



Comparative Governance

Decision-making is at the heart of governing and governance and is a more challenging task compared to just a few decades ago as a result of increasing social complexity and globalization. In this book, B. Guy Peters and Jon Pierre propose a new framework for the comparative analysis of governance, arguing that government remains a central actor in governance. By articulating the functionalist dimension of governance, they show how goal setting, resource mobilization, decision-making, implementation, and feedback can be performed by a combination of different types of actors. Even so, effective governance requires a leading role for government. The framework is also applied to a taxonomy of governance arrangements and national styles of governing. *Comparative Governance* advances our knowledge about governance failure and how forms of governance may change. It also significantly strengthens the theory of governance, showing how governance can be studied conceptually as well as empirically.

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Comparative Governance

Rediscovering the Functional Dimension
of Governing

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Preface

Governance has become one of the most commonly utilized terms in political science, and to some extent also in the other social sciences. Although the term “governance” is now commonly used, this concept is often misunderstood and is used in a variety of different, and sometimes even contradictory, ways. This book is intended to advance the study of governance and to enhance the utility of the concept in understanding politics, in general, and comparative politics, more specifically. In order to make those contributions, we are emphasizing three central features in this book.

The first, and perhaps most basic, contribution of this book is that governance is conceptualized as a powerful foundation for studying comparative politics. That emphasis is indicated in the title of the book and permeates the discussions in each chapter. While there are numerous interesting aspects of politics in all our countries, all these can be understood in terms of the basic need to govern. Elections and other aspects of individual-level behavior are interesting and perhaps even amusing at times, but they are relevant only because they contribute to governance. By having a clear conception of what constitutes governing, that comparison becomes more meaningful and more directed toward the fundamental characteristics of politics and government.

The second major contribution of this book on governance is to develop a functionalist model of governing. Functionalism has not been a popular approach to the social sciences for several decades, but still has an important place in analysis. Just as functionalist approaches served as a foundation for understanding political development, so too is it an appropriate means of elaborating governance. We have chosen to develop the functionalist model presented here for several reasons. The most important reason is to be able to overcome some of the academic squabbling about the relative roles of the state and social actors in governing. If we begin with an

agnostic position and use a set of functions to elaborate governance, we can answer questions in a more empirical manner. Further, the functionalist approach allows us to identify more readily the interaction among social actors and the state, emphasizing the manner in which these potential sources of governance interact. Finally, the functionalist approach to governance helps to identify processes as well as actors involved in governance.

The identification of fundamental processes of governing brings us to the third major contribution of this book. This is the linkage of governance and the study of public policy. As we developed the functionalist approach, we recognized that it resembles the process models in public policy, such as those developed by Charles O. Jones and William Dunn. But the linkage of governance is much more fundamental. Some decades ago, Harold Lasswell argued that politics is most fundamentally about “Who Gets What?” That very basic question is as true as it is about policy studies. And indeed public policies represent the final product of governance processes. The actions taken through the functions of the process cumulate in the policies taken by governments and their allies in the private sector.

In summary, we believe that this book develops an important conceptualization of governance. It develops a set of fundamental functions required for governing and demonstrates how these can be used to compare political systems. It also demonstrates the close connection between public policy analysis and governance. And ultimately it demonstrates that governance must be central to understanding the world of politics and governance.

We are very much indebted to David Levi-Faur and Paul ‘t Hart for detailed comments on an earlier version of the text. Yasemin Irepoglu Carreras has offered valuable assistance with the reference list. We also want to thank the two reviewers for their many constructive suggestions.

Like Molière’s M. Jourdain, speaking prose before he knew it, many scholars have spoken of governance without knowing it. We dedicate this book to them and to Monika and Sheryn for sometimes knowing about governance without talking about it.