P68 / Narrative Policy Framework: Developments, Discoveries, and Challenges

Topic : Policy Process Theories

Chair : Elizabeth Shanahan (Montana State University)

Second Chair : Jule Ksinsik (University of Lausanne)

Third Chair : Bettina Stauffer (University of Bern)

GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

The Narrative Policy Framework (NPF) is a theory of the policy process that investigates how policy narratives shape policymaking across policy stages, levels of analysis (micro, meso, and macro), institutional settings, and governance regimes. The primary research question for the NPF is how policy narratives shape the policy process. As NPF research has expanded across policy fields, countries, and methodological traditions, the framework has generated important theoretical developments, empirical discoveries, and methodological challenges. The purpose of this panel is to gather NPF scholars around the world to share their research questions, discoveries, and challenges. By bringing together scholars working with diverse research designs, policy contexts, and methodological traditions, the panel aims to foster discussion on the current state and future development of NPF research. Its broader objective is to advance understanding of how policy narratives matter in policy processes and how the NPF can be methodologically strengthened to study them.

Over the past two decades, NPF scholarship has established a growing body of theoretical and empirical research examining the power of policy narrative structure, content, and strategies that shape the policy process. NPF research has focused on (i) understanding narratives shape the policy process in particular contexts, (ii) exploring the interaction of narrative elements within and between policy narratives, (iii) advancing precision in the NPF by exploring the validity of how different narrative components (structure, content, and strategies) are operationalized, and (iv) investigating methodological innovations in content analysis, experimental designs, comparative research, and computational approaches to analyze textual data. Some investigations focus on one of these areas, while others address all three. Recent NPF scholarship has strengthened the framework's theoretical foundations while contributing to deeper understandings of the mechanisms through which narratives influence policy processes, the relationships among levels of analysis, and the generalizability of findings across policy and cultural contexts.

CALL FOR PAPERS

We welcome theoretical, empirical, and methodological papers that contribute to the continued development and application of the Narrative Policy Framework (NPF). Applicants should clearly anchor their contribution in the NPF or engage critically with the framework to enable cumulative and productive discussion. Papers may examine the role of policy narratives at any point in the policy process: agenda-setting, policy formulation, decision-making, implementation, evaluation, policy change, and policy conflict. Contributions may address micro-level narrative effects, meso-level actor strategies and coalition dynamics, macro-level narratives, or cross-level interactions. Papers may apply the NPF to new policy sectors, political systems, governance regimes, geographical contexts, or forms of policy communication, including written, oral, visual, digital, and multimodal narratives. We encourage submissions from scholars at different career stages, representing diverse perspectives and methodological traditions. We invite inquiries examining how policy narratives are constructed, strategically deployed, contested, and transformed over time. Such contributions may explore the conditions under which narratives shape policy processes and outcomes, including the influence of institutional, political, and cultural contexts.

The panel also encourages contributions that reflect on methodological approaches in NPF research. Relevant approaches include, but are not limited to, qualitative and interpretive designs, computational text analysis and machine learning, survey and experimental designs, comparative and cross-national designs, and longitudinal, historical, and process-oriented designs. Papers may also engage with mixed-methods approaches, visual and multimodal analysis, interviews, content analysis, or the methodological challenges of studying macro-level narratives and cross-level integration.

In addition, the panel welcomes critical reflections on the framework’s conceptual, methodological, and

empirical boundaries. This includes papers addressing non-findings, failed or partial applications, challenges of operationalizing narrative elements, questions of validity and reliability, and opportunities for extending the NPF in dialogue with other theories of the policy process. Out of these inquiries and others, we encourage contributions that generate new questions and directions for NPF scholarship.