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**UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI CATANIA**

Dipartimento di Scienze Politiche

**UNIVERSITÉ DE LIÈGE**

Faculté de Droit, de Science Politique et de Criminologie

**Double Master's Degree in:**

Global Politics and Euro-Mediterranean Relations

Sciences politiques, orientation générale, à finalité spécialisée en  
politiques européennes et relations euro-méditerranéennes

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**ZEINEB MRABET**

RESEARCH IN POLITICAL SCIENCES BETWEEN THEORY AND PRACTICE:

WHAT IS APPLIED RESEARCH IN POLITICAL SCIENCES?

**FINAL THESIS**

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## Abstract

The main objective of this research is to define applied research in political sciences, explore its purpose, identify the main actors involved, and explain the process of its conduction. It also aims to understand the role that plays this type of research in bridging the gap between science and practice in the political sciences field, from political science to political practices.

Through a review of the literature that defines applied research in general, and in other fields of study such as business and management study, the literature that introduces the field of political sciences, and the literature that explains the main challenges encountered for ensuring the applicability and usefulness of research results in this field, we extracted three main concepts on which we based our qualitative study: defining applied research in political sciences, conducting applied research in political sciences, and its applicability in the practical political world. The conduction of our study through semi-structured individual interviews to a selected sample of researchers, and the analysis of two applied research works, we were able to draw a clear definition of applied research in political sciences based on the WWH (What, Why, How) model, and a modelling of the process of this kind of research as well as the process of transition from scientific results to actionable solutions.

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## Introduction

For many years, scientific research has been the essence for many innovations. Not only technology and industry-oriented fields, but also some social sciences fields have benefited from research projects in order to develop practical solutions to problems or to respond to some needs that has been detected by scholars themselves, or by the concerned practitioners. The usage of scientific results to create an added value for practitioners has been fruitful, although in some fields more than others.

Innovation, for instance, was presented by the economist Joseph Schumpeter in the late 1920s and defined as the result of a set of systemic actions aiming to introduce new products and new production methods on a market, to conquer a new market, to use new raw materials, or to implement new organisational structures (Schumpeter, 1934). The Schumpeterian approach has evolved with the involvement of many scholars giving birth to the “innovation linear process”. This process consists in four main steps: a) basic (or fundamental) research; b) applied research; c) experimental development; and c) innovation.

Forest (2014) classified this process in two separated but successive categories of acts: The first category being scientific acts aiming to produce inventions using the new scientific knowledge acquired and technically applied through research. The second category being economic acts that focus on the transformation of these inventions into innovative products, methods, or processes.

In fact, according to the analysis of Laperche (2002), each of these four steps (cited above) has its own specific objective and is done in a different place. For instance, while the main purpose of basic research is generating general or oriented knowledge in public research centres and universities, applied research is mainly oriented towards applying the knowledge acquired through fundamental research, generally in industrial laboratories, or, also, conducting research that is directly oriented towards a specific practical objective.

Studying this process has led us to understand that, from our own perspective, applied research has an important pivotal aspect that ensures the transformation of theories produced by basic research works into applicable in practical life. In other words, applied research might be considered as a catalyser that bridges the gap between research and practice.

The main question that we are now asking ourselves is: Is this applicable in the field of political sciences? Precisely, is there applied research in political sciences? If yes, how can we define



it? If applied research as presented above is the testing and application of knowledge mainly acquired through basic research activities, can we consider it the same in political sciences?

In fact, we found that the literature related to applied research in the political sciences field is very limited. Applied research has mainly been introduced in exact sciences, rather than in social sciences. Furthermore, research in political sciences has been criticized to be too theoretical, and the relationship between academia and practical politics is judged by some authors (namely Donovan & Larkin, 2006) of being not enough fruitful.

Thus, the main purpose of this work will be to define applied research in the political sciences field, and to determine the extent to which we can consider applied research in political sciences a bridge between theory and practice.

### **Research question:**

What is applied research in political sciences? What is the role played by this type of research in bridging the gap between science and practice in the political sciences field?

### **Research objectives:**

- Defining applied research in political sciences, its purpose, and the actors involved
- Determining the specific process for conducting this kind of research and ensuring potential applicability
- Identifying the process that ensures effective applicability and usefulness of research in political sciences and the role of conducting applied research in this field

# Chapter 1: Literature review

## I. What is applied research?

If we try to think about applied research, the first idea that we have in mind is scientists in a laboratory equipped with test tubes working on experiments of chemicals, or scholars collecting data in order to conduct empirical studies and test pre-elaborated theories on different complex, or less complex, subjects.

Whereas this image is true, through this chapter, we will try to enlarge our perception and dig deeper into understanding applied research in less technical fields, away from exact sciences, directing our viewing angle towards social sciences, specifically political sciences.

We will go through the definitions of applied research that we found in the literature, first general definitions, and then in social sciences and identify its main characteristics.

### 1. General definition of applied research

One of the main resources to understand research related concepts is the Frascati Manual. In this manual, applied research is defined as the “original investigation undertaken in order to acquire new knowledge. It is, however, directed primarily towards a specific, practical aim or objective.” (Frascati Manual, 2015, p.51) The authors explained that the purpose of applied research can either be to test knowledge acquired through basic research works and determine its possible uses in practice, or to find new ways and methods to achieve a predetermined objective that is directly related to the resolution of a practical problem, or both at the same time. The research results are intended to be applied on products, operations, methods, or systems. “Applied research gives operational form to ideas” (Frascati Manual, 2016, p.51).

Applied research as defined by R. Panneerselvam in his book “Research Methodology” (2014) “is an organized set of activities to study or develop a model/technique to find the results of a realistic problem supported by literature and data such that its objective(s) is(are) optimized and further make recommendations/interferences for implementations.”

### 2. Applied research in social sciences

Hedrick, Bickman and Rog dedicated their book “Applied Research Design” (1993) to explain how to really conduct an applied research for applied social research practitioners. In this book, they defined applied research in social sciences as a research that “uses scientific methodology to develop information aimed at clarifying or confronting an immediate societal problem. Its

environment is often a messy one, with pressures for quick and conclusive answers, sometimes in very political contexts.” (Hedrick, Bickman, & Rog, 1993, p.2) In their book, the authors also explained that one of the main purposes of applied research, by which it differs from basic research, is its aim to discovering practically relevant and significant networks and relationships. “Applied research, in contrast, strives to improve our understanding of a specific problem, with the intent of contributing to the solution of that problem.” (Hedrick, Bickman, & Rog, 1993, p.3) In fact, as basic research is generally concerned by the existence or not of an effect or a causal relationship through analysis based mainly on statistical criteria, in applied research however, as Hedrick & al. explain, not only statistical but also practical criteria are both considered important. For the authors, applied research is also concerned by discovering whether or not causal relationships or effects exist, but it goes beyond this by adding a practical touch as they search to produce, through their studies of causal relationships, “societally significant results” (Hedrick, Bickman, & Rog, p.4)

Hedrick & al. also highlighted the difference between basic and applied research in terms of research design as they consider that applied research necessitates an extensive work as it is interested in understanding the purposes and practical endeavours of the results. In fact, they explained that the applied researcher needs to consider the extent to which his/her work will be perceived meaningful and practical by specific key audiences and interest groups, and if the outcome is important or trivial.

According to the authors mentioned above, the biggest difference between basic and applied research remains in the context. By context, the authors addressed mainly the place (where the research occurs), as applied research generally takes place on field while basic research is mainly conducted in academic institutions (universities or other research structures), the factor that triggers the researcher to study a specific research question, as basic research is generally self-initiated whereas applied research is client-initiated where the research question is generated by the client/target audience on issues that are poorly, or not at all, understood, we also found interesting the difference in terms of time pressure mentioned by the authors where they explained how applied research is more time-pressured compared to basic research.

When it comes to business studies, Sekeran (2003) has introduced in her book “Research Methods for Business” the different approaches to conduct research in the business-related fields. In the first chapter of her book, the author differentiated between basic and applied research in terms of purpose as she defined applied research as “research done with the

intention of applying the results of the findings to solve specific problems currently being experienced in the organization” (Sekeran, 2003, p.8). Thus, giving a more specific business-related context, she pressured the fact that applied research in organizations is done “to solve a current problem faced by the manager in the work setting, demanding a timely solution. For example, a particular product may not be selling well and the manager might want to find the reasons for this in order to take corrective action. Such research is called applied research.” (Sekeran, 2003, p.7)

Sekeran also shed the light on the process of transition from basic to applied research as she explained how applied research can be the continuity of basic research, which perfectly converge with the linear research and development process as we explained it above (see introduction). For her, some organizations might use the knowledge offered by the findings of a basic research for an applied research study in order to solve their own problems. This does not only shows the potential complementarity relationship between basic and applied research, but also highlights the role of applied research in offering actionable findings and solutions for practitioners.

This help us conclude that not only the process of using basic research findings in applied research works can be also valid for social sciences, but also the importance of applied research in less tangible fields than exact sciences and technology studies, as an example, as a bridge between science and practice. Thus, the question that arises apart from “what is applied research in political sciences?” is “to what extent, and how does applied research in political sciences impacts practical politics?”.

Before digging into the second question, we will try to synthetize the main characteristics and criteria of applied research that we found through the definitions presented above in the table below. This will help us define applied research in political sciences through our study.

### **3. Applied research in political sciences**

Political sciences can be also introduced as the science of politics. It is thus important to define politics first. In Lasswell’s (1950) definition, being the most cited one, politics are about “who gets what, when, how” which was explained, and simplified, by Whiteman Cobb (2020) as the “authoritative distribution of resources” (Whitman Cobb, 2020, p. 3). Hence the definition presented by Whiteman Cobb of political sciences as being the “systematic and scientific study of politics, including institutions, behaviours and processes.” (Whiteman Cobb, 2020, p. 4)

The formation of the discipline of political sciences was triggered by political philosophy discussions between multiple authors from Plato, to Machiavelli, to St. Augustine, and to Montesquieu. Thus, no one can deny the role of political theory and philosophy for the development of political sciences. Since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when political science was officially considered a formal field of study, many research works were been conducted inside the frame of this discipline, and countless of theories, concepts and notions have been identified, defined, and introduced in the various sub-disciplines of political sciences, from international relations, to comparative politics, political economy .... A definition has been introduced in the International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences explaining political science as “the study of human behavior relating primarily to the operations of government, the state, and in principle other outcomes deemed important by actors ... to explain the course and effects of political events, the work of political institutions, and the attitudes and choices of individuals engaged in political activity from voting to national and international policy-making.”

Research played and is still playing a fundamental role in this discipline, yet many authors have raised the question of usefulness of its findings, and of the relationship between research and reality, between science and practice.

While introducing the discipline of political sciences, Whiteman Cobb has highlighted the debate concerning the purpose of research in political sciences, whether it is limited to producing scientific knowledge, or to producing knowledge about “what is good or bad, just or unjust” (Whiteman Cobb, 2020, p. 10). This leads us to one of the persistent criticisms of behavioural science research (including political science) that scientists' interest is limited to the production of theories for theory's sake (Ricci, 1984. Cited in Waterman and Wood, 1992) and that research in these fields of study offers little practical knowledge that can be mobilized for and by society. As we have seen in the previous part of this chapter, applied research in other fields of studies has an important role in the transition and transformation of knowledge gained through research into practical and actionable solutions to the concerned audience. And in fact, as we also mentioned above, it is here that lies the main problem detected and debated by many authors when it comes to research in political sciences, hence our research objective of answering to these three main questions: what is applied research in political sciences? By whom and where is it conducted, and to whom? And how is it done?

Through the literature that we have presented above, we were able to think about a temporary definition of applied research in political sciences as a scientific work (paper, thesis, article,

book, ...) that is done by political scientists dedicated to responding to practitioners' needs and to contributing to the practical politics, policy process, or solving an existing political or societal problem. Its results should be practice-oriented and their transformation to actionable solutions by the targeted audience should be possible.

For now, and for the next part in our literature review, we will assume that any fact stated by an author while explaining a feature about research in political sciences that is relevant to this definition is associated to "applied research"

## **II. Applied research in political science: between theory and practice**

We have reviewed the literature that explains and explores many traits and characteristics of research in political sciences, and that addresses the problem of the "gap" between research and practice. We will thus present below some articles that we selected as the most relevant as they can help us answering to our questions.

### **a. The Problem of Political Science and Practical Politics: Claire Donovan & Phil Larkin, 2006**

The purpose of this article is mainly to understand the reason behind the unfruitful and uneasy relationship between political science academia and political practitioners. Through their research, the authors tried to study the performance and ability of political science researchers in producing usable knowledge and actionable solutions to practitioners. By practitioners, they specified that they involve "policymakers from government or the civil service, or those seeking to influence, challenge, or simply understand policy from the backbenches, NGOs, unions, trade associations, business or the media." (Donovan & Larkin, 2006, p. 11)

According to their study, Donovan & Larkin identified three main factors that can explain the lack of engagement between political science and practical politics.

First, governments' instrumentalism limits political science research's - mainly state-sponsored - existence to its purpose of serving the state, and those with power. However, the authors explained that there are political scientists who conduct many applied research works under governmental contracts or through dual funding systems (mainly in Britain). Nevertheless, these applied research works are an "exception", and their applied results are not considered as a contribution to the academic advancement by other political science peers unless they are transformed into "'unapplied' political science publications." (Donovan & Larkin, 2006, p. 13)

The authors considered that the main reason of this conflictual situation is the difference of the perception held by practitioners and researchers about political sciences. Thus, they explained that in order to tackle this problem, political scientists should be rewarded with more appropriate incentives so that their potential practical contribution can be realised. These incentives come from within the academia sphere, and from outside, thus from practitioners and mainly governments. In fact, academic publication metrics (number of publications and citation level) and the evaluation based on peer review only are what political scientists look after for reaching an “academic prestige”, and are thus the core incentives, whereas little importance is given to the practical impact and usability of the research produced.

The second factor concerns scientism and abstraction as the cause of the diminishment of readily usable product for practical politics stock. Giovanni Sartori, cited by the authors of this article, thinks that political science, especially the American style, has “missed, or even dismissed, its applied branch” which for him, brought as a consequence the image of political science as a “theory without practice, a knowledge crippled by a know-how void” (Giovanni Sartori, 2004, p. 786. Cited by Donovan & Larkin, 2006, p. 14). This factor can thus explain that the discipline itself, mainly in the United States, might have privileged theory-research at the expense of theory-practice. However, other authors, mainly Perestroikans, assumed that the reason is mainly the isolation of scientists from political and public life as a consequence of the dominance of rational research approaches. They thus assumed that a methodological pluralism in political science research can revive its applied branch and reorient it towards a better capacity to contributing to the political process. Another reason related to this factor highlighted by the authors is inclination of the political science discipline towards “refined abstraction – be it mathematical reasoning or high theory. In fact, Jane Lewis, cited by Donovan & Larkin, thinks that even though the purpose of political science research, basic or applied, is the understanding, the explanation, the conceptualisation, the classification and the pursuit of greater theoretical sophistication, “the effort to develop and refine theory ... can become so internally focused that it becomes hopelessly remote from common sense and real experience” (Jane Lewis, 2003, p. 197. Cited by Donovan & Larkin, 2006, p. 15)

The third factor identified by the authors is the need for, and limits of, engagement. In this sense, Donovan & Larkin suggest that political scientists should gain more ability to get involved in practical politics producing research results that are directly applicable by practitioners. By this, the authors mean that political scientist should get more opportunities to interact with practitioners, thus having the ability to discuss their research results allowing a

relevant translation from scientific to practical jargon, or to offer new questions and ideas to practitioners that might help making incremental improvements in practical politics and feeding the policy process. For the authors, it is for sure important to conduct applied research in other ways than under government contracts or inside governmental institutions, that “uses the knowledge and insights derived from the systematic and detailed study of political institutions and phenomena”, but it is also a fact that research results won’t be directly picked and used by those involved in the policy process. Thus, on one hand, interactions and discussions between political scientists and practical politics actors – be they policymakers, politicians, NGOs, unions, and the rest of actors – can help clarify the results of potentially usable research and the potential way of implementation or transformation into actionable solutions or ideas. On the other hand, these researcher-practitioner discussions and interactions can also inspire researchers about new research questions to be studied, thus co-developing the subjects studied in a way that, once done, their results can, almost for sure, serve practical politics in a way or in another.

**b. Bridging Research and Policy: Diane Stone, Simon Maxwell, Michael Keating, 2001**

We find the paper presented by Stone & al. interesting on many levels. First, this work doesn’t only present the perspective of political scientists and researchers, but also the practitioners’, precisely policymakers. In fact, by seeking to understand the gap existing between research and policy in political sciences, this study has taken into consideration the challenges that both types of actors are facing. Second, this work shed light on the contingent nature of the relationship between research and policy, the dependence of usability of research on social and political context, and the important role that policy windows (Kingdon’s model) can play for political practitioners as for political scientists. Last but not least, we think that the authors succeeded in viewing the problematic relationship between political sciences and practical politics from many angles. They assumed that the reasons of this problem can be not only the fact that political sciences are too theory-oriented, or that political institutions are not giving enough incentives, or place, for political scientists to contribute to the policy process, but they also considered the problem of “failure” of applied research that is directly designed to be relevant to policy in having an impact because of different reasons, namely time pressure, presentation of results or manner of communication. Thus, questioning the presence of certain competencies in political science researchers’ profiles.



To describe the dynamic between research and policy, Stone & al. assumed that the relationship is problematic, and that the problem can be the consequence of many scenarios. As we mentioned above, the interesting fact about their analysis is their holistic view of the actors involved. We will present the reasons they have states in a table below, where we will try to identify the concerned part (researchers / practitioners).

|    | Problem   | Researchers | Practitioners |
|----|---|-------------|---------------|
| 1  | A public goods problem: an inadequate supply of policy relevant research.   | X           |               |
| 2  | Lack of access to research, data and analysis of both researchers and policy makers.  | X           | X             |
| 3  | Poor policy comprehension of researchers.   | X           |               |
| 4  | Ineffective communication by researchers about their work.  | X           |               |
| 5  | Societal disconnection of both researchers and decision-makers from the effective target audience of the research undermining the implementation. |             | X             |
| 6  | Ignorance of politicians about the existence of policy relevant research, or the incapacity of bureaucrats to absorb research.                    |             | X             |
| 7  | The dismissiveness, unresponsiveness, or incapacity of policy makers and leaders of using research.   | X           | X             |
| 8  | Domains of research relevance: short term perspective in terms of impact and influence.   | X           |               |
| 9  | Power relations: concerns about the validity of knowledge(s), issues of censorship and control, ideology conflicts.                               |             | X             |
| 10 | Validity of research: "What is knowable?"   | X           |               |

*Table 1: Problems within the relationship between research and policy & the actors involved*

*Source: Author, inspired by Stone & al., 2001 (pp. 3-4)*

The first incentive that pushed us to elaborate this table is to theoretically validate an idea that we had in mind while reviewing the previous literature: applied research is done by researchers, but the cooperation with practitioners is necessary. In fact, this table clarifies the fact that researchers should involve practitioners in the research process in order to elaborate an applied research work that is relevant to the practical politics world. Yet, we will not assume that this idea is validated as long as we did not complete our research work. Then, another characteristic was made clear through this table, is that the target audience concerned by the research and the

implication of its results on the policy process are to be considered an important actor (see problem n°5). If we resonate about it, we can take the example of an agriculture-related issue, where we can understand that not only researchers and policy makers should be involved, but also farmers as their insights might be of great value in the development of the research (from the central question to the results phase), in the transition from research to policy, and then in different phases of the policy cycle, namely the implementation and monitoring & evaluation. This also enables us to say that applied research in political sciences is not only designed to those involved in practical politics, but also to the segment of population concerned by issue that the research work is tackling and its implications in terms of policy.

Another important part of Stone & al. 's work is raising the question of “towards policy entrepreneurship?”. From our point of view, applied research in political science, if it wants to reply to the main characteristic of an applied research, that of having a practical aim and objective, researchers should perceive it and conduct it in an entrepreneurial spirit. The authors have also mentioned that, through the literature they reviewed, researchers who are interested in policy impact think that policy entrepreneurship is the optimal way for making research relevant and useful for practical politics. In fact, by raising this question, the authors offered us a valuable classification of those who are more likely to conduct applied research in political science, but also the different routes that research can take towards meeting reality, thus practical politics, and policy.

| Category                  | Who   | Where  |
|---------------------------|---|--|
| Contract researchers      | External researchers contracted by political and/or public institutions or NGOs.                      | Universities, thinktanks   |
| In-house researchers      | Public servants.  | Statistical offices, semi-public administrative bodies (quangos), NGOs |
| Political advisors        | Appointed by political leaders, they may come from scientific or scholarly background.                | Governmental bodies  |
| Civil society researchers | Out-house researchers aiming to compensate for a lack of research in a particular field or to present | Think tanks, NGOs  |

|                           |  |  |
|---------------------------|--|--|
|                           | critical alternatives to government bodies.  |  |
| Disinterested researchers | Pursuing research for knowledge's sake. They operate outside or on the margins of policy making and are unconcerned about policy applications of their research. | Universities, research structures & laboratories |

*Table 2: Categories of applied political science researchers & their respective workplaces*

*Source: Author, inspired by Stone & al., 2001 (pp. 13-14)*

We find the classification offered very relevant to our purpose of identifying ‘who conduct, and where is conducted, applied research in political science’, except for the 5<sup>th</sup> category, as we think that it concerns more basic research than the applied one.

As we mentioned above, in this part, Stone & al also offered us a valuable presentation of the potential routes available for applied researchers in political sciences to make their research relevant and useful for practical politics. Amongst these routes we find the classic Legislative route, the bureaucratic access, the educational access, the climate of opinion, people’s participation and local knowledge, and networks. Screening through the explanation given by the authors of these different routes, we can not just assume that applied research in political sciences is done accordingly without considering that, in fact, the reality goes differently. For example, as the authors highlighted, even though Parliamentary and Legislative committees and inquiries can play an important mediation role between researchers and policymakers and give many opportunities to external researchers by submitting reports to parliament, this route doesn’t lack of challenges. Committees generally “favour ‘expert’ opinion” to researchers’, and inquiries’ path might take several years and might also be abandoned in case of a change in the government. As for educational avenues, going back to the contingency theory that caught our attention in this study, their importance depends on the importance given to higher education in a specific country, thus their impact may differ from a country to another. Yet, we came out with interesting conclusions that can inevitably help us through our research. First, interactions between researchers and those involved in practical politics is necessary for conducting a relevant applied research work, but, second, researchers, like entrepreneurs, need great communication and marketing skills, as the authors mentioned, knowing how to market their research findings and policy ideas” will not only help them reach the political practitioners

but also a public audience, creating thus a change in the public opinion about a certain issue or policy, which can push the creation of policy windows. Finally, the authors explained the importance of networks in creating interaction and cooperation opportunities between researchers and decision-makers, thus linking scientists holding information and analytic resources to policy and decision makers who share with them common interests and goals.

After a careful reading of this article, we were also able to identify some approaches that can be used by researchers to conduct an applied research in political sciences that can have an impact on the policy process. First, the rational model, or the evidence-based policy, where the researcher conducts an analysis of all data collected about a specific issue, presents all policy options based on results obtained. This approach is collaborative with the research users (political practitioners) as it is considered a “fitness for purpose” approach, thus, giving a great importance to “the relationship between research evidence, practice, and policy” (Stone & al., 2001, p.31). Second, the incremental approach where researchers are mainly concerned by the gradual change of existing policies rather than conducting time-consuming and costly innovative comprehensive research. Third, the knowledge accumulation approach which can also be considered an incremental approach but one of the research results. This approach consists in considering the existing knowledge on the studied issue, on related issues, or other knowledge that might be of contribution to the studied one, thus cumulating the knowledge in order to alter the perception of decision-makers through a clearer mapping of the roots of the problem and the likely effects of a policy intervention. The fourth one is policy paradigms where researchers, operating in, or collaborating with, political interest and advocacy groups, generate a disruption or a change in the dominant set of ideas that policymakers have concerning a particular issue and present a clearer definition of the problem and “what policies or instruments are appropriate to resolving them”. This approach is characterised by “long period of incremental change, punctuated by brief periods of major change” (Parsons, 1995, cited by Stole & al., 2001, P.7).

To wrap up, we will present the most relevant conclusions that we could extract from the literature that we reviewed in a table below. In this table, we tried to clarify the definition and the purpose of applied research in political science, the profile of the researcher who conducts it and the audience who will benefit from its results.

|         |   |
|---------|---|
| What    | A scientific study aiming to answer to a central question that emanates from the reality, an issue observed or identified by political science researchers, or by political practitioners, or to verify and test a theory that was presented in the literature of this field.   |
| By whom | The process of research, from formulating the research questions up until concluding the results is done by political science researchers with the cooperation of political science practitioners and the public target audience concerned by the issue studied.<br><i>Contract researchers, in-house researchers, political advisors, civil society researchers.</i>         |
| To whom | The results of an applied research in political sciences should be of service to political science practitioners, and should contain recommendations for implementations, thus contributing to the design of actionable solutions to the identified issue.<br><i>Policymakers, politicians, NGOs, unions, advocacy &amp; influence groups, media, trade associations, ...</i> |
| How     | The rational model, the incremental approach, the cumulative knowledge approach, the policy paradigms approach.   |

*Table 3: Applied research in political science: what, by whom, to whom*

Waterman & Wood (1992) conducted an interesting scientific study on the usefulness of applied research in political science in their paper “What do we do with applied research?”. Jumping into the conclusions of their analysis of the impact of an applied research offering a policy proposal about bureaucratic accountability on a 40-year period, the authors explained that, although the impact is minor, it is not to be underestimated, in the contrary, there are some ways that can make an applied research in political science useful and impactful. In fact, the authors consider that the main problem is that applied research is published in classic political and social science journals and are rarely presented in professional outlets, losing thus their practical pay-off. They concluded that applied research in political science should be as committed to producing usable knowledge as it is committed to continue in its intellectual purpose. This makes us think about the importance of the know-hows in results formulation and communication that applied researchers in political sciences should be equipped with, and to also differentiate, while linking, between “applied” and “applicable” research in political science.

In fact, we understood that applied research is still considered applied research even if it is only published in a scientific journal without having any practical impact. But we also believe that an impactless applied research does only confirm the ongoing criticism that research in political science is useless to practical politics and is only conducted for theory's sake. Through our study, we will thus consider that "applicability" is an important criterion for conducting applied research in political science, and we will try to identify the best practices for making applied research applicable in political science, thus bridging the gap between science and practice in this field.

Through the literature we have reviewed above, we think that, in fact, applicability is to be considered from the beginning of the research, from the formulation of the research question. As an applied research aims to produce solutions to an issue that emanates from reality, the research question should be formulated in a way that its results will serve to the concerned audience in an applicable way.

### **III. Conclusion**

To conclude our first chapter, we will present the main characteristics extracted from the literature that might define an applied research in political sciences and insure the applicability if its results and their usefulness to practical politics.

Applied research in political science can be defined as a scientific study aiming to answer to a central question that emanates from the reality, an issue observed or identified by political science researchers, or by political practitioners. Its purpose is to explain political events and their effects, political institutions' functioning, and the behaviour and attitude of the people engaged in political activities. Thus, a study that emanates from the political reality to serve this political reality. Applied researchers in political sciences can be contract researchers, in-house researchers, political advisors, or civil society researchers. Their work is directly dedicated to practical politics actors such as policymakers, politicians, NGOs, unions, advocacy & influence groups, media, and trade associations, and indirectly to the public audience concerned by the studied issue.

Many approaches can be used by applied researchers to conduct their research work, namely the rational model, the incremental approach, the cumulative knowledge approach, and the policy paradigms approach.

Applied researchers in political sciences face many challenges especially in terms of their relationship with political practitioners and of the applicability and usefulness of their results. These challenges are present in the entire process from the research question development to the results formulation, and are both from the inside (in terms of communication skills and technical competencies) and from the outside (in terms of research practical validity and acceptance by the political practitioners, of lack of interaction between researchers and practitioners, and the inefficiency of some research-related features such as time consumption and difficulty to access to the research results).

Through our explorative study, we will try to verify the validity of the information collected and understand more the perception of political science researchers concerning applied research in political sciences, all while trying to explore the best options, methods, and methodologies that not only ensure the rigor and relevance of an applied research but also its usefulness and applicability in the practical politics world.

## Chapter 2: Research Design & Empirical Framework Presentation

### I. Research design

#### 1. Epistemological posture

Epistemology in the English vocabulary is the theory, or science, of knowledge. It englobes the processes that generate knowledge, their logic, their foundation, and also the specific study of sciences, the concrete historical development of the issues studied. (Ladrière, 1995)

Thus, epistemological posture allows us to position ourselves in a certain scientific vision that facilitates our comprehension of necessary theoretical and methodological aspects to conduct our study, and a better clarity of the knowledge that we are about to produce.

There are three main epistemological paradigms that we will present in the table below in order to choose carefully which one is the most suitable to adopt for replying to our research question.

| Paradigms<br>Criteria   | Positivist                                     | Interpretivist   | Constructivist   |
|-------------------------|--|--|--|
| Researcher's perception | Objective/Passive: comes from reality observed | Subjective/Active: comes the perception of actors involved | Subjective/Active: comes from the perception of the researcher |
| Purpose                 | Explain &/or predict the reality               | Understand the reality                                     | Construct the reality  |
| Subject/Object relation | Independent                                    | Interdependent   |  |
| Nature of the reality   | Predetermined (exists through universal laws)  | Perceived  | Experienced/lived  |
| Unity of research       | Exact facts (phenomena)                        | Behaviours   | Researcher 's experiences                                      |
| Validity criteria       | Verifiability; confirmability; refutability    | Idiographic; path replication                              | Adequacy; teachability   |

*Table 4: Comparison of the different epistemological paradigms*

*Source: Author, inspired by Ladrière (1995) and Thiétart (2003)*



To sum up, according to Ladrière (1995) and Thiétart (2003), we can conclude that the positivist vision is when the researcher aims to explain or predict the reality through discovering the of natural and universal laws and using rational, uniform, and deductive methods. The aim of the researcher under the interpretivist vision is to understand the social world through the interpretation of reality as perceived by the actors involved. Finally, through the constructivist vision, the researcher aims to contribute to the construction of the reality as he/she and the actors involved perceive it.

Thus, as through this research work, we are trying to understand and give an explanation of applied research in political sciences helping ourselves with the existent literature and the perception of involved actors, we think that the interpretivist paradigm is the most suitable for allowing us to reply to our central research question.

## **2. Choice of the reasoning method: generating a conceptual response**

According to Charreire-Petit & Durieux (2007), there are two main scientific paths for the production of knowledge, each one of them rely on a specific reasoning method: exploration and testing, which rely respectively on induction and deduction. On one hand, exploration is when the researcher aims to introduce theoretically innovative results thus generating a new conceptual response to the issue studied. On the other hand, testing is about challenging the reality of a studied object or phenomena, thus validating, or refute, an existing conceptual response.

As our research aims to construct a definition of applied research in political research and highlight its role in making research more useful to practical sciences, the results of our work are about generating a new conceptual response rather than validating, or refuting, an existing one. Thus, we will be adopting an exploratory logic while conduct our study, hence the induction reasoning method, that Thiétart (2007) explains as a reasoning that aims to discover, or deepen the understanding of, a structure or a functioning.

## **3. Research methodology**

### **a. Methodological approach: qualitative study**

According to Velmuradova (2004), there are specific reasons that can make a researcher choose a qualitative approach rather than a quantitative one. In fact, Velmuradova explains that if a researcher is studying a question that hasn't, or rarely, been addressed in the literature, if he/she is trying to identify the components of a phenomena in order to rough it out, or if one wishes

to identify and understand the nature of the factors or forces that may explain a behaviour. In such cases, a qualitative approach is privileged as it allows to conduct an in-depth study of a phenomena based on few cases.

In our case, as through the study we are about to conduct, we will try to build a complete definition of applied research in political science by identifying its main components of why and who conducts it, for whom and how is it conducted, through collecting information from applied researchers, we think that a qualitative approach is the most appropriate. In fact, this approach, according to Easterby-Smith, et al (2009), is the only method that will allow us to guarantee a collection of rich and detailed data and a deeper understanding of the phenomenon studied.

*« Indeed, papers that build theory from cases are often regarded as the “most interesting” research and are among the most highly cited ..., with impact disproportionate to their numbers. »*

*(Bartunek, Rynes, et Ireland, 2006 ; Eisenhardt, 1989 ; Gersick, 1988 ; in Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007, p. 25)*

Among the existing qualitative research methods, we choose the multiple case study. In fact, this method emphasizes the real and rich context in which the phenomenon occurs, and therefore allows us to understand it in depth in its natural environment. This method grants of the importance to the development of constructs, measures, and testable theoretical propositions. (Eisenhardt and Graebener, 2007; p. 25)

Yin (2009) also highlights the importance of using the multiple case study if the researcher is trying to answer to a “how?” or “why?” question, or if the research question requires a detailed and in-depth description of the studied phenomena.

In this research work, we are seeking to know from the selected applied researchers (that will be presented in the next section of this chapter) ‘how do they perceive applied research in political science’ and try to identify the different components of this type of research as perceived by them. Thus, we think that the choice of a multiple case study is well justified.

To sum up, we will base our research on the data we will collect from multiple cases that we will analyse using inductive reasoning in order to develop our theoretical propositions.

**b. Level and units of analysis**

As we will be studying the perception of researchers in terms of applied research in political science, the level of analysis is then an individual one. We will build our analysis on three main units:

- Definition of applied research in political sciences
- Conduction of an applied research in political sciences
- Tackling the research-practice gap through applied research in political sciences

**c. Operationalization of key concepts**

According to Thiétart (2014), the transition from the methodological frame to the empirical one requires a great and clear operationalization of key concepts. This will allow us to turn the abstract concepts stated above as units of analysis into measurable variables.

- Definition of applied research in political sciences

| Concept   | Variables                     | Indicators  |
|---|-------------------------------|---|
| Defining applied research in political sciences: What is it, and why is it important? | Type of the research work     | Nomination given (it can be process, investigation, exploration, ...).  |
|   | Purpose of the research work  | The different reasons behind formulating applied research questions in political science.   |
|   | Researchers' profile/position | The image/reflection of who is an applied researcher in political science.  |
|   | Target audience               | Different physical or moral persons concerned by, or might benefit from, the study results.   |
|   | Perceptions exchange factors  | Importance given (or not) to the exchange of perceptions between researchers and practitioners throughout the research process and after. |

|  |  |  |
|--|--|--|
|  |  | Factors/circumstances facilitating this perceptions' exchange. |
|--|--|--|

*Table 5: Operationalization of the concept of defining applied research in political sciences*

- Conduction of an applied research in political sciences

| Concept   | Variables  | Indicators  |
|---|--|---|
| Methods and methodologies to conducting an applied research in political sciences | Privileged methodologies                                   | Scientific methodologies thought to be more efficient for conducting an applied research in political sciences.   |
|   | Difference with other fields                               | Perception about the different way of doing applied research in political sciences than in other fields, mainly exact sciences.                                   |
|   | Researchers/Practitioners communication during the process | Link between methodology choice and communication with practitioners: Importance of choosing a methodology that encourages / requires contact with practitioners. |

*Table 6: Operationalization of the concept of conducting applied research in political sciences*

- Tackling the research-practice gap through applied research in political sciences

| Concept  | Variables  | Indicators  |
|--|--|---|
| The role of applied research in political sciences in bridging the research-practice gap | Factors facilitating the conduction of practically useful applied research in political sciences | Importance given to the applicability of research results in the practical political world.<br>Factors facilitating to the researchers a better |

|  |  |   |
|--|--|---|
|  |  | contribution in bridging the research-practice gap. |
|--|--|---|

*Table 7: Operationalization of the concept of the role of applied research in political science in bridging the research-practice gap*

## **II. Empirical framework presentation: Data collection methods**

For our study, in order to ensure the relevance and rigor of the data collected, we will use a triangulation between two data collection methods, thus a combination between two sources of evidence: interviews and document analysis. This triangulation of data will allow us ‘a confluence of evidence that breeds credibility’ (Eisner, 1991, p. 110).

We will present below these two methods as well as the selection criteria that we used to carefully choose our interviewees.

### **Data collection methods**

The data collection stage is a critical and very important step in a research project. This stage, according to Thiétart (2014, p. 273), "requires a prolonged investigation in the field". The researcher should manage the interaction between him and "the subject-sources of data". Thiétart (2014, p. 273) assumes that "the whole difficulty of qualitative research consists not in ignoring the researcher (of oneself), but to qualify and control the presence of the researcher in the system of collection. »

In order to collect the primary data, we opted for semi-structured individual interviews. And for secondary data, we chose document analysis based on some applied research works provided and/or done by the interviewees. Indeed, each method has its strengths and is complementary to the other, which makes possible the desired balance to be able to collect comprehensive, reliable, and efficient data.

| Document analysis                                   | Semi-structured individual interviews             |
|---|---|
| Access to reality as comprehended by the researcher | Access to reality as perceived by the interviewee |
| Data collected as extracted by the researcher       | Data collected as explained by the interviewee    |
| Subjective utilisation of data                      | Objective utilisation of data                     |

*Table 8: Complementarity between the two data collection methods*

## 1. Semi-structured individual interviews

According to Thiétart (1999, p. 235), an interview is "a technique intended to collect, with a purpose to their analysis, discursive data reflecting in particular the conscious or unconscious mental universe of individuals. It is a question of leading the subjects to overcome or forget the defense mechanisms they put in place vis-à-vis the outside view of their behaviour or their thoughts."

Thiétart (2014, p. 274) defines the individual interview as "a face-to-face situation between an investigator and a subject", where the investigator, and therefore the researcher, will adopt a non-directive attitude towards the subject. This principle of non-directiveness, according to Evrard et al (2009, p. 99; in Thiétart (2014, p. 274), is based on "unconditional positive attention" and implies an "attitude of empathy" on the part of the researcher who should put himself in the shoes of the subject being questioned. According to this principle, we can distinguish two types of interviews that respect the attitude of non-directiveness: non-directive interviews and semi-structured interviews.

Non-directive interviews limit the intervention of researchers and their role as investigators then stops at defining a general theme and facilitating the subject's discourse. This type of interview is based on an attitude of understanding on the part of the researcher, aiming at a revival or a deepening of the elements expressed. This type of interview is generally used if the researcher's objective is "the accumulation of knowledge about a field". (Thiétart, 2014, p. 274)

On the other hand, in semi-structured interviews, or "centered" interviews (Thiétart, 2014, p. 274), the investigator, having previously defined the themes to be addressed, uses a structured guide that he has prepared and which he will complete as the interview progresses if the dynamics of the interview are addressed in the dynamics of the latter. This type of interview is used for comparison purposes between the selected cases.

For our qualitative study, we choose semi-structured interviews as we do not seek to accumulate knowledge, but to compare the answers of the interviewees in order to draw similarities in terms of the definition of applied research in political science, its main characteristics, and the factors ensuring its applicability and usefulness in the practical world.

#### **a. Conception of interviews**

Based on the operationalization of the key concepts, we were able to develop our interview guide for researchers engaged in applied research in political science.

For the development of the latter, based on the operationalization where we defined the variables to be integrated, and the indicators for measuring each variable in the previous part of this chapter, we then structured our guide into four main parts with the related questions to ask in each part (appendix 1). This is how we were able to have our guide (appendix 2), which we rigorously used for all the semi-structured interviews with the researchers we selected (see the following section).

#### **b. Conduction of interviews**

For conducting our interviews, we started by contacting researchers from our personal network through social media platforms and emails. The interviewees were very responsive and showed interest in our research. We were therefore able to set appointments within a correct timeframe.

Most of the interviews were organised online through the platform Zoom. Although the online option has its disadvantages in terms of limiting the ability to have a real experience and to observe the features and characteristics of researchers' workplace, it has also many advantages such as flexibility (in terms of the availability of the interviewees) and an easier transcription of the collected data. Interviews lasted between 30 and 45 minutes.

#### **c. Data transcription**

The transcription of the interviews was done using the "Word" software after each interview, so as not to lose certain ideas. To ensure that we did not miss any information, and after taking permission from each interviewee, all interviews were recorded. Although this method is time-consuming, the recordings were very useful because although we took notes, some verbatims were only detected afterwards, using the recordings.

#### **d. Cases' selection criteria and presentation**

The selection of cases in qualitative research is a very important phase. These cases reflect the phenomenon studied and will present similarities and differences that will help us to develop more relevant theoretical propositions.

Carefully choosing the cases to be questioned allows us a better empirical concentration on the phenomenon studied, an easier explanation of the alternatives relating to the phenomenon, and a better generalizability of the results. (Eisenhardt, 2020)

Eisenhardt (2020, p. 150) identified 3 different methods of case selection:

- **Racing:** Choosing cases that initiated in the same period of time with similar starting conditions (such as location or funds) and consider their path as if it was a race in order to achieve a similar objective. This method is mainly used to study a causal relationship in a phenomenon or to study changes in rhythm during the race. It is generally used for the organisational analysis level rather than for the individual one.
- **Polar types:** Choosing cases from two different extremes (e.g., cases with very high performance and cases with very low performance) but which remain similar across multiple dimensions. This method is especially useful for highlighting striking differences between the two extremes.
- **Common antecedents:** choosing cases with common antecedents relating to the phenomenon studied (e.g., the field of activity) that can influence the main results and will allow the process involved to be studied and highlights the interesting implications that unfold.

For this research work, we believe that the latter method is the one that aligns most with our research objective. In fact, Eisenhardt explained that this method ensures more generalizability of the results obtained, and of emerging theoretical proposals.

As a fact, the first common antecedent that can be considered as a criterion is the research field of our interviewees, which has to be a political sciences field, namely international relations, comparative politics, political economy, or political governance.

The second criterion is that the interviewed researcher can be considered as an applied researcher based on the classification that we presented in the first chapter, thus, a contract researcher, an in-house researcher, a political advisor, or a civil society researcher.



The third criterion is that the researcher has made at least two to three research works in political sciences.

**e. Selected interviewees presentation**

While the number of researchers to be interviewed could not be precise and definitive, we start with a goal of six interviews. Indeed, according to Eisenhardt (1989), qualitative research could develop through an interval from 4 to 10 cases, but the number of cases is influenced by the theoretical results as the interviews are conducted, and therefore depends on the principle of data saturation, and other pragmatic factors such as the availability of interviewees. cognitive limits, and time.

Below is a table that presents the particularities of the cases of researchers selected for our research in terms of gender, geographical location, and field of study:

| Interviewee  | Gender | Location       | Field of study  | Researcher type          |
|--------------|--------|----------------|---|--------------------------|
| Researcher 1 | M      | Rome, Italy    | Middle Eastern and North African studies: Political economy | Civil society researcher |
| Researcher 2 | F      | Tokyo, Japan   | Migration studies   | Civil society researcher |
| Researcher 3 | M      | Liège, Belgium | International & strategic commerce in the EU, arms control  | Contract researcher      |
| Researcher 4 | M      | Tunis, Tunisia | Educational system policy setting                           | In-house researcher      |
| Researcher 5 | F      | Madrid, Spain  | Diplomacy & international relations                         | Civil society researcher |
| Researcher 6 | F      | Tunis, Tunisia | Analysis of political discourse                             | Civil society researcher |

*Table 9: Selected interviewees' presentation*

**2. Document analysis:**

Document analysis is an efficient data collection method in qualitative research. It is possible through the systematic review or evaluation of printed or electronic documents. (Bowen, 2009)

This method helps the researcher to elicit meaning, gain understanding, and develop empirical knowledge. (Corbin & Strauss, 2008)

Yin (1994) explained that the usage of this method accompanied with another data collection method, such as interviews and observation (participant/non-participant) is made when the researcher is seeking convergence and corroboration through the different methods.

In our study, the purpose behind using this data collection method is to identify the convergences that exist between some applied research works in political sciences that we collected from the interviewees, or found on open access research structures' data bases, in terms of purpose of the research, methodology used (and direct contact with practitioners), results formulation, and implementation trials/possibilities.

After every interview conducted, we asked the participant if it is possible to give us access to a research work that he/she made (or used) and qualifies as an applied research in political sciences. We also searched in open access data bases of research structures or scientific reviews for research works that we considered as applied research based on the definition that we could temporarily build through our literature review, and the data collected from interviews. We set an objective of two documents at least in order to be able to also compare between the documents selected. We carefully read some studies and tried to identify the main resemblances following the guide that we made ([appendix 3](#)) based on the literature review.

## **Chapter 3: Results presentation, analysis, and discussion**

### **I. Results' presentation**

#### **1. Presentation of the results obtained through semi-structured individual interviews**

For our research work, and in order to analyse the results obtained from the semi-structured interviews we conducted, we chose to do a thematic content analysis. This method emphasizes the importance of repetitions of words, expressions, sentences or similar meanings in a speech, and considers that these repetitions highlight the interests and concerns of the individuals or groups of individuals interviewed (Thiétart, 1999). Among the types of content analysis, we believe that thematic analysis is best suited to the objectives of our research. Indeed, thematic analysis makes it possible to study not only words but also sentences or paragraphs and thus to analyse the frequency of appearance of themes and the frequency of associations.

Thus, we will start with data coding which, according to Thiétart (2014), "consists of dividing the content of a speech or text into units of analysis (words, sentences, themes, etc.) and to integrate them into categories selected according to the object of the research". It is therefore a division of data, or a decontextualization of the units of analysis defined previously (in the previous chapter), into categories. Since our unit of analysis are sentences (word association) and paragraphs (sentence association), we will express the categories as themes.

To define the categories, we opt for the a posteriori method. With this method, according to Thiétart (2014), the definition of categories and the coding of data are done simultaneously.

| Theme   | Category               | Sub-theme  | Sub-category   |                                   |
|---|------------------------|--|--|-----------------------------------|
| Defining applied research in political sciences                         | DARPS                  | Type of the research work                                      |  | TR                                |
|   |                        | Purpose of the research work                                   |  | PR                                |
|   |                        | Target audience  | Direct   | DTA                               |
|   |                        |  | Indirect   | ITA                               |
| Conducting applied research in political sciences                       | CARPS                  | Research question definition                                   | Knowledge accumulation                                     | KARQD                             |
|   |                        |  | Collaboration with practitioners                           | PCRQD                             |
|   |                        | Level of privilege granted to flexible and mixed methodologies | Foresight & forecast methods                               | FFRM                              |
|   |                        |  | Triangulation between quantitative and qualitative methods | QQT                               |
|   |                        |  | Importance of practice-oriented results' formulation       |                                   |
|   |                        | Applicability of applied research in political sciences        | FUDR   | Researchers' Communication skills |
| Presentation skills   | RPS                    |  |  |                                   |
| Researchers' ambidextrous capacities                                    | Knowledge of the field |  |  | FK                                |
|   | Networking capacities  |  |  | NC                                |
| Importance granted to researchers - practitioners meeting opportunities |                        |  |  | RPMO                              |

*Table 10: Dictionary of themes and data coding*

## 2. Presentation of the results obtained through document analysis

|                         |  |   |
|-------------------------|--|---|
| Document<br>Variable    | A new configuration of strategic trade regimes?  | Forecasting asylum-related migration flows with machine learning and data at scale  |
| Researchers' position   | Expert-researchers: contract researchers   | Contract researchers  |
| Research context        | Think tank discussion funded by the European commission:<br>Synopsis   | Academic research work supported and funded by a university:<br>Scientific report   |
| Purpose of the research | Explorative study about the potential future configuration of strategic trade control regimes. The main purpose is to explore the potential consequences of the geopolitical transformations occurring such as the trade war between the USA and China and the Russian invasion of Ukraine. These transformations represented important challenges to the EU's multilateral export control regime. | Prescriptive study aiming to overcome the challenge of the lack of specification and the hard actionability of migration theories, the complexity of the migration system, and the uncertainty of measurement tools making the already existing migration forecasting tools ineffective on many levels, making the migration flows that reached Europe in 2025-2026 surprising. This study has aimed to practically solve this issue by developing a comprehensive system for forecasting asylum applications based on adaptive models and data at scale that can be used by any country facing migration-related issues. |
| Research method         | Strategic foresight: scenarios method<br>Collaboration between expert researchers, industry, and European, national, and regional public authorities dealing with strategic trade control issues.  | Quantitative research conducted through a collaboration between researchers with different competencies interested and specialized in the same study area.  |
| Results formulation     | The results were formulated in the shape of different scenarios were every scenario's pros and cons were determined and each one was   | The results of this research work were formulated in a practical way as through reading the last parts explain the way of functioning of  |

|   |  |  |
|---|--|--|
|   | categorized based on two main variables: the likelihood and the desirability of occurrence.  | the developed forecasting function, the availability of the data and of the code.  |
| Potential usefulness in terms of actionable solutions | <p>This work offers clear insights and the way that results were formulated can inform decision makers on many levels of action, we can cite:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Strengthening Multilateral Export Control Regimes (MECRs) possibly through reforms or updates to existing treaties and arrangements</li> <li>- Encouraging countries to adopt or refine national control lists and regulations for sensitive technologies</li> <li>- Promoting increased international cooperation and dialogue to address the fragmentation of export control regimes</li> <li>- Informing policymakers and stakeholders about the complexities of dual-use technology controls and the need for comprehensive strategies to manage the proliferation risks associated with new and emerging technologies</li> </ul> | <p>This work offers a practical way to foresee migration flows that can be used not only by European Union member states but also other countries in the world.</p> <p>This work provides results that can be translated into actions by the concerned governments mainly on how to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Implement an adaptive machine learning system to provide early warnings and forecasts of migration flows, thus better prepare for and manage asylum applications.</li> <li>- Enhance cross-border cooperation and information sharing especially among European countries to create a more coordinated and unified response to migration challenges.</li> <li>- Applying dynamic modelling approaches to other complex systems and processes beyond migration, such as economic forecasting, public health planning, and disaster response.</li> </ul> |

*Table 11: Results obtained through document analysis*

Document 1: Caponetti, E., Michel, Q., & Paile, S. (February 2024). A new configuration of strategic trade control regimes? [Paper presentation]. Thirteenth Meeting of the Chaudfontaine Group, Chaudfontaine, Belgium.

Document 2: Carammia, M., Iacus, S. M., Wilkin, T., (2022). Forecasting asylum-related migration flows with machine learning and data at scale. *Scientific Reports* 12(1), 1457-1473.

## II. Results' analysis

### 1. Analysis of the results obtained through semi-structured interviews

For the analysis of the results that we obtained through semi-structured interviews, we will conduct an inter-case thematic analysis based on the themes and sub-themes presented above (in the first part of this chapter). We will thus study the answers of all interviewees in order to detect the main convergences in terms of defining applied research in political sciences, the way of conducting such type of research and of ensuring its potential applicability in the practical political world.

#### a. Defining applied research in political sciences

In order to describe an applied research work in political sciences, interviewees gave us mainly two answers: “process” and “project”. While the word “process” was repeated more than the word “project”, we think that the reason might be the fact that any research work, whether basic or applied, is a process, in a sense that it requires a set of steps to be achieved in a systematic and organized way. But the word “project” is interesting in another way. In fact, we think that it reflects the general idea of an “applied” research in terms of results. Researchers considering an applied research work as a “project” can explain to us that this kind of work has a product at the end of the process done for achieving this project. In other words, such as explained by one of the interviewees, an applied research work in political sciences can be understood as the “building of a project which has an outcome that carries a practical political impact” (researcher 2). The same interviewee explained that this is what makes a difference between a basic and an applied research in political sciences, and therefore, applied research in this field is most of the times not an academic one. In fact, another interviewee stated that “in political sciences, in order to conduct an applied research work, I think that a research will need as much grey literature as scientific one” (researcher 1).

The variable “type of the research work” was very important as it didn't only tell us about the general idea that researchers have on applied research in political sciences, but it also offered a smooth introduction to the next variable: the purpose of the research work.

Most of the interviewees think that the main purpose of an applied research work in political sciences is that the research results can ensue an impact on the practical political or policy making system both directly and indirectly. In other words, an applied research in this field should target a specific population who can be the direct reader of the work, thus a decision

maker whose decision will create a politics or policy related change, or a segment that will benefit from a change that occurred thanks to the utilisation of the research results and the actions thus done by another political or social actor, such as NGOs or civil society actors.

According to the interviewees, an applied research in political sciences can directly target governments, ministries, power holders, decision makers, representatives, and administrative bodies for more specific studied subjects. But not only. In fact, it was stated 4 times in different interviews that reaching this target audience is hard and rare. For instance, researcher 3 stated that it is better to target actors like powerful NGOs or advocacy organisations who will in their turn use the research results to push their governmental partners and stakeholders for action.

#### **b. Conducting applied research in political sciences**

“In this type of research, we have to make sure to not reinvent the wheel” one of the interviewees mentioned. In almost all interviews, researchers agreed on the importance of being informed about the knowledge that has been produced by previous research works, reports, national, regional, or international projects. The word “knowledge accumulation” was cited 9 times and other sentences with similar meaning were frequently used.

According to the answers that we got in the different interviews, an applied research question in the field of political sciences can emanate from different kinds of situations. The answers varied from the researchers’ interest and willingness to explore a certain issue that he/she observed in the reality around (5 references), to issues found in the literature (4 references), to issues pointed out by political or civil society actors (2 references), but most importantly, all interviewees think that the introduction of a new policy might be the object of an applied research project as researchers in this field can not only conduct an analysis and an evaluation of this new policy but also develop through their work new instruments and tools that can help with the implementation phase in the policy cycle.

Based on the interviews that we conducted, collaboration between researchers and practitioners for defining the issues that can be studied through an applied research in political sciences is a possibility in some contexts, but not in others. In fact, researchers 1, 3 and 4 clearly stated that this type of collaboration depends on the importance that governments and decision makers grant to scientific research and to the trust that they give to academics. Researcher 1 even added that there is a link between the possibility of such collaboration and the political regime in that country explaining that in countries under a dictatorship it is impossible that researchers will



have the opportunity of discussing with political actors (except those in opposition) and will not have the chance to create the impact that their studies' results could offer.

When it comes to the methodology that researchers use for doing an applied research in political sciences, the usage of mixed data collection and data analysis methods can be considered as the most repeated answer. In fact, we found that all interviewees think that a triangulation between qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis is essential not only for a deeper understanding of the issue, but also for better ensuring a practical impact of the results at the end of the study. Moreover, most of the interviewed researchers (4 out of 6) stated that they have generally used the strategic foresight method as it is a very practical way to build results that can be turned into actions by practitioners and inform them better on the possible scenarios related to a specific issue.

In fact, the way of formulating results has been considered very important. For example, as related to the choice of strategic foresight as a privileged method to conduct an applied research in political sciences, researcher 4 highlighted the importance of having results that are divided into categories or classified using relevant variables. This method is more structured and gives the reader a better understanding and a better capacity to transform these results into usable information or practical actions. Both researchers 3 and 4, identifying as civil society researchers, stated that their research results weren't even accepted if they were not formulated in a practical way that can inform the target audience, or the stakeholders of the NGOs they were working for, on actionable solutions.

### **c. Applicability of applied research in political sciences**

The applicability, or potential applicability, of research results for applied researchers in political sciences was shown very important as all interviewees expressed that they are interested in seeing a real impact of their research in the practical political world.

Yet, it was also an almost unanimous answer that ensuring applicability and achieving the desired impact is a difficult task for many reasons. In fact, the most stated reason (with 12 references) is the researcher's technical or practical knowledge of the field. In fact, this issue has been clarified very well by researchers 2 and 6, as the latter explained that researchers "who remain in their academic bubble without experiencing both researcher and practitioner caps" are less likely to see their research have a real impact in the practical political and policy-making world. For instance, "Networking" (with 14 references) was the most stated answer for the question about the skills needed in order to ensure the applicability of the research results

(question 11 in our interview guide). All interviewees have stated that the more the researcher has great networking skills, participates in events where he/she can meet with practitioners and political actors, and succeeds in enlarging his network, the more his/her research can reach this target and creates an impact. However, both researchers 1 and 6 mentioned the danger of giving more importance to connections and networks than it should, they explained that researchers should be aware of falling into biased research and influence machines. This goes both ways as for researcher 1 “Consultation is not an acting obligation”, explaining that researchers should keep in mind that doing an applied research work with a great potential impact does not necessarily mean that these results will be applied, while researcher 6 added that “it is true that there are honest researchers who do this kind of research with good intentions, but there are also bas-intentioned researchers who might use their academic skills combined with their network of decision-makers in order to maximize their personal interests”.

Another important reason, which we consider directly linked to the first one, is the ability of a researcher to translate the research results from a scientific to a practical jargon (7 references). In fact, we think that having a deep knowledge of the field and strong connection with practitioners can help researchers acquire this translation skills. An interesting statement done by researcher 5 is that researchers should not stop at translating their results, but also participate in the implementation phase. This led us to the identification of an important category of researchers’ ambidextrous skills, and also brought us back to the researcher’s 6 statement (mentioned above) about wearing both researcher and technical / practical expert caps. In fact, ambidexterity, in the sense of mastering both the scientific process, and the process of transformation of scientific results into practical solutions, has been considered as an important skill for researchers.

## **2. Analysis of the results obtained through document analysis**

Through the presentation of the selected documents that we have made in the previous part of this chapter, we will present below the main insights that we were able to draw out from each document based on the same structure: definition, conduction, and potential applicability of an applied research in political sciences.

### **a. Defining applied research in political sciences**

Through the analysis of our presentation of the first document, we could notice at first the role played by the researchers who were involved in this research work, most importantly the usage of both “expert” and “researcher” caps. This observation is very important as it informs us of

the necessity of having a deep knowledge of the field to an extent to which the researcher can be considered an expert. This has been also confirmed through our analysis of the second document as we can notice the inter-disciplinarity of the researchers involved and the complementarity of their knowledge and skills.

The second observation concerns the purpose of this research work: we noticed that both research works are clearly oriented towards a practical objective. In fact, through the first document, the researchers are seeking to explore the possible scenarios of the future configuration of strategic trade control regimes facing the challenges that will potentially occur due to the described geopolitical transformations. Thus, through the designed scenarios, it aims to directly inform political decision makers and guide them towards the actions that might be necessary to implement in terms of public policy. Again, the practical objective of applied research in political sciences has been confirmed in the second document where researchers used scientific methods aiming to enhance the forecasting tools of migration flows, which is not only a particularly relevant problem, but also an urgent one for governments, especially in the European context.

The third observation is related to the type of the research work. It is important to notice that the first document is a synopsis of a discussion organized by a think tank through which the subject was defined based on a current occurring challenge, and the second document is a scientific report of which the subject emanates from the observation of a real phenomenon: the ineffectiveness of forecasting tools in migration studies. In fact, this shows us that applied research in political sciences are mainly studies initiating from concrete problems or needs and, though scientific methods, are seeking to bring up practical solutions. We think that it is the reason that makes the format of a report or a synopsis somehow privileged as they can better highlight straight-to-the-point conclusions.

#### **b. Conducting applied research in political sciences**

The methodology adopted in first document is strategic foresight, precisely, the scenarios method. We think that this is an important feature especially if we consider our study's purpose of exploring not only the meaning of an applied research in political sciences, but also its blurry position between theory and practice. In fact, we think that the choice of a strategic foresight study for conducting an applied research in political sciences can be relevant as this type of studies offer a better proximity to reality: they provide a model of the different possible futures while taking into account a wide number of variables, thus minimizing the level of uncertainty,

which makes them more appealing to practitioners and increases their usefulness potential in the practical political world.

Another important observation concerning the conduction of the first research work is the multidisciplinary approach used as the actors involved in the conduction of this study - expert researchers, industry, and public authorities – are directly concerned by the results.

When it comes to the second document, the researchers used a quantitative method where the inter-disciplinarity of the researchers' profiles played an important role in combining their expertise, competences, and perceptions for tackling the complexity of the subject studied. Furthermore, the usage of machine learning models and a wide range of data reflects the rigour of the approach for resolving modern and current problems in the political practical world.

### **c. Applicability of applied research in political sciences**

The way in which the results were formulated in both studied documents shows the important role that can play applied research in political sciences in bridging the science-practice gap in this very field. In fact, in the first document, the classification of the results using the two variables that we consider very important, likelihood and the desirability of occurrence, can not only inform practitioners of the actions to be done, but also inform them of the actions to avoid. Thus, this type of results formulation can not only create a positive impact but also allow decision makers to avoid wrong or risky decisions and actions, making the study's results clear, concrete, but most of all, complete. When it comes to the second document, what caught our attention is the generalisability of the results. In fact, this is very important as it widens the role of this study in practice to a bigger scale.

The formulation of the results of the second document, highlighting the way of functioning of the developed forecasting system, shows a clear intention of the researchers of making their study useful and usable by practitioners, be they governments or concerned institutions, in Europe or in the world.

To sum up, the documents that we studied have shown us the important role that applied research in political sciences can play in bridging the gap between research and practice, and most importantly, in showing wrong the assumptions and critiques towards research in political sciences for being only made for theory's sake.

### III. Results' discussion

Through the insights that we gained after our literature review, combined with the knowledge obtained through the collection and analysis of the data presented above, we are now able to respond to our research question, thus build our definition of an applied research in political sciences and highlighting its role in the transition from scientific results into actionable and usable solutions by political practitioners.

By considering the structure that we followed in our study, this definition is based on the WWH method (What, Why, How). We will present below a synthesis the relevant insights of our study with the aim of determining the results that have been confirmed by the three sources of data mentioned above: literature, interviews, and documents

- What:

A project oriented towards the production of concrete and practical results through a scientific process combined with practical expertise. For this, researchers involved are generally required to have the ability of play the role of a scientific researcher and of an expert at the same time. Thus, researchers conducting an applied research project in political sciences should be inter-disciplinary with varied fields of expertise and roles. This will ensure their deep knowledge of the field and of the studied subject in order to define relevant research questions that emanate from reality, concrete challenges and needs, urgent problems, difficulties observed in some practices, a newly introduced policy, an observed ineffectiveness of some tools, in a specific context, that need the developing of actions and solutions, or the simplification of a process, based on relevant scientific studies. Also, researchers conducting this type of studies are required to have specific skills, such as good communication skills and great networking capacities.

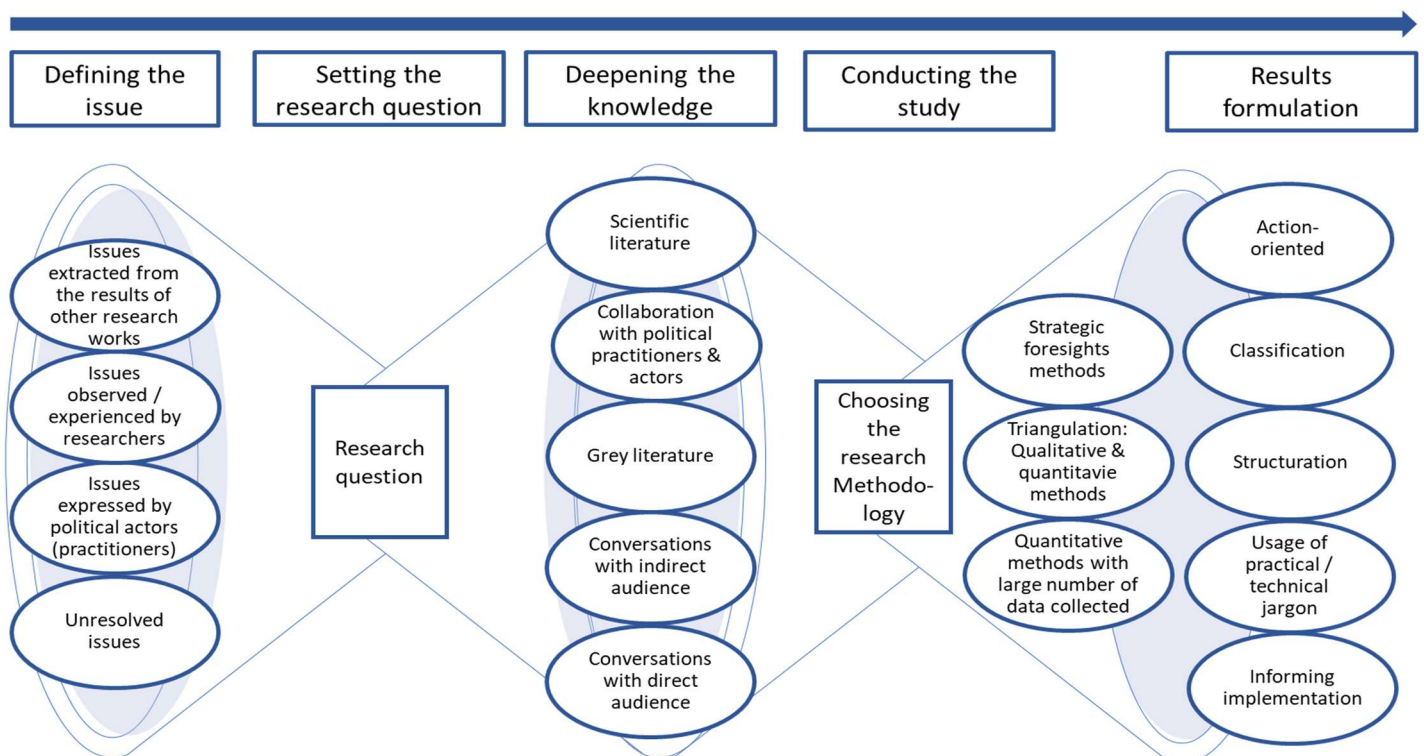
- Why:

The main characteristic of an applied research in political sciences is its purpose of achieving a practical objective. Through this type of research, researchers aim to produce results that can directly or indirectly influence decision-making processes. Thus, the target audience of this type of research is not only academic, but also includes political decision-makers, governmental institutions, NGOs, and other political actors holding the power and capacity of creating change based on the results produced.

- How:

The conduction of an applied research in political sciences implies a rigorous and systematic approach that, after the definition of relevant research questions, requires the convergence of researchers towards scientific methodologies that privilege a wide scope of data collection, both quantity and quality wise. For example, strategic foresight and a triangulation methodology have been proved effective for conducting this type of research. The formulation of the results should always be done in a way that facilitates their practical implementation, thus ensuring the usefulness and effective contribution of the research to solve concrete problems in the practical political world. It is better to have action-oriented, classified and structured results that can be directly understood and used by the target audience, like governments, political actors, and NGOs.

Through the analysis of the results obtained, we are also able to build a clearer image of the process of building an applied research in political sciences ensuring a potential applicability in the political practical world by the actors.

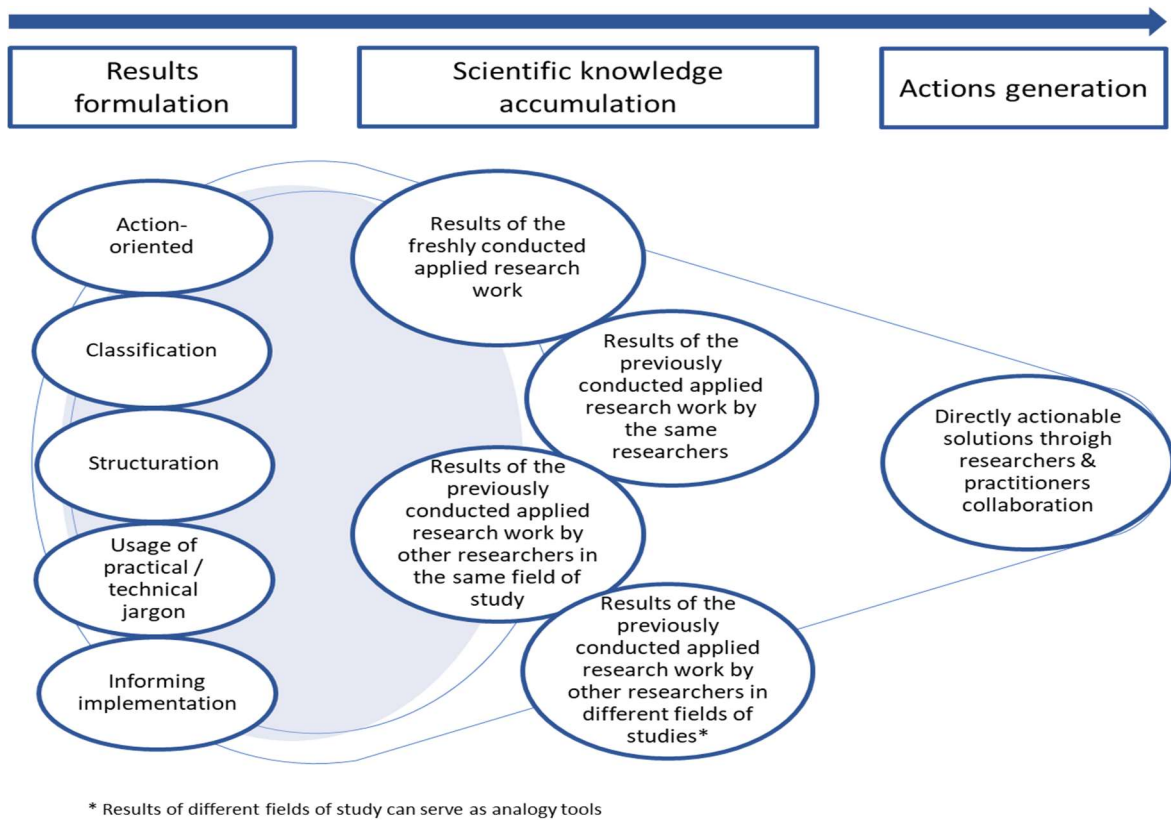


*Figure 1: Applied research in political sciences process*

In terms of research results' applicability, it is important to retain the ambidexterity concept. By level of ambidexterity of a researcher, we mean his/her capacity to not only master the rigorous scientific process of conducting a research, but also the process of transforming the

results into actionable solutions. In fact, we think that this concept can play the important role of a bridge between theory and practice in the political sciences field, and we think that we should not consider it as a part of the scientific process of conducting an applied research in political sciences, but another complementary process itself that aims to transform the results obtained through this type of research into directly applicable actions. This process requires the accumulation of knowledge acquired through the conducted research, and the knowledge acquired through other research works. But it also requires the collective participation of researchers and practitioners for setting up final and concrete actions.

Building up on the applied research in political sciences process that we presented above, we will present below the “ambidexterity process”:



*Figure 2: Ambidexterity process: Transformation of research results into actionable solutions*

## General conclusion

In the light of this research work, we present below a conclusion that summarizes the main steps taken to achieve the goals we set ourselves at the beginning.

The first chapter was dedicated to a literature review where we explored the definition of applied research in general, then introduced the definitions that exist in the literature of other fields of studies. This allowed us to draw a temporary definition of applied research in political sciences that we aimed to perfect through the empirical study that we conducted later. In this first chapter, we also reviewed the literature that addresses the main challenges of research in political sciences in terms of ensuring the transition from scientific results to practical solutions useable in the practical political world.

The conclusion of our first chapter served as a basis for our qualitative study, especially for building up our interview guide and for selecting the documents to analyse. Through this study, we collected data from 6 researchers in different political sciences fields of studies, and we made a deep analysis of two applied research studied in political sciences.

This work has allowed us to respond to our central research question: What is applied research in political sciences? What is the role played by this type of research in bridging the gap between science and practice in the political sciences field?

### *Theoretical contributions*

By answering to our research question, we believe that we contributed to the scientific body of knowledge of the political sciences field in two main crucial points:

- The existent literature on applied research in political sciences is very limited. As we made our study, we did not find any article that clearly presents a definition of this type of research in this very field. Our work has thus contributed to the political sciences theories through presenting a clear definition of applied research in political sciences, its purpose, actors, and way of conduction.
- In political sciences, as in our fields of studies, the gap between science and practice has always been a subject of debate. Making research useful and applicable is not only of interest to practitioners, but also to researchers as it serves as a great motivation. This work presents a clear process, based on literature, researchers' perception, and documents' analysis, that presents one possible way of transforming scientific results into actionable solutions, with the involvement of researchers and political actors.



### *Limits & future research perspectives*

We think that the main limit of our research work is related to the interviews that we conducted. In fact, although we reached data saturation on the important concepts that we were studying, we think that we could have extend our interviews number so that we can maybe identify some divergences, or more convergence. The main reason is that having more interviewees from the same country would have been more interesting as we think that selecting researchers in different countries deprived us of studying deeper the role of the national context, the importance that governments give to research and to scientific knowledge, in the usefulness and applicability of applied research in political sciences.

Thus, we think that one future research based on the conclusions offered by our study can be related to the relation between the importance given to scientific research and to scientists by governments on the usefulness and applicability of research results in political sciences.

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## Appendixes

### Appendix 1: Interview guide components

| Variable  | Questions  | Follow-up questions   |
|---|--|---|
| <b>Introduction</b>   |  |   |
| Self-presentation & general perception about applied research in political sciences | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can you present yourself as a researcher in political sciences?</li> <li>• What is the idea that you have about applied research in political sciences? Why is it conducted?</li> <li>• Do you consider yourself as an applied researcher in political science?</li> </ul>                            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is your main field of study?</li> <li>• What is the purpose of conducting applied research in political sciences and what is the difference with basic research?</li> </ul> |
| <b>Focus</b>  |  |   |
|   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (If yes) What type of applied researcher do you think is most adapted to your research works: a contract researcher, an in-house researcher, a political advisor, or a civil society researcher?</li> <li>• For you, who is the target audience of applied research in political sciences?</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who are interested by the results of an applied research in political sciences and who can benefit from these results?</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Deepening</b>  |  |   |
| Conducting applied research in political sciences: research question                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How does a research question of an applied research emanate?</li> <li>• To what extent do you think that collaboration with practitioners before setting the research question is important?</li> </ul>   |   |
| Conducting applied research in political sciences: methodology                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In the applied research works you conducted, did you use different research methods, or there is one method that you think is privileged? If yes, which one?</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the scientific approach that you think is the most suitable, or an approach that you think the less suitable (to avoid)?</li> </ul>                                      |
| Conducting applied research in political  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As an applied researcher in political sciences, are you interested in the usefulness of</li> </ul>  |   |

|   |  |  |
|---|--|--|
| <p>sciences: results<br/>formulation</p>          | <p>your study results and their applicability in the practical world?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• According to you, what makes the results of an applied research useful to practitioner?</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do you think that there is a specific way to formulate the results of an applied research to ensure / facilitate its usefulness and applicability?</li> </ul> |
| <p>Bridging the<br/>research-practice<br/>gap</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What skills do you judge essential for researchers to make their research useful?</li> <li>• What factors / events / circumstances can help the researcher ensure the applicability and usage of the research results by practitioner?</li> <li>• How can researchers measure the impact of their study results?</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How can a researcher transform the results of his/her study into useful actionable solutions to practitioners?</li> </ul>                                     |
| <p><b>Conclusion</b></p>                          |  |  |
|   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To conclude, what is applied research in political sciences for you, and what is its role in bridging the gap between science and practical politics?</li> </ul>  |  |

## Appendix 2: Interview Guide

- **Introduction:**
  - 1- Can you present yourself as a researcher in political sciences?
  - 2- What is the idea that you have about applied research in political sciences? Why is it conducted?
  - 3- Do you consider yourself as an applied researcher in political science?
  
- **Focus:**
  - 4- (If yes) What type of applied researcher do you think is most adapted to your research works: a contract researcher, an in-house researcher, a political advisor, or a civil society researcher?
  - 5- For you, who is the target audience of applied research in political sciences?
  
- **Deepening:**
  - 6- How does a research question of an applied research emanate?
  - 7- To what extent do you think that collaboration with practitioners before setting the research question is important?
  - 8- In the applied research works you conducted, did you use different research methods, or there is one method that you think is privileged? If yes, which one?
  - 9- As an applied researcher in political sciences, are you interested in the usefulness of your study results and their applicability in the practical world?
  - 10- According to you, what makes the results of an applied research useful to practitioner?
  - 11- What skills do you judge essential for researchers to make their research useful?
  - 12- What factors / events / circumstances can help the researcher ensure the applicability and usage of the research results by practitioner?
  - 13- How can researchers measure the impact of their study results?
  
- **Conclusion:**
  - 14- To conclude, what is applied research in political sciences for you, and what is its role in bridging the gap between science and practical politics?

### Appendix 3: Document analysis guide

| <b>Document</b><br><b>Variable</b> | <b>Document 1</b> | <b>Document 2</b> | <b>...</b> |
|------------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|------------|
| Researcher's position              |                   |                   |            |
| Research context                   |                   |                   |            |
| Purpose of the research            |                   |                   |            |
| Research method                    |                   |                   |            |
| Results formulation                |                   |                   |            |
| Potential applicability            |                   |                   |            |