

PSC 202

SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY

INTRODUCTION TO POLITICAL ANALYSIS

**RESEARCH QUESTIONS IN POLITICAL
SCIENCE**

HOUSEKEEPING

- **First homework posted on Friday**
- **Due Friday the week after**
- **Another reading quiz due Monday**

RECAP

SYLLABUS

- For all kinds of details, read the syllabus
 - Read the parts “Main Things to Know” and “More Details on Important Things”
 - No really, read them carefully...

- First class

RECAP

HOUSEKEEPING

- Read the syllabus
 - Carefully!
- Sections start Friday
- No class next Monday

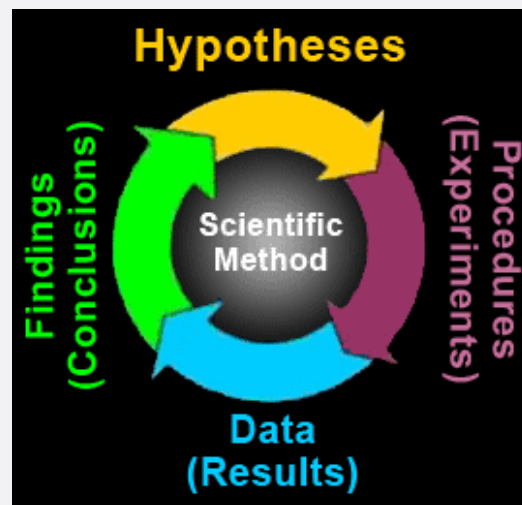
- Second class

RECAP

Finally, there will be miscellaneous small tasks throughout the semester for which you can get credit. For example, one is right here: To show that you read the syllabus, go to <http://bit.ly/37vESJ2> and enter your name, SUID, and tell me about your current favorite movie/TV show, book, album, or podcast. If you do, you'll receive credit towards your participation grade.

RECAP

- Formulate research question
- Propose explanation/theory, hypotheses
- Data collection process
- Use data to evaluate hypotheses
- Reassess explanation



CHARACTERISTICS

- Science is a *procedure* to conduct objective testing
 - Outcome of test should not depend on personal political preferences
 - Intersubjective testability
 - Science: Following procedure and report all steps
 - Someone else who follows the steps comes to same conclusion as I do

CHARACTERISTICS

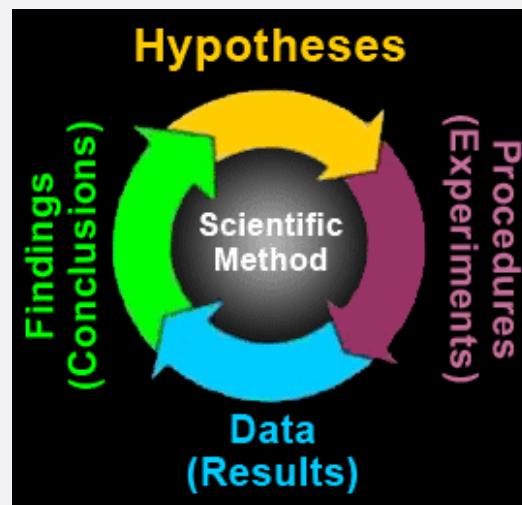
- **(Political) Scientists are the opposite of lawyers**
 - **Lawyer: Use evidence (selectively) to argue case**
 - **(Political) scientist: What is the hardest and most rigorous way to test one's hypothesis?**

TOPICS IN POLITICAL SCIENCE

- **American Politics**
- **Comparative Politics**
- **International Relations**
- **Political Methodology**
- **(Normative) Political Theory**

TODAY

- **Formulate research question**
- **Propose explanation/theory, hypotheses**
- **Data collection process**
- **Use data to evaluate hypotheses**
- **Reassess explanation**



TODAY

- **Developing a research question**
- **Current research questions in political science**

OVERVIEW

- Developing a research question
- **Current research questions in political science**

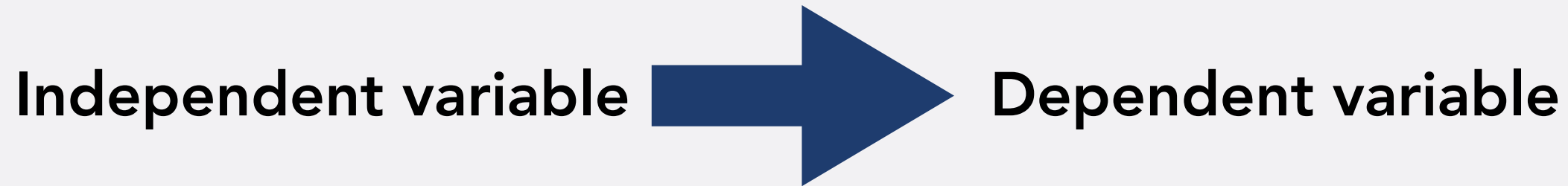
GOOD RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- Prerequisite for anything else in research process
- A good research project needs a good research question

WHAT ARE WE TRYING TO DO?

- Goal: Provide causal explanations for social/political phenomena
- What we are trying to explain: *dependent variable*
- What we are explaining it with: *independent variable*

WHAT ARE WE TRYING TO DO?



- Ultimate goal of research project:
 - _____ causes _____
 - Higher _____ causes higher _____
 - Higher _____ causes lower _____

CURRENT RESEARCH QUESTIONS



- **Some recent research questions from a top political science journal**

CURRENT RESEARCH QUESTIONS

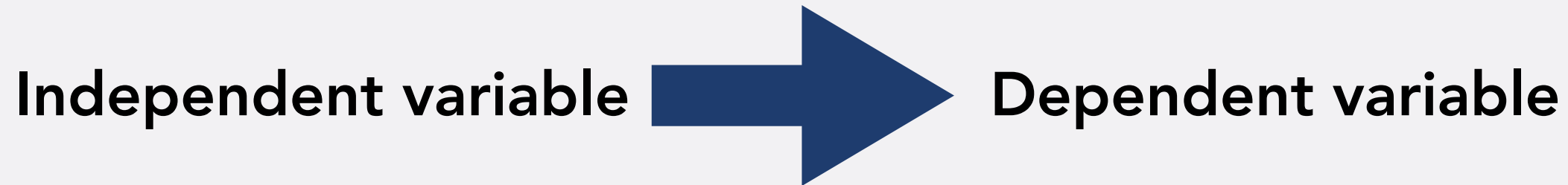
Who Punishes Extremist Nominees? Candidate Ideology and Turning Out the Base in US Elections

ANDREW B. HALL ^(a1) and DANIEL M. THOMPSON ^(a1) 

<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055418000023> Published online: 07 March 2018

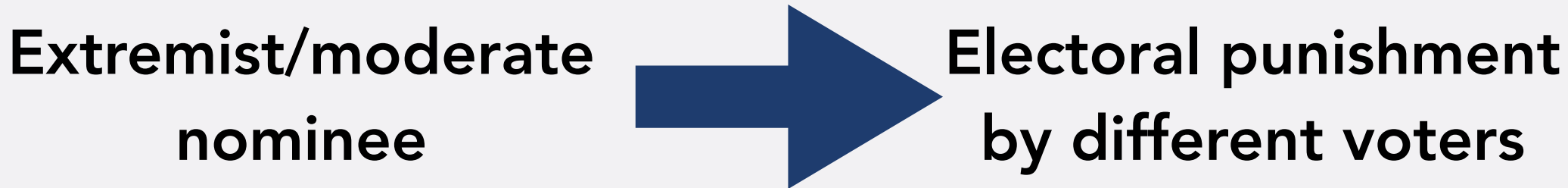
Political observers, campaign experts, and academics alike argue bitterly over whether it is more important for a party to capture ideologically moderate swing voters or to encourage turnout among hardcore partisans. The behavioral literature in American politics suggests that voters are not informed enough, and are too partisan, to be swing voters, while the institutional literature suggests that moderate candidates tend to perform better. We speak to this debate by examining the link between the ideology of congressional candidates and the turnout of their parties' bases in US House races, 2006–2014. Combining a regression discontinuity design in close primary races with survey and administrative data on individual voter turnout, we find that extremist nominees—as measured by the mix of campaign contributions they receive—suffer electorally, largely because they *decrease* their party's share of turnout in the general election, skewing the electorate towards their opponent's party. The results help show how the behavioral and institutional literatures can be connected. For our sample of elections, turnout appears to be the dominant force in determining election outcomes, but it advantages ideologically moderate candidates because extremists appear to activate the opposing party's base more than their own.

CURRENT RESEARCH QUESTIONS



- Research question: Who punishes extremist nominees in general elections?

CURRENT RESEARCH QUESTIONS



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CURRENT RESEARCH QUESTIONS

How Sudden Censorship Can Increase Access to Information

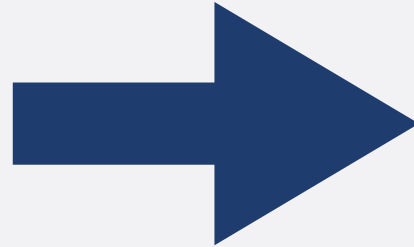
WILLIAM R. HOBBS ^(a1) and MARGARET E. ROBERTS ^(a2) 

<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055418000084> Published online: 02 April 2018

Conventional wisdom assumes that increased censorship will strictly decrease access to information. We delineate circumstances when increases in censorship expand access to information for a substantial subset of the population. When governments suddenly impose censorship on previously uncensored information, citizens accustomed to acquiring this information will be incentivized to learn methods of censorship evasion. These evasion tools provide continued access to the newly blocked information—and also extend users' ability to access information that has long been censored. We illustrate this phenomenon using millions of individual-level actions of social media users in China before and after the block of Instagram. We show that the block inspired millions of Chinese users to acquire virtual private networks, and that these users subsequently joined censored websites like Twitter and Facebook. Despite initially being apolitical, these new users began browsing blocked political pages on Wikipedia, following Chinese political activists on Twitter, and discussing highly politicized topics such as opposition protests in Hong Kong.

CURRENT RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Censorship



**Access to
information**

- **Research question: What is the effect of censorship on access to information?**

EXERCISE

Can Social Contact Reduce Prejudice and Discrimination? Evidence from a Field Experiment in Nigeria

ALEXANDRA SCACCO ^(a1) and SHANA S. WARREN ^(a2) 

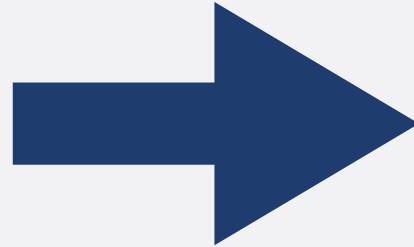
<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055418000151> Published online: 04 April 2018

Can positive social contact between members of antagonistic groups reduce prejudice and discrimination? Despite extensive research on social contact, observational studies are difficult to interpret because prejudiced people may select out of contact with out-group members. We overcome this problem by conducting an education-based, randomized field experiment—the Urban Youth Vocational Training program (UYVT)—with 849 randomly sampled Christian and Muslim young men in riot-prone Kaduna, Nigeria. After sixteen weeks of positive intergroup social contact, we find no changes in prejudice, but heterogeneous-class subjects discriminate significantly less against out-group members than subjects in homogeneous classes. We trace this finding to increased discrimination by homogeneous-class subjects compared to non-UYVT study participants, and we highlight potentially negative consequences of in-group social contact. By focusing on skill-building instead of peace messaging, our intervention minimizes reporting bias and offers strong experimental evidence that intergroup social contact can alter behavior in constructive ways, even amid violent conflict.

- **What is the research question? What are dependent and independent variable?**

EXERCISE

Social Contact



Discrimination

- **Research question: Can social contact reduce prejudice and discrimination?**

GOOD RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- **Good research questions:**
 - Who punishes extremist nominees in general elections?
 - What is the effect of censorship on access to information?
 - Can social contact reduce prejudice and discrimination?
- **But how to come up with a good research question?**
 - Trial and error
- **Some hallmarks of good research questions**

GOOD RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- *You should care about your research question*
- Inspiration can come from what you care about personally
 - But: A topic is not a question

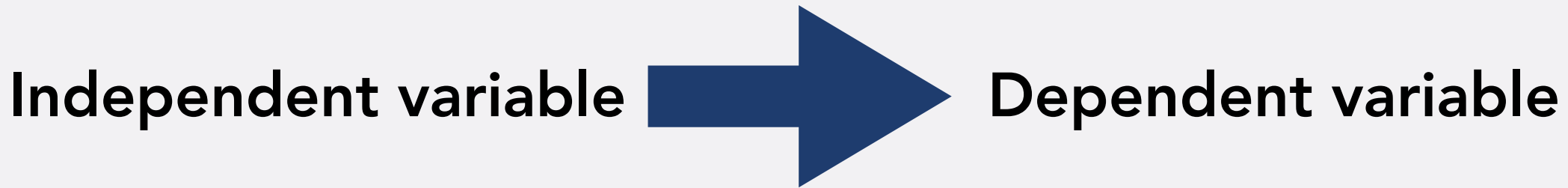
PERSONAL EXAMPLE



- Gerhard Schröder
- Former German chancellor
- September 2005: Signs agreement to build controversial gas pipeline between Russia and Germany
- November 2005: Resigns as chancellor
- 17 days later: Accepts position as board chairman of the consortium building the pipeline

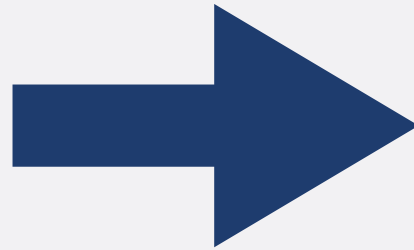
- Does the fact that politicians can get lucrative jobs in the private sector influence their decisions in office?

PERSONAL EXAMPLE



PERSONAL EXAMPLE

Private Sector Job



Decisions in Office

GOOD RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- *The question should not be normative*
- Instead, question should be answerable with data
 - Understand not what should be, but what is
 - Not: "Should politicians be able to take positions in the private sector?"

GOOD RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- *The question should answer an important question in the real world*
- Do people who are not political scientists care about your research question?
 - Does it contribute to a current debate?
 - Does it have policy implications?
 - "So what?"

PERSONAL EXAMPLE

The revolving door: why politicians become lobbyists, and lobbyists become politicians

September 21, 2016 4.28pm EDT

The point of pantouflage

Why do European companies bother to hire ex-politicians?

This month Gerhard Schröder starts a new job at Rosneft

Eric Cantor enters Wall Street's post-politics revolving door

A Revolving Door Helps Big Banks' Quiet Campaign to Muscle Out Fannie and Freddie

GOOD RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- *The question should answer an important question in the scientific literature*
- Do political scientists care about your research question?
 - Has it been answered before?
 - Does it contribute to a current debate in political science?

GOOD RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- *The question should not be too broad*
 - If too broad, hard to answer: "What effect does the revolving door have?"
 - Should be specific enough to give direction to research project: "What effect does revolving door employment have on the parliamentary votes of politicians?"

GOOD RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- *The question should not be too narrow*
 - "What effect did the revolving door job with Gazprom have on Gerhard Schröder's decision to sign an agreement to build a gas pipeline between Russia and Germany?"
 - Better: "What effect does revolving door employment have on the parliamentary votes of politicians in Germany?"

GOOD RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- Finding a good research question is a *process* with lots of trial and error
 - Question will be too broad
 - Question will be already answered in the scientific literature
 - Question will not be of interest to many
 - You find that the you cannot answer your question without answering a different question first
 - etc.

GOOD RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- You should care about your research question
- The question should not be normative
- The question should answer an important question in the real world and the scientific literature
- The question should not be too broad or too narrow