

Political Science 501, Baumgartner  
Short paper topics/discussion points  
Week 6: Quasi-experimental designs in the literature

Readings: Campbell and Ross; Campbell; Lijphart; Jennings and Markus, Lewis-Beck and Alford; Wood and Waterman

Choose one of these paper topics and come to class prepared to discuss each of the following questions:

1. Campbell and Stanley were pretty unambiguous about the value of case studies. Let's start with Campbell's discussion of case studies this week. What are the most important problems, according to him? What are some ways to avoid these problems? Are there important case studies in the literature that you can point to that have had a significant impact? What about them allowed this?
2. Campbell and Ross go through a number of comparisons showing how what appeared at first to be a significant drop in traffic fatalities may in fact not have been so impressive. Is this just a case of "how to lie with statistics" or is there a right way to make these comparisons? What do you conclude from the article?
3. Lijphart makes some pointed comparisons using a four-country design. Would this project have been more convincing with a different research design, or is this the only and best way to conceive of doing this project?
4. Jennings and Markus take advantage of what appears to be a naturally occurring experiment. What parts of the project are most convincing? If they had had full experimental control, 1) what would that have meant, practically (that is, what would they have controlled through randomness that they did not in fact control in the study), and 2) what questions could they have addressed that they have to leave untested here?
5. Lewis-Beck and Alford's study probably would not be published today because the statistical methods are not current. Does it convince you or do you think there are some substantial possibilities of spuriousness remaining?
6. Compare the methods and approach of Wood and Waterman to those of Lewis-Beck and Alford. What do they do differently and how much more convincing is that? What would you like to see in Wood and Waterman that you do not see, from a theoretical or a research design/data collection point of view?