

# Wicked Problems in the Social Sciences

## Homework 1

SOC 201 - Research Methods

February 12, 2018

Identify 3 “wicked problems” in the social world. For each problem you choose, explain why it is “wicked” (in 1 to 2 sentences) and list two “tame” questions that address the original problem. In class we discussed a number of wicked and tame questions as examples. The list of examples will be posted to the class website. Please refrain from choosing those questions. Two examples of how your answers should be structured are included below.

### Example 1

**Wicked problem/question:** *What should the US response to climate change be?*

**Explanation:** This is a “wicked” problem because a solution to the question of what to do in response to climate change requires an evaluation of priorities and values that may differ from one person to another. Moreover, the potential list of solutions is infinite.

**Tame question 1:** What impact does the US’s participation in the Paris Climate Accord have on the level of greenhouse gases in the coming decade?

**Tame question 1:** Would our participation in the Paris Climate Accord reduce our economic productivity in the decade that follows?

### Example 2

**Wicked problem/question:** *Should we replace our progressive tax rate with a flat tax rate that generates the same revenue stream?*

**Explanation:** This is a “wicked” problem because its solution requires subjective trade-offs. People will make different trade-offs depending on their material circumstances and ideological viewpoints regarding government taxation.

**Tame question 1:** What effect does a move from a progressive to a flat tax rate have on the average middle class worker’s after-tax income?

**Tame question 1:** What impact does a move from a progressive to a flat tax rate have on the level of income inequality in the country?