PSCI 340

INTRODUCTION TO COMPARATIVE POLITICS

Fall Semester, 2012

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Political Science and Comparative Politics

- If political science is the “queen of sciences”, as the ancient Greeks asserted, then Comparative Politics is that queens Chief Councilor, Royal Wizard, and First Knight. So,

- WHAT IS COMPARATIVE POLITICS?
Why are some countries— or states, or cities—poor and others wealthier?

What enables some countries to "make it" in the modern world while others remain locked in poverty?

Why are many poor countries more inclined to be governed autocratically while many wealthy countries are democratic?

What accounts for the regional, cultural, and geographic differences that exist within states or regions— and between countries and nations?

What are the politics of the transition from underdevelopment to development and what helps stimulate and sustain that process?

What are the internal social and political conditions as well as the international situations of these various countries that explain the similarities as well as the differences?

These are the kinds of questions that lie at the heart of the field of Comparative Politics.
Comparative Politics involves the systematic study and comparison of the world's political systems and behaviors using the comparative method. The comparative method is - together with the experimental method, the statistical method and the case study approach - one of the four fundamental scientific methods which can be used to test the validity of general empirical propositions, i.e. to establish empirical relationships among two or more variables while all other variables are held constant.
In particular, the comparative method is generally used when neither the experimental nor the statistical method can be employed: on the one hand, experiments can only rarely be conducted in political science; on the other hand the statistical method implies the mathematical manipulation of quantitative data about a large number of cases, while sometimes political research must be conducted by analyzing the behavior of qualitative variables in a small number of cases. The case study approach cannot be considered a scientific method according to the above definition; however it can be useful to gain knowledge about single cases, which can be used to infer generalizations or be put to comparison with other cases according to the comparative method.

- It seeks to explain differences between as well as similarities among countries.

- It is particularly interested in exploring patterns, processes, and regularities among political systems.

- It looks for trends, for changes in patterns; and it tries to develop general propositions or hypotheses that describe and explain these trends.
CP as a subfield of Political Science

Comparative Politics

International Relations

American Politics

Political Theory
food for thought

“Thinking without comparison is unthinkable. And, in the absence of comparison, so is all scientific thought and scientific research.”

understanding the importance of comparison is key.

but, we must also understand why we need to compare.
basics of the comparative method: **purposes**

not all comparisons have the same objective, but what a researcher intends to accomplish with a comparison is critical.

here are three basic purposes …

- compare to **control**
- compare to **understand**
- compare to **explain**

let’s consider how these objectives differ …
Purposes: comparing to control

- comparing to control means that we use comparisons as a way to eliminate or control for a certain variables so that we can focus on or isolate the effects of others (also referred to as comparative checking)
comparing to **control**: an example

- “the poor are poor because they’re **lazy**”
- “rapid capitalist development is **incompatible** with an authoritarian political system: strong capitalism requires political ‘freedom’”
  - “islamic culture is **antithetical** to democracy”
- “governmental **control** of school systems (which results in a lack of competition) is the main reason for the relatively poor math and science skills of American students”

**reprise**: to determine whether any of these statements is right, wrong, or something else, we have to “**test**” each one
Purposes: comparing to understand and explain

- focus on a specific place and time; idiographic (definition: “of or relating to the study or discovery of particular scientific facts and processes, as distinct from general law”)

- focus on theory or general principles; nomothetic (definition: “of or relating to the study or discovery of general scientific laws”)

- researchers interested in explanation, use comparisons to build all-encompassing explanations or “big theories” that apply across a range of specific cases
**studying** comparative politics
the basics of comparative analysis

**goals** of comparing: summary of the three **purposes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>general purpose</th>
<th>comparing to control</th>
<th>comparing to understand</th>
<th>comparing to explain</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>basic strategy or purpose</td>
<td>comparative checking</td>
<td>interpretation</td>
<td>analytical Induction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>logic or approach to comparative analysis</td>
<td>researcher uses comparisons to eliminate or control for certain variables in order to assess the effects of other variables of interest (the assumed independent variables).</td>
<td>researcher is primarily interested in a single case and uses different cases or general theories as a way to learn more about the case he/she is studying.</td>
<td>researcher uses cases as a way to build a stronger theoretical explanation. Cases are used in a &quot;step-by-step&quot; manner, with each case contributing to the development of a general theory.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* these goals may overlap

**remember!**

- comparing to **control**
- comparing to **understand**
- comparing to **explain**

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*these goals may overlap*
Comparative Politics is also...

- Study of Politics *Within* Countries
- Emphasis on politics “as they are,” not as they “should be”
- Implicit and explicit emphasis on comparing and contrasting politics within and between countries, eras, & regions
Tasks of the comparativist

- Definition
- Observation & Description
- Explanation (why!)
- Prediction
- Prescription
Why do we do comparative politics?

- To explain why politics occurs the way it does
- To try and develop explanatory and predictive models for politics and political processes

Why compare?
What is, um, well, *comparable*?

- Can we compare Apples and Oranges?

- (and why do we consider them *un*-comparable?)
if apples and oranges can be compared can, say, Haiti and the United States also be compared?
what is comparable?

- **key point:** the question does not have a fixed answer
- the answer always depends on the purposes of the researcher, and the research question
- it also depends on the **types of** “similarities and differences that” exist between or among the units of analysis
- we can compare “entities whose attributes are in part shared (similar) and in part non-shared (different)”
One more point about comparing -

- comparisons are not limited to countries or geographic spaces per se:
  - events (such as wars or revolutions) are comparable
  - political or social institutions are comparable (e.g. the executive branch, the military, economic agencies)
  - policies are comparable (e.g. health care, educational policies, welfare)
CP *because* of this issue – comparison – doesn’t have therefore a single focus.

- Studies of one country -- or a particular institution (political parties, militaries, parliaments, interest groups), political process (decision making), or public policy (e.g., labor or welfare policy) in that country. When we focus on a single country or institution it is necessary to put the study into a larger comparative framework. That means we should tell why the subject is important and where it fits in a larger context.

- Studies of two or more countries -- paired comparisons provide for genuine comparative studies and are the heart of much of International Relations sub-fields of peace and conflict dyad studies.

- Regional or area studies -- This may include studies of Africa, Latin America, the Middle East, East Asia, Southeast Asia, South Asia, Europe, or other sub-regions. Such studies are useful because they involve groups of countries that may have several things in common -- e.g., similar history, cultures, language, religion, colonial backgrounds, and so on. Regional or area studies allow you to hold common features constant, while examining or testing for certain other features.
□ Studies across regions -- Often expensive and difficult to carry out. Such studies might involve comparisons of the role of the military in Africa and the Middle East, or the quite different paths of development of the East Asian countries and Latin America.

□ Global comparisons -- With the improved statistical data collected by the world bank, the UN, and other agencies, it is now possible to do comparisons on a global basis.

□ Comparisons across institutions – comparing legislatures across states, comparing corruption across sub-national units, comparing mayoralities within a state, etc.

□ Comparisons of particular behaviors: terrorism, revolutions, voting, wars. This is an area where Comparative Politics and International Relations often mix.

□ Thematic studies -- Comparative politics focuses on themes as well as countries and regions. e.g., themes such as dependency theory, corporatism, role of the state, process of military professionalization. Thematic studies are often complex and usually carried out by more senior scholars.
Current Themes in CP

*Democracies & Democratization*

- Politics of Advanced Industrial Democracies
- transitions to democracy
- legislative institutions, electoral systems, party systems
- the judiciary
- capitalism and democracy
- democratic stability
More Themes in CP:

**Political Economy**

- Liberalization
- development
- income distribution
- business-govt relations
- welfare states
- welfare reform
- corruption
- Transitions from communism
More Themes in CP:

Effects of globalization

Citizenship; minority rights; immigration

Social movements & social mobilization
More Themes in CP:

Nationalism & ethnic conflict:
- ethnic mobilization
- conflict resolution
- nationalist ideology
- guerrilla movements
- ethnic parties
The big questions

- Who has power?
- How do those in power keep it?
- How does power change hands?
- Why are the answers different in some places and times than in others?
The “Comparative” in CP:

- One case (small $n$)
  
  Why did the East German regime collapse so suddenly in 1989?

- Many cases (large $n$)

  Why did almost all the communist regimes of East Europe collapse in 1989?

- Theoretically informed
the logic of comparative analysis

- to do comparative analysis properly, one absolutely, positively must have a grasp of the general logic or general principles of comparing
good comparative analysis requires researchers to be guided by basic principles

These principles are meant to ensure sound reasoning and valid conclusions based on valid comparisons

so what are these basic principles?
there are many “logics” or principles of comparative analysis,
but perhaps the two simplest (and the ones on which we will focus) are these* …

- most similar systems (mss)
- most different/least similar systems (mds or lss)
Most Similar and Most Different Systems

- One crucial question in the selection of cases has been advanced by Adam Przeworski and Henry Teune. This is the difference between *most similar* and *most different* systems designs. The question here is how to select the cases for comparative analysis.

- Does one select cases that are apparently the most similar, or should the researcher attempt to select cases that are the most different?

- Further, like much of the other logic of comparative analysis, this logic can be applied to both quantitative and qualitative work.
Most Similar and Most Different Systems

Theda Skocpol argued for a most different systems design in her historical analysis of revolutions in France, Russia and China.

These systems all generated major revolutions, albeit arising within apparently very different political economic and social systems.

The question for Skocpol then became: What was sufficiently common among those systems to produce political events that were essentially similar?
MSS

- The MSS design is based on comparing two or more very similar systems or units of analysis …
- More importantly, it’s based on matching up and then comparing two more systems/units that share a whole range of similarities, but also differ in at least a couple of important respects.
- Thus, differences are key.
An example.

A comparison between twins makes no sense if there are absolutely no differences. However, if one twin is “smarter” than the other, then a comparison might be useful.

A researcher assumes that the difference is due to another variable—perhaps one drank more milk than the other or attended a different type of school …
if differences are key, what needs to differ?

- a: independent variable
- b: dependent variable

- note: make sure you understand the difference between these two types of variables: consider the previous example on twins …
  - what are the independent variables?
  - what is the dependent variable?

generally speaking, all social science arguments require the independent and dependent variables to be (explicitly) identified

- in a social science argument, both variables need to be defined or operationalized as precisely as possible
- social science arguments must explain the relationship between the independent and dependent variables with precision, clarity, and depth (*vagueness is not a virtue*)
It is also the usual method that researchers in comparative politics undertake. They take a range of countries that appear to be similar in as many ways as possible in order to control for 'concomitant variation'.

- Any number of studies have been done of the Anglo-American democracies for example, or of the Scandinavian countries, or of the 'little tigers' in Asia.

- The assumption is that extraneous variance questions have been dealt with by the selection of the cases.
If a relationship between an independent variable $X$ and a dependent variable $Y$ is discovered, then the factors that are held constant through the selection of cases cannot be said to be alternative sources of that relationship.

The most similar systems design has been argued to be the comparative design, given that it is the design that attempts to manipulate the independent variables through case selection and to control extraneous variance by the same means- which is methodologically problematic.
MOST DIFFERENT/LEAST SIMILAR (MDS/LSS)

- the MDS design is based on comparing two or more very different social systems …

  more importantly, it’s based on finding two systems that differ in almost all respects, except with regard to the presumed independent and dependent variables (the many differences are eliminated as potential explanatory variables)

*similarites are key*
LSS / MDS

- Here the logic of selecting cases, and indeed the whole logic of research, is exactly opposite that of the most similar systems design.
- In the first place, the most different design strategy begins with an assumption that the phenomenon being explained resides at a **lower, sub-systemic level**.
- This means that often this strategy is looking at individual level behavior and attempting to explain relationships among variables in samples of individuals.
The most different systems design is attempting to determine how *robust* any relationship among these variables may be.

- That is, does it hold up in a large number of varied places as if the observations were drawn from the same population of individuals?
- If it does, then we have some greater confidence that there is a true relationship, not one produced by some unmeasured third or fourth or fifth variables that exist in all relatively similar systems.

Further, the basic logic of the most different systems is **falsification**, very much in the tradition of Popperian philosophy of science (Popper, 1959).
**Falsification:** The basic argument is that science progresses by eliminating possible causes for observed phenomena rather than by finding positive relationships.

- There is no shortage of positive correlations in the social sciences; instead what there is, is sometimes a shortage of research that dismisses one or another plausible cause for that phenomenon.
- By setting up tests in a wide range of settings, the most different systems design attempts to do just that, while the most similar systems design can identify many possible causes but can eliminate none.
- The logic of this approach is therefore fundamentally different from the most similar systems design. Whereas the most similar design dealt with control through careful selection of matched cases, this design deals with the control issue by virtually ignoring it.
consider the logic of mds design: in contrast to the mss, if absolutely nothing is similar between two units, a comparison makes no sense. why?

to repeat: unlike the mss design, you don’t need, nor do you want variance on the dependent variable

on other words, the dependent variable should be the same for all the units in an mds design, and so should the independent variable
Let’s try a couple of examples for both MSS and MDS
### Key Comparisons (Selected)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Canada</th>
<th>United States</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Per capita</td>
<td>$39,300</td>
<td>$47,000</td>
<td>Same (both</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDP-PPP</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>are “high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>income” countries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment</td>
<td>6.1%</td>
<td>7.2%</td>
<td>Similar, but</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>rate varies from</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>year to year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pop. below poverty line</td>
<td>10.8%</td>
<td>12.0% (2004 est.)</td>
<td>Same/similar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>equality,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(Gini)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy rate</td>
<td>99%</td>
<td>99%</td>
<td>Same</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School “life expectancy”</td>
<td>17 years</td>
<td>16 years (2006)</td>
<td>Same</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urbanization</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>Same</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic groups</td>
<td>European: 66.0%</td>
<td>“White”: 66.4%*</td>
<td>Similar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other (Asian, Hispanic: 14.8%</td>
<td>(ethnic make</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>is from 2006)</td>
<td>African, Arab: 6%</td>
<td>up is</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Native: 2%</td>
<td>Black: 13.4%</td>
<td>different,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Asian: 4.4%</td>
<td>Native: 1.0%</td>
<td>but both have</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mixed: 26%</td>
<td>Native: 1.0%</td>
<td>diversity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Net Migration rate</td>
<td>5.63 immigrants per 1,000/pop.</td>
<td>4.31 immigrants per 1,000/pop.</td>
<td>Similar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2009 est.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(illegal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>immigration</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Key Differences (dependent variable)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Canada</th>
<th>US</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gun-related homicide rate</td>
<td>0.54</td>
<td>2.97</td>
<td>550% higher in US</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall homicide rate</td>
<td>1.75</td>
<td>5.75</td>
<td>320% higher in US</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Key Difference(s) (independent variable)

Main task of researcher is to find a key difference between Canada and the US that can explain the significant variance in the dependent variable (gun-related and overall homicide rates). See main text for further discussion.

Source: CIA World Factbook (n.d.)
### the mds design: some practice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Male Suicide Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lithuania</td>
<td>68.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Americans</td>
<td>62.6*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guyana</td>
<td>33.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>34.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estonia</td>
<td>35.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Korea</td>
<td>29.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zimbabwe</td>
<td>10.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>10.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tajikistan</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guatemala</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Except for “Native Americans” all data from WHO. Rates are per 100,000

**instructions.** Look at the figures on the chart and, based on your general knowledge, identify at least two sets of “units” that might be compared using an mds design. **Write down your answers.**

Can you describe the logic of your comparison? That is, explain why the comparison makes sense and how it would help us better understand the causes of suicide or, conversely, the factors that make suicide less likely.

**Note:** Don’t worry, for now, about the year the statistics are from
But as many have noted, the problem with both approaches is the lack of explanatory qualitative methodology accounting for those nuances and subtleties of culture, family, and society that make the study of the human species so fascinating, and what drew you to the study of political science today.
How we do CP: Types of research (methodologies)

- **Quantitative**: based on numbers & statistical methods.

- **Qualitative**: does NOT rely on numerical analysis. Tends to focus on fewer cases. Includes in-depth interviews, analysis of documents, etc.
How we “do” CP”: some sources of information

- Censuses
- Electoral returns
- Surveys
- Court documents
- Interviews
- Memoirs
- Speeches
- Party programs
- Letters
- Reports
- Newspapers
- Participant-observation
Observations and questions
What variations can you see in these voting patterns?

Province-level votes for independent candidates and turnout in mayoral elections (percentages) in some of Turkey’s southeastern provinces

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mus</td>
<td>43.6</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>66.7</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agri</td>
<td>25.5</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>53.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mardin</td>
<td>25.9</td>
<td>33.6</td>
<td>67.8</td>
<td>65.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Van</td>
<td>30.4</td>
<td>17.1</td>
<td>65.6</td>
<td>61.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tunceli</td>
<td>47.5</td>
<td>71.3</td>
<td>74.1</td>
<td>67.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diyarbakir</td>
<td>21.7</td>
<td>40.9</td>
<td>43.8</td>
<td>43.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* National average support for independents: 13.7% in 1973; 6.1% in 1977
A comparative inquiry?
Paradigms in CP: What do we look at most closely?

- Rational choice
- Culture (Identities)
- Institutionalism

Note: some approaches are better at answering some questions than others!