

Research Methods for Political Science

Qualitative *versus* Quantitative?



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Research design

“the **plan** of a study that **organises observations** in such a way as to establish a **sound logical basis for causal inference**”

(Manheim et al. 2012, 422)

How do I know I am
right?

(or at least not completely
wrong)

Research design

- Should help to 'connect the dots'
- Should helps to disentangle rival hypotheses
- Should allow you to claim external validity

Rival Hypotheses

- A random sample of 1000 people showed that people who watch public broadcasting have a better political knowledge than those who do not. The effect is large and statistically significant
- -> support for public funding of RTE?

Rival Hypotheses

- Perhaps level of education impacts both
- Perhaps those who watched the RTE could have learned more doing something else
- People who watch the RTE also have time to read newspapers, etc.

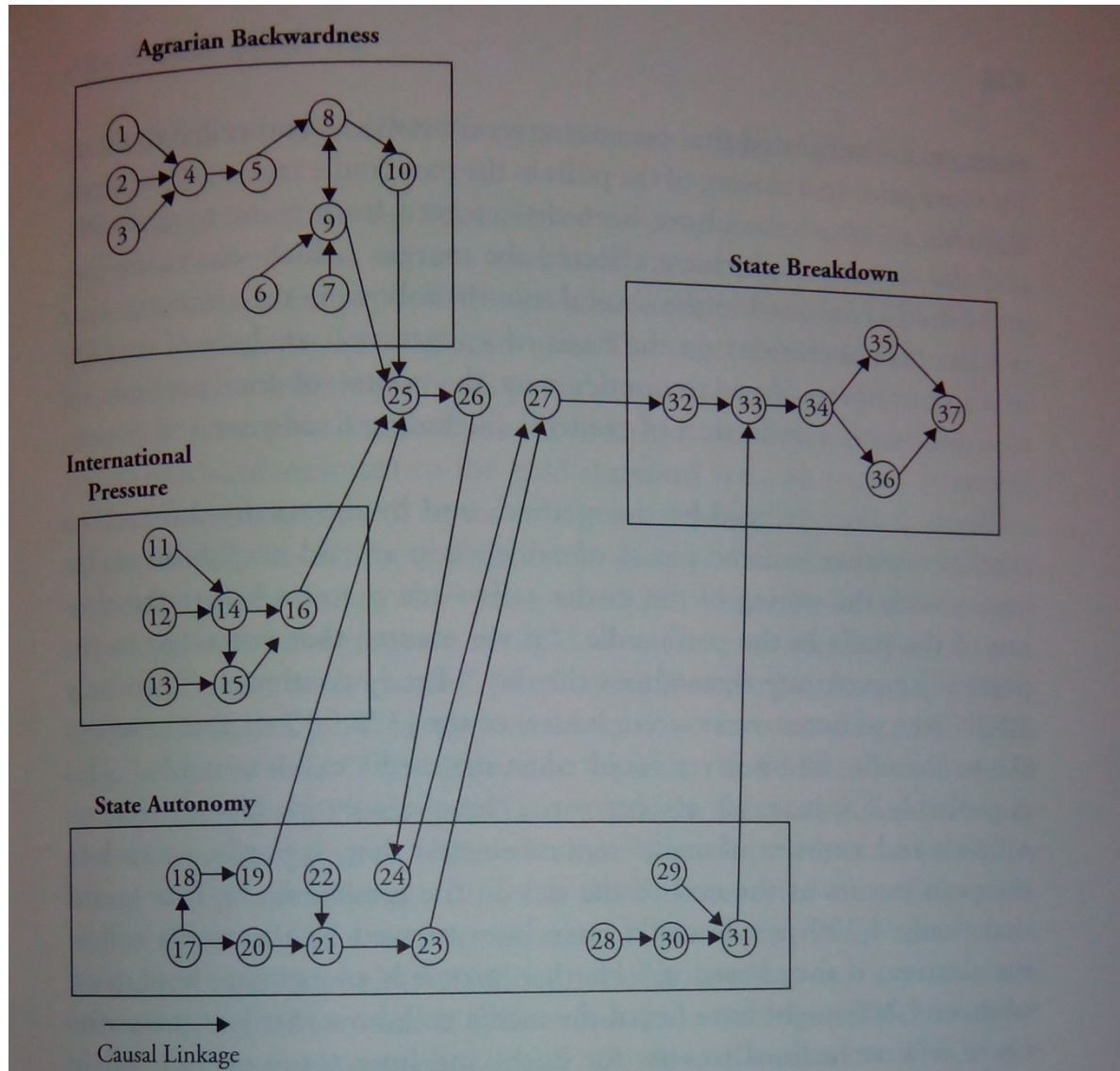
Different types of research design

- Experimental research
- Observational research
 - Survey research
 - Content analysis
 - Participatory observation
 - Discourse analysis
 - ... (many more)

Qualitative v. Quantitative

- Stylized overview of different research traditions/cultures/approaches
- Labels themselves disputed

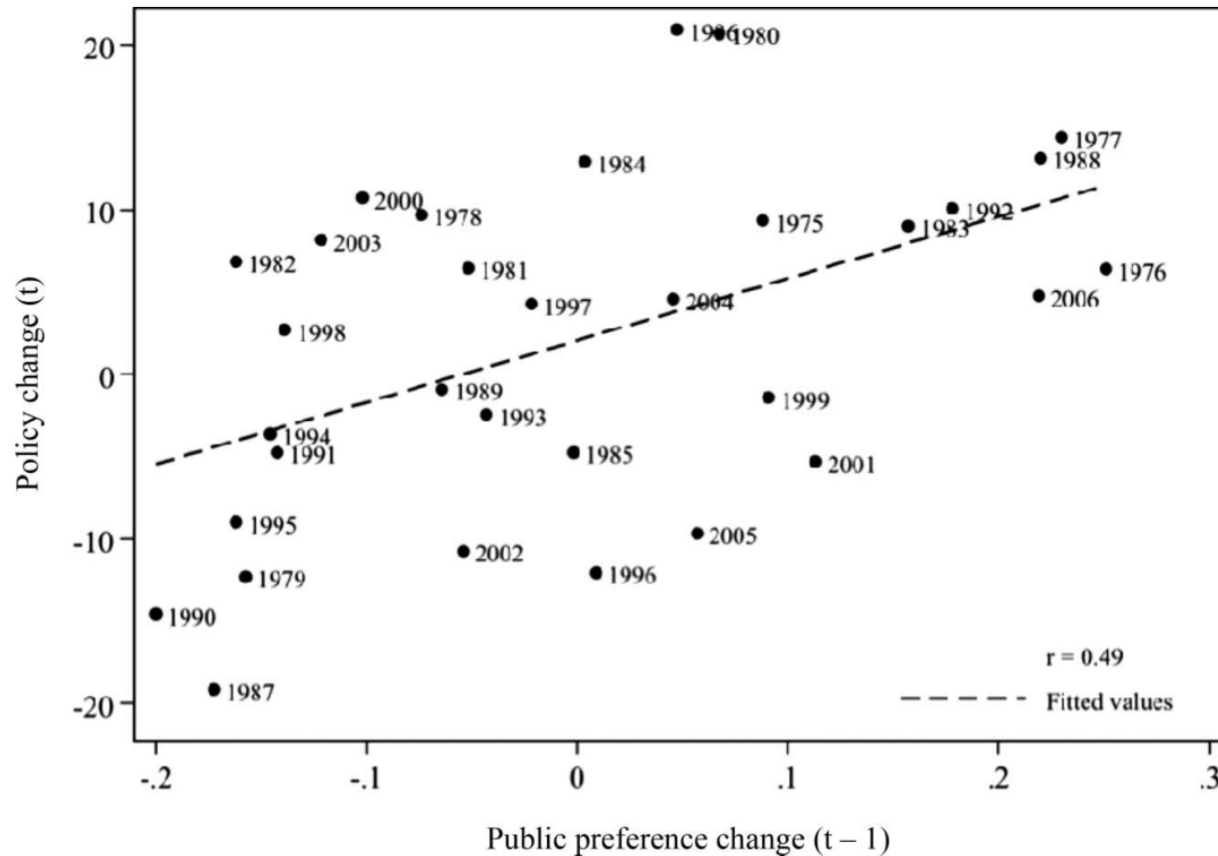
Qualitative research: an example



Study: Skocpol (1979)
From: Gerring (2007)

Quantitative research: an example

FIGURE 3
THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN POLICY CHANGE AND PRIOR OPINION CHANGE



From: Hakhverdian, A. (2012). The Causal Flow between Public Opinion and Policy: Government Responsiveness, Leadership, or Counter Movement? *West European Politics*, 35(6), 1386–1406. doi:10.1080/01402382.2012.713751

Differences

Qualitative

- Small-N
- Many variables
- Many different types of observations
- Methods: Interviews, participant observation, focus groups, document analysis

Quantitative

- Large-N
- Few variables
- Similar types of measurements
- Methods: experiments, surveys, quantitative content analysis

Approaches to explanation

Qualitative

Causes of effects

How can we explain the success of populist parties in Western Europe?

Quantitative

Effects of causes

What is the effect of public broadcasters on political knowledge?

Which of the following is a causes-of-effects study?

1. What is the effect of gender on voting behaviour?
2. How can we explain the success of the military intervention in Mali?
3. Are men more likely to receive a high salary than women?

Conceptions of causation

Qualitative

Necessary and sufficient causes

Democracies invade non-democracies if there is a conflict AND they stand to gain from ending the conflict.

Quantitative

Correlational causes

Mean causal effect
= Mean treatment – Mean control

Opposition parties are more likely to ask parliamentary questions than government parties.

Multivariate explanations

Qualitative

Multiple causal paths

**Y = (A AND B AND C) OR
(B AND D AND E)**

Quantitative

Additive causation

$$Y = b_0 + b_1 * A + b_2 * B + b_3 * C$$

Scope and generalization

Qualitative

Narrow scope

Quantitative

*Broad scope ->
generalization*

Lack of fit

Qualitative

Only a few cases, so all cases should fit.

Quantitative

It's about overall fit of the model, not fitting particular cases.

Quantitative *versus* qualitative?

- Both of value
- Complement each other
- Qualitative: identify factors that may matter
- Quantitative: do these factors generalize?