# **Assessing Policy Alternatives**

POSC 315 - Introduction to Public Policy | Week 6

David P. Adams, Ph.D.

# Feeling wonky today?

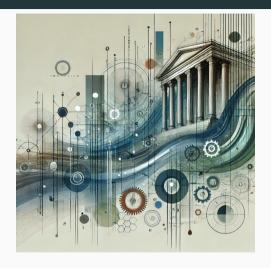


Figure 1: Policy Alternatives

# Slide 1: Feeling Wonky Today?

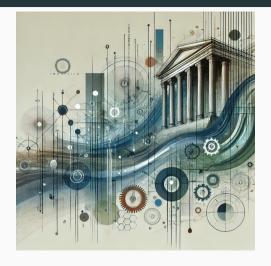


Figure 2: Policy Alternatives

### 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

**Mentimeter Word Cloud**: "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.
  - 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.

**Mentimeter Q&A**: "Was vaccine distribution equitable during the pandemic? Why or why not?"

## 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.

**Mentimeter Multiple Choice**: "If you were a policymaker during COVID-19, which criterion would you prioritize?" (Effectiveness, Equity, Liberty/Freedom)

# Slide 20: Questions?