

POP 88041 MSc Research Design A

Michaelmas Term 2024-25
Wednesdays 11am-1pm, PX 201

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Office hours: Thursdays 11.30 am -1.30 pm or by appointment

Description and Learning Objectives

This graduate seminar introduces students to the scientific inquiry of the political world. Students will learn how to identify compelling research questions and how to structure a study that contributes to an existing body of research. Moreover, we will discuss the problems of causal inference and multiple methodological approaches (statistical analysis, process tracing, case studies) to the empirical study of politics. The emphasis of the module will be on the development of novel, falsifiable, and empirically testable explanations of political phenomena.

At the end of the course, students are expected to gain a greater understanding of the research process, problems associated with conducting social research, become familiar with different research methods, learn how to formulate research questions, hypotheses, and selecting appropriate research design and data sources to test their hypotheses. Students will gain first-hand experience by writing article reviews and putting together a full research proposal, thus helping them to build the skills essential to conduct high quality research in the field of international relations and comparative politics.

Office Hours and Contact with Students

I will respond to your e-mails within 48 hours on weekdays during the teaching weeks. If you send an email during the weekend, do not expect to receive an immediate reply.

In case you have any questions about course content, readings, or class discussions, you can raise them during office hours.

Please note that I will not be able to answer substantive questions concerning course content via e-mail. In case you have such questions, please set up an appointment for office hours or raise them during class meetings. Please bear in mind that I will not cover the lecture material for you during office hours, as office hours are not intended to replace lectures.

Office hours for this term are Thursdays 11.30 am -1.30 pm. Please email at least 24 hours in advance to make up an appointment for office hours.

In case the office hours clash with your other modules or responsibilities, please let me know and we can try to make an appointment for a different day and time.

Module Requirements and Grading

10% Participation

20% Mid-term assignment

20% Draft proposal

50% Final proposal

Participation. Student participation in class discussions is a central element of the seminar. Students are expected to have done all required readings, to have acquired knowledge, and developed informed questions or critiques based on the readings *prior to the class meeting*. This means active engagement in class discussions: listening to your peers' views and constructively engaging with them, while also demonstrating a clear understanding of the weekly readings. Students will be evaluated on the quality of their input in class discussions and debate. Merely attending class or making uninformed comments are not sufficient for achieving a passing participation mark.

Seminar attendance is mandatory, and absence may result in a lowered overall module grade *except for the week/s in which the student cannot attend as a result of sickness or an emergency situation*. In such circumstances, **the students should inform me (if possible) before the seminar**.

The best learning environment is the one in which all members feel respected while being productively challenged. The course is dedicated to fostering an inclusive atmosphere, in which all participants can contribute, explore, and challenge their own ideas as well as those of others. All interactions in class will be civil, respectful, and supportive of an inclusive learning environment for all students. These rules are reciprocal, i.e., students are also expected to interact with instructors in a civil and respectful manner. Students are encouraged to speak to the instructor about any concerns they may have about classroom participation and classroom dynamics. Every participant has an active responsibility to foster a climate of intellectual stimulation, openness, and respect for diverse perspectives, questions, personal backgrounds, abilities, and experiences.

Midterm assignment, due on 1 November, 5pm via Blackboard. Students will submit three brief outlines of potential research questions that could form the basis of their research project and three potential methodologies to test these questions. The recommended length is 1000 - 1500 words (excluding references).

Each proposed research question should clearly identify the dependent variable or outcome of interest and explain the social and/or scholarly significance of the question. Students should reference relevant prior research, even briefly, to show how their question builds on existing work or suggests a new explanation or independent variable of interest.

For each research question, students must also propose a suitable methodological approach. This discussion should include a brief outline of the method, a justification for its appropriateness and utility for the research question, its feasibility, and any ethical considerations involved in data collection or analysis and must be properly referenced. Where possible, students should discuss potential data sources, their availability, and the feasibility of accessing them. Additionally, students may argue for a preferred methodological approach for their final project, if they wish.

The submission should include proper citations for both theoretical and methodological references. Further details on the assignment, including expectations and grading criteria, will be provided.

Draft research proposal, due 21 November 5pm via Blackboard. Students will submit a draft of their final research proposals. These drafts should include a causal, explanatory research question, a discussion of the background/context of this question and the variation to be explained, proposed causal explanation along with the discussion of the relevant literature, and a discussion of the observable implications of the key causal variable.

The recommended length for the draft research proposal is 1000 -1500 words, and the draft should be no longer than 1,750 words (excluding references). Note that the drafts will be graded, so please make sure that they are well-structured and appropriately formatted.

A handout with detailed guidelines for the draft research proposal will be provided.

Peer review of draft proposals, due 26 November 5pm via Blackboard. After you submit your draft research proposal you will be required to submit a peer evaluation of one of the proposals (to be randomly assigned to you via Blackboard). Recommended length is 300 - 500 words. You will be asked to provide detailed comments on the strengths and weaknesses of the proposal along with additional suggestions that you may have for further developing the research project. Detailed information about the expectations for this assignment will be provided later. *This component is not graded, however, you need to submit a peer review that fulfils the expectations to be able to receive a grade for the draft research proposal component.*

Research Proposal, due 16 December 5pm via Blackboard. The main course objective is to submit a research proposal at the end of the term based on principles of empirical research design as discussed in the weekly seminars. The focus should be on emphasizing the issues of research design rather than the substantive importance of the research project. That is, the focus of the proposal is not on providing a lengthy literature review (although some knowledge of academic work in the area should be demonstrated), but rather on writing a research proposal that specifies a well-defined research question which is grounded in theory and methodologically feasible.

Although you may use this paper as a first attempt for your M.Sc. dissertation project, there is no need to do so, and you are not at all required to write your M.Sc. dissertation on the topic you choose to pursue for this particular module. However, you **should not** submit a proposal that overlaps with material submitted to another M.Sc. module.

Detailed information on the expectations and grading criteria for final research proposals will be posted. We will also do a lot of in-class exercises and discussions where you will get a chance to receive feedback on your proposal plans.

Academic Integrity

Academic integrity is the pursuit of scholarly activity free from fraud and deception. Academic dishonesty, including, but not limited to, cheating on an exam or assignment, plagiarizing, representing someone else's work as your own, submitting work previously used without the informing and taking the consent of the instructor, fabricating of information or citations, etc. will not be tolerated.

It is a student's responsibility to ensure that research sources are properly acknowledged. Plagiarism comes in many forms but it is mainly seen as stealing someone else's words or ideas and passing them off as your own. The key point is to be aware that all work that is submitted by students must be work that they have completed themselves, with any material that has not been produced by the student (e.g. ideas, quotations etc.) being clearly indicated through proper referencing.

Plagiarism is often not intentional –it happens because students are not fully aware of what counts as academic dishonesty. I strongly recommend that you familiarize yourselves with academic integrity and good research and writing practices to avoid plagiarism:

- Consult the TCD Library guide at: <https://libguides.tcd.ie/academic-integrity/>
- Please read pp. 45-47 of the [College Calendar](#) for University's plagiarism policy.

Plagiarism will lead to automatic failure and the matter will be reported to the student's tutor and the dean of the faculty; severe penalties are likely to ensue, including possible exclusion from the exam or even the College, in accordance with College policy.

The use of artificial intelligence (AI) tools in assessments may breach academic integrity and result in serious consequences for your academic progress, especially if the work does not reflect

your own original thinking. We strongly advise against using these tools in your assessments, as they can undermine your learning and lead to violations of academic policies.

Disability Policy

Students with a disability are encouraged to register with the [Disability Service](#) to seek supports where the disability could affect their ability to participate fully in all aspects of the course.

Mental Health

If you have any concerns or are experiencing personal and interpersonal difficulties, you can contact the Student Counselling Services and get some support and resources to help you: https://www.tcd.ie/Student_Counselling/

Key Texts

The main texts for this module are:

- Johnson, Janet Buttolph, Reynolds, H.T., and Mycoff, Jason D. 2015. *Political Science Research Methods*. CQ Press. [**JRM**]
- King, G., Keohane, R.O., Verba, S. 1994. *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research*. Princeton University Press. [**KKV**]
- Richard Rich et al. 2018. *Empirical Political Analysis*. Pearson Higher Ed. Second edition. [**Rich et al.**]

We will also read a selection of articles and chapters as detailed in the module schedule below. Most readings and other relevant materials will be posted on Blackboard.

These textbooks are available from the Library.

Syllabus Modification Rights

I reserve the right to reasonably alter the elements of the syllabus at any time. More often than not this will mean adjusting the reading list to keep pace with the course schedule, although I may add reading assignments as well.

Module Schedule & Readings

Week 1 –The scientific study of politics. Research ethics.

KKV, Chapter 1

Desposato, Scott. 2014. "Ethics and research in comparative politics." *The Monkey Cage Blog*. [Link](#)

Fuji, Lee Ann. 2012. "Research ethics 101: Dilemmas and responsibilities." *PS: Political Science & Politics* 45(4): 717-723.

Optional:

JRM, Chapter 2

Rich et al., Chapter 1

Yanow, D., 2003. "Interpretive empirical political science: What makes this not a subfield of qualitative methods." *Qualitative Methods*, 1(2), pp.9-13.

Popper, K., (1963). "[Science as falsification](#)." In: *Conjectures and Refutation*, 33-39.

Feynman, Richard (1964) "On the Scientific Method." [9:59], available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EYPapE-3FRw>

American Political Science Association.2020. "Principles and guidance for human Subjects Research." [Link](#)

Week 2 – Research questions, theories and hypotheses

JRM, Chapters 3-4

Firebaugh, G., 2008. "[The first rule: There should be the possibility of surprise in social research](#)." In: *Seven Rules for Social Research*. Princeton University Press, Chapter 1.

KKV, pp. 100-114

Hoffman, Michael and Amaney Jamal. 2014. "Religion in the Arab spring: Between two competing claims." *The Journal of Politics*, 76(3): 593-606.

Optional:

Rich et al., Chapter 2.

Geddes, Chapter 2.

Zinnes, Dina A. 1980. "Three puzzles in search of a researcher." *International Studies Quarterly* 24(3): 315-42

Week 3 – Conceptualization, operationalization, and measurement

JRM, Chapter 5

Paxton, Pamela. 2000. "Women's suffrage in the measurement of democracy: Problems of operationalization." *Studies in Comparative International Development*, 35(3): 92-111.

Hooghe, Marc, and Sofie Marien. 2013. "A comparative analysis of the relation between political trust and forms of political participation in Europe." *European Societies* 15(1): 131-152.

Optional:

Gerring, John. 1999. "What makes a concept good? A criterial framework for understanding concept formation in the social sciences." *Polity* 31(3): 357-393.

Adcock, R. and Collier, D. 2001. "Measurement validity: A shared standard for qualitative and quantitative research." *American Political Science Association*, 95(3): 529-546.

Munck, Gerardo L. and Jay Verkuilen. 2002. Conceptualizing and Measuring Democracy: Evaluating Alternative Indices. *Comparative Political Studies* 35(1): 5-34.

Lasswell, Harold. 1946. "Despotism." [9:56] [Link](#)

Week 4 – The logic of statistical analysis: Large-n designs

Rich et al., Chapters 4 and 6

Coppedge, Michael. 2007. Theory Building and Hypothesis Testing: Large- vs. Small-N Research on Democratization. In Gerardo Munck (ed.), *Regimes and Democracy in Latin America: Theories and Methods*, Oxford University Press, pp. 163-177.

Tezcür, Gunes Murat. 2016. "Ordinary people, extraordinary risks: Participation in an ethnic rebellion." *American Political Science Review*, 110(2): 247-264.

Optional

Tarrow, Sidney. 1995. Bridging the quantitative-qualitative divide in political science. *American Political Science Review*, 89(2): 471-474.

Carpenter, Daniel and Moore, Colin D., 2014. "When canvassers became activists: Antislavery petitioning and the political mobilization of American women." *American Political Science Review*, 108(3): 479-498.

Week 5 – Causation and controlled experiments

Discussion of potential research questions in class – please come prepared!

Smeets, Ionica. 2012. "The danger of mixing up causality and correlation." [5:56] [Link](#)

Dubner, Stephen and Steven Levitt. 2011. "Correlation vs. causality" [3:22] [Link](#)

Masten, Matt. 2015. "Counterfactuals." [4:52] [Link](#)

JRM, Chapter 6

KKV, pp. 75-91.

McClendon, Gwyneth, and Rachel Beatty Riedl. 2015. "Religion as a stimulant of political participation: Experimental evidence from Nairobi, Kenya." *The Journal of Politics* 77(4): 1045-1057.

Optional:

McDermott, R., 2002. "Experimental methods in political science." *Annual Review of Political Science*, 5(1): 31-61.

Sands, Melissa L. 2017. Exposure to Inequality Affects Support for Redistribution." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 114, no. 4 (2017): 663-668.

Bond, Robert M., et al. 2012. "A 61-million-person experiment in social influence and political mobilization." *Nature* 489 (7415): 295-298.

Guess, Andrew et al. 2023. "How do social media feed algorithms affect attitudes and behavior in an election campaign?" *Science* 381(6656): 398-404.

Week 6 – Natural experiments and as-if randomization

Discussion of potential methodologies in class -please come prepared!

Erikson, Robert, 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.

Bhavnani, Rikhil R. 2009. "Do electoral quotas work after they are withdrawn? Evidence from a natural experiment in India." *American Political Science Review*, 103(1): 23-35.

Galiani, Sebastian, and Ernesto Schargrodsky. 2004. "Effects of land titling on child health." *Economics and Human Biology* 2(3): 353-372.

Optional:

Sekhon, Jasjeet S. and Rocio Titiunik. 2012. "When natural experiments are neither natural nor experiments." *American Political Science Review*, 106(1): 35-57.

Week 7 – Reading week. No class.

Submission of midterm assignments due on 1 November, 5pm

Week 8 - Small-n research designs: The comparative method

Collier, David. 1993. The Comparative Method. In Ada W. Finifter (ed.), *Political Science: The State of the Discipline II*, Washington, D.C.: American Political Science Association, pp. 105-119.

KKV, Chapter 4

Blaydes, Lisa. 2014. "How does Islamist local governance affect the lives of women?" *Governance*, 27(3): 489-509.

Optional:

Geddes, Chapters 3-4

Posner, Daniel. 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.

Week 9 – Small-n research designs: Case studies and process tracing

Hall, Peter A. (2008). Systematic process analysis: when and how to use it. *European Political Science*, 7(3), 304-317.

Ricks, Jacob and Amy Liu. 2018. "Process-tracing research designs: A practical guide." *PS: Political Science & Politics* 51(4): 842-846.

Snyder, Jack, and Erica D. Borghard. 2011. "The cost of empty threats: A penny, not a pound." *American Political Science Review* 105 (03):437-56.

Optional:

Gerring, John. 2004. "What is a case study and what is it good for?" *American Political Science Review* 98(2): 341-354.

Seawright, Jason, and Gerring, John. 2008. "Case selection techniques in case study research: A menu of qualitative and quantitative options." *Political Research Quarterly*, 61(2): 294-308.

Collier, David, 2011. "Understanding process tracing." *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 44(04): 823-830.

Mahoney, James. 2015. "Process tracing and historical explanation." *Security Studies*, 24(2): 200-218.

Week 10 – Data collection I: Surveys and interviews

JRM Chapters 8, 10

Dornschneider, Stephanie. 2021. Exit, Voice, Loyalty... or Deliberate Obstruction? Non-Collective Everyday Resistance under Oppression. *Perspectives on Politics*, pp.1-16.

Fujii, Lee Ann. 2008. "The power of local ties: Popular participation in the Rwandan genocide." *Security Studies*, 17(3): 568-597.

Westwood, Sean J., Justin Grimmer, Matthew Tyler, and Clayton Nall. 2022. "Current research overstates American support for political violence." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 119 (12): e2116870119.

Optional

Rich et al., Chapters 8 and 20

Zaller, John and Stanley Feldman. 1992. A Simple Theory of the Survey Response: Answering Questions versus Revealing Preferences. *American Journal of Political Science* 36(3): 579-616.

Bakker, Ryan, Catherine De Vries, Erica Edwards, Liesbet Hooghe, Seth Jolly, Gary Marks, Jonathan Polk, Jan Rovny, Marco Steenbergen, and Milada Anna Vachudova. 2015. "Measuring party positions in Europe: The Chapel Hill expert survey trend file, 1999–2010." *Party Politics* 21(1): 143-152.

Berry, Jeffrey M. 2002. Validity and Reliability Issues in Elite Interviewing. *Political Science and Politics* 35(4): 679-682.

Look at some of the major datasets used in IR/CP studies:

Correlates of War: <http://cow2.la.psu.edu/>

Militarized Interstate Disputes: <http://cow2.la.psu.edu/>

Polity IV Project: <http://www.systemicpeace.org/polity/polity4.htm>

Quality of Government: <https://www.gu.se/en/quality-government/qog-data>

Comparative Manifesto Project <https://manifestoproject.wzb.eu/>

The Religion and State Project: <https://ras.thearda.com/>

For links to datasets on various topics, see <http://www.paulhensel.org/data.html>

Week 11 – Data collection II: Content analysis and text-as-data

Discussion of research proposal drafts in class.

JRM, Chapter 9

Rich et al., Chapter 10

Benoit, Kenneth and Michael Laver. 2007. “Estimating party policy positions: Comparing expert surveys and hand-coded content analysis.” *Electoral Studies* 26(1): 90-107.

Optional:

Benoit, Ken. 2019. “Text as data: An overview.” *The SAGE Handbook of Research Methods in Political Science and International Relations*. Available at:

<https://kenbenoit.net/pdfs/28%20Benoit%20Text%20as%20Data%20draft%202.pdf>

Hanna, Alexander. 2013. Computer-Aided Content Analysis of Digitally Enabled Movements. *Mobilization: An International Quarterly* 18(4):367-388.

Oktay, Sibel. 2024. “Crisis leadership in the time of Covid: Effects of personality traits on response speed.” *International Studies Perspectives* (2024): ekae001.

Draft research proposals due 21 November 5pm via Blackboard.

Peer review of research proposals due 26 November 5pm via Blackboard.

Week 12 – Writing research proposals

Discussion and feedback on draft proposals

Mensh Brett and Konrad Kording. 2017. “Ten simple rules for structuring papers.” *PLoS Computational Biology* 13(9): e1005619

Optional

Becker, Howard. 2020. *Writing for Social Scientists: How to Start and Finish Your Thesis, Book, or Article*. The University of Chicago Press.

Final research proposals are due 16 December 5pm via Blackboard