



# Formulating Research Designs in Political Science

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## ABSTRACT

*In general, research designs can be individually tailored to the concrete research problem at hand. However, the literature suggests that there are a few basic types of research design that researchers can opt for and that differ with regard to, for instance, the selection of variables and cases, the choice of data and methods, and their implications for theory. In the following, we will provide an overview of the different types that will be taken up in the individual chapters. The one basic dichotomy is that of factor-centric versus outcome-centric research designs; the other one is large-n versus small-n designs. There are different definitions of research design, but many authors consider it refers to the choice of specific methods of data collection. Besides, upon different criteria, there are various classifications of research design, such as explanatory, conclusive, theoretical or empirical, etc. For example, upon the function of research design, exploratory research aims to explore specific research area without providing final answers to research problems. Research design has to identify the research problem in order to define subject of research, hypothesis, goals, as well as research methods – qualitative or quantitative. Different goals, such as description, explanation or prediction refer to level of scientific knowledge of research design. According that, we will choose qualitative or quantitative research methods. The role of research design is to verify or to expand scientific knowledge in political science.*

*Keywords: political science, research designs, formulating, aims, explore, qualitative, quantitative*

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## INTRODUCTION

Political science is the scientific study of politics. It is a social science dealing with systems of governance and power, and the analysis of political activities, political thought, political behavior, and associated constitutions and laws. [1,2]

Modern political science can generally be divided into the three subdisciplines of comparative politics, international relations, and political theory. Other notable subdisciplines are public policy and administration, domestic politics and government, political economy, and political methodology. Furthermore, political science is related to, and draws upon, the fields of economics, law, sociology, history, philosophy, human geography, political anthropology, and psychology.

Political science is methodologically diverse and appropriates many methods originating in psychology, social research, and political philosophy.

Approaches include positivism, interpretivism, rational choice theory, behaviouralism, structuralism, post-structuralism, realism, institutionalism, and pluralism. Political science, as one of the social sciences, uses methods and techniques that relate to the kinds of inquiries sought: primary sources, such as historical documents and official records, secondary sources, such as scholarly journal articles, survey research, statistical analysis, case studies, experimental research, and model building. There is a comprehensive introduction to research design for university students at all levels across the whole range of political science, including international relations

and public administration. It covers the key steps in the research process and explains the logic and detail of a variety of classic and cutting-edge methods.

Based on a pluralistic approach, the text endorses both quantitative and qualitative research methodologies, and outlines the strengths and limitations of different designs for addressing particular research goals.[3,4] Giving accessible and practical advice, without use of mathematical formulas or formalized notation, this clear and engaging book features many examples of real political science research, and will enable readers to design their own research projects as well as to critically evaluate existing research in the social sciences. The focus is on introducing students to the fundamentals of research design in political science. Methodologically, we discuss how to design a research project, paying attention to picking a topic and formulating a research question, identifying a gap in the literature, identifying and using theoretical arguments, and research strategies. As part of this online course, students will also learn how to evaluate other research projects and to develop the first outline of a research design at the end of the course.

The course will explain to students the importance of research design to structure a research project. It will also briefly present students to a variety of approaches to empirical political science research including experimental and quasi-experimental designs, quantitative and qualitative methods. As a result, topics introduced in the course will be varied and span all areas of political science including political behaviour, institutions, comparative politics, international relations, and public administration and policies.[5,6]

- Mode of instruction
- Online lectures, Online feedback, and Assignments
- Literature
- Maryann Barakso, Daniel M. Sabet, and Brian F. Schaffner, *Understanding Political Science Research Methods: The Challenge of Inference* (New York: Routledge, 2014).
- Assessment method
- Multiple choice questions, discussion questions and peer review, and a final

Research Design outline written assignment.

- Registration
- Students who have been assigned to this course by the Admission Committee, will be registered by the SSC in August/December.
- Brightspace
- Students that take the SPOC will use Brightspace i.s.o. Blackboard, as their digital community.

## DISCUSSION

The main objective is to heighten attention to the need for methodological rigour, and for reflection about the kinds of choices involved in doing research. More specifically, the course asks students to reflect on what goes into a successful dissertation length study, and to begin working on the design of own future research projects. It also allows students gain to some familiarity with various qualitative methods that you might apply in carrying out that research. The research design refers to the overall strategy that you choose to integrate the different components of the study in a coherent and logical way, thereby, ensuring you will effectively address the research problem; it constitutes the blueprint for the collection, measurement, and analysis of data. Note that the research problem determines the type of design you should use, not the other way around![7,8]

The function of a research design is to ensure that the evidence obtained enables you to effectively address the research problem logically and as unambiguously as possible. In social sciences research, obtaining information relevant to the research problem generally entails specifying the type of evidence needed to test a theory, to evaluate a program, or to accurately describe and assess meaning related to an observable phenomenon.

With this in mind, a common mistake made by researchers is that they begin their investigations far too early, before they have thought critically about what information is required to address the research problem. Without attending to these design issues beforehand, the overall research problem will not be adequately addressed and any conclusions drawn will run the risk of being

weak and unconvincing. As a consequence, the overall validity of the study will be undermined.

The length and complexity of describing research designs in your paper can vary considerably, but any well-developed description will achieve the following:

1. Identify the research problem clearly and justify its selection, particularly in relation to any valid alternative designs that could have been used,
2. Review and synthesize previously published literature associated with the research problem,
3. Clearly and explicitly specify hypotheses [i.e., research questions] central to the problem,
4. Effectively describe the information and/or data which will be necessary for an adequate testing of the hypotheses and explain how such information and/or data will be obtained, and
5. Describe the methods of analysis to be applied to the data in determining whether or not the hypotheses are true or false.

The research design is usually incorporated into the introduction. You can get an overall sense of what to do by reviewing the literature of studies that have utilized the same research design. This can provide help you develop an outline to follow for your own paper.[9,10]

The essentials of action research design follow a characteristic cycle whereby initially an exploratory stance is adopted, where an understanding of a problem is developed and plans are made for some form of interventionary strategy. Then the intervention is carried out [the "action" in action research] during which time, pertinent observations are collected in various forms. The new interventional strategies are carried out, and this cyclic process repeats, continuing until a sufficient understanding of [or a valid implementation solution for] the problem is achieved. The protocol is iterative or cyclical in nature and is intended to foster deeper understanding of a given situation, starting with conceptualizing and particularizing the problem and moving through several interventions and evaluations.

1. This is a collaborative and adaptive research design that lends itself to use in work or community situations.

2. Design focuses on pragmatic and solution-driven research outcomes rather than testing theories.
3. When practitioners use action research, it has the potential to increase the amount they learn consciously from their experience; the action research cycle can be regarded as a learning cycle.
4. Action research studies often have direct and obvious relevance to improving practice and advocating for change.
5. There are no hidden controls or preemption of direction by the researcher.[19]

## RESULTS

The third edition of Research Methods for Political Science retains its effective approach to helping students learn what to research, why to research and how to research. The text integrates both quantitative and qualitative approaches to research in one volume and covers such important topics as research design, specifying research problems, designing questionnaires and writing questions, designing and carrying out qualitative research and analyzing both quantitative and qualitative research data. Heavily illustrated, classroom tested, exceptionally readable and engaging, the text presents statistical methods in a conversational tone to help students surmount "math phobia." [11,12]

Updates to this new edition include:

- Research topics chapters have been upgraded and expanded.
- Two mixed methods design chapters have been added.
- A new chapter on hermeneutic analysis designs and research with large data sets.
- The chapter on multivariate statistics has been expanded, with an expanded discussion on logistic regression.
- Tools on how to prepare and present research findings are now featured in the appendix, allowing instructors more flexibility when teaching their courses.[18]

Research Methods for Political Science will give students the confidence and knowledge they need to understand the methods and basics skills for data collection, presentation and analysis.

A quick scan of news and social media illustrates the complex, often conflicting, and controversial ideas that influence politics, animate political debates, and influence policy decisions. Whether it's the procurement and distribution of vaccines in a pandemic, the merits of a universal basic income, or the regulation of the internet and online media in Canada, information of all kinds – its quality, accuracy, and source – is often contested and debated. As political scientists, our goal is to understand the political world and how it works through empirically sound research and analysis. We also want to contribute to political life by making persuasive arguments and offering evidence-informed solutions to myriad public issues. The scientific method provides us with a versatile toolkit and techniques for generating information that is credible, dependable, and verifiable.[13,14]

Understanding of the general principles, processes, and issues associated with empirical social science. In Part I: Fundamentals of Inquiry, we will begin with a discussion of the role of research in political analysis, particularly its importance for making strong arguments. Then, we'll explore some key historical developments in the 'science' of politics, including different philosophies of science and how they have influenced approaches to empirical analysis. Finally, to complete this section, we'll examine how to analyze and construct strong, evidence-based arguments (based on research and logic) for lay audiences, such as in op-eds and policy briefs.

In Part II: Designing Research, we'll look at the basic tenets of research design – elements and considerations that are essential to and common across all types of research methodologies. We'll start with a discussion of ethical issues and principles associated with doing research with human subjects, as well as professional ethics for political scientists. We'll explore the role of theory in designing research – different types of theories, their role in formulating research questions and guiding the research process. Next, we'll discuss how to clearly identify, define, and measure concepts that we use to study social and political phenomena. We'll conclude this section by putting all these elements of research design together to help identify and select appropriate samples and cases.[17]

In Part III: Research in Practice, we will explore several designs for data collection and methods for data analysis in political science research, such as case studies, interviews, and experiments. We'll

discuss issues related the selection and application of these approaches, including the fit between research goals and questions, techniques, and the validity and reliability of findings they produce[15,16]

## CONCLUSIONS

Students will learn how rational inquiry into political phenomena differs from the ways in which we often discuss politics, and students will engage in a reasoned critique of that rational process to better cope with the limits of social science research. The scientific process is a distinct way of thinking, defined by how one asks falsifiable questions, develops competing conjectures, and systematically rules out alternative explanations with empirical observation. Students will gain practical experience in conducting scientific research on social behavior, and this will prepare many students for more sophisticated research projects, including a senior thesis. Students will design their own research study, and work collaboratively to test an original hypothesis. Finally, students will demonstrate mastery of each of the methods introduced in this class through an engaged critique of published material, and efforts to replicate their findings. It is not expected that students will have experience with statistical modeling but this stresses how statistics and quantitative observation contributes to the many ways we scientifically study politics.[20]

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