

T01P15 / Multiple Streams Framework: The View from 40

Topic : T01 / POLICY PROCESS THEORIES

Chair : Evangelia Petridou (NTNU Social Research and Mid Sweden University)

Second Chair : Nikolaos Zahariadis (Rhodes College)

Third Chair : Rob DeLeo (Bentley University)

Fourth Chair : Dana Dolan (George Mason University, Schar School of Policy and Government)

5th Chair : Annemieke van den Dool (Duke Kunshan University)

GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

The year 2024 marked the 40th anniversary of the publication of *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies*, John Kingdon's landmark study that heralded the era of the Multiple Streams Framework as one of the most accessible and widely applied theories of the policy process. Indicatively, in a recent study, Rob DeLeo and colleagues (2024) found that a simple Google Scholar search yielded over 30,000 citations of Kingdon's 1984 (2003) volume and its subsequent editions. These include a wide array of applications at all levels of governance and stages of the policy process (except for evaluation), and a variety of political and country contexts and policy sectors. Further, another recent review (Petridou et al., forthcoming) revealed that a significant number of MSF applications have theoretical ambitions beyond the mere explanation of an empirical policy phenomenon. Part of what has contributed to MSF's broad appeal has also constituted criticism leveled against it: that MSF's language is metaphorical and that concepts often function as heuristics, two conditions that lower the entry barrier for using MSF and therefore have resulted in imprecise research. Having said this, the theoretical robustness of the framework is indisputable (Dolan, 2021; van den Dool, 2023) and a changing world has placed a premium on the concept of ambiguity (Zahariadis, 2007; 2014; Zahariadis et al., 2023; Rob DeLeo et al., 2024).

So, where do we go from here? During an MSF roundtable at the ECPR general conference in Dublin in 2024, we identified fruitful trajectories for the future. In terms of method, MSF research must remain pluralistic in its methodological preferences, test existing hypotheses, and use quantitative approaches to complement small-N studies, where justification of research design and methodology are transparent and rigorous. Additionally, MSF research must move towards a more standardized definition and measurement of common terms. Theoretically, it would be beneficial for future research to synthesize lessons learnt and in turn make these lessons more relevant to practitioners.

References

- DeLeo, Rob A., Reimut Zohlnhöfer, and Nikolaos Zahariadis. 2024. "Multiple Streams and Policy Ambiguity." Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
<https://www.cambridge.org/core/product/FBA20248D4A359D38AF7083D00F5149E>.
- Dolan, Dana A. 2021. "Multiple Partial Couplings in the Multiple Streams Framework: The Case of Extreme Weather and Climate Change Adaptation." *Policy Studies Journal* 49: 164-89.
- van den Dool, Annemieke. 2023. "The Multiple Streams Framework in a Nondemocracy: The Infeasibility of a National Ban on Live Poultry Sales in China." *Policy Studies Journal* 51: 327-49.
- Kingdon, John W. 2003. *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies*. 2nd ed. Boston: Longman.
- Petridou, Evangelia, Jörgen Sparf and Nikolaos Zahariadis. (forthcoming). "The Policy Entrepreneur as a Crosscutting Concept in Theories of the Policy Process: A Scoping Review of European Empirical Applications" *European Policy Analysis*
- Zahariadis, Nikolaos. 2014. "Ambiguity and Multiple Streams." In *Theories of the Policy Process*, eds. Paul A. Sabatier and Christopher M. Weible. Boulder, CO: Westview Press. 25-58.
- Zahariadis, Nikolaos. 2007. "The Multiple Streams Framework: Structure, Limitations, Prospects." In *Theories of the Policy Process*, ed. Paul A. Sabatier. Boulder, CO: Westview. 65-92.
- Zahariadis, Nikolaos, Nicole Herweg, Reimut Zohlnhöfer, Evangelia Petridou, and Novotný Vilém. 2023. "Advancing the Multiple Streams Framework." In *A Modern Guide to Multiple Streams Framework*, eds. Nikolaos Zahariadis, Nicole Herweg, Reimut Zohlnhöfer and Evangelia Petridou. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar. 1-24.

CALL FOR PAPERS

The year 2024 marked the 40th anniversary of the publication of *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies*, John Kingdon's landmark study that heralded the era of the Multiple Streams Framework as one of the most accessible and widely applied theories of the policy process. Indicatively, in a recent study, Rob DeLeo and colleagues (2024) found that a simple Google Scholar search yielded over 30,000 citations of Kingdon's 1984 (2003) volume and its subsequent editions. These include a wide array of applications at all levels of governance and stages of the policy process (except for evaluation), and a variety of political and country contexts and policy sectors. Further, another recent review (Petridou et al., forthcoming) revealed that a significant number of MSF applications have theoretical ambitions beyond the mere explanation of an empirical policy phenomenon. Part of what has contributed to MSF's broad appeal has also constituted criticism leveled against it: that MSF's language is metaphorical and that concepts often function as heuristics, two conditions that lower the entry barrier for using MSF and therefore have resulted in imprecise research. Having said this, the theoretical robustness of the framework is indisputable (Dolan, 2021; van den Dool, 2023) and a changing world has placed a premium on the concept of ambiguity (Zahariadis, 2007; 2014; Zahariadis et al., 2023; Rob DeLeo et al., 2024).

So, where do we go from here? We argue that fruitful trajectories include a methodologically pluralistic approach, including testing existing hypotheses and use quantitative approaches to complement small-N studies, which would greatly benefit from justification of research design and transparency and rigor in their methodological approach. What is more, given the maturity and versatility of MSF, a fruitful focus for future MSF studies would be syntheses of lessons learnt and in turn making these lessons more relevant to practitioners. In this panel, we welcome papers focusing on the entire framework or on one or more of its components. We especially seek papers making explicit theoretical and/or methodological contributions to the framework in novel settings including those applicable not only to Western democracies, but also the Global South and autocracies.

References

- DeLeo, Rob A., Reimut Zohlnhöfer, and Nikolaos Zahariadis. 2024. "Multiple Streams and Policy Ambiguity." Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
<https://www.cambridge.org/core/product/FBA20248D4A359D38AF7083D00F5149E>.
- Dolan, Dana A. 2021. "Multiple Partial Couplings in the Multiple Streams Framework: The Case of Extreme Weather and Climate Change Adaptation." *Policy Studies Journal* 49: 164-89.
- van den Dool, Annemieke. 2023. "The Multiple Streams Framework in a Nondemocracy: The Infeasibility of a National Ban on Live Poultry Sales in China." *Policy Studies Journal* 51: 327-49.
- Kingdon, John W. 2003. *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies*. 2nd ed. Boston: Longman.
- Petridou, Evangelia, Jörgen Sparf and Nikolaos Zahariadis. (forthcoming). "The Policy Entrepreneur as a Crosscutting Concept in Theories of the Policy Process: A Scoping Review of European Empirical Applications" *European Policy Analysis*
- Zahariadis, Nikolaos. 2014. "Ambiguity and Multiple Streams." In *Theories of the Policy Process*, eds. Paul A. Sabatier and Christopher M. Weible. Boulder, CO: Westview Press. 25-58.
- Zahariadis, Nikolaos. 2007. "The Multiple Streams Framework: Structure, Limitations, Prospects." In *Theories of the Policy Process*, ed. Paul A. Sabatier. Boulder, CO: Westview. 65-92.
- Zahariadis, Nikolaos, Nicole Herweg, Reimut Zohlnhöfer, Evangelia Petridou, and Novotný Vilém. 2023. "Advancing the Multiple Streams Framework." In *A Modern Guide to Multiple Streams Framework*, eds. Nikolaos Zahariadis, Nicole Herweg, Reimut Zohlnhöfer and Evangelia Petridou. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar. 1-24.

T01P15 / Multiple Streams Framework: The View from 40

Chair : Evangelia Petridou (NTNU Social Research and Mid Sweden University)

Second Chair : Nikolaos Zahariadis (Rhodes College)

Third Chair : Rob DeLeo (Bentley University)

Fourth Chair : Dana Dolan (George Mason University, Schar School of Policy and Government)

5th Chair : Annemieke van den Dool (Duke Kunshan University)

Session 1 Policy Entrepreneurs in the MSF

Thursday, July 3rd 08:00 to 10:00 (D2)

Discussants

Rob DeLeo (Bentley University)

Dana Dolan (George Mason University, Schar School of Policy and Government)

Multiple Streams and Policy Entrepreneurship in the Emergence of the Circular Economy in New Zealand

Patrick Barrett (University of Waikato)

The New Zealand government has committed to the goal of moving towards a circular economy in key documents that include the first Emissions Reduction Plan and the national Waste Strategy. The language of the circular economy has increasingly permeated the policy documents of various government agencies - the Climate Change Commission's 2021 recommendations for a clear plan to transition towards a circular economy; the New Zealand Infrastructure Commission's reference to the role of infrastructure in embedding the circular economy; and the 2023 Waste Strategy which includes the vision: "By 2050, Aotearoa New Zealand is a low-emissions, low-waste society, built upon a circular economy".

The paper draws on the Multiple Streams Framework (MSF) to chart the evolution of this circular economy policy agenda. Its origins lie in the zero-waste movement, a civil society-led response to the vacuum in waste management dating from the late 1980s. The political momentum created by the zero-waste movement led to the 2002 New Zealand Waste Strategy, and this laid the foundation for the 2008 Waste Minimisation Act which, amongst other things, provided for waste levies, the funding of waste innovation projects, product stewardship schemes, and regulations for waste disposal. From 2017, policies to strengthen waste management and minimisation began to be framed in terms of the circular economy, and since then local and central government agencies have increasingly used the concept.

The paper is based on a longitudinal case study that includes in-depth interviews with leaders of the zero-waste movement about their recollections of the emergence of the zero-waste policy agenda, that being the pursuit of a closed loop materials economy where products are made to be reused, repaired and recycled, with the goal of eliminating waste. The first-hand observations produced contextually rich insights, identifying key moments of change in the history of zero-waste policy, and particularly the role of policy entrepreneurs who helped to redefine the problem of waste, who developed and expanded zero-waste networks, and who worked to scale up local waste reduction schemes.

The MSF provides a set of analytical principles to observe and explain how these developments contributed to the emergence of the circular economy agenda by drawing attention to evolving definitions of the problem of waste, to the environments within which the circular economy policy idea took hold, and the political conditions for change. The paper contributes to the panel's research focus by applying the MSF within the distinctive New Zealand governance context in a way that captures the highly contingent nature of these policy changes, and the potential for political actors who straddle different streams in a small policy subsystem to derail momentum for change. The case illustrates the impact of ambiguity - the absence of an agreed definition of the circular economy - in these processes, the role of entrepreneurs to exploit ambiguity and create opportunities for change, and the impact of political power to derail momentum for change. The case provides practical insights into the features of effective policy entrepreneurship and lessons for change advocates and policy entrepreneurs.

Entrepreneurship in the Policy Process: Innovation and Legitimacy

Evangelia Petridou (NTNU Social Research and Mid Sweden University)

Jörgen Sparf (Mid Sweden University)

Policy entrepreneurs have long been considered to be agents of change, mainly by introducing innovation in dynamic policy change. Much like in the market literature, entrepreneurship in public policy has been normative and considered desirable. In this paper, we conduct a systematic literature review of empirical applications of policy entrepreneurs in the European context from 1979 to 2023 with a view to understanding the sources of legitimacy of policy entrepreneurship situated in the European multi-level governance system. We then test these contextual factors lending legitimacy to policy entrepreneurs in a comparative case study of Denmark, Norway, and Sweden in the field of crisis management and specifically the response of these countries to the geopolitical instability in the region caused by the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the conflict that followed. We identify main actors, policy entrepreneurial action, and trace the process of legitimation of such action. The main contribution of this paper, part of a larger funded project on processes of legitimation in the normalization phase of crises, is a nuanced understanding of policy entrepreneurs, challenging their normative status.

(Virtual) How policy entrepreneurs promote policy change in the absence of politicians in the policy arena: The inclusion of those on the autism spectrum in the Israel Defense Forces

Ben Kizel (University of Haifa)

Nissim Cohen (University of Haifa)

The public policy literature has extensively explored the conditions under which politicians abstain from direct involvement in policy design. However, there remains a significant gap in our understanding of the strategies employed by policy entrepreneurs when politicians are absent from the policy arena. Hence, the theoretical contribution of this research will be illustrating the strategies of policy entrepreneurs when politicians are not engaged in policy design. This research will suggest that given the fact that direct influence on politicians proves unsuccessful, policy entrepreneurs may assume the role of policy designers. The empirical contribution of this research is demonstrated through collecting empirical evidence from various populations about policy design in the absence of politicians in the policy field. Policy entrepreneurs are defined as individuals or small groups who work collaboratively, who capitalize on opportunities to influence public policy outcomes without possessing the requisite resources to do so independently. These entrepreneurs can emerge from the public, private, and non-profit sectors. They may be politicians or decision-makers themselves, or individuals outside the political sphere seeking to effect policy change. To make these changes, they must collaborate with politicians and engage actively in realizing these policy transformations. This research goal is to examine the strategies of the policy entrepreneurs without direct political involvement. Using in-depth interviews and textual analysis in this ongoing research, and the "Roim Rachok" ("Looking Ahead") Program for the inclusion of those on the autism spectrum in the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) as a case study, we uncovered preliminary indications suggesting that policy entrepreneurs develop a network of collaborations as their primary strategy when politicians are not directly engaged in the policy arena. The "Roim Rachok" program was founded in 2012 by two former employees of the Israeli Defense Ministry. Its primary objective is to facilitate the inclusion of those on the autism spectrum in the IDF, specifically in military professions where the distinctive abilities of this population can address personnel shortages. This program aims also to integrate those on the autism spectrum into the Israeli labor market after the soldiers on the autism spectrum releases from full mandatory military service.

Keywords: Policy Entrepreneurs, Policy Design, Politicians, Policy Entrepreneurial Strategies, Autism

T01P15 / Multiple Streams Framework: The View from 40

Chair : Evangelia Petridou (NTNU Social Research and Mid Sweden University)

Second Chair : Nikolaos Zahariadis (Rhodes College)

Third Chair : Rob DeLeo (Bentley University)

Fourth Chair : Dana Dolan (George Mason University, Schar School of Policy and Government)

5th Chair : Annemieke van den Dool (Duke Kunshan University)

Session 2 Applying & Testing MSF in Novel Cases

Thursday, July 3rd 16:00 to 18:00 (D2)

Discussants

Nikolaos Zahariadis (Rhodes College)

(Virtual) Sweet and Sour? Policy Entrepreneurship and the Case of the Food Labeling Law in Israel

Omri Shamir (Ashkelon Academic College)

Michal Neubauer-Shani (Ashkelon Academic College)

All over the world doctors have been warning policy makers and the public about the dangers of consuming products rich in saturated fat, salt, and sugar that lead to obesity and may cause many diseases. In a result, many countries have adopted policies directed at reducing the consumption of such products. This issue brought about a public debate in Israel, when in 2016, the Israeli Minister of Health made an announcement: "McDonald's out? Not in our country" and proclaimed that these products, from now on, are the new "public's enemies". This call soon triggered a political struggle surrounding labeling these products, involving politicians, bureaucrats, interest groups, and the public. In 2017, the Knesset has legislated a law that constitutes a national system of mandatory FoP food labelling obligation (red stickers on the packaging). Relying on the policy entrepreneurship literature and on John Kingdon's Multiple Streams Framework (MSF), while using semi-structured interviews and other data collection from existing sources (written or online), this research has two main objectives. The first, to analyse the strategies which policy entrepreneurs adopted in order to promote the FoP labeling of these products. By doing so, they tried to raise up public awareness regarding the potential health damage associated with the consumption of unhealthy food. The second objective is to use the Kingdon's MSF in order to explain the different streams and how the "opportunity window" was opened which led to the legislation of the law.

Streams as Discursive Patterns in Agenda-Setting Analyses of Gender Equality Legislations

Clyde Maningo (Chiang Mai University School of Public Policy)

This paper addresses a critical gap in understanding the discursive patterns in shaping agenda-setting of gender policymaking. Kingdon's Multiple Streams Framework (MSF) has long been a key analytical tool in explaining the opportunity for policy change as an outcome of the "coupling" of independent streams (problem, policy, and politics)—that a policy entrepreneur strategically exploits. However, MSF has faced criticism for overlooking the role of discourse in driving or marginalizing specific policy agendas. This chapter proposes a reconceptualization of MSF's streams as discursive patterns—shared and communicated sense-making processes derived from interpretive perceptions and expressed through storylines. The discursive implication of streams helps navigate intersections of identity—gender, sexuality, race, or class—as they are represented, normalized, or contested in social narratives, ultimately shaping policy outcomes. Using this framework alongside Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), I untangle the complex agenda-setting landscape of the Philippine SOGIE Equality Bill. Findings illustrate how deeply

ingrained ideological values create barriers to legislative progress, even when policy solutions are available. I attribute this to “stream disjunctions,” a failed coupling due to the influence of a competing narrative. In the problem stream, the problem is actively reframed (initially, discrimination against LGBTQ+ individuals) into issues that align with religious and traditional values, such as “threats to family structures” and a slippery slope leading to “moral decay.” The claim on the Bill’s redundancy to existing laws and its conflict with constitutional freedoms dominates the policy stream. In the political stream, the perception of the national mood, influenced by religious conservatism, creates resistance among elected officials who fear losing political capital. These streams do not exist in isolation but are interconnected, where narratives and framings in one stream influence and are reinforced by those in the others, collectively shaping the agenda-setting process. Through this framework, I aim to offer theoretical advancements in agenda-setting studies and practical strategies for advocates and policymakers working toward equitable gender and sexuality legislation

An Idea Whose Time Has Come: Establishment of European Public Schools, Rationale, Patterns of Legitimation, and Narratives

Elif Gezer (University of Luxembourg)

Luxembourg is a highly diverse country, where the official languages (Luxembourgish, German, and French) are taught successively in schools at a quasi-native level. This diversity, while an asset, leads to educational inequalities, as 47% of the population often does not speak these languages at home (Eurydice, 2024; MENJE, 2024). Public discourses, stakeholder reflections, and research studies show that students with immigration and/or low SES backgrounds often have difficulties within the education system (e.g., OECD, 2018; Sonnleitner et al., 2021).

The linguistic challenges in the education system have been on the government’s agenda, and a set of alternatives has been considered over the years. After the failure of the previous government, the establishment of European Public Schools (EPS) seems to be “an idea whose time has come”. EPS implement the European Curriculum and offer a more flexible approach to multilingual education. They operate independently of the Luxembourgish schools, representing an alternative in the public education landscape (MENJE, 2024).

The establishment of EPS marked a significant structural change in the education system, raising numerous social, political, and pedagogical questions. This study aims to understand the rationale and outcomes of EPS’s establishment by examining the policy formation process and its reflection in public discourses. Thus, it employs a content analysis of 181 documents, complemented by semi-structured interviews with 16 stakeholders. The preliminary analyses were guided by the Multiple Streams Framework (MSF) (Kingdon, 1984) to examine the problem, policy, and politics streams that influenced the establishment of EPS in Luxembourg.

The findings indicate a decline in transition to the highest academic track and an increase in dropout rates and grade repetition in the Luxembourgish secondary education system, particularly among students from low socioeconomic and migration backgrounds. These conditions contributed to the “problem definition”, leading to the establishment of EPS when the “policy window” was open. Although various solutions exist for an issue, the choice of a particular solution is crucial (Kingdon, 2010), and stakeholders emphasized that policymakers opted for the European Curriculum because it was already well-known in Luxembourg, non-profit-based, and offered multilingual education suited to the country’s needs. The establishment of EPS was perceived positively by many stakeholders as they helped non-Luxembourgish residents to better integrate and supported students who struggled in the Luxembourgish curriculum. These favorable outcomes resulted in discourses regarding the necessity to learn from these schools, which ultimately led to a spillover effect, resulting in curricular changes. One remaining question from the stakeholders is the extent to which EPS target the student population they claim to. This raises the question of whether EPS was the “advocates’ pet solution” that was then attached to some problems, or whether it was the best solution among alternatives tailored to the defined problem.

While MSF provides strong explanations on this policy formation process, as criticized by Steiner-Khamsi (2016), it does not account for transnational policy borrowing processes, which are important for understanding the establishment of EPS in Luxembourg. Therefore, the findings will be discussed by extending the framework with a globalization perspective.

Advancing Problem Framing in Multiple Streams Framework: The Framework and Key Settings

Wenjin Chen (The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, Hong Kong)

Xinyi Wang (The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology)

In response to calls to extend the theoretical development of multiple streams frameworks (MSF), this paper introduces the problem framing framework and key settings into the MSF. As one of the most popular policy process theories and analytical frameworks in the recent three decades, MSF has not systematically included and described the role and function of contextual factors in the problem framing process and problem stream. First, this paper explores and conceptualizes problem framing in the MSF as a continuous and dynamic process and develops a framework encompassing three critical phases: recognition and disclosure of a situation, engagement of the public and society, and activation of key actors. We argue that problem identification and definition in the public policy process are completed through these phases instead of being only determined by chance events or key actors of problem brokers or policy entrepreneurs. Second, besides the key phases, this paper also categorizes the important contextual factors for problem framing into four key settings: institutional settings, knowledge settings, ideological settings, and social settings. We argue that only when these settings are present, can key actors emerge and effectively drive the process of problem framing. Lastly, we conduct an empirical illustration of the framework and key settings we have introduced with a comparative case of the mental health equity policy process in Hong Kong and Australia. The study suggests that the transition dynamics from situations to public problems in policymaking should be discussed and explored more in the broader public policy theory. And future research should test the proposed framework and settings in other policy areas and contexts.

T01P15 / Multiple Streams Framework: The View from 40

Chair : Evangelia Petridou (NTNU Social Research and Mid Sweden University)

Second Chair : Nikolaos Zahariadis (Rhodes College)

Third Chair : Rob DeLeo (Bentley University)

Fourth Chair : Dana Dolan (George Mason University, Schar School of Policy and Government)

5th Chair : Annemieke van den Dool (Duke Kunshan University)

Session 3 Advancing MSF Theory and Methods

Friday, July 4th 10:15 to 12:15 (D2)

Discussants

Evangelia Petridou (NTNU Social Research and Mid Sweden University)

Refugees, Policy Entrepreneurship, and the Jordan Compact: A Multiple Streams Analysis

Ola El-Taliawi (University of Twente)

Luiz Leomil (Carleton University)

Mehmet Akif Demircioglu (Carleton University)

Refugees in protracted situations represent a complex and intractable problem to host governments. As a result of the Syrian conflict, approximately 650,000 Syrians sought refuge in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. This situation posed serious governance challenges for Jordan, which struggled with the burden placed on its economy, public services, environment, and infrastructure. The country also resisted integrating Syrians to its formal economy, fearing this could pose a threat to the national labor market, instigate resentment from host communities, and prolong their stay.

However, in early 2016, a major breakthrough occurred when various parties concerned with the situation of Syrians and their effects on Jordan achieved a historic agreement. Through this deal, known as the Jordan Compact, the country agreed to issue 200,000 permits for Syrians in exchange for trade concessions and new investment opportunities granted by the international donor community. This case is particularly remarkable because of the brokerage of a win-win deal on the part of policymakers, including those that are external to the subsystem. As such, this study aims to understand the conditions and actions that allowed for the breakthrough in the Jordan Compact agreement.

Since the early 1990s, the refugee studies scholarship has pointed to a host of factors that affect the policy responses of states to the mass arrival and prolonged presence of refugees. However, our understanding of the factors influencing the asylum policies of states, including how they come into to play, remains limited. This may be attributed to the limited engagement with public policy frameworks and theories in discussions related to refugee governance. Policy change and entrepreneurship have long been studied in the field of Public Policy, and various theories and analytical frameworks have been set forth. Among them, Kingdon's (1984) Multiple Streams Framework (MSF) highlights how policy entrepreneurs exploit brief windows of opportunity when political, policy, and problem streams align.

This research relies on primary and secondary longitudinal qualitative data (2011-2024) and deploys the MSF framework for analysis. While Kingdon's framework originally envisaged the analysis of policy developments at the domestic level, the stream coupling process in this study is further complicated by the involvement of multiple actors, including those external to the subsystem. In addition to Jordanian authorities, identified stakeholders involve British and EU leaders, international organizations, and independent experts. Despite the complexity of the case, the framework provides insight into how entrepreneurs employed various strategies to facilitate the coupling of streams, ultimately enabling the breakthrough in the Jordan Compact agreement. As we demonstrate, entrepreneurs successfully used their connections and acted swiftly to create convergence among the involved parties, including by setting forth a solution package acceptable to all.

Overall, the study deploys and tests the MSF against a particularly complex case, involving a myriad of

interests and political opportunity structures in a developing country context. While we reflect on some of the limitations of the MSF, it enhances our understanding of the brokerage of the Jordan Compact agreement in a unique way, which demonstrates the value of the framework.

(Virtual) Policy Feedback in Devolved States: A Multiple Streams Perspective on Economic Policymaking in Northern Ireland

Rob DeLeo (Bentley University)

Despite being one of the core elements of the Multiple Streams Framework's problem stream, policy feedback, which broadly refers to information concerning the current administration of government problems, has received scant attention within the MSF research community. In fact, previous research suggests policy feedback is among the "least referenced" components of the problem stream and few, if any studies, have systematically assessed whether program evaluations and other types of information about the administration of government programs can facilitate the opening of policy windows within the problem stream. The following study seeks to fill this void by examining the effect policy feedback on regional economic policymaking in Northern Ireland between 1998 and 2023. We examine the impact of three external evaluations (the 2009 Barnett Report, the 2021 Northern Ireland Audit Office Review, and the 2022 Lyons Review) of Northern Ireland's largest regional development agency, Invest NI, on the agendas of the Northern Ireland Assembly and the Parliament of the United Kingdom. We specifically seek to assess whether these evaluations triggered upticks in issues attention and agenda activity at the legislative level. Our paper makes two important contributions. First, it is one of the first attempts to explicitly use feedback to test MSF hypothesis six, which argues policy windows result from changes within the problem stream. Second, to our knowledge, it is one of the first studies to systematically apply the MSF to Northern Ireland and one of only a handful of studies to apply the theory to a devolved regional authority.

(Virtual) Multiple streams of decision-making: China's post-COVID revision of the Infectious Diseases Law

Jialin Li (University of Arizona)

Annemieke van den Dool (Duke Kunshan University)

The Multiple Streams Framework (MSF), originally developed to explain agenda-setting in the U.S., has been extended to account for decision-making processes. However, in its current shape, this extension has limited explanatory power in non-democracies. In response, this paper will critically review existing MSF propositions pertaining to decision-making, develop hypotheses on the drivers and obstacles of policy adoption in the Chinese context, and test these through a case study. The case selected is China's Infectious Diseases Prevention and Control Law, which was amended in response to COVID-19. Despite the urgency brought by the pandemic, which led to the amendment's inclusion in the legislative agenda in early 2020, the law's adoption has been delayed for over four years. This research seeks to uncover the reasons behind this unexpectedly slow process. To do so, we rely on qualitative content analysis of interviews with legislative experts, which we combine with a novel dataset of Chinese legislative records, policy documents, journal articles, and news articles. By extending the MSF to cover decision-making and operationalizing it in a China-specific context, this paper contributes to theoretical development and offers new insights into the dynamics of policy processes in authoritarian regimes.

The Problem with Problem Load: Reconceptualizing Load in the Multiple Streams Framework

Dana Dolan (George Mason University, Schar School of Policy and Government)

Nikolaos Zahariadis (Rhodes College)

What happens when policy systems buckle under pressure, disrupting consensus and stalling decision-making? In the MSF, Zahariadis's innovative concept of Problem Load sought to capture the stress of overwhelming demands—but the concept remains underutilized and inconsistently applied. Drawing on Adcock and Collier's work on concept formation, we show that Problem Load has been both misinterpreted and overstretched. We reconceptualize load within each stream and coupling process as Issue Load, Proposal Load, Justification Load, and Selection Load. Rather than measuring the volume or complexity of inputs, these concepts focus on the consensus-contention dynamics that generate internal system stress. Each Load manifests through observable indicators such as stakeholder disagreement, narrative competition, and fragmented discourse. Our reconceptualization sharpens MSF's theoretical precision,

equips practitioners with diagnostic tools, and opens new pathways for studying how governance systems approach—or avoid—overload.