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TRUTH AND POST-TRUTH IN PUBLIC POLICY: INTERPRETING THE ARGUMENTS

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In memory of Herbert Gottweis

Truth and Post-Truth in Public Policy: Interpreting the Arguments

Elements in Public Policy

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Abstract: The phenomenon of post-truth poses a problem for the public policy-oriented sciences, including policy analysis. “Fake news” and the post-truth denial of facts constitute major concerns for numerous policy fields. Whereas a standard response is to call for more and better factual information, this Element shows that the effort to understand this phenomenon has to go beyond the emphasis on facts to include an understanding of the social meanings that get attached to facts in the political world of public policy. The challenge is thus seen to be as much about a politics of meaning as it is about epistemology. The approach here supplements the examination of facts with an interpretive policy-analytic approach to gain a fuller understanding of post-truth. The importance of the interpretive perspective lies in its ability to analyze policy knowledge in social context. This is illustrated through an examination of the policy arguments that have shaped the social and political controversies related to climate change and COVID-19 denial.

Keywords: truth, post-truth, policy sciences, knowledge, social meaning, values, arguments, climate denial, COVID-19 policy, interpretive policy analysis

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