Comparative Methods in
International and Comparative Politics
GOVT 6053, Spring 2010
Wednesdays 10:10 am-12:35 pm, McGraw Hall 365
http://blackboard.cornell.edu

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Office hours: Thurs 9:30-11:30 am or by appointment

Overview. This seminar is designed to introduce doctoral students to methods of political analysis that are commonly used in the political science sub-fields of international relations and comparative politics. It is designed to familiarize students with methodological challenges commonly encountered in comparative research, including concept formation, theory development and testing, case selection, variable operationalization and measurement, and descriptive and causal inference. The material covered in this course, along with material from Government 6353, prepares students to take the comparative politics A exam. Another goal of the course is to prepare students methodologically to conduct original research in comparative politics and write an A paper in the following year. Students, therefore, will apply concepts and techniques to their own research questions as the semester progresses.

Because this seminar is designed to introduce doctoral students to some of the major issues in political science methods, and because specific methodological issues in the fields of comparative and international politics are numerous and varied, the list of topics discussed in this course should not be considered comprehensive.

Course requirements and grading. The requirements of the course are fivefold.

- You are required to attend all class meetings, to come to seminar having read and thought about the assigned material for the week, and to participate actively in class discussions. Each week, students will also be responsible for presenting the week’s readings and leading class discussion. Class participation will compose 20% of the final grade.

- Write a peer review of one paper presented this academic year in the PSAC workshop as if you were reviewing the manuscript for a journal. Be sure to provide suggestions for improvement. Further details will be distributed in class. Students are strongly encouraged to regularly attend the PSAC workshop on scheduled Friday afternoons. Your review is due by May 7th, but can be completed at any time during the semester. Your review will count for 10% of the final grade.

- Complete all ten research design assignments described below, and be prepared to discuss these ideas in class. These ten assignments consist of 1-3 pages of written work each. Your memos and research design assignments will be assessed on the quality of thinking that went into the project, rather than the proposed theory. The first nine assignments cumulatively count for 50% of the final grade.

- Before the second assignment, I will divide the class into research support groups of 3-4 students. Read the written assignments of the other members of your group as you receive them and e-mail constructive comments to at least two of them for each assignment. Alternatively, groups can choose to meet weekly and discuss each other’s ideas.
• Present to the class a 15 minute summary of your research question, theory and observable implications, case selection, and research strategy. This is assignment #10, and it counts for 20% of the final grade.

Readings. Four books are available for purchase at the Cornell Bookstore and online. All four are also on reserve in Olin Library. All others readings will be available via the GOVT 6053 Blackboard site. The books are:


Cornell University policies and regulations.
Each student in this course is expected to abide by the Cornell University Code of Academic Integrity, which is available at: http://www.cuinfo.cornell.edu/Academic/AIC.html. This code includes the following statements: “A Cornell student’s submission of work for academic credit indicates that the work is the student’s own. All outside assistance should be acknowledged, and the student’s academic position truthfully reported at all times.” It is your responsibility to familiarize yourself with university policies regarding plagiarism and other violations of academic integrity. A Cornell tutorial called “Recognizing and Avoiding Plagiarism” can be found at: http://plagiarism.arts.cornell.edu/tutorial/index.cfm

According to the Cornell University Grading System that was adopted by the University Faculty in 1965, the grade of “incomplete” is appropriate only when two (2) basic conditions are both met: 1. The student has a substantial equity at a passing level in the course with respect to work completed, and 2. The student has been prevented by circumstances beyond the student’s control, such as illness or family emergency, from completing all the course requirements on time. A grade of “incomplete” may not be given merely because a student fails to complete all course requirements on time and is not an option that can be elected at the student’s own discretion.
**Course assignments.**

**Assignment #1:** Choose a puzzle that (a) you think is important and interesting; (b) you think our understanding of is inadequate; (c) you have an intuition of how to improve our understanding of; and (d) you believe it is possible to collect data with which to explore your intuition. The puzzle could be variation in an outcome across time or space, a Pareto sub-optimality or inefficiency, or a phenomenon that simply doesn’t “make sense” and you “don’t get.” The puzzle can be from something you read in 6353 or another class or something from the “real” world. In one page or less, describe your puzzle without using jargon or suggesting a possible explanation. E-mail it to me by 8 a.m., February 1; be prepared to briefly describe your puzzle in seminar.

**Assignment #2:** Identify and briefly summarize one main and two plausible alternative explanations to your puzzle/question. There are several ways to do this. You could develop explanations “off the top of your head” using intuition, or you might collect two to three articles or books that examine roughly the same puzzle that you have posed (i.e., have roughly the same dependent variable) and draw out the conjectures that the authors offer. You may need to read about a particular case (or a small set of cases) that is an example (or are examples) of the phenomenon that you seek to explain. State your three explanations as clear, testable and falsifiable causal propositions. A falsifiable proposition is one that can be shown to be wrong. If you can’t think of any evidence that would convince you that the proposition is wrong, you need to reformulate the proposition. If possible, render the propositions (and their falsifiability) in diagrams or equations or both. Be clear about the mechanism(s) that link the cause (independent variable(s)) and effect (outcomes you are trying to explain). E-mail me and your group a 2-3 page summary by 8 a.m., February 15.

**Assignment #3:** First, identify several (or, ideally, as many as possible...) direct observable implications of each proposition and indirect ones that follow from the logics employed. Second, construct at least three hypotheses about the observable implications of your possible explanations. Make a list of the information you need to collect to (a) know whether your explanation is wrong (to disconfirm your hypotheses), (b) make a compelling case that your argument is correct, and (c) dismiss the major alternative plausible hypotheses. What would be ‘ideal’ data to assess each conjecture? E-mail me and your group a 2-3 page summary by 8 a.m., February 22.

**Assignment #4:** First, define your key independent and dependent variables; clearly state how your variables vary. Second, describe how you would operationalize these variables and discuss the tradeoffs, if any, involved in the operationalizations that you propose. If helpful, follow the steps outlined by Adcock and Collier. E-mail a 2-3 page summary to me and your group by 8 a.m., March 1.

**Assignment #5:** Identify the relevant universe of cases. Be clear about the unit of analysis. Select cases that you could use to assess the hypotheses of the observable implications of your theory. Think about what cases(s), different from the one(s) that informed your initial intuition, would be most productive to study in greater depth to add confidence that your propositions are correct or incorrect. Explain the rationale you used for selecting this unit of analysis and specific cases and why you used the criteria that you did instead of alternative ones. Explain what additional knowledge, if any, might be gained by collecting qualitative evidence on a small number of additional cases. E-mail me and your group a 2-3 page summary by 8 a.m., March 15.

**Assignment #6:** Outline a ‘large-N’ dataset that would produce some statistical test of your theory using, cross-national, sub-national, or survey data. Develop a research strategy for building this dataset, and
provide a few sample “rows.” If possible, outline “coding rules.” Describe the hypotheses amenable to quantitative tests and how the data gathered would allow you to assess those hypotheses.  

Optional: Produce some basic statistical test of the theory or an observable implication of your own theory using original data or an existing dataset. Do some descriptive statistics that show the plausibility of the theory, focusing on statistical and graphical descriptions of the dependent and principal independent variables. E-mail me and your group a 2-3 page summary by 8 a.m., March 29.

**Assignment #7:** For your main theoretical argument, identify the key actors or decision-makers and describe the sequence (if any) in which they interact. Explicitly state the choices available to those actors at each stage in their interaction. Why do those actors make the choices that they do in some situations, but not others, or at some times, but not other times? If appropriate, explain how institutions or other exogenous factors guide, motivate, or constrain the interaction between or the choices available to the actors. Explain why your main theoretical argument makes sense from the perspective of individuals. Can you identify more observable implications from the “micro-mechanism” of your propositions?  

Optional: 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. What kind of research design will you use to test your model and its predications? E-mail me and your group a 2-3 page summary by 8 a.m., April 5.

**Assignment #8, option a:** Write a 2-3 page memo describing a lab, field, or natural experiment that could be used to put some aspect of your theory or the mechanisms underlying it to an empirical test. E-mail it to me and your group by 8 a.m., April 19.

**Assignment #8, option b:** Write a 2-3 page memo describing a possible endogeneity problem in your project and how you intend to solve it. E-mail it to me and your group by 8 a.m., April 19.

**Assignment #9:** Pick a country in which you could do field research for your project and write a 2-3 memo that does two things. First, make a “to get” list of data that you would need to collect in the country to assess your theories. Second, list or describe practical and logistical issues that you might face in that country as you attempt to collect these data. These might include getting interviews, entering specific sites, setting up to live and work, acquiring research permissions or IRB approval, language concerns, funding issues, and preparations to take your family to the field. If possible, identify at least three other scholars who have worked in that country and see if their books or dissertations contain logistical information that might help you cope with these issues. E-mail a summary to me and your group by 8 a.m., April 26.

**Assignment #10:** Present a 15 minute summary of your research question, theory and observable implications, case selection, and overall research strategy in class on May 5. Students should prepare transparencies, PowerPoint slides, or printed handouts for their presentation. If necessary, we will find another block of time to complete presentations.
Class 1. January 27. Introduction


Geddes. 2003. Chapter 1 (pp. 1-26)


Supplemental


This book contains in-depth interviews with fifteen scholars in the field of comparative politics about their intellectual formation, their major works and ideas, the nuts-and-bolts of the research process, their relationships with colleagues, collaborators and students, and the evolution of the field. Almond, Bates, Collier, Dahl, Huntington, Laitin, Lijphart, Linz, Moore, O’Donnell, Przeworski, Schmitter, Scott, Skocpol, and Stepan.


Replies in the same volume by Mahoney, Wibbels, and Munck and Snyder

Class 2. February 3.  Puzzles and questions

King, Keohane, & Verba. 1994. Chapter 1 (pp. 3-33)

Geddes. 2003. Chapter 2 (pp. 27-88)


Varshney, Ashutosh. 2001. “Ethnic Conflict and Civil Society: India and Beyond.” World Politics 53, 3 (April): 362-98. (only read pages 370-374, and focus on Table 1 on p. 372)

Supplemental


Class 3. February 10.  Descriptive inference

King, Keohane, & Verba. 1994. Chapter 2 (pp. 34-74)


Class 4. February 17.  Causality and standards for valid causal inference


King, Keohane, & Verba. 1994. chapter 3 (pp. 75-114)


*Rethinking Social Inquiry*, chapter 13 and Appendix (Collier, Brady, and Seawright, pp. 222-271)


Supplemental
*Almost all of Rethinking Social Inquiry*


Includes their response to Beck, p. 359-360.

http://www.nyu.edu/gsas/dept/politics/faculty/beck/cponew.pdf
Beck’s response to the above response.
Class 5. February 24.  Concepts, concept formation, measurement, reliability and validity


Freedom House’s methodology:

Polity IV Project user’s manual:

Supplemental


Class 6. March 3. Principles of selecting the unit of analysis and cases

King, Keohane, & Verba. 1994. Chapters 4-6 (pp. 115-230)


Geddes. 2003. Chapter 3 (pp. 89-129)

Brady & Collier, eds. 2004. Chapter 6 (pp. 85-102)


Suicide terrorism

Supplemental


The deterrence debate
Class 7. March 10. Case studies and process-tracing


Geddes. 2003. Chapter 4 (pp. 131-174)


Supplemental


Class 8. March 17.  Statistics


http://www.stanford.edu/group/ethnic/DLJFNSF.doc

Supplemental


http://www.concepts-methods.org/working_papers/20071005_17_PC%2018%20Pepinsky.pdf

**Choice theories**


Geddes. 2003. Chapter 5 and conclusion (pp. 175-223)


**Supplemental**

GOVT 7073 and 7074 (Game Theory 1 and 2)


**The deterrence debate revisited**

Class 10. April 7.  Experiments


Supplemental


[readings to be trimmed]


Thelen, Kathleen, and Sven Steinmo, “Historical Institutionalism in Comparative Politics“ in Structuring Politics, Sven Steinmo et. al.


Elster, Jon. 2000. “Rational Choice History: A Case of Excessive Ambition.” American Political Science Review 94, 3 (September), and reply by authors of Analytic Narratives.

Supplemental
Cautionary note: This tale may not be entirely correct.


Class 12. April 21. Field Work


Supplemental
Syllabus of GOVT 6523 (Methods for Field Research)
Class 13. April 28.  Disciplined or Disciplinary Scuffles?

Kuhn. 1996. all.

Mahoney, James, and Gary Goertz. 2006. “A Tale of Two Cultures: Contrasting Quantitative and Qualitative Research.” Political Analysis 14, 3 (Summer): 227-249.


Supplemental
In the past (although less so in recent years), the Newsletter of the APSA Organized Section in Comparative Politics (especially in letters from the section’s presidents and commentaries on the letters) contained insightful and often controversial statements about the field. Back issues are available online:
http://www.nd.edu/~apsacp/backissues.html


Class 14. May 5. Student presentations

http://fellowships.ssrc.org/art_of_writing_proposals/

http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/11.09/ppt2.html


Complete the Training Program for Researchers in the Use of Human Participants. http://www.irb.cornell.edu/training/

Supplemental
Several articles from APSA journals on dissertations, including choosing a topic and writing a prospectus
http://www.apsanet.org/content_12965.cfm

(On reserve in Olin)