The Political Economy of Public Policy

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Course dates: 23 - 27 July 2018

Main disciplines: Public Policy, Political Science, Political Economy, Public Administration

Course Credits: 10 pts (ECTS)
Limitation: 25 participants

Course objectives / learning outcome
This course centres around the questions of how public policies emerge and change, and how they vary over time and across countries. It seeks to provide an advanced understanding of public policy, focusing on traditional models of policy-making as well as more recent contributions in the fields of comparative and international political economy. We critically assess the theoretical and empirical arguments, and apply the approaches and concepts to real-world cases, evaluating the importance of different explanations.

We focus on the different actors that play a role in the policy-making process, including bureaucrats and politicians, and business and the public. We address the question of what assumptions we should make about the actors in the policy process, and look at the role of interests, ideas and institutions. Also, we take a comparative and temporal perspective, looking at continuity, change and variation in public policy.

The course does not emphasise particular policy domains, but we apply the approaches and concepts to a wide range of issues, assessing also how different policy issues attract different types of politics. The focus of the course is generic, though the literature is
primarily concerned with policy-making in developed economies. Finally, though policy evaluation is also part of the policy process, we look at policy-making rather than evaluation.

**Course plan overview**

*Day 1 – Models and assumptions*

1. Why do we use models of policy-making?
2. What assumptions should we make about policy actors?

*Day 2 – Continuity and change*

1. Why do we observe so much continuity in policies?
2. How does policy change come about?

*Day 3 – Bureaucrats and politicians*

1. Are bureaucrats or politicians in charge of policy-making?
2. How do parties and elections matter?

*Day 4 – Business interests and the public*

1. How do interest groups matter?
2. What role do public preferences play?

*Day 5 – Policy-making in a globalised world*

1. Globalisation and policy-making
2. Policy diffusion and convergence
Day 1: Models and assumptions
On the first day, we look at several prominent traditional models of policy-making. We evaluate their key features and strengths and weaknesses. We especially focus on the underlying assumptions of the various models, addressing the more general question what assumptions about policy actors we can and should make.

Lecture 1: Why do we use models of policy-making?
- Policy stages models
- The garbage can model
- The advocacy coalition framework
- The multiple streams model

Lecture 2: What assumptions should we make about policy actors?
- Rationality and bounded rationality
- Whose interests matter?

Literature:
In case of time pressure, please prioritise the readings with an asterisk.
Day 2: Continuity and change
On Day 2, we take a temporal perspective and focus on continuity and change in policies. As we mostly observe policy continuity, we first address the question how can account for this, looking at concepts such as path dependence, negative and positive feedback, bounded rationality and institutions. We then turn to the ‘special case’ of policy change, assessing the importance of the different factors that may trigger such change, including external shocks, internal policy decay, and changes in interests and ideas.

Lecture 3: Why do we observe so much continuity in policies?
- Path dependence
- Negative and positive feedback
- Veto players
- The role of bounded rationality

Lecture 4: How does policy change come about?
- Punctuated equilibrium
- External shocks
- Internal decay
- Changes in interests and ideas

Literature:
In case of time pressure, please prioritise the readings with an asterisk.


Day 3: Bureaucrats and politicians
Day 3 focuses on the role of state actors in policy-making – that is, the bureaucrats and politicians. We look at the relationship between bureaucrats and politicians, asking the questions of who drives the policy process. Also, we discuss what motivation we can ascribe to bureaucrats and politicians. In the afternoon, we assess the importance of elections and political parties in the policy process.

Lecture 5: Are bureaucrats or politicians in charge of policy-making?
- To what extent do bureaucrats drive policy-making?
- To what extent do politicians matter in the process?
- What drives politicians and bureaucrats?

Lecture 6: How do parties and elections matter?
- Do political parties matter?
- How and when do elections matter for policy-making?

Literature:
In case of time pressure, please prioritise the readings with an asterisk.
Day 4: Business interests and the public
On Day 4, we turn to the role of societal actors in policy-making, addressing the question to what extent policies respond to organised (business) interests and the public. We look at how different interests seek to influence policy-making, and at the conditions under which policies may be responsive to public preferences. In the process of studying the role of business and the public, we also address the question whether state actors are autonomous or solely driven by societal pressures.

Lecture 7: How do interest groups matter?

- Which interest groups matter?
- How do interest groups influence policy-making?
- Is there variation in influence across policy areas?

Lecture 8: What role do public preferences play?

- Why do public preferences matter?
- When do public preferences matter?

Literature:

In case of time pressure, please prioritise the readings with an asterisk.

Day 5: Policy-making in a globalised world
On our last day, we look at policy-making in a globalised world. First, we assess how
globalisation has affected policy-making, addressing also the question whether national-
level factors – including political parties and institutions – still matter. Second, as the
globalised world is characterised by interdependence, we focus on the role of policy
diffusion, including its mechanisms and implications for policy convergence.

Lecture 9: Globalisation and policy-making
- How has globalisation constrained policy-making?
- Do domestic institutions and parties still matter?

Lecture 10: Policy diffusion and convergence
- What are the mechanisms of policy diffusion?
- What are the channels of policy diffusion?
- How does policy diffusion vary across policy areas?

Literature:
In case of time pressure, please prioritise the readings with an asterisk.
  in advanced capitalist democracies.” American Journal of Political Science 46 (3):
  642-655.
- * Daniel W. Drezner (2007). All Politics is Global: Explaining International
  The international diffusion of liberalism.” International Organization 60 (4):
  781–810.
- * Nathan M. Jensen and René Lindstädt (2012). “Leaning right and learning from
  the left: Diffusion of corporate tax policy across borders.” Comparative Political
  Studies 45 (3): 283-311.
- David M. Konisky (2007). “Regulatory competition and environmental
  enforcement: Is there a race to the bottom?” American Journal of Political Science
  51 (4): 853-872.


**The lecturer**

**Christel Koop** is Senior Lecturer in Political Economy in the Department of Political Economy at King’s College London. Her research interests revolve around regulation, delegation to independent agencies, and the trade-offs involved in politicisation and depoliticisation.

In her current research project with Christine Reh (UCL) and Edoardo Bressanelli (KCL), she looks at the implications of national-level contestation of the European Union (EU) for policy-making at the EU-level (funded by the British Academy and the Leverhulme Trust). Other projects focus on the global diffusion of competition policy, the accountability of independent central banks, the background of board members of regulatory agencies, and the transparency of transnational regulators. Her work has been published in outlets such as *Comparative Political Studies*, the *European Journal of Political Research, Regulation & Governance, Public Administration, the Journal of European Public Policy*, the *Journal of Public Policy*, and *European Union Politics*.

**Further reading list:**


• Sean Gailmard and John Patty (2017). “Giving advice vs. making decisions: Transparency, information, and delegation.” Forthcoming in *Political Science Research and Methods*.


