

## Politics & Public Governance (PPG)

Contemporary politics and public governance tend to become complex as they need to respond to (a) the increasing diversity of citizens and society, (b) the multi-level and multi-actor nature of policy-making and implementation. Political, bureaucratic, private interests and individual citizens' spheres are increasingly fragmented but at the same time more intensively interacting and even overlapping, creating dynamics and tensions based on changing, competing logics. This complexity extends to the information and knowledge used in and produced by politics and public governance. Often, knowledge is conflicting and information is contested. By combining a political science and a public administration perspective, our research wants to understand the nature of contemporary politics and public governance, its causes, effects, and, ultimately, its democratic legitimacy.

To this end, the Politics & Public Governance research group studies political and public governance institutions, their evolution and how institutional mechanisms shape actors' scope of action, positions, decisions and behaviour. Hereto, the research group combines expertise from political science, public administration, policy studies as well as public law. Our research is focused on three axes.

The first research axis, which is labelled '**Diversity and equality in politics & public governance**', studies how different needs and interests are mobilised, recognized and represented in political and administrative decision-making, how groups organize to compete for influence, and how politics and governance (re-)produce equality and inequality. Focus is on how societal, political and administrative institutions and practices bring about intended and unintended inequality, discrimination and exclusion on the basis of social markers such as gender, ethnicity, disability and sexuality. Attention is given to how policies can be coordinated and integrated in order to respond to more diverse needs, but also how administrative routines and citizen state-interactions at the front-line can bring about and sustain inequality and exclusion.

The second research axis, called '**Knowledge and information in and through politics & public governance**', studies how politicians, policy-makers and public administrators make decisions. On the one hand there is the increasing use of indicator-based information in public decision making to make governing more evidence-based and technocratic. This indicator-based governance affects the positions of politicians, citizens, and civil servants and their relations. On the other hand and in contrast to this, non-technical, layman information is emphasized more and more in processes of co-creation and co-production. Often, technocratic and user/citizen-sourced information clash and give rise to the public contestation of policies. In this context, we also study how (future) policy-makers can learn to cope with complex decision-making environments and how such skills-teaching can be embedded in academic curricula.

The third research axis, called '**Politics & public governance in a European multi-layered and multi-actor context**' focuses on the horizontal and vertical complexity of contemporary politics and public governance. Supra-nationalization, decentralization and decades of administrative reforms have dispersed public authority into institutional constellations that are governed by combinations of hierarchy, market and networks. Boundaries between public, non-profit and private responsibility for public governance have blurred. Increasingly, parliaments, cabinets, administrations and agencies at EU, national, regional and local level as well as private actors have to collaborate when making and implementing policies, regulations and service delivery. We focus on how political and public governance actors and systems deal with the changing and often conflicting institutional logics (in terms of e.g. action strategies, organizational and legal changes). Also we study how interest groups

mobilize, organize and implement strategies to generate impact on decision-making and policies in complex multi-layered environments. Finally, this axis contains research on the effects of state-society relations within multilevel environments on the performance, innovation, accountability and legitimacy of the political and administrative systems.

### Theoretical and methodological diversity

The research group explicitly opts for **diversity in both theories and methods**. The complexity of contemporary politics and governance can only be grasped by applying different theoretical frameworks, encompassing, besides others, the different institutional schools. Moreover, the choice of methodological approaches is geared towards the specific research question at hand, and range from strict positivistic large-N analyses (survey) and experimental methods to comparative analysis (controlled case studies, QCA) to pure qualitative constructivist research (discourse analysis and ethnographic methodologies). Methodological innovation is considered important in terms of an openness to integrate new approaches (like automatic text analysis, advanced statistics, new experimental methods) in order to increase the validity of research findings.

### Scientific and societal impact:

We are doing research with a **clear social mission**. We value craftsmanship of setting up and doing high quality research with substantial **scientific impact** through PhD's, international publications in highly ranked outlets as well as international networks and research collaborations with clear added value. However, while technically being of an excellent nature, social science research should not lose sight of the fact that social sciences are about and for society. Therefore, our aim is to generate and valorise societally relevant, theory-based, and empirically grounded scientific knowledge. With this knowledge, we want to contribute to political and governance systems and practices which are more responsive to society and its diversity, more effective, and ultimately more legitimate. We aim to fuel both societal debate, as well as inspire policy makers, administrators and interest groups.

### How to achieve this?

In order to achieve this, we want to be a crucial player on a selective set of research topics by:

- Fostering an open and dynamic learning culture and a pleasant work atmosphere
- Attracting and training skilled research staff with a background in political science and public administration but also in other social sciences, law and economics.
- Pursuing theoretical and methodological diversity and innovation, allowing for positivist and constructivist research approaches as well as legal-normative analyses
- Building a solid support system for PhD researchers in order to combine high-quality research with a preparation for an academic or other high-level professional career
- Pursuing a balanced publication policy aimed at combining international scientific impact with societal and practitioner-oriented influence
- Acquiring basic and applied research funds from a diversified set of research funders, primarily focused on acquiring long term research projects allowing for PhDs and post-docs
- Fostering national and international collaborations with added value
- Emphasising valorisation of research results in the practitioner community and society by participation in public debates, advising policy makers, administrators and societal actors and other tools.