

2nd Year Panel Review: Carolyn Barnett & Galileu Kim

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Comparative Politics 2nd Year Panel

1 Carolyn Barnett

- What explains volatility of social spending in oil-producing countries?

2 Galileu Kim

- What explains state capacity in terms of the education of local officials?

Public goods in transitional contexts

- Barnett: implications of early social protection laws given oil price volatility
- Kim: implications of majors' elections given underskilled staff

Capillary state capacity

- ① Main argument:
 - Educational levels of local bureaucrats matters and may be determined by mayors' ideology
- ② Data: RAIS, Brazilian Ministry of Labor; TSE
 - Education of local officials and mayors' partisanship
- ③ The average level of education is low and it's correlated with HDI
- ④ Proposed research design: exploit majors' partisanship to see if it leads to changes in education levels
- ⑤ Minor concerns: Color graphs? Informative abstract? Sectioning sequence? Redundant data description? "Vague content as name suggest"?

Questions and suggestions

1 **Why is officials' education important? Puzzle?**

- Motivate by low levels and rising shares of bureaucrats
- What is the reference point? (Provide summary statistics for OECD and/or countries of similar development)
- Cite existing research beyond Fukuyama

2 **Education in relation to existing measures**

- Discuss with relation to tax capacity and other measures
- Do we care about variation beyond secondary schooling?
- What's the correlation with income per capita? Any difference in spatial patterns? Study cases that are above/below the predicted line (by GDP)
- Any other characteristics of interest in RAIS? Can it be verified with PNAD?

Research design

- ① Are elections truly random in terms of selecting mayors with different partisanship?
 - Simple time-series design with municipal and year FE?
 - What is the hypothesized timeline of mayors' effect?
- ② Is education the ultimate outcome of interest or an instrumented independent variable?
- ③ Consider the role of geography in public goods provision and its relation to education

Oil Price Volatility and Welfare State

- 1 Data: Original country-year data of welfare policies + spending, oil prices, etc.
- 2 Puzzle: What explains volatility of social spending in OPCs and beyond?
- 3 Main argument: The effect of oil price shocks are moderated by social policy institutionalization
 - Support for moderating effect of political competition
 - Little evidence for moderating effect of corruption, state extractive capacity, or oil wealth per capita

Strengths

- 1 Exemplary ~~dissertation prospectus~~ 591 paper
- 2 Original dataset with a thoughtful integration of existing data
- 3 Important but somewhat overlooked question
- 4 A neat institutionalization argument:
“path-dependency” and “unintended consequences”
- 5 The author carefully anticipates and responds to most potential concerns

Questions and suggestions

- 1 **DV operationalization:** volatility as SD
 - Can SD differentiate volatility from monotonous trends?
 - OLS specification appears to be about (\pm) change
- 2 **Clarify relevant comparison groups:** OPCs vs non-OPCs, social protection vs public provision
- 3 **Descriptive analysis:** what is the (unconditional) correlation between oil price, fiscal policy, spending and their change/volatility?
- 4 **Volatility of spending as a research strategy** to identify how spending further affects quality of provision and development outcomes?

- 1 Use *interflex* instead of *effects* for interactions to test for common support and non-linearity
- 2 Move descriptive comparisons and brief data description (n of country and years) upfront
- 3 Shorten and simplify abstract for general audience
- 4 Shorten introduction and move parts to main text
- 5 Include CI in Figure 7 or present it differently