

Challenges to Democracy

Research Design

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Logistics

Do you have any thoughts on the syllabus and the course?

- Course requirements
- Literature
- Other things

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This is a dynamic syllabus which can change during the semester.
If any questions come to your mind in the course of the term,
please let me know!

Event announcement

Next week, we'll start with a new round of our speaker series on *Understanding Democracies: Challenges and Solutions*.

- Gefjon Off will be our guest
- She contributes significantly to our understanding of gender in politics
- Presentation on “Do gender patterns differ between the ethnic majority and Muslim minorities? Intersectional and cumulative effects of multiple identities on political behaviour”
- you are all invited to join us next Wednesday, 12-13 in GraSP 101

Plan for today

Today, we'll deal with two related issues:

1. introduction into different components of an academic article
2. discussion about the comparative method

What's good academic research for you?

In pairs, please discuss what's good academic research to you? If you have already read one, think of an academic article you've recently read and elaborate what you liked about it. [3 minutes]

Academic Research

Good research



Figure: Mind-mapping (<https://flinga.fi/s/FQWEZCY>)

Good research defined by KKV (1994)

According to King et al. (1994), is there anything like perfect research? Which criteria should good research contain?

Good research defined by KKV (1994)

King et al. (1994, pp. 16–17) define scientific research based on the following criteria:

1. Descriptive and causal Inference
2. Transparency
3. Probabilistic conclusions
4. Science is not the content, it's the *method*

Science is more than mere description (still important!), it's about identifying causal explanations of political phenomena.

The components of an academic paper

Let's collect, which ingredients should empirical research contain?

The components of an academic paper

Let's collect, which ingredients should empirical research contain?

1. Research question
2. Literature review
3. Theory
4. Research design
 - Case description
 - Data
 - Method
5. Analysis

The components of an academic paper

Today, we focus on two of these components, we'll talk about the other sections in the remaining sessions

1. Research question
2. Literature review
3. Theory
4. Research design
 - Case description
 - Data
 - Method
5. Analysis

Theory

What's a theory in the social sciences?

Theory

*“A social science theory is a reasoned and precise speculation about the answer to a research question, including a statement about why the proposed answer is correct.”
(King et al. 1994, p. 25)*

Which components does a theory consist of?

Theory

Theories consist of four components:

1. **Expectations:** An expected relationship between X and Y
2. **Causal mechanisms:** Theoretical reasoning of why X leads to Y
3. **Assumptions:** Underlying (untested) claims of how subjects behave
4. **Scope conditions:** Limits in the applicability of the theory

And what's a good theory?

Theory

A good theory:

- can be wrong
- contains observable patterns which we can study
- is specific
- should not be made more restrictive after data was analysed

Research design

Which research design have you heard of? Is there any superior to the other?

Research design

In the empirical social sciences, we can choose between two types of research designs:

1. quantitative designs
2. qualitative designs

The design should be selected based on your research question and theory and not the other way around!

What are the advantages of quantitative and qualitative approaches?

Research design

Often, both types of designs are possible, both allow to test causality and follow a positivist-empirical approach to the social sciences. Their research goals might, however, slightly differ:

Quantitative designs

- ...aim to identify systemic patterns across cases; disregards non-systemic, residual part
- ...focus on average effects
- ...zoom in on how on a specific cause X that leads to outcome Y
- ...often involves large- N (many cases)

Research design

Qualitative designs

- ...emphasize more often on the non-systemic, idiosyncratic part
- ...dedicate more space to case/event knowledge
- ...establish nuances, seeks to explain within-case variation and occurrence of rare cases
- ...typically involve small- to medium-N

How to judge data quality?

Research design

- trace data generation process
- collect data on observable implications
- ensure validity, reliability and replicability of data

Examples to practice

In the room, you find four different posters with a research question. Try to formulate a theory on the question and a research design to study it. [10 minutes]

1. Do citizens support violations of democratic principles? (Frederiksen et al. 2025)
2. How does climate change influence the legitimacy of democracy? (Cerkez 2025)

Research at the Chair of Comparative Politics

At the Chair of Comparative Politics, we adopt an **evidence-based** approach in our studies of political phenomena. This implies that we...

- ...formulate research questions that are of both theoretical and empirical relevance
- ...derive testable research hypotheses
- ...identify causal explanations
- ...use appropriate designs to test our expectations empirically

Academic research should follow a stringent and transparent research process.

The Comparative Method

“all social science requires comparison, which entails judgments of which phenomena are “more” or “less” alike in degree (i.e., quantitative differences) or in kind (i.e., qualitative differences).” (King et al. 1994, p. 2)

As the Chair of *Comparative Politics*, the comparative approach is the core pillar of our research.

Do you have an idea why it might be important to compare?

An example

“When told A causes B , someone who “thinks like a social scientist” asks whether that connection is a true causal one.”

Example:

Democratic states do not fight wars against each other.



Fundamental problem of causal inference

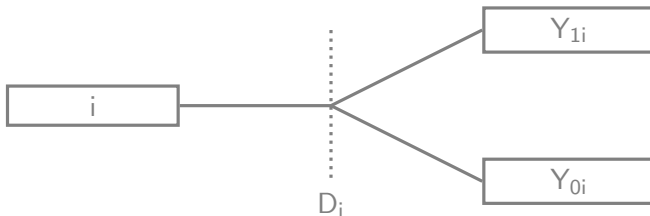


Figure: Potential Outcomes

¹see Cunningham (2021, pp. 125–128)

Fundamental problem of causal inference

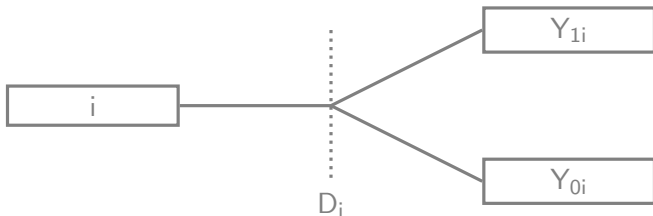


Figure: Potential Outcomes

Problem: We cannot observe the same unit in different conditions at the same time.¹

¹see Cunningham (2021, pp. 125–128)

Why comparison?



If we studied only one case, we would never know whether cats are responsible for bumpy roads.

Why comparison? II

“If we cannot rerun history at the same time and the same place with different values of our explanatory variable each time—as a true solution to the Fundamental Problem of Causal Inference would require—we can attempt to make a second-best assumption: we can rerun our experiment in two different units that are ‘homogeneous.’” (King et al. 1994, p. 90)

Comparative Designs

1. Experiments
2. Observational studies
 - Statistical studies
 - Comparative case studies

What counts as a comparison?

- A global study of how political parties recruit their candidates?
- An experiment of how voters respond to restrictive migration positions of a mainstream party?
- A study of how the German Left has developed since the Fall of the Berlin Wall?

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In the course of this seminar, we will define comparative politics more broadly. It's not necessarily a study across countries, but can very well be applied within countries (Pepinsky 2019).

What we've learned today...

- ...at least in theory: what constitutes 'good research' (in terms of theory and research design)
- ...which components empirical articles should contain
- ...how the comparative method works

To prepare for next week...

- Next week, we'll define and conceptualize (quality of) democracies
- **Main reading:**
 - Merkel, W. (2004). Embedded and defective democracies. *Democratization*, 11(5), 33–58.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13510340412331304598>
 - Dalton, R. J. (2007, January 1). *Democratic challenges, democratic choices: The erosion of political support in advanced industrial democracies*. Oxford Univ. Press.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199268436.001.0001>
- **Complementary readings:**

To prepare for next week...

- Sartori, G. (1970). Concept Misformation in Comparative Politics*. *American Political Science Review*, 64(4), 1033–1053. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1958356>
- Diamond, L., & Morlino, L. (2004). The Quality of Democracy: An Overview. *Journal of Democracy*, 15(4), 20–31. <https://doi.org/https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/jod.2004.0060>

Thank you for your attention!
Any further questions?

Literature

- Cerkez, N. (2025). *Extreme Weather Events and the Support for Democracy*. <https://ora.ox.ac.uk/objects/uuid:7b30c525-f621-46ee-9007-f52521568aca/files/s3f462793f>
- Cunningham, S. (2021). *Causal Inference: The Mixtape*. Yale University Press. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1c29t27>
- Dalton, R. J. (2007, January 1). *Democratic challenges, democratic choices: The erosion of political support in advanced industrial democracies*. Oxford Univ. Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199268436.001.0001>
- Diamond, L., & Morlino, L. (2004). The Quality of Democracy: An Overview. *Journal of Democracy*, 15(4), 20–31. <https://doi.org/https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/jod.2004.0060>

Literature

- Frederiksen, K., Le Corre Juratic, M., Allinger, T., & Bischof, D. (2025). *Democratic Transgressions Embedded in Reality*.
https://doi.org/10.31219/osf.io/42vhy_v1
- King, G., Keohane, R. O., & Verba, S. (1994). *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research, New Edition*. Princeton University Press.
- Merkel, W. (2004). Embedded and defective democracies.
Democratization, 11(5), 33–58.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13510340412331304598>
- Pepinsky, T. B. (2019). The Return of the Single-Country Study.
Annual Review of Political Science, 22, 187–203.
<https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-polisci-051017-113314>

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Sartori, G. (1970). Concept Misformation in Comparative Politics*.
American Political Science Review, 64(4), 1033–1053.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/1958356>