

Building and Evaluating Theories in Empirical Research

”Forschungsprojekt Vergleichende Politik”, University of Cologne,
summer term 2017

course number: 14335.0701

version: 05.04.2017 (previous: 16.02.2017)

Please regularly check [CCCP website for teaching-related information](#)

Sessions:

- first: 19.04.2017
- last: 19.07.2017 (see below)
- none: 07.06.2017; 28.06.2017 (to be replaced); 26.07.2017 (to be replaced)

Place and time:

- Gottfried-Keller-Str. 6, seminar room
- 12-1.30pm

Contact details:

- instructor: Prof. Ingo Rohlfing
- office hours: Thursday, 9.30am-11.30am (during term); by appointment; open-door policy
- office: Universitätsstr. 91, room 1.04
- i.rohlfing@uni-koeln.de; Skype: *rohlfinguniv*

Content

One goal of political science is to advance knowledge about political phenomena by formulating and testing theories. In this course, participants learn strategies for developing theories making *causal statements* and to avoid common mistakes and pitfalls in theory generation. The focus is on ordinary, verbalized theories, not formal theories.

If you take a look at the social science literature, you might get the impression that theory development is mostly a matter of state-of-the-art methods. There are only very few publications on theorizing and a lot on methods of all sorts. In empirical research, the research design and methods section often is longer than the theory section; sometimes, the theory section is completely missing.

Methods are important, but sound theory building is equally important. Theory and methods need to be aligned: if you do not sufficiently understand what exactly your theory says, you might choose the wrong method or your method answers a research question you have not asked. A misfit between theory and research design and method can quickly happen, as will be illustrated with empirical research, and undercuts your value of your study.

At the end of the course, participants will have formulated hypotheses of their own. Participants will also be able to determine the quality of theory development in published research.

Exam and credit points

Participants who successfully take the course get 9 ECTS points. The exam has two components:

1. a presentation (10%);
2. a research paper (90%)

Research paper

The research paper is the result of a cumulative process of theorizing over the course of the semester. In the first step, participants should identify and formulate a research question they find interesting. If a participant is working on his/her Master thesis or planning to do so, you might choose this research question. The only constraint is that it should largely fall into the field of Comparative Politics.

The participants then learn about the elements of good theories and theorizing and should develop their own argument step by step. The individual steps and the corresponding deadlines are summarized in table 1. In the end, a participant has generated a small, full-fledged theoretical argument.

In order to facilitate a steady learning experience and to give feedback in regular intervals, participants are encouraged to submit short mid-term papers on different elements of a QCA during the course. The papers are graded (see "Grading and formalities" below) and will be commented within seven days.

At the end of the course, participants have to tie together the small papers and submit them as one final paper (10-15 pages in total). The final paper will be graded. Participants may use the opportunity to make changes to a short paper before including it in the final paper. I invite you to talk to me about the presentation and the papers in person, but there is no obligation to do so.

Table 1 Deadlines to meet during course

date	assignment
03.05.	formulation and justification of research question (1 page)
17.05.	formulation of hypotheses (2-3 pages)
14.06.	probabilism/determinism and conceptualization/measurement (2-3 pages)
28.06.	specification of scope conditions (1-2 pages)
12.07.	specification of observable implications (2-3 pages)
15.09.	final paper (10-15 pages)

Presentation

Participants are required to give one presentation during the course. The subject of the presentation is one of the short papers and should not be longer than 10 minutes. The presentations will be given on the day of the deadline (printed bold in the table below). The schedule for the presentations will be fixed in the third week of the course.

Grading and formalities

The final grade is a weighted grade of the presentation and the final paper:

- Presentation: 10%
- Final paper: 90%

The presentation and the paper will be grade on a 100-point scale. Participants have the opportunity to collect bonus points for each of the four papers described above. Per paper, participants can collect up to 10 extra points. If a participant submits a mid-term paper, the final grade is the sum of the weighted grade of the presentation and final paper and the bonus points.

Two identical versions of each mid-term paper and the final paper have to be submitted in print and as PDF. The PDF should be send to i.rohlfing@uni-koeln.de. You can drop off the print version at the Center's office on the 1st floor of the IBW building in the Herbert-Lewin-Str. 2, or send the paper version by mail to, or give it to me before class (if it is a mid-term paper):

Prof. Ingo Rohlfing
Cologne Center for Comparative Politics
Herbert-Lewin-Str. 2
Universität zu Köln
50931 Köln

The paper version must contain the "[Erklärung zu Arbeiten](#)" that is signed by you by hand (sorry, it is only available in German). We would like to point out that all term papers submitted in this context will be checked anonymously for plagiarism with the software Turnitin. Term papers will not be saved permanently on the Turnitin server. ([more information on Turinitn](#))

Course literature

- Bennett, Andrew. 1999. Causal inference in case studies: From Mill's methods to causal mechanisms. *Paper presented at the American Political Science Association Conference, Atlanta, Georgia.*
- Bruter, Michael, & Harrison, Sarah. 2009. Tomorrow's Leaders?: Understanding the Involvement of Young Party Members in Six European Democracies. *Comparative Political Studies*, **42**(10), 1259–1290.
- Geddes, Barbara. 2003. *Paradigms and sand castles: Theory building and research design in comparative politics*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- King, Gary, Keohane, Robert O., & Verba, Sidney. 1994. *Designing social inquiry: Scientific inference in qualitative research*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Lange, Matthew. 2009. *Lineages of despotism and development: British colonialism and state power*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Lave, Charles A., & March, James G. 1975. *An Introduction to Models in the Social Sciences*. Lanham: University Press of America.
- Mahoney, James, & Vanderpoel, Rachel Sweet. 2015. Set Diagrams and Qualitative Research. *Comparative Political Studies*, **48**(1), 65–100.
- Obinger, Herbert, & Petersen, Klaus. 2015. Mass Warfare and the Welfare State – Causal Mechanisms and Effects. *British Journal of Political Science*, **47**(1), 203–227.
- Ragin, Charles C. 2000. *Fuzzy-set social science*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Sager, Fritz, Thomann, Eva, Zollinger, Christine, & Mavrot, Céline. 2014. Confronting Theories of European Integration: A Comparative Congruence Analysis of Veterinary Drug Regulations in Five Countries. *Journal of Comparative Policy Analysis: Research and Practice*, **16**(5), 457–474.

- Shoemaker, Pamela J., Tankard, James William, & Lasorsa, Dominic L. 2004. *How to build social science theories*. SAGE.
- Somer-Topcu, Zeynep. 2009. Timely decisions: The effects of past national elections on party policy change. *Journal of Politics*, **71**(1), 238–248.
- Toshkov, Dimitar. 2016. *Research Design in Political Science*. Palgrave.
- VanderWeele, Tyler. 2015. *Explanation in Causal Inference*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Table 2 : Topics and readings

date	topic	methods literature
19.04.	Why theory and what is it?	Shoemaker <i>et al.</i> (2004, chap. 1), Toshkov (2016, chap. 3)
26.04.	Motivating your theoretical contribution	King <i>et al.</i> (1994, 14-19), Geddes (2003, chap. 2)
03.05.	Cornerstones I: Conceptualizing cornerstones: Measurement levels and aggregation	Toshkov (2016, chap. 4), Shoemaker <i>et al.</i> (2004, chap. 2), Lange (illustration, 2009, chap. 1)
10.05.	Cause, mechanism and outcome	Shoemaker <i>et al.</i> (2004, chap. 3, 4), Obinger & Petersen (illustration 2015)
17.05.	Presentations 'cornerstones'	-
24.05.	Cornerstones II: Moderators and mediators	VanderWeele (2015, chap. 1), Somer-Topcu (illustration, 2009)
31.05.	Probabilism and determinism	Bennett (1999, 21-25), Bruter & Harrison (2009)
14.06.	Presentations 'probabilism' and 'moderators/mediators'	-
21.06.	Scope conditions	Ragin (2000, chap. 2)
28.06.	Presentations 'scope conditions', maximizing leverage: Observable implications I	Lave & March (1975, chap. 1), King <i>et al.</i> (1994, sec. 1.3)
05.07.	Maximizing leverage: Observable implications II	Sager <i>et al.</i> (2014)
12.07.	Presentations 'maximizing leverage'	
19.07.	Visualizing expectations	Mahoney & Vanderpoel (2015)
26.07.	Summary: elements of good theorizing, Q & A	-