

Politicization and Controversies in Policy Implementation

Mavrot, Céline (2024). "Politicization and Controversies in Policy Implementation". In Sager Fritz, Mavrot Céline, Keiser Lael (Eds.), *Handbook of Public Policy Implementation* (pp. 312-322). Cheltenham: Edward Elgar. Chapter DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781800885905.00035>

Pre-print Version.

Abstract

This chapter addresses the question of politicization and controversies in policy implementation processes. In contrast to the idea that politicization and controversies only occur in the policy formulation phase, the chapter highlights the importance of conflicts and debates around implementation. Politicization is defined as the process through which political processes become increasingly determined by partisanship, while controversies are public debates characterized by a strong salience and polarized opinions. Based on a literature overview of various policy analysis paradigms and illustrative examples, this chapter shows how politicization and controversies can dramatize the debate, thereby putting implementation activities under high pressure. It distinguishes various types of contentious implementation paths, depending on whether politicization happens at the political level (oversight), the delivery level (implementation), or the stakeholders' level (reception). It highlights future research avenues to better close the gap between policy formulation and policy implementation research.

Keywords: policy implementation; politicization; controversies; implementation conflict.

Introduction

While decades of policy research have addressed the crucial question of policy controversies, the focus has mainly been on the agenda-setting phase of the policy cycle. This focus can be explained by the fact that the most crucial debates occur when a policy intervention is being considered and decided in a social process of collective deliberation. Agenda-setting and decision-making are the more dramatic phases of public debates, because political discussions usually happen under public scrutiny at this stage. However, as crucial as these phases that pertain to the policy formulation part of the policy cycle are, policy implementation processes are equally important regarding the likelihood and potential consequences of politicization and controversies. These can arise in connection with policy issues that were already contentious during the formulation phase, or they can be generated in the course of the implementation itself. Implementation controversies are crucial because, by triggering debate on policy options, they are a possible source of policy change.

Smoking bans in public places are a classical illustration of controversial decision-making. With the progressive normalization of smoking bans since the late 1990s, countries worldwide have experienced intense disputes framed along the lines of a public health vs. individual freedom debate (Cairney et al. 2012). At the same time, the enforcement of the ban frequently continued to trigger implementation controversies, for instance around issues of compliance, fines, or unintended policy effects such as increased noise in the vicinity of restaurants

because of customers smoking outside (Hyland et al. 2012; Mavrot & Hadorn 2021). On the contrary, a policy might go unnoticed until it generates implementation debates. In such cases, the existence of a public policy as well as its general objectives might be consensual and its funding be renewed from year to year until implementation activities or debacles bring controversy. One extreme example is 2020's deep questioning of the existence, composition, and mission of police forces in the United States after the murder of the black citizen George Floyd by policemen at a street corner in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Whereas the mediatized death of George Floyd is the tip of the iceberg in decades of police brutality, the street-level implementation of wider law enforcement policies triggered a tremendous policy debate that included discussions about defunding the police and reallocating part of the funds to community programs (Sances 2023). Hence, controversies of policy implementation can derive from an already politicized policy formulation process, such as in the case of tobacco control, or stem from implementation activities – be it in the context of recurring problems like in the police case, or in the context of more isolated failures.

Political controversies consist of intense collective discussions on society choices, debated in the open public. Controversies are characterized by strong dividing lines and polarized stances, (Rennes 2016) as well as accusation (Barthe 2010) and scandalization processes (Buton 2009). Typically, what are referred to as “morality policies” produce public controversies, as these policies regard topics that appeal to individuals’ core values that are non-negotiable (e.g., about topics of life and death, such as abortion or euthanasia, or about the governance of sexuality, such as prostitution or homosexuality) (Budde et al. 2018; Engeli et al. 2013). However, controversies can break out on any policy issue depending on the context. Politicization can be conceptualized as the process through which a social issue is put into discussion in political arenas (for instance, in the case of a triggering event or a reform) and, importantly, generates coalitions informed by partisanship (Lagroye 2003). Although without politicization, a regular debate can span a large array of perspectives, in the case of politicization, opinions tend to crystallize around partisan worldviews, for instance, public "state interventionism vs. personal freedom," to name a typical political dividing line. Contrary to controversies that are public, a politicized debate can (but not necessarily) remain restricted to relatively confidential political arenas. The two phenomena are, however, often closely intertwined. Finally, some authors adopt a more extensive definition of politicization than the partisan one, and describe politicization as a process through which a concern becomes a political affair subject to intense debate (Feindt et al. 2020).

Because the policy process is not linear, policy implementation impacts ongoing public deliberations and future policy decisions. Politicization and controversies therefore have an influence on policy paths. This influence can range from minor adaptations to the repeal of the policy. This chapter concentrates on public disputes that happen in the wake of policy implementation, either as a continuation of policy formulation controversies or when new debates arise during delivery. For instance, these can concern contentious policies at the social level, stem from conflicts among implementation agencies, be contested by the policy's target group, or arise because of non-intended effects of the policy. Other important factors of politicization exist that are not the focus of this chapter. The long-term, structural politicization of public administration through the appointment of civil servants has given rise to an important literature (Bach & Wegrich, 2020; Lewis 2005; Peters, & Pierre 2004). This literature is, however, not addressed here because it mainly deals with national politico-administrative systems and not with policy implementation per se. This chapter focuses on occurrences of policy implementation controversies defined as public debates that are led in public arenas at the society level. The chapter is also not about other subtypes of low-key policy implementation conflicts such as, for instance, disagreements between political

principals, middle implementers and street level bureaucrats (also see chapter Zhang & Rosenbloom in this book) when they do not lead to public controversy.

In the following, the ways implementation controversies are handled in various theoretical approaches (narrative policy framework, advocacy coalition framework, actor-centered institutionalism, multiple streams framework, policy instrument perspective) are firstly reviewed with concrete examples. Second, the politicization of policy implementation is addressed at the political level (oversight), the delivery level (implementation), and the stakeholders' level (reception). Finally, these insights and their relevance for policy implementation research are discussed and future avenues for research on this topic are presented.

Politicization and Controversies: A Research Overview

Policy Implementation Controversies and Theories of the Policy Process

Like other aspects of the policy process, policy implementation can be examined by adopting various analytical lenses, with a focus ranging from ideas on one end to structural factors on the other end of the continuum. Analytical accounts of policy implementation disputes can be found in research stemming from the entire theoretical spectrum. Each of these theoretical perspectives identify key mechanisms that explain how policy evolve during implementation. To begin with, ideas are crucial in implementation controversy, as they are used to construct a narrative that appeals to emotions, judgments, and worldviews. In this perspective, the narrative policy framework has a clear heuristic value in analyzing battles of ideas. This framework focuses on the social construction of reality and the importance of interpretations in the policy process; these policy narratives unfold at the individual, coalition, and cultural levels (Jones et al. 2022). The narrative's components are its form (e.g., villains and hero characters, plot, moral of the story) and its content (related to the individuals' belief systems and interests) (*op. cit.*). Adopting a narrative policy framework for the analysis of the implementation of a controversial waste management policy in Moscow, Caroline Schlauffer et al. (2021) demonstrate that problems are not inherently controversial. They can be strategically framed as complex and conflictual—including through the creation of victim and villain figures—to ensure the existence of a debate on a given issue. The authors show that, around implementation conflicts (disposition of waste in landfills, burning of garbage, disputed construction of incineration plants based on corruption), political opposants and NGOs make use of conflict expansion strategies to reopen debates about the government's garbage policy that is detrimental to the environment, but also to launch wider discussions on the democratization of public affairs. They push narratives that highlight the complexity of the problem as well as its deep institutional roots - including corruption and the lack of democratic participation. On the contrary, governmental actors in charge of the policies and interested in maintaining the political status quo use conflict containment strategies by dedramatizing the gravity and the scope of the problem. To avoid more general discussions on the issue, the government simplify the problem and push for circumvented, technocratic solutions. Hence, ideas and narrative are used by policy actors around specific policies in the context of wider political oppositions. This perspective focused on ideas and narratives shows that, in a dynamic of controversy, confrontations between ideas can be amplified, thus having repercussions both on a specific policy area and on the general political debate. It also unveils the narrative dynamics between incumbents and challengers in policy controversies.

The advocacy coalition framework has a strong focus on both ideas and coalitions of actors. It analyzes the confrontations of competing coalitions that have divergent approaches to a

problem within a given policy subsystem. Members of each coalition share a strong set of core beliefs that inform their perspective (Jenkins-Smith & Sabatier 1994). Coalitions are assumed to be rather stable over time while fighting with each other over the solution to be brought to a policy issue. Therefore, the framework is also well-fitted to the study of implementation disputes. In a study of the controversies on nuclear energy in South Korea, Nam et al. (2022) show how coalitions opposed to nuclear energy use critical events (e.g., earthquake, regime change) strategically to attempt to trigger policy change in a particularly nuclear-friendly national context. As reflected in this study, when there is a dispute, for instance, triggered by a critical event, policy players tend to align with existing advocacy coalitions because of demonization and polarization effects. Implementation activities—in this case the construction of nuclear reactors, for instance—are then framed in a way that sustains and amplifies the coalition's preexisting claims about the problem and its solution, while coalitions continuously adapt their understanding of the problem to external shocks. The framing advocacy coalitions provide are crucial factors in the wider evolution of the collective understanding of the social issue. This understanding infuses the political environment in which policy formulation and policy implementation further happen. This shows the importance of considering the evolution of a policy over the long term to cover several cycles of policy formulation-implementation-reformulation (Jenkins-Smith & Sabatier 1994). This theoretical perspective shows how coalitions—by providing routinized frames of interactions (Jenkins-Smith et al., 2018)—contribute to developing and maintaining specific understandings of an issue, be it in reaction to specific events or to more incremental developments (Weible & Sabatier, 2006). As such, competing coalitions strongly contribute to the structuring and dynamics of a policy controversy, among other through the way they frame specific implementation episodes.

Actor-centered institutionalism is a theoretical framework aimed at "giving equal weight to the strategic actions and interactions (...) and shaping effects of given (but variable) institutional structures and institutionalized norms" (2018 [1997]: 34). Adopting this perspective (Mayntz and Scharpf 1995), Markus Hinterleitner and Fritz Sager (2015) examine how politicians navigate policy fiascos and develop self-protecting strategies referred to as blame avoidance behavior (Weaver 1986). The study is based on the example of the 2009-2010 Australian Home Insulation Program, which was intended to stimulate the economy and enhance the energy policy but ended in several fatalities due to deficient material and the faulty installation of home insulation. After a political scandal aimed at the responsible minister, the program was terminated. This study shows the importance of accountability mechanisms and of the institutionalized rules that weigh on the controversy in each concerned arena. Through this lens, the authors highlight the critical link between implementation activities and political responsibilities. While it has long been proven that bureaucrats enjoy autonomy in the implementation of public policies and that this autonomy can inherently help achieve policy objectives (Huber & Shipan 2002), controversies draw attention back to the interdependency between bureaucrats and politicians. When a fiasco occurs, the public attention immediately goes back to politicians, who need to take strong measures influencing the future of the policy because of the logic of the political game. Here, the structure of political institutions has an influence in the way the implementation controversy is managed through the responsibility and accountability mechanisms of the system. An institutionalist approach thus shows how distinctive political systems and institutions structure both policy implementation and the related debates, notably because they provide specific mechanisms for democratic accountability (Scharpf 2018).

The multiple streams framework (MSF) is based on John Kingdon's (1984) seminal observation on the not-so-linear coupling of policy problems and solutions in the processes

leading to agenda-setting (see also Zohlnhöfer & Rüb, 2016). The MSF is a theory of the policy process positing that partly independent streams develop and converge to open policy windows and trigger a reaction in the world of policies: political problems (the problem stream), available policy solutions (the policy stream), and politics (the political stream) (Herweg et al., 2018). As argued by Michael Howlett (2019), even if the MSF is mainly applied to the agenda-setting phase of the policy cycle, this framework also fits the analysis of policy implementation. According to this author, the MSF can be applied to policy implementation through a fourth stream—the "process stream"—that encompass all the steps, from agenda setting to policy evaluation, that lead to policy outputs. To complete such an MSF-inspired study of implementation, a fifth stream, the "program stream", specifically examines the activities of implementation actors, such as bureaucracies or NGOs, and of all concerned stakeholders, including the affected publics (*op. cit.*). Examining an intense political controversy around the introduction of a "Multicultural and Gender-Fair Curriculum Rule" in Minnesota, Stout and Stevens (2000) show, in an MSF approach, how contentious debates arose around various implementation stages of this inclusive education plan. This "diversity rule" aimed at holding the schools more accountable for the achievements of their minority students. Because of non-compliance of the local districts with the rule and the non-achievement of the plan's objectives regarding the concerned students, new concurrent solution streams emerged directly from the debates surrounding policy implementation: revising the diversity rule or revising the graduation rule, as two different ways to promote the success of minority students. Although these solutions could be seen as complementary, because of their development path and anchoring in different implementation coalitions, they "became competitors for resources and champions" (2000: 348). Hence, the MSF approach evidences how various streams of problems and solution might compete and evolve in reality at all stages of the policy process, including the implementation one. Finally, studies taking an MSF approach to policy implementation agree on the key role of policy entrepreneurs in bringing together the streams (Herweg et al., 2018), which is another heritage of the MSF that has all its importance in the study of controversies.

Policy instruments theory focuses on which policy instrument mixes are put in place in specific policies, how they combine, and what effect they have on the policy outcomes, but also on the society. The policy instrument approach helps both in understanding the policy dynamics from a theoretical level and in drawing learnings for effective policy portfolios in the praxis at a prescriptive level (Capano & Howlett, 2020). Inspired by a Foucauldian approach, instruments are conceptualized as non-neutral tools of the state apparatus that exercise specific forms of power (Le Galès, 2011). Political disputes and controversies about the choice of policy instruments typically happen in the field of environmental policies. Analyzing the evolution of the EU policy instrumentation in this field, Charlotte Halpern (2010) provides insights on the gap between the little progress toward the achievement of environmental objectives, on the one hand, and the strength of environmental activism, on the other. The author shows that despite being a strongly institutionalized and intensely debated area, EU environmental policy remains based on ambiguous principles, horizontal and vertical fragmentation, and a saturation of soft and poorly coordinated instruments. Moreover, "the presence of policy instruments (...) including more actors in the policy-making and implementation phases through agreement- and incentive-based policy instruments has become an important feature" of EU's environmental action (*op. cit.*: 46). The instruments approach thus importantly shows the possible mismatch between the liveliness of political and citizen debates and the reality of institutional inertia, because of policy design and policy implementation choices. In this case, the inertia happens under the varnish of apparent intense activity that allows the EU to assert its competence on the matter, but ultimately blocked the

proper problematization of environmental issues by shaping the access to the debate and restricting the type of implemented solutions. In a somewhat contrary example, the existence of policies benefitting the population (e.g., social benefits) can go unnoticed and this lack of visibility can create negative dynamics from a democratic perspective (Mettler, 2011). In her book *The Submerged State*, Mettler shows how the tools chosen to implement policies affect their recognition by the public, for instance when they contribute to invisibilize the policy and the recipients themselves are little aware of their benefits. This, in turn, influences the politics of implementation, i.e., the perception of the policy by the citizens and the related political debates about the merits of governmental action (*op. cit.*). Hence, policy instruments are the transmission belts of the policies decided at the political level. They concretize state action as personified by delivery organizations, and shape the interactions with the policy targets. As "negative and positive feedback around policy instruments inform the policy debate" (Capano & Howlett, 2020), an analytical lens focused on instruments is informative of key issues surrounding implementation controversies such as the appropriateness and the legitimacy of state action.

Politicization: The Decision-Maker, the Implementer, and the Target

In the following, the literature on the politicization of implementation processes is more specifically addressed. Politicization is understood as the impregnation of implementation activities by a partisan logic derived from politics. To put it schematically, politicization can be the result of the actions of politicians at the oversight level, of implementing actors at the delivery level, or of policy stakeholders at the level of policy reception. COVID-19 policies provide a good example of implementation processes likely to be politicized at the political level. Examining the enforcement of COVID-19 measures in the United States, Gasulla et al. (2022) found that, in situations in which information about the pandemic was incomplete, Democrat states had a better leeway to enforce policies that diverged from the federal Republican policy preferences and that contributed to the reduction of infection rates. Partisan preferences were part of the equation when determining the local policies. In cases of more complete information, ideological preferences tendentially lost their importance. To further take the governance of the COVID-19 pandemic as an example, politicization processes in policy-making and policy implementation can also be linked to struggles among governance levels. In the Italian case, the central- and regional-level authorities fought about their respective scope of action. As the Valle d'Aosta adopted a regional law to authorize local economic activities against national regulations, national authorities fought it through an appeal at the Constitutional Court, arguing that an international epidemic threat required the state to guarantee a "uniformity of implementation" (Bolgherini & Lippi 2022: 238). This example thus also sheds light on the possible involvement of different branches of government in implementation conflicts, in this case the executive and the judiciary powers.

At a more micro level, politicians might politicize the governance of a policy in the context of their oversight function. Given the nature of the political office, a certain degree of politicization is virtually inevitable, as politicians have the mandate to navigate their administration toward specific political objectives. In an extreme form however, it has been noted at the example of intelligence services that, "policymakers are guilty of politicization" the moment they compel their agencies "to alter their conclusions in ways that are politically convenient (...)" (Rovner 2013: 55). Without going as far as the sheer manipulation of information, examples of politicization in the daily running of public agencies are common. An evident case is that of migration policies. Even if they happen in a given national and international regulatory frameworks, politicians in office influence the way migration policies are implemented and hold specific claims around their implementation (Infantino &

Sredanovic, 2022). Their involvement—as the principals of the policy—in implementation is guided by the constraints related to their political role and mission. Hence, the heuristics of learning for policy makers can be more or less policy-oriented, i.e., intended to work towards effective policies, or power-oriented, i.e., oriented toward keeping one’s political influence (Trein & Vagionaki 2022). An extreme effect of contentious issues, however, can be that politicians renounce to closely oversee the implementation of the policy because of its sensitiveness, thus shifting the responsibility to policy implementers, such as in the case of tobacco control in workplaces other than in the hospitality sector (Mavrot & Hadorn 2021). Micro-level research to refine our understanding of how policy implementers cope with political pressure and the related effects on policy outcomes is still required (Sager & Hinterleitner 2022).

On the other hand, politicization can happen directly at the level of policy implementers and policy targets. In a fine-grained analysis of the anticipations of the policy clientele and policy implementers, Diane E. Schmidt (2002) shows that the actions of these two players are strongly influenced by the political context. Analyzing the implementation of labor regulation policies in the United States, she examines how worker unions and employers’ unions (i.e., policy clientele) adjust their behavior to the perceived likelihood of winning litigation cases they bring to the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) (i.e., the policy implementer), depending on whether the majority at the national level is Democrat or Republican and on the political context at the regional level. Policy clientele is found to strategically react to political shifts, as reflected in the changing number of appeals filed by workers’ unions and employers. Similarly, the regional staffs of the National Board are responsive to several variables, including the partisan one, which weigh on how they handle local investigations, and consequently on the final acceptance and dismissal rate of, respectively, workers’ and employers’ cases. Interestingly, the adjustments in the behavior of the NLRB’s clientele and staff behavior are more related to mutual expectations regarding the partisan variable than to direct political control (for an analysis of the mutual adjustments of all actors involved in the NLRB’s procedures, see also Moe 1985). This case shows how partisanship might influence policy implementation through the strong conceptions it conveys as a core dimension of political life.

Through their implementation activities, notably at the street level, public servants can also directly or indirectly contribute to the politicization of political issues (delivery level). This can for instance be the case when they emerge as “policy entrepreneurs” pushing for specific policy developments (Lavee & Cohen 2019, also see chapter Cohen in this book) and even establishing alliances with politicians to promote reforms in contentious policy areas (Mavrot 2023). In other situations, bureaucrats are not the source of politicization but react to it—for instance in the case of strong media pressure—by adapting their implementation practice to make it less prone to blames (Hinterleitner & Wittwer 2022). In both cases, policy implementation is likely to be affected and politicization influences the subsequent developments in the policy field. Finally, the targets or the stakeholders of a policy also constitute potential sources of politicization (reception level). At the example of agri-food policies in Europe, activists and advocacy groups can strategically attempt to politicize a policy to gain a seat at the table in policy areas characterized by strong barriers to access in the name of their complexity and technicality. These politicization mechanisms can happen around specific regulation and implementation activities, like, for instance, trade conflicts or authorization-granting activities (e.g., for glyphosate). In this context, politicization makes it possible to reopen the debate at a society level, and ultimately to contribute to policy change (Feindt et al., 2021; Tosun & Varone, 2020).

In this chapter, we have defined the notions of controversy and of politicization before reviewing how various policy analysis theoretical frameworks have understood implementation controversies. For illustrative purposes, we presented concrete examples of studies for each of the addressed theoretical approaches. Some of these studies examine policy implementation from a micro perspective by analyzing the interaction between political principals, implementers, and their targets through the delivery process. Others adopt a broader perspective on how longer phases of implementation have a feedback effect on policy debates. This overview shows that the classical policy analysis paradigms have much to bring to the study of policy implementation. Networks bring policy players together, institutions set structuring rules, instruments are non-neutral vectors of public policy, and ideas contribute to make sense of the policy process that is made of various streams. All these forces intervene in policy formulation as well as in policy implementation. The chapter then provided an overview of studies that focus on politicization processes during implementation and distinguished politicization at the political, the delivery, and the reception levels. This overview is not a systematic review of the literature on controversies and politicization in policy implementation. It is aimed at showing the importance of controversies and dispute in policy implementation activities in the real world, as well as their interest for policy analysis.

Discussion and Conclusion: Toward the Inclusion of the Conflictual Dimension of Implementation in Policy Analysis

Conflicts around policies do not end with policy formulation. This observation could be overlooked, because controversies happening in the agenda-setting and policy formulation phases are particularly salient moments of the public debate. However, policy implementation is the real-world concretization of policies. Through implementation, abstract policy programs meet their target on the ground, which is likely to (re)open the debate on collective choices. Hence, there is more to policy implementation than the degree of compliance of bureaucrats with political orders, or of target-groups with policies. Implementation brings society back into the debate, a process that does not end at the parliaments' door. In this sense, it is valuable for policy analysis to examine how implementation (re)opens the discussion around policies. First, implementation directly involves a whole range of actors whose interests are affected by a policy (e.g., private players, interest groups, citizens), bringing about new opportunities for strategic moves and confrontations. Second, even if agenda setting, policy formulation, and policy implementation are often depicted as different phases of the policy cycle for clarity's sake, policy controversies are illustrative of the fundamental intricacy between them and of their constant feedback loops. Third, policy implementation shows the close interrelations between policy-makers—formally in charge of the formulation—and policy implementers responsible of the implementation. Politicians have an elective mandate related to democratic representation. Bureaucrats have a public service mission related to their legal role in the government. Bureaucratic action relates to a general “public accountability” that includes political, administrative, organizational, and professional accountability (Meijer and Bovens, 2005, cited in Hupe and Hill 2007). Bureaucrats might also experience implementation dilemma related to accountability relations that fall within the scope of a “political-ideological accountability” (i.e., acting in line with one's political, ideological, or ethical principles), potentially leading to divergence with the political orders (Thomann et al. 2023). All these types of accountabilities are engaged when implementing a policy. Thus, bureaucratic action opens different fronts to policy disputes that can trickle back to politicians and bring about new or old debates.

There are promising research paths around these questions. Implementation controversies can relate to previous debates already existing during policy formulation, but also give rise to new

contestations. A closer look at these two scenarios could be revealing of distinctive configurations of policy debates and tell us more about the way policy controversies' paths shape policy change at the society level. In this sense, research on policy formulation and policy implementation could strongly feed each other, which would contribute to closing the gap between the sociology of public problems and policy analysis (see chapter of Neveu in this book). The sociology of public problems has developed a thorough understanding of the dynamics of public controversies, including the role of the media, interest groups, governmental agencies, and experts (Gusfield 1981). So have the policy analyses of agenda-setting and policy formulation, in a perspective more focused on political debates. Capitalizing on this knowledge, it would be enlightening to further consider how controversies influence implementation and how implementation influences controversies. More generally, a stronger connection of implementation studies with established theories of the policy process would constitute a fruitful path for future research (see chapter of Buzogány & Pülzl in this book). The traditional explanatory factors relied upon in policy analysis—e.g., ideas, institutions, networks, instruments, streams—can shed light on the analysis of implementation controversies. Finally, the analysis could distinguish between various types of implementation controversies, for instance, with regard to their objectives, their duration, their protagonists (what kind of policy implementers and policy targets are involved), or their content (concerned dimensions such as morality, distributive aspects, command and control issues, non-intended effects), to identify various patterns of contentious implementation processes. Such a research agenda could also distinguish distinct controversy paths with regard to whether the controversy is a prolongation of policy-formulation disputes, or brought about by the implementation itself, be it by the politicians, the delivery agents, stakeholders or the recipients of the policy.

Regardless of which theoretical perspective controversies are analyzed from, they are a fascinating entry point to the analysis of policy implementation. They reflect a series of crucial processes happening at the interface of political authorities, implementers, and the broader public. They reveal conflicting views on the social world that can (re)emerge even after a political agreement has been found during policy formulation. Given the importance attached to change in policy analysis, implementation disputes and controversies undoubtedly deserve further analytical attention.

References

- Bach, T., & Wegrich, K. (2020). Politicians and Bureaucrats in Executive Government. In R. B. Andeweg, R. Elgie, L. Helms, J. Kaarbo, & F. Müller-Rommel (Eds.). *The Oxford Handbook of Political Executives* (p. 524–546). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Barthe, Y. (2010). Cause politique et « politique des causes ». La mobilisation des vétérans des essais nucléaires français. *Politix*, 91, 77-102.
- Bolgherini, S., & Lippi, A. (2022). Politicization without institutionalization: relations between State and Regions in crisis governance. *Contemporary Italian Politics*, 14(2), 224-240.
- Buton, F. (2009). Comment les mouvements sociaux s'imposent face aux experts. Fluidité des positions et mobilisation des émotions dans la lutte contre le sida en France. *Politique et Sociétés*, 28(1), 63–89.

- Buzogány, A., & Pülzl, H. (2023). Top-down and bottom-up implementation. In F. Sager, C. Mavrot, L. Keiser (Eds.). *Handbook of Policy Implementation*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.
- Cairney, P., Studlar, D. T., & Mamudu, H. M. (2012). *Global Tobacco Control. Power, Policy, Governance and Transfer*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Capano, G., & Howlett, M. (2020). The Knowns and Unknowns of Policy Instrument Analysis: Policy Tools and the Current Research Agenda on Policy Mixes. *SAGE Open*, 10(1).
- Cohen, N. (cross-reference). Moving Beyond Traditional Policy Implementation: Street-Level Bureaucrats' Policy Entrepreneurship. In F. Sager, C. Mavrot, & L. Keiser (Eds.). *Handbook of Policy Implementation (PAGES)*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.
- Engeli, I., Green-Pedersen, C., & Thorup Larsen, L. (2013). The puzzle of permissiveness: understanding policy processes concerning morality issues. *Journal of European Public Policy*, 20(3), 335-352.
- Feindt, P. H., Schwindenhammer, S., & Tosun, J. (2021). Politicization, Depoliticization and Policy Change: A Comparative Theoretical Perspective on Agri-food Policy. *Journal of Comparative Policy Analysis: Research and Practice*, 23(5-6), 509-525.
- Gasulla, Ó., Bel, G., & Mazaira-Font, F. A. (2022). Ideology, political polarisation and agility of policy responses: was weak executive federalism a curse or a blessing for COVID-19 management in the USA?. *Cambridge Journal of Regions, Economy and Society*, rsac033, <https://doi.org/10.1093/cjres/rsac033>
- Gusfield, J. R. (1981). *The Culture of Public Problems: Drinking-Driving and the Symbolic Order*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Halpern, C. (2010). Governing Despite its Instruments? Instrumentation in EU Environmental Policy. *West European Politics*, 33(1), 39-57.
- Herweg, N., Zahariadis, N., & Zohlnhöfer, R. (2017). The Multiple Streams Framework: Foundations, Refinements, and Empirical Applications. In C. M. Weible, P. A. Sabatier (Eds.). *Theories of the Policy Process* (pp.17-54). New York: Routledge.
- Hinterleitner, M., & Sager, F. (2015). Avoiding Blame—A Comprehensive Framework and the Australian Home Insulation Program Fiasco. *Policy Studies Journal*, 43(1), 139-161.
- Hinterleitner, M., & Wittwer, S. (2022). Serving Quarreling Masters: Frontline Workers and Policy Implementation under Pressure. *Governance*, early online: <https://doi.org/10.1111/gove.12692>.
- Howlett, M. (2019). Moving policy implementation theory forward: A multiple streams/critical juncture approach. *Public Policy and Administration*, 34(4), 405–430.
- Huber, J. D., & Shipan, C. R. (2002). *Deliberate Discretion? The Institutional Foundations of Bureaucratic Autonomy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hupe, P., & Hill, M. (2007). Street-level bureaucracy and public accountability. *Public Administration*, 85(2), 279-299.

- Hyland, A., Barnoya, J., & Corral, J. E. (2012). Smoke-free air policies: past, present and future. *Tobacco Control*, 21(2), 154-161.
- Infantino, F., Sredanovic, D. (Eds.) (2022). *Migration Control in Practice. Before and Within the Borders of the State*. Bruxelles: Editions de l'Université de Bruxelles.
- Jenkins-Smith, H. C., Nohrstedt, D., Weible, C. M., & Ingold, K. (2018). The advocacy coalition framework: An overview of the research program. In C. M. Weible & P. A. Sabatier (Eds.), *Theories of the policy process* (pp. 135–171). Routledge.
- Jenkins-Smith, H., & Sabatier, P. (1994). Evaluating the Advocacy Coalition Framework. *Journal of Public Policy*, 14(2), 175-203.
- Jones, M. D., McBeth, M. K., & Shanahan, E. A. (Eds.) (2022). *Narratives and the Policy Process: Applications of the Narrative Policy Framework*. Montana State University Library.
- Kingdon, J. W. (1984). *Agendas Alternatives and Public Policies*. Boston: Little, Brown & Co.
- Lagroye, J. (2003). *La politisation*. Paris: Belin.
- Lavee E., & Cohen, N. (2019). How street-level bureaucrats become policy entrepreneurs: The case of urban renewal. *Governance*, 32(3), 475– 492.
- Le Galès, P. (2011). Policy Instruments and Governance. In M. Bevir (Ed.). *The SAGE Handbook of Governance* (pp. 142-159). London: SAGE.
- Lewis, D. E. (2005). Staffing Alone: Unilateral Action and the Politicization of the Executive Office of the President, 1988-2004. *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, 35(3), 496-514.
- Mavrot, C. (2023). Bureaucratic Entrepreneurship and Morality Politics: Dividing Lines within the State. *European Journal of Political Research*, 62(2): 486-509.
- Mavrot, C., & Hadorn, S. (2023). When Politicians do not Care for the Policy: Street-level Compliance in Cross-Agency Contexts. *Public Policy & Administration*, 38(3), 267–286.
- Mayntz, R., & Scharpf, F. W. (1995). Der Ansatz des akteurzentrierten Institutionalismus. In R. Mayntz, & F.W. Scharpf (Eds.). *Gesellschaftliche Selbstregulung und politische Steuerung* (pp. 39–72). Frankfurt a. M.: Schriften des Max-Planck-Instituts für Gesellschaftsforschung, Köln 23.
- Meijer, A. J., & Bovens, M. A. P. (2005). Public Accountability in the Information Age. In V.J.J.M. Bekkers, & V.F.M. Homburg (Eds.), *The Information Ecology of E-Government* (pp. 171–82). Amsterdam: IOS Press.
- Mettler, S. (2011). *The Submerged State: How Invisible Government Policies Undermine American Democracy*. Chicago, London: The University of Chicago Press.
- Moe, T. M. (1985). Control and feedback in economic regulation: The case of the NLRB. *American Political Science Review*, 79(4), 1094-1116.
- Nam, A., Weible, C. M. & Park, K. (2022). Polarization and frames of advocacy coalitions in South Korea's nuclear energy policy. *Review of Policy Research*, 39(4), 387– 410.

- Neveu, E. (cross-reference). The Missing Link: turning Social Problems into Policies. In F. Sager, C. Mavrot, & L. Keiser (Eds.). *Handbook of Policy Implementation (PAGES)*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.
- Peters, B.G., & Pierre, J. (Eds.). (2004). *The Politicization of the Civil Service in Comparative Perspective: A Quest for Control*. London, New York: Routledge.
- Rennes, J. (2016). Les controverses politiques et leurs frontières. *Études de communication*, 47, 21-48.
- Rovner, J. (2013). Is Politicization Ever a Good Thing?. *Intelligence and National Security*, 28(1), 55-67.
- Sager, F., & Hinterleitner, M. (2022). The Politics of Policy Implementation. A Reassessment in More Conflictual Times. In A. Ladner, & F. Sager (Eds.), *Handbook on the Politics of Public Administration* (pp. 102-113). Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.
- Sances, M. W. (2023). Defund My Police? The Effect of George Floyd's Murder on Support for Local Police Budgets. *The Journal of Politics*, 85(3), 1156-1160.
- Scharpf, F. W. (2018 [1997]). *Games Real Actors Play: Actor-centered Institutionalism in Policy Research*. New York, London: Routledge.
- Schlauffer, C., Khaynatskaya, T., Pilkina, M., Loseva, V., & Rajhans, S. K. (2021). Problem complexity and narratives in Moscow's waste controversy. *European Policy Analysis*, 7(2), 303– 323.
- Schmidt, D. E. (2002). Politicization and Responsiveness in the Regional Offices of the NLRB. *The American Review of Public Administration*, 32(2), 188–215.
- Stout, K. E., & Stevens, B. (2000). The Case of the Failed Diversity Rule: A Multiple Streams Analysis. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 22(4), 341–355.
- Thomann, E., Maxia, J., & Ege, J. (2023). How street-level dilemmas and politics shape divergence: The accountability regimes framework. *Policy Studies Journal*, early online: <https://doi.org/10.1111/psj.12504>.
- Tosun, J., & Varone, F. (2020). Politicizing the use of glyphosate in Europe: Comparing policy issue linkage across advocacy organizations and countries. *Journal of Comparative Policy Analysis: Research and Practice*, 23(5-6), 1–18.
- Trein, P., & Vagionaki, T. (2022). Learning heuristics, issue salience and polarization in the policy process. *West European Politics*, 45(4), 906-929.
- Weaver, R. K. (1986). The Politics of Blame Avoidance. *Journal of Public Policy*, 6(4), 371–398.
- Weible, C. M., & Sabatier, P. A. (2006). A guide to the Advocacy coalition framework. In F. Fischer, G. J. Miller, & M. S. Sidney (Eds.). *Handbook of Public Policy Analysis. Theories, Politics, and Methods* (pp. 123-136). London: Routledge.

Zhang, N., & Rosenbloom, D. H. (cross-reference). Conflictual Policy Implementation. In F. Sager, C. Mavrot, & L. Keiser (Eds.). *Handbook of Policy Implementation (PAGES)*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.

Zohlnhöfer, R., & Rüb, F. W. (2016). Introduction. In R. Zohlnhöfer & F. W. Rüb (Eds.). *Decision-Making under Ambiguity and Time Constraints Assessing the Multiple-Streams Framework* (pp. 1-17). Colchester: ECPR Press.

Bio

Céline Mavrot is an Assistant Professor in health policy at the Institute of Social Sciences of the University of Lausanne. She specializes in comparative policy analysis, public health controversies and policy evaluation. She was a visiting scholar at the David Geffen School of Medicine, University of California – Los Angeles (UCLA) in 2020, and at the Yale University School of Public Health in 2021. Her latest research focuses on the COVID-19 crisis governance, expert policy advice in the fields of climate change and of health policies, as well as morality policies at the example of medical cannabis.