Qualitative Research Methods

Course Goals

The central goal of the seminar is to enable students to create and critique methodologically sophisticated case study research designs in the social sciences. To do so, the seminar will explore the techniques, uses, strengths, and limitations of case study methods, while emphasizing the relationships among these methods, alternative methods, and contemporary debates in the philosophy of science. The research examples used to illustrate methodological issues will be drawn from international relations, comparative politics, and American politics. However, the methodological content of the course is also applicable to the study of history, sociology, and economics.

The seminar will begin with a focus on the philosophy of science, theory construction, theory testing, causality, and causal inference. With this epistemological grounding, the seminar will then explore the core issues in case study research design, including methods of structured and focused comparisons of cases, typological theory, case selection, process tracing, congruence testing, and the use of counterfactual analysis. Next, the seminar will look at the epistemological assumptions, comparative strengths and weaknesses, and proper domain of case study methods and alternative methods, particularly statistical methods and formal modeling, and address ways of combining these methods in a single research project. The seminar then examines field research techniques, including archival research and interviews. It concludes with student presentations of case study research designs and constructive critiques of these designs by seminar participants. Presumably, many students will choose to present the research design for their thesis, though students could also present a research design for a separate project, article, or edited volume.

Requirements

Mastery of assigned readings and active participation in seminar discussions.

One short essay critiquing the assigned readings for one week. Each student will be required to write one 1500-1800 word critique of the assigned readings for a given week. This critique can focus on one or several of the readings for the week, or on one or a few cross-cutting themes. It need not address all of the readings or discussion questions for a week.

Research Design Paper and Presentation. Students will be required to submit copies of a research design paper to all seminar participants one week in advance of presenting this design in the seminar. Each student will present their design in the seminar for a constructive critique of a
half-hour or so, with a short introduction from the student and/or advance reading questions suggesting issues or methodological dilemmas upon which participants should focus.

Research designs should address all of the following tasks (elaborated upon in George and Bennett chapter 4): 1) specification of the research problem and research objectives, in relation to the current stage of development and research needs of the relevant research program, related literatures, and alternative explanations; 2) specification of the independent and dependent variables; 3) selection of a historical case or cases that are appropriate in light of the first two tasks, and justification of why these cases were selected and others were not; 4) consideration of how variance in the variables can best be described for testing and/or refining existing theories; 5) specification of the data requirements, including both process tracing data and measurements of the independent and dependent variables for the main hypotheses of interest, including alternative explanations. There is no minimum length limit, though most designs will probably be around 7,000-9,000 words and should be shorter than 11,000 words.

**Follow-up memo on refinement of the research design.** While students are not expected to revise fully and resubmit their research designs by the end of the course, they will be required to submit a memo of about 1500 words on the modifications they think are necessary, and the dilemmas that are still unresolved, in light of the critique they received in the seminar.

**Grading**
- 30% mastery of the readings as evident through participation in class discussions
- 20% short essay
- 50% written research design, presentation of research design, and follow-up memo

**Books for Purchase**


James Mahoney and Dietrich Rueschemeyer, eds., *Comparative Historical Analysis in the Social Sciences.*

Course Outline

I) Philosophy of Science and Epistemological Issues

Jan. 18  Evaluating Theories: Positivist and Scientific Realist Approaches and Their Critics
Jan. 25  Causality, Explanation, Causal Inference, and Causal Mechanisms

II) Case Study Methods

Feb. 1  Critiques and Justifications of Case Study Methods
Feb. 8  Concept Formation and Measurement
Feb. 15 Designs for Single and Comparative Case Studies and Alternative Research Goals
Feb. 22 Typological Theory and Case Selection
Mar. 1  Process Tracing, Congruence Testing, and Counterfactual Analysis
Mar. 15 Multimethod Research: Combining Case Studies with Statistics and/or Formal Modeling
Mar. 22 Macro-Historical Comparison, Critical Junctures, and Path Dependency
Mar. 29 Field Research Techniques: Archives, Interviews, and Surveys
Apr.  5 Examples of Case Study Research, or, if necessary, an additional session of student research design presentations

Apr. 12 No Class - Students Work on Research Designs

III) Student Research Design Presentations

April 19, 26, and additional date(s) TBD: Students Present Research Designs for Constructive Critique (about 30 to 35 minutes per student, or three to four students per session)

Readings
I) Philosophy of Science and Epistemological Issues

January 18: Introduction; Evaluating Theories: Positivist and Scientific Realist Approaches and Their Critics

Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennett, preface to *Case Studies and Theory Development*.


Keohane, King, and Verba (hereafter KKV), *Designing Social Inquiry* pp. 3-33, 99-114.


Optional:


Lichbach and Lebow book on philosophy of social science, forthcoming; see esp. chapters by Lebow, Hopf, Chernoff, and Lichbach.

Jan. 25: Causality, Explanation, Causal Inference, and Causal Mechanisms


George and Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development*, chapter 7 on case studies and relevant issues in the philosophy of science.

Optional:


**II) Case Study Methods**

**Feb. 1 Critiques and Justifications of Case Study Methods**


Brady and Collier, chapters 1, 2, 12, and 13.

George and Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development*, Chapter 1.

Gary Goertz and James Mahoney, draft article on differences between qualitative and quantitative methods.

Optional:


*APSA-CP: Newsletter* of the APSA Organized Section in Comparative Politics, Vo. 9, No. 1 (Winter 1998) articles by David Collier, Tim McKeown, Roger Petersen and John Bowen, Charles Ragin, and John Stephens.

**Feb. 8: Concept Formation and Measurement**


Gary Goertz, *Social Science Concepts*, chapters 1, 2, 3.


Optional:


February 15: Designs for Single and Comparative Case Studies and Alternative Research Goals


Van Evera, Guide to Methodology, pp. 77-88.


Stephen Walt, *Revolution and War*, pp. 12-17

Jack Snyder, *Myths of Empire*, pp. 60-65

Optional:


**Feb. 22: Typological Theory and Case Selection**


Andrew Bennett and Alexander George, *CSTD* chapter 11.

Ragin, *Fuzzy Set Social Science*, chapters 2, 3, 6, 7.


Gary Goertz and James Mahoney, “Negative Case Selection: The Possibility Principle,” in Goertz, chapter 7. Think through Goertz’s exercises for this chapter, numbers 1, 2, 6, 10, 13, 14, 15, 19, and 25.

Brief Examples:

Bennett, Lepgold, and Unger, *Friends in Need*, pp. 24-28

Discussion Questions: How might Edelstein cast his theory as a more complete typological theory - that is, what variables might he add or re-conceptualize? What are the costs and benefits of re-casting his theory in this way? What are some alternative ways he might do case selection from among the population he has identified? What cases are typologically most similar to the current U.S. occupation of Iraq, and what does this suggest for the prospects for US success in Iraq? What cases might be potential anomalies for Edelstein?

Optional:


David Collier, James Mahoney, and Jason Seawright, “Claiming Too Much: Warnings about Selection Bias,” chapter 6 in Brady and Collier.

**March 1: Process Tracing, Congruence Testing, and Counterfactual Analysis**

George and Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development*, chapter 10.

Bennett, “Stirring the Frequentist Pot with a Dasy of Bayes,” *Political Analysis*, forthcoming.

Philip Tetlock and Aaron Belkin, eds., *Counterfactual Thought Experiments*, chapters 1, 12.

Andrew Bennett, *Condemned to Repetition*, pp. 2-37, 54-58. Questions: How might we judge Snyder’s counterfactual on p. 57? William Wohlforth has argued that the material decline of the Soviet economy was an important factor in explaining why the Soviet Union did not use force in central Europe in 1989, while I argue that learning was an important factor. What is the relevant counterfactual for each argument? How might we judge these counterfactuals?


Optional:


George and Bennett, CSTD, chapter 9.


March 15: Multimethod Research: Combining Case Studies with Statistics and/or Formal Modeling

Andrew Bennett and Bear Braumoeller, “Where the Model Frequently Meets the Road: Combining Statistical, Formal, and Case Study Methods,” draft paper.


Optional:


**March 22: Macro-Historical Comparison, Critical Junctures, and Path Dependency**


Gary Goertz and James Mahoney, “Concepts in Theories: Two Level Theories,” in Goertz, chapter 9. Think through Goertz’s exercises for this chapter numbers 3, 7, and, for the works with which you are familiar, number 9.
Optional:


Thomas Ertman, Birth of the Leviathan: Building States and Regimes in Medieval and Early Modern Europe, pp. 1-34, 317-334.


Additional examples:

Peter Evans, Embedded Autonomy: States and Industrial Transformation
Jack Goldstone, Revolution and Rebellion in the Early Modern World
Jeff Goodwin, States and Revolutionary Movements
Peter Hall, Governing the Economy: The Politics of State Intervention in Britain and France, pp. 3-22, 229-284.

Gregory Leubbert, Liberalism, Fascism, or Social Democracy (related to his article above)
Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan, Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation
Ian Lustick, Unsettled States, Disrupted Lands: Britain and Ireland, France and Algeria, Israel and the West Bank-Gaza, pp. 1-51, 439-53
Paul Pierson, Dismantling the Welfare State? Reagan, Thatcher, and the Politics of Retrenchment
Robert Putnam, Making Democracy Work
Dietrich Reuschemeyer and Evelyn and John Stephens, Capitalist Development and Democracy
Theda Skocpol, States and Social Revolutions
Hendrik Spruyt, The Sovereign State and Its Competitors: An Analysis of Systems Change
Charles Tilly, The Formation of National States in Western Europe
David Waldner, State Building and Late Development
Timothy Wickham-Crowley, Guerillas and Revolution in Latin America
March 29: Field Research Techniques: Archives, Interviews, and Surveys


Hope Harrison, “Inside the SED Archives,” CWIHP Bulletin


Optional:


April 5: Extended Examples of Case Study Research

Readings TBD.

April 20, 27, and additional date(s) TBD: Students are required to read and (in class) critique one another’s research designs.
Additional Suggested Readings

Case Studies and The Interdemocratic Peace Research Program


Case Studies in American Politics


I) Philosophy of Science and Epistemological Issues:

Paul Humphreys, *The Chances of Explanation: Causal Explanation in the Social, Medical, and Physical Sciences*


Jon Elster, *Nuts and Bolts for the Social Sciences*

Clifford Geertz, "'Thick Description" and "Notes on a Balinese Cockfight"


Hawthorn, *Plausible Worlds*


Carl Hempel, "The Function of General Laws in History," in his *Aspects of Scientific Explanation*


Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*

Larry Laudan, *Beyond Positivism and Relativism; Progress and its Problems*

Richard Miller, *Fact and Method*, 1987

Karl Popper, *The Logic of Scientific Discovery*

Clayton Roberts, *The Logic of Historical Explanation*

Wesley Salmon, *Four Decades of Scientific Explanation*, 1989

Wesley Salmon, *Causality and Explanation*, 1998


Arthur Stinchcombe, *Constructing Social Theories*

Alexander Wendt, "Anarchy Is What States Make of It." *International Organization*


**II) Case Study Methods**


**III) Critiques and Justifications of Case Studies and Alternative Methods**


Donald Green and Ian Shapiro, *Pathologies of Rational Choice Theory*, (Yale, 1994) pp. TBD.


Donald Campbell, "Degrees of Freedom and the Case Study," *Comparative Political Studies* 8 no. 2 (July 1975), pp. 178-193.

Phil Schrodt, “Beyond the Linear Frequentist Orthodoxy,” *Political Analysis*.

Doug Dion, "Evidence and Inference in the Comparative Case Study," *Comparative Politics*.


**IV) Additional Examples of Case Study Research**

**International Relations**

Graham Allison, *Essence of Decision*


Stephen R. Rock, *Appeasement in International Politics*


Alexander George and Richard Smoke, *Deterrence in American Foreign Policy*

Bruce Jentleson, *Opportunities Missed, Opportunities Seized: Preventive Diplomacy in the Post-Cold War World*

Helen Milner, *Interests, Institutions, and Information: Domestic Politics and International Relations*

Steve Walt, *The Origins of Alliances*

Steve Weber, *Cooperation and Discord in U.S.-Soviet Arms Control*

**Comparative Politics:** See the excellent bibliography of qualitative research compiled by David Collier at <http://www.polisci.berkeley.edu:9000/faculty/dcollier.html>

**American Politics**

Richard Neustadt, *Presidential Power*

Stephen Skowronek, *The Politics Presidents Make: Leadership from John Adams to George Bush*

Larry Sabato, *Media Feeding Frenzies*

Burke and Greenstein, *How Presidents Test Reality*
V) Readings on Concept Formation, Measurement, Uses and Limits of Archival, Interview, and Other Data Sources

Robert K. Yin, *Case Study Research*

Taylor, *Introduction to Qualitative Research*

James Maxwell, *Qualitative Research Design*

A. Strauss and J. Corbin, *Basics of Qualitative Research*

A. Strauss, *Qualitative Analysis*

Lewis Dexter, *Elite and Specialized Interviewing*

Gerome Murphy, *Getting the Facts* (interview techniques)