

17.801
Political Science Scope and Methods

Fall 2021
Tuesday 9:00-11:00 AM
E51-393

Professor
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TA
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WRAP Lecturer
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This course is designed to introduce a variety of empirical research methods used by political scientists. The primary aims of the course are to make you a more sophisticated consumer of diverse empirical research and to allow you to conduct advanced independent work in your junior and senior years. This class is *not* a course in data analysis. Rather, it is a course on how to approach political science research and presumes that social science research can be evaluated according to common criteria that transcend methodological approaches. It discusses how to generate research questions, how to think of measurement and causality in political science, existing research designs in the discipline (qualitative and quantitative), whether and when to mix research methods, and how to think about the ethics of research in political science.

The course will consist of three parts. One part of the course will involve readings and homework exercises (**due Oct 12 and Nov 2**). Our readings will be roughly evenly divided between methodological works and notable applications of various research methods from different subfields of political science. A second part of the course involves visits from guest professors. Students will be responsible for preparing questions about the professor's research design and approach. The third part of the course entails the presentation of research projects that students will be designing throughout the semester.

The research project is a critical element of the course and should be taken very seriously. First, students will submit one or two ideas for a research project (one or two paragraphs, **due Sept 28**). Next, students will submit a two-page statement describing their research question and explaining why it was selected (**due Oct 19**). Next, students will submit a list of at least 10 articles or three books on the topic and a brief abstract for each that presents the basic argument, findings, and relevance for the student's question (**due Oct 26**). Next, students will submit a critical literature review (15 pages, **due Nov 23**). This will serve as the basis for a 10-minute in-class presentation, which will be followed by a 10-minute group discussion of research strategies. Building on this discussion, students will submit a 20-25 page research proposal that includes a revised version of the literature review and a new section that proposes an original research design (**due Dec 7**). Students are required to meet with the TA **by Nov 2** to discuss their projects, and are encouraged to do so multiple times during the semester. Assignments should use *The Chicago Manual of Style* [author-date system](#) for citations and references.

This course has been designated Communication Intensive (CIM). A CIM course is designed to help you develop your writing and speaking skills in the major. As a result, a lecturer from the Writing, Rhetoric, and Professional Communication (WRAP) program has been assigned to help with this course. Students are required to meet with the WRAP faculty once during the semester, and the WRAP faculty can provide you with guidance and comments on written work. In addition, you can set up an individual consultation with the communications experts at the Writing and Communication Center (WCC) via [their online form](#). The WCC staff may be particularly helpful in revising your writing or practicing your oral presentation.

Please note that course participation is a critical part of your grade for this course. I expect that you will come to class prepared to discuss the week's readings. Discussion involves both *asking* and *answering* questions – from the teaching staff but also from other students.

Goals:

- Understand the variety of ways to answer significant questions about politics and political science.
- Learn about the benefits and drawbacks of various research methods; be able to critique research claims in popular media or academic settings.
- Gain confidence in presenting technical details clearly and concisely, both in written work and in oral

presentation.

Required work and grading:

Grades will be calculated based on performance on the following required assignments:

- 2 Exercises, due on Oct 12 and Nov 2: **10% (5% each)**
- A short preliminary research ideas (1-2 paragraphs), due on September 28, followed by a complete research questions statement (2 pages), due on Oct 19: **5%**
- A literature review (15 pages), due on Nov 23: **15%**
- An in-class presentation, to be delivered on Nov 30 or Dec 7: **10%**
- A final research proposal (20-25 pages, including revised literature review), due on December 7: **30%**

Grades for each individual assignment will be based on the demonstrated progress in accomplishing the course's goals relative to the course schedule, on appropriate adherence to each assignment's guidelines. Extra credit will be given to works that go above and beyond the assignment's expectation.

In addition, attendance in class and active participation in class discussions are also required and will factor in grades calculation:

- Complete attendance in all 13 lectures: **15%**
- Class participation: **15%**

Submitting Assignments:

All assignments must be submitted on Canvas prior to the beginning of class (9:00am EST) on their due date. They will be considered late if the submission has a time stamp later than 9:00am EST. Assignments will be penalized 1/3 of a grade for every 24 hours that they are late. All assignment should be sent as Word or PDF documents with the student's last name as the first part of the file name (e.g., Smith_LiteratureReview.docx)

Please review MIT's [Academic Integrity Policy](#). Violations of the policy will result in official Institute sanction.

Office Hours:

Professor Christia will hold office hours by appointment in her office (E53-417). Wen will hold office hours every Tuesday from 11am–1pm in her office (E40-444b) or by appointment.

Recitations:

Recitations will also be held weekly (tentatively Friday, time and room TBD; except November 26 for Thanksgiving). Recitation slides, if presented, will be posted online. Three recitations in November and December (tentatively Fridays, Nov 12 and 19 and Dec 3) will be led by the WRAP Lecturer, and will focus respectively on writing the literature review, preparing the presentation, and writing the research proposal. Students are especially encouraged to attend all three sessions.

Course Outline:

All of the readings are available from the [Canvas course website](#) and should be completed prior to class on the day that they are listed.

1. Introductory Session (September 14)

I: The Scientific Method

2. Models and Theories in Political Science (September 21)

Shively, W. Phillips. 2004. *The Craft of Political Research*. 6th edition. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson. Chapters 1-2.

Gerring, John. 2012. *Social Science Methodology: A Unified Framework*. 2nd ed. New York: Cambridge University Press. xix-xxiii (Preface) and 1-23 (Chapter 1: "A Unified Framework").

Kellstedt, Paul M., and Guy D. Whitten, 2009. *The Fundamentals of Political Science Research*. 45-65 (Ch. 3: "Evaluating Causal Relationships").

3. Generating Research Questions and Hypotheses (September 28)

Gerring, *Social Science Methodology*, 27-57 (Chapter 2: "Beginnings") and 58-73 (Chapter 3: "Arguments").

Eidlin, Fred. 2011. "The Method of Problems versus the Method of Topics." *PS: Political Science & Politics* 44(4): 758-761.

Posner, Daniel N. 2004. "The Political Salience of Cultural Difference: Why Chewas and Tumbukas Are Allies in Zambia and Adversaries in Malawi." *American Political Science Review* 98(4): 529-545.

Note: Preliminary Research Ideas due, 1-2 paragraphs (September 28)

4. Ethics and Political Research (October 5)

Milgram, Stanley. 1965. "Some Conditions of Obedience and Disobedience to Authority," *Human Relations* 18: 57-76.

Zimbardo, Phillip. "A Pirandellian Prison," *New York Times Magazine*, April 8, 1973.

(Read also this recent [argument](#) that the experiment was fraudulent. Optional reading: Zimbardo's [response](#) to the criticism.)

Wood, Elisabeth Jean. 2006. "The Ethical Challenges of Field Research in Conflict Zones." *Qualitative Sociology* 29(3): 373-86.

Zimmer, Michael. "'But the Data Is Already Public': On the Ethics of Research in Facebook." *Ethics and Information Technology* 12, no. 4 (December 2010): 313-25.

II: Methods of Political Science Research

5. Experiments, Statistical Analysis, and Case Studies (October 12)

Gerring, John. 2001. "Methods." In *Social Science Methodology: A Critical Framework*, 200-230. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Enos, Ryan D. 2014. "Causal Effect of Intergroup Contact on Exclusionary Attitudes." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 111(10): 3699-3704.

Habyarimana, James, Macartan Humphreys, Daniel N. Posner, and Jeremy Weinstein. "Why Does Ethnic Diversity Undermine Public Goods Provision?" *American Political Science Review* 101, no. 04 (2007): 709-725.

Blair, Graeme C., Christine Fair, Neil Malhotra, and Jacob Shapiro. 2013. "Poverty and Support for Militant Politics: Evidence from Pakistan." *American Journal of Political Science* 57(1): 30-48.

Holland, Alisha C. 2015. "The Distributive Politics of Enforcement." *American Journal of Political Science* 59(2): 357-371.

Note: Exercise 1 due (October 12)

III: Gathering Data

6. Selecting and Sampling Cases (October 19)

Seawright, Jason and John Gerring. 2008. "Case Selection Techniques in Case Study Research: A Menu of Qualitative and Quantitative Options." *Political Research Quarterly* 61(2): 294-308.

- Geddes, Barbara. 1991. "How the Cases You Choose Affect the Answers You Get: Selection Bias in Comparative Politics." *Political Analysis* 2: 131-150.
- Shively, W. Phillips. 2012. "Selection of Observations for Study." In *The Craft of Political Research*, 97-110. London: Pearson Classics in Political Science.
- Pape, Robert A. 2003. "The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism." *American Political Science Review* 97(3): 343-361.
- Ashworth, Scott, Joshua D. Clinton, Adam Meirowitz, and Kristopher W. Ramsay. 2008. "Design, Inference, and the Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism." *American Political Science Review* 102(2): 269-273.

Note: Research Question Statement due, 2 pages (October 19)

7. Measurement (October 26)

- Gerring, *Social Science Methodology*, 155-94 (Chapter 7: "Measurements").
- Adcock, Robert, and David Collier. 2001. "Measurement Validity: A Shared Standard for Qualitative and Quantitative Research." *American Political Science Review* 95 (3): 529-546.
- Warwick, Paul, and Maria Zakharova. 2012. "Measuring the Median: The Risks of Inferring Beliefs from Votes." *British Journal of Political Science* 43 (1): 157-175.
- Brady, Henry et al. 2001. "Law and Data: The Butterfly Ballot Episode." *PS: Political Science and Politics*. 34(1): 59-69.

Note: Annotated citations due (October 26). You should set up a meeting with the TA in the next week if you haven't met already.

8. Combining Methods (November 2)

- Fearon, James and David Laitin. 2008. "Integrating Qualitative and Quantitative Research Methods." In *The Oxford Handbook of Political Methodology*, edited by Janet M. Box-Sheffenmeiser, Henry Brady and David Collier, 756-778. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- James Mahoney and Gary Goertz. 2006. "A Tale of Two Cultures: Contrasting Quantitative and Qualitative Research." *Political Analysis* 14 (3): 227-249.
- Brady, Henry. 2010. "Data-Set Observations versus Causal-Process Observations: The 2000 U.S. Presidential Election." In *Rethinking Social Inquiry: Diverse Tools, Shared Standards*, ed. Henry Brady and David Collier, 237-242. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc..
- Lily Tsai, 2007. *Accountability Without Democracy: Solidary Groups and Public Goods Provision in Rural China*. 120-147.
- Nicholas L. Miller. 2014. "The Secret Success of Nonproliferation Sanctions." *International Organization* 68: 913-944.

Note: Exercise 2 due (November 2); Deadline to meet with TA (by November 2)

9. Guest lecture: Prof. Asya Magazinnik, MIT (November 9)

Reading TBA

WRAP session on delivering the presentation will be held at recitation (November 12)

10. Guest lecture: Prof. In Song Kim, MIT (November 16)

Reading TBA

WRAP session on writing the literature review will be held at recitation (November 19)

11. Causal Methods and Causal Analysis (November 23)

Gerring, *Social Science Methodology*, 197-217 (Chapter 8: "Causal Arguments") and 218-55 (Chapter 9:

“Causal Analyses”).

Dunning, Thad. 2010. “Design-Based Inference: Beyond the Pitfalls of Regression Analysis?” In *Rethinking Social Inquiry: Diverse Tools, Shared Standards*, ed. Henry Brady and David Collier, 206-243. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

Kern, Holder Lutz, and Jens Hainmueller. 2009. “Opium for the Masses: How Foreign Free Media Can Stabilize Authoritarian Regimes.” *Political Analysis* 17: 377-399.

Boas, Taylor C., F. Daniel Hidalgo, and Neal P. Richardson. 2014. “The Spoils of Victory: Campaign Donations and Government Contracts in Brazil.” *Journal of Politics* 76(2): 415-429.

Note: Literature Review due, 15 pages (November 23)

IV: Student Presentations & Conclusion

12. Presentations – Group 1 (November 30)

WRAP session on delivering the presentation will be held at recitation (December 3)

13. Wrap-up & Presentations – Group 2 (December 7)

Note: Final Paper due, 20-25 pages (December 7)