There has always been controversy about the proper role of students of politics

Intellectuals
• Repositories of eternal verities (Sor Juana*, Paz)
• Critics, questioners, gadflies (Socrates, Paz)

Activists and advocates for particular agendas (Marx, Luxemburg, Hayek)

Teachers
• Civics, public intellectuals (West)
• Specialized (e.g., public policy)

Researchers
• Very applied (D'): Policy analysts / auditors
• Applied (D); policy-relevant
• Basic (R); theoretical

Thinking like a social scientist
• Alternative explanations, etc.
• From theory to barefoot empiricism
• Uncle Phil: “from “Missouri”

* Juana Inés de la Cruz (née Juana Ramírez de Asbaje)
In theory, political science is a subset of “science”

Science consists of…

• Testability (falsifiability) and replicability

• Controls (including double-blind controls)

• Prima facie assumptions of honesty and competence

Social science: outcomes are human behaviors and opinions

• Imposes certain limits on scientific method

• None of these limits are unique to social sciences, just more common there

Impulse to apply methods to politics and society almost as old as civilization itself (Aristotle, Hume, etc.)
If so, political science will attempt to draw inferences using methods similar to other sciences

“[G]overnments differ in kind, as will be evident to any one who considers the matter according to the method that has guided us so far. As in other departments of science, so in politics, the compound should always be disaggregated into the simplest elements, or essential parts, of the whole. We must therefore look at the elements of which the state is composed, in order to see how the different kinds of rule differ from one another and whether any scientific result can be attained about each one of them.”

-- Aristotle, *The Politics*, Book 1, Chapter 1, c.350 BC

“So great is the force of laws, and of particular forms of government, and so little dependence have they of the humours and tempers of men, that consequences almost as general and certain may sometimes be deduced from them, as any which mathematical sciences afford us.”

-- David Hume, “That Politics May be Reduced to a Science,” Essay III in *Essays Moral, Political and Literary*, 1742.
If so, political science will attempt to draw inferences using methods similar to other sciences (2)

**Experimental** (normally in “hard” sciences)
- Ex ante controls through randomization
- Double blind controls
- Replicability

**Quasi-experiments** (natural experiments)

**Scientific Method**

**Non-experimental** (positive social sciences)
- Ex-post controls
- Replicability

**Ability to infer causality**

**Ability to generalize (inverse scale)**

**Thought experiments** (deductive)
- Counterfactuals
- Formal models
- Simulations

**Time series statistical analysis**

**Cross-sectional Statistical analysis**

**Systematic comparison**
- Method of agreement/ Most Different Systems
- Method of difference/ Most Similar Systems

**Case study**
- Implicit comparison with larger set of cases
- Possible expansion of N through internal comparisons, change over time, etc.

**Use of the materials should be cited as follows:** Chappell Lawson, MIT OpenCourseWare (http://ocw.mit.edu/index.html) course materials for 17.50 (Introduction to Comparative Politics, Fall 2006), Massachusetts Institute of Technology, downloaded on [Insert Date].
Excellent research has been done with all these methods

- **Experimental**
  - Kahneman & Tversky
  - Ansolabehere & Iyengar
  - Susan Hyde: electoral observation
  - Gerber & Green: turnout

- **“Quasi-Experiments”**
  - Krosnick: Ohio ballots
  - Rainfall and turnout
  - Rainfall and conflict (Africa)

- **Time series**
  - NES, BNES, M2KPS, etc.

- **Cross-sectional analysis**
  - Stromberg: U.S. radio
  - Moehler: African radio
  - A&R: settler mortality
  - La Porta et al.: quality of (democ.) government

- **Systematic comparison**
  - Lipset: US/Canada,
  - Art: Germany/Austria
  - Skowronek: presidents

- **Case study**
  - Abernathy: imperialism
  - de Soto: informality
  - Greif: traders
  - Allison (missile crisis)
  - Tocqueville: USA (internal comparisons)

- **Case study**
  - Lipset: US/Canada,
  - Art: Germany/Austria
  - Skowronek: presidents

- **Non-experimental**
  - Thought experiments
  - Nash: competitive equil.
  - Shepsle et al.: parties and coalitions
  - Downs: party positions
  - North & Weingast
  - Chandra: combinatorics in multiethnic societies
  - Computer simulations

- **Scientific Method**

- **Ability to infer causality**
  - N<30
  - 1>N>30
  - N=1
  - N=0

**Hybrids**: E.g., Putnam combines case study, natural experiment, large-N, systematic comparison, etc.

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Doing research in the real world
Problems and tradeoffs in selecting your topic

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