



The Politics of Problem Definition: Shaping the Policy Agenda

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At the nexus of politics and policy development lies persistent conflict over where problems come from, what they signify, and, based on the answers to those questions, what kinds of solutions should be sought. Policy researchers call this process "problem definition."

Written for both scholars and students, this book explains how and why social issues come to be defined in different ways, how these definitions are expressed in the world of politics, and what consequences these definitions have for government action and agenda-setting dynamics. The authors demonstrate in two theoretical chapters and seven provocative case studies how problem definition affects policymaking for high-profile social issues like AIDS, drugs, and sexual harassment as well as for problems like traffic congestion, plant closings, agricultural tax benefits, and air transportation.

By examining the way social problems are framed for political discussion, the authors illuminate the unique impact of beliefs, values, ideas, and language on the public policymaking process and its outcomes. In so doing, they establish a common vocabulary for the study of problem definition; review and critique the insights of existing work on the topic; and identify directions for future research.

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