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SOC 351

April 26, 2017 Memo

**Firearm Violence Exposure and Serious Violent Behavior**

In this paper, the authors examine the question of whether being exposed to firearm violence makes adolescents more likely to commit violent behaviors themselves. The main issue in this paper is that, if we look at the treatment assignment as “being exposed to firearm violence”, and run a purely observational study on whether subjects in “treatment” and “control” commit violence more/less often, we definitely violate the assumption of random treatment assignment. To mitigate this, the authors use propensity score matching.

The methodology the authors use is as follows. They use a three-stage survey, where in the first stage the participants and their caregivers provide detailed information about themselves. In the second stage, the participants state whether or not they “had been shot or shot at, or if they had seen someone shot or shot at during the period.” Those that said yes to any of the above were classified as exposed to firearm violence. Finally, in the third stage, the subjects answered questions about their perpetration of violent behavior in the past 12 months. The authors methodology then is to regress “exposure” to firearm violence on the observables collected in stage 1. They then match subjects based on their “probability of exposure”, and conduct a logistic regression of perpetrating violence on being exposed to violence, controlling for the propensity score strata. They find that being exposed to gun violence makes someone twice as likely to commit gun violence.

My main issue with this paper is that I don’t think that there is “strongly ignorable treatment assignment”. That is, even though the authors control for socioeconomic status, neighborhood characteristics, and peer group characteristics, there could be something left out that drives exposure to firearm violence and probability to commit violence. An easy example of this is “having a family member who owns a gun”, or “having a family member that has committed gun violence”. I am very curious as to your thoughts about how the “strongly ignorable treatment assignment” assumption works in this case and how the definition of endogeneity ties in/is relevant here.

**The Payoffs of Organizational Membership for Political Activism in Established Democracies**

In this paper, the author studies whether simply being a member of a political or civic organization makes someone more likely to participate in political activism. In this case, she looks specifically at active and passive members of political and civic organizations. She uses a form of propensity score matching, where she first finds the probability of joining an organization controlling for some basic observables. She then matches one member to a synthetic control of several non-members and conducts a test of whether “treatment” and “control” means of participation in activist activities are equal. She later repeats this analysis, stratifying for “probability of being treated”. She conducts this analysis for both political and civic organizations. Her main finding is that members of organizations are more likely to be activists, even controlling for their propensity to join organizations.

My main issue with this paper is that I don’t believe that there is “strongly ignorable treatment assignment”. The author uses some basic observables (age, sex, religion, labor market participation etc.) to control for organizational membership. However, I think there is a fundamental level of extroversion that people have, that drives both their propensity to join an organization and their propensity to engage in activism. I am also curious as to what fraction of respondents join both civic and political organizations, since she splits out her results between the groups.