



## Understanding policy evolution using institutional grammar: net metering policies in the United States

**Authors: Graham Ambrose, Myriam Gregoire-Zawilski, Saba Siddiki, and Nicholas Oesterling**

This paper presents a method for tracing the evolution of policy over time using the Institutional Grammar (IG). This approach looks at changes to institutional statements found within policy texts, such as when statements are added or terminated, or when language within statements is modified. This is meant to systematically capture micro-level changes to policy that a more bird's-eye view might miss. The authors used net metering policies as a case study as they are changed regularly and have diverse policy designs, coding 39 policies from the states of Arkansas, California, Illinois, and Virginia.

### KEY FINDINGS

- The IG can be used to capture granular changes in policy texts at the institutional statement and IG component levels.
- A micro-level study of policy evolution can identify changes in policy that otherwise go overlooked.

### Capturing Policy Evolution Using the IG

Using the IG, the authors were able to measure not just how often net metering policies were changed and in what ways (i.e., addition, termination, or calibration), but also how features of those policies were changing. For instance, the authors observed that of Ostrom's seven rule types — aggregation, boundary, choice, information, payoff, position, and scope — choice and payoff rules both appeared and were amended more frequently. They also found that, among constitutive statements, the Constituting Properties were most likely to change, while the Direct Object and Context changed the most among regulative statements. Identifying such granular changes can help practitioners better understand where and how policy evolution is taking place and thus direct their efforts accordingly.

### Studying Policy Evolution at the Micro-Level

Studies of policy evolution focus on the macro- or meso-levels, looking at entire policies or at changes to policy goals, programs, and instruments. By using the IG to look at policy language, this paper shows the value of studying policy evolution at the micro-level. While a policy's goals or instruments may stay the same over time, there may be even small changes in language that substantially change the individuals or entities impacted by the policy, and how they are regulated.

For more information, please see Ambrose, G., Gregoire-Zawilski, M., Siddiki, S., & Oesterling, N. (2024). Understanding policy evolution using institutional grammar: net metering policies in the United States. *Policy Design and Practice*, 7(2), 227-249.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/25741292.2024.2342093>.

*This Research Case represents an interpretation of the original scholarship which was reviewed and approved by the original author(s).*