Gov 62 Section 7

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Process tracing

What is process tracing?

- Bennett and Checkel (2015): "the analysis of evidence on processes, sequences, and conjectures of events within a single case for the purposes of either developing or testing hypotheses about causal mechanisms that might causally explain the case" (7)

Process tracing

What is process tracing useful for?

- Analyzing processes, sequences, and conjectures of events.
- Theories and hypotheses put forward claims about a set of processes.
- You can therefore use process tracing to test hypotheses.

Process tracing

When is process tracing an appropriate research tool?

- When your research goal is to test a mechanism.
- When your research goal is to examine whether X path was taken from the IV to the DV (over other paths – we call these competing hypotheses).

Process tracing

Process tracing can be deductive:

- Examine observable implications of hypothesized causal mechanisms within a case to test whehter theory on these mechanisms explains the case

Process tracing can be inductive:

- Use evidence from within a case to develop hypotheses that might explain the case
- Latter hypotheses may in turn generate additional testable implications in the case or other cases

Process tracing

How do we do process tracing?

- Determine possible observable implications of competing hypotheses
- Collect causal-process observations that provide evidence for or against these claims
- Assess relative usefulness of data and tests

Process tracing

Table 1

Process Tracing Tests for Causal Inference

		SUFFICIENT FOR AFFIRMING CAUSAL INFERENCE	
		No	Yes
NECESSARY FOR AFFIRMING CAUSAL INFERENCE	No	**1. Straw-in-the-Wind**	**3. Smoking-Gun**
		a. Passing: Affirms relevance of hypothesis, but does not confirm it.	**a. Passing:** Confirms hypothesis.
		b. Failing: Hypothesis is not eliminated, but is slightly weakened.	**b. Failing:** Hypothesis is not eliminated, but is somewhat weakened.
		c. Implications for rival hypotheses: **Passing** *slightly* weakens them. **Failing** *slightly* strengthens them.	**c. Implications for rival hypotheses:** **Passing** *substantially* weakens them. **Failing** *somewhat* strengthens them.
	Yes	**2. Hoop**	**4. Doubly Decisive**
		a. Passing: Affirms relevance of hypothesis, but does not confirm it.	**a. Passing:** Confirms hypothesis and eliminates others.
		b. Failing: Eliminates hypothesis.	**b. Failing:** Eliminates hypothesis.
		c. Implications for rival hypotheses: **Passing** *somewhat* weakens them. **Failing** *somewhat* strengthens them.	**c. Implications for rival hypotheses:** **Passing** *eliminates* them. **Failing** *substantially* strengthens.

Source: Adapted from Bennett (2010, 210), who builds on categories formulated by Van Evera (1997, 31–32).