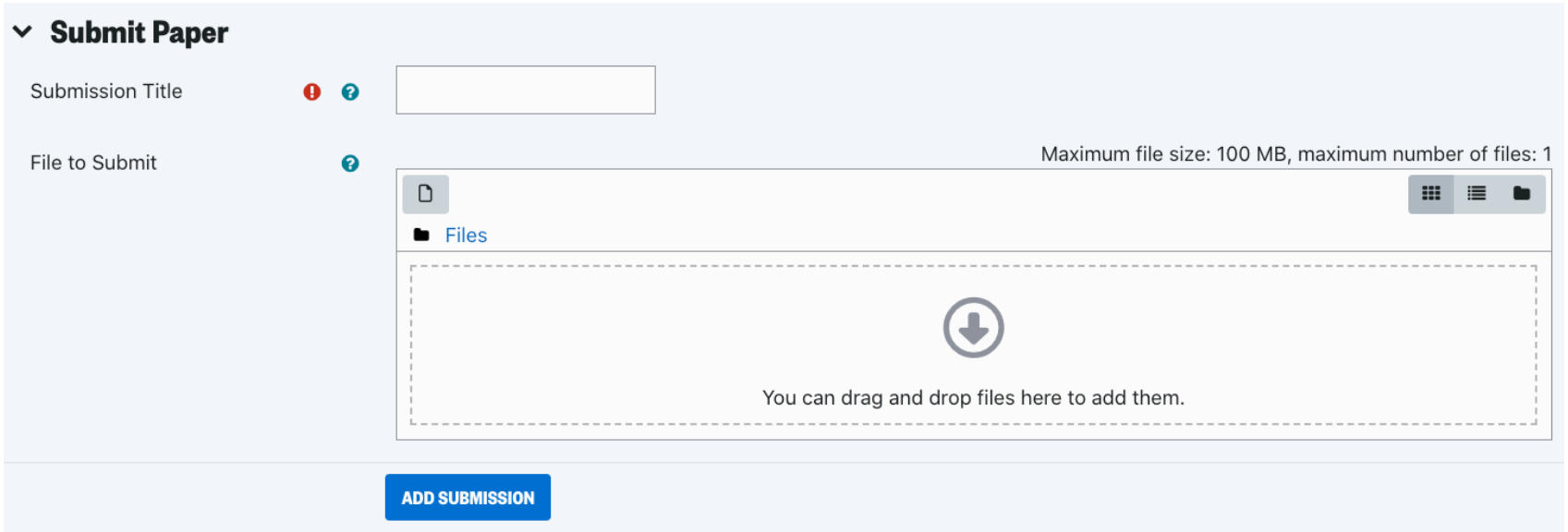
Doing Political and Social Research

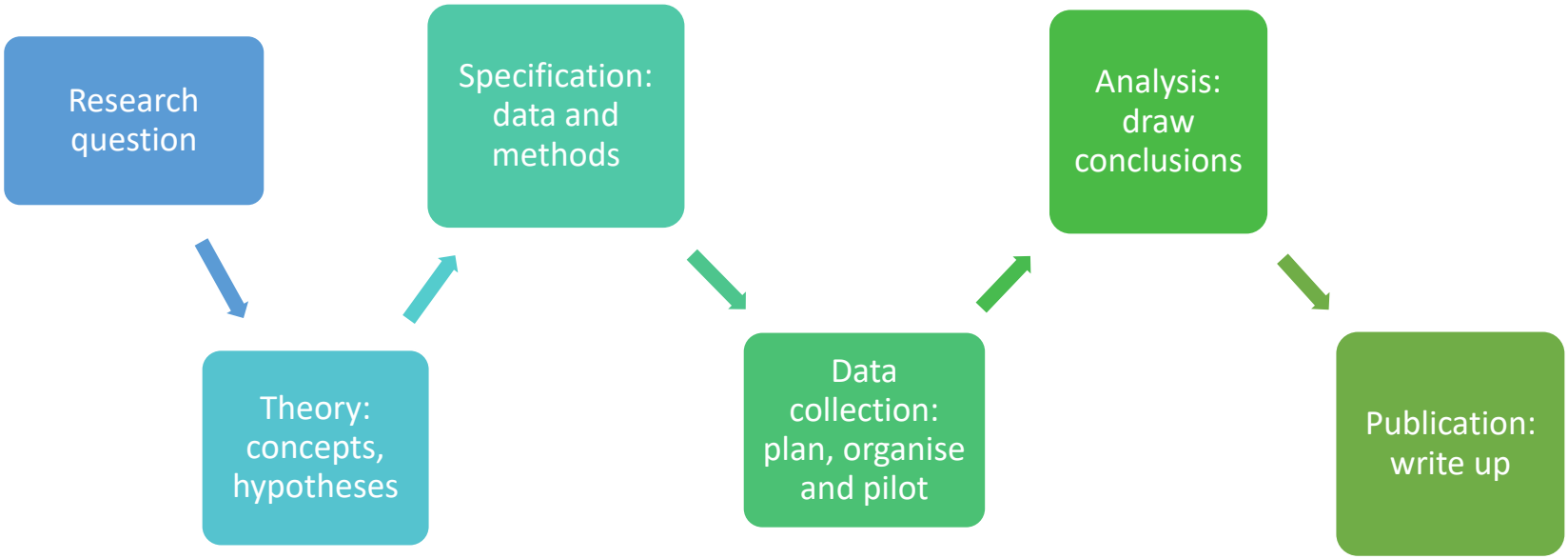
Research Proposals

Overview

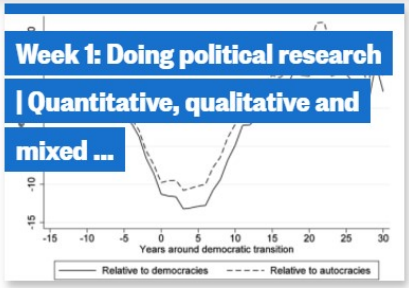
- A **2500-word** $(+/-10\%)$ research design to outline a planned research project
- Submit your work by **Midday, 10 January November 2025**
  - Attach the assessment coversheet
  - Enter your student ID in the field of Submission Title

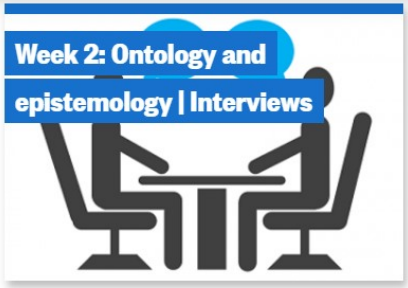


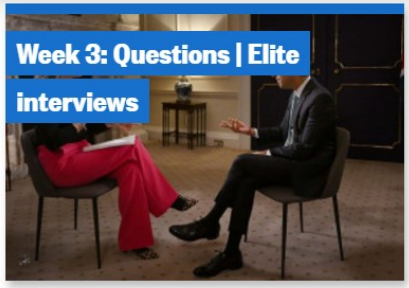
The (Idealised) Research Process



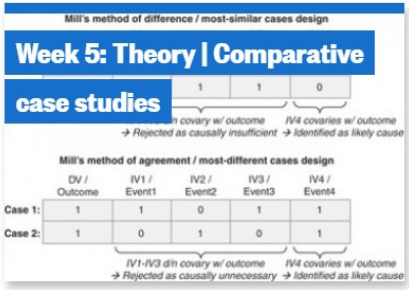
- What **ontological and epistemological foundations** underpin your research philosophy?
- What is your research **question**?
- Where does your proposed research build on **existing studies**?
- What is your **theory**? Will you be testing an existing theory, developing a new theory or adapting an exisiting theory to a different context?
- What are the key **concepts** in your research project? How will you operationalise and measure them?
- Which **method(s)** will you use to answer your question? Why do you choose this method, or sets of method? How will you collect your data? How will you analyse the data you collect? What practical difficulties might you face when collecting and analysing your data? How will you overcome them?
- What **ethical issues** might arise during your research project? How will you ensure that your research meets relevant ethical standards?


Week 1: Doing political research | Quantitative, qualitative and mixed ...
-15 -10 -5 0 5 10 15 20 25 30
Years around democratic transition
Relative to democracies
Relative to autocracies

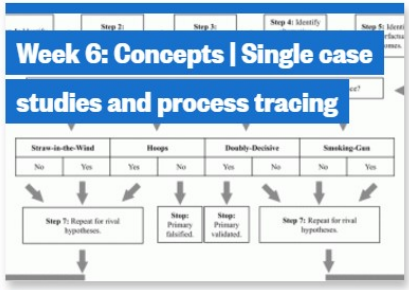

Week 2: Ontology and epistemology | Interviews


Week 3: Questions | Elite interviews

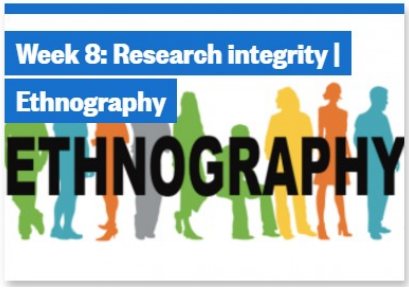
Week 4: Literature reviews | Focus groups


Week 5: Theory | Comparative case studies
Mill's method of difference / most-similar cases design
Mill's method of agreement / most-different cases design
DV / Outcome
IV1 / Event1
IV2 / Event2
IV3 / Event3
IV4 / Event4
Case 1:
Case 2:
IV4 covaries w/ outcome
→ Identified as likely cause
IV1-IV3 d/n covary w/ outcome
→ Rejected as causally unnecessary

Reading Week


Week 6: Concepts | Single case studies and process tracing
Straw-in-the-Wind
Hoops
Doubly-Decisive
Smoking-Gun

Week 7: Measurement | Documents and archives


Week 8: Research integrity | Ethnography
ETHNOGRAPHY

Week 9: Ethics | Experiments
FIELD EXPERIMENTS

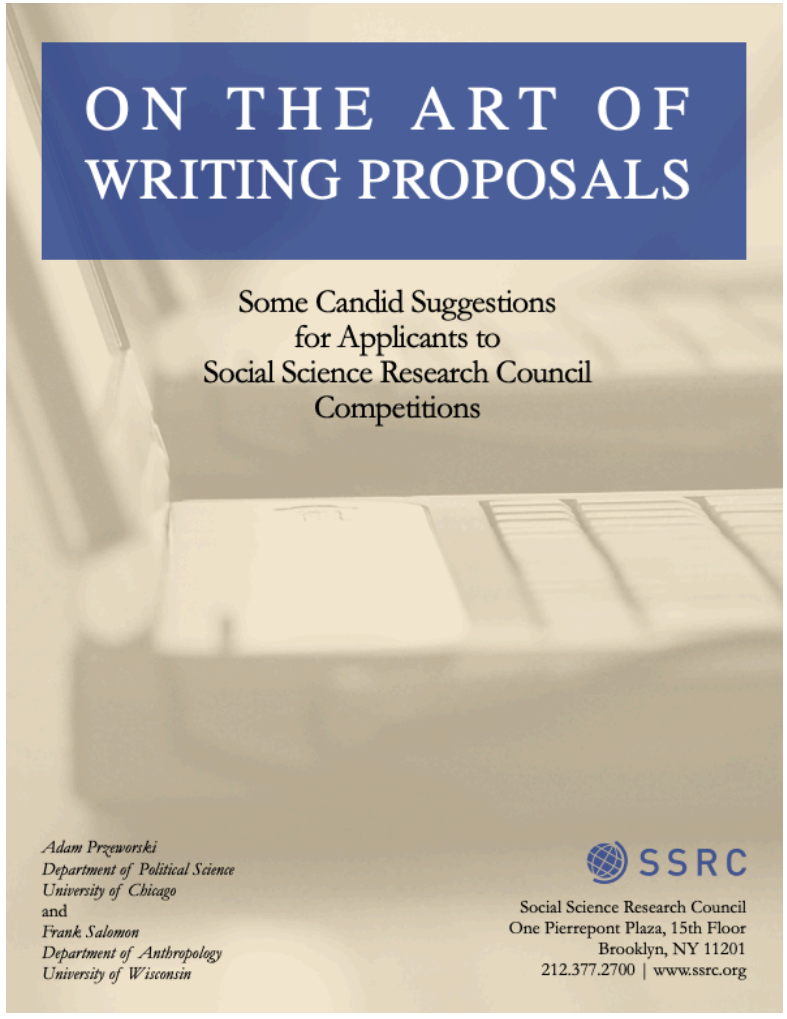
Week 10: Your research designs
Workshop

Extra: More on a proposal Overview

- State the **research question(s)** that you could answer within the constraints of a dissertation
- Provide the **background literature** – what is the body of literature that your RQs emerges from and that you plan to speak to?
- Present a **research design** to explain data collection and analysis
- Discuss the **limitations and critical considerations** specific to your research design
- Bibliography

- Research question(s) that are sufficiently focused and tractable
- Literature review that sets the relevant context and motivates the research question – what is the gap?
- A research design that
  - describes the type(s) of evidence which will be collected and analyzed to address the research question;
  - shows that the proposed evidence can feasibly be collected in the timeframe available;
  - outlines feasible method(s) that will be used to analyze the evidence
- A thoughtful discussion on the expected relative strengths and limitations of the combination of evidence and analytical method

“On the Art of Writing Proposals” (SSRC)



https://www.ssrc.org/publications/the-art-of-writing-proposals/

Extra: Explaining your design: Process tracing and case studies

- Literature review: How do you use the literature to motivate the study? What is the puzzle? Why is this study interesting, in relation to what we already know or assume?
- How do you justify the selection of cases for comparison? What is the evidence that these cases are different on the independent and dependent variables while being mostly similar in other aspects?
- What is your proposed explanation? Where does the evidence come from? What is the most convincing piece of evidence?
- Are there any alternative explanations in addition to the central argument?
- Which part of your argument could be generalized to other contexts? What is the scope condition?

Extra: Explaining your design: Quantitative research design

- Basic components
  - The key empirical **question(s)**?
  - The key **hypotheses** (empirical or testable implications) based on the theoretical literature?
  - The key **independent** (explanatory) and **dependent** (outcome) variables?
  - The key **statistical result(s)** we expect to observe in the regression table(s)?
- Advanced components
  - Are all necessary **control** variables (covariates) included in the model?
  - Are there any additional tests to assess the **robustness** of the main results? Are there any tests to study the **heterogeneous** effect (i.e., do the main findings change if we divide up the observations)?
  - What else can be or should have been tested?

Extra: Explaining your design: Qualitative research design

- What is the key concept from the literature that you seek to engage with? How do you motivate your study with reference to the literature?
- How do you justify the case selection? Is it a typical case? An exceptional case? What puzzle can it contribute to solving?
- How will the qualitative methods used allow you to answer the research questions? Is there anything that might be missed out, with your design?
- Is anything in your research paper generalizable to other settings?
- How does your research provide a sense of "being there?"

Where Research Begins

Choosing a Research Project That Matters to You (and the World)

Thomas S. Mullaney and Christopher Rea

Plenty of books tell you how to do research. This book helps you figure out WHAT to research in the first place, and why it matters.

The hardest part of research isn't answering a question. It's knowing what to do *before* you know what your question is. *Where Research Begins* tackles the two challenges every researcher faces with every new project: How do I find a compelling problem to investigate—one that truly matters to me, deeply and personally? How do I then design my research project so that the results will matter to anyone else?

This book will help you start your new research project the right way for *you* with a series of simple yet ingenious exercises. Written in a conversational style and packed with real-world examples, this easy-to-follow workbook offers an engaging guide to finding research inspiration within yourself, and in the broader world of ideas.

https://press.uchicago.edu/ucp/books/book/chicago/W/bo131341275.html