

Arbeitsbereich
Vergleichende Regierungslehre und
Politisches System Deutschlands

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Date: Oct 16, 2018

Theory building in comparative politics

Semester: Winter term 2018/2019

Date: Tuesday 10:00 – 12:00

Room: Building 3109, Room 405

Module: Vertiefungsmodul Politische Systeme und Regierungslehre (MV)

Writing is a vital element of the research process. Whether we like it or not, we can come up with the most clever research designs – if we do not frame our ideas with a convincing and engaging story, our contribution will have a hard time finding an audience. Worse even, lacking a solid theoretical frame we might not be able to publish our research findings in the first place! Against this backdrop, this course aims to equip participants with some tricks of the trade so they do not have to learn good writing habits the hard way. The goal of the course is twofold. First, the course provides some practical guidelines on how to structure a theoretical argument for a research paper. While we will learn how to construct a theory in comparative politics, good practices in theory building transcend disciplinary borders. In addition to the issue of how to structure an argument, the course will also cover the more basic question of how to write and edit a research paper. While each writer has their own specific approach, there are some good practices that should not have to be learned by trial and error. The overarching goal of the course is to help participants write better research papers in comparative politics, to turn their student projects into publishable papers, and – not least – to guide students on their way to writing their Master thesis.

Brief overview

Session	Date	Topic
1	October 23, 2018	Introduction
2	October 30, 2018	Choosing topics and research questions
3	November 6, 2018	Linking theory and political research
4	November 13, 2018	Concept specification I
5	November 20, 2018	Concept specification II
6	November 27, 2018	Relating concepts and observations: Operationalization
7	December 4, 2018	Foundational theories in comparative politics
8	December 11, 2018	Contemporary theories in comparative politics: The case of the new institutionalism(s)
9	December 18, 2018	Standing on the shoulders of giants: Replications in political research
10	January 8, 2019	Selling your idea: Some guidelines on academic writing I
11	January 15, 2019	Selling your idea: Some guidelines on academic writing II
12	January 22, 2019	Selling your idea: Some guidelines on academic writing III
13	January 29, 2019	Final discussion/Presentation of term papers

Office hours

- My office hours are Wednesday 15:00 – 16:00. Please make an appointment via e-mail at least one week before coming to my office hours and briefly describe the purpose of your visit.

Course requirements

Studienleistung

- **Weekly questions** It is imperative that you carefully work through the basic reading assignments. Please note that the reading workload in this course might be a little higher than in your other classes. Each participant is required to draft three questions for the basic readings and upload them to StudIP no later than 72 hours before the course. Each text should be covered by at least one question. Questions might explore theoretical, conceptual, or methodological aspects of the texts. Please do not draft “final exam” questions such as “What is the definition of XYZ?”; “What are the three components of XYZ?”.
- **Short presentation** To ensure that all participants have a shared understanding of the basic readings, a small group of students will prepare a short presentation covering the main ideas of the texts each week. The presentations should last no longer than ten to fifteen minutes. Please also draft some discussion questions on a separate slide. Please send your slides to the instructor via e-mail no later than 72 hours before the course. The presentations are assigned in the first week of the course.

Prüfungsleistung

For a *Prüfungsleistung*, you need to do the following in addition to the weekly questions and the short presentation:

- **Term paper** A term paper is written on a topic of your choice in the field of comparative politics. The paper will primarily be graded with regards to the issues that are covered in the course, i.e. research question, soundness of theory, hypotheses, concept specification, operationalization, and link between theory and empirics. Please come to my office hours to discuss your paper. Be sure to send me a short draft of your paper at least one week prior to your appointment. The paper should have a length of about 8,000 words. Be sure to observe the following formatting guidelines: Arial with font size 12, 2.5 cm margins, line spacing 1.5. Please hand in your paper as a PDF via e-mail and as a printed version into the postbox of the institute. The paper is due on **February 28, 2019**.

Extended overview

(1) *Introduction (October 23, 2018)*

(2) *Choosing topics and research questions (October 30, 2018)*

- Matthias Lehnert, Bernhard Miller, and Arndt Wonka. Increasing the relevance of research questions: Considerations on theoretical and social relevance in political science. In Thomas Gschwend and Frank Schimmelfennig, editors, *Research Design in Political Science: How to Practice What They Preach*, pages 62–79. Palgrave Macmillan, Houndmills, 2007
- Dimiter Toshkov. *Research Design in Political Science*. Palgrave, London, 2016, ch. 2 [Types of research and research questions]

(3) *Linking theory and political research (November 6, 2018)*

- Dimiter Toshkov. *Research Design in Political Science*. Palgrave, London, 2016, ch. 3 & 6 [Theory in the research process; Explanation and causality]

(4) *Concept specification I (November 13, 2018)*

- Arndt Wonka. Concept specification in political science research. In Thomas Gschwend and Frank Schimmelfennig, editors, *Research Design in Political Science: How to Practice What They Preach*, pages 41–61. Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2007
- Giovanni Sartori. Concept misformation in comparative politics. *American Political Science Review*, 64(4):1033–53, 1970

(5) *Concept specification II (November 20, 2018)*

- Gary Goertz. *Social Science Concepts: A User's Guide*. Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2005, ch. 2 & 3 [Structuring and theorizing concepts; Concept intension and extension]

(6) *Relating concepts and observations: Operationalization (November 27, 2018)*

- Bernhard Miller. Making measures capture concepts: Tools for securing correspondence between theoretical ideas and observations. In Thomas Gschwend and Frank Schimmelfennig, editors, *Research Design in Political Science: How to Practice What They Preach*, pages 83–102. Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2007
- Robert Adcock and David Collier. Measurement validity: A shared standard for qualitative and quantitative research. *American Political Science Review*, 95(3): 529–46, 2001

(7) *Foundational theories in comparative politics (December 4, 2018)*

- B. Guy Peters. *Strategies for Comparative Research in Political Science: Theory and Methods*. Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2013, ch. 5 [The role of theory in comparative politics]

- Detlef Jahn. *Einführung in die vergleichende Politikwissenschaft*. Springer VS, Wiesbaden, 2013, ch. 10 [Theorien der Gegenwart]¹

(8) *Contemporary theories in comparative politics: The case of the new institutionalism(s)* (December 11, 2018)

- Peter A. Hall and Rosemary C. R. Taylor. Political science and the three new institutionalisms. *Political Studies*, 44(5):936–57, 1996
- Barbara Geddes. *Paradigms and Sand Castles: Theory Building and Research Design in Comparative Politics*. University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, 2003, ch. 5 [How the approach you choose affects the answers you get: Rational choice and its uses in comparative politics]

(9) *Standing on the shoulders of giants: Replications in political research* (December 18, 2018)

- Gary King. Publication, publication. *Political Science and Politics*, 39(1):119–25, 2006
- Joshua Schimel. *Writing Science: How to Write Papers that Get Cited and Proposals that Get Funded*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2012, ch. 1–4

(10) *Selling your idea: Some guidelines on academic writing I* (January 8, 2019)

- Joshua Schimel. *Writing Science: How to Write Papers that Get Cited and Proposals that Get Funded*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2012, ch. 5–10

(11) *Selling your idea: Some guidelines on academic writing II* (January 15, 2019)

- Joshua Schimel. *Writing Science: How to Write Papers that Get Cited and Proposals that Get Funded*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2012, ch. 11-15

(12) *Selling your idea: Some guidelines on academic writing III* (January 22, 2019)

- Joshua Schimel. *Writing Science: How to Write Papers that Get Cited and Proposals that Get Funded*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2012, ch. 16–18 & 21

(13) *Final discussion/Presentation of term papers* (January 29, 2019)

¹This chapter provides a very nice overview of basic schools of thought in comparative politics. Unfortunately, I have yet to find a good comparable text in English. Maybe I have to write one myself some day. For now, non-German speakers are free to skip this text.