

How to Read

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Gov 50, Section 2

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Today's objectives

1. Answer five key questions when reading a paper
2. Read a regression table and an effect plot
3. Pick our paper for the replication project

Five questions to ask about any paper

1. What is the paper about?
2. What is its research question?
3. What is its hypothesis?
4. What data and analyses does it use to answer that question?
5. What conclusions does it make?

We'll answer each one for three papers.

Every paper has the same general shape

Abstract	The paper in one paragraph.
Introduction	The question, why it matters, the answer, and the contribution: what it adds to the literature.
Theory, background, or literature review	The literature is what others have already written about the topic. This section says what that is, what is missing, and the hypotheses.
Data and Methods	What they measured, on whom, and how.
Results	The tables and figures.
Conclusion	The answer, why it matters, and the limits of the study (or next steps).

Read it in this order

1. Abstract, slowly
2. Introduction, slowly
3. Every table and figure, slowly. Say what each shows before reading the text around it.
4. Conclusion
5. *Then* theory, data and methods, results, depending on your goal

Skip the details the first time.

Do what works for you.

After step 3 you can answer every one of the five questions, sometimes sooner.

The three papers

Paper 1. Gerber, Green & Larimer (2008)

“Social Pressure and Voter Turnout: Evidence from a Large-Scale Field Experiment”

Paper 2. Barber & Pope (2019)

“Does Party Trump Ideology? Disentangling Party and Ideology in America”

Paper 3. Acharya, Blackwell & Sen (2016)

“The Political Legacy of American Slavery”

Read the three abstracts and skim the introductions. The papers are linked on the section page.

Alone.

Question 1

What is each paper about?

The big question behind it, the one a whole literature has been asking.
Not yet the specific question this paper answers.

In pairs.

Question 1

Paper 1. What gets people to vote?

Paper 2. What shapes policy positions: party or ideology?

Paper 3. Does the distant past still shape politics today?

Question 2

What is each paper's research question?

The specific question this paper answers with data.

Descriptive. What is the world like? *Is the disease more common among the elderly?*

Causal. Does X change Y? *Does the drug cure the disease?*

All three papers here ask a causal question.

In pairs.

Question 2

Paper 1. Does telling people that their neighbors will see whether they voted make them more likely to vote?

Paper 2. Do Republicans change their position on a policy when told that Trump holds a position, even a liberal one?

Paper 3. Do white people in Southern counties that had more slavery in 1860 hold different political views today?

Question 3

What is each paper's hypothesis?

A possible answer to the research question. In other words, what we should see in the data if it is right.

It comes from a theory: a general account of why. The hypothesis is what that account predicts here.

In pairs.

Question 3

Paper 1. People told their neighbors will see whether they voted turn out more; the more who will see, the bigger the effect.

Why?

Theory. People follow social norms when they think others are watching.

Paper 2. Republicans move toward whatever position Trump takes, liberal or conservative.

Why?

Theory. Partisanship is a group identity; people follow the group's leader. The rival theory, positions come from principles, says they won't follow him left.

Paper 3. Where slavery was most common in 1860, white residents today are more Republican, less supportive of affirmative action, and higher on racial resentment.

Why?

Theory. Attitudes pass down through families and local institutions, so a shock to a place persists for generations.

Question 4

What data and analyses does each paper use?

Which kind of study is each paper, and what did the authors actually do?

Question 4

Three ways to answer a causal question

Field experiment. The researchers randomize something in the real world.

Survey experiment. The researchers randomize something inside a questionnaire.

Observational study. The researchers randomized nothing. Either God did, or you compare groups that are alike except for X, and argue that nothing else could explain the gap in Y.

Which kind is each paper? Who is in the data, and what is compared to what?

In pairs.

Dear Registered Voter:

WHAT IF YOUR NEIGHBORS KNEW WHETHER YOU VOTED?

Why do so many people fail to vote? We've been talking about the problem for years, but it only seems to get worse. This year, we're taking a new approach. We're sending this mailing to you and your neighbors to publicize who does and does not vote.

The chart shows the names of some of your neighbors, showing which have voted in the past. After the August 8 election, we intend to mail an updated chart. You and your neighbors will all know who voted and who did not.

DO YOUR CIVIC DUTY — VOTE!

	Aug 04	Nov 04	Aug 06
MAPLE DR			
9995 JOSEPH JAMES SMITH	Voted	Voted	_____
9995 JENNIFER KAY SMITH		Voted	_____
9997 RICHARD B JACKSON		Voted	_____
9999 KATHY MARIE JACKSON		Voted	_____
9999 BRIAN JOSEPH JACKSON		Voted	_____
9991 JENNIFER KAY THOMPSON		Voted	_____
9991 BOB R THOMPSON		Voted	_____
9993 BILL S SMITH			_____
9989 WILLIAM LUKE CASPER		Voted	_____
9989 JENNIFER SUE CASPER		Voted	_____
9987 MARIA S JOHNSON	Voted	Voted	_____
9987 TOM JACK JOHNSON	Voted	Voted	_____
9987 RICHARD TOM JOHNSON		Voted	_____
9985 ROSEMARY S SUE		Voted	_____
9985 KATHRYN L SUE		Voted	_____
9985 HOWARD BEN SUE		Voted	_____
9983 NATHAN CHAD BERG		Voted	_____
9983 CARRIE ANN BERG		Voted	_____
9981 EARL JOEL SMITH			_____
9979 DEBORAH KAY WAYNE		Voted	_____
9979 JOEL R WAYNE		Voted	_____

Paper 1. Field experiment. 344,000 Michigan voters. By lottery, each household got nothing or one of four letters: a civic-duty reminder, “you are being studied,” your own voting record, or your record and your neighbors’. Compare turnout across the five groups.

Please indicate whether or not you support or oppose the statement.

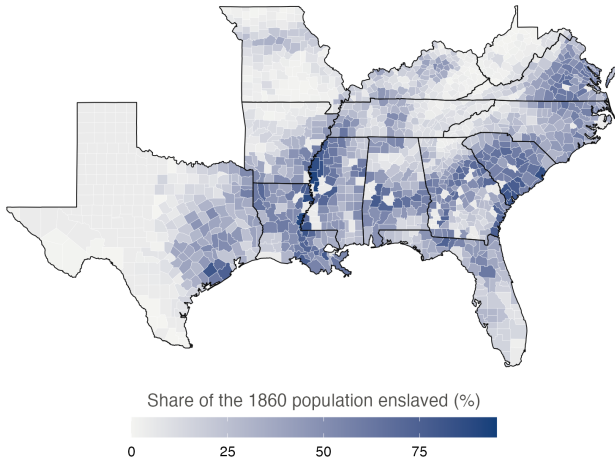
To increase the minimum wage to over \$10 an hour.

Donald Trump has said that he supports this policy.

How about you? Do you support or oppose increasing the minimum wage to over \$10 an hour?

- ☐ Support
- ☐ Oppose
- ☐ Don't know

Paper 2. Survey experiment. 1,300 Americans, ten policies each. By lottery, the question said nothing, that Trump supports the policy, that Trump opposes it, or which side Republicans in Congress had taken. Compare the share taking the liberal position across the four groups.



Paper 3. Observational study. About 1,200 Southern counties. Compare white residents' party identification, support for affirmative action, and racial resentment in counties with more slavery in 1860 to counties with less. That comparison is a line through a scatterplot.

Question 5

What conclusions does each paper make?

Finding. What the data showed. A number.

Conclusion. The answer to the research question that the finding supports.

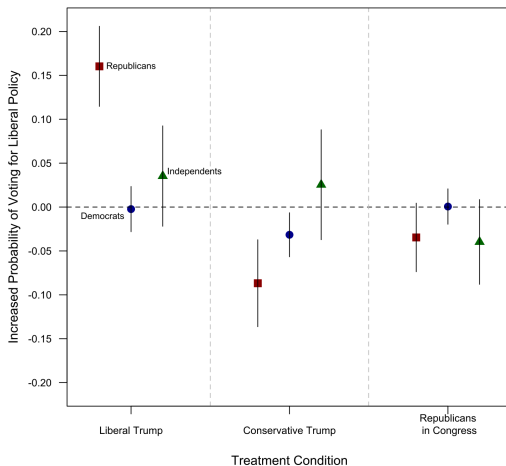
One sentence per paper: the conclusion.

In pairs.

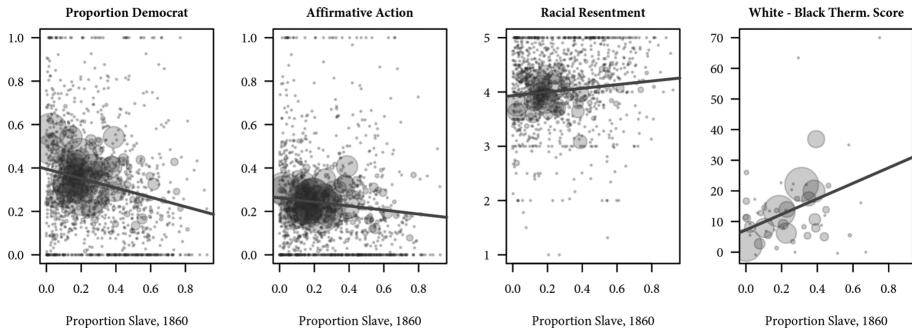
	Control	Civic Duty	Hawthorne	Self	Neighbors
Percentage voting	29.7%	31.5%	32.2%	34.5%	37.8%
N of individuals	191,243	38,218	38,204	38,218	38,201

Paper 1. Telling people that their neighbors will see whether they voted makes them more likely to vote. Social pressure gets people to the polls.

Average Treatment Effect of Policy Cues



Paper 2. Republicans move toward whatever position Trump takes, liberal or conservative. Party loyalty beats ideology.



Paper 3. White residents of counties that had more slavery in 1860 are more Republican and more racially conservative today. The legacy of slavery still shapes Southern politics.

Does the finding support the conclusion?

The finding is correct. Is the conclusion correct?

For each paper, what other hypothesis could produce the same finding?

In pairs.

One more hypothesis

For each paper, what is one more hypothesis you could test with the same data?

In pairs.

How to read a regression table

	Share of white residents who are Democrats	
	(1)	(2)
Share enslaved in 1860	-0.217** (0.023)	-0.127** (0.043)
State fixed effects (compare within a state)		yes
1860 covariates (compare counties alike in 1860)		yes
Counties	1,242	1,152

Acharya, Blackwell & Sen (2016), Table 1, columns 1 and 2. ** $p < 0.01$.

The same table as an equation

Column 1

$$\text{ShareDemocrat}_i = \alpha + \beta \text{ Enslaved}_i + \varepsilon_i$$

Column 2

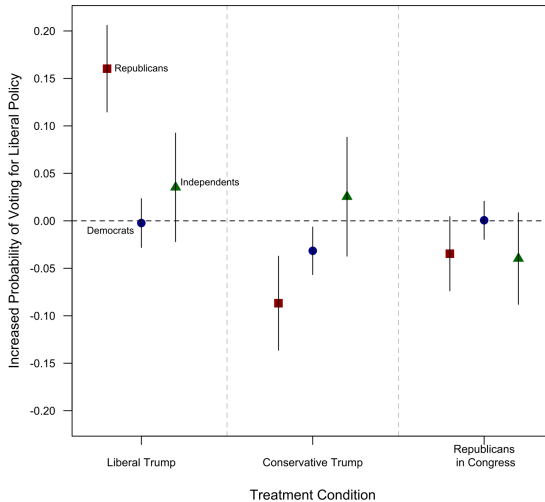
$$\text{ShareDemocrat}_i = \alpha_{\text{state}} + \beta \text{ Enslaved}_i + \gamma \text{ Covariates1860}_i + \varepsilon_i$$

The same table as an equation

- i is a county; 1,242 of them in column 1.
- ShareDemocrat: share of county i 's white residents who are Democrats, 0 to 1. Enslaved: share of its 1860 population that was enslaved, 0 to 1.
- α : where the line starts. β : the slope. ε : everything else about the county.
- $\hat{\beta}$ is the number in the table. -0.217 : all enslaved versus none is 22 points less Democratic; 10 points more enslaved is about 2 points less.
- Parentheses: the standard error, how much $\hat{\beta}$ would bounce around in another sample. Trick: more than about twice its standard error from zero is unlikely to be chance. Here $0.217/0.023 \approx 9$.
- Stars say the same thing. **: under a 1-in-100 chance of a slope this big if the true slope were zero.
- Column 2: α_{state} gives each state its own start, so counties are compared only within their state. γ Covariates1860 compares counties that looked alike in 1860. $\hat{\beta}$ falls to -0.127 , still about 3 times its parentheses.

How to read an effect plot

Average Treatment Effect of Policy Cues



Barber & Pope (2019), Figure 1.

The same plot as an equation

$$\text{Liberal}_i = \alpha + \beta_1 \text{TrumpSupports}_i + \beta_2 \text{TrumpOpposes}_i \\ + \beta_3 \text{CongressCue}_i + \varepsilon_i$$

The same plot as an equation

- i is one answer to one policy question. Republicans only, ten answers per person.
- Liberal: 1 if the answer takes the liberal position, 0 if not.
- Each cue: 1 if that sentence was shown, 0 if not, like incumbency in lecture. The control group saw no sentence, so all three cues are 0 for them.
- α : the control group's share taking the liberal position, about 40%.
- $\hat{\beta}_1, \hat{\beta}_2, \hat{\beta}_3$: the three red dots. Each is a difference from control: about +16, -8, +1 points.
- Whiskers: about twice the standard error on each side, a 95% interval. Trick: if the whisker crosses the dashed zero line, the effect cannot be told from zero. The two Trump dots clear it; the Congress dot does not.
- Same rule as the table: a dot clearing the line is a slope more than about twice its parentheses from zero.

The project

One paper for the whole section.

Everyone reproduces its main result.

Groups of four, three is fine. Each group adds something the paper didn't do.

One 45-minute presentation in December.

Half the grade is participation, half is the presentation.

Section meeting	What is due	About when
2	Pick the paper	today
4	Outline and replication plan	Sept 30
6	Data cleaned, first summaries	Oct 14
8	Main analyses, draft figures	Oct 28
9	Draft and extension proposal	Nov 4
10	Peer review of another group	Nov 11
11	Final revisions	Nov 18
12	Presentation	Dec 2

From the syllabus, by section meeting. Dates to be confirmed against the course calendar.

Which paper do we spend the semester on?

Which one would you rather work on for twelve weeks, and why?

Which one gives your group the most to add?

Ballot: `ascamara.github.io/gov50`, under Section 2.

Which paper, and random groups or groups of your choice.