

Analysing Politics

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Introduction

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

The textbook for the course is Bryman (2008), which is a good introductory book on social science research methods. The book is not about political science as such, but there will be plenty of political science examples in the lectures and assignments.

Details on the course can of course change: *Always keep an eye on Blackboard!*

Grading

The grading is based on tutorial participation, one exercise (questionnaire design), one essay (data analysis), and a final exam. The two essays are designed to give you some experience with hands-on political science research.

For this purpose we will develop an online survey, with questions designed by you (exercise), and where you will do some data analysis on those questions (essay). The first exercise will have to be done in small groups (probably two per tutorial) and all members of the group will get the same grade. The threshold for a passing grade will be made very low on this first assignment, so that you run very little risk of getting a failing grade because of lack of activity by your group mates. Make sure you form these groups right at the start of the course, in the first tutorial, so that you can get ready for submitting the first assignment in time. *Since the questions will be used for an actual online survey, late submission is not possible!* The data analysis will take the form of essays written by yourself, although working in groups to do the actual data analysis will be encouraged. Both assignments will have to be emailed to jos.elkink@ucd.ie as well as to your tutor. The relative weight of each task is as follows:

Task	Weight	Deadline
Tutorial participation	10%	
Questionnaire design	10%	3/3 5 pm
Data analysis	10%	19/4 5 pm
Final exam	70%	

Questionnaire design

The goal is to run an online survey in which students will be surveyed on a variety of different topics related to politics. As a group, design a research question you would like to answer and design - in detail - a set of about five questions that you would like to see added to the online survey to be able to answer the research question you designed. The research question can be any politically relevant research question - the first two tutorials will focus on what are good research questions for this project and what are good and bad question designs.

In this written exercise, describe the research question, the motivation, the precise survey question formulation (including answer categories) and the motivation for the question formulation - why would these help to answer the main research question, why did you choose open or closed questions, why did you choose this number of answer categories, why did you decide to include or exclude a 'don't know' category, etc. Read the chapters in Bryman (2008) on question(naire) design very carefully - designing good questions is a very precise task.

The exercise will be graded, with the grade applying equally to all members of the group, and subsequently the contents of all assignments will be merged

into one larger questionnaire to be used in an online survey. Questions might be slightly altered or combined where necessary to reduce the length of the survey or to improve the clarity.

Make sure the assignment includes all student numbers of the participants in the group.

Data analysis essay

During the two or three weeks after the first assignment the online survey will be run and one data set will be generated that contains all the results from this online survey. The data set will be made available to all students.

You will be asked to analyse the results of the survey to answer the research question your group designed and to write a report on your findings. The report should be at most 2000 words long and should contain an introduction that introduces the research question, a brief description of your theoretical argument, a discussion of your findings, and a brief conclusion, and should contain all tables or graphs necessary to present your results.

Although it is encouraged to do this in the original groups, this is not mandatory. The essay itself will have to be written on an individual basis, however, and the grade will also be individual.

Final exam

Note that for the final exam, all materials in the course are relevant, including all assigned chapters even when contents are not explicitly discussed in the lecture, including all lectures, and including your own research findings in the two homework tasks. You will get six questions, whereby you will be asked to answer one of each pair of questions. Roughly speaking, one pair of questions will relate to block 1 of the lectures; one pair to block 2; and one pair to block 3 (see schedule below). Most likely, one of the questions will relate to the survey research performed in the tutorials. Sample questions will be discussed throughout the lectures.

Tutorials

The tutorials will be taught by:

Name	Email	Tutorials
Aidan Regan	aidan.regan@ucd.ie	Tuesday
Stephen Quinlan	stephen.quinlan@ucd.ie	Thursday
Wendy Ross	wendy.ross@ucd.ie	Friday

There will be five tutorials and participation counts towards your grade. The topics of the tutorials are:

Tutorial	Date	Topic
1	25/1 - 7/2	Research questions & questionnaire design
2	8/2 - 21/2	Research questions & questionnaire design
3	22/2 - 8/3	Data analysis in Excel
4	22/3 - 11/4	Data analysis in Excel
5	12/4 - 26/4	Exam preparation

Plagiarism

Although this should be obvious, plagiarism - copying someone else's text without acknowledgement or beyond "fair use" quantities - is not allowed. UCD policies concerning plagiarism can be found at http://www.ucd.ie/regist/documents/plagiarism_policy_and_procedures.pdf. A more extensive description of what is plagiarism and what is not can be found at http://www.ucd.ie/library/students/information_skills/plagiari.html. 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

If you need to contact me outside class hours, you can find me in room F304 in the Newman Building. I do not have fixed office hours, so if you want to make sure I am present, you can make an appointment by email (jos.elkink@ucd.ie).

Topics overview

Date	Topic	Reading
<i>Block 1: General</i>		
18/1	Introduction	
20/1	Social research strategies	Bryman (2008: ch 1)
25/1	Research questions	Bryman (2008: ch 3)
27/1	Conceptualisation	Babbie (2004: pp 118-129)
1/2	Theories and hypotheses	Babbie (2004: ch 2)
3/2	Causes and explanations	Babbie (2004: ch 4)
8/2	Research designs	Bryman (2008: ch 2); Babbie (2004: ch 4)
	Experiments	Babbie (2004: ch 8)
10/2	Measurement	Bryman (2008: ch 6); Babbie (2004: ch 5)
<i>Block 2: Quantitative methods</i>		
15/2	Sampling	Bryman (2008: ch 7); Babbie (2004: ch 7)
17/2	Self-completion questionnaires (<i>Stephen Quinlan</i>)	Bryman (2008: ch 8, 9, 10); Bryman (2008: pp 644-653)
22/2	Univariate analysis	Bryman (2008: pp 313-325)
1/3	Multivariate analysis: tables	Bryman (2008: pp 325-331)
3/3	Multivariate analysis: regression (Study break)	-
24/3	Statistical inference	Bryman (2008: pp 332-338)
<i>Block 3: Qualitative methods</i>		
29/3	Qualitative research	Bryman (2008: ch 16)
31/3	Case studies and comparative methods (Easter)	Landman (2003: ch 2)
7/4	Case selection criteria	-
12/4	Interviewing (<i>Michael Anderson</i>)	Bryman (2008: ch 18)
14/4	Ethnography	Bryman (2008: ch 17)
19/4	Interpretative analysis (<i>Jennifer Todd</i>)	Bryman (2008: ch 22)
<i>Wrap-up</i>		
21/4	Exam preparation & questions	

References

Babbie, Earl. 2004. *The Practice of Social Research*. 10th ed. Wadsworth.

Bryman, Alan. 2008. *Social research methods*. 3rd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Landman, Todd. 2003. *Issues and methods in comparative politics: an introduction*. Routledge.