Comparative Political Economy - An Integrated, Hands-on Introduction Using R

BAK11: European Union and Europeanisation

Timo Seidl — Summer Semester 2023

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Office hours: *by appointment*	Class hours: *Thursday, 15:00-16:30*
Office: *online/after class*	Web: *moodle*

Course Description

This course offers an *integrated* and *hands-on* introduction to comparative political economy (CPE) *and* `R` - no prior knowledge of either is required. CPE is a subfield of political science concerned with the comparative study of how (democratic) politics shapes, constrains, and supports the (capitalist) economy. `R` is a free and open-source programming language for statistical computing and graphics. The point behind teaching both in one course is to allow students to get the best of both worlds. On the one hand, they will get a good sense for how to actually do comparative political research: how to get data, how to bring them in the right shape, how to visualize them, and how to analyze them in basic ways. On the other hand, students will get a practical but also substantively interesting introduction to `R`. After basic introductions to both CPE and `R`, we will have 4 substantive blocks where we discuss CPE papers in one session and do related analyses or play around with similar data in the other. The goal is not full replication, but learning, *in principle*, how to get CPE data, transform them, and use them to address substantively important questions such as: Why does it cost a fortune to attend university in some (European) countries while it's essentially free in others? Why are some (European) states doing a lot to combat climate change while others don't? Why is home ownership more prevalent in some (European) societies and renting in others? What is the relationship between media ownership and media bias in various (European) countries?

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Learning Outcomes

The course aims to equip students with basic knowledge of CPE and `R`. At the end of the course, students should be able to

- describe and summarize key arguments and debates in CPE;

- understand basic concepts of data science and their implementation in the `R` tidyverse;

- critically assess key arguments from the substantive areas of CPE research covered in the course;

- apply insights from CPE and basic knowledge of `R` operations to develop and start answering research questions of their own.

Requirements

Students are required to attend classes and come prepared. Three assignments will make up their final grade (their will be no student presentations). The first assignment needs to be done by every student themselves, whereas the second and third assignment can also be done in groups of two.

- The first assignment consists of two in-depth response papers on two of the four substantive readings in the second half of the class. These reflection papers should be between 600 and 800 words and will make up *20%* of the overall grade. Students are expected carefully reflect on the approaches taken in the studies we read, criticize their theoretical or empirical shortcomings, and briefly sketch an alternative way of answering the same questions or a follow-up study that builds on or complements the original study.

- The second assignment consists of 4 short and basic coding tasks that requires students to import, transform, and visualize data related to the various substantive areas we cover. This, too, will make up *20%* of their overall grade. Assignments will be administered through Posit Cloud (formerly RStudio Cloud). While there will be a mandatory assignment after the block introduction to R, students can skip one of the four assignments for the coding sessions of the 4 thematic blocks (they can freely choose which one).

- The third assignment will be a final research paper that independently develops a CPE-related research questions and *starts* elaborating and answering it with data. Elaborating means that students use R to set up an empirical puzzle or potentially interesting question (e.g. by showing an interesting correlation). Answering means using visualization, descriptive analysis, or basic inferential statistics to sketch an answer or possible ways of going about answering the question more systematically. The emphasis here is less on having a fully-fledged, well-polished final paper than on demonstrating that you have understood how one would could, in principle, go about developing, theoretically grounding, and answering a CPE-related research question. Ideally, you can build on your reflection papers and coding experience from the first two assignments; and perhaps you can even build on your research paper in your B.A. thesis. This final research paper will make up *60%* of your overall grade. It is meant to be between 3000-4000 words long (if you decide to write the paper with a fellow student, it should be between 5500-7000 words long). The deadline for the paper will be **Friday, August 18, 2023**.

Prerequisites

Students need only limited prior knowledge to successfully participate in this course: on the one hand, they should be familiar with basic (!) concepts of political science research; on the other hand, they should have, again, basic (!) knowledge of statistical concepts.

Students do **not** need any prior knowledge of R or programming. They should, however, have created a free account with Posit Cloud. In addition, students are strongly encouraged to set up an R environment on their own computers. To do so, they need to install a recent version of R itself as well as a suitable IDE (integrated development environment). I strongly recommend using RStudio Desktop. This guide walks you through these two steps and includes links to the most recent versions of both R and RStudio Desktop. If you have any problems, feel free to reach out to me.

Course Policy

Basically, don't cheat and try to learn stuff, some more details follow below.

Grading Policy

You need to submit all the required assignments to pass the course. Your final grade will be the weighted average of these assignments. What is important to me when it comes to grading are two things. First, stick to the task at hand. The response paper should be critical reflection piece, not a summary, for example. Second, put a bit of effort into your assignments, or at least make it look that way. Writing clean and crips papers or well-commented code are important skills, not just at university.

Also: you don't need to understand everything or do everything perfectly, have read a ton of additional literature, or write in a fancy way to get a very good grade. Do the task as well as you can, show me that you've thought reasonably hard about things, and just try to make sense. Easier said than done of course, so really do reach out if you're lost (instead of covering it up in jargon). I have also collected general advise for how to write a good term paper on my website, which might be helpful.

Feedback Policy

I want to give you as much feedback as you want - but I also don't want to waste my time writing more detailed feedback if you don't even care. So while by default you will only receive your grade, you can easily request written feedback by simply adding a brief note to your paper or code (e.g., 'I want to receive written feedback on this paper.').

E-mail Policy

You can always email me if you have an idea for a research paper, if you want to learn more about a certain topic and don't know where to start, or if you have a question about R or something else that you really don't want to ask in class. Please don't email me with questions that you could easily find the answer to in the syllabus or in my previous emails. I might take it badly.

Attendance Policy

You are required to attend each session, and I encourage you to prepare for and actively participate in them. However, if you really can't make it, just reach out to me, these things happen once or twice a term.

Course Outline

Week 1, March 9, 2023: General Introduction

no readings for this session

Week 2-1, March 16, 2023: Introduction to Comparative Political Economy: Theories, Concepts, Methods

Required Reading:

Baccaro, Lucio, Mark Blyth, and Jonas Pontusson, eds. 2022. Diminishing Returns: The New Politics of Growth and Stagnation. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, Introduction: Rethinking Comparative Capitalism, pp. 1-50.

Optional Reading:

Menz, Georg. 2017. Comparative Political Economy: Contours of a Subfield. Oxford: Oxford University Press, chapters 2-3, 9.

Hall, Peter A. 1997. "The Role of Interests, Institutions and Ideas in the Political Economy of Industrialized Nations." In Comparative Politics: Rationality, Culture, and Structure, edited by Mark Irving Lichbach and Alan S. Zuckerman, Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, pp. 174–207.

Streeck, Wolfgang. 2010. "E Pluribus Unum? Varieties and Commonalities of Capitalism." MPIfG Discussion Paper, no. 10/12.

Week 2-2, March 17 (Friday), 2023: Introduction to R: Basics, Importing, Transforming, and Visualizing Data

This will be a 5 hour block session (13:15 bis 18:15) with a joint dinner after. It will take place in Hörsaal 3 (H3), NIG 2. Stock D0212

Optional Readings:

Wickham, Hadley, and Garrett Grolemund. 2023. R for Data Science (2e). https://r4ds.hadley.nz/intro.html.

Llaudet, Elena, and Kosuke Imai. 2023. Data Analysis for Social Science: A Friendly and Practical Introduction. Princeton University Press.

Healy, Kieran. 2018. Data Visualization: A Practical Introduction. Princeton University Press.

Week 3, March 23, 2023: Higher Education

Required Reading:

Garritzmann, Julian L. 2016. The Political Economy of Higher Education Finance: The Politics of Tuition Fees and Subsidies in OECD Countries,1945-2015. Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 1-56

Week 4, March 30, 2023: Higher Education - Working with Comparative Political Science Data

Optional Reading:

Armingeon, Klaus, Sarah Engler and Lucas Leemann. 2022. Comparative Political Data Set 1960-2020. https://www.cpds-data.org

Week 5, April 20, 2023: Media Ownership

Required Reading:

*Neimanns, Erik, and Nils Blossey. 2022. "From Media-Party Linkages to Ownership Concentration: Causes of Cross-National Variation in Media Outlets' Economic Positioning." MPIfG Discussion Paper 22/8. https://pure.mpg.de/pubman/item/item_3475952_2/component/file_3475976/mpifg_*

Week 6, April 27, 2023: Media Ownership - Working with Expert Surveys

Optional Reading:

Popescu, Marina, Gabor Toka, Sorina Slusarec, and Laura Trandafir. 2018. "European Media Systems Survey 2017: Methodological Report (Version 1.2)." Bucharest: Median Research Centre. www.mediasystemsineurope.org.

Week 7, May 4, 2023: Housing

Required Reading:

Kohl, Sebastian. 2021. "The Political Economy of Homeownership: A Comparative Analysis of Homeownership Ideology through Party Manifestos." Socio-Economic Review 18 (4): 913–40. https://doi.org/10.1093/ser/mwy030.

Week 8, May 11, 2023: Housing - Working With Manifesto Data

Optional Reading:

Gemenis, Kostas. 2013. "What to Do (and Not to Do) with the Comparative Manifestos Project Data." Political Studies 61: 3–23. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9248.12015.

Week 9, May 25, 2023: Climate Change

Required Reading:

Finnegan, Jared J. 2022. "Changing Prices in a Changing Climate: Electoral Competition and Fossil Fuel Taxation." Comparative Political Studies. https://doi.org/10.33774/apsa-2019-t3xxg-v2.

Optional Reading:

Finnegan, Jared J. 2022. "Institutions, Climate Change, and the Foundations of Long-Term Policymaking." Comparative Political Studies, January, 1–38. https://doi.org/10.1177/00104140211047416.

Week 10, June 1, 2023: Climate Change - Producing reproducible (and pretty) reports with Quarto

Optional Reading:

https://quarto.org/docs/output-formats/pdf-basics.html

https://quarto.org/docs/output-formats/html-basics.html