(Virtual) P172 / Policy Capacity in Cross-Border and Protracted Crises in West and South Asia

Topic : State and Policy Capacity

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GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

West and South Asia are among the world's most challenging environments for public policymaking. Protracted humanitarian crises, forced displacement, growing pressures on shared water resources, and cross-border security challenges confront public institutions with uncertainty, resource constraints, demands for inter-organizational coordination, and the significant presence of external actors. In this panel, cross-border and protracted crises refer to crises whose effects, causes, or governance mechanisms extend beyond national borders and/or whose policy responses persist over time. Nevertheless, public institutions differ considerably in policy design and implementation, coordination, and the sustainability of their responses. The panel therefore focuses not on crises themselves, but on variation in the policy capacity of public institutions to address them. Drawing on Wu, Ramesh, and Howlett (2015), policy capacity is understood as the competencies and capabilities required to perform policy functions and is examined across analytical, operational, and political dimensions at individual, organizational, and systemic levels.

Comparative research on West and South Asia has often focused on specific domains, such as health, disaster preparedness, or refugee responses, whereas comparative analysis of policy capacity across multiple crisis domains within a common framework has received less attention. By connecting policy capacity with the literatures on crisis governance and inter-organizational coordination, this panel treats humanitarian crises, forced displacement, water disputes, and regional security challenges as empirical settings for comparing how policy capacity is developed, mobilized, strengthened, or eroded. It seeks to operationalize policy capacity for comparative crisis analysis, examine the institutional and political mechanisms that shape it, and analyze how inter-organizational coordination and transnational and regional actors help translate policy capacity into policy responses.

The central research question is: What factors explain variation in the policy capacity of public institutions to manage cross-border and protracted crises in West and South Asia, and how do these differences affect policy implementation, coordination, the sustainability of policy responses, and prospects for regional cooperation?

The panel advances three hypotheses for testing, critique, or refinement. First, the quality of inter-organizational coordination, independently of the level of formal institutional resources, plays a decisive role in explaining variation in policy implementation. Second, reliance on external actors increases the coverage of policy responses in the short term, but its long-term effects on domestic capacity depend on institutional arrangements: in the absence of institutional capacity-building, such reliance substitutes for or erodes domestic capacity, whereas when capacity-building is present, it strengthens domestic capacity. Third, the relationship between domestic policy capacity and regional cooperation is reciprocal: domestic policy capacity can strengthen regional cooperation, while regional arrangements can, in turn, affect domestic policy capacity.

The panel's scientific contribution lies in applying a common policy capacity framework to compare crisis domains typically examined in separate bodies of literature, while investigating the linkages among domestic capacity, inter-organizational coordination, and regional cooperation. In doing so, it seeks to foster comparative dialogue across crisis domains and countries in West and South Asia and contribute to the theoretical and empirical development of research on policy capacity and crisis governance.

CALL FOR PAPERS

This panel welcomes research on the policy capacity of public institutions responding to cross-border and protracted crises in West and South Asia—crises whose effects, causes, or governance mechanisms extend beyond national borders and/or whose policy responses persist over time. We particularly welcome studies of humanitarian governance and aid coordination in protracted crises; forced displacement policies concerning reception, protection, return, and integration; water security, climate-related risks, and

shared-resource governance; and regional cooperation and security, including the role of transnational actors in shaping state policy capacity.

Papers may be empirical and comparative, theoretical, or methodological. Studies comparing two or more countries, institutions, or crisis domains are particularly welcome. In-depth case studies are also encouraged where they make a clear theoretical or explanatory contribution to conceptualizing, measuring, or explaining policy capacity. Papers may also test, critique, or refine one or more of the panel's hypotheses concerning inter-organizational coordination, reliance on external actors, and the relationship between domestic capacity and regional cooperation. Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-method approaches that provide clear and assessable evidence are welcome, including document and institutional analysis, field interviews, process tracing, stakeholder analysis, coordination network analysis, and comparative analysis of policy capacity indicators.

The panel focuses geographically on West and South Asia and welcomes scholars at all career stages, from doctoral researchers to senior scholars. Paper proposals should clearly demonstrate their relevance to the panel's research question and specify the research problem and question, theoretical or conceptual framework, research method or design logic, and expected scientific contribution. Empirical studies should also, where possible, identify their data or sources of evidence and preliminary or expected findings. Studies that merely describe a crisis without establishing a clear connection to policy capacity, the mechanisms through which capacity develops or changes, or its implications for policy processes and outcomes fall outside the panel's scope. The panel will be held virtually, with all presentations delivered via videoconference.