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STUDYING PUBLIC POLICY:

Policy Cycles
and Policy Subsystems

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Part 1

INTRODUCTION

Chapter 1

Policy Science and Political Science

THE AMBITIONS OF POLICY SCIENCE

Policy Science is a relatively recent discipline, emerging in North America and Europe in the post-World War II era as students of politics searched for new understandings of the relationship between governments and citizens. Before that time, studies of political life tended to focus on the normative or moral dimensions of government or on the minutiae of the operation of specific political institutions. Scholars concerned with the normative or moral dimensions of government studied the great texts of western political philosophy, seeking insights into the purpose of government and the activities governments should undertake if their citizens were to attain the good life. These inquiries generated a rich discussion of the nature of society, the role of the state, and the rights and responsibilities of citizens and governments. However, the increasingly apparent gap between prescriptive political theory and the political practices of modern states led many to search for another method of examining politics, one which would reconcile political theory and practice through empirical analysis of existing politics.

Similarly, scholars interested in the institutions of government had been conducting detailed empirical examination of legislatures, courts, and bureaucracies while generally ignoring the normative aspects of these institutions. These studies of the formal structures of political institutions excelled in attention to detail and procedure but for the most part remained descriptive, failing to generate the basis for evaluating the strengths, weaknesses, or purposes of such structures. In the post-War era of de-colonization, the reconstruction of war-torn states, and the establishment of new institutions of international governance, students of politics sought an approach that would blend their studies with questions of justice, equity, and the pursuit of social, economic, and political development.¹

In this context of change and reassessment, several new approaches to the study of political phenomena appeared. Some focused on the micro-level of human behaviour and the psychology of citizens, electors, leaders, and led.

Others concentrated on the characteristics of national societies and cultures; still others focused on the nature of national and global political systems. Most of these approaches—behaviourism, elite studies, political cybernetics, and studies of political culture—have come and gone as scholars experimented with each before grasping its limitations and abandoning it to search for something better.²

One approach, however, is still with us. Its focus is not so much on the structure of governments or the behaviour of political actors, or on what governments should or ought to do, but on what governments actually do. This is an approach which focuses on public policies and public policy-making; or, as its originators deemed it, *policy science*. Pioneered by Harold Lasswell and others in the United States and the United Kingdom, policy science was expected to replace traditional political studies, integrating the study of political theory and political practice without falling into the sterility of formal, legal studies.³ Lasswell proposed that the policy science had three distinct characteristics which would set it apart from earlier approaches: it would be multi-disciplinary, problem-solving, and explicitly normative.

By multi-disciplinary, Lasswell meant that a policy science should break away from the narrow study of political institutions and structures and embrace the work and findings of such fields as sociology and economics, law and politics. By problem-solving, he envisioned a policy science adhering strictly to the canon of relevance, orienting itself towards the solution of real world problems and not engaging in purely academic and often sterile debates that, for example, characterized interpretation of classical and sometimes obscure political texts. By explicitly normative, Lasswell meant a policy science should not be cloaked in the guise of 'scientific objectivity', but should recognize the impossibility of separating goals and means, or values and techniques, in the study of government actions.

The general orientation toward the activities of governments suggested by Lasswell remains with us, and forms the subject matter of this book. However, the passage of time has led to some changes in the three specific components of the policy orientation he identified.⁴ First, while the emphasis on multi-disciplinarity remains, there is now a large body of literature focused on public policy in general. Policy science is now very much in itself a 'discipline' with a unique set of concepts, concerns, and a vocabulary and terminology all its own. Although many of these concepts have been borrowed from other disciplines, when used in the context of studies of public policy they now have a somewhat particular meaning. Furthermore, the concept of multi-disciplinarity itself has now changed in the sense that the scholars are usually not concerned with whether they must borrow from other disciplines, but rather that they must be experts in at least two fields: the concepts and concerns of policy science, and the history and issues present in the substantive area of policy under examination.⁵

Second, over the past forty years the virtually exclusive concern of many

policy scholars with concrete problem-solving has waned. At the outset it was hoped that studies of public policy-making and its outcomes would yield conclusions and recommendations directly applicable to existing social problems. Although laudable, this maxim founded on the complexity of the policy process itself, in which governments often proved intractable and resistant to 'expert' advice on subjects with which they were dealing.⁶ In the real world of public policy, technical superiority of analysis was often subordinated to political necessity.

Finally, the calls for the policy sciences to remain explicitly normative also changed over time, although rather less than have the other founding principles. For the most part, policy scholars have refused to exclude values from their analyses, and have insisted upon evaluating both the goals and the means of policy, as well as the process of policy-making itself. However, analysts' desire to prescribe specific goals and norms declined with increasing realization of the intractability of many public problems. Some investigators therefore now either evaluate policies in terms of efficiency or effectiveness, or use the record of policy efforts in an effort to establish whether governments have in practice been directing their activities towards the achievement of their stated goals.⁷

Some observers have been led to castigate the notion of a policy 'science' and to equate its promotion with an era of unrealized hopes and expectations for social engineering and government planning. Although sometimes justified by the inflated claims of individual studies, this criticism should serve as a warning against premature or ill-founded prescriptions or excessive conceptual sophistry, rather than as a rejection of the need to undertake systematic study of government actions. To the extent that the policy sciences have developed a significant body of empirical and theoretical studies into the activities of numerous governments around the globe, the early efforts and dicta of Lasswell and his followers remain valuable and continue to provide the foundation upon which the study of public policy is based.

DEFINITION OF PUBLIC POLICY

Among the many competing definitions of 'public policy', some are very complex, while others are quite simple. Despite their variations, they all agree on certain key aspects. They agree that public policies result from decisions made by governments and that decisions by governments to do nothing are just as much policy as are decisions to do something. In other respects, however, the competing definitions differ considerably. Three examples of widely-used definitions will suffice to convey the complex meaning of the term.

Thomas Dye offers a particularly succinct definition of public policy, describing it as 'Anything a government chooses to do or not to do'.⁸ This formulation is perhaps too simple and fails to provide the means for conceptualizing public policy. It would include as public policy every aspect of govern-

mental behaviour from purchasing or failing to purchase paper clips to waging or failing to wage nuclear war, and thus provides no means of separating the trivial from the significant aspects of government activities. Nevertheless, Dye's definition is not without merits.

First, Dye specifies clearly that the agent of public policy-making is a government. This means that private business decisions, decisions by charitable organizations, interest groups, individuals or other social groups are not public policies. When we talk about public policies we speak of actions of governments. Although the activities of non-governmental actors may and certainly do influence what governments do, the decisions or activities of such groups do not in themselves constitute public policy. How the medical profession interprets the causes of lung cancer and the solutions it proposes for reducing its incidence may have a bearing on what the government eventually does about the problem. However, the profession's proposed solution to the problem is not itself a public policy; public policy is the measure that a government actually takes.

Second, Dye highlights the fact that public policies involve a fundamental choice on the part of governments to do something or to do nothing. This decision is made by individuals staffing the state and its agencies. Public policy is, at its most simple, a choice made by government to undertake some course of action. A slightly more difficult concept to grasp is that of a 'non-decision': that is, the government's decisions to do nothing, or not to create a new program, or simply to maintain the *status quo*. These should be deliberate decisions, however, such as when a government decides not to increase taxes to make additional funds available for arts or health care. The fact we have the freedom to paint the interiors of our homes in colours of our choice, for example, does not mean that this is a public policy, because the government never deliberately decided not to restrict our options in this area.

William Jenkins' conceptualization of public policy is a bit more precise than the one offered by Dye. He defines public policy as 'a set of interrelated decisions taken by a political actor or group of actors concerning the selection of goals and the means of achieving them within a specified situation where those decisions should, in principle, be within the power of those actors to achieve'.⁹ Jenkins views public policy-making as a process, unlike Dye who defines it as a choice (which presumes the existence of an underlying process but does not state that explicitly). Jenkins also explicitly acknowledges that public policy is 'a set of interrelated decisions'. Rarely does the government address a problem with a single decision; most policies involve a series of decisions, some of which may be inadvertent rather than deliberate. Thus a health policy really consists of a series of decisions related to addressing citizens' health problems. Often various decisions are made by different individuals and agencies within government, such as Departments of Health as well as Finance or Welfare and the various divisions and sections within them. To fully understand a government's health policy we need to take into account all the decisions of all

the governmental actors involved in the financing and administering of health-related decisions.

Jenkins also improves upon Dye by suggesting that the question of a government's capacity to implement its decisions is also a significant consideration in the types of decisions it takes. He recognizes that there are limitations on governments which constrain the range of options they can choose from in a policy area. Internal and external constraints on government make public policy-making, and efforts to understand it, difficult indeed. The government's choice of a policy may be limited by, for instance, lack of resources or international and domestic resistance to certain options. Thus, for example, we will not understand health policy in many countries without recognizing the powerful, self-serving opposition that the medical profession is able to mount against any government's effort to cut health care costs by reducing the profession's income.

Jenkins also introduces the idea of public policy-making as goal-oriented behaviour on the part of governments, an idea which provides a standard by which to evaluate public policies. In this definition, public policies are decisions taken by governments which define a goal and set out the means to achieve it. Although this says nothing about the nature of the goals or the means involved, it provides several avenues for evaluating policies which are missing from Dye's definition. These include the relevance of the goal, the congruence of goal and means, and the degree to which the means ultimately succeed or fail to achieve the initial goal.

James Anderson offers a more generic definition, describing a policy as 'a purposive course of action followed by an actor or a set of actors in dealing with a problem or matter of concern.'¹⁰ Anderson's definition adds two additional elements to those noted by Dye and Jenkins. First, it notes that policy decisions are often taken by sets of actors, rather than a sole set or actor, within a government. Policies are often the result of not only multiple decisions, but of multiple decisions taken by multiple decision-makers, often scattered throughout complex government organizations. Second, Anderson's definition highlights the link between government action and the perception, real or otherwise, of the existence of a problem or concern requiring action.

Within their limitations, any or all of these definitions serve to outline in a general sense what is a public policy. All illustrate that studying public policy in a particular area is a difficult task. It cannot be accomplished simply by going through the official records of government decision-making found in such forms as laws, acts, regulations, and promulgations. Although these are a vital source of information, public policies extend beyond the record of concrete choices to encompass the realm of potential choices, or choices not made.¹¹ Records of decisions do not reflect the unencumbered will of government decision-makers so much as the record of the interaction of that will with the constraints upon it at given historical, political, and social conjunctures.¹²

Simply describing a government's policy is nevertheless a relatively simple task compared to knowing *why* the state did what it *did* and assessing the con-

sequences of its actions. Sometimes it may announce the reasons for making a decision, and that may indeed be the truth. However, often the government does not give any reason for making a decision; or when it does, the publicly avowed reason may not be the actual reason. In such situations it is left to analysts to determine why a particular alternative was chosen and, very often, why some other seemingly more attractive option was not selected. The tasks of understanding why a policy was not implemented as intended or evaluating the outcomes of a policy are no simpler. How analysts explain public policy and the aspects they emphasize depends on their frames of reference,¹³ which in turn depends on their interests, ideologies, and experiences.

UNDERSTANDING PUBLIC POLICY

Public policy is a complex phenomenon consisting of numerous decisions made by numerous individuals and organizations. It is often shaped by earlier policies and is frequently linked closely with other seemingly unrelated decisions. As such, it poses grave difficulties for analysts, who, not surprisingly, have developed numerous ways of approaching the public policy process. Given the complexity of the task, most emphasize only a limited range of factors, even if they recognize the general need for a holistic approach encompassing the entire range of possible variables affecting governmental decision-making. In order to get a flavour of the many approaches to the subject that have been employed by various scholars, let us briefly survey some of the significant bodies of literature.

Examining the nature of the political regime—defined loosely as the organization of the political system—is one way of understanding the public policy-making process.¹⁴ It is argued that public policies vary according to the nature of the political system and its links with the society. Some analysts in this view have even a narrower focus and concentrate only on the organization of the state itself in attempting to understand public policy-making.¹⁵ However, classifying regime types can only be a starting point in public policy analysis because it tells us little about how the characteristics of the regime manifest themselves in individual policies. It merely tells us where to look for influences on government decision-making and what general relationships we can expect to find while studying a government's activities.

Another direction which many theorists have taken is to search for causal variables in public policy-making, or for what are sometimes referred to as policy determinants.¹⁶ Analyses in this tradition concentrate on the question of whether public policies are determined by macro-level socio-economic factors or by micro-level behavioural elements, and a great deal of competing evidence has been gathered about the relationship between public policies and these and other characteristics of domestic societies and the international system.¹⁷ Such studies are largely empirical and often quantitative in orientation. While their

empirical focus has enhanced our understanding of public policies by dispelling common myths and assumptions about the nature of policy processes, they tend to lean towards general macro-level explanations and often fail to develop their arguments in the sectoral and temporal contexts in which most policies develop.

Yet another literature focuses on policy content. The approach is associated closely with scholars such as Theodore Lowi, who argued that the nature of the policy problem and the solutions devised to address it often determine how it will be processed by the political system. Thus whether the policy is primarily regulatory, distributive, redistributive, or constitutive in character determines how it will be dealt with. As Lowi put it, ultimately 'policy may determine politics' and not the other way around, as most analysts commonly suppose.¹⁸ In a similar vein, James Q. Wilson has argued that the degree of concentration of costs and benefits of a policy shapes the type of political processes that will accompany it.¹⁹ Lester Salamon has similarly argued that focusing on the nature of the policy tools or instruments governments have at their disposal to implement public policies is the best mode of analysis for understanding public policy.²⁰ While there is no denying that the nature of the problem has an effect on what can be done about it, it is often difficult to comprehend the nature of a policy problem and the patterns of costs and benefits that various solutions to it involve.

The fourth tradition concentrates on policy impact or outcomes. This literature assesses the direct and indirect effects of specific policies and tends to ignore both causal factors and the nature of the tools at the disposal of governments.²¹ Their analyses focus on quantitative analyses of links between specific government programs and use techniques of statistical inference to attribute causal relations between different types of government activities. Among economists, such studies have examined a wide range of topics in the easily quantifiable realms of fiscal and industrial policy-making and topics such as the relations between government expenditures and corporate investment activity or labour migration. Since this approach focuses only on policy outputs, however, it can say very little about the policy process which led to those outputs.

These different literatures and traditions have existed, in part, due to the nature of the different communities of analysts working on public policy. Governments themselves have always been involved in the study of public policies, both their own²² and those of other countries.²³ However, most of the literature on public policy has been generated by analysts working for non-governmental organizations. Some of these analysts work directly for groups affected by public policies, while others work for corporations, churches, labour unions, or whoever else employs them. There are also analysts who work for private 'think tanks' or research institutes, some of which have close ties with government agencies and pressure groups. Finally, some analysts work independently, many of them being associated with the university system.²⁴

Analysts working in different organizations tend to have different interests in pursuing policy analysis. Analysts working for governments, groups, and corporations affected by public policies tend to focus their research on policy outcomes. They often have a direct interest in condemning or condoning specific policies on the basis of projected or actual impact on their client organization. Private think tanks and research institutes usually enjoy a fair amount of autonomy from governments, though some may be influenced by the preferences of their funding organizations. Nevertheless, they remain interested in the 'practical' side of policy issues and tend to concentrate either on policy outcomes or upon the instruments and techniques which generate those outcomes. Academics, on the other hand, have a great deal of independence and usually have no direct personal stake in the outcome of specific policies. They can therefore examine public policies much more abstractly than can members of the other two groups and, as such, tend to grapple with the theoretical, conceptual, and methodological issues surrounding public policy-making. Academic studies tend to look at the entire policy process and take into account a wide range of factors including policy regimes, policy determinants, policy instruments, and policy content.²⁵

These differing degrees of neutrality and political interests have evolved into distinctions between 'policy study' and 'policy analysis' in the literature.²⁶ The former refers to study 'of' policy and the latter to study 'for' policy. Policy studies, conducted mainly by academics, relate to meta-policy and are concerned with understanding public policy processes. Policy analyses are, in comparison, pursued by government officials or think tanks and are generally directed at designing actual policies. The former are assumed to be descriptive and explanatory compared to the prescriptive orientation of the latter. While this distinction is worth keeping in mind, it should not be overstated. We cannot understand what the government ought to be doing (or not doing), as emphasized by the 'analysis' literature, unless we know what it can or cannot do, the concern of the 'studies' literature.

The existence of very separate traditions and literatures of inquiry into public policy has led to a plethora of studies suggesting sometimes conflicting conclusions about the public policy-making process. This fragmentation has burdened public policy analysis with an apparent complexity which can be bewildering to anyone approaching the discipline for the first time. This has resulted in efforts to reduce the complexity by synthesizing the diverse literatures on the subject.²⁷

An Applied Problem-Solving Model of the Policy Process

One of the most popular means of simplifying public policy making has been to disaggregate the process into a series of discrete stages and sub-stages. The resulting sequence of stages is referred to as the 'policy cycle'. This simplification has its origins in the earliest works on public policy analysis, but has

received somewhat different treatment in the hands of different authors. The different descriptions of the policy cycle put forward by several different authors and the common logic their models possess will be presented below. Later in the chapter, we will expand the simple model of the public policy cycle to include a wider range of factors affecting the overall policy process.

The idea of simplifying the complexity of public policy-making by breaking the policy-making process down into a number of discrete stages was first broached in the early work of Harold Lasswell.²⁸ Lasswell divided the policy process into seven stages: 1) Intelligence, 2) Promotion, 3) Prescription, 4) Invocation, 5) Application, 6) Termination, and 7) Appraisal.²⁹ In his view, the seven stages described not only how public policies were actually made, but how they should be made. The policy process began with intelligence gathering, that is, the collection, processing, and dissemination of information for those who participate in the decision process. It then moved to the promotion of particular options by those involved in making the decision. In the third stage the decision-makers actually prescribed a course of action. In the fourth stage the prescribed course of action was invoked; a set of sanctions was developed to penalize those who failed to comply with the prescriptions of the decision-makers. The policy was then applied by the courts and the bureaucracy and ran its course until it was terminated or cancelled. Finally, the results of the policy were appraised or evaluated against the aims and goals of the original decision-makers.

Lasswell's analysis of the policy-making process focused on the decision-making process within government and had little to say about external or environmental influences on government behaviour. It simply assumed that decision-making was limited to a presumably small number of participants staffing official positions in government. Another shortcoming of this model was its lack of internal logic, especially with reference to placing appraisal or evaluation after termination, since policies should be evaluated prior to being wound down rather than afterwards. Nevertheless, this model was highly influential in the development of a policy science. Although not entirely accurate, it did reduce the complexity of studying public policy by allowing each stage to be isolated and examined before putting the whole picture of the process back together.

Lasswell's formulation formed the basis for a model developed by Gary Brewer in the early 1970s. According to Brewer, the policy process was composed of six stages: 1) Invention/Initiation, 2) Estimation, 3) Selection, 4) Implementation, 5) Evaluation, and 6) Termination.³⁰ In Brewer's view, invention or initiation referred to the earliest stage in the sequence when a problem would be initially sensed. This stage, he argued, would be characterized by ill-conceived definition of the problem and suggested solutions to it. The second stage of estimation concerned calculation of the risks, costs, and benefits associated with each of the various solutions raised in the earlier stage. This would involve both technical evaluation and normative choices. The object of this stage is to

narrow the range of plausible choices by excluding the unfeasible ones, and to somehow rank the remaining options in terms of desirability. The third stage consists of adopting one, or none, or some combination of the solutions remaining at the end of the estimation stage. The remaining three stages are those of implementing the selected option, evaluating the results of the entire process, and terminating the policy according to the conclusions reached by its evaluation.

Brewer's version of the policy process improved on Lasswell's pioneering work. It expanded the policy process beyond the confines of government in discussing the process of problem-recognition and clarified the terminology in use to describe the various stages of the process. Moreover, it introduced the notion of the policy process as an ongoing cycle. It recognized that most policies did not have a definite life cycle—moving from birth to death—but rather seemed to recur, in slightly different guises, as one policy succeeded another with only minor or major modification.³¹ Brewer's insights inspired several other versions of the policy cycle to be developed in the 1970s and 1980s, the most well known of which were set out in popular textbooks by Charles O. Jones³² and James Anderson.³³

If a plethora of models of policy stages and their variants is to be avoided, however, it is necessary to clarify the logic behind the cycle model. In the works of Brewer, Jones, and others the operative principle behind the notion of the policy cycle is the logic of applied problem-solving, even though they themselves often do not state this logic clearly. The stages in applied problem-solving and its corresponding stages in the policy process are depicted in Figure 1.

Figure 1.

Five Stages of the Policy Cycle and their Relationship to Applied Problem-Solving

Phases of Applied Problem-Solving	Stages in Policy Cycle
1. Problem Recognition	1. Agenda-Setting
2. Proposal of Solution	2. Policy Formulation
3. Choice of Solution	3. Decision-Making
4. Putting Solution into Effect	4. Policy Implementation
5. Monitoring Results	5. Policy Evaluation

In this model, *Agenda-Setting* refers to the process by which problems come to the attention of governments; *Policy Formulation* refers to the process by which policy options are formulated within government; *Decision-Making* refers to the process by which governments adopt a particular course of action or non-action; *Policy Implementation* refers to the process by which governments put policies into effect; *Policy Evaluation* refers to the processes by which the results of policies are monitored by both state and societal actors, the result of which may be re-conceptualization of policy problems and solutions.

The most important advantage of the policy cycle model as set out above is that it facilitates the understanding of public policy-making by breaking the complexity of the process into a limited number of stages and sub-stages, each of which can be investigated alone, or in terms of its relationship to any or all the other stages of the cycle. This aids theory-building by allowing numerous case studies and comparative studies of different stages to be undertaken. Another advantage of the model is that it permits examination of the role of all actors and institutions dealing with a policy, not just those governmental agencies formally charged with the task.

The principal disadvantage of this model is that it can be misinterpreted as suggesting that policy-makers go about solving public problems in a very systematic and more or less linear fashion.³⁴ This is obviously not the case in reality, as the identification of problems and the development and implementation of solutions is often an *ad hoc* and idiosyncratic process. Decision-makers often simply react to circumstances, and do so in terms of their interests and preset ideological dispositions.³⁵ Another problem with the model is that while the logic of the policy cycle may be fine in the abstract, in practice the stages are often compressed or skipped, or followed in an order unlike that specified by the logic of applied problem-solving. Thus the cycle may not be a single iterative loop, but rather a series of smaller loops in which, for example, the results of past implementation decisions have a major impact on future policy formulation, regardless of the specifics of the agenda-setting process in the case concerned. In short, there is often no linear progression of a policy as conceived by the model. Third, and perhaps most importantly, the model lacks any notion of causation. It offers no pointers as to what or who drives a policy from one stage to another, a matter of crucial interest to scholars working on the subject.

The weaknesses of the model underscore the complexity of the policy process as well as the need to develop better intellectual devices to facilitate its understanding. While the five-stage cycle model helps disaggregate the policy process, it does not well illustrate the nuances and complexities of public policy-making. A model is needed that delineates in greater detail the actors and institutions involved in the policy process, helps identify the instruments available to policy-makers, and points out the factors that may underlie the process and lead to certain policy outcomes. In the following sub-section we examine the aspects of public policy-making that an improved model of a policy cycle must take account of at the conceptual level.

Towards an Improved Model of the Policy Cycle

Over the past four decades scholars and analysts working towards developing a policy science have addressed a series of related questions about the policy process raised in numerous case studies, comparative studies, and conceptual and theoretical critiques. At a very general level, these questions are related to the roles of policy actors, the interests they pursue and the impact of the ideas

that they hold on their actions; the nature of the instruments used to implement policies; and the impact of past experiences on the present and future behaviour of governments.

An improved model of public policy-making must be capable of identifying the actors involved in the policy process and the interests they pursue. Policy-making involves a multitude of actors, who may or may not have similar interests. They interact with each other in a countless number of ways in pursuit of their self-interest, and the result of their interaction is what public policy is about. But they are not completely independent and self-determining actors, since they operate within a set of existing social relations which serve to constrain their behaviour.

The context of social, state, and international institutions and the values these institutions embody condition how a problem is defined, facilitate the adoption of certain solutions to it, and prohibit or inhibit the choice of other solutions. Similarly, the set of ideas and beliefs or the 'discourse' surrounding a policy problem also serves to constrain policy actors. While there will always be conflicting interpretations of problems, almost every problem is characterized by a surprising degree of agreement on its gravity and the limited number of options open for solving it. Finally, the range of instruments available to policy-makers also serves to constrain or limit their choices. Different problems permit the use of different instruments, not all of which are completely substitutable. Until we know the instruments that are available for each task, we will have difficulty knowing why a certain instrument was chosen to implement a policy.

While their activity is conditioned by the nature of the problem under consideration and the larger political, economic, institutional, and ideological context in which they operate, policy actors are not entirely without options. Various contingencies and tactical alliances among policy actors enable them to overcome or at least mitigate the limitations they work under. But even here, the alliances and choices before policy-makers may be constrained by past choices and decisions. It is often the case that in the past policy-makers have discussed the problem and done something about it, or decided deliberately not to do anything about it. The lessons that policy-makers draw from past experiences with addressing problems can shape what views they hold and the actions they take in the present.

An improved model of the policy process must be able to deal with these complexities. Our text retains the basic elements of the policy cycle model in order to simplify the subject matter, and structure its analysis. But it seeks to capture the complexities by building deeper questions into the model and draws upon the terms and concepts of contemporary political science in answering them. Analysing each of the five stages in the public policy process involves addressing a distinct set of questions about actors, institutions, instruments, and discourses along the lines outlined above. In this way, an improved model of the policy process can emerge in which each stage will contain not simply a description of the activities which occur at that point in the process, but also an outline

of a set of variables affecting activity at that stage and hypotheses about the relationships existing among the variables. The framework draws upon many strands in the literature and enables students to cover a broad range of material, while maintaining coherence in the analysis. It is not intended to predispose students towards particular conclusions, but to help identify the key variables which affect each stage of the public policy-making process.

Such a line of analysis would help explain why governments tend to develop policies in particular sectors or deal with particular types of issues in a characteristic fashion or 'policy style' related to the context within which they work. Significant aspects of this style are related to the nature of the actors involved in each decision and the state of knowledge or belief about the policy problem in question found among the state and societal actors in the policy process.

By examining each stage of the policy cycle with care and elaborating upon the variables which affect it, it is possible to develop a taxonomy of typical policy styles with relevance to multiple areas of government activity. Such a model contributes to the development of a policy science by providing a much better understanding of why governments choose to do what they do or do not do.

The purpose of this book is to develop an analytical framework that will assist students in studying public policy. It seeks to achieve this objective by providing an examination of the broad approaches to the subject matter, and inventories of the relevant policy actors, institutions, and instruments which are involved in public policy-making. It then moves on to break down the policy process into sub-processes or sub-stages and answer the types of questions posed above. It concludes with a general commentary on studying public policy.

Part 1 provides a general introduction to the discipline. Chapter One has briefly charted the development of public policy as an academic discipline and explained what is generally meant by the term. It has proposed a five-stage model of the policy process and framed research questions for each stage. Chapter Two will examine in more detail the commonly-used approaches to public policy, emphasizing those employed by economists, political scientists, sociologists and others who emphasize interests in the public policy process. The potential and limitations of each approach are discussed briefly.

Part 2 describes the institutional parameters within which policies are made, the nature of the actors who make the policies, and the instruments the actors have at their disposal for implementing policies. Chapter Three discusses the various state and societal actors and institutions that play a salient role in public policy-making. It utilizes the concept of a policy subsystem to capture the complex links between state and societal actors involved in public policy-making. Chapter Four describes the characteristics of the instruments available to the government for implementing policies. It develops a scale of instruments based on the range of possible means by which goods and services of any kind can be delivered, from the use of voluntary or community services to direct delivery by state employees. Each chapter not only inventories the range of institutions, actors and instruments which can affect policy making, but also

establishes the difficulties of assessing and predicting which institutions, actors, and instruments will actually be involved in specific policy-making instances.

Part 3 sets out a schema for conceptualizing the policy process in order to allow finer levels of analysis. Each of Chapters Five to Nine examines a critical component or sub-stage of the public policy process, including how and why public concerns make their way onto the government's agenda; how and why some individuals and groups enjoy special input into the formulation of governmental policy options; how and why governments typically decide on a specific course of action; why governments utilize the types of policy instruments that they do; and how their actions and choices are evaluated.

Finally, Part 4 discusses the conclusions from the study in the context of the relationships between ideas, interests, and institutions in public policy-making. Chapter Ten sets out the general pattern of evolution of policies in many policy sectors, establishes a taxonomy of typical policy styles, and establishes the reasons why policies tend to develop and change through a process of 'punctuated equilibria' or 'paradigm shifts'. Chapter Eleven points out the need to continue developing and testing policy theory if the aims of the policy science are to be realized.

NOTES

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