

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-88515-7 - Comparative Politics: Rationality, Culture, and Structure - Second Edition

Edited by Mark Irving Lichbach and Alan S. Zuckerman

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## I

**Paradigms and Pragmatism***Comparative Politics during the Past Decade*

Mark Irving Lichbach and Alan S. Zuckerman

## INTRODUCTION

Students of comparative politics explain electoral behavior, political networks, political institutions, contentious politics, comparative political economies, welfare states, international-comparative linkages, and the state. Their interest in the pragmatic and causal analysis of these critical political questions defines the “messy center”<sup>1</sup> of comparative politics. The first edition of this volume emphasized the field’s research paradigms, placing rationality, culture, and structure in the subtitle. In the decade or so since the first edition was published, tension between these two perspectives on the field has persisted. Contrasts between research paradigms and pragmatic causal accounts provide the intellectual friction that drives much of our research. These alternative foci structure this edition’s themes and problems.

Aiming to transcend a battle of the paradigms, Alan Zuckerman’s chapter advances an explanatory strategy that is one such way forward. Explanations in comparative politics, he maintains, must meet clear standards: The more that are met, the better the results. The criteria include social mechanisms (a particular form of causal mechanism) that are derived from strong theoretical propositions. Convincing explanations also require empirical evidence of the specified explanatory processes. Because the ontology of politics demands that the explanations apply to stochastic, multilevel, and endogenous phenomena, simple causal claims are insufficient.

Applying social mechanisms with high prior probabilities of explanatory power and employing appropriate statistical techniques transforms the language of explanation from imprecise verbal accounts into clear and specific arguments. The results move explanation along a scale from the mistaken to the demonstrated. As an attempt to convince by doing, Zuckerman applies his message

<sup>1</sup> This characterization of the field appeared first in the symposium in *World Politics*, on the role of theory in comparative politics, published in 1996. It is meant to convey a multimethod approach that draws from many theories.

Our thanks to Sidney Tarrow and Joel Migdal for comments on earlier drafts of this chapter.

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to research on partisanship and on political violence. In his view, research paradigms are a source of strong explanatory hypotheses, but they are not the sum total of scholarship in comparative politics.

Mark Lichbach's chapter advances a somewhat different perspective on contemporary comparative politics: While overt paradigm wars have been dampened, paradigm-driven teaching and thinking persists. In the field's tool-boxes and cookbooks, paradigms continue to provide the content and direction – the underlying purpose and logic – for many contemporary comparativists. Most importantly, they fuel the field's creative impetus.

The second edition of *Comparative Politics* assesses the role that research paradigms and pragmatic explanatory strategies currently play in the field. In order to bring assessments of the debate among the paradigms up-to-date, we asked our authors to address several questions:

How have the dynamics among rationality-culture-structure played out?

What are the different types of responses to the battle of the paradigms?

How do scholars currently treat the approaches? Are rationality-culture-structure comparisons no longer central to the field? Do researchers still begin their research with an interparadigmatic dialogue in mind?

Do they still use the debate to evaluate existing theories? When developing new theories, do they still return to the debate?

Have the paradigms converged or do they remain distinct? Which metaphor best characterizes the field: separate tables, a messy center of convergence, or a mixed bag of partial synergisms? Is there a new paradigm war, with culturalists and constructivists as today's paradigm warriors, on the horizon?

Do multiple perspectives shed more light than heat? Are creative research moves often based on appeals to ideal-type paradigms? Does competition among paradigms move the field and promote progress by generating critical reflection, fashioning significant evidence, and improving important concepts?

While the authors of our theoretical chapters – on rationality, culture, and structure – and of our substantive chapters organize their contributions in their own ways, all examine the field's paradigms and pragmatic strategies of explanation.

#### THE CHAPTERS

We begin with two general chapters, Lichbach's assessment of efforts to move past the debate about research schools and Zuckerman's attempt to improve explanations in comparative politics. Both highlight the volume's links between paradigms and causal analyses. Structural and rationalist analyses applied to the messy center follow. Ira Katznelson and Margaret Levi provide theoretical overviews of structure and rationality, respectively, that demonstrate an

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emerging consortium. We then turn to movements against the mainstream. Marc Ross offers a theoretical overview of culture. Joel Migdal's discussion of the state indirectly points to, and Mark Blyth's analysis of comparative political economy more directly discusses, the growing significance of constructivism. Two chapters then illustrate the center's dialogue between research paradigms and causal pragmatism: Etel Solingen considers global-domestic linkages and Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow, and Charles Tilly analyze the field of contentious politics. The volume then considers ways that comparativists fortify the field's center by elaborating causal explanations. Robert Huckfeldt's analysis of political networks and Christopher J. Anderson's review of the literature on mass political behavior emphasize macro-micro connections and the need for multilevel analyses. Uncovering endogenous causal relationships provides the theme of Jonathan Rodden's review of institutions and political economy. Isabela Mares delves deeply into causal analyses of welfare states. Finally, Kanchan Chandra discusses the problem of making causal claims about ethnicity and politics, the research domain in comparative politics that has been most affected by recent constructivist thought.

**The Messy Center: Big-Picture Pragmatism**

"Now we political economists have a pedantic custom," writes Max Weber in his classic essay "Science as a Vocation" (1946: 129), "which I should like to follow, of always beginning with the external conditions." Following Weber, Ira Katznelson would have comparativists begin with the contemporary world's major force – modern liberalism, as it developed in the West. Katznelson suggests that robust problem-solving scholarship and the revival of large-scale studies have renewed the prospects of institutional studies that combine strong theory, a configurational approach to causality, and respect for history's variety. These efforts continue established research programs on the dominant structures of modernity – capitalism, civil society, the state, and the state system. A close critical focus on liberalism offers comparative politics a similarly energetic focus.

Even as Katznelson sees the biggest of pictures, he adopts an eclectic research strategy. In a theme that reappears in many of the chapters, Katznelson demonstrates a "pragmatic attitude about method." Displaying a "healthy disrespect for overly stylized battles about paradigms," he wants to employ "a range of analytical traditions to answer tough and meaningful questions" about "important problems." Katznelson urges "problem-focused writing that exhibits little respect for traditional divisions within comparative politics" such as political economy, contentious politics, and electoral studies. Utilizing multiple methods – archives, surveys, ethnography, experiments, and cross-national statistics – helps the field transcend "inductive variable-centered strategies." He also urges comparativists to "refuse to choose between positive and normative orientations." Believing that many "intersecting modes of investigation" can produce findings that illuminate questions that are empirically grounded, ones

rich in knowledge of time and place, Katznelson advocates a style of comparative inquiry that is “realist and concrete rather than nominal and abstract, [one] aimed at discerning a ‘sweet spot’ located in the zone between high abstraction and particular specification.”

Even so, Katznelson cautions against excessive pragmatism. Following ideas he advanced in his chapter for the volume’s first edition, Katznelson has little use for “highly targeted studies” of limited ambition that produce “substantive and conceptual retrenchment” from the great works of the past. Without the sort of larger project focused on Western liberalism that he advocates, “thematic literatures threaten to remain confined within specialized conversations, and possibilities for integrating findings across a range of discoveries are likely to stay artificially abridged.” Katznelson thus worries about the decentering of comparative politics – the heterogeneity and diversity in subjects, questions, and studies that inevitably accompany a diverse toolkit. Katznelson seeks a big-picture pragmatism that can contain the field’s tensions and contradictions.

Applying a rational choice approach, Margaret Levi also advocates research pragmatism that aims at big questions. Her chapter details significant substantive, methodological, and theoretical advances in rational choice analysis that allows rationalists to employ manageable research strategies to probe the big picture. Levi discusses how, over the past decade, rational choice comparativists have indeed helped to redirect comparative politics toward goals that she shares with Katznelson.

The successes of the comparative and historical mode of rational choice theory derive in part from debates with culturalists and structuralists. Even as convergence across the research schools grows, Levi maintains, paradigms remain: “While the paradigm wars . . . have certainly subsided, they have not disappeared entirely. Paradigmatic distinctions remain relevant both to training and to research.” She further notes, “what divides [paradigms] is method in the sense of how to construct theory and organize research findings. Rationalists continue to emphasize methodological individualism and strategic interaction.” While some debates remain, the best comparative work, Levi claims, now uses many sophisticated methods, involving some mix of field work, interviews, surveys, archival work, experiments, and statistics in addition to formal logic. She thus advocates a “multiplicity of methods as well as approaches” that “blurs the lines among approaches” and is “methodologically pluralistic.” As Levi puts it, “not everyone does everything, but everyone seems to do several things.”

By urging comparativists to “combine a nuanced understanding of the complexity of a particular (often unique) situation or set of events with a general theoretical understanding,” Levi echoes Katznelson’s big-picture pragmatism. Rational choice theory ensures that research has microfoundations, paying attention to the constraints on and the strategic interactions among the actors whose aggregated choices produce significant outcomes. A comparative and historical sensibility ensures that research respects context, which means that comparativists address important empirical and normative concerns. From their

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different starting points, Katznelson and Levi place historical and rational choice institutionalism at the very attractive messy center of comparative politics.

### **Pushing against the Mainstream: Culture and Constructivism**

Marc Ross is less willing to accept the field's current configuration. He reminds comparativists how culture is important to the study of politics: It provides a framework for organizing people's daily worlds – locating the self and others in them and making sense of the actions and motives of others – for grounding an analysis of interests, for linking identities to political action, and for predisposing people and groups toward specific actions and away from others. Moreover, “placing the concept of culture at the center of analysis,” Ross maintains, “affects the questions asked about political life.” Culture organizes meanings and meaning-making, defining social and political identity, structuring collective actions, and imposing a normative order on politics and social life.

Taking culture seriously means moving toward “a strong view of culture,” one that entails an “intersubjective understanding of culture.” Ross believes that “reducing culture to the sum of individual attitudes,” as is found in survey research, “is hardly adequate . . . culture is not a property of single individuals. Rather, it is an emergent property rooted in social practices and shared understandings that cannot be uncovered through survey data alone.” Even though many comparativists may be unfamiliar with the “interactive, constructed nature of culture,” he believes that this approach can make a significant contribution to the study of comparative politics.

Ross's research pragmatism draws him close to Katznelson and Levi at the field's center, as it distances him from culturalists whose postmodern relativism stresses the highly constructed nature of reality. Like all the authors in this volume, he agrees that “comparison is central to the social science enterprise” and that it employs many different sorts of evidence: “The most successful work linking culture and politics will not rely on only one source of data or a single tool for data analysis.” Applying a full range of evidence in the pursuit of causal analyses draws Ross's approach toward the field's messy center.

Joel Migdal places the “comparative politics of the state” at the field's center, even as he also respectfully moves apart from the mainstream. Migdal suggests that comparisons have relied heavily on a universal template or image of what the state is and does. This universal standard has strained under the widening diversity of states, especially those formed after World War II. Appreciating the effects of globalization, his chapter offers an alternative understanding of this critical concept.

Studying the state, Migdal suggests, involves probing a multilayered, multi-purpose entity whose parts frequently work at cross-purposes. This political institution operates in a similarly complex multitiered environment, which deeply affects the state and, in turn, is affected by the state. “All this complexity has turned the experience of researching the state into an eclectic enterprise. It demands a full toolkit – an amalgamation of culturalist, structuralist, and

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rationalist tools and of historical, case, and quantitative methods” because “different perspectives highlight the variegated visages of the state and their interactions with their domestic, regional, and global environments.” Appropriate research combines quantitative large-N research and qualitative single-case analysis and new forms of historical analysis, charting new directions in comparative research. Good research contextualizes the state, seeking to “combine specialized country or area knowledge (which usually is focused on the different practices of diverse states) with more general theories of state formation and behavior.” Furthermore, research is most valuable when it moves from linear, causal models toward process-oriented analysis and from comparative statics to historical analysis, emphasizing the importance of temporality and of sequencing.

How does Migdal relate to the field’s paradigms? Consistent with his explanatory pragmatism, he recognizes the importance of rational choice analyses of the state: “States’ political trajectories [are] deeply influenced by the give-and-take, negotiation, collaboration, and contestation between central state authorities (themselves sometimes fragmented) and dispersed, but locally powerful, social forces.” However, Migdal expresses reservations about rationalist theorizing: “The population is not simply an aggregate of diverse rational individuals but a collective that transcends those individuals and that gives birth to, and then loyally engages and stands behind, the state.” While recognizing the “actual baffling diversity of states,” Migdal is not interested in the rationalist program of exploring how institutions aggregate this variation into state policies and practices. His references to the “transcendental unity of the people,” to “transcending aggregated individual preferences,” and to the “general will, legitimacy, social solidarity, and unity of allegiance” are likely to make rationalists uneasy. Interested in the convergence of history and institutions, he maintains that contemporary approaches are “neglecting culturalist factors” and that “the cultural approach still seems generally to get short shrift.” Migdal’s stress on the significance of culture as understood within institutions uncovers the fragile unity of the messy center of comparative politics.

As Mark Blyth attempts to define the field of political economy, he offers another respectful critique of the mainstream. His chapter begins by noting that “hard-won empirical research showed that the economy was inseparable from politics. Modern political economy showed that if one wanted to understand significant variations in economic outcomes, then embracing the mutual implications of states and markets was a pretty good place to start.” One does not do political economy, according to Blyth, by beginning with the research paradigms of rationality, culture, and structure, as if they contain toolboxes of foundational heuristics. Rather, he suggests that political economists employ a “troika of ‘interests,’ ‘institutions,’ and ‘ideas’” in which “all three of these positions are vibrant research programs.”

Like Ross, Blyth advances constructivist claims about the importance of ideas. He contends that “exogenous shocks to agents’ material positions do not unproblematically translate into new political preferences” because “exogenous



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economic changes rarely, if ever, telegraph into agents' heads 'what has gone wrong' and 'what should be done.'" Many political economists eventually recognized that "ideas and ideologies needed to be taken seriously as explanatory concepts in their own right." Put differently, "ideas do not merely describe the world; they also help bring that world into being." The "particular construction[s] of the political economy agents develop and deploy help bring into being that which is described rather than simply describing an already existing state of affairs." Comparativists thus should be "investigating how the action of employing ideas that seek to represent or measure a given phenomenon brings the phenomenon into being." "What globalization 'is,'" for example, "is itself constructed differentially across nations" by different sets of actors.

If "agents' subjectivities and interests can be reconstructed despite their ostensible structural positions," constructivists wonder whether materialist theories of history reinterpret history as per their theories, "sacrificing historical accuracy for theoretical fit." Do actual political actors ever think the way that the theories say they do? In other words, "can one really link actors' intentions to outcomes via their material interests, as this literature presumes"? As "ideational approaches drop below the level of the possible to investigate what real actors thought and did," they challenge mainstream thinking about interests and institutions. "Once 'let out of the box,' ideas 'have a life of their own' and can take interests in new and unexpected directions." Blyth thus warns, "if contingency, construction, and interdependent effects are as replete as at least some of these [constructivist] scholars say they are, then the question of whether political economy can aspire to the status of a predictive science is questionable at best."

During the past 10–12 years, these chapters suggest, comparativists have responded to the field's research paradigms in alternative ways. While Katznelson and Levi depict a convergence around the study of history and institutions, Migdal introduces and Ross and Blyth deepen a culturalist critique of this perspective. Katznelson and Migdal offer big concepts: liberalism and the state, respectively, as unifying themes for future scholarship. All, however, share a vision of research that pragmatically draws on an eclectic array of tools.

**Fortifying the Center: Research Paradigms and Causal Analysis**

Given the disparate research tools in comparative politics, comparativists confront thorny questions about research schools and causal explanations. As the volume proceeds, the chapters move more deeply into these issues. The next two chapters, Etel Solingen's analysis of global–domestic linkages and McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly's exploration of contentious politics, highlight the efforts to speak both to paradigms and to pragmatic demands of causal research.

The relationship between comparative and international politics has a long intellectual pedigree – indeed, the distinction between the two fields confuses laypeople. Etel Solingen brings the literature on the international sources of domestic politics into the era of globalization. Focusing primarily on work published since the volume's first edition, she examines comparative politics as

it has become increasingly global in scope and interest. Her chapter relates both international influences on domestic politics (Type A effects) and domestic influences on international politics (Type B effects) to representative work in the structural, rational, and cultural traditions. States, political parties, social movements, peak associations, labor unions, policy networks, armed forces, and other collective and individual actors respond to global opportunities and constraints in various ways, suggesting far more contingency than determinacy.

As the field advances, Solingen argues, comparative and international politics draw together. Relatively simplistic understandings have given way to more nuanced and sophisticated explanations of Type A and B effects, backed by various forms of evidence. Neither purely structural nor methodological-individualist reductionisms have become modal forms of analysis, as “hybridism and mutually profitable intellectual exchange” have become dominant. Studies avoid procrustean temptations to reduce politics to rigid paradigms. As complexity deposes Occam razor’s (*lex parsimoniae*) as a standard for studies of globalization, the advantages of theoretical frugality in pure paradigmatic research seem to be progressively exchanged for the virtues of completeness and empirical validity.

Lauding “the conceptual and methodological diversity [that] comparative politics has exhibited in the past decade,” as well as the “greater creativity [that] accrues from working at the interstices of different disciplines or subfields,” Solingen echoes the field’s pragmatism. Yet, continued debates over concepts and findings suggest that comparativists remain uncertain about the immediate and long-term effects of globalization. The consequence is that “studies holding on to paradigms as foundational heuristic devices have far from disappeared.” Solingen thus reminds the reader that “asking big questions forces us to distill broad important features and rely on ideal types or heuristic devices that transcended historical or ‘true’ realities.”

While analytical debates might persist, Solingen argues that the way forward employs explanatory strategies aimed at discerning causality. Siding with Katznelson, Levi, and Migdal, her proposed methodology involves “contextualized comparisons of different cases.” As an illustration of this approach, Solingen traces the divergent paths of development of Middle Eastern and East Asian countries back to their origins in domestic coalitional grand strategies. Her pragmatic use of causal explanatory strategies unites comparativists of different theoretical and methodological stripes.

Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow, and Charles Tilly, who are affectionately known as McTT, offer more than a review of recent scholarship on contentious politics. Like Migdal and Blyth, they define a domain of inquiry. Nonroutine, or contentious, politics is a thriving but fragmented interdisciplinary field of study, divided across a confusing patchwork of disciplinary boundaries, geographic areas, historical periods, and nominally different types of contention. Changes in the “real world” of contentious politics have forced scholars to broaden their attention from social movements in Europe and the United States to newer, more wide-ranging, and more violent forms of conflict; to contention against



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nonstate targets; and to transnational contention. Their chapter traces some of these changes and puts forward a sketch of an integrated approach to a field that the authors admit is “more imagined than real.”

Research paradigms once drove the study of contentious politics. The roots of contentious politics are found in “a structurally rooted political process model,” “a rational choice perspective and its related resource mobilization variant,” and “a constructivist approach that draws, first, on an older ‘collective behavior’ tradition and, second, on the more general cultural turn in the social sciences.” Similar to what happened in comparative politics writ large, paradigm warfare led to attempts at synthesis. Navigating between Theda Skocpol’s material structuralism and Mark Lichbach’s rationalist micro-foundations, McTT’s synthesis is highly relational, dynamic, and process oriented. They prefer to study episodes rather than events and mechanisms rather than variables. Moreover, the field of contentious politics is at the forefront of the “culturalist turn” in the social sciences and comparative politics. What goes on in the contentious politics literature foreshadows the future of comparative politics.

The chapter also contributes directly to our appreciation of different patterns of explanation in comparative politics. Eschewing “general covering laws of the type ‘all collective action is aimed at producing improvements in individuals’ material situations,” McTT offer mechanisms as a way of unpeeling larger political processes: “Mechanisms are the causal links between independent and dependent variables, which we define as events that produce the same immediate effects over a wide range of circumstances.” The mechanisms of brokerage, identity shift, co-optation, diffusion, and repression relate to larger processes of political mobilization and demobilization. Assembling these mechanisms and processes, McTT argue, is the way to create the field called contentious politics.

They also suggest that “contentious politics is a causally coherent domain with distinctive properties. It is causally coherent in the sense that similar cause–effect relationships apply throughout the domain.” Though they hope that “a more thoroughgoing search for cause–effect relations spanning multiple forms of contention will be fruitful,” they believe that the successes to date have been meager. Nevertheless, viewing McTT’s research program in causal terms suggests that students of contentious politics should adopt a three-part strategy. First, “construct analytic narratives of episodes of contention.” Second, “break them down into the mechanisms and processes that drive them.” Finally, “connect them to their origins and outcomes” in particular contexts.” This last step, “delineating types of regimes and their combination of capacities and degrees of democracy . . . analyzing the interactions between regimes and forms of contention would take us far toward the construction of a comparative political science of contentious politics.”

The members of this research team think of themselves as “pragmatists” who are “catholic in our methodological judgments.” Pragmatists explore empirical causes and consequences, not transcendental foundations and

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essences, and so McTT join the mainstream of comparative politics even as this research program moves beyond the boundaries of political science.

### **Fortifying the Center: Linking Structure and Action and Exploring Causal Patterns**

The next set of chapters emphasizes the relative importance of causal analysis over research paradigms. As Solingen's chapter indicates, causal accounts in comparative politics cross levels. Huckfeldt's chapter on political networks and Anderson's review of the literature on electoral behavior highlight the linkages between context and individual choice. The second pair of chapters raises the puzzle of how endogenous political institutions become causal forces. Rodden confronts the problem of endogeneity in causal claims about institutions, and Mares show how causal accounts lie at the heart of research on welfare state institutions and policies.

Robert Huckfeldt addresses issues in democratic politics that are part of Katznelson's research agenda on modern liberalism. Suggesting that the role of the purposefully engaged citizen is central to the vitality of democratic politics, he denies that citizens are atomized individuals. To the contrary, patterns of political communication produce networks of political interdependence – people whose preferences, choices, and levels of political involvement are jointly determined by one another. Lying beyond the proximate reach of individual citizens, these patterns of communication are contingent on the distribution of beliefs and habits, as well as on the institutions and structures specific to concrete social life and particular political systems. As a consequence, both the exercise of individual citizenship and the performance of aggregate electorates are subject to institutional, cultural, and structural variations that produce important continuities, as well as discontinuities, in democratic politics.

This big problem of democratic politics is based on a simple but fundamental principle: "Politics is *not* reducible to the sum of its parts." In order to demonstrate the complexities of social networks and political communication, Huckfeldt highlights perhaps the first stylized statistical fact adduced in comparative politics: "When Tingsten plots the socialist proportion of the vote in Stockholm precincts on the working-class proportion of the precinct population, the resulting scatter follows a pronounced nonlinear s-curve pattern. At low working-class densities, the socialist parties' share of the vote falls below the working-class proportion of the population, but the vote share exceeds the working-class proportion at high work class densities. The nearly inescapable conclusion that arises on the basis of Tingsten's analysis is that the probability that individual workers (and perhaps individual nonworkers) supported the socialists varied as a function of the population composition."

Joining structure and agency in multilevel models allows Huckfeldt to study interdependent citizens. In contrast to Ross and Migdal, he constructs social structures out of individual choices and behavior. Huckfeldt thus suggests that "patterns of interdependence produce consequences for levels of