Literature Review

Department of Government
London School of Economics and Political Science

1 Brief Review of MT Material

2 Brief Review of Last Week

3 Scientific "Literatures"

Administrative Matters

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- NSS

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- Research Design Proposal

Administrative Matters

- NSS
- Research Design Proposal
- Problem sets
    - PS 6: Covers next 2 weeks
    - PS 7: Choose an article from another course
    - PS 8: R-based activity

The Exam!

The exam has three parts:

1. Short-answer questions
2. Essay analysing/evaluating an empirical article
3. Research proposal section

Sample paper is on Moodle.

Part B Readings

- Munck and Verkuilen (2002) (MT3)

- Young and Soroka (2012) (MT7)

- Goffman (2009) (MT8)

- Mershon (1996) (MT9)

- Wedeen (1998) (MT9)

- Tannenwald (1999) (LT3)

- Lange, Mahoney, vom Hau (2006) (LT4)

- Doner, Ritchie, Slater (2005) (LT4)

- Brady (2004) (LT5)

- Hibbs (1978) (LT8)

- Cusack, Iversen, Soskice (2007) (LT9)

- Bhavnani (2009) (LT10)

- Campbell and Ross (1968) (LT10)

What did we learn about during MT?

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2 Brief Review of Last Week

3 Scientific "Literatures"

What does it mean to think counterfactually?

How does doing so help us make causal inferences?

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- All research should contribute to "the literature"

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    - "The literature" is what is relevant to your research
    - Others may disagree with your definition of what research is relevant versus irrelevant

Organizing Literature

There are a few broad ways that we might identify "a literature":

1. Research using shared concepts
2. Research using shared theory
3. Research using shared data sources
4. Research using shared methods of analysis
5. Research by the same author(s)/team(s)

I. Concepts

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- Individual studies may have little in common except empirics
  - Often norms or "best practices" in the application of particular methods, regardless of research context

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- Rivalries!

Putting it all together

- Think of these organizing frameworks like a Venn Diagram, where each feature can overlap

- A literature is the subset of the complete diagram that is relevant to a particular piece of research

Finding Literature

Question: How do you find literature?

Finding Literature

- Library or Google Scholar search

- Talk to faculty members and peers

- Research syntheses

- Journals
  - Generalist
  - Subfield

- Citation networks

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- *Forward* citation search can be difficult

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- Serves two functions:
    - Summary of existing knowledge
    - Identification of limitations or gaps

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  - Usually covers a specific period of time
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- Structure and content is flexible
  - May merely summarize
  - May be "critical"

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- Provides a specific inference with the intent to guide new research or inform policy

Quantitative Review

Structure is nearly always the same:

1. A body of existing studies is gathered using inclusion/exclusion criteria

2. Statistic of interest is derived for each study

3. Statistics are mathematically aggregated (by some form of weighted averaging)

4. Patterns are examined across between-study sources of variation

5. An overall estimate is produced

Qualitative versus Quantitative Synthesis

- Remember: All quantitative synthesis is also qualitative

- Solely qualitative synthesis will tend to be more holistic

- Solely quantitative synthesis will tend to provide less critical engagement with specific aspects of individual studies

- Quantitative synthesis typically makes evidence selection criteria more explicit

Evaluating Research

In groups of 3, try to generate a set of criteria that you can use to decide whether to believe a given piece of research.

You have 6 minutes.

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2. Identify which literature or literatures you want to address
3. Develop a critical literature review of existing evidence
   - Identify ways you could contribute new knowledge

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1. Answering unanswered questions

2. Applying theory to new cases

3. Elaborating more specific implications of theories

4. Developing new measures of concepts

5. Developing new or better concept definitions

6. New, improved, and/or alternative methodology

7. Studying alternative units of analysis

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2. Identify which literature or literatures you want to address
3. Develop a critical literature review of existing evidence
   - Identify ways you could contribute new knowledge
4. Develop theory and design empirical methods using and/or improving existing theory and methods
   - Focus on improving **one** thing

Questions?