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
  o In-depth analysis of one case
  o Strong understanding of relationship between variables
  o 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
  o Comparison of two similar cases
  o Stronger understanding of relationship between variables
  o Limited depth of case analysis

• Quantitative Analysis
  o Large number of observations strengthens confidence in establishing relationship between variables
  o Allows for testing of more alternative variables
  o Little to no discussion of individual cases
  o Weaker in terms of establishing causal mechanisms

Theoretical Inquiry
  o Push ideas in a new direction
  o Create new hypotheses for future testing
  o Expand base of theoretical literature
  o 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