Assessing Policy Alternatives

POSC 315 - Introduction to Public Policy | Week 6

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# Feeling wonky today?



Policy Alternatives

# Slide 1: Feeling Wonky Today?



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.
  + They act as **justifications or rationales** for policy or government action.
  + 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:
  + 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:
  + **Identify** short/long-term costs and benefits.
  + **Monetize** tangible values.
  + Apply a **discount rate** for future values.
  + Consider **qualitative** factors.
  + **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?