

# Policy vs. Politics — What's the Difference?

Why you can care about policy without choosing sides

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The word "political" makes a lot of people disengage. But policy and politics are not the same thing — and understanding the difference is what allows you to advocate for your community without getting pulled into partisan battles.

## THE DEFINITIONS

**POLICY** refers to the specific laws, rules, programs, and regulations that govern how society operates. School funding formulas. Medicaid eligibility rules. Minimum wage rates. Voting access requirements. Policy is the substance.

**POLITICS** refers to the processes and power dynamics through which policy decisions are made. Elections, parties, campaigns, endorsements, legislative strategy. Politics is the vehicle.

You can engage deeply with policy — tracking bills, testifying at hearings, meeting with legislators, organizing your community — without endorsing candidates or engaging in partisan activity. In fact, the most effective advocates often operate across party lines.

## REFLECTION

**A policy issue that affects my community that I want to understand better**

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**Why I've hesitated to engage with policy in the past**

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**One thing I can do about a policy issue this week without it being "political"**

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## THE BOTTOM LINE

**Complete this: "I care about policy because \_\_\_\_\_. And the people making those decisions need to hear from me because \_\_\_\_\_."**

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