

# Dealing with the challenges of legitimacy, values, and politics in policy advice

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## Abstract

Policy advice has been the subject of ongoing research in the policy sciences as it raises fundamental issues about what constitutes policy knowledge, expertise, and their effects on policymaking. This introduction reviews the existing literature on the subject and introduces the themes motivating the articles in the issue. It highlights the need to consider several key subjects in the topic in the contemporary era: namely the challenge of legitimacy, that of values, and the challenge of politics. The papers in the issue shed light on the ongoing delegitimization of conventional knowledge providers, the problem of the normative basis of experts' advice, the increasing politicization of expertise in policymaking, and the relevance of political context in influencing not only the role of experts but also whether or not their advice is accepted and implemented. It is argued that these modern challenges, when not addressed, reinforce trends toward the inclusion of antidemocratic values and uninformed ideas in contemporary policymaking.

**Keywords:** policy advice, turbulent era, knowledge and policy process, policy expertise, politicization of science

## Speaking truth to power in the contemporary era

Policymaking is a collective process in which decision-makers deal with a wide range of topics and issues and in so doing rely heavily on the advice they receive from other actors. This advice concerns the important aspects of policymaking such as assessments of the nature and content of the problems decision-makers face and advice on the feasibility of the alternative courses of action from which they must choose. Even the most authoritarian and isolated dictators rely on some advice and guidance (even if, as some of the papers in this issue argue, in such regimes, this is often only for affirmation and self-justification) (Peters & Barker, 1993).

In both democratic and nondemocratic regimes, the provision of advice, or what Wildavsky (1979) called “speaking truth to power”, is often politically charged and may be heavily partisan. Such advice, for example, may deal directly with concerns around the potential electoral or partisan gains or losses from proposed courses of action. However, in other situations, the advice may be more technical or legal in nature, requiring specialized expertise and knowledge. Thus, some advice may deal with scientific

subjects such as the life cycle of tree-destroying insects or the half-life of radioactive elements and be relatively uncontroversial while other kinds of advice may deal more with more problematic aspects of the social sciences such as the description and analysis of criminal conduct or homeowner behavior. Moreover, such advice may originate from a variety of sources. It may be offered by carefully selected or self-nominated experts such as academics, lawyers, engineers, or civil servants, or any of a vast array of other subject specialists and interested parties active in society and policymaking circles (Maassen & Weingart, 2005). Or it may come more directly from the public in solicited or unsolicited forms.

Given the importance of these various forms of advice to problem definition, solution generation, decision-making, and implementation practices, the question of who exactly provides advice to whom, through which channels, who listens to it, when and why, and what ultimately is done with it have all been subjects of interest in the policy sciences for many years (Weiss, 1977, 1982, 1992; Wildavsky, 1979).

This subject is inherently problematic, and there is a long-lasting scholarly discussion, for example, about whether and how experts' knowledge offered to policymakers can be based on a separation between "is" and "ought" (Douglas, 2009; Gorski, 2013; Putnam, 2002; Reiss, 2008; Turner, 2014). The problematic separation between what is the reality (and the related causal dynamics) and what should be done according to the actual prevailing conception of right or wrong in society offers a further, powerful resource for those who, for different reasons, contest the legitimacy of experts (Christensen et al., 2023).

These kinds of epistemological and sociological issues have led to much research work in the policy sciences. Work has been done, for example, on the many specific kinds of organizations that have been specifically created to provide advice, such as think tanks and other similar nongovernmental entities, and also upon the vast repository of advice that exists in the civil service (Page, 2010). What kinds of advice these actors provide and what influence it has on decision-makers have also been the subjects of many studies, some very critical of the biases and blindspots of experts (Fischer, 1990), others more laudatory (Schudson, 2006). There are also many studies that highlight how different countries and levels of government rely more or less heavily on specific kinds of advice and specific kinds of advisors active in their policy advisory systems (Craft & Howlett, 2012; Halligan, 1995).

As a result of these studies, we know a lot about the role knowledge has played in policymaking in the past in terms of who does what and how, about the processes and structures through which advice is provided, and about the barriers and facilitators of effective advice (Capano & Malandrino, 2022). Yet, many questions remain about the generation and transmission of policy knowledge in the contemporary era. This includes subjects such as how policy advisory practices and structures differ between authoritarian and democratic regimes and between low- and high-capacity governments (Howlett, 2019), as well as more generic questions concerning how knowledge is defined and recognized in a turbulent and conflict-riddled era. These and other questions such as how contemporary trends such as heightened partisanship, the rise of social media, and resurgent populism have affected previously existing relationships and understandings of knowledge and policy remain at the forefront of research in the area (Brint, 1990; Perl et al., 2018; Stecula & Pickup, 2021; Stoker, 2018; Tella & Rotemberg, 2018).

## Ongoing challenges in the study of policy advice in a turbulent era

While it is recognized that who provides policy knowledge affects how it is received and the extent to which it is embodied in subsequent policy decisions, the exact processes and mechanisms through which this transfer occurs or not generally remain underinvestigated and poorly understood (Hannah et al., 2023; Howlett, 2023). Much of the existing empirical work on policy advice, for example, is concerned with "normal" policymaking in "normal" times under "normal" conditions in which reasonably stable policy regimes exist and the actions and relationships between decision-makers and their close advisors are seen as being broadly legitimate (Schreffler, 2010; Spruijt et al., 2014; Tamtik & Creso, 2012; van Helden et al., 2010). However, we no longer live in "normal" times, and the foundations of policy advice and policy advisory systems, as commonly understood, have been shaken due to the many political and policy challenges that decision-makers have been asked to deal with in recent years, which, among other things, have delegitimized or called into question both expert credential and what was often thought to be settled knowledge (Perl et al., 2018).

The current turbulent policy environment thus can be said to be characterized by high uncertainty and “volatility” (Ansell et al., 2017; Bennett & Lemoine, 2014), and challenges to knowledge/policy relationships due to political fragmentation and partisanship (Enders & Smallpage, 2018; Silva, 2017) and populism (Facchini & Melki, 2019) have raised many issues and concerns around the legitimacy of policy advice, the values it contains and promotes, and its epistemological claims. Advice in the contemporary world hence has a different status and nature from that of earlier eras, which, for example, centered on questions about the purported apolitical or neutral natures of what was thought to be overly technocratic advice (Fischer, 1990).

Not only do these contemporary changes and dynamics highlight the greater need for advice as governments strive to produce new policies or significantly redesign existing ones in the light of new concerns such as social equity or a re-emergent nationalism (Steinebach & Knill, 2017), but they also highlight the need for policy research to continue to reflect upon the constitutive, and intrinsically problematic, dimensions of the use and role of knowledge in policymaking in general. In other words, an era of system shock in which contestation and conflict surround policymaking in areas from new technologies to new ideologies and global pandemics calls for deeper consideration of the nature of policy-relevant knowledge and its role in the policy process (Hannah et al. 2023). The purpose of the essays in this special issue is to provide insights into these pressing concerns in exploring and understanding the contemporary dynamics and content of “speaking truth to power”.

The essays in this issue focus on three key constitutive dimensions of the current challenges to traditional conceptions and activities of policy knowledge transfer. These are the (contested) legitimacy of expertise, the (conflicting) values now commonly found in policy advice, and the different (politicized) interests behind its development and articulation.

These are key issues whose relevance has come to the fore in recent years as many of the conventional sources of knowledge have been challenged, ranging from attacks on the media and “fake news” to those on the public health “establishment” and scientific knowledge during the COVID-19 pandemic (Algan et al., 2021; Dohle et al., 2021; McKee & Stuckler, 2017).

These three challenges underline how traditional epistemological antinomies such as “knowledge” vs “ignorance”, for example, have been lost in recent years amidst extreme partisanship and the emergence of conspiracy theories in contemporary public discourse and in the increasingly bitter debates over topics in the sociology of knowledge such as the purported inescapability of historical, partisan, racial, gender, and ethnic biases in research of any kind (Hannah et al. 2023). Advice from authoritative groups and organizations that in previous eras might have been broadly trusted as impartial and evidence based is now often dismissed in many countries by many on both the left (Hattery et al., 2022) and the right (Hornsey, 2021) as irretrievably biased or self-interested, and actors and advisors often ignored in the past as unreliable or uninformed—such as bloggers, podcasters, influencers, and other media figures—have now emerged in many countries as key sources of policy advice.

These challenges are analytically distinguishable but are intrinsically interconnected. Together they can result in a kind of vicious circle of the increased trivialization of expertise and the elevation of often emotionally based opinion in its place. How and why this happens, and what can be done about it, are the subjects of the essays contained in this collection.

## The challenge of legitimacy

Legitimacy is an essential dimension of policymaking, but various policy actors possess it in different degrees. With respect to the role of expertise and experts, legitimacy is double-edged and directly affects both experts and their contribution to policymaking. That is, the legitimacy of experts is a pivotal intrinsic condition needed if it is to play a prominent role in policymaking, but it also has an extrinsic dimension that is difficult to predict and control.

That is, legitimacy affects the belief that something is “appropriate, proper, and just” (Tyler, 2006, p. 376), according to the values and practices of a community, and these values and practices, of course, do change over time. From this point of view, the intrinsic legitimacy of experts found in the past was based on the recognition of their greater epistemic authority and coupled with a belief in the objective and value-free nature of that knowledge. This was often useful to help guide policymakers’ choices in a way that is said to be better “for society as a whole” than more partisan or self-interested knowledge that

typically tends to benefit only some part or section of a community (Daston & Galison, 2007; Halligan, 1995).

This technocratic version of expert legitimacy, however, has always been questioned since policy-making is not a purely rational-optimal process but is undertaken by political actors characterized by bounded rationality, partisanship, and conflicts in ideas and values (Boswell, 2009; Cairney, 2016; Haas, 2004). Thus, the epistemic authority of experts is always open to challenge and needs to meet extrinsic criteria of legitimacy in specific contexts where different ideas, problems, and values interact with each other. As a result, “experts’ intrinsic legitimacy constantly needs constant extrinsic sociopolitical legitimation to remain relevant”.

This structural tension between epistemic authority and the sociopolitical context of policymaking can result in a continuing problem of (de) and (re)legitimation of expertise and expert-sanctioned knowledge in policymaking, especially when expert and popular opinion disagrees. The legitimacy of experts is thus a continuous process of contestation and justification with public opinion that shapes beliefs in its merits. These processes are pivotal issues for policymakers who may wish to achieve a sufficient degree of legitimation of their own choices through their match with the advice received from legitimate experts but commonly must do so in a contested environment of public and elite opinion. Consequently, the opponents of governments often attack the legitimacy of experts as a way to undermine the legitimacy of the government that relies on them, with potentially serious adverse consequences for the overall legitimacy of the entire knowledge system of society.

This omnipresent tension between the legitimacy of experts and the problem of political legitimation becomes critical in more turbulent times when it can prompt dramatic ruptures of the normal dialectic between experts’ legitimacy and system legitimation. This has been noted in the present era, where the legitimacy of experts is often under increasing attack through new means—such as social media—which allow criticism to happen more easily and in a way that is difficult for experts to rebut. As the “legitimacy” of knowledge and the authority of advisors have been challenged, the notions of fact-based or evidence-based policymaking have also increasingly been contested by proponents of more jaundiced or idiosyncratic visions of the world of policymaking (Lancaster & Rhodes, 2022). These dynamics are clearly shown by Dowling and Legrand (2023) in their article through their analysis of the reasons behind the noncompliance of many citizens with Australian COVID-19 policies.

Skepticism toward legacy media, universities, and even science is not new of course, as Marxist and indeed the left in general, both within academe and outside of it, have always been critics of the capitalist bias present in the production of expert knowledge by private companies and government agencies that service them (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). In recent years, however, this critique has been joined by other groups such as feminists who have pointed to the irretrievably patriarchal nature of much of the policy advice that underlies policy choices (Sullivan, 2021) or postcolonial perspectives that have similarly highlighted the continuing problems of racism and ethnocentrism in much supposedly value-free public policy knowledge and advice (Fleras & Maaka, 2010). While many of these systemic critiques were until recently largely relegated to the faculty club and graduate seminars, this has changed as such criticisms are now commonplace in online and other discursive spaces such as social media and participatory dialogs.

In general, this development meant that while in the past much of the general public might have tended to trust in the integrity of respected knowledge producers in media and academe and policymakers and political and economic elites would defend it, this is no longer the case. As many elites have come to embrace ideas about systemic and unconscious bias, especially around gender and race, this has combined with the popular criticism of those same elites along both those and class lines to undermine even further belief and support for traditional notions of expertise. Many members of the general public are now routinely suspicious of “experts” and embrace demonstrably false knowledge and conspiracy theories (Carson & Wright, 2022; Enders et al., 2022), while few are left to defend the merits of traditional technocratic expertise and conventional policy advice (Latour, 2018; Lavezzolo et al., 2022; Lazer et al., 2018).

This radical criticism of the neutrality and credibility of experts has weakened their capacity to be a powerful resource for policy decisions, and leading policymakers instead not often try to inform and legitimize their policies through a direct appeal to the involvement of citizens. The implications of this trend are shown by Galanti (2023) in the case of Italian education policy and Moon et al. (2023) in the case of participatory policymaking in South Korea. Similarly, Koga et al. (2023) discuss how the

Bolsonaro government in Brazil systematically excluded experts from policymaking. Or, as [Pal \(2023\)](#) show in his study of the case of the Global Solutions Summit (GSS)/World Policy Forum, experts themselves may autonomously try to re-legitimate their public perception and reputation by abandoning reliance on technical knowledge and enlarging the normative content of their own deliberations and policy recommendations.

### The challenge of values

The slippage in the intrinsic tension between experts' legitimacy and the political legitimation of policy choices in the contemporary era has contributed to the decline in expert knowledge and raised other challenges to both the theory and practice of policy advice. Beyond epistemological concerns, criticisms of bias and prejudice in the present conjuncture raise ontological questions about better understanding the "values" and "ideas" that underlie both policy knowledge and the criticisms of it ([Latour, 2018](#)).

Indeed, it is now commonplace to question whether value-free advice is possible at all and whether experts' legitimacy can ever be restored when visions of the world are based on counter-enlightenment values such as emotions, feelings, intuition, and "lived experience" ([Berlin, 2000](#)). While it may be sometimes possible to value oral traditions and traditional knowledge as important sources of collective wisdom that can supplement scientific evidence, it is often a hallmark of much antiexpert discourse in the modern era to instead assert the supremacy of the former over the latter. The idea that such alternate sources of knowledge can replace careful study and knowledge construction, however, poses an existential challenge to the policy movement as a whole, which developed precisely with the idea that evidence-informed analysis and discussion would generate superior results than partisan debate and discussion ([Mintrom, 2007](#); [Radin, 1997](#)).

Much current antiexpertise discourse represents a radicalization and popularization of the notion that experts' advice is neither a sufficient nor a necessary condition for policy choices, and it can and should be replaced by popular choices and preferences. These criticisms are often based on the assumption that experts' own values and ideological positions and predispositions render their behavior inherently antidemocratic and that traditional institutions of representative democracy—such as legislatures and executives—are so contaminated by partisanship and special interests that they can no longer serve as effective knowledge brokers or policy formulators ([Gross, 2013](#); [Jasanoff, 2004, 2005](#)). In a reprise of late-19th-century populism, the replacement of both advisors and deciders by more direct forms of democratic governance—such as constituent assemblies and mini-publics—is often lauded as more representative of different and more diverse knowledge sources that are less partisan and closer to the public interest ([Keller, 2007](#); [Vrydagh, 2022, 2023](#)).

Experts are often no longer considered as capable of "speaking truth to power" but simply as another set of self-interested actors who have specific and self-interested reasons to say things to power that promotes their particular values and interests. This challenge of values is omnipresent and can take different and even unexpected paths, like that shown by the different use that think tanks make of social media to compete in the marketplace of ideas ([Zhao & Zhu, 2023](#)), or as by [Djordjevic & Stone \(2023\)](#) argue in their contribution to this issue, how think tanks operating in authoritarian states, while not being able to really influence the content of policymaking, can nevertheless fulfill the mission of spreading the values of their donors, further eroding any pretense they may have had toward value-free analysis.

And while there is a large stream of research and scholarly reflection on the relationship between expertise and democracy and about whether and how the role of expertise and evidence-based policy can represent not only an asset but also a potential threat to democratic policymaking ([Bertsou, 2022](#); [Bertsou & Caramani, 2022](#); [Brown, 2009](#); [Christensen et al., 2023](#)), there is much less reliable research on the role of experts and policy advice in nondemocratic systems. Deeper research is necessary on this topic to have more empirical evidence of the fact that, in authoritarian regimes, experts' role can be only to legitimate the political preferences, as shown here by [Bakir \(2023\)](#). Politicians in authoritarian regimes preselect experts who merely legitimate the former's policy preferences. The comparison study of nondemocratic systems is helpful both in itself and as a way to better understand democratic practices.

### The challenge of politics

The challenge to policy advice and advisors from the political realm is not only the well-known problem of the relationship between politicians and policy advice alluded to earlier—such as the difficulties and

challenges inherent to “speaking truth to power”—but rather is linked to politicians’ tendency in the modern era to use the policy advice of experts in a very instrumental way in order to symbolically legitimate rather than inform their choices (Boswell, 2009).

This is an ongoing issue and, as several of the papers in this special issue highlight, the extent to which it occurs varies considerably by regime type. It can involve struggles over the recurrent politicization of the advice found in democratic regimes to the characteristics of authoritarian political regimes, which may favor or constrain the role of experts in policymaking in specific circumstances or more generally.

Substantially, the growing complexity of policy problems in the present era has fostered less the expected increased scientization of policy analysis than the increased politicization of policy and policy knowledge processes. This latter approach repositions policy advice as self-consciously and proudly “partis pris” rather than neutral and objective. In this view, policy advice and science are in the service of overarching elite and state values and analysis, and, accordingly, advice “biased” in that service.

Politicization, generally speaking, “means the demand for, or the act of, transporting an issue or an institution into the sphere of politics making a previously unpolitical matters political” (Zürm, 2019, pp. 977–978). When the content of scientific knowledge and related advice is affected by politicization, “an actor emphasizes the inherent uncertainty of science to cast doubt on the existence of scientific consensus” (Bolsen & Druckman, 2015, p. 746). Thus, scientific knowledge is not only continuously attacked and delegitimized as “partial” or “theoretical” but becomes a political matter, and thus, it loses its special characteristic as universally endorsed and cumulative in nature.

This trend toward the overt or covert politicization of policy advice encompasses not only overtly contested and highly charged political issues such as the “natural” pattern of income distribution or the “proper” levels of immigration that featured prominently in past eras but now is also a feature of the discussion of more technical issues such as the appropriate and most feasible responses to crises such as pandemics and climate change.

The ongoing efforts to deal with COVID-19 and global warming in particular have seen bitter attacks from critics who see the evidence supporting policy intervention as thinly disguised efforts to curtail civic and economic freedom on the part of state elites, perceptions that demonstrated the aggrandizing effect of social media on these ideas, as discussed by Dowling & Legrand (2023). The controversies in these areas involved and continue to involve not only politicians jockeying for power but also scientists jockeying to offer evidence to support their arguments and positions as Cairney & Toth (2023) highlight in the case of COVID-19 in their contribution to this issue. But other examples of this phenomenon also exist, such as in the climate change debate, for example, where some advisors promote the most pessimistic models in order to galvanize public opinion, which is countered by efforts to lampoon these models by critics as unrealistic and, indeed, overly pessimistic (Koonin, 2021; Lomborg, 2020).

The challenge of politics also affects the feasibility and effectiveness of potential and actual policy choices. As Bali and Ramesh show in their article, when experts deliver strong evidence-based knowledge that is shared by policymakers, this does not necessarily directly result in better policy design or better policy outcomes since a necessary condition for this to happen is the presence of sufficient political capacity to legitimate and implement the policy choice (Sørensen & Ansell, 2023; Wu et al., 2018). The comparative case of health-care payments offered by Bali & Ramesh (2023) clearly shows how good and highly legitimized advice is neither a sufficient nor necessary condition for good policy.

## Expert advice in the contemporary era: a vicious cycle

In a vicious cycle, the combination of undermined legitimacy of technical advice and the perception of value-driven advice has fed into the development of a much more politically driven pattern and content of expert policy advice. The three challenges discussed earlier are closely interconnected. Alternative forms of “knowledge” and the very different values on which they are based have turbocharged the politicization of policy analysis, which has in turn undermined the ideas of policy advisors “speaking truth to power” (Wildavsky, 1979).

Many technocratic experts have reacted to these challenges by not only emphasizing the complexity and sophistication of their knowledge/science but also adding a sharp edge of advocacy to their recommendations, which further exacerbates many of the problems cited earlier. To the extent that policy advocates challenge expertise, policy experts have had to embrace advocacy, and this has blurred the boundaries between expert advice and advocacy. Experts are, very often, perceived as a kind of interest

group like any others, and this contributes to the delegitimation of their epistemic authority (as the COVID-19 case has abundantly shown).

The politicization of science and the role of experts in this context opens the doors to what can be defined as the politics of experts and has affected the strategies that experts pursue in doing their job. Here, as shown by Cairney & Toth (2023) in their contribution to this issue, experts can behave in different ways, either by compromising themselves to support the preferences of politicians or by publicly criticizing them, and can do so in very different ways - from select governmental committee to open electronic media “performances” such as talk shows and commentaries. In both cases, the politicization of science can directly impact the breaking of overall epistemic authority due to its impact on the public relationship between politics and science in specific issue areas.

In other words, the legitimacy of such alternate sources of wisdom is enhanced when doubts are raised about the accuracy and neutrality of traditional policy advice. It also undermines many specific ideational assumptions built into the policy paradigms, which are the cognitive foundations that underlie program choices in most policy fields from interest rates and monetary policy to welfare policy and education, migration, and others (Hall, 1993; Hogan & Howlett, 2015), delegitimizing and destabilizing them (Wilder & Howlett, 2014).

## The structure and content of the special issue

The fact that policy choices arise from advice based on specific values and that these are “non-neutral” is not of course new in the policy sciences (Perl et al., 2018; Sabatier, 1987). To paraphrase Harold Lasswell, one of the founders of the discipline, the point is to be able to clearly distinguish between values/ideas “in” policy advice and values/ideas “of” policy advice (Lasswell, 1970).

The first has to do with the view that there is inevitable value bias in any policy recommendation and that there are always winners and losers in any policy choice (Lasswell, 1936). This is not a new insight, but many contemporary critics appear to have only just discovered, and don't like, it.

As for the second, the values/ideas “of” policy advice, the conviction that every piece of policy advice is biased leads to a forensic reflex to discover and correct that bias. However, this can also lead to a reflex of rejection since, by definition, the values driving advice cannot be held by all. This criticism is often then turned against the rationalist paradigm in the policy sciences to argue that the use of science in policymaking is also inherently biased and to promote, as we have seen, alternatives such as lived experience, oral tradition, and religious or other mystical connections to “fundamental reality”. But the fact that those making policy are self-interested does not imply that all policy knowledge is biased in their interests. Rather it suggests, as argued earlier, that one must be careful not to let this occur and rather to more carefully introduce and contextualize knowledge in the policy process.

It is the purpose of this special issue to investigate these issues in more depth and provide insights into the nature of contemporary policy advice in the era of false news, alternative facts, delegitimated experts, and increased partisanship.

As the discussion here has shown, the issues of legitimacy, values, and politics pose major challenges to the modern policy sciences that emerged following the Second World War in a relatively stable epistemological era centered on traditional enlightenment values and concepts.

While most policy theories are quite capable of recognizing and understanding these contemporary challenges (Perl et al., 2018; Cairney, 2016; Parkhurst 2017), the forces that are at work and how they are likely to change the nature of policy deliberations, precisely what the consequences are for the content of policy advice and its influence on the content of policies themselves requires more careful analysis than it has received to date. These three challenges can easily result in a vicious circle that undermines the role of experts and, above all, the role of evidence-based knowledge in policymaking, promoting alternative epistemologies and enhanced politicization that promotes continual discord, conflict, and, often, poor or poorly supported policy choices.

The special issue is divided into three sections that are committed to deepening each of the three challenges analyzed earlier. This structure is based on the observation that although the three challenges are intrinsically intertwined, an analytical separation is useful for a better understanding of both their individual and synergistic characteristics and analytical relevance.

In the first part, three papers are dedicated to a deep comprehension of the challenge of legitimacy.

Tullia Galanti analyzes the issue of experts' legitimacy in a very ideologized field, by focusing on the role of expert committees in Italian education policy. But assuming a conceptual tripartition of

legitimacy (epistemic, managerial, and political), Galanti shows how policymakers tend to design different types of expert committees according to the different types of legitimacy that they think be needed in a specific context. Furthermore, Galanti shows how the choice of the type of experts' committee is a reliable predictor of the use that policymakers will do of the advice. Thus, the epistemic legitimacy of experts cannot alone solve ideological conflicts: on highly contested policy issues, experts' advice becomes the object and/or resource of the political conflict.

M. Jae Moon, Seunggi Lee, and Seunggyu Park then present an interesting case of a Citizensourcing Policy Platform in Korea. The case shows how the complexity of policymaking needs the legitimation of citizens and of their policy ideas. At the same time, experts were not excluded from the process, as they were involved both in designing the platform and in assessing the citizens' policy proposals. Thus, this Korean case shows how the complex issue of political legitimation of policy choice can be dealt with through a co-production process. The design of this co-production strategy shows how the democratization of policymaking does not necessarily mean the delegitimation of experts but, on the contrary, the strengthening of legitimacy by including both citizens and experts in the process.

Melissa Dowling and Tim Legrand propose a compliance–legitimacy matrix to analyze the risk of delegitimation involved in measures established to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic in Asia due to the emergence of a “different truth” spread through social media. This process allowed the rise of a counter-episteme that, while completely delegitimizing the advice of the official experts, contributed to reinforcing the already existing distrust in the government of a minority of citizens. The case shows how the process of delegitimation works and how, in one way or another, the legitimacy of experts and governments is closely interconnected.

In the second part, the challenge related to values is then taken up in three cases that show how values can be the main drivers of the role of nongovernmental organizations when delivering expert advice.

Irena Djordjevic and Diane Stone examine the characteristics and the role of think tanks in the Western Balkans. These organizations are mainly funded by western donors who consider them an instrument of democratization in these countries. However, the capacity of these think tanks is limited by the fact that the relevant governments are interested only in tokenistic adoption of their advice in order to be positively assessed for eventual accession to the European Union. Notwithstanding the limited role of think tanks in influencing policies, they play a crucial role in the process by supporting the diffusion of democratic values. Thus, they are more relevant as value diffusers than policy advisors.

Leslie A. Pal then offers a different perspective on how values emerge when the legitimacy of expertise is contested on the basis that it is not considered neutral and free of values. By examining the case of the GSS/World Policy Forum launched in 2017 to support the Think20 network (a G20 initiative), he shows how this international forum of experts reacted to the challenge of values by asserting the clear normative core of their policy paradigm. Thus, to respond to the populist critics that experts are either heartless technocrats or simply servants of narrow global elites, the strategy of the GSS has been not to emphasize their intrinsic epistemic authority but to embrace frank, direct, and transparent support of key values like subsidiarity, social cohesion, social impact accounting, radical wealth redistribution, and guaranteed annual incomes. This defensive strategy also represents one of the possible evolutions of the role of expertise: from “speaking truth to power” to a kind of “speaking good to power”.

Zhao Jing and Xufen Zhu in their paper then focus on how the huge expansion and diffusion of social media are structurally changing the conventional structures and channels of resources for knowledge. They present empirical evidence to show how think tanks have capitalized on social media to spread their expertise and values, becoming digital advocates in the worldwide marketplace of ideas. This is a complex process that on the one hand can equalize ideas while on the other hand can contribute to or change the domestic value dominated by the traditional media. Thus thanks to the social media, think tanks could really diffuse new ideas and thus aiming at mobilizing public opinions and attracting the attention of policymakers.

Finally, the third part is devoted to the challenges of politics and offers four papers through which their multifaceted dimensions are deepened.

Natalia Koga et al. analyze how the conflict between politics and bureaucratic experts can evolve according to the characteristics of the institutional context and the legitimation of experts. They examine the attempt of the Bolsonaro presidency to delegitimize bureaucratic experts in health and environmental policy in the Brazilian federal government. They show that the antagonistic behavior



of the Bolsonaro government was successful in the case of environmental but not healthcare due to the different levels of institutionalization and professional cohesion in the two sectors. This evidence shows how the relationship between politicians and bureaucrats is not unidirectional and that the characteristics of the former affect the latter's capacity to defend its autonomy and professional legitimacy.

Paul Cairney and Federico Toth compare the dynamics of politics of experts in the UK and Italy during the COVID-19 crisis. The article focuses on the behavior of experts who behave autonomously in the political arena and follow different patterns of behavior according to the rules of the game they decide to follow (the rules fixed by governments and the rules of science). After classifying experts ("core insiders", "specialist insiders", "peripheral insiders", and "outsiders" and also according to their "high-profile" or "low-profile" depending on greater or lesser media exposure), they show how these different types of experts have behaved in the two countries. The empirical evidence is that experts can definitively act as political agents and behave autonomously in the policy arena when they decide to follow the epistemic rules of science and not the rules of government.

Azad Bali and M. Ramesh deal with the challenge of political capacity raised earlier. They look at health-care payment reforms, which is a highly technical issue that despite broad areas of agreement among experts has not translated into actual reforms. Their study of South Korea and Thailand shows that the payment has been more successful in the latter despite a higher level of expertise in the former. The success of Thailand is argued as rooted not only in its more modest reform goals but also in its higher level of political capacity to overcome providers' resistance. The article shows that expertise, even if widely supported, cannot shape coherently policy outputs if not accompanied by the political capacity to overcome the key actors' resistance.

Finally, Caner Bakir explores our limited knowledge of the role of experts and advisors in autocratic political systems. Building on the small number of works on the subject, Bakir proposes an analytical framework that shows that the role of experts in autocratic systems is significantly different from their democratic counterparts. In autocracies, experts are directly legitimized by the political powers because they are in charge of supporting "scientifically" the policy preferences of the regime.

Autocratic regimes speak power to experts who then speak power to truth and consequently legitimate the political regime and become a source of its stability. Overall, this article shows that the legitimacy of experts can be located in different ways according to the type of political regime. In democratic regimes, the legitimacy of experts is a combination of intrinsic and external expertise, while in autocratic systems intrinsic legitimacy (scientific credentials and evidence) matters far less than loyalty to the leader and producing advice the leader wants to hear. This leads to a different kind of "vicious circle" in that the advice can prop up the stability of the regime (constantly celebrating the "success" of policy) but also eventually undermine it since advice eventually leads to bad outcomes that cannot be ignored forever.

Taken together, the articles in this collection offer a multifaceted perspective on the problematic role of expertise and policy advice and of "speaking truth to power" in turbulent times.

## Conflict of interest

None declared.

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