PUBLIC POLICY

**INTRODUCTION TO PUBLIC POLICY-MAKING**

            Public policy-making is a complex process that involves many participants with different roles, interests, and resources. The study of public policy is the study of who gets what, why, and what difference it makes. Governments control about one-third of the economy and employ about one of every six workers.

            Public policy is whatever governments choose to do or not do; it can be seen in the behavior of government officials and agencies; it defines the relationship of government to its environment. A policy is a purposive course of action taken to deal with a problem or concern.

            Public policy is developed by governmental officials or agencies. It is a goal-oriented or purpose action, not random or chance behavior. Policies are courses of action taken over time by government officials, not separate or discrete decisions. Policies emerge in response to demands made by other actors on government, although different units of government can emit conflicting policies in response to demands of opposing groups. Policy is what governments actually do, rather than what they say they intend to do. Policy can be either positive or negative in that government can choose to act, or choose not to act; government can either prohibit or compel its citizens to act. Policy is based on law and is authoritative and legally coercive.

**WHY STUDY PUBLIC POLICY?**

It is what governments do and it affects us all; for political reasons (i.e., to become a policy activist or advocate); to know more about specific policy issues; for career advancement.

The study of public policy includes the content, causes, and consequences of government activity; the impact of social, economic, and political forces on public policy; the impact of institutional arrangements on public policy; the impact of public policy on the social, economic, political and institutional forces and processes. Studying public policy requires both insight, creativity, and imagination as well as knowledge, training, and discipline.

**The concept of public policy**

The term “public policy” refers to a set of actions the government takes to address issues within society. For example, public policy addresses problems over the long-term, such as issues with healthcare or gun control, and as such, it can take years to develop. Public policy addresses issues that affect a wider swath of society, rather than those pertaining to smaller groups. To explore this concept, consider the following public policy definition.

**Definition of Public Policy**

Public policy is a set of actions the government decides to take when approaching a problem that affects society as a group, rather than on an individual level. Simply put, public policy refers to policies that the government makes on the public’s behalf to resolve a specific issue.

For example, public policy might tackle the problem of student loans by creating a student loan forgiveness program that affects several students at once, rather than paying off the loan of one student. Something important to remember about public policy is that it does not just refer to the government’s actions, but also to the behaviors and actions that result from those actions.

**PUBLIC POLICY-MAKING AS A PROCESS:**

**Policy making steps**

Step 1. Problem Identification: Getting Government to See the Problem

A problem is a situation that produces a human need, deprivation, or dissatisfaction for which relief is sought, such as pollution, inflation, crime, poverty, etc. However, only those needs and wants that are articulated by people demanding action become problems eligible for public policy solutions. Government must perceive that a problem exists. Public problems are different from private problems in either the numbers of people affected, the numbers of people directly or indirectly involved, and the amount of resources and type of required for the solution. Most problems, however, have been around for some time, so the policy process takes place within the context of past and existing experience with each problem.

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| Problem ID | Agenda | Formulation | Adoption | Implementation | Evaluation |
| What is the problem? | Where is  the problem  presented? | What are the  proposed  solutions? | What is done  about the  problem? | How does govt.  do what it  decides to do? | Did it  work? |

Step 2. Agenda: Getting Government to Consider the Problem

            The policy agenda is comprise of items which receive serious attention from official policy-makers. Only a small number of needs and wants ever attain a place on the policy agenda of an executive, legislative, or judicial branch of government. Generally it depends on the power, status, membership and other resources of the persons or group who are adversely affected by the problem. A crisis event, a mass movement, or an influential leader may get an item on the policy agenda.

Step 3. Policy Formulation: Getting Government to Consider Solutions

            Courses of action for dealing with public problems must be developed that will be acceptable to official policy-makers. Proposals may be put forward by a chief executive, a legislator, an administrative agency, interest groups, think tanks, individual citizens, etc. Proposals must have a chance of being adopted to be considered.

Step 4. Policy Adoption: Getting Government to Adopt a Solution

            In order for a policy to be adopted, a majority coalition that supports the alternative must be constructed. This depends on the official actors involved, as well as their beliefs, intentions, etc. Adoption will be influenced by basic cultural values such as democracy, freedom, humanitarianism, and material success. Values are guides for evaluating the desirability of goals or action.

Step 5. Policy Implementation: Getting Government to Apply the Solution to the Problem

            The law, rule, or order that results from the adoption stage can be called a public policy. Without implementation there is virtually no effect, but the act of implementation may change the nature of the policy itself. Public administrators are the primary implementors of public policy. Administrative agencies often have considerable latitude in the implementation of public policy; however, Congress has oversight responsibility and the courts have the opportunity to exercise judicial review

Step 6. Policy Evaluation: Did It Work?

            What was the policy content? What was the output, the outcome, the impact? Did it work? To what degree were the objectives of the policy met? To what extent was the problem solved?

WHAT CAN GOVERNMENTS DO?

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| Coerce | Persuade | Educate | Strengthen | Rewards |
| Prohibit, compel  Criminalize  Jail  Cease & desist | Register  License, certify  Report  Tax  Investigate  Mediate | Exhort  Educate  Standards  Study, inform  Publicize  Manage  Coordinate | Grants, loans  Equal Protection  Reduce risk  Transfer payments  In-kind benefits | Hire & pay  Contract  Guarantee profit |