

SOS POLITICAL SCIENCE AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

M.A.POL.SC.204

SUBJECT NAME : COMPARATIVE POLITICS

UNIT-V

TOPIC NAME : POLICY MAKING

POLICY-MAKING

Public policies are developed by officials within institutions of government to address public issues through the political process. When it comes to creating public policy, policymakers are faced with two distinct situations. The first situation, and the ideal one, is for policymakers to jointly identify a desirable future condition, and then create policies and take actions to move toward that desired future state, monitoring progress to allow for necessary adjustments. The alternative, and less desirable, situation occurs when policymakers are unable to reach a consensus regarding a desirable future condition. In this later instance, policymakers try instead to move away from present situations judged as undesirable, even though no consensus exists about the preferred alternative.

ASPECTS OF POLICY-MAKING

The context for the public policy-making process in the United States reflects several important aspects, which are highlighted in the following paragraphs.

Guidance for Policymakers.

:Ideally, policymakers are guided by core principles. Four examples follow.

:Politicians and public servants are accountable to the public.

:Elites , in politics and the private sector, do not have the right to pursue their interests without constraints.

:Government bureaucratic and decision processes must be open, accessible, and transparent , as well as being responsive to public concerns.

Individuals and communities affected by projects have the right to information regarding proposed developments; the right to challenge the need for, and the design of, projects; and the right to be involved in planning and decision-making processes.

Public Demands.

In addition to the guidance and associated constraints placed on policymakers, demands from the general public, or "bottom up" initiatives, can be as influential as "top down" directives. The general public is reasonably educated and informed, and can mobilize to demand and support desired initiatives.

SPECIAL INTEREST GROUPS.

Powerful special interest groups can and do apply significant pressure on elected officials and public servants in order to achieve their ends, regardless of the public welfare. A special interest group is an organized group that exists primarily to advance its own specific interests. For example, a Chamber of Commerce usually advocates for interests of business, whereas the Sierra Club normally represents the views of people interested in the environment. Elites sometimes use questionable means in order to achieve their ends, and such influence is often exerted "behind closed doors."

Complex Issues.

Public policy issues normally are complex, occur in rapidly changing and turbulent environments characterized by uncertainty, and involve conflicts among different interests. Thus, those responsible for creating, implementing, and enforcing policies must be able to reach decisions about ill-defined problem situations that usually are not well understood, have no one correct answer, and involve many competing interests.

DIFFERENT ROLES OF SCIENTISTS AND POLICYMAKERS

Given the above characteristics of the policy-making process, the needs of policymakers and scientists often are different. Policymakers usually focus on the short-term (commonly, the time until the next election), and on actions that will have tangible results and outcomes while minimizing risk. In contrast, scientists are interested in the long-term, in deferring action until understanding has been gained, and in recognizing the nature, extent, and magnitude of uncertainty. Thus, the policymaker normally is interested in the simple rather than the complex, the concrete rather than the abstract, and the immediate rather than a distant result. Policymakers also understand that sometimes conditions will be favorable for a decision or action, even if a technical understanding of the issue is incomplete. Waiting for more data, analysis, and interpretation may result in policymakers losing an opportune moment. The personal characteristics of policymakers and scientists also are often different. The best policymakers are prepared and able to synthesize diverse information, move forward through acts of faith, make major leaps forward into the unknown, and effectively make prodigious bets. In contrast, scientists are taught to be conservative and cautious, and to doubt results and conclusions until evidence and analysis support them. Scientists present their findings, conclusions, and recommendations qualified with many "if's" and "maybe's," because they recognize and appreciate the complexities and uncertainties associated with their knowledge. However, policymakers usually do not want qualified statements from scientific advisors. Instead, they want simple and clear answers.

THE DISADVANTAGE OF SCIENTIFIC UNCERTAINTY.

Because various scientists may use different models and assumptions to guide their research, it is not unusual for different scientists to reach contradictory conclusions. For example, one scientist may determine that groundwater in an aquifer is being polluted; whereas another scientist may say it is not. If the aquifer is polluted, one scientist may conclude that the type and amount of contaminants in the aquifer is a threat to human health, but another scientist would disagree. One camp of scientists may say that climate warming is occurring, but others

may say it is not. As a result of these disagreements among experts, policymakers who do not like specific advice from a scientist usually can find another scientist who will provide a perspective that supports their preferred policy. The fact that scientists can disagree often confuses the public, who may be puzzled as to why scientists are not in agreement about a policy issue. Despite the scientific uncertainty that may exist, policymakers are challenged to find optimal solutions that ideally have been identified through participatory processes that reflect the scientific consensus, and that balance the interests of various groups. The Policymaking Process Public policy refers to the actions taken by government — its decisions that are intended to solve problems and improve the quality of life for its citizens. At the federal level, public policies are enacted to regulate industry and business, to protect citizens at home and abroad, to aid state and city governments and people such as the poor through funding programs, and to encourage social goals. A policy established and carried out by the government goes through several stages from inception to conclusion. These are agenda building, formulation, adoption, implementation, evaluation, and termination.

AGENDA BUILDING

Before a policy can be created, a problem must exist that is called to the attention of the government. Illegal immigration, for example, has been going on for many years, but it was not until the 1990s that enough people considered it such a serious problem that it required increased government action. Another example is crime. American society tolerates a certain level of crime; however, when crime rises dramatically or is perceived to be rising dramatically, it becomes an issue for policymakers to address. Specific events can place a problem on the agenda. The flooding of a town near a river raises the question of whether homes should be allowed to be built in a floodplain. New legislation on combating terrorism (the USA Patriot Act, for example) was a response to the attacks of September 11, 2001.

FORMULATION AND ADOPTION

Policy formulation means coming up with an approach to solving a problem. Congress, the executive branch, the courts, and interest groups may be involved. Contradictory proposals are often made. The president may have one approach to immigration reform, and the opposition-party members of Congress may have another. Policy formulation has a tangible outcome: A bill goes before Congress or a regulatory agency drafts proposed rules. The process continues with adoption. A policy is adopted when Congress passes legislation, the regulations become final, or the Supreme Court renders a decision in a case.

IMPLEMENTATION

The implementation or carrying out of policy is most often accomplished by institutions other than those that formulated and adopted it. A statute usually provides just a broad outline of a policy. For example, Congress may mandate improved water quality standards, but the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) provides the details on those standards and the procedures for measuring compliance through regulations. As noted earlier, the Supreme Court has no mechanism to enforce its decisions; other branches of government must implement its determinations. Successful implementation depends on the complexity of the policy,

coordination between those putting the policy into effect, and compliance. The Supreme Court's decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* is a good example. The justices realized that desegregation was a complex issue; however, they did not provide any guidance on how to implement it "with all deliberate speed." Here, implementation depended upon the close scrutiny of circuit and appeals court judges, as well as local and state school board members who were often reluctant to push social change.

EVALUATION AND TERMINATION

Evaluation means determining how well a policy is working, and it is not an easy task. People inside and outside of government typically use cost-benefit analysis to try to find the answer. In other words, if the government is spending x billions of dollars on this policy, are the benefits derived from it worth the expenditure? Cost-benefit analysis is based on hard-to-come-by data that are subject to different, and sometimes contradictory, interpretations. History has shown that once implemented, policies are difficult to terminate. When they are terminated, it is usually because the policy became obsolete, clearly did not work, or lost its support among the interest groups and elected officials that placed it on the agenda in the first place. In 1974, for example, Congress enacted a national speed limit of 55 miles per hour. It was effective in reducing highway fatalities and gasoline consumption. On the other hand, the law increased costs for the trucking industry and was widely viewed as an unwarranted federal intrusion into an area that belonged to the states to regulate. The law was repealed in 1987.

POLICY MAKING IN INDIA: WHO'S BEHIND IT?

That's how former RBI Governor Raghuram Rajan describes policy making in India. It may be thus worthwhile to talk about these individuals who commit acts of valor on an everyday basis. The Government of India with its civil services machinery has a monopoly over policy decisions making and implementation in the country. The origin of the Indian Civil Services can be traced back to the British era where these services formed (as they still do) the backbone of the public administration in the country. There are 50,000 civil servants in India, selected through one of the toughest entrance examinations in the world. Various government-affiliated policy making institutions such as the Reserve Bank of India conduct independent examinations for their job candidates. In 2015–16 as many as 450,000 participants decided to take the Civil Services Examination and only 1000 came out successful. That's an astonishing acceptance rate of 0.22%. The accepted candidates undergo a two-year training, during which they take professional course and travel to remote parts of the country. The civil services are also fragmented into subgroups according to the functions, the most prestigious of these is the Indian Administrative Services (IAS). Milan Vaishnav and Saksham Khosla of Carnegie India present some valuable findings about the Indian Administrative services in a recently published research paper. They find that officers serving in their home-state usually provide better quality of service delivery. Local accountability systems such as media scrutiny greatly reduce the instances of corruption. Political involvement though is a major impediment. There is a 53% chance for an IAS officer to be transferred in any given year. Thus, for most officers good governance takes a backseat over political backscratching. They also point out that for young IAS officers education and exam scores are highly correlated to future success. As per data

shared by union government in the Lok Sabha, India faces a 23% shortage of IAS officers. Despite the low acceptance rates in the selection examinations India has only a fifth as many public servants as United States, relative to population. Overall, government policy making institutions often tend to become risk-averse due to their political masters. They are plagued with bureaucratic inefficiencies and lack of specialisation. Enter think tanks, which try to fill these vacuums in the public policy space. Think tanks are privately funded not-for profit institutions which generate ideas and debate on nitty-gritties of public policy. In addition to strong research skills and a grip on issues concerning the country as well as the world, professionals working in think tanks possess communication and influencing abilities to engage with either policymakers in government for policy advocacy or the broader public through opinion pieces in print media or online media. Think tanks hire individuals from a broad variety of fields such as (but not limited to) economics — for knowledge about incentives, cost and market interactions; lawyers for their constitutional knowledge, engineers-for their analytical and data crunching prowess and political scientists for their understanding of political activities and societal behavior. Institutions specializing in public policy education such as The Jindal School of Government & Public Policy and the Takshashila Institution have integrated all these skills in short term and long term programmes to feed well trained policy professionals into think tanks, governments and research institutions. Think tanks also hire domain experts to solve problems related to a particular field such as healthcare, education or transportation. Job candidates at think tanks with masters degrees usually start off as associates or analysts and the ones who have earned a PhD get the title of a fellow. There are also few government-funded think tanks such as the Niti Aayog which hire civil servants and academics. Although India is fourth in the list of countries having the highest number of think tanks (280), the job market in the public policy arena still remains thin, which means that the number of participants in the market is significantly low compared to job markets in other space. The reasons for this on the demand side could be the limited hiring capacities of think tanks due to low funding, and on the supply side due to more financially rewarding jobs in finance and technology for potential job candidates. Thin labour markets, due to low volume of participants result in asymmetric information being available to market participants thus leading to higher search costs for both finding a job and on the other side to find an prospective candidates for the job. Price volatility which here would amount to high degree of variance in salaries is also symptomatic of thin markets. An NBER paper by Li Gan and Qi Lea confirms this by concluding that a field of specialisation with less job openings and less candidates has a lower probability of matching openings with candidates. Despite these somber findings, the future seems quite promising. The labour market in this space is likely to become thick primarily due to two factors. First, technology companies such as Uber and Google which are constantly disrupting markets and creating new business models which are beyond the comprehension of government policy makers. These organisations are hiring policy and legal experts to engage with the governments for tweaking policies that will ensure smooth functioning of their operations. Second, the Indian government is already reaching out to think tanks due to their nuanced research capabilities. Funding is also becoming less of an issue with think tanks tapping into Indian corporates and foreign donors. Finally, in a positive move aimed at bringing domain expertise to policy making, the government has decided to open its doors for private sector specialists in select departments, at the level of director and joint secretary.

Policy professionals, both outside and inside the government need to synergies for India to fill its structural loopholes and realise its complete economic potential.