

JONATHAN CHAIT

A Case Study In Hackery

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One of the persistent memes of conservative discourse is that any right-of-center figure who deviates from the right-wing line must be searching for the financial and social rewards of mainstream respectability. (A similar dynamic, of course, can be found on [the left](#).) A couple years ago, Julian Sanchez wrote a [deservedly-influential reply](#):

If you're willing to toe a straight party line, on the other hand, let's face it, you can be pretty damn mediocre and still carve out a nice little niche for yourself at any one of a welter of generously funded ideological publications and think tanks. Sure, it's a smaller pond, but you get to be a relatively big fish. You'll always have a book deal waiting at Regnery, a warm guest chair on Fox, editors at *NR* and the *Weekly Standard* eager to look at your pitches, handsome honoraria on your speaking tour of College Republican groups, and in your golden years, an undemanding sinecure as the Senior Olin Fellow at the Institute for Real 'Murricken Studies.

Keep that in mind as you watch Nate Silver [carve up](#) Veronique de Rugy. It's a great example of Sanchez's point. De Rugy conducted a [study](#) purporting to show that funds from the economic stimulus were disproportionately sent to Democratic districts. Silver shows that the study is premised on a massive flaw. The stimulus funds were overwhelmingly directed to state capitols, and distributed throughout the state from there. State capitols, of course, tend to be in Democratic Congressional districts. You should really read Silver's entire post to see how flimsy de Rugy's work is. Silver's conclusion:

That de Rugy has [testified before Congress](#) on the basis of her evidence, and never paused to consider why the top five congressional districts on her list overlap with Sacramento, Albany, Austin, Tallahassee and Harrisburg, is mind-boggling. The presence of a state capital is the overwhelmingly dominant factor in predicting the dispensation of stimulus funds. This could have been discerned in literally five minutes if she had bothered to look at the apparent outliers in her dataset and considered whether they had anything in common -- a practice that should be among the first things that any researcher does when evaluating any dataset.

de Rugy wrote her [paper](#) for the Mercatus center at George Mason, a libertarian outpost where she is a [senior research fellow](#). She [testified](#) about the paper before Congress, she's an [adjunct scholar](#) at the Cato Institute, a director of the [Center for Freedom and Prosperity](#), a former scholar at AEI, a columnist for Reason, and a frequent contributor for National Review Online. There are hundreds of people like her in Washington, most of them conservative, living well-compensated lives of pure ideological hackery.

Update: de Rugy [replies](#) to Silver. Silver [replies](#) to de Rugy.

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Chait: Leave Blanche Lincoln Aloooooone!!!