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Struggle and Triumph in Fusing Policy Process and Comparative Research

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Policymaking is characterized by general patterns not restricted to one or a few jurisdictions, policy domains, or institutional constellations. This chapter concentrates on a specific subgroup of this literature—comparative research drawing on the theories of the policy process—and strives to discuss its challenges and opportunities. This is an important endeavor because good science demands examination of the generalizability of theories and their findings to other institutional and political contexts. For scholars and practitioners alike, it is crucial to understand the conditions that bound hypotheses developed from the theories. It is likewise important to understand the major implications of theories for understanding comparative politics and public policy. Just as the past decades of research have taught us much about these bounding conditions, they have also offered a wealth of broad and well-founded generalizations that chip away the country-specific exceptionalism common in comparative policy studies.

The field of public policy has witnessed tremendous growth in the last thirty years, and much of the recent growth has been in developing and testing comparative extensions of the theories. These extensions were triggered by improved availability of data and innovative ways for gathering and analyzing data, for instance, by means of multimethod designs (e.g., Wolf 2010) and the adoption of concepts and methodologies from neighboring disciplines such as behavioral and communication sciences (e.g., Shafir 2013; Jones 2003). This has moved public policy closer to adjacent fields such as comparative and international political economy and, more recently, political psychology. Tsebelis's (2002) concept of institutional veto players has been particularly important for strengthening the comparative perspective on public policy. In the

Western European context, political parties and the assessment of their policy preferences—which concurs with Tsebelis's veto player theory—have been the focal explanatory variables of many studies and the bridge to comparative politics, which became further strengthened by the Comparative Agendas Project (see Baumgartner, Green-Pedersen, and Jones 2006; Green-Pedersen and Walgrave 2014).

This chapter offers an entrée to comparative policy process research. It begins by explicating the fundamental challenges of theoretical and empirical extensions of the policy process theories. The theories have followed unique trajectories in addressing institutions, interest group politics and advocacy, and issue-specific politics in comparative perspective. These unique trajectories deepen our understanding of issues, interests, and institutions and their impact on the dynamics of public policy (May, Sapotichne, and Workman 2006). We argue, however, that the comparative policy processes approach has arrived at a precipice where we can now make several generalizations about how institutions influence policy dynamics, the sets of issues that governments of all types face, and the form of politics within substantively specific issue areas. The comparative policy process theories owe their successes in large part to an expansive conception of what constitutes comparative research. The array of approaches yields useful lessons for the development of policy process theorizing in classic country-comparative studies. On the one hand, the approaches facilitate a more demanding empirical test of the causal mechanisms underlying policy process theories and therefore help to increase confidence in their analytical merits. On the other, the concepts and findings challenge existing theories and potentially further develop studies of the policy process. This chapter also addresses what we have learned and what is left to do.

CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL CHALLENGES

For a straightforward structuring of this treatise, we follow Weible's (2017) introductory chapter in this book and the definition of policy process research he gives, which is "the study of the interactions that occur over time between public policies and surrounding actors, events, contexts, and outcomes." Working from this definition, we can identify and discuss a set of conceptual categories that group the various challenges in conducting comparative policy process research.

Public Policies

From the literature, one might suspect that there is no debate about what public policies actually are. Yet the first and perhaps most fundamental challenge in comparative policy process research remains identifying what will be compared. Will the same policy be compared across different contexts or different points in time? Will different policies be compared in similar contexts, or will the same outcomes from different public policies be compared? And so forth.

Comparative public policy research has adopted a pragmatic approach to the question of what constitutes a public policy; there is agreement that the *content* rather than the *form* matters. It is rarely the case that comparative analyses systematically differentiate whether a public policy is an executive or a legislative act—both forms are treated as policies. In most cases, it is assumed that the causal mechanism responsible for the way a given policy outcome cuts is partisan ideology (e.g., Schmidt 1996; Huber and Stephens 2001), which should matter in the same way as a heuristic devise for choosing among different policy options regardless of the type of legal act adopted (but see Fankhauser, Gennaioli, and Collins 2015, 2016). In other cases, a variable captures the institutional arrangements leading to a public policy.

In contrast, court decisions are usually treated as instances of political agenda setting or triggers of policy change (e.g., Black and Owens 2009), but not as policies in the narrow sense. Nonetheless, the implications are the same: the involvement of courts is captured conceptually and empirically—if not when assessing the dependent variable, then when developing the conceptual model and identifying the relevant explanatory variables.

Concern for the form of public policy versus the substantive content of public policy is reflected in, and motivates, the process theories under consideration here. One could, in fact, arrange the theories in terms of their attention to the form, institutional configuration, or substance of public policies. At one end of the continuum would fall the Institutional Analysis and Development (IAD) framework, which emphasizes the institutional configuration and form of public policies. Such institutional configurations are often studied through different arrangements of the rule typology, as rules-in-form in written public policies or as rules-in-use (see Ostrom 2011; Schlager and Cox 2017, Chapter 6 in this volume). Although the IAD framework has often been adapted to public goods, particularly common pool resource issues, the framework emphasizes the institutional configurations that arise from decision dependency and repeated social interactions that promote institutional rules and norms that structure policy outputs.

The Punctuated Equilibrium Theory (PET) occupies the middle ground. It attempts to mesh together an understanding of institutional forms, particularly delegation and organization in policymaking systems, and the substantive content of issue agendas (see Baumgartner and Jones 1993; Baumgartner, Jones, and Mortensen 2017, Chapter 2, this volume). With regard to the latter, substantive content has been measured by means of budgets for specific policy areas (e.g., Jones et al. 2009) as well as for issues included in the political agendas of policymakers or the mass media (e.g., Walgrave, Soroka, and Nuytemans 2008). In PET, the institutional arrangements are often the driving force in the various degrees of leptokurtosis in agenda and policy dynamics across political systems.

Anchoring the other end of the continuum are the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF) and Multiple Streams Framework (MSF), both of which devote much more attention to understanding the role of particular actors and the competition among actors as they intersect with issue-specific policy problems. These theories focus much less on institutional forms and organization, assuming their effects lie in the background, with actor characteristics (e.g., beliefs) brought to the theoretical foreground. In fact, one could argue that the MSF strives to overcome the notion of the structuring role of institutions for interactions between actors. As Herweg, Zahariadis, and Zohlnhöfer (2017, Chapter 1, this volume) argue, the MSF is based on the idea of fluid participation, which means that the composition of decision making bodies is subject to constant change. From this perspective, institutions are thought to play a less prominent role in policymaking compared with actors. By the same token, MSF pays considerable attention to the content of policies, as indicated by one of the three streams being denoted the policy stream.

The individual policy process theories emphasize the form or the institutions to varying degrees when explaining the outcomes of policymaking. However, this leaves the question of how to define public policy in a way that is conducive to comparative research. An approach adopted by many comparative studies is the conceptual framework put forward by Hall (1993), who differentiates between policy instruments, their settings, and the hierarchy of goals behind policies, also known as policy paradigms. Despite the existence of this widely embraced approach (e.g., Knill, Schulze, and Tosun 2012), defining what exactly a policy is continues to pose a challenge for comparative research.

Time

The temporal perspective is prominent in comparative public policy and is predominantly taken up by the ACF, the PET, the MSF, and the policy subsystem adjustment model proposed by Howlett and Ramesh (2002).

Policy change requires the assessment of policy arrangements at two or more points in time. For a more nuanced conceptualization of policy change, many studies draw on the influential work of Hall (1993), who suggested differentiating between three orders of change. Changes in instrument settings correspond to first-order changes and can be attributed to "incrementalism, satisficing, and routinized decision making" (Hall 1993, 280). The adoption of a new policy instrument represents second-order change and is likely to be the outcome of strategic action. Third-order changes are changes in policy paradigms and

are associated with experimentation with new policies and lesson drawing from policy failures. Knill, Schulze, and Tosun (2012) added a fourth category that denotes the scope of a policy instrument, that is, how it governs its target groups. These categories have been used to empirically assess how policies expanded and contracted over time (Bauer et al. 2012; Knill, Schulze, and Tosun 2012; Jordan, Bauer, and Green-Pedersen 2013). It should be noted that a key contribution of policy process theorizing is raising the question of whether the dynamics of policy change are similar at all levels of change or whether different dynamics characterize change at different levels (Baumgartner 2013).

More recently, a second conceptualization, which was originally developed to assess forms of institutional change, has become popular. Streeck and Thelen (2005) propose five forms of gradual institutional changes: displacement, layering, drift, conversion, and exhaustion. Displacement is about new organizational models emerging and spreading, which then challenge the existing models. Layering is when new elements are added to existing models, creating new models that over time can expel or supplant the original ones. Drift is about organizational changes brought about by nondecisions, that is, lacking the capacity or willingness to adapt to new goals or roles. Conversion is related to the redirection of organizations to new goals or roles. Exhaustion is a gradual institutional breakdown. An application of the theoretical debate on institutional change to policy research can be found in Béland's (2007) study of three major social policy episodes in the United States: enactment of the 1939 amendments, the first mandate of the Nixon administration, and Social Security privatization during the 1990s.

Similar to policy change, the study of policy diffusion would not be possible without taking into account the temporal perspective. Policy diffusion is generally defined as the socially mediated spread of policies across and within political systems (Berry and Berry 2017, Chapter 7, this volume). The first studies of policy diffusion were descriptive and concentrated on its shape, that is, they described the adoption patterns on the basis of the cumulative number of countries that have adopted a given policy by time *t*. In most cases, this produces an S-shaped curve, implying that adoption is slow at first, then rapid, and finally levels off as saturation is reached (Gray 1973; Boushey 2010).

Policy diffusion might result in policy convergence, which can be defined as "any increase in the similarity between one or more characteristics of a certain policy (e.g., policy objectives, policy instruments, policy settings) across a given set of political jurisdictions (supra-national institutions, states, regions, local authorities) over a given period of time" (Knill 2005, 768).

In regard to the comparative perspective they adopt, there is one fundamental difference between studies that are interested in policy change—and hence are closely linked to policy process theories—and those that explore policy diffusion and convergence. Studies of policy change compare the same policy or policies over time in the same context, whereas studies of policy diffusion and convergence compare the same policy over time in different contexts. The feature they share is that all three concepts concentrate on the same policy, but research on diffusion and convergence is more comparative than studies examining policy change. From this, it follows that capturing the temporal dimension is critical to studies of policy change because it constitutes the main comparative aspect. Studies of policy diffusion and convergence can additionally exploit the comparative potential of different contexts. Therefore, policy research seeking to explain policy change must cope with the challenge of reasonably selecting the observation period.

Actors

In the last few years, the dominant trend in theorizing in comparative and political economy has certainly been to emphasize the characteristics and strategies of individual or collective actors. For example, actor-centered institutionalism, which brings the actors to the fore, is an influential theoretical perspective that appeared in 1990s policy research (see Scharpf 1997). Among the policy process theories, four pay close attention to actors: the ACF, the MSF, the Narrative Policy Framework (NPF), and the IAD framework.

In the ACF, any policy subsystem includes a set of actors, who are persons "regularly attempting to influence subsystem affairs" (Jenkins-Smith et al. 2017, Chapter 4, this volume). The merit of the ACF is that it embraces this more generic definition of actors, which has been abstracted from the classic perspective in comparative politics that an individual or a system of government agencies and interest groups matters. The concept of actors significantly broadens the understanding of who in a given political system can exercise influence on policy decisions. This conceptualization of actors makes the ACF, particularly, and the MSF and NPF suitable for comparative research. The interaction between actors or actor coalitions, rather than an understanding of institutions, lies at the heart of the research endeavor. In the end, policy subsystems vary by the actors involved in them and their influence on policies.

Although the ACF broadly considers the question of who matters for policymaking, it rests on sophisticated assumptions about actors' belief system structures. Actors have deep core beliefs (i.e., fundamental normative values and ontological axioms), policy core beliefs (i.e., beliefs specific to the respective policy subsystem), and secondary beliefs (i.e., specific instrumental means for achieving the goals underlying the policy core beliefs). The notion of beliefs indicates the ACF—similar to the PET, the MSF, and the NPF—proposes that individuals possess a limited ability to process information, that is, they are boundedly rational. From this, it follows that individuals have goals but face uncertainty in achieving those goals. Further, they have limited cognitive

abilities, which make their belief systems relevant to their formulating and pursuing policy demands.

Thus, individuals' beliefs, not their ability to process information, motivate them to support or oppose certain policies. Similarity in belief systems determines which actors form coalitions, and competition between these "advocacy coalitions" has an impact on policy change.

The MSF locates actors in the politics and problem streams (Herweg, Zahariadis, and Zohlnhöfer 2017, Chapter 1, this volume). Policy change is attained when a policy entrepreneur strategizes the confluence of the three streams (Zohlnhöfer 2016), yielding agenda and policy change when coupling occurs. The next actor in the MSF, associated with the problem stream, is denoted as the problem broker and helps define the conditions of problems; this person may be identical to the policy broker. The main difference between these actors is that the "problem broker only argues that something must be done about a specific condition while the policy entrepreneur suggests solutions to the problem" (Herweg, Zahariadis, and Zohlnhöfer 2017, this volume).

Relatedly, the NPF concentrates on how policy narratives affect individuals' preferences, risk perceptions, and attitudes about certain policies (Shanahan et al. 2017, Chapter 5, this volume). The IAD framework conceives of actors as individuals or groups in an action situation, which, again, is a sophisticated conceptualization because it presumes that actors and institutions are holistic entities (Schlager and Cox 2017, Chapter 6, this volume).

These frameworks have in common that they rest on complex conceptualizations of actors and their characteristics and how they may influence the policy process. Whereas this represents a strength for analyzing a given policymaking situation, particularly specific substantive policy issues, it complicates the adoption of a comparative approach to the study of the policy process. It also makes understanding institutions and governing systems problematic. The more nuanced a concept and its empirical application, the more difficult we will find applying it for comparative research, which becomes feasible by deliberately abstracting away from details (see Newton and van Deth 2016, 392).

Events

Events have been the central analytical concept used in studies of risk and uncertainty and policy change, diffusion, and convergence. In most theoretical approaches, events are conceived as focusing events, that is, both expected and unexpected occurrences that attract the attention of the public or policymakers for a certain period of time. Birkland (1997) differentiates between natural and manmade disasters as focusing events, whereas Cobb and Elder (1972) and Kingdon (1984), for instance, regard political alignments as focusing events or, at a minimum, as windows of opportunity.

Studies comparing policymaking over time have typically treated changes in the partisan composition of governments as events that have an impact on the dynamics and outcomes of policymaking (e.g., Walgrave and Varone 2008). Studies that compare the same policy in different contexts—cross-country comparisons—have adopted the concept of focusing events and more political variants. A typical example of a comparative study that draws on focusing events is an analysis of how accidents in nuclear power plants affect the decision to phase out nuclear power (e.g., Jahn and Korolczuk 2012). Event-focused research questions in comparative public policy are about how regional or global economic crises such as the 1970s oil shock or the 2007–2008 financial and economic crises affect policymaking (Starke, Kaasch, and Van Hooren 2014).

Research on focusing events typically concerns major policy shifts that, as many studies argue, would not have been feasible without the attention directed to a given issue for a limited period of time. Many studies of focusing events implicitly or explicitly hypothesize that these events neutralize other political forces. When events are endogenous to the system, forces such as the partisan ideology of policymakers must be taken into account (e.g., economic crisis). In marked contrast to focusing events, enabling factors—events such as party changes or changes in the socioeconomic situation of societies—are triggers for policymaking.

Comparative research is more straightforward in the case of focusing events versus other events for two reasons. First, focusing events are easier to define, which facilitates case selection. Second, focusing events are considered to be powerful enough to dominate domestic politics (but see, e.g., Nohrstedt 2005), which means the comparative research design can be simplified. More resources can be allocated to characterizing the origin, nature, and perception of the focusing events than is the case with other events. It follows that policy process theories stressing the role of systemic, or endogenous, events are more likely to pose challenges in comparative designs. For example, are changes in partisan composition of a government as relevant in one country as in another? Or does comparison require concentrating on the specific partisan composition of government? These questions illustrate the need for further reflection when incorporating systemic or endogenous events in comparative policy research.

Contexts

An important component of policy process theories is context. For example, in the NPF *context* refers to the macrolevel of analysis and to institutions or culture (see Shanahan et al. 2017, this volume). It is clear that the context in which policy processes take place matters a great deal to the outcomes and does not necessarily prevent comparative analyses. As noted above, comparative research can either exploit variation while holding the context constant (e.g., by comparing

policies over time or comparing different policies) or create variation by allowing the context to vary. Policy process theories that draw on the notion of policy subsystems (e.g., NPF and ACF) find it easier to adopt the first option, whereas theories like the policy diffusion model tend to adopt the second.

Comparative studies can theoretically and methodologically deal with context. Theoretically, one needs to identify which macrolevel factors matter for explaining policy dynamics. In the case of comparing policies that address risk and uncertainty, for example, the general institutional arrangements are less important for explaining differences or similarities between countries than risk cultures are (Douglas and Wildavsky 1983). Many observers would agree that Germany and Sweden share many similarities—relative to other countries—regarding institutional setup, socioeconomic development level, and integration in Europe. Despite these similarities, the majority of Germans oppose the production of nuclear power (e.g., Jahn and Korolczuk 2012), whereas the majority of Swedes are supportive of nuclear power (e.g., Nohrstedt 2005). It follows that German policymakers have adopted a more restrictive—if not to say prohibitive—stance on the production of nuclear power than policymakers in Sweden. Relevant contextual factors should be dependent on theory; otherwise, analyses devolve into residual explanations.

Theoretical considerations naturally have implications for research design. Qualitative comparative policy research designs can keep the context factors as similar as possible (i.e., most-similar-systems design) or allow them to vary (i.e., most-different-systems design) across countries (see Newton and van Deth 2016, 388–389). Although both designs have merit, in the literature we mostly observe country-comparative studies based on the logic of the most-similar-systems design.

Institutions provide perhaps the most relevant conceptualization of context. Handling of institutions in comparative policy process research has varied greatly, in part owing to the conception of institutions in the original theories. Extant theories of comparative politics are grounded in firm understandings of institutions. The theories of the policy process offer a rich and varied conceptualization of political institutions. Standard theories of comparative politics depict institutions as transaction costs. The veto player model as put forward by Tsebelis (2002) is a prime example of institutions as transaction costs. This conceptualization allows the veto player model to assess the policy effects of political institutions from a unified theoretical perspective, which is appealing to scholars in both comparative politics and public policy (see Ganghof 2003).

The more varied conceptualization in policy processes has its costs. For instance, comparing institutional hypotheses from the theories is difficult, even in similar problems. This lack of convergence is more problematic when we consider that understanding the effects of political institutions is a core concern in political science generally, and not just in the study of public policy.

The policy process theories gain leverage in their conceptualization and examination of political institutions by holding key elements of policy substance, and thus the range of positions and actors, stable. Where the theories, particularly the ACF and IAD framework, address particular policy problems cross-nationally, their substantive focus allows for isolating how institutional arrangements shape not only policy but also the opportunity structures faced by coalitions of actors (e.g., Gupta 2014). So, one set of institutional hypotheses derived from the policy process theories is issue dependent.

In contrast, scholars working in the PET tradition have conceptualized institutions as decision making systems for processing information and generating particular patterns of policy dynamics. For these scholars, processes of delegation, organization, and sequencing are just as important as the particular form taken by institutional structures or the substantive nature of the policy problem. Institutions are important both in prioritizing issues on the policy agenda and in determining the dynamics of policy outputs over time (Jones et al. 2009).

Development is helped along by a common system of measurement for issue agendas and in-depth work on political budgeting. This is important because it ties the front end and back end of the policy process together via generalizations about political processes (i.e., agenda setting, budgeting, or regulatory politics) and common patterns of policy dynamics. Thus, emphasis is not on comparing, say, parliaments directly to the US Congress but on comparing issue agendas and patterns of policy change. This notion of having a common measurement system leads directly to a discussion of the methodological challenges posed by comparative applications of the policy process theories.

Outcomes

Despite addressing public policy from different perspectives, studies in policy processes have in common that they largely address policy outputs and not the effects—policy outcomes. With the exception of the budgeting tradition in PET, comparative policy research has paid relatively scant attention to comparing policy outcomes. More precisely, it has hardly examined similar outcomes (e.g., reduction in poverty) as being achieved by different public policies across different contexts.

On the one hand, the concentration of policy process research on policy outputs is reasonable because these are most likely to be affected by the interactions of actors in a given institutional setting. Policy outcomes can be regarded as a type of policy feedback, which can start a new policy process. From this perspective, conceiving of the outcomes of previous policy decisions as explanatory variables concurs with the most general logic of policy process theories.

An adjacent literature strand concentrating explicitly on policy outcomes is political economy and, more precisely, studies drawing on the varieties of capitalism approach. According to Hall and Soskice (2001), the degree of coordination within the economy distinguishes between two ideal types: liberal market economies (LMEs) and coordinated market economies (CMEs). Both ideal types represent the extremes of a spectrum of pure market powers and a strong coordination of market forces in which political economies can be classified. In LMEs strong market forces dominate; in CMEs coordination mechanisms play a major role between the various market participants. In LMEs, companies coordinate their activities in all subsystems of the economy primarily by orientation on price signals, free competition in the market, and marginal cost. In CMEs, however, non-market-based relations play a major role and are crucial for the development of corporate core competencies. Corresponding research shows that CMEs produce policies that help them mitigate the adverse effects of crises more effectively than LMEs.

Interim Conclusions

We have discussed how policy process theories conceive of public policies, their temporal dimension, and the role they assign to actors, events, and context and have examined how they deal with policy outcomes. The overview shows that there exist established definitions of public policy and its elements that are, in principle, suitable for comparative analysis. Analyzing policy decisions in the same context at different points in time represents a form of comparative analysis that is implicitly and explicitly addressed in policy studies. However, there exists policy research that is comparative with regard to policy decisions and the context in which they are formulated.

The main limitation in comparative policy research is the conceptualization and systematic analysis of policy outcomes. It makes sense that policy outcomes do not represent the main subject of interest of policy process theories because they are not only affected by strategic interactions between actors but also by a whole range of additional factors (see Knill, Schulze, and Tosun 2012). Nonetheless, policy outcomes could be conceptualized as policy feedbacks (see Mettler and SoRelle 2017, Chapter 3, this volume) that—together with other factors—trigger policy change. This idea is particularly interesting because policy outcomes can be measured in ways that allow for comparison across units, time, and policy areas.

All in all, the field of comparative policy process contains several conceptual and theoretical starting points for research. Yet we also need to take into account empirical and methodological considerations before formulating a comparative policy research agenda.

EMPIRICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL CHALLENGES

In general, the research designs for applying the policy process theories comparatively are . . . comparative. Leaving this higher-order design problem aside, issues of measurement and methods still plague applications of the theories, as we have already indicated. Methodologically, one of the theories in this volume has achieved a much greater level of standardization in both measurement and methods.

The PET uses a common system for measuring the issue agendas of political institutions or systems (see Jones 2016). This system was developed early on, and subsequent developments in the theory have retained this concern for issue agendas and measuring them in a reliable, backward-compatible way. What this yields is standardization and a common metric for testing hypotheses generated across countries, institutions, and governing systems generally. This common base of measurement not only provides a common vernacular among the group but also fosters the generation of cross-national hypotheses that are very general.

This common metric has also allowed a common mode of analysis. In particular, the theory makes use of distributional and stochastic process methods, from which the general punctuation hypothesis is explored. The central notion of the PET is that individual and institutional cognition, constrained by limited attention, leads to disproportionate information processing. That is to say, policy change is characterized by lots of small, incremental changes punctuated by large, dramatic change. This dynamic leads to the characteristic "fat tails" in agenda and policy change distributions, where the distribution of change over time is leptokurtotic. This hypothesis has proved particularly powerful in describing policy dynamics in political institutions and, moreover, across countries and political systems.

The PET has made thorough use of government budgets for which country-comparative data are available (especially for advanced market economies). For example, using data for annual changes in government budgets in six nations, Jones et al. (2009) managed to identify a general empirical law of budget punctuations. This law suggests that budget processes are leptokurtic in general. More specifically, the law suggests that budgetary decreases are more punctuated than increases and that local governments are less punctuated compared to central governments.

This common metric and set of methods is largely absent from studies applying the ACF, the MSF, or the NPF. Of course, these theories have different analytical interests as well. Whereas the PET is concerned with identifying and explaining broader policy patterns on the basis of limited attention and institutional friction, the ACF, the MSF, and the NPF attach greater importance to specific policy substance. Specificity requires a more varied approach to analysis. As concerns the analytical interests of these theories and the concepts on which they draw, the above discussion shows that they are conducive to comparative research. However, they are confronted with empirical limitations that stem from key analytical concepts.

For these reasons, PET presents a more standardized approach and vocabulary for rapidly generating comparative hypotheses. To their credit, the ACF, MSF, and NPF see measuring policy change as more problematic than it at first appears, and they tend to attempt to incorporate directional measures of policy advocacy and policy change not captured in the PET's focus on attention (though the exception is in budgetary processes, where directionality is clear and easily assessed). This more varied, or at least less settled, approach to measurement and analysis in these theories comes with a cost in development. Because all these theories are well on in years, a considerable amount of time is needed to study the theories at a level that allows systematic assessment of their hypotheses. This situation is made more acute in comparative applications.

POLICY PROCESS RESEARCH AND COMPARATIVE POLITICS

The classic policy analysis literature acknowledged the relationship between policies and politics. The main claim in Lowi's (1964) influential work is that "policy determines politics" in the sense that policy types entail varying degrees of costs and opposition to attempts to change the status quo. On the basis of this reasoning, Lowi put forward a typology that distinguishes among *distributive policies* (measures that affect the distribution of resources from the government to particular recipients), *redistributive policies* (measures on the transfer of resources from one societal group to another), *regulatory policies* (measures that define conditions and constraints for individual or collective behavior), and *constituent policies* (measures that create or modify the states' institutions).

More recent research has attempted to reverse this relationship and to understand how concepts from politics can be used to explain policy decisions (e.g., Knill and Tosun 2012, 2017). The main motivation for integrating concepts from politics in policy studies stems from the success of comparative politics (see Newton and van Deth 2016). The comparative politics literature can draw on established concepts and datasets on the positions of political parties (e.g., Volkens et al. 2013), corporatism (e.g., Kenworthy 2003), and veto players (e.g., Jahn 2011), which enable comparative research.

A key interest in comparative politics is to explain the development of modern states, which includes processes of transitions toward democracy and—as increasingly happens in the last few years—autocracy (e.g., Croissant et al. 2015). The second analytical focus lies on the characteristics and effects of structures and institutions. It is within this research perspective that there exists a sizable literature addressing policymaking in executives and legislatures, which is, for instance, interested in whether government or opposition parties propose certain policies and how long the policymaking process takes given certain constellations such as grand coalition governments or minority governments (e.g., Manow and Burkhart 2008). Another key topic in the comparative politics approach to policymaking is the role of political ideologies and how states perform in the sense of solving problems by means of policymaking (e.g., Bale et al. 2010). A third major area of interest of comparative politics scholars is citizens' attitudes and their political participation (e.g., Soroka and Wlezien 2009) and the role of various actor groups, including pressure groups, social movements, mass media, and political parties (e.g., Baumgartner et al. 2009; Tosun and Schaub 2017; Walgrave, Soroka, and Nuytemans 2008; Walgrave and Varone 2008).

The integration of policy research with comparative politics research has been realized in two ways. First, studies seeking to explain policy decisions make use of the isolated factors presented above. For example, Knill, Debus, and Heichel (2010) are interested in explaining environmental policy change, but instead of relying on the policy process theories that concentrate on policy change, the authors focus on the impact of the electoral strength of political parties. Second, studies using policy process theories incorporate concepts from comparative politics. The PET is perhaps the process theory that has the most visible connection with comparative politics, which is also reflected in the background of the scholars contributing to this body of research.

To illustrate this point, note the volume on the comparative approach to agenda setting edited by Green-Pedersen and Walgrave (2014). Both editors have a background in comparative politics, with Green-Pedersen's other research concentrating on party politics and party competition (e.g., Green-Pedersen and Krogstrup 2008) and Walgrave's research revolving around the role of mass media in politics (e.g., Walgrave, Soroka, and Nuytemans 2008). The great majority of other researchers contributing to that volume—including the inventors of the PET (Baumgartner and Jones 1993; Baumgartner, Jones, and Mortensen 2017, this volume)—are comparative politics scholars working on institutions, parties, and representation (e.g., Bevan and Jennings 2014). The PET lends itself particularly well to incorporating concepts from comparative politics because of the role institutional arrangements play therein. As Baumgartner, Jones, and Mortensen (2017, this volume) explain, institutional arrangements characterized by institutional separation often work to reinforce policy stability, but sometimes they can be conducive to policy change by working to "wash away existing policy subsystems." We argue that it is the prominence of institutional arrangements and the fact that these scholars can build on the insights existing scholarship in comparative politics yields that has helped strengthen the comparative approach to PET.

Turning to actor-centered policy process theories like the ACF, we can note that these deviate from studies in comparative politics. They do not concentrate on individual actor groups but are interested in actor coalitions and their respective beliefs and resources. These are in turn a product of their long-term coalition opportunity structures and short-term constraints and resources. It is the complexity of the relationship between the individual actors forming a coalition, the importance of the relationship of different actor coalitions within policy subsystems, and the additional factors influencing them that reduces the compatibility between the ACF and comparative politics research. From this perspective, the ACF—like most other policy process theories—can make limited use of the insights offered by comparative politics owing to its sophisticated and particularly refined approach to modeling how advocacy coalitions structure policy change.

For example, Shanahan et al. (2011) use the NPF to analyze the effect of policy narratives on public opinion. To this end, the authors treat a group of students with two media accounts that reflect divergent advocacy coalitions and assess how this affects their opinion on the policy issue concerning snowmobile access to Yellowstone National Park. To transform this study into one that could guide comparative research, the focus would need to be one actor group, most likely government actors, whose policy narrative could then be explained by comparative data on how political ideology determines positions on nature protection.

Summing up, scholars in comparative politics have agreed in many areas on levels of analysis that allow for comparative measurement, which has helped this literature to become prolific. The concepts from comparative politics have migrated to some varieties of policy process research and have paved the way for comparative analysis there. Because the institution-centered process theories such as the PET can be more easily divided into specific components, they have benefited more from concepts and data originating from comparative politics than actor-centered theories, which tend to be more complex. Yet this does not mean that comparative research that draws on policy process theories does not exist, and it certainly does not preclude more comparative studies. We elaborate on this point in the next section.

POLICY PROCESS RESEARCH IN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

In this section, we characterize the comparative research that has already been undertaken or that is under way applying the theories of the policy process. We argue that the comparative extensions of the policy process theories need not be nation-comparative only but can include insights from comparing political institutions, subnational units, and different stages of the policy process (e.g., agenda setting vs. policy adoption). Our discussion of the comparative research in these theoretical traditions sets the stage for considering what we have learned, what is left undone, and what opportunities are presented by these more recent comparative extensions of the theories and concepts presented in this volume. These opportunities encompass theoretical, conceptual, and methodological possibilities.

Multiple Streams Framework

As it is the case with many policy process theories, the MSF was developed under the impression of policy dynamics in the institutional setting of the United States. Therefore, for a long time, this approach was applied to the US context, and no attempts were made to develop it further conceptually or empirically. Recently, however, studies have applied the MSF to different institutional contexts (see Herweg, Zahariadis, and Zohlnhöfer 2017, this volume; Jones et al. 2016), and conceptual efforts have been made to develop a comparative approach to MSF.

In this context, Zohlnhöfer, Herweg, and Huß (2016) argue that the MSF could be transformed to become more conducive to comparative research by paying enhanced attention to formal political institutions. This suggestion is particularly remarkable given our discussion of the natural relationship between institution-centered policy process theories and comparative politics and how this proximity has helped promote comparative policy process research. From this perspective, the proposal by Zohlnhöfer, Herweg, and Huß (2016) points at exactly the same dimension, namely, to explore possibilities for exploiting the analytical tools supplied by comparative politics. Remarkably, the need to concentrate more specifically on institutional factors is supported by a conceptual piece by Béland (2016). Also focusing on the conceptual dimension, Howlett, McConnell, and Perl (2015) advance the argument that a combination of the MSF with other policy process theories would increase its fit with comparative logic.

An example of a country-comparative application of the MSF is offered by Spohr (2016), who examines reforms of labor market policies in Germany and Sweden emphasizing the role of policy entrepreneurs. More broadly, although the comparative insights provided by the MSF are limited, we must acknowledge that isolated components of this approach have been used for comparative research. The most frequently used concepts are—such as in Spohr's (2016) study—policy entrepreneurs and focusing events (Béland and Howlett 2016, 224). For example, trade disputes, mostly in the context of the World Trade Organization, have been regarded as focusing events that trigger policy change (e.g., Ackrill and Kay 2011). Policy entrepreneurs, in particular, conceptually travel easily across the most diverse institutional settings. The same holds true for policy brokers, the notion of which has been adopted by comparative studies of the relationship between science and public policy. The concept used by these studies is related to the policy broker but refers to scientific actors as "honest brokers" (Pielke 2007).

It is interesting to see that the conceptual treatises on strengthening the comparative perspective of the MSF make a plea for emphasizing formal political institutions, whereas the existing empirical studies have chosen to concentrate on the two components that are detached from the institutional context. We can conclude that attempts to make the MSF more comparative can choose between adopting the whole approach and then concentrating on institutions and selecting isolated concepts and abstracting from institutional arrangements.

Punctuated Equilibrium Theory

PET scholars have devoted a considerable amount of effort to understanding human decision making and taking seriously the lessons of behavioral psychology and economics (Jones 1994, 2001). For this reason, the PET has been influential by itself and has stimulated other conceptual models. Building on Baumgartner and Jones (1993) and Schattschneider (1960), Engeli, Green-Pedersen, and Larsen (2012) highlight the importance of four elements: attention, actors, images, and institutional venues. The assumption of this model is that the policy process is determined by the underlying political conflicts over a given issue. In this context, the first factor that needs to be taken into account is the level of both public and political attention given to certain issues. The higher the level of attention, the more controversial the policy process that follows initial agenda setting.

Attention to individual cognition and its implications for how institutions process information and prioritize problems has led to a plethora of studies of comparative political institutions. These studies include US state governors' institutional powers (Breunig and Koski 2009), budgeting in Western democracies (Breunig, Koski, and Mortensen 2010; Jones et al. 2009), bureaucratic and regulatory policymaking (Bevan 2015; May, Workman, and Jones 2008; Workman 2015), and the relationship between the news media and parliamentary agenda setting (Vliegenthart et al. 2016).

Attention is closely connected to the number and types of actors that are involved in the problem definition of an issue (May, Sapotichne, and Workman 2006). Usually, issues of low attention are characterized by the participation of a limited group of actors in the policy process, and politicized issues are characterized by the involvement of more actors. Different types of actors typically have different preferences regarding the outcome of the policy process, which leads to controversial politics.

One area that presents tremendous possibilities in comparative policy process research is the concept of problem definitions. Stone (1989) provides a frequently used concept of problem definition: a causal story that identifies harm, describes what causes the harm, assigns blame to those causing it, and claims that the government is responsible for stopping the activity in question. Put simply, issue images are about a certain perspective from which issues are seen and about the exclusion of alternative views (Engeli, Green-Pedersen, and Larsen 2012).

The PET, with its attention to individual and organizational cognition, offers an alternative version of problem definition as the dimensions of a problem that are relevant for choice. For instance, climate change could be said to embody substantive dimensions involving trade policy, environmental policy, agricultural policy, and energy policy, among others. Climate change policy defined as energy policy has very different implications, regardless of cause and effect, than climate change policy defined as an environmental problem (see Elgin and Weible 2013). Borrowing from work on cognition, the PET sees problem definition as akin to problem representation. Choice requires the construction of a problem representation (Newell and Simon 1972; Jones 2001) before solutions can be generated and evaluated in terms of preferences or beliefs. Problem definition, then, is an indispensable precursor to choice.

Another alternative is Dery's (1984, 4–27) conceptualization of problem definitions as "gaps" or "opportunities." Policymakers compare the current policy to current conditions and define that discrepancy as either a gap in policy that needs filling or as an opportunity to expand policymaking in a given area. Using the twin notions of problem definition as dimensions of choice and as an opportunity for steering policy agendas, Workman (2015) identifies bureaucratic and administrative units as key to understanding how the governing system comes to understand given policy problems and how policy agendas are structured.

Policy Feedback Theory

The most prominent theory of policy feedback examines how current policies constrain the types of policies available in the future in a theory attentive to history and institutional development (Pierson 2004). The early policy feedback literature in particular was strongly influenced by historical institutionalism, which explores the impact of institutions on political behavior and policymaking dynamics (Béland 2010, 570). This approach is, however, different from the classic version of historical institutionalism to the extent that it has an explicit behavioral component, and as a result this theory is based on a microfoundation that allows for a more complete explanation of policy processes.

In empirical terms, this approach has been especially useful in comparative public policy for the study of the welfare state (Hacker 2002) and inequality (Hacker and Pierson 2011). Most empirical applications of the Policy Feedback Theory (PFT) draw on the concept of incrementalism and share similarities with the forms of institutional change identified by Streeck and Thelen (2005).

More broadly, the early literature paid particular attention to processes of state building, interest groups, and lock-in effects. More recently, scholars have focused on private benefits and institutions, the role of political behavior, and ideational and symbolic components of policy feedback (Béland 2010, 576). However, the design of policies can have feedback effects on individuals, not only in terms of the way they view the particular policy but also more broadly with implications on their attitudes toward politics and the political system in general (e.g., Mettler and Soss 2004). Policies that focus on broad segments of the population can pique interest in politics, for example, because political outcomes may create personal stakes and thus influence how attentive individuals are to the political process (see Shore 2016).

This scholarship mostly connects public policy to future policy change or individual behavior through the mechanism of positive feedback. However, considerable work in mass opinion makes similar connections through the mechanism of negative feedback. The thermostatic model of mass opinion posits that governments pursue policies in a left or right fashion, progressively farther away from the general preferences of the public (Wlezien and Soroka 2012). Once beyond some threshold, citizen preferences serve as negative feedback on governing party choices, even so far as being replaced if necessary. The thermostatic model is remarkably resilient across substantive policy issues and governing systems. A slightly different application of the PFT concerns the strategic use of policy decisions as a tool to move public opinion (see Soss and Schram 2007).

Weaver (2010) regards the turn to negative feedback as a correction to the emphasis historical institutionalism and path dependency literature placed on positive feedback. Positive feedback from these perspectives is associated with stability; negative feedback, with policy change. Therefore, the burgeoning attention paid to negative feedback concurs with the general increase in interest in the comparative empirical assessment and explanation of policy change.

In all, the PFT displays an affinity for comparative politics research, and therefore extending it to comparative research is a fruitful endeavor. Yet, existing studies that explicitly draw on this approach are mostly context-specific, although the accumulation of individual studies provides a relatively robust empirical picture. Nevertheless, the empirical potential of this approach has not been exploited for comparative policy process research and represents an avenue worth exploring in future research.

The Advocacy Coalition Framework and the Narrative Policy Framework

The ACF (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1993, 1999; Sabatier 1998; Sabatier and Weible 2007; Weible, Sabatier, and McQueen 2009) is one of the most influential approaches to policy change. Essentially, it views policymaking as the result of the competition between coalitions of actors who advocate beliefs about certain policy options. This competition between advocacy groups takes place within policy subsystems. The framework further argues that actors process information according to a variety of cognitive heuristics that provide guidance in complex decision making situations. In this regard, belief systems give guidance about how a social problem is structured and how it could be remedied.

Against this background, policy change may principally result from two sources. First, policy change can occur as a result of learning processes, which induces a hegemonic advocacy coalition to transform its beliefs in response to experience or new information. Second, external events may lead to changes in the power distribution among advocacy coalitions. The revision of the Advocacy Coalition Framework by Sabatier and Weible (2007) identifies two more sources of policy change. One source is endogenous events that occur within the subsystem and that highlight failures in current subsystem practices. The other source is cross-coalition learning, where professional forums provide an institutional setting that allows coalitions to safely negotiate and implement agreements.

Scholars working within the ACF have just begun to leverage the power of comparative research designs in understanding variation in coalitional structure, competition, and resulting policy outputs. Weible et al. (2016) examine policy debates surrounding hydraulic fracturing in seven countries. They find that coalition makeup and intercoalitional structure vary greatly across different types of political systems. There remains a need to understand how coalitions, processes of learning, and policy change differ by policy topics, events, and actor constellations, especially in diverse institutional contexts. Federal versus unitary systems, for instance, structure who may and may not be part of the coalition addressing a particular issue.

One point of comparative advantage in applying the ACF might be institutional jurisdictions and how these structure coalitions and coalition formation. In the United States, for instance, issue jurisdictions are a point of competition among not only subsystem actors but also federal agencies addressing these problems (Workman 2015). This is less the case in unitary, central governments such as that of the United Kingdom, with clearer lines of demarcation. The ACF promises to be particularly powerful in understanding policy change pursuant to this variation.

The key challenges for the ACF in comparative perspective are empirical and methodological. Although the ACF maintains an empirical and methodological pluralism that enables it to be widely adapted to diverse contextual policy problems, this same pluralism strains the logic of comparative research design. A systematic effort to standardize some of these diverse empirical and methodological approaches would be a boon to comparative applications of the theory, allowing scholars to test some of these broader hypotheses before digging deeper into the nuances of policy change.

The NPF is similar to the ACF but also more complex in terms of the analytical concepts it uses (e.g., Jones and Radaelli 2015). As a result, empirical studies drawing on the NPF exist (e.g., Shanahan, McBeth, and Hathaway 2011), but the empirical work concentrates on comparing policy narratives used by different advocacy coalitions in the same institutional contexts. There are no indications that this literature seeks to adopt a comparative approach that would be different from comparing policy narratives. Do narratives differ fundamentally across national borders? This would be a useful extension of this line of research. If differences exist, researchers could then ask whether the comparative differences are important for understanding policy change.

The Institutional Analysis and Development Framework

The IAD framework offers an analytical tool focused on action situations and recognizes institutional settings (Blomquist and deLeon 2011). The institutional dimension of this framework makes it particularly useful for comparative analyses, especially in the study of overharvesting in common pool resource situations. Again, similar to the PFT, the actions are systematically connected to cost-benefit analyses of individuals, which strengthen the connection of this approach to comparative politics research. The comparative dimension of this approach is explicitly acknowledged by Schlager and Cox (2017, this volume). They state that its application allows for the production of data according to the same measurement standards.

An empirical application of the IAD framework is provided by Andersson (2006), who analyzes the determinants of success of decentralized policy regimes on common pool resources. To this end, the author gathered data on forest-sector activities in municipal governments in Bolivia, which show that local governance systems are more successful when information is exchanged and learning processes are facilitated. Another insightful example is the study by Imperial and Yandle (2005) on the effect of institutions on fisheries policy. This study is worth noting because it adopted a rather unusual comparative perspective. It uses institutional arrangements to manage fisheries, namely, bureaucracy, markets, community, and comanagement. Bureaucracy is characterized by the government holding the property rights to fish and a focus on regulation that maintains fish stocks at sustainable levels; markets use trading systems that allocate property rights to vessel owners or fishers using tradable permits. If communities hold property rights to fish, they use social norms, rules, and sanctions to govern fisher behavior. With comanagement, there is shared responsibility between government and user groups. The authors offer a conceptual discussion concerning implications of these institutional arrangements for efficiency, equity, accountability, and adaptability.

Despite the existence of comparative research, Clement (2010) states that the literature based on this approach mostly studies local communities and not higher institutional levels. This observation is accurate for the empirical study of Andersson (2006) and holds true more generally because most analyses concentrate on decentralization of policy regimes and the effectiveness of local-level governance. Clement (2010) gives an interesting conceptual reason for the empirical limitation of the IAD framework: its lack of attention to power mechanisms stemming from the political and economic structures that shape power distribution. Clement further argues that institutions are not neutral but rather emerge, sustain, or collapse in political-economic contexts. It follows that the challenge in comparative analysis using the IAD framework is studying more complicated governing arrangements (e.g., at the subsystem or political system level where the rule typology and description of action situations become unwieldy).

In this way, the IAD framework tends to face the opposite set of challenges as the ACF. The ACF's methodological pluralism allows it to adapt to diverse policy problems yet makes comparative research design difficult, at least empirically and methodologically. In contrast, the IAD framework's standardized approach to empirical and methodological design is useful in comparative designs but is not widely adaptable to diverse types of policy problems.

The Diffusion of Innovation Model

The diffusion literature is comparative by definition and benefits from the availability of a common set of explanatory variables—learning, imitation, economic competition, and coercion—and metrics (see Berry and Berry 2017, this volume). Although these variables are sometimes labeled differently, the underlying causal mechanisms are the same and can be summarized as follows.

Transnational learning can be roughly defined as a process in which governments search for solutions to a problem, which they find in another jurisdiction. Emulation is the desire of policymakers to attain international acceptance by demonstrating conformity with the behavior of states that are considered leaders. Coercion is based on the assumption that there is a power asymmetry between two jurisdictions in which the more powerful one can force the other to adopt certain policy measures. Economic competition induces policymakers to adopt policies in place elsewhere if these are expected to affect the national industry's ability to compete in the global market (Vogel and Kagan 2004).

There exists an impressive amount of policy diffusion research that concentrates on the most diverse policy areas (e.g., Holzinger, Knill, and Arts 2008). However, there also exists work concentrating on diffusion processes at the subnational level. For example, Boushey (2010) uses research in agenda setting and epidemiology to characterize the process of policy diffusion among the American states. This research refutes the notion that diffusion is a thought-

out, incremental process; instead, it embodies the characteristics of an outbreak of disease. The theory posits interest groups as key to the "spread" of policies. Tosun and Shikano (2016) analyzed the spread of regions in Europe that declared they would not grow genetically modified organisms. By comparing diffusion processes within and across countries, the authors illustrate that intracountry diffusion dominates intercountry diffusion, which is an important finding because it shows that diffusion processes at the subnational level may be triggered by decision making at higher levels of government.

In addition to the agreement of a similar set of explanatory variables and their measurement, the proliferation of diffusion studies also stems from the agreement on how to measure the dependent variable. Typically, the dependent variable is binary. The similarity and simplicity in data coding have produced a remarkably coherent body of research that offers many comparative insights for processes of vertical diffusion (i.e., when a policy from a lower level of government diffuses to higher levels) and horizontal diffusion (i.e., when the policy spreads across the same levels of government, but in a number of jurisdictions). What is also characteristic for this literature is that it recognizes the importance of domestic politics and, because it is comparative by definition, it relies on concepts and measurements common in comparative politics. Thus, we have another policy process theory that has a close relationship with comparative politics and can incorporate analytical tools from that literature.

Perhaps the most robust empirical finding refers to the diffusion of environmental standards (e.g., air quality standards) in both developed and developing states. In environmental policy, the impact of economic interests on the definition of regulatory standards has been thoroughly discussed in relation to "races to the bottom." Here, the main mechanism relates to footloose investors relocating their polluting industries to "pollution havens" in parts of the world where the environmental standards are less strict. According to the theory, this can induce governments to deliberately lower their standards to a level below what is possible given the available technology. Empirically, however, there is a remarkable coherence in the absence of such dynamics (Holzinger, Knill, and Arts 2008; Tosun 2013), which means that there is no indication that governments adopt less stringent environmental standards when confronted with competitive pressure. What can be observed is the opposite scenario, known as the "race to the top," where developing countries adopt increasingly strict environmental standards (Vogel and Kagan 2004).

WHAT WE HAVE LEARNED FROM COMPARATIVE POLICY PROCESS RESEARCH

Theories of the policy process adapt well to the comparative perspective. This is particularly the case with the policy diffusion method and the IAD framework, which were developed as comparative approaches. The NPF is about comparing policy narratives created by individual advocacy coalitions. Scholars using the MSF have begun to explore the possibilities of comparative research, involving both theoretical (e.g., Howlett, McConnell, and Perl 2015; Zohlnhöfer, Herweg, and Huß 2016) and empirical work (e.g., Spohr 2016). Scholarship on PET has completed the comparative turn both by encompassing myriad political systems and their institutions and by adopting the perspective that *dynamics*, or changes in time, are necessary for understanding public policy.

The ACF has been applied to a great number of cases and already allows for drawing some comparative conclusions. In particular, we have learned that stable coalitional structures that oppose one another operate in much the same way across issue areas and governing systems. The structure, stability, and impact of advocacy coalitions vary across political contexts, but whether there exist stable patterns we do not know yet. Thus, seeking to go one step further, Weible et al. (2016) recently outlined a framework for comparative ACF research. The PET has tremendous untapped, comparative potential.

Though much work remains to be done in developing theories that accommodate comparative research designs, some generalizable lessons can be drawn from applications of policy process theories in comparative contexts. These relate to the behavior of citizens and mass publics, institutional information processing, the types of issues governments face, and the importance of coalitional politics within substantive policy issues.

First, within the set of Western-style democracies, citizens behave and evaluate public policy in remarkably similar ways. In general, the lessons of this work are that governments attend to citizen demands for attention to substantive policy issues; what citizens think is important, governments also think important (Jones and Baumgartner 2004). This is not to say that lawmaking approximates public opinion in all cases, but there is tremendous congruence between public priorities and institutional policy agendas. Likewise, the thermostatic model (Soroka and Wlezien 2009) is explicitly comparative in design and establishes that democratic systems are successful in representation and responsiveness, though with some variation associated with institutional configurations across Western democracies. Policy process theories such as the MSF have recently started to pay more attention to the institutional differences, and judging from the insights yielded from existing research this appears to be a promising perspective for future research.

Second, the nature and types of issues and problems that governments face are similar, and this finding spans Western democracies, developing nations, and authoritarian regimes. The Comparative Agendas Project has emerged as a useful measurement system for understanding the types of problems characterizing the agendas of diverse governing systems (Jones 2016). Using this policy topic coding scheme, scholars have demonstrated systematic similarities in the number and nature of problems confronting Western democracies and, increasingly, other types of governments as well.

Third, the dynamics of policy change are similar across governing systems, across political institutions within governing systems, and even across policymaking within substantive issues. The characteristic slip-stick dynamics, with long periods of incrementalism punctuated by bursts of larger-scale policy change, have nearly become empirical law in policy dynamics (Jones et al. 2009). The shape of change derives from the shifting nature of political attention, institutional differences, and the dependencies and trade-offs implicit in the limited nature of attention and in public budgets (Breunig and Busemeyer 2012). The more recent expansions of this research link similar causal mechanisms, such as institutional friction and limited attention, to the same dynamics even in authoritarian regimes. These consistencies allow some powerful lessons to be drawn about the operation of institutions, the dynamics of policy change, and the issue agendas of governments the world over.

Fourth, within particular substantive issues, ACF scholars have shown that how nations ply coalitional politics and advocacy is similar across countries. These insights move our thinking from generalizable systemic statements about policy change to a more nuanced perspective on particular issues across countries. The IAD framework makes possible similar types of generalizations, concentrating on actors in institutional settings rather than on advocacy. Taken together, the policy process theories have generated a set of generalizations that span institutions and behavior, types of political systems, and substantive issues. Still, much is left to be done. In future comparative policy process research, there are considerable opportunities for theoretical, conceptual, and empirical advancement in understanding policy dynamics.

CONCLUSIONS AND THE WAY FORWARD

Subdisciplines of political science have made great progress in the last few years as a result of pursuing comparative research and applying comparative research designs. The goal of this chapter was to scrutinize the progress policy process research has made in applying a comparative perspective. Our systematic overview of the literature drawing on the policy process theories yielded two overarching findings.

First, policy process research has been carried out for a growing number of cases, which allows for identifying general empirical patterns and a more demanding test of theoretical expectations. Second, theoretical perspectives in policy process research have become noticeably comparative, including classic comparative approaches such as cross-country studies and newer ones such as comparisons of different policy sectors in one country. Moreover, our analysis suggests that the body of comparative policy process research will expand even further in the near future.

Among the various theories, the PET forms the basis of a literature that has developed the most visible comparative dimension, albeit the IAD framework has also produced a number of comparative studies. Diffusion research holds a specific position because this research is comparative by definition. Nevertheless, even diffusion research has developed in a fashion that includes larger samples as well as the inclusion of additional dimensions, such as policy sectors, for comparison. A group of international MSF scholars discuss at a conceptual level how the MSF can be adapted to comparative research, and a few empirical studies have applied it. In regard to the ACF, comparative insights are possible as a result of the sheer number of contexts to which this perspective has been applied. This saturation has illuminated the value of conceptual evenness and highlighted the struggles of empirical and methodological pluralism.

Thus, all in all, much comparative policy process research is occurring, and the analytical perspectives adopted so far are diverse and insightful. Yet we must bear in mind that the comparative dimensions of the policy process theories depend on the adoption of a broad definition of comparative design.

In strengthening the comparative dimension of policy process research, several avenues appear worth pursuing in future research. The first relates to the PET and why it has been so successful in mastering the comparative turn. By concentrating on individual theoretical components, researchers involved in the comparative study of political agendas bring to bear their expertise and knowledge of how to measure key concepts and what data could be used for this purpose, especially comparatively. Interestingly, Béland and Howlett (2016) seem to dismiss this disaggregated approach to adapting the MSF to the comparative logic, but from our perspective starting with isolated components enables the research to benefit from the expertise of authors and allows for mutual learning and cumulative knowledge. Our first suggestion for making policy process research more comparative is to concentrate on individual conceptual components and to make these suitable for comparative research.

Our second point is about the need for systematic data gathering and coding to strengthen comparative policy process research. Again, the PET is a good example of how this can be attained: data collection and coding are systematized and standardized, which allows for producing data that facilitate comparative research. It follows that comparative research must be accompanied by efforts to produce (better) data, which can be attained by individual research groups or by forming research networks and benefiting from a coordinated approach. The availability of reliable and valid data is critical for pushing further the comparative dimension in policy process research.

Third, formal political institutions offer a possibility for conceptually and empirically advancing comparative policy process research. Our reasoning builds on institutions as a key concept in comparative politics (and political science generally): they offer a methodological tool box and data that can be used by policy process research. Institutions can be incorporated into comparative policy process research in two ways. First, institutions can be regarded as the context in which decisions are made. Second, arguably the more ambitious

approach, is to identify the role institutions play in the individual theories and then to address them in a more systematic fashion. This is a dimension on which the PET and the IAD framework were found to have a competitive advantage over the other theoretical approaches. At any rate, policy process theories offer added value in their treatment of institutions because they attend to how institutions structure and shape the relationships between actors more than approaches in comparative politics do.

Comparative research both widens and deepens our understanding of political processes. However, when we decide to compare we need to develop ideas about how to collect the appropriate evidence to test the empirical implications of the theoretical models. This leads to the question of what we should compare, and this is not an easy one to answer. In this chapter we showed that comparative research is not limited to country-comparative research. Nonetheless, we must avoid thinking that comparisons yield insights in all circumstances. To provide meaningful and novel insights, comparisons must be carefully considered and justified, so even comparative research must start with conceptual work.

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