

# Preface

Research, to me, is freedom and fun. It is the freedom to challenge authority with carefully selected evidence and well-crafted arguments. It is the fun of looking things up for yourself and playing around with data to disclose the truth behind. Unfortunately, for many students (and some professionals) of political science, research is anything but freedom and fun. It is mostly anxiety and boredom.

Learning about research methods and design needs to take a large share of the blame for why, to many, research incites boredom and anxiety. With all the *'do this'* and *'don't do that'*, *'can't say this'* and *'must say that'*, with all its formulas, checkboxes, and lists of best practices, research design seems to be about the exact opposite of freedom. It seems to be about rigour, discipline and rules, strictness and constraints. And, yet, the rigour imposed by research design *is* liberating; it is what makes a study powerful and an argument persuasive.

Of the many textbooks on research design and methods in the social sciences, few convey the power and intellectual liberty research can bring. To me, the great books by King, Keohane, & Verba (1994); Pearl (2000); Ragin (2000); Brady & Collier (2004); Goertz (2006); Elster (2007); Gelman & Hill (2007); Morgan & Winship (2007); Gerring (2012b); and some older classics, do. But, in my experience, many political science students are challenged by trying to learn from these books and fail to appreciate their insights. It is the first major motivation of the current text to make these insights more accessible, while retaining a sufficient degree of rigour.

The second major motivation is to integrate in a balanced way the many valuable lessons dispersed in the existing methodological literature. Some available textbooks are great for learning one kind or aspect of research design, but less so for others. Those that try to be comprehensive often either implicitly privilege one type of research or present a picture that is not entirely coherent. To students, this is confusing. Their reactions from reading the great debates in the methodological literature often remind me of the old joke about the rabbi who had to settle a dispute between two people. The rabbi listened to the first man and said, *'You're right'*. After that, he listened to the second man and said, *'You're right'*. Then the rabbi's wife exclaimed, *'But they cannot both be right!'*, to which the rabbi replied after some thought, *'You know, you are right, too!'*

In my view, as reflected in this text, many of the various research designs in political science are in fact compatible as long as their different

goals are made clear. Accordingly, my approach is ecumenical and the chapters of this text present, in good faith, descriptive and explanatory, experimental and observational research, large- and small-N, cross- and within-case designs. At the same time, I have tried to delineate where research approaches disagree to avoid the situation the old rabbi got himself into.

\* \* \*

This text has its origin in a course on Research Design that I put together and taught at Leiden University for several years. One learns best by teaching. I certainly did, and these chapters are an effort to partly repay my debt to the students. Many of the ideas introduced in the pages to follow are the direct offspring from my highly rewarding, although never easy, experience in teaching the class and indirect responses to my frustrations from trying to communicate, not always successfully, some of the more involved issues. It is in dialogue with the students that my thinking about research design developed, and the students deserve to receive a big part of the compliments for anything that is good in this text and none of the responsibility for its mistakes.

For several years Brendan Carroll shared with me the experience of teaching the course, and our reflections on how to improve it have left a clear imprint on the text. Discussions with Markus Haverland on various issues of research design were another powerful source of inspiration.

Many colleagues were kind enough to read parts of the book and provide encouragement, as well as comments and constructive criticism. I offer my gratitude to Brendan Carroll, Toon Kerkhoff, Patrick Overeem, Frank Häge, Ellen Mastenbroek, Markus Haverland, Antoaneta Dimitrova, Sandra Groeneveld, Elitsa Kortenska, and Maarja Berkens. Over the years, I have learned a lot about the practice of political science research from my co-authors and research collaborators. From the ones who have not been mentioned yet, I would like to thank in particular Bernard Steunenbergh, Anne Rasmussen, and Dave Lowery. My gratitude is further extended to the anonymous reviewers who read and commented on the manuscript prior to publication.

I would also like to thank the Palgrave's editors for political science. Steven Kennedy prompted me to start working on a research design textbook and offered plenty of valuable guidance along the way. Steven retired before the text was complete, and Stephen Wenham oversaw the final revisions and the publication.

Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to my family. Without the support of my wife, Radostina, I would not have been able to complete this project at all, and without her love it would not have been worth it. Our two daughters, Julia and Natialia, who were born while I was busy with the text, provided me with the best of motivations to work and write. To you three I dedicate this book.