

GOVT 83.21: Experiments in Politics

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Class: TTH 10 AM–11:50 AM, 113 Silsby
x-period: Wed. 3 PM–3:50 PM
Office hours: W 3–5 PM, 305 Silsby

Course overview

This class is a lab-style seminar in which we will design, field, and analyze an experimental study of political misperceptions. Our ultimate goal is to publish a scholarly article in a peer-reviewed journal of political science—an ambitious project that will require a substantial commitment from each student. Flexibility will also be essential since the course will evolve during the quarter based on the needs of the project. In particular, I ask that you keep the x-period open so we can use it for ad hoc meetings. I have scheduled a meeting for the x-period on October 12 but we may need to meet at that time during other weeks.

Prerequisites

The course has no prerequisites.

Plan for the course

We will begin by discussing the goals of science and the value of experiments. We will then learn about experimental design, statistics, and the use of statistical software. To make these concepts more real, students will design, administer, and analyze their own mini-experiments in small groups.

In the second phase of the course, we will determine the focus of our research. With my guidance, students will survey recent articles in political science and psychology, identify a promising theory or unresolved question related to misperceptions, and write a short paper proposing an experiment that we could carry out. After these proposals have been presented, the class will decide which question to pursue.

We will then break into groups to design different portions of the experiment, which will be revised and combined. After finalizing the design and obtaining human subjects approval to conduct the study, we will collect experimental data from online participants on Amazon’s Mechanical Turk or an equivalent service.

During the last part of the class, we will work together to analyze the data and construct a manuscript reporting our findings. Each student will draft one part of the article. I will combine those components into a draft that we will revise collaboratively. The class will culminate with each student developing a critique of the paper’s writing, argument, and quantitative analysis and proposing revisions designed to improve it. These changes will hopefully be integrated

into a manuscript that will be submitted to a scholarly journal after the completion of the course. (The outcome will depend on the results of our initial experiment.) Participation in revisions after the class ends is totally optional.

Learning objectives

By the end of the course, you will be able to:

- Explain the value of experiments to science
- Critique previous experimental research in political science and psychology
- Design and conduct an original experiment
- Perform a statistical analysis of experimental data
- Write a scholarly article reporting the results of an experiment

Course materials

The following books are required and can be purchased at the bookstore:

- Annabel Ness Evans and Bryan J. Rooney. 2010. *Methods in Psychological Research*, second edition. Sage Publications. (First edition is almost identical and much cheaper – see <http://j.mp/oPJM6q> or <http://j.mp/mTsyxf>.)
- Irwin P. Levin. 1999. *Relating Statistics and Experimental Design*. Sage Publications.

The following e-book is available for purchase online for \$0.99 (see links at <http://www.thevictorylab.com>):

- Sasha Issenberg. 2011. *Rick Perry and His Eggheads*. Crown.

Communication

The class will be run through Blackboard. I will use it to email announcements to you, to provide PDFs of all assigned readings other than the required textbooks, and to facilitate collaboration via the wiki tool. Please submit your work to me through its assignments function rather than by email. However, if you have questions, feel free to come to my office hours or email me.

Academic integrity

Students are responsible for understanding the academic integrity rules at Dartmouth. Explanations of integrity rules and principles can be found at <http://www.dartmouth.edu/~uja/>. Ignorance of the Academic Honor Principle will not be considered an excuse if a violation occurs. Beyond any penalties imposed as a consequence of an Academic Honor Principle investigation, any student who is found to have cheated or plagiarized on any assignment will receive a failing grade in the class. Details on citing sources are available at <http://www.dartmouth.edu/~writing/sources>. These academic integrity issues are especially important since we will be conducting original research in the class. Please see me immediately if you have any questions or concerns.

Students with disabilities

Students with disabilities enrolled in this course who may need disability-related classroom accommodations are encouraged to make an appointment to see me before the end of the second week of the term. All discussions will remain confidential, although the Student Accessibility Services office may be consulted to discuss appropriate implementation of any accommodation requested.

Religious observances

Some students may wish to take part in religious observances that occur during this academic term. If you have a religious observance that conflicts with your participation in the course, please meet with me before the end of the second week of the term to discuss appropriate accommodations.

Assignments and grading

Grading in this class will be based on the components described below. Late work will not be accepted without prior permission.

Class participation—25%

By necessity, our collaboration will largely take place in the classroom. As such, it is essential that each student make thoughtful and consistent contributions in class discussion and group work. At a minimum, however, you should attend class on time with your readings and assignments completed and be respectful of others during class discussion.

One-page assignments (including Wiki participation)—20%

It is also important that each student make contributions to our collective effort outside of class time. During the quarter, students will be regularly asked to contribute to the design of our experiment on the Blackboard wiki and to complete a series of one-page assignments asking them to propose experiments,

critique proposed experiments, and suggest revisions that could improve them. In each case, the goal is to help teach you how to think analytically about answering social scientific questions using experiments. Your contributions will be evaluated based on creativity, insight, and attention to detail.

Proposed experiment (due 10/7; optional draft due 10/2)—20%

Each of you will work with me to select a research topic from the list at the end of the syllabus or to choose a related topic (which I must approve). You will then write a 1000–1500 word paper summarizing recent research in that area and proposing an experiment related to misperceptions that the class could realistically complete that would make an important contribution to that literature. (Note: Before starting the assignment, read the two papers on correcting misperceptions listed under paper topics as well as Ch. 2 of Evans and Rooney.)

Here are the three primary goals of this assignment, which correspond roughly to the structure I envision (though the organization of the paper is up to you):

1. Give a short but precise summary of the most important (i.e. new and prestigious or influential/highly cited) articles in your field so that your fellow students can discuss your area intelligently. You can't possibly cover all of the research, so you should make sure to focus on the key aspects of the most important and novel studies (research questions, methodologies, findings, etc.). The idea is to give us an overview of the most relevant work (i.e., the foundational research and the most recent/relevant studies) and to build from there.
2. Make an argument for where the literature described in #1 has fallen short or where unanswered questions remain. This can be a separate section or woven into your literature review.
3. Propose an experiment that builds on the state of the art described in #2. Your description of the experiment needs to provide enough detail so that we can have an intelligent discussion about it. At a minimum, it should include the research question/hypothesis, the experimental design (e.g., 2x2 between-subjects), the proposed experimental treatments, and the dependent variable(s).

Since this will be a new type of assignment for most of you, I will review draft papers and provide feedback if you send them to me by October 2 (optional). I will also make sample papers from previous students available on Blackboard.

Contribution to article (due 11/18; drafts due 11/13)—15%

In the spirit of the class, each student will be randomly assigned to draft one component of the article, which could include part or all of the introduction, literature review, theory section, experimental design, results section, or conclusion. The exact assignments will depend on both the composition of the

class and the structure of the article that we plan to write and thus will not be made until later in the quarter. I will do my best to balance the difficulty of the assignments. You will have a chance to get feedback from your classmates on a draft of your article before it is due. Also, I will again provide sample contributions from previous students on Blackboard.

Proposed revisions/critiques of article—20%

Once we assemble the components of the article, each student will develop a 500–750 word paper critiquing a specific aspect of its writing, argument, and quantitative analysis and proposing revisions or future experiments to address the problems they have identified (5%, due November 23). You will get feedback from your classmates on a draft (due November 20) before submitting a final version. The goal is to give you experience with the critique and revision process.

Students will then write a 1500–2000 word critique of the article as a whole for their final paper. It should propose further revisions and suggest future research projects that build on our results (15%, due December 6). As in the cases above, I will provide sample papers for you to review from previous students. Please submit a short summary or proposal for the long critique before our final class (due November 27).

Course schedule

Experiments: Why and how

Rationale for experiments/plan for the class (9/22)

- Why experiments?
 - Issenberg. “Nudge the Vote.” *New York Times Magazine*. October 29, 2010.
 - Issenberg 2011.
 - Rose McDermott. 2002. “Experimental Methods in Political Science.” *Annual Review of Political Science*, pp. 31–40.
- Why misperceptions?
 - Clay Ramsay, Steven Kull, Evan Lewis. 2010. Misinformation and the 2010 Election: A Study of the US Electorate. WorldPublicOpinion.org. December 10, 2010.
 - Jennifer Jerit and Jason Barabas. “Partisan Perceptual Bias and the Information Environment”. Unpublished manuscript.
- Our plan of attack
 - Gary King. 2006. “Publication, publication.” *PS: Political Science and Politics*. 119–121 (stop where it says “Ground Rules”).

Causality, experimental design, and measurement (9/27)

- Gary King, Robert O. Keohane, and Sidney Verba. 1994. *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific inference in qualitative research*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. Ch. 3.
- Levin pp. 1–15
- Evans and Rooney chapters 1 and 5, pp. 130–148 (1st edition: 133–153)
- Small group: Design your own mini-experiment
- Required: Submit research topic rankings

Hypothesis testing, t and F tests, and χ^2 (9/29)

- Evans and Rooney ch. 4, pp. 269–293, 308–311 (1st edition: 270–294, 309–313)
- Levin pp. 16–33, 38–51, 55–61
- Discussion: Mini-experiments—what happened?
- Small group: What could you have done better?

Two-way ANOVA and multiple regression (10/4)

- Evans and Rooney pp. 299–307, 312–317 (1st edition: 300–309, 313–321)
- Levin pp. 33–37, 51–55, 61–73
- Small group: Proposed experiments discussion

Data analysis tutorial (10/6)

- *Getting Started With Stata*, ch. 3 (PDF)
- Small group: Analyze data from a previous experiment

Choosing a topic

Research topics I (10/11)

- Student research summaries (first group)
 - Rumors: Communications research
 - Memory and misinformation
 - Self-affirmation and self-regulation
 - Negation and corrections
 - Resistance to scientific evidence
- Assignment: Propose one modification to/critique of a proposed experiment for each topic other than your own (1 page; can be in list/bullet format)
- Small groups: Ideas for experimental modifications

Research topics II (10/12—**x-period**)

- Student research summaries (second group)
 - Source effects
 - Emotional responses to political information
 - “Cultural cognition”
- Assignment: Propose one modification to/critique of a proposed experiment for each topic other than your own (1 page; can be in list/bullet format)
- Small groups: Ideas for experimental modifications

Research topics III (10/13)

- Assignment: Consider all the possible approaches and write a short essay arguing which research topic is best according to the following criteria (1 page):

- Normative importance (does it deal with an important question for democracy?)
 - Theoretical contribution (new hypothesis/prediction—the more original or surprising, the better)
 - Methodological contribution (new technique used)
 - Empirical contribution (surprising or counter-intuitive result, contradicts previous findings, etc.)
 - Practical considerations (can we do it?)
- Goal: Choose research topic and basic research design

Pre-test design and analysis

Study design I (10/18)

- Read relevant articles on pre-test topics:
 - Shot by the Messenger: Partisan Cues and Public Opinion Regarding National Security and War
 - Who Said What? The Effects of Source Cues in Issue Frames
 - Acknowledging the Skeletons in Our Closet: The Effect of Group Affirmation on Collective Guilt, Collective Shame, and Reparatory Attitudes
- Assignment: Propose design of an experiment and outline of independent and dependent variables in instrument (1 page; can be in list/bullet format)
- Goal: Create preliminary experimental design

Study design II (10/20)

- Assignment: Draft experimental instrument in Google Docs
- Goal: Finalize experiment in Qualtrics

Pre-test results I (10/25—**x-period**)

- Group assignment: Write a summary of what data indicates thus far as well as a description of what statistical analyses we should run on it
- Goal: Review/understand pre-test results

Pre-test results II (10/26)

- Discuss experimental revisions based on pre-test results

Pre-test results III (10/27)

- Decide on experimental revisions for second pre-test

Pre-test results IV (11/1)

- Assignment: Email feedback on revisions, test revised pre-test experiment
- Discuss next steps
- Work on revisions to instrument for Qualtrics:
 - Non-political DVs
 - Control affirmation condition(s)
 - Information search

Pre-test results V (11/3)

- Evans and Rooney Ch. 14
- Gary King. 2006. “Publication, publication.” *PS: Political Science and Politics*. 121–125 (start at the section on style).
- Finalize instrument for Qualtrics

Writing the article

Initial analysis of results I (11/8)

- Cobb, Michael D. and James H. Kuklinski. 1997. “Changing Minds: Political Arguments and Political Persuasion.” *American Journal of Political Science*, 88–121 (sample journal article—read with attention to style, structure, and presentation).

Initial analysis of results II (11/10)

- Work on paper section drafts

Group feedback on article drafts I (11/15)

- Other students’ article drafts
- Small group: Feedback on drafts

Group feedback on article drafts II (11/16—**x-period**)

- Other students’ article drafts
- Small group: Feedback on drafts

Revising the article

Article discussion I (11/22)

- Other students' article critiques
- Small groups: Feedback on critique

Article discussion II (11/29)

- Logistics of paper revision
- Small groups: Identify problems in draft

Paper topics

Correcting misperceptions (everyone)

Misinformation and the Currency of Democratic Citizenship
When Corrections Fail: The Persistence of Political Misperceptions

Psychological reasons that corrections fail

The intricacies of setting people straight
Examination of Psychological Processes Underlying Resistance to Persuasion

Rumors: Communications research

Rumors and the Internet in the 2008 U.S. Presidential election
Troubling Consequences of Online Political Rumoring
Belief in Rumors Hard to Dispel: Fact checking easily undermined by images, unrelated facts

Rumors: Psychology research

Rumor denials as persuasive messages: Effects of personal relevance, source, and message characteristics
Source characteristics in denying rumors of organizational closure: Honesty is the best policy
Rumor Has It: The Moderating Effect of Identification on Rumor Impact and the Effectiveness of Rumor Refutation

Memory and misinformation

Explicit warnings reduce but do not eliminate the continued influence of misinformation
Correcting false information in memory: Manipulating the strength of misinformation encoding and its retraction
Terrorists brought down the plane! No, actually it was a technical fault: Processing corrections of emotive information

Mortality salience

Deliver us from Evil: The Effects of Mortality Salience and Reminders of 9/11 on Support for President George W. Bush
Two Decades of Terror Management Theory: A Meta-Analysis of Mortality Salience Research

Self-affirmation and ego depletion

When Beliefs Yield to Evidence: Reducing Biased Evaluation by Affirming the Self

Bridging the Partisan Divide: Self-Affirmation Reduces Ideological Closed-Mindedness and Inflexibility in Negotiation

Opening the Political Mind? The effects of self-affirmation and graphical information on factual misperceptions

Acknowledging the Skeletons in Our Closet: The Effect of Group Affirmation on Collective Guilt, Collective Shame, and Reparatory Attitudes

Self-affirmation and self-control: affirming core values counteracts ego depletion

The role of cognitive resources in determining our moral intuitions: Are we all liberals at heart?

Information selection and processing

Hot Cognition or Cool Consideration? Testing the Effects of Motivated Reasoning on Political Decision Making

Motivated Skepticism in the Evaluation of Political Beliefs

Self-regulation and selective exposure: The impact of depleted self-regulation resources on confirmatory information processing

“Cultural cognition”

The Tragedy of the Risk-Perception Commons: Culture Conflict, Rationality Conflict, and Climate Change

Cultural Cognition of Scientific Consensus

Conspiracy theories

Lacking control increases illusory pattern perception

An Existential Function of Enemyship: Evidence That People Attribute Influence to Personal and Political Enemies to Compensate for Threats to Control

Conspiracy Theories are for Losers

Social category differences and smear acceptance

Smearing the opposition: Implicit and explicit stigmatization of the 2008 US Presidential candidates and the current US President

Is Obama the Anti-Christ? Racial priming, extreme criticisms of Barack Obama, and attitudes toward the 2008 US presidential candidates

The Effects of Semantics and Social Desirability in Correcting the Obama Muslim Myth

Negation and corrections

Incrimination Through Innuendo: Can Media Questions Become Public Answers?

“I am not guilty” vs “I am innocent”: Successful misperception negation may depend on the schema used for its encoding

The Effects of Semantics and Social Desirability in Correcting the Obama Muslim Myth

Ambivalence and attitude certainty

Attitudinal Ambivalence and Message-Based Persuasion: Motivated Processing of Proattitudinal Information and Avoidance of Counterattitudinal Information

A new look at the consequences of attitude certainty: The amplification hypothesis

“Matching,” affect, and persuasion

“Think” Versus “Feel” Framing Effects in Persuasion

Cognitive and affective matching effects in persuasion: An amplification perspective

Majority/minority dynamics and social context effects in persuasion

The effects of minority/majority source status on attitude certainty: A matching perspective

Beyond attitude consensus: The social context of persuasion and resistance

The impact of the social context on resistance to persuasion: Effortful versus effortless responses to counter-attitudinal information

Source effects and persuasion

Shot by the Messenger: Partisan Cues and Public Opinion Regarding National Security and War

Who Said What? The Effects of Source Cues in Issue Frames

Source Credibility and Attitude Certainty: A Metacognitive Analysis of Resistance to Persuasion

Distortions in social dissemination of information

Communicating Stereotype-Relevant Information: Is Factual Information Subject to the Same Communication Biases as Fictional Information?

Maintaining cultural stereotypes in the serial reproduction of narratives

Implicit measures of racial affect

Racial Prejudice Predicts Opposition to Obama and his Health Care Reform Plan

Implicit and Explicit Prejudice in the 2008 American Presidential Election

Emotional responses to political information

Civic Engagements: Resolute Partisanship or Reflective Deliberation

The Affective Tipping Point: Do Motivated Reasoners Ever “Get It”?

How I Vote Depends on How I Feel: The Differential Impact of Anger and Fear on Political Information Processing

Mad enough to see the other side: Anger and the search for disconfirming information

Resistance to scientific evidence

The Scientific Impotence Excuse: Discounting Belief-Threatening Scientific Abstracts

Wishful Thinking : Belief, Desire, and the Motivated Evaluation of Scientific Evidence