# POL10170
# Foundations of Political Research

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## Introduction

Most courses you will take in your undergraduate studies relate to politics itself—about politics in different regions, or about particular aspects of political systems. This course, however, is about political *science*, about doing research on politics and in the social sciences more generally. How do we design our research? How do we collect data? How do we draw valid conclusions from these data?

While the focus in many other modules will be on knowledge of theories and knowledge of political systems, as well as basic analytical and critical skills, this module will provide you with very relevant practical skills and increased analytical skills that will benefit you throughout your career, both academically and professionally. Whether it is for writing course papers, critical reflective essays or columns, policy or research reports, or an academic career, good skills in research methodology is crucial for all those tasks. Furthermore, a good understanding of research methods helps you read, interpret, and evaluate existing research findings in the literature.

As textbook for the course you can either use Babbie (2015) or Babbie (2017), which is a good introductory book on social science research methods—whichever is easier or cheaper for you to acquire, although Babbie (2015) does contain two extra useful chapters on statistics,

that we will however not discuss in this course.[1] Both are available in print and e-format. The book is not about political science as such, but there will be plenty of political science examples in the lectures and the general methods are similar across the social sciences.

On completion of this module you should:

- Be familiar with core terminology (jargon) in political science research;

- Understand the underlying principles of good research design in politics;

- Have a basic understanding of the advantages and disadvantages of a number of methodological approaches;

- Be able to critically evaluate the empirical basis of findings in published research;

- Be able to produce and interpret statistical visualisations;

- Appreciate the practicalities of ethics and dissemination in politics research.

Details on the module can of course change: *Always keep an eye on Blackboard and the course website*! While Blackboard is used for materials restricted to participants in the module; slides, videos, and some other materials can be found at:

<div align="center">

`http://www.joselkink.net/FPR-Autumn-2018.php`

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While only some are referenced as "readings" on the course outline, I would strongly recommend that you check out the video recorded short lectures on *Calling Bullshit*,[2] which are highly informative about information visualisation, recognizing worthwhile research, and separating science from "fake news".

# Grading

The grading is based on one exercise—an essay based on a data project—and a final exam, which is an MCQ exam. The essays will be submitted through SafeAssign on Blackboard. The relative weight of each assignment is as follows:

| Task | Weight | Deadline |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Data project | 30% | Wednesday 14 November, 5 pm (safeassign) |
| Exam | 70% | |

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[1]See `https://www.cengage.co.uk/search/?keyword=babbie`, as well as the UCD Library and the Campus Bookshop.

[2]`https://callingbullshit.org/videos.html`

## Data project

A continuing assessment component of this course will be a small take-home data project. The purpose of this assignment is to familiarize you with basic data manipulation and statistical analysis. You will be provided with a basic political science data set and asked to produce a number of graphs, and then write an essay about the results. An online tool for generating graphs will be provided, with video instructions on how to use this tool. Further details will be provided in class and on the main web site.

## MCQ Exam

The calculation from percentage to letter grade will follow the translation as follows, with the percentages below 40% following the standard scale for UCD marks:

| Percentage | Grade | Percentage | Grade |
|---|---|---|---|
| 95–100% | A+ | 65–70% | C+ |
| 90–95% | A | 60–65% | C |
| 85–90% | A- | 55–60% | C- |
| 80–85% | B+ | 50–55% | D+ |
| 75–80% | B | 45–50% | D |
| 70–75% | B- | 40–45% | D- |

Questions will be based on the required readings, the slides, and the lecture contents. The slides are a good indication of what the main topics are you can be asked about.

# Plagiarism

Although this should be obvious, plagiarism—copying someone else's text without acknowledgement or beyond "fair use" quantities—is not allowed. Please carefully check the UCD policies concerning plagiarism[3] and its more extensive description of what is plagiarism and what is not[4]. Arguing that you "didn't know" will not be a valid excuse when we find evidence of plagiarism—if it not really clear what is expected of you in this regard, ask.

# Contact

The tutor for this module is Jesper Lindqvist (`jesper.lindqvist@ucdconnect.ie`) and all questions you have about the course organisation or content should be sent to him. He

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[3]`http://www.ucd.ie/regist/documents/plagiarism_policy_and_procedures.pdf`.
[4]`http://www.ucd.ie/library/students/information_skills/plagiari.html`

will also have weekly office hours on Fridays 10–12 in F304, Newman Building, starting 28 September. For questions about registration to the module, please revert to the undergraduate administrator, Yuko Conlon (yuko.conlon@ucd.ie).

To stay up to date with developments in the UCD School of Politics and International Relations, also keep an eye on the following social media:
Web: http://www.ucd.ie/politics/
Blog: http://politicalscience.ie/
Twitter: http://twitter.com/ucdpolitics
Facebook: http://www.facebook.com/ucdspire

# Topics overview

| Date | Title | Readings |
|---|---|---|
| 11 Sep | What is political science research? | Babbie (2015, 5–19) *or* Babbie (2017, 2–20) |
| 13 Sep | Counting or interpreting? Two cultures in research | Babbie (2015, 20–30, ch 2) *or* Babbie (2017, 20–30, ch 2) |
| 18 Sep | Example: women and post-violence transition (*Melanie Hoewer*) | Ackerly, Stern and True (2006, introduction), Hoewer (2013) |
| 20 Sep | Using library resources (*Marta Bustillo*) | Babbie (2015, 487–489, 494–500) *or* Babbie (2017, 448–450, 455-462) |
| 25 Sep | Elements of a research design | Babbie (2015, ch 4) *or* Babbie (2017, ch 4) |
| 27 Sep | Example: Development projects and corruption in Tanzania | Brazys, Elkink and Kelly (2017) |
| 2 Oct | Know what you're talking about | Babbie (2015, 123–135) *or* Babbie (2017, 126–138) |
| 4 Oct | How to see what you see? | Babbie (2015, 136–154) *or* Babbie (2017, 139–158) |
| 9 Oct | Example: who voted yes in the marriage referendum? | Elkink et al. (2017) |
| 11 Oct | Looking at a variable: graphs for single variables | |
| 16 Oct | Combining and describing variables: scales, indices, and codebooks | Babbie (2015, ch 6 and 411–415) *or* Babbie (2017, ch 6 and 423–427) |
| 18 Oct | Looking at relations: graphs for two variables | Bergstrom and West (2017*c*) |
| 23 Oct | More on causal inference | |
| 25 Oct | Testing relations: graphs for three or more variables | Bergstrom and West (2017*d*), Bergstrom and West (2017*a*) |
| Reading week—work on your data project! | | |
| 6 Nov | Survey design: Who to ask? | Babbie (2015, ch 7) *or* Babbie (2017, ch 7) |
| 8 Nov | Survey design: What questions to ask? | Babbie (2015, 246–261) *or* Babbie (2017, 255–267) |
| 13 Nov | Doing field research | Babbie (2015, ch 10) *or* Babbie (2017, ch 10) |
| 15 Nov | Coding text: qualitative and quantitative approaches | Babbie (2015, 322–334, 341–346) *or* Babbie (2017, 332–343, 350–360) |
| 20 Nov | Example: power relations in the Kremlin | Baturo and Elkink (2016) |
| 22 Nov | Reading and writing political science research | Bergstrom and West (2017*b*), Babbie (2015, 486–507) *or* Babbie (2017, 448–469) |
| 27 Nov | The ethics of doing research | Babbie (2015, ch 3) *or* Babbie (2017, ch 3) |
| 29 Nov | Review session | *all of the above* |

# References

Ackerly, Brooke A., Maria Stern and Jacqui True, eds. 2006. *Feminist methodologies for international relations*. Cambridge University Press.

Babbie, Earl. 2015. *The Practice of Social Research*. 14th edition ed. Cengage Learning.

Babbie, Earl. 2017. *The Basics of Social Research*. 7th edition ed. Cengage Learning.

Baturo, Alexander and Johan A. Elkink. 2016. "Dynamics of Regime Personalization and Patron-Client Networks in Russia, 1999–2014." *Post-Soviet Affairs* 32(1):75–98.

Bergstrom, Carl and Jevin West. 2017*a*. "Common Causes (video).".
   **URL:** *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5iVN13tbVNc*

Bergstrom, Carl and Jevin West. 2017*b*. "How do you know a paper is legit?".
   **URL:** *https://callingbullshit.org/tools/tools_legit.html*

Bergstrom, Carl and Jevin West. 2017*c*. "Misleading axes on graphs.".
   **URL:** *https://callingbullshit.org/tools/tools_misleading_axes.html*

Bergstrom, Carl and Jevin West. 2017*d*. "The Principle of Proportional Ink.".
   **URL:** *https://callingbullshit.org/tools/tools_proportional_ink.html*

Brazys, Samuel, Johan A. Elkink and Gina Kelly. 2017. "Bad neighbors? How co-located Chinese and World Bank development projects impact local corruption in Tanzania." *Review of International Organizations* 12(2):227–253.

Elkink, Johan A., David M. Farrell, Theresa Reidy and Jane Suiter. 2017. "Understanding the 2015 Marriage Referendum in Ireland: Context, campaign, and conservative Ireland." *Irish Political Studies* 32(3):361–381.

Hoewer, Melanie. 2013. "Women, Violence, and Social Change in Northern Ireland and Chiapas: Societies Between Tradition and Transition." *International Journal of Conflict and Violence* 7(2):216–231.