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March 5, 2014
Public Choice II HW #2

1)

SDA 3.5: Regression

GSS 1972-2008 Cumulative Dataset

Mar 02, 2015 (Wed 05:53 PM PST)

Variables

Role	Name	Label	Range	MD	Dataset
Dependent	**SUICIDE4**	SUICIDE IF TIRED OF LIVING	1-2	0,8,9	1
Independent	**HAPPY**	GENERAL HAPPINESS	1-3	0,8,9	1
Independent	**ATTEND**	HOW OFTEN R ATTENDS RELIGIOUS SERVICES	0-8	9	1
Independent	**SATHEALT**	HEALTH AND PHYSICAL CONDITION	1-7	0,8,9	1
Independent	**SATFRND**	FRIENDSHIPS	1-7	0,8,9	1
Independent	**POLVIEWS**	THINK OF SELF AS LIBERAL OR CONSERVATIVE	1-7	0,8,9	1
Independent	**CONSCI**	CONFIDENCE IN SCIENTIFIC COMMUNITY	1-3	0,8,9	1
Independent	**CONMEDIC**	CONFIDENCE IN MEDICINE	1-3	0,8,9	1
Weight	**COMPWT**	Composite weight = WTSSALL * OVERSAMP * FORMWT	.1913-11.1261		1

	Regression Coefficients				**Test That Each Coefficient = 0**	
	B	**SE(B)**	**Beta**	**SE(Beta)**	**T-statistic**	**Probability**
HAPPY	-.007	.006	-.013	.011	-1.110	.267
ATTEND	.022	.001	.171	.011	15.698	.000
SATHEALT	.000	.003	.000	.012	-.021	.983
SATFRND	.001	.003	.004	.012	.383	.702
POLVIEWS	.018	.003	.068	.011	6.323	.000

CONSCI	.031	.006	.055	.011	4.918	.000
CONMEDIC	-.023	.006	-.042	.011	-3.727	.000
Constant	1.698	.021			81.105	.000

Color coding: <-2.0 <-1.0 <0.0 >0.0 >1.0 >2.0 T

Effect of each variable: Negative Positive

Multiple R =	**.206**	**R-Squared =**	**.042**	**Adjusted R-Squared =**	**.042**	**SE of Estimate (Root MSE) =**	**.336**

Global Tests for Groups of Variables

Group	Wald Chi-sq	df		Adjusted Wald F	P
		Numerator	Denominator		
All independent variables	376.789	7	8511	53.789	.000

P = Probability that ALL B's in the group equal 0

Confidence intervals (95 percent)

Cells contain: -Upper limit -Lower limit	**Regression Coefficients**	
	B	**Beta**
HAPPY	.005 -.020	.010 -.035
ATTEND	.025 .019	.192 .150
SATHEALT	.005 -.005	.022 -.023
SATFRND	.008 -.005	.027 -.018
POLVIEWS	.023 .012	.089 .047
CONSCI	.044 .019	.077 .033
CONMEDIC	-.011 -.035	-.020 -.063
Constant (Intercept)	1.739 1.657	

Allocation of cases (unweighted)

Valid cases	8,518
Cases with invalid codes on variables in the analysis	44,525
Total cases	*53,043*

Missing data excluded: **Listwise**

Datasets

1	/html/D3/GSS08
2	/html/Npubvars/GSS08

CSM, UC Berkeley

I decided to explore public opinion regarding one's right to commit suicide. Despite the strong individual rights that we (Americans) enjoy in many aspects, physician assisted suicide is illegal in most states. Motivations for such laws are generally paternalistic: people should not have the autonomy to hire a physician to end their own life. I decide to explore opinion on this issue by using the variable SUICIDE4 to gauge public opinion on suicide if one is simply tired of living. My independent variables are individual happiness (HAPPY), religious service attendance (ATTEND) health and physical well being (SATHEALTH), friendships (SATFRIEND), confidence in the medical and science professions (CONMEDIC & CONSCI respectively) and political views (POLVIEWS). I selected these variables in order to test the impact of the SIVH, grop-interests, and ideology surrounding suicide.

The happiness and health/physical well-being variables were selected to measure the SIVH. If votes are selfish, we should expect those who are unhappy and in poor health to be in favor or the right to suicide. Support for the SIVH would be significant negative coefficients on each of these variables. However, there is a zero

coefficient on our health variable, and while there is a negative coefficient on our happiness variable, it is not significant- even at the 10% level (though, close). These results don't support eh SIVH.

The variables I selected to highlight group interests do support group-interest theories of public opinion. We would expect the coefficient for church attendance to be positive since consistent church goers are likely to be true believes in an afterlife (common to most religions in the U.S.). Attendance is positive, highly significant, and the coefficient is non-trivial at .17. We would expect for the friendship variable to be negative since those choosing to commit suicide would sacrifice friends; they are likely to not have a strong network of friends in the first place, but we don't find significance. Other group variables include individual confidence in science and in the medical professions. Those confident in these professions should be confident in both human's ability to master what we have control over- including the ability to end our own lives- and confidence that medical doctors will act with integrity when agreeing to assist a patient in suicide. Therefore, support for this group-interest theory of a right to suicide would be positive coefficients on each of the confidence variables. While each of the confidence variables are significant, their effect is negligible (the coefficients are quite small). Furthermore, the result is even weaker once we consider that sign on CONMEDIC is the opposite of what would support a group interest position. On net, these two variables do not produce strong results for a group-interest view of suicide rights. In summary, we have found, at best, weak support for a group interest view of suicide rights.

Finally, to test the role that ideology plays in opinions about suicide rights, I use the variable POLVIEWS. The variable, while significant, does not seem to impact opinion on suicide much: the coefficient is only .068; if we replace POLVIEWS with CONTEMP (temperature people describe regarding conservatives) the coefficient rises to .088 but this is still very small. This is week evidence that ideology explains public opinion on suicide.

In summary, our econometric model does not explain public opinion on suicide very much at all. Our R-squared is very low suggesting that we are omitting very important variables. The variables we selected to reflect self-interest and ideology do not offer much explanatory power. We found some explanatory power in variables that might explain a group-interest motivation but this evidence also was weak and the signs on some of the coefficients were the opposite of what our hypothesis predicted.

3.

I decided to review, "Descriptive Social Norms and Motivation to Vote: Everybody's Voting and so Should You" published in the Journal of Politics By Alan Gerber and Todd Rogers. 10

The authors point out that typical attempts to increase voter turnout utilize advertising telling voters that turnout will be low. The current theory predicts that if voters believe turnout will be low, they are more likely to vote; Gerber and Rogers test this reasoning via two case studies. Gerber and Rogers discover that voter turnout is higher when voters are told, via telephone marketing, that voter turnout will be high, and conversely, that voter turnout is low when voters are told that

turnout will be low; thus, standard attempts to mobilize voters are exactly backwards in their reasoning. The standard story seems to place an undue amount of confidence in citizens desire to perform a 'civic duty' by voting when voter turnout is low; Gerber and Rogers evidence suggests that voters feel a pressure to conform to social norms, more so than a civic duty to vote, or perhaps voters only feel that their votes matter in a contested election.

To test their ideas, Gerber and Rogers utilize 2 randomized trials in 2 elections. In the 2005 New Jersey general election, and the 2006 California primary election, a phone survey was conducted reporting that voter turnout would be either high or low, then responses about the voters likelihood to vote were recorded. Gerber and Rogers then analyzed the results in an ordered probit model and controlled for one's vote history, age, gender, state and the interview date (proximity to the election).

I find the authors method and results moderately convincing. I believe their method is sufficiently sound enough to identify the effect they claim to have identified, but I remain skeptical about how strong this affect is. In order to be more fully convinced about how strong the effect Gerber and Rogers claim to have identified actually is, I would like to see the procedure repeated with the following improvements: I would like to see the procedure done on non-registered voters; Gerber and Rogers, perhaps correctly, limited their exercise to only registered voters. Gerber and Rogers should include a way for voters to scale *how likely* they are to vote in the next election instead of answering a binary I am (or I am not) likely to vote in the upcoming election. While I appreciate that the authors do make

use of 2 different types of elections in two geographically distinct locations, those locations have similar electorates in many regards. While there are a large number of n voters in this paper, the n number of elections is only 2. Gerber and Rogers need to replicate this exercise on more than just 2 elections for this to be completely convincing to me.

To improve the paper, in addition to allowing paper to rank how likely they are to vote, ideally there would be a way to control for whether or not they actually did. Also, if people vote more when turnout is higher, people may not be motivated by social pressures to conform but instead motivated to vote in more contested elections since they perceive their individual vote as being more important. In order to control for this effect (and isolate the conformity effect) I would like to see future research that controls for how 'contested' an election is; that could be controlled for by ranking elections based on how close candidates are in the polls during a pre-determined time period before the election. If the Gerber and Rogers effect is real, we should see it happen in elections that are and are not hotly contested.

4.

While also a state policy, federal drug policy that criminalizes marijuana is consistently opposed by a majority of Americans, yet continues to persist. Since around 2009, a variety of polling data shows that a majority of Americans favor decriminalizing marijuana. The size of the majority has fluctuated since 2009, but a majority has consistently favored a decriminalization policy for several years.

I would offer several explanations for why this policy continues to survive. There are several interest groups who derive a concentrated benefit from the status

quo marijuana policy and the currents costs of the policy are generally dispersed amongst taxpayers. A variety of law enforcement officials, DEA agents and administrative workers, district attorneys on anti-drug task forces, prison employees (and contractors that serve prisons), and potentially some police officers and organized crime members, all have a stake in maintaining the status quo marijuana policy. If marijuana were decriminalized, the DEA would need to be significantly downsized, as would prison populations. The need for local DA's, police investigations, and all of the staff who support these operations would be non-existent. All of those people would be out of a job. Most of these groups are funded by tax payers who are likely to be rationally ignorant about how much the current marijuana policy is costing; even if they knew the entire costs of the policy, the tax payers have no grantee that they would pay lower taxes if the policy were eliminated. Private criminal lawyers, who represent those faced with drug charges- a good portion of which are marijuana charges- have invested time and other resources in building a comparative advantage in defending marijuana users in legal battles; the current law provides for this groups livelihood, so the group is likely to oppose a policy change.

In addition to there concentrated dispersed cost logic, there are some alternative reasons about why the current policy persists in light of the opposition being in the majority. First, there is a solid 40-45%+ in the minority- this is not a small minority so its power shouldn't be underestimated (especially when it likely includes a variety of aforementioned interest groups). Secondly, this group has not been in the minority for an extended period of time. 5-6 years is not a long period of

time for a majority of opinion to cause federal policy change. In fact one could argue that gradual change is happening- 23 states have decriminalized marijuana in some fashion (some legalizing it). Liberal marijuana policies in some states provide an opportunity for new interest groups to form: growers, transporters etc, who may provide additional support for policy change OR may support seeing that their state remains with a unique marijuana policy in that region to attract (maintain) 'marijuana tourism.'