Stata Figures: How To? FAQ!

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Abstract

Over the years I was asked a lot of questions in relation to Stata figure schemes. In this short document I seek to discuss these questions and give a brief overview of the schemes I produced, how to install them and how to address some issues raised. I seek to keep this document up-dated, all my postings/tweets obviously aren't. Thus, whenever you run into questions please consult this document starting from 12/02/2019 and thereafter.

1 What are Stata schemes?

Stata schemes control the design of your figure. But only that. If you plot the same data with different schemes only the looks of it will change, not the data/estimates thereof.

2 Why would I use Stata schemes?

You always use them when producing figures in Stata. Simply said: there is no way around them.

3 Why would I *not use* Stata's default schemes?

Many reasons, one being that from a data-science perspective these schemes have a lot of issues coming with them (see e.g.: Bischof 2017). Another being that you might not like the aesthetics of it and instead prefer another design of your figures.

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4 But isn't it complex and time-consuming to use different schemes?

No. Installing and activating different schemes takes you roughly 2 minutes. Your old code will still work. The costs on your side are close to zero. On the other hand, the benefits are huge: Your data will stand out more, you can tell nicer stories with your data since you ease up reading your figures to your readers.
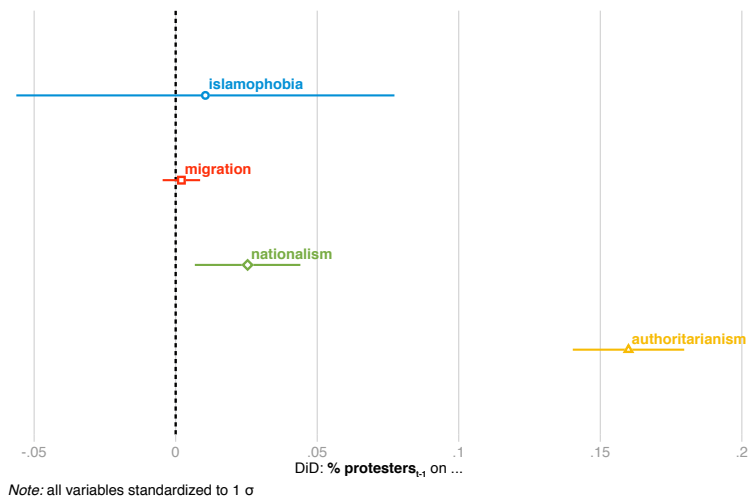
5 So, what are your schemes

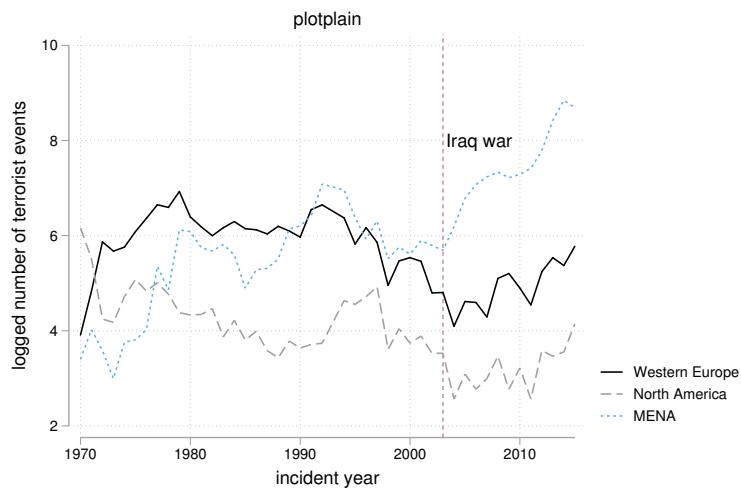In essence, I wrote three different schemes:

- **plottig:**

- **538:**
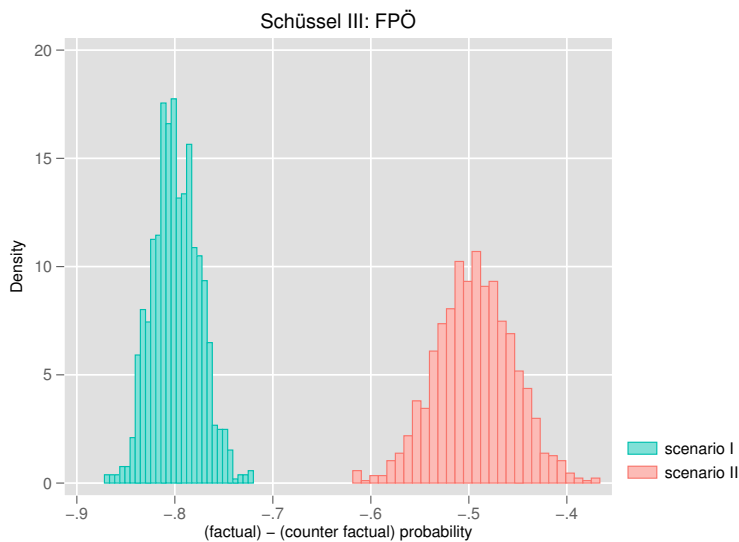
- **plotplain:**

plotplain

I myself use a scheme based on 538. I think this scheme is as close as it gets to perfect simplicity without loosing aesthetics.

6 How to install?

1. Open Stata

2. type in the command line: *ssc install blindschemes, replace all*

3. Now you can choose from one of my schemes:

    - **538** (looks like the figures from https://fivethirtyeight.com) or **538w** (same but with a white and not grayish background)

    - **plotplain** (simplistic scheme) or **plotplainblind** (same but colorblindfriendly colors)

    - **plottig** (looks like ggplot in R) or **plottigblind** (same but colorblindfriendly colors)

4. Now you can either select the scheme you want to use by relying on code or – and I would recommend this option – select 'Preferences' in Stata, then 'Graph preferences'. Then you can select the schemes you like and also change the font of the scheme. The key reason I recommend using this option is that this way you will definitely see all schemes which are installed on your machine and you can adapt fonts.

7 How to use?

Well, you just continue to use the same code you always used. There is nothing to learn here, just lay back and enjoy the new looks of your figures.

8 Error: 'xyz' not installed after having installed your schemes

Solution: if you have properly installed the schemes as outlined above, then the solution is to restart Stata. That's it. Will work, promise.

9 Problem: How to install on an offline machine?

If you want to install the schemes on a machine which is offline you will need to use a different machine which is actually online. Then follow the installation instructions above. After that you will need to find your Stata .ado directory (explanation below 'how to'). In the .ado directory you will need to search and copy all files in the subfolder 'style' and all files starting with 'scheme' in the subfolder 's'. Copy all of these files onto a usb stick.

Bring the usb stick to the offline machine and copy-paste all the files outlined above into the .ado directory of this machine. If one of the two subfolders discussed above ('s'; 'style') does not exist, create it and then copy paste the files into it.

Start Stata, should work now.

10 Problem: I do not know what my .ado directory is and where to find it

This should help:

Taken from:

https://www.stata.com/support/faqs/programming/personal-ado-directory/

11 Can I produce my own scheme?

Sure, but be aware that it takes quite some effort on your side. You can either follow the instruction in Bischof (2017: 756-758) or use Ben Jann's new command: grstyle. I would most likely go for the latter option. This was not available when I started writing my schemes and it was a nightmare full of trial and errors for me.

References

Bischof, D. 2017. "New graphic schemes for stata: Plotplain and plottig." *Stata Journal* 17 (3).