

BOOK REVIEWS

Cambridge Handbook of Experimental Political Science. By James N. Druckman, Donald P. Green, James H. Kuklinski, Arthur Lupia. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2011. 562 pp.

Experimentation has formed the basis for modern scientific discovery. Francis Bacon (1561–1626), “the father of empiricism,” was one of the first to propose a method of science based on experimentation that results in new theories that can again be tested by experimentation. At first, experiments seemed to be suitable only for the natural sciences. The method was later adopted by the “softer” sciences such as psychology and economics. Until recently, political scientists thought that classic experiments were not suitable for political science because of the complex and dynamic character of the field. In the first chapter of this edited volume by James N. Druckman, Donald P. Green, James H. Kuklinski, and Arthur Lupia, Lawrence Lowell (1910) is cited: “We are limited by the impossibility of experiment. Politics is an observational, not an experimental science . . .” (p. 3). However, the growing interest in causation and the empirically guided theory development have caused a growth in the number of experiments in political science. Scholars are encouraged by the ways in which experiments facilitate causation and use transparent procedures. Experimental political science has gained momentum, and this handbook comes at the right time to capture this moment and usher experimental political science forward.

When testing causal effects, few, if any, methods can live up to the rigor and level of control of an experimental design. But what is causality? In 1843, John Stuart Mill developed three criteria to assess causality. First, the cause needs to precede the effect in time; second, there needs to be covariance between cause and effect; third, the researcher should be certain there are no extraneous relationships that confound the effect. As Druckman et al. make clear, experiments can meet these demands of causality, and a good experiment is strong on internal validity. The first part of the book goes on in setting the scene by explaining and defining core concepts of experimentation, such as random assignment of participants, sampling, the use of pretests, mediation and moderation, and ethics.

But like all methods in science, experimentation comes with its inherent disadvantages. Probably the most formidable of criticisms on experiments is that although experiments are considered strong on internal validity, they have problems with external validity. The editors have recognized this in a reoccurring theme in several chapters. In addition, Rose McDermott devoted one chapter solely discussing internal and external validity of experiments. She makes clear that finding a proper balance between internal and external validity in experimentation is key in designing a good experiment.

This delicate balance is further expressed in a chapter by Eric Dickson, who sketches out the dilemma of stylized versus contextually rich experiments. On one hand, stylized experiments that are very much abstracted from reality offer the advantage of more control by the researcher and thus increased internal validity. Contextually rich experiments, on the other hand, will cause participants to behave more closely to the way they would in everyday life. The balance between contextual

richness and stylized abstractness differs among the two main branches of experimentation: psychology-style experimentation, which involves a setting with “mundane” realism and deception of participants, and economy-style experimentation, which are highly stylized, based on a rational-actor model and often involves some kind of monetary reward for participants. Both branches are addressed extensively.

Finding the right balance between internal and external validity can also be found in the discussion on the distinction in different types of experiments: lab experiments, field experiments, and survey experiments are all covered by this book. An interesting innovation in the field of laboratory experiments is the use of online research panels, discussed in a chapter by Iyengar. This may come at the cost of losing some control (and hence internal validity) but offers the opportunity to collect data from a diverse and large sample at relatively low cost. Nevertheless, Internet-based experiments are promising and may be the way to go in order to find the right balance between internal and external validity in political science.

This brings us to another important issue in the discussion on the external validity of experiments: the use of narrow or “convenience” samples. In other words, the use of college students as participants for experiments. The use of student participants is defended by Druckman and Kam in a separate chapter, and they argue that this is not necessarily a problem for generalization. Their main argument is as follows. First of all, the goal of experiments often is to prove (or disprove) a theoretical effect (i.e., generalization of concepts) and not necessarily generalization to other individuals. Moreover, if the treatment does not interact with relevant background variables, in other words if the treatment effect is equal across the entire population, than a convenience sample produces equal effects and can be generalized across other groups. According to the authors, using only students in a sample can even strengthen the internal validity of a study because it is easier to create similar experimental groups, which holds constant important background variables.

Besides the methodological advantages and issues with experiments, parts III through VIII of the handbook offers a wealth of examples of experiments in a wide array of domains in political science. A selection of the many studies and domains covered are research on decision making, voter choice, and elite bargaining. Further, an interesting contribution by Eric Coleman and the late Elinor Ostrom shows the application and contribution of experimentation to collective-action theory. Part IX of the Handbook shows promising applications of advanced techniques in experimental analysis. These parts show the sheer ingenuity in the application of the experimental method and confirms the rise of prominence of experiments in political science.

Notwithstanding these accomplishments, one might question the necessity of a handbook about experiments in political science. Can't political scientists not just use one of the many handbooks about experimentation from psychology? Indeed, the book contains chapters that could easily fit in any handbook on experiments, which means that to an extent political scientists can use handbooks from disciplines with a stronger experimental tradition. These more general chapters, however, are still necessary to lay a foundation for those not trained in experiments. Having said that, in general this handbook certainly has added value for the field. First, the long list of experimental studies and examples described in the nine parts of the handbook are specific to political science and provide an overview of the state-of-the-art in several domains in the field, which is valuable in itself. These specific contributions show us how experimentations can add and refine theories in political science. Second, political science experiments are likely to have different designs than those in psychology or economy. The emphasis of political scientists on the external validity of their studies will affect the internal-external validity balance. Attention will need to be paid to the realism of the experiment on various levels. For instance, are the study subjects realistic? Using students may, but not always, reflect the target population of a study. Does the experimental task sufficiently reflect the way individuals would behave in a normal situation? Giving rewards may entice people to participate, but it might also lead them to carry out tasks more concentrated and different from the way they normally

would do so. To what extent is the experimental setting realistic? Since the experiments of economists and psychologists are likely to be more abstracted and stylized than those in political science, questions about realism are less likely to be considered relevant in handbooks in these fields. A stronger emphasis on task, subject, and contextual realism renders different designs and different approaches to experiments, which deserves a separate handbook for experimentation in political science.

Taking this all together, the *Cambridge Handbook of Experimental Political Science* is an excellent and much-needed contribution to the methodological literature in political science. The handbook contains no less than nine parts and 36 chapters, which together provide a very comprehensive overview of the various uses of the experimental method in political science. The editors have done very well by bringing together a wide variety of scholars in the field of experimental political science. As a result, the range of topics addressed is extensive, and this makes it an invaluable handbook for students or scholars looking to use experiments in the future but also for scholars with more experience with experimental method.

In the afterword, early political science experimentalist Donald Kinder refers to “Campbell’s ghost.” Campbell would be pleased to see experimentation as a mature method in political science. Now, Kinder warns, we should go forward, but “going forward, it means that we should be aware of what experiments can tell us, but also of what they cannot” (p. 528). This means that the use of multiple methods should be taken seriously, which is a fine conclusion in a handbook that marks the “coming of age” of experimental political science.

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Western Intervention in the Balkans: The Strategic Use of Emotion in Conflict. By Roger D. Petersen. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

As a scholar of emotion and conflict from the field of communication, I was immediately intrigued by the subtitle of Petersen’s book. I expected to learn how Western diplomats and third parties strategically used emotions of the target populations in their attempts to negotiate peace settlements, an idea that takes my interest in third-party strategies for eliciting emotion in mediation to a more global level. I was surprised to see that the book actually examines how emotions are used as strategic resources by what Petersen calls “political entrepreneurs,” who are most often described as the “opponents of intervention.” Examining the role of targets (conflicting parties) as well as third parties in the conflict process suggests a dynamic process of mutual influence among all participants (Bodtker & Jameson, 1997). I had hoped to see how the targets of intervention influenced Western intervention strategies, yet the intervention strategies actually changed very little across cases regardless of previous success. This is a point that Petersen makes loud and clear, and it is one of the major policy implications of the book.

Petersen’s theoretical framework takes the oft-used principles of game theory, which rest on the assumption of rational action, and suggests that predictions about how political actors will respond to conflict can be more accurately made by examining emotions, specifically those of hatred, fear, anger, resentment, and contempt. The author claims this is “the first book to treat emotions as resources systematically,” and as such, the extensive case studies and examples in the book add an important element to current sociopolitical theories that rely on logic and rational action. This premise follows an interdisciplinary trend in conflict studies, which is to embrace the importance of emotion as a central component of conflict antecedents and ongoing conflict processes (Jones, 2000).