P113 / Navigating Bureaucracy and Instrument Choice: Re-evaluating Administrative Capacity and Policy Design in Contemporary Governance

Topic : Bureaucracy, Administration and Policy Process

Chair : JULIE BINALDO-VELASCO (Benguet State University)

GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

Contemporary public administration operates under continuous socio-political transformation, technological advancement, and complex governance challenges. Traditional administrative structures and classical policy designs face increasing pressures to adapt to multi-scalar policy environments, demanding a critical re-examination of how bureaucratic organizations formulate, select, and deploy policy instruments. While foundational public policy literature has long analyzed bureaucratic decision-making, contemporary scholars frequently point out a persistent gap between formal policy design and practical administrative implementation. Emerging studies highlight that policy design is not merely a technical exercise of matching instruments to goals; rather, it is a deeply contextual process influenced by bureaucratic politics, institutional capacity, and administrative discretion. Despite recent conceptual refinements in policy design frameworks such as smart regulation, procedural policy instruments, and administrative burden mitigation bureaucracies in both developed and emerging public administration contexts struggle to align policy formulation with operational reality.

This panel aims to explore how bureaucratic structures, administrative capacity, and civil service dynamics influence the formulation, selection, and design of policy instruments across diverse public policy sectors. By bringing together scholars and practitioners, the panel seeks to bridge the theoretical divide between public administration and policy design theories, offering cross-national and comparative insights into modern governance and civil service reform. The discussion centers on an overarching research question: How do institutional constraints, bureaucratic processes, and administrative capacity shape policy design and instrument choice, and to what extent do these administrative factors influence policy success or failure?

To answer this research question, the panel will specifically explore three primary hypotheses. First, we hypothesize that highly centralized or rule-bound administrative structures tend to favor procedural and command-and-control policy instruments over flexible, incentive-based, or co-design mechanisms, limiting policy responsiveness. Second, the panel proposes that administrative capacity encompassing civil service expertise, organizational learning, and resource availability directly mediates the effectiveness of innovative policy design and instrument calibration. Third, we hypothesize that political-administrative relations and civil service discretion significantly alter policy designs during the formulation and adoption stages, leading to divergent policy outcomes across public sectors. Through these inquiry paths, panel participants will examine how administrative constraints and civil service environments dictate instrument selection and policy performance across varied governance systems.

CALL FOR PAPERS

Panel Format: On-site (with at least one chair present in person)

The panel chairs invite paper proposals that critically examine the complex intersection of bureaucratic processes, administrative capacity, and policy design. As contemporary governments confront increasingly multi-faceted societal, environmental, and socio-economic challenges, the success of public interventions relies heavily on how policies are conceptualized and the practical capability of the civil service to formulate, calibrate, and execute appropriate policy instruments. This panel seeks to foster robust scholarly dialogue on how administrative institutions, governance frameworks, and civil service dynamics shape policy formulation, instrument choice, and public sector decision-making across local, national, and international governance levels.

We welcome empirical (qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-methods), comparative, and theoretical paper proposals that offer fresh insights into modern administrative practice. Submissions may address topics

including, but not limited to:

Policy Design and Instrument Selection: Analyses of how public managers and policy designers select, calibrate, and blend substantive and procedural policy instruments such as regulatory frameworks, market incentives, informational nudges, and co-design mechanisms to address complex public problems.

Bureaucracy and Civil Service Dynamics: Investigations into how administrative culture, bureaucratic politics, organizational learning, professional leadership, and discretionary decision-making influence public policy formulation and structural design.

Administrative Burden and Regulatory Management: Research examining how administrative procedures, red tape, regulatory impact assessment (RIA) frameworks, and compliance mechanisms affect both user experience in public service delivery and government execution efficiency.

Comparative Public Administration: Comparative studies illustrating how differing institutional architectures, legal traditions, levels of state capacity, and administrative traditions impact policy design and bureaucratic behavior across jurisdictions.

Sectoral and Institutional Case Studies: In-depth explorations of policy design and administrative implementation across specific domains, including general public administration, local governance, social welfare, public health, education, or economic development.

We particularly encourage submissions that propose novel analytical frameworks, comparative cross-national perspectives, or actionable policy insights aimed at enhancing administrative resilience and civil service leadership. Both early-career scholars and established researchers are warmly invited to submit paper proposals.