

## Comparative Public Policy: Using the Comparative Method to Advance Our Understanding of the Policy Process

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*Public policy scholars have stressed the importance and need for “comparing” since the 1970s—including comparing different policies, inputs, outputs, and outcomes across institutional settings. Broken down into three categories, this research note highlights recent work in comparative public policy. The first type of research is characterized by its use of the comparative method to answer two primary research questions: How do policies differ across countries, and why do they diverge? To do this, scholars in this category borrow from a myriad of literatures including economics, risk analysis, and cultural theory. The second and third categories of research add to this long-existing stream of scholarly work by using the comparative method to advance our understanding of the policy process. To achieve this, research focusing on the theories of the policy process includes two emerging trends: comparing theories across institutional configurations (how differing institutional arrangements affect policies), and comparing theories to one another (how different theories of the policy process help explain certain issues). By highlighting these recent publications, the goal of this essay is to encourage scholars from all three categories to collaborate and provide a further impetus to the subfield of comparative public policy.*

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The subfield of comparative public policy has experienced consistent development in the last half a century. Public policy scholars have stressed the importance of and need for “comparing” since the 1970s—including comparing different policies, inputs, outputs, and outcomes across institutional settings (Cyr & deLeon, 1975; Feldman, 1978; Leichter, 1977; Rose, 1991). For example, why do the United States and Britain, despite their common history, have dramatically different healthcare policies? Alternatively, does education policy follow a similar pattern in all developing countries? Adding to this long-existing stream of scholarly work, there has been a recent push towards using the comparative method to advance our understanding of the policy process. To achieve this, research focusing on the theories of the policy process includes two emerging trends: comparing theories across institutional configurations (how differing institutional arrangements affect policies), and comparing theories to one another (how different theories of the policy process help explain certain issues).<sup>1</sup>

This research note highlights recent work in comparative policy, focusing on three broad categories of scholarship. The first is characterized by its methodological use of comparison of differing policies across countries. The second and third types of research, those focusing on institutional configurations and theoretical comparisons, are characterized by their use of the comparative method in combination with the theories of the policy process. Broadly speaking, I argue that combining the two and building a bridge between the subfield of comparative public policy and the theories of the policy process is advantageous for two reasons. First, it encourages theoretical refinement by forcing policy scholars to think about how well the different theories can explain policy dynamics in different institutional settings. Second, it helps us to better define the boundaries and synergies associated with the theories by explicitly comparing them to one another and analyzing their ability to answer particular questions.

My discussion begins with a review of the first type of comparative public policy literature, for which the primary focus has been on comparison of policies outcomes both across nations and sub-nationally.<sup>2</sup> Following this, recent examples from two emerging trends in comparative public policy research are presented. This newer research is characterized by its focus on theories of the policy process, and how the comparative method can be applied to engender theory refinement and development. It includes work focusing on the comparison of theories across institutional configurations, as well as those that compare different theories to one another.<sup>3</sup> I conclude by summarizing the key points made in this review of the comparative public policy literature, and by suggesting some directions for future research. Specifically, I encourage scholars from traditional comparative policy and those studying the policy process more generally to collaborate and help add to our understanding of the policy process globally.

### **Existing Foundations: Comparing Policies in Different Institutional Settings**

Comparative public policy boasts a rich history of comparing cases across systems in order to establish general empirical connections between the characteristics of the system and the phenomenon under investigation. Based on Mill's method of difference or similarity, the logic of comparison is quite simple—if you have two systems that are similar but diverge on the dependent variable, you should look to the small number of differences in order to establish the reason for the divergence. By contrast, if you have two systems that are very different, but have experienced similar policy outcomes, you should look to the small number of similarities as a potential explanation for their similarity. Though predominantly used in order to draw inferences from small-N comparative case studies, the logic behind large-N multivariate statistics is rather similar. In both instances the research looks across systems in order to validate an inductively or deductively derived proposition about how the world works (Collier, 1993; Lijphart, 1971, 1975; Snyder, 2001).

Applying the comparative method, a large group of comparative public policy scholars study divergent policy outcomes in different countries. They generally focus on two primary research questions. First, *how* are policies different across

countries? Is healthcare policy in Germany and France the same? If not, how is it different? Second, scholars focus on *why* these policies are different. For instance, when looking at social policy in two countries, why is it that one country adopted welfare-driven policies geared towards social equity, whereas the other country favored market-driven policies? In answering these questions, scholars focus on a wide variety of substantive issues. What unites this category of scholarship is the *methodological* focus on comparing the countries to understand their divergent (or convergent) policy choices.<sup>4</sup> For example, Heclo (1974) studies social politics in Britain and Sweden, specifically focusing on the development of unemployment benefits, old age pensions, and superannuation. To answer the first question of how these policies are different, Heclo traces the historical economic and constitutional development in these countries, describing and interpreting the people, processes, and events that might explain the current state of these policies. Moving on to the why question, he considers factors such as public opinion, electoral institutions, party and interest group inputs, as well as role of the bureaucracy. He finds that three interconnected forces help to explain the policy differences—cumulative historical events and choices, key people or entrepreneurs, and the activity of bureaucracy and interest groups.

Similarly, Steinmo (2003) studies the way in which policy ideas, beliefs, values and material interests interact to explain the evolution of taxation during the 20th century in the United States as well as abroad. To explain how these policies are different across countries, Steinmo traces their historical evolution and examines the way that past knowledge and decisions shape future choices. Adding substantially to the historical institutionalism literature, he explores the role of path dependence in explaining key differences in these policies. His description of the evolution of taxation policy is significant because it illustrates how these countries came to choose the path that they did. In other words, he explains how beliefs about “good” taxation policy emerged. For his second question of why these policies look so different, Steinmo presents three independent variables—ideas (problem solutions), beliefs (interpretations), and values (basic normative preferences). He argues that these three factors interact to shape the selection process between available policy alternatives as well as how past policies and institutions limit the choices at hand.<sup>5</sup>

Recent work in this category of comparative public policy covers a wide variety of topics ranging from more general issues like social and environmental policy to specific topics like water and nuclear energy policy.<sup>6</sup> Much like the examples described above, these scholars attempt to understand how and why different governments make the choices they do. For example, Lodge (2011) studies national regulatory responses to food crisis in Denmark, Germany, and the United States. To understand why these responses differ markedly, he utilizes literature on risk regulation, exploring three possible explanations—national policy patterns (influenced by institutional structures), political panics or “knee-jerk reactions” to media coverage, and responses based on dominant characterization of the country such as regulatory, neo-liberal, and welfare state. Using a grid-group methodology derived from cultural theory (Douglas & Wildavsky, 1982), the article presents an interesting comparative public policy, which can help us understand the connection between policy and risk.

Along similar lines, Okma et al. (2010) study the different healthcare policy outcomes in six mid-sized industrialized countries—Chile, Israel, Singapore, Switzerland, Taiwan, and the Netherlands. Their primary research question is why these six countries, with similar pressures and policy options, chose to reform their health care sectors so differently. The authors borrow concepts such as funding, contracting, and payment from economic theory and combine them with factors such as the history of healthcare reform in each country, its national culture, as well as unique institutional settings to explain these differences in policy outcomes. Weaver (2010) studies the evolution of public pension policies in Western industrial countries, including Sweden, Germany, the United States, Canada, and Britain. After describing how these policies differ, he analyzes why the differences came about. He argues that the survival rate of pension regimes in these countries depends on three factors—the balance between positive and negative feedback effects, incremental reform options availability, and whether there were any regime transition alternatives. Lodge and Wegrich (2010) analyze the Europeanized food safety regime in Denmark and Germany, asking what role different logics of governance—multi-level governance, the regulatory state, and performance management—play in the food safety industry. Comparing the German “legalistic” administrative culture to the more egalitarian policy style found in Denmark provides for an interesting analysis.<sup>7</sup>

In contrast to the kinds of studies that compare policies across nations, another group of articles is set apart by its application of the comparative methodology in a *sub*-national setting. For example, Zumeta (2011) analyzes state policies and varying private higher education models found in different states within the United States. The primary purpose of his article is to present the varying policy designs, and to then come up with a framework to categorize these differences in a coherent manner. In other words, Zumeta focuses specifically on answering the *how* question, leaving the *why* question open for future research. He achieves this goal by dividing the policies into three clusters: *laissez-faire*, central planning, and market competitive postures. What makes this project interesting is the institutional context within which the research is set up—the private higher education sector in the United States remains mainly under the purview of state governments, not the national government. Given the federal nature of the U.S. government and the high degrees of autonomy granted to the states vis-à-vis higher education policies, there exist a diverse variety of policy outcomes. Although this article does not ask why these policies evolve the way they do, it does answer the how question and provides a useful tool for categorizing these outcomes.

The type of comparative policy research described in this section is extremely useful for three reasons. First, it explores public policy outcomes in different contexts, providing added variation on the dependent variable—explaining policy choices. Second, this form of research methodology helps to identify crucial patterns that can then be used to draw important inferences for explaining variations in patterns—the initial step in theorizing. Finally, comparative policy research makes it possible to identify major outliers and interesting anomalies. Cases that cannot be explained by the same set of variables or that do not fit the same pattern can prove extremely valuable for a developing a nuanced understanding of the policy process.

Even though this type of research is indispensable, it does not explicitly utilize (or seek to build upon) theories of the policy process when explaining divergent policy outcomes. Rather, these scholars employ broad theoretical frameworks borrowed from various strands of literature like risk analysis, cultural theory, economic theory, and path dependence. This approach widens the gap between comparative policy scholars and those who focus on theories of the policy process to understand policy dynamics. Because different terms and concepts are used in their research, comparativists and policy scholars are prone to talk past each other, leaving the collaborative potential of their research unrealized.

The research described in the next two sections uses the comparative method combined *explicitly* with the theories of the policy process. Doing so, as the next sections illustrate, not only enhances our understanding of how and why policies are different across countries, it also advances our understanding of the policy process more generally.

### **Emerging Trends: Comparing Theories Across Institutional Configurations**

This emerging trend in comparative public policy is different from the research presented in the earlier section in two ways: first, it tends to focus more on the why question when comparing divergent policy outcomes. Second, in doing so, it explicitly uses theories of the policy process to explain the process and the choices made in each case. For policy theory scholars, the interest in varying institutional settings originated over the past decade during which time they became increasingly interested in specifying the institutional configurations that govern policy processes. For example, ACF scholars have wrestled with questions about the extent to which their model can be applied to non-pluralistic settings. To account for these differences, they have modified the ACF to account for “coalition opportunity structures” (Sabatier & Weible, 2007). They understand that institutional configurations govern these processes, including variations in the degree of consensus necessary for policy change and the openness of the political system. Although this is an improvement, scholars have noted that future research should focus *explicitly* on the way in which these structures moderate the relationship between external parameters and coalition activity within the subsystem (Weible et al., 2011). Some scholars have moved in this direction by applying the ACF in different institutional settings. For example, Hirschi and Widmer (2010) apply the ACF to Swiss foreign policy. Similarly, Nohrstedt (2010) applies the ACF to Swedish nuclear energy policy. However, their current work focuses on a single case, and does not systematically compare that case to other countries. As researchers continue in this direction, it is critical to design our studies so as to maximize institutional variation by including multiple cases—one case limits our analytical leverage. This is where the following research, which compares theories across institutional configurations, adds to our understanding of the policy process.

In their recent article, Baumgartner et al. (2009) employ a comparative approach to study the policy process in different political systems—Belgium, Denmark, and the United States. Their main research question is whether governmental efficiency

and the level of institutional friction differs across countries based on institutional configuration.<sup>8</sup> According to the authors, whether an issue gains enough attention to arrive on the political agenda is contingent upon a number of things. These range from institutional configuration, party system, and constitutional framework, to which party is in power, and how many big issues (like the “war on terror”) are on the table. Having extensively studied the impact of institutions in the United States, the authors have recently moved towards a more comparative analysis.<sup>9</sup> Both Belgium and Denmark are significantly different from the United States in their political set-up, and comparing them to the United States opens up a wide gamut of comparative questions for future research. For instance, are parliamentary systems inherently built to produce less friction? Do federalism and multiple veto-points help or hinder the efficiency, effectiveness, and responsiveness of the policy-making process?

Maximizing institutional variation in a single study allows Baumgartner et al. (2009) to more fully explore the ways in which different configurations moderate the relationship between policy inputs and policy outputs. The study demonstrates that the level of friction and punctuation in politics is applicable to countries beyond the United States, and that these punctuations are not affected by the differences in inputs. This line of research opens up several avenues for future comparative policy research—for example, why do policy cycles look so similar across different institutional configurations? It also highlights the need to focus on the political *processes* across cases rather than just static political systems. Following this article, a few scholars have launched a policy dynamics program to measure policy attention and policy action uniformly across nations (Baumgartner, Jones, & Wilkerson, 2011).<sup>10</sup> The study includes government indicators from 11 countries, covering multiple issues, and ranging over long periods of time. Their main research question is—what factors determine “attention shifts” and the subsequent policy actions? The possible factors that may affect these shifts include elections, institutional design, information processing, and other country- and time-specific effects on policy change. The value of their comparative project lies in its ability to compare collective decision making across different institutions. They demonstrate that varying institutional and communication patterns play a big role in how collective policy decisions are made. Combined together, the relatively fixed preferences and institutional rules, along with the “moving” information flow, provide for an interesting comparative policy dynamics theory.

Another good example of this emerging trend is an article by Jones et al. (2009) in which the authors examine existing trends in public budgeting across different countries. The article studies the ups and downs in public budgets, analyzing whether they follow a consistent pattern, or whether they differ based on variations in political systems. The findings indicate that both presidential and parliamentary political systems reflect similar budgetary patterns, with shifts that are consistent with punctuated equilibrium. Still, crucial differences remain among the countries depending on the type of political system—federal and presidential systems like the United States are expected to experience higher institutional friction compared to unitary or parliamentary systems. How and why does this varying friction affect



collective decision making and policy outputs? The authors hypothesize that institutional friction decreases under parliamentary governments with a single-party majority, a unicameral legislature, and a unitary state. In contrast, presidential governments with a multi-party coalition, a bicameral legislature, and a federal state would generally experience more friction. The findings in Jones et al. (2009) are consistent with these hypotheses, illustrating that political systems with an increasing number of decision-making bodies have a “greater degree of punctuatedness in budgetary policy” (p. 869).

Similarly, Boothe and Harrison (2009) compare environmental policy making in the United States and Canada using existing lessons about the effect of institutional settings on agenda setting, as well as the Social Construction framework (SC) (Schneider & Ingram, 1993; Stone, 1989). In particular, the authors question why U.S. policy has become increasingly geared towards children’s environmental health and why the Canadian government has not followed the same path. Using an institutional explanation, the article argues that the difference in the two policies can be explained by the different governmental structures in the two countries. Specifically, the U.S. presidential system provides more room for entrepreneurial maneuvering while the Canadian parliamentary system is more constrained. Combining this institutional variation with lessons from SC, the authors present some interesting findings. The focus on children’s health in the United States, they conclude, is primarily a result of the entrepreneurial freedom accorded to American legislators, as well as the ability of U.S. environmentalists to reframe national environmental policy bringing the focus on children’s well-being. These incentives and opportunities were missing in the Canadian context, leaving the politicians unable to affect the tone of the national environmental policy. In other words, while institutional settings are an important factor for explaining varying policy outcomes, the authors argue that it is crucial to recognize the way in which path dependence and past ideological biases can affect issue construction.

In sum, the articles described in this section are similar in their motivation to compare policy process and outcomes across countries, specifically employing theories of the public policy process.<sup>11</sup> The next section presents a second emerging trend, which is characterized by its comparison of the different theories of the policy process to one another.

### **Emerging Trends: Comparing Theories to One Another**

In addition to testing existing policy theories in multiple settings and studying the way in which institutional configurations influence policy dynamics, some policy scholars have begun questioning whether we have too many theories. In a recent article, Meier (2009) expresses concerns about the existing policy theories and the role they play in our current research. Among other things, he argues that policy scholars should aim to define the scope and orientation of our theories. In addition to studying specific areas of policy research, he recommends that policy scholars look towards bigger and broader theoretical questions. For example, not only should we study policy areas like taxation and environment, but also seek out what our theories can

teach us about policy adoption, policy implementation, and policy impact more generally. Doing so, according to Meier, will help determine which theories are better suited to answer which kinds of questions. In other words, in order to gain “theoretical leverage,” research should be guided towards highlighting broader patterns.

There are two approaches to solving this problem: one is to compare theories in a relatively abstract theoretical way, and the other is to compare them to one another when answering a specific question. Taking the first approach, Schlager (2007) and Real-Dato (2009) have done an excellent job of comparing the various components of existing frameworks. Schlager compares theories of the policy process to each other, highlighting the way they use such concepts as rationality, individuals, and institutions. She also illustrates how these theories differ in the way that they describe and explain policy change. Similarly, Real-Dato’s work focuses on how the theories of the policy process have evolved without much “communication across theoretical boundaries,” proposing a synthesized theoretical framework incorporating the strengths and weaknesses of each approach. However, their research remains relatively abstract in that it focuses on theoretical underpinnings of the policy process, rather than explicitly applying it to substantive questions. For example, which of the theories can better explain taxation policy in developing nations? To answer this question and fit within the category of research described in this section, scholars would have to incorporate and compare two or more theories of the policy process in their framework. Accordingly, this section focuses on a second emerging trend wherein studies compare frameworks, theories, and models to answer substantive research questions. For instance, which theory better explains nuclear energy policy in India, and why? Or, which theory of the policy process best explains health care policy in the United States, and why?

A recent article by Ness (2010) demonstrates what this form of research would look like. The research question motivating his article is—how do states determine merit aid eligibility criteria to assign college funding? To answer this question, Ness draws upon three competing theories of policy making, the advocacy coalition framework (ACF), multiple streams (MS), and the electoral connection (EC) framework. In doing so, he explicitly compares the ability of each theory to answer his research question. For example, does policy change occur as the result of external events or policy-oriented learning that lead to a shift in the core beliefs of advocacy coalitions (Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith, 1993)? Or, does the policy streams framework advanced by Kingdon (1995) better explain patterns in policy design? Finally, does the EC framework advanced by Fenno (1978) and Mayhew (2004)—which argues that policy results from the action of elected officials who are constantly seeking reelection—better explain merit aid criteria adopted?

To answer these questions, Ness (2010) compares merit-aid policies in three states—New Mexico, Tennessee, and West Virginia—across a number of dimensions that operationalize different elements of the aforementioned theoretical frameworks. In doing so, he finds that MS is the most useful theoretical framework to understand and explain the merit-aid policy. Specifically, Ness finds that the core elements of MS existed in each of the three cases, including the combination of problems, policies, and politics; the role of influential policy entrepreneurs; and the unpredictability of



policy windows. However, his findings do not completely disregard the other frameworks, which also offer some explanatory value. He argues that there is no evidence that advocacy coalitions in the three cases united by their core beliefs were the most important actors within the subsystem. Rather, he finds that individuals who floated in and out of coalitions were the dominant actors. Still, he finds that the ACF better accounts for the way in which states learn about merit-aid policies over time, how they are influenced by external information of policy adoptions in other states, and the broader influences like public opinion and electoral shifts. Similarly, even though the EC framework does not provide a comprehensive answer to the research question, it does help highlight the motivations of legislators in a crucial way. Ness discovered that politicians were frequently supporting merit aid policies based on their constituents' needs, hinting that re-election was their primary interest.

Integrating all of these elements from each theory, Ness (2010) designs a revised MS model for explaining merit-aid criteria adoption. In this model, the role played by individual policy actors is highlighted, especially in times when they can push their agenda forward (during open policy windows) by combining the politics and the problems of the issue. He adds the elements of external learning from the policies adopted in other states to this model, arguing that the impact of knowledge from other sources plays a big role in explaining the policy-making process. Finally, Ness stresses the value of re-election for legislators, describing how the credit claiming and position taking activities complete the picture. This revised framework better answers his research question, but more importantly, it forces policy scholars to think of these theories in a more malleable way. In other words, the theories are not mutually exclusive, and comparisons such as these help advance and refine theories. Fittingly, Ness encourages future scholarship to conduct similar comparative research, including comparisons between his modified MS model to other theories of the policy process. This emerging trend of research is crucial for a number of reasons—it helps to define the scope of each theory (which theories are well suited to answer which types of questions), it also helps to refine existing theoretical frameworks by testing them against each other in different contexts. The empirically testable hypotheses that can be derived using the comparative method facilitate theory refinement, as long as the tests are transparent, replicable, and inter-subjectively reliable. Finally, studies similar to Ness's project help to further theory development because they demonstrate each theory's abilities and highlight their weaknesses, which can then be revised and assimilated with other theories where possible.

Another study that does an excellent job of comparing different theories of the policy process to gain analytical and explanatory leverage is a recent article by Weible, Siddiki, and Pierce (2011). In this piece, the authors compare two theoretical frameworks—Social Construction (SC) and the ACF—by applying them to a case study of water and land policy in the Lake Tahoe Basin located in the United States. The authors are particularly interested in comparing intergroup perceptions in adversarial and collaborative contexts, and how well these can be explained by the two theories. Drawing from the SC (Schneider & Ingram, 1993, 1997) framework, the authors hypothesize that intergroup perceptions will be more positively and powerfully constructed in a collaborative context as compared to an adversarial one. By

comparison, the ACF suggests that a collaborative context should result in a decrease in the number of actors experiencing a devil shift and an increase in the number of actors experiencing an angel shift. The authors find that with respect to the SC framework, the primary hypothesis holds true, i.e., respondents perceive groups positively and powerfully once a collaborative context is in place. Tests of the ACF proposition show support for a decrease in the number of actors experiencing the devil shift in a collaborative context.

This article is illustrative of the advantages of comparing two theoretical frameworks—it leads researchers toward specific observations, testing, and interpretation (Sabatier, 2007). More importantly, this article demonstrates the way in which comparing theories to one another can elucidate the often overlooked synergies that exist between competing theoretical frameworks. Both SC and ACF point to similar conclusions: intergroup perceptions are more positive in a collaborative context, everyone benefits from this shift, and collaborative contexts lead to better relations among groups through increased positivity and shared power. Furthermore, using theoretical comparisons for analyzing public policy helps to clarify the relative strengths and weaknesses of the theoretical frameworks. The authors point out that the mechanisms associated with the changes in intergroup perceptions remain underdeveloped. While the ACF would argue that the source of this shift lies at the individual level, SC posits that the shift takes place at the inter-subjective group level. Comparing the two frameworks highlights these nuanced differences, providing important and interesting research questions for future research.

### Conclusion: Future Directions

As presented in this note, the subfield of comparative public policy is booming, opening up exciting avenues for new scholarship. Broken down into three sections, recent comparative policy research includes comparisons of policies across institutional settings (how is the Canadian environmental policy different from the United States'), using policy theories to compare issues across contexts (can the ACF explain the evolution of nuclear energy policy in both France and India), and comparing theories to each other (which theory—Punctuated Equilibrium (PE), ACF, MS, Institutional Analysis and Development (IAD)—can better explain healthcare policy in Germany). The first type of research is characterized by its use of the comparative method to study divergent policies across countries. It is driven by two primary research questions—*how* policies differ across contexts, and *why* they are different. To answer these questions, the scholars in this category tend to borrow from a myriad of other fields (risk analysis, cultural theory, and economics). In contrast, the latter two sections are “emerging trends” and their explicit use of the theories of the policy process makes them different from the first category of research. For example, the Comparative Studies of Policy Dynamics project launched by Baumgartner et al. (2011) uses PE, applying it to multiple institutional settings in different countries. Similarly, Ness (2010) uses three different theories (ACF, MS, and EC) to explain merit aid policies in different U.S. states.

As noted by scholars like Meier (2009), Real-Dato (2009), and Schlager (2007), there is an increasing need to recognize the ways in which theories of the policy process can be synthesized and/or refined, including an understanding of which theories work best for certain issue areas. The articles summarized in the second and third sections of the research note illustrate how using the comparative method can help us better understand the policy process and achieve these goals. Accordingly, this note encourages more scholars to jump on this bandwagon and focus their research on how to employ the emerging trends that are highlighted here. Of course, there is always a trade-off associated with combining two or more theoretical frameworks. On the one hand, the simplicity associated with using one theoretical lens lends itself to easier operationalization and greater generalizability (Waltz, 1959). On the other hand, synthesizing different frameworks can help solve complex, nuanced problems. By engaging in the latter, we run the risk of losing parsimony that some view as crucial for scientific explanations. However, an attempt to synthesize also forces us to look beyond the boundaries of any particular theory to acknowledge the possible merits of other existing theoretical frameworks. In sum, the research presented in this note is a call for more scholars from both comparative policy and the broader policy theory fields to look beyond their boundaries, borrowing from each other to promote theoretical development.

Not only are these trends a substantial addition to the existing comparative policy literature, they also serve as a potential tool to bridge the gap between the fields of comparative politics and public policy more generally. In addition to building new bridges, scholars should continue adding to the existing trends within comparative public policy, focusing on new ways to study issues across institutional settings. These valuable pieces are a constant reminder of how significant concepts such as institutions and path dependence are for explaining a country's policy adoption choices. Finally, scholars from both genres would gain a great deal from collaboration, producing research that combines the conventional wisdoms of comparative public policy with the theories of the policy process.

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup> The two emerging trends highlighted here do not encompass all the developments in the sub-field of comparative public policy. Rather, they are used to illustrate the advantages of building a bridge between comparative policy and the existing theories of the policy process. These trends were identified by systematically reviewing last year's *Policy Studies Journal Yearbook*, as well as major comparative policy journals including *Journal of Comparative Policy Analysis* and *Comparative Political Studies* over the last two years. In addition, I also reviewed several recent issues of major political science and public policy journals for any relevant pieces such as *Policy Studies Journal*, *Journal of Public Policy*, and *American Journal of Political Science*.

- <sup>2</sup> A review of recent developments in the sub-field of comparative public policy can be organized in multiple ways—it is a diverse area of research that includes comparing public policies, ranging more macro analysis of economic-structural variables in the field of comparative political economy to a more micro understanding of particular policy domains such as education policy. This research note focuses on more general studies using the comparative method to understand policy outcomes in varying institutional settings. These include both macro and micro analyses of institutional and structural variables, social belief systems, and individual factors that determine policy outcomes. The goal is to highlight the methodological commonalities that unite scholarship in this sub-field and then present the new trends that connect the comparative method to the theories of the policy process. Even though some of the big questions targeted by several comparative policy scholars—redistribution, unemployment, inequality, and state capacity—play a crucial role in the evolution of the discipline, the scope of this research note does not permit their inclusion. For more on the sub-field of comparative political economy (CPE), see Esping-Anderson (1990), Katzenstein (1985), Williamson (1985), Boix (1998), and Pontusson (1995).
- <sup>3</sup> This research note attempts to highlight some of the most recent and interesting scholarship on these types published in the last two years. It is by no means meant to be an exhaustive review of this literature. Rather, I use selected articles to help highlight recent trends.
- <sup>4</sup> The literature presented in this section highlights the common “methodological” focus of comparative policy scholarship. The research note attempts to demonstrate the breadth of substantive areas covered by comparative policy scholars such as health policy, welfare policy, education policy, environmental policy, and energy policy. Research focusing on issues such as representation, inequality, redistribution, state capacity is significant but not central to this review article. For example, in addition to recent research in specific substantive areas, comparative policy scholars continue to wrestle with bigger issues such as public opinion, representation, and responsiveness in various types of democracies. For one such example, see Soroka and Wlezien (2009) who examine the dynamics between public opinion and policy feedbacks in the United States, UK, and Canada. In particular, the authors are interested in the relationship between public responsiveness and policy representation, and how this differs across countries, issues, and over time. The authors use a comparative time series analysis to answer their research question, which provides them with leverage on their dependent variables—representation and responsiveness. John, Bevan, and Jennings (2011) provide another example of this type of comparative research. In order to uncover the role of institutions in the extent to which public opinion influences policy making, the authors compare the responsiveness of legislative outputs in the UK and Scotland. They find that the British devolution to the Scottish parliament in 1999 has considerably weakened the link between public opinion and policy responsiveness in the UK. In contrast, the authors do not find any evidence of a statistically significant link between the variables in Scotland. Other recent examples of comparative political economy scholarship include Ahlquist (2011), Niemi (2010), Doyle (2010), Mintrom (2009), Gilbert (2009), and Conteh (2009).
- <sup>5</sup> For other examples of prominent comparative policy research, see Leichter (1979), Wilensky and Turner (1987), Castles (1988), Immergut (1992), and Weaver and Rockman (1993).
- <sup>6</sup> On social policy, see Del Pino and Calzada (2011) and Jacobs (2009). For research on comparative water policy, see Aubin (2011). For a recent example of comparative environmental research, see Balme (2011) and Kochtcheeva (2009), Campbell (2010), and Szarka (2010). On food safety and pharmaceutical policy, see Chaqués and Palau (2009). On healthcare policy, see Roberts (2009), Kodate (2010), and White (2010). On comparative policy performance, see Jahn and Müller-Rommel (2010). On comparative policy entrepreneurship, see Baker and Steuernagel (2009). On science and technology policy, see Rothmayr (2009), Sheingate (2009), and Ireni-Saban (2010).
- <sup>7</sup> On other recent examples of comparative policy analysis on issues surrounding the European Union, see Thatcher (2011); Fontana (2011); Callanan (2011); de Ruijter (2010); Jakobsen (2010); Di Lucia and Kronsell (2010); Lavenex, Lehmkuhl, and Wichmann (2009); Maggetti (2009) and Falkner (2010).
- <sup>8</sup> The concept of friction originated in the authors’ earlier work on politics of attention, where they argue that certain issues emerge to the political agenda while others get marginalized (Jones & Baumgartner, 2005).
- <sup>9</sup> For a similar study, also see Breunig, Koski, and Mortenson (2010), in which the authors compare budgetary systems in Denmark and the United States using Jones and Baumgartner’s (2005) model of disproportionate information processing.

<sup>10</sup> Other contributors to this project include Mortenson et al. (2011); Jennings et al. (2011); Vliegthart and Walgrave (2011); Breunig (2011); and Chaqués-Bonafont and Palau-Roqué (2011).

<sup>11</sup> For another good example of a comparative analysis of comparative analysis using the Punctuated Equilibrium Theory, see Jensen's (2009) study of welfare state theory in 18 Western countries.

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