ARCHIVAL METHODS

Historical Research in Political Science

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Political Science

OVERVIEW

This course addresses how to conduct archival research in political science, emphasizing relevant methods and best practices. The course presents substantive concepts and illustrates them through a combination of examples of applied work and controversies in the field. First, the course broadly considers what the unique purpose of archival research is. Second, it examines how to practically use archives and archival sources, and offers examples of pitfalls scholars may face. Third, it examines the method of process tracing, giving attention to issues such as timing, sequence, and endogenous political development. Fourth, it surveys effective case study methods and provides several relevant scholarly applications. Finally, it considers the difference between public and private sources of evidence and how they might impact our political science findings.

More broadly, the lectures, discussions, primary source readings, scholarly readings, and assignments will help us achieve a few course goals. First, we will develop a general toolkit of strategies and concepts for engaging in archival research. Second, we will gain knowledge of common challenges faced by archival researchers and potential shortfalls in research. Finally, we will more effectively plan and execute our own archival research strategies on topics that interest us.

Our activities in class may take a number of formats. While we will sometimes have lectures, depending on the topic there may also be discussions, debates, close readings of texts, and/or small group work. Political concepts and topics – even research methods! – often may reveal differences of opinion. So even as some of us may have strong views and potentially disagree, I ask that we listen to each other’s viewpoints while working to ensure that civility and respect for each other are always present in our conversations.

ASSIGNMENTS & GRADING

Students are expected to complete the readings, come to lecture, and participate in class. Twice during the semester, students will draft short memos on methods or substantive issues covered in class and the readings. These memos papers should be 4-6 pages double-spaced and will be presented as part of class discussion. They should summarize key points about the concepts discussed and can, for example, adjudicate amongst different authors in some of the controversies presented, describe how well or poorly an author applies a particular method or

* In drafting this syllabus, I have partly drawn upon Sigrun Kahl’s syllabus for the graduate seminar “Historical and Archival Methods” during the Fall 2014 semester at Yale.
concept, and suggest how a particular concept will inform their own research in the future. Students will also complete a final research paper, Topics and methods should be discussed with me and approved by Week 6. The paper should have a clear research question, hypotheses, method, argument, and evidence. The grade breakdown for the course is as follows:

- Participation – 15%
- 2 Response Memos – 40%
- Research Paper – 55%

**COURSE OUTLINE**

I. THE PURPOSE OF ARCHIVAL RESEARCH

**Week 1: Why Archival Research? Descriptive and Causal Inference**


II. USING ARCHIVES AND ARCHIVAL SOURCES

**Week 2: How to Utilize the Archive**

Scott A. Frisch, Douglas B. Harris, Sean Q. Kelly, and David C. W. Parker, *Doing Archival Research in Political Science* (Amherst, MA: Cambria Press, 2012), Ch. 1


**Week 2-3: Controversy: Different Interpretations of the Same Evidence**


Primary Source:

Week 3-4: Controversy: Archival Research and Quantitative Data

Week 5: Controversy: Using Historical Sources for Data

III. PROCESS TRACING

Week 6: Concept: Process Tracing

Week 6-7: Concepts: Timing, Sequence, and Endogenous Development


**Week 7: Application: Ideas and Process Tracing**


*Primary Source:*

American Political Science Association, “Toward a More Responsible Two-Party System,” supplement to American Political Science Review 44, no. 3 (September 1950), pp. 1-14

**IV. CASE STUDIES**

**Week 8: Concept: Case Studies**


John Gerring, Case Study Research: Principles and Practices (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), Ch. 2-3


**Week 8-9: Application: Cross-national Case Studies**

Theda Skocpol, States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979)

**Week 10: Application: Intra-national Case Studies**


**Week 11: Concept and Application: Ideas, Process Tracing, and Case Studies**


*Primary Sources:*


*Henry Lewis Stimson Papers*, selections


*Congressional Record*, 67th Congress, 1st Session (1921), 1854

V. PUBLIC VERSUS PRIVATE ARCHIVAL EVIDENCE

**Week 12: Controversy: Strategic Preferences and Understanding Actors’ Views**


*Primary Source:*

“What Business Thinks,” *Fortune* (October 1939), 52
Week 13: Application: Strategic Preferences


Primary Sources:
- Appendix to the Congressional Record, 64th Congress, 1st Session (1916), selection
- Congressional Record, 61st Congress, 1st Session (1909), selections
- Congressional Record, 63rd Congress, 1st Session (1913), selections