

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?

Empirical vs normative

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Normative

Focuses on: “shoulds” – on how things ought to be

Character: Value-based and prescriptive

Methods: Persuasion, logic

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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”...

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

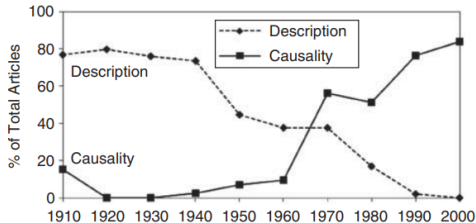


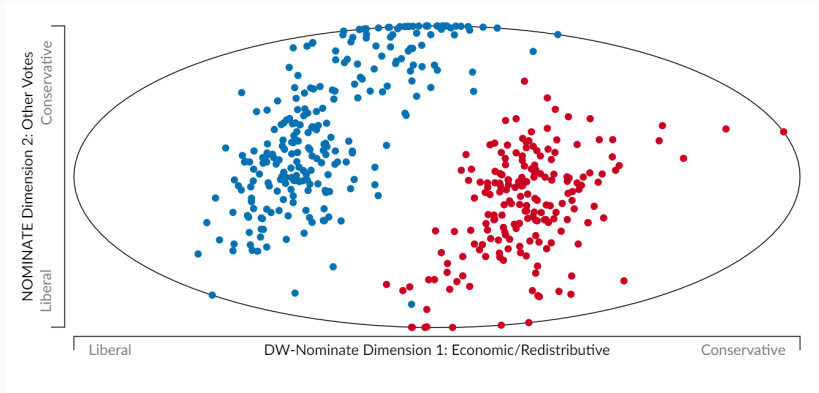
Fig. 3. *American Political Science Review*, 1910–2000

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)

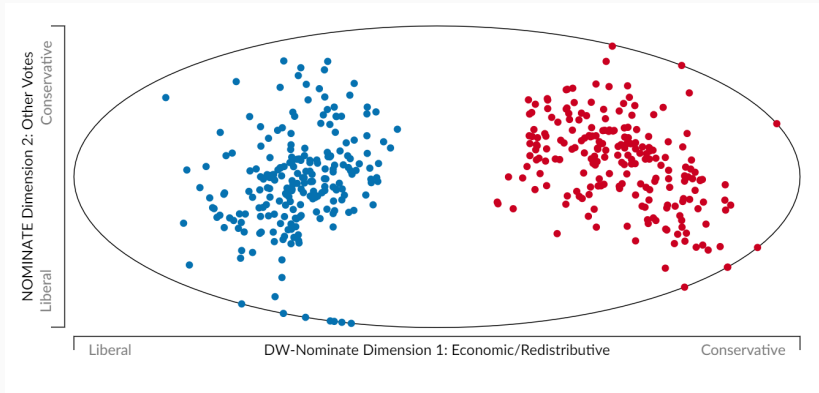
New: [Journal of Quantitative Description](#)

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

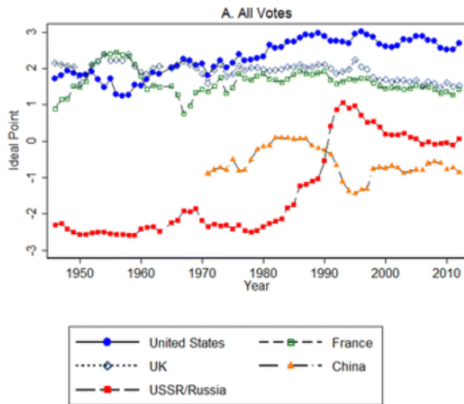
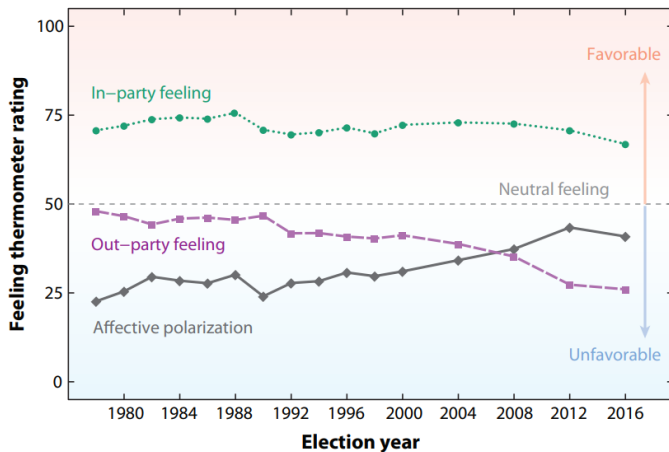


Figure 3. Ideal points of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council (P-5) in the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA).

Source: Bailey, Voeten and Strezhnev (2017)

Descriptive inference: affective polarization



Source: Iyengar et al. (2019)

Causal inference

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- Why did Congress polarize?

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- Why did the Soviet Union fall?

Causal inference

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- 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?

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?

Some reasons

- The most boring answer: because political scientists use empirical methods and we need to be able to understand!

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- 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/CURIOUS/ANXIOUS

A note on learning methods

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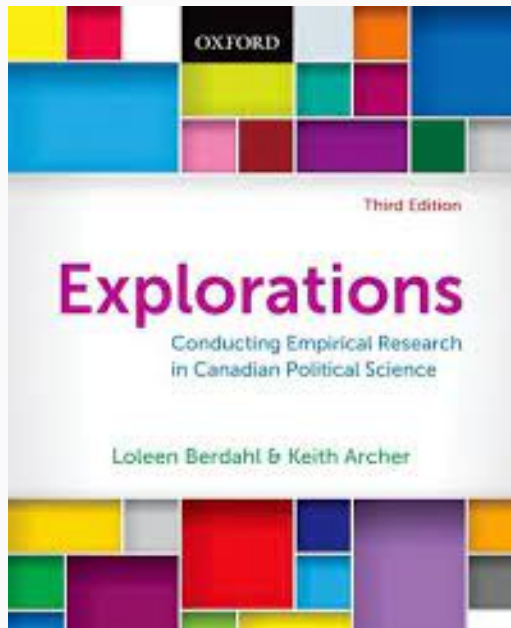
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A note on learning methods

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



Course components

Lectures: 2x per week (online)

Labs: 1x per week (in person?)

2 quizzes

Midterm + final

4-5 assignments

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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 My office hours:
TBA

- 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>.
- Gerring, John. 2012. "Mere Description." *British Journal of Political Science* 42 (4): 721–46. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123412000130>.
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