

## The Contribution of Symbolic Public Policy to Supporting the Political System

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### **Abstract:**

This study aims to clarify how symbolic public policy contributes to supporting the political system. To this end, two main axes were employed. The first axis was devoted to identifying the basic concepts representing the study variables, including public policy, symbolic public policy and the political system. The second axis addressed the importance of symbolic public policy for the political system. Finally, the study produced a set of results.

Accordingly, this research will focus on the following points:

Axis One: A conceptual introduction to the study variables

- Axis Two: The significance of symbolic public policy for the political system

**Keywords:** public policy, symbolic public policy, political system.

### **Introduction**

Today, public policies are one of the most important indicators of a state's success or failure. Historically and currently, the state plays a key role in formulating and implementing public policies. Governments actively work to develop, create and improve public policies. Every year, numerous regulations, laws and decrees are issued by executive authorities in collaboration with legislative authorities. These are then followed by a set of explanatory and clarifying instructions and procedures issued by the executive administrations.

Public policies reflect the ideology adopted by a political system in a given country and occupy a central position within state activity. They are the primary means through which governments intervene in society through various activities, such as laws, regulations, decrees, plans, actions and behaviours. Through these policies, governments become aware of public demands that have been placed at the forefront of their priorities. Therefore, public policy cannot be discussed separately from the political system and its processes as a whole.

Symbolic public policy is an important mechanism within the operations of the political system. It is adopted by the government to enhance the state's image and consolidate its position in the collective memory. This is based on the idea that strengthening national symbolism reinforces the state's moral foundations in the collective consciousness. This, in turn, strengthens the political system's ability to draw on society's moral support to implement its policies successfully. It also enhances the system's capacity to fulfil its commitments regarding national security, thereby ensuring its stability and continuity.

Accordingly, the following problem statement can be formulated:

How can symbolic public policy contribute to improving the performance of the political

### **Axis One: A Conceptual Introduction to the Study Variables**

Defining concepts is important and necessary, particularly since many of them are still the subject of considerable debate among researchers and thinkers. Therefore, clarifying and standardising concepts is the first and key step towards understanding the topic. Accordingly, through this axis, we will seek to define the most important concepts representing the study variables.

#### **First: Definition of Public Policy**

Public policy is a rights-based issue that must be correctly understood and internalised within contemporary reality. This is because it enables us to understand the official and unofficial roles involved in policy-making processes. It also helps us fulfil our duties and assert our rights. Public policy is the central issue for citizens, whether in relation to the political system or society as a whole. Above all, what matters to the individual is seeing the direct impact of the system and the actions of governments on his or her life and on society as a whole (e.g. health, housing, education, food, roads, transport, security, economic and social welfare).

As governments have authority over and responsibility towards all members of society, they must formulate public policies that address their actions, behaviours and motivations. Furthermore, public policy encompasses not only government action, but also inaction — i.e. abstention from taking action in specific situations<sup>1</sup>.

Thus, public policy can be defined as the political and non-political processes and procedures adopted by the government to reach an agreement on defining the problem, identifying alternatives for solving it and establishing criteria for comparing and prioritising these alternatives, with the aim of selecting the option to be proposed for adoption in the form of a binding public policy that incorporates a satisfactory solution to the problem<sup>2</sup>.

The term ‘public policy’ also refers to the general plan adopted by the ruling political party and government officials in positions of political authority regarding the provision of financial, human and monetary resources, as well as service resources, from various domestic, national and external sources. These resources are distributed to individuals in need, with the aim of turning them into productive citizens who contribute to society<sup>3</sup>.

Public policy can also be defined as the outcome of the interaction between inputs — represented by demands and government support — and outputs — represented by decisions concerning public interests. This reflects the performance of the political system in all areas (strategic, organisational, distributive, symbolic and international responsiveness) through the decisions and policies adopted<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup>- Bourich Riyadh “Public Policies from a Government Perspective”, Mediterranean Dialogue. Issue 05, 2013, p. 130.

<sup>2</sup>- Thamer Kamel Mohammad Al-Khazradji, Modern Political Systems and Public Policies. Amman: (A Modern Study in the Strategy of Managing Power), Amman: Majd Laoui Publishing and Distribution House, 2004, p. 28.

<sup>3</sup>- Ismail Ali Saad. and Hasan Mohammad Hasan, Theories, Doctrines, and Systems (Studies in Political Science). Egypt:University Knowledge House), 2005, p. 378.

<sup>4</sup>- Nadia Bonoua, "The Role of Civil Society in Formulating, Implementing and Evaluating Public Policy: A

In summary, public policies are the governmental activities or decisions required to implement programmes aimed at achieving political, economic and social objectives.

Public policies are generally formulated 'on behalf of the public'. Governments initiate them, and both the private and public sectors strive to comprehend them. They indicate what the government intends to do, or refrain from doing. Therefore, analysing these public policies requires a set of essential foundations that are constantly updated: collective and productive interventions that produce tangible results for different sectors; the methods and mechanisms through which the government intervenes; the information required and the steps involved in creating public policies; and the outcomes of these policies, including their evaluation and follow-up.

Thus, the manner in which governments address economic and social issues and problems can be understood as a series of governmental decisions aimed at dealing with a specific national issue<sup>5</sup>.

Accordingly, public policy can be described as an independent, dynamic and adaptable system that emerges from, and interacts with, its surrounding environment and related variables through vital responses. Public policy expresses the activity of official governmental institutions and their authority in the social environment through objectives, programmes and regular patterns of behaviour used to solve existing issues, confront present and future problems and anticipate the results. This process also involves determining the human, technical and moral resources and means required, preparing them as important systemic foundations for proper implementation and practice, and monitoring, overseeing, developing and assessing them in order to achieve tangible realisation of the public interest within society<sup>6</sup>.

### **Second: the concept of symbolic public policy**

Symbolic public policy is defined as policies to which the government gives clear and notable attention when adopting them. This gives the event a moral and ethical dimension through media coverage at appropriate times, thereby elevating the event and capturing the attention of society, influencing their thinking<sup>7</sup>.

It can also be defined as a form of public action that uses a set of symbols to influence citizens' emotions, perceptions and behaviours by emphasising the state's symbolic authority and power<sup>8</sup>.

Likewise, it can be defined as the creation and use of political symbols that strengthen the sense of responsible citizenship and national loyalty, encouraging citizens to make sacrifices

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Case Study of Algeria (1989–2009)'. Master's thesis (Al-Hadj Lakhdar University, Faculty of Law, Department of Political Science), 2009–10, p. 48.

<sup>5</sup>- Fay Al-Harbi, 'Types of Public Policies and Their Tools', accessed from: <https://ae.linkedin.com/pulse/%D8%A3%D9%86%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%B9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%A9-%D9%88-%D8%A3%D8%AF%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%AA%D9%87%D8%A7-fay-alharbi-4nghf>, accessed 25/05/2025.

<sup>6</sup>- Fahmi Khalifa Al-Fahdawi, Public Policy: A Comprehensive Perspective in Structure and Analysis. Amman: Dar Al-Masirah for Publishing, Distribution and Printing, 2001, p. 38.

<sup>7</sup>- Ibid., p. 76.

<sup>8</sup>- Al-Bachir Adi, 'Symbolic Policies: A Theoretical Approach', Tajseer Journal for Studies in Interdisciplinary Human and Social Sciences, Issue 2 (2025), p. 103.

and accept hardships for the betterment of their homeland<sup>9</sup>.

Furthermore, it is a policy through which political regimes aim to mobilise the masses and raise national enthusiasm through leaders' discourse about the nation's history, the values and ideologies of equality and democracy, and promises of future achievements and rewards. These slogans aim to improve citizens' intentions towards their leaders and strengthen their belief in their political programmes. This leads them to pay taxes willingly and comply with laws, reducing opposition to the regime and meaning they accept the government's legitimacy and its overall public policy<sup>10</sup>.

Symbolic public policy is also a planned public act that performs a mediation function as a symbolic policy. This policy has two functions:

- 1) A dominance function over the symbolic field, whether geographical or social, through celebratory and ritual displays; and
- 2) an identity function, manifested in various forms of signs and symbols.

This type of policy focuses on protecting the civilisation of belonging, its associated identity, love of the homeland, and sense of attachment. It also focuses on protecting and developing human awareness and nurturing a civic spirit. Examples include honouring national symbols, caring for heritage — such as paying attention to monuments and establishing museums — and praising pioneering and distinguished works in defence of the homeland, as well as the works of thinkers and creators from within society in various fields<sup>11</sup>.

Additionally, symbolic policy aims to create and maintain social bonds, or even strengthen them, by bringing individuals together around shared signs of recognition, through media mechanisms and the school system. It also lends politics a theatrical quality, with each era having its own “political scene” linked to its communication technology and the values it seeks to establish<sup>12</sup>.

In other words, symbolic public policies are deliberate policies designed to revive national sentiment, instil awareness of cultural identity and foster a sense of belonging and responsible citizenship among individuals and groups. Such policies include honouring national symbols, caring for heritage by paying attention to monuments and establishing museums, and praising outstanding works in defending the homeland, as well as the work of thinkers and creators from society in various domains<sup>13</sup>.

### **Second: The Concept of the Political System**

The political system, its components and structure, and the three branches of authority—legislative, executive, and judicial—are among the most important pillars of the political structure of the modern state. At the outset, the term “government” was used instead of “political systems.” The same term was also employed to refer to the three branches of authority, whether considered collectively or by focusing on one of them (the executive branch) without the others. As a result, the word “government” came to be used as a

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<sup>9</sup>- Youcef Hasan Youcef, 'Ideologies of Political Life in Developing States'. Amman: Academic Book Centre, 2016, p. 205.

<sup>10</sup>- Hichem Abdullah, *Comparative Politics in the Present Time*. Amman: Dar al-Ahliyya, 1997, pp. 199–201.

<sup>11</sup>- Hassan Abchar Tayeb, *The Modern State: A State of Institutions*. Cairo: (Cultural House for Publishing), 2000, p. 52.

<sup>12</sup>- Al-Bachir Adi, *Ibid.*, p. 108.

<sup>13</sup>- Hassan Abchar Tayeb, *Ibid.*, pp. 46–48.

synonym for the expression “executive authority.”

However, developments soon occurred that rendered this usage unacceptable in light of the successive and profound changes affecting political studies in general.

Here, we briefly outline the substance of these developments, their outcomes and repercussions, and how they have affected the concept of the political system and the three branches of authority, as well as the evolution of this concept’s meaning.

These developments summarised a new direction in political science, moving towards a scientific orientation and objective analysis and away from the descriptive and static features — or rigidity and formalism — that characterised earlier periods. Consequently, political research shifted from historical, philosophical and legal topics to scientific analyses, models and theories that were more akin to the natural sciences.

As part of these developments, new analytical frameworks emerged, as well as new theories and approaches, the most important of which are: systems analysis, institutionalism, and the functional approach. These frameworks and approaches have become the most important and suitable tools for researchers and specialists addressing topics such as the political system and the three branches of authority.

This development, often referred to as the ‘behavioural revolution’ in political research, brought about a major shift in the meaning of concepts related to systems and authority. Modules previously titled ‘Comparative Governments’ disappeared from the new political science and were replaced by terms such as ‘Comparative Political Systems’. The older term “the three branches of authority” was replaced by terms such as institutionalism and functional analysis.

Specifically with regard to the political system, it is no longer understood as merely the government. Instead, the concept now carries broader meanings, encompassing three main dimensions:

- 1) Official political institutions (the three branches: legislative, executive and judicial), and Non-official institutions — such as organisations, associations, professional and labour unions, federations and intellectual bodies — formed by political structures and roles.
- 2) A system of values, ideas and standards, constituting what is known as political culture.
- 3) The interaction, relationships and behaviours of individuals, groups and institutions<sup>14</sup>.

A political system can be defined as a set of codified practices and behaviours that play an important role in organising the lawful functioning of institutions and forces within a society. Alternatively, it can be defined as the legal regulations and rules that a state applies to its governed population in pursuit of internal and external well-being and security—thereby achieving the greatest number of interests that align with those of the population. The institutions responsible for making political decisions implement this political system; these institutions include the legislative, executive and judicial authorities<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>14</sup>- D. A.M., 'The Political System and the Three Authorities: The Concept and the Evolution of Its Significations'. Bahrain: Bahrain Institute for Political Development, 2010.

<sup>15</sup>- 15. Iman Al-Hiyari, 'The Concept of the Political System', accessed from: [https://mawdoo3.com/%D9%85%D9%81%D9%87%D9%88%D9%85\\_%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%86%D8%B8%D8%A7%D9%85\\_%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%B3%D9%8A](https://mawdoo3.com/%D9%85%D9%81%D9%87%D9%88%D9%85_%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%86%D8%B8%D8%A7%D9%85_%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%B3%D9%8A)

A political system can also be defined as the mechanism that designs policies aimed at organising and distributing resources. These policies and decisions are issued by virtue of the authority held by the political system and are binding on society as a whole, meaning there must be a general acceptance within society of these decisions and policies<sup>16</sup>.

Thus, the political system is part of a broader system: society. It is one of the most influential components within society<sup>17</sup>.

It is also more effective than other systems because it holds supreme authority within the state. Its tasks include ensuring alignment by matching political rules with official legal rules, and clarifying the objectives and functions of society.

It is also defined as a system of interactions that exists in all independent societies and performs two functions: integration and adaptation internally and externally through the use of, or threat of use of, legitimate material coercion<sup>18</sup>.

In other words, the political system can be understood as a set of procedures related to decisions affecting the whole of society, whether this concern the organisation and coordination of relationships or are enacted through law or imposed through coercion<sup>19</sup>.

### **Second Axis: The Importance of Symbolic Public Policy in the Political System**

As previously mentioned, the political system forms part of a broader system: society. It is the most influential component within society.

It follows that the political system must preserve its continuity. In order to continue to exist, it must know how to maintain its structure and organisation. This is because it will inevitably face demands and challenges, so it must understand and respond to these phenomena in order to guarantee its own stability and continuity<sup>20</sup>.

It is against this backdrop that the concept of public policy emerged as a pragmatic response to the complexity of life conditions and the interplay of conflicting interests. Consequently, it became necessary to develop plans and programmes to address any difficulties that may arise<sup>21</sup>.

In particular, symbolic public policies are characterised by a vertical nature that aligns with the state's public policies. This occurs through a process of political symbolisation carried out by political actors to solidify the policies or ensure citizens' responsiveness and engagement in their implementation. As a result, these policies enter the 'realm of meaning' to justify and legitimise intervention, serving as indicators of the success of material-type

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Access date: 17/08/2022.

<sup>16</sup>- Asma Ben Torki, 'The Political System in Algeria and Its Role in Activating the Values of Citizenship and Belonging among Youth'. Doctoral dissertation, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Mohamed Khider, Biskra, 2003, p. 53.

<sup>17</sup>- Karim Farman, 'On How the Political System Works: Principles of Theory with an Applied Study on Political Systems in the Sultanate of Oman, Algeria, France and Italy'. Lebanon: (Arab House for Encyclopaedias), 2009, p. 37.

<sup>18</sup>- Youcef Djheich, 'Institutional Development of the Algerian Political System', *Al-Bahith Journal*, Issue 05, 2015, p. 203.

<sup>19</sup>- Razika Rouabhi, 'The Impact of Political Culture on the Performance of the Political System (A Case Study of Algeria)'. Master's thesis, University of Mohamed Boudiaf, Faculty of Law and Political Science, 2014, p. 45.

<sup>20</sup>- Shirazad Ahmad Al-Nadjar, *Studies in Political Science*. Amman: Dar Dijla, 2010, p. 21.

<sup>21</sup>- Khalil Hussein, 'Public Policies and the Concept of State Administration', accessed from <http://drkhalilhusein.blogspot.com> on 04/09/2017.

public policies. In this way, symbolic policies mostly remain a form of communication between decision-makers and citizens. They enable a set of social demands and public problems to be addressed<sup>22</sup>.

It is not possible to speak of an independent, clearly defined political system with complete existence, unless it is capable of controlling the components of its political domain—both material and symbolic. The former consists of the political authority's possession of elements of material power, such as the institutions of the army, police, prisons, and so on. These material elements represent organized and directed physical violence against the body through institutions that embody physical coercion.

The symbolic components consist of everything that ensures the continued legitimacy of the ruling authority, namely possessing elements of symbolic power that the state's ideological apparatuses work to entrench in society. This is achieved through various channels of social and political socialisation, including educational, religious, media, social, political and cultural institutions. The success of this process depends on the political system's ability to shape people's behaviours and even their unconscious mentalities according to its symbolic frameworks.

The symbolic level of the political system is no less important than the material level. The collapse of the authority's symbolic power elements — through the loss of credibility of its ideological apparatuses — signals the end of the political system as a whole. At that point, the repressive material apparatuses would no longer be of any use. Therefore, regimes always focus on supporting their symbolic pillars and ideological apparatuses<sup>23</sup>.

The importance of symbolic public policy stems from the importance of political communication within political systems. This takes the form of political discourse that fulfils the public's emotional and cognitive needs, since society is constantly subject to politics. Symbols are attached to public policies to fulfil a set of psychological and moral needs, such as the feeling of belonging to a unified nation and society, thereby strengthening and reinforcing the power of political regimes materially.

Research into symbolic policies strips the state of the cloak of 'public interest' that it has long worn in its policies, decisions and public actions. This is because symbols lie at the heart of public action, becoming highly significant compared to the state's other material activities. In this way, symbolic policy tends to foster loyalty and mobilise individuals<sup>24</sup>.

As a concept established to preserve security, the state is founded on a social contract. This social contract focuses on a fundamental issue related to the state's creation in order to achieve security and ultimately rests on a system of values shared by the contracting parties. Constitutional studies also emphasise that the constitution — the fundamental law that defines the state and regulates its affairs — relies on the 'fundamental/natural principle', meaning what society agrees upon and contracts to respect.

This fundamental principle encompasses a wide range of elements, both material and moral, including values, beliefs, traditions, customs and heritage in all its forms, whether oral,

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<sup>22</sup>- Al-Bachir Adi, *Ibid.*, p. 103.

<sup>23</sup>- Al-Hasan Aqadim, 'The Symbolic Systems and the Production of Political Legitimacy' (peer-reviewed research), Section of Philosophy and Human Sciences, 2024, p. 5.

<sup>24</sup>- Al-Bachir Adi, *Ibid.*, p. 103.

material or written. It also encompasses symbols, historical milestones and individuals characterised by heroism, whose role is to inspire national vigour and instil respect for the nation, thereby linking it to its state and political system.

The success of governmental policies, which constitute a pillar of the state's national security, becomes more likely if the nation is connected to its symbols and the state and its political system can sustain the presence of that founding symbol in a way that does not hinder progress towards the future while preserving the nation's identity and independent selfhood. This is because public policy is, first and foremost, tied to achieving public satisfaction.

Symbolic policies can take many forms, such as artistic installations, architectural patterns, clothing styles, names, art, music, poetry, military performances and manifestations of the state's strength and prestige.

These policies establish an invisible yet significant connection between individuals and their country. They strengthen citizenship. However, they are not easily or automatically activated; rather, they depend on many interwoven and complex factors. These factors begin from the moment the state is established, through the process of agreement, acceptance of the political system that arises from it and the development of the legal structure on which the system relies to manage public affairs.

As a result, individuals come to see that accepting these policies is a condition of citizenship and that citizenship is valuable and worth sacrificing for. Over time, this becomes ingrained through the mechanisms and channels of socialisation. In this view, socialisation is the process by which values are passed from one generation to the next through channels such as the family, peer groups, school and social media, including everything technology encompasses in this sphere<sup>25</sup>.

Consider, for example, historical monuments. Interacting with them requires historical knowledge, which students receive through education at school. This education presents the history of their country in an idealised way, glorifying the achievements of the past and strengthening feelings of national pride. These historical landmarks are also embedded in an ongoing process of indoctrination through multiple channels, such as monuments to national heroes, poets, artists, scientists, scholars, inventors, and creators. Monuments that speak about the country's revolutions and its path of development are also included. In this context, it can be seen that, as well as relying on history curricula in schools, established states also reinforce them through field trips to museums and memorials<sup>26</sup>.

It is only natural that the issue of national socialisation should focus first on the younger generation. It may be less effective for older people who have experienced multiple crises. This means there is a need to pay attention to symbolic policies within the school curriculum so that these policies help to shape students' political awareness, encouraging active citizenship and strengthening national identity<sup>27</sup>.

The nature of these policies varies from one political system to another, ranging from

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<sup>25</sup>- Haider Abdul Morshid, 'Symbolic Policies and the State'. Baghdad: (Al-Bayan Centre for Studies and Planning), 2022, p. 4.

<sup>26</sup>- Ibid., pp. 4-5.

<sup>27</sup>- Ibid., p. 5.

democratic to authoritarian and from monarchy to republic.

These policies may address public issues that are limited to mobilising organisations within the state around identity- or value-related matters. In such cases, the head of state may adopt a conciliatory approach, acting as a mediator between conflicting perspectives through symbolic policies that aim to resolve these dilemmas. Perhaps the best example is racism in the United States of America, where Black people of African origin experience discrimination. Another example is the stance towards conflicts of reference systems, especially religious ones, within a discourse of religious tolerance<sup>28</sup>.

### **Conclusion:**

In light of what was presented, the aim of this study was to clarify how symbolic policy — considered a type of public policy — contributes to the performance of the political system and the integration of citizens into the existing political order. This was achieved by examining the use of symbols, slogans, flags and rituals, such as memorial monuments and celebrations. Attention was also given to national history, the nation's achievements and heroes, and its key symbols. This strengthens the state's image and helps to solidify its place in the collective memory, while reinforcing the moral and meaningful foundations of the state within the collective consciousness.

States resort to this type of policy to create social bonds based on solidarity, strengthen citizenship and deepen individuals' attachment to their homeland. It also works to reinforce national identity and consolidate legitimacy when the state is passing through internal and external crises that threaten the stability of the political system. In this way, states can contain threatening contexts and move beyond them, achieving stability and continuity while maintaining interaction between the political system and public opinion. This is why states adopt this kind of policy permanently and continuously.

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<sup>28</sup>- Al-Bachir Adi, *Ibid.*, p. 103.

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