



Playing the Policy Game

Basic Knowledge and Skills for
Effective Policy Process Participation

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PREFACE

Many of us have likely heard the expression “government of the people, by the people, for the people.” Yet, it is the people who are often excluded from the public policy process. Citizen engagement is typically reactive rather than proactive and passive as opposed to active. Voting and protesting are not the only ways that governments hear the voices of the people. Voting allows citizens to choose individuals who represent their interests, yet their interests are not always represented in ways they desire. Protesting brings attention to issues but doesn’t always lead to problems being solved. This book aims to empower readers to be active participants in the policy process rather than centering elected officials, appointed officials or bureaucrats as the only sources of policy power.

This book is written in the spirit of equity. In order to have equitable public policies the voices of those who are impacted by these policies need to be heard as “gaps exist between the services governments deliver and what citizens want or need” (Mintrom & Luetjens, 2018, pg. 122). This is not simply a matter of contributing to policy discourse, but perhaps more importantly, a matter of contributing to the design, development and evaluation of public policy. Further, it is about holding policy makers and other decision makers accountable for their actions and the results of the actions. This book draws from lessons learned from my practical experiences, teaching and research. It is my hope that it equips those on the front lines of public policy and social equity with the tools needed to be effective producers and consumers of public policy ideas.

The book is organized in six chapters. Each chapter includes an explanation of concepts, an illustration of the concepts in action, concluding thoughts, discussion questions, a skill development exercise and related resources. Corresponding videos and interactive content can be found at <https://sites.google.com/mocs.utc.edu/mmauldin-playingthepolicygame?usp=sharing>.

Chapter 1 introduces the concept of public policy and aims to help readers understand the policy process. The chapter provides a foundation for understanding government and governance. It frames public policy as a set of solutions to societal or community issues. It describes the policy making process with emphasis on policy stages. Chapter 1 illustrates the policy process using the COVID-19 pandemic as a policy issue.

As public policy is a political endeavor, Chapter 2 focuses on the politics of public policy. It emphasizes the roles that governmental and nongovernmental policy actors play in the policy process. The chapter uses the Covenant School shooting to illustrate covered concepts. Chapter 2 provides insights on using political statement analysis to assist readers’ understanding of policy actor positions on issues.

Chapter 3 guides readers in understanding and using the “elements of a finding” framework to adequately define policy problems. This framework considers the following factors: a) what is expected; b) explanation of the problem; c) why the problem exists; d) the consequences of the problem; and e) recommendations for improvement. The chapter aids readers in finding relevant data through various governmental and other data sources including open government data. An analysis of food deserts is used to illustrate concepts.

Policy problems demand solutions. Chapter 4 guides readers in developing solutions to identified problems. The chapter advances the “elements of a finding” framework by which readers can propose rational, fully-developed policy recommendations. Policy design is also explored with a discussion on framing policy intent, goals and related programs and activities that would need to be implemented in order to address the defined policy problem. Each of these factors is important in writing policy memos and producing related presentations as described in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5 focuses on policy communications such as policy memos and policy presentations. This chapter engages readers by helping them write and present effectively and persuasively using the insights gained from Chapter 4. The chapter introduces no-to-low cost writing, data analysis and visualization tools such as those provided by Google such as Google Docs, Google Sheets, Google Slides and Google Looker Studio. It provides a real-life example of a policy memo and policy presentation.

Holding policy makers accountable through active citizen participation in the policy process is the focus of Chapter 6. The chapter explains how citizens can hold policy and decision makers accountable for policy actions by voting and engaging them in public hearings and other meetings. The chapter suggests networking and collaboration as means of influencing public policy development.

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Chapter 1:

What is Public Policy?

PURPOSE OF GOVERNMENT

Public policy is the result of governmental actions stemming from politics. In order to understand the concept of public policy, we must have a basic understanding of the purpose of government. Governments impact nearly every aspect of human life. They provide frameworks of laws and regulations that promote the common good and ensure citizen welfare. Governments maintain law and order, protect rights and freedoms and promote economic prosperity.

There are three levels of governments in the United States. These levels of government include the Federal, state, and local governments. State governments are patterned after the Federal government. The Federal and state governments, through federalism, share certain powers such as law enforcement and taxation. States, however, have their own constitutions. State governments grant local governments powers. Local governments include counties and municipalities such as cities and towns.

Each of these governments has three branches: the Executive Branch, legislative branch and judicial branch. Our primary concern is with the Executive and legislative branches. The legislative branches develop policies that the executive branch agencies would then implement. The executive branch implements policies produced by the legislative branches utilizing a system of agencies, departments and activities.

The graphic below outlines the three levels and three branches of government and what they generally entail.

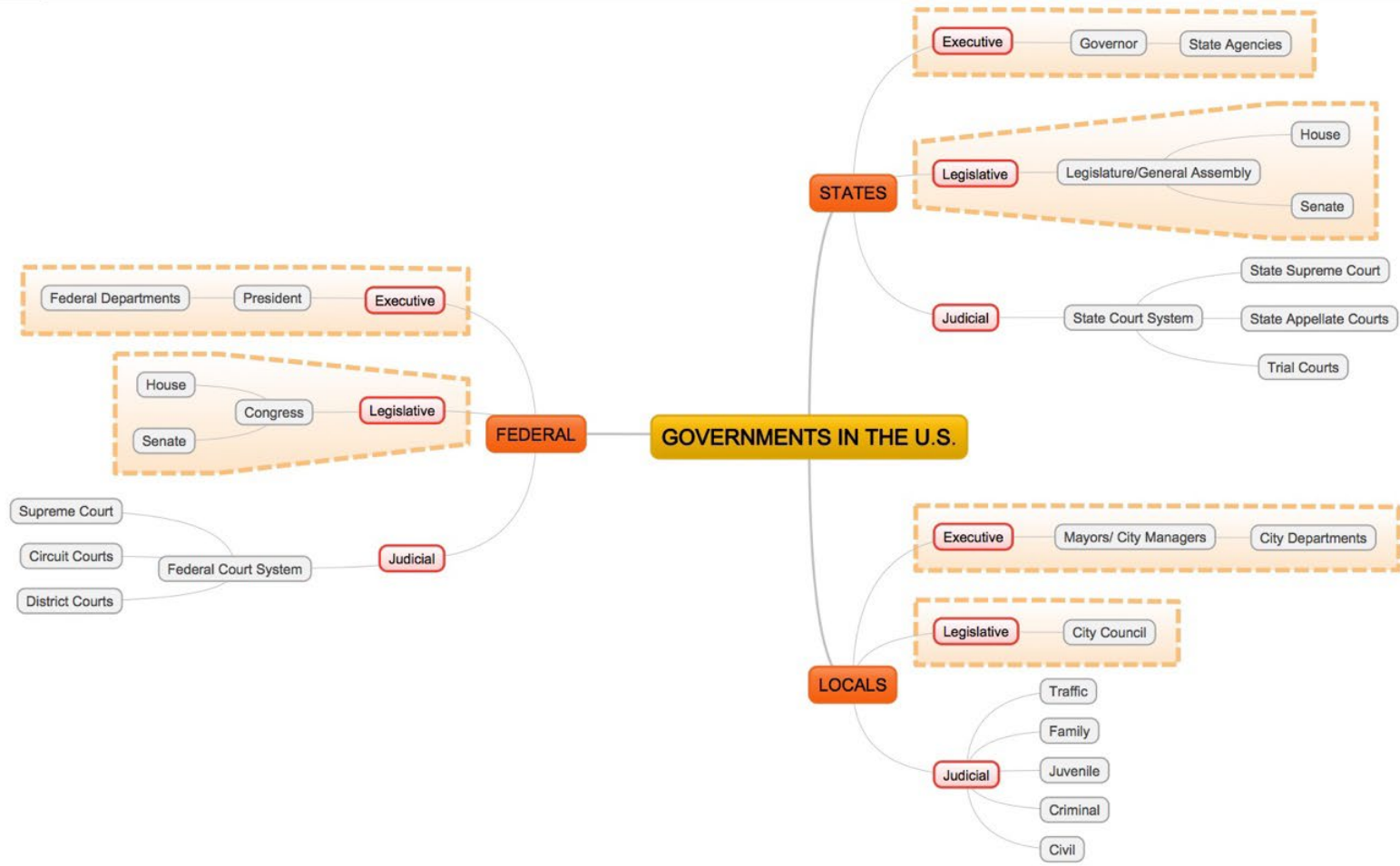


Figure 1: Add County Commission

We interact with some governmental function every day whether we realize it or not. Each level of government serves citizens independently or jointly through formal and informal partnerships within an intergovernmental system. Local governments are typically directly responsible for services such as, but not limited to, parks and recreation, public transportation, community development, education and public works. State governments regulate industries, manage natural resources, and provide for public safety, education and healthcare. The federal government manages the national economy, provides for national defense, maintains the federal interstate system and provides a policy structure for several public goods and services.

Government is the system of political processes and institutions in which public policies are made (Kraft & Furlong, 2021). Ideally, the purpose of government is to serve the needs and interests of citizens and to promote a fair, just and equitable society for all. However, this is not to say that citizens are passive beneficiaries of governmental actions. Citizens can impact government by being active participants in the public policy process.

What is Public Policy?

Kraft and Furlong define public policy as “what public officials within government, and by extension the citizens they represent, choose to do or not to do about public problems” (pg. 5). Public policies are theoretical solutions to public broad societal or community problems. They are theoretical in the sense that we often have a limited understanding of the causes and consequences of public problems. Public policies are blueprints of governmental programs and activities designed to accomplish goals. Public policies can also be tools used to impose a particular will on society as a whole or on particular segments of the population.

Public policy is a set of intentional actions undertaken to resolve broad societal or community problems. Public policies are responses to issues that arise when something is wrong, or someone is wronged. These responses are typically approved by governments and thus stipulate a government’s actions or inactions to salient public issues, perceived or real. Policy includes any formal legislative actions taken to address societal or other identified problems. Policy encompasses a multitude of broad categories of issues or “policy domains”. It is generally formulated at the legislative level but is often times guided by the policy direction of the executive (i.e. presidents, governors, mayors). Public policy decisions are binding on both those who agree with them and those who do not as they often reflect what behaviors are or are not acceptable in society (Wheelan, 2011). Policies may include laws, regulations, ordinances, executive decisions or programs (Weible, 2018). Smith and Larimer (2017) contend there is no universally accepted or precise definition of public policy, but scholars typically agree that “public policy includes the process of making choices, the actions associated with operationalizing those choices, and the outputs and outcomes produced by those actions” (pg. 4). The authors further note that policy is public in the sense that these choices are supported by coercive powers held by governments.

Public policymaking involves crafting solutions to issues across policy domains. Table X shows examples of policy domains and corresponding issue areas.

Table 1: Example Policy Domains and Issue Areas

POLICY DOMAIN	ISSUE AREAS
Civil Rights	Discrimination; Affirmative action; human rights; hate crimes
Criminal Justice	Policing; incarceration; sentencing
Economy	Employment; economic growth; inflation
Education	Funding; education quality; student performance; school choice; teacher salaries
Environment	Climate change; natural resource management; pollution ; conservation
Healthcare	Access; affordability; quality; health insurance coverage
Immigration	Immigrant rights; citizenship; border security
Labor	Minimum wage; unemployment benefits; worker rights
National Security	Terrorism; cybersecurity; national defense
Social Welfare	Social security; poverty; income inequality

THE POLICY MAKING PROCESS

Policy is generated through a process. In a general, simplified sense, policy making is typically described as a cyclical set of stages. This approach treats policymaking as a structured, sequential and constant process. Policy makers identify a problem, formulate different solutions, adopt and implement a set of solutions, then evaluate policies to determine their effectiveness. Although there are notable and important criticism of the stages approach (see Weible and Sabatier (2018)), this approach provides a meaningful heuristic for examining the process for engagement purposes.

Each stage of the policy process is described as follows:

- **Problem Identification**: A problem is brought to the attention of policymakers. This problem can be actual or perceived. Examples of issues could include air pollution, increasing costs of housing, education affordability, etc.
- **Agenda Setting**: Policymakers decide to act on an issue or set of issues. The State of the Union Address is a good way to gain insights of what the President's policy agenda includes. Leadership in legislative bodies (Congress, general assemblies, city councils) often determine the matters that it will take up. Not all matters make it to agendas because doing so may not be politically or practically feasible.
- **Policy Formulation**: Legislative bodies determine a course of policy action. They may seek insight from subject matter experts, administrators, citizens etc. in the form of testimony during legislative hearings. Once a course of action is determined, the House and Senate vote and if a bill passes both houses, it is sent to the Executive (president, governor, mayor) to be signed (or vetoed).

- Implementation: Once a bill becomes law, executive level agencies are usually tasked with implementing them. Executive level agencies develop implementation rules and determine how to design and put programs and activities into place to achieve policy goals. Some policy related activities may also be implemented by the nonprofit and private sectors.
- Evaluation: After a certain time period, the legislative body may require that policies and programs be evaluated to determine their effectiveness. This may be done as an oversight function of the legislature. Departments may also conduct evaluations, but oftentimes, non-partisan governmental offices or non-governmental organizations may conduct evaluations to maintain objectivity.

Concepts in Action: COVID-19 and the Policy Process

The COVID-19 pandemic provides an opportunity to examine governmental responses through the policy stages. Policy responses to COVID-19 were constrained as it was a new disease, its prevalence and impact was bound in uncertainty and the information learned about the diseases was constantly changing. Nonetheless, governments took various actions to slow COVID-19's spread. While each level of government responded in several ways, the focus here is on the federal government's initial response.

Problem Identification: According to the Centers for Disease Control, Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is a respiratory illness that can spread from person to person. The virus that causes COVID-19 is a novel coronavirus that was first identified during an investigation into an outbreak in Wuhan, China in November 2019. The World Health Organization declared COVID-19 to be a pandemic on March 11, 2020. COVID-19 was problematic because of the number of deaths it caused and how quickly it spread around the world and in the United States. Toward the end of March 2020, there were more than 387,000 cases and over 16,000 deaths confirmed worldwide. The United States accounted for over 46,000 cases and nearly 600 deaths at that point (Pramuck & Dzhanova, 2020).

Agenda Setting

Both the President and Congress play an active and important role in establishing policy agendas. Some argue that federal policy responses to COVID-19 were constrained due to political rhetoric espoused by President Trump (Parker & Stern, 2022). After initially downplaying the severity, impacts and potential impacts of COVID-19, President Trump declared it a national emergency on March 13, 2020. The first open hearing was held early February 2020. Several policy responses, by way of executive actions and congressional legislation, were being formulated and debated.

Policy Formulation

The primary policy strategy was to rely on states (Kates, et al., 2020). Nonetheless, initial policy responses undertaken by the President were to establish the White House COVID-19 Task Force (Kates, et al., 2020) and to ban foreign nationals from the U.S. if they had been in China in the two weeks prior to the ban (Parker & Stern, 2022). The White House later provided federal social distancing guidelines and promoted and supported COVID-19 testing. The Trump administration also initiated Operation Warp Speed in an effort to promote the rapid development, manufacturing and distribution of COVID-19 vaccines.

Congress considered several pieces of legislation designed to mitigate the health related and economic impacts of COVID-19. Congress ultimately passed, and President Trump signed, four substantive acts. These acts include the Coronavirus Preparedness and Response Supplemental Appropriations Act, the Families First Coronavirus Response Act, the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, and the Paycheck Protection Program and Healthcare Enhancement Act. (Peter G. Peterson Foundation, 2021)

Implementation

Several federal departments and agencies implemented aspects of COVID-19 policy strategies. The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) played a critical role in the federal government's COVID-19 response. Its Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) conducted research and provided guidance on mitigating the spread of COVID-19 (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021). Another HHS agency, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), was responsible for approving coronavirus drugs, vaccines and test kits. HHS and The Department of Defense (DOD) partnered to implement Operation Warp Speed (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2021).

The Department of Defense also coordinated the provision of naval hospital ships to boost hospital capacity in cities such as Los Angeles and New York. National Guard members helped state and local healthcare workers distribute medical supplies. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) conducted airport health screenings and enforced travel restriction. Officers with DHS's Customs and Border Protection agency monitored COVID-19 symptoms at ports of entry. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) coordinated the federal response and provided personnel and health supplies.

Evaluation

Governments, or organizations outside of government such as academic institutions and think tanks, conduct evaluations to assess the effectiveness of policy strategies. In doing so, they can determine whether and how to modify policies so that the policies have greater impact. A study of the effects of local, regional and national policies finds that shutdown orders prevented nearly 60 million coronavirus infections in the U.S. (Hsiang, et al., 2020). In another study, researchers find that the U.S. ban of visitors from China slowed the COVID-19 outbreak by 16 days (Kang & Kim, 2020). Moghada, et al. (2021) conclude vaccinations could play a significant role in reducing the incidence of COVID-19 related hospitalizations and deaths.

Concluding Thoughts

Many institutions, groups and individuals may influence policy decisions. These actors may include politicians, those implementing policies (administrators and bureaucrats), interest groups (both economic and public interests) and citizens. Thus, policy solutions represent the values, interests and beliefs of those exerting influence on the policy process.

Public policy is like a game in two ways. First, in any policy solution, there will be winners and losers. Thus, in an ideal and rational policy environment, we would maximize benefits of policy, while minimizing the risks and costs to policy losers. The reality is policy making does not always exist in an ideal and rational environment. Policy is "messy due to the actors involved or the roles that power and politics play" (Rinfret, Scheberle, & Pautz, 2019).

Second, public policy also requires strategy that involves creating networks, communicating and utilizing resources in ways that achieve goals. Being strategic is important because policies can be controversial given that we have different political perspectives, values and beliefs. Policies are also controversial because we often disagree on the causes and consequences of problems. When there are debates about the causes of problems, meaningful solutions are seldom implemented. This is a challenge of public policy and participating in its process.

Discussion Questions

1. If a friend asked you to explain “public policy”, what would you tell them?
2. What do you consider to be the challenging aspects of participating in the policy process? What do you consider to be the barriers to participation? What opportunities exist for participation?
3. What policy issues do you consider to be important? Why? What do you think can be done about them?

Skill Development: Understanding the Policy Process

It is important that we understand the policy process and the roles of the branches in it. Understanding the process equips us with the foundational knowledge needed for effective participation. The process is complex and nuanced; however, it is not insurmountable.

1. Identify and describe the federal policy process.
2. Identify and describe the policy process of your state government.
3. Identify and describe the policy process of your local government.
4. In what ways are the processes similar? How do they differ?

Resources

United States Congress

www.congress.gov

Federal Legislative Process

<https://www.congress.gov/legislative-process>

State Legislature Websites

<https://www.congress.gov/state-legislature-websites>

Library of Congress Guide to Law Online – U.S. States and Territories

<https://guides.loc.gov/us-states-territories>

Cable-Satellite Public Affairs Network

<https://www.c-span.org/>

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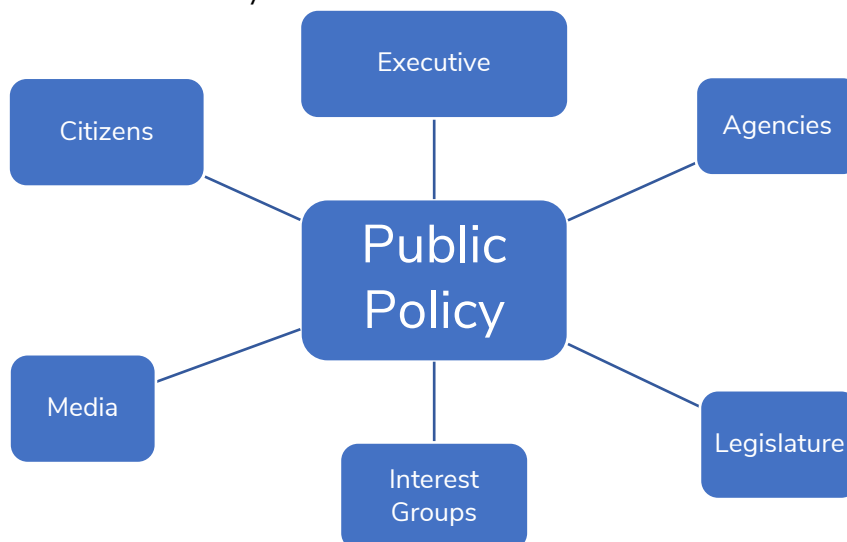
Chapter 2: Understanding the Politics of Public Policy

Politics and Public Policy

Policy should not be confused with politics. However, public policy making exists within the context of politics. The term *politics* is used in a general sense, thus not limited to partisanship. *Politics* plays a significant role in the policy process as it is the use of power and negotiation to influence governmental decisions. As public policy is the process of collective decision making (Wheelan, 2011), it is a product of political processes; therefore, policy actors must consider the political implications of their actions. Partisan politics, in the shape of political party priorities, play a substantive role in policy making. Decision making is fragmented and there are many actors that share political power and engage in creating public policy (Anderson, 2015). In addition, politics contributes to the conflict within the policy process and to resulting policies. Understanding the politics of public policy is essential to those wanting to influence public policy in any way. Wu et al. (2018) suggest that those involved in the policy process, in order to be successful, should: a) identify actors involved in and impacted by policies; b) determine their interests, ideologies and relationships with other policy actors; and c) evaluate their power and leverage within the policy process.

Policy actors include individuals, groups, or institutions that have influence in public policy decisions. Actors can include elected and unelected executive and legislative branch officials, bureaucrats working in government departments and agencies, special and public interest groups, the media and citizens.

Figure 2: Actors in the Policy Process



As noted in Chapter 1, many actors and institutions can influence the policy process and resulting outcomes. The policy process provides actors opportunities to discuss problems, develop solutions and advocate for the formal adoption of these solutions (Kraft & Furlong, 2007).

Each group of actors participates in the policy process at various stages. Table X shows categories of actors and institutions and the stages of the policy process in which they engage.

Table 2: Policy Actors and Policy Process Engagement

Actors/Institutions	Policy Process Engagement
Executive	Problem identification, agenda setting, formulation, implementation and evaluation
Departments/Agencies	Problem identification, agenda setting, formulation, implementation and evaluation
Legislative	Problem identification, agenda setting, formulation, and evaluation
Interest Groups	Problem identification, agenda setting and formulation
Media	Agenda setting
Citizens	Problem identification, agenda setting, formulation and evaluation

Governmental and Non-Governmental Actors

Policy actors can be categorized as either governmental or non-governmental. Governmental actors include the executive, legislative members and employees in government departments and agencies. Anderson (2015) describes some governmental actors as official-policy makers as they have the legal authority to create public policy. Non-governmental actors include interest groups, media and citizens.

Executives

Executives are heads of governments such as the president, state governors and mayors. They are responsible for developing and implementing policies that address societal or community issues. They typically have direct authority over executive-level departments or agencies. For example, the President of the United States is also the administrative head of the fifteen cabinet-level departments such as the Department of Defense, Department of Labor and Department of Education. Each of these executive departments is led by an appointed Secretary. The department Secretaries work at the pleasure of the President and are tasked with advancing the President’s policy agenda. Executives work closely with other governmental actors including bureaucrats and legislators in developing policy and are ultimately accountable for successful implementation of those policies. The same type of arrangement exists in state and local governments.

Actors working in governmental departments and agencies are referred to as bureaucrats. Bureaucrats translate policy ideas into an array of programs and activities. They are administrators charged with policy implementation and evaluation as they are experts with substantive knowledge about the policy areas in which they are responsible. Government

Agencies and departments are sometimes constrained politically because legislative bodies authorize, and thus influence, how they carry out their work. Further, they may also reflect the values and priorities of the executive (Kraft & Furlong, 2007).

Legislative Bodies

Legislative bodies includes institutions such as Congress, state legislatures, city councils and county commissions. Legislative bodies play a critical role in public policy. Ideally, the policy ideas developed by legislative bodies reflect the interests, values and priorities of the constituents represented by elected officials. They develop policies, pass laws and determine regulations that shape policy. Members of legislative bodies work with other actors including executives, bureaucrats, interest groups, citizens and research organizations to develop policies that address societal issues. As legislatures appropriate and allocate funding for policies, they are also responsible for providing oversight of use of those resources as departments and agencies implement policies.

Interest Groups

Interest groups are organizations that seek to influence public policy in a particular policy domain or issue. They represent the collective interests of policy issue stakeholders including businesses, industries, and citizens. Interest groups form around a myriad of issues including, but not limited to economics, general public matters, environmental concerns, civil rights, and gun control and gun rights. Interest groups work with policymakers and other actors to garner support for policies that align with their causes and values. These groups influence policy by lobbying, creating grassroots campaigns, swaying public opinion and engaging the media on specific issues.

Media

The media, specifically the news media, can shape public policy by swaying public opinion and influencing policy actors. Media brings attention to issues, but often provides minimal coverage of most policy matters in favor of focusing on more high-profile issues (Anderson, 2015). However, the media may also shed light on issues that would otherwise go unnoticed. The news media plays a role in agenda setting as it can influence which issues may be considered important enough to pay attention to. The media frames issues in ways that can shape how policymakers perceive and respond to policy issues. These frames also contribute to how the general public thinks about and understands issues. The media is an important source of information for many and provides a platform for diverse perspectives. It can promote discourse and debate of policy issues which can then contribute to better informed and inclusive policy decisions.

Citizens

In discussions about the policy process, more attention is given to other policy actors than to citizens. Some argue citizens play a small, indirect role in the policy process (Wu, Ramesh, Howlett, & Fritzen, 2018). However, citizens can play a critical role in policymaking. They bring issues to the attention of governmental and non-governmental policy actors. Citizens can assist

in agenda setting by clearly articulating policy problems and how those problems impact them. Citizens participate in the policy process through voting and by engaging elected officials through direct contact or in public hearings or other meetings. In these ways, citizens contribute to policy ideas and the formulation of solutions to societal problems. Citizens serve an important evaluation function as well. Since they turn to governments to solve problems and provide services (Harrison, Harris, & Deardorff, 2019), they can provide feedback on how policies are implemented, particularly those they benefit from or are harmed by. Citizens may also monitor the actions of elected officials and hold them accountable for their actions.

Power and Influence in Collective Policy Process Participation

We must recognize that actors have diverse interests and these interests conflict. The politics of the policy process refers to the ways in which these actors and institutions interact to shape public policy. Such interactions may include competition for resources, coordination, development of policy ideas and how these ideas can be implemented. Central to these interactions is each participant's power and influence. Power and influence may be promoted based on participants' values, perspectives on various issues, views on the role of government and political affiliation.

Influencing public policy requires an understanding of these dynamics that exist between policy actors, power, influence and values. Doing so better positions participants so that they can achieve desired policy goals. Wu et al (2018) note that many policy actors lack accumulated knowledge about and experience in the policy process. They note that many actors are weak in terms of policy acumen because they lack training in public policy and have limited access or exposure to key policy stakeholders. The authors advise policy or political acumen requires "an understanding of key players, their key interests, and their strategies and resources" (pg. 20). To gain this understanding, policy process participants must be able to establish relationships and build coalitions with governmental and non-governmental actors.

Concepts in Action

Mass shootings, particularly those which occur at schools, receive much attention and scrutiny.¹ However, it can be argued that policymakers seldom take meaningful actions toward mitigating occurrences of mass shootings. A useful example examining the intersection of politics and policy is the Covenant School shooting which occurred in Nashville, Tennessee on March 27, 2023. In this shooting, a single assailant opened fire inside the school killing six people including three students and three staff members. The shooter carried two assault-style weapons and a handgun. Law enforcement found at least two other guns after searching the shooter's home (Mattise, Loller, & Meyer, 2023). From this example, we can gain insights on Tennessee policy actors' perspectives on solving the problem of school shootings based on their initial and subsequent reactions.

On March 28, 2023, Republican governor Bill Lee released a video statement condemning the shooting but offered little in terms of policy guidance.² He suggested, however, that we must find ways to protect against such acts although we may not agree on the actions needed to be taken. Three days after the incident, the Governor floated the idea of expanding a proposal to put armed guards in all of Tennessee's public schools and provide grant funding for private schools to do so (Brown, Tennessee Gov. Bill Lee Moves to Boost School Safety Funding, Open to Gun Reform After Shooting, 2023). Governor Lee's position is consistent with the one presented in an executive order he signed in June 2002 calling for enhanced school safety measures in Tennessee following the May 2022 Uvalde, Texas school shooting. On April 11, 2023, the Governor called upon the Tennessee General Assembly to pass red flag laws - gun control measures in the form of a strong order of protection aimed at protecting citizens from people considered to be dangerous to themselves and to others. His view is that individuals who pose a threat to themselves or others should not have access to weapons. The Governor also proposed additional mental health support in schools.

It is also important to gain insights on the policy positions of other elected officials in Tennessee. During the 2023 legislative session but prior to the Covenant School shooting, the Tennessee General Assembly, the state's legislative body, considered legislation which would expand access to firearms. One such bill, supported by Republican members, would decrease the permit-less carry age from 21 to 18. Republican members also promoted expanding permit-less carry to all firearms as opposed to only handguns (Brown, Emotions, Tempers Flare at Tennessee Capitol Hours After Nashville School Shooting, 2023). Democratic members opposed permit-less carry expansion. On the day of the shooting, Democrat members called upon the General Assembly to take legislative action on gun reform. Such reform would be unlikely since Republicans held a supermajority and their position on the gun issue is to promote fewer restrictions (Brown, 2023). The law enforcement community generally opposed this position.

¹ The U.S. Congress defines mass shooting as a crime where an assailant kills or injures three or more people in a single incident using a firearm.

² The video is available at <https://www.tn.gov/governor/news/2023/3/28/video--gov--lee-addresses-tennesseans-following-tragic-covenant-shooting.html>.

Calls for gun control were echoed by citizens. Large groups of students protested at the state capitol demanding elected officials take action on gun reform (Wegner, Brown, Davis, Leyva, & Puente, 2023). Parents and leaders from Metro Nashville Public Schools also participated in the protests. Several celebrities used social media to express displeasure with elected officials for choosing not to act on gun reform and to criticize the National Rifle Association (NRA) (Garcia, 2023). The NRA, a prominent pro-gun lobbying organization, suggested that increased school security is a deterrent to school shootings (Phillips, 2023). The NRA also issued a statement opposing Governor Lee's proposal for red flag laws in Tennessee on the premise that gun confiscation violates the Second Amendment (NRA Institute for Legislative Action, 2023).

News media played a role in shaping policy deliberations. MediaMatters for America (2023) analyzed news media reports about the Covenant School shooting. They concluded NBC, CBS and ABC affiliate news stations generally followed best practices regarding gun violence reporting. Best practices include taking approaches such as addressing the popularity of gun control and gun safety legislation, sharing facts about mass shooting and gun violence, and providing updates on protests favoring stricter gun laws. In contrast, Sinclair Broadcast Group's Nashville affiliate promoted legislation fortify schools including arming teachers and hiring more school resource officers. Given the political nature of proposed solutions, the media can influence and legitimize the policy positions held by other policy actors.

Concluding Thoughts

Public policy is shaped by formal and informal political actors and institutions. These include governmental actors and institutions such as executives, departments and agencies and legislative bodies. Non-governmental actors include interest groups, the media and citizens. Each set of actors plays roles in different stages of the policy process. The political nature of public policy makes it a challenging enterprise. The policy process is complex, constantly changing and can put actors at odds in terms of values and priorities. Understanding the political dynamics of public policy is important for the development of policies that reflect the preferences and needs of diverse policy stakeholders.

Politics also plays a role in shaping policy problems. Policy problems, particularly the causes of problems, are not always agreed upon. Chapter 3 addresses the idea of problem definition. Clearly defining policy problems is paramount in developing effective policy solutions.

Discussion Questions

1. Explain why it is important to understand the politics of the policy process.
2. How effective do you think policy actors who lack a thorough understanding of the policy process will be in influencing policy outcomes?
3. Do you think partisan politics should play a prominent role in determining policy solutions? Explain.
4. Identify the executive-level departments/agencies of the federal, your state and your local governments. What issues do these departments/agencies address?
5. What interest groups are influential in a policy issue you are interested in?
6. To what extent do you think the media shapes the views of elected officials? Citizens?

SKILL DEVELOPMENT

Understanding the politics of public policy is critical to the success of any policy endeavor. Accordingly, policy is political, which requires building of support and neutralizing opponents (Bardach & Patashnik, 2016). Understanding the positions and motivations of key policy actors is an essential component of influencing public policy. This requires attention to policy issues, an understanding of the causes and consequences of related problems, careful analysis, networking, and effective communications.

Skill Development

You will conduct a political statement analysis utilizing a rudimentary form of sentiment analysis. **Sentiment Analysis** is the use of information technology to evaluate opinions expressed across multiple texts (Pritchard et al, 2015). It is also the process of extracting emotions, attitudes and views from text data. Generally, sentiment analysis allows analysts to classify textual statements as either positive, negative or neutral (Semwal et al, 2021).

Development of this skill enables analysts, public managers, advocates, etc. to: a) identify the policy positions of key policy actors and b) prepare policy position statements that consider the values, motivations and positions of those policy actors. This will enable you to have positive policy-related interactions and strengthen your positions on issues. To work on this skill, you will complete a Political Statement Analysis as outlined below.

Political Statement Analysis

STEPS IN A POLITICAL STATEMENT ANALYSIS

1. Identify a policy issue you are interested in. The issue may be related to, but not limited to, either of the following policy areas: health care, education, civil rights, gun control, environment, economy, social welfare, or national security. The issue could be at either the federal, state or local level.

2. Identify at least three key policy actors at the level of government in which the issue resides. For example, if your issue is urban livestock in Chattanooga, then your actors must be City of Chattanooga officials. Key policy actors include those that may have the greatest political influence on the issue. These actors include legislative committee chairs, members, executive leadership, etc. Actors may also include citizens and interest group representatives. Some ways to identify these actors include, but are not limited to:
 - a. Examination of legislative committee websites such as Congressional Committees. For insight on how legislative committees generally work, see <https://www.congress.gov/legislative-process/committee-consideration>.
 - b. Identification of political actors speaking on issues utilizing news media. Those who are out front on issues are typically those who possess some degree of influence.
3. Determine if the political actors' views toward the issue you selected are generally positive, negative or neutral. You may use press releases news reports (tv, print, etc.), social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and blogs (Prichard et al, 2015). Other ways to assess political actor sentiments include using websites such as www.ontheissues.org/default.htm and www.justfacts.votesmart.org/public-statement/.
 - a. Once you have identified political actor sentiment, develop a summary table similar to the one below. The table should list the issue, political actors, their position, the rationale for their position, your perception of their sentiment (positive, negative or neutral) and your source.

Issue	Political Actor	Position	Rationale for Position	Sentiment	Source(s)
Critical Race Theory and K-12 Education	Gov. Ron DeSantis	"In Florida we are taking a stand against the state sanctioned racism that is Critical Race Theory."	Tax dollars should not be spent teaching kids to hate each other and the country. We need to protect workers against the hostile work environment created when large corporations endure CRT-inspired training and indoctrination.	Negative	https://www.flgov.com/2021/12/15/governor-desantis-announces-legislative-proposal-to-stop-w-o-k-e-activism-and-critical-race-theory-in-schools-and-corporations/

4. Given each actors' position, explain how would express your position to them. Your explanation should:
 - a. Describe a problem related to the policy issue you selected.
 - b. Develop a set of potential policy solutions to the problem. These solutions should take the actors' positions into consideration

Resources

State Governors

<https://www.usa.gov/state-governor>

National Governors Association

<https://www.nga.org/governors/>

State Legislature Websites

<https://www.congress.gov/state-legislature-websites>

United States Executive Branch

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/about-the-white-house/our-government/the-executive-branch/>

United States Legislative Branch

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/about-the-white-house/our-government/the-legislative-branch/>

U.S. Interest Groups by Policy Issue

<https://justfacts.votesmart.org/interest-groups>

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Chapter 3:

Explaining Policy Problems

Public policy is essential to solving problems that affect people in society (Smith, 2013). The policy process typically begins with identifying and defining the problem or issue at hand. A policy problem is “a condition or situation that produces needs or dissatisfaction among people and for which relief or redress by governmental action is sought” (Anderson, 2015, pg. 89). Problems include “issues identified by the public and elected leaders as worthy of a coordinated response by the government.” (Rinfret, Scheberle, & Pautz, 2019) p.20. The identification of problems begins with acknowledging that something or someone is wronged and the wrong must be addressed. The use of ‘wrong’ here is relative. It simply suggests that something must be changed or improved. Policy problems arise when there are focusing events such as natural disasters or acts of terrorism. Problems also exist when there are controversies surrounding issues and when there are real or perceived threats to society.

Policy problems come in a variety of forms and substance. They also range in complexity. There are some that fall within the purview of specific levels of government while others may overlap between the federal, state and local governments. Contemporary policy debates concern abortion rights, police brutality and prohibited concepts in K-12 education. Additional overlapping issues include gun violence, access to health care and illegal immigration. Local governments may focus on issues related to land use, environmental sustainability, economic development and homelessness. Not all issues are easily remedied as political and moral values often influence perceptions of the problems and how they should be resolved. Conflict may arise when perceptions about a problem differ (Smith, 2013).

Analysis and subsequent development of policy solutions cannot begin without understanding the problem (Meltzer & Schwartz, 2019). Smith (2013) notes that these problems are often defined differently by different actors. King (1964) expressed the importance and drawbacks of problem definition and acknowledged that doing so can be rooted in politics. How problems are defined depends on values, motivations, politics and actor objectives. The goal is not to necessarily have a definitive problem definition, but to understand the nature of the problem from varying perspectives (Meltzer & Schwartz, 2019).

Without a clear understanding of the problem, it becomes nearly impossible to develop relevant and impactful policy options. Even worse, fruitless efforts may be exhausted in an attempt to address the wrong problem (Meltzer & Schwartz, 2019). Our understanding of the causes and consequences of problems may be limited due to our “bounded rationality,” which suggests we lack full knowledge of problems and potential solutions (Howlett, 2019). Kettl (2018) notes three challenges in defining problems. These include: 1) We don’t know everything – we never can; 2) Some of what we know is wrong; and 3) We don’t need evidence to make decisions (pp. 4-5). We must also recognize that problems can be defined from multiple perspectives. Problem definition is about intentional story telling. Our task is to assist policymakers in policy decision making. How problems are framed and defined determines the

type of solutions that are warranted. For example, framing illicit drug use as a public health issue as opposed to a criminal issue will likely yield different sets of policy solutions.

Explaining Problems

It is possible to frame problems objectively using data and evidence. A framework known as “elements of a finding” allows users to fully explain problems, their causes and the impacts they have. The framework provides a foundation for developing policy solutions and writing policy memos as will be discussed in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 respectively. This framework includes: a) Criteria; b) Condition; c) Cause; d) Significance; and e) Recommendation. **Criteria.** The criteria establishes a basis of comparison. This could be a legislative mandate, societal norms, a professional standard, best practices or baseline data. Criteria establishes that something is supposed to be happening or that it should be a certain way. If your audience doesn’t know what should be, it will be difficult for them to interpret the condition as being problematic.

Condition: The condition establishes the heart of the policy problem. It provides the context for the problem and is established in problem identification. Explanation of how things are in direct comparison to what should be gives your audience an opportunity to understand the magnitude of the policy problem which is often defined in terms of deficits or excess. Demonstration of deficits or excess requires comparison to the criteria.

Cause: Explanation of policy problems requires an understanding of the causes of the problem. You must explain why the problem exists. Doing so demands thorough research into the problem and examining it from multiple perspectives. If a cause is not established, meaningful solutions are difficult to develop. Ideally, policy solutions, if they are to be effective, should address the causes of the problems.

Significance: Significance establishes why your audience should care. You must describe the consequences of the problem. You should address what adverse conditions have occurred or will occur as a result of the problem you identify.

Recommendation: Every problem needs a solution. Providing problems without solutions can damage your credibility. Policy recommendations must be valid in that they are perceived to be able to rectify the problem. Recommendations should also provide insights on how the policy would be implemented. You cannot offer recommendations without providing the criteria, condition, cause and significance. Developing recommendations is explored further in Chapter 4.

Finding Data and Evidence to Explain Problems

Data serves two purposes. It helps describe and solve problems. Policy problems should be supported using sound, credible data and evidence. Without it, it will be difficult to clearly define problems. Data must be collected and analyzed in order to give it meaning related to policy problem. Kraft and Furlong (2017) advise to exercise caution when collecting data and evidence. They contend, “It is always essential to find out the source of the information, the reliability of the author or organizations, any critical assumptions that are made in a study or report, and any interpretations that might not be justified.” (pg. 133). One way to adhere to

their caution is to choose information from credible sources. Such sources include data, information and reports produced by government agencies. Non-governmental agencies such as the Brookings Institutions or Pew Research Center also contribute to policy research. Data, information and reports can also be gathered from academic institutions where researchers conduct studies that can be used to inform policy decisions. Academic policy research is published in journals such as *Public Administration Review*, *Journal of Public Policy*, *Journal of Social Equity and Public Administration*, *Journal of Policy Analysis* and *Journal of Public Management and Social Policy*. Unfortunately, access barriers may exist in some cases because some data and reports must be purchased or require licensing to use. A remedy to this is open data.

Open Data Initiatives

The federal government as well as state and local governments have begun open data initiatives. Open data is defined as data available to anyone to use without restriction. The open data concept is the idea that public data should be available to anyone who wants to use it so they can use and publish as they wish. The openness of such data can be assessed in terms of its availability and access, reuse and distribution, and universal participation. The reported potential benefits of open data include government transparency, improved service provision, and the promotion of innovation and start-up activities. (Hendler, Holm, Musialek, & Thomas, 2012). By definition, open data is limited in its utility in public governance. Open data is often treated narrowly as a product provided to non-governmental customers. This “customer-centric view of open data is unidirectional and transactional, missing much of the potential for data to act as a conduit for citizen engagement with government and direct input to decision-making” (Sieber & Johnson, 2015, p. 308). Sieber and Johnson (2015) suggest that open data facilitates access to government data and could improve service delivery, but can also increase citizen participation in government functions, which could lead to improved decision making. Attard et al. (2015) identify three reasons for opening government data. These include transparency, releasing social and commercial value and participatory governance.

The Open Knowledge Foundation, in its *Open Data Handbook* claims that open government data is a resource that is largely untapped. However, it claims that open government data creates social and economic value in terms of transparency and democratic control, participation, innovation and improved program and service efficiencies. Open data allows citizens to participate in governance processes and use data to be more informed. Users can also communicate preferences from using open data. Thus, it is expected that governments will be responsive to demands made by citizens who utilize open data to assess and critique government performance.

CONCEPTS IN ACTIONS: FOOD DESERTS

A food desert is a geographic area that has insufficient quality or quantity of food or an area where healthy food is only available at relatively high prices (Bitler and Haider, 2009). Bonanno (2012) further describes food deserts as lower-income communities with limited access to affordable and nutritious food. Specifically, these deserts typically exist in urban areas where there is limited access to food products through food stores (Cerovečki and Grünhagen, 2016). The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) defines food deserts as “neighborhoods and rural towns without ready access to fresh, healthy, and affordable food.” The USDA further notes that these areas generally have no supermarkets or grocery stores in close proximity. Bitler and Haider (2009) expand the definition of food deserts to include areas where healthy food is available, but at high prices. According to Breyer and Voss-Andreae (2013), food deserts carry the following assumptions. First, grocery stores provide affordable, nutritious foods. Second, people make food purchases from the nearest food retailer. Finally, food deserts only exist in areas that have concentrated poverty. An additional assumption is lack of transportation being a barrier to food access.

Criteria and Condition

People should have access to affordable and nutritious foods to promote improved community health outcomes. The idea of food deserts represents the degree to which food insecurity exists. Freely available data from the USDA and Centers for Disease Control (CDC) can be used to aid our understanding of food insecurity and food deserts. According to the USDA, about 10.2 percent of U.S. households experienced food insecurity in 2021.¹ In addition, about 13.5 million U.S. households are in food deserts. Figure 1 shows the prevalence of food deserts across the United States.

¹ See <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-u-s/frequency-of-food-insecurity/>

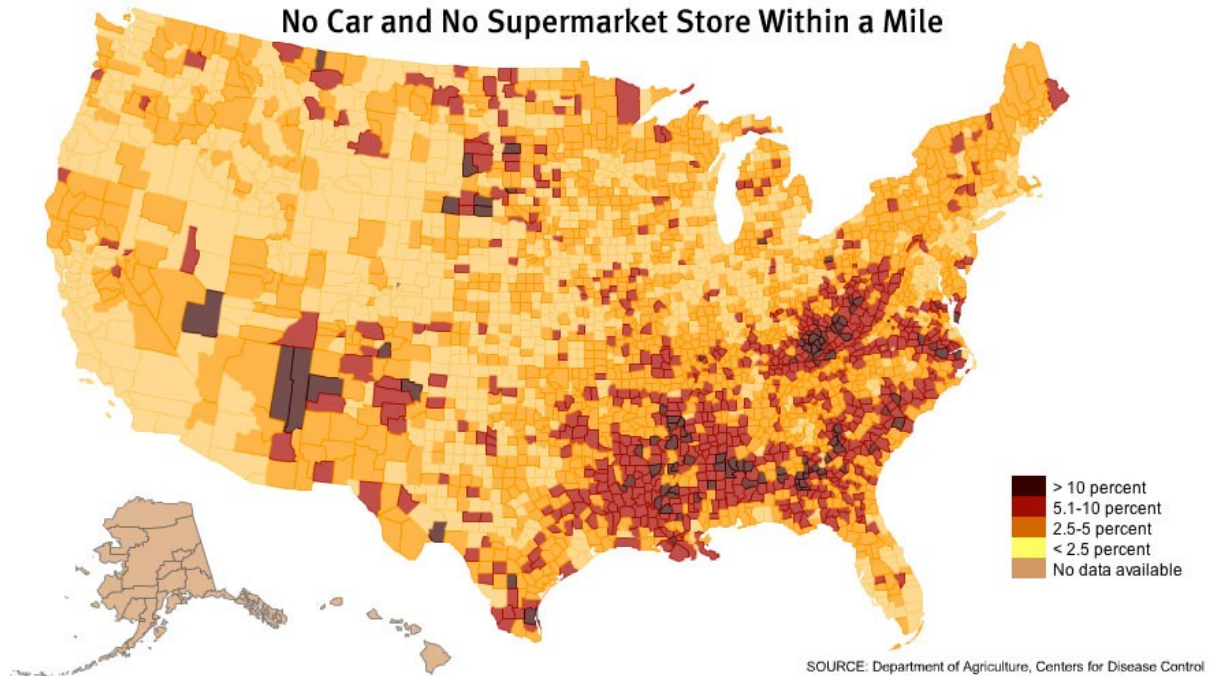


Figure 2: Prevalence of Food Deserts Across the United States

Cause

Food deserts exist due to a number of reasons. Wright et al. (2016) describe capitalist theoretical factors that contribute to the food desert formation. These factors include the following:

1. Chain supermarkets have put “mom and pop” stores out of business;
2. Decline in median income so stores moved to suburbs;
3. High land prices in urban areas may discourage economic development of supermarkets; and
4. Rural: Low population density.

Bonanno (2012) identifies demand and supply side factors related to food retail location. He argues that these factors, or the lack thereof, are important in determining food desert development. Demand side factors include market size, population and income growth, poverty rate and rate of adoption of income support programs. Supply-side factors include fixed (investment) costs, sorting, sourcing and distribution costs. Additional factors include energy and labor costs, local/state-level tax regimes, zoning laws, retail image, crime rates, and availability of public transportation.

If a community’s socioeconomic and market conditions do not support an affirmative food retail location decision, grocery stores are unlikely to locate in those areas due to low potential of profit. However, Bonanno concedes that store owners may choose to locate in low-income communities if they can take advantage of federal government food support programs such as

the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC).

Significance

Food deserts create nutritional challenges to residents who often have no choice but to get most of their food at convenience stores or fast food restaurants (Cerovečki and Grünhagen, 2016). Food deserts are seen as drivers of obesity and poor health conditions in low-income urban neighborhoods (USDA, 2009; Shannon, 2015). Wright et al. (2016) suggest that poor diets in poor people result from lack of fresh and healthy food in areas where they live. This is partly attributable to economic and spatial disparities in food systems (Brinkley, et al., 2018). Thus, it is assumed people residing in food deserts tend to have poorer health outcomes than those who do not live in food deserts because they do not have access to healthy food alternatives.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Adequately defining policy problems is a first step in developing effective solutions. Problem definition is not always easy because different political actors may perceive problems and their causes differently. Further, problems may be so complex that they may not be easily defined. This complexity may be because of the nature of the problem stemming from a multitude of causes. Nonetheless, problem definition is an important exercise that must be undertaken as part of the policy process.

Problem definition requires identification of credible and reliable data, information and reports. This can be acquired from government, non-governmental and academic institutions. Government data is freely available via open data initiatives. Such data can be used for any purpose without restriction, including use by citizens to better inform governmental policy decisions.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are the pressing policy issues in your city and state? How are these issues described by elected officials? What are the potential solutions being proposed to address these issues?
2. What data does your state and local government make available for public use?
3. Identify data you would need to demonstrate the problematic nature of a policy issue you are interested in.

Skill Development: Problem Definition

Problem definition is a process. Clearly defining problems often requires considerable time and research efforts (Meltzer & Schwartz, 2019). Your task is to begin defining policy problem you want to explore.

STEPS IN PROBLEM DEFINITION

1. **Problem Identification:** Identify a policy issue (not legislation) you want to explore. The issue may be related to, but not limited to, either of the following policy areas: health care, education, civil rights, gun control, environment, economy, social welfare, or national security. The issue could be at either the federal, state or local level. One way to approach this is to think in terms of deficits or excess and quantify if possible to provide some sense of magnitude (Bardach, 2012). For example, “There are too many homeless people in Chattanooga” or “There are not enough affordable housing units in Tennessee”. Don’t just make up the issue utilize the news media, policy and political sources to determine how issues are framed and what is deemed important in your selected policy area.
2. **Gather Data and Evidence:** Data are important in telling the policy story (Bardach, 2012). Data and evidence are needed to demonstrate that the problem you identify is problematic. By this, you should be able to explain the problem in terms of its causes and consequences. That is, why does the problem exist and what effect does it have? You may ask, “Where do we find data and evidence?” There are a variety of sources, but some good places to start include academic research, policy research, think tanks, open data, governmental organizations, the library, interviews, news stories and more. For example, www.data.gov and <https://datasetsearch.research.google.com/> provide a variety of datasets and are good places to being your data/evidence journey. Literature reviews can provide invaluable insights on the causes and consequences of problems and can often provide ideas for solutions (Bardach, 2012).
3. **Analyze and Interpret the Data and Evidence:** Data analysis is critical as it allows framing of the story. You do not want your audience to have to interpret your data and evidence on their own. It is your job to tell them, “What do the data indicate about the problem?” How can you demonstrate this beyond only using words? Kettl (2018) notes the importance of making evidence speak. As such, you must be intentional in your

interpretation and how you communicate that interpretation. One way to communicate that interpretation is through data visualizations.

RESOURCES

Federal, State and Local Government Open Data

[Data.gov](https://data.gov)

Comprehensive List of Open Data Portals Around the World

[DataPortals.org](https://dataportals.org)

Google Datasets

<https://datasetsearch.research.google.com/>

Pew Research Center

<https://www.pewresearch.org/>

State Freedom of Information Laws

<https://www.nfoic.org/state-freedom-of-information-laws/>

General Social Survey

[https://gss.norc.org/](https://gss.norc.umd.edu/)

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Chapter 4: Developing Solutions to Policy Problems

Public policies are theoretical solutions to public broad societal or community problems. They are theoretical in the sense that we often have a limited understanding of the nature of public problems and there is often uncertainty surrounding the effectiveness of the actions taken to address problems. Many public policies are deemed ineffective because either the policy problems are not clearly defined or the crafted solutions do not address the causes and consequences of the problems. This is a policy design issue. Effective policy solutions are naturally and logically linked to policy problems. Without a thorough understanding and description of problems, developing viable solutions becomes difficult.

Before we can develop sound recommendations, we must make explicit linkages to the problem. Policy recommendations must also account for implementation including the departments and agencies that would be involved and the actions they would need to take to put the policy into practice. Fortunately, policy ideas do not have to be new, thus policy actors do not always have to employ newly created solutions to policy problems. Solutions can be borrowed from different governments or from existing research investigating the causes and consequences of policy problems.

The Elements of a Finding

The “elements of a finding” framework introduced in Chapter 3 can help link solutions with the problems and their causes. The framework allows users to fully explain problems, their causes and the impacts they have. After establishing the criteria, identifying the condition and causes, and explaining the significance of the problem, policy recommendations can be developed. Policy recommendations are potential solutions to policy problems. Ideally, recommendations should be well-researched as to address the causes of problems. Policy recommendations that do not speak to the causes of problems are bound to have little impact on resolution. The Policy Elements Framework is useful for thinking about and framing policy solutions.

The Policy Elements Framework consists of a solution’s intent, goals and programs and activities. Intent refers to the broad impact the policy solution is expected to have on the problem as defined. The goals are specific measures that must be met or things that must be accomplished in pursuit of meeting the intent. Programs and activities consist of policy tools and are the drivers of policy solutions. They are what must be implemented in order to meet goals.

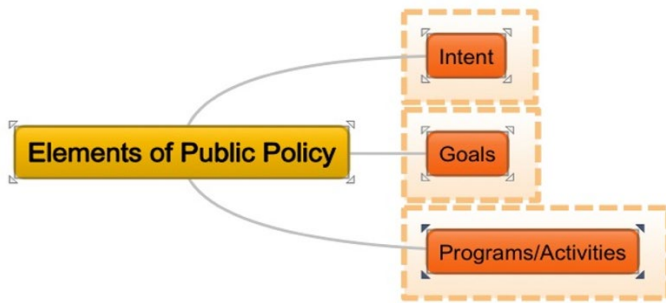


Figure 3: Public Policy Elements

Policy tools are the various mechanisms used to put policies in action. Governments employ these mechanisms in different combinations to encourage or discourage behaviors of target populations in such a way as to effectively achieve policy goals. Policy tools carry assumptions about both the policy problems and solutions. Further, tools are thought to have capabilities and technical requisites that must be carefully aligned with expectations of their use (Howlett, 2018). The policy tools are vital in comparing the linkages between a described policy problem and prescribed solutions to that problem. Policy design is not value free; however, the tools used should be aligned with defined problems in such ways as to justify their use. Table X lists and describes common policy tools governments use to achieve policy goals.

Policy Tool	Description
Regulation	Legal rules that prescribe or limit certain activities or behaviors
Tax Expenditures	Tax credits or abatements awarded to encourage behaviors or activities
Direct Financing	Provision of loans or grants to encourage behaviors or to support initiatives
Education	Provision of information to the public to raise awareness about issues and promote expected or desired behaviors
Research	Conducting or supporting investigations into issues or innovations

Federal legislation typically illustrates the Policy Elements Framework in the bill description and sections. There is a concern that the foreign adversarial governments use information and communications technologies, such as social media, in ways that are harmful to U.S. citizens or pose a risk to U.S. national security. For example, S. 686, the Restricting the Emergence of Security Threats that Risk Information and Communications Technology Act (RESTRICT Act) was proposed as a means to mitigate such potential risks.¹ The policy intent usually follows the bill number and provides an overall description of the bill's aim. The RESTRICT

¹ See <https://www.congress.gov/bill/118th-congress/senate-bill/686>.

Act's intent is to allow for the review and prohibition of certain types of transactions between people in the United States and foreign adversaries. Bill section headings can be used to identify goals. One goal, outlined in Section 4, is to address information and communications technology products and services holdings that pose undue or acceptable risks. Identification of these products and services can help to mitigate the risks associated with them, thus aiding the meeting of the intent. In order to work toward this goal, Congress authorizes the Secretary of Commerce to review holdings to determine whether they pose an undue or unacceptable risk and refer these holdings to the President.

The policy elements are not always as clear in the structure of state and local government policies. In 2022, the Tennessee General Assembly adopted and the Governor signed into law Tennessee Public Chapter No. 493, Section 51 in response to the idea of critical race theory being taught in the state's K-12 schools.² The intent is to prohibit the inclusion or promotion of certain concepts in course instructions. It can be argued that the goal is to limit teachings of racism and sexism as such teaching may be deemed to cause emotional or mental discomfort for some students. Regulation is the primary policy tool employed as the law allows the education commissioner to withhold funds from schools that are found to violate provisions of the law.

Applying the policy elements framework to existing legislation can provide insights into how policies are designed. Policy design not only considers the aim of policy efforts, but also the specific tools that are to be used in order to affect change. Design further considers whose or what behaviors need to change in order to achieve policy goals.

Policy Design

As Howlett (2018) notes, policy design is about understanding the nature of public problems, the government resources available and the capabilities and requisites of policy tools that can be used to address problems. Importantly, policy design is challenged with complex and often poorly defined problems as well as the uncertain linkages between policy actions and expected outcomes (Capano and Woo, 2017).

Policy design also considers the contents of policy and includes the following observable elements: a) target populations; b) underlying values; c) rules promoting or inhibiting certain actions; d) policy justifications; and e) policy assumptions (Smith and Larimer, 2017). Target populations refer to who benefits or takes on costs associated with public policy initiatives. Values are inherent in policy making. The values are deliberate and subjective (Smith and Larimer, 2017). Values are evident in how problems are defined, how the causes and consequences of problems are interpreted and in how solutions are crafted. The values are thus reflected in the rules promoting or inhibiting actions through a deliberate use of certain policy tools. Policy justifications include statements of why a policy solution is needed. Justifications are closely tied to the theoretical assumptions about and causes of policy problems. Policy design also includes assumptions about the potential impact policy tools have on policy targets and thus the impact changes in target behavior will have on the policy problem.

² See [Tenn. Code Ann. Section 49-6-1019](#)

Concepts in Action: Policy Solutions to Food Deserts

It is reasonable to expect that food desert policies would contain tools to address the causes and consequences of food deserts discussed in Chapter 3. Effectively addressing these demand and supply-side factors could have a positive impact in mitigating the negative consequences associated with food deserts. Figure X highlights a food desert policy model including explanations for food desert formation, the consequences of food deserts, the policy tools used to remedy them and the policy targets.

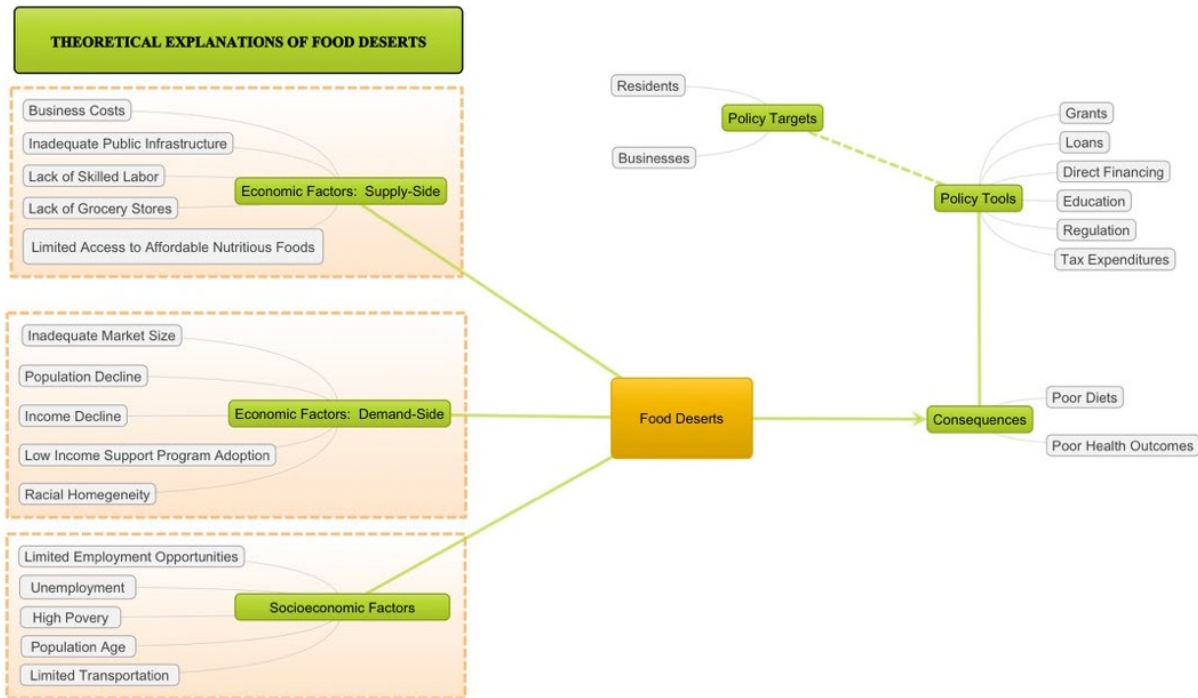


Figure 4: Food Desert Policy Model

Between 2009 and 2019, at least 24 state legislatures considered food desert policies. Of these, 9 (37.5%) states -- Alabama, Illinois, Louisiana, Maryland, New Jersey, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Washington and Wisconsin -- have adopted food desert policies.³ These policies vary in scope and delivery of policy tools used.

³ The Illinois legislation only directs the identification of food deserts.

TABLE 3: CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES OF FOOD DESERTS AND THE POLICY TOOLS USED TO ADDRESS THEM

	Alabama	Louisiana	Maryland	New Jersey	Oklahoma	Tennessee	Washington	Wisconsin
Policy Target								
Residents				X			X	
Businesses	X	X	X	X	X		X	X
Other				X		X		
Economic Factors: Supply-Side								
Business costs	X	X	X		X	X		X
High land prices								
Inadequate public infrastructure	X	X	X		X	X		X
Lack of skilled labor	X	X			X			
No grocery stores in close proximity	X	X	X	X	X	X		X
Limited access to affordable, fresh, and nutritious foods	X	X	X	X	X			
Economic Factors: Demand-Side								
Inadequate market size								
Population decline								
Income decline								
Low rate of adoption of income support programs								
Low educational attainment								
Racial Homogeneity								
Socioeconomic Factors								
Limited employment opportunities	X	X			X			
Unemployment								
Poverty								
Population age								
Limited transportation								
Food Desert Consequences								
Poor health outcomes							X	
Poor diets							X	
Policy Tools								
Grants	X	X			X		X	
Loans	X	X	X		X	X		X
Direct Financing			X				X	
Education								
Regulation								
Tax Expenditures	X							

Policy Targets. Most of the adopting states target businesses, namely food retail establishments such as grocery stores, as their policy audience. Some states, such as Louisiana and Washington, target farmers markets as well. Tennessee does not directly target grocery stores or farmers markets in its food desert policy. However, Tennessee targets local development authorities by authorizing them to issue revenue bonds and use bond proceeds to make loans to grocery stores and farmers markets. Two states, New Jersey and Washington,

target residents. Washington provides vouchers for qualifying residents to use at farmers markets or grocery stores. New Jersey also provides vouchers for residents to use at weekly markets operated by qualifying providers.

Economic Factors. Demand-side policy strategies aim to increase demand for grocery stores whereas supply-side strategies subsidize grocery stores with the aim of increasing the supply of stores (Cuffey and Beatty, 2021). Most state policies adopt supply-side strategies in addressing food desert policies. Alabama, Oklahoma and Louisiana allow financing to be used for workforce training. No state addresses demand-side factors in its policies.

Socioeconomic Factors. Only Alabama, Louisiana, and Oklahoma directly address socioeconomic factors in food desert policies. Each of these states make provisions to address limited employment opportunities. All three states' policies contain provisions to promoting the creation and retention of jobs for local residents.

Food Desert Consequences. Only the Washington policy acknowledges poor dietary and health outcome consequences associated with food deserts. For the most part, resident welfare is not addressed in state food desert policies. Eight of the state policies do not explicitly address poor health outcomes or improvement of health outcomes. Further, these state policies do not directly address resident dietary consumption or specify provisions to improve diets.

Policy Tools. Alabama, Louisiana, Oklahoma and Washington each provide grants to businesses. Each state, except New Jersey and Washington, relies on loans as the primary policy tool used to remedy food desert conditions. Two states, Maryland and Washington provide direct financing to businesses. Maryland may pay for loan application and origination fees. It may also provide direct financial assistance to stores operating in food deserts. Alabama is the only state utilizing tax expenditures.

Concluding Thoughts

Crafting solutions to policy problems is not always easy. Solutions require careful research, consideration of the political context of the policy problem, critical thinking and creativity. Recommendations must address the causes of problems and consider the policy elements including intent, goals and programs and activities. These elements provide a framework from which policies can be designed. In designing policies, consideration should be given to justifications, values, policy assumptions, target population(s), and rules promoting or inhibiting actions. Each of these factors should be evident when making recommendations to policymakers. Chapter 5 gives insights on ways to ensure the presence of these factors through writing policy memos and making effective presentations.

Discussion Questions

1. Find a bill related to a policy area you are interested in. Identify its intent, goals and programs and activities.
2. Using the bill identified in Question 1, identify the policy tools and policy targets.
3. What departments or agencies are tasked with implementing provisions of the bill?

Skill Development: Developing Policy Solutions

Problem definition requires: a) problem identification, b) gathering data and evidence, and c) analyzing and interpreting the data and evidence. It is not enough to simply present this information. It must be contextualized in a rational, meaningful way. One way to contextualize the defined problem and link it to solutions is to adhere to the 5C Framework. This framework requires specifying the criteria, condition, causes, significance and recommendations associated with a policy problem. As a refresher, review the following:

1. **Criteria:** The criteria establishes a basis of comparison. This could be a legislative mandate, societal norms, a professional standard, best practices, or baseline data. Criteria establishes that something is supposed to be happening or that it should be a certain way. If your audience doesn't know what should be, it will be hard for them to interpret the condition as being problematic.
2. **Condition:** The condition establishes the heart of the policy problem. It provides the context for the problem and is established in problem identification. Explanation of how things are gives your audience an opportunity to understand the magnitude of the problem and often defined in terms of deficits or excess. Demonstration of deficits or excess requires comparison to the criteria.
3. **Cause:** Explanation of policy problems requires an understanding of the causes of the problem. You must explain why the problem exists. Doing so demands thorough research into the problem, examining it from multiple perspectives. If cause is not established, meaningful solutions are difficult to develop.
4. **Significance:** Significance establishes why policymakers should care. You must describe the consequences of the problem. Address what adverse conditions have occurred or will occur as a result of the problem you identify.
5. **Recommendation:** Every problem needs a fix. Providing problems without solutions can damage your credibility. Policy recommendations must be valid in that they are perceived to be able to rectify the problem. Recommendations should also provide insights on how the policy would be implemented. You cannot offer recommendations without providing the criteria, condition, cause and significance.

Consider the following scenario:

A prominent member of your state legislature has suggested that all applicants to state colleges and universities be tested for drugs prior to being admitted. The legislative member contends this suggestion is based on evidence that drug use amongst high school and college students has increased over the years. Further, universities have faced increased costs and lawsuits associated with students overdosing on college campuses. Use the “elements of a finding” framework to develop a set of policy recommendations to help the member. Recommendations should include, at a minimum, the policy tools needed, the policy targets and the departments or agencies that will implement the policy and how they could implement it.

Resources

Bill Structure

<https://www.govinfo.gov/help/bills>

How Laws are Made

<https://www.congress.gov/help/learn-about-the-legislative-process/how-our-laws-are-made>

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Chapter 5:

Memos and Presentations as Tools for Effective Policy Communications

Policy communications can be written, visual, auditory or some combination of the three. They guide readers and listeners on a journey of understanding the policy problem, its causes, why it matters and what actions can be taken to remedy it. Effective policy communications should help solve problems, serve action, have consequences and be publicly accessible (Smith, 2013). Policymakers are busy readers. A busy reader is one who does not have a lot of time to ingest a lot of information or the capacity to decipher complex information in a single sitting. Busy readers face the daunting task of interpreting information and making decisions in tight timeframes. Therefore, it is important to keep the legislative audience in mind when communicating policy ideas.

Policymakers make decisions about a multitude of policy actions. They receive information from many sources and actors offering solutions to policy problems. As participants in the policy process, actors may have different reasons for wanting to influence policy actions. Regardless of these reasons, policymakers usually want to gain insights on problems, their causes and the solutions to problems. In addition, they likely ask about who is impacted by the policy solutions and the pros and cons of recommendations. The challenge is to tell a story in such a way that it answers these questions before they are asked.

Writing for public policy requires substantial research that culminates in a comprehensive reporting of findings and recommendations. The reporting may take many forms but is often used as a basis for other policy work products such as presentations, policy memos and issue briefs. The “elements of a finding” framework provides the structure on which information can be organized and shared with policymakers in both a document and in a presentation. Sharing policy ideas with policymakers sometimes is more about telling a story than a demonstration of technical sophistication. The story must be logical, supportable and informative.

USING POLICY MEMOS TO TELL THE STORY

Policy memos are one way to communicate ideas. Policy memos are documents that provide analysis and recommendations about a particular policy issue. While there is no standard for the length of policy memos, brevity should be a goal in writing them. Policymakers prefer receiving information in the form of comprehensive summaries (Smith, 2013). Memos may be structured in a variety of formats but usually contain the following sections: a) Date; b) “To” line; c) “From” line; d) Subject; e) Introduction; f) Problem Statement; and g) Recommendations.

The date, “to” line and “from” line are important parts of the policy memo. The memo becomes part of the public record once it is presented to policymakers. Therefore, the time it is shared is important, particularly when holding policymakers accountable for taking action of the presented issue. The “To” line identifies the memo’s targeted audience. You must identify individuals or

organizations who would be directly involved in implementing policy solutions you recommend. The individual or group writing the memo goes in the “From” line.

The Subject Line

The subject line conveys the memo's purpose. The subject must be specific. Decision makers want to know why it is important that they read the contents of the memo. The subject line should indicate the problem and ideally the solutions. The subject line must address the “why does it matter” question. As an example, “Crime” as a subject on a policy memo does not offer policymakers much insight on the issue being addressed as it is too general and vague. Subject lines must provide some specifics. For example, “Increasing Car Thefts Raise Public Safety Concerns”, as a subject, identifies a specific type of crime and provides insights on why addressing it should matter. Policy decision makers are more likely to pay attention to issues if we let them know what the problem(s) is.

Introduction

Write the introduction as if it is the only part of the memo your audience will read. The purpose of the memo is to inform policymakers about an issue and provide recommendations for addressing it. Memos should begin with a summary of the problem being addressed. The Introduction section should also include a brief summary of the main conclusions and policy recommendations. The rest of the memo is designed to support contentions made and conclusions presented in the introduction.

Problem Statement

If you cannot adequately define the problem, do you really have one? The problem statement section should provide a thorough, but succinct definition of the policy problem being addressed. You must be as specific as possible, providing the necessary information and supporting data/evidence. This is where you will describe the criteria, condition, cause and significance. Establish the criteria to compare with the condition. The condition is the heart of the problem statement. Use data or data visualizations to convey information to policy decision makers. Data visualization simply refers to the graphic representation of data. This can be achieved in the form of charts, graphs, maps, infographics, etc. (Kettl, 2018). These visuals should be self-contained and self-orienting such that all the information an audience needs to know and understand is contained in it (Pennock, 2019). You must also provide a narrative which explains the visuals.

The problem statement should also contain explanations of the causes of the problem. In addition, consider the significance of the problem and explicate why policymakers should address it.

Recommendation(s)

Policy memos should be stated clearly and specifically. Memos inform policymakers on how they can address the problem and how solutions can be implemented and by whom. The memo should specify the intent of your policy solutions, the policy goals, and the specific activities that

should be implemented to help achieve the stated goals. You should also describe the pros and cons of each recommendation. The key here is that your solutions must be related to the problems you identify. As an example, in the instance of car thefts, if data indicate that thefts primarily occur at people's homes, making a recommendation that additional security cameras be placed at the mall wouldn't make much sense. Recommendations should be ones that your target audience can actually address.

Policy recommendations can be based on ideas implemented in other areas. For example, we may look at what other local governments are doing to address car thefts. Policy makers want context and often want to know about the success of these policy ideas applied in other jurisdictions, especially similar state and local governments. Policy actors must make efforts to understand the impacts of these policies after they have been adopted. Success elsewhere could indicate that the ideas could be effective.

EFFECTIVE PRESENTATIONS

Policy actors may sometimes need to communicate policy advice in formal and informal presentations. If policy memos tell the story, presentations can be used to sell the story (Kettl, 2018). The development of presentations should receive the same level of effort as the policy memo. Presentations correspond with the policy memo, but do not repeat every detail found in the memo.

Effective presentations capture the audience's attention where the audience spends more time listening than they do reading. The purpose of the presentation is to inform, not entertain. Policymakers generally want to receive information within 10 minutes. They prefer presenters to get to the point by explaining conclusions and recommendations at the beginning of presentations and at the end. They also prefer presentations to be given in plain English as opposed to jargon or with highly technical explanations. Simplicity is a key feature. Presentations that bombard the audience with too many words will not sustain their attention. Further, presentations with too many motion effects or designs will likely distract the audience.

Impactful presentations result from a combination of a quality substance in the memo, attractive and purposeful visual aids and persuasive delivery. Presentations require adequate preparation, adaptability to the legislative environment and presenter responsiveness when legislative members have questions related to the presentation. Presenters should use fewer slides and avoid reading notes or slides. This can be painful to the audience (Knafllic, 2015). Consider using visualizations, particularly those developed for the policy memo, to drive the presentation. This ensures consistency and familiarity. In addition, visualizations can serve as talking points. Use presentations as a way to hold a conversation with policymakers and other policy actors.

Communications Tools

There is an abundance of available communications tools useful to those participating in the policy process. However, many of them come at a financial cost to users and may be unattainable for many individuals and organizations desiring to engage the policy process. Google has an array of tools which can be used to develop policy communications, analyze data and create visualizations. These tools are Google Docs, Google Sheets, Google Slides and Google Looker Studio. These tools are available at no- to low-cost to users. A strength of these tools is that they are cloud-based allowing for seamless, real-time collaboration with other users.

Google Docs is a word processing software which allows users to create, edit and share documents online. It is a useful tool for writing policy memos and other documents. Google Sheets is a spreadsheet software which enables users to enter, analyze and create visualizations such as charts and tables. Google Slides lets users create presentations and features several themes, layouts and animations. Users can embed videos, images and other types of media into presentations. Lastly, Looker Studio is a data analysis platform that allows users to connect and combine data from many sources and create interactive reports, dashboards and visualizations such as maps, charts and graphs.

CONCEPTS IN ACTION

Policy Memo

In the wake of the March 27, 2023 Covenant School shooting, four Tennessee mayors issued a policy memo to Governor Bill Lee, Lt. Governor Randy McNally and Speaker of the House Cameron Sexton with recommendations for reducing gun violence in the state.¹ The memo provides data on gun deaths and how Tennessee ranks compared to other states. The memo also establishes a relationship between the strength of gun laws and the rate of gun violence. Using the data and evidence demonstrating the magnitude of gun-related deaths, the mayors offer 10 policy recommendations for state policymakers. Each recommendation is supported with additional data. A criticism of the recommendations is that they are not explicitly linked to causes of gun violence. The mayors recommend the following:

1. Require background checks for all gun purchases;
2. Implement Extreme Risk Protection Orders;
3. Enhanced safety of the concealed carry law;
4. Establish a statewide minimum age for purchasing firearms;
5. Require and enable secure storage of guns;
6. Limit gun thefts from cars;
7. Ban high-capacity magazines;
8. Protect women by prohibiting convicted stalkers from owning guns;
9. Provide funding for school threat assessment teams to keep schools safe; and
10. Require reporting of lost and stolen guns.

¹ Source: <https://www.wkrn.com/news/tennessee-news/tn-mayors-pen-joint-letter-to-state-leaders-calling-for-stricter-gun-laws/> and <https://www.nashville.gov/departments/mayor/news/memo-governor-bill-lee-recommended-policy-actions-reduce-gun-violence-tennessee>

TO: Governor Bill Lee, Speaker Cameron Sexton, Lt. Governor Randy McNally

FROM: John Cooper, Mayor, Metropolitan Government of Nashville & Davidson County
Lee Harris, Mayor, Shelby County
Tim Kelly, Mayor, City of Chattanooga
Indya Kincannon, Mayor, City of Knoxville

DATE: April 19, 2023

RE: **Recommended Policy Actions to Reduce Gun Violence in Tennessee**

According to the National Center for Health Statistics, Tennessee has the 12th highest rate of gun deaths in the country over the past four years. Tennessee ranks 9th in total deaths by firearms. Nearly 1,300 Tennesseans die each year from guns, and it is the leading cause of death among children and teenagers.

Nationwide data shows a **clear correlation** between the strength of a state's gun laws and the rate of gun violence. For example, the six states with the strongest gun laws each rank among the eight safest states for the rate of gun violence.

Tennessee can save lives by implementing gun laws that have proven to be successful in other states. While evidence suggests that banning assault weapons should be a primary policy consideration, this memo outlines ten common sense policy recommendations we believe should earn bipartisan support to enact this legislative session.

We are encouraged by Governor Lee's recent support for extreme risk laws after the tragic murders a few weeks ago at The Covenant School. Now is the moment to turn statements of support and sympathy into action. We can incorporate these policies into legislation immediately. Working together, we can keep guns away from people who shouldn't have them, and out of circumstances that are likely to result in more dead Tennesseans.

1) Require background checks for all gun purchases.

- Tennessee should require point-of-sale background checks for all gun purchases, including rifles and shotguns.
- This requirement would help close a loophole that currently allows felons and other people who are prohibited from possessing firearms to bypass a background check by buying a gun from an unlicensed seller.
- A mandatory background check would screen to make sure the buyer is not legally prohibited from owning firearms due to criminal history.
- 20 states currently require background checks. Those state laws are associated with lower rates of homicide and suicide by firearm.

1

Figure 5: Excerpt from Tennessee Mayors' Memo to State Government Leaders

Policy Presentation

The Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability (OPPAGA) is a research arm of the Florida Legislature. OPPAGA provides the Legislature with data, analyses and evaluations to assist state budget and policy deliberations. The Legislature requested that OPPAGA investigate resident access to healthy food. OPPAGA analysts conducted research which described food deserts and their effects on residents. Analysts presented their findings and policy recommendations to the Florida Senate Committee on Agriculture. The presentation provides an outline, research methods, background information, findings and policy options.²

Access to Healthy Food in Florida

Presentation to the Senate Committee on Agriculture

Daphne Holden, Senior Legislative Analyst



Figure 6: OPPAGA Presentation to the Florida Senate Committee on Agriculture

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Effective policy communications involves answering questions policymakers need answered in ways that are understandable to them (Kettl, 2018). Communication is an important part of policy process participation. Policy memos and presentations are two communications devices that policy actors use to influence policymakers. Writing policy memos is an arduous and continuous process. Memos should describe the policy problem, its causes and why addressing it is important. Memos should also provide policymakers with recommendations for resolving the policy problem. Factual memos supported with data and evidence can enhance credibility and possibly affect policymakers' decisions. Policy presentations should be created and delivered in ways that parallel the policy memo. Presentations allow policy actors to present information to policymakers verbally and visually. Both memos and presentations, once part of the public record, can be used to hold policymakers accountable.

² OPPAGA Presentation Access to Healthy Food in Florida available at <https://oppaga.fl.gov/Products/Presentations>

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What do you consider to be challenging aspects of policy communications? How would you overcome these challenges?
2. What are some other ways to bring awareness to policy issues and solutions? Do you think these ways could be effective in influencing policy decisions?
3. How are issues typically brought to the attention of policymakers in your local and state governments?

SKILL DEVELOPMENT

If you don't already have one, create a Google account to access Google Docs, Sheets and Slides.

Use Google Docs to write a policy memo based on your application of the “elements of Finding” in the Chapter 4 Skill Development.

1. Write a policy memo to a policymaker or legislative body that:
 - States the problem and provides evidence of said problem. Use Google Sheets to develop a data visualization.
 - Provides a solution(s) to the problem you identify. These solutions should include an intent, goals, and policy tools, programs and/or activities that could be implemented to address the identified problem.
2. Develop a presentation based on your policy memo.

RESOURCES

MIT Broad Research Communication Lab Policy Memo Guidance

<https://mitcommlab.mit.edu/broad/commkit/policy-memo/>

Boston University School of Public Health Policy Memo Guidance -

[https://www.bu.edu/sph/students/student-services/student-resources/academic-support/communication-resources/policy-memo/#:~:text=A%20policy%20memo%20is%20a,decision%2Dmakers%20\(2\).](https://www.bu.edu/sph/students/student-services/student-resources/academic-support/communication-resources/policy-memo/#:~:text=A%20policy%20memo%20is%20a,decision%2Dmakers%20(2).)

Harvard Kennedy School of Government Policy Memo Database -

<https://policymemos.hks.harvard.edu/policy-memo-databases>

MIT Broad Research Communication Lab Policy Presentation Guidance -

<https://mitcommlab.mit.edu/broad/commkit/policy-presentation/>

GCF Global Google Drive and Docs Tutorials

<https://edu.gcfglobal.org/en/googledocuments/#>

Tech Republic Guide to Looker Studio (formerly Google Data Studio)

<https://www.techrepublic.com/article/google-data-studio-guide/>

Digital Trends How to Use Google Slides

<https://www.digitaltrends.com/computing/how-to-use-google-slides/>

Google Slides: The Ultimate Guide

<https://www.brightcarbon.com/blog/google-slides-ultimate-guide/>

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Chapter 6:

Holding Policymakers Accountable Through Active Citizen Participation

You've informed policy makers of an issue, explained its significance and provided them with recommendations to address the identified issue. Now what? For most, political engagement begins and ends with voting. That may be great for determining who will make policy decisions on our behalf, but how do we ensure that they do so? Holding governmental policy makers accountable for policy actions requires an informed and engaged citizenry. Citizen participation can amplify citizens' voices and ensure accountability. Accountability is the principle that government officials are answerable to the people for the decisions they make and actions they take (Nabatchi, Becker, & Leighninger, 2015).

Citizen participation in the policy process is important to ensure a functioning democracy. Participation in the policy process ensures that citizens, individually and collectively, have a voice in matters that affect their lives. The public often plays a small, indirect role in the policy process, but this does not mean that this role is insignificant (Wu, Ramesh, Howlett, & Fritzen, 2018). Without citizen participation, we risk getting policies we do not agree with or do not benefit us because others may have stronger influence on policymakers (Rinfret, Scherberle, & Pautz, 2018).

Citizen participation can serve democracy in several ways. First, participation can promote legitimacy of policy decisions by helping build trust between citizens and governments. Second, citizen participation can encourage transparency in the policy process. Transparency also aids trust in policy making. Third, citizen participation in the policy process encourages the consideration of diverse perspectives and ideas. The process provides an opportunity for policy makers to hear constituents who have different backgrounds and lived experiences. Participation promotes diversity and greater representation (Nabatchi, Becker, & Leighninger, 2015). Finally, citizen participation is a means for holding policy makers accountable. Participation is a feedback mechanism allowing policy makers to understand citizen needs and thus make decisions reflective of citizen interests. Citizens can hold policy makers accountable by voting and by engaging and interacting with them directly by attending public meetings.

VOTING

Voting is the cornerstone of a representative democracy. Citizens must decide the best ways to utilize the vote as voting itself is not enough (Carmichael & Hamilton, 1967). It is a fundamental right and the primary way in which most people participate in political and policy processes. Voting allows citizens to have a voice in decisions that affect them personally as well as their communities and the country.

Voting can also be a tool used to hold policy makers accountable for their actions. For instance, citizens can vote elected officials out of office if the official's performance is not satisfactory. Policy makers are accountable to the people they represent whether those people voted for them or not. Because policy makers are often concerned about losing office, they will

likely work to serve the interests of their constituents if constituents use voting as an evaluation of their actions.

ENGAGING POLICY MAKERS IN LEGISLATIVE HEARINGS

Citizens can hold policy makers accountable by engaging with them directly to express views and make demands. Engagement sometimes requires participants to be educated on the issues. One way to engage policy makers is by attending hearings or other public meetings. Hearings and other meetings allow citizens to ask questions and voice concerns. Citizens can play active roles in matters of interest, especially when they are unhappy with decisions legislative bodies make. By being vocal on certain matters, citizens demand that policymakers be responsive to their needs. Active participation in the policy process allows citizens to stay informed about issues and decisions impacting them. Participation in hearings and meetings gives opportunities to meet and begin forging relationships with policymakers and other policy actors. Personal relations with different policy actors presents opportunities to meet with them and discuss issues directly. The relationships may also be helpful in influencing policy decision making. To have effective, active participation, citizens must not only learn the policy process, but must also become educated on the issues, rules, procedures and decorum related to hearings and meetings.

Citizens who have been actively participating in the policy process by making policy recommendations should consider the following to hold policy makers accountable:

- Maintain and expand your network;
- Share your policy recommendations and supporting data and evidence with multiple members individually and collectively;
- Follow up on the status of recommendations;
- Show up. Be an active voice on related issues;
- Keep a finger on the pulse of issues of interest and related solutions in other jurisdictions; and
- Once a policy recommendation is adopted, seek analytical and evaluative input to ensure effectiveness.

CONCEPTS IN ACTION

The West Lake Landfill is a 200-acre site located in Bridgeton, Missouri. The site was used as a limestone quarry between 1939 and 1985. At some point in the early 1950s, the local government began using parts of the site to landfill solid waste and construction debris. In 1973 some areas within the landfill were contaminated with radiological materials when soil containing uranium ore processing residues were used to cover the landfill (United States Environmental Protection Agency, n.d.). The nuclear waste was remnant of the 1940's Manhattan Project (Salter, 2018). The Bridgeton Sanitary Landfill is also located on the site.

The now closed Bridgeton Landfill is owned and managed by Bridgeton Landfill, LLC which is a subsidiary of Republic Services, Inc. In late December 2010, Republic Services reported elevated temperatures on gas extraction wells. The landfill has subsequently experienced a subsurface smoldering (fire) event evidenced by increased odors and leachate production (Missouri Department of Natural Resources, n.d.). Bridgeton residents met with St. Louis County officials on October 15, 2015 to discuss the situation. Residents expressed concerns that the smoldering could produce a high-temperature chemical reaction that could reach buried waste from 1940's atomic bomb production. If this were to occur, toxic fumes and particulate matter could spread throughout the region. It was thought that the smoldering poisoned surrounding groundwater and vegetation. Some residents reported that their eyes burn and the smell induces vomiting (Rivas, 2015). Residents were concerned that local government officials were not doing enough to address the situation.

State and federal officials were involved in the situation. The then Missouri Attorney General Chris Koster sued Republic Services in 2015 for violations associated with the smoldering. Prior actions were taken by federal elected officials in February 2014. U.S. Senators Clair McCaskill and Roy Blunt and U.S. Representatives Ann Brooks and William Lacy Clay urged U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Region 7 Administrator Karl Brooks to enlist the U.S. Army Corp or Engineers to lead waste cleanup efforts (Rivas, 2015). The EPA did not adhere to this suggestion. Ed Smith of the Missouri Coalition for the Environment voiced his displeasure with elected officials merely making a suggestion and stated that they need to demand the removal of waste, particularly given that the following year would be a presidential election year.

In 2018, the EPA announced a cleanup plan for the Westlake Landfill. The plan called for digging up nuclear waste buried near the underground smoldering and cap and monitor the remaining waste (Salter, 2018). The cleanup was expected to take four years and cost \$205 million.¹ The cleanup project was delayed in March 2022 after the EPA found additional radiological material (Salter, Landfill Cleanup Slowed After More Nuclear Waste Found, 2022). It is expected that site remediation will be completed in March 2024. Many citizens expressed the displeasure with the EPA feeling that the agency was not being completely truthful.

¹ These costs are the responsibility of the landfill owners, U.S. Department of Energy and the Exelon Corp. of Chicago, whose subsidiary company formerly owned Cotter Corp. which was a uranium processor.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Citizen participation is an integral part of democratic life as it can increase effectiveness and provide government legitimacy (Fung, 2015). It is a critical aspect necessary for the identification of policy problems and formulation of solutions to them. Citizen participation can provide greater social change for a larger number of people, allow for a better understanding of what a policy is and the impacts it will have, be a way for policymakers to consider public reaction in decision making and places citizens in a position of power (Irvin & Stansbury, 2004). An actively engaged citizenry can hold policy makers accountable not only for addressing policy issues, but also for ensuring the solutions have an impact. Further, citizens can monitor policy makers' decisions and actions to make sure their concerns, needs and interests are incorporated into decision making.

In order to be impactful and credible players in the policy game, citizens must learn the policy process. Understanding the process is critical for active and meaningful engagement. Citizens should have an understanding of the roles and positions of other policy actors. Citizens should also have a sound grasp on the policy issues of interests. This requires putting significant effort in defining policy problems and having an understanding of their causes and consequences. This allows the formulation of policy solutions that are intricately linked to the causes and effects of the problem. Policy process participants must be effective communicators of policy problems and solutions. Communication comes in a variety of forms, but policy memos and presentations at public meetings are thought to be effective means of influencing policymakers and other policy actors. Ultimately, direct interaction with policymakers can promote accountability, particularly when citizens are actively engaged in the policy process. In the end, citizens may not win the policy game, but their efforts in playing will not go unnoticed.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Determine when your local legislative body meets. Identify the process for getting on the agenda to speak.
2. When is your state legislature in session? What is the process for getting on a committee meeting agenda?
3. What groups advocate for issues or causes you are interested in? How can you get involved?
4. What are other ways besides voting and participating in meetings can citizens influence policy decision making?

SKILL DEVELOPMENT

Attend or watch a meeting of your local council, state legislature or U.S. Congress.

Address the following:

1. Who is responsible for managing the meeting?
2. Are there apparent formal processes for conducting the meeting? If so, describe the processes.
3. Is there a formal written agenda? What topics are on the agenda?
4. What policy actors are involved in the meeting? What issues are they concerned with?

RESOURCES

Vote Smart:

<https://justfacts.votesmart.org/>

Open Secrets:

www.opensecrets.org

GovTrack:

<https://www.govtrack.us/for-advocates>

Congressional Record:

<https://www.congress.gov/congressional-record>

Freedom of Information Act:

<https://www.foia.gov/>

State Freedom of Information Laws:

<https://www.nfoic.org/state-freedom-of-information-laws/>

Five Ways to Hold Elected Officials Accountable:

<https://ignitenational.org/blog/5-ways-to-hold-elected-officials-accountable>

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