

Political Science Scope and Methods

MIT | 17.850 | Fall 2021 | Th 9:00–11:00 | E53-485
Course site: <https://canvas.mit.edu/courses/>

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Course Description

This course provides a graduate-level introduction to and overview of approaches to political science research. It does not delve deeply into normative political theory or statistical methods (both of which are covered in depth by other courses), but it addresses almost all other aspects of the research process. Moreover, aside from being broadly positivist in orientation, the course is otherwise ecumenical with respect to method and subfield. The course covers philosophy of science, the generation of theories and research questions, conceptualization, measurement, causation, research designs (quantitative and qualitative), mixing methods, and professional ethics.

Learning Goals

By the end of this course, students should be able to:

- Discuss the ethical, legal, and professional standards expected of political scientists
- Explain the basic philosophical foundations of political science
- Describe the major methodological and epistemological approaches in the discipline and the logic that underpins them
- Identify the major components of empirically oriented research in political science and the broad criteria used to evaluate them
- Evaluate particular works of scholarship with respect to these criteria
- Complete and document basic research tasks such as operationalization, case selection, and experimental design
- Produce a professional-grade research proposal (optional).

Assignments

You may choose one of two “tracks”: one comprising a series of practical assignments tackling various research tasks, and the other organized around the submission of a National Science Foundation (NSF) Graduate Research Fellowships Program (GRFP) application. You must decide on a track before the third class session. In each track, the assignments (listed below) compose 80% of your grade. The remaining 20% of your grade will depend on in-class participation. You should interpret grades of A+/A as “excellent/good,” B+/B/B– as “adequate/fair/poor,” and C or below as “we need to talk.”

Track 1 (No NSF)

- Session 2: COUHES training (5%)
- Session 4: Research puzzle (15%)
- Session 7: Operationalization (15%)
- Session 10: Experimental design (15%)
- Session 12: Case selection (15%)
- Session 13: Observation (15%)

Track 2 (NSF)

- Session 2: COUHES training (5%)
- Session 3: NSF GRFP proposal idea (5%)
- Session 5: NSF GRFP proposal introduction and theory (15%)
- Session 8: NSF GRFP proposal (25%)
- Session 10: (a) Operationalization or (b) experimental design (15%)
- Session 13: (c) Case selection or (d) observation (15%)

Required Texts

The following five books are required (though only one is recommended for purchase).

Purchase Recommended

John Gerring. 2012. *Social Science Methodology: A Unified Framework*. 2nd ed. New York: Cambridge University Press. ISBN: 9780521132770

PDF Will Be Posted

Nancy Cartwright and Eleonora Montuschi, eds. 2014. *Philosophy of Social Science: A New Introduction*. New York: Oxford University Press. ISBN: 9780199645107

Peter Godfrey-Smith. 2003. *Theory and Reality: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Science*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. ISBN: 0226300633

James Mahoney and Gary Goertz. 2012. *A Tale of Two Cultures: Qualitative and Quantitative Research in the Social Sciences*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. ISBN: 9780691149714

Gary King, Robert Keohane, and Sidney Verba. 1994. *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. ISBN: 9780691034713

A list of texts recommended for deeper exploration of particular subjects is printed at the end of this syllabus.

Semester Overview

- 1 September 9: Becoming a Political Scientist
- 2 September 16: Philosophy of Science
→ MIT COUHES training
- 3 September 23: The Context of Discovery
- 4 September 30: The Context of Justification
- 5 October 7: Conceptualization & Descriptive Arguments
- 6 October 14: Measurement & Descriptive Inference
- 7 October 21: Counterfactuals & Causal Arguments
- 8 October 28: Quantitative I—Experimental Analysis
- 9 November 4: Quantitative II—Multivariate Analysis
- November 11: NO CLASS (Veterans Day)
- 10 November 18: Qualitative I—General Perspectives
- November 25: NO CLASS (Thanksgiving)
- 11 December 2: Qualitative II—Case Studies
- 12 December 9: Qualitative III—Fieldwork & Interpretativism
- 13 December 16: Mixing Methods (Optional)

Course Schedule

1 September 9: Becoming a Political Scientist

What does it mean to study politics scientifically? What ethical and professional standards should we follow in our work? What does a successful career in political science look like? What skills and traits should a political scientist develop? What does a research proposal look like?

Required Readings (180 pages)

Exemplars

[PDF](#) Kenneth J. Arrow, Robert O. Keohane, and Simon A. Levin. 2012. “Elinor Ostrom: An Uncommon Woman for the Commons.” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 109 (33): 13135–13136

[PDF](#) David R. Mayhew. 2015. “Robert A. Dahl: Questions, Concepts, Proving It.” *Journal of Political Power* 8 (2): 175–187

Ethics

Gary King and Melissa Sands. 2015. “How Human Subjects Research Rules Mislead You and Your University, and What to Do About It.” August 15, 2015. https://gking.harvard.edu/files/gking/files/irb_politics_paper_1.pdf

Jesse Singal. 2015. “The Case of the Amazing Gay-Marriage Data: How a Graduate Student Reluctantly Uncovered a Huge Scientific Fraud.” *New York Magazine*, May 29, 2015. <http://nymag.com/scienceofus/2015/05/how-a-grad-student-uncovered-a-huge-fraud.html>

Workflow

[PDF](#) Pierre Bayard. 2007. *How to Talk about Books You Haven't Read*. Translated from the French by Jeffrey Mehlman. New York: Bloomsbury, preface and chap. 1–4

[PDF](#) Allan Dafoe. 2014. “Science Deserves Better: The Imperative to Share Complete Replication Files.” *PS: Political Science & Politics* 47 (1): 60–66

[PDF](#) Tim Büthe and Alan M. Jacobs, eds. 2015. “Symposium: Transparency in Qualitative and Multi-Method Research.” *Qualitative & Multi-Method Research* 13 (1). https://www.maxwell.syr.edu/moynihan/cqrm/qmmr/Table_of_Contents_13_1/, 2–8 (Introduction) and 52–64 (Conclusion)

Kieran Healy. 2019. “The Plain Person’s Guide to Plain Text Social Science,” October 4, 2019. <http://plain-text.co> (SKIM)

Examples of NSF GRFP proposals

[PDF](#) Blair Read (successful proposal)

[PDF](#) Mina Pollmann (successful proposal)

[PDF](#) Anonymous 1 (unsuccessful proposal)

[PDF](#) Anonymous 2 (unsuccessful proposal)

2 September 16: Philosophy of Science

→ MIT COUHES training

What are the philosophical underpinnings of science? How does science work in practice? What, if any, are the differences between the natural and social sciences? How do and should scientists’ values and identities affect their work?

Required Readings (217 pages)

[PDF](#) Godfrey-Smith, *Theory and Reality*, 1–121 (chap. 1–7)

[PDF](#) Eleonora Montuschi. 2014. “Scientific Objectivity.” Chap. 7 in *Philosophy of Social Science: A New Introduction*, edited by Nancy Cartwright and Eleonora Montuschi, 123–144. New York: Oxford University Press

[PDF](#) Sharon Crasnow. 2014. “Feminist Standpoint Theory.” Chap. 8 in *Philosophy of Social Science: A New Introduction*, edited by Nancy Cartwright and Eleonora Montuschi, 145–161. New York: Oxford University Press

[PDF](#) Liam Kofi Bright. 2018. “Du Bois’ Democratic Defence of the Value Free Ideal.” *Synthese* 195:2227–2245

[PDF](#) Gerring, *Social Science Methodology*, xix–xxiii (Preface), 1–23 (chap. 1: “A Unified Framework”), and 27–36 (part of chap. 2: “Beginnings”)

Additional Resources

Karl Popper. 2002. *The Logic of Scientific Discovery*. New York: Routledge

Thomas Kuhn. 2012. *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press

Sandra G. Harding, ed. 1976. *Can Theories Be Refuted? Essays on the Duhem-Quine Thesis*. Dordrecht, Holland: D. Reidel

Paul K. Feyerabend. 1993. *Against Method*. 3rd ed. New York: Verso. First published 1975

Gabriel A. Almond and Stephen J. Genco. 1977. “Clouds, Clocks, and the Study of Politics.” *World Politics* 29 (4): 489–522

Gerring, *Social Science Methodology*, 394–401 (Postscript: “Justifications”)

Bruce Bueno de Mesquita. 2004. “The Methodical Study of Politics.” In *Problems and Methods in the Study of Politics*, edited by Ian Shapiro, Rogers M. Smith, and Tarek E. Masoud, 227–247. New York: Cambridge

3 September 23: The Context of Discovery

Like many others, Gerring divides the scientific process into two “contexts”: *discovery* and *appraisal* (also known as “justification”). This week focuses on discovery—the generation of new questions, models, theories, hypotheses, explanations, and arguments. What motivates good research? How do we come up with research questions? What are attributes of good arguments? What does it mean to “explain” something? How do theories, models, and hypotheses relate to one another? When formulating theories, how should we balance values such as verisimilitude, parsimony, tractability, and usefulness? When is formalizing theory worth the effort?

Required Readings (179 pages + 38 minutes)

Overview

[PDF](#) Godfrey-Smith, *Theory and Reality*, 173–189 (chap. 12: “Scientific Realism”) and 190–201 (chap. 13: “Explanation”)

Gerring, *Social Science Methodology*, 37–57 (second part of chap. 2: “Beginnings”) and 58–73 (chap. 3: “Arguments”)

Ideas and Questions

[PDF](#) Barbara Geddes. 2003. *Paradigms and Sand Castles: Theory Building and Research Design in Comparative Politics*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 27–40, 87–88

[PDF](#) Fred Eidlin. 2011. “The Method of Problems versus the Method of Topics.” *PS: Political Science & Politics* 44 (4): 758–761

David Mayhew reflects on the origins of *Congress: The Electoral Connection* (1974). Watch at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u3VCLfi3Bzk&feature=youtu.be>. 38 minutes (Mayhew starts speaking at 6:30)

Theories and Models

[PDF](#) Stephen Van Evera. 1997. *Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 7–21 (first part of chap. 1: “Hypotheses, Laws, and Theories”)

[PDF](#) Mahoney and Goertz, *Tale of Two Cultures*, 16–38 (chap. 2, “Mathematical Prelude: A Selective Introduction to Logic and Set Theory for Social Scientists”)

[PDF](#) Kevin A. Clarke and David M. Primo. 2007. “Modernizing Political Science: A Model-Based Approach.” *Perspectives on Politics* 5 (4): 741–753

Application

[PDF](#) James D. Fearon. 1995. “Rationalist Explanations for War.” *International Organization* 49 (3): 379–414

Additional Resources

Paul Krugman. 1994. “The Fall and Rise of Development Economics.” In *Rethinking the Development Experience: Essays Provoked by the Work of Albert O. Hirschman*, edited by Donald A. Schön and Lloyd Rodwin, 39–58. Washington, DC and Cambridge, MA: Brookings Institution / Lincoln Institute of Land Policy

Robert H. Bates et al. 1998. *Analytic Narratives*. Princeton: Princeton University Press

John H. Aldrich, James E. Alt, and Arthur Lupia. 2009. “The EITM Approach: Origins and Interpretations.” In *The Oxford Handbook of Political Methodology*, edited by Janet M. Box-Steffensmeier, Henry E. Brady, and David Collier. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199286546.003.0037>

Andrew T. Little and Thomas B. Pepinsky. 2016. “Simple and Formal Models in Comparative Politics.” *Chinese Political Science Review* 1 (3): 425–447

Kieran Healy. 2017. “Fuck Nuance.” *Sociological Theory* 35 (2): 118–127

4 September 30: The Context of Justification

How should arguments be appraised (i.e., justified, tested, evaluated, falsified, compared)?

What makes for convincing appraisal? What are various strategies of appraisal? In a probabilistic world, how should we draw theoretical inferences from data? What are the advantages and disadvantages of alternative appraisal strategies, as illustrated by studies of the democratic peace?

Required Readings (240 pages)

Overview

Gerring, *Social Science Methodology*, 74–103 (chap. 4: “Analyses”)

Perspectives

[PDF](#) Paul E. Meehl. 1997. “The Problem Is Epistemology, Not Statistics: Replace Significance Tests by Confidence Intervals and Quantify Accuracy of Risky Numerical Predictions.” In *What If There Were No Significance Tests?*, edited by Lisa L. Harlow, Stanley A. Mulaik, and James H. Steiger, 395–425. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates

[PDF](#) Godfrey-Smith, *Theory and Reality*, 202–217 (chap. 14: “Bayesian Inference”)

[PDF](#) Stephen Van Evera. 1997. *Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 27–48 (second part of chap. 1: “Hypotheses, Laws, and Theories”)

[PDF](#) Peter A. Hall. 2003. “Aligning Ontology and Methodology in Comparative Research.” Chap. 11 in *Comparative Historical Analysis in the Social Sciences*, edited by James Mahoney and Dietrich Rueschemeyer, 373–404. New York: Cambridge University Press

Applications to the Democratic Peace

[PDF](#) Bruce Russett et al. 1993. *Grasping the Democratic Peace: Principles for a Post-Cold War World*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 3–23 (chap. 1: “The Fact of Democratic Peace”) and 72–86 (first part of chap. 4: “The Democratic Peace since World War II”)

[PDF](#) Susan Peterson. 1995. “How Democracies Differ: Public Opinion, State Structure, and the Lessons of the Fashoda Crisis.” *Security Studies* 5 (1): 3–37

[PDF](#) Joslyn N. Barnhart et al. 2020. “The Suffragist Peace.” *International Organization* 74 (4): 633–670

Additional Resources

Donald T. Campbell and Julian Stanley. 1963. *Experimental and Quasi-Experimental Designs for Research*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth

Paul R. Rosenbaum. 2010. *Design of Observational Studies*. New York: Springer, especially chapters 4 and 5.

Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennett. 2005. *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 37–59 (chap. 2: “Case Study Methods and Research on the Interdemocratic Peace”)

Michael R. Tomz and Jessica L. P. Weeks. 2013. “Public Opinion and the Democratic Peace.” *American Political Science Review* 107 (4): 849–865

5 October 7: Conceptualization & Descriptive Arguments

This class session covers *concepts* (the linguistic containers political scientists use to describe the social world) and *descriptive arguments* (answers to “what” questions). Following Gerring, these can be viewed as forms of descriptive (as distinct from causal) discovery. While conceptualization and description are sometimes neglected, they are both valuable scientific tasks in themselves and necessary preconditions for causal arguments and analyses.

Required Readings (165 pages)

Overview

Gerring, *Social Science Methodology*, 107–40 (chap. 5: “Concepts”) and 141–54 (chap. 6: “Descriptive Arguments”)

[PDF](#) Nancy Cartwright and Rosa Runhardt. 2014. “Measurement.” Chap. 14 in *Philosophy of Social Science: A New Introduction*, edited by Nancy Cartwright and Eleonora Montuschi, 265–287. New York: Oxford University Press

Perspectives

[PDF](#) Giovanni Sartori. 1970. “Concept Misformation in Comparative Politics.” *American Political Science Review* 64 (4): 1033–1053

[PDF](#) David Collier and James E. Mahon Jr. 1993. “Conceptual ‘Stretching’ Revisited: Adapting Categories in Comparative Analysis.” *American Political Science Review* 87 (4): 845–855

[PDF](#) Richard Locke and Kathleen Thelen. 1998. “Problems of Equivalence in Comparative Politics: Apples and Oranges, Again.” *APSA-CP: Newsletter of the APSA Organized Section in Comparative Politics* 9 (1): 9–12

Applications (Read [All](#))

[PDF](#) Robert A. Dahl. 1971. *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1–9

[PDF](#) Jacob S. Hacker. 2004. “Privatizing Risk without Privatizing the Welfare State: The Hidden Politics of Social Policy Retrenchment in the United States.” *American Political Science Review* 98 (2): 243–260

[PDF](#) Rawi Abdelal et al. 2006. “Identity as a Variable.” *Perspectives on Politics* 4 (4): 695–711

[PDF](#) Alisha C. Holland. 2016. “Forbearance.” *American Political Science Review* 110 (2): 232–246

Additional Resources

Rawi Abdelal et al., eds. 2009. *Measuring Identity: A Guide for Social Scientists*. New York: Cambridge University Press

David Collier and Steven Levitsky. 1997. “Democracy with Adjectives: Conceptual Innovation in Comparative Research.” *World Politics* 49 (3): 430–451

6 October 14: Measurement & Descriptive Inference

This session moves from descriptive discovery to descriptive appraisal—that is, from theoretical concepts and arguments to the empirical task of *measurement*. The readings discuss procedures for constructing operational measures of concepts and criteria for evaluating measurement *validity*. We consider how choices regarding measurement can affect the appraisal of descriptive arguments. To illustrate the pitfalls and trade-offs of different measurement strategies, we examine various approaches to conceptualizing and measuring democracy.

Required Readings (175 pages)

Overview

Gerring, *Social Science Methodology*, 155–94 (chap. 7: “Measurements”)

Perspectives

[PDF](#) Robert Adcock and David Collier. 2001. “Measurement Validity: A Shared Standard for Qualitative and Quantitative Research.” *American Political Science Review* 95 (3): 529–546

[PDF](#) Kevin Munger, Andrew M. Guess, and Eszter Hargittai. 2021. “Quantitative Description of Digital Media: A Modest Proposal to Disrupt Academic Publishing.” *Journal of Quantitative Description: Digital Media* 1:1–13

Pitfalls

[PDF](#) Richard E. Nisbett and Timothy DeCamp Wilson. 1977. “Telling More Than We Can Know: Verbal Reports on Mental Processes.” *Psychological Review* 84 (3): 231–259

[PDF](#) Ian S. Lustick. 1996. “History, Historiography, and Political Science: Multiple Historical Records and the Problem of Selection Bias.” *American Political Science Review* 90 (3): 605–618

Applications

[PDF](#) Mike Alvarez et al. 1996. “Classifying Political Regimes.” *Studies in Comparative International Development* 31 (2): 3–36

[PDF](#) Pamela Paxton. 2000. “Women’s Suffrage in the Measurement of Democracy: Problems of Operationalization.” *Studies in Comparative International Development* 35 (3): 92–111

[PDF](#) Shawn Treier and Simon Jackman. 2008. “Democracy as a Latent Variable.” *American Journal of Political Science* 52 (1): 201–217

Additional Resources

Jason Seawright and David Collier. 2014. “Rival Strategies of Validation: Tools for Evaluating Measures of Democracy.” *Comparative Political Studies* 47 (1): 111–138

Jack H. Hexter. 1986. “The Historical Method of Christopher Hill.” In *On Historians*, 227–251. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press

7 October 21: Counterfactuals & Causal Arguments

In this session, we transition from description to causation. We will cover both causal arguments (i.e., discovery) and causal analyses (i.e., appraisal), though we leave discussion

of specific strategies of causal appraisal for subsequent sessions. We will consider alternative definitions of causation and discuss what constitutes a well-defined (and therefore estimable) causal effect. One of the goals of this session is to establish a framework for reasoning about causation that transcends methodological divides (e.g., quantitative vs. qualitative).

Required Readings (184 pages)

Causal Arguments and Analyses

Gerring, *Social Science Methodology*, 197–217 (chap. 8: “Causal Arguments”) and 218–55 (chap. 9: “Causal Analyses”)

Philosophical Perspectives on Causation

[PDF](#) Nancy Cartwright. 2014. “Causal Inference.” Chap. 16 in *Philosophy of Social Science: A New Introduction*, edited by Nancy Cartwright and Eleonora Montuschi, 308–326. New York: Oxford University Press

[PDF](#) Henry E. Brady. 2008. “Causation and Explanation in Social Science.” Chap. 10 in *The Oxford Handbook of Political Methodology*, edited by Janet M. Box-Steffensmeier, Henry E. Brady, and David Collier, 217–270. New York: Oxford University Press, 217–249 (section 9 is optional)

Counterfactuals

[PDF](#) James D. Fearon. 1991. “Counterfactuals and Hypothesis Testing in Political Science.” *World Politics* 43 (2): 169–195

Manipulation

[PDF](#) Maya Sen and Omar Wasow. 2016. “Race as a Bundle of Sticks: Designs that Estimate Effects of Seemingly Immutable Characteristics.” *Annual Review of Political Science* 19 (1): 499–522

Causation and Historical Development

[PDF](#) David A. Bateman and Dawn Langan Teele. 2020. “A Developmental Approach to Historical Causal Inference.” In “Causal Inference and American Political Development.” *Public Choice* 185:253–279

Additional Resources

- David Lewis. 1973. “Causation.” *Journal of Philosophy* 70 (7): 556–567
- Donald B. Rubin. 2008. “For Objective Causal Inference, Design Trumps Analysis.” *Annals of Applied Statistics* 2 (3): 808–840
- William R. Shadish. 2010. “Campbell and Rubin: A Primer and Comparison of Their Approaches to Causal Inference in Field Settings.” *Psychological Methods* 15 (1): 3–17
- Judea Pearl. 2009. *Causality: Models, Reasoning, and Inference*. 2nd ed. New York: Cambridge University Press
- L. A. Paul and Ned Hall. 2013. *Causation: A User’s Guide*. New York: Oxford University Press
- Sally Haslanger. 2016. “What Is a (Social) Structural Explanation?” *Philosophical Studies* 173 (1): 113–130
- Bradford Skow. 2018. *Causation, Explanation, and the Metaphysics of Aspect*. New York: Oxford University Press
- Mahoney and Goertz, *Tale of Two Cultures*, 41–83 (Part I: “Causal Models and Inference”)

8 October 28: Quantitative I—Experimental Analysis

This is the first in a series of sessions that discuss specific causal inference strategies and research designs. We begin with what are arguably the most straightforward causal designs, ones in which units are randomly (or “as if” randomly) assigned to different treatment conditions (i.e., different levels of the causal variable of interest). Such *experiments*, whether controlled by the researcher or implemented by “nature,” offer the most propitious setting for estimating *average treatment effects* of various kinds. The applications for this week occupy different points on Dunning’s “continuum of plausibility” of as-if randomness. The examples range from temporal (Campbell and Ross 1968) and geographic (Ferwerda and Miller 2014; Kocher and Monteiro 2016) discontinuities to randomized natural (Titunik 2015) and field (Broockman and Kalla 2016) experiments. We will discuss trade-offs between internal and external validity and other issues that arise in (quasi-)experimental settings.

Required Readings (150 pages)

Overview

Gerring, *Social Science Methodology*, 256–90 (chap. 10: “Causal Strategies: X and Y ”)

Natural Experiments

[PDF](#) Thad Dunning. 2008. “Improving Causal Inference: Strengths and Limitations of Natural Experiments.” *Political Research Quarterly* 61 (2): 282–293

Applications (Read All)

[PDF](#) Donald T. Campbell and H. Laurence Ross. 1968. “The Connecticut Crackdown on Speeding: Time-Series Data in Quasi-Experimental Analysis.” *Law & Society Review* 3 (1): 33–54

[PDF](#) Jeremy Ferwerda and Nicholas L. Miller. 2014. “Political Devolution and Resistance to Foreign Rule: A Natural Experiment.” *American Political Science Review* 108 (3): 642–660

[PDF](#) Matthew A. Kocher and Nuno P. Monteiro. 2016. “Lines of Demarcation: Causation, Design-Based Inference, and Historical Research.” *Perspectives on Politics* 14 (4): 952–975 (critique of Ferwerda and Miller 2014)

[PDF](#) Rocío Titiunik. 2015. “Drawing Your Senator from a Jar: Term Length and Legislative Behavior.” *Political Science Research and Methods* 4 (2): 293–316

[PDF](#) David Broockman and Joshua Kalla. 2016. “Durably Reducing Transphobia: A Field Experiment on Door-to-Door Canvassing.” *Science* 352 (6282): 220–224

9 November 4: Quantitative II—Multivariate Analysis

In this session we broaden our focus to consider causal designs that, in the Gerring’s words, require going “beyond X and Y ” (i.e., beyond the treatment and the outcome). These include designs that: (1) adjust for the *confounding* effect of common causes of X and Y ; (2) examine the *mediators* and/or *moderators* of the X – Y relationship; or (3) use an *instrument* to induce/isolate random variation in the causal variable of interest. We also consider selection bias, which arises from inappropriate adjustment or conditioning. Finally, we examine critiques of observational studies (relative to experiments) and responses to those critiques.

Required Readings (167 pages)

Overview

Gerring, *Social Science Methodology*, 291–326 (chap. 11: “Causal Strategies: Beyond X and Y ”)

Conditioning-Induced Bias

[PDF](#) Barbara Geddes. 1990. “How the Cases You Choose Affect the Answers You Get: Selection Bias in Comparative Politics.” *Political Analysis* 2:131–150

[PDF](#) Felix Elwert and Christopher Winship. 2014. “Endogenous Selection Bias: The Problem of Conditioning on a Collider Variable.” *Annual Review of Sociology* 40:31–53

Experimental vs. Observational Studies

[PDF](#) Alan S. Gerber, Donald P. Green, and Edward H. Kaplan. 2014. “The Illusion of Learning from Observational Research.” Chap. 1 in *Field Experiments and Their Critics: Essays on the Uses and Abuses of Experimentation in the Social Sciences*, edited by Dawn Langan Teele, 9–32. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press. First published 2004

[PDF](#) Susan C. Stokes. 2014. “A Defense of Observational Research.” Chap. 2 in *Field Experiments and Their Critics: Essays on the Uses and Abuses of Experimentation in the Social Sciences*, edited by Dawn Langan Teele, 33–57. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press

Applications (Read All)

[PDF](#) Ebonya L. Washington. 2008. “Female Socialization: How Daughters Affect Their Legislators’ Voting on Women’s Issues.” *American Economic Review* 98 (1): 311–332

[PDF](#) Robert S. Erikson and Laura Stoker. 2011. “Caught in the Draft: The Effects of Vietnam Draft Lottery Status on Political Attitudes.” *American Political Science Review* 105 (2): 221–237

Additional Resources

Jasjeet S. Sekhon. 2009. “Opiates for the Matches: Matching Methods for Causal Inference.” *Annual Review of Political Science* 12:487–508

Joshua D. Angrist and Jörn-Steffen Pischke. 2010. “The Credibility Revolution in Empirical Economics: How Better Research Design is Taking the Con out of Econometrics.” *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 24 (2): 3–30

Lant Pritchett and Justin Sandefur. 2015. “Learning from Experiments when Context Matters.” *American Economic Review* 105 (5): 471–475

Jasjeet S. Sekhon and Rocío Titiunik. 2012. “When Natural Experiments Are Neither Natural nor Experiments.” *American Political Science Review* 106 (1): 35–57

John G. Bullock, Donald P. Green, and Shang E. Ha. 2010. “Yes, But What’s the Mechanism? (Don’t Expect an Easy Answer).” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 98 (4): 550–558

Angus Deaton. 2014. “Instruments, Randomization, and Learning about Development.” Chap. 8 in *Field Experiments and Their Critics: Essays on the Uses and Abuses of Experimentation in the Social Sciences*, edited by Dawn Langan Teele, 141–184. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press

November 11: NO CLASS (Veterans Day)

10 November 18: Qualitative I—General Perspectives

In the next three sessions, we turn to the analysis of non-numerical data. In this week, we read a debate that happened in the 1990s and 2000s about the role of qualitative methods in political science. King, Keohane, and Verba’s 1994 intervention in this debate is so widely known that it is often referred to simply as “KKV.” KKV’s claim that qualitative inference should follow the same principles as quantitative inference produced a number of critical responses and spurred substantial growth in the field of qualitative political methodology.

Required Readings (195 pages)

The Opening Salvo

[PDF](#) King, Keohane, and Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry*, 3–33 (chap. 1: “The Science in Social Science”) and 115–230 (chap. 4–6)

Critical Responses

[PDF](#) David Collier, Henry E. Brady, and Jason Seawright. 2010b. “Sources of Leverage in Causal Inference: Toward an Alternative View of Methodology.” Chap. 9 in *Rethinking Social Inquiry: Diverse Tools, Shared Standards*, 2nd ed., edited by Henry E. Brady and David Collier, 141–173. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield

[PDF](#) Mahoney and Goertz, *Tale of Two Cultures*, 1–15 (chap. 1: “Introduction”)

Additional Resources

David Collier, Henry E. Brady, and Jason Seawright. 2010a. “Critiques, Responses, and Trade-Offs: Drawing Together the Debate.” Chap. 8 in *Rethinking Social Inquiry: Diverse Tools, Shared Standards*, 2nd ed., edited by Henry E. Brady and David Collier, 112–140. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield

Gerring, *Social Science Methodology*, 327–58 (chapter 12: “Varying Approaches to Causal Inference”)

Henry E. Brady and David Collier, eds. 2010. *Rethinking Social Inquiry: Diverse Tools, Shared Standards*. 2nd ed. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield

John Gerring. 2017. “Qualitative Methods.” *Annual Review of Political Science* 20 (1): 15–36

November 25: NO CLASS (Thanksgiving)

11 December 2: Qualitative II—Case Studies

This session, our second on qualitative methods, delves into the specifics of case study research. It covers both cross-case comparison and within-case analysis, with an emphasis on process tracing.

Required Readings (233 pages)

Overviews

[PDF](#) Mary S. Morgan. 2014. “Case Studies.” Chap. 15 in *Philosophy of Social Science: A New Introduction*, edited by Nancy Cartwright and Eleonora Montuschi, 288–307. New York: Oxford University Press

[PDF](#) Mahoney and Goertz, *Tale of Two Cultures*, 87–99 (chap. 7: “Within-Case versus Cross-Case Analysis”)

Cross-Case Analysis

[PDF](#) Jasjeet S. Sekhon. 2004. “Quality Meets Quantity: Case Studies, Conditional Probability, and Counterfactuals.” *Perspectives on Politics* 2 (2): 281–293

[PDF](#) Dan Slater and Daniel Ziblatt. 2013. “The Enduring Indispensability of the Controlled Comparison.” *Comparative Political Studies* 46 (10): 1301–1327

Within-Case Analysis

[PDF](#) David Collier. 2011. “Understanding Process Tracing.” *PS: Political Science & Politics* 44 (4): 823–830

[PDF](#) David Waldner. 2015. “What Makes Process Tracing Good? Causal Mechanisms, Causal Inference, and the Completeness Standard in Comparative Politics.” In *Process Tracing: From Metaphor to Analytic Tool*, edited by Jeffrey Checkel and Andrew Bennett, 126–52. New York: Cambridge University Press

[PDF](#) Tasha Fairfield and Andrew E. Charman. 2017. “Explicit Bayesian Analysis for Process Tracing: Guidelines, Opportunities, and Caveats.” *Political Analysis* 25 (3): 363–380

Case Selection

[PDF](#) Mahoney and Goertz, *Tale of Two Cultures*, 177–191 (chap. 14: “Case Selection and Hypothesis Testing”)

[PDF](#) Richard A. Nielsen. 2016. “Case Selection via Matching.” *Sociological Methods & Research* 45 (3): 569–597

Applications

[PDF](#) Nina Tannenwald. 1999. “The Nuclear Taboo: The United States and the Normative Basis of Nuclear Non-Use.” *American Political Science Review* 53 (3): 433–468

[PDF](#) Diana Dumitru and Carter Johnson. 2011. “Constructing Interethnic Conflict and Cooperation: Why Some People Harmed Jews and Others Helped Them during the Holocaust in Romania.” *World Politics* 63 (1): 1–42

Additional Resources

Ruth Berins Collier and David Collier. 2002. *Shaping the Political Arena: Critical Junctures, the Labor Movement, and Regime Dynamics in Latin America*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press. First published 1991

Ana Catalano Weeks. 2018. “Why Are Gender Quota Laws Adopted by Men? The Role of Inter- and Intraparty Competition.” *Comparative Political Studies* 51 (14): 1935–1973

John Gerring. 2004. “What is a Case Study and What Is it Good For?” *American political science review* 98 (2): 341–354

Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennett. 2005. *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press

Jason Seawright 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

Paul Pierson. 2011. *Politics in Time: History, Institutions, and Social Analysis*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press

James Mahoney and Kathleen Thelen, eds. 2015. *Advances in Comparative-Historical Analysis*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

12 December 9: Qualitative III—Fieldwork & Interpretivism

In our final session on qualitative analysis, we will discuss fieldwork and ethnography. We will give particular attention to interpretive methods, which focus on how people understand and give meaning to the world around them. In contrast to positivism, interpretivism emphasizes the importance of inhabiting the perspective of the subjects of study and the impossibility of studying social phenomena neutrally or objectively. Positivism and interpretivism are often considered incompatible, but as the Cramer reading suggests, many scholars find both perspectives valuable.

Required Readings (265 pages)

[PDF](#) Clifford Geertz. 1973. “Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture.” In *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 3–30. New York: Basic Books

[PDF](#) Elisabeth Jean Wood. 2007. “Field Research.” In *The Oxford Handbook of Political Methodology*, edited by Janet M. Box-Steffensmeier, Henry E. Brady, and David Collier, 123–146. New York: Oxford University Press

[PDF](#) Joe Soss. 2018. “On Casing a Study versus Studying a Case.” *Qualitative and Multi-Method Research* 16 (1): 21–27

[PDF](#) Katherine J. Cramer. 2016. *The Politics of Resentment: Rural Consciousness in Wisconsin and the Rise of Scott Walker*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 26–44 (chap. 2: “A Method of Listening”) and 45–89 (chap. 3: “The Contours of Rural Consciousness”)

[PDF](#) James C. Scott. 1998. *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1–52 (chap. 1: “Nature and Space”)

[PDF](#) Lisa Wedeen. 1998. “Acting ‘As If’: Symbolic Politics and Social Control in Syria.” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 40 (3): 503–523

[PDF](#) David C. W. Parker. 2018. “Following Fenno: Learning from Senate Candidates in the Age of Social Media and Party Polarization.” *The Forum* 16 (2): 145–170

[PDF](#) Vesla Weaver, Gwen Prowse, and Spencer Piston. 2020. “Withdrawing and Drawing In: Political Discourse in Policed Communities.” *Journal of Race, Ethnicity, and Politics* 5 (3): 604–647

Additional Resources

Diana Fu. 2017. “Disguised Collective Action in China.” *Comparative Political Studies* 50 (4): 499–527

Lisa Wedeen. 2010. “Reflections on Ethnographic Work in Political Science.” *Annual Review of Political Science* 13 (1): 255–272

Timothy Pachirat. 2009. “The Political in Political Ethnography: Dispatches from the Kill Floor.” Chap. 6 in *Political Ethnography: What Immersion Contributes to the Study of Power*, edited by Edward Schatz, 143–161. Chicago: University of Chicago Press

Lee Ann Fujii. 2015. “Five Stories of Accidental Ethnography: Turning Unplanned Moments in the Field into Data.” *Qualitative Research* 15 (4): 525–539

Clifford Geertz. 1972. “Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight.” *Daedalus* 101 (1): 1–37

Richard Fenno. 1978. *Homestyle*. Boston: Little, Brown, 249–95 (Appendix: “Notes on Method: Participant Observation”)

Dvora Yanow and Peregrine Schwartz-Shea. 2015. *Interpretation and Method: Empirical Research Methods and the Interpretive Turn*. New York: Routledge

Richard A. Nielsen. 2019. “Recite! Interpretive Fieldwork for Positivists.” In *An Unorthodox Guide to Fieldwork*, edited by Peter Krause and Ora Szekely. New York: Columbia University Press

Jennifer Bussell. 2020. “Shadowing as a Tool for Studying Political Elites.” Pre-published, *Political Analysis*, 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1017/pan.2020.14>

Timothy Pachirat. 2014. “We Call It a Grain of Sand: The Interpretive Orientation and a Human Social Science.” Chap. 24 in *Interpretation and Method: Empirical Research Methods and the Interpretive Turn*, 2nd ed., edited by Dvora Yanow and Peregrine Schwartz-Shea, 426–432. Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe

13 December 16: Mixing Methods (Optional)

In this, our final session focused explicitly on methodology, we consider the issue of whether and how to reconcile and combine different methodological approaches. Do different methodological approaches share an underlying unity of logic and standards, or are they essentially different “cultures” that can coexist only at a safe distance from one another? Can and should a given study employ multiple methods to complement each other, or is knowledge cumulation best served by methodological specialization?

Required Readings (193 pages)

Overview

Gerring, *Social Science Methodology*, 359–376 (chap. 13: “Unity and Plurality”) and 379–93 (chap. 14: “Setting Standards”)

Approaches

[PDF](#) Evan S. Lieberman. 2005. “Nested Analysis as a Mixed-Method Strategy for Comparative Research.” *American Political Science Review* 99 (3): 435–452

[PDF](#) Francesca Refsum Jensenius. 2014. “The Fieldwork of Quantitative Data Collection.” *PS: Political Science & Politics* 47 (2): 402–404

[PDF](#) Macartan Humphreys and Alan M. Jacobs. 2015. “Mixing Methods: A Bayesian Approach.” *American Political Science Review* 109 (4): 653–673


[PDF](#) Peter Lorentzen, M. Taylor Fravel, and Jack Paine. 2017. “Qualitative Investigation of Theoretical Models: The Value of Process Tracing.” *Journal of Theoretical Politics* 29 (3): 467–491

Critiques

[PDF](#) Scott Gelbach. 2015. “The Fallacy of Multiple Methods.” *CP: Newsletter of the Comparative Politics Organized Section of the American Political Science Association* 25 (2): 11–12. http://comparativenewsletter.com/files/archived_newsletters/newsletter_fall2015.pdf

[PDF](#) Amel Ahmed and Rudra Sil. 2012. “When Multi-Method Research Subverts Methodological Pluralism—or, Why We Still Need Single-Method Research.” *Perspectives on Politics* 10 (4): 935–953

Applications

 Anna Grzymala-Busse. 2015. “Weapons of the Meek: How Churches Influence Public Policy.” *World Politics* 68 (1): 1–36

 Daniel C. Mattingly. 2016. “Elite Capture: How Decentralization and Informal Institutions Weaken Property Rights in China.” *World Politics* 68 (3): 383–412

Additional Resources

James Fearon and David Laitin. 2009. “Integrating Qualitative and Quantitative Methods.” In *The Oxford Handbook of Political Methodology*, edited by Janet M. Box-Steffensmeier, Henry E. Brady, and David Collier. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199286546.003.0033>

Thad Dunning. 2012. *Natural Experiments in the Social Sciences: A Design-Based Approach*. New York: Cambridge University Press

Jason Seawright. 2016. *Multi-method Social Science: Combining Qualitative and Quantitative Tools*. New York: Cambridge University Press

This syllabus was last modified on May 28, 2021.

Recommended Texts

The following texts are recommended for deeper exploration of particular subjects.

Writing

Joan Bolker. 1998. *Writing Your Dissertation in Fifteen Minutes a Day: A Guide to Starting, Revising, and Finishing Your Doctoral Thesis*. New York: Holt

John Van Maanen. 2011. *Tales of the Field: On Writing Ethnography*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press

Helen Sword. 2012. *Stylish Academic Writing*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press

Verlyn Klinkenborg. 2013. *Several Short Sentences About Writing*. New York: Vintage

William Germano. 2014. *From Dissertation to Book*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press

Steven Pinker. 2014. *The Sense of Style: The Thinking Person's Guide to Writing in the 21st Century*. New York: Penguin

Methodology

Stephen Van Evera. 1997. *Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press

Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennett. 2005. *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press

Janet M. Box-Steffensmeier, Henry E. Brady, and David Collier, eds. 2008. *The Oxford Handbook of Political Methodology*. New York: Oxford University Press

Henry E. Brady and David Collier, eds. 2010. *Rethinking Social Inquiry: Diverse Tools, Shared Standards*. 2nd ed. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield

Paul R. Rosenbaum. 2010. *Design of Observational Studies*. New York: Springer

Kevin A. Clarke and David M. Primo. 2012. *A Model Discipline: Political Science and the Logic of Representations*. New York: Oxford University Press

Dawn Langan Teele, ed. 2014. *Field Experiments and Their Critics: Essays on the Uses and Abuses of Experimentation in the Social Sciences*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press

Dvora Yanow and Peregrine Schwartz-Shea. 2015. *Interpretation and Method: Empirical Research Methods and the Interpretive Turn*. New York: Routledge

Diana Kapiszewski, Lauren M. MacLean, and Benjamin L. Read, eds. 2015. *Field Research in Political Science*. New York: Cambridge University Press

James Mahoney and Kathleen Thelen, eds. 2015. *Advances in Comparative-Historical Analysis*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

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- Adcock, Robert, and David Collier. 2001. "Measurement Validity: A Shared Standard for Qualitative and Quantitative Research." *American Political Science Review* 95 (3): 529–546.
- Ahmed, Amel, and Rudra Sil. 2012. "When Multi-Method Research Subverts Methodological Pluralism—or, Why We Still Need Single-Method Research." *Perspectives on Politics* 10 (4): 935–953.
- Aldrich, John H., James E. Alt, and Arthur Lupia. 2009. "The EITM Approach: Origins and Interpretations." In *The Oxford Handbook of Political Methodology*, edited by Janet M. Box-Steffensmeier, Henry E. Brady, and David Collier. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199286546.003.0037>.
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- Alvarez, Mike, José Antonio Cheibub, Fernando Limongi, and Adam Przeworski. 1996. "Classifying Political Regimes." *Studies in Comparative International Development* 31 (2): 3–36.
- Angrist, Joshua D., and Jörn-Steffen Pischke. 2010. "The Credibility Revolution in Empirical Economics: How Better Research Design is Taking the Con out of Econometrics." *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 24 (2): 3–30.
- Arrow, Kenneth J., Robert O. Keohane, and Simon A. Levin. 2012. "Elinor Ostrom: An Uncommon Woman for the Commons." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 109 (33): 13135–13136.
- Barnhart, Joslyn N., Robert F. Trager, Elizabeth N. Saunders, and Allan Dafoe. 2020. "The Suffragist Peace." *International Organization* 74 (4): 633–670.
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- Bates, Robert H., Avner Greif, Margaret Levi, Jean-Laurent Rosenthal, and Barry R. Weingast. 1998. *Analytic Narratives*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

- Bayard, Pierre. 2007. *How to Talk about Books You Haven't Read*. Translated from the French by Jeffrey Mehlman. New York: Bloomsbury.
- Bolker, Joan. 1998. *Writing Your Dissertation in Fifteen Minutes a Day: A Guide to Starting, Revising, and Finishing Your Doctoral Thesis*. New York: Holt.
- Box-Steffensmeier, Janet M., Henry E. Brady, and David Collier, eds. 2008. *The Oxford Handbook of Political Methodology*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Brady, Henry E. 2008. "Causation and Explanation in Social Science." Chap. 10 in *The Oxford Handbook of Political Methodology*, edited by Janet M. Box-Steffensmeier, Henry E. Brady, and David Collier, 217–270. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Brady, Henry E., and David Collier, eds. 2010. *Rethinking Social Inquiry: Diverse Tools, Shared Standards*. 2nd ed. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
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- Bueno de Mesquita, Bruce. 2004. "The Methodical Study of Politics." In *Problems and Methods in the Study of Politics*, edited by Ian Shapiro, Rogers M. Smith, and Tarek E. Masoud, 227–247. New York: Cambridge.
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- Bussell, Jennifer. 2020. "Shadowing as a Tool for Studying Political Elites." Pre-published, *Political Analysis*, 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1017/pan.2020.14>.
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