

CALL FOR ARTICLES

RSF: The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences

CONFERENCE ON BIG DATA IN POLITICAL ECONOMY

RSF: The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences invites paper submissions for its upcoming issue on big data in political economy.

The Study of Inequality and Polarization through Big Data

The study of inequality in political economy is on the verge of a major revolution as big data comes into play. Research will progress as sources of public and private data on economic behavior are cross-walked to data on political behavior. Examples on the economics side are geocoded mortgage foreclosure rates and labor market choices and compensation of professionals. On the political side, we would point to public opinion surveys and roll call, campaign contribution, and voter turnout records.

We will select nine papers from the responses to the RFP. The conference and online journal issue is being organized by Atif Mian of Princeton University and Howard Rosenthal of New York University. We emphasize that we are very open to papers that depart from the research agendas of the organizers. With that goal in mind, the papers will be selected by a third evaluator added by RSF as well as by the organizers. The remainder of this document develops eight areas where papers might be contributed. These areas should not be seen as exhaustive. Innovation is welcome.

Campaign contributions as political participation. Campaign contributions are a form of political participation that goes beyond simply voting. In a period where social participation may have generally declined, the number of individuals making contributions reported to the Federal Election Commission has increased dramatically, from 224,000 in 1980 to 3,138,000 in 2012. The analysis of millions of contribution records has shown, however, that the increase in participation has been more than offset by the increase in money participations by the top 0.01% of the VAP (Voting Age Population). The top contributors represented only 15% of the dollar value of all contributions in 1980 but over 40% in 2012. This concentration suggests that the political process is very distorted by large disparities in participation.

Political participation and representation. Do legislators represent their rich constituents and ignore their poor ones? Recent research has addressed this question by comparing constituency public opinion and roll call voting behavior. The research has pointed to two channels for representation. In one, an elected legislator could be directly responsive to the poor. In the other, the poor would achieve representation through electoral outcomes. Methodological issues for studying the problem have focused on the time periods being studied, the effective sample sizes used to measure constituency opinion, and the coarseness of direct survey questions on liberal-

conservative questions. Big data techniques for cumulating hundreds of thousands of interviews can be important to resolving these issues.

Political polarization. Political polarization appears to go hand-in-hand with rising inequality. The widely used measures of polarization have, until recently, come from the analysis of congressional roll call voting. Big data will permit in depth studies of political polarization that go beyond Congress, extending to state legislatures, campaign contributors, and the mass public. Linkages across data base has the potential to present a more comprehensive picture of the American political system that extends far beyond the Beltway.

Public policy in health care and other regulated professional sectors. Professions, such as medicine, law dentistry, and nursing have accessible databases on characteristics of individual members of the profession, including, in some cases, compensation. Similar information, because of SEC requirement is available for executives and directors or traded corporation. While the political preferences of members of these actors cannot be identified through voting records or survey responses, political contributions are a matter of public record. Moreover, the data permit construction of panels going over more than two decades. At the same time, individuals can be linked to professional associations, such as various organizations of medical professionals and state chapters of these organizations that take positions on public policy, such as the Affordable Care Act. Rising inequality may exacerbate divisions among professionals and these divisions may influence public policy.

Finance and Inequality. The financial sector has been seen as a major contributor to the increase in inequality. We need to understand how government produces financial regulation and deregulation. One pathway is to connect the voting behavior of members of Congress to the economic interests of constituents. Geocoded data on measures such as mortgage foreclosure rates and the portfolios of thousands of small lenders will represent a major improvement in measurement. In addition to studying legislation, it is important to study the bureaucracy, including the workings of the revolving door. Regulators can now be studied in a manner similar to the study of regulated actors in the private sector.

The political economy of networks. The importance of networks—whether based on ethnicity, race, college attendance, religion, political party or any other dimension—has long been recognized as an important determinant of economic and political outcomes. Examples of networks impacting economic outcomes include migration, job search and hiring, bank loans, venture capital, and more. The more recent—and exciting—development in this literature is the advancement in information technology that has made it possible for researchers to construct networks on a number of interesting dimensions. Firms whose networks extend to cabinet members may have higher returns than those less well connected.

Propensity to vote models, matched with demographic and spending patterns. The most recent Obama campaign in the presidential elections highlighted the value of tracing and influencing "swing" voters. Underlying such new political strategies is a wave of big data that link voter registration data with information on voter demographics, income, spending behavior, church attendance, etc. These data enable social scientists to estimate propensity to vote on various

issues much more accurately. The implications of such data for how campaigns are run and issues targeted are obvious.

Corruption and Policy Interventions. Recent years have seen a big revolution in "smart" identification cards around the world. These are government-issued individual IDs that can be secured via thumb or iris scans, and can also be used for financial transactions. For example, India is currently in the process of rolling out such identification cards that have already been given to close of half a billion people. Once such cards are issued, many government programs and transfer programs targeting children, women or the poor can be implemented based on these cards. Over time, tremendous amounts of data are generated on individuals, their mobility, and participation in various government programs. Technology is thus offering new ways for the government to interact with its citizens, bypassing some of the more traditional political intermediaries such as local politicians and local government officers. What impact is such innovation having on rent seeking, political patronage, and ultimate welfare outcomes that we care about? These are some of the fascinating questions that these new data can help us answer.

Anticipated Timeline

Prospective contributors should submit a CV and an abstract of up to two pages of their study no later than 5 PM EST on May 15, 2014, to Journals@rsage.org. Please put "Big Data" in the subject line and address the email to Suzanne Nichols, Director of Publications. Only abstracts submitted to Journals@rsage.org will be considered. Each paper will receive a \$1,000 honorarium when the issue is published. All questions should be directed to journals@rsage.org (and not to the conference organizers).

Selected papers will receive notification by the end of May. A draft of selected papers will be due by September 15, 2014. A conference will be held at the RSF headquarters in New York City in early October 2014 to discuss the papers. Travel costs, food, and lodging will be covered by the foundation. Papers will be circulated before the conference. Each paper will be presented by one of the volume contributors who will provide comments and lead discussion of the paper. The conference will focus on improvements of the papers and the identification of common themes among the papers.

Selected papers should be no longer than 35 pages. They should be double-spaced with 1-inch margins and printed in Times New Roman font. Tables and figures are included in the page count as are notes and references, which can be set single-spaced. The papers will be sent out for review by experts in the field the paper addresses.

Because the volumes are intended to influence scholarly, policy, and public thinking, they will be vigorously publicized by the Russell Sage Foundation.

Papers will be published open access on the foundations website as well as in several digital repositories, including JSTOR and UPCC/Project muse.