Nataliia Karpchuk

METHODOLOGY AND ORGANIZATION OF RESEARCH IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Lecture Notes

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The issue contains the most essential questions of the research methodology in the field of International Relations.

For Masters of the branch of expertise C "Social Sciences, Journalism, Information and International Relations", specialty C3 "International Relations".

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FOREWORD

This collection of lecture notes, titled Methodology and Organization of Research in International Relations, is designed for Master's students specializing in International Relations and International Strategic Communications. It serves as a foundational guide to understanding and applying research methodologies within the complex and interdisciplinary field of global politics.

The course is structured to provide students not only with theoretical knowledge but also with practical tools for conducting independent academic research. It emphasizes the importance of methodological reflexivity, ethical responsibility, and analytical rigor in the study of international relations. Through a combination of philosophical inquiry, methodological training, and applied techniques, students are encouraged to critically engage with global issues and develop their own research agendas.

The lectures cover a wide spectrum of methodological approaches, i.e., from positivist and interpretivist paradigms to critical, feminist, and post-structuralist perspectives. Students will explore both qualitative and quantitative methods, including case studies, process tracing, elite interviews, ethnography, discourse analysis, and statistical modeling. Each method is contextualized within the broader epistemological and ontological debates that shape the discipline.

A key objective of this course is to prepare students for the development of their Master's thesis. By the end of the program, students should be able to:

- formulate coherent and researchable questions;
- design methodologically sound and ethically responsible research projects;
- select and apply appropriate methods for data collection and analysis;
- reflect critically on their own positionality and the implications of their methodological choices.

These lecture notes are not merely academic in nature, they are intended to be a practical resource for students embarking on their own research journeys. Whether investigating strategic narratives, analyzing diplomatic discourse, or exploring the dynamics of international institutions, students will find in this course the conceptual and methodological scaffolding necessary to produce meaningful and impactful scholarship.

Lecture 1: Introduction to Research Methodology in International Relations

Objective – to provide a conceptual foundation of research methodology in IR, emphasizing the interplay of theory, ontology, and epistemology in shaping research design.

International Relations (IR) as a discipline is not only about the politics of war, diplomacy, and globalization – it is also a rigorous intellectual pursuit grounded in methodological frameworks. Methodology is the bridge between theory and empirical inquiry. It informs how we ask questions, what kind of evidence we seek, and how we interpret our findings.

Understanding IR methodology starts with two foundational philosophical debates:
- ontology (what exists) and
- epistemology (how we know what we know). These debates shape the tools researchers choose and the kinds of knowledge they consider legitimate.

Ontology, Epistemology, and Methodology

Ontology: the study of being, the nature of social entities

Example: Do objective entities that we take for granted in international politics, such as States, have an external reality? Or more simply, what is a state?

Epistemology: the study of knowledge, how is knowledge produced

Example: Are certain forms of knowledge privileged? Do we focus on explanation?

Methodology: ways through which we acquire knowledge

Example: How do we know, or the underlying logic of knowing.

Ontology frames theobject of study. For interpretive research agendas, ontology is often at the center of inquiry as interpretive authors attempt to deconstruct the meaning ofentities that we take for granted as existing in international politics, such asstates or organizations.

Epistemology, or the study of knowledgeand knowledge production. Empiricists and interpretivists make epistemological claims about what forms of knowledge have value. Are valuable contributions to scholarship those that involve rigorous testing of variables to explaina certain outcome? Or are they those that question the ontology of actors ininternational politics, such as states?

Ontology: What is Reality in IR?

• Realism: Sees international politics as anarchic, driven by material power.

• Constructivism: Reality is socially constructed; ideas, norms, and identities matter.

Ontology influences what a researcher considers to be a "fact" – is it a material capability or an intersubjective belief?

Epistemology: How Can We Know Reality?

• *Positivist Epistemology*: Knowledge is gained through observable, measurable facts.

• *Interpretivist Epistemology*: Emphasizes understanding meanings, beliefs, and context.

For instance, studying war onset may require either statistical modeling (positivist) or discourse analysis (interpretivist).

Positivism is an approach that views the world as "out there" waiting be observed and analysed by the researcher. Theories that are built on positivism see the world "as it is" and base their assumptions upon analysing physical elements such as states and international organisations, which they can account for and ascribe values to. Positivism is therefore based on the study of facts and the gathering of physical evidence. It is related to the scientific view of the natural world as being one that operates via laws (such as gravity) that can be revealed by careful study and observation. Positivists assert that equivalent laws can be revealed about the social world.

Postpositivism rejects the positivist approach that a researcher can be an independent observer of the social world. Postpositivists argue that the ideas, and even the particular identity, of a researcher influences what they observe and therefore impacts upon what they conclude. Postpositivism pursues objective answers by attempting to recognise, and work with, such biases with the theories and knowledge that theorists develop.

Interpretivism (sometimes called "anti-positivism") takes things yet further by arguing that objectivity is impossible. As an approach, this leads researchers to focus on gaining *subjective* knowledge through approaches where individuals, or smaller groups, are analysed in depth through detailed observations and discussions. This harnesses a broader framework of "qualitative analysis" in which deeper sets of data are sought from smaller numbers of participants – such as through detailed interviews. This is a different approach to gathering data than the more positivist inclined "quantitative analysis" where larger datasets are sought to gain broader insights – such as polls of hundreds or thousands of people asking them a small number of questions with only yes/no/maybe-type options for answers.

Your **research question** is shaped by:
• Theoretical interest (e.g., "Why do states go to war?")
• Normative concerns (e.g., "What is just in humanitarian intervention?")
• Empirical puzzles (e.g., "Why did the Arab Spring spread in some countries but not others?")
Whether your question is causal, interpretive, or normative determines your methodology.
Theories vs. Methods vs. Methodology
• Theory: Conceptual lens (e.g., realism, liberalism)
• Method: Specific technique (e.g., regression analysis, interviews)
• Methodology: The rationale behind choosing a method, including ontological and epistemological underpinnings.

For instance, methodological approaches that can be applied in research:

1. Institutionalism – studies international institutions and political regimes (for example, whether we study the political system of a state, the EU or NATO in general, etc.).

2. Neo-institutionalism – studies how institutions, rules, norms, cultures constrain or encourage people's choices and actions when they are part of an institution (for example, EU values).

3. Systemic approach – considers the object of research as a holistic set of elements in a set of relations and connections between them (for example, foreign policy communication technologies, public diplomacy as a complex process; the image of someone/something, whether we consider it from the point of view of different components).

4. Functionalism – international integration should be depoliticized, oriented towards the implementation of socio-economic functional tasks (for example, we study international migration).

5. Neofunctionalism – explores non-violent means and mechanisms of creating global political entities + problems of state sovereignty (e.g., common EU policies).

6. Structuralism – analysis of the IRs as a complex system; human behavior through the prism of explicit (established) / implicit rules (e.g., dependence on cultural norms); a person gives meaning to events (e.g., research on propaganda, media messages, where the researcher interprets something).

7. Constructivism – explores ideas, values (e.g., in the context of public diplomacy, image making).

8. Communicative theory (K. Deutsch) – explores cohesion (connectivity in society), understanding; how governments influence citizens.

Levels of analysis are vital components of any good methodology. When used to help shape other valid research methods, such as interviews, fieldwork, surveys – and even the basic academic staple of textual analysis (reading different available sources such as journal articles, books and other documents) – it will help to produce answers that are both self-aware (of their limits) and persuasive.

Levels of Analysis are the building blocks that are faced by all students and academics when they seek to build an analysis. We need such a device because the vast array of themes, actors and issues that we face in International Relations can quickly become overwhelming. Without separating these at times, such as with the levels of analysis, it would be a daunting task to make enough sense of things to build, or utilise, a theory that would allow us to pose viable answers to research questions. When analysing something, you will always have material constraints such as time, availability of material, or a word count. In that sense, making a conscious decision about what level of analysis you will explore will allow you to develop a more focused piece of work and simultaneously trains you to approach complex issues with an academically satisfying method that will produce results.

The <u>four levels of analysis</u> in International Relations are:

The system level comprises the global system in its entirety and looks at issues like the distribution of political power, the economic system, global governance (international organisations, laws and norms) and the diffusion of technology. Importantly, it also considers how these factors create conditions that impose themselves structurally on the other levels.

The state level looks at nation-states as actors in a set of particular external conditions, and actors with particular internal characteristics (such as whether they are democracies or whether they are large or small) and considers their strategic and economic positions.

The group level looks at actors within their social, organisational, professional and bureaucratic context, and points to the way in which they interact with their surroundings. Examples are political decision-makers in the context of governmental structures like political parties, non-governmental organisations and interest groups acting at the intersection between governments and societies.

The individual level looks at the behaviour and decisions of people both in governmental and non-governmental roles, examining their beliefs, fears and their personalities.

Hence, methodology in IR is not about "right" or "wrong" methods but about coherence between your philosophical stance, research question, and method. A rigorous IR scholar is reflexive about the assumptions guiding their research design.

Lecture 2: Qualitative and Quantitative Methods in International Relations

Objective – to explore the core qualitative methodologies used in IR research, highlighting their strengths, limitations, and appropriate use cases; to introduce quantitative approaches in IR, explain statistical techniques, and discuss their strengths, limitations, and appropriate use cases in global political research.

Methods are specific ways of doing things. If the methods are both within the reach/means of the researcher, and used correctly so they are likely to provide the information or insight needed to answer a research question, then this would be what academics call a valid research methodology..

Qualitative research in International Relations emphasizes contextual, interpretive, and in-depth analysis. Rather than seeking statistical generalization, it aims for analytical depth, exploring the meaning behind actions, institutions, and interactions. This approach is well-suited to exploring how identities are formed, how norms evolve, or why certain decisions were made.

Qualitative methods align closely with interpretivist and constructivist epistemologies, which see international politics not just as material interactions but also as shaped by discourse, belief systems, and historical narratives.

1. *Case Study Research*
• Definition: An in-depth examination of a single case (or small number of cases).
• Purpose: Explore causal mechanisms, generate or test theory.
• Example: Studying the Cuban Missile Crisis to understand deterrence and miscommunication.
Types of case studies:
• Exploratory: Define questions or hypotheses.
• Explanatory: Trace causal pathways (e.g., process tracing).
• Comparative: Compare similar or contrasting cases.
Strength: Rich detail and theory building.
Limitation: Limited generalizability.

A case study is an in-depth, detailed examination of a particular case (or cases) within a real-world context. Generally, a case study can highlight an individual, group, organization, event, belief system, or action. A case study does not necessarily have to be one observation, but may include many observations (one or multiple individuals and entities across multiple time periods, all within the same case study). Comparative analysis, on the other hand, is a method that compares two or more of anything (documents, data sets, political systems etc.) – though sometimes a form of comparative analysis is used to compare two or more cases studies, demonstrating the links between these two methods.

2. *Process Tracing*
• Definition: A method that examines sequences of events to uncover causal mechanisms.
• Application: Common in foreign policy analysis and historical IR.
Example: Tracing decision-making within the U.S. administration before the Iraq War.
Strength: Reveals how causes work.
Limitation: Requires high-quality, detailed sources.

Process tracing in IR is used to analyze the causal mechanisms linking causes and outcomes in specific cases. It involves examining the sequence of events and actions within a case to determine if a hypothesized causal process is indeed responsible for the observed outcome. This method is

particularly useful for understanding how and why events unfold in international affairs, especially when studying complex phenomena like foreign policy decision-making or conflict dynamics.

3. Elite Interviews
• Definition: Semi-structured conversations with policymakers, diplomats, or experts.
• Goal: To understand perceptions, motivations, and beliefs of actors.
Strength: Access to insider knowledge.
Limitation: Subjectivity, limited replicability.
Ethical considerations: Informed consent, confidentiality, power imbalances.

An interview is typically a structured conversation where one participant asks questions, and the other provides answers, usually providing information. An interview may also transfer information in both directions. Interviews usually take place face-to-face and in person but the parties may instead be separated geographically, as in videoconferencing or telephone interviews. Interviews almost always involve spoken conversation between two or more parties. In some instances a "conversation" can happen between two persons who type their questions and answers. A focus group is a group interview involving a small number of demographically similar people or participants who have other common traits/experiences. Their reactions to specific researcher/evaluator-posed questions are studied. Focus groups are used to better understand people's reactions to political issues or participants' perceptions of shared experiences. They allow interviewers to study people in a more natural conversational pattern than typically occurs in a one-to-one interview. In combination with participant observation, focus groups can be used for learning about group attitudes and patterns of interaction.

4. Ethnography and Participant Observation
• Definition: Researcher embeds in a community or organization to observe practices and culture.
• Rare in IR but increasingly used in areas like peacebuilding, NGOs, or transnational advocacy networks.
Example: Observing diplomatic negotiation processes at UN meetings.
Strength: Context-rich, uncover hidden norms.
Limitation: Time-intensive, ethical issues.

Ethnography is a branch of anthropology and the systematic study of individual cultures. Ethnography explores cultural phenomena from the point of view of the subject of the study. Ethnography is also a type of social research that involves examining the behaviour of the participants in a given social situation and understanding the group members' own interpretation of such behaviour. As a form of inquiry, ethnography relies heavily on participant observation – on the researcher participating in the setting or with the people being studied, at least in some marginal role, and seeking to document, in detail, patterns of social interaction and the perspectives of participants, and to understand these in their local contexts. It had its origin in social and cultural anthropology in the early twentieth century, but spread to other social science disciplines, notably sociology, during the course of that century. Ethnographers mainly use qualitative methods, though they may also employ quantitative data. The typical ethnography is a holistic study and so includes a brief history, and an analysis of the terrain, the climate, and the habitat. A wide range of groups and organisations have been studied by this method, including traditional communities, youth gangs, religious cults, and organisations of various kinds. While, traditionally, ethnography has relied on the physical presence of the researcher in a setting, there is research using the label that has relied on interviews or documents, sometimes to investigate events in the past such as the NASA Challenger disaster.

There is also a considerable amount of "virtual" or online ethnography, sometimes labelled netnography or cyber-ethnography.

5. *Discourse Analysis*
• Focus: Language, symbols, and narratives used in politics.
• Based on the premise that language constructs reality in international politics.
Example: Analyzing how "terrorism" is framed in UN Security Council resolutions.
Strength: Highlights hidden power structures.
Limitation: Risk of over-interpretation.

Discourse analysis in IR examines how language shapes our understanding and interactions within the global political arena. It is a qualitative method focusing on the meaning embedded in communication, both verbal and non-verbal, and how this shapes political actions and perceptions. By analyzing language use, IR scholars can uncover underlying power dynamics, social constructions, and cultural norms that influence global politics.

Choosing a qualitative method:

Research Aim	Best-fit Method
To understand beliefs of actors	Interviews
To trace policy decisions	Process tracing
To analyze meaning in language	Discourse analysis
To explore field-level dynamics	Ethnography
To Generate theory from empirical detail	Case study

Characteristics of qualitative research methods:
1. Qualitative research methods usually collect data at the sight, where the participants are experiencing issues or research problems. These are real-time data and rarely bring the participants out of the geographic locations to collect information.
2. Qualitative researchers typically gather multiple forms of data, such as interviews, observations, and documents, rather than rely on a single data source.
3. This type of research method works towards solving complex issues by breaking down into meaningful inferences, that is easily readable and understood by all.
4. Since it's a more communicative method, people can build their trust on the researcher and the information thus obtained is raw and unadulterated.

Validity and Reflexivity
• Internal validity: Are the causal claims convincing?
• Construct validity: Are concepts well operationalized?
• Reflexivity: Researchers must reflect on how their background and assumptions affect interpretation.

So, qualitative methods are vital for understanding the complex, nuanced, and socially constructed nature of global politics. They allow researchers to dive deep into how and why questions that cannot be answered by numbers alone. When used rigorously, they provide essential insights into IR phenomena like diplomacy, identity, norms, and power.

Quantitative methods in International Relations involve the systematic analysis of numerical data to test hypotheses, discover patterns, and infer causal relationships. Rooted in positivist epistemology, these methods assume that social phenomena can be measured objectively and studied using the logic of the natural sciences.

Quantitative IR research often aims to identify generalizable patterns across countries, institutions, or time periods. For instance, researchers might ask: Does democracy reduce the likelihood of interstate war? or How do economic sanctions affect regime stability.

Key Features of Quantitative Research in IR:

Feature	Description
Deductive logic	Starts with a theory and tests hypotheses
Operationalization	Translating abstract concepts (e.g., power, democracy) into measurable variables
Large-N analysis	Use of datasets covering many cases
Statistical inference	Drawing conclusions from sample data about the broader population

Common Quantitative Methods:
1. Descriptive Statistics
• Summarize data (e.g., means, medians, frequency distributions).
• Example: Average number of peacekeeping missions per year.

2. Correlation and Regression Analysis
• Correlation: Measures the relationship between two variables (e.g., trade and peace).
• Regression: Models the relationship between a dependent variable and one or more independent variables.
Example: Investigating whether higher GDP per capita correlates with lower conflict incidence.
Strength: Shows direction and strength of association.
Limitation: Correlation ≠ causation.

3. Time-Series Analysis
• Studies how variables change over time within the same unit (e.g., a country).
• Useful for studying trends like arms buildup or democratization over decades.

4. Cross-Sectional and Panel Data Analysis
• Cross-sectional: Data from many units at one point in time.
• Panel (Longitudinal): Repeated observations over time.
Example: Panel data on conflict onset across 150 countries from 1945–2020.

5. Event Data and Conflict Datasets

• IR uses specialized datasets: Correlates of War (COW), Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP), Global Terrorism Database (GTD), Polity IV (regime characteristics). These databases standardize political phenomena and allow for replication.

Interpreting Quantitative Results. Key considerations:
• Statistical significance: Is the result likely due to chance?
• Effect size: How big is the impact?
• Model specification: Are key variables included?
• Endogeneity: Does X cause Y or vice versa?

Software Tools
• SPSS: User-friendly for basic stats
• Stata: Popular in political science
• R / Python: Open-source, customizable
• Excel: Good for small-scale analysis
• https://voyant-tools.org/; https://www.webtools.services/text-analyzer; https://www.online-utility.org/text/analyzer.jsp : semantic analysis of texts (big data).

Hence, quantitative methods provide powerful tools for testing hypotheses, detecting patterns, and building theory in IR. While they offer objectivity and breadth, they must be used carefully to avoid false causal claims or misinterpretation of complex political realities. The most rigorous IR research often combines both qualitative depth and quantitative breadth.

Lecture 3: Critical, Post-Structural, and Feminist Methodologies in International Relations

Objective – to explore non-positivist, emancipatory, and deconstructive research methodologies in IR that challenge traditional assumptions about power, objectivity, and knowledge.

While traditional IR methodologies seek causal explanations or interpret meaning within stable structures, critical, post-structuralist, and feminist approaches interrogate the very foundations of those structures. These methodologies question who defines what counts as knowledge, whose voices are included or excluded, and how power operates through discourse and institutions.

Rather than viewing the international system as a set of material relations, these approaches emphasize ideology, language, identity, and structural oppression. They are less concerned with predictive accuracy and more with exposing power hierarchies, normative assumptions, and the contingency of "truth."

Key Critical Approaches in IR
1. Critical Theory (Frankfurt School)
• Emphasizes the link between knowledge and power.
• Advocates for a reflexive and normatively committed social science.
• Example: Critiquing neoliberal global governance as a system of domination masked as neutrality.
Key figures: Robert Cox ("Theory is always for someone and for some purpose").

Key Features of Critical Theory (Frankfurt School):

• Critique of Modernity and Capitalism: Critical Theory critiques the structures and ideologies of modern capitalist society, particularly focusing on how these structures can lead to oppression and alienation.

• Interdisciplinary Approach: It draws on various disciplines, including philosophy, sociology, psychology, and aesthetics, to provide a comprehensive understanding of social phenomena.

• Focus on Power and Domination: Critical Theory examines how power operates in society, particularly how dominant groups maintain their position through ideology and cultural mechanisms.

• Emancipatory Goal: It aims to not only analyze social problems but also to contribute to social transformation and emancipation from oppressive structures.

• Rejection of Traditional Social Science: The Frankfurt School critiqued the positivist approach of traditional social science, which they saw as too detached and value-neutral.

• Cultural Industry Critique: They analyzed the "culture industry", arguing that mass-produced cultural products (like media and entertainment) can be used to manipulate and control populations.

2. Post-Structuralism
• Influenced by Foucault and Derrida.
• Focus on discourse, power/knowledge, and the instability of meaning.
• Seeks to uncover how dominant narratives legitimize some identities (e.g., "civilized states") while marginalizing others (e.g., "rogue regimes").
Method: Discourse analysis, deconstruction
Example: How the label "terrorist" constructs a subjectivity that justifies intervention.
Key Concepts:

• Deconstruction: Poststructuralists use deconstruction to analyze texts and discourses, revealing the hidden assumptions and power dynamics within them. This involves questioning the stability of meaning and highlighting the contradictions and ambiguities within dominant narratives.

• Discourse: Poststructuralism emphasizes the role of discourse in constructing social and political realities. Discourse refers to the ways in which language shapes our understanding of the world, including the categories we use to understand states, identities, and events.

• Power: Poststructuralists see power not just as something possessed by states but as a pervasive force embedded in social relations and discourses. They argue that power operates through language and knowledge to shape what is considered legitimate and acceptable in international relations.

• Subjectivity: Poststructuralism challenges the idea of a fixed and coherent subject, arguing that identities (individual and collective) are constructed through social and linguistic processes. This means that the concept of the "state" itself is not a fixed entity but a discursive construct.

• Critique of Traditional IR: Poststructuralism critiques traditional IR theories for their reliance on objective truths and universal laws, arguing that these theories often reflect the perspectives and interests of powerful actors.

3. Feminist IR
• Challenges gender-blind assumptions of mainstream IR.
• Reveals how global politics are gendered, and how masculine norms shape diplomacy, war, and peacekeeping.
• Intersectional variants explore how gender interacts with race, class, and postcolonial status.

Example: Cynthia Enloe's work on how militarism is sustained by the roles of women as wives, nurses, sex workers, etc.

Methodologies: Ethnography, narrative analysis, participant observation.

Feminist International Relations theory analyzes international politics through a gendered lens, challenging traditional IR's focus on state-centric, male-dominated perspectives. It examines how gender shapes power dynamics, identities, and global processes, highlighting the experiences of women and marginalized groups. Feminist IR scholars critique mainstream IR's assumptions about security, war, and diplomacy, often revealing how these concepts are themselves gendered.

Key Concepts:

- Gender as a Social Construct: Feminist IR scholars view gender not as a biological given, but as a socially constructed concept that shapes identities, roles, and power relations.

- Challenging Traditional IR: Feminist IR critiques the dominance of realist and rationalist approaches in IR, which often overlook gender and its impact on international affairs.

- Intersectionality: This concept recognizes that gender intersects with other social categories like race, class, and sexuality, creating unique experiences of power and oppression.

- Feminist Security Studies: A significant area within feminist IR, this field redefines security to include human security, addressing issues like gender-based violence, economic security, and the security of marginalized communities.

- Global Governance: Feminist IR questions the male-centric nature of international institutions and advocates for greater gender equality in decision-making processes.

- Transnational Feminism: This aspect emphasizes the importance of feminist networks and movements that transcend national borders.

4. Postcolonial and Decolonial Approaches

• Critique IR's Eurocentrism and colonial legacy.

• Emphasize voices from the Global South and alternative ontologies of power, community, and sovereignty.

Example: Analyzing how "sovereignty" in Africa is constructed through postcolonial dependency, not autonomy.

Postcolonial theory in International Relations critically examines the enduring impact of colonialism on global power dynamics and international systems. It challenges the Eurocentric biases prevalent in traditional IR theories by highlighting the role of historical and ongoing power imbalances rooted in colonialism. Postcolonial IR emphasizes the need to decenter Western perspectives and incorporate the experiences and perspectives of formerly colonized nations, often using concepts like the subaltern to analyze marginalized voices and agency.

Key Concepts:

- Challenging Eurocentrism: Postcolonial IR critiques the tendency of traditional IR theories to focus primarily on the perspectives and interests of Western powers, often neglecting or misrepresenting the experiences of the Global South.

- Power Relations and Hierarchy: It analyzes how colonial legacies continue to shape international relations through unequal power structures, economic dependence, and cultural dominance.

- The Subaltern: This concept, popularized by Gayatri Spivak, refers to those who are marginalized and excluded from dominant narratives and decision-making processes within international affairs.

• Discourse and Representation: Postcolonial IR examines how Western representations of the non-West have been shaped by colonial power dynamics and how these representations continue to influence international perceptions and policies.

• Normalisation: It investigates how certain behaviors, norms, and practices become accepted as "normal" within the international system, and how this process can reinforce existing power imbalances.

• Historical Context: Postcolonial IR emphasizes the importance of understanding the historical roots of contemporary global issues, recognizing that colonialism played a foundational role in shaping the current international order.

Consequently, critical, post-structural, and feminist methodologies broaden IR by challenging what counts as knowledge, who is visible, and how power operates invisibly. They do not seek universal truths but aim to uncover silences, deconstruct dominant narratives, and imagine alternative futures grounded in justice and inclusion.

Lecture 4: Research Design and Ethics in International Relations

Objective – to equip students with the principles of effective research design in IR and to critically reflect on the ethical dimensions of conducting international political research.

Research in International Relations is not just about choosing the right method, it is about designing a coherent project where the question, theory, method, and data align. At the same time, all research must be grounded in ethical considerations: respect for participants, integrity of data, and accountability to the broader scholarly and global community.

A strong research design makes a project not only feasible and rigorous but also transparent, ethical, and impactful.

A research design is the blueprint for how a study will be conducted. It defines:
• What you want to know (research question).
• How you think about it (theoretical framework).
• How you will study it (methodology and methods).
• What data you will collect (empirical strategy).
• What standards you'll uphold (ethical framework).

Key Components of IR Research Design

1. Formulating a Research Question.

A good question is:
• Focused: Clearly defined, not too broad.
• Researchable: Can be addressed through empirical investigation.
• Relevant: Engages with existing debates in IR..
• Open-ended: Avoids yes/no questions.

Example: "How do regional organizations influence post-conflict peacebuilding in Africa?"

2. Theoretical Framework:
• Identifies the conceptual lens (realism, liberalism, feminism, etc.).
• Situates the research in existing literature and debates.
• Clarifies your ontological and epistemological position.

Ask: What assumptions about the world and knowledge underlie my project?

3. Methodology and Method:

• Methodology: Philosophical foundation (positivist, interpretivist, critical).

• Method: Specific tools (interviews, regression analysis, discourse analysis).

Ensure methodological congruence: your method should match your epistemology.

4. Data Collection and Analysis

• Qualitative: Documents, interviews, field notes, archival materials.

• Quantitative: Datasets, surveys, coding of events.

• Consider validity, reliability, and transparency in how data is collected and analyzed.

5.   *Academic Intergrity* is a commitment to honesty, fairness, respect, and responsibility in all academic work. It encompasses ethical conduct in research, learning, and teaching, ensuring trust in academic work and contributions. It involves acknowledging the work of others through proper citation and avoiding plagiarism or any form of academic dishonesty.

Key aspects of academic integrity include:

- Honesty: Being truthful and transparent in all academic endeavors.

- Trust: Fostering a reliable and dependable environment in academic settings.

- Fairness: Ensuring equitable treatment and opportunities for all students and researchers.

- Respect: Recognizing and valuing the contributions of others and upholding their intellectual property.

- Responsibility: Taking ownership of one's work and adhering to academic standards and expectations.

- Courage: Having the strength to act with integrity, even when faced with challenges or temptations to act otherwise.

- Avoiding Plagiarism: Ensuring that all work submitted is original and properly citing any sources used.

The structure and requirements to the Diploma Paper are here https://vnu-taskid841251.s3.eu-north-1.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/File/2024/10/2024_polozhennya_pro_vypusk_roboty-red.pdf

1. Purpose of the Master's Thesis

A master's thesis is an independent scientific study that demonstrates the applicant's ability to:

- analyze problems;

- conduct scientific research;

- formulate conclusions and proposals.

2. Content requirements

The work must be novel, theoretically or practically oriented.

Required elements:

- problem statement;

- source analysis;

- methodology;

- research results;

- conclusions and recommendations.

3. Structure of the work

- Title page

- Table of contents

- Introduction

- Main part (chapters, subsections)

- Conclusions
- List of sources used
- Appendices (if necessary)

4. Design

- According to state standards (DSTU).
- Font: Times New Roman, 14 pt, line spacing – 1.5.
- Margins: left – 30 mm, right – 10 mm, top and bottom – 20 mm each.
- Page numbering – bottom center, starting with the title page (without number).

5. Stages of implementation

- Selecting a topic and approving the supervisor.
- Drawing up a calendar plan.
- Writing and preliminary defense.
- Reviewing.
- Public defense before the Exam Commission.

6. Evaluation

The following tips are to be taken into account:

- the relevance of the topic;
- the quality of the analysis;
- the validity of the conclusions;
- the level of independence;
- the design and presentation.

The Structure of an Article:

1. Introduction:

- What was I studying? Describe the research problem and describe the subject of analysis you have chosen to address the problem. Explain how they are linked and what elements of the case will help to expand knowledge and understanding about the problem.
- Why was this topic important to investigate? Describe the significance of the research problem and state why a case study design and the subject of analysis that the paper is designed around is appropriate in addressing the problem.
- What did we know about this topic before I did this study? Provide background that helps lead the reader into the more in-depth literature review to follow. If applicable, summarize prior case study research applied to the research problem and why it fails to adequately address the research problem. Describe why your case will be useful. If no prior case studies have been used to address the research problem, explain why you have selected this subject of analysis.
- How will this study advance new knowledge or new ways of understanding? Explain why your case study will be suitable in helping to expand knowledge and understanding about the research problem.

2. Literature Review is focused on providing background information and enabling historical interpretation of the subject of analysis in relation to the research problem. It may include:

- relevant works in the context of their contribution to understanding the case study being investigated;
- the relationship each work has to the others under consideration that informs the reader why this case is applicable;
- new ways to interpret prior research using the case study;

- conflicts amongst seemingly contradictory previous studies;
- the way in fulfilling a need for additional research;
- gaps that exist in the literature that the case study could help to fill;
- how your own research is located within the context of existing literature.

3.　　　Method: in this section, you explain why you selected a particular subject of analysis to study and the strategy you used to identify and ultimately decide that your case was appropriate in addressing the research problem. The way you describe the methods used varies depending on the type of subject of analysis that frames your case study.

4.　　　Your findings – the answers to your research questions.

5.　　　Conclusion: as with any research paper, you should summarize your conclusion in clear, simple language; emphasize how the findings from your case study differs from or supports prior research and why. Do not simply reiterate the discussion section. Provide a synthesis of key findings presented in the paper to show how these converge to address the research problem. If you haven't already done so in the discussion section, be sure to document the limitations of your case study and needs for further research.

Regulations on the system of internal quality assurance of higher education at the Lesya Ukrainka Volyn National University, 2024, https://vnu-taskid841251.s3.eu-north-1.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/inline-files/polozhennya-pro-systemu-vnutrishnoho-zabezpechennya-yakosti-osvity-2024-r.pdf

ENSURING AN EFFECTIVE SYSTEM OF ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

9.1. Academic integrity involves compliance by all participants in the educational process with the norms of academic ethics, corporate rules and value orientations, avoiding conflicts of interest, forming traditions and holding events related to one's own internal culture.

9.2. In order to implement the principles of intolerance to violations of academic integrity and the ethics of academic relations, as well as the procedure for preventing and combating academic plagiarism at the University, the Code of Academic Integrity of the Lesya Ukrainka Volyn National University and the Regulations on the system for preventing and detecting academic plagiarism in the scientific and research activities of higher education applicants and scientific and pedagogical workers of the Lesya Ukrainka Volyn National University have been developed.

9.3. The implementation and control of compliance with ethical principles and norms of scientific research at the University is carried out by the Committee on Ethics of Scientific Research, and compliance with bioethical norms and principles in the process of developing, implementing and using the results of scientific, clinical and practical activities is carried out by the Commission on Bioethics.

9.4. In order to popularize the principles of academic integrity and raise the level of awareness of all participants in the educational and scientific activities of the University on current issues of academic integrity, the website "Academic Integrity" was created on the official website of the University.

9.5. Every year, all qualification theses of higher education applicants of the University are checked for academic plagiarism, and their electronic versions are placed in the Electronic Fund of Qualification Theses, and since 2024 - in the repository of the University library

9.6. The following are also subject to mandatory plagiarism checking: coursework of students, monographs, textbooks and manuals recommended for publication by the University's collegiate bodies, scientific works of the Department of Scientific Research and Research, submitted for publication in scientific publications (co-)founded by the University, dissertations completed by a student of a scientific degree, which are considered at a meeting of the University's department;

dissertations and dissertation abstracts submitted for defense at the University's specialized academic council (including a one-time specialized council).

9.7. To implement and promote the policy of academic integrity at the University, information and popularization and information technology events (open lectures, seminars, trainings, academic integrity week, poster defenses, etc.) are regularly held for all participants in the educational and scientific process regarding the inadmissibility of violating the principles of academic integrity and the ethics of academic relations and on the topic of the benefits of honest learning and the implementation of scientific research.

So, a robust IR research project balances intellectual rigor with ethical responsibility. From crafting a research question to conducting interviews or analyzing data, every decision must be justified methodologically and ethically. Reflexivity, transparency, and care for your subjects and readers are not optional—they are essential pillars of scholarly integrity.

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