Political Science 5016: Field Experiments in Comparative Politics

Fall 2022

Instructor: Anna Wilke Washington University
Email: wanna@wustl.edu Department of Political Science
Website: https://anna-wilke.com/ Tuesdays 4-6pm
Office: Seigle 239 Cupples II / L011
Office hours: Wednesdays 3-5pm and by appointment

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:


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:*

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

*Recommended readings:*

- Gerber and Green, Ch. 3 & 4.5

*Further readings:*


**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:*


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

*Recommended readings:*

- Gerber and Green, Ch. 5

*Further readings:*


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

*Recommended readings:*

- Gerber and Green, Ch. 5
Further readings:


October 11: Fall Break

October 18: Inter-group Contact

Required readings:

  - Optional: Listen to a great podcast on this study

Further readings:


October 25: Violence Against Women

Required readings:


Further readings:
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

November 8: Autocracy and Protests

**Required readings:**


**Further readings:**

- 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

Further readings:

- 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:

Further readings:


**November 29:** Economic Exchange

Required readings:


Further readings:


**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

Further readings:

- 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