

# THE SCIENTIFIC STUDY OF POLITICS

POL 51 | FALL 2020  
Professor Rachel Bernhard  
ribernhard@ucdavis.edu

## Classes

October 1 – December 10

### Synchronous Lecture:

Thursdays\*, 4:40 - 6:00 pm |

<https://ucdavis.zoom.us/j/97153711561?pwd=b3BUbTN6dnZHSG9iQkdoKzM3d1kwUT09> or Meeting ID: 971 5371 1561, Passcode: 326895

### Asynchronous Lecture:

Posted no later than Tuesdays at 4:30 pm (in lieu of synchronous Tuesday lectures)

### Discussion Sections:

A01, Friday, 10:00 – 10:50 am | Zoom (link tbd)

A02, Friday, 11:00 – 11:50 am | Zoom (link tbd)

A03, Thursday, 11:00 – 11:50 am | Zoom (link tbd)

A04, Thursday, 10:00 – 10:50 am | Zoom (link tbd)

A05, Thursday, 12:10 – 1:00 pm | Zoom (link tbd)

A07, Friday, 12:10 – 1:00 pm | Zoom (link tbd)

## Office Hours

Starting Oct. 6, Tuesdays, 1-5 pm | Note you must book a slot in advance

Book a slot: <https://doodle.com/mm/racheliveyvelazquezbarnhard/office-hours>

<https://ucdavis.zoom.us/j/92120972638?pwd=K25RNEpXTEJWOUd3VitnN2FBTmInUT09> or

Meeting ID: 921 2097 2638, Passcode: 445227

## Teaching Assistants

Sharif Amlani, [samlani@ucdavis.edu](mailto:samlani@ucdavis.edu) | Sections A03 & A04, office hours TBD

Jordan Hamzawi, [jhamzawi@ucdavis.edu](mailto:jhamzawi@ucdavis.edu) | Sections A05 & A07, office hours TBD

Spencer Kiesel, [skiesel@ucdavis.edu](mailto:skiesel@ucdavis.edu) | Sections A01 & A02, office hours TBD

## Overview

How do we do the “science” part of political science? The answer isn’t as straightforward as you might think from looking at polls in the news. In this class, we will learn the basics of research using the scientific method, both quantitative and qualitative, as well as common pitfalls.

This class falls into five main parts, or modules. In Module I, we will learn how to develop good questions and answer them using the scientific method, as well as common perils in research that attempts to make causal claims. In Module II, we will explore quantitative research designs and their trade-offs. In Module III, we will learn the basics of analyzing and visualizing relationships in quantitative data. In Module IV, we will turn to surveys and qualitative research, with an eye to the particular challenges of their implementation. Finally, in Module V, we will discuss researcher ethics and the media’s use of research.

## Class in the Era of COVID

All reading material for the course will be available electronically for free through Canvas. On Thursdays, with the exception of Thanksgiving, we will have synchronous lectures; no later than Tuesdays, I will post the asynchronous lecture material for students to watch. Each synchronous class will generally follow the format of:

- 4:40 pm: mini-review by Professor Bernhard (questions about the asynchronous content, upcoming assignments, etc.)
- 5:00 pm: Reading #1 discussion (group members + Dr. Bernhard)
- 5:20 pm: Reading #1 Q&A (any student)
- 5:30 pm: Reading #2 discussion (group members + Dr. Bernhard)
- 5:50 pm: Reading #2 Q&A (any student)

Each synchronous Zoom lecture will be recorded and posted to Canvas by the next day (large files often take several hours to upload to Canvas). Note that *you will need to be logged into Zoom using your UC Davis account in order to access the meeting*. During synchronous lecture, please silence and put away all other devices: cell phones, tablets, etc. Even if you are muted on Zoom, please do not load anything that might be perceived as inappropriate or offensive: do your part to make the classroom a learning environment.

During asynchronous lectures, I will cover core concepts for the class (i.e., what we would normally do in in-person lecture). During both synchronous and asynchronous lectures, I strongly recommend you take notes on paper if possible; the research is clear that we are all highly distracted by our devices and that we retain less information when we type than when we write by hand. The longer you have other devices out in front of you, the more tempted you will be to attend to the world outside of class. We only have 30 hours together, and this time is dearly purchased—by you, by your families, or by your country. I take these sacrifices seriously and expect you to do the same.

More broadly, the subject matter of the class demands that you be respectful and kind to yourselves and to your classmates as we struggle with difficult topics. This class offers a space to learn and discuss the challenges of research. Those who are unkind to others, whatever their perspective, will be asked to step away from class.

## **ASSESSMENT**

### **Synchronous Reading Discussion | 15%**

In lieu of regular in-person participation, students will be randomly assigned to one of 15 groups, each of which will take a turn summarizing and discussing one of the assigned class readings during synchronous lecture. Each group will prepare a 250-word written summary of their assigned reading (due in Canvas by the Wednesday before the assigned synchronous discussion at 11:59 pm), to be posted to a class wiki (13% of grade, same for all group members), and each individual in the group will be responsible for asking a question or making a comment during the synchronous session (2% of grade, assigned individually). A rubric will be provided in advance for the reading summary. Questions and comments will be graded on a three-point scale, equivalent to ✓+/✓/✓- (0 if none).

This means you are each responsible for being *\*extremely\** prepared and actively participating synchronously during just one lecture and for just one reading during the term. Students who cannot attend synchronously (e.g., time zone issue) or who cannot easily participate in this format (e.g., disability) should contact me ASAP to make alternate arrangements. Students who experience unanticipated WiFi issues during their assigned discussion will also be able to make alternate arrangements.

My hope is that this approach will allow us to have a more small-class, seminar-style environment rather than the dreaded Zoom lecture hall full of black screens and muted microphones that intimidates everyone (yes, your professors too!), while avoiding the heavy burden of committing everyone to many long synchronous Zoom sessions where students must constantly interrupt each other, struggle with WiFi issues, etc.

### **Weekly Questions | 10%**

The other form of lecture participation measured is a weekly reading question. Each week, you are responsible for posting one or more questions on the *previous* week's readings or lectures to Canvas by Tuesday at 11:59 pm. I will use these to generate a mini-"review session" each week.

### **Section Participation | 10%**

The primary purpose of section is to help you master the materials and skills needed to be successful in the poster project (see below), which is the largest portion of your grade. Within that, much section time will be spent developing skills in RStudio Cloud—data management, analysis, and visualization—needed to produce your poster. RStudio Cloud is a browser-based program that relies on R, a coding language developed for statistical analysis and data visualization. As such, *section is complementary to rather than review of lecture*, although your TAs are still great resources to start with if you're feeling unsure about your understanding of key concepts and readings.

Your participation can take many forms: each TA will set their own requirements and expectations. If you are not comfortable speaking much on Zoom, be sure to attend office hours and participate in Canvas discussions. Section attendance is strongly encouraged; your participation in every class counts. Participation points are awarded for thoughtful questions or answers that show you have done the reading and for helping your classmates during group work. Interrupting, talking over, or being otherwise disrespectful of your classmates will negatively affect your participation grade.

I strongly encourage you to be proactive in letting your TA know if something happens—a health or family event—that may affect your work, *even if it doesn't result in an absence*. Sometimes, events and situations may affect your work for longer or harder than you initially anticipate, and it is much easier for us to work with you to find solutions ahead of time than try to "fix" things after it has become a problem.

### **Quizzes | 20%**

There is no midterm or final exam. In lieu of exams, each week will feature a short quiz (approximately 5 questions) that includes multiple choice, fill-in-the-blank, true/false, and short answer questions. Each quiz will focus primarily on content from the asynchronous lectures, although they may also contain questions about how concepts from the asynchronous lectures apply to that week's readings. These are open-note quizzes, so they will feature a mix of basic questions (e.g., a definition of a key concept) and more difficult questions (e.g., applying a key concept to a paper or hypothetical scenario).

Each weekly quiz will be posted to Canvas on Friday and due that Sunday by 11:59 pm. While the quizzes are not the world's most fun activity, having ten quizzes means that each quiz will translate to only 2% of your grade. Having one "off" quiz won't matter very much to your final grade, and we can avoid the stress of trying to administer live online exams worth a big part of your grade.

### **Poster Presentation | 45%**

The poster presentation comprises the largest portion of your grade and will require you complete multiple assignments throughout the term:

1. Research question (5%): what do you want to know about your topic? Ask a question that defines the problem or issue you want to study. Your TAs will give you feedback on your RQ that you can use to “sharpen” your question before pursuing the next step: the literature review. Due in Canvas Monday October 12 by 11:59 pm.
2. Literature review (10%): what have others said about your topic? Provide an annotated bibliography of 8-10 sources (peer-reviewed articles or books). For each source, you should have approximately 4 sentences of description that summarizes the authors’ argument, their data, how they analyzed their data, and what they found. Due in Canvas Monday November 2 by 11:59 pm.
3. Brief (10%): a max (shorter is better!) 750-word essay that A) summarizes key facts people need to know about your topic/problem, B) describes what you think the takeaways are, and C) advocates for or against a relevant policy or the status quo based on what you’ve found. Good briefs will use concise sentences, informal language, and make clear why your topic is relevant to current politics. Due in Canvas Monday November 23 by 11:59 pm.
4. Poster (20%): your poster draws together the previous three elements and presents them in a visual form to your classmates. Your poster should have a catchy headline, list your research question, and have eye-catching, easy-to-read charts, visuals, side-bars, and bullets describing the key facts (what is currently known about your topic). It should be precise and include citations. Part of your grade for this project will also be based on group discussion of each other’s posters in an online poster session. Poster due in Canvas Monday December 14 by 11:59 pm; the asynchronous online poster session due in Canvas Wednesday December 16 by 11:59 pm.

More detailed information on the poster presentation components will be provided throughout the class.

### **Other Policies**

If you are a parent and your childcare falls through, you are welcome to bring your child or infant to class provided they are able to be present without disrupting class. Similarly, if you are nursing, you are welcome to breastfeed in class.

Please include “POL 51” in the subject line of your emails; if you do not, your email is likely to end up in the wrong folder and may be missed. I will try to respond to emails within 48 hours during the week or 72 hours over the weekend, and I usually respond to student emails each afternoon. In both class and via email, you can address me as “Professor Bernhard” or “Dr. Bernhard;” your TA should be addressed as “Mr./Ms. So-and-So” unless you hear otherwise from them.

If you need disability-related accommodations in this class, and/or if you have emergency medical information that you wish to share, and/or if you need special arrangements in order to participate in Zoom meetings, please inform me immediately. Please email me or see me during office hours. For disability-related accommodations, you must also obtain an accommodations letter (<https://sdc.ucdavis.edu>), which will be sent directly to me.

As a UC Davis student, we trust you to conduct your academic affairs ethically. Betrayal of that trust will not be tolerated. Cheating in an online course includes, but is not limited to, having someone take a quiz or complete an assignment for you, or using someone else’s written work or materials without appropriate citations (plagiarism). I take violations of academic integrity seriously. If you have questions about how best to cite another’s work or facts in the public domain, please write your TA. When in doubt, cite. I recommend the Chicago Manual of Style’s author-date format if you don’t have a favorite. If you have questions about whether an action qualifies as misconduct, please talk to me.

## Grading

All assignments save participation will be graded anonymously through Canvas. This is to prevent any unconscious bias entering the grading. For each assignment, I will provide you with a rubric well in advance of the due date. Your TA will grade your assignments and submit the grades to me before we return the assignment to you; this is to standardize all grades and reduce the possibility of error. If you believe an error has occurred, you may request a re-grade from me, in writing, no later than one week after you received the assignment grade. If I believe an error has occurred, I will re-grade the assignment from scratch; otherwise, I will defer to the original grade. Be aware that I am a much harsher grader than your TAs.

Late assignments will receive a penalty of 10% (e.g., from a 95% to an 85%) for every day late. All grades will be rounded up automatically (e.g., an 89.50% will become a 90%). Letter grades will be assigned as follows:

97+	A+	87-89	B+	77-79	C+	67-69	D+	<60	F
93-96	A	83-86	B	73-76	C	63-66	D		
90-92	A-	80-82	B-	70-72	C-	60-62	D-		

## COURSE OUTLINE

### Oct. 1 | Introduction

Reading: this syllabus!

MODULE 1: Questions, Concepts, and Measures

### Oct. 8 | Week 1: The Scientific Method and Research Questions

Reading 1: "Five Stories of Accidental Ethnography: Turning Unplanned Moments in the Field into Data," by Lee Ann Fujii (no discussant group)

Reading 2: Social Science Methodology: A Unified Framework (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.) by John Gerring, p. 37-57 (no discussant group)

### Oct. 15 | Week 2: Concepts and Measurement I and II

Reading 1: "Women's Suffrage in the Measurement of Democracy: Problems of Operationalization," by Pamela Paxton (group 2.1)

Reading 2: "The Curious Case of Black Conservatives: Construct Validity and the 7-point Liberal-Conservative Scale," by Hakeem Jefferson (group 2.2)

MODULE 2: Causality and Research Design

### Oct. 22 | Week 3: Correlation vs. Causation and Experiments

Reading 1: "Extraneous Factors in Judicial Decisions," by Shai Danziger, Jonathan Levav, and Liora Avnaim-Pesso (group 3.1)

Reading 2: "Do Politicians Racially Discriminate Against Constituents? A Field Experiment on State Legislators," by Daniel Butler and David Broockman (group 3.2)

#### **Oct. 29 | Week 4: Quasi- and Natural Experiments and Observational Studies**

Reading 1: "Youth National Service and Women's Political Ambition: the Case of Teach For America," by Cecilia Hyunjung Mo, Katharine Conn & Georgia Anderson-Nilsson (group 4.1)

Reading 2: "The Political Legacy of American Slavery," by Avidit Acharya, Matthew Blackwell, and Maya Sen (group 4.2)

#### **MODULE 3: Analysis and Visualization**

#### **Nov. 5 | Week 5: Statistical Analysis I**

One less reading thanks to Election Day on Nov. 3!!

Reading: "MPs for Sale? Returns to Office in Postwar British Politics," by Andy Eggers and Jens Hainmueller (group 5.1)

#### **Nov. 12 | Week 6: Statistical Analysis II and Data Visualization**

Reading 1: "Seven Deadly Sins of Contemporary Quantitative Political Analysis," by Philip Schrodtt (group 6.1)

Reading 2: "Beautiful Political Data," by Andrew Gelman, Joanathan Kastellec, and Yair Ghiza (group 6.2)

#### **MODULE 4: Asking: Who, How, and When?**

#### **Nov. 19 | Week 7: Surveys and Question Wording**

Reading 1: "Caught in the Draft: The Effects of Vietnam Draft Lottery Status on Political Attitudes," by Bob Erikson and Laura Stoker (group 7.1)

Reading 2: "'Global Warming' or 'Climate Change'? Whether the Planet is Warming Depends on Question Wording," by Jonathon Schuldt, Sara Konrath, and Norbert Schwartz (group 7.2)

#### **\*\* Tuesday Nov. 24 | Week 8: Interviews and Ethnography \*\***

Reading: "The Logic of Clientelism in Argentina: An Ethnographic Account," by Javier Auyero (group 8.1)

*\*\*Thursday Nov. 26 | No class thanks to colonialism! Synchronous class will be on Tuesday Nov. 24 this week only, and this discussant group will post their summary on Monday Nov. 23 instead\*\**

#### **Dec. 3 | Week 9: Case Selection and Sampling**

Reading 1: "How the Cases You Choose Affect the Answers You Get: Selection Bias in Comparative Politics," by Barbara Geddes (group 9.1)

Reading 2: "Why So Serious? Survey Trolls and Misinformation," by Jesse Lopez and Sunshine Hillygus (group 9.2)

## MODULE 5: Ethics and the Media

### **Dec. 10 | Week 10: Ethics and Research in the Media**

Film: *Obedience* (group 10.1)

Reading: “Motivated Numeracy and Enlightened Self-Government” by Dan M. Kahan, Ellen Peters, Erica Cantrell Dawson, and Paul Slovic (group 10.2)

Syllabus references and credits are due to: Victor Asal, Amber Boydston, Chris Hare, Ben Highton, Mirya Holman, Brad Jones, Chera LaForge, Andrew Little, Liliana Mason, Laura Stoker, Mark Verbitsky, and Sherry Zaks, as well as the ACCELERATE Fellows Program.