

# Experimental methods and public opinion research

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## Course description:

The course is an introduction to the use of experiments in political science and public opinion research. It consists of three parts: a presentation of the experimental method in the social sciences, its advantages and limitations; types of experiments in political science and public opinion research; survey experiments.

## Content:

### 1. Political science experimentation and the study of causality (30 minutes).

This introductory section discusses the main contributions of experimentation to political science. It is based on the introductory chapters of two widely used books in experimental political science: Morton and Williams (2010) and Druckman et al. 2011. Three topics will be covered:

- a. Causal inference and the experimental logic
- b. New experimental methods in the social sciences
- c. Experiments and public opinion research

### 2. Types of experiments (30 minutes):

This second section will be devoted to the main types of experiments, discussing their advantages and disadvantages. The survey experiment will be covered in the last part of the talk, given the popularity of that type of experiment in public opinion research. The three types discussed in this part of the talk are:

- a. Laboratory
- b. Field
- c. Natural experiments

### 3. Survey experiments (60 minutes):

This part of the course will follow the chapter by Sniderman and review some of the most important survey experimental designs in public opinion research. It will discuss traditional designs (e.g., list experiments), but also new designs made

possible by the use of computers and the internet (e.g., online experiments, social media experiments). This part will review the following topics:

- a. What is a survey experiment?
- b. Online experiments
- c. Designing a survey experiment
- d. Limits of survey experiment

### **Readings:**

Druckman, James, Donald P. Green, James H. Kuklinski, and Arthur Lupia (eds.), *Cambridge Handbook of Experimental Political Science*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. **Chapters 1 and 2.**

Morton, Rebecca B., and Kenneth C. Williams. 2010. *Experimental Political Science and the Study of Causality: From Nature to the Lab*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. **Chapters 1 and 2.**

Sniderman, Paul M. 2011. The logic and design of the survey experiment: an autobiography of a methodological innovation. In James N. Druckman, Donald P. Green, James H. Kuklinski, and Arthur Lupia (eds.), *Cambridge Handbook of Experimental Political Science*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.