Process-tracing Methods
Dr. Andrew Bennett
Professor of Government Georgetown University
May15-16, 2017
9:00am – 4:30pm

Course Overview

This two-day workshop outlines the case study method of process tracing and uses discussion and examples to enable students to use process tracing in their research. The course is applicable to research in political science, sociology, economics, education, business, criminology, and other social sciences. The audience for this course is PhD students, faculty, researchers in government or think tanks, and M.A. students who plan to write and MA thesis or apply to PhD programs. No specialized prior coursework is necessary for students to successfully participate in the workshop, although prior study of research methods and the philosophy of science will be helpful.

Process tracing is one of the most common techniques used in qualitative case studies. It is a within-case method of analysis, much like detective work, that involves both deductive and inductive assessment of evidence from individual cases. Deductively, process tracing uses Bayesian logic to analyze evidence from an individual case in order to assess the likelihood that alternative explanations of the outcome of the case are true. Inductively, process tracing uses "soaking and poking" in information about a case to develop new alternative explanations of the case.

After first introducing the Bayesian logic that underlies process tracing, the workshop offers practical advice on how to do process tracing and illustrates this advice through exercises and discussions of published research. The course also addresses case selection for process tracing, and how to combine process tracing with cross-case comparisons and typological theorizing. It concludes with constructive critiques of students' plans for process tracing in their own research projects.

Students interested in presenting their own research project for feedback on their use of process tracing should email Professor Bennett (BennettA@Georgetown.edu) with a very brief (2-3 pages at most) outline of: 1) their research question or puzzle; 2) a list of the cases in which they will use process tracing and a description of the population of which these cases are members; 3) the candidate alternative explanations for the outcomes in the cases to be studied; 4) the observable implications of these explanations to be assessed through process tracing; 5) the kinds of evidence (archives, media reports, memoirs, interviews, etc.) that will be used in the process tracing. If case selection has not yet been finalized, that is fine -- just say so or list some possible cases for study.

Outline
May 15:
9:00-12:00 Bayesian Logic and Process Tracing, In-class exercises
12:00-1:30 Lunch
1:30-4:30 Practical Advice on How to do Process Tracing, In-class exercises

May 16:
9:00-12:00 Research Design and Case Selection for Process Tracing; Combining Process Tracing with Typological Theorizing and Cross-Case Comparisons
12:00-1:30 Lunch
1:30-4:30 Student Presentations /Discussion of Students' Planned use of Process Tracing in their Research

Required Reading
- Andrew Bennett and Jeffrey Checkel, eds., Process Tracing: From Metaphor to Analytic Tool, Cambridge University Press, 2014. Read chapters 1, 10, and the appendix (pages 1-38, 260-298).
- David Collier Process Tracing Exercises. Available at http://polisci.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/people/u3827/Teaching Process Tracing.pdf
- Focus on exercises 3 (Nina Tannenwald on the nuclear taboo), 4 (Henry Brady on the 2000 Presidential election), 7 (the Fashoda Crisis, war termination in WWI, the non-use of force in Eastern Europe in 1989), and 8 (Schultz on democracies and coercive diplomacy and the Fashoda Crisis).
- Seawright, Jason and Gerring, John, 2008, "Case Selection Techniques in Case Study Research: A Menu of Qualitative and Quantitative Options." Political Research Quarterly 61 (June): 294-308.
- http://blogs.bu.edu/jgerring/files/2013/06/CaseSelection.pdf

Recommended Reading
- Tasha Fairfield and Andrew Charman, 2015 APSA paper on Bayesian process tracing.
- Derek Beach and Rasmus Brun Pedersen, Process-Tracing Methods: Foundations and Guidelines, University of Michigan Press, 2013.
- David Waldner, "Process Tracing and Causal Mechanisms." In Harold Kincaid, ed., The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Social Science (Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 65-84.
- David Waldner, chapter 5 in Bennett and Checkel, Process Tracing, pages 126-152.
- James Mahoney, "The Logic of Process Tracing Tests in the Social Sciences," Sociological Methods and Research, 41:570-597 (November 2012).

*If you are registered for non-credit and are unable to locate the readings, please contact us at wssr@concordia.ca