

**DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE
AND
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
Research Methods Posc 302**

**ASSIGNMENT I
Propositions and Variables
Due: April 5, 2000**

The purpose of this assignment is to encourage everyone to think about translating general verbal assertions into to “testable” propositions. Making these transitions is, I believe, the most important step in research because it requires one to think about exactly what a statement claims and how these arguments could be in principle verified. As I’ve said so many times, if you can do this you will have learned a marketable skill. I also want to make sure everyone understands variables, variation, and other terms.

I ask a number of questions below. I want you to answer them briefly but with complete sentences. Your response should contain enough information to demonstrate that you know what you’re talking about. See the attached guidelines.

- I. Propositions and Variables:
 - A. Consider this proposition: “College graduate are twice as likely to vote as high school drop outs.”
 1. What is the **independent** variable in this assertion?
 2. What is the **dependent** variable?
 - B. How about this statement? “Median family income is higher in urban counties than rural counties.” (Johnson and Joslyn, *Research Methods*, page. 55.)
 1. What is the **independent** variable?
 2. What is the **dependent** variable?
 - C. Now consider this claim: sex and violence on television are bad because they lead to aggression against women.
 1. Is this a normative statement? Why or why not?
 2. What is the independent variable?
 3. What is the dependent variable?
 - D. Let’s think about a slightly different version of the previous statement: “Because televised violence and sex lead to aggression against women, the government should impose a rating system on the networks.”
 1. What kind of claim is this, empirical or normative? Explain.
 - i. Note, don’t discuss the merits of the argument; just indicate what kind of statement it is.
 - E. “Cigarette smoking is rapidly becoming the single greatest threat to the health of our children. We know that 3,000 young people start smoking every day, and



1,000 of them will lead shorter lives because of it.”

1. 1996 Democratic National Platform as adopted by the Democratic National Convention on August 27, 1996.
(<http://www.democrats.org/hq/resources/platform/index.html>)
2. Answer these questions:
 - i. What is the causal assertion being made here?
 - ii. What is the independent (causal) variable?
 - iii. What is the dependent (effect) variable.

II. Extracting Propositions:

A. Example: The Effects of Public Welfare:

1. Here's a blurb for a book written under the auspices of the Cato Institute, a libertarian research organization.
 - i. “In his new Cato book, *The End of Welfare: Fighting Poverty in the Civil Society*, Michael Tanner, [Cato] director of health and welfare studies, argues ... that government welfare programs have failed to accomplish their ostensible goal of alleviating poverty and, moreover, they have undermined the traditional American principle of voluntarism. The interventionist welfare state has replaced civil society with political society and the results have been disastrous.”
(Cato Institute, <http://www.cato.org/pubs/books/endwelfare.html>.)
2. Could you translate this passage into one or more empirical assertions of the sort discussed in class? You might think about, for example, some specific implications. Consider this possibility: the passage suggests that there will be no or little relationship between public funds spent on welfare and the level of poverty. This argument could be checked by looking at federal funds spent on welfare and the poverty rate in each of the last 25 years.
3. Or one might state a proposition of the following sort: the more money spent by government for public assistance, the less private organizations and individuals donate to charitable causes. Again, one could plot (inflation adjusted) dollar amounts from the two sources to see if there is a “negative” relationship. (Note: it might be hard to find the data, but in principle such an analysis could be conducted.)
4. The quote even implies that welfare generosity has led to social problems such as increases in crime, teen pregnancy, out-of-wedlock births, and drug abuse. Anyone of these ideas could be expressed in an argument to the effect that states having generous welfare policies experience more teen pregnancy (drug abuse, crime) than more tough-minded states, others things being equal.



- B. Now consider this claim from the 1996 Democratic platform:
1. “The Crime Bill established the death penalty for drug kingpins. The President signed a directive requiring drug testing of anyone arrested for a federal crime, and he challenged states to do the same for state offenders. We established innovative drug courts which force drug users to get treatment or go to jail. We are making progress. Overall drug use in America is dropping; the number of Americans who use cocaine has dropped 30 percent since 1992.”
 - i. What is the general empirical claim or proposition? Remember to translate it into terms that would permit someone to investigate it with systematic observation.
 - ii. What is the implied independent variable or causal factor?
 - iii. What is the effect or dependent variable?
- C. Try another one:
1. George W. Bush, Republican candidate for United States president in 2000, advocates “choice” in education and makes this claim: “Finally, we must recognize the essential role of competition in achieving our goals – competition from charters and parental choice and home schooling. All monopolies are slow to reform when consumers have no power to express their frustration. In education, parents who have options have influence.”
 - i. Governor George W. Bush, "No Child Left Behind," Latin Business Association Luncheon, September 2, 1999.
http://www.georgewbush.com/speeches/9299_Education.htm
 2. Governor Bush is making an empirical claim. What is it?
 - i. State it in such as fashion that one could investigate it empirically.

This assignment asks a number of questions that (in most cases) can be answered in one or two sentences. Nevertheless, I want you to prepare it as though it were a term paper. Thus,

- make sure your name and student number appear on a typed title page;
- indicate the question numbers;
- write in complete sentences;
- proofread your work;
- if need be, use your knowledge of politics and policy to clarify the latent proposition;
- consult Patricia O’Conner, *Woe is I*, to make sure usage and style are acceptable.

Turn into 347 Smith Hall, the Political Science Department office. Do not leave papers in *my* office!