

Public Policy and Factors Influencing Public Policy

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Abstract: Within the broader content of the political system, public policy comprising several elements aiming at achieving certain interests, goals and objectives is a skilful, comprehensive, enforceable, binding, legitimate, authoritative, deliberate and purposeful framework of and for interaction within which a multiplicity of policy decisions by political office – bearers can be made and various courses of action can be put into operation by public officials in order to realize the predetermined governmental aims and objectives as economically, efficiently and effectively. However, policy is not static as it should be reformulated and adapted continually on the basis of experience, research in the relative field of operation, and changing circumstances and needs; and these are always factors which serve to change the nature and the extent of the activities of public institution. All these aspects constitute the subject – matter of this article.

Keywords: Public policy; interest goals and objectives; changing circumstances and needs; factors, framework of and for interaction.

I. Introduction

To be realistic, political policy which is not static but dynamic as it is has to be continually reformulated and adapted on experience, research and changing circumstance, needs to be based on facts, and knowledge. It is largely experienced public officials who have profound influence on political policy, depending on how authentic, complete and comprehensive their information is and also how they present it to the political rulers and the legislators, that is, members of parliament, provincial and municipal councils.

II. Purpose Of The Article

The express purpose of this article is to define the concept of public policy and show the factors that influence public policy – making

III. Public Policy And Factors Influencing Public Policy Making

1.1 Leading scientists, scholars and writers

Leading scientists, scholars and writers relevant to this subject include

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|-------------------|-----------------|--------------------|
| • J. J. N. Cloete | • David Easton | • H. A. Simon |
| • S. B. M. Marume | • E. N. Gladden | • Geoffrey Vickers |

3.2 What is public policy?

3.2.1 Definition of ‘Public policy and public policy making’

W. Fox. And Ivan H. Meyer [1995:96] define policy as:

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| a. A guide of action or statement of goals that should be followed in an institution to deal with a particular problem or phenomenon or a set of problems of phenomena. |
| b. A guide to action that should be followed by individuals in the organisation in order to provide consistence of decisions. |
| c. Goals and objectives within a given situation and the methods to realize them. In a more specific sense it indicates the steps taken to realize the objectives of a public authority. Various types of policy may be recognized. For example, political policy, functional policy and long – and short – term policy. |
| d. Statement of goals and intentions with respect to a particular problem or set of problems. |

According to Sir Geoffrey Vickers [1965:25 – 225], policy making is viewed in four different ways as follows:

- policy making as a mental skill;
- policy making as an institutional process;
- policy making in the context of the decision situation; and
- policy making within the human – ecological system.

According to Professor H. A. Simon: [1964, 1957], the concept of decision – making is the unifying core of the elements comprising the field of public administration.

IV. Comments

In our humble opinion the positive contribution of *Professor Herbert A. Simon's* book to the development of public administration as a discipline is his sophisticated introduction of the concept decision making as the unifying core of the elements comprising the field of public administration. In a penetrating examination of the field, *Professor Simon* decided that if there was one thing common to all administration, it was *decision – making*, and made the following crucially important observation:

‘Before we can establish any immutable principles of administration, we must be able to describe, in words exactly how *an administrative organisation* [we would prefer the phrase ‘executive institutions’] looks and exactly how it works. As a basis for my own studies in administration, I have attempted to construct a vocabulary which will permit such descriptions, and this volume records that the conclusions do not constitute a theory of administration, except for a few dicta offered by way of hypothesis, no principles of administration are laid down. If any theory is involved, it is that decision making is the heart of administration, and that the vocabulary of administrative theory must be derived from the logic and psychology of human choice.

The discipline public administration does not seem to have achieved the unity that *Professor Simon* had hoped for. The organisation for teaching purposes at American universities is certainly not conducive to this – too much overlap too many fragmented converses, no standardised syllabi. This applies, not only to public administration but also to other social disciplines.

One of the basic requirements of contemporary public administration is that each and every activity needs to be directed specifically at achieving a set goal. That is, a clear objective should be formulated and made public so that all interested parties know what the end result will be. It follows then that an objective should be set for each public institution. The objective has to be continually reviewed in order to meet changing circumstances and needs. Thus when an objective is laid down, a clear indication should be given of (*what, how, who, which, where, and when*):

- a. what is actually intended;
- b. how to set about achieving the objectives, that is, what work methods and procedures must be followed;
- c. who will take action to achieve the objective, that is, which political office – bearers and public be followed;
- d. the wherewithal means/ways to achieve the objective, that is, which resources, in terms of funds, personnel, materials, tools, machines and equipment; organisational structures, will be used;
- e. where to undertake action to achieve the objective; and
- f. when to take action to achieve the predetermined objective.

When an *objective* in the public sector is made known, it is usually said that the public policy has been set. The activity which precedes the public announcement of the objective is known as *public policy – making*.

Professor B. J. Roux [1968:142] views public policy determination as ‘a process of deciding on and spelling out goals in such a manner that it is possible to devise a course of action for their achievement’.

Lerche and Said [1971:24] define policy as ‘a course of action designed to attain an objective.

As can be seen, *policy* comprises *decision and action/execution*, with perhaps, greater emphasis on the former element. Action to attain a goal can arise from a policy if and only if the decision itself clearly reflects the decision – makers conception of both goal and procedure. Consequently the formal decision normally embraces at least three aspects to guide and enlighten all involved in implementation.

These *three* aspects are:

- a. *formulation* of the goal in the clearest possible terms;
- b. *nature of action*, stated in terms simple enough to be a guide to the other officials of the state; and
- c. *the form and perhaps* the amount of *national power* to be employed in achieving the goal.

V. Interests, goals and objectives

Interests

A series of *terms* in an attempt to define interest includes:

- common interest and conflicting interest
- primary and secondary interest
- initial interest
- identical and complementary interests
- cardinal interests
- legal interests
- essential and variable interests

Closer investigation reveals *two general categories*, namely,

- a. *The national interests* of a single nation, and

- b. The degree of generality of interests among two or more nations.

Under the first category various interests can be classified according to

- a. degree of priority of the interest;
- b. degree of permanence of the interest
- c. degree of generality of the interest

Let us examine *six national interests* briefly as follows:

1. **Primary interests:** include the protection of the nations physical, political and cultural identify and survival in the face of attacks from outside. All nations have these interests and must define them at all costs. Compromise is impossible here.
2. **Secondary interests:** fall outside primary interests, but contribute to them. One example is the preservation of the due immunities of nation’s diplomats.
3. **Permanent interests:** remain relatively constant for long periods. They do change with time, but only slowly.
4. **Variable interests:** are a function of current personalities, public opinion, group interest, a nations political and moral way of life. In other words, variable interests are these a nation chooses at any given moment to regard as national interests.
5. **General interests:** are those that a nation can apply positively over a wide geographical area, to many nations or in specific fields such as economy, commerce, diplomatic contact and international law.
6. **Specific interests:** are those positive interests that are not included in general interests.

Besides the six national interests mentioned above, there are three international interests:

7. **Identical interests:** among nations are of course the national interests that they have in common.
8. **Complementary interests:** between nations, though not entirely identical, can at least from a basis for agreement on certain matters.
9. **Conflicting interests:** are further explained as follows:
 - *Ends* are identical with *objectives* while *means* are the instruments, methods and subsidiary objectives employed to obtain them.
 - The crux of the matter is that *temporal aspects*; in other words, the relationship between the national interests; the postulated goal, and the chosen objectives are largely a *function of various planes of time*.
 - *National interest* implies *perpetuity or intimacy*, the idea being that such interests will *cause the state to struggle with the problem unceasingly* or at *least until the political system disintegrated*.
 - A *goal* is set in terms of the *maximum time span* that can be *foreseen analytically*.
 - As long as the situation in general remains *constant* the postulated goal will remain in, but any drastic change will necessitate the *choice of a new goal* more in keeping with the nature of the position.
 - An *objective* implies less time, or the target situation of state action and attainable in terms of the forces operative at the moment of decision.

In the choice of an objective, the extreme importance of the ends/means relation lies in the fact that whereas the goal represents the best situation imaginable the objective is the aspects that the policy – makers consider closest to the goal from a practical standpoint. In most situations the express purpose of state actions is little more than purpose of state actions is little more than one indication of the actual distance covered in that direction depends on the means available to the state in that particular situation.

All states share to some extent several basic objectives, six of which we give here as set out in *Lerche and Said [1971]*.

These objectives have a value basis and that every state interprets each of these objectives in its own interest. In other words, these *objectives are common only* in that they are shared by most states:

1. self preservation;	3. welfare;	5. ideology;
2. national security;	4. national prestige;	6. power

Elements of foreign policy:

The substance of *foreign policy* is a product of *these elements combined with the policy – making process*.

A classification of the elements of foreign policy

1. **Relatively permanent material elements**

- a. geography
- b. natural resources for example minerals; food production; energy and power.

2. Less permanent material elements

- a. industrial complex
- b. military complex
- c. changes in industrial and military capacity

3. Human elements: quantitative and qualitative

a. Quantitative: population

- urban
- rural
- commercial farmers
- educated/technical

b. Qualitative

- policy makers and leaders
- the role of ideology
- the role of information

A further classification of the elements of foreign policy

The above exposition of the elements of foreign policy is reasonably complete, but we shall also give another possible classification, which has only *two categories, tangible elements and intangible elements.*

4. Tangible elements

- a. geography
- b. population and manpower
- c. natural resources
- d. industrial and agricultural productive capacity
- e. military power

5. Intangible elements

- a. political, economic and social structures;
- b. educational and technical levels
- c. national morale
- d. international strategic positions
- e. policy – makers and leaders
- f. ideology and
- g. information.

6. An artificial comparison of two categories:

- a. *Tangible elements* have a measure of intangibility and vice versa. The tangible elements involve the concept of quality, and are measured in terms of availability, transferability and replace ability.
- b. The *intangible elements* signify quality, estimated not only in terms of excellence but also by such criteria as appropriateness and relevance.

The analysts measure the *tangible factors* but evaluated the intangibles; the quality factor built into the intangibles has a great influence upon the effectiveness with which the tangibles are employed.

This initial declaration is purely political party policy. If the political party should come into power its leaders would, as ministers, become the heads of the various state departments. These executive institutions assist them in transforming political party policy into government policy.

The policy of the government would, however, still be based considerably on political sentiment. Because public officials have to be completely impartial and objective in disputes concerning party politics, they cannot influence political policy one way of the other.

To be realistic, political policy needs to be based on facts and knowledge. It is largely the experienced public officials who have profound influence on political policy, depending on *how* authentic, complete and comprehensive their information is and also how they present it to the political rulers and the legislators [that is, members of parliament, provincial and local councils].

Public policy – making as supreme function of any government

Public policy – making, which is the activity of those who have the power and right to decide what is to be done, is the supreme function of any government at any political level.

Public policy – making is the activity preceding the announcement or publication of goal, whereas a policy statement or a policy is the result of that activity, the formal articulation of the goal that the government intends to pursue with the community.

Public policy is decided by the legislator's policy decision that is, of the public functionaries and the public institution. Thus deliberations in the legislative institutions (Parliament, provincial, and municipal councils) usually lead to legislation (*statutes, ordinances, by-laws, regulations*) which is the formal articulation or public statement of public policy and is, inter alia, a proposed programme of action aimed at the realisation of a goal.

7. Four broad viewpoints regarding meaning of public policy:

In the various meanings ascribed to public policy five broad viewpoints can be distinguished:

- a. *Public policy* is a course of action designed to attain an objective.
- b. *Public policy* is the authoritative allocation through the political process of values to groups, or individuals in the community, and in this regard, public policy is a guideline for action.
- c. *Public policy* is a comprehensive framework of and for interaction within which a multiplicity of public decisions are possible.
- d. *Public policy* is purposeful activity; a course of action put into operation to realise postulated objectives or goals.

1. Political system:

According to Professor David Easton [1965], a political system is a set of structures, institutions, dynamics, actions, and processes which interact with each other, and, across the boundaries of the system, with the environment, to allocate values authoritatively for a society (which is the most comprehensive social system) to attain the goals, ends and purposes of the society, and generally to perform those functions which may be defined as political. It is, conceptually, itself a subsystem of the wider and more comprehensive social system. It is usually regarded as an open system involved in exchanges with its environment, and an adaptive system, capable of adaptation to changing circumstances, regulation of its own components, responsive to stress and through feedback mechanisms, is able to adjust its outputs to input conditions

A political system is an open subsystem of the broader, comprehensive, all – embracing social system within which we find several other essential political subsystems which influence one another, for example, the family, economic, cultural, religious, educational, legal, and other subsystems

2. Public policy

Within the broader context of the political system, therefore, public policy is a reasonably comprehensive, enforceable, authoritative, binding, legitimate, deliberate and purposeful framework of and for interaction within which a multiplicity of public decisions can be made by elected political office – bearers, and various courses of action can be into practical operational by public administrators and their subordinates in order to realise postulated governmental aims and objectives.

Consequently the formal decision normally embraces at least three distinct aspects to guide and enlighten all involved in the implementation. These three aspects are:

- the formulation of the goal (objectives) in the clearer possible terms;
- the nature of action, stated in terms simple enough to be a guide to the officials of the state; and
- the form and perhaps the amount of national power to be employed in achieving the goal (objective).

Public policy takes one or more of several forms that is,

- a. specific legislation or
- b. in detailed legislation or
- c. in detailed regulations drawn administratively within the parameters of more generalised legislative guidelines

Public policy may also take the form of authoritative government statements of position on an issue.

3. What is the significance of public policy and public policy making?

The importance of public policy and public policy making in public administration stems from the very fact that: 'No public activity can be attempted without the stipulation of clear objective and a proper policy. In most contemporary states the supreme objective branches into a multiplicity of sub – sub objectives. Hence in these states, there is an overall policy burgeoning into numerous sub – policies, and sub – sub – policies.

For the purpose of this study, it is maintained that when an objective in the public sector is made usually said that the policy has been set. The process of events preceding the announcement of the objective is known as

policy – determination. Public policies are, therefore, those that are developed and adopted by political office – bearers, and put into, effect by government institutions and public officials.

The significance of policy making in public administration stems from the very fact that no public activity can be attempted without the stipulation of clear objective and a proper policy. In most contemporary states the supreme objective can be stated as the advancement of the general welfare, but the supreme objective branches into a multiplicity of sub – sub- objectives. Hence in these states, that there is an overall public policy burgeoning into numerous sub – policies, and sub – sub- policies.

4. What is policy making in the human – ecological system

According to Sir Geoffrey Vickers (1965:25 – 112; 115 – 169; 173 – 221; and 225 – 233), policy making is conceptualised in *four ways*, namely.

- As a mental skill;
- As an international process;
- In the context of the decision situation; and
- Within the human – ecological system.

Sir Geoffrey Vickers discussed the policy – maker as an exercise of skills; as the player of an institutional role; and as at once the captive, the product and the creator of an endless series of situations (*Geoffrey Vickers*, p. 225) He tries to put the policy – maker in perspective, by extending the focus, in space and time, to comprehend the system which he seeks to regulate and of which he is part. For the policy – maker is neither so identifiable nor as powerful as these examples might suggest.

In a world in which political choice becomes more ubiquitous and more responsible, more people become involved as agents, concerned directly or indirectly in forming or frustrating policy, as well as in their capacity as beneficiaries or sufferers from its results. He has already mentioned four capacities in which they may be involved.

According to *Geoffrey Vickers* policy making depends:

- a. on all who help to formulate the concrete alternative between which the policy – maker must choose;
- b. on all who must help to carry it out;
- c. on all whose concurrence is needed legally or in practices to put into effect; and
- d. by no means least, on all those who, by giving or withholding their trust, can nurse or kill its chances of success.

5. What is the implication of all this?

From the frequency, it means that everyone in our society is constantly involved in one or more of these ways and carries, however, carelessly or unknowingly, the corresponding responsibility. So, incidentally, is nearly everyone in other societies, whatever their political shape, we should do well, in comparing the merits of different types of policy, to look behind the forms as ask how far they in fact restrict or encourage the playing of these essential roles.

These roles not only limit the policy maker; they also contribute to policy making through the dialogue in which all are involved. In both respects they place responsibility on those who play them (*Sir Geoffrey Vickers*, 1965:225 – 226).

6. Operational definition of public policy

From the above contributions, the *concept public policy* may be viewed as:

A skilful, comprehensive, enforceable, binding, legitimate, authoritative, deliberate and purposeful framework of and for interaction within which a multiplicity of policy decisions by political office – bearers can be made and various courses of action can be put into operation by public officials (administrative, technical and operational officials and workers) in order to realise the predetermined governmental aims and objectives as economically, efficiently and effectively as possible [Marume:1988].

6.1 Factors which influence public policy and public policy – making

6.1.1 General remarks

Policy is not static. Therefore, policy should be reformulated and adapted continually on the basis of experience, research in the relative field of operation, and changing circumstances and needs. These are always factors which serve to change the nature and the extent of the activities of public institution. A basic requirement of policy is adaptability and regular reviewing to ensure that it is up – to – date, relevant and applicable to a specific area.

Generally, the policy in force at a particular time and place is *influenced by the following factors*:

- a. circumstances such as technological developments, population increases and urbanisation of the population, crisis, natural disasters, war and depression, international relations, economic and industrial development;

- b. public wants and needs;
- c. policies of political parties;
- d. activities and representations of interest groups;
- e. personal views of political office – bearers as well as views and experience of expert public officials,
- f. research and investigations

6.1.2 Policy – making machinery

It is not merely one political office – bearer or public official who deals with all the aspects of policy – making. Therefore, public policy is based on contributions made by political office – bearers and public officials at various levels of the official hierarchy and even on contributions made by private concerns. Although a decision still has to be taken at one or other stage by a specific political office – bearer such a *town council, a minister, or an institution such as the cabinet, or Parliament, the final decision* will always be based on knowledge, experience and factual information obtained from a variety of sources. For the purposes of this analysis, the following *public institutions* are involved in policy – making:-

- a. commissions of enquiry;
- b. departmental and inter – departmental committees;
- c. staff units and domestic institutions;
- d. parliamentary select committees;
- e. cabinet and cabinet committees;
- f. cabinet secretariat

6.1.3 Some key actors in strategic policy development

The following summary description may be better portrayal of the current situation in some of the democratic African countries:

a. Effective policy research and analysis

It must be realised that a meaningful, necessary and appropriate policy development depends on effective policy research and analysis; policy dialogues, and above all training and the sharing of information amongst institutional policy should ensure that the wider public is involved so as to develop an informed policy negotiation and choices.

b. The socio – political environment

The social, political and economical environment (milieu) within which policy development takes place is critical to the type and nature of the policy formulated. The environment is, therefore, both the source and the recipient of the policy that is developed. Within the social environment are various competing, conflicting and collaborative institutions, individuals, groups and both formal and informal structures with an interest and role in policy formulation.

c. Cabinet and its committees

Within the formal structures are ministries/department, public enterprises, parliament and cabinet with its various committees responsible for many areas of government activity. While inter – ministerial committees are recognised and accepted, formal structures through which government policies are initiated, conceptualised, prepared, reformulated and eventually present to cabinet, they are by on means the best method of method of information gathering in preparation for formal decision making. The major reason is that they do not, by the nature of their composition, have all the relevant expertise, competencies and skills in a particular discipline that comes for policy decision. Although they are representations of interests ministries and departments, their composition in terms of level of authority fluctuates. In any one inter – ministerial committee, for example, the members attending may not be regular and, as a result, unfamiliar with the pertinent finer details of the previous discussing where briefing may not have been possible. The variation in attendance and difference in levels of seniority and competencies, therefore, does not contribute positively to consistency and continuity of policy ideas. However, the committees are necessary for consensus – building and the well sought after cooperation of ministries in the policy implementation process.

d. Policy analysis review units

In order to enrich cabinet policy decisions, some countries, in *Africa, Asia, and Latin America, and in Europe*, have created both in the cabinet office and in ministries policy analysis review units (PARUSs), whose principal purposes are to create and maintain and consolidate data, and to clarify the roles and responsibilities of policy functionaries within ministries of government or within the coordinating agencies of government.

e. Civil society

Civil society (which refers to organisations which are outside government but which find expression in their relationship to the state; which denotes patterns of association, for example, single interest groups, professional associations and membership organisations; organs of civil society are therefore heterogeneous), in current thinking, is expected to contribute to policy development because of the economic and political liberalised policies adopted by many governments. Their purposes, constitutions and envisaged durations vary. All are, in one way or another, interest groups that may, for example, represent a particular sectoral interest (farmers, chambers of commerce, trade unions) or a particular policy point of view (pressure groups). Together they constitute the mechanism by which a diverse range of views are directed at public policy makers and absorbed into the larger consultative process. They provide an opportunity to influence the direction of government policy without necessarily seeking political office. They therefore constitute a link between the individual and the state. Civil society as part of the informal structure therefore contributes to policy formation. Many governments have found it essential to involve civil society as a way of developing national consensus in anticipation of acceptance or approval of policy outcome. Accountability by the government and acceptance of policy by civil society is a guarantee that the policy is relevant, solid, comprehensive, enforceable, respected, and all embracing.

f. External pressures

The external pressures and actors, consisting of international and regional organisations, non – governmental organisations and significant others contribute to policy formulation through their own influences; the provision of information and data; the supply of technical assistance; and the spread of philosophies and success stories in other countries and areas. Amongst the main influential, external sources of government policies are the *donors, through their expertise, aid, and technology.*

4. Summary and conclusion

Public policy, which should be continually reformulated and adapted on experiences, relevant research and changing circumstances, needs to be based on facts and knowledge.

It is largely experiences public administrators and their subordinates who have profound influence on public policy, depending on how authentic, complete and comprehensive their information is and how they present it to the political rulers and the legislators. It is important at as particular time and place is influence by such factors as:

- Circumstances such as technological developments, population increases and urbanisation, crises, natural disasters, wars and depression international relations, economic and industrial development;
- Public wants and needs;
- Policies of political parties;
- Activities and representations of interest groups;
- Personal views of political office – bearers as well as views and experiences of expert public officials
- Research and investigations

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in United Kingdom; Netherlands, Frankfurt in Germany; Lisbon in Portugal; Spain (Nice), Paris in France, Geneva in Switzerland, Belgrade in former Yugoslavia-; Rome and Turin in Italy; Nicosia – Cyprus; Athens – Greece; Beijing and Great Walls of China; Singapore; Hong Kong; Tokyo, Kyoto, Yokohama, and Osaka, in Japan]; fifteen years as management consultant and part – time lecturer for BA/BSc and MA/MBA degree levels with Christ College- affiliate of Great Zimbabwe University and National University of Science and Technology; PhD/DPhil research thesis supervisor, internal and external examiner with Christ University, Bangalore, India [2011 – 2016]; and Zimbabwe Open University since 2013; external examiner of management and administrative sciences at Great Zimbabwe University (2016 – 2019); since 2015 full time currently senior lecturer and acting chairperson of Department of Public Administration in Faculty of Commerce and Law of Zimbabwe Open University; a negotiator; a prolific writer who has published five books, twenty five modules in public administration and political science for undergraduate and postgraduate students, and over sixty referred journal articles in international journals [IOSR, IJSR, ISCA – IRJSS, IJESR, MRJESR, IJESI, IJBMI, IJHSS and Quest Journals] on constitutional and administrative law, public administration, political science, philosophy, Africa in international politics, local government and administration, sociology and community development; vastly experienced public administrator; and an eminent scholar with specialist qualifications from University of South Africa, and from California University for Advanced Studies, State of California, United States of America: BA with majors in public administration and political science and subsidiaries in sociology, constitutional law and English; postgraduate special Hons BA [Public Administration]; MA [Public Administration]; MAdmin magna cum laude in transport economics as major, and minors in public management and communications; MSoc Sc cum laude in international politics as a major and minors in comparative government and law, war and strategic studies, sociology, and social science research methodologies; and PhD summa cum laude in Public Administration.