

# Comparative Politics and the New Area Studies\*

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## Abstract

We revisit the sharp divide that emerged in the 1990s between area studies advocates and methodologically oriented political scientists. We argue that tensions between political science and area studies are neither intrinsic nor static, but instead evolve in tandem with theoretical and methodological trends, as well as with broader political and technological developments. Drawing on an original survey of American Political Science Association members and analysis of roughly 4,500 articles in leading journals, we identify four shifts in the discipline: from a theoretical to an empirical orientation; from cross-national datasets to country- and region- specific studies; from macro- to micro-level analyses; and from descriptive to causal inference. We also document evolving patterns in language training, fieldwork, methods use, and data collection. Our findings suggest political science and area studies are increasingly compatible and well-positioned for reconciliation, but that the state of area studies is fragile and the subfield of comparative politics must support it.

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# 1 Introduction

The relationship between comparative politics and area studies is long and contentious (Verba 1967; Rustow 1968; Lijphart 1971; Sigelman and Gadbois 1983; Kohli et al. 1995; Bates 1997; Szanton 2004b; Hanson 2009). Yet a sense that area studies and the social sciences are inherently in tension became particularly pronounced in the 1990s. This was an era in which rational choice theory was ascendant and cross-national regression analyses were the methodological frontier. It was also a time of vituperative exchanges on this topic, with the prominent scholar Robert Bates (1996, p. 1) describing area studies specialists as a “center of resistance to new trends in the discipline” who “tend to lag behind others in terms of their knowledge of statistics, their commitment to theory, and their familiarity with mathematical approaches to the study of politics.” By the 2000s, proclamations of the decline or even “death” of area studies expertise had become common (e.g., Yalowitz and Rojanksy 2014), as had concerns about the devaluation of regionally specific substantive political knowledge relative to social scientific theory and method (Bershidsky 2017; Demiriian 2015; Stent 2014).

These perceptions of area studies’ decline are, however, based on an outdated view of the discipline of political science. In this article, we show that comparative politics is more closely aligned with area studies than it has been for decades. Comparative research in contemporary political science is highly compatible with the area studies model, and comparativists of all generations express strong support for area studies. At the same time, political scientists today are less engaged with area studies communities and institutions than in the past, and the ingredients of good area studies—language study, extensive fieldwork, and interdisciplinary collaboration—are indeed declining. The extent to which these trends threaten to undermine area studies remains poorly understood, as they at least partly reflect the globalization of higher education, emergence of new technologies,

and the transformation of data in a digitized world.

Our argument draws on an original survey of American Political Science Association (APSA) members and an original analysis of approximately 4,500 hand-coded comparative politics articles in six top political science journals. We use these data to document several key developments that have transformed the subfield of comparative politics over the past three decades. These include: (1) shifts away from high-level theorizing and toward empirical research, especially research that relies on original data collection; (2) away from large-N cross-national datasets toward research concentrated on specific regions, or often on a single country; (3) away from a focus on macro-level units of analysis (e.g., nation states) toward micro-level units of analysis (e.g., individuals, public officials, or firms); and (4) away from descriptive correlations toward causal inference. We also show that an overwhelming majority of comparativists perceive area studies knowledge to be valuable and see the contemporary methodological frontiers of political science and area studies as compatible.

Based on these findings, we argue that the tension between political science and area studies is neither intrinsic nor static. Rather, it waxes and wanes alongside the discipline's theoretical and methodological proclivities and broader political and technological trends. The discipline's present-day emphasis on empirically oriented, micro-level, causally focused research is not merely compatible with deep regional expertise, but in fact requires it in order to produce high-quality scholarship. Current trends in the discipline are an opportune moment to strengthen area studies and to celebrate its value—both in partnership with the discipline and for the inherent value of area-specific research.

Yet compared to the ambitious vision of area studies' founders in the post-WWII period (Lust 2024), the new area studies in political science falls short. Our data reveal several concerning trends, including declines in graduate student language training, time spent conducting dissertation fieldwork, and participation in area studies associations

and institutions. These trends must be understood in the context of a globalized world connected by technologies unimaginable to earlier generations of scholars, as well as the internationalization of comparative politics as a subfield. Nevertheless, preserving an area studies-comparative politics synthesis based on regional knowledge, in-person fieldwork, and interdisciplinarity will require efforts to address these problematic trends.

Our argument unfolds as follows. We first review the evolution of area studies, political science, and their interactions, examining long-standing critiques of area studies from inside and outside of the discipline of political science. We next introduce evidence of the trends described above, drawing on our survey data and analysis of publication patterns. Based on these trends, we then characterize the evolution of area studies, contrasting emerging conceptions of a “new” area studies with the area studies model of the mid-to-late twentieth century. The latter was *broad and systemic*, relying on intensive immersion and extensive fieldwork to produce seminal works on how countries around the world are governed, which in turn facilitated comparative theory-building. The former is *narrow and focused*, requiring intimate knowledge of the institutional, cultural, and historic details required to produce novel, original data and make causal claims credible.

We conclude with a discussion of gaps in area studies research that have emerged as the newer model has gained prevalence. These include growing reliance on a one-size-fits-all approach to empirical research (which we term the “causal straitjacket”), the decline of institutionalized opportunities for interdisciplinary interactions, and the importance of macro-level analyses of countries and regions that offer insights into political systems as a whole and national-level models of governance. These lead us to make several recommendations to scholars, and to the field itself, about how to strengthen the comparative politics discipline and its engagement with area studies. As our conclusions are both descriptive and prescriptive, we adopt a Leninist position, seeking to move the discipline of comparative politics just as Laitin (2002) did a generation ago.

## 2 Area Studies: Past and Future

Area studies describes an academic mode of inquiry that emphasizes local knowledge, fieldwork, language learning, and interdisciplinarity in the study of human communities around the world. Szanton (2004a, p. 4) summarizes the dominant view of area studies throughout the latter half of the 20th century:

“Area Studies” is best understood as a cover term for a family of academic fields and activities joined by a common commitment to: (1) intensive language study; (2) in-depth field research in the local language(s); (3) close attention to local histories, viewpoints, materials, and interpretations; (4) testing, elaborating, critiquing, or developing grounded theory against detailed observation; and (5) multi-disciplinary conversations often crossing the boundaries of the social sciences and humanities.

This understanding of area studies is still common among contemporary political scientists. In our survey of APSA members (the details of which we will introduce below), respondents frequently defined an area studies specialist as:

- “A person trained to understand the culture, language, geography, and politics of a particular country or region.”
- “(someone) with a deep knowledge of the language, history, politics, and culture of a region or country.”
- “A researcher or academic with deep knowledge of a country or region’s politics, history, and economy gained through both fieldwork and desk research.”

Many respondents supplied additional details—sometimes critical—but overall there is remarkable consensus among political scientists about what area studies means.

In the United States higher education system, area studies is usually supported through interdisciplinary programs, centers, or initiatives. Prior to the second Trump administration, the U.S. federal government supported area studies research through grants under Title VI of the Higher Education Act of 1965. Professional organizations such as the Association for Asian Studies, the African Studies Association, and the Council for European Studies support professional networks across universities and research institutions. Importantly, in the United States, researchers who pursue area studies research often do not hold a primary appointment in an area studies center or program; instead, their primary appointment is in a disciplinary department such as political science, history, anthropology, or a related discipline. Academic departments of Asian Studies, African Studies, Middle Eastern Studies, or Latin American Studies—where they exist—tend to be smaller than disciplinary departments. Outside of the United States, different organizational models are more common (Goodman and Pepinsky 2025).

The institutional structures under which area studies research actually takes place are important because they help to explain the tensions between area studies and comparative politics.

## **2.1 Disciplinary and Political Tensions**

The history of area studies is intertwined with global politics. The version of area studies that arose and flourished during the Cold War reflected the security interests of the United States, and countless works from scholars working across the disciplines and around the world have analyzed the role of U.S. military, political, economic, and ideological interests in the development of area studies (see, among others, Rafael 1994; Solovey 2001; Slocum and Thomas 2003; Sidaway 2013). In the post-Cold War era, area studies suffered a striking decline in the United States, driven in part by changing disciplinary norms in the social sciences and humanities and in part by the decline in federal support for area studies

programs (on these and other forces, see Bates 1996; Ludden 2000; Katzenstein 2001; Szanton 2004b).

Although the organizational form of area studies today has historical roots in the U.S. higher education and national security nexus, every aspiring world power in modern history, from the Dutch, British, and French to the Soviets, has developed its own version of area studies and the institutional and intellectual framework to support it (Troupeau 1997; Kuitenbrouwer 2014; Gerstle and Cummings 2016) . Today, countries such as Germany (Braune and Rohde 2015), Japan (Carlile 2010), and China (Hu 2018; Fan 2024) use public funds to support area studies programs and institutions with the explicit expectation that area expertise will serve the national interest.

This history of collaboration between academia and the state is one source of tension between the traditional model of area studies and contemporary intellectual currents in higher education. But within political science in general and comparative politics in particular, the main tensions between area studies and the discipline came from different views about what comprises good research and what the goals of comparative social inquiry are (Bates 1996; Hanson 2009; Szanton 2004b; Sil 2020). Many disciplinarily-oriented comparativists held that area studies was best viewed as an input to the process of doing social scientific research. For those who believe that the goal of social science is to establish general theories of human behavior and organization, area specialists are data-gatherers and interpreters whose work is useful in service of social scientists' broader goals. This viewpoint rationalizes the division of labor between area studies as an interdisciplinary activity, and political science as a discipline, with intellectual foundations and scholarly ambitions that differ from those of area specialists.

Of course, many area experts sharply criticized this conception of a division of labor (see, e.g., several contributors in Kohli et al. 1995). For some, the division is just artificial: plainly, theory and empirics must interact, and political science has yet to discover any

covering laws that apply universally across human societies. If the most realistic target for the social sciences is to develop middle-range theories (Merton 1949) that can be tested within their proper domain, then area expertise does not just contribute to general knowledge, it delimits one of the plausible domains of knowledge cumulation. If the best we can do as social scientists is to theorize and describe populisms in Bolivia, the Philippines, or France—rather than populism as a general feature of politics without reference to national context—then this requires Bolivia, Philippines, and France specialists.

Another critical reaction to the subordination of area knowledge to disciplinary knowledge is that the audience for general social science is different than the audience for country- or regional-specific knowledge. Scholars who prioritize general disciplinary knowledge have the luxury of favoring high theory and global comparative analyses. Those who engage in policy advocacy in specific contexts, who are citizens of the countries of interest, or who want to understand local politics on its own terms do not need their research to fit within a broader literature or to satisfy non-specialist reviewers that their research is of general or comparative interest.

We take no position on what is the “correct” or “best” way to resolve these tensions (although we naturally have opinions). Instead, we review these tensions because they are an important part of the history of comparative politics as subdiscipline, and there were and are reasoned positions on both sides of the area-versus-discipline divide. We can better understand recent developments—and the emerging tensions associated with them—in light of this historical background.

## **2.2 Scholarly Challenges to Area Studies**

Within the academy, area studies has been critiqued on two main fronts. This first concerns its ontological foundations. Area studies based on the standard world regions has been criticized for reifying geographic boundaries that reflect strong Western-centric bi-

ases. Scholars who hold this view advocate for a reimagining of area studies, one that challenges Western conceptions of world regions as fixed and delimited social units organized geographically, as well as the intellectual, institutional, and political forces that organized the production of knowledge according to regions so conceived (Schäfer 2014; Houben 2017; Black 2023).<sup>1</sup>

Although this alternative approach to area studies is growing in popularity among scholars in the humanities and critical social sciences, it has had limited effects on the subdiscipline of comparative politics. As described previously, within the field of comparative politics—especially among scholars who live and work in North America and Western Europe—the decline of traditional area studies has not been interpreted as a rejection of Western conceptions of region, but rather as the privileging of method and theory over empirics, substance, and context (Kohli et al. 1995). Comparativists have responded ably to the same criticisms of traditional area studies that have motivated critical scholars. Examples include explicitly theorizing cross-regional comparisons (on comparative area studies, see Ahram 2011; Ahram, Köllner, and Sil 2018), incorporating borderlands into the comparative politics mainstream (Braun and Kienitz 2022), and exploring alternative spatial and geographic conceptions of what comprises a region or area, as in Scott (2009) on Zomia and Acharya (2014) on the Indian Ocean basin. In these ways, contemporary comparative politics has actually embraced many of the arguments offered by critics of standard world regions, but instead of conceptualizing these intellectual developments as a new kind of area studies, political scientists view these developments as invitations to strengthen social science research.

A more fundamental challenge to area studies in political science emerged from the rise of broad paradigms. The 1960-1990s were dominated by two “revolutions” in social

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<sup>1</sup>This approach also is sometimes referred to as the “new area studies,” but it is a distinctly different reconceptualization of area studies than the emerging model within comparative politics that we discuss in this article.

scientific thinking with generalist tendencies. The behavioral revolution sought to develop general accounts of human behavior through systematic observation and measurement (Dahl 1961). The rational choice revolution brought a deductive approach rooted in logical positivism to develop general principles of human behavior and interaction (Green and Shapiro 1994; Bates et al. 1998).<sup>2</sup> Although it was certainly possible for strict rationalists and dedicated behavioralists to turn their sights on research questions in particular countries or regions, such work had a greater affinity for research that presented results in general, decontextualized terms. Rational choice's ascendance also coincided with the emergence of accessible computing power and the creation of global datasets. The resulting wave of studies employing cross-national regressions seemed, at least initially, to neatly align with a discipline oriented toward generalizable empirical findings.

Within comparative politics, this period was marked by a tendency to organize comparative inquiry paradigmatically, emphasizing high-level principles like structure, institutions, culture, and rationality (see e.g. the popular textbook by Lichbach and Zuckerman 2009). As with the rational choice and behavioral revolutions, paradigmatic approaches to comparative politics had an affinity for generalization and comprehensiveness over specificity and nuance. It is unsurprising that area knowledge would be relatively devalued under rationalist, behavioralist, and paradigmatic approaches to political science, creating incentives for area specialists to fit their work within broad intellectual debates rather than developing accounts of specific places that prioritized local knowledge and responded to local concerns.

By the early 2000s, however, paradigms were on the decline as an organizing principle in comparative politics (paradigms were never as important to comparative politics as they are for the field of international relations), and behavioralism and rational choice theory

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<sup>2</sup>See Hanson (2009) for a discussion of the the overlap between behavioralist and rational choice critiques of area studies and the cyclical nature of these debates.

were no longer the revolutionary vanguards. Laitin (2002) proposed a middle position in which theories would be expressed in logical terms, shown to make general predictions, and illustrated by specific examples. New work in qualitative methodology created a common framework for reconciling case studies with general comparative approaches (Gerring 2004). And quantitative methodologists began to embrace new approaches to using statistics for the purposes of making causal inferences. The most important development in 21st century political science is the credibility revolution in empirical social science (Angrist and Pischke 2010). Today, rather than debating rationality versus culture, contemporary comparative politics is working out the place of description in a world dominated by causal inference (Gerring 2012; Munger, Guess, and Hargittai 2021; Spirling and Stewart 2025; de Kadt and Grzymala-Busse 2025).

### **2.3 The Path to Contemporary Area Studies**

Throughout the mid- to late twentieth century, the dominant style of area studies was *broad and systemic*. Scholars drawing on extensive field research produced landmark studies that illuminated modes of governance and shaped comparative theory-building. Yet, because these works often paid less attention to stringent hypothesis testing, their causal claims rested on fragile ground despite their deep engagement with local and national context. In contrast, the new area studies tends to conduct empirical inquiry in a *narrow and focused* way. Given concerns about establishing internal validity, researchers probe the institutional, cultural, or historical contexts most pertinent to their causal arguments, generating rich new datasets about particular regions and evaluating narrowly defined hypotheses. However, information not directly tied to these aims frequently remains unreported, making it challenging to piece together more comprehensive understandings of political systems.

How did we get from the old to the new area studies? As the evidence we present below

makes clear, the credibility revolution was central in shaping the contours of the new area studies. The discipline's embrace of experiments and design-based causal inference has fundamentally reconfigured how a large segment of regionally oriented political scientists conduct empirical research. Yet the credibility revolution did not occur in a vacuum. Its emergence was preceded by and contemporaneous with technological changes that were essential for the emergence of the new area studies.

Among these was the development of the internet, followed by the dissemination of low-cost videoconferencing applications and online survey platforms. These, in turn, transformed the survey experiment into a viable, low-cost strategy for testing hypotheses about the impact of information on political beliefs and attitudes around the world—and into one of comparativists' most commonly used quantitative causal inference tools (see Panel C of Table 3 and Panel B of Figure 3 below). The emergence of videoconferencing applications permitted area studies researchers to collaborate in real time with coauthors overseas, conduct preliminary interviews of subjects, and work extensively with research assistants, even when physically located outside the country of focus (D. M. Butler, R. J. Butler, and Rich 2008; Winkler et al. 2015; Howlett 2022). Declining costs of international communication also facilitated complex, team-based endeavors like field and lab-in-the-field experiments, making these methodologies more accessible to significant numbers of scholars. Meanwhile, along with the diffusion of the internet came movements for greater data access, particularly with respect to information collected by governments. These allowed scholars to obtain troves of fine-grained digitized administrative data that, combined with requisite local knowledge, are conducive to design-based causal research methods. Together, technologies such as the internet, low-cost videoconferencing, and digitization transformed not only the methods employed, but also scholars' access to their regions of expertise, the process of data collection, and the very nature of analyzable data.

The credibility revolution also reshaped comparativists' opportunities for interdisci-

plinary collaboration. After its genesis in statistics, the credibility revolution was adopted by empirical economists and subsequently by political scientists. One consequence of this trajectory was that a larger share of regionally-oriented comparativists in political science came to share the epistemological commitments and toolkit of their counterparts in economics, particularly those within development economics. This naturally led to many valuable regionally-focused interdisciplinary collaborations across the two fields.<sup>3</sup> But in contrast to humanities' central role in the post-WII vision of interdisciplinarity in area studies (Szanton 2004b; Lust 2024), partners in the humanities are relatively uncommon in the new area studies. While research in humanistic disciplines such as literary studies has progressively become more focused on core concerns of comparativists, such as power and historical forces, it has at the same time become less compatible with the epistemology of mainstream empirical comparative politics research. The rise of post-modern "high theory" led to a focus on the subjectivity of knowledge and a widespread rejection of the principles of the Enlightenment, especially positivism, leading to a fundamental wedge between what many humanities scholars and comparativists hoped to accomplish with their scholarship (Goldstone and Underwood 2016). The result is that political science collaborations with the humanities have become more natural for political theorists than for comparativists specializing in particular regions of the world.

These overarching trends provide context for the analyses of several novel sources of data on comparative politics and area studies, to which we now turn.

### **3 New Data on Area Studies and Political Science**

To better understand how contemporary comparative politics scholarship engages with area studies, we surveyed members of the American Political Science Association about

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<sup>3</sup>Consistent with this observation, Henriksen (2016) shows that the rise in co-authorship in the social sciences is stronger in fields with a quantitative and experimental orientation.

their views on area studies, the role of theory and method in political science, and other related topics. We also coded articles published in the three top general interest journals in political science and the three top field journals in comparative politics between 1980 and 2020.

### 3.1 APSA Member Survey

Our first original data source is a survey of American Political Science Association members, fielded from December 2022 to March 2023. The sample frame was all active and recently lapsed APSA members whose primary subfield is comparative politics or whose primary subfield is international relations and secondary subfield is comparative politics. With the support of APSA, we distributed this survey via email and collected response data via Qualtrics. Our response rate was 19% (1143/5994). Table A.1 provides summary statistics from our respondents and compares them to those of our sample frame. Our respondents are remarkably representative of our sample frame as measured by gender, age, and region of university.

In most of our survey analyses below, we separate respondents into three cohorts: those with PhDs prior to 2000, those with PhDs from 2001-2010, and those with PhDs after 2010. These roughly correspond to late-career, mid-career, and early- and mid-career cohorts. Comparing across these three cohorts allows us to compare political scientists' views on area studies across generational cohorts.

As with all survey data, ours has limitations. Our sample frame is current and recently lapsed APSA members, not all political scientists around the world; our inferences do not generalize beyond this sample frame. We also have a disproportionately smaller number of pre-2000 PhDs, which is surely driven by retirements among older cohorts but also may be a product of fewer senior academics maintaining their APSA memberships. Another limitation of our survey data is that our sample frame is comprised of political

scientists rather than area specialists, so we are likely to miss area specialists who are trained as political scientists but who no longer identify primarily with the discipline. And finally, our sample disproportionately covers political scientists who are employed in U.S. higher education institutions, though it is worth noting that 37 percent of respondents are employed at non-U.S. institutions (see Table A.1). To reiterate, our inferences do not generalize to the global population of political scientists. Future research in other national contexts may help to put our APSA-specific findings in comparative perspective.

### 3.2 Database of Comparative Politics Articles

We complement our survey data with a comprehensive analysis of every comparative politics article, 4473 in total, published in *American Political Science Review*, *American Journal of Political Science*, *Journal of Politics*, *Comparative Political Studies*, *Comparative Politics*, and *World Politics* between 1980 and 2020.<sup>4</sup> We hand coded each article along a number of dimensions, including number of countries, unit of analysis, research methodology, and use of original data, among other characteristics. These data provide us with a comprehensive picture of publication patterns in the three most prominent general interest political journals and the three most prominent comparative politics subfield journals. Table A.2 shows the total number of articles in our sample by journal and year.

As with our survey data, the journal data have their own limitations. The six journals from which we draw our data are not representative of all journals in the discipline of political science, and so cannot be interpreted as representative of the published research in comparative politics. Our journal dataset also excludes books, which are important for many comparativists and which are some of the most influential and well-cited publications in the field (Samuels 2013). And, notably, our dataset does not include articles published in area studies journals. But since our goal is to understand area studies

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<sup>4</sup>The dataset excludes response articles and introductions to special issues.

from the perspective of political science, we chose the journals that are most widely acknowledged as leading journals for publishing research in comparative politics (a strategy pioneered by Sigelman and Gadbois 1983). Because our focus is specifically on the interactions between and compatibility of area studies and political science, an exclusive focus on political science journals affords us with a good window into area studies as it appears within the political science discipline. Naturally, scholars working on area studies from different disciplinary perspectives may follow our approach, with adjustments as necessary to match publication norms in other disciplines and for different audiences.

## 4 The Resilience of Regional Expertise

We begin by looking at how comparativists evaluate their own expertise and research specialization. Table 1 compares our three cohorts of respondents according to the depth and nature of their regional expertise. The data are clear: Despite concerns in the 1990s and early 2000s that an emphasis on theorizing and cross-national generalizations would displace localized knowledge about countries and regions, there has been basically no change in the proportion of APSA members who consider themselves to be specialists in one specific geographic region. More than three-fourths of survey respondents indicated that their research focuses primarily on a specific geographic region or regions; a similar percentage indicated that their dissertation research was regionally specific.

At the same time, we see evidence in Table 1 of a decline in self-professed area studies expertise across the three cohorts. While most respondents continue to affirm that they specialize in a region of the world, and follow politics consistently, we observe a decline in the proportion to who identify as area studies experts, and a modest decline in the proportion of respondents who consider themselves to be knowledgeable about history and literature, two important markers of areas studies knowledge beyond the subject of politics. (We discuss foreign language proficiency, another key marker of area studies

**Table 1: Regional Expertise Among Comparativists**

	Year of PhD		
	Before 2001 (n = 250)	2001-2010 (n = 279)	After 2010 (n = 603)
<b>Panel A: Regional Focus</b>			
% of respondents whose research focuses on specific geographic region or regions	80.4 (2.5)	77.4 (2.5)	78.6 (1.7)
% of respondents whose dissertation focused on specific geographic region or regions	88.8 (2.0)	84.6 (2.2)	81.9 (1.6)
% of respondents who consider themselves area studies experts	77.1 (2.7)	68.5 (2.8)	56.2 (2.0)
<b>Panel B: Regional Expertise (means on 7-point scale)</b>			
Knowledge of day-to-day politics in region of expertise	5.61 (0.09)	5.60 (0.09)	5.69 (0.06)
Knowledge of history in region of expertise	6.11 (0.07)	6.12 (0.07)	5.93 (0.05)
Knowledge of classic works of literature in region of expertise	4.01 (0.13)	4.21 (0.13)	3.94 (0.09)

Notes: Standard errors in parentheses. Area studies expertise refers to respondents' self-ratings of 5 or higher on a 7-point scale ranging from "I definitely do not consider" to "I definitely do consider myself an area studies expert." Knowledge variables refer to respondents' self-ratings on a 7-point scale ranging from "not at all knowledgeable" to "highly knowledgeable." The regional expertise questions were presented only to the 899 respondents who indicated that their research has a regionally or country-specific focus.

knowledge, in Section 7.) Nevertheless, despite these declines, a clear majority consider themselves an "area studies expert," as measured as a 5 or greater on a 7-point scale ranging from "I definite do not" to "I definitely do consider myself an area studies expert."

These initial results are more optimistic about the state of area knowledge in comparative politics than scholars of the 1990s might have anticipated. In Table 2 we show how comparativists evaluate the fit between area studies and comparative politics, again comparing across cohorts. Panel A of Table 2 finds strong support for area studies training. Over three-fourths of the sample agrees that all comparativists should have extensive knowledge of at least one country or region; only a slightly smaller proportion agrees that all comparativists should be proficient in at least one foreign language. Support for

each of these has declined among recent cohorts, but there is overwhelming agreement about the importance of offering regionally or country-specific undergraduate classes. Perhaps surprisingly, even among the most recent cohorts, a majority supports additional graduate-level area studies training, even at the expense of methods training. Support for offering area studies comprehensive exams, which in many departments have gone out of fashion in favor of strictly sub-disciplinary exams, is just under 50% for the entire sample, with lower support among the most recent cohorts.

Support for area studies coursework is even stronger. Panel B of Table 2 shows that clear supermajorities believe that political science departments should value regional expertise when making hiring decisions for comparative politics positions and, resources permitting, should aspire to hire and retain faculty with expertise on all or nearly all world regions. Support for area studies teaching is also high across all three cohorts.

It could be that these respondents still see area expertise as incompatible with contemporary social science methods or other features of social science research. But Panel C of Table 2 shows definitively that this is not the case. Only around 25% of our respondents state that contemporary political science's methodological focus makes it incompatible with area studies. And younger cohorts are even *less* convinced of the incompatibility of political science and area studies than older cohorts. Agreement with the claim that political science's recent emphasis on causal analysis is incompatible with area studies are similarly low. Meanwhile, only about 20% of the sample believes that research generating knowledge that generalizes across countries or regions is more valuable than research generating regionally specific knowledge, and, once again, younger cohorts are even less convinced that cross-national generalizability is more important than regionally-specific knowledge.

We investigate respondents' beliefs about the compatibility of area studies and political science in more depth in Section 6 below. But to preview how to interpret the central

**Table 2: Support for Regional Expertise & Area Studies**

(% of Respondents Who Agree With Each Statement)

	Year of PhD		
	Before 2001 (n = 250)	2001-2010 (n = 279)	After 2010 (n = 603)
<b>Panel A: Importance of Area Studies Training</b>			
“All comparativists should have extensive knowledge of at least one country or region”	85.6 (2.2)	81.4 (2.3)	71.0 (1.8)
“All comparativists should be proficient in at least one foreign language”	80.4 (2.5)	73.1 (2.7)	60.2 (2.0)
“Comparative politics graduate students should receive more training to develop area studies expertise, even if this comes at the expense of methods training”	64.8 (3.0)	60.6 (2.9)	51.2 (2.0)
“Political science PhD programs should offer area studies comprehensive exams”	51.2 (3.2)	50.2 (3.0)	40.0 (2.0)
“It is important for political science departments to offer undergraduate courses focused on specific countries or regions”	92.0 (1.7)	88.2 (1.9)	83.1 (1.5)
<b>Panel B: Importance of Hiring Regional Experts</b>			
“I believe that departments should value regional expertise when making hiring decisions for comparative politics positions”	88.8 (2.0)	83.9 (2.2)	82.9 (1.5)
“Resources permitting, I believe that departments should seek to hire and retain faculty with regional expertise such that they can offer classes and conduct research on all or nearly all world regions”	74.4 (2.8)	76.0 (2.6)	75.5 (1.8)
<b>Panel C: Compatibility of Social Science &amp; Area Studies</b>			
“Contemporary political science’s methodological focus in general makes it nearly incompatible with area studies”	38.0 (3.1)	32.6 (2.8)	21.6 (1.7)
“Contemporary political science’s focus on causal analysis in particular makes it nearly incompatible with area studies”	24.8 (2.7)	22.6 (2.5)	23.9 (1.7)
“Research generating knowledge that generalizes across countries and/or regions is more valuable than research generating regionally-specific knowledge”	27.6 (2.8)	24.4 (2.6)	17.2 (1.5)

Notes: Standard errors in parentheses. Agreement refers to respondents who “somewhat agree” or “strongly agree” on a 5-point scale from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.”

takeaway from Table 2, we find that respondents across cohorts value area studies but younger cohorts are simply less able or willing to invest time in developing area studies expertise. This is at least partly due to the increasing emphasis on methods coursework, especially quantitative methods.

High levels of support for regional expertise and area studies in general stands in sharp contrast to the widespread perception of area studies decline discussed in preceding sections. How should this be understood? Part of the answer, we argue, lies in changing trends in political science over the last two decades, as we next discuss.

## **5 Trends in Comparative Politics: Evidence from Journal Data**

Four key trends have contributed to the compatibility between area studies and comparative political science in recent decades. In this section, we use our journal data to show that comparative politics research has become more empirical, more regionally specific, more focused on micro-level analysis, and more explicit about causal inference. While few would dispute that comparative politics' increasingly empirical and regionally specific focus aligns well with area studies, it is less obvious how the turn to micro-level analysis and causal inference has also enhanced compatibility, as we discuss later in this section.

### **5.1 Comparative Politics is More Empirical than Ever**

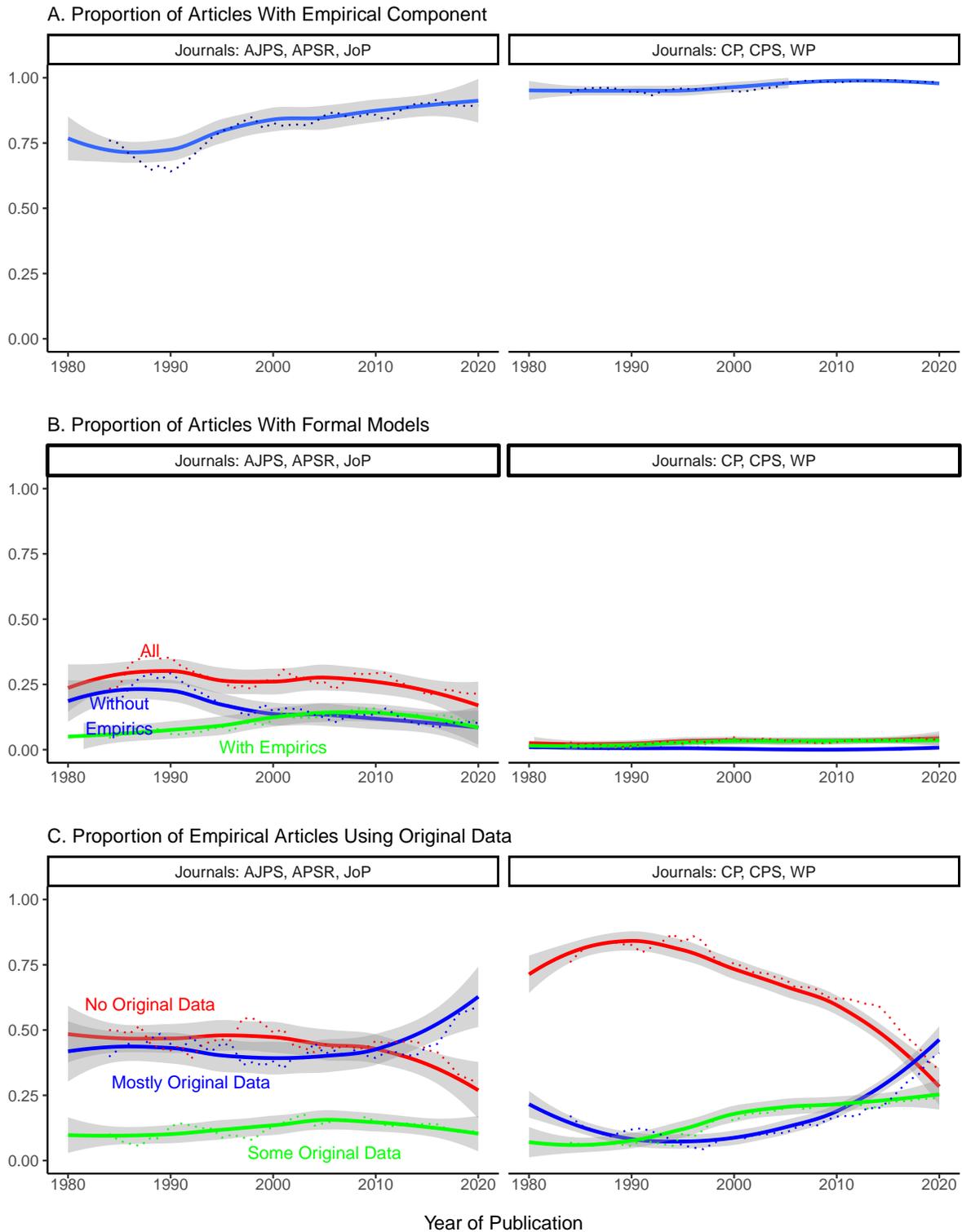
Figure 1 examines the prevalence of empirical data across the six journals in our sample between 1980 and 2020. We are interested in three features of these data: whether articles contain empirical data (those without are conceptual or theoretical in nature), whether the empirical data in those articles is original (the alternative is secondary analysis of existing data), and whether articles contain formal models.

As discussed in Section 2, a fundamental concern of the 1990s debates was that political science was becoming overly theoretical, following the model of economics in which theories would be expressed as formal mathematical statements with conclusions derived logically from their premises. In a 1993 letter published in the APSA-CP newsletter, for example, incoming section president David Laitin (1993) wrote ominously that “a specter is haunting comparative politics; it is the specter of pure theory.” And indeed, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, our data show that more than one in four articles in the top general interest journals were entirely theoretical, with no empirical component. But this has declined markedly over time, and in recent years the proportion of non-empirical articles in top political science journals has dropped to just over 10 percent, as shown in Panel A of Figure 1. When we look at comparative politics journals, we find that nearly all articles published since 1980—greater than 90 percent—have an empirical focus.

Panel B of Figure 1 shows that Laitin’s concerns about the “specter of pure theory” coincided with the heyday of rational choice and formal modeling in political science. The overall proportion of articles in top political science journals employing formal models was over nearly 30 percent in the late 1980s and early 1990s and only declined notably in the 2010s, falling to around 15 percent by 2020. But whereas four decades ago, the clear majority of formal modeling articles were purely theoretical, by the 2000s at least half of all articles featuring a formal model also included an empirical component.

The trend towards collecting and analyzing original data is even more striking, per Panel C of Figure 1. Prior to around 2010, a substantial proportion of published articles that included empirical data—including a majority of those published in comparative politics journals—presented secondary analyses of pre-existing datasets. This would describe, for example, analyses of union density and wage bargaining drawing on cross-national datasets, or analyses of cross-national survey data. Since 2000 in comparative politics journals, and since 2010 in general interest journals, we find a sharp rise in the prevalence

**Figure 1: Empirical Focus of Comparative Politics Articles (1980-2020)**



Notes: Solid lines show locally weighted regression (LOESS) curves, with 95 percent confidence intervals depicted by shaded regions. Dotted lines show five-year moving averages. AJPS = *American Journal of Political Science*; APSR = *American Political Science Review*; CP = *Comparative Politics*; CPS = *Comparative Political Studies*; JOP = *Journal of Politics*; WP = *World Politics*.

of empirical articles that employ original data, which includes findings from qualitative fieldwork, as well as original survey data or administrative data collected from official sources but never previously analyzed or published.

The historical prevalence of articles in comparative politics journals that do not use original data may seem surprising, but it speaks to the evolution of the subdiscipline and the relative value accorded to theory versus data. The articles captured in the red lines in right side of Panel C of Figure 1 are indeed empirical, not purely theoretical or conceptual in nature. But the contributions in these articles were to use existing data to frame and synthesize existing literature or findings, rather than introducing new empirical materials to refine or extend those debates.

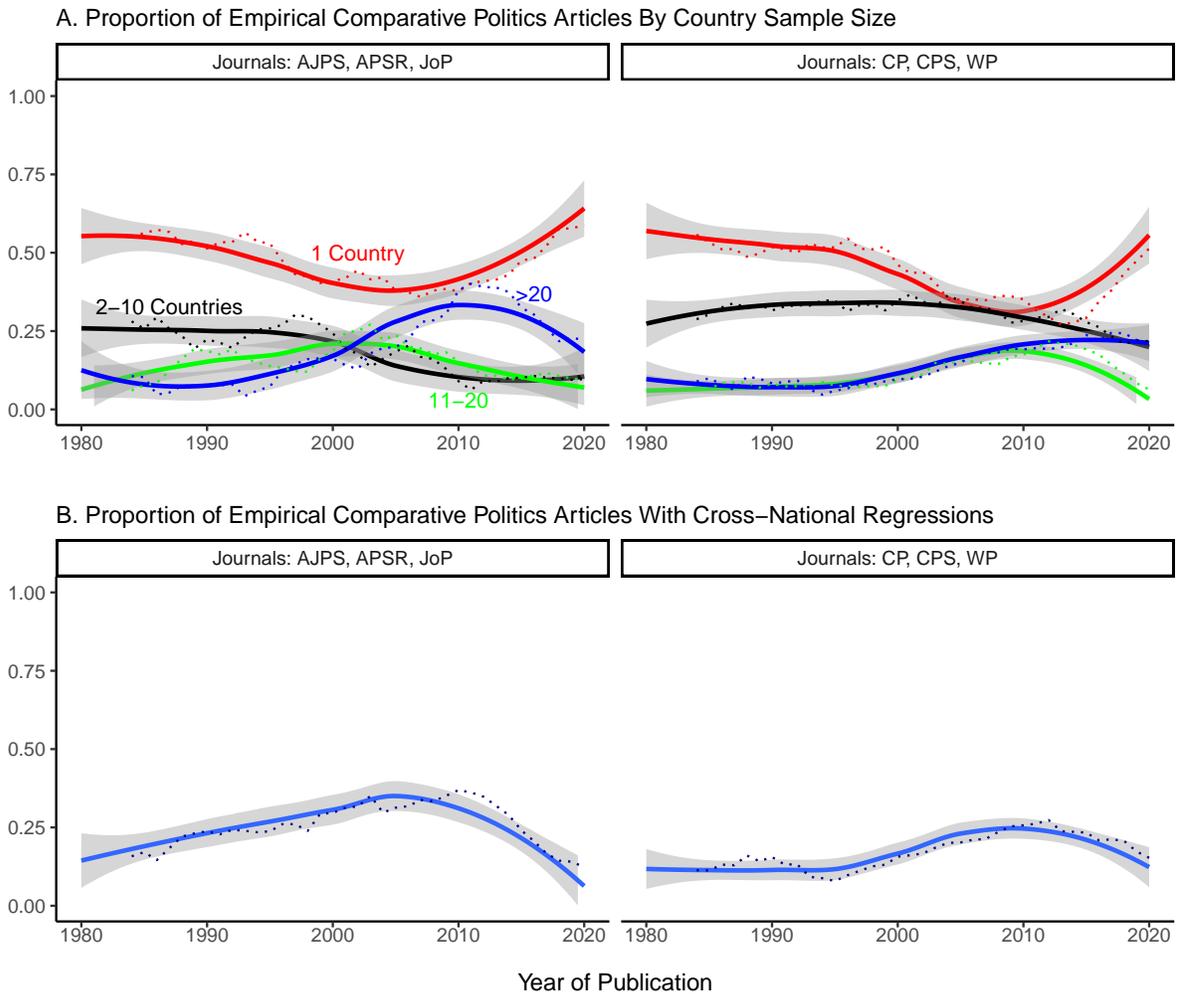
## 5.2 Single Country Research Remains Dominant

Recent work on trends in comparative politics research has found a decline in cross-national comparative research designs from their previously dominant position in the 1990s (Pepinsky 2019). Our more comprehensive journal data reinforces those conclusions.

Panel A of Figure 2 confirms that cross-national articles, especially those which largely relied on cross-national regression, partially displaced single-country studies in comparative politics journals between the 1980s and early 2000s. But beginning in the mid-2000s in the general interest journals, and around 2010 in the comparative journals, that trend reverses. Single-country articles make up a larger proportion of articles in top comparative politics journals in recent years than they ever did in the past, comprising well over half of all articles.

Panel B in Figure 2 further illustrates these trends. It shows that the proportion of published articles employing regressions with the nation-state as the unit of analysis rose noticeably until around 2010, peaking at over 40 percent of articles in the general interest journals. This trend reversed starting in the late 2000s. Even though cross-national

**Figure 2: Cross-National vs. Country-Specific Focus of Comparative Politics Articles (1980-2020)**



Notes: Solid lines show locally weighted regression (LOESS) curves, with 95 percent confidence intervals depicted by shaded regions. Dotted lines show five-year moving averages. Cross-national regressions are coded as articles using regressions with a unit of analysis at the nation-state level.

regressions were never a majority of published research in comparative politics, it is remarkable to observe—given the tenor of the methodological debates in political science in the late 1990s and early 2000s—that in recent years they are nearly absent from the most prominent journals in political science and comparative politics.

### **5.3 Micro-Level Research Has Displaced Macro-Level Research**

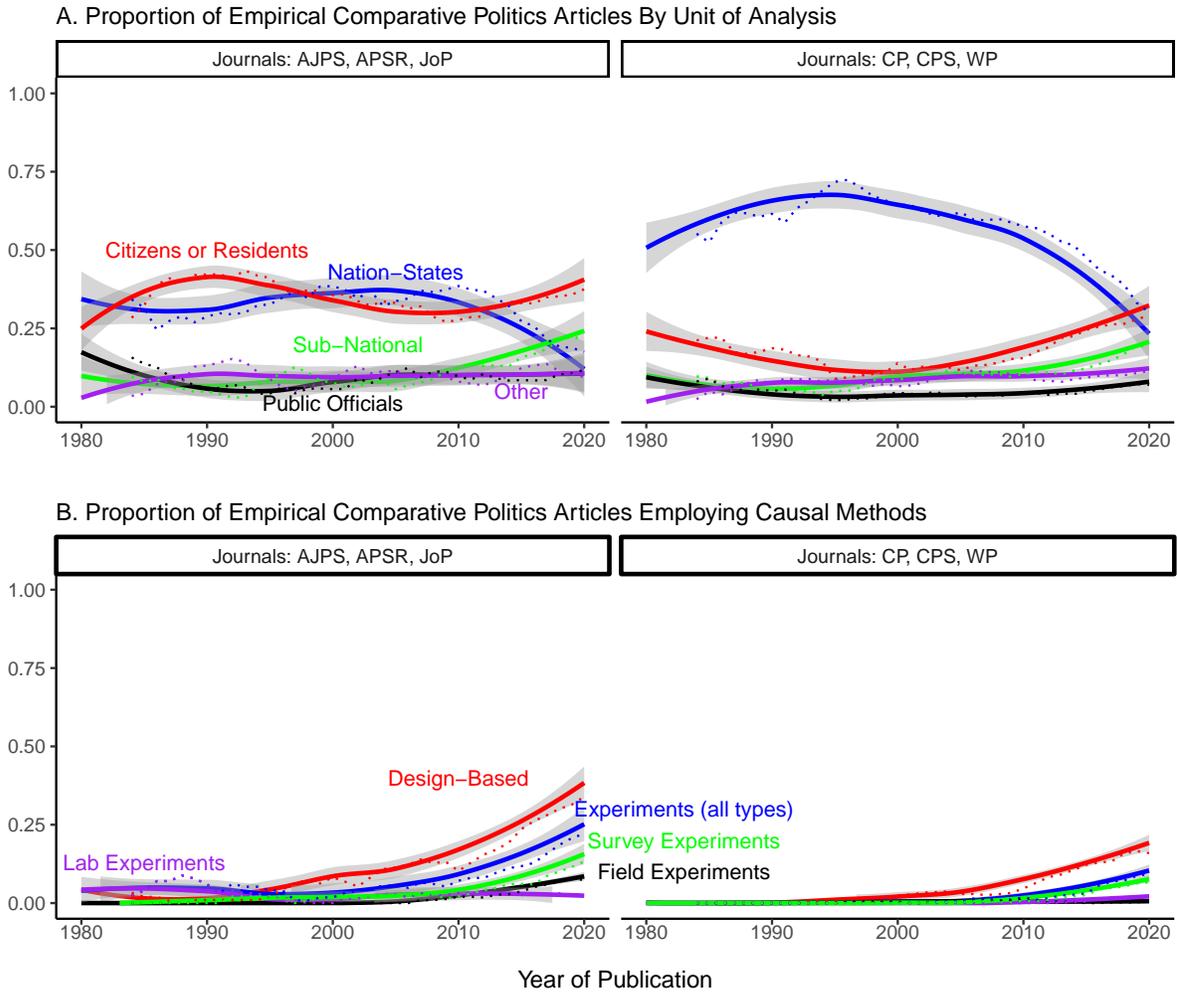
As previous research has documented (Pepinsky 2019), the return of country-specific studies coincides with a shift in analytical focus towards micro-level (e.g., citizens and voters) rather than macro-level analysis (e.g., nation-states), as is apparent in Panel A of Figure 3.

Whereas studies with a national focus comprised nearly 75% of articles in comparative politics journals by the year 2000, the nation-state as the level analysis has all but disappeared both in general interest political science journals and in comparative politics journals. Although much of this change can be attributed to the growth of surveys, micro-level administrative data, and public opinion research in comparative politics, it also reflects the embrace of subnational comparative research designs by comparativists (Snyder 2001).

### **5.4 The Credibility Revolution Has Transformed Comparative Politics**

The turn towards micro-level research designs also reflects the causal turn in empirical political science research, part of the credibility revolution in the social sciences (Angrist and Pischke 2010) which has shaped methodological discussions in the discipline for the past 25 years. Indeed, as seen in Panel B of Figure 3, these trends begin around 2000 in general interest journals, and have accelerated since around 2010. Today, over half of all comparative politics articles in general interest journals employ either experiments (mostly

**Figure 3: Micro-Level and Causal Focus of Comparative Politics Articles (1980-2020)**



Notes: Solid lines show locally weighted regression (LOESS) curves, with 95 percent confidence intervals depicted by shaded regions. Dotted lines show five-year moving averages. “Design-Based” refers to research designs for causal inference with observational data (e.g., difference-in-differences, regression discontinuity, synthetic control technique, and natural experiments). “Experiments (all types)” refers to the proportion of articles employing survey experiments, field experiments, or lab experiments.

survey experiments) or research designs for causal inference with observational data, which we label as “design-based” in Figure 3 (e.g., difference-in-differences, regression discontinuity, natural experiments, etc.). Our journal data indicate that the adoption of designs for causal inference began earliest and became most frequent in the general interest journals, with the comparative politics journals following suit shortly thereafter. Had we extended our data past 2020, we strongly suspect that these trends would continue.

## 5.5 These Trends Are Interrelated

Taken together, these four trends amount to a significant reorientation of comparative politics research relative to the early 1990s. Whereas Laitin (1993), Johnson (1997) and others expressed concern about the hegemony of pure theory and the push to identify generalized patterns across time and space, subfield trends since 2000 point in an entirely opposite direction. The modal comparative politics article published in prominent general interest and subfield journals focuses on a single country, introduces new data, and makes primarily empirical contributions. These features of contemporary comparative politics research clearly are highly compatible with and conducive to traditional conceptions of area studies. Less apparent may be the ways in which the credibility revolution and accompanying shift toward micro-level analyses are also enhancing the compatibility of comparative politics and area studies. Yet, as Malesky (2008) and Gallagher (2024) have emphasized, rigorous causal inference nearly always requires deep contextual knowledge, substantive familiarity with case materials, and in-depth fieldwork—hallmarks of area studies specialists.

Our analyses of publication trends further attest to the interrelated nature of the credibility revolution and comparative politics’ empirical, regionally specific focus. Consider, first, the intrinsic link between experimental research and original data collection. True experiments involve randomization of a treatment by the researcher in order to observe

outcomes. As is the case for any researcher-led intervention in the social world, the consequence is the production of original data. But we also find that within our sample of journal articles, 65% of those which employ design-based inference rely on observational data that was collected by the researcher; the corresponding figure for observational research designs that do not follow design-based inference is just 39%.

These patterns also overlap with the return of single-country research in comparative politics. In our journal data, 80% of experimental articles focused on just a single country, compared to 59% for design-based observational studies and just 41% for observational studies without an explicit design for causal inference. The journal data tell a consistent story in which the rise of country-specific research in comparative politics is associated with more attention to causal inference using original data.

Of course, as indispensable as an empirical focus and country-specific knowledge may be, these features alone do not constitute area studies. As discussed below, there are lingering questions about the mastery of local languages and interdisciplinarity that must be considered. It also may be the case that the causal revolution is especially conducive to a specific *type* of area studies, one with many upsides but also considerable limitations. For instance, the decline of macro-level analyses, which often present considerable challenges from a causal inference perspective, suggests that important features of regional politics are receiving insufficient attention in mainstream political science journals. But before turning to these issues, we examine in greater detail methodological trends in comparative politics and how these are shaping the subdiscipline's compatibility with area studies.

## 6 Area Studies and Methodology

In this section, we document methodological shifts in publications and graduate student training, and investigate survey respondents' perspectives about the conduciveness of

specific types of methods to area studies. We find that while some scholars, particularly among older cohorts, continue to perceive qualitative methods as distinctively aligned with area studies, younger generations increasingly recognize the compatibility of micro-level, causally focused quantitative methods. By contrast, cross-national regressions and game theory—the methodological frontier of the 1990s and early 2000s—are seen as far less compatible with area studies.

The methodological trends presented in Table 3 offer a starting point for our analysis. As shown in Panel A, qualitative methods continue to play a significant role in comparative politics. Even among the youngest cohort of survey respondents, a majority employ case study methods. That said, there is a striking decline relative to older cohorts, from four out of five to three out of five. The use of ethnographic methods has declined by roughly the same amount, but from a much lower baseline. Meanwhile, Panels B and C of show that, in line with the publication trends previously discussed, the decline in qualitative research methods occurred in tandem with a rise in quantitative methods, especially those which are designed for causal inference. Three out of four respondents in the youngest cohort report using regression-based methods for observational data, nearly 50% report using design-based methods, and an equivalent number use survey experiments (the use of laboratory experiments, by contrast, remains low). Also consistent with our analysis of journal data above, the use of formal theory among our survey respondents has declined from its already low baseline.<sup>5</sup>

Data on methods training, shown in Panel D of Table 3, point to similar trends. Younger cohorts are increasingly well-versed in quantitative and experimental methods. Nearly every respondent in the most recent cohort has taken at least one course in quantitative methods, and courses in experimental methods, a rarity for the earliest cohorts, have

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<sup>5</sup>Appendix Tables B.1 and B.2 and Figure B.1 provide more detailed analyses of the relationships between the use of quantitative and qualitative methods.

**Table 3: Methodological Trends in Comparative Politics**

	Year of PhD		
	Before 2001 (n = 250)	2001-2010 (n = 279)	After 2010 (n = 603)
<b>Panel A: % of Respondents Using Qualitative Methods</b>			
Qualitative process tracing using case studies	79.6 (2.6)	73.5 (2.6)	61.0 (2.0)
Comparative case study methods	78.8 (2.6)	69.9 (2.8)	60.0 (2.0)
Ethnographic observation	48.0 (3.2)	38.0 (2.9)	31.3 (1.9)
<b>Panel B: % Using Non-Causal Regressions &amp; Game Theory</b>			
Regression analysis of observational data (e.g., OLS, limited dependent variable models, semi-parametric models)	46.4 (3.2)	65.2 (2.9)	76.6 (1.7)
Game theory / formal theory	12.4 (2.1)	16.1 (2.2)	9.8 (1.2)
<b>Panel C: % Using Causal &amp; Experimental Methods</b>			
Designs for causal inference with observational data (e.g., difference-in-differences, regression discontinuity)	19.6 (2.5)	33.0 (2.8)	47.4 (2.0)
Field experiments	6.4 (1.6)	12.2 (2.0)	15.3 (1.5)
Survey experiments	23.6 (2.7)	39.1 (2.9)	50.9 (2.0)
Laboratory experiments	4.8 (1.4)	3.9 (1.2)	5.6 (0.9)
<b>Panel D: Methods Training (% Taking At Least 1 Course)</b>			
General methods	71.2 (2.9)	78.5 (2.5)	84.7 (1.5)
Qualitative methods	35.6 (3.0)	50.9 (3.0)	59.4 (2.0)
Interpretative methods	8.4 (1.8)	11.5 (1.9)	11.8 (1.3)
Quantitative methods	72.8 (2.8)	87.1 (2.0)	94.2 (1.0)
Game theory / formal theory	22.8 (2.7)	45.9 (3.0)	50.2 (2.0)
Experimental methods	5.2 (1.4)	7.9 (1.6)	31.3 (1.9)

Notes: Standard errors in parentheses. Methods use refers to use of a given method “frequently” or “sometimes” on a 4-point scale ranging from “never” to “frequently.”

**Table 4: Respondents with No Methods Coursework**

Year of PhD	No Methods Courses	At Least 1 Methods Course
Before 2001 (n = 250)	27 (10.8%)	223 (89.2%)
2001-2010 (n = 279)	13 (4.7%)	266 (95.3%)
After 2010 (n = 603)	7 (1.2%)	596 (98.8%)

Notes: Methods courses include any course counted in Panel D of Table 3.

grown dramatically in recent years. Notably, despite being less likely than older peers to employ qualitative methods, younger cohorts are also far *more* likely to have taken courses in qualitative methods: The proportion having taken at least one qualitative methods course is nearly double that of the oldest cohorts. Methodological training of nearly all types, interpretive methods being the sole exception, simply is far more predominant than it was 25 years ago. This is strikingly visible in Table 4, which shows the proportion of respondents in each of our three cohorts who report having taken no methods course of any form as part of their PhD coursework. Methods coursework is now a nearly universal feature of comparative politics graduate training. And as it turns out, only one of the seven respondents in the most recent cohort who reported taking no methods courses received their PhD from a U.S. university.

Given area studies' longstanding embrace of interdisciplinarity, with a particular emphasis on the humanities and language training, it is reasonable to expect scholars will associate area studies with qualitative analysis, and to believe that qualitative methods were more suitable for area studies than quantitative methods. Yet Panel A of Table 5 shows that while this position was once fairly commonly held, support for that position has declined over time. Panel B of Table 5 shows that, as expected, overwhelming majorities of respondents across cohorts agree that qualitative methods are well-suited for area studies research. But Panels C and D of Table 5 also show that growing majorities of respondents consider *certain types* of quantitative methods as compatible with area studies

expertise—specifically, regression analyses of micro-level data or field experiments. In fact, among the youngest cohort, agreement that micro-level regressions are compatible with area studies is nearly on par with agreement that qualitative methods such as process tracing, comparative case studies, and ethnographic observation are compatible with area studies. Belief in the compatibility of game theory and cross-national regressions with area studies is markedly lower, and stable over time. The conclusion to draw is that methodological and epistemological changes in the broader discipline of political science point to a possible reconciliation of quantitative research with area studies, but only insofar as those methods are attuned to local empirical context.

That possible reconciliation of comparative politics and area studies will, however, face obstacles. First among these is a lingering suspicion among area specialists in political science about the possibility of reconciling quantitative methods with true area expertise. As shown in Appendix Table C.1, respondents who explicitly identify as area specialists, especially those in later-career cohorts, are more prone to perceive quantitative methods—and contemporary political science’s methodological bent more broadly—as incompatible with area studies. A second obstacle to reconciliation comes from the political science side. Appendix Table C.2 shows that scholars who employ quantitative methods are less supportive of regional expertise and language training, across cohorts, than are those who do not use quantitative methods. When we conduct the same exercise but compare users of qualitative methods to others (Appendix Table C.3), we find that patterns are reversed. Scholars who employ qualitative methods also have notably higher levels of language proficiency as well as slightly higher levels of expertise in history and day-to-day politics (but, curiously, not literature).

In summary, the the prospects for area studies’ revitalization will depend, at least in part, on older, more qualitatively oriented scholars coming to terms with the compatibility of area studies and political science and on younger, more quantitatively oriented scholars

**Table 5: Compatibility of Methods & Area Studies**

	Year of PhD		
	Before 2001 (n = 250)	2001-2010 (n = 279)	After 2010 (n = 603)
<b>Panel A: % of Respondents Agreeing That:</b>			
Qualitative research methods are more compatible with area studies than quantitative methods	42.0 (3.1)	34.1 (2.8)	27.0 (1.8)
<b>Panel B: % Perceiving Qualitative Methods As Compatible With Area Studies</b>			
Process tracing using case studies	87.2 (2.1)	90.7 (1.7)	91.0 (1.2)
Comparative case studies	89.2 (2.0)	90.0 (1.8)	89.1 (1.3)
Ethnographic observation	86.0 (2.2)	86.4 (2.1)	88.7 (1.3)
<b>Panel C: % Perceiving Cross-National Regressions &amp; Game Theory As Compatible</b>			
Cross-national regression analyses	61.6 (3.1)	65.2 (2.9)	60.4 (2.0)
Game theory / formal theory	39.2 (3.1)	46.2 (3.0)	43.6 (2.0)
<b>Panel D: % Perceiving Causal Methods As Compatible</b>			
Micro-level regression analyses using survey or admin data	71.2 (2.9)	79.9 (2.4)	85.4 (1.4)
Field experiments	69.2 (2.9)	73.5 (2.6)	78.4 (1.7)
Laboratory experiments	27.2 (2.8)	34.8 (2.9)	42.3 (2.0)

Notes: Standard errors in parentheses. Compatibility refers to selection of “highly compatible” or “somewhat compatible” on a 5-point scale ranging from “highly incompatible” to “highly compatible.”

continuing to recognize that deep regional expertise is critical for the types of research they are conducting.

## 7 Concerning Trends and Mitigating Factors

So far, our data has shown that comparative politics retains a regionally specific and highly empirical focus. Trends in original data collection are wholly aligned with a traditional area studies focus on in-country fieldwork. And perhaps surprisingly, comparativists themselves express support for area studies, and express less concern about the compatibility of area studies and comparative politics than previous research might have suggested.

At the same time, we recognize that expressions of support for area studies are not the same as actual practice, nor are they evidence of actual language proficiency or commitment to extensive in-person fieldwork (see, e.g., Chandra 2015; Lust 2024). Indeed, data on falling language enrollment are often “Exhibit A” in claims about the death of area studies (Berman 2011), and cuts to federal funding for language education in the United States are commonly interpreted as self-evidently harmful for area studies in general (see, most recently, Alonso 2025).<sup>6</sup>

Our data reveal several alarming trends in language training and firsthand local knowledge. Panel A of Table 6 shows a more than 10 percentage point decline in speaking and reading foreign language proficiency in the post-2010 cohorts relative to the pre-2001 cohorts, and a progressive decline in language training undertaken during the PhD. Panel B of Table 6 shows an equally notable decline in percent of respondents who took one or more regionally specific political science classes during graduate school. And Panel C of Table 6 shows that younger cohorts are spending less time in the field during dissertation

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<sup>6</sup>For a rather more optimistic perspective, see Tansman (2002).

research; this is especially clear when comparing the percent of respondents who spent a full year or more conducting fieldwork—around 47% of scholars who graduated in the 2010 cohort or earlier compared to 35% for the post-2010 cohorts. Taken together, some of the core requirements for area studies as traditionally conceived—extensive, immersive fieldwork and local language competence—are notably less prevalent among younger cohorts as compared to older cohorts. Moreover, Table C.4 confirms that these declines are at least partly related to the trends in methods training discussed above: The more quantitative methods courses a respondent took, the less likely they were to take language, literature, history, and area studies courses. By contrast, more qualitative methods courses are associated with more language and area studies training.

Although these trends portend a decline in area studies competencies, there are some signs for optimism. Even though the length of fieldwork visits is declining, 59% of the most recent cohort conducted at least six months of fieldwork during their PhD studies. Over 60% of recent cohorts still have taken at least one regionally-focused course. Moreover, the percentage of respondents who took one or two regionally specific courses has remained stable across cohorts. But this latter observation obscures changes in area studies coursework along both the intensive and extensive margins. On the intensive margin, we observe a decline in the number of respondents who take three or more regional-specific courses. On the extensive margin, we observe a sharp increase in fraction of respondents who take no regional-specific courses at all. Region-specific courses seem not to have disappeared from the curriculum, but students are not taking as many as they previously did.

If language training is declining, the intensity of region-specific coursework is declining, and the average time in the field is declining, how can it be that there is no difference across cohorts in the percent of respondents reporting that they have expertise in day-to-day politics, history, and literature (as reported in Table 1)? These are self-reported

**Table 6: Declines in Area Studies Training**

	Year of PhD		
	Before 2001 (n = 250)	2001-2010 (n = 279)	After 2010 (n = 603)
<b>Panel A: Foreign Language Proficiency &amp; Training</b>			
% of respondents with foreign language proficiency (speaking)	62.0 (3.1)	60.2 (2.9)	51.9 (2.0)
% of respondents with foreign language proficiency (reading)	74.4 (2.8)	69.5 (2.8)	62.0 (2.0)
% of respondents who did language training during PhD	70.0 (2.9)	62.4 (2.9)	50.4 (2.0)
<b>Panel B: Regionally Focused Political Science PhD Training</b>			
% of respondents who took at least 1 regionally specific course	87.0 (2.2)	78.9 (2.6)	61.8 (2.1)
% of respondents who took no regionally specific courses	13.0 (2.2)	21.1 (2.6)	38.2 (2.1)
% of respondents who took 1 to 2 regionally specific courses	44.8 (3.3)	55.1 (3.1)	47.9 (2.1)
% of respondents who took 3 or more regionally specific courses	42.2 (3.3)	23.8 (2.7)	13.9 (1.5)
% of respondents who took area studies field exam	47.7 (3.8)	31.5 (3.3)	18.9 (1.8)
<b>Panel C: Dissertation Fieldwork</b>			
% of respondents who conducted at least 3 months	80.5 (2.7)	81.4 (2.5)	72.4 (2.0)
% of respondents who conducted at least 6 months	68.2 (3.1)	68.6 (3.0)	58.5 (2.2)
% of respondents who conducted at least 12 months	47.3 (3.4)	47.0 (3.3)	34.6 (2.1)

Notes: Standard errors in parentheses. Language proficiency refers to self-reported “professional working proficiency” or “near native / bilingual proficiency.” Dissertation fieldwork questions were presented only to the 899 respondents who indicated that their research has a regionally or country-specific focus.

assessments of knowledge and expertise, so it cannot be ruled out that across generations there are different standards of what constitutes low or high levels of expertise.

But this is only part of the story. There are noteworthy countervailing trends, presented in Table 7, that mitigate and to a significant degree offset the declines in PhD students' formal training in area studies. The first of these countervailing trends is that among cohorts graduating after 2000, the percent of non-native English speakers is nearly double that of the pre-2000 cohorts. Over 40 percent of more recent cohorts are non-native speakers, reflecting the internationalization of political science. A substantial portion of younger scholars are not engaging in "foreign" language training because despite their proficiency in English (all respondents were APSA members and completed the survey in English), their native language often is the local language of their region of expertise. Another countervailing trend is that, as Table 7 shows, an increasing fraction of PhD students enter graduate school with substantial area studies knowledge. Nearly half of respondents in younger cohorts were born in their region of expertise, while more than half had lived or worked there prior to graduate school. We furthermore asked those respondents who did not complete any language training why they opted out of such coursework. Our subsample sizes are small, but we find that 33% did not take language courses because they are native speakers of the relevant language, while 36% reported already having sufficient language training. Just 11% believed that fieldwork could be conducted without local language proficiency, and only 21% indicated they undertook no language training because they had no intention of doing in-country fieldwork.<sup>7</sup>

These findings suggest that at least part of the decline in area studies training among recent cohorts is because the profile of future scholars entering graduate school is different than that of their predecessors. They often enter graduate school with more firsthand knowledge of their regions of interest and relevant languages, either because they devel-

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<sup>7</sup>Responses do not sum to 100 percent because multiple answers were allowed.

**Table 7: Mitigating Factors**

	Year of PhD		
	Before 2001 (n = 250)	2001-2010 (n = 279)	After 2010 (n = 603)
% of respondents for whom English is not a native language	18.0 (2.4)	42.3 (3.0)	40.9 (2.0)
% of respondents who were born in their region of expertise	36.2 (4.1)	46.1 (3.7)	48.4 (2.5)
% of respondents who spent at least 3 months before graduate school in region on which dissertation focused	44.8 (3.2)	61.3 (2.9)	58.2 (2.0)
% of respondents currently living in their region of expertise	21.7 (3.5)	25.0 (3.2)	33.7 (2.3)

Notes: Standard errors in parentheses. Questions about region of birth and current region of residence were presented only to the 899 respondents who indicated that their research has a regionally or country-specific focus.

oped this skill set during undergraduate studies or in the gap years before entering a PhD program, or because they have native ties to the region and its languages. The internationalization of comparative politics anticipated by Katzenstein (2001) and Przeworski (2007), and described by Norris (2020), is changing way that area studies training works.

An additional mitigating factor pertains to the technological developments—internet access, videoconferencing, digitized data—discussed in Section 2.3. Shorter durations of fieldwork reflect at least in part that arranging research meetings, conducting preliminary interviews, coordinating with research assistants, or other activities that in past eras could only be done in-country can now be done from afar. Likewise, data that once would have required weeks or months to obtain, duplicate, and transport in hardcopy form may now be obtainable in hours or days, sometimes even when located outside of the country. These technologies most certainly are not substitutes for firsthand experiences. But especially for scholars with *already existing* linguistic and cultural expertise, established professional networks, and knowledge of the location of desired data sources, technological developments have reduced the need for extended fieldwork.

**Table 8: The Deinstitutionalization of Interdisciplinarity & Regional Specialization**

	Year of PhD		
	Before 2001 (n = 250)	2001-2010 (n = 279)	After 2010 (n = 603)
<b>Panel A: Regionally Focused Hiring &amp; Teaching</b>			
% of respondents hired for regionally specific faculty position	42.4 (3.2)	41.2 (3.0)	33.2 (1.9)
% of respondents who have taught regionally specific grad course	45.0 (3.2)	41.6 (3.0)	19.5 (1.6)
% of respondents who have taught regionally specific undergrad course	68.4 (2.9)	68.5 (2.8)	54.1 (2.0)
<b>Panel B: Interdisciplinary PhD Training</b>			
% of respondents who took at least 1 history course during PhD	43.7 (3.3)	36.2 (3.0)	15.6 (1.5)
% of respondents who took at least 1 literature course during PhD	13.1 (2.2)	10.1 (1.9)	8.3 (1.2)
<b>Panel C: Engagement With Broader Area Studies Community</b>			
% of respondents who are or have been a member of an area studies association	73.5 (2.8)	66.5 (2.8)	55.1 (2.0)
% of respondents who attend area studies conferences regularly	48.0 (3.2)	41.6 (3.0)	33.9 (1.9)
% of respondents affiliated with area studies center, institute, or program	54.6 (3.2)	47.0 (3.0)	33.2 (1.9)

Notes: Standard errors in parentheses.

From the area studies perspective, perhaps the most worrying trend is the decline in participation in area studies institutions among younger cohorts of scholars. Panel A of Table 8 shows that despite support for regionally focused hiring among our respondents, younger cohorts are less likely to be hired on area studies lines, and much less likely to teach region-specific courses—especially at the graduate level.

Younger cohorts are also less likely to engage with the area studies community outside of the discipline of political science. From Panel B of Table 8, it is abundantly clear that younger cohorts are much less likely to take region-specific courses in the fields of history

or literature. And Panel C of Table 8 shows that younger cohorts are less likely to join area studies professional organizations, attend their conferences, or affiliate with their institutes. The implications are grim for area studies as an inherently interdisciplinary activity: Even as comparativists remain committed to the enterprise of area studies, they are less likely to contribute to area studies at their institution or more generally. At the same time that area studies associations and programs struggle to navigate a world of scarce U.S. federal funding for area studies, comparative politics is becoming less engaged with those communities.

## 8 Conclusion: Strengthening Area Studies and Comparative Politics Together

The opportunity for a reconciliation of comparative politics and area studies is at hand, but this will require changes to how political scientists engage with area studies. Addressing the types of institutional declines discussed in the preceding section will require the active support of political scientists. A first step is for the field to recognize that much of contemporary comparative politics research *already is* a form of area studies research. Moreover, the micro-level, causally focused research that predominates in contemporary comparative politics depends on the regionally-specific knowledge produced by area studies experts and institutions. As university models are being reevaluated around the world, the future vitality of area studies departments, programs, and infrastructure are in question; comparativists must recognize that the future of comparative politics as we currently know it depends on robust area studies institutions.

This recognition of the value of area studies for comparative politics will be made easier when comparativists recognize the broad support for area studies within the discipline. We suspect that one historical legacy of the antagonistic debates of the 1990s is that many comparativists *underestimate* the extent to which their colleagues identify as area

specialists and value the broader agendas of area studies. We hope that our argument helps comparativists who see themselves as proponents for area studies to better understand how widely their positions are held by their colleagues across the discipline.

For area studies within comparative politics to thrive, though, the discipline as a whole must reward engagement with area studies, aligning comparativists' professional incentives as political scientists with the needs of area studies communities. One concrete measure is for political science departments to reward scholars equally for their service to area studies as to political science. Another is for APSA and other political science associations to formally recognize scholars who help promote interdisciplinary collaboration or institution building that sustains or strengthens area studies.

The heavy demands that the new area studies places on individual scholars also warrant particular attention. In addition to extensive training in theory, methods, and research design, good research in this mode also requires expertise in language, culture, history, and other domains—all at a time during which graduate programs are being reconfigured to push students through faster. There are no easy answers, but we believe that an important piece of the puzzle is reliance on collaborations that realize gains from trade among scholars with different kinds of theoretical, methodological, historical, and regional expertise, all of whom possess enough training in other domains to sustain such collaboration. The future for comparative politics is not for all comparativists to become regional specialists. But it does require much of—perhaps even most of—comparative politics research to incorporate expertise that only regional specialists can provide. In other words, as Gehlbach (2015) has argued, the goal is not for every scholar to be an expert in all facets of the research enterprise, but for every research output to draw on appropriate combinations of scholarly expertise.

Here, again, successful change will require the discipline to expand the ways that collaborative research is recognized and valued. Coauthoring is now the norm among

quantitatively oriented scholars. But this model must be extended to reward collaboration with country experts, including local scholars from the region being studied, not as research assistants or informants or raw data collectors (as in some of the more extreme division-of-labor proposals from the 1990s) but as full and equal partners in the research enterprise. Rather than a hierarchical model of collaboration that privileges disciplinary expertise, the appropriate model is horizontal in nature, with all participants deserving of full credit for their contributions. Such collaboration will require departments to rethink established practices for hiring and promotion decisions, but the expansion of coauthoring in the discipline more generally means that changes to how political scientists evaluate coauthored research are inevitable.

Ongoing changes in the international system strengthen the argument for further reintegrating area studies and political science. Following the end of the Cold War, one of the central criticisms of area studies as it had been practiced was that was outdated (Katzenstein 2001; Szanton 2004a). In a world of ever-expanding globalization, characterized by the free exchange of goods and ideas and with governance often exercised by supra-national institutions, the area specialist cut a parochial figure. Peculiarities of national identity and culture, although always critical factors in political life, became less salient to policymakers given the realities of global integration: the broad embrace of free markets, the convergence of living standards, and the adoption of more direct forms of political representation.

Whether or not the turn away from local context was ever merited (we think not), that era of globalization is now definitively over. In its place is an order where issues of national identity and belonging are the animating concepts of political life. The global rise of populism and the wrenching debates over immigration reflect a reality where the central axis of political contestation in many countries is about who has a legitimate claim on the rights and privileges accorded to members of the nation (Brubaker 2017;

Norris and Inglehart 2019; Mudde and Kaltwasser 2017). Productively engaging with contemporary ideological and policy debates thus necessitates a thorough grounding in the cultural-historic realities and narratives that delineate the boundaries of nationhood. To understand politics today, it is more important than ever to understand the stories that nations and their peoples tell about themselves. Comparativists with deep country knowledge—with expertise in the languages, cultures, and histories of specific regions of the world—are especially well-equipped to elucidate debates about the politics of national belonging.

Scholarly advocacy and disciplinary reform are necessary to support area studies in the coming years. But ultimately, the fate of the new area studies will depend on the scholarly value it provides. We accordingly conclude with discussion of three key gaps that are emerging in area studies as currently practiced within comparative politics: the devaluation of descriptive work, the decline of macro-level political analysis, and unresolved issues of generalizability.

Each of these three is related to the credibility revolution—the most recent of the intellectual revolutions to have reconfigured the relationship between political science and area studies. The credibility revolution, as we have argued, has pushed comparative politics in directions that make it more compatible with area studies than in the past. However, some elements of the credibility revolution framework may now be impeding the development and usefulness of the new area studies. Of particular concern is what we call the *causal straightjacket*: the tendency to shoehorn nearly all quantitative empirical analyses into a relatively small set of research designs for causal inference.

The causal straightjacket threatens to limit how comparativists use the data they have collected. Theoretically relevant descriptive statistics and associational analyses may be ignored in favor of attempts to measure causal quantities, even when these quantities can only be estimated for small or unusual segments of the population. Consequently, the

original data collection of the new area studies is often underutilized; important descriptive information about the conduct of politics never sees the light of day. These concerns are gaining attention more broadly in comparative politics (Gerring 2012; Munger, Guess, and Hargittai 2021; Spirling and Stewart 2025; de Kadt and Grzymala-Busse 2025), and there has already been some disciplinary pushback, including the general statement of principles recently announced by the *American Journal of Political Science* noting that “an exclusive focus on causal inference risks narrowing the field” and that “innovative and high-quality descriptive work” can also find a home at the journal.<sup>8</sup> But rebalancing the subfield’s emphasis on description relative to causality is especially important for the vitality of area studies, both in terms of sustaining interdisciplinary ties to disciplines with a less causal focus and in terms of recognizing the diverse types of data that area studies has traditionally valued.

The causal straightjacket also directs scholars’ focus toward institutions and policies amenable to causal identification, which are not necessarily the most relevant from the vantage point of social science theory or area studies. We are especially concerned that the new area studies’ focus on internal validity will crowd out certain types of macro-level scholarly questions that have long animated traditional area studies. The puzzle motivating many contemporary researchers is typically something like, “How does policy X or institution Y affect some aspect of politics in country A?” It is rarely of the form, “How does politics work in country A?” or “Why was policy X adopted?” Answers to questions of the first sort clearly inform answers to the second, but a system-level understanding of politics requires more than assembling a series of disparate evaluation exercises. It requires a commitment to theorizing and empirically assessing macro-level political phenomena (Pepinsky 2019). A healthy area studies-comparative politics synthesis would, we believe, make room for “big picture,” regionally specific, non-causal articles in top

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<sup>8</sup>The statement is available at <https://ajps.org/2025/06/05/editorial-principles-at-ajps/>.

political science journals.

Another widely recognized limitation of micro-level, causally focused research is the problem of drawing more generalizable conclusions from locally obtained evidence (Malesky 2008). Both experimentalists and area studies scholars actively grapple with these issues, as evidenced, respectively, by the metaketa initiative (Dunning et al. 2019) and the emergence of comparative area studies (Ahram 2011; Ahram, Köllner, and Sil 2018). However, these initiatives are rarely in conversation with each other, which is a missed opportunity. Despite the value we place on area studies and rigorous causal inference, we also believe that the subfield of comparative politics suffers when insufficient effort is made to reintegrate regionally specific findings into broader theoretical and empirical claims. Greater collaboration between experimentalists and area studies specialists with overlapping concerns is an underutilized resource for addressing these challenging questions about generalizability.

The history of area studies is ultimately one of adaptation to broad scientific, technological, and geopolitical trends. Comparative politics has evolved as well, creating both tensions and opportunities for synthesis. Looking forward, comparative politics and area studies scholars should recognize that their fates are more linked than they have been in decades. As political and academic trends evolve in the coming years, comparativists must remain vigilant in ensuring that area studies survives. And if our arguments in this manuscript are correct, comparativists may be area studies' best advocates.

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# Appendix:

## Comparative Politics & The “New ” Area Studies

A	Supplementary Information On Datasets	1
B	Faculty Survey - Use of Quantitative vs. Qualitative Methods	3
C	Faculty Survey - Area Studies & Methodology	5

## A Supplementary Information On Datasets

Table A.1: Faculty Survey Sample & Sample Frame Descriptive Statistics

	Survey N = 1,143 <sup>1</sup>	Sample Frame N = 5,994 <sup>1</sup>
Gender		
Female	424 (38%)	2,359 (39%)
Male	672 (60%)	3,541 (59%)
Other	11 (1.0%)	10 (0.2%)
Prefer not to disclose	21 (1.9%)	84 (1.4%)
Unknown	15	0
Age		
25-34	202 (18%)	918 (16%)
35-44	455 (40%)	2,254 (40%)
45-54	241 (21%)	1,271 (23%)
55-64	136 (12%)	672 (12%)
65+	92 (8.2%)	490 (8.7%)
Unknown	17	389
Region of University		
United States	635 (63%)	3,598 (60%)
Canada, UK, Australia	134 (13%)	738 (12%)
Other	238 (24%)	1,625 (27%)
Unknown	136	33

<sup>1</sup>n (%)

**Table A.2: Journal Coding Dataset:  
Count of Comparative Politics Articles By Year & Journal**

	AJPS	APSR	CP	CPS	JOP	WP	Total
1980	9	5	18	19	6	6	<b>63</b>
1981	3	8	18	19	9	6	<b>63</b>
1982	5	10	17	13	7	7	<b>59</b>
1983	4	21	17	18	12	6	<b>78</b>
1984	9	12	23	16	9	9	<b>78</b>
1985	7	17	18	18	5	5	<b>70</b>
1986	10	11	20	15	9	7	<b>72</b>
1987	11	17	22	14	7	9	<b>80</b>
1988	6	12	20	14	1	4	<b>57</b>
1989	8	10	19	15	8	8	<b>68</b>
1990	16	11	20	18	3	8	<b>76</b>
1991	5	16	20	15	4	8	<b>68</b>
1992	8	12	20	17	5	8	<b>70</b>
1993	9	12	19	15	9	9	<b>73</b>
1994	6	9	18	20	8	12	<b>73</b>
1995	4	11	16	13	8	7	<b>59</b>
1996	13	10	15	23	9	12	<b>82</b>
1997	7	9	22	21	6	10	<b>75</b>
1998	9	12	17	22	8	12	<b>80</b>
1999	12	11	18	27	4	11	<b>83</b>
2000	10	6	20	37	8	12	<b>93</b>
2001	12	14	19	37	7	15	<b>104</b>
2002	21	6	20	38	12	11	<b>108</b>
2003	10	13	20	38	9	10	<b>100</b>
2004	12	17	21	36	9	10	<b>105</b>
2005	20	12	20	41	9	14	<b>116</b>
2006	27	12	20	39	17	13	<b>128</b>
2007	20	19	20	42	15	12	<b>128</b>
2008	17	13	19	45	18	9	<b>121</b>
2009	20	18	21	47	24	10	<b>140</b>
2010	16	15	23	47	27	13	<b>141</b>
2011	21	18	21	51	19	16	<b>146</b>
2012	16	20	20	44	29	12	<b>141</b>
2013	24	23	21	52	28	11	<b>159</b>
2014	22	26	22	63	25	11	<b>169</b>
2015	23	18	24	51	29	15	<b>160</b>
2016	25	21	27	52	37	15	<b>177</b>
2017	21	22	24	56	35	14	<b>172</b>
2018	23	31	28	53	36	11	<b>182</b>
2019	28	34	29	63	55	15	<b>224</b>
2020	29	37	29	61	61	15	<b>232</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>578</b>	<b>631</b>	<b>845</b>	<b>1345</b>	<b>646</b>	<b>428</b>	<b>4473</b>

AJPS = *American Journal of Political Science*; APSR = *American Political Science Review*; CP = *Comparative Politics*; CPS = *Comparative Political Studies*; JOP = *Journal of Politics*; WP = *World Politics*.

## B Faculty Survey - Use of Quantitative vs. Qualitative Methods

**Table B.1: Use of Qualitative Methods By Quantitative vs. Non-Quantitative Scholars**

Year of PhD:	Before 2001		2001-2010		After 2010	
	Respondent uses quantitative methods?					
	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
<b>% of Respondents Who Use:</b>						
Process tracing	87.5	73.2	96.4	63.8	86.4	55.8
Comparative case studies	79.5	78.3	81.9	64.8	77.7	56.4
Ethnographic observation	57.1	40.6	56.6	30.1	56.3	26.2

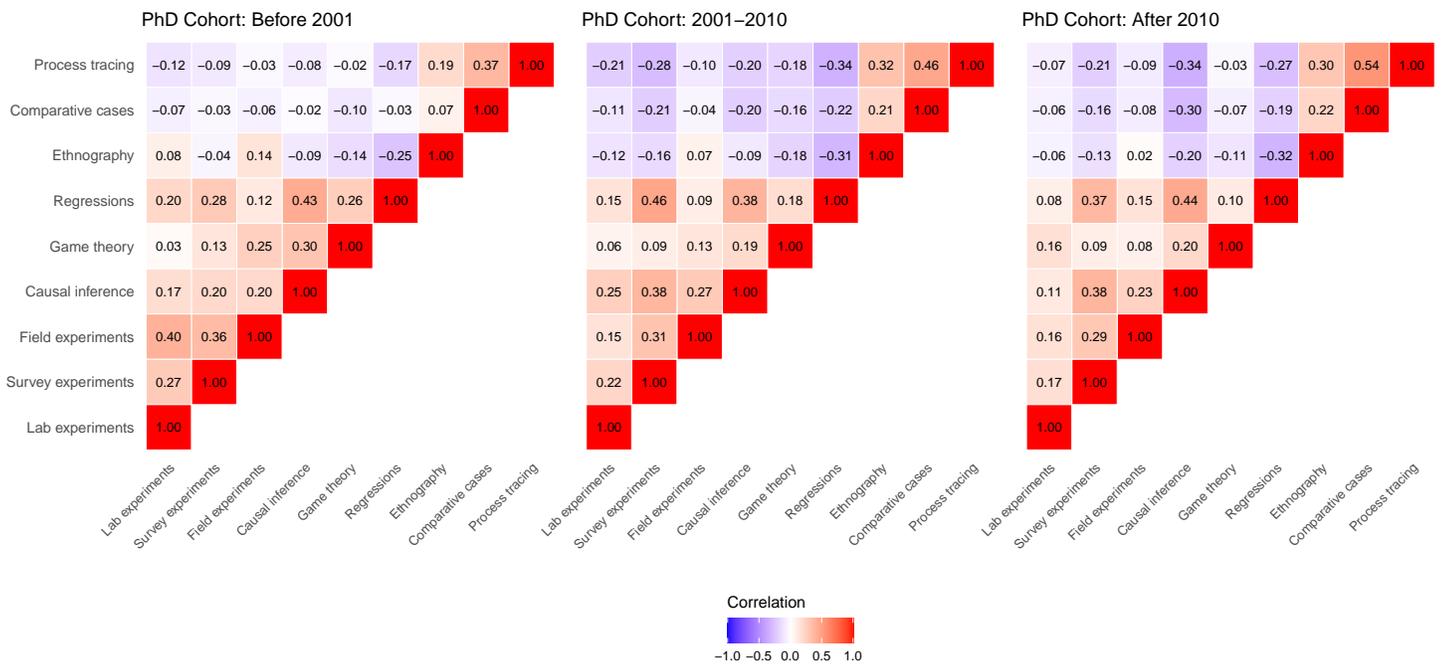
Notes: Use refers to respondents who indicate using a given method "frequently" or "sometimes."

**Table B.2: Use of Quantitative Methods By Qualitative vs. Non-Quantitative Scholars**

Year of PhD:	Before 2001		2001-2010		After 2010	
	Respondent uses qualitative methods?					
	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
<b>% of Respondents Who Use:</b>						
Regressions (observational)	85.0	43.0	95.6	59.4	93.5	70.8
Game theory	20.0	11.7	26.7	14.1	13.6	8.5
Designs for causal inference (observational)	30.0	18.7	53.3	29.1	71.4	39.2
Field experiments	5.0	6.5	13.3	12.0	16.2	14.9
Survey experiments	40.0	22.2	68.9	33.3	64.9	46.1
Laboratory experiments	20.0	3.5	13.3	2.1	6.5	5.3

Notes: Use refers to respondents who indicate using a given method "frequently" or "sometimes."

**Figure B.1: Correlation Between Use of Quantitative & Qualitative Methods**



Notes: All variables are binary, with a value of 1 if respondent reported using a given method “frequently” or “sometimes” and 0 if “rarely” or “never.”

## C Faculty Survey - Area Studies & Methodology

**Table C.1: Area Studies Scholars' Perceptions & Use of Methods**

Year of PhD:	Area Studies Expertise					
	Before 2001		2001-2010		After 2010	
	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
<b>Panel A: % Using Qualitative Methods</b>						
Process tracing	64.9	83.9	54.5	82.2	50.0	69.6
Comparative case studies	64.9	82.8	52.3	78.0	49.2	68.4
Ethnographic observation	22.8	55.7	15.9	48.2	16.7	42.8
<b>Panel B: % Using Non-Causal Regressions &amp; Game Theory</b>						
Regressions (observational)	71.9	38.5	80.7	58.1	83.3	71.4
Game theory	22.8	9.4	21.6	13.6	14.0	6.5
<b>Panel C: % Using Causal &amp; Experimental Methods</b>						
Causal inference designs (observational)	24.6	18.2	44.3	27.7	57.6	39.5
Field experiments	12.3	4.7	12.5	12.0	13.6	16.5
Survey experiments	24.6	22.9	50.0	34.0	57.2	46.0
Laboratory experiments	8.8	3.6	6.8	2.6	6.8	4.7
<b>Panel D: % of Respondents Agreeing:</b>						
PS's methodological focus incompatible with area studies	19.3	43.8	22.7	37.2	14.4	27.1
PS's causal analysis focus incompatible with area studies	15.8	27.6	14.8	26.2	17.8	28.6
Qualitative research more compatible with area studies	22.8	47.9	27.3	37.2	21.2	31.6

Notes: Area studies expertise refers to respondents' self-ratings of 5 or higher on a 7-point scale ranging from "I definitely do not consider" to "I definitely do consider myself an area studies expert." Use refers to respondents who indicate using a given method "frequently" or "sometimes." Agreement refers to respondents who "somewhat agree" or "strongly agree" on a 5-point scale from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." For exact phrasing of statements in Panel D, see Panel C of Table 2 and Panel A of Table 5.

**Table C.2: Quantitative Methodology & Area Studies Expertise / Support for Area Studies**

Year of PhD:	Before 2001		2001-2010		After 2010	
	Respondent Uses Quantitative Methods?					
	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
<b>Panel A: Foreign Language Proficiency</b>						
% with language proficiency (speaking)	66.1	58.7	57.8	61.2	57.3	50.8
% with language proficiency (reading)	80.4	69.6	66.3	70.9	64.1	61.6
<b>Panel B: Regional Expertise (means on 7-point scale)</b>						
Day-to-day politics	5.69	5.53	5.70	5.56	5.65	5.69
History	6.14	6.08	6.16	6.09	6.07	5.89
Literature	4.15	3.87	4.00	4.31	4.08	3.90
<b>Panel C: Importance of Area Studies Training (% Agreeing)</b>						
All comparativists should have regional expertise	94.6	78.3	86.7	79.1	86.4	67.8
All comparativists should have language expertise	85.7	76.1	80.7	69.9	72.8	57.6
CP grad students should receive area studies training even at expense of methods	79.5	52.9	84.3	50.5	78.6	45.6

Notes: Use refers to respondents who indicate using a given method “frequently” or “sometimes.” Language proficiency in Panel A refers to self-reported “professional working proficiency” or “near native / bilingual proficiency.” Regional expertise variables in Panel B refer to respondents’ self-ratings on a 7-point scale ranging from “not at all knowledgeable” to “highly knowledgeable.” Agreement in Panel C refers to respondents who “somewhat agree” or “strongly agree” on a 5-point scale from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.” For exact phrasing of statements in Panel C, see Panel A of Table 2.

**Table C.3: Qualitative Methodology & Area Studies Expertise / Support for Area Studies**

Year of PhD:	Before 2001		2001-2010		After 2010	
	Respondent Uses Qualitative Methods?					
	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
<b>Panel A: Foreign Language Proficiency</b>						
% with language proficiency (speaking)	30.0	64.8	40.0	64.1	42.2	55.2
% with language proficiency (reading)	55.0	76.1	53.3	72.6	51.9	65.5
<b>Panel B: Regional Expertise (means on 7-point scale)</b>						
Day-to-day politics	4.77	5.67	5.54	5.61	5.50	5.74
History	5.77	6.13	5.93	6.14	5.59	6.02
Literature	4.38	3.98	4.21	4.21	3.89	3.95
<b>Panel C: Importance of Area Studies Training (% Agreeing)</b>						
All comparativists should have regional expertise	60.0	87.8	57.8	85.9	51.9	77.5
All comparativists should have language expertise	50.0	83.0	53.3	76.9	41.6	66.6
CP grad students should receive area studies training even at expense of methods	25.0	68.3	20.0	68.4	18.2	62.6

Notes: Use refers to respondents who indicate using a given method “frequently” or “sometimes.” Language proficiency in Panel A refers to self-reported “professional working proficiency” or “near native / bilingual proficiency.” Regional expertise variables in Panel B refer to respondents’ self-ratings on a 7-point scale ranging from “not at all knowledgeable” to “highly knowledgeable.” Agreement in Panel C refers to respondents who “somewhat agree” or “strongly agree” on a 5-point scale from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.” For exact phrasing of statements in Panel C, see Panel A of Table 2.

**Table C.4: Tradeoffs Between Methods Training & Area Studies Training**

# of Quantitative Methods Courses	None (n = 140)	1 to 2 (n = 473)	3 to 5 (n = 426)	More than 5 (n = 104)
% who did language training during PhD	71.4	59.0	53.3	50.0
% who took at least 1 regionally specific PS course during PhD	79.1	77.0	66.1	62.4
% who took at least 1 history course during PhD	43.5	34.4	18.2	10.8
% who took at least 1 literature course during PhD	13.0	14.1	5.8	3.2
# of Qualitative Methods Courses	None (n = 544)	1 to 2 (n = 566)	More than 3 (n = 33)	
% who did language training during PhD	54.6	60.1	63.6	–
% who took at least 1 regionally specific PS course during PhD	67.1	75.7	80.0	–
% who took at least 1 history course during PhD	22.7	30.4	43.3	–
% who took at least 1 literature course during PhD	6.8	12.5	13.3	–
# of Experimental Methods Courses	None (n = 914)	1 to 2 (n = 218)	More than 3 (n = 11)	
% who did language training during PhD	60.0	47.2	63.6	–
% who took at least 1 regionally specific PS course during PhD	75.1	57.7	70.0	–
% who took at least 1 history course during PhD	30.5	12.9	30.0	–
% who took at least 1 literature course during PhD	10.8	6.0	10.0	–