Introduction

Public policy is the study of what governments do, and do not do. More specifically, it is the investigation of what policies are and how they perform (policy analysis) as well as how they come into being and are implemented (policy process). Comparative public policy is therefore simply the use of comparative approaches to public policy studies. The comparative approach involves the careful use of comparisons of similar units in order to strengthen our ability to make more general or more contextual statements and to learn lessons from other contexts. This could mean comparing a certain type of policy or policy process across political units (“K-12 education policy in the OECD”), a certain type of policy or policy process across time in one political unit (“K-12 education in the U.S. since WWII”); or different types of policies or policy processes within one political unit (“consumer safety policies in child products versus vehicles in the U.S.”). In addition to strengthening our generalizations, comparative public policy can act as a laboratory for “lessons learned” to improve the diffusion of better policies and policy processes.