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‘We are all comparativists now’. Why and how single-country scholarship must adapt and incorporate the comparative politics approach<sup>1</sup>.

**Keywords:** *Single-country scholarship, comparative analysis, case study, methodology, epistemology*

**Abstract:** This article asks ‘what is the way forward for single-country scholarship?’ and 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 non-domestic 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.

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## Why Single Country Scholarship Must Adapt

### **On the surface the single-country canon still thrives**

- USA: APSA hosts *inter alia* a British Politics and German Politics conference group and there is also a freestanding inter-disciplinary German Studies Association
- UK: The PSA hosts amongst others French, German, and Scandinavian Politics specialist groups, and the UK is also the base for the Association for the Study of German Politics

### **This paper argues that the underlying position of single-country scholarship within political science is less secure**

- University employers
- Academic publishers
- Journal editors (and by implication our peers)

## University employers

(Table 1 about here)

**115 out of 316 entries (36.4 per cent) available to single-country scholars, but...**

- American government/politics category makes up 59 entries (18.7 per cent) is the second strongest single sub-discipline
- Next strongest category of comparative politics (53 or 16.8 per cent of total entries), we find that only 10 (3.2. per cent of total entries) are *demonstrably* open to single-country scholars
- Public Policy: 26 single-country entries, of which 14 require a US focus, 10 are open, and only 2 require a single-country focus other than the US (Universities of Ottawa and Toronto: Canadian focus)
- Public Admin: Half of entries are open to single-country scholars but of these four are for US specialists only
- Public Law: most of the entries are open to single-country scholars but only two do not specify US specialists

## Academic Publishers

(Table 2 about here)

**The undifferentiated category of single-country scholarship (SC) makes up the largest single category of total output (420 out of 1495, or 28.1 per cent), but...**

- US/UK scholarship makes up 269 or 18 per cent
- The residual ('other') is just 151 or 10.1 per cent. This compares with....
- Comparative politics: 380 entries or 25.4 per cent
- International relations and political economy: 405 or 27.1 per cent
- Normative and empirical political theory: 227 or 15.2 per cent
- Public policy/public administration/public law: 63 or 4.2 per cent

Note: The one publisher's catalogue in which the category of single-country ('other') makes up a greater proportion of total output than that of single-country ('US/UK') is that of Ashgate

## Journal Editors

(Table 3 about here)

### **Hix's (2004) list of the 'main' political science journals**

- Only one of the original sixty-three entries represents a single country specialism (*American Politics Quarterly*, at number forty)
- Table 3. Presents Hix's top 40 journals

### **Omnibus journals: APSR and Political Studies 1980-2003**

- Stronger temporal claim about increased isolation of single-country scholarship

(Table 4 and Figure 1 about here)

### **APSR**

- Undifferentiated category of single-country scholarship largest category: 464 (46.4 per cent) of 1084 articles
- 420 (38.7 per cent) for normative/empirical political theory
- 114 (10.5 per cent) for comparative politics/area studies
- 68 (6.3 per cent) for international relations/political economy

- 15 (1.4 per cent) entries for public policy/admin/law

### **Political Studies**

- Undifferentiated category of single-country studies is second largest category: 271 (34.7 per cent) of 781 articles
- Normative/empirical political theory: 352 (45.1 per cent)
- Comparative politics/area studies: 105 (13.4 per cent)
- International relations/political economy: 44 (5.6 per cent)
- Public policy/admin/law: 9 (1.2. per cent)

But.....

**If we filter out domestic politics, the position of non-domestic single-country scholarship over the period is far weaker**

- In the APSR only 78 (7.2 per cent) out of 1084 articles is classed as single-country scholarship with a non-US focus
- In Political Studies only 114 (14.6 per cent) of the 781 articles are classed as non-UK single-country scholarship
- Despite modest rises in the 1980s in both journals, the share of non-domestic single country scholarship has fallen by almost half in the APSR (from 7.2 to 4.9 per cent) and a little less in Political Studies (16.7 to 10.3 per cent)

## How the single-country tradition must adapt

### **Comparative politics**

- Draws upon the widest possible pool of cases and/or secures the maximum number of observations across space

### **Single-country scholarship**

- 'Drills down' into the rich context of political phenomena
- More comparison across time
- Different balance between depth and breadth, micro-and macro-level explanation, rich description and abstraction, inductive and deductive reasoning, etc
- Sunk costs of learning another language/acculturation into the warp and weft of specialist country's political culture
- 'Logic of appropriateness' (March and Olsen, 1989) leads many single-country scholars to draw heavily on the single-country canon within which they operate

### **But huge potential benefits of bridging the gap**

- Rigour
- Relevance

- Resonance

## **Rigour**

- As the sub-disciplines of political science become ever more specialized the ability of the various sub-disciplines to speak to one another is reduced
- This balkanization process described leads to concept stretching and the development of incompatible definitions and uses of the same models
- Single-country scholarship prone to (i) develop models that, however formal and rigorous, are not universal but rather inductively grounded in one's domestic political environment; and/or (ii) lead to the misuse or hybridization of concepts within the canon
- Bucking this trend will add rigor to the single-country literature and also provide a tranche of single country studies with which to apply and test models and approaches from the comparative politics literature

## **Relevance**

- Narrow proxy indicator of relevance: ISI journal citation index measure of 'impact': single-country scholarship does badly
- Must critically engage with the implicit idea of cultural exceptionalism through the *routine* use of comparative data
- Be more alive to the danger of constructing tautological explanations or partial theories based on assumptions of cultural exceptionalism



- Select classifications that are designed to hold true across as many observations as possible
- *Wherever possible* construct research strategies that allow for reliable hypotheses testing and generation of predictions

## **Resonance**

- Political science should be more than ‘slow journalism’ and have a relatively long half-life in order to build the canon
- Narrow proxy indicator of resonance: ISI index of ‘sustainability’: total citations and the level of repeat citations over time indicates degree of esteem in which the cited research is held by an author’s peers
- Factor X in this is a degree of *abstraction* (Michels (1915); Dahl (1961) Almond and Verba (1963); Riker (1964); Kirchheimer (1966); Putnam (2000)) as appropriate to research
- Abstraction especially important if one is using case study design

**Vexed position of the case study (Gerring, 2004: 341)**

- Not always a comparative method: Lijphart's (1971) inclusion of case studies in his five techniques of comparison is contested (Sartori, 1994: 23; Read and Marsh, 2002: 237; see also Hopkin, 2002)
- Disagreement within the literature about (i) the nature of case studies and (ii) the extent of their usefulness

**The nature of case studies**

- Lijphart's (1971) 6 ideal types: (i) atheoretical; (ii) interpretative using existing theory; (iii) hypothesis-generating; (iv) theory testing/interrogation; (v) theory confirming; (vi) 'deviant'
- Van Evera's (1997) 5 categories: (i) theory testing; (ii) theory creating; (iii) identifying antecedent conditions; (iv) testing importance of antecedent conditions; (v) explaining cases of intrinsic importance
- Eckstein's (1975) 5 categories: (i) configurative-idiographic; (ii) disciplined-configurative; (iii) heuristic-case studies; (iv) plausibility probes; (v) crucial-case studies

**The usefulness of case studies**

- Weak criticism: e.g. Mackie and Marsh, 1995: 177
- Strong criticism: Campbell and Stanley, 1963; see also Campbell, 1969a

**Campbell's eventual reconciliation with case study method**

- Emphasis upon experimental or quasi-experimental methods

- ‘One-shot’ case study: replicability, validity (Campbell and Stanley, 1963)
- But hypothetico-deductive approach not the last word in social sciences: measurement and category error (Campbell, 1969a)
- Advocated ‘multitrait-multimethod matrices’: examination of multiple ‘rival’ explanations and the use of multiple methods in order to do so
- Thus: ‘an extreme oscillation away from my earlier dogmatic disparagement of case studies’ took place (Campbell, 1975: 191)

**But this also raises the bar for the standards required from case study research**

- ‘Plausibility probes’ (Eckstein, 1975: 94); ‘non-equivalent, dependent variables’ design (Cook and Campbell, 1979: 118, see Yin, 2000: 241)
- Increase number and/or range of observations we can generate (Eckstein, 1975; King, Keohane and Verba, 1994)
- Make the sifting of competing explanations more transparent and replicable
- Be reflexive about interplay between data and theory: ‘principle of direct measurement’ (Scheuch, 1969); structure and agency (see Marsh and Furlong, 2002)
- Micro-manage teams of country specialists: ‘multi-researcher multi-case multi-site’ (MRMCMS) method of analysis (see <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/soccul/1-3-2-6.html>)

**Table 1. Breakdown and ranking of US university vacancies advertised by the American Political Science Association by category/sub-discipline (as of 1 October 2004)**

<i>Category</i>	Total	%	<i>Single- country scholar?</i>	%	<i>European single- country?</i>	%
International Relations	61	19.3	0	0	0	0
American Government/Politics	59	18.7	59	18.7	0	0
Comparative Politics	53	16.8	10	3.2	2	0.6
Administrative/Non- academic/Other	41	13.0	0	0	0	0
Public Policy	33	10.4	26	8.2.	10	3.2.
Political Theory	23	7.3	0	0	0	0
Public Administration	18	5.7	9	2.8	5	1.6
Methodology	15	4.7	0	0	0	0
Public Law	13	4.1.	11	3.5	2	0.6
<i>Total</i>	<i>316</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>115</i>	<i>36.4</i>	<i>19</i>	<i>6.0</i>

Source: [www.apsanet.org/ejobs/eseach-results.cfm](http://www.apsanet.org/ejobs/eseach-results.cfm)

**Table 2. Five Academic Publishers' 2004 catalogues by sub-discipline**

Publisher (alphabetical order)	Sub-discipline: sub-totals (percentages)							Total
	CP/AS	IR/PE	PP/PA/P L	N/E/PT	SC	Of which US/UK	Other	
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)	00 (00)	44 (19.9)	63 (28.5)	38 (17.2)	25 (11.3)	221
Manchester University Press	92 (44.0)	25 (12.0)	00 (00)	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
<b>Total</b>	<b>380 (25.4)</b>	<b>405 (27.1)</b>	<b>63 (4.2)</b>	<b>227 (15.2)</b>	<b>420 (28.1)</b>	<b>269 (18.0)</b>	<b>151 (10.1)</b>	<b>1495 (100)</b>

Sources: Blackwell, Cambridge University Press, Manchester University Press, Oxford University Press, Routledge 2004 Politics/International Relations catalogues.

Key: CP/AS: Comparative Politics and Area Studies; IR/PE: International Relations and Political Economy; PP/PA/PL: Public Policy, Public Administration, Public Law; N/E PT: Normative and Empirical Political Theory; SC: Single-country

**Table 3. Disciplinary profile of most cited political science journals**

Journal	Omnibus	Specialist (Ranked by sub-discipline)				
		CP/AS*	IR/PE	PP/ PA/PL	N/E PT	SC
1. American Political Science Review	X					
2. American Journal of Political Science	X					
3. International Organization			X			
4. Foreign Affairs			X			
5. Journal of Politics	X					
6. International Security			X			
7. Journal of Conflict Resolution			X			
8. World Politics			X			
9. Journal of European Public Policy		X	X	X		
10. International Studies Quarterly			X			
11. Public Choice					X	
12. Journal of Common Market Studies		X	X	X		
13. British Journal of Political Science	X					
14. Journal of Peace Research			X			
15. Journal of Law, Economics and Organization				X		
16. Comparative Political Studies		X				
17. Journal of Democracy		X				
18. Europe-Asia Studies		X				
19. European Union Politics		X				
20. Political Research Quarterly	X					
21. West European Politics		X				
22. Political Studies	X					
23. PS: Political Science and Politics	X					
24. European Journal of Political Research	X					
25. Public Administration				X		
26. Party Politics		X				
27. European Journal of International Relations			X			
28. Comparative Politics		X				
29. Electoral Studies		X				
30. Post-Soviet Affairs		X				
31. Review of International Studies			X			
32. Security Studies			X			
33. Politics and Society	X					
34. Governance				X		
35. Legislative Studies Quarterly				X		
36. Political Communication		X				
37. Political Behavior		X				
38. International Interactions			X			
39. Journal of Theoretical Politics				X		
40. American Politics Quarterly						X

Source: adapted from Hix, 2004: 298.

Key: CP/AS: Comparative Politics and Area Studies; IR/PE: International Relations and Political Economy; PP/PA/PL: Public Policy, Public Administration, Public Law; N/E PT: Normative and Empirical Political Theory; SC: Single-country

**Table 4. Output of American Political Science Review and Political Studies 1980-2003, by sub-discipline: cross-tabulation by grouped years**

<i>American Political Science Review</i>		Sub-Discipline						Total	
		CP/AS	IR/PE	N/EPT	PP/PA/PL	SC domestic	SC non-domestic		
Years	1980-1985	Count	22	5	116	3	103	23	272
		%	8.1%	1.8%	42.6%	1.1%	37.9%	8.5%	100.0%
	1986-1991	Count	23	16	105	4	109	25	282
		%	8.2%	5.7%	37.2%	1.4%	38.7%	8.9%	100.0%
	1992-1997	Count	33	28	105	4	95	18	283
		%	11.7%	9.9%	37.1%	1.4%	33.6%	6.4%	100.0%
	1998-2003	Count	36	19	94	4	82	12	247
		%	14.6%	7.7%	38.1%	1.6%	33.2%	4.9%	100.0%
<b>Total</b>		<u>n</u>	<u>114</u>	<u>68</u>	<u>420</u>	<u>15</u>	<u>389</u>	<u>78</u>	<u>1084</u>
		<u>%</u>	<u>10.5%</u>	<u>6.3%</u>	<u>38.7%</u>	<u>1.4%</u>	<u>35.9%</u>	<u>7.2%</u>	<u>100.0%</u>
<i>Political Studies</i>									
Years	1980-1985	Count	15	3	90	1	46	31	186
		%	8.1%	1.6%	48.4%	.5%	24.7%	16.7%	100.0%
	1986-1991	Count	14	8	86	0	29	32	169
		%	8.3%	4.7%	50.9%	.0%	17.2%	18.9%	100.0%
	1992-1997	Count	24	15	75	2	42	26	184
		%	13.0%	8.2%	40.8%	1.1%	22.8%	14.1%	100.0%
	1997-2003	Count	52	18	101	6	40	25	242
		%	21.5%	7.4%	41.7%	2.5%	16.5%	10.3%	100.0%
<b>Total</b>		<u>n</u>	<u>105</u>	<u>44</u>	<u>352</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>157</u>	<u>114</u>	<u>781</u>
		<u>%</u>	<u>13.4%</u>	<u>5.6%</u>	<u>45.1%</u>	<u>1.2%</u>	<u>20.1%</u>	<u>14.6%</u>	<u>100.0%</u>

Sources: American Political Science Review, Vols. 74-97; Political Studies, Vols. 28-51.

Figure 1. Change in Percentage Share of Domestic and Non-Domestic Single-Country Scholarship in APSR and Political Studies, 1980-2003 (Grouped Years)

