Studying Public Policy: The Policy Cycle Framework

Public policy is a complex phenomenon consisting of decisions made by individuals and organizations inside government, and that these decisions are influenced by others operating within and outside of the state. Therefore, the studying of public policy extends beyond the record of formal investigation and official decisions to encompass the realm of potential choices or even choices not made. The main goal of the course is then to answer the question: Why and how study public policy? With this in mind, in the first part of the first session of the course, I will introduce the theoretical foundations and the methodological implications of the policy sciences, appreciating the contribution of actors, structures, and ideas to making policy. In the second part of the first session, I will then illustrate an analytical framework based on a working definition of public policy as an applied problem-solving process. The policy cycle framework breaks down the policy process into five sub-processes: the agenda-setting (which refers to the process by which problems come to the attention of governments); the policy formulation (which refers to how policy options are formulated within government); the decision making (by which governments adopt a particular course of action or non-action); the policy implementation (which relates to how governments put policies into effect); and, finally, the policy evaluation (which refers to the sub-process by which the results of policies are monitored by both state and societal actors, the outcome of which may be reconceptualization of policy problems and solutions). Each sub-process will be investigated in the second session of the course with the reading and discussion, among the participants, of some core texts of the policy sciences scholarly literature.

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