

POLICY FORUM

POD

Policy Forum Pod
Why prevention policies fail
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About us:

Policy Forum Pod is the podcast of Policy Forum.net - Asia and the Pacific's platform for public policy debate, analysis and discussion. Policy Forum is based at Crawford School of Public Policy at the Australian National University.

Our regular podcasts are written for a broad audience of public policy professionals, and those interested in public policy throughout the region.

Policy Forum connects with the Asia and the Pacific Policy Society – a network of thousands of people involved in every level of policy around the region.

Hosts: Sue Regan and Martyn Pearce

Guests: Paul Cairney and Gemma Carey

Martyn Pearce: Hello and welcome to Policy Forum Pod – the podcast for those who want to dig a little deeper into the policy challenges facing Australia and its region. I am Martyn Pearce. Policy Forum Pod is produced at Crawford School of Public Policy. They are region’s leading graduate policy school. You can find out more about us at crawford.anu.edu.au, and I am here today with my regular co-host, Sue Regan. Hello, Sue. How are you?

Sue Regan: Hi, Martyn.

Martyn Pearce: Sue is the Program Director at the Institute of Public Administration Australia and, also, a PhD Scholar at Crawford. Now, Sue, I’ve got a question for you. Tell me about something that you have failed at recently.

Sue Regan: Oh, that’s a hard one. No, it’s not really. I failed to complete my PhD on time. I know that’s pretty common, but--;

Martyn Pearce: Oh, that is terrible news. That is terrible news, and why have you failed to complete your PhD on time? What lessons have you drawn from this?

Sue Regan: I think, probably the main one is just over-committing. I think I thought I was superwoman and I think I’ve realised I’m not, so over-committing at work, at home, doing podcast co-presenting. Yeah, a bit too much over-commitment, I think.

Martyn Pearce: Well, I’m sorry. I hope I haven’t depressed you by veering into this, because the reason why I asked is today we are looking at failure from a policy perspective.

Now, we’ve spoken a lot on the podcast before about what success in policy-making might look like, whether it’s engaging effectively with the community, which we did with Paul Schmitz back in Episode 65, or listening to your scientific evidence, which we did with Ian Chubb in Episode 67, or thinking systematically, which we did with Helen Sullivan back in Episode 42, or even managing hyperpartisan and increasingly populist political environment, which Nicky Lovegrove did back in Episode 69.

But today, we are going to – wait for it – dig a little deeper into why policy fails, and we’re particularly going to look at the realm of social policy and public health, and the noble but often thwarted goals of prevention and early intervention, and we have got a fantastic line-up of guests to help us explore this topic.

First of all is Paul Cairney. Paul is Professor of Politics and Public Policy at the University of Sterling. His research spans comparative public policy, comparisons of policy theories, international policy processes, and comparisons of UK and devolved policy-making. He is currently undertaking a tour of Australia and New Zealand as a guest of ANZSOG, the Australian New Zealand School of Government.

He’s got his own blog, which is brilliant, is full of articles, full of public policy insights – I’ll leave a link to that in the show notes, and if my Twitter stalking has served me well, he’s been enjoying

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life back here, in Canberra, and not getting lost around the Lake Burley Griffin. Hello, Paul, how are you?

Paul Cairney: Hello, thank you, very good.

Martyn Pearce: Thanks so much for joining the Podcast. Also, with us is Gemma Carey. Gemma is Associate Professor and Research Director of the Centre for Social Impact at UNSW and an NHMRC Fellow. She holds a PhD in Social Policy and Population Health from the University of Melbourne.

Gemma undertakes primary research in governance and policy implementation, and much of her research investigates the processes of joining up within government and between government and non-government organisations. She also runs a very highly-regarded regular symposium and a blog, called *Power to Persuade*, which helps to build relationships between policy makers, academics and the community sector – and, again, we’ll leave a link to that in the show notes.

She recently got married, so welcome and congratulations, Gemma.

Gemma Carey: Thank you.

Martyn Pearce: Thanks so much for joining us.

We’ll get into our discussion in a second, but before we do a quick reminder to our listeners that we are really keen to get your thoughts on what we are talking about today or on any of our podcasts. You can reach us on Facebook, where we are [asiapacificpolicysociety](#). You can find us on Twitter, where we are [APPSPolicyForum](#), or just shoot us through an email – we are podcast@policyforum.net.

Stick around after the interview, because we are going to be going through some of your questions and comments that you’ve left for us or sent in to us via email, but for now let’s dive into the issue at hand. Over to you, Sue.

Sue Regan: Paul, one of the things that we wanted to talk to you about is prevention policy. This idea that by intervening early in people’s lives or intervening early in social and health problems and inequities we can make people’s lives better, and you talk about that in one of your blogs. What do you mean by prevention policy?

Paul Cairney: Sue, it’s not too different from health in our policy, I think, although I think the reason why people use prevention as a short hand because it’s connected to an idiom that prevention is better than cure, and if you can intervene as early as possible in someone’s life you can help reduce inequalities in a population or help reduce public service costs associated with intervening very early when there is crisis in their lives.

Sue Regan: And, Gemma, you work in a similar space in your work on social determinants of health. What’s your understanding of this prevention policy idea?

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Gemma Carey: I actually match up with Paul, so it is, yes, prevention is better than cure, often made on basis of economic arguments that it will save money if we do that and, yes, address social determinants of health.

Sue Regan: So, it sounds like a very intuitively easy idea that you try to prevent problems happening, that you intervene early, but I know, Paul, you've talked about how it's actually quite difficult for policy-makers to develop, and plan and, indeed, implement prevention policies? Why do you think that is?

Paul Cairney: Yes. I mean, I think it's probably one of the biggest gaps between expectations and outcomes, because they sound so good. I think if you are a policy maker for the first time and you hear you can intervene early in people's lives and turn their lives around, it sounds fantastic, doesn't it? I mean, if you describe it that way who wouldn't want to do it, but I think part of the reason it appears to fail is because people sign up to it without really knowing what it means, because it is just an idiom.

I mean, part of the reason you can get this cross-party support is because people are signing up for different reasons, so centre-left interested in reducing inequality, centre-right interested in reducing costs. I think part of the problem is sometimes it only does one of those things, which causes you to make really hard choices.

Sometimes, it doesn't do either, and I think, really, that kind of early intervention it's--; I would think of it more in terms of: if you are interested in costs, it might produce more value for money, but it won't produce--; I think what a Treasury often causes cashable savings, which is, "We've improved things so much, we can close a hospital, or close a prison or a fire service," or something like that. That's the kind of--; We can talk about it later, I guess, but that's one of the reasons why it wouldn't happen, because people like those services.

Sue Regan: Gemma, just returning to your work on social determinants of health, could you explain that for the audience what that is and how it relates to prevention?

Gemma Carey: Yes, so I always say it's everything that causes or prevents inequality, so it's social inequality. I mean, it's linked to prevention, as Paul said, but it does tend to be wrapped up very much in that phrase 'social determinants of health', which has been problematic as it's not a very sexy phrase to try and sell to the citizenry.

I think sometimes, also, there is that language thing where we're trying to translate something out of academia and people use a particular set of language or are quite wedded to a set of language that doesn't translate into a space in which you can gain policy support for it. So that, in my space, has been a real challenge.

Martyn Pearce: I know we are going to touch a little more on this little language that surrounds some of those but, Paul, I wanted to send back to you for a second. We've looked at the difficulties of defining and understanding prevention, but what other reasons are there for why prevention policy-making so often fails?

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Paul Cairney: I think there are lots of them. I mean, I don't want to give you--; There is an overwhelming amount, I guess, but I think that the simplest explanation link is that it's like in a cycle of enthusiasm and despair. Government all come in thinking that their predecessors failed because they had low political will or because they didn't know what they were doing – low competence.

They come in and then they think prevention is a good thing. Then, they're trying to define that, and they face a series of hard choices that they really don't want to deal with, and they sometimes think, "I cannot possibly do all these things in X number of years I've been in government," so they put a lot of these choice off. And then, the next government comes in and does the same thing.

There is a psychological element that, when you think something is easy and then you soon find that it could really ruin your electoral chances, you're about stuffed, and you move on. I mean, part of that's because it's also so hard to define in a useful way. I don't know if you would use – what you call it – the telescope analogy.

I think when you make policy, you want to zoom in and turn it into really specific solutions that you can do and monitor and such like, but I think a lot of prevention in health-norm policy and that sort of thing you're essentially zooming out to the abstract and saying, "Okay, well health is caused by your environment or it's climate change," and to have to suddenly listen to someone describe these kinds of things and by the end of it it means everything.

To solve someone's life chances we've got to turn the planet around, and I think if you're a policy maker you don't want to commit yourself to that. You're not going to change everything. You want something that you can write specifically a manifesto and I think that's when it becomes quite overwhelming.

Sue Regan: Is prevention policy then just another buzzword, like 'wicked problems' or 'pathology of policy', or is it something deeper?

Paul Cairney: Hmm. Well, I think all of these things do get rebranded, so they're all connected somehow, and I think another phrase might be 'wellbeing policy'. People talk quite a lot about, well, let's come up with better words for these things, but they're not really facing the other challenge, which is how do you turn those words into something practical that you can win an election on or that you can produce some kind of long-term strategy that doesn't fail when another government comes in.

Sue Regan: Gemma, do you think this is another buzzword or is it something that resonates with you in your work?

Gemma Carey: I'm with Paul, and I think anyone who has been in public health space would see that we've been reinventing different terms for this for decades and decades.

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Martyn Pearce: Gemma, you do a lot of work on joining up between government and non-government organisations when it comes to public health. What are some of the approaches that policy makers can take to understand the sort of complex range of stakeholders on a given policy issue and most effectively work across sectors?

Gemma Carey: Can I flip that a little, seeing we're focusing on failure and, instead, talk about what we keep doing wrong in that space over and over again? So, quite predictably as an implementation research when we see a lot of failure happens during the implementation phase, but there seems--;

To unpack that a little bit more, one of the things that I think that we do a lot in that space is that we don't make it a safe space to fail, even though we know that implementation is incredibly challenging, and slippery, and it's something that both researchers and practitioners really grapple with as a concept.

And so, what I've seen a lot in various policies I've looked at is attempts to really lock down implementation during the design process and then get frustrated when it won't follow from that, but it's not in a safe space to fail, so there is no deviation from that, so I always say joining up is a dynamic process but we tend to match it up with static processes rather than dynamic processes and then we get surprised over and over again when it doesn't work.

Martyn Pearce: So, what's the solution to that? How should the things be better designed?

Gemma Carey: At the absolute risk of blurting out a bunch of buzzwords, it is adaptation and [laughs] being agile, but moving beyond those buzzwords, I think it is about a culture where you can fail, where you recognise that different instruments and tools work at different points in implementation, and it's okay to remove things and revise things.

We are very good at taking things apart for the wrong reasons, because a government changed and it's political, but we're very bad at taking them apart for the right reasons, which is they're not actually working. It's okay to admit that and to put something else in place instead.

At the moment, I do a lot of work on the National Disability Insurance Scheme and that is something where you see these issues cropping up again and again.

Martyn Pearce: Paul, you talk about the common goal of giving more responsibility for service design to local public bodies. Just how easy is that?

Paul Cairney: It's one of those – I'm trying to come up with the right analogy. I think a lot of these things are Herculean tasks. Does that translate? You know, they look quite simple but they're kind of impossible things, and I think that's one of them.

Now, I see a window here for you to humour me about my favourite topic here, Sue. It is really what governments want to do – to use what they think is the best evidence and produce a

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governing system that they can work with. The only problem is people don't agree on what is good evidence or how you should govern.

Now, if you put those two things together, you can come up with lots of different models in which you can [combine? 0:14:06] evidence in policy-making, so one of them is, I think what you may associate with phrases like 'evidence-based policy-making', you take evidence from an international randomised-control trial, you import it in its entirety, and you stay--; you maintain fidelity too, like you're taking a medicine, and then you roll it out nationally with no local discretion, so that's one form.

The other one is you do the opposite thing. You have total respect for local [?? 0:14:30], you co-produce policies with service users, and local stakeholders, and such like, and then you share best practice, telling stories to each other but not expecting something that worked in one part of the country to work in another.

And so, both of those things sound easy enough, don't they, but they're completely contradictory. I think that's the difficulty. People want different things. They want centralised for national elections, they want a localised for pragmatic reasons – good reasons, they want to use RCT evidence, but they also want to use a more, a kind of wider sense of evidence, so you pull these things together.

I think you--; The only solution to these things is choice between two things you want, and you have to give up one of them. I think that it's difficult, isn't it, people don't want to--; They want to maintain--; You don't want to see our one centralisation not localisation or vice versa. You want to say, "Okay, I want all of the best of both worlds." I think that's when you just get into a bit of a mess.

Sue Regan: Paul, I wanted to pick up on something that Gemma said about the need to create safe spaces to fail. How do you think that would go down with voters?

Paul Cairney: Well, I wonder. I mean, it's the only reason that I would like to run for office just once, because I would call them and say, "Okay, given what I know, there is no way I can promise you anything. I'm just going to give it a go and [?? 0:15:58] let's see what happens."

But you just couldn't run an election like that, could you? At least in Westminster's type system, you have to project a sense of governing competence: I will manage the system and I will be in control of that, and that doesn't sit well with the idea [of] I'm going to experiment, engage in trial and error and if it doesn't work out, I'll change.

No, I think the only solution to that is a little bit of – I don't know what the word is – not quite manipulation, but you're relying on people not paying attention to what you're doing, so you can change the way you're doing things in areas that people just don't care about as much.

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I guess that would be you pick some high-profile issues in which you know you'll be assessed and then the rest of them, you've maybe got space, because people are not paying attention to them.

Martyn Pearce: So, your policy platform for when you run for office is going to be that you will promise nothing and that you will probably fail.

Paul Cairney: Yes, what was it? Under-promise and over-deliver, I suppose.

[laughter]

Martyn Pearce: I think there are plenty of politicians who could do with a little more to learn along those kinds of lines.

Sue Regan: Yes, one issue you've identified, again Paul, is that policy failure sometime is explained by a lack of political will, but you've argued that this is often not the case. Why is that?

Paul Cairney: Yes. It's one of my least favourite phrases, [lack of political will? 0:17:20], because it's such a cop-out – it's not an explanation for anything. I mean, it's [?? 0:17:27] [we are tying 0:17:28] over when you're used to assess people by their character, "You've got low inclination to do the right thing" – that sort of thing, and I think I first saw it in studies of tobacco control.

Essentially, scientists would say, "We know the evidence of the nature of the problem – the biggest cause of preventable, communicable diseases, and non-communicable diseases, and death in the world. We know what works to reduce smoking in a population, so if governments aren't doing that it's either because tobacco companies are too powerful, and politicians don't have the will to face them or they don't have the courage to face the public when things may be unpopular."

So, you don't need sophisticated analysis to come up that kind of explanation, and I think when you look into why these things don't work, they are much more to do with the ever-present factors and political systems than they are to do with individuals who don't have good, moral character, or something like that.

Sue Regan: Gemma, what's your take on this, particularly when you think about it across sectors, so not just the politicians but other people who are striving to make changes in implementing policy?

Gemma Carey: I agree that the lack of political will phrase puts so much emphasis on a very small, elite group of actors when there are so many people working in the policy space, that it does feel a bit like a cop-out and we've seen in Australia really impressive ways that people have come together to create political will, as well, so the [?? 0:19:05] Accounts campaign was a really good example of that.

Sue Regan: And how do you think we can escape what often seems to happen, which is this vicious cycle of an incoming government being very enthusiastic, over-committing potentially

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and then becoming disenchanted when they realise that things are a bit harder than they thought in opposition. What can we do about that?

Gemma Carey: They should just run on Paul's platform.

[laughter]

Paul Cairney: I mean, I think part of the problem is--; There's this phrase, [?? 0:19:40], that I like to use, just because no one really knows what it means, but it's essentially these stories depend on the starting point. Now, I think part of the problem with the starting point we've gone for is that you'd ask questions like, "Why don't people listen to evidence of policy?" or "Why don't politicians follow through?" – that sort of thing, and I think really the question should be, "How can we as a country or society come together to cooperate?" – something like that.

And you say, "Okay, we will elect people to act on our behalf and we will do it at the central level because we have, for example, national identities with national governance, that sort of thing." And, as soon as you make that choice and you have elections and they sort of work – you know, whatever we think about politicians they do sort of work.

Then you think, "Well, that's success. It's a political success on a major scale that we shouldn't take for granted," and then I think everything else flows, everything else seems like a lack of success because people are focusing on their policy aims or their particular parts of the system without really releasing it to the success of a system as a whole.

There you are, it was super positive, wasn't it? Yes.

Martyn Pearce: While I've got you here, Paul, from the University of Sterling, I cannot resist asking you the question. You're talking about the quality of policy making and yet in the UK we've got Brexit playing out. What are your reflections on the quality of policy making and all of that?

Paul Cairney: [giggles] Well, thanks for that question. I think part of the issue--;

Okay, let me just one of many things. I think the UK government used to blame the European Union for lots of things that went wrong with the UK government, so there is nothing better to say to a population, "I know you don't like the sound of this thing like environmental regulations, but European Union is making us do," so that kind of thing is bad policy making, because they are not taking responsibility for their own actions. In fact, the UK government tended to get ahead of the European on most things, so we couldn't rely on that too much.

If you'd be more optimistic, which I'd like to be, is that you'd say, "Okay, here is an opportunity for the UK government to actually take responsibility for the things that it does, because it's clearly an elected government no longer part of our supernational body, so let's hope for a great accountability in the future."

Sue Regan: That's the most positive spin on Brexit, I think I've ever heard.

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[laughter]

Martyn Pearce: So, despite the challenges that we've identified today, do you think – and this is a question to both of you, I guess, but maybe we will start with you, Paul – are governments actually getting better in any of this stuff? I mean, how optimistic are you that at all that we'll see better policy making tomorrow than we do today?

Paul Cairney: I do think so. I mean, I think if we take the long-term view, governments have achieved remarkable things. The things I tend to study, tobacco control, since the post-War period in the '50s tobacco was something that was glamorous, it was a great economic product, lots of people smoked, and it was great for the Exchequer.

Now, in countries like Australia and the UK there's been a total transformation in policy and it has a major effect on people's attitudes to smoking. If you take a 30-year view, things worked well and part of that is to do with they've got better ways of gathering and processing information, so I wouldn't be too despondent.

I think part of the reason people are less optimistic is *[that]* you think, "Well, we've got so many ways to produce more evidence now and policy-makers don't seem to pay attention to it," and I think that part of the problem is our ability to produce and share information has gone astronomically high, but our ability to process it is the same.

We have not developed superhuman cognitive capabilities, so I think that's what people are seeing. The more good evidence we produce the more you have to ignore to make any choices, so it's going to look a bit weird.

Martyn Pearce: What about you, Gemma? Where do you stand? Are you optimistic or pessimistic that we'll see better policy making tomorrow than we do today?

Gemma Carey: I'm an insufferable optimist. I think *[that]* in the Australian context what's tricky about staying an optimist, though, is that we do see so much chopping and changing and at the political level. However, the crucial thing out of what Paul said, for me, is time so when we take that longer view and we get out of this very, very quick policy cycle, media policy cycle that we're in at the moment, we do see big gains and we do see huge movements in policy.

It's just that I think there is very high expectations for transformative policy change and for it to happen very quickly and – as Paul will note in his books, and podcasts, and everything else – that's the nature of most policy making. It's incremental. And so, when we look at it just in the shorter period of time it looks like a failure, but when you look at incremental change over a long period of time suddenly you can tell a better story about what's going on and see more clearly that we have had successes.

Martyn Pearce: But the rate of political change in Australia is accelerating rather than decelerating, so does that mean –

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Gemma Carey: Surely it can get faster.

[laughter]

Martyn Pearce: I'm sure there's capacity to still do so, so does that mean you're vaguely pessimistic about the ability to see better policy-making?

Gemma Carey: I'm not, because we've seen bipartisan support from major initiatives — and I'm going to say the [NDIS? 0:25:22], because that's what I spend all day every day thinking about at the moment. We had bipartisan support, but right now we have a government implementing a policy that it did not design, and we don't get that very often, so I think that's something to really hang on to.

Sue Regan: I think, on that bipartisan optimistic note, we should probably draw the conversation to a close. Thank you, that was a fascinating discussion. Firstly, thank you, Paul, for joining us.

Paul Cairney: My pleasure.

Sue Regan: Thanks to Gemma.

Gemma Carey: Thank you.

Martyn Pearce: Well, stay with us, listeners, because in part two, when we come back, we're going to be going over some of your questions and comments, and there are some real crackers in there. So, stay with us, we'll be right back.

[interval music 0:25:57-0:26:02]

Martyn Pearce: Welcome back, and thanks very much to our guests, Gemma Carey and Paul Cairney. I think it was a really fascinating discussion, with lots of really interesting points raised. Sue, what did you make of it all?

Sue Regan: Yes, it was fascinating. I thought we really started to get into what prevention might mean in policy making and the idea of intervening early to improve someone's outcomes in the longer term is extremely challenging but, obviously, intuitively very positive, and I think we were getting into some of the nitty-gritty of how challenging that is, both in terms of a policy and implementation front but also, as Paul was talking, about the politics of that, as well.

Martyn Pearce: Well, we're interested here what you thought of our discussion today, listeners, and you can get in contact with us on Twitter, where we are [APPSPolicyForum](#). You can find us on Facebook, where we are [asiapacificpolicysociety](#), or you can just shoot us through an email — we are podcast@policyforum.net. We'd love to hear your comments and thoughts about the stuff that we do.

As regular listeners will know, at the end of each podcast each week we go over some of those comments that we've received on social media or that we've received through our website,

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policyforum.net. Check it out, there are some great articles up there at the moment, and I want to just pick a few interesting comments that have come up our way over the last week.

The first was on the podcast that we did with Caren Grown from the World Bank. In our podcast, we heard from two leading figures working on the frontline of measuring and addressing global poverty, Caren and Sharon Bessell, Professor at Crawford School and Co-Lead of the ANU Individual Deprivation Measure and, of course, a regular presenter on this podcast, and there were a couple of really good comments.

The first from Pat, on Facebook, who says, “I’m proud of my lecturer, Sharon Bessell,” – I do wonder if that might have been uploaded by Sharon, to be honest, Sue.

The second was a comment from Naima [sp?] on Twitter, who said, “The End Poverty Pod with Caren Grown and Sharon Bessell was a great conversation. It’s a pleasure to hear some exciting changes happening in the World Bank and the IDM development in ANU. It would be great to have a longer conversation on the social protection topic.” What do you reckon about that? Should we do a podcast on social protection?

Sue Regan: Yes, I think it would be great to do a podcast on social protection. I think you could really build on what we heard in the podcast with Caren and Sharon. I mean, I think there is some really exciting developments in how we are measuring poverty at global level at the moment, and to dig deeper into that would be good. What do you think, Martyn?

Martyn Pearce: Yes, that sounds like a great idea. I also think it sounds like you’re volunteering yourself to do that podcast.

Sue Regan: Yes, sure thing.

Martyn Pearce: Great. Okay, that’s fantastic. Yes, we will certainly come back to that, and thanks so much for that suggestion, Naima [sp?]. We love hearing your ideas about podcasts that you would like us to do.

The second is another thing which involves Sharon, which was an article she wrote for PolicyForum-dot-net. It was called “*Measuring What Really Matters in Global Poverty*”, and she wrote it as the launch piece on the new section that she guest-editing on Policy Forum, which is called *Poverty in Focus*. Check it out.

There are some great articles on there already, but in this first piece, the launch piece, she writes about the individual deprivation measure, which we just talked about, and why the world has to measure things that really matter if it has any chance of eliminating poverty. We got a comment from Gilda [sp?] on Facebook.

It’s pretty long, so I’m not going to read the whole thing, but Gilda writes, “In our case, the Philippines, it might take some time to get out of the cash rate of Third World country. We are getting there, having all of this infrastructure and clean-up initiatives going on. This will

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encourage more tourism and we, Filipinos, still have high recognition when it comes to social education and attitudes. America still loves to invest and open businesses in the Philippines. We can speak English, are educated, hard workers are loyal and highly respected by Americans even if President Duterte is not, but because of our geography and weather, with the epicentre of all storms, we will be rebuilding non-stop, just to maintain our daily lives." What do you think about that, Sue?

Sue Regan: Well, I think Gilda's last comment was very insightful. There's often a link between natural disasters and poverty in countries that are investing hard in trying to improve the poverty levels in the country, then it can be hit with a national disaster and it's very easy for that country to go backwards. That can be the case, and has been the case, in the Philippines. But, yes, as Gilda says, there is a lot going for the Philippines, too, and I think we wish them well in terms of building the country.

Martyn Pearce: Now, the next article I want to take a look at is one which was written by Rod Broadhurst. It takes a very different type of issue, which is the issue of 3D-printed guns. It's called "*Downloading Firearms*". In it, Rod takes a look at how Australia can protect ourselves from this kind of future of 3D-printed guns.

There was a comment from Nathan, and Nathan writes, "I just don't see any way to prevent guns reaching the hands of the masses in the long term. Sooner or later everyone will have their own 3D-printer and blockchain technology will make it impossible to stop people downloading firearm blueprints. Will there be any way to stop people short of becoming a surveillance state like China?" What do you think about that?

Sue Regan: Well, I've got mixed feelings on this. I mean, in some ways 3D-printed guns is just another way of people being able to get hold of guns and there is already lots of different ways that you can get hold of a gun, but I do think it's the case that the governance and regulation of new and developing technologies is lagging behind, and we need to really be focusing on the potential of these technologies and the implications for what's possible. So, yes, I think he makes a good point.

Martyn Pearce: I mean, the rapid development of technology in this space, it's an absolute nightmare for legislators and policy-makers to keep hold of, particularly when you're talking about crossing borders and states within states having different legal systems. How on earth do we deal with that in the future?

Sue Regan: Yes, I mean I think it is, in some ways, impossible to keep up, but I know there were certainly huge efforts at international and global level to cooperate across borders. There's potential but, you're right, it's a new world we're in and it is extremely difficult to keep ahead of that.

Martyn Pearce: I wouldn't imagine for a second that would have ever downloaded a weapon, Sue, but what is the worst thing that you have ever downloaded on the Internet?

Hosts: Sue Regan and Martyn Pearce

Guests: Paul Cairney and Gemma Carey

[laughter]

Sue Regan: Ooh, what's the worst thing I've downloaded on the Internet? Do you know what, I've never even embarked on any illegal activity on the Internet, not downloaded a TV show that I shouldn't have done, so sorry to disappoint you, Martyn. My downloads are mainly cooking recipes or children's game activities, so sorry to disappoint.

Martyn Pearce: Are these legally acquired?

Sue Regan: Yes, completely.

Martyn Pearce: Well, that's good to hear that you are above the law.

[laughter]

I'm sorry for throwing that question at you then, Sue.

A big thank you to everyone who commented and left a question, and a reminder to keep sending them in, include your suggestions for future episodes of Policy Forum Pods. You can reach us on Twitter – [APPSPolicyForum](https://twitter.com/APPSPolicyForum), find us on Facebook – [asiapacificpolicysociety](https://www.facebook.com/asiapacificpolicysociety), or shoot us through an email – podcast@policyforum.net, and if you enjoyed today's episode then, perhaps, you might want to leave us a quick review on iTunes – it will only take you 30 seconds or so, and while you're there, click that five-star – that will be a big help to us in getting the word out about this podcast.

We will be back next week with another Policy Forum Pod. Until then, from me, Martyn Pearce, cheerio.

Sue Regan: And from me, Sue Regan, goodbye.