P16 / Narrative Policy Framework: Developments, Discoveries, and Challenges

Topic : POLICY PROCESS THEORIES

Chair : Elizabeth Shanahan (Montana State University)

Second Chair : Hilda Broqvist (Mid-Sweden University)

Third Chair : Caroline Schlaufer (University of Bern)

GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

The Narrative Policy Framework (NPF) is a theory of the policy process that investigates the role of narratives in all stages of the policy process. The purpose of this panel is to gather NPF scholars around the world to share their research questions, discoveries, and challenges. The primary research question for the NPF is how policy narratives shape the policy process. The power of policy narratives occurs across levels of analysis (micro, meso, macro), at all stages of the policy process, and amongst varying governance regimes. At ICPP7, we welcome NPF scholarship that advances the framework and/or gives insight into complex policy issues.

CALL FOR PAPERS

The panel welcomes papers that contribute to ongoing research around and engage critically with the Narrative Policy Framework (NPF). Research topics may include (but are not restricted to):

--Comparative analyses applying the NPF
--The NPF applied to different political regimes and to new policy contexts and geographies
--NPF research using innovative methods
--Use of different forms of policy narratives (visual, written, oral)
--Investigating macro-level narratives and/or integration across levels of analysis
--Non-results using the NPF
--NPF applications in policy implementation or evaluation

Applicants should clearly anchor their research in the NPF framework or engage critically with it to enable fruitful discussions during the panel.

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Session 1

Friday, July 4th 08:00 to 10:00 (A4)

Discussants

Elizabeth Shanahan (Montana State University)

Hilda Broqvist (Mid-Sweden University)

Evolving Policy Narratives in Tobacco Regulation: A Comparative Analysis of Singapore and Malaysia

Jing Rou Loh (LKY School of Public Policy, National University of Singapore)

Rizkina Aliya (LKY School of Public Policy, National University of Singapore)

This paper examines the policy narratives surrounding the regulation of tobacco as a vice commodity in Singapore and Malaysia, applying the Narrative Policy Framework (NPF) to analyse the transformation of these narratives and policies over time.

The research explores key narrative evolutions surrounding tobacco, from its historical portrayal as household remedy and fashion statement to its contemporary reputation as a public health hazard. These narrative changes are then studied with corresponding policy milestones, such as tobacco cultivation promotion, taxation, labelling regulations, and public awareness campaigns, emphasising how narratives of health crises, economic trade-offs, and social consequences have shaped regulatory approaches.

Employing a comparative analysis, the study highlights the divergent strategies adopted by Singapore and Malaysia. Singapore integrates a mix of non-fiscal measures, such as limiting public smoking spaces and nationwide health campaigns, alongside fiscal policies like tobacco excise. In comparison, Malaysia prioritises fiscal interventions, though these efforts are often shaped by industry influence and competing economic priorities.

NPF serves as a lens to examine the policy narratives that seem hidden in plain sight, specifically, the policy narratives that have pushed tobacco policies into the forefront of policymakers' agenda in Singapore and Malaysia. The framework is useful as it disaggregates the structure of policy narratives into observable variables that can be used to empirically discern how narratives have played a role in the policy process. As narratives are very much shaped by the stakeholders that utilise them, NPF is also useful to see how policy narratives change over time according to shifting stakeholder dynamics.

The paper utilises a meso-level analysis under the NPF to dissect narrative elements—including setting, characters, plot, and moral—identifying the characters that government agencies, public health advocates, industries, and vulnerable populations play within the public health policy space. The research also acknowledges the challenges of analysing policy narratives, particularly in reconstructing historical narratives that significantly influence current policymaking. Limited access to historical records and the implicit nature of narrative shifts present hurdles in fully understanding the trajectory of policy evolution.

Tobacco, with its long history of discourse, offers a valuable case study for understanding how health

narratives evolve alongside decades of regulatory efforts. By showcasing the adaptability of NPF to comparative case studies, the research highlights its utility in uncovering the interplay between narratives and policy outcomes across diverse contexts. This study contributes to the broader understanding of how narrative strategies can drive public health policymaking and evolve under different scientific, economic and political pressures.

History in the service of policy narratives: The case of European migration policy debates

Imogen Bayley (European University Institute)

One of the central themes in policy studies is policy entrepreneurship, the idea that policy changes can be explained by the strategic actions of individuals and organisations in the policy process (Kingdon 1984, Baumgartner and Jones 1991). More recently, the Narrative Policy Framework (NPF) has attempted to systematize the role of narratives in public policy as particular tools for influencing policy debates (Jones and McBeth 2010). This article aims to make a theoretical and empirical contribution to the NPF by investigating how policy leaders use historical narratives as a part of their policy entrepreneurship strategies in the field of migration policy. The chosen time frame of analysis is the three year period following the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, until February 2025. Understanding how policy entrepreneurs relate to and make use of historical narratives in policy argumentation is a highly salient topic as it contributes directly to our understanding of policy entrepreneurship strategies during times of crises when windows of opportunity for policy change are opened and the deployment of certain narrative frames are thought to further favorable policy outcomes.

It is clear that well-crafted storytelling increases the effectiveness of policy communication. Historical examples are one type of a policy-related story that policy entrepreneurs can choose to tell, alongside contemporary policy examples (e.g. from abroad) and stories about individuals and organisations impacted by a policy. While the latter two have been investigated by authors connecting migration policy and narrative analysis (e.g. Sahin-Mencutek 2020, Nerlizzi 2021), a specific look into the use of historical examples will add an additional important layer to the NPF. Furthermore, the use of history is unique in its potential ability to draw on historic memory, sentiment, sympathy or antipathy. Moreover, this would be one of the few studies that would have made a clear connection between the NPF and policy entrepreneurship (e.g. Mosley and Gibson 2017; Townsend et al. 2020).

The study employs qualitative cross-case analysis (Miles and Huberman, 1994) to analyze select policy leaders active in shaping European migration policy from February 2022 – February 2025. The cases will be chosen on the basis of their significance in shaping migration policy transnationally as well as for their differences in motivation, institutional set-up, and levels and mechanisms of influence. Empirical evidence will be drawn from websites, publications, press conferences, speeches, newspaper interviews and op-eds published by the policy leaders in the aftermath of the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

The project will go beyond tracing and collecting the historical examples used, and ask specific questions regarding use of particular historical examples by policy entrepreneurs, along the four narrative elements of the NPF (Setting, Characters, Plot, Morale). Significantly, this highly interdisciplinary proposal connects the disciplines of history, policy studies, and migration studies.

Evolving narrative networks: Understanding scientific policy advice in a changing policy context

Jule Ksinsik (University of Lausanne)

During the COVID-19 pandemic, scientists became important advisors to policymakers and frequently participated in policy debates in the media. This paper integrates insights from the Narrative Policy Framework (NPF) and Social Identities in the Policy Process Theory (SIPP) to situate the narratives of scientists in the policy debate about face masks during the first year of the Covid-19 pandemic in Switzerland. It studies if scientists can be identified as one group with shared policy narratives and how their narratives evolved in relation to other actors' narratives when scientific advice was implemented. Although face masks were a low-cost and easily-accessible protective measure, and the recommendation of the national science advisory body to wear a mask in certain settings was clear from the beginning, the obligation to wear a face mask was only adopted later and step-wise. This staggered implementation of scientific advice presents an opportunity to investigate how scientists' narratives evolved when their recommendations were only slowly, and partially followed. The study contributes to a better understanding of several key questions in research of policy advice and the NPF: how narratives evolve over time, the role media narratives play in the translation of scientific advice into policy, and how scientists interact with other

actors in policy debates. Methodologically, I combine automated coding of narratives and discourse network analysis. I use a Large Language Model (OpenAI API) to code narratives in French and German speaking media articles according to a standard NPF codebook. To describe and compare the narratives over time, I employ network analysis to generate networks of narratives and actors.

Patterns of emotionalization in the Farm to Fork policy narratives

Claudio Radaelli (European University Institute)

Jonathan Kamkhaji (European University Institute)

Public discourse is often imagined in textbooks as rationality, data, and substantial deference toward science. Yet, in real-world policy processes, scientists are looked at with increasing suspicion (Weingart 2023) and public discourse has tilted toward irrationality, becoming more polarized, angry, and simplistic (Haidt 2022). In our contribution, we empirically test the drive towards emotionalization in policy narratives in a highly technical, yet highly polarized, policy debate: the Farm to Fork strategy (F2F) of the European Union. We do so by leveraging the Narrative Policy Framework and applying it to two contrasting narratives that have emerged around F2F, the official European Commission narrative and the narrative of the Hungarian Government (opposing F2F)

In a first step, by manually coding the relevant corpora, we reconstruct and compare the structures of the two narratives in terms of basic NPF elements (setting, plot, characters and morale). In a second step, we employ the NPF-annotated corpora to perform an automated analysis of the emotional content of the narratives. Drawing on this two-pronged analysis, we produce findings on the different structural elements of the two narratives, the emotions elicited by narrators, and how emotions are linked to or evoked by different characters. For example, does the hero elicit joy? Is the category of the villain connected to fear or anger? Does the victim trigger empathy?

To add depth to the analysis of emotions within narratives, we perform the same kind of analysis on a corpus of narrative interviews conducted on a sample of vulnerable farmers coming from all the EU member states. These are interviews conducted with Farm 2 Fork stakeholders/policy takers/citizens and would allow us to test the hypothesis whether policy narratives are more/less emotional than bottom-up, popular narratives.

The findings contribute to the narrative policy framework by specifying how emotions exactly map onto characters, narrators, and the overall narrative. Research for this paper is supported by a project funded by the European Union’s Horizon program (MORES project).

A Study on “I couldn’t get my child into daycare. Japan should die!!!” as a Policy Narrative

Satoru Kohda (Deloitte Tohmatsu Strategy Institute)

In 2017, Japan increased its budget for nursery school development by over 1.3 times, leading to a decline in the number of children on daycare waiting lists. This study investigates the factors contributing to this policy change, centering on a 2016 online post expressing outrage over the lack of childcare availability: "I couldn't get my child into daycare. Japan should die!" This seemingly isolated incident gained traction through parliamentary scrutiny and media coverage, becoming a policy agenda.

The post was written on an anonymous website dated February 15, 2016, which read, "I couldn't get my child into daycare. Japan should die!!! I'm going to have a baby, raise it, go out into society and work, and pay taxes, but I can't leave my child at nursery school. What is the Japanese government thinking?" According to news media, the author of this post was a married woman in her thirties who was employed at the time.

Subsequently, on February 19, 2016, an opposition member of parliament raised the issue in a question in the House of Representatives, thereby drawing attention to the problem of children on waiting lists due to a lack of nursery schools. The post then rapidly spread, thus highlighting the issue as a policy agenda.

In the wake of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's perceived lack of adequate response, women expressing discontent with the issue of children on waiting lists for childcare services took to the streets to protest in front of the Diet. This development coincided with a precipitous decline in the government's support ratings among women. In anticipation of the House of Councillors election in July 2016, the Abe administration unveiled the "Emergency Measures for the Problem of Children on Waiting Lists for Childcare Services" on March 28, 2016, through the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare. These measures were positioned as a pivotal component of the Growth Strategy released in June 2016.

This study employs the Narrative Policy Framework to examine how the controversial post, "Japan should die," led to policy change. The post, which expressed a strong sentiment against the government, became a

policy narrative due to the actions of an opposition party member. According to the NPF, the Japanese government is identified as an Opponent. The strategies employed included the "Devil Shift," which criticized the government's perceived inaction, and the "Solidarity Shift," which targeted "working mothers facing challenges in accessing childcare."

This case study will contribute to the NPF by demonstrating how a seemingly insignificant online expression of public discontent can catalyze significant policy change.

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Session 2

Friday, July 4th 10:15 to 12:15 (A4)

Discussants

Elizabeth Shanahan (Montana State University)

Caroline Schlaufer (University of Bern)

The role of cultural deep core belief systems in strategic use of policy narratives in Swiss public debates on animal experimentation

Maaike Dittrich (University of Bern)

This study explores the intersection of cultural deep core beliefs and narrative strategies within Swiss animal experimentation policy debates, employing the Narrative Policy Framework (NPF) and Cultural Theory (CT). It examines how macro-level cultural belief systems influence meso-level strategic use of narrative elements, focusing on the devil-angel-solidarity shift (DAS-shift) in narratives constructed by policy actors in the French-speaking and German-speaking cultural regions of Switzerland. Using content analysis of newspaper articles published between 1985 and 2022 surrounding four popular votes on animal experimentation, the research compares cultural belief expressions and narrative strategies over time (diachronical comparison) and between cultural regions (synchronical comparison). The findings aim to bridge the macro- and meso-levels in NPF scholarship, addressing calls to operationalize macro-level belief systems and analyze their influence on meso-level strategies. It is hypothesized that macro-level cultural deep core belief systems, rather than coalitional success or status quo versus reform stance, drive narrative strategies. Employing a quantitative and qualitative approach, this paper not only provides empirical insights into the dynamic public debate on animal testing, but also contributes to advancing NPF and CT literature by linking cultural belief systems to narrative construction and providing insights into the role of beliefs in shaping policy narratives.

The Hero of Poverty Alleviation: Narratives, Risk Preferences, and Policy Decisions of Village Cadres in Rural China

Zhiqi Xu (Erasmus University Rotterdam)

This study employs the Narrative Policy Framework (NPF) to examine how policy narratives influence the risk preferences of village cadres in rural China—a critical yet underexplored micro-level context in policy process research. By examining the behavioural impact of competing poverty alleviation narratives—top-down versus bottom-up—this research highlights the cognitive mechanisms through which narratives influence decision-making under uncertainty.

A survey experiment was conducted with 210 village cadres and representatives from 98 counties across 23 provinces. Participants were randomly assigned to view one of two one-minute videos crafted as news reports. The top-down narrative depicted the government as the hero leading poverty alleviation efforts, aligning with official discourse. In contrast, the bottom-up narrative framed individuals as heroes overcoming poverty through their own agency. Both videos were identical in style and content except for the narrative framing, ensuring that differences in outcomes could be attributed to the narratives themselves. Following the videos, participants' risk preferences were assessed using a validated investment choice question from

the China General Social Survey.

Findings reveal that exposure to the top-down narrative increased risk aversion among village cadres, leading them to prefer low-risk, low-return investment options. Conversely, the bottom-up narrative prompted greater risk-taking behaviour, with participants opting for high-risk, high-return choices. These results demonstrate that policy narratives can significantly alter individual risk preferences, with implications for fostering entrepreneurship, autonomy, and motivation in poverty reduction and rural governance.

Theoretically, this study advances the NPF by extending its application to a collectivist, non-Western context, addressing a gap in the literature regarding cultural influences on narrative effects. By integrating insights from behavioural economics and psychology, it underscores the relevance of narrative framing in shaping street-level implementer behaviours, a crucial yet understudied dimension of policy processes. Furthermore, the study responds to calls within the NPF literature for greater focus on narrative elements like characters and moral framing, demonstrating their measurable effects on policy outcomes. Methodologically, the use of video priming represents an innovative approach within NPF studies, offering a dynamic medium to convey narratives and assess their behavioural impact.

By focusing on village cadres who serve as both policy implementers and community leaders, this research provides nuanced insights into the micro-level mechanisms through which narratives shape policy outcomes. It underscores the importance of tailoring policy narratives to cultural and institutional contexts to enhance engagement and effectiveness. These findings also inform the design of narrative strategies for improving policy communication and achieving desired behavioural outcomes among implementers of poverty alleviation programs.

A typology of heroes for the Narrative Policy Framework (NPF)

Alejandro Estévez (Universidad de Buenos Aires)

Abstract: A Typology of Heroes for the Narrative Policy Framework (NPF)
This paper introduces a novel typology of heroes within the Narrative Policy Framework (NPF), a framework that has become instrumental in analyzing the narrative dynamics of public policy processes. While the NPF has extensively explored the roles of villains and victims, the conceptualization of heroes remains underdeveloped. Addressing this gap, this study categorizes heroes along two key dimensions: "Individual vs. Group" and "Transformative vs. Conservative". These dimensions are systematically integrated into the NPF's narrative structure, which emphasizes characters as pivotal in shaping policy agendas, fostering coalitions, and mobilizing support.

The typology emerges from an interdisciplinary exploration of heroes across philosophical, sociological, political, and cultural perspectives. Philosophically, heroes symbolize virtues such as moral excellence (Aristotle) and self-overcoming (Nietzsche). Sociologically, they reflect collective aspirations and act as agents of societal cohesion (Durkheim). Politically, they are transformative figures leading societal change or defending democratic values (Weber). These theoretical underpinnings support a comprehensive framework that identifies heroes' diverse roles in public policy narratives.

To illustrate the typology, the study applies it to a range of historical and contemporary examples. For instance, Nelson Mandela epitomizes the "Transformative Individual Hero", leading South Africa through reconciliation and democratization. The Black Lives Matter movement exemplifies the "Transformative Group Hero", uniting stakeholders around systemic reform. Conversely, Angela Merkel serves as a "Conservative Individual Hero", safeguarding economic stability and democratic cohesion during global crises, while the Polish Solidarity movement demonstrates the role of a "Conservative Group Hero", preserving democratic traditions in post-communist Poland.

This typology enriches the NPF by linking these heroic archetypes to its three levels of narrative analysis—micro, meso, and macro. At the micro level, heroes inspire individual beliefs and emotional resonance. At the meso level, they unify coalitions around shared strategies and values. At the macro level, heroes become cultural icons, influencing broad political and societal discourses. Furthermore, the adaptability of heroes across contexts and roles is emphasized, showcasing their capacity to transition between transformative and conservative positions depending on the narrative needs and political environment.

The implications of this typology are significant for both theory and practice. For scholars, it advances the analytical precision of the NPF, allowing for systematic comparative studies across diverse political and cultural settings. For policymakers, it offers strategic insights into the design and deployment of narratives that resonate with different audiences, legitimize decisions, and build coalitions. By emphasizing heroes' centrality in narrative construction, this study underscores their strategic importance in advancing effective, inclusive, and adaptive public policies in increasingly polarized environments.

In conclusion, the proposed typology not only fills a critical gap within the NPF but also provides a versatile

tool for understanding and leveraging the symbolic power of heroes in public policy narratives. Future research should further explore the interplay between heroes, villains, and victims, as well as the transitions heroes undergo across narrative contexts, to deepen our understanding of their enduring influence on governance and societal change.

Keywords: Narrative Policy Framework, Heroes, Public Policy Narratives, Typology, Coalition Building.

Narrating Success: Evaluation from a Policy Narrative Perspective

Hilda Broqvist (Mid-Sweden University)

In this paper, I use the Narrative Policy Framework (NPF) to study the yearly evaluations of the regional implementation of the Swedish National Strategy to prevent and combat men's violence against women. Policy evaluation remains largely understudied from a policy process perspective and in the existing NPF literature, evaluations have mainly featured as a form of evidence to be used in narratives, or as the center of a policy debate. There are, however, studies that suggest that evaluations and impact assessments follow a narrative structure with problem definitions, policy instruments, and target populations. Furthemore, outside of the NPF literature, studies on preventive policy have highlighted how policymakers and evaluators often lack clear indicators to objectively measure the success of a policy. As a result, rather than measuring the success of the policy, policymakers can settle for the "appearance of success" (Cairney and St.Denny 2020), interpreting ambigous indicators as supporting their policy position. Against this theoretical underpinning, this study utilizes the NPF codebook to study evaluations as narratives.

The boundaries of narrative plot: Synthesizing concepts and approaches

Jonathan Ruff (South Dakota State University)

The Narrative Policy Framework (NPF) has grown in popularity as a policy process framework which centralizes narratives as the primary means by which we communicate policy preferences. In the NPF, key components of policy narratives (including Characters, Settings, Morals of the Story, and Plot) are defined and measured by scholars seeking insight into narrator construction, dissemination, and interpretation of policy stories. The narrative component plot has been a particularly difficult concept to define and operationalize consistently in narrative research. This article uses a scoping review approach to capture NPF definitions of plot, presented in articles from 2011-2024, and synthesize them within the context of literary and narratological theory. I identify three conceptual boundaries: Narrative plot includes a policy narrative’s sequential structure, the valence of outcomes, and the causal attribution associated with outcomes. I then describe how NPF approaches have operationalized these conceptual boundaries and provide a user-guide for future researchers to identify studies with similar methodological approaches which use one or more of these boundaries: sequential structure (a measurement of narrative structure), valence (a measurement of narrator assessments), and causal attribution (a measurement of narrative causality). The article concludes with a discussion of how these boundaries can help the framework establish empirical reliability through a shared language on plot which transcends individual methodologies.