

International Relations and Survey Experiments

Basics

Instructor: Tobias Heinrich (heinricht@mailbox.sc.edu – www.theinrich.net)

Time and place: POLI 391, University of South Carolina, Fall 2016.

Class: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 11.40–12.55pm, Gambrell 103A.

Office hour: Thursdays, 10.30–11.30am. I will usually be available for a bit right before and after class as well. You can also schedule alternative times with me through email.

Outline

First, contrary to what one might encounter on CNN on a regular basis, domestic politics are central, fundamental in today's understanding of international relations. Scholars often focus on political institutions, public opinion, interest groups, and elections in order to explain onset of armed conflict, the imposition of economic sanctions, the restrictions of migration, the delivery of foreign aid, etc. That justifies the importance and appropriateness of the first, substantive part of this class' title.

Second, undergraduate political science courses often diverge quite a bit from political science research, even within the same instructor. Survey experiments are an excellent vehicle to narrow this gap. They first let students conduct their own research so that they not only read about existing reseach. This is more immersive and active than traditional courses. Second, the research steps can actually be carried out by students without years of graduate training. This justifies the second part of the title of the course.

This course revolves around a small number of student groups pitching, designing, carrying out, and analyzing their own survey experiments. Actual survey-takers from across the United States will be recruited so that actual, valid data can be analyzed at the end. As the topics and research questions of the groups can be anything that connects domestic politics and international relations, students' chosen topics will determine the substantive questions discussed in class.

If you actively and meticulously participate in this course, you will learn

- how to coherently think in a structured way through political issues;
- about a broad range of how domestic politics affect international relations;
- appreciate the virtues of randomization;
- how to design, carry out, and analyze a survey experiment;
- to think more like a (social) scientist and much less like a journalist or talking head.

Date of this syllabus: August 17, 2016.

Required Materials

Everything needed in class will either be freely available online, be posted on Blackboard, or accessible via USC's subscriptions of academic journals.

Grades and Grading

Your grade will be comprised of several contributions which follow the process of research. Everything in this class will be graded on a scale of 0–100. Your final grade will simply be the weighted average of all these contributions. **First**, each student writes out a crude research idea (including pitch, question, survey design, randomization). (Due August 30; weight of 1.) **Second**, each student's crude research idea will be constructively criticized by two other students. (Due September 6; weight of 1.) **Third**, after reviewing all research ideas and their respective critiques, a small number of groups should form to refine (and to ultimately conduct) the research idea. That is, the initial idea should be rewritten, extended, and subsequently presented in class. (Due September 19; weight of 2.) **Fourth**, taking in the comments from the presentation, a first draft of the research proposal has to be written and presented. (Due October 5; weight of 3.) **Fifth**, the final draft of the research proposal lays out the exact experimental design which will then be implemented. It has to address suggestions from the earlier presentation. (Due October 18; weight of 3.) **Sixth**, the final paper augments the final research proposal with the analysis of the data, critique of the own work, suggestions for future research, and conclusions. (Due November 16; weight of 3.) **Seventh**, survey involves human subjects and for such research, the researcher has to obey laws and university policies. Therefore, you have to pass online tests about research ethics and the treatment of human subjects. (Due September 29; weight of 1.)

Optionally, there is a final test that students can take which will primarily be multiple choice questions. (Due December 6; weight of 3.)

I will use the following grading scale to map the final grade-points to letter grades. A 92-100, B+ 87-91, B 80-86, C+ 77-79, C 70-76, D+ 67-69, D 60-66, and F 0-59. Standard rounding rules apply. If you choose to turn in your work late, then you will lose five points every 12 hours. Unexcused no-shows for presentations get a zero.

Assignments and examination work are expected to be the sole effort of the student or student group submitting the work. Students are expected to follow the University of South Carolina Honor Code and should expect that every instance of a suspected violation will be reported. Students found responsible for violations of the Code will be subject to academic penalties under the Code in addition to whatever disciplinary sanctions are applied. Cheating on a test or copying someone else's work, will result in a zero for the work, possibly a grade of F in the course, and, in accordance with University policy, be referred to the University Committee for Academic Responsibility and may result in expulsion from the University.

You are expected to be in class on time and be there every time as attending class is an integral part in learning the material. Further, missing class when your classmates carry out their presentations is simply rude. That said, no attendance will be taken so that there is no formal disadvantage from not showing up. I firmly believe that missing classes will adversely affect your learning and thereby your grade. However, if you fail to show up when you are supposed to present something, you will receive a zero even if your fellow group members present well.

Reading the assigned material and attending class are crucial and not substitutable for each other. Some material in the readings are starting points for the content of class sessions; others will be dissected meticulously. There will also be classes without any previous grounding in readings. Your learning and thereby your grade will require close attention to lectures and readings.

Politics is inherently a social phenomenon, and thereby discussions about it are as well. I encourage every student to voice objections, questions, critique, and dissatisfaction with the presented material as well as with the instructor's and other students' views on the material. There are only three prerequisites: the comments have to be thought-out before voiced, be respectful, and must not aim to disrupt the course for disruption's sake.

Last, in light of debates around "micro-aggression", let me clear: I cannot rule out that class discussions will challenge students' pre-existing beliefs. Consider this syllabus an omnibus trigger warning for the entire semester.

Reasonable accommodations are available for students with a documented disability. If you have a disability and may need accommodations to fully participate in this class, contact the Office of Student Disability Services: 777-6142, TDD 777-6744, email sasds@mailbox.sc.edu, or stop by LeConte College Room 112A. All accommodations must be approved through the Office of Student Disability Services.

A note on data

Once the survey experiments are fielded, students will obtain actual data from respondents. I encourage students to make the data available for everyone to use eventually (in a thesis, e.g.). Data should not be proprietary in any sense. This is roughly the norm in social science.

Course Schedule

The syllabus is very likely to be changed by the instructor and perhaps quite a bit. If you are unclear about anything, just ask. Talk to the instructor early about concerns. Also, unless noted otherwise, the "due time" is an hour before class starts.

August 18: Howdy!

August 23: Surveys, IR, research, experiments.

- Alex Mintz, Yi Yang, and Rose Mc Dermott. Experimental approaches to international relations. *International Studies Quarterly*, 55(2):493–501, 2011
- Susan D Hyde. Experiments in international relations: Lab, survey, and field. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 18:403–424, 2015

August 25: Surveying the wide world of survey experiments in IR. Go to <https://theinrich.net/sel>. Read 5+ articles from those listed and write a quick summary for each for yourself. Only pick articles that have the word "experiment" or "experimental" among their tags. What is the research question? Why does the answer to the question matter? Why are the authors using survey experiments? Who is being surveyed? Describe the survey and the experiment.

August 30: Approaching survey experiments, Day I. What are surveys? Why experimenting in surveys? Crude research idea is due, and post it on Blackboard ("Crude research idea").

- Joshua D. Angrist and Jörn-Steffen Pischke, Mastering 'Metrics. Chapter 2. On Blackboard.

September 1: Approaching survey experiments, Day II. Varieties of survey instruments. *Read another three survey experiment articles and carefully study what the survey instrument looks like. Sketch it on paper.*

September 6: Approaching survey experiments, Day III. Confounding in survey experiments. *Critiques of two other students' crude research ideas are due. Leave critiques as replies in threads on Blackboard. Which idea, maybe not your own, interests you the most?*

September 8: Approaching survey experiments, Day IV. Dealing with sensitive questions. *Forming groups for survey experiments.*

- Bryn Rosenfeld, Kosuke Imai, and Jacob N Shapiro. An empirical validation study of popular survey methodologies for sensitive questions. *American Journal of Political Science*, 2015. Focus on the frontend.

September 13: Using the internet for surveys.

- Read up on what Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk) is.
- Connor Huff and Dustin Tingley. "who are these people?" evaluating the demographic characteristics and political preferences of mturk survey respondents. *Research & Politics*, 2(3), 2015
- Adam J Berinsky, Gregory A Huber, and Gabriel S Lenz. Evaluating online labor markets for experimental research: Amazon.com's mechanical turk. *Political Analysis*, 20(3):351–368, 2012
- Kevin E Levay, Jeremy Freese, and James N Druckman. The demographic and political composition of mechanical turk samples. *SAGE Open*, 6(1), 2016

September 15: Mass public opinion and (foreign) policy.

- John H Aldrich, Christopher Gelpi, Peter Feaver, Jason Reifler, and Kristin Thompson Sharp. Foreign policy and the electoral connection. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 9:477–502, 2006
- Brandice Canes-Wrone. From mass preferences to policy. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 18:147–165, 2015

September 20: Present refined research ideas and develop them, Day I. *Upload document to Blackboard ("Refined research idea") by September 19, 11.59pm.*

September 22: Present refined research ideas and develop them, Day II.

September 27: Present refined research ideas and develop them, Day III.

September 29: Reading and discussing (macro) research on the chosen topics, Day I. *CITI online certification is due. The course is called "Social and Behavioral Researchers." (<http://orc.research.sc.edu/registration.shtml>). And register with USC's eIRB (<http://orc.research.sc.edu/PDF/eIRBRegistrationInstructions.pdf>).*

October 4: Reading and discussing (macro) research on the chosen topics, Day II.

October 6: Present research proposals in class, Day I. *Upload document to "Research proposals"*

on Blackboard by October 5, 11.59pm.

October 11: Present research proposals in class, Day II.

October 13: No class as it's Fall Break.

October 18: Applying to eIRB. *Final research proposals are due; upload to Blackboard under "Research proposals (final version)".*

October 20: Buffer class.

October 25: Buffer class.

October 27: Buffer class.

November 1: Buffer class.

November 3: Analyzing surveys, Day I.

November 8: No class as it's General Election Day.

November 10: Analyzing surveys, Day II.

November 15: Analyzing surveys, Day III.

November 17: Presenting projects and analyses, Day I. *Upload final paper to Blackboard under the eponymous folder.*

November 22: Presenting projects and analyses, Day II.

November 24: No class as it's Thanksgiving.

December 1: Last day of class. *Optional final is posted on Blackboard.*

December 6: *Last day to complete optional final.*