additionally, the unredacted lists would not be supplied to the general public. The U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of California and the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit denied the injunction request. IFS appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court, which declined to hear the case in 2015.

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Further Reading

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IRON TRIANGLES

Iron triangle is a metaphor describing an arrangement of political power and influence in which a small number of players representing similar social and economic interests exclusively direct a policy's benefits to support their own interests. Generally, three sets of persons are involved in an iron triangle: members of a legislature, executive branch regulators, and organized interest groups. They collectively define the points of the triangle image, connected by tight, mutually supportive relationships that are so strong and enduring that they are described as "iron."

Iron triangles form when groups of politically motivated individuals, businesses, or other organizations mobilize interest groups to convince their own elected legislators to enact policy primarily benefitting the legislators themselves. They receive the policy's benefits while the costs are spread widely throughout the public, usually in the form of taxes or user fees. Since the beneficiaries are parts of the legislators' reelection constituencies, the latter are highly motivated to help the former. In return, legislators are rewarded with votes and campaign financing. The legislators also tend to be members of committees with jurisdiction over these policies, usually seeking membership to more easily keep their key, mobilized constituencies happy.

Once enacted, policy must be implemented and administered through a regulatory agency in the executive branch. Since regulators are not elected, their motivations to support a policy serving special interests are different. Committee legislators design administrative agencies around a mission of implementing the policy, so most agency staff are trained to accept a culture of serving the benefitting interests. Furthermore, agency leaders generally want large budgets and considerable autonomy from legislative oversight, but they are rewarded with these only when legislators and interest groups are satisfied with the way the policy is being administered—meaning the mobilized constituents represented by the interest groups are receiving their policy benefits.

Since interest groups receive special policy benefits, legislators receive votes and campaign financing, and regulators receive fat budgets with little oversight, everyone in the triangle benefits as long as everyone else benefits. Nobody has anything to gain by changing the policy, and so it endures for very long periods of time. As long as the interest groups remain happy, the constituencies they represent will cast their votes and open their checkbooks to support their elected legislators, who in turn make sure that the policy remains unchanged, unless the interest groups themselves ask for a change. Legislators also see to it that lawmakers outside of their committee leave the policy alone, usually by promising to respect the autonomy of other legislators' own iron triangles.

Whether or not they explicitly use the term, scholars, journalists, and even politicians have used the iron triangle concept for decades to describe enduring policy regimes in the United States that appear to serve a few privileged interests at the expense of the public. Federal crop subsidies are often described as iron triangles, with farm-state legislators on agriculture committees creating and fiercely defending policies directing taxpayer money through the U.S. Department of Agriculture to compensate and insure specific types of crops at the urging of various agricultural interest groups. Daniel McCool (1989) uses the iron triangle metaphor to describe decades of taxpayer funding that flowed from the U.S. Interior Department to western agricultural and business interests in the form of giant dams and canals—benefits that came at the insistence of members of Congress, who saw dams as big, voter-impressing benefits for their home districts. Energy policy, defense policy, and banking policy have also all been held up as examples of iron triangles. Perhaps the best-known example of the concept, if not the actual term, came in the final speech of President Dwight Eisenhower to the American public in 1960, warning them about the growing political power of the military-industrial complex.

Whether these policies are really harmful to the public interest, however, is subjective, as the term "iron triangle," or similar terms like "subgovernment" and "policy monopoly," is often used by political interests that find themselves excluded from the policy's benefits. In the 1970s, scholars began expressing some doubt as to whether real iron triangles still existed in American politics, or had ever existed. Environmental interests, for example, showed tremendous success in weakening, and in some cases entirely breaking, the alleged stronghold of business over energy and water policies. The emergence overall of more interest groups recruiting members based on their willingness to challenge the status quo, and even more legislators selling themselves to constituents as agents of change, has created a highly competitive atmosphere in which it is extremely difficult for iron triangles to endure.

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Further Reading

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