

Comparative Public Policy

Comparative public policy is an important area of study cutting across major disciplines in social science. It carries both academic and policy significance. In recent years, it is gaining strength and influence because of the growing awareness of the limitation of traditional academic disciplines in policy applications and the pressing need to acquire theory-guided and empirically proven knowledge for resolving serious policy problems under a globalized environment.

Comparative public policy is an area of interdisciplinary study which uses public policy as its major unit of analysis for comparison across different systems and institutions, usually countries or governments. It typically asks questions about how, why, and to what effect different governments pursue different or similar policies. It faces problems of contested identities of method versus field and the lack of a coherent and comprehensive theoretical framework. These problems are being addressed by its emerging research, which also contributes to the creation of integrated and impactful knowledge in social science.

The interdisciplinary nature of comparative public policy is both a curse and a gift. It can enrich the content and perspectives of comparative public policy on the one hand but also cause concerns of overlapping boundaries and confused identities with other studies and disciplines.

Comparative public policy is distinct from other terms like comparative politics, and comparative public administration. They are all distinctive because they all have their uniqueness in terms of concerns or theoretical lens. At the same time, they are also interrelated as they do share some overlapping elements. One obvious example is all of them adopt comparative approaches and methods in the general arena of research in social science.

Major classification of comparative studies

field	Unit of analysis	Core discipline (s)
comparative public policy	Public policy	Interdisciplinary
comparative politics	Political systems and institutions	Political science
comparative public administration	Bureaucracy, Administration, and governance systems	Interdisciplinary