

Logics of Inquiry

Politics 201 • Class Number 30198 • Winter 2026
University of California, Santa Cruz
Prof. Benjamin L. Read

Professor's email: bread@ucsc.edu. Email is the best way to reach me, much better than Canvas.
Course web site: <https://canvas.ucsc.edu/>
Professor's web site: <https://benread.net>
Course meetings: Wednesdays, 5:30–8:30pm, Merrill Acad 23
Office hours: On Zoom: Wednesdays, 9:00–10:00am
In person in Merrill Faculty Annex 157: Thursdays, 4:00–5:00pm
Please sign up at <https://tinyurl.com/benreadofficehours>
You may also email me to make an appointment outside this time slot.
Date of this syllabus: January 6, 2026, version 1. The syllabus may be updated during the academic term.

Overview

Catalog description: Investigates approaches to study of politics and to enterprise of social science in general. Works from positivist, interpretive, historical, and critical approaches provide examples held up to critical and epistemological reflection. Enrollment is restricted to graduate students.

Further elaboration: What does it mean to conduct research on the political world? What kinds of knowledge, ideas, or other things might emerge from different forms of inquiry — “scientific” or otherwise? How meaningful, certain, valid, illuminating, or enduring might those findings or insights be? What are major approaches to such research: the premises on which they rest, the logics according to which they proceed? What might be the strengths as well as weaknesses and problems of these approaches? What distinguishes good or rigorous research efforts within various traditions?

This is a broad-spectrum methods course, one that speaks primarily to what we might call the “upstream” aspects of methods. It reaches into issues in epistemology and the philosophy of social science, while exploring how different strains of research and critique draw on and proceed from them. We consider examples of published research to assess how they manifest the potential of a given approach. But this is not a course on how to apply any particular method in practice. Thus, we will talk about the logics and problems of (for example) experiments and ethnography, not details of, or a step-by-step guide to, designing and conducting a research project involving these approaches. As well, we are less concerned with ways to combine or “mix” methods, more concerned with comprehending each on its own terms. Still, what we learn will have many implications for how students think about and use specific methods.

One goal is to help students understand and engage with many kinds of research on politics and related subjects — to grasp what other scholars are up to even if it is far from one’s own specialization.

Readings

Most readings will be available on Canvas (canvas.ucsc.edu), unless otherwise indicated on the syllabus. In Canvas, see Files / Readings.

Assignments and ground rules:

- Actively help build an enthusiastic, far-ranging, thoughtful, critical and constructive discussion.
- Do the required readings prior to each class session, consider the discussion questions that will be circulated at

least four days before class, and come prepared to contribute to the conversation. Acquire the readings well in advance of class so as to avoid logistical problems.

- Attend each class session unless absolutely unavoidable circumstances make it impossible to do so. Given that we have only ten class meetings, please plan to attend every one and do not schedule things that conflict with class.
- In the event that you are truly unable to attend class, you must 1) email me promptly with a brief explanation; 2) Within the two weeks after the class date in question, attend (in person or via Zoom) an office hours session with me to demonstrate your understanding of the assigned readings.
- In each or most class sessions, serve as discussant for one or more readings, as assigned. In your capacity as discussant, your presentation should only very briefly summarize the reading in question (if at all), but instead should launch the group on pathways for appreciating and/or critiquing it. Participation and presentations together constitute 35% of the quarter grade.
- The following sessions will have mini-projects assigned, due at the beginning of class. The basic idea will be to consider at least one piece of published research relating to the topic or research logic in question (apart from those on the syllabus) and evaluate it in a one-page paper. I will provide more specific instructions for the weeks in question. Together these are 25% of the quarter grade.
 - Week 2 on concepts
 - Week 5 on experimental logics
 - Week 6 on large-n observational logics
 - Week 8 on small n and case logics (including process tracing)
 - Week 9 on ethnography and participant observation
- In lieu of a written final examination, each student will schedule a 30-minute block of time with me, during exam week, for an oral exam on the course readings and ideas, in my office. This is 40% of the quarter grade.

Academic integrity and artificial intelligence tools:

- Excerpts from UCSC's Policy on Academic Integrity for Graduate Students (http://www.ucsc.edu/academics/academic_integrity/graduate_students/): "Academic misconduct includes but is not limited to cheating, plagiarism, fabrication, falsification, research fraud, or facilitating academic dishonesty or as further specified in campus policies and regulations, including the Campus Policy on Research Integrity. ... In cases in which academic misconduct has been determined to occur, sanctions may include dismissal, suspension for a specified period, and notation of academic misconduct on a student's transcript, including all external copies, for a specified period."
- I take academic integrity very seriously and I expect all students to do the same.
- Concerning the use of sources in your writing, and understanding and avoiding plagiarism, the single most thorough (though it is concise) and illuminating discussion I know of is Gordon Harvey, *Writing with Sources: A Guide for Students*, 3rd edition (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2017). The full text of this book is available online via the UCSC library.
- Do not use AI tools to generate any text that you submit as part of an assignment for this class. Everything you turn in should be your own original work, and should not be machine-generated.

Disability accommodations:

If you qualify for classroom accommodations because of a disability, please submit your Accommodation Authorization from the Disability Resource Center (DRC) to me during my office hours in a timely manner, preferably within the first two weeks of the quarter. Contact DRC at 459-2089 (voice), 459-4806 (TTY).

Schedule of class meetings

Class 1, Wednesday, January 7, 2026: Introduction

- Przeworski, Adam, and Henry Teune, *The Logic of Comparative Social Inquiry* (Wiley-Interscience, 1970), preface, introduction, and chapter 1, pp. ix–30
- Yanow, Dvora, “Thinking Interpretively: Philosophical Presuppositions and the Human Sciences,” and Mary Hawkesworth, “Contending Conceptions of Science and Politics: Methodology and the Constitution of the Political,” in Dvora Yanow and Peregrine Schwartz-Shea (eds), *Interpretation and Method: Empirical Research Methods and the Interpretive Turn* (M.E. Sharpe, 2006), pp. 52–88 and 89–120
- Gerring, John, “Mere Description,” *British Journal of Political Science*, 42.4 (2012), pp. 721–46
- Sil, Rudra, and Peter J. Katzenstein, “Analytic Eclecticism in the Study of World Politics: Reconfiguring Problems and Mechanisms across Research Traditions,” *Perspectives on Politics*, 8.2 (2010), pp. 411–31
- Brown, Wendy, “At the Edge,” *Political Theory*, 30.4 (2002), pp. 556–76
- James C. Scott, “A Wondering, Wandering Social Scientist,” lecture, published 2006

Further reading:

- Several volumes in the Oxford Handbooks series are directly relevant to this class, including Harold Kincaid and Jeroen Van Bouwel (eds.) *The Oxford Handbook of the Philosophy of Political Science* (2023) and Harold Kincaid (ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of the Philosophy of Social Science* (2012).
- “Introduction” and “The Naturalist Philosophy of Science” in Moses, Jonathan W., and Torbjørn L. Knutsen. *Ways of Knowing: Competing Methodologies in Social and Political Research*. 3rd ed., Red Globe Press, 2019.
- Bevir, Mark, “Meta-Methodology: Clearing the Underbrush,” in Janet M. Box-Steffensmeier, Henry E. Brady, and David Collier (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Political Methodology* (2008)
- Steinmetz, George. 2005. “Positivism and Its Others in the Social Sciences.” In *The Politics of Method in the Human Sciences*, edited by George Steinmetz, 1–56. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Parsons, Craig. 2024. “Engaged Pluralism: Rigorous Debates across Scholarly Divides.” In *The Oxford Handbook of Engaged Methodological Pluralism in Political Science*, edited by Janet M. Box-Steffensmeier, Dino P. Christenson, and Valeria Sinclair-Chapman, 1–17. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Class 2, Wednesday, January 14, 2026: Political Concepts

- Sartori, Giovanni, “Concept Misformation in Comparative Politics,” *American Political Science Review*, 64.4 (1970), pp. 1033–53
- Collier, David, and Zachary Elkins, *Working with Concepts: Foundational Essays by David Collier, with Research Notes on Innovation in the Field* (Cambridge, 2026). The following chapters:
 - Elkins, “Preface”
 - 1 Collier and Mahon, “Conceptual Stretching Revisited: Adapting Concepts in Comparative Analysis”
 - 2 Collier and Levitsky, “Democracy with Adjectives: Conceptual Hierarchies in Comparative Research”
 - 4 Weyland, “A Warning: Maintaining Conceptual Boundaries in the Era of Democratic Anxiety”
 - 5 Coppedge, “The V-Dem Project: A Multidimensional Perspective on ‘Democracy with Adjectives’”
 - 6 Chartock, “Successful Conceptual Traveling: Corporatism in Latin America, 1995–2023”
 - 13 Straus, “Genocide: A Legal Concept for the Social Sciences?”
- Schaffer, Frederic, *Elucidating Social Science Concepts: An Interpretivist Guide* (Routledge, 2015), chapters 1 and 4

Further reading:

- Goertz, Gary, *Social Science Concepts: A User’s Guide* (Princeton University Press, 2006) and later version *Social Science Concepts and Measurement* (2020)
- Dow, Douglas C., “Working with Concepts: Challenging the Language-Reality Dichotomy,” in Dvora Yanow and Peregrine Schwartz-Shea (eds), *Interpretation and Method: Empirical Research Methods and the Interpretive Turn* (M.E. Sharpe, 2006)

Class 3, Wednesday, January 21, 2026: American Political Development with Prof. Melanie Springer

See also the separate agenda document from Prof. Springer.

Introduction to the Historical Approach to Studying American Politics

- Karen Orren and Stephen Skowronek. 2004. “The Historical Construction of Politics” (Chapter 1) in *The Search for American Political Development*. New York: Cambridge UP.
- Suzanne Mettler and Richard Valelly. 2016. “Introduction: The Distinctiveness and Necessity of American Political Development” (Chapter 1) in *The Oxford Handbook of American Political Development*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Historical Institutionalism

- Elizabeth Sanders. 2006. “Historical Institutionalism” (Chapter 3) in *The Oxford Handbook of Political Institutions* (pages 39-55). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- David Butler. 2009. “Political Science: What Should We Know” (Chapter 9) in *The Future of Political Science: 100 Perspectives* (King, Scholzman, and Nie, editors). NY: Routledge Press.

Path Dependence, Timing, and Sequence

- Peter A. Hall. 2009. “Path Dependence” (Chapter 97) in *The Future of Political Science: 100 Perspectives* (King, Scholzman, and Nie, editors). NY: Routledge Press.
- Daniel J. Galvin. 2016 “Qualitative Methods and American Political Development” (Chapter 11) in *The Oxford Handbook of American Political Development*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- [At least skim; optionally, read fully] Paul Pierson. 2000. “Increasing Returns, Path Dependence, and the Study of Politics.” *American Political Science Review* 94(2): 251-267.

Example

- Robert W. Mickey. 2008. “The Beginning of the End for Authoritarian Rule in America: *Smith v. Allwright* and the Abolition of the White Primary in the Deep South, 1944–1948.” *Studies in American Political Development* 22 (Fall): 143-182.

Class 4, Wednesday, January 28, 2026: Political Theory with Prof. Dean Mathiowetz

- Wolin, Sheldon S. 1969. “Political Theory as a Vocation.” *American Political Science Review* 63(4): 1062–1082.
- Tully, James. 2002. “Political Philosophy as a Critical Activity.” *Political Theory* 30(4): 533-555.
- Brown, Wendy. 2002. “At the Edge.” *Political Theory* 30(4): 556-576.
- Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. 2003. “Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or, You’re So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay Is About You” (Chapter 4) in *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Kalinka, Irina. 2023. “Reading in Dark Times: Toward a Queer Politics of Repair.” *Media Theory* 7(1): 125-146.

Class 5, Wednesday, February 4, 2026: Experimental Logics

- “The Experimental Method,” in Moses, Jonathan W., and Torbjørn L. Knutsen. *Ways of Knowing: Competing Methodologies in Social and Political Research*. 3rd ed., Red Globe Press, 2019.
- Baldwin, Kate. “Why Vote with the Chief? Political Connections and Public Goods Provision in Zambia.” *American Journal of Political Science*, vol. 57, no. 4, Oct. 2013, pp. 794–809.
- Butler, Daniel M., and David E. Broockman. “Do Politicians Racially Discriminate against Constituents? A Field Experiment on State Legislators.” *American Journal of Political Science*, vol. 55, no. 3, July 2011, pp. 463–77.
- Gerber, Alan S., et al. “Social Pressure and Voter Turnout: Evidence from a Large-Scale Field Experiment.” *American Political Science Review*, vol. 102, no. 1, Feb. 2008, pp. 33–48.

- Bhavnani, Rikhil, “Do Electoral Quotas Work after They Are Withdrawn? Evidence from a Natural Experiment in India,” *American Political Science Review* 103:1 (February 2009)
- Dunning, Thad, “Transparency, Replication, and Cumulative Learning: What Experiments Alone Cannot Achieve,” *Annual Review of Political Science* Vol. 19 (2016), S1–S23
- Desposato, Scott, “The Ethical Challenges of Political Science Field Experiments,” in Ana S. Iltis and Douglas MacKay, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Research Ethics* (2020)
- Davis, Justine and Kristin Michelitch, “Introduction to ‘Field Experiments: Thinking Through Identity and Positionality,’” *PS: Political Science and Politics* (October 2022)

Further reading:

- Dunning, Thad. *Natural Experiments in the Social Sciences: A Design-Based Approach*. Cambridge University Press, 2012.
- Gerber, Alan S., and Donald P. Green. *Field Experiments: Design, Analysis, and Interpretation*. W. W. Norton & Company, 2012.
- Redlawsk, David P., et al. “The Affective Tipping Point: Do Motivated Reasoners Ever ‘Get It’?” *Political Psychology*, vol. 31, no. 4, Aug. 2010, pp. 563–93.

Class 6, Wednesday, February 11, 2026: Large-n Observational Logics

- “The Statistical Method,” in Moses, Jonathan W., and Torbjørn L. Knutsen. *Ways of Knowing: Competing Methodologies in Social and Political Research*. 3rd ed., Red Globe Press, 2019.
- Brady, Henry E. “Contributions of Survey Research to Political Science,” *PS: Political Science and Politics*, Vol. 33, No. 1 (Mar., 2000), 47–57
- Seawright, Jason, “Regression-Based Inference: A Case Study in Failed Causal Assessment.” In *Rethinking Social Inquiry: Diverse Tools, Shared Standards*, 2nd edition, Henry E. Brady and David Collier, eds. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield. 2010: 247–271.
- Tanisha M. Fazal, “Is War in Decline?” *Annual Review of Political Science* Vol. 28 (2025), 57–73
- Landry, Pierre F., Xiaobo Lü, and Haiyan Duan. 2018. “Does Performance Matter? Evaluating Political Selection along the Chinese Administrative Ladder.” *Comparative Political Studies*, vol. 51, no. 8: 1074–1105.
- Goertz, Gary, and Stephan Haggard. 2023. “Generalization, Case Studies, and Within-Case Causal Inference: Large-N Qualitative Analysis (LNQA).” In Harold Kincaid and Jeroen Van Bouwel (eds.) *The Oxford Handbook of the Philosophy of Political Science*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. (See also Goertz & Haggard’s in-progress book on LNQA.)
- Grimmer, Justin, Margaret E. Roberts, and Brandon M. Stewart, “Machine Learning for Social Science: An Agnostic Approach,” *Annual Review of Political Science* Vol. 24 (2021), 395–419

Further reading:

- Imbens, Guido W., “Causal Inference in the Social Sciences,” *Annual Review of Statistics and Its Application* Vol. 11 (2024), 123–52

Class 7, Wednesday, February 18, 2026: Small-n and Case Study Logics (1)

- “The Comparative Method,” in Moses, Jonathan W., and Torbjørn L. Knutsen. *Ways of Knowing: Competing Methodologies in Social and Political Research*. 3rd ed., Red Globe Press, 2019.
- Slater, Dan, and Daniel Ziblatt. 2013. “The Enduring Indispensability of the Controlled Comparison.” *Comparative Political Studies* 46 (10): 1301–27.
- Simmons, Erica S., and Nicholas Rush Smith, editors. *Rethinking Comparison: Innovative Methods for Qualitative Political Inquiry*. Cambridge University Press, 2021. The following chapters:
 - 1 Simmons and Smith, “Rethinking Comparison: An Introduction”
 - 2 Seawright, “Beyond Mill: Why Cross-Case Qualitative Causal Inference Is Weak, and Why We Should Still Compare”
 - 3 Schaffer, “Two Ways to Compare”

- 5 Soss, “On Casing a Study Versus Studying a Case”
- 6 Riofrancos, “From Cases to Sites: Studying Global Processes in Comparative Politics”
- Skocpol, Theda, “France, Russia, China: A Structural Analysis of Social Revolutions,” chapter 6 of Skocpol, Theda, *Social Revolutions in the Modern World*. Cambridge University Press, 1994.
- Eaton, Kent, “Electing Governors: Complexities of Institutional Design in Latin America’s Unitary Countries,” *World Development* 196 (December 2025)

Further reading:

- Gerring, John. *Case Study Research: Principles and Practices*. Cambridge University Press, 2006.
- Goertz, Gary. *Multimethod Research, Causal Mechanisms, and Case Studies: An Integrated Approach*. Princeton University Press, 2017.

Class 8, Wednesday, February 25, 2026: Small-n and Case Study Logics (2)

- Van Evera, Stephen. *Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science*. Cornell University Press, 1997. At least read the introduction and chapters 1–2; you may also find the later chapters useful.
- David Collier, Henry E. Brady, and Jason Seawright, “Sources of Leverage in Casual Inference: Toward an Alternative View of Methodology,” in Brady, Henry E., and David Collier. *Rethinking Social Inquiry: Diverse Tools, Shared Standards*. 2nd ed., Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2010.
- Brady, Henry E., “Data-set Observations Versus Causal-Process Observations: The 2000 U.S. Presidential Election” in Brady, Henry E., and David Collier. *Rethinking Social Inquiry: Diverse Tools, Shared Standards*. 2nd ed., Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2010.
- Bennett, Andrew, and Jeffrey T. Checkel, editors. *Process Tracing: From Metaphor to Analytic Tool*. Cambridge University Press, 2014. The following chapters:
 - 1 Bennett and Checkel, “Process Tracing: From Philosophical Roots to Best Practices”
 - 2 Jacobs, “Process Tracing the Effects of Ideas”
 - 3 Checkel, “Mechanisms, Process, and the Study of International Relations”
 - 5 Waldner, “What Makes Process Tracing Good?”
 - 6 Evangelista, “Explaining the Cold War’s End: Process Tracing All the Way Down?”

Further reading:

- Mahoney, James. 2012. “The Logic of Process-Tracing Tests in the Social Sciences.” *Sociological Methods & Research* 41 (4): 570–97
- Beach, Derek, and Rasmus Brun Pedersen. *Process-Tracing Methods: Foundations and Guidelines*. University of Michigan Press, 2019.
- Clarke, Christopher, “Process Tracing: Defining the Undefinable?” and Dowding, Keith, “Process Tracing: Causation and Levels of Analysis” in Harold Kincaid and Jeroen Van Bouwel (eds.) *The Oxford Handbook of the Philosophy of Political Science* (2023)

Class 9, Wednesday, March 4, 2026: Ethnography and Participant Observation

- Schatz, Edward, ed. *Political Ethnography: What Immersion Contributes to the Study of Power*. University of Chicago Press, 2009. The following chapters:
 - Schatz, “Introduction”
 - Yanow, “Dear Author, Dear Reader: The Third Hermeneutic in Writing and Reviewing Ethnography”
- Fenno, Richard F., Jr. “U.S. House Members in Their Constituencies: An Exploration.” *American Political Science Review*, vol. 71, no. 3, Sept. 1977, 883–917
- Fujii, Lee Ann. *Killing Neighbors: Webs of Violence in Rwanda*. Cornell University Press, 2009. Introduction and chapters 3–5
- Cramer, Katherine J. *The Politics of Resentment: Rural Consciousness in Wisconsin and the Rise of Scott Walker*. University of Chicago Press, 2016. At least chapters 1–5

Further reading:

- “Symposium: Ethnography and Participant Observation: Political Science Research in this ‘Late Methodological Moment’,” *PS: Political Science & Politics* 50:1 (January 2017)
- Fenno, Richard F., Jr. *Home Style: House Members in Their Districts*. Little, Brown, 1978.
- Scott, James C. *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*. Yale University Press, 1985.
- Auyero, Javier. *Poor People’s Politics: Peronist Survival Networks and the Legacy of Evita*. Duke University Press, 2001.

Class 10, Wednesday, March 11, 2026: Game Theoretic and Bayesian Logics

Note: These are two quite different logics. If there were more weeks in the quarter we might address them separately.

- Herfeld, Catherine, and Johannes Marx, “Rational Choice Explanations in Political Science,” in Harold Kincaid and Jeroen Van Bouwel (eds.) *The Oxford Handbook of the Philosophy of Political Science* (2023)
- Shepsle, Kenneth A. and Barry R. Weingast, “The Institutional Foundations of Committee Power,” *American Political Science Review*, March 1987, Vol. 81, No. 1, 85–104
- Gailmard, Sean, “Game Theory and the Study of American Political Development,” *Public Choice*, December 2020, Vol. 185, No. 3/4, 335–357
- Humphreys, Macartan, and Alan M. Jacobs. *Integrated Inferences: Causal Models for Qualitative and Mixed-Method Research*. Cambridge University Press, 2023. Read at least chapters 1–3, 5, and 8.

Further reading:

- Fairfield, Tasha, and Andrew E. Charman. *Social Inquiry and Bayesian Inference: Rethinking Qualitative Research*. Cambridge University Press, 2022.