Preview Questions

1. What is the Market v. Polis (i.e., RAM v. Politics) paradigm of the policy process?
2. What is a policy paradox?
3. What are the various paradoxes of political decision making?
4. Why is it important to understand policy paradoxes?
5. How do paradoxes affect the decision making process?

Reading Summary

Defining a policy paradox

* A situation in which two contradictory interpretations of the same rule both appear true.
* A situation in which following adhering to one rule to uphold societal values would violate another rule also meant to uphold societal values.
* Public policy and political situations don’t adhere to the rules of scientific decorum.

Winning is Losing and Losing is Winning

* Passing major legislation by using political power gained from an election win becomes a political liability because it provides ammunition for the political opposition.
* Political opposition uses the passage of the legislation to secure political power in the Congress in the next election.
* However, having a political foe is useful for a president and gives him an advantage during the next presidential election.

A Demonstration is a Debate or an Assault

* According to the Supreme Court, however hateful or unpopular a group’s message it contributes to the public debate if it highlights matters of public importance including the political and moral conduct of the U.S. and its citizens.

Pros and Cons of Government Assistance

* More than two-thirds of Americans believe the poor have become too dependent on government assistance programs.
* More than two-thirds of Americans believe the government should guarantee every citizen sufficient food and shelter to survive.
* Nearly two-thirds of Americans believe that individuals have significant control over their lives.
* More than two-thirds of Americans believe that government has a responsibility to take care of people who can’t take care of themselves.

Enemies or Allies

* American manufacturing industries often complain that government regulations create unnecessary costs and stifle innovation.
* American manufacturing industries look to the government to impose regulations to improve their ability to compete with foreign manufacturers and exempt them from liability.

Which Came First, the Problem or the Solution?

* The second war with Iraq can be viewed as the solution for several problems or a constant solution adapting to a changing problem.

The Good and Bad of Low Prices

* Inexpensive imports provide people access to goods and services they would not normally be able to afford.
* Inexpensive imports may cause domestic manufacturers to lose market share and reduce employment as well as prevent domestic manufacturers from entering an industry.
* Low prices have positive economic benefits but negative symbolic connotation.

A Pile versus Rubble

* In the aftermath of a natural disaster, the debris that remains has different meanings for different groups.
* To citizens, the debris is the remains of their lives and accomplishments that need to be salvaged where possible.
* To city officials, the debris is a problem that needs to be eliminated as soon as possible.

Closing Guantanamo

* The Guantanamo prison increased American security by detaining suspected terrorists.
* The Guantanamo prison decreased American security by becoming a recruitment symbol for Islamic extremists intent on harming Americans.

Is Multiculturalism good or bad for human freedom?

* Allowing cultural defense of illegal behavior risks importing immigrant cultural values into our judicial system.
* Not allowing cultural defense of certain behavior suggests that immigrants must completely abandon their way of life.

Does the “Cheetah” and equalize or confer advantage?

* Prosthetics such as Cheetahs simply enable athletes with disabilities to compete with nondisabled athletes or does it confer an unfair advantage?
* There are many factors that contribute to an athlete’s performance.

The Rationality Project

* Various fields aspire to make public policymaking more rational, analytical, and scientific.
  + Political science
  + Law
  + Public administration
  + Economics
* In the early part of the twentieth century, Progressive reformers advocated removing policymaking authority from elected bodies and giving it to expert commissions and professional city managers.
* The rationality project misses the point of politics, which helps us see and understand different worldviews.
* The rationality project emphasizes objectivity but policy analysts and decision makers can avoid their own values during policymaking.
* Public policy is dominated by economics, which models society as a market.
  + Most social scientists don’t find this model compelling or desirable.
  + A model based on community may be more applicable.
* Pillars of making public policy under the rationality project
  + Model of reasoning
  + Model of society
  + Model of policy making
* Policymaking steps under the rationality project
  + Identify objectives
  + Identify alternative courses of action for achieving objectives
  + Predict the possible consequences of each alternative
  + Evaluate the possible consequences of each alternative
  + Select the alternative that maximizes the attainment of objectives
* Problems with the rationality project
  + Doesn’t consider that there are often multiple and conflicting objectives
  + It ignores human emotional feelings and moral intuitions (i.e., dehumanizes actors)
  + People don’t always know what they want as assumed in a market model.
  + It is a production model, which doesn’t capture the struggle over ideas.
  + It doesn’t explain why policy solutions go looking for problems.
  + It doesn’t explain why solutions turn into problems.
* Political reasoning is reasoning by metaphor and analogy.
* Political analysis starts with considering the political community, not a market.
* Behind every policy issue is a contest between conflicting but equally plausible conceptions of the same goal or value.

Preview Questions

1. What is the Market v. Polis (i.e., RAM v. Politics) paradigm of the policy process?
2. What is the System 1 Thinking v. System 2 Thinking paradigm of the policy process?

Reading Summary