

PUBLIC POLICY

AN EVOLUTIONARY APPROACH



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PUBLIC POLICY

An Evolutionary Approach

*To William Howard Lester
and Paula F. Sutherland*

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PREFACE

For several reasons, this is a particularly exciting time to study public policy. Moreover, it is likely to continue to be so for the foreseeable future. First, public policy studies have become one of the fastest growing subfields in political science. In less than twenty-five years, we have seen enormous growth in student interest in this area, in the course offerings at both undergraduate and graduate levels, in the graduate programs and policy institutes, and in the research conducted in this subfield. Second, the existing literature on policy studies has witnessed enormous intellectual growth over the past two decades, and many new conceptual developments have occurred. Finally, the nature of American public policy increasingly requires policy analysis as a guide to policy design and redesign. Governments at all levels (i.e., federal, state, and local) will continue to need advice from policy analysts in the years to come as policy debates continue to proliferate in such areas as welfare reform, environmental problems, crime policy, and educational reforms.

Yet, even though many areas of the policy cycle have witnessed significant intellectual growth as far as understanding the determinants of each phase, the major problem for students of public policy (and perhaps the major challenge for teachers) is that a sense of *history* is missing in most contemporary policy analysis texts. So little of this evolutionary development has been accumulated in a single textbook that students may not fully appreciate the amount of intellectual growth that has taken place over the last twenty-five years. In addition, to appreciate more fully the extent of policy evolution, it is necessary to examine substantive policy across time. Most recently, a number of scholars have suggested that we may gain a substantially better understanding of the contours of public policy by examining public policy changes over a period of at least a decade. By doing so, we begin to appreciate how systematic patterns have developed over time and across several areas of policy.

This book offers a unique approach to introducing students to policy studies by using a diachronic or evolutionary approach so that the student may fully appreciate the dynamic developments that have taken place in our understanding of both the policy process and several substantive areas of public policy. In fact, one of the clearest trends to emerge in the entire discipline of political science over the past twenty-five years is the need for historical or longitudinal versus contemporary or cross-sectional analysis. Therefore, we explicitly adopt the

position that we can more fully appreciate and understand public policy developments by viewing them from an historical or evolutionary perspective. This simply means that we propose to use an historical (or longitudinal) approach in a conceptual, rather than a statistical, sense.

In developing this theme, the book is organized by four sections. The first section of the book introduces the student to the subfield of policy studies and notes several tensions in the field. It also discusses alternative approaches to policy analysis, what we mean by “models” and means of evaluating models. The second section of the book is devoted to an understanding of the evolution of research and thinking about various aspects of the policy cycle, noting the evolution of our conceptual understanding from the origin of the concept of each stage to the present time. The third section of the book explores the evolution of our thinking in four substantive areas of public policy, including education, welfare, crime, and the environment. This section provides an analysis of public policy from an historical perspective and thus complements our approach in the other two sections by drawing together the various trends identified earlier. The final section provides an explanation about the tendency for policy analyses to be utilized (or not to be utilized) by decision-makers and draws conclusions from the other three sections with regard to the evolution of public policy and policy studies.

A number of individuals have helped to make this book a reality. First, we owe an enormous intellectual debt to numerous scholars who, over the past two decades, have contributed greatly to our own intellectual development. Among these are (alphabetically): James Anderson, Charles Bullock, Richard Cole, Peter DeLeon, William Dunn, Malcolm Goggin, David Hedge, Richard Hofferbert, Hank Jenkins-Smith, Helen Ingram, Michael Kraft, Dean Mann, Daniel Mazmanian, Henry Nau, Walter Rosenbaum, Paul Sabatier, Harvey Tucker, Richard Waterman, and David Webber, among others. By their prolific writings, and often their willingness to provide constructive comments on our work, they have contributed in a very direct way to whatever success this book enjoys. We are very grateful for their help.

Second, several external reviewers offered their constructive criticisms and advice, including Les Alm, Brian Cook, Charles Davis, Bernie Kolasa, John Piskulich, Andrew Skalaban, and James Wunsch. We adopted many of their suggestions, and the book is much improved as a consequence. We extend our sincere thanks to all of them for their helpful advice.

We are also grateful for the encouragement and assistance we received from West Publishing Company. Several individuals, including Steve Schonebaum, Jana Otto Hiller, and Carrie Kish, provided a great deal of help which made this book much better than it otherwise might have been.

Finally, we are indebted to our families for creating an environment within which we were able to work. This book is dedicated to special members of our families who have stood by us in difficult times in years past. Of course, we are also appreciative of the support and encouragement we have received over the

years from our students in public policy studies. It is our hope that this book will further enhance their perspectives and understanding about American public policy. Lastly, we will, of course, blame all errors and omissions contained in the following book on each other, or, as a residual category, on Paul Sabatier.

James P. Lester and Joseph Stewart, Jr.

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P A R T O N E

THE CONTEXT OF PUBLIC POLICY STUDIES



