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Spring 2007
Group Projects

Assignment summary

Working with your assigned group, answer the question posed to you. You will give a 15-minute presentation (with 10 minutes available for questions) on your work on March 13. Your group will also turn in a nine-page written report on your project on Friday, March 16. (Please e-mail a copy to me by 5:00 pm., in one of the following formats: doc or pdf.) The this report should be in the form of a (mini) term paper meaning, among other things, that it should follow the format described by Kate Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*. The paper should do the following:

1. State, or re-state, the question, and discuss to whom the question is important and why.

2. Review any relevant literature you can find, either in journals, press accounts, or books.

3. Describe your method, including, how you measured the variables of interest (dependent and independent variables) and where you gathered the data.

4. Summarize your findings, using the appropriate figures and tables.

The nine page limit includes tables, figures, and bibliography.

Statement about Collaboration

You are encouraged to seek and extend as much help as you can, both within and between groups. I expect you to be meticulous in citing the written work of others that you use.

Grading

I will assign a letter grade to each group's project. That will be the grade you receive, plus or minus an adjustment that will be determined as follows: I will ask each member of the group to indicate the relative amount of effort each person contributed to the successful completion of the project. If someone in the group stands out as being a conspicuous over- or under-contributor to the group effort, that person's letter grade will be adjusted upward or downward as appropriate.

Project 1: Terri Schiavo and the Bush administration.

Names: Diana Moore, Daniel Wilson, Ruijie He, Clay Viands

Question: What explains the public attitudes about the parent's and the Bush administration's intervention in the Terri Schiavo case?

Possible explanations
- *Partisanship.* Research on public opinion generally finds that the public follows elites, especially elites that share people's predispositions or partisanship (e.g., Zaller 1992). Exceptions exist, such as the increase in approval of President Clinton among Democrats and Republicans in the wake of media criticism of Clinton over the Lewinsky revelations. But, these exceptions are rare. Is the Schiavo case an exception?
- *Attitudes about end-of-life care.* If the public did not take their cues on Schiavo from elites, what did they consider? Maybe people generally believe that their spouse, not their parents or the government, should make such choices.
- *Personal experience.* Some percentage of the public has personally faced these issues. Does personal experience play a role?
- *Religiosity.* Did religion play a role in explaining support or opposition?

Data sources
- iPOLL. You can download and analyze data sets from public opinion polls about Schiavo.
- LEXIS-NEXIS. Use to search for articles about the public response and the Bush administration's calculations.

Comments/hints
> The point of this project is to learn about gathering and analyzing public opinion data. You will need to find polls that contain questions about Terri Schiavo and about possible explanations for attitudes about the Schiavo case. Through iPOLL and other sources, you can look through survey codebooks for polls that asked about the Schiavo case. You will find it helpful to read articles on other cases where public opinion has not followed elites, e.g., Zaller's (1998) article on Monica Lewinsky (available from JSTOR).

Project 2: Cabinet quality

Names: Dwight Chambers, Jennifer Yeh, Ali Wyne

Question: What explains the quality of Cabinet appointments in the US?

Possible explanations
- *Polarization.* Ever since George Washington's second term in office, presidents have allegedly struggled to find good Cabinet members when politics becomes polarized. During such periods, good candidates for Cabinet posts allegedly refuse the nomination to avoid the partisan fray. Is this allegation true?
- *Presidential popularity.* When presidents are popular, they may more easily recruit high-quality individuals to their cabinets. Although presidential approval data is only available post-World War II, data on the economy is available for a much longer period, and may provide a reasonable substitute for presidential approval.
- *Unified versus divided government.* Presidents may also be able to recruit high-quality individuals when the committees conducting the confirmation hearings are chaired by Senators of the same party as the president.
- *General levels of education, the size of government, and population size.* The pool of high-quality candidates for Cabinet positions has probably changed over time as education levels have increased, government has grown in size, and the population has increased.

Data sources
- Wikipedia has biographies of US Cabinet members.
- PollingReport.com has data on presidential approval.
- Data on polarization in Congress is available from numerous sources, including http://voteview.com/dwnl.htm.

Comments/hints
> The trick here is to construct a reasonable measure of Cabinet quality. You will have determine what characteristics make for a high-quality Cabinet appointment, such as education and government experience, devise a coding scheme, enter the data, and average the indicators to generate a measure of quality.

Project 3: Government corruption and press freedom

Names: Santiago Pikula, Ravi Gupta, Jamie Edwards

Question: Why are some governments more corrupt than others?

Possible explanations
- *Free Press.* More snooping reporters may mean less corruption.
- *Level and length of democracy.* Young democracies struggle with the most basic implementation of democratic rules, therefore these countries might treat women's representation, and other minorities' rights, as a second order concern.
- *Colonialism.* Some scholars have argued that the British established institutions in their colonies that lower corruption.
- *Income.* Poverty probably leads government officials to take a more bribes.

Data sources
- Transparency International collects data on corruption.
- Przeworski et al, *Democracy and Development*. Book with detailed information about regime types for 141 countries.
- World Bank collects data on newspaper circulation.
- International Federation of Newspaper Publishers also collects data on newspaper circulation, which they publish in *World Press Trends*

Comments/hints

Although researchers have investigated the determinants of corruption, the role of the press is under explored. You will need to determine the best approach to measuring corruption and press freedom. You might also attempt to look at overtime change, such as comparing early 90s with more recent corruption levels. You should also consider what factors might increase the effect of press freedom on corruption.

Project 4: Women in Parliaments.

Names: Raffaela Wakeman, Sharlina Hussain, Joshua Geltman

Question: What explains the variation in women's representation in parliaments around the world?

Possible explanations
- *Duration of democracy.* Young democracies struggle with the most basic implementation of democratic rules, therefore these countries might treat women's representation, and other minorities' rights, as a second order concern.
- *Regime type.* Presidential regimes are characterized by their lack of flexibility and "winner takes all" nature. Access points to power are determined by the president and the leading political parties making it difficult for women to survive in a male dominated environment. Parliamentary systems are more flexible and governing coalitions are more likely to be formed. Therefore women should have more political representation in parliamentary regimes.
- *Electoral rules.* Countries where voters have to support one candidate in a single member districts may place more weight on the candidate's gender. Countries where voters choose among party lists in multimember districts may give more importance to the party and not to each candidate's gender.
- *Ethic fragmentation.* Countries with more than one social cleavage may find difficulties in enforcing equality of representation for all groups. The higher the ethnic fragmentation in a country the less priority will be given to women's representation. Stage of development and inequality. In countries where all the material needs of its citizens have been fulfilled other non-material issues, such as gender equality, are welcome in the political debate. Wealthy countries should have more women in their parliaments. In the same line of reasoning, income inequality should be negatively correlated with women's representation.
- *Religion.* Some religions believe in the equality of women and men more than others. These perceptions of equality may be reflected in the political opportunities forewomen. If this is true, countries with tolerant religions should have more women in parliaments.

Data sources
- United Nations Statistic Division. Social, political and economic statistics and indicators. WIDER World Income Inequality Dataset. www.wider.unu.edu
- Przeworski et al, Democracy and Development. Book with detailed information about regime types for 141 countries.
- The Freedom House website (www.freedomhouse.org) contains country reports with data about civil rights, political rights, some demographics and a "freedom" index.
- The Inter-Parliamentary Union website (www.ipu.org) contains information about legislatures around the world including electoral rules and results of the most recent elections.

Comments/hints

The trick here is, first, finding reasonable measures of things like "ethnic fragmentation," and then finding comparable measures across a bunch of countries. You will find numerous reference books from international organizations that report on economic and social statistics. You will need to do a cross-sectional study, in which the observations are at the country level. You may find the number of women in parliaments measured at a couple of different times (say in 1970 and 1990), in which case you might want to see if you can predict the change in this number across the years.