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Q&A: Machine-Learning Model Tracks Trends in Public Finance Research.

What are the leading topics in public finance and budgeting, how have they changed, and what future topics should be more closely researched by professionals and practitioners?

Can Chen and two of his former doctoral students, Shiyang Xiao at Syracuse University and Boyuan Zhao at Florida International University, used a machine-learning technique—structural topic modeling (STM)—to identify these themes and their dynamics over the past 40 years for an article recently published in the journal *Public Budgeting & Finance*.

Using the STM, Chen and his colleagues identified 15 latent topics in the areas of public budgeting, public finance and public financial management from the titles and abstracts of 1,028 articles published in the journal from 1981 to 2020. They compared these topics against those covered by standard exams for Certified Public Finance Officers (CPFO) and found much overlap. However, some topics that were mentioned less often may hint at some underexplored research agendas in PB&F.

Continue reading.

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