**What is theory?**

Often we hope our research can generate interesting, important and (wishfully) original "theoretical" insights. When you present your research ideas, it is common that someone asks you to discuss "your theory." And yet what is "theory?" How do different subject ideas in social sciences define and incorporate a "theory" into their research? What does theory do (or does not do)? How do we evaluate a theory? Is there a set of universal standards? Finally, should a project be considered less important or valuable simply because "it does not have a theory?" This week we will use several classical readings in sociology, political science, and behavioral economics to address these questions. We will use rational choice theory to illustrate some of the key points made in the lecture.

Required Readings

* [Core] Geddes, Barbara. 2003. Paradigms and Sandcastles. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press. Read Chapter 1.
* [Core].
* [Discussion] Elster, Jon. 2000. "Rational Choice History: A Case of Excessive Ambition." American Political Science Review 94(3): 685-695. You can skim the discussion on individual chapters.

Further Readings

* Bates, Robert H., Avner Grief, Margaret Levi, Jean-Laurent Rosenthal, and Barry R. Weingast. 1998. Analytic Narratives. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
* Elster, Jon. 1989. The Cement of Society: A Survey of Social Order. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
* Gailmard, Sean. 2021. "Theory, History, and Political Economy." Journal of Historical Political Economy 1: 69-104.
* Gintis, Herbert. 2004. "Towards the Unity of the Human Behavioral Sciences." Politics, Philosophy & Economics 3(1): 37-57.
* Mills, C. Wright. 1959. The Sociological Imagination. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
* Reed, Isaac Ariail. 2011. Interpretation and Social Knowledge. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
* Schelling, Thomas. 1978. Micromotives and Macrobehavior. New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company.
* Swedberg, Richard. 2017. "Theorizing in Sociological Research: A New Perspective, a New Departure?" Annual Review of Sociology 43: 189-206,
* Swedberg, Richard. 2017. The Art of Social Theory. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
* Tilly, Charles. 1990. "How (and What) Are Historian Doing?" American Behavioral Scientist 33(6): 685-711.
* Tavory, Iddo, and Stefan Timmermans. 2014. Abductive Analysis: Theorizing Qualitative Research. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

**Using numbers to study the social world**

In recent years, data science (or data analytics) has become a buzzword for social research. The Economics and Social Research Council (ESRC) has also highlighted "social statistics, methods and computing" as one of the funding priorities. Why? This week, we will discuss the epistemological and ontological considerations behind the use of statistical or quantitative approaches for social "science" research with some critical, and yet cautionary and constructive, reflections. We will also take a step further, discussing why it has become common for researchers to do (or "mix") both qualitative and quantitative methods -- either independently or via collaborations. The lecture will end with a brief discussion on the rise of "computational social science" (CSS). We will return to this topic (i.e., CSS) in the Masterclass in Social Research.

Background Reading (Optional)

King, Gary, Keohane, Robert O., and Verba, Sidney. 1994. Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. Read Chapters 1-2 if you need a refresher or a quick introduction to quantitative social research.

Required Readings

* [Core] Mahoney, James. 2010. "After KKV: The New Methodology of Qualitative Research." World Politics 62(1): 120-147.
* [Core] Gehlbach, Scott. 2015. "The Fallacy of Multiple Methods." APSR Comparative Politics Newsletter 25(2): 11-12.
* [Discussion] Bochsler, Daniel., et al. 2021. "Exchange on the Quantitative Measurement of Ethnic and National Identity." Nations and Nationalism 27(1): 22-40.
* [Discussion] Van Baval, Jay J., et al. 2020. "Using Social and Behavioural Science to Support COVID-19 Pandemic Response." Nature Human Behavior 4: 460–471.

Further Readings

* Ahmed, Amel, and Rudra Sil. 2012. "When Multi-Method Research Subverts Methodological Pluralism." Perspectives on Politics 10(4): 935-953.
* An, Weihua, and Shawn Bauldry. 2022. "Methodological Advances in Quantitative Social Science." Social Science Research. Online first.
* Barnes, Trevor. 2001. "Retheorizing Economic Geography: From the Quantitative Revolution to the 'Cultural Turn'." Annals of the Association of American Geographers 91(3): 564-565.
* Brady, Henry E., and David Collier. 2010. Rethinking Social Inquiry. Lanham, MD: Rowan & Littlefield.
* Breznau, Nate, et al. 2022. "Observing Many Researchers Using the Same Data and Hypothesis Reveals a Hidden Universe of Uncertainty." Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America 119(44): e2203150119.
* Camerer, Colin F., et al. 2018. "Evaluating the Replicability of Social Science Experiments in Nature and Science between 2010 and 2015." Nature Human Behavior 2: 637–644.
* Desrosières, Alain. 2002. The Politics of Large Numbers: A History of Statistical Reasoning. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
* Goertz, Gary, and James Mahoney. 2012. A Tale of Two Cultures: Qualitative and Quantitative Research in the Social Sciences. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
* Hamilton, Trina. 2009. "Power in Numbers: A Call for Analytical Generosity Toward New Political Strategies." Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space 41(2): 284-301.
* Huntington-Klein, Nick, et al. 2020. "The Influence of Hidden Researcher Decisions in Applied Microeconomics." IZA Discussion Papers, No. 13233.
* Jerven, Morten. 2013. Poor Numbers: How We Are Misled by African Development Statistics and What to Do about It. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
* Kwan, Mei-Po, and Tim Schwanen. 2009. "Quantitative Revolution 2: The Critical (Re)Turn." The Professional Geographer 61(3): 283-291.
* Lieberman, Evan S. 2005. "Nested Analysis as a Mixed-Method Strategy for Comparative Research." American Political Science Review 99(3): 435–52.
* Small, Mario Luis. 2011. "How to Conduct a Mixed Methods Study: Recent Trends in a Rapidly Growing Literature." Annual Review of Sociology 37: 57-86.
* Stiglitz, Joseph E., Amartya Sen, and Jean-Paul Fitoussi. 2010. Mismeasuring Our Lives: Why GDP Doesn't Add Up. New York, NY: New Press, 2010.

**Causality in social research**

In the past two decades, the demand for credibility in applied economic (or more specifically, econometric) research has led to the causal revolution in subject areas beyond economics. We will start this week first by unpacking the meaning of "causality" in social research before we move on to discuss why (sometimes) it is critical to make sure our (empirical) findings have causal implications rather than just revealing (spurious) correlations. We will then use randomized clinical trials (RCTs), which some consider as the "gold" standard, to motivate our discussion and illustrate some of the key points. We may also briefly discuss some of the popular techniques, as well as the challenges, as raised by scholars in the field of "causal inference." For those who would like to learn more about causal inference, please audit/attend "Advanced Topics in Quantitative Social Research" and/or "Experiments in Social Science" in Term 3 (Summer).

Background Reading (Optional)

King, Gary, Keohane, Robert O., and Verba, Sidney. 1994. Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. Read Chapter 3.

Required Readings

* Dunning, Thad. 2015. Natural Experiments in the Social Sciences. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Read Introduction.
* [Reading Exercise] Nunn, Nathan. 2010. "Religious Conversation in Colonial Africa." American Economic Review: Paper & Proceedings 100: 147-152. Read till the end of Part II.
* [Reading Exercise] Meyer, Birgit. 1999. Translating the Devil: Religion and Modernity among the Ewe in Ghana. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. Read Introduction and Epilogue.

Further Readings

* Brady, Henry E. 2011. "Causation and Explanation in Social Science." In The Oxford Handbook of Political Science, ed. Robert Goodin. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
* Deaton, Angus, and Nancy Cartwright. 2018. "Understanding and Misunderstanding Randomized Controlled Trials." Social Science & Medicine 210: 2-21.
* Glynn, Adam N., and Nahomi Ichino. 2015. "Using Qualitative Information to Improve Causal Inference." American Journal of Political Science 59(4): 1055-1071.
* Haynes, Laura, Owain Service, Ben Goldacre, and David Torgerson. 2012. Test, Learn, Adapt: Developing Public Policy with Randomised Controlled Trials. London: Behavioural Insights Team, Cabinet Office.
* Hedstrom, Peter, and Petri Ylikoski. 2010. "Causal Mechanisms in the Social Sciences." Annual Review of Sociology 36: 49-67.
* Munger, Kevin. 2020. "Describing the Journal of Quantitative Description: Digital Media." Never Met Science Blog.
* Samii, Cyrus. 2016. "Causal Empiricism in Quantitative Research." Journal of Politics 78(3): 941-955.
* Sekhon, Jasjeet S. 2004. "Quality Meets Quantity: Case Studies, Conditional Probability, and Counterfactuals." Perspectives on Politics 2(2): 281-293.
* Waldner, David. 2012. "Process Tracing and Causal Mechanisms." In The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Social Science. Harold Kincaid ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

**Comparative and international analysis**

We usually start our research by questioning what we observe. And yet sometimes it takes a whole village to find meaningful answers to our inquires. In this session, we will discuss how (and why it is useful and important) to broaden the scope of our research beyond the cases we rely on in the first place. We will also discuss what (pitfalls) might turn up if we fail to do that. Our discussion will draw on some key classical works in comparative politics and (comparative) sociology.

Required Readings

* [Core] Bates, Robert H. 2007. "From Case Studies to Social Science: A Strategy for Political Research." In The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Politics, eds. Carles Boix and Susan C. Stokes. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Or read Pepinsky (2019).
* [Core] Phillips, Anne. 2010. "What's Wrong with Essentialism?" Distinktion 11(1): 47-60.
* [Discussion] Tsai, Lily L. 2007. "Solidary Groups, Informal Accountability, and Local Public Goods Provision in Rural China." American Political Science Review 101(2): 355-372. You can skim the statistical sections.

Further Readings

* Collier, David. 1993. "The Comparative Method." In Political Science: The State of the Discipline II, ed. Ada W. Finifter. Washington, DC: American Political Science Association.
* Fuchs, Stephan. 2001. Against Essentialism: A Theory of Culture and Society. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
* Geddes, Barabra. 1990. "How the Cases You Choose Affect the Answers You Get: Selection Bias in Comparative Politics." Political Analysis 2: 131-150.
* Hertog, Steffen. 2021. "Taking Causal Heterogeneity Seriously: Implications for Case Choice and Case Study-Based Generalizations." Sociological Methods & Research. Online first.
* Mahoney, James, and Dietrich Rueschemeyer. 2003. Comparative Historical Analysis in the Social Sciences. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
* Pepinsky, Thomas B. 2019. "The Return of the Single-Country Study." Annual Review of Political Science 22: 187-203.
* Fairfield, Tasha, and Andrew E. Charman. 2017. "Explicit Bayesian Analysis for Process Tracing." Political Analysis 25(3): 363–380.