Course Description

This seminar examines macro-comparative research on political economy in the world's affluent countries. The emphasis is on analytical strategies and methods. We will focus on regression (especially pooled cross-section time-series regression), QCA/fuzzy set analysis, case studies, and small-N comparison. We also will consider issues associated with causal mechanisms, selection bias, and measurement. Some important techniques we will not explore include multilevel regression models, Bayesian analysis, and formal theory. The substantive issues addressed are social policy, inequality, and employment.

Requirements

Readings. The course readings are available at eres.library.arizona.edu; the password is soc596a. The one exception is the Huber and Stephens book, which you will need to order (through amazon.com, barnesandnoble.com, etc.).

Presentation. Each student will make one in-class presentation during the semester, on the readings for a given week. Use the standard conference presentation as your model: about 20 minutes, with visual aids such as overheads, PowerPoint, and/or handouts. The objective of the presentation is to highlight one or more of the central issues addressed in the readings, to locate the authors' positions vis-à-vis those issues, and to comment critically on the state of the debate and the value of the individual contributions to it. Of course, you probably won't be able to cover all of the conceivable issues and need not place equal emphasis on each of the readings. Avoid lengthy introductions and summaries of the readings. The presentation should be organized around an argument — a statement about the
most fruitful way to study the topic at hand, an adoption of a particular position in a debate, or a critique of some existing line of argument. If you don't have an argument, get one!

**Paper.** A roughly 7,500-word paper on a topic of your choice related to the course material. Due date: Monday, December 11. You must get your topic approved by me no later than November 13. The paper can be either an empirical study or a proposal for an empirical study. If you choose to do a proposal, the paper must include: (1) a theory/literature review section that discusses various theoretical perspectives and lists propositions about the empirical outcomes that would be predicted by those perspectives; (2) a detailed description of the data and methods you would use to answer your research question. Late papers will be penalized one grade level (e.g., from A to A-minus).

**Grading.** Class participation will account for 50% of the course grade. The presentation and paper will each account for 25%.

**Schedule**

Aug. 21  Introduction


Regression — especially pooled cross-section time-series regression — is by far the most commonly used technique for quantitative macro-comparative analysis. What are its advantages and limitations?


Sept. 4 No class: Labor Day

Sept. 18 Graphing

All analysis requires data reduction. But often social scientists go too far. Since inferences frequently vary depending on model specification, the cases and time periods analyzed, measurement choices, and related factors, informed readers should be shown as much of the raw data as possible. How can one best comply with this wish without overloading the paper or book with data? What are the most effective ways to present various types of data?


Sept. 25 QCA/Fuzzy-Set Analysis

Qualitative comparative analysis (QCA) is better equipped than regression to identify multiple configurations of causes that lead to the same outcome and to assess hypothesized sufficient or necessary (rather than probabilistic) causes. What are the strengths and limitations of QCA?


Oct. 2  Case Studies

What is the role of case studies in social science? What are their advantages and drawbacks? Can a case study be comparative?


Oct. 9  Small-N Comparison

Much macro-comparative research takes the form of "small-N comparative case studies." What types of variables are used? How are cases selected? What kinds of inferences can be drawn? How could such studies be improved?


Oct. 16 Combining Large-N and Small-N Analysis

Large-N and small-N analysis need not be mutually exclusive. How can the two be productively combined?


Oct. 23 Causal Mechanisms

Good empirical social science goes beyond identification of an empirical association between an explanatory variable and an outcome coupled with a plausible account of why the two may be causally linked. It also aims to test the purported causal mechanism(s) empirically.

- Collier, David, Henry E. Brady, and Jason Seawright. 2004. "Sources of Leverage in Causal Inference: Toward an Alternative View of Methodol-
ogy."


Oct. 30  Selection Bias and Counterfactuals

Selection bias occurs when the cases used for analysis are allocated nonrandomly to categories or levels of an explanatory variable of interest and the allocative process also has an impact on the dependent variable. What are the implications? What can be done to address it?


Nov. 6 Measurement

Valid inferences depend on good data, concepts, and measures. Do macro-comparative researchers pay enough attention to these issues?


Nov. 13 No class: Veterans Day

Nov. 20, Nov. 27, and Dec. 4 Presentation of student papers