

Themes (Part II): Regimes, Institutions, Parties and Elections

Regimes, Institutions, and Political Behavior

Countries (Part III): Brazil, Bolivia, Mexico

Brazil, Argentina, and Uruguay

Section 1

Methods: Scholars of comparative politics frequently debate the tradeoffs between internal and external validity. What are the key issues at stake in this debate? How should comparativists manage these tradeoffs to produce the highest-quality scholarship? In your answer, discuss works in the methods literature as well as at least two empirical works that you consider to be good examples of how to manage these tradeoffs effectively.

Canon

Half of the works on our Canon reading list are at least thirty years old. Pick any three of these older works that you consider worthy of staying on the list and explain why they remain relevant for understanding some of the questions or issues that the subfield of comparative politics is wrestling with today. If you do not believe that any three of these works are still relevant, explain in what ways the world, the discipline, or the subfield has changed so fundamentally that these older works are no longer very useful.

Section 2

Political Behavior

During the last two decades, a debate emerged amongst scholars of comparative political behavior regarding citizen rationality. “Accountability Realists” argue that citizens lack the requisite information and competence to use the ballot in a manner that engenders good political representation. On the other extreme, other scholars maintain that voters are rational and capable of holding politicians accountable for their actions in office. While this debate has largely focused on electoral behavior, we can easily extend it to a broader set of political behaviors that are constitutive of citizenship, such as collective action or the formation of political preferences.

What is your position on the debate about citizens rationality? To answer this question:

- 1) Drawing on canonical contributions to the debate on citizen rationality, (i) describe each view’s microfoundations and (ii) briefly summarize the supportive evidence adduced by its proponents.

- 2) Take a position and offer a parsimonious theoretical argument to justify it. You can adopt an intermediate position if it is cogently justified.
- 3) Rely on at least two scholarly works on research on political behavior to present evidence bolstering your case.

Regimes or institutions

To what extent can political institutions help explain democratic stability, and how can they help us account for contemporary episodes of democratic backsliding? Provide a definition of institutions (and institutional explanations), discuss institutional explanations of democratic “breakdown” and “backsliding,” and offer your own assessment of this theoretical approach.

Section 3

Latin America

During the third wave of democratization, most Latin American countries either began as democracies (Costa Rica, Venezuela, and maybe Colombia) or had transitions to democracy. But few countries (Chile, Costa Rica, Uruguay, and perhaps Brazil according to V-Dem) developed durable, high-quality democracies. What theoretical approaches best explain why some countries succeeded at this objective while most did not? What theoretical approaches are not useful for explaining this divergence in outcomes?

Your answer should discuss at least three countries.