

# **POLI210: Political Science Research Methods**

## Lecture 1: Introduction

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## Plan for today

- Introducing myself
- What this course is about
- Syllabus and requirements
- Why do you need this course?
- Questions?

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- Decline of local news and attitudes toward trade

## What is this course about?

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## **Normative**

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Character: Value-based and prescriptive

Methods: Persuasion, logic

## **Empirical**

Focuses on: Measuring and observing how things are

Character: Observational, descriptive, predictive

Methods: Collect evidence from the real world and process that evidence using the scientific method

## Empirical vs normative

POLLING QUESTION HERE: WHICH OF THESE QUESTIONS  
IS NORMATIVE?

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From the normative statement: “Men and women need equal representation in legislatures” ...

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From the normative statement: “Men and women need equal representation in legislatures” ...

1. Does gender equality in legislatures lead to more family-friendly policies?
2. Do quotas mandating a minimum proportion of women in legislatures decrease the quality of legislative output?

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3 types of inference:

- Descriptive inference: What are the facts?
- Causal inference: Why does something occur?
- Predictive inference: How will things shake out?

# Descriptive inference

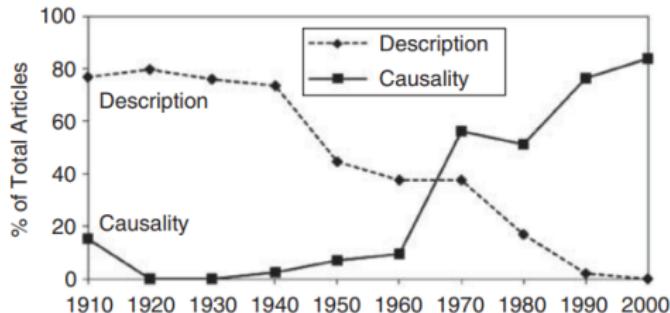


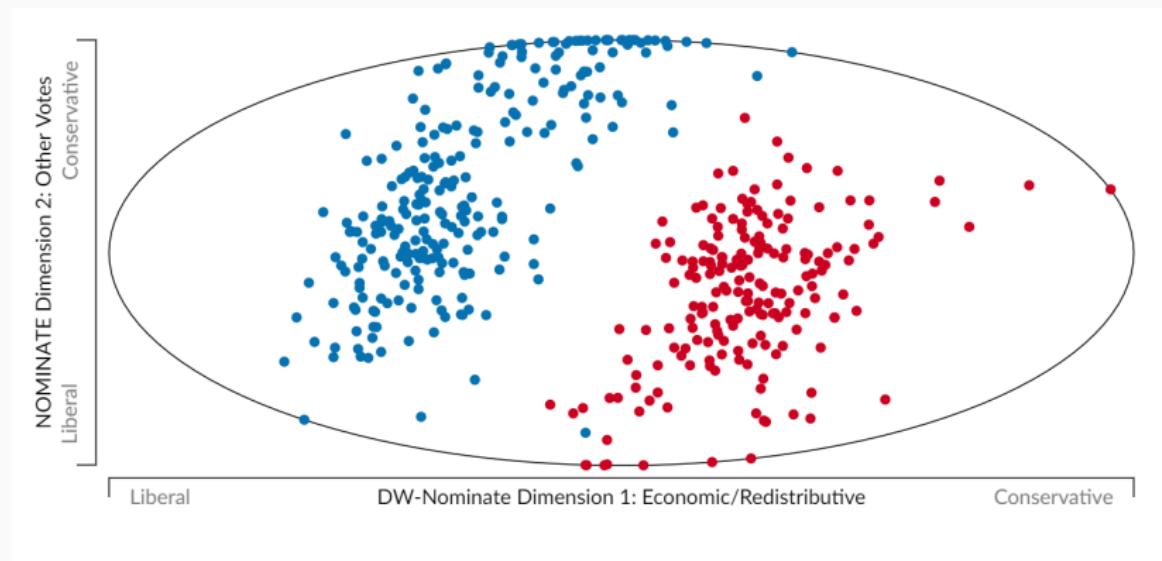
Fig. 3. American Political Science Review, 1910–2000

Note: The share of all articles whose principal argument is *descriptive* (generalizing or non-generalizing) or *causal* within the *American Political Science Review*. Coding includes all articles published within a given year, at decadal intervals – a total of 42 issues and 330 articles. Excludes book reviews, editorials, presidential addresses, personal notes and correspondences, short research notes, symposia of non-regular articles, and notes on current legislation.

Source: Gerring (2012)

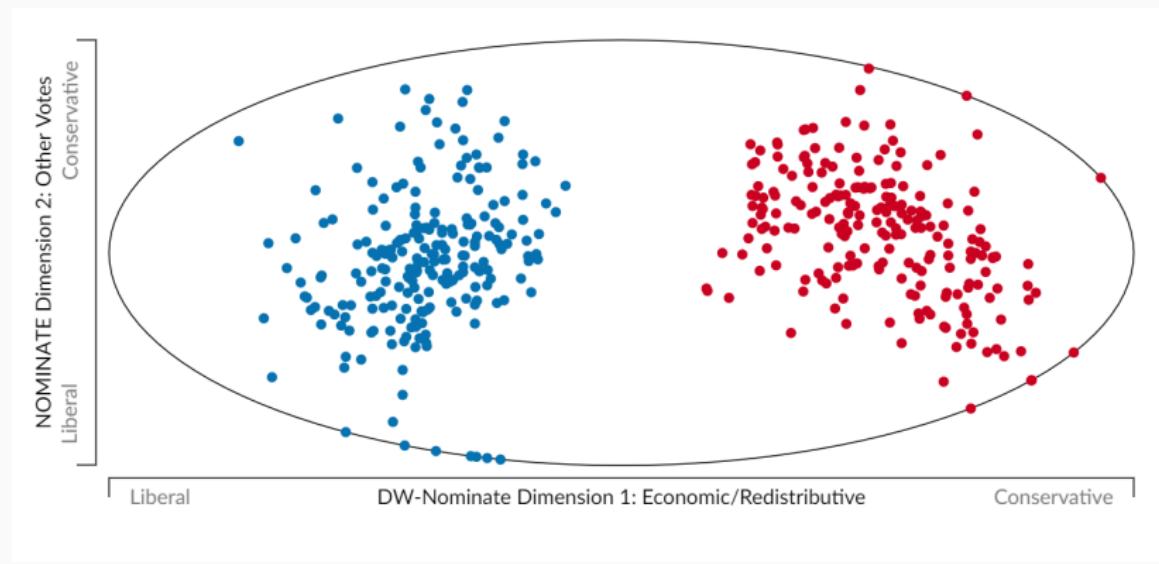
New: Journal of Quantitative Description

## **Descriptive inference: DW-NOMINATE scores**



DW-NOMINATE scores for the 90th Congress (1967-1969)

## Descriptive inference: DW-NOMINATE scores



DW-NOMINATE scores for the 17th Congress (current)

See here: [VoteView](#)

## Descriptive inference: UN voting

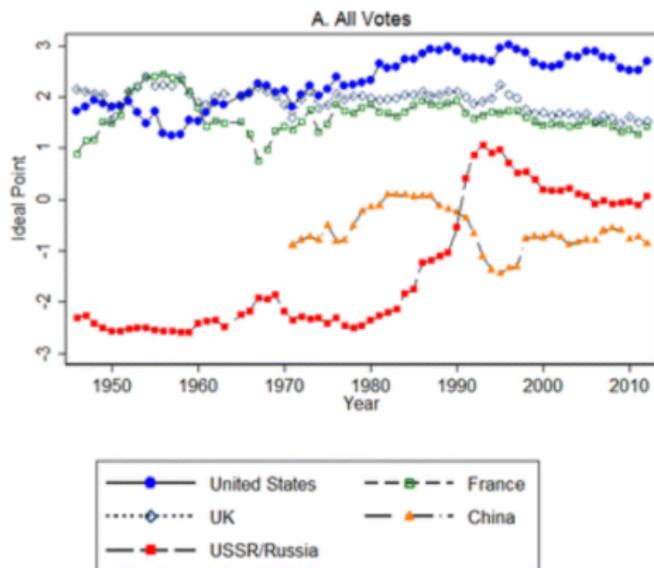
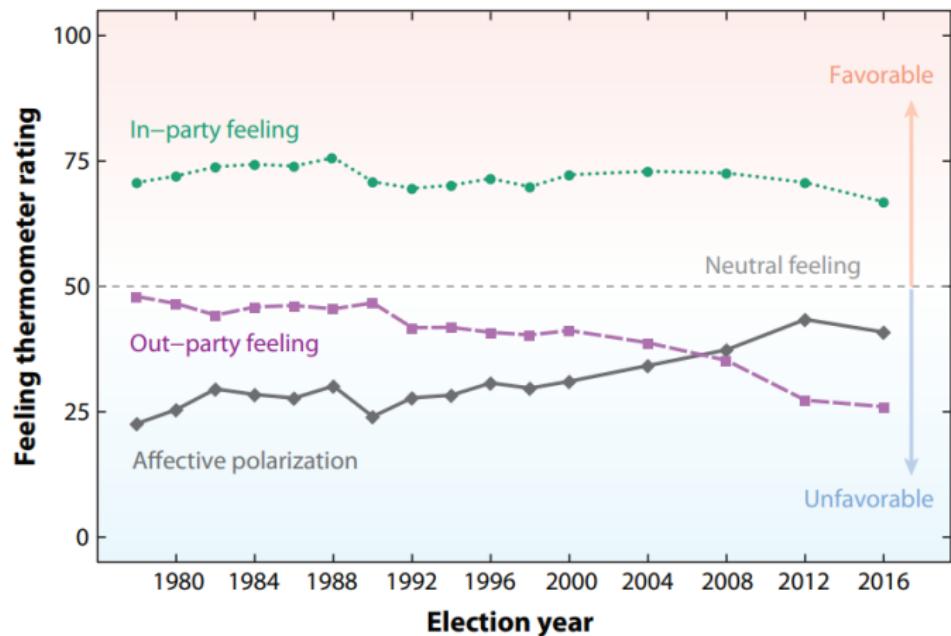


Figure 3. Ideal points of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council (P-5) in the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA).

Source: Bailey, Voeten and Strezhnev (2017)

## Descriptive inference: affective polarization



Source: Iyengar et al. (2019)

# Causal inference

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Causal inference is about *why*

- Why did Congress polarize?
- Why did the Soviet Union fall?
- Why did the Arab Spring lead to democracy in Tunisia but not in other countries?

# Predictive inference

Prediction is not causation!

## Predictive inference

Prediction is not causation!

Example? What is something I can predict but not interpret causally?

**Why make me do this?**

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- Developing a toolbox for your research
- Engaging with broader scientific debates and controversies
- Because I need this course for my degree...

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- But claims exist on continuum of plausibility
- Give you tools to assess credibility of claims

## How are we feeling?

POLLING QUESTION: FEELING  
EXCITED/OVERWHELMED/CURIOSUS/ANXIOUS

## A note on learning methods

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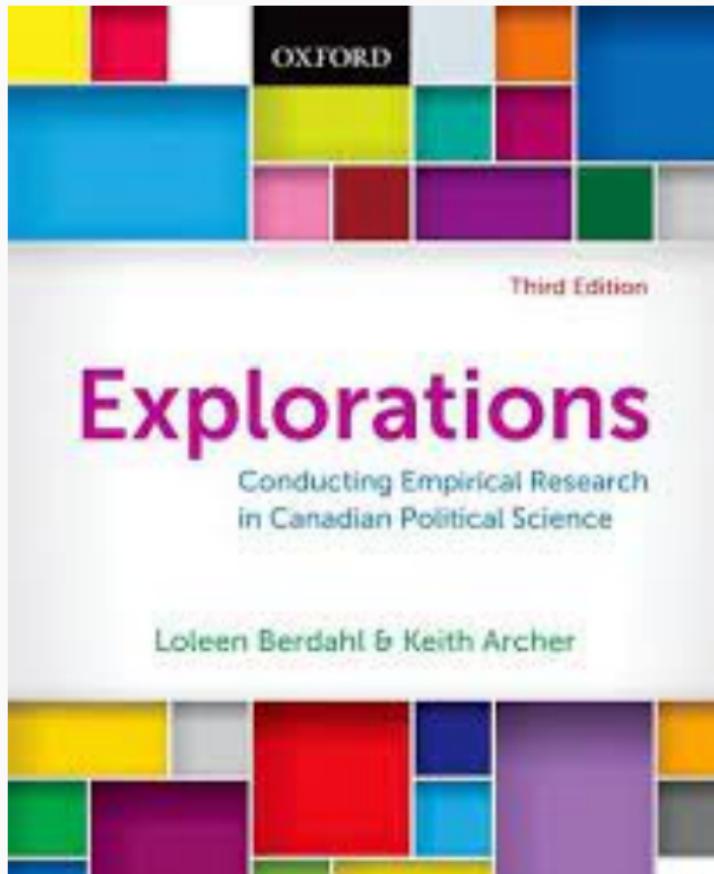
I know this can be intimidating

- But this course is *not* math-heavy
- Everyone can do well
- But do try to keep up and use the resources given to you!
- Don't hesitate to reach out

## Syllabus and requirements

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# Textbook



## Course components

Lectures: 2x per week (online)

Labs: 1x per week (in person?)

2 quizzes

Midterm + final

4-5 assignments

## Labs

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- Main use: manipulating data, performing statistical tests, making graphs and tables...

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- Why?

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- Why?
  - Scientifically: replicability and transparency
  - For you: highly marketable and a good tool to master
  - To pass your assignments ;)

ASAP: Download R and RStudio

- RStudio: IDE (Integrated Development Environment)

# Contact

Discussion boards on MyCourses: use them!

My email: [olivier.bergeron-boutin@mail.mcgill.ca](mailto:olivier.bergeron-boutin@mail.mcgill.ca) My office hours:  
TBA

## References i

- Bailey, Michael A., Anton Strezhnev, and Erik Voeten. 2017. "Estimating Dynamic State Preferences from United Nations Voting Data." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 61 (2): 430–56.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002715595700>.
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