

Fall 2022

PS0700 Research Method in Political Science

[Recitation 1]

Introduction

September 2nd, 2022

Jungmin Han

The Outline of Today's Recitation

- Introduction
 - About your TA
 - Attendance & Expectations in Recitations
- Extension of this Week's Lecture
 - Criticisms of the Scientific Methods (2)
- Brief Introduction of "R"

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Introduction

About Me & How to Contact Me?

Attendance & Expectations in Recitations

About Me

- Jungmin Han (Teaching Assistant)
 - PhD Candidate in Political Science (2018-)
 - Research Interests: International Conflicts
 - How international conflicts affect domestic politics, vice versa
 - Teaching Experience:
 - TA (PS0700 in Spring 2020), Lecture (PS0700 in Summer 2021)
 - Research Associate, Korean Institute of National Unification (Seoul, 2017)
 - MA from Peking University (China, 2016)
 - International Relations
 - BA from SUNY Stony Brook University (2013)
 - Political Science & Economics (minor in Applied Mathematics)

About You?

- How many political science major?
- How do you expect this course will be? (easy or challenging?)
- Are you familiar with any statistical program?
- What do you want to pursue in the future with a degree in political science?

How to Contact Me?

- Come to Office Hour
 - Office Number: Posvar 4434
 - Office Hour: Wed & Fri , 3:00-4:30 PM (Email for an Appointment)
- Email Me
 - Email: jungmin.han@pitt.edu (or juh85@pitt.edu)
 - Email Policy
 - Response within 24 hours (send a follow-up mail if you do not get any response)
 - Emails after 6pm will not be responded until the following day

Attendance & Expectation

- **Grading Scheme**

- Participation in recitations is 15% of your final grade
- Total 13 recitation sessions: Today's trial session + 12 sessions
- Maximum point = 5 & Minimum point = 0 (absence) for each recitation
- Total possible points = 12 recitation x 5 pts = 60 pts
- So, your final participation grade = $60\text{pts}/4 = 15$

- **How to participate in recitations ?**

- Discussions on three news articles (Week 2-8)
 - Please raise your hand and give your name before speak
 - Both quantity and quality of your participation are important
- Extra readings: 0.2% for answering questions about recommended articles each recitation (Week 3-8, so in total 1.2% of your final grade)

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Extension of this Week's Lecture

Criticisms of the Scientific Methods (2)

Criticisms II: “Interpretivism” and “Social Constructivism”

- More fundamental critiques are based on philosophical critiques of positivism, the foundational epistemology of the scientific approach
- One alternative approach is called ***Interpretivism***, which says:
 - The subject matter of political science ---people and their institutions --- is fundamentally different from that of the natural sciences. While the world of nature does not “mean” anything to molecules, atoms and electrons, social and political reality has a specific meaning and relevance structure for the beings living, acting, and thinking within it
 - Meaning is deeply embedded in culture, norms, organization of social structures at particular historical moments.
 - Therefore, the goal of the political scientist is to “understand” these meaning structures. Social science should attempt to arrive at the “interpretive understanding of social action” (the “Verstehen” approach outlined by the German sociologist Max Weber), and not attempt ultimately futile causal explanations with categories defined by the researcher

Criticisms II: “Interpretivism” and “Social Constructivism”

- A related philosophical challenge to positivism leads to the ***social constructivist*** school of political research
- Tenets:
 - Rejects the positivist notion that the world exists independently of our knowledge of it (the so-called “objectivist” position). It is based on a false initial premise – there is no “objective” social reality out there for us to observe.
 - Rather, the world is socially or “discursively” constructed. Social phenomena and categories are produced through social interaction and are in a constant state of revision. They do not have an existence independent or separate from the actors themselves, therefore they cannot be studied as “objective” or timeless phenomena.
 - Example: “Gender Differences” – are they real, biologically determined and cross-culturally valid? Or are they constructed in a given time and a given place by given sets of actors in social interaction?

Criticisms II: “Interpretivism” and “Social Constructivism”

- Implications for research from both perspectives:
 - Emphasis on uniqueness of cases, not their generalizability
 - Rejection of behavioral approaches in favor of hermeneutic approaches and methodologies that attempt “thick description” of individual phenomena
 - Attempt to discover the discursive constructs used in political life and their effects
 - The “area studies” and “critical studies” approaches in political science are especially sympathetic to this point of view
 - Focus on in-depth interviews, historical, ethnographic research and other qualitative methodologies that we will discuss later

Criticisms II: “Interpretivism” and “Social Constructivism”

- Counter-argument from behavioralists:
 - How will you know if your assertions are wrong?
 - These schools of thought may lead to the potential for non-systematic, non-verifiable, subjective analyses
- Possible Areas of Compromise
 - Qualitative political research need not fully reject the scientific paradigm (though some qualitative scholars do)
 - Qualitative political research can complement and inspire better quantitative work in many ways, as we will discuss later

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A Brief Introduction to “R”

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- R is an integrated suite of software facilities for data manipulation, calculation and graphical display.
- R will be your main computational tool for your research exercise.
- Download and Install Rstudio
 - <https://www.rstudio.com/products/rstudio/download/#download>
 - Or just google “Rstudio” and find the download webpage (rstudio.com)