FLS 6441 - Methods III: Explanation and Causation

Week 4 - Survey and Lab Experiments

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Survey and Lab Experiments

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    2. Random treatment assignment not permitted in reality
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    4. Reduce variation in context and noise in data
    5. To generalize beyond specific situations to abstract behaviour

Section 1

Lab Experiments

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    - The advantage: Control over context helps isolate mechanisms
    - The disadvantage: Can we generalize to the real world?

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  - ▶ **Hawthorne effect**: Lab context influences behaviour, social desirability bias
  - ▶ **Context effects**: The real-world always provides more information, more history
  - ▶ **Process effects**: People care *how* decisions are made
  - ▶ **Selection effects**: Actors in specific roles are rarely representative samples, 'WEIRD' or pro-social lab subjects

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  - ▶ Subjets use cues (heuristics) to draw on 'similar' situations from the real world

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- ▶ Lab experiments may be generalizable where norms/morality is less important (???)

Lab-in-the-Field Experiments

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► Standardized, artificial treatment and measurement

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- ▶ But how? Theories:
  - ▶ Preferences - in-group fairness
  - ▶ Technology - social networks permit identification and sanctioning
  - ▶ Strategy Selection - choose to cooperate more often

Lab-in-the-Field Experiments

- ▶ Lab-in-the-field
- ▶ **Population**: Ugandans
- ▶ **Sample**: 300 people in a diverse area with few public goods
- ▶ **Treatment/Control**: Various Games
- ▶ **Treatment assignment**: Random assignment to co-ethnic/non-co-ethnic

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- **Conclusion:** Norms and Networks allow co-ethnics to provide more public goods
  - ...But where are the public goods here?
  - Are public goods organized by voluntary contributions or coercive central authority?
  - Is this true of all parts of Kampala? Uganda? All ethnic groups?

Section 2

Survey Experiments

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  - ▸ Not a lab experiment: People not brought to a single location or interacting

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- ► But a limited range of 'weak' treatments possible
- ► And we can only measure short-term effects

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  - ▸ **Anchoring Bias:** The first piece of information in a question affects our response, Eg. The average person does x, what do you do?

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4. **Conjoint Experiments** - to measure relative preferences

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- ▶ 1%
- ▶ 5%
- ▶ 10%
- ▶ 25%
- ▶ 50%

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    - ▶ But we can also randomize the sequence

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▶ The treatment/control prime is separated from the response question
  ▶ Usually the prime is a few questions before the response
  ▶ Everyone sees the same response question

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- ► Many people fear for the survival of democracy: The proportion of voters who turned out to vote fell again in the 2018 election, suggesting a critical problem of declining trust and engagement in democracy. Did you vote in 2018?

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- ► How much do you support constitutional reform?

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- ► List experiments make individual responses *invisible* to the researcher
  - ► Knowing this, hopefully the respondent answers more accurately

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I am now going to read out a list of activities. Please count the number of these activities that you have done in the past one year. Please do not tell me WHICH activities you have done, only the TOTAL NUMBER of them:

- ▶ Voted
- ▶ Attended a Town Hall Meeting
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- ▸ Attended a Town Hall Meeting
- ▸ Been offered a gift, some food or money in exchange for your vote;
- ▸ Travelled to the State Capital

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- ▶ Eg. Gonzalez-Ocantos (2010) - list experiment on vote-buying in Nicaragua 2008 municipal elections
- ▶ **Direct Question**: Have you received a gift or favour in exchange for your vote?
    - ▶ 3%

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- ► Eg. Gonzalez-Ocantos (2010) - list experiment on vote-buying in Nicaragua 2008 municipal elections
- ► **Direct Question**: Have you received a gift or favour in exchange for your vote?
    - ► 3%
- ► **List experiment**:
    - ► Just the difference in mean responses between treatment and control lists
    - ► 24% = 2.31 - 2.06

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4. No Design Effects- Presence of the treatment item doesn't affect answers on other items
   - Bias towards a 'reasonable'/central number?

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- ► Also a problem of social desirability bias in which characteristics matter

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  - ▸ Attributes
    - ▸ Values

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- ▶ Randomize values and attribute order to prevent bias
- ▶ Treatment is the **combination** of attributes the respondent sees
- ▶ Millions of possible treatments

Please read the descriptions of the potential immigrants carefully. Then, please indicate which of the two immigrants you would personally prefer to see admitted to the United States.

	Immigrant 1	Immigrant 2
Prior Trips to the U.S.	Entered the U.S. once before on a tourist visa	Entered the U.S. once before on a tourist visa
Reason for Application	Reunite with family members already in U.S.	Reunite with family members already in U.S.
Country of Origin	Mexico	Iraq
Language Skills	During admission interview, this applicant spoke fluent English	During admission interview, this applicant spoke fluent English
Profession	Child care provider	Teacher
Job Experience	One to two years of job training and experience	Three to five years of job training and experience
Employment Plans	Does not have a contract with a U.S. employer but has done job interviews	Will look for work after arriving in the U.S.
Education Level	Equivalent to completing two years of college in the U.S.	Equivalent to completing a college degree in the U.S.
Gender	Female	Male

	Immigrant 1	Immigrant 2
If you had to choose between them, which of these two immigrants should be given priority to come to the United States to live?	○	○

On a scale from 1 to 7, where 1 indicates that the United States should absolutely not admit the immigrant and 7 indicates that the United States should definitely admit the immigrant, how would you rate Immigrant 1?

Absolutely Not Admit						Definitely Admit
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Using the same scale, how would you rate Immigrant 2?

Absolutely Not Admit						Definitely Admit
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Fig. 1 Experimental design: Immigration conjoint. This figure illustrates the experimental design for the conjoint analysis that examines immigrant admission to the United States.

choice outcomes hereafter. Second, in "rating-based conjoint analysis," respondents give a numerical rating to each profile which represents their degree of preference for the profile. This format is preferred by some analysts who contend that such ratings provide more direct, finely grained information about respondents' preferences. We call this latter type of outcome a *rating outcome*.
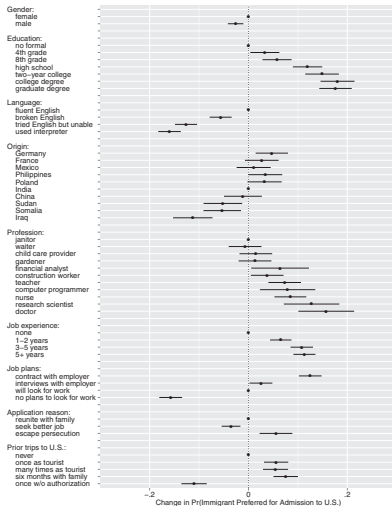
Fig. 3 Effects of immigrant attributes on preference for admission. This plot shows estimates of the effects of the randomly assigned immigrant attributes on the probability of being preferred for admission to the United States. Estimates are based on the regression estimators with clustered standard errors; bars represent 95% confidence intervals. The points without horizontal bars denote the attribute value that is the reference category for each attribute.

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    - ► So this is **not** an Average Treatment Effect for each profile

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    - Eg. the effect of gender when age, language etc. are held constant
    - It is an **Average Marginal Component Effect**
    - Eg. the effect of gender averaging across all possibilities of age, language, etc.

4. Conjoint Survey Experiments

Assumptions:

► We're still assuming people try to answer honestly

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Section 3

Generalizability

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Generalizability

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    - ▶ What is at stake in the answer? Are there any actual consequences?
    - ▶ Will they have to defend their answer in the community later?
    - ▶ Cognitive costs of thinking about your response
    - ▶ 'Cheap talk'

- Can we generalize from survey/lab responses to real-world behaviour?

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Credibility:

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Credibility:

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Credibility:

'Treatments' in survey experiments are just information or wording

But do respondents 'believe' that information?

Do they have conflicting information? What is their 'prior'?

What 'authority' or 'trust' does the source (you!) have?

Can we generalize from survey/lab responses to real-world behaviour?

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Can we generalize from survey/lab responses to real-world behaviour?

Context:

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We want to abstract from that complexity, but are humans capable of reporting their 'average' responses?

Can we generalize from survey/lab responses to real-world behaviour?

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Durability:

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Durability:

We find that a nationalism prompt produces pro-statist attitudes five minutes later in a survey

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How about a year later?

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Durability:

We find that a nationalism prompt produces pro-statist attitudes five minutes later in a survey

Would that effect persist one hour later?

How about a year later?

Real-world treatments are often continuous or repeated

Generalizability

How reliable are the responses to a Conjoint Experiment?

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Stated preferences vs. Revealed preferences

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Hainmueller et al 2014 - compare conjoint responses to a Swiss referendum

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Citizens voted on specific naturalization applicants (Really!)

Figure S11: Effects of Applicant Attributes on Opposition to Naturalization Request (Unweighted Survey Sample)
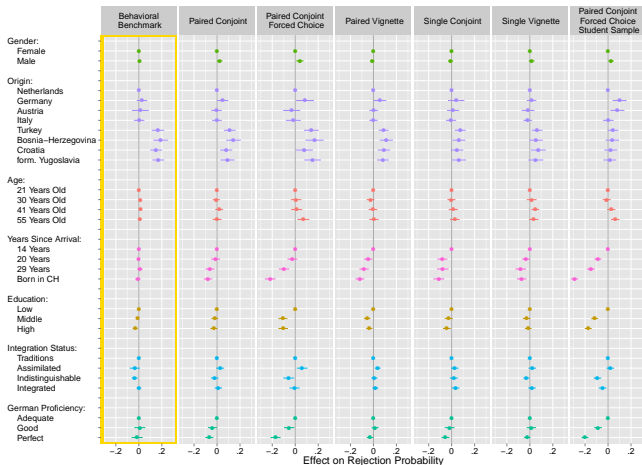

Figure shows point estimates (dots) and corresponding, cluster-robust 95 % confidence intervals (horizontal lines) from ordinary least squares regressions. The dots on the zero line without confidence intervals denote the reference category for each applicant attribute.

Generalizability

But note the conjoint method still hugely under-estimated the overall rejection rate

21% versus 37% in reality