2014 Senior Thesis Abstracts

Unhealthy Competition: Can Partisanship Predict Obamacare Health Insurance Exchange Adoption
Hanna Colin

The Affordable Care Act, the largest U.S. health care reform since the 1960s, has seen substantial political backlash and varied implementation efforts in the 50 states and Washington, D.C. The health insurance exchange mandate within the ACA allows states to create their own state-based exchange, partner with the federal government, or instead default to a federally-facilitated exchange. Why do we see limited state exchange adoption rates in the states? I argue that partisanship is essential to understanding this discrepancy. Literature has not yet measured national trends of the influence of partisanship on exchange adoption. I examine overarching trends in the relationship between state government partisan divide and health insurance exchange adoption through an ordered logit model. My findings suggest Republican partisanship is affiliated with no exchange adoption. Surprisingly, it is more probable for Democratic states to adopt a clearinghouse model that an active-purchaser model. Only extreme levels of political ideology influence the type of exchange a state adopts, although the relative influence of party versus ideology cannot be entirely distinguished.

The Uncovered Set and Two-Candidate Competition in a Large Electorate
Nicolas Dumas

In 1986, Richard McKelvey identified three different institutional structures in which preferences may be aggregated in the Uncovered Set. This paper presents a test of the robustness of one of those institutional settings – two-party competition in a large electorate – using a computational simulation. In this simulation, I relax the assumptions about voter preferences, consistent with insight from the behavioral literature. Even with these changes, electoral competition drives candidates into the Uncovered Set. These results are significant for two reasons: first, they offer evidence for the robustness of the Uncovered Set finding, and second, they offer evidence that candidates are capable of being responsive to their constituents’ preferences even without complete information about what those preferences are.

Conflicts of Conscience: A Normative Approach to the Contraceptive Mandate and Religious Accommodation
Leigh Empson

What is the appropriate course of action when state laws mandate actions from individuals that are contrary to their religious convictions? The United States faces this philosophical and legal question again as the contraceptive mandate continues to create controversy among Catholic employers. This thesis approaches this question in the context of the contraceptive mandate not from a constitutional law perspective but a normative one. It argues that, in its original form, the contraceptive mandate could constitute a significant burden on the consciences of religious employers by requiring them to facilitate and endorse the use of a product they consider to be sinful. However, the compromise of having insurance companies provide the coverage themselves at no cost is adequate to alleviate this
burden. In order to adequately accommodate Catholic consciences, the mandate should be amended to eliminate exemptions, and the compromise should be offered to all employers.

**Implications of Independence: An Analysis of the Relationship Between Energy Independence and Globalization in the OECD Nations**

Ben Gottesdiener

Dependence on foreign energy, let alone any essential resource, constrains the ability of a dependent nation to act in the international arena and increases the nation’s vulnerability. Moreover, one of the major oil-supplying regions, the Middle East, continues to be extremely politically unstable, further contributing to the vulnerability associated with dependence on foreign energy. Today, many nations have made energy independence a national priority and many are beginning to wonder what the implications of energy independence are. The question this study seeks to answer is how differing levels of energy independence affect a nation’s level of global engagement. I have quantified energy independence for the OECD countries in order to statistically analyze the possible relationship between energy independence and political and economic globalization. To the extent that global engagement provides nations with some remedy to the vulnerability linked to their energy dependence, I hypothesize that as nations are increasingly energy independent, they are likely to be both increasingly politically and economically disengaged in the international arena. The statistical analysis supports these hypotheses.

**Word Games: The Strategic Model of Judicial Decision Making and American ‘Hate Speech’ Liberalism**

David Hoffman

His paper utilizes political science methodologies – both the ‘method of difference’ and formal game theory – to examine the root causes of the American divergence from international law vis-à-vis hate speech criminalization. In contrast to the dominant explanatory narrative – that the United States is exceptional in its absolutist approach to free expression because it is freer than its European democratic counterparts – this paper argues that American hate speech tolerance is actually a remnant of America’s segregationist past. I argue that strategic judicial policy making during the Civil Rights era, specifically the capitulation by the Supreme Court to Congressional segregationists in response to the near passage of the Bricker Amendment, explains the development of America’s overall antagonism to international law standards. I then suggest that this generalized antipathy towards international law is the best explanation for the peculiar American tolerance of hateful rhetoric.

**Does Bureaucratic Capacity Explain Health Insurance Exchange Decisions? Understanding the State Implementation of the Affordable Care Act**

Callie Lambert

The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA), of 2010, is a comprehensive health reform that seeks to expand insurance coverage and control health care costs. One key mechanism for expanding insurance coverage is the creation of insurance exchanges, which are centralized markets for individuals and small business owners to purchase insurance coverage. The ACA requires every state to participate in a health insurance exchange, but states may choose to establish a state exchange, default to a federal
exchange, or participate in a partnership with the federal government. Other scholars note the apparent relationship between partisanship of state governments and exchange decisions. However, in-depth studies of this relationship reveal that exchange decisions do not always correlate to partisanship, suggesting that other factors influence these decisions. In this study of health insurance exchanges, I consider the role of bureaucratic capacity in influencing these decisions, an explanation that has yet to be considered for this case. Consistent with other literature on bureaucratic capacity, I measure bureaucratic capacity with salary and budget information for state institutions. The results show no significant relationship (at the .05 level) between bureaucratic capacity and state exchange decisions, suggesting that there are other factors influencing state decisions in the case of insurance exchanges.


Jessica Metzger

The United States Peace Corps’ mission combines two distinct goals of foreign assistance and public diplomacy. The agency enlists predominately recent college graduates to volunteer abroad, providing technical assistance to interested countries. While the Corps is bureaucratically independent from foreign policy agencies, its funding is allocated through the Congressional appropriations process. This provokes the question as to whether the Peace Corps is beholden to the foreign policy objectives. This paper seeks to assess to what degree the Peace Corps makes decisions strategically. I argue that the Peace Corps behaves as a tool for public diplomacy, in that the agency targets countries in which the population is likely to harbor negative feelings towards the U.S., primarily those who have been subject to or are contiguous to a country which has experienced U.S. military intervention. Interactions with volunteers are expected to assuage these negative feelings, translating into favorable policy outcomes for the United States. I first analyze UN General Assembly voting records of participant host countries before and after the onset of a Peace Corps program to assess the immediate impact on foreign policy behavior. I then seek to assess predictors of Peace Corps activity through a regression analysis using budget and volunteer allocation figures since the agency’s establishment in 1961. I find that while the agency indeed appears to follow a set of strategic foreign policy objectives, they do not appear to be based on a country being host or proximate to intervention.

**Immigration and Autonomy: On the Rights of Citizens and Refugees**

Bradley Niederschulte

In this paper I examine the justice of exclusionary immigration policies. I argue that the political autonomy of individuals within rights-respecting states grounds a strong right of self-determination that necessarily includes the right to exclude unwanted migrants. I show that my autonomy-oriented account of the right to exclude is better tailored to intuitions about the prerogatives and limitations of self-determination than competing accounts. I then consider a range of arguments offered in the literature for why open borders are morally required, and demonstrate that none of them are fully persuasive. I next qualify my argument by considering the moral entitlements of refugees. Balancing an absolute principle of non-refoulement with the interest that states have in self-determination, I propose a four-stage process for distributing the burden to care for refugees fairly across states. I then examine various
arguments in the literature on impermissible immigrant selection criteria and conclude, with some misgiving, that states enjoy wide latitude in how they would like to choose members. Finally, I examine the problem of doctors migrating from impoverished countries to wealthy ones. I attempt to balance the doctors’ interest in freedom with the right of their compatriots to basic medical care by arguing that the doctors who choose to migrate must pay to replace themselves in their state of origin with the help of the state that admits them.

Send in the Clones? The Effect of Surrogate Appearances on Candidate Support
Joseph L. Sutherland

Though surrogates, or those who campaign on behalf of a candidate, are used regularly by political campaigns, political science has been largely silent on whether – and if so, why – surrogates have an appreciable effect on U.S. elections. Further, we do not understand the mechanism by which their appearances may affect candidate support and vote shares. To gain insight into what this relationship may look like, I combine observational and experimental data to examine the empirical relationship between surrogate appearances and vote shares and test a proposed mechanism by which appearances may affect candidate support. I find that surrogates can affect candidate support via group-based cues and that they do increase vote shares. My findings further our understanding of voter behavior and supplement the discussion of whether campaigns “matter.”

Trading on Security: Policy Preferences in Response to Threat in the United States
Jaime Zucker

As terrorism in America has become increasingly prevalent in the past two decades, the trade-off between civil liberties and national security has become a more important consideration in determining an individual’s attitudes towards security policies. This study examines the correlation between threat type and support for security policies, arguing that, while racial differences between groups pose a normative threat to identity, and acts of violence pose an explicit threat to safety, it is the interaction of these two types of threat that will yield the highest rates of support for government policies that potentially infringe on civil liberties. To test this theory, I conducted an online experiment which exposed respondents to one of four mock newspaper articles about an out-group, then asked respondents to indicate their support for certain security policies. While the results do not support my main hypothesis that the interaction for the two threat types correlates with significantly greater support for security policies, they do suggest the need for future research to more precisely identify the relationship between threat, anxiety, and policy preferences.