

# 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.<sup>1</sup> 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 Brightspace and the course website!* While Brightspace is used for materials restricted to participants in the module; slides, videos, and some other materials can be found at:

<http://www.joselkink.net/FPR-Autumn-2022.php>

Lecture capture videos will be kept on Brightspace.

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*,<sup>2</sup> 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 Brightspace. The relative weight of each assignment is as follows:

Task	Weight	Deadline
Data project	30%	Wednesday 2 November, 5 pm (Brightspace)
Final exam	70%	

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

<sup>2</sup><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<sup>3</sup> and its more extensive description of what is plagiarism and what is not<sup>4</sup>. 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 ??? (???@ucdconnect.ie) and all questions you have about the course organisation or content should be sent to him. He will also have weekly office

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<sup>3</sup>[http://www.ucd.ie/regist/documents/plagiarism\\_policy\\_and\\_procedures.pdf](http://www.ucd.ie/regist/documents/plagiarism_policy_and_procedures.pdf).

<sup>4</sup>[http://www.ucd.ie/library/students/information\\_skills/plagiari.html](http://www.ucd.ie/library/students/information_skills/plagiari.html)

hours. For questions about registration to the module, please revert to the undergraduate administrator, Yuko Conlon ([yuko.conlon@ucd.ie](mailto: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
26 Sep	What is political science research?	Babbie (2015, 5–19) <i>or</i> Babbie (2017, 2–20)
28 Sep	Using library resources ( <i>Vanessa Buckley</i> )	Babbie (2015, 487–489, 494–500) <i>or</i> Babbie (2017, 448–450, 455–462)
3 Oct	Counting or interpreting?	Babbie (2015, 20–30, ch 2) <i>or</i> Babbie (2017, 20–30, ch 2)
5 Oct	Know what you're talking about	Babbie (2015, 123–154) <i>or</i> Babbie (2017, 126–158)
10 Oct	Reading and writing political science research	Bergstrom and West (2017 <i>b</i> ), Babbie (2015, 486–507) <i>or</i> Babbie (2017, 448–469)
12 Oct	<b>Example:</b> International institutions and its discontents ( <i>Yoo Sun Jung</i> )	
17 Oct	Looking at a variable: Graphs for single variables	Babbie (2015, 411–416) <i>or</i> Babbie (2017, 423–428)
19 Oct	Looking at relations: Graphs for two variables	Bergstrom and West (2017 <i>c</i> ), Babbie (2015, 423–429) <i>or</i> Babbie (2017, 434–444)
24 Oct	<b>Example:</b> Who voted yes in the marriage referendum?	Elkink et al. (2017)
26 Oct	Testing relations: Graphs for three or more variables	Babbie (2015, 432–449), Bergstrom and West (2017 <i>d</i> ), Bergstrom and West (2017 <i>a</i> )
Reading week—work on your data project!		
7 Nov	Coding text	Babbie (2015, 381–410) <i>or</i> Babbie (2017, 390–421)
9 Nov	<b>Example:</b> Political resistance ( <i>Stephanie Dornschneider-Elkink</i> )	Dornschneider (2016, ch 1)
14 Nov	Theories and hypotheses	Babbie (2015, ch 4) <i>or</i> Babbie (2017, ch 4)
16 Nov	Experimental designs	Babbie (2015, ch 8) <i>or</i> Babbie (2017, ch 8)
21 Nov	Historical and comparative research	
23 Nov	Survey design: Who and what to ask?	Babbie (2015, 246–261, ch 7) <i>or</i> Babbie (2017, 255–267, ch 7)
28 Nov	The ethics of doing research	Babbie (2015, ch 3) <i>or</i> Babbie (2017, ch 3)
30 Nov	Review session	<i>all of the above</i>

## References

- 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. 2017a. "Common Causes (video)".  
**URL:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5iVN13tbVNc>
- Bergstrom, Carl and Jevin West. 2017b. "How do you know a paper is legit?".  
**URL:** [https://callingbullshit.org/tools/tools\\_legit.html](https://callingbullshit.org/tools/tools_legit.html)
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- Dornschneider, Stephanie. 2016. *Whether to kill: The cognitive maps of violent and nonviolent individuals*. University of Pennsylvania Press.
- 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.