

Welcome!

Week 8: Qualitative Research Methods

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PS 210: Introduction to Empirical Methods

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Where are we?

Descriptive Statistics

Experiments

Surveys

Confidence Intervals

Regressions

These are all quantitative and (rather) Large-N methods

Qualitative and Small N-Research Methods

Based on text-based data

Often study a few cases in great detail

Data analysis is based on finding patterns in the process or entity of interest

Examples of Qualitative Research Methods

- Historical Methods
- In-Depth Interviews
- Focus Groups
- Participant Observation

Historical Methods

Primary Source research: Looking at documents stored in historical archives to draw conclusions

American Political Development

A subfield in American politics that studies that changes over time that comprised the construction of the American State and its institutions

The focus of the research methods here are historical methods to understand change over time.

Example

The Political Weaponization of Gun Owners: The National Rifle Association's Cultivation, Dissemination, and Use of a Group Social Identity

Matthew J. Lacombe, Barnard College, Columbia University

There is substantial evidence indicating that the NRA's (National Rifle Association) political influence is closely tied to the deep political engagement of the minority of Americans who oppose strict gun control laws. This explanation of the NRA's influence, however, raises its own questions; namely, why are gun owners so devoted to their cause, and why is the NRA so effective at mobilizing them? I marshal a wide range of evidence covering nearly nine decades to demonstrate that an important cause of the political activity of gun owners is the NRA's long-term cultivation and dissemination of a distinct, politicized gun owner social identity, which the NRA uses to mobilize mass political action on its behalf. My findings shed new light on the ability of interest groups to develop and use resources that help them influence policy by altering the political behavior of members of the mass public.

Social Identity Development (Lacombe 2019)

Research Question

The NRA has cultivated a sense of political gun ownership as a social identity and used it to mobilize their members to frequent and intense political action. How were they so successful in doing this?

Social Identity Development (Lacombe 2019)

Research Method

Coded 79 years of the *American Rifleman* magazine and letters to the editor in major American newspapers

Results show that the NRA created and channeled a social identity in all resources to build influence in mass arenas and that this identity is powerful in mobilizing the membership base in political action. It has become more powerful over time.

In-Depth Interviews

Structured Interviews: Provide a set number of questions for each participant

Unstructured Interviews: Broad topics for conversations and depending on the answers, you respond flexibly.

Semi-Structured Interviews: A mix of questions and free flowing discussions

Focus Groups

A group of people discuss a topic moderated by a facilitator.

Goal is to arrive at a solution of a issue, evaluate a program, understanding concepts etc.

Participant Observations -- Ethnography

Becoming part of a community to study the social phenomenon that goes on in the area.

Example

Putting Inequality in Its Place: Rural Consciousness and the Power of Perspective

KATHERINE CRAMER WALSH *University of Wisconsin—Madison*

W*hy do people vote against their interests? Previous explanations miss something fundamental because they do not consider the work of group consciousness. Based on participant observation of conversations from May 2007 to May 2011 among 37 regularly occurring groups in 27 communities sampled across Wisconsin, this study shows that in some places, people have a class- and place-based identity that is intertwined with a perception of deprivation. The rural consciousness revealed here shows people attributing rural deprivation to the decision making of (urban) political elites, who disregard and disrespect rural residents and rural lifestyles. Thus these rural residents favor limited government, even though such a stance might seem contradictory to their economic self-interests. The results encourage us to consider the role of group consciousness-based perspectives rather than pitting interests against values as explanations for preferences. Also, the study suggests that public opinion research more seriously include listening to the public.*

Rural Consciousness

Research Question

Why do people vote against their self interests?

Studies the case of rural Americans, who should vote Democrat who champion redistributive policies but many vote Republican

Rural Consciousness

Research Method

Observed participant conversations among 37 regularly occurring groups across 27 communities in Wisconsin between May 2007 and May 2011.

The author did not intervene in the conversations -- rather she observed the interactions and coded the dialogue afterwards.

She spent time (1 - 5 meetings) with each group and asked for permission to record the conversations

Rural Consciousness

Results

Results emphasized the importance of group consciousness in personal political decisionmaking. Rural Americans collectively despise urban Americans as they blame the urban residents for all of their problems. Therefore, they vote against the Democrat party, who champions city interests.

Where Qualitative meets Quantitative

Text as Data methods take qualitative data and quantify it to meaningful data that we can use statistical methods to analyze

Example

From Barack Obama to Donald Trump: The Evolution of Moral Appeals in National Conventions

Jennifer Lin*

Northwestern University

Abstract

Do Democrats and Republicans appeal to different sets of moral foundations in
national conventions? This paper examines the evolution of moral appeals in
national conventions from 1980 to 2016.

National Conventions Study

Research Question

Do speakers at the National Conventions appeal to the moral frameworks of their base?

Past research has suggested that Democrats and Republicans appeal to different moral values in their press releases, church sermons, and platforms.

So what about the national convention, which is focused on getting voters excited for the election and willing to mobilize on the party's behalf?

National Conventions Study

Research Method

1. Collect transcripts of speeches delivered at the Democrat and Republican National Convention from 2008 to 2020
2. Parse data using the Moral Foundations Dictionary with text as data methods (Graham et al 2009; Frimer 2019)
3. Code data based on the definitions of the foundations to see how well the dictionary does in sorting the moral appeals.

National Conventions Study

Results -- Quantitative

Table 4: *Morality in 2020 Convention Speeches*

Foundation	Percentage		<i>t</i>	Effect Size (<i>d</i>)
	Democrat	Republican		
Harm	1.31	1.04	2.784*	0.100
Fairness	0.51	0.43	1.04	0.039
Ingroup	1.28	1.30	-0.205	-0.008
Authority	1.09	1.39	-3.117**	-0.118
Purity	0.44	0.71	-3.508**	-0.148

Notes: The percentage of words is calculated as a function of the instances words in each foundation, established by the Moral Foundations Dictionary, appeared in text divided by the total number of words in the speech.
(*) $p = .1$, * $p = .05$, ** $p = .01$, *** $p \leq .001$

National Conventions Study

Results -- Qualitative

The Harm foundation is interested in caring and protecting vulnerable peoples

This is central for the Democrat party

The dictionary coded the following excerpt from Bernie Sanders' 2020 Democrat National Convention speech as high in appeals to Harm

As long as I am here, I will work with progressives, with moderates, and yes, with conservatives to preserve this nation from a threat that so many of our heroes fought and died to defeat. This president is not just a threat to our democracy, but by rejecting science, he has put our lives and health in jeopardy. Trump has attacked doctors and scientists trying to protect us from the pandemic while refusing to take strong action to produce the masks, gowns, and gloves our healthcare workers desperately need. Nero fiddled while Rome burned. Trump golfs. His actions fanned this pandemic resulting in over 170,000 deaths and a nation still unprepared to protect its people.

National Conventions Study

Results -- Qualitative

The Authority foundation emphasizes traditions, rule of law, and respect for authority.

Research suggests that Republicans find this foundation more appealing.

The following excerpt from Rudy Giuliani's 2020 Republican National Conventions speech highlights this foundation

It is clear that a vote for Biden and the Democrats creates the risk that you will bring this lawlessness to your city, to your town, to your suburb. There is no question that this awesome job of restoring safety for our people cannot be done from your basement, Joe. There's also no question that President Trump will fight with all his strengths to preserve the American system of government and our way of life

Questions?