1 Introduction

Public policy is largely the product of political factors that require a systematic examination. Much has been written recently about how two of types of factors – ideas and institutions - can shape the politics of public policy (e.g., Béland 2009; Béland and Waddan 2012; Campbell 2004; Lieberman 2002; Orenstein 2008; Peters, Pierre, and King 2005; Schmidt 2011; Walsh 2000). This double emphasis on ideas and institutions is hardly surprising as it is present in the history of social science research going back to the work of Max Weber (1978), who is perceived as one of the key precursors of modern ideational and institutional analysis (Lepsius 2017). Revisiting this ideational and institutional tradition is helpful to grasp the politics of public policy, which is a key challenge for contemporary policy studies, including theories of the policy process (Weible and Sabatier 2018).

Beginning with historical institutionalism, a theoretical perspective centred on the historical analysis of institutions, this Element provides a critical review of some of the existing literature on the role of ideas and institutions in the politics of public policy. The aim is to contribute to comparative policy analysis and, more generally, the study of the politics of public policy, which is a crucial yet sometimes neglected issue in policy studies. Because most policy scholars interested in politics deal, in one way or another, with the role of ideas or institutions in their research, such a critical review should help them improve their knowledge of crucial analytical issues in policy and political analysis. The ensuing discussion brings together insights from both the policy studies literature and new institutionalism in sociology and political science, and stresses the explanatory role of ideas and institutions while directly engaging with existing approaches.

This Element addresses key issues for the study of policy stability and change: the relationship among different types of explanations in social science and public policy research, and the potential effects of their interaction and potential interdependence; the role of ideational and institutional processes in the construction of key policy actors' preferences and perceived interests; the role of ideas across the policy cycle and across territorial boundaries, and especially the role of transnational actors; and, finally, asymmetrical power relations among policy actors and how these relations affect the politics of ideas – in particular, institutional settings.

Now that we know what this contribution is about, it is helpful to explain what it is *not* about. First, this study focuses primarily on theoretical rather than methodological issues. Simultaneously, this Element recognizes that different methods, such as process tracing and quantitative analysis, can be

used to explore the role of ideas and their interaction with institutions (Béland and Cox 2011b; Jacobs 2015). Second, because of the limited space available, this Element does not systematically review all the literatures relevant for the analysis of ideational and institutional processes in political and policy research. Instead, it discusses the selected approaches because they illustrate key theoretical issues for the study of ideas and institutions in public policy. More detailed literature reviews on specific topics are already available, and many are cited in this Element to allow the reader to learn more about particular topics as needed.

Although this Element is largely theoretical in nature, it features selected examples and is written in a way that should make it accessible to a broad array of scholars. Written primarily for students and researchers, it should also be accessible to practitioners and informed readers. This Element covers a lot of theoretical ground and its structure is as straightforward as it can be considering the sheer number of issues at hand. In total, sixteen short sections comprise this Element: the Introduction, fourteen substantive sections, and the Conclusion. What these substantive sections have in common is that they each help the reader attain a better grasp of the politics of public policy through the consideration of key theoretical issues.

After this Introduction, we outline what ideas and institutions mean (Section 2). Then, attention turns more systematically to the widely used yet ambiguous and contested concept of institutionalism (Section 3). This is followed by a discussion of political institutions (Section 4) and policy feedback (Section 5) as they are studied within historical institutionalism, the type of institutionalism that is most centred on politics, political institutions, and policy legacies. Attention then turns to the role of ideas within historical institutionalism (Section 6) and, more specifically, to the different types of ideas considered in the literature (Section 7). Then, we map the role of ideas and the actors carrying them across the policy cycle (Section 8). This mapping exercise leads to a critical look at existing theories of the policy process, with a focus on the advocacy coalition and the multiple-streams frameworks, both of which have a number of limitations as far as the combined and systematic study of ideas and institutions is concerned (Section 9). This is followed by a discussion of analytical issues particularly relevant for the combined examination of ideas and institutions: the role of transnational actors (Section 10), the construction of identities (Section 11), the politics of interests as it relates to inequalities and asymmetrical power relations (Section 12), the production of expertise (Section 13), the mechanisms of policy change (Section 14) and, finally, the potential impact of psychological and structural factors as they relate to ideational and institutional factors (Section 15). The Conclusion

(Section 16) sketches an agenda for future research about the relationship between ideas and institutions in the politics of public policy.

A key take-away message of this Element is that combining the study of ideas and institutions in the analysis of policy stability and change requires researchers to draw a clear analytical line between them before exploring how these two types of explanation may interact or even become interdependent. This task requires breaking down ideas and institutions while taking into account other potential explanations, namely structural and psychological ones.

2 Ideas and Institutions as Explanatory Factors

One of the most crucial tasks necessary for the development of both ideational and institutional analysis is to understand "ideas" and "institutions" as distinct explanatory factors in policy and political research. We can rely on the work of Craig Parsons (2007) to do this. Parsons convincingly maps explanatory arguments in the context of a simple yet compelling typology (for a critical discussion of his work, see Daigneault and Béland 2015).

Parsons (2007) identifies four main logics of explanation in political and policy research: structural, institutional, ideational, and psychological. First, structural and institutional explanations feature a logic-of-position that "explains by detailing the landscape around someone to show how an obstacle course of material or man-made constraints and incentives channels her to certain actions" (Parsons 2007, p. 13). Here, the term "structural" points to exogenous material explanations and "institutional" refers to historically constructed explanations. Second, ideational and psychological explanations feature a logic-of-interpretation that "explains by showing that someone arrives at an action only through one interpretation of what is possible and/or desirable" (Parsons 2007, p. 13). The main difference between ideational and psychological explanations is that the former are historically contingent while the later reflect hardwired cognitive processes.

This typology is useful for ideational and institutional analysis in part because it helps elucidate how scholars can combine the logic-of-position associated with institutions and the logic-of-interpretation associated with ideas. From this perspective, we should first draw a clear line between ideas and institutions before assessing how they might shape the behaviour and decisions of individual and collective actors, separately or in tandem, through interaction effects or even through what Tasleem Padamsee (2009, p. 427) calls the "interdependence" of explanatory factors. "Interdependence" occurs when such factors become so intertwined that their respective policy impact

depends on their mutual imbrication. For instance, in the United States during the New Deal, the payroll tax as a policy instrument became inseparable from both the then limited institutional fiscal capacity of the federal government (Leff 1983) and the idea of social insurance that President Franklin Delano Roosevelt had long embraced (Richards 1994). Here, the push for payroll tax funding as part of the 1935 Social Security Act became the product of these two factors, as they proved closely intertwined and interdependent in their capacity to shape policy change (Béland 2007a).

As this discussion suggests, both ideas and institutions are likely to interact, or even become interdependent, to shape human behaviours and decisions, but the weight of each type of explanation and the ways in which ideas and institutions interact is contingent. This means that assessing their respective roles and potential relationships is an empirical question.

Simultaneously, although scholars might first look at ideas and institutions and the ways in which they might interact to shape how actors behave, they should also realize that turning to ideas and institutions and their interaction in their own right might not always be sufficient to explain particular human behaviours and institutions. This is why, when ideational and institutional factors fail to explain key outcomes, scholars should take a closer look at psychological and structural factors and assess whether they provide better explanations either on their own or combined with one another. This is consistent with Parsons' (2007) urging for scholars to start with their preferred types of explanation before turning to other causal factors, if necessary. This is why although the primary focus of this Element is on ideational and institutional processes, we take a more systematic look at psychological and structural factors as a way to remind the reader about the potential explanatory importance of these factors (Section 15).

Throughout this Element, the term "ideas" simply refers to the historically constructed beliefs and perceptions of both individual and collective actors. The emphasis on actors is crucial here because the best ideational analysis always begins and ends with the ways in which concrete actors think and talk about the world. This is true for two main reasons. First, ideational analysis recognizes the agency of social and political actors in shaping and reshaping policy ideas and discourse (Hay 2011; for a more general discussion on agency and public policy, see Capano and Galanti 2018). Second, detaching ideas from the discourse through which they are communicated makes ideas look overly abstract and detached from concrete political and policy interactions (Schmidt 2008). From this perspective, focusing on the actual actors who articulate key ideas over time is an appropriate way to avoid idealism in the pejorative sense of the term (Béland and Cox 2011b).

The close link between ideas and actors leads us to study institutions, which refers to embedded rules and norms that shape these actors' behaviours alongside, and in conjunction with, ideas. Institutions are social and political settlements and the products of power struggles (Campbell 2004, p. 1), which are themselves embedded in ideational and institutional processes (Béland 2010b; Carstensen and Schmidt 2016).

Ideas and institutions are closely related simply because actors' beliefs and perceptions can later become institutions, which are the rules of the game that both constrain and empower actors in various settings. Although they are associated with the logic-of-position (Parsons 2007), in the social and political world institutions are subject to constant interpretation and reinterpretation by individual and collective actors, which points once again to the close relationship, and even the possible interdependence (Padamsee 2009), of ideational and institutional factors.

Closely intertwined in actual political and policy processes, these two explanatory factors are both historically constructed and the product of ongoing interactions among actors, but they differ in part because institutions are embedded rules and ideas are not, in and of themselves (Béland and Cox 2011b). When ideas become institutionalized as the enforced rules of the game, they start to shape human action in a different way, thus becoming a different type of explanation (Parsons 2007). Much of the politics of ideas in public policy is about transforming these ideas into embedded institutions, but not all ideas are successful enough to become institutionalized policies in which concrete and enforceable rules are embedded. Some ideas are more influential than others and, if powerful actors can popularize or even impose them, have a better chance of becoming institutions (Hansen and King 2001). Conversely, discarded policy institutions such as the death penalty within the European Union may survive within political debates as a policy idea that has lost its legal and institutional status but that specific individuals and collectives may still embrace and promote (on the death penalty, see Hood and Hoyle 2015).

The above discussion is rather abstract and may give the impression that ideational and institutional analysis is only concerned with purely abstract explanatory factors. This is not the case in part because, in order to study their explanatory role, both ideas and institutions must be broken down into smaller units of analysis. There are different types of ideas and institutions in the real world and scholars must draw a clear line between them before studying how they could interact under particular circumstances (Béland and Waddan 2015). This is why this Element features a discussion about concrete types of ideas and institutions and how they might relate to different social and political actors.

The study of institutions is widely used in comparative research, as policy scholars and social scientists have demonstrated how existing institutions shape the behaviour of the actors that formulate and promote key policy ideas (Hall 1989; Orenstein 2008). Importantly, institutional factors that influence these actors are not only formal political institutions such as electoral and party systems; they also comprise historically constructed policy legacies that create both opportunities and constraints for policy-makers (Lecours 2005; Skocpol 1992; for a critical perspective, see Amenta 1998). This points to the analysis of self-reinforcing and self-undermining policy feedback (Jacobs and Weaver 2015), which are associated with historical institutionalism.

3 Institutionalisms and Institutions

The starting point of the discussion about the role of institutions in policy stability and change is historical institutionalism (Fioretos, Falleti, and Sheingate 2016; Lecours 2005; Orloff 1993; Pierson 1994; Skocpol 1992; Steinmo, Thelen, and Longstreth 1992), one of the three main types of new institutionalism that crystalized in the 1980s and early 1990s (Campbell 2004; Hall and Taylor 1996; Schmidt 2008).[1] It is useful to discuss historical institutionalism alongside these two other main types of new institutionalism in order to understand what is unique about it. First, rational-choice institutionalism is grounded in an economic perspective according to which actors make choices in a constraining institutional and material environment. These constraints typically foster "evolutionary change" and "strategic equilibrium" (Campbell 2004, p. 11). A classic example of rational-choice institutionalism is the work of economist Douglas North (1990) on path dependence and institutional continuity, which had a direct influence on scholars from other disciplines, including sociology (Mahoney 2000) and political science (Pierson 2000; for a critique of path dependence, see Kay 2005). Second, organizational institutionalism, as its name suggests, focuses on the development of organizations over time. More specifically, the emphasis of organizational institutionalism is on how "taken-for-granted cognitive and normative structures constrain (and enable) actors" (Campbell 2004, p 11). An early and widely cited example of organizational institutionalism is "The iron cage revisited," an article by sociologists Paul DiMaggio and Walter Powell (1983) that shows how the emergence of organizational fields favours isomorphism, a process whereby organizations become increasingly similar as the actors populating them seek to increase the

[1] For a critical discussion stressing the ideational side of historical institutionalism, see Hay and Wincott 1998; for a broad overview of new institutionalism, see Peters 2011.

legitimacy of these organizations by making them fit well into their institutional environment.

In contrast, as the name implies, historical institutionalism is centred on the historical development of institutions.[2] Even when dealing with single-country case studies, an institution's historical development is typically studied from a comparative angle. Historical institutionalism has a strong temporal orientation, which is why, in addition to focusing on formal political institutions and their impact on individual and collective behaviour, it also stresses the need to understand existing policies as institutions that can shape future policy decisions through what is known as policy feedback (Béland 2010a; Pierson 1993). A well-known example of historical institutionalism is *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers* by US sociologist and political scientist Theda Skocpol (1992). The work looks at political institutions and feedback effects from existing policies, such as Civil War pensions, to explain the specific course of social policy development in the United States before the New Deal. Although her book focuses on the United States, Skocpol applies a comparative lens where US actors, institutions, and policy legacies are compared to the ones found in other industrial countries to shed light on so-called American exceptionalism.

While rational-choice institutionalism focuses on strategic behaviour and organizational institutionalism on cultural norms, "[h]istorical institutionalists are eclectic; they use both of these approaches to specify the relationship between institutions and action" (Hall and Taylor 1996, p. 940). This eclectic approach makes historical institutionalism a potential vehicle for ideational analysis because it leaves room for the recognition of both the agency of actors and the central role of cultural and social meanings associated with ideas. Simultaneously, historical institutionalism has a rich comparative component much less evident in the two other forms of institutionalism. Finally, and even more crucially, historical institutionalism is the purest form of institutionalism in the sense that it is centred primarily on institutional explanations, which is actually not the case for rational-choice or organizational institutionalism. As Parsons (2007) shows, rational-choice institutionalists typically make structural arguments, and organizational sociologists tend to emphasize ideational explanations.

The purest form of institutionalism – historical institutionalism – has potential for ideational analysis, something that will become clearer in the discussion

[2] In the United States, historical institutionalism is related to American Political Development (APD), which promotes systematic historical perspectives on US politics and institutions. Like historical institutionalism, APD leaves much room for the study of ideas and some of the authors discussed in this Element arguably belong to both historical institutionalism and APD. On these issues, and APD more generally, see Orren and Skowronek 2004.

that follows, which focuses on early historical institutionalism work that paid direct attention to the role of ideas in politics and public policy. The focus on this earlier scholarship should not hide the shift away from ideational analysis within some of the more recent historical institutionalist scholarship, which has taken a structural and rational-choice turn (Blyth, Helgadottir, and Kring 2016). This tendency may have led authors such as Mark Bevir and Jason Blakely (2018, p. 7) to assume misleadingly that historical institutionalism is necessarily grounded in a narrow form of "naturalism" incompatible with what they call the "interpretative turn," which is ideational in nature. One of the contributions of this Element is to show once again how historical institutionalism, when properly used and understood, is an appropriate vehicle for the study of ideas as they potentially interact with institutions (on this issue see also Campbell 2004; Schmidt 2011). Rooted in this basic intellectual project, the following sections outline the key institutional factors at the heart of historical institutionalism before showing how this approach can lead to ideational analyses to explore the interaction and the potential interdependence of ideational and institutional processes in the politics of public policy.

4 Political Institutions and Public Policy

One of historical institutionalism's central assumptions is that political institutions have a durable impact on the ways in which actors mobilize within the policy process. First, historical institutionalism recognizes that political institutions can shape key political actors in the first place. This is the case for electoral rules that preside over the development of political parties, as party systems vary greatly from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. In her book *Parting at the Crossroads*, devoted to the development of health care reform in post–World War II Canada and the United States, political scientist Antonia Maioni (1998) explains how differences in party systems can shape policy development. According to her, in contrast to the US party system centred almost exclusively on the opposition between Democrats and Republicans, Canadian parliamentary institutions allowed for the advent of influential socialist parties in the 1930s and 1940s. The emergence of these parties at both the provincial and the federal levels increased the pressure on the then dominant political parties, especially the Liberal Party, to support the expansion of universal health coverage through federal funding (Maioni 1998).

Beyond the discussion about political parties, Maioni's (1998) work stresses how political institutions shape federalism and other forms of territorial politics. Constitutional design is key here, as the distinction between unitary and federal states is crucial for the study of both politics and public policy (Pierson 1995).

Yet, in contrast to scholars who describe federalism as a simple "variable" (Greer, Béland, Lecours, and Dubin 2019), historical institutionalists also point to the fact that the nature and policy effects of federal institutions vary greatly from one federal country to the next (Benz and Broschek 2013; Obinger, Leibfried, and Castles 2005). For example, in her work on the development of conditional cash transfers in Argentina and Brazil, Tracy Fenwick (2015) shows how the constitutional design of the Brazilian federal system grants much political autonomy to municipalities, which makes it possible for the president to work with them to neutralize potential interference from state governors. In contrast, Fenwick (2015) suggests that municipalities' weaker constitutional and institutional status in Argentina works to increase governors' power, making it harder for the president to circumvent them and promote the development of conditional cash transfers across the country.

In addition to party systems and federalism, another factor on which institutionalist scholars have focused is the role of courts. This role is particularly obvious in the United States, where scholars such as William Forbath (1991) and Victoria Hattam (1993) explore how the central role of the Supreme Court in that country in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries impacted labour unions' political strategies and their relationship to the state. Because they faced so much opposition from the Supreme Court and other legal institutions, US labour unions emphasized collective bargaining and downplayed the need for political mobilization, which had a major impact on policy development during the Progressive Era (Skocpol 1992). In her book, Hattam (1993) combines an institutionalist perspective with close attention to the role of ideas, arguing that "labour visions" and institutional factors are closely related.

Party systems, federalism, and the role of courts are only three ways in which political institutions can shape the mobilization of various individual and collective actors. A number of historical institutionalist scholars use the concept of veto point to offer a more systematic look at how political actors and institutions interact closely to impact the policy process. This helps identify how institutional configurations may empower specific actors and allow them to prevent policy reform from being adopted in the first place (Bonoli 2001; Immergut 1992; Kay 1999).[3] For instance, Immergut explains how certain political institutions can help determine physicians' political power by creating particular veto points they might use to influence policy (Immergut 1992).

[3] The concept of a veto point is often associated with the concept of a veto player, which has a slightly different meaning, in part because it derives more from rational-choice theory than from historical institutionalism (Tsebelis 2002; for a recent critical discussion, see Ganghof 2017).

Drawing on this scholarship, Stephen Kay (1999, p. 406) illustrates the historical institutionalist take on the role of political institutions by arguing that they "shape (but do not determine) political conflict by providing interest groups with varying opportunities to veto policy." From this perspective, institutions create both constraints and opportunities for political actors involved in the policy process without eliminating their agency, which leads to a nondeterministic take on the influence of institutions.

It is important, however, to recognize that some proponents of historical institutionalism have adopted a purely deterministic approach to policy stability and change that is problematic at best. This is the case of the work by Sven Steinmo and Jon Watts (1995) on the lack of universal health insurance in the United States. The authors attribute this to the fragmentation of political power, an institutional characteristic that increases the influence of interest groups capable of mobilizing against progressive reforms. For the authors, who were writing not long after the defeat of President Clinton's Health Security initiative, "the United States does not have comprehensive national health insurance (NHI) because American political institutions are biased against this type of reform" (Steinmo and Watts 1995; for a critical discussion, see Hacker 1997, p. 173). This type of strict institutional determinism is at odds with recent institutionalist literature on policy stability and change that stresses the complexity, ambiguity, and multiple potential effects of institutions over time (Béland and Waddan 2012; Mahoney and Thelen 2009; Palier 2005; Streeck and Thelen 2005). This understanding of institutions is also present in the recent literature on policy feedback, discussed in the next section.

5 Policy Feedback

Policy feedback is a key concept within the historical institutionalist tradition (Béland 2010a). Stressing the importance of this concept is essential in part because much of the literature focusing on the relationship between ideas and institutions simply neglects policy feedback at the expense of formal political institutions (Campbell 2004; Hay 2011; Schmidt 2011). Yet, feedback effects from existing policies can be as important as formal political institutions in accounting for policy stability and change over time (Béland 2010a; Pierson 1993).

Anticipated in the work of scholars such as Hugh Heclo (1974), Theodore J. Lowi (1964), and E. E. Schattschneider (1935), the concept of policy feedback is strongly associated with the historical institutionalist tradition from which it emerged. Simultaneously, this concept has been widely used since the late 1980s, both within and outside historical institutionalism, as a growing