

ABSP-CF 2005 Conference: Workshop Description

APPROACHES AND METHODS IN COMPARATIVE POLITICS

Case-oriented, comparative and statistical methods : “one best way”...or mixing methods in political science ?

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The goal of the ABSP-CF working group is to encourage a methodological dialogue around the empirical study of political processes and phenomena, particularly in a comparative perspective. We strive to pursue this goal in an interdisciplinary way, by bringing together not only political scientists but also sociologists, economists, psychologists, historians, ... We also attempt to confront different methodological approaches and techniques.

In the comparative analysis of political phenomena, both at the “macro” (e.g. states), “meso” (e.g. political parties) and “micro” (e.g. electoral behaviour) levels, methods are back on the agenda. To be more specific, one now witnessed developments in three different directions :

- in the “qualitative” tradition, some work is being done to improve techniques for case-oriented research, so as to allow for systematic comparison between “rich” and “thick” cases studies, in a “small N” setting (less than 10 cases);
- in the “quantitative”, large-N tradition, new refined statistical techniques are being developed, for instance to accommodate the time dimension (pooled times-series etc.);
- somewhere in-between these two paths, more recent methods suited for “intermediate N” research designs (somewhere between 5-6 and 50-60 cases), such as Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) and its extensions, are finding an increasing number of applications.

At this stage of these developments, the ABSP-CF Congress workshop ambitions to tackle two key questions :

1. what are the key strong points of each methodological tradition for political science, particularly in comparative politics and in international relations ? Many criteria may be referred to in this respect, e.g. in terms of empirical value, generalizability, validity, robustness, theoretical value, “practical” – applied value for decision-makers, etc.

2. confrontation : is one of these strategies “superior” to the 2 other ones? Or should one consider that each path displays its own, distinctive qualities ? Or, rather, should one prioritize the “mixing” of the 3 strategies ?

Our discussions will be introduced by 3 speakers :

- “case-oriented” methods : Prof. John Gerring (Boston University)
- “quantitative” methods : Prof. Bernhard Kittel (University of Amsterdam)
- “intermediate-N” methods : Prof. Benoît Rihoux (Université catholique de Louvain)

We open this workshop to 3 additional papers. We will prioritize papers which explicitly compare/confront/combine at least 2 of the 3 perspectives (qualitative, comparative, quantitative), preferably both from a theoretical and empirical perspective. Papers may cover different fields of Comparative Politics and International Relations, as well as neighbouring disciplines in the social sciences and beyond.