Comparative Urban Political Research:
Topics and suggested module readings for an introductory course:

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This note may be considered as an appendix to our research note
BUILDING BLOCKS FOR A METHODOLOGY FOR COMPARATIVE URBAN POLITICAL RESEARCH

Introduction: The goals of comparative research

Core Reading


Supplementary Reading


NOTE ON SUPPLEMENTARY READING:

Dogan and Pelassy provide a more detailed description of the advantages of comparison, and the role of comparison in theory-building. Rose also covers some of the same issues as Dogan and Pelassy and Peters, but emphasises the role of concepts as building blocks of comparison. Rose also discusses “lesson-drawing” or learning as a reason for having a comparative perspective.
The Essence of Comparative Analysis: Dealing with Multiple Levels of Analysis

Core Reading


Supplementary Reading


NOTE ON SUPPLEMENTARY READING:

We have included several supplementary readings that build on Coleman (1990) and Przeworski and Teune (1970) in particular. Lidstrom discusses similar issues as the core readings, but through a survey of comparative local government research. He finds that few local government comparisons are deductive, and recommends that researchers consider this approach more often. Gregg, summarized above, is particularly relevant for research involving intergovernmental contexts. Mahoney offers some interesting observations on constructing causal explanations, but the concrete illustrations of the framework in the beginning and the concluding thoughts are more useful than the broad review of the literature in the midsection of the article. Finally, Teune (1990) provides an updated overview of the potential and problems of the comparative approach, reviewing the history of the field’s research questions and theory.
**Improving Study Design**

**Core Reading**


**Supplementary Reading**


**NOTE ON SUPPLEMENTARY READING**

For those who want to pursue these issues further, the supplementary reading includes Lijphart’s article on the “small n” problem and the need to increase observations, as well as Eckstein’s argument for use of crucial case studies. Both of these are widely-quoted classics in the field. Snyder’s more recent (2000) article focuses on problems of using subnational variation as a strategy, and Jackman’s article on cross-national statistical comparisons is a widely-cited reference in many comparative syllabi. Snyder mentions inclusion of subnational variation as a way of controlling for “Galton’s problem” or the problem of diffusion, which can cast doubt upon whether national factors are significant in accounting for phenomena. If there are common trends in cities across countries, then globalization or diffusion are more likely explanations than national phenomena.
Improving the quality of measurement

Core Reading


Supplementary Reading


NOTE ON SUPPLEMENTARY READING:

Because of the overviews available in Peters and Van Deth, key articles by Sartori, Collier, Preworski and Teune and Mahon, are included as supplementary rather than core reading. These contributions provide useful detail, however, for analyzing or applying concepts. The Mossberger and Stoker paper describes the problem of concept stretching in urban regime analysis, provides minimal criteria for regimes, and also describes the Dowding et al. use of the family resemblance strategy as an alternative to the Sartori/Mossberger and Stoker approach. A recent article by King et al. on new strategies for cross-national survey research is included as a supplementary reading, because it introduces a promising new approach to coping with systematic measurement errors in comparative research. This article would be most useful for the advanced student or specialist. A special category of variables in comparative research pertains to variations in political institutions. The paper by Sellers deals with the measurement of institutional characteristics of local governments, and provides a number of indices. Sellers demonstrates the way in which many variables important to multi-level analysis can be measured. The supplementary readings include a paper by Kaiser who provides an alternative approach of measuring relevant aspects of the institutional context in which local governance is situated. Both the Sellers and Kaiser works would be most interesting in relation to the section on Context in this course.
For a more comprehensive list of many excellent references on comparative research, see syllabi located at the website of the Consortium on Qualitative Research Methods (a consortium of American universities) at http://www.asu.edu/clas/polisci/cqrm/. Not all of the comparative syllabi are qualitative only.