

III. The Comparative Politics of Public Policy

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Introduction

This course investigates the politics of public policy making in comparative perspective. It is motivated by a basic cross-national puzzle: Why have Canada, the United States, and other advanced industrialized democracies responded to similar social problems with very different kinds of government policies?

For instance, Canada and the United States are both developed democracies facing the similar challenge of financing expensive medical care for their citizens. So why have these two societies chosen such radically different policy solutions – with Canada setting up a single-payer health care system covering all residents and the U.S. maintaining a patchwork of private and government insurance schemes that (at least until implementation of the Obama reforms) leaves almost one-sixth of the population uninsured? Or, in the field of environmental policy, why was the United States a world leader in aggressively regulating pollution in the early 1970s, while Western European countries took the lead on Green issues in the 1990s and the U.S. fell behind? Why do some liberal democracies, like Canada, have relatively liberal immigration policies while others try to shut the gates?

In the first half of the course, we will develop a set of general explanatory tools that will be useful in unraveling such cross-national policy puzzles. Specifically, we will examine several broad factors that shape the course of the policy making process in advanced democracies: public opinion and elections, the structure of political institutions, the organization of social interests, the set of ideas held by policy makers, and the historical legacy of a country's past policy choices.

By the end of Part I, we will have assembled an analytical toolkit that we can use to help explain cross-national similarity and difference in governments' choices across a wide range of policy fields. In Part II, the course will apply this toolkit to a series of policy fields that have a major impact on the lives of citizens: health care, welfare state reform, immigration control, environmental policy, and tax policy. In each policy field, we will ask how voters, institutions, interest groups, ideas, and history shape the cross-national patterns of policy response that we observe. We will primarily focus on the experiences of North American and West European democracies, with modest reference to Japan, Australia, and New Zealand.

Course Requirements

- **Midterm examination:** There will be a midterm examination in class. The midterm exam will cover Part I of the course.

To encourage you to plan ahead, part of the midterm exam will also ask you about your Research Paper topic. You will be told the precise question ahead of time and will be able to fully plan your answer to this question before the exam (i.e., these are easy points if you plan ahead).

- **Research paper:** In this project, you will be asked to explain why two advanced industrialized countries have adopted different policy responses to a similar domestic policy problem. The assignment will thus ask you to apply the analytical tools developed in Part I to unraveling your own cross-national policy puzzle. While the assignment has a defined structure, it allows for wide freedom of choice: it is up to you to pick both the policy field and the two countries upon which your paper will focus. A more detailed assignment will be distributed later in the term.
- **Length: 8-10 double-spaced pages**

Note above that you must choose your paper topic by the time of the midterm examination. By this point, you must have chosen the two countries and the policy field you will be examining, and you must have found out what policy choices the two countries have made in this field. Further guidance will be provided in class.

I am happy to read and comment on a thesis paragraph and outline of papers in progress. I am also happy to meet to discuss paper plans, during office hours or, if that is not possible, by appointment.

- **Final examination:** There will be a final examination to be scheduled later in the term.

Students are expected to regularly read a newspaper with good international coverage, especially of the areas (Europe and North America) that we will be emphasizing in this course. For English-language coverage, I particularly recommend the *Financial Times* and the *New York Times*, both available free online, or *The Economist*. A sense of ongoing political and policy developments will help ground the themes of the course in real-world issues, and help you to choose a paper topic with current relevance. In fact, it will probably enhance your interest and performance in all of your courses in the social sciences.

Grading.

The weighting of the written assignments in the final grade for the course is as follows:

Midterm exam 30%

Research paper	35%
Final exam	35%

Penalties for lateness

Papers handed in after the deadline will lose **2 points** on the 100-point scale for **each day** that they are late, including weekend days. The first day's penalty will be incurred by papers that come in on the right day but after the time indicated.

Required Readings and Schedule of Topics

Week 1: Introduction: The puzzle of cross-national difference

Goodin, Robert E. 1999. *The real worlds of welfare capitalism*. Cambridge, U.K. ; New York: Cambridge University Press, Chapters 3 and 4.

Part 1: Theoretical Tools

Week 2: Public opinion and elections

Ferejohn, John A. 1990. "Information and the Electoral Process." Pp. 3-19 in *Information and Democratic Processes*, edited by John A. Ferejohn and James H. Kuklinski. Chicago: University of Illinois Press.

Weaver, R. Kent. 1986. "The Politics of Blame Avoidance." *Journal of Public Policy* 6: 371-398.

Week 3: Political institutions

Immergut, Ellen M. 1992. "The rules of the game: The logic of health policy-making in France, Switzerland, and Sweden." Pp. 57-89 in *Structuring Politics: Historical Institutionalism in Comparative Analysis*, edited by Sven Steinmo, Kathleen Thelen, and Frank Longstreth. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Pierson, Paul. 1995. "Fragmented Welfare States: Federal Institutions and the Development of Social Policy." *Governance* 8: 449-78.

Week 4: Organization of interests

Olson, Mancur. 1982. *The Rise and Decline of Nations: Economic Growth, Stagflation, and Social Rigidities*. New Haven: Yale University Press, Chapter 2.

Wilson, Graham K. 2003. *Business and Politics: A Comparative Introduction (Third Edition)*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, Chapter 5.

Lindblom, Charles E. 1982. "The Market as Prison." *Journal of Politics* 44: 324-36.

Week 5: Policymakers' ideas

Hall, Peter A. 1993. "Policy Paradigms, Social Learning, and the State." *Comparative Politics* 25: 275-296.

Bleich, Erik. 2002. "Integrating Ideas into Policy-Making Analysis: Frames and Race Policies in Britain and France." *Comparative Political Studies* 35: 1054-1076.

Week 6: Policy feedback

Pierson, Paul. 1993. "When Effect Becomes Cause: Policy Feedback and Political Change." *World Politics* 45: 595-628.

MIDTERM EXAMINATION: IN CLASS
EXAM WILL INCLUDE QUESTION ABOUT YOUR
RESEARCH PAPER TOPIC.

Part 2: Policy Applications

Week 7: Research paper assignment and the logic of comparative inquiry

No readings

Week 8: Health care policy

Hacker, Jacob S. 1998. "The Historical Logic of National Health Insurance: Structure and Sequence in the Development of British, Canadian, and U.S. Medical Policy." *Studies in American Political Development* 12: 57-130.

Week 9: Welfare state reform

Pierson, Paul. 2001. "Post-Industrial Pressures on Mature Welfare States." Pp. 80-104 in *The New Politics of the Welfare State*, edited by Paul Pierson. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Pierson, Paul. 1996. "The New Politics of the Welfare State." *World Politics* 48:143-79.

Weaver, R. Kent. 2003. "Cutting Old-Age Pensions." Pp. 41-70 in *The Government Taketh Away: The Politics of Pain in the United States and Canada*, edited by Leslie A. Pal and R. Kent Weaver. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press.

RESEARCH PAPER DUE

Week 10: Immigration policy

Joppke, Christian. 1998. "Why Liberal States Accept Unwanted Immigration." *World Politics* 50: 266-93.

Week 11: Environmental policy

Vogel, David. 1993. "Representing Diffuse Interests in Environmental Policymaking." Pp. 237-71 in *Do Institutions Matter? Government Capabilities in the United States and Abroad*, edited by R. Kent Weaver and Bert A. Rockman. Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution.

Week 12: Tax policy

Steinmo, Sven. 1989. "Political Institutions and Tax Policy in the United States, Sweden, and Britain." *World Politics* 41: 500-35.

Week 13: Conclusion

No required readings.