

Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities - NOVA University of Lisbon
Department of Political Studies

Methodologies in Political Science - PhD in Political Science

September 2024 - January 2025

João Cancela

joaocancela@fsh.unl.pt

This course is about the methodological foundations required for conducting autonomous research in Political Science, with a particular focus on skills related to research design in its various stages: topic choice, literature review, selection of cases, conceptualization, operationalization, measurement, assessing hypotheses, and their results. Based on a set of readings reflecting the plurality of methodological approaches employed in contemporary political science, the program is built to allow students to acquire the skills necessary to produce original, relevant, solid, and feasible research projects.

Planning: 12 sessions = 1 presentation + 10 theoretical-practical sessions + 1 discussion session

Evaluation: attendance and participation (10%) + reading reports (10%) + mid-term exercises (15%) + 2 in-class short quizzes (15%) + final assignment (50%)

The first part of the assessment concerns the degree of involvement in the theoretical and practical discussions throughout the lessons. Students are expected to participate in the discussion of the texts indicated for each class and to intervene actively and constructively in the discussion of their classmates' research projects.

The reading reports are summary notes on the texts selected for each lesson. The length of these documents should not exceed one page - approximately 500 words - with slight deviations above or below this reference mark and presentation in the form of *topics/bullet points* being acceptable. Required reading texts are indicated between the 2nd and 9th sessions, for a total of eight sessions. To obtain maximum marks in this section of the assessment, students must submit summaries for at

least seven sessions, even in cases where they are unable to attend class. The documents must be sent by email by 6 pm on the day of the class.

The midterm exercises are concrete applications of the content taught in class. Each of these exercises will be sent to the instructor and the rest of the classmates, so that they can be discussed constructively in class, to obtain relevant feedback for the preparation of the final course work.

The short quizzes are designed to objectively assess knowledge of aspects taught in class and included in the compulsory readings.

The final essay is intended to serve as a starting point for the thesis project that students must present at the end of the first year of their PhD. The final essay in this curricular unit should present a research topic and the justification for its relevance and state the starting question(s) with the appropriate theoretical framework. The essay should also conceptualize and develop hypotheses and, if possible, include a proposal, albeit embryonic, of the methods to verify them. A brief, preliminary version of this project will be presented and discussed at the last session of the course in December. The revised version of this work -- which could benefit from the instructor's and colleagues' reading and advice on the mid-term exercises and the December presentation -- should be handed in by January 25, 2024.

Expected workload: This is a seminar in which both theoretical and practical components are combined, which requires students to read in advance and be prepared to discuss the texts indicated - not only in general terms, but also with regard to potential concrete application in their own projects. Typically, each class involves reading one or two book chapters/articles per week (approximately 30 pages per class). Throughout the seminar, students will have to carry out the following tasks:

- Participate in class constructively, discussing the texts, their own research ideas and those of classmates;
- Prepare ten summary documents of the texts in the bibliography, each with no more than one page long (~500 words), to be handed in before each session;
- Write three short documents (interim exercises) that apply the knowledge acquired in the sessions to their own research projects.
- Take two short quizzes to assess your knowledge objectively.
- Present and discuss a preliminary version of a research project in December;
- Write a developed version of this document, which corresponds to the final essay (~5000/6000 words + bibliography), to be handed in on January 25, 2024.

Deadlines to consider

From **October 3 onwards**, until 6 pm on the day of each class: send the instructor the summary of the essential text(s) of the session by email:

October 30: email to the instructor and colleagues of the first interim exercise

November 19: email to the instructor and colleagues of the second interim exercise

December 15: the third interim exercise is sent to the professor and colleagues

January 25: submission of final papers

Bibliography

Main reference:

Toshkov, Dimiter. 2016. *Research Design in Political Science*. London: Palgrave.

Other references:

Box-Steffensmeier, Janet M, Henry E Brady, and David Collier. 2010. *The Oxford Handbook of Political Methodology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Della Porta, Donatella, and Michael Keating. 2013. *Approaches and Methodologies in the Social Sciences: A Pluralist Perspective*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Elster, Jon. 2015. *Explaining Social Behavior: More Nuts and Bolts for the Social Sciences*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Flyvbjerg, Bent. 2006. "Five Misunderstandings About Case-Study Research". *Qualitative Inquiry*, 12(2), 219-245.

Gerring, John. 2012. *Social Science Methodology a Unified Framework*. 2nd edition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

---. 2017. *Case Study Research: Principles and Practices*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Goertz, Gary. 2006. *Social Science Concepts: A User's Guide*. Princeton: Princeton University Press

King, Gary, Robert Keohane, and Sidney Verba. 1994. *Designing social inquiry scientific inference in qualitative research*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

- Lieberman, Evan S. 2005. "Nested Analysis as a Mixed-Method Strategy for Comparative Research". *American Political Science Review*, 99, n.º 3: 435-52.
- Lijphart, Arend. 1971. "Comparative Politics and the Comparative Method". *The American Political Science Review*, 65, n.º 3: 682-93.
- Moses, Jonathon Wayne, and Torbjørn L Knutsen. 2019. *Ways of Knowing: Competing Methodologies and Methods in Social and Political Research*. Boston: Red Globe Press.
- Schmitter, Philippe C. 2016. "The Design of Social and Political Research". *Chinese Political Science Review*, 1, n.º 4: 577-609.
- van Evera, Stephen. 1997. *Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Detailed program

1st session: September 26th - Presentation of the course

This session provides an overview of the course and sets the scene for the main topics that will be covered in depth during the following classes. The mechanics of how the seminar works are also presented, and important concepts, terms and practical tools are introduced in order to follow the program and meet the objectives set.

2nd session: October 3 - Methodologies in political science and research designs

This session presents an overview of the research design and its relevance, and then breaks down the process into different stages. In this session we will briefly go through these various phases, pointing out the specificities and most pressing challenges of each one. We will then be able to discuss each phase in greater depth in subsequent sessions, as well as the type of dilemmas and decisions associated with them.

Essential reading:

Tohshkov (2016): ch. 1. "Introduction"

Schmitter, Philippe C. 2016. "The Design of Social and Political Research". *Chinese Political Science Review*, 1, n.º 4: 577-609. [This version is identical to the one in the book edited by Della Porta and Keating, but with a very useful appendix; you can read the version in the book, but make sure you also look at the appendix].

3rd session: October 10 - *Epistemologies in political science: approaches and perspectives*

Contemporary political science is rich in epistemological and methodological debates that influence the way we develop and evaluate research and knowledge. One way of dealing with this diversity is to see political science as a space where different approaches and ways of constructing knowledge coexist, clash, and can mutually enrich each other. This session aims to map out the main positions in these epistemological debates and familiarize students with the main lines regarding the ways of producing political science. The general features of prevailing methodological practices are also discussed, showing the practical virtues and limitations of these various approaches.

Essential reading:

della Porta, Donatella, and Michael Keating. 2008. "How many approaches in the social sciences?" In *Approaches and methodologies in the social sciences: a pluralist perspective*, edited by Donatella della Porta and Michael Keating, 19-39. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Further reading:

King, Gary, Robert Keohane, and Sidney Verba. 1994. *Designing social inquiry scientific inference in qualitative research*. Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press, pp. 3-12.

Moses, Jonathon Wayne, and Torbjørn L Knutsen. 2019. *Ways of Knowing: Competing Methodologies and Methods in Social and Political Research*. Boston: Red Globe Press [ch. 1] - those wishing to delve deeper into the topic can also read chapters 2, 7 and 8.

4th session: October 17 – *Topic choice, literature review and starting questions*

Most research projects are based on the researcher's interest in a particular topic. In this session we examine how this interest can be converted into a well-defined research question that is relevant, original and can be examined in practice. This requires looking for satisfactory answers to questions that all researchers face: how can we find a topic? How do we transition from a topic to a starting question? How can we maximize the relevance, originality and potential of our starting questions? And how can we frame our interests and starting questions within the framework of the literature already published? This session also serves to familiarize students

with the bibliographic research tools that allow them to efficiently find the most pertinent references for their projects.

Essential reading:

Tohshkov (2016): ch. 2. "Types of Research and Research Questions"

5th session: October 24th - *Theorizing and building arguments + Quick quiz #1*

To build testable hypotheses we must relate concepts, establishing links between them in the form of theoretical arguments. In this session, we will try to understand how the concepts we use can be mobilized to construct valid, well-structured arguments from which empirically testable hypotheses can be derived. We will also discuss how our arguments can be combined with established theories.

Essential reading:

Tohshkov (2016), chap. 3. "Theory in the Research Process"

Further reading:

Gerring, John. 2012. *Social Science Methodology a Unified Framework*. 2nd edition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Pp. 58-73 (Chapter 3 ["Arguments"])

van Evera, Stephen. 1997. *Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press. Pp. 7-48.

October 30: Deadline for submitting the first mid-term exercise: identifying the topic and the starting question (1-2 pages)

6th session: 31 October - *Conceptualization and operationalization*

If we want to express our ideas within the overarching discussions that make scientific literature, we need to formalize the terms we use to communicate them. As well as allowing us to anchor ideas theoretically, this conceptualization stage is essential for developing arguments and hypotheses that can be verified empirically. In this lesson we look at the stages, as well as the main challenges, inherent in the conceptualization and operationalisation process.

Essential reading:

Tohshkov (2016), chap. 4. "Concepts"

Further reading:

Goertz, Gary. 2006. *Social Science Concepts: A User's Guide*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 27-67.

7th session: November 7 - Building "cases" and describing reality

Describing the world is an essential step if we want to understand it a little better. To do so in rigorous way, we need to establish certain criteria and dimensions that allow us to assess whether our measurements, descriptions and interpretations are biased. In this lesson we will also discuss the notion of "case" and how we can measure and describe the instances we study in an informative way.

Essential reading:

Tohshkov (2016), chap. 5. "Measurement and description"

Further reading:

Gerring J. Mere Description. *British Journal of Political Science*. 2012;42(4):721-746.

Flyvbjerg, Bent. 2006. "Five Misunderstandings About Case-Study Research". *Qualitative Inquiry*, 12(2), 219-245.

8th session: November 14 - Explanation and causality

The formulation of causal generalizations – such as "X causes Y" - is the holy grail of contemporary political research. In this session we will define and debate various aspects inherent to the production of causal inferences, exploring the notion of counterfactual and its implications for the formulation of generalizations. What are the main obstacles to producing causal inferences? And how can we maximize our chances of achieving them? The aim of this lesson is to help you find answers to these questions.

Essential reading:

Tohshkov (2016), chap. 6. "Explanation and causality"

Deadline: November 19: Deadline for sending the second interim exercise: short review of relevant literature about the thing you want to study (2 pages)

9th session: November 21st - *Experimental method*

The experimental method is usually considered the gold standard of rigorous science. Although it is most prevalent in the natural sciences and health research, its growing diffusion in the study of human behaviour has meant that it has also increased considerably in political science in recent years. In this session we will examine the experimental logic, the different types of experiments, and their application to different topics, even those that (apparently) don't lend themselves to it.

Essential reading:

Tohshkov (2016), chap. 7. "Experimental designs"

10th session: November 28th - *Statistical analysis*

Quantitative methods have been a basic component of political science disciplines for decades: it is frankly difficult to imagine what the systematic study of politics would be like today without them. In general, these techniques are not specific to the field of political science, but are rather shared by different disciplines in the sciences as a whole - natural and social. In this session we will talk about the applicability of statistical analysis to the study of politics and the main opportunities and limitations that statistical analysis offers for producing causal inferences.

Essential reading:

Tohshkov (2016), chap. 8. "Large-N designs"

11th session: December 5th - *The comparative method*

The comparative method, as defined by John Stuart Mill and further developed since then, allows hypotheses to be tested even when the number of cases available to researchers is relatively small. In this session we will focus on the different modalities of the comparative method and the ways in which it is operationalized, with particular emphasis on issues related to the selection of cases, on the one hand, and how to maximize the potential for establishing causal inferences, on the other.

Essential reading:

Tohshkov (2016), chap. 9. "Comparative designs"

Further reading:

Caramani, Daniele. 2008. *Introduction to the Comparative Method with Boolean Algebra*. Los Angeles: SAGE. 1-55

della Porta, Donatella. 2008. "Comparative analysis: case-oriented versus variable-oriented research". In *Approaches and methodologies in the social sciences: a pluralist perspective*, by Donatella della Porta and Michael Keating, 198-222. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

12th session: December 12 - *Case studies + combined research designs + quick quiz #2*

The intensive study of specific cases may be the most appropriate design to answer specific questions or to better understand the nuances of a particular instance. In this session we will discuss the criteria that determine the selection of a particular case over others and the ways of conducting such analyses. We will also discuss how to combine different methods in the same investigation.

Essential reading:

Tohshkov (2016), chap. 10. "Single-case study designs"

Tohshkov (2016), chap. 11. "Mixed and nested designs"

December 15: deadline for sending the third exercise: revised previous exercises + justification for selecting the case(s) to be studied (~5 pages total)

Further reading:

Flyvbjerg, Bent. 2006. "Five Misunderstandings About Case-Study Research". *Qualitative Inquiry*, 12(2), 219-245.

Lieberman, Evan S. 2005. "Nested Analysis as a Mixed-Method Strategy for Comparative Research". *American Political Science Review*, 99, n.º 3: 435-52.

13th session: December 19 - *Discussion of draft papers*

This session will also discuss the work relating to the third mid-term exercise. Each student will have a strictly defined amount of time to present their research project, followed by comments from other students.

January 25, 2024 - **deadline for submitting the final versions of the works.**