

# The Foundation

# 1

## **PUBLIC POLICY AND OUR EVERYDAY LIVES**

A personal experience can be the starting point to understand public policy. Think about how you cast your ballot to vote in your respective state last election or you use your cell phone as your daily alarm clock—both are guided by U.S. public policies. The following stories—Professor Rinfret, Amish politics; Professor Scheberle, wool and banking; and Professor Pautz, marine mammals—demonstrate how our experiences can shape public policy.

### **Professor Rinfret: Amish Politics**

I grew up in a rural, small town in northeast Ohio—population: 3,000. When I was ten, my father ran for county prosecutor. As a result, I spent my evenings and weekends knocking on doors and stating, “Please vote for my dad.” In addition to nightly door knocking, I attended local meetings and pancake breakfasts with my dad. I still remember one rainy evening; we drove up to a local township building within the heart of our Amish community. Yes, I grew up in one of the largest Amish counties in the United States. I got out of our family minivan, but my dad stopped me and said, “Hey, you need to sit in the car tonight and work on your homework.” I did not complain, but on the car ride home I remember asking, “Why wasn’t I allowed to go inside tonight?” My dad’s response: “Because you are a girl. Women do not attend Amish community meetings.” This response invoked constant dinner conversations with my family about politics and continuous questions to my parents, teachers, and friends.

### **Professor Scheberle: Wool and Banking**

As an undergraduate majoring in journalism, with a marketing emphasis, my first two jobs were eye-opening

## **LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

*Readers of this chapter will be able to:*

1. Understand how personal stories shape our understanding of public policymaking, who is included and who is left out
2. Identify the variety of institutional and noninstitutional actors who drive how and why policies are adopted
3. Comprehend that the public policymaking process is devised by a series of stages more complex than “how a bill becomes a law”
4. Explore how public policy is a profession driven by expertise

experiences. My first “real” job was to write the monthly newsletter and press releases for the Wool Growers Association, an organization that represents the interests of sheep ranchers or farmers. The organization took strong positions on public policy matters. For example, the organization opposed the listing of the gray wolf as an endangered species, as sheep herders argued that wolves were attacking the sheep. After I received my bachelor’s degree, my second job was as an officer of the bank. Officers were strongly encouraged to contribute to the American Bankers Association Political Action Committee (PAC), an organization pressing hard for deregulation of banks. The CEO would come to every officer’s desk and collect contributions. He was an imposing 6’3” man, and when he leaned over my desk, it got my attention! Regardless, these experiences increased my awareness that organizations try to sway policymakers’ actions on policies designed to protect their perceived interests. I later developed an interest in environmental and natural resource policies, and understood the importance of education in advancing public good.

### Professor Pautz: Marine Mammals

In middle school, I was fascinated by politics because I watched the nightly news; yet I did not think politics would be a viable career path for me. I entered college a declared economics major. It was not until the fall of my sophomore year, when I took environmental economics and environmental policy that I began to change my perspective. These topics were of interest to me because I grew up in the coastal city of Portsmouth, New Hampshire, where marine animals were common. Needless to say, I was mortified by the images from the *Exxon Valdez* disaster. It upset me to see how the oil spill damaged the ecosystem and habitat for wildlife such as whales. Because of my own appreciation for marine mammals and the heartbreak caused by *Exxon Valdez*, my environmental classes enabled me to understand the role of public policy and politics in these issues.

Our own stories present policy questions: Should women be unallowed to attend a local meeting? What is the role of organizations in influencing policy? Who should protect wildlife from an oil spill? What do these stories miss? What about the role of intersectionality?<sup>1</sup> Answering such questions is not easily done and can engender controversy. Furthermore, how do you answer these questions through a **value-neutral** lens instead of **value-laden** fashion? More specifically, how do you present solutions to such questions that do not incorporate a person’s own biases (value-neutral)? Is this even possible? Or are all policy decisions driven with biased responses driven by personal opinions (value-laden)?

The purpose of the 2nd edition of *Public Policy: A Concise Introduction* is simple—to provide students with the necessary skills and tools to understand how and why public policy is created. Our goal is to provide connections between our own everyday experiences with the “doing” side of policy: **implementation**. In our second edition, this approach is examined through how we can collectively recognize our own biases and use our privilege to lift people up that may fall within the margins. Our collective goal is for the reader to merge theory and practice, providing solutions for public sector problems. This chapter sets the tone as we define public policy, the process, key actors, theories involved, and how it all applies to you.

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## STARTING WITH A DEFINITION

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The word **public** encompasses ordinary people, or community. **Policy** is a course of action adopted or created by the government<sup>2</sup> in response to public problems. When the terms are put together, public policy is a “confusing game of players, dynamics, processes, and stages” (Theodoulou and Kofinis 2004). Public policy is “a relatively stable, purposive course of action followed by government in dealing with some problem or matter of concern” (Anderson 2003, 3). Reading these definitions of public policy serves as a reminder that “Every day the intended and unintended consequences of public policy intimately touch the lives of everyone within the United States” (Theodoulou and Kofinis 2004, 2). Public policy is government action to solve a public problem.

### Power and Politics

Related to government action to solve a problem are power and politics. **Power** represents the ability to alter or influence a course of action (Theodoulou and Kofinis 2004, 3). Power is a person or group’s ability to persuade or alter perceptions. For instance, in spring 1970, Senator Gaylord Nelson created Earth Day with more than twenty million Americans demonstrating in cities across the United States to protect the environment. As a result, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (a new federal agency at the time) was created to tackle environmental issues. In a more recent example, January 2020, Amanda Gorman delivered the “Hill we Climb” at President Joe Biden’s inauguration. Gorman, 22 years of age, became the youngest poet laureate to speak at a presidential inauguration, focusing on how the United States must confront racial injustices, by concluding her poem, stating, “When the day comes, we step out of the shade of flame and unafraid. The new dawn balloons as we free it” (Parsons 2020). The media portrayed both Gaylord Nelson and Amanda Gorman as symbols of positive change, impacting our perceptions about societal issues like the environment or racial justice, using the American people to usher policy pathways forward for change.

**Politics**, as Lasswell (1958) describes, is “who gets what, when, and how.” However, politics is a broad concept—it defines the communication between branches of government and levels of government. Moreover, “Politics, at its essence, captures the competitive communication, exchange, discussions, and debate that emerge between competing ideas and groups within a state” (Theodoulou and Kofinis 2004, 8). Politics is part of policymaking and allows us to have a discussion and debate the merits of solutions to public problems.

As we define public policy and discuss the roles power and politics play within this definition, who in society controls policymaking? Pluralism and elitism help us to understand this question. **Pluralism** is the notion that we all have equal access to influence policymaking (Dahl 1961; Truman 1951). However, **elitism** suggests only a select few, the elite, have the power to influence policymaking in a Democratic society (Mills 1956). Although these two conceptualizations offer different theories, “In general, each perspective helps to identify that the concept of power should not be

measured solely as an explicit consequence, but as a complex interrelationship between the ability of certain actors to influence what actions are taken” (Theodoulou and Kofinis 2004, 4).

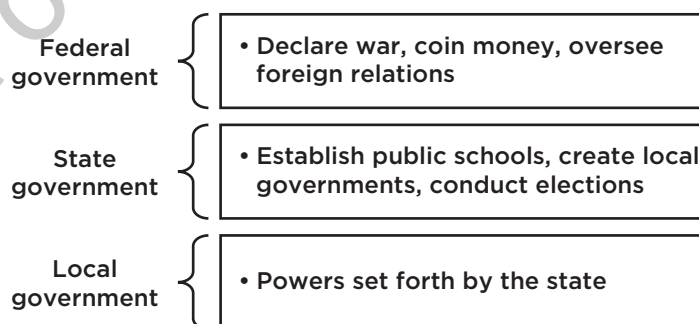
The prominent legal scholar, Kimberly Crenshaw, pushes us to question if the concepts of politics and power to recognize who does not have a seat at the table and why. Specifically, Crenshaw argues we should take a closer examination of who benefits and why in public policy. She states, “Self-interrogation is a good place to start. If you see inequality as a ‘them’ problem or ‘unfortunate other’ problem, that is a problem. Being able to attend to not just unfair exclusion but also, frankly, unearned inclusion is part of the equality gambit. We’ve got to be open to looking at all of the ways our systems reproduce these inequalities, and that includes the privileges as well as the harms” (Steinmetz 2020).

With this in mind, public policy is not created by one person; nor does it happen overnight. There are a myriad of actors involved. Each year hundreds of laws and ordinances are created at the national, state, and local level. More specifically, U.S. public policy is guided by a system of **federalism** in which power is divided between national government and the states.

## A Federal System

Figure 1.1 illustrates a brief overview of our federal system, and Chapter 3 delves into the details more fully. For foundational purposes, each level of government has separate and overlapping functions to execute public policy. For example, the federal government is responsible for overseeing relationships with other countries, deciding whether or not to go to war, or creating money. Under the Tenth Amendment, anything not specified in the U.S. Constitution is within the scope of state governments, such as public schools. Within this federal system, there is a lot of overlap, or

**FIGURE 1.1**  
Levels of Government



shared responsibility, in carrying out policy. For instance, public education standards are created by the federal government and carried out by state and local governments. Nonetheless, policy spans across governments and topics ranging from pollution control, business regulation, energy, welfare, and transportation, to name a few.

## Categories of Public Policy

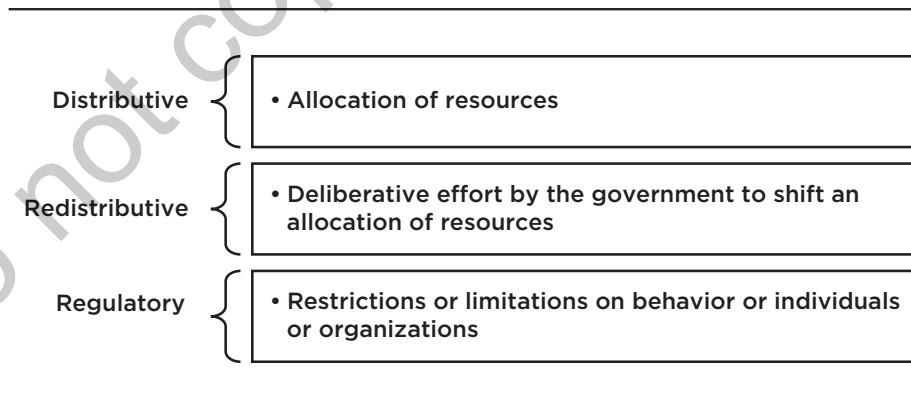
Scholars have attempted to categorize public policy into three broad categories. As Anderson (2003) suggests, “These typologies will prove much more useful in distinguishing among and generalizing about policies that have some of the more traditional and widely used categorization schemes, such as by issue area ...” (10). Figure 1.2 defines the three categories of public policy.

Distributive public policy involves the allocation of resources to individuals, groups, corporations, or communities. This type of policy benefits a segment of the population. An example of a distributive public policy is a farm subsidy. In this example, the federal government provides financial support each year to farmers to manage their crops (e.g., cotton, corn, rice, soybeans) because of inconsistencies due to weather or disease.

The purpose of a redistributive public policy is to promote equality, or occurs when the government allocates support from one group to another through social programs. However, consider the difference between *equity* and *equality*. **Equity** is the quality of being fair and impartial. **Equality** is the state of being equal, in status, rights, and opportunities. The financial aid you receive to attend college is an example of a redistributive public policy. It is based on your parents’ annual earnings.

Regulatory policy imposes restrictions on the behaviors of individuals or organizations. This type of policy is exemplary of U.S. environmental policy because regulatory policy limits the behaviors of businesses or organizations. For instance, a coal-burning power plant is allowed to produce a set limit of pollution into the air because of the

**FIGURE 1.2**  
Policy Typologies



Clean Air Act. If a company exceeds its limits, a fine ensues. Although there are different categories of public policy, how does a policy come to fruition? Who are the actors involved? Is public policy made through the “how a bill becomes a law” steps you learned in your high school government class?

We offer these brief policy typology definitions here and encourage you to consider how each, in turn, may create a system of winners and losers. For example, what demographic benefits from each typology? How does this link back to the role of power and access to public policymaking?

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## THE PROCESS

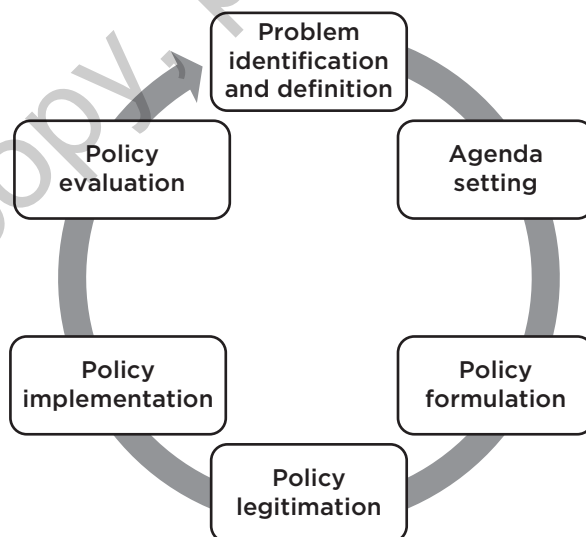
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The public policymaking process, coined as the **stages heuristic approach**, helps address the aforementioned questions. U.S. public policymaking occurs across a variety of stages and includes several actors. Figure 1.3 provides a brief explanation and foundation of this process, with Chapter 2 delving deeper into specifics.

*Stage One: Problem Identification and Definition.* The first phase of the policymaking process is to determine that there is a problem. This is not an easy endeavor. A problem or an issue can be defined by the public or lawmakers. For example, Black Lives Matter, an activist movement, argued violence against Black people in the United States needs to end. Although a problem has been identified by Black Lives Matter, the

**FIGURE 1.3**  
Policymaking Process

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question then becomes how to define the problem. Many within the Black Lives Matter movement claim the problem is due in part to unwarranted police brutality against Black people. However, the police force defines the problem differently—lack of training of police officers. As such, problem identification and definition are inherently political. This stage can be driven by value-laden (biased) perspectives shaped by our own experiences. In this case, a member of the Black Lives Matter movement uses statistical evidence or their own personal experiences in which Black people are targeted more than whites and video footage of police brutality to demonstrate this problem needs to be addressed by lawmakers. Police officers define the problem as a lack of resources to properly train employees (Chapter 6 provides much more detail).

*Stage Two: Agenda Setting.* After determining a problem exists, the second phase is how to place the problem on lawmakers' agenda. This can also be a difficult endeavor. Focusing events and policy entrepreneurs are two explanatory factors to determine what gets placed on their agenda. First, a focusing event is a sudden event that can reshape the nation's attention. An example of a focusing event is 9/11. Combating terrorism was placed on lawmakers' agenda post 9/11 and resulted in body scanning devices now commonly used at airports across the United States. Another example is COVID-19, where more than 500,000 Americans lost their lives to the deadly disease and in response, the US Congress passed the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act or the CARES Act.

Second, a policy entrepreneur could be a congressperson, governor, member of an interest group, or policy champion. This person fixates on a problem and calls for action. An example of a policy entrepreneur is Greta Thunberg. This Swedish teenager's quest is to address climate change and is well known across the globe for her speech at the United Nations in 2018. She challenged international lawmakers who must act now to confront global climate change and continues to be a formidable activist for climate change.

*Stage Three: Policy Formulation.* Once a problem has been recognized or reached the agenda of lawmakers, policy formulation or design occurs. As Schneider and Ingram (1997) suggest, "Policy design is inherently a purposeful and normative enterprise through which elements of policy are warranted to serve particular values, purposes, and interests" (3). It is at this juncture that lawmakers consider the pros and cons of a particular policy and potential solutions. For example, for health-care policy, lawmakers would consider the benefits and drawbacks for the public, hospitals, doctors, and insurance companies. The views of different groups allow for policymakers to determine a viable pathway moving forward.

*Stage Four: Policy Legitimation.* This stage is the one with which we are most familiar, or "how a bill becomes a law." For the sake of brevity, Congress (U.S. House of Representatives or U.S. Senate) assigns a piece of legislation to a committee. The committee determines if the bill should move to the floor for deliberation, debate, and a vote. If the vote passes both chambers of Congress, the president can sign or veto the legislation. If the president signs the bill, it becomes law. As Chapter 9 presents with



an examination of the Affordable Care Act, legislative lawmaking is a complex and arduous process. However, on average, Congress introduces 4,000–9,000 bills per year and less than 5 percent become law.

*Stage Five: Policy Implementation.* The fifth stage of the process is important, yet often overlooked. This stage addresses: What happens after a law goes into effect? Do members of Congress carry out every piece of legislation? There is no way for members of Congress to implement all of the policies it creates due to lack of time, expertise, and resources. This stage is where the “doing side” of policy occurs via implementation by administrative agencies. For example, the doers or implementers of public policy in Professor Pautz’s vignette are agency officials who work for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency or the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. These agencies were created by Congress to carry out laws that not only protect the public’s health but also species. This is often where a lot of the excitement or real policy occurs, and why we focus Chapter 4 entirely on this stage in the process.

*Stage Six: Policy Evaluation.* Policymaking would not be complete without the final stage: evaluation. Within this phase, **policy evaluators** measure and assess the effectiveness of programs and policies. For example, a policy evaluator will determine if the Affordable Care Act has increased health benefits for the public. A policy evaluator researches the intended outcomes of programs and policies, and provides recommendations to members of Congress. Such recommendations could include that Congress provides more funding for a program or that a program should be eliminated. The goal is for a policy evaluator to use data-driven evaluations (value-neutral) in their assessment, not their personal opinion (value-laden) to document the viable options moving forward.

This description of the policy process model provides a brief introduction to how policy is made in the United States. Inevitably, there are flaws to this model. A policy might not occur in a linear fashion as described, does not make it all the way through each of the stages, or fails to consider the role of equity. Despite these shortcomings, Chapter 2 addresses these concerns and offers additional policy models for exploration. Regardless, each of the aforementioned steps is the foundation to understand the creation of public policy, from start to finish. The second edition of this book continues to question how public policy implementation determines whether the goals of the public policy created are realized. This is where the rubber meets the road, or as we define it, the **doing side of policy**.

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## A MOTLEY CREW: INSTITUTIONAL AND NONINSTITUTIONAL ACTORS

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The policymaking process would not occur without the work and involvement of policy actors—institutional and noninstitutional. Table 1.1 highlights how the institutional actors (the three branches of government, the bureaucracy) and the noninstitutional actors (the media, interest groups, and us) are all drivers in U.S. public policymaking processes.



**TABLE 1.1**

Actors and Involvement in Process

| Actor           | Role Within Policymaking Process                        |
|-----------------|---|
| Congress        | Agenda setting, policy formulation, policy legitimation |
| President       | Agenda setting, policy formulation, policy legitimation |
| Courts          | Policy evaluation                                       |
| Bureaucracy     | Policy implementation, policy evaluation                |
| Interest groups | Agenda setting, policy formulation                      |
| Media           | Agenda setting  |
| Us              | All stages of the process                               |

### The Three Branches of Government

Congress, the president, and the Supreme Court are all involved in U.S. public policymaking. Article I, Section I, of the U.S. Constitution clearly notes that Congress has the lawmaking authority to create or develop legislation. A total of 535 elected individuals comprise Congress: 435 for the U.S. House of Representatives and 100 for the U.S. Senate. In 2020, 126 out of the 535 members of the U.S. Congress are women, with 48 women of color. Members of Congress determine what reaches the policymaking agenda and how these policies are formulated and adopted.

Specifically, within the stages of how a bill becomes a law, a policy can move forward or cease to exist within a committee. The committee determines which bills are heard and make it to the floor for deliberation for a vote. For example, in 2019, the House of Representatives Proposed the Equality Act to prohibit discrimination based on sex, sexual orientation, and gender identity in public accommodations and facilities, to name a few. The fate of this legislation remains with the Senate Judiciary Committee.

Remember, even if you reach the policymaking agenda and out of committee, it needs to be passed in both the House and Senate. Nonetheless, Congress is a powerful power broker in setting the tone for U.S. policymaking (Mayhew 2004).

This is not to say that the president does not play a role in policymaking. The president can and does shape public policy. Presidents are elected every four years and can serve two consecutive four-year terms. Popular presidents can use the **bully pulpit**—speeches, radio addresses, YouTube videos, Twitter, or forums to engender public support for a position. For instance, in 2016, President Barack Obama’s approval ratings were approximately 50 percent (Gallup 2016). Put simply, 50 percent of the population thought President Obama was doing a good job. Because of this, President Obama used public support to push for his policy directives to take shape. The idea is that popular presidents can use speeches to engender support from the public to then call their congressperson to pressure for action on a public problem.

One such example is paid parental leave for parents. In speeches to the public and the 2016 State of the Union address, President Obama stressed that the United States should pass legislation to provide six weeks of paid parental leave for all federal employees as part of the 2017 budget (Lunney 2016). As Lunney suggests, “Obama’s push for paid parental leave is part of a larger agenda to strengthen the middle class by giving families more work–life flexibility.” Although Congress has yet to adopt this policy, there is growing backing among members due to President Obama’s and the public’s support for the endeavor.

By way of comparison, a president’s use of the bully pulpit can backfire. President Trump, a frequent Twitter user, was removed from the social media site indefinitely for his speech which led to the march on the U.S. Capitol to challenge the 2020 election results. The January 6, 2021 March resulted in a second impeachment for President Trump.

The U.S. Supreme Court is not an active participant in public policymaking like Congress or the president. The courts are reactive. Simply put, the courts do not initiate public policy, yet their decisions have public policy implications. We have a dual court system in the United States, guided by three types of law: public, criminal, and civil.

**Public law** deals with constitutional and administrative questions related to government actions, **criminal law** regulates the conduct of individuals, and **civil law** deals with disputes between individuals or organizations. Also, there are differences between federal and state courts. For instance, the entry point for all federal criminal cases (such as robbing a bank) or civil cases (disputes between states or individuals, such as divorce) is the U.S. district court. If convicted at the U.S. district court level, the accused have the right to appeal the case. If the appeal is heard, this would take place at the U.S. court of appeals (thirteen total, eleven geographically located, and two specialty circuits for bankruptcy and patents). If again convicted, cases can be appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court. However, on average, the U.S. Supreme Court hears about seventy to eighty cases per year; this is about 1–5 percent of all cases appealed to the Court.

The U.S. Supreme Court typically includes nine justices who are appointed by the president and confirmed by the Senate. The justices can serve for life, providing “good behavior.”<sup>3</sup> The Court impacts policy by how the justices choose to interpret the law. If a business decides to sue the government because the business believes the Affordable Care Act placed unwarranted economic burdens on it, then the Court would need to interpret the intent of the law.

The Affordable Care Act was challenged by the arts-and-crafts chain Hobby Lobby in 2013. Hobby Lobby executives did not think they should have to cover restrictive contraception options for female employees, such as Plan B, also known as the morning-after pill. Company founders believed that life begins after conception, and therefore Hobby Lobby did not want to provide coverage for female employees. Hobby Lobby noted that its religious preferences were protected under the Religious Freedom Restoration Act as the rationale for the suit. In *Burrell v. Hobby Lobby Stores, Inc.*, the Court found in favor of Hobby Lobby and concluded that for-profit companies do not have to provide employees restrictive contraception coverage due to

religious reasons. However, the company would still have to provide less restrictive coverage, such as birth control pills, for its employees. This case demonstrates how the Supreme Court impacts public policy, or how the Affordable Care Act is interpreted, which affects the lives of individuals who work for organizations like Hobby Lobby (Oyez 2016).

## The Implementers

We often forget about the heavy lifters in the process: bureaucrats or the bureaucracy. There are a variety of ways scholars have defined “bureaucracy.”<sup>4</sup> According to William Niskanen (1971), “the original use of the term, I understand, referred to cloth covering the desk (bureau) of eighteenth-century French officials” (23). The bureaucracy, as defined by James Q. Wilson (1991), is “a complex and varied phenomenon, not a simple category or political epithet” (10). Armies, schools, and prisons, as Wilson (1991) notes, are all bureaucracies. The seminal approach to define the bureaucracy originates from the work of Max Weber (1947). For Weber, the bureaucracy is synonymous with defining all large organizations.

However, when bureaucracy is mentioned, pejorative terms come to mind—lazy, incompetent employees, or paper pushers. This should not be the case, as Anthony Downs’s *Inside Bureaucracy* (1964) reminds us:

It is ironic that the bureaucracy is still primarily a term of scorn, even though bureaus are among the most important institutions in every nation in the world. Not only do bureaus provide employment for a very significant fraction of the world’s population, but also they make critical decisions which shape the economic, political, social, and even moral lives of nearly everyone on earth. (130)

The bureaucracy and a bureaucrat’s role in society are much more than the common stereotypes. These individuals are your next-door neighbors and ensure you have clean drinking water or protect the whales from oil spills in Professor Pautz’s vignette. Yet are these individuals allowed to do this? Are bureaucrats doing Congress’s job?

The bureaucracy was created by Congress to translate vague congressional statutes and to implement public policies. It is the people within the bureaucracy, the bureaucrats or civil servants—police officers, teachers, or environmental inspectors—who carry out legislation on a daily basis (Niskanen 1971). The bureaucrats are the individuals who work within the bureaucracy to implement public policy. Put succinctly, policy implementation “[r]epresents the state where government executes an adopted policy as specified legislation or policy action” (Theodoulou and Kofinis 2004, 166–167). The bureaucracy was created to implement public policy in the United States because members of Congress do not have the time or expertise to carry out the laws they pass.

Thus, agencies, including the Human Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), to name a few, fulfill an essential role in ensuring that landmark legislation such as the Clean Air Act, the Endangered Species Act, or the Affordable

Care Act are carried out and implemented. The HRSA determines what contraceptive plans should be covered for women under the Affordable Care Act. The EPA protects the public's health by making sure the air we breathe and the water in which we swim is clean. And the USFWS ensures that species like whales are protected from oil spills. This introduction on the bureaucracy sets the tone for bureaucratic decision-making discussions in Chapters 2 and 4.

Although the aforementioned examples for Congress, president, Supreme Court, and bureaucracy are not exhaustive, the point is to begin to understand how each affects public policy. The remaining chapters of our text fill in the details.

## The Media, Interest Groups, and Us

Noninstitutional actors—the media, interest groups, and us—play a pivotal role in public policymaking. There are three ways to classify media in the United States—**broadcast**, **print**, and the Internet. Broadcast media include radio and television, print encompasses newspapers and magazines, and the Internet is an online resource that incorporates cyber versions of the more traditional media sources (Ginsberg et al. 2013). Interest groups are organized groups of individuals who fight for a cause.

There are several types of interest groups in the United States, ranging from businesses and professional associations to public interest and ideological interest groups. A **business interest group** wants to protect economic interests and includes groups such as chambers of commerce, which represent small and large businesses in the United States. **Professional interest groups** include organizations such as the American Bar Association (lawyers) or the American Medical Association (medical professionals). Public interest groups include organizations that advocate for causes, such as consumer or environmental protection. One such example is the Wool Growers Association from Professor Scheberle's vignette.

The Wool Growers Association wants to advocate for policies that protect livestock or the economic interests of ranchers. This group would be in contrast with another public interest group—the Sierra Club, a large environmental organization that advocates for environmental and species protection. In this case, the Sierra Club would promote the protection of species like wolves to counter the arguments of the Wool Growers Association.

The final type of interest group, ideological groups, provides individuals with an organization to promote their broader political perspectives or government ideologies. For instance, individuals from a religious perspective might be attracted to the Christian Coalition. The purpose of the Christian Coalition is to allow individuals of faith a pathway to be involved in policymaking.

## Shaping Policy

The media and interest groups can and do shape public policy. For example, the media coverage about a topic can impact Americans' perceptions about public problems. Journalists interpret or frame the story to the public. Framing is a powerful mechanism because it shapes a person's preferences regarding policy priorities. Moreover, framing

can and does set the policymaking agenda (Guber and Bosso 2013) because when a journalist uses images (e.g., photos or video), priming occurs. For instance, think about how the image below (Photo 1.1) after the *Exxon Valdez* oil spill might have impacted individuals like Professor Pautz. Images like this stick in the minds of the American public, and interest groups use them to support their causes and pressure lawmakers to pass policy.



AP Photo/John Gaps III

**PHOTO 1.1**  
*Exxon Valdez* Oil Spill

More specifically, each type of interest group attempts to advocate for positions to set the agenda for members of Congress. Interest group advocacy occurs through the act of **lobbying**. A lobbyist is a person who is hired by an organization to meet with congressional representatives to persuade them to pass policies to benefit their interests. Interest group advocacy is achievable because we are members of interest groups. Members of Congress listen to interest groups because they represent us, who elect them into office. Also, professional interest groups such as the American Medical Association can offer research on topics—for instance, the effectiveness of programs like Medicaid use per hospital in the United States.

In addition to lobbying, interest groups provide financial support for campaigns. Table 1.2 demonstrates the amount of money provided to members of Congress for 2019–2020. The idea is that if you donate money to a congressional candidate this helps to pass policies on your group’s behalf. The top financial contributors to Congress for 2019–2020 were professional interests within the areas of finance, insurance, and real estate. Regardless, millions of dollars are spent to pressure lawmakers to act, and the question becomes if we can play a role in this process.

**TABLE 1.2**  
Follow the Money

| Rank | Interests Represented             | Amount Provided to Members of Congress |
|------|-----------------------------------|--|
| 1    | Financial, insurance, real estate | \$1,969,655,697                        |
| 2    | Ideology or single issue          | \$1,080,858,921                        |
| 3    | Lawyers                           | \$381,959,589                          |
| 4    | Health                            | \$628,270,718                          |
| 5    | Communications or electronics     | \$620,773,090                          |

Source: Center for Responsive Politics. <https://www.opensecrets.org/industries/>.



## What About Us?

Although the media and interest groups can affect our own perceptions about public policy or a policymaker, how can the normal, everyday citizen make an impact on U.S. public policymaking? You can run for office, and if elected, shape the design or formulation of policy. But at the federal level, this only includes 535 individuals within Congress. There are over 300 million individuals living in the United States.

More realistically, you can make more of an impact as a member of an interest group, as a journalist, or as an implementer. If you are interested in pay equity, we might suggest you join the League of Women Voters to understand why men and women are paid different wages for the same type of position. You could major in journalism and interpret and present policy facts for us to digest. Or you could major in political science, wildlife biology, sociology, or forestry and work for a state or federal agency and implement public policy. Through these examples, we can and do shape the public policymaking process more broadly.

But you cannot forget that beyond understanding the process and the actors involved, you consume public policy every day. As you check Snapchat, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, BuzzFeed, or Instagram, in what ways did you consume public policy today? Did you just skim the headlines that span across your Facebook feed? As you consume public policy, it impacts your judgments about what should or should not be done. However, are judgments and daily consumption driven by value-laden or value-neutral research?

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## POLICY ANALYSIS

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One of the best ways we can become involved in public policymaking is to understand the profession of policy analysis. We consume information, but how do we know if a policy is efficient and effective? Policy evaluators regularly assess the effectiveness of all major laws to ensure they are achieving their goals. An entire field—policy analysis—has been dedicated to the evaluation of policy (Dunn 2008; Quade 1989). We suggest policy evaluation is “deconstructing an object of study—that is, breaking it down into basic elements to understand it better” (Kraft and Furlong 2015, 8).

### Policy Evaluation

Policy evaluation, stage six of the policymaking process, is conducted by policy analysts or program evaluators. These individuals have varying skills, expertise, and educational backgrounds depending upon the policy they study (Bardach 2004). Policy analysts may have backgrounds in biology, ecology, political science, engineering, or economics, to name a few. More specifically, a policy analyst is not supposed to inject their values or beliefs into the analysis. Therefore, the evaluator can provide an evidence-based policy analysis that includes all of the relevant factors so policymakers can make changes or modifications based upon that objective information (Dunn 2008).

However, the act of policy evaluation is not this simple (Dunn 2008; Weimer and Vining 2011). Policy analysts do not have unlimited resources to acquire data regarding



every single policy problem (Weimer and Vining 2011). Also, how an evaluator structures analyses may elevate some priorities over others, based upon necessity (Dunn 2008). The supporter of the evaluation (the person funding the project) may also sway the overall outcome of the analysis based upon their own values (Bardach 2004; Weimer and Vining 2011). For instance, if a member of Congress does not agree with charter schools, they can pay a private firm in his home district to conduct an evaluation to provide evidence that aligns with his stance.

Since we are all consumers of policy, what sources have been evaluated in a value-neutral fashion? The U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) and the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) assessments of policy are sources of unbiased and accurate analyses, but these are not the only entities that provide policy evaluation (Kraft and Furlong 2015). There are a whole host of other federal agencies, think tanks, trade associations, environmental interests, and other entities that provide policy evaluations, but their assumptions and evaluative criteria (the way a group evaluates a program) can vary greatly, which Chapter 2 delves into more deeply.

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## WHY STUDYING PUBLIC POLICY MATTERS

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Public policy is complex, with a variety of actors involved and models to understand how and why policies are made. Without our participation in the policy process, we may get policies we do not agree with because someone from a different viewpoint may press policymakers much more strongly. For example, Chapter 6 explores the power of the National Rifle Association (NRA) to maintain limited gun control in the United States, even though many Americans favor additional controls. As such, understanding the study and practice of public policy is important for you because (1) it helps our communities address problems, (2) it follows a systematic process to provide solutions, and (3) it is designed and implemented by countless practitioners.

*Public Policy and Community.* Understanding public policy is important because “Public policy is about communities trying to achieve something as communities” (Stone 2012, 20). More specifically, community can be a political or cultural community.

As Stone (2012) succinctly remarks, “A political community is a group of people who live under the same rules and structure of governance. A cultural community is a group of people who share a culture and draw their identities from shared language, history and traditions” (21). It is within these communities that we define public problems or dilemmas. Simply put, our community defines our own experiences.

Our opening vignettes presented how different communities identify and grapple with public problems. Professor Rinfret’s small, rural community allowed her to question more broadly what role women and minorities can, and should, play in society and that is okay to question societal normalizations that advantage certain segments of the population over others. Professor Scheberle’s experiences were first defined by her work community, but later by her years as a college professor exploring public service and environmental policy, showing that life experiences of different communities can influence policy positions. Professor Pautz explained how her college community or the classroom demonstrated that solutions are available to protect whales from a public

problem—oil spills. These experiences identify that where we live or with whom we interact shapes how we define what a problem is.

*Public Policy and Solutions.* To address public problems, public policy is also the practice of a rigorous, systematic process. Answering our questions warrants “designated policy study” (Anderson 2003, 1). Specifically, the policymaking process is a method that is inspired by a series of steps on how public policy develops to tackle public problems. In this chapter we have discussed the stages heuristic approach, but more approaches will be discussed in Chapter 2.

The notion is that most public problems, if they reach the agenda, are addressed through a framework to provide solutions. The stages heuristic approach is invaluable for students of public policy to understand the evolution of the process. As Theodoulou and Kofinis (2004) conclude:

By focusing on each of these phases, and the various additional stages, students may come to understand how policies originate, develop, and grow in a step-by-step process. Although no method is perfect, the policy cycle approach offers students a solid, practical tool with which to understand the dynamics and structure of American policy making. (34)

*Public Policy: A Profession.* We could not understand public policy without studying the doing side of public policy. In particular, public policy is a profession guided by experts in specific fields (e.g., health, education, civil rights, environment, energy). These individuals not only translate vague legislation into programs to address public problems and evaluate its effectiveness, but they ensure we have clean water to drink or fresh air to breathe. Nevertheless, public policy is multifaceted and messy: it is affected and shaped by our communities; addressed through processes; and designed and implemented by public servants in agencies, nonprofits, or volunteers in local government.

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## CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

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Public policy is driven by our own experiences, but it is often messy due to the actors involved or the roles that power and politics play. Remember that the work of public policy is a process and does not end with its creation or inception, but continues with the doing side of public policy—implementation and evaluation.

Also, we cannot forget the important recognition of *value-neutral* and *value-laden*. We are consumers of public policy each and every day, and this consumption is defined by our communities, which can lead to value-laden decisions. Public policy experts across specialized fields are trained to make value-neutral solutions to address public problems, yet we encourage the reader to consider who is left out of policymaking conversations and how our collective work helps individuals at the margins.

In short, this chapter presented a variety of concepts to provide insights into why the field of public policy is far-reaching and essential. This chapter serves as a guidepost for what is to follow. And, by the time you complete this textbook at the end of your semester, you will have the skills necessary to engage in the process.

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## KEY TERMS

|                            |                     |                                 |
|----------------------------|---------------------|---------------------------------|
| Broadcast 12               | Equity 5            | Power 3                         |
| Bully pulpit 9             | Federalism 4        | Print 12                        |
| Business interest group 12 | Implementation 2    | Professional interest groups 12 |
| Civil law 10               | Lobbying 13         | Public 3                        |
| Criminal law 10            | Pluralism 3         | Public law 10                   |
| Doing side of policy 8     | Policy 3            | Stages heuristic approach 6     |
| Elitism 3                  | Policy evaluators 8 | Value-laden 2                   |
| Equality 5                 | Politics 3          | Value-neutral 2                 |

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## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. The chapter begins with our own, personal stories. What personal experiences have you had that raise a policy question?
2. A variety of policy actors are involved in the policymaking process. Yet many Americans do not involve themselves in this process. What suggestions would you present to your friends and family about how to get involved in policymaking?
3. From the list of categories to public policy (distributive, redistributed, regulatory), what are the strengths and weaknesses of each category? Which category, in your opinion, best represents public policymaking in the twenty-first century?
4. Policymaking can be controversial. Select a current public policy you define as controversial and explain why the concepts of value-neutral and value-laden are important in these conversations.

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## SUGGESTED RESOURCES

### Suggested Websites

GovTrack, <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/committees/>.  
Oyez, <https://www.oyez.org/>.  
U.S. Congress, <https://www.congress.gov/>.  
U.S. Supreme Court, <http://www.supremecourt.gov/>.  
White House, <http://www.whitehouse.gov>.

### Suggested Books or Articles

Bachrach, Peter, and Morton S. Baratz. 1962. "Two Faces of Power." *The American Political Science Review* 56, no. 4: 947–52.  
Dahl, Robert A. 1961. *Who Governs? Democracy and Power in an American City*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Kraft, Michael, and Scott Furlong. 2015. *Public Policy: Politics, Analysis, and Alternatives*. Washington, DC: CQ Press.  
Lukes, Steven. 1974. *Power: A Radical View* (vol. 1). London: Macmillan.  
Stone, Deborah. 2011. *The Policy Paradox*. W. W. Norton.

### Suggested Films

*All the Way*, DVD, directed by Jay Roach (2016: United States), <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt3791216/>.  
*Confirmation*, DVD, directed by Rick Famuyiwa (2016: United States), <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt4608402/>.

*Iron Jawed Angels*, DVD, directed by Katja von Garnier (2004: United States), [www.imdb.com/title/tt0338139/](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0338139/).

*Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*, DVD, directed by Frank Capra (1939: United States), <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0031679/>.

*The Suffragette*, DVD, directed by Sarah Gavron (2015: United States), <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt3077214/>.

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## NOTES

1. Intersectionality: the interconnectedness of race, class, gender when considering how these groups overlap through the lens of disadvantages.
2. Institutions (e.g., Congress) and process by which policy choices are made or determined.
3. The U.S. Constitution grants Congress the authority to determine the size of the U.S. Supreme Court.
4. The 1789 Judiciary Act set the number of justices at six, which fluctuated until 1869, when Congress set the number to nine justices; this has remained the same till today.
4. A federal agency is representative of the bureaucracy.

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