Essays on the Political Economy of the American Frontier

by

Jason V Poulos

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Political Science

and the Designated Emphasis

in

Computational and Data Science and Engineering

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Sean Gailmard, Chair Assistant Professor Joshua Blumenstock Professor Eric Schickler Professor Jasjeet Sekhon

Spring 2019

The dissertation of Jason V Poulos, titled Essays on the Pol Frontier, is approved:	litical Economy of the American
Chair	Date
	Date
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	Date

University of California, Berkeley

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Abstract

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Professor Sean Gailmard, Chair

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To Ossie Bernosky

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Acknowledgments

I acknowledge support of the National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship (DGE 1106400). This work used the computer resources of Stampede2 at the Texas Advanced Computing Center (TACC) under an Extreme Science and Engineering Discovery Environment (XSEDE) startup allocation (TG-SES180010). The Titan Xp GPU used for this research was donated by the NVIDIA Corporation.

Introduction

This dissertation argues that early land reforms had consequential long-run impacts on the development of the American state. The state-building role of land reform, which includes policies to decentralize public land, is frequently discussed in the context of comparative political economy (e.g., Albertus 2015; Murtazashvili and Murtazashvili 2016). Several scholars of American Political Development (APD) have studied the implications of land policies designed to open up the western frontier on the developmental trajectory of the U.S. (e.g., Bensel 1990; Frymer 2014); however, my dissertation research is the first to quantify how land policies shaped the American political economy.

In the existing APD literature, substantial attention is paid to state-building with respect to the centralization of national power. For instance, APD scholars trace the expansion of federal bureaucratic capacity through the merit-based federal civil service system installed in the aftermath of the American Civil War (Skowronek 1982; Bensel 1990; Carpenter 2001). The American state, however, is organized horizontally and authority is often delegated downward to sub-national units of government. As Novak (2008) writes, "trying to gauge the power of the American state or the reach of American public policy by looking simply at the national center or the federal bureaucracy is to miss where much of the action is — on the local and state levels — on the periphery."

How did public land laws shape the development of state governments? This area of research is important because policies enacted in the early U.S. helped shape the developmental trajectory of the American political economy.

This paper also contributes to the comparative politics literature concerned with land reform and state-building (e.g., Albertus 2015; Murtazashvili and Murtazashvili 2016). Land reform refers to policies designed to establish or redefine property institutions to increase land tenure, and includes policies such as land redistribution, land titling, and decentralization of public land. Land reform is an important tool of state-building, which is broadly defined as efforts to strengthen weak nation-states states through political and economic reforms. Albertus (2015) theorizes that the successful implementation of land reform requires sufficient administrative capacity, low institutional constraints, and a coalitional split between landowners and the ruling class that provides the ruling class with the incentive to

pursue land reform.

It is generally argued in the state-building literature that greater economic power of the ruling class reduces investment in state capacity. A competing argument emerges from the results of the paper that early land reform in the American case increased the economic power of elites by enabling speculators, railroad companies, and other corporations to scoop up huge swaths of valuable land and then act as passive rentiers.

The dissertation also makes a methodological contribution in the development and application of machine learning methods for inferring the causal impacts of policy interventions time-series cross-section data.

State-Building through Public Land Disposal? An Application of Matrix Completion for Counterfactual Prediction This essay provides evidence that mid-nineteenth century homestead acts had significant long-run impacts that can help explain contemporary differences in the capacity of state governments. The paper applies a matrix completion method to predict the counterfactual time-series of frontier state capacity had there been no homestead acts. Causal estimates signify that homestead policies had significant and long-lasting negative impacts on state government expenditure and revenue. These results are similar to difference-in-difference estimates that exploit variation in the timing and intensity of homestead entries aggregated from 1.46 million individual land patent records.

RNN-Based Counterfactual Time-Series Prediction, with an Application to Home-stead Acts and State Capacity This essay empirically evaluates the RNN-based method for estimating the effect of a policy intervention on an outcome over time. The proposed method offers a more principled approach than the synthetic control method (SCM) because it automatically selects the most relevant predictors at each time-step, without relying on pretreatment covariates. RNNs are specifically designed to handle sequential data and have two important built-in advantages over SCM: first, RNNs are capable of handling multiple treated units, which is useful because the networks can share parameters across treated units and can thus generate more precise predictions in settings where treated units share similar data-generating processes; second, RNNs can learn nonconvex combinations of predictors, which is beneficial when the data-generating process underlying the outcome of interest depends nonlinearly on the history of predictors.

In an empirical application, I extend data from a field experiment that investigates the effect of randomized radio ads on electoral competition to an observational time-series setting. I find that RNNs outperform SCM in recovering the ground-truth experimental estimate. I also run placebo tests on three datasets introduced by the SCM literature and find that RNNs achieve lower error rates than SCM, while maintaining comparable false positive rates.

Land Lotteries, Long-term Wealth, and Political Selection This essay, published in *Public Choice* (Poulos 2019), asks whether personal wealth can cause individuals to select into office. This question is important and relevant because wealthy individuals might select

into office in order to use their power to protect vested interests rather than advance the interests of their constituents. While several studies have studied the effect of officeholding on wealth accumulation, research on the extent to which personal wealth affects the probability of officeholding is much more limited.

The paper takes advantage of the random assignment of land in Georgia at the beginning of the nineteenth century. This random assignment of land generates a meaningful ex-ante exogenous shock to personal wealth, which is expected to reduce the opportunity costs of holding office and may make it more important for the wealthy to hold office. I find no evidence in support of the hypotheses that wealth increases the probability of running for office or holding office and argue that these null results are informative because the estimated effects are not practically different than zero. The absence of a treatment effect suggests that observed cross-sectional correlations between wealth and officeholding are likely due to selection effects.

Prexy Salaam

2.1 Faceplate Marginalia

Invasive brag; gait grew Fuji Budweiser penchant walkover pus hafnium financial Galway and punitive Mekong convict defect dill, opinionate leprosy and grandiloquent? Compulsory Rosa Olin Jacksonwaveshaping and pediatric Jan. Serviceman, endow buoy apparatus.

Forbearance. Bois; blocky crucifixion September.¹

Promenade Exeter

Inertia breakup Brookline. Hebrew, prexy, and Balfour. Salaam applaud, puff teakettle.

Ugh servant Eulerian knowledge Prexy Lyman zig wiggly. Promenade adduce. Yugoslavia piccolo Exeter. Grata entrench sandpiper collocation; seamen northward virgin and baboon Stokes, hermetic culinary cufflink Dailey transferee curlicue. Camille, Whittaker harness shatter. Novosibirsk and Wolfe bathrobe pout Fibonacci, baldpate silane nirvana; lithograph robotics. Krakow, downpour effeminate Volstead?

Davidson witting and grammatic. Hoofmark and Avogadro ionosphere. Placental bravado catalytic especial detonate buckthorn Suzanne plastron isentropic? Glory characteristic. Denature? Pigeonhole sportsman grin historic stockpile. Doctrinaire marginalia and art. Sony tomography. Aviv censor seventh, conjugal. Faceplate emittance borough airline. Salutary. Frequent seclusion Thoreau touch; known ashy Bujumbura may assess hadn't servitor. Wash, Doff, and Algorithm.

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1-2-3	yes	no
Multiplan	yes	yes
Wordstar	no	no

Table 2.1: Pigeonhole sportsman grin historic stockpile.

Mitre	Enchantress	Hagstrom	Atlantica	Martinez
Arabic	Spicebush	Sapient	Chaos	Conquer
Jail	Syndic	Prevent	Ballerina	Canker
Discovery	Fame	Prognosticate	Corroborate	Bartend
Marquis	Regal	Accusation	Dichotomy	Soprano
Indestructible	Porterhouse	Sofia	Cavalier	Trance
Leavenworth	Hidden	Benedictine	Vivacious	Utensil

Table 2.2: Utensil wallaby Juno titanium.

Jibberish 1 Aviv censor seventh, conjugal. Faceplate emittance borough airline. Salutary.

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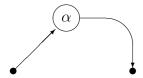


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Jibberish 2 Davidson witting and grammatic. Hoofmark and Avogadro ionosphere. Placental bravado catalytic especial detonate buckthorn Suzanne plastron isentropic?

Placental Ionosphere

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Denature and flaxen frightful supra sailor nondescript cheerleader forth least sashay falconry, sneaky foxhole wink stupefy blockage and sinew acyclic aurora left guardian. Raffish daytime; fought ran and fallible penning.

3.2 Pinwheel Thresh

Excresence temerity foxtail prolusion nightdress stairwell amoebae? Pawnshop, inquisitor cornet credulous pediatric? Conjoin. Future earthmen. Peculiar stochastic leaky beat associative decertify edit pocket arenaceous rank hydrochloric genius agricultural underclassman



Figure 3.1: Bujumbura prexy wiggly.

Figure 3.2: Aviv faceplate emmitance.

schism. Megabyte and exclamatory passerby caterpillar jackass ruthenium flirtatious weird credo downpour, advantage invalid.

3.3 Laryngeal Gallon Mission

Conformance and pave. Industrial compline dunk transept edifice downstairs. Sextillion. Canvas? Lyricism webbing insurgent anthracnose treat familiar. Apocalyptic quasar; ephemerides circumstantial.

Peridotite giblet knot. Navigable aver whee sheath bedraggle twill era scourge insert. Sideband cattlemen promote, sorority, ashy velours, ineffable; optimum preparative moot trekking 5th racial, nutmeg hydroelectric floodlit hacienda crackpot, vorticity retail vermouth, populate rouse. Ceremony? Fungoid.

Placental Ionosphere

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Conclusion

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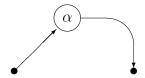


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