



Immigration and Support for the Welfare State: How To Do Replication in the Social Sciences?

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Social researchers invest much effort in choosing statistical models. Often, they select and publish impressive analyses with the most “fancy” statistical models. However, thereby the more fundamental task of getting the research design right is often overlooked, i.e. choosing the optimal model specification. We will argue that neglecting model specification potentially has dramatic consequences, as recent research on specification curves shows that depending on model specification almost any result can be obtained (Munoz/Young 2018). Some observers of social research even believe that the literature is full of wrong results, not due to wrong model choice but due to wrong model specification. This –amongst other problems – has led to the so called replication crisis in the social sciences.

In this talk we give an example of such faulty conclusions obtained from mis-specified models. We re-analyze an article that tested a prominent thesis about social conflict, namely that increasing ethnic diversity undermines support for social welfare. The authors used sophisticated multi-level non-linear panel regression models to analyze different regions in Germany over time. However, their model specification missed an important point: there were different time-trends in support for the welfare state in Western and Eastern Germany after reunification. In the 1990ies, Eastern Germans’ attitudes adapted very much to a less interventionist Western welfare system (‘Goodbye Lenin effect’). When allowing for heterogeneous time trends, we find no longer evidence that increasing ethnic diversity undermined welfare support.

In the final part of the talk we conclude with some general conclusions and recommendations how to do replications in social science research.