Research Methods for Political Science

MT week 5, lecture 1

Qualitative *versus* Quantitative?

TRINITY COLLEGE DUBLIN
COLÁISTE NA TRÍONÓIDE, BAILE ÁTHA CLIATH
THE UNIVERSITY OF DUBLIN

Dr. Thomas Chadefaux

Assistant Professor in Political Science

Thomas.chadefaux@tcd.ie

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.

Rival hypotheses

Example: lowering the voting age

Does this have an impact on turnout of young people?

Austria: voting age lowered in 2007, turnout among the youngest voters seems to be higher than under older first time voters. Support for a learning-by-example effect?

Alternative explanations

- Perhaps there is an effect from the very introduction itself
- One observation does not tell us if the effect will last
- We don’t know what would have happened if the voting age had not been lowered, but investment in youth participation, perhaps turnout for older groups would have increased.

Different types of research design

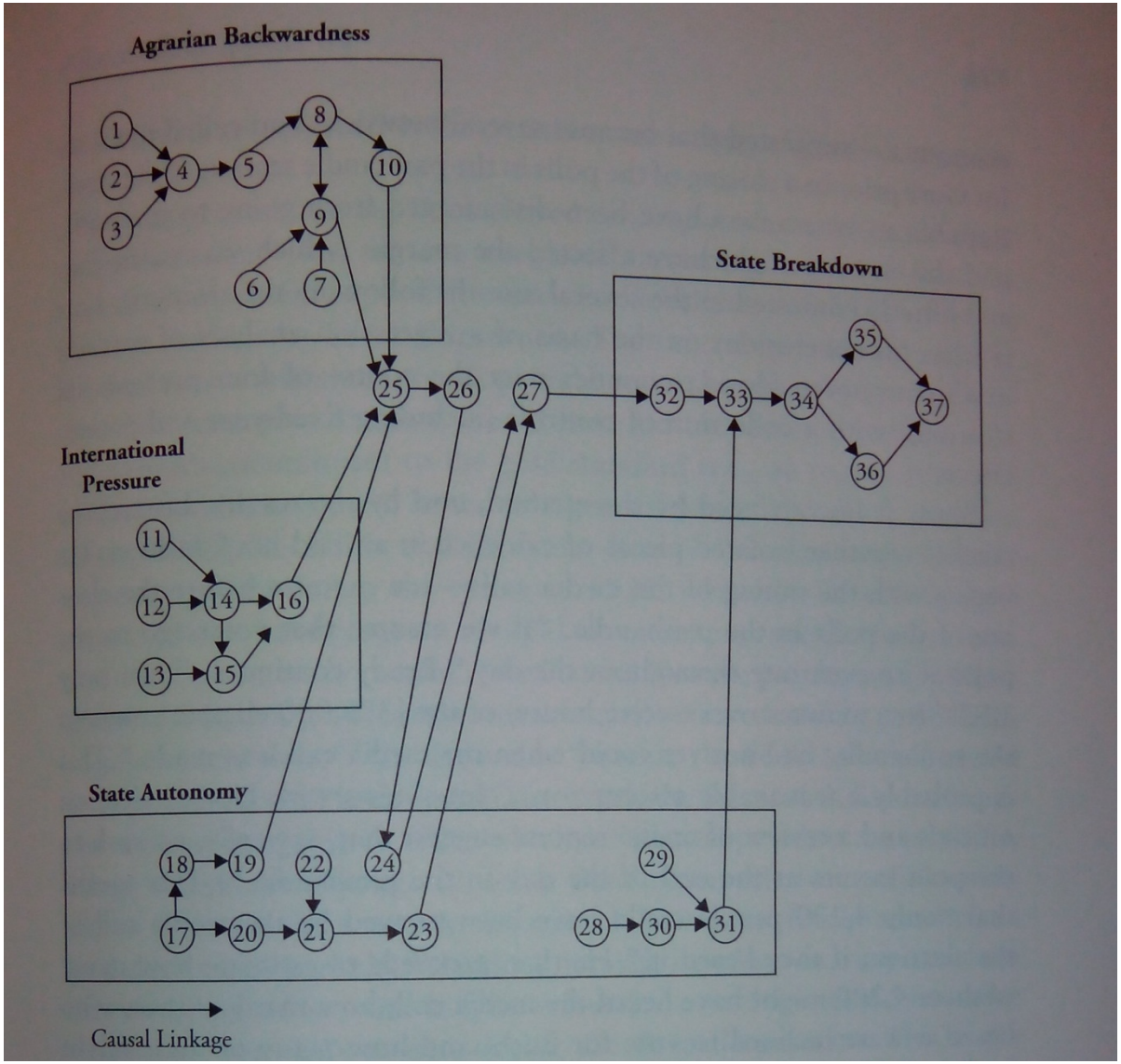
- Experimental research

- 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

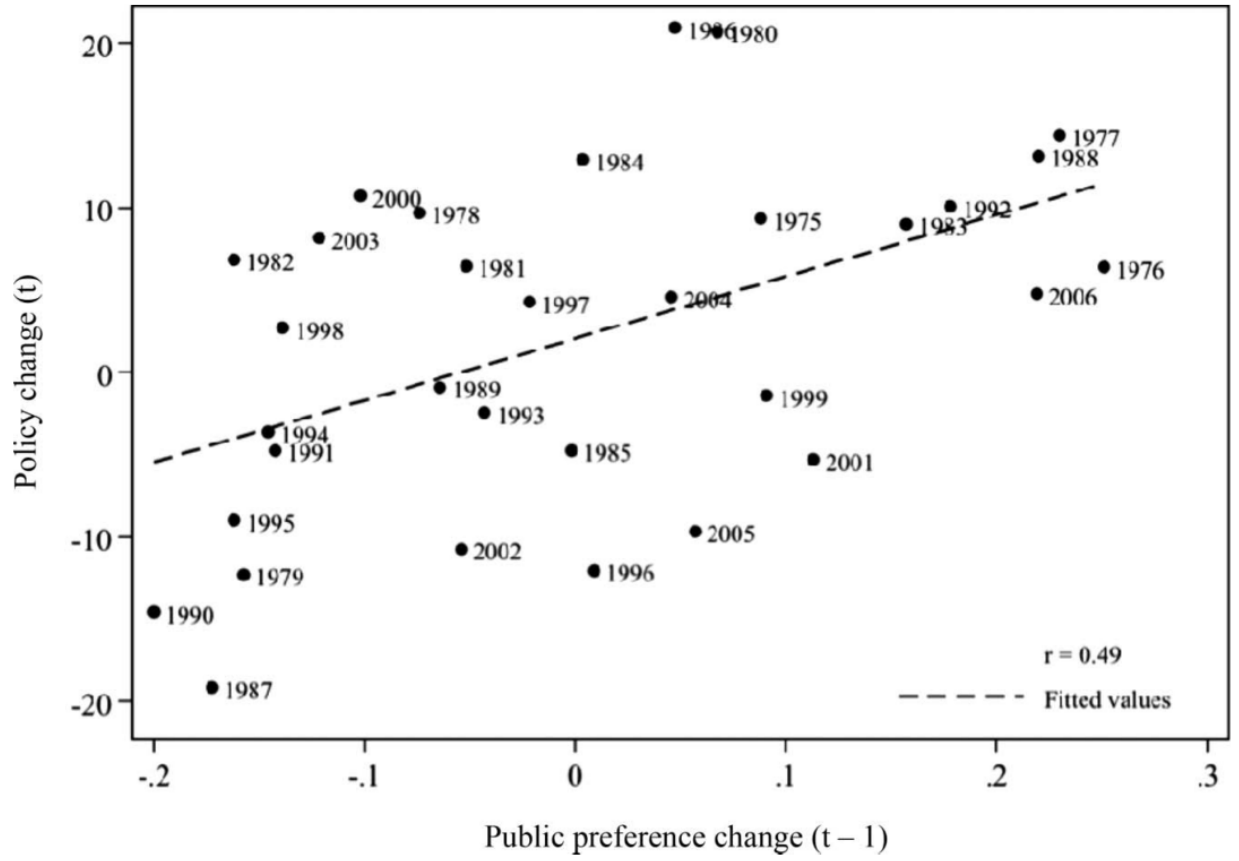
Qualitative research: an example



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

Bridging the gap

Ragin (1987)

The Comparative Method: Moving Beyond Qualitative and Quantitative Strategies

King, Keohane and Verba (1994)

Designing Social Enquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research

Approaches to explanation

Qualitative	Quantitative
Causes of effects	*Effects of causes*
How can we explain the success of populist parties in Western Europe?	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.

If A is a necessary cause of B, then...

1. If B happens, A must also have happened

2. If A happens, B is more likely to happen

3. If A happens, B will also happen

4. If A happens, B will not happen

Multivariate explanations

Qualitative	Quantitative
Multiple causal paths	Additive causation
Y = (**A** AND **B** ANC **C**) OR (**B** AND **D** AND **E**)	Y = b0 + b1 *A + b2 * B + b3 * C

Equifinality

Qualitative

Only a few causal pathways

Quantitative

Concept of equifinality unknown; implicit a large number of causal pathways

Scope and generalization

Qualitative	Quantitative
Narrow scope	*Broad scope -> generalization*

True or False? Qualitative research can tell you a lot about one case, but very little beyond that.

Case selection practices

Qualitative

Positive cases, no 0-0-0 cases

Quantitative

Random selection of cases

-> Average effects

A zero-zero-zero case is a case where:

1. The expected outcome does not occur

2. Neither the causes nor the effect studied are present
3. E.g., case where there was no revolution AND no famine AND no protests

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?