PLSC 308: "Introduction to Political Research"

Notes on the Model Presentation

April 12, 2016

[Title Slide]

I'm Christopher Zorn, and I'm proposing a study of the relationship between age and political conservatism among U.S. Supreme Court justices.

Theory and Hypotheses

- We have known for $\approx$ 100 years that SCOTUS justices vote in a way consistent with their political ideology (that is, their degree of liberalism or conservatism).

- Psychology also suggests that individuals become more politically conservative as they age... This is due to:

  · Age-related declines in intellectual curiousity (Cornelis et al. 2009)

  · Age-related declines in ambiguity tolerance and increases in need for closure / structure (Jost et al. 2003)

  · Age-related increases in behavioral constraints and predictability (Van Heil and Brebels 2011)

- Taken together, these suggest that SCOTUS justices should grow more conservative in their behavior as they age. In particular, it suggests two hypotheses:

  1. *SCOTUS justices will be more likely to support conservative outcomes as they get older.*

  2. *The older a justice is at his/her appointment, the less conservative s/he will become over time.*

Data and Operationalization

For data, I rely on two main sources:

1. The *The Supreme Court Judicial Database*, which records the ideological direction of every justice's vote in every decision from 1791-2014. In general "liberal" votes are those which support defendants vs. prosecutors, civil rights / liberties claimants vs. governments, regulation over the free market, etc.

2. The *Biographical Directory of Federal Judges, 1789-present*, which records biographical information for every Article III judge ever appointed (including date of birth).

My dependent variable is the vote of each justices in each case, coded 0 if the vote was in a "liberal" direction, and 1 if it was "conservative."

My main independent variable is the *age* of the justice at the time of the decision in question, measured in years.

Analysis

My analysis will proceed in several steps.

1. First, I will examine the liberalism / conservatism of the votes of justices at different ages, by building a crosstable of liberal/conservative voting by *justice age*. My first hypothesis will be supported if the percentage of votes which are conservative increases as the age of the justices goes up.

2. Next, I will generate boxplots showing the distributions of the justices' ages, by their votes (liberal or conservative). My first hypothesis will be supported if we see an average higher age among justices casting conservative votes than among those casting liberal votes.

3. I will then examine the correlations (tau-C) between the justices' age and their voting. A positive correlation will be supportive of my first hypothesis.

4. Finally, to assess the second hypothesis, I will examine line plots of each justice's conservatism against their age. This will allow me to observe if justices who are appointed at older ages change less in their voting than those appointed younger. Evidence of substantial increases in conservatism among younger-appointed justices – but not among older-appointed justices – would support my second hypothesis.