

Comparing Political Systems

Comparative Method

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Lecture 4

Plan

- 1 Why comparing
- 2 Selecting countries
- 3 Evidence
- 4 Note on the importance of time

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Definition of Comparative Politics

A subfield of political science

- ▶ Largest subfield
- ▶ With many sub-subfields like British Politics
- ▶ (or ANY COUNTRY Politics)

A method

- ▶ Also used in other disciplines

Comparing

Meaning (in this context)

- ▶ Studying simultaneously several countries

Why? Often-heard reason

- ▶ Because it is interesting
- ▶ Because we learn about our country in studying others

Why? Real reason

- ▶ Because many topics are at the level of countries
- ▶ And we need variation to study the causes/consequences of these topics

Why comparing

Topics of interest at the level of country

- ▶ Democracy, economy...

If you compare multiple countries

- ▶ You see many instances of these variables
- ▶ You can check any systematic patterns

Analogy

- ▶ To study the effect of a pill that could cure cancer
- ▶ You will not only study one patient

Example

Research question

- ▶ Does democracy increases the inclusion of women in politics

Notation

- ▶ Democracy = independent variable
- ▶ Inclusion of women in politics = dependent variable (or outcome variable)

Measures

- ▶ Democracy: Democratic index of Polity IV (minimalist definition)
- ▶ Condition of women: Women political empowerment index of Vdem (based on experts ranking, civil liberties + women's participation in civil society + presence in political positions)

Imagine with only one country

Brazil in 1985

Country	Democratic Index	Vdem women political empowerment index
Brazil	7	5.2

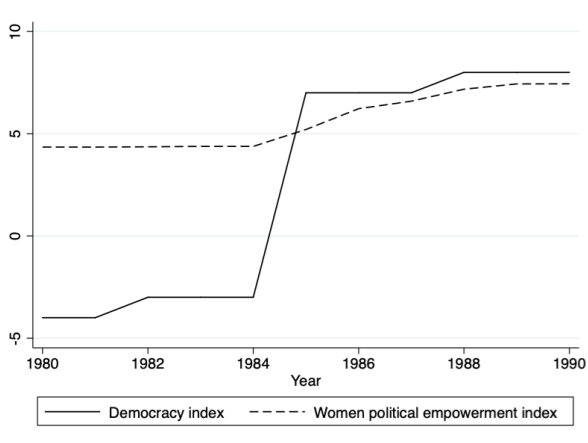
Imagine with only one country

Brazil over the years

Country	Democratic Index	Vdem women political empowerment index
Brazil 1984	-3	4.4
Brazil 1985	7	5.2

Imagine with only one country

Brazil over the years



Let's compare with other countries

Brazil and other countries of the region in 1985

Country	Democratic Index	Vdem women political empowerment index
Brazil	7	5.2
Argentina	8	7.3
Bolivia	9	4.8
Colombia	8	4.3
Costa Rica	10	7.6
Cuba	-7	6.1
Ecuador	8	5.1
El Salvador	6	3.7
Haiti	- 7	6.1
Honduras	5	4.2
Mexico	-3	5.6
Nicaragua	-1	6.1
Panama	-6	4.8
Nicaragua	-1	6.1
Panama	-6	4.8
Paraguay	-8	2.0
Peru	7	5.9
Uruguay	9	7.6
Venezuela	9	7.5

Let's compare with other countries

Summing up (autocracies $[-10, 0]$ v/s democracies $[1, 10]$)

Country	Vdem women political empowerment index (average)
Democracies	5.8
Autocracies	4.9

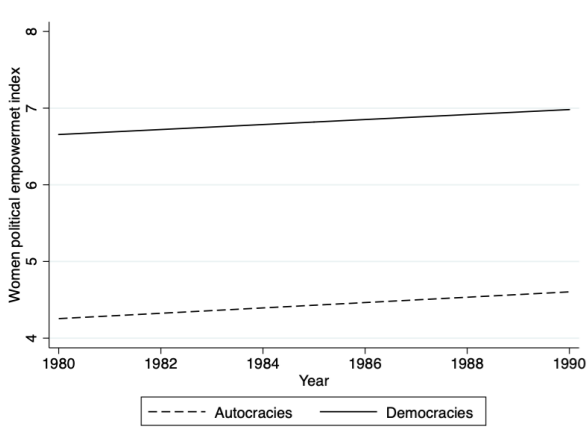
Let's compare with other countries

For the entire period 1980–1990

Country	Vdem women political empowerment index (average)
Democracies	4.7
Autocracies	3.3

Let's compare with other countries

There is an increase in women political empowerment



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Selecting countries

General rule

- ▶ The more the merrier, within a group of relatively similar countries
- ▶ (Example: countries from same region of the world during the same period)

Why? Often-heard reason

- ▶ Because you can only compare countries that are comparable

Why? Real reason

- ▶ Because you want to isolate the effect of one variable

Most Similar System Design

Old idea

- ▶ Mill, John Stuart (1843). A System of Logic. Volume 1.

In theory

- ▶ Choosing countries that are exactly the same on everything, but one independent variables
- ▶ Example: culture, economy, history... are the same, but democracy is different
- ▶ Then check whether these countries are different in dependent variable

Most Similar System Design

Does democracy affect the inclusion of women?

	History	Culture	Economy	Democracy	Women inclusion
Country A	1	1	1	1	1
Country B	1	1	1	0	0

Because the only difference is democracy, only that can explain difference in women inclusion

Most Similar System Design

Old idea

- ▶ Mill, John Stuart (1843). A System of Logic. Volume 1.

In practice

- ▶ Countries are never fully similar
- ▶ Pick countries that are similar enough
- ▶ Example: countries from the same region (Latin America, South East Asia, Western Europe...)

Most Different System Design

Be carefull

- ▶ Although it's in textbook
- ▶ It's not great !

Why?

- ▶ Because it assume that independent variable cannot counter balance each other out
- ▶ Geddes (1990), see Further Reading List

Small-N v/s large-N comparison

Definition

- ▶ Small-N = few countries (typically two)
- ▶ Large-N = more countries (15 or more)

Advantages

- ▶ Tradeoff between external and internal validity
- ▶ With small-N you have more chances to compare similar countries (internal validity)
- ▶ But is what you observe in those countries generalizable? (external validity)
- ▶ (And vice versa for large-N)
- ▶ Collier and Brady (2010), see Further Reading List

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Overall principle

Definition

- ▶ Evidence are facts
- ▶ Be transparent about evidence (where they come from, whether they are reliable, what they measure)

Why you need evidence

- ▶ Backing up claim
- ▶ Without evidence, a claim is just an opinion
- ▶ Scientific article/book that uses evidence can also be used to back up claims

Type of evidence

- ▶ Qualitative or quantitative
- ▶ Both work for small-N and large-N comparisons

Qualitative evidence

Definition

- ▶ An evidence that cannot be counted
- ▶ Examples: the content of a tweet from Bolsonaro, an official declaration from a prime minister or from a first-hand witness

How to report them

- ▶ In a table or directly in the text

Where to find them

- ▶ Direct collection: on Twitter, via personal interviews with key actors
- ▶ Indirect collection: in newspapers, in history books
- ▶ (Note: caution about the reliability of the sources)

Quantitative evidence

Definition

- ▶ An evidence that can counted
- ▶ Examples: GDP, unemployment rate, quality of democracy index

How to report them

- ▶ In a table or in a graph

Where to find them

- ▶ Direct collection: in datasets online
- ▶ Indirect collection: in official reports, scientific books/articles
- ▶ (Note: caution about the reliability of the sources)

How to find dataset

Tip

- ▶ Use Google Datasets <https://toolbox.google.com/datasetsearch>

Democracy datasets

- ▶ Freedom House <https://freedomhouse.org/>
- ▶ Polity IV <https://www.systemicpeace.org/polity/polity4.htm>
- ▶ Electoral integrity <https://www.electoralintegrityproject.com/>
- ▶ Vdem <https://www.v-dem.net/en/>
- ▶ Transparency International <https://www.transparency.org.uk/>

Economic datasets

- ▶ World Bank <https://datacatalog.worldbank.org/>
- ▶ International Monetary Fund <https://www.imf.org/en/Data>

Political culture dataset

- ▶ World Values Survey <http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSONline.jsp>

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Measuring variables

Overall principle

- ▶ The cause happens before the effect (or at the same time)
- ▶ The independent variable should be measured before the dependent variable (or at the same time)

Unit of analysis

- ▶ In most datasets, the data come in year
- ▶ But it can be in multiple years, or quarter, or days

Lagged effect

- ▶ A cause can take some time before having an effect
- ▶ Might make sense to measure dependent variable a few years after independent variable (but needs justification)

Time as a variable

Common mistake

- ▶ Comparing countries from different periods in history
- ▶ Problem: time can affect your dependent variable (contextual factor), and even very similar countries will be different in terms of temporal context
- ▶ Note: All periods in history are find as long as you have evidence

Time as a substitute for comparison

- ▶ Comparing the same country before/after the independent variable happens (example: before and after democratization)
- ▶ Same problem than above: temporal context is different
- ▶ Even a before/after comparison (dependent variable is then the difference before/after) needs multiple countries