

# Baumgartner, POLI 203

## Spring 2016

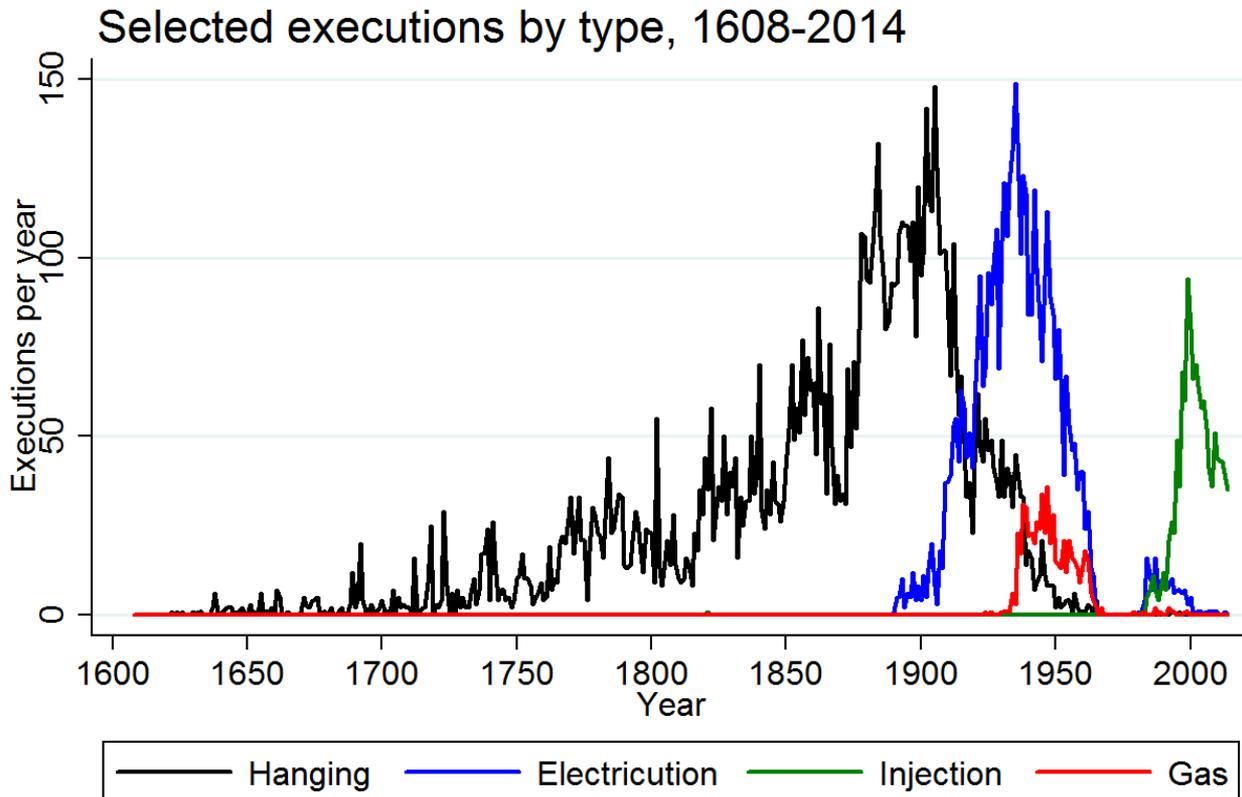
Botched executions

April 20, 2016

# Catching Up

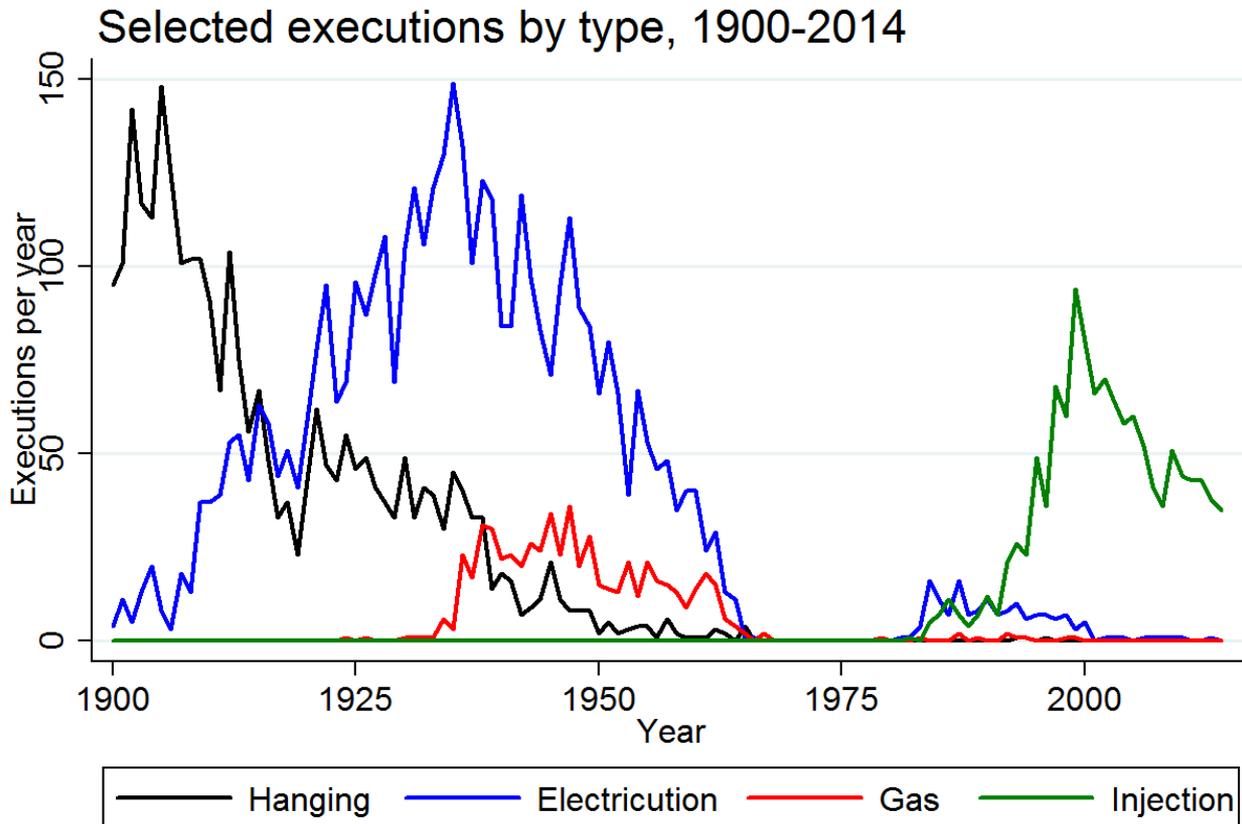
- Prison visit Friday 4/22 and 4/29. Please confirm you are really coming so others can come if you don't want to.
- Follow-up on the *Picking Cotton* talk; questions, explanations of how Ron Cotton got caught up in the story in the first place.
- Quiz grades. By popular demand, yes, we will drop the 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.