

PLSC 473: “American Judicial Behavior”

Final Examination

The final exam for PLSC 473 involves using data on the U.S. Supreme Court to answer a series of questions about the behavior of the justices on that Court.

Data

To complete this exam, you’ll rely on a data set that I’ve built for this exam. It will be somewhat familiar: it contains data on the votes of U.S. Supreme Court justices in cases heard during the 1946-2014 terms; that is, every line of data corresponds to a single vote cast by a Supreme Court justices in a single case ($N = 90061$). The data are available in a file on the github site, in the “Exam” folder, called `PLSC473ExamData.csv` or via URL at:

<https://raw.githubusercontent.com/PrisonRodeo/PLSC473-git/master/Exam/PLSC473ExamData.csv>

The data contain fourteen columns / variables:

- `JID` = An indicator for the Supreme Court justice casting the vote.
- `docketId` = A case identifier.
- `voteId` = A unique vote identifier.
- `Term` = The term in which that case was decided.
- `issueArea` = The broad issue area of the case (as indicated on pp. 105-106 of the Supreme Court Judicial Database Codebook (available here)).
- `LibVote` = Coded 1 if the justice voted in a politically liberal direction in that case, and a 0 otherwise.
- `SegalCover` = The rescaled Segal-Cover (1989) ideology measure; this is a continuous measure, where zero indicates the most conservative justice, while one indicates the most liberal.
- `Age` = The justice’s age, in years, at the time that they cast their vote in that decision.
- `Female` = Coded 1 if the justice is/was female, and 0 if they are/were male.
- `South` = Coded 1 if the justice was born in the South, and 0 otherwise.
- `CtOfApp` = Coded 1 if the justice had previously served as a judge on one of the U.S. Circuit Courts of Appeal, and 0 otherwise.
- `LibOutcome` = Coded 1 if the *outcome in the case* was liberal, and 0 if it was conservative.
- `Dissent` = Coded 1 if the justice voted in dissent (i.e., in the opposite direction from the majority) in that case, and 0 otherwise.
- `CRMood` = A continuous variable indicating how liberal (higher numbers) or conservative (lower numbers) the public’s opinion was *on civil rights and liberties issues* during the term in which that vote was cast; see the module on “public opinion” for more detail.

Questions

Answer three of the following six questions.

1. Is the relationship between justices' ideology (Segal-Cover score) and their tendency to vote liberally stronger in criminal procedure cases, or in privacy cases? To what extent?
2. Similarly: Is the relationship between justices' ideology (Segal-Cover score) and their tendency to vote liberally stronger in cases where the Court as a whole reaches a liberal decision or a conservative one? To what extent?
3. Do female justices, justices with previous Court of Appeals experience, or justices born in the South tend to be in the minority (that is, dissent) more often than justices who do not have those traits?
4. What, if any, is the direction and extent of the relationship between a justice's age and his or her tendency to dissent in Supreme Court cases?
5. Is there evidence that the 1987 rejection of Robert Bork's nomination to the Court changed the propensity of justices to cast dissenting votes? (That is, do you see significant differences in the pattern of dissenting votes in the terms prior to 1987, versus in 1987 and after?)
6. In civil rights cases, are justices over the age of 65 more or less likely to vote in a manner consistent with the dominant *public opinion* on that issue?

Logistics

Finally, a few very important points:

1. This final exam is worth a total of 450 points (150 points per question answered).
2. *Students who are writing course papers do not need to take the final exam.*
3. Answers should take the form of **short essays**, of perhaps two paragraphs in length. In each, make clear in your own words (a) what you believe is the answer to the question, and (b) on what analyses you rely to come to that answer. You may use plots, tables, or any other approaches to answer the questions. You need **not** provide computer code along with your answer.
4. You may use any resources (notes, library-based, web-based, etc.) at your disposal; this is an "open-everything" exam.
5. At the same time, exams are to be completed **individually, not collaboratively**; you are on your honor to work alone.
6. Your examination is to be submitted **electronically**, by e-mailing it to `zorn@psu.edu`.
7. Your exam should have the following characteristics:
 - It should be in Adobe PDF format.
 - It should display your full name on it.
 - It should indicate clearly which three of the six questions above you chose to answer.

8. If you have questions, the instructor can be reached at zorn@psu.edu. Note, however, that questions that would compromise the integrity of the exam process (e.g., by giving you information that would advantage you relative to other students) will not be answered.
9. The examination is due at **11:59:59 p.m. ET on Thursday, December 17, 2015**.