

MA Public Policy, Jindal School of Government and Public Policy

Fall 2026

Communication and Public Policy

Credits: 4

Instructor: Chandan Nandy

Course Manual:

Introduction

This course, Communication and Public Policy, examines how communication shapes the formulation, implementation, and evaluation of public policy in contemporary political environments. It introduces students to the central role of narratives, media systems, public opinion, and strategic messaging in influencing policy agendas and democratic accountability.

Recognising that many policy challenges are complex and “wicked,” the course emphasises how ideas are framed, contested, and communicated among governments, civil society, media, and citizens.

Across fifteen weeks, the course combines theoretical foundations with practical applications. Students engage with key frameworks in political communication, the narrative policy approach, and behavioural insights, while also analysing the impact of digital media, misinformation, and crisis communication. Particular attention is given to stakeholder engagement, evidence communication, and the ethical dimensions of persuasion in policymaking.

Through readings, discussions, and applied exercises, students will develop the ability to critically analyse policy narratives, design effective communication strategies, and communicate policy ideas to diverse audiences. By the end of the course, students will be equipped to navigate complex communication environments and contribute meaningfully to policy processes in both public and non-governmental settings.

Class lectures:

Week 1: Introduction – Communication in the Policy Process

Topics

- Communication as a component of policymaking
- Agenda setting and policy narratives
- Policy audiences and stakeholders

Readings

- Deborah Stone — *Policy Paradox* (Ch. 1–2)
- John W. Kingdon — *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies*
- Frank Fischer & Herbert Gottweis — *The Argumentative Turn Revisited* (Intro)

Week 2: Theories of Political and Policy Communication

Topics

- Mass communication theories
- Framing and agenda setting
- Deliberative democracy

Readings

- Maxwell McCombs — *Setting the Agenda*
- Robert Entman — “Framing”
- Jürgen Habermas — *Public Sphere* (selections)

Week 3: Media Systems and Policy Influence

Topics

- Role of traditional media
- Media ownership and policy debate
- Journalism and accountability

Readings

- Hallin and Mancini — *Comparing Media Systems*
- Bennett and Livingston — *When the Press Fails*
- Doris Graber — *Mass Media and American Politics*

Week 4: Public Opinion and Policy Legitimacy

Topics

- Measuring public opinion
- Policy feedback and opinion formation
- Political persuasion

Readings

- Iyengar and Kinder — *News That Matters*
- James Druckman — “Political Preference Formation”
- Page and Shapiro — *The Rational Public*

Week 5: Policy Framing and Narrative

Topics

- Narrative Policy Framework
- Strategic framing
- Policy storytelling

Readings

- Jones and McBeth — “Narrative Policy Framework”
- Deborah Stone — *Policy Paradox* (Narratives)
- Emery Roe — *Narrative Policy Analysis*

Week 6: Government Communication and Public Information

Topics

- Strategic communication in government
- Public information campaigns
- Transparency and accountability

Readings

- Sanders and Canel — *Government Communication*
- OECD — *Communicating Public Policies*
- Christopher Hood — *The Blame Game*

Week 7: Policy Communication and Behavioural Change

Topics

- Behavioural insights
- Nudging and messaging
- Public health communication

Readings

- Thaler and Sunstein — *Nudge*
- Sunstein — *How Change Happens*
- WHO — Risk Communication Framework

Week 8: Digital Media and Policy Communication

Topics

- Social media and governance
- Digital campaigns
- Algorithmic amplification

Readings

- Zeynep Tufekci — *Twitter and Tear Gas*
- Philip Howard — *Pax Technica*

- Clay Shirky — *Here Comes Everybody*

Week 9: Misinformation, Disinformation, and Policy

Topics

- Information disorder
- Platform governance
- Public trust

Readings

- Wardle and Derakhshan — *Information Disorder*
- van der Linden — *Foolproof*
- Sinan Aral — *The Hype Machine*

Week 10: Stakeholder Engagement and Participatory Communication

Topics

- Deliberative policymaking
- Citizen participation
- Policy consultations

Readings

- Archon Fung — “Varieties of Participation”
- James Fishkin — *When the People Speak*
- OECD — *Innovative Citizen Participation*

Week 11: Communicating Policy Evidence

Topics

- Knowledge translation
- Evidence-based communication

- Communicating uncertainty

Readings

- Paul Cairney — *Politics of Evidence-Based Policy*
- Craft and Howlett — “Policy Advisory Systems”
- Cartwright and Hardie — *Evidence-Based Policy*

Week 12: Crisis Communication and Policy

Topics

- Risk communication
- Crisis governance
- Pandemic communication

Readings

- Arjen Boin et al. — *Crisis Management*
- Kathleen Tierney — *Social Roots of Risk*
- WHO — Crisis Communication Guidelines

Week 13: Policy Advocacy and Campaigns

Topics

- Advocacy coalitions
- NGO communication
- Policy campaigns

Readings

- Paul Sabatier — Advocacy Coalition Framework
- Marshall Ganz — *Why David Sometimes Wins*
- Aaker and Smith — *The Dragonfly Effect*

Week 14: Ethics, Power, and Inequality in Policy Communication (*New*)

Topics

- Ethics of persuasion and propaganda
- Power asymmetries in communication
- Inequality and voice in policy discourse

Readings

- Noam Chomsky — *Manufacturing Consent* (selections)
- Amartya Sen — *The Idea of Justice* (public reasoning sections)
- Nick Couldry — *Media, Society, World*

Week 15: Course Integration and Review

Topics

- Synthesising course concepts
- Student questions
- Course reflection and wrap-up

Additional resources:

- Databases, policy portals, media sources
- Writing and research support tools

Participation guidelines:

- Expectations for class discussion: Students are expected to go through all class readings and prepare themselves sufficiently for in-class discussions.
- Students must develop a keen interest in current affairs, media, or case examples – as suggested by the instructor – for fruitful discussion, debates and deliberation in class.
- Both the above will count for students' assessment.

