

What is Comparative Politics?

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POLS 2, Lecture 1

Module 1

What is **Politics**?

Definition of Politics

We live in world with limited resources and we all have different needs and preferences as to how to distribute them.

So we need to find a way to distribute those limited resources efficiently! the key is who gets the **power** to make such decisions.

Politics is the set of activities related with making the decision of who gets what, how and when.

Comparative Politics



Definition:The systematic study of how people around the world make and contest authoritative public choices

It focuses on a variety of topics, some examples are:

- Patterns concerning political events (*i.e. Campaigns or elections*)
- Patterns pertaining to historical eras: (*i.e. The Enlightenment or the Cold War*)
- Patterns concerning recently relevant events: (*i.e. Democratization in the Muslim countries*)

In a nutshell, we will study how *politics* works around the world!

How Do We Research in Comparative Politics?

We use the **Comparative Method**. This means that we **compare** cases in order to answer relevant research questions (usually about real world events).

Example of a Research Question in CP: Why do some countries have democratic regimes while others do not?

We formulate **hypotheses** that seek to answer our research questions.

Example of a Hypothesis: The wealthier the country, the higher the probability of being a democracy.

A hypothesis proposes a link that connects a cause with an effect. They are very useful because they can be tested accross multiple cases.

Methods Used to Test a Hypothesis in CP

Qualitative: Uses few cases, not good for generalization but helpful for theory development.

Some examples are

1. Comparative Method
2. Case Studies (i.e. in-depth analysis of one case)
3. Structured/unstructured interviews

Quantitative: Uses a large number of cases, very good for generalization. But it sometimes is not good explaining specific cases.

1. Regression analysis
2. Experiments

The Comparative Method

Method of Agreement vs. Method of Difference

Method of Agreement

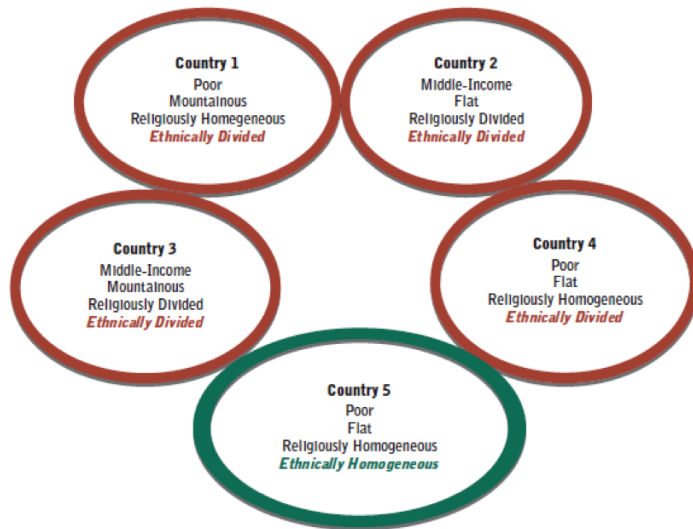


FIGURE 1.1

Using the Method of Agreement

Countries 1 through 4 all went to war, and by comparing them against each other you will note that they "agree" on only one attribute: ethnic diversity. The country that did not "agree" on this characteristic also did not go to war. The method of agreement finds the thing that all countries have in common—and in this example leads to the conclusion that ethnic diversity is a cause of civil war.

Definition: Compares and contrasts cases with different attributes but shared outcomes

Outcome Variable (i.e. the one we are trying to explain:) Civil War.

We are trying to find the cause that explains why countries went to war. Countries 1-4 DID go to war, country 5 DID NOT.

The only variable that is similar among countries 1-4 is **Ethnically Divided**, country 5 is **Ethnically Homogeneous**. So the most likely cause for war is having an **Ethnically Divided** society.

Method of Difference

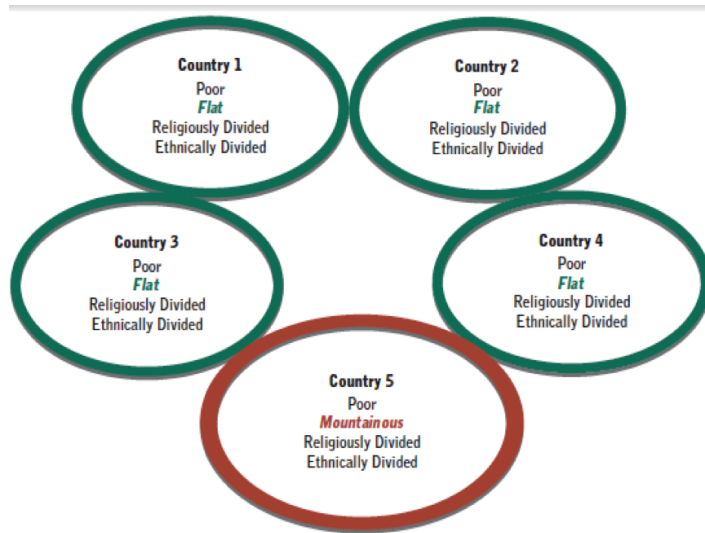


FIGURE 1.2

Using the Method of Difference

Countries 1 through 4 all remained at peace—and all share several characteristics. Country 5 went to war, and the only way it differs from the other countries is in its terrain. Using the method of difference in this example suggests a causal relationship between rough terrain and civil war.

Definition: Compares and contrasts cases with the same attributes but different outcomes

Outcome Variable (i.e. the one we are trying to explain:) Civil War.

We are trying to find the cause that explains why countries went to war. Countries 1-4 DID NOT go to war, country 5 DID.

The only variable that is different between country 5 and countries 1-4 is the terrain (i.e. **flat**). So we can infer that there is a relationship between the type of terrain and the likelihood of going to war.

Quantitative Research

What is Quantitative Research?

The use of statistics to test hypothesis using a large number of cases.

This is not a statistics class, so we will leave it at that for now. But the use of statistical models to test hypothesis is very common in Comparative Politics.

The End