CS130 Location-Based Assignment

Minerva University

CS130: Statistical Modeling

November 19, 2022

DECISION MEMO

To	Monica Zwaig, Human Rights Lawyer
From	Somtochi Umeh, Statistics Student
Date	November 19, 2022
Subject	Addressing witnesses not giving necessary information during the trials of crimes against humanity committed during Argentina's last dictatorship.

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Executive Summary

The trials against the military officers for the crimes they committed during the dictatorship in Argentina over three decades ago are still ongoing. Most accused are now very elderly, but the bereaved families still need justice. However, some officers keep silent during trials, making the case difficult to prosecute. This memo addresses the silence of these officers by asking what effect high ranks have on how much helpful information the accused volunteers. We used statistical matching (explained in the Objective section below) to explain how we would evaluate this causal effect. From the results of the eventual statistical analyses, we would know what kinds of officers we should focus our resources on to get the most helpful information.

Background Information

Argentina witnessed high levels of state terrorism during the military junta that plagued the country from 1976 to 1983. The military dictatorships kidnapped, tortured, and killed tens of thousands of their citizens, who Argentinians now recognize as 'Los Desaparecidos' (the disappeared). The military forces at the time dedicated themselves to eradicating leftist sentiments by killing people (regarded as left-wing subversives) who held those views. They also went as far as torturing and killing the subversives' family members and friends deemed guilty

by association. The military kept pregnant abducted women alive till they gave birth. Then their babies would be taken from them and given to parents who supported the military regime (Z. Monica, personal communication, November 9, 2019).

After the military dictatorship ended and Argentina returned to democratic rule, the new president initiated efforts to put the military on trial for their state-terrorism acts. However, due to several tensions around the time, Argentina's National Congress passed the Law of Due Obedience, preventing officers from being legally punishable for crimes committed during the dictatorship as they were working out of compliance. After decades of human rights movement endeavors to bring all state terrorism perpetrators to book, courts now regard the Due Obedience law as unconstitutional, making it possible to take military officers to trial for their crimes (Z. Monica, personal communication, November 9, 2019).

Over 10,000 cases have been tried, with tens of thousands more left. It's a race against time since most accused military officials are elderly, some even dying during their trials. In addition, most officers do not talk about their crimes, so getting the necessary information is difficult. Their silence could be because they still hold the same ideological beliefs, loyalty to the military, forgetfulness from old age, or fear for their family members' safety (Z. Monica, personal communication, November 9, 2019).[12]

Objective

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[1] **#context:** I provide relevant background about Argentina's military dictatorship and the urgency of the trials. This background helps any reader understand the importance of using available resources to focus the search for relevant information and how the statistical analysis fits into the context.

[2] **#evidencebased:** Z. Monica is a human rights lawyer directly involved as a prosecutor in the ongoing trials. She also has a first-hand experience of the military junta period as her family was exiled from Argentina. These make her a reputable evidence source for the information in this paper.

I want to analyze if higher military ranks affect the amount of helpful information an accused officer volunteers during the trial. With this analysis, the prosecution can evaluate which accused officers they should focus their resources on to get the most information.

Over 10,000 cases have been tried, so we already have data on the officer witnesses in each case, which gave necessary information, their military rank, age, years in service, and the number of family members they have. The treatment whose effect we want to analyze is higher military ranks. We can split our data into low to middle-ranking and middle to high-ranking officers. The middle to high-ranking officers will serve as our treatment group, while the low to middle-ranking officers will serve as the control (group without the higher military rank treatment). As mentioned earlier, many factors (variables) can contribute to an officer's silence during trials: years in service (a proxy for loyalty to the military), age, and the number of family members (the officer may fear for their family members' safety). These factors (potential confounding variables) can predict the outcome: how much valuable information the officer gives.[3]

We can evaluate the impact of higher military ranking in officer silence now that we have the treatment and control groups. We can think of our causal question this way: say we have a high-ranking military official who gave us lots of helpful information for our case. Had this same officer been an entry-level officer instead, would they still have given us any information about their crimes? We can only observe one of these outcomes and want to examine the difference between these two outcomes. We can get another officer with nearly the same age, years of service, and a similar number of family members who instead is an entry-level officers and see if they volunteered helpful information for the trial. This technique of matching people in the

[3] **#variables:** I discuss the potential predictors (confounding variables) of the usefulness of information an officer volunteers during the trial (the outcome variable). These are the independent and dependent variables respectively. These variables are then used to explain how statistical matching would happen.

treatment group to people with similar characteristics in the control group is called statistical matching. We would match each middle to high-ranking officer to a low to middle-ranking officer with similar traits and discard those that didn't get matched.

After statistical matching, we can estimate the average effect of a high-ranking military officer on the amount of helpful information volunteered during the trials. To get this average effect, we may assign quantitative values to each officer representing the usefulness of whatever information they gave.

Conclusion

After our analysis, we would have the effect of higher military ranks on confessing crimes, if any. With those results, we can answer the question of which officers we can focus our resources on to get the most helpful information: officers within the low to middle ranks, those within the middle to high positions, or some mixture of the two groups.[4]

Word count: 913 words.

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[4] **#audience:** I pay attention to the fact that the person I am writing this memo to may not have a statistical background. Therefore, I simplify any technical terms I introduce, but I majorly avoid using any technical terms.

Questions Annex:

- What caused the military dictatorship, and how did Argentina transition out of it?

- Why are the trials still ongoing?

- What challenges do you face as one of the persecution lawyers on these cases?

PICTURES AT MEMORIAL PARK FOR THE DISAPPEARED: