

# Contextualising the Teaching of Quantitative Methods in Politics

Or: How to get the terrified to love statistics

## Overall aims

- *Basic* quantitative methods for all
- *Advanced* quantitative methods for some
- Link quantitative academic study of politics with existing 'knowledge' of politics
- Link UG training with PG training/careers

## Dilemma

- Statistics anxiety, denial, ignorance...

## Solutions

- Subject specific
- Link with 'real' world
- Stress application & interpretation
- Variation in activities, teaching & assessment
- Time

## Sheffield Politics UG courses

### L2 Political Analysis – Compulsory (≈200)

Empirical research design  
 Quantification of politics  
 Quantitative Methods

### L3 Dissertation in Political Analysis – Optional (≈4-8)

'Student-led' workshop teaching

## Level 2 Political Analysis

- Theories, approaches, scientific method...
- Quantification of Politics
- Research design in Political Science
- Methodology in Political Science
- Data collection
- Data analysis

## Exercises: Data Debate

e.g. the rate of immigration should be lowered/raised

Projection of numbers of households

	Number of households (thousands)	Average household size
1992	22,487	2.44
1993	22,624	2.43
1994	22,758	2.42
1995	22,896	2.41
1996	23,025	2.40
1997	23,132	2.40
1998	23,260	2.39
1999	23,406	2.39
2000	23,597	2.37
2001	23,927	2.36
2002	24,152	2.35
2003	24,365	2.34
2004	24,555	2.33
2011	26,235	2.25
2016	27,526	2.20
2021	28,732	2.15
2026	30,042	2.11

Total International migration

Year	inflow	outflow	balance
1992	268	281	- 13
1993	266	266	0
1994	315	238	+ 77
1995	312	236	+ 76
1996	318	264	+ 54
1997	327	279	+ 48
1998	391	251	+ 140
1999	454	291	+ 163
2000	479	321	+ 158
2001	479	306	+ 173
2002	513	358	+ 155
2003	508	361	+ 147
2004	586	342	+ 244
2005	563	359	+ 204
2006	591	400	+ 191

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## Obfuscating politics?

Forest of Dean, 2010 General Election

The results from important Forest by-elections held in 2009

Labour Can't win here

General Election 2005

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## Links to careers

Guest speakers from:

- Prime Minister's Strategy Unit
- Ipsos MORI
- Ministry of Justice

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## Lectures: simple techniques

Do you think that the general economic condition of the country will improve, stay the same or get worse over the next 12 months?

% Vote Labour 2001 vs % Vote Labour 2005

% Turnout 2005 by Major Census Region District

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## Understanding complexity?

The Comparative Manifestos Project has devised a scale for measuring the ideology of political parties from -100 (far left) to +100 (far right). The following table shows the average ideology of governing parties in a selection of countries, firstly through an analysis of their campaign promises and secondly through an analysis of their policy declarations. Why do you think there are differences between the two scales?

Table 8.1. Government ideology and policy declarations

Country	Government ideology Average	Government policy declarations Average
Sweden	-21.5	-9.1
Norway	-24.8	-21.1
Denmark	-8.3	2.0
Netherlands	-5.5	5.5
Luxembourg	-13.8	-2.5
Italy	-2.9	-1.6
Germany	3.2	12.3
Ireland	7.3	-14.3

Budge, I., H-D. Klingemann, A. Volkens, J. Bara and E. Tannenbaum (2001) *Mapping Policy Preferences: Estimates for Parties, Electors and Governments*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

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## Assessment

1. Questionnaire design
2. Comparison of 2 political organisations' use of statistics
3. Data Analysis
4. Unseen exam

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## Assessment 3 datasets

1. British Election Study
2. British Social Attitudes Survey
3. Eurobarometer
4. Political Terror Scale / Polity / COW / WDI

↓ # of variables

provide meaningful variables names/labels

create easy-to-read codebooks

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## Assessment 3 support

1. SPSS workshops
2. SPSS how-to guides
3. FAQs & message board on VLE
4. SPSS surgeries
5. Alternative dataset sessions
6. SPSS output interpretation seminars



## Level 3 Quantitative Dissertation in Political Science

- *Advanced* data collection (on demand)
- *Advanced* data analysis (on demand)
- Visual presentation of quantitative data  
Visual presentation of research design
- Dual supervision



## Incentives

	Students	%
Prize of £200 advertised		
2007-08	4	1.9
2008-09	8	4.5
No prize advertised		
2009-10	7	3.8



## Do students do better?

	Mean	SD
Standard dissertation 07-08	66.6	8
Quantitative dissertation 07-08	66.0	11
Standard dissertation 08-09	67.1	8
Quantitative dissertation 08-09	70.5	6



## Do students improve more?

	07-08	08-09
Standard dissertation	66.6	67.1
All L3 taught modules	65.2	64.8
Improvement	+1.4	+2.3
Quantitative dissertation	66.0	70.5
QD students' L3 modules	63.6	64.1
Improvement	+2.4	+6.4



## The award winners

2007-08	+10.5
2008-09	+19.3

## Postgraduate study

2007-08	50%
2008-09	25%

## General approach

- No maths background assumed
- Subject specific  
(Sub-discipline specific)
- Links to 'real' politics
- Student research-led teaching/assessment
- Variation in learning activities/assessment

## Further information

"Contextualising the Teaching of Statistics in Political Science." *Politics*, 29 (3): 193-200. 2009.

"It's A Numbers Game." *PSA News*. December 2009.

"How to Teach the Reluctant and Terrified to Love Statistics: The Importance of Context in Teaching Quantitative Methods in the Social Sciences." In Payne, G. & Williams, M. eds. *Teaching Quantitative Methods: Counting on the Social Sciences*, Sage, 2010.

Project website:

<http://www.shef.ac.uk/politics/methods/>

Case study wiki:

[http://good.group.shef.ac.uk/wiki/index.php/Context\\_and\\_Quants:\\_How\\_and\\_why\\_Politics\\_structured\\_data\\_analysis\\_into\\_the\\_curriculum](http://good.group.shef.ac.uk/wiki/index.php/Context_and_Quants:_How_and_why_Politics_structured_data_analysis_into_the_curriculum)

Good Practice blog - "Linking maths to careers for undergraduates in Politics":

<http://good.group.shef.ac.uk/blog/?p=279>