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Unveiling the Dynamics of Public Policy Research: Productivity, International Collaboration, and Thematic Evolution

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Abstract

This study aims to measure the academic contribution of journals based on productivity and citation influence, map patterns of scientific collaboration between countries, and cluster general themes and topics of public policy and policy analysis research from the past decade. Using the Scopus database, 278 articles were found, which were then analysed using the bibliometric analysis method with the Biblioshiny and VOSviewer analysis tools. The results show that the Policy Sciences journal dominates the domain of research development on public policy as the most influential source regarding the number of publications and citation quality, followed by Policy and Politics. Regarding country contributions, the United Kingdom is in the top position with the highest academic impact, followed by the USA and the Netherlands, which, although different in contribution volume, still show an important role in the global research landscape. Western Europe generally shows a higher level of international collaboration than other regions. Thematic contributions become a growing discourse for theme clustering, where research development direction indicates three main trends: consolidation and deepening of core issues, strengthening theoretical approaches, and responding to global dynamics such as crises and geopolitical changes. In addition, five general themes have been successfully clustered as a framework for understanding the direction of public policy and policy analysis research to date, which can be a reference for designing further research.

Keywords: Public Policy, Policy Analysis, Bibliometric, Influential Factor, Public Administration.

Introduction

Public policy research and analysis garner increasing attention as global challenges grow more complex and the demand for responsive, adaptive governance rises (Eller & Wandt, 2020). In this context, systematic studies of thematic developments, scientific structures, and patterns of global scientific collaboration in this area are becoming increasingly relevant. Bibliometric approaches provide powerful analytical tools for mapping the intellectual landscape (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017), identifying research trends (Donthu et al., 2021), and monitoring the actors and countries contributing to the evolution of public policy discourse (Putera et al., 2021). However, bibliometric studies in the public policy domain remain relatively limited regarding data coverage, methodologies, and geographical representation.

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The initial literature review revealed six key articles that utilised bibliometric approaches to examine the field of public policy and policy analysis. These studies include the mapping of academic networks across journals (Adams et al., 2016), a topic review within a single journal (Goyal, 2017; Putera et al., 2021), an application of big data bibliometric analysis (El-Taliawi et al., 2021), a review of policy advisory systems (Hussain et al., 2023), and a case-based sectoral study of rare disease policy in China (Li et al., 2023), with data spanning from 1970 to 2022.

Four relevant bibliometric articles were identified after screening. Adams et al. (2016) mapped scientific networks in seven major public policy journals using inter-field and intra-field approaches. Still, they did not examine thematic dynamics or aspects of geographic contributions. Goyal (2017) analysed nearly five decades of publications in the journal *Policy Sciences* to trace key actors' knowledge structure and dominance, but was limited to one journal and had uneven geographic representation. The study by Putera et al. (2021) described scientific collaboration and geographic distribution in public policy and management research. Still, it did not fully explore interdisciplinary contributions to policy theory and practice development. Meanwhile, Li et al. (2023) provided a sectoral perspective through content analysis and bibliometrics but focused on the national context without any connection to global policy dynamics.

These limitations indicate a conceptual and methodological gap that needs to be bridged through broader, integrative, and cross-regional research. The lack of integrated analysis between academic performance, international collaborative learning, and thematic exploration over time suggests that the understanding of the evolution of public policy theory and practice is still partial. Therefore, a bibliometric study is needed to describe the knowledge landscape more comprehensively in terms of productivity and the influence of journal citations, maps of scientific collaborations between countries, and clustering of dominant themes and topics in the last decade.

This study attempts to provide a comprehensive mapping of the development of public policy research through a bibliometric approach using Scopus-indexed article data. Specifically, this study examines (1) the academic contributions of journals based on productivity and situational influence, (2) patterns of cross-country scientific collaboration, and (3) the clustering of common themes and topics of research on public policy and policy analysis over the past ten years. By applying the Biblioshiny and VOSviewer analysis tools, this study systematically analyses scientific performance and maps science. This article is structured into several parts, namely methodology (Section 2), bibliometric analysis results (Section 3), results of clustering of themes and topics (Section 4), and conclusions, essence, limitations, and suggestions for further research (Section 5).

The results of this study are expected to enrich the understanding of the direction of the evolution of theory and practice in the field of public policy and public administration in a more multidimensional and inclusive manner. In addition, the findings are expected to be a strategic reference for the academic community, policymakers, and research institutions in formulating a more focused, evidence-based, and responsive research agenda to the ever-evolving global challenges.

Data Collection & Method

To ensure that this research can answer the objectives that have been determined in the beginning, a workflow diagram was made that was adopted and modified from the research of

Ruslan et al. (2023) and Pranajaya et al. (2024), which can systematically help the steps of this research. The adapted workflow diagram is shown in Figure 1. Research Workflow

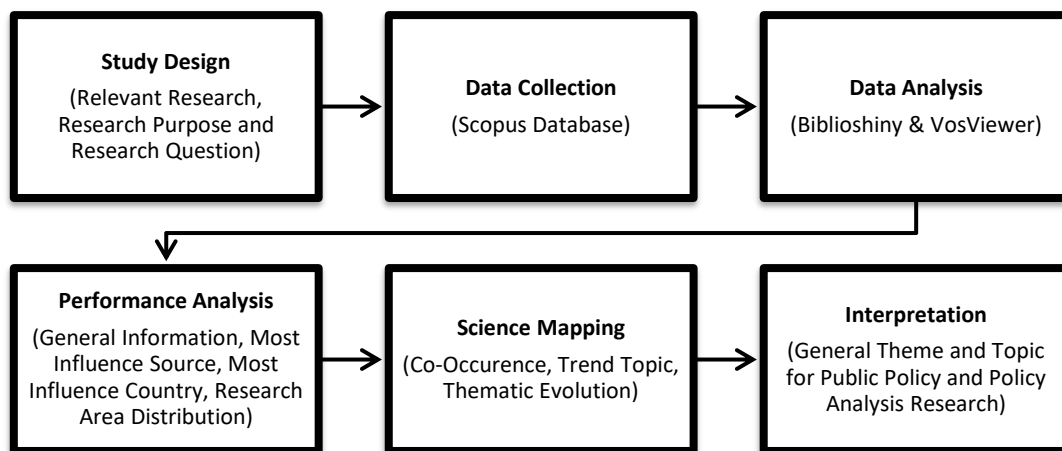


Figure 1. Research Workflow. Source: Author Elaboration

Study Design

This study uses several previous bibliometric articles as a reference to update knowledge and provide additional information from previously existing bibliometric articles related to public policy and policy analysis research. This design was chosen and adapted based on previous studies that showed the effectiveness of the bibliometric approach in understanding trends (Goyal, 2017) and mapping themes & tools (Li et al., 2023) from policy analysis research. Research questions were created to ensure this study meets the previously formulated research objectives. The following are the research questions from this study:

RQ1: What are the most influential sources, most influential countries, and most dominating research areas for public policy and policy analysis research from 2014 to 2024?

RQ2: How will public policy and policy analysis research be developed from 2014 to 2024?

RQ3: What are the general themes and topics for public policy and policy analysis research?

Data Collection

This study presents a bibliometric study conducted to analyse the development of public policy and policy analysis research. Data were collected through the Scopus database by collecting research that includes the keywords "public policy" and "policy analysis", which were accessed on January 7, 2025. The period analysed covers the period from 2014 to 2024. Scopus was selected as the only database in this study because of its reputation as a highly reputable scientific database with a wide and verified journal coverage. Scopus provides complete and consistent metadata, thus supporting the accuracy of bibliometric analysis. In addition, Scopus is compatible with various analysis software such as Biblioshiny and VOSviewer, which facilitates the process of visualisation and mapping themes. Thus, using Scopus ensures data quality and the relevance of the analysis results to the research objectives. Data collection with the Scopus database is carried out systematically to obtain a mapping of performance and thematic trends

in public policy literature, as shown in **Error! Reference source not found.**

Category	Criteria	Result
Search String	"Public Policy" AND "Policy Analysis"	3794
Search Within Result	"Public Administration"	882
Filter Year	2014-2024	499
Refine Search	Doc Type "Article", PubStage "Final", Source Type "Journal", Language "English"	309
After Manual Refinement		278

Table 1. Material Data Collections. Source: Author Elaboration

The determination of this key string refers to the approach of Putera et al. (2021), which uses the keyword "public policy" as the basis for the search. To strengthen the relevance and focus of the search on the analytical dimension in policy studies, the addition of the keyword "AND policy analysis" was carried out, considering that policy analysis activities are an inseparable part of public policy studies (Walker, 2000). The search was further narrowed by adding the keyword "public administration" because public administration is at the core of the implementation and formulation of public policy (Capano et al., 2024). From the document search results, 309 articles were found, which were then filtered with exclusion based on data completeness and relevance to the topic to be discussed. The final results display 278 articles, which will be further analysed using VOSviewer and R Studio (Biblioshiny).

Data Analysis

The bibliometric analysis method is used because of its ability to reveal research trends and conceptual maps of a field of study systematically and objectively (Donthu et al., 2021; Zupic & Čater, 2015). The two main analysis tools used in this analysis are Biblioshiny and VOSviewer. Biblioshiny, a web-based interface of the R bibliometrix package, is used to conduct a more in-depth and interactive bibliometric analysis, including the distribution of publications per year, top sources, and thematic trend analysis (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017). VOSviewer visualises bibliometric networks, such as co-occurrence keywords, in easy-to-understand maps (van Eck & Waltman, 2010). The analysed data is imported from the Scopus database in CSV format and then processed through both tools to produce relevant and scientifically accountable findings.

Performance Analysis

Performance analysis was conducted to answer RQ1 and describe the characteristics and factors influencing the publications reviewed (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017; Cobo et al., 2011). Four main general aspects were described: information (number of publications, years, and citations), most influential sources (based on publications and citations), most influential countries (contributions and international collaborations), and distribution of research fields. These four aspects were chosen because they are effective in providing a comprehensive picture of research trends and impacts, and help identify field focus and direction of development studies while maintaining the depth and coherence of the analysis.

Science Mapping

The science mapping approach is used to answer RQ2, with a focus on three main components: co-occurrence, trend topics, and thematic evolution. Co-occurrence analysis is used to map the relationships between keywords that frequently appear together in publications, to identify conceptual structures in the fields of public policy and policy analysis. Trend topics are analyzed to see the development of research interests over time, while thematic evolution is used to trace the shift in thematic focus in two main periods, namely 2019 and 2022, which reflect the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on research directions (Folfas, 2024). These three aspects were chosen because they complement each other: co-occurrence describes static structures, trend topics capture short-term dynamics, and thematic evolution provides a longitudinal perspective. This approach is considered optimal for providing a comprehensive and focused scientific picture.

Interpretation

The results of the interpretation of the analysis that has been done will be presented in the discussion chapter. The study results will be synthesised and analysed, adapting to Ruslan et al. (2023) to formulate a general theme and specific topics relevant to public policy and policy analysis research. This interpretation is important to provide deeper meaning to the data that has been collected and analysed, also to link it to theoretical and practical dynamics in the field, and to answer RQ3 and previously determined objectives. Thus, the interpretation results are expected to provide a substantive contribution to mapping the direction of future policy research and be the basis for developing more focused and contextual follow-up studies.

Result

Performance Analysis

General Information

With a data frame from 2014-2024, 278 documents were analysed so that they could describe the development of research related to public policy and policy analysis for a decade. The results show 632 authors and 68 single-authored documents, with average citations per document of 23.13, references of 18,057, and document contents of 1116 authors' keywords (DE) and 1071 keywords plus (ID). These documents come from 149 sources with an annual growth rate of 5.84%;

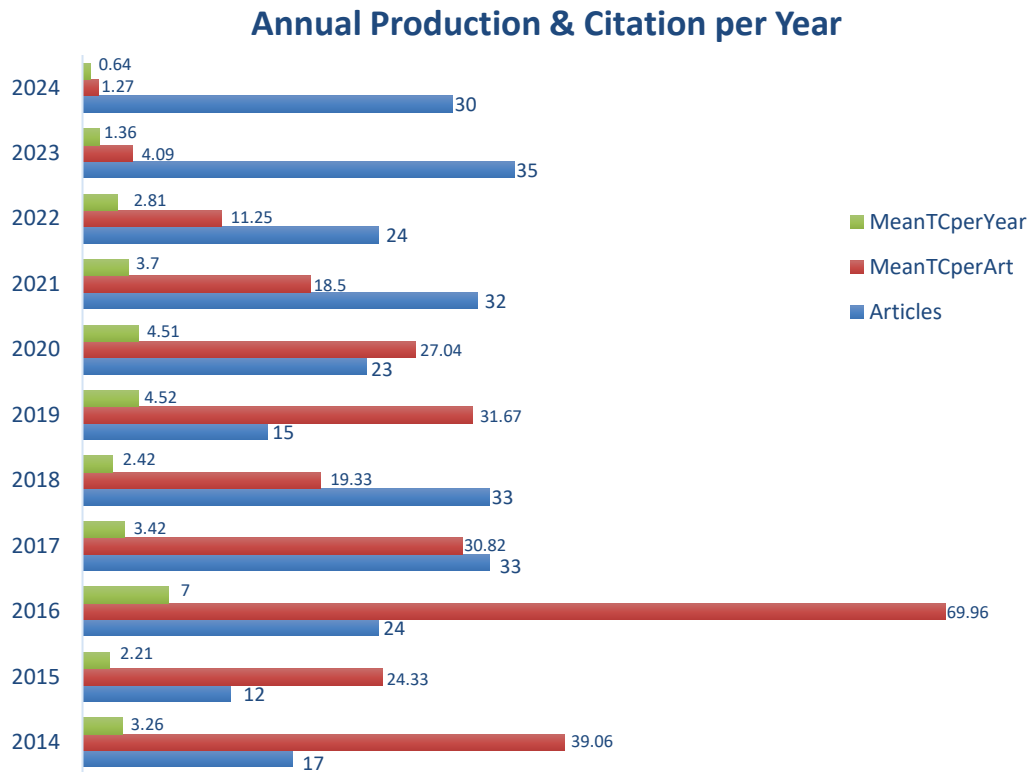


Figure 2. Annual Article Production and Annual Citation per Year. Source: Biblioshiny Output

The year 2016 stands out with 24 articles that have the highest average citations, namely 69.96 per article (MeanTCperArt) and 7 citations per year (MeanTCperYear), indicating the great influence of that year's publications in public policy studies. Although the number of articles increased in some years, such as 2017 and 2023, the quality of citations did not always follow suit, as seen from the sharp decline in MeanTCperArt in 2023 and 2024, which only reached 4.09 and 1.27. This pattern confirms that the success of scientific publications is not only measured by quantity, but also by their appeal and influence in the long-term scientific literature.

Most Influential Source

Error! Reference source not found. shows that Policy Sciences is the journal with the best performance regarding the number of articles and the quality of citations. With 19 articles published since 2015, this journal has achieved an h-index of 14, a g-index of 19, and a total of citations reaching 622, indicating the strong influence of the articles it publishes in public policy and policy analysis. The second position is filled by Policy and Politics, with 18 articles, an h-index of 10, and 382 citations, even though it only published articles in 2017.

Source	Articles	h_index	g_index	m_index	TC	PY_start
POLICY SCIENCES	19	14	19	1.272727	622	2015
POLICY AND POLITICS	18	10	18	1.111111	382	2017
POLICY STUDIES JOURNAL	13	9	13	0.75	575	2014
JOURNAL OF COMPARATIVE POLICY ANALYSIS: RESEARCH AND PRACTICE	8	6	8	0.6	186	2016
JOURNAL OF EUROPEAN PUBLIC POLICY	5	5	5	0.416667	178	2014
REVIEW OF POLICY RESEARCH	6	5	6	0.416667	95	2014
SOCIAL SCIENCE AND MEDICINE	5	5	5	0.416667	265	2014
TEACHING PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION	4	4	4	0.333333	32	2014
ENERGY POLICY	3	3	3	0.25	77	2014
EVALUATION AND PROGRAM PLANNING	4	3	4	0.25	28	2014

Table 2. Top 10 Most Influence Sources. Source: Biblioshiny Output

*Total Cited (TC), Production Year Start (PY_start)

Despite only contributing 13 articles, Policy Studies Journal has recorded 575 citations since 2014, indicating a very high citation rate per article. Bibliometric indices such as h-index, g-index, and m-index in this data provide a clear picture of the quality and consistency of the journals' influence. Interestingly, despite having fewer articles, journals such as Social Science and Medicine and the Journal of European Public Policy still perform well in terms of citations, indicating that article quality often determines academic impact more than article quantity (Haslam & Laham, 2009).

Most Influential Country

The United Kingdom appears to have the highest academic impact in related publications when viewed from the distribution of citations by country (Table 3), with a total citation (TC) of 1,408 and an average citation per article of 64. This figure shows the UK's significant dominance in public policy research, both in terms of productivity and the quality of articles produced. The USA is in second place with 569 citations and 16.3 average citations per article, indicating a large volume of contributions. However, the average value per article is lower than in other Western European countries.

Country	TC	Average Article Citations
UNITED KINGDOM	1408	64
USA	569	16.3

NETHERLANDS	542	49.3
CANADA	455	32.5
AUSTRALIA	388	21.6
GERMANY	264	26.4
ITALY	159	39.8
CHINA	158	9.9
SINGAPORE	143	23.8
SWEDEN	126	21

Table 3. Top 10 Cited Country. Source: Biblioshiny Output

The Netherlands averaged 49.3 citations per article, although its total citations were third (542), indicating that each of its publications had a higher chance of being cited than most other countries. Canada and Italy also performed well in terms of citation quality, with averages of 32.5 and 39.8 citations per article, although their total citations were not as high as the UK or the US. Meanwhile, Asian countries such as China and Singapore are starting to contribute, but their average citations are still below those of Western European countries, namely 9.9 for China and 23.8 for Singapore. This data shows that Western European and Anglo-Saxon countries still dominate the global academic performance map in public policy research, but the opportunities for growth in contributions from Asia are increasingly open as international participation and collaboration increase.

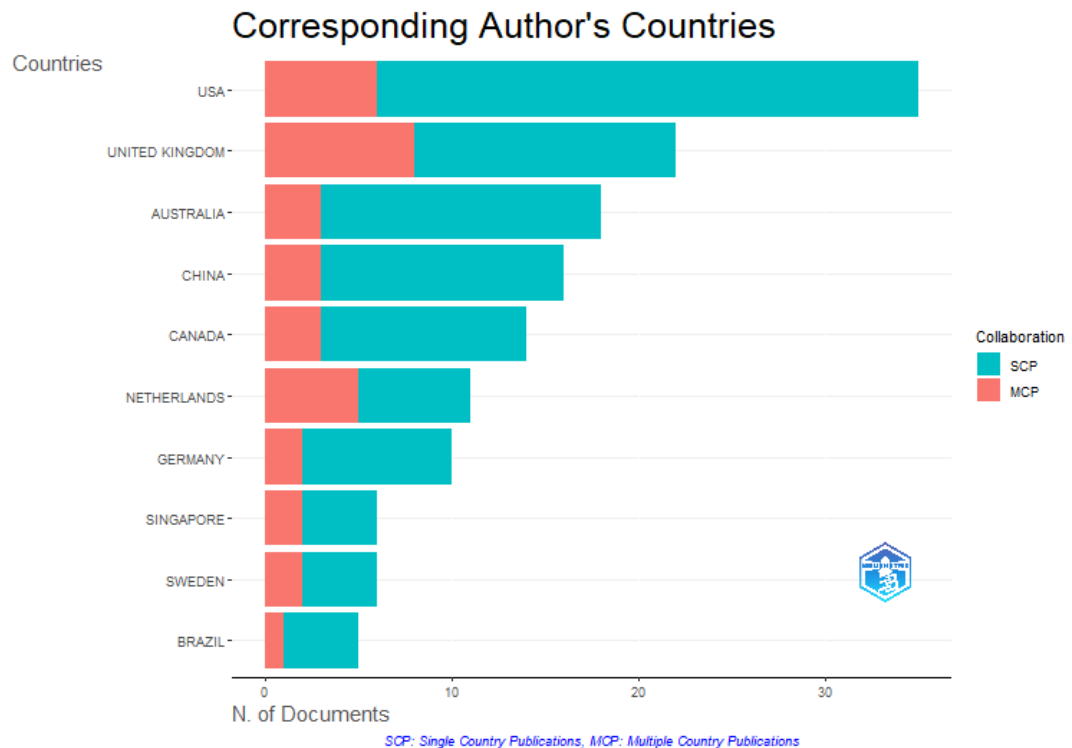


Figure 3. Corresponding Authors Countries. Source: Biblioshiny Output

The United States was the country with the largest contribution of articles in public policy research, with 35 publications (12.59%), consisting of 29 domestic publications (SCP) and six international collaborations (MCP), indicating a collaboration rate of 17.14%. In second place, the United Kingdom produced 22 articles with a higher level of collaboration (36.36%), of which eight involved authors from other countries. A similar pattern was seen in the Netherlands, which, although it only contributed 11 articles, almost half (45.45%) were the result of cross-border collaboration. Australia and China also contributed significantly (18 and 16 articles), but with lower levels of collaboration, namely 16.67% and 18.75%. Meanwhile, countries such as Singapore, Sweden, and Germany showed quite high levels of international collaboration (33.33%, 33.33%, and 20% respectively) despite their fewer publications. The level of international collaboration is an important indicator in measuring the strength of global scientific networks, with Western European countries tending to be more active in cross-border collaboration than Asian and American countries.

Research Area Distribution

The Social Science field dominates with the largest number of articles based on the distribution of scientific fields in public policy and policy analysis research (Figure 4. Area Study Distribution for Public Policy and Policy Analysis Research, namely 46.4%). This figure shows that almost half of the published research is rooted in the social sciences, confirming the important role of this discipline in understanding, formulating, and evaluating policies. Environmental science is second with 20.8%, reflecting the increasing attention to environmental issues in the policy context and the global urgency of climate change and sustainability.

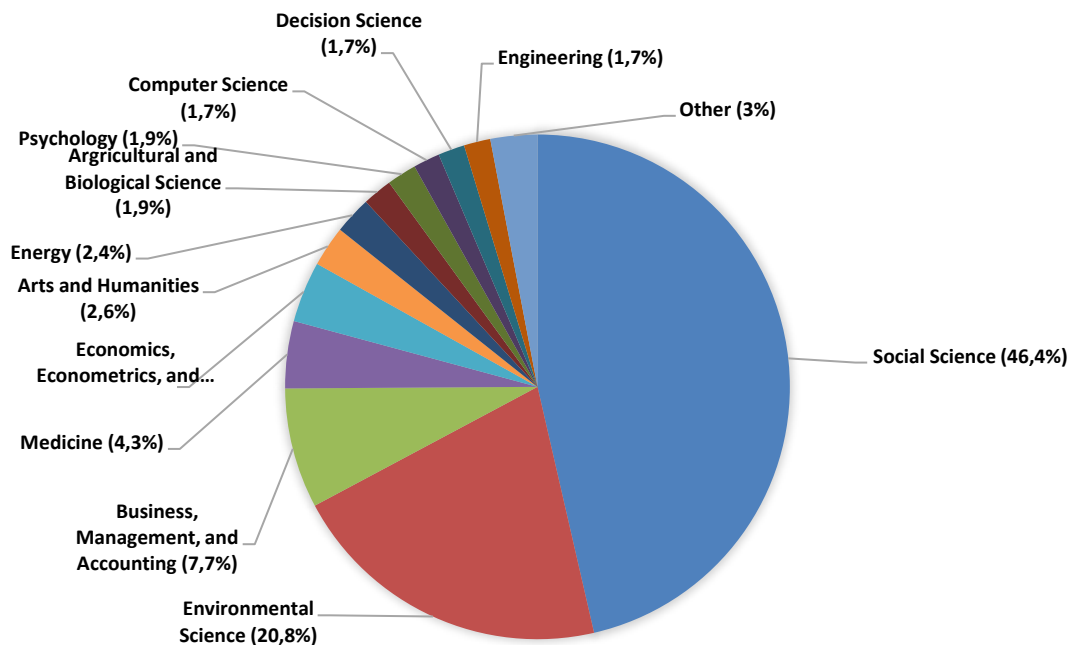


Figure 4. Area Study Distribution for Public Policy and Policy Analysis Research. Source: Scopus
Business, Management, and Accounting contributed 7.7% of publications, demonstrating the

close relationship between organizational management and public policy, particularly in governance and resource management. Other disciplines such as Medicine (4.3%) and Economics, Econometrics, and Finance (3.9%) also demonstrated the importance of health and economic perspectives in formulating effective policies. Although the contributions of fields such as Humanities, Energy, Agriculture, Psychology, Computer Science, Decision Sciences, and Engineering were each below 3%, their presence enriched the multidisciplinary approach. Another 3% came from cross-disciplinary topics that broadened the policy discourse beyond the main categories. These data confirm that public policy studies are interdisciplinary, dominated by social and environmental sciences, but remain open to contributions from various fields to deepen the analysis and increase policy relevance.

Science Mapping

Co-Occurrence

Co-occurrence analysis with the author keywords unit of analysis was conducted to identify thematic relationships between author keywords in publications related to public policy and policy analysis (Donthu et al., 2021). Using the full counting method, 1,116 keywords were detected, 22 met the minimum threshold of five occurrences. The total link strength (TLS) analysis reinforces the understanding that public policy (75 occurrences, 40 TLS) and policy analysis (43 occurrences, 30 TLS) are the centres of gravity in this field.

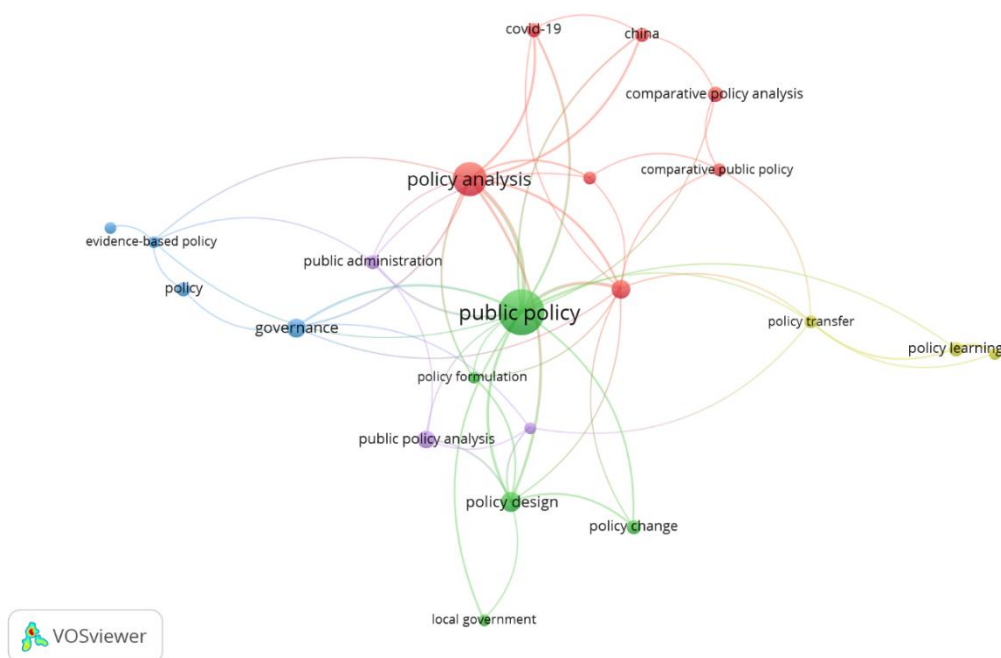


Figure 5. Co-Occurrence by Author Keywords. Source: VOSviewer Output

Visualisation and results of co-occurrence analysis using VOSviewer produced five main clusters that reflect the thematic focus in public policy and policy analysis literature, which are explained as follows:

Cluster 1 (Red) reflects an analytical and comparative approach to policy studies. Keywords such as policy analysis (43 occurrences, 30 TLS), comparative policy analysis (9 occurrences, 3 TLS), comparative public policy (6 occurrences, 4 TLS), policy process (13 occurrences, 17 TLS), advocacy coalition framework (6 occurrences, 5 TLS), China (7 occurrences, 7 TLS), and COVID-19 (7 occurrences, 8 TLS) show a concentration of research on cross-country policy comparisons and responses to global issues such as the pandemic. Policy analysis is a connectivity hub in this cluster, demonstrating its role as a conceptual bridge between other terms. The keyword COVID-19 also has a relatively high total link strength, indicating its spread across many themes.

Cluster 2 (Green) focuses on the design and dynamics of public policy. Dominant keywords such as public policy (75 occurrences, 40 TLS), policy design (15 occurrences, 18 TLS), policy change (7 occurrences, 5 TLS), and policy formulation (5 occurrences, 6 TLS) indicate attention to the process of policy formulation and change and the involvement of local government (5 occurrences, 3 TLS). Public policy recorded the highest total link strength of the entire dataset, indicating the role of this keyword as a central keyword with broad thematic coverage.

Cluster 3 (Blue) emphasises aspects of governance and evidence-based policy. Terms such as governance (13 occurrences, 8 TLS), evidence-based policy (5 occurrences, 5 TLS), policy (7 occurrences, 2 TLS), and policy evaluation (5 occurrences, 1 TLS) emerged as important indicators of policy evaluation and effectiveness in government practice. Governance was the main connecting keyword in this cluster, with evidence-based policy also showing strong links to other practically relevant themes.

Cluster 4 (Yellow) illustrates an approach focusing on policy learning and diffusion across regions. Keywords such as policy learning (8 occurrences, 8 TLS), policy failure (5 occurrences, 6 TLS), and policy transfer (6 occurrences, 7 TLS) reflect the process of policy adaptation, including learning from failures or successes of implementation in other contexts. This cluster's fairly even total link strength indicates stable connections between topics, especially in cross-country or cross-institutional contexts.

Cluster 5 (Purple) is related to institutional frameworks and policy instruments, with keywords such as public administration (7 occurrences, 7 TLS), policy instruments (5 occurrences, 5 TLS), and public policy analysis (12 occurrences, 5 TLS). This cluster focuses on administrative tools and structures in policy analysis and implementation. Although the link strength value in this cluster is not as high as in clusters 1 and 2, it is still relevant because it emphasises the structural dimensions and policy tools in public policy practice.

Trend Topic

This topic trend analysis was conducted based on author keywords that appeared at least five times out of 1,116 identified keywords. Fifteen keywords met the threshold. Each keyword was analysed based on the distribution of its appearance time (Q1: Initial year of appearance – Median – Q3: Peak year of distribution) so that it can provide an overview of the dynamics of topic popularity in public policy and policy analysis studies (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017).

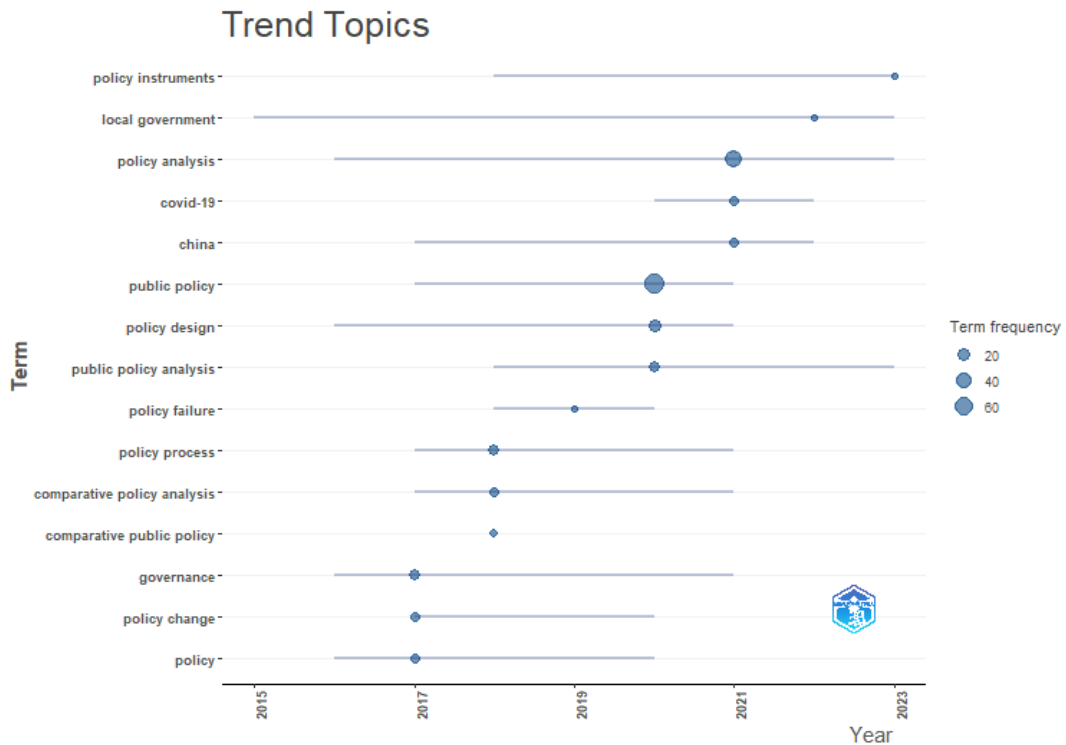


Figure 6. Trend Topics by Author Keywords. Source: Biblioshiny Output

The dominance of classic topics and adaptation to the global crisis is marked by the topic “public policy” (2017-2020-2021), which recorded the highest frequency with 75 occurrences. This trend peaked in 2021 with a median in 2020, showing an intensification of discourse related to public decision-making during the COVID-19 crisis (e.g, Mintrom & O’Connor, 2020). Simultaneously, “policy analysis” (2016-2021-2023) also experienced strong growth, with a consistent trend since 2016 and peaking in 2023. This spike emphasises the importance of an analytical approach in understanding policy dynamics, especially in the post-pandemic era. Topics such as “governance” (2016-2017-2021), “policy process” (2017-2018-2021), and “policy design” (2016-2020-2021) show a stable trend pattern from the early years and have intensified until 2021 (e.g, Marsden & Reardon, 2017). This reflects the continued academic attention to public policy-making's structural, design, and process aspects and the need for a more integrated systemic response.

Responsive Focus on Global and Regional Issues is marked by the emergence of “COVID-19” (2020-2021-2022) as a keyword that signals a shift in global attention to public health policies and socio-economic resilience (e.g, Jin et al., 2022; Lu et al., 2020; Osei-Kojo et al., 2022). This keyword began to dominate in 2020 and remains relevant until 2022, confirming that COVID-19 is not just a health topic but also a complex and multidimensional policy issue. In addition, the topic of “China” (2017-2021-2022) shows a shift in attention to comparing country policies (e.g, He et al., 2016; Mu et al., 2016). The emergence of a median in 2021 and a peak in 2022 indicates interest in alternative policy approaches (e.g, Li et al., 2023), especially in the context of pandemic response and strategic development policies (e.g, Fan et al., 2021; Jin et al., 2022).

Topics such as “policy failure” (2018-2019-2020), “policy instruments” (2018-2023-2023), and

“public policy analysis” (2018-2020-2023) mark the rise of more critical and technocratic studies (e.g., Dunlop & Radaelli, 2018; Lovell, 2019; Ralston et al., 2023). “Policy failure” emerged strongly between 2018 and 2020 as a reflection of the crisis; this topic was widely used as a lesson or to criticise policies that failed to face global challenges (e.g., Dunlop & Radaelli, 2018; Lovell, 2019). Meanwhile, “policy instruments” became a new topic that emerged and immediately peaked in 2023, indicating a shift in focus from the conceptual to the technical realm in policy implementation (e.g., Maia & Karruz, 2023; Ralston et al., 2023; Wickberg, 2023). In addition, “local government” (2015-2022-2023) showed a significant increase in 2022–2023. The results indicate local governments' increasingly central role in policy innovation and local responses to global challenges (e.g., McQuestin et al., 2023; Şahin & Turan, 2022; Traore, 2023).

Topics such as “comparative policy analysis” (2017-2018-2021) and “comparative public policy” (2018-2018-2018) indicate a trend of comparative approaches in understanding variations in policy implementation across countries. Comparative public policy only appears strongly at one point, indicating that the topic is likely case-specific or localised (e.g., Kamal & Burton, 2018). While “comparative public policy” peaked rapidly in 2018 and did not show any sustainability, “comparative policy analysis” remained consistent until 2021, demonstrating the strategic value of this approach in the policy literature (e.g., Peters, 2018; Rhodes et al., 2021; Zahariadis et al., 2023).

This topic trend analysis shows that research in the field of public policy continues to evolve following global social, political, and health dynamics. 2020 was a major turning point that showed a major shift in research direction in response to the global pandemic (Folfas, 2024). Topics such as “public policy,” “policy analysis,” and “governance” remain foundational. In contrast, new themes such as “COVID-19,” “local government,” and “policy instruments” emerged in response to the contemporary context and have become increasingly relevant in post-pandemic recovery studies. This underscores the need for methodological adaptation and substantive focus in future policy studies.

Thematic Evolution

Thematic evolution aims to see changes and shifts in thematic focus over time and option analysis using author keywords with two main cutting points, namely 2019 and 2022. These two years were chosen because they reflect important periods in the global context, namely before and after the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, which is considered to have a significant influence on the direction and priorities of research (Folfas, 2024).

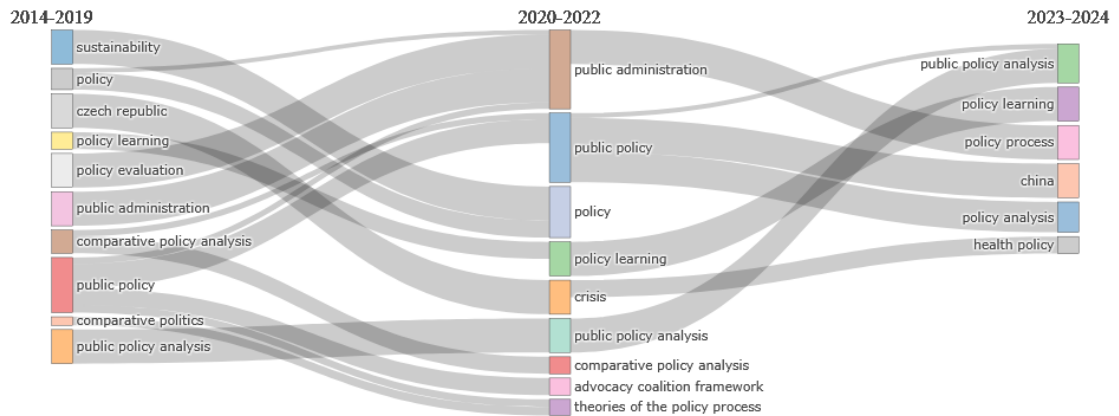


Figure 7. Thematic Evolution by Author Keywords. Source: Biblioshiny Output

Public policy studies in the last decade have developed progressively and adaptively, from concept-dominated to empirical, contextual, and technology-based approaches. Several topics show strong consistency, such as Comparative Policy Analysis (Inclusion Index 0.50; Stability 0.25) and Public Administration, which is very stable (Inclusion Index 1.00), indicating its central role in policy research. Meanwhile, Comparative Politics has shifted to a theoretical approach in Theories of the Policy Process and Advocacy Coalition Framework, reflecting a tendency towards a more specific and conceptual approach. The emergence of new keywords such as China, Crisis, and Czech Republic reflects academic responses to the global context, including the COVID-19 pandemic and regional political crises. These findings confirm that themes in public policy are not only developing continuously, but also responsive to global changes.

The Thematic evolution shows three main directions: first, there is a consolidation and deepening of key themes such as comparative policy analysis and policy learning, indicating a tendency to deepen existing approaches rather than drastically broaden them. Second, there is a theoretical expansion through adopting frameworks such as the advocacy coalition framework and the strengthening of policy sciences, reflecting academic development and the search for a more solid theoretical foundation. Third, the response to global dynamics is becoming more visible, indicating that geopolitical changes and the ongoing global crisis increasingly influence policy studies.

Discussion

Five general themes and topics have been clustered from the Science Mapping that has been carried out (theme evolution, trend topic, and co-occurrence) to provide an overview of general research themes and topics regarding public policy and policy analysis, with the following synthesis results:

Public Policy Analysis and Policy Processes in a Global Context

One of the main concerns is the approach in policy analysis; the approach in policy analysis and policy process has a crucial role in understanding the dynamics of decision-making in various countries (Bandelow et al., 2022; Nam & Weible, 2023; Shiffman et al., 2018). Through policy analysis and policy process, it can be identified that the interaction between actors (Nam & Weible, 2023), institutional structures (Nohrstedt & Olofsson, 2016), and the socio-political

(Weible & Heikkila, 2017) context in each country greatly influences the effectiveness of a policy. One way to strengthen the theoretical framework in research related to public policy and policy analysis is to utilise the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF) as an analysis model to explain the dynamics of policy coalitions, changes in values, and the influence of actors in the long-term policy process (Lantis, 2021; Park & Weible, 2018; Rugema et al., 2022). The use of ACF in public policy and policy analysis research is to map how a coalition of policy actors with aligned values and interests can influence policy direction, both in normal situations and in crisis conditions (Elgin, 2015; Embrett & Randall, 2014; Piggin & Hart, 2017).

This theme also highlights Comparative Policy Analysis and Comparative Public Policy to identify similarities and differences in policy strategies, especially in responding to global issues. As a contemporary case study, the COVID-19 crisis is analysed to evaluate the impact of policies amidst the global crisis and how countries with different institutional backgrounds formulate effective policy responses (Takefuji, 2022). In the context of comparative public policies between countries, several research findings indicate significant variations in policy responses to the global COVID-19 crisis (Alshoubaki & Harris, 2021; Osei-Kojo et al., 2022; Roziqin et al., 2021). One particular focus is directed at policy implementation in China (Jin et al., 2022; Lu et al., 2020), which is positioned as an integral part of the comparative study (Yang & Huang, 2022). The research findings show that the centralised political context in China influences the pattern of policy implementation that tends to be top-down but remains flexible in policy adaptation at the local level. Countries with decentralised governance systems tend to show more adaptive but not always consistent policy responses (Mintrom & O'Connor, 2020; Roziqin et al., 2021), while countries with centralised systems, such as China, show a pattern of fast, coordinated, and controlled policy implementation despite challenges in information transparency. The case study of China in the framework of comparative policy analysis shows that a strict top-down approach is one of the main factors in the initial success of pandemic mitigation, although, on the other hand, it limits public participation and accountability (Lu et al., 2020; Yang & Huang, 2022).

This discussion reinforces the importance of integrating theoretical and comparative approaches in public policy studies in the era of globalisation. The diversity of response patterns between countries proves that no single policy model can be applied universally but rather requires a contextual understanding of institutional structures, political values, and state capacity to respond to global challenges. Thus, this study emphasises that global policy analysis must always consider cross-country factors, adaptive theoretical models, and the complexity of policy implementation in the field.

Dynamics of Public Policy and Local Government: Policy Design, Formulation, and Change

In the context of government decentralisation, local governments have an increasingly strategic role in the policy design and policy formulation process (Reeder, 2020; Traore, 2023). Local governments act as implementers of central policies and have the authority to design and formulate policies that follow local needs and characteristics (Drew et al., 2017). Policies at the local level are no longer merely implementations of central policies but have developed into policy products that are formulated based on the region's needs, characteristics, and specific problems (Caloghirou et al., 2016). The region's policy design process is greatly influenced by the ability of local governments to identify priority issues, formulate alternative solutions, and build collaboration with other local actors, including communities, civil society organisations,

and the private sector. Emphasising the importance of institutional capacity and the quality of policy actors at the regional level in ensuring that the resulting policies are responsive and adaptive.

Highlighting the dynamics of policy change in local government environments influenced by various factors, including political pressure (Liu et al., 2018), socio-economic needs (Shpak et al., 2021; Tedds, 2023), budget capacity (Segal & Baumgartner, 2024), and demands for community participation (Laudari et al., 2020; Rolfe, 2016). These factors serve as important determinants in accelerating or inhibiting policy changes in local government. Interestingly, policy changes at the local level often occur due to bottom-up pressure stemming from community aspirations or the outcomes of previous policy evaluations (Rolfe, 2016). The formulation and alteration of regional policies are often situational and shaped by relationships between actors and the local political context (Capano & Galanti, 2021; Zuhdi et al., 2024). Regarding policy change, several articles indicate that dynamics at the local level tend to be more flexible and adaptive. However, they remain influenced by factors such as political interests (Wickberg, 2023), regional budget stability (Pavlović & Bešić, 2019), pressure from interest groups (Albareda & Fraussen, 2023), and responses to local emergencies or crises (Bárrios et al., 2018).

Local governments play a strategic role in maintaining the relevance and effectiveness of policies at the local level (McQuestin et al., 2023). Policies at the local level are dynamic (Vogel & Henstra, 2015), contextual (Boossabong, 2017), and highly influenced by relations between actors and institutional capacity in the region (Şahin & Turan, 2022). Therefore, researchers need to develop research on public policy and policy analysis in the local context to strengthen policy analysis capabilities and build a participatory and data-based policy formulation system. This discussion emphasises that the success of public policy at the local level is largely determined by how well the process of designing, formulating, and changing policies can answer the community's needs and adapt to the dynamics of the local socio-political environment.

Governance and Evidence-Based Policy Making: Evaluation and Implications for Public Policy

The application of effective governance principles is an important prerequisite in building a policy-making and implementation process responsive to the community's needs (Johns et al., 2018). In various government contexts, by implementing good governance principles such as transparency, participation, accountability, and responsiveness, policy governance can increase the legitimacy of policies while strengthening public trust in the government and becoming an important basis in every stage of the policy process and implementation (Merad & Trump, 2018; Rice et al., 2024).

Evidence-based policy is a strategic approach that encourages the government to formulate policies that are more relevant, measurable, and by community needs, especially in dealing with complex issues that require quick but targeted decisions (Petrescu & Lambru, 2021). This approach emphasizes decision-making based on empirical data and study results, not merely political considerations or intuition (Bédard, 2015). Although it has begun to be adopted in various sectors, its implementation still faces challenges such as limited accurate data, human resource capacity, and less than optimal synergy between policy makers and research institutions (Rissman & Smail, 2015). On the other hand, policy evaluation also has a strategic role in assessing the efficiency, effectiveness, and impact of policies, as well as being the basis for more adaptive follow-up policies (Ball & W. Head, 2021). However, evaluation practices are often

administrative and have not been optimally utilized as a strategic reflection tool in policy improvement (Rolfe, 2016). The lack of integration of evaluation into the policy cycle means that policy revisions are often not based on strong data, even though comprehensive evaluations can identify implementation weaknesses and provide evidence-based recommendations for subsequent policies (Ghazinoory & Aghaei, 2021).

Further research on improving public policy governance must be accompanied by strengthening the culture of evidence-based decision-making and systematic evaluation. Further research must provide input to stakeholders that it is necessary to build a governance ecosystem that sustainably supports evidence-based policy, supported by a policy evaluation system integrated into each policy cycle (Roberts, 2023; Romme & Meijer, 2020). Thus, policies are not only of high quality and responsive in the short term, but the resulting policies will be more adaptive, effective, accountable, and sustainable in responding to social challenges that continue to develop in the current era of globalisation and digitalisation.

Public Policy Dynamics: Failure, Learning, and Policy Transfer

With a focus on how public policy experiences complex dynamics amidst social, political, and economic changes, several studies have shown that factors and causes of policy failure can come from various aspects, ranging from errors in formulating objectives, inconsistencies in policy instruments, and weak coordination between actors to limited available resources. Policy failure is also often triggered by low public participation and suboptimal use of data and evidence in decision-making (Newman & Bir, 2017). Policies that are not evidence-based or ignore the local socio-political context tend to fail in the implementation stage. The dynamics of public policy are greatly influenced by the government's ability to identify factors that cause policy failure and conduct a comprehensive evaluation of the formulation and implementation process (Dunlop et al., 2020).

Policy failures are often the starting point in the policy learning process (Trein & Vagionaki, 2024). Learning from previous policy experiences is an important strategy to improve the quality of public policies in the future (Lovell, 2019). Governments and policy actors who can reflect on weaknesses and failures tend to be more adaptive in designing responsive and effective follow-up policies (Dunlop & Radaelli, 2018). This process is a key element in building a sustainable policy system because it allows the evaluation of weaknesses in previous implementations as a basis for formulating new, more contextual policy strategies. On the other hand, policy transfers between regions and countries are also common practices to improve the quality of public policies (de Oliveira, 2022; De Oliveira & Pal, 2018). This mechanism allows for the adoption of policies that have proven successful elsewhere while still taking into account adjustments to the local social, cultural, and political context (Wickberg, 2023). Effective transfer is not simply copying, but requires careful adaptation so that policies can be implemented optimally in new environments.

Policy improvement efforts in various regions often involve a process of joint learning and sharing of experiences between governments to achieve more optimal effectiveness, which shows that public policy is dynamic. Research related to the combination of failure evaluation, learning processes, and policy transfer is an important reference in creating more qualified and competitive public policies in the era of globalisation.

Public Policy and Administration Instruments in Public Policy Analysis

The success of public policy implementation can be determined by selecting and using

appropriate policy instruments according to the social (Carlier et al., 2024), political (Toshkov & Romeijn, 2021), and economic (Calcagno & Hefner, 2018) context faced. Policy instruments have a strategic role in determining the effectiveness of policy implementation, where the type of instrument chosen, whether regulatory, incentive, information, or direct service, greatly influences the level of success of policy implementation in the field (Taeihagh, 2017). Selecting the right instrument will increase acceptance, public participation, and the smoothness of distributing policy benefits to the community (Roberts, 2023). Variations in policy instruments, ranging from regulations, economic incentives, and direct services to information instruments, have advantages and challenges in their implementation (Carter et al., 2016). Regulatory instruments tend to be effective in creating legal compliance, while incentive instruments are more effective in encouraging voluntary behavioural change (Ball & W. Head, 2021; Ewert et al., 2021; Thomann, 2018). Therefore, selecting the type of instrument that is in line with the characteristics of the policy problem is an important factor in determining the effectiveness of policy implementation.

Public administration plays a foundational role in public policy governance (Wickberg, 2023), which is responsible for the technical formulation (Romme & Meijer, 2020), implementation (Rogge & Reichardt, 2016), and evaluation of policies (Fan et al., 2021). Professional, adaptive, and responsive public administration performance has been proven to have a close relationship with the success of implementing various policies (Rogge & Reichardt, 2016). Bureaucratic capacity, institutional governance, and the quality of administrative leadership directly influence the process of policy formulation, implementation, and supervision (Carter et al., 2016). Adaptive, transparent, and professional public administration is an absolute requirement in ensuring that policy instruments can be implemented optimally at the local and national government levels.

Integrating relevant policy instruments, responsive public administration, and systematic policy analysis can create a more adaptive, responsive, and sustainable policy cycle in facing ever-evolving social challenges. It must be highlighted that research related to strengthening policy analysis capacity and improving public administration governance must be prioritised to improve the quality of public policies in various sectors.

Conclusion

Based on bibliometric and thematic analysis, public policy and policy analysis studies show strong dynamics in academic performance, geographical contribution, and theme evolution. Policy Sciences is listed as the most influential journal, followed by Policy and Politics, which shows impressive performance despite its relative newness. Geographically, the United Kingdom dominates in terms of academic impact, followed by the USA and the Netherlands, which continue to play an important role globally. The pattern of international collaboration shows the dominance of Western European countries, showing strength in research quality and global networks. In contrast, participation in Asia is growing. From the thematic side, the evolution of research leads to the consolidation and deepening of core issues, strengthening of theoretical approaches, and responding to global dynamics. In addition, five general themes have also been clustered, illustrating the diversity of approaches, from local dynamics to global challenges such as policy failure, evidence-based evaluation, and public governance.

These findings contribute to the development of Public Administration theory by showing that the dynamics of public policy research and policy analysis are no longer static or fragmented but rather develop thematically and geographically in a more systemic pattern. The consolidation of

core issues, strengthening of theoretical approaches such as the advocacy coalition framework, and responses to global dynamics indicate that Public Administration theory is moving towards integrating formal-bureaucratic rationality with global socio-political complexity. In addition, the high level of international collaboration, especially in Western Europe, emphasises the importance of transnational networks as a new variable in modern public administration theory, enriching the perspective on network-based governance. The five clusters of themes also expand the conceptual boundaries of Public Administration by emphasising the importance of policy failure issues, evidence-based evaluation, and the process of policy globalisation, which encourages the need to renew theoretical approaches from traditional hierarchical models to more adaptive, participatory, and evidence-based models. Overall, this study contributes to deepening the understanding of the complexity of the reality of contemporary public administration and opens up space for developing theories that are more contextual and responsive to global change.

This study has several limitations that must be considered as part of a critical evaluation. First, this study only uses one database, namely Scopus, so the potential variation and diversity of other databases, such as Web of Science or Dimensions, have not been covered. Second, the temporal coverage is limited to the last decade (2014–2024), which may not fully capture the long-term historical dynamics in the development of public policy studies. Third, the performance analysis focuses on only two main aspects, namely the most influential sources and country contributions, so other aspects, such as individual productivity, institutions, and collaboration networks, have not been analysed. Fourth, science mapping is limited to co-occurrence techniques, trend topics, and thematic evaluations to maintain the focus of the research on the initial objectives. In addition, the results presented are still general and descriptive, so there is open space for deeper exploration in the future.

Several directions can be used for further research in line with these limitations. The use of various additional databases, such as Web of Science or other databases that are part of the Social Science Citation Index (SSCI) scope, is expected to expand the bibliometric coverage and provide a more holistic picture of the scientific ecosystem in the field of public policy. In addition, extending the analysis period can help reveal long-term trends and paradigm transitions that occur in policy theory and practice. The development of performance analysis can also be expanded by including other indicators such as author productivity, institutional influence, and citation analysis per article to obtain a deeper mapping and provide a comprehensive picture of the contribution of actors in this research ecosystem. On the other hand, the scientific mapping approach can be complemented with techniques such as co-citation analysis or bibliographic coupling to deepen understanding of the connectivity between ideas, the influence of classical literature, and identify topics experiencing accelerated academic attention. In terms of method and approach, integration with qualitative methods such as content or discourse analysis can also be an alternative in providing interpretive depth to the themes found. Thus, further research expands the dimensions of analysis and strengthens sharper theoretical contributions in developing adaptive and contextual Public Administration science.

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