

PLS 210: POLITICAL SCIENCE RESEARCH METHODS

Nazarbayev University

Fall 2023

BASIC INFORMATION

Professor: Karol Czuba

Classes:

Section 1: Tuesday and Thursday, 12–1.15 pm, 8.308

Section 2: Tuesday and Thursday, 4.30–5.45 pm, 8.154

Office hours: Tuesday and Thursday, 1.30–3 pm, and (on September 20, September 27, October 25, and November 22 only) Wednesday, 9–10 am, 6.214; you can optionally book an appointment with me here: <https://karolczuba.youcanbook.me>

Contact: Moodle forum and messages

OUTLINE

This course introduces Political Science students to the conduct of inquiry in the discipline. In the course of the semester, you will learn how to make sense of Political Science scholarship, design research projects, collect and analyze qualitative data, and present your findings. Course readings, drawn from textbooks as well as some outstanding scholarly works—both classic contributions to the discipline and recent publications that advance the field—will familiarize you with the importance and challenges of conducting high-quality research. Your individual and group engagement with and class discussions of existing scholarship will also prepare you for the crucial and difficult task of doing your own research. Your primary assignment in the course will be to design an original research project on a topic of your choosing as well as collect and analyze empirical data for that project. Along with complementary material covered in PLS 211 (Quantitative Methods in Political Science), these learning experiences will help you to think and work like a political scientist and thus provide the necessary foundation upon which you can build in upper-level courses in the Department of Political Science and International Relations.

OBJECTIVES AND LEARNING OUTCOMES

The course has three primary objectives, which correspond to the knowledge and skills that you should attain during the semester. By the end of the course, you should:

1. Be familiar with the research process and thus able to both make sense of other scholars' work and design your own research projects.

2. Understand the benefits and limitations of some key qualitative methods used by political scientists and know how to apply those methods in your own work.
3. Have the ability to conduct your own research, develop and substantiate arguments, and communicate your analysis and findings through both speaking and writing.

In addition, engagement with course material, active participation in classes, and completion of assignments should help you to develop your ability to think carefully, logically, critically, and creatively as well as to productively contribute to fellow students' learning.

PEDAGOGICAL APPROACH

This is an introductory course in that I do not assume that you will have any prior knowledge of research design or qualitative methods. At the same time, this course will challenge you. We will cover concepts, theories, explanations, and methods that may be difficult to understand. To make sense of the course content, you will need to think about it carefully, logically, critically, and creatively and to develop new analytical skills. In other words, you will need to think like a social scientist.

This is a difficult set of skills to acquire and I am committed to helping you develop it. I fully expect that some of the material I ask you to absorb and the tasks I want you to complete will be challenging and confusing. Indeed, I will expose you to new content and ways of knowing and thinking precisely so that you come up against and grapple with the limits of your own understanding. All this new-ness can be destabilizing and disorienting. This is good because not having the knowledge and skills needed to decipher social reality forces us to learn, to discard erroneous preconceptions, to make sense of existing explanations and develop new ones, to collect new empirical evidence that challenges our assumptions, and to communicate what we have learned to others through careful and clear writing and speaking based on evidence, rather than emotional arguments. I welcome your every question about any aspect of the course and this learning process, but you will also need to work hard to benefit from and do well in the course.

Involvement in class activities is an integral and necessary component of learning in the course. Active learning fosters students' ability to think clearly, logically, and critically and develop essential analytical skills. Because my students are active participants in their learning, I expect you to be prepared for, attend, and productively contribute to our classes.

Equally important to this learning process is the development of your ability to conduct your own research. I have designed the assignments in this course so that you will not only have to demonstrate your knowledge of the course material, but also collect additional empirical evidence, critically assess scholarly arguments, develop your own perspective, and—since academic work is a collaborative endeavor—present your analysis and findings in a coherent and articulate manner, in both writing and speaking, to me and to your fellow students.

SYLLABUS ADJUSTMENTS

I welcome your feedback and suggestions for changes to the course that you think would facilitate your learning. The COVID-19 pandemic and other exigencies can also disrupt my plans for the course. For these reasons, the syllabus is subject to change—at any time during the semester and at my discretion. I will endeavor to notify you of any syllabus adjustments as far in advance as possible.

CLASS ORGANIZATION

In general, we will meet in person twice a week. On Tuesdays, I will usually deliver lectures, while most Thursdays will be devoted to seminars intended to ensure your active engagement with course material and help you to make sense of lectures and readings. Participation in these seminars is mandatory, as is attendance of all (synchronous) classes. I will measure your engagement by administering quizzes on the content of readings and lectures in some classes. Your class involvement grade will reflect your performance on those quizzes as well as your active participation in class discussions.

Depending on the epidemiological situation and prevailing regulations, some classes may be held online. Online lectures will be fully asynchronous; I will make them available to you before scheduled class time. Online seminars will be synchronous and held on Zoom during scheduled class time.

All course readings and other content that you will need in the course are available online.

I hope that this organization of classes will help all of you to engage with course material and learn the important content covered in the course. I am also always available to discuss specific challenges that you may encounter at any point during the semester.

ASSESSMENT

OVERVIEW

Grading scheme

Research project	
Literature review	15%
Research design	15%
Data collection and analysis report	15%
Term test	15%
Final exam	15%
Presentation	10%
Class involvement	15%

Research project submission deadlines

Literature review	September 13 (peer review revision: September 20)
Research design	October 25 (peer review revision: November 1)
Data collection and analysis report	November 22 (peer review revision: November 29)

Test and exam dates

Term test	September 28
Final exam	TBA

ASSESSMENT DETAILS

Research project

The research project is the most important assignment in the course. Its primary purpose is to help you to develop your research skills and gain hands-on experience of conducting your own research. The project is divided into three components: 1) literature review, 2) research design, and 3) data collection and analysis report. You will first identify an area of research that interests you and conduct a thorough search of available scholarly literature on the subject. Having identified the most important and valuable relevant sources, you will write a review of this literature, in which you will detail its main strands, outline their contributions, and, crucially, identify gaps that you can fill with your own research. You will subsequently design a project that can help you to make your own contribution to the literature. In the final component of the assignment, you will make use of one of the research methods covered in the course to collect and analyze empirical data for your project. You will have approximately one month to complete each component of the project. I have intentionally spread the deadlines throughout the semester to give you time to acquaint yourself with your chosen body of scholarship and methods, reflect on the existing work and the contribution that you can make, and to conduct your empirical research. At the same time, given the amount of work required to complete the assignment it is essential that you work on the project continuously throughout the semester. I strongly urge you to speak with me during office hours whenever you feel you need advice on any aspect of the project.

You can optionally sign up to participate in peer review of research project components. If you do, you will submit an initial version of each component, provide feedback on the work of one peer, and revise your initial submission in response to the comments that you receive from them.

Term test and final exam

The term test and final exam will both comprise short-answer questions intended to test your familiarity with material covered in the lectures and readings.

Presentation

Presentations will take place during Thursday classes. Together with one or two fellow students in the course, you will give one ten-minute-long presentation that will examine the topic that we consider in a particular week through the lens of a journal article of your choice that is not a required reading in this course and has been published in a peer-reviewed Political Science journal.

Class involvement

The class involvement grade will reflect the productive contributions that you make to class discussions. During the discussions you will need to demonstrate that you have read and reflected on the readings, paid attention to the content introduced by me in lectures, and carefully listened to your fellow students' contributions as well as ask questions and offer your own answers and analysis on class topics. I will announce some of the questions that we discuss during lectures and/or on Moodle.

Needless to say, you must show up to be a part of the shared intellectual work of the course. I expect you to attend every scheduled class meeting. See the Policies section of the syllabus for exceptions.

In some classes I will administer quizzes to ask a few questions about the content of course readings or other relevant course content. These are low-stakes exercises intended to ensure and measure your engagement with course material. The quizzes will not be announced in advance and they cannot be made up if you miss a class, no matter the reason.

Particularly helpful Moodle forum posts may also count towards your class involvement grade.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Writing standard

Development of the ability to express your ideas and knowledge in writing is a key component of your university education. Your grade is dependent on you turning in assignments that clearly convey your analysis and findings using standard language, format, citation style, etc. I encourage you to work with NU's Writing Center to improve your writing. I will use my discretion in requiring students to use the Writing Center if assignments are consistently poorly written.

Research support

Librarians are available to help you locate appropriate scholarly sources, learn to use reference management software, and perform other foundational research tasks. You can schedule an appointment with a librarian here: <https://nu-kz.libcal.com/appointments/>. Alternatively, you can reach out directly to April Manabat, the subject librarian for Political Science; her email address is april.manabat@nu.edu.kz.

Assignment formatting

All assignments should be double-spaced with one-inch margins in Times New Roman 12-point font. All citations should follow the American Political Science Association Style Manual (<https://connect.apsanet.org/stylemanual/>).

Assignment submission

You will submit all assignments on Moodle. Every assignment should be submitted by 11.59 pm on the day that assignment is due.

I strongly advise you to keep rough and draft work *and* final copies of all of your assignments. You should keep all assignments until the marked assignments have been returned to you and the grades have been posted.

Late submission

I will apply a late submission penalty of 1% of the assignment grade per weekday (Monday to Friday, excluding holidays) to the components of the research project submitted after the submission deadline. I will only grade components of the research project after previous components have been submitted.

I will not accept late submission of presentations, the term test, and the final exam.

Assignment return

I will grade and return all assignments submitted on time no later than two weeks after submission.

Grading scale

A	95-100%
A-	90-94%
B+	85-89%
B	80-84%
B-	75-79%
C+	70-74%
C	65-69%
C-	60-64%
D	55-59%
D-	50-54%
F	0-49 %

Grade appeals

If you wish to appeal your grade for any assignment, you should approach me no earlier than 72 hours and no later than two weeks after that assignment was returned to you. To appeal the grade, please submit a 150-200 word written explanation of why you wish to have the grade reviewed to me. I will decide whether or not to review the grade based on the strength of your argument. If I decide to review the grade, I may keep the grade that you originally received, reduce it, or increase it.

POLICIES

Contact

I strongly encourage you to raise questions not answered by the syllabus during classes and office hours.

You are very welcome to stop by my office during office hours anytime you wish to speak with me. These office hours are open to all students. If you prefer to speak with me privately, please make a booking on my youcanbook.me page.

I am also happy to answer short questions via the course forum on Moodle or Moodle messages. If your question is of general interest, you should post it in the forum, which I hope will become a useful source of information for students in the course. Questions that require more than one short response should be addressed during classes or office hours. I will respond to forum posts and messages within one full working day. I have every confidence that you know better than to message your professors to ask questions answered in the syllabus. To streamline electronic communications in the course, you should only use Moodle to contact me. If you email me, I may miss your message; I will also only respond to your questions via Moodle messages.

Attendance

I expect you to participate in every scheduled class meeting (except asynchronous online lectures) and I will take attendance.

You may have up to three emergency absences before your grade is negatively affected. These absences may be used for any reason. The three emergency absence dates are “no questions asked”; that is, you do not need to communicate with me the reasons for your absence.

Except for documented medical emergencies, each additional absence will result in a reduction of your overall class involvement grade by 25%. I will also reduce your class involvement grade if you habitually arrive late or leave early.

It is your responsibility to obtain from fellow students notes on the material covered in classes that you miss.

Academic misconduct

The Student Code of Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures outlines the policies and procedures that address academic misconduct. You are responsible for complying with those regulations—as well as those described in the syllabus.

All assignments you submit in the course must be your original work. You may use any source or tool while preparing to write your assignments but except for correctly attributed direct quotations the assignments must be entirely written by you. You must identify the sources of any ideas that are not your own.

Information technology access

We will primarily use two information technology platforms—Moodle and Zoom—maintained by the university. The IT helpdesk (helpdesk@nu.edu.kz) can provide you with technical assistance needed to access and use both platforms.

Copyright and data protections

The materials that I create for the course and share with you are my intellectual property and are to be used solely for your learning in the course. The materials may not be reproduced or shared with others outside the course without my written permission.

Online copies of student assignments and other student data will only be stored on NU servers or using services (such as Google Drive and Moodle) governed by NU’s data protection policies.

If some students are unable to participate in seminars held online, I will ask for your permission to record our discussions for those students’ benefit. I will only record the seminars if all students in

attendance grant such permission. Because seminar recordings unavoidably contain identifying information about students, they may under no circumstances be copied or shared. I will delete all seminar recordings following the completion of the course.

Students may not record classes or any other course materials that contain personally identifying information.

SCHEDULE AND READINGS

The textbooks that we will be using in the course are:

Berg, Bruce Lawrence, and Howard Lune. 2017. *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences*. Harlow: Pearson Education.

Johnson, Janet Buttolph, H. T. Reynolds, and Jason D. Mycoff. 2016. *Political Science Research Methods*, Los Angeles: Sage Publications.

Additional course readings are listed below.

All readings are required. They are all available online on Moodle or through links in the syllabus. Please pay attention to specified page numbers; in many cases only a section of a particular reading is required.

I am likely to amend the schedule and readings to align them better with the learning needs of students in the course. For this reason, the schedule is tentative and likely to change as we move through the course material this semester.

PART I: RESEARCH DESIGN AND INFERENCE

Week 1: Introduction

Keohane, Robert O. 2009. "Political Science as a Vocation." *PS: Political Science & Politics* 42(02): 359–63.

Kellstedt, Paul M., and Guy D. Whitten. 2018. "The Scientific Study of Politics." In *The Fundamentals of Political Science Research*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1–24.

Bernstein, Steven, Richard Ned Lebow, Janice Gross Stein, and Steven Weber. 2000. "God Gave Physics the Easy Problems: Adapting Social Science to an Unpredictable World." *European Journal of International Relations* 6(1): 43–76. (read only pp. 43–53)

Week 2: Research puzzles, research questions, and the literature

Geddes, Barbara. 2003. "Big Questions, Little Answers: How the Questions You Choose Affect the Answer You Get." In *Paradigms and Sand Castles: Theory Building and Research Design in Comparative Politics*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 27-88. (read only pp. 27-40)

Johnson, Janet Buttolph, H. T. Reynolds, and Jason D. Mycoff. 2016. "Beginning the Research Process: Identifying a Research Topic, Developing Research Questions, and Reviewing

the Literature.” In *Political Science Research Methods*, Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 74–102.
(read only pp. 74–84 and 98–99 this week)

Grzymala-Busse, Anna. 2020. “Beyond War and Contracts: The Medieval and Religious Roots of the European State.” *Annual Review of Political Science* 23(2): 1–18.

Week 3: Interlude I—Searching, reading, and writing

Johnson, Janet Buttolph, H. T. Reynolds, and Jason D. Mycoff. 2016. “Beginning the Research Process: Identifying a Research Topic, Developing Research Questions, and Reviewing the Literature.” In *Political Science Research Methods*, Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 74–103.
(read pp. 84–102 this week)

Burke, Timothy. “How to Read in College.” *Easily Distracted*.

<https://blogs.swarthmore.edu/burke/permanent-features-advice-on-academia/how-to-read-in-college/>.

Green, Amelia Hoover. 2013. “How to Read Political Science: A Guide in Four Steps.”

<https://www.ameliahoovergreen.com/uploads/9/3/0/9/93091546/howtoread.pdf>.

Berg, Bruce Lawrence, and Howard Lune. 2017. “Writing Research: Finding Meaning in Data.” In *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences*. Harlow: Pearson Education, 201–218.

Randolph, Justus J. 2009. “A Guide to Writing the Dissertation Literature Review.” *Practical Assessment, Research and Evaluation* 14(13): 1–13.

Week 4: Concepts, variables, theories, and hypotheses

Johnson, Janet Buttolph, H. T. Reynolds, and Jason D. Mycoff. 2016. “The Building Blocks of Social Scientific Research: Hypotheses, Concepts, and Variables.” In *Political Science Research Methods*, Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 104–27.

Levitsky, Steven, and Lucan A. Way. 2002. “The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism.” *Journal of Democracy* 13(2): 51–65. (skim pp. 58–63)

Tilly, Charles. 2003. “Inequality, Democratization, and De-Democratization.” *Sociological Theory* 21(1): 37–43.

Stephan, Maria J. et al. 2008. “Why Civil Resistance Works.” *International Security* 33(158): 7–44. (read only pp. 7–19 and 40–44)

Week 5: Cases and observations

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.

Elfverson, Emma. 2019. “The Political Conditions for Local Peacemaking: A Comparative Study of Communal Conflict Resolution in Kenya.” *Comparative Political Studies* 52(13–14): 2061–96. (skim pp. 2071–80, but make sure you read the Appendix on pp. 2085–87)

Collier, David, Jason Seawright, and Henry E. Brady. 2003. “Qualitative versus Quantitative: What Might This Distinction Mean?” *Qualitative Methods* 1(1): 1–8.

Week 6: Measurement and description

- Johnson, Janet Buttolph, H. T. Reynolds, and Jason D. Mycoff. 2015. "The Building Blocks of SocialScientific Research: Measurement." In *Political Science Research Methods*, Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, 128–64. (read only pp. 128–51)
- Gerring, John. 2012. "Mere Description." *British Journal of Political Science* 42(4): 721–46.
- Risse, Thomas, and Eric Stollenwerk. 2018. "Legitimacy in Areas of Limited Statehood." *Annual Review of Political Science* 21(1): 403–18. (read only pp. 403–10)
- Soifer, Hillel. 2008. "State Infrastructural Power: Approaches to Conceptualization and Measurement." *Studies in Comparative International Development* 43(3–4): 231–51. (skim pp. 235–44)

Week 7: Explanation and causation (and term test)

- Johnson, Janet Buttolph, H. T. Reynolds, and Jason D. Mycoff. 2015. "Research Design: Making Causal Inferences." In *Political Science Research Methods*, Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, 166–210. (this week read only pp. 166–71 and skim pp. 171–95 and 203–09)
- Tilly, Charles. 2001. "Mechanisms in Political Processes." *Annual Review of Political Science* 4(1): 21–41.

Week 8: Within-case inference

- Johnson, Janet Buttolph, H. T. Reynolds, and Jason D. Mycoff. 2015. "Research Design: Making Causal Inferences." In *Political Science Research Methods*, Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, 166–210. (read only pp. 166–99)
- Collier, David. 2011. "Understanding Process Tracing." *PS: Political Science and Politics* 44(4): 823–30.
- Bennett, Andrew. 2010. "Process Tracing and Causal Inference." In *Rethinking Social Inquiry: Diverse Tools, Shared Standards*, eds. Henry E. Brady and David Collier. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 207–19.
- Fairfield, Tasha. 2013. "Going Where the Money Is: Strategies for Taxing Economic Elites in Unequal Democracies." *World Development* 47: 42–57.

Week 9: Cross-case inference

- 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. (review your notes or reread)
- Tarrow, Sidney. 2010. "The Strategy of Paired Comparison: Toward a Theory of Practice." *Comparative Political Studies* 43(2): 230–59.
- Schatz, Edward. 2009. "The Soft Authoritarian Tool Kit: Agenda-Setting Power in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan." *Comparative Politics* 41(2): 203–22 (skim pp. 208–17)
- Lange, Matthew. 2009. "Introduction." In *Lineages of Despotism and Development: British Colonialism and State Power*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1–19. (skim pp. 1–11)

Week 10: Interlude 2—Research ethics

- Berg, Bruce Lawrence, and Howard Lune. 2017. "Ethical Issues in Research." In *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences*. Harlow: Pearson Education, 43–64.
- Lewis-Kraus, Gideon. 2016. "The Trials of Alice Goffman." *The New York Times Magazine*.
<https://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/17/magazine/the-trials-of-alice-goffman.html>.

PART II. DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Week 11: Ethnography

- Berg, Bruce Lawrence, and Howard Lune. 2017. "Ethnographic Field Strategies." In *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences*. Harlow: Pearson Education, 103–35.
- Jäger, Philipp Frank. 2014. "Flows of Oil, Flows of People: Resource-Extraction Industry, Labour Market and Migration in Western Kazakhstan." *Central Asian Survey* 33(4): 500–516.
- Pachirat, Timothy. 2009. "The Political in Political Ethnography: Dispatches from the Kill Floor." In *Political Ethnography: What Immersion Contributes to the Study of Power*, ed. Edward Schatz. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 143–62.

Week 12: Interviews and focus groups

- Berg, Bruce Lawrence, and Howard Lune. 2017. "A Dramaturgical Look at Interviewing" and "Focus Group Interviewing." In *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences*. Harlow: Pearson Education, 65–106.
- Elfverson, Emma. 2019. "The Political Conditions for Local Peacemaking: A Comparative Study of Communal Conflict Resolution in Kenya." *Comparative Political Studies* 52(13–14): 2061–96. (review your notes or reread)
- Fujii, Lee Ann. 2010. "Shades of Truth and Lies: Interpreting Testimonies of War and Violence." *Journal of Peace Research* 47(2): 231–41.
- Mkandawire-Vallhmu, Lucy, and Patricia E Stevens. 2010. "The Critical Value of Focus Group Discussions in Research with Women Living with HIV in Malawi." *Qualitative Health Research* 20(5): 684–96.

Week 13: Archival research

- Berg, Bruce Lawrence, and Howard Lune. 2017. "Unobtrusive Measures in Research" and "Social Historical Research and Oral Traditions." In *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences*. Harlow: Pearson Education, 146–68. (read only pp. 146–65)
- Grzymala-Busse, Anna. 2020. "Beyond War and Contracts: The Medieval and Religious Roots of the European State." *Annual Review of Political Science* 23(2): 1–18. (review your notes or reread)
- D'Arcy, Michelle, and Marina Nistotskaya. 2017. "State First, Then Democracy: Using Cadastral Records to Explain Governmental Performance in Public Goods Provision." *Governance* 30(2): 193–209.

Week 14: Qualitative data analysis

- Berg, Bruce Lawrence, and Howard Lune. 2017. "An Introduction to Content Analysis." In *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences*. Harlow: Pearson, 181–200. (skim pp. 187-196)
- Hall, R. B. 2003. "The Discursive Demolition of the Asian Development Model." *International Studies Quarterly*: 71–99.

Week 15: Review