Blogging and Science Communication

Gianluca Baio

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Researchers' Society Workshop

King's College London, 7 June 2017

- **Some examples of why blogging is good and fun**
- Why it's sometimes bad
- How it can get ugly...

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- Some examples of why blogging is good and fun
- Why it's sometimes bad
- **How it can get ugly...**

- Several platforms
  - Wordpress
  - bloggers
  - Google sites
  - ...

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- Generally pretty easy
- Some have facilities to include maths symbols and LaTeX-like text
- Can manipulate further if you learn some basic `HTML` — but **not** necessary!

Gianluca Baio's blog

Bayesian statistics, health economics and random stuff

FRIDAY, 2 JUNE 2017

The code (and other stuff...)

I've received a couple of emails or comments on one of the General Election posts to ask me to share the code I've used.

In general, I think this is a bit dirty and lots could be done in a more efficient way — effectively, I'm doing this out of my own curiosity and while I think the model is sensible, it's probably not "publication-standard" (in terms of annotation etc).

Anyway, I've created a (rather plain) GitHub repository, which contains the basic files (including R script, R functions, basic data and JAGS model). Given time (which I'm not given...), I'd like to put a lot more description and perhaps also write a Stan version of the model code. I could also write a more precise model description — I'll try to update the material on the GitHub.

On another note, the previous posts have been syndicated in a couple of places (here and here), which was nice. And finally, here's a little update with the latest data. As of today, the model predicts the following seats distribution.

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Labour are still slowly but surely gaining some ground — I'm not sure the effect of the debate earlier this week (which was deserted by the PM) are visible yet as only a couple of the polls included were conducted after that.

LINKS

- Gianluca's website
- UCL Stats for Health Economic Evaluation
- New post
- Dashboard

LABELS

- Bayesian statistics (222)
- Health Economics (136)
- Perso (126)
- R (65)
- London (63)
- Hierarchical models (59)
- Software (58)
- Causal inference (26)

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- Mostly random stuff
  - As in "random variables/probability models"
  - But more specifically as in "anything goes"...

- Mostly random stuff
  - As in "random variables/probability models"
  - But more specifically as in "anything goes"...

- Some examples:
  - Predicting the results at the 2014 FIFA World Cup
  - General Elections (all over the place — Italy, US, UK, Spain)
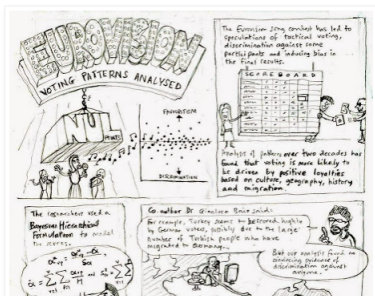 - Eurovision contest
  - ...

That time of the year…

Slightly later than last year, but, like every year, that time is coming. Yes: Eurovision again. From our point of view, it's of course being a lot quieter than last year, although the paper is still going strong.

But we've had two nice surprises: first we've been asked to give a radio interview on Australian radio. Why on earth, do you say? I'm glad you asked! Well, apparently, Australians looove the ESC — just to give you an idea, I think the radio programme is usually focussed on serious elections, but this week they dedicated the whole show to the ESC!

Since this is the 60th edition, Australia have been invited to participate. So they'll feature later this week in Vienna and the people at Radio Adelaide have asked me to discuss our results (the podcast for the full programme is here — I'm on at around minute 15:00). If you get over how nasal my voice sounds and keep listening, you will also learn that the University of Melbourne has also recently activate a module on Eurovision! May be we have a career lined up…

The second interesting news is that we've been contacted by Taylor and Francis (the publisher of the Journal of Applied Statistics). They have had this amazing idea to promote the paper by turning it into a cartoon — here's a draft version (I think that the final one will be out shortly).

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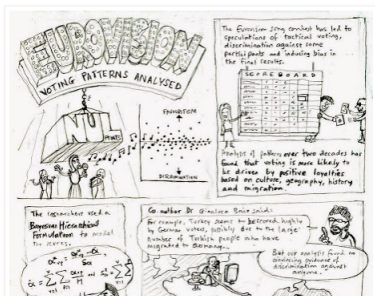
BLOG ARCHIVE

UCL

MONDAY, 18 MAY 2015

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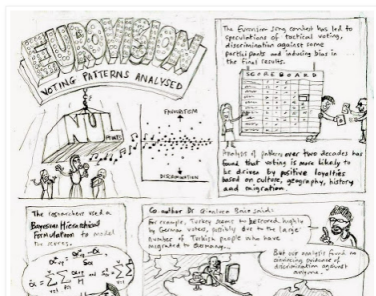**BLOG ARCHIVE**

Eurovision madness

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I'm not a pervert!

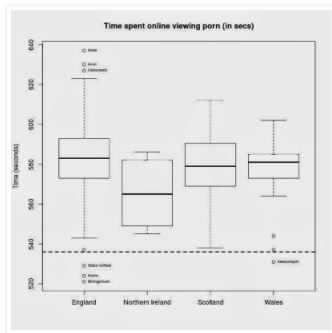https://gianlubaio.blogspot.co.uk/2014/01/porn-capital-of-porn-nation.html

Porn capital of the porn nation

The other day I was having a quick look at the newspapers and I stumbled on this article. Apparently, Pornhub (a website whose mission should be pretty clear) have analysed the data on their customers and found out that the town of Ware (Hertfordshire) has more demand for online porn than any other UK town. According to PornHub, a Ware resident will last 10 minutes 37 seconds (637 seconds) on its adult website, compared with the world average time of 8 minutes 56 seconds (just 536 seconds).

Comments have gone both ways, with Ware being dubbed (in a somewhat derogatory way) the "Britain capital of porn", while some people have highlighted the better "performance", shall we say, of Ware viewers (who, ahem, lasted on line nearly 2 minutes longer than the average viewer).

The data (or at least an excerpt) are available from The Guardian website and so I have very, very quickly played around with them. In particular, I think that it's kind of weird that the analysis focussed just on the maximum value; so I had a quick look at the entire distribution.

Interestingly, it appears that not just Ware, but basically all of the British towns in the dataset are above the world average; some are

Sidebar

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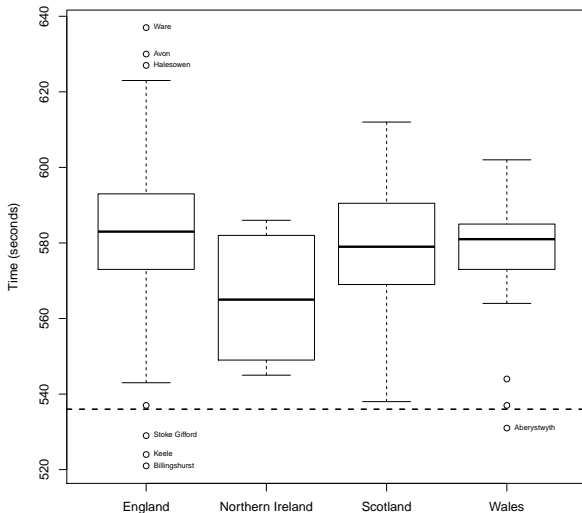
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Time spent online viewing porn (in secs)

I'm not a pervert!(But some people are)...

🏛UCL

Andy Barbour 11 January 2014 at 05:21
Hah, "lasted" -- brilliant choice of words, Gianluca!
Reply

Gianluca Baio ✎ 12 January 2014 at 10:41
Carefully searched! ;-)
Reply Delete

Francesco Pecchioli 12 January 2014 at 21:28
I don't have any knowledge of R code but to me the letter R does really suite the post.
Reply

Gianluca Baio ✎ 12 January 2014 at 22:31
Hadn't thought of that, Picchio — but you do have a point! :-)
Reply Delete

Kimberly 8 February 2014 at 12:42
This comment has been removed by a blog administrator.
Reply

cfat fesc 15 February 2014 at 11:41
This comment has been removed by a blog administrator.
Reply

Ethan 17 February 2014 at 05:30
This comment has been removed by a blog administrator.
Reply

Porn capital of the porn nation
Bayes 2014 coming up nicely!
New year, new cost-effectiveness thresholds?
Significant news

▶ 2013 (90)
▶ 2012 (98)

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Course: 1st Italian Astrostatistics School, 12-16 June 2017
2 weeks ago

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anyway?

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Great work. I believe having your own server will make things more possible happen in a proper way for you. web application development company on *Shiny happy people in the land of the Czar* | Harrison Reynolds | on 09/10/16

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- Causal inference (26)

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  ▼ June (1)
    The code (and other stuff...)
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  ▶ February (1)
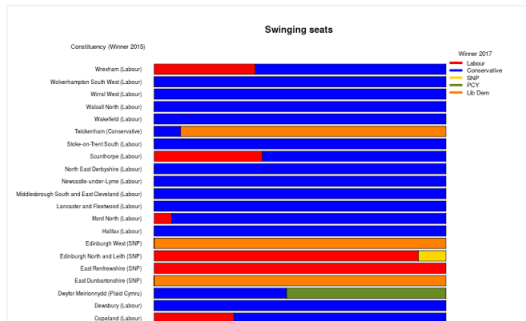 ▶ January (3)

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Swinging seats

Sidebar:
- Causal inference (26)

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Predicting the UK's snap general election

Written by Gianluca Baio on 30 May 2017.

I have decided to build a model to try to predict the results of the upcoming snap general election in the UK. I'm sure there will be many people attempting this, from various perspectives and using different modelling approaches. But I have set out to develop a fairly simple (though, hopefully, reasonable) model. In the process of describing this to you, I hope to shed some light on how statisticians build predictive models.

We start with the data, which come from national voting intention polls conducted by a number of research agencies, including YouGov, ICM and Opinium.

Arguably, this election will be mostly about Brexit; there surely will be other factors, but because this election comes almost exactly a year after Britain's referendum on membership of the European Union (EU), it is a fair bet to suggest that how people voted back then, and how they still feel now, will massively influence the election result.

Luckily, all the polls I have found report data in terms of voting intention, broken down by Remain/Leave votes during the EU referendum. Using these polls, I am looking to predict the results of the seven main political parties – Conservatives, Labour, UKIP, Liberal Democrats, SNP, Green, and Plaid Cymru – plus all "Others". Also, for simplicity, I'm considering only the results for the 632 constituencies in England, Scotland and Wales, not the 18 Northern Ireland constituencies. This shouldn't be a big problem though, as elections are generally a local affair in Northern Ireland, with the mainstream British parties not playing a significant role.

As well as recent polling data, I also have available data on the results of both the 2015 general election and the 2016 EU referendum. I had to do some work to align these two datasets, as the referendum did not use the same geographical resolution as is typically used during general elections. I therefore mapped the voting areas used in 2016 to the parliamentary constituencies and have recorded the proportion of votes won by my eight parties in 2015, as well as the proportion of Remain votes in 2016.

For each constituency, I therefore have a distribution of election results, which I can use to determine the average outcome, as well as various measures

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The World Cup forecast: let's go all the way!

Written by Gianluca Baio & Marta Blangiardo on 08 July 2014. Posted in Sports

This is (maybe) the final post in the series dedicated to the prediction of the World Cup results – I'll try and actually write another to wrap things up and summarise a few comments, but this will probably be a bit later on. Finally, we've decided to use our model, which so far has been applied incrementally, ie stage-by-stage, to predict the result of both the semifinals and the finals.

The first part is relatively straightforward - we now know the results from the quarter-finals. Thus, we can re-iterate the procedure and i) update the data with the observed results; ii) update the 'current form' variable and the offset; iii) re-run the model to estimate each team's propensity to score; iv) predict the result of the unobserved games – in this case the two semi-finals (Brazil vs Germany and Argentina vs Netherlands).

However, to give the model a nice twist, I thought we should include some piece of extra information that is available right now, ie the fact that Brazil will, for certain, play their semi-final without their suspended captain Thiago Silva and their injured 'star player' Neymar (who will also miss the final, due to the gravity of his injury). Thus, we ran the model by modifying the offset variable for Brazil, to slightly decrease their 'short-term' quality.

[NB: if this were a 'serious' model, we would probably try to embed these changes in a more formal way, rather than as 'ad hoc' modifications to the general set up. Nevertheless, I believe that the possibility of dealing with additional information, possibly in the form of subjective/expert knowledge, is actually a strength of the modelling framework. Of course, you could say that the selection of the offset distribution is arbitrary and other possibilities were possible – that's of course true and a 'serious' model would certainly

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    • A variation of the birthday problem - a reader responds
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► 2014 (15)

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When in Rome…

Yesterday I was in Rome to teach in a short course on Bayesian methods in health economics.

The 6.45am flight from London was actually on time, which was impressive, considering that the last time I flew Alitalia I never made it to Rome — we stopped in Milan but, because of "technical problems", the flight was cancelled. I had to give a talk via Skype from the airport and then got back to London with the very last flight, although I was originally supposed to be back with the 7.30pm flight.

I arrived at Fiumicino at about 10.30am and after the passport control I headed to the train station. Unfortunately, there was no train scheduled to go into central Rome in the near future (or, for that matters, even in the distant future, according to the electronic board). So I walked back to the coach station. Signs on either side and on the front of the coach, as well as on the actual ticket said €4 one-way.

The driver however said that it was €5.

After a few minutes we left. Before we were even out of the parking lot, the driver was already shouting on his mobile phone (the first call was to "Fra") — needless to say, he did not have blue-tooth or headphones; although to be fair he was remarkably good at handling the steering wheel with his knees.

The first part of the journey into Rome is on the motorway and it wasn't very busy, so he was just happy to chat away, mostly boosting to his friends that they got stuck in traffic because they didn't ask his advice; but there also was a call to his mum (who, apparently, had annoyingly failed to talk to dad, which means he would have to do it himself) and a failed attempt to contact his wife, Barbara.

When we actually got to the outskirts of town and off the motorway, the traffic became a bit worse. At that point, his friend "Fra" called again, and again the driver started to playfully (I think) insult them because they were stuck in traffic. Until we also got stuck in a big jam, that is. In response to this, he started to honk the horn and shout at everybody, including a policeman who was handling the traffic (well, he wasn't really doing a good job, but still…).

Finally, a good 90 minutes after we left the airport, we arrived in central Rome, which unfortunately was still not where I needed to go. Because of a strike and a couple of demonstrations, the traffic in the area was mental. There was no official queue for the taxi, but I still managed to waive at and hope one, so I suppose I shouldn't complain too much that to do this (6km) it took me another 45 minutes.

After a quick lunch, we started the course; the turnout was all right (about 20 people) and I think it went reasonably well — although, as I suspected, we had planned a bit too much. I have given this lecture a few times in the last months (although in slightly different formats and this time it included more bits about the general principles of Bayesian statistics) and there are a couple of things that I think are really interesting.

The first is that people seem to be genuinely surprised to hear about the controversy between Neyman-Pearson and Fisher and that they couldn't even bear to be in the same department (the usual reaction from the audience is to think I'm joking). The second is the reaction to my point that the prior *information* and the prior *distribution* are two different things, which I always stress. I think people generally take this well and I think it makes it a bit easier to come to terms with the idea of formulating the prior as just *one* possible probabilistic "translation" of some knowledge, which can be generally expressed in words.

At the end of the course, I took a taxi to the airport. It was still pretty busy, but that didn't bother me that much (by then I'd sort of given up). I got to the airport in time for a quick (and incredibly expensive) sandwich before boarding the flight, only to discover that they had assigned seat 4A to 4 people — of course I was one of them. The plane was not very full, but they still spent a good 15 minutes frantically calling I-don't-know-who on the phone to try and "sort it out". Which they did, in the end — by telling three of us to just find another seat.

LABELS

- Bayesian statistics (222)
- Health Economics (136)
- Perso (126)
- R (65)
- London (63)
- Hierarchical models (59)
- Software (58)
- Causal inference (26)

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When in Rome...

Yesterday I was in Rome to teach in a short course on Bayesian methods in health economics.

The 6.45am flight from London was actually on time, which was impressive, considering that the last time I flew Alitalia I never made it to Rome — we stopped in Milan but, because of "technical problems", the flight was cancelled. I had to give a talk via Skype from the airport and then got back to London with the very last flight, although I was originally supposed to be back with the 7.30pm flight.

I arrived at Fiumicino at about 10.30am and after the passport control I headed to the train station. Unfortunately, there was no train scheduled to go into central Rome in the near future (or, for that matters, even in the distant future, according to the electronic board). So I walked back to the coach station. Signs on either side and on the front of the coach, as well as on the actual ticket said €4 one-way.

The driver however said that it was €5.

After a few minutes we left. Before we were even out of the parking lot, the driver was already shouting on his mobile phone (the first call was to "Fra") — needless to say, he did not have blue-tooth or headphones; although to be fair he was remarkably good at handling the steering wheel with his knees.

The first part of the journey into Rome is on the motorway and it wasn't very busy, so he was just happy to chat away, mostly boosting his friends that they got stuck in traffic because they didn't ask his advice; but there also was a call to his mum (who, apparently, had annoyingly failed to talk to dad, which means he would have to do it himself) and a failed attempt to contact his wife, Barbara.

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Posted by Gianluca Baio at 17:43 ✏ M B t f P G+1 +1 Recommend this on Google

Labels: Bayesian statistics, Miscellanea

2 comments:

jspncr 26 April 2017 at 13:49

Would you care to share your scripts? I would be interested to play around with this!

Reply

Gianluca Baio ✏ 27 April 2017 at 11:34

I want to make some changes to the model, to include a few other features (eg to anchor the estimated vote shares to some historic data, in order to have a more robust estimate and safeguard against "over-enthusiastic" polls). Will post again with more detail, when I have a moment...

Reply Delete

Enter your comment...

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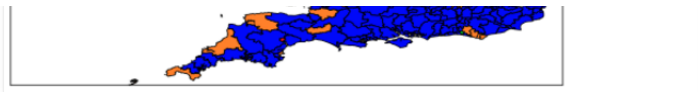Publish   Preview   ☐ Notify me

As soon as I have a moment, I'll share a more intelligible version of my code and will update the results as new polls become available.

Posted by Gianluca Baio at 13:29   M ⬚ t f P G+1 +1 Recommend this on Google

Labels: Bayesian statistics, Miscellanea

1 comment:

Idontgetoutmuch 31 May 2017 at 11:54

Have you had a moment to share your code? Maybe it's on github somewhere?

Reply

Enter your comment...

Comment as: Gianluca Baio (▼

Sign out

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giabaio / **Election2017**

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⬡ **giabaio** committed on GitHub Create README.md   Latest commit 58f1388 a day ago

⬡ README.md	Create README.md	a day ago
⬡ Script.R	First commit	2 days ago
⬡ Utils.R	First commit	2 days ago
⬡ data.Rdata	First commit	2 days ago
⬡ model.txt	First commit	2 days ago
⬡ polls.xls	First commit	2 days ago

⊞ **README.md**

Election2017

Prediction of the UK General Election 2017

There are two main R files. The first one, Utils.R has a set of functions that are used repeatedly to pre-process the data, run the model and then post-process the results to produce tables, maps, etc.

The second one, Script.R, actually does all the work, by loading the relevant packages, the utility functions, and then running the analysis and calling the functions to post-process the results.

THURSDAY, 7 NOVEMBER 2013

Rescue remedy

Interesting day, today. I woke up really early (3.45am) to catch my flight to Amsterdam to give my **talk** at the Chemometrics Workshop. The cab got me to the airport early enough so that I could clear security, have a coffee and slowly make my way to the gate.

But when I arrived there, I realised that before leaving home, on the spur of the moment, I decided to take a different jacket — you know, just to stir things up a little. Too bad that I had left my passport in the jacket that was at home... But, no matter; after all I still have my **Italian ID card** — I don't often use it, but surely that would come to the rescue and allow me to board my flight. Except that it was kind of expired (well — "kind of" meaning expired two years ago). And so they kindly escorted me outside the departures area.

At which point (it was about 6am), I decided it was time for desperate measures and called home. Thankfully, my sister-in-law Sara is visiting, so, I thought, if I can get Marta, she could come and bring me my passport and XY won't be alone at home. So all will be fine. Except that, at that point, I had missed my flight. But they assured me that the next one would still get me to Amsterdam on time. So I just needed to pay a reasonable "recovery fee" and get the passport in time to re-do the check in, re-clear security (and possibly re-take a coffee).

I can't really blame her, but it was kind of difficult to get hold of Marta and I had to ring quite a few times before she actually picked up the phone. And of course, she was quite upset too! (You know the kind of sleepy voice that basically sounds like: "I would probably kill you and then leave you if you were here"). But again, I don't think I can really blame her... Anyway, thankfully, enter super-wife to the rescue! She drove the 45 minutes from our house to the airport and managed to get me my passport on time.

Oh, did I mention that the flight they told me would get me to Amsterdam on time was actually full, so they couldn't rebook me on that one? Yeah — that happened too... Luckily, just when I was about to give up, I thought I'd check with British Airways; I was half expecting they would ask charge £100,000 but in fact I only had to pay just a little more than the "recovery fee" would have been, so I bought a one-way ticket.

In the end, I did manage to get to Utrecht on time. The talk was scheduled for 11.15 and I got to the conference centre with well over 10 minutes to spare! Because I didn't want to miss on any of the possible excitement of the day, I also witnessed a robbery on the train from Schipol — an American guy got his backpack stolen by a lovely-looking (but clearly evil-acting) lady when the train stopped at one of the stations along the way.

By the way, the talk went well, I thought. It was probably a bit too long and I had to cut one of the examples short, but people seem to have liked it and asked me quite a few questions. I'm at the airport now, waiting to board my flight back home — assuming I still have a home, that is. I did buy chocolate in the hope of placating my lovely, forgiving other half...

Thank you!