

# Cambridge Elements

## Elements in Public Policy

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## SYMBOLIC POLICY

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## Symbolic Policy

Elements in Public Policy

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**Abstract:** Symbols are everywhere in politics. Yet, they tended to be overlooked in the study of public policy. This Element shows how they play an important role in the policy process, how they are used to shape citizens' representations thanks to their ability to combine meanings and to stimulate emotional reactions. It uses situation of emergency as a lens through which this symbolic dimension is analysed, and it focuses on two case studies (governmental responses to the Covid-19 crisis in Europe in 2020 and to terrorist attacks in France in 2015). The Element shows how the symbolic enables leaders to claim legitimacy for themselves and their decisions, and foster feelings of reassurance, solidarity and belonging. All politicians use the symbolic, whether consciously or otherwise, but what they choose to do varies and is affected by timing, the existence of national repertoires of symbolic actions and the *personas* of leaders.

**Keywords:** symbolic, policy, leadership, crisis management, legitimation

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