

Topic 1: Voter Turnout

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Key takeaways:

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1.1 Empirical Studies

1.1.1 Get-out-the-vote campaigns

Gerber and Green (2000)

Main hypothesis Personal canvassing mobilizes voters more effectively, decline in voter turn-out is related to decline in personal means of campaign.

Literature Some related works are

- collective action and prosocial behavior (blood donations, recycling, good deeds): Christensen et al. (1998), Wang and Katzev (1990), Spaccarelli et al. (1989), Reams and Ray (1993)
- voter turn-out and contact with political organizations/candidates:
 - Kramer (1970), Rosenstone and Hansen (1993). **Endogeneity issue:** political contact is not exogenous: it could be that those most likely to vote are also most likely to receive contact.
 - Adams and Smith (1980), Miller et al. (1981). **Small sample:** results are not statistically reliable

Empirical details This paper designed an experiment as in table 1.1, and

- $N = 29380$ (within 22077 households): randomize at HH level, analyze at individual level, NO clustering
- the baseline control group (no mail, no phone call, no in-person contact) is large ($N = 10800$), due to budget limit
- specification: intent-to-treat, use the treatment assignment as an instrument

Results personal canvassing is very effective, while telephone and mail canvassing is limited. Face-to-face political activity is suggested to be very important. Decline in voter turnout might be attributed to the decrease of in-person campaigns. A competing hypothesis proposed by Rosenstone and Hansen (1993) where decline in voter turn-out is related to decline in the volume of mobilization was ruled out since ANES data shows no trend of decline in total mobilization.

Table 1.1: Experiment Design of **Gerber and Green (2000)**

		No. direct mailings sent				Total
		0	1	2	3	
No phone call	without in-person	10800	2406	2588	2375	18169
	with in-person	2686	519	625	627	4457
Phone call	without in-person	958	1451	1486	1522	5417
	with in-person	217	385	352	383	1337
Total		14661	4761	5051	4907	29380

Questions and comments Some of the questions I have for this study are

- Telephone and mail treatment are designed to be correlated, why? To show that even the two combined won't work as good as personal canvassing? Perhaps it's just what happened, unintentionally, a situation.
- Selection bias: The answering rate is only 28% of the in-person treated group, only 32.1% of the phone-call treated group. The results show that the bias is not big.
- Potential spillover effect: It's an ITT analysis, would be interesting to see the effects on the neighbors of the in-person contacted HHs.
- This is perhaps related to the rising of more polarized, social-media-star type of politicians? I guess it's related to the mechanism behind the effectiveness of in-person means, is it because the people would react more actively to things that they are feel? Or a hate towards the campaign means that they feel mistreated or dehumanized (email/messages)?

And some general comments:

- **I like:** bigger experiment, cleanly written, good explanation on ITT and instruments, well designed experiment
- **Not so sure:** empirical strategy is a bit basic (not necessarily a bad thing), no understanding on the mechanism, generality is limited (bigger scale/more important elections would probably need other forms of nudges), no welfare analysis.

Gerber, Green, and Larimer (2008)

Main hypothesis Social pressure can serve as an important inducement to political participation. There are two competing channels:

- **intrinsic:** satisfaction from behaving according to a norm
- **extrinsic:** incentive to comply to a norm

Washington (2006)

1.2 Related Theories

References

- Alan S Gerber and Donald P Green. The effects of canvassing, telephone calls, and direct mail on voter turnout: A field experiment. *American political science review*, 94(3):653–663, 2000.
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