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Show Me The Evidence

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- 37 percent of managers reported “an evaluation had been completed within the past 5 years of *any* program, operation, or project they were involved in” [italics added]
- Another 40 percent reported they did not know if an evaluation had been conducted – suggesting they didn’t use it if it were done

This has been noticed....

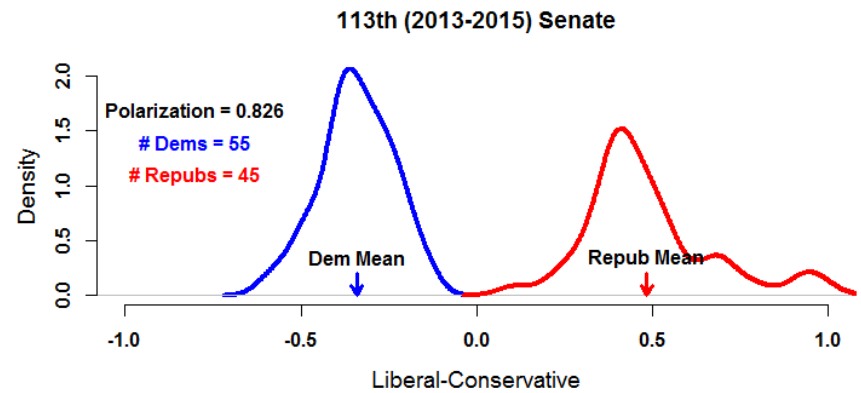
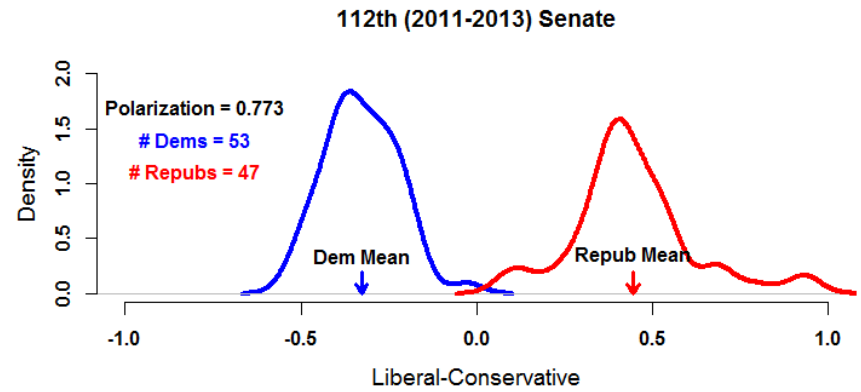
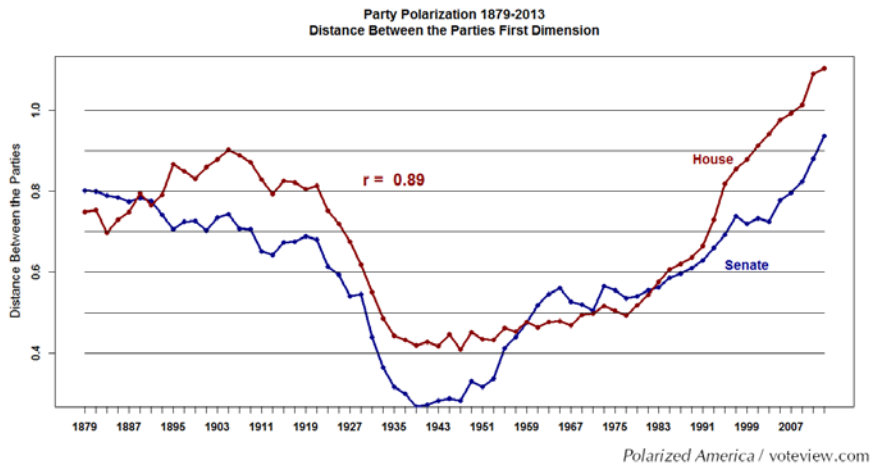
“Rigorous ways to evaluate whether programs are working exist. But too often such evaluations don’t happen. They are typically an afterthought when programs are designed — and once programs have been in place for awhile, evaluating them rigorously becomes difficult from a political economy perspective.

This has to change....Wherever possible, we should design new initiatives to build rigorous data about what works and then act on evidence that emerges — expanding the approaches that work best, fine-tuning the ones that get mixed results, and shutting down those that are failing.”

The Administration has made more progress than you might think

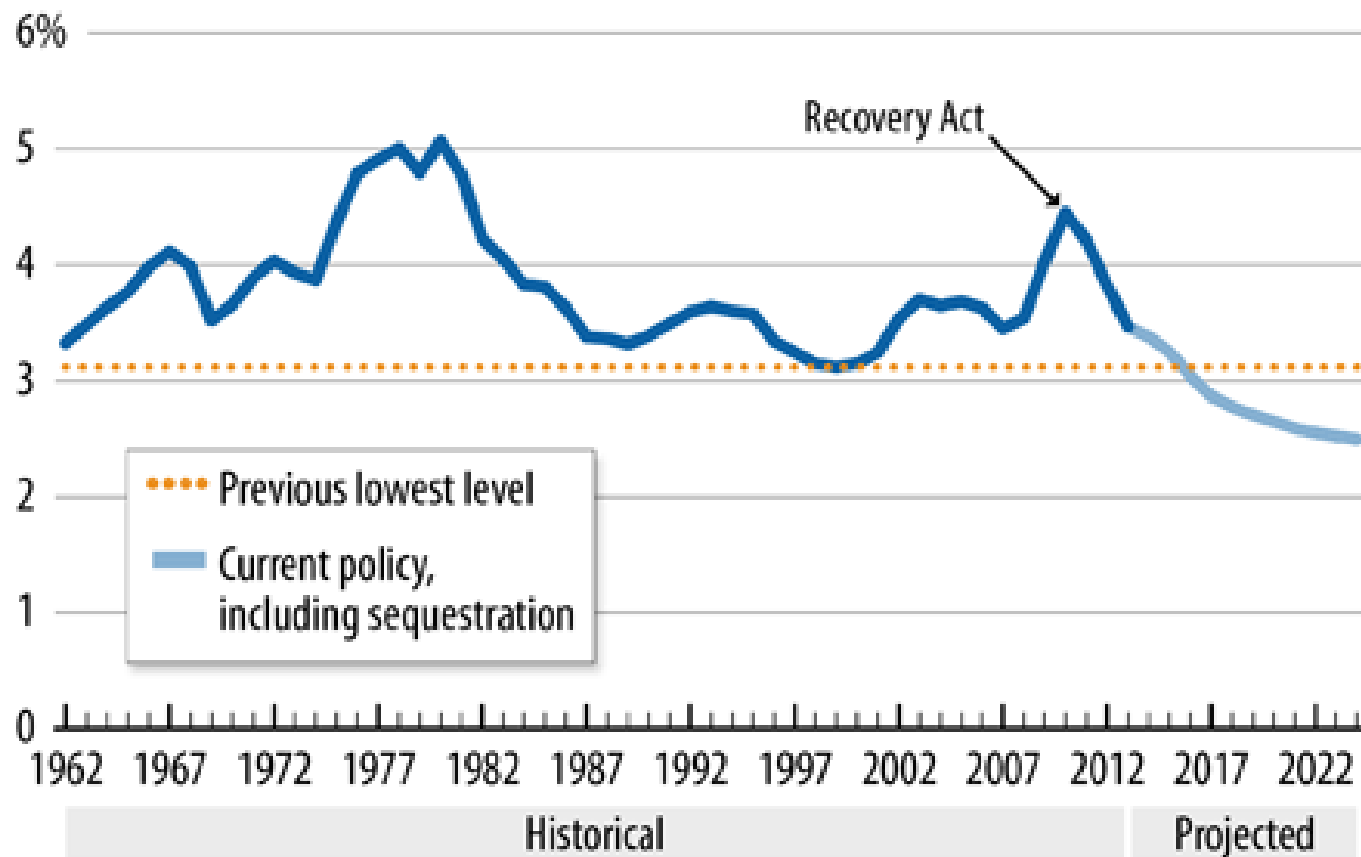
- Read the book!
- Depends on a lot of dedicated people. Just a few unsung heroes:
 - Kathy Stack
 - Martha Coven
 - Robert Gordon

The context: polarization



The context: tighter budget constraints

Non-Defense Discretionary Spending as a Percent of GDP, 1962-2024



Source: Center on Budget and Policy Priorities based on Office of Management and Budget and Congressional Budget Office data.

Center on Budget and Policy Priorities | cbpp.org

Youth Opportunity Grants

- In 2000, Department of Labor awarded Youth Opportunity (YO) grants to 36 high poverty urban, rural and Native American communities
- Youth Opportunity Community Centers provided safe and accessible places to increase education and employment skills and receive long-term supportive services, such as life skills training and mentoring. Built partnerships among public, private, and nonprofit organizations to leverage resources and expand outcomes.

Decision Information Resources, Inc. evaluation of YO grants:

- Reduced overall number of out-of-school and out-of-work (disconnected) youth.
- Reduced number of high-school dropout and increased postsecondary enrollment for foreign-born youths.
- Increased percentage of youth overall with at least an 11th-grade education, reducing the percentage of youths not in school, and increasing the percentage in secondary school.
- Increased labor-force participation rate overall and specifically for teens ages 16 to 19, women, native-born residents, blacks, and in-school youth.
- Increased employment rate among blacks, teens, out-of-school youth, and native-born youths and had a positive effect on the hourly wages of women and teens.

RCTs: The Potential

- Historically tax deductions on 401(k) and IRA contributions and tax deferrals on earnings have not proven particularly effective at encouraging retirement savings among low- and middle-income families.
 - Value of preferences low because of low marginal tax rates.
 - Matching contributions may be more effective since size of contribution not tied to MTR
- Difficult to draw clear conclusions from previous literature on the topic.
 - Previous research drew on Saver's Credit, enacted in 2001, provides a reduction in federal income taxes up to 50 percent of contributions to an IRA or 401(k).
 - But use of the credit is limited because it has low income eligibility thresholds, its structure is complex, and it is not refundable.
 - Employer matching contributions to 401(k)s also difficult to study because matching rates may be tied to worker characteristics, changes in the company's financial position, and other factors.
- RCT in St. Louis:
 - 14,000 tax filers that came into one of 60 H&R Block offices in low- and middle-income neighborhoods
 - Clients were randomly assigned to different IRA contribution match rates from H&R Block: 0 (control group), 20 percent, or 50 percent.
 - Instead of reducing tax liability, the match was contributed directly into an IRA up to a limit of \$1000.

Saving Incentives

- Take-Up Rates
 - No Match → 3% take-up rate
 - 20% Match → 8% take-up rate
 - 50% Match → 14% take up rate
- Average Contribution Levels (conditional on take-up and excluding match)
 - No Match → \$765
 - 20% Match → \$1102
 - 50% Match → \$1108
- Average Contribution Levels (unconditional on take-up and excluding match)
 - No Match → \$22
 - 20% Match → \$85
 - 50% Match → \$155

Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)

- In 2008 the Department of Education helped fund a program through H&R Block that provides assistance completing financial aid applications for college to low- and moderate- income families.
- In North Carolina and Ohio, randomly selected low-income tax filers were provided with pre-populated FAFSA forms using tax return data. Furthermore, an H&R Block tax professional answered the families questions in an interview and estimated how much financial assistance the student was eligible to receive. The tax professional also offered to submit the FAFSA electronically on the family's behalf.
- Results
 - The treatment group was more likely to attend college the next year (34.2 percent of the control group and 42.3 percent of the treatment group).
 - The treatment group was more likely to be enrolled in college for two straight years (28 percent of the control group vs. 36 percent of the treatment group).
 - The treatment group was more likely to receive a Pell grant in the first year after the intervention and received \$375 more in Pell grants over the follow up period.
 - The program was relatively inexpensive, at \$90 per participant.
- Partly as a result of this research, applicants can now pre-populate their FAFSA with information from the IRS and the Department of Education has worked to further simplify the FAFSA application.

“claiming that RCTs are the best way to definitively establish causality does not imply that all other evidence has no value”

[page 20]

Evaluation gets its own chapter in the ERP (2014)!



CHAPTER 7

EVALUATION AS A TOOL FOR IMPROVING FEDERAL PROGRAMS

Since taking office, President Obama has emphasized the need to determine what works and what does not in government, and to use those answers to inform Federal policy and budget decisions. The President's 21st Century Management Agenda, submitted to Congress with the fiscal year 2010 Budget, set bold goals for building a more efficient, more effective government that contributes to economic growth and strengthens the foundations for economic prosperity (OMB 2009a). Today, evaluating Federal programs and interventions to understand their impact, and developing the infrastructure within agencies to support a sustained level of high-quality evaluations, remains an Administration priority. By rigorously testing which programs and interventions are most effective at achieving important goals, the government can improve its programs, scaling up the approaches that work best and modifying or discontinuing those that are less effective.

This Administration has supported the use of rigorous, high-quality "impact" evaluations to measure changes in a variety of outcomes targeted by Federal programs, ranging from earnings to health to electricity usage. Many factors affect whether Federal programs achieve their goals, and identifying impacts specifically attributable to programs is challenging. An impact evaluation is a particular type of program evaluation, and aims to measure the causal effect of a program or intervention on important program outcomes. This chapter focuses on impact evaluations. "Process" evaluations (another type of program evaluation) and performance measurement also contribute to building evidence about how well programs are working, but differ in important ways from impact evaluations (Box 7-1).

Building on the efforts of previous administrations, the Obama Administration is working to reform the Federal Government's approach to improving program performance. In addition to emphasizing transparency and accountability in tracking progress toward agencies' priority goals, this new approach also aims to complement and to draw on the Administration's

Coalition for Evidence-Based Policy low-cost RCT competition

Three winners

- **A large, multi-site RCT of Bottom Line, a program that provides one-on-one guidance to help low-income, first-generation students get into and graduate from college.** This study will measure college enrollment, persistence, and completion outcomes for a sample of nearly 1,400 students over a seven-year period, using administrative data from the National Student Clearinghouse. The study cost is \$159,000.
- **A large RCT of Durham Connects, a postnatal nurse home visiting program designed to improve child and mother health and well-being.** The study will use hospital administrative records to measure program impacts on families' emergency department use and related healthcare costs through child age 24-months, for a sample of about 1,100 families in Durham County, North Carolina. The study cost is \$183,000.
- **A large, multi-site RCT of workplace health and safety inspections conducted by the federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA).** For a sample of about 29,000 business establishments eligible for a randomized inspection, the study will test whether being randomly chosen for inspection affects establishments' subsequent injury rates and business outcomes (e.g., sales, business closures) over a multi-year period – all measured through administrative data from OSHA and other sources. The study cost is \$153,000.

Second RFP in December; 6 winners will be selected

J-PAL North America (US Health Care Delivery Initiative)

U.S. HEALTH CARE DELIVERY INITIATIVE



[About HCDI](#) | [People](#) | [RFP](#) | [Evaluations](#) | [Partnership Development Conference](#)

About the U.S. Health Care Delivery Initiative

The U.S. Health Care Delivery Initiative (HCDI), managed by J-PAL North America (J-PAL NA), encourages randomized evaluations of strategies to make health care delivery in the United States more efficient and more effective.

HCDI's Activities:

1. **Research:** HCDI provides targeted funding to invited researchers for randomized impact evaluations that can provide valuable insights for learning which policies and programs are effective in improving the efficiency of health care delivery and what the reasons are for the policies' impacts.

The initiative will (a) issue Requests for Proposals (RFPs) 2-3 times per year inviting proposals from preselected researchers for evaluations of policies aimed at improving the efficiency and efficacy of health care delivery in the United States, (b) evaluate the proposals according to a set of criteria, and (c) select randomized impact evaluations to fund, both full evaluations and pilots.

2. **Capacity Building:** J-PAL NA will provide support in forming strong research teams and building the capacity of researchers, their staff, and collaborators at partner organizations to design and conduct high-quality randomized evaluations. HCDI will encourage research best practices, including the registration of impact evaluations and the publication of data from funded evaluations.

HCDI will host matchmaking conferences to connect researchers with policymakers and practitioners to identify potential policy innovations and research opportunities.

3. **Policy Outreach:** J-PAL NA will disseminate the results of the funded evaluations to ensure that they reach decision makers in an accessible, digestible format through policy briefs, online tools,

THE
PROBLEM

THE
SOLUTION

MONEYBALL
PRINCIPLES

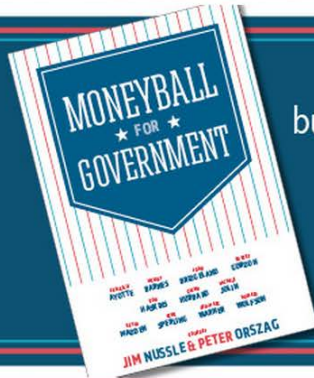


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**MONEYBALL
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Billy Beane, general manager of the Oakland A's, transformed baseball by ignoring the scouts and using data to build championship contending teams despite limited budgets. Moneyball for Government, a project of Results for America, encourages governments at all levels to increase their use of evidence and data when investing limited taxpayer dollars. By playing Moneyball, we can improve outcomes for young people, their families and communities.

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- 1. Dedicate 1 percent for evaluation – 1 percent of discretionary funding set aside to evaluate the other 99 percent**
- 2. Cross-government prizes for innovation in evaluation**
- 3. What Works Clearinghouses – best example is Institution of Education Sciences**
- 4. Pay for Success and social impact bonds – with evaluation embedded in design**
- 5. Chief Evaluation Officers**
- 6. Budget process and funding**