

PS 817: Empirical Methods of Political Inquiry

Department of Political Science
University of Wisconsin–Madison
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Spring 2021

Class times: Tuesdays, 9–10:55am

Class location: [Here](#)

Class website: [Here](#)

Office hours: Thursdays, 9–11am

(Sign up [here](#))

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Course overview

This course introduces the fundamentals of research design in political science. We start by examining how political scientists formulate puzzles and questions, and discuss the processes of theorization, concept formation and measurement. We then study how political scientists test claims using qualitative and quantitative methods. Such methods include description, controlled comparisons, and natural, field and survey experiments. We conclude with a discussion of the role of transparency and replications in political science research.

Instructional mode

Online, synchronous. Classes will not be recorded.

Learning outcomes

Successful students will gain a broad understanding of the political science method as described above. In particular, students will gain an appreciation of the fundamentals of good research design, and the strengths and weaknesses of various qualitative and quantitative research methods.

Course credits

This is a three credit class. The credit standard for this course is met by an expectation of a total of 135 hours of student engagement with course learning activities, which include class meetings of two hours each week, multiple instructor-student meetings over the course of the semester, reading, data collection, analysis, writing, etc.

Assignments and grading

The class grade will be based on active and informed class participation, five short written assignments and a term paper. The specifics of these assignments and a detailed grading breakdown are available below:

1. Active, informed class participation, for 20% of the class grade. Participants are expected to have read the assigned works closely, and reflected on them, including possibly by discussing them with their colleagues before class.
2. Five short assignments (3-5 double-spaced pages), for 10% of the class grade each.
 - Assignment 1: Identify a puzzle or research question that you find interesting. Discuss the degree to which existing theories answer your question, and outline your own explanation for the phenomenon. Distill 2-3 testable hypotheses from your theory. Due: 2/16
 - Assignment 2: Building on assignment 1, identify your dependent and independent variables. Suggest ways in which these variables can be measured, and locate data on them. What are the possibilities of mis-measurement? How can these be minimized? What kind of sample overlap do you have? Do you have missing data problems? Due: 3/2
 - Assignment 3: Critique a research design presented in a paper at a colloquium in one of the field seminars. What problems you see in the research design and what might be done to fix those problems? Due: Anytime before 4/20
 - Assignment 4: Propose an observational research design (interviews, ethnography, multiple regression, difference-in-difference, IV, regression discontinuity, etc.) to help answer the puzzle you identified in the previous assignment. Under what assumptions would you be able to identify the causal effect of your independent variable of interest? Why are these assumptions plausible? Due: 3/30
 - Assignment 5: Design an experiment (survey, natural, field) to help answer the puzzle you identified in the previous assignments. Assume you have the power of fiat in making your experiment happen. Be sure to identify the exact nature of the treatment. What are possible confounding factors? Due: 4/20
3. A term paper, for 30% of the class grade (approximately 20 double-spaced pages). Building on your previous assignments, pose a clear research question, synthesize the relevant literature, and outline a theory and at least two falsifiable hypotheses. In the bulk of the paper, develop a tractable research design (including a data collection and analysis plan) that would allow for theory testing. Ideally, you would pursue this project in subsequent classes, resulting in a published paper. Please discuss your topics with me once by week 6, and a second time by week 11. Papers are due on Canvas one week after the last class, on 5/4.

All assignments will be given one of the following letter grades: A, AB, B, BC, C, D and F. To calculate the final letter grade, these grades will be converted to numeric scores (A=96,

AB=90, B=85.5, BC=81, C=75, D=67.5, F=60), which will then be summed using the weights mentioned above. The total score will be converted to the final letter grade using the following scale—A=92-100, AB=89-91, B=83-88, BC=80-82, C=71-79, D=65-70, F=below 65.

Rules, rights & responsibilities

See <http://guide.wisc.edu/graduate/>.

Course evaluations

You will receive an official email two weeks prior to the end of the semester when your course evaluation is available. You will receive a link to log into the course evaluation with your NetID where you can complete the evaluation and submit it, anonymously. Your feedback is important to me.

Academic calendar and religious observances

See <https://secfac.wisc.edu/academic-calendar/#religious-observances>.

Academic integrity

By enrolling in this course, each student assumes the responsibilities of an active participant in UW–Madison’s community of scholars in which everyone’s academic work and behavior are held to the highest academic integrity standards. Academic misconduct compromises the integrity of the university. Cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, unauthorized collaboration, and helping others commit these acts are examples of academic misconduct, which can result in disciplinary action. This includes but is not limited to failure on the assignment/course, disciplinary probation, or suspension. Substantial or repeated cases of misconduct will be forwarded to the Office of Student Conduct & Community Standards for additional review. For more information, refer to <http://studentconduct.wiscweb.wisc.edu/academic-integrity/>.

Accommodations for students with disabilities

The University of Wisconsin–Madison supports the right of all enrolled students to a full and equal educational opportunity. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Wisconsin State Statute (36.12), and UW–Madison policy (Faculty Document 1071) require that students with disabilities be reasonably accommodated in instruction and campus life. Reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities is a shared faculty and student responsibility. Students are expected to inform me of their need for instructional accommodations by the end of the third week of the semester, or as soon as possible after a disability has been incurred or recognized. I, will work either directly with you or in coordination with the McBurney Center (at 1305 Linden Drive and 608.263.2741; see www.mcburney.wisc.edu) to identify and provide reasonable instructional accommodations. Disability information, including instructional accommodations as part of a student’s educational record, is confidential and protected under FERPA.

Diversity and inclusion

Diversity is a source of strength, creativity, and innovation for UW–Madison. We value the contributions of each person and respect the profound ways their identity, culture, background, experience, status, abilities, and opinion enrich the university community. We commit ourselves to the pursuit of excellence in teaching, research, outreach, and diversity as inextricably linked goals. The University of Wisconsin–Madison fulfills its public mission by creating a welcoming and inclusive community for people from every background—people who as students, faculty, and staff serve Wisconsin and the world.

Readings

The readings are a combination of books, book chapters, and articles. Some are general sources intended to acquaint you with a set of issues; others are applications that exemplify a methodological approach. The three required books are Gerring’s *Social Science Methodology: A Unified Framework* (2nd ed.), King, Keohane, and Verba’s *Designing Social Inquiry* (KKV), and Brady and Collier’s *Rethinking Social Inquiry* (2nd ed.), all available for purchase online. You are welcome to borrow, share, or buy the books as you see fit. Other readings will be distributed electronically on the Canvas course website. Students are expected to do all of the required reading and attend class meetings ready to discuss the material. I will give advance notice if readings are changed.

Course Schedule

Class 1 (1/26): Introduction

Class 2 (2/2): Puzzles and Questions

King, Keohane and Verba, Chapters 1, 2.

Gerring, Chapters 1, 2.

Collier and Brady, Chapters 1, 5.

Geertz, Clifford. 1973. *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*. New York: Basic Books. Chapter 1.

Keohane, Robert O. 2009. “Political Science as a Vocation.” *PS: Political Science & Politics* 42: 359-63.

Class 3 (2/9): Theories, Models, Hypotheses

Gerring, Chapters 3, 6, 8.

Collier and Brady, Chapter 11.

Fearon, James D. 1991. “Counterfactuals and Hypothesis Testing in Political Science.” *World Politics* 43: 169-95.

Kuhn, Thomas S. 1962. *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Skim pages 1-173.

Lakatos, Imre. 1968. "Criticism and the Methodology of Scientific Research Programmes." Paper presented at the Proceedings of the Aristotelian society.

Clarke, Kevin A., and David M. Primo. 2007. "Modernizing Political Science: A Model-Based Approach." *Perspectives on Politics* 5: 741-53.

Class 4 (2/16): Concepts

Gerring, Chapter 5.

Sartori, Giovanni. 1970. "Concept Misformation in Comparative Politics." *American Political Science Review* 64: 1033-53.

Pitkin, Hanna Fenichel. 1967. *The Concept of Representation*. Berkeley: University of California. Appendix on Etymology.

Abdelal, Rawi, Yoshiko M Herrera, Alastair Iain Johnston, and Rose McDermott. 2006. "Identity as a Variable." *Perspectives on Politics* 4: 695-711.

Fisman, Raymond, and Edward Miguel. 2007. "Corruption, Norms, and Legal Enforcement: Evidence from Diplomatic Parking Tickets." *Journal of Political Economy* 115: 1020-48.

Class 5 (2/23): Measurement

Gerring, Chapter 7.

King, Keohane and Verba, pages 150-68.

Coppedge, Michael, John Gerring, David Altman, Michael Bernhard, Steven Fish, Allen Hicken, Matthew Kroenig, Staffan I Lindberg, Kelly McMann, and Pamela Paxton. 2011. "Conceptualizing and Measuring Democracy: A New Approach." *Perspectives on Politics* 9: 247-67.

Adcock, Robert and David Collier. 2001. "Measurement Validity: A Shared Standard for Qualitative and Quantitative Research." *American Political Science Review* 95: 529-46.

Grimmer, Justin. 2010. "A Bayesian Hierarchical Topic Model for Political Texts: Measuring Expressed Agendas in Senate Press Releases." *Political Analysis* 18: 1-35.

Class 6 (3/2): Data Collection and Description

Gerring, John. 2012. "Mere Description." *British Journal of Political Science* 42: 721-46.

Ansolabehere, Stephen, John M De Figueiredo, and James M Snyder Jr. 2003. "Why Is There So Little Money in US Politics?" *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 17: 105-30.

Dal Bó, Ernesto, Frederico Finan, Olle Folke, Torsten Persson, and Johanna Rickne. 2017. "Who Becomes a Politician?" *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 132: 1877-914.

Bonica, Adam. 2014. "Mapping the Ideological Marketplace." *American Journal of Political Science* 58: 367-86.

Grimmer, J., 2015. "We are all social scientists now: how big data, machine learning, and causal inference work together." *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 48(1), pp.80-83.

Class 7 (3/9): Case Selection, Case Methods, Sampling and Generalization

Brady and Collier, Chapters 6, 10 and 11.

Gerring, John. 2004. "What Is a Case Study and What Is It Good For?" *American Political Science Review* 98: 341-54.

Flyvbjerg, Bent. 2006. "Five Misunderstandings About Case-Study Research." *Qualitative Inquiry* 12: 219-45.

Geddes, Barbara. 1990. "How the Cases You Choose Affect the Answers You Get: Selection Bias in Comparative Politics." *Political Analysis* 2: 131-50.

Gisselquist, Rachel M. 2014. "Paired Comparison and Theory Development: Considerations for Case Selection." *PS: Political Science & Politics* 47: 477-84.

Class 8 (3/16): Participant Observation and Interviews

Cramer, Katherine J. 2016. *The Politics of Resentment: Rural Consciousness in Wisconsin and the Rise of Scott Walker*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Chapters 1, 2 and appendices.

Gillespie, Andra and Melissa R. Michelson. 2011. "Participant Observation and the Political Scientist: Possibilities, Priorities and Practicalities." *PS: Political Science and Politics* 44(2): 261-265.

Morris, Zoë Slote. 2009. "The Truth About Interviewing Elites." *Politics* 29: 209-17.

Martin, Cathie Jo. 2013. "Crafting Interviews to Capture Cause and Effect." In *Interview Research in Political Science*, ed. Layna Mosley. Ithaca: Cornell University Press. 109-24.

Mosley, Layna. 2013. "Introduction: 'Just Talk to People'? Interviews in Contemporary Political Science." In *Interview Research in Political Science*, ed. Layna Mosley. Ithaca: Cornell University Press. 1-28.

Parker, David C. W. 2018. "Following Fenno: Learning from Senate Candidates in the Age of Social Media and Party Polarization." *The Forum* 16(2): 145-170.

Simmons, Erica S. 2016. "Market Reforms and Water Wars." *World Politics* 68: 37-73.

Class 9 (3/23): Regression, Fixed Effects, Difference-in-Difference, Matching

Fearon, James D., and David D. Laitin. 2003. "Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War." *American Political Science Review* 97: 75-90.

Miller, Grant. 2008. "Women's Suffrage, Political Responsiveness, and Child Survival in American History." *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 123: 1287-327.

Sekhon, Jasjeet S. 2009. "Opiates for the Matches: Matching Methods for Causal Inference." *Annual Review of Political Science* 12: 487-508.

Dube, Arindrajit, Oeindrila Dube, and Omar García-Ponce. 2013. "Cross-Border Spillover: Us Gun Laws and Violence in Mexico." *American Political Science Review* 107: 397-417.

Class 10 (3/30): Instrumental Variables and Regression Discontinuity Estimators

Acemoglu, Daron, James Robinson, and Simon Johnson. 2001. "The Colonial Origins of Comparative Development: An Empirical Investigation." *The American Economic Review* 91: 1369-401.

Hansford, Thomas G., and Brad T. Gomez. 2010. "Estimating the Electoral Effects of Voter Turnout." *American Political Science Review* 104: 268-88.

Brollo, Fernanda and Tommaso Nannicini. 2012. "Tying Your Enemy's Hands in Close Races: The Politics of Federal Transfers in Brazil." *American Political Science Review* 106(4): 742-761.

Lee, David S. 2008. "Randomized Experiments from Non-Random Selection in U.S. House Elections." *Journal of Econometrics* 142: 675-97.

Samii, Cyrus. 2016. "Causal Empiricism in Quantitative Research." *Journal of Politics* 78(3): 941-955.

Class 11 (4/6): Natural Experiments

Bhavnani, Rikhil R. 2009. "Do Electoral Quotas Work after They Are Withdrawn? Evidence from a Natural Experiment in India." *American Political Science Review* 103: 23-35.

Dunning, Thad. 2012. *Natural Experiments in the Social Sciences: A Design-Based Approach*. Cambridge University Press. Chapters 1-4.

Erikson, Robert S, and Laura Stoker. 2011. "Caught in the Draft: The Effects of Vietnam Draft Lottery Status on Political Attitudes." *American Political Science Review* 105: 221-37.

Green, Donald P., Tiffany C. Davenport, and Kolby Hanson. 2019. "Are There Long-Term Effects of the Vietnam Draft on Political Attitudes or Behavior? Apparently Not." *Journal of Experimental Political Science* 6(2): 71-80.

Baldwin, Kate, and Rikhil R Bhavnani. 2015. "Ancillary Studies of Experiments: Opportunities and Challenges." *Journal of Globalization and Development* 6: 113-46.

Hyde, Susan D. 2007. "The Observer Effect in International Politics: Evidence from a Natural Experiment." *World Politics* 60: 37-63.

Class 12 (4/13): Laboratory and Field Experiments

Renshon, J., Lee, J.J. and Tingley, D., 2017. "Emotions and the micro-foundations of commitment problems." *International Organization* 71(S1): S189-S218.

Gottlieb, Jessica, 2017. "Explaining variation in broker strategies: A lab-in-the-field experiment in Senegal." *Comparative Political Studies* 50(11): 1556-1592.

Fearon, James D, Macartan Humphreys, and Jeremy M Weinstein. 2015. "How Does Development Assistance Affect Collective Action Capacity? Results from a Field Experiment in Post-Conflict Liberia." *American Political Science Review* 109: 450-69.

Wantchekon, Leonard. 2003. "Clientelism and Voting Behavior: Evidence from a Field Experiment in Benin." *World Politics* 55: 399-422.

Gerber, Alan S, and Donald P Green. 2000. "The Effects of Canvassing, Telephone Calls, and Direct Mail on Voter Turnout: A Field Experiment." *American Political Science Review* 94: 653-63.

Class 13 (4/20): Surveys and Survey Experiments

Schaeffer, Nora Cate, and Stanley Presser. 2003. "The Science of Asking Questions." *Annual Review of Sociology* 29.

Sniderman, Paul M. 2018. "Some Advances in the Design of Survey Experiments." *Annual Review of Political Science* 21: 259-75.

Tomz, Michael, and Jessica LP Weeks. 2020. "Public opinion and foreign electoral intervention." *American Political Science Review* 114(3): 856-873.

Lupu, Noam. 2013. "Party Brands and Partisanship: Theory with Evidence from a Survey Experiment in Argentina." *American Journal of Political Science* 57: 49-64.

Barabas, Jason, and Jennifer Jerit. 2010. "Are Survey Experiments Externally Valid?" *American Political Science Review* 104: 226-42.

Hainmueller, Jens, Dominik Hangartner, and Teppei Yamamoto. 2015. "Validating Vignette and Conjoint Survey Experiments against Real-World Behavior." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 112: 2395-400.

Class 14 (4/27): Replication and Transparency in Research

Fowler, Anthony, and Andrew B Hall. 2018. "Do Shark Attacks Influence Presidential Elections? Reassessing a Prominent Finding on Voter Competence." *Journal of Politics* 80(4): 1423-1437.

Franco, Annie, Neil Malhotra, and Gabor Simonovits. 2014. "Publication Bias in the Social Sciences: Unlocking the File Drawer." *Science* 345: 1502-05.

Lupia, Arthur, and Colin Elman. 2014. "Openness in Political Science: Data Access and Research Transparency: Introduction." *PS: Political Science & Politics* 47: 19-42.

Isaac, Jeffrey C. 2015. "For a More Public Political Science." *Perspectives on Politics* 13: 269-83.

Jacobs, A.M., Bütthe, T., Arjona, A., Arriola, L.R., Bellin, E., Bennett, A., Björkman, L., Bleich, E., Elkins, Z., Fairfield, T. and Gaikwad, N. 2021. “The Qualitative Transparency Deliberations: Insights and Implications.” *Perspectives on Politics* 1-38.

Oforu, George and Posner, Daniel. 2020. “Pre-analysis Plans: A Stocktaking.”

Final papers due on Canvas, 5/4