Thomas A. **Leavitt**

PH.D. CANDIDATE, POLITICAL SCIENCE

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Education

Columbia University in the City of New York   *New York, NY*

M.A., 2016; M.Phil., 2017; Ph.D., Expected 2020   *September 2014 - PRESENT*

- **Research Interests**: Political Economy of Development; State Formation; Democratic Transitions; Ethnic Politics
- **Major Field**: Comparative Politics (Dissertation Chair: Macartan N. Humphreys)
- **Minor Field**: Methodology (Minor Committee: Donald P. Green and José R. Zubizarreta)

University of Chicago   *Chicago, IL*

M.A., International Relations, with Honors   *August 2012 - August 2014*

DePauw University   *Greencastle, IN*

B.A., Political Science, *Magna Cum Laude*   *August 2005 - May 2009*

Publications & Working Papers

SUBSTANTIVE

Democracy and Economic Inequality: The Countervailing Roles of Suffrage and Circumscription in Apartheid South Africa   *Under Review*

T. LEAVITT

This paper draws upon quantitative text analysis of the verbatim debates and proceedings in South Africa's parliament from 1948 – 1994 (the entire duration of apartheid) in order to make conceptual contributions to theories of both state formation and democracy. First, I demonstrate that apartheid MPs sought to extend suffrage to Black South Africans; yet such suffrage was confined to territorially circumscribed political domains in order to blunt the redistributive implications of democracy. Second, I demonstrate that MPs' discourse of liberal, democratic rights for Black South Africans was positively correlated with policy proposals for racially and territorially circumscribed political jurisdictions. The implications of these empirical results are both positive and normative: First, the populations and territories over which a state's legal authority extends depend not solely on nonstrategic constraints, such as geography, but also on the countervailing roles that suffrage and territorial circumscription play in economic redistribution. Second, conceptions of government type (i.e., whether a government is democratic or not) are based on a determinate, bounded political community to which politicians are (or are not) accountable. Yet this paper's focus on variation in the territories and populations that political boundaries encompass induces scholars to reassess the normative value they ascribe to democracies by considering the formation of political boundaries to which any designation of "democracy" or "nondemocracy" must logically refer.

Communication Technologies and Their Effects on Political Participation: Experimental Evidence from South Africa   *In Preparation*

T. LEAVITT, G. SYUNYAEV and A. WILKE

Throughout the developing world, communication between citizens and their local representatives occurs mainly in-person. The pervasiveness of this mode of communication is suboptimal for at least two reasons: (1) Given the often large geographic scope of wards, the costs of communication for citizens are high and (2) some citizens are better able than others to access local politicians, such that only an unrepresentative subset of citizens is able to express preferences to, and receive information from, local government. The burgeoning development of low-cost information and communications technologies (ICTs), however, has the potential to remedy these two challenges. We experimentally test this proposition in the context of South Africa, where many of its municipal governments have begun installing free, high-speed Wi-Fi for local residents. The experimental treatment is an online communication platform to which Internet users gain access via a Facebook login and are subsequently assigned to (a) the opportunity to send a personal message, (b) the opportunity to send an anonymous message or (c) a pure control condition without the opportunity to send any message. These experimental conditions yield a descriptive analysis of how political participation varies within and across online social networks, such as Facebook, and a causal analysis of how message content varies depending on whether or not political communication is anonymous. Through a seemingly unrelated endline survey, we measure the effects of online communication on individuals' political satisfaction and participation. This experiment is thereby able to yield evidence for political psychological theories related to citizens' political participation, as well as theories about the extent to which new technologies complement or substitute traditional modes of communication.

Experiments and Bayesian Belief Revision: The Epistemic Value of Randomization in Updating Credences about Causal Hypotheses

Under Review

T. LEAVITT

One justification for randomized experiments is that they enable researchers to reject or fail to reject causal hypotheses with controlled error probabilities. Such an evidential rationale may be apposite in the context of falsificationism, but is not in the context of Bayesian belief revision; however, arguments that do assess the value of randomization in the context of Bayesian belief revision erroneously suppose that the desideratum of randomization is balance on prognostic covariates between experimental conditions. Under this supposition, scholars such as Howson and Urbach (2006) argue that methods of matching and control are better able to meet the aim of covariate balance than is randomization. This paper argues instead that randomization possesses epistemic value insofar as it ensures the existence of a probability measure of evidential support that (1) is independent of researchers' subjective beliefs (e.g., beliefs about which covariates are prognostic) and (2) satisfies the following evidential desideratum: The expected probability measure of evidential support should be greatest for the true hypothesis and should monotonically decrease in the distance of each false hypothesis from the truth. I illustrate that randomization does indeed yield such a probability measure in the form of a Normal-distribution-based likelihood function that describes not the population from which units are sampled, but a causal estimator whose randomness stems from only the assignment of units to experimental conditions. Such a likelihood function thereby forms a reasonable basis upon which rational agents ought to revise their subjective credences about causal parameters. While this process of belief revision does indeed depend on an agent's idiosyncratic prior beliefs defined on a potentially nonexhaustive set of causal parameters, the aforementioned evidential property of randomization ensures that belief revision in this nonideal context has optimal *truth-approximating* (if not *truth-tracking*) properties. Randomization therefore plays an integral evidential role in the context of Bayesian belief revision about causal hypotheses.

Causal Inference in Observational Studies: Assignment Mechanism Models and the Role of Covariate Balance

In Preparation

T. LEAVITT

Observational studies posit that units' treatment assignment probabilities are governed by an unknown function of baseline covariates such that, if units have identical baseline covariates, then they must have identical treatment assignment probabilities. But even if all potentially confounding covariates are observed, exact balance on all of them is usually mathematically and practically infeasible; hence, researchers often conduct tests of covariate balance to assess whether a given design has "enough" balance such that the study can be analyzed as if it is a block, uniform randomized experiment. In this paper, I explain that the null hypothesis of such tests is not covariate balance, per se, but the proposition that treatment assignment probabilities are *uniformly* distributed within covariate blocks. I then formally demonstrate that tests of this null hypothesis are biased against a subset of alternative hypotheses that probabilities are *nonuniformly* distributed within blocks, and subsequently develop a power analysis that enables researchers to discern the specific alternative hypotheses for which the aforementioned null hypothesis is biased and unbiased, respectively. The argument and method advanced in this paper shed light on debates about the role that models of the assignment mechanism and subsequent assessments of covariate balance play in drawing causal inferences from observational data.

Honors & Awards

Proposal Development Grant

South Africa

THE ABDUL LATIF JAMEEL POVERTY ACTION LAB (J-PAL), MIT

Summer 2017

Summer Research Grant

South Africa

CENTER FOR DEVELOPMENT ECONOMICS AND POLICY (CDEP), COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

Summer 2016

Summer Research Grant

South Africa

CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES (CSDS), COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

Summer 2015

Dean's Fellow

New York, NY

GRADUATE SCHOOL OF ARTS & SCIENCES, COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

2014 - 2019

2nd Year Specialization Fellowship

Chicago, IL

DIVISION OF THE SOCIAL SCIENCES, UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

2013 - 2014

University Unendowed Scholarship   *Chicago, IL*

Division of the Social Sciences, University of Chicago   *2012 - 2013*

Resident Fellowship   *Chicago, IL*

Division of the Social Sciences, University of Chicago   *2012 - 2013*

Teaching Experience

Lecturer, Political Systems of Africa   *New York, NY*

Department of Political Science, City College of New York (CCNY)   *Spring, 2018*

Teaching Assistant, Causal Inference for the Social Sciences   *Ann Arbor, MI*

ICPSR Summer Program - University of Michigan   *Summer, 2013 – 2017*

- **Ben Hansen**, Department of Statistics, University of Michigan
  Jake Bowers, Department of Political Science & Statistics, University of Illinois at Urbana–Champaign

Teaching Assistant, Advanced Topics in Quantitative Research:
Limited and Qualitative Dependent Variables   *New York, NY*

Department of Political Science, Columbia University   *Spring, 2017*

- **Gregory Wawro**, Department of Political Science, Columbia University

Teaching Assistant, Math Methods for Political Science   *New York, NY*

Department of Political Science, Columbia University   *Fall, 2016; Fall, 2017*

- **Johannes Urpelainen**, Department of Political Science, Columbia University, 2016
- **Thibault Vatter**, Department of Statistics, Columbia University, 2017

Teaching Assistant, Data Analysis and Statistics for Political Science Research *New York, NY*

Department of Political Science, Columbia University   *Spring, 2016*

- **Benjamin Goodrich**, Department of Political Science, Columbia University

Skills

Programming	[R] , Stan, Stata, Python
Software	LaTeX, Mathematica
Languages	Luganda, Lukonzo

Presentations

Politics and History Network   *New York, NY*

Panelist   *May 15, 2017*

Rethinking Governance in Africa, ASA Annual Meeting   *Washington, D.C.*

Panelist   *December 3, 2016*

Methods Workshop, Columbia University   *New York, NY*

Presenter   *April 22, 2016*

Master's Thesis Panel, African Studies Workshop   *Chicago, IL*

Panelist   *June 4, 2013*

Biannual Conference, African Studies Workshop   *Chicago, IL*
Panelist   *May 17, 2013*

Inside Politics: Studying States and Societies From Within, MPSA Annual Meeting   *Chicago, IL*
Panelist   *April 3, 2013*

Service

Methods Workshop   *Columbia University*
Coordinator   *Aug 2016 - May 2017*

Political Science Graduate Student Council   *Columbia University*
President   *Sep 2015 - May 2016*

Contemporary African Political Economy Research Seminar (CAPERS)   *Columbia University*
Coordinator   *Oct 2015*

Professional Memberships

American Political Science Association (APSA)   *Washington, DC*
Member   *2013 - PRESENT*
- Comparative Politics
- African Politics Conference Group
- Political Methodology
- Experimental Research
- Qualitative and Multi-Methods Research
- Foundations Of Political Theory

Midwest Political Science Association (MPSA)   *Chicago, IL*
Member   *2013 - PRESENT*

African Studies Association (ASA)   *Piscataway, NJ*
Member   *2013 - PRESENT*