

THE APPROACH AND METHODS OF COMPARATIVE POLITICS

Comparative Politics

Guillermo Toral

IE University

What are we covering today?

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- Workshop and exercise: Dissecting an academic article

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 - Are these articles relevant to non-academic communities? Why or why not?

Exercise in groups



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- How does political science differ from other sciences?

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- Scientific progress depends on individual, extraordinary studies – or scientists

What are the features of good (political) science?

Features of good (political) science: Overview

1. Clear theory

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2. Testable hypotheses

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6. Social relevance

1. Theoretical clarity

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- specify any relevant **scope conditions** (or where / when it should apply)

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- **Causal** – implications for explaining cause-and-effect relationships, and manipulating outcomes
- Comparative politics typically engages causal, predictive, and/or descriptive arguments

What theoretical perspectives or paradigms are most common when talking about politics?

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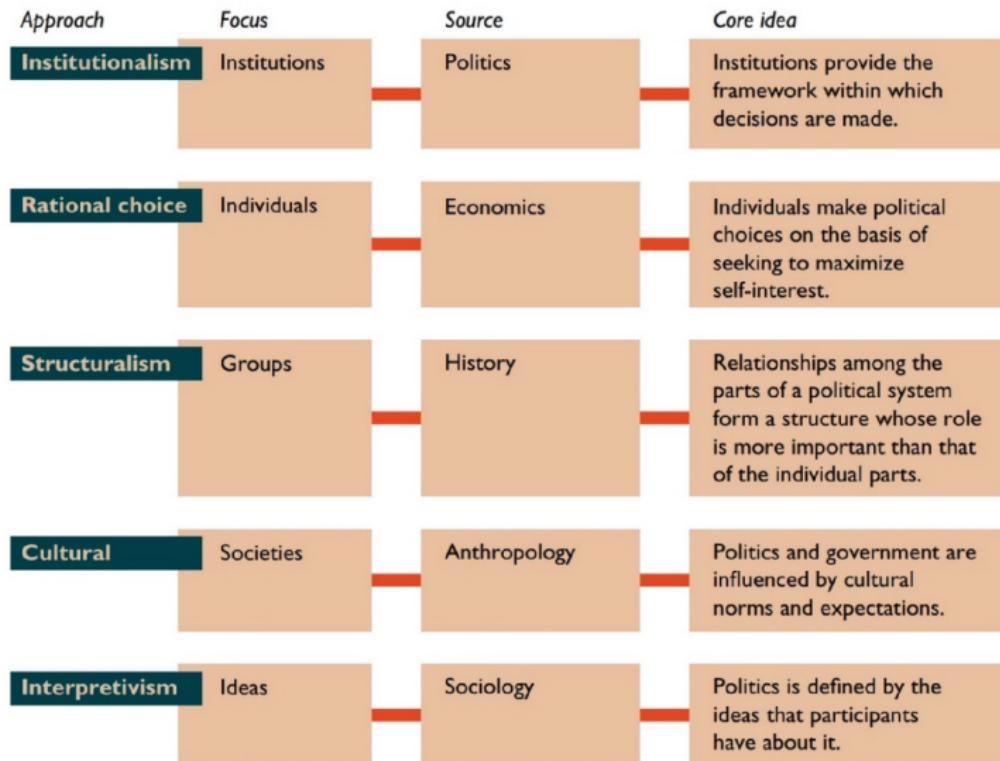
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- **International environment**: focus on how global pressures shape domestic politics

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- Are **non-trivial** or are surprising in some way

3. Rigorous methodology

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- Have some degree of **external validity** (i.e., allow us to draw conclusions that can be generalized to samples or settings other than the one we studied)

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- A strategy for **measuring uncertainty** around such inferences
- A **rationale** (and supporting evidence) why the methods we use get at the key quantity of interest

How to make credible inferences

If we want to learn about the effect of X (treatment) on Y (outcome), typically looking at the level of Y among units with high vs low levels of X will not be a valid strategy.

- Social and political variables are typically correlated with many other variables

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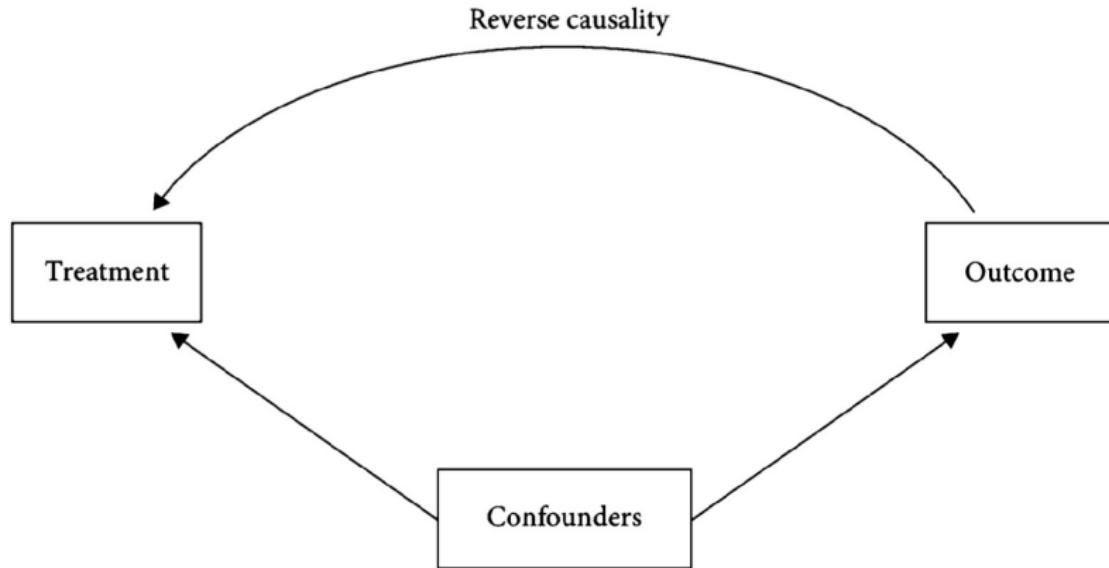
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- We typically want to argue that a relationship between X and Y holds **ceteris paribus**, i.e. " or “all other things being equal”. How can we say that credibly?

The main threats to credible causal claims



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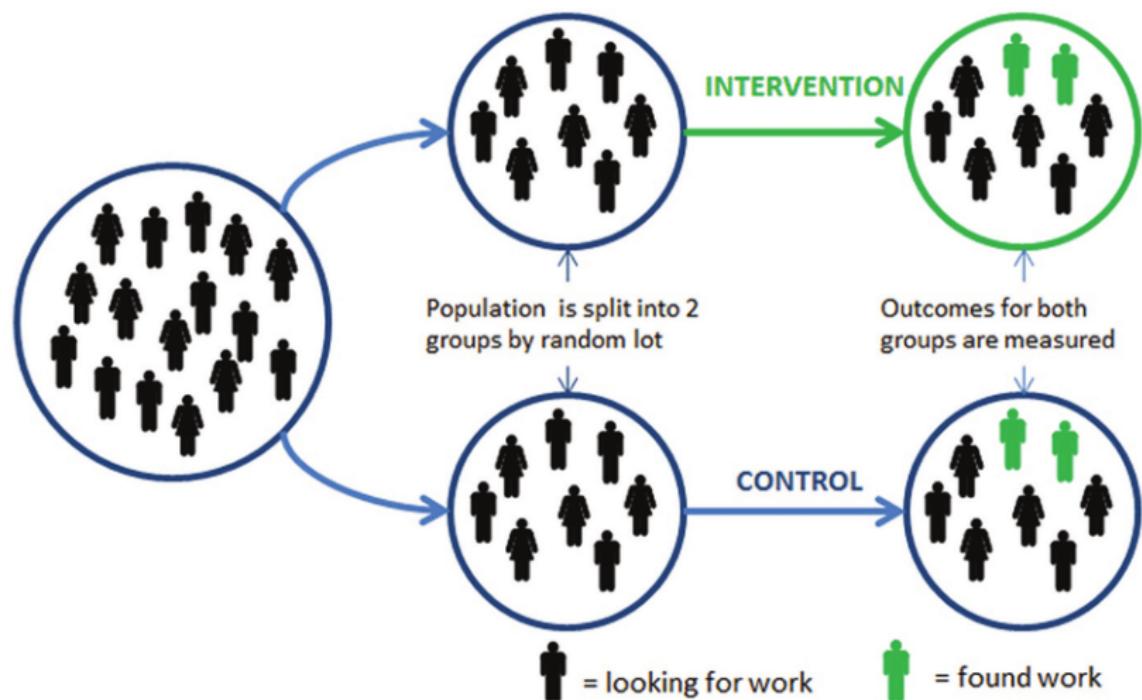
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- Experiments therefore ensure there are **no confounders and no reverse causality**

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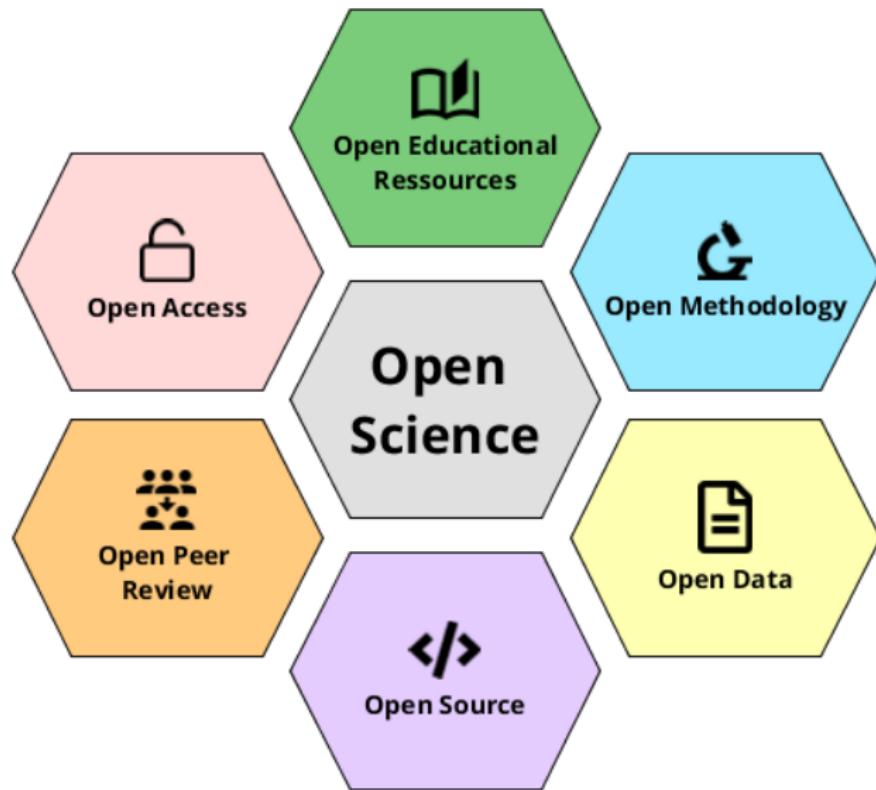
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- It also allows the scientific community to **reuse that data** for other purposes

Open science is at the center of good science



5. Ethical standards

(Political) science needs to be subject to high ethical standards – otherwise significant harm to individuals / communities can ensue.

Key **ethical risks** in comparative politics:

- Variables of interest are often very sensitive and/or consequential (e.g., identity, racism, order, democracy)

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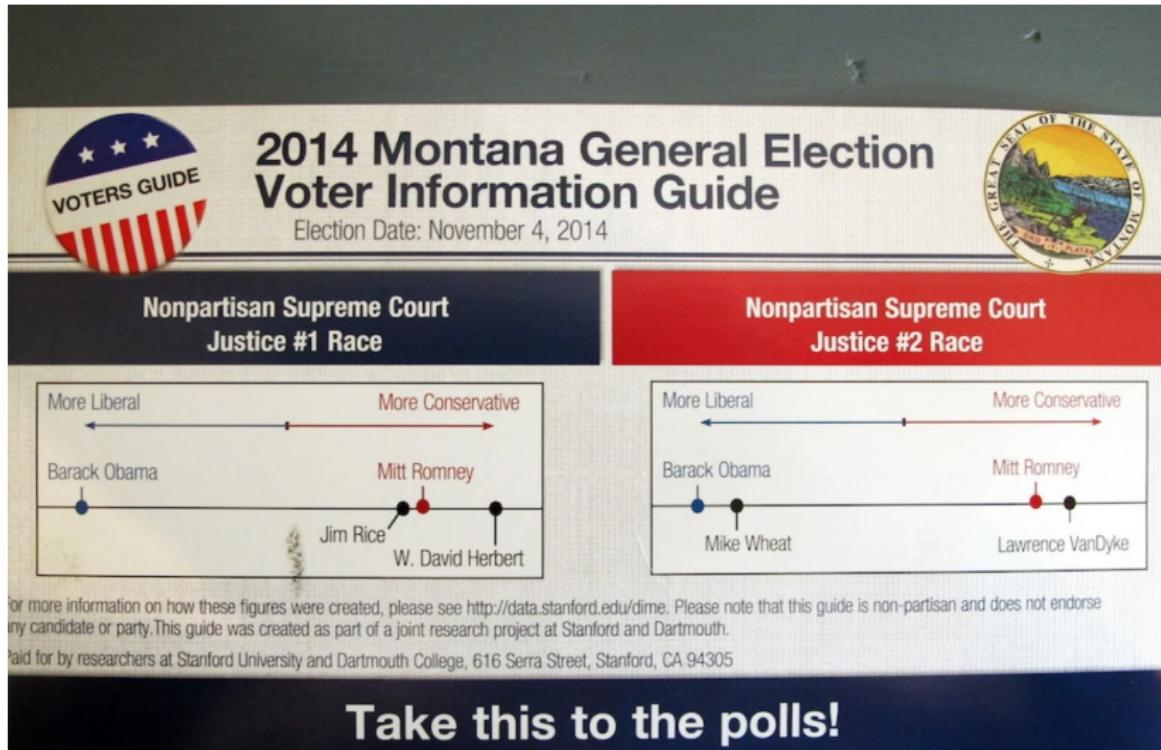
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- Prior review and approval

Is this study unethical, and if so why?



The image shows the cover of the "2014 Montana General Election Voter Information Guide". At the top left is a circular "VOTERS GUIDE" logo with a blue and red design. At the top right is the "GREAT SEAL OF THE STATE OF MONTANA". The title "2014 Montana General Election Voter Information Guide" is centered above the subtitle "Election Date: November 4, 2014".

Nonpartisan Supreme Court Justice #1 Race

	More Liberal	More Conservative
Barack Obama	•	
Jim Rice	•	•
W. David Herbert		•

Nonpartisan Supreme Court Justice #2 Race

	More Liberal	More Conservative
Barack Obama	•	
Mike Wheat	•	
Lawrence VanDyke		•

For more information on how these figures were created, please see <http://data.stanford.edu/dime>. Please note that this guide is non-partisan and does not endorse any candidate or party. This guide was created as part of a joint research project at Stanford and Dartmouth.

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Take this to the polls!

Is this study unethical, and if so why?

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Political Scientists in Hot Water over Field Research



8 January 2015

An experiment by political science researchers at Stanford and Dartmouth Universities is raising hackles in Montana. Three political science professors may have broken Montana state election laws, calling into question the ethics of performing research experiments with the potential to affect election results.

As part of the study, mailers containing information on the ideological leanings of four nonpartisan candidates for Montana State's Supreme Court were sent to 100,000 Montana voters. The research project was intended to test whether voter turnout will increase in nonpartisan elections if voters receive more information about a candidate's political leaning. The mailer, entitled "2014 Montana General Election Voter Information Guide," features the official state seal and ranks the judicial candidates on an ideological spectrum from President Barack Obama on the liberal end, to former presidential candidate Mitt Romney on the conservative end. Similar mailers were sent to voters in California and New Hampshire, although there has not been a backlash in those areas.

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Workshop and exercise: Dissecting an academic article

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- Your research design due at the end of the semester should approximate, in some aspects, an academic paper (although much shorter and without data)
- Getting better at reading academic papers is a great way to build your ability to process large amounts of (often technical) information, which is something you'll often do in careers beyond research too – e.g., in government, law, journalism, consulting, tech, etc.

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 - They follow a common structure and have plenty of signposts to help the reader

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- Are the author's **conclusions** reasonable, given the evidence?

Exercise: Dissecting an academic article

Download the article at

www.guillermotoral.com/cp/bhandari.pdf



Political Determinants of Economic Exchange: Evidence from a Business Experiment in Senegal



Abhit Bhandari Institute for Advanced Study in Toulouse

Abstract: *Economic growth requires confidence in the state's ability to enforce secure exchange. But when states selectively enforce rule of law, political considerations can moderate the trust that buyers have in sellers. I argue that political connections produce moral hazard in exchange because they introduce biases in expectations of judicial enforcement. Buyers avoid trade with politically connected sellers, and, in this context of unequal enforcement, formal contracts disproportionately protect politically connected buyers. To examine these features of connections and contracts, I created a sales business in Senegal and randomized whether employees signaled political connections and/or offered formal contracts during transactions. The results show that political connections decreased buyers' willingness to exchange. Formal contracts increased exchange, though primarily for connected buyers. These findings show that asymmetric political connections can impede daily trade and intensify economic inequalities in developing contexts, while simultaneously demonstrating the limits of state institutions for mitigating politically driven moral hazard.*

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- Can you think of ethical issues in the research? Are they addressed? How?

Wrap-up

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