Global Development: Intermediate Topics in Politics, Policy, and Data

Course ID: PSCI 3200-001

Schedule: Tuesday, Thursday 3:30-4:59 PM

Instructor: Jeremy Springman

Course Description

Tremendous growth in the amount of data available and our ability to process it raises the exciting possibility that these advances could benefit the world's poor. This course will allow students to engage with cutting-edge research that deploys new data and contemporary social science research methods to understand development, as well as hands-on experience analyzing diverse types of data. The course will be organized around several timely substantive topics in global development, including democratic backsliding and autocratization, political accountability and citizen engagement, climate change resilience, and migration. As we explore these topics, students will be introduced to data analysis methods, inferential techniques, and computational tools that are useful across a wide range of applications. Specifically, students will deepen their understanding of basic statistical methods common to the social sciences (such as linear regression), learn how these methods can be used to make inferences about population characteristics and causal relationships, and prepare documents that contain reproducible data analysis workflows using markdown.

This class is also designed as a follow-up to PSCI 1102. Students are encouraged but not required to take that course before this one. Students should be ready to engage with data assignments in the programming language R. This means that students should also have taken PSCI 1800 or an equivalent course. Students that have not taken PSCI 1102 and PSCI 1800 (or an equivalent) should contact the instructor before enrolling. Students more comfortable in Python are welcome, but will receive less instructor support.

Activities & Assessments

Weekly reading assignments will be divided between contemporary research on substantive topics in global development and textbook chapters focused on social science research methods. You are expected to attend class and be prepared to engage in discussion about the assigned readings. Performance in this class will be evaluated by class attendance and participation (10%), short blog posts engaging with the methods or substance of weekly readings (20%), data exercises (30%), and a final project (40%).

We will use Data Analysis for Social Science: A Friendly and Practical Introduction as a jumping-off point for this course. While students are expected to already be familiar with many of the tools and concepts covered this book, it will serve as a method to review core concepts and orient discussion about how to expand on these skills. Students are encouraged, but definitely not required, to purchase a personal copy.

Course Policies

- A personal laptop will be required during class.
- Late submission of assignments will incur a penalty of 2 points deducted for every day late, except in documented cases of serious illness or family tragedy.
- This course aspires to be as inclusive as possible. Students requiring special accommodation should notify the instructor prior to the second week of class to determine the most appropriate adaptations.

Instructor Details

I am Jeremy Springman, a Senior Research Associate working at PDRI-DevLab@Penn. You can reach me at jspr@sas.upenn.edu. You can learn more about my research on my website.