

Guidelines concerning the issue of confidentiality in political science research

In the wake of the controversy that arose during the 1990 presidential election in the Republic of Ireland, the committee of the PSAI elected at the 1990 AGM, as enlarged by subsequent co-options, noted that those conducting research into politics are rarely given explicit guidelines as to research practice. Accordingly, the committee asked one of its members, Dr Lee Komito, to draw up a set of guidelines for the conduct of research. These guidelines were discussed and refined at meetings of the committee throughout the year. The committee's proposed guidelines were adopted by the Annual General Meeting of the PSAI on 12 October 1991. They are as follows:

Scholars should, whenever possible, use non-confidential sources in their research, so that their work can be tested or replicated. They should determine on initial contact whether a source is non-confidential. The informant's right to remain anonymous should be respected, unless a clear understanding to the contrary has been reached. Individuals have the right not to participate in research, and informed consent must be given by research participants, both to their participation in the research and to whether their participation will be revealed. Informed consent requires knowledge of the aims of the research, funding of the research, the use to which the research is intended to be put, and the consequences that may follow, both to individuals and groups involved, from the research. Scholars should honour any undertakings given to research participants regarding anonymity and confidentiality. They should anticipate the effects of their research and its publication on participants, and their research should not be used in a manner intended to be recklessly harmful to the individuals or groups who have consented to participate in the research. To avoid unfair exploitation, participants should have their contribution to research suitably acknowledged.