

DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

PECOS4021 - Research Methods

5 November 2018, 09:00 (4 hours)

4 hours in duration

The following classification of scores can be used tentatively when grading the exam:

A: 86-100 poeng	B: 71-85 poeng	C: 46-70 poeng
D: 31-45 poeng	E: 16-30 poeng	F (ikke bestått): 0-15 poeng

Short-answer questions:

Please answer 5 out of the 6 questions below. Suggested use of time, in total, for all short-answer questions is 2 hours (weight: 50%), thus 24 minutes per question.

S1) (10p)

Scholars in diplomatic/international history usually rely heavily on primary sources collected from state archives. Discuss the reasons and name at least three alternative types of primary sources, which they might integrate into their research.

*International and diplomatic history are focused mainly on international relations, traditionally on questions of war and peace. Main actors in their accounts are predominantly statesmen and diplomats, whose official records are mostly found in state archives. **Trachtenberg** is a possible reference here.*

*Alternative sources are personal documents like diaries, but also images, film etc. Students should mention here, that the use of such alternative sources might convey a different constructivist/cultural history perspective on international/diplomatic history. **Donnelly/Norton** could be a reference here.*

S2) (10p)

Why would an explorative and concept-developing case study be of value to a broader field of research? Explain and then discuss what this entails for the concept of generalisation.

Case studies are useful when we seek to explore in depth a field that has not hitherto been researched in detail. The purpose would typically be to develop hypotheses about specific features or causal processes detected within that case. These elements could then be taken further in empirical research elsewhere, often in the form of hypotheses that apply to a broader universe. Both Levy (2013) and Gerring (2017) stress the potential for hypothesis-generation through case study research. Concepts often arise through intimate knowledge of specific cases; many social science concepts have been developed this way. Concepts may, but do not necessarily have to, be incorporated in hypotheses. Generalisation applies here since concepts and hypotheses are supposed to reach beyond the case towards a more or less specified universe of similar processes, events etc.

S3) (10p)

A researcher interested in the ideational content of foreign policy turns to you for advice. Drawing on the course literature, account for two different approaches to analysing foreign policy ideas in text. Then discuss in brief whether your two selected approaches are capable of answering the same kind of research questions.

*Foreign policy ideas may be analysed in text in numerous ways. The course literature accounts for at least three different approaches. One is **Ted Hopf**, who recommends an extensive hermeneutic process of reading and interpreting documents from across the social sphere. Hopf thus addressing meaning-making in the broadest sense to account for the ideational streams that inform foreign policy formulation. This applies even in the Soviet Union of the 1950s, where supposedly detached elites determined foreign policy. Another approach is that of **Jamie Gaskarth**, whose discourse analysis encompasses a full century of parliamentary debates on foreign policy. Gaskarth looks for ideational structures that are often half-articulated but nevertheless very important to understand the guiding principles of foreign policy. He stresses the suppressive power of these unstated principles, which are generally conservative and obstructive to attempts to formulate an “ethical” foreign policy as opposed to safeguarding the national interest. A third approach is that of **Christian Rauh**, who conducts a computer-generated content analysis of foreign policy debates in the German Bundestag, highlighting the salience and framing of EU affairs by different actors at different times. The three approaches are capable of addressing rather different research questions. Hopf looks primarily at what foundational ideas appear to inform foreign policy formulation, Gaskarth focuses on ways in which certain ideas act as structural barriers to policymakers, whereas Rauh primarily answers the “who says what and under what circumstances” question. Hopf and Gaskarth makes the boldest claims, but with a rather weak foundation for valid inferences. Their findings remain speculative, but perhaps more interesting than those of Rauh.*

S4) (10p)

Drawing on Kathy Charmaz’ contribution to the course literature, account for the concept of grounded theory – as a research strategy and as a set of practical guidelines for empirical analysis. What do you consider the key strengths and shortcomings of this approach?

Grounded theory takes inspiration from the hermeneutic method common in the humanities; the concept of an circular process of interpretation, between the whole and its parts, and between pre-conceptions (tentative hypotheses about the meaning embedded) and the empirical material. In the social sciences, this often takes the form of “local research frontiers” where theory is contextual and subject to continuous revision. In the form of specific advice for empirical analysis, grounded theory is applicable to textual data as well as to interviews. Charmaz emphasises interviews and the joint interpretive search for meaning that informal, conversational interviews allow for. Repeated interviews at different stages of the research process are recommended. A key strength of the approach is the opportunity to trace what you are searching for with and alongside the interviewee, ensuring that any finding (particularly about intentions, ideas, perceptions) are in accord with those that you are researching. Shortcomings may be poor replicability and difficulties in navigating between the vernacular and the conceptual; any scope for generalisation is also hard to determine.

S5) (10p)

According to Patricia Clavin “transnationalism” (the use of a transnational history approach) has the potential to enrich the study of foreign relations. Discuss this claim and give concrete examples.

A transnational perspective allows to take different or broaden existing perspectives on foreign policy actors (not only as diplomats, but also as parts of a transnational elite, experts, professionals etc.)

Transnationalism allows to include different actors, e.g. with regard to the role of the women’s rights movement during the Paris Peace Conference of 1919, that are lost with a “classical” diplomatic history approach.

A transnational perspective allows for alternative periodizations with regard to the history of foreign relations (if the history of transnational cooperation is put next to the classical periodization in foreign relations along the two world wars for example)

Transnationalism opens a perspective on “contracts, coalitions and interactions” across state boundaries (Nye/Keohane)

It would be an extra if students pick up the “honeycomb” metaphor Clavin uses to characterize the transnational perspective. Honeycombs are structures that bind together, but at the same time open space for interaction.

S6) (10p)

“Any form of case study also involves a form of comparison”. Discuss this statement. What benefits and shortcomings do you see in devising a more formal mode of comparison, such as most similar systems design? Illustrate by a real or hypothetical example from the field of peace and conflict studies.

A case is always studied in light of something, typically in the form of concepts and theory, and very often informal comparisons are part of the analysis, in order to make sense of the findings. Making comparison a formal design enables these comparative observations to be brought into the open. Most similar systems design takes this mode of thinking to its logical conclusion, by emphasising a causal relationship where the issue at stake is to isolate the single variable(s) that seem to be the cause of a certain outcome. The second case is then formalised as akin to a control group. This may help focus on the causal relationship in question, but may also give a false impression of control. Often, moreover, one may not be so concerned about a causal relationship – and even if one is, the two supposedly similar cases may still exhibit quite different processes and features. Note: A suitable example is required.

Long-answer question:

Suggested use of time for long-answer question is 2 hours (weight: 50%), thus 24 minutes per sub-question.

L1)

Brexit – that is, the UK’s departure from the European Union – is an ongoing process which involves a set of highly complex negotiations as well a wide-ranging political debate, within the UK as well as in other member states and in the EU’s own institutions. (*NOTE: None of the questions below requires in-depth knowledge on neither Brexit nor the political system in the UK*)

Today’s events are expected to offer material for future historians. Put yourself in the shoes of someone being asked to write this history 20 years from now.

- a) What kind of source material would you be inclined to choose? How might positionality, (your theoretical, methodological and other pre-assumptions) inform this choice? (10p)

Major weight should be put on the reasoning rather than on the type of sources students suggest. Positionality could in this sense play out in many different ways from a political bias to the historiographical approach which suggests the inclusion or exclusion of certain types of sources. Against this background the answer could be either restricted and explain one particular approach or differentiated with a view to different possible outcomes linked to different approaches and choices taken.

- b) Discuss how a history of Brexit from a transnational perspective might differ from an analysis focused on the British debate alone. (10p)

In general terms a transnational approach would differ in as far as it would inquire whether ideas (such as on sovereignty or identity) which inform the debate or political (e.g. populist) strategies prominent in the Brexit debates emanate from outside the British context and if so, how they are adapted and implied in specific ways on the national level. Reversely only a transnational perspective would allow to put the British debate in a broader context (rise of populist movements and politics, political mobilization in the age of neoliberalism and globalization etc.)

A group of political scientists have won funding for a research project focusing upon the elite-level Brexit debate in the UK in the first two years (2016-18) following the referendum. They are eager to include insights from historians in their work to widen the theoretical and methodological framework.

- c) As one of the historians asked to contribute here and now, what kind of challenges do you envisage when defining, approaching and analysing the relevant sources? (10p)

For a start, there will be sources covering internal governing processes that withheld from the public for decades to come. With regard to the empirics, there is also an obvious challenge in the sheer wealth of data. On what criteria should you select the relevant sources? Due to the lack of distance to the events, it might furthermore be uncertain who are the most prominent actors in the debate and what would be the most important playfields to look at (role of the media, networks, lobby groups?). The direction of a future analysis will also to some extent be guided by the outcome; to study an ongoing process could mean that the analysis appears dated or misguided once the result has become clear.

One of the sub-projects within the group draws on the following research question: “What was the ideational content of different Eurosceptic factions in the (governing) Conservative Party in the two years following the referendum?” In the first meeting of the research group, the presenting researcher is criticised for proposing “what is merely a descriptive analysis”.

- d) What are the basic characteristics of descriptive as opposed to causal analysis? On the basis of the proposed research question, try to expand or rewrite the question to encompass a causal argument. Would this require a different set of data? (10p)

Descriptive analysis sets forth to portray, summarise, classify etc., whereas the purpose of causal analysis is to explain: the causes behind specific results/effects or the effects of specific causes. “What was the ideational content of different Eurosceptic factions in the (governing) Conservative Party in the two years following the referendum?” could be extended in ways such as: “and where did these ideas emerge from?” or “what specific policy proposals did these result in?” or “why was some of these marginalised while others became government policy?” Any of these would require data on processes, influence etc. that were not obviously part of the original question.

Another colleague asks the researcher to clarify whether she will be trying to map Eurosceptic factions inductively or deductively.

- e) Discuss what is referred to by inductive vs. deductive research and account for what the distinction amounts to in the example of analysing factions in a political party. (10p)

Inductive research seeks to develop concepts and theory from an explorative analysis of the data at hand; deductive research takes specific concepts and theory as point of departure and either applies these to address an empirical question or tests them against the data. Inductive research of Eurosceptic factions in the Conservative Party would mean to start from a blank slate and trace what pattern of different types of Euroscepticism emerges from the data. Deductive research on factions would mean starting from existing concepts and categories in the literature and using these to organise the data collection and analysis. There would be several classifications of different forms of Euroscepticism (or conservatism) choose from. The purpose of the research would then be to analyse the ideas of these agreed or established factions.