

# Welcome and First Lecture

Department of Government  
London School of Economics and Political Science

- 1 Substantive Material

- 2 Introductions

- 3 Administrative Stuff

# Claims

- Politics is full of claims
- The credibility of claims depends on the strength of evidence and argument
- This class aims to give you tools to:
  - make credible claims, *and*
  - evaluate claims made by others

# An Example



The screenshot shows the top portion of The Guardian's website. The header is dark blue with the 'theguardian' logo in white, followed by the tagline 'website of the year'. Below the header is a navigation bar with links: 'home', 'business', 'economics', 'banking', 'retail', 'markets', 'eurozone', 'UK', 'world', and a menu icon labeled 'all'. The 'economics' link is highlighted. Below the navigation bar, there is a sub-header 'Economics' with a blue and yellow icon. The main headline reads 'Brexit vote puts Britain's rising competitiveness at risk, says WEF'. Below the headline, a sub-headline states: 'World Economic Forum report gives UK highest ranking in a decade, but suggests leaving EU will have negative impact'.

theguardian  
website of the year

home › business › economics banking retail markets eurozone UK world all

Economics

## Brexit vote puts Britain's rising competitiveness at risk, says WEF

World Economic Forum report gives UK highest ranking in a decade, but suggests leaving EU will have negative impact

Source: Larry Elliott, *The Guardian*, Sep. 27, 2016

# Definitions

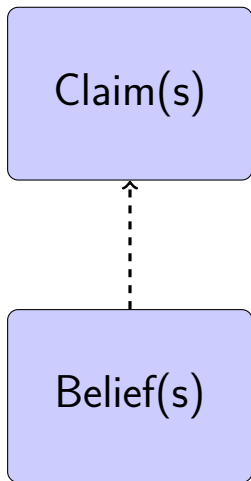
- Inference: “a belief based on evidence *and* rules for processing that evidence”
- Methodology: “tools for gathering and analyzing data to try to make valid inferences”

# Drawing Inferences

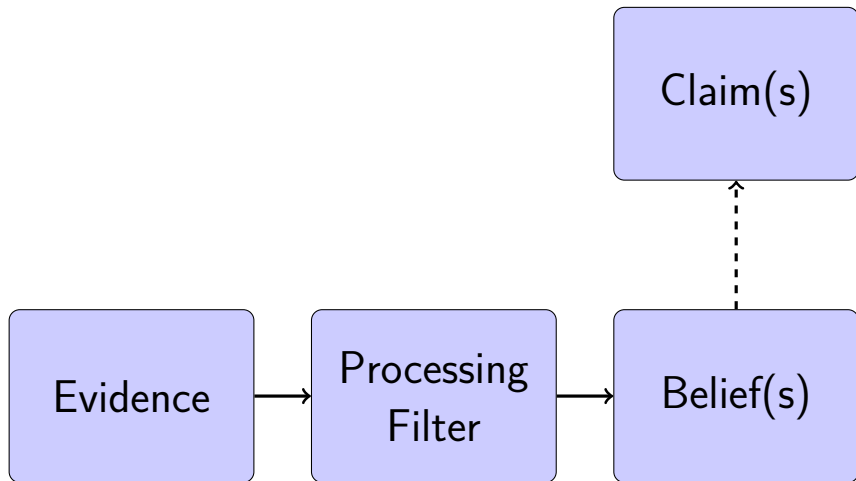


Claim(s)

# Drawing Inferences



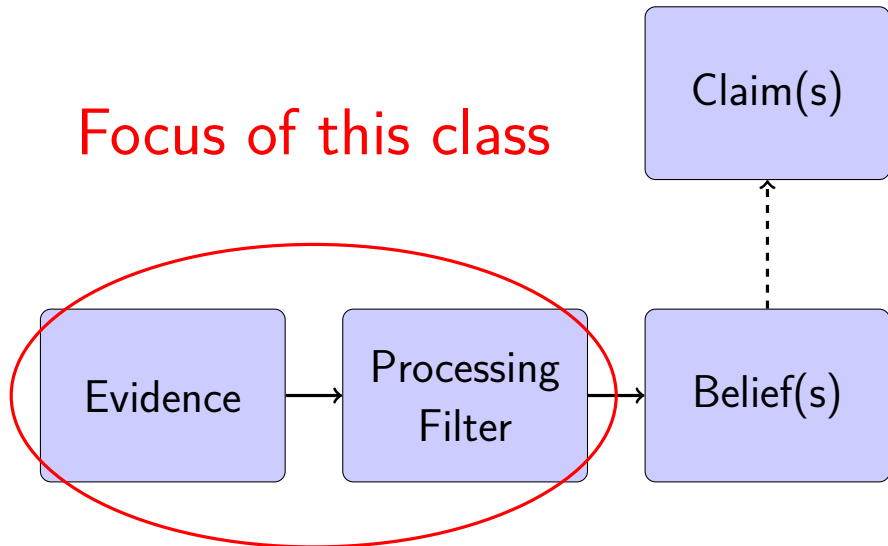
# Drawing Inferences





# Drawing Inferences

Focus of this class



# Question for you

How might we draw an inference about the effect of Brexit on economic competitiveness?

# Two Categories of Inference

## 1 Descriptive Inference

- What are the facts?

## 2 Causal Inference

- Why does something occur?

# Descriptive Inference

- Sometimes seen as the lesser type of inference
- Still often very interesting
- Examples
  - Is the climate changing?
  - Is the United States politically polarized?
  - Is global terrorism increasing?
  - Is Azerbaijan a democracy?

# Causal Inference I

- Typically what we are interested in
- Questions about “why?”
- Examples
  - *Why* is the climate changing?
  - *Why* is the United States politically polarized?
  - *Why* is (or is not) global terrorism increasing?
  - *Why* is (or is not) Azerbaijan a democracy?

# Causal Inference II

Typically start with either:

1 an outcome (dependent variable)

or

2 a cause (independent variable)

# Causal Inference: 2 Types

## Reverse

If what, then Y?  
What causes Y?

Associated with a  
search for causes

ex. What causes  
climate change?

## Forward

If X, then what?  
What happens if X?

Associated with  
“Experimentation”

ex. What happens if  
we release  
greenhouse gases  
into the air?

# Which of these is a causal research question?

- 1 Will Labour win the next UK general election?
- 2 What had to have happened for Labour to win the last UK general election?
- 3 How has Labour's electoral performance changed over the last three decades?
- 4 What was the result of the last UK general election?
- 5 What role did the economy have on the last UK general election?



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# Good research questions

- Start from political problem or puzzle
- Builds on an existing research literature
- Non-obvious<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Note: evolving standard

# Which is a better RQ?

Why was Germany allocated 96 seats in the European Parliament during the 2014 elections?

Why was “degressive proportionality” chosen as the method of allocating seats in the EP?

# Which is a better RQ?

Given what we know from Skocpol about the causes of social revolutions, why haven't such revolutions occurred in several post-Soviet states in Central Asia?

Given my conversations with taxi drivers during my weekend holiday in Tashkent, why hasn't Uzbekistan become a full-fledged democracy?

# Which is a better RQ?

How do social media facilitate Britons' decisions about where to take a summer holiday?

How did social media use shape the development of "Arab Spring" protests in Egypt?

# Other ways to generate research questions

- 1 Puzzle-driven
- 2 Theory-driven
- 3 Data-driven
- 4 Method-driven

# Scientific method

- 1 Research question(s)
- 2 Clarify the core concepts
- 3 Develop (causal) theory
- 4 Derive specific, testable hypotheses
- 5 Plan data collection
- 6 Gather data/evidence
- 7 Analyze data
- 8 Draw inferences



# Questions?

1 Substantive Material

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# Who am I?

- Thomas Leeper
- Assistant Professor in Political Behaviour
- Originally from Minnesota (USA); worked in Denmark for past 2.5 years
- Interested in public opinion and political psychology
- Office hours:  
Mon 2:30–3:30; Fri 9:30–10:30 CON 3.21  
(Sign-up on LSE for You)  
Otherwise, email: [t.leeper@lse.ac.uk](mailto:t.leeper@lse.ac.uk)

# Who is your GTA?

- Elena Pupaza
- PhD candidate at LSE

# Who are you?

- Introduce yourself to a neighbour
- Where are you from?
- What interests you about government or politics?
- What do you hope to learn from the course?

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# Course Resources

- Reading List:

<http://readinglists.lse.ac.uk/lists/B821602E-0B75-9923-D8C5-457373E1789E.html>

- Toshkov's *Research Design in Political Science*

- Moodle:

<https://moodle.lse.ac.uk/course/view.php?id=4889>

- Slides (after lecture)
- Forums
- Assignments

# Textbook





# Schedule: Michaelmas Term

MT 1 Introduction (Sep. 30)

MT 2 Concepts: "I'll know it when I see it" (Oct. 7)

MT 3 Measurement: Concepts in Practice (Oct. 14)

MT 4 Tabulation and Visualization (Oct. 21)

MT 5 Translating Texts into Interpretations and Numbers (Oct. 28)

Reading Week

MT 7 Interviewing, Structured and Unstructured (Nov. 11)

MT 8 Actually Talking to People: Participant Observation (Nov. 18)

MT 9 Case Studies (Nov. 25)

MT 10 Sampling and Representativeness (Dec. 2)

MT 11 Ethics and Research Integrity (Dec. 9)

# Schedule: Lent Term

LT 1 Causality: Explanation versus Prediction (Jan. 13)

LT 2 Theory Development and Hypothesis Generation (Jan. 20)

LT 3 Literature Review (Jan. 27)

LT 4 Case Comparisons (Feb. 3)

LT 5 Causal Mechanisms (Feb. 10)

Reading Week

LT 7 Statistical Inference (Feb. 24)

LT 8 Getting to Regression: The Workhorse of Quantitative Political Analysis (Mar. 3)

LT 9 Matching and Regression: Accounting for Rival Explanations (Mar. 10)

LT 10 Experimental Design and the Search for Quasi-Experiments (Mar. 17)

LT 11 Conclusion, Exam Prep, Synthesis (Mar. 24)

# Learning Outcomes

- 1 Identify theories, hypotheses, and methods used in empirical political science research.
- 2 Apply different methods to political science research questions.
- 3 Analyze data to measure concepts, make comparisons, and draw inferences.
- 4 Define causation and the multiple ways of reaching causal inferences.
- 5 Communicate political science concepts, theories, and methods in writing.

# Summative Assessment

- 1 Breadth: 2-hour written exam (ST)
  - Similar to last year's paper
  - Sample paper will be available on Moodle
- 2 Depth: 3000-word research design proposal

# Research Design Proposal

- Research question
- Theoretical contribution
- Testable hypotheses
- Description of the proposed data collection and analysis
- **Due Date:**  
**Tues 21 March 2017 at 5:00pm**

# Problem Sets

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Identifying & Evaluating Claims	Problem Set 1	Tues. Oct. 11
Concepts and Measurement	Problem Set 2	Tues. Nov. 8
Data Collection I	Problem Set 3	Tues. Nov. 22
Data Collection II	Problem Set 4	Tues. Dec. 13
Proposal Topics Presentation	Presentation	November

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Causality	Problem Set 5	Tues. Jan. 24
Theory Evaluation	Problem Set 6	Tues. Feb. 7
Literature Review	Formative Essay	Tues. Feb. 21
Article Critique	Problem Set 7	Tues. Mar. 7
Statistical analysis	Problem Set 8	Tues. Mar. 21

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# Questions?

