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Political scientists are interested in learning about and understanding a variety of important political phenomena. Some of us are interested, for example, in the conditions that lead to stable and secure political regimes without civil unrest, rebellion, or government repression. Some are interested in the relationships and interactions between nations and how some nations exercise power over others. Other political scientists are more interested in the relationship between the populace and public officials in democratic countries and, in particular, whether or not public opinion influences the policy decisions of public officials. Still others are concerned with how particular political institutions function. They conduct research on questions such as the following: Does Congress serve the interests of organized groups rather than of the general populace? Do judicial decisions depend upon the personal values of individual judges and the group dynamics of judicial groups or on the relative power of the litigants? To what extent can American presidents influence the behavior of members of the federal bureaucracy? Does the use of nonprofit service organizations to deliver public services change government control of and accountability for those services? Do political parties enhance or retard democratic processes? How much do the policy outputs of states vary and why do they vary?

This book is an introduction to the process and methods of using empirical research—research based on the actual, "objective" observation of phenomena—to achieve scientific knowledge about political phenomena. Scientific knowledge, which is discussed in more detail in Chapter 2, differs from other types of knowledge, such as intuition, common sense, superstition, or mystical knowledge. One difference stems from the way in which scientific knowledge is acquired. In conducting empirical research the researcher adheres to certain well-defined principles for collecting, analyzing, and evaluating information. Political science, then, is simply the application of these principles to the study of phenomena that are political in nature.

Students should learn about how political scientists conduct empirical research for two major reasons. First, citizens in contemporary American society are often called upon to evaluate empirical research about political
phenomena. Debates about the wisdom of the death penalty, for example, frequently hinge on whether or not it is an effective deterrent to crime, and debates about term limits for elected officials involve whether or not such limits increase the competitiveness of elections. Similarly, evaluating current developments in eastern Europe, Southeast Asia, Central America, and South Africa requires an understanding of the role of competitive elections, rights of expression, religious tolerance, and the ownership of private property in the development of democratic institutions and beliefs. In these and many other cases, thoughtful and concerned citizens find that they must evaluate the accuracy and adequacy of the theories and research of political (and other social) scientists.

A second reason for learning about political science research methods is that students often need to acquire scientific knowledge of their own, whether for a term paper for an introductory course on American government, a research project for an upper-level seminar, or a series of assignments in a course devoted to learning empirical research methods. Familiarity with empirical research methods is generally a prerequisite to making this a profitable endeavor.

The prospect of learning empirical research methods is often intimidating to students. Sometimes students dislike this type of inquiry because it involves numbers and statistics. To understand research well one must have a basic knowledge of statistics and how to use statistics in analyzing and reporting research findings, but the empirical research process that we describe here is first and foremost a way of thinking and a prescription for disciplined reasoning. Statistics will be introduced only after an understanding of the thought process involved in scientific inquiry is established, and then in a nontechnical way that should be understandable to any student familiar with basic algebra.

Students are also sometimes uneasy about taking a course in social science research methods because they view it as unrelated to other courses in their political science curriculum. But an understanding of the concepts typically included in such a course is integrally related to a student’s assimilation, evaluation, and production of knowledge in other courses. An important result of understanding the scientific research process is that a student may begin to think more independently about concepts and theories presented in other courses and readings. For example, a student might say, “That may be true under the given conditions, but I believe it won’t remain true under the following conditions.” Or, “If this theory is correct, I would expect to be able to observe the following.” Or, “Before I’m going to accept that interpretation, I’d like to have this additional information.” Students who can specify what information is needed and what relationships between phenomena must be ob-
served in support of an idea are more likely to develop an understanding of the subjects they study.

Researchers conduct empirical research studies for two primary reasons. One reason is to accumulate knowledge that will apply to a particular problem in need of solution or to a condition in need of improvement. Research on the causes of crime, for example, may be useful in reducing crime rates, and research on the reasons for poverty may aid governments in devising successful income maintenance and social welfare policies. Such research is often referred to as applied research because it has a fairly direct, immediate application to a real-world situation.

Researchers also conduct empirical research to satisfy their intellectual curiosity about a subject, regardless of whether the research will lead to changes in government policy or private behavior. Many political scientists, for example, study the decision-making processes of voters, not because they are interested in giving practical advice to political candidates, but because they want to know if elections give the populace some measure of influence over the behavior of elected public officials. Such research is sometimes referred to as pure, theoretical, or recreational research to indicate that it is not concerned primarily with practical applications.1

Political scientists ordinarily report the results of their research in books or articles published in political science research journals (see Chapter 6 for a discussion of how to find articles in these journals). Research reported in academic journals typically contains data and information from which to draw conclusions. It also undergoes peer review, a process in which other scholars evaluate the soundness of the research before it is published. Occasionally, however, political science research questions and analyses appear in newspapers and magazines, which have a wider audience. Such popularly presented investigations can use empirical political science methods and techniques as well.

In this chapter we describe several political science research projects that were designed to produce scientific knowledge about significant political phenomena. We refer to these examples throughout this book to illustrate many aspects of the research process. We present them in some detail now so that you will find the later discussions easier to understand. We do not expect you to master all the details at this time; rather, you should read these examples keeping in mind that their purpose is to illustrate a variety of research topics and methods of investigation. They also show how decisions about aspects of the research process affect the conclusions that may be drawn about the phenomena under study. And they represent attempts by political scientists to acquire knowledge by building on the research of others to arrive at increasingly complete explanations of political behavior and processes.
In 1936 Harold Lasswell published *Politics: Who Gets What, When, How.* Ever since then, political scientists have liked this title because it succinctly states an important truth: politics is about winning and losing. No political system, not even a perfectly democratic one, can always be all things to all people. Inevitably, policies favor some and disadvantage others. So important is this observation that one of political science’s main tasks is discovering precisely which individuals and groups benefit the most from political struggle and why.

As one might expect, efforts to explain political outcomes have taken widely different forms. According to one approach, called power resources theory, the social strata or classes that win depends heavily on their political resources, not the legitimacy of their claims or fair treatment by public servants. In this view, a democratic political system can be thought of as an arena in which struggles for material and symbolic rewards take place. On any given issue the “team” with the greatest strength—as measured by, say, organizational skill and size, access to expertise, wealth, and the like—will fare far better than those with less. The way the field is set up (that is, the structure of the government) plays a role because it may favor one side over another. But it is really the players’ strengths and weaknesses that determine the outcome. This view is at one and the same time optimistic and pessimistic because it holds that although “average” citizens can participate in policymaking, in fact they seldom do, except, for example, as members of powerful organizations like labor unions.

Other social scientists have objected to this theory because it portrays politicians and bureaucrats as more or less passive bystanders who simply do the bidding of one side or the other. So another school of thought, often called state-centered theory or institutionalism, argues that even members of democratic governments (sometimes called state managers) have their own interests, which they can frequently impose on those outside the political system. Far from being an arena, the state itself is best thought of as one of several participants (a sort of team) in the struggle over political gains and losses.

As one might surmise, many other kinds of answers to the question “Who gets what?” have been proposed. Which of these theories is right? Given the importance of the debate, it should come as no surprise that an enormous amount of research and thought has gone into the argument. Our purpose in this book, however, is not to decide this particular controversy but rather to describe some of the methods used to study the matter.

A common and effective approach is to derive specific predictions from each of the theories and then to look for information, or “data,” that supports one side and undercuts the others. Presumably the theory with the most em-
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pirically confirmed propositions would be judged to be in some sense the best. An interesting example of this kind of research is found in the work of David Bradley and his colleagues. Their article "Distribution and Redistribution in Postindustrial Democracies" illustrates the steps in the research process and provides many of the examples for this book. After posing the question of what explains political outcomes—in their words, what determines "distributive and redistributive processes"—Bradley and colleagues conducted a thorough review of the literature, a subject we take up in Chapter 6. Using this background information, they then stated a series of hypotheses or statements whose validity were to be checked empirically. The power resource theory, for instance, states that a group or class that can through democratic means such as elections gain control of a government for a sustained period of time will win concrete benefits for itself. More precisely, to the extent that political parties representing workers and unions dominate the legislative and executive branches of government they will enact economic and employment policies favorable to the lower classes. In contrast, if the lower classes are poorly or weakly organized and parties representing the interests of those higher up the social and economic scale are in power, government policies will tend to favor business and the wealthy. Since parties of the working class are often called leftist or even socialist, one specific test of the power resources theory is to see if a relationship exists between the magnitude and length of left-wing control of government and distributive and redistributive outcomes.

Bradley and his colleagues formalized their analysis by defining what are called dependent variables (see Chapter 3). One of these dependent variables, "pre-tax and transfer inequality," measures how evenly or unevenly income is distributed among a nation’s households before taxes are levied or payments from government programs are received. (The numerical indicator of this variable is the gini coefficient, which varies between 0 and 1. If all the households in a country have exactly the same income, there is no inequality and the coefficient equals 0. If, however, one family has all the income and the remainder none, the coefficient is 1.0, meaning complete inequality.) Since the definition means that values close to 1 imply inequality, while those near 0 suggest the opposite, this measure provides a systematic quantitative way to compare income distributions across nations. The other dependent variable in the analysis is the (percentage) reduction in inequality after government taxes and transfers have been taken into account. Since it too provides a precise numerical indicator, specific predictions can be assessed empirically. Bradley and colleagues’ so-called explanatory or independent variables include measures of leftist political party control of government. (The difference between types of variables and the incorporation of variables in hypotheses are discussed in detail in Chapter 3.)
The idea behind the Bradley group’s research is that if the power resources theory holds, then in nations where the lower and working classes are able to mobilize through left-wing parties and control government long enough, there will be relatively large reductions in inequality as the result of government action. If, instead, the strength of leftist parties is (to take one case) counterbalanced by the power of state managers, then there will be little or no relationship between the partisanship of governments and the reduction in inequality. Of course, innumerable factors affect the distribution of income besides the nature of the political system. So to analyze the theories fully the researchers had to measure and control for several additional variables, such as nations’ positions in the global economy, their level of female participation in the workforce, and their degree of industrialization.

Data on these dependent, explanatory, and control variables were collected for about a dozen industrial democracies, including the United States, Australia, Canada, and many European countries, and analyzed by a variation of a statistical technique called regression analysis (see Chapter 13). This technique allows investigators to see how and how closely two variables are related to each other when still other factors have been held constant.

The findings of this analysis strongly supported the authors’ main hypothesis. They concluded, “Taken together, the results of our study are a resounding vindication of power resources theory.” They found a strong relationship between reduction in inequality and the ability of subordinate classes to mobilize and support leftist governments. In the United States, for instance, the leftist, or liberal, party, the Democratic Party, has at best had a tenuous hold on government, and as expected the reduction in inequality has been small compared with nations such as Sweden and Norway that have much stronger leftist parties.

In a more recent study, Lane Kenworthy and Jonas Pontusson analyzed trends in the distribution of gross market income—the distribution of income before taxes and government transfers—for affluent OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development) countries using data from the Luxembourg Income Study, the same source of data used by Bradley and his colleagues. Kenworthy and Pontusson were interested in whether inequality in market income has increased and to what extent government policies have responded to changes in market income inequality. In particular, they were interested in testing the median-voter model developed by Allan H. Meltzer and Scott F. Richard.

According to the median-voter model, support for government redistributive spending depends on the distance between the income of the median voter and the average income of all voters. The greater this distance, the greater the income inequality and, thus, the greater the demand from lower-income voters for government spending. Countries with the greatest market
inequalities should have more government spending. One way to test the median-voter model is to see whether changes in redistribution are related to changes in market inequality. One would expect that larger changes in market inequality would cause larger changes in redistribution. The authors found this to be the case, although the United States, Germany, and the United Kingdom do not fit the pattern very well. In further analyses in which they look at country by country responsiveness to market inequality over several decades, Kenworthy and Pontusson found that most OECD countries are responsive to market income inequalities, although to varying degrees, and that the United States is the least responsive.

Perhaps, Kenworthy and Pontusson suggest, government responsiveness to market inequality is related to voter turnout. If one assumes that lower-income voters are less likely to turn out to vote than are higher-income voters, then one would expect that the lower the turnout, the less likely governments would be pressured to respond to income inequality. The median-voter model still would apply, but in countries with low voter turnout, the median voter would be less likely to represent lower-income households. Kenworthy and Pontusson used regression analysis and a scatterplot (Figure 1-1) to show that the higher the voter turnout, the more responsive a country is to market income inequality. The results provide an explanation for why the United States is less responsive to changes in market inequality than are other nations: the United States has the lowest turnout rate among the nations included in the analysis.

These research findings are more interesting in view of another body of research that we consider shortly: the possibility that since the mid-1950s the bottom classes in America have been increasingly dropping out of electoral politics. This means the poor, skilled and unskilled workers, and others are not able to mobilize through leftist parties to advance their interests in the political arena.

The point of these examples is not to make a statement about the

![FIGURE 1-1](image_url)

Redistribution Coefficients by Average Voter Turnout

Source: Adapted from Figure 9 in Lane Kenworthy and Jonas Pontusson, "Rising Inequality and the Politics of Redistribution in Affluent Countries," Perspectives on Politics 3 (September 2005): 462.

Note: Aust = Australia; Can = Canada; Den = Denmark; Fin = Finland; Ger = Germany; Nth = Netherlands; Swe = Sweden; UK = United Kingdom; US = United States. Presidential elections for the United States; general parliamentary elections for the other countries. Redistribution data are for working-age households only.
value of particular ideologies or parties. Instead, we want to stress that important questions—what could be more crucial than knowing who gets what from a political system?—can be answered systematically and objectively, even if tentatively, with careful thought and analysis. Moreover, we hope to show that the techniques used in these debates are not beyond the understanding of students of the social sciences.

Who Votes, Who Doesn't?

The previous example of research showed the importance of group power in determining political winners and losers. Political participation is a major factor: those individuals who make themselves heard in politics "do better" than those who are apathetic. So a natural question is, Why do some people participate more than others?

A good place to start looking for the answer is with the decision to vote. Except for new research that we review briefly later in this chapter, most political scientists accept two generalizations about voting in the United States. First, voting varies by socioeconomic class. Members of the lower classes participate less frequently than do more affluent and better-educated citizens. There is, in short, a "class gap" in turnout rates. The second finding is that since the 1950s fewer and fewer people are going to the polls. Voting rates dropped more or less steadily until the 2000 presidential election—a closely contested race—when barely more than half of the eligible citizens took part. The voting rate has been even lower in recent congressional or "off-year" elections and in the South.

The political scientist Walter Dean Burnham combined these findings into an argument that has come to be known as "selective class demobilization." In a nutshell, Burnham's thesis is that the decline in turnout is especially pronounced in the lower and working classes, those with relatively little education and income and working in manual, routine service and unskilled occupations. Those higher up the ladder, so to speak, have voted at more or less the same rates since the 1950s. In Burnham's words, "The attrition rate among various working-class categories is more than three times as high as in the professional and technical category and well over twice as high as for the middle class as a whole." In other words, for every upper-class nonvoter, there are now two or three lower-class nonvoters. It appears to Burnham and others that the lower classes are effectively abandoning electoral politics. And as a consequence and in keeping with the research on winners and losers, it appears that political rewards may increasingly favor the middle and upper classes.

In the tradition of modern political science, Burnham supports his case by using hard empirical data—measured turnout rates for various social strata. (He relies heavily on census data and graphical and tabular displays to make
him points.) But even more important, he supplies a theory that explains this apparent selective demobilization. He contends that political parties in America, never very strong to begin with, have become even weaker in the post-World War II years as a result of many factors, including the rise of candidate-centered campaigns and the increased use of primary elections in party nominations. The weakening of party organization has been especially pronounced in the Democratic Party.\textsuperscript{13} The decline of parties places an especially onerous burden on the working and lower classes. Why? Because these groups, having less education and information about government, rely more heavily on cues and motivation supplied by political parties, and without this guidance these citizens lose their way in politics and frequently drop out.\textsuperscript{14}

So selective class demobilization has a cause—the decline of parties—and a consequence—the loss of political influence. If true, Burnham’s analysis would have enormous implications for the understanding of American politics. Stated bluntly, public policy will have an upper-class bias. Being so provocative, Burnham’s thesis naturally sparked considerable comment and controversy, a fact that illustrates an important aspect of scientific research.

As discussed in Chapter 2, science demands independent verification of findings. Conclusions such as Burnham’s are not accepted at face value but must be verified by others working separately. In this case, additional research has produced mixed results. Some investigators agree with Burnham that the decline in turnout has been concentrated disproportionately among lower socioeconomic classes.\textsuperscript{15} But others, using alternative measures of class and other data sets, come to a different conclusion. Jan E. Leighley and Jonathan Nagler, for instance, found “that the class bias [in nonvoting] has not increased since 1964.”\textsuperscript{16}

Complicating matters even further, recent research calls into question even the basic belief that voter turnout in general has been declining. These newer investigations say the apparent decrease in the rate of electoral participation stems from an artifact in how turnout is measured. The voting rate has typically been measured as the number of votes cast divided by the number of eligible voters. This procedure may seem straightforward, but a problem arises. How should the eligible voting population be defined? The Census Bureau uses the so-called voting-age population (VAP) as its measure of the eligible electorate. But, as Michael P. McDonald and Samuel L. Popkin maintain, this approach “includes people who are ineligible to vote, such as noncitizens, felons, and the mentally incompetent, and fails to include [Americans] living overseas but otherwise eligible.”\textsuperscript{17} They developed an alternative measure of the pool of eligible voters and showed that when it is used in the denominator of voting-rate calculations “nationally and outside the South there are virtually no identifiable turnout trends from 1972 onward, and within the South there is a clear trend of increasing turnout rates.”\textsuperscript{18}
Adjusting the VAP to exclude felons raises another series of questions investigated by political scientists: To what extent does the disenfranchisement of nonincarcerated offenders (a practice that in the United States results in the disenfranchisement of large numbers of citizens) alter the outcome of elections? Why is the United States alone among democratic countries in this regard? And, what accounts for differences in restricting access to the ballot among the American states?19

Finally, here is another curious twist in research on voter turnout. Some investigators approach the study of political phenomena by building what are known as formal models. Although we discuss this methodology in Chapter 5, we can say here that modelers begin with a set of a priori assumptions and propositions and use logic to deduce further statements from them. Up to this point, the truth of the conclusions depends simply on logic; no empirical verification is required. But the conclusions are sometimes translated into operational terms and tested by using data from sample surveys and other sources.

In the case of voter turnout, the modeling approach begins with the assumption that citizens are rational, in the sense that they try to maximize their utility (the things that they value) at the least cost to themselves. So a potential voter will think about the personal benefits of going to the polls and weigh these against the costs of doing so (for example, taking the time to become informed, registering, and finding and driving to the polling place). Surprisingly, many models lead to the conclusion that a rational person—one who wants to maximize utility at least cost—will decide that voting is not worth the effort and simply abstain.20 The reason for this conclusion: one single individual’s participation has an exceedingly small probability of affecting the outcome of an election. And so, according to the deduction, the small chance of bringing benefits by voting is easily outweighed by the costs, however low. Consequently the formal model predicts that hardly anyone will vote. But in point of fact millions of Americans do vote, which seems to belie the model’s conclusions. This situation, which has been called the “paradox of voting,” has sparked an enormous amount of discussion and controversy since the 1950s.21

This is not the place to sort out these arguments and counterarguments. Instead we have used studies of voter turnout to illustrate some features of research that are described in more detail in the following chapters, including the derivation of hypotheses from existing theory, measurement of concepts, and the use of objective standards to adjudicate among competing ideas. The major point, perhaps, is that if one’s procedures are stated clearly, others can pick up the thread of analysis and independently investigate the problem. In this sense empirical political research is, like all science, a cumulative process. Usually no one person or group can discover a definitive answer to a complicated phenomenon like voting or nonvoting. Rather the answers come, if they do at all, from the gradual accumulation of findings from
In recent years increased public and scholarly interest has focused on the human rights practices of governments. Several organizations (Amnesty International, the U.S. Department of State, and Freedom House, for example) publish annual reports on the human rights performance of nations worldwide. Researchers Stephen C. Poe and C. Neal Tate investigated the causes of state terrorism, which involves violations of personal integrity rights and includes such acts as murder, torture, forced disappearance, and imprisonment of persons for their political views. Poe and Tate sought to explain variation of government or regime performance in human rights in 153 countries during the 1980s. Most of the previous studies on human rights abuses compared the practices of a more limited set of nations at a single point in time. Poe and Tate built upon the earlier research by examining change that occurred within a given country across a specified period of time.

Poe and Tate considered the following as possible explanations of variations in state terrorism:

- Presence of democratic procedures and protections (democracy). Because they offer an alternative method of settling conflicts, and because they provide citizens with the tools to oust from office potentially abusive leaders, democratic procedures and protections minimized serious threats to human rights. In fact, some definitions of human rights include wording that notes the need for access to democratic procedures and protections. (By focusing on variation in state coercion, the authors made sure that their measures of democracy were distinct from their measures of human rights abuses.)

- Population size and growth. A large population increases the number of opportunities for government coercion and creates stress on available resources. Rapid population growth creates even greater stress. In addition, rapid population growth results in an increase in the proportion of the population that is young, an age cohort that is more likely to engage in criminal behavior and threaten public order.

- Level of economic development and economic growth. Rapid economic growth creates resentment within those classes that are not benefiting from the new wealth. Such resentment could destabilize a regime and thereby promote repression. However, higher levels of economic development will result in less repression as highly developed countries are able to meet the needs of their people.
Establishment of leftist regime. States governed by a socialist party or coalition that does not permit effective electoral competition with non-socialist opposition and removal from office of abusive leaders are predicted to have higher levels of state terrorism.

Establishment of military regime. Military regimes are expected to be more coercive than other types of regimes, but this hypothesis needs to be tested because some military regimes take power claiming that the previous regime was violating the rights of citizens.

British cultural influence. A colonial tie to British political and cultural influences is more favorable to protection of human rights than is a tie to other colonial influences.

International and civil war experience. A state's experiences with both international and civil war influence a government's use of repression to control its citizens.

Poe and Tate found that governments with established democratic procedures and protections were unlikely to engage in human rights abuses. They also found that governments in more populous countries were more likely to engage in human rights abuses than were governments in less populous countries. However, population growth in and of itself did not affect levels of government repression. Neither did a history of British cultural influence nor the presence of an established military regime. Economic development had only a weak impact on reducing human rights abuses, and the impact of leftist governments was mixed. Poe and Tate found that national experience in international and civil wars had "statistically significant and substantively important impacts on national respect for the personal integrity of citizens...with civil war participation having a somewhat larger impact than participation in international war." Experience with civil war appeared less likely to provoke human rights abuses in countries with democratic governments. Poe and Tate concluded that "basic rights can be enhanced by actors who would encourage countries to solve their political conflicts short of war, and use whatever means are at their disposal to assist them in doing so."24

A Look into Judicial Decision Making and Its Effects

When the decisions of public officials clearly and visibly affect the lives of the populace, political scientists are interested in the process by which those decisions are reached. This is as true when the public officials are judges as when they are legislators or executives. As one legal scholar states in his review of the development of empirical research on judicial decision making:
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"Given the often critical role judges play in our constitutional, political, and social lives, it is axiomatic that we need to better understand how and why judges reach the decisions they do in the course of discharging their judicial roles." The decision-making behavior of the nine justices of the U.S. Supreme Court is especially intriguing because they are not elected officials, their deliberations are secret, they serve for life, and their decisions constrain other judges and public officials. As a result, political scientists have been curious for some time about how Supreme Court justices reach their decisions.

Researchers have approached the study of judicial decision making from several different perspectives. Early studies investigated the influences of a judge’s background (for example, as a prosecutor or defense attorney) and personal attributes such as race or gender. The results have been mixed, with little evidence to support the influence of these factors. One school of thought concerning judicial decision making holds that decisions are shaped primarily by legal doctrine and precedent. Because most Supreme Court judges have spent many years rendering judicial decisions while serving on lower courts, and because judges in general are thought to respect the decisions made by previous courts, this approach posits that the decisions of Supreme Court justices depend on a search for, and discovery of, relevant legal precedent.

Another view of judicial decision making proposes that judges, like other politicians, make decisions in part based on personal political beliefs and values. Furthermore, because Supreme Court judges are not elected, serve for life, seldom seek any other office, and are not expected to justify their decisions to the public, they are in an ideal position to act in accord with their personal value systems.

One of the obstacles to discovering the relationship between the personal attitudes of justices and the decisions handed down by the Court is the difficulty of measuring judicial attitudes. Supreme Court justices do not often consent to give interviews to researchers while they are on the bench, nor do they fill out attitudinal surveys. Their deliberations are secret, they seldom make public speeches during their terms, and their written publications consist mainly of their case decisions. Consequently, about all we can observe of the political attitudes of Supreme Court justices during their terms are the written decisions they offer, which are precisely what researchers are seeking to explain. Some researchers use political party and the appointing president as indicators of judicial attitudes, although these are less than satisfactory measures.

An inventive attempt to overcome this obstacle is contained within Jeffrey A. Segal and Albert D. Cover’s article “Ideological Values and the Votes of U.S. Supreme Court Justices.” Segal and Cover decided that an appropriate way in which to measure the attitudes of judges, independent of the decisions
they make, would be to analyze the editorial columns written about them in four major U.S. daily newspapers after their nomination by the president but before their confirmation by the Senate. This data source, the researchers argue, provides a comparable measure of attitudes for all justices studied, independent of the judicial decisions rendered and free of systematic errors. Here, too, though, the researchers had to accept a measure that was not ideal, for the editorial columns reflected journalists' perceptions of judicial attitudes rather than the attitudes themselves.

Despite this limitation, the editorial columns did provide an independent measure of the attitudes of the eighteen Supreme Court justices who served between 1953 and 1987. Segal and Cover found a strong relationship between the justices' decisions on cases dealing with civil liberties and the justices' personal attitudes as evinced in editorial columns. Those justices who were perceived to be liberal before their term on the Supreme Court voted in a manner consistent with this perception once they got on the Court. Judicial attitudes, then, do seem to be an important component of judicial decision making.

Other researchers have investigated the influence of so-called extra-legal factors on the decisions of Supreme Court justices. Are there factors in addition to ideology but outside of legal precedent that influence judicial decision making? Do judges behave strategically to increase their prestige or influence vis-à-vis other judges and other branches of government? Are they subject to influence by other judges and governmental actors? Among the possibilities are congressional influence (given the ability of Congress to pass legislation that overrides Court decisions and to initiate constitutional amendments, among others actions), presidential influence, and public opinion.

The presidential election in 2000 brought into sharp relief for many Americans the importance of Supreme Court decisions to American politics. Some people felt that the high regard that Americans have for the Supreme Court brought closure to the highly contentious election and that support for the Supreme Court as an institution helped people to accept its decision in *Bush v. Gore* (2000). Others argued that general support and respect for the Supreme Court was undermined among those disappointed by the decision. Interestingly, political scientist Valerie J. Hoekstra was already busy investigating the two general questions raised so vividly by the 2000 decision: (1) How does the content of Supreme Court decisions affect support for the Court? That is, does respect for the Court decline among people who disagree with a decision? (2) Do Supreme Court decisions have any effect on public opinion? In other words, does the public change its mind about public policy issues once the Supreme Court has spoken?

Hoekstra's work demonstrates how the choice of a research design (the topic of Chapter 5) affects a researcher's ability to answer research questions.
with confidence. Hoekstra noted that public opinion polls generally show that the Supreme Court enjoys higher and more stable levels of public support than Congress or presidents, but that stability of aggregate-level measures such as public opinion polls does not mean that the opinions of individuals have not changed. She argued that a panel study, one in which the same individuals are interviewed before and after a Supreme Court decision, is best for examining how support for the Supreme Court changes and whether individuals change their views about an issue in response to the Court’s decision in a case. She also argues that it is important to interview individuals who are aware of the case to be decided by the Court. One cannot expect a decision of the Supreme Court to influence how people feel about an issue, if people are not aware of its decision. Most Supreme Court decisions do not have the national significance and high level of public awareness as in Bush v. Gore. Therefore, Hoekstra selected four cases and interviewed people in the communities from which the cases originated.

Hoekstra hypothesized that people who are more supportive of the Supreme Court are more likely to change their view of an issue in the direction of the Court’s decision and that people who have strong opinions about an issue are less likely to change their views than are people whose opinions are not as strong. In two of the four cases, Hoekstra found that public opinion shifted in the direction of the Court’s decision, but initial levels of support for the Court did not have an effect on the amount of change. She did find that people who paid more attention to politics, and presumably were more aware of the issue, were more likely to change opinion in direction of the Court’s decision. Overall, she found limited support for the persuasive effect of Supreme Court decisions.

In terms of the effect of Supreme Court decisions on the public’s support of the Court, Hoekstra found that people who were pleased with the Court’s decision became more confident in and supportive of the Court, whereas those who were disappointed with the decision became less supportive. These changes were affected by how strongly a person felt about the issue: those who cared strongly about an issue tended to change their views of the Court more than those who did not care as much about the issue.

**Influencing Bureaucracies**

Political control of the bureaucracy is an ongoing topic of discussion and investigation by political scientists. A variety of theories about political influence on bureaucratic activities has ascended, only to be superseded by new theories based on yet more research. Theories have evolved from the politics-administration dichotomy, which strictly separates politics and administration, to the iron triangle, or capture, theory, which views agencies as responsive to
a narrow range of advantaged and special interests assisted by a few strategically located members of Congress, leaving the president with relatively little influence. A more recent theory, the agency theory, suggests that presidents and Congress do have ways to control bureaucratic activities. According to this theory, policymakers use rewards or sanctions to bring agency activities back in line when they stray too far from the policy preferences of elected politicians. Control mechanisms include budgeting, political appointments, structure and reorganization, personnel power, and oversight.  

Research shows that agency outputs vary with political changes. The emergence of a new presidential administration, the seating of new personnel on the courts, and change in the ideological stances of congressional oversight committees all influence agency outputs. B. Dan Wood and Richard W. Waterman tried to find out more about political control of bureaucracies. They studied a broad range of agencies to identify how agencies are controlled and to assess the relative effectiveness of the different control mechanisms. They were also interested in determining whether Congress or the president is more effective at influencing bureaucratic outputs.

Wood and Waterman selected seven federal agencies, each representing a different organizational design. Using archives and interviews of high-ranking agency officials, they identified events that should have caused change in bureaucratic outputs. They then gathered information on agency outputs of regulatory enforcement activities, such as litigations, sanctions, and administrative decisions. In contrast to previous researchers, they obtained information on outputs on a monthly or quarterly basis. They then looked to see whether agency outputs had changed in the ways predicted based on the changes that had occurred at the political level. Wood and Waterman found evidence that political controls did cause changes in outputs in all seven agencies. Political appointment had a very important impact on political control; reorganization, congressional oversight, and budgeting were also important factors in accounting for change in agency activities. These findings, indicating that agency outputs do respond to political manipulation, led Wood and Waterman to suggest that policy monitoring should become routine for federal agencies. Information on outputs could make politicians and bureaucrats more accountable and informed and help all participants in the policy process have access to information. The information could also aid scholars in further research on the behavior and decisions of public bureaucracies.

More recent research investigated the issue of political control of public agencies at their inception and illustrates that politicians believe that they can influence them. David E. Lewis observed that presidents and Congress compete over the control of agencies and that agencies vary in the extent to which they are designed to be insulated from presidential control. He hypothesized that divided government and the size of the majority in Congress
affects the probability of Congress creating an insulated agency. For example, when the same party controls the presidency and Congress, and the size of the majority in Congress is large, Congress will create an agency less insulated from the president. If, however, the party control of the executive and legislative branches is divided and the majority in Congress is large, Congress will want to create an agency that is insulated from the president's control, although expectations about the presidency changing party hands also play a role in Congress's strategy. To test these hypotheses, Lewis collected data on agencies created between 1946 and 1997 measuring the extent to which they were designed with insulating features. He found that the percentage of new agencies with insulating characteristics correlated with periods of divided government, and that during periods of divided government with large majorities in Congress, the percentage of insulated agencies was higher than when majorities were small. Higher presidential approval ratings were associated with less agency insulation during periods of unified government and with more agency insulation during periods of divided government. Lewis concluded that, in general, weak presidents are less able than strong presidents to resist congressional desires to insulate agencies. Lewis's research would seem to suggest that Wood and Waterman's research should be expanded to include more agencies and to take into account whether an agency was designed to be more responsive to Congress or the president.

Effects of Campaign Advertising on Voters

Enormous sums of money are spent on campaign advertising by candidates vying for political office. Political scientists have long been interested in the effects of campaign advertising on voters. Some have argued that advertising has little effect due to the public's ability to screen out messages conflicting with their existing views. Others have suggested that campaign activity, including advertising, stimulates voter interest and increases turnout. More recent conventional wisdom suggests that negative campaign advertising, particularly television advertisements, has harmful effects on the democratic process: negative campaign ads are thought to increase cynicism about politics and to cause the electorate to turn away from elections in disgust, a phenomenon called demobilization.

A 1994 study on so-called attack advertising by Stephen D. Ansolabehere, Shanto Iyengar, Adam Simon, and Nicholas Valentino is widely recognized as establishing support for the demobilization theory. Noting that "[m]ore often than not, candidates criticize, discredit, or belittle their opponents rather than providing their own ideas," they hypothesized that, rather than stimulating voter turnout, such campaigns would depress turnout.
The researchers devised a controlled experiment in which groups of prospective voters were exposed to one of three advertisement treatments: positive political advertisements, no political advertisements, or negative political advertisements. After taking into account other factors likely to affect a person's intention to vote, Ansolabehere and his colleagues found that exposure to negative (as opposed to positive) advertisements depressed intention to vote by 5 percent.

Recognizing that the size of the experimental effect—that is, how much impact advertising has on behavior—might not match the size of the real-world effect, the researchers also devised a strategy for measuring the effect of negative advertising in real campaigns. They measured the tone of the campaigns in the thirty-four states that held a Senate election in 1992. They calculated the turnout rate and something called the roll-off rate for each Senate race. The roll-off rate measures the extent to which people who were sufficiently motivated to vote in the presidential election chose not to vote in the Senate race. The researchers found that both the turnout rate and the roll-off rate were affected by campaign tone. Turnout in states with a positive campaign tone was 4 percent higher than in states where the tone was negative. The difference in roll-off rates was 2.4 percent, with roll-off rates higher in those states with more negative campaign advertising. These results confirmed the team's earlier results and demonstrated that campaigns may in fact depress voter turnout.

Ansolabehere and his colleagues suggest that the decline in presidential and midterm voter turnout since 1960 may be due in part to the increasingly negative tone of national campaigns. They also raise some interesting questions, asking whether or not candidates should "be free to use advertising techniques that have the effect of reducing voter turnout" and whether or not, "in the case of publicly financed presidential campaigns, [it is] . . . legitimate for candidates to use public funds in ways that are likely to discourage voting."42

Subsequent researchers have conducted studies using different approaches that qualify this finding. For example, Kim Fridkin Kahn and Patrick J. Kenney used survey responses from the 1990 National Election Study's Senate Election Study to "explore the relationship between the tenor of campaigns and the propensity to vote."43 They based their measure of the tone of campaigns on a sample of TV ads from candidates' campaigns and a sample of newspaper articles selected from the largest circulating newspaper in each state in which there was a Senate election. They also contacted campaign managers and asked them to characterize the level of mudslinging in the campaigns. Kahn and Kenney controlled for several factors that could influence a person's propensity to vote, such as the closeness of the Senate election, the characteristics of other elections going on in the state, and several individual characteristics, including a person's attachment to a major po-
political party. They found that negative campaign information did not have a uniform effect on individuals' propensity to vote. Campaign messages and media coverage critical of a candidate were associated with higher levels of voter turnout, presumably because they provided some useful information to voters. However, their data did show that mudslinging had a negative impact on turnout. Kahn and Kenney concluded:

"Responses to the negativity of campaigns depend on political predispositions. Specifically, campaign tone is more consequential for independents, people with less interest in politics, and people with less knowledge about politics. When the proportion of legitimate criticism in the news increases, these groups are more likely to participate in the election. They also are adversely affected by mudslinging. When campaign rhetoric is uncivil and inappropriate, they are likely to abstain from the political process."

In another study, Martin P. Wattenberg and Craig Leonard Brians investigated the contention that "the intent of most negative commercials is to convert votes by focusing on an issue for which the sponsoring candidate has credibility in handling but on which the opponent is weak." Using survey or poll data from the 1992 and 1996 American presidential elections that allowed them to identify respondents who recalled seeing negative ads, positive ads, or no ads at all and to compare their turnout rates, Wattenberg and Brians found that negative ads did not depress turnout. In fact, for groups considered unlikely to vote (such as young people or those lacking a high school education), turnout rates were higher for those who recalled seeing either a positive or negative ad, compared with those who recalled no ad. For groups expected to have higher turnout rates, ad recall had only a slight effect on their turnout rates. After taking into account a wide range of factors associated with turnout, the researchers found that recall of negative political ads was significantly associated with higher turnout rates in the 1992 elections. For the 1996 elections they found that recall of ads, whether positive or negative, had no impact on turnout rates. They also concluded that recalling a negative ad did not have a depressing effect on a person's sense of political efficacy. They suggested that the experimental findings of Ansolabehere and his colleagues do not hold up in the real world of elections. Recall, though, that those experimental findings were buttressed by their analysis of aggregate voting data in the 1992 Senate races. Wattenberg and Brians questioned these findings and pointed out that the election data used by Ansolabehere and his colleagues are different from the official 1992 election returns published by the Federal Election Commission (FEC).

As we noted earlier in the chapter, political science is an iterative or cumulative activity. And so Ansolabehere and his colleagues responded to Wattenberg
and Brian's study by noting that survey recall data are prone to inaccuracies: recall is a poor measure of actual exposure, and people who are likely to vote are more likely to recall seeing a political ad. They analyzed the survey data for the 1992 and 1996 elections, making adjustments for exposure to campaign ads that Wattenberg and Brian's did not. They used data measuring the volume of ads in the different senatorial elections, noting that higher-volume campaigns have disproportionately more negative ads. They also noted that the tone of campaigns becomes more negative as elections approach. Thus respondents surveyed earlier in an election will have been exposed to less negative campaigning than those interviewed later in an election. Their analysis showed that recall of negative ads was significantly higher in states with higher levels of advertising and in the latter stages of the campaign and that intentions to vote were lower in states with more television advertising and in the latter stages of campaigns. Thus they concluded that the survey data show that negative advertising has a negative impact on voter turnout. They also replicated their analyses of the Senate races using official FEC data (previously they had used data obtained directly from the election officers in each state) and concluded that, on average, turnout in positive campaigns is nearly 5 percentage points higher than turnout in negative campaigns.

In closing, we should point out that other political scientists have been actively investigating an important related question: Do attack ads work? The authors of an analysis of research on this topic concluded that negative ads have not been shown to be more effective than positive political ads in a statistically significant way, but their effect could be "politically significant or even decisive" in some campaigns. As long as the conventional wisdom that attack ads work persists, campaign managers and candidates are unlikely to abandon them.

In Chapter 5 we discuss some ways to design research to investigate the effects of advertising on political behavior. We simply note for now that this issue will surely continue to preoccupy researchers and illustrates some of the complexities and excitement of the empirical study of politics.

**Research on Public Support for U.S. Foreign Involvement**

The ongoing conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan highlight the relevance of public support for U.S. military involvement in foreign affairs and the extent to which the American public judges the president's performance based on foreign policy issues. Researchers have investigated a wide range of factors associated with public support for U.S. military involvement, some of which focus on attributes of individuals, including attitudes toward the use of military force and U.S. involvement in world affairs in general, education, knowledge,
edge of foreign affairs, and others that focus on situational factors such as the primary purpose or objective of U.S. military involvement, the relative power of the U.S. vis-à-vis an adversary, the costs of involvement (particularly U.S. military casualties), the extent of elite consensus over whether the United States should be involved, and multilateral support for involvement. Let's take a look at one recent example of such work.

In an article entitled “Success Matters: Casualty Sensitivity and the War in Iraq,” Christopher Gelpi, Peter D. Feaver, and Jason Reifler investigated the claim that the U.S. public will support military operations only if combat deaths are minimal, the so-called casualty-phobia thesis. Their work responded to a debate over whether the American public reflexively withdraws its support for U.S. military missions as casualties mount or whether casualties are but one factor in a more complicated cost-benefit analysis affecting support for military missions. And, if the latter case is true, they ask, how important are casualties in the analysis? They also are interested in how individuals’ assessments of the likelihood of success and other beliefs affect their tolerance for combat deaths.

In the first part of their investigation, they collected weekly data on U.S. combat deaths in Iraq from January 1, 2003, through November 1, 2004, and used public opinion data to measure public support for the war. Several polling questions, which can be used to measure public support, have been asked routinely over the course of the war in Iraq: approval of the president in general, approval of the president’s handling of the situation in Iraq, and whether the Iraq war has been “worth it.” They found that the poll results to the three questions were closely correlated, so that their results were not affected by which question was used to measure support for the war. Therefore, in their article they reported the results from their analyses for just one of the questions, presidential approval. They looked at the relationship between the average weekly approval ratings for President George W. Bush from March 2003 to November 2004 and cumulative U.S. military deaths in Iraq for three time periods: the major combat phase, the occupation period, and the period subsequent to the transfer of sovereignty to an Iraqi authority.

The researchers were interested especially in the extent to which the public’s expectation of a successful outcome and its belief in the rightness of the war explain support for the war in Iraq, even in the face of mounting casualties. To begin to explore the impact of the public perception of success, they calculated the impact of casualties on presidential approval for each of the three phases of the Iraq war. For the major combat period, they found a positive relationship between casualties and presidential approval (as casualties went up, so did approval of the president). During this period, despite the casualties, one would expect a “rally round the flag” effect and perception of success was assumed to be high. This relationship changed during the
second period, U.S. occupation, when success was less certain: mounting casual-
sualties were associated with a decline in presidential approval. In the third
period, in which Iraqis assumed sovereignty, which could be interpreted as
an indication of a likely successful outcome to the war, casualties had no
impact on presidential approval even though media coverage was intense and
the number of casualties approached one thousand.

As Gelpi, Feaver, and Reifler point out, using aggregate data to explore the
impact of several individual attitudes and beliefs and their interaction is prob-
lematic because such data do not allow us to link individuals' answers to dif-
ferent polling questions. Thus we do not know for sure whether individuals
who believe that the mission in Iraq will be successful are more willing to tol-
erate mounting casualties than those who doubt that the mission will be suc-
sessful. We also do not know how beliefs about the rightness of the war in Iraq
and the likelihood of its success interact to affect tolerance for casualties.

To address this limitation of aggregate data, the researchers conducted a
series of surveys in which they asked respondents questions about their con-
dience in victory, whether they believed that President Bush did the right thing
in attacking Iraq, and their tolerance for military deaths. They also asked survey
respondents questions about the primary policy objective of the war in Iraq,
their perceptions of an elite consensus, and their attitudes toward multilateral-
ism, in order to test competing explanations for tolerance of casualties. They
found that these other factors do influence tolerance of casualties but that be-
iefs in success and rightness have a greater impact on the dependent variable.

Figure 1-2 shows the impact of a respondent's beliefs in success and
rightness of the war (the latter indicated in the figure as approval) on the
probability that the respondent was willing to tolerate 1,500 U.S. casual-
ties. As one goes from left to right, that is, from lower beliefs in success to
higher, the groups of columns increase in height. Looking at each group of
columns, one can see that as approval of the war increases, so does tolerance
for casualties, although not very much for those respondents who think that
success is not very likely. The figure shows that beliefs about the expected
success and rightness of the war work together to explain tolerance for ca-
usalities, but the columns in the figure clearly indicate that beliefs about suc-
cess have a greater impact on tolerance for military deaths than beliefs about
the rightness of going to war; in general the columns tend to increase in
height more rapidly as one goes by group to group from left to right rather
than within groups. In addition, a respondent who believes that success is
not at all likely, but who strongly approves of the rightness of the war has
only a 23 percent chance of tolerating 1,500 deaths whereas a respondent
who believes that success is very likely, but strongly disapproves of the
rightness of the war (right-front corner) has a 50 percent chance of tolerat-
ing 1,500 casualties.
Clearly, both citizens and politicians have quite a bit to learn from recent political science research on the conditions under which the public will support the use of military force and foreign policies advocated by national political leaders. It is exciting for researchers to investigate these issues and to pursue greater understanding of these and related questions.

Conclusion

Political scientists are continually adding to and revising our understanding of politics and government. As the several examples in this chapter illustrate, empirical research in political science is useful for satisfying intellectual curiosity and for evaluating real-world political conditions. New ways of designing investigations, the availability of new types of data, and new statistical techniques contribute to the ever-changing body of political science knowledge. Conducting empirical research is not a simple process, however. The information a researcher chooses to use, the method that he or she follows to investigate a
research question, and the statistics used to report research findings may affect the conclusions drawn. For instance, some of these examples used sample surveys to measure important phenomena such as public opinion on a variety of public policy issues. Yet surveys are not always an accurate reflection of people's beliefs and attitudes. In addition, how a researcher measures the phenomena of interest can affect the conclusions reached. Finally, some researchers conducted experiments in which they were able to control the application of the experimental or test factor, whereas others compared naturally occurring cases in which the factors of interest varied.

Sometimes researchers are unable to measure political phenomena themselves and have to rely on information collected by others, particularly government agencies. Can we always find readily available data to investigate a topic? If not, do we choose a different topic or collect our own data? How do we collect data firsthand? When we are trying to measure cause and effect in the real world of politics, rather than in a carefully controlled laboratory setting, how can we be sure that we have identified all the factors that could affect the phenomena we are trying to explain? Finally, do research findings based on the study of particular people, agencies, courts, communities, or countries have general applications to all people, agencies, courts, communities, or countries? To develop answers to these questions we need to understand the process of scientific research, the subject of this book.

Notes


4. For example, Theda Skocpol, ed., *Bringing the State Back In* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985).


6. In other words, this variable indicates how much state programs reduced the *gini* coefficient.


12. Ibid., 125.
13. Burnham writes, "While no one doubts that the Republican party suffers from some internal divisions and even occasional bouts of selective abstention among its supporters ... the GOP remains much closer to being a true party in the comparative sense than do today's Democrats." Ibid., 124. This remark is as true in the early twenty-first century as it was in the mid-1980s when Burnham wrote it.
18. Ibid., 968 (emphasis added). Also see Michael P. McDonald, "On the Overreport Bias of the National Election Study Turnout Rate," Political Analysis 11 (Spring 2003): 180–186.
20. One of the first to arrive at this conclusion was the economist Anthony Downs, whose seminal book An Economic Theory of Democracy (New York: Harper and Row, 1957) sparked a generation of research into the seeming irrationality of voting.
23. Ibid., 866.
24. Ibid.
26. Ibid., 834–835.
27. For an example of research that considers both precedent and values, see Youngsik Lim, "An Empirical Analysis of Supreme Court Justices' Decision Making," Journal of Legal Studies 29 (June 2000): 721–752.
29. For an example of an investigation of strategic considerations, see Forrest Maltzman and Paul J. Wahlbeck, "Strategic Policy Considerations and Voting Fluidity on the Burger Court," American Political Science Review 90 (September 1996): 581–592.
32. Ibid., 13.
33. Ibid., 113.
34. Ibid., 114.
35. Ibid., 137.
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37. Ibid.
39. Ibid., 54.
40. Ibid., 61, 68.
42. Ibid., 835.
44. Ibid., 887.
48. For these and additional articles on the controversy, see the "Forum" section of the *American Political Science Review* 93 (December 1999): 851-909.

Terms Introduced

**APPLIED RESEARCH.** Research designed to produce knowledge useful in altering a real-world condition or situation.

**EMPIRICAL RESEARCH.** Research based on actual, "objective" observation of phenomena.

**POLITICAL SCIENCE.** The application of the methods of acquiring scientific knowledge to the study of political phenomena.

**PURE, THEORETICAL, OR RECREATIONAL RESEARCH.** Research designed to satisfy one's intellectual curiosity about some phenomenon.