

Qualitative Methods for Public Policy

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This document is a syllabus for a course on qualitative methods applicable to the study of public policy. It is divided into two parts. The first part, entitled Methodology, deals with a number of issues which apply to all areas of social science research. Sections one to four in this part are more abstract; sections five to eight deal with relatively practical issues. The second part, entitled Methods, deals with a number of specific methods by which we acquire systematic information about the real world: in particular, interviews, statutes, and other texts.

Part I

Methodology

1 Purpose of inquiry

- King et al. (1994, chs. 1-3) (*DSI*) sets out a view of social inquiry as involving descriptive and causal inference, applicable to both 'qualitative' and 'quantitative' styles of research.
- Brady and Collier (2004, ch. 2, §II; chs. 3-4, Appendix) gently questions whether *DSI*'s view of social inquiry is equally applicable to both styles of research, and whether other goals, such as non-causal explanation, have been ignored.
- Macintyre (1971), by comparison, offers a radical critique of the kind of project embodied by *DSI*.
- Elster (1989, ch. 1) offers important examples of non-causal explanations; the entire book is wonderfully written and well-worth reading.

* Questions about this syllabus, or suggestions for inclusion, should be sent to chris.hanretty@eui.eu. This syllabus was last updated on February 21, 2010.

2 Concepts

- [Sartori \(1970\)](#). A classic. Concepts are hierarchically organised; concepts lower down the 'ladder of abstraction' share all the properties of their parents but are differentiated w.r.t their conceptual siblings.
- [Goertz \(2005, chs. 1-3; 5 if time allows\)](#) extends Sartori; argues for the usefulness of concepts built on the basis of 'family resemblance' (*pace* Wittgenstein).
- [Collier and Levitsky \(1997\)](#)
- [George and Bennett \(2005, ch. 11\)](#) defends the use of typologies, somewhat maligned by *DSI*
- [Weber \(1994a\)](#) is the reference text on ideal types.

If you are in any doubt about the usefulness of typologies, consider [Hall and Soskice \(2001\)](#), [Esping-Andersen \(1993\)](#), or [Hallin and Mancini \(2004\)](#).

3 Big interpretative schemae

- [March and Olsen \(2004\)](#) compares the 'logic of appropriateness' and a 'logic of consequentialism'.
- [Inkeles and Levinson \(1997\)](#) is a hold-out from the ancient tradition of 'national culture'.
- [Rhodes et al. \(2006, chs. 1-4\)](#) introduces a variety of 'institutionalisms'.
- [Hood \(1995\)](#) applies cultural theory to the study of bureaucracy.

4 Measurement

- [King et al. \(2004\)](#) provides a statistical method for resolving a long-standing problem in survey research. Use the article as an introduction to the topic, rather than as a proposed solution.
- [Adcock and Collier \(2002\)](#): claims for measurement what *DSI* claims for social scientific inquiry as a whole.

5 The comparative method

- [Teune and Przeworski \(1970, ch. 2\)](#) – the Most Similar and Most Different Systems design.

- [Mill \(1973\)](#), Book III, ch. VIII; Book VI, ch. VII) – the methods of difference and agreement – and why they don't work in the social sciences.
- [King et al. \(1994\)](#), ch. 4, ch. 5 §5.3) lists a number of considerations almost completely orthogonal to those of Mill, Teune and Przeworski.

6 The case study

- [Eckstein \(1975\)](#). Details a number of types of case study differentiated by their relation to theory.
- [George and Bennett \(2005\)](#), chs. 1, 3–6). An excellent book.

7 History and process-tracing

1. [George and Bennett \(2005\)](#), ch. 11). On process-tracing; compare with [Hall \(2008\)](#) and [Bates et al. \(2000\)](#).
2. [Pierson \(2004\)](#), ch. 1–3) details a number of temporal processes in politics.
3. [Liebowitz and Margolis \(1990\)](#) discusses a particular example of path dependency, namely the adoption of the QWERTY keyboard.
4. [Gould \(2002\)](#), ch. 9, pp. 745–783, 874–971). An exposition of the concept of punctuated equilibrium from its inventor.

8 Normativity

- [Bauböck \(2008\)](#).
- [Weber \(1994b\)](#); [Weber \(1994c\)](#). Another sociological classic.

Part II

Methods

9 “Soaking”

- [Bray \(2008\)](#) and [Bayard de Volo and Schatz \(2004\)](#) both provide ethnographic or anthropological approaches to politics.

- [Packer \(2006\)](#) provides an example of how such anthropological knowledge is deployed by practitioners – in this case, the US Army.
- [Fenno \(1990\)](#): an extremely enjoyable read.
- [Rhodes \(2005\)](#); [Rhodes et al. \(2007\)](#) is particularly relevant for the study of public policy.
- [Kritzer \(1996\)](#)

10 Interviewing

- [Dexter \(2006\)](#)
- [Altheide \(2002\)](#) indirectly provides an answer to the question, how does journalistic interviewing differ from scholarly interviewing.
- [Johnson and Weller \(2002\)](#) illustrates how interviews can occupy various stages in the research process.
- [Moore \(2008\)](#) discusses examples of pathological interviewing styles.

11 Other texts: newspapers, autobiographies, legislation

- [Schwarze \(1992, chap. 3, section 1\)](#) should be skimmed; [MacCormick and Summers \(1991, chs. 4, 6, 11\)](#) is perhaps an easier read.
- [Earl et al. \(2004\)](#) is particularly important given the growth in availability of newspapers online and via subscription services like Lexis-Nexis.

12 Policies

- [Lascoumes and Le Gales \(2007\)](#)
- [Vedung \(2000, ch. 5\)](#)
- [Hood \(1991\)](#): with respect to what values are you evaluating policies?

13 Producing research

- [Christians \(2005\)](#)
- [Rose \(2007\)](#)
- [Orwell \(1946\)](#) is another classic which is useful both in *interpreting* and *analyzing* politics

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