# Our Political World in Data

BA POL_W5/W7

Heidelberg University

Summer 2020

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Drop-in exercise hours: Tuesdays, 4-6pm via Moodle Chat

Student hours: by appointment Wednesdays, 5-7pm via heiCONF or heiCHAT

The syllabus is subject to change. Please find the most recent version on Moodle.

## Course Description

Before we can explain political phenomena, we have to describe and measure them. Political scientists in recent years have created datasets that capture politics across time and around the globe on such diverse topics as states and conflict, democracies and dictatorships, political leaders and parties, and the political role of ethnic groups and women. The rise and easy availability of such big data, however, risks their uncritical use. In this seminar, students therefore familiarize themselves with prominent datasets in political science, visualize their information, critically evaluate them, and use them to answer questions about politics, such as what states do and what challenges to their rule they face; what distinguishes democracies from dictatorships; which political elites run the state and the regime; and what say social groups have in politics.

## Course Objectives

1) **Students familiarize themselves with prominent datasets** in Political Science, which political phenomena they capture and how they measure them. The seminar comprises three parts: States and Conflict; Democracies, Dictatorships, and Political Elites; and Social Groups.

2) **Students critically evaluate the datasets**. This includes assessing the advantages and disadvantages of minimalist and maximalist concepts; distinguishing between conceptualization (definition) and operationalization (measurement); telling apart valid from invalid, and reliable from unreliable measures; and gauging the benefits and pitfalls

of different strategies to gather data, such as expert surveys and content analyses.

3) **Students use the dataset to answer questions about politics**. Such questions include whether the world is becoming more peaceful; whether democracies are eroding; whether dictatorships are changing; what parties want; which ethnic groups are marginalized; whether women are gaining political influence; and what people value and believe.

## Class Format

1) One or several students **present a dataset** and its main features in a presentation uploaded to Moodle on Mondays.
2) Students **ask questions** about the dataset and the presenters respond in the discussion forum on Moodle between Mondays and Wednesdays.
3) In groups of two, students work through **exercises** to further familiarize themselves **with the dataset** between Mondays and Wednesdays.
4) We **evaluate** the strengths and weaknesses of **the dataset** in light of the presentation and exercises in the discussion forum on Moodle between Wednesdays and Fridays.
5) Students learn about a **study which uses the dataset to answer** an explanatory research **question** through a presentation by myself which I will upload to Moodle on Fridays.

## Classroom Policies

- **Academic Integrity**: I expect students not to plagiarize and instead to **properly cite all sources**. Please ask me if you have questions about what constitutes plagiarism.
- **Inclusive Learning: your success in this class is important to me**. If there are aspects of this course that prevent you from learning or exclude you, especially under the current especially challenging circumstances, please let me know as soon as possible. Together we will develop strategies to meet both your needs and the requirements of the course.
- **Disability Accommodations**: I encourage students with disabilities to **discuss appropriate accommodations** with me. This includes non-visible disabilities such as chronic diseases, learning disabilities, head injury, attention deficit/hyperactive disorder, or psychiatric disabilities.

## Prerequisites

I have designed the class such that students unfamiliar with statistical software such as Stata or R can participate without any issue. While students can use such software for the exercises and/or the application paper, only spreadsheet software such as Excel will at times be necessary.

## Oral requirements (*mündliche Leistung*, 2LP)

1) **Participation** (25%): do the **reading** for each class **and engage** with the course contents in the **discussion sections** for the presentations, the dataset's strengths and weaknesses, and the application in the discussion sections on [Moodle](.).

2) **Presentation** (40%): **summarize** the main features of **one dataset**. This summary should include a) what the dataset collects information on; b) how the dataset defines and measures the phenomena; c) which countries and years the dataset covers; and d) what uses the dataset has. Please discuss the specific contents of the presentation with me during student hours. The presentation should consist of a slide set (such as PowerPoint) and a voiceover by the presenter(s). The presentation should last 10-15 minutes for one presenter, and up to 20 minutes for two or more presenters. The presentation is **due** via email to me or shared link the week of the respective class on **Monday at noon**. If you send me the draft slides by the preceding Friday at noon I will give you feedback on them. Please send me up to three **preferences**, if any, during which class you would like to present **by April 28 at the end of day**.

3) **Exercises** (35%): **answer the short questions** I raise in the exercises **for each dataset together** with one other student. Sometimes there are clear answers to the questions, often there are not and different answers are possible. You can keep your answers brief. I am available on HeiCHAT on Tuesdays from 4-6pm to answer questions about the exercises. The answers are **due** via email to me by the **end of Wednesday** the week of the respective class. Name the document with your last name(s) and use the course name as the email subject. Please send me your **preference,** if any, with whom you would like to work together **by April 28 at the end of day**. If you do not have any preference, I will assign you another student.

Please keep in mind that you **also** have to **sign up** for the oral examination **until May 10**, usually via [LSF](.). Please find more information in the *FAQ Prüfungsanmeldung*-file on the Moodle course page.

Written requirements (*Hausarbeit*, 6LP)

1) **Evaluation paper** (33.3%): **discuss the strengths and limitations of the dataset you presented**. The paper should entail a discussion of the scope of the dataset (e.g. which questions can and cannot be answered), the validity and reliability of its data, the transparency of its methodology, and possibly other topics. The paper should have three to four double-spaced pages of text. The paper is **due on August 31**. I will upload the evaluation papers to Moodle such that all students can access them. Please name the paper with your last name, include a declaration of authorship (*Eigenständigkeitserklärung*), and email it with the course name as the subject.

2) **Application paper** (66.7%): **use the dataset to answer an important question**. Pick a question in conversation with the instructor; choose one dataset from class to answer the question; justify why this question is important for scholars and/or practitioners; justify why you choose this dataset; explain how you would use the dataset to answer the question. There are two options with the same task, but different emphases:

   a) **Data analysis**: this application emphasizes the actual data analysis. Choose a **descriptive question**, such as whether right-wing parties have become stronger in the last decade; and **analyze the dataset** to answer the question.

   b) **Research design**: this application emphasizes the research project. Choose an **explanatory question**, such as whether an increase in the strength of right-wing parties has led to more restrictive immigration policies; **review** the **existing research** on the question; and **propose an answer** to the question. You **do not** have to **analyze** the dataset to actually answer the question.

   The paper should have six double-spaced pages of text. It is **due on August 31**. Please name the paper with your last name, include a declaration of authorship (*Eigenständigkeitserklärung*), and email it with the course name as the subject.

   Please keep in mind that you **also** have to **sign up** for the written examination **until August 1**, usually via LSF. Please find more information in the *FAQ Prüfungsanmeldung*-file on the Moodle course page.

## Organization

You can access all readings either by following the embedded hyperlink or by downloading them from Moodle. Please let me know if you cannot access one of the readings. I will also upload all other class documents such as presentations to Moodle.

The starred (*) datasets won the Lijphart/Przeworski/Verba Data Set Award of the American Political Science Association.

**Introduction** (April 27 – May 3)

Questions:

– What are the course objectives, class format, requirements, and classroom policies?
– What are students' backgrounds and interests?
– What are the course contents?
– What types of research questions and variables are there?
– How are concepts, attributes, and indicators related?
– What features of a dataset can be distinguished?

Optional reading:

– Adcock, Robert, and David Collier. 2001. Measurement validity: a shared standard for qualitative and quantitative research. *American Political Science Review* 95(3): 529-546.
– Goertz, Gary. 2006. *Social Science Concepts: A User's Guide*. Princeton: chapter 2.

## Part I: What do states do and which challenges do they face?

**Constitutions** (May 4 – May 10)

Dataset: Constitute Project / Comparative Constitutions Project (CCP)*

Questions:

– What are constitutions and how can we measure them?
– What topics do constitutions cover?
– How often do states change their constitutions?
– Application: do constitutional provisions on balanced budgets promote governments' fiscal discipline?

Reading:

– The Comparative Constitutions Project. http://comparativeconstitutionsproject.org: About the CCP, Research Design, Timeline of Constitutions, Constitution Rankings.
– The Constitute Project. https://www.constituteproject.org/: About, Countries, Topics.
– Amick, Joe, Terrence Chapman, and Zachary Elkins. Forthcoming. On Constitutionalizing a Balanced Budget. *Journal of Politics*: read abstract, introduction, chapters 3, 4, 4.1, conclusion; skim rest.

**State Capacity** (May 11 – May 17)

Dataset: State Capacity Dataset

Questions:

– What is state capacity and what types of capacity are there?

– How can we measure state capacity?

– How do state revenues and expenditures differ between states and over time?

– Application: do democracies and leftist governments increase state capacity?

Reading:

– Hanson, Jonathan, and Rachel Sigman. 2019. Leviathan's Latent Dimensions: Measuring State Capacity for Comparative Political Research. *Working Paper.*

– Grassi, Davide, and Vincenzo Memoli. 2016. Political Determinants of State Capacity in Latin America. *World Development* 88: read summary, introduction, conclusion; skim rest.


**Organized Violence (**May 18 – May 24)

Dataset: Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) / Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO)*

Questions:

– What is organized violence and how can we measure it?

– How much and what types of organized violence do states face?

– How does organized violence differ between states and over time?

– Application: Why does bad governance lead to repeat civil war?

Reading:

– Uppsala Conflict Data Program. 2020. http://ucdp.uu.se/: Countries in Conflict View, Fatalities View, About, Methodology, skim Definitions and FAQ.

– Gleditsch, Nils, Peter Wallensteen, Mikael Eriksson, Margareta Sollenberg, and Håvard Strand. 2002. Armed Conflict 1946-2001: A New Dataset. *Journal of Peace Research* 39(5): 615-627.

– Pettersson, Therése, Högbladh, Stina, and Magnus Öberg. 2019. Organized violence, 1989-2018 and peace agreements. *Journal of Peace Research* 56(4): 589-596.

– Walter, Barbara. 2015. Why Bad Governance Leads to Repeat Civil War. *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 59(7): read 1242-1426, 1249-1250, 1263-1264; skim rest.

**Social Movements** (May 25 – May 31)

Dataset: Nonviolent and Violent Campaigns and Outcomes (NAVCO)

Questions:

–   What are social movements and how can we measure them?

–   What types of social movements do states face?

–   How do social movements differ between states and over time?

–   Application: are nonviolent social movements more successful than violent ones?

Reading:

–   Nonviolent & Violent Campaigns and Outcomes Data Project. About the project; NAVCO 1.2 Codebook and Data; NAVCO 2.1 Codebook and Data.

–   Chenoweth, Erica, and Orion Lewis. 2013. Unpacking nonviolent campaigns: Introducing the NAVCO 2.0 dataset. *Journal of Peace Research* 50(3): 415-423.

–   Stephan, Maria, and Erica Chenoweth. 2008. Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict. *International Security* 33(1): read 7-9, 15-19, conclusion, skim 10-14.

**Part II: What distinguishes democracies from dictatorships, and who governs them?**

**Electoral, Liberal, Deliberative, Egalitarian, and Participatory Democracy**
(June 1 – June 7)

Dataset: Varieties of Democracy Project (V-Dem)*

Questions:

–   What is democracy and how can we measure it?

–   What types of democracy are there?

–   How does democracy differ between states and over time?

–   Application: is global democracy eroding?

Reading:

–   Varieties of Democracy. 2019. https://www.v-dem.net: read About V-Dem, Policy Brief, V-Dem Graphing Tools, heavily skim Methodology, and Codebook.

–   Lührmann, Anna, and Staffan Lindberg. 2019. A third wave of autocratization is here: what is new about it? Democratization 26(7): abstract, introduction, 1098-1101, conclusion; skim rest.

**Militaries, Parties, Strongmen, and Monarchs** (June 8 – June 14)

Dataset: Autocratic Regimes (GWF)*

Questions:

- What is a dictatorship and how can we measure it?
- What types of dictatorship are there?
- How do dictatorships differ between states and over time?
- Application: which dictatorships are more likely to expropriate companies?

Reading:

- Geddes, Barbara, Joseph Wright, and Erica Frantz. 2014. Autocratic Breakdown and Regime Transitions: A New Data Set. *Perspectives on Politics* 12(2): 313-331; skim Codebook.
- Wilson, Matthew, and Joseph Wright. 2017. Autocratic Legislatures and Expropriation Risk. *British Journal of Political Science* 47(1): read 1-3, 15, skim rest.

**Royals, Militaries, Parties, Presidents, and Parliaments** (June 15 – June 21)

Dataset: Democracy and Dictatorship (DD/CGV)

Questions:

- What is a dictatorship and how can we measure it?
- What types of democracy and dictatorship are there?
- How do dictatorships differ between states and over time?
- Application: are democracies or autocracies more likely to default on their debt?

Reading:

- Cheibub, José, Jennifer Gandhi, and James Vreeland. 2010. Democracy and Dictatorship Revisited. *Public Choice* 143(1-2): 67-101; skim Codebook on Moodle.
- Beaulieu, Emily, Gary Cox, and Sebastian Saiegh. 2012. Sovereign Debt and Regime Type: Reconsidering the Democratic Advantage. *International Organization* 66: read 709-711, 730-732, skim 712-729.

**Part III: Which parties compete in the political arena?**

**Parties and their Positions I** (June 22 – June 28)

Dataset: Manifesto Project*

Questions:

– What are parties and how can we measure them?

– What policies do parties pursue and how can we measure their positions?

– Which types of parties are there?

– How do the types of policies parties pursue vary between states and over time?

– Application: do mainstream parties change their positions when radical right parties succeed?

Reading:

– Volkens, Andrea, Werner Krause, Pola Lehmann, Theres Matthieß, Nicolas Merz, Sven Regel, Bernhard Weßels. 2017. The Manifesto Data Collection. *Manifesto Project (MRG/CMP/MARPOR). Version 2019b*: https://manifesto-project.wzb.eu: About, A Short Primer, Visualize, Working with the Main Dataset, Explore, Corpus, and Browse Corpus.

– Abou-Chadi, Tarik, and Werner Krause. 2018. The Causal Effect of Radical Right Success on Mainstream Parties' Policy Positions: A Regression Discontinuity Approach. *British Journal of Political Science*. Forthcoming: read 1-3, 15-16, skim rest.

**Parties and their Positions II** (June 29 – July 5)

Dataset: Global Party Survey

Questions:

– What are parties and how can we identify them?

– What policies do parties pursue and how can we measure their positions?

– Which types of parties are there?

– What are populist parties and how can we identify them?

– Application: none

Reading:

– Global Party Survey. 2020. https://www.globalpartysurvey.org: What We Do. Methods. Data Visualizations.

– Norris, Pippa. 2020. Measuring Populism Worldwide. *Working Paper*.

**Part IV: What say do social groups have in politics?**

**Ethnic, Linguistic, Religious, and Racial Groups** (July 6 – July 12)

Dataset: Ethnic Power Relations (EPR)

Questions:

– What are ethnic, linguistic, religious, and racial groups?

– How can we measure the groups?

– Which political roles can they play and how can we measure them?

– How is their political role different between states and over time?

– Application: do refugees spark civil conflict?

Reading:

– Luc Girardin, Philipp Hunziker, Lars-Erik Cederman, Nils-Christian Bormann, and Manuel Vogt. 2015. *GROW^{up}* - Geographical Research On War, Unified Platform. ETH Zurich. http://growup.ethz.ch/. About. View. Read.

– Vogt, Manuel, Nils-Christian Bormann, Seraina Rüegger, Lars-Erik Cederman, Philipp Hunziker, and Luc Girardin. 2015. Integrating Data on Ethnicity, Geography, and Conflict: The Ethnic Power Relations Data Set Family. *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 59(7): 1327-1342.

– Rüegger, Seraina. 2018. Refugees, ethnic power relations, and civil conflict in the country of asylum. *Journal of Peace Research* 56(1): read 42-43, 54-55, skim 44-53.

**Women** (July 13 – July 19)

Database: Our World in Data/Sustainable Development Goal Tracker

Questions:

– How do we measure gender (in)equality?

– What types of gender (in)equality are there?

– How does the political role of women differ between states and over time?

– Application: do female politicians make women more likely to engage in politics?

Reading:

– Sustainable Development Goal Tracker. 2019. https://sdg-tracker.org/: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls: read text, skim data sources.

– Barnes, Tiffany, and Stephanie Burchard. 2013. "Engendering" Politics: The Impact of Descriptive Representation on Women's Political Engagement in Sub-Saharan Africa. *Comparative Political Studies* 46(7): read 767-769, 784-785, skim 770-783.

**Citizens and their Values** (July 20 – July 26)

Dataset: World Values Survey*

Questions:

- What beliefs and values do citizens have and how can we measure them?
- What types of values do citizens have and how can we measure them?
- How do the values of citizens differ between states and over time?
- Application: what do citizens mean when they say 'democracy'?

Reading:

- World Values Survey. 2020. http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org: Data & Documentation; Documentation / Downloads; Online Analysis; Frequently asked questions.
- Kirsch, Helen, and Christian Welzel. 2019. Democracy Misunderstood: Authoritarian Notions of Democracy around the Globe. *Social Forces* 98(1): read 59-61, 63-68, 86-87; skim rest.

**Policy Processes** (July 27 – August 2)

Dataset: Comparative Agendas Project*

Questions:

- How can we measure policy processes?
- Which organizations are involved in policy processes?
- What policy areas can we distinguish?
- Application: do public opinion and protest affect legislative agendas?

Reading:

- Comparative Agendas Project. 2020. https://www.comparativeagendas.net/: About/Select a Project. Datasets/Codebooks. Master Codebook. Trends Tool.
- Bevan, Shaun. 2019. Gone Fishing: The Creation of the Comparative Agendas Project Master Codebook. In: Frank Baumgartner, Christian Breunig, and Emiliano Grossman (eds.). *Comparative Policy Agendas: Theory Tools, Data.* Oxford: skim.
- Bernardi, Luca, Daniel Bischof, and Ruud Wouters. 2020. The public, the protester, and the bill: do legislative agendas respond to public opinion signals? *Journal of European Public Policy* 27(1): read abstract, introduction, 7-10, 15-18; skim rest.

**Application Paper due** (August 31)