Research Design in Comparative Politics
Seminar 2nd Term: Jan – March 2012

Adrienne Héritier
Tuesdays, 11:00-13:00
Seminar Room 2

This seminar deals with some of the main problems and alternatives that we face when designing and conducting comparative political research. Which are fundamental issues concerning the scope, theories and methods of empirical analysis of comparative political research in different areas and at different levels? It is the object of comparative political research to explain outcomes by comparing different political units, be they national governments, or subnational governments in the context of international, European or national developments. Why, for instance, do countries respond differently to the pressures of the financial crisis? By comparing individual political units and the outcomes of their decision-making processes we submit that specific causal factors account for diverging outcomes. These factors may be of political, institutional nature, of an economic, social or cultural nature. Scholars hold widely divergent views as to which factors account for different outcomes across political units and how these factors can be theorized.

The seminar will focus on central topics that include the problems of concept formation and theorization; the understanding of causation and explanation; most similar case comparison and comparative statics; as well as analytical narratives and process tracing. It will further focus on how quantitative and qualitative methods can be applied in a mixed-method approach. The basic conceptual, theoretical, explanatory and process-analytical questions will be discussed on the basis of concrete examples of comparative political analysis.

Each participant will be expected to read and comment on the designated literature of each of the topics and to participate actively in the weekly discussions. Researchers will also be expected to formally present and discuss particular problems of research design that they face in their own thesis work.

Session One: 10 Jan 2012
Introduction; Conceptualization;
Task Assignment

Gerring, J., 1999, What makes a concept good? A criteria framework for understanding concept formation in the social sciences, Polity 31:3, 357-93
Collier, D., M.E. Mahoney 1993 Conceptual Stretching Revisited, APSR 87:4, 845-55

Session Two: 17 Jan 2012
Theorization/Causal explanations (1)
analysis 13-37;
Chapter 3: Rational Choice theory 39-67; Chapter 4: Interpretation theory 68-87
Chapter 5: Functional and structural explanations 91-113


Researcher project presentation

**Session Three: 24 Jan 2012**
Theorization/causal explanations (2)


Researcher project presentation

**Session Four 31 Jan 2012**


Bendor, J., Hammond, T.H. 1992, Rethinking Allison’s models, APSR, 301-322

Researcher project presentation

**Session Five 7 Feb 2012**

Process Tracing and Analytic Narratives


Buette, R. 2002, Taking temporality seriously: modelling history and the use of narratives as evidence, APSR, 481-493
Hall, P. 2008. Systematic process analysis: what it is and how to use it, EPS 7, 304-317

Researcher project presentation

**Session Six 14 Feb 2012**
Mixed Methods Designs (1)

Researcher project presentation

**Session Seven 21 Feb 2012**
Mixed Methods Designs (2)

Researcher project presentation

**Session Eight 28 Feb 2012**

Mead, L.M, 2010, Scholasticism in Political Science; Perspectives on Politics, 453-464


Researcher project presentation

**Session Nine: 6 Mar 2012**
