



Citizens & Ideological Text

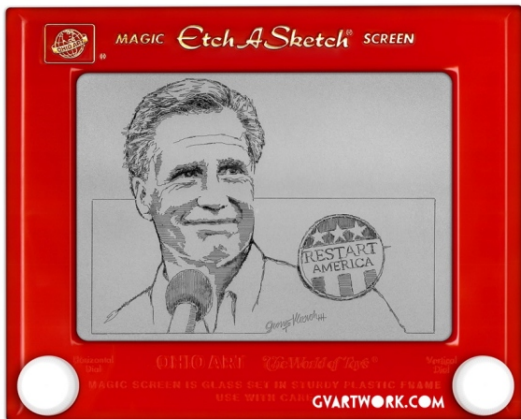
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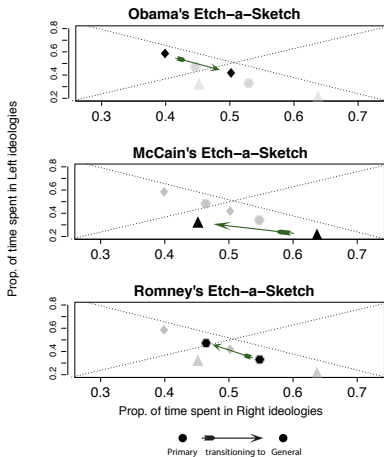
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MPSA 2015



- 1 Project Motivation
- 2 Data Collection
- 3 Results
- 4 Discussion











(1) Can voters decipher the ideological content of language?



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- ▷ Can certain phrases cue voters to the ideology of a speaker?
- ▷ Can the effect exist in the absence of framing or topic cues?
- ▷ How subtle can cues become for voters to see the difference?
- ▷ Does respondent ideology affect how s/he perceives the language?



(2) *How* do citizens read and understand political language?



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- ▷ What signals are citizens looking for?
- ▷ Which signals do respondents receive, and which go amiss?
- ▷ Does the process vary by respondent ideology, party or preference?
- ▷ Do citizens ever see signals that aren't actually in the text?



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- ▷ Framing and priming effects do exist.
- ▷ The ‘tone’ of rhetoric can serve a similar role.
- ▷ Language expresses sentiment in informative ways.



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One word change has a sizable effect on the tone of the sentence.



Three studies to examine citizen perception of ideological language



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1 Identifying phrases without context



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Q: Immigration has received a lot of attention in the past few years. Do you consider immigration to be an important political debate for today?



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Yes, I think immigration is an important issue. There are more than 12 million **undocumented workers** in this country. These **immigrants** tend to work for less than an **average wage**, and live in poverty, which puts incredible stress on their families as well as straining **federal programs**. Plus, the fact that these **undocumented workers** accept lower wages undercuts the **labor market**, pushing down wages for everyone. So yes, immigration is an important debate to have. It's a question of **social justice** and **economic opportunity**.



Or subjects receive this response:

Yes, I think immigration is an important issue. There are more than 12 million **illegal aliens** in this country. These **illegals** tend to work for less than **market** wages, and live in poverty, which puts incredible stress on their families as well as straining the **welfare state**. Plus, the fact that these **illegal** workers accept lower wages undercuts the **free market**, pushing down wages for **hard working Americans**. So yes, **illegal** immigration is an important debate to have. It's a question of justice and economic **liberty**.



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- ▶ Place the blogger on a scale from 1 to 7
- ▶ Is it likely that the blogger has extreme views?
- ▶ Can you explain how you arrived at your decision?
- ▶ Do you agree with the blogger's statement?

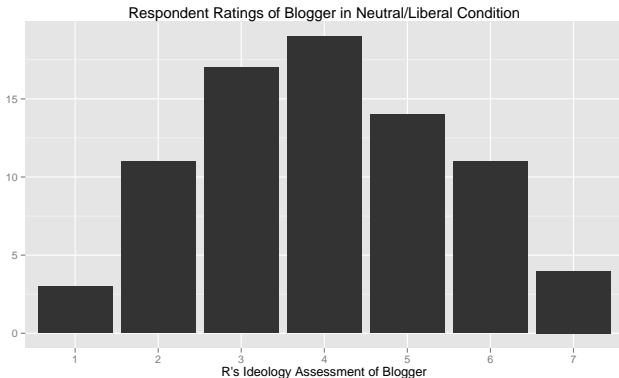


Figure: Ratings of blogger in neutral condition

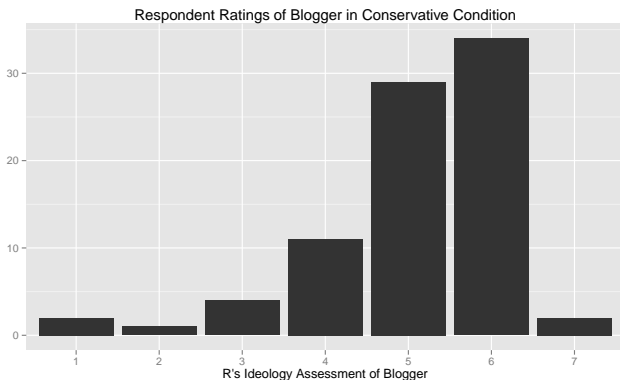


Figure: Ratings of blogger in conservative condition



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 - 68% rate the blogger as moderate; 55% agree with statement
 - Agreement increases $\text{Pr}(\text{Rate Moderate})$ by about 80%



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- ▶ No differences by sophistication or attention
 - Sophisticates no more likely to give the 'right' categorization

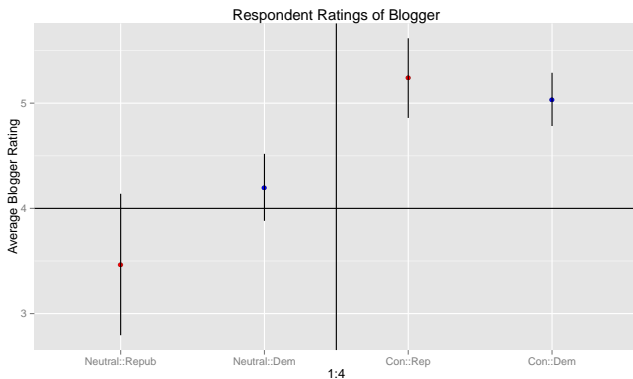


Figure: Mean ratings in each condition, by respondent party, with 90% intervals.



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- ▶ Many (30%) use the (fixed) frame as an indicator but the treatment effect isn't attenuated
- ▶ Some attempt to infer policy positions from the text, or else draw inferences from what the blogger does *not* write.



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- ▶ We use the following passage:

“ We must address immigration immediately. There are 12 million [illegal aliens/undocumented workers] in this country, and we’re going to have another 12 million if we don’t address the underlying problems. We have only passed incremental changes in the past, and that is not enough. We need to increase border [patrols/security] to address our [open] border, and we need to find a way to handle the millions of [aliens/foreign born workers] already in this country. American [working men/workers] demand action, and I stand with them. I support comprehensive immigration reform.”

- ▶ Treatment effect is smaller, in the expected direction, but not statistically distinguishable
 - Much smaller sample (50); boundary effect



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Thank you

We look forward to your comments and questions.



1 Figure ??: Deviation from Ideological Balance



Some Figure in Appendix

▶ [Back to Appendix](#)