

Political Science 501, Baumgartner  
Short paper topics/discussion points  
Week 7: Experiments

Readings: Robinson, Quattrone and Tversky, Chin, Bond, and Geva, Iyengar, Iyengar again.

Choose one of these paper topics and come to class prepared to discuss each of the following questions:

1. Go through the logistics of what Robinson did and identify the points where if he could do it again he'd devote more resources. Did he avoid the "plasma donor" issue? Could he have achieved higher participation rates? Do you think that history or any other threats were plausible in his case? Was the treatment unambiguous? Is this a topic for which experimental methods are particularly useful, or would another approach be better?
2. Review the internal validity of the experiments that Quattrone and Tversky describe. Are these water-tight? Any potential flaws?
3. Review the external validity of Quattrone and Tversky. Compare the Chin, Bond, and Geva. Which one do you believe with more confidence, in terms of generalizing to the larger population of interest?
4. To read Iyengar's article you'd believe we are on the verge of a new golden era of experimental work in political science. Let's assume that is true for the moment. What are the most promising areas for experimental work? Describe a topic that could profitably be investigated with experimental approaches. What areas are likely to be the last ones explored with experiments, and why?
5. After playing Whack a Pol at least three times, and noting the variables they collect, what kinds of analysis can they do and what do you think of the approach?
6. What is the internet equivalent of a plasma donor? What precautions can an experimentalist take to avoid them? Is this a serious problem, or can it pretty easily be avoided?
7. Experiments often require a "cover story" that diverts the subjects from the true source of the study. There are two issues there. One is how to come up with a plausible cover story; the other is the ethics of misleading the subjects. Review the readings for this week by critiquing their uses of cover stories. Did the subjects probably know what behavior was being monitored, and therefore potentially change their behavior? If not, how was this achieved?