

Department of Government 2013

Theory and Explanation in Political Science

Roni Lehrer

INTRODUCTION

Module Description

This module prepares you for and guides you in writing your MA/MSc dissertation. It covers the philosophical foundations of science (Philosophy of Science), their real world applications (Research Design) and the dominant idiom of explanation in Political Science (Rational Choice Theory). The first part deals with questions like: What is science? What is Social Science? What exactly is a theory? How do Hypotheses relate to theories? Does science have to make predictions about the future?.

The part on research design clarifies how the ideals of the philosophy of science can be applied in the 'real world'. Questions include for instance: How do I find an interesting research question? How do I come up with a theory that answers my question? Comparison should be made amongst similar cases - how do I find similar cases? How do I write a scientific dissertation?

The third part covers Rational Choice Theory in detail and provides a toolbox of theories and games that are suited to explain a huge variety of political phenomena. They will come very handy when you have to find a neat explanation in your dissertation.

In general, the module is structured to help you progress in writing your MA/MSc dissertation. In the second half of the year and once you had to submit your research topic to the Department, students will give short presentations in class about their research.

Module Aims

The aim of the module is to:

Provide students with an **understanding** of the basic issues in the philosophy of science, research design and rational choice theory. Thereby, students will learn how to write a scientific dissertation.

Module Objectives

By the end of the module the students should be able to

- discuss basic issues in the philosophy of science,
- formulate research questions,
- develop a scientific theory and derive hypotheses from it,
- understand and apply basic rational choice theory to explain political phenomena.

Module Organisation and Structure

Teaching on the module will be in form of classes.

The weekly classes will consist of 110 minute units.

In **preparation** you will be expected to have read the set reading for that week (see below).

Module Administration

The module administrator is Miss Alex West. Her office is open 10:00-13:00 and 14:00-16:00, Monday to Friday. She can answer general queries about your course or the Department. You should refer any other questions you have to the instructors of the module.

Assessment

Assessment is split into three parts: At two points in the module (Weeks 10 and 24), you can decide whether to submit an essay discussing questions dealing with topics covered in class, a draft of a section of your dissertation, or a research proposal.

For the essays, individual questions are provided for the different essays (see end of syllabus) and you have to choose one of the corresponding questions for each essay.

Alternatively, you can submit drafts of your dissertation's theory (week 10) and research design (week 24).

Third, you can submit a research proposal for a PhD project (or the like).

Even if you have submitted an essay in week 10, you can still submit a research design chapter in week 24.

Each of the submission must not be longer than 3000 words.

All submissions should be submitted to FASer before 09.45 on the day of the lecture

Students are able to access the online submission via the 'myEssex Portal' or

<https://www.essex.ac.uk/e-learning/tools/faser/students>

In either case, you have to take the final exam. The questions in this examination will be based upon all of the classes and reading material for the year. The exam lasts 3 hours and you will be expected to answer 3 questions from a choice of 5.

The first assessment counts 20%, the second assessment 30%, and the exam 50% towards the final mark.

Trouble Shooting

If you have problems with any part of the module, you should consult the module instructor via email (rdlehr@essex.ac.uk) or during office hours (Tue 3-4pm, room: 5A.214).

If you encounter more general problems—keeping up with the study schedule, or, for example, with accommodation—you should consult your Adviser. If you cannot remember the name of your Adviser, get in touch with Alex West who keeps a central register. If all else fails, contact the Department's Senior Adviser, Dr Theresa Crowley (Room 5.306; tel 3486; e-mail crowtx@essex.ac.uk)

MODULE READING

Since we do not cover a single classical topic (but three), there is no book that exactly matches the module's content. I recommend that you have a look at the list of assigned texts for each session. Most of the time, there are multiple books or articles that cover roughly the same content and it does not really matter which text you read. Therefore (and because some of the books are hard to get hold of), I usually list multiple but rather similar texts for each session.

I do *not* expect that you read *all* the texts before class. However, I strongly recommend that you look at some of them after class to make sure that you understood the concepts and arguments correctly.

For class discussions, I assign additional texts (highlighted with an '*'). These texts are mandatory reading and you should have read them before class. Please note that I will add texts to the reading list during the module.

MODULE OUTLINE

Week 2: Introduction; What is Science?; What is Social Science?

Okasha, Samir. 2002. *Philosophy of Science. A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Chapter 1.

Thagard, Paul R. 1978. "Why Astrology is a Pseudoscience". In Martin Curd, J.A. Cover, and Christopher Pincock. 2013. *Philosophy of science. The central issues*. Second Edition. New York: W.W. Norton.

R. E. Goodin and H. D. Klingemann, 'Political Science the Discipline' in R. E. Goodin and H.D. Klingemann (eds.) *The New Handbook of Political Science*.

*Dogan, Mattei. "Political Science and the Other Social Sciences" in R. E. Goodin and H.D. Klingemann (eds.) *The New Handbook of Political Science*.

Week 3: Explanation; Deduction; Induction; Causality; Theory

Hempel, Carl G. "Two Basic Types of Scientific Explanation". In Martin Curd, J.A. Cover, and Christopher Pincock. 2013. *Philosophy of science. The central issues*. Second Edition. New York: W.W. Norton.

Okasha, Samir. 2002. *Philosophy of Science. A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Chapters 2 and 3.

Elster, Jon. *Explaining Social Behavior: More Nuts and Bolts for the Social Sciences*. Chapter 1.

Coleman, James. 1990. *Foundations of Social Theory*. Harvard University Press. Chapter on Meta-Theory.

*Philip A. Schrodtt. Seven Deadly Sins of Contemporary Quantitative Political Analysis. Section about Predictions.

*Stevens Jacqueline. Political Scientists Are Lousy Forecasters. Accessible at:

http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/24/opinion/sunday/political-scientists-are-lousy-forecasters.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0

Week 4: Positivism; Falsification; Empiricism; Theories and Hypotheses

Okasha, Samir. 2002. *Philosophy of Science. A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Chapter 4.

Popper, Karl. 1963. *Science: Conjectures and Refutation*. In CCP, pages 3—10.

Benton, Ted and Ian Craib. 2011. *Philosophy of Social Science. The philosophical Foundations of social thought*. 2nd edition. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Friedman, Milton. 1966. "The Methodology of Positive Economics" In *Essays In Positive Economics*. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press.

*Lehrer, David. 2005. "What is Spurious? An Inquiry Across Methods." ECPR: Budapest.

Week 5: Bayesianism; Mechanisms

Salmon, Wesley. 1990. *Rationality and Objectivity in Science*. In CCP, pages 518-549.

Elster, Jon. *Explaining Social Behavior: More Nuts and Bolts for the Social Sciences*. Chapter 2.

*Feyerabend, Paul. 2010. *Against Method*. Fourth Edition. London: Verso. Introduction, Chapters 1-4, and Chapter 15.

Week 6: Research Programmes; Scientific Revolutions; Summary Philosophy of Science

Kuhn, Thomas. 1996. *The Nature and Necessity of Scientific Revolutions*. In: CCP, pages 79-93.

Lakatos, Imre. 1973. *Science and Pseudoscience*. In: CCP, pages 20—36.

*List, Christian and Kai Spiekermann. Forthcoming. "Methodological Individualism and Holism in Political Science: A Reconciliation" *American Political Science Review*.

Week 7: Research Design: Finding Research Questions; Finding a Theory; Observing Causality; Selection Bias

Geddes, Barbara. 2003. *Paradigms and Sand Castles. Theory Building and Research Design in Comparative Politics*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press. Chapters 2 and 3.

*King, Gary, Robert O. Keohane and, Sidney Verba. 1994. *Designing Social Inquiry. Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. Chapter 1.

Achen, Christopher. 1986. *The Statistical Analysis of Quasi-Experiments*. Berkeley: University of California Press. Chapters 1 and 4.

Jaccard, James and Jacob Jacoby. 2010. *Theory Construction and Model-Building Skills. A Practical Guide for Social Scientists*. New York: The Guilford Press.

Michelitch, Kristin. 2010. "Do Elections Manipulate Patterns of Inter-ethnic or Inter-partisan Discrimination? A Field Experiment on Price Bargaining in Africa". Available at: http://cess.nyu.edu/conferences/2-2010/papers/QP_100117.pdf

Hainmueller, Jens, and Dominik Hangartner. "Who Gets a Swiss Passport? A Natural Experiment in Immigrant Discrimination". *American Political Science Review* 107(01): 159–187.

Week 8: Research Design; Writing a Research Paper

*Falk, Armin and Nora Szech. 2013. "Morals and Markets" *Science* 10: 707-711.

And one of these:

(*)Stimson, James. "Professional Writing in Political Science: A Highly opinionated Essay" http://www.unc.edu/~jstimson/Working_Papers_files/Writing.pdf

(*)Przeworski, Adam and Frank Salomon. 1995. "The Art of Writing Proposals". SSRC.

(*)University of Essex. "How to improve your academic writing". Available at https://www.essex.ac.uk/myskills/How_to_improve_your_academic_writing.pdf.

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Week 9: Basics of Rational Choice Theory

*Laver, Michael. 1997. *Private Desires, Political Action. An Invitation to the Politics of Rational Choice*. London: Sage. Chapters: 1 and 2.

Downs, Anthony. 1957. *An Economic Theory of Democracy*. New York: Harper & Row. Chapters: 1 and 2.

Week 10: Game Theory

J. Morrow. *Game Theory for Political Scientists*, chpt. 1, 2, 3, 4.

J. W. Schiemann, "Meeting Halfway Between Rochester and Frankfurt: Generative salience, Focal Points, and Strategic Interaction", *American Journal of Political Science* 44 (2000), 1-16.

Muthoo, Abhinay. 2000. "A non-technical introduction to bargaining theory". *WORLD ECONOMICS-HENLEY ON THAMES*- 1(2): 145–166.

Week 11: Collective Action

*Olson, Mancur. 1971. *The Logic of Collective Action. Public Goods and the Theory of Groups*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, Chapters 1 and 2.

Laver, Michael. 1997. *Private Desires, Political Action. An Invitation to the Politics of Rational Choice*. London: Sage. Chapter 3.

Week 16: Spatial Models and Strategic Voting

Downs, Anthony. 1957. *An Economic Theory of Democracy*. New York: Harper & Row. Chapters: 3, 7, 8, and 9.

Cox, Gary. 1997. *Making Votes Count. Strategic Coordination in the World's Electoral Systems*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Week 17: Institutionalism

*Hall, Peter A. and Rosemary C. R. Taylor. 1996. "Political Science and the Three New Institutionalisms". *Political Studies* 44: 936–957.

Week 18: Institutional Choice

Boix, Carles. 1999. "Setting the Rules of the Game: The Choice of Electoral Systems in Advanced Democracies". *American Political Science Review* 93(3): 609–623.

Rittberger, Berthold. 2001. "Which institutions for post-war Europe? Explaining the institutional design of Europe's first community". *Journal of European Public Policy* 8(5): 673–708.

*Young, H. Peyton. 1999. "The Economics of Convention." *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 10(2):105-122.

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Week 19: Social Choice Theory

Riker, William. 1982. *Liberalism against Populism*. Waveland Press.

*North, Douglas. 1990. "A transaction cost theory of politics". *Journal of Theoretical Politics*.

Week 20: Veto Players

Tsebelis, George. 2002. *Veto Players. How Political Institutions Work*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Cunningham, D. E. 2006. "Veto players and civil war duration". *American Journal of Political Science* 50(4): 875–892.

*Shepsle, Kenneth, and Barry Weingast. 1991. "Structure-induced equilibrium and legislative choice". *Public Choice*.

Week 21: Selectorate Theory

Bueno de Mesquita, Bruce, Alastair Smith, Randolph M. Siverson, and James D. Morrow. 2003. *The Logic of Political Survival*. London: The MIT Press.

*Muthoo, Abhinay. 2000. "A Non-Technical Introduction to Bargaining Theory." *WORLD ECONOMICS* 1:2.

Week 22: Principal Agent Theory

Putnam, Robert D. 1988, "Diplomacy and Domestic Politics: The Logic of Two-Level Games" *International Organization* 42(3): 427-460.

McCubbins, Mathew D. and Thomas Schwartz. 1984. "Congressional Oversight Overlooked: Police Patrols versus Fire Alarms". *American Journal of Political Science* 28(1): 165-179.

Müller, Wolfgang C. 2000. „Political Parties in parliamentary democracies: Making delegation and accountability work“. *European Journal of Political Research* 37: 309–333.

Laffont, J.-J. And D. Martimort. 2002. *The Theory of Incentives*, Princeton Univ. Press

Salanié B. 1997. *The Economics of Contracts , A Primer*, MIT, Cambridge.

Week 23: Bounded Rationality

Simon, Herbert A. 1985. "Human nature in politics: The dialogue of psychology with political science". *The American Political Science Review*:293–304.

*Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky. 1979. "Prospect Theory: An Analysis of Choice Under Risk." *Econometrica* 47:2, 263-91.

Jones, Bryan D. 1999. "Bounded Rationality." *Annual Review of Political Science* 2:297-321.

Week 24: Other Types of Explanation: Evolution, Constructivism

*Wendt, Alexander. "Anarchy Is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics." *International Organization* 46, no. 2 (1992): 391–425.

Orion Lewis and Sven Steinmo. "Taking Evolution Seriously: Institutional Analysis and Evolutionary Theory". <http://spot.colorado.edu/~steinmo/TakingEvolution.pdf>

Laver, Michael. 2005. "Policy and the Dynamics of Political Competition". *American Political Science Review* 99(2): 263–281.

Laver, Michael, and Ernest Sergenti. 2012. *PARTY COMPETITION: AN AGENT-BASED MODEL*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Week 25: Other Types of Explanation: Neuro-Politics

*Fowler, James H. and Darren Schreiber. 2008. "Biology, Politics, and the Emerging Science of Human Nature". *Science*.

Fowler, James H., and Christopher T. Dawes. 2008. "Two Genes Predict Voter Turnout". *The Journal of Politics* 70(3).

Charney, Evan, and William English. 2013. "Genopolitics and the Science of Genetics". *American Political Science Review* 107(2): 382–395.

Deppe, Kristen Diane, Scott F. Stoltenberg, Kevin B. Smith, and John R. Hibbing. 2013. "Candidate Genes and Voter Turnout: Further Evidence on the Role of 5-HTTLPR". *American Political Science Review* 107(2): 375–381.

Fowler, James H., and Christopher T. Dawes. 2013. "In Defense of Genopolitics". *American Political Science Review* 107(2): 362–374.

Week 30: Revision

Week 31: Revision

Week 32: Revision

Essay Questions

Essay 1:

- Pick a subfield of Political Science (e.g., voting behavior). Would you call the appearance of Rational Choice Theory a “scientific revolution” (Kuhn) to this subfield?
- Can Popper’s idea of Falsification distinguish Political Science effectively from other means of generating knowledge about politics (e.g., journalism)?
- Pick a subfield of Political Science (e.g., inter-state conflict). Is Political Science at risk of becoming a “degenerative research program” (Lakatos) in this subfield? Or has it become a “degenerative research program” already?
- Pick an idea from the Philosophy of Science. To what extent is it applicable to Ideology and Discourse Analysis or to (normative) Political Theory?

Essay 2:

- In what circumstances can institutions help to solve collective action problems (e.g., the production of collective goods)? Provide examples to support your argument.
- Is Veto Player Theory better suited to explain domestic or international politics? Or does it perform equally well in both arenas? Provide examples to support your argument.
- What aspects of how parties compete for votes do rational choice models highlight and what aspects do they omit?
- What aspect of democracy can Principal-Agent Theory explain? What aspects are left unexplained, and why are they left unexplained? Provide examples to support your argument.
- What normative implications do Arrow’s Theorem and the McKelvey-Schofield-Theorem have for modern democracy?