

## **Fundamentals of Political and Social Research**

Universitat Pompeu Fabra

Fall Quarter 2020

**The course takes place online through Zoom**

Class link: <https://zoom.us/j/96202303787>

**Instructor:** Enrique Hernández ([enrique.hernandez@uab.cat](mailto:enrique.hernandez@uab.cat))

### **1. Course overview**

This course covers basic issues in epistemology and research design. We will ask the broader question of how one can generate useful knowledge in the social sciences. The first part of the course will focus on theory construction and the generation of causal arguments. The second part of the course will examine topics in empirical research design and hypothesis testing. Throughout the course, the students will work on the step-by-step formulation of their own research designs.

### **2. Objectives of the course**

The aims of the course are the following:

- To become acquainted with some basic debates in the history of social research
- To learn about the key issues in methodology and research design
- To write an initial research proposal
- To empower post-graduate students to choose their own approach to research

### **3. Evaluation**

The evaluation will consist of five elements:

- Three short written assignments (1-2 pages). Due in weeks 4, 6 and 8/9 **(30%)**.
- Student-led discussions: Each class, two/three students will help the professor conduct the discussion. A sign-up sheet will be circulated in the first day of class **(10%)**.<sup>1</sup>
- Reviewing: Each student will review and submit a short report about one of the research proposals handouts that will be discussed in the tutorials in weeks 9/10 **(10%)**.
- Final assignment: Students will write a short research proposal (8-10 pages) at the end of the course **(50%)**. Due on January 4<sup>th</sup>.

### **4. General guidelines to write a research proposal**

Przeworski, Adam and Frank Salomon (1988/1995). "The Art of Writing Proposals: Some Candid Suggestions for Applicants to Social Science Research Council Competitions." Memo published by the Social Science Research Council. [Link](#)

Guidelines for writing a research proposal for a PhD in the Department of Political and Social Sciences. European University Institute. [Link](#)

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<sup>1</sup> Due to the online format of the class the evaluation of the student-led discussions will be based on the questions that students must submit 24 hours prior to the class in which they have registered to act as discussion leaders (more details will be provided during the first day of class).

## **5. Course organization**

The course is divided into two groups:

- Group 1 (Tuesdays from 9 to 12): For those of you with limited prior experience with research design and research methods.
- Group 2 (Fridays from 9 to 12): For those of you who have already taken courses on research design either at the undergraduate or post-graduate level

While the contents covered in each of the groups will be very similar and the assignments will be exactly the same, some of the readings will differ between the two groups.

Students are expected to read the readings assigned to each session. When different readings are assigned to each of the groups this is clearly specified in the syllabus. In any case, all students are encouraged to read all the readings.

## PART I: BUILDING THEORIES

### 1. On science: Paradigms, advance, and vocation.

Everyone: Hay, Colin. (2002). Political analysis. A critical introduction. Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke. Pp. 1-66

Everyone: Schwartz, Martin A. (2008). The importance of stupidity in scientific research. *Journal of Cell Science* 121, 1771–1771.

Everyone: Wallis, K., & Zwar, N. (2018). Ham for the holidays: The challenge of choosing wisely. *The British Medical Journal*, 1-2

### 2. Selecting research questions.

Everyone: Toshkov, Dimiter. (2016). Research design in political science. Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan. Chapter 2

Everyone: McCauley, Adam., Ruggeri, Andrea., (2020) From Questions and Puzzles to Research Project. in: Curini, Luigi., Franzese, Rob. (Eds), *SAGE Handbook of Research Methods in Political Science and International Relations*, SAGE

Everyone: Firebaugh, Glenn. (2007), *Seven Rules for Social Research*, Princeton: Princeton University Press. Chapter 1

#### Additional readings:

Gelman, Andrew., Imbens, Guido., (2013) *Why ask Why? Forward Causal Inference and Reverse Causal Questions*. National Bureau of Economic Research, Cambridge, MA.

Gustafsson, Karl., Hagström, Linus. (2018). What is the point? Teaching graduate students how to construct political science research puzzles. *European Political Science* 17, 634–648

**Assignment 1:** Formulate your own original research question. It must be related to a topic you have read about in political science or sociology. Write one page presenting a puzzle and making a convincing claim about why you think it is important. **Due on: week 4.**

### 3. Building theories.

Group 1: Toshkov, Dimiter. (2016). Research design in political science. Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan. Chapter 3

Group 2: Lave, Charles and James March (1975). *An Introduction to Models in the Social Sciences*, New York: Harper & Row. Chapters 1, 2, 3.

Everyone: Swedberg, Richard (2016). Before theory comes theorizing or how to make social science more interesting. *The British Journal of Sociology* 67, 5–22

#### Additional readings:

Kohli, A., Evans, P., Katzenstein, P.J., Przeworski, A., Rudolph, S.H., Scott, J.C., Skocpol, T., (1995). "The Role of Theory in Comparative Politics: A Symposium." *World Politics* 48, 1–49.

#### 4. Causality and the experimental benchmark.

Group 1: Toshkov, Dimiter. (2016). Research design in political science. Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan. Chapters 6-7

Group 2: Angrist, Joshua and Jorn-Steffen Pischke (2009). *Mostly Harmless Econometrics*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. Chapters 1-2.

Everyone: OMFG Exogenous Variation! Or, Can You Find God Nails When You Find An Indonesian Politics Hammer [[Link to blogpost](#)]

Everyone: Is theory getting lost in the “identification revolution”? [[Link to blogpost](#)]

Additional readings:

Everyone: Kocher, M.A., Monteiro, N.P., (2016). Lines of Demarcation: Causation, Design-Based Inference, and Historical Research. *Perspectives on Politics* 14, 952–975

**Assignment 2:** Propose a hypothesis related to your research question. Specify what is the dependent variable, what is the main independent variable, what is the process linking the two and discuss alternative explanations for your outcome. The assignment should be no longer than one page. **Due on: week 7**

### PART II: TESTING THEORIES

#### 5. Conceptualization, operationalization and measurement.

Group 1: Toshkov, Dimiter. (2016). Research design in political science. Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan. Pp. 83-122

Group 2: Goertz, G., Mahoney, J., (2012). A tale of two cultures: qualitative and quantitative research in the social sciences. Princeton: Princeton University Press. Pp. 127-177

Everyone: Adcock, R. (2001). “Measurement validity: A shared standard for qualitative and quantitative research.” *American Political Science Review*, 95(3): 529-546.

#### 6. The logic of large-N designs: Strengths and pitfalls.

Group 1: Toshkov, Dimiter. (2016). Research design in political science. Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan. Chapter 8

Group 2: Keele, L., (2015). “The Statistics of Causal Inference: A View from Political Methodology”. *Political Analysis* 23, 313–335.

Everyone: Freedman, D.A., (1991). “Statistical Models and Shoe Leather.” *Sociological Methodology* 21, 291–313.

Additional readings:

Bernardi, F., Chakhaia, L., Leopold, L., (2017). “Sing Me a Song with Social Significance: The (Mis)Use of Statistical Significance Testing in European Sociological Research.” *European Sociological Review* 33, 1–15.

Keele, L., Stevenson, R.T., Elwert, F., (2020). The causal interpretation of estimated associations in regression models. *Political Science Research and Methods* 8, 1–13.

### 7. The logic of small-N comparative designs: Strengths and pitfalls.

Everyone: Toshkov, Dimiter. (2016). *Research design in political science*. Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan. Chapter 9

Everyone: Collier, David. (1993). The comparative Method. In Ada W. Finifter (editor). *Political Science: The State of the Discipline II*. Washington, D.C.: American Political Science Association

Everyone: Bartolini, Stefano. 1993. On Time and Comparative Research. *Journal of Theoretical Politics* 5, 131–167.

### 8. The logic of single case studies: Strengths and pitfalls (+ Mixed methods)

Everyone: Toshkov, Dimiter. (2016). *Research design in political science*. Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan. Chapter 10

Everyone: Collier, David. (2011). “Understanding Process Tracing”. *PS: Political Science & Politics* 44, 823–830

Everyone: Seawright, J., (2016). *Multi-method social science: combining qualitative and quantitative tools, Strategies for social inquiry*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press. Chapter 1

**Assignment 3:** Submit a handout (2 pages short summary) of your research proposal. The handout should provide a general overview of the key elements of your research proposal. You can also use the handout to bring up some doubts and questions you might have about your research proposal. The handout will be reviewed by the professor and one student reviewer, who will write a short (1 page) report providing constructive feedback and suggestions. Reviewers must submit their report 24 hours before the date of the tutorials. **The handout is due on week 8 (if your tutorial is scheduled on week 9), or on week 9 (if your tutorial is scheduled on week 10).**

### 9. Selection of cases.

Everyone: Gary King, Robert O. Keohane, Sidney Verba (1994). *Designing Social Enquiry*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. Chapter 4.

Everyone: Seawright, J., & Gerring, J. (2008). Case Selection Techniques in Case Study Research. A Menu of Qualitative and Quantitative Options. *Political Research Quarterly*, 61(2), 294–308.

- **Start of research proposal tutorials.** Students will meet (online) with the professor and the student who has reviewed their handout to discuss their research proposal.

### 10. Research proposal tutorials (2)

- **Continuation of research proposal tutorials**