PSC 480: Scope of Political Science

Prof. Bethany Lacina
Thursdays, 9:30–12
Fenno Room

This course presents a road map of the discipline of political science and its aims, with a focus on understanding approaches to explanation and empirical research. Classes will alternate between discussion of readings and students developing and critiquing successive iterations of their own empirical project.

Instructor

Bethany Lacina
Email: blacina@ur.rochester.edu
Office: Harkness 322
Office hours: By appointment

Teaching assistant

Hun Chung
Email: hunchung1980@gmail.com
Office: Harkness 308
Office hours: Wednesday, 2–3

Course Requirements

1. Students must attend every class. A student who misses class must get in touch with me within 24 hours of the start of the missed class period and then complete a make-up assignment.

2. Reading for the week must be completed by all students before class.

3. Weekly assignments are noted below. All weekly assignments are due by noon the day before class. There will be a course Dropbox folder where you can post your assignments and find other students' assignments. Late work will receive half credit. Assignments not handed in by the start of class will receive a zero.

4. You must read other students' assignments in advance of class and be prepared to offer comments and suggestions.

5. I will get in touch with you outside of class if I have concerns about your preparation for class or participation.

6. Your final assignment will be a research prospectus that sums up the work done throughout the semester.

7. Every assignment, including the final assignment, is equally weighted in your final grade, with some leniency if you improve over the semester. Grading is based on the quality of thinking that went into the assignments rather than the strength of the empirical results.

Readings

- Most of the journal articles and book chapters in the syllabus are available through links below.
- Readings marked with a double dagger (‡) are available in electronic format through the University of Rochester library catalog.
- You should buy one book: Daniel Little. 1991. *Varieties of Social Explanation*. Westview Press.

Academic honesty

Students and faculty at the University must agree to adhere to high standards of academic honesty in all of the work that we do. The College Board on Academic Honesty provides further information on our policies and procedures: www.rochester.edu/college/honesty.

In this course the following additional requirements are in effect: You are encouraged to discuss course readings and assignments with your fellow students. However, all written work must be done independently and not in collaboration with another. All written work must properly format quotations, use citations, and include a bibliography where necessary. Cases of plagiarism will be referred to the Academic Honesty Board.

Class schedule

Jan 19: Introduction to the course

To prepare for class:

In advance of class, think about the research topics that you would like to work on over the next few years at Rochester. During class, I'll ask you to describe your research interests and explain the kind of contribution you hope to make in your dissertation.

Jan 26: What is a good explanation? Developing questions

Reading for the week:

Daniel Little. 1991. *Varieties of Social Explanation*. Westview Press. Chapter 1.

Peter Machamer. 2002. "A Brief Historical Introduction to the Philosophy of Science." In *The Blackwell Guide to the Philosophy of Science*. Ed. Peter Machamer and Michael Silberstein. Blackwell. ‡

Gary King, Robert O. Keohane, and Sidney Verba. 1994. *Designing Social Inquiry*. Princeton University Press. Chapter 1. http://press.princeton.edu/chapters/s5458.pdf

James Johnson. 2006. "Consequences of Positivism: A Pragmatist Assessment." *Comparative Political Studies* 39(2). http://doi.org/10.1177/0010414005282982

Kevin Clarke and David Primo. 2007. "Modernizing Political Science: A Model-Based Approach." *Perspectives on Politics* 5(4). https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592707072192

Larry Laudan. 1981. "A Problem Solving Approach to Scientific Progress." In *Scientific Revolutions*. Ed. Ian Hacking. Oxford University Press.
https://www.dropbox.com/s/z9yq0fkozc199rr/Laudan_ScientificProgress.pdf?dl=0

Assignment (due at noon the day before class):

Choose a research question from a literature within political science that you think is inadequate. You should have an intuition on how to improve the state of this literature and believe there are (or it is possible to create) quantitative data with which to explore your question.

You will be asked to make a brief in-class presentation of this research question. A written outline of your presentation should be distributed to the group before the class meeting to allow all members of the group to prepare comments, questions and suggestions.

Feb 2: Causality

Reading for the week:

Daniel Little. 1991. *Varieties of Social Explanation*. Westview Press. Chapter 2.

Henry Brady. 2008. "Causation and Explanation in Social Science." In *The Oxford Handbook of Political Methodology*. Ed. Janet Box-Steffensmeier, et. al. Oxford University Press. https://www.dropbox.com/s/dw9ugnyv7wv0044/BradyOxfordHandbook.pdf?dl=0

Nancy Cartwright. 2015. "Causal Inference." In *Philosophy of Social Science: A New Introduction*. Ed. Nancy Cartwright and Eleanora Montuschi. Oxford University Press. https://www.dropbox.com/s/4lph7sguqpslha6/cartwright_causality.pdf?dl=0

Tilly, Charles. 2001. "Mechanisms in Political Processes." *Annual Review of Political Science* 4. http://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.polisci.4.1.21

John H. Goldthorpe. 2001. "Causation, Statistics, and Sociology." *European Sociological Review* 17(1). http://www.jstor.org/stable/522622

Assignment (due at noon the day before class):

Write a one-page memo revising the research topic you presented last week. (Or changing topics altogether, if necessary). The memo should clarify your question and the scope of what you aim to explain.

Feb 9: Macrocausal theories

Reading for the week:

Daniel Little. 1991. *Varieties of Social Explanation*. Westview Press. Chapters 5, 6 and 9.

Arthur Stinchcombe. 1968. *Constructing Social Theories*. Harcourt. Chapter 3.
https://www.dropbox.com/s/g1xu6kohndlv1q6/constructing%20social%20theories.pdf?dl=0

James Johnson. 2002. "How Conceptual Problems Migrate." *Annual Review of Political Science* 5. http://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.polisci.5.112801.080933

Gregory M. Luebbert. 1987. "Social Foundations of Political Order in Interwar Europe." *World Politics* 39(4). www.jstor.org/stable/2010288

Assignment (due at noon the day before class):

Create a 3-page outline of the existing answers to your question, with ample citations. Your outline should lay out the strengths and weaknesses of the existing answers.

Feb 16: Institutions

Reading for the week:

Kenneth Shepsle. 1989. "Studying Institutions." *Journal of Theoretical Politics* 1(2).
http://doi.org/10.1177/0951692889001002002

Jack Knight. 1995. "Models, Interpretations and Theories: Constructing Explanations of Institutional Emergence and Change." In *Explaining Social Institutions*. Ed. Jack Knight and Itai Sened. University of Michigan Press.
https://www.dropbox.com/s/m7bh96t01dnzn6g/Knight_ExplainingInstitutions.pdf?dl=0

Avner Greif and David D. Laitin. 2004. "A Theory of Endogenous Institutional Change." *American Political Science Review* 98(4). https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055404041395

Kathleen Thelen. 2003. "How Institutions Evolve: Insights from Comparative Historical Analysis." In *Comparative Historical Analysis in the Social Sciences*. Ed. James Mahoney and Dietrich Rueschemeyer. Cambridge University Press.
https://www.dropbox.com/s/9zk9qkci1m7d9ce/Thelen_Institutions.pdf?dl=0

Lorene Allio et. al. 1997. "Post-communist Privatization as a Test of Theories of Institutional Change." In *The Political Economy of Property Rights*. Ed. David Weimer. Cambridge University Press.
https://www.dropbox.com/s/ckui4ywfj5neocw/Allio_PostCommunistPrivatization.pdf?dl=0

Jack Knight and Douglass North. 1997. "Explaining the Complexity of Institutional Change." In *The Political Economy of Property Rights*. Ed. David Weimer. Cambridge University Press.
https://www.dropbox.com/s/xkid71ko489s9tu/KnightNorth_Complexity.pdf?dl=0

Assignment (due at noon the day before class):

Make a list of descriptive facts you could use to convince someone that your question is important and non-obvious. For example, if your question were "why do civil wars occur," relevant descriptive facts might include how often civil wars occur, where and when they occur, the usual length of these wars, typical outcomes, etc. You are creating a to-do list of things you would like to find out; you do not have to retrieve the relevant facts right now.

E.g., you could write down "the number of civil wars since WWII." You do not need to find out what that number is.

Turn your list into a two-page outline. Make it clear how these descriptive facts would be useful in justifying your research topic. For example, a particular fact might illustrate your topic's normative importance or show that there is puzzling variation to be explained.

Feb 23: Methodological individualism and rational choice

Daniel Little. 1991. *Varieties of Social Explanation*. Westview Press. Chapters 3 and 9.

David Austin-Smith and Jeffrey S. Banks. 1998. "Social Choice theory, Game Theory, and Positive Political Theory." *Annual Review of Political Science* 1. http://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.polisci.1.1.259

Debra Satz and John Ferejohn. 1994. "Rational Choice and Social Theory." *Journal of Philosophy* 91(2). http://www.jstor.org/stable/2940928

Robert Sugden. 2000. "Credible Worlds: The Status of Theoretical Models in Economics." *Journal of Economic Methodology* 7(1). http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/135017800362220

Ariel Rubinstein. 1991. "Comments on the Interpretation of Game Theory." *Econometrica* 59(4). http://www.jstor.org/stable/2938166

Donald Green and Ian Shapiro. 1994. *Pathologies of Rational Choice Theory: A Critique of Applications in Political Science*. Yale University Press. ‡

Kevin Clarke and David Primo. 2007. "Modernizing Political Science: A Model-Based Approach." *Perspectives on Politics* 5(4). https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592707072192

James Johnson. 2010. "What Rationality Assumption? Or, How 'Positive Political Theory' Rests on a Mistake." *Political Studies* 58(2). http://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9248.2009.00811.x

James Johnson. 2014. "Models among the Political Theorists." *American Journal of Political Science* 58(3). http://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12114

Mar 2: Interpretation

Reading for the week:

Daniel Little. 1991. *Varieties of Social Explanation*. Westview Press. Chapter 4.

Clifford Geertz. 1973. *The Interpretation of Cultures*. Basic Books. Chapters 11–12. ‡

James C. Scott. 1985. *Weapons of the Weak*. Yale University Press. Chapters 2, 7. https://www.dropbox.com/s/m6lxau1rx4ds2su/Scott_Weapons.pdf?dl=0

Robert Bates, Rui J. P. de Figueiredo, and Barry R. Weingast. 1998. "The Politics of Interpretation." *Politics and Society* 26(4). https://doi.org/10.1177/0032329298026004007

Assignment (due at noon the day before class):

Write a six page memo that poses your research question; uses descriptive facts to show that the question is important and non-obvious; and shows how the existing literature fails

to answer your question. This memo will pull together the writing you have already done. You will also need to track down some of the descriptive data that you identified in your last memorandum.

Mar 9: Cases

Reading for the week:

Peter Abell. 2004. "Narrative Explanation: An Alternative to Variable-Centered Explanation?" *Annual Review of Sociology* 30.
http://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.soc.29.010202.100113

James Fearon. 1991. "Counterfactuals and Hypothesis Testing in Political Science." *World Politics* 43(2). http://www.jstor.org/stable/2010470

David D. Collier. 2011. "Understanding Process Tracing." *PS: Political Science and Politics* 44(4). http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S1049096511001429

Sheri Berman. 1997. "Civil Society and the Collapse of the Weimar Republic." *World Politics* 49(3). www.jstor.org/stable/25054008

Robert H. Bates, Avner Greif, Margaret Levi, and Jean-Laurent Rosenthal, Ed. 1998. *Analytic Narratives*. Princeton University Press. Introduction and Chapter 4.
https://www.dropbox.com/s/i9qgxziy9z559h5/AnalyticNarratives.pdf?dl=0

Assignment (due at noon the day before class):

Submit a memo of 2 to 3 pages that proposes an answer to your question and lists as many observable implications of that answer as you can generate. Be sure to think about observable implications at multiple levels. E.g., if your answer is correct, what kind of beliefs do relevant actors have? What actions do they take? What would you observe at the level of a city/firm/army/legislature, etc.? What kinds of observations would contradict your proposed answer?

Mar 23: Narrative and ethnographic field methods

Reading for the week:

Clifford Geertz. 1973. *The Interpretation of Cultures*. Basic Books. Chapter 1. ‡

Wood, Elisabeth Jean. 2009. "Field Methods." In *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Politics*. Ed. Carles Boix and Susan Stokes. Oxford University Press. ‡

Richard Fenno. 1986. "Observation, Context, and Sequence." *American Political Science Review* 80(1). www.jstor.org/stable/1957081

Lisa Wedeen. 2010. "Reflections on Ethnographic Work in Political Science." *Annual Review of Political Science* 13. http://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.polisci.11.052706.123951

Each member of the class will be assigned to read one of the following pieces:

Séverine Autesserre. 2014. *Peaceland: Conflict Resolution and the Everyday Politics of International Intervention*. Cambridge University Press. Appendix.
https://www.dropbox.com/s/ucacg25gzuhkp4e/Peaceland.pdf?dl=0

Richard F. Fenno. 1978. *Home Style: House Members in Their Districts*. Little Brown. Appendix.
https://www.dropbox.com/s/cy4qn6024i3zltw/Fenno_HomeStyle.pdf?dl=0

David D. Laitin. 1986. *Hegemony and Culture: Politics and Change among the Yoruba*. University of Chicago Press. Appendix.
https://www.dropbox.com/s/o0e4z6ew650xp5s/Laitin_HegemonyCulture.pdf?dl=0

Sharon Werning Rivera, Polina Kozyreva, and Eduard Sarovskii. 2002. "Interviewing Political Elites: Lessons from Russia." *PS: Political Science and Politics* 35(4).
https://doi.org/10.1017/S1049096502001178

Assignment (due at noon the day before class):

Read about a particular case (or a small set of cases) that instantiate(s) your question. You should rely on books, articles, archives, newspapers, biographies, etc. Write a five-page memo on how the case is related to your question. Is it anomalous for reigning theory and/or does it comport to the ideas you have proposed?

Mar 30: Large-n observational research

Reading for the week:

Daniel Little. 1991. *Varieties of Social Explanation*. Westview Press. Chapter 8.

Christopher Achen. 2002. "Toward a New Political Methodology." *Annual Review of Political Science* 5. http://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.polisci.5.112801.080943

Rosenbaum, Paul R. 1999. "Choice as an Alternative to Control in Observational Studies." *Statistical Science* 14(3). http://www.jstor.org/stable/2676761

Kevin Clarke and David Primo. 2012. *A Model Discipline: Political Science and the Logic of Representations*. Oxford University Press. Chapter 5.
https://www.dropbox.com/s/4l4dcy5aovtjf0a/ClarkePrimo.pdf?dl=0

Macartan Humphreys, Raul Sanchez de la Sierra, and Peter van der Windt. 2013. "Fishing, Commitment, and Communication: A Proposal for Comprehensive Nonbinding Research Registration." *Political Analysis* 21(1). http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/pan/mps021

Assignment (due at noon the day before class):

Write a three page outline that proposes a field research strategy that could help answer your question. The strategy should be based on one or some of the following: interviews, participant observation, focus groups, a field survey, and ethnography. Your written research strategy should make clear the kinds of information you would gather and discuss how this data would help you to evaluate the competing answers to your question.

Apr 6: Creating large-n observational data

Reading for the week:

Yoshiko M. Herrera and Devesh Kapur. 2007. "Improving Data Quality: Actors, Incentives, and Capabilities." *Political Analysis* 15(4). http://www.jstor.org/stable/i25791900

Steven Wilkinson. 2010. "Data and the study of Indian politics." In *The Oxford Companion to Politics in India*. Ed. Pratap Mehta and Niraja Gopal Jayal. Oxford University Press. https://www.dropbox.com/s/8zl7s55f7s9uaho/wilkinson_data_indian_politics.pdf?dl=0

Nancy Cartwright and Rosa Runhardt. 2015. "Measurement." In *Philosophy of Social Science: A New Introduction*. Ed. Nancy Cartwright and Eleanora Montuschi. Oxford University Press. https://www.dropbox.com/s/40r91x79d4n6eg7/Cartwright_measure.pdf?dl=0

Angus Deaton. 2006. "Measuring Poverty." In *Understanding Poverty*. Ed. Abhijit Vinayak Banerjee, et al. Oxford University Press.
http://www.princeton.edu/~deaton/downloads/Deaton_Measuring_Poverty.pdf

Geraldo Munck. 2009. *Measuring Democracy*. Johns Hopkins University Press. Chapters 1–3. ‡

David Collier and Robert Adcock. 1999. "Democracy and Dichotomies." *Annual Review of Political Science* 2. http://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.polisci.2.1.537

Assignment (due at noon the day before class):

Search out a data set that could be used to assess an observable implication of the argument you made in an earlier memorandum. Create a three page report on whether the data are consistent with that observable implication. The report should cover where the data came from, how they were coded, how relevant concepts were measured, and what relationships in the data you would expect to find if various answers to your question hold. In analysis, can use any statistical tools that you wish (e.g., t-tests, OLS) but you should include basic descriptive statistics for all variables and some form of bivariate analysis—i.e., do not jump directly to multivariate analysis.

Apr 13: Laboratory, survey, and field experiments

Reading for the week:

Angrist, Joshua D. and Jörn-Steffen Pischke. 2009. *Mostly Harmless Econometrics*. Chapter 2. ‡

Dawn Lagan Teele, Ed. 2014. *Field Experiments and Their Critics*. Yale University Press. Chapters 1–3. https://www.dropbox.com/s/fqrlyna1peyo65w/Fieldexperiments.pdf?dl=0

Rose McDermott. 2002. "Experimental Methods in Political Science." *Annual Review of Political Science* 5. http://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.polisci.5.091001.170657

Macartan Humphreys and Jeremy M.Weinstein. 2009. "Field Experiments and the Political Economy of Development." *Annual Review of Political Science* 12.
http://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.polisci.12.060107.155922

Assignment (due at noon the day before class):

Write a two page outline describing some large-n data that would help you investigate your question but which does not currently exist. What variables do you need? How might you define and collect those variables? If your data were collected, what analysis would you perform? What existing data would you need in order to perform that analysis?

Apr 20: Experiment-inspired analysis of observational data

Reading for the week:

Angrist, Joshua D. and Jörn-Steffen Pischke. 2009. *Mostly Harmless Econometrics*. Princeton University Press. Chapters 4–6. ‡

Allison J. Sovey and Donald P. Green. 2011. "Instrumental Variables Estimation in Political Science: A Readers' Guide." *American Journal of Political Science* 55(1). http://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-5907.2010.00477.x

Andrew C. Eggers, et al. 2015. "On the Validity of the Regression Discontinuity Design for Estimating Electoral Effects: New Evidence from Over 40,000 Close Races." *American Journal of Political Science*, 59(1). http://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12127

Edmund J. Malesky, et al. 2014. "The Impact of Recentralization on Public Services: A Difference-in-Differences Analysis of the Abolition of Elected Councils in Vietnam." *American Political Science Review*, 108(1). http://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055413000580

Assignment (due at noon the day before class):

Write a 2-page research memo describing a lab, survey, or field experiment that could be used to answer some aspect of your question or the argument you have advanced. The memo should make it clear what performing your experiment would entail; what observations it could generate; and what observations would be consistent with reigning theories and/or your argument.

Apr 27: Choosing and/or integrating tools

Reading for the week:

Healy, Kiernan. 2016. "Fuck Nuance." *Sociological Theory* forthcoming. https://kieranhealy.org/files/papers/fuck-nuance.pdf

Michael Coppedge. 1999. "Thickening Thin Concepts and Theories: Combining Large N and Small in Comparative Politics." *Comparative Politics* 31(4). http://www.jstor.org/stable/422240

Evan S. Lieberman. 2005. "Nested Analysis as a Mixed-Method Strategy for Comparative Research." *American Political Science Review* 99(3). http://www.jstor.org/stable/30038950

Fearon, James D. and David D. Laitin. 2008. "Integrating Qualitative and Quantitative Methods." In *The Oxford Handbook of Political Methodology*. Ed. Janet Box-Steffensmeier, et. al. Oxford University Press. https://www.dropbox.com/s/6tfn44xmaa5q4dp/FearonLaitinOxfordHandbook.pdf?dl=0

Amel Ahmed and Rudra Sil. 2012. "When Multi-Method Research Subverts Methodological Pluralism—or, Why We Still Need Single-Method Research." *Perspectives on Politics*. 10(4). http://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592712002836

Shapiro, Ian. 2002. "Problems, Methods, and Theories in the Study of Politics, or What's Wrong with Political Science and What to Do About It." *Political Theory* 30(4). http://www.jstor.org/stable/3072623

To prepare for class:

Prepare a 15-minute presentation of your research question, preliminary findings, and research strategy for the future. This presentation should update previous iterations of your project, responding to other students' questions and criticisms. You do not need to circulate any material in advance of class.

May 11: Final research prospectus due by 5pm by email

Turn in a research proposal of fifteen pages (not including bibliography) that draws together all of the assignments you have done through the semester. It may be helpful to think about the proposal as the type of essay you would write for a grant application. The proposal should pose a question, situate that question in the literature, and use data to illustrate the importance and non-obviousness of the question. Present the answer(s) to your question that you propose to investigate and any preliminary findings that you have. Then, describe and justify future research. In the plan for further research, you do not need to incorporate all of the methods we have discussed. Focus on the methods that appear most likely to succeed and make an argument as to why those methods are appropriate.