



Module Syllabus
POL50200: Qualitative Research Methods
Wednesdays: 12-14 -- Room: G317, Newman Building, UCD

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1) Module Description

The module deals with three core uses of qualitative methods in political science: 1) Methods related to research design such as case studies, 2) Methods related to analysis, such as process tracing and coding, and 3) Methods for data collection, such as elite interviews or focus groups. In addition, we will discuss practical aspects that arise in the use of qualitative methods such as transparency, research ethics, data management or software use.

The module's primary goal is to assist students in designing their research. We will devote little time to philosophical/epistemological discussions and a considerable amount of time to practical aspects of employing qualitative methods, linking the discussed methods to participants' research, and helping them overcome methodological challenges. The format combines lectures with student presentations and practical exercises.

2) Module Overview

SESSION	TOPICS
(1)	Introduction
(2)	Research Design in Qualitative Research
(3)	Case Studies (lecture)
(4)	Case Studies (applied)
(5)	Process Tracing (lecture)
(6)	Process Tracing (applied)
(7)	Coding (lecture) & Coding Software
(8)	Coding (applied)
(9)	Questionnaire Design
(10)	Interviews & Focus Groups (lecture)
(11)	Interviews & Focus Groups (applied); Data Management (lecture)
(12)	Data Management (applied); Course Evaluation

3) Detailed Outline: Session Plans, Readings & Required Preparation for Each Class

The following is a week by week detailed outlines. **Please pay attention as to what type of preparation is required for each class *beyond* the assigned readings.** Required readings are marked with a *, other readings below are additional recommended readings.

Week 1: Introduction

Session Plan

- 1) Short Intro into Research Traditions
- 2) Course Outline & Assignments
- 3) Student Research Intro, with focus on methods used and knowledge about methods

Preparation

1) Reading:

This syllabus

2) Assignment

Come to class prepared to discuss your own research in about 3 minutes along the following lines.

- What are you studying in your PhD?
- Why? How? Where?
- What kinds of methods are you (thinking of) using?
- What do you expect from this module?

Week 2: Debates about Inference

Session Plan

1) Lecture on

- Methodological Debates on qualitative research
- Distinctiveness of qualitative research
- Causality in qualitative research
- Mixed method research

2) Exercise about approaching research topics from different methodological perspectives

Readings

*King, G., R. Keohane, and S. Verba. *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994, chapters, 1, 3

*Mahoney, James, and Gary Goertz. "A tale of two cultures: Contrasting quantitative and qualitative research." *Political Analysis* 14.3 (2006): 227-249.

Lano Clark, V. L. & Badiie, M. 2010. Research questions in mixed methods research. In: Tashakkori, a. & Teddlie, c. (eds.) *Sage Handbook of Mixed Methods in Social & Behavioral Research*. London: SAGE Publications.

Week 3: Case Studies and Case Selection

Session Plan

1) Lecture on Case Study Designs & Case Selection

2) Exercise on Identifying Populations, Case Types & Designs

Preparation

1) Readings

*Gerring, John. 2004. "What Is a Case Study and What Is It Good For?" *American Political Science Review* 98 (2): 341–54.

*George, Alexander L., and Andrew Bennett. 2005. *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences*. MIT Press, [Chapter 1](#) (in particular from p.19 onwards)

*Seawright, Jason, and John Gerring. 2008. "Case Selection Techniques in Case Study Research: A Menu of Qualitative and Quantitative Options." *Political Research Quarterly* 61 (2): 294–308.

Gerring, J., 2006. *Case study research: Principles and practices*. Cambridge University Press.

2) Reading Assignment

Review discussion of case types and case selection in the following two papers: Note: you are not required to

read the whole paper, just identify the type of cases and how the authors approach/ justify case selection.

- De Juan, Alexander., and Eva Wegner, 2017. Social Inequality, State-Centered Grievances, and Protest – Evidence from South Africa. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*.
- Reese, Michal, Ruby, Keven and Robert Pape. 2017. Days of Action or Restraint? How the Islamic Calendar Impacts Violence, *American Political Science Review*, 111 (3), 439–459.

Week 4: Case Studies Applied

Session Plan:

- 1) Student Presentations
- 2) Applied Reading Discussion

Preparation:

- Downes, A.B., 2004. The problem with negotiated settlements to ethnic civil wars. *Security Studies*, 13(4), 230-279.
- Cornell, S.E., 2002. Autonomy as a source of conflict: Caucasian conflicts in theoretical perspective. *World politics*, 54(2), 245-276.
- Haverland, M., 2000. National adaptation to European integration: The importance of institutional veto points. *Journal of public policy*, 20(1), 83-103.

Assignment for these readings:

- What is the research question?
- What are the populations and cases in this research?
- What type of case study is it?
- What is the research design?

Week 5: Process Tracing

Session Plan

- 1) Lecture on
 - What is Process Tracing
 - Types of Process Tracing (Theory testing, building, explaining outcomes)
- 2) Process Tracing Tests
- 3) Exercise on Process Tracing Tests

Readings

- *Beach, D. and Pedersen, R.B. (2013) *Process-Tracing Methods*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan. Please read Chapter 2 and Appendix A: A checklist for Process Tracing
- *Collier, David. "Understanding process tracing." *PS Political science and politics* 44.4 (2011): 823.
- *Doyle, A.C. *The Adventure of Silver Blaze Short story* - Please read this short novel as it is used in many process tracing tests as an illustration
- Hall, P.A., 2013. Tracing the progress of process tracing. *European Political Science*, 12(1), pp.20-30.
- Evangelista, Matthew. "Explaining the Cold War's End: Process Tracing All the Way Down." *Process Tracing: From Metaphor to Analytic Tool* (2015): 153-185.
- Ian Lustick (1996) "History, Historiography, and Political Science: Multiple Historical Records and the Problem of Selection Bias," *American Political Science Review* 90: 605-18.
- Jacobs, Alan M. "Process tracing the effects of ideas." *Process Tracing: From Metaphor to Analytic Tool* (2015), Chapter 7.
- Mahoney, James. "The logic of process tracing tests in the social sciences." *Sociological Methods & Research* (2012): 0049124112437709

Week 6: Process Tracing Applied

Session Plan:

Student presentations **and** discussion of applied texts

Preparation:

1) Readings

- Tannenwald, N., 1999. The nuclear taboo: The United States and the normative basis of nuclear non-use. *International organization*, 53(3), pp.433-468.
- Fairfield, T., 2013. Going where the money is: Strategies for taxing economic elites in unequal democracies. *World Development*, 47, pp.42-57.
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2) Reading Assignment: Reconstruct from these papers:

- What is the research question?
- What are x and y, i.e. the relationship between which two factors is being traced?
- Is it theory-testing, theory building, or explaining outcomes?
- What are the findings – on which evidence are they established?
- Does the author perform a process-tracing test?
- How transparent is the author in discussing the weighting of evidence?
- Which alternative explanations were considered?

Week 7: Coding & Coding Software

Session Plan

- 1) Lecture on Coding
- 2) Short Coding Exercises
- 3) Presentation of Coding Software

Readings

- *Saldaña, Johnny. 2015. *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*. Sage, Chapters 1-2.
- *Auerbach, Carl, and Louise B. Silverstein. 2003. *Qualitative Data: An Introduction to Coding and Analysis*. NYU press, chapters on coding.
- *Blair, Erik. 2015. A reflexive exploration of two qualitative data coding techniques, *Journal of Methods and Measurement in the Social Sciences*, 6(1), 14-29.

Week 8. Coding Applied

Session Plan

1) Student Presentations on Coding Schemes & Findings

You will be provided with original material (focus group transcripts) to read before the session. Your assignment is to develop a coding scheme for these materials and present your findings in this session.

Week 9 Questionnaire Design

Session Plan

- 1) Lecture on
 - measuring concepts with closed questionnaires
 - treatment design in survey experiments
- 2) Exercise on questionnaire design

Preparation:

1) Reading

*Halperin, S. and Heath, O., 2017. Political research: methods and practical skills. Oxford University Press, second edition, pp.261-273.

2) Prepare between 6-10 survey questions measuring your core concepts

Week 10: Interviews & Focus Groups

Session Plan

- 1) Lecture on
 - Interview Types: Semi-structured, Open, etc
 - Interviewee selection techniques: snowballing, representative sampling etc.
 - Focus Groups
- 2) Discussion of Reading Assignment

Preparation:

1) Readings

- *Rubin, Herbert J., and Irene S. Rubin. *Qualitative interviewing: The art of hearing data*. Sage, 2011. Chapters 4 & 9
- *Ryan, Katherine, et al. 2014. Focus Group Evidence: Implications for Design and Analysis. *American Journal of Evaluation*, 35(3) 328-345.
- *Walton, Grant. 2013. Is all corruption dysfunctional? Perceptions of Corruption and its Consequences in Papua New Guinea, *Public administration and Development*, 33, 175–190/
- Leech, B. Asking Questions: Techniques for Semi-structured Interviews, *Political Science*

3) Reading Assignments

- What type of focus groups are being conducted in Walton 2013?
- Could you gather the same evidence with a closed questionnaire? What additional insights is he getting?

Week 11: Focus Groups/ Interviews Applied & Data Management Lecture

Session Plan:

- 1) Student Presentations on Focus Groups/ Interviews
- 2) Lecture on Data Management

Week 12: Data Management Applied and Course Evaluation

Session Plan:

- 1) Student Presentations on Data Management
- 2) Course Evaluation

4) Assessment

The following components make up your grade:

COMPONENT	WEIGHT
Active Participation	15%
Presentations/ Assignments	45%
Term Paper	40%

1. Participation (15%)

You are expected to attend each session, be prepared, and participate in discussions. You are also expected to

give constructive feedback on your classmates' research presentations.

2. Presentations/ Assignments (45%)

You are expected to present twice. If class size exceeds ten students, one of the presentations may be substituted by a written assignment or two shorter inputs. Presentations should be about 15 minutes.

For your presentations/ assignment, choose two of the four options below.

Option 1: Presentation on Case Studies

Either: present on a case study you are doing (planning to do) in your research project, discussing questions such as:

- What type of case study is it?
- How did you decide on case selection? (if you have pragmatic reasons for selecting the case please say so but try nevertheless to discuss what type of case it is in the universe of possible cases)
- In which way might your case selection influence your findings?
- How will you be able to generalize from your case study?

OR: present on a case study from the literature (email me respective the paper week before). Choose a major article that employs a case study and discuss questions such as:

- How did the author decide what country, region, town, or institution should be selected for the study? Do you think the criteria were appropriate?
- Is it a "crucial" case for the theory?
- Can any generalizations be drawn from the case?
- How does the author define and limit the unit for study? Might the choice of other units lead to different results?

Option 2: Process-Tracing

Either: present on how you are using (planning to use) process tracing in your research project. In your presentation, discuss questions such as:

- Which type of process-tracing is used?
- Which alternative explanations are you considering?
- Which types of tests are you conducting?
- How are you selecting and weighing the evidence?

OR: Choose a paper using process tracing (email me/ and other students this paper a week before). In your presentation, discuss questions such as:

- Which type of process-tracing is used?
- Which types of tests were conducted?
- How was the evidence selected?
- How transparent is she/he in discussing the weighting of evidence?
- Which alternative explanations were considered?

Option 3: Presentation of Coding Scheme & Findings

You can present a coding scheme & findings based on that scheme from

- your own work.
- Transcripts from focus groups that I will provide you with (either on political participation in the UK or on clientelism in South Africa & Tunisia)

Option 4: Interviews/ Focus groups

This is a useful exercise only if you are planning to conduct interviews or focus groups in your research. However, it is not essential that you have already conducted these interviews/ focus groups.

Your presentation should include these components:

- selection (i.e. sampling) and recruitment of interviewees
- the type of knowledge you are seeking to unearth with your interview
- main themes/ questions of your interview guideline and how they relate to the core facts/ stories/ processes you are interested in
- choice of interview method and rationale for it
- plans for transcription, coding, analysis

Option 5: Data Management Plan

Write a data management plan for your research project and present it in class. If you choose this option, your presentation should focus on core components of such a plan (see [UCD library data management checklist](#) for more details). If your project is purely quantitative I strongly recommend that you choose this as one of your presentations/ assignments as this is a method-neutral skill.

- Data Types
- Data Organization, Documentation and, Metadata
- Data Storage and Security

3. Term Paper (40%)

The paper should be useful for your research project and relate to methodological aspects/ literature covered in class. It can be based on one of your presentations (except the one on data management) – but make sure to take on board the feedback you got in class! Please make sure that your term paper is not just a reworked research proposal and does not dwell on a lot background information of your case.

You could for instance focus on one of the following questions/topics:

- justify your choice for a specific epistemological approach
- detail and justify your choice for a specific case selection method
- the way you will be identifying causal mechanisms
- discuss/evaluate qualitative evidence that you have already gathered for you project

You are very welcome to propose other questions/themes for your paper, as long as they are related to the topics covered in class and aim at showing how you address them in your own work. Papers should be approximately 3500-words in length, excluding references. You should email me a 300 word proposal by the 1st of December 2018.

Indicate number of words at the top of your assignment.

FINAL submission deadline is the 20th of December 2018.