The Real Issue for Future Comparative Policy Research: 

Does Government Matter?

Professor Frank Castles

Tuesday 19 April
12.30pm - 1.30pm
Acton Theatre, Level 1, J.G. Crawford Building
Light lunch will be provided

Inquiries contact Henry Keenan Ph: 6125 5559, henry.keenan@anu.edu.au

The essential argument presented in this seminar is that, despite the work of many pioneering scholars, the original agenda of those who came to comparative public policy with a view to demonstrating that ‘politics matters’ remains substantially unfulfilled. The substance of that agenda was to show that choices made through the ballot box influenced not only what governments did, but also had implications for important aspects of the lives of the citizens making those choices. One important reason for this failure was that much of the emergent quantitative literature came to focus on differences in large-scale aggregates of public spending as their main measures of the impact of institutional and electoral choices without inquiring much further as to whether such differences translated into a diversity of real outcomes. Professor Castles seeks to model a diverse range of outcomes with a view to assessing the impact of both political and governmental output variables. On the basis of that assessment, he argues that the challenge for the next generation of political science informed comparative policy research is to go beyond an examination of the link between political choice and the size of government to ask questions about – and ideally to begin to map – the linkages between the things governments do and the lives their citizens experience.

Frank Castles is Emeritus Professor of Social and Public Policy, University of Edinburgh and Adjunct Professor of Political Science at the ANU. From 1990-96 he was Professor of Public Policy at the ANU. He is the author of seven books and editor of 14 more, more than 80 articles in refereed journals and circa 40 book chapters. His most recent books include The Future of the Welfare State (OUP, 2004), Federalism and the Welfare State (Co-editor, Cambridge, 2005), The Disappearing State? (Editor, Edward Elgar, 2007) and The Oxford Handbook of the Welfare State (Co-editor, OUP, 2010).