

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-04452-4 - Process Tracing: From Metaphor to Analytic Tool

Edited by Andrew Bennett and Jeffrey T. Checkel

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Process Tracing

Advances in qualitative methods and recent developments in the philosophy of science have led to an emphasis on explanation via reference to causal mechanisms. This book argues that the method known as process tracing is particularly well suited to developing and assessing theories about such mechanisms. The editors begin by establishing a philosophical basis for process tracing – one that captures mainstream uses while simultaneously being open to applications by interpretive scholars. Equally important, they go on to establish best practices for individual process-tracing accounts – how micro to go, when to start (and stop), and how to deal with the problem of equifinality. The contributors then explore the application of process tracing across a range of subfields and theories in political science. This is an applied methods book which seeks to shrink the gap between the broad assertion that “process tracing is good” and the precise claim “this is an instance of good process tracing.”

Andrew Bennett is Professor of Government at Georgetown University. He is also President of the Consortium on Qualitative Research Methods, which sponsors the annual Institute on Qualitative and Multi-Method Research at Syracuse University. He is the co-author, with Alexander L. George, of *Case Studies and Theory Development* (2005), which won the Giovanni Sartori Prize in 2005 for the best book on qualitative methods.

Jeffrey T. Checkel is Professor of International Studies and Simons Chair in International Law and Human Security at Simon Fraser University. He is also a Global Research Fellow at the Peace Research Institute Oslo. He has published extensively in leading European and North American journals, and is the author of *Ideas and International Political Change: Soviet/Russian Behavior and the End of the Cold War* (1997), editor of *International Institutions and Socialization in Europe* (Cambridge University Press, 2007), co-editor (with Peter J. Katzenstein) of *European Identity* (Cambridge University Press, 2009), and editor of *Transnational Dynamics of Civil War* (Cambridge University Press, 2013).

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-04452-4 - Process Tracing: From Metaphor to Analytic Tool

Edited by Andrew Bennett and Jeffrey T. Checkel

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Strategies for Social Inquiry

Process Tracing: From Metaphor to Analytic Tool

Editors

Colin Elman, Maxwell School of Syracuse University

John Gerring, Boston University

James Mahoney, Northwestern University

Editorial board

Bear Braumoeller, David Collier, Francesco Guala, Peter Hedström,

Theodore Hopf, Uskali Maki, Rose McDermott, Charles Ragin, Theda Skocpol,

Peter Spiegler, David Waldner, Lisa Wedeen, Christopher Winship

This new book series presents texts on a wide range of issues bearing upon the practice of social inquiry. Strategies are construed broadly to embrace the full spectrum of approaches to analysis, as well as relevant issues in philosophy of social science.

Published titles

John Gerring, *Social Science Methodology: A Unified Framework, 2nd edition*

Michael Coppedge, *Democratization and Research Methods*

Thad Dunning, *Natural Experiments in the Social Sciences: A Design-Based Approach*

Carsten Q. Schneider and Claudius Wagemann, *Set-Theoretic Methods for the Social Sciences: A Guide to Qualitative Comparative Analysis*

Nicholas Weller and Jeb Barnes, *Finding Pathways: Mixed-Method Research for Studying Causal Mechanisms*

Forthcoming titles

Diana Kapiszewski, Lauren M. MacLean and Benjamin L. Read, *Field Research in Political Science: Practices and Principles*

Jason Seawright, *Multi-Method Social Science: Combining Qualitative and Quantitative Tools*

Peter Spiegler, *A Constructive Critique of Economic Modeling*

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-04452-4 - Process Tracing: From Metaphor to Analytic Tool

Edited by Andrew Bennett and Jeffrey T. Checkel

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Process Tracing

From Metaphor to Analytic Tool

Edited by

Andrew Bennett

Georgetown University

Jeffrey T. Checkel

Simon Fraser University



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press
 978-1-107-04452-4 - Process Tracing: From Metaphor to Analytic Tool
 Edited by Andrew Bennett and Jeffrey T. Checkel
 Frontmatter
[More information](#)

CAMBRIDGE
 UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781107686373

© Cambridge University Press 2015

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2015

3rd printing 2015

Printed in the United Kingdom by Clays, St Ives plc.

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Process tracing : from metaphor to analytic tool / edited by Andrew Bennett, Georgetown University, Jeffrey T. Checkel, Simon Fraser University.

pages cm. – (Strategies for social inquiry)

ISBN 978-1-107-04452-4 (hardback) – ISBN 978-1-107-68637-3 (paperback)

1. Political science – Methodology. 2. Causation. 3. Case method. 4. Qualitative research. 5. Social sciences – Methodology. I. Bennett, Andrew, 1960– editor. II. Checkel, Jeffrey T., 1959– editor.

JA71.P756 2015

320.01–dc23

2014021292

ISBN 978-1-107-04452-4 Hardback

ISBN 978-1-107-68637-3 Paperback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this publication, and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

Contents

<i>List of figures</i>	<i>page</i> vii
<i>List of tables</i>	viii
<i>List of contributors</i>	ix
<i>Preface</i>	xi

Part I	Introduction	1
1	Process tracing: from philosophical roots to best practices Andrew Bennett and Jeffrey T. Checkel	3
Part II	Process tracing in action	39
2	Process tracing the effects of ideas Alan M. Jacobs	41
3	Mechanisms, process, and the study of international institutions Jeffrey T. Checkel	74
4	Efficient process tracing: analyzing the causal mechanisms of European integration Frank Schimmelfennig	98
5	What makes process tracing good? Causal mechanisms, causal inference, and the completeness standard in comparative politics David Waldner	126
6	Explaining the Cold War's end: process tracing all the way down? Matthew Evangelista	153
7	Process tracing, causal inference, and civil war Jason Lyall	186

vi Contents

<hr/>		
Part III	Extensions, controversies, and conclusions	209
8	Improving process tracing: the case of multi-method research Thad Dunning	211
9	Practice tracing Vincent Pouliot	237
10	Beyond metaphors: standards, theory, and the “where next” for process tracing Jeffrey T. Checkel and Andrew Bennett	260
	<i>Appendix: Disciplining our conjectures: systematizing process tracing with Bayesian analysis</i> Andrew Bennett	276
	<i>References</i>	299
	<i>Index</i>	320

Figures

4.1	The causal mechanism in “The Path to European Integration.” From Pierson, Paul. “The Path to European Integration: A Historical Institutional Analysis.” <i>Comparative Political Studies</i> 29/2: 123–163 © 1996. Reprinted by permission of SAGE Publications.	page 114
5.1	A causal graph	131
5.2	Comparative statics in <i>The Sources of Democratic Consolidation</i> (Alexander 2000)	134
5.3	Wood’s causal graph of post-insurgency democratic transition in El Salvador and South Africa	138
5.4	Two causal models	138
5.5	Spruyt’s generic theory of institutional emergence	144
5.6	Gorski’s causal model of Calvinism and state power	148
7.1	Number of articles published on civil war onset or dynamics in fifteen political science journals, 1995–2012	188
A.1	Classification of evidentiary tests	285
A.2	Properties of “straw-in-the-wind” evidentiary test	287
A.3	Properties of “hoop” evidentiary test	287
A.4	Properties of “smoking-gun” evidentiary test	288
A.5	Properties of “doubly decisive” evidentiary test	288

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-04452-4 - Process Tracing: From Metaphor to Analytic Tool

Edited by Andrew Bennett and Jeffrey T. Checkel

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Tables

1.1	Process tracing best practices	<i>page</i> 21
2.1	Strategies of process tracing ideational effects	50
4.1	“Good/best-practice” and “efficient” process tracing compared	108
4.2	Process-tracing framework of <i>The Choice for Europe</i>	109
4.3	Modes of action in <i>The EU, NATO, and the Integration of Europe</i>	122
7.1	Mechanisms and measures as proposed by Cederman <i>et al.</i> (2010)	196
7.2	Sample research design for assessing effects of civilian victimization using process tracing	201
7.3	Possible mechanisms linking civilian victimization to insurgent recruitment and violence	202
10.1	Process tracing best practices	261

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-04452-4 - Process Tracing: From Metaphor to Analytic Tool

Edited by Andrew Bennett and Jeffrey T. Checkel

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Contributors

Andrew Bennett, Professor, Department of Government, Georgetown University

Jeffrey T. Checkel, Professor and Simons Chair, School for International Studies, Simon Fraser University, and Global Research Fellow, Peace Research Institute Oslo

Thad Dunning, Robson Professor of Political Science, Department of Political Science, University of California, Berkeley

Matthew Evangelista, President White Professor of History and Political Science, Department of Government, Cornell University

Alan M. Jacobs, Associate Professor, Department of Political Science, University of British Columbia

Jason Lyall, Associate Professor, Department of Political Science, Yale University

Vincent Pouliot, Associate Professor and William Dawson Scholar, Department of Political Science, McGill University

Frank Schimmelfennig, Professor of European Politics, Swiss Federal Institute of Technology, Zürich

David Waldner, Associate Professor, Woodrow Wilson Department of Politics, University of Virginia

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-04452-4 - Process Tracing: From Metaphor to Analytic Tool

Edited by Andrew Bennett and Jeffrey T. Checkel

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-04452-4 - Process Tracing: From Metaphor to Analytic Tool

Edited by Andrew Bennett and Jeffrey T. Checkel

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Preface

When the editors of the Strategies for Social Inquiry Series at Cambridge University Press first approached us to write a book on process tracing, our response was “yes, but . . .” That is, we absolutely agreed there was a need for such a book, but, at the same time, we were leery – hence that “but” – of writing a standard methods text. Of course, process tracing is a method, so there was no getting around writing a methodology book.

Yet, from our own experience – be it working with Ph.D. students, reviewing manuscripts and journal articles, or giving seminars – we sensed a need, indeed a hunger, for a slightly different book, one that showed, in a grounded, operational way, how to do process tracing well. After discussions (and negotiations!) with the series editors, the result is the volume before you. We view it as an applied methods book, where the aim is to show how process tracing works in practice, using and critiquing prominent research examples from several subfields and research programs within political science. If the last fifteen years have seen the publication of key texts setting the state of the art for case studies, then our volume is a logical follow-on, providing clear guidance for what is perhaps the central within-case method – process tracing.

All chapters have been through numerous rounds of revision. The broad outlines of Chapter 1 were first presented to the Research Group on Qualitative and Multi-Method Analysis, Syracuse University, in June 2010, where we received critical but constructive feedback from some of the sharpest methodological minds in the business. A fully revised version of the first chapter together with drafts of most of the others were then critiqued at a workshop held at Georgetown University in March 2012. During this meeting, Peter Hall and Jack Snyder – in their role as “über-discussants” – gave indispensable help, assessing the project as a whole, but also providing trenchant criticisms and constructive suggestions on individual chapters. At this same workshop, we also received valuable feedback from Colin Elman and the Georgetown scholarly community, especially Kate McNamara and

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-04452-4 - Process Tracing: From Metaphor to Analytic Tool

Edited by Andrew Bennett and Jeffrey T. Checkel

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Dan Nexon. In the summer of 2012, three anonymous reviewers for Cambridge University Press evaluated key parts of the manuscript. Their comments were invaluable in helping us (re)frame the project, but also – and more specifically – in pushing us to rethink and justify key arguments we lay out in the opening chapter.

We owe thanks to many people and institutions, with the most important intellectual debt to our authors. Throughout, they rose to our challenge – “to make process tracing real!” – while diligently responding to multiple rounds of requests for changes and improvements in their chapters and providing insightful feedback on our own. For helpful comments on various parts of the manuscript, we thank – in addition to those already named – Derek Beach, Aaron Boesenecker, Jim Caporaso, Marty Finnemore, Lise Howard, Macartan Humphreys, and Ingo Rohlfing, as well as seminar audiences at the Freie Universität Berlin, Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, Geneva, and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. In addition, we received excellent feedback from what is perhaps our main target audience – Ph.D. students – in courses and workshops at Georgetown University, Goethe-Universität Frankfurt, the Institute for Qualitative and Multi-Method Research, Syracuse University, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, the Research School on Peace and Conflict, Peace Research Institute Oslo, and the Oslo Summer School in Comparative Social Science Studies.

The academic editors of the series – Colin Elman, John Gerring, and Jim Mahoney – are owed a special thank you. From the beginning, they pushed us to produce the best possible book. We often agreed with their criticisms; when we did not, their help made us more aware about our central aim.

Checkel also thanks the Kolleg-Forschergruppe “The Transformative Power of Europe,” Freie Universität Berlin and its directors – Tanja Börzel and Thomas Risse – for providing a stimulating and collegial setting during the book’s final write-up.

Last and certainly not least, we owe a debt of gratitude to Damian Penfold, who carefully – and cheerfully – copy-edited and formatted the entire initial manuscript, and to Barbara Salmon for preparation of the index. At Cambridge University Press, we thank John Haslam for organizing an efficient and rigorous review process, and Carrie Parkinson and Ed Robinson for overseeing the production of the book.

For administrative and logistical assistance, we thank Ellen Yap at the School for International Studies, Simon Fraser University, and Eva Zamarripa of the Mortara Center at Georgetown University. Financial support was provided by the Simons International Endowment at Simon Fraser

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-04452-4 - Process Tracing: From Metaphor to Analytic Tool

Edited by Andrew Bennett and Jeffrey T. Checkel

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

University, and by the School of Foreign Service and Mortara Center, both at Georgetown University.

One issue that can arise for readers who seek to interpret any co-authored text is the division of labor among the authors or editors. This book was a joint effort from the start, with equal contributions from the two editors. Bennett wrote the first draft of Chapter 1, while Checkel did the same for Chapter 10, and we each revised the other's draft, so the results are truly collaborative. In addition, both editors provided feedback to each of the contributing authors. It is thus not fair to list one editor's name first, but we have followed alphabetical convention in doing so to avoid any impression that our partnership was unequal, and we have listed the authorship of our co-authored chapters to reflect which of us wrote the first draft of each.

The two of us each have a special relation to rock. If one – Bennett – relishes the challenge of climbing straight up cliffs and rock faces around North America, the other – Checkel – enjoys the thrill of climbing iced-up rock ridges at 4,200 meters in the Swiss Alps. For all their differences, these passions are united by a common thread. It is called a rope – or, for Checkel, a *Seil* – and, without it, we are in grave peril. After four intense years working on this project, we are happy to report that neither of us dreams of secretly cutting the other's rope. In fact, it is the opposite. We now better appreciate the intellectual core of that rope we have never shared when climbing – a joint commitment to empirically rich, rigorous, but pluralistic knowledge production. It is our hope that this book contributes to that goal.

AB and JTC
Washington, DC and Vancouver