Policy Instrument

policy-instrument · policy instrument · concept

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Summary

An identifiable technique of collective action — a binding regulation, an executive order, a voluntary code, a technical standard, a treaty, or similar — by which a public authority structures behaviour to address a policy problem. Instrument choice is itself a substantive policy decision, not a downstream implementation detail.

At a glance

Used by

15 instrument(s)

Related concepts

model-card, red-team-evaluation, compute-threshold, provenance-watermarking

Primary source

Lascoumes, P. & Le Galès, P. (2007). Introduction: Understanding Public Policy through Its Instruments — From the Nature of Instruments to the Sociology of Public Policy Instrumentation. Governance 20(1): 1-21. See also Hood (1983) The Tools of Government, ch. 1-2; Salamon (2002) The Tools of Government: A Guide to the New Governance, pp. 1-47; Howlett (2011) Designing Public Policies, ch. 3-5.

Details

The canonical public-policy literature treats a policy instrument as a discrete 'tool of government' deployed to organise collective action. Hood's seminal NATO typology (Hood 1983, The Tools of Government, ch. 1-2) groups instruments by the resource base they exploit — Nodality (information), Authority (legal command), Treasure (fiscal transfer), and Organisation (direct provision). Salamon (2002, The Tools of Government: A Guide to the New Governance, pp. 1-47) extends the frame to a 'third-party governance' world in which most instruments are distributed delivery mechanisms (grants, contracts, vouchers, tax expenditures, regulation), and Howlett (2011, Designing Public Policies, ch. 3-5) operationalises instrument choice as constrained by information, capability, and political variables. The political-sociology tradition (Lascoumes & Le Galès 2007, Governance 20(1): 1-21) goes further: instruments are not neutral techniques but 'a particular form of materialisation of state power' (pp. 4-5) that produce effects independently of their stated objectives — meaning instrument choice is policy substance.

In AI governance, the patchwork of binding regulation (EU AIA), executive orders (US EO 14110), voluntary codes (G7 Hiroshima), technical standards (NIST AI RMF), international treaties (CoE AI Convention), and resolutions (UN A/RES/78/265) is best understood not as incoherence but as the predicted response to what Marchant et al. (2011, The Growing Gap Between Emerging Technologies and Legal-Ethical Oversight, ch. 1) call the 'pacing problem' — formal regulation lags capability development by years, so jurisdictions sequence soft-law (norm-setting, capability evaluation) ahead of hard-law (binding obligations). Anderljung et al. (2023, 'Frontier AI

Regulation,' arXiv:2307.03718, §3) argue the multi-instrument mix is necessary under dual-use indeterminacy; critics argue it enables regulatory arbitrage.

The seven InstrumentKind values in this wiki map onto Hood's NATO scheme as follows: binding_regulation + executive_order + international_treaty = Authority; technical_standard = Authority+Nodality hybrid; policy_statement + voluntary_code + resolution = Nodality/sermons. Market-based instruments (tradeable permits, Pigouvian taxes) and pure information instruments (registries, labels) are present in AI governance but not yet first-class categories in this catalog.

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APA

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CHICAGO

Policy Window. n.d.. "Policy Instrument." Wiki article (Concept). https://policywindow.org/wiki/policy-instrument.

HARVARD

Policy Window (n.d.) 'Policy Instrument', Wiki article — Concept, available at: https://policywindow.org/wiki/policy-instrument.

OSCOLA

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