

REFLECTIVE NOTE

This project on human–animal conflict at the IIM Sirmaur campus provided valuable insights into how public policy operates in practice, particularly in situations where multiple ethical, administrative, and behavioural considerations intersect. While the issue of stray dogs initially appeared to be a campus-level safety concern, the process of policy analysis revealed it to be a deeper case of policy paralysis and implementation failure.

One of the most significant learnings from this project was the distinction between the existence of policy and its effective implementation. Although formal rules such as the “no pets on campus” policy are in place, fieldwork evidence demonstrated that these rules have limited impact without enforcement mechanisms, clarity of responsibility, and stakeholder alignment. This reinforced the classroom understanding that policy success depends not only on design but also on execution and institutional capacity.

Engaging with primary field evidence in the form of student and staff complaints highlighted the human cost of policy failure. The documented dog bite incidents illustrated how gaps in governance directly translate into physical injury, psychological distress, and academic disruption. These narratives helped us understand the concept of “uninsured risk,” where individuals bear the consequences of collective policy failure despite the administration’s role in managing shared spaces.

The project also deepened our understanding of wicked policy problems. Conflicting stakeholder interests—between safety-focused students, animal-sympathy groups, and the campus administration—demonstrated why linear or coercive policy solutions are often ineffective. Actions driven by ethical compassion, such as feeding stray dogs, while well-intentioned, were found to unintentionally increase collective risk. This reinforced the relevance of theoretical frameworks such as the Prisoner’s Dilemma and Commons Theory in real-world policy contexts.

Another important learning was the value of behavioural and design-oriented policy tools. Rather than relying solely on bans or enforcement, the project highlighted the potential of nudges, awareness mechanisms, and user-centred policy design to address sensitive issues involving both safety and ethics. Mapping the “incident-to-recovery” journey of bite victims further illustrated how policy gaps become visible only when examined from the user’s perspective.

Overall, this project shifted our understanding of public policy from a rule-based framework to a dynamic process shaped by human behaviour, institutional coordination, and ethical trade-offs. It underscored the importance of proactive governance, clear accountability, and evidence-based interventions in resolving complex social problems. The experience reinforced that effective public policy must balance compassion with collective safety and translate intent into measurable outcomes at the ground level.