DEEP IV IN LAW

Appellate Decisions and Texts Impact
Sentencing in Trial Courts

Zhe Huang
Tufts University
Xinyue Zhang
OpenX
Ruofan Wang
Microsoft
Daniel L. Chen
Toulouse 1 Capitole University
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Zhe Huang
Tufts University
Xinyue Zhang
OpenX
Ruofan Wang
Microsoft
Daniel L. Chen
Toulouse 1 Capitole University

Author for correspondence: Daniel L. Chen, daniel.chen@tse-fr.eu

Abstract: Do US Circuit Courts’ decisions on criminal appeals influence sentence lengths imposed by US District Courts? This Element explores the use of high-dimensional instrumental variables to estimate this causal relationship. Using judge characteristics as instruments, this Element implements two-stage models on court sentencing data for the years 1991 through 2013. This Element finds that Democratic, Jewish judges tend to favor criminal defendants, while Catholic judges tend to rule against them. This Element also finds from experiments that prosecutors backlash to circuit court rulings while district court judges comply. Methodologically, this Element demonstrates the applicability of deep instrumental variables to legal data.

Keywords: legal data, causal inference, natural language processing, machine learning, Deep IV

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