

POLI 571A (001)
Methods of Political Analysis:
Qualitative Research and the Problem of Causal Inference

2015-2016, Term 2

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OVERVIEW

This seminar explores the logic and methods of qualitative political research. The aim of the seminar is to prepare graduate students to be both thoughtful designers of their own research projects and careful consumers of a wide range of social-scientific literature. Students will also learn how to defend – and spot the limitations of – the qualitative research strategies they may employ. Among the questions we will address are: What are the goals of empirical political research? What makes for a good research question or hypothesis? When we do qualitative research, what are we looking for, and where do we look for it? How do we assess the evidence we find?

The course is oriented toward two broad research goals. First, throughout the course, we will be primarily focused on the empirical study of *causation* in the political world. Though political scientists have made crucial contributions to knowledge through description, criticism, and interpretation, most empirically oriented scholars have tended to be drawn, at least in part, to questions of a causal nature: why particular things have happened in the past, under what conditions they will happen again, what their consequences were or will be, through what mechanisms they are produced, or what political actors today should do to produce the consequences they want. We will thus devote most of our attention to the methodological challenges posed by causal inference and explanation.

Second, while this is a course in empirical methods, one of its chief goals is learning how we can contribute to *theoretical development*. By this I mean that we will consider empirical methods not just for what they can tell us about the particular cases under examination, but also for their ability to help develop, test, and refine more general propositions – i.e., theories – about politics. An interest in theory does not imply that we are necessarily in search of sweeping, universalistic claims about the world or grand unifying frameworks; nor does it mean that we are uninterested in explaining specific important outcomes. Rather, it means that, along with our concern with particular cases, we are also interested in uncovering patterns, mechanisms, or causal regularities that to some degree travel across space or time.

While we will address a wide range of methodological issues, three broad themes will emerge:

- 1.) At the core of empirical social science lies an attitude of self-skepticism. As social scientists, our task is not to go looking for evidence that we are right. Rather, it is to constantly ask ourselves, “How do I know if I’m right?” and “What evidence can I find that I might be *wrong*?”
- 2.) Research design is about making tradeoffs: most methodological approaches, well executed, have both benefits and costs. Thoughtful research design requires paying close attention to these tradeoffs, choosing those techniques that are best suited to our particular research goals. Moreover, once the research has been completed, we must take seriously the limitations of our choices – knowing what conclusions our methods will and will not allow us to draw. In this course, we will pay close attention to the distinct advantages of small-n research, its drawbacks as compared with large-n quantitative methods, and the strengths and weaknesses of alternative qualitative tools.
- 3.) Drawing inferences about cause-and-effect in the social world is hard. We will examine both the challenges to causal inference and the main strategies that political scientists use to address those challenges. A key concern will be figuring out how case-study-based strategies of causal inference differ from strategies based on correlations across cases.

READINGS

Readings for the course consist of a mixture of methodological writings and substantive illustrations of alternative approaches, drawn from across the discipline of political science. You will find the readings in three locations.

First, there is one **required book**, available for purchase at the UBC Bookstore:

King, Gary, Robert O. Keohane, and Sidney Verba. 1994. *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. (Referred to below as “KKV.”)

Second, readings marked with an asterisk (*) are **available online** through the UBC Library’s website.

Third, there is a **Custom Course Pack**, available for purchase at the UBC Bookstore, containing all other readings.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

In addition to reading assigned texts, class members will learn about qualitative methods through discussion, analytical writing, and the design their own qualitative research projects.

- 1. Reading:** Course members are expected to come to class each week having completed all of the assigned readings, and having thought about them carefully.
- 2. A short paper on process-tracing: Due March 6.** Each student will write a short paper based on readings that employ process-tracing. A detailed assignment will be distributed later in the term.
- 3. Research design:** Each member of the class will write a proposal for a research project on a research question of her/his own choosing. The research proposals should reflect careful thought about the methodological issues and tradeoffs we will have read about and discussed during the term. While they will require some limited secondary research on the chosen topic, I will be looking less for substantive mastery of the specific subject matter than for considerations of research design.

The proposal will be handed in in three stages:

Stage I: Causal theory. Due Feb. 1 via email at the start of class. For this assignment, each member of the class will choose a causal theory that their proposed research project will be intended to test. The hypothesis must be **causal** in nature. The hypothesis must also be derived from an **existing study**. This assignment is required but will not receive a formal grade.

Stage II: Observable Implications. Due late March. In addition to the items in Stage I, this paper will spell out the key observable implications of your theory.

Stage III: Pre-analysis Plan. Due mid-April. The pre-analysis plan will lay out your main theory, a competing theory, and a specific strategy for testing these theories against one another.

4. Final exam. There will be a short-answer final exam designed to test your command of key concepts from the course.

5. Weekly class participation. As a seminar, this course depends on the active participation of its members. I expect each member of the class to attend, and make thoughtful contributions to, the seminar each week. Useful comments will draw on and assess arguments and concepts from the readings, and will also try to engage with other students' contributions. Even a good question asking for clarification of an issue can help move the discussion forward and constitutes high-quality participation. Quality is more important than quantity, though I expect each member of the class to contribute regularly in some way.

Given the technical nature of much of the material, some classes will include short (or, occasionally, longer) lectures. Asking clarifying questions during these lectures can be extremely useful in ensuring that everyone is following the material. (If you are unclear on an issue, others probably are as well.)

Summary schedule of assignments

(Some exact due dates will depend on rescheduling of classes and will be announced early in semester)

Feb. 1	Stage I Paper: Causal theory
Early March	Process-tracing paper
Late March	Stage II: Observable Implications
Mid-April	Full proposal (hardcopy and email)

Grading scheme

Process tracing paper:	15%
Stage 2 paper:	20%
Stage 3 paper:	30%
Final exam	15%
Participation:	20%
Total grade	100%

Penalties for lateness

Assignments handed in after the deadline will lose **2 points** on a 100-point scale for **each day**, including weekend days. The first day's penalty will be incurred by papers that come in on the right day but after the time at which they are due.

Missed classes

Because class participation is a central part of the learning experience, I will ask students who miss a class to write me a 2-3 page, informal memo (can be short bullet points) with their thoughts on two or more of the readings for the week. This memo is due one week after the missed class. The memo is not meant to be an onerous task and will not be marked. It is intended to encourage and demonstrate analytical and critical engagement

with the literature like that which we will be pursuing in seminar discussions. It is also highly recommended that students get a copy of notes taken by a fellow class member.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

The University considers plagiarism to be the most serious academic offence that a student can commit. Whether intentional or accidental, instances of plagiarism will have serious academic consequences.

In my experience, many students who believe they know what plagiarism is do not actually have a clear understanding of where the line between proper and improper use of sources lies. I thus encourage you to read the UBC Library's excellent guide at <http://learningcommons.ubc.ca/guide-to-academic-integrity/>

OTHER INFORMATION

The University accommodates students with disabilities who have registered with the Disability Resource Centre. The University accommodates students whose religious obligations conflict with attendance, submitting assignments, or completing scheduled tests and examinations. Please let me know in advance, preferably in the first week of class, if you will require any accommodation on these grounds. Students who plan to be absent for varsity athletics, family obligations, or other similar commitments, cannot assume they will be accommodated, and should discuss their commitments with me before the drop date.

Students who need additional time for an assignment for a medical or serious personal reason must contact me **before** the due date and **as soon as the problem arises**. Requests for accommodation made after an assignment's due date will not generally be considered. I will usually need to see some documentation, such as a doctor's note, to make accommodation. Please note that **I do not make extensions for foreseeable circumstances, such as having multiple papers due in the same week. Extensions are reserved for unforeseeable events that are outside a student's control** (e.g., illness, a death in the family). When you know of such situations ahead of time, it is your responsibility to organize your work for this course so that you can turn in the assignment on time. This may mean getting an early start on a paper.

Along these lines, **extensions will usually not be granted for work lost due to computer crashes or the loss of a computer file**. The reason for this is that there are simple and free ways of regularly and automatically backing up your work. **I recommend that all students subscribe to a free, automatic online backup service** (e.g., Dropbox, Mozy, Carbonite – these are just examples, not endorsements). These services will ensure that your files are backed up to a remote server at least once a day (some, like Dropbox, perform a backup every time you hit "Save"). Thus, even if your

computer dies, there is no reason you should not be able to retrieve a quite current copy of your work.

IMPORTANT: All accommodations (extensions, etc.) must be recorded in writing via email. It is the student's responsibility to ensure that there is an email record of any accommodation s/he has received. Thus, even if we have had a face-to-face conversation about an extension, you must send me an email confirming the accommodation. This simply ensures that we have a record of any individualized arrangements that have been made.

Students should retain a copy of all submitted assignments (in case of loss) and should also retain all their marked assignments in case they wish to apply for a Review of Assigned Standings.

I am very happy to meet to discuss any issues or concerns that arise over the course of the term. This includes further discussion of substantive topics in the course, problems you may be having completing requirements, or concerns you have about the way the course is being run. If you cannot make it to my office hours, please see me after class or email me to make an appointment at another time. For issues that can be dealt with electronically, email is usually the fastest way to reach me, and I tend to respond quickly.

COURSE TOPICS AND READINGS

Part I Research goals

1. Course introduction

2. Goals I: Questions, answers, theory

Popper, Karl R. *Conjectures and refutations: the growth of scientific knowledge*. London: Routledge and K. Paul, 1965, part of Chapter 1, (pp. 33-59).

Przeworski, Adam, and Henry Teune. *The logic of comparative social inquiry*. New York: Wiley-Interscience, 1970, Chapter 1, pp. 17-30.

Van Evera, Stephen. *Guide to methods for students of political science*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997, Chapters 1 and 3 (pp. 7-21, 89-95) [Short – but to be read carefully.]

For examples of theoretical “causal logics”:

* Owen, John M. 1994. "How Liberalism Produces Democratic Peace."

International Security 19(2): **READ ONLY**:

- pp. 87-101 plus Figure 1: pay particular attention to causal logic on pp. 93-101

* Jacobs, Alan M. 2008. "The Politics of When: Redistribution, Investment, and Policymaking for the Long Term." *British Journal of Political Science* 38 (2): **READ ONLY**

- pp. 193 to top of p. 208: pay particular attention to causal logic on pp. 203 to top of 208

* Ross, Michael. 2008. "Oil, Islam, and Women." *American Political Science Review*. 102(1): **READ ONLY**

- pp. 107-110 (skipping short section on South Korea): pay particular attention to causal logic of theoretical argument on pp. 109-110.

NO CLASS ON 1/18: TO BE RESCHEDULED

3. Goals II: Causality and causal explanation

* Margaret Marini and Burton Singer, "Causality in the Social Sciences," in Clifford Clogg, ed., *Sociological Methodology* 1988 (American Sociological Association): **ONLY PAGES 347-363**.

King, Gary, Robert O. Keohane, and Sidney Verba. *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994, Sec. 3.1-3.2 (pp. 76-91).

Ragin, Charles C. *The Comparative Method: Moving Beyond Qualitative and Quantitative Strategies*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987, Chapter 2, pp. 19-26.

*Mahoney, James. 2008. "Toward a Unified Theory of Causality." *Comparative Political Studies* 41 (4-5):412-36.

* Dessler, David. "Beyond Correlations: Toward a Causal Theory of War." *International Studies Quarterly* 35, no. 3 (1991): 337-355.

Part II Correlational Approaches to Causal Inference

4. The small-n comparative method

Mill, John Stuart. 1868. *A System of Logic*. London: Longmans, pp. 425-448, 482-489 [page numbers refer to the specific edition in course pack].

* Skocpol, Theda and Margaret Somers (1980). "The Uses of Comparative History in Macrosocial Inquiry." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 22: 174-97.

@ Immergut, Ellen M. (1992). "The rules of the game: The logic of health policy-making in France, Switzerland, and Sweden." *Structuring Politics: Historical Institutionalism in Comparative Analysis*. S. Steinmo, K. Thelen and F. Longstreth. New York, Cambridge University Press: 57-89.

* Ziblatt, Daniel. 1994. "Rethinking the Origins of Federalism: Puzzle, Theory, and Evidence from Nineteenth Century Europe." *World Politics* 57 (1): 70-98.

* Lieberon, Stanley. "Small N's and Big Conclusions: An Examination of the Reasoning in Comparative Case Studies Based on a Small Number of Cases." *Social Forces* 70, no. 2 (1991): 307-320.

NO CLASS 2/8: BC FAMILY DAY (STATUTORY HOLIDAY): TO BE RESCHEDULED

NO CLASS 2/15: READING WEEK

5. The logic of statistical analysis

KKV, sections 2.6 and 2.7

* Sykes, Alan. O. (1993). "An Introduction to Regression Analysis," University of Chicago Law School, Working Paper in Law and Economics No. 20. Available at: http://www.law.uchicago.edu/Lawecon/WkngPprs_01-25/20.Sykes.Reggression.pdf

Fox, William, *Social Statistics*, pp. 225-232, 257-279.

* Boix, Carles. 1999. "Setting the Rules of the Game: The Choice of Electoral Systems in Advanced Democracies." *American Political Science Review* 93 (3): pp. 609-624.

* Maoz, Zeev, and Bruce Russett. 1993. "Normative and Structural Causes of Democratic Peace, 1946-1986." *American Political Science Review* 87 (3):624-38.

6. Challenges of Causal Inference: King, Keohane, and Verba

KKV [Read all except Chapter 4, Section 5.1, and sections previously read. Technical proofs in boxes are optional.]

**Part III
Process Tracing**

7. The logic of process tracing as causal inference

Hall, Peter A. 2003. "Aligning Ontology and Methodology in Comparative Politics." Pp. 373-404 in *Comparative Historical Analysis in the Social Sciences*, edited by James Mahoney and Dietrich Rueschemeyer. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Collier, David, Henry E. Brady, and Jason Seawright. 2010. "Toward an Alternative View of Methodology: Sources of Leverage in Causal Inference." In *Rethinking Social Inquiry: Diverse Tools, Shared Standards*, edited by Henry E. Brady and David Collier.

* McKeown, Timothy J. 1983. "Hegemonic Stability Theory and 19th Century Tariff Levels in Europe." *International Organization* 37:73-91.

* Johnston, Alastair Iain. 1996. "Learning Versus Adaptation: Explaining Change in Chinese Arms Control Policy in the 1980s and 1990s." *The China Journal*: 27-61.

* Tannenwald, Nina. 1999. "The Nuclear Taboo: The United States and the Normative Basis of Nuclear Non-Use." *International Organization*. 53(3): 433-468.

8. Types of Causal Process Observations

****PROCESS TRACING PAPER DUE IN CLASS****

* Mahoney, James. 2010. "After KKV: The New Methodology of Qualitative Research." *World Politics*. 62(1): 120-47 – **read only through p. 131.**

* Jacobs, Alan M. 2011. "Process Tracing and Ideational Theories." In *Process Tracing: From Metaphor to Analytic Tool*. Edited by Andrew Bennett and Jeffrey Checkel. New York: Cambridge University Press.

* Owen, John M. 1994. "How Liberalism Produces Democratic Peace." *International Security* 19 (2):87-125.

* Fearon, James D. 1994. "Domestic Political Audiences and the Escalation of International Disputes." *American Political Science Review* 88: 577–92.

* Snyder, Jack, and Erica D. Borghard. 2011. "The Cost of Empty Threats: A Penny, Not a Pound." *American Political Science Review* 105 (03):437-56.

Go back and look carefully for CPOs in case study sections of:
Immergut, "The Rules of the Game"

9. Process tracing as Bayesian analysis

Van Evera, pp. 30-34.

* Collier, David. 2011. "Understanding Process Tracing." *PS: Political Science and Politics*. 44:4: 823-830. (Easy download at: <http://polisci.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/people/u3827/Understanding%20Process%20Tracing.pdf>)

* These very short introductions to Bayes' rule:

<http://www.cs.ubc.ca/~murphyk/Bayes/bayesrule.html>
<http://www.trinity.edu/cbrown/bayesweb/>

Bennett, Andrew. 2015. "Appendix." In *Process Tracing: From Metaphor to Analytic Tool*. Edited by Andrew Bennett and Jeffrey Checkel. New York: Cambridge University Press.

* Humphreys, Macartan, and Alan M Jacobs. 2015. "Mixing Methods: A Bayesian Approach." *The American Political Science Review* 109 (4): **READ ONLY pp. 653-58 plus Supplementary Appendix B at <http://www.columbia.edu/~mh2245/papers1/BIQQ.pdf>**.

* Rohlfing, Ingo. 2014. "Comparative Hypothesis Testing Via Process Tracing." *Sociological Methods and Research*. 43(4): 606-642.

10. Mixing methods: integrating correlational and process-based evidence

* Fearon, James, and David Laitin. 2008. "Integrating qualitative and quantitative methods." In *Oxford Handbook of Political Methodology*, eds. Janet M. Box-Steffenmeier, David Collier, and Henry E Brady. Cambridge, UK: Oxford University Press.

* Kreuzer, Marcus. 2010. "Historical Knowledge and Quantitative Analysis: The Case of the Origins of Proportional Representation." *American Political Science Review* 104 (5): **read only p. 378-end**

* Humphreys, Macartan and Alan M. Jacobs. "Mixing Methods: A Bayesian Integration of Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches to Causal Inference." Unpublished Manuscript. Download from my webpage (bottom) – **read the rest, Supplementary Appendix optional.**

Part IV

What to Observe: Cases and Data

11. Measurement: Validity, Reliability, Error and Bias

KKV, Section 5.1

* Herrera, Yoshiko, and Devesh Kapur. "Improving Data Quality: Actors, Incentives and Capabilities." *Political Analysis*, Volume 15, Issue 4, pp. 365 – 386.

* Adcock, Robert, and David Collier. 2001. "Measurement Validity: A Shared Standard for Qualitative and Quantitative Research." *The American Political Science Review* 95 (3):529-546.

Putnam, Robert D., Robert Leonardi, and Raffaella Nanetti. 1993. *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, Chapter 3.

12. Types of Qualitative Evidence

* Goldthorpe, John H. 1991. "The Uses of History in Sociology: Reflections on Some Recent Tendencies." *British Journal of Sociology* 42: 211-30.

Trachtenberg, Marc (2006). *The Craft of International History*. Princeton, Princeton University Press, Chapter 5, "Working with Documents."

George and Bennett, pp. 94-106, 117-119.

* Booth, Alan, and Sean Glynn. "The Public Records and Recent British Economic Historiography." *Economic History Review* 32, no. 3 (1979): 303-315.

* Davies, Philip H.J. (2001). "Spies as Informants: Triangulation and the Interpretation of Elite Interview Data in the Study of the Intelligence and Security Services." *Politics* 21(1): 73-80.

* O'Brien, Kevin, and Lianjiang Li. "Popular Contention and Its Impact in Rural China." *Comparative Political Studies* 38, no. 3 (2005): 235-59.

* King, Desmond, and Randall Hansen. "Experts at Work: State Autonomy, Social Learning and Eugenic Sterilization in 1930s Britain." *British Journal of Political Science* 29, no. 1 (1999): 77-107.

Read at least one of the following on techniques of elite interviewing, depending on your interests:

* Aberbach, Joel D. and Bert A. Rockman (2002). "Conducting and Coding Elite Interviews." *PS: Political Science and Politics* 35(4): 673-676.

* Berry, Jeffrey M. (2002). "Validity and Reliability Issues In Elite Interviewing." *PS: Political Science and Politics* 35(4): 679-682.

* Rivera, Sharon Werning (2002). "Interviewing Political Elites: Lessons from Russia." *PS: Political Science and Politics* 35(4): 683-688.

[N.B. For other tips on techniques of elite interviewing, see other essays in this Symposium in *PS*.]

NO CLASS MARCH 28: EASTER MONDAY

13. Case Selection

KKV, Chapter 4.

* Geddes, Barbara. 1990. "How the Cases You Choose Affect the Answers You Get: Selection Bias in Comparative Politics." *Political Analysis* 2:131-150.

Collier, David, James Mahoney and Jason Seawright. 2004. "Claiming too Much: Warnings about Selection Bias." in *Rethinking Social Inquiry: Diverse Tools, Shared Standards*, edited by Henry E. Brady and David Collier.

George, Alexander L., and Andrew Bennett. *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005, pp. 120-123.

* Lieberman, Evan S. "Nested Analysis as a Mixed-Method Strategy for Comparative Research." *American Political Science Review*. 99(3): 435-452.

* Seawright, Jason, and John Gerring. 2008. "Case Selection Techniques in Case Study Research." *Political Research Quarterly* 61 (2):294-308.

* Review Figure 2 and associated discussion and very short section on "Case Selection" (pp. 670-71) in Humphreys and Jacobs, "Mixing Methods."

****PLUS****

Two readings strongly recommended as good syntheses of many of the course themes:

George and Bennett, Chapter 1.

Munck, Gerardo. 2004. "Tools for Qualitative Research." In *Rethinking Social Inquiry: Diverse Tools, Shared Standards*, edited by H. E. Brady and D. Collier, pp. 105-122.