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Autumn Trimester 2020

Introduction to Statistics (POL40950)

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Term: Autumn Trimester 2020

Time: TBC

Location: TBC

ECTS: 10.0

Format: Lectures; lab work; blended learning

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Introduction

This course is an introduction to quantitative data analysis in the social sciences, in particular political science, public policy, and sociology. Do you want to know whether more informed voters are more likely to have liberal values? Whether democracies are less likely to initiate a war? Whether high tax rates lead to higher levels of corruption? For many social science questions, what we are really after is establishing whether there is a relationship between two variables of interest. And, we typically want to verify that there is no third variable explaining this relationship.

In statistical analysis, the first tool one usually reverts to answer such questions is regression analysis. There are many other statistical tools available to the social scientist, but regression analysis is by far the most common and a thorough understanding of this method generally the key to being able to read or write quantitative social science papers and research reports. The course therefore will introduce you to regression analysis – including model specification (which variables to include in a model?) and statistical inference (how do I know whether my findings hold for cases beyond my sample?).

The core textbook for the course is Ismay and Kim (2020), which is freely available online at <https://moderndive.com>.¹ This book takes a modern, data science approach to regression analysis. The differences between data science and more typical quantitative social science will be discussed in class, in particular in the context of model specification.²

¹Chester Ismay and Albert Y. Kim (2020). *Statistical Inference via Data Science: A ModernDive into R and the tidyverse*. Boca Raton: CRC Press. URL: <https://moderndive.com>.

²The structure of this module is similar to [Introduction to Statistics](#) taught at the School of Politics and International Relations in previous years. I thank Jos Elkind for allowing me to follow and adjust the structure of the previously taught module.

For the applied parts of this course, such as data import, data wrangling, and data visualisation, we will read parts of the following textbooks. Both books will also help you with your homework assignments and the technical elements of your course paper.

- Hadley Wickham and Garrett Golemund (2017). *R for Data Science: Import, Tidy, Transform, Visualize, and Model Data*. Sebastopol: O'Reilly. URL: <https://r4ds.had.co.nz>.
- Kieran Healy (2019). *Data Visualization: A Practical Introduction*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. URL: <https://r4ds.had.co.nz>.

We will work extensively with the R statistical programming language. The three books mentioned above (Ismay and Kim 2020; Wickham and Golemund 2017; Healy 2019) rely on the R statistical programming language and provide detailed and intuitive examples and the corresponding R code (based on the **tidyverse** approach). In addition to these books, I recommend the following literature for introductions to statistical methods, regression, causal inference, and R:

- **Basic grasp of statistics:** David Spiegelhalter (2020). *The Art of Statistics: Learning from Data*. London/New York: Penguin Books.
- **Research design:**
 - Paul M. Kellstedt and Guy D. Whitten (2018). *The Fundamentals of Political Science Research*. 3rd edition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
 - Gary King, Robert O. Keohane, and Sidney Verba (1994). *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- **R for political scientists:** Erik Gahner Larsen and Zoltán Fazekas (2019). *Quantitative Politics with R*.
- **Data visualisation:** Claus O. Wilke (2019). *Fundamentals of Data Visualization: A Primer On Making Informative and Compelling Figures*. Sebastopol: O'Reilly.
- **Causal inference:**
 - Ethan Bueno Bueno de Mesquita and Anthony Fowler (2019). *Thinking Clearly in a Data-Drive Age*. Unpublished Book Manuscript.
 - Scott Cunningham (2020). *Causal Inference: The Mixtape (v. 1.8)*. Unpublished Book Manuscript.
- **RMarkdown:** Yihui Xie, J.J. Allaire, and Garrett Golemund (2018). *R Markdown: The Definite Guide*. Boca Raton: CRC Press.

Learning Outcomes

1. basic understanding of working with R and RStudio
2. being able to wrangle, summarise, describe, and visualise statistical data
3. basic understanding of (frequentist) statistical inference
4. basic understanding of executing and interpreting multiple regression
5. preliminary understanding of logistic regression

Approaches to Teaching and Learning

The sessions consist of lectures and labs each week. Some of the lectures and labs will be online. The lectures focus on the fundamental aspects of statistical inference as well as the interpretation of these methods and examples.

In the online lab, students will be provided with clear instructions and solve problems related to data wrangling, visualisation and statistical methods using the statistical programming language R. The homework assignments are structured so that they gradually lead up to a comprehensive regression analysis and associated social science paper, putting the technical material of the class in practice.

I will make extensive use of quizzes³ throughout the lectures to increase attention and engagement in times of blended learning and online lectures. In addition, I will distribute several short feedback surveys during the term in which you can indicate what you can provide feedback, ask questions, and make improvement suggestions.

Overview of Assessment

- Homework assignment (Week 3): 25%
- Homework assignment (Week 6): 25%
- Course paper (end of trimester): 50%

Expectations and Grading

Students submit two **homework assignments** during the term (after the end of Week 3 and Week 6). Each homework counts towards 25% of the final grade. The homeworks will be distributed via Brightspace 14 days before the submission deadline as an RMarkdown file.⁴ Students fill in the answers and solutions in the same RMarkdown file, rename it to `hw_01/02_surname_firstname.Rmd`, knit it as an `html` file, and submit it via Brightspace. Only knitted `html` files will be accepted. More details on the homeworks will be provided in the first session(s) of the course.

Students also submit a **course paper** which counts towards 50% of the final grade. The research paper is a written analysis consisting of 4,000 words (including bibliography, captions, and footnotes). Students are required to develop a research question and answer this question using quantitative methods and regression analysis. Students are free to answer questions from all fields of social science, but must justify their choice and the relevance of the question. The course paper must address the following aspects: research gap and relevance; theory and expectations (based on previous research); data and methodological approach; results; conclusion and outlook. The course paper must be submitted via Brightspace as a `pdf` document before **TBC**. Detailed instructions on the research paper, the presentation, and the in-class discussion will be provided in class and on Brightspace.

For information on academic writing, I recommend the following two sources:

- Stephen B. Heard (2016). *The Scientist's Guide to Writing: How to Write More Easily and Effectively Throughout Your Scientific Career*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Patrick Dunleavy (2014). *How to Write Paragraphs in Research Texts (Articles, Books and PhDs)*. URL: <https://medium.com/advice-and-help-in-authoring-a-phd-or-non-fiction/how-to-write-paragraphs-80781e2f3054>.

³<https://mentimeter.com>.

⁴Xie, Allaire, and Golemund (2018) provide a very extensive and detailed introduction to RMarkdown. For a very short primer to RMarkdown see: https://rmarkdown.rstudio.com/articles_intro.html We will discuss how to create and compile RMarkdown files in the first two weeks of the module.

If you require information on proper citation style, please refer to the guidelines of the American Political Science Association:

- APSA Committee on Publications (2018). *Style Manual for Political Science (Revised 2018 Version)*. URL: <https://connect.apsanet.org/stylemanual/>.

Student effort hours	
Student effort type	Hours
Lectures	10
Computer Aided Lab	10
Autonomous Student Learning	200
Total	224

Plagiarism

Although this should be obvious, plagiarism – copying someone else’s text without acknowledgement or beyond ‘fair use’ quantities – is not allowed. Plagiarism is an issue we take very serious here in UCD. Please familiarize yourself with the definition of plagiarism on UCD’s website⁵ and make sure not to engage in it.

Late Submission Policy

All written work must be submitted on or before the due dates. Students will lose one point of a grade for work up to 5 working days late (*B–* becomes *C+*). Students will lose two grade points for work between 5 and 10 working days late (*B–* becomes *C*). When more than two weeks are necessary, the student will need to apply for extenuating circumstances application via the SPIRe Programme Office.

Questions and Problems

In this module, we will discuss concepts, methods, and software you might not have heard of before. I am aware that parts of this module could be challenging and I will assist you as best as I can. In addition to the lectures and lab sessions, I offer weekly office hours only for participants of this module. The office hours will take place via Zoom. I will share the link and password to the virtual room in the first lecture and post it on Brightspace.

If you struggle to solve problems relating to R or RStudio, I expect that you first consult the assigned readings and [StackOverflow](#). It is very likely that at least one other person faced the same problem before or received the same error message. If something is not working, try the following steps first before contacting me:

1. Use the ‘Search’ function in the online books of the recommended textbooks (Ismay and Kim 2020; Wickham and Golemund 2017; Healy 2019) and look up keywords that relate to your problem or the function that causes a problem. For questions about concepts, I recommend to consult the [Glossary of Statistical Terms](#) (Harrell 2019).
2. Try to summarise the problem in your own words and then google this summary. If the problem relates to R, add `rstats` to your search query. For example: `how to import csv file in rstats`. I am almost certain that you find a solution to most of your questions.

⁵<https://libguides.ucd.ie/academicintegrity>.

3. If your R code returns an error, I would advise you to Google the text the error message. For example: `Error: Can't subset columns that don't exist.`

→ If steps 1–3 still do not solve your problem or question, [please get in touch with me](#). I am happy to help!

I will continuously update an FAQ page on Brightspace with questions that students have asked me and that might be relevant for everyone in the course.

Syllabus Modification Rights

I reserve the right to reasonably alter the elements of the syllabus at any time by adjusting the reading list to keep pace with the course schedule. Moreover, I may change the content of specific sessions, depending on the participants' prior knowledge and research interests. If I make adjustments, I will send an email to all seminar participants and upload the revised syllabus to Brightspace.

Course Structure

Week 1: Accessing and Visualising Data (21–25 September 2020)	5
Week 2: Descriptive Statistics (28 September – 2 October 2020)	6
Week 3: Simple Regression (5–9 October 2020)	6
Week 4: Multiple Regression (12–16 October 2020)	6
Week 5: Reporting (Regression) Results (19–22 October 2020)	7
Reading Week (26–30 October 2020)	7
Week 6: Multiple Regression – Categorical Independent Variables Interaction Effects (2–6 November 2020)	7
Week 7: Sampling Distributions and Central Limit Theorem (9–13 November 2020)	7
Week 8: Hypothesis Tests and Confidence Intervals (16–20 November 2020)	8
Week 9: Multiple Regression – Diagnostics and Model Fit (23–27 November 2020)	8
Week 10: TO BE DISCUSSED (30 November–4 December 2020)	8

Week 1: Accessing and Visualising Data (21–25 September 2020)

What is quantitative political science? What are data? What is a variable? What are the different levels of measurement? How to describe your variables graphically, including pie charts, histograms. How to look at a distribution.

Mandatory Readings

- Kieran Healy (2019). *Data Visualization: A Practical Introduction*. Princeton: Princeton University Press: ch. 1.
- Chester Ismay and Albert Y. Kim (2020). *Statistical Inference via Data Science: A Modern Dive into R and the tidyverse*. Boca Raton: CRC Press: ch. 1–3.

- tidyverse style guide: <https://style.tidyverse.org>.

Optional

- David Spiegelhalter (2020). *The Art of Statistics: Learning from Data*. London/New York: Penguin Books: ch. 2.
- Erik Gahner Larsen and Zoltán Fazekas (2019). *Quantitative Politics with R*: ch. 7, 10.

Week 2: Descriptive Statistics (28 September – 2 October 2020)

How to describe your variables numerically, including the mean, mode, median, variance, and standard deviation. How to describe relations between variables graphically, including bar charts, scatterplots, and boxplots. Discussion of covariance and correlation to look at numerical indicators of relationships.

Mandatory Readings

- Chester Ismay and Albert Y. Kim (2020). *Statistical Inference via Data Science: A Modern Dive into R and the tidyverse*. Boca Raton: CRC Press: ch. 3–5.
- Erik Gahner Larsen and Zoltán Fazekas (2019). *Quantitative Politics with R*: ch. 3.
- Greg Wilson, Jennifer Bryan, Karen Cranston, Justin Kitze, Lex Nederbragt, and Tracy K. Teal (2017). “Good Enough Practices in Scientific Computing”. *PLoS Computational Biology* 13(6): e1005510.

Week 3: Simple Regression (5–9 October 2020)

Descriptive univariate linear regression models – how to look at the relation between two continuous variables.

Mandatory Readings

- Chester Ismay and Albert Y. Kim (2020). *Statistical Inference via Data Science: A Modern Dive into R and the tidyverse*. Boca Raton: CRC Press: ch. 6.

Optional

- Paul M. Kellstedt and Guy D. Whitten (2018). *The Fundamentals of Political Science Research*. 3rd edition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: ch. 9.

Week 4: Multiple Regression (12–16 October 2020)

How to perform and interpret regression models with more than one independent variable. How to think about the difference between prediction and causal inference? Some discussion of model specification.

- Chester Ismay and Albert Y. Kim (2020). *Statistical Inference via Data Science: A Modern Dive into R and the tidyverse*. Boca Raton: CRC Press: ch. 6.

Optional

- Paul M. Kellstedt and Guy D. Whitten (2018). *The Fundamentals of Political Science Research*. 3rd edition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: ch. 10–11.
- Erik Gahner Larsen and Zoltán Fazekas (2019). *Quantitative Politics with R*: ch. 11.

Week 5: Reporting (Regression) Results (19–22 October 2020)

How to present and interpret regression results. How to structure a quantitative research paper. How to convince the reader of the robustness of your results.

Mandatory Readings

- Gary King (2006). “[Publication, Publication](#)”. *PS: Political Science & Politics* 39 (1): 119–125.
- Chester Ismay and Albert Y. Kim (2020). *Statistical Inference via Data Science: A Modern Dive into R and the tidyverse*. Boca Raton: CRC Press: ch. 11.
- Glenn Firebaugh (2008). *Seven Rules for Social Research*. Princeton: Princeton University Press: ch. 1.

Optional

- David Spiegelhalter (2020). *The Art of Statistics: Learning from Data*. London/New York: Penguin Books: ch. 12.
- Kieran Healy (2019). *Data Visualization: A Practical Introduction*. Princeton: Princeton University Press: ch. 4–5.
- Erik Gahner Larsen and Zoltán Fazekas (2019). *Quantitative Politics with R*: ch. 14.

Reading Week (26–30 October 2020)

Week 6: Multiple Regression – Categorical Independent Variables Interaction Effects (2–6 November 2020)

Categorical independent variables in multiple regression. Modeling interaction effects in multiple regression.

Mandatory Readings

- John Fox (2015). *Applied Regression Analysis and Generalized Linear Models*. 3rd edition. Los Angeles: SAGE: ch. 7.
- Chester Ismay and Albert Y. Kim (2020). *Statistical Inference via Data Science: A Modern Dive into R and the tidyverse*. Boca Raton: CRC Press: ch. 6.1.2.

Optional

- Jens Hainmueller, Jonathan Mummolo, and Yiqing Xu (2019). “[How Much Should We Trust Estimates from Multiplicative Interaction Models? Simple Tools to Improve Empirical Practice](#)”. *Political Analysis* 27 (2): 163–192.
- William Roberts Clark, Michael J. Gilligan, and Matt Golder (2006). “[A Simple Multivariate Test for Asymmetric Hypotheses](#)”. *Political Analysis* 14 (3): 311–331.
- Frederick Solt, Yue Hu, Kevan Hudson, Jungmin Song, and Dong “Erico” Yu (2017). “[Economic Inequality and Class Consciousness](#)”. *The Journal of Politics* 79 (3): 1079–1083.

Week 7: Sampling Distributions and Central Limit Theorem (9–13 November 2020)

What are probabilities and probability distributions? Introduction to the normal distribution. What is statistical inference? Introduction to sampling methods. What is the Central Limit Theorem?

Mandatory Readings

- Chester Ismay and Albert Y. Kim (2020). *Statistical Inference via Data Science: A Modern Dive into R and the tidyverse*. Boca Raton: CRC Press: ch. 5.
- Paul M. Kellstedt and Guy D. Whitten (2018). *The Fundamentals of Political Science Research*. 3rd edition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: ch. 7.

Week 8: Hypothesis Tests and Confidence Intervals (16–20 November 2020)

What are hypothesis tests and confidence intervals? How to think of statistical inference in multiple regression analysis.

- Chester Ismay and Albert Y. Kim (2020). *Statistical Inference via Data Science: A Modern Dive into R and the tidyverse*. Boca Raton: CRC Press: ch. 9–10.

Optional

- David Spiegelhalter (2020). *The Art of Statistics: Learning from Data*. London/New York: Penguin Books: ch. 7.

Week 9: Multiple Regression – Diagnostics and Model Fit (23–27 November 2020)

How to think about model fit in the contexts of prediction and causal inference. Statistical versus modelling considerations in model specification. Common problems in regression analysis (and hints at solutions).

- Chester Ismay and Albert Y. Kim (2020). *Statistical Inference via Data Science: A Modern Dive into R and the tidyverse*. Boca Raton: CRC Press: ch. 11–12.

Optional

- Erik Gahner Larsen and Zoltán Fazekas (2019). *Quantitative Politics with R*: ch. 11.4.

Week 10: TO BE DISCUSSED (30 November–4 December 2020)

Before the first lecture, I will distribute a short survey. You can indicate your prior experience with qualitative and quantitative methods and also select which topic you would like to cover in the last session of this module.

Possible contents:

- Categorical dependent variables (logistic and multinomial regression)
- Reproducible research
- ???

References

- APSA Committee on Publications (2018). *Style Manual for Political Science (Revised 2018 Version)*. URL: <https://connect.apsanet.org/stylemanual/>.
- Bueno de Mesquita, Ethan Bueno and Anthony Fowler (2019). *Thinking Clearly in a Data-Drive Age*. Unpublished Book Manuscript.
- Clark, William Roberts, Michael J. Gilligan, and Matt Golder (2006). “A Simple Multivariate Test for Asymmetric Hypotheses”. *Political Analysis* 14 (3): 311–331.
- Cunningham, Scott (2020). *Causal Inference: The Mixtape (v. 1.8)*. Unpublished Book Manuscript.
- Dunleavy, Patrick (2014). *How to Write Paragraphs in Research Texts (Articles, Books and PhDs)*. URL: <https://medium.com/advice-and-help-in-authoring-a-phd-or-non-fiction/how-to-write-paragraphs-80781e2f3054>.
- Firebaugh, Glenn (2008). *Seven Rules for Social Research*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Fox, John (2015). *Applied Regression Analysis and Generalized Linear Models*. 3rd edition. Los Angeles: SAGE.
- Hainmueller, Jens, Jonathan Mummolo, and Yiqing Xu (2019). “How Much Should We Trust Estimates from Multiplicative Interaction Models? Simple Tools to Improve Empirical Practice”. *Political Analysis* 27 (2): 163–192.
- Harrell, Frank E Jr (2019). *Glossary of Statistical Terms*. URL: <https://hbiostat.org/doc/glossary.pdf>.
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- Heard, Stephen B. (2016). *The Scientist’s Guide to Writing: How to Write More Easily and Effectively Throughout Your Scientific Career*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Ismay, Chester and Albert Y. Kim (2020). *Statistical Inference via Data Science: A Modern Dive into R and the tidyverse*. Boca Raton: CRC Press.
- Kellstedt, Paul M. and Guy D. Whitten (2018). *The Fundamentals of Political Science Research*. 3rd edition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
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- Solt, Frederick, Yue Hu, Kevan Hudson, Jungmin Song, and Dong “Erico” Yu (2017). “Economic Inequality and Class Consciousness”. *The Journal of Politics* 79 (3): 1079–1083.
- Spiegelhalter, David (2020). *The Art of Statistics: Learning from Data*. London/New York: Penguin Books.
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- Wilke, Claus O. (2019). *Fundamentals of Data Visualization: A Primer On Making Informative and Compelling Figures*. Sebastopol: O’Reilly.
- Wilson, Greg, Jennifer Bryan, Karen Cranston, Justin Kitzes, Lex Nederbragt, and Tracy K. Teal (2017). “Good Enough Practices in Scientific Computing”. *PLoS Computational Biology* 13 (6): e1005510.
- Xie, Yihui, J.J. Allaire, and Garrett Grolemund (2018). *R Markdown: The Definite Guide*. Boca Raton: CRC Press.