

Newsletter

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Guest Letter

Getting the Concepts Right

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At the time of writing, in June 2009, Giovanni Sartori's latest book, *Il Sultanato* (Roma: Laterza, 2009) is receiving a lot of attention in Italy. Like two other recent books of his, *Mala Tempora* (2004) and *Mala Costituzione* (2006), both also published by Laterza, *Il Sultanato* is a bestseller, rubbing shoulders on the Italian equivalent of

the *New York Times* list with the likes of John Grisham, Stieg Larsson, and Andrea Camilleri. However, since, like the earlier books, *Il Sultanato* simply collects his recent columns in the liberal daily *Corriere della Sera*, it is unlikely to appear in an English-language edition. Nor is it likely to have

much appeal for Sartori's traditional and often quite devoted academic readership. These are short, acerbic pieces addressed to political and cultural problems in contemporary Italy which achieve a great resonance at home but which would probably puzzle most foreign readers. Indeed, in recent years Sartori has been reborn

in Italy as a must-read columnist and television commentator, applying his forensic political science and philosophical skills to a sustained defense of democratic institutions in the face of their risk of erosion under the regime of Silvio Berlusconi, the Sultan of *Il Sultanato*. Given that the weak center-left opposition to Berlusconi is both divided and supine, Sartori's intellectual critique is among the most effective oppositions that Berlusconi faces. Small wonder that this elderly (he was born in 1924) but still unremittingly sharp professor of political science has become such a

celebrity in his home country.

"As far as I was concerned, if there was one article that all graduate students in the comparative social sciences should read, it was 'Concept Misformation.' The paper seemed to say all that needed to be said on the topic."

Sartori's star also continues to rise in the international academic profession. His scholarly books, old and new, are being regularly republished in new editions and new translations, and he has been garlanded with a number of highly prestigious professional awards. More relevant

in this particular context, his classic article on concept formation, first published in the *APSR* in 1970, has now become accepted as one of the most deserving classic writings of modern political science. It has taken a bit of time to get there. According to the figures from Google Scholar, the paper won little more than a handful

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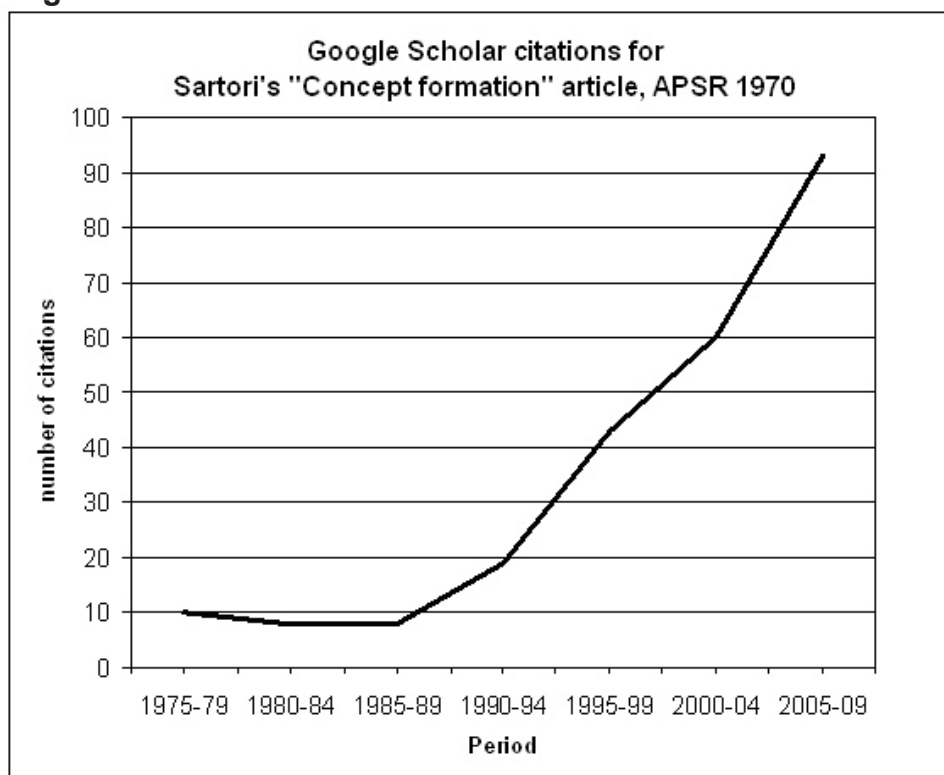
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Figure 1



of citations in the 1970s and 1980s, but it has grown enormously since then (see Figure 1). In 2009 Routledge published what is effectively a Festschrift to the piece, *Concepts and Method in Social Science: The Tradition of Giovanni Sartori*, edited by David Collier and John Gerring, which includes reprints of Sartori's key essays on concept formation, as well as a series of applications and reflections by a number of contemporary scholars. It's a great book, and I highly recommend it.

When I first taught a graduate class on the comparative method in the mid-1980s, Sartori's essay was the most important and most accessible paper on the importance of concept formation to comparative politics. To be sure, there were other papers in the area, some pre-dating Sartori and some responding and reacting. Moreover, Sartori was still chewing on the bone and had co-authored the relatively complex and often impenetra-

ble *Tower of Babel* (International Studies Association) in 1975 and had edited *Social Science Concepts* (Sage) in 1984. But the APSR piece was in a class of its own: clear-headed, logical, workable and utterly convincing. As far as I was concerned, if there was one article that all graduate students in the comparative social sciences should read, it was "Concept Misformation." The paper seemed to say all that needed to be said on the topic.

Twenty years on, when I was asked to contribute a chapter on concept formation to the European University Institute methods book edited by Donatella Della Porta and Michael Keating, *Approaches and Methodologies in the Social Sciences* (2008), I was therefore reluctant to agree. Sartori had said it all, and there was really nothing to add. But although one might have thought nothing could be added, in fact a lot had been added in the intervening

“Today, when one sits down to prepare a graduate class on the comparative method, it is difficult to know where to begin: there is now almost as big a literature on concept formation as there was on the entire field of the comparative method in the 1980s. I exaggerate, of course, and Sartori would probably tell me I’m stretching the concept of ‘almost.’ But even so.”

years, and it was this which led me eventually to write the chapter. One major addition was clearly Collier and Mahoney’s essay in the *APSR* in 1993 revisiting Sartori’s notion of conceptual stretching and flagging the idea of radial and family resemblance concepts, each a departure from Sartori’s classical approach. And then Collier and Levitsky developed the notion of the “diminished subtype” in their now classic essay on “democracy with adjectives” in 1997 (a revised version now appears in the Routledge volume). Both of these papers made a lot of waves in their own right, by now cumulating some 160 and 600 citations respectively. Meanwhile, John Gerring had published a lengthy piece on “good” concepts, and then Gary Goertz (are all these guys related?) had published a well received book offering a

“user’s guide” to *Social Science Concepts* (2006). The shelves were filling up, and were also being supplemented by a very broad-ranging series of working papers (currently up to #32), edited by Andreas Schedler, and published under the auspices of the IPSA Committee on Concepts and Methods (<http://www.concepts-methods.org/papers.php>). Today, when one sits down to prepare a graduate class on the comparative method, it is difficult to know where to begin: there is now almost as big a literature on concept formation as there was on the entire field of the comparative method in the 1980s. I exaggerate, of course, and Sartori would probably tell me I’m stretching the concept of “almost.” But even so.

This also feeds into student work. Years ago, having read Sartori, graduate students learned that it was important to define their key concept clearly, to be able to say what it was and what it was not, and, in an ideal world, to be able to locate it on some notional ladder of abstraction: three straightforward tasks, none of them easy but all of them hugely useful and worthwhile. Nowadays, my students puzzle a lot over concepts. Not only about their definition and meaning, which is fair enough, but also about their form. “I’m not sure if this should be a classical or a radial concept,” they confess, often very worriedly and sometimes badly blocked. “I’m not sure if I’m dealing with family resemblances or subtypes,” says another. “Is this an added or diminished property?” And so on. Years ago, the section on concepts took up two or three thesis pages, if that. Now, it is planned as a whole chapter. Now, it takes much more time and space to say what you are doing, leaving commensurately less to actually do it. And while some of this rebalancing is welcome, I worry that it’s gone too far.

Political scientists who work with

quantitative methods tend to be poor on concept formation. If you sit in on a seminar on the influence of cleavages on partisan affiliation by a quantitative scholar, for example, you quickly learn that almost nobody in the room is interested in discussing the concept of cleavage or even partisan affiliation. Instead, they all want to talk about measuring influence, and they spend their time debating whether the Breusch–Godfrey test might yield better results than the Durbin–Watson statistic, and so on. It’s a similar story when you read the referees’ reports on any paper that employs a reasonably sophisticated quantitative analysis. This sort of paper is usually seen to rise or fall on the issue of how the analysis was conducted, and it is only rarely that much attention is paid to the actual findings. How something is done becomes more important than what is

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being done – or at least the issue of how something is done becomes easier to seize on as a stick with which to beat the analysis. Method is often more graspable than substance.

Qualitative scholars usually didn't have this problem. Since method was often loose and ill-defined, the focus, perforce, was on the topic and the findings. In these studies, the "so what?" question always loomed larger than the "so how?" question. "So how?" would have met a fairly inadequate answer in any case. As qualitative scholars fight for greater recognition and professional respect within the wider political science community, however, this balance begins to shift. A greater self-consciousness about approach and method begins to emerge, and qualitative methods begin to contest for attention on the same terrain as quantitative methods. Even the language becomes more sophisticated. Historical approaches become path dependencies, finding out who did what to whom and when becomes process tracing, and case studies – "often practiced but little understood," as Gerring put it in his 2004 *APSR* paper – assume multiple dimensions and forms.

In short, the gap between qualitative and quantitative methods begins to close. However, this is not because the two methods are applied in similar ways; rather it is because the growing sophistication and self-consciousness of the qualitative approach results in raising methods to the same sort of altar that they have long occupied in quantitative research, and so increasingly promotes the importance of the "so how?" question at the cost of the "so what?" question. But although it might be appealing to speak of unified approaches and common meeting grounds between qualitative and quantitative research, it is also important not to let one set of standards

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define the other. To compete on the same terrain seems analogous to the way "High Church" Anglicanism sought to replicate the rituals and forms of the Roman Catholic Church, or to how the famous Utopian Socialist Robert Owen, a convinced opponent of the church and marriage, used to organize and conduct his own secular wedding ceremonies.

All good scholars need to get their concepts right. This is the beginning of good research. This also means having to deal with and sometimes discard the sort of problematic concepts that the contributors to this issue of *APSA-CP* discuss, even though the most problematic concepts are sometimes the most interesting and fruitful to work with, since these can be the ones that lead to answers that are not just cut and dried. In getting their concepts right, scholars therefore need to pay at least as much attention to the meaning of the concept as to its form. This was the main lesson of Sartori's 1970 paper, and it is one of the principal reasons why that paper said almost all that needed to be said on the subject. Saying more than this certainly helps, and saying more often clarifies, but the danger is that saying more

also eventually leads to diminishing returns. In this sense I would doubt that many scholars in comparative politics will have gained more from reading Sartori's later work on the *Tower of Babel* and his *Social Science Concepts* than they first gained from reading "Concept Misformation."

When my graduate students sit down to examine what is now an enormous literature on concepts, case studies, QCA and fuzzy sets, process tracing, mixed methods, nested analyses, and so on, they are often overwhelmed. Inevitably, they sometimes forget about what they should be doing and instead worry too much about how they should be doing it. In the process, as I constantly remind them, they risk falling into the trap that Sartori, quoting C. Wright Mills, cites in the opening paragraph of his 1970s essay: that they are being mastered by method or theory and are thereby kept from working. That is, they risk being transformed from "conscious" thinkers, which is clearly good, into "over-conscious" thinkers, which is not. Understanding this important conceptual distinction is not very problematic, and is certainly always worth bearing in mind.

Concepts that Hinder Understanding... and What to Do About Them



Josep Colomer



Gregory Kasza

The State



Irfan Nooruddin



Carolyn Warner

State

Nowadays political studies are too state-centered. I am referring to “state” as a form of polity, which is different from other classic forms, mainly “city,” “empire” and “federation,” which have been largely neglected. A single analytical category such as “state” cannot account satisfactorily for disparate political communities that, like elephants and mosquitoes, have population and area sizes more than one hundred thousand times higher than others, from China and India to Nauru or Vanuatu. In contrast to other forms of polity, the state is defined for its sovereignty, which implies a single source of legitimacy over a population within a fixed territory with stable borders. In this sense, the form “state” has existed in Western Europe within a historical period that began only about 300 years ago and is today essentially finished. The rest of the world has been unacquainted with the Westphalian notion of sovereign

“Nowadays political studies are too state-centered. ...It’s time to bring the city, the empire, and the federation back in.”

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states. Russia and most of Asia have been durably organized as empires. In North America a federation was built from previously independent states. In former European colonies in Hispanic America and Africa there are many failed states. In the Middle East nation-state building is not succeeding due to local

ethnic conflicts and for a lack of greater areas of economic and security cooperation. Actually, the West European states were able to survive as independent polities in the international arena only thanks to having colonial empires. When these disappeared, they began to create a new imperial-size area of economic and security cooperation among themselves – the European Union – which has reduced the relevance of the notion of state even where the original experience took place. It’s time to bring the city, the empire, and the federation back in.

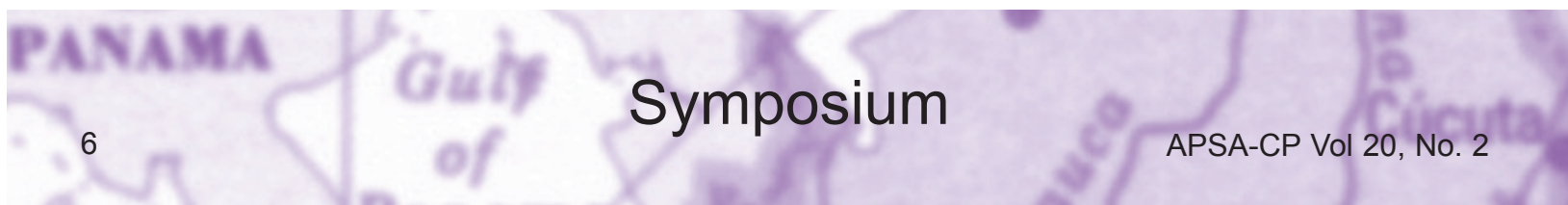
The New Institutionalism

James G. March and Johan P. Olsen (1983) introduced this concept into political science, arguing that post-WWII scholarship had largely ignored institutional analysis. “Institution” has two common meanings. In the narrow sense, “institutions” are formal organizations like parties, bureaucracies, or NGOs. Both as independent and dependent variables, these have always been prominent in political science. More broadly, “institutions” refer to patterns of political life, whether formally organized or not. Defined in this way, institutional analysis is almost synonymous with empirical political

“In either case the notion that political science had abandoned institutions at some point is false.”

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theory, whose main task is to explain patterns of action. In either case, the notion that political science had abandoned institutions at some point is false.

March and Olsen did not define "institution," but their use of the term approximates its broader meaning. They treat institutions not only as formal organizations but also such things as rules, norms of trust, identities, and roles that might be transmitted by socialization rather than by organizations. What was their rationale for arguing that political science had ignored these things, or for collecting such a mélange under one label?

The discourse concerning the "new institutionalism" emerged within the confines of rational choice theory, and it should have been presented that way. The operative meaning of "institution" in this discourse seems to be any factor shaping political action in a consistent way that does not result from an individual's rational decision. Rational choice theorists in economics and political science had apparently ignored such institutions or treated them as products of individual choice, and for these scholars their reappearance as causal variables was indeed something "new." But there was little new here for anyone else.

In sum, the "new institutionalism" was rational choice theory's rediscovery of the rest of the profession. The false claims to novelty associated with the concept were unfortunate. Every time we rename the wheel, we introduce artificial discontinuities between different schools of thought and different generations of scholars. Old institutionalists forged a rich body of research in the decades which predate March and Olsen's work.

Good Governance

Is America better governed than Canada? Than India? Conceptual difficulties in defining "good governance" have (unfortunately?) not deterred scholarly efforts to measure it, leading to claims of governance's value based on assessments of the impact of public transparency, rule of law, corruption, and so on, on a variety of desirable outcomes. If governments are charged with providing public services, security, and economic growth, good governance improves such provision. But is good governance the same as good government or good politics?

"To understand governance as a political phenomenon, we must understand how citizens experience the state...."

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Focusing on governance is attractive for policy scholars, the World Bank, and UNDP because it avoids contentious normative debates about the desirability of particular regime types. Rather, focusing on "governance" allows them to concentrate on the role of experts, not politicians, in improving "service delivery." Although the temptation to conflate good governance and good government is strong, doing so traps us in the fuzzy logic of "all good things go together" and obfuscates our understanding of politics.

Three main weaknesses bedevil governance scholarship. First, definitions of good governance too often include the policy outcomes to be explained, leading to tautology, and are unhealthily preoccupied with corruption. Second, proponents of governance reform advocate apolitical/efficient/technocratic expertise over (admittedly messy) contested political practice. Thus, we talk about governance reform independent of larger political reform, and laud efficiency improvements without discussing their distributional implications. Finally, by ignoring political process in favor of policy outcome, we reduce citizens to objects of governance. To understand governance as a political phenomenon, we must understand how citizens experience the state, to whom they turn when government officials are unhelpful, and whether they feel capable of holding accountable those appointed to serve them. Thus, rather than top-down elite-driven consensus about what constitutes good governance, I urge more citizen-centered theorizing about what constitutes governance.

Corruption

While corruption has been a topic of theoretical and empirical enquiry at least since Aristotle, it is plagued by conceptual, to say nothing of measurement, difficulties. In most empirical scholarship, the concept is described as the misuse or abuse of public office for private gain or benefit. Because the brief definition gets at the gist of most understandings of corruption, it is worth retaining. Yet it hides the extent to which the concept is amorphous, multifaceted, and wide-ranging. The concept verges on being stretched to include any illegal action by a government or corporate actor. To advance a broader, cumulative research program, several questions must be addressed. What is the scope of the terms "misuse" or "abuse"? In different studies, it may be bribery, nepotism, illegal campaign financ-

ing, fraud, embezzlement, collusion, cartels, patronage, unethical but legal actions, rent-seeking, and/or malfeasance. What of the term “public office”? The concept evokes the holder of a government position, but for many studies is understood to mean someone with “entrusted power,” thus encompassing corruption within a firm. The terms “private gain” or “private benefit” also have loose boundaries, often extended to include political parties and groups. In addition, the term could include cases in which the beneficiary is, from some perspectives, the public good, as when defense contracts with foreign countries are won through bribery. All terms in the basic definition are vulnerable to differences across countries: to wit, what is “abuse” in one

“The concept verges on being stretched to include any illegal action by a government or corporate actor.”

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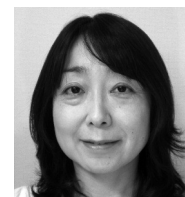
country may not be construed or legally defined as such in another. Arriving at a comprehensive definition satisfactory to all may not be possible. Scholars have also devised different

explanatory typologies based on configurations of corrupt actors and institutions, such as influence markets, elite cartels, oligarchs and clans, and official moguls (Johnston 2005), and on domains of corruption, such as personal or official (Banfield 1975). Rather than throw out the basic definition, comparative studies should aim to increase their comparability and replicability by specifying clearly their scope conditions, by being rigorous and unambiguous about the phenomena counted as “corruption,” by explaining which plausibly related phenomena are not included, and what, if any, typology is applied. Doing so will reduce conceptual confusion and enhance knowledge accumulation about corruption.



Anna Seleny

Decision-making



Junko Kato

Self-Interest

“What does it mean to say that political actors – from individuals to nations – are self-interested? Not much, actually.”

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“Self-interest” enjoys something like the status of the legal term *res ipsa loquitur*: the thing speaks for itself. Few concepts, however, are less intrinsically meaningful or more dependent on contextualization. What does it mean to say that political actors – from individuals to nations – are self-interested? Not much, actually. If self-interest is inescapably central to the study of politics, then why is it conceptually both “thin” and vague?

First, we tend to reduce actors’ interests to short-term, material gain. Variations in behavior, then, merely reflect differences in power-endowments, opportunity-structures or other “objective” phenomena. Some schol-

ars do consider longer-term, non-material motivations and goals. Yet although actors almost always pursue their interests in societies, we find little sustained focus on how social context defines interest. As a result, rarely is the concept dynamic. When faced with seemingly rational actors who live together peacefully one moment, and in the next become their neighbors’ executioners, comparativists often take intellectual refuge in “cascades” and “tipping points” (useful descriptors that fail to identify the mechanisms of change); or in the self-interested behavior of political entrepreneurs (one possible mechanism of change, which nevertheless begs the fundamental questions, such as: to what



shared understandings do entrepreneurs appeal; when and why do they succeed or fail?)

Culturalists and constructivists have argued that ideas, meaning, and norms are important. And a few comparativists grasp the central truth: that rationality and culture are two sides of the same coin (e.g. Cruz 2005). So why the stubborn segregation

between those who do the research to give content to the concept, and those for whom this content is almost always self-evident or even universal?

Part of the answer might be that we labor under the belief that if politics is about interest, then it is about rationality. By bringing in ideas, meaning, and norms we seem to blunt rationality's distinctive sharpness. And as we

cross into the territory of ideology and political culture, we lose the illusion that we are engaging "hard" concepts, and with it a comforting, albeit false, sense of clarity and certainty. But as Albert Hirschman showed in *The Passions and the Interests*, the notion of interest as a discrete and powerful force that is acceptable because it "tames" the passions is itself an ideational construct.

Rationality

Although individual decisions and choices are fundamental elements in understanding politics, we have yet to tackle head-on the psychological processes of making decisions. We have left the psychological processes in a black box because we have had no way to analyze human cognition or the mind. In comparative politics, the focus on institutions and their constraints on individuals have often

resulted from our ability to analyze only the observable and tangible subjects of a study. An alternative approach would be to set up a behavioral assumption that is strict enough to draw causal inferences about an individual decision.

For the last few decades, a rational choice approach has applied the concept of economic rationality to individ-

ual-level analysis and has significantly contributed to political analysis, including comparative analysis. Political scientists have tended to feel uncomfortable with alternative concepts, such as bounded rationality (see Simon 1985) and the framing of decisions in prospect theory (see Tversky and Kahneman 1987). Taking into consideration cognitive processes, these alternative concepts make a closer approximation of real decision-making possible, but only by including the discursive analysis of psychological processes. Behavioral economics has recently taken into account a psychological underpinning such as altruistic consideration for others' welfare and the subjectivity of decisions, both of which are inconsistent with expected utility theory but are familiar subjects in our discipline. Neuroeconomic approaches have tried to make these cognitive foundations tractable as neural processes. This development enables political scientists to work again on the important question of the relationship between decisions and the cognitive processes. Exploring the cognitive processes is expected to provide a novel foundation to explain rational behavior that is broadly defined as goal-seeking under the constraints from cognitive processes as well as external situations and institutions.

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Dan Slater

Regimes



Thomas Koelble

Authoritarianism and Autocracy

Authoritarianism has moved from the margins to the mainstream of comparative politics. Driving this shift has been a renewed recognition of authoritarian regimes' institutional diversity. One important way these regimes vary is in their concentration of deci-

“Unfortunately, it has become commonplace to treat autocracy and authoritarianism as synonyms. ...The concepts of autocracy and authoritarianism need disentangling.”

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sion-making power. Is it monopolized by a single individual, or shared by a broader collective? How and why might authoritarian regimes become more or less personalized over time? What are the likely consequences of such shifting arrangements for authoritarian durability?

Addressing these important theoretical questions requires a shared conceptual toolkit. Luckily, we can begin with the classics. Highly personalized

authoritarian regimes have classically been classified – drawing on familiar Greek etymology – as “autocracies.” As the *Oxford English Dictionary* suggests, an autocrat is “one who rules with undisputed sway.” Not all authoritarian regimes are so personalized, however. Hence not all authoritarian regimes are autocracies. Unfortunately, it has become commonplace to treat autocracy and authoritarianism as synonyms – as seen, for instance, in the Polity dataset's use of “autocracy scores” to measure countries' degree of departure from democratic practices. But China, the world's largest authoritarian regime, is not an autocracy at all, by the classic definition. A concept that fails to capture the largest example of the phenomenon it is supposed to capture is a concept in trouble.

The concepts of autocracy and authoritarianism need disentangling. Authoritarian regimes are not all autocracies, but vary in the degree to which they are autocratic. Doubtlessly one reason to prefer “autocracy” to “authoritarianism” is that it rhymes with democracy. But the use of a concept should depend not merely on a good rhyme, but a good reason. Recognizing that not all authoritarian regimes are autocracies will help comparativists focus more attention on the difficult tasks of apprehending and explaining variation in how autocratic these regimes are, across cases and over time.

Democracy

“Democracy” is a concept that is broadly used and misused in the political and social sciences. The concept has been applied to describe a plethora of different political systems; institutional and organizational arrangements; various methods of decision-making; deliberation, consultation, the expression of values and attitudes; and so forth. Yet comparativists fundamentally disagree about the extent to which the concept can and should be used to describe social, economic, and political realities. Particularly in its application to post-colonial countries, the use of the term clouds understanding of existing realities rather than illuminating them. In con-

“Yet when social scientists ‘rank’ democracies ... political entities across the globe are measured with similar yardsticks. Small wonder, then, that the North appears democratic and the South does not!”

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trast to the economically prosperous zones of North America and Western Europe, former colonies and many of the economically deprived areas of the globe do not enjoy the social, economic, structural, historical, or political conditions that underpin democratic regimes in the North. Yet when social scientists “rank” democracies in terms of concepts such as “the quality of democracy” or the level to which democratic principles such as accountabili-

ty, electoral freedom, or a whole host of other dimensions of “democracy” are upheld, all political entities across the globe are measured with similar yardsticks. Small wonder, then, that the North appears democratic and the South does not! Yet a more nuanced interpretation of what democracy may mean in different places – which may help explain different approaches to democratic decision-making – is often dismissed as merely an excuse for

particularism at best and corrupt regimes at worst. Comparative politics needs to come to grips with the facts that democracy has now become a global concept with local variations and understanding these variations is more important and illuminating than pressing each country and region into a theoretical and analytical straightjacket tailor-made for the North but entirely inappropriate for the South.



Carol Mershon



Joy Langston



Matt Golder



Marcus Kreuzer



Vello Pettai

Parties and Elections

Parties as Electoral Actors

In the conventional wisdom, a political party is defined as a team of politicians that in democracies competes for popular support and governmental office at election time. This definition serves the essential function of distinguishing parties from, for example, interest groups. Agreement on this definition has made possible cumulative research and landmark achievements in comparative politics and political science more broadly. This consensus, however, has come at a price. In recent decades, the discipline has acquired a bias in favor of an elections-dominant understanding of what political parties are and do. (But see, e.g., Aldrich 1995; Katz and Mair 2002.) This understanding of parties is too narrow, for it is grounded in the assumption that parties are fixed units from one election to the next. The foundational definition of parties as electoral actors has led us to downplay the fact that parties are also coalitions of incumbents. Once we conceive of parties as endogenous coalitions of individual incumbents, we can perceive and analyze the strategic choices that legislative incumbents make between elections, choices that not only can reshape what happens at

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Carol Mershon

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elections but also can reconstitute parties during the intervals from one national legislative election to the next. This expanded concept of parties hence entails the notion that, to varying degrees, in different systems, legislators' recurring decisions on party affiliation preserve or modify the sizes and policy positions of legislative parties; it also implies that legislators have a privileged place within parties, given their actions' visibility and impact. In defining legislative par-

ties as potentially shifting coalitions of incumbents, we gain leverage on such key questions as the origins of institutional change (e.g., Benoit and Hayden 2004), the role of opposition parties in competitive autocracies (Gandhi and Przeworski 2007; Magaloni 2007), and the origins of

change and stability in party systems (Heller and Mershon 2009; Mershon and Shvetsova 2009). And we attain fresh insights on how elections affect the incentives faced by the individual legislators who together form the coalitions of incumbents that are parties.

Party Organizational Change

When speaking of how political parties change, it is not always useful to conceive of a party's internal organization as a "black box" that will either adapt automatically to a large-scale transformation in the external environment or disappear, as some authors would have it (Downs 1957).

Newer works seek to understand the internal politics of the party organization by concentrating more on the interests and potential payoffs of leaders, or on the party's institutional flexibility (Kitschelt 1994; Koeble 1992). But the concept of party organization is cloudy, making it difficult to understand organizational adaptation. Some authors refer to electoral platforms and policy proposals (Roberts 1998), while other concentrate on the links between parties and labor unions or other large groups of voters (Levitsky 2003), and still others mean candidate selection and campaign strategy.

One suggestion for clearing up this conceptual confusion would be to disaggregate the idea of party organization. By studying the different areas of responsibility within a party, it

"...by disaggregating the concept of party organization ... one is obligated to be clearer about the different tasks that a typical party must undertake."

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becomes clearer that different leaders are in control of distinct elements of the party, and have different preferences and interests, which can help explain variation in outcomes within the same party. Finally, by disaggregating the concept of party organization (to better understand how it changes) one is obligated to be clearer about the different tasks that a typical party must undertake.

All parties – at least those in democratic or electoral authoritarian regimes – must fulfill certain obligations (depending on political regime and electoral system rules): they must recruit potential candidates, select those who will run under their electoral banner, run campaigns, and promote the party line in the nation's legislature. Not all aspects of the party can change equally or equally successfully. How leaders of different areas of the party organization are able to adapt to a changing environment in turn depends on their incentives and opportunities. Understanding this intra-party variation can help clarify how parties change over time.

Ideological Congruence

Although there is a large literature examining the ideological congruence between the preferences of citizens and their representatives, relatively little attention has been paid to exactly how ideological congruence should be conceptualized. It turns out that empirical results regarding ideological congruence can depend critically on how one conceptualizes and measures it. The standard approach is to conceptualize congruence as the absolute ideological distance between the government and the median citizen (absolute median citizen congruence). However, this approach ignores all information about the distribution of citizen preferences. An alternative would be to conceptualize congruence in terms of the average absolute distance between all citizens and the government (absolute citizen congruence). One problem with doing this, though, is that the maximum level of absolute citizen congruence is not independent of the dispersion of citizen preferences. This means that representatives in homogenous constituencies are automatically at an advantage in terms of their ability to produce con-

"Overall, conceptualizing congruence in relative terms offers a number of advantages over current practices."

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gruence than representatives in more heterogeneous constituencies. An alternative that avoids this problem is to conceptualize congruence relative to the dispersion of citizen preferences (relative citizen congruence). It is worth noting that both concepts of absolute congruence mentioned earlier can be appropriately employed only if the policy space is perceived in the same way across different units of analysis. This is not the case for con-

cepts of relative congruence. By normalizing congruence relative to the dispersion of citizen preferences, relative citizen congruence avoids the use of an abstract left-right scale and provides a metric-free concept of congruence. As a result, it avoids potential difficulties with differential item functioning (DIF) that might arise if the policy space is perceived differently across countries. Overall, conceptualizing congruence in relative terms

offers a number of advantages over current practices because it allows us to incorporate information about the full distribution of citizen preferences and avoids potential difficulties with DIF.

For a more detailed discussion of these and other issues related to the conceptualization and measurement of ideological congruence, see Golder and Stramski (2009).

Effective Number of Parties

Scholars occasionally ignore how context affects the validity of concepts. The Effective Number of Parties (ENP) was originally developed to calculate more precisely the fragmentation of established party systems. (Laakso and Taagepera 1979) More recently, it has been used to measure the institutionalization of transitional party systems (Reich 2004; Chhibber and Kollman 2004; Shvetsova 2002; Tavits and Annus 2006). This extension creates a number of problems that Table 1 illustrates in a stylized fashion.

The ENP scores make party system A appear more institutionalized than party system B; it remained unchanged in the former but increased by 0.94 parties in the latter. This inference is inconsistent with the fact that 100% of voters in party system A shifted their party allegiances to two new parties while only 20% did so in party system B. Thus, ENP is a valid measure of institutionalization for the latter but not the former.

Party systems A and B represent characteristics commonly found in transitional and established party sys-

Table 1										
		Party System A				Party System B				
		Vote Share of Party				Vote Share of Party				
Elections	ENP	1	2	3	4	ENP	1	2	3	4
t	2	50	50			2	50	50		
t+1	2			50	50	2.94	40	40	10	10

tems, respectively, and as such underscore the problem that arises from using ENP to measure the institutionalization in such different contexts. The most important qualitative difference between the two party systems is the source of their change (Kreuzer and Pettai 2009).¹ In established party systems, voters are the principle

source of change as they shift their allegiances. The resulting change in existing and new parties' vote shares as well as fragmentation is validly captured by ENP. Transitional party systems, by

contrast, change in more complex ways. They are subject to the same voter-driven change as established ones; however, they also are changed by a wide variety of intra-electoral, elite-driven forms of party reorganization (i.e. mergers, electoral coalitions, fissions or hopping of individual candidates between existing parties (Kreuzer and Pettai 2009)).²

In the Baltics, for example, parties that merged, broke up, or formed electoral coalitions won on average 38.5% of the votes between 1992 and 2005. Party membership also was very transient, as 15-20% of individual electoral candidates hopped back and forth between parties (Kreuzer and Pettai 2003). It is such elite-driven reorganization that frequently transforms transitional party systems in a way that ENP insufficiently captures. It consequently overestimates the degree of political stability whenever party organizations are under-institutionalized.

Notes

¹ Rein Taagepera recognizes the difference between transitional and established party systems and, by implication, the limitations of ENP to measure institutionalization (Grofman et al. 2000).

² Such reorganizations are rare in established party systems (Mair 1990). Italy and Japan in the 1990s are the two rare exceptions.

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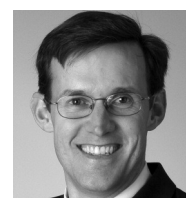
Structuring Political Conflict



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Michelle Taylor-Robinson



Jason Brownlee



Barbara Geddes

Ethnicity

Ethnicity is a concept of deceptive simplicity in comparative politics. Spanning elements of identification, networks, and cooperation – and with implications ranging from voting to violence – it is a fundamental concept to which scholars intuitively relate, but in markedly divergent ways. Despite being one of the dominant explanatory variables in the field, it is plagued by a number of conceptual ambiguities largely attributable to differences in measurement or methodology.

Rich case studies tend to see ethnicity as contextually understood, highlighting mechanisms and grasping longitudinal components of the concept that may be internally consistent, but which are not readily generalizable due to limitations in sampling and sample size. On the other hand, quantitative works – more externally valid thanks to the larger number of cases under inquiry – mostly treat ethnicity as fixed over time. With measures of fractionalization, polarization, or

domination based on static dimensions of language, race, or religion, such works shed limited light on the mechanisms behind the identified correlations or lack thereof. Unsurprisingly, divergence in methodology and measurement often leads to conflicting results. For example, in the context of civil war, qualitative work tends to identify ethnicity as a powerful explanatory variable for conflict, while quantitative work has failed to identify any strong association. Though the best way to understand ethnicity is still debated, recent works have exhibited notably more definitional and conceptual clarity. Scholars who have appreciated the complexity of the term have attempted to break it down into its constituent parts; others, using experimental methods, have moved from observational to behavioral data, aiming to ascertain directly whether and how the concept of ethnicity is at work. But a question remains: will this generalizable measure for which we strive ever capture a meaningful notion of ethnicity? Or do regional specificities render the goal of a universal understanding of ethnicity unattainable?

“But a question remains: will this generalizable measure for which we strive ever capture a meaningful notion of ethnicity? Or do regional specificities render the goal of a universal understanding of ethnicity unattainable?”

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Cleavage

The general notion of a cleavage is that of a deep-seated socio-structural conflict that has political significance. Cleavages reflect broadly based and long-standing social and economic divisions within a society.

Older notions of cleavage distinguished between ascriptive traits, achieved status, and opinion cleavages. This classification is also found in some more recent formulations that, from a developmental perspective, differentiate between pre-industrial cleavages, which are more or less ascriptive variables; industrial cleavages, which are achieved variables like education and social class; and finally post-industrial cleavages, which are value orientations.

A more recent and very influential contribution to the cleavage literature is that of Stefano Bartolini and Peter Mair (1990). They argue that only divisions that combine a socio-structural element, a normative element comprising values and beliefs, and an organizational element should be called cleavages. Although all three elements must normally be present for a cleavage to exist, the authors allow them to vary in strength independently of each other. This is a research strategy for more macro-oriented studies

of cleavages.

Another approach based on Bartolini and Mair's conceptualization is to consider cleavage politics as one particular kind of politics and cleavage voting

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as one particular type of voting. This approach can be used in analysis of survey data.

Cleavage voting is the indirect effect of

a socio-structural variable via value orientations or issue positions on party choice. A class cleavage is, for example, the indirect effect of social

class via economic left-right values on party choice. A possible New Politics cleavage would be, for example, the indirect effect of education via materialist/post-materialist or authoritarian/libertarian values on party choice. Cleavage voting can be separated from pure structural voting, which is the direct effect of social structure on party choice, and value voting, which is the effect of values on party choice when controlling for prior structural variables (see Knutsen and Scarbrough 1995).

Please see table 2 for a summary of my recommendations.

Table 2: "Cleavage" Recommendations

- 1. Drop the use of the cleavage concept for analyses of the impact of issues and values on political behavior.**
- 2. Use Bartolini and Mair's conceptualization of cleavage for macro-oriented studies.**
- 3. Use the concept of cleavage voting in survey analysis.**
- 4. In a very general sense, studies of the relationship between socio-structural variables and party choice could still be called studies of cleavages.**

Discourse

The postmodernist concept of "discourse" is troublesome and confusing, yet I've found that it offers us theoretical and methodological insights. Discourse can refer to roughly two things. First, it can mean instances of actual speech or text;

this is the sense often used by quantitatively oriented discourse analysts or by most of us in ordinary parlance. Second, it can refer to any characteristic language or way of talking that subtly conveys our deep, unarticulated assumptions about the

world. It may even refer to the beliefs themselves, at which point it becomes nearly synonymous with the notion of a worldview or mindset. This postmodernist notion of discourse is usually associated with an antipositivist philosophy, making polit-

ical scientists reluctant to use the term. Yet in my study of populist movements, I've found that we can understand populism best when we approach it as a discourse in the postmodernist sense. To see populism as a set of ideas akin to an ideology is not very interesting or precise, because the beliefs that underlie populism are not consciously articulated but operate at a lower cognitive level. When we think as populists, we automatically start to speak as populists. This creates a tight link between ideas and language that is not really contemplated in the behaviorist study of ideas. Discourse also offers insights into methodology and can be scientific-

ly measured. For example, to measure a worldview such as populism, we are forced to examine what people say. And in order to measure this language, we have to incorporate not just its ideational content, but its form (i.e. it has to sound populist). Furthermore, to gauge this form, we sometimes need human coders rather than computer software to interpret whole texts, or we may need to incorporate populist language into our survey questions. This all suggests a different approach to surveys and content analysis, but one that is still amenable to techniques for ensuring reliability and precision.

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Clientelism

Scholars had hoped that during the Third Wave of democracy clientelism would disappear as democracies consolidated (e.g. O'Donnell 1992), but instead clientelism has adapted to free and fair elections and is still an integral part of politics. Yet clientelism has proven difficult to theorize and include in empirical studies – why? One reason is that old literature needs to be updated for clientelism in the context of democracy, where patrons and brokers have adapted to secret ballots and competitive elections (see Stokes 2005; Nichter 2008). A second is that clientelism as an institution takes varied forms (see Kitschelt and Wilkinson 2007). For example, clients may select a patron where individual candidates, not parties, are responsible for winning elections (e.g., Brazil); conversely, clients may need to prove their loyalty to a party by working for the party's political apparatus to obtain clientelistic benefits (e.g., Argentina's Justicialist (Peronist)

Party, Honduras's traditional parties). A third reason concerns the different perceptions about the "deliverables" of clientelism: particularistic benefits for clients, handouts

"...clientelism is often viewed as undesirable, and the emotionally loaded nature of the concept hinders objective investigation of its causes and policy consequences."

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at campaign rallies, development projects for communities of loyal clients and "public" goods that in fact operate as "club" goods (Roniger 2004; Kitschelt and Wilkinson 2007; Hagopian 2009). There is a voluminous literature on clientelism, but there is little comparative research or empirical work examining clientelism as a variable and the concept is still inconsistently defined, thus hampering communication across researchers and empirical measurement. In addition, clientelism is often viewed as undesirable, and the emotionally loaded nature of the concept hinders objective investigation of its causes and policy consequences. One solution would be to adopt a notion of "clientelism with adjectives" (à la Collier and Levitsky 1997's characterization of the concept of democracy), and for the field to determine the core characteristics of clientelistic linkages while recognizing their different variants.

Moderate Opposition

Organized groups promoting change differ in politically consequential ways. They adopt particular tactics, goals, and ideologies, which in turn affect their relationships with other movements, social constituencies, and ruling elites. Across countries, such groups also exhibit significant similarities.

Precise terminology can help comparativists analyze these organizations with a com-

mon vocabulary, as shown by scholarship on pressure groups and political parties. Even if these concepts periodically merit refinement, their usage is generally accepted by outside analysts, the groups' members, and their respective governments. By contrast, the term "moderate opposition," as often applied in democratizing or authoritarian contexts, can refer to a number of traits and spark unproductive terminological tussles.

Moderate opposition groups may or may not operate non-violently; the African National Congress maintained an armed wing but is valorized as an exemplar of moderation and its effectiveness. Moderates may participate in elections, but they may also abstain, as when Benigno

"Binary treatments of moderates and radicals obscure the conceptual elasticity of 'moderation.' To paraphrase George Orwell, moderate has been a term of praise; those defending 'moderate opposition' groups would likely balk at tying the epithet to a single meaning."

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From Seoul to Cairo, street protesters have made objections to US foreign policy a major plank of moderate opposition.

Binary treatments of moderates and radicals obscure the conceptual elasticity of "moderation." To paraphrase George Orwell, moderate has been a term of praise; those defending "moderate opposition" groups would likely balk at tying the epithet to a single meaning. Comparativists may therefore want to avoid the thicket of moderation and instead label movements as parties, pressure groups, militias or some combination – based not on approval or deprecation, but upon the organizations' empirical characteristics.

Aquino's movement withdrew from Ferdinand Marcos's dubious presidential poll in 1981.

Ostensibly moderate campaigns for change may seek limited alterations in government, yet they may also overhaul the state, e.g., Solidarity in Poland. Finally, while pro-American sympathies may help a movement get tagged as moderate, ideological orientation has been no prerequisite.

Divided

The competition is intense, but "divided," as in divided elite, wins my personal prize for the most bothersome concept. What government, party, junta, political science department, or family has been observed closely without the discovery of factions or divisions? How can we tell which divisions are "important?" Which divisions are relevant for explaining a particular outcome? "Divided" need not but often does exemplify why the use of concepts in political science can be problematic: scholars who use it often fail to identify the concrete criteria used to decide which particular events, processes, situations or objects are subsumed by the concept. That is, which actions or attitudes did the scholar observe

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that led him or her to classify one elite as divided and another as unified? Without the identification of such criteria, readers cannot decide whether to believe scholars' claims, other scholars cannot replicate research, and it is easy to fall into arguments that cannot be resolved about whether a particular elite is "really" divided, what divided means, and, most hopeless, what it should

mean. "Divided" is a concept used to "measure" or classify another concept, "elite." The same argument applies to concepts such as elite used to identify entities to be classified. Criteria are needed to identify which individuals belong to the elite. Many problems associated with the use of concepts can be eliminated by identifying concrete criteria for how to classify cases encountered in

the real world as members of conceptual categories. These criteria should be clear and specific enough so that another scholar encountering the same factual situation would classify it in the same way and so that new situations can be classified. I have found that forcing myself to identify such criteria helps to clarify my own ideas and makes them more intelligible to others.

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Organized Section in Comparative Politics

Business Meeting, APSA Toronto

Friday, Sept. 4 at 6:15 pm

See you there!

Dataset Review: Parliamentary Powers Index

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M. Steven Fish and Matthew Kroening have published an ambitious volume that measures the power of the national legislature for 158 countries (Fish and Kroening, 2009) based on a Parliamentary Powers Index (PPI). This index includes 32 items that measure four aspects of legislature strength: the legislature's ability to influence the executive, the legislature's autonomy from executive control, the legislature's authority in specific areas, and its institutional capacity. However, some deficiencies in the construction of this index weaken the merits of the exhaustive compilation of information: conceptual imprecision in the definition of measurement and some procedural flaws in the elaboration of the index. After describing the main characteristics of the PPI, I will highlight some of these relevant critiques.

Description of the PPI

The PPI is based primarily on the Legislative Powers Survey that contains 32 separate indicators of legislature strength. The authors administered the survey to country experts (on average, five responses per country during the period 2002-2006) and complemented the information with analysis of national constitutions and other relevant sources. With all the information collected, they generated the PPI, which ranges from zero (least powerful) to one (most powerful), for 158 countries.

The 32 yes/no questions of the survey

are clustered in four sections or sub-indexes. The first section covers the influence of the legislature over the executive (INFLEXEC: 9 questions), the second one the institutional autonomy of the legislature (INSTAUT: 9 questions), the third one the special powers of the legislature (SPECPOW: 8 questions), and the fourth one the institutional capacity of the legislature (INSTCAP: 6 questions). Each survey item is dichotomous. If the legislature possesses the power in question, the item is scored in the affirmative. If not, it is scored in the negative. Even though some questions may have more than two alternative answers

"To arrive at the PPI for each country, they divided the total number of affirmative answers by the total number of items in the survey, assigning equal weight to each item. Even though they are aware that each item cannot be equally important, they opted for this procedure since the importance of an item may vary from country to country and from time to time. However, some weighting is implied by the use of different numbers of items for each dimension..."

(yes/no), the authors settled the questions in a way to reduce the possible answers into a yes/no response. In order to compare items with one another and to aggregate them into a broader index, they sacrificed a more precise alternative scoring system. The authors assigned the same weight to every item.

To build the PPI, the authors determined the answers to each item for each country by studying the expert consultants' questionnaires, constitutions, and relevant secondary sources. To arrive at the PPI for each country, they divided the total number of affirmative answers by the total number of items in the survey, assigning equal weight to each item. Even though they are aware that each item cannot be equally important, they opted for this procedure since the importance of an item may vary from country to country and from time to time. However, some weighting is implied by the use of different numbers of items for each dimension; they employed 9 questions concerning two dimensions of the legislature strength (influence of the legislature and autonomy of the legislature), and 8 and 6 of the remaining two (special powers of the legislature and institutional capacity, respectively).

Deficiencies in the Construction of the Index

In this section, I discuss the two main flaws of the PPI that weaken its utility as an instrument to measure effectively the strength of the legislature. The first deficiency is conceptual since the definition of "legislature strength" may be not coherent with the four dimensions selected. The second deficiency is procedural, since in the building of

Table 1. Evaluation of Items' Performances

Items	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
Legislature can impeach the President or replace the Prime Minister	15.4	35.8	0.606	0.858
Legislators may serve simultaneously as ministers	15.3	39.0	0.064	0.872
Legislature has powers to interpellate	15.0	36.8	0.499	0.861
Legislature can conduct investigation of executive officials	15.2	35.3	0.687	0.855
Legislature has power of oversight over the agencies of coercion	15.4	35.7	0.654	0.856
Legislature appoints the Prime Minister	15.4	36.2	0.561	0.859
Legislature's approval is required to confirm individual ministers	15.5	38.2	0.237	0.867
The country lacks a Presidency or it is elected by the legislature	15.4	38.3	0.184	0.869
Legislature can vote no confidence in the government	15.2	36.9	0.417	0.863
Legislature is immune from dissolution from the executive	15.5	40.1	-0.112	0.875
Executive lacks decree power	15.3	36.3	0.513	0.86
Laws passed by the legislature are veto-proof	15.3	36.3	0.507	0.86
Legislature's laws are supreme and not subject to judicial review	15.7	39.3	0.062	0.869
Legislature has the right to initiate bills in all policy jurisdictions	15.1	37.7	0.312	0.865
Expenditures of funds appropriated by the legislature is mandatory	15.2	36.0	0.549	0.859
Legislature controls the sources that finance its own operation	15.1	35.9	0.65	0.857
Members of legislature are immune from arrest and/or prosecution	15.3	38.2	0.202	0.868
All members of the legislature are elected	15.0	36.6	0.534	0.86
Legislature alone can change the constitution	15.3	36.9	0.408	0.863
Legislature's approval is necessary for the declaration of war	15.1	37.1	0.391	0.863
Legislature's approval is necessary to ratify foreign treaties	14.9	37.4	0.441	0.862
Legislature has the power to grant amnesty	15.3	37.3	0.347	0.865
Legislature has the power of pardon	15.7	38.9	0.173	0.867
Legislature reviews and has power to reject appointments to the judiciary	15.3	37.1	0.378	0.864
The chairman of the central bank is appointed by the legislature	15.7	38.1	0.383	0.864
Legislature has a substantial voice in the operation of state-owned media	15.5	36.7	0.546	0.86
Legislature is regularly in session	15.0	37.3	0.425	0.863
Each legislator has a personal secretary	15.4	37.3	0.346	0.865
Each legislator has at least one non-secretarial staff member	15.6	38.0	0.31	0.865
Legislators are eligible for reelection without any restriction	14.8	38.8	0.252	0.866
A seat in the legislature is an attractive enough position that legislators are generally interested in and seek re-election	14.9	38.2	0.371	0.864
The reelection of incumbent legislators is common enough that at any given time the legislature contains a significant number of highly experienced members	15.0	37.7	0.327	0.865

the index they did not consider key methodological steps before clustering the items to assure replicability and reproducibility.

In relation to the conceptual deficiency, the authors assume legislature strength as a latent variable, and they try to grasp it through four dimen-

sions. By considering four dimensions, the authors understand strength of the legislature as a three-level structure concept: one referring to the basic-level concept, one at a second level that comprises the four dimensions, and the third level consisting of the 32 items. If the concept has this structure, one should take it into account

when constructing the measure. When facing multidimensional and multilevel concepts, it is necessary to clarify both the relationships among the dimensions and the nature of continuum on which the variables lie (Goertz 2006). First, one should be clear about whether these four dimensions are substitutable or not. For example,

do high influence, special powers, or institutional capacity compensate for low autonomy? Or is a high level of all of these necessary for a strong legislature? Or, is a high level of any one of these dimensions sufficient for legislature strength? Many item combinations are possible, but the authors just aggregate all the indicators, assigning equal weights to each one. This procedure implies complete substitutability, even though it is not clear that the authors preferred this rule to the other possibilities.

Second, it is important to define the range of the continuum, identifying the positive and negative ends of the spectrum, and its implications for the concept. Normally, it is easier to have a precise idea of the positive pole of the concept (in this case, legislature strength) than about the negative pole, but it is nevertheless important to think also about the negative end of the spectrum, since it is necessary to give the substantive character of the continuum linking the two poles. In order to solve this difficulty, Goertz recommends taking the negative pole as the positive and ask about its negative. It is always useful to ask about the positive pole and the degree to which it is different from the not-positive pole. However, this important exercise was not considered by the authors. For example, instead of assuming "legislature weakness" as the negative pole, the authors might have thought executive strength as the "negative" pole of the continuum. The latter would give us a better grasp of "relative strength" of the legislature than the former. This type of decision can affect the building of the index and the measurements that flow from it.

Furthermore, the 32 items have been clustered without explicitly defined criteria for aggregation, which impedes clarification of the concept that is

being measured. The authors also neglect to list any criteria for selecting the measurement format. What justification is there for assuming that the items are unidimensional, or for weighting them equally? These are choices, whether the authors address them or not.

Moreover, the authors could have justified the choice of items to constitute the scale. Not all the items evaluated (and asked) should necessarily be considered in the index. Rather, this decision should be based on analysis of the items' means (a mean close to the center of the range of possible scores is desirable), analysis of the item variance (a relatively high variance is wanted since we need items

sistent to the extent that its items are highly intercorrelated. Also, it is used to test the reliability of the index, since strong correlations among items imply strong links between them and the latent variable, so that after an item-selection process we can be confident that our selected components are all measuring the same concept in the same direction. The authors did not report such a procedure.

Fortunately, after applying the tests, Cronbach's alpha is 0.867, which justifies confidence in the internal consistency of the index. This is a good result, but it can be improved by eliminating items that are only weakly correlated with the others (in bold in Table 1). It may also be improved by

Table 2. Reliability and Reproducibility Coefficients by Sub - Indexes

Sub-Index	Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient	Guttman scalogram reproducibility coefficient
Influence over the Executive (INFLEXEC)	0.765	0.813
Institutional Autonomy (INSTAUT)	0.623	0.808
Specified Powers (SPECPOW)	0.699	0.824
Institutional Capacity (INSTCAP)	0.599	0.861

that make responses vary considerably; identical answers indicate that the item does not have discriminant power), and item scale correlation (each individual item should be correlated substantially with the correlation of the remaining items, so the corrected item scale correlation test is recommended) (see Table 1). A Cronbach's coefficient alpha test can be used to test item performance and internal consistency. Alpha indicates the proportion of variance in the scale scores that is attributable to the true score. It is concerned with the homogeneity of the items within a scale and therefore it also determines internal consistency. A scale is internally con-

clustering them by criteria different from the four sub-index division proposed by the authors. We would need theoretical reasons to attempt different clustering that can further improve Cronbach's alpha.

When Cronbach's alpha tests are applied to the four sub-indexes proposed, scores show heterogeneous levels of reliability, which give us some leverage for questioning item clustering. INFLEXEC shows a strong reliability coefficient (0.765), but this significant coefficient is not a characteristic of the remaining ones, especially INSTCAP that scores 0.599 (see Table 2). The internal consistency of



the overall index (0.867) is significantly higher in comparison to each individual sub-index, largely because there are so many more items in the overall index, most of which are fairly strongly correlated. Different aggregations would produce diverse outputs for reliability, and would probably improve the sub-indexes' reliabilities.

Factor analysis is also recommended in order to cluster items more efficiently. According to DeVellis (2003), factor analysis has three main purposes. It helps to determine how many latent variables underlie a set of items, it can provide a means of explaining variation among relatively large numbers of original variables (using relatively few newly created variables), and it can help identify the substantive content of the factors that account for the variation among a larger set of items. The last goal is accomplished by identifying groups of items that covary with one another and appear to work well together. Factor analysis provides different item selections in order to obtain more efficient results, which produce diverse outputs for reliability and reproducibility tests.

Moreover, a reproducibility test is fur-

ther needed. For example, a Guttman scalogram analysis can calculate the coefficient of reproducibility (see Table 2), which is the percentage of original responses that could be reproduced by knowing the scale scores used to summarize them. None of these procedures were considered in the elaboration of the PPI. A superior Guttman scale should score over 0.85 in reproducibility. After applying Guttman scalogram to the overall PPI index (0.823) and to each of the four sub-indexes (see Table 2), it is clear that there is still room for improvement. Even though the coefficients scored over 0.80, only INSTCAP sub-index attains the recommended score.

Final remarks

I have argued that the PPI could be improved if the item clustering were guided by both conceptual and methodological criteria. Conceptually, the authors could define the criteria for the dimensions considered in the definition of legislature strength, and their weight in the overall index. Doing this would probably lead to improved reliability, internal consistency, and replicability. Methodologically, the authors could have checked and

reported the applicability and efficiency of all the items in the PPI. The tests I have reported here suggest that legislative strength could be measured more reliably by dropping certain items and clustering the remaining ones differently. The PPI Index as an overall measurement is fairly reliable, but not as much as it could be; the sub-indexes could be strengthened even more.

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<http://www.matthewkroening.com/Datasets.htm>

Dataset Announcement

Bertelsmann Transformation Index

The Bertelsmann Transformation Index is a set of 52 indicators of political transformation, economic transformation, and the "quality of governance among decision makers." It covers 125 countries "with a population of more than two million that have not achieved the status of a fully consolidated market-based democracy." Political Transformation is an average of scores on 18 indicators of state-ness, political participation, rule of law, stability of democratic institutions, and political and social integration. Economic Transformation is an aver-

age of scores on 14 indicators of level of socioeconomic development, organization of the market and competition, currency and price stability, private property, welfare regime, economic performance, and sustainability. The Status Index is a combination of Political and Economic Transformation. There is a separate (political) Management Index that averages scores on 14 indicators of steering capability, resource efficiency, consensus-building, and international cooperation, and is adjusted to compensate for the level of management

difficulty faced by each country. Initial scores are assigned by one country expert, then adjusted in consultation with another country expert, then adjusted for regional and international comparability and approved by a board. The Status Index and all its components are available for 2006 and 2008; the Management Index is available for 2005-2007. The disaggregated average scores and a brochure giving a brief overview of the methodology can be downloaded at <http://www.bertelsmann-transformation-index.de/46.0.html?&L=1>.

Section Awards

Gregory Luebbert Best Book Award

Award for the best book in the field of comparative politics published in 2007 or 2008:

Raymond Duch
Oxford University
Randolph Stevenson
Rice University

The Economic Vote (CUP, 2008).

Award Committee Members: Isabela Mares (Chair), Benjamin Smith, and Regina Smyth.

Gregory Luebbert Article Award

Co-winners for the best article in the field of comparative politics published in 2007 or 2008:

Stathis N. Kalyvas
Matthew A. Kocher
Yale University

"How Free is Free Riding in Civil Wars?" *World Politics* 59 (January 2007), 177-216.

and

Daniel Ziblatt
Harvard University

"Does Landholding Inequality Block Democratization?" *World Politics* 60 (July 2008), 610-41.

Award Committee Members: Pepper Culpepper (Chair), Anna Grzymala-Busse, and David Samuels.

Sage Paper Award

Given to the best paper in the field of comparative politics presented at the 2008 APSA Annual Meeting:

Dan Slater
University of Chicago
Benjamin Smith
University of Florida

"Economic Origins of Democratic Breakdown? Contrary Evidence from Southeast Asia and Beyond"

Award Committee Members: Frances Hagopian (Chair), Aseem Prakash, and William Hurst.

Lijphart, Przeworski, Verba Data Prize

Award for a publicly available data set that has made an important contribution to the field of comparative politics:

Jan Teorell
Lunds Universitet
Sören Holmberg
University of Gothenburg
Bo Rothstein
University of Gothenburg

The Quality of Government Dataset, version 15 May 2008.

University of Gothenburg: The Quality of Government Institute. Available at <http://www.qog.pol.gu.se>

Award Committee Members: Lyle Scruggs (Chair), Lane Kenworthy, and Karen Ferree.

Editors' Notes

The editors welcome suggestions of relatively new and potentially useful datasets that should be announced or reviewed in APSA-CP. Anyone interested in reviewing a dataset for the newsletter should contact Michael Coppedge at coppedge.1@nd.edu.

Any announcements relevant to the comparative politics field can be submitted for inclusion in the newsletter. Please email any such announcements to ckiewiet@nd.edu.

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