# P215 / Contentious Implementation: How Interest Groups and Social Movements Shape Policy Implementation

**Topic :** Implementation/Street-Level Bureaucracy

**Chair :** Lauriane Cailleux (University of Lausanne)

**Second Chair :** Julie Pollard (University of Lausanne)

## GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

Adopting a policy rarely settles the conflicts it has stirred. Once a law is passed, firms, NGOs, professional bodies or citizen groups can keep mobilizing over how it is specified, delivered and enforced. They sit on participatory councils, take agencies to court, protest against the siting of projects, or press local authorities to bend the rules. Opponents can try to reopen the battle by other means, and new actors may emerge (Anria et al., 2026).

These dynamics have been examined across several strands of scholarship that have rarely been brought into systematic dialogue. Implementation research has recognized the political nature of implementation (Sager & Gofen, 2022; Sager & Hinterleitner, 2022) and increasingly calls for attention to conflict and contestation (Mavrot, 2024; Zhang & Rosenbloom, 2024), yet remains largely centered on public actors. Interest group research has begun to examine more systematically how organized interests influence implementation (Truijens & Hanegraaff, 2024). Social movement scholarship has also documented how movements shape implementation, from the translation of movement demands by bureaucracies to the role of mobilization in securing policy gains (Andrews, 2001; Anyidoho et al., 2021; Chartock, 2011; Harrison, 2016; Silva, 2015). In parallel, the literature on legal mobilization has shown how collective actors use legal norms and institutions, within and beyond courts, to contest the interpretation and enforcement of rights and policies (Vanhala, 2010; Colli, 2024).

Yet these insights remain dispersed across research traditions, policy sectors and institutional arenas. Existing studies have examined different actors, strategies and sites of contention, but less attention has been paid to how these dynamics intersect throughout implementation: how conflicts unfold across implementation venues, how non-state actors combine repertoires of action, and how these struggles reshape policies after adoption. Rather than treating litigation, administrative lobbying, participation and protest as separate phenomena, we propose to examine them as dimensions of contentious implementation. Drawing on the concept of contentious politics (Tilly & Tarrow, 2007), we use contentious implementation to designate episodes in which non-state actors make claims about whether and how an adopted policy should be (re)interpreted, delivered or enforced, involving governments as targets, allies or mediators. Such contention may rely on (or combine) inside strategies with outside ones such as media campaigns or protest (Beyers, 2004). It spans implementation venues, i.e. the institutional and non-institutional settings where post-adoption decisions are made or can be challenged (Baumgartner & Jones, 1993): administrative, judicial, consultative or territorial, among others. Which venues matter, and how actors engage with them, is itself at stake.

The panel addresses the following overarching questions: How do non-state actors contest policies once they have been adopted? How do they select, combine and move between different implementation venues and repertoires of action? How do the opportunities and constraints of the implementation process shape these strategies and the outcomes of contention?

The panel thus aims to build a shared research agenda on contentious implementation across diverse sectors and countries.

## CALL FOR PAPERS

Call for Papers:

We invite empirical, theoretical and methodological papers analyzing how non-state actors (firms and business associations, NGOs, trade unions, professional organizations, citizen groups, social movements or coalitions among them) seek to shape policies after their adoption, and how implementing authorities respond.

We welcome papers drawing on implementation studies, interest group research, legal mobilization scholarship and research on the policy consequences of social movements to examine how non-state

actors mobilize, contest implementation decisions and seek to shape policy outcomes. We particularly encourage contributions that bridge these perspectives.

Contributions may address one or several of the following lines of inquiry, including, but not limited to:

· Who mobilizes? Which non-state actors become involved during implementation, and which public actors do they target or ally with?

· Where? Which venues become relevant during implementation (e.g. administrative, judicial, consultative, territorial)? How and why do actors select, combine, or move between different implementation venues?

· How? What strategies and repertoires do non-state actors deploy (e.g., lobbying, litigation, participation in consultative bodies, media campaigns, protest among others), and how do they combine inside and outside strategies? How do administrative discretion, implementation arrangements, policy characteristics, territorial structures, and levels of governance shape the opportunities and constraints for contention?

· What effects? How do implementing authorities respond to contention (consultation, co-optation, blame avoidance, repression)? What are the consequences of contentious implementation: delay, adaptation, hollowing out, entrenchment or policy change?

Contributions may cover any policy sector, geographical context, or level of governance and may employ qualitative, quantitative, comparative, or mixed-method approaches.

We particularly encourage research designs able to follow actors, strategies and issues across venues and over time (process-tracing, issue-tracing, longitudinal or comparative designs). Contributions focusing on a single venue or moment of implementation are also welcome insofar as they shed light on the broader dynamics of contentious implementation.