

FRONTIERS OF POLITICAL RESEARCH: TOPICS, TRENDS, TECHNIQUES

MA Elective Course, Winter 2020
4 CEU credits, 8 ECTS

Carsten Q. Schneider

November 6, 2019

Instructor

Carsten Q. Schneider
Professor
Department of Political Science
Central European University

Room: Nador u. 9, FT 903
E-mail: schneiderc@ceu.edu
Phone: +36 1 327-3086

Instructor

Gabor Simonovits
Assistant Professor
Department of Political Science
Central European University

E-mail: simonovitsg@ceu.edu

Classes

TBA

Office Hours

Carsten:

NB: Sign up beforehand at <http://carstenqschneider.youcanbook.me>.

Course Description

The course is an exploration of research frontiers in comparative politics that are opening due to both new social, political, and technological developments and changes in the way the discipline studies both old and new phenomena. New approaches that have emerged in the discipline include the use of novel data (e.g. due to digitization), tools of analysis (e.g. machine learning), and more careful thinking about cause and effects (e.g. a more design-based approach to inference and reflections on the mechanisms behind cause-effect relations). The course then consists of three parts. In the first part, we identify and discuss emerging standards of how to do empirical research in Political Science. The second part focusses on new strategies of generating data for political research. In part three, we assess how old topics are studied with these new standards and new data.

Learning Outcomes

During the course work, students are asked to write position papers, to actively participate during in-class discussions, to prepare a group presentation, and to write a final essay. The position paper is expected to help develop the ability to synthesize the information gathered from the readings, determine a focus point, and to develop a coherent line of argumentation. The emphasis on in-class participation and in-class presentations is meant to foster the skills of expressing informative reflections 'on the spot' and to decrease potential fears of speaking in front of others. The final essay aims at improving the ability to generate logical, plausible, and persuasive arguments and to apply the tools studied in class to a topic of own choice.

Learning Activities and Teaching Methods

Teaching methods consist of lectures, seminars, group work, and student presentation. The following teaching activities will take place.

Presence and Participation

Students are expected to be actively present at all lectures and seminars. In case you are unable to attend, you need to inform both instructors via email prior to the meeting you are going to miss. During the seminars you are expected to reflect critically on the mandatory readings and to engage in discussions with your fellow students and the instructor(s). Questions and stimulating interaction during the lectures will be positively evaluated as well. As some might be more shy than others and because our class might be bigger than average, everybody is encouraged to send questions, suggestions, and comments via email to the instructors prior to the meetings. These emails will count towards the participation grade. In general, for the grade the quality of participation prevails over its quantity, but if quantity is zero, quality is zero, too. Feedback on the class performance (including grade) will be provided if and when students sign up for an appointment during the office hours. *Unexcused* missed classes count with 0 points for participation on that specific day.

Individual presentation

Each student signs up for presenting one of the mandatory readings. In about 15 minutes, the task is to not only capture the essence of the reading, but to also insert it into the debates we will have had at that point in the course. The goal of the student presentation is to stimulate critical reflections in the group and to signal which interpretation of the reading is given by the student.

Group presentation

Each student will have to take part in one 30 minutes presentation in a group of two persons, depending on the number of participants in the course. The presentation needs to be accompanied by a 1-page(!) handout to be distributed to all course participants. Structure, content, and function of this handout will be discussed in the beginning of the course. The presentation needs to be on the topic of the week and should be based on more than the material covered by the mandatory readings. Grade-relevant features of the presentation are: adherence to time limit, meaningful hand-out, coherence between different presenters within group, factually adequate representation of the literature processed, and critical/ innovative/ interesting/ stimulating/ thought-provoking own thoughts. Feedback on the presentation (including a grade) will be provided if and when presenters sign up for an appointment during the office hours.

Position papers

Throughout the course you will have to write two position papers. The position papers should briefly summarize the content of the mandatory readings for the particular session and then critically reflect on them relying on previous readings, lectures, and additional material that meaningful relates the topic in question. You can use any session to write their position paper on, except the one for which you give your presentation in class. The position paper must be between 750-800 words and be uploaded to the course's e-learning website prior to the session in question. Deadline is one minute before the start of the session on which you write the position paper. As their name suggest, position papers are meant to explain what your position on a specific issue is. Therefore, keep mere summaries to a necessary minimum and spend most effort on developing your own thoughts. Papers that do this will receive a better grade than those that limit themselves to correct summaries of the texts read.

Final Essay

Students are asked to write a final essay in which they discuss the pros and cons of using new standards, methods, and data for analyzing an important problem in Political Science of their choice. The final essay must be between 3500 and 3800 words long, reference list excluded.

Auditing

Students who audit the class are expected to be present at all sessions, to do the mandatory readings, and to actively participate in class discussions. Auditing students do not have to submit any written assignment, nor take part in the group presentation.

Assessment

Grade composition

In-class participation	10%
Small individual presentation	10%
One group presentation	20%
Two position papers	20%
Final Essay	40%

The grading follows the standard scale adopted by the Department of Political Science:
A: 100-94; A-: 93-87; B+: 86-80; B: 79-73; B-: 72-66; C+: 65-59; F: 58-0

Late submission

In case of late submissions, three grade points from the final grade of the assignment are deducted for every 12 hours of delay. For instance, submitting 15 hours late leads to a deduction of six points.

Word-limit violation

A violation consists in writing more words than the upper limit or less than the lower limit. In case of violations of word limits, one grade point from the final grade of the assignment is deducted for every 5% of word limit violation. For instance, if the lower limit is 3000 and somebody writes 2400 words (= 20% below word limit), four points are deducted.

Use of laptop and electronic devices

The use of laptops and electronic devices in the classroom is not allowed. Students who insist in reading and taking notes in electronic format should come and see me in order to see if or how this request can be accommodated. The use of electronic devices for anything else than strictly course related matters will lead to a participation grade of 0 points for the particular session.

Course outline

Part A – Big topics

This part of the course introduces to the meta-methodological topics currently discussed in Political Science. Along these lines, we address the issue of causality, causal effects, causal mechanisms, validity, transparency, ethics, and big data with its pros and cons. Wherever meaningful, these issues will be addressed both from a qualitative and a quantitative angle.

Week 1: Causality and external validity

One of the most important tendencies in the conduct of quantitative social science research has been a growing attention to causality. Proponents of the *credibility revolution* claim that a central question of any quantitative inquiry should be whether a particular research design permits the making of credible causal claims. Some opponents of this tendency argue that obsession with causality leads political scientists to focus on unimportant questions or conduct studies on non-representative samples. In the first two class meeting we will discuss the main arguments on both sides.

Mandatory readings:

Cyrus Samii. Causal empiricism in quantitative research. *The Journal of Politics*, 78(3): 941–955, 2016

John Huber. Is theory getting lost in the ‘identification revolution’? *The Political Economist*, pages 1–3, 2013

Recommended readings:

Joshua D Angrist and Jörn-Steffen Pischke. The credibility revolution in empirical economics: How better research design is taking the con out of econometrics. *Journal of economic perspectives*, 24(2):3–30, 2010

Week 2: Qualitative approaches and causality: QCA, multimethod research, causal mechanisms

Qualitative research is undergoing a revolution in terms of formalization and systematization of its research protocols. Within this broad and still expanding field, we focus on the question of how best to combine cross-case studies (revealing causal effects) with within-case studies that aim at detecting causal mechanisms. We discuss how cross-case methods such as QCA and experiments ought to be combined with follow-up case studies.

Mandatory readings:

Carsten Q. Schneider and Ingo Rohlfing. Combining QCA and Process Tracing in Set-Theoretic Multi-Method Research. *Sociological Methods and Research*, 42(4):559–597, 2013. doi: DOI:10.1177/0049124113481341

Jason Seawright. *Multi-Method Social Science. Combining Qualitative and Quantitative Tools*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2016, chapters 1 and 7

Recommended readings:

Ingo Rohlfing and Carsten Q. Schneider. A Unifying Framework for Causal Analysis in Set-Theoretic Multi-Method Research. *Sociological Methods & Research*, 47(1):37–63, 2018. doi: 10.1177/0049124115626170

Ingo Rohlfing and Christina Isabel Zuber. Check your truth conditions! Clarifying the relationship between theories of causation and social science methods for causal inference. *Sociological Methods & Research*, 2018. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0049124119826156>

Carsten Q. Schneider and Ingo Rohlfing. Set-theoretic Multimethod Research: The Role of Test Corridors and Conjunctions for Case Selection. *Swiss Political Science Review*, forthcoming,

2019. doi: 10.1111/spsr.12382

Carsten Q. Schneider and Ingo Rohlfing. Case Studies Nested in Fuzzy-set QCA on Sufficiency: Formalizing Case Selection and Causal Inference. *Sociological Methods & Research*, 45(3):526–568, may 2016. ISSN 0049-1241. doi: 10.1177/0049124114532446. URL <http://smr.sagepub.com/cgi/doi/10.1177/0049124114532446>

Ingo Rohlfing and Carsten Q. Schneider. Improving Research On Necessary Conditions: Formalized Case Selection for Process Tracing after QCA. *Political Research Quarterly*, 66(1): 220–235, 2013

Week 3: Transparency, ethics, and planning

The topics of transparency, research ethics, and planning feature high on the agenda of those who seek to improve social science research. While commonly agreed as desirable goals, there are important limitations and trade-offs in achieving them in specific research situations. We divide the discussion into qualitative and quantitative research approaches.

Mandatory readings:

quantitative:

Annie Franco, Neil Malhotra, and Gabor Simonovits. Publication bias in the social sciences: Unlocking the file drawer. *Science*, 345(6203):1502–1505, 2014
Maria Konnikova. How a gay-marriage study went wrong. *The New Yorker*, 2015

qualitative:

Alan M Jacobs, Tim Büthe, and et al. Transparency in Qualitative Research: An Overview of Key Findings and Implications of the Deliberations. 2019. URL <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3430025>

Recommended readings:

Tamarinde Haven and Leonie van Grootel. Preregistering Qualitative Research. *Accountability in Research: Policies and Quality Assurance*, 0(0), 2019. ISSN 0898-9621. doi: 10.1080/08989621.2019.1580147. URL <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/08989621.2019.1580147>

Week 4: Reflections on big data

Big data, together with buzz words like machine learning or artificial intelligence heavily influence the discourse on the future of the social sciences. In this week, we do not try to map this broad debate. Instead, the goal is to shed light on some of the challenges and pitfalls that arise with the availability (and pressure to use) of big data. In addition to challenges and pitfalls for social science research, there are also issues to be discussed in terms of social science teaching

Mandatory readings:

Issues and challenges:

Henry E. Brady. The Challenge of Big Data and Data Science. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 22(1):297–323, 2019. ISSN 1094-2939. doi: 10.1146/annurev-polisci-090216-023229

Uwe Flick. The Concepts of Qualitative Data: Challenges in Neoliberal Times for Qualitative Inquiry. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 25(8):713–720, 2019. ISSN 15527565. doi: 10.1177/1077800418809132

Teaching:

Annette N. Markham. Critical Pedagogy as a Response to Datafication. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 25(8):754–760, 2019. ISSN 15527565. doi: 10.1177/1077800418809470

Dragana Stojmenovska, Thijs Bol, and Thomas Leopold. Teaching Replication to Graduate Students. *Teaching Sociology*, 2019. ISSN 0092-055X. doi: 10.1177/0092055X19867996. URL <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0092055X19867996>

Recommended readings:

Part B - New ways to generate data

Whereas in the previous part, we have discussed new theoretical and methodological approaches of analyzing data, in this part we focus on new ways of generating data. Due to new technologies, data is now available that did not exist a decade ago.

Week 5: Experiments and interventions

A tendency complementary to the credibility revolution is a growing role of experimentation in political science. In essence, experimentation allows researchers to generate data on counterfactuals that would not be observable otherwise. Experimentation is useful both for the purpose of testing the impact of public policies and to test the observable implications of theories. We will discuss the merits and drawbacks of experimentation based on a particular experimental study and then discuss more “big-picture” issues based on an edited volume on experiments.

Mandatory readings:

Dawn Langan Teele. *Field experiments and their critics: Essays on the uses and abuses of experimentation in the social sciences*. Yale University Press, 2014

Christopher F Karpowitz, J Quin Monson, and Jessica Robinson Preece. How to elect more women: Gender and candidate success in a field experiment. *American Journal of Political Science*, 61(4):927–943, 2017

Recommended readings:

Thad Dunning. *Natural Experiments in the Social Sciences A Design-Based Approach*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2012 James N Druckman. Experimental myths. *The Experimental Political Scientist*, 1:9–11, 2010

Week 6: Text as data

One source of new data are texts. Speeches, party manifestos, newspaper articles, tweets, etc. can be ‘harvested’ in machine-readable format and then subjected to new forms of analyses. We discuss the potentials and limits of these new forms of data and analyses and illustrate them with two examples

Mandatory readings:

Seraphine F Maerz and Carsten Q Schneider. Comparing Public Communication in Democracies and Autocracies - Automated Text Analyses of Speeches by Heads of Government. *Quality and Quantity*, 2019. ISSN 1573-7845. doi: 10.1007/s11135-019-00885-7. URL <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11135-019-00885-7>

Christopher Lucas, Richard A. Nielsen, Margaret E. Roberts, Brandon M. Stewart, Alex Storer, and Dustin Tingley. Computer-assisted text analysis for comparative politics. *Political Analysis*, 23(2):254–277, 2015. doi: 10.1093/pan/mpu019

Recommended readings:

Pablo Barberá. Birds of the same feather tweet together: Bayesian ideal point estimation using twitter data. *Political Analysis*, 23(1):76–91, 2015

John T. Jost, Pablo Barberá, Richard Bonneau, Melanie Langer, Megan Metzger, Jonathan Nagler, Joanna Sterling, and Joshua A. Tucker. How Social Media Facilitates Political Protest: Information, Motivation, and Social Networks. *Political Psychology*, 39(3):85–118, 2018. ISSN 14679221. doi: 10.1111/pops.12478

Week 7-8: Potpourri of topics to choose from

For these two weeks we offer a wider range of topics and ask participants to choose according to their interests. We will spend one class meeting on each of the chosen topics discussing one

application a new methodology/data source. An (incomplete) list of topics is comprised of the following:

Administrative data

Karl-Oskar Lindgren, Sven Oskarsson, and Mikael Persson. Enhancing electoral equality: Can education compensate for family background differences in voting participation? *American Political Science Review*, 113(1):108–122, 2019

Luminosity as a proxy for economic performance

Xi Chen and William D Nordhaus. Using luminosity data as a proxy for economic statistics. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 108(21):8589–8594, 2011

Crowd-sourcing

Kenneth Benoit, Kevin Munger, and Arthur Spirling. Measuring and explaining political sophistication through textual complexity. *American Journal of Political Science*, 63(2):491–508, 2019

Large non-representative samples

Andrew Gelman, Sharad Goel, Douglas Rivers, David Rothschild, et al. The mythical swing voter. *Quarterly Journal of Political Science*, 11(1):103–130, 2016

Audio data

Bryce J Dietrich, Matthew Hayes, and DIANA Z O'BRIEN. Pitch perfect: Vocal pitch and the emotional intensity of congressional speech. *American Political Science Review*, 113(4):941–962, 2019

Social networks

Jennifer M Larson. Networks and interethnic cooperation. *The Journal of Politics*, 79(2):546–559, 2017

Part C – Studying old topics with new data

Week 9: Corruption

Corruption is an old topic in Political Science. One recurrent problem is its evasive nature which makes measurement particularly challenging. New tools for generating (digitalized) data might represent a way forward on this front.

Mandatory readings:

Mihály Fazekas and István János Tóth. From corruption to state capture: A new analytical framework with empirical applications from Hungary. *Political Research Quarterly*, pages 1–28, 2016. ISSN 1065-9129. doi: 10.1177/1065912916639137. URL http://www.crcb.eu/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Fazekas-Toth_{ }State_{ }capture_{ }PP_{ }2014Nov.pdf

Ferenc Szucs. Discretion and corruption in public procurement. *Job Market Paper, University of California at Berkeley*, 2017

Recommended readings:

Rasmus Broms, Carl Dahlström, and Mihály Fazekas. Political Competition and Public Procurement Outcomes. *Comparative Political Studies*, 2019. ISSN 15523829. doi: 10.1177/0010414019830723

Week 10: Electoral fraud

Electoral fraud belongs to the bread and butter discipline of both social scientists and practitioners in non-democratic political regimes. While much circumstantial evidence on specific cases exist, new forms of data generation might help to scale up these efforts of measuring a phenomenon that usually takes place in the dark.

Mandatory readings:

Francisco Cantú. The Fingerprints of Fraud: Evidence from Mexico's 1998 Presidential Election. *American Political Science Review*, pages 1–49, 2019. doi: 10.1017/S0003055419000285

Ruben Enikolopov, Vasily Korovkin, Maria Petrova, Konstantin Sonin, and Alexei Zakharov. Field experiment estimate of electoral fraud in russian parliamentary elections. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 110(2):448–452, 2013

Recommended readings:

Andreas Schedler. The menu of manipulation. *Journal of Democracy*, 13(2):36–50, 2002

Week 11: Censorship

Censorship is still ubiquitous in authoritarian countries though with the emergence of new technologies the forms and objectives of censorship are undergoing rapid changes. In this set of class meetings we will consider how cutting-edge methodologies and data sources can be deployed to learn about the effect of censorship.

Mandatory readings:

Holger Lutz Kern and Jens Hainmueller. Opium for the masses: How foreign media can stabilize authoritarian regimes. *Political Analysis*, 17(4):377–399, 2009

Yuyu Chen and David Y Yang. The impact of media censorship: 1984 or brave new world? *American Economic Review*, 109(6):2294–2332, 2019

Recommended readings:

Gary King, Jennifer Pan, and Margaret E Roberts. Reverse-engineering censorship in china: Randomized experimentation and participant observation. *Science*, 345(6199):1251722, 2014

Week 12: Leftovers and wrap-up

We use the last week of the course to further discuss topics that will have turned out to be of intense interest to most participants during the course. We also use the occasion to reflect more broadly on the possible future(s) of (comparative) political science.

Mandatory readings:

Philippe C. Schmitter. The nature and future of comparative politics. *European Political Science Review*, 1(01):33, 2009. ISSN 1755-7739. doi: 10.1017/S1755773909000010. URL [http://www.journals.cambridge.org/abstract_{_}S1755773909000010](http://www.journals.cambridge.org/abstract/_}S1755773909000010)

Recommended readings: