

Making Public Policy

Lecture 2: What is Public Policy?

The Policy Paper Assessment

- The election background is not that important
- Must present an argued position, defending why this is the best policy over all the others
- Most material can be found online or in the reading pack
- Must consult this school's assessment policy and referencing style
- First 1000 words: outline current policy, the problem, how and why it got this way
- The rest of the essay is where we present our argument as to what should be done
- We should consider other alternatives as well, and why ours is the best

Definitions of Policy

- What governments do, why they do it, and what difference it makes
- A political agreement to act or not act in some way so as to mitigate or resolve problems on the political agenda

What is Public?

- At least in developed countries, there are virtually no facets of life in which the government does not have some degree of involvement; everything is 'public'
- Is public policy determined by the public interest, and is this the same thing as public opinion

The Politics Continuum

- Political science is concerned with theoretical questions of power, interests and values, whereas public administration is concerned with the very practical implementation of these ideas; public policy sits somewhere in the middle
- It often works as a continuum, where the implementation of a policy is followed by a period of analysis and reflection

Policy and Political Parties

- Generally, the Labor Party has tended to formulate policy on a collective basis, whereas Liberal Party policy has tended to be much more strongly shaped by the leader, less of a collective focus
- Opposition parties seldom have as detailed policy statements as the party in power, as the latter has the resources of the government at its disposal

Possible Essay Topics

- Economic Stimulus Plan
- Taxation
- Employment
- Health
- Housing
- Transport
- Education

- Climate Change
- National Broadband Network
- Fairness for Working Families

Lecture 3: Institutions

Basic Definitions

- A government consists of institutions responsible for making collective decisions in society
- Governance denotes the activity of making collective decisions, which is usually done by governments, but can be done by delegated bodies or international organisations
- The state is a political community formed by a territorial population which is subject to a single government
- Sovereignty refers to the ultimate source of authority in a society, the highest decision-making authority
- A citizen is a person accorded legal rights and duties flowing from membership in a state

Types of Regimes

- Single-party
- Dictator or despot
- Military
- Monarchy
- Theocracy
- Illiberal democracies
- Liberal democracies

Presidential and Parliamentary Systems

- Presidential: the US, most Latin America, South Korea
- Semi-presidential: France, Sri Lanka
- Parliamentary: Most of Western Europe, Canada, India
- In a presidential system, the head of state is the same as the head of government, whereas in a parliamentary system they are separate
- Hence, it is not the name of the head of state that makes something a parliamentary system (they could be called a president); it is the power they have
- Another crucial difference is that presidential systems have full separation of the executive and legislative arms of government are totally separate (president is not a member of parliament and is elected separately), whereas in parliamentary systems they are fused
- Presidents are also popularly elected and dominant, whereas prime ministers are selected by parliament or parties and are supposed to be considered first among equals, rather than dominant
- Presidential systems also have some security of tenure for heads of state, whereas the prime minister has no security of tenure at all

The Federal System

- Vertical fiscal imbalance: refers to the situation where there is a disparity between the taxing capacity and the revenue needs of the state compared to the federal government
- The Commonwealth government gives money to states in several different ways

- Grants tied to specific purposes, which enable the government to influence state power
- General purpose payments untied to any specific purpose
- The Goods and Services tax
- Horizontal fiscal equalisation refers to the unequal distribution of commonwealth resources amongst the states
- The argument in favour of this is that services are more expensive to provide in some regions than others, and each Australian should have equal access to federal services

Relevance of Federalism to public policy

- Duplication of resources, leading to inefficiency
- Often the two levels of government can act in contradiction to each other
- Competition between states
- Policy vacuums, as often both tiers of government blame the other for problems, e.g. homelessness and public transport
- Arguments that federalism promotes regional development, government closer to the people, and provides an additional layer of checks and balances

Legislative Design

- Unicameral: China, New Zealand, Scandinavia
- Bicameral: Australia, the US, Canada, Britain, most of Europe

Lecture 4: Actors

What is an Actor?

- Policies are political results that emerge from the interplay of many different individuals and groups, none of whom will achieve exactly what they want
- Key actors are any individual or group able to take action on a public problem or issue

Key Actors in the Policy Process

- Politicians
- Advisors, politician's personal staff – employed as political advisors
- Public servants – have different responsibilities to political staff
- Central agencies (treasury, finance, Cabinet) and line departments (health, education, more specific departments)

The Public Service

- Public servants are employed under separate act to political staff, and are supposed to give 'frank and fearless advice', free of political influence
- However, many political theorists argue that since the 1990s there has been a trend towards increasing politisation of the public service
- There is also evidence that the public service is somewhat biased in favour of labor
- There are about one million public servants in Australia, at state and federal levels

Policy Advice Versus Political Advice

- Not 'What is the best policy for the nation', but 'what policy can I come up with by next Tuesday that the Parliament will take seriously'

Policy Researchers

- Academics: they don't have much influence, but can sometimes come up with policies
- Think tanks: probably bigger in the United States than Australia
- Public service
- Community organisations
- Industry lobby groups: they generally have the money to undertake detailed research and polling data
- Citizens: focus groups

Policy Promoters

- The Media
- Politicians
- Professional lobbyists: employed by organisations to try to influence politicians
- Politicians often find that meeting with lobbyists is an effective means of obtaining information, as they tend to have all the research and information ready
- Lobbyists are usually ex-politicians, and are granted unlimited access to parliament

Policy Designers

- These are people who actually write the legislation
- Office of parliamentary counsel
- Office of legislative drafting
- Clerk of the Senate
- Ministerial and departmental advisors
- These bodies are often given very tight deadlines to actually write the legislation

The Budget Process

- Around September every year, the government announces how much revenue they have collected in the previous year
- They then collect submissions from community and interests groups concerning the use of the money
- Budget submissions are then taken from the various ministries
- The expenditure review committee is comprised of a few senior ministers, and it is their job to cut as much out as possible; other ministers must appear before this committee and present their case for funding
- The budget is written up and then presented to Cabinet, before it is finally presented to the public at Budget night, which is a very important event
- At this the politicians and public service must stand before the Senate Estimate Committees, and answer questions about how they are spending the money

Participants in the Policy Process

- Stakeholders: anyone affected by a policy
- Citizens: who have both rights and responsibilities
- Community Actors: other interested parties who may be involved in an issue but not have a direct stake in it
- Voters: will people actually be willing to vote for it

- Taxpayers: will people actually be willing to pay for the policy
- Virtually all policy changes make some people worse off, hence why policy change is often so difficult

Lecture 5: The Policy Cycle

Models and Theories

- A model seeks to describe something, usually in a highly simplified manner; they lack causality
- In contrast, a theory seeks to explain something

Institutionalism

- Is a response to pluralism and Marxism
- Sees policy outcomes as more than just social struggle – policy is crucially based upon government and political action
- The state is always a key actor
- Focus is on path dependency; the historical evolution of how the policy came about
- Key Questions
- How do institutions shape the goals that key actors pursue
- How do they structure power relations among these actors
- How are some actors advantaged and others disadvantaged

The Australian Policy Cycle

- The policy process is a 'cycle' that feeds back in onto itself; it has no beginning or end
- It is designed as a simplified model to make sense of what in the real world can be a very confusing and messy process

Arguments for a Policy Cycle Model

- Government is a process, not a set of institutions; the process does not finish with a decision
- Disaggregates complex phenomenon into manageable steps
- It is argued that the policy cycle represents an appropriate sequence of policy; good policy involves all of these steps, even if out of order

Criticisms of a Policy Cycle Model

- It oversimplifies policy work in a 'messy and complex world'
- The model suggests that policy workers solve problems in a linear and systematic fashion, which is generally not the case
- The model mostly applies to government, not other actors involved in policy
- The model does not include causation – who drives policy from one stage to the next?
- The hierarchical top-down approach ignores other stakeholders and perspectives

An Example: Paid Parental Leave

- Natasha Stott Despoja introduced the Workplace Relations (Paid Maternity Leave) Amendment Bill in 2002
- It sought to introduce a government-funded 14 weeks payment at the minimum wage
- The bill was not supported by any of the major party, and was not passed

- A revised bill was reintroduced in 2007, motivated by changed in public opinion and a united nations HREOC report that recommended some kind of maternity leave
- The Rudd Labor government established a Productivity Commission report, which resulted in a labour policy of 18 weeks maternity leave at the minimum wage
- The Liberals later introduced their own more generous version
- The end result is that we see that a process of over ten years, the policy has gone all over the place, skipping steps and going back to past steps, and in the end there still has been no policy that has been adopted

Applied Problem Solving and the Policy Cycle

- Problem recognition – agenda setting (show clearly that it is a problem, how will you get the government to pay attention)
- Proposal of solution – policy formulation
- Choice of solution – decision making (evaluating alternative options and choosing the best)
- Putting solution into effect – policy implementation (anticipating and overcoming opposition, analyse the effect on other policies, multiple levels of government, unintended consequences)
- Monitoring results – policy evaluation

The Pharmaceutical Benefit Scheme

- Research and development of drugs is mostly conducted by private companies in the US and Europe
- The therapeutic goods administration tests all drugs that are sold in Australia
- The PBAC determines if a particular drug should be subsidised, based on cost effectiveness
- The PBAC then submits this recommendation to the PBPA, which decides what the 'fair price' of the drug should be; this is then debated with the manufacturing company
- The decision is then submitted for minister's approval
- Practitioners prescribe the PBS medicine, which is then supplied by the pharmacist
- The government only recoups about \$1 billion of the \$5 billion that are spent on the drugs
- This policy is very popular, but has come under attack by drug companies in the US in relation to the free trade agreements

Lecture 6: Models and Theories

- Pick one (or more) of these theories to apply during the essay – use the one that is most useful and most convincing for your argument
- As we write out paper, we must identify the target groups of the policy, and who will be disadvantaged
- Use of statistics to back up funding estimates might be useful

How to Choose a Theory

- Does it make sense?
- Is it consistent with the available evidence?
- How much does it explain?
- Does it add anything to our understanding?
- Does it say anything different from any other theory?

Rational-Comprehensive Decision Making Model

- Set clear goals
- Explore all options with full knowledge of all preferences and values
- Consider all options, costs and benefits before making a decision
- Arrive at an optimal solution
- This is an optimal ideal type – it never occurs in reality

Properties of 'Good' Policy

- Political feasibility
- Economic efficiency
- Social effectiveness (for the public good)
- Public policy generally involves trade-offs between these three ideas

Incrementalism

- Put forth by Lindblom (1959) in 'the Science of Muddling Through'
- Policy moves forward slowly, often for no particular logical reason
- Rapid leaps or changes are rare
- This theory rejects policy formation as a rational, stepwise process
- Policy arises out of a 'marketplace' of autonomous decision-makers trying to pursue their own interests
- The mess of compromise that emerges is called public policy
- This model has been criticised as conservative, favouring existing policies and powerful players that already exist

Garbage Can Model

- Decision makers 'dump' policy options and solutions together according to availability and political feasibility
- Thus, things can become connected even if they don't really fit very well with each other

Rational Choice Theory

- This is the dominant theory used in Australian public policy
- Focuses on individual actors, and involves the application of economic models to political behaviour
- Holds that individuals are self-interested and make social & political choices on this basis
- The basic role of govt is to protect property rights, enforce rule of law, and enable effective markets: privatisation, low tariffs, globalised economy, limited social policy
- 'Rent seeking' – well-organised minority groups try to get special concessions from govt; selfish interest groups pervert govt with representational legitimacy
- Rational, self-interested bureaucracy will 'capture' resources + dominate policy
- Political actors – both policy makers & voters – act selfishly

Criticism of Public Choice

- Political & social behaviour is different to economic behaviour
- Premised on empowered individuals capable of making such choices with access to knowledge & information
- Premised on effective market operation

- Rejects benefits of inductive reasoning
- Privileges certainty over knowledge

Sociological Individualism

- Like public choice, based on individual but less right-wing
- Govt should correct market failures to secure social outcomes as individuals alone cannot
- However, only in instances of market failure

Marxism

- Marxists oppose the whole idea of public policy, as it relates to the idea of an elite in government imposing its decisions in the masses
- Marxist theory sees that society is dominated by a political elite who holds wealth, power and influence
- Neo-Marxists see the state as responding to worker interests as long as it does not disrupt capitalism itself

Statism

- Statism is a branch of institutionalism
- Statists see state as key agent, but are less interested than institutionalists in structures or organised institutions
- The state's monopoly on use of force enables social and structural organisation

Pluralism

- Pluralism focuses on interest group competition
- The state is a neutral decision-making institution open to bargaining and negotiation between a variety of interest groups
- The idea is that good policy emerges out of the competition between rival interest groups
- Corporatism refers to the formal links between government and key sectional groups (for example, the workers accords in the 1980s)

Application of Theories: Pensions

- Traditionally retirement pensions have been provided by the state
- The problem, however, is that the aging of the population is increasing pension demands while reducing the ability of the state to raise the tax revenues
- Australia's superannuation system is widely seen as an example of a policy innovation, as it combines both state and market involvement
- Under this system, employers must contribute a minimum of 9% of wages to the pension fund of your choice
- Workers can contribute more, which is only taxed at 15%
- There is also a safety net for the unemployed and poor
- Interesting question: does a government that has compelled you to invest then have obligations when the investment fails?
- This is an example of an unintended consequence

Lecture 7: State Welfare

Types of Welfare Systems

- Liberal - Australia, US, UK, Canada, NZ
- Conservative - Germany, France, Austria, Belgium, Spain, Italy
- Social Democratic - Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Finland
- Asian - Japan, S. Korea, Hong Kong, Singapore

Liberal Social System

- Individuals have rights of freedom from excessive state interference
- Benefits that are provided are means tested, and are seen as a 'safety net'
- Private savings and charity is encouraged
- Welfare is seen as against the idea of individual initiative
- Very limited wealth redistribution (targeted)

Challenges to Neoliberalism

- Market failure can lead to the demand for government intervention
- Argument that it is not fair that a two tier system developments whereby the rich can afford a better level of care than those who have to rely on the state
- What role does the government have when privatisation fails – e.g. public transport

Conservative Social System

- The state adopts a paternalistic attitude towards the populace
- More rights to social insurance, though often linked to employment
- Special interest groups are very active, such as church or other NGOs
- The market is subordinated to the state
- Wealth is transferred through the tax system from the rich to the poor, though this is not the goal of the system; classes remain intact
- Common in Europe, especially Germany, Austria, France, Belgium, Switzerland
- Different from both Social Democracy and Liberalism in that the family is preferred over the individual

Social Democratic System

- Welfare is seen as a right of citizenship
- Welfare is not means tested, but is available to everyone
- The idea is that the state takes care of people
- Most insurance and social services are government provided
- Full employment is preferred to economic growth
- High degree of social transfers and progressive taxation
- Originally seen as a mixture of communism and capitalism
- Very strong public sector
- Idea of 'womb to tomb' care by the state
- Very strong role for unions, even in private companies
- Big emphasis on equality

Challenges to Social Democracy

- Rise in immigration leading to public opposition to their use of social services
- System becomes less sustainable to aging population
- Generous unemployment benefits lead to high unemployment rates, especially amongst youth
- European Union membership has necessitated economic reform
- Brain drain of people gaining free education in the state and then moving overseas where they can pay lower taxes
- Most countries have been moving away from this model in recent years, for these reasons

	Social Policy	Social Rights	Stratification effects	State-market-family relationship
Liberal	Neither privileged nor subordinate	Minimal	Equality of poverty for minority; market-differentiated welfare for majority	Market provision encouraged
Conservative		Quite extensive	Existing status differentials preserved	Family protected
Social Democratic	Privileged	Extensive	Universal benefits graduated according to accustomed earnings	Market crowded out; family socialised
<i>Productivist (Asian)</i>	<i>Subordinate to economic policy</i>	<i>Minimal; extensions linked to productive activity</i>	<i>Reinforcement of productive elements</i>	<i>Premised on overriding growth objectives</i>

Tax Models

- Left wing states tend to advocate higher and progressive tax rates
- Sales taxes are generally opposed, which corporate taxes supported
- Right-wing states tend to like keeping income taxes lower and less progressive
- They also tend to prefer lower corporate taxes and higher sales taxes
- The basis behind this is encouraging strong work effort in the right-wing states, and encouraging equality in the left-wing states
- Interestingly, wealthy nations are found in the ranks of all four types of systems, and all have similar HDI levels, so one must question how much of a difference these policies make

Employment Policy

- On the left, the idea is that the government should actively intervene to provide full employment
- On the right, the idea is that the government should merely provide the ideal market conditions for high levels of employment
- The left emphasises direct government employment of workers, and government provision of re-employment and training places
- There is also substantial regulation of the labour market, such as working hours and conditions

Work and Family

- What is the appropriate balance between work and personal or family time?
- Is family time a 'right', as the labour unions argued at the last election
- What should be the maximum number of working hours in a week?

- What should be the relationship between casual and fulltime work?
- Should the government intervene to grant specific rights for casual workers?
- Should these questions be up to the individual or the market?
- Whose responsibility should it be to pay for and look after children?
- Low-fertility rates and aging population have both social and economic implications. Is it a State or Market problem?
- Who should pay for parental leave: the state or the market?

Women and Paid Work

- Workforce participation rates for women are lower than for men
- On average women are paid less for the same work
- Generally women occupy less senior positions
- Is this simply an equity issue
- What about women who choose to be homemakers? Doesn't maternity leave privilege working women?
- The former liberal government adopted this view, and hence the adoption of the baby bonus

Lecture 8: Networks and Public Policy

- Networks are ubiquitous in political science and public policy these days, and has become somewhat of a cliqued buzzword

What are Policy Networks?

- "Policy networks are sets of formal institutional and informal linkages between governmental and other actors structured around shared if endlessly negotiated beliefs and interests in public policy making and implementation" RAW Rhodes
- "The network concept draws attention to the interaction of many separate but interdependent organizations which co-ordinate their actions through inter-dependencies of resources and interests. Actors, who take an interest in the making of a certain policy and who dispose of resources required for the formulation, decision or implementation of the policy, form linkages to exchange these resources" Borzel
- They provide a way of analysing and describing the relationships between government and non-government actors

Key Features

- Multiple actors, not just the government (business, labour, interest groups, think tanks)
- Actors are interdependent – each have resources that the others need, and they must bargain amongst themselves in order to get the resources they need to pursue or implement the desired policy
- These actors share a common interest in a particular policy area
- Policy development and implementation occurs as a result of negotiation and interaction between actors
- Network analyses provides a way of describing how policy emerges out of the relationships between the government and other groups, not just looking at the attributes of the individual groups

Why are Policy Networks Important

- They limit participation in the policy processes, acting almost like a closed club, tending to resist or exclude outsiders who might try to challenge the status quo in the policy network
- In relation to this, they have a role in defining the roles of actors
- They decide which issues will be included and excluded from the policy agenda
- The network members establish the rules of the game, and the accepted behaviours and practices
- Government is not necessarily the dominant actor in policy networks, and so it raises the question of how the government can be held accountable

Policy Network Typologies

- Policy networks range on a continuum between different 'ideal types', or idealised conceptual models that help us in classification, but do not exist in the real world
- Marsh and Rhodes define the continuum as ranging between policy communities and issue networks
- The former are very tightly integrated, and the latter are much looser

Policy Community Characteristics

- Limited number of participants (some are deliberately excluded)
- Frequent and deep interaction between members on policy issues – attend same conferences, meet socially, etc
- Share a fairly consistent set of values, and consensus in ideology; agree on broad policy preferences
- All participants can speak with confidence on behalf of the group they represent
- These relationships can be plotted in network diagrams

Issue Network Characteristics

- Used for a different purpose – policy consultation only
- Many more participants, with open access
- There are fluctuating interest and participation levels, as it is only about consultation, not actual policy making
- Many groups on the fringe who have limited access
- Policy communities do not produce very diverse ideas, as everyone in the community knows everyone else, knows what is expected, and what is going on
- They tend to be very stable and hard to break into
- Issue networks, on the other hand, are the complete opposite – levels of trust and established protocols are much less strongly developed
- Hence, the structure of networks is a very important variable in determining the outcome of policy

Network Governance

- "Policy networks reflect a changed relationship between state and society. There is no longer a strict separation between the two. Instead of emanating from a central authority, be this government or the legislature, policy today is in fact made in a process involving a plurality of both public and private organizations" - Mayntz
- 'Governance' instead of 'Government'

- “Governance refers to self-organizing, inter-organizational networks characterized by interdependence, resource exchange, rules of the game and significant autonomy from the state” - Rhodes 1997
- It has been argued that networks are an innovative new method of organising society and governance, something different to government or markets
- Increasingly, governance is carried out not exclusively by the government, but by a network of government, quasi-government and non-government actors
- This means that these networks that engage in governance are not fully controlled by the government, and so are not fully accountable in the same way

Traditional Hierarchical Governance Model

- Clear division of powers between elected Government (sets policy) and Bureaucracy (Implements policy and provides policy advice)
- Actions/behaviour governed by formalised rules (SOPs)
- SOPs = standard operating procedures; centrally determined and rigidly followed rules, written up in official manuals
- Relationships governed by rigid hierarchy and command and control
- Government is central actor and is independent; other actors are subservient
- Clear ‘chain of accountability’ between actors (Westminster in Australia and Britain)

Why the Shift in Governance Modes?

- Policy issues and problems are increasingly complex, so-called ‘wicked problems’ that have many causes, extend across many jurisdictions, and are immensely complex
- Climate change is an excellent example
- It is argued that traditional, segregated bureaucratic institutions are unable to cope with such things
- Recent push to decentralise service delivery, passing it from the central state to local agents or private industry (in order to increase efficiency and responsibility)
- There has been an increase in demands from interest groups for more involvement in the policy process
- The loss in faith and reduction in size of the government since the 1970s has led to a much more diverse group of actors, which can only be coordinated by networks (e.g. employment agencies)

Characteristics of Network Governance

- Governance functions no longer sole preserve of State but are delivered through autonomous, inter-organizational networks of government and non-government actors (Governance Networks)
- Network actors are interdependent
- Actions/Behaviour governed by shared/negotiated norms not mandated by government (command and control)
- Relationships open and flexible
- Accountability is indirect, not exclusively the realm of any single actor

Networks and Democracy

Positive View

- Are a very useful method of helping citizens and grassroots movements to get involved in policy
- More flexible and able to deal with complex problems
- Easy for changes to occur and actors to come and go
- More opportunity for cooperation and negotiation

Negative View

- Privilege special interests (the insiders in the network)
- Networks are not generally elected – they are appointed by government or nominated by other groups
- Lack transparency and clear lines of accountability, but still have a great role in making policy and affecting people's lives

Lecture 9: Identifying Issues

McQuail and Windahl Model

- Divided into the media, public and policy agendas
- All are effected by personal experience and real-world indicators of the importance of an issue or event
- Also important are the 'gatekeepers', in particular the media and professional lobbyists, as well as the Cabinet

Issue Context

- How long does the government have to take action or make a decision?
- Have relevant parties already adopted a position on the issue?
- How central to the concerns of the organisation is the policy?

Internal Characteristics

- Scope for choice?
- Level of consensus about issue/solution?
- How complex?
- How much uncertainty about issue/possible outcomes?
- How value-laden?

Repercussions

- Scale of consequences involved?
- How many people affected?
- How significant are affected groups?
- How significantly is each group affected?
- Likely to ramify & affect other issues?
- Does action restrict agency's future flexibility of action?

Costs of Action

- How large are costs of acting?

- Is cost incremental or quantum jump?
- How long will resources be committed?
- Cost of analysis?
- Will analysis have pay-off?

Political risk calculation

- The most significant issues don't necessarily make it onto the agenda – the specific attitudes and interests of the ruling parties or leaders play a huge role
- For example, it is highly unlikely that the cabinet would go through with a policy if the PM disagreed
- Politicians and advisers use risk filters to determine what action to take – unlike the private sector they are highly risk averse
- Kingdon (2003) argues that issue introduction stage is like biological natural selection, in that issues which are incongruent with community values, very expensive, find organised opposition, or are not appreciated by many politicians, tend to die
- In addition, it is often easier for politicians just to take no action rather than risk offending someone

Problem Definition

- The function of problem definition is to (Rochefort & Cobb 1994) “explain, describe, recommend and above all persuade”
- Have to put up a ‘smoke screen’ hiding how complex and difficult the particular problem you are promoting really is
- Also need to create a problem that is as broad and severe as possible; if it just effects a minority it is unlikely to be passed
- Smaller issues are more likely to be addressed if they can be linked to larger and more prominent issues
- There is a competition among voices seeking attention for their particular problem, and one must frame a problem in a particular way such that it stands out and seems worthy of action
- Problems are not objective facts, but rather depend upon one’s values

Ill-structured Problems

- Open to endless interpretation and possible solutions
- As such governments usually shy away from dealing with them directly, but they can be dealt with as a sort of side-effect of other policies
- For example, poverty and environmental protection

Well-Structured Problems

- Open to a possible solution
- Break ill-structured problems into smaller more manageable sections
- Policy analysts are responsible for restructuring and ordering problems in such a way as to facilitate problem solving by decision makers

Objective or Socially Constructed

- Socially constructed means ‘to attach values and meanings to an event, people, patterns of action, or any other phenomenon (Schneider & Ingram 1997: 107)

- Problem definition is a process of image making, where the images have to do with attributing cause, blame and responsibility
- Political actors deliberately portray them in ways calculated to gain support for their side
political actors use narrative story lines and symbolic devices to manipulate so-called issue characteristics, all the while making it seem as though they are simply describing facts
- There is in fact a systematic process by which political actors struggle to control interpretations and images of difficulties
- Common political buzzwords are often used in this attempt, for example 'us and them', 'responsible or irresponsible', 'moral or immoral', 'haves versus have-nots'
- None of these things can be analysed objectively, but are merely values that help to build the socially construction of perceiving something as a problem
- One generally tries to apply positive labels to the people one's policy will help and negative labels to the people one's policy will harm
- One needs to provide for some explanation as to why your policy benefits one group at the expense of another – why is this justified

What is Serious

- Very arbitrary, and dependent on intensity of advocacy of each person
- Depends on politician's openness to issue
- Also depends upon what competing policy items are on the agenda: for example, wars and terrorist attacks can wipe others things off the agenda
- Rhetoric (Stone, 1989)
- Affective imagery (Rochefort and Cobb, 1993)
- Representation of the problem (Bacchi, 1999)

Cabinet Ministers

- Ministers are not necessarily policy experts in their field, and so are heavily dependent upon their public service advisors
- Cabinet meetings are a forum to discuss policy priorities, but they do not generally meet very often (hard to get everyone together), and cabinet meetings are thus used mostly for urgent issues or crises
- Think tanks, organisations and academics may be good at presenting their policy to the media, but if they cannot get the ear of the minister it is unlikely to get onto the policy agenda
- As such, paid political lobbyists are a highly popular way of organisations getting the ear of the minister – lobbyists may work for several such organisations at once
- Another way of doing this is for organisations to attend events where they know the minister could be present (this could include party fundraising events)

Is Ideology Dead?

- Ideology is not longer as important in politics as it once was, as many voters do not strongly identify with an ideology and are somewhere in the middle of the political spectrum and undecided on many issues – hence most parties cater to this group
- Liberals – 'choice' not 'pro-business'
- Labor – 'working families' not 'working classes'

- Greens – ‘green’ not ‘anti-capitalism’
- Nationals – ‘for regional Australia’ not ‘higher food prices’

External Drivers of Policy

- Much ministerial time is spent responding to problems and complaints, with a limited ability to set the policy agenda
- For example, the Mabo court decision forced the government to take legislative action on an issue that was previously in the too hard basket
- Media attention and opinion polls are also influential
- International events, such as wars and refugee arrivals can be influential
- Technological developments that shake up the status quo, for example the internet and stem cell research
- Demographic shift (e.g. population growth and the ageing population)
- Economic forces (e.g. share market fluctuations, interest rates, employment rates)

Lecture 10: Agenda Setting and The Media

Factors Within Government

- The particular point in the budget cycle the government is in at the moment will impact the reaction of the government to different government proposals
- This is also related to the problem of correctly estimating the costs and revenues of the budget
- Statutory ‘sunset’ clauses can force the parliament to re-examine the effectiveness of legislation after a certain period of time (e.g. anti-terrorism laws)
- Unfavourable audit reports, or other performance audits and benchmark failures
- Government promises can also bind them to particular actions – for example the early introduction of the myki card
- On the other hand, often opposition parties make promises that they think they can keep, but once they get into government they find that state finances were not as they had thought

Focus Groups

- Governments increasingly conduct focus groups, where ideas, policies and slogans are tested out with real groups of people
- This can often be done poorly, and so to be useful needs to be carefully structured and conducted correctly
- It is said that the terrorist hotline fridge magnets came out of a focus group

Conditions and Problems

- Conditions are simply statements of fact of the way things are: for example, Australian preference for low-density housing in city suburbs
- Conditions can become defined as problems when a critical mass of decision makers defines them as so; e.g. ‘urban sprawl’
- The same problem can also be perceived in very different ways depending on one’s perspective

- For example, the general problem of transportation could be perceived as an insufficient roads by drivers, insufficient bike paths by cyclists, and insufficient trains by public transport users

Requirements for Inclusion in Agenda

- 1. Agreement on a problem – significant interests agree there should be change; coalition of voices inside and outside government
- 2. Prospect of a solution – policy makers prefer issues with plausible solutions; politicians not drawn to failure
- 3. Appropriate for govt expenditure – competition for limited resources
- 4. For whom is it a problem? – ideology can influence minister's decisions

The Role of Celebrities

- In the United States and maybe Australia as well there is a growing trend towards attaching celebrities to various policy proposals in attempt to increase the visibility
- Julia Roberts tearfully testified about a disease that strikes young girls; Meryl Streep was upset about insecticide spray on apples; even Kermit the Frog lobbied for a bill regulating the breeding and sale of exotic animals
- "Expertise does not photograph well, Julia Roberts does" said Eric Denzelhal

Issue Attention Cycle

- Interest groups wait for an opportune time to present their policy (could be decades or years)
- One clear example of this is the environmental movement
- The groups latch on to a significant or tragic event in order to present the policy
- The policy thus makes it onto the agenda and in the media
- However, once the immense costs of solving the problem are realised, it gradually gets dropped from the agenda

Media and Public Agendas

- It is widely accepted that there is media bias, but this is not too much of an issue owing to freedom of media and diversity that exists
- However, it does change the way politicians and lobbyists will behave, for example presenting their news or agenda to whichever outlet will be most sympathetic
- The public also has agendas, tending to seek information that reinforces existing beliefs

Releasing Policies

- A common strategy of political parties is to release smaller elements of a policy one at a time, rather than the entire comprehensive policy all at once
- One reason for this is to allow all the elements to be absorbed by the public and the media
- The other reason is to prevent opposition groups from analysing the policies in detail, dissecting them and finding faults in them

Lecture 11: Policy Analysis and Instruments

- Guest Lecturer Dr Stephen Ziguras, Senior Adviser to State Minister for Community Development
- The state government cabinet has twenty ministers

- Types of Advisors

Media advisors

- Those who deal with media outlets, and are hence the first ports of call for media persons, and hence have the highest public profile
- Also involved in preparing press statements
- Often come from a background in journalism and/or media and communications
- Each minister has one

Other Advisors

- Caucus liaison advisors – work for the minister, and mostly works with other members of parliament (backbenchers) who have questions, etc
- Policy advisors – involved in the devising and implementation of government policy
- Political advisors advise the ministers on what sort of political support there will be for a given policy
- Many of those who end up in these policy advisor roles are a background in representing interest groups, charities, activist groups, etc

The Public Service

- Public servants do not generally change as a result of election changes in government
- However, there are some policy advisors who work for ministers and are employed by the government, but do change at election time
- These people generally focus on the political side of things, whereas the public service will focus on policy outcomes, conducting research, setting out options, etc

The Influence of Political Advisors

- He says that political advisors see themselves as working for the government in order to facilitate the adoption of policies that will benefit the public
- Political advisors do not have any official legal power to make decisions, give orders or grants use of funds
- On the other hand, advisors do have influence inasmuch as they represent the minister
- They may indeed use this influence to push forward their own agenda rather than that of the minister
- Political advisors will be lobbied extensively from different groups, even though they do not have any formal power
- In order to try to limit political cronyism, the public service are often responsible for the specific use of public funds, after politicians determine the broad programs that will be funded

Origin of Political Advisors

- In Australia these advisors originated in the 1970s during the Whitlam era, as the incoming labour government felt that the bureaucracy was unresponsive to their attempted policy changes, after the Coalition was in power for so long
- For some time there was thus a degree of antagonism between political advisors and the public service, though this has diminished somewhat in recent years

Impediments to Good Policy Adoption

- Lack of government funding for programs like poverty relief may not always be the biggest problem; it may simply be the red tape and organisation required to get it
- Lack of clear evidence about the effectiveness of various policies is a major impediment to adoption of good policy
- Another major problem is simply the wide disagreement about what should be done, or lack of public support for it
- For example, there is good evidence that higher alcohol taxes are an effective method of reducing alcohol harm, but there is public opposition to this
- Most organisations, whether public or private, only tend to plan four to five years ahead; this is not just a government problem

Avoiding Corruption

- Oversight system via the auditor general, who has the power to investigate every grant the government provides, and checks to see all is in order, and money is being spent on what it should
- There are many other checks and balances like this to keep the public sector honest
- Another reason is that public sector employees in Australia are reasonably well paid

Lecture 12: Policy Instruments

Assignment Advice

- Works cited most important list
- Assignment due online and in hardcopy by 5pm 29th April
- Word limit has 10% leeway
- Ensure online sources have URLs and access dates
- Mention policy instruments (and other lecture stuff) in policy paper

Policy Instruments

- Exhortation: advertising or propaganda to persuade or cajole public or specific groups to do something
- Evidence suggests that this is not a very effective approach, but mostly just a 'feel good' policy that shows that government is doing something
- Shock advertising may have some impact on people, but is unlikely much to change behaviour
- The media is seldom interested in discouraging this, as the government is a big source of advertising revenue for the media
- Economic incentives: prices or subsidies to alter behaviour
- One of the most common areas of taxation is alcohol and tobacco
- Provision: the state provides goods and services directly; for example, Scandinavian countries have government-owned shops that sell alcohol directly
- Regulation: the state uses law to control or change behaviour (most common method)

Evidence-Based Policy

- The election of the Blair Government in 1997 led to the rise of the idea of 'evidence-based policy', where policies are based on evidence rather than ideology

- Came as a reaction to the neo-liberalism of the 1980s
- One advantage of this is that it utilizes the knowledge of individuals outside of government
- Policy makers inside of government do not necessarily have any particular expertise in their particular department, and like ministers they can move around a lot
- Argued that this can result in more transparency and efficiency
- One problem with this approach is that research often takes far longer than policy makers are willing to allocate
- Big research projects can often take 5-10 years, far longer than the government time-frame
- Research is also very costly, and difficult to conduct for policy-making

Triple Bottom Line

- Economic: cost-benefit analysis, market competitiveness, opportunity costs
- Social: community impact analysis, social justice
- Environmental: ecological sustainability, other environmental effects
- Also are legal and political effects

Cost-Benefit Analysis

- Economic costs and benefits are analysed and measured in dollars
- Requires technical skills and judgements about the correct discount rate
- Critics argue that some costs and benefits cannot be measured in dollars, and that the goal is efficiency over equity and justice
- Nonetheless, these are fairly commonly used in government, owing to the easy ability to compare
- Cost-effectiveness analysis is similar, except that it does not try to measure benefits, but simply begins with the desired policy, and seeks to identify the most cost-effective way of carrying it out

Opportunity Costs

- Incorporates the forgone benefits of policies that the government is not able to adopt as a result of adopting a particular policy
- The difficulty is with constructing the model properly

Balanced Budgets

- Generally accepted model is that governments should balance the budget over the business cycle
- Thus the impact of any program on the budget is a hotly debated topic
- Concern that higher government borrowing raises interest rates
- Social Justice Principles
- Participation: an important goal of the government must be to maximise the ability of everyone to participate in politics and society, for example through education
- Rights: government must provide protection of individual and social rights
- Equity: must take into consideration whether or not a policy improves or hinders equity

Environmental Impact

- Increasing use of 'Environmental Impact Studies' as an additional means of analysing policies
- Are not usually decisive, but can provide ammunition for interest groups, etc

Fundamental Legislative Principles

- Fundamental legislative principles require that legislation has sufficient regard to the rights and liberties of individuals and to the institution of parliament
- A Senate Standing Committee consisting of 3 Labor, 2 Liberals and 1 Green analyses all legislation passed by parliament
- The committee examines all bills which come before the Parliament and reports to the Senate whether such bills:
 - Trespass unduly on personal rights and liberties
 - Make rights, liberties or obligations unduly dependent upon insufficiently defined administrative powers
 - Make rights, liberties or obligations unduly dependent upon non-reviewable decisions
 - Inappropriately delegate legislative powers
 - Insufficiently subject the exercise of legislative power to parliamentary scrutiny
- The committee produces a report detailing their findings to parliament, although parliament is not obliged to follow their recommendations

Parliament

- Does the legislation:
 - Provide clarity and precision?
 - Limit delegations to make legislation?
 - Provide for parliamentary scrutiny of delegated legislation?
 - Reserve power to parliament to amend acts?
 - Provide adequacy of the head of power to make subordinate legislation?
 - Provide for subordinate legislation's consistency with its principal legislation?
 - Contain only matters appropriate to subordinate legislation?
 - Provide for sub-delegation of power under subordinate legislation only in certain circumstance?

Individual rights and liberties

- Does the legislation:
 - Provide sufficient definition and provision for review of administrative power?
 - Provide consistency with the principles of natural justice?
 - Allow only appropriate delegation of administrative power?
 - Not reverse the onus of proof in criminal proceedings?
 - Provide judicial supervision by warrant of powers of entry, search and seizure?
 - Provide adequate protection from self-incrimination?
 - Apply retrospective laws?
 - Confer immunity from prosecution without adequate justification?
 - Provide for fair compensation for compulsory acquisition of property?
 - Have sufficient regard to aboriginal tradition and Torres Strait Islander custom?

Lecture 13: Consulting with the Public

The Consultation Process

- The type of consultation undertaken depends largely upon the costs and resources available

- Theoretically the consultation process should be carried out early enough to incorporate the advice, but often they do not, simply treating the consultation process as a box to be ticked

How do we Know Public Opinion

- Opinion polls – most such surveys are not actually published, but are conducted for private purposes
- Interactive media like websites, letters to the editor and radio talkback – politicians and other organisations monitor these to see what people are talking about
- Public meetings held with politicians or other officials
- Advisory committees formally set up by the government to investigate a particular issue; these are much harder for the government to ignore
- Submissions to parliamentary inquiries – organisations send letters en masse to these inquiries in order to highlight an issue

Who Should be Consulted?

- The government often wants to go beyond the normal organisations and interest groups that normally dominate the consultation process and reach ordinary citizens, but the time consuming nature of the process inevitably privileges the entrenched organised interests
- Good public policy should account for differing views and involve a wide range of stakeholders, though in practise parties will always preference different stakeholders depending upon their ideology
- Public choice theory questions who is really a legitimate stakeholder
- One again, often the government wants to reach ordinary citizens and identify their life experience and perceptions, though in practise they generally reach the same experts
- One must ultimately question whether populism is a sound basis for making good public policy

Potential Means of Consultation

- Opinion polls
- Focus groups
- Interactive media (websites, TV / radio talkback)
- Public meetings / Community Cabinets
- Summits (e.g. 2020 Summit)
- Advisory committees
- Submissions to inquiries
- Contact with local Members of Parliament
- Through lobbyists or other filters (think-tanks)

Purpose of Consultation

- Ideally is supposed to be to improve the quality of decisions
- In reality usually in order to gain legitimacy of a policy or broad direction they have already adopted
- Governments will generally not agree to consultation if they think that out of it will come something that opposes their ideology or policy
- Also serves to promote consensus amongst stakeholders

- The liberalist idea that consultation produces good policy
- Political reasons – it is a way to justify and promote decisions
- If the public and stakeholders are involved they are more likely to support or at least not oppose the outcome
- More involvement of stakeholders also increases the number of parties to blame when something goes wrong

Social Capital

- Social capital are social networks or links that make society more productive
- Reciprocity, trust and cooperation binds communities together and arguably leads to better outcomes
- There is also a supposed link to democracy, with healthier democracies having more social capital

Consultation Traps

- Not all groups are representative of their community – leaders of specialised groups might not always actually be representative of their members, or even agree with the leaders of similar groups
- Often the government will incorporate small changes to their policy around the edges in response to consultation and public opinion, but they seldom totally withdraw or reverse a policy for fear of losing face
- Another big problem can be when different departments within government do not adequately communicate with each other, and so pursue conflicting policies

Modes of Interaction

- Notification – One-way communication of information by the government to a passive public. Not strictly consultation but often first stage in process.
- Consultation – Two-way flow of information with active seeking of opinions from interested/affected groups
- Participation – Active involvement of stakeholders in policy making, providing a sense of 'ownership'
- Delegation – significant autonomy is granted to private actors, but with overall control maintained by the government through rule setting and provision of funds, etc
- Control – giving total control over the policy area totally to the public (e.g. referenda) is rare, and if it does occur will mostly be through privatisation

The consultation Diamond

- Early stages often domain of public sector and government; bureaucracy rule-bound and process-driven, not congruent with public participation
- Most public consultation occurs during the middle of the policy cycle, where assumptions are tested and foundations laid for community acceptance
- During the final decision-making stage, the public service takes control and prepares advice for Cabinet

Risks of Consultation

- If lobbyists or interest groups leaders get too involved with the government because if there is a change of government they might antagonise the new party
- Leaders of these interest groups may also be seen as compromising the independence of their organisation
- For the government it is often easier to do nothing than to be involved in consultation, as it is often difficult to ignore the proposals after the government has promised to act
- One potential means around this is to leave a long time after the end of consultation until the government is obliged to respond – for example the 2020 summit
- There is also the potential that consultation will turn into another form of elite decision-making, where certain minority groups or stakeholders are privileged

Lecture 14: Decision-Making and Cabinet

Traditional Ministerial Responsibility

- The public service is supposed to be independent of politicians, with tenure and providing frank and fearless advice to the government
- Traditionally in the Westminster system, ministers are held responsible for everything that happened in their departments, thus if something goes wrong they must resign, regardless if it was personally their fault
- Increasingly this is no longer the case, especially given that departments are so much bigger and more complex than before, and so increasingly the department might be aware of something that the minister is not

Higher Education Case Study

- In 1974 the Whitlam government decided to abolish university fees in order to increase participation in university, and based on social justice ideas
- This policy remained in place until the 1980s, when a different labour government decided to scrap the policy
- One reason for this was that the working class constituency of the labour party opposed free university places as primarily benefitting the middle classes
- The abolition of fees also did not change the demographics of the university, as the student body was still predominantly middle class
- The argument was that in order to increase the participation in higher education, students would pay some of the costs of their education
- This would increase total resources in the education sector
- The side benefit (garbage can model) was that by increasing the involvement in education, youth unemployment would be reduced, which was a big problem at the time
- In the case of higher education, interest groups will tend to put forth these issues in the second half of the year, as this is when students are thinking about their future course options – this kind of strategic placing is common in politics

Questions About Tertiary Education

- What's the appropriate level of government funding?
- What about full-fee paying students?
- Should universities be able to charge what they want?

- What about equity and the public good?

Cabinet Submissions

- Much of the debate about policy actually occurs between government departments, as each considers how a new proposal and policies will impact their interests and bottom line
- Cabinet proposals are only a few pages long, so often important policy decisions are made on not a great deal of direct information

The Power of the PM

- The PM was traditionally held to be first among equals, as he does not have tenure and can be overthrown by a vote of no confidence
- PMs generally select the cabinet ministers from people they agree with, so there is less chance of disagreement
- Traditionally the PM only really chaired the cabinet, but now he increasingly leads, acts like a president

Cabinet Voting and Secrecy

- Cabinet is based on the principle of collective ministerial responsibility, where each cabinet minister agrees to support the policy in public, or be forced to resign
- Formal votes are rare in the cabinet, as things are usually decided by consent, although the PM always has to agree
- Cabinet meetings are conducted in strictest confidence, with the records not opened for thirty years afterwards
- Leaks from within the cabinet are the sign of a weak and unstable government

Cabinet Procedures

- Ministers always present the submission to cabinet, even if they are not the ones who drafted it
- Public servants and advisors can make factual presentations, but must leave when the decision is actually taken
- The only ones in the room aside from the ministers are note-takers, and they do not take a verbatim account
- The chair must approve the wording of decisions, which are then distributed to cabinet ministers for public announcements
- New government are not able to access the cabinet records of previous governments
- (copy)

Cabinet Sub-Committees

- Many issues are delegated to cabinet sub-committees to help work through the enormous number of decisions that must be made
- Their decisions are not binding on cabinet, but are just a help
- The PM or deputy PM has a seat on most committees, plus the relevant ministers
- National Security Committee: focuses on major international security issues of strategic importance to Australia, national responses to developing situations, and classified matters relating to aspects of operations and activities of the Australian Intelligence Community

- Expenditure Review Committee: considers matters of detail regarding expenditure and revenue during and between the Budget
- Strategic Priorities and Budget Committee: provides strategic oversight and direction of broad government strategy, whole-of-government issues, and Council of Australian Government processes
- Parliamentary Business Committee: considers priorities for the Australian Government's legislation program
- Social Policy Committee: provides strategic direction and coordination of the development of policy and delivery of programs concerning indigenous affairs, social inclusion, health, ageing, education, employment, housing, immigration and citizenship
- Climate Change, Water and Environment Committee: provides strategic direction and coordination of the development of policy and the delivery of programs concerning climate change, water and the environment
- Border Protection Committee: provides policy in response to irregular migration and maritime people smuggling
- Economic Policy Committee: industry policy, infrastructure, transport, communications, innovation policy, resources and energy, trade, industrial relations, agriculture and tourism

Matters that Must Go to Cabinet

- New policies or significant changes
- Proposals affecting employment
- Expenditure proposals (Budget process)
- Proposals affecting other state or international government
- Significant responses to parliamentary Committee reports
- Negotiation of treaties
- Most legislation that goes through parliament is actually minor issues, and so do not need to go through cabinet

Things that Can Go Through Cabinet

- Policy submissions, signed by ministers seeking government action
- Memoranda from department officials responding to Cabinet requests for information
- Committee reports focusing on specific issues
- Significant appointments
- Urgent matters
- Executive council minutes are the notes taken by the ministers who meet with the governor general to gain approval of parliamentary legislation

Lecture 15: Implementation Tools and Methods

Governments and Election Budgets

- Governments have an advantage over the opposition at election time, as they can set the budget, and therefore the political agenda
- Often they save up money in the leadup to the election and then go on a big splurge

Non-Coercive Forms of Action

- Advertising and provision of information, though it is often argued that these 'information campaigns' are actually covert forms of political advertising that presents the government in a very positive light
- Private provision of services through contracting out: this raises questions of accountability, and whether ministers be held responsible for the actions of an enormous department, especially when there is significant contracting out
- However, one important source of accountability comes in the form of senate inquiries, as the government often does not control the senate
- Direct government provision of services: somewhat of a move away from this recently
- Government involvement or ownership in the market: for example, the government owns medibank private on the justification that it sets a standard for the rest of the industry
- Loans, subsidies, tax incentives

Coercive Forms of Action

- Taxation, especially vice-taxation of things like cigarettes and alcohol
- Note the recent review to the tax system: Henry tax review

Statutory Bodies

- Owned by the government, but independent from ministerial control
- Operated under the aegis of specific legislation and can be held accountable
- Examples are courts, ABC and regulatory authorities

Government-Owned Enterprises

- Commercial operations under legislation where the government is the sole owner
- Not taxed but pay dividends to the government
- Often done in utilities

Government-Owned Companies

- Fully commercial companies with government as the sole shareholder, for example Qantas, Telstra, commonwealth bank
- Rare nowadays as most have been privatised
- One of the last remaining ones is Medibank Private

Forms of Privatisation

- Selling ownership completely to private sector
- Contracting out: competitive tendering between private providers for 'non-core activities'; includes providing policy advice and services, as well as writing and overseeing effective and comprehensive contracts
- Deregulation: ownership always was private, but now subject to less government oversight
- Public/private partnerships
- Departmental Program: funded from consolidated revenues (budget) and run by public servants - arguably more accountable than private companies

Implementation Problems

- Ambiguous original decision – not clear what it actually means

- Conflict between different policies, especially given that government departments are not great at coordination
- Insufficient resources for policy
- Conflict with interest groups and other significant players
- The target group is often hard to reach
- There are unexpected consequences
- Attention can be shifted to other problems, often thanks to the media emphasis
- Policy is not based on correct causal theories about how the world works
- Implementation not completed when there is a change of government
- Unexpected external events, such as a war or financial crisis

Necessary Coordination

- Central agencies, including departments of Prime Minister and Cabinet
- Treasury, relating to economic policy
- Department of Finance and Deregulation: impact on the budget
- Attorney-General's Department concerning legal implications and legislation

Lecture 16: Accountability I

Purposes of Accountability

- Uphold representative democracy
- Maintain political stability
- Maintain separation of powers
- Provides a check against corruption, patriotism and nepotism
- Related to the importance of the free media
- Public should not feel dependent on the bureaucracy

Liberal Ideology and Accountability

- Liberal democracy is based on more than just elections and majority rule; the government cannot do something just because the majority votes it in
- Accountability is related to the liberal concept that the citizens give the government authority in the form of a social contract, and thus the contract needs to be monitored by accountability

Means of Government Accountability

- Representative institutions (as opposed to monarchies/authoritarian regimes)
- Political stability (civil and military institutions brought under control)
- Separation of powers
- Healthy respect for and scepticism of government
- Social norms against patronage and nepotism
- Free media (not government controlled or concentrated)
- Public not dependent on bureaucracy
- Civil social pressure and interest groups
- Anti-corruption ethos and agencies

Formal-External Methods

- Constitutional protections and guarantees
- Division of the legislature into two houses, with the upper house holding the government to account, organising committees and investigation, etc
- Ministerial responsibility in front of parliament
- An independent and powerful judiciary (including the High Court) to constrain the power of governments

Formal-Internal Methods

- Bureaucratic supervisory hierarchies keep government personnel accountable
- Formal codes of conduct in the public service
- Anti-corruption agencies

Informal-External Methods

- The free media, although media ownership is highly concentrated in Australia
- Public participation and consultation
- Civil society, social capital and political culture of questioning the government

Informal-Internal Methods

- Organisational culture, including professionalization of the public service and adoption of private sector management principles
- More emphasis on outputs and outcomes rather than just inputs and internal processes
- Peer pressure

The Westminster chain of accountability

- Public servants -> ministers -> parliament -> public
- However, unlike in Britain, the backbench of the governing party does not in Australia act to question ministers or keep them accountable
- Elections also serve to keep the government accountable, but the governing party also has an advantage, as they can decide upon the timing of an election

Accountability Versus Answerability

- Don't really have accountability so much as answerability
- The chief mechanism of this is question time, which occurs at 2pm every day while parliament is sitting
- Any member can ask ministers a question; it is very strategic, rehearsed and more of a media show than anything else, with the emphasis being on trying to embarrass the other side
- Ministers can of course evade questions, and also take questions on notice, which is effectively a way of avoiding a question
- The speaker can call points of order, but the speaker is always from the government party, and so will seldom push ministers for an answer

Lecture 17: Accountability II

Ministerial Accountability and Responsibility

- Traditionally the minister was expected to resign if there was a mistake in his department, but with the increasing size of the public sector ministers are increasingly reluctant to take responsibility for all the actions of their department
- Many analysts argue that there is an increasing culture in the public service of not informing the minister of bad news, so that they cannot be held accountable for things that go wrong
- Ministers will always take credit for things, but are always reluctant to take the blame for anything, and are much more likely to blame the public service

Ministerial Resignations

- Resignations are generally rare, and are not the primary means of holding accountability
- There are frequent public and opposition calls for ministerial resignations concerning all sorts of issues, but rarely are these followed through with
- It really depends on how the party is going in the polls, how close the minister is to the PM, and what party faction the minister is in
- Resignations for being unable to support Cabinet decisions are even rarer
- Later comeback into Cabinet following resignation is quiet common
- Cabinet reshuffles or demotions are more common than sackings

Senate Estimates

- Senate estimates are a series of senate committees where they are able to question ministers and public servants about all sorts of things; they are often fishing sessions for finding out scandals
- Originally they were supposed to be about the budget, but nowadays they are an important mechanism for ensuring accountability across a broad range of issues

Forms of Responsibility

- Personal responsibility
 - directly at fault
 - misused perks
 - misused power
 - intentionally misled parliament
 - moral transgression
- Primary responsibility (conflict of interest)
- Vicarious responsibility (taking blame as well as credit for administrative actions)

Democratic Deficit

- Ultimately the government decides what they are responsible for, as they can decide when to call elections, when to enforce ministerial sackings, control of parliament, etc
- The parliament can censure a minister, but usually they don't get through, as the government controls the lower house
- Even if it does get passed, the parliament has no real power to actually sack ministers, unless they go through the criminal justice system

- With the PM becoming more presidential, is he also becoming more responsible for the actions of ministers?
- There are official written ministerial codes of conduct, but once again it depends how strictly the government wants to enforce them
- Probably the most important accountability mechanism through parliament are the powerful investigative functions of the upper house
- Most ministerial sackings occur following investigations initiated in the upper house

Levels of Accountability

- First Level: did the direct implementers behave properly (e.g. contracts, lower officials)
- Second Level: did the managers/decision makers put the right system in place
- Third Level: the minister and top government officials
- There is a general tendency to push blame down the hierarchy as much as possible
- Private ministerial staff are also rather ambiguous, as they are sort of a mix of first and third level, and can often be blamed by the minister for mistakes (they lack job tenure and are easily sacked)

Public Servant Accountability

- There is a perpetual tension between the public service's duty to provide 'frank and fearless advice', and the general pressure and culture to serve the government of the day
- Internal management is generally left to secretaries and senior executives, thereby making politicians feel that they are not responsible for such things
- How are the public protected, for example, whistleblowing protection is generally weak, especially if the information was originally provided in confidence

Public Accountability

- Public accountability refers to the processes by which public officials are held answerable to the public for their actions and inactions
- The government is accountable in particular to relevant stakeholders (e.g. interest groups), but one must ask how representative these are of the public as a whole

Political Corruption

- Transparency international ranks Australia as eighth in the world in terms of perceptions of corruption levels
- There are various state and federal agencies that operate to keep this under control
- They have broad ranging powers to investigate complaints made against politicians, officials, judges, etc

Freedom of Information Act

- Guarantees all citizens access to most documents held by government ministers, departments and most statutory authorities
- Individuals can appeal to change incorrect or out of date information
- Citizens generally do not use this, but media organisations do (in part because it is expensive and time-consuming)
- One way around this is for a document to be listed as cabinet in confidence

Information that Public Agencies must Publicise

- Their organisational structure
- Their functions
- The kinds of decisions they make
- Their arrangements for public consultation
- Which kinds of documents are held and access arrangements
- Their decision-making rules

The Commonwealth Ombudsmen

- These are officials who have investigative power to consider and investigate complaints of perceived unfair or unreasonable treatment by a government agency or department
- The disadvantage is that they have no power to force agencies to do something, and can only make recommendations
- That said, they have a high success rate, as departments want to resolve problems, especially because they must report on the number of complaints they have and how they are dealt with them

The Auditor-General

- This is a critical institution of government founded by the fourth act of parliament back in 1901
- He reports to parliament and investigates on issues of public expenditure
- For example, the auditor general has recently investigated the effectiveness and use of educational revolution funds
- They have extensive powers to access documents and information
- However once again they do not have any direct powers, and can only advise parliament to make changes, but not force them

Accountability Challenges

- Accountability is now increasingly defined in terms of efficiency of service management, rather than equity
- In public-private contracts, there is the question of how private providers can be held accountable, especially if something is not written in the original contract
- Financial penalties can only go so far, as the government does not want to bankrupt its contractors
- The free media is spending less money on investigative journalism, as it is expensive and advertising revenues are in decline
- Are citizens really still active participants or are we increasingly just consumers?
- Now that expert opinion is becoming increasingly important, how do we balance this against the need for public accountability?

Lecture 18: Policy Evaluation

What is Being Evaluated?

- Appropriateness evaluation: should it be done through a new program or an existing program; is service delivery through government, private, community, third sector?
- Efficiency evaluation: how well public money is used for policy purposes

- Effectiveness evaluation: is the program meeting objectives?
- Meta-evaluations: assessment of the evaluation process itself

Evaluation Metrics

- All departments need to measure three key things in their reports: inputs, outputs and outcomes
- Inputs are generally just taxpayer money, or sometimes user pays revenues
- The outputs are the products, services and advice that the organisations provide, both to the public at large and to some parts of the government
- Outcomes are the results of the outputs, which are usually much broader and harder to measure
- Three means of evaluation
- Economy – minimising inputs
- Efficiency – minimising inputs relative to maximisation of outputs
- Effectiveness – analysing to what extent the outcomes are achieving objectives
- All government ministries except defence are subject to a 2% annual reduction in budget called the efficiency dividend

Conventional Approach to Evaluation

- Goal identification based on program/policy documents or standards established by evaluator or stakeholder consultation
- Policy outcomes measured
- Comparison of goals and outcomes is basis for evaluation
- Search for explanation may lead to analysis of policy development and implementation
- When new governments come into power they typically skip to the last step with virtually all programs, and see what they want to cut and what they want to continue with

Contract Problems

- When the government contracts services out to private corporations usually built into the contract there is a prohibition against speaking out against the government or the project with which they are engaged
- This presents a problem for effective evaluation, as they are the ones most likely to know about how the program actually went

Methods of Evaluating

- Benchmarking: comparing to other countries and states
- Budget documents and audits: must show how they used their money
- Interviews with participants or stakeholders
- Calling for submissions
- Specific performance indicators
- Longitudinal studies to measure performance over the long-run, such as the census
- Statistics can generally be presented in very different ways depending on what point you want to make

Defining Unemployment

- ABS defines unemployment as someone over the age of 15 who is without work but has actively looked for work in the past four weeks and is available to start work immediately
- Many argue that the definition of employed as long as you work at least one hour per week is highly unfair and unrealistic
- Governments are often accused with manipulating the figures to reduce the unemployment figures, for example shifting people from unemployment to disability pensions

Male Total Average Weekly Earnings

- Average of before tax earnings including overtime of employed males
- Excludes half the population
- Does not take into account taxes or inflation
- Measures the mean rather than the median
- Does not include measures of wealth inequality

Qualitative Research

- Types of questions that might be asked in relation to various policies include
- What are the barriers to employment?
- Why were you inactive?
- Why aren't your earnings consistent over the year?
- Why did you choose a government or private school?
- Why did you change from one to another?
- The general advantage of qualitative research is that it allows you to get passed the broad number and look at how and why things are happening
- Limitation: attempting to generalise from very small samples, which is why quantitative data are generally preferred

Comparative Research

- In Australia this is not as useful, as the states generally do things very similarly
- Also, there are few states, so there is only a small sample size
- One can compare Australia to other countries, but which countries?
- We can compare across time, but this introduces the problem of selection bias, in terms of which cases and time frame to select
- Most government policies also take many years to have a significant effect
- In these economic and political questions there are also so many confounding variables