
We Are All Comparativists Now

Why and How Single-Country Scholarship Must Adapt and Incorporate the Comparative Politics Approach

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This article asks, “What is the way forward for single-country scholarship?” It also discusses why and how single-country scholars should adopt a more comparative approach in their research. To do this, the article presents cross-sectional and longitudinal data that illustrate the relative isolation of the single-country canon, especially nondomestic single-country studies, within the wider discipline of political science. To suggest how this be redressed, the article then discusses how single-country scholarship might build bridges to the comparative approach and the benefits this might generate. The article argues that careful and innovative use of the case study research design provides the ideal means to do this.

Keywords: *single-country scholarship; comparative analysis; case study; methodology; epistemology*

What is the way forward for single-country scholarship? On the surface, the single-country canon still thrives. In the United States, the American Political Science Association (APSA) hosts inter alia, a British politics and German politics conference group, and there is also a freestanding interdisciplinary German studies association that contains a robust political science strand. In the United Kingdom, the Political Studies Association hosts among others French, German, and Scandinavian politics specialist groups, and the United Kingdom is also the base for the Association for the Study of

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German Politics, with scholars from across Europe and North America among its membership.

This article, however, argues that the underlying position of single-country scholarship within political science is less secure than it appears and that evidence suggests that university employers, publishers, and journal editors alike see the single-country tradition as detached from the core of discipline. The article argues that although the individual scholar can do nothing to shift market forces and intellectual preferences, she or he can and should respond to them by breaking out of the empirical and intellectual silo of much single-country scholarship and becoming more relevant to the wider discipline. It is argued that this would both ensure the survival of a vigorous tradition of single-country scholarship and benefit the comparative politics canon. The article is written from the perspective of someone who has worked mainly within the single-country tradition (in this case, with a focus on the Federal Republic of Germany) but has recently begun to incorporate the tools of comparative analysis. I therefore argue that the use of comparative concepts and data is of tremendous potential benefit to the single-country scholar. In short, the article argues why and how we are (or at least should be) “all comparativists now.”

The rest of the article is structured as follows. First, it discusses why single-country scholarship must adapt by presenting evidence that suggests that, with the exception of domestic studies of U.S. and U.K. politics, the single-country canon occupies a marginal position within North American and British political science. It then goes on to discuss how this adaptation might take place. There are two strands to this discussion. First, it briefly identifies the potential benefits of bridging the gap between the single-country and comparative canons and structures this discussion around the ideas of (a) rigor, (b) relevance, and (c) resonance, with noted references to significant examples from the literature as pointers to or instances of best practice. Second, it advocates the careful and innovative use of the case study design as the ideal means with which to bridge the gap, engages some of the epistemological and methodological issues that are flagged in the literature, and again identifies examples of good practice as appropriate. Finally, the article concludes with a summary and discussion of the data and arguments made.

Why the Single-Country Tradition Should Adapt: The Marginal Position of Single-Country Scholarship

There are three manifestations of the marginal position of single-country scholarship within political science. First, there is evidence within the acad-

Table 1
Breakdown and Ranking of U.S. University Vacancies Advertised by
the American Political Science Association by Category or
Subdiscipline (as of October 1, 2004)

Category	Total	%	Single-Country Scholar?	%	European Single Country?	%
International relations	61	19.3	0	0.0	0	0.0
American government or politics	59	18.7	59	18.7	0	0.0
Comparative politics	53	16.8	10	3.2	2	0.6
Administrative, nonacademic, or other	41	13.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Public policy	33	10.4	26	8.2	10	3.2
Political theory	23	7.3	0	0.0	0	0.0
Public administration	18	5.7	9	2.8	5	1.6
Methodology	15	4.7	0	0.0	0	0.0
Public law	13	4.1	11	3.5	2	0.6
Total	316	100.0	115	36.4	19	6.0

Source: American Political Science Association (2004).

emy that demand for single-country courses is currently weak and that it is failing to compete with sexier topics such as globalization and human rights. Goetz (2001) noted this problem several years ago in relation to the study of politics in Germany, but there is evidence that the problem is more widespread and that this is reflected in the demand for academic faculty. To demonstrate this, Table 1 takes data from the APSA faculty recruitment site (<http://www.apsanet.org/ejobs>) and breaks down and ranks the share of vacancies advertised as of October 1, 2004, by category or subdiscipline.¹

1. Six points should be noted here. First, these are descriptive, cross-sectional data that make no temporal claims. Second, although the total number of individual postings was 198, many of them specify multiple fields. Therefore, Table 1 takes each specified field as being a separate entry. Third, the administrative, nonacademic, or other category is a hybrid category but is included because it is often cross-posted with other categories. The net effect of this classificatory rule is neutral in that, although it increases the overall N to 316, it decreases the percentage scores for all the other subdisciplinary categories alike. Fourth, despite the relative dominance of domestic politics in North American political science, it is included in the single-country category. This includes data on public law and public administration, which in the United States uses a domestic focus as the default mode of analysis. Fifth, all general postings are counted as open to single-country scholars. This rule is not applied to other subdisciplines. Finally, although it is very likely that strong single-country applicants would be considered for, say, comparative politics posts, this is impossible to quantify and is therefore discounted. Despite this last classificatory rule, the net effect of the above rules is to give a positive skew in the number of postings open to single-country scholars. Thus, the method of coding is biased to falsify at the first hurdle the article's claims.

At first glance, the overall score for vacancies open to single-country scholars appears relatively positive, with 115 out of 316 entries (36.4%) available to single-country scholars. However, the picture is inflated by the strength of the American government or politics category, which with 59 entries (18.7%) is the second strongest single subdiscipline. If we take the next strongest category of comparative politics (53 or 16.8% of total entries), we find that only 10 (3.2% of total entries) are demonstrably open to single-country scholars. A similar picture emerges with public policy entries. Here there are a total of 26 single-country entries, of which 14 require a U.S. focus, 10 are open, and only 2 require a single-country focus other than the United States (both of which, at the universities of Ottawa and Toronto, require a Canadian focus). At the bottom of the rankings, half of the public administration entries are open to single-country scholars, but of these, four are for U.S. specialists only. Similarly, with public law, most of the entries are open to single-country scholars, but only two do not specify U.S. specialists.

Taken in the round, therefore, the number of entries demonstrably open to single-country scholars is small, especially for nondomestic single-country scholars. Although 36.4% of entries are open to single-country scholars, once we remove U.S. specialists, we are left with only 12.2% of entries. Demand for single-country scholars with, say, a European focus is weak, as is demand for specialists in highly significant non-European countries such as China (two entries) and Russia (one entry). By contrast, scholars possessing a comparative and/or regional focus are in demand. If we look at the comparative politics category, there were seven requests for European or EU specialists and similar numbers for the study of Asia (10 entries), Latin America (9 entries), the Middle East (8 entries), and Africa (5 entries). Similarly, in the public law category, the only non-U.S. specialists specified are those with a focus on Latin America, the Middle East, or Asia. In the United Kingdom, job specifications for advertised vacancies tend to be less specific than those in the United States and are thus harder to code. Moreover, at any given time, the number of vacancies is much smaller. Nevertheless, anecdotal evidence suggests that—as in the United States—the proportion of posts for which single-country specialists other than those of domestic (i.e., British) politics might credibly apply is relatively small.²

2. One can speculate as to why the market precludes most single-country scholarship. Perhaps the opportunity cost of grasping the nuances of a single country's political culture deters students (the same phenomenon that appears to be driving the decline in student demand for modern languages in Anglophone universities). However, I suspect that it is likely that students simply do not find single-country courses as relevant as other options on offer. Power, and the issues associated with the exercise of power, often appears to be moving away from the individual nation state and toward systems of supranational governance such as the European Union and the World

The second manifestation of the marginality of single-country scholarship is its underrepresentation in the output of academic publishers. Table 2 sets out the balance among subdisciplines based on their shares of publications advertised in the 2004 politics and international relations catalogues of the following six academic publishers: (a) Ashgate, (b) Blackwell, (c) Cambridge University Press, (d) Manchester University Press, (e) Oxford University Press, and (f) Routledge.³ The table demonstrates that if we leave aside scholarship on U.S. and U.K. politics, single-country studies are underrepresented within the publishers' 2004 catalogues. The undifferentiated category of single-country scholarship makes up the largest single category of total output (420 out of 1,495, or 28.1%), but if we discount U.S. or U.K. scholarship (269 or 18%), the residual of single-country scholarship (other) is just 151 (or 10.1% of the total). Two observations are particularly relevant here. First, the aggregate single-country (other) total compares poorly with fields such as comparative politics (380 or 25.4%), international relations and political economy (405 or 27.1%), and normative and empirical political theory (227 or 15.2%). Indeed, the only category that is less well represented than single-country (other) is that of public policy, public administration, or public law (63 or 4.2%). Second, the only publisher's catalogue in which the category of single-country (other) makes up a greater proportion of total output than that of single-country (United States or United Kingdom) is that of Ashgate, a relatively small publisher (that specializes in turning doctoral theses into books).

The third manifestation of the marginalization of single-country scholarship is the wealth of evidence suggesting it now inhabits an intellectual silo. There is a great deal of first-class scholarship within the canon, but with some notable exceptions, it is perceived as having very little to say to the wider political science community. This is reflected in the low status of single-country journals in the international political science market. To demonstrate this, let us examine Hix's (2004) list of the main political science journals. On the basis of his calculation of journals' impact scores, using the ISI citation database, Hix compiles a representative list of the main political science journals within the international market. For methodological reasons

Trade Organization. As a result, the kind of nation-specific phenomena that interest single-country scholars may appear anachronistic to students. Exploring this possibility is beyond the scope of the article but is an interesting focus for further research.

3. Two points must be made about the data in Table 2. First, once again it is cross-sectional and makes no temporal claims. Second, the table again uses a coding strategy designed to maximize the score for single-country scholarship. Thus, in coding the total of 1,495 entries in the table, publishers' own classifications by subdiscipline are disregarded, and any publications primarily focused on a single country are reclassified as single-country studies.

that are unimportant in the context of this article, the list is not exhaustive and has been questioned by some. But by and large, the overall shape of the rankings is intuitively right and includes important non-Anglophone titles such as *Politische Vierteljahresschrift*, *Revue française de science politique*, and *Rivista Italiana di Scienza Politica*. And in Hix's ranking, the low status of single-country journals is evident, with only one of the 63 entries representing a single-country specialism (*American Politics Quarterly*, at number 40). This compares with 18 omnibus journals, 18 journals open to comparative politics and area studies, 16 open to international relations and political economy scholarship, 9 journals open to research in public policy, public administration, or public law, and 4 specializing in normative or empirical theory. Hix's original list, to which I have added a ranked subdivision by subdiscipline, is set out in Table 3.

Given the low status of single-country journals, the obvious strategy is to publish in one of the high-status omnibus journals found in Hix's (2004) list. But here I introduce a stronger temporal claim and argue that not only are single-country studies underrepresented within the leading omnibus journals but that this trend has increased over time. To demonstrate this point, Table 4 breaks down the output of two of the leading omnibus journals in Anglophone political science during a 24-volume period from 1980 to 2003 inclusive, according to subdiscipline.

Table 4 sets out the total research output of *American Political Science Review* (APSR) and *Political Studies* during the period,⁴ using the same subdisciplinary categories as in previous tables.⁵ The table demonstrates

4. *American Political Science Review* (APSR) and *Political Studies* are the flagship journals of the American Political Science Association (APSA) and the Political Studies Association, respectively, and are chosen for three reasons. First, they are functional equivalents and therefore appropriate subjects of comparative analysis. Second, the closeness of the two journals to the respective political science professional associations in the United States and United Kingdom means that (rightly or wrongly) they can be considered reasonably representative windows onto the mainstream profession in the two countries. Finally, both are journals of international status.

5. All research articles and forum-type discussions are included in the total, but review articles, book reviews, and (in APSR) annual conference addresses by the APSA president are not. The data are cross-tabulated, using grouped years (four groups of 6 years) to increase the *n* for each data point and generate more meaningful percentage scores. In terms of coding by subdiscipline, many research articles blur the categories between subdisciplines, and any replication of the data might problematize one or two individual categorizations. I have made a judgment call on such articles using consistent criteria. This is particularly evident in terms of the divide between empirical political theory and single-country studies in APSR. Given that much North American scholarship is hypothetico-deductive in nature, the divide between the two subdisciplines is often fuzzy. I have therefore used the following coding strategy: If a research

(text continued on p. 1095)

Table 2
Five Academic Publishers' 2004 Catalogues by Subdiscipline

Publisher	Subdiscipline															
	CP or AS		IR or PE		PP, PA, or PL		NPT or EPT		SC		United States or United Kingdom		Other		Total	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Ashgate	52	24.2	85	39.5	22	10.2	14	6.5	42	19.5	16	7.4	26	12.1	215	
Blackwell	12	8.3	26	18.1	18	12.5	63	43.8	25	17.4	18	12.5	7	4.9	144	
Cambridge University Press	54	24.4	60	27.1	0	0.0	44	19.9	63	28.5	38	17.2	25	11.3	221	
Manchester University Press	92	44.0	25	12.0	0	0.0	14	6.7	78	37.3	50	23.9	28	13.4	209	
Oxford University Press	71	24.7	62	21.6	9	3.1	49	17.1	96	33.4	82	28.6	14	4.9	287	
Routledge	99	23.6	147	35.1	14	3.3	43	10.3	116	27.7	65	15.5	51	12.2	419	
Total	380	25.4	405	27.1	63	4.2	227	15.2	420	28.1	269	18.0	151	10.1	1,495	100.0

Note: CP or AS is comparative politics or area studies; IR or PE is international relations or political economy; PP, PA, or PL is public policy, public administration, or public law; NPT or EPT is normative or empirical political theory; SC is single country.

Table 3
Disciplinary Profile of Most-Cited Political Science Journals

Journal	Specialist (Ranked by Subdiscipline)						
	Omnibus	CP or AS ^a	IR or PE	PP, PA, or PL	NPT or EPT	SC	
1. <i>American Political Science Review</i>	X						
2. <i>American Journal of Political Science</i>	X		X				
3. <i>International Organization</i>			X				
4. <i>Foreign Affairs</i>							
5. <i>Journal of Politics</i>	X						
6. <i>International Security</i>			X				
7. <i>Journal of Conflict Resolution</i>			X				
8. <i>World Politics</i>			X				
9. <i>Journal of European Public Policy</i>		X	X	X			
10. <i>International Studies Quarterly</i>			X				
11. <i>Public Choice</i>					X		
12. <i>Journal of Common Market Studies</i>		X	X	X			
13. <i>British Journal of Political Science</i>	X						
14. <i>Journal of Peace Research</i>			X				
15. <i>Journal of Law, Economics, and Organization</i>					X		
16. <i>Comparative Political Studies</i>		X					
17. <i>Journal of Democracy</i>		X					
18. <i>Europe-Asia Studies</i>		X					
19. <i>European Union Politics</i>		X					
20. <i>Political Research Quarterly</i>	X						
21. <i>West European Politics</i>		X					
22. <i>Political Studies</i>	X						

(continued)

Table 3 (continued)

Journal	Omnibus	Specialist (Ranked by Subdiscipline)					
		CP or AS ^a	IR or PE	PP, PA, or PL	NPT or EPT	SC	
23. <i>PS: Political Science and Politics</i>	X						
24. <i>European Journal of Political Research</i>	X						
25. <i>Public Administration</i>				X			
26. <i>Party Politics</i>		X					
27. <i>European Journal of International Relations</i>			X				
28. <i>Comparative Politics</i>		X					
29. <i>Electoral Studies</i>		X					
30. <i>Post-Soviet Affairs</i>		X					
31. <i>Review of International Studies</i>			X				
32. <i>Security Studies</i>			X				
33. <i>Politics and Society</i>	X						
34. <i>Governance</i>				X			
35. <i>Legislative Studies Quarterly</i>				X			
36. <i>Political Communication</i>		X					
37. <i>Political Behavior</i>		X					
38. <i>International Interactions</i>			X				
39. <i>Journal of Theoretical Politics</i>				X			
40. <i>American Politics Quarterly</i>						X	
41. <i>Millennium—Journal of International Studies</i>			X				
42. <i>Publius—The Journal of Federalism</i>		X					
43. <i>Political Theory</i>						X	
44. <i>Journal of Public Policy</i>				X			
45. <i>International Affairs</i>			X				
46. <i>Philosophy and Public Affairs</i>						X	

Table 4
Output of American Political Science Review (APSR) and Political Studies From 1980 to 2003 by Subdiscipline

Journal	Subdiscipline													
	CP or AS		IR or PE		NPT or EPT		PP, PA, or PL		SC Domestic		SC Nondomestic		Total	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
<i>APSR</i>														
1980 to 1985	22	8.1	5	1.8	116	42.6	3	1.1	103	37.9	23	8.5	272	100.0
1986 to 1991	23	8.2	16	5.7	105	37.2	4	1.4	109	38.7	25	8.9	282	100.0
1992 to 1997	33	11.7	28	9.9	105	37.1	4	1.4	95	33.6	18	6.4	283	100.0
1998 to 2003	36	14.6	19	7.7	94	38.1	4	1.6	82	33.2	12	4.9	247	100.0
Total	114	10.5	68	6.3	420	38.7	15	1.4	389	35.9	78	7.2	1,084	100.0
<i>Political Studies</i>														
1980 to 1985	15	8.1	3	1.6	90	48.4	1	0.5	46	24.7	31	16.7	186	100.0
1986 to 1991	14	8.3	8	4.7	86	50.9	0	0.0	29	17.2	32	18.9	169	100.0
1992 to 1997	24	13.0	15	8.2	75	40.8	2	1.1	42	22.8	26	14.1	184	100.0
1998 to 2003	52	21.5	18	7.4	101	41.7	6	2.5	40	16.5	25	10.3	242	100.0
Total	105	13.4	44	5.6	352	45.1	9	1.2	157	20.1	114	14.6	781	100.0

Note: CP or AS is comparative politics or area studies; IR or PE is international relations or political economy; NPT or EPT is normative or empirical political theory; PP, PA, or PL is public policy, public administration, or public law; SC is single country.

that, once again, the undifferentiated category of single-country scholarship is in superficially good shape compared with other subdisciplines. In *APSR*, single-country scholarship is the largest category of published research and makes up 464 (46.4%) of 1,084 articles. This compares with 420 (38.7%) for normative or empirical political theory, 114 (10.5%) for comparative politics or area studies, 68 (6.3%) for international relations or political economy, and 15 (1.4%) entries for public policy, administration, or law. In *Political Studies*, the largest category is normative or empirical political theory, with 352 (45.1%) of 781 articles during the period. However, single-country studies are the second biggest category with 271 (34.7%) of the total. This compares with 105 (13.4%) articles in the comparative politics or area studies category, 44 (5.6%) for international relations or political economy, and 9 (1.2%) for public policy, administration, or law.

But if we filter out domestic politics, the position of nondomestic single-country scholarship during the period is far weaker. In *APSR*, only 78 (7.2%) out of 1,084 articles are classed as single-country scholarship with a non-U.S. focus. Similarly, only 114 (14.6%) of the 781 articles in *Political Studies* are classed as non-U.K., single-country scholarship. Moreover, despite modest rises in the 1980s in both journals, the share of nondomestic, single-country scholarship has fallen by almost half in *APSR* (from 7.2% to 4.9%) and a little less in *Political Studies* (16.7% to 10.3%) during the period. The relative changes in percentage share for the two strands of single-country scholarship are isolated and set out in Figure 1.

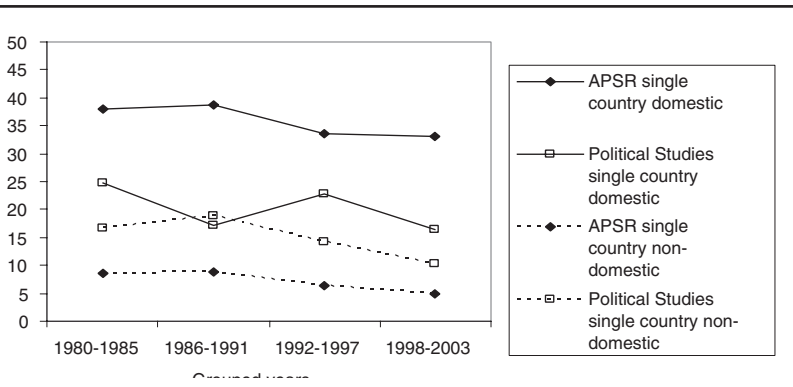
Taken in the round, Tables 1 to 4 and Figure 1 demonstrate the fragile status of single-country scholarship within North American and British political science—especially nondomestic scholarship. Of course, many single-country scholars will take a fatalistic view of this, but others will accept that there is a problem. But how can embracing the comparative method help single-country scholars address it?

How the Single-Country Tradition Should Adapt: Bridging the Divide Between the Comparative and Single-Country Traditions

In the second half of this article I suggest how single-country studies can more often and more effectively bridge the divide between the two traditions.

article develops a formal model and tests it on empirical data, it is classified (comparative politics, international relations, single country, etc.) according to the nature of the data set. If, however, the article builds a formal model to explore its logical assumptions and/or predictions, it is classed as empirical political theory.

Figure 1
Change in Percentage Share of Domestic and Nondomestic
Single-Country Scholarship in *American Political Science Review* and
***Political Studies*, 1980 to 2003 (Grouped Years)**



This strategy is not without its problems as the two approaches share much common ground but are also quite distinct. For many students of comparative politics, the instinct to draw on the widest possible pool of cases and/or to secure the maximum number of observations is at the core of the subdiscipline. As a result, the imperative to compare and make such comparisons explicit is reflected in the comparativist's chosen methodological toolkit. By contrast, the single-country specialist often operates within quite different parameters. There are both rational or instrumental and normative reasons for this.

In terms of the rationale behind single-country research, the single-country scholar is compelled to drill down into the rich context of political phenomena within a given polity to derive explanations for it. So instead of comparison across space, single-country scholars often rely more on implicit processes of comparison across time and are compelled to strike a different balance between depth and breadth, micro- and macro-level explanation, rich description and abstraction, inductive and deductive reasoning, and so on. And in instrumental terms, many single-country scholars will have also invested the sunk costs of not only learning another language but also acculturating themselves into the warp and weft of their specialist country's political culture. These factors are reinforced by the norms that underpin single-country scholarship, where a different "logic of appropriateness" (March

& Olsen, 1984) leads many single-country scholars to draw heavily on the single-country canon within which they operate.⁶

It is thus clear that a methodological and epistemological gap exists between the two approaches. Yet as I now discuss, there are tremendous potential benefits in bridging the gap, based around the idea of achieving the highest possible degrees of (a) rigor, (b) relevance, and (c) resonance.

Rigor

In terms of rigor, I argue here that methodological and analytical rigor will be enhanced if the gap between the single-country and comparative approaches is narrowed. As the subdisciplines of political science become ever more specialized and the opportunity costs of mastering them become higher, so the ability of the various subdisciplines to speak to one another is reduced. But given the strong empirical and methodological overlaps between comparative politics and single-country studies, this process can and should be avoided. There are two reasons for this. The first reason is that the balkanization process described above must inevitably lead to concept stretching and the development of incompatible definitions and uses of the same models. Because of its application in multiple settings, the use of the comparative method can and does expose any logical or empirical weaknesses in a given model and/or concept. This can also be the case in single-country scholarship as well, especially if it is observation and/or case rich (see Eckstein, 1975; G. King, Keohane, & Verba, 1994, p. 52). But all things being equal, scholarship grounded in a single-country perspective can be prone to either (a) develop models that, however formal and rigorous, are not universal but rather inductively grounded in one's domestic political environment and/or (b) lead to the misuse or hybridization of concepts within the canon.⁷ The second reason why divergence between single-country and

6. Reasons for this might include a lack of (a) reflexivity about methods, (b) knowledge of the wider comparative politics literature, or (c) simply being more comfortable drawing on the established literature of their country specialism.

7. Perhaps inevitably, given its international preeminence, U.S. political science is prone to this tendency. For instance, Duncan Black's (1948) median voter model is parsimonious and robust in as far as it goes. However, Anthony Downs' (1957) development of Black's original model in his *Economic Theory of Democracy*, especially the assumptions as to how political parties respond to the need to appeal to the median voter, are based on the implicit normality of the pattern of two-party competition. Downs did acknowledge the existence and divergent dynamics of nonmajoritarian systems, but his core office-seeking assumption that "parties formulate policies in order to win elections, rather than win elections in order to formulate policies" (p. 28) is clearly grounded in the logic of two-party competition. And as Duverger (1951) observed, although two-party competition is not unheard of in more proportional systems, it is far more strongly associated with majoritarian systems such as that in the United States—the domestic

comparative scholarship should be avoided is because it represents a missed opportunity for the comparative politics canon as well. Not only would greater synergies between the two approaches add rigor to the single-country literature but it would also provide a tranche of single-country studies with which to apply and test models and approaches from the comparative politics literature. It might even be used to develop new ones (Eckstein, 1975, pp. 93-123). This argument is returned to in our discussion of the case study method as a means of bridging the gap.

Relevance

The idea of relevance is amorphous and hard to measure. On the one hand, a narrow proxy indicator of relevance is provided by the ISI journal citation index measure of impact, which measures the amount of citations journals—and by definition the scholarship within them—receive in a given year. As already noted when discussing the Hix (2004) list of political science journals, single-country scholarship as a discrete journal category appears to have already lost this battle—with only one single-country journal included in the list. So single-country scholarship must be more relevant to the wider discipline if it is to increase its share of output in omnibus and comparative politics journals.

But to do this, single-country scholarship must do more to address a number of issues. First, it must more critically engage with the idea of cultural exceptionalism that is often implicit in the single-country canon. Here the routine use of comparative data would force single-country scholars to be more alive to the danger of constructing tautological explanations or partial theories based on assumptions of cultural exceptionalism.⁸ Second, it must

context in which Downs' theoretical worldview is inductively grounded. Consider the common usage of the concept of corporatism within the British domestic politics literature. In this variant of domestic single-country scholarship, the term *corporatism* is widely used to describe the (ultimately unsuccessful) attempts to coordinate economic planning and industrial policy in Britain during the 1960s and 1970s (e.g., R. King, 1983). Yet most comparative studies of corporatism in Europe and the "southern cone" of Latin America would argue that the United Kingdom has always lacked the formal and essentially coercive institutional structures that make corporatism sustainable (Lehmbruch & Schmitter, 1982; Schmitter & Lehmbruch, 1979). Thus, the particular use of the concept in the United Kingdom has led to two flaws—both theoretical and empirical—in U.K. politics literature. First, in the broadest terms, the lack of rigor in this regard is essentially misleading to scholars within the wider discipline. Second, it has led much of the U.K. literature to assume that the failure of economic coordination in the United Kingdom in the 1970s was in part a failure of corporatism rather than a failure to practice corporatism.

8. The debate about the "nature of the terrain" and the need to open out to cognate fields is already happening in other fields with a strong specific focus (see Keeler, 2005; see also Rosamond, 2000, and Wiener & Diez, 2004, on the European Union literature).

select classifications that are designed to hold true across as many observations as possible, in the manner that is commonplace within the comparative method.⁹ Third, it must aspire wherever possible to construct research strategies that allow for reliable hypotheses testing.¹⁰ Finally, and moving on from the last point, it must aspire to generate predictions that can be tested in subsequent research. Clearly, it would be unreasonable to suggest that all single-country scholarship can or should fulfill all of these objectives, but in moving toward them, single-country scholarship will make itself more relevant to the mainstream discipline.

Resonance

If political science is to be more than a form of slow journalism, we must aspire to a degree of resonance—in other words a relatively long half-life—in our research to build the canon. Once again, a proxy indicator of resonance would be the ISI index of sustainability, which is based on longitudinal data regarding both total citations and the level of repeat citations over time. In many ways, such a measure is quite authoritative, given that repeat citations over time would indicate the degree of esteem in which the cited research is held by an author's peers. But it does not explain why some scholarship makes what is effectively a permanent contribution to the canon and other contributions appear to be more ephemeral.

Clearly, the degree of rigor with which research is carried out and the perceived relevance of its findings play a major role in determining the degree of

9. There are potential feedback effects from the single-country canon back to the comparative politics literature as well. Katzenstein's (1987) work on the German "semi-sovereign state" is grounded in a broad understanding of the structuring and process of state-society relations, and his notion of "semi-sovereignty" as a description of a distinct set of internal constraints on the steering capacity of the state is applicable in multiple settings.

10. Of course this is not universal practice within single-country research given the reliance of a great deal of the canon on inductive reasoning and thick description. But in the broadest terms, it is of course possible. Let us look at three subfields that are relevant to single-country scholars and at the same time allow hypothesis testing. First, within the study on electoral behavior, the economic voting literature is strongly hypothetico-deductive in nature. It is grounded in complex formal models of rationality (Downs, 1957; Schneider & Frey, 1988; Tufte, 1978) and relies on large *n* research designs and tests hypotheses about the actual act of voting or nonvoting (see Feld & Kirchgässner, 2000; Lewis-Beck & Paldam, 2000). In the related study of party competition and cooperation, the literature on coalition theory and maintenance is dominated by game-theoretical models and abstracted accounts of individual rationality (Müller & Strøm, 2003; see also Axelrod, 1970; Gamson, 1961; Riker, 1962). Finally, although not conforming to a strict reading of the hypothetico-deductive method, the relatively abstract concept of the effect of institutional settings on political opportunity structures (see Kitschelt, 1986; Stepan, 2001; Tarrow, 1994) does allow the formulation of loose hypotheses that can be applied to single-country studies.

resonance achieved. But I would argue that these are necessary rather than sufficient conditions. We can all cite examples of research that has risen above the ephemeral; in my area of research I would cite inter alia Michels' (1915) work on the German SPD, Dahl (1961) on community power in New Haven, Almond and Verba (1963) on political participation, Riker (1964) on federalism, Kirchheimer (1966) on political parties, Putnam (2000) on U.S. civil society, and much of the work cited in this article. None of this work has gone unchallenged in the years since publication, but they all possess that X factor that has ensured their survival in the canon. And I would argue that this X factor lies in the dimension of abstraction that these accounts bring to their subjects. Of course the degree of abstraction used varies, with Dahl's concept of pluralism and the fragmentation of power across policy areas or Putnam's idea of social capital being far less abstract than Riker's expositions on the differences between centralized and decentralized federalism (Michels' iron law of oligarchy or Kirchheimer's "catch-all party" model lie somewhere in between these poles). But the key point here is that this dimension of abstraction allows the antecedent conditions of the knowledge claims made in these works to be more transparent to the reader, the process of research to be more replicable, and the findings of the research to be less vulnerable to being made redundant by subsequent events and/or academic debate. Given the need to create classifications and models that can be used in different institutional settings, the comparative method is predisposed toward some degree of abstraction—and the single-country canon must do the same.¹¹

Building the Bridge: The Argument for the Case Study Design

Of course the aspirations discussed above will not be appropriate to all single-country research, and the single-country researcher may find that a

11. For instance Hine's (1993) *Governing Italy* was published shortly before the collapse of Christian Democratic dominance of the Italian party system in 1994. Nevertheless, Hine's book retains its analytical power because it is grounded in a number of abstractions based around the idea of bargained pluralism. By contrast, Katz and Ignazi's (1996) edited work on the 1994 juncture (*Italian Politics: The Year of the Tycoon*) lacks the level of abstraction found in Hine's work and opts for a (fascinating) thick description of a bounded and atypical year in post-war Italian politics. Neither Katz nor Ignazi are strangers to the use of abstract models, as Katz and Mair's (1995) cartel party model attests, and I assume that the boundedness and atypicality of the 1994 experience in Italy spurred the editors to eschew abstraction and concentrate on the narrative of the events. But if one imagines that the tables had been turned and the Katz and Ignazi study had taken place before 1994, such a narrative would have retained some fascination as a time capsule of the previous era but would have less resonance within the wider canon than that achieved by Hine's more abstracted work.

wholesale adoption of the comparative method is not well suited to, or even feasible for, her or his research. Thus she or he must ask herself or himself: What modes of comparison are best suited? This question relates to research design, methods of data collection and analysis, and epistemology.

Starting with research design, Lijphart (1971) identified five different techniques of comparison: (a) global statistical analysis, (b) case studies, (c) focused comparisons, (d) diachronic studies, and (e) pooled comparative research. But in practice, a great deal of comparative research does not fall neatly into Lijphart's taxonomy; rather, it combines methods. There are two reasons for this. First, restricting one's research to one particular method may not address all aspects of the research question, and, second, the use of multiple methods enhances the validity of research because each method serves as a check on the other (Read & Marsh, 2002, p. 237; see also Hopkin, 2002). For these reasons, many comparative research projects deliberately combine different types of data or even distinct methods to achieve triangulation (Denzin, 1970). Given the logic of inquiry associated with most single-country studies, I would argue that in most instances the appropriate mode of triangulation for single-country scholars is through the design option of the case study.

Sartori (1994, p. 23) draws a distinction between case studies as a method *per se* and as a method with some merit within the context of a wider comparative analysis. By this he means that case studies can only be regarded as a good method of comparison if a well-defined and operational theoretical framework informs them. Sartori's comments reflect what has recently been described as the "vexed position" that case studies occupy within the discipline (Gerring, 2004, p. 341), and there is a significant level of disagreement within the literature about (a) the nature of case studies and (b) the extent of their usefulness.

Starting with the nature of case studies, students of comparative politics will be aware that there are many divergent sets of case study ideal types to be found within the literature. For instance, Lijphart (1971, pp. 691-693) divides case studies up into six ideal types: (a) atheoretical case studies, (b) interpretative case studies using existing theory, (c) hypothesis-generating case studies, (d) case studies used to interrogate or test a theory, (e) studies used to confirm a theory, and (f) so-called deviant studies. By contrast, Van Evera (1997, p. 55) produces a five category schema made up of (a) theory-testing case studies, (b) theory-creating case studies, (c) case studies used to identify antecedent conditions, (d) cases used to test the importance of antecedent conditions, and (e) those that explain cases of intrinsic importance. And in perhaps the seminal North American work on the case study method, Eckstein (1975, p. 94) posits five categories: (a) configurative-idiographic,

(b) disciplined-configurative, (c) heuristic case studies, (d) case studies as plausibility probes, and (e) crucial case studies. I will return to Eckstein's work on case studies in a moment.

In terms of the usefulness of case studies, most constructive criticism of the case study method falls between two poles. At one pole, we find scholars who are not critical of the case study method per se but are skeptical about the extent to which the various types of case study methods are genuinely comparative. For instance, Mackie and Marsh (1995) have critiqued Lijphart's (1971) typology. Disregarding the first category of athereotical case study, they argue that the second category of case study is not strictly comparative anyway, and the other four ideal types are not necessarily comparative either; they can only be considered comparative if "they use and assess the utility of concepts developed elsewhere . . . test some general theory or hypothesis, or generate concepts to be of use elsewhere" (p. 177). At the other pole, we find scholars who question whether case study research can ever be of more than limited use because of what they would regard as the limitations of the approach. Perhaps the most substantial example of this can be found in the earlier writing of Donald Campbell (Campbell & Stanley, 1963; see also Campbell, 1969a). Campbell's emphasis on experimental or quasiexperimental methods in his early writings led him to condemn the typical one-shot case study as unreplicable, of dubious internal or external validity, and, generally speaking, unscientific (Campbell & Stanley, 1963). At the same time, however, Campbell's thoughtful approach to the scientific method meant that he did not consider the hypothetico-deductive approach to be the last word in its application in the social sciences, not least because of the hazards of measurement and category error (Campbell, 1969a). Because of this, Campbell moved away from the orthodox hypothetico-deductive notion of pursuing a single hypothesis for a given phenomena and began to advocate the examination of multiple rival explanations and the use of multiple methods to do so.¹² But in advocating this, Campbell also came to realize that he had opened the door to an acceptance of the case study as a means to explore and eliminate such hypotheses. As a result, in his *Comparative Political Studies* article "'Degrees of Freedom' and the Case Study" (Campbell, 1975), he accepted that "an extreme oscillation away from my earlier dogmatic disparagement of case studies" (p. 191) had taken place.

12. Campbell developed this argument implicitly in his 1950s work on "multitrait-multimethod matrices" (Campbell & Fiske, 1959) and made it explicit in the late 1960s when he stated that it was impossible to prove theories but only to probe them by eliminating rival hypotheses (Campbell, 1969b).

Ultimately, Campbell recognized the usefulness of what Eckstein (1975) called the “plausibility probe” (p. 94) case. But given Campbell’s reputation for methodological rigor, his acceptance of the case study method also raised the bar in terms of the standards of research design required and the payoffs that this might generate. In this he echoes Eckstein, who identifies six different positions on the suitability of case studies for theory building “both in themselves and relative to comparative politics” (p. 92). Of these options, one to four are reasonably modest assessments of the value of the case study method, but options five and six are far more ambitious. Let us examine options five and six in turn.

Eckstein’s (1975) option five holds that case studies and comparative studies are of equal value and that both can be used to test and validate theories. Thus, for Eckstein, “The choice between [case and comparative studies] may then be arbitrary, or may be tailored to nonarbitrary considerations as the nature of theories, accessibility of evidence, skills of the researcher, or availability of research resources” (p. 93). This, in essence, is the position I argue in this article and is held by Eckstein to “state the most logically defensible position” (p. 95) among the options he lists. Option six, however, is the most ambitious for the case study method and holds that “properly carried out, [case studies are] a better bet than comparative studies [and that] it might even be extended to hold that comparative studies are most useful as preliminary inconclusive aids to conclusive case studies” (p. 93). I would argue that it is somewhere between options five and six that Campbell was moving toward his notion of the “nonequivalent, dependent variables” design (Cooke & Campbell, 1979, p. 118), which is considered analogous to the case study (see Yin, 2000, p. 241).

The extent to which the case study design is effective in probing single or rival hypotheses is dependent on the number and/or range of observations we can generate (Eckstein, 1975; G. King et al., 1994). For many of us working within the single-country canon, this would entail a considerably more careful and reflexive use of existing methods. As Campbell (1975) observed, in orthodox anthropological case studies, “innumerable alternative solutions” (p. 182) to explain complex social phenomena were considered and rejected by researchers as a matter of course. This sifting of competing explanations often appears to be self-explanatory to the single-country specialist—to the extent that we effectively cease to acknowledge the process. But if we are to undertake case study research that comes close to Eckstein’s options five and six, this process must become more transparent and replicable—a task that is fairly straightforward using large n data but is also practicable using small n and/or qualitative data through techniques such as process tracing

and pattern matching (see Gerring, 2004, p. 349; see also Pierson, 2004, pp. 79-102).

The task of probing rival explanations in particular also raises issues of the interplay between data and theory (see George & Bennett, 2005). To examine this, let us consider the use of large n data. In handling such data, it is important to avoid the problem of individualist and/or ecological fallacies. To resolve this hazard, reflexively comparative single-country case studies must adhere strictly to the “principle of direct measurement” (Scheuch, 1966) in which conclusions about individual-level phenomena (e.g., partisan orientation) are only drawn from individual-level data, such as sample surveys and censuses, and those relating to ecological-level phenomena (e.g., political culture or the degree to which a state is authoritarian) are only drawn from ecological-level data, such as aggregate data from electoral districts, sub-national tiers of government, and so on. This ties into issues of theory because the choice of micro-political analysis, using individual-level data, and macro-political analysis, using more ecological data, is not just a technical one—it also goes to the heart of the now well-documented but ongoing “structure-agency” debate (Hay, 2002). Thus, we are brought seamlessly through the dimensions of research design and data collection or analysis to that of epistemological positioning. For although the principle of direct measurement is primarily an issue of method, what appears to be essentially a technical matter of sound empirical research also has epistemological consequences. Thus, studies with a micro-level focus are implicitly making assumptions about the importance of agency in explaining political phenomena, whereas those using predominantly macro-level data are often focused on the role of structure, broadly defined. As a result, if we have ambitions for the inferential power of the case study in the manner discussed above, our epistemological position must be made explicit (see Marsh & Furlong, 2002).

Finally, none of this is reinventing the wheel, and there is a great deal of first-class case study research that we can already use as templates.¹³ Nor is this form of research just a matter for the lone researcher. For if the strength of the individual study is depth at the expense of breadth, a level of additional breadth can also be achieved through the use of focused comparisons—using

13. For instance, Riker’s (1982) work on heresthetics—although focused primarily on a single explanatory schema—does conform to the other criteria discussed in this section and has as a result been used as a prescriptive template for research in other settings (McLean, 2001; Taylor, 2005), whereas Allison’s (1999; see also Gerring, 2004, p. 345) analysis of competing explanations for the resolution of the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis can also be regarded as an example of good practice and comes close to Campbell’s (1969a, 1969b, 1975; Campbell & Fiske, 1959; Campbell & Stanley, 1963) aspirations for the case study as the exploration of rival hypotheses.

teams of country specialists. This somewhat labor-intensive approach has been described elsewhere as the “multi-researcher multi-case multi-site” (MRMCMS) method of analysis (see <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/soccul/1-3-2-6.html>). The aim of the MRMCMS design is to harness teams of researchers from different intellectual contexts to create a better trade off between breadth and depth where this is appropriate and desirable. Such an approach is not without its difficulties but if—and it remains a big if—a sufficient level of rigor is achieved, then the potential payoffs associated with such team efforts could be enormous and may provide a way forward.¹⁴

Conclusion

This article began by asking, “What is the way forward for single-country scholarship?” Using cross-sectional and longitudinal data, the article demonstrates the relative isolation of the single-country canon within the wider discipline of political science and argues that the way forward is for it to embrace the comparative method.

The article tries to avoid an overly prescriptive approach to the problem identified in the first half of the article. Indeed, it is made clear that in the discipline of political science, there is room for a diversity of approaches. But it is hoped that other single-country scholars will feel that it is important to respond to what looks like a *prima facie* case of misfit between their subdiscipline and the preferences of the wider discipline. And, of course, the fact that fine single-country scholarship continues to be published in omnibus and comparative politics journals indicates that many scholars have already done this.

The second half of this article is dedicated to a discussion of the shape such a response might take. Yet paradoxically it is in the debate about how single-country scholars might more reflexively incorporate the comparative method that some of the best reasons why this might be the case are put forward. Thus, without reiterating the detail of these arguments, it is clear that the entire single-country canon would benefit from the empirical and theoretical disciplines imposed by the comparative method. And at the same time, the careful use of the case study design would not only serve to make

14. If it is to be used, the organization of the “multi-researcher multi-case multi-site” approach involves more care than the kind of ad hoc assembly of academic teams associated with edited volumes in the area studies tradition. In particular, the organizers of such an approach must confront the challenges of (a) coordination and (b) synthesis, and this will involve the kind of micromanagement that many political scientists (unlike their lab-based counterparts elsewhere) will find uncomfortable and intrusive.

the single-country canon more relevant, it would also provide comparative politics scholars with insights and thick description that the comparative lens would otherwise not provide. Thus, as Gerring (2004) observes, “A field where cross-unit studies are hegemonic may be desperately in need of in-depth studies focused on single units” (p. 353). Clearly the opportunity costs of moving toward the kind of rigorous case study designs required to achieve these aspirations are high, but so are the potential payoffs. To conclude, in terms of rigor, relevance, and resonance within the wider political science canon, it is apparent to this single-country scholar at least that we would benefit profoundly if we really were “all comparativists now.”

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