

Spring 2021 | Thursdays, 4:00-6:30 pm | Classroom: <https://unm.zoom.us/j/97010733277>

POLS 512: Causal Inference in Comparative Politics

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Office Hours: Mondays 9:00-10:30am (and other times by appointment)

Course Description

This course surveys current research in political economy, broadly defined. Topics will include political accountability, distributive politics, ethnic conflict, discrimination, government corruption, electoral manipulation, and public good provision, among others. The main goal of the course is to prepare students to design and implement research projects that rigorously identify causal relationships. Course material will expose students to some of the most common solutions to problems of causal inference in social science. Techniques to be covered include instrumental variables, regression discontinuity, difference in differences, natural experiments, and field experiments. Students will be expected to (1) read and critique recent comparative politics research that use these techniques, with an emphasis on applications to substantive questions rather than methodological details, and (2) produce multiple research proposals that use these techniques and present them in class.

Learning Outcomes

Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) from the departments of Political Science can be seen [here](#). This course is designed with three goals in mind:

- Providing an overview of contemporary topics and debates in the study of (empirical) political economy, broadly defined.
- Introducing students to widely used techniques to identify causal effects in the social sciences. These include tools and methods necessary to evaluate the impact of public policies and programs.
- Developing skills necessary to conduct independent research. These include the ability to identify potential research ideas, formulate research questions, and write research papers.
- Fostering the ability to evaluate and critique existing research and, most importantly, to provide *valuable feedback* to ongoing projects – that is, feedback that is respectful and offers constructive criticism, including ideas on how a research project can be improved.

Course Requirements

Readings

In this course, we will mostly read journal articles and working papers. Students are **not required to purchase** any books for this class. That said, the following books provide excellent treatments(!) of the topics covered in the course:

- Angrist, J. D. and Pischke, J.-S. (2008). *Mostly Harmless Econometrics: An Empiricist's Companion*. Princeton University Press.
- Angrist, J. D. and Pischke, J.-S. (2014). *Mastering 'Metrics: The Path from Cause to Effect*. Princeton University Press.
- Dunning, T. (2012). *Natural Experiments in the Social Sciences: A Design-Based Approach*. Cambridge University Press.
- Morton, R. B. and Williams, K. C. (2010). *Experimental Political Science and the Study of Causality: From Nature to the Lab*. Cambridge University Press.

Grading

- Reading, participation, and class performance (20% of final grade). This class is a discussion seminar, not a lecture course. It is essential that students be prepared to discuss **all of the mandatory readings** each and every class. Many of the works we will read are a blend of theory, methods, and substantive empirical analysis. Class participants should thus be prepared to describe and compare the week's required readings from two points of view:
 - What are the main **substantive arguments** being made? What phenomena are the targets of explanation? Are they clearly identified and defined? What variables are proposed to explain them? What causal mechanisms are proposed as linkages?
 - What **methodological approach** is taken to enhance the credibility of those arguments and how well does it succeed? What kinds of empirical implications of the theory are examined?
- Short research proposals (60% of final grade). During the semester, students must submit and present six research proposals of between 600 and 900 words using the identification strategy discussed in the previous week of class (each worth 10% of the final grade). Proposals should include: (1) the question to be studied, (2) a short discussion of the findings of existing literature, (3) a working hypothesis, and (4) a discussion of the data needed to answer this question and of how the project satisfies any assumptions inherent in the identification strategy. **Proposal must be submitted on Learn by 7:00 pm the evening before class** (as indicated in the schedule below). Students will give short presentations of their projects in class.
- Final research proposal (20% of final grade). At the end of the semester, students will submit a research proposal that develops one of their short proposals (suggested length is 3,000-4,000 words). This proposal should include a more elaborate literature review, and a detailed discussion of hypotheses, data availability, and identification issues. For projects with publicly available data, successful projects could include a rough preliminary analysis.

Course Expectations and Policies

1. Late work. Course work must be completed on time. Papers will lose one letter grade for every day of lateness. No "Incomplete" grades will be given except for cases of severe emergency. The emergency must be documented and reported to me immediately. (Professor's discretion applies).
2. Reading. Students must complete the readings prior to coming to class. I encourage bringing in not only thoughts on the readings but also questions based on parts of the readings that seemed unclear, difficult to grasp, or that you found interesting.

3. Participation. There is such a thing as bad participation. Students are encouraged to learn how to both be good listeners and good speakers—a balance between both promotes good participation. While engaged discussion is encouraged any language that is disrespectful will result in dismissal. *If anyone feels they are unsafe or disrespected in the classroom they should report to me immediately.*
4. Academic honor and respectful behavior. All activities associated with this course must comply with University policies regarding academic integrity, honesty, and discrimination. The University's full statement on academic honesty and the consequences for failure to comply is available in the [Pathfinder](#). Violations of these policies will be handled with the utmost seriousness.
5. Name. Class rosters are provided to the instructor with the student's legal name. If you have a preferred name or gender that is different as to what will be listed in the roster, please email me so that your preferences can be respected. Please advise me of this preference early in the semester so that I may make appropriate changes to my records.
6. Disabilities. Accessibility Services (Mesa Vista Hall 2021, 277-3506) provides academic support to students who have disabilities. If you think you need alternative accessible formats for undertaking and completing coursework, you should contact this service right away to assure your needs are met in a timely manner.
7. Subject to Change Statement. Information contained in this syllabus, other than the grade policy, may be subject to change with advance notice, as deemed appropriate by the instructor.

Course Schedule

Note: Mandatory readings (marked with a ★) must be completed before class. All other readings are optional and were included to illustrate the use of these techniques to study different substantive topics.

Week 1 (January 23). Introduction

- ★ Angrist, J. D. and Pischke, J.-S. (2008). *Mostly Harmless Econometrics: An Empiricist's Companion*. Princeton University Press. [Chapters 1 and 2](#).
- ★ Dunning, T. (2012). *Natural Experiments in the Social Sciences: A Design-Based Approach*. Cambridge University Press. [Chapter 1](#).
- ★ Huber, John. 2013. [“Is Theory Getting Lost in the ‘Identification Revolution’?”](#) The Money Cage.

Week 2 (January 28). Field Experiments

- ★ Butler, D. M. and Broockman, D. E. (2011). Do politicians racially discriminate against constituents? A field experiment on state legislators. *American Journal of Political Science*, 55(3):463–477.
- ★ Harris, J. A., Kamindo, C., and Van der Windt, P. (2020). Electoral administration in fledgling democracies: Experimental evidence from Kenya. *Journal of Politics*.
- ★ Ichino, N. and Schündeln, M. (2012). Deterring or displacing electoral irregularities? Spillover effects of observers in a randomized field experiment in Ghana. *Journal of Politics*, 74(1):292–307.
- ★ Olken, B. A. (2010). Direct democracy and local public goods: Evidence from a field experiment in Indonesia. *American Political Science Review*, 104(2):243–267.
- Bertrand, M., Djankov, S., Hanna, R., and Mullainathan, S. (2007). Obtaining a driver's license in India: An experimental approach to studying corruption. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 122(4):1639–1676.

- Gaikwad, N. and Nellis, G. (2020). Do politicians discriminate against internal migrants? Evidence from nationwide field experiments in India. *American Journal of Political Science*.
- Wantchekon, L. (2003). Clientelism and voting behavior: Evidence from a field experiment in Benin. *World Politics*, 55(3):399–422.
- White, A. R., Nathan, N. L., and Faller, J. K. (2015). What do I need to vote? Bureaucratic discretion and discrimination by local election officials. *American Political Science Review*, 109(1):129–142.

Week 3 (February 4). Field Experiments

- ★ Presentations – students in groups A and B.

First research proposal due Wednesday, February 3 by 7 pm (at the latest).

Week 4 (February 11). Lab and Survey Experiments

- ★ Bassi, A., Morton, R. B., and Williams, K. C. (2011). The effects of identities, incentives, and information on voting. *Journal of Politics*, 73(2):558–571.
- ★ Habyarimana, J. P., Humphreys, M., Posner, D. N., and Weinstein, J. (2007). Why does ethnic diversity undermine public goods provision? *American Political Science Review*, 101(4):709–725.
- ★ Lyall, J., Imai, K., and Blair, G. (2013). Explaining support for combatants during wartime: A survey experiment in Afghanistan. *American Political Science Review*, 107(4):679–705.
- ★ Hainmueller, J. and Hiscox, M. J. (2010). Attitudes toward highly skilled and low-skilled immigration: Evidence from a survey experiment. *American Political Science Review*, 104(1):61–84.
- ★ González-Ocantos, E., Kiewiet de Jonge, C., Meléndez, C., Osorio, J., and Nickerson, D. W. (2012). Vote buying and social desirability bias: Experimental evidence from Nicaragua. *American Journal of Political Science*, 56(1):202–217.
- Corbacho, A., Gingerich, D. W., Oliveros, V., and Ruiz-Vega, M. (2016). Corruption as a self-fulfilling prophecy: Evidence from a survey experiment in Costa Rica. *American Journal of Political Science*, 60(4):1077–1092.
- Dunning, T. and Harrison, L. (2010). Cross-cutting cleavages and ethnic voting: An experimental study of cousinage in Mali. *American Political Science Review*, 104(1):21–39.
- Isaksson, S. (2018). It takes two: Gender differences in in group work. Working paper.
- Lupu, N. (2013). Party brands and partisanship: Theory with evidence from a survey experiment in Argentina. *American Journal of Political Science*, 57(1):49–64.

Week 5 (February 18). Lab and Survey Experiments

- ★ Presentations – students in groups A and C.

Second research proposal due Wednesday, February 17 by 7 pm (at the latest).

Week 6 (February 25). Natural Experiments

- ★ Chattopadhyay, R. and Duflo, E. (2004). Women as policy makers: Evidence from a randomized policy experiment in India. *Econometrica*, 72(5):1409–1443.
- ★ Eymeoud, J.-B. and Vertier, P. (2018). Gender biases: Evidence from a natural experiment in French local elections. Working paper.

- ★ Ferraz, C. and Finan, F. (2008). Exposing corrupt politicians: The effects of Brazil's publicly released audits on electoral outcomes. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 123(2):703–745.
- ★ Sekhon, J. S. and Titiunik, R. (2012). When natural experiments are neither natural nor experiments. *American Political Science Review*, 106(1):35–57.
- ★ Washington, E. L. (2008). Female socialization: How daughters affect their legislator fathers' voting on women's issues. *American Economic Review*, 98(1):311–332.
- Bobonis, G. J., Cámara Fuertes, L. R., and Schwabe, R. (2016). Monitoring corruptible politicians. *American Economic Review*, 106(8):2371–2405.
- DellaVigna, S. and Kaplan, E. (2007). The Fox News effect: Media bias and voting. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 122(3):1187–1234.
- Galiani, S., Rossi, M. A., and Schargrodsky, E. (2011). Conscriptio and crime: Evidence from the Argentine draft lottery. *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics*, 3(2):119–36.
- Ho, D. E. and Imai, K. (2008). Estimating causal effects of ballot order from a randomized natural experiment: The California alphabet lottery, 1978-2002. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 72(2):216–240.
- Hyde, S. D. (2007). The observer effect in international politics: Evidence from a natural experiment. *World Politics*, 60(1):37–63.
- Jones, B. F. and Olken, B. A. (2005). Do leaders matter? National leadership and growth since World War II. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 120(3):835–864.

Week 7 (March 4). Natural Experiments

- ★ Presentations – students in groups B and C.

Third research proposal due Wednesday, March 3 by 7 pm (at the latest).

Week 8 (March 11). Instrumental Variables

- ★ Dasgupta, A. (2018). Technological change and political turnover: The democratizing effects of the Green Revolution in India. *American Political Science Review*, 112(4):918–938.
- ★ Hangartner, D., Dinas, E., Marbach, M., Matakos, K., and Xefteris, D. (2019). Does exposure to the refugee crisis make natives more hostile? *American Political Science Review*, 113(2):442–455.
- ★ Martin, G. J. and Yurukoglu, A. (2017). Bias in cable news: Persuasion and polarization. *American Economic Review*, 107(9):2565–2599.
- ★ White, A. (2019). Misdemeanor disenfranchisement? The demobilizing effects of brief jail spells on potential voters. *American Political Science Review*, 113(2):311–324.
- Alesina, A., Giuliano, P., and Nunn, N. (2013). On the origins of gender roles: Women and the plough. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 128(2):469–530.
- Bhavnani, R. R. and Lacina, B. (2015). The effects of weather-induced migration on sons of the soil violence in India. *World Politics*, 67(4):760–794.
- Carnegie, A. and Marinov, N. (2017). Foreign aid, human rights, and democracy promotion: Evidence from a natural experiment. *American Journal of Political Science*, 61(3):671–683.
- Cirone, A. and Van Coppenolle, B. (2018). Cabinets, committees, and careers: The causal effect of committee service. *Journal of Politics*, 80(3):948–963.
- Marshall, J. (2019). The anti-Democrat diploma: How high school education decreases support for the Democratic Party. *American Journal of Political Science*, 63(1):67–83.

Week 9 (March 18). Spring break

Week 10 (March 25). Instrumental Variables

- ★ Presentations – students in groups A and B.

Fourth research proposal due Wednesday, March 24 by 7 pm (at the latest).

Week 11 (April 1). Regression Discontinuity (Part 1)

- ★ Lee, D. S. (2008). Randomized experiments from non-random selection in U.S. House elections. *Journal of Econometrics*, 142(2):675–697. (*Background reading.*)
- ★ Bhalotra, S., Clots-Figueras, I., and Iyer, L. (2018). Pathbreakers? Women’s electoral success and future political participation. *The Economic Journal*, 128(613):1844–1878.
- ★ Malik, R. (Forthcoming). (A)political constituency development funds: Evidence from Pakistan. *British Journal of Political Science*.
- ★ Harris, A. J. (Forthcoming). Election administration, resource allocation, and turnout: Evidence from Kenya. *Comparative Political Studies*.
- ★ van der Klaauw, W. (2002). Estimating the effect of financial aid offers on college enrollment: A regression-discontinuity approach. *International Economic Review*, 43(4):1249–1287.
- Hall, A. B. (2015). What happens when extremists win primaries? *American Political Science Review*, 109(1):18–42.
- Larreguy, H., Marshall, J., and Querubín, P. (2016). Parties, brokers and voter mobilization: How turnout buying depends upon the party’s capacity to monitor brokers. *American Political Science Review*, 110:160–79.
- Nellis, G. and Siddiqui, N. (2018). Secular party rule and religious violence in Pakistan. *American Political Science Review*, 112(1):49–67.
- Owen, A. L. (2010). Grades, gender, and encouragement: A regression discontinuity analysis. *The Journal of Economic Education*, 41(3):217–234.

Week 12 (April 8). Regression Discontinuity (Part 2)

- ★ Hidalgo, F. D. and Nichter, S. (2016). Voter buying: Shaping the electorate through clientelism. *American Journal of Political Science*, 60(2):436–455.
- ★ Rueda, M. R. (2017). Small aggregates, big manipulation: Vote buying enforcement and collective monitoring. *American Journal of Political Science*, 61(1):163–177.
- ★ Dell, M. (2010). The persistent effects of Peru’s mining “mita”. *Econometrica*, 78(6):1863–190.
- ★ Cantoni, E. (2020). A precinct too far: Turnout and voting costs. *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics*, 12(1):61–85.
- Angrist, J. D. and Pischke, J. (2009). Using Maimonides’ rule to estimate the effect of class size on scholastic achievement. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 114(2):533–575.
- Casco, J. (2020). Conditional cash transfers, household time allocation and bargaining power: The human development bonus in Ecuador. Working paper.
- de Kadt, D. (2017). Voting then, voting now: The long-term consequences of participation in South Africa’s first democratic election. *Journal of Politics*, 79(2):670–687.
- Gulzar, S. and Pasquale, B. J. (2017). Politicians, bureaucrats, and development: Evidence from India. *American Political Science Review*, 111(1):162–183.

- Saavedra, M. H. (2018). Kenji or Kenneth? Pearl Harbor and Japanese-American assimilation. Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3218512>.

Week 13 (April 15). Regression Discontinuity

- ★ Presentations – students in groups A and C.

Fifth research proposal due Wednesday, April 14 by 7 pm (at the latest).

Week 14 (April 22). Difference in Difference

- ★ Morton, R. B., Muller, D., Page, L., and Torgler, B. (2015). Exit polls, turnout, and bandwagon voting: Evidence from a natural experiment. *European Economic Review*, 77:65–81.
- ★ Ba, B. (2020). Going the extra mile: the cost of complaint filing, accountability, and law enforcement outcomes in Chicago. Working paper.
- ★ Kogan, V. (Forthcoming). Do welfare benefits pay electoral dividends? Evidence from the national food stamp program rollout. *Journal of Politics*.
- ★ Lyall, J. (2009). Does indiscriminate violence incite insurgent attacks? Evidence from Chechnya. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 53(3):331–362.
- Desai, Z. and Lee, A. (Forthcoming). Technology, choice, and fragmentation: The political effects of electronic voting in India. *Political Science Research and Method*.
- Franck, R. and Riner, I. (2012). Does the leader's ethnicity matter? Ethnic favoritism, education, and health in Sub-Saharan Africa. *American Political Science Review*, 106(2):294–325.
- Gallego, J. (2018). Natural disasters and clientelism: The case of floods and landslides in Colombia. *Electoral Studies*, 55:73–88.
- Laughlin, B. (2019). Border fences and the Mexican Drug War. Working paper.
- Solé-Ollé, A. and Sorribas-Navarro, P. (2008). The effects of partisan alignment on the allocation of intergovernmental transfers. differences-in-differences estimates for Spain. *Journal of Public Economics*, 92(12):2302–2319.

Week 15 (April 29). Difference in Difference

- ★ Presentations – students in groups B and C.

Sixth research proposal due Wednesday, April 28 by 7 pm (at the latest).

Week 16 (May 6). Review session

- ★ Readings to be decided depending on students' interests.

Final research proposal due Thursday, May 13 by midnight (at the latest).