MY457: Reappraisal Summative Assignment

Due: 23 May 2025, 5pm

Overview:

Your summative assignment for MY457 is to reappraise a published empirical paper, with a focus on **causal inference**. You will reproduce the **main results** of the paper and evaluate the authors' empirical work.

Your reappraisal should be roughly 4-6 pages of text, plus any figures or tables. You should focus your discussion on empirical questions, rather than a theoretical model or the literature review. There may be scope for a discussion of things like theory and measurement and how that relates to the concepts studied, but this should be done with a view to understanding how the authors' theory and measurement strategy affects their empirical strategy and the interpretation of their results.

For some of the papers it may not make sense to reappraise every result. You should focus on what you believe to be the most important analyses in the paper, with a focus on **causal inference**. You will not be penalised for not reappraising or reproducing every result, but you may lose points if you do not reappraise the most important results in the paper. Your mark will not be contingent on finding (or not finding) a mistake in the paper you reappraise, nor on overturning (or not overturning) the result.

Your mark will not depend on which paper you choose. You will be graded on the quality and depth of your reappraisal, your understanding of the paper and the methods used therein, and the clarity of your presentation. You will be awarded a final mark out of 100.

Submission:

You will be assigned a GitHub Classroom repo for storing and submitting your work. Your reappraisal should be submitted as your GitHub Classroom repo before the deadline. If you are late you will lose 5 points (out of a total of 100) for every 24 hours. Your final submitted GitHub Classroom repo should include:

- Your reappraisal as a **.pdf** file, rendered from an .Rmd file, which should follow the template found in the GitHub Classroom repo. Do not edit the template, but make a copy of it, rename it appropriately, and work from that copy. The final .pdf file should include two parts:
    i. Your main report, including both the text of your report and any figures and tables (preferably included in the text at the appropriate point)
    ii. A code appendix, which includes all the code you used to generate your results. This should be included at the end of your report, and should be clearly separated from the main text. Do not include code in-line unless there is a very strong reason for doing so (e.g. you want to highlight a specific coding error you found in the original paper, and highlight your correction.)
- The .Rmd file used to render the .pdf you submitted.
- All code you used to generate your results, from data ingestion through final analysis. Much of this may be included in the .Rmd file, but any other code should be included too (e.g. if you define functions and source them into your .Rmd, they should be in the repo).
- The data you use for your reappraisal. If there is additional data you cannot include (e.g. if you collect some new data you cannot share) this must be clearly documented, and processes for sourcing and handling this data should be enumerated.
- A README.md file that includes a brief description of your project including the citation of the paper you reappraise, plus any other information you think is relevant.

If you have any questions about these instructions, please post them on the Moodle forum as soon as possible.

Paper Options:

You must select **one** (1) of the following papers to reappraise:

1. Alsan, M., Braghieri, L., Eichmeyer, S., Kim, M.J., Stantcheva, S. and Yang, D.Y., 2023. Civil liberties in times of crisis. *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics*, 15(4), pp.389-421.
2. Forster, A.G. and Neugebauer, M., 2024. Factorial survey experiments to predict real-world behavior: A cautionary tale from hiring studies. *Sociological Science*, 11, pp.886-906.
3. Frymer, P. and Grumbach, J.M., 2021. Labor unions and white racial politics. *American Journal of Political Science*, 65(1), pp.225-240.
4. Narasimhan, V. and Weaver, J., 2024. Polity size and local government performance: evidence from India. *American Economic Review*, 114(11), pp.3385-3426.
5. Tellez, J.F., 2022. Land, opportunism, and displacement in civil wars: Evidence from Colombia. *American Political Science Review*, 116(2), pp.403-418.

You may not choose another paper to reappraise. It is **your responsibility** to find a copy of the paper, and to find the replication package of the article you choose.

Expectations:

Below is an indication of what is expected for different classes of final mark (pass, merit, distinction).

Note 1: The guide below is *not* hard and fast nor is it determinative. It is merely a guide. Ultimately, the *quality* of your work will determine your final grade. This includes the depth of understanding of the material that you demonstrate, the professionalism of your final reappraisal, and the manner in which you analyse, visualize, and present results.

Note 2: The numbered points are *not* a proposed structure for a project. You should structure your reappraisal in whatever way makes sense to you, given the paper you choose and the points you wish to make.

Minimum Requirements For A Passing Grade:

At minimum, your reappraisal would be expected to do the following:

1. **Research Design and Assumptions**

- Your reappraisal should offer a brief and clear summary of the research design employed by the authors, in your own words (i.e., do not just copy their language – you should translate their description of their design into your own words).
- This should include a description of the causal identification strategy, the data used, and the assumptions underpinning the identification strategy.

2. **Computational Reproduction of Main Results**

- Reproduce the main results of the paper as best as possible. This should include any tables, figures, or other results that are central to the paper's argument. You will have to decide what counts as a "main result" for the paper you select.
- Your reproduction should be written in *R*. This may mean that you will need to re-write some of the authors' code (which could be in Stata, Python, or any other language). You may use any *R* packages you like.
- You should note any issues you discover in the process of reproducing the main results, including coding errors, discrepancies, or other problems. If you find your results are a little different from the authors', you should document this and do your best to explain the discrepancies.
- You should appraise your reproduction – do the authors' results reproduce? If not, why not?

3. **Reproducibility**

- Your reappraisal should be fully reproducible from the github repo you share. This means that someone should be able to take your code and reproduce your results exactly. This includes any data cleaning, data manipulation, and data analysis steps you take.

Expectations for a Merit:

For a merit, your reappraisal would be expected to include 1-3 above, as well as:

4. **Critical Evaluation**

- Your reappraisal should offer a critical evaluation of the research design, measurement, and estimation strategies employed by the authors. This should include a critical discussion of the assumptions underpinning the identification strategy, how these assumptions relate to the empirical results, and your assessment of their credibility.
- You may devise some tests to probe or falsify the assumptions the authors make, or to test the robustness of their results. This could include balance tests, sensitivity analyses, placebo tests, alternative estimation strategies, or other strategies you come up with.

Expectations for a Distinction

For a distinction, your reappraisal would be expected to include 1-4 above, as well as:

5. **Strong Programming Practices**

- Your reappraisal should demonstrate strong programming practices, specifically with regard to reproducibility. This means that your code should be well-commented, well-organized, and might make use of, for example, functional programming, modularity, orchestration, or other practices that make your code literate, efficient, and reproducible.

6. **Original Contribution**

- Your reappraisal should offer an original contribution. This may include the integration of new data you collect yourself, justifying and using a different identification strategy, implementing a different estimation or evaluation framework, extracting deeper insights from the data, creating a new and creative way of visualizing the results, and so on. Note that if they are particularly creative and insightful, your tests devised in 4 may also represent an original contribution.