Understanding Politics and Public Policy

Foundations and Core Concepts
POSC 315: Introduction to Public Policy
Lecture 1 (Part 1 of 3)

Summer 2025

California State University, Fullerton

Theme of the Course

1. Individualism
2. Equality
3. Community
4. Patriotism
5. Rule of Law
6. Diversity
7. Distrust of Government

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These questions help us understand **values** and **priorities** in policy choices.

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  - Many are *interdisciplinary*.
- We will focus on the *politics* of policy.
  - How do we get from a problem to a solution?
  - How do we get from a solution to a policy?
  - How do we get from a policy to a program?
  - How do we get from a program to an outcome?

Different Views Across the Political Landscape

Across the political landscape, we have many different views about:

1. Problem Definition
What things are problems that need solving?

2. Solution Identification
What are the solutions to those problems?

3. Intervention Selection
Is a government program the best way to solve those problems?

4. Implementation Strategy
What are the best ways to implement solutions?

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What about policy?

Let's compare your responses with academic definitions...

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- How we organize and govern ourselves; the **art and science of government**.

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- Public policy addresses problems that are public or problems that some members of society think *should* be public.

What is Public?

- Public versus Private come to us from the Latin *publicus* and *privatus*, from Ancient Rome
- Publicus means "of the people" or "of the state"
- Privatus means "individual" or "personal"

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These distinctions begin to collapse from the 19th century onward.

Reflection Activity

Think About:

- Social media platforms
- Healthcare decisions
- Education choices

Questions:

- Where do you see the public/private boundary shifting?
- How might these shifts affect policy decisions?

Key Takeaways

- **Politics:** The process of making collective decisions about public resources and rules
- **Public Policy:** Government's course of action in response to public issues
- **Public vs. Private:** Historically distinct spheres that are increasingly blurred
- **Policy Process:** The path from problem identification to outcome evaluation

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Coming Up Next

In Part 2, we'll explore the history of political thought and how it shapes modern policy approaches.