

(Week 5) Causality and hypothesis testing
**(Week 6) Quant. analysis: strengths &
pitfalls**

Research design

6 & 13 November, 2017

Andrew Eggers

**The “credibility revolution”:
from job training to political science**

A story about program evaluation

National Supported Work Demonstration (1975-1979): ex-offenders, drug addicts, etc. receive 12-18 months of subsidized employment in 10 US cities.



MDRC implementing NSW in 1970s

Does it work? Of 6,600 eligible participants, some randomly assigned to **control group** (no subsidized employment).

	Treatment	Control
Avg earnings after program	\$4,670	\$3,819

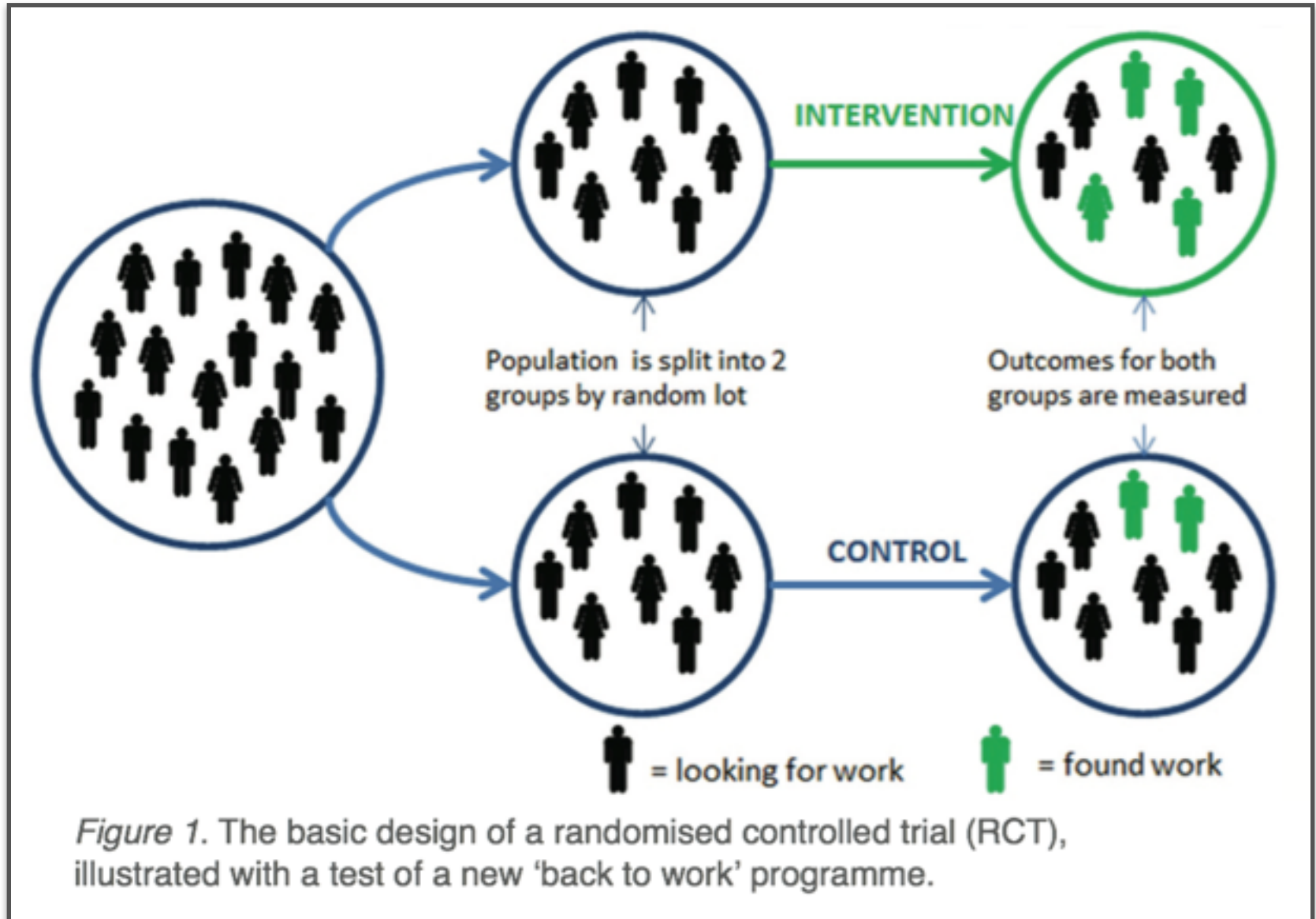


Figure 1. The basic design of a randomised controlled trial (RCT), illustrated with a test of a new 'back to work' programme.

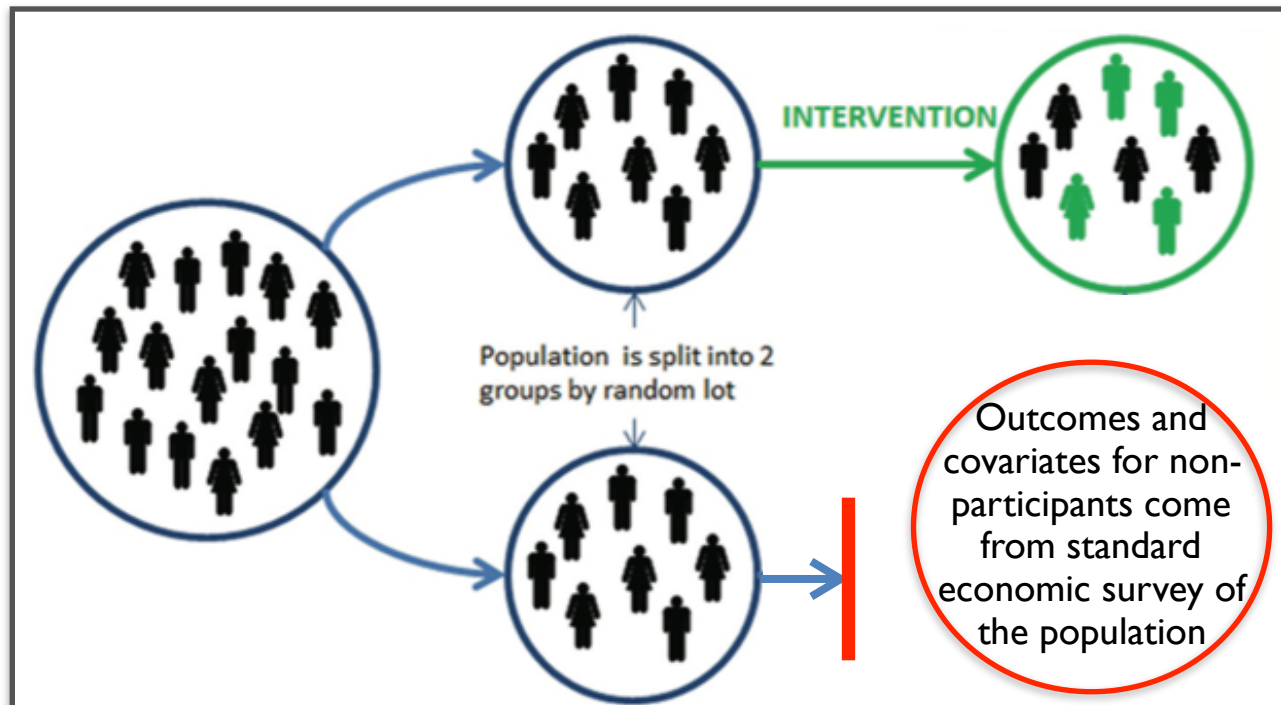
Lalonde (1986): “Evaluating the econometric evaluations of training programs with experimental data”

Idea: Ignore the experimental control group; use standard economic surveys instead.



Robert Lalonde,
University of Chicago

How close to the experimental benchmark do we get with standard econometric approaches?



Lalonde (1986): “Evaluating the econometric evaluations of training programs with experimental data”

How close to the experimental benchmark do we get by applying standard econometric approaches to non-experimental data? Not very close!

“Policymakers should be aware that the available non-experimental evaluations of employment and training programs may contain large and unknown biases resulting from specification errors.” (p. 617)

Fundamental problem of causal inference

What we want:

Outcome if individual
did participate in
program

minus

Outcome if individual
did not participate in
program

$$y_i(1)$$

-

$$y_i(0)$$

Fundamental problem of causal inference is that we never observe both *potential outcomes* for any individual.

Overcoming FPOCI by comparing units?

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Is this the same as the average treatment effect?

i.e. average of the individual treatment effects

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Do we think it works in political science?

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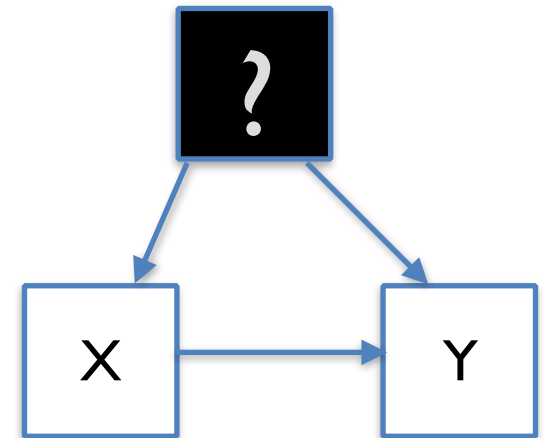
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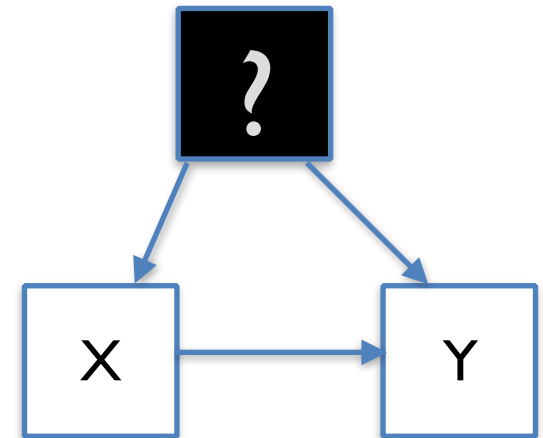
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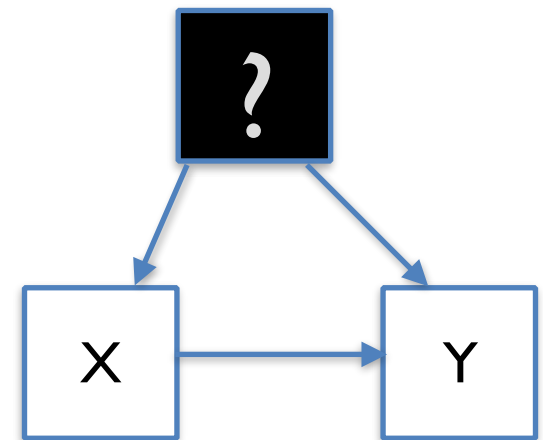
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- how to measure them?
- how exactly they are related to X or Y ?

The **credibility revolution** (Angrist & Pischke 2010) is due to a rising suspicion that **we don't** know.



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Basically, **selection bias** due to unobserved/unobservable characteristics or misspecification errors, i.e. **confounding, endogeneity**.

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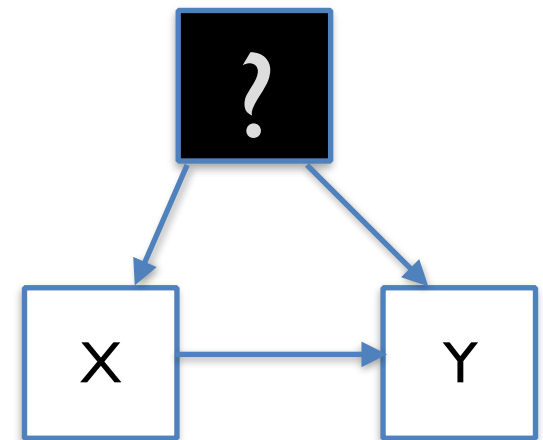
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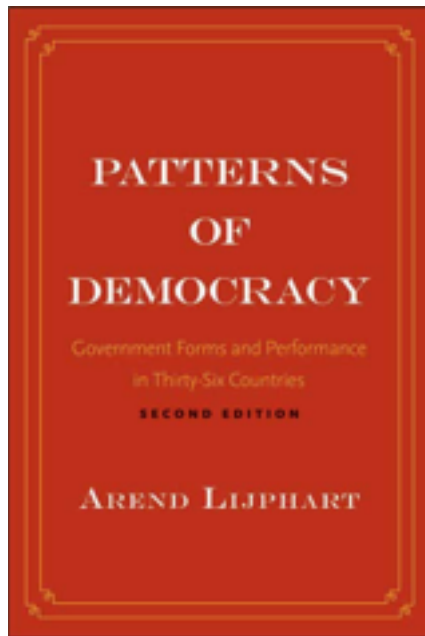
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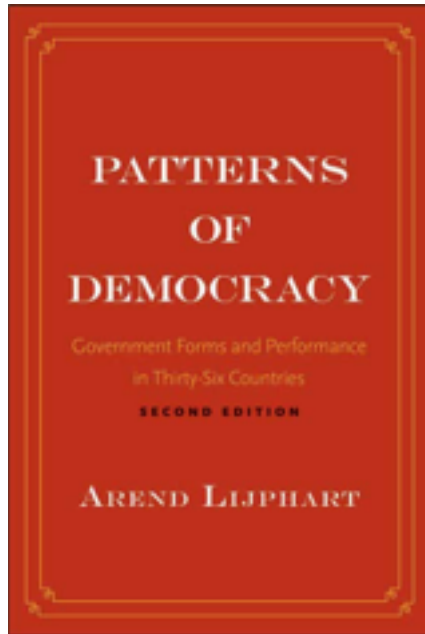


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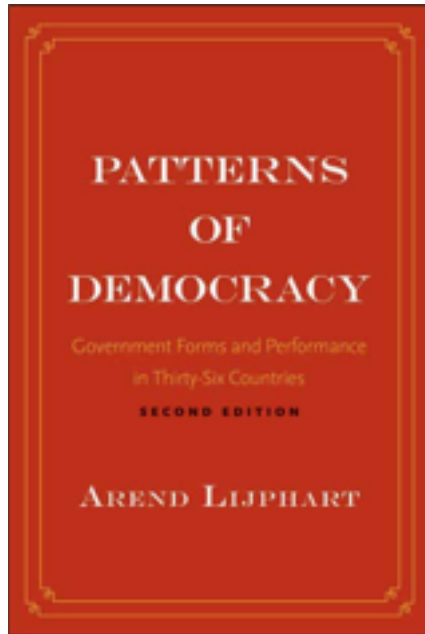
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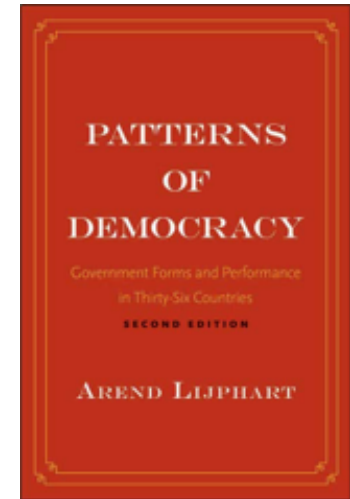


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(Many talks in Nuffield Politics seminar, IR colloquium)

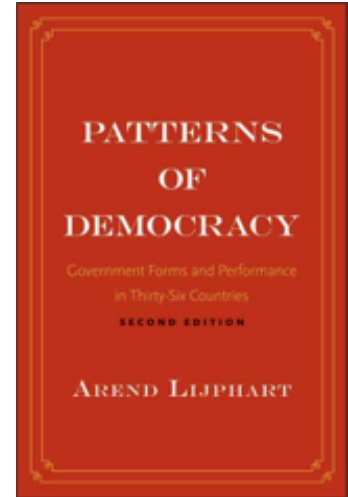
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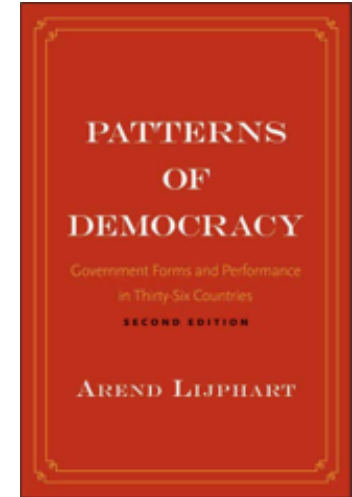


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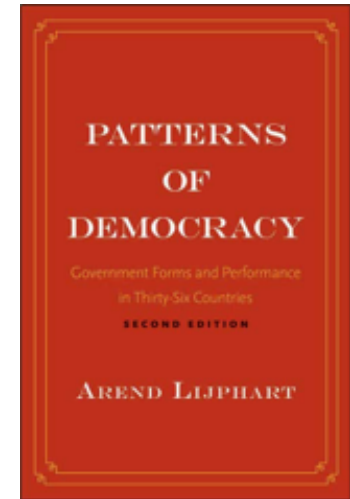
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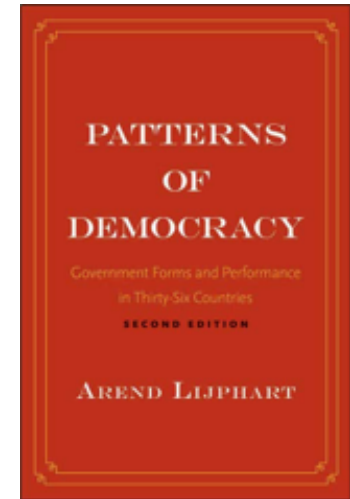
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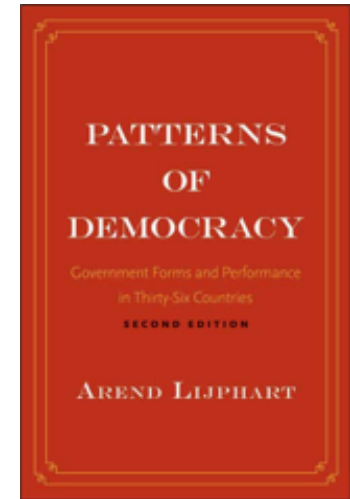
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Your “identification strategy” is what makes your design more credible than a cross-sectional regression in a sample from P .



How does government form affect performance?

Design vs statistical control

Key feature of design-based approach: choosing or creating settings where **statistical control** is less necessary.

Research question	Statistical control approach	(Non-experimental) design approach
What is effect of job training program?	Gather data on a bunch of people including participants and non-participants. Regress wages on participation indicator and controls.	Locate job program that was over-subscribed; compare outcomes for successful and unsuccessful applicants.
What is effect of PR (compared to plurality) on turnout?	Gather data on turnout from various countries. Regress turnout on electoral system indicator and controls.	Compare French cities just above and below population cutoff that determines electoral system.

Looking under a lamppost

Internal validity and external validity — see Cyrus Samii “Causal Empiricism”



What does this mean for you?

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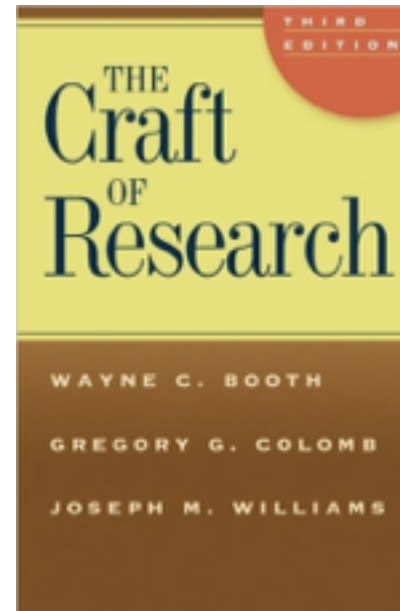
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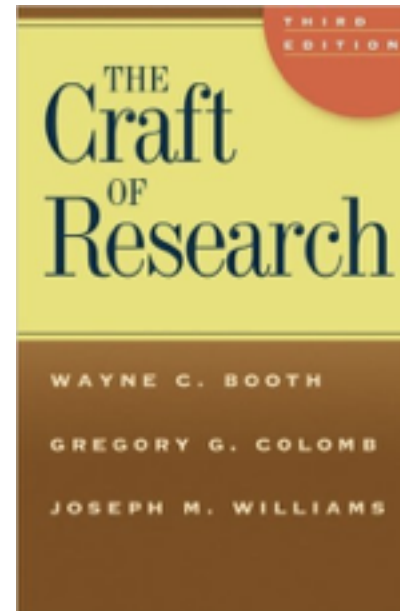
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Also known as “motive”: why are you making me read this?

Some types of conceptual problems

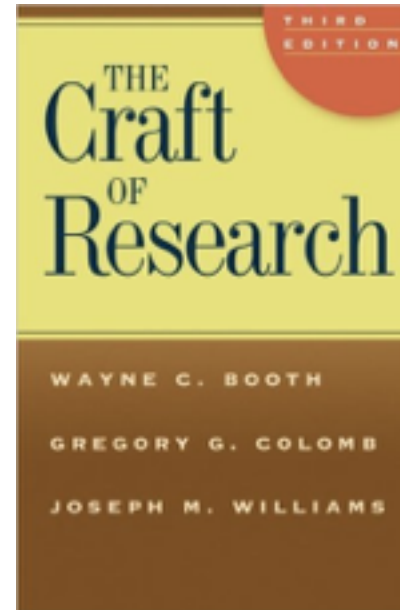


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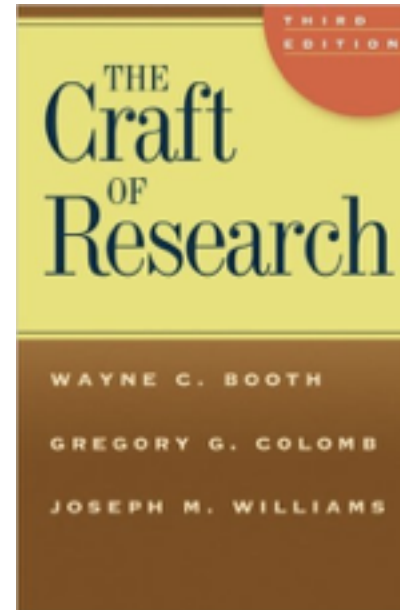
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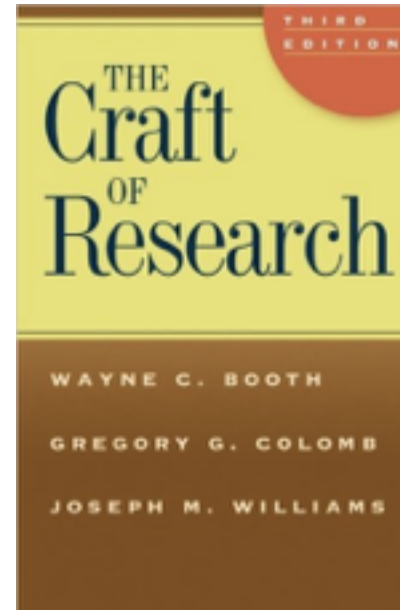
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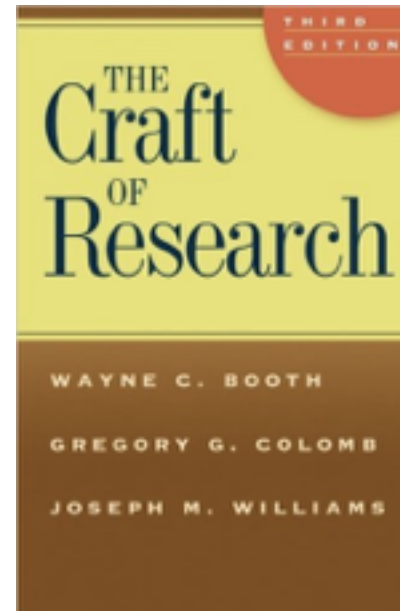
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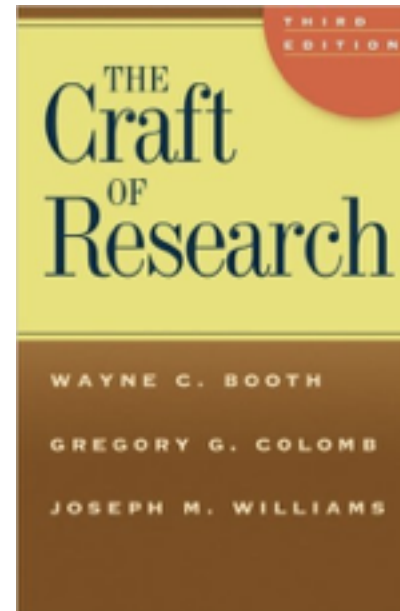
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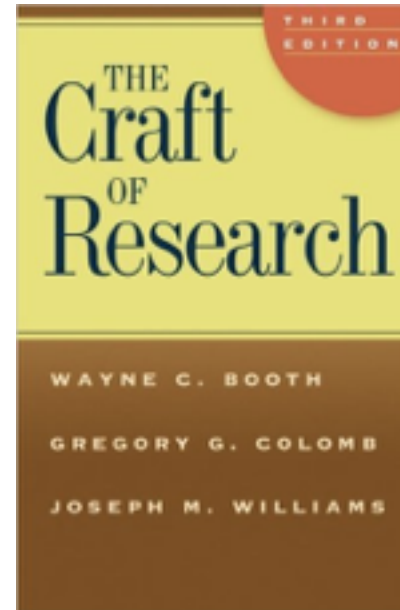
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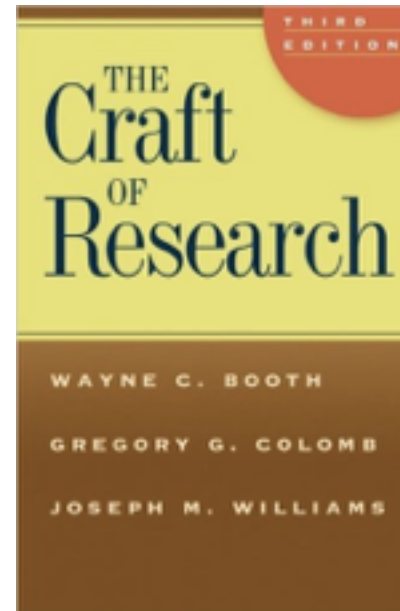
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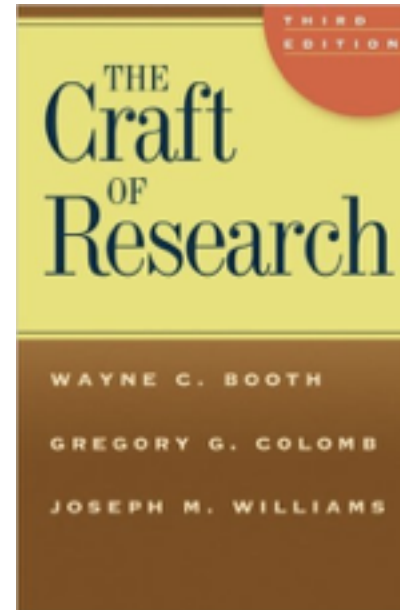


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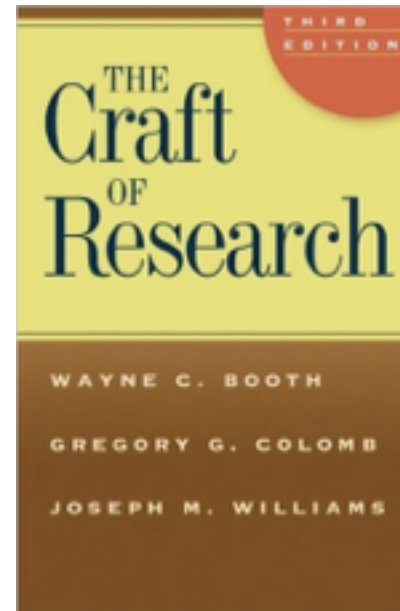


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- You also need to convince us that it is **important** to address this problem.

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- Is there detailed weather data?

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find out if there is something interesting that addresses confusion/ignorance/disagreement in literature.

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- adapt a formal model to a different setting, study its features...

find out if there is something interesting that addresses confusion/ignorance/disagreement in literature.

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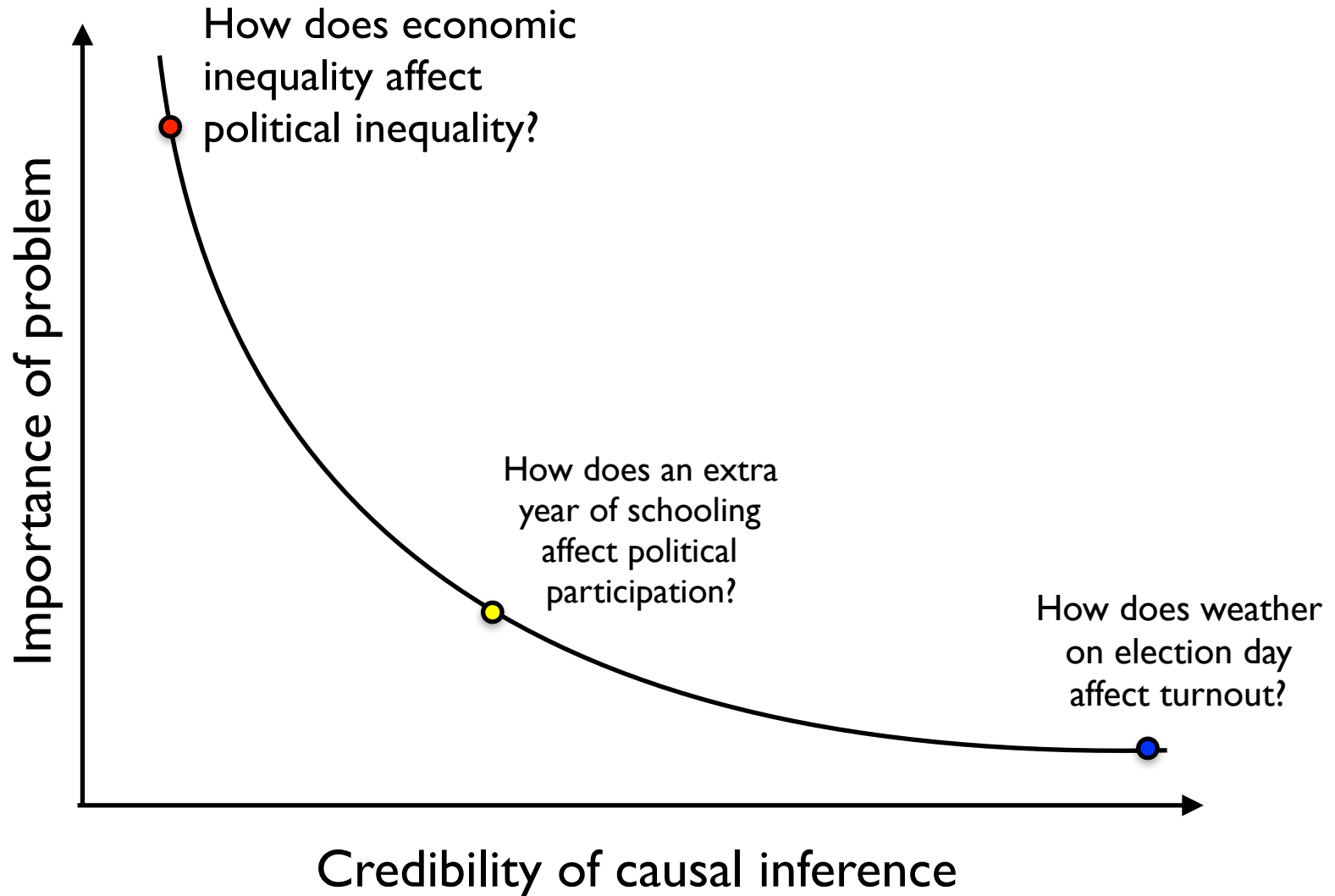
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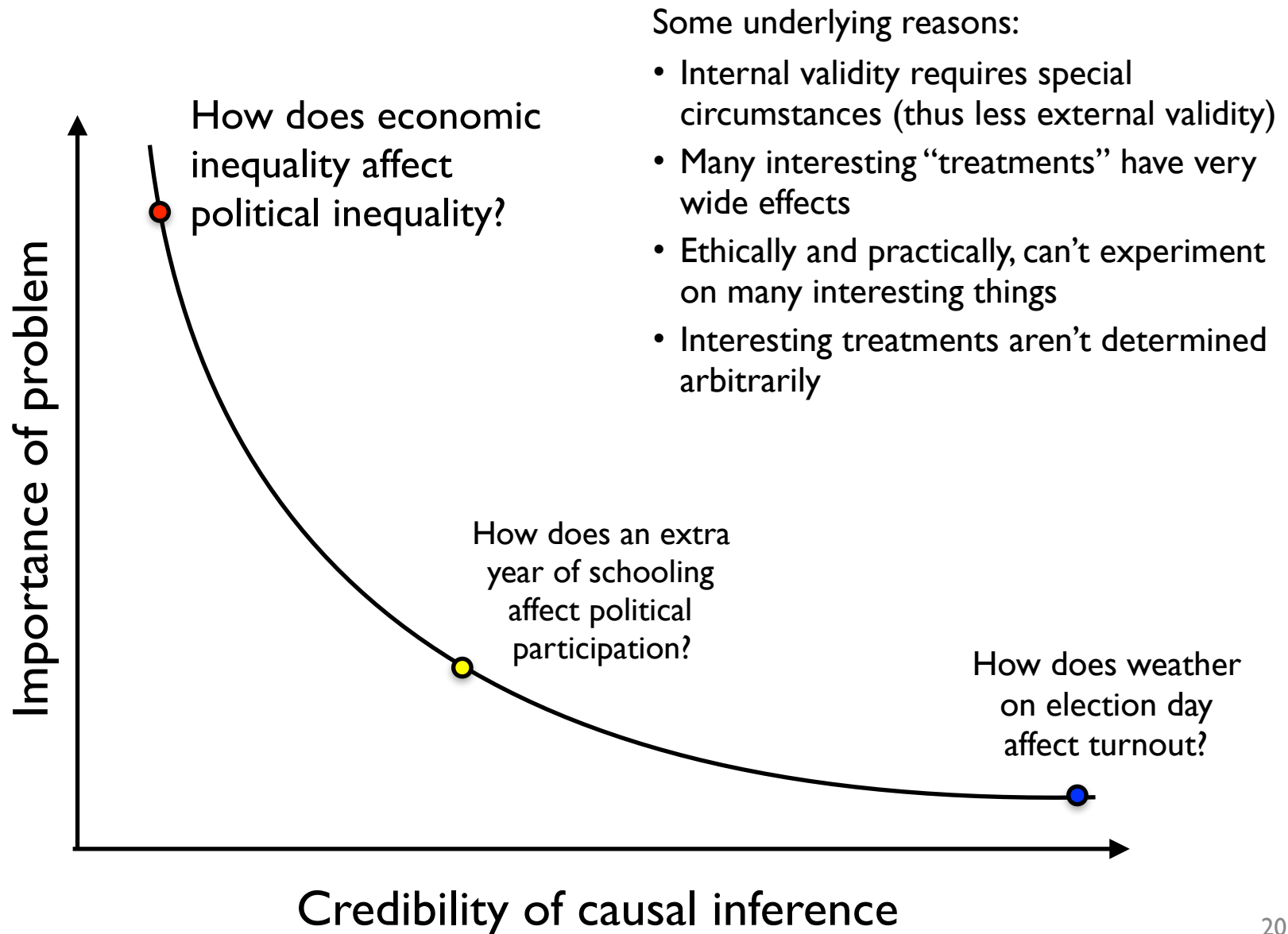
But the method- or data-driven approach often leads to trivial questions, scattered research profile.

And causal inference-driven approach excludes other types of questions: descriptive, explanatory, conceptual/theoretical.

The credibility/importance tradeoff



The credibility/importance tradeoff



Please remember this advice if your research involves any claims about effects

Suppose there were no constraints (time, money, ethics, the number of countries). What is the most informative experiment I could run to measure the effect I want to study?

Benefits: Clarifies to you (and reader)

- what you are trying to study
- what challenges you face
- what feasible designs actually exist

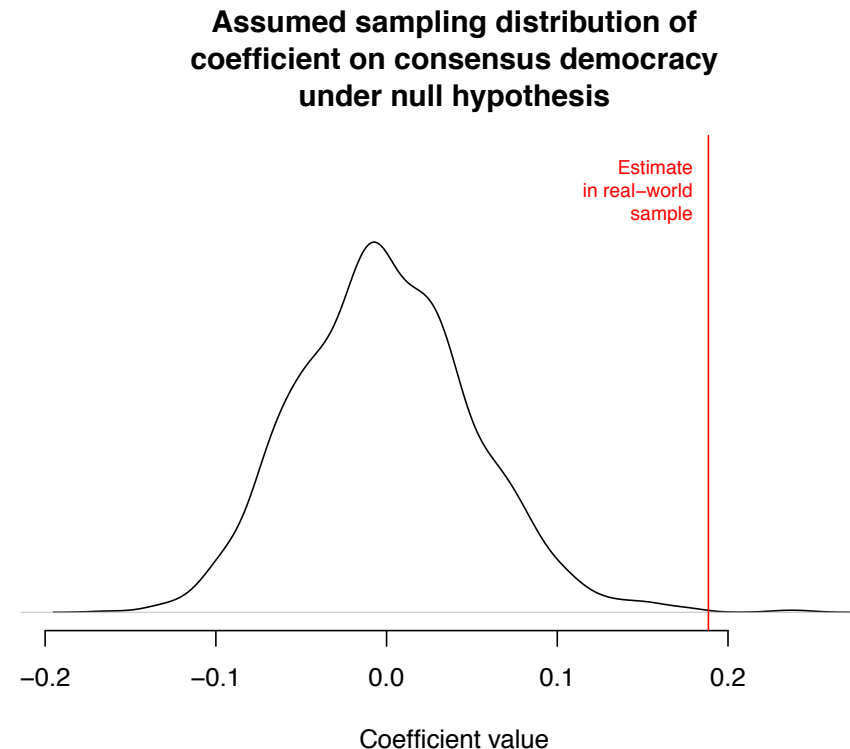
Some big questions about design-based inference and the “credibility revolution”

- Does a study on elections in French villages tell us anything about national elections? (external validity)
- What about explanation? What does the study in French villages tell us about why turnout is higher in PR countries (the puzzle to be explained)?
- What about “theory-testing”? What theory is tested when the setting for our analysis was carefully chosen?
- What about “effects of causes” questions that can’t be answered this way: what is the effect of globalization?

Design-based research and hypothesis testing

The basic hypothesis testing framework

- Generate a hypothesis and a test statistic (e.g. regression coefficient)
- Derive sampling distribution for test statistic under the null hypothesis (e.g. if true regression coefficient is zero)
- p-value indicates probability of getting a test statistic as extreme as observed estimate if null hypothesis actually true
- Convention: reject null hypothesis if p-value < .05



$$\alpha \equiv \Pr(\text{Reject null} | \text{Null is true}) = .05$$

Should we believe empirical claims in published research? (I)

What's the probability that the null hypothesis is *actually* false, given that the author rejects the null hypothesis in a statistical test?

Remember
Bayes Theorem?

$$\Pr(a|b) = \frac{\Pr(b|a)\Pr(a)}{\Pr(b)}$$

$$\Pr(\text{Null is false}|\text{Reject null}) = \frac{\Pr(\text{Reject null}|\text{Null is false})\Pr(\text{Null is false})}{\Pr(\text{Reject null})}$$

Should we believe empirical claims in published research? (2)

What's the probability that the null hypothesis is *actually* false, given that the author rejects the null hypothesis in a statistical test?

$$\Pr(\text{Null is false} | \text{Reject null}) = \frac{\text{Power} \times \Pr(\text{Null is false})}{\text{Power} \times \Pr(\text{Null is false}) + \alpha(1 - \Pr(\text{Null is false}))}$$

Power: probability of correctly rejecting null

alpha: probability of incorrectly rejecting null

Implication: we should believe claim of **statistical significance** when

- alpha is low (standard *goal* is .05)
- $\Pr(\text{Null is false})$ is high (i.e. the rejection is not surprising)

Should we believe empirical claims in published research? (3)

First challenge: Editors and reviewers require surprising results.

- *This gene causes turnout!*
- *The outcome of football games affects incumbent vote share!*
- *The disease environment during colonization affects current economic development (through institutions)!*

This makes published results (especially in top journals) less believable.

What can we do?

Should we believe empirical claims in published research? (4)

Second challenge: What is true value of alpha (probability of incorrectly rejecting the null hypothesis)?

We reject the null when the p-value is below .05. Is this the same as $\alpha = .05$?

Consider:

- You run 20 regressions to pick your “preferred specification” (specification search)
- You don’t pursue projects where, even with 20 regressions, you still get null results (file-drawer problem)

In practice, alpha might be **much** higher than .05!

Four kinds of “search” to worry about

Specification search: Having chosen an X and Y of interest and a setting, try various control variables, functional forms, etc until you find a significant relationship between X and Y

Treatment search: Having chosen a Y of interest and a setting, run a regression and choose your hypothesis based on what coefficients turn out to be significant/interesting

Outcome search: Having found a setting where X is quasi-randomly assigned, try various outcome variables Y until find a significant relationship

Subgroup search: Having found a setting where X is quasi-randomly assigned, try various subgroups (e.g. young Asian men) until find a significant relationship

Which of these is better with “credibility revolution”?
Which is worse?

Replication movement and DA-RT

<http://www.dartstatement.org/>



[Petition](#) to delay DA-RT implementation

Petition to Delay DA-RT Implementation

November 3, 2015 [list includes those who signed of November 8 5:15 pm EST]

Dear Colleagues,

We write as concerned members of the American Political Science Association to urge an important amendment to the statement, "Data Access and Research Transparency (DA-RT): A Joint Statement by Political Science Journal Editors." In the joint statement, dated October 6, 2014, journal editors committed their respective journals to a set of principles, to be implemented by January 15, 2016.

DA-RT organizers have made many efforts over the past five years to reach out to members of the profession through various symposia and meetings. However, these issues began to gain widespread attention only when the journal editors signed the statement of October 6, 2014 and panels at the 2015 annual meeting of the American Political Science Association brought the issue to the attention of many scholars who had not realized the possible implications of that statement for their own research, despite the previous outreach activities. Conversations at the panels, roundtables, section business meetings, and other venues at the recent annual meeting demonstrated that members of the Association have only just begun to grapple with the

Pre-registration movement and EGAP



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20151107AA	Emotions, Impunity, and Victimization: Survey Experiments on Justice and Foreign Policy in Georgia (<i>This design is gated</i>)	Alexander Kapatadze, Thomas Zeitzoff