

IPSA Antalya Summer School 2025
Case Study and Process Tracing
Tentative Course Syllabus

Course Instructor:

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Course Description:

This course examines the logic and practice of case study research, with a particular emphasis on process tracing in qualitative analysis. It introduces students to the foundational premises of how to identify, test, and refine causal mechanisms operating in historical processes, with the broader goal of constructing valid, historically grounded causal arguments in their own research.

In a nutshell, a case study is an in-depth analysis of a bounded instance—a case—selected not for representativeness alone but for what it can reveal about a larger theoretical puzzle. Its value lies in its capacity to unpack complexity, trace processes over time, and generate or test causal claims that are historically and contextually situated. Process tracing, in turn, enables the researcher to make strong causal inferences by uncovering the sequence and combination of mechanisms that shape variation in outcomes of interest.

The first part of the course covers the strengths and limitations of the case study method, different types of case studies, and strategies of case selection. The second part turns to the inferential logic of process tracing, focusing on its role in theory testing and theory building, with particular attention to counterfactual reasoning and the structure of causal tests.

By the end of the course, students are expected to: (i) read, understand, and critically evaluate academic work that employs case study and process tracing methods; and (ii) design and carry out rigorous research using these methods, while also learning how to navigate common methodological and inferential challenges.

Course Format:

This is a five-day, intensive, and highly interactive advanced-level course, designed for graduate students and early-career researchers seeking to deepen their understanding of qualitative methods. While no formal prerequisites are required, participants are expected to be familiar with basic concepts in social science methodology and to be engaged in their own research projects or proposals. We meet Monday through Friday for four hours each day, with sessions split into two parts: morning lectures and afternoon discussions.

From Monday to Thursday, the mornings will be devoted to lectures introducing key concepts, methods, and debates. In the afternoons, we will hold structured discussions around the assigned readings, focusing on how they connect to core methodological questions and research practice. Friday is reserved for a workshop session, where students have the opportunity to present their own work—whether a research proposal, a research design, or an ongoing project—and receive in-depth, constructive feedback from both the instructor and peers.

Course Schedule:

1st Day (Monday):

- What is a case? What is a case study for?
- Strengths and limitations of case studies
- The logic of causal inference

2nd Day (Tuesday):

- Types of case study designs: single, comparative, nested
- Case selection strategies

3rd Day (Wednesday):

- Understanding Process Tracing: Its strengths and pitfalls
- Theory-testing and Theory-building: Evidence, causal mechanisms and tests

4th Day (Thursday):

- Counterfactual logic of causal reasoning and inference in case study and process tracing.

5th Day (Friday):

- Showcasing exemplary research using process tracing
- Workshop for Student Projects

Core Readings:

- Beach, D., & Pedersen, R. B. (2023). *Process-Tracing Methods: A Practical Guide*, Cambridge University Press.
- Seawright, J. (2016). *Multi-Method Social Science: Combining Qualitative and Quantitative Tools*, Cambridge University Press.
- Trampusch, Christine and Bruno Palier. (2016). "Between X and Y: How Process Tracing Contributes to Opening the Black Box of Causality." *New Political Economy* 21(5):437- 54
- Mahoney, James. 2012. "The Logic of Process Tracing Tests in the Social Sciences." *Sociological Methods & Research* 41(4):570-97.
- Seawright, J. and John Gerring. (2008). "Case Selection Techniques in Case Study Research: A menu of Qualitative and Quantitative Options." *Political Research Quarterly* 61(2): 294-308
- George, A. L., & Bennett, A. (2005). *Case studies and theory development in the social sciences*. MIT Press.