

Problem Set 1

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August 31, 2017

1 My Interests

My current academic interests lie in economic history, racial economics, economic growth, and the use of GEOspatial data. My current and future research will likely fall within these areas.

1.1 Economic History

I have been interested in economic history since my initial introduction to economics in studying economics: studying the past to shed light on questions like the determinants of growth is something I find very interesting.

My first real research project, my undergraduate thesis, explored the effects of historic institutions and culture in the Spanish regions of Catalonia and Aragon. The heterogeneity of culture and historic institutions across regions in Spain allows for comparisons that can isolate the effect of each. These two regions rank amongst the most affluent in Spain by income per capita. In the mid 13th, Catalonia and Aragon were part of the same kingdom, *La Corona de Aragón*. This historic kingdom was a limited monarchy where the king ruled over the people through a contract between the two parties. The populace also elected representatives to serve on the *Consell de Cent* which would later become the Generalitat, Catalonia's present day governing body [5].

Despite their shared institutional heritage, the regions do not share a similar culture. Even when Catalonia and Aragon were a single kingdom, they each kept their respective languages, Catalan and Aragonese. After the dissolution of *La Corona de Aragón* and both regions joined the Spanish state the Aragonese language began to fade. Catalan on the other hand still enjoys a prominent place in Catalonia to this day. Moreover, from around 2006 – 2015 Catalonia had numerous protests and disputes with the Spanish government over the question of its becoming an independent state. Like the aforementioned Basque region, Catalonia sees itself as an independent state rather than merely a Spanish region.

What is of greatest interest with this particular project is that it seems to suggest that culture and historic institutions can be independent. Under *La Corona de Aragón* Catalonia and Aragon had nearly identical institutions, but their current culture remains different. This is a complication to pathways described by Tabellini [7] where historic institutions affect current institutions through culture which tacitly suggests here that Aragon and Catalonia should have a similar culture. However, the prevalence (or lack thereof) of the local language in each region and Catalonia's independence referendums suggest apparent cultural differences.

1.2 Economics and Race

The intersection of economics and race is something that has been on my mind since I became interested in economic history. Originally, before settling on a comparison of Catalonia and Aragon, I had intended to do a cross country comparison of Andalusia and the American South during the 18th and 19th centuries. Both regions shared a largely agricultural economy and an impoverished, under educated workforce. However, unlike the slaves in the American South, the *jornaleros*, or migrant workers, in Andalusia were usually full Spanish citizens and highly mobile. It is also noteworthy that after end of slavery in the US and the rise of Spain's tourism industry, both regions remain two of the relatively poorest in their respective countries.

Although I ultimately elected not to undertake this project, I still remain interested in how racial issues affect the US economy. The release of police violence data and the Moore School's recent purchase of Gallup's poll data, gave rise to my second project. Although Roland Fryer [3] examined whether there is any significant difference between races in incidents of lethal and non-lethal police violence. My project would look at only instances of lethal police violence and examine such violence's effects on trust in various government institutions and the police themselves. I initially sought to approximate trust by 911 calls; however, given the unavailability of such data for the entire US, I elected to use Gallup's confidence in institutions poll. This offers data from 2016 all the way back to 1973 detailing an individual's confidence in various government institutions. While the surveys do not follow particular individuals, they should be representative of the entire US.

There is literature that suggest persistence of negative sentiments in shocking events that disproportionately affect blacks. In Alsan's study of the illegal Tuskegee syphilis experiment, black men of the same age as those in the experiment close to the hospital were less likely to use medical care [2]. One would expect the recent salience of police related fatalities to breed such distrust similar to the previously mentioned experiment,

There seem to be precious few economics papers on the subject of police violence. Aside from Fryer’s paper, other top papers on this subject are from fields like criminology or criminal justice. An examination of the sort I intend to do could explain some of the struggles of poorer minority communities. Literature suggest a link between trust in one’s governing institutions and economic growth and development [6] [6] [4]. It is possible some continuing poverty among minorities can be attributed to decreased trust in institutions which in turn leads to less investment in human or social capital.

1.3 Economic Growth

Examining economic growth has been one of my interest since I began to study economics. Being from South Carolina, I think I would be both interesting and helpful to understand the decisions that have hurt our state economically and seek a path to undo much of that harm. The two projects I am working on now are either tangentially related growth (Economics and Race) or directly so (Catalonia vs Aragon). In the future I would also like to do a project similar to what Acemogulu, Johnson, and Robinson did, but in the American South. In their work Acemogulu, Johnson, and Robison showed that extractive institutions set made settlements that were worse off in the long run [1]. While the American South did not have particularly extractive institutions under slavery, it is possible that regions where slavery was more intense led would lead to less favorable economic outcomes in the long-run. It is difficult to impossible to determine the intensity of slavery since such information is both qualitative and unrecorded, but one could proxy slavery’s intensity through certain labor intensive crops. For such a project a potential regression could take the following form:

$$Y_{it} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 State_i + \beta_{2t} Intense_{it} + \beta_{3t} Population_{it} + \beta_4 Slave_{it} + \epsilon_{it} \quad (1)$$

Where $State_i$ is a state dummy variable, $Intense_{it}$ is the prevalence of said intense crops in a given year in a given county, $Population_{it}$ is the citizen population, and $Slave_{it}$ is the slave population.

1.4 GEOSpatial Data

My interest in GEOSpatial data is ancillary my true interests in history, race, and growth. Many of the projects I have elected to do in recent memory have required the use of mapping software. Through the time I have spent using mapping software and working techniques like spatial regression discontinuity these things have grown on me. Additionally, when one looks at things like growth or crime, accounting for location is inevitable. Spatial data will likely follow me and perhaps even show up in my dissertation.

References

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