P07 / The Impact of Public Policy on Political Participation: Comparing Evidence from around the World

Topic : POLICY, POLITICS AND POLITICAL REGIME

Chair : Maureen Donaghy (Rutgers University)

GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

How does public policy shape the political participation of those most affected by its implementation? We know that policy can often have feedback effects through which individuals may be motivated to advocate for the continuation, modification, or cancellation of the policy based on its effect on their lives. But we have very little evidence from around the world about what kinds of policies tend to motivate or depress participation towards other claims and how individuals choose to get involved in various contexts. This panel seeks to bring together researchers from diverse parts of the world to foster a comparative discussion on the effects of public policies on politics to enhance our understanding of the factors that generate participation, particularly among those who are the direct targets or beneficiaries of policies.

The concept of policy feedback gained traction in the 1980's and 90's as part of the wave to situate policy making and politics within the framework of historical institutionalism (Pierson 1993; 1994; Skocpol 1992; Weir, Orloff and Skocpol 1988). This framework brought in the dimension of time and how policies reshape politics, and then in turn politics reshape policies (Béland and Schlager 2019; Mettler and SoRelle 2014). The question of how policies impact the politics of beneficiaries has then been explored by a number of scholars in the United States (for example, Soss and Schram 2007; Mettler 2002, 2005; Campbell 2002, 2003, 2012) who find that the direction of attitudes and participation is very much conditioned by the type of policy. More recently research has expanded in a comparative direction, though like the United States more work is needed to identify how different types of policies shape political participation across diverse contexts.

The genesis for this panel comes not only from this previous literature but from the chair's research on how social programs shape the empowerment of beneficiaries to make further claims of the state across the Global North and South. The direction of the effects of policy on political participation are particularly important for social policies meant to reduce inequalities, contribute to poverty alleviation, and rectify structural discrimination. We want to know whether social policies are achieving the outcomes they are meant to produce. In other recent research, scholars have asked whether conditional cash transfer programs engender political loyalty to those most responsible for implementing the policy and under what circumstances that loyalty endures.

In this panel we seek additional examples of research on political preferences as well as the range of behavior from active claims-making to greater alienation that may result from the implementation of diverse social policies, in particular. However, other types of policy also have political effects, such as those involving climate change, immigration, and economic development and these papers are also quite welcome. For example, how might development policies that aim to prevent flooding shape the politics of those most directly at risk? Empirical evidence is needed to understand the broad political effects of such policies and the aim of this panel is to bring scholars together to further this effort.

For this panel I hope to bring together scholars of various thematic, academic, methodological, and geographic orientations. The call for papers is open to anyone who would like to contribute to our knowledge of the feedback effects of public policy on individuals' political preferences and engagement. Both in-person and virtual participation are welcome. Papers may explore issues areas including, but not limited to: housing, conditional cash transfers, climate change, immigration, healthcare, education, transportation, and infrastructure. All papers should reflect evidence-based research.

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CALL FOR PAPERS

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Chair : Maureen Donaghy (Rutgers University)

Session 1

Thursday, July 3rd 08:00 to 10:00 (B7)

(Virtual) The Impact of Policy on Politics: How Self-Managed Housing Programs Shape the Political Perspectives of Residents

Maureen Donaghy (Rutgers University)

Abstract: For millions across Brazil, the first election of President Lula da Silva from the Workers' Party (PT) promised to reshape the relationship between citizens and the state, bringing into decision making people who had long been marginalized, particularly by income and social class. Towards this objective, the administration ushered in numerous participatory institutions as well as innovations in social programs. Among these were experiments in resident-engaged housing projects for urbanization of informal settlements and construction of new units in cities across the country. The question for this paper is whether participation in these projects produced greater trust in governments and continued support for the PT among residents. Based on fieldwork in São Paulo in 2019 and 2022, I find the participatory design of housing projects provided residents with great pride and satisfaction. But the implementation of the policies often led to distrust in government when promises went unmet, funding stopped, and residents did not feel secure. After four years with virtually no new investments in housing, however, many residents returned to the PT and Lula with vigor.

The Kafala (sponsorship) System and Expatriate Political Engagement in Smart Cities: Policy Feedback Effects in Dubai and Kuwait

Azin Moalej (Toronto Metropolitan University)

Today, the term "Smart City" has emerged as a catchphrase in the mission and vision of many countries, especially in developing countries such as those in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, including Dubai and Kuwait. While public political engagement is one of the smart city initiatives, the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) aspect is mostly emphasized in smart city discourses. This paper examines the role of public participation in decision-making as an important yet neglected initiative of the smart city concept. It also explores how the Kafala (sponsorship) system in Dubai and Kuwait City has influenced the political engagement of expatriates, who comprise four-fifths of these countries' population, during the COVID-19 era, as a critical period to assess the policy. Grounded in the policy feedback literature, the study investigates how this labor governance framework shaped expatriates' political discourse, indifference, and stagnation in claims-making during the pandemic.
Research Question: How did the Kafala sponsorship system affect expatriates' political engagement and discourse within the framework of policy feedback effects in Dubai and Kuwait City during COVID-19?
Methodology:
Social network analysis of Twitter discourse to examine patterns of engagement and disengagement.
Analysis of policy documents, government reports, and sponsorship regulations.
Findings and Contribution: This study enhances the overall understanding of how labor governance policies influence political engagement in non-Western contexts, particularly in Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. Preliminary findings indicate that while digital platforms have created spaces for expatriate discussions, the restrictive nature of the Kafala system has reinforced patterns of exclusion, dependency, and suppressed political claims-making among expatriate workers. Even the Diwaniyas in Kuwait, as a public sphere, could not foster expatriates' political engagement or empower civil society as effectively as in Dubai. This paper underscores how governance structures shape both political engagement and disengagement by situating the Kafala system within the policy feedback framework.
The findings will provide comparative insights into how labor policies influence political outcomes in Kuwait and Dubai, especially in relation to historical institutionalism and policy feedback theories.

SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY IN THE NGQUSHWA LOCAL MUNICIPALITY BASED ON ARNSTEIN'S LADDER OF CITIZEN PARTICIPATION: A CITIZEN'S PERSPECTIVE

Tyanai Masiya (University of Pretoria)

IMPI KUHLENGISA (Nelson Mandela University)

Stellah Lubinga (University of Pretoria)

This study assessed citizen participation in social accountability mechanisms within the Ngqushwa Local Municipality using Arnstein's Ladder of Participation as a theoretical lens. This study uses a qualitative research design, incorporating structured interviews with 12 participants from Ngqushwa Local Municipality and data analysed thematically. The findings indicate that citizen participation is largely tokenistic, characterised by low levels of engagement and a significant disconnect between citizen involvement and actual municipal decision-making. Specifically, citizen participation mostly occurs in the lower rung of Arnstein's ladder (tokenism), such as informing, consultation, and placation, reflecting a limited impact on policy and service delivery outcomes. The Municipality must move beyond mere token engagement and foster deliberative, transparent, and empowering processes in which citizens are not just informed but actively involved in shaping local policies and service delivery. This includes empowering ward committees, enhancing transparency in public meetings, and reforming participatory budgeting to ensure that public input is meaningfully integrated into final decisions. The research findings will inform the development of robust social accountability mechanisms, promoting a more profound and genuine form of citizen participation that is adaptable and applicable to other municipalities within and beyond South African borders.

(Virtual) How Policy Tools Shape Participation: The Role of Narrativity and Interactivity in China's Moral Bank Initiative

Jasper Pinquan Jiang (Renmin University of China)

In today's polarized political climate, where trust in institutions is declining, traditional policy tools often fail to inspire broad public participation or address complex governance challenges. There is an urgent need for innovative policy approaches that can effectively mobilize collective action. This study addresses this gap by exploring the Moral Bank initiative in Yongfeng Village, Sichuan Province, China. **The study is framed within a creative theoretical framework that classifies policy tools based on narrativity and interactivity**—two key elements that can enhance citizen engagement. The central aim of this study is to **demonstrate how policy tools**, when enriched with **compelling storytelling** and **engaging participation**, **can foster lasting civic involvement and reshape governance dynamics.**

This study introduces a theoretical framework that combines narrative theory and political psychology theory. Narrativity involves **embedding stories** within policy tools that **convey shared values and collective goals**. These narratives **evoke emotional responses and promote a sense of solidarity** among citizens. Interactivity emphasizes citizen involvement in the policy process. Unlike the previous rigid models, interactive policy tools **allow citizens to act as active players, as engaging as being in a game**, rather than passive recipients. According to this framework, the moral bank is a typical policy tool with high narrativity and strong interactivity.

The Moral Bank initiative operates through a points-based reward system where villagers earn "moral points" for participating in activities like environmental conservation and local dispute resolution. These points can be exchanged for food, healthcare, and school supplies. What distinguishes the Moral Bank from traditional policy tools is its integration of compelling storytelling and engaging participation. The moral narratives of community duty and collective responsibility create a strong emotional connection to the policy, while the interactive aspect—where citizens actively engage with the system and benefit from their contributions—enhances their sense of ownership and investment in governance. This combination of narrativity and interactivity forms the basis of the policy's effectiveness in mobilizing civic engagement.

The results have successfully increased participation in projects like the "toilet revolution" to improve sanitation and local health initiatives. The moral bank has also fostered social trust and strengthened community cohesion through public recognition of virtuous actions and the reinforcement of positive social norms. The integration of honor and shame mechanisms, where citizens are publicly acknowledged for their good deeds and sanctioned for negative behavior, has created a cycle of sustained engagement and pro-social behavior.

In conclusion, this research emphasizes the significant role of narrativity and interactivity in shaping modern policy tools that engage citizens in promoting good governance. **By embedding meaningful stories and**

facilitating active participation, policies can foster not only citizen engagement but also social cohesion and public trust. This study contributes to the theory of governance innovation by offering a robust framework for strategically designing policy tools that effectively address contemporary governance challenges.