

# **Public Policy Defined**

Introduction to Public Policy



# Political Science

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▶ Political science is...

the systematic study of power, decision-making and the production of order in society



# Political Science Questions

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- ▶ Who governs?
- ▶ For what ends?
- ▶ And by what means?



# Key Questions

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- ▶ What is the difference between government and politics?
- ▶ What is public policy?
- ▶ What are public problems?



# Questions to Consider

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## **IDEAS**

What is the difference between government and politics?



# Government

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- ▶ Institutions
- ▶ Political Processes
- ▶ Legal Authority



# Politics

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- ▶ Power and Influence
- ▶ “Who gets what, when and how” (Lasswell 1958)
- ▶ Who participants, influences, wins and loses



# Government and Politics

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Most simply, *politics* is about who holds power, *government* is the process by which power is allocated and used.





# Key Questions

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# Questions to Consider

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## **IDEAS**

What are the common elements found in different definitions of public policymaking?

- Tool: Public Policy Defined Handout



# Common Elements of Policy

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- ❑ Authoritative decisions
- ❑ Deliberative action or inaction
- ❑ Conscious choice
- ❑ Dynamic processes
- ❑ Focus on means and ends
- ❑ Limited by capacity and/or feasibility

(Dye 1972; Jenkins 1978)



# What is public policy?

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Most simply public policy is what those with *authority* choose *to do*, or *not do*, about *public problems*.



# Public Policy Outputs

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What does public policy look like?

- ▶ Laws
- ▶ Treaties
- ▶ Executive orders
- ▶ Regulations
- ▶ Judicial rulings
- ▶ Taxes
- ▶ Grants
- ▶ Programs
- ▶ Action
- ▶ Inaction



# Public Policy Outcomes

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What does public policy do?

- ▶ Distributive: costs and benefits to everyone
- ▶ Redistributive: taken from some to benefit others
- ▶ Constituent: “rules of the game”
- ▶ Regulatory: restricts

(Lowi 1972)



# Understanding Outcomes

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What impact does public policy have?

It depends...

- What problem was the policy intended to address?
- What was the policy intended to do about the problem?
- How was the policy structured?
- What group/geographic location is most affected by the policy?
- What are some potentially unforeseen consequences?



# Polycymaking

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# Policymaking

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The process of matching goals and means has two dimensions:

- Technical: what is the best relationship between means (tools) and ends (goals)?
- Political: what are the ends (goals) that can be agreed upon and what means (tools) are considered 'appropriate'?

*Policies often represent which of many different values and goals are given the highest priority in any given decision.*



# Policy Analysis

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## Policy analysis...

the study of the causes and consequences of policy decisions

encourages deliberate critical thinking about the causes of public problems, the various ways governments and/or the private sector might act on them, and which policy choices make sense

requires knowledge of government and politics and the ability to evaluate policy actions

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# Key Questions

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# Questions to Consider

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## **IDEAS**

What are some examples of public problems?

Are all problems public?

How do we decide?



# What are public problems?

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Most simply, *public problems* are conditions that are perceived to be *unacceptable* and therefore *requiring intervention*.



# Public Problems

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Public problems can be addressed through:

- Government Action
- Private Action
- No Action

Depends on:

- Definition
- Public Opinion
- Feasibility



**Questions?**