

PUBLIC POLICY

Class Notes

I. What is Public Policy?

- A. Public reflects the intentions of a government and the subsequent actions to implement laws and other policies.
 - 1. It's the substance of what government does, or in some cases fails to do
 - 2. Inaction/indifference also a PP: EX: indifference to civil rights enforcement or gender equity
- B. Under the umbrella of public policy:
 - 1. Foreign Policy
 - 2. Defense Policy
 - 3. Social Policy
 - 4. Economic Policy
 - 5. Social Justice Policy
 - 6. Environmental Policy

II. The Preamble >>> Constitutional basis of Public Policy

*We the People, of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, **establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution of the United States of America.***

III. Steps in the Policy Making Process

- A. *Step 1: Problem Identification and Agenda Setting* - What's the problem? Does government have a role in fixing it? If so, put it on the government's agenda i.e. "to do list."
Forces that bring issues to the forefront:
 - 1. A crisis (ex: terrorist attack, natural disaster)
 - 2. Interest groups
 - 3. Citizens
 - 4. The media (gatekeeper role in particular)
 - 5. Members of Congress
 - 6. Individuals in the White House Staff
 - 7. New research
- B. *Step 2: Policy Formulation* – What should be done about the problem?
 - 1. Members of Congress propose legislation, congressional committees hold hearings, investigations, etc.
 - 2. The President forms a study group, task force
 - 3. Issue networks try to influence policy
 - 4. The federal courts hear cases, the Supreme Court agrees to hear a case on a policy issue
- C. *Step 3: Policy Adoption* – The Action Plan
 - 1. Congress passes legislation
 - 2. The President signs a bill into law, issues an executive order, directs the bureaucracy to act
 - 3. The Supreme Court hands down a decision
- D. *Step 4: Policy Implementation* – The Plan in Action
 - 1. Federal agencies and departments carry out the law or executive, issue regulations
 - 2. State and local governments sometimes must carry out a federal plan (ex: No Child Left Behind)
- E. *Step 5: Policy Evaluation* – After the fact, is the plan working
 - 1. Congress re-evaluates through appropriations process, sunset legislation
 - 2. Government Accountability Office (GAO) audits public policy programs, contracts, and procedures to make sure money is spent the way Congress intends
 - 3. The President re-evaluates through OMB and budget

IV. Public Policy Theories

- A. *Pluralist Theory* - so many different competing interest groups that no one group gets anything/everything
 - 1. many groups, so no one group or faction has overwhelming power of influence
 - 2. PP formed by conflict and bargaining among organizations representing affected interest groups
 - 3. interesting alliances form >>> EX: religious right (Christian Coalition) and women's groups (N.O.W.) work together against pornography; KKK and ACLU and 1st Amend. rt. to free speech
- B. *Power Elite Theory* - political power rests in the hands of a few
 - 1. EX: President, members of Cong., wealthy interests, well connected; Iron Triangle
 - 2. these elites control the political agenda as well as public policy
- C. *Incrementalist or Bureaucratic Theory* - decisions and PP arrived at slowly and gradually
 - 1. PP dominated by career bureaucrats in the fed. bur., not politicians and interests groups
 - 2. bureaucrats particularly powerful when Cong by law confers wide discretion (EX: procurement of weapons, enforcement of civil rights, making of foreign policy, regulating business)