P255 / Power and Politics in the Policy Process

Topic : Policy Process Theories

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GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

Politics and power are the under-theorised in much policy process research. The dominant frameworks – the Advocacy Coalition Framework (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1993), the Multiple Streams Framework (Kingdon 1984) and the Narrative Policy Framework (Jones and McBeth 2010) – all carry implicit theories of power: coalitions deploy resources, entrepreneurs couple streams, narratives mobilise. Yet these mechanisms are rarely connected explicitly to the political science literature on power, from Schattschneider's (1960) mobilisation of bias and Bachrach and Baratz's (1962) non-decisions to Lukes's (1974) three dimensions and later work on policy feedback and drift (Pierson 1993; Hacker and Pierson 2010). The result is a field that explains how policy changes while remaining comparatively silent on who is able to make it change, who is kept out, and why.

Without examining the politics of policy making, scholars may be missing critical explanations for core questions in policy process research, such as:

1. To what extent does political polarization influence policymaking, particularly non-majoritarian politics?
2. How does an advocacy coalition actually leverage politics affect policy change?
3. How do marginalized actors leverage political power to trigger punctuations in the policy equilibrium to disrupt policy monopolies?
4. How do policy actors use formal or informal power to deny agenda space to opponents when the streams of policy activity would ordinarily foster agenda change?

The panel's research question is therefore: how does political power in its decisional, agenda-setting and ideational forms shape the mechanisms that policy process theories use to explain stability and change, and how should those theories be revised to account for it explicitly?

The objective is a cumulative body of work in which these propositions are specified, tested across political systems and sectors, and fed back into framework development, so that politics and power become explicit rather than assumed elements of policy process theory. The panel is linked to a forthcoming Policy & Politics special issue on Power and Politics in the Policy Process; papers accepted to the panel may be considered for that issue through the journal's regular peer review.

CALL FOR PAPERS

We invite papers that place political power at the center of the explanation of policy studies. Contributions may be theoretical, empirical or methodological, but each should make explicit how power is conceptualized, how it operates in the mechanisms under study, and what the findings imply for policy process theory more generally. We are particularly interested in politics are included in these studies, highlighting often-overlooked core concepts of parties, elections, public opinion, deliberative bodies, the courts and interest group activity.

We particularly welcome papers that:
1. Revise or extend an established framework (ACF, PET, MSF, NPF, policy feedback, policy design) by specifying the role of decisional, agenda-setting or ideational power within it;
2. Examine how marginalised or outsider actors acquire and use political power to disrupt policy monopolies or trigger punctuations;
3. Analyse agenda denial, non-decision-making and other uses of formal or informal power to prevent

change that the frameworks would otherwise predict;
4. Study policymaking under democratic backsliding, executive aggrandisement or illiberal governance, and ask whether frameworks built on pluralist assumptions still hold;
5. Develop measurement or research-design strategies for observing power, including the second and third faces, in policy process research;
6. Draw comparative or cross-national lessons about the relationship between power and policy outcomes.

Single-country case studies are welcome where the design supports generalisable claims about power and the policy process. Work from the Global South and from non-democratic or hybrid regimes is especially encouraged, as these settings expose assumptions that remain invisible in established democracies.

Abstracts should state the research question, the conception of power employed, the data and method, and the expected contribution to theory. Methodological diversity is encouraged: qualitative, quantitative, interpretive, experimental and mixed designs are all suitable.

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