

Study: Football coaches are conservative

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A University of California-Berkeley researcher says he's discovered professional football coaches tend toward conservative decision-making behavior.

David Romer, also a National Bureau for Economic Research scientist, argues professional football coaches tend to weigh the consequences of failure more heavily than the impact of success.

Specifically, Romer shows trying for a touchdown rather than a field goal would increase a team's chances of winning a game by about 3 percentage points, which is very large for a single play. However, when faced with the decision, every NFL team in Romer's sample chose to attempt a field goal.

"Much of the previous evidence of systematically conservative behavior involves highly stylized laboratory settings with small stakes and inexperienced decision-makers devoting relatively little effort to their choices," Romer writes. "Thus, previous work provides little evidence about the strength of force pushing decision-makers toward conservatism. The results of this paper suggest that the forces may be shockingly strong."

The study appears in the April issue of the Journal of Political Economy.

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