



## **Policy Brief # PB-103-2025**

July 30<sup>th</sup>, 2025

# **Dilemma of Public Policy and Administration**

**Mehr un Nissa**  
**Research Intern**



## **Dilemma of Public Policy and Administration**

**by**

**Mehr un Nissa**

### **Abstract**

The dilemma of public policy and its administration lies in the governance and intention of both stages. Public policy and public administration have one crucial element in common –the public, which seems to be lost somewhere in the background of Pakistan’s policy making cycle. The intention of both the procedures is, and ought to be, the public. Policy cycle serves as the foundation of these processes and this foundation in Pakistan’s case is faulty that results in gaps and lags in the execution stage. The lack of proper and bottom level public participation makes the say of government, investors, and technocrats weigh more than what is actually needed or for whom the policy is being formulated –essentially stripping the citizens of their right and power of decision making. Policies ought to be public led with the government and technocratic parties as a support along the way. Moreover, the political will, instability, weak institutions, absence of good governance and political self-interest make the administrative part of that formulated policy even more challenging. This leads to the unmet goals and benchmarks. The dilemma of this theory and praxis cannot be eradicated completely but efforts and measures in the right direction with the right intention can help navigate this paradox more efficiently and effectively –elaborated as a series of steps.

## Introduction

The simplest way to define public policy are the choices or decisions a government makes -what it chooses to do and not to do, what to react on, when, and how. This is how Thomas Dye defines it and more or less every other scholar. Also as the efficient way to prioritise and allocate for the relief of masses on need basis. These government activities are meant to influence the lives of citizens in one way or another. Ever since the organisation of society there have been ruling parties or governments and their policies, a tool for their governance. (Patton, 2023; Salman et al., 2016). A question that arises here is, when the term says ‘Public’ policy, should it be not defined as the public choice of what to do and not do?

Policies have continually adapted to the changing needs of civilization. In earlier eras, they were driven by survival instincts, expansionist ambitions, authoritarian aims, public pressures, and rulers’ own self-interests—often in response to internal or external threats, as seen in medieval Europe and the British, Mongol, and Chinese empires. Today, under nation-states and democratic principles, policy formation and assessment draw on public demand and feedback, stakeholder participation, foreign investment, global dynamics, alliances, trade, and economic considerations. The art of putting these policies into practice is known as public administration.

Public administration—the art of turning political decisions into services for citizens—has existed, like policy, since civilization began but was first formally framed by Woodrow Wilson in his 1887 essay “The Study of Administration.” Traditional Public Administration, inspired by Max Weber’s bureaucracy, relied on rigid hierarchies where officials simply executed policies set by political leaders. In response to its growing sluggishness, New Public Management arose in the late 20th century, borrowing private-sector practices to boost innovation, efficiency, and accountability by treating citizens as customers. By the early 2000s, New Public Governance added a pluralistic, networked layer—steering rather than rowing—through collaborative partnerships between government, business, and third-sector organizations. (Cape Peninsula University of Technology, South Africa. et al., 2023). Both NPM and NPG complement, as in adoption of private-sector strategies, and in some instances might oppose each other, as in the pluralistic nature of governance in NPG. The shift towards

NPM and NPG is the shift of governance from its *rowing* role, in the Traditional rigid model, to a *steering* one.

## **Nexus Between the Public Policy and Administration**

Thus, both, Public Policy and Public Administration, aim to serve the public or masses being governed. Public policy is the problem raised or a theory built for the betterment of the society by the government with the citizen's needs as the centre of it, and Public Administration is the praxis of that policy whose effectiveness, efficiency and outcome depends on the governance i.e. how that praxis is approached/ executed.

## **Dilemma of Public Policy and Public Administration and the Factors Contributing to it –Pakistan's Context**

For an outcome to be sustainable in the long run, the foundations ought to be strong. In the nexus of public policy and administration, the *policy cycle* serves as the foundational brick of the envisioned façade. It also depends on who is envisioning it, and for what purpose. The term 'public policy' suggests that 'who' here is the public – the party being influenced directly or indirectly, and the ones who should be driving the decision. Why? Because the need, intention, and purpose of a public policy is to address and solve their grievances and progressive works.

Speaking for Pakistan, its policies lack in-depth *participation* which results in a consultative approach rather than participative, which demands the active inclusion of stakeholders in the decision-making process, rather than a surface level input and feedback. This portrays a picture of *co-optation* in the cycle. This is to say that the sway of stakeholders like investors and administrative departments is much more than the need of the public. They are often technocrat or government led, when in actual they should be the supporting pillars, and the public ought to be leading that policy. Additionally, the public representatives or union leaders in the 'participative' approach are often those with influence, resources and/or privilege, that is, the elite of that particular group –business class, agriculture, medical professionals, and so on. They are not aware or cannot fathom the needs of the bottom of the chain –what their hurdles and needs are, and thus they are overlooked. This echoes Milovan Djilas's 'New Class System' –the administrative class, with privileges and an illusion to be

serving the public when in effect it is only that, an illusion that serves the elite and privileged because the *decision makers* are them, not the public.

In addition to this, the sugar crisis 2025 highlights another hiccup in policing sector. The lack of *need assessment*, for exports in balance with the production and local consumption of sugar before the approval of exports creating its shortage and thus, high rates resulted with the end consumer bearing the burden. Tax policies are meant to be facilitative for the common masses, rather certain groups, as business, trader and real estate community, lobby them into their own favour, leaving the general public to bear the brunt of harsher tax policies. Formation of Overseas Pakistanis' Commission (OPC) paint the picture of utopian policy making, as policies need to be based on realistic grounds. Institutions with overly lengthy complicated, corrupt and exploitable civil law and administrative processes create gaps and need for ADR (Alternative Dispute Resolution) organisations that bypass such lengthy procedures, as is OPC –a grievance redressal platform for overseas Pakistanis' (mostly) property and commercial dispute cases. Where it becomes a productive step to cover those administrative and judicial loopholes online, it also creates extra burden on provincial capital. Similarly, Jirga system is also an informal form of ADR to socially bypass arduous legal processes. This points to the lack and need of need assessment, along with contextual capacity-based policy for stronger institutions. For this to happen institutional capacity, and political will of implementers, and their authority needs to be thoughtfully included in the cycle. The utopian idea of a policy always seems idyllic, but without regional context, capacity of tools of implementation, acceptance rate of public for change and innovation, and the proper need assessment, that idyllic policy will harm and waste resources instead of facilitating in the set policy agenda. This occurs due to the discrepancy between conceiving a problem and designing its policy which in turn hinders its implementation process and outcome.

Public policy needs *stability and a conducive environment* with the needed duration for it to work efficiently and show effective outcomes. Whereas, Pakistan's history is lined with political instability, policy reversals before their time, government dismissals before the end of their terms, and the back to back switch between democratic and dictatorial regimes (Jabeen et al., 2020; Salman et al., 2016). Pakistan is home to *diverse voices* with its rich culture and values, thanks to the several ethnicities residing on this land. This means the policy structures more than often are



linked, confusing, and/or intertwined because the problems are not straight forward and cannot be solved by a clear single solution.

For instance, the problem of water scarcity and distribution with looming climate crisis involves several regional, provincial, agricultural, economic, and cross border stakeholders. All of these issues are interdependent and cannot be solved without the other. These problems need to be satiated in all their individual complex demands and needs via collaborative governance, adaptive and proactive leadership, and systems thinking approach (Head & Alford, 2015). Thus, lack of detailed survey of the identified problems, operational strategies, ad hoc approach to band aid a wound at the eleventh hour pressure the bureaucratic structures into reactive policies instead of researched and forecasted proactive strategies.

Similarly, the National Water Policy 2018 is a victim of lack of operational structures and *institutional confusions* between the provincial and federal governments, especially post 18<sup>th</sup> amendment in the constitution of Pakistan (Mumtaz et al., 2020). This creates a hurdle for policy implementation. Polio still has a home in Pakistan due to this along with the resistance of the public. Policies fuelled by *self-interests* to gain voters are often ill placed in intention and misguided in their objective. Single National Curriculum policy aimed to level the educational knowledge base throughout the nation and provide uniform, quality, up-to-date education to every student, but the question is the gap found between a student of private school versus the student of a government school is actually of content or the teaching methodology? If teaching methodology is the actual need of the hour, then the SNC goal will never be achieved by the uniformity of educational content. Instead the target should be the hiring criteria of teachers, their eligibility, quarterly performance reviews, and up-to-date trainings along with practical learning, with theory, for the students so that the curriculum focuses on soft skill building with increased knowledge base instead of cramming information as is the case. This is also to mention the training practical learning frameworks provided by the program are in accordance with the infrastructure and institutional capacity at present.

A good policy execution is characterised by good *public service delivery* which is found to be dependent on the characteristics of *good governance* -especially greater accountability, rule of law, political will, corruption control, transparency, inclusivity, political stability and institutional strength. This is because effective governance is good resource management (Adejuwon, 2012; Cape Peninsula University of

Technology, South Africa. et al., 2023; Salman et al., 2016). Hence, it can be concluded that (good) governance is at the heart of Public Policy, its process and Public Administration for efficient and effective outcome.

### Suggested Directions for Reduction of this Dilemma

It is essential to be aware that paradoxes cannot be solved, but they definitely can be navigated and managed by thoughtful and realistic good governance. The dilemma cannot be fully eradicated, and so a compromise will be inevitable every now and then for every stakeholder. Some recommendations in that direction are as follows:

- **Policy Cycle Ought to be Public Led Instead of Technocrat Led:** Policies ought to be public led. They should be heard and their concerns understood properly to reach the bottom of the chain, via participative measures to make them a *decision maker* in the policy cycle, because those surviving every day would not care for innovation if their basic needs are not being fulfilled. In turn, it will also increase the sentiment of ownership. Then those decisions should be supported on different levels by the experts and government, making the next stage of implementation more effective and efficient, for a proper diagnosis is half the treatment. This step asks for a change or reform in the process of Pakistan's policy cycle.
- **Institutional Strength and Capacity:** This holds the key for the next step of implementation part. Institutional strength also lies in the *political will* and *capacity* of its implementers. All of this can be managed by keeping the policy innovative and modelled in a manner to utilise the context, available resources and capacity of the institution and its human resource, in the best possible way. Right human resource for the right position makes a vital element here for stronger competency. One more parameter to consider here is that the policies get supportive and favourable conditions and get to complete their timeframe for proper evaluation and outcomes. This is a crucial and challenging element for Pakistan due to its politically unstable environment, and no policy can succeed without political stability. This stability can be achieved by institutional strength when its authority is not influenced and/or contested by a political figure unjustly and measures against corruption are taken and concerned parties are made accountable –for magnanimity of punishment does not

matter, certainty of it is what matters. Whoever this certainty is against, it should not make a difference, for rule of law needs to prevail for a stable political ground.

- **Participative Policy Instead of Co-optive or Consultative Frameworks:** Taking input and insight of the bottom of the chain and then moving up from there will help get a clearer picture of what sector is lacking what and for which concerned group. This can be achieved by m-government framework. Developing a collaborative mobile government participation framework using grounded theory – Pakistan could benefit from indigenising the role of mobile government as is the Chinese model an exemplar and several instances from the West. This will be fruitful in reducing the gap between the government's service delivery and public participation, following the collaborative governance theory. When used effectively considering acceptance rate and accessibility of such service, it will help address community needs and diminish complexities of Pakistan's culture by constant and effective communication. (Chen et al., 2025; Valle-Cruz et al., 2020).

## Conclusion

Pakistan's policy making is in need of a policy shift to reduce the dilemma of public policy and administration: to a participative, responsive to the masses, proactive, innovative, inclusive and a contextualised approach that focuses on ensuring execution. Not a simple task. Easier said than done, but essential for this beloved land, Pakistan's, progression in the right direction.



## Bibliography

Adejuwon, K. D. (2012). The Dilemma of Accountability and Good Governance for Improved Public Service Delivery in Nigeria. *Africa's Public Service Delivery and Performance Review*, 1(3), 25. <https://doi.org/10.4102/apspdpr.v1i3.34>

Cape Peninsula University of Technology, South Africa., Barbier, L., & K Tengeh, R. (2023). Literature Review of Public Administration and Good Governance from 1890 to 2023. *Jurnal Transformativ*, 9(1), 43–65. <https://doi.org/10.21776/ub.transformative.2023.009.01.3>

Chen, T., Shang, T., Yan, R., & He, K. (2025). Developing a collaborative mobile government participation framework using grounded theory. *Government Information Quarterly*, 42(2), 102026. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.giq.2025.102026>

Head, B. W., & Alford, J. (2015). Wicked Problems: Implications for Public Policy and Management. *Administration & Society*, 47(6), 711–739. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0095399713481601>

Jabeen, P. D. N., Jadoon, P. D. Z. I., Mubashar, U.-F., & Salman, D. Y. (2020). Revisiting Public Policy Making Process and Strategies in Pakistan: A Governance Perspective. *South Asian Studies*, 31(2), Article 2. <http://111.68.103.26/journals/index.php/IJSAS/article/view/3058>

Mumtaz, M., Sumra, K., & Khan, K. (2020). National Water Policy of Pakistan: A Critical Analysis. *Journal of Managerial Sciences*, 14(4). <https://journals.qurtuba.edu.pk/ojs/index.php/jms/article/view/124>

Patton, M. Q. (2023). Public policy evaluation: Origins and evolution. In F. Varone, S. Jacob, & P. Bundi (Eds.), *Handbook of Public Policy Evaluation* (pp. 16–30). Edward Elgar Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781800884892.00008>

Salman, Y., Mubashar, U.-F., Jadoon, Z. I., & Jabeen, N. (2016). Revisiting Public Policy Making Process and Strategies in Pakistan: A Governance Perspective. *South Asian Studies*, 31(02), Article 02.

Valle-Cruz, D., Criado, J. I., Sandoval-Almazán, R., & Ruvalcaba-Gomez, E. A. (2020). Assessing the public policy-cycle framework in the age of artificial intelligence: From agenda-setting to policy evaluation. *Government Information Quarterly*, 37(4), 101509. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.giq.2020.101509>