

Public Policy

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third level

What are Policy Instruments?

Policy instruments are techniques at the disposal of the government to implement policy objectives. After the issue/problem is defined, tools are found to achieve the desired outcome. Examples of policy instruments used are expenditures, regulations, partnerships, exchange of information, taxation, licensing, direct provision of services, doing nothing, contracts, subsidies and authority.

The purpose of policy instruments are to:

- Achieve behaviour change within individuals
- Realize social, political or economic conditions
- Provide services to the public

Governments choice of policy instruments is bound most importantly by past actions (policy instruments the current government has used in the past). Other restraints include financial, social, international and cultural pressures. The political framework may be the largest constraint.

The types of policy instruments available to government include :

- Doing nothing : decide not to intervene. There may be no problem, financial constraints or precedents that cause the government to choose to do nothing. Or, the problem may be self-corrective

- Information-based : influence people through knowledge transfer, communication and moral persuasion (behaviour is based on knowledge, beliefs and values). This is the least coercive of the instruments

Expenditure-based : money is used as a direct instrument to achieve outcome (grants, contributions, vouchers, etc) .

Regulation : government s role is to command and prohibit - this is the most widely used instrument/ tool. It defines norms & acceptable behaviour or limits activities

Acting directly : providing a direct service to achieve outcome (rather than working through citizens or organizations to achieve goals). Examples include education, garbage collection, Parks and Recreation