

University of Hamburg
Department of Social and Economic Sciences
Political Science
24-109.21 Topics in Comparative Political Economy: Preferences and Institutions (2)
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Topics in Comparative Political Economy: Research Design in Political Science

Syllabus Spring 2022

VMP 9 B537

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Course Outline

The course will support you formulate your own research project by addressing fundamentals of theory building and research design in political science. The course covers a range of topics, starting from the selection of important and interesting research topics, formulating research questions, literature assessments, the development of theory and empirically testable hypotheses, issues of case selection, measurement and operationalization, and basics in quantitative and qualitative designs.

By the end of this course, you will:

- Formulate own research questions and identify key literature
- Specify concepts, theory, hypotheses and choose a research method
- Be familiar with causal reasoning and different methods for causal inference
- Clearly communicate research goals, theory and methods and justify the choices you make
- Be familiar with the process of drafting a thesis and be able to conduct your own research project

Requirements

Readings. You are expected to assess the assigned literature before class. The literature provides a thorough understanding of key aspects we are going to discuss in class and is meant to support you in the process of drafting your own research project.

Homework. Start working on your project early! Homework assignments help you design your own research project. Each assignment focuses on different aspects of theory building and research design. Upload a short summary of the homework task on OpenOlat before class (1-2 pages, double spaced, 12pt font, justified text). Discussions in small groups during class are based on your homework.

Class Discussions. In class discussions we will go through several parts of your own research project. You will receive feedback from classmates and the instructor and you are expected to reflect on this feedback when working on your project. Several assignments help you to understand central aspects of the class topics.

Presentations. You will present twice during this term. The first presentation is based on one of the course topics and builds on the assigned literature (15-20 min). The second presentation takes place towards the end of the term and focuses on your own research project (see below).

Research Drafts. You will present and write a draft for a research project during this course.

1. Presentation:

- Content
 - (a) Research topic: Why should we care about your research? Refer to current phenomena of political or social significance.
 - (b) Research question: Which question are you trying to answer? Specify the puzzle.
 - (c) Literature review: Assess the key literature you are referring to (max. 1 page).
 - (d) Concepts: Define the theoretical concepts.
 - (e) Theory: What is your theoretical answer to the research question? Draft an argument.
 - (f) Hypothesis: What are the observational implications of your argument?
 - (g) Data and Method: How do you test your hypotheses empirically?
- Format and Submission

- (a) Presentations (max. 10 min)
- (b) Focus on key aspects and avoid narration

2. Written Draft:

- Content
 - (a) Theory: Revise earlier version (includes research topic, research question, literature review, concepts, theory, hypothesis).
 - (b) Data and Method: Explain the methods you will use to answer your research questions. Which cases do you focus on? Which data are you using? Discuss strengths and weaknesses.
 - (c) Empirical Evidence: Provide a first empirical analysis to test your hypotheses. Discuss your results.
- Format and Submission
 - (a) max. 5,000 words (double spaced, 12pt font, justified text, PDF)
 - (b) Focus on key aspects and avoid narration

Assessment

Students will be evaluated through the written research draft. It is no more than 5,000 words (double spaced, 12pt font, justified text, PDF) and includes at least 20 references. The written draft is due on Friday, July 30, 10 am.

Academic Writing

In academic writing, both substance and style matter. Be focused and concise. Use active voice. Spell-check. Re-read your proposal and check for structure and clarity. Please review these short pieces.

- James A. Stimson. n.d. Professional Writing for Political Science: A Highly Opinionated Essay.
- Paul Krugman. 1993. How I Work.
- Barry Weingast. 1995. Caltech Rules For Writing Papers: How To Structure Your Paper And Write An Introduction.

Reference Books

- Lisa A Baglione. *Writing a Research Paper in Political Science: A Practical Guide to Inquiry, Structure, and Methods*. Cq Press, 2018.
- Kosuke Imai. *Quantitative Social Science: An Introduction*. Princeton University Press, 2018.
- Paul M. Kellstedt and Guy D. Whitten. *The Fundamentals of Political Science Research*. 3rd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018.
- John Gerring and Dino Christenson. *Applied Social Science Methodology: An Introductory Guide*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017.
- Dimiter Toshkov. *Research Design in Political Science*. Macmillan International Higher Education, 2016.
- Jeffrey M Wooldridge. *Introductory Econometrics: A Modern Approach*. Nelson Education, 2016.
- Gary Goertz and James Mahoney. *A Tale of Two Cultures: Qualitative and Quantitative Research in the Social Sciences*. Princeton University Press, 2012.
- Henry E Brady and David Collier. *Rethinking Social Inquiry: Diverse Tools, Shared Standards*. 2nd ed. Ebook Central. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2010.
- Janet M. Box-Steffensmeier, Henry E Brady, and David Collier. *The Oxford Handbook of Political Methodology*. Political Methodology. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.
- John Gerring. *Case Study Research: Principles and Practices*. Cambridge university press, 2006.
- Barbara Geddes. *Paradigms and Sand Castles: Theory Building and Research Design in Comparative Politics*. Analytical Perspectives on Politics. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003.
- Gary King, Robert O. Keohane, and Sidney Verba. *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research*. Princeton Paperbacks. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994.

Schedule

April 4	Introduction and Technicalities
April 11	Types of Research and Research Questions
April 18	No Class (Easter)
April 25	Literature and Reviewing
May 2	Theory Building
May 9	Concepts and Operationalization
May 16	Explanation and Causality
May 23	No Class (Break)
May 30	Research Design and Case Selection
June 6	No Class (Pentecost)
June 13	Experimental Designs
June 20	Large-N Designs
June 27	Project Presentations I
July 4	Project Presentations II
July 11	Project Presentations III

1. Introduction and Technicalities

Recommended:

- Paul M. Kellstedt and Guy D. Whitten. *The Fundamentals of Political Science Research*. 3rd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018. Ch.1
- Gary King, Robert O. Keohane, and Sidney Verba. *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research*. Princeton Paperbacks. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994. Ch.1.1

Homework:

Which political or social phenomena are you interested in?

1. Prepare a short description of the topic.
2. Why is it interesting to you and to the scholarly debate? Specify the audience.

2. Types of Research and Research Questions

Required:

- Dimiter Toshkov. *Research Design in Political Science*. Macmillan International Higher Education, 2016. Ch.2
- Barbara Geddes. *Paradigms and Sand Castles: Theory Building and Research Design in Comparative Politics*. Analytical Perspectives on Politics. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003. Ch.2
- Gary King, Robert O. Keohane, and Sidney Verba. *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research*. Princeton Paperbacks. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994. Ch.1

Recommended:

- Lisa A Baglione. *Writing a Research Paper in Political Science: A Practical Guide to Inquiry, Structure, and Methods*. Cq Press, 2018. Ch.2
- Paul M. Kellstedt and Guy D. Whitten. *The Fundamentals of Political Science Research*. 3rd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018. Ch. 4

Homework:

Formulate a research question:

1. Describe the phenomena you are interested. Explain its relevance.
2. Formulate a research question. Consult the readings. Start with “Why” or “How”.
3. Specify the goal (theory generation, theory testing, theory application).
4. How does your research question raise issues about the conventional wisdom or why does it suggest that existing interpretations may be incomplete?
5. Which tentative explanation do you propose to answer your research question?
(one paragraph)

3. Literature and Reviewing

Required:

- Lisa A Baglione. *Writing a Research Paper in Political Science: A Practical Guide to Inquiry, Structure, and Methods*. Cq Press, 2018. Ch.3, Ch.4

- John Gerring and Dino Christenson. *Applied Social Science Methodology: An Introductory Guide*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017. Ch.11
- Richard R Lau and Ivy Brown Rovner. “Negative Campaigning”. *Annual Review of Political Science* 12 (2009): 285–306. Ch.11

Recommended:

- Holger Stichnoth and Karine Van der Straeten. “Ethnic Diversity, Public Spending, and Individual Support for the Welfare State: A Review of the Empirical Literature”. *Journal of Economic Surveys* 27, no. 2 (Apr. 1, 2013): 364–389.

Homework:

Preparing the literature review.

1. State your research question.
2. Find relevant political science journal articles related to your research question.
3. Summarize the key elements:
 - What is the argument?
 - Central concepts?
 - What are the findings?
4. How are the articles similar? How are they different? Identify a debate.
5. Characterize and group the literature (only submit this part).

Consult Baglione Ch.3 and Ch.4 for help. “The Beginnings of Gabriela’s AB” in Ch.3 provides a good example.

4. Theory Building

Required:

- Paul M. Kellstedt and Guy D. Whitten. *The Fundamentals of Political Science Research*. 3rd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018. Ch. 2
- John Gerring and Dino Christenson. *Applied Social Science Methodology: An Introductory Guide*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017. Ch.2
- Dimiter Toshkov. *Research Design in Political Science*. Macmillan International Higher Education, 2016. Ch.3

Recommended:

- Barbara Geddes. *Paradigms and Sand Castles: Theory Building and Research Design in Comparative Politics*. Analytical Perspectives on Politics. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003 Ch.2
- Kieran Healy. “Fuck Nuance”. *Sociological Theory* 35, no. 2 (2017): 118–127

Homework:

Work on your own research project.

- State your RQ (Why..?)
- Make an argument (I argue that..)
- Provide a tentative explanation (This is because..)
- Define the key concepts.
- Which assumptions are you building on?

5. Concepts and Operationalization

Required:

- John Gerring and Dino Christenson. *Applied Social Science Methodology: An Introductory Guide*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017. Ch.3
- Dimiter Toshkov. *Research Design in Political Science*. Macmillan International Higher Education, 2016. Ch.4, Ch.5
- Robert Adcock and David Collier. “Measurement Validity: A Shared Standard for Qualitative and Quantitative Research”. *The American Political Science Review* 95, no. 3 (2001): 529–546.

Recommended:

- Gary Goertz. *Social Science Concepts: A User’s Guide*. Princeton University Press, 2012. Ch.2, Ch.3
- Gerardo L. Munck and Jay Verkuilen. “Conceptualizing and Measuring Democracy: Evaluating Alternative Indices”. *Comparative Political Studies* 35, no. 1 (Feb. 1, 2002): 5–34.
- Giovanni Sartori. “Concept Misformation in Comparative Politics”. *American political science review* 64, no. 4 (1970): 1033–1053.

Homework:

Identify the key concepts of interest to you.

1. Collect various conceptualizations of the phenomena you are interested in.
2. Identify the core attributes of the term.
3. Decide which way of defining the term is most useful. Explain why you think your definition is better than others.
4. Identify various indicators that are used, or might be used, to measure the concept.
 - What are the strengths and weaknesses of each indicator?
 - Are these indicators likely to be highly correlated, or weakly correlated? (Will they identify different phenomena as members of the concept?)
 - Are there controversies surrounding that measurement instrument?
 - How successful is it in representing the concept of theoretical interest?
 - Are there parts of that concept that are left out
 - Are there other problems of measurement associated with it?

6. Explanation and Causality

Required:

- Paul M. Kellstedt and Guy D. Whitten. *The Fundamentals of Political Science Research*. 3rd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018. Ch.3
- John Gerring and Dino Christenson. *Applied Social Science Methodology: An Introductory Guide*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017. Ch.5
- Dimiter Toshkov. *Research Design in Political Science*. Macmillan International Higher Education, 2016. Ch.6
- Peter Hedström. “Studying Mechanisms to Strengthen Causal Inferences in Quantitative Research”. *The Oxford handbook of political methodology* (2008): 319–335.

Recommended:

- Peter Hedström and Richard Swedberg. “Social Mechanisms: An Introductory Essay”. *Social Mechanisms: An Analytical Approach to Social Theory* (1998): 1–31.

- Gary King, Robert O. Keohane, and Sidney Verba. *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research*. Princeton Paperbacks. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994. Ch.3
- James D. Fearon. “Counterfactuals and Hypothesis Testing in Political Science”. *World Politics* 43, no. 2 (1991): 169–195.

Homework:

1. Choose one of the article you use for your literature review:
 - What are the dependent and independent variables?
 - Do the authors provide a causal explanation? Which one?
2. Think about your research project:
 - Dependent and explanatory variable
 - Causal mechanism
 - Potential confounders

7. Research Design and Case Selection

Required:

- Thomas Plümper, Vera E Troeger, and Eric Neumayer. “Case Selection and Causal Inferences in Qualitative Comparative Research”. *PloS one* 14, no. 7 (2019): e0219727.
- Paul M. Kellstedt and Guy D. Whitten. *The Fundamentals of Political Science Research*. 3rd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018. Ch. 4
- Gary King, Robert O. Keohane, and Sidney Verba. *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research*. Princeton Paperbacks. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994. Ch.4

Recommended:

- Lisa A Baglione. *Writing a Research Paper in Political Science: A Practical Guide to Inquiry, Structure, and Methods*. Cq Press, 2018. Ch. 7
- Henry E Brady and David Collier. *Rethinking Social Inquiry: Diverse Tools, Shared Standards*. 2nd ed. Ebook Central. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2010. Ch. 6

- Barbara Geddes. *Paradigms and Sand Castles: Theory Building and Research Design in Comparative Politics*. Analytical Perspectives on Politics. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003. Ch.3

Homework:

Design your (ideal) research project

- Research question
- Theory
- Data and case selection
 - Cases and level of observation
 - Dependent variable
 - Explanatory variable(s)
 - Potential confounding variables

8. Experimental Designs

Required:

- Dimiter Toshkov. *Research Design in Political Science*. Macmillan International Higher Education, 2016. Ch.7

Recommended:

- John Gerring and Dino Christenson. *Applied Social Science Methodology: An Introductory Guide*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017. Ch. 7
- Alan S Gerber and Donald P Green. *Field Experiments: Design, Analysis, and Interpretation*. WW Norton, 2012.
- Rebecca B Morton and Kenneth C Williams. *Experimental Political Science and the Study of Causality: From Nature to the Lab*. Cambridge University Press, 2010.

9. Comparative and Large-N Designs

Required:

- Paul M. Kellstedt and Guy D. Whitten. *The Fundamentals of Political Science Research*. 3rd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018. Ch. 6 - Ch. 11

- Dimiter Toshkov. *Research Design in Political Science*. Macmillan International Higher Education, 2016. Ch.8, Ch. 9

Recommended:

- Kosuke Imai. *Quantitative Social Science: An Introduction*. Princeton University Press, 2018.
- John Gerring and Dino Christenson. *Applied Social Science Methodology: An Introductory Guide*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017. Ch. 8
- Jeffrey M Wooldridge. *Introductory Econometrics: A Modern Approach*. Nelson Education, 2016.
- Henry E Brady and David Collier. *Rethinking Social Inquiry: Diverse Tools, Shared Standards*. 2nd ed. Ebook Central. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2010. Part F

10. Project Presentations I

11. Project Presentations II

12. Project Presentations III