Research Design and Research Logic

This version: October 8, 2025

University of Cologne
Department of Political Science | Winter Term 2025/26
Advanced Seminar

Sessions on **Fridays**,
Time: **14:00–17:30**
IBW Building, Herbert-Lewin-Str. 2
Room **S100**

Note: **This seminar takes place *every two weeks*.**

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Office hours: by appointment

Course Description

This course equips students with the conceptual and practical tools to design and critically evaluate empirical research in political science. You will develop a structured approach to causal reasoning and learn how to select research designs that effectively address complex causal questions in the study of politics. The course is organized into two main parts. In the first part (Weeks 1–3), we focus on the foundations of research design. You will learn how to formulate compelling research questions, connect them to theoretically grounded and empirically testable propositions, and understand the logic of causal inference. We will introduce key frameworks for causal analysis, including Directed Acyclic Graphs (DAGs) and the Potential Outcomes framework. In the second part (Weeks 4–8), we turn to specific quantitative research designs used to identify causal effects in observational and experimental settings. You will gain an in-depth understanding of natural experiments and quasi-experimental methods, including difference-in-differences, instrumental variables, and regression discontinuity designs. We will also explore how to design your own (survey) experiments and discuss the logic and application of modern qualitative and mixed-methods approaches. Each session in Weeks 4–8 features a student-led presentation of a state-of-the-art research paper that applies the method covered that week.

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this course, the students will be able to:

- Elucidate the fundamentals of empirical research,
- Delineate the concepts of causality and causation,
- Explain and analyze challenges of causal identification using Directed Acyclic Graphs and DAGs and the Potential Outcomes Framework
- Understand and critique established causal research designs with observational data,
- Create their own identifying variation in experimental studies,
- Develop a research design for a research question of their choice.

Prerequisites

This seminar is intended for both novice and experienced graduate students. A general understanding of concepts and theories of comparative politics, as well as knowledge of fundamental quantitative and qualitative research methods, is sufficient to partake in the seminar. While perfection is neither expected nor required, students should possess the ability to comprehend and articulate themselves in English, as it will be the primary language used in class.

Course Structure

The course is structured around eight synchronous, in-person block seminars, with two sessions each. It adopts a dynamic and interactive seminar format that encourages active participation and fosters collaborative learning. In addition to individual research, the course emphasizes group discussions, critical analysis of course materials, and collective exploration of additional resources. To fully benefit from the course, students are expected to come prepared by completing the assigned readings ahead of each meeting. All course materials will be easily accessible through ILIAS, our online learning platform.

Assessment

This course follows a portfolio model of examination, which consists of the submission and short presentation of a research paper (1) and the submission of a research exposé. The format and specific criteria for each assignment will be communicated through ILIAS, ensuring transparency and clarity. Feedback is an essential component of the learning process, and therefore, the assignments will be returned to students with comments.

The final grade will be based on the following components:

Paper Presentation: 20 Points. Each student will deliver a 10-minute presentation of an assigned academic research paper discussed in class. Assigned papers are marked with an (A) in the reading list. Presentations will take place from Week 4 through Week 8. Students will present in pairs. Each presentation should clearly summarize the paper's research question, theoretical framework, data and methods, key findings, and its contribution to the literature. Evaluation will be based on clarity and understanding of the material.

Research Exposé: 80 Points. Drawing from the groundwork laid by previous assignments, craft a detailed exposé (maximum 5000 words, allowing a ±5% margin) that meticulously elucidates the intricacies of your research design.

Grading Scheme

Points	Grade	Points	Grade
100–96	1,0	70–66	3,0
95–91	1,3	65–61	3,3
90–86	1,7	60–56	3,7
85–81	2,0	55–51	4,0
80–76	2,3	50–0	5,0
75–71	2,7		

Registration

Registration is only possible independently by the students, for the course and the exam separately via KLIPS. The deadline for exam registration will be announced following the start of the

semester. Late registrations, unfortunately, cannot be accommodated. Detailed instructions and support for exam registration can be found on the Department website:

https://politics.uni-koeln.de/en/academics/examinations/registration

Course Schedule

Week 1: October 17, 2025

Session I: Introduction

Session II: Fundamentals of Research Design

- Halperin, S., & Heath, O. (2020). *Political Research: Methods and Practical Skills* (3rd ed.), Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press: Chapter 2.
- King, G., & Keohane, R. O., & Verba, S. (1994). *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research.* Princeton: Princeton University Press: Chapter 1.

Week 2: October 31, 2025

Session I: Research Goals and Research Questions

- Day, C., & Koivu, K. L. (2018). Finding the Question: A Puzzle-Based Approach to the Logic of Discovery. *Journal of Political Science Education*, 15(3), 377-386.
- Halperin, S., & Heath, O. (2020). *Political Research: Methods and Practical Skills* (3rd ed.), Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press: Chapter 4.

Session II: How to Read and Write a Research Paper: From Theory to Data

- Writing For Research. (2016, September 25). Structuring and Writing Academic Papers. Medium.
- Halperin, S., & Heath, O. (2020). *Political Research: Methods and Practical Skills* (3rd ed.), Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press: Chapter 5.
- Toshkov, D. (2016). *Research Design in Political Science.* Chapter 6. Theory in the Research Process. Palgrave: 56-82.

Week 3: November 14, 2025

Session I: Causation and Causal Models

- Huntington-Klein, N. (2021). *The Effect: An Introduction to Research Design and Causality.* Boca Raton: Chapman and Hall/CRC: Chapter 5-9.
- Rohlfing, I., & Zuber, C. I. (2021). Check Your Truth Conditions! Clarifying the Relationship Between Theories of Causation and Social Science Methods for Causal Inference. *Sociological Methods & Research*, 50(4), 1623-1659.
- Mutz, D. C. (2016). Harry Potter and the Deathly Donald. *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 49(4), 722-729.

Session II: Basics of Quantitative Designs

- Keele, L. (2015). The Statistics of Causal Inference: A View from Political Methodology. *Political Analysis*, 23(3), 313-335.

- Angrist, J. D., & Pischke, J. S. (2009). *Mostly Harmless Econometrics: An Empiricist's Companion*. Princeton: Princeton University Press: Chapter 2.

Week 4: November 28, 2025

Session I: Natural Experiments

- Dunning, T. (2012). *Natural Experiments in The Social Sciences: A Design-Based Approach*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: Chapters 1–2.
- *(A)* Castanho Silva, B., & Proksch, S. O. (2021). Fake It 'Til You Make It: A Natural Experiment to Identify European Politicians' Benefit from Twitter Bots. *American Political Science Review*, 115(1), 316-322.
- Cremaschi, S., & Barileto, N., & de Vries, C. (2025): Without Roots: The Political Consequences of Collective Economic Shocks. *American Political Science Review*, First View.

Session II: Difference-in-Differences

- Huntington-Klein, N. (2021). *The Effect*. Chapter 18.
- *(A)* Bechtel, M. M., & Hainmueller, J. (2011). How Lasting is Voter Gratitude? *American Journal of Political Science*, 55(4), 851–867.
- Ankori-Karlinsky, L. O. (2025). Political Symbols and Social Order: Confederate Monuments and Performative Violence in the Post-Reconstruction U.S. South. *American Political Science Review*. Online First. doi:i:10.1017/S0003055425101007.

Week 5: December 12, 2025

Session I: Instrumental Variables and Regression Discontinuity Designs

- Dunning, T. (2012). *Natural Experiments in the Social Sciences*. Chapters 3–4.
- Huntington-Klein, N. (2021). *The Effect*. Chapters 19–20.

Session II: Instrumental Variables and Regression Discontinuity Designs

- *(A)* Hangartner, D., & Dinas, E., & Marbach, M., & Matakos, K., & Xefteris, D. (2019). Does Exposure to the Refugee Crisis Make Natives More Hostile? *American Political Science Review*, 113(2), 442–455.
- Colantone, I., & Stanig, P. (2018). The Trade Origins of Economic Nationalism: Import Competition and Voting Behavior. *American Journal of Political Science*, 62(4), 936-953. in Western Europe
- *(A)* Abou-Chadi, T., & Krause, W. (2020). The Causal Effect of Radical Right Success on Mainstream Parties' Policy Positions: A Regression Discontinuity Approach. *British Journal of Political Science*, 50(3), 829-847.
- Lang, V., & Schneider, S. A. (2023). Immigration and Nationalism in the Long Run. CESifo Working Paper No. 10621. https://www.ifo.de/en/cesifo/publications/2023/working-paper/immigration-and-nationalism-long-run

Week 6: January 9, 2026

Session I: Survey Experiments: How to Run Your Own Surveys

- Stantcheva, S. (2023). How to Run Surveys: A Guide to Creating Your Own Identifying Variation and Revealing the Invisible. *Annual Review of Economics*, 15, 205–234.

- Haaland, I., Roth, C., & Wohlfart, J. (2023). Designing Information Provision Experiments. *Journal of Economic Literature*, 61(1), 3–40.
- Bansak, K., & Hainmueller, J., & Hopkins, J., & Yamamoto, T. (2021). Conjoint Survey Experiments. In: (overview reading).

Session II: Vignette, Conjoint, and Information Experiments

- *(A)* Hainmueller, J., & Hopkins, D. (2015). The Hidden American Immigration Consensus: A Conjoint Analysis of Attitudes towards Immigrants. *American Journal of Political Science*, 59(3), 529–548.
- *(A)* Haaland, I., & Roth, C. (2020). Labor market concerns and support for immigration. *Journal of Public Economics*, 191, 104256.

Week 7: January 23, 2026

Session I: Field Experiments

- *(A)* Haas, V. et al. (2025). Does Protest Affect Bystanders? Field Experimental Evidence from Germany. OSF Preprint. https://osf.io/preprints/osf/42s8e_v2
- Wantchekon, L. (2003). Clientelism and Voting Behavior: Evidence from a Field Experiment in Benin. *World Politics*, 55, 399–422.

Session II: Quantitative Text Analysis and Artificial Intelligence

- Geiecke, F., & Jaravel, F. (2024). Conversations at Scale: Robust AI-led Interviews with a Simple Open-Source Platform. *SSRN*. doi:10.2139/ssrn.4974382.
- *(A)* Castanho Silva, B., & Pullan, D., & Wäckerle, J. (2025). Blending in or standing out? Gendered political communication in 24 democracies. *American Journal of Political Science*, 69(2), 653–668.

Week 8: February 6, 2026

Session I: Qualitative Methods

- Lijphart, A. (1971). Comparative Politics and the Comparative Method. *American Political Science Review*, 65(3), 682–693.
- Rohlfing, I. (2012). *Case Studies and Causal Inference: An Integrative Framework*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. Chapter 4.
- Skocpol, T. (1979). *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China*. Cambridge University Press. Introduction.
- *(A)* Ternullo, S. (2024). Place-Based Partisanship: How Place (Re)Produces Americans' Partisan Attachments. *American Journal of Sociology*, 130(2), 293–343.

Session II: Mixed Methods

- Dunning, T. (2012). *Natural Experiments in the Social Sciences*. Chapter 7.
- *(A)* Thachil, T. (2014). *Elite Parties and Poor Voters: Theory and Evidence from India*. *American Political Science Review*, 108(2), 454–477.