P02 / Social Equity in Public Policy

Topic : INEQUALITIES AND PUBLIC POLICY

Chair : Shahjahan Bhuiyan (American University in Cairo)

GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

Although a contesting concept, equity is believed to be the core of production and dissemination of knowledge across academic disciplines. In the context of a national state, when knowledge is diverse and inclusive, it helps governments to identify problems and to seek their socially equitable solutions for the benefit of their citizens. Public Administration as an academic discipline is discharging this critical responsibility dating to the early days of the field. Dwight Waldo, a US political scientist, who first described the influence of social equity on the body of public administration as a ductless gland, a subtle but important influence in the field. George Frederickson opines that the search for social equity provides public administration with a real normative base. In this particular milieu, the definition of social equity that has been advanced by Johnson and Savara (2011, p. 282) is deemed useful, "...is the active commitment to fairness, justice, and equality in the formation of public policy, distribution of public services, implementation of public policy, and management of all institutions serving the public directly of any contract. Public administrators, including all persons involved in public governance should seek to prevent and reduce inequality and injustice based on significant social characteristics and to promote greater equality in access to services, procedural fairness, quality of services and social outcomes."

Empirical evidence suggests that countries across the world suffers from the lack of social equity challenges. Wooldridge and Bilharz note that in today's increasingly divisive and complex world, issues of inequity are at the center of policy debates and public frustration regarding a variety of social problems. Widening income gaps, unequal access to health and education resources, and tensions between racial and social groups are at the forefront of conversations, particularly for the public agencies looking to resolve them. By examining the context of the social equity conversation, public administrators may better understand how to reduce inequities in society and the role public policy plays to advance the agenda.

The objectives of this panel is to understand the critical role social equity plays in shaping public policy. In doing so, this panel attempts to explore a broader research question: How and to what extent policy debates centering social equity shapes making and implementing public policy?

CALL FOR PAPERS

Submissions are welcome on all relevant thematic issues (e.g., health, education, race, gender, economic) that cross-cut between any forms of social (in)equity and public policy. Depending on the number of submissions, similar thematic papers (e.g., racial inequity) will be categorized in one group to ensure a consistent discussion. It is expected that the papers that will be presented in this panel will trigger policy debates and offer policy solutions/suggestions to contribute to make a better world where we all aspire to live in a just society.

P02 / Social Equity in Public Policy

Chair : Shahjahan Bhuiyan (American University in Cairo)

Session 1

Friday, July 4th 10:15 to 12:15 (C1)

Transforming Public Sector Performance: Applying the Liberatory Public Service Framework to Address Systemic Inequities

Meghna Sabharwal (The University of Texas at Dallas)

Transforming Public Sector Performance: Applying the Liberatory Public Service Framework to Address Systemic Inequities

Meghna Sabharwal, The University of Texas at Dallas

Rashmi Chordiya, Seattle University

Erna Ruijer, Utrecht University

Sean McCandless, The University of Texas at Dallas

Adana Protonentis, Kindred Consulting

Imane Hijal-Moghrabi, The University of Texas Permian Basin

Shilpa Viswanath, John Jay College of Criminal Justice, CUNY

Public administrators often navigate tensions and contradictions around operationalizing values such as equity, economy, effectiveness, and efficiency, which are frequently presented as competing principles in public administration (PA) and performance management. In this article, we argue for the application and integration of the liberatory public service (LPS) framework to align these values more effectively, using four illustrative case studies to demonstrate how LPS can offer a path forward in addressing the challenges inherent in public sector performance management. The LPS framework advocates for a trauma-informed, repair-centered public service that compassionately centers marginalized communities. We suggest that LPS can reframe equity, economy, effectiveness, and efficiency as complementary rather than competing values, playing a crucial role in addressing systemic inequities that disproportionately impact historically and persistently marginalized populations.

Traditional approaches to performance management in the public sector are deeply rooted in extractive capitalism, which relies on intersectional forms of oppression, such as racism, sexism, classism, and ableism. The sophisticated control and surveillance methods of performance management, often viewed as standard, have historical ties to managerial practices from early industrial-era scientific management. These modern management techniques aimed at achieving efficiency and economies of scale for greater profits originated from systems such as settler colonialism and slave-era plantation management. Consequently, capitalist approaches to public sector performance management risk becoming tools of oppression, contributing to the reproduction of systemic inequities and harm against marginalized communities. The case studies included in this article highlight how these systemic inequities persist within public sector performance management systems and demonstrate the need for a framework like LPS to address them.

The first case study examines backlash against diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives within the U.S. Federal Secret Service. The second case explores the decision of the Society of Human Resource Management to shift its focus away from equity, reflecting a broader resistance to equity initiatives in the workplace. The third case involves King County, which, despite progress toward racial and social justice, still faces challenges such as pay and promotion disparities and discrimination against Black women. Finally, the article analyzes a case from the Netherlands, where new data exchange methods used by the Tax Authority to enhance efficiency led to systemic discrimination against vulnerable groups due to an inadequate equity analysis. These case studies underscore how systemic inequities manifest in public performance management contexts and provide a strong argument for integrating the LPS framework to address these issues.

LPS is grounded in grassroots social justice movement frameworks and aligns with existing social equity-focused approaches in public administration. It recognizes the importance of emotional labor in public

service, the need for care-centered and relational approaches, and the necessity of a public ethics of care guiding all public administration functions. LPS distills the teachings from various social justice frameworks and applies them to public service through five key principles. These principles include integrating inner and collective transformation, recognizing the pervasive trauma caused by historical and institutional oppression, and creating organizational spaces for healing and repair. LPS emphasizes the importance of centering the experiences of those most impacted by systemic inequities and seeks to transform harmful conditions, ending cycles of oppression.

LPS values love, courage, repair, healing, joy, efficacy, solidarity, and transformation. It offers a vision and a practice aimed at liberating public service from exclusionary and harmful systems, replacing them with inclusive, nourishing, and life-affirming systems that foster collective work, shared accountability, transparency, and care. In public performance management, LPS can guide the development of accountability and performance measurement systems that are trauma-informed, repair-oriented, and centered on the needs of those most impacted by inequitable systems. By integrating LPS, public performance management systems can mitigate harm caused by systemic disparities and advance the goals of efficiency, economy, effectiveness, equity, and collective liberation. We conclude by highlighting implications for future research and practice that integrate LPS into public performance and management at all levels.

Social equity, policy, and public views on parents' right to opt children out of curriculum content in schools

Nevbahar Ertas (University of Alabama at Birmingham)

Andrew McKnight (University of Alabama at Birmingham)

Aim: Increasing divisions regarding curriculum and instruction have resulted in calls for authority to opt children out of specific lessons, censorship of books, and removal of content from public school curriculums in the United States. As the call for this panel notes, "unequal access to educational resources, and tensions between racial and social groups" lie at the heart of critical policy debates and public frustration regarding various social issues. To address these challenges, public administrators and policymakers must consider the present nature of public opinion that may hamper effective civics education, specifically regarding the history of marginalized groups. Yet, the research literature on perceptions of parental opt-out is scarce. The purpose of this study is to address this gap by examining public opinion regarding parents opting their children out of learning about content they find objectionable.

Research questions: The study focuses on the following research questions: How prevalent is the view that parents should be able to opt-out their children from lessons at school in the United States? Do parents and non-parents differ in their opinion? Do these opinions vary by political affiliation and opinions about other education policy issues? To investigate the last question, we specifically focused on three key factors: Preference for parental authority over curriculum; Opinions regarding whether schools should teach the history and consequences of race and income inequality; and attitudes about inclusion of books on race and socio-economic inequality in curriculum.

Methodology: First, we will clarify the notion of social equity in education by relying on public administration and critical cultural theory. This discussion will critically reflect on the social equity implications of diminishing representation of diverse perspectives, histories, and voices in the curriculum. After our theoretical inquiry, we will present analysis of a large and nationally representative survey data collected in 2022 as part of the Understanding America Study to provide empirical insight into beliefs and attitudes regarding curricular control in U.S. schools.

How it fits with the panel's research questions: The call for papers states that the pursuit of social equity provides public administration with a "normative base." In the case presented here, that base is represented by a culturally inclusive and historically accurate public school curricula that fosters effective social citizenship toward an equitable democracy. Public education is a key context for the social equity conversation, since exclusion of certain histories, cultures, or ideas restrict representation, perpetuate systemic inequities, and deny students the opportunity to engage with diverse, accurate, and critical knowledge necessary for an inclusive society. Recognizing the challenges and understanding public education as a key context for the social equity conversation is vital for identifying strategies to advance equity through effective public policy.

Beyond Numbers: Consumption Expenditure Inequality Among Social Groups in India

Pushpendra Singh (Somaiya Vidyavihar University, Vidya Vihar East, Mumbai, India)

Archana Singh (International Institute for Population Sciences)

The deeply entrenched caste system in India is evident not only through visible social markers but also through practices that regulate consumption patterns, aligning individuals with their ascribed caste-based class status. Therefore, the objective of this study is to analyse the patterns of consumption expenditure among caste/social groups over the decade from 2011-12 to 2022-23. Additionally, it focuses on examining food and non-food expenditures to understand how caste-based disparities influence resource accessibility and consumption behaviour. Furthermore, it investigates the extent and dynamics of consumption inequality across socio-economic groups, with a particular focus on caste-based disparities and fractile classes.

To address these issues, the study uses household consumer expenditure surveys from the 2011-12 and 2022-23. First, the average consumption expenditure across all households was calculated and then broken down by social groups. Second, consumption inequality was measured and analysed using Theil Decomposition Indices and the Lorenz Curve. Finally, quantile regression was applied to examine how household consumption expenditure differs across various points in the income distribution for each social group.

The study reveals that per capita expenditure increased across all social groups over the decade from 2011-12 to 2022-23, with a noticeable shift from food to non-food spending. However, disadvantaged groups remain limited in their access to high-quality foods, highlighting persistent consumption inequality. Furthermore, inequality metrics, such as Theil indices and Gini coefficients, indicate that intra-group disparities are the primary drivers of inequality, particularly among higher-income households.

Keywords: Household Consumer Expenditure, Caste, Social Inequality, food to non-food spending, India.

JEL Classification : D11, D13, D19, E21

Limits to Social Equity in Public Policy: Evidence from Affordable Housing in Urban Bangladesh

Aaqib Zahid (University of Dhaka)

Nusrat Chowdhury (University of Dhaka)

The term social equity has been considered one of the fundamental pillars of Public Administration, although the interpretation of the same is somehow catered according to the ethos and practices of administration in a particular context. However, compared to other pillars of public administration, such as efficiency, effectiveness, and economy (Gooden and Portillo, 2011), the normative nature of equity provides the scope for narrative-based qualitative analysis in social equity research to understand the intricate factors that shape social equity in public administration and policy. With this understanding and opportunity, this paper intends to explore how social equity is perceived and prioritized in the affordable urban housing projects in The National Housing Policy of Bangladesh (2016) and explore the political, administrative, and cultural context that impacts the social equity in these projects. To be more specific, this paper focuses on the National Housing Authority (NHA), under the Ministry of Housing and Public Works, that envisions providing affordable housing access to all strata of society and undertakes various housing projects and allocates plots throughout Bangladesh. However, to what extent these projects ensure social equity remains largely unexplored. The guiding question of this paper is how social equity, as outlined in the National Housing Policy 2016, translated into the implementation of affordable urban housing projects and practices by NHA? To explore social equity, this research uses Johnson and Svara's (2011) framework that measures social equity through four dimensions, namely- procedural fairness (equal process for all), access (no barrier to participation), quality (same level of treatment) and outcomes (reduction of inequality). This research will follow a comparative case study approach by examining four selected projects by NHA in Dhaka City that have been targeted for different socio-economic groups and cater to the largest number of people. The study area has been chosen for two reasons: first, Dhaka is one of the overly populated cities in the world with a surge of migration and unplanned settlements, and second, NHA has the highest number of projects in Dhaka that cater to the highest number of people. The data will be collected from primary and secondary sources: secondary data from documents related to the projects and primary data from narratives of policymakers, implementers, project supervisors, experts, as well as the beneficiaries of the projects. The narratives or primary data will be collected through in-depth interviews following a purposive sampling technique to have a diverse perspective. This paper is expected to unpack further how the concept of social

equity is translated into policy implementation, especially in the context of a developing country, which has not been studied widely. Based on the findings and the analysis, the research would provide input to make such projects more socially equitable, and it aspires to add more depth to Svara and Johnson's Framework.

This paper fits this panel because it aligns its core theme through empirical research that aspires to provide policy solutions and advance theoretical understanding.

Bridging the Gap: Analyzing Social Equity and Representation in Indian Higher Education Institutions

Kiran Kumar Gowd (Center for Politics and Policy Studies (CPPS))

Abstract

Diversity and inclusion are critical to ensuring equitable access to education and addressing historical socio-economic inequalities in Indian Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). However, despite constitutional mandates and affirmative action through reservation policies, the representation of Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), and Other Backward Classes (OBCs) in HEIs remains alarmingly disproportionate. This paper examines the implementation and impact of reservation policies on social equity in HEIs, drawing on data collected through the Right to Information (RTI) Act to assess the representation of various social categories in faculty positions, student enrollments, and administrative roles.

The initial part of the paper situates the issue within the broader context of social justice and educational equity. A review of relevant literature highlights the transformative potential of reservation policies as envisioned by scholars such as B. R. Ambedkar and other proponents of affirmative action. However, existing studies also underscore systemic challenges, including institutional resistance, discriminatory practices, and inadequate implementation of quotas, which hinder the realization of social justice goals. Recent works, such as Thorat and Attewell (2007) and Sukhadeo Thorat’s studies on exclusion in HEIs, provide critical insights into the persistence of caste-based inequalities despite policy interventions.

The findings of this paper, based on RTI responses from leading HEIs, reveal stark disparities in the representation of SCs, STs, and OBCs. The data reflects an underrepresentation of these groups in faculty positions, PhD programs, and high-ranking administrative roles, highlighting a significant gap between policy and practice. Moreover, the paper identifies trends of overrepresentation among dominant social groups, indicating systemic biases and limited institutional accountability. These findings underline the urgent need for comprehensive reforms to ensure effective implementation of reservation policies, transparency in recruitment and admissions, and mechanisms to monitor compliance with affirmative action mandates.

The paper argues that fostering genuine diversity and inclusion in HEIs requires a paradigm shift in institutional culture and governance. It concludes by recommending policy measures, such as the periodic public disclosure of diversity metrics, capacity-building programs for marginalized groups, and enhanced oversight by regulatory bodies, to bridge the gap between constitutional ideals and on-ground realities. This study contributes to the ongoing discourse on social equity in Indian education, emphasizing the critical role of HEIs in creating a more inclusive and just society.

Keywords: Diversity and Inclusion, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), Other Backward Classes (OBCs), Reservation Policy, Social Equity, Caste-based Inequalities, Right to Information (RTI), Affirmative Action, Educational Justice, Institutional Discrimination, Policy Implementation.

P02 / Social Equity in Public Policy

Chair : Shahjahan Bhuiyan (American University in Cairo)

Session 2

Friday, July 4th 16:00 to 18:00 (C1)

How to reduce social inequities in the field of physical activity policy? Co-producing policy recommendations in 6 EU countries

Sven Messing (University of Limerick)

Leonie Birkholz (Friedrich-Alexander Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg)

Peter Gelius (University of Lausanne)

Catherine Woods (University of Limerick)

Introduction: The importance of policies to promote physical activity is increasingly recognised, as such policies have the potential to create healthier environments that encourage active lifestyles. While there is a growing body of research on the effectiveness of PA promotion policies, their impact on reducing social (health) inequities remains unclear. This perspective is also not systematically addressed by existing tools for monitoring and evaluating policies in the field of physical activity promotion.

This study aims to adapt the use of a public policy implementation assessment tool – the Physical Activity Environment Policy Index (PA-EPI), currently implemented in 6 EU countries – to better address social inequities. This includes the development of an equity module and the systematic consideration of equity in the process of using the tool. This will improve the understanding of the role of social equity in public policy in this field of research.

Methods: To develop an equity module, a systematic review was conducted, which included a comprehensive search of six databases, independent screening of the records by two reviewers, and synthesis of the included studies. Studies were clustered into policy domains based on ISPAH's “Eight Investments that work for Physical Activity” framework, and studies that demonstrated positive effects on reducing social inequities through the promotion of physical activity were analysed to identify good practice. Experts were consulted to finalise the equity module.
To integrate equity considerations systematically in the process of using the tool, a literature search and expert interviews were conducted.

Results: Based on 38 scientific studies and 8 grey literature documents, a PA-EPI Equity Module has been developed. The module includes statements for the 45 indicators of the PA-EPI and provides guidance on how to systematically integrate social equity into the process of data collection (e.g., on national health, sport, or active transport policies). To ensure that a social equity perspective is taken into account in the process of using the tool, equity councils will be established, composed of organisations representing socially disadvantaged groups. The purpose of these equity councils is to define and refine policy recommendations for physical activity promotion from a social equity perspective.

Discussion: The study systematically integrates social equity into a tool for assessing the implementation of public policies to promote physical activity. It has identified effective physical activity policies that reduce inequalities across various domains. These examples of good practice provide blueprints for other countries and can inform policy development, not only in the 6 EU countries currently using the tool.

The study highlights the need for researchers and policymakers to use scientific evidence to advance the policy agenda aimed at promoting social equity. In addition, the study provides insights into how policy recommendations that include a social equity perspective can be developed in a systematic and participatory process. These findings can contribute to learning between countries and support the development of more equitable public policies.

Eliminating petty corruption as a barrier to health equity: An Analysis of Anti-Corruption Measures in Lithuania

Vytautas Valentinavicius (Kaunas University of Technology, Lithuania)

Raminta Pucetaite (Kaunas University of Technology)

Donata Jovarauskiene (Kaunas University of Technology)

Rimantas Rauleckas (Kaunas University of Technology)

The fifth author – Jolanta Vai?i?nien? (Kaunas University Technology)

Health equity is a cornerstone of social equity and a prerequisite at the system level for individuals to exercise agency as maintained by the human capacity approach (Braveman, 2010; Nussbaum, 2011). Ensuring accessibility to healthcare and quality of healthcare service is a moral duty of democratic states (Sen, 2002). Petty corruption defined as small-scale (e.g. 50 EUR) payment of bribes or other material and immaterial means of motivating low- and mid-level public officials such as healthcare professionals to amend their behaviour in order to facilitate higher quality or faster access to healthcare services (Graycar, 2015), is among the sociocultural barriers that distort service delivery, worsen inequalities, and reduce access to healthcare. Corruption poses a major threat to the stability and reinforcement of democracy (Mungiu-Pippidi, 2006), eroding trust in democratic structures (Jha et al. 2024). Even within democratic systems, corruption, including petty corruption, continues to diminish transparency and weaken public trust in healthcare system (Brueckner, 2021; European Commission, 2022).

Reducing corruption is essential for strengthening health systems, advancing health equity, and mitigating social inequalities. While previous research has examined the impact of corruption on healthcare systems, limited attention has been paid to how national and institutional policies address these challenges, particularly in post-occupational EU democracies like Lithuania, where Soviet-era legacies and European integration efforts intersect (see Weistra et al., 2017; Parvanova, 2025). Moreover, the role of policies in combatting petty corruption as a form of corruption has received far less attention in corruption studies. We address the respective gaps in academic discourse by conducting a two-level analysis. First, we examine Lithuania's national health policies and legal frameworks to evaluate the anticorruption measures enshrined in law and the obligations of healthcare institutions to establish anticorruption measures within institutional policies. Specifically, we take a critical look at policies to identify measures for combatting petty corruption. Second, we evaluate whether and how national policies are reflected in institutional policies to guarantee health equity and address the causes of petty corruption, which is among the highest in the EU (European Commission, 2022). Using qualitative document analysis, our objective is to identify gaps between national and institutional policies and provide policymakers with recommendations on integrating anticorruption measures to strengthen health equity assurance, enhance regulatory compliance in healthcare settings, and promote greater social equity in healthcare access.

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Fertility vs. Equality: The Unintended Labor Market Consequences of China's Paid Family Leave Expansion

Chenling Wan (LKY School of Public Policy, National University of Singapore)

This paper examines how China's 2016 reforms extending paid maternity leave and paternity leave have shaped women's labor market outcomes, with a particular focus on social equity and gender disparities. Drawing on six waves of the China Family Panel Studies (CFPS) from 2010 to 2020, I use a difference-in-differences approach to exploit temporal and provincial variations in paid family leave. My research question is twofold: (1) How do extended maternity and newly introduced paternity leave policies affect women's labor force participation and weekly working hours? and (2) Do these policies produce unintended spillover effects on women without children and on young men?

Methodologically, I leverage provincial-level policy data on maternity and paternity leave—collected from official documents—and merge them with individual-level survey responses on employment status, income, working hours. This allows us to estimate the causal impact of policy changes while controlling for individual characteristics, province-specific trends, and year fixed effects. The findings highlight a substantial negative effect of longer maternity leave on female labor market engagement, including for nulliparous (childless) women. Younger women, in particular, bear the largest penalties in terms of reduced workforce participation and working hours. By contrast, the introduction and expansion of paternity leave—even though relatively short—mitigate these adverse impacts and improve outcomes for women. Importantly, a higher paternity-to-maternity leave ratio correlates strongly with higher labor force participation and longer weekly work hours for women, suggesting that shared caregiving responsibilities can lessen labor market inequalities.

These findings carry clear implications for **T17 P02: Social Equity in Public Policy**, demonstrating how well-intentioned family leave reforms may inadvertently shift employers' expectations, thus limiting women's employment opportunities and widening gender gaps. Such pressures can also suppress fertility intentions, undermining the very goals of pro-natal policies.

In contributing to the panel's exploration of how public policies shape social equity outcomes, this paper underscores the need to look beyond the apparent friendliness of family leave policies to understand their potential unintended consequences. It shows that when businesses need to bear the costs associated with employees' childbirth, shared parental leave is crucial in promoting equitable labor market participation and can serve as a model for other contexts seeking to reconcile fertility policies with broader commitments to social equity and gender parity.

The Pathway of Digital Transformation to Social Equity: An Institutional Analysis of TPMAP in Thailand

Charoon Ponghan (Yonsei University)

The convergence of digital transformation and social equity has become a critical area of governance, particularly in addressing systemic poverty and inequity. This study explores the pathway of digital transformation to social equity through an institutional analysis of the Thai People Map and Analytics Platform (TPMAP) in Thailand. It investigates how TPMAP, a government-initiated big data platform, leverages digital technologies to address poverty and reduce social inequity. The research is guided by three key questions: (1) How does TPMAP use big data to tackle poverty and inequity in Thailand? (2) What institutional factors enable or constrain the TPMAP's impact on social equity? (3) What are the challenges and policy implications for enhancing TPMAP' s effectiveness? To address these questions, the study employs the Institutional Analysis and Development (IAD) framework to analyze TPMAP's institutional arrangements, stakeholder interactions, and outcomes. Using a qualitative case study approach, the research combines content analysis and descriptive analysis of secondary data sources including government reports, official statements, academic studies, and media reports, and semi-structured interviews with relevant stakeholders involved in TPMAP's implementation at national, provincial, and local levels. The IAD framework allows for a comprehensive examination of how contextual factors, action arenas, and patterns of interaction shape TPMAP's role in promoting social equity. The findings reveal that TPMAP has transformed Thailand's approach to poverty alleviation by enabling multi-dimensional poverty analysis, data-driven decision-making, and targeted resource allocation. However, challenges such as political transitions, data accuracy issues, and the need for sustained stakeholder collaboration highlight the complexities of implementing digital transformation initiatives for social equity. The study concludes with recommendations for institutionalizing TPMAP as a non-partisan tool, strengthening data governance, and fostering broader stakeholder engagement to ensure long-term sustainability and equity impact. This paper aligns with the panel's research question by demonstrating how social equity considerations have influenced

the design, implementation, and governance of TPMAP. It highlights the role of digital transformation in addressing systemic inequities and provides insights into the institutional dynamics that enable or constrain equitable policy outcomes. By examining TPMAP as a case study, the paper contributes to broader discussions on how digital governance can advance social equity in developing countries.