STV4428B – Theories of public policy and the policy process

Course content
Public policies are influenced by various aspects such as party politics, institutional factors, or lobbyism by non-state actors. In this course, students are introduced to a wide range of political science theories that are relevant for understanding the process of policymaking. While some of these approaches reveal how individuals or organizations can achieve surprising things, others point to more systemic factors. In the discussions and the term paper, participants will be challenged to take a stand on the advantages and disadvantages of different theories when explaining specific aspects of policymaking. All the steps in the political decision-making process will be analyzed, ranging from an issue being put on the political agenda until political decisions are made and finally implemented and enforced. The course introduces public policy at both the national and international levels, and students are trained to understand how these different political levels influence and interact with each other.

Learning outcomes
Knowledge

- Have a good understanding of what important political science theories say about who and what influences public policy choices and design
- Understand how different political science theories can be used to understand the various steps in the decision-making process, from agenda setting to political decisions, and implementation.
- Have insights into the complex interaction between national and international dynamics shaping policy-making and -implementation
- Be aware of the different challenges linked to the implementation of political decisions.

Skills

- Be able to analyze which factors explain policy change and decisions.
- Be able to form a well-founded opinion about the strengths and weaknesses of the most central explanatory approaches in the study of public policy.
- Be able to carry out independent, nuanced, and clear written analyses of the causes and consequences of specific political outputs/outcomes.

Competence

- Be able to assess what is politically possible/feasible to get adopted and implemented in specific cases, and be aware that the scope of political opportunities varies between policy fields, geographical areas, and over time.
- Be able to design concrete strategies for political influence, management, and implementation.

Admission

- Students who are admitted to study programs at UiO must register each semester for the courses and exams they wish to sign up for in the Studentweb
- Students enrolled in other Master's Degree Programmes can, on application, be admitted to the course if their study programme allows this.

- If you still need to enroll as a student at UiO, please see the further information on admission requirements and procedures.
- Apply for guest student status if you are admitted to another Master's programme (deadline 1 August / 5 January).

Prerequisites

A previous Bachelor (BA) in Political Science or a similar degree program is recommended.

Teaching

Nine lectures and one seminar.

In the seminar, students will:

- Present an outline of their term paper and comment on the other students' outlines.

Obligatory activity

- Submission of the outline of the term paper
- Participation in the seminar, thorough reading and discussion of the other students' outlines

Examination

- The central examination will be a term paper
- The term paper must be between 3500 to 5000 words
- It must have a topic reflecting the course readings and curriculum, but the student chooses the final topic.
- The final topic must be discussed with and approved by the course's lecturers.
- The term paper is prepared by the submission of the outline of the paper before the seminar session. This outline consists of 1000 to 1500 words and is presented in the seminar.
- The term paper must meet the formal requirements for the submission of written assignments

Examination language

The term paper has to be written in English.

Submit assignments in Inspera

You submit your assignment in the digital examination system Inspera. Read about how to submit your assignment.

Use of sources and citation

It would be best if you familiarized yourself with the rules for using sources and citations. If you violate these rules, you may be suspected of cheating/attempted cheating.

Grading scale

Grades are awarded on a scale from A to F, where A is the best grade and F is a fail. Read more about the grading system.

Explanations and appeals
All grades are communicated and explained to the students to foster future improvements.

Resit an examination
If you are sick or have another valid reason for not attending the regular exam, we offer a postponed exam later in the same semester. See also information about resitting an exam.

Withdrawal from an examination
It is possible to take the exam up to 3 times. If you withdraw from the exam after the deadline or during the exam, this will be counted as an examination attempt.

Special examination arrangements
Application form, deadline, and requirements for special examination arrangements.

Evaluation
The course is subject to continuous evaluation. We also ask students for constant feedback and take part in comprehensive evaluations throughout the course.

Course plan and structure:

1. Introduction

Guiding question: *Who are your lecturers? Who are you? What are public policies? What is the policy process?*

Hassel, A. & Wegrich, K. (2022). *How to do public policy.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, Ch. 1-2, pp. 5-62.

Vedung, E. (2010). "Policy Instruments: Typologies and Theories." In: Bemelmans-Videc, M.-L., Rist, R. C. & Vedung, E. (Eds.). *Carrots, Sticks & Sermons: Policy Instruments & Their Evaluation.* London: Routledge, pp. 21-58.

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2. Policy Entrepreneurship

Guiding question: *Who are policy entrepreneurship? What makes them successful?*

Theory/Overview:

Greer, S. (2015). "John W. Kingdon, Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies". In: Lodge, M., Page, E. C. & Balla, S. J. (eds). *The Oxford Handbook of Classics in Public Policy and Administration.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, Chapter 29.

Mintrom, M., & Norman, P. (2009). "Policy entrepreneurship and policy change". *Policy Studies Journal* 37(4): 649-667.

Application:

Bakir, C. (2009). "Policy entrepreneurship and institutional change: Multilevel governance of central banking reform." Governance 22(4): 571-598.

Batory, A. & Lindstrom, N. (2011). "The Power of the Purse: Supranational Entrepreneurship, Financial Incentives, and European Higher Education Policy". *Governance*, 24: 311-329.

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3. Path Dependence & Historical Institutionalism

Guiding question: *How does the 'past' influence current policy-making? How can we use the insights gained by policy feedback and path dependence literature to overcome political stalemate?*

Theory/Overview:
Thelen, K. (1999). "Historical Institutionalism In Comparative Politics". *Annual Review of Political Science,* 2(1): 369-404.

Pierson, P. (2000). "Increasing Returns, Path Dependence, and the Study of Politics". *The American Political Science Review,* 94(2): 251-267.

Béland, D., Campbell, A., & Weaver, R. (2022). *Policy Feedback: How Policies Shape Politics.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, Chapters 2 and 4 (pp. 2-30).

Application:
Pahle, M., Burtraw, D., Flachsland, C. et al. (2018). "Sequencing to ratchet up climate policy stringency". *Nature Climate Change* 8: 861–867.

Hanger-Kopp, S., Thaler, T., Seebauer, S., Schinko, T. & Clar, C. (2022). "Defining and operationalizing path dependency for the development and monitoring of adaptation pathways". *Global Environmental Change,* 72: 1-11.

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4. Veto players & Rational Choice Institutionalism

Guiding question: *How does the institutional setup influence the processes and outcomes of policy-making?*

Theory/Overview:
Tsebelis, G. (2002). *Veto Players: How Political Institutions Work.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, pp. 17-66.

Moe, T.M. (2015). "Vested Interests and Political Institutions". *Political Science Quarterly*, 130: 277-318.

Application:
Madden, N. J. (2014). "Green means stop: veto players and their impact on climate-change policy outputs". *Environmental Politics*, 23(4): 570-589.

Angelova, M., Bäck, H., Müller, W. C., & Strobl, D. (2018). "Veto player theory and reform making in Western Europe". *European Journal of Political Research*, 57(2): 282-307.

Hix, S. (2007). "Euroscepticism as Anti-Centralization". *European Union Politics* 8(1): 131-150 .

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5. Hypocrisy & Sociological Institutionalism

Guiding question: *What is organizational 'hypocrisy'? How does it help political institutions to deal with diverging demands by their 'environment'?*

DiMaggio, P. J., & Powell, W. P. (1983). "The Iron Cage Revisited: Institutional Isomorphism and Collective Rationality in Organizational Fields". *American Sociological Review* 48(2): 147–160.
Brunsson, N. (2007). *The Consequences of Decision-Making*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Ch. 7., pp. 111-131

Application:
Lavenex, S. (2018). "'Failing Forward' Towards Which Europe? Organized Hypocrisy in the Common European Asylum System". *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, 56: 1195– 1212
Knill, C., Steinebach, Y., & Fernández-i-Marín, X. (2020). "Hypocrisy as a crisis response? Assessing changes in talk, decisions, and actions of the European Commission in EU environmental policy". *Public Administration* 98: 363–377.

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6. Policies & Framing

Guiding question*: What is policy framing? How can framing help to gain an advantage in the policy process?*

Theory/Overview:
Oxley, Z. (2022). "Framing and Political Decision Making: An Overview." *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics,* pp. 1-18.
https://oxfordre.com/politics/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.001.0001/acrefore-9780190228637-e-1250

Application:
Walgrave, S., Sevenans, J., Van Camp, K. et al. (2018). "What Draws Politicians' Attention? An Experimental Study of Issue Framing and its Effect on Individual Political Elites." *Political Behavior* 40: 547–569.

Klüver, H., Mahoney, C. & Opper, M. (2015). "Framing in context: how interest groups employ framing to lobby the European Commission". *Journal of European Public Policy*, 22(4):481-498.

Euchner, E., Heichel, S., Nebel, K. & Raschzok, A. (2013). "From 'morality' policy to 'normal' policy: framing of drug consumption and gambling in Germany and the Netherlands and their regulatory consequences". *Journal of European Public Policy*, 20(3): 372-389.

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7. Information Processing & Patterns of Policy Change

Guiding question: *What are the main patterns of policy change? Is policy change 'linear' or 'disruptive'? Why can we expect 'punctuated' patterns of policy change?*

Theory/Overview:

Jones, B D., & Baumgartner, F. R. (2012). "From there to here: Punctuated equilibrium to the general punctuation thesis to a theory of government information processing." *Policy Studies Journal* 40(1): 1-20.

Kaplaner, C., & Steinebach, Y. (2022). "Why we should use the Gini coefficient to assess punctuated equilibrium theory". *Political Analysis* 30(3): 450-455.

Application:

Jones, B. D., Baumgartner, F. R., Breunig, C., Wlezien, C., Soroka, S., Foucault, M., François, A., Green-Pedersen, C., Koski, C., John, P., Mortensen, P.B., Varone, F. & Walgrave, S. (2009). "A General Empirical Law of Public Budgets: A Comparative Analysis". *American Journal of Political Science*, 53: 855-873.

Fernández-i-Marín, X., Hurka, S., Knill, C., & Steinebach, Y. (2022). „Systemic dynamics of policy change: Overcoming some blind spots of punctuated equilibrium theory". *Policy Studies Journal*, 50(3): 527-552.

John, P., & Jennings, W. (2010). "Punctuations and Turning Points in British Politics: The Policy Agenda of the Queen's Speech, 1940–2005". *British Journal of Political Science*, 40(3): 561-586.

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8. Seminar

Presenting and discussing term paper drafts.

9. Policy Accumulation & Bureaucratic Overload

Guiding question: *What is policy accumulation? Why do governments tend to produce more policies than they abolish? What are the (potential) consequences of policy accumulation?*

Theory/Overview:

Adam, C., Hurka, S., Knill, C. & Steinebach, Y. (2019). *Policy Accumulation and the Democratic Responsiveness Trap*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, Ch 1-3, 5. pp. 1-49;

Adams, G. S., Converse, B. A., Hales, A. H. et al. (2021). "People systematically overlook subtractive changes." *Nature* 592: 258–261.

Application

Limberg, J., Steinebach, Y., Bayerlein, L. and Knill, C. (2021). "The More The Better? Rule Growth And Policy Impact From A Macro Perspective". *European Journal Of Political Research*, 60: 438-454.

10. What is policy implementation?

Guiding question: *Which analytical perspectives on policy implementation do exist? To what extent do the analytical perspectives lead to different assessment criteria for successful policy implementation?*

Theory/Overview:

Wegrich, K. (2015) "Jeffrey L. Pressman and Aaron B. Wildavsky, Implementation." In: Lodge, M., Page, E. C. & Balla, S. J. (eds). *The Oxford Handbook of Classics in Public Policy and Administration*, Oxford: Oxford Handbooks, pp. 342-358.

Gilson, L. L., (2015). "Michael Lipsky, Street-Level Bureaucracy: Dilemmas of the Individual in Public Service." In: Lodge, M., Page, E. C. & Balla, S. J. (eds). *The Oxford Handbook of Classics in Public Policy and Administration*, Oxford: Oxford Handbooks, pp. 384-404.

Application

Lavee, E. & Cohen, N. (2019). "How street-level bureaucrats become policy entrepreneurs: The case of urban renewal". *Governance* 32: 475– 492.

Thomann, E., Hupe, P., & Sager, F. (2018). „Serving many masters: Public accountability in private policy implementation". *Governance*. 31: 299– 319.