

Department of Public Administration & Policy
School of Public & International Affairs
University of Georgia

Ph.D. Comprehensive Examination
Public Policy
Fall 2023

DIRECTIONS: Develop comprehensive, coherent, and well-flowing essays in response to your chosen questions in Parts I, II, and III. Please choose one question from each Part. Indicate by Part and number which question you are responding to at the beginning of each essay (i.e. PART I Question 1). Each question will be weighted equally. Cite appropriately throughout all of your work and provide full references at the end of each essay. Remember the 5,000 word limit for this exam, inclusive of all essays but not including reference pages.

PART I. Please answer one of the following two questions:

1. With foundations in the third-generation policy implementation literature, the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF) has emerged as a hybrid of “top-down” and “bottom-up” approaches to explain the policy process with particular focus on problems characterized by goal conflict and technical disputes among various actors from different levels of government (Sabatier 1986; Sabatier and Weible 2007). This research program has many characteristics that can be mapped onto Ostrom’s Institutional Analysis and Development framework (IAD), but the ACF differs notably in three ways. Please describe their similarities and differences for the following:
 - how their variables explain the policy process,
 - their key limitations, and
 - how these lenses align with Ostrom’s conceptualization of frameworks, theories, and models.

2. A critical “stage” of the policy process entails that in which agenda setting occurs. Drawing from the Advocacy Coalition Framework and the Multiple Streams Framework, define agenda setting and describe i) when this takes place in the policy cycle, ii) the different types of policy stakeholders that are involved in setting the decision-making agenda and the role(s) they play, iii) and the factors that shape when, whether, and how policy alternatives are included on the decision-making agenda. Finally, what factors may influence whether an agenda item is considered in the formulation of a policy? Discuss two barriers that may prevent a policy alternative on the agenda from ultimate inclusion for policy design.

PART II. Please answer one of the following two questions:

3. The concept of a public good can sometimes be difficult to explain. Some things, like roads or the U.S. military defense are sometimes offered as examples. Other goods, like vaccinations against SARS-CoV-2 can be more controversial with people in the real. Thus, there are questions about the strengths and weaknesses of the concept of public goods and other explanations for public provision. Sometimes, many people in society can believe one thing is a public good while others fervently believe it should be a private good. Primary and secondary education (kindergarten through 12th grade) is one example. Explore the public good character of child and youth education – providing theory-based arguments on both sides. Your answer should address the following:
 - How does the concept of non-excludability explain why government delivers the service?
 - How do the concepts of externalities explain why government delivers the service?
 - Contrast arguments (for and against) education as a publicly provided good from an economic/efficiency perspective to arguments based on social justice goals.

4. Under well-known conditions of perfect competition, non-increasing returns, and the absence of price externalities, the market allocation of goods and services attains a point on the Pareto frontier (First Welfare Theorem). Therefore, the market, considered as a collective mechanism for making social decisions, maximizes a particular social welfare function. Economists often explicitly or implicitly assume that moves along the Pareto frontier in any direction – moves that transfer wealth from one member of society to another – are of no benefit to society precisely because they represent moves from one maximal point on the social welfare function to another.
 - Discuss why every point on the Pareto frontier maximizes some social welfare function.
 - Assume that there is a declining marginal utility of wealth, what does the market social welfare function imply?
 - If we use the Kaldor-Hicks criteria for cost benefit analysis what types of policies will be favored? Why?
 - Contrast this Pareto-based policy process to one that is driven by a formal theory of justice (perhaps using John Rawls’s “Veil of Ignorance” metaphor). Discuss a policy where you would be opposed to using the “market” social welfare function and would favor a Rawlsian justice frame.

PART III. Please answer one of the following two questions:

5. Consider the opioid epidemic. Over the past two decades, the rate of opioid mortality has been going up around the U.S., with some areas experiencing more than a 400% increase in annual opioid-related deaths since the year 2000. Policymakers have noted that the increase in opioid mortality is associated with a contemporaneous increase in opioid prescriptions being written and filled through legitimate pharmacies. As a result, some states, though not all, have passed policies that seek to reduce opioid prescribing, hoping that this will reduce opioid overdose deaths. One popular state policy is mandatory Prescription Drug Monitoring Programs (PDMPs), which require that physicians check a state database on their patients' opioid use before writing a prescription and then report any prescriptions they do write to the PDMP for future reference. Assume that you have data on county-level opioid prescribing and county-level opioid-related overdose deaths.
 - a. Outline a theoretical justification for why one might expect that a PDMP could change opioid-related overdose deaths. What is the behavior, and what is the source of the behavior, that the policy targets?
 - b. Discuss one threat to the internal validity of a regression model that estimates the effect of mandatory PDMPs on opioid mortality using your knowledge of policy process. (Hint: Is there some way that the coefficient on the PDMP variable could be biased?) Discuss a solution to that threat to internal validity.
 - c. Discuss what other variables would you need to control for when estimating the effect of mandatory PDMPs on county-level opioid-related overdose deaths.
 - d. Devise an estimation strategy for assessing the effect of mandatory PDMPs on opioid mortality that accounts for the threat to internal validity you identified in b. above. Explain this approach in detail. Present the estimating equation. Discuss the interpretation of your key policy variable, and how you would assess the strength of the model.
 - e. Explain how the results of what you would (hypothetically) learn could be used in policymaking or management.

6. Privatization of government services through contracting out with private (including nonprofit) providers has been an alternative for government for centuries in the U.S. and other nations. Governments have utilized this alternative increasingly in recent decades. Consider the challenge of assessing a privatized service by comparing it to a government-provided version of the same service. What theoretical and practical difficulties are there in making these sorts of comparisons? Explain challenges in research design and analytical methods that such comparisons raise. Explain endogeneity and suggest an endogeneity problem that might arise in this study. Choose an example of a service that government is providing, but that a private or nonprofit organization is also providing under a government contract. Suggest a research design that you would use to compare the two forms of provision, on cost of provision of the service, taking into account the quality of the service provided.