Synthesis and Review

Week 8

7 March, 2016

Prof. Robin Harding

Nice tools, but what do we do with them?

- As students of social science

  - in tutorial and exam essays,

- As social scientists

  - in original research,

- And beyond…

Assessing evidence on empirical questions

For example:

- What claims have been made about the merits and defects of so-called majoritarian and consensus democracies, and how have these claims been tested in scholarly research? (PPE reading list)

- What is state strength? What determines how strong a state is? (PPE reading list)

- What matters more for revolutionary success, the structure of class relations or the international environment? (Prelims specimen exam paper)

- Does distinguishing amongst regimes based on whether they are presidential, semi-presidential or parliamentary tell us much about political outcomes? (Prelims specimen exam paper)

- What causes party systems to change over time? (Prelims specimen exam paper)

- Are voters less attached to political parties than in the past? (Prelims specimen exam paper)

Engage with the evidence critically
(critical: involving skilful judgement as to truth, merit, etc.)

Explain the basis of empirical evidence you cite

"Evans and Tilley say X, but Fisher says Y"

"Evans and Tilley's regression analysis of the British Election Study indicates X, but Fisher (using the same data) says Y once we properly control for age and education"

Assess the empirical evidence you cite

"Evans and Tilley say X"

"Evans and Tilley say X, but their analysis does not account for important factors . . ."

"Evans and Tilley say X, but their analysis only indirectly addresses the question because . . ."

"Evans and Tilley say X, and their analysis is particularly credible because. . ."

New ways to engage with conceptual questions

For example:

- Can we draw a sharp distinction between regimes that are democratic and those that are not? If so, what are the criteria? If not, why not? **(PPE reading list)**

- Is a failed state a state? **(Prelims specimen exam paper)**

- Can we identify different types of legislatures? **(Prelims specimen exam paper)**

Goal is to understand the world better:

- This should motivate our engagement with concepts

- Use tools introduced in this course to help you do this **(e.g. research questions and research designs, approaches to measurement, etc.)**

Types of research questions

Descriptive questions:

- what proportion of UK citizens support leaving the EU?

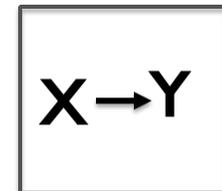- are voters less attached to political parties than in the past?

Explanatory questions (reverse causal questions):

- why do democracies seldom fight wars against each other?

- what causes revolutions?
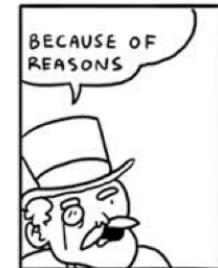
Forward causal questions:

- what is the effect of campaign spending on election outcomes?

- what is the effect of consensus democracy on political stability?

Why should we care about research questions?

Criteria against which to evaluate research:

➡ Judge research according to how well it meets the goals it was designed to achieve

If purpose of research is descriptive, don't criticise it for not identifying a causal effect, but do expect it to accurately "describe"

- e.g. are voters less attached to political parties than in the past?

    ➡ Dalton's (2000) first goal is to investigate change in partisanship over time in advanced industrial democracies. How successfully does he achieve this?

If purpose is explanatory, hold evidence to this standard

- e.g. what causes revolutions?

    ➡ Skocpol's (1979) goal is to explain why revolutions occur. Does her research design enable her to do this?

Concepts

Unobservable, abstract expressions of ideas used in everyday discourse, where meaning may be **contested**.

Conceptualisation: the mental process whereby abstract and imprecise notions (concepts) are made more specific and precise.

Example: Can we draw a sharp distinction between regimes that are democratic and those that are not? If so, what are the criteria? If not, why not?

- This is partly a question about conceptualisation
- Requires engagement with literature on democracy as a **concept** e.g. Dahl; Schmitter & Karl; Levitsky & Way
- May want to think about research question (and theoretical argument) under examination
    - e.g. Harding & Stasavage (2014), "What Democracy Does (and Doesn't Do) for Basic Services"
    - e.g. Lindberg (2006), "Democracy and Elections in Africa"
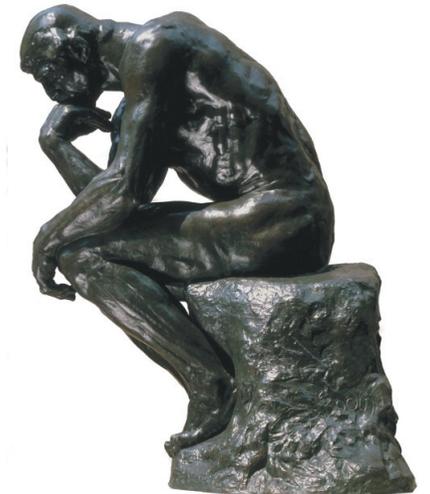
Measurement

Process by which phenomena are observed systematically

Necessitates operationalisation:

- development of specific research procedures that will result in empirical observations representing those concepts in the real world

Democracy and Dictatorship	Polity IV
A regime is classified as a democracy if all of the following conditions apply. Otherwise, it is classified as a dictatorship. 1. The Chief Executive must be elected. 2. The Legislature must be elected. 3. There must be more than one party. 4. There must have been at least some alternation of power under existing institutional arrangement. ➡ BINARY	Regimes coded on indices of democracy and autocracy. Ten-point scales based on: 1. The competitiveness of political participation (1–3). 2. The competitiveness of executive recruitment (1–2), 3. The openness of executive recruitment (1), and 4. The constraints on the chief executive (1–4). ➡ CONTINUOUS

Why should we care about measurement?

Criteria for evaluating whether empirical analysis addresses research question:
➡Are measures fit for purpose?

Validity	Reliability
Extent to which measures correspond to the concepts they are intended to reflect.	Extent to which the measurement process repeatedly and consistently produces the same score for a given case.
Democracy and Dictatorship: ➡ effectively reflects a binary conceptualisation of democracy, if we care about elections ➡ but what about Botswana, or Singapore? **Polity IV:** ➡ useful operationalisation of Dahl's "Polyarchy" ➡ but how should the various aspects be weighted? ➡ what does the index mean, if different combinations can produce the same values?	**Democracy and Dictatorship:** ➡ YES ➡ although, what constitutes alternation of power? **Polity IV:** ➡ coding rules pretty clear, but some scope for subjectivity?

Why should we care about measurement?

Example: Can we draw a sharp distinction between regimes that are democratic and those that are not? If so, what are the criteria? If not, why not?

- This is also a question about measurement

- Not only concerned with distinction in the abstract, but also whether this is possible empirically

- Requires engagement with empirical work on democracy

- Again, may want to think about research question (and theoretical argument) under examination

  - e.g. Harding & Stasavage (2014), "What Democracy Does (and Doesn't Do) for Basic Services"

    ➡ EIEC (from Database of Political Institutions)

  - e.g. Lindberg (2006), "Democracy and Elections in Africa"

    ➡ Freedom House

- If interested: look at Varieties of Democracy project (www.v-dem.net)

Why should we care about measurement?

Example: What claims have been made about the merits and defects of so-called majoritarian and consensus democracies, and how have these claims been tested in scholarly research?

- A predominantly empirical question, drawing largely on work of Arend Lijphart

- Conceptual concerns: e.g. what are majoritarian and consensus democracies?

- Measurement concerns: so many!
  - e.g. effective number of parties: reliable, but valid?
  - e.g. federalism: valid and/or reliable?

- But credit where credit is due: these are difficult problems

Case selection

Where you look determines what you see:

- avoid selection bias

- criteria for selection cannot be correlated with the outcome of interest

- 92% of Brits want to quit EU (according to poll of Daily Express readers)

How to select cases?

- Random sampling
  - ➡ every case in population has same probability of being selected
  - ➡ true relationships will be faithfully represented in the data

- Intentional selection
  - ➡ avoid selection criteria that are correlated with DV
  - ➡ allow for some variation in the DV (unless purely descriptive)
  - ➡ be aware of selection effects, and condition inferences accordingly

Why should we care about case selection?

Threats to inference

➡ process of using facts we know to learn facts we don't know

Internal validity

➡ guilt by association

➡ falsely infer shared characteristics are causes

External validity

➡ overgeneralisation

➡ falsely infer relationships in sample reflect those in population

Why should we care about case selection?

Example: What matters more for revolutionary success, the structure of class relations or the international environment?

- In large part an empirical question about determinants of revolutions

- Skocpol's (1979) "States and Social Revolutions"
  - ➡ argues that revolutions are caused at least in part by foreign threats
  - ➡ comparative historical analysis of French, Russian and Chinese revolutions
  - ➡ all had revolutions, all faced international threats

- Inference suffers from internal validity problem
  - ➡ only observe levels of explanatory factors in cases where outcome occurred
  - ➡ "analysis/conclusion is not particularly credible because..."

Why should we care about case selection?

Example: What claims have been made about the merits and defects of so-called majoritarian and consensus democracies, and how have these claims been tested in scholarly research?

- A predominantly empirical question, drawing largely on work of Arend Lijphart

- Lijphart's (2012) "Patterns of Democracy"
  - ➡ restricts analysis to countries that have been continuously democratic for 20 years
  - ➡ problematic if this selection criteria is correlated with DV
  - ➡ possible that younger democracies are likely to perform worse on measures of macro-economic performance

- Inference may suffer from external validity problem
  - ➡ relationships in the cases he does observe may not be the same in the cases he does not observe (younger democracies)

Analysis

Tools for evaluating relationships between 2 variables

- **Correlation:** measure of linear association
  - ➡ coefficient tells us, if you plot x and y, how closely are the points arranged on a line, and is the slope positive or negative?

- **Regression:** linear prediction of association
  - ➡ coefficient tells us how our prediction of the outcome changes with a one-unit change in the associated predictor

Tool for evaluating relationships between >2 variables

- **Multivariate regression:** conditional linear prediction of association
  - ➡ coefficient tells us how our prediction of the outcome changes with a one-unit change in the associated predictor, holding other predictors fixed
  - ➡ allows us to account for omitted or confounding variables

Analysis

Tools for inference

- **margin of error**

  ➡ estimate of how much an estimate may vary due to random error (sampling error)

- **statistical significance**

  ➡ estimate of likelihood of observing a slope this large if there is actually no relationship

  ➡ meaning of stars is tied to notion of hypothesis testing

Why should we care about analysis?

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Explain the basis of empirical evidence you cite

- "Evans and Tilley's regression analysis of the British Election Study indicates X"

  ➡ now you know what this means

  ➡ and you can interpret the results in a meaningful way

Assess the empirical evidence you cite

- "Evans and Tilley say X, but their analysis does not account for important factors…"

  ➡ now you understand the importance of omitted/confounding variables

  ➡ N.B. this is both a statistical and a theoretical issue

Why should we care about analysis?

Example: Does distinguishing amongst regimes based on whether they are presidential, semi-presidential or parliamentary tell us much about political outcomes?

- In part an empirical question about the impact of regime types

- Life expectancy of presidential democracies is considerably shorter than parliamentary democracies

  ➡ Linz (1978, 1990a) has argued that presidential regimes are intrinsically less stable than parliamentary regimes

- Cheibub (2007) analyses original dataset covering all democratic regimes between 1946 and 2002

  ➡ shows that relationship between presidentialism and regime instability is not robust to the inclusion of military legacy

    ➡ military legacy is a confounding variable

    ➡ correlated with both choice of presidential regimes and regime stability

Why should we care about analysis?

Example: What claims have been made about the merits and defects of so-called majoritarian and consensus democracies, and how have these claims been tested in scholarly research?

- A predominantly empirical question, drawing largely on work of Arend Lijphart

- Lijphart's (2012) "Patterns of Democracy"
  - ➡ multivariate regression analysis of relationship between consensus democracy and various indicators of government performance
  - ➡ controls for economic development (HDI index) and population size
  - ➡ can you think of any omitted/confounding variables?
  - ➡ "analysis does not account for…, which matters because…"

Why should we care about analysis?

Example: Are voters less attached to political parties than in the past?

- An empirical question, focusing on evidence for/against decline in partisanship

- Dalton & Wattenberg (eds.) (2000) "Parties without Partisans"
    - ➡ multiple approaches to same issue
    - ➡ attempt to investigate mechanism
    - ➡ "analysis is particularly credible because…"

Tools for social scientists…

…like you!

Q-Step essay:

➡ opportunity to engage in original, empirical social science

➡ due Tuesday of TT week 2 (May 3rd)

➡ guidelines on weblearn

➡ drop-in sessions first week of TT (look for emails)

➡ £200 for the best essay, plus honourable mentions

Tools for the "real world"

Internships:

- the University Careers Service has a UK internship programme
  - details available at http://www.careers.ox.ac.uk/using-careerconnect/

- Q-Step Internship Awards provide up to £1,500 to undertake an internship which focuses on developing quantitative methods skills
  - Mount Stuart Trust
  - YouGov
  - Demos
  - Citizens' Advice West Oxfordshire

- details on WebLearn, apply through CareerConnect
  - deadline 13th March

Speaker Series:

- Wednesday, 4pm, Manor Road Building
- Simon Jackman (Stanford University)
- use of social science methods outside academia

Lecture feedback

please fill out the feedback form and hand it back