

Defining Public Policy

Whoever wins has the right to make decisions on behalf of everyone, and whoever loses is required by the law—backed by the police powers of the state—to accept the winner’s decisions. This means that any groups that prevail under formal rules can legitimately use public authority to impose bureaucratic institutions that are structurally stacked in their own favor, and that may make the losers worse off, perhaps by a lot (Moe 2005, 218).

Policy is...

A deliberate course of action that an individual or group consistently follows in dealing with a problem (Anderson 2006)

A standing decision characterized by behavioral consistency and repetitiveness on the part of both those who make it and those who abide by it (Eulau and Prewitt 1973, 465)

The instruments through which societies regulate themselves and attempt to channel human behavior in acceptable directions (Schneider and Ingram 1997)

Public Policy is...

A course of government action or inaction in response to public problems (Kraft and Furlong 2010)

A projected program of goals values and practices (Laswell and Kaplan 1963, 70)

A course of action or inaction pursued under the authority of government (Hecl 1974, 4)

The principles that govern action directed towards given ends (Titmuss 1974, 23)

The authoritative allocation of values for the whole society (Easton 1953, 129)

Policy emerges from identifiable patterns of interdependence between [sic] key social actors such as parties, corporations, unions, professions, and citizens. . . . Public policy is one of the central processes through which our communities respond to major social, economic and environmental problems....(3) Policy, then, may be expressed as any or all of these three things: clarifications of public values and intentions; commitments of money and services; or granting of rights and entitlements (Considine 1994, 1-2)

A social process of authoritative decision making by which members of the community clarify and secure their common interests (Clark 2002, 6)

A set of interrelated decisions taken by a political actor or group of actors concerning the selection of goals and the means of achieving them within a specified situation where these decisions should, in principle, be within the power of these actors to achieve (Jenkins 1978 qtd. in Burger 1993, 7)

A policy can be thought of as a set of instructions from policy makers to policy implementers [sic] that spell out both goals and the means for achieving those goals (Nakamura & Smallwood 1980, 31 qtd. in Rist 1994, 548)

Whatever governments choose to do or not do (Dye 1972, 1)

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