

Big ideas:
Three
Theoretical
Traditions



Challenge: capture the idea of the Grand
Canyon with a single photo

Sketch your photo idea in your notes

Rationalist

Structuralist

Culturalist

- A typology
- A continuum
- Networks of scholars
- Big questions of social science
- Analogy: Camera Lens



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Rationalist lens:

Big Question: How can actors use reason to satisfy interests?

- Cost/benefit analysis
- Nomothetic goals (universal laws)
- Actors are like stick figures
- Assume fixed interests



Rationalist: How can actors use reason to satisfy interests?

- Scholarly communities:

- Behavioralism
- Positivism
- Economics

- Methods

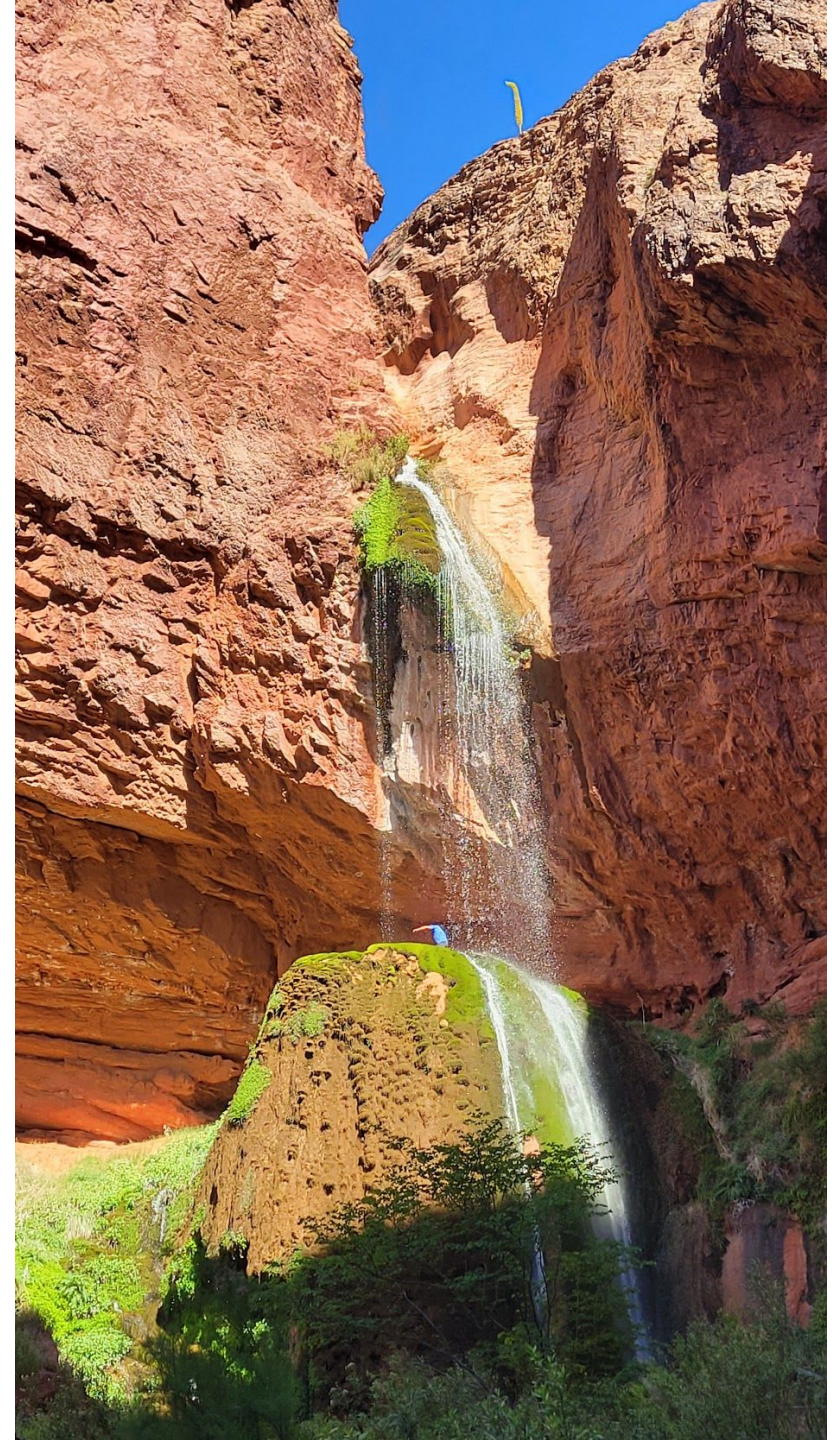
- Mathematical proofs
- Statistical analysis



Structuralist lens: Mid-range

Big Question: How do actors relate to each other through institutions?

- Institutional rules affect behaviors
- Institutions may shape preferences/ goals
- Look at big historical changes
- Institutions: political parties, interest groups, class relations, electoral rules

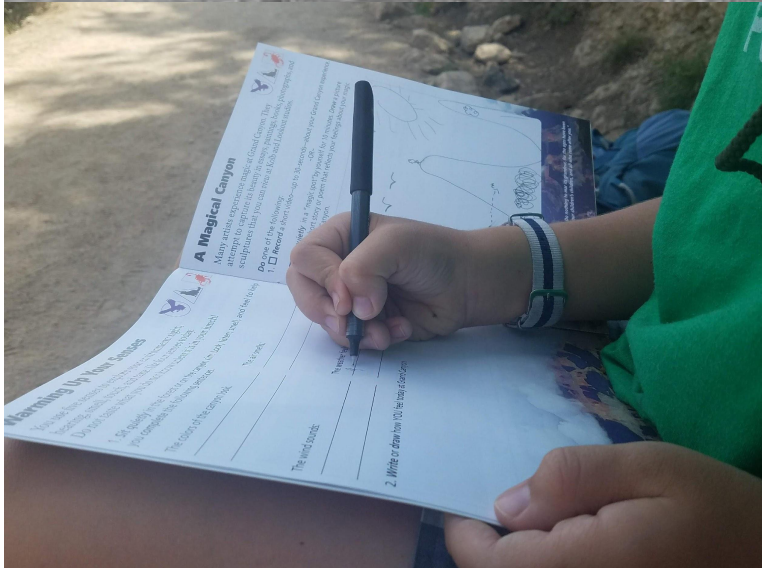


Structuralist: How do actors relate to each other through institutions?

- Scholarly communities:
 - Sociology
- Methods
 - Historic institutionalism
 - Comparing institutions
 - Changes over time
 - Inductive or deductive



Two Havasupai Indian women in front of a native dwelling, Havasu Canyon, ca.1899/
Photo by George Wharton James, public domain



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Culturalist lens

Big Question: How do rules constitute individual and group identities?

- Rules like gender, class, national ID, honor, shame
- What does it mean to be a "good" member of this community?
- What stories do we tell ourselves about who we are?
- Assumes that identities are malleable

Culturalist: How do rules constitute identities?

- Scholarly communities:
 - Anthropology
 - Gender studies
 - Area studies
- Methods
 - Interpretive
 - Participant-observation
 - Inductive



- Symbolic behavior
- Narrative
- Detailed single-case studies