

POLI210: Political Science Research Methods

Lecture 3.1: Scientific literatures

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September 14th, 2021

Boring admin stuff

- WhatsApp chat: not monitored!
- Labs start this week – you must have R installed!
- Assignment 1 (filling in survey): will be available shortly
 - Due September 20th, 11:59PM
 - Make sure to input student ID correctly!
- OH: in person or on zoom?
 - Chris: Tuesdays 1-2pm
 - Marion: Wednesdays 10:30-11:30am
 - Irene: Fridays 11:30-12:30
 - Danielle: Fridays 1:30-2:30pm
- Workshop on Thursday

Scientific literatures

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A research paper outlines what people have said previously...

And makes clear what its **contribution** is

- B&A, p.27: “the author is making an argument that her research fits into the larger body of literature but is still unique.”

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- “Previous research implies X, but it’s never been tested”
 - e.g. applying theories from political theory: Carole Pateman on participatory democracy – the individual qualities and attitudes necessary for democracy to work can only be developed through democratization of all authority structures
- “Theory X does not seem to work in situation Y; why?”
 - Allison (1969) on the Cuban Missile Crisis

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We have our hypothesis:

- As democracy (IV) increases...
- warmaking (DV) decreases
- Stated more clearly: “As a dyad becomes more democratic, the probability that the countries composing the dyad go to war with one another decreases.”

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- **Measurement:** How will we actually measure our concepts?
 - A popular index of democracy: Polity scores
 - Not without its problems...

And then the critiques flow in...

Might there be something that is related to both democracy and war and that would explain away the association?

- Cold War interests, capitalism, economic development, suffragette movement, trade relations...
- For each of these, we want to develop a theory and derive **testable implications**

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- Western bias in measurement?

Western bias?

For one period, 1997–2003, Iran's Polity score jumped massively, by nine points. What accounts for this change? It coincides with the presidency of Khatami, a pro-Western reformer. Khatami tried to befriend the United States and reorient Iranian foreign policy. He also campaigned to make the government more accountable to the people. He did not, however, change or even seek to change the constitution or any of the key institutions or processes of the regime, saying, “there will not be a democratic regime in the true sense of the word.”⁹ Moreover, even his limited reform efforts failed.

(Colgan 2019)

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- Critiques improve the literature
 - Ever-evolving science
- Despite all this work, highly-trained scholars still disagree

How your paper relates to the literature

Example: Baccini et al. (Baccini, Brodeur, and Weymouth 2021)

- The research question: what was the effect of COVID-19 on the 2020 presidential election in the US?
- County-level analysis that relates covid cases and Trump vote

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 - College football losses... (Healy, Malhotra, and Mo 2010)
 - Shark attacks... (Fowler and Hall 2018)

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We'll see more on Thursday during the workshop

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- Use cognitive shortcuts! You can't read everything

Academic journals

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 - See here: [Google scholar's top publications](#)
- Lower-ranked journals are not necessarily bad!

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- Incentive for researchers: keep looking until you find something!
- Evidence of this in PS: Gerber et al. (2010)
- Result:
 - 20 studies find no effect of X on Y
 - 1 study finds effect of X on Y
 - That one study is published, the other 20 are not

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- Transparency: publish data and code
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- Pre-registration (now obligatory at JoP!)
 - The idea: before collecting data, say exactly how you'll analyze the results
 - Going even further: registered reports

BONUS: What do political scientists study?

Figure 1.2 A word cloud of the 60 most popular keywords in political science, based on 10,000 articles published in the top 20 journals over the last ten years



Toshkov (2016, 15)

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- Baccini, Leonardo, Abel Brodeur, and Stephen Weymouth. 2021. "The COVID-19 Pandemic and the 2020 US Presidential Election." *Journal of Population Economics* 34 (2): 739–67.
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- Fowler, Anthony, and Andrew B. Hall. 2018. "Do Shark Attacks Influence Presidential Elections? Reassessing a Prominent Finding on Voter Competence." *The Journal of Politics* 80 (4): 1423–37.
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- Gerber, Alan S., Gregory A. Huber, Marc Meredith, Daniel R. Biggers, and David J. Hendry. 2017. "Does Incarceration Reduce Voting? Evidence about the Political Consequences of Spending Time in Prison." *The Journal of Politics* 79 (4): 1130–46. <https://doi.org/10.1086/692670>.
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- Imai, Kosuke, and James Lo. 2021. "Robustness of Empirical Evidence for the Democratic Peace: A Nonparametric Sensitivity Analysis." *International Organization* 75 (3): 901–19.
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