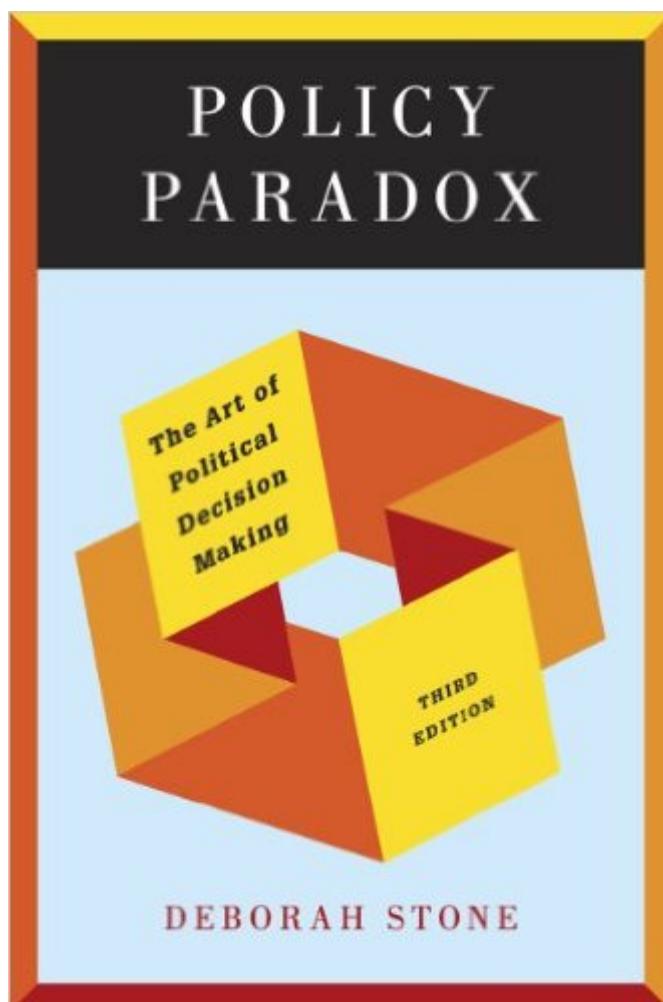


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# Policy Paradox: The Art Of Political Decision Making (Third Edition)



## **Synopsis**

The most accessible policy text available. Policy making is a political struggle over values and ideas. By exposing the paradoxes that underlie even seemingly straightforward policy decisions, Policy Paradox shows students that politics cannot be cleansed from the process in favor of rationality. • Author Deborah Stone has fully revised and updated this popular text, which now includes many paradoxes that have arisen since September 11. Examples throughout the book have been updated, and the prose has been streamlined to make a great read even better.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

This is a fascinating and thought provoking book on political decision making. I have used it as a text in my doctoral course on policy analysis for nearly two decades. She juxtaposes two models in this book. (1) The rationality project. This is where we use rational approaches to policy making, including economic analysis. The idea is to use neutral and objective data to make the best policy decision possible. The model for society and its functioning is the market, with its emphasis on self-interest and rational calculation. (2) On the other hand, she points out that this does not describe the political world. Here (see the chart on page 35), we see that community is important (not just self-interest), altruism has a role to play, cooperation and competition coexist, and so on. Politics is an arena where there is contestation over facts, values, even numbers. There is no objective, neutral evaluation of facts. The very nature of the economic, rational approach is contested. The volume explores the debates between the political and rational models in such

arenas as the goals for society, the nature of deciding on which problems should be addressed, and how solutions are addressed. This is a thought-provoking work that will leave readers thinking about the nature of policy making and what is at stake.

This book is a classic for good reason. It lays out concepts clearly, intelligently, and convincingly, all while sounding conversational and not overly technical, as is a pitfall of many academic publications. Stone's frameworks are just that--frameworks--and are useful for structuring one's analysis of policy, while also recognizing that no real world situation fits the frameworks perfectly. My one large critique of Stone is her extremely apparent liberal bias. While the ideas she presents are not inherently liberal or conservative (though one could certainly make the argument that the 'market model' she argues against is a conservative one and the 'polis model' she champions is a liberal one), the examples she draws to illustrate them are biased towards a liberal perspective. Whenever she presents something 'bad' done in a policy situation, it is almost always a Republican or conservative doing it, while liberal ideas and actions are almost always presented as the 'right thing' to do or a compassionate application of policy. Even as a liberal myself, it got a bit grating towards the end of the book. At times in certain chapters it seemed like Stone was soapboxing about an issue, even if that issue was only tangentially relevant to the topic at hand. If you can get past the bias, and perhaps only skim the examples she uses, there is still a lot to get out of this book.

I noticed that Dr. Stone's latest work was what can be called a "best seller" in the Policy arena on , since its debut December 2011 (roughly number 1 for nearly a month, then at least the top 20 thereafter). I was surprised that as of July 3, 2012 not even one person reviewed the book. Perhaps everyone is speechless. But, it really is a good book. Simply put, this third edition of Policy Paradox is an excellent work for anyone seriously wanting to change the world for the better by understanding the political arguments that undergird social policies, which often, and erroneously appear rationally constructed. By understanding how policy can be a struggle for ideas and the control of ambiguity in communities, which she refers to as the "polis," the policy analyst/advocate will be better prepared to jump into the debates by posing alternative viewpoints that ought to more closely adhere to fundamental humanistic principles of social justice and human rights. Having used the previous editions of her book for roughly fifteen years in my policy classes, I must say, that this book with its updated examples and now a new addition of "welfare" ( in addition to liberty, security, equity, and efficiency) as worthwhile goals for policy, which she says unite us as they divide us, is a

must read for those from a variety of disciplines, who wish to engage in policy analysis and implementation. It is also extremely well written as the previous editions, with boxes that adequately summarize major points. Interspersed also with amusing anecdotes and even cartoons, I am sure that the reader will not be disappointed with her lively, yet serious style, for as she reminds us, when it comes to policy, the stakes are high.

Deborah Stone makes complicated policy issues easy to understand. Used this book for a public policy course as part of my undergrad, and actually found myself looking forward to weekly readings of the text. I would read this again in my free time.

Deborah Stone presents some clear logic in the community building approach to policy. The book is well written and unambiguous in its suggestions, and carries a common theme across the chapters, tying them together nicely. Understand, however, that this is not a policy process book without a political position: the perspective is undoubtedly leftist leaning towards socialist. There is nothing wrong with such a political perspective (agree or disagree), but it is vital to be clear that this is a politically motivated opinion. Use this book to expand your horizons and learn about one side of a complex issue, but be sure to consider alternative points of view when doing so. Similarly, if you are considering using this within the context of a course on policy making, be sure to leverage additional resources to balance the viewpoints.

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