

PSC 563
Causal Inference: Applications & Interpretation
Spring 2015
2pm-4:40pm, Harkness 329

Alexander Lee

Instructor:

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Office Hours: Wednesdays, 10-12 or by appointment

Course Goals:

This course is designed to prepare students to design and implement research projects that rigorously identify causal relationships. The material will examine some of the most common solutions to problems of causal inference in social science, and how they can be fitted to larger programs of hypothesis testing. Techniques to be covered include instrumental variables, regression discontinuity, natural experiments, field experiments, difference in difference and matching. Students will be asked to read and critique recent work from comparative politics and american politics that use these techniques, with an emphasis on applications to substantive questions rather than methodological details. Students will be asked to produce multiple research proposals that use these techniques, and present them in class.

Grading:

Class Participation — 20%

Four short research proposals (15% each) — 60%

Final Research Proposal — 20%

Course Policies:

Unexcused late work will be penalized a whole letter grade, and an additional letter grade for every additional 24 hours of lateness. Plagiarism or cheating will be treated seriously and reported to the Board of Academic Honesty.

Course Requirements:

Attendance and Reading: Students will be graded on their attendance and participation in all classes.

Short Research Proposals: Students should produce a proposal of between 600 and 900 words using the identification strategy discussed in the previous week of class. The proposal should outline the question to be studied, the conclusions of the existing literature, a working hypothesis, the data to be used and justify whether the project satisfies any assumptions inherent in the design. Students will not be required to submit a proposal in one week of their choosing, after giving the professor 24 hours advanced notice. The proposal is due by email at 7pm the evening before it is due. Student will make a short five minute presentation of their ideas in the next class.

Final Research Proposal: Should develop one of their short proposals into a more fully formed idea, with a literature review and detailed discussion of data availability and identification issues. Suggested length, 3000-4000 words.

Readings

Week 1: Introduction

January 13th: Introduction to the class and the subject

Week 2: Randomized Experiments

January 20th: Lecture and Discussion

Readings:

Wantchekon, Leonard. "Clientelism and voting behavior: Evidence from a field experiment in Benin." *World politics* 55.03 (2003): 399-422.

Gerber, Alan S., and Donald P. Green. "The effects of canvassing, telephone calls, and direct mail on voter turnout: A field experiment." *American Political Science Review* 94.03 (2000): 653-663.

Banerjee, Abhijit V., Raghavendra Chattopadhyay, Esther Duflo, Daniel Keniston, and Nina Singh. "Can institutions be reformed from within? Evidence from a randomized experiment with the Rajasthan police." (2012).

Habyarimana, James, Macartan Humphreys, Daniel N. Posner, and Jeremy M. Weinstein. "Why does ethnic diversity undermine public goods provision?." *American Political Science Review* 101, no. 04 (2007): 709-725.

Week 3: Randomized Experiments

January 27th: Student Presentations

Week 4: Natural Experiments

February 3rd: Lecture and Discussion

Readings:

Ferraz, Claudio, and Frederico Finan. "Exposing Corrupt Politicians: The Effects of Brazil's Publicly Released Audits on Electoral Outcomes." *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 123.2 (2008): 703-745.

Bhavnani, Rikhil R. "Do electoral quotas work after they are withdrawn? Evidence from a natural experiment in India." *American Political Science Review* 103.01 (2009): 23-35.

Krasno, Jonathan S., and Donald P. Green. "Do televised presidential ads increase voter turnout? Evidence from a natural experiment." *The Journal of Politics* 70.01 (2008): 245-261.

Lee, Alexander. "Redistributive Colonialism: The Long Term Legacy of International Conflict in India." (2015).

Week 5: Natural Experiments

February 10th: Student Presentations

No Class February 17th

Week 6: Instrumental Variables

February 26th: Lecture and Discussion

Readings:

Angrist, Joshua D. "Lifetime earnings and the Vietnam era draft lottery: evidence from social security administrative records." *The American Economic Review* (1990): 313-336.

Miguel, Edward, Shanker Satyanath, and Ernest Sergenti. "Economic shocks and civil conflict: An instrumental variables approach." *Journal of political Economy* 112.4 (2004): 725-753.

Gabel, Matthew, and Kenneth Scheve. "Estimating the effect of elite communications on public opinion using instrumental variables." *American Journal of Political Science* 51.4 (2007): 1013-1028.

Guiso, L., and P. Sapienza. "L. Zingales, 2008. Long Term Persistence." *NBER Working paper* 14: 278.

Week 7: Instrumental Variables

March 2nd: Student Presentations

Week 8: Regression Discontinuity

March 16th: Lecture and Discussion

Readings:

Lee, David S., Enrico Moretti, and Matthew J. Butler. "Do voters affect or elect policies? Evidence from the US House." *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* (2004): 807-859.

Lee, Alexander, and Kenneth A. Schultz. "Comparing British and French Colonial Legacies: A Discontinuity Analysis of Cameroon." *Quarterly Journal of Political Science* 7 (2012): 365-410.

Fisman, Raymond, Florian Schulz, and Vikrant Vig. "The Private Returns to Public Office." *Journal of Political Economy* 122.4 (2014): 806-862.

Lalive, Rafael. "Unemployment benefits, unemployment duration, and post-unemployment jobs: A regression discontinuity approach." *The American economic review* (2007): 108-112.

Week 9: Regression Discontinuity

March 23rd: Student Presentations

Week 10: Difference in Difference

March 30th: Lecture and Discussion

Readings:

Lyall, Jason. "Does indiscriminate violence incite insurgent attacks? Evidence from Chechnya." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* (2009).

Fowler, Anthony. "Electoral and policy consequences of voter turnout: Evidence from compulsory voting in Australia." *Quarterly Journal of Political Science* 8.2 (2013): 159-182.

Jensen, Robert, and Emily Oster. "The power of TV: Cable television and women's status in India." *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 124.3 (2009): 1057-1094.

Miller, Grant. "Women's suffrage, political responsiveness, and child survival in American history." *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 123.3 (2008): 1287.

Week 11: Difference in Difference

April 6th: Student Presentations

Week 12: Miscellaneous Topics

April 13th: Lecture and Discussion

Readings:

Barabas, Jason. "How deliberation affects policy opinions." *American Political Science Review* 98.04 (2004): 687-701.

Hegre, Håvard, and Nicholas Sambanis. "Sensitivity analysis of empirical results on civil war onset." *Journal of conflict resolution* 50.4 (2006): 508-535.

Jha, Saumitra. *Shares, coalition formation and political development: evidence from seventeenth century England*. Graduate School of Business, Stanford University, 2008.

Abadie, Alberto and Javier Gardeazabal. "The Economic Costs of Conflict: A Case-Control Study for the Basque Country." *The American economic review* (2004): 92(1).

Week 13: Final Student Presentations

April 20th: Student Presentations
