Introduction to qualitative methods
Specialization module – Module VI: Political science methods

instructor: Prof. Ingo Rohlfing, PhD
office hours: Wednesday, 10am-12; by appointment; open door policy
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first session: 12.10.2018
last session: 01.02.2019
room: Institutshörsaal, Gottfried-Keller-Str. 6
time: 10.00-11.30

Please also regularly check the CCCP information on teaching on the internet:
http://www.cccp.uni-koeln.de/en/public/teaching/

The course introduces participants to the principles and practice of qualitative research with a focus on the field of Comparative Politics. In our course, “qualitative research” is understood as subsuming case studies and process tracing. We first discuss the standard qualitative/quantitative distinction and the trade-offs involved in doing qualitative research. In the second part, we turn to case selection and the types of cases that are available for analysis. Part three covers “the comparative method”, varieties of comparative case studies and challenges in implementing them. The fourth part deals with process tracing and the analysis of mechanisms. We use multiple examples from different subfields of Comparative Politics for illustrating good practices and not-so-good practices in qualitative research.

At the end of the course, you will be familiar with the key terms, strategies and challenges of comparative case studies and process tracing in single cases. This will allow you to critically read qualitative research on a methodological dimension, evaluate its quality and construct qualitative research designs of your own.

Topics and readings
Part 1: General considerations
12.10.18: What qualitative research is & causal analysis and inference I

19.10.18: Causal analysis and inference II

26.10.18: Populations and universes of cases

Part 2: Case selection
02.11.18: Case selection I
09.11.18: Case selection II

Part 3: Comparative case studies
16.11.18: “The Comparative Method”

23.11.18: Critics of the comparative method
Different room: Hörsaalgebäude (Building 105), Hörsaal G

30.11.18: An extended view on comparisons

07.12.18: Comparison: An example

Part 4: Process tracing
14.12.18: What a causal mechanism is
- Craver, Carl F. and Lindley Darden (2012): In search of mechanisms: Discoveries across the life sciences. Chicago: University of Chicago Press: chap. 2 (it is on mechanisms in biology; just ignore the small biological stuff when reading the chapter)
21.12.18: Process tracing and analyzing mechanisms


11.01.19: Working with sources


18.01.19: Making sense of the evidence I


25.01.19: Making sense of the evidence II

- Example: Fairfield, Tasha and Candelaria Garay (forthcoming): Redistribution under the right in Latin America: Electoral competition and organized actors in policymaking Comparative Political Studies.

01.02.19: Wrap-up session


Course requirements and grading

Prior exposure to qualitative methods is recommended, but not necessary for taking the course. The exam is a portfolio exam, meaning that you have to submit multiple written assignments over the course of the term.
Each of the assignments is graded. The first four assignments get a weight of 15%, the last assignment on an entire article 40%. Each assignment is graded on a scale ranging from 18 to 0 points. The final grade is determined by weighting the points (not the grade) of the individual assignments. The course is passed if the weighted final number of points is 9 points or more. Failing an individual assignment (grade 5.0) is possible because only the final grade matters.

If a paper is submitted up to 24 hours after the deadline, I will deduct one point from the grade you would have gotten if you had submitted the assignment in time. I will deduct two points when the submission is between 24 and 48 hours late. If you submit more than 48h late, the grade for the assignment is 5.0 and this assignment is failed.

Each paper has to be written in English. The deadline for the first four assignments is the beginning of the class one week later. The final assignment is due on March, 15, midnight. The first four assignments should have between 4-6 pages. The final assignment should have between 10-15 pages.

If you want to take the course and have a disability or disabilities, please feel free to get in touch with me anytime.