

# Introduction to Research

Master in Political Science

Academic year 2025-2026, Fall semester

10 ECTS

Mondays and Wednesdays, 11.00 to 13.30

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## Coordinator

Carol Galais

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Office hours: Monday and Wednesdays 15:00 - 16:00 (appointment required in advance)

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## Faculty

Eva Anduiza, Gabriela de Carvalho.

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## Introduction

The module introduces students to the principles of research design in mainstream political science. We begin with a brief introduction to the social sciences and place particular emphasis on quality standards as well as the key elements of a research project and a scholarly article. Several sessions are devoted to posing effective research questions, conducting and writing a literature review, and developing skills in academic writing. We then examine the purpose of theories, different approaches to theory generation, and ways of evaluating their validity. The module also covers the role and nature of testable hypotheses: how to derive hypotheses from theories, how to test competing hypotheses, how to measure theoretical constructs, and how to appropriately handle empirical evidence. Finally, we explore how different strategies for testing hypotheses can be used to make valid causal inferences, introducing students to the main types of qualitative and quantitative research designs without going into the specific methods they entail.

The course does not cover interpretive methods in the discipline. Students interested in this approach may wish to consult Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, *Interpretation and Method: Empirical Research Methods and the Interpretive Turn* (2015, Routledge).

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## Course objectives

The module aims to equip students with the research design tools necessary to initiate research projects in political science. In practical terms, its primary goal is for each student to prepare an original research proposal for their Master's thesis.

The module offers an overview of the different stages of research (e.g., defining a research problem, reviewing the literature, operationalizing concepts), anticipates potential obstacles in the research process, and discusses possible solutions as identified in the scholarly literature. Faculty members will also present examples of actual, current research, with particular emphasis on how to link significant research questions to appropriate research strategies.

The module is non-substantive in nature; that is, it does not directly address specific thematic areas of political science. Instead, its focus is epistemological, and the research examples used throughout are chosen to illustrate methodological rather than substantive issues. Students are strongly encouraged to connect the methodological content of the course with their own research interests (see course assignments).

This module serves as a precursor to *Research Methods* (spring semester), which focuses on applied research techniques in both quantitative and qualitative traditions.

### Prerequisites

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Students enrolled in this module are expected to hold a degree in political science or a social science discipline.

Reference handbook:

- Toshkov, D. (2016). Research design in political science. Bloomsbury Publishing.

### Skills

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- Generate innovative research ideas.
- Write an original research proposal for your MA thesis.
- Identify the main methodological difficulties that arise in political analysis and be able to deal with them using existing tools.
- Evaluate reports, documents and research carried out by third parties.
- Demonstrate reading comprehension of scientific texts in English.

### Assessment

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To be assessed, you need to attend 80% of the sessions. It is at the discretion of professors to call the roll or not.

Your **participation** during the classes, including the quality of the feedback you provide on your classmates' presentations (see Assignment 3), accounts for **10%** of your final grade.

For this course, you need to complete three assignments: two written assignments and one oral presentation

-Assignment 1. First research proposal outline: research question and hypotheses. **25%** Due on **October 31**. Extension: about 500-800 words. Professor: **Carol Galais**

-Assignment 2. Essay on qualitative methodology. **25%**. Due on **November 28**. Extension: about 2000 words. Professor: **Gabriela de Carvalho**

-Assignment 3. Students will present in class (≈5 minutes, with slides) a research proposal moving from the question to an outline of the design. Presenters will receive and provide feedback (see participation grade). **(40%)**. **Carol Galais**

## Program and contents

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You may also consult the course schedule on the Calendar of the Master's program.

1. 29/09/2025. Monday . Introduction: What is science, what is a social science research. General quality principles and good practices. *Carol Galais*.
  - Recommended readings:
    - Mirya Holman's pre-submission checklist.
2. 01/10/2025. Wednesday. Anatomy of a paper. *Carol Galais*.
  - Recommended readings:
    - Baglione, L. (2008). Doing good and doing well: Teaching research-paper writing by unpacking the paper. PS: Political Science & Politics, 41(3), 595-602.
3. 06/10/2025. Monday. Conceptualization & operationalization (I). *Eva Anduiza*.
  - Recommended readings:
    - i. Toshkov, chapter 4
    - ii. Gerring, John. 1999. "What Makes a Concept Good? A Criterial Framework for Understanding Concept Formation in the Social Sciences." Polity 31(3): 357-93.
4. 13/10/2025. Monday. Conceptualization & operationalization (II). *Eva Anduiza*.
  - Recommended readings:
    - i. Toshkov, chapter 4
    - ii. Gerring, John. 1999. "What Makes a Concept Good? A Criterial Framework for Understanding Concept Formation in the Social Sciences." Polity 31(3): 357-93.
5. 15/10/2025. Wednesday. Research questions. *Carol Galais*.
  - Recommended readings:
    - i. Firebaugh, G. (2008). Seven rules for social research. Princeton University Press. Chapter 1.
6. 20/10/2025. Wednesday. Literature review. *Carol Galais*.
  - Recommended readings:
    - i. Pacheco-Vega (2018): Writing theoretical frameworks, analytical frameworks and conceptual frameworks.
7. 22/10/2025. Monday. From theories to hypotheses. *Carol Galais*.
  - Recommended readings:
    - i. Syed Imran Ali (2012) What is hypothesis and how to prepare it?
  - Recommended readings:
    - i. Toshkov, chapter 5
    - ii. Pollock, Philip H., and Barry Clayton Edwards. 2019. The Essentials of Political Analysis. 6th edition. Thousand Oaks, CA London New Delhi Singapore: CQ Press. Chapter 1

8. 27/10/2025. Wednesday. Principles of Research Design. *Carol Galais*.
  - Recommended readings:
    - Unal, Murat. (2022). Identification. The key to credible causal inference
9. 29/10/2025. Monday. Quantitative research designs. Observational research & quasi-experimental methods. *Carol Galais*
  - Recommended readings:
    - Galais, C., & Pérez-Rajó, J. (2023). Populist radical right-wing parties and the assault on political correctness: The impact of Vox in Spain. *International Political Science Review*, 0(0). <https://doi.org/10.1177/01925121231190555>
    - Hauwaert, S. M., & Huber, R. A. (2020). In-group solidarity or out-group hostility in response to terrorism in France? Evidence from a regression discontinuity design. *European Journal of Political Research*, 59(4), 936-953
10. 03/11/2025. Wednesday. Introduction to qualitative research methods. *Gabriela de Carvalho*.
  - Recommended readings:
    - i. Gerring, John. 2017. "Qualitative Methods." *Annual Review of Political Science* 20 (1): 15–36. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-polisci-092415-024158>.
    - ii. Pierson, Paul. 2007. "The Costs of Marginalization: Qualitative Methods in the Study of American Politics." *Comparative Political Studies* 40 (2): 146–69. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414006296347>.
11. 10/11/2025. Monday. Designing and selecting cases for case studies research. *Gabriela de Carvalho*
  - Recommended readings:
    - i. Flyvbjerg, Bent. 2006. "Five Misunderstandings About Case-Study Research." *Qualitative Inquiry* 12 (2): 219–45. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800405284363>.
    - ii. Gerring, John. 2004. "What Is a Case Study and What Is It Good For?" *American Political Science Review* 98 (2).
    - iii. "Phase One: Designing Case Study Research." 2004. In *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences*, by Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennett, 73–88. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press.
12. 12/11/2025. Wednesday. Designing and selecting cases for comparative research. *Gabriela de Carvalho*
  - Recommended readings:
    - i. Ankar, Carsten. 2008. "On the Applicability of the Most Similar Systems Design and the Most Different Systems Design in Comparative Research." *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* 11 (5): 389–401. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13645570701401552>.
    - ii. Joppke, Christian. 2007. "Transformation of Immigrant Integration: Civic Integration and Antidiscrimination in the Netherlands, France, and Germany." *World Politics* 59 (2): 243–73. <https://doi.org/10.1353/wp.2007.0022>.

- iii. Tarrow, Sidney. 2010. "The Strategy of Paired Comparison: Toward a Theory of Practice." *Comparative Political Studies* 43 (2): 230–59.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414009350044>.
13. 17/11/2025. Monday. Process tracing: fundamentals and application. *Gabriela de Carvalho*
  - Recommended readings:
    - i. Beach, D. (2022). *Process Tracing Methods in the Social Sciences*. Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics. <https://oxfordre.com/politics/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.01.0001/acrefore-9780190228637-e-176>.
    - ii. Kay, A. and Baker, P. (2015), What Can Causal Process Tracing Offer to Policy Studies? A Review of the Literature. *Policy Stud J*, 43: 1-21.  
<https://doi.org/10.1111/psj.12092>
    - iii. Meegdenburg H. van (2023), Process tracing: an analyticist approach. In: Mello P.A. & Ostermann F. (Eds.), *Routledge handbook of foreign policy analysis methods*. London and New York: Routledge. 405-420.
14. 19/11/2025. Wednesday. Data, triangulation, and writing in qualitative research. *Gabriela de Carvalho*
  - Recommended readings:
    - i. Tracy, Sarah J. 2010. "Qualitative Quality: Eight 'Big-Tent' Criteria for Excellent Qualitative Research." *Qualitative Inquiry* 16 (10): 837–51.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800410383121>.
    - ii. Hussein, Ashatu. 2009. "The Use of Triangulation in Social Sciences Research" *Journal of Comparative Social Work* 4 (1): 106–17. <https://doi.org/10.31265/jcsw.v4i1.48>.
    - iii. Yin, Robert. 2009. "Collecting Case Study Evidence: The Principles You Should Follow in Working With Six Sources of Evidence." In *Case Study Research and Applications. Design and Methods*, 71–103. London: SAGE Publications.
15. 24/11/2025. Monday. Presentations Session (I) *Carol Galais*.
16. 26/11/2025. Wednesday. Presentations Session (II) *Carol Galais*.
17. 01/12/2025. Monday. Presentations Session (III) *Carol Galais*.
18. 03/12/2025. Wednesday. Presentations Session (IV) *Carol Galais*.
19. 10/12/2025. Wednesday. Experimental research (I) *Eva Anduiza*.
  - Recommended readings:
    - i. Toshkov, chapter 7
    - ii. Watch Graeme Blair presentation of Round IV of Metaketa Project. Can community policing be used effectively by new and reconstituted police forces in contexts in which the state's legitimacy is challenged? From 16.20 min to 41 min: <https://youtu.be/UcNbqA95SOk>
20. 15/12/2025. Monday. Experimental research (II) *Eva Anduiza*.