

# 1 Possible Research Paper Topics PLS 300 Fall 2010

## Contents

|          |                                                                                          |          |
|----------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|
| <b>1</b> | <b>Possible Research Paper Topics PLS 300 Fall 2010</b>                                  | <b>1</b> |
| <b>2</b> | <b>General, other data sources for projects:</b>                                         | <b>1</b> |
| 2.1      | Data sources to explore . . . . .                                                        | 1        |
| 2.1.1    | Comparative Public Opinion – individual level data . . . . .                             | 1        |
| 2.1.2    | Comparative Governance – country-level data . . . . .                                    | 1        |
| <b>3</b> | <b>Project Suggestions</b>                                                               | <b>2</b> |
| 3.1      | Further thoughts on studying American Political Behavior with the ANES surveys . . . . . | 2        |
| 3.2      | Subject 1: The War on Terror . . . . .                                                   | 2        |
| 3.2.1    | Research questions . . . . .                                                             | 3        |
| 3.2.2    | Data . . . . .                                                                           | 3        |
| 3.2.3    | References to get started . . . . .                                                      | 3        |
| 3.3      | Subject 2: The Gender Gap in American political behavior . . . . .                       | 3        |
| 3.3.1    | Data . . . . .                                                                           | 4        |
| 3.3.2    | References to get started . . . . .                                                      | 4        |
| 3.4      | Subject 3: Public opinion in Ghana, 2006 . . . . .                                       | 4        |
| 3.4.1    | Data . . . . .                                                                           | 4        |
| 3.4.2    | References to get started . . . . .                                                      | 4        |
| 3.5      | Subject 4: Social Capital in South Africa . . . . .                                      | 5        |
| 3.5.1    | Data . . . . .                                                                           | 5        |
| 3.5.2    | References to get started . . . . .                                                      | 5        |
| 3.6      | Creating an ICPSR account . . . . .                                                      | 5        |

## 2 General, other data sources for projects:

### 2.1 Data sources to explore

#### 2.1.1 Comparative Public Opinion – individual level data

World Values Survey (WVS) <http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org>. The WVS is a global survey covering multiple years and countries and regions all around the world, in which mass publics are asked a wide range of questions about their values, beliefs, and political ideals.

#### 2.1.2 Comparative Governance – country-level data

Quality of Governance (QG) data. The QG data are country-level measures of the quality of democracy, governance (broadly defined), human rights, and much more around the world. A codebook describing the data is here: [http://www.qog.pol.gu.se/data/QoG\\_Codebook\\_v27May10.pdf](http://www.qog.pol.gu.se/data/QoG_Codebook_v27May10.pdf) Prior to attempting to access the data, review the codebook and see the mapping application (The World Freedom Atlas) here <http://freedom.indiemaps.com/>. which visually describes many of the variables assessed in the project. After you have narrowed down a set of countries to study, I can help you access the data for analysis.

### 3 Project Suggestions

Below I have presented a series of research project subjects, divided into different sections.

Keep in mind that in selecting any of the **research questions and data sources** I have identified below, your research will be subjected to a slightly elevated grading scrutiny, depending on how reliant on my time you are in completing the project. You are free, however, to use these materials as a starting point for a research project that works in a different direction.

Some of the research questions are presented as descriptive, rather than causal, questions. Keep in mind that a better research project, though, will go beyond the descriptive aspect to a causal theory. If base your work on a descriptive question, I will expect excellent data analysis.

#### 3.1 Further thoughts on studying American Political Behavior with the ANES surveys

One subject to investigate is the idea of “issue evolution”, which is the process by which new policy issue debates are introduced into debate in American politics and over time become absorbed into partisan conflict.

One research paper could compare party identification across a number of issues (such as the stem cell research, abortion, defense spending, the environment, or any others), to see how strongly partisanship correlates with policy issue views. An interesting application of this subject would be to study the correlation over time, comparing relationships in 2008 with a prior election year, such as 1996 or a prior year’s survey available on SDA.

Good sources:

Mouw, Ted; Sobel, Michael E., “Culture wars and opinion polarization: The case of abortion.” *American Journal of Sociology*. Jan 2001, 106, (4), 913 - 943

Adams, Greg D., “Abortion: Evidence of an Issue Evolution.” *American Journal of Political Science*. Jul 1997, 41, (3), 718 - 737.

Another subject could be to examine the factors that shape how consistently people express opinions over time, using the pre and post election waves of the 2004 or 2008 NES survey. For comparisons, you could study liberal and conservative identification over time, or opinion on issues such as government spending on services, and attitudes toward interventionism. What factors may explain these differences? Education? Political Awareness or Interest?

Jacoby, William G., “Issue framing and public opinion on government spending.” *American Journal of Political Science*. Oct 2000, 44, (4), 750 - 767.

Wyckoff, Mikel L., “Issues of measuring ideological sophistication: Level of conceptualization, attitudinal consistency, and attitudinal stability.” *Political Behavior*. 1987, 9, (3), 193 - 224.

#### 3.2 Subject 1: The War on Terror

For this subject, you have the option to study any of the following research questions: RQ

The dataset for this assignment are from the *Global Terrorism Database II (1998-2004)*. From the description of the dataset:

“The goal of the Global Terrorism Database II (GTD2) was to create a comprehensive and sound dataset on global terrorism that can be used to derive methodologically robust insights into the phenomenon of terrorism and how to counter it. Information in the GTD2 was drawn entirely from publicly available, open-source materials. The criteria for incident inclusion and the coding

scheme used in GTD2 were developed by a Database Development Committee, which consisted of recognized experts in terrorism and data collection. In order to be considered a "terrorist incident" the event had to have been committed by non-state actors had to have been violent, and intentional. In addition the act must have met two of the following three criteria: (1) The act must have been aimed at attaining a political, economic, religious, or social goal. In terms of economic goals, the exclusive pursuit of profit did not satisfy this criterion. (2) There must have been evidence of an intention to coerce, intimidate, or convey some other message to a larger audience (or audiences) than the immediate victims. (3) The action must have been outside the context of legitimate warfare activities, i.e. the act must have been outside the parameters permitted by international humanitarian law (particularly the admonition against deliberately targeting civilians or noncombatants). Data in this collection contain 7,154 events. The main variable categories presented in these data include: identification numbers, incident date, incident location, incident information, attack information, target information, perpetrator information, perpetrator statistics, perpetrator claim of responsibility, weapon information, casualty information, consequences, hostage/kidnapping, additional information, and source information."

### 3.2.1 Research questions

A few descriptive research questions could get you started: How have the number or targets of terrorist attacks changed since 9/11? Which regions of the world are the subjects of the most frequent attacks? Who is responsible for most terrorist attacks? How have the effects of terrorist attacks changed?

### 3.2.2 Data

These data may be analyzed using the SDA data analysis system we discussed in class. To access the dataset, go to <http://www.icpsr.umich.edu/cgi-bin/SDA/ICPSR/hsda?nacjd+22600-0001>. You will have to create an ICPSR account to access the data.

See the codebook and user's guide for further information about the dataset.

### 3.2.3 References to get started

LaFree, Gary; Dugan, Laura; and Fahey, Susan. 2008. "Global terrorism and failed states." In Hewitt, J. Joseph; Wilkenfeld, Jonathan; Gurr, Ted Robert, *Peace and Conflict 2008*. College Park, MD: University of Maryland, Center for International Development and Conflict Management.

LaFree, Gary; Dugan, Laura, 2007. "Introducing the global terrorism database." *Terrorism and Political Violence* 19:181-204. (Search for this article in Google Scholar. A PDF copy is freely available.)

## 3.3 Subject 2: The Gender Gap in American political behavior

The subject of the gender gap in American politics – differences between men and women on political attitudes, beliefs, and values, has a lengthy history of empirical study. Some research question related to this general subject could be an examination of the factors that explain why women tend to identify more with the Democratic party than Republican, and how or why policy issue attitudes differ.

### 3.3.1 Data

Use the 2008 and/or the 2004 American National Election Studies dataset. Analyzed through SDA or online. Obviously, you'll want to rely upon the gender variable (such as V041109A) in the 2004 study or in the 2008 study, to look at differences across genders.

### 3.3.2 References to get started

Herek, Gregroy M., "Gender gaps in public opinion about lesbians and gay men." *Public Opinion Quarterly*. Spr 2002, 66, (1), 40 - 66.

Howell, Susan E.; Day, Christine L., "Complexities of the gender gap." *Journal of Politics*. Aug 2000, 62, (3), 858 - 874.

Inglehart, Ronald; Norris, Pippa, "The Development Theory of the Gender Gap: Women's and Men's Voting Behavior in Global Perspective." *International Political Science Review*. Oct 2000, 21, (4), 441 - 463.

## 3.4 Subject 3: Public opinion in Ghana, 2006

### 3.4.1 Data

The data are from the survey, "International Stability: What Ghanaians are Thinking, 2006". From the study description: "This survey, conducted February 2 to May 2, 2006, was used to gather public opinion data in Ghana on issues such as the global threat of terrorism, the United States' foreign policy, and questions pertaining to the Middle East and Africa. Respondents were asked to give their opinion on which two countries they thought were the greatest threats to international stability. Many questions focused on the United States' involvement in the war on terrorism and international affairs. Some questions dealt with Islam and its relationship to modernity and democracy. Respondents were asked if they thought George W. Bush's administration had a policy of democratizing the region of the Muslim world and whether the democratization of that region of the Muslim world will increase or decrease violent aggression against Western interests. Demographic variables included sex, age, marital status, nationality, religion, education level, employment status, and political ideology. A non-probability purposive sampling strategy was used for this study. Attempts to conduct a random/probability sampling technique in Ghana were difficult because of the difficulty of obtaining a complete sampling list of the population, whereby everyone in the population would have an equal or known chance of being included in the sample. "

Analyze the data through SDA: <http://www.icpsr.umich.edu/cgi-bin/SDA-ID/ICPSR/hsda?icpsr+04548-0001>

### 3.4.2 References to get started

Bratton, Michael, "Briefing: Islam, democracy and public opinion in Africa." *African Affairs*. 2003, 102, 493 - 501.

Temin, Jonathan; Smith, Daniel A., "Media matters: Evaluating the role of the media in Ghana's 2000 elections." *African Affairs*. Oct 2002, 405, 585 - 605.

### **3.5 Subject 4: Social Capital in South Africa**

Apartheid ruled South Africa from 1948 to 1994. Since then, South Africa has transitioned to a multi-ethnic democracy. In brief, the subject of social capital involves the assessment of the causes and consequences of interpersonal trust. Clearly, this is an important subject in South Africa. In this research project, you could study how social capital forms under ethnically diverse conditions, how it affects political behavior, or any other aspect of it.

#### **3.5.1 Data**

Data are from the “Afrobarometer: Round 2.5 Survey of South Africa, 2004”. “The Afrobarometer project is designed to assess attitudes toward democracy, markets, and civil society in several sub-Saharan African countries, and to track the evolution of such attitudes in those country over time. Respondents answered questions about their opinion of South Africa’s elected officials in local and national government, the government’s performance on issues such as the economy and crime. Questions about respondents’ living conditions, economic conditions, and the political influence of ethnic identity were also asked. Other questions asked about respondents’ trust in public institutions, interest in public affairs, their level of civic engagement, and their satisfaction with the way democracy and elections worked in South Africa. In addition, respondents were quizzed on their knowledge of government officials, presidential term limits, and government policy, and gave their interpretation of the concept of democracy.”

Data can be analyzed online through SDA: <http://www.icpsr.umich.edu/cgi-bin/SDA-ID/ICPSR/hsda?icpsr+04702-0001>

#### **3.5.2 References to get started**

Paxton, Pamela, “Social capital and democracy: An interdependent relationship.” *American Sociological Review*. Apr 2002, 67, (2), 254 - 277

Cigler, Allan; Joslyn, Mark R., “The extensiveness of group membership and social capital: The impact on political tolerance attitudes.” *Political Research Quarterly*. Mar 2002

### **3.6 Creating an ICPSR account**

Go to the “Databases” link from the library homepage. Look under the alphabetic index entry under the “I”, and find ICPSR at the top. From there, follow the instructions.

You will need to setup this account prior to accessing the datasets through SDA, unless the data are located in the “archive” that we accessed in class.