Chapter 1

Public Policy: An Introduction

Public policy affects each citizen in hundreds of ways, some of them familiar and some unsuspected. Citizens directly confront public policy when they are arrested for speeding, but they seldom remember that the advertising on the television shows they watch is regulated by the Federal Communications Commission and the Federal Trade Commission. Many citizens who complain loudly at tax time about government bureaucracy and overregulation have forgotten the fire and police protection or the paved streets those revenues provide. Indeed, public policy in America affects a vast range of activities, from nuclear warheads to bathroom plumbing, from arresting lawbreakers to providing medical care for the elderly. This book aims to clarify key dimensions of this ubiquitous influence on American life and to introduce the debates swirling around its major controversies. It takes an *issue-oriented approach* to the beginning study of public policy.

STUDYING PUBLIC POLICY

What Constitutes Public Policy?

Even though examples of public policy come readily to mind, defining public policy in clear and unambiguous terms is not easy. Political scientists have devoted considerable attention to the problem without reaching a consensus.[1] The term *public policy* always refers to the actions of government and the intentions that determine those actions. Making policy requires choosing among goals and alternatives, and choice always involves intention. The federal government, for example, chose to create Medicare in 1965 to help retirees with their medical needs. Policy is seldom a single action, but is most often a series of actions coordinated to achieve a goal. Thus, public policy is defined in this book as *an*

intentional course of action followed by a government institution or official for resolving an issue of public concern. Such a course of action must be manifested in laws, public statements, official regulations, or widely accepted and publicly visible patterns of behavior. Public policy is rooted in law and in the authority and coercion associated with law. (The terms *public policy* and *policy* will be used interchangeably.)

Three qualifications are necessary, however, for this definition of public policy. First, the idea of an intentional course of action includes decisions made *not* to take a certain action. For example, Congress voted in 1993 not to continue funding for the Superconducting Supercollider Project. Second, the requirement that official actions be sanctioned by law or accepted custom is necessary because public officials often take courses of action that step outside public policy—for example, they sometimes take bribes or exceed their legal authority. Such deeds should not be considered public policy—that is, unless they are openly tolerated in a particular political system. Third, laws or official regulations should not be mistaken for the whole realm of policy; nor does policy always meet intended goals. Lawmaking is not enough to establish a policy; implementation, interpretation, enforcement, and impact of laws and regulations, discussed later, are also part of policy. Moreover, as we shall see later in this chapter, quite often there are unintended consequences to public policies. Although some political scientists argue that these unintended impacts are part of the policy, we believe that it is conceptually clearer to consider policy and its impacts separately.

Why Study Public Policy?

Students of political science and public administration have several reasons for studying public policy. The first is *theoretical*: Political scientists seek to understand and explain the world of politics—that is, they attempt to develop and test explanatory generalizations about the political behavior of individuals and institutions. Because public policy is a part of politics, political scientists are concerned with how it is related to such things as political party structure, interest groups, inter-party competition, electoral systems, and executive-legislative relations. Political scientists who seek explanation call for the discipline to develop and test policy theory.[2] They often develop models of the policy process as a means to facilitate understanding how policy is made across a number of areas. Such models can focus on interest group activities, powerful elites, institutional forces, rational choices, advocacy coalitions, or incrementalism.[3]

A second reason for studying public policy is *practical*. Political scientists and students of policy apply knowledge to solve practical problems. They are interested in how policymaking can be made more rational and effective, how the obstacles to implementing policy decisions can be removed, and how those policies affect the quality of individual and social life. The standard here, according to political scientist Lawrence Mead, is "effective governance"; that is, whether government action (or inaction) solves evident public problems.[4] As political scientists Duncan MacRae and James A. Wilde pointed out, the study of public policy requires "the use of reason and evidence to choose the best policy among a number of alternatives."[5]

A third reason for studying public policy, related to the second, is *political*. Debate and controversy over public policy in America is not new, but today the range of issues over which serious disagreement occurs is far greater than in the past. Constant bombardment with policy choices compels citizens to make choices. So many issues are placed before the public—health care reform, crime prevention, economic stability, AIDS prevention, and war at the national level; taxation and spending, teacher quality, and public utility regulation at the state level; zoning, mass transportation, and property taxation at the local level—that mental circuits begin to overload. As citizens, political scientists and college students hope the study of public policy will help them find their way through the tangle of complex issues and sophisticated policy proposals. They try to understand the arguments and ideological positions that define policy choices.

The emphasis of this book is on the second and third reasons for studying policy—the practical and political—but it draws on the first as well, for intelligent policy selection depends on the analysis and understanding developed by the theoretical findings of political science.

DEFINING MAJOR CONCEPTS

Categories of Public Policy

The American national government is responsible for thousands of different policies, and state and local governments are responsible for many thousands more. Therefore, we need classifications of policies into different types in order to discuss them clearly. Moreover, political scientists have found that political activity varies according to certain characteristics of policy. Classification of policies, therefore, allows them to test which features of policy have the most influence on the politics of the policy process. There is no single classification suitable for all purposes. The following paragraphs summarize three common classifications employed by political scientists (purposes, types, goods). (See Table 1.1.) These classifications are not mutually exclusive, but rather focus on different aspects of public policy.

Because public policy is intentional, that is, attempts to achieve certain goals, we can group policies into classifications based on *purpose*. There are many

TABLE 1.1 Classifications of Policy

Purposes	Types	Goods
Security	Distributive	Collective
Membership	Regulatory	Private
Prosperity	Self-Regulatory	
Needs	Redistributive	

SOURCE: *Intergovernmental Perspective*, Vol. 18, No. 4 (Fall 1992): 8.

different ways to classify, and political philosophers for centuries have debated the most fundamental purposes of government and the proper goals for it to pursue. The policies discussed in this book can be categorized under four headings. Government, first, exists to provide *security* from internal and external threats to the lives, liberties, and properties of its members. National defense and foreign policy (Chapter 12) are prime examples of this purpose. Another is crime policy, which intends to establish order and to protect citizens from each other through crime prevention and punishment of criminals (Chapter 6). Government itself is often a threat to the security of residents; therefore, modern democratic nations enhance security by placing limits on government itself through constitutions and bills of rights. The chapters on equality (Chapter 10) and on morality policy (Chapter 13) discuss such rights as freedom of speech, religious freedom, and equal voting. Although there is little disagreement that security is a principal purpose of government, considerable debate arises over what policies are most effective in ensuring security (unilateral action in foreign policy or cooperation with allies, for example).

A second purpose of government is *membership*; that is, determining who is and who is not a member of society. Members of a political society are citizens, who enjoy certain rights and bear certain responsibilities denied to residents and visitors who are not citizens. The matter of citizenship has taken on considerable significance in recent decades with the large increase in immigration (Chapter 11). The debate focuses on who may be allowed within the borders of the United States and who, once in, is eligible for citizenship. A second focus of membership debate in democratic nations, such as the United States, is equality. Democracies do not recognize first- and second-class citizenship. All citizens should be equal in fundamental rights and responsibilities. Yet racial and religious differences, gender, and other characteristics historically have divided citizens into different groups with different political rights and social opportunities. Therefore, race, religion, gender, and ethnicity raise significant equality challenges and call into question the meaning of equal membership. Specific equality issues, such as school integration and affirmative action, involve the meaning of equality. (See Chapters 6 and 10.)

A third purpose of government is helping to ensure the material well-being of its members. We may think of this as a *prosperity* goal. In democratic, capitalist nations government does not have the sole or even the primary role in providing the goods and services necessary for material prosperity. However, as we shall see in the two chapters devoted to economic policy, American citizens do expect the national government to help to manage the economy and to provide the legal and social infrastructure for economic growth. State and local officials too are often judged by their ability to attract employment and economic development to their cities or states. Environmental policy and energy policy (Chapter 5) might also be thought of as essential components of material well-being.

Finally, government helps people to meet *needs*. As with the prosperity goal, the expectation is not that government has the main responsibility in all areas, but it takes a leading role in some, such as educating citizens. The extensive system of elementary, secondary, and higher education operated by state and local governments and funded in part by the federal government is ample testimony to

the importance of government's role in meeting this need. In the case of other needs, government in the United States takes a supplemental role, stepping in when private efforts are not sufficient to meet citizens' minimum needs for health care or income support. Policies such as Medicare, Medicaid, Social Security, and food stamps are examples of this governmental purpose.

A second classification scheme emerges when political scientists try to determine whether certain kinds of policies affect the types of political activity involved in policymaking. One influential classification divides policies into distributive, regulatory, self-regulatory, and redistributive.[6] *Distributive* policies allocate benefits from government to certain segments of the population. The more widely the benefits are distributed, the more consensual the policies and the more popular the policy is likely to be. These benefits may be in the form of subsidies (agriculture price supports, for example) or contracts (for aircraft carriers). They can also come in the form of direct government provision of services (public schools) or direct payments to individuals (Social Security checks).

Regulatory policies impose constraints on individuals and groups. They reduce liberty of action. Some set up rules for the entire society, criminal justice laws, for example, or speed limits. Civil rights laws also regulate standards of employment, public accommodation, and housing for the entire society. Other regulations are far more particular, restricting who may enter the banking business (entrants must possess a certain amount of capital), or imposing limits on bank loans. Environmental laws restrict the kinds and quantities of pollutants businesses may generate. Regulatory policies may be highly conflictual, because those subject to the regulations may perceive themselves as losers in a battle with those favoring the restrictions. Yet, often businesses lobby government for regulations that might protect them from competition (safety regulations that only large companies are able efficiently to meet, for example). These conflicts are prominent in the chapters on morality policy, economic regulation, and energy and the environment.

Self-regulatory policies are similar to regulatory, except that the persons or groups regulated possess considerable authority and discretion to formulate and police the regulations governing them. Attorneys, physicians, engineers, and other professions, for example, receive authority from government to license practitioners, thus determining who may and who may not practice the profession. Such groups often also develop and administer their own codes of ethics, enforce discipline, and help to govern the schools that produce the professionals. Farmers often develop and vote on various collective actions governed by state or federal law, such as pest control programs and crop marketing schemes. Self-regulatory politics often takes place outside of public scrutiny and can lead to charges of policies developed exclusively in the interest of the regulated, rather than in the public interest.

When issues of *redistribution* take the stage, politics becomes highly ideological and highly partisan. Redistribution involves not only the allocation of benefits or services to certain parts of the population, but the taxing of other parts of the population to generate the funds. Those who possess the funds, or the rights and powers reallocated, seldom give them up willingly. Moreover, liberals and

progressives are generally more favorable to redistributive measures than conservatives. Policies that help to meet needs or to guarantee equal membership are often classified as redistributive. These involve taxing relatively more affluent members of society in order to provide income assistance, food, housing, or health insurance to the less affluent. The graduated income tax can also be considered redistributive, as can taxes on gasoline used to fund mass transit. The perception of winners and losers, as in regulatory politics, makes redistributive policymaking highly contentious. The benefits of a policy may be (or be perceived) as a zero-sum game, in which the benefits to some must be exactly balanced by losses to others. The redistribution of scarce resources by government always generates intense opposition.

A third classification often encountered in the study of public policy is *collective* or *public goods* and *private goods*. Some policies involve the provision of collective goods, that is, goods that cannot be divided. Thus, if the good is provided at all, it has to be provided to everyone. Examples are national defense, clean air, and traffic control. Of course, providing such goods may involve regulation or redistribution of funds, thus making the benefits of the policies seem divisible. But the goods themselves cannot be divided.

Private goods are the opposite. These are goods that can be divided and given to some persons, but not others. Most distribution and redistribution policies fall into this classification. Some persons qualify for food stamps; others do not. Some students qualify for admission to a selective state university; others may be admitted to second-tier colleges or to junior colleges. Liberals, conservatives, and other ideological groups strongly disagree about the range of private goods that it is appropriate for government to distribute.

Models of the Policy Process

Making public policy is extraordinarily complex. It involves public opinion, media attitudes, expert ideas, active citizens, business and labor leaders, elected representatives, presidents and governors, judges, and bureaucrats. Policymaking calls on political resources, economic conditions, popular cultural attitudes, and international conditions. When political scientists do research attempting to understand public policy, they try to reduce the complexity of the policymaking process to a manageable degree by creating *models of policymaking* that summarize the primary forces at work. None of these models is complete; none captures all of the relationships that are important. No one model best describes the features of policymaking in every area. Although the chapters that follow do not adhere strictly to any of these models, they draw upon the primary qualities of some political science models.

Features of the *institutional model* appear in the description of the institutional context of public policy in Chapter 2. This model stresses the opportunities and constraints on policy that are part of the very structure of the American constitutional order: judiciary, bureaucracy, executives, legislatures, separation of powers, federalism, and so forth. A variant of the institutional model is *historical institutionalism*, which combines the institutional focus with the effect of long-term patterns of

development. Here there is a recognition that early policy decisions carry large effects through time, so that policies become *path dependent*. The cost of changing policy direction increases over time. Once, for example, a state legislature takes a get-tough approach to crime by building more prisons, these very prisons become institutional forces that prevent different approaches in the future. What would the state do with empty prisons if it decided on a different approach?[7]

The *elite model* focuses on the influence over policy exercised by powerful individuals or groups. This model contrasts with the *pluralist model*, which stresses that many groups and individuals have an influence in the American democratic system. Each of these group's interests and ideas must be taken into account. Both of these models picture these individuals and groups being active and influential across many policy areas. The *group* or *subgovernment model* is similar to the pluralist model, but recognizes that different policy areas (for example, crime, health, transportation) are important to different actors. Legislators, bureaucrats, experts, and interest groups that are active in one area are often quite different from those active in a different policy arena. These groups form advocacy coalitions that are active in particular policy areas, but not in others. Under these conditions, policy networks develop webs of lobbyists, committee staff members, and policy administrators all deeply involved in a particular policy domain, but not active in other policy areas.

Some political scientists model policy as a rational process. Policymakers in the *rational-comprehensive model* take account of all information about the policy problems and of all policy options, then select the options that best fulfill the policymaker's goals. The *public choice model* thinks of those active in policymaking as actors attempting to choose options that maximize their self-interest. They select policy options that help them realize their interests. Game models are a variation of this idea, focused on situations of policy choice with options that cannot be compromised.[8]

Policy Analysis

Policy analysis is principally concerned with describing and investigating how and why particular policies are proposed, adopted, and implemented. This is the theoretical side of policy studies. A policy option must be evaluated in the light of what policy analysis reveals about its chances of being adopted, the probable effectiveness of the option, and the difficulties of implementation. A proposal for increased spending for high school education, for example, would need to be tested against data on the impact of increased spending on student achievement levels. Advocates of fundamental restructuring of the health care system need to take into account the political inertia favoring only incremental reform.

Policy analysis is not, however, value neutral. Policy analysts want to discover which policy proposals best fulfill important public values.[9] Thus, policy analysis invokes such principles as freedom, equality, justice, decency, and peace. Indeed, politics often concerns debates about the very meaning of these terms.

Those who would sharply separate policy analysis from fundamental social values make a grave mistake. Policy analysis without awareness of ethical

perspectives is lame. This is particularly true when evaluating the impact of policy. Ethical principles must be brought to bear on the discovery of the good and bad effects of policy. Such principles not only measure success and failure; they also provide insight into consequences that otherwise would not be revealed.

Policy analysis done by political scientists can be distinguished from *policy advocacy* by politicians, partisans, or interest groups. Advocacy differs from analysis, because advocacy begins from commitment to economic interests or to principles as interpreted by specific ideological systems, such as liberalism, conservatism, and environmentalism. Nevertheless, both advocacy and analysis draw upon similar principles and goals, and the two intertwine in the real world of politics. Although ideological commitments can bring to policy analysis important overlooked values, policy advocates are more concerned to advance their ideology than to understand the policy process, which is the goal of policy analysis. The following chapters will discuss different ideological perspectives on policy at some length because the policy debates are often framed by ideology.

Stages of Policy Development

Political scientists often use a model of the policymaking process that focuses on the stages through which ideas and proposals move before becoming public policy. Some political scientists criticize these models as overly rigid and rational. That is, they argue that politics does not follow the clear lines and divisions of the stages model. Windows of opportunity for policy creativity open many times in unexpected ways, so that policy entrepreneurs have to be ready at any time to jump or to move through stages of the process rapidly. Multiple streams of policy proposals and political forces can converge and overwhelm careful policy deliberation.[10] Moreover, these models have not generated important theoretical insights into policymaking.[11] Despite the importance of these criticisms, the stages model is a suggestive tool; that is, it isolates various aspects of public policy and allows focusing attention on them. Certain of these aspects are widely recognized and need to be part of any introduction to public policy.[12] Different scholars label the stages differently and place different emphases on them, but the terms in Figure 1.1 are common.

The development of a public policy begins with public recognition that a problem exists. The three *pre-policy stages* are (1) problem definition or issues formation, (2) policy demands, and (3) agenda formation.

Before a policy issue is defined or adopted, a problem of public concern must be perceived. Ethical and ideological perspectives play an important role during this problem perception stage because different perspectives will see and define problems differently. For example, imagine how the same social phenomenon, the pornography industry, might be viewed by people of differing moral values. Some might view sexually explicit literature as a manifestation of a socially open and healthy attitude toward sexuality. Others might see it as a symptom of an unhealthy obsession with sex and a rejection of higher values. Due to the contrasting opinions of the two groups, different formulations of the issue will result. Thus, the issues formation stage leads to the next stage, policy

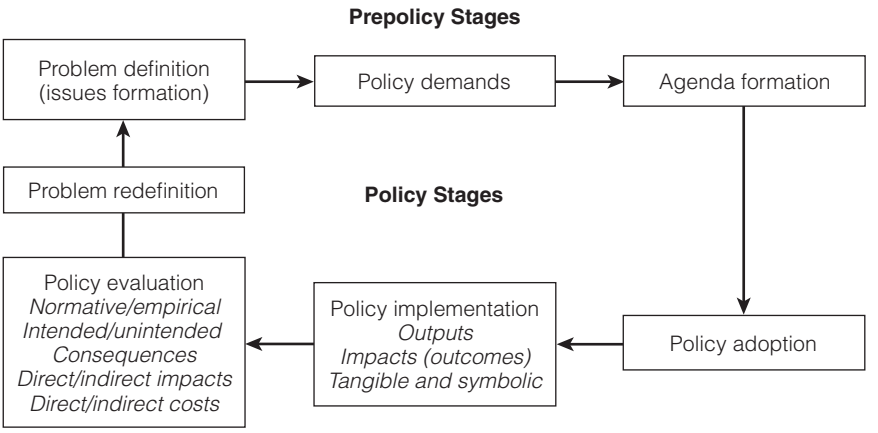

FIGURE 1.1 Stages of the Policy Process

demands: Now opposing demands are made for government action. For example, some people want the smut shops closed down and the owners thrown in jail. Others want the authorities to keep out of what they see as the private business of individual citizens (a demand for government nonaction). Gradually, this social give-and-take may coalesce into a perception that policymakers must deal with this problem, and it competes with other problems for the attention of policymakers. Some problems fail to sustain attention in this competition; others rise to prominence. That is, some make it and some fail to make it onto the policy agenda. The various demands and perspectives create an agenda of alternative proposals for dealing with the issue. Some proposals and demands never make it to the agenda; others are put on the agenda in altered form.

Agenda-setting is always a political process; that is, groups struggle for power to control the agenda. Because all legislative and executive bodies are limited in the issues they can address at any given time, the power to have attention paid to "your" issue on the agenda is invaluable. Therefore, ideological and interest groups compete to broaden the agenda to include their issues or to narrow it by excluding issues that they do not want considered. Such groups may be elected officials, bureaucrats responsible for policy administration, public interest groups, or groups directly affected by particular policies. Pluralist, elite, issue attention, and other political science theories attempt to explain the development of policy agendas. The following chapters call attention to groups active in the problem definition, policy demand, and agenda formation stages.

Following the pre-policy stages, the next major stage in the development of a public policy is deliberation and *policy adoption*. From the policy agenda, decision makers, with the input of interest groups, policy experts, and constituents, debate and bargain over alternative policy formulations, settling on an alternative or a combination of alternatives to respond to the problem. Decisions are made; policies are formulated; and policy statements are issued, taking such forms as orders, regulations, or laws. Clearly, the same kinds of considerations of power as in the policy agenda stage are relevant here. Also important is the

constitutional and statutory structure of the institution that makes the policy decision. Structure often determines which outcomes have a greater chance of success in the political struggle.

Policy statements and lawmaking are not the whole of policymaking. If they were, policy analysis would be easy. Rather, policy decisions must be implement-ed—that is, steps must be taken to put the policy statement into practice in order to achieve the policymaker's goals. Policy *implementation* means money spent, laws enforced, employees hired, and plans of action formulated. A law against theft would hardly be a policy if no public resources were devoted to preventing thefts and apprehending thieves. In implementation, "there's many a slip twixt cup and lip." Even programs involving little conflict can be difficult to implement if there are numerous participants with differing perspectives and if many particular decisions have to be made before the policy is fully implemented.[13] The more complex the implementation process, the more likely that the intent of the policy will become distorted or lost. Successful achievement of policy goals depends upon the tractability of the problem being addressed by the policy; that is, how possible is it really to make change. Implementation depends as well upon the clarity of the law, the talents and financial resources available to those administering it, and a variety of political factors, such as public support, media attention, socioeconomic conditions, and the attitudes and resources of groups affected by the policy.[14]

Policy implementation includes outputs and impacts. Policy *outputs* are the tangible manifestations of policies, the observable and measurable results of policy adoption and implementation. Stated another way, outputs are what governments in fact do in a particular policy area: The policy outputs of the food stamp program, for example, include money spent, food vouchers created, clients served, employees hired, and regulations issued. All of these are tangible. Outputs may also be symbolic: Public statements of encouragement and hope are symbolic outputs of the food stamp program. Exercising defense policy includes making threats, posturing, and issuing conciliatory statements. Just as policy analysts can observe and measure money spent and employees hired, they can also record, classify, and count symbolic outputs, though doing so is more difficult.

Policy *impacts* (sometimes called outcomes) are the effects that policy outputs have on society. They are the policy's consequences in terms of the policy's stated goals as well as of the society's fundamental beliefs. For the food stamp program, major impacts would naturally include changes in recipients' diets. The impact of a defense policy includes military strength vis-à-vis other nations and some measure of national security, as well as various economic effects of defense spending. Evaluating a policy's impact requires taking into account its effects on the entire society, not only the target group toward which it is directed. Moreover, impacts include the policy's unintended as well as its intended consequences. (See Aspects of Policy Evaluation, next section.)

Policy impact is a major component of an important focus of this text, the evaluation of public policy. Policy evaluation focuses principally on the impact of policy, because it is largely from the performance and consequences of policy that we assess its success or failure. Policy can be debated, problems defined,

agendas built, and programs adopted and implemented; but what difference does all of this mean for improving the life of society as a whole or of its particular parts? This is the question of impact. Evaluation attempts to assess the outcomes of policies—their effects on society—in order to compare them with the policies' intended goals. It asks whether the goals have or have not been met, with what costs, and with what unintended consequences. It considers whether policy is equitable and efficient and whether it has satisfied the interests demanding action. For example, policy evaluation asks whether the welfare reforms legislated in 1996 did in fact reduce poverty, increase work, or improve the lives of low-income persons. Policy evaluation of antipoverty programs necessarily involves ideas about justice, the value of work, and the place of poverty in an affluent society. Thus, a policy can be evaluated only after it has been implemented. Moreover, evaluation leads back to issue formation and policy deliberation in a (nearly) endless loop. Evaluations of policy inevitably produce advocates for change and other advocates for maintaining the policy. The social problems that stimulate policy responses seldom can be completely fixed. "Policy is more like an endless game of Monopoly than a bicycle repair."[15]

Table 1.2 lists the policy analysis concepts just discussed, as well as the concepts of policy evaluation discussed in the next section, and illustrates them from one particular policy arena: crime.

Aspects of Policy Evaluation

Policy evaluation involves collecting and analyzing information about the efficiency and effectiveness of policies. The purpose is to determine whether goals of policy have been achieved and to improve policy performance. Evaluating policy has both normative and empirical dimensions. The *normative dimension* refers to values, beliefs, and attitudes of society as a whole, of particular groups and individuals in society, and of the policy evaluators themselves. Persons of different values and ideologies use different normative concepts to evaluate policy. Evaluation, therefore, is always political. Progressives, conservatives, socialists, feminists, and anarchists differ fundamentally in their understanding of such concepts and in their ranking of them. Conservatives, for example, believe that free competition and protection of private property are the fundamental values to be pursued by economic policy. Socialists, however, see just distribution of the social product as the principal value. Different policy evaluators and different political groups, then, will evaluate public policy differently. Normative perspectives come into play, not only in assessing the goals of policy but also in analyzing how well policy accomplishes the desired goals.

Normative evaluation, however, is not enough. The *empirical dimension*—that is, understanding the facts—must precede judgment. Before praising or damning the Supreme Court's freedom-of-the-press decisions, one must examine the actual decisions and attempt to assess what difference, if any, they have made or are likely to make in the day-to-day operations of the press. And before criticizing welfare fraud, one should obtain the most accurate statistics available on money lost through fraudulent claims. Policy evaluation without empirical analysis of policy

TABLE 1.2 Concepts in Policy Analysis

Concept	Definition	Illustration
Implementation	Steps taken to put a policy into practice	Hiring police; building prisons
Outputs	Measurable results of policy adoption and implementation	Numbers of police; conviction rates
Impacts (outcomes)	Actual effects that policy outputs have on society	Crime rates; feelings of safety and security
Direct	A policy's impact on its intended population	Impact on criminals or potential criminals
Indirect (externalities)	Policy's impact on individuals and groups other than intended population	Impact on families of persons in prison
Intended	Consequences anticipated by a policy or program	Higher arrest and conviction rates
Unintended	Consequences not anticipated by a policy or program	Greater public assistance usage by prisoners' families
Short-term	Outcomes evaluated shortly after policy is implemented	Changes in crime rate during the year after a policy change
Long-term	Outcomes evaluated after policy has been in place for a longer time	Changes in crime rate over ten years
Policy evaluation	Process of assessing impacts of a policy	Assessment of effectiveness of a program intended to reduce crime rate
Empirical dimension	Evaluation by policy's measurable outputs and outcomes	Crime statistics; prison statistics; conviction rates
Normative dimension	Evaluation by policy's effect on values, beliefs, and attitudes	Effect of policy on freedom, justice, security, and family stability
Cost-benefit analysis	Compares benefits of a program with costs of implementing it	Money spent; crime rate reduction
Direct	Costs and benefits from allocation of resources and impact on intended population	Prison costs; reimprisonment rate of persons released from prison
Indirect (externalities)	Costs and benefits from allocation of resources and impact on other than intended population	Economic prosperity in communities housing new prisons; public assistance costs

content, output, and impact is like voting for a baseball all-star team without information on players' batting, earned-run, or fielding averages.

Specifically, policy evaluation is used to

1. Determine which goals are being met and to what degree (including unintended consequences)
2. Identify reasons for success and failure
3. Allocate (or reallocate) resources
4. Make changes to improve policies or decide to end policies that are not working.

Through these efforts, policymakers can make sure that policies accomplish what they are intended to and are responsive to the public and elected leaders. Moreover, a glance at Table 1.2 suggests the multiple factors involved in a public policy. Complex social problems, such as crime, the economy, health care, and foreign policy, have multiple dimensions requiring multiple approaches. The various dimensions and the many policy initiatives required to address them mean that major public problems will never have single policy solutions. There is no "one policy fits all" for responding to terrorism, for example. Border security, electronic and human intelligence, military action, disaster preparedness, and many other initiatives are required. This means as well that any major policy issue requires choices and trade-offs. There are limited resources of time, money, and attention. Spending more on border security may leave less for intelligence gathering, not to mention less for education or crime policy. Limited resources demand, in turn, careful policy evaluation to make sure that assets are being used most effectively.

Policy evaluation normally focuses on programs that are the result of policy processes. Policies create programs that tend to be the focus of evaluation, called *program evaluation*. Evaluation assesses the actual or likely outcomes or impacts of the policy. It takes place after the policy or program has been implemented. Evaluation may be required by the legislation creating the policy or by more general legislation, such as *sunset laws*. Sunset laws are statutes that require each program to be terminated at some specific time (five or ten years, for example), unless an evaluation leads to a decision to continue it. Administrative rules or executive orders also may require evaluation. Most grant-in-aid programs also include a requirement that the program being funded be evaluated. The evaluation determines whether the program should continue or what improvements should be made in it. Public administrators are responsible for *performance management*, the ongoing review of accomplishments and problems. Evaluation goes beyond performance management reviews and involves a systematic process of data collection and analysis of a program's goal achievement over a particular period of time. This text cannot accomplish the detailed program evaluation described here for the policies it discusses. Its evaluation is at a higher level of generality. However, the same considerations and concepts apply to this evaluation of general policies (such as Medicare or criminal justice policy) as to specific programs.

Evaluations may be process (often called formative) or outcome (often called summative) evaluations. Process evaluation assesses the activities and structures of

the policy implementation. The processes may include, for example, whether a community policing program follows procedure, how many police are assigned to the program, or what kind of patrol is practiced. Outcome evaluations focus on the impact of the policy or program. Thus, outcome evaluation of a community policing policy would examine whether there was an impact on crime in the neighborhood, such as reduction in burglaries or muggings. Both forms of evaluation are necessary for a complete assessment of the policy.[16] It would not make much sense, for example, to know that community policing was not working, but not know why. Thus, it would be important to know that it is not working (outcome) and what processes led to the failure so that the processes can be corrected.

In order to conduct an evaluation, it is necessary to plan ahead. As in writing a research paper, it goes much smoother if a plan is developed in advance. Thus, it is necessary to decide what purpose the evaluation serves. Is it to focus on process or outcome? What is the goal of the policy or program? What does the evaluation need to determine? What assumptions are being used? How much money, time, and people resources are available for the evaluation? What indicators or measures are going to be used? How will the information be collected? How will unexpected circumstances be handled? What is the schedule for completion? What use will be made of the results? These essential questions need to be thought through before beginning the evaluation. Once they have been addressed, the evaluator needs to decide on the evaluation method or tool to use.

One popularly used technique is *cost-benefit analysis*. It compares the benefits or outcomes of the program with the costs of implementing it. The benefits and costs are stated in dollar terms, thus allowing for determining how much the outcomes cost. While on the surface, it may seem easy to determine costs and benefits, it is much more complicated. *Direct costs* and *benefits* may be easy to determine. However, *indirect costs* and *benefits* are another matter.

Direct costs and benefits relate to the specific allocation of resources and the impact on the intended population. Thus, a plan to develop a light rail system in an urban area presumably would be designed to improve commuting. It might also have the goals of reducing pollution and decreasing the need for roads and highways. The amount of money spent on the system and the disruption to residents and businesses along the route are direct costs. Indirect costs might include the loss of business to areas not served by the light rail line and the increase in time needed for delivery of goods to businesses along the lines because of more limited access. The increase in the value of property along the route may be an indirect benefit to owners of the property but a negative, indirect impact on those who rent the property. These indirect costs and benefits are also called *externalities*, or *spillover effects*. So, in evaluating a program or policy, it is necessary to consider all the costs and benefits, not just the obvious direct costs and benefits.

Intended and *unintended impacts* of the policy or program also must be considered. Intended impacts are the stated goals or outcomes of the policy. Unintended impacts are those not anticipated as the policy or program was developed. For example, the indirect costs and benefits of the light rail system in our example might be considered unintended impacts while the direct benefits would be intended impacts.

Policies also have long-term effects and short-term impacts. Both need to be considered in evaluation. Similarly, some policies have symbolic importance. The decision to build a new football stadium for a professional team may have great symbolic importance to the residents of a city. The stadium project may have been justified in part on the basis of making a world-class city and thus would be an intended symbolic benefit. Unintended and long-term costs can be illustrated by the Iraq War. With one out of six soldiers who served in Iraq suffering some degree of post-traumatic stress disorder or major health problem, likely long-term increases in health care costs, drug abuse, family violence, suicide, mental illness, and crime must be considered a long-term cost.

Costs and benefits of some programs are difficult to measure. How do we measure the benefit of clean air? Businesses may want to measure it in one way: the cost to them. Clean air advocates, however, may want to measure it in terms of the incidence of medical problems in the communities affected by the quality of the air near a manufacturing plant. Still others may focus on the aesthetics of the community and the presence or absence of a brown cloud over the area. Still others may want to measure the impact on plant life or animals. The conflicting concerns of these actors in the policy process make evaluation a political enterprise. The power or influence of any one of these actors may determine what is examined and what use is made of the information. As the administration of George W. Bush demonstrates, business sometimes has a great deal of influence over what is examined and what use is made of the information. Business has been successful in influencing the Bush administration to discount much of the evaluation on environmental issues, and the administration has reversed many environmental policies because of their perceived negative impact on business. Similarly, debates over whether to facilitate embryonic stem cell research or to make a morning-after birth control pill available over the counter illustrate the interweaving of political reasons with scientific data in the adoption and evaluation of policies.

Program evaluation is conducted by various agencies or officials. At the national level, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) conducts evaluation of federal government programs, usually at the request of members of Congress as it is an agency of Congress. GAO may initiate evaluations on its own, and many of the evaluations required in the legislation setting up programs are its responsibility. The Congressional Budget Office and Congressional Research Office also conduct many evaluations. Most states have an auditing agency responsible for evaluation or have legislative committees with such responsibilities. Local governments use a variety of similar agencies. Governments often also contract with independent contractors to conduct evaluations. The result of all of them is the evaluation report. It then is the responsibility of managers and policymakers to make effective use of the evaluations. Politics affects how they do so.

Policies do not go on forever (though some appear to). Policies change over time. For example, welfare policy changed fundamentally in the 1990s. Policies sometimes are terminated. Their reason for being passes, and legislatures end them. The processes involved in changing and terminating policies are the same as those involved in policymaking: problem definition, agenda-setting, adoption, and evaluation.