

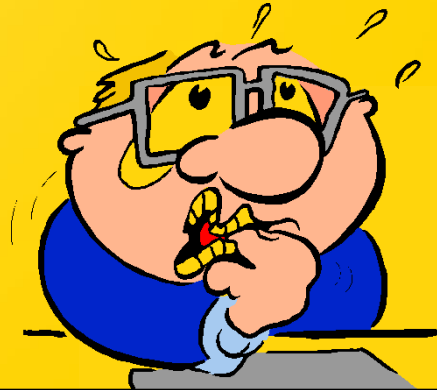


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# Priors: When to worry?

Rens van de Schoot & Sarah Depaoli

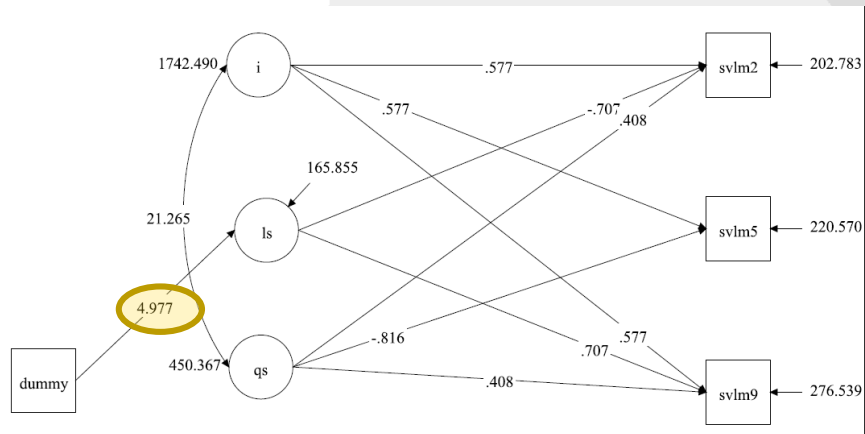
[www.rensvandeschoot.com](http://www.rensvandeschoot.com)



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Dear dr. ,

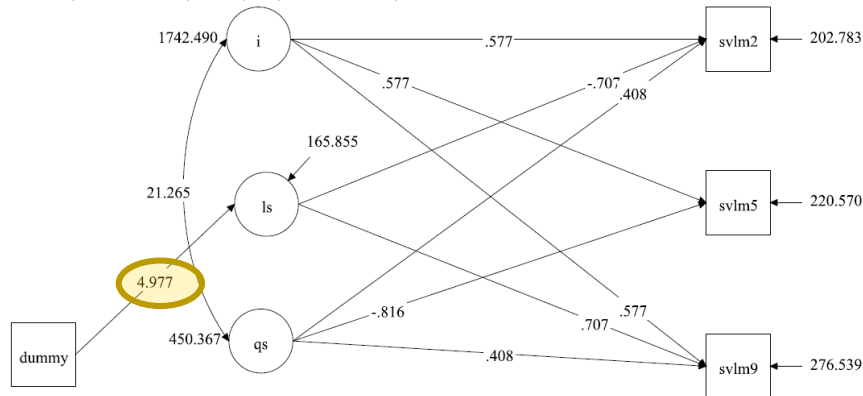
We would kindly invite you to review this paper about ...





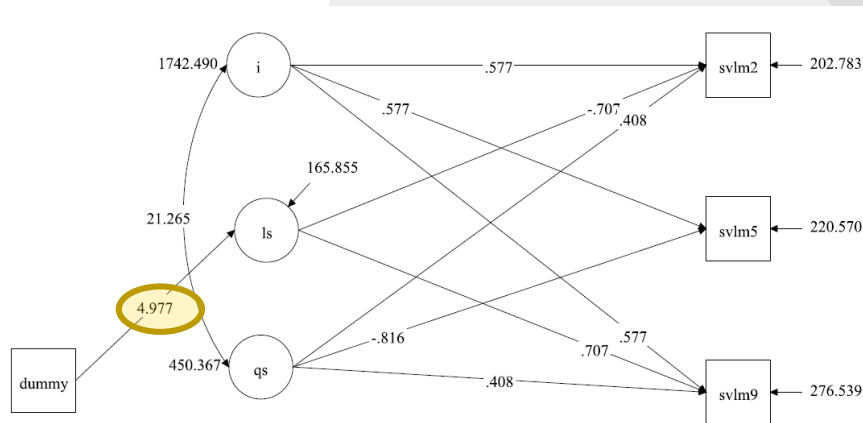
Because of the small sample size ( $n=20$ ) we used Bayesian estimation. Hox et al. (2012) showed that a multilevel model with only 20 clusters could be estimated with Bayesian statistics whereas maximum likelihood estimation could not.

Hox, J., van de Schoot, R., & Matthijsse, S. (2012). How few countries will do? Comparative survey analysis from a Bayesian perspective. *Survey Research Methods*, 6, 87-93.

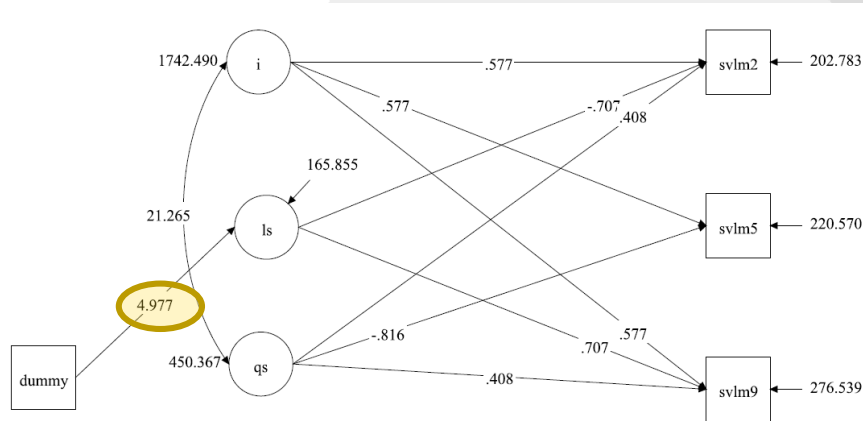


Since we are no experts in Bayesian estimation we relied on the default settings of Mplus and only specified:

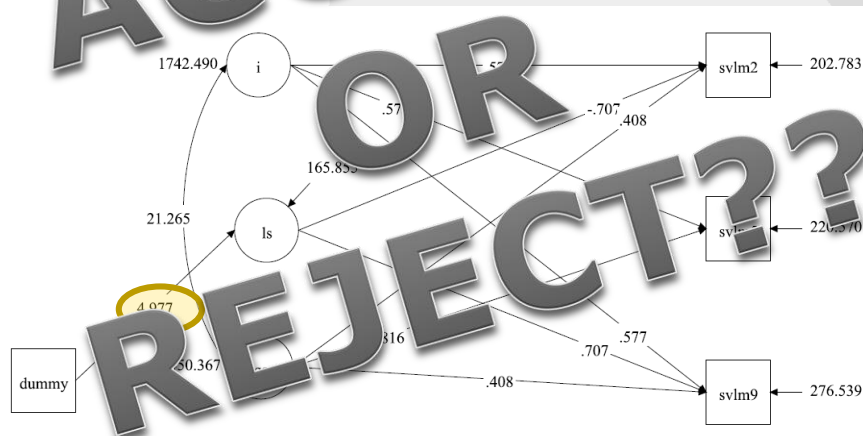
ANALYSIS:ESTIMATOR is Bayes;



The results are completely in line with our hypothesis: there is a significant difference between the two groups on the slope parameter. All is fine, please accept our paper for publication.



The results are completely in line with our hypothesis: there is a significant difference between the two groups on the slope parameter. All is fine, please accept our paper for publication.



# The WAMBS-Checklist

## When to worry, and how to Avoid the Misuse of Bayesian Statistics

*Depaoli & Van de Schoot (2014)*

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# The WAMBS-Checklist

Although it is very attractive to use Bayesian statistics, naively applying Bayesian methods can be dangerous:

1. the exact influence of the priors is often not well understood and priors might have a huge impact on the study results.
2. akin to many elements of frequentist statistics, some Bayesian features can be easily misinterpreted.

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# The WAMBS-Checklist

## TO BE CHECKED BEFORE RUNNING THE ANALYSIS

**Step 1:** do you understand the priors?

## TO BE CHECKED AFTER ANALYSIS BUT BEFORE INSPECTING MODEL RESULTS

**Step 2:** did the trace-plot reached the target distribution?

**Step 3:** does convergence remain after doubling the number of iterations?

**Step 4:** does the histogram have enough precision?

**Step 5:** does the posterior distribution make theoretical sense?

**Step 6:** do different specification of the multivariate variance priors influence the results?

## UNDERSTANDING THE EXACT INFLUENCE OF THE PRIORS

**Step 7:** Is there bias when compared with non-informative priors?

**Step 8:** Are the results stable for a sensitivity analysis?

## AFTER INTERPRETATION OF MODEL RESULTS

**Step 9:** Is the Bayesian way of interpreting model results used?

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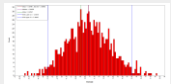

## AFTER INTERPRETATION OF MODEL RESULTS

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# Step 1

	Distributional form of the priors (e.g., normal, inverse gamma, etc)	Type of prior (non-, weakly, highly informative)	Source of background information	Graph of Plot <sup>b</sup>	Hyperparam
<b>Parameters<sup>a</sup></b>					
Y on X <sub>1</sub>	Normal	Highly inf.	Table x on page xx of the meta-analysis of Author et al. (2000)		N(8,5);
Y on X <sub>2</sub>	Normal	Highly inf.	Obtained from expert knowledge, see for more information Appendix X.		N(1,10);
Y: Mean	Normal	Non inf. (default of the software used)	n/a	n/a	N(0,10000000)
Y: residual variance	Inverse Gamma	Non inf. (default of the software used)	n/a	n/a	IG(-1,0);

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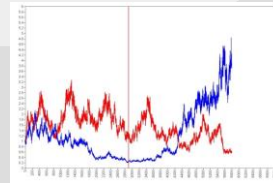
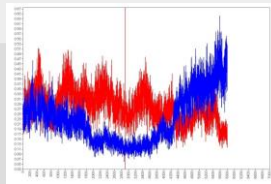
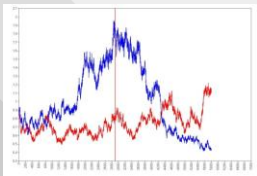
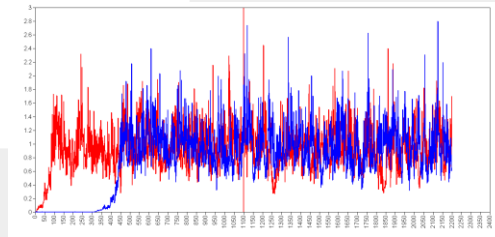
## AFTER INTERPRETATION OF MODEL RESULTS

**Step 9:** Is the Bayesian way of interpreting model results used?

**Step 10:** Are the results reported according to the Bayesian approach?

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## Step 2



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## The WAMBS-Checklist

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## Step 3

ANALYSIS:  
ESTIMATOR IS BAYES;  
BSEED = 200;

OUTPUT: `interval(hpd);`

PLOT: `type is plot2;`



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## Step 3

ANALYSIS:  
ESTIMATOR IS BAYES;  
BSEED = 200;

**CHAINS = 4;**  
**BITERATIONS = 100000 (2000);**  
**BCONVERGENCE = .01;**

OUTPUT: `interval(hpd);`

PLOT: `type is plot2;`



## Step 3

ANALYSIS:  
 ESTIMATOR IS BAYES;  
 BSEED = 200;  
 CHAINS = 4;  
**FBITERATIONS = 4000;**

OUTPUT: interval(hpd); **TECH8;**  
 PLOT: type is plot2;


## Tech 8 - priors

### TECHNICAL 8 OUTPUT FOR BAYES ESTIMATION

CHAIN	BSEED	ITERATION	POTENTIAL SCALE REDUCTION	PARAMETER WITH HIGHEST PSR
1	0	100	1.010	1
2	285380	200	1.000	2



Bconvergence = .01;




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Tech 8 - priors

TECHNICAL 8 OUTPUT FOR BAYES ESTIMATION

CHAIN	BSEED	
1	0	
2	285380	
ITERATION	POTENTIAL SCALE REDUCTION	PARAMETER WITH HIGHEST PSR
100	1.010	1
200	1.000	2

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Tech 8 - priors

TECHNICAL 8 OUTPUT FOR BAYES ESTIMATION

CHAIN	BSEED	
1	0	
2	285380	
ITERATION	POTENTIAL SCALE REDUCTION	PARAMETER WITH HIGHEST PSR
100	1.010	1
200	1.000	2
300	1.004	2
400	1.002	2
500	1.000	1
600	1.000	1
700	1.002	2
800	1.000	1
900	1.000	1
1000	1.000	1

Iterations = (1000);

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## Tech 8 - priors

### TECHNICAL 8 OUTPUT FOR BAYES ESTIMATION

CHAIN	BSEED	
1	0	
2	285380	
ITERATION	POTENTIAL SCALE REDUCTION	PARAMETER WITH HIGHEST PSR
100	1.010	1
200	1.000	2
300	1.004	2
400	1.002	2
500	1.000	1
<b>600</b>	<b>1.000</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>700</b>	<b>1.002</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>800</b>	<b>1.000</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>900</b>	<b>1.000</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>1000</b>	<b>1.000</b>	<b>1</b>

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## Tech 8 - priors

### TECHNICAL 8 OUTPUT FOR BAYES ESTIMATION

CHAIN	BSEED	
1	0	
2	285380	
ITERATION	POTENTIAL SCALE REDUCTION	PARAMETER WITH HIGHEST PSR
100	2.210	1
200	2.100	2
300	1.904	2
400	1.802	2
500	1.700	1
600	1.600	1
700	1.302	2
800	1.200	1
900	1.060	1
<b>1000</b>	<b>1.040</b>	<b>1</b>

Relied on defaults settings:  
Bconvergence is .05;

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## Tech 8 - priors

### TECHNICAL 8 OUTPUT FOR BAYES ESTIMATION

CHAIN	BSEED		
1	0		
2	285380		
ITERATION	POTENTIAL SCALE REDUCTION	PARAMETER WITH HIGHEST PSR	
100	2.210	1	
200	2.100	2	
300	1.904	2	
400	1.802	2	
500	1.700	1	
600	1.600	1	
700	1.302	2	
800	1.200	1	
900	1.060	1	
1000	1.040	1	

!!! The last 100 iterations are maybe oké, but not all iterations after burn-in !!!

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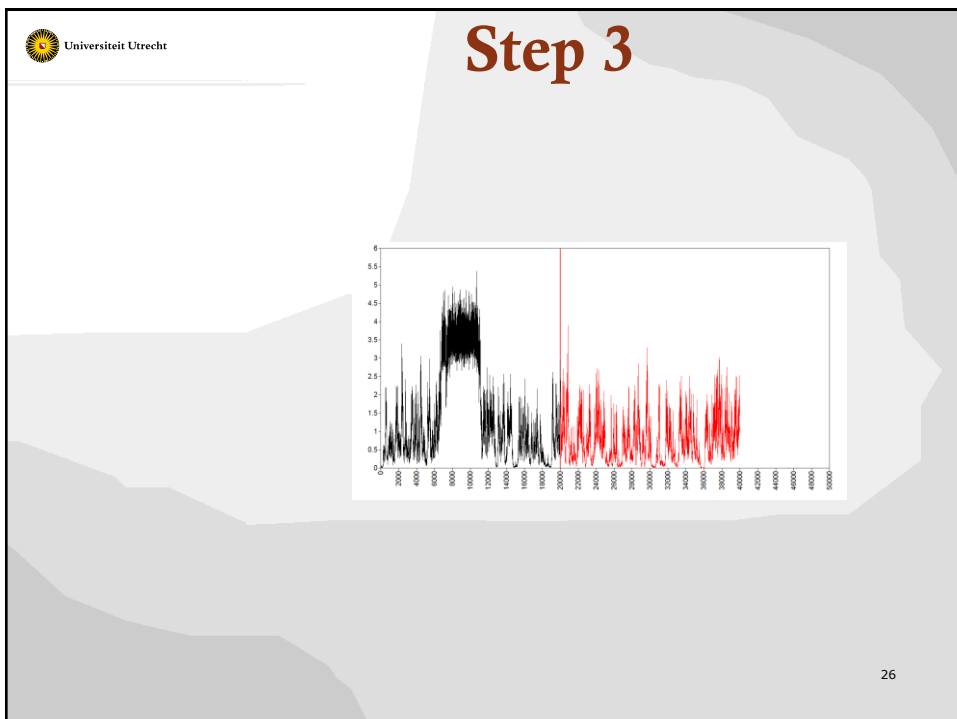
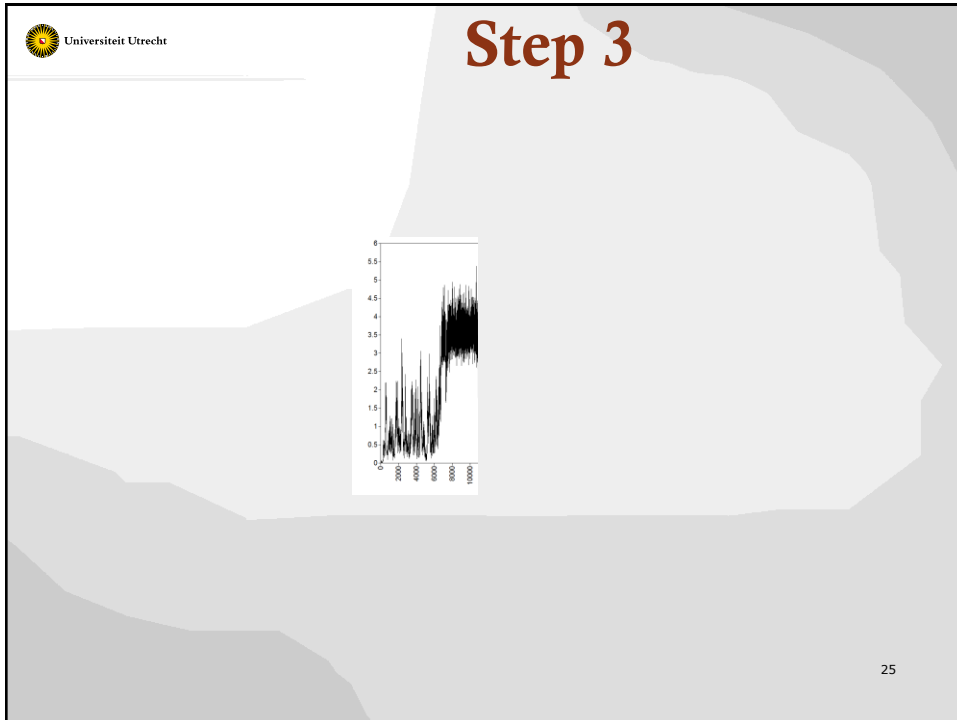
## Tech 8 - priors

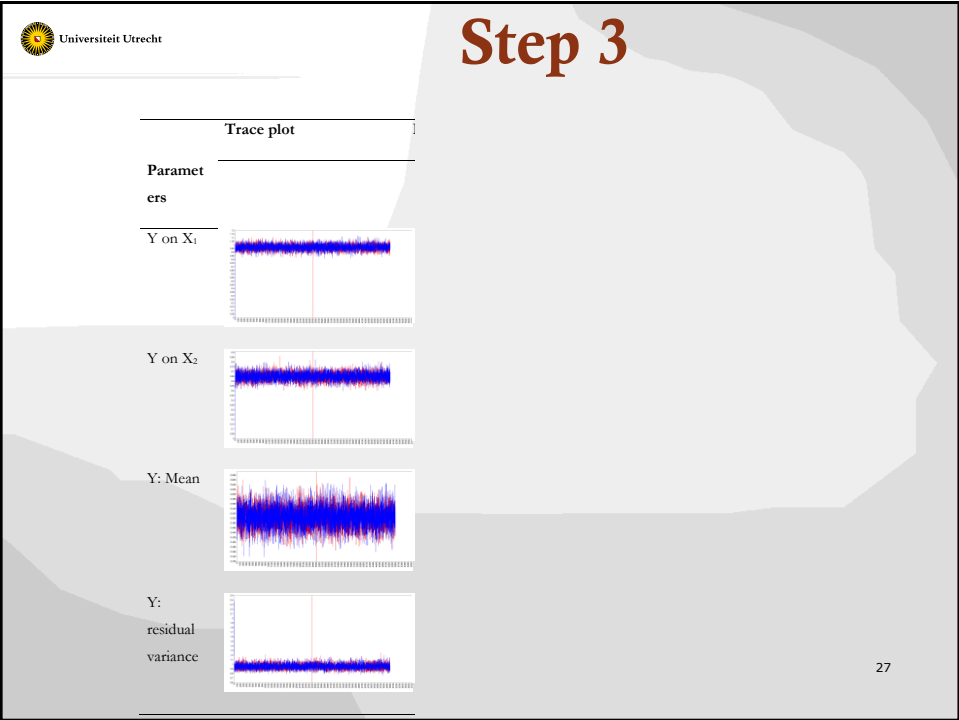
### TECHNICAL 8 OUTPUT FOR BAYES ESTIMATION

CHAIN	BSEED		
1	0		
2	285380		
ITERATION	POTENTIAL SCALE REDUCTION	PARAMETER WITH HIGHEST PSR	
100	2.210	1	
200	2.100	2	
300	1.904	2	
400	1.802	2	
500	1.700	1	
600	1.600	1	
700	1.302	2	
800	1.200	1	
900	1.060	1	
1000	1.040	1	
1100	1.010	1	
1200	1.000	2	
1300	1.004	2	
1400	1.002	2	
1500	1.000	1	
1600	1.000	1	
1700	1.002	2	
1800	1.000	1	
1900	1.000	1	
2000	1.000	1	

Solution: Increase number of  
iterations with  
Fiterations = 2000;

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Step 3

	Bias for Step 3 <sup>a</sup>
	$\frac{[(\text{initial converged model} - \text{model with double iterations}) / \text{model with double iterations}] * 100}{}$
Parameters	
Y on X <sub>1</sub>	$[(0.969 - 0.970) / 0.970] * 100 = -0.10$
Y on X <sub>2</sub>	$[(0.650 - 0.650) / 0.650] * 100 = 0.00$
[Y]	$[(0.510 - 0.511) / 0.511] * 100 = -0.19$
Y	$[(0.953 - 0.951) / 0.951] * 100 = 0.21$

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# The WAMBS-Checklist

## TO BE CHECKED BEFORE RUNNING THE ANALYSIS

**Step 1:** do you understand the priors?

## TO BE CHECKED AFTER ANALYSIS BUT BEFORE INSPECTING MODEL RESULTS

**Step 2:** did the trace-plot reached the target distribution?

**Step 3:** does convergence remain after doubling the number of iterations?



**Step 4:** does the histogram have enough precision?

**Step 5:** does the posterior distribution make theoretical sense?

**Step 6:** do different specification of the multivariate variance priors influence the results?

## UNDERSTANDING THE EXACT INFLUENCE OF THE PRIORS

**Step 7:** Is there bias when compared with non-informative priors?

**Step 8:** Are the results stable for a sensitivity analysis?

## AFTER INTERPRETATION OF MODEL RESULTS

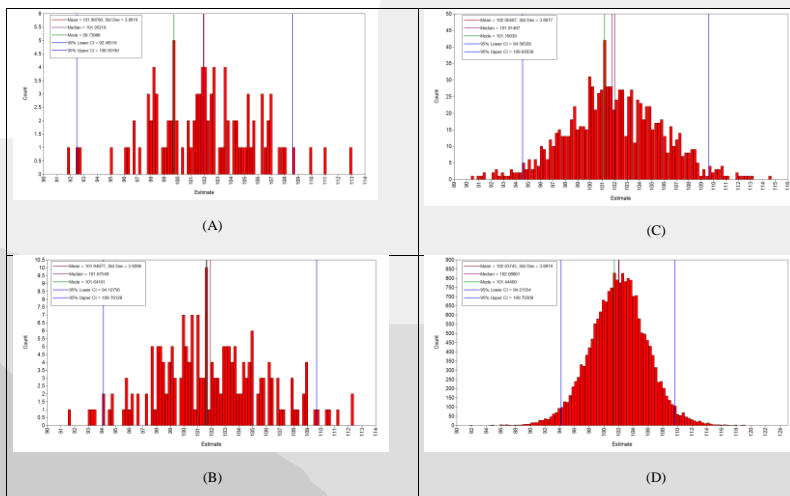
**Step 9:** Is the Bayesian way of interpreting model results used?

**Step 10:** Are the results reported according to the Bayesian approach?

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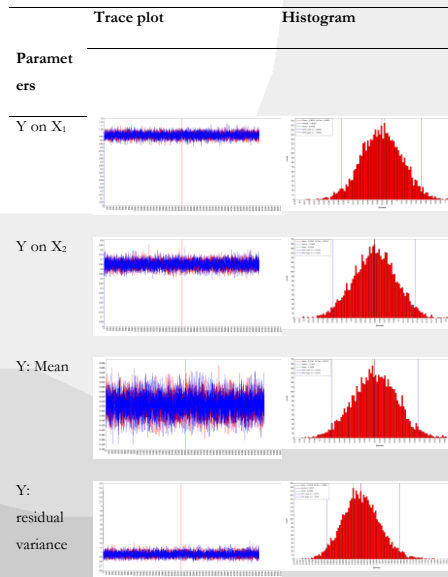
## Step 4

The more iterations, the more information in the histogram and the better the results approximate the posterior distribution



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## Step 4



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## The WAMBS-Checklist

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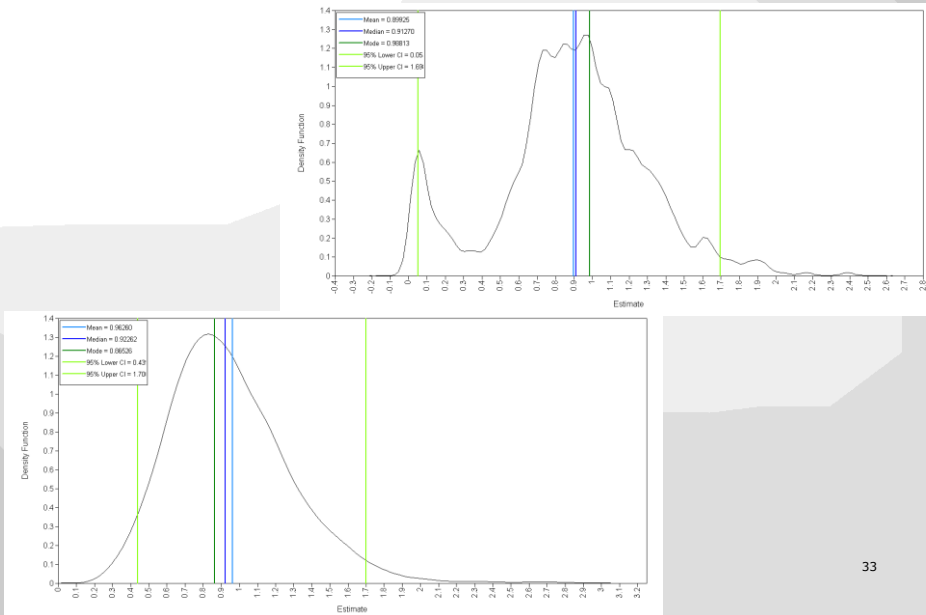
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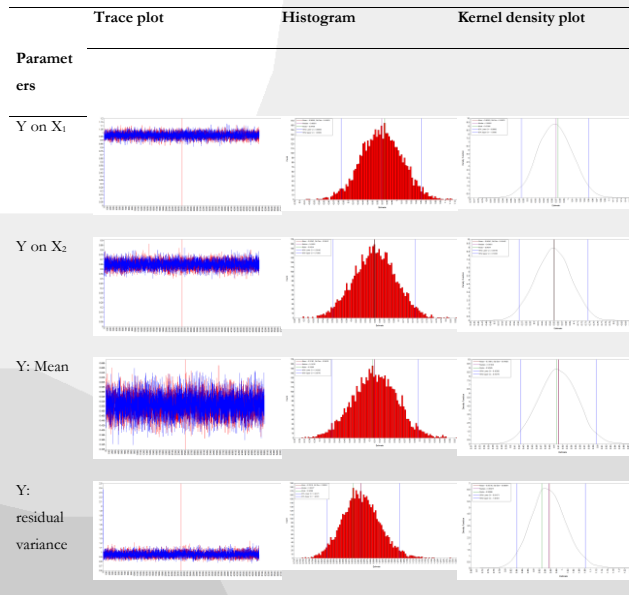
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# Step 5



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# The WAMBS-Checklist

	Bias for Step 3 <sup>a</sup>	Bias for Step 6 <sup>b</sup>
	$[(\text{initial converged model} - \text{model with double iterations}) / \text{model with double iterations}] * 100$	$[(\text{initial variance priors} - \text{model with alternative priors}) / \text{model with alternative priors}] * 100$
<b>Parameters</b>		
Y on X <sub>1</sub>	$[(0.969-0.970) / 0.970] * 100 = -0.10$	$[(0.969-0.969) / 0.969] * 100 = 0.00$
Y on X <sub>2</sub>	$[(0.650-0.650) / 0.650] * 100 = 0.00$	$[(0.650-0.650) / 0.650] * 100 = 0.00$
[Y]	$[(0.510-0.511) / 0.511] * 100 = -0.19$	$[(0.510-0.510) / 0.510] * 100 = 0.00$
Y	$[(0.953-0.951) / 0.951] * 100 = 0.21$	$[(0.953-0.949) / 0.949] * 100 = 0.42$

<sup>a</sup>initially with 5,000 iterations, alternative model with 10,000 iterations

<sup>b</sup>initially with IG(-1,0), alternative model with IG(1,1)

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	$[(\text{initial converged model} - \text{model with double iterations}) / \text{model with double iterations}] * 100$	$[(\text{initial variance priors} - \text{model with alternative priors}) / \text{model with alternative priors}] * 100$	$[(\text{initial priors} - \text{default/non-informative priors}) / \text{default/non-informative priors}] * 100$
<b>Parameters</b>			
Y on X <sub>1</sub>	$[(0.969-0.970) / 0.970] * 100 = -0.10$	$[(0.969-0.969) / 0.969] * 100 = 0.00$	$[(0.969-0.969) / 0.969] * 100 = 0.00$
Y on X <sub>2</sub>	$[(0.650-0.650) / 0.650] * 100 = 0.00$	$[(0.650-0.650) / 0.650] * 100 = 0.00$	$[(0.650-0.650) / 0.650] * 100 = 0.00$
[Y]	$[(0.510-0.511) / 0.511] * 100 = -0.19$	$[(0.510-0.510) / 0.510] * 100 = 0.00$	$[(0.510-0.510) / 0.510] * 100 = 0.00$
Y	$[(0.953-0.951) / 0.951] * 100 = 0.21$	$[(0.953-0.949) / 0.949] * 100 = 0.42$	$[(0.953-0.953) / 0.953] * 100 = 0.00$

<sup>a</sup>initially with 5,000 iterations, alternative model with 10,000 iterations

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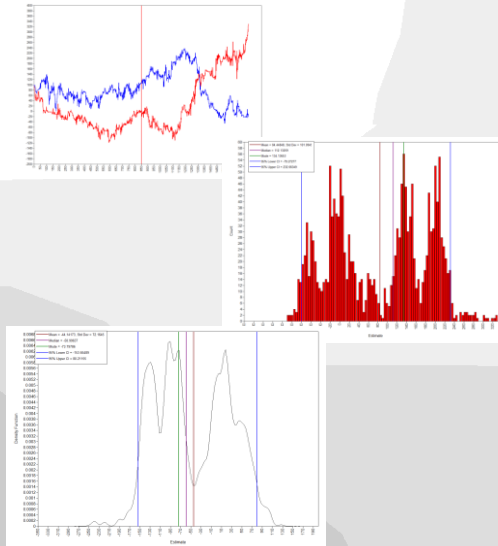
## AFTER INTERPRETATION OF MODEL RESULTS

Step 9: Is the Bayesian way of interpreting model results used?

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## Back to the example:



POTENTIAL ITERATION HIGHEST PSR	PARAMETER WITH SCALE REDUCTION	
100	3.870	7
200	2.679	7
300	3.405	7
400	4.204	7
500	3.642	1
600	3.536	7
700	3.995	7
800	4.025	7
900	3.176	7
1000	3.203	7
1100	3.588	7
1200	3.120	7
1300	2.656	7
1400	1.862	3
1500	1.338	3
1600	1.113	3
1700	1.021	3

## Back to the example:



POTENTIAL ITERATION HIGHEST PSR	PARAMETER WITH SCALE REDUCTION	
100	3.870	7
200	2.679	7
300	3.405	7
400	4.204	7
500	3.642	1
600	3.536	7
700	3.995	7
800	4.025	7
900	3.176	7
1000	3.203	7
1100	3.588	7
1200	3.120	7
1300	2.656	7
1400	1.862	3
1500	1.338	3
1600	1.113	3
1700	1.021	3

**REJECT**