Data + Perspective + Creativity

Government 1360
Fall 2018
https://canvas.harvard.edu/courses/44030

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Lecture Location: CGIS Knafel 354
Lectures: Tuesday and Thursday, 9 – 10:15
Section: To be arranged on Thursday afternoons or Fridays

Our Offices: CGIS, K410 (Ansolabehere), K420 (Penn), and K411 (Kuriwaki)

This course introduces you to the elements of public opinion research from two different perspectives – an academic and a political consultant   Both are trying to build models of individuals and of the public as a collective. They ultimately use research differently, but they are engaged in the same quest. We will teach you how to design and analyze surveys to build models of public opinion. We will also teach you how to translate survey data into advice to leaders and how to put that advice forward in a cogent, convincing memo.

The first half of this course provides a quick introduction to the nuts and bolts of surveys – how data are used to give advice, how to design a survey, how to ask a good question, how to think about the public and about behavior.

Throughout the first half of the course you will work on designing a survey, which will be fielded in week 7 of the course to a national sample of US adults.   The survey will be designed with the goal of collecting data that will be used to advise political leaders after the election about the legislative agenda.

The second half of the course provides in depth case studies of the use of polling data to guide decision-making of elected officials and candidates. We will take you into the weekly strategy meetings with the president, policy experts and pollsters.   Specifically, we will examine how modern presidents integrated polling and policy cases of war and peace, budget making/government shutdowns, crises and scandals, and presidential re-election campaigns. We will examine the four most recent Presidents (Clinton, Bush, Obama, and Trump) and the Congresses they faced. There will be particular emphasis on the events surrounding William Clinton's presidency from 1995-1999. The goal of this part of the course is to teach you how data are actually used to advise leaders.   This is a rare glimpse at how it's really done.

At the end of the course you will submit a political strategy memo for a president or other political leader. Our goal in the second half of the course is to teach you how to write a memo that will provide clear and data-supported advise to a candidate. What path do you advise the leader to follow in order to pass legislation he or she wants? How do the survey data support your proposal? What policy and media strategies should the leader pursue?

How will weekly sessions work? We have 2 sessions each week, Tuesday and Thursday. The Tuesday sessions will involve lectures about public opinion and the politics of policy making. The Thursday sessions will be workshops in which you will learn how to design and analyze surveys.   Sections will offer guidance working on weekly assignments, which involve programming in the R programming language. Attendance in all three is required. If you are going to be absent please email the Teaching Fellow in advance.

We expect from you active engagement in the course. That includes participation in the class, completing several smaller assignments throughout the semester, and writing an in-depth memo at the end of the semester.   The smaller assignments will consist of data analyses, questionnaire design, and memo writing.   The smaller assignments are steps in designing and analyzing survey data and will contribute to the development of your final memo.

Assessment

You will be graded on participation in class and section, weekly activities, your survey design, your presentation, and your final memo (paper). There are no examinations. Evaluation will be holistic but roughly follow the following breakdown.

Lecture and Section Attendance: 18%
Survey Questionnaire Submissions: 18%
Data Analysis Submissions: 18%
In-Class Presentation: 10%
Final Memo: 36%

Some data analyses require the use of the programming language R (or Stata, if there is a substantial demand). Python and other languages is permitted but not supported by the Teaching Fellow. Completely relying on Microsoft Excel and similar spreadsheet software is not permitted. The course does not assume familiarity in programming, but those completely new should be prepared to invest their time in learning through section.

Each Thursday workshop is usually followed by an Assignment due electronically the following Tuesday. Each assignment is designed to be simple and cumulative. We will not offer extensions for these short assignments.

Academic Integrity

Students are encouraged to study together but must turn in their own work. Each submission must reflect each student's own understanding of material. This means that while students are permitted to discuss homework assignments, they must still work through all of the assignment themselves. Students are not permitted to copy code or descriptions either from each other. Students are also not permitted to split up assignments among a group in order to complete them faster.

Any violations of this policy will be referred to the Harvard College Honor Council. If anything is unclear, students should ask an instructor first.

Readings

Bradburn, Norman A., *Asking Questions: The Definitive Guide to Questionnaire Design* (2004: John Wiley & Sons)

Herbert F. Weisberg, Jon A. Krosnick, Bruce D. Bowen, *An Introduction to Survey Research, Polling, and Data Analysis* (1996: Sage Publications), 3rd edition.

V.O.Key Jr., *The Responsible Electorate: Rationality in Presidential Voting*, 1936-1960

Mark Penn, *Microtrends Squared: The Small Forces Behind the Big Disruptions Today* (2018:Simon and Schuster)

Douglas E. Schoen, *Power of the Vote: Electing Presidents, Overthrowing Dictators, and Promoting Democracy Around the World* (2008: Harper)

Evan Thomas, Andrew Murr, Leslie Kaufmann, Debra Rosenberg and Karen Breslau, *Back From the Dead: How Clinton Survived the Republican Revolution* (1997: Newsweek)

John Zaller, The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion, Chapters, 1-3.