

# **Paradigms in comparative politics: Structural, rational actor and cultural perspectives**

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Comparative Perspectives  
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# Paradigms in comparative research

- rational actor: reasons
- culture: rules
- structure: relations

# Rational Actor: Reasons 1/4

- Ontology:
- methodological individualism
- The world consists of individuals, actors who act, make preferences, decide etc.
- Their activities are always intentional and serve a specific purpose:
- Actors choose optimal strategies to accomplish their goals (profit maximization)

## Rational Actor: Reasons 2/4

- Study of collective processes and decisions that are deliberate and carefully chosen
- i.e. they are the results of individual's rational choice
- However, individual rationality may lead to collectively suboptimal outcomes

# Rational Actor: Reasons 3/4

- Methodology:
- Actors activities are influenced by material constraints of objectively existing external environment
- When the external environment changes, so do actors' strategies
- Rational choice theorists seek to formulate universally valid law-like generalizations

# Rational Actor: Reasons 4/4

- The goals of comparative analysis:
- To arrive at generalizations, universally valid in all times and places
- Quantitative research techniques and positivist philosophy are typically employed

# Culture: Rules 1/5

- Ontology:
- Individuals firmly entrenched in a unique culture
- They follow social rules (norms) that make up their individual as well as collective identities
- Norms are intersubjective or transindividual
- A group of people interprets the world around them on the basis of symbols, norms, values and patterns of behavior

## Culture: Rules 2/5

- Their perceptions are analytically more important than objective material conditions
- Culture involves common knowledge about the construction of reality (is, not should)
- Individual's interests are not given *a priori*
- Rationality is neither universal nor necessary
- Rather, it is conditional and varies depending on the dominant culture (culturally bounded)

# Culture: Rules 3/5

- culture: a system of meanings and identities that explains how (and why) people act (the ways they do)
- Culture and community are the bases of social control: our roles dictate standards of social respect, recognition, reputation and status

# Culture: Rules 4/5

- Methodology:
- HOWs, not WHYs (understanding, not explanation of social phenomena)
- We need to look beyond material causal relations to identify the inner meaning of actors' decisions
- Culture is both *external* (materially real and transmitted from the past individuals) and *internal* (individuals are socialized into it)

# Culture: Rules 5/5

- Strategies of comparison:
- Participant's understanding may not be the same as scientist's understanding of the situation
- The norms, forms and practices of one's culture are relevant
- The parts must be understood in terms of the whole (and the other way around)
- Comprehending the material world is not the same as comprehending the social world (we need to seek the internal meaning of actions)

# Structure: Relations 1/4

- **Ontology:**
- A holistic approach: Networks, linkages, interdependencies and interactions among the parts of some systems
- Relationships among individuals, collectivities, institutions and organizations
- Reject focus on the individuals themselves
- What matters is the structural conditions, not individuals' determination

# Structure: Relations 2/4

- Structuralists emphasize structural conditions and activities that are not in the hands of these actors
- These structural conditions influence or even determine activities of individuals
- Methodology:
- Objects and structures are real, e.g. the state is real (it exists beyond coercive apparatus), international state systems is real (it exists beyond the UN)

# Structure: Relations 3/4

- Social structures are real and social scientists should search for social kinds such as revolutions, social classes, social movements, etc.
- These social kinds have causal powers, we need to study the historical dynamics of real social types

# Structure: Relations 4/4

- Strategies of comparison:
- Classify cases into categories and then they investigate the historical dynamics associated with each class
- Similar processes, sequences and laws occur in similar structures; different processes...in different structures
- One can identify a small number of typical paths
- This typological approach limits the generalizability of one's findings to the type of classes examined

# Basketball for extra credit

- **The oral debriefing questions:**
- 1. What happened?
- 2. Is the game fair?
- 3. Did the "ability" of the student matter? Why? Why not?
- 4. Which CP theory best describes what you have observed during the game, and why?

# The Ultimatum Game

- **The oral debriefing questions:**
- 1. Would you accept the offer of XX to YY?
- 2. Why? Why not?
- 3. What is the driving factor for the original offer?
- 4. What is (are) the driving factor(s) for accepting or refusing the offer?
- 5. Which CP theory best describes what you have observed during the game, and why?

# Drop the ball game (The Button, Button Game)

- 1. Are the volunteers truly rational actors? Did they always make rational calculations that were based on cost-benefit analysis?
- 2. What were the cost-benefit analyses the volunteers made to arrive at their decisions?
- 3. Did non-material factors influence the participants' decisions? Why or why not?
- 4. Which CP theory best describes what you have observed during the game, any why?