

Short Courses

The section's three short courses shared 170 registrations, an exceptionally high level of attendance for APSA short courses. The courses were: Conceptual Innovation at the Intersection of Qualitative and Quantitative Methodology (co-taught by David Collier, Henry E. Brady, Jason Seawright, and Thad Dunning); Strategies for Field Research in Comparative and International Politics (co-taught by Melani Cammett and Benjamin Read); and Fuzzy Sets and Case-Oriented Research (taught by Charles Ragin). Please be on the lookout for short course offerings from the members of the Qualitative Methods section for APSA 2006.

Working Group

During the annual meeting, the section participated in a new APSA initiative, sponsoring a working group on qualitative methods. Through this group, the section sought to make its panels and short courses more valuable to participants in the meeting by providing continuity, coordination, and shared discussion. The working group convened both at the beginning and toward the end of the APSA meeting for a general discussion, and APSA provided certificates of recognition to those who participated fully in the working group.

The working group was also a great success. Although initially APSA envisioned groups of perhaps 20, the qualitative methods working group had close to 70 participants. Throughout the meeting, individuals could identify one another with badges provided by the APSA conveners. During the general meetings, participants engaged in lively discussions about the alternative qualitative methods available for political analysis.

Business Meeting

Andrew Bennett hosted his final business meeting after serving as President of the section for the last three years. The success of the section reported above is due in no small part to Andy's hard work and to the many section projects he has initiated and supported.

At the meeting, the section awards were presented (for information on the winners see the back of this issue) and the new section officers were elected (names are listed on the first page). A special award was also presented marking Alexander George's enduring commitments to the development and application of qualitative methods, with remarks by Jack Levy. The section's reception immediately following the business meeting was dedicated in Alex's honor, and co-sponsored by The MIT Press and Harvard's Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs. Graham Allison, the Center's Director, dedicated the reception to Alex, and called attention to the eagerly anticipated new book by Alex and Andy Bennett on *Case Studies and Theory Building in the Social Sciences* (MIT Press, 2005).

It is a pleasure to begin my presidency with the section in such excellent condition. Thank you for your help in making it so successful.

Notes

¹ Colin Elman and John Gerring doubled checked the data in this newsletter. In doing so, they also made a number of valuable suggestions.

Creative Hypothesis Generating in Comparative Research

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The following material is excerpted from Chapter 1, "The Human Dimension of Comparative Research," of Gerardo L. Munck and Richard Snyder's forthcoming book, Passion, Craft, and Method in Comparative Politics, which will be published in 2006 by The Johns Hopkins University Press (www.press.jhu.edu). The book consists of in-depth interviews with fifteen leading scholars in the field of comparative politics: Gabriel A. Almond, Robert H. Bates, David Collier, Robert A. Dahl, Samuel P. Huntington, David D. Laitin, Arend Lijphart, Juan J. Linz, Barrington Moore, Jr., Guillermo O'Donnell, Adam Przeworski, Philippe C. Schmitter, James C. Scott, Theda Skocpol, and Alfred Stepan. These scholars discuss their intellectual formation, their major works and ideas, the nuts and bolts of the research process, their relationships with colleagues, collaborators and students, and the evolution of the field. The excerpt addresses one of the most elusive aspects of scientific inquiry: the process of generating good ideas. All quoted material presented in this excerpt is taken from the interviews in Passion, Craft, and Method in Comparative Politics.

Textbooks and courses on methodology center mainly on the issue of testing ideas, yet they usually offer little insight about the prior matter of how one generates ideas worth testing in the first place.¹ Similarly, professional publications rarely include discussions of how ideas emerge. The interview format employed in *Passion, Craft, and Method in Comparative Politics* allowed for an exploration of how fifteen leading scholars actually do their research, thereby opening a valuable window on the process of formulating good ideas. The interviews show that rich life experiences provide fertile ground for generating new ideas. They also show that experience is not the only path to insight in comparative research. Scholars spend a large share of their time reading; and books, journals, and newspapers all play an indispensable role in the development of ideas. Moreover, directly observing political and social interaction is an important tool for creative hypothesis generating. The interviews highlight five methods that help spark the comparative imagination of the best scholars: (1) "bibliographic sleuthing," that is, hunting for untapped sources in libraries and bookstores; (2) following current events; (3) critical engagement with contemporary works; (4) reading, and rereading, the classics of political and social theory; and (5) real-time observation of political action.

Bibliographic sleuthing, which involves searching, even in a haphazard way, in libraries or in bookstores, can lead to the serendipitous discovery of works that provide new insight.² For example, while rummaging in a used bookstore in Rio de Janeiro, Philippe Schmitter found an obscure book written in the 1930s that triggered his insight that the system of interest representation in Brazil could be conceptualized as “corporatist.”³ Similarly, Theda Skocpol discovered an old, forgotten book on social insurance in the United States in the early 1900s, which argued that Civil War pensions were a major social policy that would soon lead the United States to surpass Europe in the public provision of social benefits.⁴ According to Skocpol, “When I read this, it made me curious, because the mere empirical assertion that, in 1913, there was a lot of government social spending going on that amounted to *de facto* old age pensions cut against the grain of the whole literature that saw the United States as a laggard in social provision. I was skeptical at first...but I decided to look into the matter, because I had a hunch it might lead to something.” Skocpol’s hunch proved correct, as her probing resulted in a novel argument: the United States was actually a precocious welfare state, not a laggard behind European countries. This argument, in turn, played a pivotal role in her book *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers*.⁵

Following current events by reading newspapers and magazines can also serve to generate new ideas. Samuel Huntington says that reading “about what’s going on in the world” plays a fundamental role in his research. He recounts how his observation of chaos, anarchy, and corruption across developing countries in the 1960s, “when everybody was talking about modernization and development,” led to the insight that “there [was] more political *decay* out there than political development. And so I wrote *Political Order in Changing Societies*.”⁶ Reading about current events can work in tandem with bibliographic sleuthing in the formation of new ideas. While reading the newspaper in Switzerland one day, Schmitter saw an article about the role of the Swiss Milk Producers’ Association in the annual price-fixing mechanism for milk. He noticed that this regulatory framework bore a remarkable resemblance to the corporatist systems of interest intermediation he had previously studied in Brazil and Portugal. This realization led him to the library in search of material on Swiss interest group politics, where he discovered an unpublished dissertation from the 1930s on Swiss corporatism. As a result of his newspaper-inspired trip to the library, Schmitter saw that the concept of corporatism could be applied not only to authoritarian countries, but also to democratic ones. This insight anchored his influential article, “Still the Century of Corporatism?”, as well as subsequent works that further elaborated the corporatist model of interest group politics as an alternative to the pluralist model.⁷

Critical engagement with contemporaries is a further way to stimulate new ideas. David Laitin describes how research on the relationship between culture and politics by contemporary scholars like Harry Eckstein, Aaron Wildavsky, and Arend Lijphart, provided a compelling foil against which he developed and refined his own ideas: “I was going after Harry

Eckstein from the very beginning. I was arguing against Eckstein’s congruence theory, which posited a kind of direct mapping from one realm—culture—on to another—politics.”⁸ In contrast, I said that there was no necessary connection between the cultural and other realms, between say religion and politics...My views also went against Lijphart and also against almost everyone who had been writing on culture.”

Laitin’s critical engagement with the work of these interlocutors helped him formulate his idea that culture both shapes and is in turn shaped by political choices. Similarly, Skocpol notes that arguing against “mistaken others” plays a key role in the process of developing her own ideas:

I’ve always worked out what I was thinking by critiquing work done by others. What gets me excited is seeing that someone else is partly right and partly wrong....My major projects have always been launched with a sense of argument against a received wisdom or an interlocutor, especially somebody important whose work I respect.

Another way to stir the comparative imagination concerns *classic works* of political and social theory. These classics play an important role in the intellectual life of some of the top scholars in comparative politics. Robert Dahl sees himself as having engaged throughout his career in what he calls an “imaginary dialogue” with Plato, Rousseau, and Marx. Adam Przeworski observes, “Reading classics of political theory is extremely important to me. It’s a source of hypotheses, historical information, and great ideas.” Schmitter offers:

For me, engaging the classics is almost automatic. I start by thinking about the nature of the problem on which I want to work, and then I ask myself, ‘Who’s said something about this?’ Sometimes it is simply a matter of having these classic works in your head, having read them....My first instinct is to go through my own memory of what I have read on political thought.

Finally, Juan Linz notes, “Whenever I start working on something, I usually look to see whether Weber has anything to say on that theme.” To show how he draws ideas and inspiration from the classics, Linz recounts his use of Weber’s concept of “sultanistic regimes” to study personalistic dictatorships, such as those of Anastasio Somoza Debayle in Nicaragua and Rafael Leonidas Trujillo in the Dominican Republic.⁹ Because the degree of cronyism, nepotism, and unbridled discretion enjoyed by the ruler was so extreme in these cases, Linz felt uncomfortable classifying them in the same category as regimes like Francisco Franco’s in Spain and Antonio Salazar’s in Portugal. According to Linz,

Weber makes a distinction between a traditional, legitimate form of patrimonialism, on one hand, and the corruption of patrimonialism into sultanism, on the other. When I reread Weber’s section on patrimonialism, I thought, ‘That’s exactly what I am looking for!’ Then I reformulated Weber’s concept in a modern way by specifying indicators of sultanism, like nepotism, cronyism, and the private appropriation of power and wealth.

You have questions in your own mind that you want to address, and sometimes you read the classics and say, 'well, that's an interesting insight, it illustrates what I was groping for.' So, the more you read and the more you know, the better.

Real-time observation of political action is a further technique for generating fresh ideas. James Scott describes how living in a Malaysian village for two-years enabled him to conduct rolling interviews with peasants that helped him see the "subterranean forms of resistance to hegemony, such as desertion and foot-dragging, underneath the placid surface of the village."¹⁰ Scott also emphasizes that "politics is everywhere," not just in the distant and exotic setting of "the field," and he offers a fascinating example of observing political interaction among passengers while riding on a train from New York City to Washington, D.C. Schmitter also highlights the value of observation, noting that his efforts to form new concepts are often stimulated by talking to political actors and listening closely to the words they use to describe what they do. Laitin's discussion of watching a Catalan national dance, the Sardana, while doing fieldwork in Barcelona offers an especially vivid example of how observation can help trigger new ideas:

When the people perform the Sardana they put their little bundles of possessions in the center and dance around them. So, they developed an urban dance that enabled them to protect their property the whole time they were dancing. And they have to count a fairly large number of steps....I saw them counting their steps with their lips, though trying to hide it because you're not supposed to show it.

Thousands of tourists have seen the Sardana, it happens all the time, and the dance itself is relatively boring. But to me it was inspirational, and I asked myself a very simple question. 'Here I am in the most bourgeois city I've ever lived in, with a commercial bourgeoisie that goes way, way back, which developed an urban form of culture in which they can protect their property while dancing. And they count! It's the fundamental commercial function to count.' And then I asked, 'why are people who are so rational and so calculating pushing a linguistic movement that would increase their communicative capabilities by zero? You would think the Catalans would be on this gigantic learn English campaign, which would be tremendously more useful for their commercial dealings. Why are they pushing this language, Catalan, which, if successfully promoted, will allow them to communicate with no more people than they presently communicate with, and which will have no communicative payoff whatsoever?' And I just walked through the town for the next two or three days, sort of like a zombie, asking and re-asking that question to myself.

Watching the Sardana made it easier for Laitin to see that the tools of game theory, especially the concept of "coordination games," offered a powerful and fruitful way to explain

why people participate in language movements that do not serve their material interests.¹¹ Laitin concludes, "this insight in Barcelona pushed my research program for quite a while, in utterly new directions. Fieldwork has that excitement for me."

Conclusion

Hunting for obscure books, perusing the newspaper, critically engaging contemporary authors, reading the classics, and making observations are, of course, not sufficient to formulate important ideas. After all, many social scientists read the newspaper and follow current events, yet few produce works with the impact of Huntington's *Political Order in Changing Societies* or Schmitter's "Still the Century of Corporatism?"¹² Moreover, as Max Weber reminds us, "Ideas occur to us when they please, not when it pleases us."¹³ Hard work, discipline, and maybe even luck are also necessary to develop good ideas, as is intelligence, especially the capacity to recognize an important question, puzzle, or lead when it arises.¹⁴

Although factors like luck and intelligence are difficult, if not impossible, to control, there may still be ways to increase the probability of developing new ideas. The evidence from the interviews in *Passion, Craft, and Method in Comparative Politics* underscores the importance of openness to the possibility of surprise combined with the curiosity, confidence and drive to follow a hunch. Moreover, by mastering the literature so that we have a firm grasp of the "conventional wisdom," we may be able to enhance our ability to notice puzzling new information. For example, had Skocpol not understood that the standard view cast the United States as a welfare laggard, then she probably would not have seen that the book she serendipitously discovered through bibliographic sleuthing made an argument that cut sharply against the grain. And her fortuitous discovery of this book still might have led nowhere had she lacked either the curiosity to pursue the lead or the skepticism and confidence to question received wisdom.

While there is no magic formula for sparking the comparative imagination, these various methods of creative hypothesis formation are important aspects of the process of generating good ideas.

Notes

¹ This imbalanced focus on hypothesis-testing, as opposed to hypothesis-generating, is not unique to political science and sociology. See William J. McGuire, "Creative Hypothesis Generating in Psychology: Some Useful Heuristics," *Annual Review of Psychology* Vol. 48 (1997):1-30.

² Bibliographic sleuthing can be done increasingly on the Internet.

³ Mihaïl Manoïlesco, *Le Siècle du Corporatisme* (Paris: Alcan, 1934).

⁴ Isaac Max Rubinow, *Social Insurance, With Special Reference to American Conditions* (New York: Arno Press, 1968; orig. 1913). ⁵ Theda Skocpol, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers: The Political Origins of Social Policy in the United States* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1992).

⁶ Samuel P. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies* (New Haven, CT.: Yale University Press, 1968).

⁷ Philippe C. Schmitter, "Still the Century of Corporatism?" *Review of Politics* Vol. 36, N° 1 (1974): 85-131; reprinted as "Still the Century of Corporatism?" pp. 85-131, in Fredrick B. Pike and Thomas Stritch (eds.), *The New Corporatism: Social-Political Structures in the Iberian World* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1974).

⁸ Harry Eckstein, *Division and Cohesion in Democracy: A Study of Norway* (Princeton, N.J., Princeton University Press, 1966).

⁹ Linz's initial formulation of the concept of sultanistic regime is in Juan J. Linz, "Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes," in *Handbook of Political Science*, vol. 3, Nelson Polsby and Fred Greenstein, eds. (Reading, Mass: Addison-Wesley, 1975). See also H. E. Chehabi and Juan J. Linz, "A Theory of Sultanism I: A Type of Nondemocratic Rule", pp. 3-25, in H. E. Chehabi and Juan J. Linz, eds., *Sultanistic Regimes* (Baltimore, Md.: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998).

¹⁰ The results of this research were published in James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985).

¹¹ On "coordination games," see Thomas C. Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1980).

¹² Samuel P. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies* (New Haven, CT.: Yale University Press, 1968); Philippe C. Schmitter, "Still the Century of Corporatism?" *Review of Politics* Vol. 36, N° 1 (1974): 85-131.

¹³ Max Weber, "Science as a Vocation," Pp. 129-156, in H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, eds. *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), p. 136. Weber further notes, "...ideas come when we do not expect them, and not when we are brooding and searching at our desks. Yet ideas would certainly not come to mind had we not brooded at our desks and searched for answers with passionate devotion."

¹⁴ Luck may be more important in determining the impact rather than the quality of research. When told that he had been lucky in his research, Louis Pasteur replied, "Fortune favors the prepared mind." See Lewis Wolpert and Alison Richards, *A Passion for Science* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 6.

Symposium I: Ian Shapiro's *The Flight from Reality in the Human Sciences* (Princeton University Press, 2005)

This symposium is based on a roundtable discussion of Shapiro's book, held at this year's meeting of the American Political Science Association in Washington, D.C. We would like to thank the editors of The Good Society (A PEGS Journal) for their permission to reprint some of the material from their forthcoming symposium on the state of the discipline.

Introduction

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One of the surprising results of this roundtable on Ian Shapiro's new collection of essays was the establishment, at least among the panelists, of a large area of uncontroversial common ground, ground that might not have been so uncontroversial in previous years. No one opposed the project of political science in general. No one attempted to transcend politics with a conflict-ending theory of everything. Everyone recommended a focus on the mid-range of political analysis, with some work at very high or very low levels of abstraction. No one blamed individual scholarly shortcomings for the problems of the discipline, nor were social class, ideology, or historical particularity said to be at the root of political science's failure to fulfill its promise. Instead, each panelist (including Theda Skocpol, whose very interesting spoken contributions are not included in this symposium) looked to academic practices, scholarly assumptions, and perhaps most importantly, at professional and educational institutions. It is therefore not at all surprising that when serious disagreements did arise, they had to do with the practice of education in the discipline, and especially with the teaching of political science methodology.

In *Flight*, Shapiro argues for a problem-driven rather than method-driven research practice. By the "flight from reality in the human sciences," Shapiro means the tendency of research

ers to cleave to attractive theoretical constructions of political life, whatever the evidence presented by political reality might be. Researchers' theoretical commitments not only incline them to ignore unwelcome facts, these commitments prevent them from observing such facts in the first place. Shapiro finds this dynamic at work nearly everywhere he looks: among rational choice theorists, famously, but also among political theorists, appellate court judges, and students of political behavior, among others. Fortunately, he does not find it everywhere, and while arguing for approaches to the study of politics that might be more open to empirical reality and thus more likely to contribute to our knowledge about politics, Shapiro sketches a set of practices under the loose heading of "realism" that should be more fruitful than those currently in fashion.

Shapiro associates himself with the members of what he calls "the mature Enlightenment," and rightly so. He shares their orientation toward incrementalism in the pursuit of knowledge, their preference for practical results over grand theory building, and their interest in bettering the human condition without losing sight of the actual human beings experiencing it. Shapiro *dis*associates himself from a broad tradition of theories that explain everything by adjusting their observations of the complex political world to fit their predilections (this mode of categorization makes for refreshingly strange bedfellows: Bentham, Marx, and Freud find themselves beside contemporary rational choice theory, for example). The intellectual radicalism of Shapiro's approach to the study of politics (see his 1999 *Democratic Justice* [Yale University Press]) is sometimes overshadowed by the individual scholarly controversies in