P03 / Policy Analysis and Policy Research in Latin America

Topic : COMPARATIVE PUBLIC POLICY

Chair : Leonardo Secchi (Universidade do Estado de Santa Catarina)

Second Chair : Cesar Nicandro Cruz-Rubio (Universidad Carlos III de Madrid)

GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

The objective of the panel is to study the production of public policy research and public policy analysis in Latin American countries.

This panel aims to cover the subject area of Public Policy in Latin America, a world region that share similar socio-cultural, political, institutional, and administrative characteristics. This panel wants to bring in an overview of public policy analysis and research in Latin America, convening a host of scholars and practitioners from the region.

The proposed panel aims to discuss an overview of public policymaking, institutions, and comparative studies on PP themes. As noted by Jreisat (2005, 2011) most internationally published scholarship in Public Administration focus on countries from Europe, Asia, and North America. The same point was made by Geva-May, Hoffmann and Muhleisen (2018) about policy research. The authors explicitly indicate a lack of comparative publications from the Global South, in general, and from the Latin American region, specifically. This shortage of publications hinders the diffusion of knowledge and administrative solutions between the Global North and the Global South.

The expected benefit from this panel is the availability of a high-quality articles on policy analysis and research in the Latin American region, with a straightforward scope in providing the current state of PP in the region, its challenges and recommendations for policy and further research. This panel can be of interest for researchers and practitioners interested in public policy research and policy analysis in the region, as well as for those working with comparative Public Analysis in non-Spanish and non-Portuguese speaking countries.

Adopting a comparative perspective on public policy analysis and research (Geva-May et al., 2018; Walle & Brans, 2018), the panel proposes the following research question: What are the prevalent public policy analysis methods adopted by policymakers in the region? What are the prevalent policy research theories and frameworks adopted by scholars in the regions? What examples of idiosyncratic or genuine methods/frameworks of policy analysis or policy research have emerged in Latin America?

CALL FOR PAPERS

We welcome theoretical and empirical papers with a policy analysis or policy research perspective of regional comparative fashion or single country studies in Latin America. The following topics are of special interest: public policy analysis traditions (rationalist vs. argumentative policy analysis), policy design, policy evaluation, participation, deliberation, policy diffusion and circulation, advocacy coalition framework, punctuated equilibrium theory, genuine or idiosyncratic methods for policy analysis and policy research.

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Session 1

Thursday, July 3rd 10:15 to 12:15 (A5)

Discussants

Cesar Nicandro Cruz-Rubio (Universidad Carlos III de Madrid)

Critical policy studies in Latin America

Rosana Boullosa (University of Brasilia/Brazil and Enap/Brazil)

The emergence of Critical Policy Studies as a dissenting school within the broader policy field is gaining visibility in Latin America. Although this development might initially seem delayed compared to similar movements in the Global North, it actually represents a powerful and creative shift with the potential to redefine core aspects of Critical Policy Studies. Rather than replicating established frameworks, Latin American contributions offer novel epistemological and political perspectives deeply rooted in the region's histories, social struggles, and intellectual traditions.

It is important to emphasize that, although Critical Policy Studies have only recently begun to consolidate as a recognizable strand within the Latin American policy field, critical thinking has long thrived in the region. For decades, critical traditions have developed robustly in disciplines such as economics, sociology, literature, history, and geography. Scholars in these fields frequently engaged with public policy issues, even if they did not identify themselves within the policy studies domain. The dominance of conventional and normative approaches in policy analysis often marginalized these perspectives, but this does not mean that critical thought was absent; it simply existed in other disciplinary spaces.

More recently, however, a new generation of scholars has emerged, explicitly positioning themselves within policy studies while also challenging its dominant assumptions. These scholars aim to dispute not only epistemological frameworks but also the political and deontological commitments of mainstream policy analysis. Their work presents a critical epistemological alternative, engaging with local realities while also fostering transnational dialogues.

What might have seemed like a late entry has, in fact, unfolded as a dynamic and transformative movement. By drawing on Latin America's rich and diverse critical tradition, this emerging field has expanded the horizons of Critical Policy Studies, offering contributions that go beyond the limits of Northern paradigms. In this sense, Latin American Critical Policy Studies benefit from the convergence of two major critical traditions: European critical theory—particularly the second generation of the Frankfurt School—and Latin American critical thought—especially its third generation.

The intersection of these traditions has enabled more radical and inclusive critiques within the field, opening space for innovative theoretical and methodological approaches. Three strands have been particularly influential in shaping this development: decolonial studies, feminist studies, and social management studies. These approaches are deeply rooted in historically emancipatory and diverse lines of thought, and they offer pluralistic, inclusive, and context-sensitive perspectives on public policy processes.

Decolonial studies challenge the epistemic and geopolitical hierarchies that structure dominant policy knowledge, advocating for situated understandings of values, arguments, and legitimacy. Feminist studies foreground subjectivity, affect, and reflexivity, shedding light on power relations, care, and embodied knowledge in policy processes. Social management studies, in turn, propose a reconfiguration of the very notion of public policy, emphasizing collective action, civic participation, and social learning as core elements of democratic public institutions.

These approaches do not merely extend Critical Policy Studies; they contribute to reshaping its foundations. They address historical gaps in the field, particularly the absence of a more radical geopolitical vision, a gender-informed analysis, and a geocentric understanding of public policy dynamics. Far from being

peripheral adaptations, Latin American contributions constitute original and necessary interventions that help democratize the very terms of what is recognized as policy knowledge—and who is entitled to produce it.

This paper explores these contributions in depth. It begins by briefly revisiting the trajectory of European Critical Theory, particularly the Frankfurt School (section 1), and then turns to the history of Latin American critical thought (section 2) and its contemporary analytical schools. It then examines the key contributions of Latin American scholarship to Critical Policy Studies through three primary lenses: decolonial studies (section 3), focusing on values and argumentation; feminist studies (section 4), highlighting subjectivity and reflexivity; and social management studies (section 5), emphasizing their redefinition of public policy and institutions. The conclusion synthesizes these contributions and proposes an agenda for future research to further develop this emerging field.

Incorporating the temporal differences between the global and local contexts in the public policymaking process in Latin America

Martha-Isabel Gómez-Lee (Universidad Externado de Colombia)

In the high Andean region of South America, Indigenous people walk in the present looking at the past, carrying the future on their backs. For inhabitants of this region the future is a continuous return to the past. In Latin America is time to incorporate in the public policymaking process the different ways of understanding time in the global and local context. In the former, temporality is conceived as something mechanical and universal, while in the local temporalities are dynamic and sui generis. The purpose of the paper is the diffusion of knowledge and solutions between the Global North and the Global South. In this context, is exposed, the need for a theoretical hybridization to interpret the multifaceted nature of time in local contexts in Latin America, which are simultaneously global. The Global South must overcome the original public policy sciences that were contextualized, oriented to the solution of universal temporal problems and focused on the use of mechanical time. This paper applies the route of theoretical hybridization proposed by Gómez Lee (2024) between the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF) and the approach called "Temporalities of the Future" promoted by the International Graduate School (IGC). To establish this new hybridization route, three main strategies are adopted: to identify the advances in the temporalities of the future in Latin America in their relationship with decision-making, to study “glocalities" (Escobar, 2005;2012), such as those of the constructed process in the Colombian Pacific, in which subaltern strategies of localisation are highlighted and to mix with the way in which Sabatier's Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF) illustrates the elaboration of policies considering the temporal beliefs of political actors. In this way, time is incorporated as a social construction. It is concluded that the large gap between the ways in which decision-makers understand time in the development and use of theories of the policy process and the beliefs of future temporalities of local political actors involved in a public problem in Latin America must be bridged. Public policy must overcome the homogenous cultural perspective and encourages the reinforcement of non-dominant cultural forms.

(Virtual) Human Rights and Public Policies in Ecuador: Between Centrality and the "Thorn in the Side"

Efren Guerrero (Pontificia Universidad Católica del Ecuador)

Since the return to democracy in 1978, evidence suggests that public policy in the Republic of Ecuador has oscillated between successive transitions of paradigms in the management of public affairs and the personalized nature of political decisions, hindering an intergenerational perspective in the design, implementation, and evaluation of state activities. This fact intersects with the growing importance of human rights and the mechanisms of guarantee as both modulators and objectives of public policy. This paper will provide a historical perspective from the return to democracy until 2022, divided into four periods ("neglect," "consolidation," "centrality," "pandemic"), in which planning efforts intersect with citizen, legal, and social pressure to make fundamental rights the ultimate goals of state activity. It is proposed that the increasing formal centrality of human rights in the public agenda intertwines with a tendency to view rights as a "thorn in the side," an obstacle to development goals that denies the existence of otherness and minority populations. It is concluded that the post-pandemic needs and the generalized crisis will generate a new status quo in which the limits of the state face new challenges and veto actors.

(Virtual) Artificial intelligence in Latin America’s public policy cycles

Juan Gutiérrez (Universidad de Los Andes)

This paper examines the adoption of artificial intelligence (AI) systems by public bodies in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC). First, we created a novel data base that mapped over 600 AI systems in 20 LAC countries that have been deployed in the last decade. We characterized each system with over 15 variables, such as objectives, functions, method or technique used to develop it, status, and the type of data used to train or operate it, among others. Then, we selected and analyzed 14 systems that illustrate diverse technologies and government sectors from different countries and how explored how these tools could contribute to the main stages of the public policy cycle: agenda-setting, formulation, implementation, and evaluation. Three case selection criteria were considered: a) functions of the AI systems, b) countries that adopted them, and c) availability of information about their implementation. Our analysis covers various systems utilized across multiple government sectors and countries, including Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, and Peru. We also examine how these systems can help governments achieve their objectives and the risks associated with their implementation. Our research reveals that LAC governments embrace and use diverse AI systems in various sectors (law enforcement, health, education, public utilities, environmental etc.). However, there is limited publicly available information on these systems, particularly on critical issues such as who developed the tool, whether results or impacts associated with its use have already been reported, and how the system was financed. This underscores the importance of investigating tools that enhance algorithmic transparency. We also highlight the need to prevent and manage risks associated with implementing different AI systems, especially when human rights may be at stake. Additionally, there is a need for further research on adopting AI in LAC to understand the situations or contexts that may or may not favor the adoption and implementation of systems by the governments in the region.

The Punctuated Equilibrium Theory in Latin America: Recent Productions and New Research Agendas.

Felipe Brasil (University of Sao paulo)

The punctuated equilibrium theory (PET) is a theory of public policy and political change developed by Frank Baumgartner and Bryan Jones. This model seeks to explain how public policies change and evolve over time in democratic political systems. The model argues policy change is characterized by long periods of stability punctuated by short bursts of rapid change. Public policies generally remain stable for extended periods. During these phases of stability, there may be incremental adjustments and routine policy maintenance, but major changes are infrequent. Periodically, there are abrupt and significant policy changes. These policy "punctuations" occur relatively rarely and are often triggered by various factors such as changes in public opinion, election outcomes, crises, shifts in political power, or changes in the policy subsystem.

The PET has contributed to better understand the dynamics of policy change in democratic systems and the role of various factors in shaping the policy agenda. Overall, the PET provides a valuable framework for studying the non-linear nature of policy change and the complexities of the policymaking process in democratic societies. It also provides a general framework to explain why policy process is biased.

By linking attention and information processing levels to access the policy agenda, PET successfully bridges the gap between two seemingly contrasting approaches: incrementalism and large-scale public policy change. According to PET, extended periods of stability and incremental adjustments coexist with sudden and dramatic shifts in policymakers' attention. The model is structured by constructing representations of public policies, mainly focusing on the monopolies surrounding them. Policy monopolies are rigid constructs formed by institutional and ideational arrangements that create barriers to new participants and ideas, incentivizing prolonged stability and incremental changes. However, occasionally, the monopoly is disrupted through a reconfiguration of the image and arrangements surrounding a policy, leading to punctuations .

PET also makes an empirical contribution to the study of the policy process by developing quantitative research on policy agendas. In its origins, the empirical strategy to test PET relies on case studies in the US, such as pesticides, smoking, and nuclear power. A decade after the publication of Agendas and Instability, Jones and Baumgartner created the Comparative Agendas Project (CAP), which aims to track long-term attention dynamics across countries and time using quantitative methods. CAP brings together research groups from different countries in Europe, Asia, and Latin America to develop datasets that contain information about the dynamics of issue attention following a standard methodological scheme.

This paper is divided into five sections. The next section presents the critical developments of PET from 1993 to the present day, emphasizing the theoretical and empirical contributions resulting from its global application. The second section discusses the creation of the Comparative Agendas Project (CAP) and its analytical and methodological frameworks in a comparative perspective. The third section focuses on developments of PET in Latin America. Finally, the last section concludes by summarizing the contributions of this chapter and future research avenues.

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Session 2

Thursday, July 3rd 16:00 to 18:00 (A5)

Discussants

Leonardo Secchi (Universidade do Estado de Santa Catarina)

Bridging the Evidence Gap: Evaluating the Bolsa Estudante Program in Brazil

Marcos vinicio wink junior (Universidade do Estado de Santa Catarina)

Alan Santos (Universidade do Estado de Santa Catarina)

High school dropout rates remain a persistent challenge in Latin America, with profound implications for socioeconomic development and equity. In Brazil, the state of Santa Catarina launched the Bolsa Estudante Program in 2022, a conditional cash transfer initiative aimed at reducing dropout rates among low-income high school students. The program provides financial support to eligible students, contingent on maintaining a minimum attendance rate of 75%. While its design aligns with global best practices in education-focused transfer programs, its evaluation remains limited, with decisions regarding its renewal relying solely on average attendance metrics rather than comprehensive impact assessments.

This study seeks to address this gap by providing a robust evaluation of the Bolsa Estudante Program through a Difference-in-Differences (Diff-in-Diff) methodology. Using data from the Continuous National Household Sample Survey (PNAD Contínua) and administrative records, the analysis compares attendance trends among eligible students (treatment group) and their higher-income peers (control group) before and after program implementation. By isolating the program's effects and accounting for socioeconomic variables such as parental education and regional inequalities, the study contributes to the evidence base on policy effectiveness in Latin America.

The findings reveal the importance of context-sensitive policy evaluation in addressing systemic challenges in education. Preliminary results highlight significant heterogeneity in program impacts, with greater effectiveness observed in regions with higher socioeconomic vulnerabilities. This underscores the need for adaptive policy designs that consider local disparities in infrastructure, resource availability, and student needs. Furthermore, the study critically examines the barriers to integrating evaluation findings into decision-making processes, emphasizing the political and institutional factors that influence the use—or lack thereof—of evidence in policymaking.

By situating this research within the broader context of public policy analysis in Latin America, the study contributes to the ongoing dialogue on evidence-based policymaking in the region. It highlights the potential of evaluations not only to inform program continuation but also to drive strategic improvements and enhance equity in educational outcomes. Additionally, the study provides a valuable case study for scholars and practitioners interested in the interplay between policy design, implementation, and evaluation in Latin America.

This work aligns with the panel's objective of understanding how policy research and analysis are conducted in Latin America, offering insights into the methodologies and challenges of evaluating public programs in the region. It calls for a stronger emphasis on institutionalizing evaluation mechanisms and fostering a culture of evidence use, ensuring that public policies are not only well-designed but also effectively implemented to address the region's pressing social issues.

Introduction to Public Policy in Latin America

Leonardo Secchi (Universidade do Estado de Santa Catarina)

Cesar Nicandro Cruz-Rubio (Universidad Carlos III de Madrid)

The objective of this paper is to introduce the reader to this Handbook of Public Policy in Latin America. This handbook was designed to compile state-of-the-art developments in the application of analytical models, comparative studies and include specific cases of public policy in Latin America. Describes the historical advancement of this field of study, their advancements and the role several key research and teaching institutions and organizations play around. Finally the paper describes the content of the handbook making thematic comments about their sections and main authors' contributions.

keywords: Public policy; policy studies; policy sciences; theory development; public governance; Latin America

Distributive Politics in Rural Housing Policy Implementation in Colombia

Claudia Avellaneda (Indiana University Bloomington)

Ricardo Bello-Gomez (Rutgers University)

Affordable housing is often subject o a trade-off between technical response to housing demand an political interests at different levels of government. While distribution of housing subsidies is formally expected to follow technical need-based criteria, political influence also may affect these allocations. This research explores demand/need and political factors as explanations for resource allocation across the Colombian municipalities through the national Rural Housing Program. the quantitative analysis relies on a panel dataset of the 1,100 Colombian municipalities during 2009-2016. Municipal socio-demographic characteristics assess rural housing demand while vote share for national, regional, and local leaders measure political interests. Findings from the two-way fixed-effects OLS regression suggest that the program favors core voters, as municipalities with higher votes for the president receive greater rural housing allocations. This reserach contributes to the literature of housing and social policy implementation, and is relationships with distributive politics by assessing the technical and political drivers of resource allocation in an emergent economy's multi-level setting.

The transformation of the polycentric governance system of conflict management into strategic ecosystems. Tumaco Case 2023-2025

Juan-Antonio Zornoza (Universidad Nacional de Colombia)

How to transform a traditional governance system into polycentric processes based on process and network approaches through joint strategies between institutions, organizations and communities?

A qualitative model with a changing structure of actors, issues and decision-making scenarios, combined with quantitative models of problems extracted from a data set, can identify the capacities for negotiating interests between actors with persuasion, leadership and information-knowledge skills. The game ecology framework, based on network analysis, can obtain results that transform the governance system of Tumaco and influence its multi-level agenda, starting from the problem of marine and coastal pollution of the Eastern Tropical Pacific Marine Corridor (CMAR), with actions for habitat preservation, food security, water supply, tourism, rural development, fishing, work, infrastructure, education and public health, for organizations, institutions and indigenous, rural, urban and Afro-Colombian communities of the Tumaco district. The governance system built can strengthen the coordination and effectiveness of the instruments and the forums with the actors allow to know capacities, competencies, interactions, and to identify new actors, decision centers and problems. The information collected facilitates the classification of actors and adds components. The semi-structured interviews identify objectives, roles and relevant information to analyze the network. Actors who cannot be contacted (ethnic peoples or armed groups) are characterized using secondary sources, the information is classified and analyzed to build a graph whose nodes represent the capacity and interest of the actors, and the edges relationships of trust.

Problems such as ecosystem degradation, land concentration, rural underdevelopment, extractive practices, food and water crises can be addressed through productive transformation and collaborative governance. Recent research by Berardo & Lubell (2016) and Morrison et al. (2023) examined governance systems in areas of ecosystem importance and oriented the Games Ecology framework towards a theory with multiple

empirically testable hypotheses. In the first case, networks self-organize based on their perception of risk. At risk of desertion, they form bonding structures, and at low risk, they form bridging structures, in governance systems with diverse institutional strengths.

The cases of the Sacramento Valley and Tampa Bay contrast with the Paraná Delta in the degree of professionalization and institutionalization of the networks. The second case, the Australian Great Barrier Reef, confirms that polycentric governance comprises spaces and actors that are interdependent over time, which fragment the polycentric capacity to resolve conflicts and adapt. A building block approach facilitates understanding and practicing polycentric governance because it offers an accurate diagnosis of systemic dynamics. The Tumaco case is similar to the Paraná Delta in that institutional weakness is compensated by strong organizations that take on their tasks, schedule forums, and manage the process. The ecosystem worsens if political and industrial strategies undermine coordination and deepen coastal pollution. Latin American actors are possibly more inclined to establish psycho-affective links than to engage in lobbying and rational transactions.

Keywords: Polycentric governance, game ecology, network approach, social network analysis, collective action, Latin America, circular economy.

Indigenous Communities and Public Policies in Colombia: Navigating Moral and Structural Challenges

Andres Morales (Universidad Internacional de la Rioja)

Indigenous communities in Colombia occupy a unique yet precarious position within the nation's socio-political landscape. Representing over 4% of the population and encompassing diverse cultural, linguistic, and ecological systems, these communities face systemic challenges rooted in historical marginalization, territorial disputes, and structural inequities. Public policies aimed at addressing indigenous rights and development in Colombia have made notable strides, particularly following the 1991 Constitution, which recognized Colombia as a multicultural and pluri-ethnic state (Van Cott, 2000). Despite these advances, significant gaps remain in policy design, implementation, and moral considerations, revealing the tension between national development objectives and indigenous self-determination.

This paper examines the evolution of public policies affecting indigenous communities in Colombia, focusing on three critical areas: territorial autonomy, cultural preservation, and socio-economic inclusion. Policies such as Law 21 of 1991, which ratified the International Labour Organization's Convention 169, provide a legal framework for indigenous autonomy and territorial rights. However, enforcement remains inconsistent, particularly in regions affected by armed conflict and resource extraction activities (Rodríguez-Garavito et al., 2008). These challenges are compounded by moral dilemmas, such as balancing the rights of indigenous communities with national priorities like economic growth and infrastructure development (Postero, 2007).

A key focus is the moral imperative of ensuring meaningful participation of indigenous communities in policy-making processes. While mechanisms like prior consultation (consulta previa) are legally mandated, they often fail to provide genuine opportunities for indigenous voices to influence decisions, particularly in the context of extractive industries and megaprojects (Roldán-Ortiga, 2004). Such practices frequently exacerbate inequalities and undermine trust between indigenous communities and the state.

The paper also explores how indigenous knowledge systems can inform more inclusive and sustainable public policies. Drawing on examples from the Amazon and Sierra Nevada regions, it argues that integrating indigenous worldviews into policy frameworks can address critical moral issues, such as environmental degradation and social inequality (Escobar, 2008). However, achieving this requires a fundamental shift in how indigenous communities are perceived—not as obstacles to development but as partners in creating equitable and sustainable futures.

Through a critical analysis of policy documents, case studies, and interviews, this paper highlights the successes and shortcomings of Colombia's approach to indigenous rights and public policies. It underscores the need for a holistic framework that not only recognizes indigenous autonomy but also addresses structural inequalities and moral dilemmas inherent in state-indigenous relations. By fostering genuine collaboration and aligning public policies with indigenous priorities, Colombia can make significant strides toward a more just and inclusive society.

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