

This document contains two parts:

- **Part 1:**

Method Guide. Provides a step-by-step approach that can be taught in qualitative research design or methods classes in content/textbook analysis week. It shows students how to prepare a textbook sample, choose keywords, record coverage, and classify findings.

- **Part 2:**

Student Assignment. An exercise where students apply the content analysis method to one textbook chapter and reflect on what their results reveal about how topics are presented in political science texts.

Method Guide: Replicating a Textbook Content Analysis

Studies of political science textbooks have grown over the past two decades, with attention to how race, gender, and other social identities are represented. These projects have underscored the fact that textbooks do not just summarize a field, they also shape how students first encounter it. Despite this importance, there is not yet a single, widely adopted approach for conducting systematic textbook audits in political science. Scholars have used different strategies for selecting books, validating their relevance, and coding content. The result is a fragmented set of methods that are often hard to replicate in the classroom. This guide responds to that gap by offering a sample approach that instructors can use, adapt, and even assign to students.

Our aim here is not to declare a single “correct” method, but to share a tested framework. The steps below can be applied to labor politics (the subject of our published study)¹, but also to any other topic that instructors feel may be underrepresented in political science education.

Step 1. Selecting a Representative Corpus

The first challenge in textbook analysis is identifying a representative sample of books. The main challenge in political science textbook analysis is that it is difficult to find a ready list that ranks/compares the widely used or widely assigned textbooks in classroom. For instance, International Relations (IR) publishing is concentrated among a handful of major academic publishers, with a long range of smaller presses and open-access resources. A practical but credible strategy is to select a representative sample in this case can be combining three steps:

1. **Survey the major publishers.** Look at catalogs from Oxford, Routledge, Pearson, Norton, Rowman & Littlefield, Palgrave, and CQ Press.
2. **Add open-access titles.** Platforms like OpenStax and E-IR increasingly provide free, high-quality texts that are widely adopted. These textbooks can always be included in your sample as (1) they provide digital access to the content which makes the content analysis easier (2) can give the researcher a robustness check opportunity to cover the free textbook segment of the market.
3. **Check classroom use.** Here the **Open Syllabus Project (OSP)**² is especially valuable. OSP compiles millions of syllabi from higher education and reports both how often a book appears (number of appearances) and how it clusters by field (teaching score).

This combination ensures that the textbooks in your sample are not only theoretically appropriate but also actually used in classrooms.

Step 2. Validating Classroom Relevance (Using OSP)

¹ Mirzaei, S., Giwa, A., & Bar, E. (2025). Missing from the Curriculum: A Content Analysis of Labor Politics in International Relations Textbooks. *Journal of Political Science Education*.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/15512169.2025.2553335>

² Visit for more information <https://www.opensyllabus.org>

One concern with the selected textbook sample to be analyzed can be whether it is relevant to the field that you are aiming to study. In our published analysis we cross-referenced each selected book with OSP data to ensure that it:

- **Actually appears in IR syllabi.** Adoption frequency shows whether the text is more than just a publisher's marketing item.
- **Fits in the IR subfield.** OSP's Galaxy³ visualization maps texts by co-assignment patterns, letting you see whether a book clusters with "International Relations" or drifts into "Global Affairs" or "Comparative Politics."

This step helps instructors reassure colleagues (and students) that the audit is grounded in what's really being taught, not just a handpicked set of books.

Step 3. Defining the Unit of Analysis

Once you have your corpus, the next step is deciding what you will count. We recommend looking at three complementary layers:

1. **Index layer.** Are relevant terms listed in the index part of the textbook? How many sub-entries are there? On how many pages? Indexes often give a quick sense of salience.
2. **Body-text layer.** Scan the actual prose to see how (and how often) the terms you selected to analyze appear. This avoids missing content that publishers neglect to index.
3. **Context layer.** Pay attention to sidebars, figures, images, and text boxes. Textbooks sometimes acknowledge a topic visually or anecdotally without giving it narrative weight in the main chapters.

This three-layer approach balances efficiency with depth and makes it easier for students (if assigned) to see different dimensions of representation.

Step 4. Choosing Keywords and Comparators

The simplest way to operationalize representation is to select a keyword family. For instance in our case, the labor set included: *union, worker, labor, social movement, bargaining, strike*.

To make results more meaningful, it helps to include comparator terms that you expect to be more visible. We used: *Marxism, multinational corporations (MNC/TNC), and political party*. Comparators prevent the project from becoming a "yes/no" on labor alone. Instead, they show whether labor is uniquely absent or whether the textbook generally omits non-state actors.

Step 5. Measuring Coverage

To make results comparable across books, keep the metrics simple and standardized:

- **Distinct pages:** Count each page with a relevant mention once (even if the term appears multiple times).

³ visit <https://galaxy.opensyllabus.org/>

- **% of total book:** Divide distinct pages by the book's total pages (excluding front matter).

Reporting results as a percentage of the book is especially powerful. Eleven pages may sound substantial, but if the book is 700 pages long that is less than 2%.

Step 6. Classifying the Treatment of Content

Not all mentions are equal. To capture differences, we coded each mention into three simple categories:

- **Agential:** workers or unions described as actors shaping outcomes (e.g., strikes, protests, negotiations).
- **Structural:** labor framed as part of an institutional or systemic arrangement (e.g., corporatist bargaining, labor law frameworks).
- **Substantive:** labor noted only as background or example, without real agency or structural weight.

We also added a temporal tag: *Historical* (pre-1990) vs. *Contemporary* (post-1990). This distinction helps highlight whether textbooks present labor only as a feature of the past, or as a live issue in global politics today.

Step 7. Transparency and Reliability

Because this kind of coding involves judgment, it is important to be transparent. Instructors (or students) should:

- Keep a decision log noting edge cases (e.g., whether a "strike" described in a case study counts as structural or agential).
- If possible, double-check a subset of the data with another coder to see if judgments align.

This is not about statistical reliability so much as modeling good scholarly practice. Although our published analysis focused on labor politics, the same protocol can be applied to other topics. Instructors can swap the keyword set while keeping the same sampling and measurement steps.

Step 10. Limitations

It is important to close with a reminder that this method produces a diagnostic audit, not a definitive causal claim. Indexes can omit entries, different editions may vary, and framing judgments are interpretive. The value of this method lies in its transparency and comparability, not in establishing causal explanations.

Student Handout Assignment

Assignment: *Who is Missing from political science Textbooks?*

Course: Research Methods / Research Design

Type: Short qualitative coding exercise (before or after-class assignment)

Time commitment: 2–3 hours

Deliverables: 1–2 pages + short reflection

Overview

Textbooks shape what new students learn to see as important. In this assignment, you will audit one textbook chapter for how much space it gives (or withholds) to certain groups, issues, or perspectives.

You will practice a simple content analysis method: choosing keywords, searching for them, recording coverage, and reflecting on what the results tell us about the discipline.

Steps

STEP 1. Select one topic cluster from the list below. These represent groups/issues that are often underrepresented in textbooks:

1. **Labor & workers** (*union, worker, strike, bargaining*)
2. **Migration & refugees** (*refugee, migrant, asylum, displacement*)
3. **Climate & environment** (*climate, environment, emissions, sustainability*)
4. **Indigenous politics** (*Indigenous, tribal, Native, First Nations*)
5. **Global South perspectives** (*Global South, developing countries, Third World, decolonial*)

STEP 2. Pick one comparator topic that you expect to be more visible. Options include:

- Multinational corporations (MNCs / TNCs)
- Non-governmental organizations (NGOs)
- Human rights
- Terrorism/security
- Trade/globalization

STEP 3. From your assigned textbook, pick one chapter that relates to the topic you picked (examples: globalization, international organizations, security, international political economy).

STEP 4. Search through the chapter using your keywords. For each term:

- Record the **page numbers** where it appears.
- Count each page once (not every mention).
- Note how it is framed:

- **Agential:** actors shaping outcomes (e.g., unions protesting, refugees lobbying).
- **Structural:** institutions/systems shaping the actors (e.g., labor law, refugee regimes).
- **Substantive:** background/example without agency or structure.

STEP 5.

- Count the **total pages in the chapter** (excluding figures/references).
- Count the **distinct pages** where your keywords appear.
- Calculate the **% of the chapter** devoted to the topic:
(distinct pages ÷ total pages) × 100

Write a short memo (~400 words) that answers these questions:

1. Which topic (your choice vs comparator) received more coverage?
2. How was your chosen topic framed (agential, structural, or substantive)?
3. Where could it have been logically included but wasn't (a "missed opportunity")?
4. What does this tell us about how the textbook defines its boundaries?
5. Do you think this omission is accidental (textbooks can't cover everything) or systemic (certain voices/issues are consistently left out)? Explain.