

Week 1: Concepts and Measurement

Jennifer Lin

2021-09-22

Course Syllabus

Welcome to PS 210! I am excited for this quarter! In this section, I will discuss the section expectations.¹

Each week, we will meet for an hour outside the lecture times to discuss the course materials. This is your opportunity to **ask questions, review the material** and **clarify** anything that can be confusing from the course.

- Come to section prepared to discuss the materials from the readings and lectures. I will briefly review the lecture material for the week during each section. However, the emphasis will be on your questions.
- Please be respectful of others when speaking, listening and responding.
- Please try to check your emails and Canvas at least once daily for any course readings and updates from Dr. Seawright, myself or any of the other course TAs.

Your attendance at these TA sections are part of your participation grade. I will be taking attendance each time we meet.

If you have any questions at any point in this course, please do not hesitate to email me. If you would like to speak to me and cannot make my office hours, I am **happy to set up an appointment to meet**². Please note that if you **email me after 7 PM Central Time on the weekday or at any point during the weekend, I may not respond to your question until the next business day**. If I can be of assistance in any way to you in this class, please do not hesitate to reach out.

¹ Please see https://lin-jennifer.github.io/teaching/syllabus/Syllabus_PS210Section.pdf for the full Section Syllabus

² You can schedule Office Hours here: <https://calendly.com/lin-jennifer/ps-210-student-hours?month=2021-09>

Week 1 Content

*Political Science is a **SCIENCE***

Political Science is a **Science** and so the study of politics (Political Science) follows many of the steps any scientist (be it a Biologist, Chemist, Physicist) would follow

1. Ask Questions
2. Do Research and Formulate a theory
3. Make Predictions

4. Test Predictions with Data and Experiments
5. Run statics and report results
6. Share findings with the world!

In Political Science, we try to model political space by asking questions and finding answers. However, models do not cover everything.

Think about models in your life. What comes to mind? Maybe toy cars, blueprints, maps, globes? Each of these try to model something of interest. Specifically, a car, a house (or whatever it is intending to build), streets in a city, and the world. Yet, each model is missing something.

Think about a model of a house. If you are a plumber, you might only care about where the pipes are. If you are an electrician, maybe how the electric grid runs. If you are a painter, you only want to know the square footage of the walls, and if you are an interior designer, maybe just the layout of the space. Inherently, if I asked each of these roles to draw a model of a house, I will get different results. This is because models only display some parts well but not others. A model of a house from an interior designer will mean almost nothing to a plumber.

This is political science at its core. Social Science research only covers some aspect of the world. Any one study or any one way of measuring a concept is *always* wrong. It is *always* missing something.

Let's take my research agenda as an example. I study rural political behavior. But it is a lot to write a paper on rural political behavior for the entire world. Therefore, it is only reasonable for me to break up the study of rural political behavior into several, more manageable question chunks. Here is a non-exhaustive list of more specific questions, where you can further break it down to even more specific questions if you want.

- What is “rural” and how do we measure it?
- What kinds of political behavior are we interested?
- What perspective are we taking? (historical, recent elections, etc.?)

Measurement

So you want to model something in political science? What is the concept that you want to measure? What are some things we need to consider in thinking about how to measure this concept?

Suppose we are interested in measuring someone's feelings towards a member of the opposing party. In thinking about a way to measure someone's feelings towards a member of the opposing party, we need to hash out:

- How we define “feelings” and “opposing party”?

- Reliability of the Measure – same thing each time
- Validity of the Measure – measures what we are intending

A common way of measuring this concept is the feeling thermometer, where respondent rate, from a 0 to 100 scale, how warmly they feel towards members of their own or opposing party. But remember, all models are wrong! What does this measurement not assess? Perhaps trust? Intent to socialize? Belonging? All of these are valid and researchers have developed items to measure feelings towards opposing partisans to address each of these concepts.