

Understanding Politics and Public Policy

Foundations and Core Concepts

POSC 315: Introduction to Public Policy

Lecture 9-1: Policy Analysis Part 1

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- General Concepts of Policy Analysis
- Outputs vs. Outcomes
- Role of Policy Analysis in the Policy Process
- Understanding Causation
- Brief History of Policy Analysis
- Role of the Policy Analyst
- Modern Approaches
- Applied Policy Analysis: Let's Try It!

General Concepts of Policy Analysis

What is Policy Analysis?

A systematic approach to evaluating policy alternatives for addressing public problems using data and reasoned arguments.

Core Purpose: Provide clear, objective information to decision-makers.

Key Question: How can we use evidence to determine which policies are most effective?

Outputs vs. Outcomes

Outputs:

- Measurable things an agency produces
- Tangible efforts, easy to track
- Examples: traffic signals, people served, laws passed

Outcomes:

- Actual effects on society
- Harder to quantify
- Examples: accident reduction, improved health

Distinction: Outputs show what was done; outcomes show what difference it made.

Understanding Causation

Causation = Relationship between cause and effect

To establish causation:

- Temporal sequence (cause precedes effect)
- Correlation
- No spuriousness (other factors ruled out)

Understanding Causation (continued)

Positive

Education $\uparrow \rightarrow$ Income \uparrow

Negative

Cigarette Tax $\uparrow \rightarrow$ Smoking \downarrow

No Relationship

Ice Cream Sales \nrightarrow Crime Rate

History of Policy Analysis

Early Developments:

- 1908: *Muller v. Oregon* — Brandeis Brief
- Rise of social science in governance
- New Deal → growth of policy advisors
- WWII → operations research techniques

Lasswell's Principles:

- Problem-solving orientation
- Multidisciplinary
- Acknowledges values in policy decisions

"In a democracy, values matter as much as facts."

Key Traits:

- Applied & practical
- Interdisciplinary
- Empirical & theoretical
- Aims to improve public decisions

- Great Society → demand for analysts
- Dominance of economic rationality
- Rise of modeling & forecasting
- Limits of technical approaches become visible