

# Policy Analysis Toolbox

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## Preface

The aim of this toolbox is to provide a practice-oriented handbook for current and prospective Ukrainian and international policy analysts and think-tankers. It will guide you from the early stages of planning your policy research project to implementing it and communicating your analysis professionally and effectively. One of its principal points of focus is the selected methodological approaches that should be taken into account when developing a research design. The idea for the toolbox originated from the frequent enquiries we received about the workshops on research methods in Ukraine, offered jointly by our institute and our partner organisation Ilko Kucheriv Democratic Initiatives Foundation (DIF), in 2017–2019. The workshops formed part of the projects *Platform for Analytics and Intercultural Communication (PAIC)* and the *German Ukrainian Researchers Network (GURN)*, both supported by the German Federal Foreign Office. In addition, we were finding in our work that there was often a lack of uniform standards employed in analytical publications such as policy papers or briefs. A demand was also emerging for a handbook with a strong focus on scientific quality and research design to promote evidence-informed policy analysis, as well as a need for the collation of good advocacy practices. As a result, the IEP teamed up with our Ukrainian partners from DIF and formed an international working group with four other external researchers, from Germany, Ukraine, the UK and Georgia, in order to gain an interdisciplinary and multinational perspective. We started by comparing the analytical publications of leading Brussels-based, German and Ukrainian think tanks. The results and many examples arising from this research have been incorporated into the toolbox. The numerous visualisations, tables and checklists are intended to support you in your analyses and ensure that your advocacy communication does not fail because of ineffective presentation of your findings. The toolbox is available in Ukrainian and English.

**The toolbox was created within the scope of the project *German-Ukrainian Researchers Network (GURN 2)* and was kindly supported by the German Federal Foreign Office.**



Federal Foreign Office



## About the publishers

**Institut für Europäische Politik** – IEP is a non-profit organisation and one of the leading foreign and European policy research institutions in the Federal Republic of Germany. It has been analysing topics relating to European politics and integration and bringing them to practical implementation since 1959.

**Ilko Kucheriv Democratic Initiatives Foundation** – DIF, founded in 1992, is one of the most influential Ukrainian think tanks. It combines policy analysis and sociological surveys in its work. Thematic foci: democratic change, integration into the EU and the Euro-Atlantic area, reforms and conflict resolution.

## About the project

**The policy analysis toolbox is part of the German-Ukrainian Researchers Network (GURN 2).** The aim of the project is to strengthen cooperation between German and Ukrainian think tanks as well as expertise in the field of policy analysis and to promote bilateral dialogue and knowledge transfer. GURN is conducted in cooperation with the Ilko Kucheriv Democratic Initiatives Foundation (DIF, Kyiv), think twice UA (Kyiv) as well as the New Europe Center (NEC, Kyiv), and is kindly supported by the German Federal Foreign Office.

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Photo credit: Copyright © szakalikus/358659592/depositphotos.com

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## List of abbreviations

- CCP** – Chinese Communist Party
- CFSP** – Common Foreign and Security Policy
- CSDP** – Common Security and Defence Policy
- DIF** – Ilko Kucheriv Democratic Initiatives Foundation
- EaP** – Eastern Partnership
- EBRD** – European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
- EU** – European Union
- GDP** – Gross Domestic Product
- GDPR** – General Data Protection Regulation
- HDI** – Human Development Index
- IEP** – Institut für Europäische Politik
- IMF** – International Monetary Fund
- KIIS** – Kyiv International Institute of Sociology
- MSSD** – Most Similar Systems Design
- MDSD** – Most Different Systems Design
- NABU** – National Anti-Corruption Bureau of Ukraine
- OECD** – Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
- QoC** – Quality of Governance
- QMV** – Qualified Majority Voting
- QTA** – Quantitative Text Analysis
- QLTA** – Qualitative Text Analysis
- SSU** – Security Service of Ukraine

 | – Example

 | – Handout

# 1. What is evidence (-informed) policy analysis and why do we need it?

## 1.1 Definition of policy analysis

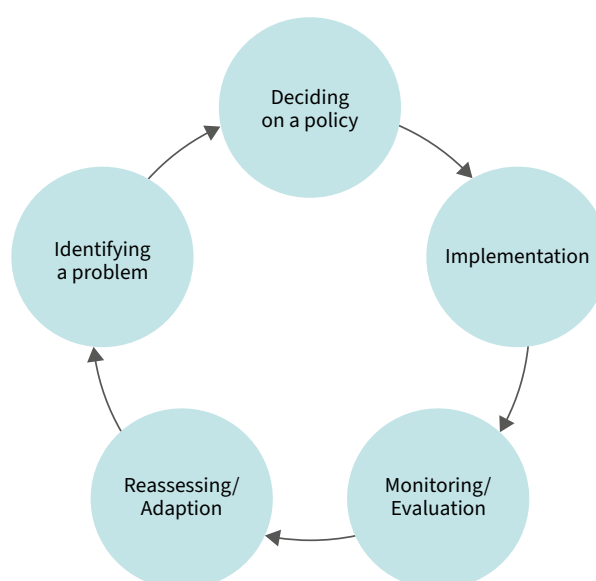
*Thomas Barrett*

Policy analysis cannot be narrowly defined due to its multidisciplinary nature. It aims at creating, assessing and communicating policy-relevant information to the public and decision-makers. It does so using an evidence-based approach rooted in social science methodology and theory (Dunn, 2015). In practice, this often involves identifying policy options to ameliorate a particular political, social or economic problem, and then deciding which options are likely to be most effective. But it can have broader aims, such as uncovering the existence of a previously unidentified social problem, or overcoming political and structural barriers to policy adoption and implementation.

Policy analysis can be broken down into three broad approaches: **analysis-centred**, **policy process** and **meta-policy**. The analysis-centred approach focuses on specific and targeted solutions to an identified problem. It is generally a more technocratic approach, since it focuses on how to produce an optimum outcome, regardless of stakeholder preference or structural constraints (Hoppe, 1999). One phrase associated with this approach is “best practice” – exploring policies adopted in a variety of domains (usually countries) to identify an “ideal” policy that can be implanted into other domains. An example of such an approach would be a policy paper on the Ukrainian gas market which argues that market liberalisation or more consumer protection is the optimum policy for reform based on European practice, but without paying close attention to its feasibility in the Ukrainian reality.

The **policy process approach** is centred on the feasibility of adoption and implementation of a policy based on the political process and stakeholder interests. This could include policies under consideration or those already being implemented by the government, or a policy recommendation under development by the analyst. The approach stems from a recognition that identifying ideal solutions will be of limited use without the potential to build sufficient political or social coalitions in favour of a supporting policy between policymakers, experts, elites or the electorate (Dryzek, 1993). This approach is also more concerned with the policy cycle: the concrete steps by which policymaking institutions or organisations move from identifying a problem to deciding on a policy, implementing it, monitoring and evaluating its outcomes, and possibly to reassessment (Althaus et al., 2020). How the policy cycle is set up will have a substantial impact on whether an institution will choose appropriate policies and respond effectively to any unforeseen consequences of their implementation.

*Figure 1.1: Policy cycle*



To continue the example of the Ukrainian gas sector: even if an analysis-centred approach showed that liberalising the Ukrainian gas market would produce the optimum outcome, if major stakeholders such as oligarchs and gas consumers oppose the policy, successful adoption and implementation of the policy is unlikely, without other simultaneous measures to win over these social blocs. Moreover, if the policy cycle in Ukraine is deficient (for example, if most draft laws are written by ill-qualified deputies' assistants or gas company lobbyists, and inadequately monitored and evaluated), then it is unlikely that implementation will be successful; how the process can be improved would need to be assessed. This approach also recognises that good advocacy, even when targeted at particular stakeholders, might not be enough to overcome obstacles. Resistance from certain interest groups or limitations in the policy process may be insurmountable, and either the policy needs to be adapted in light of these obstacles, or the analyst must give a clear idea of how they can be overcome.

The **meta-policy approach** is rooted in the idea that some societal problems may arise from structural factors, rather than poor individual policies or failures in the policy process. Whereas an analysis-centred approach operates at the micro level, meta-policy examines the contextual factors at the macro level that may influence specific policies. Staying with the gas sector, we might argue that reform is rendered almost impossible by the impunity granted to energy oligarchs, both by successive Ukrainian governments and by Western countries that allow money to be laundered through their financial centres. Thus, a meta-policy approach would argue that these structural or contextual factors must be altered before any meaningful change can occur at the individual policy level.

The choice of approach is largely determined by the priorities of the analyst. An analyst in a government ministry research department may be tasked with assessing a specific, narrowly defined policy option, and therefore opt for the analysis-centred approach. Meanwhile, an analyst working for an NGO in a particular sector may be less interested in the policy itself, and more concerned with how to build coalitions to push through an already identified policy option. This is very common in Ukraine, where a key question is often how to achieve the passing of a law through the Ukrainian legislator Rada in the face of opposition from various interest groups such as deputies, oligarchs or the presidential administration. Finally, the meta-policy approach may be appropriate to assess why a particular policy failed to create the desired effect (for instance, a policy that is considered "best practice" elsewhere). The meta-policy approach can put together the pieces of the broader puzzle to assess the factors that have interfered in a specific case. One example of this would be the struggle of many of Ukraine's anti-corruption bodies such as NABU or the High Anti-corruption Court to secure high-level convictions. The problem may not lie in the design of these particular institutions, but rather in wider structural conditions in Ukrainian law enforcement.



Table 1.1: Matrix of policy analysis types corresponding to research goals

	Type of policy analysis	Focus	Key question
Micro Level ↓	<b>Analysis-centred</b>	Specific social problem or policy	What is the ideal policy to address the social problem? Is the current policy addressing the problem effectively?
	<b>Policy process</b>	Stakeholders, political process, resource constraints	What is the most effective and realistic policy given the political constraints, stakeholder interests and limited resources?
Macro Level	<b>Meta-policy</b>	Stakeholders, political process, resource constraints	What is the most effective and realistic policy given the political constraints, stakeholder interests and limited resources?

## 1.2 How does policy analysis differ from other analytical formats?

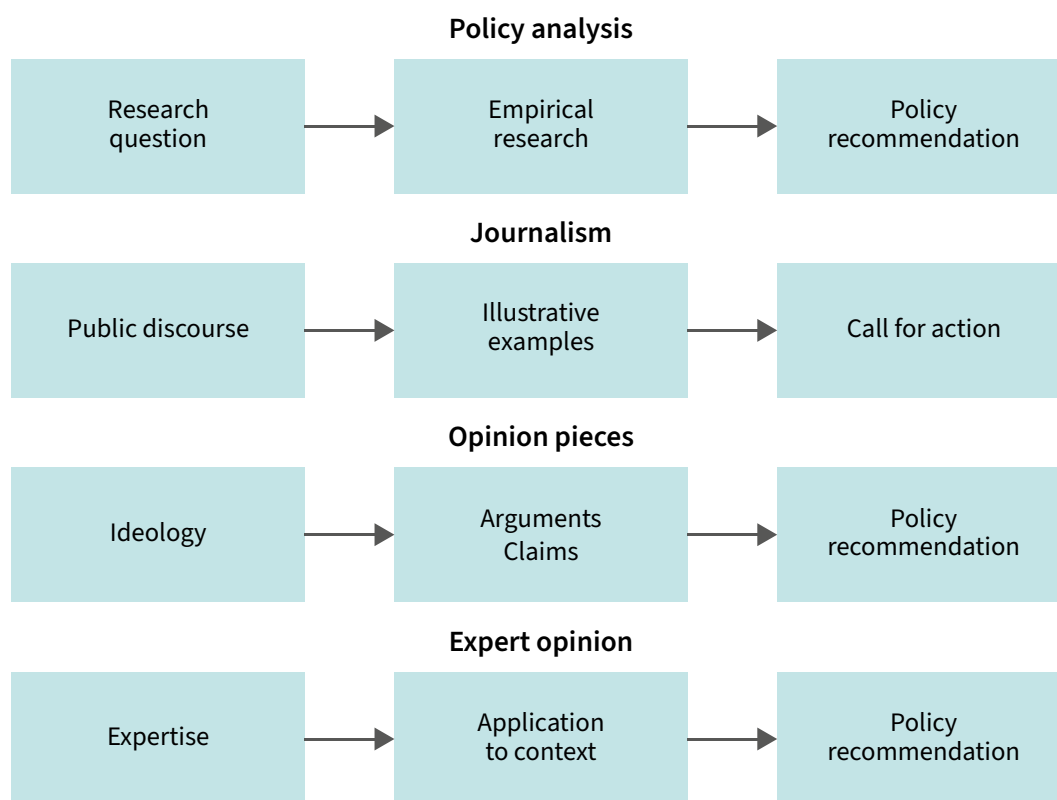
*Thomas Barrett*

In broad terms, the goals of policy analysis often overlap with those of other types of analysis. Journalistic articles frequently criticise a particular existing or proposed policy and promote a new policy option or ways to improve existing ones. Opinion pieces or expert analysis also tend to promote a particular policy at the expense of others. What differentiates policy analysis from these formats is its attempt to ground the choice of policy option in an evidence-based understanding of the social problems addressed. A **journalistic piece** may highlight certain supposed negative effects of a certain policy, for example that generous unemployment benefits are causing people not to work. It would then extrapolate from this that current welfare policy must be changed. A policy analyst reading this article in the newspaper would aim to take a more holistic view of the situation by asking several questions. Does the social problem addressed (voluntary unemployment) actually exist, or is it just a media scare? If there is strong evidence that the problem does exist, is it actually caused by generous unemployment benefits, or perhaps by something else (e.g. limited job opportunities, low salaries, lack of training)? If the policy in question is actually causing the social problem, are there alternatives or improvements that would reduce the social problem without creating new one (e.g. poverty-related health and crime outcomes)?

Similarly, **opinion pieces** tend to have a specific agenda focused on attacking or promoting a particular policy. Faced with a social problem, they are not usually based on empirical research leading to a set of different policy options, followed by further assessment to select the optimal policy. Instead, they often work backwards from a specific ideological position, which they use to identify both the problem and the solution. Despite being intimately concerned with politics, (good) policy analysis can depoliticise certain aspects of policymaking by rooting it in evidenced research rather than ideological dogmas. Poor-quality policy analysis is often indistinguishable from journalism or opinion pieces, since it fails to base its arguments in research and neglects to consider a range of options.

Finally, **expert commentary** may look very similar to policy analysis, since it implies that the author has sufficient sectoral expertise to write authoritatively on a given topic, identify the main challenges and recommend one or more appropriate solutions. However, policy analysts might not always be experts in each area they analyse, for instance if they work for a ministerial policymaking department and are expected to write papers on a variety of topics. Hence, policy analysis does not necessarily rely on expertise or in-depth knowledge, but rather on the ability to conduct high-quality research, which we will return to in Chapter 3 → [How to make your policy analysis credible](#).

*Figure 1.2: Overview of different analytical formats and their goals*



The research-driven nature of policy analysis means it has much in common with academic writing, and many of the research techniques and methodologies developed by academics are deployed in policy analysis. However, the key difference lies not in the analytical techniques used, but the way in which research is deployed and communicated, and what purposes these serve.

## 1.3 Academic communication versus policy communication

*Salome Minesashvili*

Communication is an essential part of policy analysis. The latter inherently aims not only at critical evaluation and creation but also at instigating policy changes. Modification of and improvement to policies can only take place when research conducted is delivered to those who influence policymaking (Dunn, 2018). When policy knowledge remains only in the hands of policy analysts, it is not effective (Webber, 1992). If the communication and persuasion aspects are marginalised, this can lead to even good-quality studies and relevant policy recommendations being rejected (Meltsner, 1979), with the result that they will not be translated into policy.

While policy communication is an essential element of policy analysis, or applied research as some call it (Webber, 1992), it differs somewhat from communication in academic research. Despite some common characteristics, the two diverge in terms of the goals, audience, means, medium and style.

### Goals of communication

Firstly, it should be noted that what differentiates policy research from journalistic articles, opinion pieces or expert commentary is what brings it closer to academic research:

- ▶ Both academic and policy analyses rely on similar research methods and techniques. They adopt similar data-gathering methods in order to reach objective research outcomes, including interviews, surveys, focus groups, etc.
- ▶ The two also use similar inductive or deductive reasoning, which means that policy research also relies on academic theories for the design of the study and methodology.
- ▶ Even though academic research is often irrelevant to decision-makers, the two sometimes do intersect since academic research can form a base for policy research (Weimer & Vining, 2011). Thus, the policy analyst's role as an "interpreter" between academic and policy worlds becomes even more important. Essentially, the policy analyst's goal is to transform scientific results into societal, economic and political values. Therefore, being a good policy analyst involves not only conducting objective and valid research but also translating it into policy-relevant recommendations.

Despite their overall similarities, academic research and policy research serve different purposes. Academic objectives comprise development of or improvement to theories and the testing of hypotheses to these ends. Policy studies, on the other hand, strive to solve social issues via research and consider various alternatives in order to reach this goal (Weimer & Vining, 2011). This is why the terms "basic" and "applied" are used to describe academic research and policy research respectively (Dunn, 2018, 398).

Since the two approaches differ, by way of their focus on theory on the one hand and on improving practice on the other, they also deviate in terms of communication goals. Academics share data in detail to demonstrate its correctness, while policy analysts share their results in order to enhance the utilisation of the collected policy-relevant knowledge (Bardach & Patashnik, 2016). The ultimate purposes of policy analysis can range from policy assessment and agenda-setting to specific policy formulation, adjustment or adoption (Dunn, 2018, 392). Therefore, it is essential for policy analysts to think strategically about their audience and its composition, which will also influence the effectiveness of their communication (ibid, 395).

## Audience, means and medium of communication

Given their distinct goals, academic and policy communication will also target different audiences. While academics primarily strive to reach their peers, and to make their research known to the academic community and receive feedback, policy researchers predominantly target policymakers and, depending on their goal, other actors in society. Essentially, their target group comprises those who can directly or indirectly influence policymaking and agenda-setting as well as the entire public in terms of awareness-raising.

Similarly, while academic and policy research often share means of communication, differences do exist in this respect. Academics primarily share their written results in the form of articles and books, therefore directing their efforts towards academic journals and publishers. While policy analysis can be released in the form of articles or even longer versions, as books, it may also encompass many other forms of written communication, including papers, reports, executive summaries, memoranda and press releases (Dunn, 2018).

The social aspect of the communication, in terms of how it is delivered, as already noted above, is paramount in conveying the policy analysis results to the target group. Conferences are a medium often shared by both policy and academic communication, albeit with different audiences. However, policy analysts will usually employ more than one means of communication, combining several for increased impact. Such communication platforms might be referred to as personal briefings, group presentations, conferences for media or roundtable discussions (Young & Quinn, 2002).

In recent years, the gap between academic and policy analyses has been narrowing, due to use of digital media. As online communication tools become increasingly popular, so does online outreach in the field of research. Rapid progress in information and communications technology has changed the way research is disseminated, and being a researcher nowadays largely entails online science outreach (Bik et al., 2015) and digital advocacy (Bürger, 2015). The following are the three main digital delivery methods, which also comprise different means of knowledge transfer (Montagni et al., 2019):

- ▶ **Classic web:** Information sharing through the websites of institutions/think tanks/organisations and online journals/magazines/newspapers, etc. This provides a one-way method of communication where interaction is only possible via comments left by the readers (if this option is available at all).
- ▶ **Web 2.0:** Social networks (Twitter, Facebook; Research Gate and Academia.edu for academics), wikis, blogs, vlogs and forums (e.g. Reddit). They allow more direct interaction between researchers and their target groups.
- ▶ **Hypertext** (digital text enriched with links, images, videos or audio files); **Images** (photos, maps and diagrams); **Videos** (executive summary videos explaining complex problems in a condensed way); **Audio** (radio programmes, podcasts, direct audio exchange, such as Skype or telephone calls) and the combination of video and audio (Skype, Zoom); **Infographics** (combination of visual elements to summarise the research); **Games** (often used in collaboration with museums and other public institutions).

While availability of digital media is an opportunity, researchers should also be aware of the risks. The enormous volume of information in the digital world can become a problem. It is a challenge for policymakers to find and select good-quality data. In addition, digital media is prone to inequality, due to: more attention being paid to certain researchers' ranks and names; bias where researchers share information without proper bibliographic data or having checked evidence; or a temptation to share superficial or only eye-catching messages from research, further exacerbating bias. It is important that researchers, before taking advantage of digital media, work on their communication skills and ensure they are well prepared when delving into digital space.

## Style of communication

Since academic and policy communications are aimed at different audiences, the style of communicating research findings will also vary. Firstly, communication for policy analysts constitutes an act of persuasion that already includes some normativity and requires a position to be taken (Meltsner, 1979; Webber, 1992). Therefore, unlike “cold objectivity” of academic research, policy analysis is value-driven (Young & Quinn, 2002, 19), while advocacy in favour of specific alternatives gives communication a normative character. For example, a study in “basic” research might investigate the role of sociocultural factors in anti-vax attitudes in Ukraine and as an outcome present a list of factors that seem to be shaping such attitudes. “Applied” research would instead study how to reduce the extent of anti-vax attitudes in Ukraine. This hypothetical study might well seek to answer the first question and, based on the findings, proceed to search for solutions.

Even though policy analysis extends further towards the normative than academic analysis does, due to it advocating for the best approach to solve the issue at hand, it should still be differentiated from so-called **activist communication**. When compared to this, policy analysis is more aligned with academic research, since it is based on evidence and academic research methods. So even if the analysis results in a specific policy being advocated, it still relies on a prior objective, evidence-based analysis and a careful consideration of counter-arguments, risks and limitations. This approach must be adhered to by think tanks that want to cultivate an unbiased reputation when trying to influence decision-makers. Activist communication, on the other hand, usually communicates a specific policy, not necessarily after objective consideration of alternatives, but rather according to their subjective understanding of what is fair and just for a specific group of people.

The second way in which style of communication differs relates to how the information is presented to the audience. Unlike **academic communication**, policy analysis is often presented to groups who not only lack familiarity with research technicalities but also the time to spend absorbing the information. Policy analysts, in contrast to academics, should avoid including in their communication too much information on methods and statistics; they should keep the communication rather brief and simple, and make it easily understandable (Meltsner, 1979; Bardach & Patashnik, 2016; Dunn, 2018). This can be achieved by choosing to leave out certain aspects, including much of the background information, detailed description of the data produced in the research process, and specialised terminology and concepts. It is better instead to focus only on the evidence and data that are necessary to make the argument convincing. Research concepts or statistical routines should be translated for policymakers into commonly understandable language (Dunn, 2018). Some even note that a simplicity test might involve an analyst being able to explain the research to a grandparent or a taxi driver (Young & Quinn, 2002; Bardach & Patashnik, 2016). Instead of presenting theoretical frameworks, **telling a story** becomes more important in policy analysis. Always bear in mind that policymakers are short on time, so precise and concise presentations are key, often involving visual displays and summaries.

### Tips on effective policy communication:

- ▶ Avoid too much information on theory, methods and collected data.
- ▶ Avoid including vast amounts of background information.
- ▶ Avoid specialised terminology and concepts.
- ▶ If specialised concepts are used, explain them.
- ▶ Use only evidence necessary to convince.
- ▶ Keep the communication brief and simple.
- ▶ Use summaries and visual displays.

**Table 1.2: Academic versus policy communication**

	<b>Academic communication</b>	<b>Policy communication</b>
<b>Goals</b>	Theory-building, testing hypotheses	Agenda-setting, policy improvement, adjustment or adoption
<b>Audience</b>	Academic peers	Policymakers, general public, civil society, etc.
<b>Means</b>	Articles, books	Articles, books, papers, reports, memoranda, press releases
<b>Medium</b>	Journals, publishers, websites, digital media, conferences, workshops, colloquia	Websites, printed media, digital media, conferences, briefings, roundtable discussions
<b>Style</b>	Objective Highly technical, heavy on methodology and data	Normative Simple language, understandable to ordinary people, brief with more visual displays

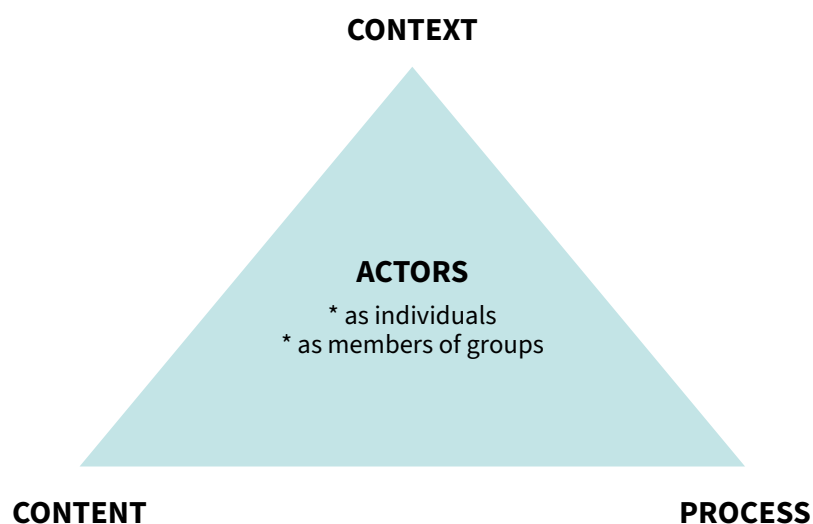
## 2. How to make your policy analysis relevant for stakeholders and donors

### STEP 1: Consider the context

*Andrii Sukharyna*

While academic research can be detached from the existing political situation, policy analysis cannot. Whereas academic research may prioritise the study of fundamental aspects or even compare unrealistic scenarios, policy analysis must not. The study of the problem and the review of scenarios that could result in a solution should always be realistic and based on an understanding of the context.

*Figure 2.1: The policy analysis triangle (Walt & Gilson, 1994)*



Detailed legend: The policy analysis triangle consists of four elements: **context** (context is affected by many factors such as instability or uncertainty created by changes in political regime or war, by different ideologies, or by historical experience and culture); **content** (what the policy is mainly about); **process** (how the policy was introduced and implemented); and **actors** (who participate in and influence formulation and implementation of the policy).

Policy analysis cannot exist separately from a complex and dynamic environment. It is impossible to analyse processes and phenomena in isolation – they are always part of a larger social process, and various factors will influence both the current situation and any attempt to change it. Nor is it possible, however, to take everything into account. This would lead to an extreme degree of methodological pluralism, and the results of previous studies and analyses can often be transferred only to a limited extent, as the context is constantly changing. Inherent in extreme methodological pluralism is the uniqueness of each social situation and the requirement for a different approach in each case. This cannot be achieved in policy analysis with limited resources.

However, contextual factors can significantly influence policy analysis. Seemingly identical situations that occur in different regions or time periods often have radically different outcomes. Researchers should not allow such similarity to mislead them into thinking that certain events are developing according to the same scenario. One of the main methodological problems in every study is the extent to which it is appropriate to delve into the surrounding context. On the one hand, it cannot be ignored, because its factors can influence each specific case. On the other hand, situations need to be generalised, conclusions drawn and recommendations made based on past experience and previous research. The following factors can be highlighted as relevant in terms of context:

**Table 2.1: Contextual factors**

<b>Philosophy</b>	All political doctrines come from philosophy; philosophical features in the region or the philosophical views of stakeholders influence decision-making.
<b>Psychology</b>	There are features both at the micro level (psychology of stakeholders) and at the macro level – features of psychology in relation to large imaginary groups of people.
<b>Ideas</b>	In society, different ideas, such as democracy, freedom, equality and justice, spread in different ways. At the same time, they act as a strong motivating factor for certain groups.
<b>Culture</b>	Cultural differences between communities are often exaggerated, but almost all researchers agree that such features exist and can significantly influence policy implementation.
<b>History</b>	Historical features determine how various forms of social relations are created. Knowledge of historical context provides a means of producing more systematic knowledge of political processes.
<b>Place</b>	The historical context does not include the influence of geographical aspects and climate.
<b>Population</b>	The demographic situation and its prospects significantly influence context. This includes migration, demographic distribution and the coexistence of nationalities.
<b>Technology</b>	The development and heterogeneity of technologies can affect the political context.

Tilly & Goodin, 2011

## Determine the scope of your research

When discussing how to determine the scope of a research study, it can be useful to use an example. In a study of the process behind the implementation of e-voting in Ukraine, of obvious importance are the technological aspects, such as whether the level of internet penetration is sufficient, and the extent to which different age groups can use smartphones and computers. However, would cultural and psychological aspects need to be investigated? Could the implementation of e-voting potentially undermine people's confidence in the integrity of elections? Trust in state institutions is traditionally low, and the lack of understanding of the verification process on behalf of the general public could lead to distrust among voters. Other factors are also likely to have an impact. Complex processes require, ideally, consideration to be given to all aspects of the context, and they certainly must not ignore that context.

However, the planning stage will help in analysing scope and determining how achievable a particular task is. If uncertainty exists as to whether the entire research objective can be realised, it can be beneficial to plan to divide the objective into smaller and more specific research aims. The following four aspects should be considered, bearing two groups in mind: the authorities who will use the recommendations provided in the completed study; and the population (and stakeholders) for whom the regulation is created. In addition, an assessment will need to be made as to whether it will be possible to fulfil the research objectives.



**Table 2.2: Considerations when analysing policies**

<b>Theoretical</b>	Resources	Do you have the resources (financial, time, etc.) to conduct the policy analysis? Do you have the expertise to conduct the research?
<b>Practical</b>	Costs	What are the financial costs of this policy?
	Feasibility	Is the policy technically and juridically feasible?
	Acceptability	Do the relevant policy stakeholders view the policy as acceptable? Will citizens agree with certain decisions and what resistance might be encountered to the implementation of such changes?

Based on: Morestin, 2012.

When developing different scenarios, the best option will be the one that can be implemented most successfully according to the existing context. Feasibility can constitute a limitation to proposed changes that may be considered particularly radical. For example, when analysing options relating to changes in the regulation of arms or drugs, it may be inappropriate to propose alternative policies that cannot be implemented in the current policy cycle. It will not be possible to translate into real policy changes that are too radical (such as free circulation of weapons when there has been no such circulation thus far): it will not be technically possible to maintain control, nor is the policy likely to be acceptable to citizens. When proposing alternatives, it is always necessary to keep within contextual limitations, particularly in relation to the short-term perspective. In the longer term, more serious transformations can be made, whereby consideration can be given to the shifts needed for those changes to become less unrealistic and to the ways in which they could be translated into policy

**Table 2.3: How to narrow the scope of your topic**

<b>Theoretical approach</b>	Limit your topic to a particular approach to the problem. For example, it is possible to assess the impact of criminal legislation on the prevalence of corruption at elections.
<b>Aspect or sub-area</b>	Consider only one part of the topic. For example, if your topic is corruption in elections, choose one type of corruption – for example, indirect bribery of voters.
<b>Time</b>	Limit the time period you are studying. For example, explore the issue using the 2019 and 2020 elections.
<b>Population group</b>	Impose limits by age, gender, race, profession, species or ethnic group. For example, the topic of electoral corruption is likely to relate more to older voters and pensioners.
<b>Geographical location</b>	Geographical analysis can be a useful means of exploring an issue. For example, if your topic is electoral corruption, focus on Ukraine or on a group of countries with similar electoral systems.

Based on: MIT Libraries (n.d.), [“Selecting a Research Topic: Refine your topic”](#).

## STEP 2: Do a stakeholder analysis and enable a co-creation process

*Salome Minesashvili*

### Benefits of stakeholder engagement

The most effective policy analysis is participatory and based on a consensus-building process. This is ensured by stakeholder engagement at various stages of analysis, which promotes co-creation instead of undertaking the research in an isolated, out-of-context environment. The stakeholder engagement process is usually preceded by stakeholder identification (Freeman, 2010), including mapping and analysis. Once stakeholders and their interests, as well as their potential contribution and relevance to the project, have been identified, the researcher can decide who can be engaged, in what manner and at which stage of policy analysis.

Stakeholder engagement is extremely beneficial for three reasons:

1. It can increase the **understanding of the issue and the potential consequences** that selected solutions can bring (Helbig et al., 2015). Ensuring interaction with those who are aware of or affected by the policy environment – or indeed help form it – where the policy recommendations will later be implemented, means it is less likely that the policy analysis will drift away from reality and that it will fit better into the existing context. It essentially allows for a “reality check” to be carried out at different stages of the analysis.
2. Participatory policy research can also **reveal major conflicts, as well as agreement**, between various stakeholders. By inviting their engagement, researchers create a setting where the stakeholders can bring their interests to the table while gaining an understanding of others’ interests, which can affect final outcomes and decisions (ibid, 2015).
3. Transparent and open stakeholder participation can also serve as a **consensus-building process** and a chance for those with conflicting views to overcome differences while building trust in policy drafting and policymaking, which can eventually ensure acceptance of the final policies (Klievink et al., 2012). This can only be achieved if the stakeholders are not just “users and choosers” but “**makers and shapers**” of policy (Cornwall & Gaventa, 2000).

Stakeholders, however, vary by the extent of their power. They can be categorised thus: 1. Stakeholders with power in the form of either knowledge or resources to influence the policy content; 2. Powerless stakeholders who are significantly affected by final decisions (Brugha & Varvasovszky, 2000). Policy development includes both categories (Bryson, 2004). Reaching out to the broader public is of course costly and time-consuming; not all stakeholders need to be engaged at all stages and in all aspects of the project. It is up to a skilled researcher to decide which stakeholders to approach, and when and how to engage them.

### Developing a co-creation plan

It is best to start by identifying reasons for engagement for certain stakeholder groups. Such reasons can be instrumental, substantive or normative (Beierle & Cayford, 2010). In the first case, a researcher might want to build trust among the stakeholders, find a common ground and gain approval for the project, especially if there is a conflict of interests. Substantive need implies that the problem is complex and so the stakeholder engagement is a means to obtaining any missing information and understanding the issue in greater depth. Finally, when dealing with issues that affect the public or at least some of its sectors, engagement is a way to encourage them to contribute to decisions relevant to them, and to increase the likelihood that they will validate or consent to the policy. From these broader reasons, different specific goals of engagement can be identified:

**Goals of engagement:**

- ▶ Fact-finding
- ▶ Identifying stakeholder values and priorities
- ▶ Balancing stakeholder interests
- ▶ Consensus-building
- ▶ Commitment-building
- ▶ Increasing legitimacy and acceptance of the project.

Once the goals have been identified, the decision as to who should be engaged will be based on pre-identifying the potential contributions that each stakeholder or stakeholder group can provide. Depending on their position in decision-making bodies or in the public realm, these contributions can include technical or policy expertise, knowledge of a specific local topic, knowledge of practices, political support, administrative support or support during implementation.

Keeping in mind goals of engagement and potential contributions that the identified stakeholders can provide, the researcher or group of researchers can decide on the extent of their co-creation process. Since the process, albeit beneficial, is costly and time-consuming, as well as being dependent on the resources available to the research team, the engagement scale can vary from a small group of key stakeholders to a broader public.

In addition, stakeholders can be reached out to at different stages of policy analysis: from identifying the problem to constructing policy alternatives, choosing solutions, policy design and – if the analyst is also involved later on – then at the implementation and evaluation stages (Young & Quinn, 2002). The plan can be flexible and, depending on how the process evolves, more stakeholders can be reached out to at each stage, or the level of participation can change over time.

**In sum, in order to define which kind of stakeholder engagement is important in the policy analysis, researchers can use the following guiding questions (see Table 2.4):**

- ▶ What is the reason for engagement?
- ▶ What is the goal of engagement?
- ▶ What could each stakeholder contribute?
- ▶ At what stage should stakeholders be approached?

*Table 2.4: Stakeholder engagement checklist*

	Stakeholder	Reason for engagement	Goal of engagement	Potential contribution	Stage of engagement
<b>Example</b>	Local government representatives	Instrumental and substantive	Fact-finding, balancing interests, consensus and commitment-building	Technical expertise, knowledge of local issues, implementation and political support	Identifying the problem, constructing policy alternatives, choosing solutions

## Choosing forms and tools of engagement

Stakeholder engagement can take several forms, and each form has its own goal and tools (Helbig et al., 2015). It is up to the researcher to decide, based on the above criteria, which form best suits the project. In addition, different forms can be used at different stages of policy analysis as well as for different kinds of stakeholders.

*Information sharing:* This is a basic form of engagement where stakeholders are merely provided with information at different stages of the policy analysis. Thus, the level of engagement is quite low and would be suitable only for such stakeholders who demonstrate low influence or interest, or who do not attribute much importance to the issue (Bryson, 2004). To provide such information, possible tools include websites, newsletters, flyers, conventional media releases and social media posts, or other means, such as inviting stakeholders to attend conferences and discussions with a view to them being observers. For example, the Ukrainian Verkhovna Rada and its committees often employ this form of stakeholder engagement when they deal with governmental or non-governmental stakeholders or international partners. The engagement takes place across various components of their work such as drafting and improving laws or developing national programmes and strategies. Information sharing can happen either at the committee initiative or at the request of the stakeholders, under the Ukrainian law “on Access to Public Information”. This could include obtaining information from committee reports or the provision of information upon request (Khutor & Klymosiuk, 2021).

*Consultation:* This is a more intensified form of engagement that aims to elicit stakeholders’ interests, ideas and viewpoints and to collect information on the given issue. Interviews, focus groups, surveys, online public discussions on draft papers and forums can be used as tools. Again, taking Verkhovna Rada as an example, committees sometimes receive comments, remarks and proposals from stakeholders or they hold consultations with the public. This form of engagement is still considered unilateral, since the committees in these circumstances are not changing their positions. The process can, however, also be bilateral where a dialogue is involved, and where the stakeholders not only present their position but also receive feedback and can respond to arguments. Related activities include participation in committee hearings, in a working group, in public advisory bodies, public discussions live or online, round tables, conferences and other events organised by the committees.

*Partnership:* This is a yet more intensive form of participation where researchers and stakeholders work together towards analysis and policy development. This form also aims to bring diverse stakeholders together to form a shared understanding of the issue, to exchange information and to collectively identify alternative policy options. Some tools that can be used include workshops, scenario-building (Wimmer et al., 2012), simulation games or role-playing (Andersen et al., 2007). Stakeholder recommendations will eventually be considered the final draft of policy analysis. In the case of the Ukrainian legislator, the committees and stakeholders exchange resources, such as organising joint activities, and the cooperation results in a joint resolution of the issue at stake. Some of the forms of partnership that the Verkhovna Rada committees use include joint appeals to public authorities, joint measures with the ombudsman, the formation of strategic partnerships through memoranda of cooperation, constant participation of stakeholders in the committees work, etc.

*Empowerment:* In this type of engagement, the decision-making is in the hands of the stakeholders. Here the primary goal of the researcher is consensus-building and thus final acceptance of the project, which can be achieved through citizen juries, by starting a stakeholder board or by activities similar to those mentioned above, where stakeholders collaboratively arrive at final decisions (Klievink & Lucassen, 2013).

Which type of engagement an analyst chooses very much depends not only on their goals but also on available resources and the thematic field of research. For instance, empowerment can

be challenging in a sensitive field such as security, while both partnership and empowerment can be time-consuming and risk extending the decision-making process. Therefore, costs and benefits should be thoroughly evaluated before an analyst decides on the form of engagement.

## Ensuring effective stakeholder engagement

There are three common challenges to stakeholder engagement: 1. Practical factors such as stakeholder access to the meetings and time constraints in their schedules; 2. More critical issues, including conflicting interests and thus ineffective consensus-building; 3. When it comes to public engagement, especially concerning some group constellations, cultural factors can also hinder information gathering or discussions.

### Box 1: Cultural factors in stakeholder engagement

Examples of cultural challenges in stakeholder engagement can include women sharing less in the presence of men or participants sharing less in the presence of authority, for instance when high-level church representatives are present in the groups. In such cases, it is safer to meet each group separately.

### Several measures can be taken to ensure successful stakeholder engagement:

- ▶ Select the most relevant stakeholders for the engagement activities.
- ▶ Assess the capabilities of stakeholders to use the envisioned tools and technologies.
- ▶ Make the participating stakeholders aware of their roles and the objectives of their engagement and provide them with in-depth information on the issue.
- ▶ Understand how information flows between the stakeholders and facilitate negotiations in multiple formats by encouraging maximum expression from the participants (Helbig et al., 2015).

Researchers can use Table 2.5 as a method to categorise engagement strategies for identified stakeholders.

**Table 2.5: Stakeholder engagement matrix**

Stage of engagement	Form of engagement			
	Information sharing	Consultation	Partnership	Empowerment
Identifying problem				
Constructing policy alternatives				
Choosing solutions				
Designing policy				

## STEP 3: Approach your donors

*Ljudmyla Melnyk & Elisabeth Starck*

One way to secure funding for your analytical publication is to contact prospective donors directly. This applies in particular if there is no open call for applications that suits your policy objectives. Open calls contain very specific requirements and forms, so there is no space for creativity. This chapter will highlight what to keep in mind when choosing a suitable donor for your project and how to structure your proposal, as well as providing examples of a perfect email pitch.

### Know your donor

As with every good investment pitch, the first step to securing a donor is getting to know them. It is advisable to carry out extensive research beforehand in order to familiarise yourself with their mission, profile, projects and values. This not only makes it easier to sell your idea more effectively, because your proposal can be tailored to their agenda, but it also impacts how the finished publication will be perceived by the targeted stakeholders. It should be borne in mind that any donors will need to be disclosed, not only in line with the donors' specifications, but also for transparency reasons.

#### The following questions can serve as a guideline:

1. What is the donor's ideological orientation? Are they affiliated to a party/business?
2. Which projects have been supported in the past? Do you see a common theme? How does your publication fit in?
3. How will that donor's support reflect on your publication? Could it serve as an amplifier/multiplier of your statements or undermine its credibility?
4. Do they accept proposals on a rolling basis or have set annual/quarterly deadlines for proposal submission?
5. Who is your contact partner? Invest in research to make sure that your proposal reaches the relevant person(s), i.e., those who will make the final decision regarding your grant.

If it is difficult to access relevant information online, do not hesitate to reach out to the donor organisation via email or a quick phone call. It is better to confirm that your proposed projects fits into the potential donor's overall funding scheme than to waste your time – and that of the donor – on a proposal that is misinformed or misdirected.

### Write a proposal

The core element of approaching a donor is the submission of a proposal that will convince the grant commission to offer you funding. A good proposal summarises the concept behind your analytical publication and highlights key aspects of your research while emphasising your publication's value for the big picture, for example, society.

Make sure to include topical keywords (so-called "buzzwords") that are related to both your research project and the donor's mission. Buzzwords can help the grant commission to quickly categorise your research and assess its compatibility with the donor organisation. Therefore, it is again recommended that you scour the potential donor's website to extract those buzzwords that could help to increase the chances of a successful pitch.

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**Examples of foundation-specific buzzwords:**

- ▶ **Heinrich Böll Foundation:** promotion of democracy; ecology; solidarity; non-violence; democratic immigration society; gender equality; citizens' participation (Ukraine-specific); climate and energy policy (Ukraine-specific); promotion of civil society (Ukraine-specific).
- ▶ **Friedrich Ebert Foundation:** social democracy; social justice; reduction of social inequality (Ukraine-specific); sustainable economic policy (Ukraine-specific); strengthening the democratic rule of law (Ukraine-specific); security cooperation (Ukraine-specific); Ukrainian foreign policy (Ukraine-specific); labour market policy (Ukraine-specific).
- ▶ **Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom:** promotion of liberty/freedom; political education; enforcement of universal human rights; economic policy; open society (Ukraine-specific); rule of law (Ukraine-specific); fighting disinformation (Ukraine-specific).

Your proposal should also include information on an estimated time frame, activities planned and the required budget. If the donor organisation has set out specific formatting/content requirements for proposal submissions, always make sure to follow those guidelines. Some organisations prefer a short sketch of your project, whereas others require an in-depth, detailed project description. Unless specified otherwise, the handout provided below can serve as a useful guide for proposal writing.

**Communicate your proposal**

Some organisations provide online forms for submissions and generally will not consider any proposal that has been submitted by other means of communication, such as email or by post. Failure to observe the stipulated submission requirements may also put you or your organisation in an unfavourable position in the future, which you want to avoid.

However, in most cases, an email is considered the standard means of communication between you and the donor, so the perfect email pitch is essential. A professional email will have several structural elements and certain language components, an example of which is provided below.



## Handout “Writing a Proposal”

ORGANISATION NAME + LOGO

Name Surname of Recipient  
 Name of Organisation  
 Address (Street, No.)  
 Department

Your contact  
 (Name Surname)  
 Name of Your Organisation

Address  
 Phone No.  
 Work email address

31 January 2023

**Subject: Proposal for a policy analysis on forms of citizen participation for promotion of local democracy in Ukraine**

<b>Time frame:</b> 01.01.2023–01.07.2023	<b>Partners (if applicable):</b> Organisation Y	<b>Est. budget:</b> 10,000 €
---------------------------------------------	----------------------------------------------------	---------------------------------

**Target audience:**  
Civil society actors, experts, political decision-makers in Europe and Country X

**Background**  
 What is the background of your research interest? Start with a basic understanding of the topic, historical/ social context and then narrow the focus of the details that lead into the particular aspect(s) you would like to research. This can include new developments in the field you are researching. Highlight the relevance of the problem today. You can use primary or secondary sources.

**Current status of research and problem statement**  
 In this unit, you are required to state the current status of research in the desired topic(s). Mentioning relevant works of other scientists will help to show “blind spots” in the research field, which describe pending scientific questions and justify your research project. Here you can also highlight the contribution your analytical publication will make to society.

**Objectives of the research project**  
 In this section you will describe the objectives of your analytical publication. Set them out briefly and concisely. This section (almost) always starts with: “The aim of the research project is ...”. State your research hypothesis/ question clearly.

You should also demonstrate the scope of your project, i.e., what methods will you use (surveys, quantitative data analysis, etc.) and why? What will the outcome of your project entail? (Analytical publication, presentation, panel discussion, etc.)

ORGANISATION  
Street No.  
Zip-Code Town  
Country

Chairman  
Chairman 2

BANK  
Bank Code  
Account Number

+ 49 (0) 30 445 7898  
info@organisation.com  
www.organisation.com

*The Recipient's contact information goes at the top (1 -2 pt font size smaller than rest of text body).*

*Pay attention to the international format. Include country codes for phone numbers and translate city names to English (if necessary). Do not use abbreviations in the address, as it could be difficult for a foreigner to understand.*

*The title should be short, exact, and refer to the main research activity. Too long or too short title (same goes for too much detail or too less detail) will fail to give donors/partners a quick and encouraging overview of your activity.*

*State your key data at the very top to provide a quick overview for the reviewing committee.*

*Use donor-oriented buzzwords here.*





*This part shows that you have good planning capabilities and holds you accountable to complete the project on time, so make sure your schedule is sound and accounts for enough buffer time.*

ORGANISATION NAME + LOGO

**Schedule of activities (visualisation)**

If your project encompasses multiple activities or partner organisations with whom you will be coordinating the project, draw up a timeline with important milestones and activities to be completed. Include a short description for each step and take time to present this information in a visually appealing manner.

01.01.–15.05.2023	16.05–31.12.2023	01.01–28.02.2024
<b>Phase I: Conceptualisation</b>	<b>Phase II: Data collection and analysis</b>	<b>Phase III: Presentation and publication of results</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Desk Research</li> <li>• Operationalisation</li> <li>• Selection of case study countries</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Field study in X/Y (February – April)</li> <li>• Expert interviews</li> <li>• Evaluation of collected data</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Presentation of end results</li> <li>• Publication of policy brief</li> <li>• Public communication campaign</li> </ul>

**Outcome**

Here you can sketch out the end products of your research project. In which format/medium (infographic, policy brief, etc.) will you present the end results?

**Literature**

A complete list of all literature that has been utilised in the preparation of the proposal. Make sure to use a recognised citation format (MLA; APA; Chicago; Harvard) and stick to the citation requirements.

**Annex**

The Annex usually includes a budget plan, if requested

*This information can also be provided in a separate short document as an attachment.*

**About your organisation**

Lastly, include a short description of your organisation. Give information on when it was founded, the area of expertise, overall mission and successful projects/awards received. You can also present your department and refer to previous analytical publications you have published. You should disclose other donors (of the project, as well as the organisation). Make sure to give a balanced and diverse impression of financial support streams to underscore the organisation's neutrality and ideological independence.

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info@organisation.com  
www.organisation.com



## Handout: The perfect email pitch

The subject line is one of the most important parts. It should be a short, precise summary of your request.

Recipient: m.mikhailova@recipient.org  
 BCC: olexiy.stasiuk@ownorganisation.com

---

Subject line: Funding proposal for a policy analysis on forms of citizen participation for promotion of local democracy in Ukraine

---

Salutation: Dear Mr/Ms Mikhailova,

Opening sentence: I have received your contact information via your colleague Mr Zagorodnyuk. He referred me to you as the point of contact for requests concerning project cooperation. I am a senior policy analyst at Strong Democracy, an award-winning think tank based in Kyiv, Ukraine.

Main body: I would like to interest you in a funding opportunity for the research project we are currently planning focusing on forms of citizen participation for the promotion of local democracy in Ukraine. Attached you will find a detailed project proposal, budget plan and additional information about our organisation.

Closing remarks: We hope that we can interest you in a cooperation with us. If you have any further questions, do not hesitate to contact me.

Thank you very much in advance for your consideration.

Sincerely,  
 Signature: Oleksa Shapoval

---

Senior Policy Analyst  
 Strong Democracy Think Tank (Kyiv)  
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 mobile: +38 717 8765399  
 15, 3rd floor, Kirpichny Street, Kyiv  
[www.strongdemocracy.ua](http://www.strongdemocracy.ua)

Recent Publication: "Battling election fraud in district elections – new technologies for the win?" (2022) Read here: [www.strongdemocracy.ua/electionfraud](http://www.strongdemocracy.ua/electionfraud)

Attachment: Proposal\_Strong Democracy\_2022.pdf (440 kb).

- Choose a formal salutation, unless you are well-acquainted with the person you are contacting. If you don't know who you are writing to: Dear Sir or Madam
- The sentence after the salutation always begins with a capital letter in BrE. When you are contacting someone for the first time, tell the person where you got the contact from. If you have met before, remind the person of your previous meeting.
- You can shortly introduce the organisation you are working for here.
- Content-wise, you can give a short summary of your research proposal which answers all the 'W-Questions': Who? What? When? Where? Why? How? Do not re-iterate your research proposal word for word. Indicate the reason for contact.
- You can and should refer to the attachment.
- The closing remarks consists of 1-2 closing sentences and a final salutation. The closing remarks always end with a full stop, the final salutation with a comma.
- Alternatives: Best/Kinds regards,
- Make sure the signature follows international standards. Use smaller characters and clearly separate it.
- You can also include Twitter /Facebook handles.
- Include the country code of your telephone number.
- Translate city names to English (if necessary) Don't use abbreviations in the address, as it could be difficult for a foreigner to understand.
- Signatures often contain a form of marketing, e.g. with a short description of the service the company offers or links to publications
- It is helpful to add the attachment before writing the text, because you may forget it. Always indicate attachments in your text, otherwise they are easily overseen.

Choose a document title that is clearly understandable to outsiders and distinguishable from other documents you send. Include your organisation's name (abbreviated, if necessary) and avoid abbreviations.

Make sure the file size is not too big. Even if it does not exceed the maximum file size (usually around 20 MB), it may take ages to load for the recipient, which is frustrating. Compress if necessary.

**General remarks:**

- ▶ Always use PDF format, so the recipient can open it easily and the formatting does not change. Never send documents in Word format. This is not only considered unprofessional but could also lead to revealing private information (comments, revisions, metadata) that was not intended for the recipient (Microsoft Support, n.d.).
- ▶ Use a professional (work) email, not your private one. Make sure your address does not look like a spam address, otherwise it may well end up there.
- ▶ Do not forget to check your text at the end to ensure the character sizes or fonts are consistent.
- ▶ You can highlight key information in bold, but don't overdo it.
- ▶ Use short sentences in a simple style. Organise the content in logical paragraphs and divide them by a space. Avoid long blocks of texts and vary the length of sentences and paragraphs.
- ▶ Use enumerations (firstly, to begin with, next, finally etc.), or additional remarks (furthermore, additionally, for instance, as a result etc.) to structure your text.
- ▶ To make sure your attachments can be opened from a different computer without difficulties; try sending it to a colleague beforehand.
- ▶ If you send more than one document: when you refer to a document in the main body of the email, add the document name in brackets behind it, so it is clear which document you are referring to.

## 3. How to make your policy analysis credible

### STEP 1: Define your problem

*Serhii Shapovalov*

Defining a policy problem is one of the first and most important tasks in writing a policy paper. Since the purpose of a policy paper is to act as a call for action to solve a particular problem in a particular way, that problem must be properly defined. In other words: “To get the right answer, you have to ask the right questions.

#### Policy problem as a part of a problem situation

A specific policy problem is part of a *problem situation*. A policy problem develops when a problem situation is not, or not adequately, dealt with by corresponding policy. A **problem situation** is a particular set of conditions that causes anxiety, excitement, discomfort or stress in society (Kiliievych et al., 2016, 13; Dunn, 2017, 70). Examples of problem situations are:

- ▶ government corruption
- ▶ ineffective management in the housing and utilities sector
- ▶ the emigration of intellectuals abroad
- ▶ the army’s low combat readiness
- ▶ low pensions for elderly citizens
- ▶ tax evasion by entrepreneurs
- ▶ outflow of investment from the country
- ▶ high accident rate on highways
- ▶ spreading misinformation in the media

#### There are several ways to identify a problem situation:

- ▶ **Look around:** It may seem obvious, but many problems are visible to the unaided eye: illegal parking, domestic violence, overloaded public transport, untimely waste collection, homeless animals on the streets, poverty among certain social groups, etc.
- ▶ **Speak with stakeholders** (policymakers or representatives of social groups that are affected by certain public policies): People who work in a certain sphere have an idea of the problems existing in this sphere.
- ▶ **Monitor the media:** The media cover social problems that are already “hanging in the air” and at the same time further emphasise these problems in the public discourse (Zarembo et al., 2021, 52–53).
- ▶ **Monitor the change of indicators in a specific area over a certain time period** (increase in the number of criminal offences, decrease in the living wage, deterioration of air quality indicators, increase in the number of car accidents, etc.): The change in indicators is caused by a certain problem that may require action by the government.
- ▶ **Look at isolated events that seem unusual:** Such events may be a sign of a problem that is developing in a particular area, which requires government action (Kiliievych et al., 2016, 13). For example, the finding of a single case of rabies infection of a fox in a forest in the Kyiv region may be a sign of problems with the availability of vaccines, improper performance of duties by forestry, etc.

## Structuring the problem: how to define a policy problem from the problem situation

Eugene Bardach (2011, 8 f.) advises avoiding one of the common pitfalls of formulating a policy problem: defining the solution to the problem as the problem itself. For example, avoid the wording “There is too little shelter for homeless families”, which suggests that building new shelters is the best solution to the problem of large numbers of homeless families.

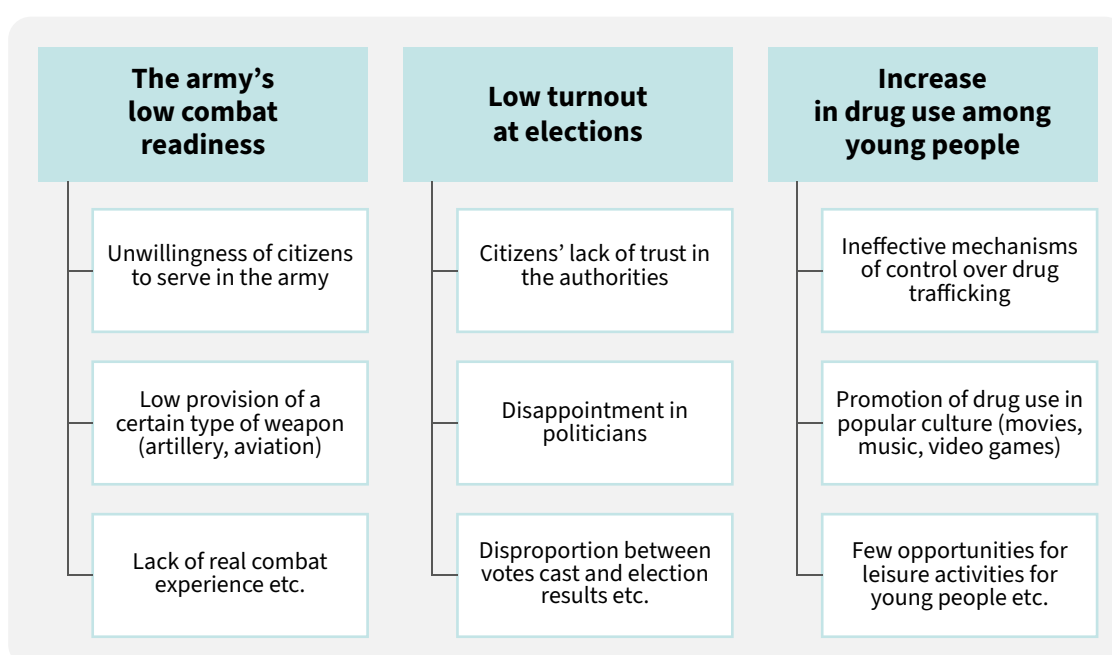
However, building new shelters is clearly not the only way to solve the problem of homeless families, and it may not be the most effective way. Therefore, it is better to formulate the problem situation as “Too many families are homeless.” *Then this problem situation can be broken down into its causes.* Recognising some of the reasons why families become homeless can help in formulating a better policy problem. Solving this redefined policy problem may help to solve the problem situation of homeless families more effectively than the construction of shelters.

Another example of a poorly worded problem: “New schools are being built too slowly.” Again, this wording already assumes that building new schools is the best way to solve the problem of insufficient space for children in classrooms. Perhaps a better solution would be to make better use of existing facilities, to partially implement distance learning, etc. Thus, it is better to formulate the problem situation as “There are too many schoolchildren relative to the currently available classroom space.” *Then you can analyse the causes of this problem situation* and look for alternative formulation of the policy problem that needs to be solved.

These examples lead us to one of the methods used in structuring a problem (that is, turning a problem situation into a specific policy problem). Dunn (2017, 96 ff.) calls this method **hierarchy analysis**. It involves considering the possible causes that lead to a problem situation.

Let us consider some examples of problem situations and a few reasons that *may* cause them. Note that the infographic below shows only a few possible causes of these problem situations and the items included are only suggestions. In reality, there could be dozens of possible causes and your ideas about the causes of these problem situations may differ from those listed below.

**Figure 3.1: One problem – multiple causes**



To make a more comprehensive list, it makes sense to conduct a stakeholder survey. Policy problems are characterised by subjectivity (Dunn, 2017, 72) and therefore different stakeholders have their own ideas as to the causes of these problems depending on their position, beliefs and experiences. To get a deeper understanding of the possible causes of electoral absenteeism, you would need to interview active voters, people who tend not to vote, politicians, election officials, etc. To understand why the army is in a state of low combat readiness, it is useful to understand the opinion of military officers, military planning bodies, politicians from the relevant parliamentary committee, ordinary soldiers, etc.

Having made a list of possible causes of the problem situation, it is necessary to focus on those which:

1. have the greatest influence on the scale of the problem situation
2. which can be solved through the authorities' intervention.

In the case of army combat readiness, the provision of certain types of weapons to the army can be influenced in the short term using public policy tools, but the lack of experience in real combat operations cannot be tackled so quickly. So, the policy problem may be formulated as “Low provision of howitzers with a range up to 40 km to artillery military units” or “Low provision of fighter jets to air force units”. The choice of problem will depend on the evaluation of which weapons contribute to the army's combat readiness the most (see point 1, above).

### **How far can we go in structuring the problem?**

The causes of the problem situation can be further broken down. For example, I suggested that the unwillingness of citizens to serve in the army is one of the reasons for the army's low combat readiness. However, it is possible to go one step further and consider why citizens do not want to serve in the army. These reasons may be (once again, the items included are only suggestions; your own ideas may differ):

1. low salaries of military personnel and insufficient social benefits
2. the spread of pacifist views in society
3. the low level of patriotic education in educational institutions
4. fear of getting injured during service
5. vicious practices of human relations within the army, etc.

Among these reasons we can also distinguish those that can be influenced by the tools of public policy. There is very little that can be done either about the pacifist views of a large proportion of citizens or the fact that some people are afraid of physical injury when handling weapons. However, the state can use policy methods to influence the content of patriotic education programmes, to remove perceived drawbacks to participation in the organisation of service (non-statutory relations in the army, officers' disrespectful attitudes towards soldiers, etc.). Thus, the policy problem may be formulated as “Ineffective mechanisms for resolving conflicts within teams in the army”, “Ineffective programmes for patriotic education in high schools,” etc.

### **Consider your relations with the decision-makers and clients**

When defining a policy issue, you have to consider who your client is and which government body forms your target audience. If your client has posed a clear question about how to increase the number of shelters, then that is the policy problem you need to solve, and you as the author will not

have the freedom to define the policy problem any other way (see also Chapter 2 Step 3 → [Approach your donors](#)).

Considering which government body forms your target audience also influences your freedom in defining the policy problem. One of the fundamental characteristics of policy problems is that they are related to problems in other areas. For example, the problems of low pensions, youth unemployment and poverty are closely related to problems that exist in the economy of the country. Therefore, in order to solve such problems, it is often necessary to liaise with decision-makers from several sectors at once. Unfortunately, this is not always possible.

Let us imagine that the target audience of your policy paper is the Ministry of Defence. The problem situation that needs to be addressed is the reluctance of citizens to serve in the armed forces. Earlier, we highlighted several possible causes of this problem, among which were three causes upon which public policy tools might have an impact: low salaries of military personnel and insufficient social benefits; the low level of patriotic education in educational institutions; and the vicious practices of human relations within the army.

If we define a policy problem as either the low salaries of military personnel or deficiencies in patriotic education, then the Ministry of Defence might not be the only body able to influence the solutions to these problems. There might also need to be involvement from the Ministry of Finance or the Ministry of Education, and therefore the respective decision-makers from these ministries would need to be convinced to accept the proposals. However, the researcher might want to concentrate on how realistic it is that the problem of internal conflicts between people in army teams is solved by the Ministry of Defence itself. In that case, the problem of your policy paper could be defined as “Ineffective mechanisms for resolving conflicts within teams in the army.”

## Wording matters

All the analytic work aimed at defining the policy problem can be condensed into a single sentence that formulates the policy problem. Oleksandr Kiliievych (2016, 17 f.) advises formulating it in one of two ways:

**Table 3.1: Wording options: “What’s wrong” versus “How to”**

<p><b>Emphasising the unsatisfactory state of affairs by pointing out “what’s wrong”.</b> The unsatisfactory state of affairs can be emphasised with the words “absence of smth”, “lack of smth”, “excessive smth”, etc. Eugene Bardach (2011, 2) also says that it is helpful to include the word “too” in the formulation of the policy problem: “smth happening too slow”, “smth grows too fast” etc.</p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of public parking facilities in Shevchenkivskiy district of Kyiv city</li> <li>• Lack of media literacy lessons in the lower age groups of general education schools in Ukraine</li> <li>• Excessive number of people at the interchange stations of the subway in Kharkiv during rush hour (between 18.00 and 20.00)</li> <li>• Too many people with annual incomes over \$60,000 are living in subsidised apartments (Bardach, 2011, 6)</li> </ul>	<p><b>Providing the client/target audience with a targeted “how-to” statement.</b> In this case, the policy problem formulation begins with the word “how”.</p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How to ensure the transparency of public procurement by the executive authorities of Ukraine</li> <li>• How to remove unauthorised trade near subway stations in Kyiv</li> <li>• How to reduce the accident rate on the Kyiv–Odesa highway within the Kyiv region</li> <li>• How to provide residents of the village of Kulyshivka with good-quality drinking water</li> <li>• How to reduce the number of subsidies for housing and communal services, which are provided to citizens of Ukraine (Kiliievych et al., 2016, 14)</li> </ul>
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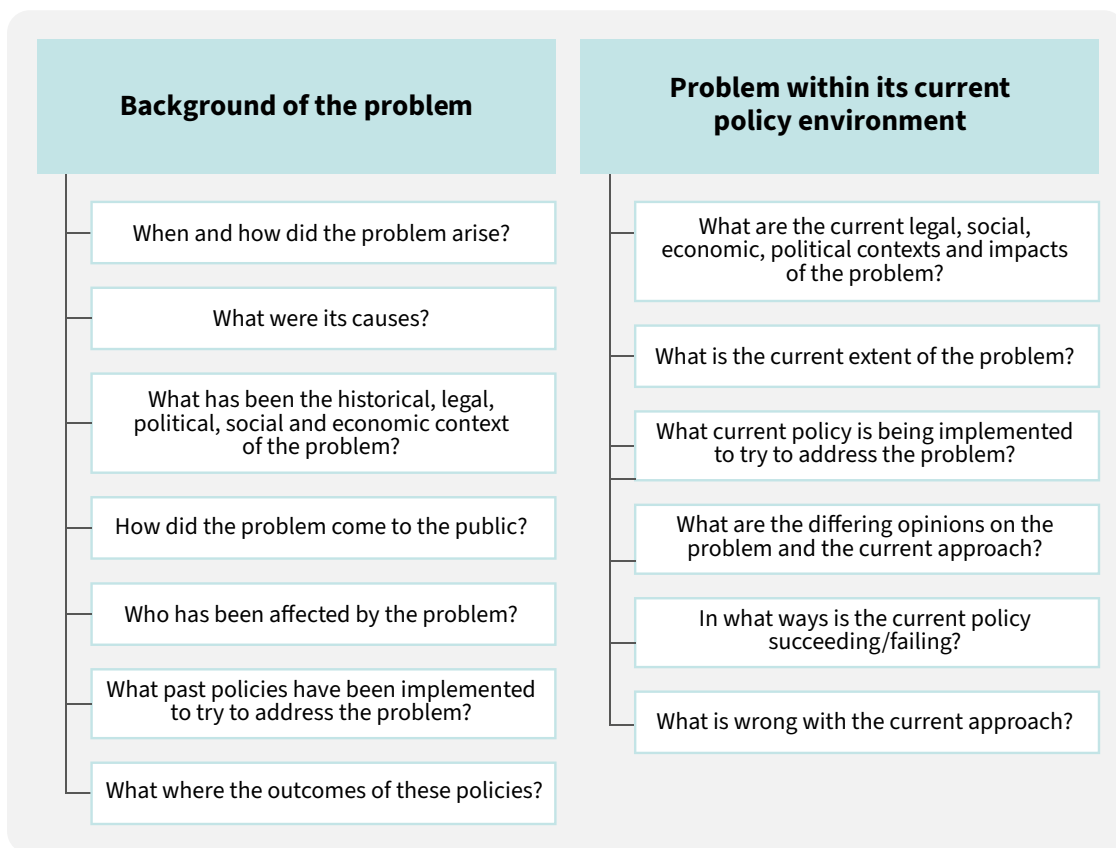
Note that in these examples the scale of the problems varies from nationwide to local, and in addition, for certain ones there's a limited time period in which they occur (e.g., rush hour in the subway). Most often, the scope of the problem will depend on which authority will be your target audience, and therefore which range of tasks, powers and resources are available to you.

### Problem description

The result of all the work involved in defining the policy problem is quite modest – one sentence that outlines the policy problem. However, it does not end there. We still need to convince the reader that the problem really exists, that it affects a large number of people, and that it is important to solve it. This is done in the corresponding section of the policy paper, the problem description, which follows immediately after the introduction (Young & Quinn, 2002, 43 ff.).

The authors use different approaches in an effort to present the problem description in a convincing way. Depending on the essence of the policy problem and the purpose of the policy brief, a **different range of questions may be included in the problem description section**. Young & Quinn (2002) suggest using the following checklist of questions that can help make the problem description convincing (however, not all of them may be answered in each particular case):

Figure 3.2: Questions for problem description



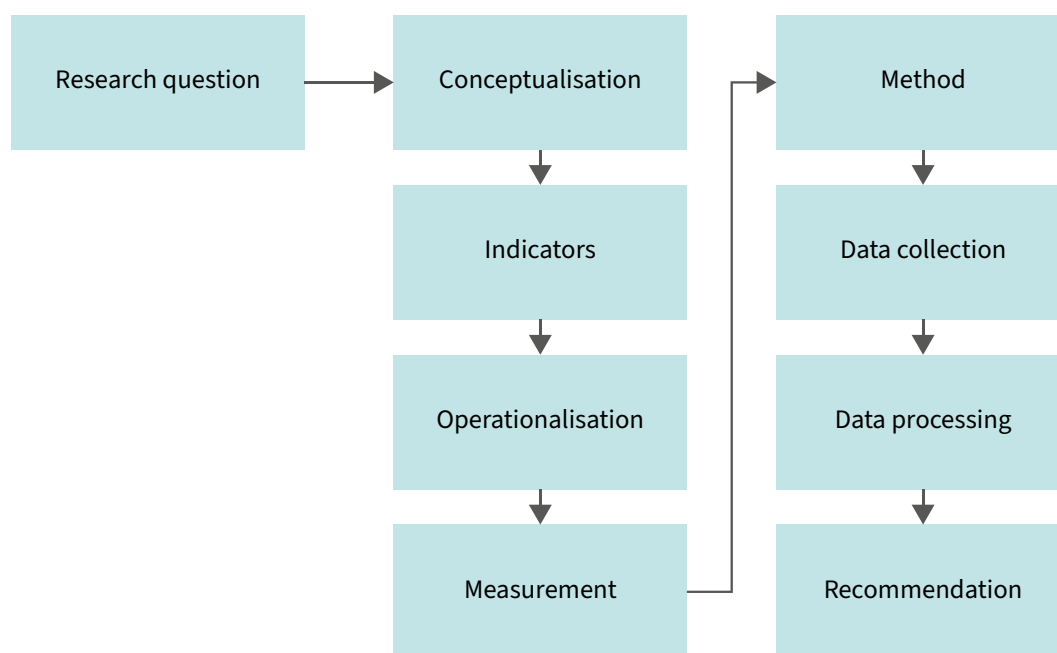
Source: Young & Quinn, 2002, 48–49.



## STEP 2: Formulate the research question

Thomas Barrett

Figure 3.3: The workflow from research question to recommendation



A key component of effective policy analysis is to ground it in appropriate and clearly formulated research methods. Even if it is not explicitly stated in the form of a question, good policy analysis always has an underlying research question that helps to define the appropriate research methods. Hence, it is important to be aware of the exact nature of the questions you are asking when conducting research in order to know how best to answer them. Broadly speaking, there are three categories of research questions:

### Descriptive questions (“what?”)

*What has been the outcome of privatisation in Ukraine?*

Descriptive questions attempt to piece together the facts or narrative of the situation in question. They are most appropriate when there is a lack of clarity around a phenomenon, or it is heavily disputed. Taking the example above, the nature of privatisation in Ukraine is partly shrouded in mystery, and its outcome is a major source of debate in the media and political arena. To answer the question provided in the example above, a certain level of storytelling is required. This is not fictional storytelling, but rather the ability to pull together primary and secondary sources into a compelling narrative. This may involve challenging a dominant narrative about a particular event or period. For example, some accounts describe the history of privatisation in Ukraine as a tale of deprivation and collapse, while others see it as planting the seeds of a capitalist democracy. Calling these accounts “storytelling” does not discredit them as empirical analysis – their strength or weakness lies in the ability of the researcher to build a credible analysis from the available evidence (Gerring, 2012).

This type of question usually causes the most confusion among analysts. Many see descriptive questions as an invitation to provide a long, dry historical analysis of as many facts and events concerning the topic as possible. Not only is this of no interest to readers, but it also misses the analytical potential of descriptive analysis. To return to the example of privatisation, analysts should avoid the trap of simply describing the historical process of privatisation. The analytical focus of the question is the “outcome” of privatisation – what kind of economic and political order emerged due to privatisation? Answering such a question effectively requires a systematic analysis of dominant narratives and a literature review on the topic. Is post-privatisation Ukraine an emerging capitalist economy? Is it an oligarchy? A rentier state? Is it stuck in a middle-income trap or commodity trap? As we can see, such analytical questions about the nature of the phenomenon are at the heart of a descriptive research question, not a dry narrative.

### **Causal questions (“why?”)**

*Why do some forms of privatisation produce better economic and social outcomes than others?*

Causal questions ask about the relationship between variables in the social world. In the example above, the question implies a relationship between economic and social outcomes (the dependent variable, in scientific terms) and that different varieties of privatisation may have an effect on these outcomes in different settings (independent variables). The question can be open ended (as above) where we want to discover the cause, or it can be focused on a specific independent variable. In the latter case, we may already suspect the independent variable is a significant cause, but we want to understand the mechanism by which it affects the dependent variable:

*Why do privatisations involving foreign companies produce better economic and social outcomes than others?*

In this example, we already have a supposed cause (involvement of foreign companies), and we want to show the causal mechanism by which foreign company involvement leads to better outcomes (and, implicitly, that foreign involvement is actually the cause, and not some other phenomenon that often appears alongside it). Therefore, causal questions often lead to the researcher piecing together several intermediate mechanisms which fit together into a causal chain to explain an outcome.

### **Explanatory questions (“how?”)**

*How can Ukraine recover from an economic crisis?*

Explanatory questions are often a hybrid between descriptive and causal questions. They aim to explain a specific outcome, and therefore require both storytelling and causal inference. To explain how the Ukrainian economy can recover, first the story of what happened to Ukraine’s key industries and markets must be pieced together, but the causal mechanisms of how these developments can lead to a certain outcome also needs to be uncovered – leading to recovery. This may involve examining the “what” of previous economic crises and the “why” of how the country recovered.

There is another type of question that occurs frequently in policy analysis: the “which policy is more appropriate/effective?” question. It is worth noting that this is not a research question. The answers to the research question may help us to answer the question of the optimum policy, but the two should not be confused. Asking which policy is optimal is logically subsequent to the research question, which seeks to examine the social problem that we are interested in. For example, the question “Is privatisation the best long-term strategy for the Ukrainian economy?” is not a research question. The underlying research question here is likely to be “How can Ukraine improve economic performance?”. This is a combination of a “what” question (“What is the state of the Ukrainian economy?”) and a “why question” (“Why does economic improvement occur in countries like Ukraine?”).

**Table 3.2: Overview of research question types and their characteristics**

Type of research question	Simplified	Key features	Example
<b>Descriptive</b>	“What?”	Understanding contexts, questioning dominant narratives	What has been the outcome of privatisation in Ukraine?
<b>Causal</b>	“Why?”	Uncovering causal mechanisms	Why does decentralisation contribute to the green transformation of Ukraine?
<b>Explanatory</b>	“How?”	Combining descriptive and causal approaches	How can Ukraine recover from an economic crisis?

The research question provides direction and acts as a frame of reference throughout the investigation process. Choosing which type of research question is most appropriate depends on the main goal of the policy analysis in question. If the aim is to question the nature of a particular process (e.g. privatisation, deregulation) or to challenge conventional understandings, a descriptive question may be the most appropriate. If the goal is to uncover the most principal cause of a particular phenomenon (e.g. corruption, economic growth, electoral turnover), then a causal question might be preferable. If we are focused on a particular outcome and how it was or could be achieved, then we may want to combine descriptive and causal elements with an explanatory question.

## STEP 3: Do desk research

*Anastasiia Bobrova*

### What is desk research and why should your policy analysis include it?

Desk research (also called secondary research) is a research method that involves using already existing research data. In contrast to collecting your data, with this method, you will use readily available data previously compiled by someone else. This data can take many different forms. It is possible to retrieve it from journal articles, monographs, policy reports, newspapers or government records. Secondary data can also be found in databases such as Eurostat or organisations like IMF or OECD.

Firstly, desk research helps to identify gaps in the existing knowledge and argumentation on the topic to underpin social and political debates in the field (Mayer et al., 2013). It also provides the chance to understand how your analysis will help to bridge those gaps, and what insight and answers you plan to find. Secondly, it enhances the credibility of your policy analysis. Consulting various sources helps locate robust evidence that might support your arguments and recommendations later. Some policy problems are not strictly bound to one field but are cross-cutting through various topics. Thus, desk research might help you to discover new perspectives on the policy area and to redefine the policy problem. Finally, when writing a policy analysis, you are striving to be part of a broader scholarly or political conversation on a specific topic. By reviewing the existing research on your topic, you are developing a sense of that conversation among academics, politicians and other stakeholders relevant to your policy field. Even though many analytical publications, especially less comprehensive ones like policy briefs, do not include a classic literature review as is familiar in scientific articles, doing some form of desk research is indispensable if you want to write a successful policy analysis.

**Table 3.3: Pros and cons of desk research**

Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provides context</li> <li>• Time-saving</li> <li>• Cost-effective</li> <li>• Enhances credibility of your analysis</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relies on secondary data that might be fragmented, outdated or irrelevant to the purposes of current analysis</li> <li>• Generates less novelty and insights than primary research</li> </ul>

Source: Adapted and enhanced from (Wills et al., 2016, 9).

## Desk research sources and how to use them

Starting desk research might be overwhelming, as it can be a challenge to quickly navigate various articles, datasets and governmental records. Every publication you read will lead to new questions and inquiries, which might result in wasting time on interesting though irrelevant sources. Therefore, when approaching a source, make sure it is useful for the analysis and ask yourself several questions:

- ▶ Is this source relevant to my analysis? Will it bring me closer to answering my research questions, or provide thematic or methodological insights on the topic?
- ▶ Is the information up to date? Have there been any new developments on the topic that might make this source outdated?
- ▶ Is the source credible? Can we trust the author or the institution?

The main challenge is avoiding falling into the rabbit hole of numerous exciting reports and articles. Approach this process with research questions at hand. Having the questions ready will narrow the scope of literature to review and make this work more structured. Starting with abstracts and executive summaries will help you understand the main idea of the piece of research and whether it is relevant to your analysis. After you have identified the corpus of core literature, begin working on it thoroughly, noting the lines of argument and definitions of key terms. Look for recent publications on the topic to gain an understanding of the current debate. Nevertheless, do not dismiss older studies. Even if research was carried out some years ago, it could still be highly relevant, support your idea and provide answers or insights.

Remember, behind every publication is a human who might have an ideological stance or social background. Scholars and analysts usually represent different academic traditions and schools of thought. These things might impact the way analysts and researchers define terms, interpret their findings and choose lines of argument as well as influencing which policy solutions they opt for. When working with past research findings, remember to seek different views on the same problem. Avoid so-called confirmation bias, which is a risk if you only collect data that confirms your assumption. Search out information that may contradict the initial ideas. Approach every publication as a tool and try to understand whether it will support your analysis and guide you into the broader conversation among scholars in your field (Harris, 2019, 13).

**Table 3.4: Types of resources for desk research**

Resource	Where to find	Note
Peer-reviewed publications	<p>Online search tools, e.g.:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Google Scholar</li> <li>• Research Gate</li> <li>• Academia.edu</li> </ul>	<p>There are plenty of open-access articles available.</p> <p>If the article is not available, consider writing to the author(s) directly to ask for a copy/draft.</p>
Quality research and analysis	<p>Non-governmental organisations and think tanks</p> <p>e.g., in Ukraine:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Kyiv International Institute of Sociology</li> <li>• Cedos think tank</li> <li>• Ilko Kucheriv Democratic Initiatives Foundation</li> <li>• Centre for Economic Strategy</li> <li>• Labour Initiatives</li> <li>• Kyiv School of Economics</li> </ul>	<p>Check local organisations and initiatives on their latest work/related topics.</p>
Research and policy analysis, comprehensive overviews and reports	<p>International organisations, e.g.:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• International Organization for Migration</li> <li>• International Labour Organization</li> <li>• United Nations</li> <li>• The World Bank</li> </ul>	<p>International organisations often collect unique data and provide comprehensive overviews and reports that might become useful sources for the desk research.</p>
Administrative data (budget revenues, housing, migration, etc.)	<p>Either publicly accessible or provided on request:</p> <p>e.g., Ukraine: official <a href="#">open data portal</a></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access information about registered vehicles and their owners</li> <li>• Households that receive housing allowances</li> <li>• Court rulings</li> </ul> <p>e.g., open data from EU countries available in the (<a href="#">European data portal</a>).</p>	<p>If the data is not openly available, identify the level where the information is collected and stored (national, sub-national, local). You can then send a request to the corresponding public body.</p>
Statistical data	<p>e.g., Ukraine: State Statistical Service (incl. regional branches)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• collects information on socio-demographic characteristics of the population, migration, labour market, education, etc.</li> </ul>	<p>Their annual reports are usually available on their (<a href="#">website</a>).</p>

Census data	<p>Definition: Unique, comprehensive data about the population's socio-demographic and economic characteristics.</p> <p>Usually available online on the websites of government bodies responsible for statistics.</p>	<p>Typically, the census is conducted every 10 years. However, in Ukraine, the last census took place in 2001. The next census is scheduled for 2023. Because of the war it is unlikely to be conducted.</p> <p>Currently, we have limited information regarding internal migration, household composition and housing conditions.</p>
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Both **statistical and administrative data** might have additional shortcomings. Besides missing information, as in the case of the census, another issue is fragmentation. For instance, data collected by the State Statistical Service during the first years of Ukrainian independence has not been digitised and might only be available on paper (Zheriobkina et al., 2021, 39). Moreover, sometimes the data is unavailable in a machine-readable format. Hence, it is necessary to thoroughly examine each dataset's methodology to understand how this information was collected as well as its limitations.

While secondary data is the basis for desk research, it is also a double-edged sword. On the one hand, using secondary data is a time-saving and cost-effective way of finding the necessary information. On the other hand, it should be borne in mind that the data was collected under certain circumstances and for specific purposes, which might differ from the goals and tasks that drive your own analysis. Therefore, given that secondary data risks being outdated and fragmented, it is important to always approach it critically and assess whether this dataset helps answer your research questions.

## Analyse the impact of current policies

Previously, in Chapter 1, we mentioned that policy analysis is multidisciplinary in nature and can have various aims, from developing alternative policy options to overcoming political or structural barriers to policy adoption. However, in aiming to reach those goals, it is crucial to understand the political landscape shaped by pre-existing policies.

There are several ways to analyse the impact of current and previous policies. It is possible to: 1) gain an overview of the influence policies have on the definition of political problems and agendas; 2) examine the effect of policies on the structure of governmental institutions and their procedures in dealing with specific issues; 3) explore the effects policies have on particular groups, especially power groups; and 4) investigate how policies restructure relations between citizens and the government (SoRelle & Michener, 2021, 80 ff.).

For instance, in Ukraine, mass housing privatisation after the collapse of the Soviet Union resulted in subsequent policy decisions favouring owner-occupancy. The policy problem was defined as “lack of housing” rather than “lack of housing affordability”. Over the years, governmental institutions shifted their initiatives towards supporting homeownership, mainly by providing concessional loans to selected target groups of households. The establishment of the State Fund for Support of Youth Housing Construction in 1992 shaped the way governmental support for housing purchases is allocated. These decisions resulted in indirect support and even direct incentives to developers and construction firms, who have come to strongly influence the housing policy. These policies encourage citizens to purchase rather than rent their homes and have in turn had an impact upon citizens' views on housing policy (Fedoriv & Lomonosova, 2019; Cedos, 2022).

There are also different types of policy effects. *Policy outcomes* are goods, services or resources received by target groups. On the contrary, *policy impacts* are long-term changes in knowledge and attitudes resulting from policy outcomes (Dunn, 2018, 254). To continue with the example of the

Ukrainian housing policy, the number of concessional loans provided by the government over a certain time period is a policy outcome. The support for the concept that only a privately owned home could be considered a real home is a policy impact (Fedoriv & Lomonosova, 2019, 84).

To examine policy impact, it is crucial to define reliable and measurable indicators (Dunn, 2018, 255). For example, to measure whether the current policies impact housing affordability, we could examine the percentage of the monthly income households spend on housing (rent, loan payments, utilities). It is considered unaffordable if a household spends more than 30% of its monthly income on housing.

This is just a quick example of the effects of current and previous policies on subsequent policy decisions and reforms, government institutions and target groups. Understanding and analysing this impact is essential for developing policy solutions and recommendations. In reality, such analysis is much more complex and could constitute a topic for a separate research project. Within the framework of the desk research, it might not be possible to comprehensively review all the current and previous policies in the field. Therefore, it is necessary to structure your work and deploy some limitations.

Start with reviewing the status quo in the selected policy area. Identify critical reforms and policy decisions over the last couple of years. Underpin their initial aims, milestones, target groups and beneficiaries. Make a list of all relevant policy documents (e.g., laws, official governmental strategies) that you need to review. Look for other comprehensive analyses of the impact of current policies. Try to find opponents and proponents of the policies to examine their evidence and compare argumentation. Define indicators that will help you to assess the effects of current policies. The following questions might help you to start this analysis:

- ▶ What problems do current policies try to tackle, and how are these problems defined?
- ▶ Which governmental bodies are responsible for policy implementation?
- ▶ What were the initial policy goals, and to what extent have they been achieved?
- ▶ What are the policy outcomes?
- ▶ What are the policy impacts? Is there any measurable evidence of current policy impacts?
- ▶ Have current policies resulted in any concomitant adverse effects? If yes, whom have these consequences affected?
- ▶ Have any alternative policy solutions been proposed? If yes, what are the potential impacts of these alternatives?

When analysing the impact of current policies, remember that you need credible, relevant and up-to-date sources. Look for governmental reports about implementing particular programmes and comprehensive reviews written by non-governmental organisations and think tanks. Note that data about policy impact might be incomplete or measure the indicators irrelevant to policy outcomes (Dunn, 2018, 252).

### **Checklist: Do desk research**

- ▶ Make a list of data necessary for the analysis and the institutions or governmental bodies responsible for this information.
- ▶ Identify the core corpus of literature.
- ▶ Make sure the chosen sources are relevant, up to date and credible.
- ▶ Familiarise yourself with debates and discussions within the field.
- ▶ Identify key terms and lines of argument for the topic.
- ▶ Identify blind spots in the existing research, knowledge and argumentation on the topic.

## STEP 4: Turning abstract ideas into measurable observations (operationalisation)

*Thomas Barrett*

To make the research component of our policy analysis credible, we need to incorporate empirical data into the theories we wish to examine. This is a key difference compared to other written formats, which may advocate policies – such as opinion pieces – but which do not base their claims on analysis of data (although they may refer to facts and figures uncritically). The process of connecting abstract theories with real-world empirical data is known as “operationalisation”. It can be broken down into four main steps: conceptualisation, indicators, operationalisation and measurement.

### Conceptualisation

Conceptualisation means developing an understanding and definition of the concept you are working with. In order to eventually measure abstract concepts such as “democracy”, “war”, “civil society” and “economic development”, we need to be clear about the conditions these concepts entail and be consistent in our application of the terms throughout our research (Toshkov, 2017). Democracy is the classic example: whether we define democracy very broadly (as the presence or absence of competitive elections) or narrowly (as a holistic institutional setup including the rule of law, vibrant independent media etc.) will have obvious consequences for our findings. Hence it is sensible to scan the relevant literature for the most appropriate definition of your concept and amend it to your specific purpose if necessary.

### Identifying indicators

The abstract concepts mentioned above all have one thing in common: they are not directly observable in the real world. We may claim to have lived in a democracy, or through a war or a period of economic development, but we did not observe these concepts directly. Instead, we witnessed a variety of indicators that suggested the presence of our theoretical concept. To operationalise an abstract concept, we need to break it down into these observable indicators. Taking the example of war, we might expect to observe several things: a declaration of war, two competing authorities, mobilisation of military forces, the firing of heavy munitions, military and civilian casualties, capturing of territory. Any one of the above on its own does not necessarily constitute war – heavy munitions can be fired for diverse reasons. But when aggregated, they allow us to measure the existence or intensity of war. Some concepts may only require a single indicator, such as economic growth. Others need to be compiled into indexes to measure the concept. A classic example would be Freedom House’s “Freedom in the World” index, which divides the concept of freedom into two broad indicators – political rights and civil liberties – and numerous sub-indicators for each (e.g. right of assembly, openness and transparency of government etc.).

### Operationalisation

Now, we have indicators for our concept that are observable in the real world. The next step is to find aspects of these values which can be measured, most often numerically. Sometimes this is rather obvious, in particular with economic or demographic data. If we want to measure population or economic growth, we simply take the population or GDP at time X versus time Y. We may also have a binary measurement, where we want to know whether a concept is present or not. To return to the example of war, we may decide (not arbitrarily, but based on prior analysis of existing literature), that to affirm the presence of war there must be at least two distinct authorities claiming power, plus a mobilisation of over 2,000 military personnel, over 200 rounds of heavy munitions fired and more than 100 casualties. Any case that meets these criteria can be considered as indicating the presence of war. However, it is often beneficial to analyse the prevalence of a concept for which there are several indicators. This is why indexes are frequently used, which aggregate several indicators into a



numerical figure. In this case, each indicator will be assigned a minimum and maximum score which reflects variance, and the total of these scores forms the overall score for the concept. This allows the combining of qualitative and quantitative data. For example, an index of human wellbeing could have a score from 1 to 5 points for “happiness”, taken from survey data (e.g. “not happy at all, mostly unhappy, neither happy nor unhappy, mostly happy, totally happy”), as well as a score from 1 to 5 for income (e.g. \$0–500, \$500–1,000, \$1,000–2,000, \$2,000–5,000, \$5,000+).

Operationalisation is also relevant for in-depth single-case studies that are not concerned with measurement and specific variables. Here, we should think of operationalisation as linking concepts with pieces of empirical evidence collected during the research process (Toshkov, 2017). This kind of research more closely resembles detective work, and will be given more attention later when we discuss process tracing.

## Measurement

Once the measurable phenomena for our indicators has been decided upon, the final step is to decide how to measure them. This can involve a nominal scale, where observations are assigned into categories represented by a number, albeit the numbers do not imply any order (e.g. religion, ethnicity, war vs no war). Ordinal measurements involve a rank order of observations (e.g. from strongly disagree to strongly agree), but there are no standard units to mathematically compare observations. Once again, the “Freedom in the World” index is instructive: it offers an aggregate score for a country of 0 to 100, formed from a maximum of 40 points for political rights and a maximum of 60 points for civil liberties, which are themselves formed from numerous sub-indicators of maximum five points. Five points for the sub-indicator “media freedom” represents a high level of press freedom, while 0 points represents its total absence. Hence the index allows us to make comparative claims about more or less freedom over time or between cases. Finally, interval measures are those which use standard units (e.g. time, weight, number) whereby we can make mathematical claims (e.g. an income of \$8,000 is double \$4,000) that we cannot make for other measurements (e.g. we cannot say that one country is three times as free as another, even if one has a freedom score of 30 and another of 90, because these numbers have no mathematical relationship). How exactly the measurement process is conducted is then a question of method.

**Table 3.5: Example – What is the relationship between privatisation and democracy?**

	<b>Privatisation</b>	<b>Democracy*</b>
		*This example uses a minimalist definition of democracy
<b>Conceptualisation</b>	The transfer of businesses from state to private ownership and control	Regular handover of legislative and executive authority through competitive elections
<b>Indicators</b>	Privatisation auctions, insider privatisation, illegal privatisation	Competitive elections, political parties, handovers of power, legislative and executive institutions
<b>Operationalisation</b>	What proportion of businesses is transferred from the state to private sector over a given time period?	Does a country experience handovers of control of executive and legislative institutions as a direct result of the outcome of competitive elections?
<b>Measurement</b>	Percentage of state-owned enterprises or parts thereof transferred to private ownership and control over a 30-year period	Number of instances of handover of control of executive and legislative institutions as a direct result of the outcome of competitive elections within a 30-year period

## STEP 5: Decide on methods

Thomas Barrett

### Quantitative & qualitative studies

The merits of quantitative versus qualitative methods have dominated many articles and fuelled fierce debates, but it is worth making a few basic observations. The strength of quantitative studies lies in their potential to produce robust empirical results which can be replicated and scrutinised. Statistical analysis can reveal the existence of significant correlations between variables, which is essential for theory-building. One downside of quantitative analysis is the gap between correlation and causation. Although a high degree of correlation may convince us of a certain causal relation, in some cases, the correlation may be an expression of a different but much more important causal mechanism.

The advantage of qualitative studies is their ability to trace chains of events and causation to a high degree of specificity by focusing on cases holistically rather than reducing them to a series of numerical values. This can be especially useful for phenomena that occur too rarely for quantitative analysis to be effective, such as wars, crises, revolutions or social mobilisation, or unique phenomena. In this case, we often want a nuanced picture of the variables at play, including contextual factors. The disadvantage of qualitative studies is that they are very hard to replicate or scrutinise externally. If another researcher were to repeat the same semi-structured interviews with different participants, they might come to a completely different understanding of the case in question. This places a heavy burden on the qualitative researcher to be convincing, to consider a wide range of possible explanations and to justify why some explanations were discarded or not given priority.

Some researchers suggest using mixed methods analysis to combine the benefits of quantitative and qualitative methods. The most common variant here is to start with a quantitative analysis, and once a correlation between an independent and a dependent variable is discovered, to switch to a single-case study or comparative case studies to uncover the mechanism that produces this correlation. In this case, quantitative analysis can be used to discover the optimal cases for qualitative analysis.

Policy analysts should devote close attention to choosing the most appropriate method for their study. To do so, they should consider the types of data available or which can be reasonably produced, and what is required to answer the research question. In many cases the choice is obvious, but in some cases it depends on the priorities of the analyst.

**Example – mixed methods:** Evan Lieberman, *Race and Regionalism in the Politics of Taxation in Brazil and South Africa* (2003).

Lieberman sets out to ascertain what enables some states to raise more tax than others. Using a quantitative regression analysis, he established a correlation between GDP and tax-raising capacity. However, there were many cases of variation between countries with similar GDP, showing that other factors were at play. He therefore chose two countries with a similar level of GDP, but very different tax-raising capacity (Brazil and China) for comparative qualitative research, to uncover the underlying mechanism at play.

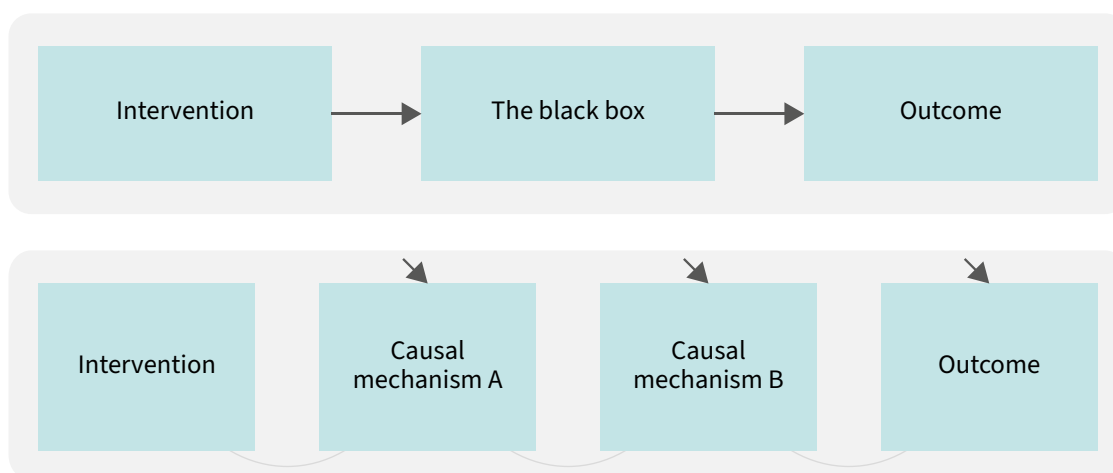
Lieberman, E. S. (2003). *Race and Regionalism in the Politics of Taxation in Brazil and South Africa*. Cambridge University Press.

**Table 3.6: Research methods – pros and cons**

Type of method	Advantages	Disadvantages
<b>Quantitative</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can estimate the significance of a correlation</li> <li>• Replicable</li> <li>• Allows randomised selection</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shows correlation, not causation</li> <li>• Struggles to account for intervening variables</li> <li>• Struggles to account for change over time</li> </ul>
<b>Qualitative</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Analytical depth</li> <li>• Can identify causal mechanisms</li> <li>• Accounts for context</li> <li>• Accounts for intervening variables</li> <li>• Accounts for change over time</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not replicable</li> <li>• Risk of selection bias</li> <li>• Cannot specify the significance of a correlation</li> </ul>

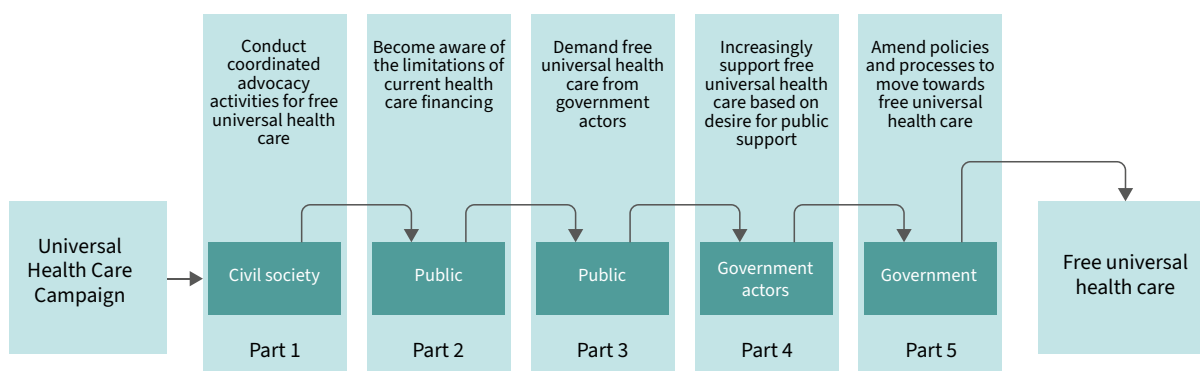
## Process tracing

Although it is a type of qualitative method, process tracing deserves special attention since it is not a method of data collection like interviews but a way to use collected data to open the “black box” of causality. As we discussed above, statistical analysis can establish correlation between variables. Process tracing aims to uncover causation by constructing the causal chain between dependent and independent variables. It can therefore be used to test whether a correlation is of causal significance (Trampusch & Palier, 2016).

**Figure 3.4: The process tracing mechanism**

Take the following example from the Centre for Development Impact, which demonstrated process tracing using the movement for Universal Health Care in Ghana:

**Figure 3.5: A simplified causal mechanism based on the Universal Health Care Campaign in Ghana**



Source: Adapted from Beach and Pedersen (2013) using the example of the Universal Health Care Campaign case study.

The example shows how the Universal Health Care Campaign actually resulted in the adoption of universal healthcare, by identifying the chronology of causal mechanisms that led to the outcome. Advocacy helped to increase awareness, leading to public demand, followed by a government response and ultimately adoption (Centre for Development Impact, 2015).

Process tracing usually involves a synthesis of types of qualitative data such as source analysis and interviews, alongside description, in order to uncover the causal mechanisms in question. For example, semi-structured interviews with activists, experts or those involved in the policy process can be used to elicit the steps that led to the outcome.

**Table 3.7: Types of process tracing**

Type	Definition
<b>Theory-testing</b>	Theory-testing involves taking an existing theory, which posits a relationship between a dependent and independent variable, and attempting to construct the causal links that could lead from the intervention to the outcome in a particular case.
Example: In the Ghanaian case of universal healthcare, we could take another country that adopted universal healthcare, and test whether the advocacy-based theory is applicable in this case.	
<b>Theory-building</b>	Theory-building involves exploring the causal mechanisms in a particular case, and examining whether any of them are generalisable in terms of a larger set of cases.
Example: We may ask whether the Ghanaian case helps us to build a theory of how universal healthcare becomes adopted in African countries.	
Explaining the outcome	The cause of the outcome is unknown. The analyst searches backwards from the outcome to get to the original intervention.
Example: Ghana has achieved universal healthcare and we are researching how this came about.	

## Case selection

One of the largest obstacles to high-quality policy analysis is arbitrary case selection, particularly when involving comparative research. The reasons for this are understandable: researchers may have country-specific knowledge or topical expertise. Expertise should certainly not be discouraged; nonetheless, it is essential to justify our case selection to avoid certain common pitfalls. The main goal of case selection is to reduce the problem of overdetermination. Often during policy analysis, rather than struggling to come up with the cause of an outcome, the researcher encounters the opposite problem: there are too many possible causes that sound somewhat plausible. This is especially challenging in single-case case studies. Why did the Revolution of Dignity occur? Because of an escalating spiral of protest and police violence? Because key oligarchs defected to the opposition? Because the Ukrainian people were no longer prepared to tolerate corruption and wanted a European future? Because of the historical legacy of popular democracy from the time of the Zaporizhzhian Sich? The explanations may seem limitless.

Comparative analysis attempts to reduce the overdetermination problem by choosing cases in such a way that reduces the number of possible explanations. The two most common approaches are Most Similar Systems Design (MSSD) and **Most Different Systems Design (MDS)**.

MSSD involves choosing cases that are as similar as possible with respect to most potential causal variables, but with variation in the outcome that is being investigated. Imagine you are trying to explain the cause of revolutions. You should try to compare countries that are similar in terms of most causal variables. Therefore, you might choose to compare Belarus, Ukraine, Armenia and Georgia. They are all post-Soviet countries with similar historical, legal and economic legacies. However, Ukraine, Georgia and Armenia all experienced Colour Revolutions while Belarus did not. In this way you can eliminate certain explanations: if Ukraine, Georgia, Armenia and Belarus have all experienced high corruption, but only three out of the four experienced revolutions, then corruption is not a sufficient explanation for the occurrence of revolutions. Instead, you can explore the variables that differ between those who experienced revolutions and those who did not. For example, you may say that those countries that witnessed the rise of a domestic oligarch, or those that transitioned away from the command economy, were those that experienced revolutions. You can therefore decide to focus your comparative analysis on these variables and set aside other variables that do not explain between-country variation.

*Table 3.8: Example study of a Most Similar Systems Design*

Case	Ukraine	Georgia	Armenia	Belarus
<b>Insignificant causal variables</b>	Orthodox religion	Orthodox religion	Orthodox religion	Orthodox religion
	Post-Soviet country	Post-Soviet country	Post-Soviet country	Post-Soviet country
	Widespread corruption	Widespread corruption	Widespread corruption	Widespread corruption
	Large-scale popular mobilisation	Large-scale popular mobilisation	Large-scale popular mobilisation	Large-scale popular mobilisation
<b>Key causal variables</b>	Split in the ruling elite	Split in the ruling elite	Split in the ruling elite	No split in the ruling elite
	Shock transition to market economy	Shock transition to market economy	Shock transition to market economy	No shock transition to market economy
<b>Outcome to be explained</b>	Revolution	Revolution	Revolution	No Revolution

MDS is very similar but turns the approach upside down. Here, maximally different cases are chosen, which are the same in terms of the outcome (dependent variable). The researcher will search for the common independent variables that explain why the cases have the same outcome. Imagine you are trying to explain why both Ukraine and Hong Kong experienced massive anti-government popular mobilisation. Ukraine and Hong Kong have very different historical, cultural, economic and political legacies. However, you can seek out certain common variables that explain why they both experienced mass mobilisation. Both countries are threatened by a belligerent and much larger neighbour (Russia and China). Moreover, both countries are post-imperial. Therefore, your comparative analysis can focus on these commonalities, and on explaining why these two variables are key to mass mobilisation.

**Table 3.9: Example study of a Most Different Systems Design**

Case	Ukraine	Hong Kong
<b>Insignificant causal variables</b>	Slavic Orthodox culture	Confucian/Taoist/Buddhist culture
	Post-Soviet economic model	Free market economic model
	Widespread corruption	Low corruption
	Low GDP per capita	High GDP per capita
	Divided ruling elite (competing oligarchs)	United ruling elite (CCP)
<b>Key causal variables</b>	Post-colonial society with aggressive imperialist neighbour	Post-colonial society with aggressive imperialist neighbour
	Increasingly authoritarian government	Increasingly authoritarian government
<b>Outcome to be explained</b>	Mass mobilisation	Mass mobilisation

Of course, MSSDs and MDSs are not fully robust, since they may overlook the interaction of different variables. They should be viewed more as a mental framework by which to judge whether certain cases are worth comparing. If we want to analyse two cases, but realise that they have many similarities and differences on both the independent and dependent variable, we should ask ourselves whether they are appropriate, and whether the comparative approach will yield results.

This section has focused on comparative analysis as a way to solve overdetermination. However, another common type of analysis is single-case selection. This method is often used when the case in itself is the focus of the author, not any phenomena it may represent. For example, a researcher may choose a single-case study of the Orange Revolution, not as an example of revolutions more broadly, but because they want to understand this particular case. The strength of single-case studies is that they allow the author to devote time to achieving analytical depth regarding the case in question and to address many factors in detail. The downside is the aforementioned problem of overdetermination – the author must persuasively use both descriptive and causal analysis to show why the factors they are highlighting are more important than others.

## STEP 6: Collecting empirical data

*Thomas Barrett*

### Primary source analysis

A common form of empirical data is primary source material. This includes written documents pertaining to the event or phenomenon under study, such as politicians' speeches, party manifestos, regulations, legislative acts, organisations' reports and official communiques. It is important to note that secondary sources (e.g. opinion pieces, academic publications, journalistic articles) do not constitute empirical data unless it is these publications that are specifically under analysis (e.g. media analysis). There are several ways that written sources can be used as empirical data.

Firstly, quantitative text analysis methods (QTA) can be applied for analysis. QTA uses statistical or programming software (e.g., R) to analyse large quantities of texts for key terms. To do this, the researcher must create or use pre-existing dictionaries of terms and program the parameters of the analysis. A good example of QTA is the analysis of party manifestos and propaganda. QTA can analyse the different issues or social groups that parties refer to (e.g. "the working class", "trade unions", "immigrants", "elites"), how frequently a term occurs, how these change over time and whether these references are positive or negative (e.g. "greedy unions", "dishonest politicians", "hardworking immigrants"). The advantage of QTA is that it allows a large amount of data to be processed. The downside is the limited abilities of most QTA software to detect meaning or interpret data. Unless the researcher is highly skilled in advanced methods such as machine learning, QTA is mostly limited to providing the prevalence of key terms over time.

The second application is qualitative text analysis (QLTA). Unlike QTA, QLTA requires researchers to read the primary sources and hand-code. Coding in this case is different from the IT sphere – it refers to deciding in advance which types of speech in a text can be put into an analytical category. For example, the research might analyse the manifesto of a political party and develop a coding that identifies claims to class identity versus national or racial identity. The researcher defines (either from the existing literature or resulting from the reading process) the types of claims or information under investigation. The advantage of the coding process over simply reading the texts and writing one's own synthesis is that coding allows the researcher to establish the threshold for which they consider their hypothesis to be valid, meaning that other researchers could rerun the experiment on the same or different material to verify or challenge the claim. The number of texts that can be reasonably analysed is much lower for QLTA than QTA but allows a lot more room for interpretation and complexity. For example, QLTA could be used to analyse how international organisations refer to corruption or anti-corruption strategies in their reports and communiques and how this changes over time. Researchers can engage with more complex hypotheses, such as "since the 1990s, EU reports on the rule of law in Ukraine have shifted from viewing corruption as an outcome of poor legislation to being a collective-action problem". Such a hypothesis would be very challenging to test using quantitative analysis of key terms, but could be achieved qualitatively as the researcher can code certain ideas or themes and then state that a certain discourse predominated at a particular time.

### Interviews in policy analysis

There are three main categories of interviews in policy analysis. The first is narrative or testimonial interviews. Such interviews are most appropriate when the researcher has limited knowledge of the topic, wants an insider perspective, or wants the hypotheses of their research to emerge from the interviews themselves (Leech, 2002). For example, if we are analysing the causes of homelessness, we may choose to interview a sample of homeless people and ask them to reveal aspects of their

biography. From these interviews, we can build up a repository of common themes or details of people who become homeless. This may be more useful than statistical data (e.g. income of their family as a child, ethnicity, divorce, drug use etc.) because it allows us to reconstruct the temporal and causal chain that led to the outcome, and to include variables which are hard to capture statistically. For example, it could be that, statistically speaking, drug use does not have a significant correlation with homelessness, but interviewees may reveal that drug use combined with an unsupportive family, or soon after divorce, had a much larger impact than the statistics would suggest. Such interviews may also reveal new avenues for research that were not obvious from analysing statistical data. The main distinguishing feature of narrative interviews from structured or semi-structured interviews is that the interviewer does not design questions to elicit answers to certain questions (e.g. “why do you think people become homeless?”), but to give the interviewee the opportunity to tell their story, free from attempting to satisfy the expectations of the interviewer (Hollway & Jefferson, 2008).

The second category is semi-structured interviews. These are most appropriate when the researcher has a high level of understanding of the subject matter but needs to obtain information about specific phenomena or instances from people who have witnessed them first hand or have particular expertise, in order to both empirically analyse the resulting data and refine the hypotheses of the research (McIntosh & Morse, 2015). In practice, this involves a series of predefined, standardised and open-ended questions. While the interviewee answers these questions, the researcher must stay attuned and ask follow-up questions that encourage the interviewee to elaborate on general knowledge or areas of particular interest. As a result, the researcher generates relevant qualitative data to support or falsify their hypothesis, but may also encounter new perspectives that cause them to refine their hypothesis (Ahlin, 2019).

A third category is structured interviews with closed questions. These are generally used when the researcher already knows a lot about the subject matter and types of responses and wants to know how many respondents fit each category. Hence, such interviews are so methodologically similar to survey data that we shall not deal with them separately.

The validity and reliability of interview data are often open to significant criticism from many perspectives. Some of this critique comes from the belief that interview data simply produces storytelling, which is highly selective and influenced by the worldview of the interviewer and the interviewees selected. However, this is equally applicable to quantitative research, albeit often more hidden. In fact, when used properly, interview data should acknowledge the choice of interviewees, their potential subjectivity and the wider worldview of the researcher. Rather than enabling the researcher to hide behind “objective” methods, interviews allow them to challenge dominant narratives and generate and test new theories. This is important for policy analysis, in order to avoid repeating conventional explanations of politics, society or economics and reaffirming them with selective quantitative data. (For a useful explanation of the criticism against semi-structured interviews and case studies and answers to this criticism, see: Diefenbach, 2009.)

Ethical concerns are crucial for all types of interview. Analysts should take appropriate steps regarding consent, data protection and anonymity. There are many handbooks and online resources that deal with interview ethics (Morris, 2015). Some key aspects to bear in mind are asking for express written consent, giving clear information about how the interviews will be used and asking if the interviewee wishes to remain anonymous and respecting these wishes (see Chapter 3 Step 8 → [\(Hold yourself accountable\)](#)).

## Surveys

There are two main uses of surveys in policy analysis: opinion surveys and needs assessment. Opinion surveys gauge the mood of the population or a specific social group on a policy, range of policy options or the issue the policy seeks to address. Needs assessments are a way of asking



community members or social groups (e.g. stakeholders) what they see as the most important needs of that group or community.

The advantage of surveys is that, unlike interviews, they allow opinions to be sourced from large numbers of people and can control the variety of participant backgrounds through representative selection or randomisation. Therefore, the same survey can be expected to produce relatively similar responses when repeated for the same population. The main drawback of survey data is the dependence on how questions are framed. Semi-structured interviews may start with pre-decided questions, but the interviewer should ask further questions based on the responses elicited and perhaps adapt the structure for future interviews. With survey data, this adaptation is only made possible by rerunning the survey or holding a small pre-survey. Hence it is essential to bear in mind that how the questions are framed strongly influences the answers. Therefore, it is recommended the researcher avoids questions that contain the answer within themselves or that have a very limited choice of answers.

There may also be key aspects that are completely overlooked because the researcher did not consider them when creating the survey. An insufficient grasp of local context creates a significant risk of such mistakes. For example, an international organisation might run a survey on internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Ukraine and the kind of support they receive from the state. The survey might focus on whether IDPs received support typical in Western welfare states (e.g. unemployment benefits, housing, childcare, energy allowances etc.). However, it may neglect forms of welfare provision common in post-Soviet states (discounted transport, free university places etc.). The survey would therefore elicit an inaccurate picture of the social issue in question. An additional level of depth can be added to surveys by incorporating questions where respondents can write longer answers; however, this dramatically increases the workload of data processing.

## Statistical analysis

Rather than dealing with specific individuals and phenomena as a connected whole, statistical analysis transforms people or events into a variety of data points based on certain observable criteria (e.g., wealth, GDP, race, gender, age etc.). These data points are then aggregated and analysed to establish correlation between these variables. The most common type is simple regression analysis, yet there are other more sophisticated methods, such as panel data, which accounts for change over time, and Bayesian statistics, which quantifies uncertainty (Imai, 2018).

Statistical analysis is effective when it comes to establishing correlation between dependent and independent variables. However, correlation does not mean causation. Taking a classic example, several studies have highlighted the greater susceptibility of Black people in the United States to a variety of health conditions when compared to white people. This has at times been used as evidence that Black people have poorer health outcomes (Saini et al., 2021). However, this strong correlation does not account for a variety of intervening factors, such as the concentration of Black Americans in inner-city areas, lower average income, higher poverty and a lack of training among medical professionals on how to stop certain symptoms in Black patients.

Hence while statistical analysis seems very analytically robust, it is only as strong as its framing. The analyst must be prepared to explore a range of possible causal factors and be open to the possibility that the strongest correlation does not necessarily imply that this variable is the cause.

## Open data sources

While generating new data is not uncommon in policy analysis, much is based on existing raw or processed data that is openly available. Raw data usually means large spreadsheets of information that have not yet been categorised meaningfully. Processed data has already been grouped into specific indicators or measurements, or even aggregated into indices.

Analysts should take the time to understand the methodologies of the open data sources they are using, otherwise they run the risk of repeating conventional understandings that are the product of poorly compiled or politicised data. The methodologies of state statistical bureaus may be designed for political convenience. A classic example is the calculation of the unemployment rate, where many categories of not-in-work people are not classified as unemployed in order to reduce the figure. Another is the calculation of the subsistence minimum, which can be manipulated to mask poverty or keep social payments low.

Even commonly used international instruments should be treated with caution. For example, the World Bank's "Ease of Doing Business Index" has been long used as a measure of the openness of the business environment in a country. However, given the economic benefits of being considered a good country with which to do business, many countries introduced laws and regulations to specifically target the indicators in the index. This led to a bizarre situation where countries with famously hostile business environments wound up at the top of the rankings. There were also several instances of alleged or admitted collusion between World Bank and national government officials to change the methodology to improve a country's ranking (Ghosh, 2020).

Similarly, Transparency International's "Corruption Perception Index" is widely used, but most corruption experts acknowledge that since it only measures perception of corruption, it cannot be used to make effective comparisons between countries, as it is highly culturally specific, and can only really be used to map changes in perception within one country (Mungiu-Pippidi & Dadašov, 2016).

Other well-known or relevant open data sources include the following:

**Table 3.10: Topical overview of open data sources**

Governance	Democracy	Public opinion	Economics/wellbeing
World Bank Governance Indicators	Freedom House "Freedom in the World" Index	Eurostat	World Bank Open Data
Transparency International "Corruption Perception Index"	Economist Intelligence Unit democracy index	Pew Global Attitudes Project	Human Development Index (HDI)
Global Corruption Index	V-Dem	Gallup polls	OECD Data
Quality of Governance (QoC) dataset	Polity IV	IPSOS polls	EBRD Transition Report
Opendatabot (Ukraine)	Human Freedom Index	Ilko Kucheriv "Democratic Initiatives" Foundation polls	IMF Data
Puls Ugody (Ukraine)	Vanhanen's Polyarchy index	Kyiv International Institute of Sociology (KIIS) opinion polls	Prozorro (Ukraine)

Source: Own figure.

It is worth noting that in the 21st century, the most expansive collections of data are no longer held by governments or international organisations, but by private sector companies who use it internally or sell it to other firms. Such companies have huge deposits of data, in particular in domains like economic data, and consumer preferences and behaviour. This often gives a substantial advantage

to lobbyists who masquerade as policy analysts, since they can access data that is unavailable to the public and which is hard to challenge. Some of this data is available to independent researchers and policy analysts, but usually at prohibitively high prices.

Other types of data, such as from state organs or central banks, may be available for free but not openly accessible online. In this case, the analyst should apply to the relevant body with a request for access and may only be able to access the data on the premises of the institution.

### Free instruments for data collection and analysis

There are many tools that enable the processing and analysis of data. Some are designed to be simple and user friendly, while others allow a high degree of flexibility with the right expertise.

*Table 3.11: Free instruments for data collection and analysis*

Software	Advantages	Disadvantages
<b>The R Project for Statistical Computing (Short: "R")</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Open source</li> <li>• A variety of modifications and packages are available for free</li> <li>• Enables different types of data analysis</li> </ul> <p>Examples: regression analysis, time-series analysis, quantitative text analysis</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relatively high time investment to work with it</li> <li>• Requires knowledge of its specific programming language</li> </ul>
<b>Stata</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More user-friendly approach to quantitative data</li> <li>• Variety of statistical tools and options available</li> <li>• No need to code</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Free access only available for a limited period as trial version</li> <li>• Subscription-based</li> </ul>
<b>MAXQDA</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Free access only available for a limited period as trial version</li> <li>• Subscription-based</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Free access only available as a trial version</li> </ul>

Source: Own figure.

Other very useful tools not strictly related to data analysis are citation software such as EndNote, Zotero and Mendeley. While most often used for easily managing footnotes and bibliographies, they have many other useful functions, such as categorising literature by keywords, annotating texts, finding open-access versions and managing large numbers of texts.

## STEP 7: Dealing with data

*Thomas Barrett*

### Interpreting evidence

How data is interpreted depends on the kind of data collected. Quantitative, especially statistical, data may be subject to certain conventions in the scientific literature on how data should be analysed and what constitutes a "statistically significant" result. Therefore, quantitative analysis may lead to

specific conclusions such as “liberalising gas prices leads to an average 0.25% GDP growth over a 10-year period”. For such conclusions to withstand scrutiny, the analyst should be aware of the best statistical conventions for different types of data, and whether the data is representative and not a misleading snapshot. Will the conclusions look different if the same data is analysed over a different time? If so, the analyst must find a more representative timeframe.

Qualitative data has different aims and therefore different methods of interpretation. When making conclusions the analyst should justify how the data reinforces the conclusion. One common mistake is for analysts to present the data and move into conclusions as though they are self-evident. This can confuse the reader about how the conclusions flow from the evidence, or they may interpret the data differently! (For how to decide between qualitative or quantitative approaches, see Chapter 3 Step 5 → [Decide on methods](#)).

### **Avoiding confirmation bias**

Confirmation bias is the selection of specific data or the design of data collection in such a way that the results reaffirm the preconceptions of the analyst. Confirmation bias is something all researchers and analysts should aim to avoid, while acknowledging that it will, to a certain extent, be inevitable. It is also just as likely to occur in quantitative as in qualitative research, although many falsely assume that the former is more “objective”. It can emerge at all stages of the research process.

One strategy for dealing with confirmation bias is for the analyst to be explicit about potential biases by signposting them during the writing process. While policy analysis attempts to some degree to depoliticise policy using empirical research, it can never claim to do so 100%. Different epistemologies (ways of knowing) and ideologies inevitably influence policy analysis. For example, whether a policy recommendation prioritises economic growth, social cohesion, quality of living or environmental protection is highly subjective, and the author does not need to shy away from this.

That being said, this does not mean that policy analysts can abandon empirical research to suit their preferences. Like any profession, policy analysts should commit to a level of professionalism where they seriously consider and interrogate alternative explanations and design their research in such a way that allows the consideration of other possibilities. If the researcher decides to research “how does privatisation stimulate economic growth”, then they have already drawn a conclusion which side-lines other explanations. Thus, returning to the beginning of the chapter, the research question must be framed to allow multiple explanations to be explored. Widely exploring the literature also helps expose the analyst to a variety of alternatives, some of which may challenge existing preconceptions.

### **Universal versus case-specific generalisation**

An important factor to consider when interpreting data is the applicability of the conclusions drawn. Does the evidence lead to conclusions that only apply to the particular case under study at a particular time? Or can it be generalised across an entire policy field, sector or region?

Returning to the example of Ukrainian energy policy, if the data leads to the conclusion that state regulation of gas prices or liberalisation is the optimum policy for citizens’ wellbeing, can this be applied to other countries in the post-Soviet space or beyond? This returns to the question of “best practice” – can an effective policy solution in one socio-economic domain (e.g. the EU) be applied universally or to neighbouring countries, or is it only applicable to the specific composition of this unit?

Policy analysts should be explicit about how widely their recommendations are applicable. They may take a minimalist approach – that the recommendation is only applicable to the case in question

(e.g., Ukraine). If the data collected is based on a single-case study, this may be the best approach. However, this limits the number of readers likely to be interested in the policy paper or forces them to decide whether the analysis can be applied to the case they are interested in. Therefore, even with a single-case study, the analyst may specify some parameters that allow the findings to be applied elsewhere.

Policy analysts should be explicit about how widely their recommendations are applicable. They may take a minimalist approach – that the recommendation is only applicable to the case in question (e.g., Ukraine). If the data collected is based on a single-case study, this may be the best approach. However, this limits the number of readers likely to be interested in the policy paper or forces them to decide whether the analysis can be applied to the case they are interested in. Therefore, even with a single-case study, the analyst may specify some parameters that allow the findings to be applied elsewhere.

### **Checklist: Dealing with data**

- ▶ Is the collected data representative of the studied phenomenon?
- ▶ Is the data interpreted according to the correct scientific standards?
- ▶ Are the conclusions drawn from the data valid?
- ▶ Do the conclusions logically follow the evidence presented?
- ▶ Is there a bias towards a certain outcome and are you aware of it?
- ▶ What kind of generalisations are possible based on your research design?
- ▶ Are the findings applicable to other circumstances? If yes, which/to what extent?

## **STEP 8: Hold yourself accountable**

*Andrii Sukharyna*

### **The ethics of doing policy analysis**

Policy analysis combines scientific research on current social issues with an advocacy component, which is expressed in the analysis of different policy options and advancing one's own policy recommendations. Due to the strategic goal of a policy brief or policy paper, an inherent conflict exists concerning the values underlying academic work, namely objectivity and neutrality. Analytical publications base their arguments on academic findings and then abstract practical conclusions from these findings (Bodde, 1986). Implementation will be carried out by decision-makers, with potentially vast real-life effects (Christensen et al., 2019). As such, paying attention to the ethical dimension of policy analysis should be a core concern when writing analytical publications.

Conducting ethical policy analysis applies to all aspects of an analytical paper – from problem formulation, selection of evaluative criteria and construction of policy alternatives to predicting outcomes and/or presenting a preferred policy option (Mintrom, 2010). Influencing the policy process thus demands great integrity from policy analysts, regarding the compatibility of the intended goals with the common good and the strategic use of academic sources to advance normative claims.

**Table 3.12: Ethical considerations every step of the way**

<b>Step</b>	<b>Ethical considerations</b>
<b>Problem formulation</b>	<p>The objective facts of a problem are subject to different interpretations from all relevant stakeholders.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify relevant stakeholder groups and learn how members of those groups see the problem and how they would like it to be addressed.</li> <li>• Assess the findings and identify the key lines of disagreement.</li> </ul>
<b>Selection of evaluative criteria</b>	<p>It is common for policy analysts to analyse policy alternatives using three criteria: <b>efficiency, equity and administrative simplicity</b>.</p> <p>However, these are not the only criteria that apply. In complex issues, it is often necessary to consider how the implementation of policies will affect personal freedom, human dignity, social harmony and environmental sustainability.</p>
<b>Construction of policy alternatives</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It should be ascertained how many policy alternatives would be considered a reasonable number.</li> <li>• Include alternatives that appear most relevant, given the problem and discussions surrounding it.</li> <li>• A set of alternatives should be constructed, taking the broader financial context into account.</li> <li>• The construction of alternatives offers an opportunity for policy analysts to broaden policy discussions.</li> <li>• Treat the analysis as a vehicle for facilitating the discussion of additional alternatives.</li> </ul>
<b>Predicting outcomes</b>	<p>All analytical work is about making simplifying assumptions. The models can only be approximate real-world processes. It is essential to clearly understand the limits of analysis.</p> <p>All evidence and facts can be interpreted differently. High standards of technical ability and clarity of explanation in works of analysis must always be maintained.</p>
<b>Presenting a policy option</b>	<p>In terms of how results are presented, the main ethical issue is one of standardisation. On the one hand, it is worth employing the standardised forms of reports adopted already in the organisation (or sphere). On the other hand, a formalised publication cannot always adequately describe the essence of the research or the results of the policy analysis.</p>

Source: Mintrom, 2010.

## Responsible work with sources

Scientific sources lie at the heart of every analytical publication. In a factual sense, they provide the informational foundation of a policy brief, in other words, an author relies on the work of other social scientists to understand the emergence and background of a socio-political problem they want to address. Scientific sources are also explicitly referenced in an analytical publication by means of citation. Citing the academic work of others serves multiple purposes. First and foremost, it is used to give evidence for the information presented in the text, so that other readers can ascertain for themselves the origin of a certain argument. Indicating the source is also a form of giving credit to the intellectual contribution of academic peers and a form of respect within the scientific community. An often-cited source is an indicator of the work's value and relevance in a certain field. Thus, referencing also has a legitimising effect in terms of a certain idea, concept or theory. Accordingly, using the work of others has implications for their academic reputation, particularly if the original

content is misconstrued in the process (Penders, 2018). It can also impact the credibility of your own publication if your argument rests on questionable sources.

Working responsibly with sources entails the following aspects:

**Table 3.13: How to work responsibly with sources**

<b>Evaluating sources:</b> Identifying which sources to use following established quality criteria	Purpose and intended audience (What is the purpose of the source? Who is the intended audience?)
	Authority and credibility (Who is the author? What are the qualifications of the author? Who is the publisher?)
	Accuracy and reliability (Is the information well researched? – References, data, original research)
	Currency and timeliness (When was the information published? Is the information current or outdated?)
	Objectivity or bias (Does the information promote a political, religious or social agenda? Are the opinions supported by facts?)
<b>Working with sources:</b> Knowing how to use these sources in an ethical and legal way	Cite correctly and avoid plagiarism
	Correct in terms of content: do not take quotations out of context
	Read publications in full, give credit where credit is due

Source: Own figure.

## Privacy obligations

When the policy analysis material is prepared on the basis of independent research, the same privacy obligations apply to it as to the main research. You are responsible for the privacy obligations of your sources. Having privacy obligations does not mean that the names of your informants, interviewees and experts cannot be indicated, but this can only be done in cases of direct and unequivocal consent. Any publication of data that can directly identify your informants must be explicitly agreed upon.

In certain cases, it is obviously quite difficult to maintain a balance between relevance and factual reinforcement of policy analysis while preserving the confidentiality of information sources. In such cases, it is advisable to use the maximum openness of the necessary applications and materials, while maintaining the confidentiality of the sources.

Such requirements apply to any sensitive research topics. This is especially noticeable in topics related to medicine. It is necessary to anonymise the received data, especially when received from vulnerable groups (for example, from respondents with incurable diseases (such as HIV/AIDS) or from marginalised groups in certain societies (sexual minorities, religious views or atheism etc.) (Saunders, Kitzinger, 2015).

This is not the only situation where privacy obligations need to be observed in policy analysis. When it comes to research (social, marketing, political, digital, medical etc.), there are codes of rules and guidelines to follow. In Europe, the General Data Protection Regulation (EU GDPR) regulates methods of working with personal data (GDPR, 2018).



## An example of a consent form for participation in an interview/focus group:

### Declaration of Consent

Name of the Research Project/Policy Study

**Project manager and responsible institutions:**

**Contact person:**

**Project aims:**

**Participation in the project includes:**

1. Participation in an interview (expert interviews)
2. Interviews will be recorded (audio-, video recording) and later transcribed.

**Voluntary participation**

Participation is voluntary and there will not be any monetary remuneration. You are able to withdraw your consent to participate in this research project at any time, without having to give any reasons and without incurring disadvantages as a result. You are able to access your personal data stored (upon request) and ask for corrections or deletion of these data at any time.

**Confidentiality and anonymity**

Please note that in the course of this study, gathering personal information about you or anyone else is not our objective. However, personal information might be gathered as a side-product of the interviews. For all these data, confidentiality is ensured within the study. No personal information will be disclosed to individuals who are not members of the responsible research team.

The data collected can only be published in pseudonymised form that will render impossible the identification of you, your family, your employer and your place of residence. For example, this implies that your name does not appear in any reports on the interviews and that statements cited are pseudonymised in a way that does not allow you to be re-identified.

**Use of the data**

Within the course of the study, data gathered in the interviews will be used for the study, to create a think tank mapping and to develop recommendations.

The results of these interviews might be published in anonymised research papers and reports. Data transcribed and pseudonymised might be deposited in a data repository so that it can be re-used for scientific purposes.

**Consent**

I have read the explanation provided to me and all questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I voluntarily agree to be interviewed within the scope of this study and consent to the intended processing of my data.

yes     no

.....  
Name, Surname (printed characters)

.....  
Date, Signature



## Sensitive aspects of the work of policy analysts

In some cases ethical aspects might prevail over a rational analysis of benefits and costs. Thus, the researcher should consider the readiness of society when looking at, for example, sensitive issues such as changing the regulations surrounding the circulation of psychotropic substances, sex work, ownership of weapons and euthanasia. Even though the results of the research may indicate the tangible advantage of one alternative over another, the implementation of the recommended policy may be highly unlikely, because it will contradict the views of the majority of society or of groups of influence with great mobilisation potential. Ethical aspects in the regulation of research are most clearly highlighted in the medical field, where there are both universally recognised sets of rules and a number of potentially controversial provisions that are subject to debate.

### *Personal biases and views*

Our personal views influence the results of research. Thus, based on the results of empirical tests, ideological “biases” within the framework of social psychology have been revealed. The analysis showed that the ideological preferences of scientists did influence the results of scientific work, but this influence was smaller than predicted in the research hypothesis (Eitan, 2018). In addition to ideology, which affects our research to some extent, there are also many other biases – cognitive defects that make it difficult for someone to perceive reality objectively.

Although the influence of such bias on the results of our research work cannot be completely eliminated, awareness of personal bias allows the researcher to more carefully check the conclusions and monitor possible resulting errors.

## 4. How to make your policy analysis influential

### *Salome Minesashvili*

While the researcher’s goal is to achieve quality analysis with reliable and detailed findings (Patton et al., 2016), its successful delivery to the target audience and efficient advocacy is the next crucial step towards the ultimate goal of policy improvement. At this stage, researchers might encounter a number of challenges that need careful consideration when deciding which strategy to use in advocating policy analysis.

Firstly, there are general structural, political and cultural challenges that researchers face in the specific policymaking environment of a country. For instance, especially in developing countries, a prevalent informal sector might be a challenge when it comes to decision-making regarding policies. Other challenges might include structural obstacles, such as weak institutional capacity and poor organisational structure; cultural obstacles such as poor participatory culture and communal polarity over the feeling of citizenship; and political challenges such as a government’s lack of trust in civil society organisations as well as legal obstacles to the latter’s participation in policymaking (AALEP, 2013).

While these factors are generally harder to overcome completely, the following steps can tackle them:

- ▶ Understand the policy “landscape” within its broader political, legal and cultural environment.
- ▶ Carry out a careful mapping of stakeholders to target the right audience, which later will also shape the way policy analysis is presented and delivered.

- ▶ Carefully consider the target group. In certain circumstances, providing information to specific public sectors with the aim of citizen mobilisation is a more efficient way to achieve optimum indirect influence on policymakers, whereas in other circumstances, directly engaging with decision-makers will make more sense.

Once you have taken the broader environment into consideration, as well as identified a target group, you can decide on how the policy analysis can best be delivered, in order to make it as influential as possible. If you are targeting the decision-makers, keep in mind that they usually work with incomplete information; they can only consider policy options that will not bear too much risk in terms of high political cost, and they will need incentives to be persuaded that the risks can be overcome and to act accordingly (Academy of Civil Participation, 2019). Therefore, while it is important to stay as close to the “rational” ideal as possible when proposing certain policies, ensure arguments are presented as appealing to the interests and values of decision-makers in order to be more effective in influencing policymaking.

At the same time, target audiences usually have a short attention- and time-span as well as a lack of technical knowledge. To grab their attention and build trust in your publication, your goal is to transform analytical deliverables into a convincing narrative. This narrative should be founded on solid evidence and followed by recommendations. In addition, make sure that the audience understands the message. Language is important, and a clear and simple way of delivering the analysis usually gets to the point more easily than a highly technical, analytically charged text. These factors are discussed in detail below.

The challenges mentioned above, as well as consideration as to the best way to access a specific audience, should guide you in choosing the ideal communication tools. What type of publication would suit the target group and what is the best means of communicating it? Choose the communication channels that this audience uses – a process that requires a good understanding of the target group and its local environment.

## **STEP 1: Decide on the type of publication**

*Salome Minesashvili*

Policy analysis can take a variety of forms, and the target audience once again dictates which format best suits the delivery of collected information. It is worth noting that while policy analysis publications often include advocacy-oriented papers, they are to be distinguished from a policy study. The latter usually refers to research-oriented long papers, and the primary difference between the two is their target audience.

A policy study, which might also be called a policy report, policy paper, policy research paper or working paper, usually targets an expert audience (Young & Quinn, 2017). It will be based on primary research and provide a detailed picture of the issue as well as the policy options available. On the other hand, policy analysis targets a non-specialised audience, such as decision-makers, specific segments of the general public, journalists, NGOs, etc. Its papers can take a variety of forms and go by a variety of names such as policy brief, policy memo, position paper, issue paper, fact sheet, infographics, etc. In policy analysis, a more concise version of evidence is used, which can also stem from a previously conducted policy study but it will rarely include primary research. A hybrid type that combines the two has also been used by think tanks, shorter than a study but longer than a policy analysis. This still includes primary research but conveys it in language simple enough for a broader audience (ibid, 2017).

**Policy study:**

- ▶ Targets policy specialists or experts
- ▶ Issue driven: provides detailed analysis
- ▶ Includes primary research
- ▶ Discipline-specific language
- ▶ Up to 20,000 words
- ▶ Documents: Research paper, policy report, policy paper, working paper, etc.

**Policy analysis:**

- ▶ Targets non-specialists: decision-makers, journalists, NGOs, general public
- ▶ Audience-driven: key findings to convince
- ▶ Rarely includes primary research
- ▶ Simple language
- ▶ Up to 5,000 words
- ▶ Documents: policy brief, policy memo, issue paper, position paper, fact sheet, infographics, etc.

Deciding which kind of format to use for the policy analysis, as mentioned above, depends on the target audience. What a policy analysis and a policy study share is that each is a relatively concise and tight document, the result of several constraints faced by policy analysts, including limited background knowledge of the issue and the time required to understand it. The document will need to include a clear and clean definition of a problem and proposed solutions. But keeping in mind these factors, the documents can still vary and some of them and their structures are discussed below.

**Policy study**

Policy study analyses a public policy issue in a comprehensive and detailed manner. Publications can be produced in different formats and can vary in terms of names, including policy paper, research paper, research report, etc. But they all share similar features:

- ▶ *Audience:* Policy studies are primarily aimed at policy specialists. These might include experts in both the academic and non-academic communities, or policy specialists in the field of policymaking, as well as generally informed readers who have a strong interest in the selected issue.
- ▶ *Objectives:* An in-depth policy study aims to contribute to an increased understanding of the policy issue, whether *ex ante* (policy before it is implemented) or *ex post* (policy after it has been operating for some time). It provides a comprehensive overview of background as well as previously conducted research, to assist the reader in understanding the policy from multiple angles, and from the perspective of the writer. It attempts to convince the reader of the need to address the problem and might emphasise the benefits of changing policy. Preliminary recommendations can also be made from the findings, especially on longer-term interventions. However, the emphasis remains on analysis.
- ▶ *Content:* To achieve these objectives, a policy study is usually longer and includes a detailed description of background information based on a comprehensive overview of previous studies; it also usually includes primary research to support the argument the researcher is advancing, a concise description of methodology and conclusions from findings. There may be a discussion of different policy options that derive from the analysis.

- ▶ **Structure:** A policy study would typically follow the same chronological order as research:
  - Title and table of contents
  - Executive summary
  - Introduction
  - Literature review
  - Method and procedures
  - Presentation of data
  - Conclusions and recommendations
  - Appendices
  - Bibliography.
- ▶ **Language and style:** Language is usually academic and heavy with technical terms, and the text data centric. However, if an analyst intends to have a broader readership, simpler language is more advisable.
- ▶ **Length and format:** The length can reach up to 20,000 words. The format would tend to be that of a report, including table of contents, an executive summary, different sections and subheadings, data presented in bullet points, tables and graphs. This way, publications are accessible to diverse readers, and for their specific purposes.

### Examples of policy studies:

Campbell-Verduyn O. [Conjuring a cooler world? Blockchains, imaginaries and the legitimacy of climate governance](#). Center for Global Cooperation.

Allers, L., Racz, A., & Saether, T. (2021). [Dealing with Russia in the Arctic: Between exceptionalism and militarization](#). German Council on Foreign Relations.

Sakhno, H., Kobernik, A., & Yuzkiv, V. (2021). [Labour market after the Covid-19 crisis: What professional skills will women need?](#) Center for Economic Strategy

### Policy brief

A policy brief is a concise summary of a policy issue, followed by the presentation of policy actions to address the problem and a recommendation as to the best alternative. An *objective brief* usually presents balanced information to policymakers, enabling them to make up their own minds. An *advocacy brief* is in favour of one particular course of action.

- ▶ **Audience:** The most common audience for a policy brief is policymakers who are involved in formulating or influencing policies but who do not conduct research themselves or read expert texts. But a wider, knowledgeable audience can also be targeted.
- ▶ **Objectives:** Policy briefs aim to persuade the reader of the urgency of a particular problem and to propose a policy alternative. Thus, it can serve as a stimulus for an action. Such briefs aim to provide enough background information on the selected issue so the reader is able to understand it. They also strive to convince the reader that the issue needs to be addressed. If it is an *objective brief*, its goal is to provide information on policy alternatives. The *advocacy brief* provides evidence to support the selected alternative and the ways it could be implemented. Ultimately, the brief aims to stimulate the targeted reader to make a decision.
- ▶ **Content:** In order to achieve these objectives, policy briefs take a problem-oriented approach, containing persuasive arguments to justify the proposed recommendations. They are to the point and focus on a particular issue, providing just enough information and a concrete definition of the problem for the reader to understand it. In this way, even scientific findings are

inextricable from current policy debates. While policy briefs include firm evidence, they mainly focus on interpretation and the findings gained from primary research (if conducted) rather than detailed research procedures and methodology. Rather, they examine the practical implications of the research and ways of applying research outcomes. Emphasis is placed on policy actions, and evidence serves to lead logically to them. Chronologically, a brief usually includes the definition of an urgent policy issue, outlines ways to address it, evaluates possible outcomes based on research and evidence and chooses the best alternative and the best practice by which to achieve it.

- ▶ *Structure* (for more details on how to structure an analytical publication, see Chapter 4 Step 2 → [Structure your publication](#)):
  - Title and executive summary
  - Introduction
  - Context and importance of the problem
  - Policy alternatives
  - Policy recommendations
  - Conclusion
  - Appendices
  - References.
- ▶ *Language and style*: Language in a policy brief is professional but not academic. Clear language is essential, with arguments that are well explained and easy to follow. Academic terminology should be avoided or, if used, defined and translated with a general reader in mind.
- ▶ *Length and format*: Policy briefs can be up to 5,000 words. However, as the targeted audience has limited time, most of them are much shorter. They are divided into relatively short sections, with many headings and subheadings. Visualisations such as tables, graphs, charts, maps and photographs are highly encouraged for a better guidance but they should be simple and easy to understand. They usually have an attractive and eye-catching design that guides the reader easily through the content and the logic of the brief. Use of colour, illustrative quotes, logos and slogans is quite common.

### Examples of policy briefs:

Koller, S. (2021). [Towards more effective deradicalization. DGAP Policy Brief.](#)

International Crisis Group (2021). [Responding to Russia`s new military buildup near Ukraine.](#)

Mitta, C., Van Ooijen, C, & Osimo, D. (2021). [User-centricity: What it means, how it works and why it's needed. The Lisbon Council.](#)

### Policy memo

A policy memo is also a type of a policy brief and sometimes the two names are used interchangeably. However, the essence of each is different. A policy memo is usually a shorter document and can be designated an information brief that summarises the research on the selected policy issue rather than discussing specific courses of policy action.

- ▶ *Audience*: The audience can include policymakers, academic communities, NGOs, etc. Policy memos are therefore generally aimed at a wider but knowledgeable audience who are aware of the topic but have little time to step back to gain a bigger picture or to keep up with the conducted research in the field.

- ▶ **Objectives:** Policy memos aim at providing policy-relevant information, stemming from analysts' research, in a concise and engaging way. Thus, they are written to help readers access fact-based information and make informed decisions. They aim to inform the audience in a concise and professional manner with the most relevant content. However, the focus is not on the work of government policy analysts but rather on fresh research findings, original thinking on a pressing issue or new ways of seeing and interpreting factual material that can provide an innovative outlook for the policymaking field. In short, a policy memo is a short take-away on a large point.
- ▶ **Content:** Readers should be able to understand the key points of the memo after a quick read or even from reading the first paragraph. The memo will need to contain clear and direct arguments, expressed concisely regarding a specific issue and supported by strong evidence. Academic significance is not the key factor in policy memos; any research should relate to policymaking, and the importance of the topic for policymakers should be explained. A policy memo usually contains an introductory paragraph that summarises the entire memo, followed by several small subsections that help to explain the issue in more detail or that outline possible scenarios. Recommendations are not usually part of policy memos, but if included they are kept relatively general and brief.
- ▶ **Structure:**
  - Title
  - Introductory paragraph
  - Background
  - Findings/analysis
  - Conclusion
  - References.
- ▶ **Language and style:** Even if they are summarising academic research, policy memos are not academic papers, and therefore it is essential to avoid academic jargon. Language should be clear and concise but not simplistic, the target audience is likely to include experts. If specialised terms are used, they should be kept to a minimum and explained to the reader. The general style is professional.
- ▶ **Length and format:** Policy memos are relatively short, generally up to 2,000 words. They usually contain carefully worded subsections with subheadings, which are informative and lead the reader through the logic of the main argument. Memos can include visualisations relevant to research findings but they are not a necessity.

### **Examples of policy memos:**

PONARS Eurasia. [List of policy memos.](#)

### **Analytical blog**

Analytical blogs are generally concise forms of contributions on public policy. They can be divided into two categories: analysis that is also sometimes called commentary; and research blogs. Analysis pieces convey informed discussion and commentary on the current affairs and usually on a single contemporary pressing issue. Research blogs can be summaries of longer research pieces, or the blog can be based on some limited independent research.

- ▶ **Audience:** Analytical blogs are directed at audiences who may not be experts but who are interested and informed about the specific issue. However, they can also target academics or practitioners who have little time for longer research reports. This is why they should be written with a wider audience in mind.

- ▶ *Objectives:* Analytical blogs aim to offer readers an understanding or interesting analysis of an issue from current affairs. Blog articles often have a commentary section and also strive towards stimulating some discussion around the topic. They can also aim to increase visibility and readership of previously conducted research or an ongoing research project.
- ▶ *Content:* To achieve these objectives, analytical blogs usually include concisely presented information on the ongoing issue and its relevance/urgency and the author's take on the given topic, usually discussed in an interesting, engaging way. Some evidence is included to support the arguments. In the case of a research summary, blogs will include key points from the larger reports along with any relevant evidence.
- ▶ *Structure:* Blogs start with catchy and narrative titles that sum up the main argument of the article. A small summary can follow about the presented issue and the position that the article discusses. The blog would then proceed with some background information on the specific issue and its urgency in ongoing affairs. Key arguments will follow, with some relevant evidence. Blogs usually end with a brief conclusion that might include suggestions as to a general policy direction.
- ▶ *Language and style:* Blog contributions usually use language that falls somewhere between journalistic and academic. They include shorter, concise sentences. Generally, overuse of academic terminology should be avoided and all the technical concepts should be translated for a broader readership.
- ▶ *Length and format:* Analytical blogs are typically around 500–2,000 words. They include shorter paragraphs and can be divided into subsections. References are usually represented via hyperlinks, with in-text citations, endnotes and footnotes being exceptions. Visualisations are encouraged, such as charts, figures and tables, as well as photographs that illustrate the post.

### Examples of analytical blogs:

The London School of Economics [blogs](#).

Sakhno, H. (2021). [Flexible working contracts: More rights for service employees](#). Centre for Economic Strategy.

Deloffre, M.W. (2020). [It's not too late to stem the third wave of the coronavirus pandemic: Bottom-up approaches to pandemic response](#). Centre for Global Cooperation Research.

### Infographics

An infographic is a data visualisation that conveys highlights from complex information on a specific policy in an appealing format. It is an accessible and eye-catching way of linking policy analysts with knowledge users.

- ▶ *Audience:* The audience of infographics is wide and can range from policymakers to ordinary citizens. What unites this form is the idea that the target groups lack the time or interest for longer policy analysis texts; therefore the point should be conveyed to them rapidly and easily in a compressed and easy-to-understand format.
- ▶ *Objectives:* The main objective of infographics is to facilitate the understanding of a selected issue with compelling, rapidly available information. They allow the audience to quickly find patterns and easily compare data. However, even though the primary aim of infographics is to inform and educate, they can also carry an agenda. How certain data is chosen, and then presented, can advocate for a specific understanding of policy positions. Thus, it can also serve as a persuasive tool for the target audience to convince them that the particular issue exists, and/or that it is urgent, or it needs to be addressed in a specific way.

- ▶ *Content*: Easily accessible information is achieved by visualisations of data that aims to increase the amount of information people retain in comparison to plain text. Therefore, infographics usually contain iconography and signifiers that convey information in a concise way.
- ▶ *Structure*: Infographics are heavily based on visualisations but they can also be accompanied by explanatory text. Sometimes they simply include quantitative data in illustrative graphs, with a title. They can also include a visual presentation of a sequence of actions, to explain the process involved in a certain issue. The amount of text can vary from minimal (titles only) to an interpretation of data beyond the visualisation, or it can form part of the visualisation itself.
- ▶ *Language and style*: Narrative text is usually kept to a minimum and when it is present, it serves to explain the visualisation. Technical terms and abbreviations should be avoided and the language should be simple and concise, so a wider audience can understand it.
- ▶ *Length and format*: An infographic is usually a one-page data visualisation but it can also be part of a larger text or include a sequence of different visual material. It can take a number of shapes and forms but will generally be grouped into maps, graphics and diagrams. These formats can also be combined to convey a narrative. Colour choice plays an important role in making the information understandable, as colours can highlight the most important part of data or make a distinction between the data points. However, visually overwhelming representations of data that convey excessive information are the least effective. Therefore, simplicity should be maintained.

### Examples of infographics:

Democratic Initiatives Foundation. [Infographics](#).

Heinrich Böll Foundation. [Infographic 1](#); [Infographic 2](#).

## STEP 2: Structure your publication

*Oksana Huss and Elisabeth Starck*

Every analytical publication – be it a policy brief or an analytical blog – has a certain set of structural elements that divide the content on a logical basis. The use of common practices in the semantic structure of the text helps the reader to understand the message of the text better and faster.

### 1. The title

The function of the title is to:

- ▶ communicate the subject of the analysis
- ▶ raise expectations towards its content
- ▶ trigger interest in reading the text.

An effective title should:

- ▶ define the subject of your analysis and set certain expectations regarding its content, while being as concise as possible
- ▶ use keywords relevant to your issue, so it can be found more easily, based on search engine optimisation in online search results
- ▶ be clear, and understandable, without using niche terminology.

The title can include stylistic devices to make it more memorable, but this is secondary to its purpose, which is to be clear and concise while reflecting the content. Some rhetoric devices are:



- ▶ (Rhetorical) **questions**, which can spark a reader’s curiosity (IDRC, n.d.)

“Is there a remedy for EU enlargement fatigue?”

- ▶ **Wordplay** and puns, metaphors, alliteration...
- ▶ A common ploy is to divide the title into two sections, the first stipulating the broad topic of the policy paper, and the second section specifying your field of research/analysis. This provides a semantic structure and connects your specialised research with the overall issue. It can also be used to shorten a longer title.

“**Digitalisation in Ukraine**: examining the impact of the eGovernance tool Diia on quality of public services”

Structural element	Positive example	Negative example
<b>Title</b>	<p>“Labour market after the COVID-19 crisis: What professional skills will women need?”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Question in title reiterates research question/objective of the paper</li> <li>• Clearly defines the topic of the paper (time period, policy field, specification: women’s qualifications)</li> </ul> <p>Sakhno, H., Yuzkiv, V. &amp; Kobernik, A. (2021), <a href="#">Labour market after the COVID-19 crisis: What professional skills will women need?</a>, Centre for Economic Strategy (CES).</p>	<p>“Challenges and opportunities for Bosnia and Herzegovina”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The title is too broad: The paper focuses on infrastructure in BiH, which is not reflected in the title</li> </ul> <p><a href="#">Policy paper</a> by Adnan Ćerimagić, published by the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Office in Bosnia and Herzegovina</p>

## 2. The abstract and executive summary

The function of both the executive summary and the abstract is to communicate the scope of the text, namely its aim, the content and the results.

Differences	Abstract	Executive summary
Aim	To trigger the interest of the reader; to present the roadmap of the analytical text	To present the central argument – the “message”; to summarise the content and main results
Form	1–2 paragraphs (50–250 words); does not include references, tables or charts	A complete text that can be considered separately (1–10 pages/up to 5% of the entire text); can include charts and tables
Purpose	Appropriate for all types of analytical materials; can be used on the website to describe the document before downloading	Mainly for policy research and publications that provide arguments for certain policies; as a rule, contains policy recommendations at the end
<b>Commonalities</b>	Fully reflects the structure of the document and its content; does not contain any new information that is not in the main text; can be a part of the introduction; are not mutually exclusive	

Accordingly, there is some variation in scope for each element.

Semantic element	Abstract	Executive summary
<b>Introduction/analytical problem</b> → Why is it worth reading this document? What is innovative about it in comparison to other research or policy ideas? (ref to ch xx)	2–3 lines stating main analytical problem	1–2 paragraphs describing the policy problem and substantiating the (analytical or empirical) approach to the solution
<b>Aim/research question</b> → What is the aim of the document? (ref to ch xx)	1–2 lines stating and explaining the research question	1–2 paragraphs discussing available alternatives, pointing out their weak and strong aspects
<b>Design of the analytical work</b> → What makes the analysis convincing? How is the main argument substantiated methodologically?	3–4 lines reflecting on data and method used, which lead to the conclusion	1 paragraph on methodology (not compulsory)
<b>Finding/Result</b> → What does the author want to convince the reader of?	2–3 lines stating main results	Varies from a few paragraphs to 1–3 pages describing main argument
<b>Policy recommendations</b>	Not applicable	Varies from a few paragraphs to 1–3 pages; concisely presents policy solutions

Short documents, such as policy briefs, policy memos or analytical blogs, include a short version of the executive summary, which captures the main message of the document. Depending on the general purpose of the analytical document, the content can vary: if the document is presenting one or more sides of an argument, the executive summary should indicate the problem and summarise the central argument concerning its solution. If the nature of the document is analytical, the executive summary will seek to convince the reader of the validity of the analysis and thus will also contain a brief methodological statement.

<p><b>Executive summary</b></p>	<p>“Violent Islamist extremism is still one of the biggest threats to internal security as well as societal cohesion in the EU. As a crucial part of any comprehensive counterstrategy, tertiary prevention encompasses measures designed to encourage and support (violent) extremists in prison and in society to leave their milieus, deradicalize, decriminalize, and reintegrate into society. However, ‘exit work’ is becoming increasingly complex: The profiles of radicalizing individuals are becoming more diverse; an ever-larger number of governmental and civil society actors must work together; and the effectiveness of any measure must be clearly demonstrated. Global events such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the growing importance of the online dimension, and the blurring of internal and external security make for additional pressure.</p> <p>National governments and international bodies must be aware of key trends to ensure an effective and sustainable prevention policy.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Prevention actors need to prepare for a wider range of potentially radicalized individuals, including not just men but also women and youth.</li> <li>– Closer cooperation between different actors and across professions is crucial and requires trust building and mechanisms for exchanging information.</li> <li>– Effectiveness has a price: Sustainable exit work and the prevention of recidivism are only possible if prevention work receives long-term funding, including for monitoring and evaluation, to identify the most effective responses.”</li> </ul> <p><b>Strong points of the short executive summary:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Short introduction into the topic and its relevance</li> <li>• Executive summary gives reasons why radicalization work faces new challenges and succinctly states what they are</li> <li>• Gives policy recommendations</li> <li>• Attuned to the target audience.</li> </ul> <p>Source: Koller, S. (2021). <a href="#">Towards More Effective Deradicalization. DGAP Policy Brief. German Council on Foreign Relations.</a></p> <p>Another good example of a longer executive summary that presents a separate document: Institute of Legislative Ideas (2022). <a href="#">“Executive Summary regarding the establishment of the Agency for Ukraine’s Recovery”</a>)</p> <p><b>Strong points of the long executive summary:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduction into the problem and the context</li> <li>• Discussion of the alternative policy propositions</li> <li>• Recommendations</li> </ul>
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### 3. The introduction

The function of the introduction is to prepare the reader for the document. This is usually set out in several parts: first, the central component of the introduction is a comprehensive statement of the policy and/or analytical problem. The problem statement should lead to the second part – a statement of the aim of the document or an analytical question, which is coherent with the problem. Together, these two parts are often treated as the “rationale” for the study. Third, the introduction highlights the innovativeness of the idea or the analysis and its unique features. Further, the introduction may entail a brief methodology description and/or context description if no separate sections are foreseen for that. Finally, the introduction provides an overview of the document’s structure and may indicate how its chapters are semantically connected. In the following steps, we go into more detail on each element:

### 1) Start with the context of the policy problem, and the definition of the problem

This first part serves as a “**zooming-out**” of the specifics of your research issue **before** “**zooming back in**” at a later point. Focus on the background of the problem that you will be discussing later in further depth and avoid too general or too detailed descriptions, because readers might lose interest if they can’t see an immediate link to your policy problem.

- ▶ Use strong adjectives to increase attention.
- ▶ Adversative conjunctions (yet; however; nevertheless) play with the reader’s preconceptions and create suspense for your argument/perspective.

✍ The political importance of the Arctic: “The Arctic presents **deep strategic ambiguity**: it has a history of peaceful **cooperation** and **great-power competition**, often occurring in parallel.” (Allers et al., 2021)

The definition of the problem serves to convince the reader that an urgent policy problem exists and reading this paper is therefore necessary because it offers possible solutions. Define any keywords that are central to your paper (Richards, n.d.).

✍ “This all **creates a dilemma** for European countries – Arctic and non-Arctic – regarding their relations with Russia in the High North [...]. Therefore, **the West should follow** a double-sided strategy.” (Allers et al., 2021)

### 2) Connect the above with the statement of intent/purpose

The statement of intent consists of **one to two sentences** that reflect the **main research question or goals** of the policy paper. It is very important for building your argument and usually reveals your position.

✍ “This paper describes the situation and explains the reasons for the lack of strengthened Sino-Russian economic ties, with statistics and data on specific projects [...]” (Milov, 2021)

✍ “Therefore, the paper outlines how a separate youth policy dimension fits with the EU’s Youth and Central Asia policy (section 1) and Central Asian interest in cooperation (section 2).” (Bewerunge & Plottka, 2021)

### 3) Provide a brief overview of the methodology of the study

This feature is important to show that your argumentation is evidence based and follows good academic practice. Give an overview of the methods used and/or the origin of the underlying data. Since a policy paper focuses on one particular problem, you may need to indicate the limitations to your research and other related issues that were outside its scope. **Transparency is key.**

✍ “The data used for this analysis was taken from official Russian and Chinese sources – the Russian Central Bank and Federal Customs Service and the Chinese General Administration of Customs – as well as from the BP Statistical Review of World Energy and media reports on the progress of specific Sino-Russian projects.” (Milov, 2021)

### 4) Conclude with an overview of the paper’s structure

Briefly outline the contents of each section of the paper, to provide a roadmap for the reader.

✍ “This paper is divided into two parts. The first examines [...]. The concluding section assesses [...]” (Allers et. al. 2021)

<p><b>Introduction</b></p>	<p>“This DGAP analysis examines developments in the Arctic against the backdrop of increasing great power rivalry in Europe – between NATO and Russia – and globally – between the US and China. It examines the extent to which the Arctic’s dual character as a region marked by cooperation and competition between Western countries and Russia can be maintained despite a deteriorating security climate.”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Clearly states research approach to the issue at hand and its background/relevance (bigger picture)</li> </ul> <p>Allers, L., Racz, A. &amp; Saether, T. (2021). <a href="#">Dealing with Russia in the Arctic: Between exceptionalism and militarization. German Council on Foreign Relations.</a></p> <p>“Therefore, the paper outlines how a separate youth policy dimension fits with the EU’s Youth and Central Asia policy (section 1) and Central Asian interest in cooperation (section 2). Summarising major challenges for youth in Central Asia in section 3, a comprehensive package of recommendations to establish a youth policy dimension of EU–Central Asia relations is proposed in section 4.”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Structure of the paper is explained</li> <li>▶ Reader knows what to expect</li> </ul> <p>Bewerunge, A. &amp; Plottka, J. (2021). <a href="#">A Youth Policy Dimension of EU–Central Asia Relations, IEP Policy Paper (No 02/21).</a></p> <p>“European Defence Union (EDU) initiatives are proceeding full steam ahead with the political backing of both the EU institutions and key Member States. [...] <b>Yet</b>, the framework guiding the consolidation of a dynamic and integrated European Defence Technological and Industrial Base (EDTIB) <b>requires some fine tuning.</b>”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Contradiction with yet/however creates suspense/tension grabs the reader’s attention: “Scientific puzzle”</li> <li>▶ Briefly illuminates the background of the paper while highlighting new issues</li> </ul> <p>“What can be done to remedy shortfalls identified by the EDA’s Capability Development Priorities (CDPs), reduce the number of systems operated at EU level, and enhance interoperability? Does the EU risk strategic shrinkage and falling into defence irrelevance?”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Research questions are clearly identifiable and serve as a guiding thread throughout the paper</li> </ul>
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#### 4. Contextualising the main argument in the ongoing discussion

In a research paper, this function fulfils the literature review, which is a synthesis of the research in your policy field and a key component of any scientific paper (Purdue Writing Lab, n.d.). It is meant to show that you have conducted in-depth theoretical research on your policy issue and it is used to highlight your paper’s original contribution to the existing research. In other types of publication, this part constitutes an overview of available policy solutions. In the discussion of the challenges and weaknesses associated with the available alternatives, you can present your solution as the one that seeks to overcome those challenges. (See also Chapter 3 Step 3 → [Do Desk Research.](#))

1. Summarise and discuss the main arguments/approaches to your policy issue in the existing literature (Richards, n.d.). Include recent literature as well as foundational works. Be precise and keep citation techniques in mind.
2. Make comparisons and show differences between the approaches where appropriate. Put the sources into context.
3. Critically evaluate: mention the strengths and weaknesses of your sources (Purdue Writing Lab, n.d.).

4. Locate your research within the academic discussion and evaluate your publication’s contribution to the topic (University of Arizona Writing Center, n.d.).
5. Ask yourself: how is my policy analysis/outcome unique/new? How does it complement the existing research?

<p><b>Literature review</b></p>	<p>“Yet, <b>while research has documented the military’s evolution</b> in these different roles over the past decade, an overarching analysis identifying and analysing the military’s contemporary core roles <b>is still lacking. This study attempts to fill that lacuna</b>, by first, identifying and analysing the roles for the military institution in contemporary society and second, to reflect on how these roles influence current civil–military relations.”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Presents own contribution and its significance to the scientific community</li> </ul> <p>“Yet, in spite of its sequestration from the civilian world, the military organisation remains an <b>open-ended system characterised by its interdependence</b> of, and constant exchanges with, <b>its environment</b>. Morris Janowitz has, for example, <b>in contrast to</b> Erving Goffman and Samuel P. Huntington, argued for the importance of the military’s connection with society, and Chiara Ruffa, Christoph Harig, and Nicole Jenne point out that we have come a long way from the caricature of a total institution, <b>in this Special Issue’s introduction</b>.”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Gives overview of the issue and draws on relevant literature, contrasting opinions, synthesis of arguments</li> <li>▶ Recent literature included</li> </ul> <p>Wilén, N. &amp; Strömbom, L. (2021). <a href="#">A versatile organisation: Mapping the military’s core roles in a changing security environment</a>, EJIS/Egmont Institute.</p>
<p><b>Example of policy options</b></p>	<p>“<b>To some extent</b>, the lack of political will by governments in the three countries can be addressed by a <b>stronger use of EU leverage and conditionality</b>. This pressure is particularly valuable to <b>push for the adoption of reforms but also in times of crisis</b>. [...] <b>However</b>, while the use of economic leverage by the EU and its member states will be important in the shorter term, <b>it is unlikely on its own to resolve</b> the underlying systemic issues that exist in the three countries.”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Presents one policy option (stronger financial threats in case of non-compliance), and explains its applicability and drawbacks</li> </ul> <p>“The EU <b>cannot continue to pursue</b> a primarily technical approach. [...] <b>[I]t needs</b> to become a more overtly political actor that speaks out about these problems and addresses them through political channels or diplomatic engagement. For this, <b>the EU will need to rely on information provided by whistleblowers and it should therefore provide assurances for their protection</b>. At the same time, to avoid standing alone in criticizing ruling elites, the EU can draw on a network of like-minded partners to increase the legitimacy of its criticism.”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Introduces a new policy option with possible steps to be taken</li> </ul> <p>Gelhaus, L. et al. (2021). Rule of Law Diplomacy: Why the EU Needs to Become More Vocal in Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine. DGAP Policy Brief (No 4, July 2021). German Council on Foreign Relations (DGAP). (<a href="#">Online</a>, last access 16.08.2022)</p>

## 5. Findings, recommendations and conclusion

This is the **central part** of a policy paper and presents the main argument that should logically lead to the call for action. All three parts should be strictly interconnected but refrain from repeating each other.

- ▶ Findings usually have three components: the main claim, the explanation of this claim and substantiation with the facts.
- ▶ Recommendations build upon findings and include only those points that result from the conducted analysis. Recommendations can be a part of the conclusion.
- ▶ The conclusion briefly captures the aim of the document and synthesises findings. The main added value of the conclusion is, however, in bringing the findings to a new analytical debate, for example, discussing them from a broader perspective or providing an outlook on trends and developments.

The conclusion synthesises the most important findings from the problem description and policy options discussion, to produce logical conclusions.

- ▶ Highlight only the most significant findings of the analysis. **Keep it short.**
- ▶ Provide support and justification for the policy recommendations that will follow.
- ▶ Ensure that all arguments are rooted firmly and clearly in evidence produced by the research (IDRC, n.d.).
- ▶ Many people read the introduction and the conclusion first before going to the main body of the paper. Make sure the **conclusion mirrors your introduction** and underline the strength of your argument (IDRC, n.d.).
- ▶ As a policy option is not one single measure, but a whole strategy, the solution must comprise various practical steps (= recommendations).
- ▶ The policy recommendations should consistently follow your analysis of the policy options. They must be clear, persuasive, feasible and supportive of your goals.
- ▶ What specific administrative or legal guidelines will your policy option provide?
- ▶ The specific recommendations can be subdivided via sections, numbers, bullet points or italics (logical division).

Finish with a **concluding remark** to leave a **lasting impression**.

- ▶ Present some final thoughts on the issue in light of the big picture of your analysis: What is the goal of your policy recommendations?
- ▶ You can include a **persuasive appeal** to your readers: What is the outlook for the future, if decision-makers do or don't act according to your research?

Note that some papers use a separate section before the conclusion to introduce the policy recommendations.

<p><b>Conclusion &amp; recommendations</b></p>	<p>“This <b>paper has argued that</b> extending QMV to CFSP would be in the interests of all member states. <b>This is because</b> it would strengthen the resilience of the EU’s foreign-policy system to third-country influence, boost the overall effectiveness of the Union’s external action, and mitigate the risk that the main responsibility for common European foreign policymaking would move away from the EU to mini-lateral forums, such as the E3 group, at which smaller member states do not usually have a seat.”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Restates main argument and gives supporting arguments</li> </ul> <p>“<b>In the long term</b>, the EU <b>cannot avoid</b> moving to more majoritarian decision-making in foreign policy <b>if it wants to strengthen the credibility of its external action</b> and become a geopolitical actor. <b>Under its existing unanimity-based decision-making rules</b> in CFSP and CSDP, the EU continues to act more as a loose confederacy than a genuine Union [...]. Therefore <b>there is no alternative</b> to extending QMV to CFSP in the long term. <b>It is time to make it so.</b>”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Concise, memorable, persuasive appeal/outlook as a concluding remark: Why do we need to change voting mechanisms? What would happen if we didn’t change the status quo?</li> <li>▶ Urgency to act + best option is emphasised</li> </ul> <p>“To facilitate the acceptance of QMV in CFSP among the opposing EU capitals, there are <b>three things that can be done</b> by its supporters in addition to waiting for more open-minded governments to take office in those capitals. First, [...]”</p> <p>Novàky, N. (2021) Qualified Majority Voting in EU Foreign Policy: Make It So. Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies. (<a href="#">online</a>, last access 16.08.2022)</p> <p>“Tertiary prevention programs and measures need to pay more attention to gender and age. <b>For example</b>, penitentiary institutions must facilitate regular contact between imprisoned parents – women, but also men – and their children.”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Clear message, which is then further elaborated by giving examples</li> </ul> <p>Koller, S. (2021). <a href="#">Towards more effective deradicalization</a>. <i>DGAP Policy Brief</i>.</p>
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## STEP 3: Argumentation

*Oleksandra Keudel*

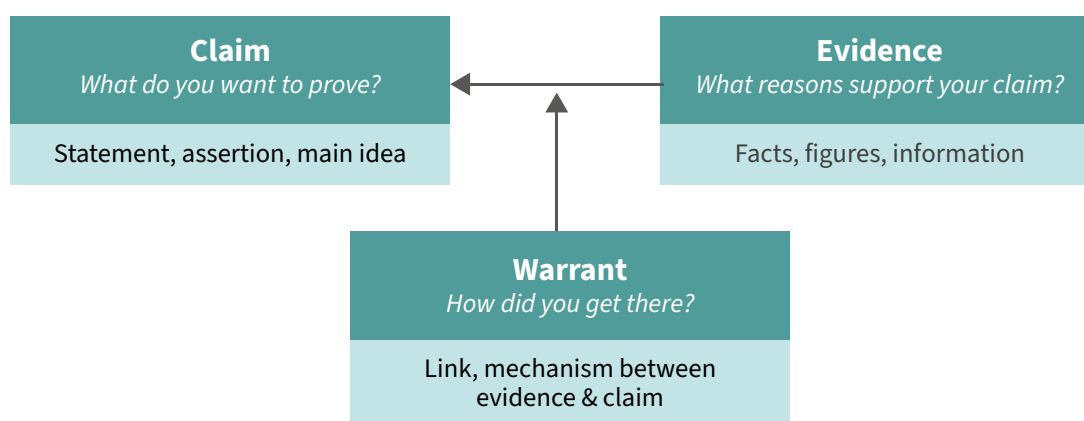
Complex policy challenges need policy responses that both address the problem and reduce negative, unintended impacts of policy solutions. This has prompted a trend among decision-makers and policy analysts towards evidence-informed policymaking. Advice surrounding this type of policymaking recognises, on the one hand, the political nature of policy decision-making: personal values, partisan ideologies, political compromises and public opinion will all shape a policy solution. On the other hand, policy advice will be based on reasonably robust evidence of effectiveness, conditions and impact of policy solutions. Thus, systematic analysis of varied types of data and explicating causal links between phenomena is also valued (Parkhurst, 2017). This chapter removes the political component in favour of focusing on argumentation – the use of evidence to communicate policy advice. The chapter also discusses the paragraph structure as manifestation of argumentation in writing.



## Layout of an argument

For most policy analyses it is sufficient to use the basic threefold layout, adapted from Stephen Toulmin (see: Toulmin, 2003, 83–134): an argument is a claim, supported by evidence and the warrant. In this section, we will explore these elements in more detail.

**Figure 4.1: Layout of an argument**



Source: Adapted and enhanced from (Toulmin, 2003, 83–134; Karbach, 1987).

A **claim** is a statement or conclusion, “whose merits we are seeking to establish” (Toulmin, 2003, 90). Claim is an answer to the question “What do you want to prove?”. A claim in a policy document may look like these examples: “The biggest winners in our global economy are those at the top”,<sup>1</sup> “Ukraine is an advanced country in terms of real capabilities for repelling cyber-attacks”,<sup>2</sup> “the [Nord Stream 2] pipeline has become a liability”<sup>3</sup>. Even if an analyst’s claim is the result of an analysis or a summary of an expert observation, it is not an ultimate truth but rather a (hopefully, well-grounded) assertion. It needs support in the form of evidence and an explanation of the evidence’s bearing on the claim (a warrant).

**Evidence** in the layout of an argument refers to facts, figures, data and any other information to support the claim. It answers the question “What reasons support your claim?”. Evidence is different from (mathematical or legal) proof, which is often conclusive. Instead, in policy analysis, new evidence may emerge that updates our prior knowledge. There is no unified typology or standard for what constitutes evidence. For practical purposes, it is proposed to distinguish between descriptive and analytical evidence (Table 1).

**Table 4.1: Descriptive and analytical evidence**

	<b>Descriptive evidence</b>	<b>Analytical evidence</b>
<b>Meaning</b>	Data and information that captures the state-of-the-art	Findings that establish causal relationships as a result of research

<sup>1</sup> Adapted from: (Hardoon, 2017, 3)

<sup>2</sup> Adapted from: (Gressel 2020, 8–9)

<sup>3</sup> Adapted from: (Gros 2022, 1)

<b>Example</b>	Administrative, statistical, survey data, government and company reporting, legal provisions and court decisions, news reports, audio and video recordings, (oral) testimonies by stakeholders, own qualified observations (e.g. an analyst's observations from a topical roundtable discussion)	Conclusions of scholarly research in fields relevant to a policy problem, findings or evaluations of a policy or a specific programme, findings from journalist investigations
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Source: Adapted and enhanced from (Wills et al., 2016, 9).

While varied types of data or information may serve as evidence, ideally only robust and valid evidence should underpin policy advice. Transparency in describing the process of arriving at the evidence is often a sign of more trustworthy evidence (see also Chapter 3 Step 8 → [Hold yourself accountable](#)). In addition, the following questions can be applied to test how appropriate the evidence is for your argument:

**Table 4.2: How to choose reasonably good evidence for an argument**

Question	Indicators of appropriateness	Example
<b>Source: What/ who is the source of information or data?</b>	Check: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ The credentials of the source, to estimate whether it has the expertise and capacity to address a certain policy issue or produce a specific type of data.</li> <li>▶ Indications that a source follows professional standards (e.g. journalistic, academic, legal professional and so on).</li> </ul>	An expert in the field would normally have a list of thematic publications and an appropriate institutional affiliation.  An organisation would have a description of a mandate, resources, governance structure on its website.
<b>Methodology: How did the source arrive at its data or get its information?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ For analytical evidence and statistical data, the conceptual framework and methods for data collection and analysis should be presented clearly, limitations acknowledged.</li> <li>▶ Methods should be applied according to respective quality standards, references to original sources used, if relevant.</li> <li>▶ For other types of evidence (e.g., news report), check for references to sources or the process by which a piece of evidence was obtained.</li> </ul>	Explanation of the conceptual framework, operationalisation, and calculations in a policy research paper (e.g. Hafner et al., 2016).  Referencing reputable secondary sources and explaining own calculations in a policy brief (e.g. Gros, 2022).
<b>Quality of evidence: Is the data/information itself timely and accurate?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Is the data the most recent? If not, are there reasonable grounds for using old data/information?</li> <li>▶ Is this the most accurate data? If not, are there grounds for not using the most accurate data?</li> <li>▶ Can you find another source that corroborates this data/information?</li> </ul>	Reflecting on ideal parameters of data for the type of analysis the source conducts and how this restricts the choice of data. E.g. for quantifying the cost of corruption, authors considered using Eurobarometer data for its comprehensiveness, but rejected it because it does not allow sufficient comparison over time (Hafner et al., 2016, 28 f.)  An analyst may wish to use triangulation – cross-checking the evidence in several sources, which are independent of each other.

**Warrant** is a reasonable connection between evidence and the claim. It answers the question “How did you get there?” Its function is to show that a step between the data and the claim is legitimate by explaining to the reader how this data supports the claim; often one needs to describe a mechanism behind the data-claim link (Toulmin, 2003, 91 ff.). In everyday argumentation, warrant is often implied or is very short. In policy research, however, a warrant may be a finding contained in other research. In that case, strictly speaking, it becomes a claim that would need to be represented according to Toulmin’s structure. To avoid piling up arguments and defocusing the reader, a reference to previous research that illustrates the link mentioned in the warrant is sufficient.

## How to write a good argument

Following Toulmin’s structure when writing a policy document can be challenging, so allow enough time to revise your text. Start by listing the main claim and three to four auxiliary claims you want to develop in, for example, a policy brief. By the time you come to write the policy brief, you will have conducted the desk research or your original study, so it should be possible to extract the necessary evidence from that to support each claim. Finally, write the warrants: clearly state the links between your data and claims based either on your findings or by referencing previous research.

### Box 1: Tips on how to recognise that you have a complete argument

- ▶ Ask three questions relating to the structure of an argument (Figure 1) when reviewing a paragraph:
  - If you have written a string of claims with neither evidence nor warrant, isolate the claims into sentences, start a new paragraph for each sentence and add evidence and warrants, respectively.
  - If you wrote the evidence first, and then a warrant (or missed this out), and concluded with a claim, move your conclusion to the beginning of the paragraph.
- ▶ Train yourself to write down warrants even if you think they are clear and implicit. Start a warrant, after having written a claim and listed the evidence, with “This means that...”. Delete the “This means...” part once the sentence is complete.
- ▶ Decide if all your evidence serves to support your claim in light of the warrant. Delete the evidence that is irrelevant. Update your warrant or claim.

Below is an adapted example that could be an expert’s statement in an oral address or a brief commentary: although referring to evidence, the text does not contain reference to sources. In writing policy briefs or papers, it is more credible to list the sources of the data for an argument, because the reader can independently verify them. The elements of the argument layout are given in bold:

**[claim]** Ukraine is an advanced country in terms of real capabilities for repelling cyber-attacks. **[data: resources and experience]** On the one hand, the SSU, the State Service for Special Communication and the National Police’s cybercrime departments are well staffed [note: source reference in writing]. They work closely with Ukraine’s telecommunication providers and private sector IT companies, the strongest amongst all Eastern Neighbourhood countries [note: ideally, there should be a reference here illustrating the strength of the IT sector and its cooperation with the authorities; it would be sufficient to skip the part “the strongest...”, however]. On the other hand, since the illegal annexation of Crimea, Ukraine has become a laboratory for Russia’s cyberwarfare, such as the NoPetya malware attack, the “Black-Energy” and “KillDisk”. Ukraine was the target of high-capacity attacks by Russian intelligence services as well as by freelance cyber-criminals and amateurs from Russia. **[warrant: connect the data and the claim “this means that”]** Thus, the country has the necessary human resources and coordination structures, which have been put to the test in serious incidents, to ensure its resilience to cyber-attacks.

Source: Own interpretation based on (Gressel, 2020, 8 f.).

There is often a temptation to incorporate several claims in one, but this should be done with caution in order not to make an argument hard to follow. For example, one may wish to say, “Ukraine is the most advanced country among the EaP countries in terms of real capabilities for repelling cyber-attacks.” Adding this adverb, however, requires support for this additional claim via evidence and a warrant to illustrate how one has arrived at the claim that Ukraine not only possesses the mentioned capabilities but also that they are superior to those of other EaP countries. This could still be done, for example, by modifying data to reflect a comparison of either the capabilities of EaP countries or the severity of Russian cyber-attacks on these countries (or both), and by modifying the warrant to link the data to the claim. However, in so doing, one may end up with two different paragraphs – and it is for the analyst to decide whether their argument focuses on the superiority of Ukraine’s cyber-security infrastructure in the region or on the presence of cyber-defence capabilities as such. For example (the qualifiers and respective amendments are marked yellow):

**[claim]** Ukraine is the most advanced country in terms of real capabilities for repelling cyber-attacks among the EaP countries. **[data: resources and experience]** On the one hand, the SBU, the State Service for Special Communication and the National Police’s cybercrime departments are the best-staffed in the region [here should be a source for comparison or a footnote, where an analyst describes their own calculation and sources]. They work closely with Ukraine’s telecommunication providers and private sector IT companies, the strongest among all Eastern Neighbourhood countries [reference to the source]. On the other hand, since the illegal annexation of Crimea, Ukraine has become a laboratory for Russia’s cyberwarfare: high-capacity attacks by Russian intelligence services as well as by freelance cyber-criminals and amateurs on Ukraine, such as the Russian NoPetya malware attack, the “Black-Energy” and “KillDisk”, are far more frequent and sophisticated than in any other EaP country. **[warrant: connect the data and the claim]** In comparison to other EaP countries, the country has the necessary human resources and coordination structures, which have been put to the test in some of the most serious incidents, to ensure its resilience to cyber-attacks.

Source: Own interpretation based on (Gressel, 2020, 8 f.).

## Dealing with counterarguments

Counterarguments are statements that may challenge your assumptions, go against your claims or question the validity of your evidence and warrants. Counterarguments may also simply be qualifications: identifying the conditions under which your claim-evidence-warrant structure is less credible. While acknowledging counterarguments may at first seem like a weakness, in fact it adds credibility to one’s analyses: an intelligent reader will most likely come up with their own counterarguments, hence furnishing them with rebuttals from the outset will help weaken their argumentation. This section provides tips for dealing with counterarguments based on a critique of a claim and warrant (Box 2) or of evidence (Box 3) and relevant examples.

### Box 2: Tips to deal with counterarguments based on the claim or warrant part of an argument

- ▶ **Identify and recognise alternative claims**, e.g. held by specific stakeholders or resulting from other analyses. In a text, use phrases such as “on the other hand”, “critics argue...”, “according to [expert opinion, research finding]”. State these alternative claims explicitly.
- ▶ **Consider conditions under which your claim or warrant may not hold reliably**. In a text, add a qualifier to a claim such as “presumably”, “most likely”, “if X, then Y”.

In the following extract from a policy research piece, authors base their study of the cost to the EU of corruption on a premise that corruption reduces economic growth. Yet they also account for the alternative claim that low growth may cause corruption. In their argumentation, they first present

both claims and then reiterate their claim with a qualifier (“suggest” – that is, not 100% sure) and substantiate it with meta-studies as opposed to single studies. This way, they pre-empt critique of their main assumption:

**[claim 1]** Some scholars argue that the causality runs from high corruption levels to low income (**[evidence]** Ehlrich & Lui, 1999; Lamsdorf, 2007), *while some argue* that a **[claim 2]** transition from a situation with high levels of corruption to one with low levels of corruption is just a by-product of economic growth (**[evidence]** Treisman, 2000). [...] **[claim]** Probably both interpretations regarding the direction of causality *seem plausible, nevertheless*, **[evidence for claim 1]** the meta-studies by Ugur (2014) and Campos et al. (2010) **[qualifier]** suggest that causality runs from corruption to lower economic output and growth. (Hafner et al., 2016, 26)

The next example, from a policy brief, shows how the author addresses the different conditions under which a warrant is legitimate to substantiate the assertion that a Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline from Russia to Germany is a “liability” to the EU. One warrant is based on a condition that Russia attacks Ukraine and is political; another warrant is based on an alternative condition, whereby Russia does not attack, and refers to the reliability of Russia as a trade partner. Note that in this example warrant 2 is split by evidence:

**[evidence]** With Vladimir Putin overtly threatening war, **[claim]** the [Nord Stream 2] pipeline has become a liability. **[qualifier 1]** If Russia really invades Ukraine, **[warrant 1]** it would be inconceivable for the German government not to pull the plug, at least politically.<sup>4</sup> [...] **[alternative qualifier 2]** If Russia does not attack Ukraine, **[warrant 2]** it is clear now that one can no longer trust the country to always deliver gas on purely commercial terms. **[evidence]** The deliberate reduction in gas flows this winter, combined with the disturbingly low levels of gas storage replenishment in facilities owned by Gazprom earlier in 2021, **[warrant 2]** shows that Russia is willing to use the “gas weapon” when it appears opportune. (Gros, 2022, 1)

### Box 3: Tips to deal with counterarguments based on the evidence part of an argument

- ▶ Recognise **limitations of methodology**, highlight how you deal with them and the insights they still provide
- ▶ Acknowledge **shortcomings of your data** but explain how it is the best available option
- ▶ **Stress triangulation**: using data from different sources (if applicable)

In the following example, the authors substantiate their choice of a respondent sample, which is not statistically representative of the population. They try to eliminate the grounds for the critique (unrepresentativeness) with an explanation that the purpose of the selection is not to capture trends and law-like regularities but to highlight a thematic variation in perceptions:

“While our sample is self-selected, we received responses from all theoretically relevant stakeholder groups and can thus capture the variety of their perceptions.” (Author)

<sup>4</sup> Here some clarity could be useful to explain what “politically” refers to. For example, it could mean that normatively it is unthinkable to continue doing business with a country violating an international security order.

In this extract from policy research on the cost of corruption in the EU, the authors reflect on what ideal data collection could look like but acknowledge that such data is not available. Instead, they use the best possible alternative, which had already proved to be reliable in another research:

“...projects can be divided into distinct cost components, including for instance, labour or energy costs, which would allow the estimation of unit costs of each particular project or contract. However, in the absence of such detailed information we follow the approach taken by Fazekas & Tóth (2016) and use the measure of prices in form of [sic] the relative contract value, which is available in the PP database.” (Hafner et al., 2016, 56).

## Structure of a paragraph

A paragraph is a collection of related sentences which together convey **one idea**. Therefore, a paragraph starts with a **topic sentence**, followed by examples, evidence, related commentaries and perhaps a concluding or bridging sentence to the next paragraph. A paragraph’s structure is analogous to that of an argument in that information and data should be used to support the main idea expressed in the topic sentence. Other ways to ensure that a paragraph is well developed are listed in Box 4.

### Box 4: Tips to ensure that a paragraph is well developed

Start with a topic sentence = main idea. Use 5–6 sentences maximum to:

- ▶ Employ examples and illustrations
- ▶ Cite data (facts, statistics, evidence, details and others)
- ▶ Examine testimony (what other people say, such as quotes and paraphrases)
- ▶ Use an anecdote or story
- ▶ Define terms in the paragraph
- ▶ Compare and contrast
- ▶ Evaluate causes and reasons
- ▶ Examine effects and consequences
- ▶ Describe the topic
- ▶ Offer a chronology of an event (time segments)

Source: Purdue Writing Lab (n.d.).

Consider this example, where the main idea is “The coronavirus crisis disproportionately impacted women at a productive working age”. Note how the authors unpack virtually every word in the topic sentence: they illustrate a strong statement “coronavirus crisis hit women” by comparing the data on the respective decline in male and female employment; they cite data for the specific age group to substantiate the claim “working age”; they cite a source that shows how the thirties are a “productive” age; finally, the authors evaluate reasons for the observed phenomenon, citing closure of kindergartens combined with the fact that it is working-age women who are most likely to have children of kindergarten age, and that families underestimate women’s paid work. The authors also offer a commentary regarding the possible negative consequences of this development (“worrying trend”):

**[Topic sentence = main idea] The coronavirus crisis hit women at a productive working age.**

A temporary closure of kindergartens and schools during the lockdown put additional pressure on families with children, so paid work for mothers could have taken a back seat. The number of employed women aged 30–34 declined by 6.6% compared to 3.4% for men [the authors refer to a table with their own calculations in the text of the paper]. This is a worrying trend, as the 30s are considered to be the most productive years for career development (PayScale), but it is also the age when women are more likely to combine work with motherhood (Sakhno, Yuzkiv & Kobernik, 2021, 8).

In the following example, the main idea is to show a contradiction in the research findings in terms of how corruption affects voter turnout. Hence, authors compare and contrast relevant sources, while also providing a commentary on possible reverse causality. Note how neatly the paragraph contains two arguments using the Toulmin structure:

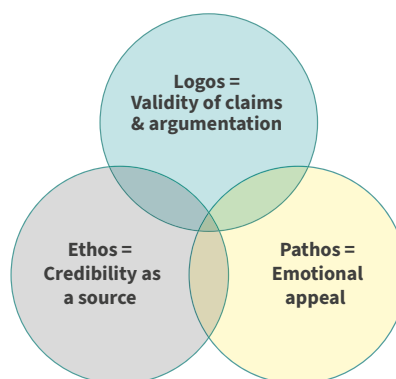
**[Topic sentence = main idea] The existing literature provides two contradictory views on how corruption influences turnout.**

Firstly, **[claim 1]** corruption can mobilise citizens, **[warrant 1]** if citizens prefer clean and accountable governments, they turn out in higher numbers if they do not find transparency and effectiveness in their current government (**[evidence 1]** Inman and Andrews, 2010). Secondly, **[claim 2]** corruption might repel voter turnout. **[warrant 2]** Disappointment experienced due to corruption might push potential voters to withdraw from the democratic process (**[evidence 2]** Kostadinova, 2009). **[comment]** Similar to the relationship between corruption and economic output, the direction of causality is a priori not clear. For instance, Charron and Lapuente (2010) and Montinola and Jackman (2002) suggest that there might be a reverse causality as democratic practices might curb corruption (Bäck and Hadenius, 2008). (Hafner et al., 2016, 27)

## Persuasiveness parameters

In the year 350 BCE, in his work *Rhetoric*, Aristotle developed three argumentation tactics or ways to appeal to a target audience: ethos, logos and pathos (Figure 3). Although used primarily in speech- and essay-writing, these tactics can be helpful in adapting the policy documents to a targeted reader.

**Figure 4.2: Parameters of a convincing policy publication**



Source: Adapted from Aristotle's rhetorical triangle (Burnell et al., 2016, 85).

**Logos** means logic or reason. Readers will question the validity of the findings and recommendations in a policy document, and so they should be supported by proper argumentation. The writing should demonstrate logical consistency and sound evidence, and therefore follow the argument structure. The persuasiveness parameters include:

- ▶ Transparent presentation of research design (where relevant), including limitations
- ▶ Consistent referencing of data sources
- ▶ Listing of calculations, modelling results, list of interview partners, robustness checks as expected according to the quality standard of a selected methodology (e.g., in annexes)
- ▶ Use of argument structure (claim-evidence-warrant) throughout the text.

**Ethos** means ethics and refers to the demonstration of a researcher’s credibility as the source of policy advice. In policy publications, demonstrate credibility by:

- ▶ using professional language that is appropriate to the target audience and is grammatically correct (see also [Chapter 4 Step 5](#) → [Pay attention to language](#))
- ▶ listing your professional credentials as an author of publication (e.g. Chatham House publications feature “About the authors” at the end of their papers, see: Benton and Harwatt, 2022, 40)
- ▶ presenting information about your organisation (e.g. Center for Economic Strategy publications feature its mission, history, principles and contact details, see: Sakhno, Yuzkiv & Kobernik, 2021, 3).

**Pathos** means emotion and refers to emotional impact or personal connection, which can be achieved using language and design. Policy analyses generally avoid using emotional language in a quest for authority and perceived neutrality. At the same time, there are cases when reasonably emotional language in an analytical text helps catch a reader’s attention. For example, emotional phrases can be used to underline the urgency of a problem, as in the excerpts below (emotional phrases are italicised). Note, however, that the emotional appeal is justified using evidence:

“There is *no getting away from the fact that the biggest winners* in our global economy are *those at the top*. Oxfam’s research has revealed that over the last 25 years, the top 1% have gained more income than the bottom 50% put together. Far from trickling down, income and wealth are being sucked upwards at an *alarming rate*.” (Hardoon 2017, 3)

“The number of employed women aged 30–34 declined by 6.6% compared to 3.4% for men [the authors refer to a table with their own calculations in the text of the paper]. This is a *worrying trend* [...]” (Sakhno, Yuzkiv & Kobernik, 2021, 8)

Another important way to garner positive emotions with respect to your policy publication is in the design and layout. Everything from the size of font and the use of images, tables and graphs up to the colour-coding of structural elements of the text affect how long your text will hold a reader’s attention and how easily a reader will be able to grasp your main argument (see also Chapter 4 Step 6 → [Think about the details](#)), especially the checklist for a professional-looking publication.



## STEP 4: Define concrete recommendations

*Serhii Shapovalov*

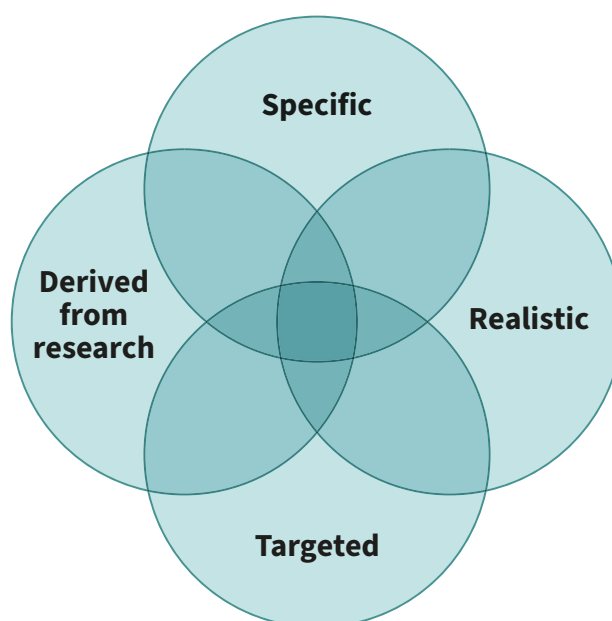
### Main principles when defining policy recommendations

Conclusions and policy recommendations are an essential structural part of the policy paper. Moreover, recommendations are a key element of the policy brief because they constitute a call for action and are needed by those who make policy decisions, which is ultimately the main function of the policy brief. As Kateryna Zarembo et al. (2021, 42) argue, to perform this function effectively, recommendations have to be specific, targeted and realistic.

First, recommendations should call for a specific rather than an abstract action. Examples of abstract actions are recommendations to “support businesses”, “attract investors”, “strengthen the economy”, “ensure the rule of law”, “reform law enforcement”, etc. Such recommendations require further clarification. How exactly should businesses be supported, what kind of businesses should be supported, and which resources should be used? Which aspect of the functioning of law enforcement agencies requires reform; what exactly needs to be changed?

Second, the recommendation should indicate who exactly should make and/or implement certain policy decisions. That is, it is necessary to understand what the decision-making process in a particular sector looks like: which state or local government bodies are involved, what their powers are. With this in mind, it is necessary to recommend specific actors to make specific decisions.

*Figure 4.3: Parameters of a good recommendation*



Based on Zarembo et al., 2021, 42-44.

Third, the action that must be taken by a specific actor must be implementable. Moreover, it must be realistic from both the administrative and political perspectives. Being realistic in administrative terms means that there are resources (human, financial, etc.) available to implement the recommended

decision. Being politically realistic means that the proposed decision corresponds to the interests of stakeholders and the decision-makers themselves. If the proposed solution to the problem clearly contradicts these interests, there is little chance of implementing the suggested decision.

These three conditions must be met simultaneously. If the suggested decision is quite specific and addressed to a specific actor, but unrealistic in terms of implementation, it will not be implemented. If the proposed solution is specific and realistic, but not addressed to a specific actor, the chances of its implementation are also very low. Insufficiently specific recommendations are very likely to be ignored as well.

However, how vague a recommendation is depends on how the policy problem is defined. If the policy problem was defined too broadly (see Chapter 3, Step 1 → [Define your problem](#)), then the recommendations are unlikely to be specific.

Finally, it is important that policy recommendations are directly derived from the research conducted. Otherwise, the recommendation will look unconvincing, as it will not answer the question of why the author is proposing this particular solution to the problem and not any other.

### **Policy options and policy recommendations**

As Oleksandr Kiliievych et al. (2016, 27) argue, policy recommendations should be based on the comparison of policy options. A policy option is a set of specific, clearly stated actions that are understandable to implementers and the public and that are defined without abstract generalisations.

Policy options offer mutually exclusive approaches to solving the problem. This means that the proposed policy options cannot be implemented simultaneously.

The number of policy options proposed in the policy paper may range from three to seven (more often four or five), with one policy option being the preservation of the status quo. The description of the policy options should contain the following components:

- ▶ the main activities required to implement this policy option
- ▶ the potential benefits of the policy option, assessment of its results
- ▶ the potential drawbacks of the policy option (possible losses for society or individual stakeholders in case of implementation of this policy option, assessment of the cost of resources to implement this policy option) (Kiliievych et al., 2016, 21 f.).

After the comparison of several policy options, the policy paper concludes with the choice of one policy option, and the recommendations will contain specific steps for the implementation of that policy option. According to Oleksandr Kiliievych et al. (2016, 23 ff.), policy options should be compared according to five universal criteria:

**Table 4.3: Overview of the five criteria for policy option formulation**

<b>Criterion</b>	<b>Definition</b>
<b>Effectiveness</b>	The degree to which the set goals are achieved.
	Example: If the goal of a particular government programme is to increase the popularity of contract military service, then for each policy option the efficiency indicator would be the increase in the number of contracts signed by citizens with the armed forces on a voluntary basis over the year compared to the basic number.
<b>Efficiency</b>	The relation between the results of a policy and the resources expended to achieve that result (= cost–benefit analysis).
	Example: In one policy option, the expected result is an increase in the number of citizens' contracts with the armed forces by 50,000 per year at the cost of \$1,000,000. The second policy option increases the number of contracts with the armed forces by 30,000 per year, and this result can be achieved by spending \$500,000.  The first case achieves more absolute contracts, but at a higher price (cost per contract: \$20).  In the second case, there are fewer contracts, but they are cheaper (\$16.7).  In terms of efficiency, the second policy option is better, although the decision has to be made in a specific context, given the availability of resources and how urgent the need is to get citizens into the military.
<b>Fairness</b>	How the implementation of the policy option will affect the interests of stakeholders; how unequal the distribution of benefits and costs will be among different groups of the population during the implementation of the policy option.
	Example: If you build a recycling plant in a village, most of the villagers will benefit, because it reduces unauthorised waste dumped near the village, and the plant will create jobs. However, people who live close to the plant may suffer, for example, from the noise or smell.
<b>Political feasibility</b>	Correspondence of the policy option to the priorities of the authorities; societal support of the suggested actions; how such actions relate to the interests of stakeholders and decision-makers.
	Example: If the villagers do not support the construction of a waste recycling plant, even though they will objectively benefit from it, it is better not to make such a decision, because it will only create social tension.
<b>Administrative feasibility</b>	Availability of resources to implement the policy option and action.
	Example: Are there enough resources (financial, human) to implement the policy option? Are there enough professionals with the necessary skills to implement the suggested actions (e.g., build a waste recycling plant)? Do we know where to draw upon these resources if needed? Is there a legal and regulatory framework in place to implement these actions?

To compare policy options, you can build a table with a score for each policy option given for each of the five criteria. For each criterion, a range of possible scores should be assigned, for example, from 1 to 5 where 1 represents the lowest score and 5 is the highest score.

**Table 4.4: Policy option comparison matrix**

Comparison criteria	Assessment of the policy option			
	Status quo	Policy option 1	Policy option 2	Policy option 3
<b>Effectiveness</b>	1	2	4	3
<b>Efficiency</b>	1	3	2	5
<b>Fairness</b>	2	4	1	3
<b>Political feasibility</b>	5	3	4	2
<b>Administrative feasibility</b>	5	3	2	4
<b>Overall option score</b>	14	15	13	17
<b>Option ranking</b>	3	2	4	1

Source: Kiliievych et al., 2016, 76.

However, this scheme of comparing policy options should not be regarded as the only valid one. Depending on the context, the set of criteria can be modified for comparison. For example, an analysis of costs and benefits may be used. In such a case, politically infeasible policy options are not taken into consideration at all, and administrative feasibility is determined in terms of costs and benefits (that is, the policy option that offers the best result for fewer resources is considered the most administratively feasible to implement). So, the cost to benefit ratio (which is equivalent to the “efficiency” criterion described above) becomes the main criterion for the analysis.

### Reality check: considering examples

First, *consider the target audience for your paper*. If the purpose of your paper is to draw the attention of the general public to a particular problem, there is no point in writing recommendations in such detail. Recommendations can generally suggest several approaches to solving the problem. Thus, your paper is more of an agenda-setting document. This is especially true when, for example, government representatives have an interest in maintaining the status quo and preventing NGOs from influencing policy. In this case, you need to work with public opinion, which will put pressure on the representatives of the authorities to change the current status quo.

In contrast, if you can influence policy (for example, you are working in cooperation with a governmental body, you are lobbying for a certain decision, or you write a policy paper directly on behalf of a governmental body), then it is sensible to make recommendations as detailed as possible, applying all the aspects described above.

Additionally, *consider the format of your publication*. Writing detailed recommendations requires doing separate research. You need to process quite a lot of data in order to form quantitative indicators of the effectiveness and efficiency of your proposed actions, to analyse the interests of stakeholders and public opinion, and to assess the availability of resources for the implementation of your recommendations. All of this information is difficult to fit into a short brief.

Finally, if the topic of your paper is a research report (e.g. the results of an opinion poll), the “Conclusions and recommendations” section may highlight the main problems identified in the opinion poll, and recommend solutions to those problems in a general way. For example, the Democratic Initiatives Foundation conducted research on the needs faced by IDPs in Ukraine, compiled in the analytical report [“Assessment of needs and expectations for the future of internally displaced persons and refugees”](#) (DIF 2022). One of the main results was that the long-term needs of IDPs, including employment in a new place of residence, are more urgent at this stage. Having a job would help these people provide for their own short-term needs (buying food and clothing, renting housing, providing education for children etc.). However, in order to develop specific recommendations on job creation for IDPs, an additional study on the state of the economy in Ukraine, the problems of business, ways to promote business development in war conditions etc. is needed. Therefore, the problems will be the subject of future studies, which will suggest more specific recommendations.

### Checklist: Formulating policy recommendations

- ▶ Is it clear **what problems** should be addressed by the suggested policy recommendations?
- ▶ Is it clear **what specific actions** must be taken to implement the suggested policy recommendations?
- ▶ Is it clear **who** exactly should carry out these actions?
- ▶ Do recommendations follow the analysis consistently?

Assess according to the five evaluative criteria for policy options:

- ▶ To what extent can the proposed actions solve the problem (**effectiveness**)?
- ▶ Is there an estimate of the resources required to implement the suggested actions, and how does the cost of resources relate to the expected result of implementing these actions (**efficiency**)?
- ▶ Is there an estimate of who will benefit and who will lose from the implementation of the proposed actions (**fairness**)?
- ▶ Is it clear whether the proposed actions are consistent with the interests of stakeholders and do citizens support them (**political feasibility**)?
- ▶ Is it clear whether there are resources (material, human, legal, etc.) to implement the proposed actions (**administrative feasibility**)?

As mentioned above, ideally, the recommendations will answer all these questions. In practice, you need to take into account the type of paper and its target audience.

## Consider the following example:

Policy brief “[Addressing the Challenges of Digital Lending for Credit Markets and Financial Systems in Low- and Middle-Income Countries](#)” by Christoph Sommer (2021):

Policy recommendations suggested in the paper	Analysis according to the suggested questions
<p>Fostering stability and integrity in (digital) credit markets. Regulators need to introduce or modify specific licences and regulations for all digital financial service providers to create a level playing field for digital lenders (fair competition) and to safeguard the integrity and stability of the credit market. This includes removing loopholes for unlicensed and unregulated products (i.e. curbing predatory lending) and preventing exploitative financialisation of unserved groups with little financial literacy. National regulatory authorities need to ensure that customers are sufficiently educated about digital credits and their associated costs and risks by requiring digital lenders to comply with a specified format for presenting the central loan terms in a consistent and clear manner that is comprehensible even to (potential) consumers with limited financial literacy. Bilateral and multilateral donors can foster digital and financial literacy through financial and technical cooperation. Furthermore, national regulatory and supervisory bodies should extend existing consumer protection policies for banks and financial institutions to comparable digital lending products offered by nonbank financial service providers. Technical assistance by organisations with experience in consumer protection in digital finance, such as GIZ, can facilitate these reforms.</p> <p>Increasing availability of longer-term loans. Development finance institutions (DFIs) and other national and international promoters of (M)SMEs have to play a central role here. They can provide longer-term funds to local banks for on-lending to (M)SMEs with the conditionality that some of the resulting loans have a maturity of more than one year and some a maturity of more than two years. They can also offer partial credit guarantees for loans above these thresholds to cushion local credit providers against the risks of longer-term lending and to incentivise provision of longer loan maturities.</p>	<p><b>Necessary questions:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Is it clear which goals should be achieved by the suggested policy recommendations? (<i>highlighted in yellow</i>)</li> <li>▶ Is it clear what specific actions must be taken to implement the suggested policy recommendations? (<i>highlighted in blue</i>)</li> <li>▶ Is it clear who exactly should carry out these actions? (<i>highlighted in green</i>)</li> </ul> <p><i>Comment: The actors are further specified in the action description. However, the actors are not specified at the country level, because the study is not focused on the individual countries.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Do recommendations follow the analysis consistently?</li> </ul> <p><i>Comment: The author refers to the studies of other researchers on how to solve the problems of digital lending.</i></p> <p><b>Additional questions:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Are there specific indicators of the effectiveness of these actions? (To what extent can the proposed actions solve the problem?)</li> <li>▶ Is there an estimate of the resources required to implement the suggested actions, and how does the cost of resources relate to the expected result of implementing these actions (efficiency)?</li> <li>▶ Is there an estimate of who will benefit and who will lose from the implementation of the proposed actions (fairness)?</li> <li>▶ Is it clear whether actions are consistent with the interests of stakeholders and do citizens support them (political feasibility)?</li> <li>▶ Is it clear whether there are resources (material, human, legal, etc.) to implement the proposed actions (administrative feasibility)?</li> </ul> <p><i>Comment: Each of the proposed recommendations may be the subject of future studies, in which all of these aspects will be described in more detail. This material serves as an agenda-setting document, but it also offers quite specific directions for dealing with digital lending.</i></p>

## Presenting policy recommendations

Finally, it is not only the content of the recommendations that is important, but also their design and place in the structure of the paper. In many cases, recommendations are placed in the “Executive summary” section. A proportion of the potential audience will read only the section with the main conclusions and recommendations. Moreover, there is a high probability that decision-makers will only read this part of the study, since they often do not have enough time to read the whole paper. Given this, the main advice is to make the recommendations easily recognisable in the text.

It is also good practice to outline recommendations with bullet points in the “Conclusions and recommendations” section so that a reader can clearly distinguish conclusions that synthesise the main study results and recommendations that call for action.

### Box 1: How to present your policy recommendations

- ▶ Place them strategically in a clear and self-contained section (either at the beginning or end of the paper)
- ▶ Visually separate them instead of burying them in the conclusions
- ▶ Use a box or bullet points to highlight them

## STEP 5: Pay attention to language

*Salome Minesashvili*

Language and stylistic nuances shape the first impression that readers develop of a policy analysis. How professional it looks, its tone, and accessibility in terms of understandable language can all define its level of appeal to the target audience.

Objectivity is key for the professional outlook of policy analysis, which means that the presented arguments are supported by evidence rather than personal opinions. However, communicating policy analysis is an act of persuasion. Thus, it necessarily includes a factor of normativity and has a value-driven character (Meltsner, 1979; Webber, 1992; Young & Quinn, 2002, 19). In such a case, the researcher decides that a certain issue is urgent and chooses a specific policy alternative over another. In order to convince the audience that the message is important, the policy analysis language should be normative and relate to real-life issues (Academy of Civil Participation, 2019). This requires highlighting meanings and outcomes rather than theories or methods (Institut für Europäische Politik, 2017), unlike in scientific papers. You can also try to be topical and relate to an upcoming event, whether elections, summits, etc., to underline the urgency of the issue.

Even if policy analysis contains important information, it is clear communication that makes it understandable to the reader (Young & Quinn, 2002). The best-written policy analysis has the reader in mind. Unless the target audience is an expert community, you should use simple and understandable language, and avoid excessively specialised terminology and concepts. It is advisable to instead focus on the evidence necessary to make an argument convincing. Any specific terminology should be translated into a language understandable for the intended readers (Meltsner, 1979; Bardach & Patashnik, 2016; Dunn, 2018). This way, those who are not subject matter experts are also able to access the analysis, meaning it can reach a more diverse audience.

Clear and understandable language also requires establishing a coherence within and between each element of the text to give a clear picture of the main argument (Young & Quinn, 2002). At the same time, this cannot be dragged out; it is equally important that the message is concise and straightforward. Below is a checklist and a list of suggestions relating to language and style in policy analysis, which should help you to communicate the product in an objective, clear and accessible manner.

### Checklist for policy analysis language and style:

- ▶ Is the language compelling to the target audience?
- ▶ Are arguments straightforward and presented in a logical manner?
- ▶ Will the target audience understand concepts?
- ▶ Is the structure clear?
- ▶ Is the document easy to navigate in terms of structure?

There are a number of steps that researchers can take to make sure that the above questions are positively met:

#### 1. Content of the text

- ▶ Show the urgency of the selected problem in order to appeal to the audience.

Example, excerpt from Deloffre, M. Z. (2020). “It’s not too late to stem the third wave of the Coronavirus pandemic: Bottom-up approaches to pandemic response.” Center for Global Cooperation Research.

“It’s a matter of time before the Corona virus (COVID-19) pandemic engulfs the developing world in its third wave. Crisis-affected and developing countries in the Middle East, Africa and South America with weak health care systems and capacity; low levels of basic water and sanitation facilities; crowded urban centers, slums, and refugee camps; poor disease surveillance; and weak government capacity will struggle to contain the pandemic. Social distancing is not possible in a refugee camp, and it is ineffective without adequate testing and contact tracing; hand-washing is not feasible without soap and running water. These underlying conditions, existing vulnerabilities, and low levels of resilience make fertile ground for disease spread. The medical emergency will devastate the fragile economies, food security, and development outcomes in these already vulnerable countries. Yet the cataclysmic potential of this third wave has garnered very little global attention and even less global action. It is painfully obvious that global cooperation to fight the pandemic is necessary, but also, unlikely. The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed long-standing weaknesses in global humanitarian and health cooperation, however, decades-long reforms in both sectors provide three bottom-up solutions states can support to mitigate the effects of the third wave: build on existing coordination structures, flexible funding and localization.”

- ▶ Push key messages at the beginning of text/paragraphs to grab the reader’s attention.

#### 2. Writing style

- ▶ Use clear and plain language that can be easily understood by everyone. Straightforward, simple words are easier for all types of audience to read and will make the text comprehensible to everyone.

Text directed at a diverse audience, excerpt from Reznik, O. (2021). “Language, religious affiliation and geopolitical beliefs: the sociocultural foundations of the anti-vax attitudes among Ukrainians.” Democratic Initiatives Foundation.



“Ukraine now has one of the lowest levels of vaccination worldwide. The governmental policy during the early stages of the vaccination campaign is one obvious issue, but the lack of willingness to vaccinate and the fear of the vaccines by the population even when several vaccines are available remains a major obstacle. It took governmental regulations and requirements to get vaccinated for state employees to incentivize many citizens to get vaccinated. In other words, Ukrainians might not be motivated to get vaccinated, but they are not ready to lose their job or other benefits, such as the use of public transportation and access to restaurants/cafes, gym, etc.

Therefore, the goal of the study is to identify the factors that contribute to vaccine hesitance and resistance. More specifically, the study aimed to: 1) empirically identify the proportion of those who got vaccinated or plans to do so and those who do not plan to get vaccinated; 2) the analysis of social, demographic, and cultural characteristics of the groups of respondents with regards to their intention to get vaccinated.”

Text directed at an expert community, excerpt from: Campbell-Verduyn, O. (2021). “Conjuring a cooler world? Blockchains, imaginaries and the legitimacy of climate governance.” Center for Global Cooperation.

“Global environmental governance has long faced a legitimacy crisis (Bernstein 2005; 2012). On the input side, apex groupings of state and non-state actors coordinating attempts to address environmental problems have become increasingly inclusive. Yet, decision-making input tends to persistently privilege access of multinational firms and those actors best able to mobilize the necessary capital, time, expertise, and other resources. On the output side, long-standing forms of “marketized” (Newell 2008; Paterson 2010; Gray 2017) and “non-state market driven” (Cashore, 2002) environmental governance suffer from frequently unmet outcomes. Most prominently, the goal of preventing a two-degree Celsius rise in global temperature, set out by the 2015 Paris Agreement, is increasingly perceived as unachievable?”

- ▶ Write short and precise sentences. While dense and well-supported arguments are important, break down complex information into easily understandable units.
- ▶ Use understandable terminology or define all technical terminology. Spell out acronyms the first time they appear.
- ▶ Avoid jargon and qualifiers.

For example, avoid such terms as *totally*, *completely*, *definitely*, etc.

- ▶ Eliminate unnecessary content and excess words.

For example, use *faculty and staff must...* instead of *all faculty and staff must...*

- ▶ Use active rather than passive voice since the latter obscures who is responsible for what.

For example, use the *government must introduce a policy of...* instead of *A policy of... should be introduced...*

- ▶ Write in third person instead of first and second. This makes the text look more objective.

### 3. Language ethics

- ▶ Use gender-neutral language (if it is relevant for your language). Do not use masculine or feminine pronouns if the gender is not known.

For example, avoid using gendered nouns such as *chairman*, *man*, *mankind*. Use instead: *chair*, *department head*, *coordinator*, *humanity*, *individual* or *person*. Use *they/their* instead of *he/she*, *his/her*.

### 4. Visual support

- ▶ Supplement text with visual data if possible, such as graphs, tables and charts. This helps give the reader a quick overview of the main arguments or to reveal the relationships that may be hidden in the text.

### 5. Format of the text

- ▶ Use paragraphs and subheadings for organisation of arguments into logical units. This gives readers an overview of the flow of arguments and helps them to comprehend the logic before as well as during the reading.
- ▶ Distil and group information into bullet points when possible. This highlights complex information in a visually clear pattern and helps readers focus on important messages.
- ▶ Avoid typos. They make the text look unprofessional.
- ▶ Use consistent font size (except for headings and footnotes).
- ▶ Keep it short, if possible. You do not need to include every detail in the text, but it is important to flesh out important points. You can always include extra information in the footnotes or in the appendix.
- ▶ Revise and review several times; ask colleagues for a review.

## STEP 6: Think about the details

*Ljudmyla Melnyk & Elisabeth Starck*

The last step to making your policy analysis influential lies in the details. In this section we will take a closer look at the importance of branding for think tanks. We will focus on the role that a professional layout for publications, as a part of an organisation's branding strategy, plays in the dissemination of your publications and their underlying ideas.

### Branding and credibility

Branding can be described as the process of making your think tank, or its analytical products, easily recognisable and distinguishable from other organisations by means of logo, slogan, symbols, layout and attributed qualities (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.). As such, branding serves to promote your think tank – by attempting to shape certain (positive) reader perceptions around it and thus contributing to the building of brand credibility. The goal of your think tank's branding is to stand out among the crowd of your professional peers and competitors.

Branding can increase your organisation's credibility, which comprises two elements: trustworthiness, understood to measure the **willingness** of an entity to deliver on certain promises and reader expectations (e.g. scientific accuracy, objectivity of an analytical publication); and expertise, which describes the **ability** to fulfil the aforementioned expectations (employing authors with a scientific

background in the field in which they are writing). Taken together, think tanks that are seen as credible by their stakeholders are associated with a lower perceived risk that the presented information is flawed, and thus consumer uncertainty when dealing with a new product is also reduced (Erdem & Swait, 2014, 191 f.). This in turn positively impacts upon future interactions between a stakeholder and an organisation.

### Why do we need branding in scientific publications?

Whereas the study of branding and its impact on brand credibility is typically considered in business contexts, there is a growing need to take these elements into account in scientific organisations, such as think tanks (Thon, 2020). This is because science operates in a context of imperfect or asymmetrical distribution of information (in this case, field-specific knowledge) similar to the context of a business that knows much more about the manufacturing conditions and quality of a product it is selling compared to the consumer (Molinillo et al., 2022, 1; Erdem & Swait, 2014, 191 f.). This creates uncertainty on the part of the stakeholder, for example: *“How can I trust this think tank’s publication to present me with unbiased, thoroughly researched information so that I can confidently rely on it in the policymaking process?”*

#### *How can you achieve branding in analytical publications?*

Three main aspects can be considered when creating professional branding in analytical publications:

► **Layout**, including:

- your organisation’s logo

the structure of the text (see [Chapter 4 of resp. Step 2](#), including name and title of the publication

- the font (coherent use of one font type throughout the publication; differentiate headings/text body with different font sizes)
- coherent colour scheme
- spacing and visualisation of its contents.

The above features relate to the primary aspect of branding, namely its **outside appearance and recognisability**. As Machin and Niblock (2008, 244) point out in their study on rebranding of newspapers, “ideas, mood and style [are communicated] not only through written contents but also through visual design”.

It should be evident from the layout alone where the structural components, such as introduction, main body, conclusion and recommendations, start and end ([cf. Chapter 4 of resp. Step 2](#)). It is up to you whether you put the recommendations section at the beginning or the end of the publication. However, there is a tendency to place the most important information in the first few pages where the reader’s attention is likely strongest. A well-thought-through layout evokes a sense of trust in the contents of the publication, and trust is a valuable resource when it comes to influencing your stakeholders and audience.

- **Reachability/approachability:** This aspect is concerned with conveying the publication’s professionalism and seriousness. Along with the name of the author(s), it is important to include the name and contact information of the publishing institution, for example, your think tank (address, telephone number, email). Depending on the type of publication, if the goal is to highlight the author as a public expert figure, a short biography could be included, as well as the author’s contact information at the institution, and a link to further material written on the issue. However, this is less common where the publication is part of an ongoing series published by your institution. Where appropriate, providing this type of information is an important signal to the reader that you stand behind what you have published and have sufficient expertise in the policy field, and that there is a contact opportunity in case of further questions.

- **Transparency:** This final aspect relates to the “trustworthiness” dimension of brand credibility. The publication’s branding should include an imprint (usually at the end), provide copyright information with respect to the pictures used and give credit to outside contributors, such as graphic designers or translators who have helped in bringing this publication to life. This also applies to disclosing the paper’s supporting donors. Optional, but recommended, to provide transparency in the writing process, is the provision of details on the think tank’s website regarding the internal review process. Some authors also choose to credit their proofreaders directly in the publication.

Transparency also entails clearly labelling at the top of the first page what kind of document your publication is, for example, “policy brief”, “working paper” or “commentary”, in order to make it clear what readers can expect of your work. Lastly, do not forget to include the date of publishing. Providing all this information reduces the risk of uncertainty surrounding the information and emphasises the scientific quality of the publication.

**Table 4.5: Checklist for a professional-looking publication**

Layout:

Aspect	Considered/Included?	
<b>Branding</b> Is there a clear and recognisable design specification for the publication (series)?	Coherent colour scheme	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Logo	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Coherent font	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Structure</b> Are all features present and recognisable?	Title	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Text elements, depending on the type of publication, such as abstract/executive summary, main part, recommendations, conclusions, sources	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Literature (footnote, endnotes or bibliography (if applicable, depends on the type of publication))	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Imprint or additional information (see below)	<input type="checkbox"/>

Transparency:

Aspect	Considered/Included?	
Type of publication	Type of the publication and/or publication series stated	<input type="checkbox"/>
Date	Month and year	<input type="checkbox"/>
Author	Name of author(s) and short biography	<input type="checkbox"/>

Imprint*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Name of publishing institution</li> <li>▶ Address</li> <li>▶ Website</li> <li>▶ Phone number</li> <li>▶ ISSN/ISBN/DOI number for citation purposes (if applicable)</li> <li>▶ Copyright of your publication</li> <li>▶ Liability disclaimer (<i>“The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of XY”</i>)</li> <li>▶ Short description of the publishing institution (goals, policy expertise, legal structure (non-profit), etc.)</li> </ul>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<p><b>External credit</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Copyright information of all graphics/images used in the publication</li> <li>▶ Editor</li> <li>▶ Review</li> <li>▶ Translation</li> <li>▶ Layout</li> <li>▶ Supporting foundations/donors</li> </ul>	<input type="checkbox"/>

\* The elements of an imprint depend on the type of publication. In books, for example, the imprint also includes the name of the printing house and many other elements.



## Handout: A professional-looking publication

Publication Series Title
Organisation's logo

# Title of Publication

Subtitle

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Date (Month and Year)

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The Title, as well as the name of the author can be put in the header of the subsequent pages. This ensures that the readers knows whose work and on which topic he reads. Catchy titles will especially be kept in mind.

Series Number if applicable

In shorter papers, the abstract and recommendations (if applicable) stand at the top of the paper. They are the first item (because most important) that you want the reader to take away from the paper. If you have a longer paper with an executive summary, opt for a separate page, so it can be read as a stand-alone element.

Headings should be 1-2 pt larger than rest of the text body. You can also highlight them by using bold font, or colour.

Try to offset quotes visually by choosing a different colour font, one that matches the overall colour design, e.g. of the logo.

Choosing columns to structure your text is helpful if the paper is not too long (< 5 pages). But it remains a layout choice and you can also structure the text in one column.

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In a policy study, there is usually a separate page for the table of contents and the (executive) summary and/or recommendations. Also note the different placements of the acknowledgement section in the examples: in the paper by the Ukrainian think tank *Razumkov Centre* and the German think tank SWP, this section is placed before the main text, whereas in the paper published by the Royal Institute of International Affairs, acknowledgements are given at the very end.

With the help of our comparative think tank study, we have selected a few examples below, which we consider to have achieved an overall very good layout for their publication. As always, when it comes to design choices, there is no exact formula, or right way to do things. Certain elements of design will also depend on the type of your publication, for example, policy brief or policy study. You can use the examples below as inspiration.

**Positive examples for a policy brief:**

[“Breaking double standards in the EU’s migration policy”](#) by Vittoria Meissner, March 2022, published by IEP).

[“Towards More Effective Deradicalization Urgent Recommendations for Addressing Violent Islamist Extremism”](#) by Sofia Koller, December 2021, published by DGAP)

**Positive examples for a policy study:**

[“Aligning food systems with climate and biodiversity targets: Assessing the suitability of policy action over the next decade”](#) by Helen Harwatt, Klas Wetterberg, Arpana Giritharan and Tim Benton, 2022, Royal Institute of International Affairs).

[“Cities and Their Networks in EU-Africa Migration Policy: Are They Really Game Changers?”](#) by Steffen Angenendt, Nadine Biehler and David Kipp, November 2021, published by SWP).

[“Assessment of Public Support for Ukraine’s Euro-Atlantic Integration and Policy Recommendations”](#) by Yuriy Yakymenko & Mykhailo Pashkov, October 2019, published by Razumkov Centre and the Trans European Policy Studies Association).

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