

POLI SCI 210

Introduction to

Empirical Methods in Political Science

Spring 2026

Instructor: Gustavo Diaz (gustavo.diaz@northwestern.edu)

Lecture: Tuesday/Thursday 9:30 – 10:50am, Harris Hall L07

Canvas: <https://canvas.northwestern.edu/courses/245612>

Student Hours: Tuesday 2:00 – 4:00pm, Scott Hall 103

Teaching Assistants

- Tanner Bentley (tannerbentley2029@u.northwestern.edu)
- Chloe Bernadaux (chloebernadaux2028@u.northwestern.edu)
- Mikhail Turchenko (mturchenko@u.northwestern.edu)

TA Student Hours

TA	Time	Office
Bentley	Wednesday 1:00 – 2:50pm	Scott Hall 111
Bernadaux	Tue/Thu 1:00 – 2:00pm	Scott Hall 413
Turchenko	Tuesday 2:00 – 4:00pm	Scott Hall 110

Discussion Sections

Section	Time	Room	TA
60	Fr 10:00 – 10:50AM	University Hall 312	TBD
61	Fr 11:00 – 11:50AM	University Hall 312	TBD
62	Fr 1:00 – 1:50PM	University Hall 112	TBD
63	Fr 2:00 – 2:50PM	University Hall 412	TBD
64	Fr 10:00 – 10:50AM	University Library 3722	TBD
65	Fr 11:00 – 11:50AM	University Hall 318	TBD

Course Overview

This course introduces the empirical methods used by political scientists to answer research questions, including their appropriate application, advantages, and shortcomings. You will learn how researchers use data in social science contexts, with a particular emphasis on political science topics, across three broad areas: quantitative, experimental, and qualitative studies. This course prepares students to read and evaluate research in subsequent courses on substantive social science topics.

Learning Objectives

- Identify and explain descriptive and causal inference approaches, as well as their challenges in political science
- Evaluate inferential claims in academic social science research
- Identify types of research designs, explain their strengths and weaknesses, and discuss alternative approaches
- Communicate research processes and findings

Requirements

There are no requirements to take this course, which fulfills the methodology requirement for Political Science majors. This course also counts toward the Empirical and Deductive Reasoning requirement (formerly known as Formal Studies Distribution Area) at Weinberg College.

Required Reading

i Textbook

Clipperton, Jean, et al. 2020. *Empirical Methods in Political Science An Introduction*. Northwestern University Libraries

This is a *FREE* resource available through the link above. The rest of the syllabus will refer to the textbook as **EMPS** for short.

Any other required material or reading will be linked in the schedule below and available on Canvas.

Grading

This course uses a labor-based grading agreement, commonly known as contract grading. In this course, instead of being given a final grade based on how “good” your submitted assignments are, your final grade will be based on the amount of work you put into the course. The goal is to decouple grades from performance and emphasize learning and effort.

Each assignment is worth a number of points. You need 250 points out of a total of 300 to receive an A. The following table translates points to letter grades. These correspond in ratio to the [Weinberg College grading system](#).

Grade	A	A-	B+	B	B-	C+	C	C-	D	F
Points	≥ 250	235	215	200	185	165	150	135	100	< 100
GPA	4.0	3.7	3.3	3.0	2.7	2.3	2.0	1.7	1	0

There are five types of assignments:

1. **Quizzes** (10 points each)
2. **Research design critiques** (10 points each)
3. **AI memos** (10 points each)
4. **Section participation** (10 points each)

With the exception of quizzes, which award points based on correct answers, all assignments are marked as satisfactory or unsatisfactory. You receive full points for every assignment marked as satisfactory.

The weekly assignments will be made available no later than the beginning of the first lecture of the corresponding week. These assignments are due on Fridays at 11:59 PM of the week they are assigned. You can choose which assignments to complete, but you will be deducted 20 points if you have not obtained at least 100 points by Friday, February 13. This requirement is waived if you have been approved for accommodations for this course by [AccessibleNU](#).

This course does not formally require attendance, but if the average lecture meeting attendance, based on the total number of students enrolled in the class at the time of meeting, exceeds 50% by the end of the quarter then every student enrolled in the course will receive **50 extra points** at the end of the term. The first week of instruction is excluded from this calculation.

Quizzes (10 points each x 8)

Weekly quizzes on the lecture and textbook material will be available on Canvas each week. These quizzes are brief, untimed, and consist only of multiple choice, matching, and true/false questions. Each quiz may be taken as many times as you want before the deadline. Quizzes may be taken while referencing notes and course materials. The first quiz is due on week 2.

Research design critiques (10 points each x 7)

Every week has additional non-textbook readings assigned, these are usually published articles that illustrate the application of the methods we discuss that week. You can choose to write a short form document (around 700-1,000 words) that summarizes the question, relevance, and research design of the study in question, and then use course material to evaluate its design or implementation.

Ultimately, your research design critique must answer the question of “what should we change if we were to go back and conduct the study ourselves?” The first research design critique is due on week 3. A detailed rubric is posted on Canvas.

AI memos (10 points each x 8)

Starting on week 2, you can ask a generative AI chatbot to explain the a concept, topic, or issue related to the corresponding week’s theme. You should then ask at least five follow up or clarification questions on the topic. You are encouraged to be creative in selecting your prompts, as long as they relate to course material for that week and align with the rubric posted on Canvas.

Based on your conversation with the AI, you will write a short memo (500-1000 words) summarizing the interaction and evaluating its quality. How does the AI explanation compare to what we discussed in class? Why is it different from the course material? Why is it more/less helpful than what is covered in the textbook or lectures? Do you feel the recommended sources (if any) are credible? At the end of the document, you should also attach a transcript of your conversation with the AI (you can directly ask in the chat to export a copy in Word format, include an external URL, or submit a separate file).

Northwestern University recommends students and faculty to use [Microsoft Copilot](#) to engage with generative AI. When using Copilot via Office 365 or Bing while logged into your Northwestern email account, your data will not be shared nor used for product improvement or to train other AI models. However, you are welcome to use your favorite generative AI chatbot as long as you are able to include a transcript in your memo.

Section participation (10 points each x 7)

During sections, we will engage in additional discussion of the week’s material, with emphasis on the assigned non-textbook readings for each week. Your participation will be marked as satisfactory/unsatisfactory in each week. You must actively participate, not merely attend, in order to receive credit.

Research Study Participation Requirement

Students enrolled in this course are required to complete a research participation assignment. This will involve taking part in studies conducted by students and faculty from the Department of Political Science, and will include up to 4 hours of research study participation. This will primarily require completing on-line surveys, and in some cases in-person studies at Scott Hall. Students will be able to see how political science studies are conducted and can request information about the studies at the end of the quarter. Students who prefer not to participate in research may opt for an alternative that entails reading a book chapter about political science research and writing a five page reaction paper. The typical chapter is about 20 pages and thus reading it and writing a five-page paper should take approximately four hours. In order to opt for the 5-page paper alternative, please email the lab manager, Jacob Fortier at jacobfortier2027@u.northwestern.edu.

Schedule

Week 1 (January 6/8): Introduction and Overview

NO DISCUSSION SECTIONS

EMPS Chapters 1-2

Week 2 (January 13/15): Theory and Data

NO DISCUSSION SECTIONS

EMPS Chapters 3-4

Week 3 (January 20/22): Inference

EMPS Chapter 5

Krcmaric, Daniel, Stephen C. Nelson, and Andrew Roberts. 2024. “[Billionaire Politicians: A Global Perspective.](#)” *Perspectives on Politics* 22 (2): 357-371

Week 4 (January 27/29): Surveys

EMPS Chapter 6

Rosenzweig, Leah R. and Nicole E. Wilson. 2023. “[State of the Fiscal Contract in Lagos’ Informal Settlements.](#)” *Studies in Comparative International Development* 58: 1-28

Week 5 (February 3/5): Experiments

EMPS Chapter 7

Naunov, Martin. 2024. “[The Effect of Protesters’ Gender on Public Reactions to Protests and Protest Repression.](#)” *American Political Science Review*

Week 6 (February 10/12): Large N

EMPS Chapter 8

Harbridge-Yong, Laurel, Craig Volden, and Alan E. Wiseman. 2023. “[The Bipartisan Path to Effective Lawmaking.](#)” *Journal of Politics* 85 (3): 795-1165

Week 7 (February 17/19): Quasi-Experiments

Huntington-Klein, Nick. 2022. [The Effect: An Introduction to Research Design and Causality.](#) Chapman & Hall. Chapter 18

Cattaneo, Matias D., Nicolás Idrobo, and Rocío Titiunik. 2020. [A Practical Introduction to Regression Discontinuity Designs: Foundations.](#) Cambridge University Press. Chapters 1-4

García-Montoya, Laura, Ana Arjona, and Matthew Lacombe. 2022. “[Violence and Voting in the United States: How School Shootings Affect Elections.](#)” *American Political Science Review* 116 (3): 807-826

Saab, Andrew. 2026. “Fickle loyalties: Intragroup competition in open list elections.” *Electoral Studies*

Week 8 (February 24/26): Small N

EMPS Chapter 9

Gilbert, Danielle. 2022. “[The Logic of Kidnapping in Civil War: Evidence from Colombia.](#)” *American Political Science Review* 116 (4): 1226-1241

Week 9 (March 3/5): Machine Learning

EMPS Chapter 12

Libgober, Brian and Connor T. Jerzak. 2024. “[Linking datasets on organizations using half a billion open-collaborated records.](#)” *Political Science Research and Methods*

Week 10 (March 10/12): Weinberg College Reading Period

Make up class if needed

Northwestern University Syllabus Standards

This course follows the [Northwestern University Syllabus Standards](#). Students are responsible for familiarizing themselves with this information.