
PSC 214

Empirical Controversies in Amer. Politics

Spring 2014
2:00-4:40 Wed.
LeChase 181

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Office Hours: Fri. 2:00-4:00

PURPOSE

Is the mass media really biased? Does abortion lower the crime rate? Does the “No Child Left Behind” act encourage cheating? Providing convincing answers to these hot-button political issues requires good research design. Our goal is to learn the techniques behind designing research studies that allow political scientists and economists to answer exactly these kinds of questions. Our focus is on setting up the problem so that data analytic techniques, when applied, provide the right answers.

PREREQUISITES

The only prerequisite is an undergraduate course in data analysis. PSC 200 or 201 suffices for political science.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Evaluation is based on class participation (30% of your grade), two essay exams (20% each), and a 15-page research design project (30% of your grade). The exams are given as scheduled and are not given early—please make any travel plans accordingly. The research design is due during the course’s university-scheduled final period.

A web page for this course is to be found here:

<http://www.rochester.edu/College/PSC/clarke/204/204.html>

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Be familiar with the University’s policies on academic integrity and disciplinary action (<http://www.rochester.edu/College/CCAS/AdviserHandbook/AcadHonesty.html>). Violators of University regulations on academic integrity will be dealt with severely, which means that your grade will suffer, and I will forward your case to the Chair of the College Board on Academic Honesty.

Remember that the same technology that has made plagiarism easier to accomplish has also made it easier to detect. If you do not cite a source, it is plagiarism. If you do cite it, it is scholarship.

COURSE SCHEDULE

All readings are online at the course web page unless followed by a URL.

September 3: Introduction

- None (first day of class).

September 10: Explanation in the Social Sciences

- Lave & March (1975), “An Introduction to Speculation.”
- Schelling (1978), “Micromotives and Macrobehavior.”
- Geertz (1972), “Deep play: notes on the Balinese cockfight.”

September 17: Methods in the Social Sciences

- Achen and Snidal (1989). “Rational Deterrence Theory and Comparative Case Studies.”
- Freedman (1991), “Statistical models and shoe leather.”
- Rosenbaum (1999), “Choice as an Alternative to Control in Observational Studies.”
- Green & Gerber (2003), “The Underprovision of Experiments in Political Science.”

September 24: Does Money Determine Elections?

- Levitt (1994), “Using Repeat Challengers to Estimate the Effect of Campaign Spending on Election Outcomes in the U.S. House.”
- Gerber (1998), “Estimating the Effect of Campaign Spending on Senate Election Outcomes Using Instrumental Variables.”
- Jacobsen (2004), “Money in Congressional Elections.”
- Stratmann (2005), “Some talk: Money in politics.”

October 1: Does Capital Punishment “Work”?

- Cloninger & Marchesini (2001), “Executions and Deterrence: A Quasi-Controlled Group Experiment.”
- Mocan & Gittings (2003), “Getting Off Death Row: Commuted Sentences and the Deterrent Effect of Capital Punishment.”
- Goertzel (2004), “Capital Punishment and Homicide.”
http://www.csicop.org/si/show/capital_punishment_and_homicide_sociological_realities_and_econometric_illu
- Berk (2005), “New Claims about Executions and General Deterrence: Deja Vu All Over Again?”

October 8: Did Legalizing Abortion Affect the Crime Rate?

- Donohue & Levitt (2001), “The Impact of Legalized Abortion on Crime.”
- Joyce (2004), “Did Legalized Abortion Lower Crime?”
- Donohue & Levitt (2004), “Further Evidence that Legalized Abortion Lowered Crime.”
- Sailer, “Did Legalizing Abortion Cut Crime?”
<http://www.isteve.com/abortion.htm>
- Levitt & Sailer (1999), “Debate.”

⇒ Essay Exam 1

October 15: Does Democracy Lead to Peace?

- Russett (1993), “Grasping the Democratic Peace.”
- Layne (1994), “Kant or Cant? The Myth of the Democratic Peace.”
- Ray (1998), “Does Democracy Cause Peace?”

October 22: Is There a Liberal Bias in the Media?

- Groseclose & Milyo (2005), “A Measure of Media Bias.”
- Niven (2003), “Objective Evidence on Media Bias: Newspaper Coverage of Congressional Party Switchers.”
- Patterson (1996), “Bad News, Period.”
- Watts *et al.* (1999), “Elite Cues and Media Bias in Presidential Campaigns: Explaining Public Perceptions of a Liberal Press.”

October 29: Does No Child Left Behind Encourage Cheating?

- Amrein & Berliner (2002), “High-Stakes Testing, Uncertainty, and Student Learning.”
<http://epaa.asu.edu/epaa/v10n18/>
- Raymond & Hanushek (2003), “High-Stakes Research.”
<http://edpro.stanford.edu/hanushek/admin/pages/files/uploads/ednext.accountability.final.pdf>
- TBA.

November 5: A Taste for Discrimination?

- Knowles, Persico, and Todd (2001), “Racial Bias in Motor Vehicle Searches: Theory and Evidence.”
- Donohue and Levitt (2001), “The Impact of Race on Policing and Arrests.”
- Ravina (2008), “Beauty, Personal Characteristics and Trust in Credit Markets.”

November 12:

- TBA.

⇒ Essay Exam 2

November 19: Student Presentations

- TBA.

December 3: Student Presentations

- TBA.

December 10: Student Presentations

- TBA.

Your 15-page research design is due the last day of classes.