

Book Reviews

Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences

by Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennett
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As an academic discipline, political science is characterised not only by debates over theoretical paradigms and research outcomes, but also by debates over research methods which pit the adherents of qualitative research against those who believe that knowledge can only be gained through formal models and quantitative testing. *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences* outlines an important middle ground in these debates by arguing that case studies and formal models are complementary methods and that each fills an important void. For example, statistical analysis can reveal important deviant cases to a trend or theory, while cases studies are well suited to reveal why such a case is deviant and, by extension, highlight previously unexamined variables.

The focus of the book is threefold. It first engages with the qualitative versus quantitative debate and sets out a ‘collaborative’ research program, using research on the democratic peace thesis as an example. The second section is intended to serve as a handbook for graduate students interested in case study methodology and theory building. The third section outlines alternative case study methods such as process tracing and the congruence method, which are designed to overcome weaknesses traditionally associated with case study research. The concluding chapter provides an important reminder to graduate political science students of their purpose; “to provide policymakers with ‘generic knowledge’ that will help them form effective strategies” and seeks to bridge the gap between academic theory and policy-making (p. 7). The book is thus aimed both at academics interested in debates over research methodology, as well as at graduate students seeking to develop their research design. Alexander and Bennett deliver to both audiences. The book engages fully with the literature on research methods, as well as the literature on case study development, specifically King, Keohane and Verba’s *Designing Social Inquiry* and others. While making a strong case for the continued relevance of case study methods, it remains aware of the shortcomings and proposes alternative methods which can overcome these flaws. For example, the authors point to the congruence method and process tracing as ways to overcome the problems of case selection for comparative analysis.

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The graduate student will equally find the book of use, particularly as few Australian political science departments offer courses on research methods. The second section outlines a step-by-step process to theory building and research design, importantly indicates the potential pitfalls of certain research designs and usefully outlines the advantages and limits of single case and multiple cases. The appendix is also an excellent resource as it outlines and analyses the research designs of some of the premier works in politics and international relations and provides the reader with practical examples discussed in previous chapters.

If there is one flaw with the book it is that the title is slightly disingenuous. Although the book enters into some methodological debate outside the realm of political science and international relations, the bulk of the literature that forms the basis of the debate, and the examples used in the appendix are from the politics and IR disciplines, rather than the full spectrum of the social sciences. This is to be expected, as research methods vary widely across the social sciences; nevertheless, a more apt title would have specified politics, rather than social sciences as a whole. Consequently, the book is an invaluable tool for graduate students in political science, international relations and possibly history. While the research methods it outlines will certainly be useful to students outside these disciplines, its utility will diminish slightly as the literature used to highlight these methods is located mainly in the former disciplines of social science.

James Manicom
Flinders University