PS440C Stanford University
Professors David Laitin and Jonathan Wand
Tuesdays 3:15PM – 6:05PM; GSL

Seminar: Comparative Political Analysis

I. COURSE SUMMARY

This seminar has two purposes. First, it introduces graduate students in comparative politics to current standards in research design. Second, it requires students to develop their own research designs that meet 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 evaluated on the basis of the appropriateness of the research design and tools for answering your research question, and the quality of the rationale you provide for each component and the inferences that could be drawn from their use. You will not be evaluated on the implementation, nor on the outcomes of the preliminary or exploratory theoretical and empirical research that you perform.

Before handing in your final assignment, students will have an opportunity to present their prospectus, and defend it, before a group of advanced graduate students. Details of assignments are included below. Memos, slides, etc., should be posted on the Coursework website by 5pm on the Monday before each meeting to give everyone time to read all student work and to prepare comments and questions. The success of the seminar will depend on each student's preparedness to discuss the assigned readings and to offer comments and feedback on each other's work, as well as the amount of effort each student invests in advancing his/her own research agenda. The reading load is intentionally light so that: (1) students can take the time to look back at readings from 440A and 440B to identify material that can illuminate methodological issues through references to research papers already published in the comparative field; and (2) students can commit to advancing their own work and supporting the work of others with thoughtful comments and criticisms.

III. BOOKS TO PURCHASE

Geddes, Barbara (2003; hereafter "Geddes"). Paradigms and Sand Castles: Theory Building and Research Design in Comparative Politics. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
ISBN-10: 0472068350
ISBN-13: 978-0472068357

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.
ISBN-10: 1594489254
ISBN-13: 978-1594489259

Kreps, David (1990) Game Theory and Economic Modeling (hereafter GTEM)
ISBN-10: 0198283814
ISBN-13: 978-0198283812

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

ISBN-10: 0226458083

ISBN-13: 978-0226458083

IV. STUDENTS WITH DOCUMENTED DISABILITIES

Students who may need an academic accommodation based on the impact of a disability must initiate the request with the Student Disability Resource Center (SDRC) located within the Office of Accessible Education (OAE). SDRC staff will evaluate the request with required documentation, recommend reasonable accommodations, and prepare an Accommodation Letter for faculty dated in the current quarter in which the request is being made. Students should contact the SDRC as soon as possible since timely notice is needed to coordinate accommodations. The OAE is located at 563 Salvatierra Walk (phone: 723-1066, 723-1067 TTY).

V. WEEKLY MEETINGS AND ASSIGNMENTS

Preparation During Spring Break

A. Readings

The first reading introduces the themes of Week 1:

Johnson (2006). Pp. 1-136.

The second reading is for those student with no or limited background in formal theory:

Kreps (1990). Chapters 1-4.

B. Thinking

Note meeting scheduled for Week 2 and Assignment 1 in Week 3. Students should be doing preliminary thinking about this assignment, the foundation for the entire course, as soon as possible, and surely before the course begins.

Week 1 Question Selection

The purpose of the readings for this week will be to develop criteria for a good research question and a roadmap on a strategy for answering it.

A. In pursuit of a Research Question

Geddes. Chapter 1 and pp. 27-35.

Kuhn. Chapters IV, VI, and IX.

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.

David Friedman (2005) Statistical Models, pp. 1-17

Angrist, Joshua and Jorn-Steffen Pischke. (2009). Mostly Harmless Econometrics. Princeton. Chapter 1.

B. A Roadmap for Answering It

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

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 2: Tutorial with Instructors on Developing Student Research Questions

Students will sign up for half-hour consultations in which both instructors will be present to help develop student research questions. You should come to the meeting with one or more proposed research question(s) that you think could satisfy Assignment 1 (see below).

There will be no formal class meeting in Week 2. In preparation for that meeting, students should consult:

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.

An example NSF project description (TBA).

Week 3 Political Theory and Comparative Politics

Assignment 1:
Based on the discussions from the week 2 tutorial, 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 memo addressing (a)-(e) above.

Week 4 Narrative

Instructors assign one ideal narrative in this week and then ask you to write a preliminary one on your research question.

Bates, Robert, Avner Greif, Margaret Levi, Jean-Laurent Rosenthal, and Barry Weingast (1998). *Analytic Narratives*. Princeton UP. "Introduction" (pp. 3-22) and Weingast's "Political Stability and Civil War: Institutions, Commitment, and American Democracy" (pp. 148-193).

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 narrative (conscious of the narrative style in Weingast's chapter) in a way that reveals your conjecture about the mechanism at work and demonstrates to the reader the inadequacy of previous theorizing about the phenomenon that you have highlighted. In class, your narrative will be presented by a partner, who will emphasize the following features of your narrative: Who are the key actors? What are their goals? Which strategies are available to them? What are their beliefs about the statement of the world? Especially, what mechanism structures their interactions?

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.

We provide in this week a set of stylized games with political implications; you should read them with an eye for the kind of formal representation that captures the nub of the political transactions that drive outcomes in your narrative.

A. A Primer in Game Theory

David Kreps, GTEM. (Chap 5 & 6; this assumes that those with no background also read 1-4 previously).

B. Reputation Games (Kreps and Wilson) and Their Limits (Bates)

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

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

C. PD and other non-cooperative games

Fearon and Laitin (1996) "Explaining Ethnic Cooperation"

D. Coordination Games

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

Timur Kuran (1991) "Now out of Never: The Element of Surprise in the East European Revolution of 1989" World Politics (October 1991)

E. Capturing the Nub of a Political Transaction (different games for different structures)

Geddes. Pp. 40-69.

Week 6: Student Formalizations

Assignment 3:
Pick one of the styles of formalization from week 5 and apply it to your research project/puzzle, with explicit justification for choice of domain, statement of alternatives, and answering the question of why your project is like one of the models. Once done, you should specify that game, with pay-offs justified by assumption. Equilibrium solutions need not be worked out, as the core of the assignment is to highlight the actors, the political/strategic structure, and the sequence of moves. Prepare a one-slide presentation of the basic model and payoffs, showing how outcomes identified in the research are reached.

Week 7: Mapping Theory to Data: Operationalizing concepts, design, and statistical models

A. Measurement and Theory

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.

B. Experimental design and methods

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

Habyarimana, James, Macartan Humphreys, Daniel Posner & Jeremy Weinstein (2007). "Why Does Ethnic Diversity Undermine Public Goods Provision?" *APSR* 101(4):709-25.

Angrist and Pischke (2009) Mostly Harmless Econometrics, Chapter 2.

C. Econometric models with observational data

Abadie, Alberto & Javier Gardeazabal (2003). "The Economic Costs of Conflict: A Case Study of the Basque Country." *AER* 93(1):113-32.

Acemoglu, Daron, Simon Johnson & James A. Robinson (2002). "Reversal of Fortune: Geography and Institutions in the Making of the Modern World Income Distribution." *QJE* 117(4):1231-94.

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

Week 8: Operationalizing an empirical project

Students will work on *two* assignments: one collective (assignment 4) and one individual (assignment 5). Helpful readings, include

Little, Roderick and Donald Rubin (2002) Statistical Analysis with Missing Data (2nd ed). Chapter 1.

Carmines, E.G. and Zeller, R.A. (1986) Reliability and validity assessment. Chapter 1

Assignment 4:
Class to be broken down into groups based upon common data interests. Each group should download a publicly available dataset. Based on the data/variables available, it should then pose a descriptive question in terms of the relationship between three variables. collectively, the group should evaluate the specification of these variables and their coding criteria. finally, each group should prepare a short presentation, teaching the class: (a) the overall architecture of the dataset; (b) how key variables are measured and specified, with emphasis on reliability and validity; (c) why data is missing (if any) and how is missing data are treated in dataset; (d) provide summary univariate statistics, with attention to distribution of variables; and (e) answer the descriptive question.

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 be applied to data, but should outline (a) how you would operationalize/measure variables from theory and any others needed for estimation; (b) the experimental design or the logic of model; (c) your discussion of possible confounders, such as violations of SUTVA, noncompliance, unmeasurable variables (or ones you know would in practice not be measured) and their implications for inference; and (d) a clear statement of the test and what inference that would be drawn from different outcomes.

Week 9: Statistical Test of Student Hypotheses

Assignment 6:
Build a data set that would produce some statistical test of the theory or an observable implication of your own theory. Address for this data issues listed in Assignment 4.
Do some descriptive statistics that show the (im)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. Discuss in light of issues raised in Assignment 5(a) and (c). Presentation of regression results is optional, and will only be allowed after these basic descriptive statistics have been fully explored. Prepare a 10-minute presentation describing your statistical exploits to present in seminar.

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.