Researchers using qualitative methods, including case studies and comparative case studies, are becoming more self-conscious in enhancing the rigor of their research designs so as to maximize their explanatory leverage with a small number of cases. One aspect of qualitative research that has not received as much attention is the use of primary and secondary source material as data or evidence. This essay explores the potential problems encountered by political scientists as they conduct archival research or rely on secondary source material produced by historians. The essay also suggests guidelines for researchers to minimize the main problems associated with qualitative historical research, namely, investigator bias and unwarranted selectivity in the use of historical source materials. These guidelines should enable advanced undergraduates and graduate students to enhance the quality of their historically minded political science scholarship.

Keywords: qualitative research, historiography, bias, selection

In a recent edition of this journal’s forum on pedagogy in international studies John Odell (2001) nicely illustrated the types of case studies available to students and scholars in political science through a review of their applications in the field of international political economy. Most of these applications were studies of historical episodes, rather than contemporary cases. As a result, students wishing to apply case study methods in their own research are soon confronted with a problem familiar to those who have been conducting independent research for some time. How does one choose from the historical record the materials that will best help one to develop or test theory, or even simply describe a set of events, in a particular case or small set of cases?

The purpose of this essay is to introduce advanced undergraduate and beginning graduate students in political science to historiography, defined as the writing of history based on a selective, critical reading of sources that synthesizes particular bits of information into a narrative description or analysis of a subject.

Author’s note: I want to thank Moises Arce, Steve Walker, and the reviewers and editors of ISP for their insightful comments on an earlier version of this article. I would also like to thank the organizers, instructors, and participants in the first annual Training Institute on Qualitative Research Methods, held January 3–12, 2002, at Arizona State University. The lively discussion and debate that occurred during the Institute prompted me to write this article.
In particular, this essay will focus on the analysis of primary and secondary sources for use in qualitative international relations research. It offers a pragmatic set of guidelines to help researchers minimize the effects of the most notorious problems that persistently face qualitative historical analysis, namely, investigator bias and unwarranted selectivity in the use of source materials.

The essay is geared to advanced undergraduates and beginning graduate students for several reasons. First, these students may not have yet had any instruction in method whatsoever. Second, if they have had some methods training, it is far more likely to be in quantitative as opposed to qualitative methods. Finally, even if qualitative methods are discussed, it is still unusual to spend much time on the interpretation and use of historical source material. These observations are troubling, since most of these students will be instinctively drawn to qualitative analyses of historical cases when assigned a seminar paper. The goal of this essay is to serve as a resource for these students in combination with essays on qualitative methods like Odell’s. Ultimately, by learning more about qualitative methods and the use of evidence from the historical record, students will produce higher quality research, learn more from their research experience, and provide their professors with interesting food for thought.

The article begins with a discussion of the main features associated with qualitative historical analysis in international relations. Unwarranted selectivity and investigator bias are then introduced as two potential problems facing historically minded political scientists as they choose primary and secondary sources of documentary evidence. The potential effects of these problems and guidelines for mitigating their disruptive effects are then discussed for both primary and secondary sources. The article concludes with some examples of qualitative historical analysis that make judicious use of both types of source material.

Qualitative Historical Analysis

The phrase “qualitative historical analysis” denotes a methodological approach that employs qualitative instead of quantitative measurement and the use of primary historical documents or historians’ interpretations thereof in service of theory development and testing. This phrase is not meant to delineate a new methodological approach to the study of international relations, but rather to highlight features common to many long-standing research traditions in the field. As the labels indicate, an interest in qualitative methods suggests an examination of the presence or absence of certain qualities or attributes in some phenomenon of interest, as opposed to quantitative methods, which generally measure the degree to which an attribute is present. This distinction is often made with reference to the levels of measurement, which would consider nominal and ordinal measures to be qualitative, and interval and ratio measures to be quantitative.\(^1\) However, quantitative techniques have been developed to analyze nominal- and ordinal-level data, so often the choice between qualitative and quantitative techniques becomes a matter of taste. Qualitative researchers generally argue that operationalizing certain concepts according to a fixed set of rules that assigns a meaningful numeric representation to a phenomenon may be difficult or impossible, but that most reasonable people would agree when an instance of the phenomenon is observed. Qualitative methods are therefore often used when the concepts to be studied are more amenable to labeling by words rather than numbers.

Qualitative analyses are usually performed on a small number of cases, or perhaps even a single case, whereas the hallmark of quantitative methods is the

\(^1\) Consult a research methods textbook such as Babbie (2002:129–133), or Johnson, Joslyn, and Reynolds (2001:92–95) for more information on the levels of measurement.
statistical analysis of a large number of cases coded on a variety of attributes. In international relations a case is often a country, or it may be a dyadic pair of countries, or a crisis, war, or some other event. As Odell (2001:162) describes it, a case is “a single instance of an event or phenomenon.” Ragin (1992:1) reminds us that these instances must be “similar enough and separate enough to permit treating them as comparable instances of the same general phenomenon.” It is also important to recall that cases always comprise many observations, such as a single country with observations on some variable of interest over time. Narrative analysis of some form is often used to connect these observations in qualitative analyses, whether the stated method is explicitly narrative-based or not. Numbers may be used in qualitative analysis for illustrative or evidentiary purposes, yet the weight of the causal explanation lies in the verbal presentation of the argument.

The distinction between qualitative and quantitative methods may be imprecise as many phenomena are amenable to both types of analyses. In practice, methods such as case studies (Eckstein, 1975; George, 1979), the comparative method and its extensions (Lijphart, 1971; Ragin, 1987; Collier, 1993; Mahoney, 1999), process tracing (George and McKeown, 1985), narrative (Mahoney, 1999, 2000a) and its “analytic” form employing game theory (Bates et al., 1998), investigations of path dependence (Mahoney, 2000b; Pierson, 2000), counterfactual analysis (Tetlock and Belkin, 1996), the elaboration of causal mechanisms (Hedstrom and Swedberg, eds., 1998), and fuzzy set analysis (Ragin, 2000) all fall under the rubric of qualitative analysis for the purposes of this essay. As with Odell’s (2001:162) discussion of case studies, this article addresses itself primarily to practitioners of “pragmatic positivism.” Genealogy, deconstruction, or other methods of analysis based on literary criticism also use historical source material, but since they operate from a different epistemological standpoint they are not discussed here.2

History can be used for a variety of reasons in the conduct of qualitative analysis, but scholars of international relations generally turn to history, and the work of historians, for “facts” used in description and explanation. In our search for facts we must always remember that their meaning is never objectively obvious—facts never speak for themselves. As Levy (2001:51) states, it is “the conventional wisdom in both history and political science that all empirical observations are filtered through a priori mental frameworks, that all facts are ‘theory laden.’” Levy (2001:51) continues this line of reasoning by recalling an analogy originally made by E. H. Carr, a historian that many political scientists claim as one of their own, between facts and fish swimming in the ocean. What the fisherman catches depends on chance, the part of the ocean he fishes in, and what kind of tackle he uses, the latter two depending entirely upon what kind of fish he is looking to catch.3 The moral of the story is that the facts we find are dependent upon the facts we seek based upon our implicit or explicit theoretical orientation. We often forget this lesson in political science.

What many political scientists will seek in their examination of primary and secondary source materials is to home in on what Topolski (1999:200–201) labels “basic information.” Basic information refers to statements that are relatively free of interpretation, hence they are accorded a relatively high level of consensus on the part of scholars. These kinds of statements are probably limited to well-known events, and would include things like “George W. Bush became president of the U.S. on January 20, 2001,” or “Germany invaded Poland in 1939.” These kinds of basic information are also what Bailyn (1982) refers to as manifest events. Manifest events refer to those events that contemporaries were clearly aware of as they occurred, even if their underlying causes were obscured from

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2 See Der Derian and Shapiro (1989) for an introduction to these topics in the study of international relations.

3 The analogy between facts and fish is found in Carr (1964:23).
their understanding. On the other hand, latent events refer to events that contemporaries were not fully aware of as they happened. It is only in retrospect that we can speak clearly of latent events such as the impact of the Industrial Revolution, or long cycles in the global political economy, or of changes in demography or technology. It is difficult for any contemporary to understand the “big picture” when he is stuck in the middle of history. According to Bailyn, the integration of manifest and latent events is the source of most historiographical disputes as the origins, causes, and consequences of manifest events—the “facts”—take on different interpretations in light of revisions in the understanding of concurrent latent events.

The pragmatic positivist response to this dilemma about facts is that although “observations are inevitably theory-laden they are not theory-determined” (Ray and Russett, 1996). Haber, Kennedy, and Krasner (1997:37) similarly suggest that “truth resides ultimately in the facts (theory laden though they may be), not in the eye of the beholder.” These statements by well-known political scientists and historians should not suggest a lack of controversy over the interpretation of facts. Pelz (2001:103) concurs with his fellow historians Bailyn and Gottschalk that most historical controversies are not about the data or facts per se, but rather “what the basic forces are that operate in history and how they operate.”

The international historian Paul Schroeder (1997:68–69) also suggests that no matter how much historical disputes “seem to revolve around particular discrete facts,” they are really disputes over interpretation and judgment of the significance of the facts. As Gaddis (2001:308) argues, “there is no such thing as a definitive account of any historical episode. Revision in history is like restaging in theater: it is what the business is all about.”

Haber, Kennedy, and Krasner (1997:36) point out that even large quantitative data sets like the Correlates of War (COW) were constructed based in part on historians’ interpretations of manifest and latent events. As Singer (1965) said of his work on the COW project, data are “made” rather than collected. However, once these data sets become the standard for quantitative analysis in the discipline they seem to take on an air of objectivity and neutrality, as we forget that the facts included in the data set are based on historians’ interpretations. These quantitative analyses are thus one step further removed from historical sources than their qualitative counterparts. As a result, qualitative researchers have spent far more time agonizing over the proper use of primary and secondary historical source materials than their quantitative counterparts.

As we will see when we begin to explore the use of primary and secondary sources, it is the interpretation and judgments based on historical “facts” that cause qualitative researchers so much angst. What historians take to be the normal course of investigation, the continuous revision of our understanding of the past, political scientists find troubling as they seek definitive proof that their theories explain the past and offer the potential of predicting the future. Political scientists should thus consider what kinds of facts they need from the historical record as they begin their research. You may be on relatively safe ground if you are looking for simple descriptions of manifest events, or basic information. However, it is much more likely that as a political scientist you will be combining both manifest and latent events taken from primary and secondary sources to create a broader sense of explanation or understanding.

Therefore, once you have chosen your research question, and the particular qualitative method you will use to answer it, the next step in the research process is to select your historical source materials. This is an absolutely crucial step in your analysis as the historical record becomes your source of data, your evidence of manifest

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4 The original statement is found in Gottschalk (1963:208).
and latent events. Unfortunately, as our discussion of “facts” has revealed, the selection of historical source material can produce controversy about your judgments concerning the interpretation and meaning of facts, but there are pragmatic guidelines that can help to mitigate these problems. The following section introduces you to the main problems faced by qualitative researchers as they begin to choose source materials: unwarranted selectivity and investigator bias.

The Selection of Source Materials

The selection of source materials for a research project always incurs the potential for claims of unwarranted selectivity and investigator bias. This is an unavoidable part of qualitative research, and in fact, all studies in the social sciences should be carefully scrutinized for these problems. One of a researcher’s main goals should be to demonstrate that the choice of primary and secondary source materials was made to minimize the potential adverse effects of selectivity and bias. If a researcher fails to do this, he or she is subject to the criticism described by Odell (2001:164) in his discussion of the disciplined interpretive case study.

Most events are consistent with more than one interpretation. One general risk of this method is selective reconstruction of the event to support a favored theory by underlaying evidence inconsistent with the theory or supporting an alternative.

This general problem achieved prominence in an influential article by Ian Lustick (1996:605) in which he posed the question that most historically minded international relations and comparative scholars are confronted with in their research daily: “How are social scientists, intent on using historical episodes to test their theories or to elaborate their typologies, to choose among differing accounts of the past?” As Lustick elaborates, historians do not produce theoretically neutral background narratives from which objective facts can be mined for the developing and testing of theories in political science. Lustick examined the work of well-known scholars, such as Barrington Moore (1966), to demonstrate that what we think we know about history through the use of secondary sources is actually a collection of often contradictory accounts based on historians’ personal commitments, “presentist” political concerns, and methodological choices about source materials. He describes this selective use of historians’ work as “selection bias.”

According to Collier and Mahoney (1996:58–59), selection bias occurs when “some form of selection process in either the design of the study or the real-world phenomena under investigation results in inferences that suffer from systematic error.” Selection bias can arise under several circumstances: when individuals self-select into the categories of an explanatory variable; when the values of the explanatory variables are affected by the values of the dependent variable at an earlier point in time; and when cases have been deliberately selected on the extreme values of the dependent variable. Lustick (1996:606) suggests that a political scientist’s decision about which particular historical monograph to rely on in testing theories or building typologies is a form of selection bias. Although many political scientists have uncritically accepted Lustick’s diagnosis (e.g., Elman and Elman, 1997, 2001; Larson, 2001), the problem is not appropriately described as selection bias.5 The use of historical monographs

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5 See Geddes (1990), King, Keohane, and Verba (1994), contributors to the American Political Science Review symposium on “The Qualitative-Quantitative Disputation” (June 1995), Collier and Mahoney (1996), Dion (1998), and various chapters in Brady and Collier (forthcoming) for a discussion of selection bias and its implications for small-N research.
does not fall into any of Collier and Mahoney’s categories. However, all historical research involves some degree of selectivity, whether of primary or secondary source material, as well as the potential for bias. The remedy to these problems that allows us to do reputable historical research is to justify the selection of materials, and minimize the various sorts of bias that selection inevitably entails. The following section focuses on strategies to deal with selectivity and bias in a political scientist’s investigation of primary sources.

Primary Sources

Primary sources refer to the original source material on an event, including all evidence contemporary to the event. Secondary sources refer to everything that has been written about the event subsequent to that time. This distinction can be somewhat fuzzy in practice. How contemporaneous must an account of an event be in order to be considered primary? Certainly diplomatic notes or letters written during a crisis would be considered primary, but what about an account of the same crisis written twenty or thirty years later by one or both of the participants as part of their autobiographies? In practice, most historians seem to prefer sources that are as close to the event in time and place as possible—some sources are more primary than other sources.

An enormous amount of published and unpublished, public and private primary source materials are contained in government and private archives, libraries, and individual collections around the world. Students of international politics are most likely to encounter published public and private documents available in their own college or university library. These sources could include chronicles, memoirs, diaries, memos, letters, newspapers, United Nations and other international organization documents, official U.S. government documents and publications, and transcripts of speeches. Students might have access to special collections of unpublished materials documenting a particular individual’s life, or perhaps a collection put together by an individual in some area of particular interest. If a U.S. presidential library is close at hand, one can access a wealth of information about U.S. domestic politics and foreign affairs, both published and unpublished, from the time the president served in office. These are just a few of the primary sources available to students as they begin their seminar paper or dissertation prospectus.6

The first thing to realize as you begin to select your primary sources is that in many ways they have selected you. For example, you are probably using sources that are readily available to you, unless you have the time and money to travel to a particular repository. You may be using sources that have been preserved by some person or organization for some purpose, perhaps as propaganda or as a self-serving account of events. You might be using sources that survived through time quite by accident, while other equally important sources may have perished. Further, some of the sources may be in a language unfamiliar to you, requiring interpretation if you are to use them. Finally, your access may be restricted in the case of special collections, which limits your ability to get the materials you need in a timely manner. Therefore, of all the primary sources that might be pertinent to your research question, you are automatically dealing with a smaller group that may already have some inherent bias. As Elman and Elman (2001:29) remind us, “historians know that there are likely to be other documents, indeed whole collections of papers, that they have not seen. Accordingly, they are inclined to view their results as the uncertain product of an incomplete evidentiary record.” In reality, the “smaller” group available to you may actually still entail too large

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6 Van Evera (1997) is a valuable source of practical advice on both case studies and historically oriented dissertation research.
a number of documents for you to examine in any detail, requiring even further selectivity in the primary sources you ultimately use for your research. Judgments or inferences made based on the evidence contained in your selection of primary sources should be presented in such a way as to acknowledge the potential impact of this selectivity.

Once you have located a group of primary sources you believe are pertinent to your research question, you can then move on to evaluating the sources. To evaluate a document, a professional historian would first subject it to external criticism, meaning an examination of its authenticity. In most cases, the possibility of a forged, faked, or otherwise inauthentic document is probably remote. However, when something seems amiss in the authorship, time period, style, or origin of a document, professional historians will attempt to uncover its past. This kind of detective work is probably beyond the skills of most undergraduate and graduate students. However, if something suspicious shows up in a primary source, it would be unwise to rely on it for your understanding of an event. Let us assume for simplicity’s sake that the primary source documents you are dealing with are genuine. The next step in the evaluation of a document is internal criticism, or the interpretation of the document.

Assuming that its language is familiar to you, the main question to ask of any document is whether it is a reliable account of an event or not. According to Larson (2001:343):

It is important to interpret documents within their historic, situational, and communication contexts. We need to understand the purpose of a document and the events leading up to it in order to interpret its meaning correctly. In his book on propaganda analysis, George recommends applying the formula: who said what to whom under what circumstances and with what purpose.

George’s (1973:37–44) dictum requires that each document be evaluated relative to what is known about the actors, their intentions, their interactions, and the situation they found themselves in. Larson (2001:348) suggests turning to newspapers as a useful aid in this process. Newspapers allow the construction of a chronology of events that are unfiltered through later interpretations. An accurate chronology is crucial because the sequence of events tells us how the actors were responding to each other and the situation. If some sort of bias is detected in the document, then even that is useful information. It may explain misperceptions held by government officials that led to ill-conceived foreign policy, or concerted efforts to sway public opinion, or it may project a certain kind of image to allies or enemies. Interesting information may be gleaned from public documents about bureaucratic politics, especially when private autobiographical accounts differ from the official party line. Often silences or inconsistencies concerning known events or actors in autobiographies or official chronicles may speak volumes.7

If possible, consult a variety of types of primary sources to get at the event in question. Relying exclusively on autobiographical accounts would bias your interpretation in favor of the way that the participants viewed the situation. How was the event reported in the newspapers, and what other contemporaneous accounts can you find? By triangulating with different sources of evidence to maximize your archival coverage you should be able to reveal inaccuracies or biases in the individual sources, and ultimately construct a more accurate representation of history.

Creating that representation itself is as much an art as a science, involving aesthetic judgments about the organization of historical material (Elman and

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7 See Diebel (2002) for a discussion of the use of memoirs in teaching and research.
Despite the “revival of narrative” heralded by Stone (1979), and an array of recent writing on the subject (e.g., Griffin, 1993; Kiser, 1996; Mahoney, 1999), a handbook on how to construct a narrative is yet to be authored. George (1997:49) has recently argued that historians should “produce an authoritative, detailed analysis of the problems associated with making scholarly use of archival sources,” which would be “invaluable in training political scientists as well as young historians.” Currently, the best method of learning how to use primary source material in constructing a narrative is to mimic the work of respected historians and political scientists.

George (1997:48–49) recommends political scientists take “the cure of history” by collaborating with historians, or at least consulting historians for their input on the best sources of archival materials and secondary publications before conducting research. Deborah Larson, one of Alexander George’s former students, is even more insistent in her recommendation that political scientists conduct their own archival research. Larson (2001:337–343) strongly agrees with Lustick’s (1996) diagnosis of the problem of political scientists uncritically using secondary sources produced by historians. She suggests that by doing our own archival research, we avoid the selectivity inherent in the historians’ work, the possibility that hindsight bias might cause us to overestimate the retrospective probability of an event’s occurrence, and we are able to judge for ourselves between competing interpretations of events. Further, since political scientists and historians approach their subject matter with different types of research questions, much of the data needed by political scientists may not be present in these secondary sources. Archival research is thus necessary to fill in the data that may be missing from secondary sources. The search for missing data from primary sources is probably beyond most undergraduates’ capabilities, but graduate students working on their dissertations should consider trips to repositories that may contain previously unexamined primary source material that can add to both political scientists’ and historians’ understandings of an event.

Levy (2001:60) is not entirely convinced of the efficacy of demanding that political scientists engage in their own primary research. In particular, given the amount of data political scientists generally need to test their theories, it may be impossible for a single individual to adequately investigate all of the relevant primary sources—even if the subject is a single case. If the requirements of good archival research are expanded to include the archives from different countries, such that the views of all of the participants in an international event are represented adequately, the problem is magnified even further. This problem is not confined to political science; as the historical sociologist Theda Skocpol (1984:382) has argued, “a dogmatic insistence on redoing primary research for every investigation would be disastrous; it would rule out most comparative historical research.” Levy (2001:61) is also not convinced that the selectivity inherent in using secondary sources is any more problematic than the selectivity of an individual working in the archives. The same types of biases are likely to result in both situations.

The controversy between Levy and Larson demonstrates the immense importance of justifying your selection of documentary evidence, whether from primary or secondary sources. Primary sources are often seen as superior to secondary sources, yet access to primary sources may come at great expense in terms of time and money that most professors will not have, let alone graduate and undergraduate students conducting historical research for the first time. The key to your use of primary sources is to consider the ways that the select group of documents you include as evidence may (mis)represent the event you are discussing, and how they may be perceived by other scholars as doing so. The general guidelines for minimizing the effects of selectivity and bias are summarized in Table 1. Unfortunately, the difficulty posed by selectivity and bias only
increases as political scientists move from examining primary sources to relying on secondary source material produced by historians. The next section examines this controversy and offers some guidelines to minimizing the problems of selectivity and bias in the use of secondary sources.

Secondary Sources

Much of the recent discussion between historians and political scientists concerning the choice of source materials has revolved around the different purposes of the two disciplines (e.g., Elman and Elman, 1997, 2001). Political science generally rewards nomothetic, or generalizable claims, whereas history tends to reward idiographic, or more specific claims. As a result, Haber, Kennedy, and Krasner (1997:42–43) note that historians base their conclusions on primary sources, while political scientists tend to use a wider array of source material including the frequent reliance on monographs produced by historians. Levy’s reaction to Larson’s call for more archival work by political scientists, in combination with our own disciplinary requirements, suggests a closer examination of our use of secondary sources. The remainder of this section outlines a variety of potential biases and selection effects introduced through political scientists’ reliance on historians as if they were the “hewers-of-wood and the drawers-of-water” providing detailed case studies upon which political scientists might build “grand explanatory structures” (Hunt, 1992:116).

Lustick’s (1996) discussion of “selection bias” actually expresses a concern about two different problems from the perspective of political scientists drawing on secondary sources—bias and selectivity. The first concern is the bias of the historian who may draw on some primary sources to the exclusion of others, such that he produces a distorted account of some historical event. The second concern is the selection effects introduced by the political scientist when she chooses to focus on a particular historian’s work and consciously or unconsciously excludes others. The worst-case scenario for Lustick, what he seems to mean when he describes “selection bias,” is when these two problems are conjoined. In this scenario a political scientist with a particular theoretical and conceptual predisposition purposefully selects certain historians who share this bias, and whose work is already tainted as such leading to a misleading historical account, and therefore mistaken confirmation of the political scientist’s theory. The next few sections examine bias and selectivity and provide pragmatic guidelines to minimize the problems they pose for historical research using secondary sources.

Bias

Bias lurking in the monographs produced by historians is a potential problem for political scientists who would use these works as secondary sources of evi-
dence for their own studies. McCullagh (2000) describes several ways in which historical research can be biased. A historian may misinterpret the evidence, thereby drawing incorrect inferences about past events. A historian may leave out important facts about the event, such that it is an unfair or unbalanced account. A historian may employ facts that are known to be false in light of the available evidence. Finally, a historian may omit important causes in a causal explanation of some event, or what political scientists would refer to as “omitted variable bias,” such that a misleading account is produced. These potential sources of bias lead to the first lesson for a political scientist using secondary sources: never rely on a single historian’s account of an event. Always cross-reference with other historians working within the same historiographical tradition, or with historians working within different traditions.

All of the aforementioned forms of bias may be lurking in a historical account charged with “presentism,” or the construction of Whig history. Presentism and whiggishness refer to descriptions or analyses of the past based on the vantage point of the present. The charge of presentism, or Whig history, has been the hobgoblin of historiography since Butterfield (1931) first described the phenomenon. As Mayr (1990) points out, no two historians would ever agree on what exactly is whiggish, but everyone is afraid of having that label attached to their own work. Whig history, or presentism, may mean that the present is seen as an inevitable consequence of past events, that current events always demonstrate the march of progress over time, or that modern historians are making unfair value judgments about earlier historians’ work or theories, especially when important facts are omitted to make those historians or theories look flawed in retrospect. One result of the fear of the Whig history label is that many historians have chosen to stick to a “deadly, purely descriptive exercise of reporting facts” (Mayr, 1990:301). The maxim of these historians is to stay as close to the primary documents as possible. Mayr (1990:309) ultimately rejects the notion that it is incorrect to view the past based on the level of understanding in the present, as long as historians avoid the “well-known faults of bias, chauvinism, falsifications of priority, and finalistic interpretations.”

Larson (2001:339–340) draws explicit attention to the problem of presentism in her description of the “hindsight bias” or the “knew-it-all-along” effect. She cites experimental work that demonstrates that individuals always overestimate the retrospective probability of an event. Further, people tend to be unaware of the effects that knowledge of the outcome has on the way we remember and reconstruct the past. For example, in hindsight the end of the Cold War “seems inevitable, if not overdetermined, although no one predicted it” (Larson, 2001:340). As we have seen, her solution is for political scientists to conduct more archival research such that we can reconstruct past situations based on how people in the past saw them. The use of primary sources, however, is clearly not enough to ward off this criticism, as demonstrated by historians’ frequent charges of presentism in each other’s work.

Therefore, the second lesson for political scientists using secondary sources is to look for indicators of implicit or explicit presentism in a historian’s monograph. A concern with the past based on the present is not in and of itself a problem. Many political scientists and historians are regularly motivated to study the past based on some problem in the present (e.g., Craig, 1983; Puchala, 1995; Haber, Kennedy, and Krasner, 1997), yet a failure to take into account contingency and chance in the way historical events unfolded to produce the present may indicate a biased view of history. A third lesson, related to the second, is to be wary of historians claiming to be simply reporting the facts. As we know from our discussion of facts, all facts are interpretations based on implicit or explicit theories. A historian claiming to report history “as it really was” is probably relying on some implicit theory or theories that a careful reader must uncover.
Elman and Elman (1997:9) also point out that political scientists and historians are subject to similar cultural, disciplinary, and financial influences on their research. Certain topics or methods are deemed more important in our respective disciplines at different points in time, therefore academics who want to succeed will be drawn to them. Some topics will be determined by present problems and backed by government funding, therefore drawing academics to those questions. Finally, academics often move in and out of public service, which may shape their research questions, as well as the conclusions they draw from their research. Lebow (2001:116) succinctly summarizes these potential sources of bias in his statement that “research agendas, especially in history and social science, reflect political, institutional, and personal agendas.” Scholars in international relations are aware of this problem. Jorgensen (2001:11), for example, recommends examining the political culture of the country or region within which the scholar works, the organizational culture of government bureaucracies and university systems, and the “habits, attitudes, and professional discourse” within the discipline as indicators of other sources of influence and bias in academics’ work.8 Similarly, historians create theories of historiography, known as “historics,” in the attempt to explain how scholars’ views of the social world and their resulting scholarship are formed (e.g., Megill, 1994).

The lesson on how to deal with the influence of political, organizational, and disciplinary culture is difficult to draw in practice. This is probably beyond an undergraduate’s reach, but graduate students may begin to have a sense of these effects within the discipline of political science. However, only historians will have a good sense of these influences within their discipline. The fourth lesson is to be aware of these potential influences as you encounter the work of particular historians and political scientists whose reputations precede them. Henry Kissinger, for example, is a well-known political scientist whose work is historical, and probably affected not only by his government service in the U.S. but by his experiences growing up in pre–World War II Germany, his education at Harvard, and so on (Isaacson, 1992). His political realist version of history is well known among both historians and political scientists. However, scholars with well-known reputations like Kissinger are probably the exception. Most undergraduates and graduate students, and even professors, may not know the intellectual heritage associated with each scholar, especially outside their discipline.

With so many potential sources of bias in historians’ work, Elman and Elman (2001:29) have argued that historians would benefit from “a more self-conscious definition and evaluation of their theoretical preconceptions.” There is some sense in which historians tend to downplay their own theoretical preconceptions in their work; that is, explicitly theoretical or “total” history, on the order of Toynbee, has been shunned in modern historiography.9 However, as Lebow (2001:117) explains, “it is process, not motive” that separates good and bad historical scholarship. So what exactly is the process that historians follow to create the secondary sources that political scientists rely upon?

Historians make synoptic judgments, meaning “a broad interpretation of a development based on examining it from different angles to determine how it came to be, what it means, and what understanding of it best integrates the available evidence” (Schroeder, 1997:68). Gaddis (2001:306) elaborates by suggesting that historians conduct thought experiments to re-create realities they cannot directly experience in order to match their mental reconstructions of past events with the best available evidence. Schroeder (1997:69) confirms the

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8 Thies (2002) suggests that investigator bias may result from an even more basic need—that of securing a social identity within a community of researchers.

importance of the bounds that evidence places on such imagination by employing an analogy to a physician’s diagnosis of a patient demonstrating symptoms of a physical ailment. Gaddis (2001:305–309), drawing on Goldthorpe (1991), makes a similar analogy to the way other nonreplicable sciences “fit” their representations of the past to reality. He argues that just like paleontologists or geologists, historians’ synoptic judgments must fit together what evidence remains from original sources, what judgments they make of these remains, and what they can bring their colleagues in the research community to accept.

The fifth lesson is that while historians make inferences about the past, often imagining what must have occurred, they are still bound by the available evidence. New evidence uncovered by subsequent historians, or perhaps in your own archival work, may call into question previous historical accounts. New evidence may correct the biases identified by McCullagh (2000), including misinterpretation, the omission of important facts, the use of facts that turn out to be false, and the omission of important causes. Therefore, in reviewing secondary sources, start with the most recent contributions and work backwards. Recent articles and monographs will highlight “facts” that have stood the test of time, as well as revisions to prior accounts. The main guidelines for minimizing the impact of bias derived from the use of historians’ monographs are summarized in Table 2. The next section explores the problems posed by selectivity in the use of secondary sources.

Selectivity

That historians are necessarily selective when drawing upon archival evidence to make their synoptic judgments about events should come as no surprise given our previous discussions of primary source materials. However, the impact of selection upon the findings from a research project is magnified when a political scientist selects certain historical monographs and not others, because the historians who wrote the monographs have already engaged in a selection process by choosing some primary sources to the exclusion of others. The main question for political scientists to consider is how the historians’ biases and resulting selectivity affect our own choices about the use of their work as secondary source material in building and testing theories.

The most likely determinant of the selection of secondary source material by a political scientist is the particular theoretical tradition she is working within, and her implicit or explicit desire to demonstrate the applicability and veracity of the theory. In order to gain some insight into this problem it is useful to look at how historians understand political scientists’ use of theory as a guide to evidence. Consider Edward Ingram’s (1997:55–56) take on the differences in the use of theory between the two disciplines.

For the political scientist, a theory is often redefined to remove perceived blemishes, then proved using case studies. . . . Historians read the theory with interest

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Table 2. Guidelines on Minimizing the Effects of Bias in the Use of Secondary Sources</th>
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<td>• Never rely on a single historian’s account of an event.</td>
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<td>• Be aware of implicit or explicit presentism in a historian’s monograph.</td>
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<td>• Be wary of historians claiming to simply be reporting the facts.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Be aware of the potential influences of political, organizational, and disciplinary culture on a historian’s work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Start your inquiry into secondary sources with the most recent contributions to a subject and work backwards through the literature to see which historical “facts” have stood the test of time.</td>
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and find it useful although it often seems closed and self-referential: an alternative to the evidence rather than a way of making more of it or of creating new varieties. They are puzzled, however, by the gap between the rigor of the theory and the paucity of the examples. Why these cases? And why no explanation for leaving out dozens of others? The answer is obvious. The cases are not repeatable experiments designed to test a theory: they are illustrations of a proposition taken to be sound.

Gaddis’s (2001:301–302) understanding of this distinction is much the same.

We think it important to keep an open mind, and we see theory—at least theory that purports to account for history rather than simply reflecting history—as more often than not closing minds.

Ingram (1997) is also puzzled by political scientists’ implicit claims to a “timeless” world, and the way in which they engage in what Collier and Mahon (1993) would call “conceptual stretching,” by transporting modern concepts like the state back to a time when no such entity existed. Schroeder (1997) worries about the “fit or misfit” between historians’ accounts of events and what political scientists do with those accounts, although he suggests that most political scientists seem to try to use secondary sources responsibly.

However, Schroeder (1997:71) does describe certain practices of political scientists as “misuses” of history.10 There are the “garden variety” misuses of history based on poor historical knowledge or research such as “inaccurate statements, ignorance of vital facts, untenable interpretations, and so on.” Even worse in his estimation is when political scientists make these mistakes by relying on the work of other political scientists instead of historians, a problem akin to “brewing tea from already used tea bags.” And finally, when political scientists misapply works of history by failing to understand or ignoring the limits of the historical material they are working with and consequently “turn historical facts and data into something they are not.”

This last point is especially troubling to historians, as they see political scientists turning stylized facts they extract from historians’ work into absolute facts for their own purposes. Recall from our earlier discussion of facts, the sense among historians that every fact is already a theory. Once you extract a “fact” from its place in a historical narrative, it loses its meaning, and certainly cannot be transported into a different theoretical tale and carry the same explanatory weight. Ultimately, political scientists’ use of “facts” from secondary sources is unconvincing to some historians. As Ingram (1997:56) explains, historians are not “persuaded that a cluster of lightly researched, detached—at best semidetached—cases, often written up by different scholars, is likely to advance the argument.” Even the political scientist William Wohlforth (2001:356) expresses similar discontent with his colleagues who “expend immense intellectual effort to adopt some laudable scientific practices—logical rigor, clarity, falsifiability—but often with little regard for the nature and limits of historical evidence.”

This discussion highlights a number of potential problems with political scientists’ use of secondary historical materials, which are summarized in Table 3.

10 For examples of many of these problems, see Schroeder’s (1994) analysis of neorealists’ use of history.
theoretical propositions are truly generalizable. The result may be a sloppy, superficial use of secondary sources that belies little true knowledge of the case in question. The lesson for both of these problems is to get to know your case(s) well. This may mean that instead of three superficial case studies, you concentrate on one well-researched case.

A third problem is the failure to recognize the limits of historical evidence. Political scientists on a fact hunt may extract descriptions or explanations from secondary sources without taking into account the context provided by the historian. The lesson is to be careful about the “facts” you are culling from secondary sources. A fourth, and related, problem is the perception that political scientists live in a timeless world in which concepts travel easily back and forth through the years. When looking for facts about “states,” or “hegemons,” or any other concept in political science, one must be careful about specifying scope conditions. Historians’ accounts are unlikely to use concepts in a transhistorical manner as we often do in political science, therefore facts we might draw from historically grounded accounts may be misleading when counted as evidence for our timeless propositions.

Finally, and most troubling for qualitative historical analysis in political science, there is an assertion among historians that in political science, theory “testing” is really just an illustration of a preexisting belief of the scholar. To guard against this perception, political scientists should clearly lay out the theory and its testable propositions, analyze the case to see what evidence from the secondary record contradicts as well as supports those propositions, all the while weighing that evidence in an up-front and open manner. Historians believe, and it appears to be fairly common practice, that political scientists stylize the theory, then stylize the “facts” to fit the theory, such that the result is a closed circle. The lesson should be to make available all of the evidence to the reader, make your judgment about how the evidence fits with the theoretical propositions, yet exercise some humility about the possibility that your judgments may be wrong.

### Other Approaches to Minimizing Bias and Selectivity

The problems posed by bias and selectivity in the use of primary and secondary sources are daunting for both history and political science, especially when political scientists borrow from historians. Given that the problems posed by bias and selectivity can only be minimized, never eliminated, how should political scientists proceed in their use of historical source material? Up to this point, this article has provided some general pragmatic guidelines for dealing with the problems of bias and selectivity as you encounter primary and secondary sources. However, more specific (and more complicated) approaches to these problems have been offered in the literature. In Lustick’s (1996) aforementioned article on “selection bias,” he directs historically minded social scientists to explicitly pay attention to historiography in the selection of source material. After admitting his own early failings in this regard, Lustick (1996:615–616) offers four specific approaches for dealing with the problem of “selection bias” in qualitative historical analysis, which are potential avenues for more advanced students to follow.
The first suggestion is to “be true to your school” by identifying one school of historiography that you will stick with as the historical record against which you will test your theories. This would require political scientists to become familiar with general trends in historiography, as well as developments in particular areas of historical inquiry.¹¹ Many areas of diplomatic history are fairly well documented with regard to historiographical trends. For example, U.S. diplomatic history as it has moved through its nationalist, progressive, revisionist, post-revisionist, and perhaps international history phases is outlined in readily accessible formats, such as Hogan and Patterson (1991), Combs (1983), and DeConde (1976), and new developments appear in regular symposiums in the journal *Diplomatic History*.

There are several problems with this approach. First, not all areas of historical inquiry have readily accessible documentation of historiographical trends. This problem can probably be overcome through extensive reading of secondary sources. Historians, probably more than political scientists, build on each other’s work through Popper’s method of “conjecture and refutation”; therefore particular schools of thought and their adherents are often identified by scholars as they confront other historical accounts. Pragmatically speaking, begin with the more recent sources and work backwards through the references, as the refutations tend to sharply delineate the scholars whose conjectures they are reacting against. A second problem is that even if a researcher is very careful to lay out the theoretical commitments that come with a particular school of historiography, this suggestion seems to directly contradict the spirit of Lustick’s argument that you should not select a series of histories that are mutually supportive, as well as supportive of your own claims. This practice runs the risk of confirming historians’ suspicions about our tautological use of theory and evidence. You may cite a historian or group of historians as corroboration for the theoretical perspective you have taken, but you probably cannot test a set of hypotheses derived from a theory with that same historical source. However, this seems to be fairly standard practice in qualitative historical analysis in political science because once you find a historiographical tradition that focuses on the same actors, processes, and events that interest you it seems illogical to switch to another tradition that may not have the same focus.

Lustick’s second suggestion is to examine a particular school of historiography over an extended period of time, and draw as evidence those claims that stand the test of time within the school of thought. This suggestion is probably what adherents to the first recommendation are likely to do in their research. The added value in the second suggestion is the supposed ability to weed out historians’ personal biases over time. It is subject to the same problems as mentioned with the first suggestion.

Lustick’s third suggestion is to “triangulate” by using the interpretations of historians from different historiographical schools. The first problem with this approach, as Lustick notes, is that it may be exceedingly difficult as different historiographical schools will use different theories and concepts, and often focus on different actors, processes, or structures. If this approach involves a focus on different latent events, then you will probably end up creating a very complicated multi-causal, multi-level explanation of some event. You may find yourself in a situation where the unit of analysis is sometimes the state, class, or even the world system, and the latent events are sometimes shifts in the balance of military power, technological revolutions, or economic forces. A second problem with this suggestion is the enormous proliferation of historiographical schools of inquiry in the last few decades. A full-time scholar or student of political

¹¹ Iggers (1997) and Wilson (1999) are accessible introductions to general historiographical trends.
science would probably get lost trying to keep up with the enormous proliferation in historical writing required to meet this recommendation.

Lustick’s final suggestion is that social scientists engage in “explicit triage” by using their own judgment about historians’ accounts to pick and choose among various historiographical interpretations of events. Such an account would explicitly footnote the sources of alternative interpretations such that the reader could investigate the differences in opinion. Larson’s (2001) response is to suggest that political scientists do their own archival work in order to select from competing schools of thought. This suggestion is also subject to the same problems mentioned in the discussion of triangulation.

Lustick’s (1996) recommendations on dealing with bias and selectivity are probably too complicated for most undergraduates to follow in a self-conscious manner. Graduate students are more likely to have the ability to pursue one of his approaches, yet each approach still has significant drawbacks that leave your scholarship open to criticisms of unwarranted selectivity and investigator bias. The simple recommendations on minimizing bias and selectivity in the use of primary and secondary sources as summarized in Tables 1 through 3 will serve most students well in their research projects. As your investigation proceeds you may actually find yourself spontaneously engaging in one of Lustick’s approaches due to the nature of your research question. As long as you can justify your choices of primary and secondary source materials, as well as direct your reader to sources that shed doubt on your account, you will be conducting qualitative historical analysis befitting the best scholars of the tradition.

Whether or not you have succeeded in mitigating the effects of bias and selectivity on your findings is ultimately decided by the community of researchers in your area of study. Gaddis (2001:322) has said that historians generally admit the problems posed by bias and selectivity “and then get on with doing history as best we can, leaving it to our readers to determine which of our interpretations comes closest to the truth.” Elman and Elman (1997:12) proposed an even more stringent requirement to evaluate the use of source material by political scientists. They suggest taking a political scientist’s work, deleting the introduction, conclusion, and theoretical chapters, and then submitting it to historians to judge whether the qualitative studies would be considered “good” history. Current practitioners of qualitative historical analysis are more likely to follow the former advice, rather than the latter, although the movement toward more rigor in qualitative analysis may eventually require political scientists to meet the standards of two disciplines in the pursuit of their research. The following section provides examples of qualitative historical analysis that have achieved acclaim in the community of researchers that inhabit the intersection of political science and history in the subfields of international security, international political economy, comparative historical analysis, and foreign policy analysis. These studies are also likely to meet the standards of both good political science and good history.

**Qualitative Historical Analyses to Emulate**

This essay has outlined two of the most serious potential problems with qualitative research and suggested ways to mitigate their effects. Most reputable scholars in international relations already implicitly or explicitly adopt the same kinds of practices in the conduct of their research that were recommended earlier in the article. Therefore, an effective way to learn to conduct qualitative research is to mimic the best practitioners of the method in your area of study. The recent plethora of scholarship on the end of the Cold War provides numerous examples of solid research, despite the fact that much of it continues to be revised as new documentary sources are uncovered. William Wohlforth’s (1993) *The Elusive Bal*
ance is an example of a political scientist making good use of both primary and secondary sources, many recently released from Soviet archives near the end of the Cold War. Wohlforth’s book is also a self-conscious attempt to explore balance of power theory through the perceptions of the decision-makers on both sides of the U.S.-Soviet rivalry without committing the sin of a “closed and self-referential” stylization of both theory and fact to illustrate a scholar’s pre-existing belief.

John Lewis Gaddis has also written extensively on the end of the Cold War. Gaddis’s (1992) *The United States and the End of the Cold War: Implications, Reconsiderations, Provocations* is a collection of his essays previously published as articles and book chapters before the end of the Cold War. The interesting thing about this collection is that most of the historical work based on documentary evidence available at the time stands up well after the Cold War. What did not stand up well were predictions he made in the chapter entitled “How the Cold War Might End,” in which he presents his original essay alongside later corrections made about the kinds of inferences and judgments he used to make those predictions. Gaddis gives himself a grade of “C+” based on his ability to predict, and cautions all social scientists, including economists and political scientists to be careful about their predictions and also to keep track of them as an exercise in humility.

Later work by both Wohlforth and Gaddis illustrates the impact that new documentary sources can have on scholarship. In *Witnesses to the End of the Cold War*, Wohlforth (1996) presents the transcripts of a conference held at Princeton in February 1993 which brought together decision-makers from both the United States and the Soviet Union. The first six chapters of this book are a useful primary source of evidence for scholars interested in the final days of the Cold War. What is even more interesting from a pedagogical standpoint is the pairing of these transcripts of former U.S. and Soviet officials revealing heretofore unknown pieces of information with four chapters of analysis by well-known political scientists, including Fred Greenstein, Robert Jervis, Alexander George, and William Wohlforth himself. This is an excellent book to read to grasp how historically minded political scientists draw from elite discussions, as well as secondary sources, to make judgments about the international politics of particular historical periods.

Gaddis (1997) also returns to the process of revising history based on new revelations from archival sources around the world in his book *We Now Know*.12 In conducting his research Gaddis ran into the same problem facing most political scientists who want to draw comparisons across different countries and cultures: the necessity of examining a multitude of archival sources in languages other than the ones you read or speak. Gaddis, to his own chagrin, and probably to that of many other professional historians, professes that he relied on translations of primary sources from researchers working around the world. In particular, he obtained a great deal of information from the Cold War International History Project based at the Woodrow Wilson Center in Washington, D.C. The Project regularly publishes its *Bulletin* and a number of occasional papers that are useful sources of translated primary source documents from around the world. Despite the fact that purist historians may disapprove of his lack of archival research, and the potential problems of selectivity and bias that may be introduced into his study as a result of relying on materials selected by others for

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12 Raymond Garthoff’s work (1989, 1994, 2001) also demonstrates the revision of scholarship about the events of the Cold War. Much of his work is informed by informal and formal interviews with principal decision-makers in these events. As a former U.S. ambassador and State Department officer, he probably has better access to these types of officials than most academics, but it is important to remember that his government service may introduce some measure of bias in his work. However, judging from the reception of his work in the academic community this does not seem to be a problem.
translation, he is cautious in the presentation of his findings, and overall presents a good model for political scientists to emulate.

While the end of the Cold War has provided an exciting time for political scientists and historians to reflect on each other’s craft, other areas of study have also produced worthwhile qualitative analyses. The intersection of political psychology and foreign policy analysis has produced numerous studies that make good use of primary and secondary sources. Larson’s (1985) *Origins of Containment* is often cited as an exemplar of the effective use of archival research by a political scientist. Larson explicitly sought the help of historians in selecting repositories to visit, in understanding the historiography of the Cold War, and in understanding what constitutes good historical scholarship. In *Roosevelt and the Munich Crisis*, Barbara Farnham (1997) adopts a “political” decision-making approach to explaining FDR’s foreign policy choices prior to WWII. As with Larson’s book, Farnham can be read as a solid piece of historical scholarship even if the reader is not familiar with political psychology. In fact, Farnham saves much of her discussion of alternative theoretical approaches to decision-making for the appendices. It would seem that both of these scholars’ work would meet Elman and Elman’s (1997) stringent test of good historical research.

Recent work in the tradition of comparative historical analysis and historical sociology also deserves emulation among a new generation of scholars. Hendrik Spruyt’s (1994) *The Sovereign State and Its Competitors* is a thorough explanation of how the sovereign territorial state eventually prevailed over competing institutional forms, such as the city-state and the city-league. It is even more remarkable given that it does not employ any novel archival sources. Given that Spruyt relies almost exclusively on the work of historians of various sorts, he is subject to questions about selectivity and bias. Yet, the explanation woven out of these prior accounts is compelling, and has met with widespread acclaim in the scholarly community. The same can be said of Ertman’s (1997) *Birth of the Leviathan* and Luebbert’s (1991) *Liberalism, Fascism, or Social Democracy*, both of which attempt to explain the formation of particular types of states and regimes in early modern Europe and interwar Europe, respectively. This kind of research is in much the same vein as Barrington Moore’s (1966) *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*, yet Ertman and Luebbert appear to be much more self-conscious in their attempts to detail competing explanations and provide source material for readers interested in pursuing those avenues of inquiry.

Finally, the field of international political economy has also produced some excellent qualitative studies. Beth Simmons’s (1994) *Who Adjusts?* is a masterful combination of both qualitative and quantitative research on the foreign policy choices of states to remain faithful to, or defect from the gold standard during the interwar years. She artfully combines both primary and secondary sources to weave a narrative that integrates well with her quantitative results, without the appearance of purposefully choosing sources that only support those results. Eric Helleiner’s (1994) *States and the Reemergence of Global Finance* is an accessible critique of the prevailing wisdom that the globalization of financial markets has been inevitable and unstoppable through the use of both primary and secondary sources. This book is also a useful example of the way historical research proceeds through “conjecture and refutation,” as the arguments and documentary source material in this book can be compared to the original arguments and sources that Helleiner is attempting to refute.

**Conclusion**

Qualitative historical analysis in political science is a difficult enterprise at best, yet as the examples from the previous section suggest, the payoff in terms of explanation and understanding of events, processes, and actors is enormous
when it is done well. Given the discipline’s interest in nomothetic explanation, and qualitative researchers’ normal focus on a handful of cases at best, we are constantly looking to improve our sources of data and evidence. That primary and secondary historical sources go into the creation of large-N data sets is generally forgotten when they become the standard for quantitative research. Qualitative researchers, on the other hand, must constantly defend their data against claims of selectivity and bias.

Bias and selectivity on the part of historians and political scientists conducting primary research, and by political scientists using secondary sources produced by historians, are serious problems for both quantitative and qualitative researchers to consider. This essay has attempted to provide a practical guide for advanced undergraduates and graduate students as they begin to engage in qualitative historical analysis. Qualitative research is currently undergoing a renaissance in international relations research, as a number of articles and books concerning qualitative methods have appeared recently (e.g., Dion, 1998; Mahoney, 2000a; Ragin, 2001; Brady and Collier, forthcoming). This essay should provide a base from which to explore the primary and secondary historical source material that the methods need to make explanatory claims.

In the end, all scholarship in political science is judged by the quality of the evidence. Qualitative historical analysis, whether in international relations or comparative politics, shares many of the same evidentiary concerns with history. As Haber, Kennedy, and Krasner (1997) titled their contribution to a symposium of diplomatic historians and international relations theorists, our two disciplines are “brothers under the skin.” Both disciplines would benefit from more rigor in rooting out inappropriate bias and selectivity, perhaps ultimately leading to fruitful cross-fertilization in many areas of research. Until this is achieved, both political scientists and historians should be wary of wholesale importation of theory or evidence from the other. This essay is one step toward promoting the judicious use of primary and secondary sources from the historical record by political scientists in the early stages of their academic and professional development.

References


