Assessing Policy Alternatives

POSC 315 - Introduction to Public Policy | Week 6

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Slide 1: Feeling Wonky Today?

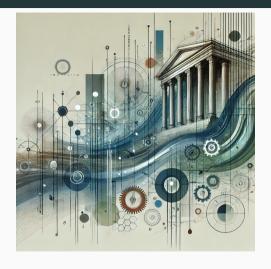

Figure 1: Policy Alternatives

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.

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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.

- **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.

- **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.

- **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.

- **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**.

- **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) $\times$ Consequences (C)**
  - Used to understand public risk during COVID-19.
- **Public Perception** vs. **Expert Evaluation**: Perception often drove risk-related decisions.

- **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?