P19 / Causal Claims and Causal inferences in Comparative Policy Analysis

Topic : COMPARATIVE PUBLIC POLICY

Chair : Iris Geva-May (The Wagner School, NYU and SPPA, Carleton Univ. Canada)

Second Chair : Guillaume Fontaine (FLACSO Ecuador)

Third Chair : Philipp Trein (University of Lausanne)

GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

Causal claims and inferences have become important criteria for research design and methods in comparative policy analysis (CPA). “Why”-questions are often present in CPA, for instance to address why policies on related policy problems are most similar or most different. Degrees of similar or different causes may be the answer. Yet the concept of causality often remains implicit and scholars conceive it in a different way — either as patterns of regularity, counterfactuals or causal forces— according to their philosophical and scientific ontology. Some argue that explicit causal inferences should be at the core of CPA while others contend that causation is not to be explained but, at best, interpreted.
These similarities and discrepancies affect the very theory and practice of CPA, when it comes to address “Why” questions about agenda-setting, policy formulation, adoption, implementation or evaluation. Why does a government put a problem on the agenda? Why is a policy mix preferred to another? Why is a policy adopted or not? Why is there a gap in a policy implementation? Why does a policy produce unexpected outputs or outcomes?
Such questions are given a partial treatment by conventional analytical frameworks. For instance, the advocacy coalition framework and the multiple stream approach focus on the agenda-setting, while policy design focuses on the instrumentation; comparative historical analysis and political economy have produced strong theories of policy change, while econometrics has been more thorough to assess
policies impacts. Yet while the theoretical statement made by these frameworks are conspicuous, their methodological foundations are not always explicit and their procedures often suffer from a lack of transparency.
Two logics of causation currently coexist in CPA —probabilistic and deterministic— hence raising a problem of alignment between ontology and methodology at the time of selecting a comparative method for confirming or disconfirming purposes. On one hand, the probabilistic logic has produced theories of causation based on mean causal effects, general trends and symmetric causation, which commands variable-centered research designs for large-n comparisons. On the other hand, the deterministic logic has produced theories of causation based on differences in kind, necessity claims and asymmetric causation, which commands case-based research designs for small-n comparisons and within-case studies. The dilemma extends to the conceptualization of causal conditions (necessity and sufficiency), the status of set membership and even the techniques to measure variations in kind or degree. Whatever their choice, scholars´ research agenda derives from different designs and practices, and ultimately ends up making symmetric or asymmetric causal claims, which produce formal models or causal mechanisms, and so on and so forth. Some may contend that only co-variance in large-n comparisons allows to establish a causal relation in a policy process, or that small-n comparisons are a better way to identify the causal forces at stake in that process. Some may advocate for experiments or quasi-experiments while others would object these as inaccurate for practical or even ethical reasons. Eventually a growing number of comparative policy studies advocate for a multi-method research design.

JUNE 25,

4-6 pm - Preconference JCPA Workshop Keynotes on comparative methods: Beryl Radin and Guy Peters (MB 9EG)

6-7 pm - Reception of the JCPA and ICPA - Forum Scholarly Society (MB 9 lobby)

JUNE 27,

12:30-2pm - Lunch meeting, Editorial board and Friends of the JCPA and ICPA-Forum (MB 9A)

More info

CALL FOR PAPERS

The objective of this workshop is to discuss the theoretical implications of different concepts of causal inferences and causal claims in CPA, and in particular how scholars and practitioners identify and deal with causation in theory and practice. Participants are expected to contribute to the discussion with an 8,000 word paper based on a small-n or a large-n comparison of substantive policies within or in-between social units.

The following questions may be addressed as guidelines for the discussion:

1. What is the nature of causality in your comparative framework?
2. What theory (or theories) of causation has it been supported or produced by?
3. How was this theory operationalized?
4. Which comparative methods have been favored to assess the causal inferences or causal claims?
5. How have these methods combined with others in the research design?
6. What contribution does the research make to CPA methods?

The workshop will be sponsored by the ICPA-Forum scholarly society and the Journal of Comparative Policy Analysis, Routledge on its 20th anniversary, to advance this important CPA issue. Submitted papers may be shortlisted for publication in the JCPA following the journal's standard blind fold reviewing process.

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Session 1Process-Tracing and Comparative Policy Analysis

Wednesday, June 26th 14:00 to 16:00 (MB 3.435)

Discussants

Beryl Radin (McCourt School of Public Policy, Georgetown University)

Getting Underneath the Hood : The Implications of Mechanism Approaches for Policy-Process Theorizing

Adam Wellstead (Michigan Technological University)

Evert Lindquist (School of Public Administration)

Modes of policy learning as causal mechanisms: coming up with a “policy learning measuring instrument” for qualitative research

Jonathan Kamkhaji (European University Institute)

Contending with Policy Legacy: Comparative Case Study of Local Health Insurance in Indonesia and the Philippines

Kidjie Saguin (University of Melbourne)

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Session 2Aligning Methodology and Ontology

Wednesday, June 26th 16:30 to 18:30 (MB 3.435)

Discussants

Iris Geva-May (The Wagner School, NYU and SPPA, Carleton Univ. Canada)

The Role and Impact of Policy Learning Approaches in Comparative Policy Analysis

Claire Dunlop (University of Exeter)

Better understanding of the policy process through randomised designs in the field

Peter John (KCL)

From a causal to a consequentialist perspective: a pragmatic approach to compare policy processes differently

Philippe Zittoun (ENTPE - LAET - University of Lyon)

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Session 3Process Tracing and Qualitative Comparative Analysis

Thursday, June 27th 08:00 to 10:00 (MB 3.435)

Discussants

Guillaume Fontaine (FLACSO Ecuador)

Why not privatize schools? A Bayesian Process Tracing analysis of divergent school choice reform paths in France and England

Charlotte Haberstroh (London School of Economics and Political Science)

Using comparative methods in search of causality: Advancing the state of energy justice research by using a case-oriented approach

Brent Burns (Michigan Technological University)

MODELING THE BLACK BOXES OF CAUSATION

Alessia Damonte (Dept. Social and Political Sciences - Università degli Studi di Milano)

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Session 4Quantitative and Qualitative Comparative Analysis

Thursday, June 27th 10:30 to 12:30 (MB 3.435)

Discussants

Philipp Trein (University of Lausanne)

Understanding the effectiveness of policy interventions. On the methodological implications of different conceptualizations

Valerie Pattyn (Institute of Public Administration - Leiden University)

The Familial Foundations of the Welfare State: Government as a Nurturing Institution in Cross-National and Historical Perspectives

Alla Baranovsky (Harvard University)

Eileen McDonagh (Northeastern University)

An ACF Explanation of the Canadian Firearms Act: Regularity Versus Mechanistic Causation

Tim Heinmiller (Department of Political Science, Brock University)