

Research Design in Political Science

Department of Political Science
Emory University
Fall 2017

Meeting room: 313 Tarbutton
Meeting time: Thursday, 8:30 – 11:30

Instructor: Jeffrey K. Staton
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Office Hours: Tuesday, 10:00 - 12:00 or by appointment

Course Description

This course provides an introduction to conducting research in the field of political science. Topics include the selection and development of research questions, conceptualization, measurement, theoretical modeling, ethical concerns in human subjects research, and the problem of causal inference. We are introduced to common methods for inferring causation in experimental and observational data. Students have the opportunity to evaluate and design their own research. Special attention is given to the process of writing a paper which describes the results of a study.

Grading

Your final grade is a weighted average of the following five components:

Participation (10%) Active participation is essential to graduate seminars. I expect you to be present. I expect you to be prepared and I expect you to participate.

Introducing a empirical study (20%) Select an article published in a top political science journal, e.g., APSR, AJPS, JOP, BJPS, World Politics, LSQ, IO, etc. Provide a written evaluation of author's introduction to the research problem to be studied. This is found in the introductory sections of the paper. In a paper with a deep theoretical argument, this can be found before the theoretical argument is presented. In a primarily empirical paper, it often includes a theoretical argument. Historically, this is the section of the paper that we would refer to as the "introduction" and "literature review." Summarize the question and explain how the authors develop it. How soon do you learn the research question? Is it clearly stated? Do they convince you that the question is important? Do they convince you that it has not been answered before or that the answers need further consideration? Are the key concepts that the author needs in order to describe the question clear to you? How closely connected is the material that follows the development of the question to the question itself? Do you detect differences between the question the author intends to answer and the results that are summarized or do the results provide clear answers to the original question? If you see a disconnect, what is it and what kind of evidence would you have rather seen? Your evaluation should be about 5-7 pages.

Why is my study important? (20%) Identify a professor(s) (or advanced Ph.D. student) in our department with whom you would like to discuss research. I will organize a meeting with this person. You will meet and discuss with him/her a recent study they have completed. You do not need the professor to have a finished paper, but if he or she does, ask for it! Before you read it, though, you should have the meeting. Your assignment is to generate a report on the paper. What question is the professor attempting to answer? Why is the question important? What debate is being addressed? What was known about the question prior to the professor's study? What was the theoretical model that structured the analysis? What is the key finding in the study? How does the empirical design work? Why is the finding important? Why is it important? Is there anything puzzling in the study? What questions remain open? Your report should be about 7-10 pages.

Reviewing an article (15%) I will provide you with an article to review. You will complete a review of this article as if you were asked to do so by a leading journal in the field. We will discuss the review process during the semester, so don't worry! You will have guidelines.

Research design (35%) You will develop a research design on a topic of interest to them. The research design may be written specifically for this course or you may combine this requirement with a paper requirement in another course (obviously the more efficient strategy if available!). You might consider a design that follows from the first two assignments. Your design should include the following components: (1) a statement of the problem/question, (2) a discussion of what is known about this question and what remains open for study, (3) the theoretical model that structures your empirical work, (4) the empirical implication you will test, and (5) a pre-analysis plan (i.e., a clear statement of your study's design and your plan for evaluating the implications it is designed to test).

ADSR Statement

Emory University is committed under the Americans with Disabilities Act and its Amendments and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act to providing appropriate accommodations to individuals with documented disabilities. If you have a disability-related need for reasonable academic adjustments in this course, provide the instructor(s) with an accommodation notification letter from Access, Disabilities Services and Resources office. Students are expected to give two weeks-notice of the need for accommodations. If you need immediate accommodations or physical access, please arrange to meet with instructor(s) as soon as your accommodations have been finalized.

Incomplete Grades

No incomplete grades will be given unless there is an agreement between the instructor and the student **prior** to the end of the course. The instructor retains the right to determine legitimate reasons for an incomplete grade.

(Mostly) Conceptual Matters

August 24: The Field of Political Science

What is political science and what are its origins? In what ways do the origins of the field influence how work is done in 2017? What are the key debates about how political science is done? How much should you care about those debates? And if you care about them, when is the right time to engage in these debates?

Required Readings:

Albert Somit and Joseph Tanenhaus. *The development of American political science: from burgess to behavioralism*. New York: Irvington Publishers, 1982.

David Easton. Political science in the united states: Past and present. *International Political Science Review*, 6(1):133–152, 1985.

Gary King. Restructuring the social sciences: reflections from harvard's institute for quantitative social science. *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 47(1):165–172, 2014.

Jeffrey C Isaac. Restructuring the social sciences? a reflection from the editor of perspectives on politics. *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 47(2):279–283, 2014.

Gregory Kasza. Perestroika: For an ecumenical science of politics, 2001.

August 31: No Class, APSA

September 7: Conceptualization

What is the role of conceptualization in political science? Why does it matter? What common challenges do social researchers confront in the process of conceptualization?

Required Readings:

Mike Brown. *How I killed Pluto and why it had it coming*. Spiegel & Grau, 2012.

Jeremy Waldron. Is the rule of law an essentially contested concept (in florida)? *Law and Philosophy*, 21(2):137–164, 2002.

Guillermo O'donnell. *Polyarchies and the (un) rule of law in Latin America*. Instituto Juan March de Estudios e Investigaciones, 1998.

September 14: Theoretical Modeling

What is a model? What are the components of a model? What makes a model a good model? How are good questions connected to good models? I will provide you a copy of Lave & March, *An Introduction to Models in the Social Sciences*. You'll need to read. Chapters 1, 2, & 3. In addition, you will need to read the following.

Required Readings:

Kevin A Clarke and David M Primo. Modernizing political science: A model-based approach. *Perspectives on Politics*, 5(4):741–753, 2007.

September 21: Connecting concepts to indicators

What makes a measure of a concept a good measure? On what grounds do we evaluate measures? What is the value of descriptive inference in modern political science? What about pure description as in the presentation of simple facts about politics? Required Readings:

Gerardo Munck and Jay Verkuilen. Conceptualizing and measuring democracy: Evaluating alternative indices. *Comparative Political Studies*, 35(1):5–35, 2002.

Shawn Treier and Simon Jackman. Democracy as a latent variable. *American Journal of Political Science*, 52(1):201–217, 2008.

Agustín Echebarria-Echabe and Emilia Fernández Gude. A new measure of anti-arab prejudice: Reliability and validity evidence. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 37(5):1077–1091, 2007.

ASSIGNMENT DUE: Introducing a research question due.

September 28: Causation

What does it mean to say that something is the cause of something else? What is the fundamental problem of causal inference?

Required Readings:

Stephen Mumford and Rani Lill Anjum. *Causation: a very short introduction*. OUP Oxford, 2013.

Guido W Imbens and Donald B Rubin. *Causal inference in statistics, social, and biomedical sciences*. Cambridge University Press, 2015.

Empirical Matters

October 5: Experimental Methods

Randomized experiments are commonly characterized as the gold standard for evaluating causation. How do experiments address the fundamental problem of causal inference? Political

scientists use a variety of experimental designs, from those conducted in a lab, to those embedded in surveys to experiments “in the field.” In this class, we will consider a variety of these designs.

Required Readings:

Andrew Healy, Alexander G Kuo, and Neil Malhotra. Partisan bias in blame attribution: When does it occur? *Journal of Experimental Political Science*, 1(02):144–158, 2014.

Thomas Zeitzoff. Anger, exposure to violence, and intragroup conflict: A ?lab in the field? experiment in southern israel. *Political Psychology*, 35(3):309–335, 2014.

Alan S Gerber, Donald P Green, and Christopher W Larimer. Social pressure and voter turnout: Evidence from a large-scale field experiment. *American Political Science Review*, 102(01):33–48, 2008.

October 12: Human Subjects and Transparency

What is human subjects research? What are your obligations to human subjects in your research? How do you ensure that your research is ethical? What processes must you follow in order to conduct human subjects research? Prior to class, you must complete CITI training at Emory. You can begin the training here: <http://www.irb.emory.edu/Training/courses/citi.html> In addition, please read the following piece. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2014/11/02/how-to-make-field-experiments-more-ethical/?utm_term=.13df8e987f5e

October 19: Process Tracing

How can you learn about causation from one case? What standards exist for evaluating such data? Read Chapter 12 of the Brady and Collier text. Required Readings:

David Collier. Understanding process tracing. *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 44(4):823–830, 2011.

ASSIGNMENT DUE: Why is my study important due.

October 26: Comparative Case Studies and Mixed Methods

As you know, the original method of political science involved comparative historical analysis. Scholars still make use of comparative case studies. What can be learned from such methods? Required Readings:

Jeffrey K Staton. Judicial policy implementation in mexico city and merida. *Comparative Politics*, pages 41–60, 2004.

Jasjeet S Sekhon. Quality meets quantity: Case studies, conditional probability, and counterfactuals. *Perspectives on Politics*, 2(2):281–293, 2004.

Macartan Humphreys and Alan M Jacobs. Mixing methods: A bayesian approach. *American Political Science Review*, 109(4):653–673, 2015.

November 2: Matching and Regression

We now turn to quantitative analysis of observational data. We will begin with matching and regression. How are these methods related? Under what conditions can you treat a regression coefficient as an estimate of a causal effect? Required Readings:

Joshua D Angrist and Jörn-Steffen Pischke. *Mostly harmless econometrics: An empiricist's companion*. Princeton university press, 2008.

Elizabeth A Stuart. Matching methods for causal inference: A review and a look forward. *Statistical science: a review journal of the Institute of Mathematical Statistics*, 25(1):1, 2010.

November 9: Natural and Quasi-Experiments

This week we will consider natural and quasi-experimental research. We will consider regression approaches for evaluating natural experimental data. We will also consider the method of difference-in-differences. Required Readings:

Thad Dunning. Improving causal inference: Strengths and limitations of natural experiments. *Political Research Quarterly*, 61(2):282–293, 2008.

Adam N Glynn and Maya Sen. Identifying judicial empathy: Does having daughters cause judges to rule for women's issues? *American Journal of Political Science*, 59(1):37–54, 2015.

Alan B. Krueger David Card. Minimum wages and employment: A case study of the fast-food industry in new jersey and pennsylvania. *The American Economic Review*, 84(4):772–793, 1994.

November 16: Natural and Quasi-Experiments

This week we cover regression discontinuity. In addition to the articles that follow below, please consider the following paper by Ashworth, Bueno de Mesquita and Friedenberg: <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/48a0/f5fe0f05e2b05d60c4b9f95f0990a044adc1.pdf>. Required Readings:

Christopher Skovron and Rocio Titiunik. A practical guide to regression discontinuity designs in political science. *American Journal of Political Science*, 2015.

Andrew C Eggers, Anthony Fowler, Jens Hainmueller, Andrew B Hall, and James M Snyder. On the validity of the regression discontinuity design for estimating electoral effects: New evidence from over 40,000 close races. *American Journal of Political Science*, 59(1):259–274, 2015.

ASSIGNMENT DUE: Article review due.

November 23: Instrumental Variables

Required Readings:

Allison J Sovey and Donald P Green. Instrumental variables estimation in political science: A readers' guide. *American Journal of Political Science*, 55(1):188–200, 2011.

Daron Acemoglu, Simon Johnson, and James A. Robinson. The Colonial Origins of Comparative Development: An Empirical Investigation. *American Economic Review*, 91(5):1369–1401, 2001.

November 30: Biases in Research Communities

<http://egap.org/methods-guides/10-things-you-need-know-about-multiple-comparisons>.
Required Readings:

Alan S Gerber, Donald P Green, and David Nickerson. Testing for publication bias in political science. *Political Analysis*, 9(4):385–392, 2001.

December 7: Research Design

ASSIGNMENT DUE: Research Design Due.