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### PSCI 213 Essay 3

#### Building a More Equitable Society: Priorities of Policy Analysis in Democratic States

Policy analysis seeks to solve or alleviate an identified issue, in pursuit of achieving set objectives. From these objectives, criteria are defined as concrete, measurable forms for evaluating policy. Criteria are the core of policy analysis, used to compare the potential of policies in achieving the outlined goals and addressing the overall issues, and are applicable across political environments (Meltzer and Schwartz 2019, 106). There are four criteria generally used today: effectiveness, efficiency, equity, and feasibility. In practice, the prioritization and interpretation of these criteria vary depending on the political and ideological framework applied within. Thinking of the context of a Democratic US state, the application of these criteria will reflect the values and objectives of the party. The Democratic party often tries to pursue policies emphasizing principles like social justice, economic welfare, and environmental protections hoping to increase opportunity access for all individuals. Considering this, the prioritization and ranking of these criteria for this policy landscape becomes clearer. In a democratic state, equity should be the primary criterion due to its centrality to the Democratic Party's platform and should shape the interpretation and application of effectiveness, closely following equity in the ranking, then efficiency, and feasibility, respectively, to ensure policies meet the outlined objectives in a manner that reflects the party's platform and values.

In considering policymaking within a Democratic state, equity's place as a primary criterion emerges due to its role in the development, assessment, and implementation of policies. In their 2020 Party Platform, the national Democratic party outlined their commitment to policies and actions that "forge a stronger, brighter, and more equitable future," placing equity as a

priority themselves (Democratic National Committee 2020, 5). Equity goes beyond the idea of equality, where everyone is treated the same, to address deeper issues of fairness, justice, and inclusivity, recognizing the systemic flaws of US government and society throughout history that created deep, lasting inequalities. Equity recognizes the diverse needs and challenges across communities that require different approaches to produce fairer outcomes for all.

For democratic states, who, for example, routinely prioritize social justice, civil rights protections, and access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities, equity should be the top priority for analysis. For instance, the Massachusetts Democratic Party states on its website that “government exists to empower people by...guaranteeing equal rights and opportunity for all” (Massachusetts Democratic Party). The party and its priorities often highlight a commitment to tackling systemic marginalization to create a society where all are supported in having the means to thrive, as outlined by the national party’s 2020 platform. In this context, equity in policy analysis means asking who gets what benefits, and when and how they are getting them, to evaluate whether the benefits are helping to level the playing field for those historically disadvantaged (Stone 2012, 39), thus ensuring that policies are fair and just.

In democratic states, effectiveness should closely follow behind equity in a ranking of criteria, with its focus on the achievement of specific, intended policy outcomes. Effectiveness measures the level of achievement of objectives by policies, contributing to society’s overall welfare and progress (Meltzer and Schwartz 2019, 117). In a democratic state, the concept of effectiveness connects closely with equity, highlighting the importance of assessing policy for its success in achieving its goals, and its broader impact on creating a more equitable society. Effectiveness is a close second to equity for democratic states and their policies addressing social issues like healthcare access, education equity, and economic inclusivity, as ensuring policies are

achieving meaningful outcomes contributes to advancing the party's overall commitment to their values and platform.

Following equity and effectiveness in the ranking of criteria, comes efficiency. Efficiency concerns assessing options for maximizing the number of outputs for a given input, emphasizing the judicious use of resources to achieve the best possible outcome (Meltzer & Schwartz 2019, 123). It reflects a commitment to ensuring policies produce maximum benefits with minimal waste, an idea especially important when considering the ambitious policy agendas often associated with Democratic platforms. Ensuring policy efficiency is also important for getting broad support for policy. Beyond financial or resource efficiency, considering social and environmental impacts is also important, especially when considering equity. For policies, this involves efficient use of all resources, like natural, human, and economic capital, furthering the commitment to set values, like social justice and environmental preservation, for example.

Finally, feasibility comes at the end of the ranking. Feasibility concerns assessing how possible a policy is for adoption and implementation, addressing barriers in processes, politics, institutions, and legality (Meltzer and Schwartz 2019, 120). In democratic states, especially, considerations for implementation can go beyond general limitations of institutional or process barriers and includes ideological or political opposition that can make gaining broad support for progressive policies more difficult. While feasibility is critical to ensuring policies are possible within the system, it falls in the final place of the ranking, as it is also important to ensure feasibility is not being over-considered to the point of limiting policies, as truly transformative policies furthering goals of equity, social justice, environmental protections, etc., involve challenging the status quo.

Equity should be the first criterion for evaluation in democratic states to ensure policies are fulfilling the commitments the party has made. Beyond this, equity is also important to consider first as it can play a role in guiding the application of the other criteria, to make sure policies are maintaining promised values and goals. Equity can be crucial for interpreting the effectiveness, efficiency, and feasibility of policies. For example, effectiveness should be reflected as producing fair and just benefits for all; a policy's efficiency should be assessed to ensure the efficient distribution of resources is equitable; and establish that a policy's feasibility is not just political and economic, but it is also socially and morally feasible.

A balanced approach to applying these criteria must be taken, to reflect the commitment of the Democratic party to equity, as well as effective and responsible governance. All four criteria should always be considered, and though equity should be a key priority in shaping the others as well, it should not overshadow any other criterion. A good policy choice will reflect all four criteria; no one should dominate, and none should be ignored. Furthermore, the application must be dynamic and flexible. The ranking of the four as equity, effectiveness, efficiency, and feasibility is good for general application across democratic states, but every state has different contexts and structures that must be accounted for, and each policy issue has unique needs and objectives that require different criteria interpretations and applications. Effective policy analysis with these criteria will help shape policies and guide democratic governance for a more equitable society, with policies reflecting the needs and demands of diverse communities. Such policies and analysis are crucial as states and the nation as a whole face contemporary issues like racial inequity, difficulties of healthcare access, and environmental threats like climate change.

## References

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