

CHAPTER 2

An Introduction to Public Policy



PURPOSE

This chapter provides background information that is useful in understanding the meaning of the term “public policy” and the role of public policy in local, state, and national government. When you have completed this chapter you should be able identify the private sphere, civil society, and government as three parts

of society. You should also be able to evaluate, take, and defend positions on which parts of society may be best suited to deal with certain problems. Finally, you should be able to explain the role of public policy in dealing with common problems of society.

B Class Activity — Distinguishing Among Areas or Spheres of Society

Listed below are some everyday events that might occur in the United States. For each event, identify whether it takes place in (A) the private sphere, (B) civil society, (C) government, or (D) a combination of any of these.

- 1 A local school board changes graduation requirements.

(A) (B) (C) (D)

- 2 Susan becomes a member of the Girl Scouts.

(A) (B) (C) (D)

- 3 Carmen and her friend go out to dinner and a movie.

(A) (B) (C) (D)

- 4 Marco's family and friends have a picnic on July 4.

(A) (B) (C) (D)

- 5 Sara and her two sisters join a labor union.

(A) (B) (C) (D)

- 6 The Sierra Club lobbies state legislators to pass environmental protection laws.

(A) (B) (C) (D)

- 7 The state legislature passes a law limiting the use of cell phones while driving.

(A) (B) (C) (D)

- 8 Citizens join a taxpayer's association in an effort to get government to lower taxes.

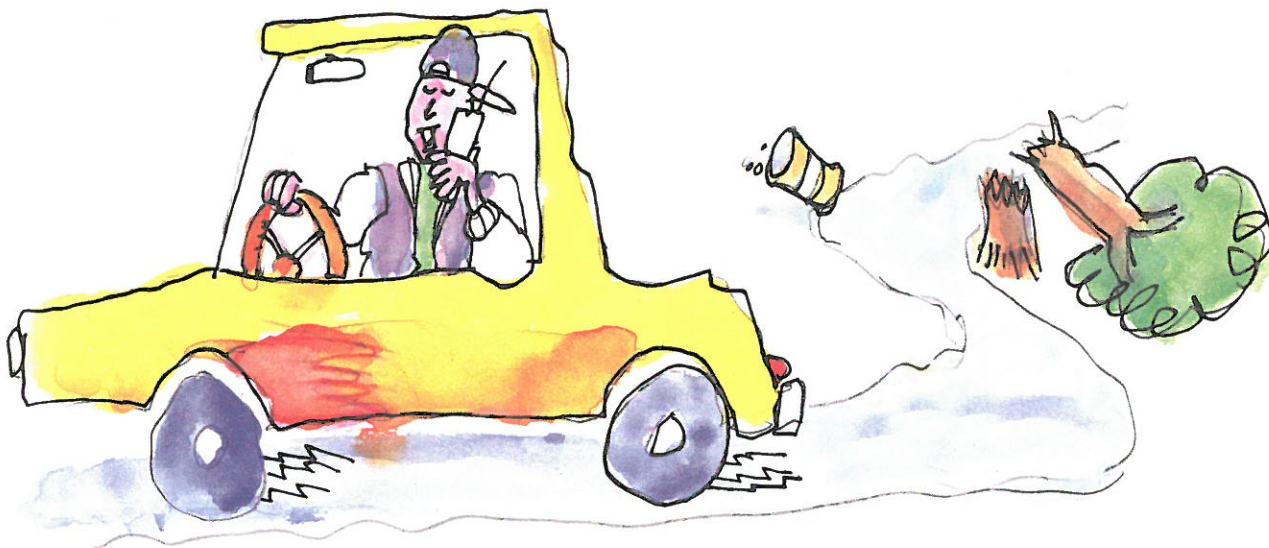
(A) (B) (C) (D)

- 9 The federal government awards a contract to a private company to repair sections of an interstate highway.

(A) (B) (C) (D)

- 10 A city council passes a law establishing smoke free zones in public parks.

(A) (B) (C) (D)



- 5 Protecting the borders of the country
 - (A) (B) (C)
- 6 Maintaining streets in cities and towns
 - (A) (B) (C)
- 7 Providing medical care for the indigent
 - (A) (B) (C)
- 8 Protecting people from criminal activity
 - (A) (B) (C)
- 9 Upholding the moral standards of the community
 - (A) (B) (C)
- 10 Building highways, bridges, and dams
 - (A) (B) (C)
- 11 Protecting the country from external attack
 - (A) (B) (C)
- 12 Promoting economic prosperity
 - (A) (B) (C)

E What is Public Policy?

There are reasonable differences of opinion among scholars on the definition of the term "public policy." Because examining these differences would divert attention from the principal goals of Project Citizen, the definition stated below has been selected as most useful for the purposes of the project.

Definition and function of public policy

In democracies, a public policy is a concept or set of ideas that guides a course of action or a procedure used in dealing with public issues or problems.

Public policies are often embodied in laws, rules, or regulations or agreed upon procedures used by government to fulfill its responsibilities to protect the rights of the people and to promote the general welfare.

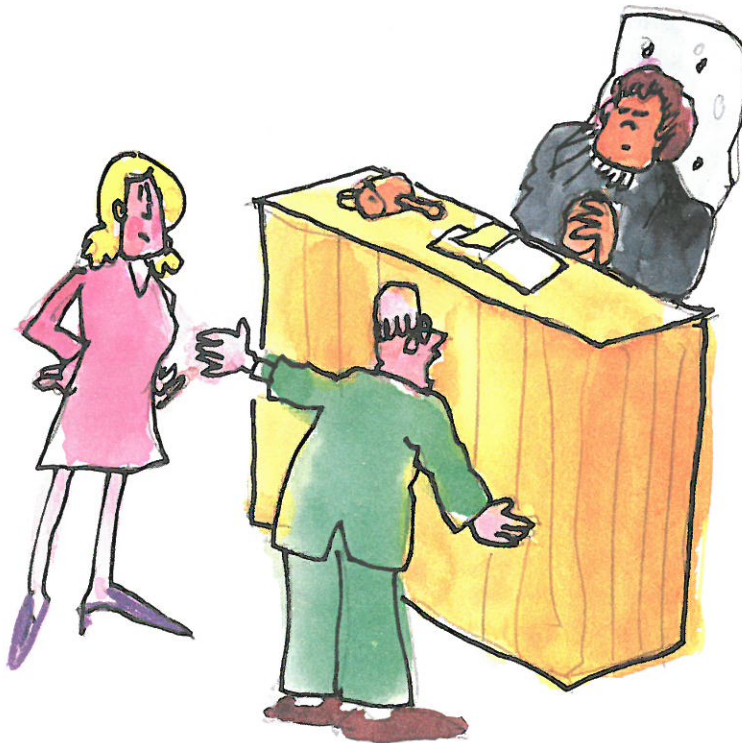


- governmental institutions and civil society acting independently, but dealing with the same problem. For example:
 - both local government and religious organizations might provide homeless shelters or child-care facilities
 - governmental agencies and charitable organizations such as the Red Cross might have independent programs designed to help people affected by natural disasters
- civil society handling problems not dealt with by government in accordance with a government policy. This leaves such problems to be dealt with by civil society or the private sphere. For example:
 - professional associations might provide special programs and training to enhance the knowledge and skills of their members
 - religious institutions might try to enhance the morality of their constituents

Procedural justice and the development and implementation of public policy

Procedural justice refers to the fairness of the ways information is gathered and the fairness of the ways decisions are made. In democracies, in particular, people working in governmental agencies and institutions, the “servants of the people,” are required to use fair procedures in the development and implementation of public policy that, among other goals, enable the people to observe and take part in their government. The goals of procedural justice are to

- increase the chances of discovering information necessary to make wise and just decisions
- insure the wise and fair use of the information in making decisions
- protect important values and interests such as the right to privacy, human dignity, freedom, distributive justice, and efficiency





F Class Activity — Applying the Definition of Public Policy

Which of the four descriptions below best categorizes the ten situations listed? Be prepared to explain your choice.

- (A) A public policy solution to a problem by a governmental institution
- (B) A public policy solution to a problem by a governmental institution cooperating with civil society
- (C) A solution to a problem dealt with by public policy and by civil society each acting independently
- (D) A solution to a problem by civil society acting alone

1 Government funding of medical research, interstate highways, and higher education

- (A) (B) (C) (D)

2 Providing assistance to the poor through government issued food stamps and the voluntary contributions of church members

- (A) (B) (C) (D)

3 Providing education by religious institutions to promote their specific moral standards

- (A) (B) (C) (D)

4 Creating the Department of Homeland Security by the federal government to protect the country from the threat of terrorism

- (A) (B) (C) (D)

5 Community groups taking disadvantaged urban youth on rural outings

- (A) (B) (C) (D)

6 Providing training to neighborhood watch groups by law enforcement agencies

- (A) (B) (C) (D)

7 Providing food and shelter for the homeless by both state government and private groups

- (A) (B) (C) (D)

8 Community groups arranging for young people to visit elderly members of the community who live alone and lack social contact

- (A) (B) (C) (D)

9 Federal government providing tax incentives to businesses for them to locate in areas of high unemployment

- (A) (B) (C) (D)

10 Authorizing public funding of charter schools by a board of education

- (A) (B) (C) (D)