Experimental research in political and social sciences

Syllabus

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Course objectives

Randomized controlled trials (RCTs) are considered as the gold standard in the policy evaluation literature because they are a powerful tool to identify causal effect. The course supplies an introduction to the use of RCTs in the political and social sciences. The aim is to stress pros and cons of RCTs in order to develop doctoral candidates' understanding of RCTs as well as to recognize how they can help to answer a wide range of research questions and to solve relevant social issues. The course will provide students with the competences to conduct and to critically discuss RCT and experimental research in the political and social sciences.

Day 1: November 6, 10-13

The counterfactual approach and the language of the potential outcome

In this class we will talk about the logic of the counterfactual approach to causality introducing the language of the potential outcome and reviewing the basics of OLS regression.

Readings: Angrist and Pischke (2014), Ch. 2; Morgan and Winship (2015), Ch. 1-2.

Day 2: November 7, 10-13 (Aula Romei)

Experimental research in social sciences: randomized controlled trials and survey experiments

In this class we will discuss the logic of RCT together with its strengths and weaknesses. We then compare RCT with other approaches in experimental research such as survey experiments, vignettes studies and correspondence experiments.

Readings: Angrist and Pischke (2014), Ch. 1; Berk (2005); Mutz (2011)

Day 3: December 14, 14-17 (Aula Romei)

RCT in practice

This class is devoted to the presentation and discussion of a couple of empirical papers and how to implement it in Stata.

Readings: Gerber et al. (2009); Martini et al. (2021)

Day 4: December 15, 9-12 (Aula 7, Palazzo Hercolani)

Classroom presentation

PhD students will present and discuss the following experimental papers:

Gil-Hernandez et al. (2024); Baldassarri & Grossman (2013); Ballarino et al. (2022)

References:

Angrist, J. D., & Pischke, J. S. (2014). *Mastering' metrics: The path from cause to effect*. Princeton: Princeton University press.

Baldassarri, D., & Grossman, G. (2013). The effect of group attachment and social position on prosocial behavior. Evidence from lab-in-the-field experiments. *PloS one*, *8*(3), e58750.

Ballarino, G., Filippin, A., Abbiati, G., Argentin, G., Barone, C., & Schizzerotto, A. (2022). The effects of an information campaign beyond university enrolment: A large-scale field experiment on the choices of high school students. *Economics of Education Review*, *91*, 102308.

Berk, R. A. (2005). Randomized experiments as the bronze standard. *Journal of Experimental Criminology*, *1*, 417-433.

Gerber, A. S., Karlan, D., & Bergan, D. (2009). Does the media matter? A field experiment measuring the effect of newspapers on voting behavior and political opinions. *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics*, *1*(2), 35-52.

Gil-Hernández, C. J., Pañeda-Fernández, I., Salazar, L., & Munoz, J. C. (2024). Teacher Bias in Assessments by Student Ascribed Status: A Factorial Experiment on Discrimination in Education. *Sociological Science*, *11*, 743-776.

Martini, A., Azzolini, D., Romano, B., & Vergolini, L. (2021). Increasing college going by incentivizing savings: Evidence from a randomized controlled trial in Italy. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, *40*(3), 814-840.

Mutz, D. C. (2011). *Population-based survey experiments*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Morgan, S. L., & Winship, C. (2015). *Counterfactuals and causal inference*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.