

What is Public Policy?

Introduction to Public Policy

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POSC 315

Week 1



Figure 1: Public Policy

Public Policy is what officials within government, and by extension the citizens they represent, choose to do or not to do about public problems.

Many different ways to discuss public policy

- ① **Intentions:** the purposes of government action
- ② **Goals:** the stated ends to be achieved
- ③ **Plans or proposals:** the means to achieve the goals
- ④ **Programs:** the authorized means for pursuing the goals
- ⑤ **Decisions or choices:** specific actions that are taken to set goals, develop plans, and implement programs

Policy Outputs and Outcomes

- ① **Policy Outputs:** the formal actions that governments take to pursue their goals
- ② **Policy Outcomes:** the effects that result from policy outputs



Figure 2: What's the difference?

- **Institutions:** the rules, norms, and procedures that structure the behavior of individuals and organizations.
- **Government:** the institutions and political processes through which public policy choices are made with legal authority to govern or rule a group of people.
- **Government Institutions:** the US Constitution, Congress, the President, the Courts, the bureaucracy, and state and local governments.
- **Federalism:** the division of power between the national government and state governments; the division of power and authority on a geographic basis.

- **Politics:** the process of making and implementing decisions that apply to members of a group; concerns the exercise of power and the resolution of conflicts.
- **Policy Making:** the process by which authorities decide which actions to take to address a problem or set of problems.
- **Policy Analysis:** the process of identifying and evaluating policy options and their consequences.

The Social Context

- **Social Problems:** conditions that are harmful to individuals or society and that require collective action to address.
- **Social Values:** the beliefs that people hold about what is good, right, and desirable.
- **Social Norms:** the unwritten rules that guide behavior in a society.
- **Social Changes:** the transformations in society that affect the way people live and work.



Figure 3: Social Context

The Context of Public Policy (cont.)

The Economic Context

- **Economic Problems:** conditions that are harmful to individuals or society and that require collective action to address.
- **Economic Policy:** the actions that governments take to influence the economy, such as setting tax rates, spending money, and regulating businesses.



Figure 4: Economic Context

The Political Context

- **Political Problems:** conditions that are harmful to individuals or society and that require collective action to address.
- **Political Party System:** the organization of political parties and the competition between them.
- **Trust in Government:** the belief that government will act in the public interest.
- **Ideology:** a set of beliefs about the proper role of government in society.



Figure 5: Political Parties

The Governing Context

- **Complex Governance Structures:** the overlapping and interdependent relationships among government agencies, interest groups, and other organizations.
- **Shared Responsibility:** the idea that government, the private sector, and civil society all have a role to play in addressing public problems.



Figure 6: Governing Context

The Cultural Context

- **Political Culture:** refers to widely held values, beliefs, and attitudes, such as trust and confidence in government and the political process, or the lack thereof.
- **Political Socialization:** the process by which individuals learn about politics and acquire political values and beliefs.
- **Political Participation:** the ways in which people get involved in politics, such as voting, running for office, or joining interest groups.
- **Cultural Differences:** help to explain the wide variation in state and local public policies.



Figure 7: Cultural Context

