A.m. 17.871
Spring 2009
Group Projects

Assignment summary

Working with your assigned group, answer the question posed to you *with regression analyses*. You will give a 10-minute presentation on your work on Monday, March 9. Your group will also turn in a 10-page written report on your project on Friday, March 13. (Please e-mail a copy to me by 5:00 pm. in one of the following formats: doc or pdf.) The 10-page limit includes tables, figures, and bibliography. The 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 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. In doing so, show that you have learned the techniques in class by, for example, interpreting the relevant regression coefficients and the SER, and explaining differences between bivariate and multivariate findings.

Data requirements

The data set you create must have least 30 cases and at least three explanatory variables.

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-contributor or under-contributor to the group effort, that person's letter grade will be adjusted upward or downward as appropriate.

Project 1: Government corruption and press freedom

Group: Carrie, Raphael, Daniel

Question: Why are some governments more corrupt than are others?

Possible explanations
- *Free Press.* More snooping reporters may mean less corruption.
- *Level and length of democracy.* Democracy may reduce corruption by allowing voters to reject corrupt politicians.
- *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 2: Women in Parliaments

Group: Monica, Tess

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.

Project 3: Experiment on retrospective voting in presidential elections

Group: Amanda, Matt, Stephen

Question: Why do voters judge presidents primarily based on the election-year economy? Why don't they consider the average economy during a president's term?

Possible explanations
- *Present bias.* There are several possible explanations for what researchers have come to call myopic economic voting. The one I would like you to investigate experimentally is whether voters are afflicted from something psychologists refer to as present bias (or peak-end rule). This bias occurs when people's evaluations of experiences (such as the economy under a president) is unduly shaped by the end (such as their experience of the economy on Election Day). If the economic growth stalls at the end of a president's term, for instance, they perceived the economy as having been generally bad on average during his or her term, even if it was quite good.

The experiment
- To test the present-bias hypothesis, I suggest that you randomly assign subjects (that you will recruit) to see one of two visualizations the economy during presidents' terms over the last hundred years.
  1. The first visualization is how a citizen might ideally look at the economy: a figure showing the history of GDP growth (or other measures) in every quarter of a president's four-year term. Based on such a figure, citizens can easily see the average strength of the economy.
  2. The second visualization attempts to approximate how citizens actually experience the economy: present them with one or two quarters at a time and have them evaluate a president's performance on the economy while looking at the last quarters before Election Day.
- You will then examine whether these randomly assigned visualizations influence people's evaluations of presidents' performance on the economy. If citizens base their evaluations of the president more on the economy just before the election in the second example, it would suggest that their perception of the economy at the time of the election has an undue influence on their perceptions of the average economy.
- Before administering your experiment, you will need to get human subjects approval through the COUHES exempt form (http://web.mit.edu/committees/couhes/forms.shtml).

Bibliographic sources
- For myopic economic voting, see this working paper: http://www.princeton.edu/~bartels/chairs.pdf. You might also find Chapter 4 of this book helpful: Bartels, L. M. 2008. Unequal Democracy: The Political Economy of the New Gilded Age: Princeton University Press.
- For peak-end rule, see the many Kahneman articles, e.g., Kahneman, D., P. P. Wakker, and R. Sarin. 1997. Back to Bentham? Explorations of Experienced Utility*. The Quarterly Journal of Economics 112 (2):375-405.

Project 4: Electoral systems and quality of representation

Group: Vernon, Bill, Nick

Background. Democratic countries the world over employ a wide variety of electoral systems. Citizens of democratic countries vary in how responsive they believe their leaders are to their desires. A natural question arises about whether some electoral systems are better than others in transmitting the voices of citizens to the ears of elected officials. This question is intrinsically interesting, but it has practical implications, since reformers the world over often try to change the local electoral system in order to make it more "responsive" to the people. In particular, it is commonly believed that systems that have more parties from which to choose and that employ some form of proportional representation are more responsive to citizen demands.

Question. Do citizens from countries with more political parties and that employ proportional representation in their legislative elections feel that their voices are heard more than citizens from countries with few parties and that employ plurality voting for legislatures?

Possible explanations
  - *Multi-partyism.* The more parties a country has, the more they are able to populate the full array of possible issue positions. This gives voters more of a reason to believe their voices are heard in the parliament.
  - *Proportional representation.* Proportional representation (PR) systems allocate seats in the legislature in proportion to the votes received throughout a geographic region, in contract to plurality systems, which allocate seats on a "winner take all" basis. Under this system, minority views are presumed to be more likely to be represented in the legislature.
  - *Individual demographics.* Certain types of people may be happier with governing institutions than others, despite the electoral system. Sometimes this will be a function of local political factors. For instance, wealthy people in a country controlled by the Socialist Party may be less likely to believe the parliament is "fair" than working-class people.

Data sources
Comparative Study of Electoral Systems. This is a cross-national, collaborative survey that asked an identical battery of questions to citizens in several dozen countries. It is available through its own web site (http://www.umich.edu/~cses/) and the Harvard-MIT Data Center. You will also discover that there are individual reports that document the political and partisan context of each country included in the project.

Bibliographic source
  - Christopher J. Anderson and Christine A. Guillory. 1997. "Political Institutions and Satisfaction with Democracy: A Cross-National Analysis of Consensus and Majoritarian Systems." *American Political Science Review* 91: 66–81.

Comments/hints
This project will involve the use of a large, unwieldy data set (the CSES), merging it with information gathered from other data sources. You thing you will want to meditate on while you do this project is whether the questions asked in the different countries actually mean the same thing, across different languages and cultures.