The Public Value of Social Science Research

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What is the value of social science research?
Public and private sector decisions rely on evaluations of past actions.
Which evaluations should we believe?
Evaluation Criteria

• CREDIBLE
  – the quality of being believable or trustworthy

• LEGITIMATE
  – in accordance with recognized or accepted standards or principles
What is the value of social science research?

It is a source for credible and legitimate evaluations.
Richard Feynman (1974 – Caltech Commencement Address)

“[Scientific integrity] corresponds to a kind of utter honesty—a kind of leaning over backwards....
• Richard Feynman (1974 – Caltech Commencement Address)

“...the idea is to give all of the information to help others judge the value of your contribution; not just the information that leads to judgment in one particular direction...”
DA-RT Principle
(Lupia & Elman 2011)

• Three sources produce **credibility** and legitimacy
  
  – Data Access
  
  – Research Transparency
    • Production Transparency
    • Analytic Transparency
What is the value of social science research?

It is a source for credible and legitimate evaluations.
What is the value of social science research?

Science allows a greater degree of **honesty** in evaluation
Baghdad

Did the surge work?

- Baghdad, 2003-2008
  - A *spike* in conflict
  - A *surge*
  - Violence declines
Why less violence?

• Hypothesis 1:
  – The surge detects and defeats insurgents

• Hypothesis 2:
  – Ethnic unmixing reduced contact
Data Accumulated from Different Sources

- **Ethnic** composition of neighborhoods
- **Changes** in settlement patterns over time
- **Location** of violence
- **Date** of violence
Fig 1. Empirical data used for seeding and validation of the model. Ethnic maps show Shia (grey), Sunni (black) and mixed neighborhoods (striped). The level of violence by neighborhood is displayed in different grey shades (center map)
Weidmann-Salehyan Method

• All data geocoded

• Evaluate millions of possible ethnic-geo-time-violence patterns

• Patterns provide estimates of how different policing policies would work
Findings

• Most attacks against nearby ethnic rivals
  – Attackers need “local” support.

• Civilians search for safety
  – Ethnic enclaves emerge & prepare

• Ethnic segregation limits violence
Not just academic

• Implication: Early “surge” most effective
Deliverables
Deliverables...

• ...are insights and discoveries that can improve people’s lives and the health of the nation.

• ...can come in the form of basic or applied research.

• ...provide significant tangible value to others
Iphone
A result of basic and applied research
Social Science can...

• Improve the effectiveness of socially valuable programs

• Increase efficiency and effectiveness in the private sector

• Improve citizens’ lives.
But...
Our Own Worst Enemy

Why Scientists Communicate Badly and What We Can Do About It

James N Druckman, Northwestern U
Arthur Lupia, U Michigan
1. Overview
People lack information
People who lack information can make bad decisions
Of what value is the information that we offer?
2. our challenge
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Newton Connects
Newton, Inc., will enhance network connectivity for Newton-based devices this fall via Newton Internet Enabler 2.0. Ethernet capability can connect devices to Local Area Networks.

Welcome to Mars
See alien terrain in QuickTime VR movies from Sony.
The communicative space is increasingly competitive
a few facts

• We are easily distracted.
  – (Lavie 2010)

• We prefer quick and simple explanations.
  – (Kahneman 2011)

• We often evaluate information based on how it makes us feel.
  – (Kunda 1990)
• These attributes of learning are not the exception, they are the rule.

• These aspects of our nature are difficult to change.
Early Preferences

• The fetus and infant come to prefer (i.e., want to be near) the identifiable aspects of their environment that correlate with an increase in pleasure or a decrease in pain.
strategic implications

• Science communicators are in a fierce and ongoing competition for attention.

• Therefore, understanding what audiences want is more important than ever.
3. conclusion
How can science communicators win battles for attention?
Intuition

- An educator is most effective when their information hits the “sweet spot”
The “sweet spot” (Lupia 2014)

- relates to “core values or concerns” as a means of attracting needed attention

  technically correct & improves task performance.
Thank you!