

Explicitness is crucial to the analysis of world politics because it allows us constantly to check our reasoning against additional cases and lets others explore the soundness of our arguments.<sup>13</sup>

## Methodology

Analysts disagree over which research strategy is best suited for uncovering these underlying patterns. David A. Lake and Robert Powell characterize the choice of a methodology as a “bet” as to the best way to investigate a problem.<sup>14</sup> Two different methodologies have received the most attention or had the most bets placed on them.<sup>15</sup> The first is based on the historical method and is referred to as the **traditionalist approach**. Historians seek to acquire knowledge of an event or problem by immersing themselves in its every detail. The task of the scholar is to capture the entire essence of a subject. Not only must the whys and whats of diplomatic and military undertakings be recounted but the context of action must be recreated. An in-depth familiarity with the topic, firsthand observation, and a thorough examination of original documents are the core research tools for the historian. Truth is established by marshaling all of the evidence gathered using these tools and presenting it in a persuasive manner.

During the 1960s many analysts began to apply a very different methodology to the study of world politics. Referred to by some as the **scientific method** and by others as **behavioralism**, this methodology took as its point of departure the belief that events could be understood better if they were taken out of context and examined with other events of the same kind in some type of controlled fashion. Doing so would allow scholars to replicate the work of others. Replication was important to behavioralists because it lay at the heart of the scientific method. Scientific truth was established not by a single researcher making a persuasive case for his or her position but by the ability of others to duplicate this research strategy and get the same result. Replication in the study of world politics was seen as impossible using the traditionalist approach to inquiry.

Behavioralists identified three problems as standing in the way of arriving at a scientific understanding of world politics. First, there was no agreed on vocabulary to guide research. All might agree that power was central to the study of world politics but some analysts defined power in terms of resources; for others it was defined as a goal; and for still others it was defined as a means to achieving a goal.<sup>16</sup> Second, even when analysts agreed that power should be defined in terms of resources, disagreement existed over how to operationalize the concept or give it concrete meaning. Should power be measured in terms of economic resources or military resources? If in terms of military resources, what should be counted: tanks, personnel, nuclear warheads, delivery vehicles, or aircraft? Finally, because findings were presented in a highly personal fashion it was often unclear from traditionalist accounts why an event happened. Did poverty and political alienation have to exist simultaneously to produce revolutions or did poverty lead to political alienation, which then produced a revolution?

What behavioralists wanted were highly structured studies in which **independent** and **dependent variables** were defined, the nature of causation was specified, and terms were operationally defined. Independent variables are the factors one uses to explain an event. A dependent variable is the event one tries to explain.

### Traditionalist approach

A way of studying world politics that emphasizes the uniqueness of events and relies on historical case study analyses as their primary methodology. It is generally contrasted with the scientific method.

### Scientific method

A way of studying world politics that seeks to emulate the method of investigation employed in the sciences. It makes great use of quantitative data and emphasizes regularities and commonalities in events in constructing and testing theories. It is often contrasted with the traditionalist method.

### Behavioralism

An approach to studying international relations that emphasizes the actions of individuals or groups and studies them through the scientific method.

### Independent variable

The factor thought to influence, affect, or cause some other phenomenon.

### Dependent variable

The event or political phenomenon that one is trying to explain.