POL22: POLITICS AND PUBLIC POLICY

Organiser
Dr Margarita Gelepithis

Lecturers
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Dr Margarita Gelepithis          mg2000@cam.ac.uk
Professor Dennis Grube           dcg40@cam.ac.uk
Professor Mike Kenny             mhk30@cam.ac.uk
Dr Cristina Peñasco             cp633@cam.ac.uk

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 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. 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.
# LECTURE SCHEDULE

## Michaelmas Term

<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>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Introduction</em></td>
<td>Dr Margarita Gelepithis</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| 2    |      |      |      | *Interests and public policy (I)*  
Democratic responsiveness | Dr Margarita Gelepithis          |
| 3    |      |      |      | *Interests and public policy (II)*  
Business and organized interests | Dr Margarita Gelepithis          |
| 4    |      |      |      | *Ideas and public policy (I)*  
Complexity and understanding | Dr Margarita Gelepithis          |
| 5    |      |      |      | *Ideas and public policy (II)*  
Norms and values | Dr Margarita Gelepithis          |
| 6    |      |      |      | *Institutions and public policy (I)*  
Political systems | Dr Margarita Gelepithis          |
| 7    |      |      |      | *Institutions and public policy (II)*  
History and path dependence | Dr Margarita Gelepithis          |
| 8    |      |      |      | *Taking stock*              | Dr Margarita Gelepithis          |

## 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>
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<td><em>Wicked Problems in Public Policy</em></td>
<td>Professor Dennis Grube</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Wicked Problems in Public Policy</em></td>
<td>Professor Dennis Grube</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<td><em>Environmental Policy</em></td>
<td>Dr Cristina Peñasco</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<td><em>Environmental Policy</em></td>
<td>Dr Cristina Peñasco</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>Inequality and Regional Policy</em></td>
<td>Professor Mike Kenny</td>
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<td>Professor Mike Kenny</td>
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<td></td>
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<td><em>Digital Policy</em></td>
<td>Professor Diane Coyle</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>Digital Policy</em></td>
<td>Professor Diane Coyle</td>
</tr>
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<td>2</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Revision lecture</td>
<td>Dr Margarita Gelepitisis</td>
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SUPERVISIONS

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

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>What are normative ideas, and how do they influence public policymaking?</td>
<td>Public policy is at least as much about ‘puzzling’ as it is about ‘powering.’ Discuss.</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>
</tr>
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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>
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### SEMINARS

There are three seminars in Michaelmas term and four seminars in Lent term. Seminars are structured around the following discussion questions.

#### Michaelmas Term

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Discussion question</th>
<th>Seminar leader</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Week 3</td>
<td>Does public policy disproportionately reflect business interests?</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Week 5</td>
<td>What is the role of ideas in transformative policy change?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Week 7</td>
<td>How are policymakers constrained by institutional context?</td>
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</table>

#### 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>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Week 2</td>
<td>What’s the difference between a difficult problem and a ‘wicked’ one – and should it make any difference to how governments approach them?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Week 4</td>
<td>UNFCCC was adopted to stabilize GHG concentrations in the atmosphere at the level that would prevent dangerous effects on the climate system. After almost 30 years of failure, we should abandon the UNFCCC. Discuss.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Week 6</td>
<td>Was “levelling up” the right policy approach to adopt to deal with the UK’s deepening regional inequalities?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 4    | Week 8                               | Tbc                                                      | Diane Coyle }
ASSESSMENT

Students will be assessed through a three-hour written examination in the Easter Term. Students must answer three questions.

Since this is the first year this paper is running, there are no past exam papers. But please rest assured that the exam will closely follow the following sample:

POL22 SAMPLE EXAM

Duration: Three hours.

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?
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


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


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


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

- and the discovery of innocence. Cambridge University Press.

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 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
• F. Angeli, S. Camporesi and G. Dal Fabbro (2021) ‘The COVID-19 wicked problem in public health ethics: conflicting evidence or incommensurable values?’ Humanities and Social Sciences Communications 8: 161.

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 Cristina Peñasco

Comparative environmental decision making in developed vs. developing countries.

**Week 1.**

The Policy Challenge

Essential reading


Further reading


**Week 2.**
Policy Solutions

Essential reading


Further reading


Seminar

UNFCCC was adopted to stabilize GHG concentrations in the atmosphere at the level that would prevent dangerous effects on the climate system. After almost 30 years of failure, we should abandon the UNFCCC. Discuss.


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 (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*

CASE FOUR. DIGITAL POLICY
Professor Diane Coyle, CBE
**Week 7**
Reading list to follow.

**Week 8**
Reading list to follow.
EASTER TERM READING LIST

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