

Baumgartner, POLI 203

Spring 2016

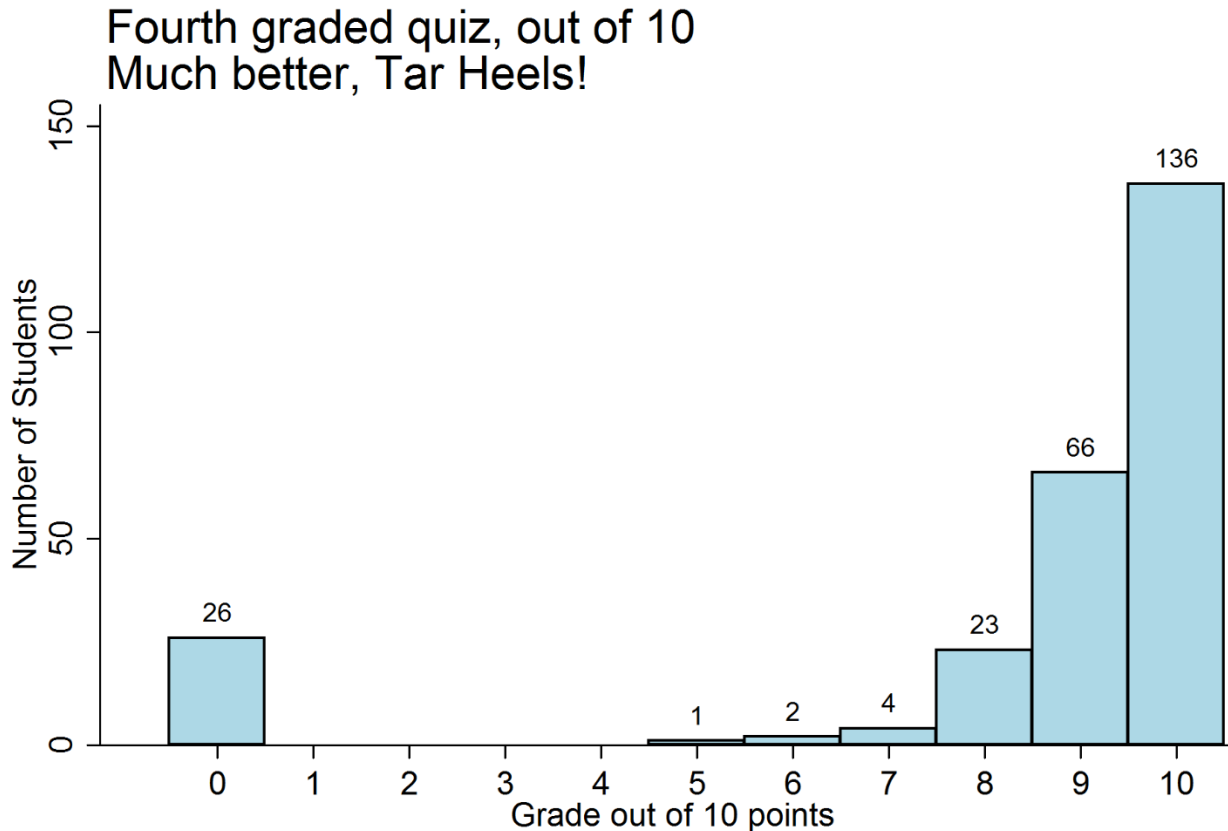
Reading: Peffley and Hurwitz

March 21, 2016

If you are interested, my classes next fall

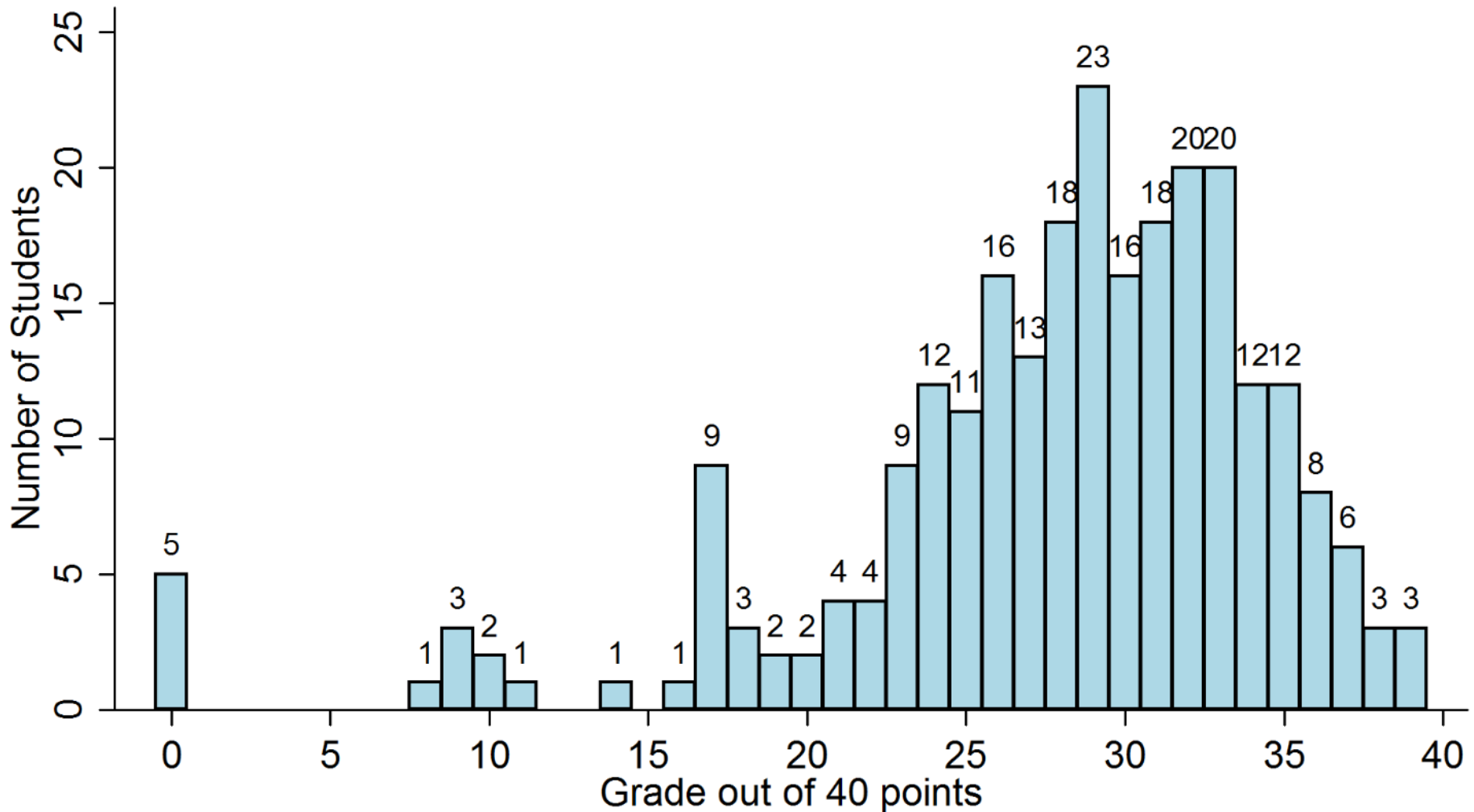
POLI 421-001 (12421)	<p>FRAMING PUBLIC POLICIES</p> <p>Will discuss super-predators, framing of mass incarceration, bi-partisan consensus in favor, then current decline from 1980s to present</p>	TuTh 3:30PM - 4:45PM	Murphey - 112
POLI 490-001 (6998)	<p>ADV UND SEMINAR (Traffic Stops)</p> <p>Data intensive class analyzing racial disparities in traffic stops in NC, selected other states. Focus on police. Note: Data-heavy.</p>	TuTh 5:00PM - 6:15PM	Murphey - 112

March 7 quiz results: getting better!



Mean grade: 9.40 ; Median grade, 9. N = 232 / 258.

Four quizzes accumulated, out of 40. Keep studying.
We need to move this distribution to the right.



Mean grade: 27.8; Median grade, 28. N = 258.

In Memoriam
Darryl Eugene Hunt, 1965-2016



Today's lecture will make you mad

- We are going to talk about the impact of race on public opinion relating to the death penalty.
- First, background on “motivated reasoning” or cognitive bias, as part of human nature.
- Second, evidence about this for the death penalty, that's the ugly part
- Wednesday, we will review trends in public opinion over time, which are not so upsetting.

Persuasion v. Resistance

- Fact: I went to Michigan and you can't make me root for Ohio State or even make me think it's a good university
 - Duke? Don't even think about it.
- Resistance: Your lack of openness to certain ideas, facts, new bits of information.
- Sometimes, exposure to challenging information actually causes you to wrack your brain to seek out counter-vailing information from memory, reinforcing your prior belief.
- Huh? New information can back-fire.

Accuracy v. Directional Goals

- Sometimes, we have strong emotional or cognitive goals, and we want to support those goals: family loyalty, partisanship, school loyalty, wishful thinking.
- Sometimes, we have no bias at all and we just want interpret the information neutrally: what is going to be on the test? How much food do I need to buy for the party?
- Think of how you respond to things: in cases where you have a strong pre-set opinion, when you see challenging information, do you say: No, that can't be true.
- In other situations, do you notice that you are completely neutral?
- That's the point. Sometimes we care about the goal, not the evidence. Other times, we are neutral.

Persuasion and the death penalty

- One reason the moral argument is so “sticky”
 - To be persuaded to change your opinion on the death penalty, based on morality, would typically involve accepting an idea that your religious beliefs are wrong.
- Innocence, cost, other “logistics” arguments allow one to be persuaded without calling into question those basic elements of self-identification.

Motivated Reasoning

- Some things you accept easily, other things you subject to great scrutiny
- This is human nature
- It makes very good sense to behave this way
 - Examples: don't pay attention, reevaluate anything when for example a cat purrs when you pet it. But when the unexpected happens, you need to look further.
 - Sun rises in the east, ok no big deal. Sun rises elsewhere, ok you'd need to look into that!
 - This is very appropriate behavior, human nature, and allows you to allocate your attention where it needs to be: on the “surprises” in life.

However, in politics it can be terrible

- Your predisposition (call it a prejudice, call it a pre-existing attitude, call it what you will) determines:
 - How you accept, or if you accept, new information as credible.
 - It's not just that conservatives watch Fox so are exposed to things they already believe, and liberals watch MSNBC
 - It's actually worse than that: even when presented with the information, people respond differently

Memory

- It's easier to remember something that “makes sense” – e.g., that conforms to your previous beliefs
- It's harder to remember something that doesn't make sense.
- So your brain is full of “confirming” facts and it filters out those facts that disconfirm your previous beliefs

Attitudes and Information

- Often, people are hostile to learning
- They know that more information may confuse things, make their attitudes and behaviors harder to justify, and this causes anxiety or stress, so people often resist
- This will happen to you when you try to explain more about the facts you have learned about the death penalty to others after this class!

Death penalty opinions

- Ellsworth and Gross (1994):
 - People feel strongly about the death penalty
 - They know little about it
 - They feel no need to know more...
- Thurgood Marshall: The more you know about it, the less you support the death penalty.
- So, to maintain support, it is good to limit information.

Racial differences in understanding Crime

- Causes of crime:
 - **Dispositional** factors (violent tendencies, no sense of right and wrong, criminals are just disposed that way)
 - **Structural** factors (poverty, biased policing, etc.)
 - Obviously, there can be a mix. Individuals might weight the two factors differently...
- These relate to race: why are Blacks over-represented in prison?
 - Dispositional factors?
 - Structural factors?
- Blacks and Whites might differ in the weights we each give to these explanations...

These racial differences in attitudes may lead to different responses to information

- Blacks: structural factors stronger, so relatively welcoming or open to structural explanations
- Whites: dispositional factors stronger, so relatively hostile to information suggesting that this may not be so, or that structural factors matter...
 - “You can prove anything with statistics...”
 - Find a way to down-play the unwelcome evidence.

Shift the weight you give

- Faced with evidence about structural factors, you might say:
 - Yes, I knew that, it confirms my expectations, and it furthermore demands reform (if you already agree)
 - But if you disagree, you might say:
 - Data are flawed
 - Even if the data are not flawed, there is STILL a dispositional aspect to it, and we can't ignore that! In fact, I'm going to insist that we focus more on that.

The survey evidence, from the readings

- “Statistics show that African Americans are more often arrested and sent to prison than are whites. The people we talk to have different ideas about why this occurs. I’m going to read you several reasons, two at a time, and ask you to choose which is the *more important* reasons why, in your view, blacks are more often arrested and sent to prison than whites.
 - First, the police and justice system are biased against blacks, OR blacks are just more likely to commit more crimes?
 - Next, the police and justice system are biased against blacks, OR many younger blacks don’t respect authority?”

This generates a 0-4 scale

- 0 = give the structural answer twice
- 4 = give the dispositional answer twice

- Blacks, Mean = 1.5, Mode = 0
- Whites, Mean = 2.5, Mode = 4

- So we get some real variation there...

Table 1

- Do you favor or oppose the death penalty for persons convicted of murder? **W 65, B 50**
- Some people say that the death penalty is unfair because most of the people who are executed are African Americans. Do you... **W 77, B 38** (W= +12, B = -12 compared to baseline)
- Some people say that the death penalty is unfair because too many innocence people are being executed. Do you... **W 64, B 34** (W = -1, B = -16)

Figure 1

- As Whites move from the Structural to the Dispositional explanation of crime, their support for the death penalty increases very strongly. At the far end of the dispositional scale, almost no Whites are strongly opposed to the death penalty...

Backlash effects

- Whites reject the “racial bias” argument so strongly that they increase support for the death penalty..
 - Motivated reasoning: they think of why this is, and focus on disposition, and become highly punitive.
 - Other possible explanation they do not propose: self interest: it won't apply to me, so it is easy to support... (DP won't typically apply to any of us...)

Easy arguments, and hard ones

- It is very hard for most Americans to accept the idea that the criminal justice system is unfair to Blacks.
- This just shakes too many beliefs. People resist it, therefore. They attach the disparities that are observed to dispositions, not structures.
- Both matter, of course. But you can choose which one you focus on.

Innocence is easy. Race is hard.

- Lots of arguments are hard. That is, they will meet with greater resistance. In fact, they can even backfire:
 - Morality
 - Deterrence
 - Race
- Some arguments are easier. People are not as investing in protecting against them:
 - Innocence
 - Cost
 - Botched executions