

Empirical Methods of Research
Wednesday 9:00am - 11:30pm

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course provides a graduate-level introduction to political science research. It aims to prepare students for designing their own research projects, and for evaluating critically political science (and social science) scholarship. The course covers aspects of the research process, including the generation of theories and research questions, conceptualization, measurement, causation, research designs (quantitative and qualitative), and mixing methods.

ASSIGNMENTS

Participation (25%)

You must participate in class discussions to succeed in this course. You are expected to complete class readings prior to the class session for which they are assigned, and to come to class prepared to contribute to discussion. For methods articles/book, you are expected to be able to answer questions about the material and engage in discussions about the use and application of such methods. For substantive papers, you should be prepared to summarize the main research question, theory, research design, results and contribution. Students should also take the time and care to walk through the logic of individual arguments before coming to class. I expect students to be able to explain the assumptions and logic of all theories and methods in the required readings and critically engage the relative merits and flaws of each piece. Anyone may be called upon to comment on the reading at any point.

You will be expected to lead discussion on 3 papers throughout the semester. This means, you will be called on at the beginning of the discussion to give a summary of the article: research question, argument, and research strategy. You will also be expected to provide your evaluation of the component of the paper most relevant to our discussion. For example, for weeks on theory, consider: is the argument internally consistent, is it missing important actors/actions, are the motivations or incentives attributed valid?

Some suggestions:

- Some readings contain methodological techniques that may be unfamiliar. Do not skip this material, but it is okay if some of it is foreign or difficult. Bring questions to class, and we will discuss together.
- Academic writing is not always concise; learn to read strategically. Try to make sure you understand the following for each paper: research question, argument, research strategy, and findings, as relevant.
- To evaluate papers, try to ask yourself questions as you read. For example, does this research design best test the argument? What are the weaknesses or limitations of the research strategy? Do the findings provide evidence for the argument? How does this study help us answer the initial research question?

Proposal or Paper (60%)

You will produce one major written assignment. There are two tracks: (1) preparation of an NSF Graduate Research Fellowships Program research proposal, or (2) preparation of a research article. For both tracks, you will be selecting a research question, generating an argument and empirical expectations, and proposing an empirical research design to test (the implications of) your argument. For a research article, you will additionally be expected to include results that test your argument and an evaluation of these results.

Your final paper (NSF proposal or research article) is worth 25% of your grade. It is due on December 13th at 11:59pm. The submission should reflect feedback given on assignments throughout the semester and during your final presentation.

In the lead-up to the final paper submission, you will be expected to complete 5 short memos and 2 short presentations, worth 35% of your grade. Each presentation is expected to be 5 slides or less, taking up about 5 minutes. Each memo is expected to be 2 pages maximum. The memos and presentations are due by Tuesday at 9:00 a.m.

- Assignment 1: research question (due September 9)
- Assignment 2: theory (due September 23)
- Presentation 1: research question and theory (due September 23)
- Assignment 3: concept and measurement (due October 14)
- Assignment 4: quantitative research design (due November 4)
- Presentation 2: quantitative research design (due November 4)
- Assignment 5: qualitative research design (due December 2)

Presentation (15%)

Students will do a conference style presentation, using PowerPoint or Beamer, on December 10, 2025. Presentations should be 10-12 minutes in length. As part of the presentation grade, each student is also expected to provide written comments to other

students to help them improve their research proposal or article. Your written comments are to be sent to me at the end of the class, and I will share it with the other students.

COURSE READINGS

This course will use a mixture of books and journal articles. It is suggested that you purchase one book, but PDF versions will be provided online regardless. You are not required to read supplemental articles or books. These are intended to help during your research and provide additional resources for specific topics and methods that your work requires.

I reserve the right to make changes to the syllabus, including readings and project deadlines. I will give at least 5 days' notice if adjustments are made to the readings or assignments.

COURSE SCHEDULE OVERVIEW

Week 1 August 27: Introduction

Week 2 September 3: Research questions

Week 3 September 10: Theory

Week 4 September 17: NO CLASS – INSTRUCTOR TRAVELING

Week 5 September 24: Empirical Research Design

Week 6 October 1: Concept Formation and Descriptive Inference

Week 7 October 8: Measurement

Week 8 October 15: Causality and Experiments

Week 9 October 22: Causal Inference Strategies for Observational Data

Week 10 October 29: Causal Inference Strategies for Observational Data

Week 11 November 5: Qualitative Methods

Week 12 November 12: Qualitative Methods

Week 13 November 19: Qualitative Methods

Week 14 November 26: NO CLASS – THANKSGIVING

Week 15 December 3: Mixed Methods

Week 16 December 10: Student Presentations

COURSE SCHEDULE

August 27: Introduction

We will begin with an overview of the course and a general introduction to political science research.

Overview:

- Putnam, Robert. 2003. “APSA Presidential Address: The Public Role of Political Science.”
- APSA Presidential Address by Kathleen Thelen: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pwz1WYPdAlo>.
- Gerring, Social Science Methodology, xix–xxiii (Preface), 1–23 (chap. 1: “A Unified Framework”), and 27–36 (part of chap. 2: “Beginnings”).
- Gary King, Robert Keohane, and Sidney Verba. *Designing Social Inquiry*, chapter 1.

Supplemental:

- 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.
- Shapiro, Ian. 2002. “Problems, Methods, and Theories in the Study of Politics, or: What’s Wrong with Political Science and What to Do About It” In Ian Shapiro, Rogers M. Smith and Tarek E. Masoud, eds., Problems and Methods in the Study of Politics. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Peter A. Hall. 2007. “The Dilemmas of Contemporary Social Science,” Boundary 2 34 (3): 121-41.
- Mansbridge, Jane. 2014. “What Is Political Science For?” *Perspectives on Politics* 12(1): 8–17.

September 3: Research questions

This week focuses on discovery—the generation of new questions. What motivates good research? How do we come up with research questions? What are attributes of good research questions?

Ideas and questions:

- Geddes, Barbara, 2003. *Paradigms and Sand Castles: Theory Building and Research Design in Comparative Politics*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, Chapter 2 (pp. 27–35, 37-43).
- John Gerring. *Finding your Social Science Project: The Research Sandbox*. Chapter 4 – general strategies for finding a topic.

Applications:

Read the introduction and literature review: focus on question and framing.

- Scheve, Kenneth and David Stasavage (2010). “The Conscription of Wealth: Mass Warfare and the Demand for Progressive Taxation.” *International Organization* 64: 529–61.
- Clayton, Amanda, and Pär Zetterberg. 2021. “Gender and Party Discipline: Evidence from Africa’s Emerging Party Systems.” *American Political Science Review* 115(3): 869–84.
- De Micheli, David. 2021. “Racial Reclassification and Political Identity Formation.” *World Politics* 73(1): 1–51.

Supplemental:

- John Gerring. *Finding your Social Science Project: The Research Sandbox*. Chapter 5 – Heuristics
- Fred Eidlin. 2011. “The Method of Problems versus the Method of Topics.” PS: Political Science & Politics 44 (4): 758–761

Assignment 1: Prepare a memo that does A, B & C, while keeping in mind that later in the course you will need to add D & E.

- A. States your research question clearly and concisely;
- B. Discusses whether existing theories are adequate to answer your question;
- C. Provides an intuition about how you could advance the literature;
- D. Suggests a theoretical logic linking the factors you see as consequential to the outcome of interest; and
- E. Cites some preliminary evidence to suggest why your hunch might be correct. This evidence may be derived from a case that you know well, or may be a “stylized fact”

September 10: Theory

This week we will focus on theory. 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?

Theories and arguments:

- John Gerring. *Finding your Social Science Project: The Research Sandbox*, chapter 8.
- Stephen Van Evera. 1997. *Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science*, chapter 1.
- Margaret Levi. 2004. “An Analytic Narrative Approach to Puzzles and Problems.” Chap. 10 in *Problems and Methods in the Study of Politics*, edited by Ian Shapiro, Rogers M. Smith, and Tarek E. Masoud, 201–226. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Application:

Read the introduction and theory/argument sections.

- Jha, Saumitra. 2013. "Trade, Institutions and Ethnic Tolerance: Evidence from S. Asia," *American Political Science Review*, 107(04), 806-832.
- Fearon, James D., and David D. Laitin (1996). "Explaining Interethnic Cooperation." *American Political Science Review* 90(4): 715–35.

Supplemental, for students with no background in formal modeling:

- Shepsle, Kenneth (2010). *Analyzing Politics*. New York: Norton. Pages 90–148 (spatial analysis; median voter theorem).
- Avinash K. Dixit, Susan Skeath, and David H. Reiley Jr. (2014). *Games of Strategy* (Fourth Edition), pp. 17–41 (How to think about strategic games); 47–62 (extensive form games with backwards induction); and 91–108 (normal form games with Nash concept).

Supplemental:

- Mahoney and Goertz, Tale of Two Cultures, 16–38 (chap. 2, “Mathematical Prelude: A Selective Introduction to Logic and Set Theory for Social Scientists”)
- Kevin A. Clarke and David M. Primo. 2007. “Modernizing Political Science: A Model-Based Approach.” *Perspectives on Politics* 5 (4): 741–753
- Andrew T. Little and Thomas B. Pepinsky. 2016. “Simple and Formal Models in Comparative Politics.” *Chinese Political Science Review* 1 (3): 425–447
- James Fearon (1995) “Rationalist Explanations for War” *International Organization* 49(3): 379-414.
- Shayo, Moses. 2009.“A Model of Social Identity with an Application to Political Economy: Nation, Class, and Redistribution,” *American Political Science Review*, 103(02), 147-174.

Assignment 2: Develop a clear theoretical statement about a political process, from which we can derive expectations about what will happen, both within the context that inspired your research question, but also other contexts as well. You should be explicit about (a) the actors; (b) their preferences; and (c) and the sequence of moves in their interaction. The logic can be represented through: game-theoretic models, in flow charts linking treatments to outcomes, and in various other ways. The motives of individuals and/or groups should be fully fleshed out, and the implications of their motivations, interactions, and decisions should be identified and evaluated theoretically. Arguments should be built up from “primitives.” As guidance for this, the readings for this week offer examples of theories that link primitives to political outcomes. Some questions to keep in mind when thinking about strategic (and other) interactions:

- Who are the key actors?
- What are their goals?

- What actions are available to them in pursuit of their goals?
- What are their beliefs about the state of the world?
- What mechanism (aka “game form”) structures their interactions?

September 24: Empirical Appraisal

We discuss generally the design of political science research to test and appraise theories in a credible fashion.

In class presentations (<5 slides, <=5 minutes) about research question and theory.

Overview:

- S. Ashworth, C. Berry, and E. Bueno de Mesquita, *Theory and Credibility*, chapters 2-5.

Supplemental:

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

October 1: Concept Formation and Descriptive Inference

This week covers concepts (containers used 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.

Overview:

- Gerring, John. Social Science Methodology, 107–40 (chap. 5: “Concepts”) and 141–54 (chap. 6: “Descriptive Arguments”)
- David Collier and James E. Mahon Jr. 1993. “Conceptual ‘Stretching’ Re-visited: Adapting Categories in Comparative Analysis.” *American Political Science Review* 87 (4): 845–855.

Applications:

- David Collier and Steven Levitsky. 1997. “Democracy with Adjectives: Conceptual Innovation in Comparative Research.” *World Politics* 49 (3): 430–451.
- Alisha C. Holland. 2016. “Forbearance.” *American Political Science Review* 110 (2): 232–246
- Jefferson, Hakeem. "The politics of respectability and Black Americans' punitive attitudes." *American Political Science Review* 117.4 (2023): 1448-1464.

- Esberg, Jane. "Censorship as reward: evidence from pop culture censorship in Chile." *American Political Science Review* 114.3 (2020): 821-836.

Supplemental:

- 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
- Rawi Abdelal et al. 2006. "Identity as a Variable." *Perspectives on Politics* 4 (4): 695–711.

October 8: Measurement

We consider the empirical task of measurement. Readings pertain to operationalizing measurement of concepts and evaluating validity. As an example, we consider pitfalls and trade-offs to different measurement strategies applied to the concept of democracy.

Overview:

- Gerring, John. Social Science Methodology, 155–94 (chap. 7: "Measurements").

Application:

- Cheibub, José Antonio, Jennifer Gandhi, and James Raymond Vreeland. "Democracy and dictatorship revisited." *Public choice* 143 (2010): 67-101.
- David Collier and Steven Levitsky. 1997. "Democracy with Adjectives: Conceptual Innovation in Comparative Research." *World Politics* 49 (3): 430–451
- Little, Andrew T., and Anne Meng. 2024. "Measuring Democratic Backsliding." *PS: Political Science & Politics* 57(2): 149–61.

Supplemental:

- 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
- Adcock, Robert and David Collier. 2001. "Measurement Validity: A Shared Standard for Qualitative and Quantitative Research." *American Political Science Review* 95(3): 529-546.
- Gary King, Robert Keohane, and Sidney Verba. *Designing Social Inquiry*, Chapter 2.
- Munck, Gerardo L. and Jay Verkuilen. 2002. "Conceptualizing and Measuring Democracy: Evaluating Alternative Indices." *Comparative Political Studies* 35(5): 5-34.
- Jason Seawright and David Collier. 2014. "Rival Strategies of Validation: Tools for Evaluating Measures of Democracy." *Comparative Political Studies* 47 (1): 111–138.

Assignment 3: Prepare a memo that (1) defines a key concept for your analysis, and (2) proposes a measurement strategy for it. In terms of the concept, address: how does your definition compare to existing definitions of similar concepts? In which ways, for example, might the existing definitions be misleading or fall short? In terms of measurement: how might you operationalize your measure? How would your strategy compare to existing measures of similar concepts? In which ways, for example, might the existing measure be misleading? How does your measurement strategy improve on the existing measure?

October 15: Empirical Design – Causality and Experiments

Introduction to causality. One of the goals of this session is to establish a framework for reasoning about causation. We also begin to discuss specific causal inference strategies and research designs. We start with the most straightforward causal designs – experiments – where units are randomly assigned to different treatment conditions (i.e., different levels of the causal variable of interest).

Overview:

- Gerring, Social Science Methodology, 197–217 (chap. 8: “Causal Arguments”), 218–55 (chap. 9: “Causal Analyses”), and 256–90 (chap. 10: “Causal Strategies: X and Y”).
- Joshua Angrist and Jörn-Steffen Pischke *Mostly Harmless Econometrics*, chap. 2 “The Experimental Ideal”.

Applications:

Focus on the argument, experimental research design, and results.

- *Field experiments*: David Broockman and Joshua Kalla. 2016. “Durably Reducing Transphobia: A Field Experiment on Door-to-Door Canvassing.” *Science* 352 (6282): 220–224.
- *Lab experiments*: James Habyarimana, Macartan Humphreys, Daniel N. Posner, and Jeremy M. Weinstein. "Why does ethnic diversity undermine public goods provision?" *American Political Science Review* 101 (4): 709-725.
- *Survey experiments*: Mattingly, Daniel, Trevor Incerti, Changwook Ju, Colin Moreshead, Seiki Tanaka, and Hikaru Yamagishi. 2025. “Chinese state media persuades a global audience that the “China Model” is superior: Evidence from a 19-country experiment.” *American Journal of Political Science* 69: 1029–1046.

Supplemental:

- Gary King, Robert Keohane, and Sidney Verba. *Designing Social Inquiry*, Chapter 3.
- James D. Fearon. 1991. “Counterfactuals and Hypothesis Testing in Political Science.” *World Politics* 43 (2): 169–195

- 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
- Julia G. Falleti and Julia F. Lynch. 2009. “Context and Causal Mechanisms in Political Analysis.” *Comparative Political Studies* 42 (9): 1143–1166
- 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
- Kristin Kanthak and Jon Woon. 2015. Women Don’t Run: Election Aversion and Candidate Entry. *American Journal of Political Science*.

October 22: Empirical Design – Causal Inference Strategies for Observational Data

We discuss observational studies (rather than experiments). We focus on causal inference strategies and research designs where treatment approximates randomness (“as if” randomly) and is assigned by “nature,” rather than by the researcher (as in experiments).

Overview:

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

Applications:

Focus on the argument, research design, and results.

- *Natural experiments*: Hainmueller, Jens and Hangartner, Dominik. “Who Gets a Swiss Passport? A Natural Experiment in Immigrant Discrimination,” *American Political Science Review*, 107(01), 159-187.
- *RDD*: Dell, M. and Querubin, P. (2017). Nation Building Through Foreign Intervention: Evidence from Discontinuities in Military Strategies. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 133(2):701.

Supplemental:

- Roccio Titiunik. 2015. “Drawing Your Senator from a Jar: Term Length and Legislative Behavior.” *Political Science Research and Methods* 4 (2): 293–316.
- Jasjeet S. Sekhon and Roccio Titiunik. 2012. “When Natural Experiments Are Neither Natural nor Experiments.” *American Political Science Review* 106 (1): 35–57

October 29: Empirical Design – Causal Inference Strategies for Observational Data

We continue our focus on causal designs for observational studies. We cover more and less credible strategies, where researchers must deliberately make a case for non-biased exposure to treatment and against confounding effects of omitted variables, selection bias, and other threats to causal interpretation.

Overview:

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

Strategies for observational studies:

Focus on the argument, research design, and results.

- IV/Matching: Acharya, Avidit, Matthew Blackwell, and Maya Sen (2013). “The Political Legacy of American Slavery.”
- DID: Abdelgadir, Aala, and Vasiliki Fouka. "Political secularism and Muslim integration in the West: Assessing the effects of the French headscarf ban." *American Political Science Review* 114.3 (2020): 707-723.
- Controlling for confounders: Mitts, Tamar. 2019. “From Isolation to Radicalization: Anti-Muslim Hostility and Support for ISIS in the West.” *American Political Science Review* 113(1): 173–94.

Supplemental:

- Acemoglu, Daron, Simon Johnson, and James A. Robinson. "The colonial origins of comparative development: An empirical investigation." *American economic review* 91.5 (2001): 1369-1401.
- Albouy, David Y. "The colonial origins of comparative development: an empirical investigation: comment." *American economic review* 102.6 (2012): 3059-3076.
- Rhode, Paul W. "How Suitable are FAO-GAEZ Crop Suitability Indices for Historical Analysis?" (2024).
- Sovey, Allison J., and Donald P. Green. 2011. “Instrumental Variables Estimation in Political Science: A Readers Guide.” *American Journal of Political Science* 55:188-200.
- Felix Elwert and Christopher Winship. 2014. “Endogenous Selection Bias: The Problem of Conditioning on a Collider Variable.” *Annual Review of Sociology* 40:31– 53
- 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
- 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.

Assignment 4: Prepare a memo that proposes a quantitative empirical design for your project that would serve as a test of an observable implication of your theory. This can be in the form of analyzing available dataset, collecting administrative or social media

data, or a pre-analysis plan for an experiment. Be explicit about the extent to which your design yields correlational evidence or causal evidence. If it is correlational, spell out potential confounders that limit the inference that can be drawn from your analysis.

November 5: Empirical Design – Qualitative Methods

We turn to the analysis of non-numerical data. In this week, we contextualize the role of qualitative studies in the discipline. We also start to think about one use of qualitative studies: cross-case comparison.

In class presentations (<5 slides, <=5 minutes) about quantitative research design.

Overview:

- John Gerring. 2004. “What is a Case Study and What Is it Good For?” American political science review 98 (2): 341–354.
- Barbara Geddes. 1990. “How the Cases You Choose Affect the Answers You Get: Selection Bias in Comparative Politics.” Political Analysis 2:131–150

Application:

Focus on argument, research design, and results.

- Bishara, Dina. 2021. “The Generative Power of Protest: Time and Space in Contentious Politics.” Comparative Political Studies.
- Daniel Posner, “The Political Salience of Cultural Difference: Why Chewas and Tumbukas are Allies in Zambia and Adversaries in Malawi,” American Political Science Review 98, No. 4, 529-545.

Supplemental:

- John Gerring. 2017. “Qualitative Methods.” Annual Review of Political Science 20 (1): 15–36.
- Mahoney and Goertz, *Tale of Two Cultures*, 87–99 (chap. 7: “Within-Case versus Cross-Case Analysis”).
- Jasjeet S. Sekhon. 2004. “Quality Meets Quantity: Case Studies, Conditional Probability, and Counterfactuals.” Perspectives on Politics 2 (2): 281–293
- Richard A. Nielsen. 2016. “Case Selection via Matching.” Sociological Methods & Research 45 (3): 569–597
- Barbara Geddes. 1990. “How the Cases You Choose Affect the Answers You Get: Selection Bias in Comparative Politics.” Political Analysis 2:131–150
- Mahoney and Goertz, *Tale of Two Cultures*, 177–191 (chap. 14: “Case Selection and Hypothesis Testing”)
- Edward Miguel, 2004, “Tribe or Nation? Nation Building and Public Goods in Kenya versus Tanzania,” World Politics 56: 327-62.

November 12: Empirical Design – Qualitative Methods

Specifics of case study research. It covers within-case analysis, with an emphasis on process tracing.

Overview:

- David Collier. 2011. “Understanding Process Tracing.” PS: Political Science & Politics 44 (4): 823–830.
- 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

Applications:

- 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.
- 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

Supplemental:

- Winward, Mark. 2020. “Intelligence Capacity and Mass Violence: Evidence from Indonesia.” Comparative Political Studies.

November 19: Empirical Design – Qualitative Methods

We will discuss fieldwork and ethnography. We will give 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.

Overview:

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

Application:

- 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”)
- Tariq Thachil, Elite Parties, Poor Voters: How Social Services Win Votes in India (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), Chapter 5.

Supplemental:

- Lisa Wedeen. 1998. "Acting 'As If': Symbolic Politics and Social Control in Syria." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 40 (3): 503–523
- Elisabeth Jean Wood. 2007. "Field Research." In *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Politics*, edited by Janet M. Box-Steffensmeier, Henry E. Brady, and David Collier, 123–146. New York: Oxford University Press
- 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
- 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>
- Lisa Wedeen. 2010. "Reflections on Ethnographic Work in Political Science." *Annual Review of Political Science* 13 (1): 255–272
- Diana Fu. 2017. "Disguised Collective Action in China." *Comparative Political Studies* 50 (4): 499–527
- 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

Assignment 5: Prepare a memo brainstorming a qualitative strategy that would enhance the empirical credibility of your project.

November 26: NO CLASS – THANKSGIVING

December 3: Mixed Methods

We consider whether and how to reconcile and combine different methodological approaches.

Overview:

- Gerring, *Social Science Methodology*, 359–376 (chap. 13: "Unity and Plurality") and 379–93 (chap. 14: "Setting Standards")
- Evan S. Lieberman. 2005. "Nested Analysis as a Mixed-Method Strategy for Comparative Research." *American Political Science Review* 99 (3): 435–452

Applications:

- Daniel C. Mattingly. 2016. "Elite Capture: How Decentralization and Informal Institutions Weaken Property Rights in China." *World Politics* 68 (3): 383–412
- Grzymala-Busse, Anna. "Weapons of the Meek: How Churches Influence Public Policy," *World Politics*: 1-36.

Supplemental:

- 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
- 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
- Francesca Refsum Jensenius. 2014. “The Fieldwork of Quantitative Data Collection.” *PS: Political Science & Politics* 47 (2): 402–404
- Jason Seawright. 2016. *Multi-method Social Science: Combining Qualitative and Quantitative Tools*. New York: Cambridge University Press

December 10: Student Presentations

COURSE POLICIES

Communications: Please use your university email to contact me, as needed. You can expect a response from me within 1-2 business days during the working week.

Classroom Recording: To ensure the free and open discussion of ideas, students may not record classroom lectures, discussion, and/or activities without the advance written permission of the instructor, and any such recording properly approved in advance can be used solely for the student's own private use.

Assignments: All assignments are due at the time/date specified in the “Assignments” section in the syllabus and various places on Canvas. Your assignments must be uploaded to the assignment page in Canvas (unless otherwise noted). No late presentations will be granted (without a university approved excuse). Late assignments will be penalized 1/3 of a grade (e.g. from A to A-) for every day beyond the due date.

Academic Integrity: Students in this course will be expected to comply with the University of Pittsburgh’s Policy on Academic Integrity. Any student suspected of violating this obligation for any reason during the semester will be required to participate in the procedural process, initiated at the instructor level, as outlined in the University Guidelines on Academic Integrity. The use of generative AI writing tools (such as ChatGPT, GrammarlyGO, GPT-3, GPT-4, BERT, or others) is prohibited in this class. Assignments for the course have been designed to help you develop intellectually without the use of these technologies. You will generate ideas, read, revise, and write on your own and/or in consultation with peers, me, or Writing Center tutors and you will not use AI at any stage of your writing process. Any use of AI technologies in your work will be considered an academic integrity violation and addressed accordingly. Please see me if you have any questions about this policy.

Disability Services: If you have a disability for which you are or may be requesting an accommodation, you are encouraged to contact both your instructor and Disability Resources and Services (DRS), 140 William Pitt Union, (412) 648-7890, drsrecep@pitt.edu, (412) 228-5347 for P3 ASL users, as early as possible in the term. DRS will verify your disability and determine reasonable accommodations for this course.

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