

## History matters: Role of time in policy making and analysis



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### ABSTRACT

Policies are greatly affected by the dynamic social and political environment in which they are made and implemented. The effects on policies are analysed based on the events that take place around the formulation and implementation of the policy and different political and social impacts are often discernible. The impact on policies is due to the change in “context” and “time” in which the policies are formed and implemented. There exist several independent variables that interact with each other and bring about the changes in policies and their outcome, in this paper these variables are considered as the Temporal aspects. The temporal aspects involved in the process of policy analysis simplify the understanding of the policy formulation and the outcomes as the complexity of the process cannot be simplified by a superficial linear follow-up of the events but has to weigh in the temporal aspects that are involved.

### KEY WORDS

Temporal, Comparative Policy Analysis, Time, Context, Causal Mechanism, Temporality

### INTRODUCTION

Time has been argued to be a vital component for comparative policy analysis and policymaking, which gets often ignored (Pierson, 2004),

but the fundamental argument of “History Matters”, upon which the claim mentioned above originates, is deceptively complex and simultaneously valuable. The complexity is majorly due to the different independent variables of time (temporal aspects) and how they interact to influence the causes and outcomes and the nature in which the historical, political, social and economic events unfold (Pierson, 2004, p.6). Considering time as a dimension in the analysis of policymaking expands our understanding of the role of social changes, political mobilisation, policy feedback effects and path dependence by placing them in a rational order in the timeline for policy analysis (Bonoli, 2007, p.497) which gives us a comprehensive knowledge of the complex social dynamics (Pierson, 2000, p.72). Time does not play a direct cause but acts as a temporal context that influences the input and output of the policy. This paper shall discuss different temporal aspects that play a crucial role in comparative policy analysis with policy examples to make it more comprehensible.

### TIME AND ITS RELEVANCE IN COMPARATIVE POLICY ANALYSIS

The major discussion around the importance of time in the political and social sciences has been around the causes and the outcomes of events. These causes and the outcomes have been analysed using different methods as Anna

Grzymala-Busse employs the analysis of Causal mechanisms and processes to support her findings on how temporality is the way to a better historical explanation, and Pierson studies the transition from causes to outcomes based on the observation of events involved and considers social mechanism (Pierson, 2004, p.6). Though they use different mechanisms, the observation made by both of them is based on the 'change' from cause to an output of an event, which is analysed for the impact different temporal aspects have on it. The causes and the outcomes both exhibit strong temporal dimensions when we explore how the causal events are unfolding and use the same analysis for the outcomes (Pierson, 2004, p.167).

Considering time as a dimension adds depth to the analysis of policies as time is not a direct cause, but various temporal aspects act as a context around which the event is unfolding. Even when we analyse a policy or event on a timeline but devoid of the impacts caused by the temporal aspects on the outcome and the causes, the observation might not capture the major cause behind the policy or the event and remain focused on apparent events close to the change. For comparative policy analysis, aspects like the periodisation and "infinite regress" are of crucial importance when drawing a cross-national analysis or analysing a policy taking into account the part events; the timing of major events like democratisation, industrialisation, demographic changes and other social and political changes might have an influence on the policy so the period of analysis (periodisation) even though same periods, might not yield reliable observations (Castles, 1995). Infinite regress is also one of the aspects that is important to have a better analysis of policy as the general analysis, either cross-national or as a case analysis, is based on the identification of a critical juncture and, as Slater and Simons argue that after the identification of the critical juncture the critical antecedents should be identified as well so that the causal effects

narrow down the complexity for a simpler understanding of the background for comparative analysis and major causal event that led to the outcome under observation (Slater and Simons, 2010).

To further understand the role of time in the comparative policy analysis, we can also relate time to the theory of policy cycle, which explains the entire process of policy formulation and analysis as various stages, which initiates from Agenda Setting and end with policy evaluation and have different steps like consultation, decision making and implementation (Cairney, 2012) and temporal aspects like timing, events and sequences that can lead to path dependence can impact the policy cycle in several ways. From delays in the policy implementation to the frequency of re-evaluation, different temporal aspects can be easily seen affecting the policy at different stages (Grzymala-Busse, 2010 & Pierson, 2003). The discussion further shall be based upon the temporal aspects and the way in which they interact, impacting the causes and outcomes while also delineating the nature of changes in causes and the outcomes.

### **TEMPORAL ASPECTS THAT IMPACT THE INPUT AND OUTPUT OF THE POLICIES**

The temporal aspects either pose an individual impact or interact with the other aspects to affect the causes and outcomes. The different temporal aspects can create situations like path dependence and positive feedback effects, and also evident temporal aspects also help us understand the nature of change unfolding based on the speed it unfolds in. We shall look at these temporal aspects and relate them with the policies or changes to better understand them.

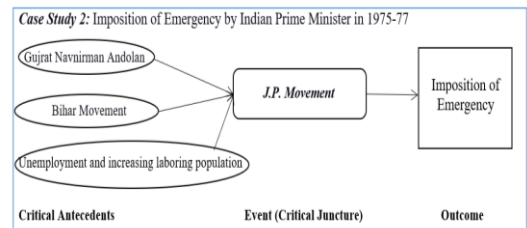
**Timing:** Timing is different from the other temporal aspects. When the other temporal aspects are about the trends and changes that lead to an event or the outcomes of an event based on a timeline, timing is the placement of

the event in the timeline (Grzymala-Busse, 2010). Timing leads to contextual effects (Grzymala-Busse, 2010) as the situation in which a decision is being made keeps on changing with the availability of the option to choose from changing continuously. From favourable conditions for a policy change to the introduction of a new policy before the next election cycle to consolidate a beneficiary vote bank, everything is related to the contextual aspects of society and politics, but the temporal aspect of the decision is what makes a policy more successful and also helps us to analyse the major cause behind it (Bonoli, 2007). The options available to the decision-maker keep on changing, and at times not taking a decision on time is a decision in itself and is done paying due attention to timing.

**Case Study 1:** In India, in response to the hardships caused by the long stretched lockdown and the financial burden it caused during the Covid-19 pandemic in the year 2020-21, the Indian government introduced a free ration scheme and direct cash benefits to the most vulnerable communities in the country which was expected to end in November 2021 but following the elections to the five states in January 2022 the ruling dispensation evaluated the policy and extended it until March 2022. The extension helped the government win four out of five states as the beneficiaries of the policy turned out to be a consolidated vote bank for them (Service, 2022). This is how the timing of a decision informs us of the causes for policy change, as in such a scenario, it's more of a context.

**Event:** Events have been considered to be the central point around which the causes and the outcomes have been analysed, and so have been identified as critical juncture as well in order for considering a rational period (periodisation and infinite regress) to analyse a policy considering the historical context it was made in. The other temporal aspects influence the

trend in which the causes and outcomes unfold, but an event as a temporal aspect can both open an opportunity for a new policy to be made and be the base for the evaluation of the policy for the causes that led to it. When affected by other temporal aspects like sequence, frequency and timing, events can yield different impacts on the causes and outcomes (Pierson, 2000). Events also determine the possibility of future actions in the timeline, creating path dependence or positive feedback.



Source: (Devasahayam,2012)

**Note:** The above figure is graphical representation of the reasons that led masses to join the J.P. movement which was against the policies of then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and she responded to it by imposing the laws of emergency revoking the Fundamental rights of citizens This is how an event as an aggregate of several antecedents partial causes lead to an outcome.

**Path Dependence due to past events:** Path dependence or positive feedback is based on the belief that "*History is remembered*" (Pierson,2000, p.75). The events that happened in the past have the potential to keep on affecting the policy domain in the future without recurring, as evident from the concept of "*Historical Causation*" by Arthur Stinchcombe quoted by Pierson (Pierson, 2003, p.195 & Mahoney, 2000).

**Sequence:** The comparative analysis of history relies on understanding the sequence in which the events unfold over time; this is evident from Grzymala-Busse's understanding of the sequence in the temporal aspect, as she also quotes Mahoney and Rueschmeyer (Grzymala-

Busse,2010,p.1274). The sequence in which the things happen incredibly impacts the outcome of the policies; these events can be historical or maybe just before the policy implementation. The ordering of the events is also one of the causal reasons for path dependence (Pierson, 2000, p.92). To understand the different outcomes caused by the same events in two cases, the sequence of the events can be beneficial. Technological advancements, a demographic shift, a revolution or any event that might have eased the policy path forward, if it happens after the implementation, might lead to different outcomes.

#### *Case Study 3: Demonitisation in India 2016*

In 2016 the Government of India took an astonishing decision to demonetise the 500 and 1000 denomination currency notes; the step was taken to control the increasing black economy in-country and address the issue of the counterfeit currency. But the sequence in which the government's actions happened created chaos in the nation. The two major ill-ordered steps the government took that led to the implementation failure were printing new currency and being prepared for the role out of policy. Once the old currency was demonetised on 8th November 2016, there was no way of getting any exchange until the next three days when the atm machines started providing a limited amount of cash in just the new 2000 denomination. This was majorly due to a shortage of new currency as only a small amount of currency in 2000 denomination was printed, and the delays were aggravated as the atm machines were not customised for dispensing the new currency. The sequence that should have been printing money and customising the banks and ATMs for such an important policy was utterly randomised (Arun & Punj, 2018).

**Duration:** Duration is the time between the beginning and end of an event. It is important for understanding the critical junctures we need for periodisation for comparative analysis and

also the causal impact the critical juncture poses (Grzymala-Busse,2010, p.1278). In order to understand it in terms of policies, duration is the time being taken to implement a policy in the entirety of the goals that the policy was made to achieve or the service it was made to offer. The policy domain is dynamic, and the circumstances in which the policy was begun to be made keep on changing(Cairney, 2012), so the policy should not take a really long time to implement so as the returns from it are partial or not received at all.

#### *Case Study 4: Lokpal in India*

In 2013 after a massive protest named India Against Corruption, the incumbent government finally agreed to establish a body comprising four retired judicial members and four non-judicial named Lokpal, which looked into the corruption allegations being levelled against the political and executive at national levels. But even after clearing the Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act in 2013, it took the next six years to appoint the members in 2019. And this does not mean that the Lokpal started performing; since then, it is still receiving the same levels of complaints and has not been able to deliver any of the expected results and further changes to the policy to fight corruption are being advised (ThePrint, 2022 & Complaints received by Lokpal do not indicate decreasing trend, says government, 2022).

#### **TEMPO (SPEED AND ACCELERATION)**

Tempo is the speed at which a policy or event is being unfolded, so it is the aspect that impacts the duration (Grzymala-Busse,2010, p.1282). The policy might be implemented in a short time or may take forever; this is what shall determine the tempo of the policy and so can be the outcomes of the policy as well. The policy outcomes can take longer to be evident enough to be analysed, and this can be understood through Pierson's work on the speed of changes and the outcomes they yield. The

causes and the outcomes might unfold at a different tempo, and this can be due to several observed effects like the Threshold effect, cumulative causal effect or long causal chains that take time to unfold (Pierson, 2003, p.181) and the outcomes can be based on the same cumulative effects. A lot depends on the tempo when implementing a policy, as, at a faster pace, the policy might depend on the available resources, implementing infrastructure and knowledge.

*Case Study 5:* The vaccination policy in India during the Covid-19 pandemic.

In response to the covid-19 pandemic, when faced with a stupendous number of daily cases of covid -19 patients due to the huge population, India implemented the Covid-19 vaccination policy in January 2021 with the aim of vaccinating 300 million people by August 2021. The policy was in response to the moral panic created due to the increasing number of infections and the rising death toll due to the infection, and vaccination was the only way out of this situation. By July 2021, only 9.82 million people got fully vaccinated, which means they got two doses of vaccine, and 325 million were partially vaccinated with a single dose. This had several changes, from changing the recommended time gap between the two doses, the precautions to take, etc. This shows how the tempo of how fast a policy gets rolled out impacts the outcomes of the policy and gives more information about the policy (Rackimuthu et al., 2021).

**Frequency:** Frequency is the occurrence of an event in a given duration, and frequency is also related to the tempo (Grzymala-Busse, 2010, p.1278). Keeping policy analysis in perspective, the frequency can be the how often are the policies being reviewed or amended. The frequency of such events in comparative policy analysis gives a better understanding of the difference between the cases among which the comparison is being drawn or the reason for the performance of a policy. With a higher

frequency of review and amendments, the policies can better adapt to the environment they are implemented in, as the policy domain is dynamic and prone to changes (Cairney, 2012).

*Case Study 6:* The Indian Defense Policy

The last review committee formed in India for the defence was in 1999, and the committee was Kargil Review Committee. There have been several minor changes in the system since then, such as the introduction of the One Rank One Pension policy for the defence personnel, the appointment of the Chief of Defence Staff to cultivate better coordination between the three forces and other minor changes but the need for a complete review of the defence policy has been realised after several clashes at the Line of Actual Control with the Chinese troops occurred in recent years (Service, 2021). There is also a constant tussle between the executive in the defence ministry and the personnel of the defence forces based on the administration. A timely review of the policies in accordance to the changing scenario might help the policy better serve its purpose.

**Time Horizons:** When related to the policy analysis, time horizons are mainly based on understanding the political aspect of policymaking involving the government and the opposition keeping in mind the electoral cycle (Clasen, 2022). The policies are highly vulnerable to being affected by the electoral prospects of the policymaker as the decisions they take are highly dependent on the effects the decision might have on their re-election prospects (SCHMIDT, 1996, p.167). Thus, the time horizons are considered an important temporal aspect for policymaking and analysis. The policymaker keeps the time horizon in mind to avoid any adversities that the decision might portray, and the analyst understands the time horizon to get a better view of the reason behind it.

*Case Study 7:* Revoking the Farm Bills (Agriculture Act 2020) in India.



In 2020 the government of India cleared the Agriculture Bill, which consisted of several reforms in the agriculture, three of which were: the Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act, 2020, Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement of Price Assurance, Farm Services Act, 2020, and the Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act, 2020 (Curtis, 2021). The three acts received an outrageous protest from the side of the farmed unions, and the protest lasted for around more than a year. The government stayed intransigent towards the protest, which saw the death of more than 700 farmers due to various reasons during the protest, but the government stayed unmoved on its reforms. But towards the end of 2021, the government finally repealed the act completely; this was done keeping in mind the elections to five states that were to take place in January 2022 (The Indian Express, 2021). The government's decision to retract the agriculture act delineates how important the time horizon is and how can it manipulate the policy. The government's decision to repeal the agriculture Act cannot be analysed unless the true reason behind it is understood.

## CONCLUSION

The importance of time in the comparative policy analysis can be realised through the arguments of the pioneering researchers like Mahoney, Pierson and Bonoli who explain how the Historical analysis of the events and the nature in which they unfold is important and adding time as a dimension to the analysis helps in achieving a much-sophisticated observation. We have discussed the several temporal aspects and the way they interact with each other impacting the causes and the outcomes of any event or policy. The case studies we used to discuss the different temporal aspects, strengthens our claim that time is a vital component for comparative policy analysis.

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