Project seminar

Political Justifications

Winter semester 2021/22

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Office hours   Tuesdays, 11.00 am – 12.30 pm, registration via *MyStudy*

Time and place

| Mondays, starting | 16:15 – 17:45 | Weekly seminar | C 40.108 |
| 18 October | | | |

Course description

The justification of political decisions forms an integral element of governing. Angela Merkel justifies why Germany needs a "federal lockdown" to fight the ongoing Corona pandemic. Xi Jinping, China's president, explains why the Belt and Road Initiative is a sensible enterprise to strengthen global infrastructural networks. And Joe Biden gives reasons for why the world needs strengthened efforts to fight climate change. These are contemporary examples for political justifications, or the reasons given for why a political decision is taken. They routinely accompany politics and offer an opportunity to study the norms and values that inform political decision-making. According to Rainer Forst, the 'right to justification' is one of the most fundamental rights of any citizen.

This English-speaking seminar introduces students to the systematic study of political justifications and provides them with a method – qualitative content analysis – that is particularly suited for that task. In small groups, students will design and conduct their own study of political justifications. After introducing students to the key concepts related to political justifications (part 1), we will learn how to develop a convincing research design and how to study political justifications using qualitative content analysis (part 2). Accompanied by close supervision, part three is dedicated towards conducting students' own research projects on their self-chosen topic.

Course objectives

In this course students learn
- to develop a feasible research design, including the choice of appropriate sources, for the study of political justifications by applying the method of qualitative content analysis;
- to organize themselves in small research groups with a view towards developing, conducting and documenting a research project in their common area of interest;
- to present your approach and findings to other students in your class.

Course assessment

This is a Complementary Studies course that is open to students with any disciplinary background and does not require prior knowledge of political science. The goal of this course is to conduct an independent research project on the topic of political justifications in **research groups of up to 4 students**. Assessment is via a research report, written jointly by each research group, that documents the analytical choices, procedures and results of your research project. The course assessment is composed of the following three parts, the indicated percentages for each combined make up the overall grade.

1. Oral presentation (20 % of the total grade)

In the last two sessions of the seminar (see schedule below), you present the results of your research as a group. Presentations last no longer than **12 minutes per group** and cover the research question, research design, and initial results. Good presentations stick to the given time frame, are supported visually or with the help of a written handout, are presented in an appealing way and explain the content in a comprehensible way. For this assignment, the evaluation will focus on your presentation skills, rather than the concrete content of the presentations.

2. Design of a codebook (30 % of the total grade)

In the third part of the seminar, you design a codebook, which forms the analytical basis for conducting the empirical analysis. A codebook describes the categories that you apply to your textual material. It defines these categories, differentiates them from each other and gives positive as well as negative examples to illustrate their usage. A codebook also defines the coding unit and describes and justifies the text corpus that forms the basis of your project.

3. Research report (50 % of the total grade)

Finally, you write a research report of 3500-4000 words (approximately 6-8 pages). In the report, you state your research question, elaborate the research design, and describe the discovered patterns in political justifications. You also summarize central aspects of the codebook. Since you submit the codebook separately as a course assignment, this can be done concisely. A good paper embeds the different steps appropriately in the conceptual-theoretical literature, going beyond the literature mentioned in the seminar plan, finds a clear form of presentation for the empirical

results, and elaborates three hypotheses on how these patterns can be explained theoretically at the end.

You upload the written parts of the coursework (codebook and research report) to the "Research Report" folder found under "Materials" on the *MyStudy* page by **Tuesday, March 15, 2022** (11:59 pm). If you submit your assignment late or not at all you will receive a fail (grade: 5,0).

Teaching arrangements

This course is designed to help you plan and carry out an empirical research project in small groups. We will acquire the knowledge and skills necessary for this task over the course of the semester. The course is based on a mixture of guided seminar sessions and independent group work.

In the first half of the seminar, we will work on the conceptual-theoretical (part 1) and methodological foundations (part 2). Each session is based on a reading and one or several guiding questions. The questions are intended to assist you in preparing the reading and to guide our seminar discussion. Readings are either available electronically through the Leuphana library (marked accordingly in the syllabus) or I will make them available as pdf files under "Material" on *MyStudy*. The third part of the seminar consists primarily of group work, which will be organized independently and can be held over Zoom. Research groups consist of up to four participants.

Successful participation in this course depends, in large parts, on the effective coordination of the work in the research groups, which is your own responsibility. By the start of the fourth session on 8 November you should have formed your research groups. It is advisable for groups to be formed according to common research interests. Please use the group tab "finding a research groups" on *MyStudy* to self-organize and find groups. Once the groups have formed, it is useful to structure group work along personal interests. Those who are interested in theory and concepts can advance group work in this area. The same applies to the method and the selection of the empirical material. All group members should participate in coding.

You will have two opportunities to receive feedback from me on your group work – marked with "deadline" in the course overview. To do so, upload your research question, including a half-page description (**29 November**), as well as the draft of the codebook (**10 January**) into the corresponding folders under "Material" on *MyStudy* by the respective deadline. You can then sign up for my office hour.

Course overview

Session	Date	Topic
1	18 October	Introduction and overview
		Part 1: Conceptual-theoretical foundations
2	25 October	Political justification and legitimacy
3	1 November	Studying political justifications through public communication; discussion of research topics
		Part 2: Research design and methodology
4	8 November Deadline:	Basics of research design; discussion in research groups *Formation of research groups*
5	15 November	Basics of qualitative content analysis; coding exercise
6	22 November	Sampling techniques and unitizing; research group discussion
7	29 November Deadline:	Studying political justifications: an exemplary study; coding exercise *Research question of your project, including a half-page description*
		Part 3: Design of codebook
8	6 December	Introduction to codebook design and questions
9	13 December	Independent group work: codebook design I
10	20 December	Independent group work and live chat (4.15 – 5.00 pm): codebook design II
11	10 January Deadline:	Reliability testing (guest: Henning Schmidtke, GIGA) *Draft of the codebook*
		Part 4: Presentation of results
12	17 January	Presentation session I
13	24 January	Presentation session II
14	31 January	Final discussion and evaluation

Syllabus

18 October: Introduction and overview

In this session, I will introduce the course syllabus and answer questions about the course. We will also get to know each other.

Part 1: Conceptual-theoretical foundations

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25 October: Political justification and legitimacy

Guiding questions
- ❖ What is a (political) justification? How does the concept of political justification differ from mere political rhetoric?
- ❖ Why are generalizable standards important to the task of (political) justification? Which ones can we distinguish? How are justification and legitimacy related?
- ❖ When are justifications likely to be most visible, and why?

Readings
- Cook, Terrence. 1980. Political Justifications: The Use of Standards in Political Appeals. *Journal of Politics* 42: 511-537. Read only pp. 511-520.
- Boltanski, Luc and Laurent Thévenot. 1999. The Sociology of Critical Capacity. *European Journal of Social Theory* 2(3): 359-377. Read only pp. 359-373.

1 November: Studying political justifications through public communication; discussion of research topics

In this session, we will start thinking more specifically about how to study political justification empirically through an analysis of public communication by political actors. I will also provide space to discuss possible research topics in small groups.

Guiding questions
- ❖ What are the three dimensions of empirical legitimacy? What advantages does a focus on public communication have?
- ❖ What is a legitimation discourse, and how can it be studied empirically?

Reading
- Schneider, Steffen, Frank Nullmeier, and Achim Hurrelmann. 2007. "Exploring the Communicative Dimension of Legitimacy: Text Analytical Approaches." In Achim Hurrelmann, Steffen Schneider, and Jens Steffek (eds.), *Legitimacy in an Age of Global Politics*. Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 126-155.

> **Part 2: Research design and methodology**

The second part of the course is about developing an appropriate research design to empirically investigate patterns of political justification. For this purpose, we will deal with basic questions of research design as well as with methodological aspects of their analysis. Our method of choice is qualitative content analysis.

8 November: Basics of research design; discussion in research groups

Guiding questions
- ❖ What is a mixed methods research design? Does it provide a convincing solution to conflicting paradigms in the science war?
- ❖ Describe the most important steps in conducting a research project.

Reading
- Mayring, Philipp. 2014. *Qualitative Content Analysis: Theoretical Foundation, Basic Procedures and Software Solutions*. Klagenfurt, chapter 1. Available at: https://www.ssoar.info/ssoar/handle/document/39517.

15 November: Basics of qualitative content analysis; coding exercise

Guiding questions
- ❖ What are the main principles of qualitative content analysis? What are the steps to performing a qualitative content analysis?
- ❖ Contrast the process of inductive category formation with that of deductive category formation. What are the advantages and disadvantages of each?

As you study the text, try to apply what you read to your own research topic.

Reading
- Mayring, Philipp. 2014. *Qualitative Content Analysis: Theoretical Foundation, Basic Procedures and Software Solutions*. Klagenfurt, chapter 4 (only pp. 39-44; 51-54) and 6 (only pp. 79-87; 95-103). Available at: https://www.ssoar.info/ssoar/handle/document/39517.

22 November: Sampling techniques and unitizing; research group discussion

Guiding questions
- ❖ Why is sampling important to academic research, and to the empirical study of political justifications?
- ❖ Which approaches to sampling are available to researchers, and which advantages and disadvantages do they have?
- ❖ How do researchers unitize their material?

When studying the text, contemplate the advantages and disadvantages of different approaches to sampling and unitizing for your own research projects.

Reading
- Krippendorff, Klaus. 2004. *Content Analysis: An Introduction to its Methodology*. London: Sage, chapters 5 and 6 (pp. 97-124). [e-resource]

29 November: Studying political justifications: an exemplary study; coding exercise

In this session we will discuss a study that uses qualitative content analysis in an exemplary way. Our focus in the discussion will be on the methodological aspects of the study. We will also conduct a coding exercise based on your own empirical material in your research groups.

Please bring some text material from your own research projects.

Reading
- Pansardi, Pamela, and Francesco Battegazzorre. 2018. The Discursive Legitimation Strategies of the President of the Commission: A Qualitative Content Analysis of the State of the Union Addresses (SOTEU). *Journal of European Integration* 40(7): 853-71. [e-resource]

Part 3: Design of a codebook

In the third part of the seminar, you will draw up a codebook, the central analytical tool of your empirical investigation of legitimation patterns. Thus, the codebook is a determining factor for the quality of your analysis.

6 December: Introduction to codebook design and questions

In this session, I will introduce you to the design of a codebook using the example of the research project "Sources and Consequences of Legitimation Strategies of Regional Organizations", which I am leading at the Leibniz Institute for Global and Regional Studies (GIGA) in Hamburg. We will take the codebook we use in this project as an example. You will also have the opportunity in this session to ask questions and discuss the codebook regarding your own projects in the research groups.

Reading
- Codebook of the research project "Sources and Consequences of Legitimation Strategies of Regional Organisations"

13 December: Independent group work: Codebook design I

In this session, you will begin to create the codebook in your research groups; no official seminar session will be held. You can use the codebook discussed in the last session as a template.

20 December: Independent group work and live chat session (4.15-5.00 pm): Codebook design II

In this session, you will continue with the design of your codebook. In addition, I will be available via *Zoom* from 4.15 – 5.00 pm to answer questions about the codebook. I will make the respective Zoom link available under "Onlinelehre" on *MyStudy*.

10 January: Reliability testing (guest: Henning Schmidtke, GIGA)

Once you have designed a codebook, your coding needs to be tested for reliability. Reliability captures how accurate a scientific measurement is. In our context, it gauges the extent to which different coders independently come to an identical coding when coding the same material. When coders disagree on the interpretation of their textual material, the measurement is considered unreliable. This is something you want to avoid. In this session Henning Schmidtke from the German Institute for Global and Area Studies (GIGA) in Hamburg will be our guest, and he will guide you through an example of a reliability test.

Reading
- Krippendorff, Klaus. 2004. *Content Analysis: An Introduction to its Methodology*. London: Sage, chapter 11. [e-resource]

Part 4: Presentation of results

In the final part of the seminar, you will present your collaborative research to the other participants of the seminar.

17 January: Presentation session I

In this and the following session, you will present the design and first results of your research projects. I will assign presentation slots for the various research groups in due course. Information on the expectations regarding your presentations can be found at the beginning of this syllabus under "Course assessment."

24 January: Presentation session II

In this session, you will continue presenting the design and first results of your research projects. I will assign presentation slots for the various research groups in due course. Information on the expectations regarding your presentations can be found at the beginning of this syllabus under "Course assessment."

31 January: Final discussion and evaluation

In the final session, we will review what we have learned in this seminar and discuss the course's evaluation report.