

PO977-40 Theories and Traditions in Public Policy

26/27

Department

Politics & International Studies

Level

Taught Postgraduate Level

Module leader

Kerem Öge

Credit value

40

Module duration

22 weeks

Assessment

Multiple

Study location

University of Warwick main campus, Coventry

Description

Introductory description

Public policy shapes how societies tackle challenges such as climate change, economic inequality, healthcare, education and AI. This module introduces you to the major theories and traditions that help us understand how policies are made, why some succeed while others fail, and how they can be improved.

But this is not just a module about abstract ideas. Alongside exploring classic and contemporary theories, you will apply them directly to real-world cases. Through discussions, games, debates, and applied tasks, you will see how these frameworks can be used to interpret policy decisions, explain outcomes, and think critically about the future of governance.

Together we will ask: What drives governments to act? How do ideas, institutions, and interests shape policies? Why do some policies persist even when they clearly do not work? And most importantly, how can theory help us better understand and engage with today's urgent policy debates?

Students in previous years have valued how the module blends theory with practice, giving them both a strong foundation in policy traditions and the tools to analyse cases they care about. If you want to sharpen your theoretical knowledge while developing applied skills for policy analysis, this

module is the right place to start.

Module aims

The principal aim of this module is to develop an advanced understanding of the key theories, concepts, and processes of public policy. It introduces students to major approaches for analysing how policies are shaped, implemented, evaluated, and changed across different political contexts.

The module also aims to develop students' ability to engage critically with competing perspectives in the public policy literature and to apply analytical frameworks to real world policy problems. In doing so, it strengthens skills in policy analysis, evidence use, and clear communication.

Outline syllabus

This is an indicative module outline only to give an indication of the sort of topics that may be covered. Actual sessions held may differ.

Term 1 (Foundational theoretical underpinnings, traditions and concepts)

Week 1: Introduction and contested public policy

Weeks 2 - 5: Foundations and Main Theoretical Perspectives

Weeks 7 - 9: Critical approaches: interpretivism, feminism and the study of framing

Week 10: Organised interests

Term 2 (modes of policy-making; policy cycle; international/global public policy)

Weeks 11 - 12: Modes of Policy-making: principal-agent dynamics, governance networks and multi-level governance

Weeks 13 - 17: Policy cycle: policy change, implementation, evaluation and complexity

Weeks 18 - 19: International/global public policy

Week 20: Conclusion

Learning outcomes

By the end of the module, students should be able to:

- Demonstrate in depth knowledge concerning different theoretical debates and their importance for thinking about public policy and governance
- Identify and comprehend and analyse different structures of governance and modes of policy making
- Analyse, compare and critically evaluate fundamental assumptions and arguments in the literature on governance and public policy

Indicative reading list

[Reading lists can be found in Talis](#)

Subject specific skills

(c) Cognitive Skills

- Construct and substantiate an argument
- The ability to devise a viable research essay topic in areas relevant to the module

(d) Subject-Specific/Professional Skills · Proficiency in using web-based documentation and databases · Students will improve their capacity to undertake further postgraduate study in political science and international relations

Transferable skills

(b) Key Skills · Written communication skills · Oral communication skills · Working with others · Problem solving · Information technology

Study

Study time

Type	Required
Seminars	18 sessions of 2 hours (9%)
Private study	344 hours (86%)
Assessment	20 hours (5%)
Total	400 hours

Private study description

tbc

Costs

No further costs have been identified for this module.

Assessment

You do not need to pass all assessment components to pass the module.

Assessment group A4

	Weighting	Study time	Eligible for self-certification
Assessed Essay 1	50%	10 hours	Yes (extension)

	Weighting	Study time	Eligible for self-certification
5,000-word essay			
Assessed Essay 2 5,000-word essay	50%	10 hours	Yes (extension)

Assessment group R

	Weighting	Study time	Eligible for self-certification
Assessed Essay 1 Same as the original	50%		Yes (extension)
Assessed Essay 2 Same as the original	50%		Yes (extension)

Feedback on assessment

Written feedback plus verbal explanation if needed.

Availability

Courses

This module is Core optional for:

- TPOS-M9PX Double MA in Global Governance (with University of Waterloo, Canada)
 - Year 1 of M9PX Global Governance Double MA (with University of Waterloo)
 - Year 1 of M96H Public Policy (Double Degree - Waterloo)
 - Year 2 of M9PX Global Governance Double MA (with University of Waterloo)
- TPOS-M9PV Double MA in Journalism, Politics and International Studies (with Monash University)
 - Year 1 of M9PV Journalism, Politics and International Studies Double Degree (with Monash University)
 - Year 1 of M94H Journalism, Politics and International Studies: Public Policy (Double Degree - Monash)
 - Year 2 of M9PV Journalism, Politics and International Studies Double Degree (with Monash University)
- TPOS-M9PW Double MA in Politics and International Service (with American University, Washington DC)
 - Year 1 of M9PW Politics and International Service Double MA (with American University)
 - Year 1 of M95H Politics and International Service: Public Policy (Double Degree - AU)
 - Year 2 of M9PW Politics and International Service Double MA (with American

University)

- Year 1 of TPOS-M9PE Double MA in Politics and International Studies (with NTU Singapore)
- TPOS-M9PP Double MA in Politics and International Studies (with Universität Konstanz, Germany)
 - Year 1 of M92H Public Policy (Double Degree - Konstanz)
 - Year 2 of M92H Public Policy (Double Degree - Konstanz)
- Year 1 of TPOS-M9PF Postgraduate Taught Public Policy

This module is Optional for:

- Year 2 of TPOS-M9PX Double MA in Global Governance (with University of Waterloo, Canada)
- Year 1 of TPOS-M9PP Double MA in Politics and International Studies (with Universität Konstanz, Germany)
- Year 1 of TPOS-M9PT MA in International Development
- Year 1 of TPOS-M1PA MA in International Politics and Europe
- Year 1 of TPOS-M9Q1 Postgraduate Politics, Big Data and Quantitative Methods
- Year 1 of TPOS-M1P3 Postgraduate Taught International Political Economy
- Year 1 of TPOS-M1P8 Postgraduate Taught International Politics and East Asia
- Year 1 of TPOS-M9P9 Postgraduate Taught International Relations
- Year 1 of TPOS-M9PC Postgraduate Taught International Security
- Year 1 of TPOS-M9PS Postgraduate Taught Political and Legal Theory
- Year 1 of TPOS-M9PQ Postgraduate Taught United States Foreign Policy
- Year 1 of TPOS-M1PD Postgraduate Taught the Politics of Climate Change

This module is Option list A for:

- TPOS-M9PV Double MA in Journalism, Politics and International Studies (with Monash University)
 - Year 1 of M9PV Journalism, Politics and International Studies Double Degree (with Monash University)
 - Year 2 of M9PV Journalism, Politics and International Studies Double Degree (with Monash University)
- Year 2 of TPOS-M9PW Double MA in Politics and International Service (with American University, Washington DC)
- TPOS-M9PE Double MA in Politics and International Studies (with NTU Singapore)
 - Year 1 of M91F Globalisation and Development (Double Degree - NTU)
 - Year 1 of M91L International Development (Double Degree - NTU)
 - Year 1 of M91B International Political Economy (Double Degree - NTU)
 - Year 1 of M91C International Politics and East Asia (Double Degree - NTU)
 - Year 1 of M91D International Politics and Europe (Double Degree - NTU)
 - Year 1 of M91G International Security (Double Degree - NTU)
 - Year 2 of M91L International Development (Double Degree - NTU)
 - Year 2 of M91B International Political Economy (Double Degree - NTU)
 - Year 2 of M91C International Politics and East Asia (Double Degree - NTU)
- TPOS-M9PP Double MA in Politics and International Studies (with Universität Konstanz, Germany)

- Year 1 of M92L International Development (Double Degree - Konstanz)
- Year 1 of M92D International Politics and Europe (Double Degree - Konstanz)
- Year 1 of M92G International Security (Double Degree - Konstanz)
- Year 1 of M92K Political and Legal Theory (Double Degree - Konstanz)
- Year 1 of M92J United States Foreign Policy (Double Degree - Konstanz)
- Year 2 of M92B International Political Economy (Double Degree - Konstanz)
- Year 2 of M92C International Politics and East Asia (Double Degree - Konstanz)
- Year 2 of M92D International Politics and Europe (Double Degree - Konstanz)
- Year 2 of M92E International Relations (Double Degree - Konstanz)
- Year 2 of M92G International Security (Double Degree - Konstanz)
- Year 2 of M92K Political and Legal Theory (Double Degree - Konstanz)
- Year 2 of TPOS-M9PT MA in International Development
- Year 1 of TPOS-M9Q1 Postgraduate Politics, Big Data and Quantitative Methods
- Year 2 of TPOS-M1P8 Postgraduate Taught International Politics and East Asia
- Year 2 of TPOS-M9PS Postgraduate Taught Political and Legal Theory
- Year 2 of TPOS-M9PQ Postgraduate Taught United States Foreign Policy

This module is Option list B for:

- Year 1 of TPOS-M9PE Double MA in Politics and International Studies (with NTU Singapore)
- Year 1 of TPOS-M9PP Double MA in Politics and International Studies (with Universität Konstanz, Germany)
- Year 1 of TIMA-L981 Postgraduate Social Science Research

This module is Option list D for:

- Year 1 of TPOS-M9P9 Postgraduate Taught International Relations
- Year 1 of TPOS-M9PC Postgraduate Taught International Security
- Year 1 of TPOS-M9PQ Postgraduate Taught United States Foreign Policy