

The Political Analyst's Toolbox

Chapter 1

Policy Analysis, Political Analysis, and the Toolbox

1. What You Will Learn in this Module

You will learn:

1. Why good policy analysis demands good political analysis.
2. What tools a political analyst needs in her toolbox.

Key Concepts

By the end of the module you should be able to define:

Policy analysis

Political analysis

Political feasibility

Political sustainability

The "Good policy/good politics/good practice" paradigm

Wall Flowers, Stinkers, and Sweet Spot Policies

The political analyst's toolbox

2. Policy Analysis and Political Analysis

The Student Loan Scandal

Imagine it is early in the first Obama Administration and you are Secretary of Education Arne Duncan. Analysts in the Department of Education (DOE) have called your attention to an alarming rise in student defaults on federal education loans.¹ After some investigation, you discover that many of the defaults occur because unscrupulous for-profit universities market loans to poor students, minority students, veterans, and even the homeless in a deceptive and huckster-ish way, provide the students with shoddy worthless classes, and leave them saddled with enormous debt and a valueless degree or no degree at

¹ To see some basic facts, consult "Financing Post-secondary Education in the United States," National Center for Education Statistics, Department of Education http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_tua.asp particularly Figures 5-7.

all.² The bottom line: students who tried to do the right thing to improve themselves, their families, and communities end up with blasted and shattered lives while heartless con-men get rich on government dollars and human misery.

“This is a scandal! It’s outrageous, unfair, and a national disgrace,” you declare in a staff meeting. “It’s our job to put a stop to this!”

OK, Mr. Secretary: *How do you do it?*

You remember an old adage of Lyndon Johnson’s: “Telling a man to go to Hell is easy. Sending him there is much harder.” In other words, saying you are going to clean up this policy mess is easy. But doing it may be pretty tough. There are likely to be strong political interests at play simply because the money is so substantial, literally billions of dollars. You can try to cut the predatory vampire schools off from federal money – but you may well lose that political fight. In fact, the attempt may create a political firestorm that could derail the DOE and even end your career. If you are going to successfully send this problem to “Hell” rather than have it send you there, you will need a good policy analysis of the options – and a *really good* political analysis to go with them.

Good Policy Analysis Requires Good Political Analysis

The series of modules entitled “The Political Analyst’s Toolbox” is aimed at helping *policy analysts who need to understand politics*. So, the “political analysis” taught here is quite different from the horse-race punditry or opinionated commentary practiced on TV talk shows or the nation’s editorial pages. This not to disparage the pundits unduly; sometimes political commentary can be clever and insightful as well as entertaining. But our subject is serious political analysis for people who care about policy.

Let’s be clear about the difference between *policy analysis* and *political analysis*. Policy analysis is taught to future practitioners in most schools of public policy, public administration, international relations, education, public health, social work and so on. It probably should be taught in the nation’s leading law schools. So what is policy analysis anyway? Here is a definition:

Policy Analysis: The systematic, analytic, and ethically informed consideration of which policy alternatives best serve the public interest.

As you can imagine, there are lots of tricky elements here, ranging from the highly technical to the deeply philosophical. But the basic components of policy analysis are rather straight forward. (See Figure 1).

² The story has been documented in many articles in the education trade newspaper, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*; just go to their webpage and search. But for a vivid albeit hardly disinterested overview, see the testimony of Steven Eisman before the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pension in June 2010 “Subprime Goes to College” <http://www.help.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Eisman.pdf>

Components of a Policy Analysis

1. What are the **alternatives**?
2. What are the **likely effects** of each alternative?
 - How will people respond?
 - Economic
 - Political
 - Social
 - How will nature respond? Scientific considerations
3. What are the **costs and benefits (C&B)** of those effects?
 - Economic C&B
 - Political C&B
 - Social C&B
 - Ethical C&B
4. What is the **feasibility** of each alternative?
 - Politically feasible to enact
 - Administratively feasible to operate
 - Politically sustainable over time
5. Given 1-4: **What should we do?**
 - Who decides and how?

Figure 1. Five Components of a Policy Analysis.

If you look at these five components, you will see that policy analysis is just structured common sense: what are my choices, what are the pluses and minuses of each choice, which one is the best one taking everything into consideration? You will also notice if you look carefully that political analysis shows up in most of the components. In fact, *practical political analysis* is essential for good policy analysis.

Practical Political Analysis: Practical political analysis identifies for each policy alternative its likely *political effects*, the *political costs and benefits* of those effects, the *political feasibility* of enacting the alternative, and the *political sustainability* of the alternative over time.

Political feasibility refers to the practicalities of placing the alternative “on the books”: ushering a bill through the legislative process into the statutes, writing administrative regulations and having them prevail in court, adopting an agency policy as a standing rule for use by operators in the agency.

In the student loan scandal, one option for Secretary Duncan is writing a regulation that blocks federal student loans for students in those schools whose graduates regularly fail to get jobs (a “gainful employment” regulation). In other words, the regulation would keep money away from diploma-mill schools that rip off students and leave them unemployable due to worthless courses and valueless degrees. Secretary Duncan needs to worry about the political feasibility of actually creating this regulation. First, does he have the legal authority to issue such a regulation? Second, will the White House approve or nix a DOE gainful employment regulation? Third, will it survive the inevitable challenge in court? Fourth, will Congress over-ride the regulation statutorily, reversing it with legislation to cut the predatory schools back into their student loan bonanza?

Political sustainability looks to the future and asks, will this policy alternative last or will it be undermined, repealed, or subverted in the future? A law, regulation, or agency policy “on the books” is fine – but what matters is results on the ground. Simple enactment accomplishes little if the policy will be subverted, ignored, or administratively botched. For example, what will happen to the gainful employment regulation if a future Secretary of Education is an executive from one of the for-profit vampire schools? How likely is that to happen? Will Congress appropriate money to administer the regulation? Can the bureaucrats in the DOE actually enforce the regulation?

Example

Designing for Political Sustainability: Privatizing the Enforcement of Employment Discrimination Policy

Often Congress fears its preferred policy will not be politically sustainable when a hostile president is in charge of administering a regulatory program. So rather than create a traditional regulatory agency, Congress sometimes creates a *private regulatory regime* administered in a decentralized way through law and courts.

A good example is employment discrimination law. If you believe you have been illegally discriminated against by an employer, you typically do not file a grievance with an

administrative agency, who then investigates and may levy a fine. Instead, you hire an employment discrimination lawyer (often on a contingency fee basis – the lawyer gets paid only if he wins the case). Then you sue the employer and may receive a financial payment.

This set of arrangements did not occur “naturally” or by accident. Rather, Congress *designed* this regulatory regime in order to get around presidential administrations that would have gutted enforcement of anti-discrimination laws.³

3. The “Good Policy/Good Politics/Good Practice” Paradigm

The “Good Policy/Good Politics/Good Practice” Paradigm provides one way to think about the relationship between political analysis and policy analysis. The basic idea is shown in the Venn Diagram of Figure 1. The three circles represent 1) “Good Policy” as identified by economists, policy experts and policy analysts, 2) “Good Practice” – meaning, easy and practical to implement as determined by seasoned managers and savants of public administration, and 3) “Good Politics” as identified through practical political analysis. When two circles overlap, the policies in the overlap region display the attributes of both circles. When all three circles overlap ... we return to this lovely possibility in a minute.

³ This story is well-told in Sean Farhang’s *The Hidden Regulatory State*.

An example of policies that fall in two domains but not all three is what I've labeled "Wall Flowers." These are policies that experts see as excellent and that could be implemented rather easily if only they were enacted – but no one wants to take them to the political ball. They aren't politically feasible.

Example

A Wall Flower Policy: Carbon Taxes

Most economists who study global warming favor a carbon tax as a solution.⁴ As is well-known, global warming, a potentially catastrophic threat to many species on earth (perhaps including our own), results from atmospheric pollution caused by burning carbon-based fuels. The principal sources of the pollution are coal-fired power plants and automobiles burning gasoline or ethanol. A carbon tax aims to raise the price of dirty energy relative to cleaner energy and conservation. It is not intended to raise revenue; rather, proceeds from the tax would be rebated to consumers. However, given the price increase in dirty energy, millions of consumers and firms would find clever ways to shift their consumption into to cleaner energy or conservation. Firms would innovate new products and technologies to meet the enhanced demands for clean energy and conservation. A standard derivation in intermediate microeconomics shows that taxes of this kind are the most economically efficient way to achieve any specified reduction in

pollution. Moreover, a carbon tax would be relatively easy to implement since it could be applied at the gas pump or in the price of electricity, just like currently existing taxes.

Despite its "good policy"/"good practice" intersection, the carbon tax is political anathema in the United States, at least at the present time.⁵ Opposing it are interest groups including: oil producers, corn growers and ethanol manufacturers, oil refineries, automobile manufacturers, automobile dealers, oil pipeline owners, coal mining companies, coal miners, and utilities whose power plants use coal. Most important of all, it is detested by consumers who would feel the shock of higher gasoline prices and higher electricity prices, despite the rebates. And, to most consumers the benefits seem speculative, long-run, and accrue as much to foreigners as U.S. citizens. Why should Americans pay more at the pump to help Bangladeshis? The carbon tax is just terrible, terrible politics.

⁴ For a recent and sophisticated analysis highlighting the political complementarity between carbon taxes and renewables, see Gernot Wagner et al, "Energy Policy: Push Renewables to Spur Carbon Pricing,"

Nature September 2 2015
<http://www.nature.com/news/energy-policy-push-renewables-to-spur-carbon-pricing-1.18260>

⁵ Though California has instituted its own carbon tax.

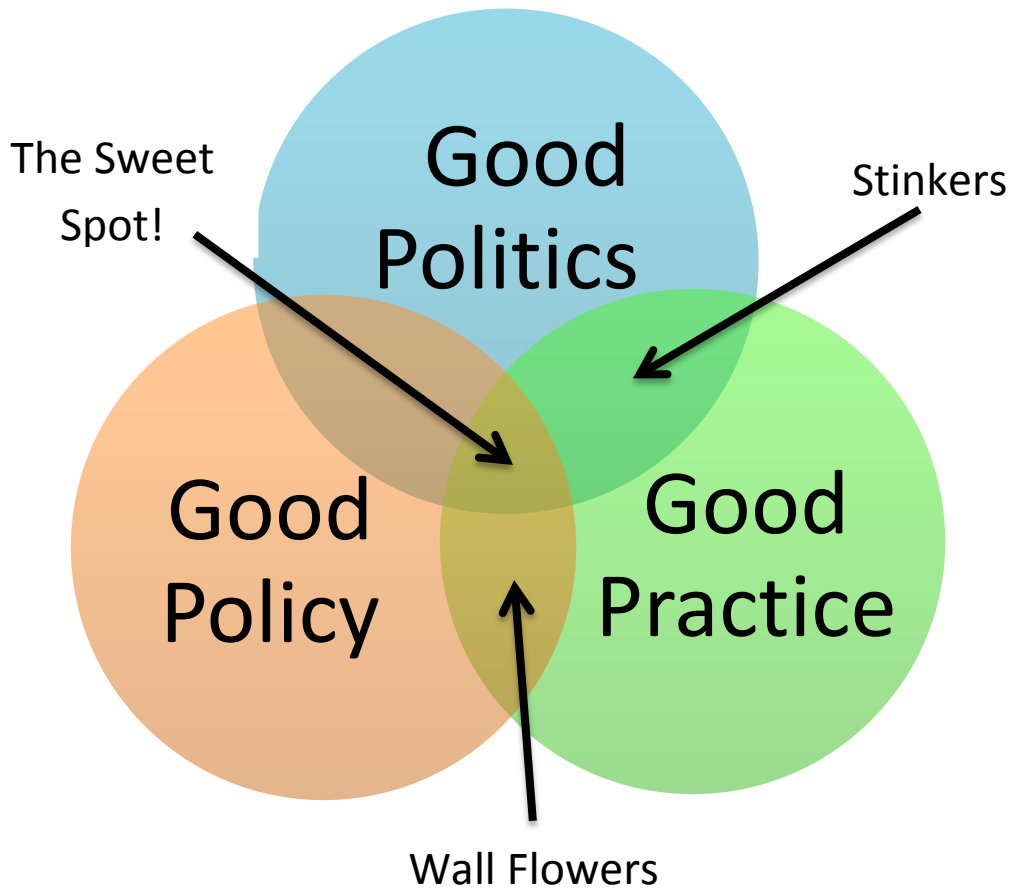


Figure 2. The “Good Policy/Good Practice/Good Politics” Paradigm. Overlap regions display the properties of the separate circles.

Some Wall Flowers, like the carbon tax, seem doomed to remain only a bright idea. But some are discovered by a Prince or Princess Charming who finds a way to bring them to the political ball.

Example

Another Wall Flower Policy: Congestion Pricing

Have you ever been stuck in a traffic jam in rush hour? Have you seen traffic in a major city in complete gridlock or inching along at a snail’s pace? The human and economic costs of traffic

congestion are enormous. So, what can be done about it?

My former colleague, Nobel Laureate William Vickrey, came up with a seemingly pie-in-the-sky

solution for the problem: congestion pricing. The idea is simple: charge people a higher fee to use bridges or streets at peak load hours, and a lower fee at low usage periods. People who have flexibility will shift their traveling from peak periods to off-peak periods, or use public transit.⁶

In fact, modern technology makes it fairly easy to implement Vickrey's wild idea and several big cities around the world have done so, notably Singapore, central London, and Stockholm. For those places the result are in: big drops in congestion, sizeable increases in traffic speeds, boosts in mass transit use, and reduction in air pollution.

In 2007-08, New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg proposed a congestion pricing plan for the core business district of the city, lower Manhattan.⁷ The plan would have imposed a tax on trucks and cars entering that part of the city during peak hours in week days. The resulting fees would have been used for mass transit projects. Voters

in the city and around the state liked the plan, by about 2:1 margins. So did a broad coalition of businesses and environmentalists. But some near-by suburbanites (especially in some neighborhoods in Queens and Brooklyn) opposed it. The plan would have forced auto users from these locations to change their driving behavior into Manhattan (perhaps shifting to buses or subways) or pay the fees.

Under New York law, New York City could not impose the pricing scheme unilaterally but had to seek state legislation to implement the plan. Unfortunately for Bloomberg's plan, the near-by suburbanites were a powerful block in the state legislature. And they had a champion in Speaker Sheldon Silver. Although Silver actually represented lower Manhattan, as Democratic leader he paid careful attention to the desires of Democratic state legislators from the suburban districts.⁸ Silver blocked congestion pricing, refusing to allow the measure to come to a vote, and it died.⁹

Congestion pricing in London found a successful Prince Charming in the form of the flamboyant London mayor, Ken Livingston. In New York City, Mike Bloomberg tried but failed to become congestion pricing's Prince Charming – but perhaps if he had been a better political analyst he might have managed it. *Proponents of Wall Flower policies need practical political analysis if ever their good, practical policy is to make it into law and remain there.*

⁶ For an introduction see *Congestion Pricing – A Primer*, Federal Highway Administration http://ops.fhwa.dot.gov/publications/fhwahop08039/cp_prim1_00.htm

⁷ For a quick overview, see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Congestion_pricing_in_New_York_City. A useful analysis of the politics of NYC congestion pricing is offered in Bruce Schaller, "New York City's Congestion Pricing Experience and Implications for Road Pricing Acceptance in the

United States," *Transport Policy* 17:266-73 (2010) http://www.nyc.gov/html/dot/downloads/pdf/schaller_paper_2010trb.pdf

⁸ Silver resigned his position in 2015 after his arrest in a \$4 million corruption and kickback scheme.

⁹ In the Module "Pivotal Politics" we will examine how to analyze legislative politics to identify and address choke points like that posed by Speaker Silver.

In contrast to the lovely but lonely Wall Flowers, some bad policies unfortunately make for great politics. In the diagram, I have labeled the space of these policies as “Stinkers.”

Nobody loves a Stinker ... true or false? The fundamental property of a Stinker policy is that it makes society as a whole worse off – poorer, sicker, less educated, less safe, more miserable – than if the Stinker had never come into existence in the first place. But Stinker policies typically don’t make *everyone* worse off. Usually they make a few people better off, sometimes *much* better off. They just do so to the detriment of everyone else. The few winners love their Stinker despite the damage it does.

Example

Sweet But Stinking: Sugar Subsidies

One of the most protected U.S. industries is sugar growing.¹⁰ In fact, the U.S. uses a battery of policies to keep sugar prices high, including price supports, tariff rate quotas, and marketing regulations.

Well, so what? The first effect of these policies is to raise the price of food for consumers, transferring the money to sugar growers. Estimates of the size of the transfer range from about \$1 billion dollars annually to three or four times that amount. This transfer thus amounts to about a \$10 “tax” on average for each American; in turn, the money goes to a relatively small number of sugar growers, yielding each about \$85,000 on average. Almost incredibly, though, much of the money flows to single family in Florida, the Fanjul family of Palm Beach.

This politically powerful family grows much of its sugar in the Everglades, wrecking environmental havoc on extremely fragile and valuable wetlands. The distortion in the sugar market almost certainly reduces employment in the U.S. In addition, by blocking imports of cheap sugar from poor countries in the Caribbean and Africa, the subsidies impoverish very poor people abroad.

So, the subsidies rip off American sugar consumers, many of whom are relatively poor; contribute to environmental damage; kill American jobs; and hurt very poor people abroad – all to benefit a tiny handful of extremely wealthy and politically connected American sugar producers. This is what Stinker policies look like.

Opponents of Stinkers need to recognize that being on the right side isn’t enough. *Opponents of Stinkers need practical political analysis in order to stop the bad boys in their tracks, or at least wear them down around the edges.*

¹⁰ An excellent overview is Kimberley Elliot, “Big Sugar and the Political Economy of US Agricultural Policy,” Center for Global Development, 2005. http://www.cgdev.org/files/2794_file_CGDEV_BigSu

[gar3a.pdf](#) . A recent update on policy is “Sugar and Sweeteners,” Economic Research Service, Department of Agriculture <http://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/crops/sugar-sweeteners/policy.aspx>

Of course, what we really want are policies in the Sweet Spot: policies that make the world a better place, are easy to implement, and are politically feasible and politically sustainable.

Example

A Sweet Spot Policy: The Earned Income Tax Credit

The Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) is a tax subsidy given to relatively poor working people – often single women with small children – in order to subsidize their working. The reason is, many of the jobs poor people can get don't actually pay a living wage, so it becomes attractive for poor people just to quit and apply for welfare or work in risky illegal markets. The EITC, which at present provides the average beneficiary about \$3,000 per year, makes it possible and attractive for people like this to take and hold a regular job (you have to work to get the EITC). The cost of the program in 2013 was about \$56 billion, making it the third largest anti-poverty program in the U.S. (after Medicaid and Food Stamps).¹¹

Unlike an increase in the minimum wage, the EITC does not create an incentive for employers to cut jobs.¹² In fact, the EITC is essentially a negative income tax of the general kind originally proposed by free-market guru Milton Friedman. The income tax link makes the program easy to implement since it can just piggyback on existing income tax returns.

Still, the EITC clearly takes money from the wealthy and redistributes it to the poor. So one

might expect the program to be opposed by the wealthy, in the same way the estate tax is anathema to extremely wealthy individuals. Critically, however, the EITC, while nominally going to poor working people, actually subsidizes the labor force of companies that employ many poor people. In other words, it cuts labor costs for companies like fast food restaurants, hotels, or other service industries. This subsidy for business creates some powerful allies for the EITC. And since the EITC goes only to working people, it does not evoke the moralistic distaste many middle class tax-payers feel for means-tested welfare programs.

Support for the EITC has been bipartisan: Republicans like it as a business subsidy and an alternative to raising the minimum wage, while Democrats like it as an income transfer program.

Finally, the EITC appears to make a big difference in the lives of poor people. Straight-forward studies by the Census and Bureau of Labor Statistics estimate that the EITC cuts poverty rates in the U.S. by at least 3% (lifting some 9 million people out of poverty) while fancier studies by labor economists put the effects at

¹¹ These workers pay payroll taxes, which of course they would not if they were not employed.

¹² The extent to which the minimum wage actually does this is somewhat controversial. For example, a famous study found little adverse impact of minimum wage increases on employment in fast food restaurants (Card and Krueger). Perhaps fast

food restaurant have cut their labor so extensively that an increase in the minimum wage just doesn't hurt employment there. But most economists believe the minimum wage leads some firms to cut some jobs. See for instance how the CBO "scores" minimum wage legislation.

over twice that size.¹³ Other (but not all) studies show that the EITC improves the health of recipients (life is less stressful and they can afford to get medical care), improves the health of their infants, and improves the test scores of recipients' children, so more go to college and fewer have children as teen-agers.¹⁴

In sum, while hardly perfect the EITC is probably one of the most effective poverty reduction programs in the U.S., it's easy to implement, and it's at least politically sustainable if not terribly popular. This is what Sweet Spot policies look like.

Sweet Spot policies have great cost-benefit ratios, so society as a whole is actually enriched and improved by them. They are easy to implement, perhaps because they are self-enforcing or can be run by a handful of relatively ordinary people. And, they are attractive politically, or at least not unattractive.

But even Sweet Spot policies can have enemies.

Example

A Controversial Sweet Spot Policy: Mandatory Immunizations

Immunizations are probably the best technology ever invented by modern medicine: one or two shots and you *never* get sick from truly horrible diseases! It's like something out of *Star Trek*. And, the cost of most immunizations is fairly low, leading to astounding benefit-cost ratios even accounting for the generally modest adverse side-effects (in a tiny number of cases the side effects are severe).

Not surprisingly, the vast majority of parents happily get immunizations for their children. Still, some people don't, out of poverty, ignorance, sloth, sincere religious conviction (e.g., Christian Scientists or members of the

Dutch Reform Church), a cynical desire to free-ride on the "herd immunity" of the immunized, or out-and-out delusional thinking.

In turn, unimmunized children create nasty epidemics and unnecessary deaths, disability, and suffering – including for small infants that soon would have been immunized by their conscientious parents (immunizations begin only at 12 months). From this perspective, "bad" parents sicken, cripple, or even kill the innocent children of "good" parents.

Not surprisingly some states require (almost all) parents to immunize their children, arguably a

¹³ Kathleen Short, "The Supplemental Poverty Measure 2013," Current Population Reports, Bureau of the Census (October 2014) <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2014/demo/p60-251.pdf>. See also Hillary Hoynes and Ankur Patel, "Effective Policy for

Reducing Inequality? The Earned Income Tax Credit and the Distribution of Income" NBER Working Paper 21340 (July 2015)

¹⁴ For various references, see <http://www.vox.com/2015/7/16/8974745/eitc-study-hoynes-patel>

Sweet Spot policy. Recently however such policies have been opposed by people in the “deluded” category: those taken in by repudiated junk science, bizarre internet rumors, and misguided celebrity attacks on immunization (e.g., the “Jenny McCarthy phenomenon”). The lesson: even Sweet Spot policies can have enemies.

Sweet Spot policies don't create themselves. And even they need savvy defenders on occasion. *Without practical political analysis, you can't identify the Sweet Spot policies, bring them into life, and protect them when they need help.*

4. The Political Analyst's Toolbox

Serious policy analysis requires serious political analysis. So, how can you learn how to do serious political analysis? As always, nothing works better than lots of talent plus lots of practice! But if you aren't Lyndon Johnson or Franklyn Roosevelt and are just a beginner, how can you become at least somewhat proficient at practical political analysis?

Over the years, political scientists and political economists have devised a set of models to make sense of policy making. To be truthful, this work really isn't much use to practitioners, nor was it meant to be. However, it can be turned into something quite useful: practical frameworks and handy tools that help practitioners analyze a political situation, devise feasible plans to enact policies, and formulate strategies to implement them sustainably.¹⁵ I don't want to exaggerate or over-sell: these tools aren't magic. Nor are they rocket science. In general they are most valuable to beginners since experienced pros use the ideas almost instinctively. But, on average they do work and if you master them and use them your policy batting average will improve.

So, what tools do you need?

To answer the question, it's helpful to think about *the policy life cycle* (we examine the policy life cycle in more detail in Module 2). At least conceptually, policies move through four stages: issue emergence; policy creation; policy articulation; and policy implementation. Who is active, what they try to accomplish, which political institutions are most important, and – critically – which analytical tools are essential, all shift over the policy life cycle. Table 1 lays out the details.

In *issue emergence*, policy activists try to frame an issue, raise its salience, and put it on the agenda of policy makers. Doing so often requires collective action by group members (individuals or firms) and strategic use of the media. To understand issue emergence, key analytic skills thus include collective action analysis and media analysis.

In *policy creation*, congressmen craft and enact statutes, often at the behest of or in collaboration with the executive. Then, courts decide on the statute's constitutionality. Several analytic skills are valuable for understanding policy creation. The first is interest group assessment, indicating the broad line-up of

¹⁵ For the most part, the innovators in this effort have been political economists teaching MBAs in business schools, see for example David Baron's textbook *Business and Its Environment*.

interests and the likely tactics the actors will employ. Then, for specific policy alternatives coalition appraisal is vital – how strong are the legislative coalitions backing or opposing a proposal, what are the

Stage in Life Cycle	Key Players	Key Activities	Key Institutions	Key Analytic Skills
<i>Issue Emergence</i>	Activists, Interest group members, reporters, political candidates, public	Framing issues, claiming attention, mobilizing groups	Interest groups, media, parties	Collective action analysis, media analysis
<i>Policy Creation</i>	Congressmen, president, firms, interest groups, Supreme Court justices (high court), academics & policy entrepreneurs	Creating alternatives, setting legislative agendas, lobbying, building & breaking coalitions, enacting statutes, litigating statutes (constitutional interpretation)	Congress, presidency, Supreme Court, think tanks	Interest group assessment, coalition appraisal, persuasion model, legislative pivotal politics
<i>Policy Elaboration</i>	Agency civil servants, agency political appointees, central executive political appointees, legislators, firms, interest groups, executive lawyers, administrative law judges	Writing regulations, lobbying regulations, litigating regulations (statutory interpretation)	Operating agencies, independent regulatory agencies, Presidential management agencies, Congress, interest groups, Department of Justice, DC circuit court, US Supreme Court	Regulatory pivotal politics
<i>Policy Implementation</i>	Agency civil servants, agency political appointees, central executive political appointees, contractors, interest group activists, public sector union leaders, firms, legislators, president, reporters	Administering programs (organizing, budgeting, staffing, operating, contracting), managing crises, creating policy blowback, managing policy blowback	Operating agencies, Congress, presidency, interest groups, public sector unions, media	Performance management

Table 1. Different Phases in the Issue Life Cycle Require Different Analytic Skills. Later stages often call for analytic tools from earlier stages. For example, to manage policy blowback may require a legislative political analysis using the tools associated with policy creation.

vulnerabilities of the two coalitions, and where are the opportunities to strengthen them? Second, persuasion and lobbying are important activities in policy creation. So, analyzing persuasion opportunities is vital: who is the right target, what is the most effective message, and what are the best pathways of communication? To make sense of these matters one needs a persuasion model. Finally, because legislative action is so central to policy creation, one needs to understand when policy windows in the legislature are open and when they are closed, and what policies (if any) can thread the legislative needle. This is the subject of legislative pivotal politics.

In *policy elaboration*, the rather broad mandates of statutes are made operational. Perhaps the central activity here is writing regulations. As a result, agency civil servants, the political appointees who are their immediate bosses, and the central administration appointees who oversee both, are critical players – as are the interest groups who fight hard to shape or even kill regulations. One needs to understand how the regulatory state functions: when are regulatory windows open or closed, and which regulations can pass through the many gates and checkpoints in the process? This is the subject of regulatory pivotal politics.

Finally, policy implementation puts the “boots on the ground” (more likely, very sensible work shoes). Again, agency civil servants are the key actors who carry out policies – mailing checks, teaching children, arresting criminals, inspecting factories, testing water, processing applications, conducting scientific research, and so on. However, because so much of U.S. government is actually farmed out to contractors (including state and local governments), they also are important actors. Public administration is a huge area but to get some insight into the politics of policy implementation, a special tool is the performance management matrix.

These eight tools, plus one more (the “Four I’s”), create a rather well-stocked toolbox for practical political analysis. (See Figure 3).

Political Analysis Toolbox

Inside the Toolbox

- 4 I's
- Interest group matrix
- Collective action worksheet
- Coalition worksheet
- Persuasion model
- Media response analysis
- Pivotal politics model
- Regulation analysis
- Measurement matrix for implementation



Figure 3. What's In the Box? The Political Analyst's Toolkit

The 4 I's get you situated, they are the place for beginning. The *Interest Group Matrix* identifies the type of politics you face, and thus what tactics to expect from opponents and what tactics to use yourself. A key concept is political organization. The *Collective Action Workshop* follows up by analyzing whether, and suggesting how, a group can get organized effectively for politics. The *Coalition Worksheet* allows you to identify strong versus weak legislative coalitions, and is invaluable for building and breaking coalitions. The *Persuasion Model* helps identify what messages to employ in elite versus mass lobbying and persuasion. *Media Response Analysis* predicts how the media cover issues, and thus complements the Persuasion Model. The *Pivotal Politics Model* provides a powerful tool to analyze legislative feasibility, identifying when legislative policy windows are open, when closed, and the political content of laws that can thread the legislative needle. *Regulation Analysis* adopts three earlier tools – the IG Matrix, the Coalition Worksheet, and the Pivotal Politics model – to regulation writing. These are essential tools for navigating the politics of the Administrative State. Finally, the *Measurement Matrix* looks at a vital issue in the politics of implementation. It identifies when performance-based management will work well, when its difficult, and when it may be a disaster.

If you master these tools, you will soon move beyond the beginner category.

So, let's get started!

Nutshell Review of Module 1

1. Political analysis is an essential part of policy analysis. Without acute political analysis by supporters, many good ideas don't become policy; conversely, without effective political analysis by opponents, many bad ideas become policy all too easily.
2. Political analysis focuses on the political feasibility and political sustainability of policies.
3. Practical political analysis needs tools to assist in policy emergence. You can find these tools in the Political Analyst's Toolbox.

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