Overview

If you could learn only one thing in graduate school, it should be how to do scholarly research. You should be able to assess the state of a scholarly literature, identify interesting questions, formulate strategies for answering them, have the methodological tools with which to conduct the research, and understand how to write up the results so they can be published.

Although most graduate level courses address these issues indirectly, we provide an explicit analysis of each. We do this in the context of a variety of strategies of empirical political inquiry. Our examples cover American politics, international relations, comparative politics, and other subfields of political science that rely on empirical evidence. We do not address certain research in political theory for which empirical evidence is not central, but our methodological emphases will be as varied as our substantive examples. We take empirical evidence to be historical, quantitative, or anthropological. Specific methodologies include survey research, experiments, non-experiments, intensive interviews, statistical analyses, case studies, and participant observation.

Assignments

Weekly reading assignments are listed below. Since our classes are largely participatory, be sure to complete the readings prior to the class for which they are assigned. Books are available in the Harvard Coop. All materials are also on reserve in the Littauer Library.

As you read each selection, try to accomplish the goals listed in the first paragraph of the syllabus. You should bring at least one new researchable idea to class each week. We will sporadically ask you for (oral) descriptions of these and will then very likely ask
questions such as: How would you do that? What makes that an interesting question? Is it an important question? What contributions would this question make to the scholarly literature? You should be able to provide a complete and concise answer in a minute or two.

You are also responsible for four assignments: (1) By Week 3, you should bring to class two copies of a qualitative empirical article from a political science journal (or relatively self-contained book chapter) you are willing to defend. (2) You will receive a copy of someone else’s article Week 3 and, by Week 4, you should hand in two copies of a 3-5 page typed methodological critique of the article you were assigned. (3) You will receive a critique of the article you brought and should prepare a 3-5 page typed response by Week 5. (4) A qualitative research proposal (15-20 pages) is due 7 days after the last class at 4pm; turn this in to Lara Birk or at the front desk at CBRSS (34 Kirkland Street). We prefer to give no incompletes; papers turned in late will be judged according to proportionately higher standards.

Students who have coauthored a paper with a fellow student in a previous class in graduate school are encouraged to coauthor their papers in this class too. All others are required to coauthor with another member of this class, or to ask us for an exception.

Evaluation Grades will be determined by a weighted average of class participation and the assignments.

Paper Details Quantitative and qualitative research: Much of this seminar is devoted to this distinction. The general message is that these are different approaches to research for which the same logic applies. Quantitative research involves collecting information on a large number of cases. A sample survey is an example; a cross-national study of all industrialized democracies is another. This usually means in practice that the “richness” of the information about any one case is limited. Qualitative research involves focusing on a smaller number of cases, but gathering much more information. Depth interviews with a few people would be an example; a study of a particular decision in one or a very cases might be another. As we will discuss, each approach has its advantages and disadvantages in bringing information to bear on a research question.

Researchers often try to have it both ways: conducting a quantitative study supplemented by depth analysis of a few cases. (Or, if one prefers to think of it: a depth study of a few cases supplemented by a quantitative study.) An attitude survey on civic engagement and depth interviews with some respondents may be combined. Or a quantitative study of the demographics of crime may be combined by participant observation in an urban gang. Or a study of the correlates of inter-state violence may be combined with some studies of the sequence of events in smaller numbers of international crises.

The main assignment for this course is a research paper that uses two such approaches. It might be a random sample survey study you conduct on some political subject, coupled with some deeper interviews. It might be an analysis of existing survey data combined with original interviews of some depth. It might be a statistical analysis across the states of the relationship between some public policy and characteristics of the state’s political and economic system, coupled with a closer analysis of a legislative decision process.

It may not be possible, within the framework of a one semester course, to do a fully realized dual-method project of the sort envisioned. But one can illustrate a good beginning, do a pilot project that makes progress on both parts, or completes both by limiting the target population to ease data collection.
**Reading** is due the week indicated.

**Week 1** Overview of the course and the state of disciplinary warfare.

**Week 2** Nature of Political Inquiry

- **Recommended:** Diesing, Paul. *How Does Social Science Work?* University of Pittsburgh Press.

**Week 3** Causality and Causal Inference

- KKV, Chapters 3–4

**Week 4** Small-n Causal Inference

- KKV, Chapter 5–6.

**Week 5** Process-tracing and case studies


**Week 6** Measurement


**Week 7** Combined Quantitative and Qualitative Research

- Herbert McCloskey and John Zaller, THE AMERICAN ETHOS Chap 6
- Sidney Verba and Gary Orren, *EQUALITY IN AMERICA* chap 10

**Week 8** Participant Observation and Interpretation.


**Week 9** Historical Institutionalism


**Week 10 Experiments**


- Stephen Ansolabehere and Shanto Iyengar, Going Negative: how Political Advertisements Shrink and Polarize the Electorate (Free Press, 1995), Chaps. 1, 2, and 5.


**Weeks 11-13** Discussion of Student Research Designs