POL22: POLITICS AND PUBLIC POLICY

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Outline
This paper introduces the politics of democratic policymaking, with the aim of laying the foundations for empirically substantiated and critical evaluation of the actions of governments. It is structured in two parts. Part one, in Michaelmas term, introduces conceptual and theoretical tools that can help us make sense of how governments in different countries respond to social and economic pressures. We will explore, in turn, the interests, ideas, and institutions that shape the behaviour of key actors in public policymaking. Part two, in Lent term, is an opportunity to delve deeper into some specific policy issues. We will analyse policy challenges that are of pressing importance in the 21st century, in a series of guest lectures and seminars delivered by experts from the Bennett Institute for Public Policy. There will be two revision sessions in Easter Term.

Lectures, readings, seminars and supervisions will be finalised shortly before the beginning of each term and announced on Moodle.
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Room</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Lecturer</th>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Wednesday 11th October</td>
<td>12pm-1pm</td>
<td>S1</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>Dr Margarita Gelepithis</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Wednesday 19th October</td>
<td>12pm-1pm</td>
<td>S1</td>
<td>Interests and public policy (I) Democratic responsiveness</td>
<td>Dr Margarita Gelepithis</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Wednesday 25th October</td>
<td>12pm-1pm</td>
<td>S1</td>
<td>Interests and public policy (II) Business and organized interests</td>
<td>Dr Margarita Gelepithis</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Wednesday 1st November</td>
<td>12pm-1pm</td>
<td>S1</td>
<td>Ideas and public policy (I) Complexity and understanding</td>
<td>Dr Margarita Gelepithis</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Wednesday 8th November</td>
<td>12pm-1pm</td>
<td>S1</td>
<td>Ideas and public policy (II) Norms and values</td>
<td>Dr Margarita Gelepithis</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Wednesday 15th November</td>
<td>12pm-1pm</td>
<td>S1</td>
<td>Institutions and public policy (I) Political systems</td>
<td>Dr Margarita Gelepithis</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Wednesday 22nd November</td>
<td>12pm-1pm</td>
<td>S1</td>
<td>Institutions and public policy (II) History and path dependence</td>
<td>Dr Margarita Gelepithis</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Wednesday 29th November</td>
<td>12pm-1pm</td>
<td>S1</td>
<td>Taking stock</td>
<td>Dr Margarita Gelepithis</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Room</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Lecturer</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Tuesday 23rd January</td>
<td>9am-10am</td>
<td>SG1</td>
<td>Wicked Problems in Public Policy</td>
<td>Professor Dennis Grube</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Tuesday 30th January</td>
<td>9am-10am</td>
<td>SG1</td>
<td>Wicked Problems in Public Policy</td>
<td>Professor Dennis Grube</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Tuesday 6th February</td>
<td>9am-10am</td>
<td>SG1</td>
<td>Environmental Policy</td>
<td>Dr Matthew Agarwala</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Tuesday 13th February</td>
<td>9am-10am</td>
<td>SG1</td>
<td>Environmental Policy</td>
<td>Dr Matthew Agarwala</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Tuesday 20th February</td>
<td>9am-10am</td>
<td>SG1</td>
<td>Inequality and Regional Policy</td>
<td>Professor Mike Kenny</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Tuesday 27th February</td>
<td>9am-10am</td>
<td>SG1</td>
<td>Inequality and Regional Policy</td>
<td>Professor Mike Kenny</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Tuesday 5th March</td>
<td>9am-10am</td>
<td>SG1</td>
<td>Technology Policy</td>
<td>Professor Dame Diane Coyle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Tuesday 12th March</td>
<td>9am-10am</td>
<td>SG1</td>
<td>Technology Policy</td>
<td>Professor Dame Diane Coyle</td>
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Lent Term
*Please note: the order of the guest cases in Lent term will be confirmed nearer the time.*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Room</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Lecturer</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Revision lecture and seminar</td>
<td>Dr Margarita Gelepithis</td>
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</tbody>
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SUPERVISIONS

There are three supervisions in Michaelmas term, three in Lent term, and one in Easter term.

Michaelmas term supervision questions correspond to particular Michaelmas term lectures and their associated readings.

Lent term supervision questions DO NOT correspond to particular lectures. You are encouraged to draw on theoretical content from Michaelmas term freely, and to substantiate your answers with policy examples from the guest lectures in Lent term as you see fit.

Supervision questions are intended to help you prepare for the exam. There have been six ‘Michaelmas-style’ questions and two ‘Lent-style’ questions in both the sample exam and the 2022-23 paper.

Please prepare a 1500 word essay in response to the following questions:

**Michaelmas Term**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wk</th>
<th>Option 1</th>
<th>Option 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>To whose interests is public policy responsive?</td>
<td>Does interest group influence make public policy less democratic?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Public policy is at least as much about ‘puzzling’ as it is about ‘powering.’ Discuss.</td>
<td>What are normative ideas, and how do they influence public policymaking?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Are majoritarian political institutions responsible for producing weak welfare states?</td>
<td>How are policy preferences shaped by the existing policy context?</td>
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</table>

**Lent Term**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wk</th>
<th>Option 1</th>
<th>Option 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Why does public policy sometimes fail to address important societal challenges?</td>
<td>Why are policy problems sometimes ignored for centuries before they are addressed by policymakers?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Political leaders flatter themselves if they think they have the power to change the world. Discuss</td>
<td>Does the logic of collective action make some policy problems intractable?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Why do different governments respond differently to similar policy challenges?</td>
<td>In what sense is public policy politically contested?</td>
</tr>
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SEMINARS

There are no seminars in Michaelmas term and four seminars in Lent term. Seminars are structured around the following discussion questions.

Lent Term
*Please note: the order of the guest cases in Lent term will be confirmed nearer the time.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Discussion question</th>
<th>Seminar leader</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Week 2</td>
<td>tbc</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tuesday 30\textsuperscript{th} January</td>
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<td></td>
<td>12pm-1pm, SG1</td>
<td>Dennis Grube</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Week 4</td>
<td>tbc</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tuesday 13\textsuperscript{th} February</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12pm-1pm, SG1</td>
<td>Matthew Agarwala</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Week 6</td>
<td>tbc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tuesday 27\textsuperscript{th} February</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12pm-1pm, SG1</td>
<td>Mike Kenny</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Week 8</td>
<td>tbc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tuesday 12\textsuperscript{th} March</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12pm-1pm, SG1</td>
<td>Diane Coyle</td>
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ASSESSMENT

You will be assessed through a five-hour written examination in the Easter Term.

POL22 SAMPLE EXAM

Answer any three of the following questions. Your answers should refer to at least one specific area of policy.

1. Does public policy today primarily reflect the interests of the middle classes?
2. Are interest groups detrimental to public policymaking?
3. How influential are experts in public policy?
4. How do ideas about justice and fairness shape public policy?
5. Does consensus democracy produce kinder, gentler public policies?
6. What is path dependence, and how does it shape public policy?
7. Would citizens be less politically disaffected if they understood the constraints that policymakers face?
8. Why are long periods of policy stability occasionally punctuated by change?

POL22 PAST EXAM (2022-23)

Candidates should answer three questions. Your answers should refer to at least one specific area of policy.

You have a five-hour window in which to start and finish this exam, and you can choose when you take the exam within the time limits of the five-hour window (unless you have specific access arrangements).

Word limit – 4,500 words in total.

1. Does it make a difference what party is in power, as to whose preferences are represented in policymaking?
2. Does public policy disproportionately reflect business interests?
3. “[The ideas of economists and political philosophers, both when they are right and when they are wrong, are more powerful than is commonly understood. Indeed the world is ruled by little else. Practical men, who believe themselves to be quite exempt from any intellectual influences, are usually the slaves of some defunct economist.]” Does this statement by John Maynard Keynes overstate the importance of ideas in public policy?
4. How can the construction of normative arguments change the path of policy?
5. Would electoral reform improve public policymaking in majoritarian political systems?
6. To what extent are policy makers constrained by previous policy choices?
7. Is public policy inherently political?
8. Why are some policy problems intractable?
MICHAELMAS TERM READING LIST

Week 1.
Introduction

What is public policy? Why study politics and public policy? In this introductory lecture, we set out the aims and structure of POL22: Politics and Public Policy. The paper aims to give you the tools to evaluate the actions of government critically but without cynicism. We will explore the interests, ideas, and institutions that shape public policymaking, using these concepts to explain damaging policy choices, and to inform discussion of some big 21st century policy challenges.

Essential reading

None this week.

Further reading


Week 2.
Interests and Public Policy (I) Democratic responsiveness

Understanding public policy involves understanding its distributional consequences. This week we ask, in whose interests is public policy made? Are policymakers responsive to interests of the middle classes? Of the rich? Of specific pivotal or swing voters? Does it make a difference what party is in power as to whose interests are represented in policymaking?

Essential reading

- Iversen, T. and Soskice, D. (2019) *Democracy and Prosperity*. OUP. (Sections 1.3.5 and 1.8. of the Introduction. These sections set out the core of Iversen and Soskice’s argument about public policy responsiveness to middle class interests).

Further reading


**Week 3.
Interests and Public Policy (II) Business and organized interests**

This week we deepen our discussion of public policy responsiveness. We consider whether public policy disproportionately reflects business interests, and how collective action problems may systematically disadvantage the interests of some social groups.

**Essential reading**

• Lohmann, S. (2003). Representative Government and Special Interest Politics (We Have Met the Enemy and He Is Us). *Journal of Theoretical Politics* 15, 299-319.

**Further reading**


**Week 4.
Ideas and Public Policy (I) Complexity and understanding**

Public policy is often complex, and its effects are difficult to evaluate let alone predict. In this week’s session we explore how policymaking is shaped by ideas about how the world is and about what the effects of public policy choices will be. We consider how ideas about public policy are contested and how they change over time, paying particular attention to the role of experts, politicians, and the media.

**Essential reading**


**Further reading**

• Barnes, L. (2022) Taxing the rich: public preferences and public understanding, *Journal of European Public Policy*, 29:5, 787-804

**Week 5.**

**Ideas and Public Policy (II) Norms and values**

*Normative ideas are central to public policymaking. This week we explore the role that ideas of fairness and justice play in public policymaking. We consider how normative ideas are linked with descriptive and causal beliefs, how they are constructed and mobilised, and how they contribute to transformative public policy change.*

**Essential reading**


**Further reading**


**Week 6.**
Institutions and Public Policy (I) Political systems

In the first of two weeks on institutions, we explore how political institutions shape public policy. We consider whether different political systems lead policymakers to act in different ways, resulting in systematic differences in public policy.

Essential reading


Further reading


Week 7.
Institutions and Public Policy (II) History and path dependence

Past policy choices are an important part of the institutional context in which policy is made. To what extent are policymakers constrained by previous policy choices? What does it mean for policy to be path dependent?

Essential reading


Further reading

Week 8.
Taking stock

This week we take stock of what we have learnt, in preparation for the case studies in Lent term.

There is no new reading this week.
LENT TERM READING LIST

This term we will analyse four policy challenges that are of pressing importance in the 21st century, in a series of guest lectures and seminars delivered by experts from the Bennett Institute for Public Policy.

Please note: the order of the guest cases is subject to change and will be confirmed nearer the time.

CASE ONE. WICKED PROBLEMS IN PUBLIC POLICY

Professor Dennis Grube

Week 1.
Wicked problems (I)

Public policy problems come in all shapes and sizes. Some seem relatively straightforward, allowing for clear goals and workable solutions. But some problems are inherently so complex, that even understanding the issue is difficult, let alone arriving at solutions that can garner public support. Problems like crime or poverty, for instance, are so embedded and interlinked with other issues that they seem to defy every effort to solve them. Labelled ‘wicked problems’, this week’s lecture looks at how we can define and understand these complicated issues better.

Essential Reading

- B.W. Head (2022) Wicked Problems in Public Policy: Understanding and Responding to Complex Challenges, (Open Access, Palgrave Macmillan). Ch. 2

Further Reading


Week 2.
Wicked problems (II)

This week’s lecture extends the discussion from defining and understanding wicked problems, to asking how we might try and actually solve them. The literature offers a wide range of potential approaches, but are any of them capable of dissolving the complexity that seems to prevent policy success on these issues?

Essential Reading


Further Reading


• B.W. Head (2022) *Wicked Problems in Public Policy: Understanding and Responding to Complex Challenges*, (Open Access, Palgrave Macmillan). Ch. 3-4


CASE TWO. POLITICS AND ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY
Dr Matthew Agarwala

TBC

Week 1.

Week 2.

CASE THREE. INEQUALITY AND REGIONAL POLICY
Professor Michael Kenny

Week 5
The history of (mostly failed) regional policy-making in the UK, and the importance of cities in the UK's growth strategy.

Week 6
Policy tools and dilemmas: how should 'levelling up' work?

• HMG, *Levelling up the United Kingdom*, February 2022; available at [Levelling Up the United Kingdom White Paper](https://publishing.service.gov.uk), pp1-51, 105-156

• Henry Overman, 'People, places and politics; the challenge of levelling up in the UK', Centrepiece, Spring 2020; available at: [https://cep.lse.ac.uk/pubs/download/cp570.pdf](https://cep.lse.ac.uk/pubs/download/cp570.pdf)

• Ron Martin et al., *Levelling up Left-Behind Places*

• Paul Collier, *The Future of Capitalism*

• Martin Sandbu, *The Economics of Belonging*

• Philip McCann, *The UK Regional-National Economic Problem*

• Tom Kelsey and Michael Kenny, *Townscapes: the value of social infrastructure*; available at: [https://www.bennettinstitute.cam.ac.uk/publications/social-infrastructure/](https://www.bennettinstitute.cam.ac.uk/publications/social-infrastructure/)
CASE FOUR. TECHNOLOGY POLICY
Professor Dame Diane Coyle, DBE

Week 7

Essential reading


Further reading


Week 8

Essential reading


Further reading

Scott, James C (1998) *Seeing Like A State: How certain schemes to improve the human condition have failed.*

Other essays in *Daedalus* Spring 2022 issue on AI & Society. https://direct-mit-edu.ezp.lib.cam.ac.uk/daed/issue/151/2

**EASTER TERM READING LIST**

No new reading.

There will be a revision lecture and seminar, details to follow.