

PLS 210
Political Science
Research Methods

Week 2:

Research questions, research puzzles, and the literature

Welcome back!

Recap

- Research in Political Science as answering *research* questions about politics
- (Also:
 - The research process in Political Science
 - Good research
 - Key perspectives on doing research in Political Science
 - Political Science as a vocation)

Plan for today

- Research questions:
 - Features of good research questions
 - Formulating research questions:
 - General information about the world (and models)
 - Research puzzles
 - Existing scholarship —>
- The literature

Research questions

- Importance
- Clarity and precision
- Feasibility
- Observability and empiricism
- Open-ended-ness
- Value
- Simplicity



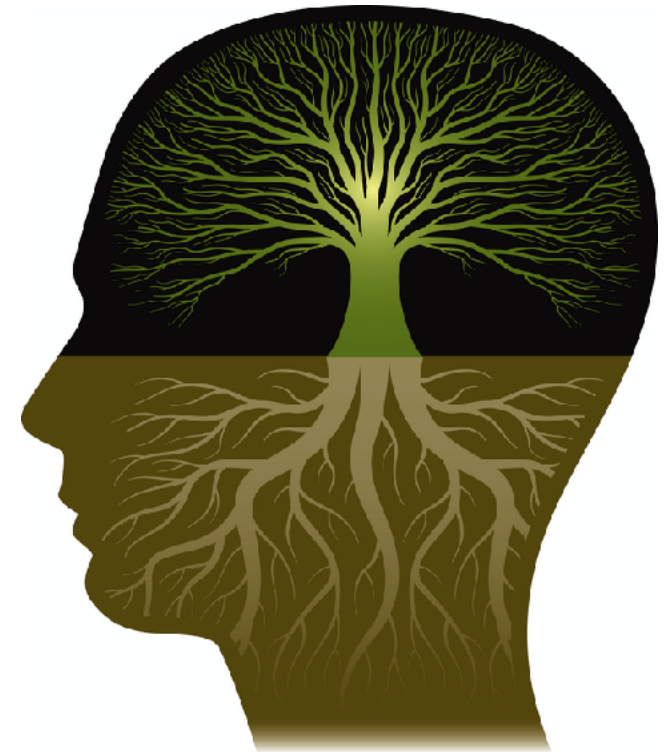
Choosing research questions: inspiration

- Geddes:
 - “Curiosity, fascination, and indignation should guide the choice of research topic.
Emotion has been banned from most of the research enterprise, and properly so. But one place it should remain is in the choosing of research topics.”



Choosing research questions: knowledge

- Geddes:
 - “Having this kind of factual knowledge base helps the scholar to avoid making unfounded claims about the uniqueness of particular events, processes, or countries and also to avoid mistaking the simplified portraits of events often found in the literature for realistic descriptions.”



Choosing research questions: models

- Kellstedt and Whitten:
 - Thinking about the world “in terms of models in which the concepts of interest become variables that are causally linked together by theories.”

Choosing research questions: models

- Geddes:

- “Models make possible interpretations of information that simply would not have occurred to us otherwise. A model is a simplified representation of a process. Its purpose is to illuminate a basic logic underlying the process that might not be perceptible from observation of the entire complicated reality overlaid, as all reality is, with multitudinous irrelevant details. A good model—one that is useful, fruitful, or exciting—shows both its creator and those who are exposed to it something about the process that they had not perceived before.”

Choosing research questions: models

- Moore:

- “No bourgeoisie, no democracy”
- Political influence of bourgeoisie → democracy or communism / fascism

- Moore, Barrington. 1966. *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World*. Boston: Beacon Press.

- Olson:

- Irrationality of collective action

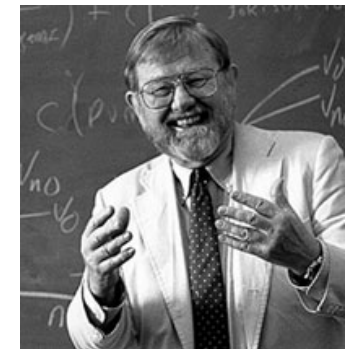
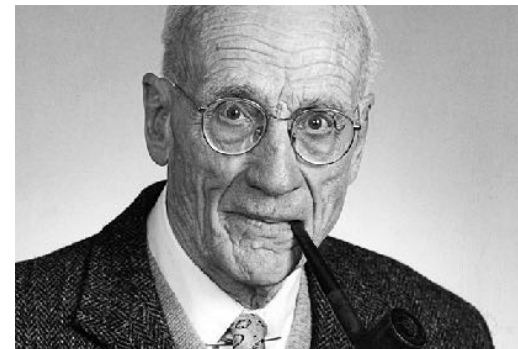
- Olson, Mancur. 2002. *The Logic of Collective Action*. Oxford: Blackwell.

CHART I
CATEGORIES AND EXPLANATORY VARIABLE CLUSTERS IN BARRINGTON MOORE'S
SOCIAL ORIGINS OF DICTATORSHIP AND DEMOCRACY

| Common Starting Point: ^a (Except U.S.A.) | Route One "Bourgeois Revolution" Agrarian Bureaucracy | Route Two "Reactionary Capitalism" Agrarian Bureaucracy | Route Three "Communism" Agrarian Bureaucracy |
|--|---|---|--|
| Key Variable Clusters | | | |
| Bourgeois Impulse: | Strong | Strong | Medium-strength |
| Mode of Commercial Agriculture: | Market | Labor-repressive | Labor-repressive |
| Peasant Revolutionary Potential: | Low | High | Low |
| Critical Political Event: | Bourgeois Revolution | Revolution From Above | Peasant Revolution |
| Major Systemic Political Outcome: | Democratic Capitalism | Fascism | Communist Dictatorship |
| Cases: | Britain U.S.A. | France | Germany Japan Russia China |

**[P]owerful central governments that we can loosely call royal absolutisms or agrarian bureaucracies established themselves in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in all the major countries examined in connection with this study (except of course the United States). . . . [T]he fact forms a convenient if partly arbitrary peg upon which to hang the beginnings of modernization (*Social Origins*, p. 417).

Politics and Society Fall 1973



Choosing research questions: research puzzles



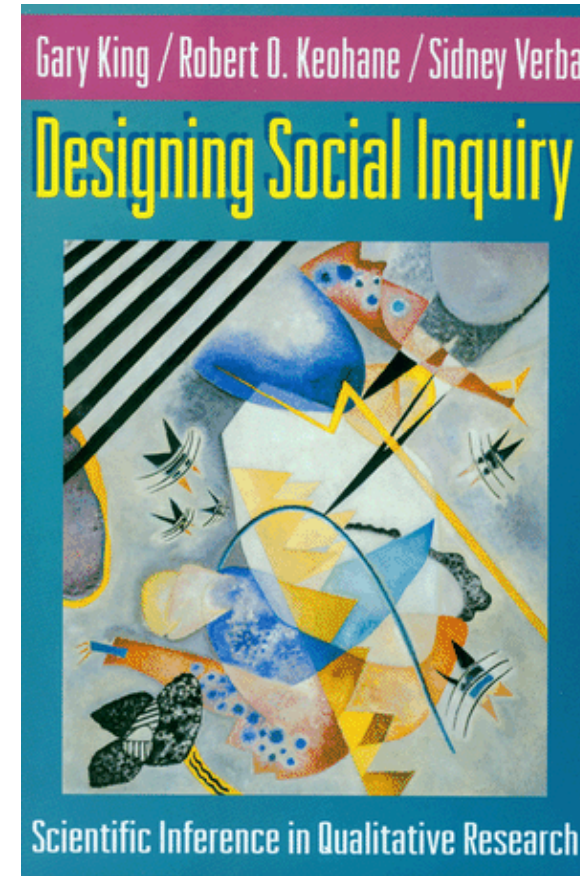
Choosing research questions: the literature

- Geddes:

- “The literature on some subjects contains only a few arguments generally accepted as true; many controversies in which the hypotheses on both sides lack both clarity and strong empirical support; and large amounts of opinion and conjecture, unsupported by systematic evidence but nevertheless often referred to as theory. Such a literature creates a fuzzy research frontier. The reader finds not well-defined holes in the literature but swampy quagmires. Students who wade into these literatures often find themselves sinking into the quicksand of contested definitions and chasing after nebulous dependent variables that flit around like will-o’-the-wisps.”

Choosing research questions: the literature

- King, Keohane, and Verba (KKV):
 - Important hypotheses lacking systematic evidence
 - Hypotheses suspected to be false
 - Controversy resolution
 - Unquestioned assumptions
 - Overlooked topics
 - King, Gary, Robert O. Keohane, and Sidney Verba. 1994. *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- New settings



The literature and the literature review

- Scholarly consensus
- Main foci
- Overlooked issues
- Common explanations
- Perspectives
- Methods
- Conceptualization and measurement

Literature review: Ansolabehere et al.

- Scholarly consensus:
 - “It is generally taken for granted that political campaigns boost citizens’ involvement...”
- New revisionist scholarship:
 - “American campaigns have changed dramatically...”
 - Broadcasting is now “potent tools in the hands of campaign operatives, consultants, and fund-raisers.”
 - “A handful of studies have considered the relationship between campaign advertising and political participation, with inconsistent results.”

Literature review: Grzymala-Busse

- Research question: where does the (European) state come from?
- Canonical answers:
 1. Interstate wars (—> Tilly)
 2. Ruler-society bargaining and contracts
- Interstate threats —> need to make war —> need to raise revenue —>
 1. extractive state capacity or
 2. bargaining —> representative institutions



Literature review: Grzymala-Busse

- Unanswered questions:
 - Fragmentation
 - Cross-state institutional similarities
 - State functions
- Grzymala-Busse's answer:
 - The Medieval Church as a rival, template, and key contributor to state development

Takeaways

- Features of good research questions
- Sources of inspiration:
 - General knowledge of the world (and models)
 - Research puzzles
 - The literature —>
- The literature and the literature review