INTRODUCTION

When it comes to public policy-making, public administration (PA) is traditionally said to play an important role in both the design and implementation of public policies. Decisions can be shaped and reshaped during administration, and participants are crucial decision-makers of public policies. Further, a government’s bureaucracy plays an important role in the political game. In other words, it makes sense to study the power of PA alongside other actors such as government, parliament, interest groups, science, other experts, and lobbyists. As such, many policy theories and studies of governance treat PA as contributing – alongside other governmental and non-governmental actors – to a complex or messy policy-making system in which there are blurry boundaries between analysing, influencing, making, and delivering policy.

Early elite studies already include some PA members or entities in the political elite, as they appear to have formal competences and resources or the reputation of being powerful. For example, a classic role of civil servants is to take responsibility for the policy analysis that precedes policy formulation. We also highlight more recent studies that show how PA can be a central actor in political networks, reflecting a tendency to understand policy-making as a continuous governance process rather than a cycle that can be broken down into discrete linear stages.

Generally speaking, these studies suggest that – although policy processes are too messy to categorize precisely – there are regular patterns of behaviour that constitute the policy-making cultures of political systems. Therefore, we focus on how PA contributes to a government’s administrative culture, or the rules and norms of policy administration. We then relate this idea to comparisons of policy styles, or the routine ways in which a government makes and implements policy in consultation with stakeholders such as interest groups. In each case, we find a combination of two elements that perhaps represent two sides of the same coin: (1) each government or political system may have its own ‘style’, or rules and procedures to process policy, but (2) policy studies identify the tendency towards common policy-making constraints and dynamics.

Further, while PA contains many individuals, studies tend to focus on their collective role as organizational actors. In most of the political systems we describe, it is organizational entities rather than individuals that have the competences, resources, power, and access to shape policies decisively (Knoke 1993). As such, when describing the role of PA, we include entire departments or agencies, but also explore a tendency to focus on particular sections, sub-sections, divisions, and other organizational sub-entities.

We also explore the role that actors such as experts play in a government’s policy style. We define expertise broadly, to reflect a tendency for governance and transdisciplinary science studies to include far more actor groups than solely academia and science. Experts comprise...
those actors having a particular *expertise* in one specific policy field, subsystem, or issue (see Brandenberger et al. 2022). These experts demonstrate particular importance, not only as informants for research and policy analysis but also as contributors to policy-making. In other words, administrations and experts may be associated primarily with the technical side of policy analysis, but also contribute to the wider political process that underpins policy design and delivery.

**THE ROLE OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION IN POLICY ANALYSIS, ADMINISTRATIVE CULTURES, AND POLICY STYLES**

In this section we explore the duality of key policy-making dynamics. On the one hand, the idea of administrative cultures and policy styles is that governments seem to pursue different ways to process evidence and make choices to respond to their policy-making environments. On the other hand, this reputation for taking a distinctive approach on paper does not necessarily translate to substantively different outcomes or practices. While government bureaucracies and elections policy-makers matter, their actions take place in a policy-making environment over which they have limited knowledge and control. We pursue this duality in three sub-sections.

**Can We Identify Administrative Cultures and Policy Styles?**

PA and policy studies seek to identify the contribution of bureaucratic and other actors to regular, orderly, and distinctive patterns of policy-making in political systems (Painter and Peters 2010; Howlett and Tosun 2019). For example, Cairney et al. (2018b: 131) draw on O’Riordan and Wynne (1987) to describe four archetypes associated with different political systems:

1. **Adversarial.** Bureaucracies oversee a highly formalized process according to the letter of the law. There are frequent judicial reviews of administrative processes and choices, which can be resource intensive. Expertise and academic analysis are valued, but the adversarialism and openness of the process also expose actors’ highly politicized dynamics.
2. **Consensual.** Bureaucracies serve executives that are accountable to parliament, with limited court involvement. More policy-making is processed behind the scenes, such as in the ‘policy communities’ of civil servants and interest groups that exchange information and advice for routine access to government (Jordan and Richardson 1982).
3. **Fiduciary or authoritative.** Systems with powerful central governments and weak legislatures allow bureaucracies to take charge of policy analysis and formulation (again behind closed doors) and limit the access of interest and other groups.
4. **Neocorporatist.** Associated with relatively close-knit tri-partite relationships between government, business, and labour groups. Bureaucracies foster these relationships via formalized processes to ensure continuous and systematic consultation and negotiation, and often the relative exclusion of other actors.

Further, studies of ‘policy styles’ identify major variations according to political system characteristics. Howlett and Tosun (2019) compare old and new ways to conceptualize such styles. First, they draw on Richardson’s (1982) classic edited volume *Policy Styles in Western*
Europe, which identifies countries who differ on two aspects: the ‘relationship between
government and society’, to identify relatively consensual versus impositional systems; and
‘dominant approaches to problem-solving’, to compare relatively anticipatory versus reactive
approaches to policy problems (Table 19.1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy styles in Western Europe</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Anticipatory</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consensual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impositional</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source:* Adapted from Howlett and Tosun (2019: 7).

Second, their approach identifies a cross-section of countries that differ on two aspects: ‘inclusiveness of decision-making’, such as to compare highly inclusive liberal democracies and
less-inclusive closed or authoritarian systems; and ‘key political actors’ to compare more or less bureaucratic versus participatory systems (Table 19.2).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy styles across the globe</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>High inclusiveness in policy-making</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bureaucrat and expert led</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politician and public led</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source:* Adapted from Howlett and Tosun (2019: 13).

**Policy-Making Complexity: Constraining and Facilitating Bureaucratic Action**

However, the complexity of policy processes undermines the sense that they can be broken
down into a predictable and routine pattern of bureaucratic policy-making. We use modern
descriptions of a key bureaucratic practice – *policy analysis* – to demonstrate this argument.

Classic models of policy analysis, described by textbooks, describe a multi-step process
conducted traditionally by civil servants: define a policy problem of interest to your client,
identify feasible solutions, use values and political goals to compare solutions, predict their
effects, and make a recommendation to your client (Cairney 2021a: 12). Further, these ana-
lytical steps relate strongly to the notional ‘stages’ through which policy needs to go before
it can be delivered: define a problem, generate solutions, select a solution, legitimize your
choice, implement, and evaluate policy (Cairney 2021a: 55; Wu et al. 2017). In other words,
these are rationalist processes focusing on a technical process of analysis, insulated within
a well-defined and orderly process.

In contrast, contemporary studies of policy *analysts* suggests that this image of analysis
has fallen out of favour. They provide a contrast between: (1) the old club-like nature of
policy-making involving ‘a small number of analysts, generally inside government (such
as senior bureaucrats, economists, or scientific experts), giving technical or factual advice,
about policy formulation, to policy-makers at the heart of government, on the assumption that
policy problems would be solved via analysis and action’ and (2) the more modern, open, and
contested political process in which (a) policy-making authority is spread across many levels
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and venues, (b) civil servants compete with many other sources of policy analysis inside and outside of government, and (c) the required skills of analysts has expanded to reflect the need to collaborate across government, manage networks, and deal with conflict (Cairney 2021a: 35–36, drawing on Radin 2019; Brans et al. 2017; Enserink et al. 2013).

Consequently, Mayer et al. (2013) describe many possible policy analysis styles, not only including rationalist ideas but also ‘argumentative’ (to reflect the contest to define policy problems) and ‘participatory’ (to widen analysis to stakeholders and citizens). Further, Brans et al.’s (2017) edited book (and Hassenteufel and Zittoun’s 2017 chapter in particular) contains multiple explanations for variations in policy analytical styles according to factors such as ‘levels of bureaucratic capacity for analysis’, ‘the extent to which policy-makers contract out analysis’, ‘the types and remits of advisory bodies’, ‘the level of government in which analysts work’, and the relative importance attached to economic methods such as cost-benefit analysis (Cairney 2021a: 38).

Policy theories situate such activity within policy-making processes that defy rationalist order and central government control (Cairney et al. 2019). Although they vary in scope, these theories contain two common messages. First, policy-makers are subject to ‘bounded rationality’, or the inability to process all information and anticipate all of the consequences of their choices. Instead, individuals combine cognition and emotion, and organizations depend on standard operating procedures, to limit their attention to information. Second, they do not fully understand or control their policy-making environment, which contains: many policy-makers and influences spread across levels and types of government, and many authoritative venues, each with their own dominant ways of thinking, rules, and networks. Policy-makers seek pragmatic ways to prioritize a small and manageable number of issues and aims, which represent a small part of overall government business (Cairney 2021a: 49–56).

The Limits to Administrative and Policy Styles in Complex Policy-Making Environments

If we combine insights on policy-making complexity and styles, we find a more nuanced picture in which administrative and policy style archetypes do not always describe actual policy and PA well. For example, archetypes of administrative cultures are distinct on paper but tend to converge somewhat in practice, following their common engagement in international networks and adoption of broadly similar waves of reform such as New Public Management (the importation of private sector ideas and processes into the public sector) and new tools for policy analysis (Cairney et al. 2018b: 14; Page 2003).

Further, differences in some policy styles are less apparent in practice than on paper. A classic European example is the on-paper contrast between ‘majoritarian’ versus ‘consensus’ democracies (when both elect governments via free and fair elections). Lijphart (1999: 2–3) argues that policy styles result from formal political system rules. Cairney (2019: 28) summarizes this argument as follows:

In a consensus democracy, a proportional electoral system diffuses power among many parties, obliging them to cooperate and compromise with each other to govern. This need for ‘inclusiveness, bargaining and compromise’ helps promote a wider culture of cooperation, which extends to the relationships between policy-makers and influencers. For example, governments may be more likely to encourage corporatism or similar forms of routine bargaining. In a majoritarian democracy, there is a ‘winner takes all’ mentality, in which parties compete with each other and feel no need to cooper-
ate, and the party of government encourages a culture of top-down imposition and open competition between interest groups.

Yet, comparative studies of actual policy styles in such countries suggest that they do not live up to these archetypes (Kriesi et al. 2006: 357–3588), and many find more subtle differences between policy styles. For example, the majoritarian/consensus distinction overstates differences between the UK and Switzerland in relation to energy policy-making (Cairney et al. 2018a).

This result is partly because ‘majoritarian’ systems are more consensual in practice, and partly because the dynamics of policy-making have similar elements: policy-makers, facing bounded rationality, pay attention to some issues and delegate most to civil servants, who exchange access to government for information and advice from specialist organizations (Cairney 2019: 30). Further, while there are many variations in practices to arise from these general dynamics, they can vary as much by policy sector (Cairney 2021b). Indeed, Howlett and Tosun’s (2021) handbook on policy styles explores national, sectoral, administrative and governance, formulation, leadership, implementation, and evaluation styles!

The result of this difference between major national differences on paper versus often-subtle differences in practice is that we need to demonstrate the nature of policy-making dynamics in each case to establish the role of PA in policy-making. For example, how can we better understand power in policy-making and the role that many different actors can (and do) play in PA?

POWER IN POLICY-MAKING

Many studies in political science are dedicated to the issue of power in policy-making and the identification of powerful actors (Smith et al. 2014; Dahl 1960). Early elite studies applied varied approaches to identify the ‘ruling class’ (Hoffmann-Lange 2007). The positional approach (Mills 1956), can be considered the least inclusive, which acknowledges diversity in democratic decision-making, but focuses on actors with the formal competences or positions to decide. The decisional approach more concerns actors’ activities in policy-making and identifies powerful actors based on their appearance at different stages of the policy process. Applying this approach, Knoke (1993) came to the conclusion that not individuals, but collective actors and organizations, are decisive in policy-making. He furthermore noticed that the so-identified political elite consists of public and private actors, where governmental representatives, including PA, played the most active roles (see also Laumann and Knoke 1987). Finally, the third approach, reputational method, is predominantly based on expert interviews or surveys, and aims at identifying those who are perceived as powerful (Hunter 1953). When applied separately, and at least when applied in conjunction (Hicks et al. 2015), PA is usually already classified as part of this so-called political elite. Not only do they appear several times in the process (decisional approach), but also they hold competence of designing policies, through drafting and implementation, as well as through lobbying and bargaining (positional and decisional approaches, Hoffmann-Lange 2007).

Already in 1988, Tait et al. demonstrated how the three approaches (positional, decisional, and reputational) overlap. When studying the role of public servants, street level bureaucrats, and other actors involved in community action programs, the authors highlight that two-thirds of the actors identified through the positional approach also had the reputation of being
powerful. Additionally, a 40 per cent overlap exists between activity in decision-making and position. Not only do they show that PA belongs to the political elite, which then related to different power aspects, but they also portray the occurrence of elite structures, including PA, from national to very local levels.

Ingold and Pflieger (2016) were also interested in the role of actors in multi-level decision-making. More concretely, they studied the role actors play in the very same policy domain (here climate policy), but at the domestic and the international levels. They therefore conducted surveys and interviews with more than 50 actors involved in either domestic Swiss climate mitigation policy-making, or in the preparation of the Swiss position at the UNFCCC Conferences of the Parties (COPs), or in both. They gathered structural data and were able to draw policy networks with public and private organizations (nodes) and collaboration ties among them. One administrative agency, the Swiss Federal Office for the Environment, proved most central in both networks and was able to link both the domestic as well as the internationally active actors. This study thus confirmed three insights: first, that PA is involved in policy formulation; second, that PA participates in policy formulation at both the domestic and international levels; and third, that PA can play a crucial role in connecting diverse public and private actors through central positions in policy networks.

Additional studies exist that link elite approaches with social network analysis and vice versa. In this vein, Ingold and Leifeld (2016) show that the reputation of being powerful depends on both an actor’s competences and position on one side, and an actor’s engagement in policy networks and collaboration on the other. Fischer and Sciarini (2016) also come to this very same conclusion. Both studies utilized comparative and longitudinal network data to study various policy domains over time. Out of the diverse policy processes under analysis, PA representatives belonged to the top five policy actors with the highest reputation, and also the highest network centrality (thus being active and popular as collaboration partners).

This high activity of PA representatives is not only a phenomenon observed in national policy-making. When studying policy diffusion in transnational river basins in Europe, Metz and Fischer (2016) conclude that from all studied countries (Switzerland, Germany, the Netherlands, and France), PA representatives served as the most active diffusors of innovative policy solutions, mainly through their participation in official meetings, platforms, and events.

**ROLES THE MULTIPLE ACTORS PLAY**

Different policy process theories and approaches discuss the divergent roles that not only actors, but also PA, can play in policy design. The Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF; Jenkins-Smith et al. 2018) for instance, distinguishes between actors who are part of a policy subsystem, and those who are not. The constituent elements of policy subsystems include a geographic scope, a topical area, and the array of policy actors involved. Actors become active in a subsystem in order to ‘somehow’ be involved in policy-making concerning the issue or topic at stake. A first selection criterion for policy studies in general, and studies interested in policy design, planning, and drafting in particular, is therefore to see who comprises the policy subsystem.

Within the policy subsystem, actors can take various roles (see Table 19.3), including so-called principal or auxiliary actors (Weible et al. 2020). Here, one must be clear about the meaning of principal or auxiliary: principal and auxiliary to what? A subsystem is typically
Table 19.3 Multiple roles actors play in subsystems and coalitions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy actor categories</th>
<th>Definitions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Latent/isolate/potential policy actors</td>
<td>Policy actors not engaged who might have stake in the issue.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal and auxiliary actors</td>
<td>Principal actors are regularly engaged central to the subsystem; auxiliary policy actors are intermittently engaged, operate on the periphery of the subsystem or both.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purposive/material groups</td>
<td>Purposive groups are organizations motivated by a value-based mission (e.g. a non-profit environmental group); material groups are organizations motivated by profit (e.g. a corporation or business).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy brokers</td>
<td>Policy actors motivated to help opponents reach compromise or agreements.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy entrepreneurs</td>
<td>Policy actors motivated in shaping policy change or stasis decisively.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted from Weible et al. (2020).

characterized by two or more opposing coalitions that show high within-coalition belief congruence, and high across-coalition belief conflict. Actors of one coalition mainly coordinate actions with coalition peers, but sometimes also with enemies. They can be principal or auxiliary actors to the whole subsystem, or to one specific coalition. A bit simplified, if PA takes a role as principal coalition member, it does not act any different from any other actor in the political game expressing own interests and trying to impact policy outputs. When acting as principal subsystem member, this means that PA still impacts politics and policy, but can do so in a rather neutral role, for example through seeking stability across opposing coalitions in the subsystem.

Principal actors of one coalition share the belief systems with this coalition and have a high ‘belief overlap’ therein (see again Ingold and Gschwend 2014). They can also share coordination patterns within or across coalitions in the subsystem. Auxiliaries have some, but not much belief overlap, and are most often only loosely connected with their coalition peers as opposed to other actors in the subsystem.

Actors can also be a principal subsystem member, interested in subsystem dynamics and issues (as typically brokers or entrepreneurs are), but being only auxiliary or at the periphery of one coalition. Generally speaking, this can be the ideal role for PA, as this principal subsystem actor is rather ideologically neutral (or behaves as such), but still very active in policy-making. Principal subsystem actors have a high degree of coordination relations with a variety of other actors, belonging to some or all the coalitions present in the subsystem, and thereby act as high connectors across the whole subsystem. The study of Ingold and Varone (2012) confirms the role of principal subsystem members for PA in the case of Swiss climate policy, where the Energy Agency – not being the leading agency one should note – acted as a true broker and made policy compromise possible.

In general, and as many ACF applications show (Pierce et al. 2017), PA can comprise both principal and auxiliary coalition members. This also strongly depends upon the institutional setting and the subsystem context (see above). For example, the leading agency of the PA in one specific policy subsystem might typically take a principal role in the subsystem as coordinator, but less so in one specific coalition. A supporting agency, however, might have the freedom to act as coalition members, but serve instead as auxiliary participants therein.
PA then also takes different forms in the policy process, depending on what arena is studied. As the comparison between the media and policy arena done by Schaub and Metz (2020) has shown, their assumption is confirmed that PA members are more active and apparent in the policy process than the media portrays them in political discourse. Furthermore, and confirming what we have written above, PA can play a strong role as connectors among different types of actors in the policy process, but this ‘connection role’ is not confirmed in the media. As such, PA can be policy designers, but typically in the more technical and substantive policy process where public attention is lower.

In general, policy process theories and their respective empirical applications come to the conclusion that party politics can, but do not have to be, a decisive factor in policy planning and design (see the application from Sager and Rieffe 2013 of the garbage can model, for example). A broader variety of actors and their interests, also characterized as governance (Driessen et al. 2012), have a say in policy-making. As a result, PA representatives are not an exception: the study by Sager et al. (2019) of healthcare policy in decentralized Switzerland concludes that policy change is strongly impacted by the ‘strength of the Left’ in the respective subnational government. This result can only be fully explained, however, when taking the ‘administrative environment’ into account.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, we compared the role of PA in policy-making on paper and in practice. On paper, we can identify distinctive administrative cultures and policy styles according to the country or region of government. In practice, policy-makers are subject to similar constraints and dynamics – associated with bounded rationality and policy-making environments – which should prompt us to reflect on the accuracy of certain policy style reputations. Studies of power and case studies of policy processes might shed further light on the role of PA in policy-making.

Elite studies help to reinforce and add nuance to these conclusions. PA representatives are part, or can be part, of the political elite. They are not always the most central or powerful actors, but some are able to be part of the top five to ten actors that seem to shape policies decisively (Ingold et al. 2021). They do so in very different ways, be it as connectors among different levels (see Ingold and Pfleiger 2016; see also Angst et al. 2018), as transnational policy diffusors (see Metz and Fischer 2016), or as those who are simultaneously active and seen as powerful (Fischer and Sciarini 2016). When studying the Ryanair/Charleroi complaint, Christopoulos (2006) only partially confirms this ‘multi-power-role’ position of bureaucrats in policy conflicts and legal cases. He outlines that bureaucrats, aside from other political and private actors, were unable to dominate the issue, but figured among the most active and best-connected actors during crisis management. We therefore conclude that power is multi-faceted and that aside from other actors of the political elite, PA can play various power roles and positions in policy design and bargaining (see also Ingold et al. 2021).

NOTE

1. This is a multi-author joint report. The section on administrative styles was led by Lorenzo Marvulli.
REFERENCES


