

COMPARATIVE PUBLIC POLICY: METHODOLOGICAL PATHWAYS AND CONTEMPORARY EPISTEMIC STAKES



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Abstract:

Comparative public policy is widely regarded as a vital field within political science and public administration, as it examines how governmental policies are formulated and implemented across different countries while analyzing the factors that shape their success or failure. This study seeks to provide a comprehensive perspective on the field by reviewing its methodological foundations, its principal challenges, and the stakes surrounding its future trajectory. It addresses the following central question: how can generalizable knowledge about public policy be constructed through comparative methodology in light of the multiplicity of its analytical challenges and the uncertainty surrounding its future? By drawing on both epistemological and historical inquiry, the study arrives at several findings, the most significant of which is that comparative public policy is not merely a matter of comparing states, but rather of systematically analyzing the interaction between local and global factors. It further concludes that this field can no longer remain confined within theories developed in the twentieth century. The most pressing challenge, therefore, lies in developing a dynamic model that acknowledges the plurality of actors while conceiving of policies as complex systems.

Key words: public policy; comparative public policy; epistemology; comparative method; future stakes.

Introduction:

The field of comparative public policy constitutes a cornerstone for understanding the dynamics of contemporary governance. As a subfield of political science, it raises fundamental questions that extend beyond the surface description of governmental programs, reaching instead into the roots of divergence and convergence

among policies, the mechanisms of decision-making, their implementation, and the evaluation of their outcomes across national contexts and multiple levels of government.

The scope of this field is not confined to describing differences and similarities in the content of public policies across countries or over time. Rather, it extends to understanding why and how the trajectories of policy formulation, policy design, implementation, and outcomes vary across different contexts. This line of inquiry leads to an examination of the epistemological questions that form the backbone of the field and define its boundaries and central analytical challenges.

Accordingly, the main problematic of this paper lies in analyzing the fundamental tension between the ambition and significance of the field, on the one hand, and the complexity of its subject matter, on the other, through the following question: how can generalizable knowledge about public policy be constructed through comparative methodology in light of the multiplicity of its analytical challenges and the ambiguity surrounding its future?

Within this problematic, the importance of the topic derives from two dimensions:

Scientific importance: it lies in the attempt to fill a theoretical gap in the Arabic literature, which continues to suffer from a limited degree of theorization concerning comparative public policy as a field distinct from traditional political science.

Practical importance: it lies in providing a reference framework for decision-makers to understand how policies are analyzed and transferred across countries, and how international models may be integrated in ways that remain consistent with local specificities.

As for the objectives of the study, they may be summarized as follows:

- ✓ To establish an epistemological and methodological understanding of the topic and to dispel the ambiguity and confusion among student researchers and political scholars between the field of comparative politics and that of comparative public policy.
- ✓ To analyze the historical development of the field and the impact of the epistemological turns that have shaped it.
- ✓ To deconstruct the conceptual challenges involved in defining comparative public policy and identifying its units of analysis.
- ✓ To analyze comparative methodology and present its most significant challenges and limitations.
- ✓ To anticipate the future of the field in light of the growing criticism surrounding the crisis of explanatory models.

In methodological terms, the study relies on the historical approach to trace the stages in the development of the field of comparative public policy, as well as on the

epistemological approach to analyze the structure of concepts and their evolution, while also employing the descriptive method to examine its methodology and future prospects.

To address the aforementioned problematic, the study is structured as follows:

The first Topic: The epistemology of comparative public policy: the birth and development of the field between scientism and realism.

The second Topic: The conceptual framework of comparative public policy: defining the concept.

The third Topic: The comparative dimension in comparative public policy: the status of the field, the method, and its challenges.

The fourth Topic: The future of comparative public policy in light of theoretical stagnation and the absence of a unifying model.

THE FIRST TOPIC: THE EPISTEMOLOGY OF COMPARATIVE POLICIES: THE BIRTH AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE FIELD BETWEEN SCIENTISM AND REALISM.

Comparative public policy, as a field of knowledge, is generally regarded as a subfield of comparative politics, which itself constitutes one of the most significant epistemological domains within political science, if not its most prominent one.

The field emerged in the mid-twentieth century as a response to the dominance of constitutional studies, under the influence of the behavioral revolution in political science, which redirected attention from formal institutions to decision-making processes and the analysis of observable outcomes. It developed within a context marked by persistent epistemological tension between the search for comprehensive scientific laws modeled on the natural sciences and the recognition of historical and cultural context as a fundamental determinant of public policy (Locke, & Kathleen, 1995, pp. 337–339). This tension turned the field into a laboratory for some of the central problematics of the philosophy of science within the political sphere.

Its origins are, in fact, closely connected to the broader historical development of political science, extending back to the Greek era. The history of comparative politics may therefore be approached through three fundamental stages, with the behavioral revolution constituting the decisive turning point that distinguishes the phases of this development.

First requirement: The Pre-Behavioral Stage

This stage represents the traditional phase, extending from the fourth century BCE to the second half of the twentieth century. It is characterized by the large number of thinkers who employed comparison in their political studies by examining how the

systems of government under which they lived actually functioned, thereby attempting to draw the earliest boundaries of comparative politics. Among these figures were Aristotle in the Greek period; Augustine and Thomas Aquinas in the Middle Ages; and, in the Renaissance and modern era, Niccolò Machiavelli, Montesquieu, Alexis de Tocqueville, John Stuart Mill, Émile Durkheim, Max Weber, and Robert Dahl. Through their works, these thinkers made substantial contributions to the development of the social sciences in their modern form, largely because they adopted comparison as a foundational mode of inquiry. They produced comparative studies covering several European countries, including France, Italy, Germany, and England, and this comparative orientation later extended toward the United States. (Hislope, & Mughan, 2012, p. 28.)

Accordingly, this period, particularly before the Second World War, was marked by intense intellectual development enriched by numerous scholars who produced notable comparative studies. Nevertheless, these studies remained limited to a small number of European countries, such as France, Britain, and the Soviet Union. At the same time, a degree of isolation persisted between European and American scholars, accompanied by differences in both the level and the substance of their studies. Moreover, despite the achievements of this body of work, it was often comparative in name more than in substance, since much of it focused either on describing a single state or on presenting parallel descriptions of institutions in several states, owing to the dominance of the state-centered approach in comparative inquiry.

These studies also failed to focus systematically on identifying points of similarity and difference. In addition, they neglected the dynamic dimension of political life and its institutions, as scholars were primarily concerned with constitutional structures in a descriptive manner, without assessing them or explaining the reasons underlying their success or failure.

Second requirement: The Behavioral School Stage

In the period following the First World War, political studies witnessed a relative transformation as a result of the propositions advanced by the behavioral school, which crystallized and matured between 1957 and 1963. Among its most important contributors was Gabriel Almond, whose work was influenced by Talcott Parsons as well as by the Chicago School. These influences led him to incorporate new variables into political analysis, such as political culture, the variables of the political process, and informal groups (Gabriel. 1970, p. 8..). Equally significant were the contributions of David Easton (Easton, 1957, pp. 383–400.), who enriched the field of comparative politics through the systems approach and his reformulation of the concept of the political system. His work injected new momentum into the study of informal dimensions in political life and political processes.

Through its core propositions, the behavioral school shifted attention away from the description of constitutional institutions and their formal powers toward a focus on the actions, processes, and patterns of behavior taking place within those institutions.

Third requirement: The Post-Behavioral Stage

With the beginning of the 1970s, it became evident that the developmental perspective was no longer the sole framework in comparative politics. Numerous approaches emerged in reaction to growing dissatisfaction with the assumptions and limitations associated with developmentalism. This stage reflected a broader critique of the reductionist tendencies of behavioralism and an increasing awareness of the need to reintroduce history, power, institutions, and context into comparative analysis.

Among the most significant approaches associated with this stage were the corporatist approach and the dependency approach. At the same time, several earlier perspectives regained prominence, particularly the renewed emphasis on the state, while comparative public policy analysis began to flourish as a distinct and increasingly influential academic field. (Gabriel. 1990, pp. 172–175.)

A historical review of the development of comparative politics indicates that sustained interest in comparative studies of public policy is relatively recent, having emerged primarily during the post-behavioral stage. The importance of the comparative public policy approach became especially apparent through its departure from the behavioral orientation that dominated political science in the 1960s, precisely because it marked a significant transformation in the research agenda of the discipline in two fundamental respects:

- a shift from an emphasis on inputs to a focus on outputs.
- a shift from concern with macro-level politics to the analysis of sectoral or specific public policies.

Since the 1970s, scholarly attention gradually moved away from universalistic ambitions toward more specific objectives, particularly the formulation and testing of scientific hypotheses. This transition reflected the growing recognition that comparative studies of public policy conducted by political scientists and political sociologists had often served, in earlier periods, as instruments for legitimizing domestic policies rather than as vehicles for strictly scientific inquiry. (Anneliese, 2013, p. 13.)

Accordingly, the principal features that characterized comparative analysis in the field of public policy during this period may be identified as follows:

- a transition from traditional historical analysis to the analysis of contextual data through the presentation and interpretation of facts across a broad range of cases.
- a movement away from abstract, universal, macro-level analysis toward a stronger focus on area studies.
- the comparative analysis of policies in relation to the political and institutional processes that contribute to democracy.

- a growing orientation toward the social and economic context in the study of comparative public policy.
- a shift in comparative inquiry from concentrating on the foundational requirements of democratic systems to examining the outcomes generated by different political systems.
- an expansion in the geographical scope of research to include Africa, Asia, and Latin America, after having long been confined primarily to Europe and the United States.

It may therefore be argued that, during this period, the scientific ambition that had accompanied behavioralism quickly encountered the complexity of political reality. Researchers found that a policy capable of succeeding in Sweden could fail entirely in Brazil despite apparently similar economic inputs. This realization contributed to the emergence of a realist orientation, which restored the significance of several key dimensions:

- cultural legacy: the influence of values and traditions on the acceptance or rejection of public policies.
- new institutionalism: the view that institutions are not merely formal structures, but rules of the game that shape the behavior of political actors.
- historical trajectory: the idea that the decisions made by a state in the past constrain the range of choices available in the present.

These defining features of comparative public policy were consolidated through numerous studies that contributed to the broader diffusion and recognition of the field. Among the most influential were Richard Titmuss's study on the implications of blood donation for social policy in Britain and the United States; Hugh Hecló's analysis of modern social policy in Britain and Sweden; Peter Hall's work on economic policy in Britain and France; and Douglas Ashford's 1986 study of welfare policy-making in the welfare states of France and Britain. (See: Richard, 1972, pp. 81–84. Hugh, 1974, 354 pages. Hall, 1986, 341 pages. Douglas, 1992, pp. 13–14.) These and other studies played a central role in expanding and consolidating the field, endowing it with considerable significance and a distinctly contemporary specificity, particularly through its intersections with other social science disciplines such as sociology, history, and economics. Contemporary comparative public policy scholarship has also drawn substantially on theories and approaches derived from anthropology and public administration.

Accordingly, the branches of comparative public policy developed in a relatively coherent manner during the second half of the twentieth century, as public policy scholars increasingly emphasized the importance of comparison from the 1970s onward, including the comparison of different policies, inputs, outputs, and outcomes across institutional frameworks.

Comparison, as a method, remained closely connected to the modern transformations that shaped public policy as a field of study. With the growing rejection and gradual transcendence of traditional rational models in public policy analysis, alongside the emergence of alternative approaches to the study of public policy—particularly those developing in experimental economics, behavioral economics, and psychology—the field began to incorporate new variables such as behavioral adaptation, patterns of behavioral change, and new institutionalism. (Kevin B, 2009, pp. 209–211.) This evolution came to be associated with what is often described as the second generation of comparative public policy studies, which emerged in the 1990s and developed in parallel with globalization and the information revolution, responding to new research demands in political analysis. This stood in contrast to the first generation of studies produced between 1970 and 1980, which had outlined an uncertain and fragmented future for the field.

As researchers in comparative public policy identified new areas of inquiry, it became increasingly evident that the field was expanding both in scale and in analytical scope at the global level. This expansion was driven by its strong explanatory capacity, which conferred upon it a distinctly contemporary character. It consequently developed into an autonomous academic field taught in major universities around the world, while numerous mechanisms were mobilized to promote its diffusion and affirm its significance, including specialized centers, academic journals, and scientific studies published internationally, as well as efforts to connect policy-makers and decision-makers with the most significant evaluative research, hypotheses, and theories capable of practical application.

THE SECOND TOPIC:

THE CONCEPTUALIZATION OF COMPARATIVE PUBLIC POLICY: DEFINING THE CONCEPT

Determining the nature of any concept within the social sciences constitutes a major challenge for researchers. Given that this field is relatively recent from both scientific and empirical perspectives, comparative public policy remains one of those concepts that political literature has not addressed extensively in definitional terms. This is largely because researchers have tended to engage with it more directly through application and case-study analysis, or to approach it primarily as a scientific field characterized by specific methodological requirements and analytical challenges. Accordingly, the principal definitional contributions relating to comparative public policy, both as a concept and as a field, are presented here.

As noted earlier, the field of public policy moved from description to analysis over a relatively short period, until by the late 1970s it had become the subject of comparative study across different states and political systems, emerging as a growing subfield within comparative politics. By the mid-1980s, major transformations had taken place in comparative public policy, significantly increasing its importance in the

study of different states and giving the field of comparative politics renewed momentum.

This field therefore represents a fusion between the theoretical and epistemological dimension of public policy, on the one hand, and the methodological dimension of political science, on the other, by placing comparative analysis at the center of its inquiry.

At this point, however, an epistemological distinction must be drawn between comparative politics and comparative public policy. Whereas traditional comparative politics focuses on inputs such as elections, parties, and political culture, comparative public policy concentrates on outputs and effects. According to Peters, comparative politics asks who holds power, whereas comparative public policy asks how that power is used to address society's problems. (Peters G, 2014, p. 32.)

Accordingly, the most significant intellectual contributions made by scholars in defining comparative public policy stem from a comparative analytical and methodological perspective on the field of public policy. These may be presented as follows:

- ✚ Arnold Heidenheimer defines comparative public policy as the study of how, why, and for what purposes different governments pursue particular courses of action or inaction. (Heidenheimer & Hugh, & Carolyn, 1990, p. 3.)
- ✚ According to Howard Leichter, it is the field of inquiry that seeks to explain and evaluate similarities and differences in public policy, its outputs, and its effects across different countries. (Howard, 1977, p. 146.)
- ✚ Charles Anderson deepens this definition by linking it to the concept of comparative policy evaluation, understood as the comparative assessment of political achievement across different political systems. In this sense, it involves the evaluation of a wide range of policies and their relationship to multiple economic, social, and political variables in order to derive inferences concerning the political performance of different types of political systems. (Charles, 1978, p. 30.)
- ✚ Gabriel Almond and Bingham Powell, by contrast, regard comparative public policy as the field through which contemporary and other policy-related differences are understood, and through which the political performance of states with differing characteristics and situated in different parts of the world is compared on the basis of their outputs. (Gabriel A & G. Bingham, 1992, p. 107.)
- ✚ According to Jamil Jreisat, comparative public policy refers to the use of comparative analysis across national boundaries in order to understand the choices, problems, successes, constraints, and solutions available to policy-makers as they confront public issues in different countries. (Jamil E, 2002, p. 82.)
- ✚ Isabelle Engeli and Christine R. Allison likewise conceive comparative public policy as the field that examines why governments choose different programs and policies, whether through action or complete inaction, by studying

the policy-making process from the emergence and definition of the problem through policy formulation, implementation, and evaluation. (Engeli & Christine, 2014, p. 2.)

✚ Richard Rose, for his part, considers comparative public policy to be the art of learning from the experiences of others through the transfer of lessons while taking local contexts into account. (Rose, 2005, p. 15.)

Although some scholars have criticized these definitions—some for focusing primarily on the institutional or structural dimension, and many for reflecting a bias toward Western models—there is, in general, a clear conceptual convergence in the way comparative public policy has been defined. Broadly speaking, it seeks to study and analyze government policies across different countries or political systems in order to understand how they are formulated, implemented, and evaluated within diverse political, economic, and cultural contexts. This is achieved through a focus on comparing similarities and differences in governmental policies and programs, such as those related to education, health, and the environment, with the aim of drawing lessons regarding the factors that shape their success or failure. These factors include actors, such as the state, parties, and pressure groups; institutions, such as governmental structures and political systems; processes, including the stages of policy-making from planning to evaluation; and contexts, including culture, history, and globalization.

THE THIRD TOPIC:

THE COMPARATIVE DIMENSION IN COMPARATIVE PUBLIC POLICY: THE STATUS OF THE FIELD, THE METHOD, AND ITS PROBLEMATICS

Comparative public policy has become an increasingly important field of study within political science because it promotes the circulation of knowledge, expertise, and best practices across the world. This growing importance derives both from the nature of its subject matter and from the significance of its methodological foundations.

The emphasis on patterns of difference and similarity in national policies, both within and across states, with the aim of understanding how and why states differ in their public policies and what may be learned from their respective experiences in matters of public concern—such as security, education, health, labor markets, work-life balance, inequality, and welfare—makes it necessary to recognize this field as one of genuine scientific significance. Such significance is acquired principally through the use of comparative methodology. Despite the many problematics associated with it, this methodology remains the most rigorous scientific instrument capable of providing both analytical and practical added value to the field of public policy.

First requirement: Understanding Comparative Methodology

The use of the comparative method is closely linked to the scientific benefits it offers in the study of political phenomena. At this point, however, a distinction must be drawn between comparison and the comparative method. Thinking comparatively

is a self-evident human practice upon which the foundations of knowledge have rested since the earliest stages of human existence. In its simplest sense, comparison means establishing a relationship between two things, phenomena, or cases in order to identify points of similarity and difference between them.

John Stuart Mill defines it as the study of similar or analogous phenomena across different societies, or as the systematic analysis of differences in one or more variables across two or more societies (Chelbi, 1997, p. 70.). Alexis de Tocqueville, for his part, regarded it as an essential component of scientific inquiry in the social sciences. In this sense, it constitutes the focal point and core of the scientific method, functioning as an alternative to experimentation in the natural sciences and fulfilling many of the same purposes. (Gabriel A & G. Bingham, 1992, p.32.)

From a methodological perspective, comparative inquiry reflects the search for, or identification of, the distinctive similarities and differences that characterize a phenomenon, a case, or a set of phenomena and cases under study, as well as the determination of the conditions and circumstances underlying those differences and similarities in order to understand, analyze, and interpret them. It is therefore a methodological necessity for any attempt at generalization, since it reveals causal relationships through the diversity of conditions that comparison makes observable.

A comparative study therefore requires the following conditions:

1. The comparison must encompass all relevant aspects of similarity and difference among the phenomena under examination.
2. The phenomena, elements, or variables being compared must be clearly defined and subjected to the same methods and procedures of analysis in order to ensure scientific precision in identifying similarities and differences.
3. The phenomena being compared must share certain characteristics while also displaying a degree of variation, since comparison cannot be meaningfully conducted between phenomena that are entirely identical or entirely unrelated.

This is the general understanding of comparison. In political science, however, comparison is specifically concerned with the phenomena of political inquiry, and here the comparative method acquires a more precise meaning. If, in the social sciences, it is understood as the sequence of steps followed by the researcher in comparing the phenomena under study in order to identify the factors governing points of similarity and difference, then in political analysis it is concerned with examining the distribution of political phenomena across different systems and societies, or within particular patterns among them. It also involves comparing political systems in terms of their continuity, development, and the transformations that affect them across successive stages of that development. (Al-Qasabi, 2004, p. 241.)

If the purpose of the comparative study of political phenomena is to identify similarities and differences among countries by understanding and analyzing the mixture of continuity and variation that characterizes governments across the world,

while taking into account the global, regional, and national contexts within which they operate, then the comparative method may be understood simply as the set of strategies and techniques used to achieve that objective. It is regarded as a principal strategy for drawing conclusions about causal relationships in any field of inquiry. (Rod & Harrop, 2001, p. 69.)

Accordingly, the comparative method is the methodological approach adopted in the study of any social phenomenon or concept, and in comparative research based on the techniques and instruments of political science, with the aim of identifying the factors that govern points of similarity and difference in such phenomena in order to produce empirical generalizations of a broader scope.

These defining features of comparative public policy were progressively consolidated through the methodological advantages offered by comparison and through the analytical functions it performs within the field of public policy. In this regard, comparison:

1. Enables researchers to examine the policies of other societies, thereby providing a broader view of political alternatives and shedding light on the strengths and shortcomings of political life.
2. Constitutes the backbone of the comparative method in political science. It represents a central requirement in the scientific analysis of any political phenomenon, insofar as comparative analysis—being itself one of the pillars of political science—may be employed within a broader framework in which the researcher draws on methods, tools, and analytical frameworks such as the historical method and content analysis.
3. Contributes to the development of explanations and the testing of theories concerning how political processes unfold and the mechanisms through which political change occurs. In this sense, the logic of comparison employed by political researchers corresponds to the logic of experimentation used in the exact sciences.

It is, in the words of Dogan Mattei and Dominique Pelassy, the “engine of knowledge.” It is an indispensable path through which the complexity of the world is organized, interpreted, and explained. (Dogan & Dominique, 1984, p. 8.)

As a concluding observation, Harry Eckstein argues that the most prominent thinkers in the history of political philosophy and political thought were also scholars of comparative politics, and that all branches of political science gain greater analytical capacity whenever they employ the comparative method and comparative analysis. (Harry & David. 1963, p. 3.)

Accordingly, within the field of public policy, the comparative method should not be understood merely as the observation of similarities and differences. Rather, it constitutes the use of scientific procedures to test hypotheses concerning the relationship between political and institutional variables and public outputs across different units of analysis.

Its place within this field is therefore both central and foundational, and this may be highlighted through the following:

1. Surpassing methodological nationalism: without the comparative method, public policy as a discipline would have remained confined to local experiences. The comparative method provides the researcher with a global laboratory through which it becomes possible to determine whether the failure of a given policy results from a flaw in local administration or from a weakness in the political theory upon which it is based. (Adolino. & Blake. 2011, p. 18.)

2. Building and developing cross-border theories: the comparative method has contributed to the development of major theories such as path dependency, which explains why certain states persist in ineffective policies. This status has made the comparative method the principal force behind the field's evolution from legal description to institutional analysis. (Peters, 2019, p. 62.)

3. The function of evaluation and policy learning: the method occupies the position of a practical guide, as comparison enables states to evaluate their performance in relation to their peers. In this sense, comparison functions as a diagnostic instrument for identifying gaps in governmental performance and explaining the reasons underlying both success and failure. (Knill, & Tosun, 2020, p. 125.)

What gives this method its particular importance is that it possesses the characteristics of a rigorous scientific procedure, more precisely a set of systematic and carefully structured steps, which most researchers agree may be summarized as follows: (See: Nasr, 1998, pp. 122–148. Collier, 1993, pp. 105–118.)

1. Defining the research problem: this is achieved by formulating the problem clearly and precisely, while linking it to the unit of analysis on which the comparison is based, independently of the researcher's personal inclinations, biases, or background, all of which may generate problems of inaccuracy in the study. At the same time, political and cultural contexts must be taken into consideration.

2. Choosing the unit of analysis to be compared: this is done by selecting the internal units across which the comparison will be conducted, since the dominant pattern in comparative studies is not to compare entire states, but rather to select units within states for comparative purposes. At this stage, however, the problem of the adequacy of the unit of analysis may arise, namely the extent to which it is representative as a comparative sample of the society or state it is intended to reflect.

3. Formulating hypotheses and identifying variables: in any comparative study, the variables governing the unit of analysis must be identified, and hypotheses must be formulated accordingly.

4. Defining concepts, operational definitions, and the appropriate theoretical framework: this requires the establishment of a conceptual structure that guides the researcher throughout the comparative study and directs the selection of field instruments and the appropriate theoretical framework, in order to organize the

information collected and reveal its limitations. This is necessary as a foundational point of reference, because without it the researcher's effort remains little more than the collection and classification of similar or different facts with no meaningful connection between them and no analytical framework capable of structuring them. It should also be emphasized that concepts must be defined with precision in order to avoid complications in determining the indicators of operational definitions, especially given the variation in meanings and connotations from one society to another.

5. Collecting information and data: data constitute a basic requirement for comparison, since they are the means through which the characteristics of the unit under study are clarified. This may take the form of questionnaires, observation, or interviews, depending on the subject of comparison itself, which determines the range of instruments needed to describe and analyze the phenomenon. At this stage, it is essential to select the most appropriate strategy for collecting data relevant to the problem under study, while taking care to avoid bias, inaccurate information, and flaws in the method of data collection.

6. Identifying similarities and differences: this is the core of comparison, since the domains of variation and divergence must be identified, described, and analyzed to a level that allows for both clarification and theoretical abstraction.

7. Analysis and interpretation: this stage concerns the analysis of the collected data through appropriate statistical and non-statistical techniques in order to verify the research hypotheses, arrive at specific results, and interpret them by uncovering the significance of the information obtained, such as identifying the reasons behind the differences observed among similar phenomena in different societies. This requires from the researcher a high degree of rigor, precision, and comprehensive command of the units under comparison, together with intellectual independence from influences, values, and inclinations that may negatively affect interpretation.

It remains the case that, at the methodological level, several major problematics arise in the use of the comparative method, the most significant of which are as follows: (See: Brady, & Collier, 2010, pp. 164–166. Collier, 1993. pp. 108–112. Nasr, 1998, pp. 152–165.)

1. The confusion between implicit and explicit comparison, or between conscious and unconscious comparison: many studies in the field of comparative politics amount to little more than case studies involving a number of units, such as political systems or states, without engaging in fully developed comparative analysis.

2. Bias and confinement within a particular cultural framework: this occurs when analysis remains detached from recognition of the diversity, plurality, and variation that characterize human phenomena, causing the same phenomenon to carry different, and at times contradictory, meanings depending on differences of place, society, and historical period.

3. The misclassification of political systems and the inaccurate assessment of the degree of difference between categories: this may occur either through the excessive

multiplication of types to the point that distinctions become imperceptible, or through the stretching and expansion of concepts to such an extent that they lose analytical precision.

4. The problem of identifying genuinely comparable units: such units must contain a sufficient degree of both similarity and difference. Selecting cases that are overly similar reduces variation, whereas selecting cases that are entirely different makes meaningful comparison much more difficult.

5. Cultural and temporal challenges: cultural specificity and historical transformation affect the validity of comparison. For example, comparing systems of government in the nineteenth century with those of the twenty-first century without taking geopolitical transformations into account produces misleading conclusions.

6. The inadequacy and inconsistency of data: the quality of available data varies significantly from one country to another, especially in unstable societies where official statistics may be unreliable, incomplete, or entirely unavailable.

In order to overcome these problematics and enable comparative political studies to achieve their ultimate objective, a number of requirements must be met:

1. Determining the level at which the analysis is conducted: when examining a phenomenon, collecting data about it, and studying it, it is necessary to specify the analytical level at which these operations are carried out. At this point, two levels emerge—the individual level and the macro level—and these must not be conflated. (Kazem, 2004, p. 23.)

2. Possessing an accurate grasp of context: the researcher must have a precise understanding of the cultural, economic, social, political, and geographical contexts of the phenomena under comparison. This includes a thorough understanding of their legal, economic, and political systems, as well as their prevailing ideological orientations, together with the collection of sufficient and reliable data concerning them.

3. Ensuring consistency between the problem under study and the relevant cognitive field or theoretical framework: methodological coherence requires that the research problem remain aligned with the theoretical perspective through which it is approached.

4. Precision in the use of concepts and in the formulation of hypotheses: concepts must be employed with rigor, while hypotheses must be formulated in a manner characterized by clarity, coherence, and testability.

5. Distinguishing between implicit and explicit comparison: particular caution must be exercised against superficial comparison that focuses on formal appearances while neglecting substantive realities.

6. Addressing the problem of comparability through specific comparative strategies: in response to this issue, some scholars proposed more structured

approaches. Gabriel Almond, for example, introduced the concept of the Regional Approach, which is based on conducting comparison among units located within the same region. (Almond & Coleman, 1960, p. 34.)

Henry Teune and Adam Przeworski also proposed two major comparative strategies:

- The Most Similar Systems Model: this is the most widely used model in political science. It focuses on highly similar systems in order to neutralize many of the common variables within the units under comparison, while reducing the number of dimensions along which the systems differ.
- The Most Different Systems Model: this involves selecting units that display a high degree of divergence, with comparison often conducted at the level of subsystems or at the level of the behavior of individuals, groups, or local communities. (Przeworski & Teune, 1982, pp. 32–35.)

From the foregoing discussion, it may be inferred that the comparative method occupies a central position in political studies, and particularly in the field of public policy, because it converts the study of administration and governance from a mere description of local facts into an analytical discipline capable of generating general rules and theoretical propositions.

Second requirement: The Methodological Status of the Field of Comparative Public Policy

The principal justification for studying this field derives, above all, from the significance of its method. Numerous scholars have raised questions regarding the purpose of employing the comparative method in the study of governments and public policies, and several compelling justifications have been advanced. According to Kenneth Newton, the most important of these may be summarized, from a broad and comprehensive perspective, in three principal propositions:

- A country cannot be understood adequately without knowledge of other countries.
- Other countries cannot be understood without knowledge of their institutional and historical backgrounds.
- Valid generalizations about government and politics cannot be reached without the use of the comparative method. (Kenneth & Jan, 2010, pp. 1–3.)

However, Arnold J. Heidenheimer, a pioneer in this field, offered a more specialized set of justifications, which may be presented as follows: (Heidenheimer & Hugh, & Carolyn, 1990, pp. 3–6.)

1. Developing a guiding framework for the design of better policies: Different countries frequently adopt alternative strategies to address the same issues, and this is entirely natural. Careful comparative research, however, makes it possible to distinguish outcomes that result from unique national circumstances from those that

reflect more general patterns observable across countries. Consequently, comparing different approaches to similar problems may generate both positive and negative lessons, thereby contributing to the construction of a guiding framework for what should, and should not, be done.

2. Achieving a deeper understanding of the functioning of governmental institutions and political processes: Since the essence of politics lies in addressing the classical questions—who governs, how, and with what consequences for the lives of citizens—the substance of the answer becomes increasingly complex as governmental political activity expands. Determining who governs does not end with identifying who votes and who is elected to office; it also requires an understanding of what individuals working within government, along with other relevant actors, actually do in the making and remaking of public policy in contemporary settings.

3. Responding to the growing interdependence among contemporary states: Many issues, particularly in the fields of economics and the environment, extend beyond national borders, and the public policy strategies adopted by one state often exert significant influence on policy-making in others. Effective functioning in such a world requires an understanding of the diverse approaches states adopt in solving problems, as well as the ways in which the effects generated by some states are transmitted to, intersect with, and reshape the policies of others.

On the basis of these justifications, Jamil Jreisat concluded that the objectives of studying comparative public policy analysis may be defined as follows: (Jamil E, 2002, pp. 80–82.)

1. Continuously broadening the global knowledge base of public policy: Comparative analysis frequently produces important information concerning governments and their policies in different sectors, such as health and education, across different countries. Moreover, the growing interdependence that characterizes the contemporary world confirms that every problem and every policy affecting one state may significantly influence others. The policy-maker, therefore, must understand how other states address their problems in order to determine appropriate responses and assess how foreign policy strategies may affect the conditions of his or her own country.

2. Focusing on the impact of political context and revealing the extent to which public administration influences public policy: Policies cannot be implemented unless the resources necessary for that purpose are made available, including political feasibility and political support. Comparative analysis therefore directs attention to the contextual and administrative conditions that shape policy outcomes.

3. Improving understanding of the policy choices available to governments: Comparing the policy of one state with that of another enhances understanding of the alternatives governments may adopt in addressing major issues, particularly after the implementation stage, which often represents the greatest challenge confronting government.

4. Investigating the role of public administration and identifying variations in its means and effectiveness: Since any political decision lacking administrative consideration remains sterile, one of the central aims of comparative policy analysis is to examine the role of public administration and to reveal differences in its instruments, capacities, and degrees of efficiency.

In sum, the study of comparative public policies combines a theoretical orientation with an applied scientific character, and is fundamentally intended to:

- expand and deepen the scope of scholarly understanding of a given political problem and of the lessons derived from the experiences of states in the field of public policy;
- assist in testing theories and hypotheses by revealing the changing nature of political decision-making when confronted with concrete issues;
- contribute to the classification of policies according to their field and level;
- analyze the underlying factors behind the policies adopted in different societies undergoing rapid change and increasing interaction;
- provide certain possibilities for anticipating the future trajectories of public policies.

Third requirement: The methodological requirements used in comparative public policy:

Researchers engaged in comparative studies generally, within the broader field of comparative politics regardless of the subject under investigation, tend to raise two principal questions: what are the major similarities and differences among the variables under study across the selected countries? And how may these similarities and differences be explained? The same logic applies to the field of comparative public policy.

Addressing these questions within this field requires attention to a number of methodological axes proposed by Arnold Heidenheimer and Douglas Ashford in their definition of the field (Heidenheimer & Hugh, & Carolyn, 1990, pp. 3–8.), namely: how, where, what, why, and for what purpose certain policies are pursued across multiple countries.

1. **How:** Inquiry framed through this interrogative form does not refer to how comparison itself is conducted, that is, to the technical methodology of comparative analysis. Rather, it directs attention toward defining the variables and the domain of the public policy under comparison.

- **Variables:** These refer to the elements on which analytical attention should be concentrated when comparing policies across countries. For example, should emphasis be placed on government and its institutions, on the components and instruments of policy, or on informal actors, among other possible factors? In other words, this

dimension concerns comparison among the elements shaping a given policy, whether examined individually through partial analysis or collectively through holistic analysis.

- **Domain:** This refers to the sectoral field, which varies according to the different issues addressed by public policy, such as security, education, health, transport, employment, justice, environment, agriculture, and industry, among others. These domains are numerous because they are associated with the diverse and expanding needs of society, needs that have become increasingly complex in the contemporary period.

2. **What:** This concerns the question of what occurs at the level of the general or partial system of public policies; in other words, what is the substantive content of these policies? What issues do they address? And what dimensions does the policy encompass? For example, if the study focuses on the educational system within education policy, the inquiry would examine what occurs within the educational system as a whole, what occurs within its subsystems, what can be changed in order to improve performance in light of transformations affecting the phenomenon under comparable conditions, and what other countries have done from which useful lessons may be drawn.

3. **Where:** This refers to identifying the countries, regions, or spatial domain—whether a state or a particular geographical region at the local, continental, or international level—selected for analysis according to several characteristics identified by researchers in the field. For example, Mark Kesselman argues that the selection of countries must rest on the presence of conditions that provide a valid foundation for comparison, since the concept of the state must refer to the principal political institutions responsible for the making, implementation, and adjudication of major policies. (Kesselman, & Krieger, & Joseph, 2009, p. 5.)

From a methodological perspective, it is also generally accepted that scientific comparison is conducted among countries, states, or cases in which a certain degree of similarity and difference is present, provided that the selection of these countries is justified in accordance with the requirements and objectives of the study.

On this basis, political literature in the field of comparative policy has produced a wide range of studies since the 1970s. (See: Patrick, 1979, 264 pages. Charles, 1980, 250 pages. Heidenheimer & Hugh, & Carolyn, 1990, 416 pages.) These studies initially focused on comparisons between countries within Europe itself, often on a bilateral basis. One example is Hugh Heclo's 1974 study comparing Britain and Sweden, as well as comparisons among states within the United States, such as Patrick Larkey's 1979 study. Comparative inquiry later moved toward cross-national comparisons, that is, between European countries and others such as the United States, as illustrated by Charles Foster's 1980 study comparing Germany and the United States. The scope subsequently expanded through the multiplication of cases and countries—beyond two states—to include countries and continents such as Latin America, Asia, and Africa. An example of this broader comparative orientation is Arnold Heidenheimer's study

comparing the United States, France, Sweden, the Netherlands, West Germany, and Japan.

Researchers in this field emphasize that comparative analysis generally follows three strategies in determining the number of countries to be selected: comparison among many countries, which corresponds to statistical analysis; comparison among a small number of countries, which corresponds to focused comparison; and single-country studies, which take the form of case studies. This is closely related to the variable under investigation: the higher the level of theoretical abstraction of the variable, the greater the possibility of including a larger number of countries in the study. For instance, in the field of public policy-making, if the study is directed toward examining the role of the legislative authority in the process in general terms, the scope of research may expand to encompass several countries. (Todd, 2000, pp. 22–33.) By contrast, if the research focuses on the role of women's quota systems within the legislative authority in public policy-making, then the number of countries included becomes more limited, confined to those that actually apply such a system.

4. Why:

This constitutes the pivotal question in comparative analysis. At this stage, researchers seek to explain and interpret the similarities and differences among the policies of the selected cases by investigating and formulating what are commonly referred to as theories of causality. These theories attempt to explain why, when (X) occurs, (Y) follows as a consequence. In other words, the inquiry centers on how (X), as the independent variable, becomes the cause of the emergence of (Y), the dependent variable.

The analysis does not end at this point; rather, it extends further to account for the existence of divergent outcomes despite the presence of similar causes. For example, why do policies relating to social welfare, education, and migration differ markedly between two states despite similarities in institutional structure, legal framework, and environmental conditions? In such cases, researchers must attribute these differences, for example, to variations in culture, in the management of state institutions and social organizations, or to an interaction among all of these explanatory factors. This line of inquiry contributes to the identification of significant patterns that may enhance understanding of the causes underlying major political outcomes, while also providing an opportunity to examine more closely how public policies operate across countries that differ in customs, traditions, and social structures.

Within this context, David Levi-Faur proposed four methods or techniques through which prior assumptions may be formulated for the cases under study, thereby strengthening inference and supporting conclusion. Through these techniques, connections are established between dependent variables and explanatory variables by combining John Stuart Mill's designs with the strategies of Henry Teune and Adam Przeworski, as illustrated in the following table: (Levi-Faur, 2006, p. 59).

Table No. (01): David Levi-Faur's Model of the Four Methods of Inference

	Mill's Method of Difference	Mill's Method of Agreement
Most Similar Systems Design	Technique 1: dealing with differences in similar cases. Assumption: certain differences in the explanatory variables are associated with differences in the dependent variable.	Technique 2: dealing with similarities in similar cases. Assumption: reducing variation in both the explanatory and dependent variables.
Most Different Systems Design	Technique 3: dealing with differences in different cases. Assumption: maximizing variation in both the explanatory and dependent variables.	Technique 4: dealing with similarities in different cases. Assumption: maximizing variation in the explanatory variables while minimizing variation in the dependent variable.

Source: (Levi-Faur, 2006, p. 59.)

5. For What Purpose:

This question concerns the outcome that may be derived from comparing policies across different countries. The answer begins with an examination of the objective of the comparative method, which expands understanding of the political world, improves classification, and makes possible not only the explanation but also, to some extent, the prediction of many public policies. Elliot Feldman argues that disagreement persists regarding the reasons for undertaking comparative policy analysis, and that this problem is closely associated with methodological issues. (Elliot J, 1978, p. 291).

Accordingly, the researcher must determine the purpose or objective of studying the selected topic within comparative policy studies, and this objective naturally varies from one study to another.

THE FOURTH TOPIC:

THE FUTURE OF THE FIELD OF COMPARATIVE PUBLIC POLICY IN LIGHT OF THEORETICAL EXHAUSTION AND THE ABSENCE OF A MODEL

In light of contemporary global transformations, the field of comparative public policy is confronting numerous and unprecedented challenges at both the substantive and methodological levels. This condition is largely attributable to the accelerating pace of change in the environmental, geopolitical, and technological spheres. Developments such as artificial intelligence, the increasing intensity of climate-related disasters and pandemics, and the escalation of tensions among the major powers are reshaping the environment in which policies are formulated and implemented. At the same time, these developments impose fundamental questions regarding the continued adequacy of traditional theories for interpreting such dynamics. As a result, the field faces a series of pressing problematics concerning its future trajectory.

This field has consequently come to experience an increasing crisis of identity, as classical models—such as rational choice theory and the Multiple Streams Framework (Kingdon, 1984, pp. 84–94.)—are no longer sufficient to explain the profound transformations affecting policy-making. These transformations include, for example, the intervention of transnational technology corporations, such as Facebook and Amazon, in shaping public agendas, as well as the influence of digital platforms on representation and democratic change.

Moreover, the dominant theories in this field rest on assumptions that have become increasingly outdated. As a result, the field is currently undergoing a paradigmatic crisis, the most significant manifestations of which may be summarized as follows:

- **The absence of a comprehensive explanatory model:** This reflects a disjunction between academic idealization and the reality of globalized policy processes, thereby calling for a redefinition of concepts such as the “state” and the “public actor.” State-centered approaches continue to treat the state as the sole actor, despite the emergence of entities such as Microsoft, which negotiate directly with governments over issues such as privacy policy. (Zuboff, 2019, p. 176).

- **The dominance of linear assumptions:** These assumptions are grounded in models such as the public policy cycle, with its sequential stages of formulation, implementation, and evaluation. In rapidly evolving digital policy domains, however, these boundaries tend to collapse, as illustrated by the development of artificial intelligence policies within the European Union.

- **Western bias:** The field has long concentrated on welfare-state issues, such as health and education, within the Global North, while neglecting critical issues in the Global South, including structural adjustment policies and identity-based policies. This

has produced a substantial gap in the substantive agenda of the field. (Howard J, 2002, pp. 62–65).

If the field is to keep pace with contemporary challenges, the theoretical framework of comparative public policy must be renewed so that it corresponds to an age marked by uncertainty and decentralization. It has become necessary to advance this field in a manner consistent with the intertwined complexities of the contemporary world through the following directions:

- **Deepening cross-border comparisons:** Comparative analysis is no longer confined to similar states, but has expanded to examine the interactions between domestic policies and global factors. An example is the study of how different countries adopt green energy policies, such as a comparison among Germany, China, and South Africa, which requires analysis of the influence of international organizations, including the Paris Climate Agreement, on national policy-making. (Dettef, 2016, p. 215).

- **Integrating quantitative and qualitative methodologies:** Tools such as social network analysis (SNA) and machine learning are increasingly being employed to understand how policies diffuse across countries. This includes, for example, the study of how digital tax policies spread among states through the use of Big Data. (Gilardi, 2022, pp. 421–450).

- **Assessing the impact of technology on policy-making:** Artificial intelligence has transformed the ways in which policies are evaluated, including the use of predictive algorithms to assess the effectiveness of education policies in different countries, such as in comparisons between Finland and India. At the same time, this development raises important ethical concerns, including algorithmic bias. (Margetts & Dorobantu, 2019, pp. 1035–1042).

- **Focusing on adaptive policies:** This is particularly important in the context of unexpected crises, such as the Covid-19 pandemic, where the value of comparing states' capacities for rapid adaptation becomes especially evident. For instance, comparing unemployment assistance policies during the pandemic in Sweden, representing the welfare model, and the United States, reflecting a more decentralized model, highlights the role of institutions in strengthening resilience. (Béland & al, 2021, pp. 143–159).

- **Deconstructing Western centrality in comparative studies:** There is a growing call to examine the policies of countries in the Global South, such as Rwanda in public health and Singapore in housing, as alternative models to European experiences. (Kate & al., 2020, p. 3).

Accordingly, the future of the field of comparative public policy is likely to be multidisciplinary, technology-oriented, and increasingly attentive to non-traditional actors such as digital platforms and social movements. This requires researchers to develop new analytical tools and move beyond traditional binaries, such as North–South and public–private.

Conclusion:

Comparative public policy remains an indispensable instrument for understanding global complexities through the articulation of theory and practice. The evolution of the field reflects a persistent tension between the ambition to construct a general theory, associated with scientism, and the recognition of the specificity of national cases, associated with realism. It is precisely this tension that has made comparative public policy an inherently interdisciplinary field, positioned at the intersection of theoretical abstraction and practical application.

Despite the progress achieved in comparative studies within this field, the methodological problematics surrounding the comparative method have hindered the construction of integrated and generalizable theories, and this continues to constitute the most significant challenge confronting the discipline. Nevertheless, recent advances in analytical tools, together with the growing recognition of the importance of scientific rigor, offer researchers the possibility of overcoming many of these constraints. Such progress, however, requires a firm commitment to precise standards in the selection of cases and concepts, as well as to the integration of quantitative and qualitative research methods. In the age of globalization, comparison remains an essential instrument for disentangling the complexities of political systems.

For this reason, the field of comparative public policy can no longer remain confined within theoretical frameworks inherited from the twentieth century. The central challenge lies in developing a dynamic model capable of recognizing the plurality of actors—including states, corporations, and digital citizens—while also conceiving of policies as complex adaptive systems shaped by non-linear interactions, and employing a critical perspective that reflects the diversity of regional experiences.

The epistemological future of comparative public policy likewise depends on sustained attention to cross-border analysis, the imperative of integrating quantitative and qualitative methodologies, and the growing role of modern technologies and digitalization in policy analysis.

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