

**PSC-694: Qualitative Political Analysis  
Spring 2026**

T 9:30AM – 12:15 PM  
Eggers 100A

**Professor:** Erin Hern

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**Office:** 400B Eggers Hall

**Office Hours:**

([Zoom](#)): M 12-2

(In person): by appointment

**Course Description:**

This course introduces students to qualitative methods of data collection and analysis. It combines an overview of best practices in social science research design with practical instruction regarding process tracing, interviews, ethnography, content analysis, and archival work. This course focuses on practical application, from data collection and management to analysis, and culminates with student production of original qualitative or multi-method research.

**Objectives:**

By the end of this course, students will:

- a. Understand the potential and limits of qualitative methods in political science.
- b. Understand the strengths and weaknesses of various qualitative methods, including process tracing, interviews, focus groups, ethnography, and archival methods.
- c. Practice implementing each of the methods listed above.
- d. Develop competence in research design using qualitative or multiple methods.
- e. Design and carry out a research project based on original qualitative data collection.

**Required Texts:**

Saldaña, Johnny. 2025. *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*. 5th Ed. Sage.

(Ebook available through SU Library) Brady, Henry and David Collier. 2010. *Rethinking Social Inquiry: Diverse Tools, Shared Standards*. 2nd Ed. Rowman & Littlefield.

**Course Requirement and Grading:**

Active Class Participation	30%
Exercises	40%
3 Research Roundtables (Required/Ungraded)	0%
Final Paper	30%

**Class Participation** is an essential part of this seminar. In class we will discuss concepts as well as practice the skills taught in the reading. Students should come to class having completed the readings, ready to contribute to discussion and participate in in-class exercises. At the end of the semester, when

students present their research projects, their classmates are expected to provide meaningful verbal feedback.

**Exercises** accompany the readings assigned prior to each class. These exercises require you to engage with the readings and apply some of the concepts. Exercises will not be given letter grades, but will be evaluated on the basis of completion (full credit, half credit, no credit). To receive full credit, students should put forth effort to respond to each part of the question and demonstrate thoughtful engagement with the assigned readings. Each exercise should be no more than 2-3 pages (double spaced). These exercises should be completed and submitted via Blackboard prior to class, as they will form the basis of discussion. Exercises submitted late may receive no more than half credit.

Each student will participate in three **research roundtables** detailing the progress they have made on their final paper (see below). The time allocation for each presenter will depend on the final enrollment in the class. During the first (week 3), students will present their research question and working hypotheses. During the second (week 10), students will report on their methods and data collection plan/progress. During the third, students will give a full presentation of the current status of their project, including the research question, hypotheses, source(s) of data, analysis plan, progress to date, and challenges. Following this presentation, the class will engage in a PSRW-style workshop to give feedback and suggestions to each student. Participation in the research roundtables is required to complete the course, but the roundtables themselves are ungraded. The purpose is not to present polished work, but to solicit feedback. Students who do not present will be penalized 10% on their final paper.

Students will complete the course by submitting a **final paper**. This paper should be based on analysis of original research conducted using one or more of the methods discussed over the course of the semester. There are obvious limits to what one can achieve over the course of one semester. While I expect that your paper includes a well-defined research question, solid concept formation, and informed hypotheses, your data collection might be circumscribed and your analysis might not lead to a definitive conclusion. My expectations are as follows:

1. Research question and hypotheses are specific and informed by the relevant literature
2. Concept formation and measurement of relevant variables are logically sound
3. Research design follows best practices of case selection/sampling and is forthright about possibility of causal claims
4. Data collection effort is reasonable under circumstances (time constraint, geographic constraint, etc.)
5. Analysis of data follows principles learned in the course

This final paper is an opportunity to conceptualize and carry out a small-scale original research project. Because of time and other various constraints, it is essential that your research question and data collection plan are not overly ambitious. You need to be able to collect and analyze your data over the course of several weeks, so it is essential that you keep the scope modest. The best-case scenario is that you stumble across something interesting that you can scale up into an article- or dissertation-length project later.

There are no set length requirements for your paper, as the length will depend on the method you have chosen and the amount of data you are able to collect. As a general rule, you should aim for 20-30 pages (double-spaced, not including works cited or methodological appendices).

## COURSE POLICIES

### **Late Work**

Timeliness of assignments in this class is important, as the assignments will prepare you for class discussion. I will accept late work for no more than half credit. Extensions are possible for the final paper under extenuating circumstances, but will likely require filing “incomplete” paperwork given the deadline for grade submission.

### **Course Policy on Use of AI**

Based on the specific learning outcomes and assignments in this course, artificial intelligence is permitted on the following: Grammarly is permitted on all assignments with disclosure. You may use AI-enabled tools like Elicit, ResearchRabbit, or ScopusAI to help identify appropriate works to build your bibliography for your project. See each assignment, quiz, or exam instructions for more information about what artificial intelligence tools are permitted and to what extent, as well as citation requirements. If no instructions are provided for a specific assignment, then no use of any artificial intelligence tool is permitted. Any AI use beyond that which is detailed in course assignments is explicitly prohibited except when documented permission is granted. If you find a useful tool, let us know! We, as a class, can discuss appropriate and inappropriate usage. We are all navigating this rapidly changing technology environment together. My goal is to facilitate the use of helpful tools while maintaining intellectual integrity and upholding the learning goals of the course.

## UNIVERSITY POLICIES

### **Academic Integrity:**

As a pre-eminent and inclusive student-focused research institution, Syracuse University considers academic integrity at the forefront of learning, serving as a core value and guiding pillar of education. Syracuse University’s Academic Integrity Policy provides students with the necessary guidelines to complete academic work with integrity throughout their studies. Students are required to uphold both course-specific and university-wide academic integrity expectations such as crediting your sources, doing your own work, communicating honestly, and supporting academic integrity. The full Syracuse University Academic Integrity Policy can be found by visiting [class.syr.edu](http://class.syr.edu), selecting, “Academic Integrity,” and “Expectations and Policy.”

Upholding Academic Integrity includes the protection of faculty’s intellectual property. Students should not upload, distribute, or share instructors’ course materials, including presentations, assignments, exams, or other evaluative materials without permission. Using websites that charge fees or require uploading of course material (e.g., Chegg, Course Hero) to obtain exam solutions or assignments completed by others, which are then presented as your own violates academic integrity expectations in this course and may be classified as a Level 3 violation. All academic integrity expectations that apply to in-person assignments, quizzes, and exams also apply online.

Students found in violation of the policy are subject to grade sanctions determined by the course instructor and non-grade sanctions determined by the School or College where the course is offered. Students may not drop or withdraw from courses in which they face a suspected violation. Any established violation in this course may result in course failure regardless of violation level.

### **Disability Related Accommodations:**

If you believe that you need accommodations for a disability, please contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS), <http://disabilityservices.syr.edu>, located in Room 309 of 804 University Avenue, or call (315) 443-

4498, TDD: (315) 443-1371 for an appointment to discuss your needs and the process for requesting accommodations. ODS is responsible for coordinating disability-related accommodations and will issue students with documented Disabilities Accommodation Authorization Letters, as appropriate. Since accommodations may require early planning and generally are not provided retroactively, please contact ODS as soon as possible.

### **Religious Observances:**

SU religious observances notification and policy, found at <http://hendricks.syr.edu/spiritual-life/index.html>, recognizes the diversity of faiths represented among the campus community and protects the rights of students, faculty, and staff to observe religious holidays according to their tradition. Under the policy, students are provided an opportunity to make up any examination, study, or work requirements that may be missed due to a religious observance provided they **notify their instructors before the end of the second week of classes for regular session classes** and by the submission deadline for flexibly formatted classes. An online notification process is available for students in **My Slice / StudentServices / Enrollment / MyReligiousObservances / Add a Notification**.

## **COURSE SCHEDULE**

\*BB\* denotes a scanned reading available on Blackboard. All other required readings are available electronically through SU's library or online.

### **UNIT 1: CONCEPTS AND INFERENCE WITH QUALITATIVE DATA**

#### **Week 1 (1/13) What is Qualitative and Multi-Method Research?**

Mahoney, James. 2010. "After KKV: The New Methodology of Qualitative Research," *World Politics* 62(1): 120-147.

Ahmed, Amel and Rudra Sil. 2012. "When Multi-Method Research Subverts Methodological Pluralism—or, Why We Still Need Single-Method Research," *Perspectives on Politics* 10(4): 935-953

**Exercise 1:** Select and briefly describe one piece of qualitative or multi-method research that you particularly like (published or unpublished, article or book-length). What did you like most about it? What made it compelling to you? **AI note:** Grammarly permitted with disclosure.

#### **Week 2 (1/20) Concepts and Measurement**

Adcock, Robert and David Collier. 2001. "Measurement Validity: A Shared Standard for Qualitative and Quantitative Research," *American Political Science Review* 95(3): 529-546.

Collier, David, Judy LaPorte, and Jason Seawright. 2012. "Putting Typologies to Work: Concept Formation, Measurement, and Analytic Rigor," *Political Science Quarterly* 65(1): 217-232.

Collier, David, Fernando Daniel Hidalgo, and Andra Olivia Maciuceanu. 2006. "Essentially Contested Concepts: Debates and Applications," *Journal of Political Ideologies* 11(3):211-246.

Slater, Dan. 2013. "Democratic Careening," *World Politics* 65(4):729-63.

**Exercise 2:** After carefully reading the Slater piece, consider the following: what is democratic careening? Using Adcock & Collier’s task list, come up with a background concept, systematized concept, and indicator for “democratic careening.” The indicator may be typological/categorical, ordinal, or binary. **AI note:** Grammarly permitted with disclosure.

### **Week 3 (1/27) Descriptive Inference, Causal Inference, and Mechanisms**

Kreuzer, Marcus. 2019. “The Structure of Description: Evaluating Descriptive Inferences and Conceptualizations,” *Perspectives on Politics* 17(1): 122-139. (View [online](#) for ATI annotations)

Falleti, Tulia, and Julia Lynch. 2009. “Context and Causal Mechanisms in Political Analysis,” *Comparative Political Studies* 1143-1166.

Collier, David, Henry Brady, and Jason Seawright. 2010. “Sources of Leverage in Causal Inference: Toward an Alternative View of Methodology.” Chapter 9 in *Rethinking Social Inquiry*

Brady, Henry. 2010. “Data-Set Observations versus Causal Process Observations: The 2000 US Presidential Election,” Chapter 12 in *Rethinking Social Inquiry*

Dunning, Thad. 2010. “Design-Based Inference: Beyond the Pitfalls of Regression Analysis?” Chapter 14 in *Rethinking Social Inquiry*

**Research Roundtable 1:** Come to class with your research question and 2-5 hypotheses. Consider: does your project rest on descriptive or causal inference? Begin to brainstorm some types of data that could provide inferential leverage for your project. What kinds of things would you need to observe to find support for your hypotheses? **AI Note:** Grammarly permitted with disclosure

### **Week 4 (2/3) Case Selection and Small-N Inference**

\*BB\* George, Alexander and Andrew Bennett. 2004. *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences*. Chapter 3: “The Methods of Structured, Focused Comparison.”

Gerring, John. 2008. “Case Selection for Case Study Analysis: Qualitative and Quantitative Techniques,” in Janet M. Box-Steffensmeier, Henry E. Brady, and David Collier. *The Oxford Handbook of Political Methodology*

Goertz, Gary and Stephan Haggard. 2023. “Large-N Qualitative Analysis (LNQA): Causal Generalization in Case Study and Multimethod Research,” *Perspectives on Politics* 21(4): 1221-1239.

MacLean, Lauren. 2010. *Informal Institutions and Citizenship in Rural Africa*. Cambridge UP, Chapter 1.

Berry, Marie. 2017. “Barriers to Women’s Progress After Atrocity: Evidence from Rwanda and Bosnia-Herzegovina,” *Gender & Society* 31(6): 830-853.

#### Optional

Snyder, Richard. 2001. “Scaling Down: The Subnational Comparative Method,” *Studies in Comparative International Development* 36(1): 93-110.

Simmons, Erica S. and Nicholas Rush Smith. 2025. “How Cases Speak to One Another: Using Translation to Rethink Generalization in Political Science Research,” *American Political Science Review* (Online First)

**Exercise 3:** Compare and contrast the case selection strategies employed by MacLean and Berry. Consider: what possibilities and limitations governed case selection? What strategy did each employ? To what extent do these case comparisons facilitate causal leverage? To what extent is each analysis threatened by selection bias or omitted variable bias? **AI Note:** Grammarly permitted with disclosure

## UNIT 2: FORMS OF QUALITATIVE DATA COLLECTION

### Week 5 (2/10) Ethics of Data Collection + Managing Qualitative Data

\*BB\*Kapiszewski, Diana, Lauren M. MacLean, and Benjamin Read. 2015. *Field Research in Political Science: Practices and Principles*. New York: Cambridge University Press. Chapter 4.

2025. Porisky, Alesha and Lauren M. MacLean. "The Ethics of Compensation in Political Science Research," *Comparative Political Studies* (OnlineFirst).

Holmes, Caroline. 2021. "Standing Out and Blending In: Contact-Based Research, Ethics, and Positionality," *PS: Political Science* 54(3): 443-447.

\*BB\* Pachirat, Timothy. 2010. "The Political in Political Ethnography: Dispatches from the Kill Floor." In Schatz, Edward, ed. *Political Ethnography: What Immersion Contributes to the Study of Power*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, Chapter 6.

Jacobs, Alan et al. 2021. "The Qualitative Transparency Deliberations: Insights and Implications," *Perspectives on Politics* 19(1): 171-208.

Read the "[Managing Data](#)" section of Syracuse's QDR website.

**Exercise 4:** Complete human subjects training through [CITI](#) and submit your completion certificate. Note: if you have already completed this training, you may submit your certificate from previous completion.

\*Note\* if your data collection is solely for this class, your project is not "designed to contribute to generalizable knowledge" and does not need IRB approval. If you were to expand this project into a publishable form based on interaction with human subjects, you would need to submit an IRB protocol.

### Week 6 (2/17) Interviews + Focus Groups

Mosely, Layna. 2013. *Interview Research in Political Science*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press (E-book). Read the introduction and chapters 1, 3, 4, and 5. Review any other chapters that may be relevant for your own work.

Cyr, Jennifer. 2015. "The Pitfalls and Promise of Focus Groups as a Data Collection Method," *Sociological Methods and Research* 45(2): 231-259.

Michener, Jamila. 2020. "Power from the Margins: Grassroots Mobilization and Urban Expansions of Civil Legal Rights," *Urban Affairs Review* 56(5): 1390-1422.

**Exercise 5:** Think of any question you find interesting that could be answered by talking to people (it does not need to be a political science—or even academic—question). Write interview questions that could

elicit that information and make a list of the types of people you would ideally want to ask. Then, find people and ask the questions. Shoot for at least 3 subjects. Write a reflection of the process: which questions worked best? Why do you think that was? How did you feel in the role of interviewer? How did your respondents react to you? **AI Note:** Grammarly permitted with disclosure

### **Week 7 (2/24) Ethnography and Participant Observation**

Boswell et al. 2018. "State of the Field: What can Political Ethnography Tell us About Anti-Politics and Democratic Disaffection?" *European Journal of Political Research* 58: 56-71

Wedeen, Lisa. 2010. "Reflections on Ethnographic Work in Political Science." *Annual Review of Political Science* 13. pp. 255–272.

Simmons, Erica and Nicholas Rush Smith. 2017. "Comparison with an Ethnographic Sensibility," *PS: Political Science & Politics*. 50(1): 126-130.

Hummel, Calla. 2018. "Bribery Cartels: Collusive Corruption in Bolivian Street Markets," *Latin American Research Review* 53(2):217-230.

\*If you are considering undertaking an ethnography, you should purchase Emerson, Fretz and Shaw's *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*.

**Exercise 6:** Choose an event or activity to attend as an ethnographer. The event could be any type of activity with social or political importance in which you can safely participate. Prior to the event, think of a guiding question you might be able to answer through your observation Stay for at least an hour, take notes, and write an ethnography. Your ethnography should include thick description and analysis of norms, codes of conduct, ritual, or deeper meaning of behavior that help illuminate an answer to your guiding question. Consider how you can describe behavior in ways that reveals some important element of culture, human behavior, or broader societal power dynamics. **AI Note:** Grammarly permitted with disclosure

### **Week 8 (3/3) Archival and Primary Source Documents**

Lustick, Ian. 1996. "History, Historiography, and Political Science: Multiple Historical Records and the Problem of Selection Bias," *American Political Science Review* 90: 605-18.

Lee, Alexander. 2022. "The Library of Babel: How (and How Not) to Use Archival Sources in Political Science," *Journal of Historical Political Economy* 2(3):499-526.

Gaikwad, Nikhar, Veronica Herrera and Robert Mickey. "Text-Based Sources: Final Report of QTD Working Group II.1" December 2018.

Sweet, Rachel. 2020. "Bureaucrats at War: The Resilient State in the Congo," *African Affairs* 119(475): 224-250.

#### Optional:

Trachtenberg, Marc. 2006. *The Craft of International History: A Guide to Method*. Chapters 3-5

Gasparyan, Olga. 2019. "The Importance and Peculiarities of Archival Work in Political Science," *APSA Comparative Politics Section Newsletter* XXIX(2): 5-11. *Note: If you are considering historical research, the remainder of this newsletter will also be helpful*

**Exercise 7:** Think of a research question (something you've already worked on would be best), and imagine what kinds of primary source documents might be able to help you answer that question. Make a list. Look for an archive or repository—digital or physical—that might have those types of documents. Increasing numbers of archives are digitized, and those that are physical often have digitally accessible lists of holdings. Learn as much as you can about this archive and its holdings, and match potentially helpful documents to the list you came up with. **AI Note:** Grammarly permitted with disclosure

\*\*\*\*SPRING BREAK\*\*\*\*

### **Week 9 (3/17)**

**Research Roundtable 2: Methods and Data Collection** – Present (or re-present) your research question and hypotheses. State your chosen method and present a clearly defined data collection plan. Report on any progress you have made with initial data collection, and bring any questions or anticipated challenges moving forward.

## **UNIT 3: ANALYZING QUALITATIVE DATA**

### **Week 10 (3/24) Coding Qualitative Data**

Saldaña, Johnny. *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*, 5<sup>th</sup> Ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Reading Notes: the entire book is assigned, but you should focus on Ch 1-4, and the coding methods most relevant to you (probably chs. 7, 9, 10, or 11).

Kluver, Heike, and Hana Back. 2019. "Coalition Agreements, Issue Attention, and Cabinet Governance," *Comparative Political Studies* 52(13-14): 1995-2031.

**Exercise 8:** Select a body of 5-10 short texts. These could be op-eds, thematically-linked emails, listicles, transcripts of YouTube videos—anything. Select a coding strategy. Conduct a round of first-cycle coding and use your coding to draw descriptive inferences about your items in an analytic memo. **AI Note:** Grammarly permitted with disclosure

### **Week 11 (3/31) Process Tracing and Historical Analysis**

Collier, David. 2011. "Understanding Process Tracing," *PS: Political Science & Politics* 44(4): 823-830.

Bennett, Andrew. 2010. "Process Tracing and Causal Inference," Chapter 10 in *Rethinking Social Inquiry*

Ricks, Jacob I. and Amy H. Liu. 2018. "Process-Tracing Research Designs: A Practical Guide," *PS: Political Science & Politics* 51(4): 842-846.

Vergheze, Ajay. 2024. "Randomized Controlled History?" *Journal of Historical Political Economy* 4:361-289.

Paine, Jack, Xiaoyan Qiu, and Joan Ricart-Huguet. 2025. "Endogenous Colonial Borders: Precolonial States and Geography in the Partition of Africa," *American Political Science Review* 119(1): 1-20. [Skim article for the argument, but focus on the collection and presentation of evidence in [appendix C](#)]

Optional:

Bennett, Andrew and Jeffrey T. Checkel, Eds. 2015. *Process Tracing: From Metaphor to Analytic Tool*. Cambridge UP.

Slater, Dan and Erica Simmons. 2010. "Informative Regress: Critical Antecedents in Comparative Politics," *Comparative Political Studies* 43(7):886-917.

**Exercise 9:** Consider the Paine et al piece, and the evidence in the supplement. What evidence do they use to support their argument? What kind of evidence could have undermined it? How are they employing "causal process observations" and ruling out alternative explanations? **AI Note:** Grammarly permitted with disclosure

## **Week 12 (4/7) Techy Qualitative Analysis / Quantitative Analysis of Qualitative Data**

Computer-Assisted QCA:

Ide, Tobias and Patrick A Mello. 2022. "QCA in International Relations: a Review of Strengths, Pitfalls, and Empirical Applications," *International Studies Review* 24(1): viac008.

Content Analysis:

Grimmer, J., & Stewart, B. M. (2013). Text as Data: The Promise and Pitfalls of Automatic Content Analysis Methods for Political Texts. *Political Analysis*, 21(3), 267–297.

Arthur Spirling. 2016. "Democratization and Linguistic Complexity: The Effect of Franchise Extension on Parliamentary Discourse, 1832–1915." *The Journal of Politics*, 78(1):120-136.

AI and Qualitative Analysis:

Silver, Christina. 2023. "[What's afoot in the Qualitative AI space?](#)"

Gillen, Andrew. 2024. "[Can we Trust AI in Qualitative Research?](#)"

Optional:

Dusa, Adrian. [QCA with R: A Comprehensive Resource](#)

Thomann, Eva, Jorn Ege, and Ekaterina Paustyan. 2022. "Approaches to Qualitative Comparative Analysis Practices: A systematic review," *Swiss Political Science Review* 28(3): 557-580.

Roberts, M. E., Stewart, B. M., Tingley, D., Lucas, C., Leder-Luis, J., Gadarian, S. K., Albertson, B., & Rand, D. G. (2014). Structural Topic Models for Open-Ended Survey Responses. *American Journal of Political Science*, 58(4), 1064–1082.

Lori Young and Stuart Soroka 2012 "Affective News: The Automated Coding of Sentiment in Political Texts." *Political Communication*, 29:2, 205-231.

Knox, D., and Lucas, C. A Dynamic Model of Speech for the Social Sciences. *American Political Science Review*. 2021;115(2):649-666.

**Week 13 (4/14) Research Roundtable 3 (part 1)**

**Week 14 (4/21) Research Roundtable 3 (part 2)**

**Final Paper due by end of day, May 1**