

Policies and Policy Types

Introduction to Public Policy

Week 6

Understanding Policies

- Different types of policies involve different stakeholders
- Some policy types create more conflict than others
- Some policies are more visible to the public
- Policies can turn uninvolved citizens into engaged participants

Policy Typologies

- Help us categorize and understand different policies
- Help predict what kind of politics will accompany different policies
- Categories have limitations and aren't always perfect
- Policies can change types over time
- Some policies fit into multiple categories

Classic Policy Typologies

Distributive Policies

Definition: Takes resources from a broad group and gives benefits to specific groups or individuals

- Often results from "logrolling" or "pork barrel" politics (trading favors)
- Creates "Interest Group Liberalism" where:
 - Government tries to please many narrow interests
 - Specific groups benefit but the broader public interest may suffer

Distributive Policies: Characteristics

- Interest groups form specifically to protect and expand these policies
- Generally popular with politicians, bureaucrats, the media, and the public
- Usually difficult to change or eliminate once established
- Resistant to reform efforts

Distributive Policies: Examples

- Farm subsidies
- Social Security
- Medicare
- Medicaid
- Student loans
- Tax breaks for homeowners
- Tax deductions for charitable giving

Distributive Policies: Equity Considerations

Equality vs. Equity

- Equality means everyone gets the same thing
- Equity means distributions that are fair, even if not equal

In the U.S. context, we focus on equal opportunity, not equal outcomes

Distributive Policies: Three Dimensions of Equity

1. **Recipients:** Who gets the benefits?
2. **Item:** What is being distributed?
3. **Process:** How are distribution decisions made?

Redistributive Policies

Definition: Takes resources from one clearly identifiable group and gives them to another clearly identifiable group

- Affects allocation of wealth, property, rights, or privileges
- Can work in either direction:
 - From wealthy to less wealthy
 - From less wealthy to wealthy
- Not always about money - can involve rights and privileges

Redistributive Policies: Examples

- Welfare programs
- Food stamps
- Unemployment insurance
- Social Security
- Medicare
- Medicaid
- Affirmative action
- Civil rights protections

Redistributive Policies: Characteristics

- Often controversial and face public opposition
- Difficult to enact, change, or eliminate
- Challenging to reform
- Highly visible and frequently debated

Regulatory Policies

Definition: Policies that restrict or guide the behavior of certain groups or individuals

- Uses government authority to control or change behavior
- Three main types:
 - Competitive regulatory policies
 - Protective regulatory policies
 - Constituent regulatory policies

Competitive Regulatory Policies

Definition: Policies that manage competition among businesses

- Limits who can provide certain goods and services
- Allows government to regulate price, quality, and availability
- Enables both government and professional oversight of markets

Competitive Regulatory Policies: Examples

- Professional licensing
- Utility regulation

- Telecommunications regulation
- Banking and insurance regulation
- Transportation regulation
- Broadcasting licenses

Competitive Regulatory Policies: Characteristics

- Usually low visibility to the general public
- Generate relatively little conflict
- Generally supported by government institutions and stakeholders

Protective Regulatory Policies

Definition: Policies designed to protect the public from potential harms of private activities

- Often create additional costs for businesses (passed to consumers)
- Use government authority to control or change behavior
- Implementation shaped by interest groups and policy networks

Protective Regulatory Policies: Examples

- Environmental protection
- Consumer protection
- Food and drug safety
- Workplace safety
- Anti-discrimination policies
- Anti-harassment policies
- Privacy regulations
- Occupational health standards

Protective Regulatory Policies: Characteristics

- High visibility and often generate significant conflict
- Frequently face opposition from various stakeholders
- Difficult to enact, change, or eliminate
- Challenging to reform

Constituent Regulatory Policies

Definition: Policies that protect individual rights or serve governmental functions

Intended to benefit the general public or the government itself

Examples:

- Foreign and defense policy
- Policies governing structure and operations of government agencies

Alternative Policy Typologies

Cost-Benefit Analysis

Definition: Method of analyzing policies by comparing costs with benefits

- Key question: Are costs and benefits concentrated or spread widely?
- Social perception matters:

- Groups who believe they'll bear the costs usually oppose the policy

Substantive vs. Procedural Policies

Substantive Policies

What the government does

The actual content and goals of government action

Procedural Policies

How the government does it

Rules for making and implementing policies (hearings, comment periods, etc.)

Material vs. Symbolic Policies

Material Policies

Provide tangible benefits

Concrete actions with measurable outcomes

Example: Funding for more police officers

Symbolic Policies

Provide intangible benefits

Appeal to values, beliefs, and emotions

Example: "Just Say No" anti-drug campaign

Liberal vs. Conservative Policies

Liberal View

Government can solve problems and achieve social goals

Conservative View

Government intervention often creates more problems

This distinction is easy to generalize but least useful for detailed analysis

Questions?

Policies and Policy Types

Introduction to Public Policy