

# Handbook of Causal Analysis for Social Research

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# Handbook of Causal Analysis for Social Research

 Springer

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# Preface

In spring of 2010, Howard Kaplan invited me to compile a volume on sociological methodology for the Springer series, *Handbooks of Sociology and Social Research*. I proposed causal analysis for the focus of a new volume because (1) causal explanation is a common goal of social research, (2) the nature and practice of causal analysis has been a topic of methodological debate for decades, and (3) the literature on causality has moved quickly in the last 20 years to a point where a volume-length assessment by a diverse collection of scholars would be of considerable value to readers in sociology and in the social sciences more broadly.

After selecting causal analysis as the focus of the volume, I recruited contributors with established track records of publishing sophisticated and readable methodological scholarship, most of whom held appointments in sociology departments and/or were trained as sociologists. Contributors were encouraged to recruit graduate student coauthors in order to expand the community of scholars in sociology who write on methodological topics.

As a target audience, I asked contributors to write for advanced graduate students and faculty researchers in sociology. I also recommended that contributors include conceptual and empirical examples from sociology and from the allied social sciences whenever appropriate. To maximize accessibility, I asked contributors to develop chapters with mathematical details and demands that would be only as difficult as they needed to be, in recognition of the fact that too much methodological scholarship already uses more mathematics than is necessary for the purposes at hand. As an objective standard, I asked for chapters that required mathematical preparation that is no more advanced than is necessary to read the typical articles published in *Sociological Methodology* and *Sociological Methods and Research*.

I also made it clear to contributors that my goal, as Editor, was not to push for the adoption of any particular model of causality, including the counterfactualist perspective on quantitative causal analysis of which I am most enamored. However, I did note that, because of the shape of the recent literature, I hoped that all chapters would engage some of the counterfactuals literature to some extent. I indicated that such engagement could be critical and/or brief, as appropriate, and that I was inviting a collection of scholars whom I expected would collectively disagree on the ultimate value of the potential outcome version of the counterfactual model. As readers of the complete *Handbook* will discern, I succeeded in generating a diversity of positions on this issue.

I thank the contributors to the volume for their uniformly strong dedication to their chapters. We hope that this *Handbook* will strengthen the conclusions typical of social research, providing a wide range of researchers with methodological guidance that can help them to (a) select and utilize methods

of estimation and inference appropriately and (b) determine when causal conclusions are warranted, based on the particular standards in the subfields in which they work. If this *Handbook* succeeds in promoting these goals, then all of the credit is due to the talent and skill of the contributors to the volume.

Ithaca, NY

Stephen L. Morgan

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