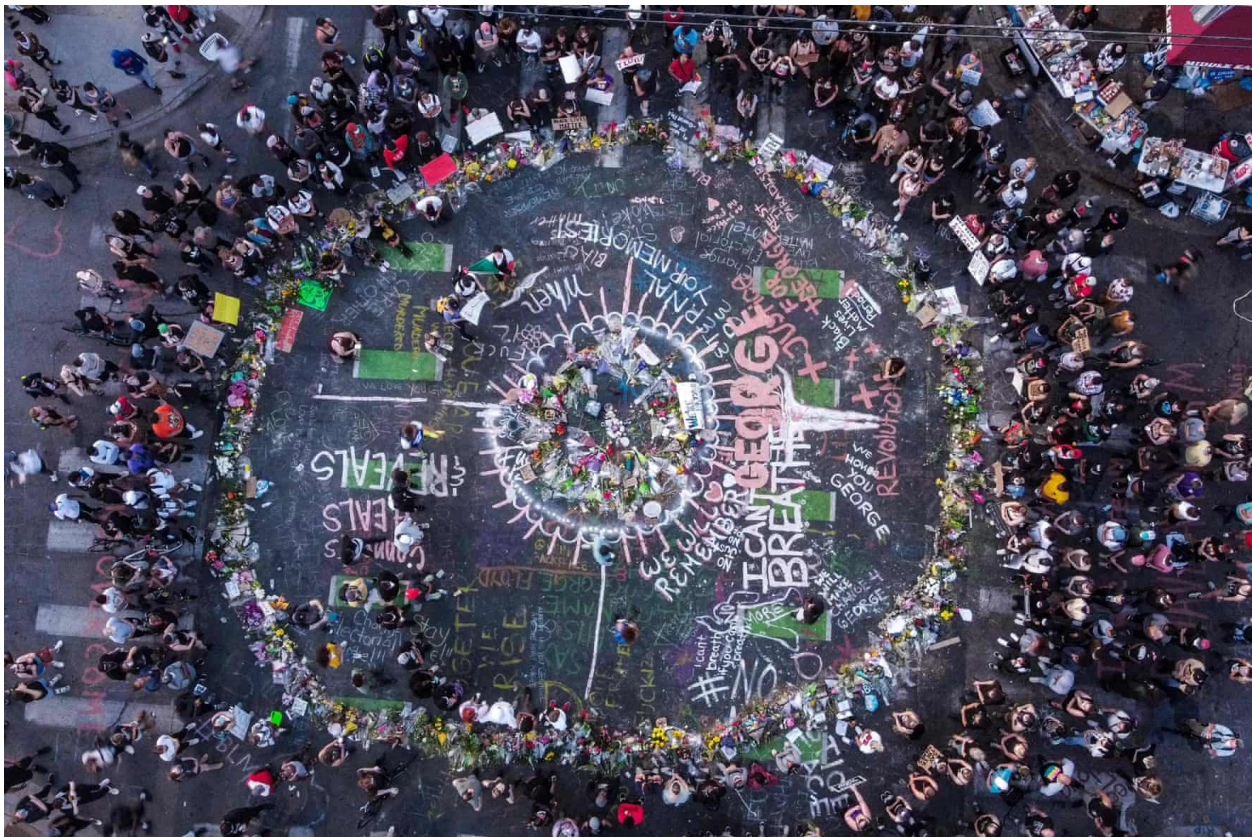


# Methods of Political Research

## POSC 230

Professor: Eric Mosinger  
Office: Zoom Room  
Student Hours: Any time via Slack chat  
Email: [emosinger@carleton.edu](mailto:emosinger@carleton.edu)

Winter 2021  
Monday, Wednesday, & Friday  
Class Time: MW 11:30am / F 11:10am  
Zoom link: posted on Moodle



Protesters gathered near the makeshift memorial in honor of George Floyd in Minneapolis, marking one week since his killing by police, June 2, 2020. Photo credit: Chandan Khanna/AFP/Getty Images.

## 1 Course Summary

**Welcome to Methods of Political Research!** How can we create reliable knowledge about politics? Topics in political science are disparate. They range from the study of nuclear deterrence, great power conflict, and international political economy to domestic institutions, social movements and protest, Congressional behavior, and ethnic identity. Yet a common set of tools helps political scientists understand why politics unfolds as

it does across different domains. This course introduces students to the qualitative and quantitative methodologies that political scientists use to test our theories about the world.

We will also read, analyze, and critique recent research in political science that employs methods we have learned. This research has a common theme: Black Lives Matter. We will explore how political scientists have tried to answer questions like: Why are Black men and women killed at higher rates by police than White men and women? How should we measure racism? What explains police militarization in the United States? When, where, and why do BLM protests occur? When are Black individuals more likely to support BLM protests? When do BLM protests lead to progressive legislation? How do we conduct our research ethically, in ways that not only *protect* our research subjects from harm but also *contribute* to our research subjects' self-defined goals?

## 2 Learning Objectives

By the end of the course, you will be able to:

- Ask causal questions about politics.
- Define and operationalize the key concepts underpinning political science research, and craft a coherent research design.
- Learn to use the basic tools of political science investigation: process tracing, interviews, surveys, ethnography, descriptive statistics, and linear and logistic regression.
- Consider at all times the ethical implications of your research projects.
- Develop a thorough, effective research design for a year-length comps project, comment intelligently on others' work, and revise your own work based on feedback.

## 3 Student Evaluation

Course Assessment		Grading Scale			
Assignment	% of Total	Grade	Range	Grade	Range
1) Participation and Groupwork	25%	A	93–100	C	73–76.9
2) Short Assignment (6 total)	6 × 5%	A-	90–92.9	C-	70–72.9
3) Comps Proposal Presentation	10%	B+	87–89.9	D+	67–69.9
4) Comps Research Proposal	35%	B	83–86.9	D	63–66.9
		B-	80–82.9	D-	60–62.9
		C+	77–79.9	F	Below 60

## 4 Readings and Recommended Resources

You do not have to buy any books for this class. However, there is one recommended resource:

- Paul M Kellstedt and Guy D Whitten, *The Fundamentals of Political Science Research*, 3rd Edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

While there are no assigned readings from the above textbook, it can serve as a useful reference for you if a) you're struggling to make sense of some of the lecture material, or b) for whatever reason you have to miss one of the lectures. All assigned readings will be posted on the class Moodle page as a PDF or a link. Make sure to read each article while taking careful notes filled with brilliant insights!

## 5 Expectations

I'm sad that I won't get to meet most of you in person this winter, but I've been working hard to design a course that gives you the same hands-on, collaborative experience you'd have in a face-to face class. From me you can expect a great deal of understanding and flexibility: I know that each of you will be facing different challenges in this strange, alternate reality version of college. This will be a fraught trimester in which human concerns, rather than academic concerns, must always be our first priority.

My most important expectation of you is simple: be respectful of everyone in the class, and of each other's views. In an environment as diverse as Carleton's, everyone has a different perspective to offer, to teach, and to learn. Engage with the course fully and listen to your fellow students. Make this a class where everyone feels welcome to talk.

I know that political science methods can seem rather intimidating or perhaps even unappealing to students. You might be taking this because it's a required course for the major and just plan to slog through it. **My goal this term is to prove to you that methods are actually awesome!** In fact, when political scientists get together, we rarely discuss politics (we mostly agree about politics), but we get into heated, passionate arguments about methodology. Again, I recognize that this might make both methods *and* political scientists seem unappealing, but I'll try to change your mind.

Do the readings. They're rarely from a textbook, because even the most basic social science methods are constantly changing. Instead, I'm assigning recent, methodologically interesting work in political science on Black Lives Matter. Read with an eye towards these articles' methodological strategies – the main topic of our classroom conversations.

Though this class will be taught online, it has the same attendance requirements as an in-person class. That is, please do attend, and join in the Zoom call on time (barring the inevitable technical difficulties, naturally). Regular attendance will make up a large part of

your participation grade for the course. That said, due to the global pandemic and all that, I am giving you each *two no-questions-asked, no-need-to-email-the-prof absences* to use over the course of the trimester. If you need to take a third or fifth or twelfth absence, **you must email me at least 30 minutes before class.**

## 6 Evaluation

**Format and Required Citation Style:** Submit written work online through our Moodle (you will get my feedback through the Moodle as well) and use the [APSA style guide](#) to format citations and bibliography. I accept papers written in **English or Spanish.**

**On-Time Work Policy:** My expectation is that you will complete your work by deadlines listed on this syllabus. When sufficiently compelling circumstances arise, I will grant students an extension without imposing a grade penalty. I will only grant extensions that students request *prior* to the original deadline. Students should tell me when they expect to complete their work and *communicate* with me about its progress.

### Summary of Assignments

1. **Class Participation and Groupwork:** This is a **synchronous** class taught over Zoom. On some occasions I will lecture, but more often, we will engage in class and group discussions in which students are expected to share their thoughts, ideas, and questions with the class. We also will engage in a variety of groupwork exercises based on the readings. Don't worry! There will be lots of opportunities to be engaged with the class, either during class sessions, on the class Slack, or in my Student Drop-In hours. If you contribute to discussions in any one of these fora at least a couple of times a week, you're in good shape. 25% of course grade.
2. Six Short Assignments (always due Thursday evening at 6pm). Each assignment is worth 5% of the course grade and will be graded on a simple 0–5 scale.
  - **Week 2: Research Question and Hypothesis**
  - **Week 3: Literature Review**
  - **Week 5: Within-Case Process Tracing**
  - **Week 6: Graphing and Descriptive Statistics**
  - **Week 8: Correlation and Regression**
  - **Week 9: Regression Analysis Write-Up**
3. **Comps Proposal Presentation:** In the Comps Proposal Presentation, you will prepare a short 5 minute presentation on your comps research design (see following assignment). After your presentation, we will have a short period for questions of around 2–3 minutes. The presentations will take place in two simultaneous breakout

rooms on March 8 and March 10: I will moderate one and Annette will moderate the other. 10% of course grade.

4. **Comps Research Proposal:** Your main goal in this course will be to develop a 15–20 page research design proposal intended to guide you through a year-long comps project. Your goal in this proposal is to show why your proposed research is interesting, what it will contribute that we don't already know, and most importantly, how you will successfully carry out the research. In order to do this, you will need to systematically discuss your main and alternative hypotheses, how you define and intend to measure your key concepts, your principal sources of data, and the methods you plan to use to analyze these data. Due at 6pm on March 15. 35% of course grade.

## 7 Academic Integrity

Obviously, don't cheat, lie, steal, plagiarize, or otherwise behave dishonorably in this class or throughout life. If you are unsure of what might constitute plagiarism, *ask me!* When in doubt, cite your sources!

## 8 Resources for R Programming

We will learn to use the statistical programming language R in this course. We will primarily use **RStudio Cloud**, a cloud-based platform, to share and run code. I'll provide the links to our course drive when we begin our Quantitative module. You will find a handy guide to RStudio Cloud here: <https://rstudio.cloud/learn/guide>.

NOTE: For students who may have Internet issues you may opt out of using RStudio Cloud and instead use a local installation of R and R Studio. In this case I would advise you to do your work off line and then upload things like working scripts to your Cloud space when you have a connection). Please chat about this with me beforehand! Installing R and RStudio on a personal machine is a two step process. First Get R, then add R Studio.

**To install R on your own machine:** <http://www.r-project.org/>. Follow the download link. Choose a download site and the appropriate package for your OS (Windows, Mac, Linux)

**Installing RStudio:** <http://www.rstudio.com/>. Follow the links to the free open-source desktop download. Its generally easiest to use the installer for your OS.

**For help with doing data analysis and visualization via R:** I find *Quantitative Politics with R* (<http://qpplr.com/index.html>) to be one of the best short online references for budding political scientists. It covers almost all of the techniques that we will learn in class, and is clearly written with many examples. And if this fails, remember that even the great Daron Acemoglu turns to [Google](#) for help when his code breaks.

## 9 Other Resources for Students

### Writing Help

The Carleton Writing Center, located on the 4th floor of the library (also known as “4th Libe”), has peer tutors available for assisting students in all stages of their writing. You may drop in for help or [schedule an appointment](#).

### Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

Carleton College is committed to providing equitable access to learning opportunities for all students. The Disability Services office (Henry House, 107 Union Street) is the campus office that collaborates with students who have disabilities to provide and/or arrange reasonable accommodations. If you have, or think you may have, a disability (e.g., mental health, attentional, learning, autism spectrum disorders, chronic health, traumatic brain injury and concussions, vision, hearing, mobility, or speech impairments), please contact [disability@carleton.edu](mailto:disability@carleton.edu) or call Sam Thayer ('10), Accessibility Specialist (x4464) or Chris Dallager, Director of Disability Services (x5250) to arrange a confidential discussion regarding equitable access and reasonable accommodations.

### Students Experiencing Challenge or Crisis

Carleton College is fortunate to have a full complement of professionally trained staff to support students that are experiencing a challenge or crisis in their lives. When a personal challenge or crisis occurs, it often has an academic impact and may require flexibility around course responsibilities. In such situations, talking to a trusted professor can also be helpful. It can be difficult to approach a faculty member about personal issues, but if I can be of help, please don't hesitate to come and talk.

## 10 Schedule of Classes and Assignments

### MODULE 1

#### SO YOU WANT TO LEARN SOMETHING ABOUT POLITICS?

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#### Week 1, 1/4 - 1/8

**Monday:** Introduction to the Course

No reading.

**Wednesday:** Asking Good Questions

Shea Streeeter, "Lethal Force in Black and White: Assessing Racial Disparities in the Circumstances of Police Killings," *The Journal of Politics* 81, no. 3 (2019): 1124–1132.

**Friday:** Identifying Causal Claims

No reading.

**Week 2, 1/11 - 1/15**

**Monday:** Assessing Causality + Types of Research Designs

Michael Tesler, "Republicans And Democrats Agree On The Protests But Not Why People Are Protesting," *FiveThirtyEight*, <https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/republicans-and-democrats-increasingly-agree-on-the-protests-but-not-why-people-are-protesting/>.

**Wednesday:** Operationalizing Concepts

Navin A. Bapat, "America's New Civil War? – Political Violence at a Glance," 2016, <http://politicalviolenceataglance.org/2016/07/11/americas-new-civil-war/>.

Christopher D. DeSante and Candis Watts Smith, "Fear, Institutionalized Racism, and Empathy: The Underlying Dimensions of Whites' Racial Attitudes," *PS: Political Science & Politics* 53, no. 4 (2020): 639–645.

**Short Assignment:** Research Question and Hypothesis due Thursday at 6pm.

**Friday:** Academic Sources and Literature Review

No reading.

**MODULE 2**  
**QUALITATIVE METHODS**

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**Week 3, 1/18 - 1/22**

**Monday:** Case selection

Timothy C. Lim, *Doing Comparative Politics: An Introduction to Approaches and Issues* (Boulder, Colo: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2006), Chapter 2.

*Optional:* John Gerring, *Case Study Research Principles and Practices*. (Leiden: Cambridge University Press, 2006), Chapter 5, especially pp. 89–90.

**Wednesday:** Process-tracing

Jacob I. Ricks and Amy H. Liu, “Process-Tracing Research Designs: A Practical Guide,” *PS: Political Science & Politics* 51, no. 4 (2018): 842–846.

Derek Beach and Rasmus Brun Pedersen, *Process-Tracing Methods: Foundations and Guidelines* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2016), pp.107–119.

**Short Assignment:** Literature Review due Thursday at 6pm.

**Friday:** Process-tracing with Historical Data

Julian Go, “The Imperial Origins of American Policing: Militarization and Imperial Feedback in the Early 20th Century,” *American Journal of Sociology* 125, no. 5 (2020): pp. 1193–1221, 1239–1241, and 1246–1247.

*Optional:* [Robert Karl's Twitter thread and videos on archival methods](#)

**Week 4, 1/25 - 1/29**

**Monday:** Interviewing

Layna Mosley, ed., *Interview Research in Political Science* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2013), Chapters 1, 10, and Appendix.

**Wednesday:** Research Ethics

April L. Few, Dionne P. Stephens, and Marlo Rouse-Arnett, “Sister-to-Sister Talk: Transcending Boundaries and Challenges in Qualitative Research With Black Women\*,” *Family Relations* 52, no. 3 (2003): 205–215.

**Friday:** Survey Experiments

Tabitha Bonilla and Alvin B. Tillery, “Which Identity Frames Boost Support for and Mobilization in the #BlackLivesMatter Movement? An Experimental Test,” *American Political Science Review* 114, no. 4 (2020): 947–962.



**MODULE 3**  
**QUANTITATIVE METHODS**

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**Week 5, 2/1 - 2/5****Monday:** Data and Data Sets

Erica Chenoweth and Jeremy Pressman, "This Summer's Black Lives Matter Protesters Were Overwhelmingly Peaceful, Our Research Finds," *Washington Post*, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2020/10/16/this-summers-black-lives-matter-protesters-were-overwhelming-peaceful-our-research-finds/>.

Explore the Crowd Counting Consortium's data sets:

<https://sites.google.com/view/crowdcountingconsortium/home>

**Wednesday:** Descriptive Inference

Lauren D. Davenport, "Beyond Black and White: Biracial Attitudes in Contemporary U.S. Politics," *American Political Science Review* 110, no. 1 (2016): 52–67.

**Short Assignment:** Within-Case Process Tracing due Thursday at 6pm.

**Friday:** The Normal Distribution

No reading.

**Week 6, 2/8 - 2/12**

**Monday: Midterm Break.**

**Wednesday:** Comparisons and Graphing

No reading.

**Short Assignment:** Graphing and Descriptive Statistics due Thursday at 6pm.

**Friday:** From Correlation to Causation. . .

Maneesh Arora, Davin L. Phoenix, and Archie Delshad, "Framing Police and Protesters: Assessing Volume and Framing of News Coverage Post-Ferguson, and Corresponding Impacts on Legislative Activity," *Politics, Groups, and Identities* 7, no. 1 (2019): 151–164.

**Week 7, 2/15 - 2/19**

**Monday:** Linear Regression

No reading.

**Wednesday:** Linear Regression

Tyler T. Reny and Benjamin J. Newman, "Protecting the Right to Discriminate: The Second Great Migration and Racial Threat in the American West," *American Political Science Review* 112, no. 4 (2018): 1104–1110.

**Friday:** Linear Regression

No reading.

**Week 8, 2/22 - 2/26**

**Monday:** Multiple Regression

No reading.

**Wednesday:** Multiple Regression

Tyson D. King-Meadows, "Harbingers of Unrest in Baltimore: Racial and Spatial Cleavages in Satisfaction with Quality of Life before the 2015 Uprising," *Politics, Groups, and Identities* 8, no. 5 (2020): 845–866.

**Short Assignment:** Correlation and Regression due Thursday at 6pm.

**Friday:** Multiple Regression

No reading.

**Week 9, 3/1 - 3/5****Monday:** Regression Diagnostics

No reading.

**Wednesday:** Regression Diagnostics

No reading.

**Short Assignment:** Regression Analysis Write-Up due Thursday at 6pm.**Friday:** Logistic RegressionAndrea Benjamin et al., "Set in Stone? Predicting Confederate Monument Removal," *PS: Political Science & Politics* 53, no. 2 (2020): 237–242.**Week 10, 3/8 - 3/12****Monday:** Student Presentations

No reading.

**Wednesday:** Student Presentations

No reading.

**Assignment:** Comps Research Proposal due at 6pm on March 15.