Research Design in Political Science
Department of Government, LSE
2015-2016

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Instructor
Thomas J. Leeper
Department of Government
Connaught House 3.21
thosjleeper@gmail.com

GTA
TBD

1 Introduction

The course will introduce students to the fundamentals of research design in political science. The course will cover a range of topics, starting from the formulation of research topics and research questions, the development of theory and empirically testable hypotheses, the design of data collection activities, and basic qualitative and quantitative data analysis techniques.

The course will address a variety of approaches to empirical political science research including experimental and quasi-experimental designs, large-n survey research, small-n case selection, and comparative/historical comparisons. As a result, topics covered in the course will be varied and span all areas of political science including political behaviour, institutions, comparative politics, international relations, and public administration.

Every week will involve a lecture followed by a class with a Graduate Teaching Assistant.

2 Learning Objectives

The learning objectives for the course are as follows. By the end of the course, students will be able to:

1. Identify interesting political science research questions and formulate theories and hypotheses that answer them
2. Describe and operationalize concepts from political science theories
3. Evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of different approaches to empirical research
4. Apply political science theories to the design of original research

3 Learning Assessment and Feedback

Students will be evaluated through (1) a 2-hour written exam covering the full breadth of course content and (2) a 3000-word written paper applying course material in the form of a research design proposal. The final mark will reflect an equal weighting of both forms of assessment.

The written exam covers the full breadth of material from the course and will test students' knowledge of course content, including concept definition, the appraisal of political science theories, the generation of hypotheses, and — most importantly — the appropriateness of different research designs for answering specific research questions. This will count for 50% of the final mark.

The individual research design paper should outline the basic elements of a novel research project, namely a research question, theoretical contribution, testable hypotheses, and a description of the proposed data collection and analysis. Unlike the written exam, this paper should focus narrowly on a topic of the student's choice and display a greater depth of understanding of a smaller set of ideas raised in the course. This will count for 50% of the final mark.

As formative work in preparation for both exam forms, students will complete short "problem set" assignments, approximately every other week (see course schedule for details), which allow them to apply material from the course to concrete political science examples (e.g., identifying design elements of a published research paper; proposing strategies for answering a given research question, etc.). While these formative assessments do not count toward the final mark, they provide an opportunity for peer and instructor feedback.

4 Reading Material

5 Course Website

6 Schedule

The general schedule for the course is as follows. Details on topics covered and the readings for each week are provided on the following pages.

6.1 Introduction

6.2 Research Questions: What do we want to know?

6.3 Building Theories from Observations

6.4 Deriving Hypotheses from Theory

6.5 Concepts: "I'll know it when I see it"

6.6 Measurement: Concepts in Practice

6.7 Causality: Explanation versus Prediction

6.8 Process-Tracing and Working with Texts

6.9 Case Selection: Comparisons over Time and Geography

6.10 Sampling and Representativeness

6.11 Probability and Statistical Inference

6.12 Interviewing, Structured and Unstructured

6.13 Questionnaire Design

6.14 Tabulation and Visualization

6.15 Matching: Accounting for Rival Explanations

6.16 Regression

6.17 Experimental Design

6.18 Quasi-Experiments, or the Search for Easy Answers

6.19 Ethics and Research Integrity

6.20 Conclusion and Synthesis

6.1 Introduction

Instructor: Thomas

Lecture

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Readings

See Also:

6.2 Research Questions: What do we want to know?

6.3 Building Theories from Observations

6.4 Deriving Hypotheses from Theory

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6.6 Measurement: Concepts in Practice

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