

Research Design: Comparative Case Studies

Wednesday 10 a.m. – 12 noon PEG 1.G 191

Tutorial:

Monday 10 a.m. – 12 noon PEG 1.G 161

There are various ways to think about social science methods. While most of methods teaching at the Bachelor level deals with specific techniques (e.g., interviews, participant observation, regression analysis, etc.), there is yet another (more abstract) layer that looks at **research design issues**. These deal with the planning and potential pitfalls of research projects. Over the years, there has been a notable amount of scholarly contributions to this field. The literature differentiates between various research design types (such as quantitative, comparative, interpretive, or theoretical research designs, etc.) and has developed different rules and recommendations for them. In this course, we focus on comparative research designs (or, more precisely: **comparative case study** research designs).

Comparative case study research exists in nearly all sub-disciplines of political science and sociology. It usually looks at a limited number of cases (sometimes even only one) and is empirically oriented. Examples include the rise of populist parties in European democracies, or democratization processes in Latin America, or peace agreements after 1990, or the formal and informal structures of universities in Hesse, or the comparative study of two neighborhoods, etc. etc.

Topics of this course include: the difference between qualitative and quantitative designs; the specificities and challenges of comparative case studies; different phases of the research cycle, such as research questions, concepts, case selection, inference, and writing-up; process tracing methods; set-theoretic methods; mixed-methods approaches; and the professional application of methods, etc.

There are at least four goals which the course wants to achieve: (1) Participants will be enabled to differentiate between various types of research designs. (2) They will know the principles and elements of various comparative case study research designs in order to implement them in their own MA theses. (3) They will enhance their capacity to read, understand and work with publications that are based on comparative case study research designs. (4) They will be introduced to the social science sub-discipline of methodology and will get to know the most important contemporary debates.

This course is **compulsory** for students of the MA program in Comparative Democracy. It is highly recommended for those students of the other MA programs in political science and sociology who are interested in this type of designs. Ideally, the course is taken during the first semester of the MA programs. Students with other methodological preferences are invited to choose an alternative research design course. Since this is a compulsory course for students in Comparative Democracy, many examples and texts, etc., will be mainly (but not exclusively) oriented towards political science and the sub-field of comparative politics.

The course is assigned to the modules CD-MA-C (compulsory), PW-MA-1, IS-MA-1, SOZ-MA-7, SOZ-MA-8, WISOZ-MA-2 and MEAS 3a/b.

During the end of every session, the topic of the subsequent week will be introduced by the instructor. This should help to deal with the obligatory course readings which will be discussed in the subsequent session.

Bonald Pärkola offers a weekly tutorial, placed inbetween two sessions and preparing for the course. The tutorial is especially recommended for all students taking the *Modulabschlussprüfung*, above all for the MA Comparative Democracy students for whom this course is compulsory.

Course rules:

Registration via the official ways of the department is mandatory. Students who are not registered with the department are not allowed to participate. Students who are accepted into the course are required to participate in the first session or to inform Bonald Pärkola (perkola@em.uni-frankfurt.de) **before** the first session about their absence. Otherwise, inscription to the course will be discontinued, and the student loses her*his place in the course.

The course will be held in English. After the first week of the semester (19 Oct 2026), all relevant information will only be communicated via the OLAT platform. Therefore, registration with the OLAT course is absolutely essential. Note that also all readings will be provided via OLAT.

Students receive 3 CP for active participation. Three requirements have to be met for a confirmation of participation: (a) presence and active participation at 80% of the sessions (attendance lists will be circulated); (b) an oral introduction of one of the obligatory readings (5 min); (c) a 1 ½ pp. review of the same text, to be submitted before the subsequent course session.

For the *Modulabschlussprüfung*, a written exam will be organized during the last course session, that is on 10 February 2027 at 10:00 a.m. (rooms PEG 1.G 078 and PEG 1.G 083). For students of the MA program in Comparative Democracy, this exam is part of the compulsory *Modulabschlussprüfung* and will last 60 minutes. For MEAS students, the *Modulabschlussprüfung* is also compulsory. They receive additional 3 CPs for the *Modulabschlussprüfung*, and their exam lasts 80 minutes. For the students of the MA programs in political science, sociology, or economic sociology, the *Modulabschlussprüfung* is optional (i.e., they can also opt for only 'active participation'). If these students decide in favor of a *Modulabschlussprüfung*, then they receive additional 5 CPs for the *Modulabschlussprüfung*, and their exam lasts 120 minutes. ERASMUS students can get 3 CPs (only participation), 6 CPs (participation plus 80 minutes exam) or 8 CPs (participation plus 120 minutes exam).

For more information, please consult regularly the website of the chair (English version: https://www.goethe-university-frankfurt.de/47929351/Chair_in_Qualitative_Empirical_Research_Methods?locale=en). Please, direct all organizational questions to Bonald Pärkola (perkola@em.uni-frankfurt.de). Before writing an e-mail, just check whether the answer to your request can be found on the website or in this syllabus. When communicating with us, please exclusively use your official student e-mail address (@stud.uni-frankfurt.de). We do not reply to any other e-mail address.

This course will take place for the next time during the winter term 2027/28.

14 Oct 2026

Organizational Aspects

Introduction to next session's topic: The Debate on Research Designs

21 Oct 2026

The Debate on Research Designs

Lijphart, Arend (1971). "Comparative Politics and the Comparative Method." *American Political Science Review* 65, 3: 682-93.

Mahoney, James, and Gary Goertz (2006). "A Tale of Two Cultures: Contrasting Quantitative and Qualitative Research." *Political Analysis*, 14, 3: 227-49.

Introduction to next week's topic: Comparative Case Study Designs

28 Oct 2026

Comparative Case Study Designs

Blatter, Joachim, and Markus Haverland (2012). *Designing Case Studies. Explanatory Approaches in Small-N Research*. Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 1-32.

Goerres, Achim, Markus B. Siewert, and Claudius Wagemann (2019). "Internationally Comparative Research Designs in the Social Sciences: Fundamental Issues, Case Selection Logics, and Research Limitations." *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie* 71, supplement issue 1: 75-97.

Introduction to next session's topic: Research Ambitions, Research Interests, Research Questions

4 Nov 2026

NO CLASS

11 Nov 2026

Research Ambitions, Research Interests, Research Questions

Gerring, John, and Jason Seawright (2022). *Finding Your Social Science Project*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 73-101.

Halperin, Sandra, and Oliver Heath (2020). *Political Research*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 93-122.

Introduction to next week's topic: Concepts

18 Nov 2026

Concepts

Sartori, Giovanni (1970). "Concept Misformation in Comparative Politics." *American Political Science Review* 64, 4: 1033-53.

Goertz, Gary (2020). *Social Science Concepts and Measurement*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, pp. 26-56. [additionally optional for a quick reading: pp. 1-25]

Introduction to next week's topic: Case Selection

25 Nov 2026

Case Selection

Collier, David, and James Mahoney (1996). "Insights and Pitfalls: Selection Bias in Qualitative Research." *World Politics* 49, 1: 56-91.

Mahoney, James, and Gary Goertz (2004). "The Possibility Principle: Choosing Negative Cases in Comparative Research." *American Political Science Review* 98, 4: 653-69.

Introduction to next week's topic: Inference

2 Dec 2026

Inference

Maggetti, Martino, Fabrizio Gilardi, and Claudio M. Radaelli (2013). *Designing Research in the Social Sciences*. Los Angeles et al.: Sage, pp. 42-68.

Falletti, Tulia G., and Julia F. Lynch (2009). "Context and Causal Mechanisms in Political Analysis". *Comparative Political Studies* 42, 9: 1143-66.

Introduction to next week's topics: Presenting Research Results; Good Quality Research Designs

9 Dec 2026

Presenting Research Results

Good Quality Research Designs

Becker, Howard S. (2020). *Writing for Social Scientists*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, pp. 24-60.

Schmitter, Philippe C. (2016). "The Design of Social and Political Research." *Chinese Political Science Review* 1: 577-609.

Research between Passion and Profession

16 Dec 2026

POSSIBLE MAKE-UP SESSION

END OF THE YEAR BREAK

13 Jan 2027

Indications for the Exam

Typology of Case Study Research Designs

Introduction to next week's topic: Process Tracing

No readings

20 Jan 2027

Process Tracing

Bennett, Andrew, and Jeffrey T. Checkel (2015). "Process Tracing: From Philosophical Roots to Best Practices." In Andrew Bennett and Jeffrey T. Checkel (eds.), *Process Tracing. From Metaphor to Analytical Tool*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 3-38.

Beach, Derek (2020). "Case Studies and Process Tracing." In Dirk Berg-Schlosser, Bertrand Badie, and

Leonardo Morlino (eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Political Science*. Los Angeles et al.: Sage, pp. 288-304.

Introduction to next week's topic: Set-Theoretic Approaches

27 Jan 2027

Set-Theoretic Approaches

Wagemann, Claudius (2020). "Configurative Methods." In Dirk Berg-Schlosser, Bertrand Badie, and Leonardo Morlino (eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Political Science*. Los Angeles et al.: Sage, pp. 341-356.

Mahoney, James, and Rachel Sweet Vanderpoel (2015). "Set Diagrams and Qualitative Research." *Comparative Political Studies* 48 (1): 65-100.

Introduction to next week's topic: Methodological Pluralism

3 Feb 2027

Methodological Pluralism

Beach, Derek, and Jonas Gejl Kaas (2020). "The Great Divides: Incommensurability, the Impossibility of Mixed-Methodology, and What to Do about It." *International Studies Review* 22, 2: 214-35.

Bulutgil, H. Zeynep, and Harris Mylonas (2026). "Theory Before Method: The Case for Methodological Pluralism in Political Science." *International Political Science Review*, online first, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0192512161445570>

Summary and preparation for the exam

10 Feb 2027

EXAM (rooms PEG 1.078 and PEG 1.083, entrance starting at 9:45 a.m.)