

Concepts

“I’ll know it when I see it”

Department of Government
London School of Economics and Political Science

Concepts

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 - We cannot theorize or study a phenomenon until we know what it is

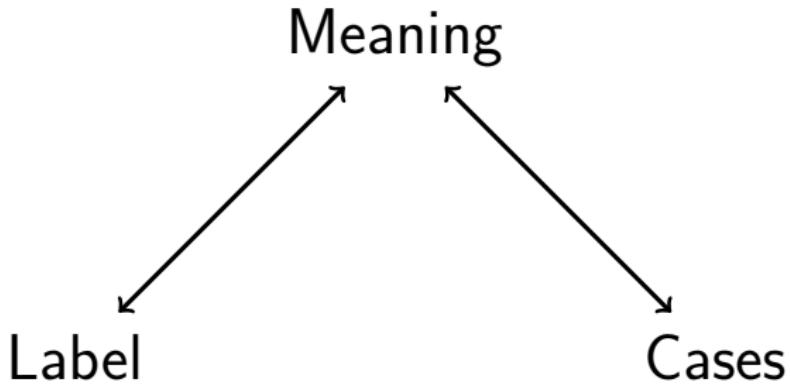
Concepts

- Definition: The words and ideas that we use to describe the world
- Why do we care?
 - We cannot theorize or study a phenomenon until we know what it is
 - Problem Set 1 is due on October 11.

Quick Brainstorm

What are some important political science concepts?

Ogden & Richard's Triangle¹



¹Richards, I.A., and Ogden, C.K. 1923 *The Meaning of Meaning*.

Concepts are useful because they distinguish things from other things.

In particular, they:

- Resolve ambiguity
- Avoid vagueness

Approaches to Concept Definition

- 1 Classical Approach
 - 2 Family Resemblence
-
- Gerring's 7 criteria²

²Gerring also offers “minimal,” “maximal,” and “cumulative” formulations as ways to develop concepts

Classical Approach

- Specify a set of “constitutive dimensions” that *are* the concept
 - Fundamental characteristics of the concept
 - Not causes or effects
 - Not measures of the concept

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- Dimensions are *necessary and jointly sufficient*

Boolean Logic

- **AND:** necessary
 - Implies attributes required to be a case of the concept
- **OR:** sufficient
 - Implies multiple ways to be a case of the concept

Attributes may be *individually* or *jointly* necessary and/or sufficient

Dahl's Definition of Democracy

- Two dimensions
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- Without liberalization: “inclusive hegemony”
- Without inclusiveness: “competitive oligarchy”

Minimal and Maximal

- Gerring uses three types of concept definitions:
 - Minimal
 - Maximal
 - Cumulative
- All three of these are within the classical approach
 - All focus attribute *necessity*

Questions?

Define the concept of “chair”



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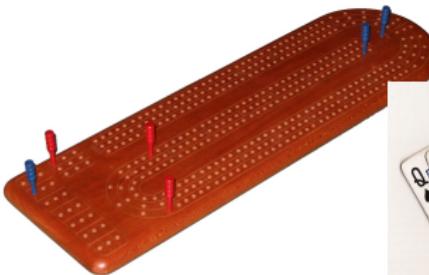
Family Resemblence

- Classical approach focuses on *necessary* elements
- Some concepts have no necessary elements but are still meaningful

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- We might also think about elements that are *sufficient* to establish membership

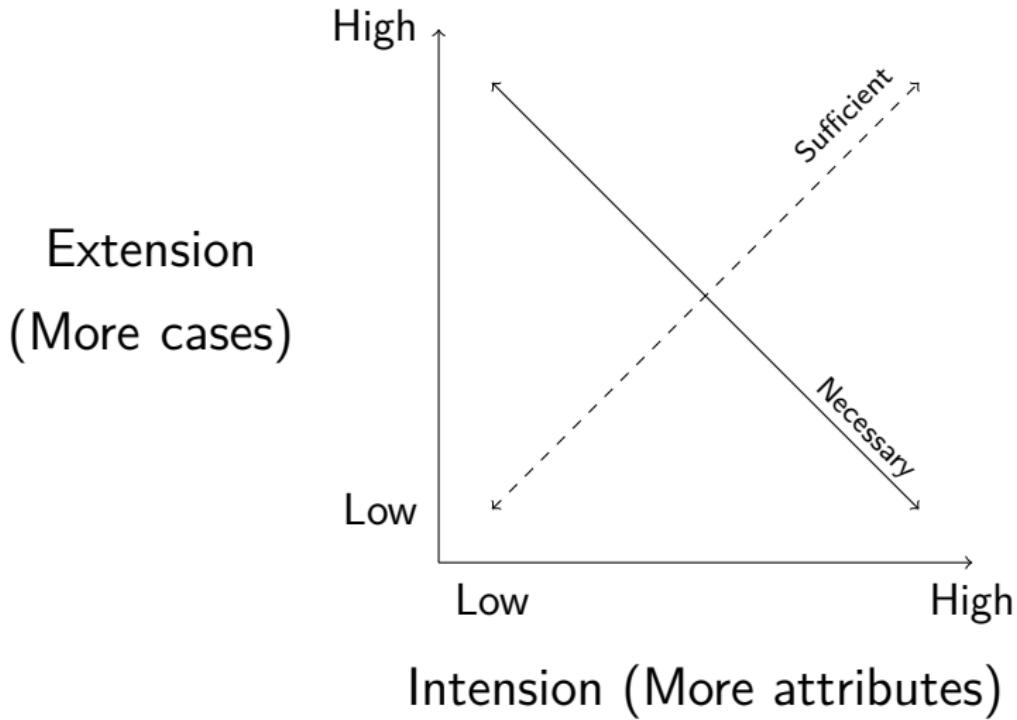
Example: Define “game”



Complex Boolean Logic

- Jointly necessary and sufficient:
Rule of Law \wedge Equality
- Jointly necessary w/ insufficient attributes
Rule of Law \wedge (Equality \vee Elections)
- Simple family resemblance logic:
(Equality \vee Elections)
- Complex family resemblance logic:
(Rule of Law \wedge Participation) \vee (Equality \wedge Elections)

Trade-offs



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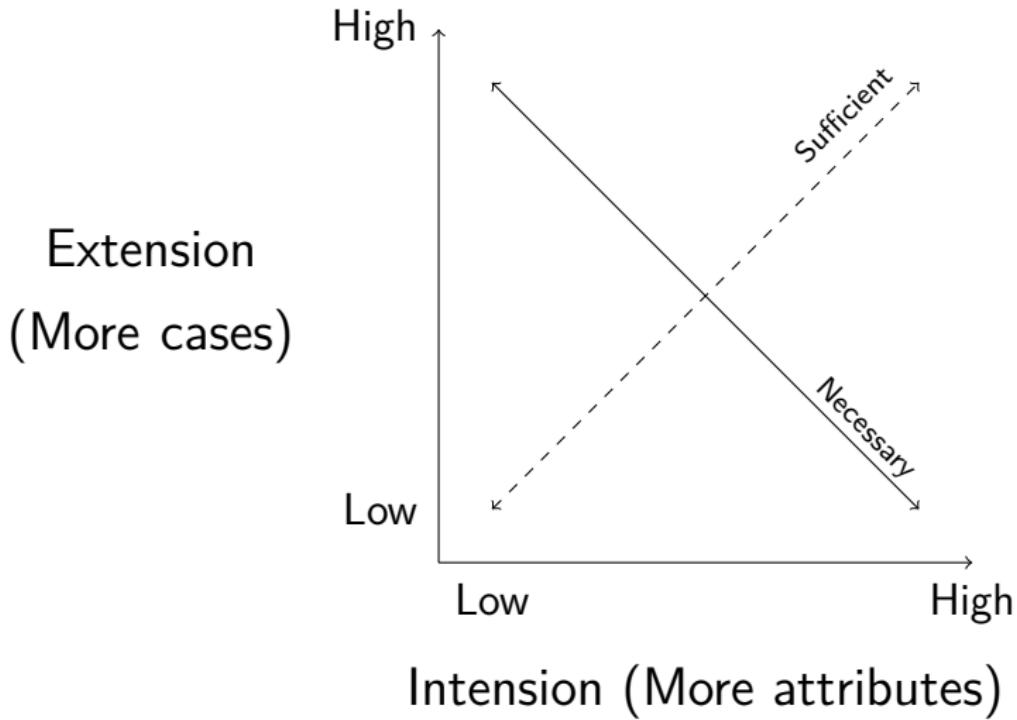
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Questions?

Gerring's Criteria

- 1 Resonance
- 2 Domain/scope
- 3 Consistency
- 4 Fecundity
- 5 Differentiation
- 6 Causal utility
- 7 Operationalization (next week)

In Sum

- We need to know what we're talking about before we can theorize causal relationships or study something empirically
- Concepts vary in their usefulness and are contestable
- Many ways to define and evaluate concepts

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