Writing Assignment 1

This assignment requires you to do the following: (1) make an observation based on the state-legislators data, (2) develop a model that explains that observation, and (3) discuss several additional implications of your model.

Notes

- You must submit the initial submission (i.e., a polished draft, *not* a rough draft) through eCampus by noon on Thursday, July 20.

- I do not tolerate plagiarism. You can find the Honor System Rules <u>here</u>. You should note that even seemingly minor violations can become a permanent addition to your transcript.

- You should reference sources as needed. However, I strongly recommend that you sketch out your basic ideas <u>before</u> looking at others ideas. I want this paper to be <u>at least</u> 80% about your own ideas and <u>at most</u> 20% about others' ideas.

- The paper must contain at least 1,400 words. I welcome additional effort, but I encourage you to focus on fitting more content into 1,400 words rather than submitting a 2,000 word paper.

- You should make the paper look and sound professional, but I encourage you to be creative and playful with your prose. Remember, others' will read your writing. Make it enjoyable.

- You should write the paper to so that someone who has not had this class could read it. Perhaps imagine writing to your parents. Suppose this person is interested in politics—they'll be excited to read your ideas—but not knowledgeable about statistics (i.e., they don't know what an standard deviation is).

Structuring Your Paper

Use the following sections in your paper:

Section 1: Introduction
Give an overview of your paper and explain why others should care about your ideas. Emphasize your key point.

Section 2: Observation
Using the tools we discussed so far in the class (histograms, density plots, average, SD), make *one* simple observation about the ideology scores from the state-legislators data set. Fight the urge to be profound—keep the observation simple. A unexpected difference works best. Keep in mind that individual legislators ideology scores do not change over time in the state-legislators-data set (unlike the nominate data set), so over-time comparisons are less likely to be fruitful. Here are some possibilities:

- Compare the average ideology score for one party across time in the same state.

- Compare the standard deviation of Democrats to the standard deviation of Republicans in one state and one year.

- Compare the standard deviation of one party in one state in one year to the standard deviation of the same party in another state in the same year.

- Compare the overall in the density plots for Democrats and Republicans in two states and one year.

I recommend *against* focusing on Independents. While there are a few in the data set, there are not enough to produce strong patterns—usually only one or two per state-year.

Use one or two graphs (or maybe tables, but graphs are usually better) to make an interesting comparison. These data offer many possibilities. Be sure to include the graph in the paper.

To assist you. I have included several plots of the data at the end of this document. Look through these plots and identify one interesting pattern. Remove all the data irrelevant to the observation you want to focus on (e.g., get rid of the other parties, states, or years), and create a plot that highlights your observation.

Keep in mind that this is a simple observation intended to motivate the speculation/model in the next section.

Section 3: Speculation
Given your observation, speculate about why the observation occurs. Use your observation to spur and inspire thoughts about the processes that lead to the observation.

Make your model causal. For example, explain what factors cause the unexpected differences between two states.

Beware of caring too much about being right. I care mostly about you clearly explaining creative and imaginative ideas.

Refer to the notes on models and the chapters from Lave and March for additional guidance. This is the most important component of the paper.

Section 4: Implications
List and discuss several implications of your model. If you wanted to evaluate your model, what are some implications that you might test? What other data might you look at? What other facts would you need to know? Try to come up with at least three implications.

Section 5: Conclusion
Again, give your readers and overview of the paper and leave them with a takeaway—your key point.

Formatting

✓12 point, Times New Roman Font, for the main body text.

✓Double-space the main body of the text.

✓Use section and subsection headings, with larger or different font as you see fit.

✓1 inch margins.

✓Include your name, the title of your paper, and the word count on the first page of your paper.

✓Beyond the points above, I simply want your paper to look professional and give you room to match the format to your aesthetic preferences. See the "Under Review" papers on the research section of my website to see how I typically format my papers.

References

For matters of style, I refer you to the APSA style manual <u>here</u>. For an example of how to format the paper (title, name, sections, references, etc.) see a paper of mine <u>here</u> (you do not need to include an abstract in your paper).

You might find the following two papers find helpful as references:

Shor and McCarthy (2011) describe the data set we know as state-legislators, so you might find it useful in explain the data to your readers. The paper is technical, but you should still find it helpful.

- Shor, Boris and Nolan McCarthy. 2011. "The Ideological Mapping of American Legislatures." *American Political Science Review* 105(3): 530-551.

Layman, Carsey, and Horowitz (2006) offer an overview of the research on party polarization in American politics. You should find this paper a helpful reference, but also realize that it points you to many other potential references.

- Layman, Geoffrey C., Thomas M. Carsey, and Juliana Menasce Horowitz. 2006. "Party Polarization in American Politics: Characteristics, Causes, and Consequences."

You can find the code to create these plots here.