

Day 2: What is Public Policy?

Daniel J. Mallinson

School of Public Affairs
Penn State Harrisburg
mallinson@psu.edu

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Road map

- What is politics?
- What is public policy?
- What is public? Private?
- Policy Sciences and Evidence-Based Policymaking

What is politics?

What immediately comes to mind when you hear the word “politics”?

What is politics?

Harold Laswell (1958)

“who gets what, when, and how”

Three aspects: competition, cooperation, and power

What is public policy?

What did you write about?

What is public policy?

Some Important Background

- A young field of study (30/60 years)
- Lack of consensus about how to define public policy
- Interdisciplinary (huge economics influence, also political science, sociology, history, others)

What is public policy?

Birkland's key attributes are helpful for defining public policy

- Made in response to some problem that requires attention
- Made on the “public’s” behalf (why in quotes?)
- Oriented toward a goal or desired state (e.g., solving a problem)
- Made by governments
- Interpreted and implemented by public and private actors
- What government chooses to do or not to do

What is public? Private?

Let's make a list!

What is public? Private?

Appeals to the “public interest” are important for claiming that something is a public policy problem

Birkland’s Definition of Public Interest

“The assumed broader desires and needs of the public, in whose name policy is made. The public interest is hard to define, but is something to which all policy advocates appeal.”

Are public desires and needs the same thing?

Policy Science

- To answer “why” questions about human behavior and political institutions
- To solve problems
- To improve governance
- Use a scientific approach: Research question, theory, data, analysis and interpretation, repeat
- Provide evidence for policymakers

Evidence-Based Policymaking

A current movement to formally incorporate evidential standards in policymaking

Evidence and Emotion

- BUT, analysis is often conducted for the purpose of *advocacy*
- Emotion plays an important role in policy making
- Doing something is politically valuable (e.g., DARE)

“Because neither facts nor emotions are solely decisive, evidence and emotion play important roles in policy making, and sometimes emotion gains the upper hand. (Birkland, p. 19)”

Questions

What remains unclear from the first chapter?