2012 Senior Thesis Abstracts

Health Care Reform That Almost Wasn’t: How Rhetoric Shaped the 2009 Health Care Debate
Kelsey Berkowitz

The Obama Administration’s health care reform legislation, the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, was one of the most contentious pieces of legislation to have ever moved through Congress. Yet in the early months of the Obama Administration, members of both parties in Congress stated their desire to approach health care reform in a bipartisan way. In this analysis I attempt to solve the puzzle of why, given that the two parties had stated their willingness to work together to devise and pass health care reform legislation, the legislation’s passage was far from certain up until the very end. To do this I analyze the rhetoric of the two parties during the debate, using computational linguistic analysis coupled with traditional textual analysis to understand how that rhetoric influenced the debate’s progression.

Becoming Singapore and Rich: Singapore and Malaysia’s Natural Experiment with Property Rights and Economic Growth
Stuart Davis

The recent global economic downturn has reinvigorated the question of economic growth. In this study, I aim to elucidate the causes for economic growth by examining the particularly revealing case of Singapore and Malaysia. Since the emergence of Malaysia and Singapore as two independent countries in 1965, and despite their structural and cultural similarities, the Singapore economy grew at a significantly faster pace than Malaysia. I posit that this puzzling divergence in growth trajectories is a function of Singapore’s relatively stronger commitment to property rights demonstrated by their more credible network of laws, regulatory institutions and commercial practices. Moreover, my natural experiment design, afforded by the exogenous relationship between Singapore and Malaysia’s separation and their respective property rights regime, offers a novel insight into how the specific institution of property rights affect countries’ development.

The Life of the (Tea) Party: The Tea Party and the Efficacy of Social Movements
Ariel Dobkin

In the following paper, I examine the efficacy of the Tea Party based on its ability to attract support and pursue a specific legislative agenda. In order to accomplish its goals and be a lasting force in politics, a political movement needs to achieve three factors of success: a Substantial Constituency, Policy Specificity, and tangible Legislative Influence. I utilize a computational model to determine that the Tea Party has reached the critical mass of followers necessary to effectively pursue goals. I use survey data from 2010 and 2011 to determine that the unifying issue of the Tea Party is fiscal responsibility and the role of government. Because Tea Partiers share this narrow interest, I argue that they can accomplish their goal if they focus and function as an interest group. I use the Anti-Saloon League’s push from Prohibition as a comparative case study to demonstrate the increase in efficacy that comes with consolidation of a disparate movement. This thesis makes a larger point about social movements in
general; with a Substantial Constituency, Policy Specificity, and the organization that leads to Legislative Influence, any movement can be successful.

**A Tough Balancing Act: Institutional and Political Factors in the Budget Process**
Corey Donahue

This thesis examines both the effectiveness of congressional budgeting rules that have been put in place over the last two decades as well as the impact of public opinion regarding the size of the deficit. The issue is important both to settle past debates regarding the value of budgetary procedure and also in order to understand how best to restrict the growth of future deficits. This study attempts to differentiate itself by combining an examination of the legislative history of important budgeting laws with a quantitative analysis. In this thesis, I will argue that while public anger over the deficit is important for congressmen to reach agreement on how to eventually balance the budget, the implementation of lasting institutional restraints on discretionary spending is an effective method to reduce the deficit.

**Is Your Workforce Legal? E-Verify Laws in the U.S. States**
Sarah Elizabeth McDonald

State work authorization laws are on the rise. From 2006 to 2011, 15 states passed legislation requiring that public and/or private employers use E-Verify, a federal system that checks whether an employee is authorized to work in the United States. Scholars have studied factors that influence federal immigration policymaking but not those that drive state-level E-Verify legislation. My study uses logistical and linear regression to determine the effect that economic conditions, interest group representation, public opinion, and political ideology have on a state’s likelihood of passing E-Verify laws. I find that economic conditions and interest group representation have the largest influence on the type of E-Verify policy a state passes.

**Look Like Me, Act Like Me: The Effect of Reserved Seats on Substantive Representation of the Maori in New Zealand**
Courtney L. Millian

Reserved seat systems are a unique method for ensuring a baseline level of minority representation. They require that certain seats be occupied by members of a particular minority group. This study seeks to advance the debate on reserved seats by addressing their potential to influence minority substantive representation. I extend existing theories of ethnicity and electoral systems to the context of substantive representation of Maori, a minority group for which seats are reserved in New Zealand. Most notably, I hypothesize that the incentives generated by reserved seats will prompt the Maori legislators in those seats to pursue a greater degree of substantive representation than those Maori legislators who hold non-reserved seats. Using original data sets of written parliamentary questions and member’s bills, I construct two models to test the effects of ethnicity and tier on a legislator’s pursuit of substantive representation, above and beyond simply increasing the number of minorities in the legislature.
Blowing Away the Competition: Who’s Leading the Pack in Wind Power Use and Why
Amy Plovnick

Wind power use in the United States has increased considerably over the last decade. However, there is a great deal of variation across states in the amount of wind power generated and the percentage of electricity obtained from wind power. In addition, the states that use the most wind power are not necessarily the states with the greatest wind resources. In this paper, I investigate what accounts for this variation in wind power use across states. I argue that the institutions – the rules and government structures – that govern the wind power industry determine its growth within states. I find that the types of renewable energy policies that a state adopts and the state’s economy and resource availability have a significant effect on its wind power use, while the political environment within the state does not. As renewable energy policies diffuse between states and to the federal government, it is important to recognize that some policies are more effective than others in promoting renewable energy development.

Talking Torture: A Democracy’s Guide to Interrogation Ethics
Dan Rebnord

No abstract available

Refugee Hospitality: A Comparative Analysis Across Countries
Michelle Shapiro

There is tremendous variation in the level of hospitality that host countries extend to their refugees. Some countries provide refugees with nearly the same rights as they provide their citizens, other countries restrict the freedom of their refugees while another set of countries refuses to recognize refugees as anything more than illegal foreigners. In this paper, I try to understand why certain countries are more hospitable to refugees than others. I focus on understanding how a past conflict influences refugee hospitality. A country with a past conflict may be apprehensive about creating hospitable conditions that invite in refugees since refugees may create security risks. However a country with a past conflict also may be more sympathetic to refugees and therefore treat them more hospitably. To determine refugee hospitality, I created scores that reflect how well countries’ refugee laws comply with international refugee laws. I perform statistical tests to determine the impact of different types of conflicts occurring less than 10 years, 10-19 years and more than 20 years ago. My results indicate that a past ethnic conflict may result in inhospitable treatment regardless of when the conflict occurred. A country with an adverse regime change should initially provide inhospitable treatment, though it should become hospitable as the conflict becomes farther in the past.

Swing Vote: The Impact of the Health Care Vote in the 2010 Midterm House Elections
Jun Yoon

In the 2008 elections, the Democrats won 257 seats in the U.S. House of Representatives, receiving support from the Obama coalition composed of minorities, white professionals, students and a substantial number of white middle-class voters. But just two years later in the midterm elections, the
Democrats lost 63 seats to the Republican Party, marking the biggest midterm loss since 1938. What caused such a historic turnover in the House of Representatives? In this paper, I argue that the incumbents’ vote on the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act played a significant role in whether or not the candidate was reelected. The empirical analysis supports this argument, showing that marginal Democrats who voted for the passage of the health care bill were likely to be voted out of office in the midterm elections, while safe Democrats who voted for the bill were more likely to be reelected.