

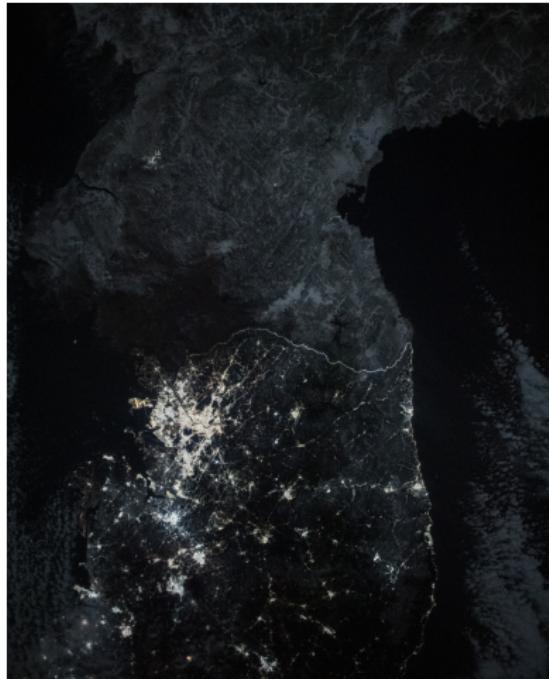
# **THE APPROACH AND METHODS OF COMPARATIVE POLITICS**

*Comparative Politics*

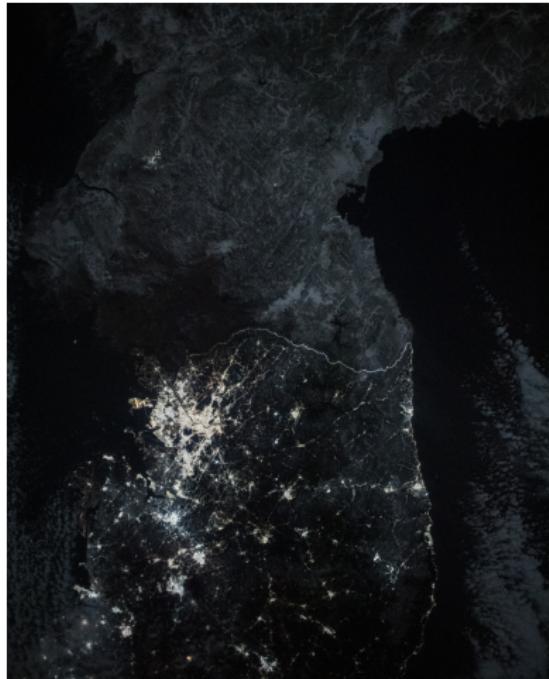
Guillermo Toral

IE University

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- Workshop and exercise: Dissecting an academic article

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  - Are these articles relevant to non-academic communities? Why or why not?

# Exercise in groups

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# Journalistic vs academic accounts of political phenomena

The New York Times

Trump Administration   LIVE Updates view app   Tariff Tracker   Trump's Tariffs Invalidated   Redistricting Push   Trump-Kennedy Alliance   Trump's Crime I

## Half of Congress Members Are Millionaires, Report Says

By Eric Lipton  
Jan. 8, 2014

WASHINGTON — It is hardly the kind of news that lawmakers in Congress would want to highlight during a week when unemployment benefits expired for more than a million Americans. But Congress has achieved something of a milestone.

For the first time in history, more than half the members of the House and Senate are now millionaires, according to a new analysis of financial disclosure reports filed last year.

The median net worth for lawmakers in the House and Senate was \$1,008,767 — up 4.4 percent, according to the analysis, conducted by the nonprofit Center for Responsive Politics, which examines the influence of money on politics in Washington.

Over all, at least 268 of the 534 current members of Congress had an average net worth of \$1 million or more in 2012, which is the year covered by the reports that each lawmaker had to file in 2013.

The wealthiest member of Congress, as has previously been the case, was Representative Darrell Issa, Republican of California, who had a net worth of between \$330 million and \$398 million, a significant chunk of which he earned through the Viper car

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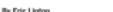
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American Political  
Science Review

## The Class Ceiling in Politics

Published online by Cambridge University Press: 11 November 2024

OLLE FOLKE and JOHANNA RICONE

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### Abstract

Prior studies have documented that working-class individuals rarely become parliamentarians. We know less about when in the career pipeline to parliament workers disappear, and why. We study these questions using detailed data on the universe of Swedish politicians' careers over a 50-year period. We find roughly equal-sized declines in the proportion of workers on various rungs of the political career ladder ranging from local to national office. We reject the potential explanations that workers lack political ambition, public service motivation, honesty, or voter support. And while workers' average high school grades and cognitive test scores are lower, this cannot explain their large promotion disadvantage, a situation that we label a class ceiling. Organizational ties to blue-collar unions help workers advance, but only to lower-level positions in left-leaning parties. We conclude that efforts to improve workers' numerical representation should apply throughout the career ladder and focus on intra-party processes.

### Information

Type	Research Article
Information	American Political Science Review, Volume 119, Issue 5, August 2025, pp. 1375 - 1392 DOI: <a href="https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003085624001011">https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003085624001011</a>
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- How does political science differ from other sciences?

## Things that are **not true** about science – political or otherwise

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- Scientific progress depends on individual, extraordinary studies – or scientists

What are the features of good (political) science?

# How to do good (political) science: Overview

## 1. Clear theory

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1. Clear theory
2. Testable hypotheses

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6. Social relevance

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A **theory** is a proposition or set of propositions about the relationship between variables, providing an internally consistent logic to explain (political) phenomena, and which can be subjected to empirical testing through observation or experimentation

Good theories:

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- specify any relevant **scope conditions** (or where / when it should apply)

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- **Causal** – implications for explaining cause-and-effect relationships, and manipulating outcomes
- Comparative politics typically engages causal, predictive, and/or descriptive arguments

# What theoretical perspectives or paradigms are most common when talking about politics?

- **Institutionalism:** focus on how formal or informal institutions shape outcomes and behavior

*By training our ability to identify and assess arguments from different perspectives, we can become better at critiquing others' and at building our own theories about politics*

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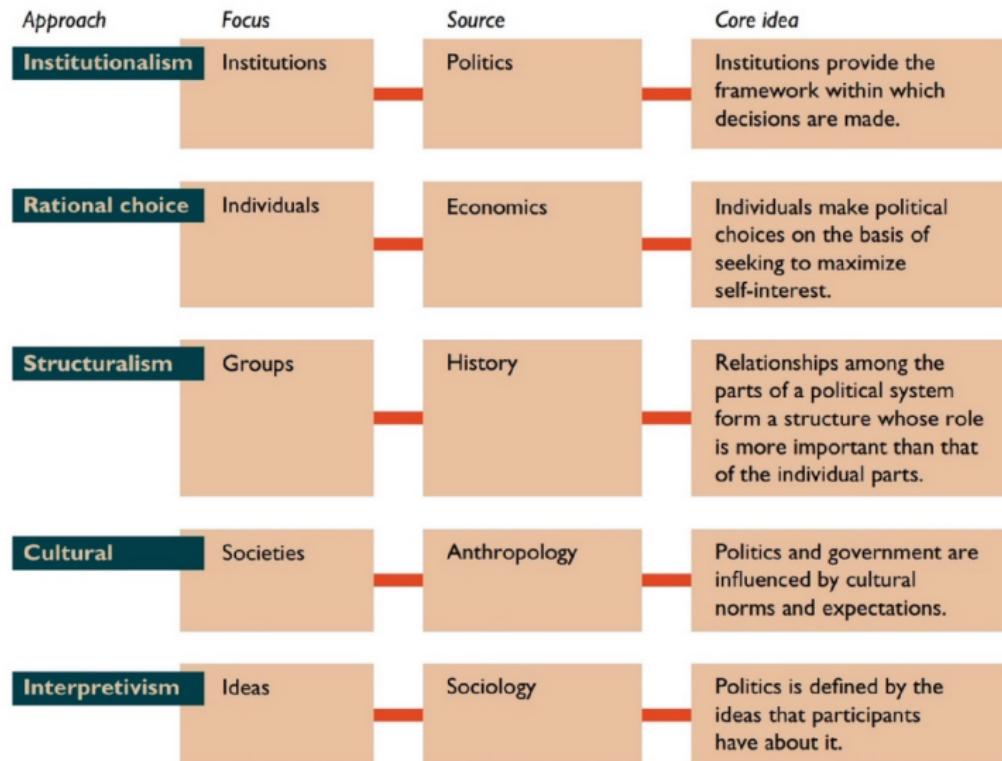
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- **International environment**: focus on how global pressures shape domestic politics

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- Are **non-trivial** or are surprising in some way

### 3. Rigorous methodology

A **research design** is a strategy for answering a research question using empirical material. We broadly refer to that strategy as the study's methodology or methods.

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- Have some degree of **external validity** (i.e., allow us to draw conclusions that can be generalized to samples or settings other than the one we studied)

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- A **rationale** (and supporting evidence) why the methods we use get at the key quantity of interest

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  - A **testable hypothesis**
  - A **research design** to test it

## How to make credible inferences

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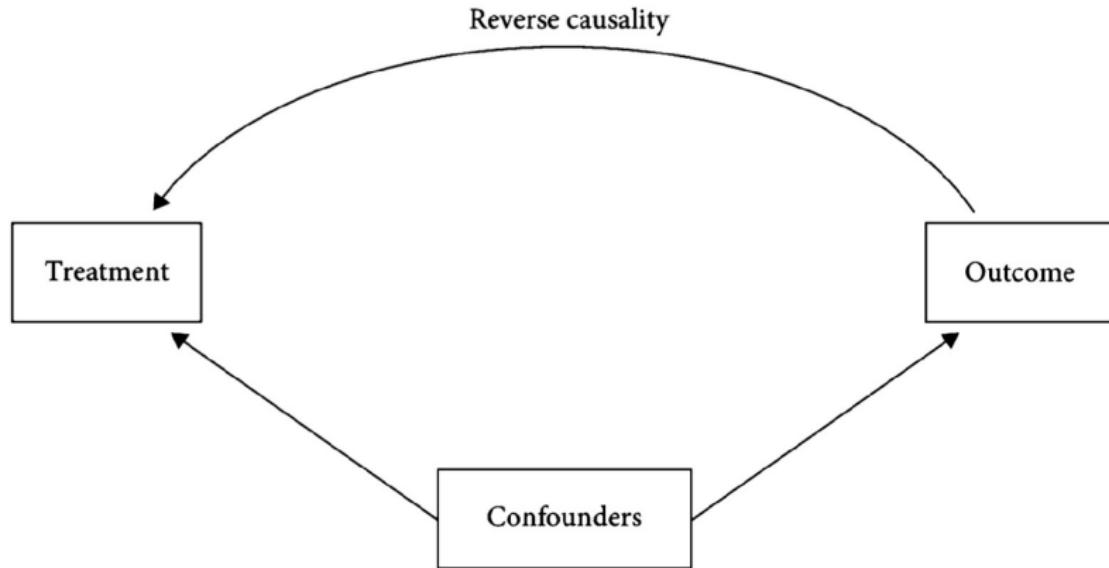
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- Moreover, it may be that the outcome we are interested in is also a cause of the treatment or cause we care about – this is called **reverse causality**
- We typically want to argue that a relationship between X and Y holds **ceteris paribus**, i.e. " or “all other things being equal”. How can we say that credibly?

# The main threats to credible causal claims



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  - Case studies
  - Surveys
  - Administrative data
  - Satellite imagery

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- Experiments **randomly assign an intervention** (aka treatment) whose impact on one or several outcomes of interest we want to evaluate
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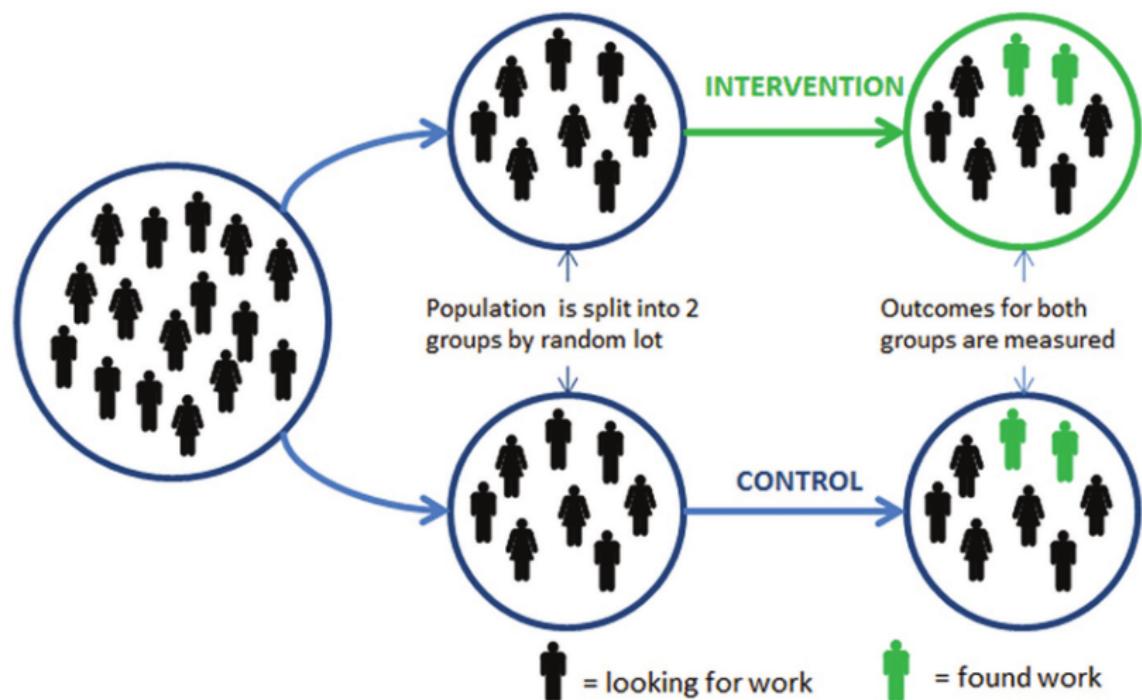
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- Experiments therefore ensure there are **no confounders and no reverse causality**

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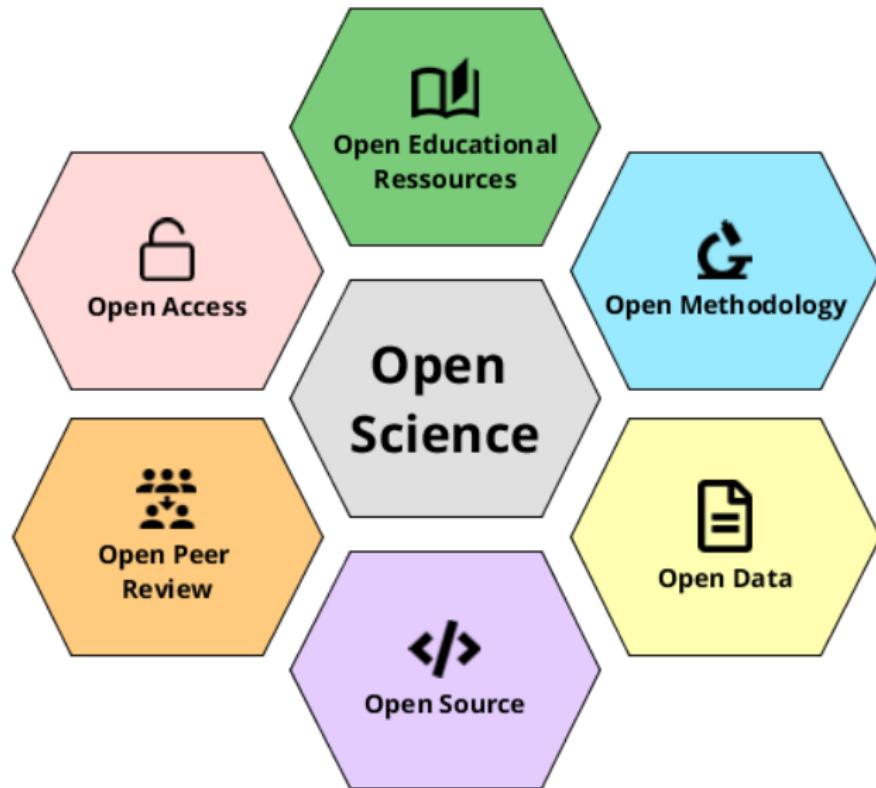
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# Open science is at the center of good science



## 5. Ethical standards

(Political) science needs to be subject to high ethical standards – otherwise significant harm to individuals / communities can ensue.

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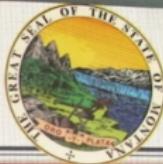
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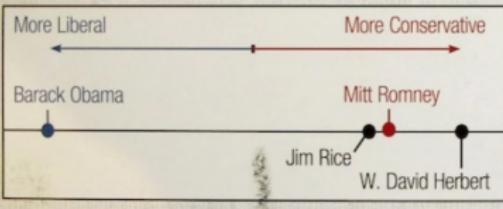


# **2014 Montana General Election Voter Information Guide**

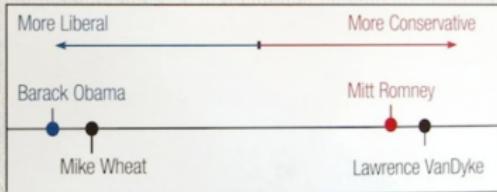
Election Date: November 4, 2014



## **Nonpartisan Supreme Court Justice #1 Race**



## Nonpartisan Supreme Court Justice #2 Race



For more information on how these figures were created, please see <http://data.stanford.edu/dime>. Please note that this guide is non-partisan and does not endorse my candidate or party. This guide was created as part of a joint research project at Stanford and Dartmouth.

Paid for by researchers at Stanford University and Dartmouth College, 616 Serra Street, Stanford, CA 94305

## Take this to the polls!

# Is this study unethical, and if so why?

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## Political Scientists in Hot Water over Field Research



8 January 2015

An experiment by political science researchers at Stanford and Dartmouth Universities is raising hackles in Montana. Three political science professors may have broken Montana state election laws, calling into question the ethics of performing research experiments with the potential to affect election results.

As part of the study, mailers containing information on the ideological leanings of four nonpartisan candidates for Montana State's Supreme Court were sent to 100,000 Montana voters. The research project was intended to test whether voter turnout will increase in nonpartisan elections if voters receive more information about a candidate's political leaning. The mailer, entitled "2014 Montana General Election Voter Information Guide," features the official state seal and ranks the judicial candidates on an ideological spectrum from President Barack Obama on the liberal end, to former presidential candidate Mitt Romney on the conservative end. Similar mailers were sent to voters in California and New Hampshire, although there has not been a backlash in those areas.

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## Workshop and exercise: Dissecting an academic article

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- In this course (and probably in others) you will have to read multiple academic papers
- Your research design due at the end of the semester should approximate, in some aspects, an academic paper (although much shorter and without data)
- Getting better at reading academic papers is a great way to build your ability to process large amounts of (often technical) information, which is something you'll often do in careers beyond research too – e.g., in government, law, journalism, consulting, tech, etc.

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- Are the author's **conclusions** reasonable, given the evidence?

# Graded exercise in groups: Dissecting an academic article

Download the article at

[www.guillermotoral.com/cp/bhandari.pdf](http://www.guillermotoral.com/cp/bhandari.pdf)



## Political Determinants of Economic Exchange: Evidence from a Business Experiment in Senegal

**Abhit Bhandari** Institute for Advanced Study in Toulouse

**Abstract:** *Economic growth requires confidence in the state's ability to enforce secure exchange. But when states selectively enforce rule of law, political considerations can moderate the trust that buyers have in sellers. I argue that political connections produce moral hazard in exchange because they introduce biases in expectations of judicial enforcement. Buyers avoid trade with politically connected sellers, and, in this context of unequal enforcement, formal contracts disproportionately protect politically connected buyers. To examine these features of connections and contracts, I created a sales business in Senegal and randomized whether employees signaled political connections and/or offered formal contracts during transactions. The results show that political connections decreased buyers' willingness to exchange. Formal contracts increased exchange, though primarily for connected buyers. These findings show that asymmetric political connections can impede daily trade and intensify economic inequalities in developing contexts, while simultaneously demonstrating the limits of state institutions for mitigating politically driven moral hazard.*

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# Wrap-up

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## Exit ticket

On the discussion page on Blackboard, submit a quick, personal thought on:

*What's one thing political science can do (or can be useful for), and one thing it cannot?*

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  - *What makes states successful – and why do they sometimes fail?*
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