Preface

There has never been a better time to study policy and policymaking. I said the same thing in 2012 and 2020, but this time it's really true. As such, you deserve a much better book than the last two editions. Indeed, my ambition is to make each new edition so much better than the last edition that it causes you to wonder why the first edition was so terrible in comparison. You have every right to ask me to define 'better', be disappointed when I mumble something unconvincing in reply, then refuse to leave (figuratively) until I give you a better answer (literally) because I brought it up (figuratively) in the first place. If you really must press me, here is what I mean by better.

Actors. People or organisations taking action. For example, Arnold Schwarzenegger as the California governor, not the cyborg. Also known as 'players' when we describe policymaking in relation to 'games'.

More coverage of existing topics and concepts. There is much more on how policy process research informs policy analysis, based on the material I wrote to teach policy analysis in a Master of Public Policy (MPP) (Cairney, 2021; 2023). I have also given bounded rationality and policymaker psychology its own chapter, to give proper space to studies of **actors** making choices. This separation also gives me more space to extol the benefits of the NPF and SCPD (see the list of abbreviations). Maybe they'll have their own chapter one day. For now, it is useful to compare how they describe actors using stories to influence policy.

More on why policy theories matter. You don't have to be fascinated by policy theories to find them valuable, but you may want a clearer payoff to reading a book like this. For example, there are 'practical lessons from policy theories' (Weible and Cairney, 2021). Insights from policy theories help analysts understand how their policymaking environments constrain or facilitate their action. I also relate practical lessons to policy design, the misguided hope for 'evidence-based policymaking', and the need to understand why the 'policy cycle' model endures despite its descriptive inaccuracy.

More coverage of topics that I should have discussed more. The first edition focused primarily on the 'mainstream' theories that describe and explain policymaking (see Durnová and Weible, 2020). The third edition pays more respect to 'critical' approaches that use research to identify and challenge inequalities of power in politics and society. For example, Chapter 3 discusses critical policy analysis and shows how it connects to wider critical social science and humanities research, such as critical race theory or feminist or decolonising approaches. Chapter 4 examines how these approaches analyse power, and the relationship between power and ideas.

A little more on philosophy and methods (or ontology, epistemology, methodology). Mainstream theories tend to be associated with 'positivism' (as opposed to – say - 'constructivism'). If so, they come with fairly standard rules on which methods produce high quality knowledge, on the assumption that this knowledge corresponds to a world out there that exists regardless of our perception of it. In that context, my plan is to convince you that all theories of knowledge are inescapably circular, which means that we do not have a convincing

Rationalist. Based on reason or knowledge. The word's meaning often relates to what rationalism is *not*, such as to reject religion as a way to interpret the world, or to prioritise reason over emotion or ideology.

Technocratic. Policymaking informed or controlled by an elite profession or group of experts.

narrative of how we accumulate knowledge. Then, I will smile knowingly (much like Chalmers, 1999's cat), invite you not to worry about it too much, then encourage you to think about knowledge creation as a social and political – as well as scientific – activity. This discussion is essential to your understanding of research. It also helps to make sense of debates about the extent to which policymaking can – and should – be **rationalist**. Chapter 3 explores this question in relation to stories of post-war hopes for rationalist policy analysis. For some, rationalism is an aspiration, to get closer and closer to a scientific (or **technocratic**) approach to policy analysis and design. If so, policy theories help to explain why this ideal will never be fulfilled, and critical policy analysis asks if it should have been an ideal in the first place.

More attention to more people and more countries. The second edition notes two major limitations to the original. First, it "relied too much on white male (usually US and UK) authors, reinforcing a general tendency of political science scholars to undervalue women and send 'a very clear message to students about who (white male elites) and what (institutions) are important in political science'" (see Atchison, 2017; 2021). Second, it focused too much on a small number of Western or Global North countries, partly because most mainstream policy studies are produced by Western scholars about Western countries. My aim in this edition is to get further away from the tendency to reinforce the dominance of the field by a small proportion of that field. One way into that discussion is ask: what is deemed essential reading or 'canon' in our field, who gets to decide what story we tell about its value, and whose stories and studies are marginalised (Shilliam, 2021)? There are also some wider professional efforts to highlight and challenge routine sources or forms of discrimination in our field, from asking how 'diverse and inclusive are policy process theories' (Heikkila and Jones, 2022) to documenting the extent to which 'sexual misconduct is pervasive within academia' (Young and Wiley, 2021). In each case, the vaguely expressed *equal opportunity* to participate in policy process research is undermined routinely by the *unequal capability* to act in the absence of discrimination. That

Outwith. Outside, beyond. It's a Scottish word.

said, nothing that I write can take away from the fact that you are currently getting this story from me. So, I also list further reading that introduces some wider possibilities within and **outwith** the 'mainstream' [**PAC: remember to do that**].

More attention to the purpose of policy (such as to address inequalities). Politics is about 'who gets what, when, how' (Lasswell, 1936). People try to use policy processes to get what they want, such as to define and address inequalities in very different ways. In that context, I co-authored a series of reviews to identify how different disciplines or approaches – such as in public health, education, gender, and climate change research – use policy theories to explain (and challenge) the endurance of profound social and economic inequalities (Cairney et al, 2022; 2023). In each case, researchers identify a contrast between two views on the purpose of public policy: to encourage state retrenchment in favour of markets and individual responsibility ('neoliberal' approaches), or to push for state intervention to redistribute power and resources or prevent the further marginalisation of some social groups ('social justice'

approaches). Chapter 3 uses these approaches to highlight the application of critical policy analysis and Chapter 5 explores the connection between policymaking, ideas, and power.

More clarity. You may be reading this book after a fairly dispiriting start. Maybe you have tried to read some specialist articles and books, finding them to be full of a new and initially incomprehensible technical language (jargon). If you have been really unlucky, maybe you have read enough texts to notice that the jargon changes a lot, often to reflect academic fashions rather than a strong desire to produce a clear sense of accumulated wisdom. If so, my aim is to guide you through this literature in a series of steps: begin with my short explainers (a series of blog posts in 500, 750, or 1000 words); read a book chapter; follow up the essential reading; then venture into the fields. Hopefully, you can tailor this combination of texts to suit the amount of time you have to devote to the study of policymaking (some people have years, some only hours). A lot of research is about 'taking the field forward', with a very small and specialist audience in mind. Rather, my aim is to make sure that you are not left behind. Policy process jargon is remarkably valuable, but its value does not rely on its incomprehensibility to new readers. I think that you can make a similar case for clarity in relation to other potential readers. Policy practitioners may seek to reflect on the policymaking environment that constrains or facilitates their action, but with little time to learn a new technical language. Scholars in many other disciplines seek to understand how their research relates to policy and policymaking, but without the need to shift careers to make sense of it all. We talk about policy research being highly interdisciplinary, but that is only true if our work is understandable to people in other disciplines.

More coherence? If, only for my sake, please read the part of the introduction that people tend to skim (the description of each chapter). You will see that I put a lot of effort into trying to show how all of these things fit together in a neat story. Yet, there are reasons not to expect or want coherence: complexity and contestation. First, the field is too large and unwieldy to contain in a single narrative, and its convoluted nature reflects the *complexity* of the policy processes that we study. Second, people are competing to offer the best ways to describe, explain, and evaluate policymaking. If so, we could only really produce a coherent story of the field if giving preference to some accounts over others. Maybe it would be better – at this introductory stage - to juggle multiple, and often contradictory, stories and see how long we can keep them all in the air. Then, you can decide which theories or approaches are worth more of your time when you have to make hard choices about what to research.

- Expression of gratitude for chapter reviewers
- Expression of gratitude to co-authors of research informing new material
- Hat tip to publisher
- Profound inspirational comment at the end

<div style="text-align:right">Paul Cairney</div>

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