

Vanessa Rigney

Advisor: Dr. Eric Hill

Summer 2025 Fursca Report

Over the course of the summer, I have conducted research regarding people's perceptions of Donald Trump, with a focus on trying to understand how those perceptions might change when people are given the chance to discreetly share those same opinions.

The main thought when going into this study was that people may change their political attitudes depending on the situation they find themselves in. People want to fit in, so I was curious if people weren't always completely honest when discussing how they feel about Trump. I felt this might give us some insight into a possible reason as to why Trump was able to win in such a landslide, when most news outlets projected the race as pretty neck-and-neck.

The key of this study is how we measure both overt and covert attitudes. For overt, we simply asked "Does the behavior of the current president of the United States make you angry or upset?". For covert, participants were randomly assigned into one of two groups, one group had a list of four items, the other group had a five item list. They were both asked how many of the items make them angry, with the fifth item being the behavior of the current president of the United States. Because the only difference in the groups is that one item, we can look at differences between the groups as the percent of people that are actually upset with the president. Analyzing the data, using mostly correlation and regression, we found quite a few interesting trends. The most shocking was the rate at which democrats' (left-leaning) opinions on Trump changed between how they openly evaluated Trump and when they were given an opportunity to evaluate him more discreetly and anonymously. The take home message being when reporting

their attitudes overtly and directly, 88% of democrats disapproved of Trump, but when using the more covert item-count technique, that number dropped to just a 47% disapproval rate among democrats.

Over this summer I've accomplished a lot of my goals for the project, and I came away with some intriguing data that will roll perfectly into my plan to springboard off of this project to complete my thesis, as well as run a second study over the fall semester, in an attempt to build enough of a case to get the present study published.

This study also helped me to build my skills as I move forward hoping for a career in research. This project has allowed me to try more complex statistical analyses and really try and get comfortable with them. The more understanding I have with the statistics that back psychology, the better prepared I will be in the actual field.

Overall, FURSCA has allowed me to get my feet wet with research, while really being able to sit in the driver's seat and try a lot of different things I otherwise wouldn't have been able to in a traditional classroom setting.