

# Political Science 5016: Field Experiments in Comparative Politics

Fall 2022

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Tuesdays 4-6pm

Cupples II / L011

**Overview:** This seminar course focuses on field experiments as a tool to shed light on important questions in comparative politics. Importantly, this course is not a pure methods course that assigns problems sets etc. – even though it has elements of that – but predominantly a seminar course in which we read, discuss and replicate existing experimental research. This course is best suited for advanced students who already have a basic understanding of statistics and basic skills in using statistical software packages like R.

## Learning objectives:

- How do you design and implement a field experiment to answer research questions in comparative politics?
- How does your experimental design guide your analysis strategy?
- How can experiments be used to test social scientific theories?
- How do you take an experimental design to the field?
- What are threats to inference in an experiment and how can they be addressed?

## How we will achieve those objectives:

We will begin the semester with four lecture-based sessions that introduce the basics of experimental methodology. The focus is on the fundamentals of causal inference as it relates to experimentation as well as statistical properties that can guide your experimental design and analysis strategy. Students will be asked to complete one coding exercise that is designed to put some of the theoretical results and analysis procedures into practice. Sessions during the rest of the term will consist of discussions of cutting-edge experimental work with a focus on the comparative politics of developing countries. Every week, students will critically engage with the research design and findings of a small number of experimental papers on a substantive topic. The number of readings is intentionally kept small such that we will have time to engage in-depth with the respective experimental studies. Topics for sessions at the end of the term will be chosen based on students' research interests.

**Resources:** The methods part of this course will heavily draw on the following textbook:

Alan S Gerber and Donald P Green. *Field Experiments: Design, Analysis and Interpretation*. London: W W. Norton & Company, 2012

Chapters relevant to each methods focused session are listed as *recommended* in the schedule, because they are not required to follow the lectures. However, I strongly encourage students to acquire the textbook and read the relevant chapters either before or after class. The book covers many more practical examples and insights than we can cover in class. Moreover, it is likely that students will find chapters of the book that we do not cover in class helpful as they work on their assignments.

*Required readings* for substantive weeks are listed in the schedule below and will be made available on the course's Canvas page. The syllabus also lists *further readings* which provide additional background and are meant for students who would like to delve deeper into a particular methodological or substantive topic. Such readings are provided on Canvas only if they are not publicly available or difficult to find. Lecture slides will be made available on Canvas immediately after each lecture.

Additional online resources that cover a range of experiment related topics and may be helpful as students work on their assignments are the [Evidence in Governance and Politics \(EGAP\) Methods Guides](#) and the [EGAP Learning Days Book](#).

### **Requirements:**

Students will be evaluated based on the following:

*In class participation (10%):* Students are expected to closely read the required readings and actively participate in class discussions.

*Coding exercise (10%):* During the third week of the semester, students will be asked to put some of the methods covered in class into practice in a coding exercise. Students should upload their code, associated output and answers to Canvas before class on September 20. Students are welcome to work in groups, but each student should submit her own code and write-up that should indicate with whom the student collaborated. Students are strongly encourage to use the software package R to complete this exercise and to submit their answers in R Markdown format.

*Response papers (30%):* Each student will write two short response papers (2-3 pages) on one or several of the required readings for two substantive sessions. Students will be assigned to weeks at the beginning of the term. Response papers should be submitted online on Canvas by noon on the day of class. Response papers should critically assess the articles in terms of the relevance of their research question, theory, ability of the experimental design to shed light on the paper's theoretical claims, or analysis strategy. Good response papers will be constructive, i.e., they will not only point out weaknesses, but provide ideas for improvement or shed light on overlooked contributions. I encourage students to use these two posts on [how to read](#) and [critique](#) papers as a guide to writing response papers – and more broadly to giving feedback in their role as seminar

participants, discussants and reviewers.

*Replication (50%):* Each student will conduct a replication of one field experimental paper. Students are welcome to choose an experiment from the syllabus or another experimental study upon approval. Students are expected to i) write their own code to replicate the main results of the paper (zeroing in on key findings instead of replicating all results is encouraged), ii) extend the analysis in the paper in at least one new direction, and iii) write a short paper that introduces the study, its goals, arguments and experimental design, and presents the findings of the replication exercise. Ways to take the analysis into a new direction include

- additional robustness checks (e.g., do the results change when  $p$ -values are calculated using randomization inference? Are the results sensitive to the inclusion of covariates?),
- tests of additional theoretical implications (e.g., does the theory predict that there should be treatment effect heterogeneity?)
- considering additional estimands (e.g., can we use post-stratification to estimate a population average treatment effect?)

The goal is to be creative and learn more from available data – not to “debunk” published findings. Replication data should be available for most papers published in leading journals since 2010. Typically, these data can be downloaded from the journal’s webpage, from a link provided in the paper or from authors’ webpage. To the degree that studies have been pre-registered, students should also consult pre-analysis plans. Links to pre-analysis plans can usually be found in the paper, on author’s webpages, or through the [EGAP](#) or [AEA](#) registries. Usage of R is encouraged.

Students are expected to meet with me several times to discuss this assignment throughout the term:

- During the month of September to discuss their choice of paper. Make sure you have access to the data by this time.
- During the month of October to discuss progress with replicating the main results.
- During the month of November to discuss how the student aims to extend the paper’s analysis.

The write-up, data and replication code should be submitted via email before the last class on December 6.

### **Schedule and Readings:**

Note that this schedule is tentative. Topics may be adjusted and readings added or removed based on how we progress in class.

**August 30:** Introduction – Causal Inference & Experimentation

*Recommended readings:*

- Gerber and Green, Ch. 1 & 2

*Further readings:*

- Anna M. Wilke and Macartan Humphreys. “Field Experiments, Theory, and External Validity”. In: *SAGE Handbook of Research Methods in Political Science and International Relations*. Ed. by Luigi Curini and Robert Franzese. London: SAGE, 2020, pp. 1007–35

**September 6:** Sampling Distributions, Statistical Inference & Hypothesis Testing

*Recommended readings:*

- Gerber and Green, Ch. 3 & 4.5

*Further readings:*

- Cyrus Samii and Peter M Aronow. “On equivalencies between design-based and regression-based variance estimators for randomized experiments”. In: *Statistics & Probability Letters* 82.2 (2012), pp. 365–370
- Winston Lin, Donald P. Green and Alexander Coppock. 2016. “Standard operating procedures for Don Green’s lab at Columbia.” [https://alexandercoppock.com/Green-Lab-SOP/Green\\_Lab\\_SOP.pdf](https://alexandercoppock.com/Green-Lab-SOP/Green_Lab_SOP.pdf)

**September 13:** No Class

**September 20:** Using Covariates in Experimental Design and Analysis

Coding exercise due before class

*Recommended readings:*

- Gerber and Green, Ch. 4

*Further readings:*

- Winston Lin. “Agnostic notes on regression adjustments to experimental data: Reexamining Freedman’s critique”. In: *The Annals of Applied Statistics* 7.1 (2013), pp. 295–318

**September 27:** One-Sided Non-Compliance

*Recommended readings:*

- Gerber and Green, Ch. 5

*Further readings:*

- Alan S Gerber et al. “Baseline, placebo, and treatment: Efficient estimation for three-group experiments”. In: *Political Analysis* 18.3 (2010), pp. 297–315

**October 4:** One-Sided Non-Compliance

*Recommended readings:*

- Gerber and Green, Ch. 5

*Further readings:*

- Alan S Gerber et al. “Baseline, placebo, and treatment: Efficient estimation for three-group experiments”. In: *Political Analysis* 18.3 (2010), pp. 297–315

### **October 11: Fall Break**

### **October 18: Inter-group Contact**

*Required readings:*

- Salma Mousa. “Building social cohesion between Christians and Muslims through soccer in post-ISIS Iraq”. In: *Science* 369.6505 (2020), pp. 866–870
  - *Optional:* Listen to a great [podcast](#) on this study
- Matt Lowe. “Types of Contact: A Field Experiment on Collaborative and Adversarial Caste Integration”. In: *American Economic Review* 111.6 (2021), pp. 1807–44
- Alexandra Scacco and Shana S Warren. “Can Social Contact Reduce Prejudice and Discrimination? Evidence from a Field Experiment in Nigeria”. In: *American Political Science Review* 112.3 (2018), pp. 654–677

*Further readings:*

- Elizabeth Levy Paluck et al. “Prejudice reduction: Progress and challenges”. In: *Annual Review of Psychology* 72 (2021), pp. 533–560
- Luke N Condra and Sera Linardi. “Casual Contact and Ethnic Bias: Experimental Evidence from Afghanistan”. In: *The Journal of Politics* 81.3 (2019), pp. 1028–1042
- Han Il Chang and Leonid Peisakhin. “Building Cooperation among Groups in Conflict: An Experiment on Intersectarian Cooperation in Lebanon”. In: *American Journal of Political Science* 63.1 (2019), pp. 146–162

### **October 25: Violence Against Women**

*Required readings:*

- Donald P Green, Anna M Wilke, and Jasper Cooper. “Countering Violence Against Women by Encouraging Disclosure: A Mass Media Experiment in Rural Uganda”. In: *Comparative Political Studies* 53.14 (2020), pp. 2283–2320
- Jasper Cooper, Donald P Green, and Anna M Wilke. “Reducing Violence Against Women in Uganda through Video Dramas: A Survey Experiment to Illuminate Causal Mechanisms”. In: *AEA Papers and Proceedings*. Vol. 110. 2020, pp. 615–19
- Eric Arias. “How Does Media Influence Social Norms? Experimental Evidence on the Role of Common Knowledge”. In: *Political Science Research and Methods* 7.3 (2019), pp. 561–578

*Further readings:*

- Avidit Acharya, Matthew Blackwell, and Maya Sen. “Analyzing Causal Mechanisms in Survey Experiments”. In: *Political Analysis* 26.4 (2018), pp. 357–378
- Fotini Christia, Horacio Larreguy, Norhan Muhab, and Elizabeth and Parker-Magyar. “Can Media Campaigns Empower Women Facing Gender-Based Violence amid COVID-19?” *Unpublished Manuscript* (2022), [https://publications.ut-capitole.fr/id/eprint/44237/1/wp\\_tse\\_1294.pdf](https://publications.ut-capitole.fr/id/eprint/44237/1/wp_tse_1294.pdf)

### **November 1:** Networks and Collective Action

#### *Required readings:*

- Paul Atwell and Noah L Nathan. “Channels for Influence or Maps of Behavior? A Field Experiment on Social Networks and Cooperation”. In: *American Journal of Political Science* 66.3 (2022), pp. 696–713
- James D Fearon, Macartan Humphreys, and Jeremy M Weinstein. “How Does Development Assistance Affect Collective Action Capacity? Results from a Field Experiment in Post-Conflict Liberia”. In: *American Political Science Review* 109.3 (2015), pp. 450–469
- Alexandra Avdeenko and Michael J Gilligan. “International Interventions to Build Social Capital: Evidence from a Field Experiment in Sudan”. In: *American Political Science Review* 109.3 (2015), pp. 427–449

### **November 8:** Autocracy and Protests

#### *Required readings:*

- Lauren E Young. “The Psychology of State Repression: Fear and Dissent Decisions in Zimbabwe”. In: *American Political Science Review* 113.1 (2019), pp. 140–155
- Davide Cantoni et al. “Protests as Strategic Games: Experimental Evidence from Hong Kong’s Antiauthoritarian Movement”. In: *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 134.2 (2019), pp. 1021–1077

#### *Further readings:*

- Jaimie Bleck and Kristin Michelitch. “Capturing the Airwaves, Capturing the Nation? A Field Experiment on State-Run Media Effects in the Wake of a Coup”. In: *The Journal of Politics* 79.3 (2017), pp. 873–889
- Edmund Malesky, Paul Schuler, and Anh Tran. “The Adverse Effects of Sunshine: A Field Experiment on Legislative Transparency in an Authoritarian Assembly”. In: *American Political Science Review* 106.4 (2012), pp. 762–786
- Jidong Chen, Jennifer Pan, and Yiqing Xu. “Sources of Authoritarian Responsiveness: A Field Experiment in China”. In: *American Journal of Political Science* 60.2 (2016), pp. 383–400
- Sarah E Anderson et al. “Non-Governmental Monitoring of Local Governments Increases Compliance with Central Mandates: A National-Scale Field Experiment in China”. In: *American Journal of Political Science* 63.3 (2019), pp. 626–643

## November 15: Electoral Accountability

### *Required readings:*

- Thad Dunning et al. “Voter information campaigns and political accountability: Cumulative findings from a preregistered meta-analysis of coordinated trials”. In: *Science Advances* 5.7 (2019), eaaw2612
- Eric Arias et al. “Information Provision, Voter Coordination, and Electoral Accountability: Evidence from Mexican Social Networks”. In: *American Political Science Review* 113.2 (2019), pp. 475–498
- Jessica Gottlieb. “Greater Expectations: A Field Experiment to Improve Accountability in Mali”. In: *American Journal of Political Science* 60.1 (2016), pp. 143–157

### *Further readings:*

- Alberto Chong et al. “Does Corruption Information Inspire the Fight or Quash the Hope? A Field Experiment in Mexico on Voter Turnout, Choice, and Party Identification”. In: *The Journal of Politics* 77.1 (2015), pp. 55–71
- Taylor C Boas, F Daniel Hidalgo, and Marcus André Melo. “Norms versus Action: Why Voters Fail to Sanction Malfeasance in Brazil”. In: *American Journal of Political Science* 63.2 (2019), pp. 385–400
- Abhit Bhandari, Horacio Larreguy, and John Marshall. “Able and Mostly Willing: An Empirical Anatomy of Information’s Effect on Voter-Driven Accountability in Senegal”. In: *American Journal of Political Science* (2021)
- Cesi Cruz, Philip Keefer, and Julien Labonne. “Buying informed voters: New effects of information on voters and candidates”. In: *The Economic Journal* 131.635 (2021), pp. 1105–1134
- Guy Grossman and Kristin Michelitch. “Information Dissemination, Competitive Pressure, and Politician Performance between Elections: A Field Experiment in Uganda”. In: *American Political Science Review* 112.2 (2018), pp. 280–301
- Ryan S Jablonski et al. “Individualized Text Messages about Public Services Fail to Sway Voters: Evidence from a Field Experiment on Ugandan Elections”. In: *Journal of Experimental Political Science* (2021), pp. 1–13

## November 22: Bureaucracy

### *Required readings:*

- Pia J Raffler. “Does Political Oversight of the Bureaucracy Increase Accountability? Field Experimental Evidence from a Dominant Party Regime”. In: *American Political Science Review* (2020), pp. 1–17
- Tara Slough. “Squeaky Wheels and Inequality in Bureaucratic Service Provision.” *Unpublished Manuscript* (2021), [http://taraslough.com/assets/pdf/colombia\\_audit.pdf](http://taraslough.com/assets/pdf/colombia_audit.pdf)

*Further readings:*

- Pablo Balán et al. “Local Elites as State Capacity: How City Chiefs Use Local Information to Increase Tax Compliance in the Democratic Republic of the Congo”. In: *American Economic Review* 112.3 (2022), pp. 762–97

**November 29:** Economic Exchange

*Required readings:*

- Abhit Bhandari. “Political Determinants of Economic Exchange: Evidence from a Business Experiment in Senegal”. In: *American Journal of Political Science* (2021)
- Raul Sánchez de la Sierra. “Whither Formal Contracts?” In: *Econometrica* 89.5 (2021), pp. 2341–2373

*Further readings:*

- Yotam Margalit and Moses Shayo. “How Markets Shape Values and Political Preferences: A Field Experiment”. In: *American Journal of Political Science* 65.2 (2021), pp. 473–492
- Edmund Malesky and Markus Taussig. “Participation, Government Legitimacy, and Regulatory Compliance in Emerging Economies: A Firm-Level Field Experiment in Vietnam”. In: *American Political Science Review* 113.2 (2019), pp. 530–551

**December 6:** Ethics of Experimentation & Survey Experimentation

*Required readings:*

- Baron/Young. Transparency in research ethics – Methods to monitor principles and practice in violent contexts.  
[EGAP Standards Discussion](#)
- Edward Asiedu et al. “A call for structured ethics appendices in social science papers”. In: *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 118.29 (2021), e2024570118
- Jason Lyall, Graeme Blair, and Kosuke Imai. “Explaining support for combatants during wartime: A survey experiment in Afghanistan”. In: *American political science review* 107.4 (2013), pp. 679–705
- Dino Hadzic and Margit Tavits. “The gendered effects of violence on political engagement”. In: *The Journal of Politics* 81.2 (2019), pp. 676–680

*Further readings:*

- Macartan Humphreys. “Reflections on the ethics of social experimentation”. In: *Journal of Globalization and Development* 6.1 (2015), pp. 87–112
- Jens Hainmueller and Michael J Hiscox. “Attitudes toward highly skilled and low-skilled immigration: Evidence from a survey experiment”. In: *American political science review* 104.1 (2010), pp. 61–84



- Miguel M Pereira. “Understanding and reducing biases in elite beliefs about the electorate”. In: *American Political Science Review* 115.4 (2021), pp. 1308–1324
- Jae-Hee Jung. “The mobilizing effect of parties’ moral rhetoric”. In: *American Journal of Political Science* 64.2 (2020), pp. 341–355
- Taylor N Carlson. “Through the grapevine: Informational consequences of interpersonal political communication”. In: *American Political Science Review* 113.2 (2019), pp. 325–339