

Political Analysis and Statistical Applications for Social Policy Research

Ryan T. Moore*

My dissertation focuses on the interaction between democratic institutions and policy outputs. More specifically, I study the creation of American social policy through direct democracy and the evaluation of policy outcomes through randomized field experiments. I am interested in who votes for elements of the American welfare state, how field experiments should be implemented to minimize the impact of political interests, and how different groups fare under direct democracy. My dissertation essays develop statistical procedures to inform these inquiries into the politics of social policies, particularly the politics surrounding pension and health care policies. I also provide original public-use software for implementing these methods.

Intrastate Robin Hoods?: Voting for Pensions in the US States

Between 1914 and 1956, voters decided 39 state-level ballot propositions on old age pensions. These elections offer a unique opportunity to test models of individual electoral support for redistribution, none of which has been previously tested with electoral data. I examine state-, county-, and individual-level data using deterministic descriptive techniques, hierarchical Bayesian modeling, and survey estimation. I show evidence that inequality is associated with more aggregate support for pensions, and that poor voters are more likely to vote for redistributive pensions. I introduce original public-use software for analyzing ecological data.

Blocking to Improve Political Science Field Experiments

Political scientists rely on randomized treatment assignment to aid valid causal inference in field experiments, laboratories, and survey research. However, by blocking on known covariates before randomization, political research can do significantly better than completely randomized designs. Pre-treatment blocking can help ensure covariate balance between treatment and control groups, can improve the precision of causal inference, can define causal effect estimates for strata, and can enable *ex ante* procedures for robustness to noncompliance. Additionally, both experiments and observational work too infrequently attempt to detect possible interference between units. These tools stand to greatly improve causal estimates in laboratory and field settings. I provide original public-use software for implementing high-dimensional blocking, especially for settings in which analysts prefer to make the most-similar blocks as homogeneous as possible. I show a validated application to perhaps the largest health insurance experiment ever conducted.

Differential Disadvantage: Political Misfortunes of Minorities in Direct Democracy

Concerned about a democratic “tyranny of the majority”, scholars have made significant attempts to determine whether ballot proposition elections systematically disfavor racial minorities. I challenge recent scholarship and argue that racial and ethnic minorities are less likely than whites to be on the winning side of direct democracy elections. I demonstrate that under unrestrictive assumptions about the treatment of missing data, Asians, blacks, and Latinos are all 2 to 3 percentage points less likely to be on the winning side than are whites, and that this finding is not confined to minority-targeted propositions. Differences persist even excluding racially targeted propositions; minorities are more likely than whites to lose on a broad range of issues, including some categories of social policy.

*Ph.D. Candidate, Department of Government, Harvard University. Institute for Quantitative Social Science, 1737 Cambridge Street, Room N320, Cambridge MA 02138; <http://www.people.fas.harvard.edu/~rtmoore/>, 617.830.1890, [rtmoore \(at\) fas.harvard.edu](mailto:rtmoore@fas.harvard.edu).