

PLS 210

Political Science Research Methods

Week 1:

Introduction to the course

Political Science research

Welcome to PLS 210!

Plan for today

- Introduction to the course
- Political Science research

Research: joy and trepidation

- Research puzzle and research question
- Interpretation:
 - Fun and freedom —and rigor
- Hypothesis
- (+ conceptualization, theory development, operationalization, data collection, analysis, etc., etc.)



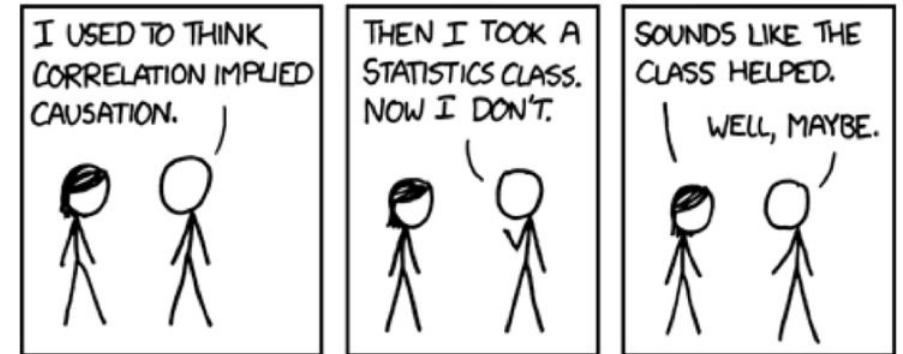
Course objectives

- Ability to do your own research
- Understanding of the research process
- Knowledge and tools to assess others research



Course content

- Part I. Research design and inference:
 - Principles of research design
 - The literature and literature review
 - Descriptive and causal inference
 - Research ethics
- Part II. Data collection and analysis:
 - Ethnography
 - Interviews and focus groups
 - Historiography
 - Content analysis



Course organization

- Readings:
 - Textbooks and some non-academic sources
 - Important contributions to Political Science
- Lectures and seminars
- Contact:
 - Office hours
 - Moodle forum and messages



Assessment

- Research project 45%
 - Literature review 15%
 - Research design 15%
 - Data collection report 15%
 - Term test 15%
- Final exam 25%
- Class involvement 15%

Course policies and requirements



IT'S IN THE SYLLABUS

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Commitments

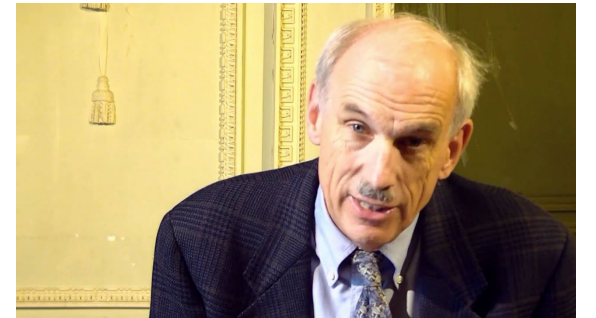


Political Science research

- Political Science—and politics and science
- Research process
- Good research and disciplinary contention
- Political Science as a vocation

Political Science

- Kellstedt & Whitten:
 - “[P]olitical science is about the scientific study of political phenomena.”
- Keohane:
 - “Political science is the study of politics through the procedures of science.”



Politics

- Keohane:
 - “[A]ttempts to organize human groups to determine internal rules and, externally, to compete and cooperate with other organized groups; and reactions to such attempts.”
- Lenin:
 - “Весь вопрос—кто кого опередит?” (“The whole question is—who will overtake whom?”)
 - Allegedly said in a 1921 speech
- Laswell:
 - “Politics: Who Gets What, When, How”
 - Lasswell, Harold Dwight. 1936. *Politics: Who Gets What, When, How*. New York: Whittlesey House.



Science and research

- Keohane:
 - “[A] publicly known set of procedures designed to make and evaluate descriptive and causal inferences on the basis of the self-conscious evaluation of methods that are themselves subject to public evaluation.” —>
- Answers to questions



Research process

- Research puzzles and research questions
- Concepts and conceptualization
- Interpretation and inference:
 - Descriptive
 - Causal
- Hypotheses, theories, and variables

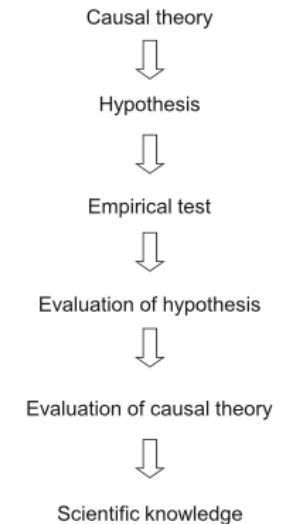


Figure 1.1 The road to scientific knowledge

Contending approaches to doing Political Science research

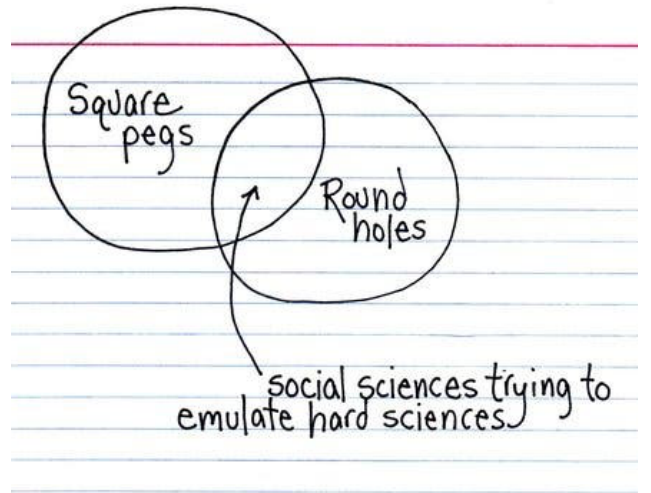
- Kellstedt & Whitten:

- “Scientists are lumped into different disciplines that develop standards for evaluating evidence.” →
- But it’s all science: scientists as impartial, objective observers of law-like relationships and phenomena that occur generally, making parsimonious theorization possible



Contending approaches to doing Political Science research

- Bernstein et al.
 - ‘Physics envy’ responsible for “precious little in the way of useful, high confidence results”
 - ‘Hard’ science of politics made impossible by the messiness of social reality:
 - (Quasi)-randomness and system openness
 - Individual, group, and state-level variation in responses to incentives
 - Contingency
 - Learning and agent manipulation (“Molecules do not learn from experience. People do, or think they do.”)

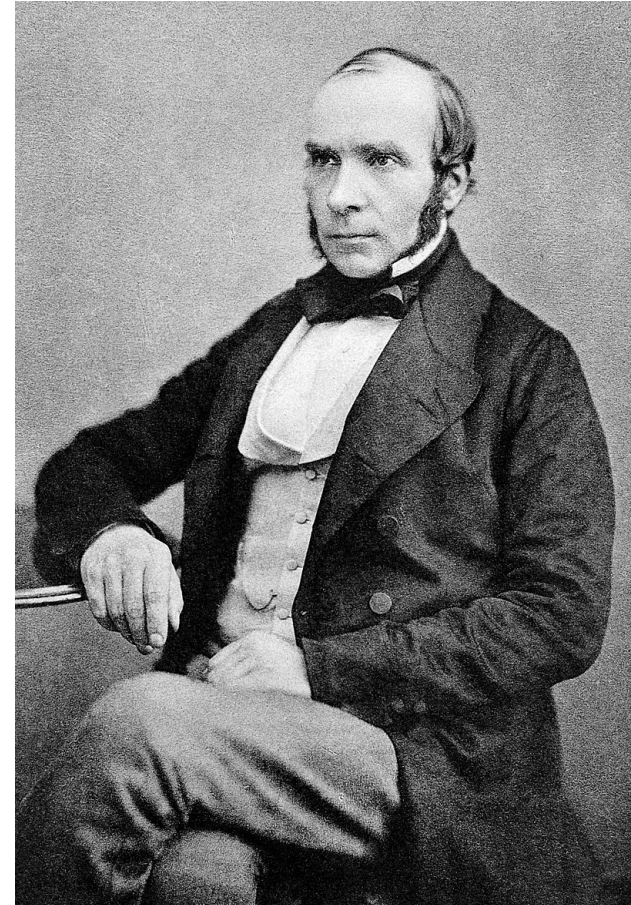
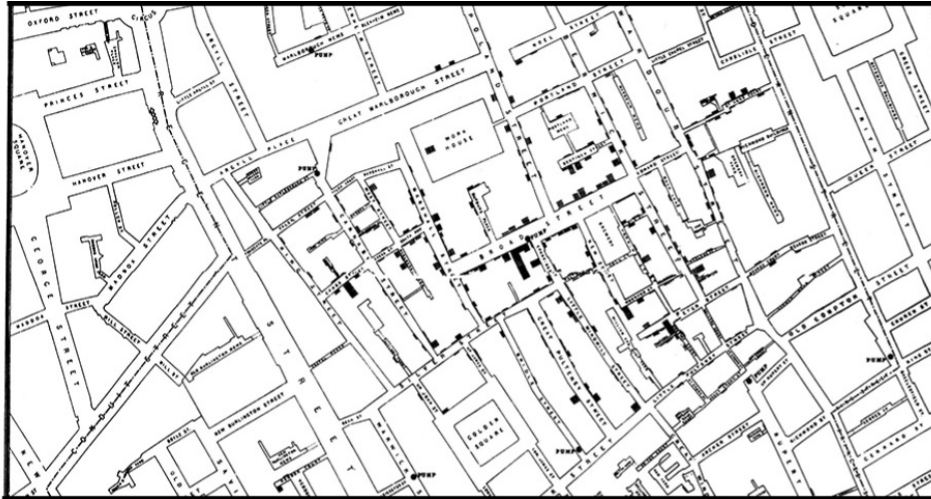


Contending approaches to doing Political Science research

- 'Positivism' vs. subjectivism
- Qualitative vs. quantitative research
- In reality, a lot of pragmatism and ecumenical thinking—as well as contention—in contemporary mainstream Political Science

The importance of good research

- Pattern-finding:
 - Biases
 - Ramifications —> the case of John Snow's water pump



Political Science as a vocation

- Keohane:
 - “If causal inferences in our field, and prediction, are so intractable, why choose political science as a vocation? My short answer is that we study politics not because it is beautiful or easy to understand, but because it is so important to all fields of human endeavor.”
- Empirical research vs. normative commitments