

Factors Affecting for Making Policy Decisions: A Conceptual Discussion

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Abstract

Policy decision passes through a complex process as it is affected from a number of socio-economic and political factors. This descriptive article highlights the constraints in policy- decision making, namely political, economic, and socio-cultural constraints in decision making. This article reviews the theories of decision making of public policy. The article begins with introduction followed by discussion on constraints in decision-making. Finally, it includes the conclusion of the study. Literatures are drawn from international and national level for discussion purposes; however, the article eludes depth empirical research with detailed surveys.

Keywords: *Policy Decisions, Political Factors, Economic Factors, Socio-Cultural Factors*

1. Introduction

The pioneer of public policy Analysis H. D. Laswell (1950) stated that policy decisions as projected program of goals, values and practices. Policy decision-making devotes to actions taken within governmental settings to formulate, adopt, implement, evaluate, or change policies. Policy formation often overlaps with its decision-making process (Rana, 2014). Lasswell (1950) described policy decision making as a problem-solving process comprising the identification problems, gathering information, formulating alternative and making choices to realize specific goals and values. Policymakers, in the democratic political system, formulate policy options/alternatives considering the policy problems. Ideally, it is

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the course that best addresses the problem of the public based on theories at the given time. Thus, decision-making stands as one of the important stages of policymaking.

Multiple perspectives exist regarding decision-making methods. They range from rational, top-down perspectives to incremental and power-based ones. The rational model posits that decision-makers carefully filter their environment and dispassionately decision-makers side opportunities with inside qualities (Sapru, 2011). It further assumes that decision-makers carefully scan their environment and objectively match it with maximum benefits (Anderson, 2003). By contrast, the organizational/institutionalism view emphasizes that even though these may be the intentions of individual actors, the design of the organization (in terms of structure and process) greatly influences what is perceived, encoded, and acted upon. Some scholars opine the organization as entangled in its inner complexity, with limited coping routines and a high degree of context sensitivity. On the other hand, incremental decisions largely focus on the small variations from present policies (Lindblom, 1976; Rana, 2014). The political view especially questions the intended collective rationality of actors and frames them as coalitional. Stronger groups will often enhance their power and interests at the expense of the minority or even the firm's overall well-being (Allison, 1971).

Constraints in decision making

Policy/decisions emit and exist in societal and political phenomenon. Policies should resonate with the very societal howls and smiles/supports manifested through eclectic way. However, several problems and constraints can arise during the decision-making process. A policy can yield the best results if it comes over given constraints from environment, specifically political, economic, and social. It is argued these constraints should be integrated into the policy formulation process rather than be faced at the implementation stage. Policies are introduced for the public and as a nation's course of action, thus, it needs to come over widely prevailed constraints. Therefore, decision-makers should be aware of the diverse obstacles that can be encountered in the policy-making process.

Many scholars argued that political and socio-economic conditions led to the emergence of sets of policy issues. The interplay of these elements affects the nature and destiny of policies. However, by the mid-1960s, Thomas dye and others in the United States concluded that cultural, political, and other factors were less significant for explaining the mix of policy decisions than were factors related to the economic condition (Sharkansky, 1971). However, today's world appears to be a puzzle game containing numerous riddles. Addressing the public

policy problems and issues that originate in the level of development of society has also become more hazardous and controversial than ever. Thus, consideration of all policy determinants/barriers in policymaking becomes essential than before for effective policies. Given this scenario, analysts and researchers need to lay adequate evidence and information on policy choices.

Political constraints

Policies get more often stuck due to political barriers. Such barriers exist and morph into many forms making the process complicated and linger. In decision-making, a course of action, to be acceptable, must satisfy a whole set of political requirements, or constraints. Sometimes one of these requirements, or constraints, is singled out and referred to as the goal of the action. But the choice of one constraint from many is to a large extent arbitrary. For many purposes, it is more meaningful to refer to the whole set of requirements as the (complex) goal of the action. This conclusion applies both to individual and organizational decision-making (Simon, 1996). Given this reason, policy actors should be cautious and ultra-aware of the political constraints in decision-making.

Policies can yield the best results if they overcome several constraints from the environment, especially political constraints. Political constraints mainly emphasize the nature of politics and government. Scholars argued that political constraints should be integrated into the policy formulation rather than be faced at the implementation stages. Ambiguity and time constraints are facts of political life. Their ubiquity makes policy-making messy complex contestable and less comprehensible. Therefore, traditional models, seeing policy making as an exercise in rational problem-solving, turn out to be unconvincing.

Political factors including various actors significantly affect the policy alternatives (Reich, 1995). Policymaking is all about the exercise of politics in which numerous hidden and direct forces play roles. Public policymaking becomes a messy process, in which circumstances, events, political dynamics, elected and unelected officials, as well as the public mood all, have equal possibilities to impact policy decisions (Almond et. al, 2011). This means that policymakers need to ensure that the initial set of policy alternatives that are subsequently submitted to the rough and tumble of politics has been generated through a systematic and analytical process relying on data and evidence (Mazo, 2019).

Furthermore, political culture affects the political feasibility of policy decisions. Political culture limits the choices valuable to public officials or policymakers. Decision-makers and citizens' political culture also impacts policy choices. Com-

pared to the levels of political cultures, participant political culture shape politics and policies than parochial political culture and subject political culture (Almond et. al, 2011). However, the latter plays a catalyst in creating political instability. Individuals and society nurture their own political culture that differentiates the values and lifestyles of its members from those of other societies. So, policymakers must consider the acceptance of particular policy decisions concerning society to gain political feasibility to ensure the legitimacy of decisions as well.

Partisan ideology could also affect public decisions/ policies. Political ideas in defining the sorts of problems can determine policy agendas to policy decisions as well (King, 1973; Howlett & Ramesh, 2003). Different sets of ideas or ideologies can be constructed to have a significant impact on public policymaking (Chadwick,2000; George, 1969; Howlett & Ramesh,2003). The conflict of ideology escalates when making policies as the individuals concerned want their opinions, ideas, and choices as the best among others. Ultimately, ongoing and unsolved tension prolongs inviting complication.

Principled beliefs and causal stories alter public policies decisions (Howlett, 1992). It means a problem can arise when identifying policy problem recognition and policy content too because of different beliefs and underlying realities (Fisher and Forster, 1993). However, the influence of causal ideas and beliefs is not automatic. Although some scholars argued that some ideas become fashionable at specific times (Howlett & Ramesh, 2003). If there is synergy between ideas and the interest of actors, then a policy decision can take place.

Furthermore, John Kingdon (1984) suggests that characteristics of policy issues are concerned with the nature of political institutions and circumstances, and the development of policy solutions. In this way, that can lead to the opening and closing of windows of opportunity for policy decisions (Kingdon, 1984; Howlett & Ramesh,2003). He also states three sets of variables -streams of problems, policies, and politics- interact in decision-making. If there is no clear interaction among these windows, policymaking becomes more complex. Besides it, he further identified discretionary political window types with other types which assist in the predictability of decisions.

Policy monopoly models also suggest how policy decisions are politically introduced. The way policy actors engage in policy discussion, debate, and persuasion and their presentation of a variety of evidence and argument in support of particular positions can make a great difference in decision-making (Majone, 1989; Howlett & Ramesh,2003). Scholars Jones and Baumgartner view that specific subsystems gain the ability to mold the interpretation of problems and thus how it

is conceived and discussed among decision-makers. They further come to say that policy subsystem members seek to alter policy images/ discourses through several tactics (Howlett & Ramesh,2003).

Moreover, the strategy adopted by decision-makers affects policymaking. Generally, the strategy adopted by them falls into two types. In the ‘downsian’ strategy, groups can publicize a problem to alter its venue by encouraging the public to call upon the governments to resolve it (Baumgartner and Jones, 1993; Howlett & Ramesh,2003). In the second type of approach, decision-makers involved in the policy subsystem that does not like the policies being developed or discussed by governments seek to alter the institutional arrangement within which the political subsystem expands their membership (Baumgartner and Jones, 1993; Howlett & Ramesh,2003). Hence, this way decision-making process can get stuck with a pile of turning points.

Economic constraints

Economic constraints exist as external factors that limit decision-makers to do what they want, and the factors are usually out of the control of the decision-maker (Rana, 2014). These sorts of constraints represent the main important factor in the decision-making process, including making choices and determining the desirability of options. Monetary also affects decision-making as tends to provide the required skills, knowledge, and so on.

From Thomas Dye to Frederick Pryor, all developed the idea that the structure of a nation’s economy determined the types of public policies-decisions. To clarify it further, the life span of decisions depends on the national/state’s economy. In its extreme form, this line of analysis led to the emergence of the convergence thesis. The convergence thesis suggests that as countries industrialize, they tend to converge toward the same policy mix (Ramesh & Howlett, 2003). Many scholars indicated that there is a positive relationship between a nation’s economic condition and welfare policies. To put it further, a high level of economic development and wealth creates similar opportunities regardless of the differences in their social and political structures. Wilensky (1975) opined that economic variables are quite important than political ones in understanding why such policies are adopted and why not others.

Economic constraints contain two folds effect on the policy environment (Sharransky & Edwards,1978). Firstly, it affects the demands on the political system. The monetary condition determines the prospective demands that come from the environment. The destitute society/group would demand of fulfilling their basic

needs. Whereas an affluent and wealthy, people/society would claim innovation, for instance space explorations as their policy agendas. The second restraint is that decisions are to be taken by decision-makers. The decision approved in terms of political and social conditions may turn out to be infeasible when it comes to finances. This can limit the set of political, and socially feasible alternatives. Hence, when decision-making comes to finances, decision-makers have to consider it wisely if covers the lives of decisions.

Several economic forces shape public policy (Sharansky & Edwards,1978). The quality and quantity of natural resources such as fuel, minerals, and agricultural lands can affect policy decisions. To clarify this, if a nation has fertile land, then policymakers can take decisions to produce abundant wheat and eradicate hunger within five years. To do so, it needs skills, knowledge, and so on. Similarly, the quality of industry and agriculture also helps employment creation and economic growth. If there are plenty of excellent industries, the decision-makers can make policies to provide new job opportunities to people based on their skills and interests. Furthermore, the condition of foreign trade deficit/profit has input in policy decisions. When a nation falls into a trap of deficit, then the nation cannot afford luxurious policy solutions though they turn out to be effective choices. However, if there is plenty of foreign investment, policymakers can initiate policies adhering to it. A viable source of money can lead to a kind of confidence and agreement to choose the best policy option and get implemented it. Additionally, unemployment, recession, and inflation create obstacles in policy decisions. When a government struggles with unemployment, inflation, and recession/depression, it needs to enact policies to combat these problems (Almond et. al, 2011). As a result, decision-makers cannot move out of those hurdles and lag the other needs.

Socio-cultural constraints

Socio-cultural constraints affect public policies significantly (Blyth,2016). Basically, socio-cultural barriers denote to human-made constructs emitted from social norms and cultural values. The two concepts are so intertwined (e.g., a group has a culture of behaving in a certain way, which is linked to what they believe about what constitutes an admirable life). All societies need to be able to make collective choices that affect all their members. Some of those choices enter the domain of “politics” or “public policy” and some do not. Whether or not there is a clash of values is the common cause of something falling into the realm of politics (Muer, 2014).

In a democracy, politics and policy decisions depend on how voters behave. Social modernization transforms the political values and political culture of the

public which increase demands for a more participatory system (Almond et. al, 2011). In one view of the world, such as some parts of the rational choice school of political science, voters choose the politicians who promote policies most likely to advance their interests. In this view, policymakers aim to develop and implement policies decisions in a way that will provide benefits to a majority, or a large enough minority to be successful. The tools of cost-benefit analysis, and in particular distributional impact assessments, would therefore be at the heart of policy-making. However, some scholars argue that the desire to engage with rational choice theory moved political science research away from a concern with culture and ideas (Blyth, 2016).

However, social-cultural constraints constitute a huge place in policymaking, especially in developing nations. Unless the decision-makers address societal and cultural issues related to policy decisions, low chance of an agreement remains in such a heterogeneous society (Benabou, 2008). The problem of societal fragmentation would severely emerge when narrow sectional groups are too strong to be ignored even in a strong state. It also weakens the state's ability to mobilize them toward the resolution of societal problems.

There are a few socio-cultural elements that mold policies. They have possibly an adverse impact on decision-making seeking by restricting access to policy options and giving rise to negative emotions. Firstly, the condition of cultural diversity can impact policies. Ethnically diverse decision-makers may not have a common understanding of the same issue. This can be equally applied to the common public as well. The policy that seems to be perfect for one group may appear as a problem or threat to the next group. Secondly, the state of stratification of society can determine policies (Almond et. al, 2011). It means, people from affluent strata can have higher policy demands whereas, the poorer section of society can demand just for assurance of basic things. Thirdly, Social values, beliefs, and attitudes, literacy have huge potential to determine policies. The variance in the previously mentioned elements might escalate policy options. To nourish policies, consideration of these fundamentals is essential. Finally, the literacy level of citizens can shape policies. The higher the education level of citizens, the higher the chance that they lay their demands more complex (Howlett & Ramesh, 2003). Compared to it, illiterate people would demand less intricate policy solutions.

Moreover, social values and norms impact decisions. Recognition of demands coming from society is quite essential. Decision makers should acknowledge whether they hold the possibility to address the demands of an open society or a closed society's norms. Deviations and variances co-exist in terms of customs,

traditions and norms in both societies. Policymakers should also be familiar with if the public supports the policy change. Identifying such tendency would allow them to figure out possible risks while making decisions (Howlett & Ramesh 2003). Open society welcomes newer policies with wider support than resistance to it like in closed ones. Furthermore, social harmony can also matter in making decisions. When society is fragmented and heterogeneous, mutual tolerance between races, and harmony might be low. Consequently, a policy can turn into 'an apple of a cord' rather than a solution.

2. Conclusion

In conclusion, numerous ambushes lie in policy-decision making. Fundamentally, decision makers are circumscribed by economic barriers. This factor significantly determines the demands that come from the environment and the decisions that are taken by decision-makers. The higher the national economy, the higher the chance of public policy coming to promote public welfare. Furthermore, social-cultural constraints widely prevail in every political system. Addressing such constraints helps ensure the legitimacy of decisions and becomes easier to get implemented. To do all this evidence, analysis, and information are of great importance. Going through all hurdles is only possible when the decision-makers are also well-informed dynamically also pay attention to political goods (values) that motivate different policy- decisions.

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