

# Assessing Policy Alternatives

POSC 315 - Introduction to Public Policy | Week 6

---

David P. Adams, Ph.D.

# Slide 1: Feeling Wonky Today?



**Figure 1:** Policy Alternatives

## Slide 2: Learning Objectives

- Describe evaluative criteria for judging the value of policy proposals or alternatives
- Explain how to apply the methods of policy analysis
- Identify three key economic approaches to policy analysis
- Distinguish between several kinds of decision-making and impact analysis
- Compare the ethical approach of policy analysis against other methods

**Opening Question:** *“When you think of COVID-19 policies, what comes to mind?”*

## Slide 3: Evaluative Criteria for Judging Policy Proposals

- **Evaluative criteria** are the specific dimensions of policy objectives used to weigh policy options or judge the merits of existing policies or programs.
  1. They act as **justifications or rationales** for policy or government action.
  2. The use of explicit criteria establishes **clear standards** that keep analysis objective and focused.

## Slide 4: Evaluative Criteria for Judging Policy Proposals

- Policy debates often involve multiple, competing criteria:
  1. Policymakers want policy actions to be **effective**, but also:
    - **Minimize costs.**
    - **Promote equity.**
    - **Maintain individual rights.**
  2. Analysts must determine which criteria are most important and **rank policy alternatives** accordingly.

## Slide 5: Evaluative Criteria - Effectiveness

- **Criterion: Effectiveness**

- **Definition:** Likelihood of achieving policy goals.
- **Limitations:** Involves **uncertain projection** of future events.
- **Example:** Evaluating how effective lockdowns were in controlling COVID-19 spread.

## Slide 6: Evaluative Criteria - Efficiency

- **Criterion: Efficiency**

- **Definition:** Achieving goals relative to **costs**.
- **Limits:** Difficult to measure all costs/benefits; **political decisions** play a role.
- **Example:** Analyzing the efficiency of vaccine distribution programs during the pandemic.

## Slide 7: Evaluative Criteria - Equity

- **Criterion: Equity**
  - **Definition:** **Fairness** in distributing costs and benefits.
  - **Limits:** Difficult to measure; disagreements over **fair process** vs. **equal outcomes**.
  - **Example:** Assessing vaccine distribution for vulnerable communities.



## Slide 8: Evaluative Criteria - Liberty/Freedom

- **Criterion: Liberty/Freedom**
  - **Definition:** Extent of impact on **privacy** and individual rights.
  - **Limits:** Clouded by **ideological beliefs**.
  - **Example:** Mask mandates and lockdowns during COVID-19.

## Slide 9: Evaluative Criteria - Political Feasibility

- **Criterion: Political Feasibility**

- **Definition:** Likelihood of policy **support** from elected officials.
- **Limits:** Depends on **economic and political conditions**.
- **Example:** Varied support for vaccination mandates across regions.

## Slide 10: Evaluative Criteria - Social Acceptability

- **Criterion: Social Acceptability**
  - **Definition:** Extent of **public acceptance**.
  - **Limits:** Hard to gauge even with data; depends on **issue saliency**.
  - **Example:** Public reactions to mask mandates during the pandemic.

## Slide 11: Evaluative Criteria - Administrative Feasibility

- **Criterion: Administrative Feasibility**
  - **Definition:** Likelihood of effective **implementation** by agencies.
  - **Limits:** Requires projecting **resources** and agency capabilities.
  - **Example:** Logistical feasibility of mass vaccination campaigns.

## Slide 12: Policy Analysis Methods

- **Policy Analysis Methods** often draw from **economics**:
  - **Cost–Benefit Analysis** (CBA)
  - **Cost-Effectiveness Analysis** (CEA)
- Emphasize **efficiency**, but useful for nontechnical analyses as well.
- Example: **CBA** of lockdowns—costs vs. reduction in cases.

## Slide 13: Policy Evaluation Beyond Economics

- Policy analysis involves:
  - **Effectiveness, Equity, Liberty/Freedom, Political Feasibility.**
- COVID-19 policy debates illustrated the difficulty of balancing these criteria.
- Ultimately, **decision-making** lies with **policymakers** and the **public**.

## Slide 14: Economic Approaches to Policy Analysis

- **Public policies** require resources; economic analysis helps understand real costs.
  - Helps weigh **trade-offs** between alternatives.
- Criticism: Overemphasis on **dollar values** may **neglect societal needs**.
- Example: COVID-19 relief packages—balancing economic costs with public health benefits.

## Slide 15: Understanding Cost-Benefit Analysis (CBA)

- **Steps** in CBA:
  1. **Identify** short/long-term costs and benefits.
  2. **Monetize** tangible values.
  3. Apply a **discount rate** for future values.
  4. Consider **qualitative** factors.
  5. **Aggregate** results.
- Example: Evaluating benefits and costs of mass testing campaigns.



## Slide 16: Cost-Effectiveness Analysis (CEA)

- Used when **benefits** aren't easily monetized.
- Compares **relative value** of different options.
- Example: Comparing investments in vaccines vs. contact tracing during COVID-19.

## Slide 17: Introduction to Risk Assessment

- **Risk Assessment** estimates risks (e.g., pandemics).
  - **Risk (R) = Probability (p) × Consequences (C)**
  - Used to understand public risk during COVID-19.
- **Public Perception vs. Expert Evaluation:** Perception often drove risk-related decisions.

## Slide 18: Political and Institutional Approaches

- **Political Feasibility Analysis:**
  - Gauges **support** from officials and stakeholders.
  - Example: Varied adoption of COVID-19 restrictions based on political context.

## Slide 19: Conclusion

- **Key Takeaways:**

- Evaluative criteria are critical for policy analysis.
- Economic methods like **CBA** and **CEA** are useful but have limitations.
- COVID-19 illustrated the need to balance **effectiveness**, **equity**, and **freedom**.
- **Political feasibility** and **public involvement** are essential for successful implementation.

**Final Question:** *“If you were a policymaker during COVID-19, which criterion would you prioritize?” (Effectiveness, Equity, Liberty/Freedom)*

## Slide 20: Questions?