

PUBLIC POLICY IN INDIA

COURSE CODE: M23PS03DE

Discipline Specific Elective Course

Postgraduate Programme in Political Science

Self Learning Material



SREENARAYANAGURU
OPEN UNIVERSITY

SREENARAYANAGURU OPEN UNIVERSITY

The State University for Education, Training and Research in Blended Format, Kerala

SREENARAYANAGURU OPEN UNIVERSITY

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To increase access of potential learners of all categories to higher education, research and training, and ensure equity through delivery of high quality processes and outcomes fostering inclusive educational empowerment for social advancement.

Mission

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Pathway

Access and Quality define Equity.

Public Policy in India

Course Code: M23PS03DE

Semester- III

Discipline Specific Elective Course
Postgraduate Programme in
Political Science
Self Learning Material
(Model Question Paper Sets)



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The State University for Education, Training and Research in Blended Format, Kerala



Public Policy in India

Course Code: M23PS03DE

Semester- III

Discipline Specific Elective Course

Postgraduate Programme in

Political Science

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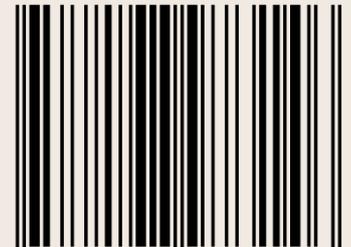


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MESSAGE FROM VICE CHANCELLOR

Dear learner,

I extend my heartfelt greetings and profound enthusiasm as I warmly welcome you to Sreenarayanaguru Open University. Established in September 2020 as a state-led endeavour to promote higher education through open and distance learning modes, our institution was shaped by the guiding principle that access and quality are the cornerstones of equity. We have

firmly resolved to uphold the highest standards of education, setting the benchmark and charting the course.

The courses offered by the Sreenarayanaguru Open University aim to strike a quality balance, ensuring students are equipped for both personal growth and professional excellence. The University embraces the widely acclaimed “blended format,” a practical framework that harmoniously integrates Self-Learning Materials, Classroom Counseling, and Virtual modes, fostering a dynamic and enriching experience for both learners and instructors.

The University aims to offer you an engaging and thought-provoking educational journey. The MA programme in Political Science offers an advanced study of governmental structures and processes. It combines theoretical frameworks with practical applications, emphasising policy analysis and implementation. The curriculum covers organizational theory, public policy, administrative law, governance ethics, etc. Through the courses, learners gain expertise in public sector management. This programme prepares graduates for leadership roles in government agencies, non-profits, and international organizations, as well as for further academic pursuits. The Self-Learning Material has been meticulously crafted, incorporating relevant examples to facilitate better comprehension.

Rest assured, the university’s student support services will be at your disposal throughout your academic journey, readily available to address any concerns or grievances you may encounter. We encourage you to reach out to us freely regarding any matter about your academic programme. It is our sincere wish that you achieve the utmost success.



Regards,
Dr. Jagathy Raj V. P.

01-11-2025

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BLOCK 1

Public Policy: An Introduction



SRI SARVAGUNA GURU
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SGOU - SLM - MA Political Science - Public Policy in India

1

UNIT

1

Public Policy: Nature, Scope and Significance

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this unit, learners will be able to:

- define and explain the concept and characteristics of public policy.
- explain the development of public policy as a field of academic study and its interdisciplinary nature.
- identify the different forms and levels of public policies, including their objectives and implications.
- distinguish between public policies and related concepts such as decisions, goals, and planning.
- evaluate the role and impact of public policy in shaping democratic governance and national development.

Background

Public policy has evolved as a vital area of study within the social sciences. While the roots of policy thinking extend back centuries, the formal study of public policy gained momentum in the mid-20th century, particularly under American influence. Early political scientists focused mainly on the structure and function of political institutions, often overlooking the practical aspects of policymaking. This changed when scholars like Thomas R. Dye and Harold Lasswell emphasised the need to study not just institutions, but also the actual decisions and actions taken by governments.

Public policy refers to the set of actions, laws, regulations, and decisions made by government bodies to address public concerns. These actions reflect society's values and priorities, aiming to solve problems, allocate resources, and guide development. Policymaking is not just about government administration; it involves planning, goal-

setting, evaluation, and the consideration of various social, economic, and political factors.

Over time, public policy has grown into an interdisciplinary field that encompasses political science, public administration, law, economics, sociology, and environmental studies. It has also become more practical and problem-solving in nature. In democratic societies, public policy is seen as a mechanism through which governments can promote public welfare, reduce inequalities, and plan for the future. Today, policymaking is deeply tied to development goals, governance reforms, and improving citizens' lives. Thus, the study of public policy has become essential for understanding how governments function and how they respond to social needs and challenges.

Keywords

Policy Sciences, Policy Goals, Decision-Making, Governance, Mega Policies, Policy Analysis, Policy Implementation, Policy Planning, and Development Planning

Discussion

Public policy has been studied for a long time, but the modern approach to policy analysis has strong American influences from the 20th century. The foundations of this field were laid in the 1940s, and since then, it has significantly influenced both academia and government institutions. As an academic subject, public policy started gaining recognition in the 1950s. Over time, it has evolved and expanded, striving to be recognised as a distinct discipline within the social sciences. It is an essential part of various fields, including political science, public administration, economics, and business management, as it focuses on the decisions and actions taken by the government.

Previously, public policy was mostly studied by political scientists who concentrated on government structures and their philosophical foundations rather than the policies themselves. Their main interest was in political institutions and their struggle for power, with little emphasis on how policies were actually made. Over time, this has changed. Thomas R. Dye notes that political science now emphasises public policy, particularly understanding why governments take certain actions and the impact of those actions. While political scientists now pay more attention to how policies are formed, public administration



scholars recognise that government officials play a crucial role in shaping policies, not just implementing them.

In recent years, public policy has evolved into a separate branch of social sciences known as "policy sciences." This concept was introduced by Harold Lasswell in 1951. Today, policy sciences go beyond simply aiming to create socially useful knowledge. However, in the 21st century, their ability to provide objective and reliable insights has been questioned.

1.1.1 Public Policy: Meaning and Definition

☐ Goal-directed government action

To begin with, public policy is a goal-directed course of action. These actions are taken by the government to address a public problem. Public policy is as old as governments themselves. Regardless of the forms and wherever and whenever the government has existed, public policies have been formulated and implemented. To cope with the problems and demands of the people, the government has to create many policies. These policies are called public policies. The field of public policy has emerged recently, with its beginnings traced back to the early 1950s. The concept of policy science was born in 1951, with the publication of Harold Lasswell and Daniel Lerner's 'The Policy Science: Recent Developments in Scope and Methods.'

Public policy is a guide to action to be taken by the administration with regard to a series of matters. It constitutes a system consisting of:

- a. Course of action
- b. Regulatory measures
- c. Laws of the state
- d. Society's norms
- e. Funding priorities, and
- f. Execution by the government.

It embodies rules enacted from the constitution, legislative acts, and judicial decisions. Its elements are drawn from social sciences such as economics, political science, sociology, ethics, etc.

1.1.1.1 Definitions

Public policy may be defined as what the government says

to do or not to do. It is the goal or purpose of government programmes. To gain a clear understanding of the concept, it is desirable to examine a few definitions provided by scholars and experts in the field.

According to Robert Stone, public policy is ‘the relationship of the government to its environment’, whereas Thomsa R. Dye states, ‘Public policy is whatever the government chooses to do or not to do’. Richard Rose asserts, “Public policy is not a decision but is a course or pattern of activity.” David Easton defines ‘Public policy as the output of the political system and is the authoritative allocation of values’ for the whole society.

Scholarly definitions

Thus, public policy comprises governmental decisions and activities through which the government attains certain goals and objectives. The formulation and implementation of public policy involve a well-planned pattern. It requires interaction between government agencies, namely the executive, legislature, bureaucracy, and judiciary.

1.1.1.2 Components of Public Policy

Austin Ranney explains various components of public policy. They are:

Ranney's five components

1. Declaration of goals and objectives
2. Declaration of course of action
3. Declaration of social values
4. Declaration of intent, and
5. Implementation of intent

1.1.1.3 Major Features of Public Policy

The most important features of public policy are given below:

Policy features listed

1. Public policy is a goal-oriented action
2. Public policy is a course of actions. It is an outcome of the government’s collective action
3. Public policy is not what the government actually does, nor what subsequently happens, but rather what the government intended to do
4. Public policy may be either positive or negative in form
5. Public policy has a legal and authoritative base.



Members of society pay taxes, obey traffic rules, and adhere to pollution control norms because of their legal sanctions and coercive power

6. Public policy involves many participants – policymakers, the public, other interest groups, experts, and the media

☐ Reasons for growth

1.1.1.4 Reason for its growth

1. Awareness among the people that policies and government programmes are for the benefit of citizens.
2. The expanded role of government in regulating and distributing goods and services, as well as providing welfare activities.
3. The poor performance of government policies and programmes and the demand for solutions to problems.
4. The role of political scientists in maintaining relevance in governance.

1.1.1.5 Factors influencing Public Policy

Policies are not made in a vacuum. Several factors, such as political, economic, social, and cultural influences, play a role in determining public policy. In this context, policymakers are bound to consider the following factors:

1. Public policy must comply with the provisions of the constitution and the laws enacted by the legislature. Judicial decisions also influence policymaking.
2. Existing values, ethics, customs, traditions, beliefs, and public opinion influence policymaking.
3. External factors, such as international law and international institutions like the IMF and World Bank, also exert influence. At present, no country can make policies in isolation without giving due consideration to these values.
4. Various government departments must grant clearance for a policy if they are affected by it.
5. Political parties, pressure groups, professional associations, etc., influence public policy to serve their interests.

Public policymaking is a lengthy process involving a large number of institutions and individuals at various stages. The main organs engaged are the legislature, the executive, political parties, and pressure groups. Politicians, civil servants,

❑ Policy-making process/Levels

professionals, and the public also participate in the process. Policymaking is a continuous endeavour, being formulated and reformulated at various levels in the administrative hierarchy. E.N. Gladden divides the policymaking process into four levels. At the highest level, there is a political policy formulated by Parliament. At the second level, there is an executive policy framed by the cabinet. The third level comprises an administrative policy framed by the administration. At the lowest level, there is a technical policy, which is a day-to-day policy enacted by officials.

❑ Parsons' policy aims

1.1.1.6 Significance of Public Policy

Public policy is a significant component of any political system. It is primarily concerned with the public and their problems. The role of public policy is to shape society for its betterment. According to W. Parsons, public policy aims to enlighten the future development of individuals, promote social awareness and legitimacy, rather than merely deliver goods and services. Thus, it involves improving the democratic and political capacities of the people as well as the efficiency or effectiveness of service delivery. Consequently, public policy has a participatory and democratic character.

❑ Developmental role highlighted

Public policy has a developmental role to play. Well-planned policy aids in the socio-economic development of the nation. After independence, India formulated a number of policies aimed at socio-economic development and transformation. In this context, the role of the Planning Commission may be remembered. Policies regarding agricultural development, industrial growth, poverty eradication, rural development, and so on were also established. All these policies yielded positive results.

❑ Nation building contribution

Public policies have also contributed to the task of nation-building. Now India is ready to face and defend external challenges. We have also succeeded in uniting divergent groups (castes, religions, languages). Thus, we can see that public policies have helped achieve socio-economic development and maintain national unity and integrity.

❑ Political science relevance

The role of public policy is also relevant to political science. Public policy can be studied to gain greater knowledge about the origin, development, and consequences for society. This knowledge will enhance our understanding of the political system and society. Furthermore, the study of public policy



enables us to apply social science knowledge to solve practical problems.

❑ Political utility/
Crises

Public policy has political utility. It ensures that the nation adopts the right policies to achieve the right goals. It may be argued that political scientists cannot be silent or impotent in the face of significant political crises. They have a moral obligation to advocate for specific public policies. This task is fulfilled by politicians who possess knowledge of public policies. Thus, a scientific analysis of public policy helps in understanding the causes and consequences of policies, thereby facilitating practical solutions to social problems.

❑ Complexity/
Social ill

Public policy has assumed considerable importance in the context of increasing complexity in society. It helps to explain the causes and consequences of government activity. Public policy not only aids in understanding social ills but also provides devices and mechanisms for curing these ills.

In short, public policy acts as oxygen for the growth and development of the country and its people. Good policies elevate the country to great heights. Without good public policy and planning, a country would become stagnant and fall behind the rest of the world. Furthermore, policy studies help scholars, administrators, politicians, and political scientists to analyse every policy in depth and improve its choices, formulation, implementation, and feedback process. We may say that public policy serves as a mechanism to regulate the activities of individuals and groups in society in the public interest. It gives concrete shape to the objectives of administration. Public policy determines the future shape of society and affects people in the social, economic, and political spheres of life. It impacts the general public, legislature, administrators, interest groups, and the media.

1.1.2 Public Policy and Other Related Concepts

1.1.2.1 Policies and Decisions

A policy is a planned course of action, while a decision refers to making a judgment in a specific situation. Although policy-making involves decision-making, not every decision qualifies as a policy. Decision-making typically includes identifying a problem, analysing possible solutions, and selecting the best course of action. Administrators make decisions as part of their daily responsibilities within the existing policy framework.

The decisions they make help guide administrative actions. Anderson explains that "policy decisions" are those made by public officials that shape or authorise public policy. These decisions may involve issuing executive orders, creating administrative regulations, or interpreting laws in court.

1.1.2.2 Policies and Goals

Policy-making is about choosing objectives and goals, which means it involves values and priorities. While policies and goals are connected, they are not the same. Goals are the desired outcomes, while policies outline the steps to achieve those outcomes. Policies help direct actions toward specific objectives and may include rules that encourage or prohibit certain behaviours. Since policies reflect values, decision-makers often base them on their beliefs about what serves the public interest. Research on the Supreme Court suggests that judges' decisions are influenced by their policy values.

1.1.2.3 Policy-Making and Planning

In a democracy, policy-making involves not just choosing programmes but also defining their objectives and methods. It also includes deciding how policies will be implemented. However, policy-making and planning are different. A plan is a structured approach to achieving specific goals, meaning that planning is part of policy-making. Government plans often do not clearly define goals; instead, they may be vague, inconsistent, or contradictory. A national development plan, for example, is a collection of projects that may not always fit together as a unified strategy. Resource allocation and setting targets in various economic sectors are central to planning. However, having financial investments alone is not enough to achieve targets; a well-defined policy framework is essential. Effective policies lead to successful plans and efficient administration.

1.1.3 Scope of Public Policy

Public policy is a crucial field of study and practice. Since its development as an area of research, it has expanded in both theory and application. A key aspect of studying public policy is analysing current trends and predicting future developments. In many developing countries, governments face increasing pressure to accelerate national progress, adopt modern technology, reform institutions, boost economic production,

❑ Expanding scope/
Pressures



maximise resource utilisation, and improve living standards. As a result, the scope and importance of public policy have grown significantly.

The study of public policy involves understanding its nature, causes, and effects using insights from multiple disciplines. Policy analysis is an approach that integrates research from various fields to address real-world problems. The study of policy analysis includes:

1. **Understanding the Policy Process:** This involves identifying issues, setting priorities, designing, implementing, and evaluating policies.
2. **Using Research in Policy-Making:** This includes applying analytical methods, research, and advocacy to define problems, develop policies, and assess their impact.

Public policies influence almost every aspect of daily life. They cover a wide range of issues, from essential matters like defence, healthcare, and education to economic policies such as taxation and inflation. Policies also extend to areas like environmental protection, transportation, housing, and technological advancements. These sectors involve collaboration across different disciplines, institutions, and organisations. Within each policy area, various research institutions, political groups, civil society organisations, and advocacy groups work to identify challenges and push for effective policy solutions.

Policy wide influence

1.1.4 Significance of Public Policy

Public policy plays a crucial role in a democratic government by addressing issues that affect society as a whole. It focuses on public concerns rather than individual or private matters. The idea behind public policy is that certain aspects of life belong to the community, not just individuals, and require collective action. In a democracy, public policies help achieve important societal goals.

Crucial democratic role

1.1.4.1 Improving Society

One of the main purposes of public policy is to shape society for the better. It aims not only to improve government services but also to enhance democratic participation. Instead of focusing solely on making public services more efficient, policies should strengthen democratic control over governance. This means reforming government structures to make them more inclusive

Shaping society/
Democracy

and accountable, rather than simply adopting market-driven approaches.

1.1.4.2 Enhancing the Economic and Social System

Government role shift

The role of public policy depends on the responsibilities a government takes upon itself. In early capitalist societies, governments played a minimal role, mainly regulating economic and social activities rather than actively shaping them. However, with the rise of planned development, governments began to take an active part in economic and social progress. As a result, public policy expanded beyond regulation to include development initiatives. This shift led to the creation of various government institutions responsible for formulating and implementing policies.

Many developing countries use public policy to drive political, social, and economic progress. To achieve national development, they continuously refine policies that can contribute to growth and stability. Public policy serves as a key tool in moving societies forward by transitioning them from past challenges to future opportunities.

1.1.4.3 Shaping the Future

Addressing future needs

Public policy helps shape the future by addressing how current policies evolved, their present impact, and how they can be improved. In developing nations, the role of public policy has grown significantly due to advancements in technology, industrialisation, urbanisation, and environmental concerns. As public functions expand, so does the need for effective policies.

Studying past policies is essential for understanding the present and planning for the future. Many current policies are influenced by previous decisions, making historical analysis an important part of policy-making. Defining policy problems and exploring possible solutions is at the heart of modern governance. In this way, public policy acts as a strategic tool for solving societal issues and guiding national development.



Summarised Overview

This unit provides a comprehensive understanding of public policy—its meaning, nature, scope, and significance. Public policy is broadly defined as the set of actions and decisions made by the government to solve public issues. It is not only a response to societal needs but also a means of guiding national development. Scholars like David Easton, Dye, Vickers, and Anderson have offered varied definitions, but all emphasise the purposeful and authoritative nature of government actions.

Public policies can be formal or informal, written or unwritten, and may vary in terms of specificity and enforceability. They often include goals, implementation strategies, and responsible authorities. Some policies are clearly stated in laws and regulations, while others are ambiguous or left unexecuted. Policies may be designed to take action (positive) or avoid action (negative). They can be legally binding or based on long-standing traditions.

The unit distinguishes between policies and related concepts such as decisions, goals, and plans. While all policies involve decision-making, not every decision is a policy. Goals refer to desired outcomes, while policies define how to achieve them. Planning is a more structured aspect of policy-making and involves setting targets and allocating resources.

The scope of public policy is broad and covers various sectors such as health, education, defence, environment, and economy. It draws from multiple disciplines and plays a key role in governance. In modern democracies, public policy is essential for responding to complex challenges and promoting equitable development. It helps in shaping the future by analysing past experiences, defining current problems, and proposing solutions. In developing nations especially, public policy is a crucial tool for political, social, and economic transformation.

Self-Assessment Questions

1. Define public policy in your own words.
2. Mention any two characteristics of public policies.
3. What is the contribution of Harold Lasswell to policy sciences?
4. Explain the difference between a policy and a plan.
5. How does public policy influence everyday life?
6. Differentiate between positive and negative public policies.
7. What are mega policies? Give one example.
8. Why is it important to study past policies while planning new ones?

9. Discuss the scope of public policy in modern governance.
10. Explain the role of public policy in the development of democratic societies.

Assignments

1. Analyze the historical evolution of public policy as a field of study, particularly noting the shift in focus from political institutions to policy impact. Discuss how public policy integrates concepts from various social science disciplines (e.g., political science, economics, public administration).
2. Explain the meaning of public policy using definitions provided by scholars like Thomas R. Dye and David Easton. Detail Austin Ranney's five components of public policy and discuss how these components manifest in a real-world policy example (e.g., a traffic or environmental regulation).
3. Distinguish between public policy and the related concepts of decisions, goals, and planning. Illustrate how planning serves as a part of policy-making and how policy decisions differ from routine administrative decisions.
4. Evaluate the significance of public policy in a democratic political system, focusing on its role in shaping society for the betterment and enhancing the economic and social system. Additionally, identify and discuss at least three distinct internal and external factors that influence the determination of public policy.

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Suggested Reading

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Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.

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UNIT 2

Evolution of Public Policy Analysis

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this unit, learners will be able to:

- explain the historical evolution of public policy analysis and its modern significance
- distinguish between different types and approaches to policy analysis
- explain the key steps involved in the policy analysis process
- identify the goals, tools, and methods used by policy analysts
- evaluate how policy analysis informs government decision-making and improves public outcomes

Background

The development of public policy analysis marks a significant shift in how societies approach complex governance issues. Although informal advisory systems existed in ancient societies, the structured and systematic form of policy analysis is a modern phenomenon. As states grew in size, responsibility, and complexity—especially in the 20th century—the demand for evidence-based decision-making increased. This led to the emergence of formal policy research centres, think tanks, and advisory institutions that offered governments analytical insights to address public problems efficiently.

The 1960s and 70s saw the institutionalisation of policy analysis in many developed countries. Nations like the UK and USA established expert bodies to aid in policy planning and evaluation. Over time, the scope of policy advice expanded beyond government departments to include independent research organisations, universities, and civil society groups. This shift acknowledged the need for both technical expertise and diverse viewpoints in policymaking.

Policy analysis evolved into a distinct profession and academic field with its own methodologies, goals, and ethical standards. Analysts began focusing on understanding the causes and consequences of public decisions. Whether advising in advance (ex-ante)

or evaluating outcomes afterwards (ex-post), their role became essential in balancing political feasibility, economic efficiency, and social fairness.

While once dominated by scientific models and rational planning, modern policy analysis now also embraces practical, political, and behavioural aspects. This makes it more grounded in reality, especially in democracies where multiple actors influence decisions. In summary, the study of policy analysis is crucial to understanding how informed decisions are made, evaluated, and improved in a complex and changing world.

Keywords

Ex-ante Analysis, Ex-post Evaluation, Policy Alternatives, Policy Goals, Pragmatic Approach, Descriptive Analysis, Prescriptive Analysis, Think Tanks, Policy Monitoring

Discussion

1.2.1 Origin of Policy Analysis

Policy analysis has existed in some form since the beginning of organised societies. In ancient times, rulers would consult with advisors to make important decisions. However, modern policy analysis, as we know it today, developed mainly in the 20th century. With the growth of the State and access to better tools and information, decision-making became more structured and based on logic and evidence. As governments became more powerful, there was a stronger need to make policies based on reason and reliable information.

Modern analysis origins

Policy research centres

Diverse policy advice

During the 1960s and 1970s, many developed countries established policy research centres and think tanks. For example, the United Kingdom created the Central Policy Review Staff (CPRS) in 1970. This group included experts from various fields and was set up to help the government make smarter, long-term policy decisions. Similar organisations were formed in the United States with the same goal—providing in-depth analysis of specific policy issues.

Over time, the structure of policy advice has become more diverse. Today, governments rely not only on official bodies (such as the executive, legislative, and judicial branches) but also on outside experts and organisations to gather information, give advice, and assess policy outcomes.



❑ Growth and shift

Since the 1970s, training and research in policy analysis have grown significantly in many developed nations. This growth was driven by the rising need to solve public problems effectively. However, in recent times, there has been a noticeable shift away from heavily analytical approaches in policy-making, with more emphasis on practical or political considerations.

1.2.2 Definitions of Policy Analysis

The Dictionary of Public Administration defines policy analysis as “a systematic and data-based alternative to intuitive judgments about the effects of policy or policy options. It is used (a) for problem assessment and monitoring, (b) as a 'before-the-fact' decision tool, and (c) for evaluation.”

❑ Dunn's definition

According to William Dunn, policy analysis is “an applied discipline which uses multiple methods of inquiry and argument to produce and transform policy-relevant information that may be utilised in political settings to resolve public problems.”

Carl Patton and David Sawicki observe that policy analysis is “a systematic evaluation of the technical and economic feasibility and political viability of alternative policies, strategies for implementation, and the consequences of policy adoption.”

Edward S. Quade asserts that policy analysis remains a "reasonable strategy for discovering good solutions."

1.2.3 Implications of Policy Analysis

According to Thomas R. Dye, policy analysis focuses on the following key aspects:

❑ Focus of Policy Analysis

1. **Focus on Understanding Rather than Giving Advice:** Policy analysis is more about explaining policies than simply offering solutions. Recommendations, if made, come after a full understanding of the issue. The belief is that one must first understand a problem clearly before suggesting what should be done, and this is best achieved through careful research, not just opinion or argument.
2. **Searching for Causes and Effects of Policies:** Policy analysis investigates what causes certain policies and what results they produce. This involves following a scientific and logical approach. While advanced tools like statistics can help, they are not always necessary for good analysis.
3. **Developing Broad Theories about Public Policy:** Another important goal is to create general ideas or theories that can

be applied to different policies and government sectors. Analysts aim to develop explanations that are applicable in more than one case and that remain useful over time and in different situations.

According to Stuart S. Nagel, there are four important parts of policy analysis, each of which has evolved over the past four decades:

❑ Four parts of policy analysis listed by Stuart Nagel

1. **Goals:** Policies always aim to achieve certain goals—usually to increase public benefits while reducing public costs. For example, reducing crime is a common goal. Today, analysts often treat goals as starting points (or assumptions) and work on finding the best ways to achieve them.
2. **Means:** These are the tools or methods used to reach the goals. There is growing recognition that the means must be practical in both political and administrative terms. Environmental policies, for instance, exemplify the importance of choosing means that are realistic and acceptable to all stakeholders.
3. **Methods:** This refers to how analysts study the connection between different policy options and the outcomes they produce. Although policy analysis is becoming more accurate and technical, it also acknowledges that sometimes simple methods are sufficient—such as exploring ways to help poor people obtain legal support in civil cases.
4. **Profession of Policy Analysis:** Policy analysis has evolved into a full-fledged profession, with more training programmes, research centres, financial support, academic associations, and government involvement than ever before. This professional growth demonstrates how important and recognised the field has become.

1.2.4 Different Types of Policy Analysis

Policy analysis can be grouped into three main types:

Three main types

❑ Public policy can be grouped as

1. **Ex-ante and Ex-post Policy Analysis:** When policy analysis is conducted before a decision is made, it is referred to as ex-ante or prospective analysis. This type helps predict possible outcomes of a policy. When the analysis is performed after the policy is already in place, it is called ex-post or retrospective analysis. This helps assess whether the policy worked as intended.



2. **Scientific Pragmatic Approaches Analysis:** There are two main ways to approach policy analysis. One is the scientific method, which focuses on facts, logic, and data; supporters like Stokey and Zeckhauser advocate for a rational and objective process. On the other hand, a pragmatic or practical approach recognises that real-world decision-making is influenced by politics, limited information, and human behaviour. Analysts like Quade suggest that while policy analysis isn't an exact science, it still assists decision-makers in making better choices. Even if it is not perfect, it can guide individuals toward more effective solutions and facilitate discussions among stakeholders.
3. **Prescriptive and Descriptive Analysis:** Prescriptive policy analysis focuses on recommending specific actions to achieve certain goals. In contrast, descriptive analysis examines past policies to understand what happened and why. Descriptive analysis typically occurs after a policy has been implemented, helping to evaluate its success or failure.

1.2.5 Stages in Policy Analysis

Policy analysis involves several steps. Each step aids in making informed decisions about public policies.

1. Identifying Problems and Objectives

This is the first and most important step. Often, the goals are not clear, or they may even conflict with one another. To begin, it is essential to clearly define the problem. This includes understanding its background and identifying any potential market failures. Once the problem is well understood, the next step is to determine what goals should be achieved. Frequently, important goals are overlooked, so they must be given careful attention.

❑ Five steps on policy analysis

2. Specifying Policy Alternatives

After the problem and goals are clear, the next step is to consider different policy options. The analyst must determine which choices are most suitable for the situation. As new information becomes available or as goals change, new options may be added. This step should not be regarded as a routine task. It is important to carefully consider all possible actions before narrowing them down to a few practical options.

3. Evaluating Policy Alternatives

Once the alternatives are listed, the next step is to predict the

potential outcomes of each option. This often involves using models, particularly in technical areas like pollution control. If outcomes are uncertain or vary significantly, the analyst may use tools such as flowcharts to illustrate different scenarios. The analyst must compare the pros and cons of each option to determine which is the most advantageous. The policy that appears best in theory may not always be feasible in practice, so both technical strengths and political realities should be taken into account.

4. Recommending Policy Action

After comparing the alternatives, the analyst or decision-maker selects the most suitable option. Sometimes, the choice is straightforward; other times, it is more complex and requires consideration of which outcomes are more important.

5. Monitoring Policy Outcomes and Evaluating Performance

Even after a policy is implemented, there may still be uncertainties regarding its success or whether it is being followed correctly. Although analysts are not always involved in the application of the policy, it is beneficial for them to participate in its monitoring and review. Patton and Sawicki point out that “Even after a policy has been implemented, there may be some doubt as to whether the problem was resolved appropriately and whether the selected policy is being implemented properly.” This indicates that evaluation helps to improve future policy-making. A policy might fail not because it was a bad idea, but because it was not executed properly or because its assumptions were incorrect.

In summary, policy analysis is a step-by-step process, and each step presents its own challenges. Many studies in public policy end up unused, not always due to the decision-makers, but sometimes because the findings are not communicated clearly. To be effective, analysis must be easy to understand and convey. Although predicting the future is challenging, good policy analysis aids in enhancing our understanding of different options and their outcomes, leading to better decisions.



Summarised Overview

This unit explores how public policy analysis has developed into an essential tool for modern governance. Initially seen in ancient advisory practices, it has transformed into a formal process used by governments and experts to solve public problems in a structured and evidence-based manner. The 20th century, especially the 1960s and 70s, marked the professionalisation of policy analysis, with the establishment of specialised research bodies like the UK's Central Policy Review Staff and similar institutions in the United States.

Policy analysis is defined as a systematic, data-driven effort to assess policy options, monitor problems, and evaluate outcomes. Scholars such as William Dunn, Carl Patton, and Edward Quade emphasise that the discipline goes beyond offering advice—it seeks to understand policies deeply and provide insights based on thorough research. According to Thomas R. Dye, it aims to explain the causes and effects of policies, develop general theories, and support rational policymaking.

Types of policy analysis include *ex-ante* (before policy implementation), *ex-post* (after implementation), scientific vs. pragmatic approaches, and prescriptive vs. descriptive methods. Each has its own purpose—whether forecasting future outcomes, evaluating past efforts, or suggesting new actions. Analysts must also deal with political realities, conflicting goals, and changing circumstances.

The stages of policy analysis include identifying problems and goals, exploring alternative solutions, assessing outcomes, recommending actions, and evaluating performance. Analysts must balance theory and practicality while ensuring their findings are clear and useful for decision-makers. Despite uncertainties in predicting outcomes, strong policy analysis improves understanding, enhances decision-making, and contributes to better governance.

In conclusion, public policy analysis plays a vital role in formulating effective policies. It helps governments respond to societal needs, choose appropriate actions, and review their results for continuous improvement.

Self-Assessment Questions

1. What is the main focus of modern public policy analysis?
2. Define *ex-ante* and *ex-post* policy analysis with examples.
3. Describe how policy analysis differs from general decision-making.
4. Explain the contributions of William Dunn to the field of policy analysis.

5. What are the key goals of public policy analysis according to Stuart S. Nagel?
6. How do scientific and pragmatic approaches to policy analysis differ?
7. Outline the five major steps in the policy analysis process.
8. What role do think tanks and research institutions play in policymaking?
9. Discuss the importance of evaluating policy alternatives before making a decision.
10. Why is policy monitoring essential even after implementation?

Assignments

1. Trace the evolution of policy analysis from its ancient origins to its modern, structured form in the 20th century. Discuss the role of institutions like the UK's Central Policy Review Staff (CPRS) and the growth of research centres in the 1960s and 1970s in the professionalisation and diversification of policy advice.
2. Compare and contrast the definitions of policy analysis provided by William Dunn (applied discipline, multiple methods) and the Dictionary of Public Administration (systematic, data-based alternative). Based on Thomas R. Dye's perspective, discuss the three core implications of policy analysis, emphasising the focus on understanding (causes and effects) over simply giving advice.
3. Differentiate between the three main typologies of policy analysis discussed: Ex-ante vs. Ex-post, Scientific vs. Pragmatic, and Prescriptive vs. Descriptive. Explain the purpose of each type and how the pragmatic approach addresses the realities of political influence and limited information in decision-making.
4. Detail the five sequential stages of policy analysis as outlined in the text (Identifying Problems to Monitoring Policy Outcomes). Discuss the key practical challenges inherent in two of these stages: a) the difficulty in Identifying Problems and Objectives (e.g., conflicting goals), and b) the need to balance technical strengths and political realities during the Evaluating Policy Alternatives stage.



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UNIT 3

Types of Public Policy

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this unit, learners will be able to:

- explain the major types of public policy based on their purpose and structure
- differentiate between distributive, redistributive, regulatory, and self-regulatory policies
- identify the significance of material versus symbolic policies and collective versus private goods
- classify public policies functionally into explicit/implicit and framework/operational types
- analyse how different government organs influence the formation and implementation of policies

Background

Public policies shape the way governments function and how they respond to the needs of society. As a field of study, understanding the different types of public policy helps us comprehend how these decisions impact people, allocate resources, and reflect political priorities. Classifying policies offers clarity and aids in evaluating their functions, effectiveness, and implications.

Early classification systems sorted policies based on subject matter, the institution that framed them, or historical periods. However, more useful frameworks have emerged that consider what the policy intends to do (substantive versus procedural), who benefits or is affected (distributive, redistributive, regulatory), and how policies are formed and implemented (explicit versus implicit, framework versus operational).

Distributive policies provide benefits to specific groups, often through subsidies or support programmes. Redistributive policies alter the allocation of existing resources,

such as tax reforms or social welfare schemes. Regulatory and self-regulatory policies impose rules to manage behaviour, with the latter often being supported by the regulated group itself.

Policies may also be symbolic or material. While material policies create real change, symbolic policies often serve political or public relations purposes. Additionally, distinguishing between policies providing collective goods (e.g., clean air) versus private goods (e.g., paid healthcare services) helps explain the rationale behind public funding decisions.

The unit also explores the role of different government organs in policy formation—legislative (statutory), executive (non-statutory), and judiciary (judge-made). The framework versus operational classification explains how policies evolve from general goals to detailed implementation steps.

Overall, understanding the types of public policy enhances our grasp of governance, decision-making, and public administration processes. It also highlights the need for cooperative federalism, where both central and state governments play a role in policy success.

Keywords

Distributive Policy, Redistributive Policy, Regulatory Policy, Self-Regulatory Policy, Symbolic Policy, Material Policy, Collective Goods, Private Goods, Explicit Policy, and Framework Policy

Discussion

1.3.1 Different Types of Public Policy

Public policies can be grouped in various ways to help us understand how they work and how they affect people. Some traditional methods of classifying policies include dividing them by subject, such as labour, welfare, civil rights, or foreign policy; by the institution involved, like laws made by the legislature or decisions by the judiciary; or by the time period, such as policies from the New Deal or the post-World War II era. While these groupings are useful for organising discussions, they do not always explain the core nature of the policies. More helpful classifications focus on how policies function.



One approach is to separate policies into **substantive** and **procedural** types. Substantive policies concentrate on what the government plans to do, such as building roads or providing welfare. Procedural policies focus on how actions are carried out or who is responsible for executing them.

Another classification sorts policies into **distributive**, **regulatory**, **self-regulatory**, and **redistributive**. This method examines how policies affect society and the different groups involved in making or receiving the policy decisions. According to T. J. Lowi, there are three main types of public policies: distributive, redistributive, and regulatory. He also states that all policies utilise some form of control because they aim to change how people or groups behave. The following are the important types of public policy.

1.3.1.1 Distributive Policies

Distributive policies are concerned with the distribution of new resources and are based on the concept of ensuring distributive justice. Their aims are: 1. to remove economic inequalities; 2. to provide a decent standard of living for working people; and 3. to protect the interests of the weaker sections of society. These policies indicate the concepts of adaptability and flexibility, which are hallmarks of a welfare state. In 1997, in the case of Air India Corporation, the Supreme Court held that social justice and equality are complementary to each other. The expression "social and economic justice" involves the concept of distributive justice, which connotes the removal of economic inequalities and rectifying injustices. A just social order can be achieved only when inequalities are removed and everyone is provided with what is legally due. All public welfare programmes are distributive. Agricultural subsidies for farmers, subsidised food for the poor, adult education programmes, social insurance, vaccination camps, and the public distribution system, among others, are all examples of such policies.

Distributing new resources

1.3.1.2 Redistributive policies

Redistributive policies are concerned with changing the distribution of existing resources. Distributive policies are one of the means to secure distributive justice in a system of governance. Their objective is to bring about social and economic changes. Certain assets and benefits are disproportionately divided among specific sections of society, and these need to be redistributed so that they reach those in need. Redistributive policies are difficult

Changing existing resources

to enact because they involve the reallocation of money, rights, or power. Those who possess these resources rarely yield them willingly. Income policies are often cited as examples of redistributive policies.

1.3.1.3 Substantive Policies

Substantive policies are concerned with the general welfare and development of society, such as the provision of education and employment opportunities, economic stabilisation, law enforcement, and anti-pollution laws. These policies do not cater to any particular or privileged sections of society. They must be formulated dynamically, keeping in mind the goals and characteristics of the constitution and the Directive Principles of State Policy, as well as the current moral claims of society.

General welfare development

1.3.1.4 Regulatory policies

Regulatory policies are concerned with the regulation and control of individual conduct through coercive techniques. The objective of these policies is to ensure that regulations serve the public interest. They help to shape the relationship between the state, citizens, and businesses. These policies address the regulation of trade, quality education, safety measures, and more. For example, the UGC, AICTE, and CBSE regulate education, while professional groups like the Medical Council of India and the Bar Council of India ensure standards in the fields of medicine and law, respectively. Other regulatory bodies include the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI), the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI), the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS), the Reserve Bank of India, the Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC), State Electricity Boards, State Transport Corporations, and others.

Regulation and Control

1.3.1.5 Constituent Policy

Constituent policy is concerned with establishing new institutions or mechanisms for public welfare.

1.3.1.6 Material Symbolic Policy

These policies depend on the type of benefits they allocate. Material policies provide tangible resources or substantive power to their beneficiaries. Examples include legislation requiring employers to pay minimum wages and funding for public housing programmes.

Tangible vs. Symbolic



1.3.1.7 Capitalisation Policy

- ❑ Financial subsidies functions

These policies relate to financial subsidies provided by the centre to the states and local governments, as well as agreements between central and state businesses. They are not primarily focused on infrastructure and development policies for government business organisations, but rather aim to ensure that these entities function properly. Different types of public policies explain the varied functions performed by the government. They represent patterns of action either to resolve conflicting claims or to provide incentives for cooperation. Ultimately, they are aimed at bolstering public policy.

- ❑ Collective/Private goods

Policies can also be grouped by whether they provide collective goods or private goods. Collective goods are those that, once provided, benefit everyone equally, such as national defence or clean air. You cannot give them to some people and not others, and individuals usually would not pay for them on their own. That is why the government steps in and pays for them through taxes. Other examples include traffic control, public safety, and mosquito control. Private goods, on the other hand, can be divided and sold, such as postage, garbage collection, or medical services. Some services provided by the government can be treated like private goods, with charges for those who use them. The decision to provide such services through public funds instead of the private market often depends on politics, traditions, and public expectations.

- ❑ Liberal/Conservative views

Finally, discussions around public policies often focus on the divide between liberals and conservatives, although these terms can be unclear. In the late 1800s and early 1900s, liberals generally supported government action to promote greater equality, while conservatives preferred to maintain the status quo or supported gradual change. Liberals often advocated for public policies to address societal problems, whereas conservatives believed that society could improve on its own over time. In general, liberals supported regulations and later backed welfare programmes, while conservatives often resisted these efforts.

- ❑ Three functional groupings

Policies can be grouped in different ways depending on how they function. One common approach is to divide them into three types: explicit and implicit policies, framework and operational policies, and those made by the executive, legislature, or judiciary.

1.3.2.1 Explicit and Implicit Policies

Explicit policies are those that are clearly stated. These include laws passed by Parliament, rules and regulations created by the government under legal authority, statements of policy announced in Parliament or published in official documents, and decisions made by courts. In contrast, implicit policies are those that are not formally announced but can be understood from the actions or behaviour of the government.

1.3.2.2 Framework and Operational Policies

Framework policies outline the broad goals, aims, and plans of the government in specific areas, such as education or health. These policies explain what the government wants to achieve and how it generally plans to go about it. Operational policies are more detailed and practical; they include specific programmes, schemes, rules, and instructions for how to carry out the goals set in the framework policy. For a policy to be ready for implementation, several steps are needed: setting goals, deciding on the strategy, planning specific actions, issuing detailed instructions, and arranging the necessary staff and funds. These steps usually follow a certain order, but the process often involves back and forth. As plans develop, earlier decisions might be reviewed and changed based on new understanding. For example, while working on specific activities, it might become clear that a certain target year is not realistic, leading to a revision of the original goal.

Goals vs. details

Typically, the government does not wait until everything is final before making a policy public. It often announces the goals and broad plans first, followed by specific programmes later. National policies, such as those on health, education, and forests, are mostly statements of intention. They present general goals and the direction the government wants to take, but they do not always contain full details. These framework policies provide the basis for the later development of more detailed plans. However, if no action follows after such a policy is announced, it remains just a statement without real effect. Often, some parts of the policy are implemented while others are ignored, meaning that only certain issues from the framework policy are addressed.

Goals announced first

Governments often choose to issue framework policies for a few reasons. First, it helps show the public that they are serious about addressing important problems, which can help them



❑ Framework policy reasons

gain political support. Second, by announcing a general plan, the government can test how people respond before making firm commitments. This method allows them to adjust their direction based on feedback. Third, policy decisions often cannot be made all at once because of limited information, conflicting opinions, or a lack of resources. Step-by-step discussions within government and consultations with experts and the public can help clarify what actions are needed and how to carry them out. Additionally, involving people in stages can increase support for the policy and make it easier to implement.

1.3.2.3 Classification of Policies by the Organ Competent to Approve Policy

❑ Statutory/Non-statutory/Judge-made

One important way to classify policies is by identifying which part of the government has the authority to approve them. Based on this, policies can be grouped into three types: laws made by the legislature (known as statutory policies), policies made by the executive (non-statutory policies), and policies that arise from court decisions (judge-made policies). Technically, rules and regulations created under the authority of a law are also considered statutory because the legislature permits the executive to make them. When courts review such rules, they typically check two things: whether too much power has been granted to the executive under the law, and whether the executive has exceeded its authority while making the rules. These rules are also subject to scrutiny by the legislature. However, in practice, the executive wields significant control over these regulations, so they often function like non-statutory policies. If the government lacks sufficient support in Parliament to pass a law, it may opt for a non-statutory policy, provided it does not contravene any existing laws. However, non-statutory policies are generally less forceful and more akin to guidelines than laws.

❑ Judicial review explained

Laws passed by Parliament can be challenged in court, but this does not mean that courts have the final say in approving laws. Judicial review resembles an inspection. Just as auditors do not set rules but verify compliance with existing rules, courts examine whether policies created by lawmakers or the executive adhere to the Constitution. They also assess whether executive decisions align with both constitutional provisions and the laws enacted by Parliament.

A law clearly tells people what they must or must not do and is binding on everyone. Officers and courts must enforce

❑ Law vs. guidelines/Lists

it. A non-statutory policy, however, usually outlines what the government plans to do and provides instructions for carrying it out. Government officials are expected to follow these instructions, and citizens are affected mainly when such policies set conditions they must meet to receive benefits. Another major difference is that a law can only be made if Parliament or a State Legislature has the authority under the Constitution. The Constitution divides powers between the Union and the states under three lists in the Seventh Schedule. The Union List has 100 subjects on which only Parliament can make laws. The State List has 61 subjects for state legislatures. The Concurrent List includes 53 subjects on which both can make laws. If both the state and central governments pass a law on the same concurrent subject, the central law takes priority unless the state law was sent to the President for approval and received it.

❑ Executive power/ Cooperation

Generally, executive powers follow legislative powers. However, for topics in the Concurrent List, the executive powers usually remain with the states unless the Constitution or a central law states otherwise. This means the central government often depends on the states to carry out its laws on these subjects unless it has created its own administrative setup for the task. Because of this dependence, it is important for the central government to consult with the states before passing such laws. Cooperation between different levels of government works best when both are involved from the beginning and remain engaged until the end. The division of responsibilities between the Union and the states has been examined and updated over time.

Summarised Overview

This unit explores the various ways public policies are classified based on their goals, beneficiaries, implementation methods, and legal backing. It emphasises how understanding the types of policies can help interpret their role in governance and social impact. One key classification divides policies into distributive, redistributive, regulatory, and self-regulatory. Distributive policies allocate new resources, often through subsidies or services to targeted groups. Redistributive policies adjust how existing resources are shared to promote equity, typically through taxes or welfare programmes. Regulatory policies set standards to control behaviour, while self-regulatory policies are created and supported by the groups they affect, such as professional councils.

Another distinction is between material and symbolic policies. Material policies lead



to concrete outcomes, such as public housing or wage laws, while symbolic ones focus more on political messaging or appeasement without substantial change. However, symbolic policies can evolve into material ones over time if supported with funding and enforcement. Policies can also be classified by the type of goods they provide: collective goods benefit all citizens equally and are usually publicly funded, while private goods can be divided and often require payment. This division influences decisions on whether services are provided by the government or through the market.

Functionally, policies are grouped as explicit (clearly stated in laws or official documents) or implicit (understood through actions), and as framework (broad goals and intentions) or operational (detailed plans and steps). Lastly, policies may be shaped by different government organs—statutory (legislature-made), non-statutory (executive-made), and judicial (court interpretations). The interaction between central and state governments also affects policy formulation and implementation, especially in India's federal structure. This classification system enhances the understanding of how public policies are designed, debated, implemented, and evaluated in democratic governance.

Self-Assessment Questions

1. What are the main characteristics of distributive public policies?
2. Differentiate between redistributive and regulatory policies with examples.
3. How do self-regulatory policies differ from regulatory ones?
4. Explain the significance of symbolic policies in democratic governance.
5. What is the difference between collective goods and private goods?
6. Discuss the importance of explicit and implicit policy classifications.
7. Define framework and operational policies with suitable examples.
8. Why are non-statutory policies considered weaker than statutory ones?
9. How does the federal structure of India influence policy implementation?
10. In what ways can symbolic policies become material over time?

Assignments

1. Analyse T. J. Lowi's classification of public policies (distributive, redistributive, regulatory). Explain the core concept of distributive policies by discussing its aims, the concept of distributive justice, and providing relevant examples from the text (e.g., public welfare programmes, subsidies).
2. Differentiate between substantive and procedural policies, providing examples for each. Then, elaborate on the nature and objective of regulatory policies, and discuss the role of specific regulatory bodies (e.g., UGC, SEBI) in shaping the relationship between the state, citizens, and business.
3. Explain the difference between explicit and implicit policies. Further, distinguish between framework and operational policies, detailing the stages required to move from broad framework goals to detailed operational implementation. Why do governments often choose to issue framework policies first?
4. Classify public policies based on the government organ competent to approve them (statutory, non-statutory, and judge-made). Discuss how the constitutional division of powers (Union, State, and Concurrent Lists) influences the formulation and implementation of statutory policies, especially regarding the need for consultation and cooperation between the Union and State governments.

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BLOCK 2

Major Approaches to the Study of Public Policy

UNIT

1

System Approach, Elite Theory and Group Theory

Learning Outcomes

After completing this unit, learners will be able to:

- explain the systems approach and its relevance in understanding public policy
- identify the key arguments of elite theory and assess its implications for democratic governance
- analyse the role of interest groups in policy-making through the lens of group theory
- compare the strengths and limitations of the systems approach, elite theory, and group theory in explaining policy processes
- apply these theoretical frameworks to evaluate policy-making in the Indian context.

Background

The study of public policy requires systematic approaches that help scholars and practitioners understand how policies are made, who influences them, and why certain outcomes prevail. Among the major approaches, the systems approach, elite theory, and group theory have been particularly influential.

The systems approach, developed by David Easton, views public policy as the output of a political system that transforms inputs from the environment into authoritative decisions. Inputs include demands from citizens and supports such as law-abiding behaviour and taxation. These inputs are processed by political institutions—executive, legislature, judiciary, and bureaucracy—into outputs or policies. Feedback mechanisms then influence future demands and supports, creating a dynamic cycle. Although this approach highlights the interaction between the environment and political structures, it is often criticised for being too simplistic and for neglecting the internal power struggles within the system.



Elite theory presents a different view by emphasising the dominance of a small, powerful minority in shaping policy outcomes. Scholars like Mosca, Pareto, Michels, Lasswell, and Mills argue that elites, due to their wealth, education, and authority, play a decisive role in defining policy agendas. This theory suggests that democracy often functions as a competition between elites rather than as genuine popular rule, making public participation largely symbolic. Critics, however, argue that elite theory underestimates grassroots influence and the potential for wider democratic engagement.

Group theory, on the other hand, focuses on the interplay of organised interests. It views policy-making as the result of competition and compromise among various pressure groups. According to Truman, groups channel citizen interests into political action, thereby linking individuals with government institutions. Policy outcomes, therefore, reflect the balance of power among competing groups. While this approach highlights pluralism and negotiation, it also acknowledges inequalities in resources and influence across groups.

Together, these approaches provide diverse yet complementary insights into how policies are shaped, debated, and implemented.

Keywords

Systems Approach, Inputs and Outputs, Feedback Mechanism, Elite Theory, Iron Law of Oligarchy, Group Theory, Interest Groups, Policy Equilibrium, Bureaucratic Influence, and Democratic Elitism

Discussion

2.1.1 System Approach

□ Easton's System Analysis

David Easton was the first political scientist to analyse public policy from the perspective of system analysis. The policy-making process has been regarded as a 'black box' that converts the demands of society into policies and decisions. In his "Analysis of Political Systems," David Easton argues that the political system is engaged in the 'authoritative allocation of values' (converting inputs from the environment into desired outputs). This system is dynamic and deals with feedback, thereby making the public policy process interdependent and cyclic.

2.1.1.1 David Easton's Model: A Framework for Policy Analysis (1965)

In his framework, he presents Input-Output Analysis.

❑ Input–Output Analysis

According to him, input consists of demands and support. Inputs are the claims made by individuals and groups on the political system for action to satisfy their demands. Demands can be:

- a. Demands for the allocation of goods and services
- b. Demands for the regulation of behaviour
- c. Demands for participation in the political system; and
- d. Demands for communication.

Demands cannot be satisfied without support. Supports can be:

❑ Types of Support

- a. Material support, including repayment of taxes and other levies to the government
- b. Obedience to laws, rules, regulations, etc.
- c. Participatory support
- d. Attention paid to governmental communication.

Outputs are the authoritative decisions and actions of the system's leaders. They consist of policies and decisions, including:

❑ System Outputs Explained

- a. Taxation and economic policies
- b. Regulation of human behaviour
- c. Distribution of resources; and
- d. Symbolic outputs, i.e. communication of policy input.

❑ Concept of Feedback

There is also a concept of feedback. This concept indicates that public policies may have a modifying effect on the environments, the demands generated therein, and the character of the political system. Policy output may produce new demands, which lead to further policy output, creating a continuous and never-ending flow of public policy. Thus, policy is originated, implemented, adjusted, and readjusted. It is a 'flow model' of the political system. In every political system, a cyclic and continuous process is ongoing.

2.1.1.2 Criticisms and Limitations of the Systems Approach

Despite its analytical value, the systems model has notable shortcomings when applied to the study of public policy:



Over-Simplified Framework

Neglect of Internal Dynamics

Lack of Agency Recognition

Elite Influence

Bureaucratic Dominance in Policy

Ideological Bias in Policy

Usefulness of Systems Theory

1. **Over-Simplification:** The input-output framework is often seen as too linear and simplistic to capture the complexities of real-world policy-making. It tends to rely heavily on idealistic assumptions derived from welfare economics, assuming a clear and universally agreed-upon notion of social welfare.

2. **Neglect of Internal Dynamics:** Critics argue that the model overlooks the internal workings of the “black box”—the political institutions and actors that actually shape policy. It inadequately addresses the roles of power structures, individual agency, and institutional behaviour within the policy process. Lineberry notes that political decisions are deeply influenced by prevailing economic conditions, which this model does not fully accommodate.

3. **Lack of Agency Recognition:** The model fails to recognise that policymakers themselves actively influence the environment in which they operate. Instead of treating institutions as neutral facilitators of public demand, it should acknowledge their capacity to shape outcomes proactively.

4. **Elite Influence:** The assumption that public demand drives policy often ignores the reverse influence, where political and bureaucratic elites shape public opinion. The term “with inputs” has been introduced to capture how internal motivations and elite interests can redirect or reinterpret policy demands. Bureaucracies, in particular, can initiate and legitimise policies independent of public pressures.

5. **Role of Bureaucracy in Developing Countries:** In nations like India, where national goals may not be clearly defined, bureaucracies often play a much more influential role in policy formulation. Unlike in Western democracies, where bureaucrats serve more technical roles, in developing countries, they may guide or dominate the policy-making process.

6. **Impact of Ideological Biases:** Finally, the environment’s influence on policy is filtered through the values and beliefs of those in power. Policymaking is not just about responding to external stimuli but also about how decision-makers perceive and interpret these inputs. Their personal ideologies significantly shape the selection and prioritisation of policy options.

However, systems theory is a useful aid in organising our enquiry into policy information. It provides answers to significant aspects of the political process, such as: What factors in the environment generate demands upon the political system? How is the political system able to convert demand into public policy? How do environmental inputs affect the character of the political system? How does the character of the political system affect the content of public policy, and how do environmental

inputs influence that content?

2.1.2 Elite Theory

According to elite theory, public policy does not reflect the demands of the masses. Rather, it embodies the prevailing values of the elite. The theory posits that power and influence in any society or organisation are concentrated in the hands of a select few. It is a theory within sociology, political science, and philosophy that suggests power in society is held by a small number of individuals. These individuals control key decision-making areas such as politics, economics, education, and media. They typically come from the upper classes, including wealthy families and business owners. This group includes politicians, business leaders, scientists, intellectuals, media personalities, religious figures, and military leaders.

☐ Elite Theory Perspective

The elite believe that they alone have the ability to determine and implement policies that promote the welfare of the masses. The policies created by the elites reflect elite values and prefer the status quo to radical changes. This model has found more adherents among sociologists than among political scientists.

☐ Elite Policy Dominance

Gaetano Mosca's Contribution

Mosca, in his work "The Ruling Class," provides a classic enunciation of the Elite theory. According to him, in all societies, two classes of people emerge: a class that rules and a class that is ruled. The first class is always less numerous, performs political functions, monopolises power, and enjoys all the advantages that power brings. In contrast, the second, more numerous class, is directed and controlled by the first class in a manner that is more or less legal, and more or less arbitrary and violent.

☐ Mosca's Ruling Class

Contributions of Thomas Dye and Harman Zeigler

In their work "Iron Law of Democracy," they summarise the Elite theory as follows:

- a. Society is divided into masses and classes. Only a small number of people allocate values for society; the masses do not decide policy.
- b. The few who govern are typical of the masses who are governed. Elites are drawn disproportionately from the upper strata of society.



- c. Movements of non-elites to elite positions must be slow and continuous to maintain stability and avoid revolutions. Only non-elites who have accepted the basic elite consensus can be admitted to governing circles.
- d. Elites share a consensus on behalf of the basic values of the social system and the preservation of the system.
- e. Public policy does not reflect the demands of the masses but rather the prevailing values of the elite. Changes in public policy must be incremental rather than revolutionary.
- f. Elites influence the masses more than the masses influence elites.

❑ Iron Law of Democracy

Thus, it becomes clear from their theory that competition exists between the elites in power and the counter-elites attempting to come to power, with the common masses playing no role in determining public policies. The policies are formulated by the ruling elites, and government officials and agencies carry those policies into effect.

2.1.2.2 Schumpeter's Perspective on Democratic Elitism

❑ Schumpeter's Competitive Democracy

Joseph Schumpeter addressed the tension between elitist theory and democratic ideals by proposing a model of democracy based on competition among elites. In this model, the electorate participates not by directly making decisions, but by choosing between competing political groups or "political enterprises," each offering different policy packages. This framework gives democracy a market-like structure, where citizens act as consumers selecting among policy alternatives offered by rival elites. Anthony Downs later extended this economic interpretation in his own theory of democratic behaviour.

2.1.2.3 Contributions by Lasswell and Mills

❑ Lasswell's Elite Theory

Harold Lasswell played a significant role in developing modern elite theory. He believed that political science should focus on studying influence, identifying who gets what, when, and how. He accepted Pareto's idea of elite dominance and proposed the emergence of various skilled elite groups, such as military and police officials, media experts, corporate leaders, technocrats, and bureaucrats. Lasswell feared that the collaboration of these elites could lead to a "garrison state," where power is concentrated among military and technocratic authorities. He advocated for policy sciences to promote a greater

distribution of power and strengthen democratic institutions, though critics like Philip Merelman argued that Lasswell's approach to curbing elite dominance was overly idealistic.

C. Wright Mills, in his influential work *The Power Elite* (1956), examined how interconnected elites, particularly in the military, corporate, and bureaucratic sectors, were increasingly controlling decision-making in the United States, especially during the Cold War and Vietnam era. Like Lasswell, Mills believed that intellectuals and scholars had a vital responsibility in challenging elite dominance and safeguarding democratic values.

Mills and the Power Elite

2.1.2.4 Implications of Elite Theory in Public Policy

Elite theory offers important insights into policy analysis by highlighting the structural separation between ruling elites and the general public. Michels' "iron law of oligarchy" implies that over time, organisational elites prioritise their own agendas, often diverging from the interests of the people. Max Weber similarly noted that the rise of bureaucracy, particularly without strong democratic oversight, can pose significant threats to accountable governance.

Insights of Elite Theory

The theory also suggests that changes in public policy generally reflect shifts in elite preferences rather than grassroots movements. Since elites tend to share a consensus on preserving the core values of the system, most policy reforms are incremental and aimed at maintaining social stability. Consequently, policy alternatives that fall outside this elite consensus are unlikely to gain traction.

Elite Consensus in Policy

While elite values may sometimes promote public welfare, elite theory maintains that the responsibility for such welfare rests with the ruling class, not the public. This top-down view reinforces the idea that political parties and elections often serve more as symbols of public participation than as genuine channels of democratic influence.

Top-Down Governance

2.1.2.5 Criticism

Elite theory is often criticised for portraying democratic processes as largely symbolic. It asserts that policymaking consistently serves elite interests and that the public plays a passive role in shaping policy outcomes. Mass elections and political party platforms, in this view, are largely orchestrated

Critique of Elite Theory



to legitimise elite decisions rather than to reflect popular will.

❑ Limited Elite Responsiveness

However, the theory does allow for some reform and adaptation—elites may adjust policies when the stability of the system is threatened, as long as these changes remain within the boundaries of the dominant value framework. In this sense, elite theory acknowledges a form of limited responsiveness but underscores the enduring concentration of power and influence at the top.

❑ Group Interaction in Politics

2.1.3 Group Theory

Group theory interprets public policy formulation through the lens of what is often referred to as the "hydraulic theory of politics." This perspective sees the political landscape as a dynamic system of competing forces and pressures, where policy outcomes emerge from the interaction of these opposing interests. At the heart of this theory is the belief that group interaction forms the core of political activity. For the average citizen, interest or pressure groups serve as significant avenues of influence, acting as intermediaries between individuals and the government.

❑ Definition of a Group

A group is typically defined as a collection of individuals who share common interests and unite to advocate for their demands before government institutions. As articulated by Truman, an interest group is essentially a body of people with shared attitudes who assert specific claims upon other groups in society. When such a group directs its demands at governmental structures, it becomes a political entity.

❑ Influence of Interest Groups

Generally, interest groups aim to shape or influence governmental policy decisions. This process is a defining feature of democratic systems, where politics often revolves around the contest for influence among diverse groups. However, while all groups seek to exercise political power, not all are equally involved or successful in this pursuit.

❑ Politics as Group Interaction

Key Features of Group Theory:

1. Politics as Group Interaction:

Group Theory perceives politics as a continuous and dynamic interaction among various organised groups in society. These groups, representing diverse interests such as businesses, labour unions, professional bodies, farmers, and social movements, compete to influence government decisions and policies in

their favour. Political activities are seen as a reflection of this competition and collaboration among groups.

2. Focus on Interest Groups:

According to Group Theory, interest groups play a central role in politics, surpassing the importance of individuals or state institutions. People engage in politics primarily through their membership in such groups, with their political actions being shaped by these affiliations. Organised groups act as advocates for their members, voicing their needs and demands to influence government policies.

Centrality of Interest Groups

3. Government as an Arbiter:

The government functions as a neutral mediator rather than an autonomous or dominant force. Its role is to balance and reconcile the conflicting interests of various groups, ensuring that no single group gains excessive power and maintaining stability within the political system.

Government as Arbiter

4. Balance and Regulation through Competition:

Group Theory emphasises the concept of equilibrium within political systems. Stability arises when competing groups hold each other in check. If one group becomes disproportionately powerful, opposing forces or government intervention work to restore balance. This self-regulating principle underscores the pluralistic nature of political systems.

Balance through Competition

5. Policy as a Result of Group Negotiation:

Public policy is not crafted in isolation by individuals or solely by the government, but rather emerges from bargaining, negotiation, and compromise among competing groups. The policy outcomes reflect the relative strength, organisation, and influence of the groups involved in the decision-making process.

Policy through Negotiation

6. Pluralism and Democratic Representation:

Rooted in the concept of pluralism, Group Theory posits that democracy flourishes when diverse organised groups have the liberty to compete for influence. It assumes a society enriched by differing values and interests, where inclusive political participation by all groups ensures equitable representation.

Pluralism in Democracy

7. Politics as a Dynamic Process:

Group Theory highlights the fluid and evolving nature of



Dynamic Political Process

Unequal Group Influence

Pressure Politics and Lobbying

Stability through Competition

Policy as Group Equilibrium

Politics as Interest Contest

politics. Groups continuously form, dissolve, and reorganise in response to new challenges, policies, and power dynamics. This ongoing interaction lends flexibility and adaptability to the political system, enabling it to respond to societal changes.

8. Variations in Access and Influence:

Groups vary in their organisational strength, leadership quality, resources, and access to policymakers. These factors significantly determine their ability to influence public policies. Well-organised and adequately resourced groups have a greater capacity to impact decisions than weaker or fragmented ones.

9. Role of Pressure Politics and Lobbying:

Pressure tactics and lobbying are considered integral aspects of democratic political systems under Group Theory. Groups employ diverse strategies—such as petitions, demonstrations, strikes, and direct lobbying—to sway political leaders and public sentiment towards their objectives.

10. Stability through Group Competition:

The theory asserts that democracy operates most effectively when open competition among groups exists, allowing all interests a platform for expression. By channelling conflicts into structured negotiation and compromise, group competition fosters political stability and sustains the legitimacy of democratic institutions.

2.1.3.1 Group Equilibrium in Policy Formation

Advocates of Group Theory argue that public policy represents a state of balance or equilibrium that results from the competing interests and relative strengths of various groups. The influence of a group is shaped by several factors, including its size, financial resources, organisational capability, leadership quality, access to decision-makers, and internal unity. Policy outcomes tend to favour the group that can exert greater influence within this competitive environment.

Within this theoretical framework, political activity is viewed as a reflection of the ongoing contest among organised interests. Policymakers are seen as reactive to these pressures, navigating among competing demands through negotiation and compromise. Political leaders and parties strive to form majority coalitions by aligning with multiple interest groups, often those with divergent goals, in order to consolidate power.

❑ Forces of Stability

Group theory also suggests that certain forces help preserve stability within the interest group system. Firstly, there exists a broad, latent segment of the population that supports the constitutional framework of the nation, providing foundational stability. Secondly, overlapping membership among groups helps restrain any single group from acting in ways that contradict broader societal norms or constitutional values. Individuals who belong to multiple groups act as moderating forces, as each group must consider the diverse affiliations of its members. Lastly, equilibrium is maintained through inter-group competition; the influence of any one group is checked by the counterbalance of others.

Summarised Overview

This unit explores three major approaches to the study of public policy—systems approach, elite theory, and group theory. Each provides a distinct framework for understanding the forces that shape government action.

The systems approach, pioneered by David Easton, conceptualises public policy as the outcome of a political system responding to societal demands and supports. Inputs from the environment are transformed by institutions into outputs, or policies, which are then evaluated through feedback loops. While this model highlights the cyclical nature of policymaking, critics note that it oversimplifies reality and fails to adequately address power relations, elite influence, and bureaucratic dominance, especially in developing countries.

Elite theory shifts focus to the role of a small ruling class in shaping public policy. Thinkers such as Mosca, Pareto, Michels, Lasswell, and Mills argue that policies primarily reflect elite interests, with the masses playing a marginal role. The concept of democratic elitism, advanced by Schumpeter, frames democracy as a competition among elites, where citizens merely choose between competing groups. Although elite theory highlights the concentration of power, it has been criticised for minimising the role of popular participation and grassroots influence.

Group theory emphasises pluralism, where policy outcomes emerge from the competition among organised interest groups. These groups represent diverse societal interests and act as intermediaries between citizens and the state. Policy equilibrium, according to this approach, is achieved through negotiation and compromise among competing pressures. However, inequalities in resources and influence often mean that some groups are better positioned to shape policies than others.

Taken together, these three approaches offer valuable perspectives on policy-making. While the systems approach underscores structure and process, elite theory highlights the concentration of power, and group theory stresses competition and negotiation. Their combined insights enrich our understanding of how public policies are formulated and implemented.



Self-Assessment Questions

1. Explain David Easton's systems approach. What are its key components, and how do inputs, outputs, and feedback operate within a political system?
2. Differentiate between demands and supports in Easton's input-output model. Give examples of each in the context of Indian public policy.
3. Discuss three major criticisms of the systems approach. Why is it considered overly simplistic by some scholars?
4. What is meant by "with inputs" in systems theory? How does this concept highlight the influence of political and bureaucratic elites?
5. Who are the major contributors to elite theory? Summarise the core arguments of Mosca, Pareto, Michels, Lasswell, and Mills.
6. Explain Michels' "Iron Law of Oligarchy." How does this idea challenge conventional understandings of democratic governance?
7. Describe Joseph Schumpeter's concept of democratic elitism. How does it redefine the role of citizens in a democracy?
8. Define an interest group according to Truman. How do pressure groups influence public policy according to group theory?
9. Compare elite theory and group theory. In what ways do they differ in their interpretation of political power and policy-making?
10. Assess the relevance of the systems approach, elite theory, and group theory in understanding policy-making in India. Provide illustrative examples.

Assignments

1. Define the systems approach and explain its main components.
2. What role does feedback play in Easton's systems model?
3. Discuss two major criticisms of the systems approach in policy analysis.
4. Explain the concept of "with inputs" in the systems approach.
5. Who are the key contributors to elite theory, and what are their main arguments?
6. What is Robert Michels' "Iron Law of Oligarchy," and how does it relate to policy-making?
7. Explain Joseph Schumpeter's idea of democratic elitism.
8. How do pressure groups influence policy outcomes in group theory?

9. Compare the explanatory strengths of elite theory and group theory.
10. Critically evaluate the relevance of these approaches in understanding public policy in India.

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Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.

SGOU

UNIT 2

Incremental Approach to Public Policy Making

Learning Outcomes

After completing this unit, learners will be able to:

- explain the core principles of incrementalism and contrast them with the rational model of policy-making
- identify and discuss Lindblom's two models of decision-making (root and branch methods)
- analyse the main features and characteristics of the incremental approach to public policy
- evaluate the strengths, limitations, and criticisms of incrementalism as an approach to policy-making
- apply the concept of analytical incrementalism to understand how power relations influence decision-making processes

Background

Public policy-making is a complex and dynamic process shaped by competing interests, institutional constraints, and limited resources. While the rational model of decision-making has often been promoted as an ideal, it assumes that policy-makers can identify all possible alternatives, assess their consequences, and select the best option. In reality, decision-makers rarely have the time, information, or capacity to achieve this level of comprehensiveness. Against this backdrop, Charles E. Lindblom introduced the incremental approach, which became one of the most influential critiques of rationalism in policy studies.

In his seminal 1959 article "*The Science of Muddling Through*," Lindblom argued that policy-making more often advances through small, successive adjustments rather than sweeping reforms. He described this as a process of "muddling through," where



policies evolve gradually, guided by compromise, negotiation, and practicality. This incremental approach reflects the realities of governance, where uncertainty, limited knowledge, and political pressures shape the choices available to decision-makers.

Lindblom later developed his ideas further in “*Still Muddling Through*” (1979), introducing distinctions such as simple incremental analysis, strategic analysis, and disjointed incrementalism. These forms recognise both the advantages of small, practical steps and the constraints of bounded rationality. While incrementalism has been praised for reducing conflict, maintaining stability, and providing coherence in complex systems, it has also been criticised for being overly conservative and for reinforcing the status quo.

This unit introduces the origins, evolution, features, and critiques of incrementalism. It also explores its relevance in contemporary governance, where decision-making is rarely straightforward. By examining both its strengths and limitations, students will gain a deeper understanding of how incrementalism continues to shape public policy debates in practice.

Keywords

Incrementalism, Rational Model, Muddling Through, Root Method, Branch Method, Bounded Rationality, Disjointed Incrementalism, Strategic Analysis, Policy Stability, and Pluralism

Discussion

2.2.1 Incremental Approach

The incremental approach views public policy as a continuation of previous government activities, with only incremental modifications. It was presented as an alternative to the traditional Rational Model of decision-making. Charles Lindblom introduced the incremental model in his article, ‘The Science of Muddling Through’ (1959). He aimed to demonstrate that rational decision-making is not feasible for “complex political questions.”

Incremental Policy Approach

Lindblom’s Constraints View

According to Lindblom, constraints of time, intelligence, and cost prevent policymakers from identifying the full range of policy alternatives and their consequences. He proposes that successive limited comparisons are more relevant and realistic.

Lindblom argues that policymakers generally accept the

❑ Policy Continuity Factors

legitimacy of the programmes of the previous government and continue with them, making slight modifications to the current programmes. This is because they do not have enough time, money, or information regarding the existing policies. The cost of collecting information is too great. They are not in a position to predict all the consequences of a particular policy, even in the modern age of information technology.

❑ Reluctance for Major Changes

The uncertainty surrounding the future leads them to continue with earlier policies. Making a major shift in policy is not always easy or politically expedient. Furthermore, the political tension involved in framing new programmes and policies is greater if they must be altered annually. Major changes are not made unless the policy is deemed unsatisfactory.

❑ Characteristics of Incrementalism

2.2.1.1 Characteristics of Incremental Approach

1. Gradual progress: The model suggests that small changes should be made incrementally instead of large-scale radical changes.
2. Flexibility: This approach is flexible and adaptable, allowing changes to be made in response to changing circumstances.
3. Pragmatism: The model permits practical solutions to be implemented rather than idealistic or theoretical ones.
4. Resource optimisation: The approach focuses on maximising resources by using them effectively to achieve small, manageable goals.
5. Consensus building, collaboration, and consultation with stakeholders are emphasised to ensure support for proposed changes.
6. Trial and error: The model acknowledges that trial and error may be necessary in finding solutions.
7. Decision-making: The approach involves repeated rounds of decision-making to respond to changing circumstances.

❑ Improved Muddling Through

In another article, 'Still Muddling Through', published in 1979, Lindblom shifted his attention to making the increments in policies more informed, i.e. the skill in solving complex problems. His aim is to suggest new and improved muddling through. He draws a distinction between:

1. Incrementalism as a political pattern, i.e. step-by-step



changes.

2. Incrementalism as a policy analysis. In this article, he makes the case for 'analytical incrementalism' as a method for achieving a main form of incremental security balance of power in a plural society in which business and large corporations tend to exercise a powerful influence over the policy-making process. He argues that there are three main forms of incremental analysis:

- α) Simple incremental analysis: Examines only small alternatives close to existing policies;
- β) Strategic incremental analysis: Utilises tools such as system analysis, management by objectives, and programme evaluation to simplify problems; and
- χ) Disjointed incrementalism: Disjointed incrementalism is an analytical strategy that involves simplifying and focusing on the problem by:
 - α) Limiting analysis to a few familiar alternatives;
 - β) Conducting empirical analysis of the problem;
 - χ) Focusing on the ill to be remedied rather than the goals to be sought;
 - δ) Engaging in trial and error learning;
 - ε) Analysing a limited number of options and their consequences; and
 - φ) Fragmenting analytical work among many in policy-making.

❑ Forms of Incremental Analysis

2.1.1.2 Advantages

1. Efficient method: It is considered a more efficient method than other methods of policy-making. This method does not demand the use of many resources, such as time and money. It is regarded as a practical and suitable way to achieve major changes gradually.
2. Simple approach: This method is the easiest to use. One need not be very experienced, as it can be easily understood.
3. Gradual changes: Unlike other rational methods, this method involves gradual changes, making it easier for people to accept the changes.
4. Enhancing political feasibility: Large-scale reforms often face resistance from various interest groups and

❑ Merits of the Incremental Approach

stakeholders. Incremental changes are more likely to gain acceptance, as they involve continuous negotiations and compromise.

5. Adapting to changing circumstances: The world is constantly evolving, and new challenges and opportunities arise. This model allows policymakers to adopt these changes more effectively.

2.2.1.3 Challenges

Though the incremental approach offers several advantages, it is not free from criticism. The following are major criticisms:

❑ Criticisms of Incrementalism

1. Slow progress: Incrementalism is criticised for leading to slow progress. Incremental changes may not be sufficient to address urgent and pressing issues. In some cases, bold and decisive action may be necessary to tackle important problems effectively.
2. Lack of ambition: This model may be seen as lacking ambition. By focusing on small adjustments, transformative changes may not be possible. This can result in a piecemeal approach that fails to address the root causes of complex problems.
3. Inertia and complacency: Incrementalism can lead to inertia and complacency. Policymakers may become comfortable with making minor adjustments and avoid tackling more significant challenges. This can result in a lack of innovation and a failure to adapt to changing circumstances.

❑ Advantages of Incrementalism

In conclusion, we may say that the incremental approach offers a pragmatic and adaptable method of policymaking. By focusing on small and manageable changes, policymakers can minimise the complexities of public policy and adapt to changing circumstances. While the model has its challenges and criticisms, it remains a valuable tool in the policymaker's toolkit.

❑ Lindblom's Evolving Perspective

2.2.1.4 Critical Evaluation

Over time, Lindblom's views shifted. While in 1959 he strongly supported incrementalism as the most effective model, in the 1970s he became more critical. He argued that pluralism was flawed, as businesses held disproportionate influence, and he acknowledged the need for radical change in many areas. However, he also noted that societies usually act only in small steps, except in times of crisis.



❑ Critiques of Incrementalism

Scholars such as Yehezkel Dror criticised incrementalism for being overly conservative. They argued it works only when policies are stable and resources are available. It tends to reinforce the status quo and ignores the possibility of fundamental reforms. Critics also noted its indecisiveness and lack of predictive power, as shifts in policy may occur abruptly and not in linear steps.

❑ Power and Policy-Making

Despite these critiques, Lindblom's main concern was to understand how power and knowledge shape policy decisions. He emphasised that policy-making is not a simple or linear process but a continuous, interactive one, shaped by competing interests and power relations. According to him, anyone wishing to improve governance must understand how power structures influence policies and how these can be restructured to achieve better outcomes.

Summarised Overview

The incremental approach to public policy, advanced by Charles E. Lindblom, challenges the assumptions of the rational model of decision-making. The rational model assumes that policy-makers can identify all alternatives, predict their outcomes, and select the most efficient option. Lindblom argued that such comprehensiveness is rarely possible because decision-makers face limitations of time, resources, and knowledge.

In his article *"The Science of Muddling Through"* (1959), Lindblom introduced incrementalism as a more realistic framework, where decisions are made step by step through small modifications of existing policies. This method reflects political realities, where compromise, negotiation, and gradual adjustments guide outcomes. Lindblom contrasted the root method (comprehensive rationality) with the branch method (incrementalism), emphasising the practicality of the latter.

Later, in *"Still Muddling Through"* (1979), Lindblom elaborated on different forms of incremental analysis: simple incrementalism, which considers small adjustments; strategic analysis, which simplifies problems using selective tools; and disjointed incrementalism, which highlights fragmented decision-making involving multiple actors and partial coordination.

The incremental model is characterised by gradual change, reliance on trial and error, mutual adjustment, and continuity. It has been valued for reducing political conflict and maintaining stability, especially in democratic settings. However, critics such as Yehezkel Dror have pointed out that incrementalism is overly conservative, reinforces existing power structures, and ignores the need for radical reforms when problems

demand them. Lindblom himself later acknowledged the dominance of powerful actors, such as corporations, in shaping policy outcomes within an incrementalist framework.

Despite its limitations, incrementalism remains an influential model in policy analysis. It highlights the practical constraints of governance and underlines the importance of power relations, negotiation, and adaptation in the policy process. Understanding incrementalism enables students to appreciate the balance between theory and practice in decision-making.

Self-Assessment Questions

1. Explain the concept of incrementalism in public policy-making. How does it differ from comprehensive or rational decision-making?
2. What did Charles Lindblom mean by “muddling through”? Why did he argue that it is more realistic than rational policy-making?
3. Describe the main reasons why policymakers rely on incremental adjustments rather than major policy changes.
4. Identify and explain the key characteristics of the incremental approach.
5. What are Lindblom’s root method and branch method? How do they differ in terms of decision-making?
6. Discuss the three forms of analytical incrementalism: simple incremental analysis, strategic incremental analysis, and disjointed incrementalism.
7. What advantages does incrementalism offer in a politically pluralistic society?
8. What are the major criticisms of incrementalism? Why is it sometimes considered too conservative?
9. How did Lindblom’s views on incrementalism change between his 1959 article and his later writings?
10. Evaluate the relevance of incrementalism in contemporary policy-making. Can it effectively address complex or urgent policy problems?

Assignments

1. Define incrementalism in public policy-making.
2. How does Lindblom’s incremental model differ from the rational model of decision-making?
3. Explain the concept of “muddling through” in the context of public policy.
4. What are the main features of the incremental approach?



5. Discuss Lindblom's distinction between root and branch methods.
6. Explain the significance of bounded rationality in incrementalism.
7. What are the three forms of analytical incrementalism? Provide examples.
8. Critically evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of incremental policy-making.
9. How did Lindblom's views on incrementalism evolve between 1959 and 1979?
10. Why is incrementalism considered both a realistic and a conservative approach to policy-making?

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UNIT 3

Rational Approach and Cost-Benefit Analysis Approach

Learning Outcomes

After completing this unit, learners will be able to:

- explain the key features of the Rational Approach in public policy-making
- analyse the stages involved in rational decision-making and their practical limitations
- discuss the concept of bounded rationality and its implications for policy formulation
- evaluate the principles and steps of Cost-Benefit Analysis as a policy tool
- critically assess the strengths and weaknesses of applying the Rational and Cost-Benefit Approaches in the Indian policy context

Background

Public policy-making is often seen as a process of choosing the best possible alternative to address social, economic, and political problems. Among the various approaches to policy-making, the Rational Approach and Cost-Benefit Analysis (CBA) are widely recognised for their emphasis on systematic evaluation and efficiency.

The Rational Approach is built on the assumption that decision-makers act logically by identifying goals, ranking them according to priority, examining all possible alternatives, and selecting the most efficient option. This model assumes that policies should maximise overall value by ensuring that benefits outweigh costs. Thinkers such as Robert Haveman and Thomas Dye emphasised efficiency and net value as central to rationality. However, Herbert Simon's idea of "bounded rationality" reminds us that human decision-making is limited by time, information, and political pressures. Thus, in practice, policies are often "satisficing" rather than fully rational.

Cost-Benefit Analysis complements the rational model by offering a practical tool to compare alternative policies. By calculating costs and benefits in monetary and sometimes qualitative terms, CBA helps decision-makers choose the most beneficial policy option. Its origins can be traced to early 20th-century America, and it later became

central to welfare economics and government planning systems such as PPBS. Although widely used, CBA faces criticism, especially in quantifying social and ethical benefits such as health, environmental, or cultural values.

Together, the Rational Approach and CBA highlight the importance of evidence-based, systematic, and outcome-oriented policy-making. Despite their limitations, they provide frameworks to improve decision-making in governance. Understanding these approaches equips students of public policy with tools to critically evaluate real-world decisions where competing interests, values, and constraints shape policy outcomes.

Keywords

Rational Approach, Cost-Benefit Analysis, Bounded Rationality, Policy Alternative, Net Value Achievement, Efficiency, Optimisation, Policy Evaluation, Decision-Making, Welfare Economics

Discussion

2.3.1 Rational Approach

Rational Policy Model

Rational models emphasise that policy-making is a choice among policy alternatives based on rational grounds. Herbert Simon, Yehezkel Dror, and Thomas R. Dye are the main proponents of this model. According to this approach, a rational policy aims at the 'maximisation of net value achievements'. As an intellectual endeavour, rationalism seeks to learn all preferences in a society, discover all available policy alternatives, understand the consequences of each policy alternative, calculate how the selection of one policy affects the remaining alternatives, and ultimately select the policy alternative that is the most efficient in terms of costs and benefits of social values.

Societal Value Preferences

According to this theory, the value preferences of society as a whole can be known and their relative utility can be measured. It would then be possible to select the best available alternatives. A policymaker should possess comprehensive knowledge and understanding of the values of the population and should comprehend their way of life.

Efficiency in Rational Policy

Thomas R. Dye equates rationality with efficiency. According to him, a policy is rational when it is the most efficient, meaning the ratio between the values it achieves and the values it sacrifices is positive and higher than that of any other policy alternatives.



❑ Rational Policy-Making Process

He further states that the idea of efficiency involves calculating all social, political, and economic values sacrificed or achieved by a public policy.

In a rational model, policy must appear logical and factual. Thus, Herbert Simon's rational model of decision-making separates facts from values. He emphasises the importance of new scientific techniques, such as process. According to him, three kinds of activities are involved in the rational policy-making process: intelligent activities, design activities, and choice activities.

❑ Phases of Rational Decision-Making

The first phase of the decision-making process involves searching the environment for conditions that call for decisions (intelligent activity).

The second phase, according to him, involves inventing, developing, and analysing possible courses of action (design activity). The third phase is selecting a particular course of action from those available (choice activity).

Public policy-making should be rational. However, achieving rationality is not easy. In order to be rational, it is desirable that the following steps be taken:

1. **Problem Definition:**

Clearly identify and define the problem or issue that requires a policy response. This involves understanding the root causes, the scope of the problem, and the desired outcomes.

2. **Establishing goals or objectives:**

Determine the goals and objectives that the policy aims to achieve. These should be specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound (SMART)

3. **Generation of alternatives:**

Develop a range of possible policy options or solutions to address the problem. This involves brainstorming and considering all feasible alternatives.

4. **Evaluation of alternatives:**

Assess the potential impact, feasibility, cost and benefit of each alternative. This step often involves quantitative analysis, such as cost-benefit analysis, to determine the most effective and efficient option.

❑ Rational Policy Requirements

5. Selection of the best alternatives:

Choose the alternative to achieve the policy goals with the least cost and greatest benefits. The decision should be based on a thorough evaluation of evidence and data.

6. Implementation

Develop an implementation plan that outlines how the chosen policy put into action, including the allocation of resources, responsibilities and timelines.

7. Monitoring and Evaluation

Continuously monitor the implementation of the policy and evaluate its outcomes against the established objectives. This allows for adjustments and improvements as needed.

❑ Prerequisites of Rational Policy Making

2.3.1.1 Prerequisites of Rational Policy Making

1. Firstly, an adequate understanding of social values is extremely important (value preferences in society).
2. Data and information regarding alternative courses of action must be readily available.
3. There must be a defined decision-making system in the organisation with the capacity to understand relevant data, analyse it properly, and predict the consequences of the alternative courses of action.

The rational model provides a structured, logical framework for decision-making, minimises bias, and promotes transparency and accountability.

2.3.1.2 Limitations of the Rational Approach

While attractive in theory, the rational model faces several challenges in practice:

- **Difficulty in Achieving Goals:** Policy problems are often too complex for purely rational solutions. Decision-makers may also prioritise personal interests, such as power, money, or re-election, over societal goals.
- **Optimisation problem:** Although the model aims to find the best outcome, policy-makers often settle for compromises. For instance, pollution control may require costly measures, but public resistance to higher expenses limits truly optimal solutions.



❑ Limitations of the Rational Model

- Conflict between rationality and urgency: Emergencies or legislative deadlines often force quick action, leaving little time for thorough analysis.
- **Value conflicts:** Different groups hold competing values, making it hard to rank them consistently.
- **Political feasibility:** Even if a rational option exists, it may not be politically acceptable. Leaders often avoid unpopular decisions, delay action, or form committees to reduce conflict.
- **Cost-benefit challenges:** Accurately measuring costs and benefits is difficult, especially when policies involve social, cultural, or ethical values that cannot easily be quantified.

Simon noted that it is unrealistic to expect individuals or governments to be fully rational. At best, they aim for “satisficing,” meaning they choose an option that is good enough rather than the absolute best.

2.3.1.3 Conclusion

❑ Rational Model in Practice

Rational policy-making remains more of an ideal than a consistent practice. It is difficult to achieve due to time limits, incomplete information, political pressures, and conflicting values. Nevertheless, it is still an important analytical model, as it highlights the conditions under which better decisions can be made.

❑ Bounded Rationality

Simon’s idea of *bounded rationality* suggests that policy-makers rarely “optimise” but instead settle for satisfactory choices. Private organisations, with focused profit goals, may come closer to rational decision-making. Public organisations, however, face multiple demands and scarce resources, making the process much more complex.

❑ Improving Decision-Making

In practice, governments should still aim to clarify goals, choose efficient strategies, measure outcomes, and make adjustments through feedback. The rational model may be hard to apply fully, but it serves as a useful guide for improving decision-making in public policy.

2.3.2 Cost–Benefit Analysis (CBA) Approach

Cost–Benefit Analysis (CBA) is a methodical, numerical, and logical process employed to evaluate whether a suggested policy, initiative, or programme will produce greater benefits than

❑ Cost–Benefit Analysis Overview

❑ Monetising Costs and Benefits

❑ Discounting in CBA

❑ Strengths of CBA

❑ Applications of Cost–Benefit Analysis

costs for the community. This approach is based on traditional economic theories that stress the effective distribution of limited resources. The fundamental concept is that every choice entails sacrifices, and CBA offers a formalised framework to assess whether the anticipated benefits surpass the drawbacks.

In this framework, all costs and benefits—whether direct or indirect, concrete or abstract—are quantified in monetary values. This allows policymakers to weigh different outcomes against a standardised measure. The process typically starts with recognising the alternatives for the project or policy. Subsequently, analysts compile a list of all potential expenses (such as building costs, environmental consequences, and management fees) and all prospective advantages (including enhanced productivity, reduced travel time, better health outcomes, or improved community welfare). These values are predicted over the entire lifespan of the project.

An essential aspect of CBA is the practice of discounting, which transforms future costs and benefits into their present worth. This reflects the principle that current money carries more value than future funds. Analysts subsequently compute metrics like the Net Present Value (NPV), Benefit–Cost Ratio (BCR), or Internal Rate of Return (IRR) to evaluate the economic viability of a project. When benefits surpass costs, the initiative is viewed as favourable.

The strength of CBA resides in its impartiality, consistent methodology, and its capability to steer decisions that enhance social welfare. It provides decision-makers with a logical foundation for evaluating various policy alternatives and assists in rationalising public expenditure.

2.3.2.1 Application of Cost–Benefit Analysis

Cost–Benefit Analysis is commonly utilised across various areas of governance, development planning, and public policy. In public infrastructure, CBA is vital for assessing significant investments such as highways, bridges, airports, ports, power generation facilities, and irrigation systems. Governments depend on it to ascertain whether such considerable investments yield adequate economic benefits through lower travel expenses, improved connectivity, or boosted economic growth.

In the social realm, CBA is used to evaluate programmes in education, healthcare, sanitation, social services, and



❑ Social Applications of CBA

job creation. For instance, it aids in understanding the long-term value of vaccination efforts, literacy initiatives, skill enhancement programmes, and poverty reduction strategies by comparing their expenses with advancements in health, productivity, and overall living conditions.

❑ Applications of Cost–Benefit Analysis

Environmental policy is yet another critical domain where CBA is heavily applied. It assesses the financial implications of pollution control initiatives, waste disposal systems, forest preservation, renewable energy projects, and strategies to address climate change. CBA assists policymakers in determining whether the costs associated with emission reductions or environmental safeguarding are warranted by the resulting benefits, such as improved air quality, public health advantages, or diminished climate risks.

❑ Applications of Cost–Benefit Analysis

International development organisations such as the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, and the IMF utilise Cost-Benefit Analysis to evaluate development initiatives in nations with low and middle incomes. This approach ensures that financial resources, including loans and grants, are allocated to projects that foster durable and equitable developmental outcomes. In addition, regulatory agencies apply Cost-Benefit Analysis to measure the economic effects of laws and regulations, such as workplace safety guidelines, consumer protection statutes, and environmental policies, ensuring they yield overall social benefits without placing undue burdens on industries.

Consequently, Cost-Benefit Analysis serves as an essential tool for the allocation of scarce resources, improving transparency, and encouraging effective public policy.

2.3.2.2 Critiques of Cost–Benefit Analysis

❑ Limitations of CBA

Despite its extensive use, Cost-Benefit Analysis faces a variety of criticisms, particularly concerning its foundational assumptions, limitations, and ethical considerations. One major critique revolves around the challenge of assigning monetary value to intangible or non-market assets. Numerous social, environmental, and cultural advantages—including biodiversity, heritage, community health, scenic value, and the worth of human lives—cannot be simply or accurately quantified in financial terms. This frequently results in important social issues being undervalued.

❑ Critique of Discounting Practices

Another point of contention pertains to the practice of discounting, which diminishes the anticipated value of future returns. This approach tends to favour immediate gains over enduring sustainability, creating a bias against initiatives aimed at environmental protection, climate change alleviation, or projects whose benefits become evident over extended periods. Critics contend that this practice undermines fairness for future generations and diminishes support for initiatives that benefit those yet to come.

❑ Criticisms of Cost-Benefit Analysis

Cost-Benefit Analysis has also been criticised for perpetuating social disparities. Since it often relies on principles like willingness to pay, the perceived benefits may skew higher for affluent individuals—who can afford more—compared to poorer communities. This can skew policy priorities and neglect vulnerable groups. Moreover, the outcomes of Cost-Benefit Analysis largely depend on assumptions, estimates, and the quality of data used. Minor inaccuracies, biased inputs, or manipulation for political purposes can produce misleading findings, which might inadvertently support detrimental or inefficient policies.

❑ Criticisms of Cost-Benefit Analysis

From an ethical standpoint, Cost-Benefit Analysis is frequently criticised for concentrating too narrowly on economic efficiency while overlooking issues related to fairness, justice, and the equitable distribution of benefits. A project may demonstrate considerable overall net benefits yet still adversely affect certain groups or communities. Critics maintain that ethical considerations, democratic ideals, and public preferences should not be confined strictly to monetary evaluations.

❑ Role of Cost-Benefit Analysis

In spite of these challenges, Cost-Benefit Analysis continues to be a significant analytical instrument. Nevertheless, it should be supplemented with additional qualitative and participatory methods to ensure that decision-making is balanced, fair, and socially equitable.

2.3.2.3 Conclusion

CBA remains a widely used technique for ranking and comparing policy alternatives. It plays an important role in budgetary planning by helping to ensure that resources are allocated efficiently. Its main appeal lies in its systematic framework for identifying goals, assessing their impacts, and comparing costs with benefits.



❑ Continued
Relevance of
CBA

Although its role declined somewhat with the rise of privatisation and deregulation—where markets were expected to allocate costs and benefits more efficiently—CBA continues to be a central tool in rational analysis and government decision-making. It also serves as a mechanism for legitimising public policies by providing measurable, objective criteria for evaluation.

Summarised Overview

This unit examines two influential approaches to public policy-making: the Rational Approach and the Cost-Benefit Analysis Approach.

The Rational Approach emphasises logical and systematic decision-making. It involves identifying problems, setting clear goals, ranking priorities, and comparing policy alternatives. Decision-makers are expected to evaluate costs and benefits before selecting the most efficient option. Lindblom's "rational man" framework illustrates this step-by-step process, while Herbert Simon's concept of bounded rationality highlights the practical limits of human decision-making. Constraints such as incomplete information, time pressures, political interests, and conflicting values often prevent fully rational choices. Instead, policies tend to aim for satisfactory rather than optimal solutions.

Cost-Benefit Analysis (CBA) provides a practical tool for applying rational principles. It compares the costs and benefits of different policy options in both monetary and qualitative terms. Originally developed in the United States in the early 1900s and institutionalised in the 1960s through welfare economics and defence planning, CBA remains a significant tool for assessing public programmes. Its three major steps include identifying impacts, assigning monetary values, and estimating difficult-to-measure benefits. While useful in budgetary planning and resource allocation, CBA also faces criticism. Quantifying intangible benefits such as environmental quality, social well-being, or cultural preservation often involves subjective judgments that reduce their neutrality.

Both approaches share the objective of improving policy efficiency and accountability. While rational analysis sets an ideal model, CBA operationalises these principles in applied decision-making. Together, they provide frameworks for governments to clarify goals, evaluate alternatives, allocate resources, and monitor outcomes. Despite their limitations, they remain important tools for students and practitioners of public policy to understand and critically assess how decisions are made in practice.

Self-Assessment Questions

1. Explain the Rational Approach in public policy-making. What assumptions does it make about decision-makers?
2. Describe the main stages involved in rational decision-making. Why are these stages difficult to apply in real-world policy situations?
3. What is meant by bounded rationality? How does it challenge the idea of fully rational policy-making?
4. Discuss Thomas Dye's view of rationality as efficiency. How does this relate to cost and value calculations?
5. What prerequisites are necessary for rational policy-making to function effectively?
6. Identify and explain three major limitations of the Rational Approach.
7. What is Cost-Benefit Analysis (CBA)? How does it help policymakers evaluate different policy options?
8. Explain the role of discounting in CBA. Why is this practice controversial?
9. What are the main criticisms of using CBA in public policy, especially when valuing social or environmental benefits?
10. Compare the Rational Approach and the Cost-Benefit Analysis Approach in terms of their assumptions, strengths, and limitations.

Assignments

1. Define the Rational Approach to public policy-making.
2. Explain the key requirements for a policy to be considered rational.
3. What is bounded rationality? Give an example.
4. List the main stages of rational policy-making.
5. Discuss two limitations of the Rational Approach.
6. What is Cost-Benefit Analysis (CBA) and why is it important?
7. Explain the three main steps of CBA with examples.
8. What are the major criticisms of applying CBA in public policy?
9. Compare the Rational Approach and the Cost-Benefit Analysis Approach in terms of objectives and application.



10. Assess the relevance of the Rational and CBA approaches in the Indian policy-making context.

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BLOCK 3

Public Policy in India

UNIT 1

Policy Initiation, Policy Deliberation and Policy Making

Learning Outcomes

After completing this unit, learners will be able to:

- explain the meaning and significance of policy initiation, deliberation, and decision-making in the policy process
- identify key stages in policy formulation, including problem identification, agenda setting, proposal formulation, and decision-making
- analyse the role of various actors (legislators, executives, interest groups, and citizens) in shaping public policy
- evaluate how issues move from public concern to the formal policy agenda and become part of governmental action
- critically assess the importance of negotiation, compromise, and legitimacy in policy decision-making

Background

Public policy serves as a mechanism through which governments respond to public needs and challenges. It is not merely a set of ideas but a planned course of action that includes programmes, projects, and resource allocation to address societal issues. Understanding the early stages of policy-making is crucial, as these stages largely determine which issues are addressed and how they are framed for government attention.

Policy initiation is the starting point where problems are identified, recognised as significant, and brought into the public sphere. The shift from a private issue to a public problem depends on factors such as the number of people affected, the intensity of concern, the problem's persistence, and the resources at stake. Once recognised, problems must compete for a place on the policy agenda. Agenda setting is selective;



only some issues are prioritised for governmental action. This stage is shaped by public opinion, political leadership, media attention, and pressure groups.

Following agenda setting, policy deliberation involves developing solutions or proposals. At this stage, government agencies, advisory committees, and interest groups work to frame possible responses. Proposals may compete, and compromises often shape the final form of solutions.

Decision-making is the point at which authorised bodies approve, modify, or reject proposals. Legislatures, executives, and administrators play a key role, and their decisions carry legal authority. Importantly, decision-making reflects both political negotiation and democratic legitimacy, as public officials act on behalf of citizens.

By examining these early stages—initiation, deliberation, and decision-making—students gain insight into how public issues evolve into concrete actions and why understanding this process is essential for policy analysis and governance.

Keywords

Policy Initiation, Problem Identification, Agenda Setting, Policy Formulation, Policy Proposal, Decision-Making, Systemic Agenda, Governmental Agenda, Public Participation, Policy Legitimacy

Discussion

Public policy generally represents a plan of action taken to address specific problems in society. It is not just an idea but an initiative that leads to concrete actions such as programmes, projects, and allocation of budgets. Scholars have developed different frameworks to understand the stages of the policy process, which aids in systematic analysis. In this context, public policy is seen as a series of linked steps or actions. This staged approach is useful because it reflects how policies typically move from problem recognition to implementation and evaluation.

Thomas R. Dye outlines six key stages of the public policy process:

1. **Problem Identification:** Recognising social problems, spreading awareness, and expressing demands for government intervention.
2. **Agenda Setting:** Deciding which issues will be considered

and prioritising them for government attention.

3. Policy Formulation: Developing proposals or plans to address the identified issues.
4. Policy Legitimation: Gaining political and legal approval for the chosen proposal and turning it into law or official policy.
5. Policy Implementation: Putting the approved policy into effect through programmes and actions.
6. Policy Evaluation: Assessing the results of the policy, examining its impact on the target groups, and suggesting modifications if needed.

Although the process does not always follow these steps in strict order, the framework provides a logical sequence to understand policy-making. For convenience, the entire process can be grouped under three broad stages: policy formulation, policy implementation, and policy evaluation.

3.1.1 Public Policy Formulation

Policy formulation is a dynamic process involving several actors, events, and political institutions. It attempts to respond to the demands placed by the public.

James E. Anderson divides policy formulation into four main steps:

Collective problems become public concerns

1. Identifying Public Problems
2. Placing Them on the Policy Agenda
3. Formulation of Policy Proposals to Deal with the Problem
4. Making Policy Decisions

Public policies usually arise from issues that affect significant sections of society, prompting collective action. Unlike personal difficulties, public problems require government intervention to create acceptable solutions. When a problem affects many individuals, it becomes a matter of public concern and enters the policy sphere.

3.1.1.1 Identification of Public Problems

The identification of public problems is the starting point of policy-making. Public policies spring from the issues that



trouble a segment or segments of society. A public problem concerning a large number of individuals may become a question of public policy. The demand for action may come either from those directly affected by the issue or from others who act on their behalf. Larry Gerston lists four key factors that determine when an issue becomes a public problem:

Public problems initiate policymaking

- **Scope:** Refers to how many people are affected. A problem with a wide impact is more likely to receive policy attention.
- **Intensity:** Refers to the strength of public concern. Intense emotional reactions can quickly push an issue to the forefront.
- **Duration:** The longer a problem persists, the greater the pressure on policy-makers to address it.
- **Resources:** Refers to what is at stake in terms of money, effort, and potential benefits. Thus, identifying a public problem is the starting point for the public policy-making process.

3.1.1.2 Agenda Setting

Agenda setting is the next step, where only a limited number of issues receive serious attention from policy-makers. Political leaders, public opinion, and even protests can bring problems to the government's notice and push them onto the policy agenda. Only those demands that policy-makers decide to address or feel compelled to respond to form what is known as the policy agenda. This agenda is distinct from general political demands because it includes only the issues that receive serious consideration. It is also different from political priorities, which refer to the ranking of these agenda items according to their urgency or importance.

☐ Only key issues gain attention

Within a political system, there can be multiple policy agendas. Cobb and Elder identify two major types: the systemic agenda and the institutional (or governmental) agenda. The systemic agenda includes all issues that are widely recognised by members of the political community as deserving public attention and falling within the legitimate authority of the government. This type of agenda is present in every political system at national, state, and local levels and mainly serves as a discussion agenda. For action to take place, an issue must move from the systemic agenda to the institutional or governmental

☐ Systemic concerns move to official agendas

agenda, which consists of problems that public officials are actively considering and addressing.

3.1.1.3 Formulating Policy Proposals

Once the problem is identified and selected, the next stage is the formulation of policy proposals. At this stage, concrete solutions are designed. Policy formulation is the process of developing suitable and practical options to address public problems. However, this process does not always end with the creation of a law, executive order, or administrative regulation. Sometimes, policymakers may choose not to act at all, allowing the situation to resolve on its own. In other words, the presence of an issue on the policy agenda does not automatically guarantee that the government will take direct action on it. Government agencies, advisory commissions, legislatures, and interest groups play a major role in developing proposals. An advisory commission is also created by the government to examine a particular policy and develop policy proposals. The establishment of the Srikrishna Commission by the Government of India to look into the demand for the Telangana state is an example of such an advisory commission.

❑ Agencies design feasible policy options

3.1.1.4 Policy Decision-Making:

Policy formulation is closely linked with the policy decision stage, as both often overlap in practice. The main purpose of formulation is to gain approval for a preferred policy option, and the final decision is the outcome of this entire process. A policy decision refers to the formal action taken by an authorised individual or body to approve, modify, or reject a proposed policy. Such decisions may take the form of passing legislation, issuing an executive order, or taking other official actions.

❑ Final decisions formalise policy choices

In most cases, the decision stage does not involve choosing from several completely developed alternatives. Instead, it focuses on a single preferred alternative that its supporters believe can gain sufficient approval, even if it does not fully satisfy all their expectations. As the process advances toward decision-making, some proposals are dropped, others revised, and compromises are made. Negotiations help narrow differences, and in some situations, the final decision becomes a mere formality. In other cases, the outcome remains uncertain until the vote is taken or the decision is formally announced.

❑ Decisions Shaped Through Compromise and Negotiation

While private individuals and organisations may influence decisions, the legal authority to make them lies with public



❑ Legislative Decisions Reflect Public Will

officials—legislators, executives, administrators, and judges. In democratic systems, decision-making is most strongly associated with legislatures, which are expected to represent the will of the people. It is often said that a legislative majority reflects the majority of citizens, which aligns with the democratic principle that governance should reflect popular will. Policy decisions taken by legislatures are generally accepted as legitimate because they are made through lawful procedures and are binding on all concerned. In general, decisions by public officials are viewed as legitimate when made within their legal authority and according to established standards.

❑ Final Approval Enacts the Policy

The final stage in the policy-making process is the policy decision. It is directed towards winning approval of a preferred policy alternative. A policy decision involves actions by some official persons or bodies. It takes the form of legislation or an executive order. The policy-making process is completed only after the appropriate authority has adopted the policy.

Summarised Overview

This unit explores the crucial early stages of the policy-making process: policy initiation, deliberation, and decision-making. Policy initiation begins with recognising public problems. Issues become policy-relevant when they affect a significant portion of society, generate strong concern, persist over time, and involve substantial resources. These conditions encourage public demand for government intervention.

Agenda setting follows a selective process in which only certain issues gain priority for governmental attention. The policy agenda is shaped by political leaders, media coverage, public opinion, and interest groups. It differs from general political demands because it consists solely of issues actively under consideration by policymakers. Cobb and Elder's distinction between systemic and governmental agendas helps explain how problems transition from public discussion to official action.

Policy deliberation refers to the stage where possible solutions are formulated. Government agencies, expert committees, legislators, and advocacy groups contribute proposals. Multiple alternatives may be considered, but the process often results in a compromise that balances competing interests. Sometimes, decision-makers may opt for inaction if they believe problems will resolve naturally.

Decision-making is the point at which formal action is taken. It may involve passing legislation, issuing executive orders, or making administrative decisions. This stage reflects negotiation, persuasion, and political compromise. Decisions are considered legitimate when made by authorised bodies following lawful procedures, and they

become binding on society.

Together, these stages highlight that policy-making is not a single event but a dynamic process involving problem recognition, priority-setting, solution development, and collective decision-making. Understanding these steps helps explain why some issues receive attention while others do not and how democratic governance turns public demands into actionable outcomes.

Self-Assessment Questions

1. Define policy initiation and explain its significance in the policy-making process.
2. What are the four factors identified by Larry Gerston that determine when an issue becomes a public problem?
3. Differentiate between systemic agenda and governmental agenda with examples.
4. Discuss the role of agenda setting in shaping government priorities.
5. Explain the main steps involved in policy formulation according to James E. Anderson.
6. Evaluate the role of interest groups and advisory commissions in developing policy proposals.
7. Why are negotiation and compromise important in policy decision-making?
8. Discuss the relationship between policy formulation and policy decision-making.
9. How does public opinion influence the policy agenda?
10. Critically examine the importance of legitimacy in policy decisions in a democratic system.

Assignments

1. Examine how public problems transform into public policies. Discuss the factors that influence this transition, from problem identification to inclusion in the governmental agenda, by drawing on Gerston's criteria and Cobb & Elder's agenda-setting framework.
2. Analyse the process of policy formulation in democratic systems. Explain the role of government agencies, advisory commissions, expert bodies, and interest groups in designing feasible policy options, with suitable illustrations.



3. Decision-making is both a political and administrative activity. Evaluate how negotiation, compromise, and legitimacy shape policy decisions, and discuss why legislatures remain central to ensuring democratic approval.
4. Discuss the importance of monitoring and evaluation in the policy process. Explain how monitoring ensures quality, time, and cost control, and analyse how evaluation measures policy outcomes, effectiveness, and social impact.
5. Critically assess the institutional and non-institutional mechanisms of policy evaluation in India. Examine the roles of the CAG, parliamentary committees, enquiry commissions, internal departmental reviews, and civil society organisations in strengthening policy accountability and transparency.

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UNIT 2

Agencies for Public Policy Making

Learning Outcomes

After completing this unit, learners will be able to:

- explain the roles of key policy-making agencies such as the Cabinet, Prime Minister, PMO, NDC, and the Secretariat
- analyse how constitutional provisions, administrative mechanisms, and political practices shape public policy decisions
- evaluate the significance of inter-ministerial coordination and collective responsibility in governance
- assess the contributions of the Secretariat, ministries, and senior administrators to policy formulation and implementation
- critically examine the interplay between political leadership and bureaucracy in shaping public policies

Background

Public policy-making in India is a collaborative process involving multiple agencies that operate within a constitutional and administrative framework. The efficiency and effectiveness of this process depend on the coordination and functioning of these agencies.

At the centre of policy-making is the Cabinet, which serves as the principal decision-making body in India's parliamentary democracy. Comprising the Prime Minister and Cabinet Ministers, the Cabinet exercises constitutional authority, formulates policies, and ensures their implementation. Its power is strengthened by the principle of collective responsibility, administrative control through the Cabinet Secretariat, and the support of the majority party in Parliament.

The Prime Minister plays a pivotal role as the leader of the executive and the head



of the Cabinet. His powers are reinforced by electoral mandates, control over Cabinet appointments, and influence over major policy areas. The Prime Minister's Office (PMO) acts as the administrative nerve centre, providing support, coordinating communication, and ensuring the timely execution of decisions.

The National Development Council (NDC), though not a constitutional body, has historically played a vital role in planning and coordinating economic development efforts. It brings together the Prime Minister, Union Ministers, and Chief Ministers to discuss and approve national plans.

Equally important are the Secretariat, ministries, and departments that constitute the administrative machinery of the government. They draft policies, prepare plans, monitor programmes, and support ministers with data and analysis. Senior civil servants play a crucial role in shaping decisions by providing technical expertise and ensuring that policies are practical and implementable.

Together, these agencies form the backbone of India's public policy process, balancing political will, administrative capacity, and federal coordination to achieve national goals.

Keywords

Cabinet, Prime Minister, Prime Minister's Office, Cabinet Secretariat, National Development Council, Collective Responsibility, Ministries and Departments, Policy Planning Units, Inter-Ministerial Coordination, Bureaucratic Role in Policy

Discussion

3.2.1 The Cabinet

- ❑ Cabinet directs national policy decisions

In India's parliamentary system, the Cabinet is the principal policy-making body. It is a relatively small group, usually comprising members, including the Prime Minister and Cabinet Ministers. Together, they are the closest and most direct policymakers within the constitutional framework. The Cabinet shapes major policies, sets the direction of governance, and ensures that decisions taken are implemented effectively.

Sources of Cabinet Power

- ❑ Cabinet directs legislation and administration

The Cabinet's authority is derived from several key sources:

1. Constitutional Authority: The Cabinet holds the power to frame policies that are later presented before Parliament for approval. It acts as the real directing authority in both

legislation and administration. Constitutional expert Jennings described the Cabinet as “the core of the constitutional system.”

☐ Ministers uphold unified decisions

☐ Secretariat supervises ministerial functioning

2. Principle of Collective Responsibility: The Cabinet functions as a united body. Once a decision is made, all ministers are expected to publicly support it or resign. This principle strengthens the government by presenting a common front against criticism and ensures unified action.

3. Administrative Control: Through the Cabinet Secretariat, it coordinates and supervises the work of various ministries. The Secretariat prepares meeting agendas, records minutes, circulates decisions, and follows up on their implementation to ensure timely action.

4. Party System: In a parliamentary democracy, the Cabinet usually commands a majority in the legislature. Party unity allows the executive to pass its policies through Parliament with relative ease.

The Cabinet in India follows the British model and usually meets at least once a week. It discusses both major policy issues and specific administrative matters, ensuring that all significant proposals are examined in detail before being introduced in Parliament. As the supreme executive authority, it also coordinates the work of ministers and initiates key legislation.

3.2.1.1 Cabinet Committees

☐ Cabinet committees handle specialised issues

For facilitating the policy-making process, the business rules provide for the establishment of standing committees of the Cabinet to aid in making swift decisions on pressing issues of national importance. These committees enable an in-depth analysis of policy matters. The composition of the committees varies, and occasionally ad hoc committees are also formed for specific purposes. The Cabinet can review the decisions made by the committees. There are different types of standing committees.

3.2.1.2. Cabinet Secretariat

The Cabinet Secretariat is a critical institution supporting the functioning of the Cabinet. It is under the direct charge of the Prime Minister. The administrative head of the Secretariat is the Cabinet Secretary, who is also the ex officio chairman of the Civil Service Board.



Functions of the Cabinet Secretariat

The Secretariat performs several important tasks:

1. Preparing the agenda for Cabinet and Committee meetings.
2. Maintaining records of decisions and proceedings.
3. Monitoring the implementation of Cabinet decisions.
4. Administering the Government of India (Transaction of Business) Rules, 1961, and Allocation of Business Rules, 1961, to ensure the smooth functioning of ministries.
5. Facilitating inter-ministerial coordination and resolving differences among ministries.
6. Keeping the President, Vice-President, and Ministers informed through summaries of departmental activities and managing crisis situations.
7. Providing information and materials needed for Cabinet deliberations.

There are other important functions that it discharges, viz:

1. Monitoring. 2. Coordination. 3. Promoting new policy initiatives.

3.2.1.2. The Cabinet Secretary

The Cabinet Secretary is the senior-most civil servant and the administrative head of the Cabinet Secretariat. Though his formal duty is to provide secretarial support to the Cabinet, his influence is much greater.

- He sits next to the Prime Minister during Cabinet meetings and briefs him personally.
- He prepares the Cabinet minutes, ensuring they reflect the most relevant aspects of discussions.
- He maintains the morale of the civil service, protects their interests in conflicts with politicians, and acts as an advisor and guide to senior officials.

The Cabinet Secretary is thus both the head of the civil service and a crucial link between the political and administrative wings of government.

3.2.2. The Prime Minister

The Prime Minister is the leader of the government, often

□ Prime Minister Initiates Key Policies

elected with the face of the projected prime ministerial candidate. Therefore, the people have special expectations of the Prime Minister as a policy initiator. He is the leader of the party in power. His attention to policy issues is seen as an impetus for those issues, as the other ministers in the Council of Ministers are appointed by the President on the advice of the Prime Minister. Ramsay Muir describes the Prime Minister as the steersman of the steering wheel of the ship. According to Prof. Jennings, the Prime Minister is the sun around which other planets revolve. However, despite this strong position, the personality of the Prime Minister significantly impacts his standing among other ministers. His success also depends on the ability of his advisors and other ministers. The importance of the Prime Minister in policymaking and making crucial decisions can be seen in the following points:

The Prime Minister is the chairman of the NITI Aayog, the National Developmental Council, the National Integration Council, and the Inter-State Council. He presides over the Cabinet and has considerable influence over its decisions.

Constitutional Duties of the Prime Minister

Article 78 of the Constitution outlines the Prime Minister's responsibilities:

1. Communicating all Cabinet decisions and legislative proposals to the President.
2. Providing any information relating to administration that the President may request.
3. Submitting to the Council of Ministers any matter decided by an individual minister that has not been considered by the Council of Ministers if the President so requires.

Sources of the Prime Minister's Power

Several factors explain the strength of the Prime Minister's position:

- 1. Electoral Mandate:** In a parliamentary democracy, MPs often owe their positions to the popularity of the party leader. This allows the Prime Minister to command strong support from the ruling party.
- 2. Control Over Cabinet Decisions:** In crucial areas such as defence, foreign affairs, and economic policy, the Prime



Minister takes a personal interest. Though decisions require Cabinet approval, his opinion carries significant weight.

3. Power of Patronage:The Prime Minister appoints and removes ministers, reshuffles the Cabinet, and allocates important government posts. This ensures loyalty from most ministers, though the Prime Minister must act carefully with colleagues who enjoy strong party backing.

4. Control Over Civil Services: As head of the Civil Service, the Prime Minister makes key appointments (secretaries, heads of public enterprises, governors, etc.) through the Cabinet Appointments Committee. This allows him to shape administrative leadership.

The power of the Prime Minister is not static; it varies with the personality, style, and political strength of the individual in office, as well as the ability and influence of Cabinet colleagues.

3.2.2.1 Prime Minister's Office (PMO)

The PMO is a staff agency that provides advice to the Prime Minister on important matters and generally offers secretariat assistance. The PM enjoys the status of a department under the Government of India. The PMO assists the Prime Minister in carrying out his overall responsibilities and maintaining a link with the ministers, as well as with the state governments. It acts as a think tank for the Prime Minister and also looks after the public relations of the Prime Minister.

❑ PMO strengthens prime ministerial governance

❑ PMO's power depends on the Prime Minister

❑ PMO's influence grew over time

The role of the PMO in decision-making has been changing over time, and it has often overshadowed the Cabinet Secretariat. During periods of its greater influence, the PMO has often been referred to as the government of the Government of India. The role of the PMO has varied with the power of the Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister's Office (formerly called the Prime Minister's Secretariat) was established in 1947 to assist in discharging the Prime Minister's duties. Its role expanded significantly under Lal Bahadur Shastri and further under Indira Gandhi, Rajiv Gandhi, and Atal Bihari Vajpayee. Today, it has a greater say in the policy-making process.

Other Functions of the PMO

- Maintaining official communication with the President,

Governors, Union Ministers, and foreign representatives.

- Handling public grievances and important matters referred to the Prime Minister.
- Examining cases submitted for the Prime Minister's orders and providing necessary policy advice.

The PMO serves as the nerve centre of governance, ensuring that the Prime Minister remains well-informed and that government decisions are executed effectively.

3.2.3 Role of the National Development Council (NDC)

□ Planning Commission and NDC Established

After independence in 1947, India adopted planned economic development to achieve rapid social and economic progress. Although the Constitution did not explicitly mention planning bodies, the Planning Commission was established through a Cabinet resolution on 15 March 1950, and the National Development Council (NDC) was set up on 6 August 1952 to guide planning efforts.

The NDC is the highest policymaking body for planning below Parliament. It discusses the broad approach to Five-Year Plans, reviews draft outlines, and approves final versions with or without amendments. Following the recommendations of the Administrative Reforms Commission in 1967, its functions were redefined to include:

- Setting guidelines for national plan formulation and assessing available resources.
- Reviewing plans prepared by the Planning Commission.
- Considering major social and economic policy issues that affect national development.
- Periodically reviewing the implementation of plans and recommending corrective measures.

The NDC aims to mobilise national efforts and resources to support development, encourage common economic policies across states, and ensure balanced and accelerated growth.

3.2.3.1 Composition of NDC

- Prime Minister (Chairperson)
- Union Cabinet Ministers
- Chief Ministers of all States



❑ NDC Influences Major Development Programmes

- Chief Ministers/Administrators of Union Territories
- Members of the Planning Commission

Meetings are generally held twice a year and are attended by Chief Ministers, Governors, Union Ministers, the RBI Governor, members of the Planning Commission, and senior officials. The Planning Commission provides administrative support. Interestingly, the NDC does not formally pass resolutions, but its decisions carry significant weight and are usually followed. Approval of a plan by the NDC enables the preparation of sector-specific development programmes, which are then presented to Parliament.

Due to its large membership, the NDC often appoints committees to study specific issues in detail. Its recommendations are highly regarded and generally implemented, giving it an important role in federal coordination and national planning.

3.2.4 Role of the Secretariat, Ministries, and Departments

The Indian Constitution provides for a parliamentary form of executive at both central and state levels. This executive is assisted by ministries and departments, collectively referred to as the Secretariat. These bodies form the headquarters of government administration.

❑ Ministries created and administratively led

Under the Government of India (Allocation of Business) Rules, 1961, ministries and departments are created by the President on the advice of the Prime Minister. Each ministry is headed by a Minister, assisted by a Secretary who serves as the administrative head. The Secretariat is the nerve centre of policymaking and is responsible for initiating, coordinating, and supervising government programmes across the country.

3.2.4.1 Functions of the Secretariat

The Secretariat performs a wide range of functions, including:

1. Assisting ministers in policy formulation.
2. Drafting legislation, rules, and regulations.
3. Preparing sectoral plans, programmes, and budgets, and monitoring expenditure.
4. Approving and modifying operational programmes.
5. Supervising the execution of policies and evaluating

their outcomes.

6. Interpreting policies, coordinating with other branches of government, and liaising with state administrations.
7. Developing organisational and personnel capacity within ministries.
8. Supporting ministers in discharging their responsibilities to Parliament.

3.2.4.2 Policy Making Role of the Secretariat

❑ Secretariat advises and coordinates decisions

The Secretariat is a key advisory and administrative body that supports ministers in decision-making. The Secretary, as the chief advisor, provides necessary data, prepares policy options, and ensures that decisions are based on sound analysis. It frames legislative proposals, supervises implementation, and serves as the channel of communication with states, the Planning Commission, and other constitutional bodies.

❑ Planning units support informed policymaking

To strengthen policymaking, the government has set up Policy Planning Units in key ministries. These units ensure coordination among different programme elements, encourage policy evaluation, and provide independent analysis for better decision-making. Advisory committees, composed of experts and representatives, are often attached to ministries to provide guidance on specific policy issues. These committees may also represent the federal character of India by including state representatives, although their role is more limited compared to ministerial committees.

❑ Senior Administrators Significantly Shape Policy

In theory, democratic governance is political, not bureaucratic, with civil servants expected to implement decisions made by elected leaders. However, in practice, senior civil servants play a significant role in shaping public policy. Their technical expertise, administrative experience, and ability to analyse issues give them considerable influence over ministers' choices. Administrators ensure that policies are practical and can be successfully implemented. They interpret laws, determine rights and obligations, and guide the execution process. The success or failure of many policies in post-independence India can be directly linked to the role played by senior administrators in shaping, advising, and implementing government decisions.



Summarised Overview

This unit examines the key agencies responsible for public policy-making in India and their interconnected roles in shaping governance. The Cabinet emerges as the central policy-making authority, guided by constitutional provisions and collective responsibility. It sets policy direction, coordinates ministerial functions, and ensures implementation through the Cabinet Secretariat, which manages agendas, records, and follow-up actions.

The Prime Minister stands at the core of the executive system, influencing policy decisions through leadership, control over Cabinet composition, and personal involvement in strategic sectors like defence and foreign policy. The Prime Minister's Office (PMO) serves as a vital support mechanism, handling communication with stakeholders, processing grievances, and providing policy advice.

The National Development Council (NDC) historically acted as a platform for cooperative federalism, ensuring that national plans reflect both central and state perspectives. Its discussions and approvals shaped the Five-Year Plans and guided development priorities.

At the administrative level, the Secretariat, ministries, and departments play a fundamental role in policy formulation. They prepare proposals, draft legislation, and monitor implementation. Senior civil servants, as advisors and administrators, bridge the gap between political leadership and administrative execution, ensuring decisions are evidence-based and feasible.

Policy Planning Units within ministries further enhance policy design by conducting evaluations and offering analytical support. Advisory committees supplement this process by bringing expert and state-level inputs.

Overall, this unit highlights how political and administrative institutions interact to transform ideas into actionable policies. It underscores the importance of coordination, expert input, and leadership in achieving effective policy outcomes in a democratic setting.

Self-Assessment Questions

1. Explain the role of the Cabinet as the principal policy-making body in India.
2. Discuss the sources of the Cabinet's power in the parliamentary system.
3. Describe the constitutional duties of the Prime Minister under Article 78.
4. Evaluate the significance of the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) in modern governance.

5. Analyse the role and composition of the National Development Council (NDC).
6. Discuss how the Secretariat supports policy formulation and implementation.
7. Examine the importance of inter-ministerial coordination in effective governance.
8. Explain the advisory role of senior civil servants in shaping public policies.
9. Assess the impact of collective responsibility on Cabinet decision-making.
10. Critically analyse the balance between political leadership and bureaucratic expertise in policy-making.

Assignments

1. Examine the role of the Cabinet as the principal policy-making authority in India. How do constitutional provisions, collective responsibility, and administrative control shape its functioning?
2. Analyse the importance of the Prime Minister in India's policy-making structure. Discuss how electoral mandate, Cabinet control, and the support of the PMO enhance the Prime Minister's leadership.
3. Discuss the evolution and growing influence of the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) in policy-making. How has its role changed over time, and in what ways does it interact with other executive institutions?
4. Evaluate the contribution of the National Development Council (NDC) to India's planning process. Explain its composition, functioning, and role in coordinating national development strategies.
5. Critically assess the policy-making role of the Secretariat, ministries, and senior civil servants. How do administrative expertise, inter-ministerial coordination, and policy planning units influence the formulation and implementation of public policies?

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UNIT 3

Policy Monitoring, Evaluation and Feedback

Learning Outcomes

After completing this Unit, learners will be able to:

- explain the concept of policy monitoring and its role in ensuring the efficient and effective implementation of public policies
- differentiate between monitoring, control, and evaluation, and discuss their significance in the policy cycle
- analyse the steps involved in policy monitoring and evaluation, including data collection, performance measurement, and corrective actions
- critically assess the role of evaluating agencies such as the Programme Evaluation Organization (PEO), the CAG, and Parliamentary Committees in improving policy outcomes
- discuss the importance of feedback mechanisms in reshaping policies and promoting accountability, transparency, and better governance

Background

Policy evaluation, monitoring, and feedback form a crucial stage of the public policy process, bridging the gap between formulation and the improvement of policies over time. The success of any public policy depends not just on its design but also on how well it is implemented and continuously monitored. Monitoring ensures that resources are used efficiently and programmes are executed according to set standards of time, cost, and quality. A robust monitoring system allows policymakers to track progress, identify deviations, and take corrective action promptly. This makes monitoring not just an administrative function but also a tool for effective policy management.

Evaluation, on the other hand, goes beyond monitoring by asking whether a policy achieved its intended outcomes and whether those outcomes were socially desirable.

It is a learning process that helps governments refine objectives, replace ineffective programmes, and redesign implementation strategies. Various methods, including cost-benefit analysis, impact assessment, and performance appraisal, are used to measure policy success.

Feedback is an equally important element in the cycle, as it provides policymakers with insights from stakeholders, beneficiaries, and evaluators. Such feedback ensures that policies remain dynamic and responsive to changing socio-economic conditions. It also strengthens accountability by keeping both implementers and decision-makers answerable for results.

Overall, policy monitoring, evaluation, and feedback are indispensable for evidence-based policymaking, enabling governments to reduce waste, improve efficiency, and ensure that policies align with public needs and expectations.

Keywords

Policy Monitoring, Policy Evaluation, Control Mechanism, Impact Assessment, Cost-Benefit Analysis, Performance Appraisal, Feedback Loop, Programme Evaluation Organisation (PEO), Zero-Based Budgeting, Public Accountability

Discussion

3.3.1 Policy Monitoring

Achieving the goals of public policy depends not only on proper formulation but also on effective implementation and monitoring. Monitoring and control form the core of policy management, as they ensure that programmes are carried out efficiently and deliver the expected results. Through monitoring, policy implementers can observe the actual impact of their efforts and identify areas where adjustments may be required.

The primary objective of monitoring is to ensure that available resources are used optimally and that the programme remains aligned with its intended outcomes. Standards for efficiency and effectiveness are set during the policy-making stage, and monitoring helps verify whether these standards are being met.

An efficient monitoring system allows administrators to track progress, detect deviations early, and take corrective action where necessary. This reduces costs, saves time, and improves



resource utilisation. The central requirement of monitoring is a robust information system that supplies timely and accurate data to policymakers and implementers. Such a system ensures that policy performance stays as close as possible to its original objectives. A good monitoring framework also provides controls over staffing, costs, and scheduling, helping achieve desired results within the shortest possible time.

3.3.1.1 Definition of Policy Monitoring and Control

Monitoring and control, though often mentioned together, are distinct concepts. Originating as management tools in engineering, they were later applied to public policy.

- Monitoring refers to observing the progress of a policy programme and detecting potential deviations from the planned performance.
- Control refers to making adjustments whenever the observed performance diverges from the plan.

In the context of public policy, monitoring involves tracking implementation progress, measuring resource use, and ensuring that activities are completed within the allocated time and budget. When deviations occur, corrective steps are taken—either by replanning a specific activity or, if necessary, analysing the cause of major variances before deciding on a course of action.

3.3.1.2 Steps in Policy Monitoring

Monitoring policy implementation involves ensuring that programmes meet their **time** and **cost** objectives. Six key steps can be identified:

1. **Planning:** Establishing clear expectations and benchmarks against which progress can be measured.
2. **Allocation:** Distributing resources—financial, human, and technical—to policy activities.
3. **Implementation:** Executing the planned technical and administrative work.
4. **Measurement:** Observing and recording performance indicators related to time, cost, and quality to detect any deviations.
5. **Evaluation:** Analyzing the causes of identified deviations and assessing their impact on policy

outcomes.

- 6. Adjustment:** Taking corrective action to bring implementation back in line with original plans.

3.3.1.3 Measures for Effective Policy Monitoring

Monitoring is central to successful policy management and requires a deliberate investment of effort and resources. Several measures can enhance its effectiveness:

1. Designing a Robust Monitoring System

The monitoring framework must address three critical factors—**technical quality**, **time schedule**, and **cost control**. It is not enough to focus only on the budget or deadlines; technical outcomes must also meet the required standards. Tools such as **activity bar charts**, **resource bar charts**, and **cash flow projections** can be designed to track progress accurately. -

- Ensuring quality-time-cost control

2. Strengthening the Communication System

Timely and transparent communication is crucial to monitoring success. Information must flow effectively from the operational level to top management. Routine updates, summary reports for senior officials, and detailed progress notes for field staff keep everyone aligned. Regular review meetings should be held to assess progress and resolve emerging issues. The Eleventh Five-Year Plan recommended the creation of transparent data repositories that could be accessed by independent evaluators. Modern monitoring systems should use electronic tools for real-time communication and data sharing. -

- Transparent real-time communication

3. Building Administrative Capacity

The effectiveness of monitoring depends largely on the skills, commitment, and authority of the monitoring staff. They require expertise in planning, accounting, and general management, along with decision-making authority to take corrective action. Key personnel should be accountable for presenting reliable data and ensuring that monitoring adds value. Committees comprising representatives from the Centre and States can help strengthen monitoring capacity. For instance, following the Union Home Ministry's advice in 2009, States and Union Territories set up 24/7 control rooms to track and respond to security threats. -

- Skilled authoritative monitoring staff



4. Taking Corrective Actions

Monitoring must lead to action whenever deviations occur. There are three main types of corrective actions:

- **Correction and Improvement:** Making adjustments such as reallocating staff, funds, or time while continuing the programme.
- **Replanning:** Redefining programme objectives, timelines, or budgets when major changes are required.
- **Cancellation:** As a last resort, discontinuing a programme if it is no longer viable or relevant, especially during crises.

3.3.2 Policy Evaluation

Policy evaluation has existed as long as policy-making itself and is generally considered the final stage of the policy cycle. It focuses on assessing what happens after a policy is implemented, asking whether the policy has achieved its intended goals and whether it is socially valuable. Evaluation provides policymakers, planners, and administrators with reliable data about the effectiveness and relevance of current and past strategies for solving public problems.

Evaluation measures policy effectiveness

3.3.2.1. Policy Evaluation

The final stage of the policy process is policy evaluation. It is concerned with what happens once the policy has been put into effect. It assesses the effectiveness of public policy in terms of intentions and results. It is the best opportunity to evaluate whether commitments have been carried out in line with the policy's design.

Evaluation checks implementation results

The major objective of policy evaluation is to make an objective assessment of the proposed policy and to provide necessary suggestions for improving its efficiency.

Functions of Evaluation

Evaluation performs several functions in policy analysis. It provides reliable information about policy performance. Its main purpose is to measure the impact of policy on society. It reveals the extent to which a particular goal has been achieved.

Evaluation measures performance and goals

Secondly, evaluation helps to clarify the values that underlie the selection of goals and objectives.

Thirdly, evaluation may enable the policymaker to restructure

policy problems. It may also contribute to the emergence of new objectives and potential solutions.

The main function of evaluation is to address problems in the face of policy delivery. It is used to assess policy efficiency, policy effectiveness, and policy impact.

3.3.2.2. Types of Evaluation

Joseph S. Wholey has identified three types of policy evaluation:

1. Programme Impact Evaluation

This involves the assessment of overall programme impact and effectiveness. It aims to determine the extent to which the programmes are successful in achieving basic objectives. This can be done according to effectiveness, efficiency, adequacy, responsiveness, appropriateness, and similar criteria.

2. Programme Strategy Evaluation

This refers to the assessment of the relative effectiveness of the programme strategy and its variables. Here, the emphasis is on determining which programme strategies are most productive.

3. Project Monitoring Evaluation

This involves the assessment of individual projects through site visits and other activities.

Often, the above types of evaluations are conducted in a mixed manner. A single type of evaluation can only provide a partial picture regarding the policy issues.

3.3.2.3 Policy Evaluation Process

Conducting an evaluation requires a systematic framework. Typically, five steps are involved:

- 1. Identifying the Purpose:** Clearly state why the evaluation is being conducted and what questions it seeks to answer.
- 2. Defining Areas of Evaluation:** Focus on specific programme components (e.g., environmental impact, delivery mechanisms) that will provide the most useful information.
- 3. Selecting Methods and Collecting Data:** Choose appropriate research techniques, develop data collection



tools, conduct pilot tests, and plan for proper sampling, timing, and storage.

- 4. Analysing Results:** Clean and tabulate data to generate meaningful insights that inform policy decisions.
- 5. Preparing an Evaluation Report:** Present a well-structured report with findings, recommendations, and technical appendices, ensuring it can be referred to for future analysis.

3.3.2.4 Evaluation in Operation (Implementing Agencies)

Policy evaluation is a complex process. Multiple agencies are involved in the task. It is carried out in a variety of ways by a range of evaluators. It may be conducted by those delivering the programmes or by private agencies outside the government. Communication media, researchers in both private and public institutions, organised groups, commissions, and public interest organisations are involved in evaluating policies. They also provide the public with information.

1. Evaluation by Implementing Agencies

The implementers themselves monitor the progress of the policies. They use periodic reports, meetings, public hearings, grievances, and complaints to assess whether the implementation is being carried out as planned. However, this system suffers from: (1) a lack of sufficient skills and expertise in reporting and analysing the problems, and (2) a lack of willingness to highlight failures in implementation due to fear of embarrassment.

2. Evaluation by Trained Professionals:

Here, the evaluation can be conducted by specialised staff. These can be both internal (within the organisation) or external audit agencies, advisory boards, professional institutions, etc.

3. Evaluation by Parliament

In democratic countries, legislative bodies are involved in policy evaluation. They exercise this evaluation process through techniques such as asking questions, moving no-confidence motions, calling attention motions, and the budgetary process. Evaluation may also be conducted through committee hearings and investigations. In India, the Public Accounts Committee, the Estimate Committee, the Committee on Public Undertakings, and the select committees attached to Parliament also perform

❑ Evaluations
Involve Diverse
Institutions

❑ Field Monitoring
Suffers Key Gaps

❑ Specialised
Staff Conduct
Evaluations

❑ Legislatures
scrutinise policy
performance

evaluation functions. The Public Accounts Committee, for example, institutes inquiries in cases of fraud and financial irregularities, investigates revenue leakages, streamlines the functioning of autonomous bodies, and seeks to improve procedures and tighten financial control.

3.3.2.5. Evaluation by CAG

❑ CAG ensures transparent financial oversight

The CAG is the head of the Indian Audit and Accounts Department and acts as a guardian of public finance. He is an officer of Parliament and is referred to as the eyes and ears of the Public Accounts Committee. His main function is auditing the accounts of the Union and State Governments. He has broad statutory authority to ensure the accountability of the executive to the legislature. He assists the legislatures in the effective exercise of financial control.

❑ CAG verifies proper revenue procedures

While conducting audits of the receipts of the Union and the States, the CAG ensures that the rules and procedures guarantee that the assessment, collection, and allocation of revenue are done in accordance with the law and that there is no leakage of revenue that legally should come to the government. In addition to the Union and States, he audits the receipts and expenditures of the following:

- a. All bodies and authorities substantially financed from central or state revenue.
- b. Government companies and
- c. Other companies and bodies required by law.

Evaluation studies may be undertaken by the office of the CAG on its own initiative, based on directives in the legislation, at the request of financial committees, or sometimes at the request of individual members of the legislatures.

3.3.2.6. Evaluation by Administrative Agencies.

❑ Internal reports assess departmental performance

All government departments prepare their internal evaluation reports. These reports provide an opportunity to appraise the workings of the programmes and projects undertaken by the departments. Similarly, every department, while sending its request to the finance ministry, evaluates the actual plans and programmes undertaken by it. The Organisation and Methods (O and M) division in ministries also indirectly performs the task of policy evaluation.



Evaluation by Public Enquiry Commission

- ❑ Expert bodies enhance evaluation credibility

- ❑ Central commissions offer informed evaluations

- ❑ Civil society evaluates public policies

- ❑ Vague goals hinder accurate evaluation

Enquiry Commissions constituted under the Commission of Enquiry Act, 1952, the Central Vigilance Commission, and the Niti Aayog can also be used as a means of policy evaluation. The reports of these commissions receive greater public confidence in the evaluation process because of their expertise and objective approach compared to other commissions.

Other commissions set up from time to time, such as the Administrative Reforms Commission, Law Commission, National Commission on Labour, Police, Agriculture, Education, Central Pay Commission, National Human Rights Commission, etc., also hold evaluative significance. Their recommendations are often cited in the policy-making process. They hold wide consultations with the concerned parties, use expert advice, and take due time and effort in analysing the impact of various policies.

Evaluation activity is also carried on outside the government. University research scholars, private research institutes, pressure groups, and public interest organisations evaluate policies that have an impact on public officers to some extent. They also provide the wider public with information, publicise policy action or inaction, and advocate for the enactment or withdrawal of policies. They sometimes effectively voice the demands of the weaker sections of the public.

3.3.2.7. Problems of Evaluation

Evaluation is an important component of the policy-making process. It must be objective, systematic, and empirical. However, it is a very difficult exercise. The evaluation process is confronted with many factors:

1. Unclear policy goals

When the policy goals are unclear and not in a measurable form, policy evaluation becomes a complex and cumbersome task. In such cases, officials may define the goals of the programmes differently and reach differing conclusions. Even when the goals are clear, they may not be practical.

2. Problem of measurement

Even when the goals are clear, measuring the extent to which they have been achieved presents difficulties. Evaluators

Measuring goal achievement is difficult

Lack of reliable data hinders evaluation

Government controls evaluation disclosure

Evaluation challenges arise from organisational inertia

may not be impartial individuals capable of taking an objective view of the policy issue. The same conditions can be interpreted differently by different evaluators.

3. Problem of data collection

In most cases, it is found that people are not interested in providing the necessary information. Furthermore, the data required to evaluate the programmes may not be available or may be in an unsuitable form.

4. Official resistance

This is another barrier to policy evaluation. Evaluation reports are typically submitted to the government. If a report is favourable to the government, it is published widely and regarded as an achievement. Conversely, if the report highlights the failures of government agencies, the government may choose not to make it public.

5. Inertia of the organisation

Organisations tend to resist change, while evaluation implies change. Thus, organisational inertia can be an obstacle to evaluation.

Public policy evaluation is a complex process and a significant political endeavour. Evaluating public programmes involves listing the goals, measuring the degree to which these goals have been achieved, and finally suggesting changes. This may align the organisation's performance more closely with the intended purposes of the programmes.

Suggestions

1. The government should encourage non-governmental agencies, universities, and research institutions to take up the task of policy evaluation.
2. Adequate resources should be made available to the evaluating agency.
3. A standardised format, criteria, and methodology should be used for evaluation.
4. Emphasis should be placed on training personnel so that they can perform their tasks effectively and efficiently.
5. Inter-governmental and intra-agency exchanges of skilled personnel should be promoted; and
6. Efforts should be made to establish a well-coordinated information dissemination system.



Summarised Overview

This Unit explores the critical role of monitoring, evaluation, and feedback in public policy. Monitoring is introduced as the process of observing policy implementation, measuring performance indicators, and ensuring that time, cost, and quality standards are met. Key steps in monitoring—planning, allocation, implementation, measurement, evaluation, and adjustment—are outlined as necessary for keeping programmes on track. Effective monitoring also requires robust information systems, strong communication channels, and adequate administrative capacity.

Policy evaluation is presented as a systematic process of assessing whether a policy has achieved its objectives and whether it remains relevant in addressing public issues. Evaluation is distinguished from monitoring as it looks retrospectively at results rather than simply tracking progress. Several evaluation approaches are highlighted, including performance appraisal, financial audits, result evaluation, cost–benefit analysis, and impact assessment. These methods help determine the effectiveness, efficiency, and long-term consequences of public policies.

The Unit also discusses the institutional arrangements for evaluation, including operating staff, administrative agencies, the Programme Evaluation Organisation (PEO), Parliamentary Committees, and the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG). These agencies provide checks and balances that improve policy design and implementation.

Finally, feedback is emphasised as a mechanism for incorporating lessons learned into future policymaking. By integrating evaluation findings and stakeholder input, feedback ensures that policies remain adaptive and aligned with evolving public needs.

Self-Assessment Questions

1. Define policy monitoring and explain its significance in the policy cycle.
2. Differentiate between monitoring and control with suitable examples.
3. Discuss the six key steps involved in policy monitoring.
4. Explain the measures that can enhance the effectiveness of monitoring systems.
5. Define policy evaluation and explain how it is distinct from monitoring.
6. Describe the process of policy evaluation, highlighting its five key steps.
7. Examine the types of policy evaluation with examples.
8. Discuss the role of the Programme Evaluation Organisation (PEO) in strengthening policy evaluation in India.
9. Explain the role of Parliamentary Committees and the CAG in holding the executive accountable.



10. Discuss the importance of feedback in improving public policy and governance.

Assignments

1. Explain how public problems emerge and discuss the conditions that push them onto the policy agenda.
2. Assess the major differences between systemic and governmental agendas and analyse why only some issues move from one to the other.
3. Discuss the role of policy formulation in shaping effective public action, with reference to the contributions of agencies, advisory bodies, and interest groups.
4. Evaluate the importance of negotiation, compromise, and legitimacy in policy decision-making within democratic systems.
5. Critically examine the interconnected nature of policy initiation, deliberation, and decision-making, explaining why these stages shape the overall direction of public policy.

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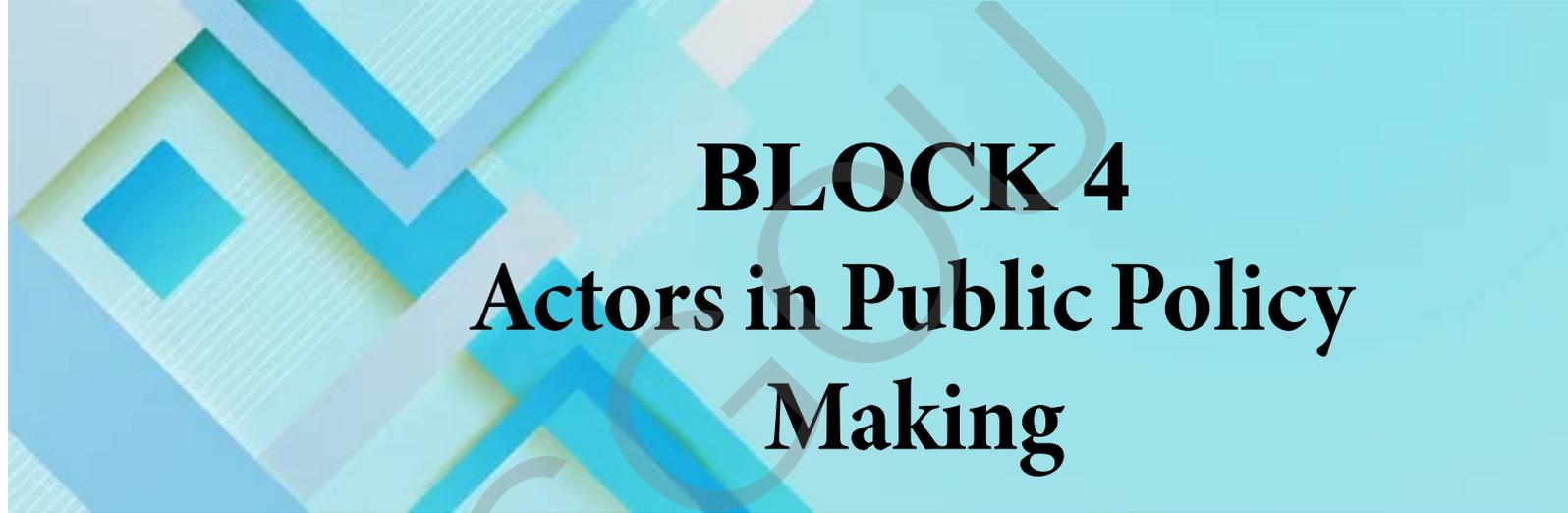
Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.

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BLOCK 4
Actors in Public Policy
Making

UNIT 1

Legislature, Executive and Judiciary

Learning Outcomes

After studying this unit, students will be able to:

- explain the role of the legislature in framing laws, debating issues of public importance, and legitimising government decisions
- analyse the powers and functions of the executive and its significance as the primary driver of policy formulation in a parliamentary system
- evaluate the concept of judicial review and its impact on shaping public policies through landmark judgments
- assess the interrelationship between the legislature, executive, and judiciary in ensuring checks and balances within a democratic framework
- critically examine contemporary challenges such as party discipline, delegated legislation, and judicial activism in the context of policy-making

Background

In any democratic system, the legislature, executive, and judiciary form the three pillars of governance, collectively responsible for shaping, implementing, and reviewing public policies. The legislature represents the sovereign will of the people and serves as the primary forum for debating and passing laws. In India, Parliament is entrusted with the authority to legislate, scrutinise government performance, approve budgets, and provide a platform for the redress of grievances. However, in practice, the legislature's role is often more procedural than substantive, as most policy initiatives are prepared by the executive and merely endorsed by the legislature. The executive, comprising the President, the Council of Ministers, and the civil services, is the central force behind policy-making. In a parliamentary system, the Prime Minister and the Cabinet hold substantial authority, steering policy proposals, preparing legislation, and ensuring



parliamentary approval. Cabinet Committees and the Prime Minister's Office further streamline decision-making and coordination.

The judiciary acts as the guardian of the Constitution, ensuring that legislative and executive actions conform to constitutional provisions. Through its power of judicial review, the Supreme Court and High Courts can strike down unconstitutional actions, interpret ambiguous laws, and lay down guidelines with policy implications. Together, these three institutions create a dynamic system of checks and balances. The legislature legitimises decisions, the executive initiates and executes policies, and the judiciary ensures justice and constitutional compliance. Understanding their functions and interactions is essential to appreciating the complexities of public policy-making in India and the evolving nature of democratic governance.

Keywords

Legislature, Parliament, Executive, Council of Ministers, Prime Minister's Office, Judicial Review, Separation of Powers, Cabinet Committees, Delegated Legislation, Judicial Activism

Discussion

4.1.1 Legislature

The Constitution of any democratic country derives its authority from its citizens, recognising their ultimate sovereignty in governing the nation. This sovereignty is exercised through an elected legislature, chosen by adult franchise, supported by a Council of Ministers at both the Union and State levels. In a parliamentary system, this Council is collectively responsible to the legislature. In India, as in other democracies like the UK and the US, the legislature is a central body for law- and policy-making. The Indian Parliament, the British Parliament, and the US Congress are key institutions where public policy is debated and shaped. As Ripley notes, Congress lies at the very heart of policy-making in the US. Similarly, in parliamentary democracies, legislatures hold significant authority since the Prime Minister must maintain majority support in the legislature to remain in office. As Wade and Phillips argue, even when legislative authority is delegated, the supremacy of Parliament remains intact in Britain.

❑ Legislatures as Sovereign Policy-Makers

❑ Core Functions of the Indian Parliament

The Indian Parliament performs several essential functions: enacting laws, formulating policies, authorising taxation and public expenditure, and holding the government accountable for financial management. It acts as a platform for debate on public issues and allows citizens' grievances to be expressed. Its influence increases during critical events like a vote of confidence, where the government can be unseated if it fails to secure majority support. Members of Parliament also enjoy the freedom to vote, even against the government, without directly endangering its continuity. This model of legislative functioning is also seen in parliamentary systems in the UK and Germany.

❑ Parliamentary Supremacy vs. Separation of Powers

Legislative authority is vested in elected members of Parliament. Within the constitutional framework, Parliament is the final decision-maker for policy matters. In theory, parliamentary power is unlimited in democratic systems. However, the US Congress has comparatively less power because it does not select the executive head, and its members are barred from holding executive office. Unlike parliamentary systems, where cabinet ministers are part of the legislature, the US Cabinet is separate, which maintains a clear division of powers between the executive and the legislature.

4.1.1.1 Realities of Legislative Supremacy

❑ Executive Dominance over Parliamentary Policy-Making

Although Parliament appears supreme in theory, its real influence on policy-making is limited. In practice, the Council of Ministers, comprising the Cabinet and the Prime Minister, drives the policy agenda. Since they enjoy majority support, their proposals are generally passed. Policy initiatives are often drafted within ministries, and Parliament's role largely becomes that of approval rather than independent policy creation. For this reason, Parliament is sometimes described as a forum for debate and scrutiny rather than a direct policy-making body. In the US, when the President and Congress belong to different parties, obtaining approval becomes challenging, unlike in parliamentary systems, where majority support is usually automatic. In both systems, however, most legislation originates within the executive branch before being introduced for debate and approval. Hence, Parliament functions more as a constitutional mechanism to legitimise government decisions than as an independent decision-making authority. The real power lies with the executive leaders who command majority support in Parliament.



❑ Parliamentary Alliances and Committee Influence

Effective policy-making also depends on alliances within Parliament. The government must maintain the confidence of its back-benchers to ensure a working majority. Discontent among these members can threaten government stability, making party discipline and negotiation essential. Governments often use whips and party committees to maintain cohesion and prevent rebellion. Most members prefer to keep their party in power despite occasional disagreements with leadership. The ruling party also controls the legislative timetable, which further strengthens its ability to secure the passage of its proposals. However, not all proposals succeed. Bills are sometimes rejected due to flaws or public protests. To ensure informed decision-making, Parliament delegates much of its work to specialised committees. Committees allow members to focus on specific policy areas, study issues in depth, and make recommendations. These committees play a key role in determining the fate of legislation.

❑ Procedural Legislature under Executive Control

In the US, decentralisation of power allows even individual members of Congress to introduce bills. In parliamentary systems, however, bills are usually brought forward by cabinet ministers. This decentralisation has gradually increased the number of opportunities for interest groups to influence the legislative process. Parliamentary committees also help manage the heavy workload, although Indian MPs often have limited research support or office facilities. This lack of resources means they rely heavily on committee colleagues when voting on complex matters. Moreover, legislators face competing demands as representatives of their constituencies. Much of their time is spent attending public functions or addressing local concerns, leaving limited scope for policy research. As a result, parliamentary approval often becomes a procedural step rather than a detailed policy review. Most legislation in parliamentary systems is made under delegated powers granted to ministers, primarily to save time and address technical details. Only a small portion of delegated legislation receives detailed parliamentary scrutiny unless challenged in court. Thus, Parliament's role in policy-making remains largely procedural, approving decisions initiated within the executive branch after consultations with various stakeholders.

4.1.2 Executive

In a parliamentary system, the executive wields significant influence over policy-making because power is concentrated in the government. The executive typically consists of three

components:

1. **The Head of State:** In India, this is the President, who functions as the constitutional head and exercises powers on the advice of the Council of Ministers (Article 74 of the Constitution).
2. **The Council of Ministers:** This includes the Prime Minister and ministers from the ruling party or coalition, who are collectively responsible to the legislature.
3. **Civil Services:** Government officials and administrative staff who support the Council of Ministers in implementing policies and managing day-to-day governance.

This arrangement was designed to provide strong leadership to the legislature in matters such as law-making, policy formulation, and financial administration.

4.1.2.1 Sources of Executive Power

The power of the executive comes from multiple sources, which strengthen its role in governance and policy-making:

1. **Parliamentary Majority:** The executive derives strength from the support of a majority in the legislature. Most legislators prefer to keep their party in power rather than allow the opposition to form a government. This party discipline reinforces the authority of the Council of Ministers.
2. **Control Over Policy Initiation:** Most policies approved by Parliament originate within the executive. Cabinet members and their departments draft bills after consulting relevant stakeholders, including civil society groups. These proposals carry considerable weight, making it difficult for back-benchers or the opposition to challenge them effectively. Even amendments are usually accepted only when the concerned minister agrees.
3. **Delegated Legislation:** A large share of policy decisions is made through delegated powers granted to ministers and secretaries. Only a small fraction of such statutory instruments are subject to detailed parliamentary scrutiny, further consolidating executive power.
4. **Consensus-Oriented Approach:** Governments often

adopt policies that enjoy broad support, reducing criticism from within the ruling party. At times, the executive also seeks opposition support, as seen during the passage of significant policies such as the US-India Civil Nuclear Agreement (2008).

4.1.2.2 Political Executive Bodies

1. The Cabinet

The Cabinet is the principal decision-making body of the executive. It consists of the Prime Minister, cabinet ministers, ministers of state, and deputy ministers. Although the entire Council of Ministers is formally responsible for governance, policy decisions are mostly taken in the Cabinet, which functions collectively. To streamline its work, the Cabinet operates through several standing committees that make decisions on issues of national importance and urgent matters. The number and nature of these committees may vary over time, and ad hoc committees can also be formed for specific purposes. Two key committees are the Political Affairs Committee and the Economic Affairs Committee, both chaired by the Prime Minister. The Cabinet Secretariat, led by the Cabinet Secretary, provides administrative and logistical support. The Cabinet Secretary prepares meeting agendas, circulates decisions, records minutes, and ensures follow-up action by the concerned ministries. This makes the Secretariat a vital component of the policy-making process.

□ Cabinet Committees as Core Policy Engines

2. The Prime Minister and the Prime Minister's Office

Within the executive, the Prime Minister holds a central position. He not only leads the Cabinet but also exerts significant influence over its decision-making process. In areas such as foreign policy, defence, and economic affairs, the Prime Minister often plays a direct and personal role. However, Cabinet decisions are generally collective, and the Prime Minister must secure the agreement of colleagues rather than impose unilateral decisions. The Prime Minister's Office (PMO), originally established in 1947 as the Prime Minister's Secretariat, has become an important advisory and coordinating body since 1965. The PMO is headed by a Principal Secretary and includes senior officials who assist the Prime Minister with policy matters, inter-ministerial coordination, and the follow-up on decisions. All Cabinet matters pass through the Cabinet Secretariat, but the PMO provides critical inputs, develops policy alternatives, and ensures that issues requiring the Prime

□ Prime Ministerial Leadership in Policy-Making

Minister's attention are addressed. The effectiveness of this arrangement depends on the Prime Minister's leadership style and the political strength of the ruling party or coalition.

4.1.2.3 Executive in Policy-Making

Most policy decisions in India are prepared within the departments and ministries in consultation with affected stakeholders. These proposals are then discussed in Cabinet Committees, where the real policy work occurs, before being formally approved by the Cabinet. Once cleared, they are presented to Parliament, which usually sanctions them. This process illustrates that, in practice, the executive is the primary driver of policy-making. Parliament largely plays a legitimising role, approving decisions that have already been shaped by the Cabinet and the Prime Minister's leadership.

❑ Executive-Driven Policy Pipeline

4.1.3 Judiciary

In India and the United States, the judiciary shares constitutional supremacy with the legislature and executive, unlike the British system, where a clear separation of powers does not exist. Both India and the US have institutionalised separation of powers more fully, allowing the Supreme Court to exercise judicial review. Judicial review refers to the authority of courts to examine the actions of the legislature and executive and declare them unconstitutional if they violate the provisions of the Constitution. Generally, courts avoid interfering in policy decisions unless a policy is unconstitutional, illegal, or motivated by malice. In recent years, however, courts, particularly the Supreme Court, have significantly shaped public policy through their power of judicial review and landmark judgments.

❑ Judicial Review Shaping Public Policy

4.1.3.1 Judicial Review and Its Role

The Constitution empowers the Supreme Court and the High Courts to review laws and administrative actions. If any action contradicts constitutional provisions, the courts can declare it invalid. This not only restricts government overreach but also guides the state on actions necessary to protect the public interest. The judiciary thus acts as a guardian of constitutional limits and ensures that no authority exceeds its powers. Courts often interpret ambiguous legislative provisions or conflicting rules to resolve disputes. When a judge chooses among possible interpretations of a law or executive order, that interpretation becomes binding on the litigants. If such decisions are upheld

❑ Judiciary as Constitutional Guardian



by other courts, they evolve into binding legal principles that effectively shape policy for all jurisdictions. As Chief Justice Charles Evan Hughes famously observed, “*The Constitution is what the judges say it is.*” This illustrates the judiciary’s inherent role in policy-making within a democracy.

4.1.3.2 Judicial Function as Policy-Making

The judiciary influences policy in several ways:

- 1. Development of Common Law:** Courts create and refine common law rules alongside legislative statutes. They define criminal conduct, interpret statutory language, and set constitutional limits. For example, in *Indira Gandhi v. Raj Narain* (1975), the Supreme Court affirmed the doctrine of separation of powers as part of the Constitution’s basic structure.
- 2. Review of Administrative Actions:** Courts review decisions of administrative tribunals and government bodies to ensure they comply with constitutional and statutory requirements. If such actions exceed their authority, courts can strike them down. This mechanism is far more robust in India and the US than in Britain, where Parliament’s sovereignty restricts judicial review of legislation.
- 3. Case-Specific Decisions:** Courts act only when approached through properly filed cases, requiring proof of legal injury and exhaustion of administrative remedies. Their rulings are based on the facts presented but can have far-reaching implications. For instance, in *Vishaka v. State of Rajasthan* (1997), the Supreme Court framed guidelines to prevent sexual harassment in the workplace, which became binding policy across public and private sectors.

Importantly, if courts refuse to decide, the status quo remains unchanged. Judges must act within constitutional and legislative boundaries to avoid conflict with other branches of government. As A.K. Ayyar observed in the Constituent Assembly, judicial independence should not turn courts into a “super-legislature” or “super-executive.” Moreover, the judiciary depends on the executive for implementing its decisions, and bureaucratic interpretation can influence how judicial orders are enforced.

❑ Limits on Judicial Power and Enforcement

4.1.3.3 Judiciary's Broader Role in Society

❑ Judicial Activism in Policy Transformation

Judicial decisions have played a transformative role in shaping social and economic policies. Laws related to equality before the law, property rights, labour relations, and the status of women have been progressively developed through court judgments. Judges often issue rulings with significant policy impact, influencing governance far beyond the courtroom. Compared to courts in countries like Australia, Canada, Japan, or Germany, the US Supreme Court and, increasingly, the Indian judiciary wield more extensive influence over policy. In India, the Supreme Court and High Courts have intervened in areas such as education reform, labour rights, environmental protection, and welfare measures. This growing trend is often referred to as judicial activism, where courts take a proactive role in ensuring justice and protecting citizens' rights against excessive state power. The combination of increased state intervention in daily life, governmental failure to address social problems, and judicial willingness to act has reinforced the judiciary's central role in policy formation.

Summarised Overview

This unit examines the critical role of the legislature, executive, and judiciary in India's policy-making process. The legislature, primarily Parliament, is entrusted with law-making, taxation, financial oversight, and public debate. While constitutionally supreme, its practical role is often limited to legitimising decisions already formulated within the executive. The increasing reliance on delegated legislation and parliamentary committees indicates a shift towards efficiency, though it also raises questions about legislative independence.

The executive is the most influential policy actor, with the Prime Minister and the Cabinet driving decision-making. Cabinet Committees handle detailed policy work before presenting proposals for parliamentary approval. The Prime Minister's Office provides crucial advisory and coordinating support, while the Cabinet Secretariat ensures implementation and follow-up. The executive's dominance is reinforced by party discipline, majority support in Parliament, and its control over policy initiation. The judiciary ensures that governance remains constitutionally sound through judicial review. The Supreme Court and High Courts interpret laws, settle disputes, and sometimes lay down binding policies, such as in the *Vishaka* guidelines on sexual harassment. Judicial activism has emerged as a powerful tool to address executive inaction and uphold citizens' rights.



Overall, this unit highlights the interconnectedness of these three branches. The legislature provides legitimacy, the executive drives action, and the judiciary safeguards constitutional values. Together, they ensure that public policy remains democratic, accountable, and responsive to the needs of society.

Self-Assessment Questions

1. Explain the constitutional role of the legislature in public policy-making in India.
2. Discuss the practical limitations of legislative supremacy in a parliamentary system.
3. Analyse the functions and significance of Cabinet Committees in policy formulation.
4. Describe the role of the Prime Minister and the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) in executive decision-making.
5. Evaluate the impact of delegated legislation on parliamentary control.
6. Explain the concept of judicial review with examples of landmark judgments.
7. Discuss the significance of judicial activism in shaping social and economic policies.
8. Examine the relationship between the legislature, executive, and judiciary as instruments of checks and balances.
9. Assess the challenges posed by party discipline and back-bencher dissent in parliamentary decision-making.
10. Critically evaluate the role of the judiciary as a policy-making body in a democracy.

Assignments

1. How does the legislature function as a forum for law-making, scrutiny, and legitimisation of executive actions in India, and to what extent is its policy-making authority constrained by executive dominance?
2. In what ways does the executive—through the Prime Minister, Cabinet, Cabinet Committees, and civil services—shape the policy-making process in a parliamentary system, and how do factors such as party discipline and delegated legislation enhance its power?



3. How does the judiciary exercise its role in public policy through judicial review, landmark judgments, and judicial activism, and what constitutional and practical limits define the extent of its influence?

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UNIT 2

Political Parties and Interest Groups

Learning Outcomes

After studying this unit, students will be able to:

- explain the role of political parties as mediators between citizens and policymakers in shaping public policy
- analyse the conditions for responsible political parties and assess the challenges of meeting these conditions in India
- evaluate the internal power distribution and factional dynamics within political parties and their influence on policy outcomes
- describe the role of interest groups, their types, and strategies in influencing public policy
- assess the impact of lobbying, advocacy, and coalition-building on decision-making and public policy formulation

Background

Political parties and interest groups are vital actors in the public policy process, linking society with the state. Political parties act as intermediaries between citizens and policymakers by converting public opinion into policy platforms and programmes. Their manifestos and electoral promises provide the framework for policy action when in power. They also play a significant role in offering alternatives when in opposition, thereby ensuring that governance remains competitive and accountable. Parties help set national priorities, mobilise voter participation, and articulate social and economic goals. The responsiveness and responsibility of political parties, however, depend on their ability to maintain internal cohesion, present clear policy alternatives, and implement their programmes when in power. In India, party competition is intense, but parties often struggle with factionalism, weak discipline, and coalition pressures, leading to



fragmented or compromised policy outcomes.

Interest groups, on the other hand, play an essential role in interest articulation by lobbying for policies that benefit their members or serve a public cause. They provide technical data, policy alternatives, and feedback to policymakers, thereby enhancing the rationality of decisions. Interest groups vary from private associations, like business lobbies, to public interest organisations advocating for environmental protection or social justice. Their influence depends on their resources, organisation, and strategies. Tools like lobbying, coalition-building, advocacy campaigns, and litigation allow these groups to influence policy outcomes. International actors, including multilateral organisations and transnational NGOs, further amplify their reach in a globalised context. Together, political parties and interest groups form the pluralist foundation of democratic policymaking, ensuring that governance reflects competing demands, societal diversity, and citizen aspirations.

Keywords

Political Parties, Party Manifesto, Policy Platforms, Party Competition, Factionalism, Interest Groups, Lobbying, Advocacy, Coalition Building, Policy Articulation

Discussion

3.2.1 Political Parties and Public Policy

Public opinion plays a key role in shaping public policy, and political parties act as a bridge between the public and policy makers. Parties aim to amplify public opinion when making policy choices and must accommodate voter preferences. This means they not only respond to what voters want but also actively influence and shape those preferences. Whether in government or opposition, political parties function as mediators between citizens and decision-makers. Edmund Burke famously defined a political party as “a group of individuals united to promote the national interest based on shared principles.” Party manifestos or platforms, which form the basis of election campaigns, guide the ruling party when it designs and implements public policies. Political parties are therefore critical in ensuring public control over governance, representing the issues important to citizens, and setting social and economic goals.

❑ Political Parties as Policy Mediators

3.2.1.1 Conditions for Responsible Political Parties

Political theorists have discussed what makes political parties “responsible.” Downs argued that parties create policies to win elections rather than win elections to create policies. Tullock, on the other hand, emphasised that parties use policies as tools to secure votes. In either case, parties shape voter preferences significantly.

Edwards and Sharkansky identified several key conditions for parties to be considered responsible:

1. Each party must have a clear programme.
2. Candidates must be committed to the party programme.
3. Parties must present their programmes publicly.
4. Opposition parties must present alternatives.
5. Ideally, there should be two major parties for clearer choice.
6. People should vote for programmes, not just individuals.
7. The party with the majority must assume control of the government.
8. The ruling party must have internal unity and discipline to implement its programme.
9. The winning party must carry out its programme once in power.
10. The governing party must accept responsibility for governmental performance.
11. The opposition must be ready to govern if given the chance.

3.2.1.2 Power Distribution in Political Parties

The distribution of power within political parties has a direct impact on government policy. Party leadership, particularly the parliamentary group and its leader, holds significant influence over policy formulation. While rank-and-file members help select party leaders, leadership dominance generally shapes the direction of policy initiatives. Party leaders also have control over crucial appointments, including cabinet selections when the party is in power, which allows them to consolidate authority. Even opposition leaders can play a potential role in influencing policies, although the primary function of party

Party Leadership and Policy Influence



members outside leadership is to support their leaders. At times, grassroots support becomes vital for shaping major policy decisions on issues like economic policy, taxation, or foreign relations.

3.2.1.3 Internal Party Dynamics and Policy-Making

Factionalism often influences policy direction within parties. For instance, parties like the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) have witnessed internal divisions due to their diverse ideological groups. Control over key party offices, such as the president, general secretary, and vice president, is an important source of power for party leaders, who are usually chosen by parliamentary colleagues rather than the general membership. In parliamentary democracies like India, the party leader is rarely challenged for re-election and generally enjoys strong security of tenure. The leader usually has the final say in the selection of ministers once the party wins a majority.

❑ Factional Power Shaping Party Policy

3.2.1.4 Party Competition and Policy Conflicts

Indian political parties, much like their French counterparts, are largely focused on winning elections rather than formulating comprehensive policy solutions. Party conflict is common on issues related to economic policy, social welfare programmes, Centre–State relations, and the regulation of business and labour. Major policy debates arise during the discussion of Five-Year Plans, budgets, and significant legislation. Budgets, often considered the Prime Minister’s or Chief Minister’s policy statement, become the centre of party rivalries. For example, the no-confidence motion against the Manmohan Singh government in 2008 over the India–US civil nuclear deal highlighted how policy issues can become points of intense party conflict.

❑ Election-Driven Party Policy Conflicts

3.2.1.5 Limitations of Political Parties in India

Research shows that Indian political parties often fall short of meeting the conditions of responsible party governance. Parties have diverse programmes targeting different social groups, making it difficult to take unified national positions. Leaders struggle to control elected representatives consistently, and the Prime Minister’s dependence on legislative support sometimes weakens party discipline in policy-making. Under these circumstances, influence over policy decisions varies across party factions and individuals. At times, party members prioritise their personal political survival over voter preferences or party positions, making policy outcomes a product of negotiation and

❑ Weak Party Discipline in Policy-Making

compromise rather than a coherent party programme.

3.2.2 Interest Groups

Interest groups play a significant role in the policy-making process in almost every country. The way these groups are formed and the extent of their legitimacy, however, vary depending on whether a country is democratic or authoritarian, developed or developing. In democratic nations like the United States and Great Britain, interest groups are more numerous, visible, and able to function freely. In contrast, in systems like the former Soviet Union, their presence and activities were more restricted. Regardless of the system, interest groups perform an essential function known as interest articulation; they express the demands of their members and propose possible policy alternatives. They also provide valuable information to public officials, often technical in nature, about the issues at hand and the potential impacts of various policy choices. In this way, interest groups contribute to making the policy-making process more rational and informed.

❑ Interest Groups as Policy Articulators

3.2.2.1 Types of Interest Groups

Interest groups can be broadly divided into two categories based on their objectives: private interest groups and public interest groups (often called NGOs or civil society organisations).

- ▶ Private Interest Groups focus on securing direct and tangible benefits for their members, often financial in nature. They may also work to prevent losses that might occur if certain policies are implemented. Examples include taxpayer groups lobbying for tax exemptions, patient groups seeking state-funded treatment, or exporters demanding protection against currency fluctuations.
- ▶ Public Interest Groups are motivated by a shared cause rather than financial gain. Their focus may be on issues such as environmental protection, children's rights, good governance, or limiting the size of government. Their primary reward is emotional satisfaction when their cause advances. These groups evaluate government policies through the lens of their mission and campaign accordingly.

❑ Varied Structure and Influence of Interest Groups

Interest groups can be temporary, created for a single issue,



Foreign and Global Actors in Policy Influence

or permanent with a broad agenda. They also differ in their organisational strength, funding capacity, ability to influence public opinion, and ability to exert pressure on decision-makers.

3.2.2.2 Role of International and Multinational Actors

In many policy areas, foreign actors play a significant role. Countries often lobby for policies that protect their economic and commercial interests through diplomacy. For example, nations such as the USA, Japan, and members of the EU strongly advocate for robust intellectual property rights. Smaller nations like Sweden, despite having less military or economic power, focus on humanitarian and peacebuilding roles to enhance their influence. Embassies frequently monitor policy developments, make formal representations to relevant ministries, and attempt to shape outcomes in their favour. International organisations such as the World Bank, WHO, and UNICEF also play an institutional role in policymaking. They provide funding, technical support, and sometimes enforce conventions. Similarly, multinational corporations, business associations (e.g., International Intellectual Property Alliance), global NGOs (e.g., Oxfam, Action Aid), and transnational advocacy networks work with local groups to influence policy, thereby amplifying their impact far beyond their domestic reach.

3.2.2.3 Strategies of Collective Action

Interest groups use a variety of strategies to influence policy decisions:

1. Informational Strategies

These strategies focus on providing information and influencing perception. They include:

- Responding to calls for public comments on draft policies
- Participating in departmental consultations
- Giving testimony before parliamentary committees
- Running media campaigns and advertisements
- Lobbying policymakers directly
- Advocacy efforts targeting public opinion

2. Power-Enhancement Strategies

These involve building leverage and political pressure through:

- Forming coalitions with like-minded groups
- Mobilising grassroots supporters
- Gaining support from political parties
- Using parliamentary tools like questions and motions
- Organising strikes, demonstrations, or symbolic protests

3. Forum Shifting

When domestic channels are unresponsive, groups may:

- File cases in courts
- Lobby foreign governments
- Approach international human rights committees

The choice of strategy depends on the group's resources, objectives, and relationship with policymakers.

3.2.2.4 Cooperative vs. Confrontational Approaches

Private interest groups generally prefer cooperation but may turn adversarial when their core interests are threatened. Public interest groups, however, are more likely to adopt grassroots campaigns, protests, and media events to attract attention. Some public groups engage in constructive cooperation, collaborating with the government on shared goals while reserving the right to criticise on other matters. Others believe a confrontational stance is more effective in achieving results.

Diverse Advocacy Strategies of Interest Groups

3.2.2.5 Coalition Formation and Policy Outcomes

Interest groups often form coalitions to increase their visibility and effectiveness. These alliances allow groups with complementary strengths, such as grassroots mobilisation and policy expertise, to combine efforts. However, coalitions are often issue-specific and may break apart when the policy scope changes. For example, health and consumer groups may jointly demand price controls on medicines. This often forces the government to act, but typically through limited controls on selected medicines rather than all drugs. Once the scope of control is narrowed, the interests of pharmaceutical companies diverge based on their product lines, weakening their united front. This shows how altering the scope of a policy can shift alliances and reshape the politics of decision-making.

Issue-Specific Coalition Dynamics



3.2.2.6 Lobbying: A Key Tool for Private Groups

Lobbying remains the most important tactic for private interest groups. It involves strategic communication of information at every stage of the policymaking process. Lobbying has three strategic dimensions:

1. **Advancing Preferred Policies:** Supporting policies favourable to the group and countering rival proposals.
2. **Influencing Decision-Makers:** Persuading policymakers to adopt their viewpoint.
3. **Careful Packaging of Information:** Presenting technical data, legal analysis, and political implications in a way that highlights the benefits of the group's position and undermines competitors' claims.

Lobbying often involves subtle persuasion, selective use of information, and careful attention to timing and etiquette. While threats are rarely explicit, veiled warnings or implications are not uncommon.

3.2.2.7 Advocacy and Public Mobilisation

Advocacy, more commonly employed by public interest groups, focuses on shaping public opinion rather than directly lobbying policymakers. It differs from lobbying in three main ways:

- **Target Audience:** The primary targets are the media, academics, and public intellectuals.
- **Cause-Driven Messaging:** Communication is rooted in the broader mission of the group.
- **Combination with Direct Action:** Advocacy often goes hand in hand with rallies, public campaigns, and symbolic events to indirectly pressure decision-makers.

Effective advocacy uses tailored communication methods for different audiences. Large-scale campaigns rely on mass communication, whereas small group discussions or interpersonal meetings allow for more detailed persuasion.

Summarised Overview

This unit explores the critical role played by political parties and interest groups in public policy-making. Political parties serve as the primary mechanism through which citizens' preferences are translated into policy agendas. Party manifestos act as a blueprint for government action, while party leaders and parliamentary groups hold significant power in directing policy initiatives. The internal structure of parties, including leadership dominance and factional alignments, directly affects how policies are debated and adopted.

The concept of responsible parties is discussed, emphasising the need for clear programmes, party discipline, and accountability for implementing electoral promises. However, Indian political parties often face challenges such as internal factionalism, a lack of unified national positions, and difficulty in controlling elected representatives. These limitations weaken party cohesion and make policymaking a process of compromise and negotiation.

Interest groups complement the work of political parties by providing issue-specific inputs. They can be private groups seeking economic benefits or public interest groups driven by social causes. Their role extends to information sharing, lobbying, mobilising public opinion, and pressuring decision-makers through both cooperative and confrontational strategies.

The unit also examines collective action strategies, including coalition building, grassroots mobilisation, and forum shifting (using courts or international bodies). The importance of lobbying as a tool for private groups and advocacy as a preferred mechanism for public groups is highlighted.

Overall, the unit underlines how political parties and interest groups interact to create a pluralistic policy environment, where competing interests are negotiated, and public policy emerges as the outcome of both electoral mandates and societal pressures.

Self-Assessment Questions

1. Define political parties and explain their role in linking citizens with policymakers.
2. Discuss Edmund Burke's definition of a political party and its relevance to Indian democracy.
3. Analyse the conditions for responsible political parties and assess whether Indian parties fulfil them.
4. Explain how internal power distribution within parties influences policy-making.
5. Discuss the impact of factionalism on policy outcomes with relevant examples.



6. Define interest groups and differentiate between private and public interest groups.
7. Explain the role of international organisations and multinational actors in shaping national policies.
8. Discuss the various strategies of collective action used by interest groups.
9. Critically examine lobbying as a policy influence tool and its ethical considerations.
10. Evaluate the combined role of political parties and interest groups in sustaining democratic governance.

Assignments

1. How do political parties function as mediators between citizens and policymakers, and what challenges do they face in meeting the conditions for responsible party governance in India?
2. In what ways do interest groups—both domestic and international—use lobbying, advocacy, and coalition-building to influence public policy, and how do their strategies vary based on objectives and resources?
3. How do internal party dynamics, factionalism, leadership dominance, and election-driven competition shape policy outcomes in India's political system?

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UNIT 3

Bureaucracy and Media

Learning Outcomes

After studying this unit, learners will be able to:

- explain the role of bureaucracy and media as key actors in the public policy-making process
- analyse the factors that influence the increasing involvement of administrators in policy formulation
- identify the specific functions and challenges of administrators in the policy-making process
- describe how the media act as both a bridge between the government and citizens and a shaper of public and political agendas
- evaluate the criticisms and challenges faced by both the bureaucracy and the media in their respective roles in policy-making

Background

Public policy is the foundation of governance, transforming political goals into tangible actions that affect the lives of citizens. While elected officials, such as ministers and legislators, are traditionally seen as the primary policy creators, the reality is far more complex. This unit delves into the crucial and often under-recognised roles of two powerful, non-elected actors: bureaucracy and the media.

Traditionally, public administration was viewed as simply carrying out policies rather than creating them, with civil servants expected to execute the decisions of political authorities. However, this distinction has blurred significantly over time. Senior administrators, or bureaucrats, have gained considerable influence in policy formulation due to their specialised knowledge, continuity in service, and proximity to



decision-making. They provide technical advice, interpret legislative intent, and design implementation mechanisms, often shaping the final content of policies. This has led to debates about the extent of their power and its compatibility with democratic principles, which emphasise political accountability.

Concurrently, the media has emerged as a powerful force in the policy landscape. It functions as a bridge between the government and the public, informing citizens about policies and reflecting public reactions back to authorities. By highlighting specific issues, the media can set the public agenda and create a sense of urgency, thereby influencing which issues policy makers address. However, the media's dual role as a public service and a profit-driven business raises concerns about biased reporting, sensationalism, and the concentration of ownership, which can undermine its democratic function. This unit will explore these dynamics, providing a comprehensive understanding of how these two powerful institutions influence the public policy-making process.

Keywords

Bureaucracy, Public Policy, Policy Formulation, Policy Implementation, Administrative Responsibility, Political Accountability, Public Agenda, Media Bias, Media Consolidation, Collective Action.

Discussion

4.3.1 Bureaucracy / Administrative Officials

Traditionally, public administration has been viewed as primarily concerned with carrying out policies rather than creating them. According to democratic principles, civil servants—whether called bureaucrats, administrators, or public managers—are expected to execute the decisions taken by elected political authorities such as ministers, legislators, and councillors. Although policy formulation and policy implementation are distinct functions of government, they are closely linked. Legislatures or political leaders define policy in broad terms, generally through laws or acts. The task of interpreting these policies and translating them into workable programmes often falls to the administrative arm of the government. While administrators do not possess the legal authority to create policy, they play a significant supporting role by offering technical advice, clarifying legislative intent, and

❑ Administrators
as Policy
Interpreters

designing mechanisms for implementation.

In recent decades, however, the influence of the bureaucracy in policy formulation has increased. Civil servants, particularly those in senior positions, often play an active part in shaping public policies, which has led to debates and criticism about the extent of their power. In India, top-level administrators have sometimes faced strong challenges to their authority. Democratic systems emphasise that governance should remain politically accountable rather than purely administrative. Bureaucracy refers to a structured administrative organisation staffed by non-elected officials who are appointed based on rules and organised hierarchically within departments. In parliamentary democracies, bureaucrats are formally under the control of the political executive. Yet, their specialised knowledge, continuity in service, and proximity to decision-making give them significant influence over policy outcomes.

❑ Rising Bureaucratic Influence in Policy

4.3.1.1 Factors Influencing the Administrator's Role in Policy-Making

Senior administrators influence public policy at multiple stages—drafting options, interpreting data, and suggesting strategies. They may even subtly modify the intent of legislative enactments. The following factors explain their strong role:

1. Administrative Responsibility

Administrators have a constitutional duty to advise political leaders on policy options. Senior officials, such as Secretaries to the Government of India, assist ministers in making decisions that cannot be handled through routine procedures. They clarify the scope of policies, prepare briefing materials, and assess financial and administrative implications. Their involvement goes beyond mere advice and often shapes the final content of policies.

❑ Administrative Policy Guidance

2. Knowledge and Expertise

Bureaucrats hold a near monopoly over technical and procedural knowledge, acquired through education and years of experience. This enables them to analyse the financial, social, and administrative feasibility of proposals, anticipate reactions from stakeholders, and recommend innovative solutions. Since they collect and analyse the data used in decision-making, they often set the terms of debate. Most ministers lack technical expertise and must rely heavily on their senior officials to

❑ Expertise-Driven Bureaucratic Influence



translate broad political goals into workable plans.

3. Permanence and Continuity

☐ Continuity-
Backed
Bureaucratic
Authority

The permanent nature of the civil service (protected under Articles 309–311 of the Indian Constitution) strengthens bureaucratic authority. Ministers frequently rotate between portfolios, and their average tenure is often shorter than the time needed for a policy to be formulated and evaluated. Consequently, civil servants provide continuity, make many day-to-day decisions, and keep departments functioning even in the absence of ministerial involvement. Though expected to remain politically neutral, administrators often shape policy based on their professional judgement and departmental priorities. Where ministers are weak or lack strong policy preferences, bureaucrats gain greater influence. When ministers are assertive and ideologically committed, bureaucratic influence tends to be more restrained.

4.3.1.2 Functions of Administrators in Policy-Making

According to the United Nations, senior administrators are responsible for helping formulate policies aimed at national development goals and managing resources for their implementation. Their major functions include:

1. **Understanding National Goals** – Grasping the larger vision or “mega-policies” guiding national development.
2. **Advising on Feasible Policies** – Ensuring that proposals are technically, economically, administratively, and politically implementable.
3. **Translating Policy into Action** – Breaking down broad policy objectives into specific operational targets and analysing the costs and benefits of different approaches.
4. **Applying Rational Techniques** – Using scientific and management tools wherever applicable while acknowledging the political nature of policymaking.
5. **Ensuring Coordination** – Aligning policies with existing ones to avoid duplication or conflict, and ensuring coherence in policy instruments.

Policymakers must also consider the time factor, as delays can render policies ineffective. Forecasting and scenario planning are crucial for anticipating future challenges and avoiding

crisis-driven governance.

4.3.1.3 Challenges and Criticisms

Senior administrators often spend most of their time managing day-to-day operations, leaving little opportunity for strategic thinking or policy innovation. Tasks such as budgeting, negotiations, and personnel management consume their attention, resulting in insufficient focus on policy planning. The civil service is frequently criticised not for being too powerful politically, but for its inadequate capacity to engage in long-term, strategic policy analysis.

❑ Operational Overload
Limiting Strategy

In many developing countries, additional challenges include:

- **Poor Coordination with Politicians** – Weak collaboration leads to gaps in professional input for complex issues.
- **Lack of Innovation** – Bureaucrats may fail to respond creatively to rapidly changing situations.
- **Difficulty Handling Citizen Engagement** – Managing the growing interface between government and citizens poses challenges.
- **Limited Capacity for Technological Change** – Rapid advancements in science and technology demand skills that many senior administrators lack.

Without strong analytical and strategic abilities, senior civil servants cannot contribute effectively to high-level policy design or international negotiations. In India, the real work of policy making takes place in Cabinet Committees, supported by administrators in the Secretariat. Final decisions are made by ministers in consultation with the Prime Minister, with bureaucrats providing crucial inputs throughout the process.

❑ Limited Strategic Capacity in Governance

4.3.2 Role of Media in Public Policy-Making

The media play a crucial role in shaping the policy agenda by influencing how the public and policymakers perceive issues. By highlighting certain events, incidents, or crises, the media create a sense of urgency and frame the context in which policy responses are formulated. In this way, they can set the public agenda by deciding which issues are “newsworthy.” The media also act as a bridge between citizens and the government, closing the information gap. They inform the public about government decisions and policies while simultaneously reflecting public reactions back to the authorities. This two-way

❑ Media as Agenda-Setters



flow of information allows both sides to respond to each other's actions. When the media publicise particular issues or causes, they become an important channel through which governments understand the concerns of the people.

❑ Challenges of Biased and Constrained Media

However, concerns arise when media coverage is politically biased. Biased reporting can distort public understanding and undermine the democratic process, turning the media into a tool for manipulation rather than enlightenment. In India, for instance, topics such as health, education, agriculture, and the environment often receive far less attention compared to sensational or commercially appealing news. High-quality, impartial media coverage is essential for citizens to make informed decisions and for policymakers to act responsibly. Unfortunately, the effectiveness of the press in covering political issues is constrained by legal and institutional barriers, including the Official Secrets Act, parliamentary privilege, ministerial responsibility, and libel laws. As a result, press standards in covering government issues have reportedly declined, with limited pressure from either politicians or the public to reverse this trend. When media coverage influences public opinion, and when governments are responsive to that opinion, the media indirectly shape policies as well. Thus, public opinion expressed through mass media becomes a central factor in policy formulation.

4.3.2.1 Media as a Double-Edged Institution

❑ Media as Political Mobilisers

The media functions not only as a channel of communication but also as a creator of news, attitudes, and agendas. It informs the public and guides public discourse. Recognising this influence, political parties worldwide run their own newspapers, television channels, and digital platforms. Media reports alert policymakers, interest groups, and political parties to emerging issues, threats, and opportunities. For interest groups, media attention is an opportunity to amplify their cause, pressure the government, and mobilise support. For political parties, media coverage can serve as a platform to raise their visibility and gain public approval. In this sense, the media reduce the costs of collective action and become an important tool for advocacy and activism, especially for public interest groups.

At the same time, the media is not merely a public service—it is also a business. Most newspapers, television networks, and online platforms depend heavily on advertising revenue to survive. Many major news outlets are part of large business

Media as Political Mobilisers

conglomerates, sometimes cross-subsidised by their other commercial ventures. As a result, there is pressure to focus on content that attracts high viewership or readership, often prioritising sensational or entertaining stories over those that promote a deeper understanding of public issues. Globally, the media industry has seen consolidation, with powerful conglomerates controlling multiple forms of communication, including print, television, film, and digital platforms. This concentration of media ownership has raised concerns about the diversity of viewpoints and editorial independence. Critics argue that the pursuit of higher ratings, circulation, and profits encourages the media to cater to populist fears, promote entertainment over education, and prioritise profit over public interest—particularly visible in television news.

Summarised Overview

This unit examines the evolving roles of bureaucracy and media in public policy-making. While the traditional view sees civil servants as mere implementers of policies decided by elected officials, their influence has grown significantly. This shift is driven by three key factors: administrative responsibility, which compels them to advise political leaders and assess policy implications; their near-monopoly on knowledge and expertise gained through years of experience; and their permanence and continuity in service, which provides stability amid frequent changes in ministerial portfolios. Administrators, particularly senior officials, are now actively involved in drafting policy options, interpreting data, and even subtly modifying legislative intent. Their functions include advising on the feasibility of policies, translating broad objectives into actionable plans, and ensuring coordination to avoid conflicts. However, challenges persist, such as a focus on day-to-day operations over strategic thinking, a lack of innovation, and limited capacity to handle technological change.

The media also plays a powerful and dual role in this process. On one hand, it functions as a bridge between the government and citizens, informing the public about policies and communicating public concerns back to authorities. By deciding what is "newsworthy," the media sets the public agenda and influences which issues receive attention from policymakers. On the other hand, the media is a business, often prioritising sensational or commercially appealing news over high-quality, impartial coverage of complex issues. The consolidation of media ownership by large conglomerates also raises concerns about editorial independence and the diversity of viewpoints. Despite legal and institutional barriers that constrain their effectiveness, the media's ability to influence public opinion makes it a central factor in policy formulation.

Self-Assessment Questions

1. Explain the traditional view of the bureaucracy's role in public policy and how it has evolved in recent decades.
2. Discuss the three main factors that explain the increasing influence of senior administrators in policy formulation.
3. Analyse the key functions of administrators in policy-making, as outlined by the United Nations.
4. What are the major challenges and criticisms faced by senior administrators in their policy-making role?
5. How do the media set the public agenda and influence policy-making?
6. Critically evaluate the statement: "The media is a double-edged institution."
7. Discuss the role of bureaucrats in India's policy-making process, referencing the Secretariat and Cabinet Committees.
8. How does the commercial nature of the media, including its reliance on advertising and ownership by business conglomerates, affect its role in public policy?
9. Explain the concept of political accountability in the context of bureaucratic influence in policy making.
10. Describe the relationship between civil servants and ministers, and how their respective strengths and weaknesses can affect bureaucratic influence.

Assignments

1. How do senior administrators influence public policy despite lacking formal law-making authority, and what factors strengthen their role in the Indian context?
2. What major challenges and criticisms limit the bureaucracy's effectiveness in policymaking in developing countries, particularly regarding innovation, technology, and political coordination?
3. How do the media function as both agenda-setters and agenda-shapers in democratic policymaking, and in what ways do commercial pressures, ownership patterns, and bias affect policy and public opinion in India?

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Suggested Reading

1. Anderson, J. E. (1975). *Public Policymaking*. Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
2. Sapru, R. K. (2010). *Public Policy: Art and Craft of Policy Analysis*. PHI Learning.
3. Ayyar, R. V. Vaidyanath (2009). *Public Policymaking in India*. Pearson.
4. Anderson, J. E. (2014). *Public Policymaking: An Introduction* (8th ed.). Cengage Learning.
5. Dye, T. R. (2017). *Understanding Public Policy* (15th ed.). Pearson.



Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.

SGOU

MODEL QUESTION PAPER SETS



SRI SARVAGANA GURU
OPEN UNIVERSITY

SGOU - SLM - MA Political Science - Public Policy in India

147



SREENARAYANAGURU OPEN UNIVERSITY

QP CODE:

Reg. No:

Name:

THIRD SEMESTER MA POLITICAL SCIENCE EXAMINATION

DISCIPLINE ELECTIVE COURSE

MA23PS03DE –Public Policy in India

SET-1

Time: 3 Hours

Max Marks: 70

SECTION A

*Answer any **ten** questions in a word or a sentence. Each question carries **one** mark.*

(10 × 1 = 10 Marks)

1. What is public policy?
2. Name any one feature of public policy.
3. Who introduced the concept of public policy analysis?
4. What is meant by the scope of public policy?
5. What is regulatory policy?
6. Name any one form of redistributive policy.
7. Which approach views policy as a conversion of inputs into outputs?
8. Which theory emphasizes the rule of a small influential minority?
9. Who formulated the Group Theory of public policy?
10. What does incrementalism mean?
11. What is policy formulation?
12. Name any one agency that initiates public policy.
13. What is policy evaluation?
14. Which organ of the government implements public policy?
15. What is one role played by political parties in public policy-making?



SECTION B

Answer any **five** questions in two or three sentences. Each question carries **two** marks.

(5 × 2 = 10 Marks)

16. What is the significance of studying public policy?
17. How did public policy emerge as an academic discipline?
18. What is the difference between distributive and regulatory policy?
19. Explain the core idea of the System Approach.
20. What is the main premise of Elite Theory?
21. What are the features of the Incremental Approach?
22. What is the role of the legislature in public policy making?
23. What is meant by policy monitoring?
24. How does the media shape public policy?
25. What role do NGOs play in public policy implementation?

SECTION C

Answer any **five** questions. Each question carries **four** marks.

(5 × 4 = 20 Marks)

26. Explain the nature and scope of public policy.
27. Describe various types of public policy.
28. Examine the assumptions of the Political Economy Approach.
29. Discuss the different stages of the public policy cycle.
30. Explain the role of the executive in policy making.
31. Discuss the importance of policy evaluation and feedback.
32. How do interest groups influence public policy outcomes?
33. Examine the role of bureaucracy in policy formulation and implementation



SECTION D

Answer any **three** questions. Each question carries **ten** marks.

(3 × 10 = 30 Marks)

34. Critically examine the nature, scope and significance of public policy in contemporary governance.
35. Evaluate System Approach, Elite Theory and Group Theory as major analytical approaches to the study of public policy.
36. Discuss in detail the stages involved in the public policy process with suitable examples.
37. Analyze the role of the Legislature, Executive and Judiciary in public policy making.
38. Assess the influence of political parties and interest groups in shaping public policies.
39. Critically evaluate the role of Bureaucracy, Media and NGOs in public policy making. Discuss how Phule and Dayananda laid the foundations of anti-caste and religious reform movements in modern India.



QP CODE:

Reg. No:

Name:

THIRD SEMESTER MA POLITICAL SCIENCE EXAMINATION

DISCIPLINE ELECTIVE COURSE

MA23PS03DE – Public Policy in India

SET-2

Time: 3 Hours

Max Marks: 70

SECTION A

*Answer any **ten** questions in a word or a sentence. Each question carries **one** mark.*

(10 × 1 = 10 Marks)

1. What is meant by policy analysis?
2. State any one objective of public policy.
3. Who defined public policy as “whatever governments choose to do or not to do”?
4. What is meant by legislative policy?
5. Name one redistributive policy instrument.
6. Which approach views policy as decisions made through bargaining?
7. Who proposed the Elite Theory?
8. What does the Rational Approach emphasize?
9. What is cost–benefit analysis?
10. What is policy implementation?
11. Name any one agency responsible for policy execution.
12. What is policy feedback?
13. Which organ of the government interprets laws?
14. Name one role of interest groups in policy making.
15. What is advocacy in public policy?



SECTION B

Answer any **five** questions in two or three sentences. Each question carries **two** marks.

(5 × 2 = 10 Marks)

16. Explain the importance of studying public policy in public administration.
17. Write a brief note on the evolution of public policy analysis.
18. What are regulatory policies? Provide one example.
19. Explain the principle of Group Theory.
20. State the main viewpoint of the Rational Approach.
21. Describe the Incremental Approach in brief.
22. What is the role of Judiciary in public policy making?
23. How do political parties act as policy actors?
24. What is policy monitoring and why is it needed?
25. Explain the role of media in agenda-setting.

SECTION C

Answer any **five** questions. Each question carries **four** marks.

(5 × 4 = 20 Marks)

26. Discuss the significance of public policy analysis in governance.
27. Explain the types of public policies with examples.
28. Analyze the Elite Theory of public policy.
29. Examine the Rational Approach and its limitations.
30. Explain policy deliberation and decision-making.
31. Describe the role of the Legislature in the policy process.
32. Discuss the importance of monitoring and feedback in public policy.
33. Evaluate the contribution of NGOs in public policy implementation.

SECTION D

Answer any **three** questions. Each question carries **ten** marks.

(3 × 10 = 30 Marks)

34. Critically assess the evolution of public policy studies and its development as an academic discipline.
35. Compare and contrast Group Theory, Elite Theory and Rational Approach in public policy analysis.
36. Explain the policy cycle with special reference to policy initiation, formulation, implementation and evaluation.
37. Discuss the role and functions of Legislature, Executive and Judiciary as key policy actors.
38. Analyze the influence of political parties and interest groups in public policy formulation.
39. Examine the significance of Bureaucracy, Media and NGOs in shaping contemporary public policy.



സർവ്വകലാശാലാഗീതം

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**DON'T LET IT
BE TOO LATE**

SAY NO TO DRUGS

**LOVE YOURSELF
AND ALWAYS BE
HEALTHY**



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Public Policy in India

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