

Sociology 837: Seminar in Public Opinion and Political Sociology

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Course description

This seminar is devoted to research on public opinion in post-communist societies, with emphasis on mass-level support for a societal change brought by both democratization and marketization processes. The course focuses on analyzing panel data obtained in Poland, called POLPAN. In this study, a national sample of men and women (N=1,700) was interviewed in 1988, 1993, 1998, and 2003. The questionnaire contains items pertaining to political attitudes such as normative support for democracy, evaluation of socioeconomic changes during the post-communist transformation, egalitarianism, and beliefs about the role of the state in forming and executing welfare policies. It also contains a broad range of socio-demographic and social-stratification variables.

Students are expected to formulate empirically testable hypotheses and examine the POLPAN to demonstrate the extent to which the data are in agreement with their hypotheses. It is expected that the literature review of a relevant topic, the derivation of the hypotheses, and the description of data analyses will form the term paper. This paper, at various stages, will be subject to class discussion, critical reading of peers, and the instructor's periodical evaluation.

Some analyses performed by students will involve advanced statistical methods such as multinomial logistic regression (MLR), hierarchical linear modeling (HLM), and structural equation modeling (SEM), including both confirmatory factor analysis and causal analysis of latent variables (LISREL). All statistical methods used during the course will be explained by the instructor, most advanced students, or invited guests.

Course objectives

Students will be encouraged to pursue their own interests in research on public opinion in a post-communist society. They will have an opportunity to advance their interest in substantive issues in public opinion research. Students will select a portion of their assigned readings, explore the relevant literature in sociology and political science, and perform empirical analyses of survey data.

The course objective is to produce good-quality research in the form of publishable articles. Some students' papers will be included in a volume edited by the instructor. This volume is a sequel to *Social Patterns of Being Political*, published by IFiS Publishers, an outlet of the Polish Academy of Sciences. For those papers needing further exploration, the instructor will continue to encourage and support the students' efforts to publish their papers in other outlets such as *Communist and Post Communist Studies*, *International Journal of Sociology*, or *East European Politics and Societies*.

Readings

A. Selected chapters from the following books:

- Kazimierz M. Slomczynski, ed. 2000. *Social Patterns of Being Political: The Initial Phase of the Post-Communist Transition in Poland*. Warsaw: IFiS Publishers.
- Kazimierz M. Slomczynski, ed. 2002. *Social Structure: Changes and Linkages*. Warsaw: IFiS Publishers.
- Richard Rose, William Mishler, and Christian Haerpfer. 1998. *Democracy and Its Alternatives: Understanding Post-Communist Societies*. Baltimore, MD.: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- James R. Kluegel, David S. Mason, and Bernd Wegener. 1995. *Social Justice and Political Change: Public Opinion in Capitalist and Post-Communist States*. New York: De Gruyter.
- Christopher G. A. Bryant and Edmund Mokrzycki, eds. 1994. *The New Great Transformation? Change and Continuity in East-Central Europe*. London: Routledge.

B. Selected articles from an extended bibliography on East-Central Europe, Poland in particular.

Requirements

* Class participation. Students are expected to be prepared to discuss all of the assigned readings and all individual data analysis on the due date.

* Reviews. Students will be asked to write two peer-review evaluations of papers prepared by other participants in the class.

* Term paper (from 25 to 35 pages of text plus references and tables) on the topic approved by the instructor.

Grades

Class participation 10%, reviews (20%), and term paper 70%.

Important dates

- (.) - Introductory class: the structure of the POLPAN study.
- (.) - Individual meetings with instructor
- (.) - Literature review due
- (.) - Main data analyses
- (.) - First draft of the term paper due
- (.) - Distribution of revised term papers
- (.) - Peer-review evaluations due
- (.) - Final draft of the term-paper due