

Baumgartner, POLI 203

Spring 2016

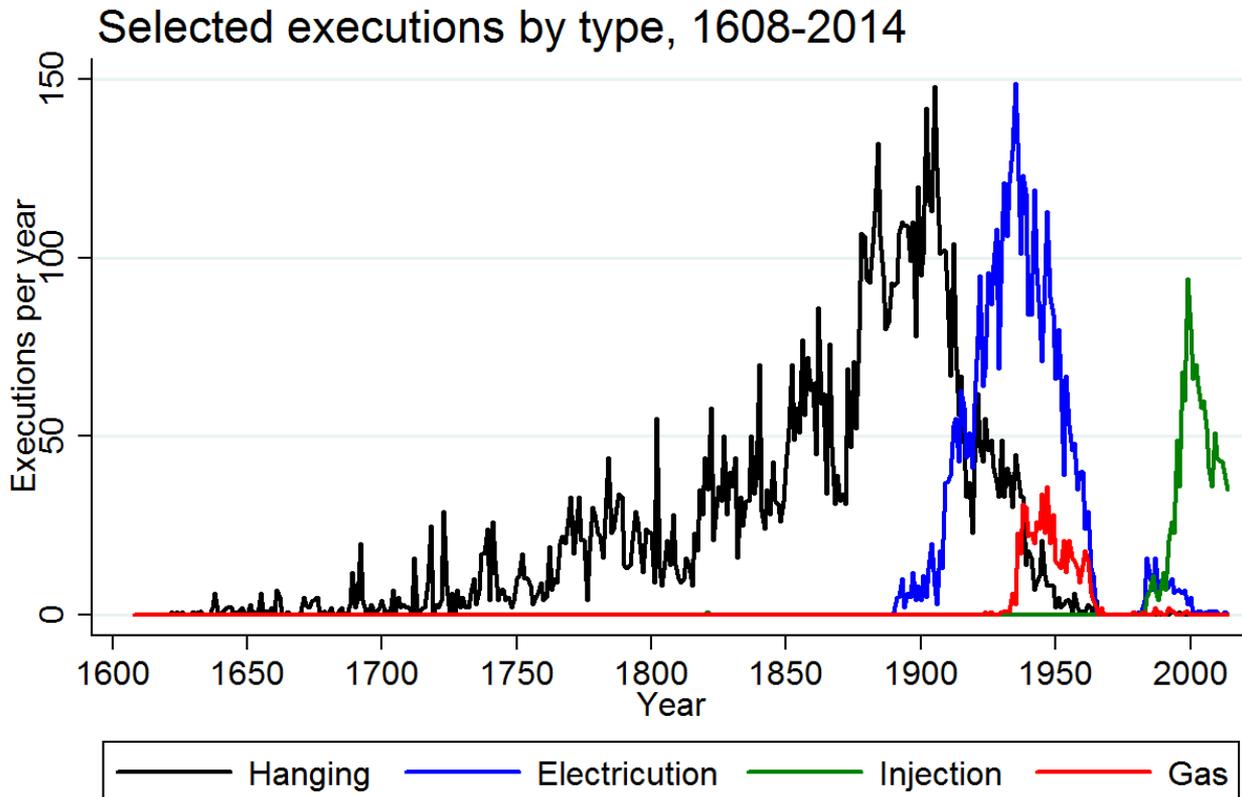
Botched executions

April 20, 2016

Catching Up

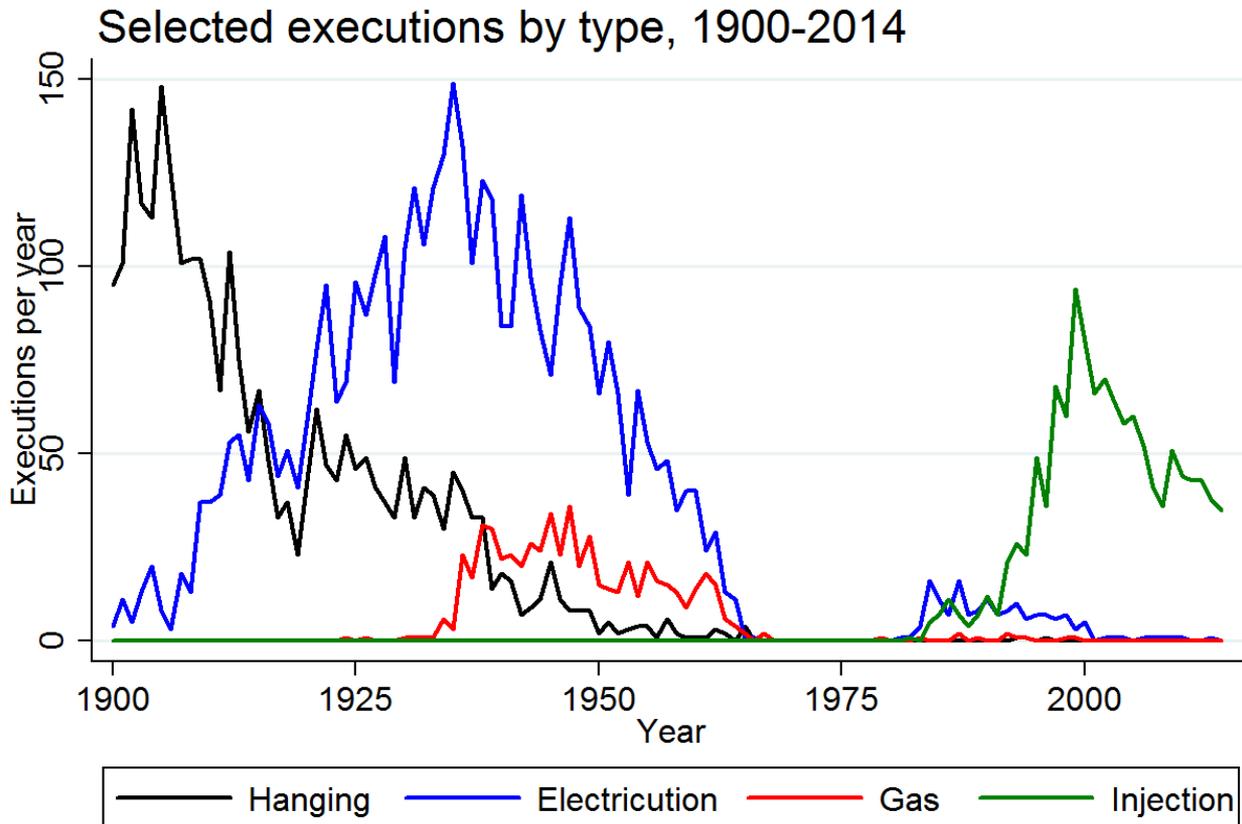
- Prison visit Friday 4/22 and 4/29. Please confirm you are really coming so others can come if you don't want to.
- Follow-up on the *Picking Cotton* talk; questions, explanations of how Ron Cotton got caught up in the story in the first place.
- Quiz grades. By popular demand, yes, we will drop the lowest quiz grade before calculating your final grades.
- Final exam: you need a scantron.
- Today: end early, do survey on books and speakers, as well as save time for course evaluations.

Hanging went out of style, eventually



Excludes 144 firing squads and 120 others including burning, pressing, gibbetting, hanging in chains, bludgeoning, and breaking on the wheel.

Twentieth century and beyond: continued experimentation



Excludes 34 inmates killed by firing squad and 1 who was hung in chains in 1913.

Being “Westinghoused”

- First electrocution article, 1890
 - “we live in a higher civilization today”
- Thomas Edison and George Westinghouse battled over whose system (AC: Edison, or DC: Westinghouse) was safer.
- Edison helped use the Westinghouse system.
- Westinghouse donated to the defense of the inmate...
- <http://www.unc.edu/~fbaum/teaching/articles/FirstElectrocutionNewspaperStory.pdf>

Jesse Tafero

- “flaming electric chair”
- <http://www.unc.edu/~fbaum/teaching/articles/FirstElectrocutionNewspaperStory.pdf>

Lethal Injections

- Oklahoma medical examiner invented the system as an improvement over electrocution.
- Early system: 3 drugs
 - Anesthetic (sodium thiopental; later pentobarbital). This should make the inmate unconscious.
 - Paralytic (pancuronium bromide). This should make the inmate unable to move a single muscle, for the comfort of those watching. But it also means they cannot express pain.
 - Heart-stopper (potassium chloride). This causes death.
- Later: shortages of these drugs (some because of import restrictions) have caused new systems to be adopted.
- No one could possibly know if it “hurts” – nor how much.
- <http://www.deathpenaltyinfo.org/state-lethal-injection>

How can you botch this?

- Can't find veins.
 - Heroin users don't have good veins
 - Obese inmates
- Doctors refuse to be involved.
 - NC recently changed the law to allow EMT's to do it, which could mean a prison guard.
- Main reason: no one has much practice.
 - (Very few botches reported in Texas.)

You can botch anything

- Hanging: wrong amount of “drop” for the weight and size of the inmate.
- Electrocution: poor conductors of electricity, not enough current, not long enough, etc.
- Gas: not that easy to have a gas chamber inside a building, need a REALLY GOOD ventilation system. Watching someone suffocate is not pleasant in any case.
- Firing squad: how many shots are enough?
- Lethal Injection: lots of problems.

Make it pretty?

- Killing is an act of violence
- The surest way to avoid suffering might be something like a large-caliber rifle shot from very close range, to the head. Loss of consciousness would be immediate.
- But this is too ugly.
- So we create a paradox for ourselves.

The never-ending search

- Many in the public might well be comfortable with battery acid, terrible suffering, or at least they say so.
- But the constitution prohibits unnecessary suffering.
 - “mere extinguishment of life” is what we are looking for, not a gruesome spectacle, nor unnecessary suffering.
- So we search for a method that will square a circle that perhaps cannot be squared.
- Plus, those who do it generally have very little practice.