UGST4008: Introduction to Comparative Methodology

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Office hours: Tuesdays and Fridays, 14.00-16.00 (CET)
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Winter Term, AY 2020-2021
B.A. level course
Credit value: 2 credits (4 ECTS credits)
Mandatory course
Module: Introduction to Politics
Prerequisites: None
Class time: Tuesdays and Fridays, 16.00-17.00 (CET)

BRIEF COURSE INTRODUCTION:
This course introduces BA students to the study of politics through the comparative method. Topics include concept formation, theory development and testing, case selection, measurement, and causal inference. The course consists of two parts. In the first part, students are familiarized with the main approaches in comparative political methodology. In the second part, this knowledge is applied to and deepened through empirical research on democratization.

LEARNING OUTCOMES:
The overall aim of the course is to help students design their own comparative research project, as well as to evaluate the research of others.

LEARNING ACTIVITIES AND TEACHING METHODS
The class meets twice per week. Typically, the first session introduces the topic and takes a close look at the reading. The second session takes up the discussion points introduced by students and deepens the understanding of the topic through class discussion and in-class exercises. Throughout the course, students will be encouraged to relate political science methodology to urgent questions facing their societies and polities. Student success in making this connection between theory, empirical research, and political problems will determine to a large extent the grade for class participation.

ASSESSMENT:
The final grade is based on:
- Class attendance and participation: 10%
- Class preparation: 20%
- Paper on concepts and gender: 30%
- Research design: 40%
The first paper is on concepts and gender. For class you have read Goertz and Mazur’s (2008) chapter with ten guidelines for mapping gender and politics concepts. For the paper, please read one of the chapters that apply this framework (chapters 3 to 11). Then, in your paper, address the following two questions: 1) How does the chapter use Goertz and Mazur’s (2008) conceptual framework?; 2) How useful is this framework, in your reasoned opinion, for understanding the concept covered in the chapter? Word limit: 800 words, everything included in the word count. Deadline: to be discussed in class.

For the research design you revisit week 1 and use McCarty’s (2019) framework to design an empirical study on a topic of your choice. The outcome should be presented as a series of slides (minimum 5, maximum 10). Deadline: to be discussed in class.

Class preparation: Please submit discussion points for at least four readings (excluding weeks 1 and 5) on Moodle by midnight before the first session of that week. The discussion points should flag issues, raise questions, critically reflect on the reading for that week, or connect issues of comparative methodology to real-world events, phenomena, trends, or patterns. Each set of discussion points (minimum two, maximum four) is graded (5% of the final grade for each of the four weeks selected). If you want to improve your grade for the discussion points you can submit a fifth set, in which case only the four best grades will be counted.

MAIN COURSE MATERIALS:


All readings and other course material are available on Moodle.

Week 1: Methods can be murder

We start with the analogy of the empirical political scientist as detective.


Week 2: Comparative intuition

Humans compare all the time, the challenge for scientists is to do so explicitly and systematically.

**Week 3:** How to get started

This week we start a cluster of five sessions on social science methodology, three of them devoted to one chapter from Gerring’s influential and practical textbook.


**Week 4:** Concepts


**Week 5:** Concepts and gender


**Week 6:** Arguments: Descriptive


**Week 7:** Arguments: Causal


**Week 8:** Definitions and measures

This week we start a cluster of four sessions on empirical research on democratization in which we apply and extend what we just learned about comparative methodology to the field of democratization.


**Week 9:** What is good theory?


**Week 10:** Organizing the data (and your thoughts)


**Week 11:** The state-of-the-art in democratization research


**Week 12:** Preparation of student research papers.