

Selecting a Methodology

These are general observations and guidelines to help students when selecting a methodology. As always, you should also consult and follow the guidance of your professor and/or TA.

Questions to ask when deciding on a methodology:

1. What kind of question am I asking?
2. What kind of data is available?
3. What kind of conclusion do I hope to come to?

Empirical Research Paper

- **Case Study**
 - In-depth analysis of one case
 - Strong understanding of relationship between variables
 - Should select a “critical case” – either an easy case that should confirm the theory (and thus disconfirmation would cause significant doubt in the theory) or a hard case that would pose great difficulty for the theory (but confirmation would strongly increase confidence in theory)
- **Comparative Case Study**
 - Comparison of two *similar* cases
 - Stronger understanding of relationship between variables
 - Limited depth of case analysis
- **Quantitative Analysis**
 - Large number of observations strengthens confidence in establishing relationship between variables
 - Allows for testing of more alternative variables
 - Little to no discussion of individual cases
 - Weaker in terms of establishing causal mechanisms

Theoretical Inquiry

- Push ideas in a new direction
- Create new hypotheses for future testing
- Expand base of theoretical literature
- Little connection to empirical literature

Policy Analysis/Recommendation

- Utilize empirical data to understand a problem
- Based on causal finding, recommend a policy
- Must explain how policy will remedy problem