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 approaches, particularly statistical methods and formal modeling. The fourth section of the course will methodologically critique examples of case study research within defined research programs. These examples will be selected in part based on the interests and input of seminar participants. The final three weeks of the seminar will be devoted to 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 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 the Bennett-George paper, "Research Design Tasks," in the assigned readings below): 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**


Charles Ragin, *Fuzzy Set Social Science* (University of Chicago, 2000)


Course Outline

Jan. 22 Introduction

I) Philosophy of Science and Epistemological Issues

Jan. 29 Evaluating Theories: Positivist and Scientific Realist Approaches and Their Critics
Feb. 5 Causality, Explanation, and Causal Inference

II) Case Study Methods

Feb. 12 Concept Formation
Feb. 26 Designs for Single and Comparative Case Studies and Alternative Research Goals
Mar. 12 Typological Theory and Case Selection
Mar. 19 Process Tracing, Congruence Testing, and Counterfactual Analysis

III) Case Studies and Alternative Methods: Comparative Advantages and Complementarities

Mar. 26 Statistics and Formal Modeling: Contrasts and Complementarities with Case Studies
April 2 Critiques and Justifications of Case Study Methods

IV) Critiquing Examples of Case Study Research

April 9 Case Studies and the Interdemocratic Peace Research Program
April 23 Case Studies and Macro-Historical Comparison in Comparative Politics

V) Student Research Design Presentations

April 30, May 3 (Monday only classes are scheduled to meet on Thursday of Study Week; if necessary, we can try to move this to a day convenient for everyone)

Readings

January 22 Introduction

Charles Ragin and David Zaret, "Theory and Method in Comparative Research: Two


Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennett, draft preface to Case Studies and Theory Development (forthcoming, MIT Press).

I) Philosophy of Science and Epistemological Issues

January 29 Evaluating Theories: Positivist and Scientific Realist Approaches and Their Critics


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


Daniel Little, Microfoundations, chapters 9, 10, and 12, pp. 173-214, 237-256.


February 5: Causality, Explanation, and Causal Inference


Andrew Bennett, 1999 ISA paper on causal inference in case studies.


II) Case Study Methods

February 12: Concept Formation


**February 26 Designs for Single and Comparative Case Studies and Alternative Research Goals**


Andrew Bennett and Alexander George, "Research Design Tasks," draft chapter for *Case Studies and Theory Development*.


Brief Examples: Stephen Walt, *Revolution and War*, pp. 12-17; Jack Snyder, *Myths of Empire*, pp. 60-65; possible additional brief examples TBA.

**March 12 Typological Theory and Case Selection**

*Designing Social Inquiry* pp. 124-149.


Andrew Bennett and Alexander George, "Draft Chapter on Typological Theory," draft manuscript.

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


**March 19: Process Tracing, Congruence Testing, and Counterfactual Analysis**


Alexander George and Andrew Bennett, “The Congruence Method,” draft chapter for *Case Studies and Theory Development*.


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


**III) Case Studies and Alternative Methods: Comparative Advantages and Complementarities**
March 26: Statistics and Formal Modeling: Contrasts and Complementarities with Case Studies

KKV, Designing Social Inquiry, pp. 55-63, 91-95.


Alexander George and Andrew Bennett, draft chapter 1 from Case Studies and Theory Development.


Robert Bates, Avner Greif, Margaret Levi, Jean-Laurent Rosenthal, and Barry Weingast, Analytic Narratives, pp. 3-18; critique by Jon Elster and rejoinder by the authors in American Political Science Review September 200 pp. 685-702. Also, reviews by David Dessler and Andrew Bennett.

April 2: Critiques and Justifications of Case Study Methods


APSA-CP: Newsletter of the APSA Organized Section in Comparative Politics, Vo. 9,


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

**April 9: The Interdemocratic Peace Research Program**


**April 23: Case Studies and "Macro Comparison" in Comparative Politics**


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


Possible additional extended examples to be chosen from the following list, with input from students:

Ruth Berins Collier and David Collier, Shaping the Political Arena
Brian Downing, The Military Revolution and Political Change
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
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, Disputed Lands: Britain and Ireland, France and Algeria, Israel and the West Bank-Gaza
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
Additional Suggested Readings

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*


Paul Diesing, How Does Social Science Work? (Univ. Of Pittsburgh Press, 1991)

Jon Elster, Nuts and Bolts for the Social Sciences

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


Hawthorn, Plausible Worlds


Robert Klee, Introduction to the Philosophy of Science (Oxford, 1997)

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


Michael Sobel, "Causal Inference in the Social and Behavior Sciences," in Gerhard

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

Chris Achen and Duncan Snidal, "Rational Deterrence Theory and Comparative Case Studies,"


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

Jeffrey Friedman, ed., The Rational Choice Controversy (Yale, 1996) pp. TBD.


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

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


Stanley Lieberson, "Small N"s and big conclusions," in Charles Ragin and Howard Becker, What is a case, pp. 105-118.


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)