The Nature of Pro-Environmental Behavior
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Recent years have seen a great expansion in the public consciousness of human impacts on global environment, as well as wider acceptance of the reality of anthropogenic climate change. Although individual willingness to take pro-environmental action is a crucial component to real progress on the climate dilemma, it is a phenomenon whose antecedents are complex and diffuse. While much of the literature on this topic focuses on the identity characteristics which may account for individual pro-environmental behaviors, in this research project I build on research in environmental psychology and other disciplines to hypothesize that spending time in nature impacts the pro-environmental behaviors of individuals. I argue that, because it facilitates deeper connection and measurable psychological changes toward cooperative behaviors, time in nature is likely an influence on future actions on behalf of the natural world. I further theorize that although time in nature may impact Democrats and Republicans differently, there is an effect regardless of partisanship. To test this hypothesis, I employ a multivariate regression analysis which tests the relationship between time spent in nature and pro-environmental behaviors while controlling for possible confounding variables including income, education, gender, and partisanship. To investigate the effects of partisanship, I also run a model testing whether time in nature influences the behavior of Democrats and Republicans differently. I expect to find in each case that the relationship between time in nature and pro-environmental behaviors is statistically significant. Such findings could serve to emphasize the importance of access to natural spaces for the future of environmental attitude formation and activism.

Public Opinion and the Supreme Court: And Never the Twain Shall Meet?
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My research paper investigates whether the Supreme Court is influenced by public opinion. It is important to be aware of whether the Court is inclined to uphold laws that have been passed by legislative majorities or overturn them. Is the Supreme Court restrained or does it have a tendency for judicial activism? The question that guides my work is: During the period of approximately the last six decades, has the Supreme Court been influenced by public opinion when deciding politically important (i.e., salient) cases? My theory is that the Supreme Court is influenced by public opinion when deciding cases that are salient due, in part, to the Court’s inherent political nature. Justices ascend through a partisan appointment process that is predicated on the sharing of power between the President and the Senate. Consequently, justices and their institution cannot uncouple from the political ecosystem. Specifically, I posit that fear of non-implementation constrains a justice’s decision-making. Non-implementation would occur if the Court’s ruling was not enforced by either a lower court or a non-judicial authority. And the potential consequence of recurring non-implementation is to degrade the Court’s legitimacy. To test my hypothesis systematically, I will use multivariate regression analysis to examine the relationship between the ideological direction of Supreme Court case decisions and prevailing public opinion, while accounting for the influences of other factors. My analysis incorporates data from (approximately) 5,000 individual Supreme Court cases, extending from 1958 to 2018. I predict that public opinion does influence Supreme Court decision-making when rulings will ‘resolve’ the national debate around issues that have significant public policy implications.
Affecting Change: Civil Rights and Interest Group Influence in the Supreme Court

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The Supreme Court of the United States is required to interact with outside actors as it fulfills its duty of interpreting the law. These actors, including interest groups and the Solicitor General, often provide the Court with information regarding the political and social effects of their decisions. Throughout the past century, the relationship between interest groups and the Supreme Court has changed due to increased ideological and political polarization across the country. These increases have escalated the amount of partisan-oriented amicus curiae, or friend-of-the-court, briefs submitted to the Court. As the Court receives more information from partisan-oriented organizations, I hypothesize that the litigant that receives the most amici support will also receive the support of the Court. This hypothesis stems from the Court’s historical agreement with the desires of public opinion, due to its lack of enforcement power, causing the Court to rule in favor of the amicus groups that are believed to mirror public interests. Amicus briefs, historically meant to provide factual information, have begun to reflect the effects of partisan polarization by working to persuade the Court to decide in a particular direction. By assessing the influence of amicus briefs on the Court’s civil rights decisions following the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, my research highlights the effects that both liberal and conservative-oriented interest groups have on civil rights jurisprudence. My research separates civil rights cases into 11 issue-areas, including discrimination, prison rights, and women’s rights. By conducting a multivariate analysis, I account for the effects of amicus briefs and several control variables, including the president’s and Congress’s ideologies, on the Court’s decisions. My preliminary results build on research conducted in the late 1990s by indicating the decreased efficacy of amicus briefs and increased effects of partisan ideology and public opinion on the Court.

Voter Suppression and Minority Participation in the Absence of Federal Preclearance

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In 2013, the Supreme Court rendered unenforceable the federal preclearance provision of the Voting Rights Act of 1965—a decision that many feared would undo decades of progress in eliminating voting discrimination. Chief Justice John Roberts claimed that federal preclearance was an “extraordinary measure” that is no longer warranted. Was he correct? Or have our worst fears been realized? Almost a decade since the decision, I explore these questions by mapping the landscape of election laws across all fifty states and analyzing their effects on minority participation in each election cycle from 2006 through 2020. I identify de facto voter suppression by state legislatures, such as voter-ID requirements and felon disenfranchisement, and assess whether these have increased since the Shelby County v. Holder decision. I then use multiple regression analysis to assess whether these laws widen the gap in voter registration and turnout rates between white and minority voters. I theorize that, contrary to Chief Justice Roberts’ claim, voting discrimination had been kept at bay by the federal preclearance provision, rather than by previously covered state legislatures’ own accord. In the absence of federal preclearance, I expect to see an increase in voter suppression following the 2013 decision and a negative relationship between voter suppression and minority participation. These findings may inform major voting rights legislation moving through Congress this year.

Housing Price and Fertility Rates in the 21st Century China

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This paper uses national data collected through China’s population census to estimate the effect of housing prices on fertility rates between 2000-2020 across 31 provincial-level administrative regions in mainland China. I theorize that higher housing price would lead to a decrease in fertility rates. I take housing price as a proxy for the overall costs of living. As houses become more expensive, younger generations are forced to save money for years to afford buying a house. When individuals’ income remains unchanged, higher housing prices lower people’s purchasing ability. This lowered purchasing ability leaves people less financially capable of raising a child and results in individuals being less willing to have a child. This paper employs a multivariate regression model and controls for other relevant variables. I expect to find that with the continuous increase in housing price, there is a steady decrease in fertility rates in each administrative region. Furthermore, since a more rapid rise in commodity prices is associated with fast economic development especially in Beijing and Shanghai, the fertility rates in these two regions would be the lowest, corresponding with a weak per capita purchasing power of individual households. This analysis of the relationship between housing price and fertility rate is important because it explains why there is a fertility decline despite robust economic growth in a developing country. This paper calls for changes in maternity policy to accommodate possible decline in workforce and productivity in China and its aging society in the next 20 years.