Lecture 3: Wicked Problems in IR

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1. I don't understand how my brain works.
2. But my brain is what I rely on to understand how things work.
3. Is that a problem? I'm not sure how to tell.
Some Housekeeping

• Does everyone have their clickers registered?
  • Any problems?

• Homework 1 is posted online and due next Wednesday.

• I will be out of town next week.
  • Monday and Wednesday will be class as usual
  • Friday of next week: No class.
Reading Quiz

• What was the technology-driven change discussed in Jackman’s TED talk?
• A. Big Data
• B. Massively parallel processing
• C. Self-driving cars
• D. Artificial Intelligence
• E. Assembly line automation
• F. Voice recognition
Reading Quiz

Jackman gives the example of using “big data” to:

• (a) Predict the results of elections using polling results. *
• (b) Forecast stock market swings using consumer confidence.
• (c) Explain the downward trend in democratic movements.
• (d) Link capitalist enterprise to support for democracy.
An Outline for Today

• Evaluation research (continued from Wednesday)
• Research design as a path to good citizenship
• Examples of wicked problems in IR
The Jackman Video

- What did you guys think?
Explanatory Research

• Not just what is happening, but why.
• Causation
• We know poor kids often work outside the home, but...
  • Does poverty cause children to work outside the home, or is it something else?
• We know kids that work outside the home often don’t go to school, but...
  • Is it the outside jobs that keep them out of school, or is it something else?
• Understanding causal relationships helps us predict what will happen if we change something.

• If lack of school attendance causes low skill attainment, and low skill attainment causes poverty...
  • Then increasing school attendance should improve skill attainment and reduce poverty.
Evaluation Research

- Did it work?

- This is all the rage in the international aid community these days. Are programs working? If so, which programs give the largest effects for the most money?
Jobs in Evaluation Research

• **Job Title:** Monitoring and Evaluation Fellow

• **Description:** Village Enterprise is seeking a Fellow to lead its field-level Monitoring and Evaluation activities, design and manage innovative pilot projects as well as current Special Projects in a highly dynamic team. The M&E Fellow will also support East African staff to implement and improve the organization's core program, supervise interns and regional managers, and monitor program implementation.

• Village Enterprise is an innovative microenterprise development organization working in East Africa to reduce poverty with the following mission – “To equip people living in extreme poverty with resources to create sustainable businesses.” Village Enterprise provides business training, seed capital/start-up funds .... Over the next five years, Village Enterprise plans to expand its program, evaluation and innovation efforts significantly.
Research Design and Citizenship

• Research design makes you a good consumer of information
  • Insist on evidence to back up factual claims & have the skills to evaluate the quality of that evidence
  • Understand the difference between things we know with a high degree of uncertainty and things about which we remain uncertain
  • Be your own no-spin zone
Hold yourself to a High Standard

• Epistemic rationality:
  • Update your beliefs in the face of new evidence
  • Take steps to mitigate your cognitive biases
  • Examine why you believe what you believe
  • Acknowledge uncertainty. Don’t hold strong views on topics you know little about.

• You remain human
  • It remains OK to “go along to get along”
Wicked Problems in IR

• Policy Question: Should the EU & the IMF forgive a substantial part of Greece’s government debt?

• What are some empirical questions whose answers would help us answer this policy question?
Wicked Problems in IR

• Policy Question: Should the U.S. ratify the Iranian nuclear deal?

• What are some empirical questions whose answers would help us answer this policy question?
Any questions about your homework?