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Policy and Policymaking in the UK

Chapter 1

Introduction: how is policy made in the UK?

It is tempting to think that the policy process in the UK is chaotic and in continuous **crisis**. In fact, we have many crises from which to choose, including: *economic*, in which governments face recession, banking collapses, huge debts and 'tough choices' about cuts to public

> **Crisis**: A period of instability or major difficulty; a turning point requiring an important decision.

services; *security*, in which governments respond to terrorist threats in their own countries and consider going to war with others; *energy*, when there are high prices and shortages of supply; *public service*, whenever a health, social care, police or education service is found to be underfunded or underperforming; *representative*, when elected politicians become embroiled in scandals about their expenses and conduct; and, *constitutional*, when governments consider making major changes to the United Kingdom and European Union.

These issues are important, but this impression of chaos is also self-fulfilling; we collectively generate a sense of crisis by paying so much attention to so few aspects of government. The consequence is that most other government activity is performed with almost no media or

> **Actor**: a participant. An actor can be an individual or an organisation with the ability to deliberate and make decisions.

public attention. So, the policy process is an odd collection of issues which generate high levels of attention, involving many **actors**, and issues that are processed almost completely out of the public spotlight, involving very few. Or, some issues receive disproportionate attention at one stage of development, only to be ignored at another – despite being just as important as they were in the past (Hogwood, 1987).

How do we make sense of such a policymaking system? Let's begin by considering how policy *appears* to be made in the UK. This is not an easy task for two main reasons. First, there may be important differences between the design of political systems and their operation in practice. This is a key point to remember when we compare the UK with other political systems – a key tenet of policy studies is that systems may have been designed in rather different ways, only to operate similarly because policymakers face very similar pressures and problems. Second, political systems are complex; we need to simplify them to describe and understand them. Any simple description of the policy process will be partial, describing only a small number of features and ignoring others. This outcome is inevitable but also frustrating; we are left with the idea that something is missing and that we do not see the big picture. So, it is useful to generate several accounts and to compare them, to give ourselves a range of expectations and explanations of policymaking on which to draw.

A simple, optimistic, account relates policymaking to the wishes of the public: political parties engage each other in a battle of ideas, to attract the attention and support of the voting

Manifesto: a public statement of policy aims.

Civil Servants: bureaucrats in central government departments or agencies.

public; the public votes every 4-5 years; the winner forms a government; the government turns its **manifesto** into policy; and, policy choices are carried out by **civil servants** and other bodies. In other words, there is a clear (albeit infrequent) link between public preferences, the strategies and ideas of parties and the final result.

To this basic description, we can add some ideas associated with the **Westminster model** and the UK's reputation as a 'majoritarian' democracy (Lijphart, 1999). The UK has a plurality ('first past the post') voting system which tends to exaggerate support for, and give a majority in Parliament to, the winning party. It has an adversarial style of politics and a 'winner takes all' mentality which tends to exclude

Westminster model (WM): Westminster is the home of the UK Parliament. The WM may describe: the design of UK political institutions and practices; the design of other political systems in that mould; and, expectations about how UK politics works. It is generally rejected as a description of UK politics but remains a reference point for how it should work.

opposition parties. The executive resides in the legislature and power tends to be concentrated within government (unlike the US system with checks and balances) – in ministers that head government departments and the Prime Minister who heads (and determines the members of) Cabinet. The government is responsible for the vast majority of public policy and it uses its governing majority, combined with a strong party 'whip' (a system used to make sure that most Members of Parliament vote according to the 'party line'), to make sure that its legislation is passed by Parliament.

In other words, this narrative suggests that the UK policy process is centralised and that the arrangement reflects a 'British political tradition': the government is accountable to public, via Parliament, on the assumption that it is powerful and responsible. It takes responsibility for public policy and acts in a 'responsible' way, often making 'strong, decisive, necessary action, even when opposed by a majority of the population' (Blunkett and Richards, 2011).

A simple, pessimistic, account may identify the *lack of* accountability to the public: politics is too far removed from 'the people' because politicians make decisions in relative isolation. Part of this account relates to the UK political system in particular, since it may be associated with a 'top-down' mentality and 'one way traffic from those governing (the Government) to those being governed (society)' (Richards and Smith, 2002: 3). The behaviour of its political class was also highlighted by a major expenses scandal in 2009 (Pattie and Johnston, 2012; Vivyan et al, 2012). Another part highlights a general disenchantment with the politics of representative democracies; policymaking is described as elitist, carried out by a powerful political class that is too far removed from the general public to know how best to govern (Stoker, 2006; Hay, 2007; Flinders, 2012; prompting various ideas for reform, including the greater inclusion of underrepresented groups such as women - Ashe et al, 2010; Krook, 2006). Or, policymaking is a battle for election but not of ideas, since the main political

parties tend to present similar ideas and compete to demonstrate their relative governing competence (Green, 2007).

Perhaps confusingly, we can also identify accounts which make the opposite case: that politicians are too likely to 'pass the buck' to other organisations and that no-one seems to be responsible because no one seems to be in charge. This shift in responsibility can relate to highly visible decisions to transfer powers to the European Union and devolved governments, and give 'independence' to the Bank of England. Or, we can identify a general feeling that more decisions are being made, or carried out, by the 'unelected state' which consists of bodies such as **quangos** and non-governmental bodies (such as the charities delivering social services or the private sector companies that build schools and hospitals).

> **Quangos**: quasi-non-governmental bodies, sponsored by government departments but operating at 'arms length' from ministers.

Box 1.1 What Does Policymaking *in the UK* Mean?

The book focuses primarily on the policymaking and policies of the UK government. Some comparisons are made with the policymaking styles in the devolved territories (Scotlnd, Wales, Northen Ireland), which first held elections in 1999 (and enjoyed some administrative devolution before 1999). Each chapter on specific areas considers if we are talking about policy for the UK as a whole or some combination of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. In some cases, we can discuss UK policy as a whole with minimal discussion of devolved differences (economic, foreign, defence) but, in many (and the devolved areas, such health and education, in particular), their policy differences are too significant to ignore.

What Happens When We Combine These Accounts? We Find 'Complex Government'

If we combine these optimistic and pessimistic accounts we might conclude that politicians promise too much and people expect too much from politicians. This insight has added significance in systems like the UK because the 'Westminster model' suggests that power is concentrated in the centre. So, people expect powerful policymakers to be able to deliver on their promises – and public disenchantment may creep in when ministers don't deliver and/ or don't take the blame for things going wrong. Yet, in the world of 'complex government' (box 1.2), **ministers** have two good reasons not to take the blame.

> **Ministers**: Members of Parliament (MPs) chosen to make policy in government departments (and form the Cabinet, the government's formal decision-making body). A Secretary of State heads each department (the Treasury is headed by the Chancellor of the Exchequer) aided by junior ministers.

First, policy is now made at many levels (and types) of government. For example, 'tobacco policy' is actually a collection of policies made by the European Union, UK, devolved governments and, in some cases, local authorities. Policy is also often carried out by a range of bodies with more or less contact with government

departments. In some cases, it looks like ministers are simply passing the buck to other bodies, to avoid making controversial decisions. In others, there are good reasons to maintain these arrangements. A powerful example is in mental health where arms-length bodies make sure that doctors and social workers act properly when they use the Mental Health Act to 'section' or detain people for treatment against their will. Such bodies have to be given a degree of independence to assure the public that they are not simply there to back up the decisions of other government bodies. The outcome of these multi-level and arms-length arrangements is that ministers cannot simply make policy. Instead, they are increasingly obliged to coordinate policy in negotiation with a wide range of other bodies – or trust that other bodies will implement policy in the way they expect.

Second, ministers cannot pay attention to all of the issues for which they are responsible. In fact, they can only pay attention to a tiny proportion – which makes it plausible for them to look shocked when a decision, made in their name, has gone badly. This is also why regular changes of government do not cause wholesale shifts in policy: most decisions are beyond the reach of ministers. The sheer size of government means that it could easily become unmanageable. So, governments break policy down into more manageable departments, and a large number of divisions within departments, dealing with issues that involve a smaller number of knowledgeable participants. Most policy is made at a level of government not particularly visible to the public or Parliament, and with minimal ministerial or senior civil service involvement. These arrangements exist primarily because it makes sense to devolve decisions and consult with certain groups. Ministers rely on their officials for information and advice. For specialist issues, those officials rely on specialist organisations. Organisations trade that information and advice (and other things, such as the ability to generate agreement among large and influential groups) for access to, and influence within, government.

Ministers are *responsible* for this activity, and they can set the tone of many of the debates, but they cannot pay attention to everything going on. Instead, they promote a few **problems** to the top of their **agenda**, often following a major event or a successful media campaign by certain groups. This might produce major policy change because ministerial attention encourages a wide range of people to get involved to influence policy in a short space of time (or they have already been active, trying to get ministerial attention). However, the logical consequence to their heightened attention to that one issue is that the same thing does not happen in most others. In most cases, it is business as usual, since so much policymaking is devolved to people who operate out of the public and political spotlight. This point extends to the implementation of policy. The Westminster model suggests that ministerial wishes are carried out by a neutral civil service responsible directly to ministers (through a clearly hierarchical departmental structure) or other bodies committed fully to the delivery of government policy. Yet, most policy is implemented by bodies – often with ideas and routines of their own - that receive only fleeting attention by ministers.

> **Problem:** an issue that requires a solution.
>
> **Agenda**: a list of problems to be addressed.

Box 1.2 What is 'Complex Government'?

The phrase 'complex government', used to describe the complicated world of public policy, can relate to many factors, including:

- the huge size and reach of government (most aspects of our lives are regulated by the state)
- the potential for ministerial 'overload' and need to simplify decision-making
- the blurry boundaries between the actors who make policy and those who seek to influence and/ or implement it (public policy results from their relationships and interactions)
- the multi-level nature of policymaking
- the complexity of the statute book and the proliferation of rules and regulations, many of which may undermine each other.

'Complex government' may undermine the ability of people to understand how government works when they seek to engage with it or simply hope to hold it to account. A government's overall aims may be difficult to identify and the final outcomes may be difficult to track, while the link between the two may often seem weak.

Do These Lurches of Attention Cause Major Policy Change?

These insights do not completely undermine the image of policymaking generated by the Westminster model. Political parties still produce manifestos and, although the majority of the public may not believe it, the party of government generally fulfils the majority of its manifesto commitments (Bara, 2005). Instead, policy studies prompt us to think about the bigger picture; to shift our attention somewhat, from the high profile and short term nature of

Whitehall: the home of UK Government departments.

Westminster and **Whitehall** politics, to the long term delivery of policy outcomes beyond the headlines and the public spotlight (Cairney, 2012b). Indeed, a key insight from the policy literature is that we may find more evidence of power in British politics by considering the issues that do *not* receive policymaker attention (box 1.3). In this context, there are four main reasons not to expect major policy change when a new government enters office and prompts bursts of attention to a small number of issues.

First, policymakers do not have the brain power or resources to consider all options and the

Ideal-type: an unrealistic simplification of reality (which *might* be something to aspire to) used to explore what really happens.

Linear – a straight line from start to finish.

consequences of their policies. In fact, this point represents the traditional starting place for policy studies. We begin by considering the **ideal-type** of 'comprehensive rationality' (or 'rational-synoptic' model) 'in which a policymaker has a perfect ability to produce, research and introduce her policy preferences' (Cairney, 2012a: 4). This ability would help policymakers to translate their values (as laid out in their manifestos) into policy in a straightforward way. They would have a clear

and coherent set of priorities and the link between aims and choices would be **linear**: identify your aims, produce a range of options to achieve them, and select the optimal solution. We then identify the concept of 'bounded rationality' (Simon, 1976) in which policymakers have to use "short-cuts rather than comprehensive analysis, and seek satisfactory rather than 'optimal' solutions to policy problems" (Cairney, 2012a: 6). Many rely on trial-and-error policymaking or depart from current policy in a series of steps (Lindblom, 1959; 1979). For policymakers, this has the benefit of reduced controversy: radical policy change always produces winners and losers; a government could try to impose its will, but this can be politically expensive and governments can only spend so much (their attention, energy and popularity are limited resources).

Second, there is no easy **solution** to the problem receiving so much attention. Good, sensible, acceptable solutions take time to develop and it is possible for public and ministerial attention

Solution: the answer to a problem (it may not be the right answer).

to shift to another issue before this problem is solved (to the satisfaction of policymakers and influential groups). An odd feature of policymaking is that it is often not linear; the solution to a problem is often produced *before* there is significant attention to it (Cohen et al, 1972; Kingdon, 1984; 1995).

Third, parties make big promises in opposition but, as soon as they enter government, they inherit policy before they choose (Rose, 1990). Any 'new' policy is likely to be a revision of an old one, perhaps following some degree of failure. Indeed, parties often run election campaigns based on the idea that they will reform failing services. They might want to make serious changes, but they are also constrained by decisions made by governments in the past – that produced organisations, regulations and employees which are difficult to remove (Hogwood and Peters, 1983).

Finally, things don't change overnight because people's beliefs don't change overnight – even when major events prompt huge surges in attention. There may be a dominant understanding of a policy problem, and its solution, that is promoted by a wide range of powerful groups. Events may draw attention to policy problems, and a discussion of new solutions, without necessarily changing that balance of power or the fundamental beliefs of those involved. For example, the recent banking crisis produced some remarkable changes (such as the UK Government buying the Royal Bank of Scotland) but not radical change in the way that governments treat the financial sector (the RBS will be sold; the purchase did not represent a commitment to renationalisation). Similarly, National Health Service (NHS) scandals (such as in Stafford in 2013) may prompt attention to the fate of particular hospitals

Ideology – a broad set of political beliefs/ values held by an individual, party or social group.

without prompting governments to alter, fundamentally, the way that hospitals operate. Of course, there are many instances in which new governments challenge existing beliefs within policy sectors (post-2010 examples include Education Secretary Michal Gove's schools agenda and Work and Pensions Secretary Ian Duncan-Smith's **ideological** and austerity-driven welfare reforms), but such reforms may only come to fruition after several periods of office.

Box 1.3 Policymaking Attention and Power

Power is not simply about visible conflicts in which one group wins and another loses. It is also about the power to determine which issues we pay attention to and, therefore, which conflicts will arise. If the attention of policymakers, the media and the public lurches from one issue to another, and most issues are ignored, some groups may exercise power by making sure that some issues do not receive attention. In this sense, power may relate to the preservation of a status quo which benefits some and hurts others. First, groups may exercise power to reinforce social attitudes. If the weight of public opinion is against government action, governments may not intervene. The classic example is poverty – if most people believe that it is caused by fecklessness, they may question the need for major government intervention. In such cases, power and powerlessness may relate to the (in)ability of groups to persuade the public, media and/ or government that there is a problem to be solved. In other examples, the battle may be about the extent to which issues are private (with no legitimate role for government) or public (open to legitimate government action), including: should governments intervene in disputes between businesses and workers? Should they intervene in 'domestic' disputes between a married couple? Should they try to stop people smoking in places (such as cars and homes) that might be considered private or public? Second, groups may exercise power to keep some issues on the government agenda at the expense of others. Issues on the agenda are often described as 'safe' – more attention to these issues means less attention to the major imbalances of power within society (Abbott, Wallace and Tyler, 2005: 35; Bachrach and Baratz, 1962; 1963; 1970; Crenson, 1971; Schattschneider, 1960).

How Do We Make Sense of UK Policy and the Policy Process?

To make sense of this process, the book contains two main parts. The first part (chapters 2 to 6) provides an analytical framework and set of key questions to structure our study. The second (chapters 7 to 15) provides a series of chapters on policy and policymaking in substantive policy areas: economic, health, justice, welfare, education, foreign, defence, agricultural, environmental, and transport. The questions are as follows:

1. *What is policy?* 'Policy' is a collection of measures often introduced by different policymakers at different times. They may combine to produce a coherent response, or some measures may undermine others. Each chapter identifies a wide range of policy instruments to build up a picture of policy change from the post-war to the present.

> **Majoritarian democracy** – the label is often used to describe countries using the plurality electoral system and concentrating power at the centre of government.

2. *How is policy made?* Each chapter considers the nature of the policy process, from the high profile 'top-down' style associated with **majoritarian democracies** to the more humdrum, day to day, process in which governments consult routinely with groups. Chapters such as health and education examine the extent to which styles differ in the devolved territories.

3. *Multi-level policymaking*.   Each chapter considers who has responsibility for policy and the key decisions they have made. In many areas, policy will be a collection of policies made at multiple levels, and different types, of government.

Pressure participants: Actors attempting to influence public policy. They can be membership groups, businesses, public sector bodies and other types of government (Jordan et al., 2004).

4. *Policy networks*. Each chapter considers the extent to which policy is based on group-government consultation and the balance of power between different **pressure participants** such as interest groups (for example, which groups are the most consulted?).

5. *Power and ideas*. Each chapter considers how problems are 'framed' by policymakers. Framing refers to the way that a policy is understood and, therefore, how – or *if* -policymakers try to solve it. For example, does policy continue unchanged for long periods because the problem has been 'solved', or change quickly to reflect new ways to frame and solve problems? The question allows us to situate a discussion of contemporary policy in the context of policies made in the past, asking where policy ideas came from and exploring the extent to which current policy decisions are made to address problems created by previous governments. Each chapter also considers the extent to which new frames and solutions arise when countries learn from the experiences of others.

Policy conditions – the nature of the policy environment and hence the problems that policymakers face. Relevant contextual factors include a political system's size, demography, economy and public attitudes/

6. *Socioeconomic factors and the role of 'events'.* Each chapter considers the context in which decisions are made, examining the most relevant **policy conditions** and the ways in which the policy environment combine with key events (such as crises) to influence the decisions made by policymakers.

7. *How do these factors combine to explain policy change*?   Points 2-6 help us make analytical distinctions between these factors but, in practice, they combine to provide a more complete explanation. Each factor may influence (and reinforce the importance of) another. The socioeconomic context might change, causing people to frame the problem in different ways and help some groups find more favour within government. The experience of other countries may shape the UK's policy agenda. Particular institutions (such as government departments with particular rules and forms of behaviour) may help shape the ways that socioeconomic conditions are perceived, how much attention is paid to new ideas from other countries and the groups that are relied upon most for information and advice. Each chapter presents a broad narrative on policy and explains change with reference to the interactions between these explanatory factors.

The Structure of the Book: using theory to study and explain practice

Chapter 2 Policymaking in the UK

Chapter 2 expands on the book's two key questions: what is public policy and how is it made in the UK? It identifies the key definitions of 'policy' and 'public policy' used in the literature. To frame a discussion of the literature on policymaking, it examines further the concept of 'comprehensive rationality' to examine the idea of an ordered policymaking system in which fully informed authoritative policymakers are at the heart of the process (in fact, comprehensive rationality is effectively the description of a policymaking system in which one person is in control). It expands on the idea of linear policymaking by outlining the 'policy cycle' which breaks policy down into a series of stages including agenda setting, policy formulation, legitimation, implementation and evaluation. It outlines the various ways

Legitimation – the process of gaining a degree of public approval, directly or through Parliament.

in which such ideal-types are rejected or modified in the literature, but notes that the individual stages are still worthy of study. For example, the analytical distinction between policy formulation and implementation remains important as long as policymakers wonder why their expectations did not translate into outcomes. A discussion of **legitimation** allows us to examine the often-peripheral (but occasionally powerful) role of Parliament, and consider the other ways in which governments seek to legitimise their policies (such as through consultation with the public and interest groups). The role of evaluation is important in its own right because it involves the exercise of power to describe the success or failure of public policies - a factor that may determine the extent to which they are revisited and new policy is made.

This discussion of rationality and central control has a particular relevance to the study of contemporary UK policymaking because the UK system is often portrayed as hierarchical; power is held at the centre and the government makes policy from the top-down and with limited concessions to Parliament or other actors. Further, devolution has produced the

Consensus democracy – the label is often used to describe countries using a proportional electoral system and sharing power between parties.

potential for contrasting forms of government, including the 'power sharing' model in Northern Ireland (with representation in the Assembly and government for parties representing protestant and catholic populations) and the design of **consensus democracy** in Wales and Scotland. Indeed, Flinders (2010: 176) identifies 'bi-constitutionality' following the promotion of consensus democracies within an overall majoritarian system. Scotland in particular is associated with the phrase 'new politics' as a symbol of a shift away from the politics of 'old Wesminster' (Cairney and McGarvey, 2013: 10-13). Yet, the policymaking processes in the UK and devolved governments are not as different as they appear to be, because they are all subject to common policymaking constraints - such as 'bounded rationality', inheritance before choice, and the need to consult widely to secure the necessary knowledge and support for successful policy. The UK's alleged tendency to insulate the policy process from other actors is exaggerated. The chapter introduces a range of policy theories and concepts to challenge these images of control, arguing that UK governments are generally unwilling and/or unable to make policy in this way.

This discussion informs our broad examination of contemporary political crisis in the UK which is based in part on a sense of disillusionment with representative and 'responsible' (or 'government knows best') policymaking removed from parliamentary or popular participation. In fact, the UK is often no different from most policymaking systems – most **representative democracies** do not include high levels of popular participation. They tend to produce policymaking arrangements focused on governments consulting with the most interested, resourced and affected pressure participants.

Representative democracy - 'indirect' democracy; citizens decide who should represent them in an elected chamber rather than participate directly.

Chapter 3 Multilevel and Fragmented Policymaking

Chapter 3 discusses the importance of shifting our attention from a sole focus on UK central government to consider how UK policymaking fits into a wider multi-level picture. The UK government shares power in two main ways:

1. Vertically - upwards to the European Union and other international organisations, and downwards to devolved, regional and local governments.
2. Horizontally - to government agencies and public bodies held responsible for carrying out UK policy. There is also an important role for UK courts, particularly in fields related to the European Convention on Human Rights (and, in some cases, EU matters of trade and competition).

It is also 'fragmented' in the sense that the UK governmental structure is broken down into departments and agencies, and policy issues are managed in different sectors (such as agriculture) and subsectors (such as dairy farming). Departments may also share responsibilities with others, particularly in **cross cutting** issues - such as poverty and social inclusion which may be addressed by departments responsible for employment, social security, taxation, and public services such as health, education and justice. Some issues, such as inequality (in relation to factors such as gender, race, ethnicity and ability) may also defy attempts to introduce cross-departmental coordination. We can identify serial attempts by governments to set up specific units and/ or 'mainstreaming' initiatives (to oblige each department to consider the effect of public policy on particular social groups) to encourage **joined up government**, but often without backing these initiatives with sufficient resources (including political weight and staffing).

Cross cutting – issues which defy simple department boundaries and require coordination across them.

Joined up government – An old buzz-phrase to describe the ability to address policy in a holistic manner (or at least make sure that policy in one department does not undermine policy in another).

This image of fragmentation may be accentuated by multi-level policymaking. For example, alcohol policy may be framed in terms of public health, criminal justice and anti-social behaviour, and the economic benefit of the industry. Further, when the Scottish Parliament

passed legislation to introduce a 'minimum unit price' for alcohol, it was challenged in the Court of Session (Scotland's supreme civil court) and examined by the European Commission (Cairney and McGarvey, 2013: 165-7).

The chapter considers this set up from an 'institutional' perspective. It outlines definitions of 'institutions' which refer to regular patterns of behaviour and the rules or norms that influence such behaviour (Cairney, 2012: 69). An institution is a set of rules associated with organisations or systems. They range from the highly visible and legal rules that people are obliged to follow, to the unspoken and informal expectations that people may have for their own behaviour and the actions of others. For example, a government department operates according to the law (for example, regarding how civil servants act and account for their behaviour) and its own informal procedures (regarding, for example, its means to gather evidence and consult with groups) – and both may influence how it understands and addresses policy problems.

The chapter highlights the need to identify which organisations are most involved in particular policy issues, and the extent to which their responsibilities overlap. It highlights the importance of rules and norms as a way to explain how policy is processed differently by different organisations. For example, mental health policy may be pursued very differently by the Home Office (responsible criminal law and more likely to consult with groups representing police officers) and the Department of Health (responsible for health services and more likely to consult with doctors). Issues may also be treated differently, or given more or less attention, at EU and UK Government levels. Or, the public bodies responsible for policy delivery may have different understandings of the policy problem and attach less importance to the UK Government's solution. Indeed, one classic account suggests that 'street level bureaucrats' establish routines and rules of thumb to satisfy only a limited amount of central government objectives (Lipsky, 1980)

Chapter 4 Policy Networks and Governance

Chapter 4 continues the focus on a diffusion of power from UK central government. It considers the often blurry boundaries between formal holders of policymaking authority (such as ministers and the civil servants acting on their behalf) and those pressure participants

Policy networks: A broad term to describe the often close relationships between policymakers and the nongovernmental organizations that help to formulate and implement policy.

who often possess informal influence. It identifies the importance of **policy networks** – a term which describes the relationships that develop between civil servants held responsible for developing policy and the pressure participants that they rely on for information and advice (see Cairney, 2012a: 179 for related terms, including 'policy community' and 'subsystem').

A discussion of networks informs a broader analysis of **governance** or multilevel governance (MLG) in which we identify a web of relationships between actors with formal and informal sources of power at many levels of government. Combined with chapter 3, it helps us

Governance: a vague term to describe the diffusion of power from the core executive to other organisations.

Core executive – the centre of government, including senior ministers such as the Prime Minister and Chancellor, and the administrative arrangements which support them.

understand the limits to an image of UK policymaking based on the idea of **core executive** control or an exclusive policymaking 'club'. Rather, the UK government often shares power with other bodies when making policy and it relies on other bodies to deliver its policy aims.

Chapter 5 Power and Ideas

Most academic explanations of policymaking are based on a combined understanding of the role of power and ideas. First, we discuss the role of power to influence how much attention policy issues receive (box 1.3) and how problems are framed, or understood and described, before they are solved. Policymakers can only pay attention to a small number of issues for which they are responsible, so they ignore most issues and promote a small number to the top of their agenda. Consequently, routine policymaking or policy delivery often continues for long periods because policy issues receive minimal attention. An understanding of power is important to examine why some issues receive attention (and policy often changes) and others do not, while some solutions are considered and most are ignored. This often involves visible debates and the framing of issues in particular ways, to ensure that policy responsibility can be claimed by one group of actors.

(Her Majesty's) **Treasury**: the government department responsible for government taxation and spending.

For example, the dominant framing of drugs policy may determine if it is addressed primarily by the Department of Health and social and medical groups (as a public health problem), or the Home Office and the police (as a problem of criminality, law and order). Or, for example, government departments may compete with each other for resources distributed by the **Treasury**.

Second, we discuss the role of ideas as represented by **paradigms**, ideologies, or **norms** that

Paradigms - ways of thinking that are so ingrained in the psyche that they are often taken for granted

Norm – a rule or standard of behaviour considered to be normal and therefore acceptable.

influence the beliefs of policymakers and, therefore, their attitudes towards policy problems. In such cases, power is more difficult to observe because it relates to the ability to influence how people think and what they believe (either intentionally, as a form of manipulation, or unintentionally, when they reinforce widespread beliefs by taking them for granted and acting accordingly). We may identify policy paradigms in which the nature of problems, and their solutions, are taken for granted and receive minimal attention – perhaps until they are challenged gradually, by actors who question dominant beliefs, or radically, by shocking events that cause policymakers to rethink their beliefs in light of new evidence or the appearance of policy failure. For example, Hall (1993) describes major change in UK economic policy in the 1970s when one paradigm was replaced by another following a period of severe economic and political crisis, while Rogers and Pilgrim (2001) and Cairney et al (2012) describe more gradual (over many decades) but profound shifts in the way that governments understood issues such as mental health and smoking policies.

Our discussion of paradigms allows us to consider the importance of policy legacies and the extent to which current policy decisions are made routinely to reflect decisions made in the past (or to address problems created in the past - Wildavsky, 1980: 62; Hogwood and Gunn, 1984: 245). We can compare the role of inheritance to the process of policy learning, in which policymakers use new information to guide their decisions. This may involve learning from the past or from the experience of others. Terms such as 'lesson-drawing' and **policy transfer** describe this potential to import ideas and policies from other political systems, while terms such as 'Europeanisation' and 'globalisation' may be used to suggest that the process in the UK is not always driven primarily by the UK Government (Rose, 1993; Dolowitz and Marsh, 1996; 2000; Cairney, 2012a: 244-5).

Policy transfer - a vague term to describe the import/ export of knowledge, solutions or government programmes from one system to another.

Chapter 6 Socioeconomic Factors and the Role of 'Events'

The chapter considers the importance of the policy environment, or the policy conditions that influence how policymakers think about and solve problems. The policy environment may represent what policymakers take into account when identifying problems and deciding how to address them. They may be particularly aware of factors such as:

- a political system's demographic structure, including the working population, the number of people at school age, and the number of older people receiving social security and care
- the nature of the economy, including levels of employment, consumer spending, investment in industries and services, and the potential for taxation
- mass behaviour, including (un)healthy behaviour, levels of crime, education attainment, and public attitudes to policies.

The policy environment may represent a source of pressure on policymakers - particularly when events, and media and public attention to events, seem to force policymakers to respond and, in many cases, think and act in new ways. For example, the economic environment is an important influence on the ability of governments to finance public policies, while changes to the economic performance of a country often dominate the attention of governments. In addition, crises (such as in the 1970s and from the late 2000s) often prompt policymakers to reconsider fundamentally their approach to economic policy. Demographic shifts may have a large bearing on policy decisions – such as when an ageing population makes it expensive to maintain pensions, welfare and social care policies, or when a baby boom influences demand for schools and health services. In addition, events (such as an extremely cold winter or flu epidemic), combined with a media and public reaction, often prompt policymakers to make quick decisions on issues such as healthcare and social security payments.

The chapter discusses how we should best understand the influence of such factors, comparing the idea that socioeconomic factors, combined with events, represent the primary determinant of policy decisions, with the idea that policymakers can 'mediate' that process and, to some extent, choose to which factors to pay most attention.

Postwar consensus – the commitment by Labour and Conservative governments (from approximately 1945-79) to a strong role for government in running the economy, nationalised industries and welfare state.

Welfare state – the (often-progressive) tax-funded provision of services such as social security, healthcare and education.

Keynesian – an approach to economics which encouraged major government intervention at key points (such as to borrow and spend to increase 'demand' during periods of low economic growth).

Thatcherism – a broad term to describe policy and policymaking from 1979 (when the Margaret Thatcher-led Conservative Party was first elected).

Chapter 7 Key Developments in UK Post-war Policy and the UK State

It is difficult to understand contemporary public policy in the UK without considering the major changes that have taken place in the UK state in the post-war period. Each individual policy chapter considers the key post-war developments – but a dedicated chapter is also required to present the 'big picture'. Chapter 7 examines a range of policies associated with the **postwar consensus**, including the rise of the **welfare state** (which included social security provision for older people, children and the unemployed, free medical care, and free education), the nationalisation of major industries (including coal, steel, and railways) and a **Keynesian** approach to UK Government economic policy.

This alleged consensus came under serious challenge from the 1970s when an economic crisis - symbolised by the UK Government's need to borrow $4 billion from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in 1976 – undermined the image of its favoured social and economic policies. Major policy changes became associated closely with the idea of **Thatcherism**; a government project based on challenging the post-war consensus in key areas, including:

- a major change in economic policy, from Keynesianism to 'monetarism'
- a shift in the balance between state and market provision through privatisation – including the sale of public corporations and social housing, 'quasi-markets' in health and social services, increased charges for public services, 'contracting out' publicly funded services, and public-private partnerships (PPP) to build large capital projects such as roads, bridges, schools and hospitals
- the pursuit of 'new public management' (the application of private sector methods to the public sector)
- the reform of employment laws to limit the power of trade unions
- changes to the welfare state.

The Thatcher era also saw the increased use of measures to challenge the role of local authorities (such as reforming local taxation and introducing new public bodies to deliver services previously controlled by local authorities). The UK also joined the EU in 1973 and became further integrated even during the 'Eurosceptic' era of Conservative government (1979-97).

This experience underpins modern discussion of policymaking in the New Labour (1997-2010) and coalition government (2010-present) years. In most cases, those governments accepted or accelerated the policies of their predecessors. For example, Labour extended the sale of social housing and public bodies, and the use of 'quasi-markets' in healthcare, increased charges for higher education, and did not reverse employment laws (despite the historic links between Labour and the trade unions). The Conservative-led coalition government has made further changes in this direction (including raising annual HE fees from £3000 to £9000) and has sought further cuts in public services, backed by its reference to a new 'age of austerity'. Consequently, UK Government policy is often described as **neoliberal** (and the appearance of neoliberalism in many countries is generally linked to the idea of **globalization** and the desire of many governments to maintain low taxes and minimal employment regulations to attract foreign investment).

Neoliberal – a broad preference to reduce public provision and the role of the state in favour of the private sector and the market.

Globalization – The intensification of worldwide economic, social and political convergence made possible by advances in communication and transport.

Chapter 8 Economic policy

The chapter explains key terms, such as the difference between fiscal and monetary policy (and wider issues, such as industrial and competition policies), identifies key domestic actors such as the Treasury and Bank of England, and highlights the importance of the global context and key international actors. It examines in more detail the main postwar developments (including the extent to which the UK government shifted from 'Keynesian' to 'monetarist' policies). Its main focus is the current economic crisis, its main causes, the ways in which UK governments may have contributed to it (in area such as banking regulation and government spending) and the ways in which they have tried to solve it.

Chapter 9 Health Policy

The chapter examines areas such as healthcare organisation and substantive areas such as public health (including tobacco, alcohol, obesity and drugs policy) and mental health policies. It identifies the main differences in health policy since devolution – a factor that receives relatively high coverage because four different systems have developed in the UK (starting before, and accelerated by, devolution). It highlights the relative tendency of the UK Government to favour market-based solutions and to reform healthcare structures in the NHS for England, and considers the cost of PPP projects for hospitals.

Chapter 10 Education Policy

The chapter examines areas such as higher education (including the introduction and extension of tuition fees), compulsory education (including the use of testing in schools and the role of local authorities) and pre-school education (including the influence of ideas regarding the age at which students should receive formal education). It identifies the main differences in education policy since devolution – a factor that receives relatively high

coverage because different systems have developed in the UK (Scotland's system was already very different, while Wales' system has diverged since devolution). It highlights the relative tendency of the UK Government to reform education structures and promote competition (such as when promoting student testing and education league tables) in England.

Chapter 11 Justice and Home Affairs Policy

The chapter discusses key developments in domestic security and controversial issues such as the detention of criminal suspects and the (aborted) introduction of ID cards. It discusses the centrality of New Labour's promise to be tough on crime (and the causes of crime) and, for example, the ways in which this approach affected other areas such as mental health policy. It discusses the riots in England in 2012 and the narratives that have been produced about what causes crime and how it should be addressed. It examines the ways in which policing and areas such as immigration combine, focusing on examples such as the Home Office's controversial illegal-immigrants initiative in 2013.

Chapter 12 Urban and Regional Policy

The chapter considers the development of policies regarding local authorities, housing, planning and integrated transport. It notes the major changes that have taken place since the postwar period (the changing role of local authorities in these areas is particularly worthy of discussion). It charts the rise and fall of social housing in the UK, including the 'right to buy' and the often-reduced role for local authorities in the delivery of policies.

Chapter 13 Environmental, Rural and Resource Policy

The chapter considers the rise of 'environmental policy' in the second half of the postwar period and its effect on more established policies on energy, transport and agriculture. Concern for the environment provided a new frame of reference to consider issues such as: the mix of fossil, nuclear and renewable energies; the future of farming and fishing and the development of rural policy; and, the mix between types of transport, such as public (trains and buses) and private (road), and the expansion of airports.

Chapter 14 Social Welfare Policies

The chapter tracks broad trends in the ways that governments have sought to introduce, maintain and reform the welfare state. It covers areas such as social care and social security. It highlights the UK's distinctive state pension system (in which current taxpayers fund pensions; there is no investment pot) and the pressures of an ageing population (on state pensions and the increasing reform of public sector professional pensions). The chapter contains a box comparing Scottish and UK government approaches to care for older people.

Chapter 15 Foreign Affairs and Defence Policy

The chapter considers foreign affairs in two main ways: (1) its membership of international bodies such as the EU, UN and Nato; its influence on those bodies and the effect of

membership on UK policymaking; and, (2) its role in major conflicts such as Iraq War. The chapter considers the extent to which foreign policymaking is different from domestic policymaking – a belief that has led to relatively few comparisons of foreign and domestic policies and policymaking in the literature.

Conclusion: What is the nature of British policymaking?

The final chapter brings together the theories, concepts and empirical evidence to consider: how policy is made; how distinctive British policymaking is; how much policy has changed in each area and what we can say, overall, about the extent (and causes) of policy change in the post-war UK. The examination of a wide range of policy areas is crucial to this overall evaluation. A key tenet of policy studies is that politics and policymaking vary markedly from policy area to area, and from issue to issue. So, we might identify major differences in UK policymaking styles across time, in different government departments and even within those departments. This makes an overall evaluation of British policymaking difficult. However, it is not impossible because the policy literature provides us with enough insights and concepts to show us which aspects of policymaking are 'universal' or likely to be in evidence regardless of the era or issue.

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