ICPSR Short Course in “Process tracing methods”

Three-day module – May 27-29, 2020
University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI

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Course goals
Process tracing is a research method designed to learn how things work in real-world cases. Increasingly used across the social sciences and in applied policy evaluation, process tracing involves unpacking a causal process in a case and tracing how it worked empirically, enabling strong within-case inferences about causal processes.

The aim of this intensive three-day course is to provide participants with a good working understanding of the core elements of process tracing as a distinct social science case study method, enabling you to utilize it in your own research either as a stand-alone method or in combination with other methods in multi-method designs such as experiments or small/medium-n comparisons using Qualitative Comparative Analysis. The course will combine lectures and discussions with group work on exercises and individual work using your own research.

The course explores the two core elements of process tracing, focusing first on the theory-side of what we are actually 'tracing' (i.e. causal processes or mechanisms), and second, how we are able to make evidence-based causal inferences using within-case, 'mechanistic' evidence that are the traces left by the operation of causal processes. The final session deals with case selection and how it can be combined with other methods.

Syllabus

Course prerequisites: Some basic knowledge of case study methods.

Readings marked with ** are supplemental

Day 1 – May 27
9 am - 12 am
Session 1 - an introduction to recent developments in case-based research

- Beach, Derek and Jonas Gejl Kaas (forthcoming) 'The great divides: incommensurability, the impossibility of mixed-methodology, and what to do about it.', accepted for publication in International Studies Review.

9.00 - 9.30 - Introduction
9.30 - 10.30 - Introductory lecture
10.45 - 12.00 - continue lecture + discussion

1 pm - 5 pm
Session 2 - working with theories of causal mechanisms

1.00 - 2.30 - lecture on what causal mechanisms are (and how to theorize them)
2.45 - 5.00 - groupwork and discussion

>> Group work on mechanisms <<

Day 2 – May 28
9 am - 12 am
Session 3 - making inferences with mechanistic, within-case evidence
• Doyle, Arthur Connan (1894) Silver Blaze can be downloaded free at: http://www.wesjones.com/doyle1.htm

9.00 - 10.30 - Lecture
10.45 - 12.00 - group work

>> Groupwork - Sherlock Holmes <<

1 pm - 5 pm
Session 4 - improving empirical tests
1.00 - 2.30 - lecture on operationalizing tests
2.45 - 5.00 - groupwork and discussion

>> Groupwork - Tannenwald <<

Day 3 – May 29
9 am - 12 am
Session 5- Process-tracing designs

9.00 - 10.30 - Lecture - different types of designs
10.45 - 12.00 - group work

>> Groupwork - Lőblová <<

1 pm - 5 pm
Session 6 – Case selection, generalization and multi-method designs

1.00 - 2.30 - lecture on case selection and generalization
2.45 - 4.00 - groupwork and discussion
4.00 - 5.00 - wrapping up

>> Groupwork - case selection exercise based on Kuehn and Trinkunas <<

**Examples of process tracing:**

- **Beach, Derek, Sandrino Smeets and David Schäfer (2019) 'The past in the present – how policy makers learn to tackle wicked policy problems through analogical reasoning', *Policy Studies Journal*. https://doi.org/10.1111/psj.12372


**About the instructor:**

Derek Beach is a professor of Political Science at the University of Aarhus, Denmark, where he teaches case study methodology, international relations, and European integration. He has authored articles, chapters, and books on research methodology, referendums, and European integration, and co-authored the books *Process-tracing Methods: Foundations and Guidelines* and *Causal Case Studies* (both with University of Michigan Press). He has taught qualitative case study methods at ECPR and IPSA summer and winter schools, held short courses at the APSA annual meeting on Process-tracing and case-based research, and numerous workshops and seminars on process tracing methods throughout the world. He is also an academic co-convenor of the ECPR Methods Schools. He will be an academic fellow at the Independent Expert Group of the World Bank in spring 2020.