

## PSCI 368: Frontiers in Political Science Research, Fall 2018

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Tuesdays & Thursdays 3:00-4:30pm  
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How do we know what we know? How can we convince others that our arguments about the state of the world are correct? These are questions that have bedeviled scholars since Aristotle. In some fields, the answers may seem more or less settled. In political science, however, research methodology continues to be a hotly contested subject, often dividing departments and pitting scholarly journals against one-another in bitter, intense disputes.

Political science is under attack. Beginning in 2009, many members of Congress have sought to cut National Science Foundation funding for political science projects, resulting in a brief suspension of political science grants in 2013 and 2014, and a proposed 11 percent reduction in the social science budget for 2019. Commentators criticize political science because it “can never achieve the objectivity of the natural sciences.”<sup>1</sup> In 2015, Uzbekistan even banned political science as a subject from its education and research institutions.<sup>2</sup> In 2016, U.S. political scientists faced ridicule for failing to predict the election of President Donald Trump.

At the same time, the discipline has been roiled by conflict from within. A movement of professors and graduate students inspired by an anonymous 2000 email authored by someone calling himself or herself “Mr. Perestroika” criticize the field as being narrow, parochial, and methodologically orthodox. As Mr. Perestroika put it, “We are in the business of political science and not failed economics.” Political theorist Ian Shapiro charges that in political science – and in other humanistic social sciences – “the flight from reality has been so complete that the academics have all but lost sight of what they claim is their object of study.”<sup>3</sup> Kennan Ferguson charges, “Core aspects of various subdisciplines of political science have been built around the subjugation of different peoples.”<sup>4</sup>

The turmoil of the last dozen years concerns a number of questions whose answers are critical for those of us interested in understanding politics in an ordered and rigorous way. What does it mean to be “scientific” in the context of a subject such as politics? Can we develop theories and test them in ways comparable to theory-testing in other disciplines? What challenges do we face

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/congress-should-cut-funding-for-political-science-research/2012/06/04/gJQAuAJMEV\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/congress-should-cut-funding-for-political-science-research/2012/06/04/gJQAuAJMEV_story.html)

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/sep/05/uzbekistan-islam-karimov-bans-political-science>

<sup>3</sup> Ian Shapiro, *The Flight from Reality in the Social Sciences* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), p. 2.

<sup>4</sup> Kennan Ferguson, “Why Does Political Science Hate American Indians?” *Perspectives on Politics* 14:4 (December 2016), p. 1029.

in adapting the scientific method to political institutions and behavior? Is there room for multiple methodologies, and what purposes can different methodologies serve?

This term we will grapple with these and other questions, evaluating examples of different types of research, as well as considering philosophical critiques of different research approaches. In addition to examining the field with a critical eye, each of you will undertake a rigorous research project, culminating in a poster presentation the final week of class.

Student grades will be based on the following: Assignments (5) – 25%; Participation – 20%; Research Proposal – 10%; Project outline – 10%; Final Project – 35%. To make grades easily calculable, I'll work on a point system in which there is a total of 1000 points possible. Therefore, the final project will be worth 350 points, and so on. Participation will be based on in-class discussion and labs.

Because much of this course will involve discussion, it is imperative that you complete the readings for each class period and come to class prepared to discuss them. The quality of the course will suffer along with your grades if you do otherwise. Late assignments will drop by 4% of their total value for each day they are late. (An assignment worth 100 points drops by 4 points, an assignment worth 50 points drops by 2 points, etc.)

The following book is worth purchasing:

- Johnson, Janet Buttolph, H.T. Reynolds & Jason D. Mycoff. *Political Science Research Methods* (8<sup>th</sup> Ed.). Washington, DC: CQ Press, 2016.

Other readings are available on the course website, at nb.mit.edu (invitations forthcoming).

Finally, Friday afternoon lab sessions are times reserved for practical engagement with political science research topics and skills. Students are not expected to prepare anything in advance for these lab sessions, but participation in them is a large portion of the participation grade.

## **I – Introduction – Political Science?**

*Preview of the Course*

1. Tuesday September 11

*Political Science: History and Foundations*

2. Thursday September 13
  - Max Weber, “Science as a Vocation” in H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), pp. 129-156.
  - Johnson/Reynolds/Mycoff, Chapter 1 (skim), Chapter 2.

NO LAB ON FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 14

3. Tuesday September 18

- Leo Strauss, “An Epilogue,” in Herbert J. Storing, Ed., *Essays on the Scientific Study of Politics* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1962), pp. 307-327.
- Deborah Stone, “The 2017 James Madison Award Lecture: The Ethics of Counting,” *PS: Political Science and Politics*, January 2018, pp. 7-15.

## II – Asking Questions Scientifically

### *Reviewing the State of Existing Research*

4. Thursday September 20

- Gary King, Robert Keohane, and Sidney Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), Chapter 1.
- Johnson/Reynolds/Mycoff, Chapter 3.

### LAB: September 21

### *Theorizing & Hypothesizing*

5. Tuesday September 25

- King, Keohane & Verba, Chapter 2.
- Johnson/Reynolds/Mycoff, Chapter 4.

### *Controversy: The Democratic Peace Theory*

6. Thursday September 27

- Sebastian Rosato, “The Flawed Logic of Democratic Peace Theory,” *American Political Science Review* 97:1 (November 2003), pp. 585-602.
- Branislav L. Slantchev, Anna Alexandrova, and Erik Gartzke, “Probabilistic Causality, Selection Bias, and the Logic of the Democratic Peace,” *American Political Science Review* 99:3 (August 2005), pp. 459-462.
- Johnson/Reynolds/Mycoff, Chapter 5.

### LAB: September 28

### *Operationalizing*

7. Tuesday October 2

- King, Keohane & Verba, Chapter 3.
- Johnson/Reynolds/Mycoff, Chapter 11-12, but skim pp. 369-387.
- **ASSIGNMENT** (50 points): Conduct a brief review of the political science literature on a topic of interest to you. Make use of electronic databases, indices, and other resources as necessary. Write a two-page summary of your research and hand it in, along with a list of what you perceive to be the key articles in the subject area.

### III – Varieties of Inquiry

...For Many Cases

#### *Bivariate Analysis*

8. Thursday October 4

- Johnson/Reynolds/Mycoff Chapter 13, but skim pp. 431-440; 467-477.
- Simon Chauchard, “Can Descriptive Representation Change Beliefs about a Stigmatized Group? Evidence from Rural India,” *American Political Science Review* 108:2 (May 2014), pp. 403-422.

LAB: October 5

#### Multivariate Analysis

9. Tuesday October 9

- Johnson/Reynolds/Mycoff Chapter 14, read pages 516-558.
- Raymond M. Duch and Michael Taylor. “Postmaterialism and the Economic Condition.” *American Journal of Political Science* 37:3 (August 1993), pp. 747-779.

#### *Controversy: When is Bivariate Analysis Appropriate?*

10. Thursday October 11

- Paul R. Abramson and Ronald Inglehart, “Education, Security, and Postmaterialism: A Comment on Duch and Taylor’s ‘Postmaterialism and the Economic Condition.’” *American Journal of Political Science*, 38:3 (August 1994), pp. 797-814.
- Raymond M. Duch and Michael Taylor. “A Reply to Abramson and Inglehart’s ‘Education, Security, and Postmaterialism.’” *American Journal of Political Science*, 38:3 (August 1994), pp. 815-824.

NO LAB OCTOBER 12 – MIDTERM RECESS

#### *Issues in Multivariate Analysis – Dichotomous Dependent Variables*

11. Tuesday October 16

- Johnson/Reynolds/Mycoff Chapter 14, read only pages 559-582.
- Lars-Erik Cederman, Andreas Wimmer, and Brian Min, “Why Do Ethnic Groups Rebel? New Data and Analysis,” *World Politics* 62:1 (January 2010), pp. 87-119.
- **ASSIGNMENT:** Problem Set 1 - Means Testing, Correlation, and Regression (50 points).

...For Fewer Cases

### *Case Studies*

#### 12. Thursday October 18

- Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005), Chapter 3, “The Method of Structured, Focused Comparison,” and Chapter 4, “Phase One: Designing Case Study Research.”
- Meyer, Brett, “Learning to Love the Government: Trade Unions and the Adoption of the Minimum Wage,” *World Politics* 68:3 (July 2016), pp. 538-575.
- **ASSIGNMENT** (50 points): Locate a political science data set in the course folder. Open the data, locate a dependent variable of interest to you as well as some independent variables that you think might affect it. Generate descriptive statistics, measures of association, and a regression model. Include a brief (1 page) explanation of what you find. Turn in the results.

LAB: October 19

*Controversy: Should We Study Cases in the Same Way as Large “N” Studies?*

#### 13. Tuesday October 23

- Ronald Rogowski, “The Role of Theory and Anomaly in Scientific Research.” *American Political Science Review* 89:2 (June 1995), pp. 467-470.
- Gary King, “Restructuring the Social Sciences: Reflections from Harvard’s Institute for Quantitative Social Science,” *PS: Political Science and Politics*, January 2014, pp. 165-172.
- Jeffrey Isaac, “Restructuring the Social Sciences? A Reflection from the Editor of Perspectives on Politics,” *PS: Political Science and Politics*, April 2014, pp. 279-283.

### *Experiments*

#### 14. Thursday October 25

- Johnson/Reynolds/Mycoff, Chapter 6, read only pages 166-185.
- Ariel R. White, Noah L. Nathan, and Julie K. Faller, “What Do I Need To Vote? Bureaucratic Discretion and Discrimination by Local Elected Officials,” *American Political Science Review* 109:1 (February 2015), pp. 129-142.
- Devra C. Moehler, “Democracy, Governance, and Randomized Development Assistance,” *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 628 (March 2010), pp. 30-46.
- **ASSIGNMENT:** Problem Set 2 - Logistic Regression (50 points).

LAB: October 26

*Controversy: Are Field Experiments the “Gold Standard” of Social Science?*

15. Tuesday October 30

- Dawn Langan Teele, “Reflections on the Ethics of Field Experiments,” Chapter 5 in Dawn Langan Teele, ed., *Field Experiments and Their Critics: Essays on the Uses and Abuses of Experimentation in the Social Sciences* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), pp. 115-140.
- Andrew Gelman, “Experimental Reasoning in Social Science,” Chapter 7 in Dawn Langan Teele, ed., *Field Experiments and Their Critics: Essays on the Uses and Abuses of Experimentation in the Social Sciences* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), pp. 185-195.
- **RESEARCH PROPOSAL DUE**

*Sampling, Interviewing, and Survey Research*

16. Thursday November 1

- Johnson/Reynolds/Mycoff, Chapter 9, Chapter 10.

LAB: November 2

**IV – Beyond Methods to ‘Approaches’**

*Rational Choice Theory and Formal Modeling*

17. Tuesday November 6

- Anthony Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1957), Chapter 1, pp. 3-20; Chapter 8, pp. 114-127.
- Mancur Olson Jr., “Collective Action: The Logic.” Chapter 19 in Pietro S. Nivola and David Rosenbloom, Eds. *Classic Readings In American Politics*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed. (New York: St. Martin’s/Worth, 1999), pp. 191-205.
- **ASSIGNMENT** (50 points): Find an article in a major political science journal on a topic of interest to you and critically examine its methodology. Hand in a two-page evaluation of the article.

18. Thursday November 8

- Joseph M. Brown and Johannes Urpelainen, “Picking Treaties, Picking Winners: International Treaty Negotiations and the Strategic Mobilization of Domestic Interests,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 59:6 (2015), pp. 1043-1073.
- Ethan Bueno de Mesquita, “The Quality of Terror,” *American Journal of Political Science* 49: 3 (July 2005), pp. 515-530.

LAB: November 9

*Controversy: Is Rational Choice Theory Destroying Political Science?*

19. Tuesday November 13

- Donald Green and Ian Shapiro, *Pathologies of Rational Choice Theory: A Critique of Applications in Political Science* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), Chapter 1, Chapter 3.

*Interpretive Approaches*

20. Thursday November 15

- Mark Bevir and R.A.W. Rhodes, "Defending Interpretation," *European Political Science* 5:1 (March 2006), pp. 69-83.
- Katherine Cramer Walsh, "Putting Inequality in its Place: Rural Consciousness and the Power of Perspective," *American Political Science Review* 106:3 (August 2012), pp. 517-532.
- **PROJECT OUTLINE DUE**

LAB: November 16

*Historical Institutionalism*

21. Tuesday November 20

- Thomas Ertman, "The Great Reform Act of 1832 and British Democratization," *Comparative Political Studies* 43 8/9 (August/September 2010), pp. 1000-1022.

THANKSGIVING RECESS

22. Tuesday November 27

- Monika Nalepa, "Captured Commitments: An Analytic Narrative of Transitions with Transitional Justice," *World Politics* 62:2 (April 2010) pp. 341-380.

*New Frontiers*

23. Thursday November 29

Choose to read one:

- Lene Aarøe, Michael Bang Petersen, and Kevin Arceneaux, "The Behavioral Immune System Shapes Political Intuitions: Why and How Individual Differences in Disgust Sensitivity Underlie Opposition to Immigration," *American Political Science Review* 111: 2 (May 2017), pp. 277-294.
- Robert Braun, "Religious Minorities and Resistance to Genocide: The Collective Rescue of Jews in the Netherlands during the Holocaust," *American Political Science Review* 110:1 (February 2016), pp. 127-147.
- Nils Weidmann and Idean Salehyan, "Violence and Ethnic Segregation: A Computational Model Applied to Baghdad," *International Studies Quarterly* 57:1 (March 2013), pp. 52-64.
- Pablo Barberá, John T. Jost, Jonathan Nagler, Joshua A. Tucker, and Richard Bonneau, "Tweeting From Left to Right: Is Online Political Communication More Than an Echo Chamber?" *Psychological Science* 26:10 (2015), pp. 1531-1542.

LAB: November 30

## V – What Now?

### 24. Tuesday December 4

- Rogers M. Smith “Political Science and the Public Sphere in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century,” Social Science Research Council, Transformations of the Public Sphere, posted September, 2011 at <http://publicsphere.ssrc.org/smith-political-science-and-the-public-sphere/>
- Jane Mansbridge, “Presidential Address: What Is Political Science For?,” *Perspectives on Politics* 12:1 (March 2014), pp. 8-17

### 25. Thursday December 6

- **STUDENT PRESENTATIONS/RESEARCH PROJECT DUE**

NO LAB ON DECEMBER 7