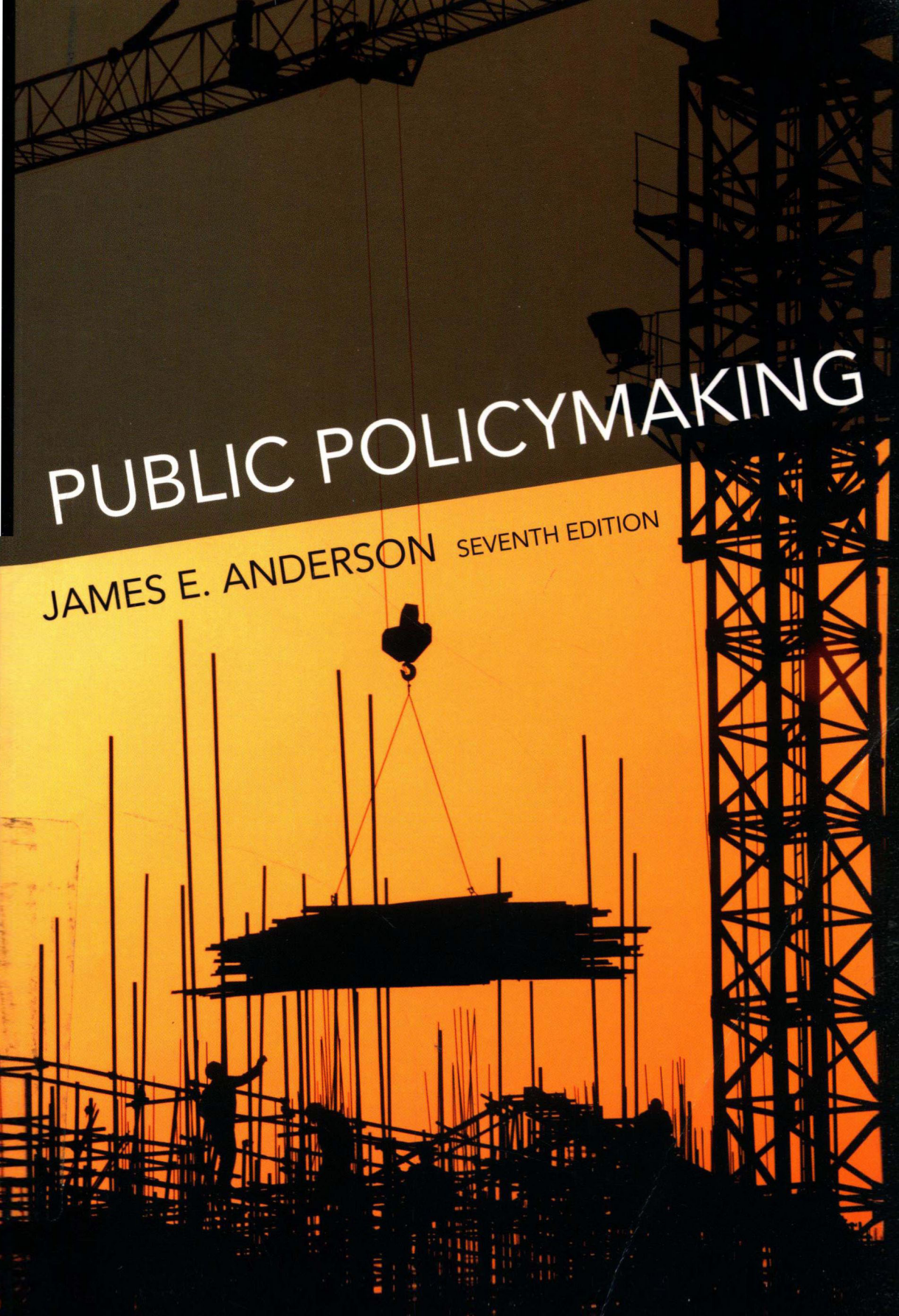
PUBLIC POLICYMAKING
JAMES E. ANDERSON
SEVENTH EDITION

Public Policymaking

An Introduction

SEVENTH EDITION

JAMES E. ANDERSON

Texas A&M University

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Preface

In *Public Policymaking: An Introduction,* Seventh Edition, the policymaking process is presented as a policy cycle—a sequence of functional activities beginning with problem identification and agenda formation, and concluding with the evaluation and the continuation, modification, or termination of policy. This policy cycle schema is a workable approach to the study and analysis of public policymaking, whether in the United States or elsewhere. In addition, the text looks at some other approaches to the study of policy formation; describes and analyzes the political environment of policymaking in the United States; makes comparisons with other countries; and examines some of the logistical aspects of policymaking, such as majority building, cost-benefit analysis, and decision-making.

In the years since the sixth edition of this book was published, various noteworthy changes have occurred in government and public policy. The housing bubble burst and a major economic recession, along with a financial crisis, set in. National budget deficits have swelled, and the national debt has mushroomed. The long war in Iraq appears to be winding down as the war in Afghanistan is heating up.

The George W. Bush administration, which displayed a governing style and policy positions that differed greatly from those of the predecessor Clinton administration, has departed from Washington. In its place is the Barack Obama administration, whose policy preferences and actions are much more liberal and interventionist than those of President Bush and his people. Moreover, the Democratic Party has gained control of both Houses of Congress. The political pendulum has taken a leftward swing. Though "current events" is not my major concern, these and other matters have been considered in revising and updating this book.

The American system continues to demonstrate resilience and the capacity to temper and mitigate change. Policies have been changed, but the fundamental structure of the policymaking process remains as before. As a result, the text's approach to policymaking remains fully relevant to the current field of study.

As the subtitle indicates, *Public Policymaking: An Introduction* serves as a jumping-off point for the study of public policymaking by touching upon all stages or phases of the policymaking process. In addition, for those who want to explore these stages more deeply, the suggested readings and websites listed at the end of each chapter will be helpful.

While I certainly have my own opinions on policy and politics, I try to be even-handed and impartial in my handling of the many topics covered in this book. I have been guided, and I think with considerable success, by the principle of

"intended neutrality" in writing this book. Analysis rather than advocacy and teaching rather than preaching have been my goals.

Organization and Updates

I have made a variety of changes and additions, and a few deletions, in this revision, taking into account new developments in policymaking, particularly at the national level in the United States. I have also been influenced by recent additions to the scholarly literature on public policy formation. The basic framework of the book, however, remains intact. In the initial chapter I have restructured the discussion of categories of public policy. Constituent policy is a new feature.

The chapter titled "The Policy-Makers and Their Environment" surveys the political environment, or context of policymaking, and presents the official and unofficial participants in the policy process. Many minor changes have been made along with the addition of material on Congress and the Supreme Court and presidential action.

"Policy Formation: Problems, Agendas, and Formulation," examines policy problems and agendas, agenda-setting processes, and the formulation of policy proposals. These are the pre-adoption aspects of the policy cycle. Material has been added on problems, agenda-setting, and formulation.

The chapter "Policy Adoption" centers on decision-making and the adoption of policies. Science is added to the decision criteria section. There is a new case study on the Economic Stimulus Act. It stands in contrast to the bankruptcy study, which has been updated.

The "Budgeting and Public Policy" chapter deals with the national budgetary process because of its importance for the implementation and substance of policy. A new section on fiscal policy is included, the discussion of congressional decision-making is expanded, and the struggle for a balanced budget (a losing venture, it seems) has been updated.

"Policy Implementation" covers much territory in surveying the implementation or administration of policy. The discussion of federal aid to education, including the No Child Left Behind Act has been consolidated, voluntary regulation has been added as a implementation technique, and there are new case studies on nuclear waste disposal and water pollution control.

The chapter named "Policy Impact, Evaluation, and Change" probes the effects of policies, their evaluation, and possible termination. A variety of modifications and limited additions have been made. The section on food safety is updated, as is Head Start, and more is said about agency termination, to name a few. The airline deregulation case has been retained and deserves close scrutiny.

In concluding comments, the reader will encounter some comments, thoughts, and conclusions on the American policy process. This time around I have more to say about the policy cycle, policy change, and policy success and failure. The policy cycle remains a popular and useful analytical tool.

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Companion Website

An exciting feature of this edition is the text's companion website, which provides additional resources for instructors and students. The Instructor website includes PowerPoint slides for classroom presentations, ideas for classroom activities, and suggested paper topics, while the Student website has flashcards for reviewing text terms, crossword puzzles, tutorial quizzes, and chapter outlines.

Acknowledgments

I wish to express my appreciation to all who have assisted in the preparation of this edition. At the request of Cengage Learning, several scholars provided pre-revision reviews. They presented me with many good ideas and suggestions for change and improvement. Of course, I did not agree with everything that came at me, but it was intellectually valuable and a good learning experience to be so challenged. They helped immensely in this revision. Thanks go to the following professors for reviewing the text and offering their input:

John Bohte (University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee)

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Various colleagues at Texas A&M University and elsewhere were providers of information and advice. Dan Wood and Jon Bond especially deserve mention. Once again, Carrie Kilpatrick, in her pleasant manner, promptly and accurately transformed my handwritten copy into good typescript. At Cengage Learning, Edwin Hill, Carolyn Merrill, Jeff Greene, and Matthew DiGangi helped to get the revision underway, kept me in motion, and otherwise helped to bring the project to a successful conclusion. Also, much appreciation to my development editor, Thomas Finn, and Lauren Traut, my project editor at Elm Street Publishing Services. Alberta (Mrs. Anderson) has been a source of encouragement and a positive influence on my life and scholarly undertakings for many decades.

Any shortcomings in the book are of my own doing, so I accept responsibility for them. I would appreciate readers informing me about errors or misjudgments.

[J.A.]

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1

The Study of Public Policy

In the course of their daily lives, people are affected, directly and indirectly, obviously and subtly, by an array of public policies. Take, for example, automobile owners. When a car is purchased, the Truth in Lending Act requires provision of accurate information by a lender on the cost of credit. The vehicle features safety equipment, such as a padded dash and seat belts, required by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, and a catalytic converter to reduce tailpipe emissions, necessitated by Environmental Protection Agency rules. Out on the highway, financed jointly by the state and national governments, our driver needs to be aware of state and local traffic regulations or risk direct contact with law enforcement officials. State policy requires that the automobile be insured and that both it and the driver be licensed. The price of the gasoline it consumes is indirectly affected by national energy policies and directly increased by national and state excise taxes. The vehicle's gas mileage must meet the national corporate average fuel economy (CAFÉ) standard or a "gas guzzler" tax will apply. Many more laws and rules apply to automobiles.

Public policies in a modern, complex society are indeed ubiquitous. They confer advantages and disadvantages; cause pleasure, irritation, and pain; and collectively have important consequences for our well-being and happiness. They constitute a significant portion of our environment. This being so, we should know something about public policies, including how they are formed, budgeted, implemented, and evaluated. There are also scientific, professional, and political reasons for studying public policies and policymaking.

Scientifically, the systematic and rigorous study of the origins, development, and implementation of public policies will enhance our knowledge of political behavior and governance, as well as of public policy per se. How is policymaking affected by federalism and the separation of powers? Were pressure groups or public opinion or the media influential in the adoption of a policy? Why did government cease to be concerned with a problem? Concern with questions of this sort are designated as *policy study*.

Professionally, a person may pursue a career as a policy analyst or evaluator. Practitioners of *policy analysis*, which draws heavily upon economic theory and

statistical and mathematical analytical techniques, have been growing in number in recent decades.[1] Policy analysis has an applied orientation and seeks to identify the most efficient alternative (i.e., the one that will yield the largest net social benefit) for dealing with a current problem, such as the control of air pollution or the disposal of household garbage. A variant of policy analysis is evaluation research, which assesses how well policies attain their goals and the other societal effects that they may have. Cost-benefit analysis and risk analysis fall into this category.

Politically, many people want to engage in *policy advocacy*, using knowledge of public policy to formulate and promote "good" public policies that will have the "right" goals, that is, goals that serve their purposes. They may think of themselves as liberals, conservatives, libertarians, communitarians, or socialists and disagree greatly in their notions of what is good or just. The research efforts of policy advocates are frequently skewed by their wish to generate data and analysis in line with their preferences. In contrast, policy study is motivated by the intent to be impartial.

This book draws on the scientific policy studies approach to develop a basic understanding of the policymaking process, which is here viewed as an inherently political process involving conflict and struggle among people (public officials and private citizens) with conflicting interests, values, and desires on policy issues. In describing and analyzing the policymaking process, the scientific policy studies approach has three basic aims.[2] First, its primary goal is to explain the adoption of a policy rather than to identify or prescribe "good" or proper policy. Analysis, rather than advocacy, is its style. Second, it rigorously searches for the causes and consequences of public policies by applying social-scientific methodology, which is not restricted to the use of quantitative data and methodology. At a minimum, it requires that one should strive to be rational, empirical, and objective. Third, this approach aims to develop reliable theories and explanations about public policies and their politics. Thus, policy studies can be both theoretical and relevant to the more practical aspects of policymaking. It has been said that nothing is as practical as a good theory.

The Plan of This Book

There is not a single process by which public policies are formed. They do not come off an assembly line as do automobiles, refrigerators, and other standard products. Rather, variations in the subjects of policies will produce variations in the style, techniques, and politics of policymaking. Foreign policy, taxation, health-care financing, surface-transportation policy, occupational licensing, and land-use zoning are each characterized by a somewhat different policy process—different participants, procedures, decision rules, political patterns, and more. There is a case to be made for the argument that policy determines politics, though I do not fully subscribe to it.

Policymaking may also take different forms, depending upon whether its organizational venue is a legislature, the White House, the judiciary, or an

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administrative agency. Policymaking within agencies is more likely to feature hierarchy, secrecy (or low visibility), and the involvement of experts or professionals than is legislative policymaking. Courts do not act in the same way that legislatures or executives do. And certainly one can discern different patterns in tax policy formation in the United States, Great Britain, and France.

This variability does not mean, however, that there are no common functions or elements and that it is impossible to formulate generalizations on policy formation. Given the diversity and complexity in policymaking processes, the development of some sort of "general theory" that has broad explanatory power is an unrealistic aspiration.[3] But we can achieve a useful start toward what political scientists call "theory building" by striving to develop sound generalizations about such topics as who is involved in policy formation, on what sorts of issues, under what conditions, in what ways, and to what effect. Nor should we neglect to ask about how policy problems develop or obtain a place on governmental agendas. Such questions are not as simple as they may first appear.

To provide a conceptual framework to guide the examination of the policy process in the ensuing chapters, I view it as a sequential pattern of activities or functions that can readily be distinguished analytically although they may be empirically more difficult to pull apart. The following categories or stages are employed (see their portrayal in Table 1.1). Some illustrative questions are included.

1. *Problem identification and agenda setting*. The focus here is on how the problems that may become the targets of public policies are identified and specified. Why only some problems, out of all that exist, receive consideration by policy-makers requires an examination of agenda setting, that is, how governmental bodies decide what problems to address. What is a public problem? Why does some condition or matter become a public problem? How does a problem get on a governmental agenda? Why do some problems not achieve agenda status?
2. *Formulation*. This encompasses the creation, identification, or borrowing of proposed courses of action, often called alternatives or options, for resolving or ameliorating public problems. Who participates in policy formulation? How are alternatives for dealing with a problem developed? Are there difficulties and biases in formulating policy proposals?
3. *Adoption*. This involves deciding which proposed alternative, including taking no action, will be used to handle a problem. In American legislatures this function is performed by majorities. How is a policy alternative adopted or enacted? What requirements must be met? Who are the adopters? What is the content of the adopted policy?
4. *Implementation*. (A synonym is *administration*.) Here attention is on what is done to carry into effect or apply adopted policies. Often further development or elaboration of policies will occur in the course of their administration. Who is involved? What, if anything, is done to enforce or apply a policy? How does implementation help shape or determine the content of policy?

TABLE 1.1

The Policy Process

Policy Terminology	Stage 1: Policy Agenda	Stage 2: Policy Formulation	Stage 3: Policy Adoption	Stage 4: Policy Implementation	Stage 5: Policy Evaluation
Definition	Those problems, among many, that receive the serious attention of public officials	Development of pertinent and acceptable proposed courses of action for dealing with a public problem	Development of support for a specific proposal so that a policy can be legitimized or authorized	Application of the policy by the government's administrative machinery	Efforts by the government to determine whether the policy was effective and why or why not
Common sense	Getting the government to consider action on the problem	What is proposed to be done about the problem	Getting the government to accept a particular solution to the problem	Applying the government's policy to the problem	Did the policy work?

Source: Adapted from James E. Anderson, David W. Brady, and Charles Bullock III, *Public Policy and Politics in the United States*, 2d ed. (Monterey, CA: Brooks/Cole, 1984).

5. *Evaluation*. This entails activities intended to determine what a policy is accomplishing, whether it is achieving its goals, and whether it has other consequences. Who is involved? Who is advantaged and disadvantaged by a policy? What are the consequences of policy evaluation? Are there demands for changes in or repeal of the policy? Are new problems identified? Is the policy process restarted because of evaluation?

Within this simplified framework, the formation and implementation of policies are seen as political in that they involve conflict and struggle among individuals and groups, officials and agencies, with conflicting ideas, interests, values, and information on public-policy issues. Policymaking is "political"; it involves "politics." That is, its features include conflict, negotiation, the exercise of power, bargaining, and compromise—and sometimes such nefarious practices as deception and bribery. There is no good reason to resist or disparage this conclusion, or to imitate those who derogate policies that they do not like with such statements as "It's nothing but politics." Although it is sometimes implied or even asserted that if enough analysis were done, if enough facts and data were gathered, all "right-thinking" people would agree on the appropriate course of action to handle a problem, this is not the way the world works. Quite reasonable people can disagree on policy issues because they have differing interests, values, and affiliations. Politics is the way a democratic society resolves such differences.

The policy process (sometimes it is called the *policy cycle*) approach to policy study has several advantages. First, and most important, the policy-process approach centers attention on the officials and institutions who make policy decisions and the factors that influence and condition their actions. We need to be concerned about more than the complexity of public problems, the goals of the polity, the general forms policy responses can take, and similar matters. Knowledge of these is clearly of value, but we also want to know who makes policy decisions and how they do it. Consequently, answers are needed for such questions as: What is the legislature's role in policymaking? How does its structure affect decision-making? What sorts of factors or considerations influence the legislators' decisions? The policy-process approach not only helps us learn about policymaking and policy; it also causes us to take a more holistic view of how government works.

Second, policymaking usually incorporates the stages or categories of activity that I have described. Its sequential nature thus helps one capture and comprehend the flow of action in the actual policy process. However, in actuality the formulation and adoption stages may blend together, as when proposed legislation on welfare reform is modified during consideration in committees and on the House and Senate floors in order to win votes needed for its enactment. Administrative agencies issue rules elaborating policy, as in the case of public-lands policy, while implementing it (see the chapter titled "Policy Implementation"). The adoption of a policy, such as restrictions on abortion, solves a problem for some people while it creates a problem for others, who then restart the policy process in an effort to modify or repeal the disliked

policy. Even in such instances, the policy-process approach can be used to analytically distinguish the various activities involved.

Third, the policy-process approach is flexible and open to change and refinement.[4] Additional stages can be introduced if experience indicates that they would strengthen description and analysis. Perhaps budgeting should be recognized as a separate stage of the process. Various forms of data collection and analysis, whether quantitative (statistical), historical, legal, or normative (value-oriented), are compatible with it. It can be used to study a single policy (e.g., the Americans with Disabilities Act) or to compare the enactment and implementation of several civil-rights laws. Group, institutional, and other approaches to policy study can be fitted into it. The group approach may help explain policy adoption; institutionalism can cast light on its implementation. Systems theory may help alert us to some of its societal consequences.

Fourth, the policy-process approach helps present a dynamic and developmental, rather than static and cross-sectional, view of the policy process. It is concerned with the evolution of policy and requires that one think about what moves action on policy from one stage of the process to another. Moreover, it helps emphasize relationships, or interactions, among the participants in policymaking. Political parties, interest groups, legislative procedures, presidential commitments, public opinion, and other matters can be tied together as they drive and help explain the formation of a policy. Further, one can seek to discover how action at one stage of the process affects action at later stages. For example, how does the design and content of legislation ease or complicate its implementation? How does implementation affect its impact?

Fifth, the policy-process approach is not culture bound. It can readily be used to examine policymaking in foreign political systems. It also lends itself to manageable comparisons such as how problems reach governmental agendas, how policies are legitimated, or how policies are implemented in various countries. Some comparisons of this sort are included in this book.[5]

We now turn to an explanation of public policy and of various ways of categorizing public policies.

What Is Public Policy?

In general usage, the term *policy* designates the behavior of some actor or set of actors, such as an official, a governmental agency, or a legislature, in an area of activity such as public transportation or consumer protection. Public policy also may be viewed as whatever governments choose to do or not to do. Such definitions may be adequate for ordinary discourse, but because we set out in this book to do a systematic analysis of public policy, a more precise definition or concept is needed to structure our thinking and to facilitate effective communication with one another.

In this book a policy is defined as *a relatively stable, purposive course of action or inaction followed by an actor or set of actors in dealing with a problem or matter of concern*. This definition focuses on what is actually done instead

of what is only proposed or intended; differentiates a policy from a decision, which is essentially a specific choice among alternatives; and views policy as something that unfolds over time.

Public policies are developed by governmental bodies and officials. (Nongovernmental actors and factors may of course influence public-policy development.) The special characteristics of public policies stem from their being formulated by what political scientist David Easton has called the "authorities" in a political system, namely, "elders, paramount chiefs, executives, legislators, judges, administrators, councilors, monarchs, and the like." These are, he says, the persons who "engage in the daily affairs of a political system," are "recognized by most members of the system as having responsibility for these matters," and take actions that are "accepted as binding most of the time by most of the members so long as they act within the limits of their roles."[6] In short, public policies are those produced by government officials and agencies. They also usually affect substantial numbers of people.

There are several implications of this concept of public policy as a relatively stable, purposive course of action followed by government in dealing with some problem or matter of concern. First, the definition links policy to purposive or goal-oriented action rather than to random behavior or chance occurrences. Public policies in modern political systems do not, by and large, just happen. They are instead designed to accomplish specified goals or produce definite results, although these are not always achieved. Proposed policies may be usefully thought of as hypotheses suggesting that specific actions be taken to achieve particular goals. Thus, to increase farm income, the national government has utilized income subsidies and production controls. These programs have indeed enhanced the incomes of many farmers, but by no means all.

The goals of a policy may be somewhat loosely stated and imprecise in content, thus providing a general direction rather than precise targets for its implementation. Those who want action on a problem may differ both as to what should be done and how it should be done. Ambiguity in language then can become a means for reducing conflict, at least for the moment. Compromise to secure agreement and build support may consequently yield general phrasing and lack of clarity in the statement of policy goals.

Second, policies consist of courses or patterns of action followed over time by governmental officials rather than their separate, discrete decisions. It is difficult to think of such actions as a presidential decision to honor a movie actor or a Social Security Administration decision to award disability benefits to John Doe as public policies. A policy includes not only the decision to adopt a law or make a rule on some topic but also the subsequent decisions that are intended to enforce or implement the law or rule. Industrial health and safety policy, for example, is shaped not only by the Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970 but also by a stream of administrative rules and judicial decisions interpreting, elaborating, and applying (or not applying) the act to particular situations.

Third, public policies emerge in response to *policy demands*, or those claims for action or inaction on some public issue made by other actors—private citizens, group representatives, or legislators and other public officials—upon

government officials and agencies. Such demands may range from general insistence that a municipal government "do something" about traffic congestion to a specific call for the national government to prohibit theft of pet dogs and cats for sale to medical and scientific research organizations. In short, some demands simply call for action; others also specify the action desired.

In response to policy demands, public officials make decisions that give content and direction to public policy. They may enact statutes, issue executive orders or edicts, promulgate administrative rules, or make judicial interpretations of laws. Thus, the decision by Congress to enact the Sherman Antitrust Act in 1890 was a policy decision; another was the 1911 Supreme Court ruling that the act prohibited only unreasonable restraints of trade rather than all restraints of trade. Each was of major importance in shaping that course of action called *antitrust policy*. (The Sherman Act also prohibits monopolization and attempts to monopolize.) Such decisions may be contrasted with the innumerable relatively routine decisions that officials make in the day-to-day application of public policy. The Department of Veterans Affairs, for example, makes hundreds of thousands of decisions every year on veterans' benefits; most, however, fall within the bounds of settled policy and can be categorized as routine decisions.

Policy statements in turn usually are formal expressions or articulations of public policy. Among these are legislative statutes, executive orders and decrees, administrative rules and regulations, and court opinions, as well as statements and speeches by public officials indicating the government's intentions and goals and what will be done to realize them. Policy statements are sometimes notably ambiguous. Witness the conflicts that arise over the meaning of statutory provisions or judicial holdings, or the time and effort expended analyzing and trying to divine the meaning of policy statements by national political leaders such as the president of the United States or the chair of the Federal Reserve Board. Different levels, branches, or units of government may also issue conflicting policy statements, as on such matters as environmental pollution or liability for consumer products.

Fourth, policy involves what governments actually do, not merely what they intend to do or what officials say they are going to do. If a legislature enacts a law requiring employers to pay no less than a stated minimum wage, but nothing is done to enforce the law, and subsequently little change occurs in economic behavior, it seems reasonable to contend that public policy actually takes the form of nonregulation of wages.

Relevant here is the concept of *policy outputs*, or the actions actually taken in pursuance of policy decisions and statements. This concept focuses our attention on such matters as amounts of taxes collected, miles of highway built, welfare benefits paid, restraints of trade eliminated, traffic fines collected, and foreign-aid projects undertaken. These can usually be enumerated with little difficulty. Examining policy outputs, we may find that a policy differs somewhat or even greatly from what policy statements indicate it should be.

Policy outputs should be distinguished from *policy outcomes*, which focus on a policy's societal consequences. For example, do longer prison terms

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