Economics of Crime Reading Questions, Reading List, and Course Schedule

The University of Texas at Dallas
ECON 4396.501 (Fall 2021)

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subject to change

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1   Reading Questions

I will ask the following questions for each journal article reading. To facilitate participation by *everyone* in the class, I will go around the room (starting from a new spot each time) and call on you to answer these questions:

- What is the research question?

    - Why is it worth asking?
    - What did earlier papers have to say about this research question? (what is the previous literature?)
    - What is this paper's contribution?

- What data are being used in this paper?

    - How were they collected? (panel survey, cross-sectional survey, administrative records, experiment, etc.)
    - What are the important variables? How are they defined?
    - What is the unit of observation? (state-year, person-month, etc.)

- What is the empirical strategy (method) for answering the research question? (randomized controlled trial, differences-in-differences, instrumental variables, regression discontinuity, etc.)

- What would be the ideal dataset (think randomized experiment) to answer this research question?
- What would be the empirical strategy to use on this ideal dataset?
- How is this paper's dataset different than the ideal one? (what variables are missing or measured in a different way, etc.)
- What is the main equation being estimated in this paper?
- How does identification work? Imagine the simplest case: you have 2 people (or states), and 1 is exposed to to the policy change. What has to be true for you to be able to say that the difference in the outcome is due to the policy change (in what ways do the people have to be the same or different)?
- What are the sources of exogenous variation? What are the differences between people (or states) that are due to chance and not due to things that people (or states) can control?
- **Bonus: do you find the identification assumptions credible? Why or why not?**

- What are the main results?

  - What are some alternative explanations for the results?
  - Does the author test for alternative explanations?
  - What new questions arise from the paper's results? (hint: what are areas for future research?)
  - What are the policy implications of the results?
  - Do you buy the main conclusions of the paper? Why or why not?

- Overall, what did you think about the paper?

2 Course Schedule and Reading List (see section 1 for the reading questions!)

- **Tuesday, August 24: Introduction and Trends in Crime**

  - Chettiar, Inimai M. 2015. "The Many Causes of America's Decline in Crime." *Atlantic.com* Available at
    https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2015/02/the-many-causes-of-americas-decline-in-crime/385364/

  - Introduction to understanding regressions, causal inference, and empirical strategies

  - Introduction to how to read an empirical paper in economics

- **Thursday, August 26: Incarceration I**

  - Aizer, Anna and Joseph J. Doyle, Jr. 2015. "Juvenile Incarceration, Human Capital, and Future Crime: Evidence from Randomly Assigned Judges." *Quarterly Journal of Economics,* 130(2): 759-803.
    https://doi.org/10.1093/qje/qjv003

- **Tuesday, August 31: Incarceration II**

  - Arteaga Cabrales, Carolina. working paper. "Parental Incarceration and Children's Educational Attainment"

- **Thursday, September 2: Deterrence and Recidivism I**

  - Hansen, Benjamin. 2015. "Punishment and Deterrence: Evidence from Drunk Driving." *American Economic Review,* 105(4): 1581-1617.
    https://doi.org/10.1257/aer.20130189

- **Tuesday, September 7: Deterrence and Recidivism II**

  - Doleac, Jennifer. 2017. "The Effect of DNA Databases on Crime." *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics,* 9(1): 165-201.
    https://doi.org/10.1257/app.20150043

- **Thursday, September 9: TBD**

  - listen to this Probable Causation podcast featuring Professor Aurelie Ouss on pretrial detention and ways to reduce failure-to-appear rates
  - https://www.probablecausation.com/podcasts/episode-21-aurelie-ouss

- **Tuesday, September 14: Police Use of Force**

  - Hoekstra, Mark, and CarlyWill Sloan. working paper. "Does Race Matter for Police Use of Force? Evidence from 911 Calls."

- **Thursday, September 16: Race and the Criminal Justice System I**

  - Luh, Elizabeth. working paper. "Not So Black and White: Uncovering Racial Bias from Systematically Misreported Trooper Reports."

- **Tuesday, September 21: Race and the Criminal Justice System II**

  - Cunningham, Jamein P. and Robynn Cox. 2021. "Financing the War on Drugs: The Impact of Law Enforcement Grants on Racial Disparities in Drug Arrests." *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* 40(1): 191-224. https://doi.org/10.1002/pam.22277

- **Wednesday, September 22: draft of group presentation slides and notes due via email by 5 p.m.**

- **Thursday, September 23: virtual group meetings instead of in-person class**

- **Tuesday, September 28: Race and the Criminal Justice System III**

  - Feigenberg, Benjamin, and Conrad Miller. 2021. "Racial Divisions and Criminal Justice: Evidence from Southern State Courts" *American Economic Journal: Economic Policy* 13(2): 207-40.
    https://doi.org/10.1257/pol.20180688

- **Thursday, September 30: TBD**

  - listen to this Probable Causation podcast featuring Professor Greg Midgette on an alcohol sobriety program:
  - https://www.probablecausation.com/podcasts/episode-47-greg-midgette
  - **Final version of slides due via email by 5 p.m.**

- **Tuesday, October 5: Group Presentations I**

- **Thursday, October 7: Group Presentations II**

- **Tuesday, October 12: Group Presentations III**

- **Thursday, October 14: Group Presentations IV**

- **Tuesday, October 19: Lab Day I or TBD**

- **Thursday, October 21: Lab Day I or TBD**
    - listen to this Probable Causation podcast featuring Professor Sara Heller on how summer youth-employment programs affect crime:
    - https://www.probablecausation.com/podcasts/episode-25-sara-heller
    - **Group presentation summary due via email by 5 p.m.**

- **Tuesday, October 26: Lab Day II or Crime and the Labor Market**
    - Agan, Amanda Y. and Makowsky, Michael D. 2021. "The Minimum Wage, EITC, and Criminal Recidivism." *Journal of Human Resources* https://doi.org/10.3368/jhr.58.5.1220-11398R1

- **Thursday, October 28: Crime and the Labor Market or Lab Day II**
    - listen to this Probable Causation podcast featuring Professor Mica Sviatschi on the effects of criminal gangs on economic development in El Salvador:
    - https://www.probablecausation.com/podcasts/episode-15-mica-sviatschi

- **Tuesday, November 2: Lab Day III (asynchronous)**
    - **Today is election day.** If you are eligible to vote (in Texas or elsewhere) and registered, it is your civic duty to inform yourself of the issues and/or candidates on the ballot and to vote in the election
    - To help facilitate this important civic process (particularly because polls close in Dallas and Collin Counties at 7 p.m. and our class goes until 6:45 p.m.), there will be no in-person class today
    - Instead, I will post slides (and/or a recording) of more statistics that you can watch at your leisure and I will have extra office hours in case you have questions about any concepts or how the commands work in Excel or Stata

- **Thursday, November 4: Drugs**
  - Dobkin, Carlos and Nancy Nicosia. 2009. "The War on Drugs: Methamphetamine, Public Health, and Crime." *American Economic Review* 99(1): 324-349. https://doi.org/10.1257/aer.99.1.324

- **Tuesday, November 9: Sexual Assault**
  - Lindo, Jason M., Peter Siminski, and Isaac D. Swensen. 2018. "College Party Culture and Sexual Assault." *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics,* 10(1): 236-265. https://doi.org/10.1257/app.20160031

- **Thursday, November 11: Lab Day IV (asynchronous)**
  - listen to this Probable Causation podcast featuring Professor J.J. Prescott on sex offender registries:
  - https://www.probablecausation.com/podcasts/episode-20-jj-prescott

- **Tuesday, November 16: Domestic Violence**
  - Currie, Janet, Michael Mueller-Smith, and Maya Rossin-Slater. 2020. "Violence While in Utero: The Impact of Assaults during Pregnancy on Birth Outcomes." *The Review of Economics and Statistics* https://doi.org/10.1162/rest

- **Thursday, November 18: TBD**
  - listen to this Probable Causation podcast featuring Professor Anna Bindler on the labor market costs of crime victimization:
  - https://www.probablecausation.com/podcasts/episode-39-anna-bindler
  - **Crime data portfolio due via email by 5 p.m.**

- **Tuesday, November 23: No class–Fall Break!**

- **Thursday, November 25: No class–Fall Break/Thanksgiving!**

- **Tuesday, November 30: TBD**
  - Carr, Jillian and Analisa Packham. 2021. "SNAP Schedules and Domestic Violence." *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management,* 40: 412-452. https://doi.org/10.1002/pam.22235

- **Thursday, December 2: Sex Work**

  - Cameron, Lisa, Jennifer Seager, and Manisha Shah. 2021. "Crimes Against Morality: Unintended Consequences of Criminalizing Sex Work." *The Quarterly Journal of Economics,* 136(1): 427-469.
    https://doi.org/10.1093/qje/qjaa032.

- **Tuesday, December 7: Immigration and Crime**

  - Muchow, Ashley N. and Catalina Amuedo-Dorantes. 2020. "Immigration Enforcement Awareness and Community Engagement with Police: Evidence from Domestic Violence Calls in Los Angeles." *Journal of Urban Economics* 117: 103253.
    https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jue.2020.103253.

  - **Last day of class!**