

# POIR 614: Experimental Political Science

Prof. Miguel Maria Pereira

Spring 2021

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**Class Hours:** Friday 2:00pm-4:50pm  
**Office Hours:** by appointment

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## Course Description

This course provides an introduction to experimental research in political science for Ph.D. students in POIR. The course combines an introduction to experimental methods, and a survey of recent experimental scholarship across subfields. Throughout the semester, the students will acquire the skills to design original experiments and to critically evaluate existing research. This is a methods course and should be of interest to students across empirical subfields. Experimental methods can be useful to study American politics, comparative politics, and international relations.

The course will begin with a brief introduction to causal inference and the key statistical tools required to design and analyze experiments. Next, we will proceed with substantive readings that have relied on different experimental techniques. The readings will span across subfields. My goal is to show students the flexibility of experimental methods to explore a wide variety of questions in political science and international relations. This course should be of particular interest to students planning or already using experiments in their own research.

## Materials

- (FEDAI) Gerber, Alan S., and Donald P. Green. 2012. *Field experiments: Design, analysis, and interpretation*. WW Norton.

## Requirements and Gradings

### Problem Sets (20%)

**Theory** classes will be followed by problem sets (4 in total). **No credit will be given for late assignments without justification.** There are no exceptions. Problem sets will be graded on a 0-100 scale. You are encouraged to discuss problem sets with each other. However, all code and words must be your own, and I encourage you to attempt all problem sets independently before working collaboratively. You must use R to complete these problem sets.

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## Class participation and response papers (20%)

All students are expected to have done the required readings and contribute to the class discussion. While reading, pay special attention to the details, strengths and weaknesses of the experimental designs, but also to the relationship between the empirical strategy and the theory. To facilitate discussion in the **Applications** weeks, each student is expected to write a short response paper on the assigned readings. You do not need to write a response paper when you are a discussant that week (or on **Theory** weeks). The response paper should be about 2 pages long and address the following questions (as applicable):

- Are the theoretical arguments in the text believable?
- Is the empirical strategy consistent with the main argument?
- **What are the main strengths and limitations in the experimental design?**
- If you do not find the empirical findings fully convincing, what pieces of evidence would have convinced you?
- What do the readings suggest about promising directions for future research? Suggest interesting and feasible research questions.

The response memos should be submitted to the entire class no later than **Thursday (at noon)**.

## Class discussant (20%)

One or two students will be in charge of leading our discussion on the weeks with substantive readings (marked as **Applications**), and every seminar participant will have to perform as discussant 1-2 times in the semester. In addition to providing a short overview of the readings and leading the discussion on the required readings, the discussion leaders should make a very short presentation on an extra reading. This may be an article from the recommended list or a new article that the discussant has found on their own. The discussants should prepare a list of discussion questions and submit these no later than Thursday (at noon) to the entire class. The discussion questions should focus on similar issues as the response papers (see above). Examples of discussion topics:

- research question and motivation
- theory (is the argument clear and internally consistent?)
- research design (e.g., is the design appropriate for testing the argument?)
- experimental design (main strengths and weaknesses)
- inferential methods
- ethical considerations
- conceptualization and measurement
- new research ideas that the paper generated

This is the list of issues I would like to see covered in most discussions. But feel free to express any other ideas, questions, or comments that you may have!

## Research paper/proposal (40%)

Students will attempt to write a publishable-quality paper or a research proposal with an experiment. Mixed-methods are encouraged (combining experiments with observational or qualitative data, for instance). The goal is to produce drafts that can be turned into a paper over the next year. A research proposal will look like an empirical journal article, only without the actual analysis. It will include a statement of a research question or puzzle, a review of related literature, theoretical arguments, testable hypotheses drawn from these theories, and a detailed pre-analysis plan. Including some initial analyses is strongly encouraged even in a proposal. Co-authored projects with up to two students are also accepted. Chapter 13 in FEDAI can be helpful.

You will be working on your research paper/proposal throughout the semester. Below, I have listed the class sessions in which each different parts of the class project are due. You are expected to hand in written work on your project, and every student is also expected to hand in written comments on other students' work as described below.

### February 5: Choosing a project

For this session, each student needs to present a description of *two* research ideas for experiments in their own subfield of interest. Please circulate a *one page summary of each idea* to the entire class by **noon on Thursday (February 4)**. The summary should include answers to the following questions: What is the research question/puzzle? Why do you

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think this is an important puzzle? What are your predictions? Broadly, what is the research design? What resources would you need to complete the project (focus on feasible projects)? (Note: **at least one of the topic ideas should include a theoretical contribution, not simply an experimental test of an established argument**)

Before coming to class, every student needs to go through each of the submitted research ideas and prepare a set of comments for each. Specifically, pay attention to the following issues:

1. Is this an interesting question? If not, is there a way to refocus the question to make it more interesting?
2. Does the research question have a broad appeal? Can it be refocused to broaden its appeal?
3. Does the research design appropriately tests the theoretical predictions? Can this relationship be strengthened?
4. Challenges/strengths of the experimental design?
5. Is the proposed project doable this semester or within a year?

The goal for this meeting is for each student to narrow down their project ideas into one that they will pursue.

### **February 26: Literature review**

On February 26 each student needs to submit to me a literature review for her/his chosen project. This review should include:

1. A one-page summary of your research idea (revised based on comments from February 5)
2. A literature review which includes the following: What has been written on this topic before? What potential explanations have been provided? Why are these explanations insufficient? How is your project improving upon the status quo?
3. Your literature review should give us enough information about the topic to discuss and decide whether pursuing the project is worthwhile.

### **April 9: Early drafts: motivation, theory, and research design**

For this session, each student needs to prepare an early draft of their paper and circulate it to the entire class by **noon on Thursday, April 8**. Chapter 13 of FEDAI provides specific suggestions on how to prepare a draft for an experimental paper. This draft should include:

1. Introduction and motivation (most important part of a paper)
2. Concise literature review which includes the following: what has been written on this question? What potential explanations have been provided? Why are these explanations inadequate? How is your explanation an improvement?
3. Theory: What is the theory? Carefully articulate the causal mechanism implied in your argument. Is there a plausible alternative argument?
4. Research design: While this section has to include an experiment it may not be limited to it. Important questions to address: What is the identification strategy (if there is one)? What is your estimand of interest? How are you measuring the predictors and the outcomes? How does the design address issues of internal and external validity? Include paragraph on ethical considerations.

Before coming to class, each student needs to go through each of the submitted drafts. **You will be assigned to prepare written comments (at least one page) for three drafts.**

### **May 7: Final draft due**

Each student submits her/his paper to me electronically by 5PM on May 7, 2021. Late submissions without justification will not be accepted.

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## Course Schedule

### Week 1 (Jan 15) - Introduction: Why Experiments?

Required Readings:

- FEDAI Chapter 1
- Gerber, Alan S., Donald P. Green, and Edward H. Kaplan. 2014. "The illusion of learning from observational research." in Teele, Dawn L. (Ed.) *Field Experiments and Their Critics: Essays on the uses and abuses of experimental research in social science*.
- Stokes, Susan. 2014. "A Defense of Observational Research." in Teele, Dawn L. (Ed.) *Field Experiments and Their Critics: Essays on the uses and abuses of experimental research in social science*.

Recommended:

- Druckman, James N., et al. 2006. "The growth and development of experimental research in political science." *American Political Science Review*: 627-635.
- Angrist, Joshua D., and Jörn-Steffen Pischke. 2008. *Mostly Harmless Econometrics*. Chapter 1.
- Green, Donald P., and Alan S. Gerber. 2003. "The underprovision of experiments in political science." *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 589(1): 94-112.
- Levine, Adam Seth. 2020. "Why Do Practitioners Want to Connect with Researchers? Evidence from a Field Experiment." *PS: Political Science & Politics* 53.4: 712-717.

### Week 2 (Jan 22) - Theory: Experiments and Models of Potential Outcomes

Required Readings:

- FEDAI Chapter 2
- Kalla, Joshua L., and David E. Broockman. 2016. "Campaign contributions facilitate access to congressional officials: A randomized field experiment." *American Journal of Political Science* 60.3: 545-558.
- Brutger, Ryan, Joshua D. Kertzer, Jonathan Renshon, Dustin Tingley, and Chagai M. Weiss. 2020. "Abstraction and Detail in Experimental Design." Working Paper.

Recommended:

- Angrist, Joshua D., and Jörn-Steffen Pischke. 2008. *Mostly Harmless Econometrics*. Chapter 2.
- Hernán, Miguel A., and James M. Robins. 2018. *Causal Inference: What If*. Boca Raton: Chapman & Hall/CRC. Chapter 2.1-2.3. ([Available online here](#))

### Week 3 (Jan 29) - Theory: Sampling Distributions and Randomization Inference

Required Readings:

- FEDAI Chapter 3
- Butler, Daniel M., and David W. Nickerson. 2011. "Can learning constituency opinion affect how legislators vote? Results from a field experiment." *Quarterly Journal of Political Science* 6.1: 55-83.
- (Focus on the design, mostly in the Appendix) King, Gary, Benjamin Schneer, and Ariel White. 2017. "How the news media activate public expression and influence national agendas." *Science* 358(6364): 776-780.

Recommended:

- Bruhn, Miriam, and David McKenzie. 2009. "In pursuit of balance: Randomization in practice in development field experiments." *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics* 1(4): 200-232.

### Week 4 (Feb 5) - Choosing a project

This week's assignment is described on pages 2-3.

Recommended for inspiration in choosing projects:

- FEDAI Appendix B
- King, Gary. 2006. "Publication, Publication." *PS: Political Science and Politics* 39: 119-125.
- Geddes, Barbara. 2003. *Paradigms and Sand Castles*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press. Chapter 2.

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## Week 5 (Feb 12) - **Theory:** Covariates and heterogeneous treatment effects

Required Readings:

- FEDAI Chapters 4 and 9
- (Skim) Montgomery, Jacob M., Brendan Nyhan, and Michelle Torres. 2018. "How conditioning on posttreatment variables can ruin your experiment and what to do about it." *American Journal of Political Science* 62.3: 760-775.
- (Skim) Coppock, Alexander, Thomas J. Leeper, and Kevin J. Mullinix. 2018. "Generalizability of Heterogeneous Treatment Effect Estimates Across Samples." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*.

## Week 6 (Feb 19) - **Applications:** Framing experiments

Required Readings:

- (Skim) Amsalem, Eran, and Alon Zoizner. 2020 "Real, but Limited: A Meta-Analytic Assessment of Framing Effects in the Political Domain." *British Journal of Political Science*.
- Costa, Mia. 2020. "Ideology, Not Affect: What Americans Want From Political Representation." *American Journal of Political Science*.
- Rathbun, Brian C., Joshua D. Kertzer, and Mark Paradis. 2017. "Homo Diplomaticus: Mixed-Method Evidence of Variation in Strategic Rationality." *International Organization* 71.
- Connor Huff, and Robert Schub. 2018. "The Intertemporal Tradeoff in Mobilizing Support for War." *International Studies Quarterly* 62.2: 396-409
- Druckman, James N., Erik Peterson, and Rune Slothuus. 2013. "How elite partisan polarization affects public opinion formation." *American Political Science Review*: 57-79.

Recommended:

- Chong, Dennis, and James N. Druckman. 2013. "Counterframing effects." *The Journal of Politics* 75.1.
- Kertzer, Joshua D., and Thomas Zeitzoff. 2017. "A bottom-up theory of public opinion about foreign policy." *American Journal of Political Science* 61.3: 543-558.
- Zvobgo, Kelebogile. 2019. "Human rights versus national interests: Shifting US public attitudes on the international criminal court." *International Studies Quarterly* 63.4: 1065-1078.
- Incerti, Trevor. 2010. "Corruption information and vote share: A meta-analysis and lessons for experimental design." *American Political Science Review*.
- Haas, Nicholas, and Prabin B. Khadka. 2020. "If They Endorse It, I Can't Trust It: How Outgroup Leader Endorsements Undercut Public Support for Civil War Peace Settlements." *American Journal of Political Science*.

## Week 7 (Feb 26) - **Theory:** Dealing with noncompliance

Literature review due today! (see p. 3)

Required Readings:

- FEDAI Chapters 5 and 6.
- Harden, Jeffrey J., Anand E. Sokhey, and Katherine L. Runge. 2019. "Accounting for Noncompliance in Survey Experiments." *Journal of Experimental Political Science* 6.3: 199-202.
- (Skim) Broockman, David E., Joshua L. Kalla, and Jasjeet S. Sekhon. 2017. "The design of field experiments with survey outcomes: A framework for selecting more efficient, robust, and ethical designs." *Political Analysis* 25.4: 435-464.

## Week 8 (Mar 5) - **Applications:** Experiments on political elites

Required Readings:

- (Review piece; skim) Grose, Christian R. "Experiments, Political Elites, and Political Institutions."
- Broockman, David E., and Daniel M. Butler. 2017. "The Causal Effects of Elite Position-Taking on Voter Attitudes: Field Experiments with Elite Communication." *American Journal of Political Science* 61.1: 208-221.
- Grose, Christian, Pamela Lopez, Sara Sadhwani, and Antoine Yoshinaka. Forthcoming. "Social Lobbying." *Journal of Politics*.

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- ⊙ Pereira, Miguel M. Forthcoming. "How do Public Officials Learn About Policy? A Field Experiment on Policy Diffusion." *British Journal of Political Science*.
  - ⊙ Zelizer, Adam. 2019. "Is position-taking contagious? evidence of cue-taking from two field experiments in a state legislature." *American Political Science Review* 113.2: 340-352.
  - ⊙ Karpowitz, Christopher F., J. Quin Monson, and Jessica Robinson Preece. 2017. "How to elect more women: Gender and candidate success in a field experiment." *American Journal of Political Science* 61.4: 927-943.

Recommended:

- ⊙ Gulzar, Saad, and Muhammad Yasir Khan. 2018. "Motivating Political Candidacy and Performance: Experimental Evidence from Pakistan." Working Paper.
- ⊙ Butler, Daniel M., and Adam M. Dynes. 2016. "How politicians discount the opinions of constituents with whom they disagree." *American Journal of Political Science* 60.4: 975-989.

*Examples of recent audit studies:*

- ⊙ Coppock, Alexander. 2019. "Avoiding post-treatment bias in audit experiments." *Journal of Experimental Political Science* 6.1: 1-4.
- ⊙ Jensen, Nathan M., Michael G. Findley, and Daniel L. Nielson. 2018. "Electoral Institutions and Electoral Cycles in Investment Incentives: A Field Experiment on Over 3,000 US Municipalities." *American Journal of Political Science*.
- ⊙ Gaikwad, Nikhar, and Gareth Nellis. 2020. "Do Politicians Discriminate Against Internal Migrants? Evidence from Nationwide Field Experiments in India." *American Journal of Political Science*.
- ⊙ Mendez, Matthew S., and Christian R. Grose. 2018. "Doubling down: Inequality in responsiveness and the policy preferences of elected officials." *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 43.3: 457-491.

## **Week 9 (Mar 12) - Wellness Day (No Class)**

## **Week 10 (Mar 19) - Theory: Attrition and Interference**

Required Readings:

- ⊙ FEDAI Chapters 7 and 8.
- ⊙ Sinclair, Betsy, Margaret McConnell, and Donald P. Green. 2012. "Detecting spillover effects: Design and analysis of multilevel experiments." *American Journal of Political Science* 56.4: 1055-1069.
- ⊙ Zhou, H., and Fishbach, A. 2016. "The pitfall of experimenting on the web: How unattended selective attrition leads to surprising (yet false) research conclusions." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 111(4): 493-504.

Recommended:

- ⊙ Ichino, Nahomi, and Matthias Schündeln. 2012. "Deterring or displacing electoral irregularities? Spillover effects of observers in a randomized field experiment in Ghana." *The Journal of Politics* 74.1: 292-307.
- ⊙ Chen, Jiehua, Macartan Humphreys, and Vijay Modi. 2010. "Technology diffusion and social networks: Evidence from a field experiment in Uganda." Unpublished Manuscript.

## **Week 11 (Mar 26) - Applications: Intergroup relations**

Required Readings:

- ⊙ Mousa, Salma. 2020. "Building social cohesion between Christians and Muslims through soccer in post-ISIS Iraq." *Science* 369.6505: 866-870.
- ⊙ Enos, Ryan D. 2014. "Causal effect of intergroup contact on exclusionary attitudes." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 111.10: 3699-3704.
- ⊙ Munger, Kevin. 2017. "Tweetment effects on the tweeted: Experimentally reducing racist harassment." *Political Behavior* 39.3: 629-649.
- ⊙ Chong, Dennis, Mingxing Liu, and Qi Zhang. 2016. "Collective Resistance under Authoritarianism: Elite-Mass Strategies in an Experimental Game." *Political Behavior* 38.4: 951-976.

Recommended:

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- ◉ Choi, Donghyun Danny, Mathias Poertner, and Nicholas Sambanis. 2019. "Parochialism, social norms, and discrimination against immigrants." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 116.33: 16274-16279.
  - ◉ Humphreys, Macartan, William A. Masters, and Martin E. Sandbu. 2006. "The role of leaders in democratic deliberations: results from a field experiment in São Tomé and Príncipe." *World Politics* 58(4): 583-622.
  - ◉ Siegel, Alexandra A., and Vivienne Badaan. 2020. "# No2Sectarianism: Experimental Approaches to Reducing Sectarian Hate Speech Online." *American Political Science Review* 114(3): 837-855.

## Week 12 (Apr 2) - Applications: Political communication and media effects

Required Readings:

- ◉ Carlson, Taylor N. 2019. "Through the grapevine: Informational consequences of interpersonal political communication." *American Political Science Review* 113.2: 325-339.
- ◉ Gerber, Alan S., Dean Karlan, and Daniel Bergan. 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.
- ◉ Conroy-Krutz, Jeffrey, and Devra C. Moehler. 2015. "Moderation from bias: A field experiment on partisan media in a new democracy." *The Journal of Politics* 77.2: 575-587.
- ◉ Arceneaux, Kevin, and Martin Johnson. 2015. "How does media choice affect hostile media perceptions? Evidence from participant preference experiments." *Journal of Experimental Political Science* 2.1: 12.

Recommended:

- ◉ Jerit, Jennifer, Jason Barabas, and Scott Clifford. 2013. "Comparing contemporaneous laboratory and field experiments on media effects." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 77.1: 256-282.
- ◉ Bisgaard, Martin. 2019. "How getting the facts right can fuel partisan-motivated reasoning." *American Journal of Political Science* 63.4: 824-839.
- ◉ Green, Donald P., Anna M. Wilke, and Jasper Cooper. 2020. "Countering violence against women by encouraging disclosure: A mass media experiment in rural Uganda." *Comparative Political Studies*.

## Week 13 (Apr 9) - Discussion of early drafts

This week's assignment is described on page 3.

## Week 14 (Apr 16) - Applications: Experiments on mass behavior

Required Readings:

- ◉ (Review piece; skim) John, Peter. 2016. "Field Experiments on Political Behaviour."
- ◉ Gerber, Alan S., Donald P. Green, and Christopher W. Larimer. 2008. "Social pressure and voter turnout: Evidence from a large-scale field experiment." *American Political Science Review*: 33-48.
- ◉ Foos, Florian, and Eline A. De Rooij. 2017. "All in the family: Partisan disagreement and electoral mobilization in intimate networks—A spillover experiment." *American Journal of Political Science* 61.2: 289-304.
- ◉ Brierley, Sarah, Eric Kramon, and George Kwaku Ofofu. 2020. "The moderating effect of debates on political attitudes." *American Journal of Political Science* 64.1: 19-37.
- ◉ Hinnoosaar, Marit, Toomas Hinnoosaar, Michael Kummer, and Olga Slivko. 2019. "Wikipedia Matters." Unpublished manuscript.

Recommended:

- ◉ Braconnier, Céline, Jean-Yves Dormagen, and Vincent Pons. 2016. "Voter registration costs and disenfranchisement: experimental evidence from France." *American Political Science Review* 111.3: 584-604.
- ◉ Dunning, Thad, et al. 2019. "Voter information campaigns and political accountability: Cumulative findings from a preregistered meta-analysis of coordinated trials." *Science Advances* 5.7.
- ◉ Gottlieb, Jessica. 2017. "Explaining variation in broker strategies: A lab-in-the-field experiment in Senegal." *Comparative Political Studies* 50.11: 1556-1592.
- ◉ Huber, Gregory A., Seth J. Hill, and Gabriel S. Lenz. 2012. "Sources of bias in retrospective decision making: Experimental evidence on voters' limitations in controlling incumbents." *American Political Science Review*: 720-741.

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## Week 15 (Apr 23) - Applications: Experiments on bureaucracies

### Required Readings:

- ⦿ Slough, Tara. 2019. "Bureaucrats Driving Inequality in Access: Experimental Evidence from Colombia". Unpublished manuscript.
- ⦿ Fang, Albert H., Andrew M. Guess, and Macartan Humphreys. 2019. "Can the government deter discrimination? Evidence from a randomized intervention in New York City." *The Journal of Politics* 81.1: 127-141.
- ⦿ Fried, Brian J., Paul Lagunes, and Atheendar Venkataramani. 2010. "Corruption and inequality at the crossroad: A multimethod study of bribery and discrimination in Latin America." *Latin American Research Review* 76-97.
- ⦿ Raffler, Pia. 2019. "Does Political Oversight of the Bureaucracy Increase Accountability? Field Experimental Evidence from an Electoral Autocracy." Working paper.
- ⦿ Linos, Elizabeth, Joanne Reinhard, and Simon Ruda. 2017. "Levelling the playing field in police recruitment: Evidence from a field experiment on test performance." *Public Administration* 95.4: 943-956.

### Recommended:

- ⦿ (Review piece) Hansen, Jesper Asring, and Lars Tummers. 2020. "A Systematic Review of Field Experiments in Public Administration." *Public Administration Review*.
- ⦿ Asunka, Joseph, Sarah Brierley, Miriam Golden, Eric Kramon, and George Ofosu. 2017. "Electoral fraud or violence: The effect of observers on party manipulation strategies." *British Journal of Political Science* 49.1: 129-151.
- ⦿ Chen, Jidong, Jennifer Pan, and Yiqing Xu. 2016. "Sources of authoritarian responsiveness: A field experiment in China." *American Journal of Political Science* 60.2: 383-400.
- ⦿ Toral, Guillermo. 2019. "Information, oversight, and compliance: A field experiment on horizontal accountability in Brazil." Working paper

## Week 16 (Apr 30) - Wellness Day (No Class)