



## Studying Public Policy

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# Studying Public Policy\*

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In the last few years, the study of policy and policy-making has become one of the most fashionable branches of the discipline. It has spawned new university courses, an Institute for Public Policy Research, and several new journals, including *Policy Sciences*, *The Public Interest*, and most recently, *Canadian Public Policy*. The impetus to focus on policy, on what governments actually do and why, comes from a great many sources. Partly it may be a reaction against the so-called behavioural revolution which seemed often to lead us away from a concern with the stuff of politics. Partly it stems from a growing desire to be in some sense more "relevant" and to apply whatever knowledge we have to contemporary societal problems. Partly it stems from the desires of government themselves to be more systematic in their consideration and assessment of alternative programs.<sup>1</sup> Policy research has also been given urgency by increasing pessimism about the ability of governments to cope in an era of "demand overload" and "the fiscal crisis of the state."<sup>2</sup>

Despite this recent preoccupation with what, after all, is one of the oldest concerns of political science, we have not really advanced very far in increasing understanding of how government policies and actions are to be explained or understood. There is a proliferation of isolated studies, and of different methods and approaches, but precious little in the way of explanation. Indeed, we are not even sure of what it is we want to explain, of what our dependent variables should be. This paper hopes to provide an assessment and critique of some of the principal developments of recent years, and to suggest some potentially more

\*This paper is a revised version of a seminar prepared for the Department of Political Economy, University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, in January 1975. I would like to thank the department and its members for giving me the opportunity, and also to thank several of my colleagues at Queen's University, and the University of Essex, for their comments – Dale Poel, Graham Wilson, John Meisel, Simon McInnes, Allan Tupper, Finn Hoven, and David McKay.

<sup>1</sup>For a discussion of recent developments in this direction in the Canadian federal government, see G. Bruce Doern, "The Development of Policy Organizations in the Executive Arena," in Doern and Peter Aucoin, eds., *The Structures of Policy-Making in Canada* (Toronto, 1971), 38–78. See also Gordon Robertson, "The Changing Role of the Privy Council Office," *Canadian Public Administration* 14 (Winter 1971), 487–508; and A.W. Johnson, "The Treasury Board of Canada and the Machinery of Government in the 1970's," *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 4 (September 1971), 346–66. See also several of the contributions to Thomas Hockin, ed., *Apex of Power* (Scarborough, Ont., 1971).

<sup>2</sup>See, among others, Daniel Bell, "The Public Household – On 'Fiscal Sociology' and the Liberal Society," *The Public Interest* 34 (Winter 1974), 29–68; Anthony King, "Overload: Problems of Governing in the 1970's," *Political Studies* xxiii (June–September 1975), 284–96; James O'Connor, *The Fiscal Crisis of the State* (New York, 1973); and Richard Rose, "Overloaded Government," *European Studies Newsletter* v (December 1975), 13–18.

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## L'étude des politiques publiques

*L'auteur évalue et critique les approches les plus récentes utilisées dans l'étude des politiques publiques et formule un cadre de référence pour la conduite future d'une telle étude. Après avoir démontré les limites inhérentes aux études de cas ainsi qu'aux approches fondées sur la prise de décision, lesquelles sont surtout axées sur des préoccupations propres soit à l'administration publique, soit à l'analyse des politiques (« policy analysis »), il suggère que l'étude des politiques doit tenir compte d'un éventail plus large de facteurs politiques et institutionnels qu'elle ne l'a fait jusqu'à présent, de façon, notamment, à ce que la détermination des politiques (« policy-making ») ne réfère plus simplement au règlement des problèmes (« problem-solving »), mais aussi à la compétition et aux conflits qui les ont engendrés.*

*Selon l'auteur, l'étude comparative des politiques publiques devrait en premier lieu bien identifier l'étendue de l'action gouvernementale, les moyens dont le gouvernement dispose pour atteindre ses objectifs et la répartition des bénéfices et des coûts résultant de ses activités. Un examen critique des divers modèles utilisés pour expliquer ces trois dimensions lui permet de conclure que l'utilité de chacun des modèles est restreinte à des aspects bien particuliers des politiques publiques, si bien qu'aucun d'entre eux ne permet, à lui seul, d'en fournir une explication adéquate.*

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fruitful lines of inquiry.<sup>3</sup> Almost every aspect of policy-making in Canada remains shrouded in ignorance if not mystery. The need, therefore, is to develop both theory and information-gathering together; each must inform the other. It is also necessary to rescue the study of policy from two or three holes in which it threatens to become stuck.

First, policy study has become rather closely linked with the study of bureaucracy and public administration. Obviously, bureaucratic agencies are central elements in the policy-making process, and no study of policy could ignore them. But bureaucrats and politicians operate within a broader political framework, defined by such factors as prevailing ideologies, assumptions and values, structures of power and influence, patterns of conflict and division, and so on. They make critical choices, but from a rather limited set of alternatives. Moreover, much of the literature on bureaucracy is concerned with questions such as efficiency and effectiveness, which, while important, do not seem to me to be the central ones. Policy-making must be broader than public administration.

It is even more important to rescue the study of policy from what we might call the technologists, whose main concern has been to develop aids to assist official decision-makers make in some sense "better" decisions. In this view, exemplified by writers like Yehezkiel Dror,<sup>4</sup> policy-making is essentially a technical question,

<sup>3</sup>One embarks on yet another review of the literature and presentation of a framework with some trepidation. Should we not actually get on and do the research, rather than endlessly talk about how to do it? I hope, however, the paper does break some new ground both in its formulation of the problems and in its attention to the Canadian case. Among the better recent assessments of the field are: Austin Ranney, ed., *Political Science and Public Policy* (Chicago, 1969); Richard Rose, "Comparing Public Policy: An Overview," *European Journal of Political Research* 1 (1973), 67-94; Hugh Hecllo, "Review Article: Policy Analysis," *British Journal of Political Science* 2 (January 1972), 83-108; Anthony King, "Ideas, Institutions and the Policies of Governments: A Comparative Analysis," Parts I-III, *British Journal of Political Science* 3 (July and October 1973), 291-313 and 409-23.

<sup>4</sup>*Public Policy-Making Re-examined* (San Francisco, 1968). See also Erich Jantsch, "From Forecasting and Planning to Policy Sciences," *Policy Sciences* 1 (Spring 1970), 31-4, and

a matter of developing more systematic means to canvass alternatives, assess costs and benefits, and implement choices. This literature, which appears to have had considerable influence with government decision-makers themselves, is also prescriptive: it seeks primarily not to *explain* how or why decisions are made, but to *prescribe* more effective ways of doing it. It also tends to focus its study narrowly, suggesting “better” policy – that is, policy which is more rational, consistent, cost-effective, and so on – will follow from reforms of administrative structure and development of new analytical techniques. Randall Ripley distinguishes between policy analysis – “advice on the choosing of alternatives” – and “policy theory” – “the explanation of why certain alternatives are chosen and others are not.”<sup>5</sup> If we are to understand politics generally, our study of policy must be firmly rooted in the latter view.

In seeking to move beyond the perspectives of public administration and policy analysis, each of which is useful but limited, we need to link up the study of policy with the more traditional concerns of political science and in particular with the three most vital elements: power, conflict, and ideology. What governments do cannot be fully explained either by focusing only on the actions and perceptions of the “proximate policy-makers,”<sup>6</sup> as Charles Lindblom calls them, or by stressing only the impersonal forces of the environment, such as levels of economic development, urbanization, and affluence, as some of the recent American “determinants” literature suggests. Policy emerges from the play of economic, social, and political forces, as manifested in and through institutions and processes. A danger in the emergence of a specialized subdiscipline of “policy science” is that such broad forces will be ignored or assumed.

Second, policy-making is not, by and large, simply a matter of problem-solving, of taking some common goal and seeking the “best” or most cost effective “solution.” It is rather a matter of choice in which resources are limited and in which goals and objectives differ and cannot easily be weighed against each other. Hence policy-making is a matter of conflict. There are very few pure public goods,<sup>7</sup> that is, those which are available equally to all citizens. Most goods distributed by government confer differential benefits – some get more than others; some pay more than others. Much of the debate about them is precisely about these questions.<sup>8</sup> Hence the most important question to ask in the study of policy is Lasswell’s political question: who gets what, when, and how?

A third basic assumption about policy flows from this perspective: policy study needs to be comparative across both space and time. We need to look at the broad

other articles in the same issue. For a Canadian example, see Economic Council of Canada, Eighth Annual Review, *Design for Decision-Making* (Ottawa, 1971). A good critique is found in G. Bruce Doern, *Political Policy-Making: A Review of the Economic Council's Eighth Annual Review and the Ritchie Report* (Montreal, 1972).

<sup>5</sup>“Review of Ranney and Dror,” *American Political Science Review* 63 (1969), 918

<sup>6</sup>*The Policy-Making Process* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1968), 20–1 and chap. 9

<sup>7</sup>For a discussion of varieties of public goods, see Peter O. Steiner, “The Public Sector and the Public Interest,” in Robert Havemann and Julius Margolis, eds., *Public Expenditures and Policy Analysis* (Chicago, 1970), 21–58. The classic definition is that of Paul Samuelson, “The Pure Theory of Public Expenditure,” *Review of Economics and Statistics* 36 (1954), 387–90.

<sup>8</sup>Herbert Jacob and Michael Lipsky, “Outputs, Structure and Power,” *Journal of Politics* xxx (May 1968), 510

evolution of patterns of policy over long periods within countries, provinces, and other units, in the ways they deal with similar problems as a first step towards the primary goal of explaining the differences.

Before considering a broader approach, let us examine some of the general characteristics of the existing policy literature. Most obvious is the striking concentration on case studies, examining either a single decision, or policy in a general area such as pensions, or immigration, or foreign policy. Indeed the most common framework sometimes appears to consist of mandatory theoretical chapters at the beginning and end which bear little relationship to the detailed historical reconstruction of a set of events which takes up the bulk of the book.<sup>9</sup> Such studies can be extremely useful, especially when, as in Canada, we have so little basic information with which to work. They can provide a sense of the rich nuance, detail, and complexity of the real world of policy-making, which those concerned with more abstract model-building would do well to remember. While a single case can never confirm a theory, it is possible to design case studies which may falsify one (though the fact is, there are few if any theories of policy-making well developed enough to be tested). Case studies may also suggest new hypotheses or generalizations which could be applied and tested later in other studies.

In general, it must be said that few of these potential benefits have been realized. Individual case studies tend to be isolated and unique, each looking at different issues, using different methods, and asking different questions. This makes comparison extremely difficult. Their focus has often been on the details of the policy itself, rather than on using the policy to generalize about politics.<sup>10</sup> Cumulative knowledge and theory cannot simply grow automatically by piling case studies on top of each other. Case studies have also a tendency not to focus on the "normal" but on the unique, exotic, or important, so insights gained from them may actually be misleading. Moreover, in focusing on a specific decision or piece of legislation, case studies tend to ignore those issues or alternatives which simply do not come up for debate. It is easy to get submerged in the minutiae of the issue itself, and therefore to miss what might be much broader factors influencing the outcome.

Many of these problems might be quite easily overcome. Programs of coordinated case studies applying similar questions, frameworks, and methods to carefully selected issues of different sorts could yield cumulative results. Conversely, applying several different models to a single case, as Graham Allison did with three models in the Cuban missile crisis,<sup>11</sup> is also useful. Similarly, much is to be gained by very simple comparisons and by the selection of cases which offer particular promise of illuminating wider aspects of policy. One of the most interesting examples is Richard Titmuss's *The Gift Relationship*<sup>12</sup> a comparison of the ways in which the United States and Great Britain deal with the common issue of how to distribute blood for medical purposes: in one case, it is largely a commercial, market-based activity, in the other entirely voluntary. The case

<sup>9</sup>This is true even of the best such studies, for example, Kenneth Bryden, *Old Age Pensions and Policy-Making in Canada* (Montreal, 1974).

<sup>10</sup>For example, Freda Hawkins, *Canada and Immigration: Public Policy and Public Concern* (Montreal, 1972)

<sup>11</sup>*Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis* (Boston, 1971)

<sup>12</sup>London, 1970

allowed Titmuss to explore some of the basic value differences between the two countries and to show how in a fundamental way they helped shape policy.

The second major weakness of the literature is its failure to come to grips with what might be called the problem of the dependent variable. As Lewis Froman suggests, "for reasons which are not hard to analyse, researchers are likely to spend a good deal more time constructing explanations of phenomena than in becoming more sophisticated in the description of the behaviour to be explained."<sup>13</sup> What is it about public policies that we want to explain? What dimensions of policy are of special interest to the political scientist? Until we have a much clearer conception of how to answer these questions, policy studies will inevitably be confused and unproductive. Little of the literature seems to try systematically to link some set of independent explanatory variables with some dependent ones; few deal with substance of content. Instead, we have on the one hand studies which look at a particular institution or process – cabinet, federal-provincial negotiations, the bureaucracy, or interest groups – but which simply *assume* that in some sense they are important variables with an impact on policy. The assumption is seldom tested, and research tends to concentrate on explicating and describing the patterns of interaction within the institution or process.

The literature on Congress in the US suffers especially from this malady, as does that on the so-called presidentialization of the prime minister in Canada.<sup>14</sup> To take another example, Bruce Doern, Peter Aucoin, and others have provided excellent analyses of the recent structural and analytical changes (PPBS, ministries of state, strengthened central coordinating agencies, and the like) within the federal government.<sup>15</sup> But the question remains: even if fully implemented, what difference do these changes make in what gets done, or for whom government serves? On the other hand, we quite often have studies which, as do many of the essays in the recent Doern and Wilson book *Issues in Canadian Public Policy*,<sup>16</sup> examine substantive policies, but do little to ask what forces led to one particular set of outcomes rather than another.

A major exception to this observation is the literature on comparative city and state expenditure patterns in the United States, which does systematically try to link a series of independent variables, both political and non-political.<sup>17</sup> The

<sup>13</sup>"The Categorization of Policy Contents," in Ranney, *Political Science and Public Policy*, 43

<sup>14</sup>Denis Smith, "President and Parliament: The Transformation of Parliamentary Government in Canada," in Orest Kruhlak et al., eds, *The Canadian Political Process* (Toronto, 1970), 367–82

<sup>15</sup>G. Bruce Doern, "The Policy-Making Philosophy of Prime Minister Trudeau and his Advisers," in Thomas Hockin, ed., *Apex of Power* (Scarborough, Ont., 1971); Doern, "The Development of Policy Organizations in the Executive Arena," in Doern and Aucoin, *Structures of Policy-Making*, 39–78; Peter Aucoin and Richard French, *Knowledge, Power and Public Policy*, Science Council of Canada, Background Study No. 31 (Ottawa, 1974)

<sup>16</sup>G. Bruce Doern and V.S. Wilson, eds., *Issues in Canadian Public Policy* (Toronto, 1974).

<sup>17</sup>The literature is cited and assessed in: Gary Tompkins, "A Causal Model of State Welfare Expenditures," *Journal of Politics* 37 (May 1975), 392–416; Stuart Rakoff and Guenther Schaefer, "Politics, Policy and Political Science: Some Theoretical Alternatives," *Politics and Society* 1 (1970), 51–77; John H. Fenton and Richard Chamberlayne, "The Literature Dealing with the Relationships between Political Processes, Socioeconomic Conditions and Public Policies in the American States," *Polity* 1 (Spring 1969), 388–404; Thomas R. Dye, *Understanding Public Policy* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1972), chap. 11. For another thorough critique, see Joyce M. Munns, "The Environment, Politics and Policy Literature," *Western Political Quarterly* xxviii (December 1975), 646–67.

general finding is that broad environmental factors, rather than political characteristics, account for the greatest proportion of the variance, though recent work has tended to reinstate them somewhat. Unfortunately, many of the correlations are low, and the selection of variables is rather arbitrary: many of the more interesting independent factors cannot easily be built in to the models used, and the dependent variables seldom go beyond raw expenditure figures. More important, these studies have not yet been accompanied by a theory which would account for the correlations and indicate the steps by which the environmental differences are translated into policy differences. Some recent work in this vein has made international comparisons of spending on social security: in general, they find only weak correlations with economic factors, and indicate that the time of first introduction of the policies explains the greater part of the variance, suggesting that broad political factors like ideology and values are very important, even if day-to-day variations in political leadership are not.<sup>18</sup>

The characteristics of policy which a political scientist might want to explain are very different from those which other specialists would want to. For example, the description of the outcomes of the Canada Pension plan debate given in *Federal-Provincial Diplomacy*<sup>19</sup> would, whatever its merits for a political scientist, have been more unsatisfactory for an actuary interested in designing pension plans, since what he would consider important, I would not. For empirical investigation, it is of course vital to know what those involved felt to be the important characteristics of the policies in question, but we need to go beyond that to posit theoretically relevant categories, typologies, or classifications of the different dimensions of policy. One problem for political scientists doing policy research is that the information presented in such sources as the *Public Accounts* or *Estimates* is not classified according to such criteria.

A third basic danger for policy studies stems from the pressure to be politically and socially relevant. Apart from the eclectic case study approach, the most important recent approach to policy study is what Hugh Helco calls "programmatic" study.<sup>20</sup> The concern is not to explain existing policies but to prescribe general techniques for deciding on policies, and to recommend which among a variety of alternatives government should choose. Introducing the journal *Policy Sciences*, its editor stated the purpose as "to augment by scientific decision methods and the behavioural sciences, the process that humans use in making judgements and taking decisions."<sup>21</sup> In the same issue, Yehezkiel Dror spoke of the "supradiscipline" which would use "systematic knowledge and structured rationality for the conscious shaping of society."<sup>22</sup>

<sup>18</sup>See Frederic Pryor, *Public Expenditures in Communist and Capitalist Nations* (London, 1968); Henry Aaron, "Social Security: International Comparisons," in Otto Eckstein, ed., *Studies in the Economics of Income Maintenance* (Washington, 1967), 14-38; Felix Paukert, "Social Security and Income Redistribution," *International Labour Review* 98 (November 1968), 425-50; Koji Taira and Peter Kilby, "Differences in Social Security Development in Selected Countries," *International Social Security Review* 22 (1969), 139-53.

<sup>19</sup>Richard Simeon, *Federal-Provincial Diplomacy* (Toronto, 1972)

<sup>20</sup>"Policy Analysis," 97-104. See also the essays in Julius Margolis, ed., *The Analysis of Public Output* (New York, 1970).

<sup>21</sup>E.S. Quade, "Why Policy Sciences?" *Policy Sciences* 1 (Spring 1970), 1

<sup>22</sup>*Policy Sciences*, 137. See also Malcolm Rowan, "A Conceptual Framework for Government Policy-Making," *Canadian Public Administration* XIII (Autumn 1970), 277-96.

To the extent that there is a dependent variable or criterion for assessing policies it is efficiency or cost effectiveness. This literature is concerned with the development of more effective analytical tools, and the objects of its study tend to be decision-makers in central coordinating agencies. It is attractive because it lends itself to a problem-orientation and to multidisciplinary techniques, and because it suggests political scientists really can be useful to government. As Vernon Van Dyke suggests, an all-out focus on policy and analysis in this sense would take us “fully into the realm of normative problems and social engineering.”<sup>23</sup>

Like him, I find the prospect most undesirable. Partly this is because the advocates of the approach mislead themselves about the basic nature of the policy process. It is not simply a rational intellectual process; goals are not simply “given.” As a guide to decision-makers, PPBS and systems analysis have proved themselves of limited utility, and this is not simply because the tools are not sufficiently refined. More important, the approach is very narrowly focused; it simply takes for granted existing values, norms, institutions, and patterns of power when it is precisely such broad shapers of policy which need exploration. As Aaron Wildavsky notes, the efficiency criterion assumes the current distribution to be valid so it cannot handle the fact of different people having different preferences. “But the question of whose utility function is to prevail is of prime importance in making public policy.”<sup>24</sup>

But most important, these approaches do not help us *explain* policy: that is not their intent. Here the divergence between the decision-maker and the political scientist becomes significant. Obviously policy analysis, in the sense of providing tools and giving assessments of the cost and consequences of different alternatives, is desirable for governments (and citizens – providing they can have access to the analyses). But that objective is quite different from the scholarly one of increasing the understanding of political reality. Concentration on the former is unlikely to advance us very far in the latter. There is something of a danger that the lure of influence for academics, and the desire of the federal government to promote mission-oriented contract research, especially in sensitive policy areas, will lead students to a concentration on technique and relevance which will inhibit the development of a more sophisticated understanding of policy. Students of Greek political thought enjoy fewer temptations to stray from the path of academic virtue. Prescription, moreover, is to a large extent made possible only by explanation: the danger is that we are being asked to run before we can walk, with the resulting possibility of misleading both ourselves and governments. However, without better understanding of the general process and without the attempt to uncover basic assumptions and constraints, “applied” research and concentration on technique become no more than ad hoc response to transient events, and risk degeneration into a more fundamental irrelevance.

Several other problems with the literature may also be mentioned. We have focused too much on the official decision-makers and not enough on the influences

<sup>23</sup>“Process and Policy as Focal Concepts,” in Ranney, *Political Science and Public Policy*, 35

<sup>24</sup>“The Political Economy of Growth,” in Ranney, *Political Science and Public Policy*, 59. See also his “Cost-Benefit Analysis, Systems Analysis and Program Budgeting,” *Public Administration Review* xxvi (1966), 292–310.



which shape the alternatives they consider, the assumptions they make, and the kinds of actions they take. One way to look at this is to suggest that at any given point in time there is a large universe of possible problems or issues to which decision-makers could pay attention and which they could consider important. Similarly, within each issue area there is a wide universe of alternative possible governmental actions. In practice, however, we find that only a small subset of all problems, and a similarly small subset of alternatives, is actually considered, and policy seldom alters greatly from one time to the next. The question, then, is what reduces the agenda to a manageable size, and what principles or forces serve to limit the range of alternatives considered? In this sense what political actors assume, or take for granted, becomes what is most important for explanation.<sup>25</sup> Comparison – across time, units within a nation, and between nations – again provides the tool for exploring some of these dimensions. In addition, given the overwhelming evidence of incrementalism and continuity, a longer time span and emphasis on historical evolution is required.<sup>26</sup>

Given these strictures against much of the existing literature, how should we approach the study of policy? What sorts of models might be useful in providing an over-all understanding of policy and its relationship to the political system? At the outset two caveats should be offered. First, as Richard Bird points out, no one single clear and simple explanation of something as many-faceted and huge as modern government is likely to be possible, at least with our current level of knowledge.<sup>27</sup> Rather than searching for a very high level of abstraction and one or two “crucial” variables, our conception should allow us to group and make sense out of a wide variety of determinants of policy. Second, a framework designed to illuminate broad patterns of policy – that is, the tendencies and effects of large sets of individual decisions – may not be terribly helpful in explaining the particular characteristics of individual decisions, such as why an airport was built in one location rather than another.

In the latter case, the detailed actions and perceptions of the particular decision-makers involved are most crucial; in the former, we see those actions as being limited by the operation of much broader factors. The approach used here assumes that the political machinery and the policy-makers at any point in time work within a framework which greatly restricts the alternatives they consider and the range of innovations they make.<sup>28</sup> This framework, or set of constraints and opportunities, defines a set of problems considered to be important, a set of acceptable solutions or policy responses, a set of procedures and rules by which they will be considered. The framework is made up of various characteristics of the broad social and economic environment, the system of power and influence, the

<sup>25</sup>For a conception of political culture which stresses the assumed or taken for granted character of cultural factors, see David Elkins and Richard Simeon, “A Cause in Search of its Effect, or What Does Political Culture Explain?” unpublished paper, 1975.

<sup>26</sup>Good examples of such an approach are H.V. Nelles, *The Politics of Development* (Toronto, 1974), and Ronald Manzer, “Public Policies in Canada: A Development Perspective,” paper presented to the Canadian Political Science Association, Edmonton, June 1975, mimeo.

<sup>27</sup>*The Growth of Public Spending in Canada* (Toronto, 1970), 137

<sup>28</sup>Thus the Canadian Tax Foundation estimates that only 31 per cent of federal expenditure could be seen as “controllable” by Parliament. *The National Finances, 1974–75* (Toronto, 1975), 1–6.

dominant ideas and values in the society, the formal institutional structures. The policy process itself – the interaction of formal and informal actors such as politicians, bureaucrats, pressure groups, and the media bargaining with each other – reflects and is shaped by this broader framework, and by the pattern of problems, precedents, and policies received from the past. But the process also has some independent effect on policy outcomes. This perspective suggests a sort of funnel of causality. At the most general level, and most remote from the particular choice of alternative A or B, is the socioeconomic environment; next come the fundamental political variables, power, culture and ideology, and institutions; finally the most proximate source of decision is the operation of the decision-making process itself. To some extent, the more concerned one is with broad patterns of policy, and with international comparisons, the more one will concentrate on environmental, ideological, and structural variables; the more concerned with day-to-day shifts in policy, the more one will assume those prior factors as given and focus on the decision-makers themselves, though some environmental constraints may enter here too. Much of the literature has tended to focus on one end of the funnel without taking account of the other. Thus work on the environment has tended to ignore the “black box” of the political process, while work on the process has tended to ignore the setting within which it operates.

To provide an effective overview of the policy system, two things are required. First, the characteristics of policy to be explained must be specified. That should be the starting point from which, so to speak, we will work our way back into the political process; how far back will depend largely on what aspects of policy we seek to explain. Second, we must link the factors to each other, trying to delineate both their inter-relationships and their independent contributions to explaining the central dimensions of policy. How, for example, do current elites define and respond to problems shaped by received wisdom and general cultural norms? This perspective is just that, a perspective or framework; it is not a theory, or even a model. It is also imperialistic in the sense that it relates policy to the study of politics generally: indeed, it seeks to bring to bear on the dependent variable, policy, a great many elements of politics which have been brought to bear on other dependent variables, such as “democratic stability.”<sup>29</sup>

### **Patterns of policy**

Let us now try to flesh out this perspective by examining the framework in more detail. First, how should we conceptualize the dependent variable? Given a comparative focus, what dimensions of public policy are most important? How do we characterize that which we seek to explain – namely, what governments do, or what L.L. Wade calls “the policy balance.”<sup>30</sup> This must be the starting point. But how do we describe the almost infinitely complex policies and programs of a country like Canada? The task is daunting. Single pieces of legislation may run to hundreds of pages; a 1970 summary of environmental legislation in Canada

<sup>29</sup>There is an interesting imbalance in the political science literature generally: increasing sophistication and clarity in the specification and measurement of the independent variables, combined with continued lack of attention to what these high-powered tools are explaining.

<sup>30</sup>“Political Science and Public Policy: A Review Essay,” *Policy Sciences* 2 (Summer 1971), 321

took two large volumes.<sup>31</sup> Policy includes the revised statutes of eleven governments, their public accounts, numberless ordinances and regulations, white papers and reports, not to mention the informal and unwritten actions of officials in the field. "Government activities in a modern state defy complete analysis or description," observes *The National Finances*.<sup>32</sup> To fully describe policy in a single issue area is hard; to characterize in detail overall patterns of policy is probably impossible without some theoretical guidelines.

Despite this complexity, it is possible to summarize and simplify, and to abstract from the whole range of government activities some dimensions especially relevant for political scientists. The chief criterion for selecting these dimensions should be what aspects of policy are most relevant to the study of politics. The dimensions should also be relevant to the normative concerns of politics, such as equality and participation. And, they should enable us to be comparative. Finally, we should, at least in principle, be able to measure them.

To describe policy simply as what governments do raises a host of other questions. Virtually every writer in the field feels compelled to offer a definition of policy. That will not be done here, but one or two points about the position of the observer should be made. First is the difficult distinction, made by Ira Sharkansky<sup>33</sup> and others, between "output" and "outcome," which is essentially a distinction between what is done and its consequences for the society. In practice the distinction seems impossible to maintain: description of governmental action – money spent, a bill passed, or whatever – seems pointless without consideration of the meanings attached to it by those who decided, by those affected, or by outside observers. It is perhaps more useful to distinguish between first-order consequences, which are intended or immediately perceived, and second-order consequences, either benign or malign, which are not foreseen. In the categories to follow, two – scope and means – are primarily aspects of output, and one – distribution – refers primarily to the effects of policy.

A related question is whether, to be called "policy," actions of government must be accompanied by a statement of intentions or purpose. Anthony King reserves the term policy for "a consciously chosen course of action (or of inaction) directed towards some end," and uses the term "quasi-policy" to describe situations in which governments may have a wide variety of actions, past and present, within a given policy area, without necessarily having adopted consciously an over-all set of goals.<sup>34</sup> For example, Canadian governments do not have a "policy" on income distribution, but they do many things which affect it; they may have a policy on poverty, but no doubt many activities with consequence for poverty are not included in it. The broader a policy field and the more agencies and levels active in it, the more likely it is to be characterized by "quasi-policy." The Trudeau government, it might be noted, has recently attempted to draw together federal activities in broad fields such as urban affairs, and thus to

<sup>31</sup>CIL Ltd, *A Digest of Environmental Pollution Legislation in Canada* (Ottawa, 1970)

<sup>32</sup>*The National Finances, 1971–72* (Toronto, 1972), 79

<sup>33</sup>"Environment, Policy, Output and Impact," in Sharkansky, ed., *Policy Analysis in Political Science* (Chicago, 1970), 61–79

<sup>34</sup>"On Studying the Impacts of Public Policies: The Role of the Political Scientist," in Matthew Holden and Dennia Dresang, eds, *What Government Does*, Sage Yearbooks in Politics and Public Policy, Vol. 1 (Beverly Hills, 1975), 298–316

turn quasi-policy into policy.<sup>35</sup> As King suggests, the domain of policy study must encompass both: to concentrate only on explicitly stated actions and plans would be to rule out a vast proportion of government activity.

Finally, there is the question as to whether the categories used by students of policy should be the same as those used by decision-makers themselves: is policy what those responsible for it say it is, or what the observer infers? It must be the latter; first, because in many areas it will be impossible to find such statements, and, second, because the decision-makers' categories are unlikely to be related to the theoretical concerns of a particular discipline. For example, the *Estimates* do not classify programs by the extent to which they redistribute across regions, or by whether they meet symbolic or material needs. Thus the order that is to be imposed on the data must come primarily from the observer, though it remains an important empirical question to examine the relation between decision-makers' intentions and actual activity.<sup>36</sup>

For research purposes, we usefully distinguish between three levels of analysis. First are specific *programs*: the Canada Pension Plan, the Canada Assistance Plan, or the wage and price control program. This is the level of most existing policy study. Programs do typically involve statements of intent, desired objectives, and specified tools for reaching them. Here, the researcher accepts the categories and definitions of the policy-makers. Second is policy in particular areas – social, economic, cultural, transportation, etc. Policy areas include both programs explicitly related to them, as well as the other actions of government which affect them. Some areas will be defined by the decision-makers; others will be defined by the researchers' theoretical interests. The notion of policy areas lends itself to comparison. A researcher can select one area, such as the environment, and look at the activities that different countries, provinces, or cities pursue with respect to it, and the reasons behind these activities. Finally, at the level of *patterns* of policy we seek to impose or discern order on, or in, a broad range of activities. Here the categories and questions used owe little to the decision-makers' perspective; they are guided by the over-riding theoretical concerns of the student. Policy will thus be carved up and abstracted in different ways to suit these interests.

In the literature on policy-making we find several suggested definitions of the dependent variable. Policies may be classified according to substantive area – social security, agriculture, environment, defence, etc. – or by client group – farmers, workers, manufacturing industry – or by the level of government responsible.<sup>37</sup> Such classifications are useful for some purposes, but seem to offer little theoretical insight. Another set of categories is provided by students of public administration who are properly concerned primarily with matters of efficiency and effectiveness. Two very influential recent classifications are those of David Braybrooke and Charles Lindblom<sup>38</sup> and Theodore Lowi.<sup>39</sup> For the

<sup>35</sup>See Aucoin and French, *Knowledge, Power and Public Policy*, chap. 1.

<sup>36</sup>See Manzer, "Public Policies in Canada," for an example of such inferences.

<sup>37</sup>See Lewis Froman, "The Categorization of Policy Contents," in Ranney, *Political Science and Public Policy*.

<sup>38</sup>*A Strategy for Decision* (New York, 1963)

<sup>39</sup>Lowi's typology, in various formulations, occurs in several places. See "American Business, Public Policies, Case Studies and Political Theory," *World Politics* xvi (July 1964); and "Decision-Making versus Policy-Making: Towards an Antidote for Technocracy," *Public Administration Review* (May–June 1970), 314–25.

former, the question is whether policy outcomes are incremental, that is, are they only small adjustments from the preceding status quo, or are they non-incremental large steps? There is some ambiguity in Braybrooke and Lindblom because incrementalism seems for them to be both a characteristic and a result of the policy process. Taking incrementalism as the dependent variable, we find, first, that it is not easily operationalized (what is a large or small step? What about a lot of small steps resulting in major change?), and, second, that it is not, in itself, a terribly interesting question. Lowi's categories – distributive, regulatory, redistributive, and constituent – focusing as they do on the balance between individual and collective action and on the degree of coercion, is much more important for students of politics. Lowi also relates his categories to a variety of other elements of the process, including level of conflict, locus of decision, and the like. Unfortunately for our purposes, Lowi himself prefers to use his categories as independent variables which themselves shape subsequent policy processes. Moreover, it is very hard to operationalize his categories, especially to distinguish between distributive and redistributive policies.<sup>40</sup>

Three dimensions of policy are fundamental for political science. First is the *scope* of government policy. What aspects or elements of social and economic life in the society are matters about which governments make decisions? What is the place of government in the society? Second is the question of *means*. Which instruments or techniques do governments typically use in order to assure approval or compliance with their decisions? Here we follow Lowi's emphasis on the essential element of coercion which characterizes governmental decisions,<sup>41</sup> and we may broadly classify policies along a continuum running from voluntary compliance to coercive compliance. Third, and most important, is the *distributive dimension*. "Who gets what?" How are the costs and benefits of government activity distributed among the members of the society? To what extent does government serve as a mechanism for redistribution of income or other benefits? These three dependent variables thus ask: What does government do? How does it do it? And with what effects? On all three dimensions considerable variation across nations is likely. The task of policy research is to describe growth and change in them, and to assess alternative explanations. Let us examine them in a bit more detail.

### Scope

The scope of government refers to the range of matters which are subject to public choice and in which governments are involved. We thus distinguish governmental choices – characterized by their authoritativeness<sup>42</sup> – from choices made by free

<sup>40</sup>This is because, in an objective sense, virtually all expenditure policies are redistributive: to the extent that one group gets a benefit there is less to give to other groups. However, one group's gain may not be *perceived* as another's loss, especially in a system with a large and expanding pie, with a political style which emphasizes log-rolling, and with a fragmented decision structure, in which taxing and spending decisions are taken separately, and decisions in one area are made without reference to others. For a reformulation of Lowi's categories in this direction, see Robert H. Salisbury, "The Analysis of Public Policy: A Search for Theories and Roles," in Ranney, *Political Science and Public Policy*, 151–75.

<sup>41</sup>Lowi, "Decision-Making versus Policy-Making"

<sup>42</sup>There are several problems with the authoritativeness criterion. Most important is the fact that decisions by some private actors, for example, Imperial Oil, may effectively be just as authoritative as governmental decisions. See Mark Nadel, "The Hidden Dimension of Public

individuals, by the market, or by non-market negotiations between groups. One of the most obvious characteristics of modern society is how much the range of government activity has expanded. It is not simply that governments spend more money, but also that they spend it on more things. More and more subjects become politicized; private has become public. The causes and consequences of this expansion remain obscure. Among the causes which have been identified and remain debated are the imperatives of an industrial, urbanized, technologically advanced society, the needs of monopoly capital or technostructure, the demands of newly enfranchised groups, the impact of crises such as war, and the simple availability of resources.<sup>43</sup> No such large literature has examined the implications of growth, though recent writers such as Daniel Bell and James O'Connor have discussed the "fiscal crisis of the state"<sup>44</sup> stemming from a built-in imbalance between revenue availability and expenditure demands, problems in the growth of bureaucracy, and changes in patterns of conflict resulting from increased politicization. In both America and Europe such questions appear to be increasingly urgent: can governments cope?

There are many ways to assess the growth of government. The simplest is to observe what proportion of the gross national product is spent by government or passes through its hands, or to see what proportion of all employees work for the government. Even within Western capitalist countries, substantial variations exist within a common general trend. For example, between 1967 and 1969, total public expenditure (excluding capital transfers) was 19.4 per cent of GNP in Japan, 31.7 per cent in the United States, 33.6 per cent in Canada, 37 per cent in France, 38 per cent in Britain, and 43.9 per cent in the Netherlands.<sup>45</sup> In the previous fifteen years public spending had been rising half again as fast as GNP.

Public spending, however, captures only some dimensions of governmental scope, first because it tells us little about the actual content of what is done (Sharkansky's "spending-service fallacy"),<sup>46</sup> and, second, because spending is only one form of government involvement. While it may be true that "the budget is the skeleton of the state stripped of all misleading ideologies,"<sup>47</sup> governments also affect group and individual behaviour through symbolic actions, through regulation and proscription in the criminal code, and in the activities of regulatory agencies and the like. Moreover it would be hard to infer many of the most important responsibilities of public authorities through budgetary analysis: the

Policy: Private Governments and the Policy-Making Process," *Journal of Politics* 37 (February 1975), 2-34. On the other hand, governments' ability to command compliance is being increasingly questioned. Thus King points out that government may be becoming "merely one among a number of contenders for wealth, power and influence, the others including large companies, trade unions and their members, foreign companies, foreign governments and international organizations." See "Overload: Problems of Governing in the 1970's," 295. Nevertheless, the term does seem to capture an essential difference between governmental and non-governmental acts, and so will be retained here, although the need to study the public effects of private decisions is not denied.

<sup>43</sup>Bird, *The Growth of Public Spending*, provides the best summary and critique of explanations for the growth of government, especially those provided by economists.

<sup>44</sup>O'Connor, *The Fiscal Crisis of the State*. This is an important and sophisticated Marxist analysis of the state. Bell adopts some central aspects of the thesis, though within an entirely different normative framework, in "The Public Household."

<sup>45</sup>Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, *Expenditure Trends in OECD Countries* (Paris, 1972), 67

<sup>46</sup>Ira Sharkansky, *Spending in the American States* (Chicago, 1968), 110-11

<sup>47</sup>Rudolf Goldscheid, quoted in Bell, "The Public Household," 30

extent of public ownership, management of the economy, and so on. Similarly, the significance of the federal bilingualism policy is not evident in the budgetary allocations made to it. Thus a variety of more sensitive measures, both of the general activity of governments and of particular policy areas, such as social security, need to be developed. In these areas, too, international variations seem important. For example, Canada appears to have a somewhat more fully developed welfare state and a higher level of public ownership than the US. Canadian governments also seem to have played a somewhat greater role in economic development than those in the US,<sup>48</sup> and to have more explicitly played a “nation-building” role, both economically (the National Policy, the CPR) and culturally (the CBC, bilingualism, etc.).

If we are able effectively to explain such international differences, we will have progressed far towards development of theories of policy formation. Differences in the scope of government and the content of policies should illuminate many other aspects of comparative politics as well. For example, it would be interesting to know the extent to which the economic imperatives (if such they are) of industrialism and postindustrialism lead to a convergence and similarity between nations, or whether national historical, cultural, and institutional differences perpetuate important differences in scope.

### Means

The second dimension of the dependent variable is the means by which governments make and enforce policy choices.<sup>49</sup> Several ways of classifying these dimensions might be used. The most important stems from the fact that, as Lowi emphasizes, government decisions are characterized by an element of compulsion: they apply to everyone, and all are, nominally at least, obligated to obey. This is especially true for those policies which, to use Lowi’s terminology, are either regulatory, defining permissible or impermissible behaviour, or redistributive, taking benefits from one group and giving them to another. In Lowi’s third category of policy outputs, distributions, governments only distribute benefits and are not perceived to be imposing costs. In seeking some goal, governments have in principle a choice of means. They may seek to persuade the recipients through appealing to their sense of citizen duty, as in Finance Minister Turner’s unsuccessful efforts to get business and labour to agree on wage and price limitations, or they may seek to induce them to behave in certain ways by offering rewards or incentives, such as with DREE grants. In both cases compliance is sought through primarily voluntary means. On the other hand, government may direct, prohibit, or require people to do things, using not a carrot but a stick and invoking coercive penalties for those who do not comply. Within any country various combinations of these techniques will obviously be used.

A second distinction of means, also used by Lowi, is between public and

<sup>48</sup>See Nelles, *Politics of Development*, for a superb discussion of these activities at the provincial level. Using O’Connors category of “economic development” spending, about a quarter of Canadian federal spending in 1967 was on economic development, compared with only 11 per cent for the US federal government.

<sup>49</sup>Bruce Doern defines the content of policy as “means.” See “The Concept of Regulation and Regulatory Reform,” in Doern and Wilson, *Issues in Canadian Public Policy*, 12.

private. That is, governments may implement policies through their own governmental agencies, or they may delegate some or all of the implementation to other groups: licensing boards made up of doctors, marketing boards made up of producer's representatives, and so on. The British and Canadian strategy of operating social and medical insurance directly through state agencies contrasts sharply with the more common continental European practice of running such programs through trade unions, employers, and other associations.

Third, we may distinguish between situations in which governments act directly on individuals or groups and those in which it acts indirectly by altering the environment within which individuals make their own decisions. For example, in economic management, governments might want to restrict individual borrowing: they could use direct controls, or try to influence behaviour by manipulating interest rates.

Policy is likely to vary on these three dimensions from issue to issue, from time to time, and across systems. It should be possible to suggest a variety of hypotheses linking these dimensions to various aspects of the political process, especially political culture, levels of conflict, and patterns of dominance and submission.

### **Distribution**

Despite the fact that "who gets what" is at the heart of politics, we have very little information about the distributional impact of government programs. To what extent does government act to promote equality? Virtually all spending programs have a distributional effect, whether or not they are deliberately planned. We need to look at both individual programs and policy fields, and at the over-all impact of government. Yet what is true of the US seems true of Canada also: that "one is impressed by the lack of knowledge or even raw data of program impact including the distribution of program benefits. It is as if these were impolite if not impolitic questions to raise."<sup>50</sup> There are two reasons for this lack of knowledge. First, decision-makers do seem to think of such questions as impolitic: they much prefer to think they are solving problems and finding solutions and that what they do benefits everyone equally. An important part of the politician's task, indeed, is to find policies which are, or can be presented as, satisfying as many groups as possible. Conflict may be much greater if all groups can easily calculate their wins and losses in the political arena. Decision-making is much harder when the game is perceived as a zero-sum situation.

But even more important are the immense technical problems involved in identifying and weighing the costs and benefits for different groups. Despite major problems involved in making assumptions about the incidence of many kinds of tax, it is possible to identify rather clearly the way in which the taxation system allocates the burdens of financing government and alters the income distribution curve, as Joseph Pechman and B.A. Okner show in the recent book *Who Bears the Tax Burden?*<sup>51</sup> But, as Robert Havemann points out, taxes are visible and

<sup>50</sup>James T. Bonnen, "The Absence of Knowledge of Distributional Effects: An Obstacle to Effect Policy Analysis and Decisions," in Havemann and Margolis, *The Economics of Income Maintenance*, 246–70

<sup>51</sup>Washington, 1973. For Canada, see Allan M. Maslove, *The Pattern of Taxation in Canada* (Ottawa, 1972).



painful while benefits of public expenditure are less visible and often intangible.<sup>52</sup> Recent work by economists<sup>53</sup> suggests that it is relatively easy to make these measurements with transfer payments such as welfare or pensions, where the groups benefiting are easily identifiable. Even here, however, the beneficiaries may be seen less as the recipients and more as those elements in the population who benefit from maintaining social peace. Similarly, relatively little problem is posed by pure public goods, since by definition they affect everyone equally. But how does one identify such goods? Even such a classic public good as defence has a distributional impact to the extent that defence contracts or bases provide benefits to particular industries or localities. It gets even more complex if one assumes the benefits from defence spending are proportional to an individual's stake in the community, or if one takes into account that some people are pacifists, for whom spending on arms is a direct "illfare."<sup>54</sup>

Whole classes of government activity become extraordinarily difficult to deal with effectively. What assumptions must one make to assess the benefits of spending on highways or airports? Are DREE grants providing windfall benefits to the companies that receive them, or, through a trickle-down process, to citizens in the communities where they locate, or to the country as a whole by reducing the threat to natural integration of regional grievances? Are manpower training programs benefiting the worker who is trained, or the company that employs him, or both?

These are all problems associated with expenditure programs. But there are equally severe problems with the many government actions which do not involve direct spending or transfers. Thus the whole process of law and regulation, involving rules governing the behaviour of groups in the marketplace, the provisions of licences and the like, confers benefits and alters the competitive advantages of different groups. In addition governments provide symbolic and intangible benefits. Canada's adoption of the maple leaf flag was a clear psychic benefit to some and a psychic deprivation to others. Similarly in programs such as the promotion of bilingualism in the federal public service, the symbolic costs and benefits almost certainly outweigh the monetary ones. Even in a predominantly financial program like welfare, the means by which it is administered may have a major effect on the sense of dignity and well-being of the recipient, and on either the feeling of outrage or of moral satisfaction on the part of the donors.

One wonders, therefore, whether even in principle it is possible to make progress in this area. The answer is a tentative yes, even though the perfect calculus will probably always elude us. Work by economists, such as Dodge, Gillespie, Johnson, and Maital,<sup>55</sup> has made considerable progress in attempting

<sup>52</sup>"Public Expenditures and Policy Analysis: an Overview," in Havemann and Margolis, *Public Expenditures and Policy Analysis* (Chicago, 1970), 1-20

<sup>53</sup>For a very good discussion of some of the necessary assumptions and difficulties in this field, see Morgan Reynolds and Eugene Smolensky, "The Post-fisc Distribution: 1961 and 1970 Compared," *National Tax Journal* xxvii (December 1974), 515-27.

<sup>54</sup>The term is Richard Titmuss's. See his *Social Policy, an Introduction* (London, 1974), 27.

<sup>55</sup>W. Irwin Gillespie, *The Incidence of Taxation and Public Expenditures in the Canadian Economy*, Studies of the Royal Commission on Taxation No. 2 (Ottawa, 1962); James A. Johnson, *The Incidence of Government Revenues and Expenditures*, Study for the Ontario Committee on Taxation (Toronto, ND); David Dodge, "Impact of Tax, Transfer and Spending Policies," *Review of Income and Wealth* 21 (March 1975), 1-52

to assess the over-all fiscal impact of government by calculating the incidence of taxation, and of spending, and then subtracting the difference. They have been forced to make some heroic assumptions, and to leave many programs out of their calculations because the benefits could not be allocated, but in a short time considerable advances have been made. David Dodge, using recent data, suggests the net impact of government *is* progressive, providing large benefits to those families with incomes of less than \$4000 a year, declining benefits to those with incomes between \$4000 and \$13,500, and a rising net tax to those with higher incomes. But, using a different assumption, Shlomo Maital argues that in the US, and to a lesser extent in Canada, the redistribution takes from the middle income groups and gives to those above and below.<sup>56</sup>

In a general review of this literature from several countries, S.M. Miller and Martin Rein conclude that, despite a large increase in governmental transfers in recent years, inequalities of income remain substantially unchanged: it appears that increased redistribution has just kept pace with the increased inequality in original incomes (which may in itself have been promoted by government policies). Government moves to promote equality have been "less than effective, despite the so-called welfare state."<sup>57</sup> Clearly considerable refinement is needed. Studies have been made of individual programs, such as David Springate's on DREE.<sup>58</sup> Similarly Meyer Bucovetsky and Richard Bird have clearly set out the alterations of the federal tax burden (which turn out to be minimal) of the recent Canadian tax reform process.<sup>59</sup>

Unfortunately the difficulties in these analyses are more than technical; they are also normative. For example, Cy Gonick and others argue that the "Vast proportion of public expenditure" subsidizes the business community through the "blue chip socialism" of subsidies, tax concessions, and the like.<sup>60</sup> They also argue that education spending subsidizes business by socializing the costs of training manpower, and that welfare spending subsidizes the failure of the private market. However, spending on social programs such as pensions, welfare, unemployment insurance, and the like is most commonly seen to be "progressive," representing redistribution to the less well off segments of society and "compensation" to the victims of the failure of the economic system. The extension of such programs is similarly seen to represent to some degree the increased political power of workers. But for a Marxist analyst of the state, like James O'Connor, such spending grows primarily from the needs of monopoly capitalists, stemming, in part, from their desire to socialize many of the costs of production and, in part, from a desire to ensure social peace and harmony. "Thus the fundamental effect

<sup>56</sup>"Is Redistributive Taxation a Myth?" Discussion Paper No. 122, Institute for Economic Research, Queen's University, 1973

<sup>57</sup>"Can Income Redistribution Work?" *Social Policy* 6 (May-June 1975), 3-18, esp. p. 3

<sup>58</sup>"Regional Development Incentive Grants in Canada," DBA Thesis, Harvard University, 1972

<sup>59</sup>"Tax Reform in Canada: A Progress Report," *National Tax Journal* xxv (March 1972), 15-41

<sup>60</sup>Cy Gonick, "Sociology and the Economics of Growthmanship," in Laurier Lapierre, ed., *Essays on the Left* (Toronto, 1971), 139. See also Ian Adams et al., *The Real Poverty Report* (Edmonton, 1971); and Dimitri Roussopoulos, *The Political Economy of the State* (Montreal, 1973). For a lively discussion of "socialism for the rich," see David Lewis, *Louder Voices: The Corporate Welfare Bums* (Toronto, 1972); see also Trevor Lloyd, "State Capitalism and Socialism: The Problem of Government Handouts" in Lapierre, *Essays on the Left*, 161-73.

of social security is to expand productivity, production and profits. Seen in this way, social insurance is not primarily insurance for the workers but a kind of insurance for capitalists and corporations.”<sup>61</sup> “Welfare” and “warfare” expenditures, he adds, are thus not at root contradictory, but are rather different expressions of the same needs. Thus as Bertram Gross suggests, the “recipients” of welfare may not be the real “beneficiaries.”<sup>62</sup> Other Marxists, especially Miliband, Poulantzas, and Gough,<sup>63</sup> explain the welfare state more as the necessary concession which must be made to ensure continued dominance for the ruling class. It may be impossible to judge between such opposed interpretations of the same phenomena, derived as they are from such divergent ideological premises. However, examination of the circumstances under which such programs were initially developed, of the political forces arguing for and against them, and of the justifications by their proponents can help.

In many ways it is the *perceptions* of benefits and costs which are important; therefore we need to pursue some other avenues of inquiry. For example, case studies should examine the perceptions of winning and losing, or of mutual gain, of the participants in the decision process and of those directly affected by it. Similarly, large scale surveys can elicit the perceptions of voters. Much would be gained by increased focus on policy-related questions in survey research, exploring such areas as who the voters see government as serving, the degree of their knowledge of policy, and their evaluations of the packages of services and programs available to them.<sup>64</sup> Some work relating voter opinions to the agenda and decisions of government is available, but much more needs to be done. How they are perceived is of course the only way of assessing the distribution of symbolic or non-material benefits.

Given the complexity of measuring the tangible benefits and costs (taxes, subsidies, transfers, and the like), the perception of benefits and costs remains vital, since it is the basis of action. Such perception in fact is one of the most important of the many uncertainties facing political actors. It is important therefore to examine what concepts of fairness they employ, what categories of beneficiaries they have in mind, and what rules of thumb they follow in assessing distribution. Where possible we may compare the objective distribution with the perceived one. Over the longer term, the work of historians may lead us to perceive patterns in broad variations in national policies over a long period, such as shifts from a stress on nation-building and economic growth to the welfare state or regional disparities.

In Canada we need to focus especially on redistribution as it relates to the primary cleavages in the social structure – that is, the pattern of benefits and costs as they affect economic classes, regions, ethnic groups, and industrial sectors. Again, at present, there are few data classified in these ways. Indeed T.N. Brewis

<sup>61</sup>*The Fiscal Crisis of the State*, 138

<sup>62</sup>“Review” of Frances Fox-Piven and Richard Cloward, *Regulating the Poor: The Functions of Social Welfare*, which appeared in *Social Policy* 3 (May 1972), 57

<sup>63</sup>Ralph Miliband, *The State in Capitalist Society* (London, 1969); Nicos Poulantzas, *Political Power and Social Classes* (London, 1973); and Ian Gough, “State Expenditure in Advanced Capitalism,” *New Left Review* 92 (July–August 1975), 53–92

<sup>64</sup>Some aspects of citizen perceptions are found in *To Know and Be Known*, Report of the Task Force on Government Information (Ottawa, 1969).

observes that it is even impossible at the moment to quantify net transfers from Ottawa to the provinces, despite our preoccupation with regional disparities.<sup>65</sup>

Fundamentally this emphasis on distribution links up with some of the basic questions of democratic theory. In whose interests does government work? Does it, as Marx and Marxists like Ralph Miliband<sup>66</sup> suggest, operate to maximize the interests of the economically dominant? Or of some middle majority? Or of the working class? Does it, as the pluralists suggest, reinforce the status quo by giving all groups a hearing and distributing benefits according to the resources they can bring to bear, or is it rather an instrument through which equality is promoted or the balance between interests altered? The distributive question also confronts us with the question of social conflict, since it assumes that most of the time all cannot benefit equally, and that policy-making is competition over scarce resources. Finally it poses the fundamental question: What is the role of the state in advanced industrial society? The distinction between scope and distribution reminds us that the development of the "positive state" is not necessarily the same as the development of the egalitarian state.

### Explanations

In order to understand variations along these dimensions, five general approaches can be identified.<sup>67</sup> I will look in turn at policy as a consequence of the *environment*, of the distribution of *power*, of prevailing *ideas*, of *institutional* frameworks, and of the *process* of decision-making. Each seems to have some capacity to explain patterns of policy, but none alone provides a full understanding. In part, they are competing approaches; for example, one might have an environmental versus an ideological explanation. However, they are more usefully seen as complementary: each makes some contribution, and policy emerges from multiple causes. But, for the dimensions of policy outlined, the most powerful models appear to be the power-resources and cultural-ideological ones. Moreover, the utility of each approach varies depending on the aspect of policy one wants to explain: aspects of the process are more powerful in explaining small, detailed variations in policy; ideology and the environment explain broader variations. The approaches are not mutually exclusive, indeed the interactions between them are important objects for study. Together they encompass most of the policy literature; some also suggest ways material not so commonly focused on understanding policy can be incorporated. Here I will sketch only some general characteristics of each approach.

#### ENVIRONMENT

First, patterns of policy may be explained by reference to certain characteristics of the environment of politics. In the most general sense, these refer to such broad characteristics as demography, geography, and levels of urbanization,

<sup>65</sup>T.N. Brewis, *Regional Economic Policies in Canada* (Toronto, 1969), 85. For one attempt at such a calculation, see Hartley Lewis, "Statistics on the Impact of National Fiscal and Monetary Policies," *B.C. Studies*, 13 (September 1972), 43-54.

<sup>66</sup>*The State in Capitalist Society*

<sup>67</sup>These categories bear considerable resemblance to those suggested by Anthony King in "Ideas, Institutions and Policies of Government," *op. cit.*

wealth, industrialization, and the like. The work of Dye, Hofferbert, and others in the US suggested that it is such environmental factors, and not any characteristics of the political process, which best explain variations in the patterns of spending of American states – politicians, parties, the extent of maldistribution of votes in the electoral system, and the like have only marginal effects.<sup>68</sup> D.J. Falcone and Michael Whittington come to similar conclusions in their examination of trends in Canadian federal government activity,<sup>69</sup> though other studies find political factors outweighing environmental ones in explaining Canadian interprovincial variations – in contrast to findings for the US and Mexico.<sup>70</sup> Some more recent American work, such as that of Brian Frye and Richard Winters,<sup>71</sup> who looked at the extent of redistribution in state government policies, also suggests that the “political variables” are indeed more important than Dye’s work suggests. Some international comparative analyses of spending on social security find that variations within developed countries are only weakly related to socioeconomic indicators, and are more strongly associated with an historical factor – the time at which such policies were first introduced<sup>72</sup> – and with such “political” factors as degree of centralization.

Thus this literature remains somewhat confused and tentative, and little has been done to trace out the mechanisms through which the environmental factors actually bring about certain outcomes. Nevertheless the setting, geographic, demographic, technological, and so on, is clearly an important starting point for policy. It both defines a set of problems which need to be dealt with and places limits on the resources – material, technological, and intellectual – available for dealing with them. Thus the growth in government everywhere in the West seems to be clearly related to the imperatives generated by population and economic growth and the like, and there are broad similarities in the role of government in all these societies.<sup>73</sup> However, the designation of certain issues or problems as important is not simply a matter of objective conditions. And once a problem *has* become defined as important, study of the environment alone cannot tell us just how the issue will be perceived, or what policy responses will be made to it. Thus, urbanization generates the need to move people around, it does not tell us how the costs will be distributed. Environmental changes may benefit some groups more than others, or they can generate social conflict, but the changes themselves do not tell us which groups’ interests will be most prominent in the policy responses. Thus environmental variables alone have only limited explana-

<sup>68</sup>See note 17.

<sup>69</sup>“Output Change in Canada: A Preliminary Attempt to Open the Black Box,” paper presented to the Canadian Political Science Association, Montreal 1972, mimeo

<sup>70</sup>James Bennett Hogan, “Social Structure and Public Policy,” *Comparative Politics* 4 (July 1972), 477–509. See also Dale Poel, “Canadian Provincial and American State Policy,” paper presented to the Canadian Political Science Association, Montreal 1972, mimeo.

<sup>71</sup>Brian Frye and Richard Winters, “The Politics of Redistribution,” *American Political Science Review* 64 (June 1970), 508–22

<sup>72</sup>See note 18. For the most thorough recent study of this problem, see Harold Wilensky, *The Welfare State and Equality* (Berkeley, 1975).

<sup>73</sup>An alternative view of the environment stresses not so much the technological and other imperatives of such processes as urbanization, but also the specific character of the dominant economic system, such as Galbraith’s “technostructure.” This is an example of the interdependence of the various factors, but it seems more reasonable to deal with the role of technocrats, capitalists, and others under the heading of power.

tory value. They probably explain more about the variation in the *scope* of government than they do about either the means selected or the distribution of benefits involved. To the extent they do shape policy, it is as they interact with cultural and ideological predispositions, with the distribution of political resources among social groups, and the like.

For comparative analysis, the environment serves as a valuable starting point. Given two or more societies with similar environmental characteristics (say an energy shortage, or a certain percentage of the population below the poverty line), we can ask how and why they vary in their response to them. In some policy areas, perhaps those such as fiscal and monetary policy, where the level of interdependence among nations is high, where a mode of analysis such as Keynesian economics has become internationally accepted, and where economic and social structures are similar, policy variations may indeed be small. In other areas, such as cultural policy, they are likely to be greater. Even among countries which share broad socioeconomic characteristics such as industrialization, there remain quite large differences in such things as government's share of per capita income, proportion of GNP spent on social security, levels of government ownership, and the like. It seems unlikely that such large variations are to be explained simply by environmental differences.

A final aspect of the environment is especially important for students of policy in Canada. The interdependence of societies means that policies, especially economic policies, have very great spillover effects. Thus, American policies with respect to matters like inflation crucially affect Canadian well-being and pose problems for Canadian policy-makers. Similarly, Canadian policy-makers are greatly constrained in what they can do with respect to taxation, and fiscal or monetary policy. The limits of these constraints have not often been tested, and they may indeed be partly imaginary. Nevertheless it seems impossible to fully explain Canadian policy in many areas without reference to our dependency on the US.<sup>74</sup> Another sense in which the US presence is important is the extent to which the Canadian political agenda is set by whatever is on the American agenda at the time, and the extent to which major policy innovations in the US, like President Johnson's War on Poverty, are imported into Canada. Similar phenomena of course exist in the interdependencies among provinces, and between them and the federal government.

#### POWER

The second model suggests that we explain what governments do by reference to the distribution of interests in the society and the resources available to these interests. Most simply, the pattern of policy will reflect the distribution of power and influence, given certain patterns of division and cleavage. This is at once the most plausible and most complex of the perspectives. We would expect policy outcomes, especially the distributional dimensions, to be a function of the number of interests involved, the degree of disagreement or conflict among them, and the relative means of influence which each is able to bring to bear in the policy

<sup>74</sup>There is a growing literature in this area. For a variety of approaches, see Andrew Axline, et al., *Continental Community* (Toronto, 1974), and Ian Lumsden, ed., *Close the 49th Parallel etc.* (Toronto, 1970).

process. But grave problems arise in the conceptualization and measurement of power itself, and in describing the structure of power in society. The debate between the Millsian elitists, the neo-Marxist class analysts, and the pluralists shows no sign of abating. Nor does the methodological debate between those who, like Dahl, argue that power can only be attributed when its exercise is visible in concrete situations of conflict, and those, like Bachrach and Baratz,<sup>75</sup> for whom non-decisions and the exercise of power through anticipated reactions and limiting the political agenda is crucial. Nevertheless, the elitists and pluralists agree that power does provide the key to understanding policy. They disagree about the real nature of that structure. For the pluralists, policy distributes benefits widely, and is usually a compromise among interests, because political resources are distributed widely; for the elitists, policy benefits the few because only the few exercise influence successfully. Note that each of these models includes both a statement about the dependent variable (benefits are widely shared or are narrowly concentrated) and about the independent variable (power is fragmented, power is centralized). A third model might separate participation in decisions from sharing of the benefits: thus the "Red Tory" image suggests that individual citizens participate little, but that the elites generating policy seek to serve the interests of the followers. The self-interestedness of elites should not be assumed. We obviously cannot resolve these questions here, but I do not think that their difficulty should lead us to abandon the influence focus altogether. One strategy for dealing with the problems is again to focus on the end product, on the distribution of burdens and benefits among social groups. One cannot automatically infer that because group A received benefits this was entirely due to A's successful exercise of influence. But if we take the distribution as a starting point, we can work back into the political process to examine such things as the role group A played, the attitudes that other groups had towards group A, the pattern of alliances that evolved, and so on. One problem with a great deal of the power literature has been that it assumes a relationship between power and outcomes, without actually demonstrating it or even describing the outcomes in very much detail.

We might also consider whether certain particularly illuminating case studies might be undertaken. For example, a major study of the Canadian tax reform process which began with the appointment of the Carter Commission in 1961 would be especially valuable for two reasons.<sup>76</sup> First, it was clearly an issue in which every citizen in the society had a stake and would therefore presumably have an incentive to mobilize whatever resources he possessed. "Few things so clearly reveal the naked play of vested interests in any country as do attempts to change an existing fiscal structure."<sup>77</sup> Second, it appears possible for economists

<sup>75</sup>Robert A. Dahl, "A Critique of the Ruling Elite Model," *American Political Science Review* 52 (June 1958), 463-9; and Peter Bachrach and Morton Baratz, *Power and Poverty* (New York, 1970), chaps. 1-2. See also Raymond Wolfinger, "Non-Decisions and the Study of Local Politics," and Frederick Frey, "Comment," *American Political Science Review* 65 (October 1971), 1063-80 and 1081-1101.

<sup>76</sup>See Bucovetsky and Bird, "Tax Reform in Canada"; and Bucovetsky, "The Mining Industry and the Great Tax Reform Debate," in A. Paul Pross, ed., *Pressure Group Behaviour in Canadian Politics* (Toronto, 1975), 87-114.

<sup>77</sup>Richard M. Bird, "The Tax Kaleidoscope: Perspectives on Tax Reform in Canada," *Canadian Tax Journal* XVIII (Sept.-Oct. 1970), 444.

to measure rather precisely the impact of the tax burden. In the Canadian tax reform process we had:  $T_1$ , the preexisting tax system, distributing costs in certain ways; a political process occurring within a royal commission, leading to the proposal  $T_2$ , which would have altered the distribution of the burden; another political process, including public debate, pressure on the government, and so on, leading to  $T_3$ , the White Paper, which again altered the distribution; another political process including parliamentary committee hearings and Edgar Benson's exercise in participatory democracy, culminating finally in  $T_4$ , the legislation. A research project which, on the one hand, concentrated on measuring the shifts in tax burdens for a large variety of social and economic groups at each point and, on the other hand, closely investigated the political process in between each point would seem to offer considerable promise of directly relating process to outcome in a way which would likely cast considerable light on the real patterns of influence in the country. It would also be relatively easy to extend the analysis to experiences with tax reform in other countries.

Despite the difficulties, power seems obviously related to all three dimensions of policy I have outlined. In the capitalist societies, at least, the expansion of the scope of government seems to have coincided with the accession of previously excluded groups to a share of political power, though some writers argue that this expansion has also been turned to the benefit of the already powerful; for example, Galbraith's notion of socialism for the rich and free enterprise for the poor, or Theodore Lowi's notion that expansion of the role of government was accompanied, in the US, by parcelling out the responsibility to private groups.<sup>78</sup> Kenneth Bryden's recent study of pension legislation in Canada shows how social reform can become domesticated, so that current pension policies provide little in the way of redistribution among income classes.<sup>79</sup> Similarly, the means by which policy is carried out is related to the level of conflict and to the distribution of power: the more widely influence is distributed, as in the pluralist model, the more voluntaristic the means; the more intense the conflict, the less the likelihood of compromise, and the more chance of coercion.

#### IDEAS

The third approach focuses on cultural and ideological factors: policy is a function of the dominant ideas, values, theories, and beliefs in the society.<sup>80</sup> Fundamentally, these factors may be seen as providing the basic assumptions and framework within which policy is considered. By culture here we mean simply such basic orientations to the political system as the definition of the relevant community to which obligation is felt; optimism or pessimism regarding man's ability to change his world; orientations to political activity; orientations towards conflict, and the like. By ideology, we mean more explicit, detailed, and politically focused ideas, which explain the political world, provide a framework for interpreting particular events, and offer a recommendation and prescriptions for future action. For the analysis of public policy, three dimensions seem particularly important.

First, we can distinguish between procedural and substantive ideas. Procedural

<sup>78</sup>*The End of Liberalism* (New York, 1969)

<sup>79</sup>*Old Age Pensions*

<sup>80</sup>*Ibid.*, 11



norms or values suggest rules of the game or methods which are considered legitimate. They include such things as the decision-rules to be employed (majority rule, proportionality, unanimity), perceptions of the situation as 0-sum or not, views about what tactics are permissible, views about who the legitimate participants in the policy process are and about how much secrecy is permitted, and the like.<sup>81</sup> Very important here, I think, is the extent to which the participants in the political process are basically self-regarding or public-regarding in their approach to politics. Such factors appear to be to a large extent (but not completely) independent of individual issues, or levels of conflict, and thus seem to have an independent effect on how the policy process operates, and to influence especially the means.

Perhaps the most fully developed recent statement of a procedural hypothesis is Lowi's discussion of the "public philosophy" of interest group liberalism, which he suggests can account both for the procedures of American policy-making and for some of its distributive characteristics, such as its continual reinforcement of the status quo.<sup>82</sup> Work by George and others on the "operational code" and by Putnam on elite attitudes is also important in this vein.<sup>83</sup> Hugh Hecló provides an interesting contrast between the procedural styles of Swedish and British policy-making which had some important consequences for policy results: "in general, Swedish discussions of social policies have begun from an assumption that the primary requisite for policy decision is more information, clarification and analysis among the interested parties. British discussion has generally begun from the assumption of divergent interests resolvable only through partisan conflict, and certainly not through joint committee work."<sup>84</sup> In the Canadian case a variety of procedural analyses of this type have been made, as in the emphasis on Canadian deference to elites, lack of entrepreneurial talent, and relatively greater Canadian collectivism identified by writers like Lipset, Porter, Presthus, and others. We need more detailed studies of the procedural values of political elites. Some valuable insights are found, for example, in Presthus's study of Canadian interest groups and Meisel's analysis of Liberal "hubris."<sup>85</sup>

Substantive values relate to what governments *should* do; what general goals should be pursued. The most obvious aspect here is of course the left-right dimension, which is closely related to scope and distribution. More generally, substantive values relate to such things as the emphasis on economic growth. Other

<sup>81</sup>For an interesting analysis of the interplay between culture and the policy process, see Thomas Anton, "Policy-Making and Political Culture in Sweden," *Scandinavian Political Studies* 4 (1969), 88-102.

<sup>82</sup>"The Public Philosophy: Interest Group Liberalism," *American Political Science Review* 61 (March 1967), 5-24

<sup>83</sup>Alexander George, "The Operational Code: A Neglected Approach to the Study of Political Leaders and Decision-Making," *International Studies Quarterly* 13 (June 1969), 190-222; Robert Putnam, "Studying Elite Political Culture: The Case of Ideology," *American Political Science Review* 65 (1971) 651-81, and "The Political Attitudes of Senior Civil Servants in Western Europe," *British Journal of Political Science* 3 (July 1973), 257-90; and Thomas Anton et al., "Bureaucrats in Politics: A Profile of the Swedish Administrative Elite," *Canadian Public Administration* 16 (Winter 1973), 627-51.

<sup>84</sup>*Modern Social Politics in Britain and Sweden* (New Haven, 1974), 313-14

<sup>85</sup>Robert Presthus, *Elite Accommodation in Canadian Politics* (Toronto, 1973), chs. 2, 11; John Meisel, "Howe, Hubris and 1972," in his *Working Papers in Canadian Politics* (3rd ed., Montreal, 1974)

aspects of substantive ideology are also important, especially in the Canadian situation; the most important ones have to do with the definition of the Canadian nation and views about French–English relations, regional disparities, and the relative roles of federal and provincial governments.

It is unlikely that particular policies are very often simply deduced from some explicit ideological framework (though Trudeau's policies in the area of bilingualism come close to a clear implementation of ideas enunciated previously), but ideas do seem to provide a general framework within which discussion of particular options takes place. Thus the development of the welfare state was not simply a result of a changed environment, or of the accession to power of the workers, it was also a product of changes in ideas about what the role of the state should be, what its obligations to citizens are, and so on. Anthony King makes a good case for what he calls "ideas" as being the fundamental causes of the relatively small scope of government in the United States as compared with other industrialized countries, and of its relatively poorly developed welfare system.<sup>86</sup>

More narrowly, it is useful to examine what might be called the prevailing theories held by decision-makers about the causes of problems and how to deal with them. J.M. Keynes observes that "the ideas of economists and political philosophers are more powerful than is commonly understood. Indeed the world is ruled by little else. Practical men, who believe themselves to be exempt from any intellectual influences, are usually the slaves of some defunct economist." Keynes's own influence bears him out: "one cause above all others" accounts for the success of full employment after the Second World War – the publication in 1936 of the *General Theory*.<sup>87</sup> Ron Manzer's study of developmental sequences of policy in Canada similarly stresses the importance of theories of poverty and crime and punishment, and the ways in which theories shaped policy in those areas.<sup>88</sup> These ideas or theories stem not only from generalized ideologies, but also from contemporary knowledge in social sciences, learning from the experience of other countries, and the like.

The second distinction is between elite and mass values. What role do citizens play – are they subjects, participants, spectators, or rebels? Are the elites relatively constrained or relatively free and autonomous? Are citizens willing to defer to political authority, or do they demand a voice? Similarly what about elite orientations: how do they view their role? Much of the conflict in recent years surrounding the demand for greater governmental responsiveness and greater participation is related to changing views about the citizen's role, on one hand, and an inability or unwillingness of governmental institutions to respond on the other. In understanding the making of individual policies, elite orientations are probably most important factors. Several suggestions are found in the Canadian literature, for example the view of Canadian politicians as brokers, or as irrationally preoccupied with problems of national unity, or as cooperative elites in the consociational democracy model holding the country together by overarching cooperation while keeping the masses quiescent. None of these observations is particularly well founded, but much room for research is available.

<sup>86</sup>"Ideas, Institutions and the Policies of Governments"

<sup>87</sup>Michael Stewart, *Keynes and After* (2nd ed., Harmondsworth, Eng., 1972), 13. The quote from Keynes is on p. 25.

<sup>88</sup>"Public Policies in Canada"

Third, we need to look at the dimension of ideological homogeneity and heterogeneity. Ideology in general may play two roles: it may serve to support and legitimize the existing status quo – the existing institutions, procedures, power structures, and patterns of policy. Or it may play a role of opposition, attempting to mobilize people to challenge the existing order or the existing patterns of policy. The policy process and policy outcomes are likely to be very different in societies where one ideology is dominant (indeed such societies may be seen, as some Americans see themselves, as “non-ideological”) than they are in situations of ideological diversity and conflict. In both cases, ideology is very closely linked both to patterns of power, either challenging or legitimizing them, and to the institutional structure, which may be seen to embody or support the existing ideological order. In this sense, ideas, like power, need to be related to the groups whose interests they promote or defend.

Like King, I lean strongly towards “ideas” and differences in dominant ideas from country to country as the basis for explaining policy differences, though I would place more stress on the link between ideas and the interests and influence of different groups. Ideas seem to be the essential both to the substance and to the means by which policy is made. They are especially useful, I think, in understanding broad policy shifts over long periods of time, such as the development of the welfare state,<sup>89</sup> and in understanding the more gross differences in the patterns of policy in different countries. They are less useful the more rigid the environmental constraints. Ideas do not provide complete explanations. They tend to be general and thus to account for broad orientations rather than the specific details of policy; in this sense they are especially important in providing the assumptions which define the problems and limit the range of policy alternatives considered at any point.

It might be objected that the stress on ideas implies an unrealistic view of the policy process, seeing it as explicitly goal-orientated, in which some group of decision-makers with clear ideological purposes simply promotes policies that conform to its ideology. A contrasting view sees the policy process as much more chaotic and incoherent, with policy the result of the clash of many interests in which no central thread is discernible. This viewpoint also stresses the importance of unanticipated consequences, the possibility of people agreeing on policy even though they disagree on final ends, and so on.<sup>90</sup> This is indeed the case: policies are the result of long accumulations of small decisions; decision-makers, especially in non-crisis situations, seldom do self-consciously select a single purpose; policy is the result of a complex bargaining process. But that process does go on within a framework of assumptions, norms, and values concerning both the procedure and the substance of policies, and from a long-term and comparative perspective it is this framework that is most important.

#### INSTITUTIONS

The fourth approach concentrates on the policy consequences of the institutional structure – the formal rules and regulations – of the political system. The way in which government is organized, the degree of centralization or decentralization,

<sup>89</sup>For a statement of this view, see Richard Titmuss, *Social Policy: An Introduction*, 22.

<sup>90</sup>See the work of Lindblom, and Braybrooke and Lindblom cited above; and Judith Sklar, “Decisionism,” in Carl Friedrich, ed., *Nomos VII: Rational Decision* (New York, 1967), 3–17.

the way authority is shared, the formal mechanisms for registering decisions are all involved here. Thus, for example, A.H. Birch argues that it is the "complications of federalism" which account for the rather late development of the welfare state in Canada.<sup>91</sup> Or E.E. Schattschneider, R. MacGregor Burns, and a host of others argue that certain features of American political institutions so fragment authority that innovation is systematically prevented and immobilism results. Similarly, many have argued impressionistically that somehow cabinet systems are able to move more decisively and effectively than systems with the separation of powers. Or, to use another example, N.H. Lithwick argues that the present structure of urban government in Canada is inherently incapable of dealing with contemporary problems.<sup>92</sup>

Now to sort out the independent effect of institutional factors is extremely difficult. Institutions are obviously the result of broader political factors: Canada has federalism *because* regional and linguistic divisions are strong; the United States has the separation of powers at least in part because James Madison and others wanted to limit the scope of government and control the power of the masses. Similarly, in the long run, if political pressures are sufficiently strong, institutional hurdles can be cleared and institutions changed. But in the short run, institutions do place constraints on decision-makers and help shape outcomes. They do so in primarily a negative sense, by making some solutions harder, rather than by suggesting positive alternatives. It does not seem unreasonable to suggest that the greater the number of veto points, or the greater the emphasis on gaining the consent of all, the fewer innovations there will be, and the more limited will be the scope of the government.

There is considerable debate about the effect of institutional factors. Anthony King points out that in the US it is not so much that radical proposals were vetoed because of institutional fragmentation, but that they were never seriously proposed.<sup>93</sup> On the other hand, governments exercising very centralized constitutional powers may, because of their own internal divisions, or the pressures on them, act extremely cautiously. Similarly, J. Roland Pennock finds none of the differences in agricultural policy in Britain and the United States that might have been predicted from differences in institutional structure.<sup>94</sup> On the other hand, in his comparison of American, Canadian, and Swedish air pollution policy, Lennart Lundqvist concludes that "structures do indeed matter. ... Although it is equally clear that other factors influence policy choices, political structures have considerably more impact on the choice of alternatives than one would have expected, given the similarity of the problems and the similarity of (possible) available solutions."<sup>95</sup> Arnold Heidenheimer, examining social policy in the US and Western Europe, argues that it is the interaction of interest groups and institutions which best explain differences.<sup>96</sup>

<sup>91</sup>*Federalism, Finance and Social Legislation* (Oxford, 1955), 204

<sup>92</sup>*Urban Canada: Problems and Prospects* (Ottawa, 1970)

<sup>93</sup>"Ideas, Institutions and Policies," 416

<sup>94</sup>"Responsible Government, Separated Powers and Special Interests: Agricultural Subsidies in Britain and America," *American Political Science Review* LVI (September 1962), 621-33

<sup>95</sup>"Do Political Structures Matter in Environmental Politics?" *Canadian Public Administration* 17 (Spring 1974), 139

<sup>96</sup>"The Politics of Public Education, Health and Welfare in the USA and Western Europe," *British Journal of Political Science* 3 (July 1973), 315-40

Institutional factors may also influence the means: the more veto points there are, the more consensual and voluntaristic the means, and the more policies are likely to be distributive rather than redistributive. Finally, institutions may have implications for distribution, for who gets what. We may see institutions in this sense as conferring formal authority, as requiring that certain formal steps be taken before policy is enacted, and giving certain authorities the right to make those decisions. To the extent that these authorities are linked to certain interests and groups within the societies these actors are likely to exert more influence. Thus in Canada, federalism does have some fairly clear policy consequences. It tends to structure our thinking about policy problems, so that we see them in regional terms. It gives special weight to certain interests which are regionally based, and disadvantages to some others which are nationally distributed.<sup>97</sup> Because of the process of federal–provincial negotiation on the Canada Pension Plan which federalism engendered, it seemed clear that certain elements in pension policy were given great weight; others, which would have been more prominent had the institutional framework been different, were neglected.

The institutional factors are so bound up with the other approaches that it seems impossible to weigh their over-all impact on policy. The most fruitful approach will probably be to conduct comparative studies of similar issues across units with clear institutional variations. We should also remember that institutions themselves have no particular policy content; their effects lie in the way in which they interact with other social forces, and in the way they give advantages to some interests and disadvantages to others. The way institutions structure political competition and therefore policy debate can also be examined in the sense that they may provide incentives to politicians to pursue some kinds of strategies as opposed to others, as Alan Cairns suggests is the case for political parties in the Canadian electoral system.<sup>98</sup>

In a longer-run perspective, institutional arrangements may themselves be seen as policies, which, by building in to the decision process the need to consult particular groups and follow particular procedures, increase the likelihood of some kinds of decisions and reduces that of others. For example, a legal requirement that public hearings be held before a development project can go ahead increases the bargaining resources of local residents and environmentalists. The establishment of new Departments and agencies reflects not only the growth in the scope of government, but also the recognition of the importance of newly mobilized groups and interests, which can then use these new institutions to promote favourable policies. Change in governing structures may thus be seen in part as a process of institutionalizing interests. Hence institutions are both dependent variables, reflecting earlier decisions, and independent factors, conditioning the future play of political forces.

#### PROCESS

Closely associated with institutions, and in a way almost indistinguishable from them, is a focus on the process of decision-making itself. The vast bulk of the

<sup>97</sup>See Richard Simeon, "Regionalism and Canadian Political Institutions," *Queen's Quarterly* 82 (Winter 1975), 499–511.

<sup>98</sup>"The Electoral System and the Party System in Canada," in Orest Kruhlak et al., eds., *The Canadian Political Process* (Toronto, 1970), 139–64

policy literature, of course, is primarily concerned with this level, in describing the ways in which the proximate policy-makers – bureaucrats, politicians, interest group leaders – interact with each other in the making of policy. Much of this literature takes the form of the rather sterile debate between the “disjointed incrementalists,” the “rationalists,” and the “mixed scanning” advocates, a debate marked by a confusion about whether these models are actually descriptive or prescriptive.<sup>99</sup>

We need to look at process in this sense in two ways. First, it is these decision-makers who actually make the formal decisions and carry them out. It is *through them* that the broader political forces operate. Their agenda and behaviour reflect the pressures of the environment, the play of political influences surrounding policy disputes, the norms, assumptions, and values found in the culture and the ideology, and the opportunities and constraints imposed by the institutions. The causal arrows do not jump straight from environment to legislation; power and influences are exercised and brought to bear on particular decision-makers; and assumptions, norms, and values must be made concrete. Up to this point, the models we have sketched have been rather static; they are sets of variables which the process sets in motion. This perspective has important implications for a research strategy. Power, ideology, and the other factors can all be studied in the abstract; indeed, they usually are. The problem has been to bring them to bear in explaining policies. In part I have suggested we do that through examining the *outcomes* themselves: Whose interests have been served? What values are implicit? What means have been used? Examining the *process* can show how these results came about. Thus comparative case studies can illuminate many of the broader aspects the earlier approaches implied. We can interview the participants to find out not only what happened when, but also to probe deeper. How did the problem come to be defined in this way? Why were alternatives *a*, *b*, and *c* considered, but not *d* and *e*? Which groups was it important to listen to, and why? And so on. In exploring the actions, assumptions, perceptions, and strategies of participants, we should begin to see more broadly how these wider features of the political system impinge on the policy process. Through comparison we are able to highlight what may be the most important facts: those which are simply taken for granted by the participants themselves. Process, then, becomes the bridge on which we work forward from what we know about institutions, ideology, power, etc., to policy outcomes; and on which we work backwards from variations in policy outcomes to seek explanations.

Process is important in another sense; that is, as an independent contribution to policy outcomes. The proximate policy-makers may have their own interests, such as the bureaucratic need for maintenance and expansion, and their own ties to clientele groups. Similarly, writers like March and Simon, and Braybrooke and Lindblom, have stressed certain characteristics of the situation facing the decision-makers themselves: complexity, uncertainty, a limited capacity for analysis, and the like. They have suggested some of the strategies, such as incrementalism and satisficing, by which decision-makers can simplify their decision processes and which do have consequences for outcomes.

<sup>99</sup>For a good discussion of this debate, see Peter Aucoin, “Theory and Research in the Study of Policy-Making,” in Doern and Aucoin, *The Structures of Policy-Making in Canada*, 10.38.

Related to a process approach but also closely linked to the power and institutional dimensions – is the work of “public choice” theorists. This “new political economy,” undertaken primarily by economists, seeks to build deductive models of individual behaviour and collective decision from a simple set of assumptions, the most important being the assumption of self-interest. Thus, politicians are vote-maximizers, and bureaucrats are motivated to increase the size of their agencies. Given constraints such as information and transaction costs, predictions about behaviour and outcome are deduced. In addition, much of this literature is normative, asking what justifies replacement of individual or market choice mechanisms with public or governmental choices. The parsimony and logic of many formulations are persuasive, indeed beguiling. They provide important insights and may be a useful baseline against which to observe real world activities. The abstract and general character of this mode of analysis, however, renders it of somewhat limited value in exploration of substantive policy. Moreover, many of the assumptions about motives, structural constraints, and the like take for granted factors which I have argued must be investigated. For example, we may accept the self-interest motivation, but what an actor will define as his self-interest is not evident. Politicians may seek to maximize votes and bureaucrats the size of their budgets; what they will have to advocate to succeed in these goals depends heavily on the distribution of political resources, the dominance of certain ideas and the like.<sup>100</sup>

There are a multitude of frameworks available for the study of policy process.<sup>101</sup> Many suggest a temporal or functional sequence ranging from placing an issue on the agenda, to formal decision, to implementation, appraisal, and determination. Most such frameworks are simply a way of organizing information. Two process approaches which do fairly clearly relate the character of the process to the character of the outcome are those of Allison in *Essence of Decision* and Lindblom in *The Intelligence of Democracy*.<sup>102</sup>

Lindblom emphasizes both an intellectual process, incrementalism, and a political bargaining process, partisan mutual adjustment. In his model, decision-makers do not attempt to consider all alternatives or to ask the grand questions; they take the existing situation as given and seek to make only marginal improvements. Individual decision-makers do not try to take into account each other's point of view; rather, each acts selfishly. But bargaining resources are widely distributed and the actors engage in mutual adjustment. The result for Lindblom – but not for Lowi who by and large accepts Lindblom's description of what goes on – is policy outcomes in which the largest number of interests are likely to have got at least some of what they wanted, in which there is considerable compromise, in which policy changes in only small steps, and so on.

<sup>100</sup>There is a large and diverse literature in this field. Some important examples are: Albert Breton, *The Economic Theory of Representative Government* (London, 1974); James M. Buchanan and Gordon Tullock, *The Calculus of Consent* (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1962); Mancur Olson, *The Logic of Collective Action* (Cambridge, Mass., 1965); Anthony Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (New York, 1957); Robert Bish, *The Public Economy of Metropolitan Areas* (Chicago, 1971). For a good summary of the literature and an application to the study of Canadian and Australian Federalism, see M.H. Sproule-Jones, *Public Choice and Federalism in Australia and Canada* (Canberra, 1975).

<sup>101</sup>For example, Richard Rose, “Comparing Public Policy”

<sup>102</sup>Lindblom, *The Intelligence of Democracy* (New York, 1965)

Allison, after generally rejecting the view that policy can be seen as the rational, clear decision of a single actor such as the president, postulates two alternative models. One is similar to Lindblom's model: policy is the result of bargaining among the bureaucratic agencies and leaders involved. The other stresses the imperatives of bureaucratic organization – the need to simplify, the failure to learn from the environment, the inertia, and the commitments to standard operating procedures. One might also explore how much bureaucratic expansionism is now a central force in the growth of government itself. The results again are limited flexibility and incremental change.

These two models do generally describe the day-to-day operation of the policy process. And they are likely to have certain independent consequences of their own, such as marginal change and reinforcement of the status quo. Certainly to explore minor changes in particular policies we probably would not need to go much further than the immediate process. But these are only very partial models. They deal with the routine and the stable, rather than with change or crisis. More important, they take far too much for granted. Why one set of bureaucratic structures, and not another? Why one set of alternatives being debated and not a narrower or broader one? In fact, Lindblom for example, *assumes* a decentralized institutional structure much like the American, a general consensus, both procedural and substantive, on the basic characteristics of the system, a shared commitment to the rules of the game, and limited levels of conflict. But what is the process like when these characteristics do not prevail?

In a way much of this boils down to the question of what is the role of the politician and bureaucrat in the policy process. For some of the environmentalists, the role is minimal: the black box of politics does not make such difference. The process writers place considerably more emphasis on the political role, though their results suggest that it is limited too, since policy at any time  $t_2$  is best predicted by seeing what it was at time  $t_1$ . The approach developed here, by emphasizing the framework of the environment, ideas, power, and institutions within which the process operates may suggest in one sense that the process and its participants are unimportant. But in another, broader, sense the argument is that the process is crucial. For it is the focus, the impact point, of all the other variables. The environmentalists tend to downplay the political variables altogether; the bureaucratic process writers, on the other hand, study a rather narrow set of political forces. The approach outlined here seeks to define policy-making as political, but in a much wider sense.

A brief illustration will demonstrate the sorts of hypotheses which might be derived from each of these approaches. Let us take anti-poverty policies, and, for the sake of argument, simply assert that they have failed to achieve social justice for the poor. How might each approach try to explain why?

The environmental approach might suggest such factors as the lack of the necessary resources to fully close the poverty gap; the possibility that to do so would lead to levels of taxation which could not be achieved given Canada's dependence on foreign investment; the simple lack of information about *how* to eliminate poverty even if the resources or the will were there. None of these alone seems very persuasive.



A power approach might take a variety of forms. A more elitist approach would assert that policy benefits a small dominant group, which has little interest in alleviating poverty except for a desire to avoid social unrest, and which, moreover, operates an economic system which inevitably generates poverty. A more majoritarian power explanation would assert that the poor are a minority, and that it is not a small elite but the non-poor majority which would object to bearing the necessary burdens. Both would agree that the poor themselves lack most of the political resources to make their needs effectively heard.

An ideological approach would stress the dominance of a complex of ideas concerning the need for self-reliance, the moral worthlessness of the poor, a preference for the market system, weakness of a sense of community obligation, the prevalence of concern for economic growth over concern for equity, and so on. Similarly, it might argue that the procedural norms of the system freeze out the poor from participation because they cannot speak the appropriate language and do not understand the rules of the game.

An institutional approach would, like Birch, stress the “complications of federalism,” including federal–provincial conflict, and the imbalance between revenues and the division of constitutional responsibility for social policy, and the like. It might also stress the problems of bureaucratic fragmentation within levels of government and the resultant inconsistencies in policy and failure to coordinate.

Finally, a process approach would look at the ways various official and unofficial policy-makers interacted in the considerations of anti-poverty policies. In doing so, it would draw on the other approaches: on power, by looking at who the participants are, what interests they represent, what resources they possess; on ideas, by looking at both the procedural and substantive values of the participants; on institutions, by examining the constraints and opportunities they present, and by assessing the ways certain assumptions, precedents, standard operating procedures, and the like become entrenched within certain departments and agencies. The process focus would also stress the strategies and tactics of participants as influenced by the other factors, and would look at the relationship between policy-making in the policy field with that in other fields.

Most of the above assertions are, at least to some degree, testable even within the context of a single country like Canada. More progress would be possible using comparison. No one approach seems fully persuasive: shapers of social policy are likely to be complex. Nevertheless use of this framework – combined of course with a much fuller description and assessment of anti-poverty policies themselves – does promise both to encompass most of the factors adduced to study policy in the past and to compare their utility more systematically than before. It also suggests that while specialization inevitably means individual students will mine particular parts of the field, they must both be more aware of the existence of the other potential foci and explicitly relate the fruits of their work to the contents of policy itself.

I have tried to present a very general framework for the study of policy, together with a few tentative hypotheses which might be explored. In a way it is an argument for the role or place that studies of policy should have in political science

and it is a response to the apolitical, atheoretical, non-cumulative, and non-comparative characteristics of much of the recent work in the area. The framework here is most unhelpful in one way: it presents not a theory, but a way of looking at policy; it does not simplify study, but instead makes it more complex. I hope it has isolated the issues, has suggested a guide to the important questions, especially those concerning what is to be explained, and has provided some criteria for selecting and presenting information.

More generally, several suggestions for how we should conduct policy research arise. First, we need much better descriptions of what governments actually do, what the allocation of values and costs is. At the moment we have too many independent variables chasing too few and too vague dependent ones. Second, as political scientists, our concern at the moment should be primarily with describing and explaining, rather than recommending techniques and solutions to policy problems. Third, case studies can be a very valuable tool: but they must be comparative, the cases must be carefully selected, and they should be used to penetrate the political process in order then to ask some of the broader questions. At the same time case studies are not enough. We need longitudinal studies of the evolution of policy over long periods, and we need to take studies of culture, voting, and the like and try to formulate hypotheses by which they might be related to policy.

The task for policy research outlined here is a vast one. At every level we are faced not only with a lack of data, but also with difficult theoretical, methodological, and even ideological problems. Some attempts to provide an over-all view, however tentative, and to summarise what is already known will be extremely valuable. But it is not intended that everyone should try to answer all these questions. Specialization is inevitable, but the perspective outlined here will have served its purpose if it has sketched a general outline of the whole forest, and indicated on which clumps of trees it is most important to concentrate. Similarly, specialists will make their greatest contributions if they can keep in mind that it is the forest we ultimately want to understand, and that policy studies will advance to the extent that clear and explicit links between dependent and independent variables are established.

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