



UNIVERSITI  
TEKNOLOGI  
MARA

# THE ANATOMY *of* PUBLIC POLICY: RHETORIC vs. **REALITY**



**YARINA** Ahmad

UiTM  
Professorial  
Lecture

# Table of Contents

<i>List of Figures</i>	ix
<i>Preface</i>	xi
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	xv
<i>List of Abbreviations</i>	xvii

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION TO PUBLIC POLICY** 1

---

■ Fundamentals of Public Policy: Rhetorically	1
■ Historic Evolution of Public Policy	2
■ Definition of Public Policy	3
■ Models for Public Policy Decision-Making	4
■ The Nature of Public Policy	5
■ Key Characteristics of Public Policy	7
■ The Role of Public Policy in Governance	9
■ Public Policy from the Malaysian Perspective	10
■ Constitutional Framework for Public Policy in Malaysia	12
■ Developing and Formulating Public Policy in Malaysia	13
■ The Reality of Public Policy in Malaysia: The Ugly Truth	16
■ Conclusion	26

# *Preface*

Public policy is essential to contemporary governance because it establishes priorities, allocates funds, and shapes millions of people's daily lives. But all too frequently, its grandiose rhetoric clashes with the obstinate realities of execution. A desire to investigate that crucial gap led to the creation of *The Anatomy of Public Policy: Rhetoric vs. Reality*, which looks at how policies are created, why they fail in practice, and how they can be re-engineered to achieve their goals.

Three historic national research projects that provide unique perspectives on Malaysia's policy environment are at the core of this investigation. Firstly, a thorough assessment of the "new norms" public health campaign that served as the foundation for Malaysia's COVID-19 response can be found in the *Research on the Impact of New Norms Campaign*. Secondly, the *National Border Security Index* shows how multi-agency, community-based efforts to safeguard our land and sea borders have changed over time. Thirdly, the *National Security Index* is a dynamic tool for measuring national resilience that condenses nine fundamental values, from social justice to territorial integrity.

The theory is covered in detail in Chapter 1, along with the historical development of public policy, its distinguishing characteristics, and its crucial function in contemporary statecraft.

## FUNDAMENTALS OF PUBLIC POLICY: RHETORICALLY

Public policy is a goal-oriented course of action taken by governments to address public concerns and achieve societal objectives. It is used as a strategic tool to solve problems, maintain national stability, and ensure long-term development progress. Governments use public policy to address social issues like housing and welfare, combat threats like crime and illegal drug trafficking, and advance economic and political objectives like revenue generation and sustainable development. In essence, public policy refers to the decisions and actions taken by official government bodies and agencies that have a direct impact on the public interest.

As the cornerstone of governance, public policy shapes a country's legal, economic, and social landscape. It establishes a structured framework of laws, regulations, and strategic actions designed to achieve national and global goals (United Nations, 2015). More than a set of rules, public policy is a dynamic and ever-changing process that influences decision-making at all levels of government. Its impact extends beyond politics to include economic growth, social welfare, education, healthcare, national security, and environmental sustainability.

Public policymaking is a systematic process that culminates in a policy decision and subsequent implementation. Throughout history, various types of governments—oligarchies, monarchies, aristocracies, tyrannies, and democracies—have relied on structured policies to manage challenges, allocate resources, and respond to their citizens' changing needs. Regardless of the governing system, public policy is an inherent function of governance that constantly adapts to meet current challenges (Tarr, 2024).

Political ideologies, societal values, historical contexts, and economic conditions all have an impact on how public policy is developed (Cairney, 2014). Other than that, public policy

# THE ANATOMY *of* PUBLIC POLICY

RHETORIC VS. REALITY

## THE

Anatomy of Public Policy: Rhetoric vs. Reality examines why even well-crafted policies fail and how to reimagine them for long-term success. This book combines theory and evidence from three Malaysian studies: the Impact of New Norms Campaign (COVID-19), the National Border Security Index, and the National Security Index. The book commences by scrutinising the development of policy and emphasising the shortcomings of top-down mandates, including insufficient coordination, ambiguous KPIs, and unpredictable funding. The case studies of Malaysia's pandemic response, border-control innovations, and security strategy show how integrated governance, community engagement, and data-driven coordination can overcome complex challenges. The story culminates in the Strategic Resilience Cycle, a fourteen-pillar model that transforms episodic reforms into long-lasting institutions. This volume provides a practical guide for policymakers, civil society leaders, and scholars to bridge the gap between rhetoric and real-world impact.

**Yarina Ahmad** is a Professor of policy and social studies at Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) and a lifetime member of the Malaysian Society for Higher Education Policy & Research Development. She has led 16 of 46 research projects worth RM5.8 million and received multiple prestigious awards, including the National Book Award (Best Editing), Best Researcher (Social Sciences and Humanities) at the Academic University Award 2020, and the UiTM Top Talent Award 2022. She also received the UiTM Excellent Service Award (2015, 2016, 2017, 2023) and the Monash Postgraduate Publication Award (2013). Her work includes Malaysia's first COVID-19 pandemic research on the impact of cultivating new norms and the first National Security Index, both recognised by the Malaysia Book of Records. She has led key national studies on national security, border security, integrity, and drug policy. Between 2014 and 2025, she graduated 15 PhD and 5 Master's students, making significant contributions to academic and national policy development.

