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Chapter 1 Introduction: what is policy and policymaking?

Key questions in this chapter

The aim of this chapter is to identify why public policy and policymaking matter and how policy theories help to explain the nature of policy change. Key questions include:

- *What is public policy*? *How does it change?*

I define public policy as *the sum total of government action, from signals of intent to the final outcomes*, to provoke discussion rather than assert one definition. It is also essential to identify what governments don't do, and it not always clear what 'the government' is. Still, we need a definition of policy to identify measures of policy change.

- *How do governments analyse and make policy?*

There are simple step-by-step guides to using evidence to inform policy analysis. However, we also need to explain why policymakers must ignore most evidence to make choices, or who gets to decide what evidence or knowledge is policy relevant.

- *Who influences and makes public policy?*

Policymaking is political, and politics is about power and inequality. Many actors, with different beliefs and interests, try to exercise power to get what they want. Inequalities of power translate into unequal influence and clear winners and losers from policy outcomes.

- *Where do they make policy?*

There is no single authoritative 'centre' of policymaking. Policymaking is spread across many 'centres', each with their own rules, relationships, ways of thinking, and responses to events.

- *What is the best way to explain policymaking?*

The famous 'policy cycle' model provides a simple – but inaccurate - way for governments to describe policymaking. The model could describe what governments can do, should do, would like to do, or would like you to think they do! Policy theories provide more accurate and complex stories of what they actually do.

- *What are the payoffs to studying policy and policymaking?*

Policy theories help to identify some hard truths, such that policymakers do not fully understand the problems they face, or control the policy processes in which they engage. These insights help to identify how to engage with the policy processes that exist, not the fantasy worlds that we might prefer to see.

What is public policy and why does it matter?

Imagine the scene. We are in your first policy seminar. I seem friendly enough, but you are with a group of peers who just met. Things are nice and awkward, and no-one wants to be the first to speak. Then, I ask <u>you</u> the classic first question: *what is public policy?* Do you have a concise and convincing answer? Here is what you might say after reading this chapter.

First, you state - quite reasonably - that *you know it when you see it*. For example, from 2020, we witnessed many government responses to COVID-19, including: giving information on how to stay safe; obliging people to wear masks; funding people when they could not work; establishing organisations to 'test and trace' infected people; and, legislating to restrict the behaviour of people and organisations, backed by the police and other enforcement measures (often called 'lockdowns'). You say that *all of these actions are examples of policies*, and perhaps we can add them all up to identify a government's COVID-19 policy. If so, policy matters since – in life or death cases like COVID-19 – it affects how we try to live our lives.

Then, you notice a twinkle in the eye of one of your peers, as they ask: *what about governments who refused to do one or more of those things*? For example, some governments had very short or relatively voluntary lockdowns, and not all populations were obliged to wear masks. Isn't the rejection of certain policies also government policy? Not to be outdone, you nod knowingly, then ask: *does a government even need to refuse to do something to count as policy?* In other words, what if they said nothing about it, or a certain action was not even on their agenda? Sometimes we can only describe the absence of a policy when we see its presence somewhere else, prompting us to wonder why it happened in one place and not another.

You feel good about your excellent points until you spot someone slouched in their chair, looking unimpressed. After much encouragement from me, they mumble: *it doesn't matter what they say they will do, since they rarely deliver on their promises, and are only in it for themselves*. This statement is common, and often reflects low levels in trust in elected politicians, or a more general belief that politics is dysfunctional. It can put a dampener on the conversation if we conclude too quickly that politics is doomed. So, for now, we settle on a useful point about policy as a promise: *there is a big difference between a statement of intent and an outcome*, even though both might be called 'policy'. Sometimes the gap has a simple explanation: politicians don't keep their promises. However, even the most sincere and energetic policymakers struggle to turn their aims into policy outcomes. In those cases, the explanation for slow progress is more complicated, relating to complex 'systems' or 'environments' out of their control.

We continue with our discussion of COVID-19, since the pandemic and pandemic responses had profound impacts on so many people. Many witnessed the death of friends and family. Many are still trying to recover from illness. Many lost their jobs or finished their education at home. Some people are glad to be back to normal life as quickly as possible. Others describe the initial response to COVID-19 as inadequate and the removal of restrictions as too hasty. Still, we can agree that *the effects of the pandemic were highly unequal*: some people were able to enjoy a healthy life, living and working from a warm and safe home; some had to live and

work in less safe spaces, which exacerbated their poor health. Whether or not we agree on *what the government should have done to reduce inequalities* is a different matter.

We then move on to our assessments of policymaking. For example, *what motivated governments to act*, and *how did they describe the problem and their policies*? Did policymakers seem in control of the facts and the government response? Did governments use enough of their power to protect everyone? Did they reduce or exacerbate inequalities? It prompts us to consider *who influenced policy* the most, including high profile scientists describing the evidence, business groups concerned about the economy, and campaigners criticising insufficient or excessive government action.

Finally, I prompt you to consider who was making or delivering the policies we described. Did all policies emerge from a single centre of government? You each describe a different answer based on which country you call home. For example, since my fantasy seminar is in Scotland, we try to work out who does what here, including: the UK government raising and spending most money for the UK, and coordinating a UK-wide response, but also regulating behaviour largely in England; the Scottish Government regulating behaviour in Scotland, Police Scotland exercising discretion about who to punish and how, Scottish schools deciding how to operate safely while meeting Scottish Government aims and following regulations, and public and private organisations interpreting various rules about distancing, hygiene, and mask wearing. Does it all add up to what we call 'public policy'? If so, clearly many actors are making and influencing policy, and we do not get a full picture if we focus only on the statements of a small group of powerful people in one 'centre'.

Box 1.1 Definitions and descriptions of public policy

People use 'policy' to describe very different things, and it is impossible for everyone to agree on one concise and comprehensive definition (Colebatch, 1998: 72-73; Smith and Larimer, 2017). Hogwood and Gunn (1984: 13–19) identify ways to understand policy: as a label for a field of activity (e.g. health policy); an expression of intent (e.g. we will improve healthcare); specific proposals (e.g. a manifesto); decisions of government and the formal authorization of decisions (e.g. legislation); a programme, or package of legislation, staffing, and funding; intermediate and ultimate outputs (e.g. more or less doctors, better or worse medical care); outcomes, or what is actually achieved (e.g. better or worse population health); and, a process and series of decisions, not an event and single decision.

Descriptions of public policy include:

The actions of government and the intentions that determine those actions. (Cochran et al. in Birkland, 2005: 18)

Diverse activities by different bodies are drawn together into stable and predictable patterns of action which (as often as not) come to be labelled 'policy' (Colebatch, 1998: x)

Policy designs are observable phenomena found in statutes, administrative guidelines, court decrees, programs, and even the practices and procedures of street level bureaucrats (Schneider and Ingram, 1997: 2)

Whatever governments choose to do or not to do. (Dye in Birkland, 2005: 18)

Decisions by governments to retain the status quo are just as much policy as are decisions to alter it. (Howlett and Ramesh, 2003: 5)

There is an underlying assumption that policy is a good thing, that it fixes things up. Policymakers are the ones who do the fixing. (Bacchi, 2009: ix, challenging this assumption)

Defining public policy as a way to understand policymaking

Public policy. The sum of government action, from signals of intent to the final outcomes (compare with Box 1.1).

This discussion of COVID-19 policy and policymaking sums up most of the issues that you will face when trying to make sense of **public policy**. Policy clearly matters, and it is difficult to identify any aspect of life that is not influenced by government in some way. However, a comprehensive definition is elusive, and the value of simple definitions is to open discussion about what they leave unsaid. For example, let's begin with my definition and compare it with the wider insights summarised in Box 1.1. What remains unclear?

First, *does policy include what policymakers say they will do?* Sometimes, policymakers gather evidence, think long and hard, describe their aims sincerely, and do all they can to make them happen (Althaus et al., 2020). Sometimes, they make remarks without thinking about next steps, or statements that are deliberately vague or symbolic to make it look like governments are responding to an **issue** or **problem** (Colebatch, 1998: 9). If so, we need to be clear what we mean: are we describing a single statement or bigger strategy? Is the strategy backed by concrete measures such as legislation, budgets, and staffing?

Policy issue. A focus of discussion, debate, or conflict in politics.

Policy problem. A policy issue to be solved. Policymakers may not describe it as a problem if they do not have a solution.

Second, *does policy include the effects of a decision?* It is important to identify the effects of policies, not least because we need to understand why they do not live up to expectations. A traditional focus is 'implementation gaps' and the limits to policy made from the 'top-down'. For example, governments find it easier to pay for *outputs*, like doctors and teachers, than *outcomes* such as improved population health and education. Further, it is essential to ask why gaps exist. One answer is that outcomes are not determined by spending on personnel, since each profession may have its own ideas on how to act, and population behaviour is not so amenable to government influence (Colebatch, 1998: 114). Another answer is that government policies fail when they do not focus on the wider social and economic determinants of inequalities in health and education (Chapter 3).

Third, *what is 'the government' and who exactly are policymakers?* Reject the misleading idea of a single and clearly defined government making and delivering all policy from the centre (or the top-down). Most policy theories try to describe a policymaking *system* or *environment*

Street level bureaucracy. Lipsky's (1980) description of the professionals – including teachers, doctors, police officers, judges, and welfare officers – who make policy while they deliver.

Court politics. Describes the 'political leadership network' and short-term strategies of elites 'at the heart of government' (Boswell et al, 2021: 1260).

that includes multiple 'centres'. Sharing power happens by *choice* or *necessity* (Cairney et al, 2019). *Choice* refers to a formal decision to share or delegate responsibilities, such as when a constitution identifies a balance of powers between executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government, or sets out the powers of central and local governments. It also refers to delegation, such as when central government legislation identifies who or what is responsible for delivering policy, including an elected regional government, a unit or agency set up to deliver, or a profession within those organisations. *Necessity* refers to the inevitable limits to central government powers. It prompts their reliance on many other actors to make and deliver policy, from the many experts and interest groups who inform policy design, to the elected and unelected organisations – including '**street level bureaucracy**' - that make or deliver other policy instruments. While it is tempting to focus only on the **court politics** at the centre of policymaking, most policy theories try to explain a much wider policymaking environment in which policy is the product of the actions of, and interactions between, many 'policy collectivities' (Colebatch, 1998: 23; 2006: 1; Rose, 1987: 267–68).

Therefore, we need to be clear what we mean by 'policymakers'. Sometimes, people are describing the elected actors in well-defined positions of authority, like Presidents or Prime Ministers. However, it is also a catch-all term to describe actors who make policy in some way, including unelected civil servants (government bureaucrats) and street level bureaucrats. This focus on joint action also prompts us to identify who has the authority to be involved, from elected politicians with formal authority, to the experts and influential groups with informal influence. Combined, they are part of *policy networks* who make and influence policy.

Fourth, *does public policy include inaction?* Actors exercise power to get what they want, and they often want policymakers to ignore or do nothing about an issue. In such cases, we need to understand action behind the scenes. Further, policymakers may deliberately ignore an issue or do the bare minimum to address it. They decide that it is not really their problem, do not know how to solve it, or fear the negative political consequences of policy change. Or, inaction results from a lack of knowledge about (or attention to) a problem, or a missed opportunity to act (McConnell and 't Hart, 2019). In very few cases, the issue is entirely new and there is a period of inaction before governments catch up. In most cases, an elected policymaker's inaction simply reinforces the way things are already done in government.

Fifth, *what motivates policymakers, and what is the purpose of government action?* It is difficult to know what really motivates policymakers to act, but we have some useful theories

> **Frame (framing).** A political act to define a policy problem. The selective use and presentation of information, and selection of one way of understanding a problem at the expense of others (compare with narratives in Chapter 14).

and concepts to help us make sense of what they do. Many approaches focus on **framing** or narratives to identify how policymakers define the problem or characterise the people they seek to help (Chapters 11, 13, 14). Further, the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF) (Chapter 12) describes actors entering politics to turn their beliefs into policy. In each case, we have methods to identify how much attention people pay to issues, how they frame or narrate them, and how their beliefs inform attention and framing.

However, what if policymakers have motives that they keep to themselves? Perhaps your mind went quickly to corruption: do I mean they take bribes to do favours for powerful people? Not really. You don't need someone like me to make those suggestions (the 'all politicians are corrupt' argument is not my focus). Rather, I am introducing the idea of *good politics, bad policy* (or vice versa), in which it often seems that politicians avoid certain choices if they think they will be beneficial but unpopular. Marsh and McConnell (2010: 571; McConnell, 2010) relate this point to three measures of 'policy success' that politicians might seek to juggle: (1) will this policy boost my popularity (*political*), (2) how easy will it be to process and maintain support (*process*), and (3) will it achieve its intended outcomes if implemented (*programmatic*)? In other words, policymakers may want to make a positive difference, avoid dispiriting opposition and delay, *and* remain popular enough to win the next election, but find themselves forced to choose between these aims.

Finally, *who wins and loses from government action and inaction?* Actors exercise power to win from policy choices and outcomes. In many cases, these contests are visible and their outcomes are measurable, which helps us to conclude that the biggest or most frequent winners are powerful (or, they benefit from the power of others). In many other cases, we need to look more closely at, or deduce, the power relationships in politics. For example, some studies highlight attempts by actors to keep an issue off the policy agenda, either by reinforcing the belief that an issue is not the responsibility of government, or making sure that policymakers focus on other issues (Box 1.2). This focus on power should warn us against the assumption that public policy is simply a force for good, or an expression of public preferences. Rather, a key element of 'critical' policy studies is to identify – and challenge - the processes that reinforce unfair inequalities and further marginalise social groups.

Box 1.2 Public policy and inequalities

A focus on inequalities magnifies the issues that arise when we ask: what is policy and policymaking? First, it highlights the gap between rhetoric and action. Governments may make vague commitments to foster more equitable policies and processes to challenge inequity (unfair inequality). However, they may also avoid defining equity or producing policies consistent with that promise to reduce unfair inequalities. Second, governments may produce strategies to address inequalities, but without a major impact on outcomes. For example, they

may focus on how to encourage individuals to change behaviour (such as to seek work, education, or a healthy lifestyle) without addressing the social and economic drivers of unequal opportunities and outcomes. Third, it is difficult to know who is responsible for addressing inequalities, partly because they can be framed in so many different ways, such as in relation to social groups (e.g. racialised or gendered inequalities) or policy sectors (e.g. health or education inequalities). Potentially relevant roles are spread across many levels and types of government, or shared between public and private organisations. The result may be an accountability deficit in which everyone – and therefore no-one – is held responsible.

Fourth, many policymakers express scepticism about the responsibility of the state to address specific inequalities. For example, Bachrach and Baratz's (1970) famous discussion of poverty and 'non-decision making' highlights the exercise of power to reinforce major barriers to state action: to boost the proportion of the public that thinks poverty is the fault of the individual, or make sure that policymakers treat poverty as a low priority on the government agenda (Chapter 3). Fifth, policymakers may draw on social stereotypes to describe people in poverty as scroungers, and often single-out social groups to portray welfare dependence (Ingram and Schneider, 2005). The overall result of limited state action may be the endurance of inequalities and, in many cases, the dominance of policies that further marginalise some social groups.

It is common to refer to inequalities as a 'wicked' problem (Cairney et al, 2022a). Rittell and Webber (1973) coined the term to describe many policy problems as not amenable to simple analysis and solutions. Rather, people do not agree what the policy problem is (or what causes it), the problem is multifaceted and difficult to describe comprehensively, the availability of effective solutions is unclear, and there is reluctance to engage in 'trial and error' to see what works because policy failures have profound negative consequences (1973: 161-7; see also Newman and Head, 2017; Turnbull and Hoppe, 2018; McConnell, 2018; Cairney and St Denny, 2020; compare with 'super wicked' – Levin et al., 2012; Auld et al, 2021). The term 'wicked' can be useful to reject the misguided notion that problems like inequalities are amenable to 'rationalist' policy analysis (Preface; Chapter 2). However, we should not treat 'wicked' as synonymous with intractable, to the extent that policymakers give up (Chapter 2).

Overall, if there are profound social and economic inequalities, why does policy not change proportionately to reduce them or mitigate their effects? The answer from policy theories is that there is contestation to define the problem, decide if it is a government responsibility, assign a low or high priority, determine how far the state should intervene to redistribute resources or influence behaviour, and declare the success or failure of attempts to far. The answer from critical policy analysis is that researchers should engage in contestation to ensure that marginalised groups receive support or are not punished by public policies (Chapter 2).

What is policy change, and why does it matter?

Policy change. Policy that is modified or transformed. Its absence may be called **policy continuity**. Or, 'policy change' can be a catch-all to describe a notional range (e.g. from zero to radical change)

Policy tool or **policy instrument**. A device used to turn a broad aim into a specific action. The terms are often used synonymously. Scholars may examine the use of one tool or identify the overall impact of a **policy mix** (collection of instruments used to turn policy aims into action).

A working definition of policy helps us to measure **policy change**. Describing and explaining policy change is central to policy research *and* action. If political actors recommend radical action, to address problems such as inequalities (Box 1.2), they need to explain how and why policy does or doesn't change. We need to identify what we mean by policy change, and how we can measure its impact. This requirement raises even more questions.

First, *how should we categorise policy measures*? Measuring change begins with categorising the **mix** of **policy tools** or **instruments** (Box 1.3). For example, Hood and Margetts (2007: 3) relate tools to two general requirements: to 'detect' (e.g. gather information on policy problems) and 'effect' (e.g. take action to address problems). In that context, they identify four main categories of tools:

- *Nodality.* Being at the centre of the information network that underpins problem detection and policy development. Examples include: funding and conducting research, monitoring and influencing media and social media, broadcasting messages to inform citizens, and propaganda (2007: 21-48).

- *Authority.* The power of policymakers to legislate and regulate. Examples include: obliging people to give information (such as regarding their income or identity), enabling and constraining behaviour, or requiring a qualification or license to allow behaviour (such as to practice law or medicine, or drive a car) (2007: 49-77).

- *Treasure.* To gather and use resources to support policy decisions. Examples include taxes to raise revenue, and payments based on status or behaviour (such as to mitigate the effect of unemployment or support childcare) (2007: 78-101).

- *Organization.* The resources - such as staff, buildings, and technology - and coordinative capacity at their disposal. Examples include: treating patients, educating students, detaining prisoners, transporting people, and responding to crises (2007: 102-25)

I like these category names because they are stylised. They remind us that different terms describe similar things, or similar terms are used in different ways. For example, 'regulation' (Box 1.3) can describe: setting standards, with or without enforcement; state enforcement to deter or oblige behaviour; self-regulation, such as to allow a medical profession to set and force standards; using multiple tools to influence things like market prices (such as to set a cap or oblige competition) or overall inflation (such as to change central bank interest rates); 'franchising' or determining which organisation gets to deliver what service, such as postal delivery; obliging businesses to manage risks in particular ways, such as to stop banks over-investing or industries taking environmental risks; and, the tools of regulation, such as by people or algorithm (Lodge and Weigrich, 2012; Baldwin et al, 2012; Yeung and Lodge, 2019).

Box 1.3 Types of policy instruments and 'new policy design'

A small number of categories of policy tools only provides a general guide to a wide range of potential activity. The following examples highlight the large number of instruments used by governments:

1. *Gathering and using evidence for policy formulation* (Jordan and Turnpenny, 2015). Examples include policy analysis by funded research organisations (Chapter 2) or the 'co-production' of policy-relevant knowledge or solutions by policymakers, citizens, and stakeholders (Durose and Richardson, 2015; Durose et al., 2017).
2. *Public education.* To provide evidence and advice to citizens to encourage learning or exhort behavioural change.
3. *Regulations and enforcement*. Regulations or legislation to limit individual or organisational behaviour, backed by enforcement such as fines for non-compliance.
4. *Voluntary agreements*. To work with businesses to deliver government aims, such as to limit the advertising of unhealthy products (Baggott, 1986). To encourage cooperation between unions and business or referee disputes between fossil fuel and environmental groups (Jordan, 2001).
5. *Behavioural public policy*. To gather and use evidence on how people think to influence how they act (John, 2018; Chapters 2 and 7).
6. *Taxation*. Includes taxes on individual incomes, business profits, property, and the sale of goods or services.
7. *Public expenditure*. Spending on policy areas such as education, populations such as children, and current or capital (e.g. teacher wages or building schools).
8. *Economic incentives*. Subsidies to encourage behaviour, such as grants to support students or payments to encourage farming. 'Tax expenditures' involve foregoing income by providing exemptions, such as if an individual donates income to charity.
9. *Economic disincentives*. Punitive taxation on the sale of products such as tobacco.
10. *Providing public services*. To deliver services such as healthcare or schooling directly, fund non-governmental organisations, or oversee private activity. To provide tax-funded services for free, subsidise services, or make charges.
11. *Reforming government departments or services.* To establish a new department, change who is responsible for policy delivery, or try to integrate services.

Studies of 'new policy design' examine the use, and potential benefits, of policy instruments (Chapters 2 and 3; Howlett, 2014; Howlett et al, 2014). First, they identify political dilemmas and trade-offs. How much tax-funded state intervention should there be, and who should shoulder the largest burden (e.g. high profit businesses and high earners)? Which populations need or deserve the greatest support, and should it be conditional on behaviour (such as to seek work)? If governments want to influence behaviour, should they provide information, exhort change, use economic incentives or disincentives, or regulate? Should they provide public services directly, subsidise services, or regulate a market? Should they provide universal services or set conditions on their use (such as a means test)? Second, a government's policy mix indicates more or less commitment to state intervention. Some may restrict policy to

providing information and advice. Others may tax, spend, and regulate to oblige social change (Cairney and St Denny, 2020: 18).

Third, since there are few truly new issues, 'new' instruments are used to replace others, or add to an already complex policy mix (2014: 297-300; Peters et al, 2019). The outcomes of each new measure are difficult to predict. Examples such as 'comprehensive tobacco control' show that a coherent collection of measures can combine to help 'denormalise' smoking, such as by raising prices, prohibiting advertising and smoking in public places, obliging health warnings, and offering smoking cessation services (Cairney, 2019a). Examples such as 'climate justice' – to mitigate and adapt to climate change in a fair way – show that policymaking is fragmented and spread across many levels and types of government, with each 'centre' contributing to often-contradictory or ineffectual measures (Cairney et al, 2023).

Second, *what tools or instruments are likely to be used?* If policy analysis was solely a technical exercise, we would expect policymakers to adopt the most 'technically feasible' solutions that would work as intended when implemented. However, it is not. Policymakers need to identify what solutions are politically feasible, such as to make sure that the solution is consistent with their beliefs (and those of their allies) and that its adoption will not make them too unpopular or provoke a level of opposition that would undermine implementation. In that context, Lowi (1972: 299; 1988: 726) famously claimed that 'policies determine politics': each category of policy instrument has its own 'political dynamic' relating to state coercion, the type of government involved, and its intended target. The likely effect of policy on individuals or groups will influence their levels of opposition, how they mobilize to influence policy, and where they engage. Some types of policy are more difficult to sell and deliver because they are more coercive or costly, requiring more political resources to ensure success:

- *Redistributive* policies take resources from some to give to others, such as via the tax and benefits systems of central governments. They have highly visible winners and losers, prompting opposition from powerful groups seeking to protect their position and/ or limit the role of the state.
- *Distributive* policies provide benefits only to some groups, such as via benefits or services provided by central or local governments. They can benefit some people without being as connected to coercive taxation or a stark sense of winners and losers.
- *Regulatory* policies limit the behaviour of individuals or organisations. They are coercive, but the costs of individual regulatory policies can be shifted to individuals and private companies without creating an overall sense of winning and losing.
- *Constituent* policies relate to the design or reform of political systems and administration, providing very broad societal costs and benefits and provoking interest largely among political party or governmental actors (Lowi, 1964: 690-1; 1972: 300; see also McCool, 1995: 246–48; Smith, 2002; Tolbert, 2002).
- *Behavioural* policies use evidence on how people think to influence how they think and act. They did not feature in Lowi's schema, but we can imagine their attractiveness to governments if they can sell them as non-coercive ways to enhance or replace regulation (although see Chapter 7; John, 2011; Pykett et al, 2018).

Third, *how should we categorise policy change?* Giordono and Cairney (2019) summarise common categories of measures:

1. *The substance and size of policy change*. Substance can refer to tangible policy instruments (Box 1.3) and how they contribute to overall policy aims. For example, a vague strategy not backed by regulations or resources may seem insubstantial. Size can be measured by comparing old and new instruments such as a rise in tax or shift from a voluntary agreement to a regulation, identifying the impact of an instrument over time such as if more people qualify for a benefit, or relating change to a benchmark or international standard.

2. *The speed of policy change*. Speed is an amount of change during an amount of time. It can relate to the gap between a problem arising and a government response, how long it takes for a response to be delivered, or how this response or delivery time compares with policy change in other systems (e.g. governments may be 'leaders' or 'laggards'). Profound change can be 'sudden' or 'gradual'.

3. *The direction of policy change*. Direction describes the policy trajectory, such as in relation to an expansion or contraction of a programme, convergence with other jurisdictions (often related to 'league tables'), divergence from others, or in relation to ideology, such as to become more left or right wing.

Narrative. A non-fictional story of a series of events. An attempt to 'render various series of events into an intelligible whole' (Kay, 2006: 23).

Fourth, *can we provide different – and equally convincing – **narratives** of policy change*? While the categorisation of instruments and measures is helpful, it does not ensure a comprehensive analysis of all the measures that we call 'policy'. Rather, policy actors compete to describe and evaluate public policy, often by using evidence selectively to characterise its substance, speed, and direction (Cairney, 2007a). As researchers, we could claim to be more 'objective' and maybe we'd get away with it. Still, we face dilemmas about how to characterise policy change overall when governments maintain so many different – and often contradictory – aims and instruments whose impacts are difficult to track. For example, a high-profile promise may be backed by legislation but not the resources to ensure delivery. A low-key and informal collaboration between multiple governments and non-governmental organisations could prove to be effective or ineffective (Chapter 7). In practice, most areas will contain a mix of high- and low-profile, formal and informal, well-funded and poorly funded, successful and unsuccessful policy instruments. If so, the aim is to turn a long list of actions into a narrative of policy change. Key factors include:

- *The timeframe*. Policy change takes time, so an absence of immediate impact may be followed by profound long-term change. Or, governments may invest heavily initially then let delivery slide.
- *The level or type of government we study*. Policy change can seem very different when viewed from the 'top down' (focusing on central government aims) or 'bottom up' (focusing on the practices of organisations or street level bureaucrat).

- *The policy instruments we select.* Studies can focus on why one key measure was adopted (Chapter 13) or try to capture policy change across an entire political system (Chapter 11).

GDP. Gross Domestic Product. The annual total of goods and services produced in a country.

- *Our indicators.* We can relate government spending to its overall budget, **GDP**, previous years, or international trends. Government spending on health education may be overshadowed by business spending to advertise unhealthy products. A fine on a corporation may be small compared to its income.

- *Our expectations.* Policy change can often seem insubstantial compared to the size of the problem, a government's promises, or another government's response. For example, researchers are often frustrated by a lack of action to reduce smoking, mitigate climate change, or reduce inequalities (Cairney et al, 2012; 2022a; 2023).

- *Does motivation matter?* Policymakers can introduce policies to seek different kinds of success, to boost their popularity, prioritise measures that are easy to legitimise in the short term, or produce beneficial long-term outcomes (Marsh and McConnell, 2010: 571). Motivation matters if we judge policy change in relation to stated aims, such as if a tobacco tax or speeding fine is described as a public health measure rather than a revenue raiser. In some cases, motives are stated explicitly. In others, motivation is difficult to demonstrate (who would admit to making policies for selfish reasons?).

- *The search for coherence.* A reference to 'policy' could imply coherence: these measures add up to an overall response to a problem. Yet, governments often produce contradictory policies, such as to subsidise tobacco production but limit sales (Cairney et al, 2012). One policy strategy may be undermined by another. For example, the biggest influences on population health or the climate are instruments designed for a different purpose, such as to boost economic growth (Cairney et al, 2022a; 2023).

- *The language of policy change.* The rest of the book generally uses terms like 'minor' versus 'major' policy change, and examines if policy change is 'incremental' or radical (e.g. Chapters 4, 6, 11). Yet, our field of study does not have a singular vocabulary or agreement on what these terms mean.

- *Researcher motivation or bias.* Some scholars may describe themselves as objective or removed from their object of study, but they are human beings with beliefs about the nature of policy problems, which problems are worthy of study, who or what should solve them, how we should gather evidence on solutions, and whose voices matter in research and practice (Bacchi, 1999: 200; Ackerly and True, 2008).

These factors suggest that different researchers could – reasonably – come to very different conclusions about how to define a policy or determine how much it changed. Similarly, it is possible for one researcher to produce different and equally plausible accounts of the type, speed, and nature of change. Therefore, it is important for researchers to 'show their work' (Giordono and Cairney, 2019) when narrating policy change. The choice of narrative has a crucial effect on the value of the policy theories covered in this book, particularly when they are used to explain policy continuity or radical change.

What are policy theories, and why do they matter?

Imagine the scene. We are in your second policy seminar and you are a bit concerned that a simple question – *what is policy, and how does it change?* – got so complicated so quickly. The guy slouched in his chair is now muttering: *typical academics, making something so simple seem so complex*. I reply that it's not really my colleagues' fault. They are trying to make sense of key aspects of policymaking complexity in their research, and doing it in different ways. Their way makes sense to a lot of people, but little sense to others. Magnify this process by the number of approaches, and you have a mass of technical language (jargon), with no way to bring it all together into a common language or perspective. We could bemoan our inability to understand all perspectives, or celebrate pluralism and try to understand many (see Preface).

Heuristic (heuristic device). An analytical tool to guide investigation. A way to simplify our world to help to understand part of it.

Concept. An abstract idea or principle.

Model. A representation of an object or process. It does not need to be accurate or to scale, as long as we understand its limits (e.g. the London Underground map – Parsons, 1995: 59).

Theory. A set of analytical statements, assumptions, or principles used to structure observation and explanation.

Framework-theory-model. For Ostrom (1999: 39–40), frameworks identify concepts and organize analysis, theories make general assumptions about causal relationships between concepts, and models make specific assumptions about objects of enquiry. Cairney and Heikkila (2023: 292-3) describe '**theoretical approaches**' to reflect (1) a lack of agreement on terminology ('the literature contains a complicated mix of frameworks, theories, and models'), and (2) the wider role of 'policy theories' in guiding how groups of scholars design research and choose methods.

Mainstream policy studies. Describes policy analysis and most of the policy process theories in this book. Durnová and Weible (2020: 3) compare it with **interpretive** studies, including critical approaches to policy analysis and research (Chapter 2).

We agree that **heuristics** would be useful to simplify our world enough to understand it. Still, there is high uncertainty about where to begin. One option is to use **models** to think about policymaking. Some models seem applicable to many cases. For example, the most famous model in this book is the policy cycle (Chapters 2 and 3). It turns a complex policymaking process into a small number of 'stages', including to define a policy problem, generate feasible solutions, implement, and evaluate the outcomes. Its usefulness comes from its simplicity. However, it is not an accurate representation of policymaking or a good guide to engagement with policymakers. Readers could use it to understand essential policymaking tasks, but should not be misled into thinking that policymaking could be so orderly (Chapters 2 and 3).

Another option is to use policy **frameworks** and **theories**. Both are defined in different ways by different scholars (prompting generic terms like **theoretical approaches**). Still, we can identify common elements and aims of **mainstream** policy theories:

1. To use frameworks to identify the most important features of our object of study, and assign clearly-defined **concepts** to describe them. Frameworks help scholars to conduct research and cooperate with each other with reference to a common understanding.

2. To use theories to identify the relationships between key features, such as to explain the main causes of policymaking dynamics. Frameworks tell us what to look for and theories help to explain what we find.

Imagine the use of mainstream policy theories as a step-by-step process, from identifying one case to generalising across many. First, we identify policies and their main causes. Second, we examine the extent to which we can identify the same causes in other situations and generalize from specific to numerous instances. Third, to do so, we identify abstract ideas that apply across many or all cases. Fourth, we use those abstract ideas to inform our study of subsequent case studies. Fifth, in doing so, we might attempt to assess the value of the theory (or suggest modifications to address particular cases). In other words, although the world is complex and beyond our full understanding, we can still identify a manageable number of factors that explain what happens within it (John, 1998: 8; Sabatier, 2007a: 5). We might also hope that the theory is parsimonious; it explains many things in an efficient way.

Mainstream policy theories help to understand the discussions in this chapter so far, including how to go from defining policy to measuring policy change, and identifying and explaining general patterns. For example, punctuated equilibrium theory (PET) (Chapter 11) began to explain why certain actors were able to exert power by monopolizing (1) access to policymakers and (2) how people understood and addressed policy problems. Baumgartner and Jones (1993) used rich case studies on tobacco, nuclear power, the environment, and pesticides in the US. Then, Jones and Baumgartner (2005) developed the 'general punctuation hypothesis', a more abstract theory based on the ability of policymakers to process information and pay attention to policy issues, with the potential to be applicable to all policy areas and beyond the USA. PET helps to measure policy change in a political system over time, finding a huge amount of minor change but many instances of major change. It then explains these patterns in relation to attention. Most policy does not change much because there is not much policymaker attention to an issue; the current ways of doing things continue. Some policies change when there is high attention, which contributes to debates and decisions to do things differently (Chapter 11).

More generally, policy theories seek to explain why policymaking is beyond the full understanding and control of policymakers. First, policymakers are subject to **bounded rationality** (Simon, 1957). Most studies begin with the **ideal type** of **comprehensive rationality** then identify how policymakers deal with its absence, such as to use cognitive shortcuts to gather enough information to make choices (chapter 4). Bounded rationality is universal: no human can achieve omniscience and no government can gather and process all policy relevant information. However, policy theories identify different ways to analyse policy actor responses, from paying minimal or maximal attention to issues, to forming coalitions with

Ideal type. An abstract concept or artificial scenario (not necessarily an ideal).

Comprehensive rationality. An **ideal type** of policymaking. Describes a single omniscient all-powerful source of policymaking. Policymakers at the centre translate their values and aims into policy following a comprehensive study of choices and their effects.

Bounded rationality. The absence of comprehensive rationality. The limits to processing information and making choices.

like-minded actors, telling stories to motivate an audience, or using social stereotypes to decide who should win or lose from policy (Chapter 4). They also relate these acts to the exercise of power: actors can use material resources to win disputes, but also engage in framing and argumentation to influence how people think and the issues to which they pay attention (Chapter 5).

Second, actors face policymaking complexity. Most theories seek to understand a policymaking environment in which there is no single centre of government. Some approaches zoom into one key elements, to identify the spread of policymaking across multiple centres, and the institutions, networks, ways of thinking, and responses to social and economic conditions and political events in each centre (Chapters 5-9). Others combine these elements to provide an overall narrative of how policy actors engage in their environments (Chapters 10-14).

These policy theories sound great, but is there anything else I should know?
At this point in the seminar, everyone is ready to high-5 and leave ten minutes early. However, just for the sake of completeness, you note that I keep saying 'mainstream' then ask about other relevant approaches. I reply that 'mainstream' is a very general description of most of the approaches we cover, beginning with policy analysis and continuing with the theories covered largely in Chapters 10-14. The comparison is with 'critical' approaches - introduced in the Preface - that use research to identify and challenge inequalities of power. The distinction highlights the big philosophical questions that we can't ignore forever: what is the nature of the social world, and does it exist independent of our knowledge of it (ontology), and how can we gather and accumulate that knowledge (epistemology)? Mainstream theories are often associated with 'positivist' answers to those questions: scientific methods produce high quality knowledge about the general features of policymaking, this knowledge corresponds to the world out there, and it can be gathered by anyone following the same methods. In contrast, critical or **interpretive** approaches suggest that researchers are central to the knowledge gathering process (each researcher produces distinctive results) and we are producing context-specific knowledge that it not so generalisable.

In practice, there are blurry boundaries between these approaches and some potential for agreement, as follows. First, it is difficult to know how we accumulate knowledge and few people see their approach as immune to these difficulties (Chalmers, 1999). Second, few would argue that there is a 'general theory' applicable to all public policy (Smith and Larimer, 2009: 15–17). The world is too complex, there are too many causes of outcomes to allow for a single explanation, and parsimonious theories only explain one part of a process. Indeed, much of the public policy literature represents 'thick description' to map aspects of complex terrain (Hill, 1997: 2; John, 1998: 8–9). Third, mainstream theories developed in specific contexts (usually the USA) then applied to some others (usually Western Europe), which makes it difficult to assert their universal applicability. Fourth, we can use mainstream and critical accounts to centre the role of politics in policy analysis, to warn against the idea that it is an objective

search for the truth about policy problems or for optimal policy solutions (Chapter 2; Cairney, 2023). Many mainstream theorists also produce practical or normative lessons from their work.

Yet, it would be doing a disservice to critical approaches to ignore their distinctive contributions (explored primarily in Chapters 3-5, 6, and 14). The distinction between using mainstream approaches empirically (to describe and explain policymaking), and critical approaches normatively (to engage with policy processes to challenge inequalities) may be blurry, but it helps to identify what scholars think they are doing in the name of research. It also warns against attempts to combine many insights or approaches into one. Maybe we can combine the insights of many studies, but that should be a discussion in its own right (Cairney, 2013a; Chapter 16).

The structure and story of this book

At this stage of the seminar, all that there is left to do is go through the syllabus. Rather than me narrating it in person, you all agree to study the following description before we meet again, even though we all know that this is the part that people don't read.

Chapter 2 What is policy for? Who is policy for? Perspectives from policy analysis, policy design, and critical policy analysis

Chapter 2 describes the purpose of public policy and policy change. In other words, what is policy for, and who is it for? It summarises a classic answer from the study of policy analysis: elected policymakers should be in charge of identifying policy problems, and they should use evidence and their beliefs to define and address problems. Policy analysts should engage in a series of steps to: use their client's problem definition as their starting point, identify technically and politically feasible solutions, use values and goals to identify the trade-offs between each solution, estimate their effects, and make recommendations.

Studies of policymaking highlight a new portrayal of this activity. The old story is of rationalism and central control: an elite cadre of objective scientific analysts identify optimal solutions and relay them to a small group of powerful policymakers at the centre of government. Aspects of this old story still resonate in modern hopes for 'evidence based' policy. The new story is of argumentation and multi-centric policymaking: many analysts compete to define problems and propose solutions, in a policymaking environment in which there are many elected and unelected policymakers. In that context, the 'new policy design' (Box 1.3) explores if anyone controls the overall policy mix. While it makes sense to seek *policy coherence* or *policymaking integration*, a practical lesson from policy theories is that both are elusive.

Studies of critical policy analysis argue that rationalism and optimality were not good ideals anyway. This language of objectivity downplays the essential role of politics. Instead, we need to identify how political actors exercise power to decide whose knowledge is relevant, who should make and influence key choices, and who should benefit from policy outcomes. Critical policy analysis can also play a direct political role, such as to challenge dominant ways to define and address problems and seek radical changes to the status quo.

Chapter 3 How is policy made? The policy cycle and beyond

Chapter 3 compares old and new stories of how policy is made. It begins with the classic story of orderly policymaking via a series of key stages. Governments set the policy agenda, formulate policy solutions, make and legitimating choices, then implement and evaluate before

deciding to maintain, modify, or terminate the policy. This story does not describe policymaking well. It features in this book as an ideal-type to be compared with the real world. In its place, the new story highlights bounded rationality and policymaking complexity, which can be summed up as follows: policymakers have a limited understanding of policy problems and very little control over their policymaking environment. Policymaking concepts and theories try to capture key elements of the policy process but emphasise its messiness and complexity.

Chapter 3 explains why the policy cycle image remains so important when it is so inaccurate. The old story serves two useful purposes. First, it describes the tasks or functions essential to policymaking and we can use it to explore the politics of each task. For example, policy theories focus on the power to set policy agendas and define problems, the competition to propose solutions, different ways to understand an 'implementation gap', and the contestation to declare success or failure during evaluation. Further, while there are blurry boundaries between making and implementing policy, it makes sense to devote attention to the politics of public administration.

Second, it often describes what policymakers want to do or look like they are doing. The image portrays an orderly process in which they are in control. If so, can policy theories provide a better story of how policymaking should work? For example, chapters 7 and 10 explore positive models of policymaking based on cooperation across multiple 'centres'. More generally, policy theories help to reject over-optimistic ideals. A focus on policymaking reality helps to generate practical lessons.

Chapter 4 How do policymakers deal with bounded rationality? The psychology and politics of choice.
Comprehensive rationality describes one single source of authoritative choice: policymakers translate their values and aims into policy following a comprehensive study of choices and their effects. Bounded rationality highlights the inevitable human and organisational limits to processing information and making choices: no human can achieve omniscience and no government can gather and process all policy relevant information. Insights from psychology suggest that humans respond by using cognitive and emotional shortcuts to gather enough evidence to inform their choices. They may pay more attention to information that they can recall and relate easily to their understanding of the world, and act in accordance with their firmly held beliefs.

Chapter 4 explores how policy theories relate bounded rationality and psychology to policymaking. The classic story is of incrementalism. Lindblom (1959; 1979) suggests limiting analysis to a small number of policy choices that diverge modestly from the status quo, and engaging in trial-and-error to see what works. Analysts would be wasting their time on researching more radical options that would not gain political support. Modern theories challenge the idea that choices relate so closely to strategic choices or that they contribute inevitably to incremental policy change. Some identify political action driven by deeply held beliefs, instincts, quick emotional judgements, socialisation, and social identity as much as 'rational' choices. Most identify the tendency for policy processes to produce mostly minor policy changes but also many major changes, in ways that are not summed up well by 'incremental'.

Chapter 5 Who is powerful and why? Winning disputes, setting the agenda, and shaping beliefs
Power and politics are at the heart of policymaking, but what do we mean when we use these terms? The classic definition of politics - 'who gets what, when, how' (Lasswell, 1936) – highlights processes to resolve disputes in favour of some at the expense of others. Many actors, with different beliefs and interests, try to use their resources to get what they want, but the contest is unequal. Some contests are highly visible, in which actors with greater material resources overcome their opponents or win a 'battle of ideas'. Some are somewhat visible, such as when actors compete to keep an issue on or off the policy agenda. This contest can involve using formal procedures to manage the agendas of government, or trying to persuade people that an issue is not worthy of their attention (Box 1.2).

Chapter 5 uses the latter to connect power to the role of ideas, to identify how some actors manipulate or influence the beliefs of others rather than engaging in visible conflict. Inequalities of power and outcomes can relate to dominant ways of thinking, such as to only value some sources of policy-relevant knowledge, or to blame social groups for their own poverty and reject the idea that unequal health or climate outcomes are largely out of their control. If these dominant ideas are accepted and reinforced, people may not see the need to organise to challenge them, or to identify a role for the state in solving many policy problems. The reinforcing power of beliefs, rules, and norms may be most profound when they are taken for granted in everyday life.

Chapter 6 Who makes and benefits from the rules? Institutions and new institutionalism
Institutions are the rules and norms that political actors use to make policy and govern behaviour. Some rules are formal and written, such as contained in constitutions, legislation, codes of practice, or documents establishing standard operating procedures. Others are informal and unwritten, more difficult to identify, but no less important. They can range from norms communicated via visible behaviour, socialisation, or enforcement to expectations about 'the way things are done around here'.

Chapter 6 explores how 'new institutionalist' scholars define institutions, conceptualise their role or influence, and seek to research their impact on politics, policymaking, and people. For example, institutions can represent: decisions in the past that have become entrenched and difficult to change, a source of incentives or disincentives for individual political actors, well-enforced rules on what behaviour is appropriate, or the shared beliefs or understandings that can be reinforced or reinterpreted. We can examine the routine impact of such institutions on social groups, such as when the interpretation and enforcement of rules contributes to systematic discrimination against women and people of colour. We can also explore how researchers generate knowledge on these processes, such as to identify how institutions provide 'feedback' to policymakers when addressing problems, or how the design of institutions contribute to policy change. Indeed, policy change is highly debate in new institutionalist studies: do we witness long periods of stability then rapid change, or more gradual changes with major long-term effects?

Chapter 7 Why do many 'centres' share policymaking responsibilities? Multi-level governance and multi-centric policymaking:
Many policy theories describe multiple venues for authoritative policy choice, each with their own understanding of problems and rules to address them. Instead of one single centre of power, think of policy as the product of many 'centres'. They do not have equal influence or as much power as central governments, but they still matter. We miss a lot if we focus only on the choices of one government, at the expense of a wider focus on collaboration and contestation across many organizations. For example, we may examine policymaking across multiple levels, including local, regional, national, and supranational policymaking when examining policy in the European Union or with reference to international organisations such as the United Nations. Or, we may wonder what it would take for all relevant public and private organisations to collaborate effectively to address the same problem (such as when examining policies to address climate change). In each case, we might refer more to *governance* than *government*, to reflect the blurry boundaries between formal and informal sources of authority, which make it difficult to identify clear-cut decisions or power relations.

Chapter 7 explores two different reasons to expect multi-centric policymaking. The first is the *choice* to share policymaking responsibilities. This choice could be formalised, such as in a written constitution that sets out each venue's responsibilities, or in legislation that delegates central government powers to subnational governments. The second is *necessity*. Necessity relates to bounded rationality: policymakers can only pay attention to a small proportion of their responsibilities and must delegate the rest. It also relates to complexity: policymakers operate in an environment over which they have limited understanding and even less control.

Chapter 7 examines how governments respond. Some central governments seek to centralise power and reassert their authority, from the maintenance of authoritarian government to project central power, to attempts in Westminster systems to match central capacity to meet expectations for democratic accountability. Some governments may seek more realistic arrangements, in which they accept the limits to their coordinative capacity but still seek to influence outcomes. They may try to set the strategic direction for policy implementation, pursue policymaking integration, manage the networks of organisations focused on the same goal, or contribute to more collaborative forms of governance.

Chapter 8 Where is the action, and who are the key players? Policy networks and subsystems
Policy theories focus on this blurry boundary between making and influencing policy. They identify the relationships between policymakers and the interest groups or other actor who contribute to policy. 'Network' is the umbrella term for such relationships, and it covers a wide range of group-government relations, from relatively close and insulated to open and competitive. The main focus is on the 'subsystems' or 'policy communities' in which a relatively small number of actors engage. These more specialised arrangements help to process the majority of government business.

Chapter 8 explains why these networks or subsystems are so pervasive. They are a function of bounded rationality and complexity: there are far more issues to process than any person or organisation could understand or handle. So, policymakers pay attention to some issues and delegate the rest, such as to bureaucrats charged with managing specific problems. Bureaucrats rely on certain experts or specialists to help them understand and address problems, and close-knit networks may arise when this relationship is beneficial for each side. The result can be

long periods of policymaking stability, when governments have established a way to define and address problems and leave the details to specialists, or when coalitions dominate for long periods. Still, there is ever-present potential for instability, when governments face overwhelming pressure from other actors, or respond to policy failures, that prompt them to rethink their approach.

In that context, political actors can perform a range of key roles, including insider groups who know how to exploit the 'rules of the game', outsiders who challenge exclusive policy processes, well-connected policy entrepreneurs who know when to exploit opportunities, experts in demand for their knowledge, and brokers able to secure agreements between competing actors.

Chapter 9 Is policy in the control of policymakers? Structures, Environments, and Complex Systems.

Chapter 9 shifts from the *agency* of policy actors to the *structures* that constrain and facilitate their action. While our initial focus on policy analysis and cycles accentuates the role of powerful policymakers, they seem far less powerful when engaging in a policymaking environment that they struggle to understand. This environment includes the institutions that guide their behaviour, the networks on which they rely, and the tendency for policy to be made in a collection of policymaking centres. What else can we add to this list of constraints? First, *policy conditions* are largely out of policymaker control and may prompt lurches in their attention. They include demographic changes, shifts in social attitudes, new technologies, economic pressures, and natural disasters or political crises. Second, *globalisation* sums up the idea that key choices are beyond the full control of a national government, such as when trying to manage a domestic economy or shore up national borders. Third, *inheritance before choice* describes a tendency for policymakers to manage existing commitments, and face *policy inertia*, rather than embark on bold new adventures.

Chapter 9 explores how to conceptualise such constraints. One option is to use evolutionary metaphors to describe the interaction between actors and their environment, to suggest that the power of the former relates to their ability to adapt to the latter. These metaphors are pervasive in policy studies and a feature of Chapters 10-14. Another option is to treat policymaking as akin to a *complex system*, in which policy outcomes seem to emerge from systems in the absence of central control. Policymakers can make a difference, but their impact relates primarily to feedback from the system. This language of complex systems is increasingly important to approaches such as PET (Chapter 11).

So far, these chapters contribute to an image of the policy process that is unlike the policy cycle. We are trying to account for policy choices in the face of bounded rationality, taking place in a policymaking environment in which there are many actors spread across many 'centres', each with their own rules, networks, ways of thinking about problems, and responses to context and events. Figure 1.1 visualises these concepts and the remaining chapters engage with them in different ways.
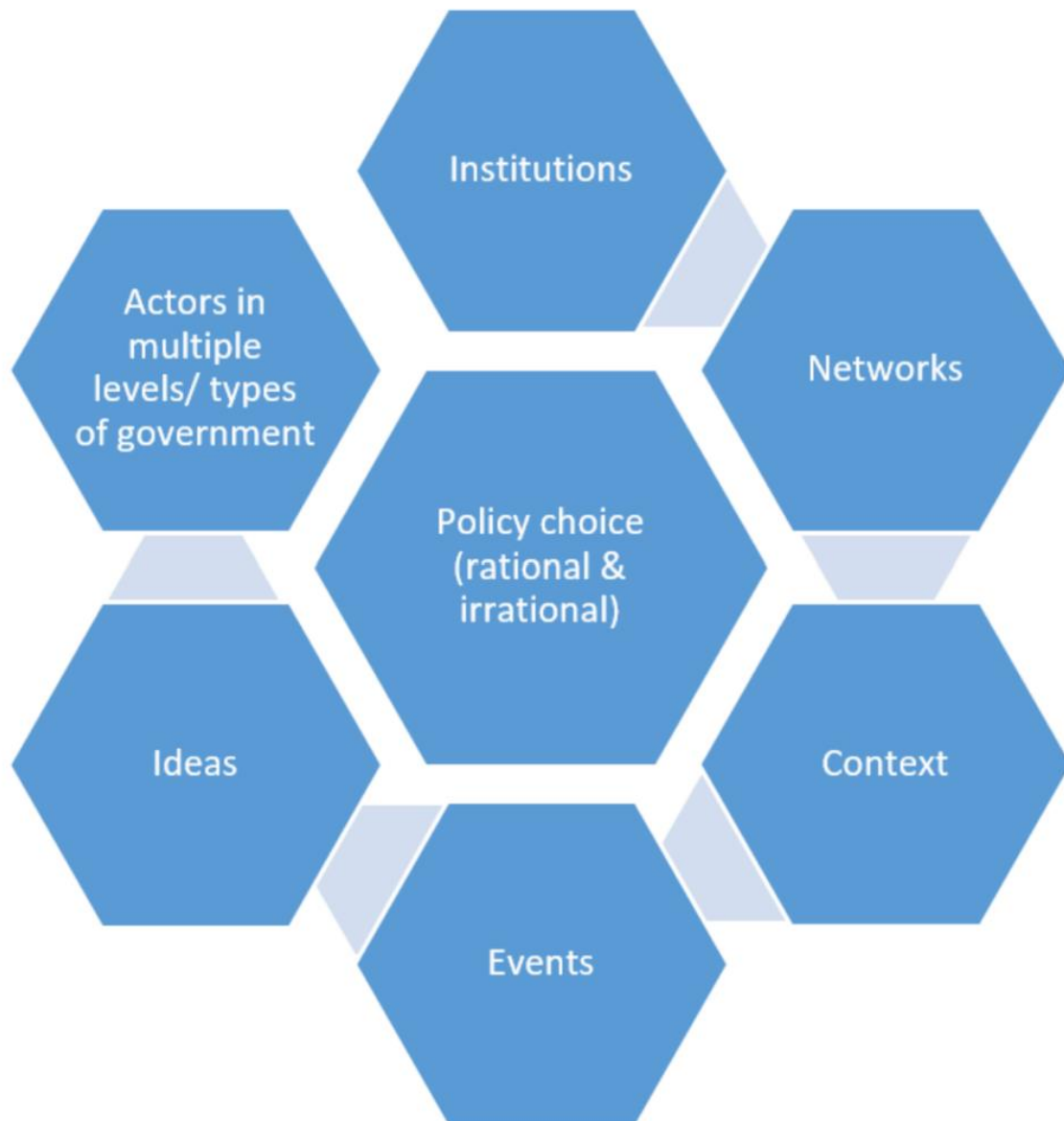
Chapter 10 Can we solve collective action problems in public policy? Rational choice and the IAD.

Chapter 10 relates bounded rationality and policymaking complexity to the pursuit of collective action in society and government. On the one hand, there is a profound need for people to cooperate to solve problems that are beyond their individual understanding and control. On the other hand, insights from simple mathematic models ('game theory') and economics ('rational choice') help to identify collective action problems: the potential for choices made by individuals to have an adverse societal effect when there is an absence of trust, obligation, or other incentives to cooperate. People may satisfy their own short-term rewards at the expense of long-term collective action. While government coercion could be a solution to individual non-cooperation, governments also face collective action problems in multi-centric systems.

Chapter 10 describes the contribution of the Institutional Analysis and Development framework (IAD) to this problem. The IAD helps to produce key principles of policy design

built on studies in which people have cooperated effectively to manage scarce resources. It also identifies how institutions can become vehicles for problem-solving and collective action inside and outside of government. Under the right conditions, people and organisations will decide to act collectively to produce and enforce rules to avert public policy tragedies.

Chapter 11 What explains policymaking instability and policy punctuations? Punctuated equilibrium theory.
Chapter 11 shows how bounded rationality contributes to lurches of policymaker attention in complex policymaking systems. Punctuated equilibrium theory (PET) helps to explain long periods of policymaking stability and short but intense periods of instability. These dynamics explain a tendency for most policy changes to be minor but many to be major. PET describes a distribution of policy change akin to the frequency and intensity of earthquakes. Early PET studies related these dynamics to agenda setting and policy networks. Public, media, and policymaker attention rose in relation to a pressing problem, governments produced solutions and institutions, attention fell, and the details were left to specialists. These arrangements could last for decades before an event, policy failure, or successful campaign by interest groups rekindled policy concerns. Modern PET studies focus more on complex systems, to identify the pervasiveness of earthquake-style distributions of policy change. They relate these outcomes to *disproportionate information processing*, in which policymaker attention does not relate strongly to the size of policy problems or available information. Attention can be low and organisations can carry out the same routines for long periods, then suddenly policymaker attention lurches and there is intense pressure to change policy and the rules of policymaking.

Chapter 12 How can we understand conflict, cooperation, and policy-oriented learning? The Advocacy Coalition Framework.
Chapter 12 shows how bounded rationality contributes to conflict and cooperation in policy subsystems. The Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF) suggests that people engage in politics to turn their beliefs into policy. They form advocacy coalitions with people who share their beliefs, and compete with other coalitions in policy subsystems devoted to specific policy issues. These subsystems display a mix of politicized disputes and routine activity. There may be scope for cooperation and routine policy-oriented learning in relation to technical aspects of policy, but in a context where disputes can be highly charged and coalitions may demonise their opponents. Policy change tends to be minor, such as when some coalitions dominate and only learn to update their beliefs on how best to deliver their aims. However, major change can result from 'shocks', in which actors leave a coalition after experiencing policy failure or another coalition is better able to exploit changes external to the subsystem (such as when a crisis emerges or a new government is elected).

Chapter 13 Does policy change during windows of opportunity? The Multiple Streams Framework.
Chapter 13 also focuses on key moments and turns the policy cycle on its head. In place of an image of orderly and sequential stages, we find a 'garbage can' model in which policy analysis is never comprehensive, policymaker aims are unclear, and essential policymaking functions operate independently. Policymaking organizations represent 'collections of choices looking for problems, issues and feelings looking for decision situations in which they might be aired, solutions looking for issues to which they might be an answer, and decision makers looking for work' (Cohen et al., 1972: 1). The multiple streams framework (MSF) builds on this insight to suggest that major policy change is possible, but not inevitable, when policymaker attention

lurches to a problem. Rather, many things need to happen during a 'window of opportunity': there is sufficiently high attention to one way to interpret a problem, a technically and politically feasible solution exists, and policymakers have the means and motivation to adopt it.

Chapter 14 Do actors gain an advantage by telling stories and exploiting social stereotypes? The NPF and SCPD.

Chapter 14 charts the profound impact of stories and storytelling on policy and policymaking. Policy actors use cognitive and emotional shortcuts to deal with bounded rationality, which makes them more or less susceptible to stories of policy problems and solutions. The Narrative Policy Framework (NPF) suggests that policy actors seek to influence their audiences by constructing stories with a setting, characters, plot, and moral. The impact of their stories relates partly to narration and argumentation, and largely to the beliefs of their audience. It would be surprising to see a story change an audience's beliefs altogether. Rather, the aim may be to tap into particular beliefs to motivate action. Social Construction and Policy Design (SCPD) identifies a tendency for policy actors to exploit social stereotypes, to identify the good groups worthy of state support and bad groups that should be unsupported or punished. In turn, some groups can challenge or exploit these stories to seek policy benefits, while others are powerless to respond. The overall effect may be a dysfunctional policy process in which some groups receive disproportionate benefits while others are punished and alienated from politics.

Chapter 15 Do governments learn from experience? Policy learning and transfer:

Chapter 15 uses what we have learned so far to revisit the idea of policy analysis and design. We began with a focus on the purpose of policy, to design solutions to problems with the aid of comprehensive analysis and reason. It requires policy learning, in which actors use new information to update their knowledge and skills and apply them to policy design. For example, it is common to hope for *evidence-based policymaking*, in which learning from research and experts is at the heart of analysis, or for *co-produced policymaking* based on routine collaboration and knowledge exchange among many actors. However, policy learning is a political exercise in which actors contest the evidence and learn how to win disputes with their competitors. It takes place within a complex system in which there is no single hub for learning and no straightforward way to respond.

Chapter 15 relates learning to policy transfer, which describes the extent to which governments import policy ideas, instruments, or programmes from other governments. This process could involve learning from successful experiences elsewhere, provided that both governments understand the problem in the same way and could adapt lessons to different political systems. Alternatively, transfer could be a less 'rational' process in which policymakers import solutions without understanding them, or a less voluntary process in which governments feel obliged to follow the lead of others.

Chapter 16 Conclusion

Chapter 16 relates these conceptual insights to two main concerns. First, do policy theories help us to understand and address major policy problems in society? It is clear from chapters 1-9 that social and political inequalities are pervasive, to produce policymaking systems that are not conducive to solving such problems. If so, can we combine insights from critical policy analysis and policy theories to envisage a fairer way to recognise policy-relevant knowledge,

include people in policymaking, and produce outcomes? Second, do these theories travel well, and contribute the same insights to many different political systems? Most of the concepts and theories in this book originated in the US or Western Europe. There is scope for them to 'travel' more widely, but with the potential to exacerbate the knowledge-based inequalities described in this book. In that context, each chapter explores key examples of conceptual applications across the globe, and the conclusion reflects on the results.

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