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Original Research

The Convergence of Law and Politics for Enhancing Government Policy-Making Processes

Hamed. Jabraeeli[1*], Roghaie. Gholizadeh[2]

[1] MA, Department of Public Law, Ta.C., Islamic Azad University, Tabriz, Iran
[2] MA, Department of Private Law, Ta.C., Islamic Azad University, Tabriz, Iran

*** Corresponding author email address**: Jjaaxd54@gmail.com

Received: 2026-02-09 **Revised:** 2026-06-23 **Accepted:** 2026-07-01 **Published:** 2026-11-01

The convergence of law and politics represents a critical paradigm shift in contemporary governance, aiming to bridge the inherent tension between legal rigidity and political flexibility. This study examines how the integration of legal frameworks into political decision-making processes can substantially enhance the quality, legitimacy, and effectiveness of government policy-making. Historically, law and politics have often been treated as separate spheres: law has emphasized stability, predictability, procedural order, and the protection of rights, whereas politics has prioritized responsiveness, negotiation, public preferences, and the exercise of democratic will. However, this separation may result in policy incoherence, implementation failures, and legal vulnerabilities. By fostering a synergistic relationship between legal norms and political strategies, governments can design policies that are not only legally sound, in terms of respecting constitutional limits, procedural justice, and human rights, but also politically feasible and socially responsive. Such convergence facilitates evidence-based regulation, reduces arbitrary exercises of power, and promotes participatory governance. The study concludes that institutional mechanisms, such as regulatory impact assessments, multi-stakeholder dialogues, and legislative quality-control procedures, are essential for operationalizing this convergence. Ultimately, these mechanisms can contribute to more resilient, accountable, and sustainable policy outcomes in complex democratic societies.

Keywords: *Policy-making; legal convergence; governance effectiveness; political accountability*

How to cite this article:
Jabraeeli, H. & Gholizadeh, R. (2026). The Convergence of Law and Politics for Enhancing Government Policy-Making Processes. *Interdisciplinary Studies in Society, Law, and Politics, 5*(6), 1-8. https://doi.org/10.61838/kman.isslp.511

1. Introduction

Effective government policy-making has always been a challenging endeavor, requiring a delicate balance among competing values: legality versus expediency, stability versus adaptability, and expertise versus representation. Traditionally, law and politics have been conceptualized as distinct, and sometimes antagonistic, domains. Law is associated with normative stability, formal procedures, impartial adjudication, and the protection of individual rights against state overreach. Politics, by contrast, embodies the dynamic contestation of interests, the articulation of collective choices, partisan negotiation, and the pursuit of public goods through majoritarian or consensus-based processes. When these two realms operate in isolation, several pathologies may emerge: policies may be legally flawless but politically unenforceable because of limited stakeholder buy-in or practical constraints, or politically popular but legally defective, leading to judicial invalidation or rights violations. Moreover, the absence of legal discipline within political processes can foster clientelism, regulatory capture, and policy volatility. Conversely, an excessively legalistic approach can stifle innovation and delay urgent responses to social problems.

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The concept of convergence, understood as the active integration of legal reasoning, procedural safeguards, and rights-based approaches into the core of political policy-making, offers a promising remedy. Convergence does not mean dissolving the distinction between law and politics; rather, it advocates structured interaction, institutional feedback loops, and shared standards. Examples include mandating legal compatibility reviews for legislative proposals, such as constitutional impact statements, establishing independent regulatory oversight bodies with both legal and political expertise, and requiring public participation mechanisms that satisfy both democratic legitimacy and due process requirements. Such convergence enhances the overall policy cycle, from agenda-setting and formulation to adoption, implementation, and evaluation. It also strengthens government accountability, as political decisions become traceable to legal mandates and subject to judicial or quasi-judicial review without undermining democratic discretion (Burris & Gostin, 2012).

This introduction sets the stage by arguing that the convergence of law and politics is not merely a theoretical aspiration but a practical necessity for improving state policy-making in the twenty-first century. The subsequent sections examine the theoretical foundations of this convergence, identify its institutional enablers, and discuss potential challenges. Ultimately, this study argues that governments capable of bridging the legal-political divide are better equipped to address complex and multilayered policy problems, ranging from climate change and digital transformation to public health and social justice, while maintaining public trust and the rule of law.

2. Creation of Public Policy Theories in Law and Political Science

In both law and politics, scholars and practitioners must seek answers to the major public questions facing the nation. Political science studies public policy in order to understand how policies are created and how different variables influence policy outcomes. It has developed various theories that explain how laws and public policies are formulated. The field of law, in turn, examines how public policy is created, interpreted, and processed through courts and administrative institutions. Instead of relying primarily on general public policy theories, courts often refer to previous rulings and statutory frameworks adopted by government institutions in order to determine how public policy should be made. The process of studying both the creation of law and judicial reasoning can be "messy" and complicated. Otto von Bismarck is often credited with saying that laws are like sausages, and it is better not to see them being made. However, this should not be the case. Law and public policy should be visible, intelligible, and accessible to the public. Both political science and law have often approached policy-making from narrow disciplinary perspectives, and this has produced a disconnection between the two fields. When communication is weak and disengagement between law and politics persists, the result is precisely the production of "sausage" rather than transparent and accountable policy-making (Filgueiras et al., 2023).

What, then, does this mean for the fields as a whole? The answer is that they need to communicate with one another and develop cross-disciplinary exchange. Laws and public policies are not created in a vacuum, nor are they merely the byproduct of legislators passing detailed statutes. Accordingly, legal scholars need to recognize the political processes involved in the creation of laws and policies. Political scientists, likewise, need to understand that prior case law, judicial interpretation, and court rulings affect how policies and laws are crafted. If the two fields were able to come together and better understand one another, studies of public policy and the laws themselves would become more comprehensive, more coherent, and more capable of producing meaningful effects for the people of the nation.

What are public policy theories, and why are they necessary? Political science has attempted to create theoretical models for understanding the establishment of law and the ways in which people themselves influence political processes. These policy theories are designed to explain how policy development occurs and why differences emerge across policy processes. Public policy theories address decisions made by governmental authority, including the commonly recognized rules that structure public service. For government to govern effectively, it must create different policies. Accordingly, governments establish various agencies to administer specific areas, and these agencies then construct the policies that they will eventually enforce. Public policy theories examine different dimensions of policy

formation, and when combined, they can offer a broader and more comprehensive view of how public comments, public influence, and institutional processes contribute to policy creation. However, many of these theories lack sufficient legal substance, particularly regarding how courts interpret legislation passed by Congress and how such interpretation shapes public policy.

Political scientists have developed many theories regarding how public policy is made, often without adequately examining the law, the courts, administrative agencies, or the ways in which administrative law affects public policy. One such theory, Policy Feedback Theory, suggests that policy restructures subsequent political processes and that feedback from the public reshapes discussions about what policies should become. Put simply, newly created policies generate new political dynamics through their interaction with the people affected by those policies. From these new political discussions, newer policies are then designed to reflect emerging political realities. This feedback produces new and improved policies, as well as better studies of the effects of law and order within the population. This policy theory attempts to create open discussion of public policies, and these debates may then develop into the forms of change that governments seek through policy-making (Barnes, 2022).

Policy Feedback Theory requires a public that is engaged with the laws and policies created by government. The citizenry component of Policy Feedback Theory is therefore highly important. Citizens must be genuinely engaged with government, and government must also be willing to listen to the citizens of the nation. An additional requirement that must be considered within Policy Feedback Theory is that the power of organized groups can potentially influence policy in one direction or another. However, Policy Feedback Theory has certain limitations. Most importantly, it is difficult to study fully in its broadest terms. More often than not, such studies are based on small case studies rather than comprehensive reviews of the entire process. This means that the theory may operate with a limited data pool.

The Advocacy Coalition Framework is similar to Policy Feedback Theory because its processes and stages develop recursively. The Advocacy Coalition Framework emerged from the work of two scholars addressing the same problem from different perspectives. From this work, they created the original structure of the Advocacy Coalition Framework. This theory already contains a number of assumptions built into its model. These assumptions are intended to incorporate the different factors that all public policy theories must address. The strength of the Advocacy Coalition Framework is that it provides a flexible approach for political scientists and public policy theorists. It allows for both short-term and long-term considerations and builds upon the natural political process within policy subsystems. However, the Advocacy Coalition Framework does not fully capture the administrative system because it is difficult for the original feedback to expand. Once a decision has been made, the process returns only to the short-term phase and does not re-evaluate the entire system as a whole.

The Narrative Policy Framework is a public policy theory that explains the differences that emerge in the creation of public policies. The strengths of this theory can be analyzed at different levels, ranging from the local level to the global level.

This means that the theory can adjust itself to various jurisdictions without changing its entire structure. Unlike the other theories discussed, the Narrative Policy Framework contains constraints that are already built into the theory. The Narrative Policy Framework takes the policy setting into account, including the legal restrictions imposed by administrative law considerations. However, the Narrative Policy Framework lacks the feedback mechanisms found in the previous two theories. This means that it is difficult to observe how policies change over time and how they evolve.

The Institutional Analysis and Development Framework is another public policy framework with an extensive intellectual history. This framework begins in a manner similar to many feedback theories and, for the most part, resembles Policy Feedback Theory. Among policy theories, the Institutional Analysis and Development Framework may be considered the “Swiss army knife” of public policy analysis. Within this framework, there can be multiple levels of analysis within a single study of public policy. The analysis can then be broken down into additional subtopics based on different subsystems. Although this may seem useful for integrating multiple analyses into one framework, its capacity to accommodate so many analyses may also cause the overall intent of public policy to become overlooked.

Public policy theories have their proper place. They are needed to show how policies change over time. Yet these theories remain theories developed primarily for political scientists. This means that they often omit real-world legal implications and the institutional channels through which policies must pass (Oyekunle, 2024).

The world of law is highly complex. Law has many internal rules and technical dimensions, and experts often spend years learning how to navigate them. Administrative law is no different. Public policy theories are useful, but they encounter a significant problem: Congress does not always enact highly specific laws. In administrative law, it is widely recognized, as previously discussed in this paper, that Congress often deliberately drafts statutes in broad or vague terms. From this vagueness, courts have created a framework for both Congress and administrative agencies to formulate public policies. This framework is extensive and allows the public to comment on policies that may affect them.

The non-delegation doctrine allows Congress flexibility in creating public policy by not requiring every detail of a policy to be included in the language of legislation. The Supreme Court has ruled that Congress must provide agencies with an intelligible principle, or what may be described metaphorically as "banks to the canal," so that there is a way to determine whether an agency has followed a legislative mandate. It is impossible for Congress to create every detail of public policy, but Congress can establish a framework that executive agencies can complete through the rulemaking process. This framework for public policy establishes guiding principles, and these principles must be published in order to inform the public about the policy and ensure that the policy reflects the intentions of both Congress and the public.

In the public policy theories discussed above, many theories leave the final decision-making stage underdeveloped. When Congress does not provide a specific directive and an agency policy is created within the executive branch, that policy must go through the Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs (OIRA), which is part of the Office of Management and Budget. Accordingly, all regulations issued by executive branch agencies must be approved by OIRA. This serves as a mechanism through which the President can know, control, or at least influence what agencies are doing. This aspect of policy-making is not adequately represented in many public policy theories. One person within the federal agency system can directly affect the public policies that are implemented. However, it must also be stated that independent agencies, such as the Securities and Exchange Commission and the Federal Communications Commission, do not send public policies through OIRA. What further complicates the public policy process is that Congress can state in legislation that an agency shall not send rules to the Office of Management and Budget. The converse is also true: the Office of Management and Budget cannot prevent an agency, through its review, from fulfilling a congressional mandate.

With the role of agencies expanding dramatically during World War II, Congress passed the Administrative Procedure Act (APA). This United States federal statute governs the manner in which federal administrative agencies may propose and establish regulations. The APA gave agencies the ability to make public policies. Agencies now have several ways to create rules and public policies. One is formal rulemaking, which occurs through a formal hearing. This form of rulemaking rarely occurs today because it is too cumbersome. The most widely used method for creating public policy is the informal rulemaking process. This means that agencies must issue notice, receive comments, and issue a final policy. This has produced an approach to policy-making that differs significantly from the approach suggested by many public policy theories. In National Petroleum Refiners Association v. FTC (1973), the courts supported APA rulemaking because it allows for greater input from all affected parties than case-by-case decision-making. This has enabled agencies to create more flexible public policies because agencies do not always need to locate authority in explicit statutory language. In crafting public policies, agencies inevitably encounter unforeseen problems and therefore need flexibility. If agencies go too far in creating public policies, Congress can change or repeal the policies that the agency has created (Alschner & Skougarevskiy, 2018).

However, the creation of public policies is not as simple as it may appear. A public policy may be brought before a court before it can be implemented. There are two main types of challenges to public policies: substantive challenges, in which the rule itself is contested, and procedural challenges, in which the public policy may be acceptable in substance but defective because the

appropriate procedures were not followed in its creation. In reviewing challenges to public policies and rules, courts often prefer not to address the substantive merits of the rules. Instead, courts tend to focus on whether the correct procedures were followed in producing the public policy. Courts assume that if the proper procedure is followed, the correct substance of public policy is more likely to result.

More importantly, courts require rationales in rulemaking. This requirement is intended to demonstrate that agencies have adequately considered all relevant factors during the process of creating public policies. Courts do not want to see post hoc rationalizations of rules and public policy. This requirement ensures that public policies are more explicit in justifying choices made during the policy-making process and therefore guards against hidden or improper influences. This principle was further reinforced in Motor Vehicle Manufacturers Association v. State Farm Mutual Automobile Insurance Co. (1983), where the Court stated that there must be a "rational connection between the facts found and the choice made." This decision contributed to the development of the hard look doctrine. The hard look doctrine states that agencies cannot simply claim that they have adopted a different policy philosophy; they must explain why they rejected commenters' complaints or concerns about the public policy. Under this doctrine, agency action may be considered arbitrary and capricious if the agency relies on factors that Congress did not intend it to consider, fails to consider an important aspect of the problem, offers an explanation that runs counter to the evidence before the agency, or provides an explanation so implausible that it cannot be attributed merely to a difference in view or agency expertise.

Public policy theories also encounter difficulty because both Congress and administrative agencies can create policies. In American Mining Congress v. Mine Safety & Health Administration (1993), the courts imposed additional boundaries on policy-making. First, without a rule, a statute passed by Congress may be impossible to enforce because its language is too broad. Agencies must therefore "fill in the blanks" in creating public policy. Second, the agency may publish the policy in the Code of Federal Regulations. Third, the rule may amend, repeal, or conflict with a prior legislative rule. Fourth, the agency may intend the rule to be binding.

These boundaries were designed to help build the framework that agencies must follow in creating policy. Another restriction placed on agencies in policy creation is that, if there is a longstanding interpretation of policy, the agency must go through notice-and-comment rulemaking to change that interpretation. As with many public policy theories, there are sections of administrative law that allow for notice and opportunity for comment on public policies. This is consistent with court decisions. Courts have ruled that there must be a logical outgrowth between the proposed and final policy. This means that notice and opportunity for comment can influence public policies and allow the final policy to differ from what was initially proposed by Congress or the agency. The only requirement is that the final policy remain connected to the same issue and constitute a logical outgrowth of the original policy. Again, considering different public policy theories, Congress did not intend rulemaking to be unaffected by political influence. Congress and agencies understand that the creation of public policies is a quasi-legislative process, meaning that political influence will exist just as it does in the ordinary legislative process, and that such influence falls within their institutional authority. This means that public policy theories that treat politics as a variable are consistent with the decisions of the courts. Even though agencies are often willing to create public policies, they may also be required to engage in obligatory rulemaking. Agencies may decide that a general rule is impossible because of varied possibilities of application, or that they first need experience in order to understand how courts will interpret the policy. Agencies must also state what their policies are, and these policies must be made public. Policies that are contained in an agency manual, not made public, not subjected to a notice-and-comment period, and not supported by any justification for avoiding public procedure must be published and made public, as reflected in Morton v. Ruiz (1974). Accordingly, public policies created by government agencies must be "out in the open." Public policy theories rarely address this issue and often assume that policies will naturally remain within public view. However, these theories do not sufficiently consider one of the most common types of documents produced by agencies: guidance documents. These are documents in which an agency explains what it believes a policy or statute means. The problem with

these documents is that the public does not have input into their creation. Public policy theories generally do not address these documents, even though they are produced daily by agencies and have direct effects on public policy (Lee & Oh, 2010).

The APA has an immediate impact on public policy because adjudication can completely alter how a policy is implemented. APA § 701 allows for judicial review unless the statute that created the public policy precludes review or the agency action is committed to agency discretion by law. APA § 702 establishes the right of review. This means that, for a public policy to be adjudicated, there must be a person suffering a "legal wrong," which is restrictive in relation to tort, contract, or statutory suits. Another way in which a public policy may be brought before a court is when the policy adversely affects or aggrieves a party. This is a broad threshold and allows public interest groups to petition for review.

Another issue that may influence public policy is that an agency may postpone the effective date of an action pending judicial review if justice requires. This may significantly delay implementation of the public policy, and such delay is not reflected in many public policy theories.

Once a public policy has been brought before a court, additional issues arise before the policy can be fully implemented. APA § 706 defines the scope of review through which courts examine public policy. A reviewing court may compel agency action that has been unlawfully withheld or unreasonably delayed. If the court finds that a public policy was unlawful and sets aside the agency action, the court has several grounds for concluding that the policy violated the law: the action may be arbitrary, capricious, or an abuse of discretion; otherwise not in accordance with law; contrary to constitutional requirements; in excess of statutory jurisdiction; beyond the agency's authority or limitations; adopted without observance of the procedure required by law; unsupported by substantial evidence in cases of formal rulemaking or adjudication; or unwarranted by the facts. This means that even after a public policy has been adopted, it may be delayed by litigation before taking full effect. Public policy theories must therefore account for litigation because public policies may be altered by courts before they are fully implemented (Al-Mushayt, 2019).

Even with all these procedures under the APA, courts have limited their own scope of review regarding public policies. Citizens to Preserve Overton Park, Inc. v. Volpe (1971) established a presumption in favor of agency action in relation to the creation of public policy. Furthermore, if the statute establishing the public policy gives the agency broad discretion to create rules, the agency may effectively create the entire public policy. The APA shows that each authority of government is subject to review unless there is a statutory prohibition or the action is "committed to agency discretion."

Courts have also slightly limited the power of agencies to interpret public policy however they choose. This limitation is known as the Chevron doctrine. However, judicial control over public policy interpretation has a long history. Courts first addressed how much deference should be given to agency interpretations of statutes in Skidmore v. Swift & Co. (1944). In that ruling, agency interpretations of statutes granting them authority to create public policy were not controlling on the courts. The case stated that courts would look to agency interpretation for guidance, and that the weight of deference given to administrative interpretation would depend on the thoroughness of the agency's consideration, the validity of its reasoning, its consistency with earlier and later pronouncements, and other factors that give it the power to persuade even if it lacks the power to control. Accordingly, if a public policy failed these factors, the interpretation would be persuasive authority only, not binding authority. Then, in Chevron U.S.A., Inc. v. Natural Resources Defense Council, Inc. (1984), the Court revisited the question of how much deference courts should give to agencies that create public policy. The Court reasoned that judges should not second-guess the wisdom or policy determinations of agencies. The Court concluded that politically accountable legislative or executive branches, through the intent of legislation, are better suited to make such policy decisions. On that basis, the Court reasoned that Congress had delegated interpretive authority to the executive branch rather than the judiciary for the creation of public policy. The core of Chevron is that not all agency interpretations of public policy should automatically be accepted. However, if the policy interpretation is reasonable and falls within the scope of congressional legislative intent, courts should defer to the agency's interpretation of the statute. The

Court later narrowed the Chevron doctrine. In United States v. Mead Corp. (2001), the Court further limited Chevron by stating that deference applies only when Congress has delegated to the agency the authority to make rules carrying the force of law and when the agency has acted through a formal process of rulemaking or adjudication (Heichel et al., 2005).

All of this means that the two fields must foster stronger interdisciplinary communication. Law and political science are responsible for analyzing and shaping the laws and policies that ultimately direct the nation. The two fields need to develop consistent theories that are mutually intelligible across their respective domains. This means that political scientists must remain attentive to courts and legal doctrine, while attorneys must understand the political dynamics behind the different decisions that affect public policy. A new mutual theory is therefore required. With all these judicial dimensions of public policy in mind, where does this leave the creation of law and public policy? It leaves us with a "sausage" that does not match what the "casing" can hold. When agencies create public policy, they possess extensive power in the formation of that policy because Congress has often delegated broad authority and allowed agencies to create policies within statutory frameworks. This means that the field must reconsider and revise public policy theories. First, many existing public policy theories can be combined, although with substantial modifications, so that both political scientists and lawyers can understand the full process of creating laws and public policies.

First, the redefined theory would need to include feedback from the public. Such feedback reshapes discussions about what policies should become. In this way, newly created policies generate new political dynamics through their interactions with the people affected by those policies. From these new political discussions, additional and newer policies are created to reflect emerging political conditions. This approach would be consistent with the public feedback required by the APA and the rulemaking process in administrative law.

The next major issue that the new policy theory must address is the selection path through which Congress grants agencies authority to create public policies. Additionally, the theory must indicate how public policy is created and must distinguish between informal and formal rulemaking while also accounting for the political negotiation that occurs in Congress. This is a critical distinction because of the Administrative Procedure Act and the ways in which public policy may later be adjudicated.

For both political scientists and lawyers to understand how public policy is created, the new theory must have a level of flexibility similar to the Advocacy Coalition Framework. Such a theory would allow for both short-term and long-term considerations and would build on the natural political process within policy subsystems. This flexibility would make it possible to account for many of the changes that occur during policy creation, including agency guidance documents, the precise wording or lack of wording in congressional statutes, legislative history, APA adjudication processes, and the other factors discussed above (Bennett, 1991).

3. Conclusion

In conclusion, the convergence of law and politics emerges as a cornerstone of modern and effective governance. This study has demonstrated that the traditional dichotomy between legal certainty and political responsiveness is increasingly obsolete in the face of complex societal challenges. When legal frameworks and political processes operate in isolation, policy outcomes often suffer from either excessive rigidity or unpredictable volatility. However, when deliberately integrated, they create a virtuous cycle: legal norms provide the stable architecture and procedural guardrails within which political deliberation can flourish, while political inputs ensure that legal rules remain relevant, legitimate, and attuned to evolving social realities.

The key benefits of such convergence include enhanced policy coherence across different levels and sectors of government; reduced implementation gaps due to early legal vetting and stakeholder involvement; strengthened rule of law by embedding legal accountability mechanisms into political decision-making; increased public confidence through transparent, participatory, and rights-respecting processes; and greater policy resilience against judicial challenges or political reversals.

To operationalize convergence, governments should adopt institutional reforms such as mandatory regulatory impact assessments that include legal and

political criteria, mixed expert-lay committees for policy design, ex ante constitutional review of major legislation, and training programs for policymakers on basic legal principles and for legal professionals on policy analysis. Moreover, fostering a culture of interdisciplinary dialogue between legal scholars and political scientists can enrich both theory and practice.

Finally, although convergence cannot eliminate all tensions between law and politics, and although some degree of constructive friction remains healthy for democratic governance, it offers a robust framework for improving the quality, legitimacy, and effectiveness of state policy-making. Future research should explore comparative case studies of successful convergence models across different political and legal systems, as well as the role of civil society and digital technologies in facilitating this integration. In the long run, embracing convergence will not only make governments more competent but also more accountable to the citizens they serve.

Authors' Contributions

Authors contributed equally to this article.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

Acknowledgments

We would like to express our gratitude to all individuals helped us to do the project.

Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

Funding

According to the authors, this article has no financial support.

Ethical Considerations

In this research, ethical standards including obtaining informed consent, ensuring privacy and confidentiality were observed.

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