Political Science 105 - Fall 2017
Class project requirements

Background

Each group is responsible for choosing a research question for which members assert a possible causal relationship between an explanatory variable and a dependent variable, and then collect observational data that demonstrates an association (or lack thereof). There are three stages to the project: (1) statement of research question and variables/hypothesis, along with collection of raw data (due uploaded to Blackboard by **October 25, 2017**), (2) a 15-minute, in-class presentation (falling between **November 15 and December 6, 2017**, and (3) brief reports and peer evaluations, due uploaded to Blackboard by **December 6, 2017**. I will accept assignments through the start of class (3:55 PM Eastern) for each due date. A description of each component follows below.

Brief statement of the research question and hypotheses/variables, and submission of raw data

On **October 25, 2016**, one member of each group (chosen among the members) will submit to Blackboard a brief summary (one paragraph, submitted as a Word file) that explains the research project, as well as a copy of the raw data in an excel spreadsheet (.xls, .xlsx, or .csv; note: .numbers files not accepted!).

The summary should first list:

- the research question. For example, "how does income inequality influence voter turnout?"

- the unit of observation. For the example above, the unit of analysis could be the country or the US state, depending on your interest. Choose a unit of observation based on the units for which your variables actually vary. In this example, if choosing the country as your unit of observation, you might want to specify only advanced democracies as a requirement for case selection (using perhaps the United Nations definition).

- the explanatory variable, in terms of the specific measure you include in your spreadsheet. Continuing with the above example, your EV could be the GINI coefficient as recorded by the World Development Indicators (for the country level), or from the US Census Bureau (for the US state-level), measured for, e.g., the year 2015. Be sure to cite your data (include the name of the source and a link to the webpage where you obtained data).

- the dependent variable, again in terms of the specific measure. For the above example, you could use reported voter turnout from the OECD (for the country-level), or from the US Census Bureau (for the US state-level). You want to be sure you DV data are not measured for a year before your EV is measured in most cases. Again, be sure to cite the source.

The spreadsheet should be properly formatted. There should be no information other than variable names in the first row (including ID variable(s), explanatory variable, and dependent variable), with observations in the subsequent rows. There should be at least 30 observations (chat with me if you want to use fewer).

Please title the statement something along the lines of "Group # statement.doc," Similarly, please title the data "Group # data.xls" or something similar.

Presentations

Between **November 15 and December 6** (with the presentation order randomly assigned), each group will present **in no more than 15 minutes** a brief discussion of their research question, a visualization of the association between their variables, and discuss the conceptual and empirical challenges that should caution us against a causal interpretation of the findings. In other words, explain the relationship between explanatory and dependent variables (or lack thereof), and consider reasons why we should be careful before assuming the association (or non-association) is "real." For example, discuss other factors that could influence both the explanatory and dependent variables (and thus lead to spurious correlation).

Specific material to cover

- Explain your research question
- Explain your unit of observation
- List your explanatory and dependent variables (and where you obtained the data)
- Report summary statistics for both variables (mean or median, or proportion in each category)
- Present visualization of association
- Discuss reasons we might be unsure of causation (why be careful interpreting apparent association?)

Important requirements

- At least the summary stats and data visualizations need slides (or some presentation format). I would recommend putting all information on slides
- Presentations must last no longer than 15 minutes. Practice!
- Presentations **in .pdf format** must be sent to me (via email) in advance of class.

Brief Report and Peer Evaluations

The substance of the presentation should be summarized in no more than one (1) double-spaced page. One member of the group (chosen among members) should submit the report to Blackboard by **December 6**.

Each student should submit a peer evaluation in which they briefly summarize their own contribution as well as that of each of the other group members. The statement also is due (uploaded to Blackboard) by **December 6**.

Project Grades

Projects will compose 1/3 of each student's final grade. Points breakdown is as follows:

- Summary and data: 35%
- Presentation: 30%
- Final report: 30%
- Attendance during presentations: 5%

Peer evaluations do not necessarily influence final grades. Students who are evaluated as doing a good-enough job will receive no grade adjustment. Those who are judged to have gone above and beyond (while remaining friendly and cooperative) could receive bonus points. Students who do not pull their weight would be downgraded–potentially to 0% if they have no substantive role in the project!