

Workshop: Process Tracing and Practice Analytics

3rd Term, Academic Year 2022-2023

Dates & Times: 17, 18, 19 April 2023: 9.00-16.00

Room: Seminar Room 2 (All sessions except 19 April, 14.00-16.00, when we are in Seminar Room 3)

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Workshop

Description

This three-day, four-part workshop provides an in-depth overview of process analytics. Students of the European Union do process – say, to explain the Union’s response to climate change; political economists do it – to chart the rise of central bank independence; international relations scholars use it – to track the emergence of social practices that structure relations among states; conflict studies does it – to capture the dynamics of rebel group mobilization in civil wars; sociologists and political ethnographers utilize it – to observe the daily practices that shape identity. As these examples suggest, the convergence on process is occurring not only in subfields and disciplines, but at a deeper, philosophical level as well. For positivists and critical realists, the study of causal effects is now supplemented with a processual understanding of cause as causal mechanisms, while many interpretive scholars adopt a relational ontology that necessitates a turn to process and practice.

Process is thus cool and hot - and more and more scholars are doing it. The challenge for us is to keep it cool while learning how to use it in an epistemologically plural, rigorous, transparent and ethically aware manner.

The workshop begins – Part I – with foundations. Meta-theoretically and conceptually, we examine the ways in which scholars from different disciplines think about process, from causal mechanisms to social mechanisms and social practices. In Part II, we zero in on process tracing as a key method for measuring process, one that comes in different epistemological flavours: critical realist / mainstream; Bayesian; and interpretive / practice-tracing. For each of these, we explore how the data collection and data analysis work. Part III is the workshop’s core. Over three sessions, we consider different applications of process tracing / practice tracing, using the arguments-standards-concepts from the first two parts to assess how good a job people are doing with the method.

We conclude – Part IV – with collective brainstorming, where students workshop their own efforts at utilizing process analytics in their theses. This last session helps to make real and operational what we read, debate and assess in the first three parts of the workshop.

The workshop is worth 10 credits.

Learning Outcomes

- An understanding of the varying ways that different disciplines – and philosophies of social science – think about ‘process.’
- For process tracing as method, an appreciation of the key features, strengths and weaknesses of its three main types: critical realist / mainstream; Bayesian; and interpretive / practice-tracing.
- For empirical applications of the method, an appreciation of the typical challenges that arise in the data collection and data analysis, be they about resources (time and mission funding), data quality, research ethics, or research transparency.
- A clear/better sense of how you can operationalize and use practice analytics in your thesis.

Format

The workshop will be run as a seminar, where the emphasis is on debate, discussion and collective learning. Written discussion questions/comments will serve as the starting point for Parts I, II and III (sessions #1 - #6), helping us set an agenda for each session. In Part IV, we shift gears and look at your work that uses practice analytics, with the goal being to give you practical advice on how to use the method.

Readings

Books to be read – mostly key sections - include the following.

- Bennett, Andrew and Jeffrey T. Checkel, Editors, *Process Tracing: From Metaphor to Analytic Tool* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015)
- Fairfield, Tash and Andrew Charman, *Social Inquiry and Bayesian Inference: Rethinking Qualitative Research* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022)
- Pouliot, Vincent, *International Pecking Orders: The Politics and Practice of Multilateral Diplomacy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016)
- Tannenwald, Nina, *The Nuclear Taboo: The United States and the Non-Use of Nuclear Weapons Since 1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007)
- Wood, Elisabeth Jean, *Insurgent Collective Action and Civil War in El Salvador* (NY: Cambridge University Press, 2003)

Workshop readings are accessible in two ways.

- Books & Chapters in Books: All books are available electronically from the EUI Library. In the reading list below, these are indicated by **(E-Book)**, with the hyperlink to the book provided.
- Journal Articles: These are easily obtained electronically through the EUI Library.

If you encounter any problems accessing workshop readings, please contact Pia Dittmar.

Requirements

There are three requirements; to receive credit for the workshop, you need a passing mark in all three.

- 1) Workshop Discussions: Active participation in them (Parts I, II, III)
- 2) Preparation of Discussion Questions/Comments (Parts I, II, III)

- ➔ Written discussion questions/comments will serve as the starting point for sessions #1 - #6, with all researchers preparing 2-3 questions/comments for each of these sessions. These should be distributed (by e-mail) to all workshop participants prior to our first session on 17 April.
- ➔ Your questions and comments should reflect a critical engagement with and assessment of the readings. What are their strong and weak points? Their meta-theoretical, theoretical, methodological, ethical, or empirical contributions-omissions? Preparing these questions/comments is not intended as a writing exercise; indeed, they can be quite short.

3) Practice Analytics in Action (Part IV)

- ➔ By 18 April, please circulate (by e-mail) to all workshop participants a 2-3 page (double-spaced) overview of your thesis, the role you see process tracing / practice tracing playing in it, and issues you are encountering in operationalizing the method – with the data collection, data analysis, data quality, data access, transparency, ethics and the like.
- ➔ We will devote 30 minutes to each researcher’s work. She/he gets 1-2 minutes at the beginning to highlight issues and problems encountered with the practice tracing / process tracing; the remainder of the 30 minutes is devoted to feedback and suggestions from the rest of the group.

Topics & Readings

Monday, 17 April

Part I: The Priors – Philosophical and Conceptual

Session #1 (0900 - 1100): Process Tracing and Practice Analytics – Nut & Bolts

Gerring, John, “Review Article: The Mechanismic Worldview – Thinking Inside the Box,” *British Journal of Political Science* 38/1 (2007): 161-79.

Hedstrom, Peter and Petri Ylikoski, “Causal Mechanisms in the Social Sciences,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 36 (2010): 49–67.

Adler, Emanuel, “Practices, Background Knowledge, Communities of Practice, Social Orders,” in Emanuel Adler, *World Ordering: A Social Theory of Cognitive Evolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019) – Chapter 4. ([E-Book](#))

Adler, Emanuel and Vincent Pouliot, “International Practices,” *International Theory* 3/1 (2011): 1-36.

Part II: Accessing & Measuring Process – Epistemological Pluralism and Methodological Rigour

Session #2 (1100 – 1200, 1330 - 1600): Process Tracing, Bayesian Process Tracing, Interpretive Process Tracing, and Practice Tracing

Bennett, Andrew and Jeffrey T. Checkel, Editors, *Process Tracing: From Metaphor to Analytic Tool* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015) - Chapters 1, 10. ([E-Book](#))

Fairfield, Tasha and Andrew Charman, *Social Inquiry and Bayesian Inference: Rethinking Qualitative Research* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022) – Chapters 1, 3, 4. ([E-Book](#))

Norman, Ludvig, “Rethinking Causal Explanation in Interpretive International Studies,” *European Journal of International Relations* 27/3 (2021): 936 –959.

Pouliot, Vincent, “Practice Tracing,” in Andrew Bennett and Jeffrey T. Checkel, Editors, *Process Tracing: From Metaphor to Analytic Tool* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015) – Chapter 9. ([E-Book](#))

Pouliot, Vincent, *International Pecking Orders: The Politics and Practice of Multilateral Diplomacy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016) – Appendix. ([E-Book](#))

Tuesday, 18 April

Part III: The Method in Action

Session #3 (0900 - 1100): Process/Practice Tracing in the Field – Interviews & Ethnography

Wood, Elisabeth Jean, *Insurgent Collective Action and Civil War in El Salvador* (NY: Cambridge University Press, 2003) - Chapters 1, 2, 7-8. ([E-Book](#))

Pouliot, Vincent, *International Pecking Orders: The Politics and Practice of Multilateral Diplomacy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016) – Introduction, Chapters 2, 6. ([E-Book](#))

Adler-Nissen, Rebecca and Alena Drieschova, “Track-Change Diplomacy: Technology, Affordances, and the Practice of International Negotiations,” *International Studies Quarterly* 63/3 (2019): 531–545.

Session #4 (1100 – 1200, 1330 - 1430): Process/Practice Tracing in the Field – Archives & Documents I

Tannenwald, Nina, *The Nuclear Taboo: The United States and the Non-Use of Nuclear Weapons Since 1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) - Chapters 1, 2, 4, 5. ([E-Book](#))

Session #5 (1430 - 1600): Process/Practice Tracing in the Field – Archives & Documents II

Bakke, Kristin, “Copying and Learning from Outsiders? Assessing Diffusion from Transnational Insurgents in the Chechen Wars,” in Jeffrey T. Checkel, Editor, *Transnational Dynamics of Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013) - Chapter 2. ([E-Book](#))

Schwartz, Rachel and Scott Straus, “What Drives Violence against Civilians in Civil War? Evidence from Guatemala’s Conflict Archives,” *Journal of Peace Research* 55/2 (2018): 222–235.

Cornut, Jeremie and Nicolas de Zamaroczy, “How Can Documents Speak about Practices? Practice Tracing, the Wikileaks Cables, and Diplomatic Culture,” *Cooperation and Conflict* 56/3 (2021): 328-345.

Wednesday, 19 April

Session #6 (0900 - 1030): Process Analytics – State of the Art & Where Next

Zaks, Sherry, “Updating Bayesian(s): A Critical Evaluation of Bayesian Process Tracing,” *Political Analysis* 29/1 (2021): 58-74.¹

¹ Bayesian process tracers have responded to Zaks’ critique. See Bennett, Andrew, A. Charman and T. Fairfield, “Understanding Bayesianism: Fundamentals for Process Tracers,” *Political Analysis* 30/2 (2022): 298-305 (doi:10.1017/pan.2021.23). In turn, Zaks has replied to Bennett, Charman and Fairfield: Zaks, Sherry, “Return to the Scene of the Crime: Revisiting Process Tracing, Bayesianism, and Murder,” *Political Analysis* 30/2 (2022): 306-310 (doi:10.1017/pan.2021.24).

Checkel, Jeffrey T., "[Process Tracing – Towards a New Research Agenda](#)," Paper presented at the American Political Science Association Annual Convention (October 2021).

Part IV: What's in It for Me?

**Session #7 (1030 – 1200, 1330 - 1600): Process Analytics & You
– Brainstorming Workshop**