

MARGINAL REVOLUTION

Marginal Revolution

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Is America as polarized as you think?

In this study, we argue that the perceived polarization of Americans along party lines is partially an artifact of the low response rates that characterize contemporary surveys. People who agree to participate in opinion surveys are more informed, involved, and opinionated about the political process and therefore hold stronger, more meaningful, and partisan political attitudes. This motivational discrepancy generates a bias in survey research that may amplify evidence of party polarization in the mass public. We test the association between response rates and measures of polarization using individual-level data from Pew surveys from 2004 to 2014 and American National Election Studies from 1984 to 2012. Our empirical evidence demonstrates a significant decline in unit response that is associated with an increase in the percentage of politically active, partisan, and polarized individuals in these surveys. This produces evidence of dissensus that, on some issues, may be stronger than exists in reality.

That is from [a forthcoming piece by Cavari and Freedman in The Journal of Politics](#). For the pointer I thank an anonymous correspondent.

The post [Is America as polarized as you think?](#) appeared first on [Marginal REVOLUTION](#).

Can Britain make itself less complacent?

Posted: 12 Mar 2018 09:08 PM PDT

Educators in Britain, after decades spent in a collective effort to minimize risk, are now, cautiously, getting into the business of providing it.

Four years ago, for instance, teachers at the Richmond Avenue Primary and Nursery School looked critically around their campus and set about, as one of them put it, “bringing in risk.”

Out went the plastic playhouses and in came the dicey stuff: stacks of two-by-fours, crates and loose bricks. The schoolyard got a mud pit, a tire swing, log stumps and workbenches with hammers and saws.

“We thought, how can we bring that element of risk into your everyday environment?” said Leah Morris, who manages the early-years program at the school in Shoeburyness in southeast Britain. “We were looking at, OK, so we’ve got a sand pit, what can we add to the sand pit to make it more risky?”

Now, Morris says, “we have fires, we use knives, saws, different tools,” all used under adult supervision. Indoors, scissors abound, and so do sharp-edged tape dispensers (“they normally only cut themselves once,” she says).

Limited risks are increasingly cast by experts as an experience essential to childhood development, useful in building resilience and grit.

I suppose I am skeptical of this approach, as it may lead to harm and furthermore the benefits of risk have to arise more organically. It will in any case be interesting to see how the public digests these changes as they play out in the lives of children.

Here is **the full story by Ellen Barry**. In any case, there is also **a bingo revival in Britain**, is that a sign of renewed passivity?

The post **Can Britain make itself less complacent?** appeared first on **Marginal REVOLUTION**.

On the so-called “beauty premium”

Posted: 12 Mar 2018 09:02 PM PDT

Very unattractive respondents always earned significantly more than unattractive respondents, sometimes more than average-looking or attractive respondents. Multiple regression analyses showed that there was very weak evidence for the beauty premium, and it disappeared completely once individual differences, such as health, intelligence, and Big Five personality factors, were statistically controlled.

...Past findings of beauty premium and ugliness penalty may possibly be due to the fact that: 1) “very unattractive” and “unattractive” categories are usually collapsed into “below average” category; and 2) health, intelligence (as opposed to education) and Big Five personality factors are not controlled. It appears that more beautiful workers earn more, not because they are beautiful, but because they are healthier, more intelligent, and have better (more Conscientious and Extraverted, and less Neurotic) personality.

That is from Satoshi Kanazawa and Mary C. Still, probably not the last word on this topic but still an advance in knowledge. Via [Kevin Lewis](#).

The post [On the so-called “beauty premium”](#) appeared first on [Marginal REVOLUTION](#).

The Nordic glass ceiling?

Posted: 12 Mar 2018 10:35 AM PDT

Iceland in particular stands out among the Nordic states, since it has a smaller welfare state than its larger Nordic cousins and also ranks among the highest share of female managers in the world. On the other hand, Denmark has the highest tax rate among all the nations in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and ranks at the bottom in terms of its proportion of female managers.

In the dataset for developed economies, there are three countries with equal or higher rates of female managers than Iceland: New Zealand, the United States, and Latvia. These countries have relatively low tax rates: 26.4 percent in the United States, 29.0 percent in Latvia, and 32.8 percent in New Zealand.

That is from [a new Cato study by Nima Sanandaji](#).

The post [The Nordic glass ceiling?](#) appeared first on [Marginal REVOLUTION](#).

Monday assorted links

Posted: 12 Mar 2018 09:28 AM PDT

1. [Should the Pentagon investigate UFOs in greater depth?](#)
2. [How do you teach people to love difficult music?](#) (NYT)
3. [“He swore that he would avoid learning about anything that happened to America after Nov. 8, 2016.”](#) (NYT)
4. [Did the blockchain mis-title this paper?](#)
5. [Big business is better than small business.](#)
6. [Steve Bannon on Hayek and the The Road to Serfdom](#) (video).
7. And [the excellent Michael R. Strain is now writing for Bloomberg View.](#)

The post [Monday assorted links](#) appeared first on [Marginal REVOLUTION](#).

The World’s Biggest Field Experiment

Posted: 12 Mar 2018 04:22 AM PDT

A **new paper** (another **summary**) in Nature reports on what is perhaps the world's biggest field experiment which has successfully shown how to, at scale, increase crop yields and reduce fertilizer usage in China. The scope of the 10 year experiment is astounding. The researchers first conducted thousands of field experiments all over China to discover and validate best practices:

A total of 13,123 site years of field trials were conducted from 2005 to 2015 for the three crops (n=6,089 for maize, 3,300 for rice and 3,734 for wheat), with sites spread across all agro-ecological zones... Each field trial included two types of management: conventional farmers' practice (control) and ISSM-based recommendations (treatment; developed specifically for a given area). The recommended practices were discussed with local experts and participating farmers. Adjustments were made when necessary. Finally, the agreed-upon management technologies were implemented in the fields by the farmer; the collaborators provided guidance on-site during key operations, such as sowing, fertilization, irrigation and harvest. Campaign collaborators recorded fertilizer rate, pesticide and energy use, and calculated nutrient application rate. At maturity, grain yield and above ground biomass were sampled by the collaborators for plots with a size of 6m² for wheat and rice, and 10m² for maize. Plant samples were dried at 70 °C in a forced-draft oven to constant weight, and grain yield was standardized at 14% moisture for all crops.

With validated best practices in hand the researchers and tens of thousands of collaborators then fanned out across the country to convince farmers to adopt the best practices.

During the campaign, about 14,000 training workshops, 21,000 field days, and more than 6,000 site demonstrations were organized by campaign staff; more than 337,000 pamphlets were distributed... During the campaign, we also encountered barriers and experienced challenges. For example, we observed that some farmers appeared indifferent during some outreach events. We later learned that it was mainly, because they could not comprehend the scientific content that we were trying to deliver. We solved the problem by having local (county or township) agents acting as an on-site 'interpreter' in ways that speaks/connects with those farmers.

This was amusing:

It is also worth noting that the interests of agribusinesses do not always align with those of our campaign staff. For example, one of our main strategies used in the campaign was to select a site (for example, a village) for a given area, establish the base with field demonstrations of ISSM-based practices, then attract and engage more farmers from the same as well as neighbouring villages, creating a snowballing and lasting effect. But sometimes, our partners in the private sector were more interested in changing sites so as to reach more farmer-clients. Vigorous debates and discussion ensued. Eventually, the private sector personnel conformed to our reasoned schemes while using the established sites as demonstrations for visitors from other areas.

Outputs and inputs among the treatment and control farmers were then measured (here I would have liked more information about the randomization. A lot can go wrong or be mismeasured at this stage.).

Farmers conducted all field operations. Campaign collaborators and/or extension agents were responsible for information and data collection. Typically, 10–30 farmers were randomly selected per ISSM-adopting site; another group of randomly selected 10–30 farmers from a nearby village without ISSM intervention served as a control/comparison. From the selected pool of farmers (roughly 14,600 paired data points), information on key management practices were obtained through a questionnaire survey, including crop varieties, planting densities, planting dates, fertilizer rates and harvest dates. For some sites, grain yields were directly measured in the same way as the field trials (see ‘Field trials’) for the selected 10–30 farmers. Yield and nitrogen rate were then averaged for each site.

The results were impressive.

Aggregated 10-year data showed an overall yield improvement of 10.8–11.5% and a reduction in the use of nitrogen fertilizers of 14.7–18.1%, when comparing ISSM-based interventions and the prevailing practices of the farmers. This led to a net increase of 33 Mt grains and a decrease of 1.2 Mt nitrogen fertilizer use during the 10-year period, equivalent to US\$12.2 billion.

The entire experiment cost on the order of \$56 million and generating \$12.2 billion dollars of increased output, not including any environmental gains.

As if this weren’t enough the researchers then surveyed over *8 million* smallholder farmers in China to estimate how much output could increase if the intervention were fully scaled.

What’s especially encouraging about this project is that no new technologies, seeds or infrastructure was involved—just basic science and a tremendous outreach campaign. Moreover, since the campaign increased profits it may continue to generate gains in the future even without further intervention as the practices spread. Repeated interventions will be necessary as climate changes, however. Information technology may makes this easier. China can be intimidating.

The post **The World’s Biggest Field Experiment** appeared first on **Marginal REVOLUTION**.