

Seminar: Comparative Political Analysis

I. COURSE SUMMARY

This seminar has two purposes. First, it introduces graduate students in comparative politics to current methodological standards. Second, it requires students to develop their own research design that meets those standards.

II. REQUIREMENTS

A research prospectus (one in the mode of a 15-page description of research that is standard for NSF proposals) that sums up the work done throughout the quarter on your research question will be due at the end of exam week. The prospectus will be graded on the quality of thinking that went into the project rather than the proposed theory or the significance of the statistical results. Before handing in your final assignment, you will have an opportunity to present your prospectus, and defend it, before a group of advanced graduate students.

Details of assignments are included below. Your memos, slides, etc., should be posted on the class discussion website by noon on the Friday before each meeting to give everyone time to read your work and prepare comments and questions.

The success of the seminar will depend on your preparedness to discuss the assigned readings and to offer comments and feedback on each other's work, as well as the amount of effort you invest in advancing your own research agenda. The reading load light is intentionally so that: (1) you take the time to look back at readings from 440A and 440B to identify material that can illuminate methodological issues under discussion; (2) you can commit to advancing your own work and supporting the work of others with thoughtful comments and criticisms.

III. BOOKS TO PURCHASE

King, Gary, Robert, Keohane and Sidney Verba (1994; hereafter "KKV"). Designing Social Inquiry. Princeton: Princeton UP.

Geddes, Barbara (2003; hereafter "Geddes"). Paradigms and Sand Castles: Theory Building and Research Design in Comparative Politics. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Kuhn, Thomas (1996; hereafter "Kuhn"). The Structure of Scientific Revolutions. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Shepsle, Ken and Mark Bonchek (1997). Analyzing Politics: Rationality, Behavior, and Institutions. New York: Norton. [This text is recommended for those without previous training in formal analysis.]

IV. WEEKLY MEETINGS AND ASSIGNMENTS

Week 1 Introduction to the Course: Lines and Circles in the Study of Comparative Politics

KKV. Chapter 1.

Geddes. Chapter 1 and pp. 27-35.

Kuhn. Chapters IV, VI, and IX.

Laitin, David (2002). "Comparative Politics: The State of the Subdiscipline," in Ira Katznelson and Helen Milner (eds.), State of the Discipline. New York: Norton.

Przeworski, Adam and Henry Teune (1970). Logic of Comparative Social Inquiry. New York: Wiley. "Introduction," pp. 3-13.

Farr, William (1855). "The Thames, the Water Supply, and the Cholera Epidemic" in Noel Humphreys (ed.), Vital Statistics: A Memorial Volume of Selections from the Reports and Writings of William Farr. London: Offices of the Sanitary Institute.

Johnson, Steven (2006). The Ghost Map: The Story of London's Most Terrifying Epidemic and How It Changed Science, Cities, and The Modern World. New York: Riverhead. Pp. 81-136.

Przeworski, Adam and Frank Salomon (1988). "The Art of Writing Proposals: Some Candid Suggestions for Applicants to Social Science Research Council Competitions." Memo published by the Social Science Research Council.

[NB. This reading is intended to be helpful in the preparation of your final assignment.]

Week 2 The Comparative Method at Work: Testing for Observable Implications of Theories

Geddes. Pp. 37-40.

Przeworski and Teune (1970). Chapters 1-4.

Bates, Robert, Avner Grief, Margaret Levi, Jean-Laurent Rosenthal, and Barry Weingast (1998). Analytic Narratives. Princeton: Princeton UP. "Introduction," pp. 3-22.

Ferejohn, John (1991). "Rationality and Interpretation: Parliamentary Elections in Early Stuart England" in Kristen Monroe (ed.), The Economic Approach to Politics: A Critical Reassessment of the Theory of Rational Action. New York: Harper Collins.

Week 3 Political Theory and Comparative Politics

Assignment 1:

Choose a research question from a theory that (a) you read for PS 440A/B or another political science course; (b) you think is important; (c) you think is inadequate in explaining variance; (d) you have an intuition that can be formalized on how to improve it; and (e) you believe there are (or it is possible to create) quantitative data in which to explore the theory and your intuition for its improvement. Prepare a brief in-class presentation of this research question and circulate a written outline to the group.

Week 4 Narrative

KKV. Chapter 2.

Kiser, Edgar (1996). "The Revival of Narrative in Historical Sociology: What Rational Choice Theory Can Contribute." *Politics & Society* 24(3): 249-72.

Ellis, Stephen (2001). The Mask of Anarchy: The Destruction of Liberia and the Religious Dimension of an African Civil War. New York: NYU Press. "Introduction," pp. 1-30.

Assignment 2:

Read about a particular case (or a small set of cases) that is (or are) an instantiation (or are instantiations) of your motivating intuition. Drawing on books, articles, archives, newspapers, biographies, etc., write a five-page memo on how that case (or those cases) is (or are) anomalous for the reigning theory. Suggest which variables might need to be added or substituted to do better than reigning theory. Write an addendum to this paper that shows an initial search for datasets that might be useful for future high-n statistical tests.

Week 5 Formalization

N.B. It is assumed that most students will not yet have taken a course in game theory; the value added at this stage in your project development lies in identifying ways in which formalization may prove useful in developing a theoretical argument.

Geddes. Pp. 40-69.

Bates (1998). "The International Coffee Organization" in Bates et. al., Analytic Narratives.

Weingast, Barry (1997). "The Political Foundations of Democracy and the Rule of Law." American Political Science Review 91(2):245-63.

Kreps, David and Robert Wilson (1982). "Reputation and Imperfect Information." Journal of Economic Theory 27(2): 253-79,

Shepsle, Ken and Mark Bonchek (1997). Analyzing Politics: Rationality, Behavior, and Institutions. New York: Norton.

[N.B. This assignment is only for those students without a basic background in game theory. It will not be discussed in class.]

Assignment 3:

Specify an extensive form game that captures the essential logic of how you consider outcomes to be reached in your own theoretical argument. With pay-offs justified by assumption, solve through backward induction the equilibrium (or equilibria) of your game. Prepare a one-slide presentation of the basic model and payoffs, showing how outcomes identified in the research are reached.

Weeks 6 Statistics: Measurement

Geddes. Pp. 69-86, 148-72 and Appendix A (pp. 225-232).

Lazarsfeld, Paul F. and Allen H. Barton (1951). "Qualitative Measurement in the Social Sciences: Classification, Typologies, and Indices," in Daniel Lerner and Harold D. Daniel Lerner and Harold D. Lasswell (eds.), *The Policy Sciences: Recent Developments in Scope and Method*. Stanford: Stanford University Press. Pp. 155-92.

Assignment 4:

Class to be broken down into three groups. Each group should download a publicly available dataset. From it, the group should evaluate the specification of these variables and their coding criteria based on principles raised in the required reading, and what students have learned in the PS350 sequence. Prepare a short presentation in which you concentrate on the measurement of one or two key concepts.

Week 7 Statistics: Demonstrating Causality

Przeworski, Adam (2007). "Is the Science of Comparative Politics Possible?" in Susan Stokes and Carles Boix (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Politics*. New York: Oxford UP.

Dunning, Thad (2008). "Improving Causal Inference: Strengths and Limitations of Natural Experiments." *Political Research Quarterly* 61(2): 282-93.

Wantchekon, Leonard (2003). "Clientelism and Voting Behavior: Evidence from a Field Experiment in Benin." *World Politics* 55: 399-422.

Miguel, Edward (2004). "Tribe or Nation? Nation Building and Public Goods in Kenya versus Tanzania." *World Politics* 56:327-62.

Assignment 5:

Draft a memo in which you consider the challenges of establishing a causal relationship in your research. Present an identification strategy based on a plausible field or natural experiment. Your memo does not need to report details of specific cases (i.e., the proper nouns), but should outline a plausible scenario in which you could evaluate the implications of your motivating intuition.

Week 8 Statistical Tests of Student Ideas

Assignment 6:

Build a data set that would produce some statistical test of the theory or an observable implication of your own theory. Do some descriptive statistics that show the plausibility of your amendment to the reigning theory. Your analysis should focus on statistical and graphical descriptions of the dependent, and principal independent variables; and on analysis of basic correlations. Presentation of regression results is optional, and will only be allowed once these basic descriptive statistics have been fully explored. Prepare a 10-minute presentation describing your statistical exploits to present in seminar.

Week 9 Choosing Cases

KKV. Chapters 4-6.

Lieberman, Evan (2005). "Nested Analysis as a Mixed-Method Strategy for Comparative Research." *American Political Science Review* 99(3): 435-52.

Sekhon, Jasjeet (2004). "Quality Meets Quantity: Case Studies, Conditional Probability, and Counterfactuals." *Perspectives on Politics* 2(2): 281-293.

Fearon, James and David Laitin (2008). "Integrating Qualitative and Quantitative Methods," in Janet M. Box-Steffensmeier, Henry E. Brady, and David Collier (eds.), *Oxford Handbook of Political Methodology*. New York: Oxford UP.

Assignment 7:

Prepare a short presentation answering the following questions: What cases(s), different from the one that informed your original intuition, would be most productive to study in greater depth to add confidence that your theoretical model and empirical support of it are correct? What additional knowledge might be gained by collecting qualitative evidence on a small number of selected cases?

Week 10 Final Presentations to Outside Panel

Each student should prepare a 20-minute presentation of his/her research question, preliminary findings, and research strategy for the future to present to a panel of advanced graduate students qua "outside evaluators" (as if a talk at a professional meeting). Students should then be prepared to answer questions for 25 minutes. Outside evaluators will provide written feedback on the student presentations to accompany instructors' comments on the final research prospectus.

Version: 9 March 2009