

Basic Theories and Methods in Comparative Politics

PSC 77901

Fall 2023

Thursday 2:00-4:00

Location GC 3307

Nicholas Rush Smith

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Office Hours

Thursday 1:00-2:00

Location TBD

Description: Practitioners of comparative political science leverage myriad tools in order to examine, understand, measure, and predict political behavior across contexts. At its heart, political science is an effort to understand political phenomena, but its practitioners often disagree about the best ways to go about it. This course will introduce students to the history of comparative political science, epistemological debates within the subdiscipline, the process of developing a research project, and varied approaches to conduct comparative political research.

To accomplish these goals, the course is broken into three broad sections. The first pushes students to ask why we compare. The second introduces students to the process of developing a comparative research project. The third asks what strategies of comparison we can use to carry out the project. Throughout the course of the semester, students will develop a mock research proposal, like that which would be suitable for submission to a major dissertation research grant fellowship, based upon an influential book in political science to learn the craft of developing a research design.

Learning Outcomes: Students will learn how to formulate a research question, develop a literature review, and create a research design to answer that question.

Course Assignment: The primary assignment for the course is to produce a research proposal suitable for submission to a professional academic funding competition based upon an influential book in political science. (A list of approved books covering multiple different topics that are suitable for this project is at the end of the syllabus.) Essentially, students will work retroactively to reconstruct the logic by which an author developed their research question and the design to solve it and create a justification for that design to be presented in the form of a mock research grant proposal. There will be several short assignments to help students develop the necessary skills to produce a typical funding proposal that will be submitted throughout the term and a final 10-page research proposal to be submitted at the end of the term incorporating feedback received throughout the course of the semester. Detailed instructions will be provided on the individual assignments separately.

- 1) Assignment 1: Select a book from the approved list upon which to base your eventual proposal and explain why you think the book's topic is important (Due September 21)

- 2) Assignment 2: Summarize the problem the book addresses and formulate a specific research question the book attempts to answer (Due September 28)
- 3) Assignment 3: Describe and justify the book's unit of analysis (Due October 5)
- 4) Assignment 4: Summarize and critique a high-quality article on the topic of the selected book (Due October 19)
Assignment 5: Explain the book's hypothesis, along with the expected outcomes or significance of the proposed research (Due October 26)
- 5) Assignment 6: Describe and justify your selected book's research design (Due November 16)
- 6) Assignment 7: Final Research Proposal (December 7)

Grading and Evaluation: The course will be graded on a 100-point scale. The breakdown is as follows:

Assignment 1: 5 points
 Assignment 2: 5 points
 Assignment 3: 10 points
 Assignment 4: 20 points
 Assignment 5: 10 points
 Assignment 6: 15 points
 Assignment 7: 25 points
 Participation: 10 points

Books to Purchase:

Erica S. Simmons and Nicholas Rush Smith, eds. 2021. *Rethinking Comparison: Innovative Methods for Qualitative Political Inquiry*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Course Overview

Section I: Why We Compare

Week 1 (August 31): Course Introduction

No Reading

Week 2 (September 7): Is There a Science of Comparative Politics?

Almond, Gabriel. 1966. "Political Theory and Political Science." *American Political Science Review* 60 (4): 869–879.

Sheldon Wolin. 1969. "Political Theory as a Vocation." *American Political Science Review* 63 (4) 1062-1082.

King, Gary, Robert Keohane and Sidney Verba. 1994. *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research*. Princeton: Princeton University Press: 3-27.

Dipesh Chakrabarty. 2007. *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press: Chapter 1.

Case: Barbara Geddes. 1999. "What Do We Know about Democratization After Twenty Years?" *Annual Review of Political Science* 2 (1): 115-144

Week 3: (September 14): Is Comparison Political?

Peng Cheah. 1999. "Grounds of Comparison." *Diacritics* 29 (4): 3018.

Nick Cheesman. 2021. "Unbound Comparison." In *Rethinking Comparison: Innovative Methods for Qualitative Political Inquiry*. Erica S. Simmons and Nicholas Rush Smith, eds. New York: Cambridge University Press: 64-83.

Pachirat, Timothy. 2009. "The Political in Political Ethnography: Dispatches from the Kill Floor." In *Political Ethnography: What Immersion Contributes to the Study of Politics*. Edward Schatz, Ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Case: Kanisha D. Bond, Courtenay R. Conrad, Dylan Moses, and Joel W. Simmons. 2022. "Detecting Anomalies in Data on Government Violence." *Political Science Research and Methods* 10: 634-641.

Week 4 (September 21): How Does Our Research Culture Change Our Approach to Comparison?

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

Benedict Anderson. 2016. "Frameworks of Comparison." *London Review of Books* 38 (2).

Lisa Wedeen with Erica S. Simmons and Nicholas Rush Smith. "Theory and Imagination in Comparative Politics: An Interview with Lisa Wedeen." In *Rethinking Comparison: Innovative Methods for Qualitative Political Inquiry*. Erica S. Simmons and Nicholas Rush Smith, eds. New York: Cambridge University Press: 251-274.

Case: Lisa Wedeen. 2007. "The Politics of Deliberation: Qāt Chews as Public Spheres in Yemen." *Public Culture* 19 (1): 59-84.

DUE Assignment 1: Select a book from the approved list upon which to base your eventual proposal and explain why you think the book's topic is important

Section 2: How We Develop a Comparative Project

Week 5 (September 28): How Do We Develop Puzzling Questions?

Przeworski, Adam and Frank Salomon. 1995. "On the Art of Writing Proposals." New York: Social Science Research Council.

Barbara Geddes. 2003. *Paradigms and Sand Castles: Theory Building and Research Design in Comparative Politics: Analytical Perspectives on Politics*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press: Chapter 2.

Robert Dahl with Gerardo L. Munck and Richard Snyder. "Robert A. Dahl: Normative Theory, Empirical Research, and Democracy," from *Passion, Craft, and Method in Comparative Politics*, Gerardo L. Munck and Richard Snyder, eds., (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press): 113-149.

Case: Nicholas Rush Smith. 2019. *Contradictions of Democracy: Vigilantism and Rights in Post-Apartheid South Africa*. New York: Oxford University Press: Preface, Introduction.

DUE Assignment 2: Summarize the problem the book addresses and formulate a specific research question the book attempts to answer

Week 6 (October 5): What Are We Comparing When We Compare?

Adam Przeworski and Henry Teune. 1966. "Equivalence in Cross-National Research." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 30 (4): 551-568.

John Gerring. 2004. "What is a Case Study and What is It Good For?" *American Political Science Review* 98 (2): 341-354.

Joe Soss. 2021. "On Casing a Study versus Studying a Case." In *Rethinking Comparison: Innovative Methods for Qualitative Political Inquiry*. Erica S. Simmons and Nicholas Rush Smith, eds. New York: Cambridge University Press: 84-106.

Case: Severine Autesserre. 2009. "Hobbes and the Congo: Frames, Local Violence, and International Intervention." *International Organization* 63 (2): 249-280.

DUE Assignment 3: Describe and justify the book's unit of analysis

Week 7 (October 12): How Do We Conceptualize What We Are Comparing?

Giovanni Sartori. 1970. "Concept Misformation in Comparative Politics." *American Political Science Review* 64 (4): 1033-1053

Frederic Charles Schaffer. 2016. *Elucidating Social Science Concepts: An Interpretivists Guide*. New York: Routledge: Chapter 1.

Hannah Pitkin. 1985. *Wittgenstein and Justice: On the Significance of Ludwig Wittgenstein for Social and Political Thought*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press: Chapter 4.

Case: Hannah Pitkin. 1985. *Wittgenstein and Justice: On the Significance of Ludwig Wittgenstein for Social and Political Thought*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press: Chapter 8.

Week 8 (October 19): How Do We Understand How Others Have Compared Before Us?

Abbott, Andrew. 2014. *Digital Paper: A Manual for Research and Writing with Library and Internet Materials*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press: Chapter 3.

Case: Berman, Sheri. 1997. "Civil Society and the Collapse of the Weimar Republic." *World Politics* 49 (3): 401-429.

DUE Assignment 4: Summarize and critique a high-quality article on the topic of your selected book

Week 9 (October 26): To What Ends Do We Compare?

Evan Lieberman. 2005. "Nested Analysis as a Mixed-Method Strategy for Comparative Research." *American Political Science Review* 99 (3): 435–452.

Frederic C. Schaffer. 2021. "Two Ways to Compare." In *Rethinking Comparison: Innovative Methods for Qualitative Political Inquiry*. Erica S. Simmons and Nicholas Rush Smith, eds. New York: Cambridge University Press: 47-63.

Mala Htun and Francesca R. Jensenius. 2021. "Comparative Analysis for Theory Development." In *Rethinking Comparison: Innovative Methods for Qualitative Political Inquiry*. Erica S. Simmons and Nicholas Rush Smith, eds. New York: Cambridge University Press: 190-207.

Case: Schaffer, Frederic Charles. 1997. "Political Concepts and the Study of Democracy: The Case of Demokaraasi in Senegal." *PoLAR* 20 (2): 40-49.

DUE Assignment 5: Explain the book's hypothesis, along with the expected outcomes or significance of the proposed research

Section 3: What Strategies of Comparison We Can Use

Week 10 (November 2): What Is a Controlled Comparison and Why Is It Useful?

Dan Slater and Daniel Ziblatt. 2013. "The Enduring Indispensability of the Controlled Comparison." *Comparative Political Studies* 46 (10): 1301-1327.

Adam Przeworski and Henry Teune. 1970. *The Logic of Comparative Social Inquiry*. New York: Wiley Interscience: Chapter 2.

Thad Dunning. 2008. "Improving Causal Inference: Strengths and Limitations of Natural Experiments." *Political Research Quarterly* 61 (2): 282-293.

Case: Daniel Posner. 2004. "The Political Salience of Cultural Difference: Why Chewas and Tumbukas Are Allies in Zambia and Adversaries in Malawi." *American Political Science Review* 98 (4): 529–545.

Week 11 (November 9): How Do We Incorporate Context into Comparisons?

Rachel Gisselquist. 2014. "Paired Comparison and Theory Development: Considerations for Theory Development." *PS: Political Science and Politics* 47 (2): 477-484.

Richard M. Locke and Kathleen Thelen. 1995. "Contextualized Comparisons and the Study of Comparative Labor Politics." *Politics & Society* 23 (3): 337-367.

Erica S. Simmons and Nicholas Rush Smith. 2021. "Comparisons with an Ethnographic Sensibility: Studies of Protest and Vigilantism." In *Rethinking Comparison: Innovative Methods for Qualitative Political Inquiry*. Erica S. Simmons and Nicholas Rush Smith, eds. New York: Cambridge University Press: 231-250.

Case: Erica S. Simmons. 2016. "Market Reforms and Water Wars." *World Politics* 68 (1): 37-73.

Week 12 (November 16): How Do We Compare within Systems?

Philip McMichael. 1990. "Incorporating Comparison with a World-Historical Perspective: An Alternative Comparative Method." *American Sociological Review* 55 (3): 385-397.

Thea Riofrancos. 2021. "From Cases to Sites: Studying Global Processes in Comparative Politics." In *Rethinking Comparison: Innovative Methods for Qualitative Political Inquiry*. Erica S. Simmons and Nicholas Rush Smith, eds. New York: Cambridge University Press: 107-126.

Jillian Schwedler. 2021. "Against Methodological Nationalism: Seeing Comparisons as Encompassing through the Arab Uprisings." In *Rethinking Comparison: Innovative Methods for Qualitative Political Inquiry*. Erica S. Simmons and Nicholas Rush Smith, eds. New York: Cambridge University Press: 172-189.

Case: Case: Adom Getachew. 2019. *Worldmaking after Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self-Determination*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press: Chapter 5.

DUE: Assignment 6: Describe and justify your selected book's research design

Week 13 (November 23): No Class
CUNY Cancellation

Week 14 (November 30): How Do We Compare Historically?

Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennett. 2005. *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press: Chapter 10.

William H. Sewell, Jr. 2005. *Logics of History: Social Theory and Social Transformation*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press: Chapter 3.

Diana Kim. 2022. "Taming Abundance: Doing Digital Archival Research (as Political Scientists)." *PS: Political Science & Politics* 55 (3): 530 - 538

Case: Diana Kim. 2012. "The Story of the Tattooed Lady: Scandal and the Colonial State in British Burma." *Law and Social Inquiry* 37 (4): 969-990.

Week 15 (December 7) How Do Encounters with the World Change What We Are Comparing?

Sally Falk Moore. 2005. "Comparisons: Possible and Impossible." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 34 (1): 1-11.

Giovanni Picker. 2014. "Rethinking Ethnographic Comparison: Two Cities, Five Years, One Ethnographer." *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 46 (3): 263-284.

Sarah E. Parkinson. 2021. "Composing Comparisons: Studying Configurations of Relations in Social Network Research." In *Rethinking Comparison: Innovative Methods for Qualitative Political Inquiry*. Erica S. Simmons and Nicholas Rush Smith, eds. New York: Cambridge University Press: 152-171.

Case: Sarah E. Parkinson. 2013. "Organizing Rebellion: Rethinking High-Risk Mobilization and Social Networks in War" *American Political Science Review* 107 (3): 418-243.

DUE Assignment 7: Final Research Proposal

Books for Research Design (Choose One)

Books were chosen to represent a selection of major topics in the study of comparative politics, for methodological diversity, and to represent work from different eras of research within the subdiscipline. If students are interested in working on a book that uses a particular method or approach, as opposed to choosing a book on a particular topic, please reach out to me and we can discuss the broad approach each book takes.

Authoritarianism

Lisa Wedeen. 2019 [1999]. *Authoritarian Apprehensions: Ideology, Judgment, and Mourning in Syria*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Democracy/Democratization

Barrington Moore. 1993 [1966]. *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Economic Development

Adom Getachew. 2019. *Worldmaking After Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self-Determination*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Environmental Politics

Thea Riofrancos. 2020. *Resource Radicals: From Petro-Nationalism to Post-Extractivism in Ecuador*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Ethnic Politics

Steven Wilkinson. 2006. *Votes and Violence: Electoral Competition and Ethnic Riots in India*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Gender

Mala Htun and Laurel S. Weldon. 2018. *The Logic of Gender Justice: State Action on Women's Rights around the World*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Health

Evan Lieberman. 2009. *Boundaries of Contagion: How Ethnic Politics Have Shaped Government Responses to HIV*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Labor Politics

Ruth Berrins Collier and David Collier. 2002. *Shaping the Political Arena: Critical Junctures, the Labor Movement, and Regime Dynamics in Latin America*. South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press.

Law

Diana S. Kim. 2021. *Empires of Vice: The Rise of Opium Prohibition across Southeast Asia*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Nationalism

Benedict Anderson. 1983. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso.

Party Politics

Niloufer A. Siddiqui. 2023. *Under the Gun: Political Parties and Violence in Pakistan*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Political Organizations

Sarah Parkinson. 2023. *Beyond the Lines: Social Networks and Palestinian Militant Organizations in Wartime Lebanon*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Political Violence

Scott Straus. 2008. *The Order of Genocide: Wace, Power, and War in Rwanda*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Revolution

Theda Skocpol. 1979. *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Social Movements

Erica S. Simmons. 2016. *Meaningful Resistance: Market Reforms and the Roots of Social Protest in Latin America*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

State Formation

Charles Tilly. 1993. *Coercion, Capital and European States: AD 990 – 1992*. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers.