1 Module Content

This graduate seminar provides an introduction to the scientific inquiry of the political world. Students will learn how to identify compelling research questions and how to structure a study so as to contribute to an existing body of research. Moreover, students will engage with problems of causal inference and multiple methodological approaches (statistical analysis, process tracing, case studies) to the empirical study of politics. The emphasis of the module will be on the development of novel, falsifiable, and empirically testable explanations of political phenomena.

2 Covid-19 procedures

We envision face to face (f2f) teaching for the complete but all students should be aware and prepared that teaching conditions could change on short notice if infections rise and government regulations changes. Teaching will be dynamically adapted if several of us are unable to attend due to Covid-related self-isolation and I will seek to accommodate the continued exposure to the lecture material for any self-isolating student.

Please do not attend any f2f class if you have Covid-19 related symptoms. All participants must follow government and Trinity guidelines when attending a f2f session, which means social distancing, and wearing a face-mask!

If I have to isolate myself our weekly sessions will naturally move online – you will be notified by email. Office hours will predominantly take place on Zoom. Please schedule a separate appointment if there is an issue which you would rather discuss f2f.
3 Module Requirements and Policies

The overall grade will be based on:

- Participation, counting 10%
- Academic Peer-Review Report, counting 22.5%
- Research Proposal consisting of:
  - Research question, counting 5%
  - Project outline, counting 22.5%
  - Final research design, counting 40%

3.1 Written Assignment Guidelines

Please make sure you are aware of the Turnitin submission arrangements via Blackboard at least several days prior to the deadline for each assignment. All submission deadlines are naturally in Irish time. All late work, unless excused in advance by the course lecturer will be penalized at a rate of 5 marks per day (up to a maximum of 30 marks). All requests for excuses from submission penalties, whether justified by a medical certificate, a LENS report, or other reason, must be submitted in advance of the deadline to the course instructor. Where any assignment is submitted after the deadline to Turnitin for any reason, the student must also email me at berzj@tcd.ie to inform me it has been submitted. All coursework needs to be submitted via the plagiarism detector Turnitin, now integrated into the course’s Blackboard account.

The Assignment Submission Form available from the Departmental website ([https://www.tcd.ie/Political_Science/assets/word/Plagiarism%20cover%20sheet.docx](https://www.tcd.ie/Political_Science/assets/word/Plagiarism%20cover%20sheet.docx)) should be filled out and included as the first page of all your submissions.

All papers should be typeset in a 12 point font, using 1.5pt spacing. When in doubt follow usual practices for academic work, as exemplified by articles in major political science journals. Use a consistent reference style throughout the paper (author-year is preferred).

Under no circumstances will written work be accepted after the set work has been marked and returned to other students, or after the end of the term. Requests for special consideration advanced at a later stage will not be accepted. Essays may, of course, be handed in earlier than the due date. All material will be marked by the lecturer. Turnitin assignments should be clearly marked with the student’s name.

3.2 Participation (10%)

Student participation in class discussion and debate on the readings is a central element of the seminar. Students are expected to have read all required readings and to have acquired detailed knowledge and developed informed critiques of the readings prior to the class meeting. This means active engagement in class discussion: listening to your peers’ views and constructively engaging with them,
while also demonstrating a clear understanding of the weekly readings. Students will be evaluated on the quality of their input in class discussion and debate, merely attending class is not a sufficient condition for achieving a passing participation mark. Seminar attendance is mandatory and absence may result in a lowered overall module grade if no medical certificate or similar documentation is provided.

3.3 Academic Peer-Review Report (22.5%)

For a scientific study to be published in a peer-reviewed journal, it must pass the scrutiny of anonymous expert reviewers. These reviewers are tasked with closely reading the paper, providing a thorough assessment of the quality and impact of the research, and offering to the journal editor a recommendation on publication (1. accept; 2. revise & resubmit; 3. reject). Students will be required to submit a peer-review report of a recent political science working papers. You will be able to choose between six papers, most from the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, which have been selected by the lecturer. The papers can be found on Blackboard. Guidelines on how to produce an effective peer-review report can also be found on Blackboard.

The required length of the peer-review report is between 1,000-1,500 words (including reference list, footnotes, and title page). The report should be submitted by 6pm on Friday, 19 November 2021 via Turnitin in Blackboard. Late submissions will not be accepted.

3.4 Research Proposal (5% + 22.5% + 40%)

The main course objective is to submit a research proposal at the end of Michaelmas Term based on principles of comparative research design as discussed in the weekly seminars. The focus should be on emphasizing the issues of research design rather than the substantive importance of the research project. That is, the focus of the proposal is not on providing a lengthy literature review (although some knowledge of academic work in the area should be demonstrated), but rather on writing a research proposal that specifies a well-defined research question which is grounded in theory and methodologically feasible. Although you may use this paper as a first attempt for your M.Sc. dissertation project, there is no need to do so, and you are not at all required to write your M.Sc. dissertation on the topic you choose to pursue for this particular module. However, you should not submit a proposal that overlaps with material submitted to another M.Sc. module.

Three-step approach to writing your research proposal:

1. The research question: (1) must be causal in nature and should outline a broad question you are interested in exploring further; and (2) should include a short discussion of the variation to be explained, proposed causal explanation (including a discussion of the causal logic – i.e. the different steps – that links the independent variable to the dependent variables) and significance of research. Submission is due by 6pm on Friday, 8 October 2021, via Turnitin in Blackboard. The paper should not exceed 800 words. The research question counts as 5% of your final grade.
2. Project outline: outline/summary of project including a more refined discussion of your research question, an indication of your causal explanatory variable (including a discussion of the causal logic that links your independent and dependent variables), a discussion of observable implications of your key causal variable and the importance/significance of the project. This paper will count 22.5% towards your overall grade. The project outline is due at 6pm on Friday, 5 November 2021. The length of the project outline should be between 1250-1750 words (including reference list, footnotes, and title page).

3. Final research design: the final proposal will include a precise definition of your dependent variable, an outline of alternative explanations and observable implications of your key causal variable, address issues of testing and measurement, data collection and analysis. It essentially covers all the topics discussed throughout the course. This paper will count 40% towards your overall grade. The final research design paper is due at 6pm on Friday, 10 December 2021. The length of the paper should be between 2,750 and 3,500 words (including footnotes, references and title page). You may find a handout with guidelines for the final research design paper on Blackboard.

4 Plagiarism

Students are reminded that plagiarism is unacceptable in any circumstances and both the Department and College takes all plagiarism cases very seriously. Offenders will be referred to tutors and plagiarized essays may be given a zero mark or penalized in other ways. Students are strongly recommended not to look at all at any previous essays on similar topics written by students at Trinity or other universities, as the likelihood of incurring plagiarism penalties becomes high.

5 Course Readings

Each week we will have a few selected mandatory readings/media (number of which vary depending on length and difficulty) that all of us are required to prepare diligently. In addition, the syllabus provides a number of readings marked as optional which are not required but highly recommended. You will be able to find all required readings in the Blackboard module of the course. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any issues accessing optional material through TCD Library.

6 Syllabus Modification

Please note that I reserve the option to reasonably alter the elements of the syllabus at any time. Most likely this will mean the addition of new media or an additional reading, but can also entail the exchange of a required with an additional reading to match the focus of our in-class discussions.
General Readings


For those with a limited social science methods background, it might be helpful to start by reading chapters from an introductory text, such as:


7 Course Outline

Week 1. Can we study politics scientifically?
Week 2. Concept Formation, Theory Development & Hypothesis Testing
Week 3. The Logic of Statistical Analysis
Week 4. Challenges of Causal Inference & Directed Acyclic Graphs
8. October 2021: Research question paper due, 6 PM
Week 5. Causal Mechanisms & Process Tracing
Week 6. Case Studies & Case Selection
Week 7. Study/Review Week
5. November 2021: Project outline due, 6 PM
Week 8. The Nuts-and-Bolts of Process Tracing & Mixed Methods Design
Week 9. Operationalization and Measurement
Week 10. Methods of Data Collection
19. November 2021 Academic peer-review report due, 6 PM
Week 11. Bias in Measurement and Research
Week 12. Writing the Research Proposal
10. December 2021: Final research design proposal due, 6 PM
Detailed Schedule

Week 1. Can we study politics scientifically?
15. September

Introductory readings (optional):

Theoretical readings (required):
Mahoney, J. and Goertz, G., 2006. “A tale of two cultures: Contrasting quantitative and qualitative research.” Political analysis, 14(3), pp. 227-249. (you can skim this article)

Audio & Video (optional):

Tool suggestion:
Connected Papers – https://www.connectedpapers.com/

Week 2. Concept Formation, Theory Development & Hypothesis Testing
22. September

Introductory readings (optional):

Theoretical readings (required):
http://www.jstor.org/stable/3235246

Theoretical readings (optional):
The Guardian (18 August 2012) “Thomas Kuhn: the man who changed the way the world looked at science.’
URL: https://www.theguardian.com/science/2012/aug/19/thomas-kuhn-structure-scientific-revolutions

Research examples (required):

Audio & Video (optional):
In Our Time BBC 4 (2007) “Karl Popper” [42:09], available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qWRWMDe5QGs

Week 3. The Logic of Statistical Analysis
29. September

Theoretical readings (required):

Theoretical readings (optional):
Research examples (required):
URL: http://oep.oxfordjournals.org/content/56/4/563.short

Week 4. Challenges of Causal Inference & Directed Acyclic Graphs (DAGs)
6. October

Introductory readings (optional):
Read Sections 1.2 & 1.3: https://mixtape.scunning.com/introduction.html#what-is-causal-inference

Theoretical readings (required):
URL: http://www.annualreviews.org/doi/abs/10.1146/annurev.polisci.5.091001.170657

Research examples (required):

Real-world examples, Audio & Video (required):
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8B271L3NtAw
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t8ADnyw5ou8

Theoretical readings (optional):


Research examples (optional):


URL: http://www.nature.com/nature/journal/v489/n7415/pdf/nature11421.pdf

Week 5. Causal Mechanisms & Process Tracing
13. October

Introductory readings (optional):


Theoretical readings (required):


Collier, David, Henry E. Brady, and Jason Seawright. "Toward an Alternative View of Methodology: Sources of Leverage in Causal Inference." in Rethinking Social Inquiry: Diverse Tools, Shared Standards, edited by Henry E. Brady and David Collier, pages 244-266 only.


Theoretical readings (optional):


Hall, Peter A. 2003. 'Aligning Ontology and Methodology in Comparative Politics.' Pp. 373-404 in Comparative Historical Analysis in the Social Sciences,

Research examples (required):

Week 6. Case Studies and Case Selection

20. October

Introductory readings (optional):

Theoretical readings (required):
URL: http://www.journals.cambridge.org/abstract_S0003055404001182

Theoretical readings (optional):

Research examples (required):
URL: http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0003055404041334

Week 8. The Nuts-and-Bolts of Process Tracing & Mixed Methods Design

3. November

Theoretical readings (required):


Research examples (required):

Theoretical readings (optional):

Week 9. Operationalization and Measurement
10. November

Introductory readings (optional):

Theoretical readings (required):

Research examples (required):

Audiovisual (optional):

Week 10. Methods of Data Collection
17. November

Introductory readings (optional):

Theoretical readings (required):

Theoretical readings (optional):

Research examples (required):

Week 11. Bias in Measurement and Research
24. November

Introductory readings (optional):
Theoretical readings (required):

Theoretical readings (optional):

Research examples (required):

The Conversation (22 April 2013) “The Reinhart-Rogoff error - or how not to Excel at economics’, available at: http://theconversation.com/the-reinhart-rogoff-error-or-how-not-to-excel-at-economics-13646

Audiovisual (optional):
Week 12. Writing the Research Proposal

1. December

Introductory readings (optional):


Theoretical readings (required):
