

## 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	<b>without</b> in-person	10800	2406	2588	2375	18169
	<b>with</b> in-person	2686	519	625	627	4457
Phone call	<b>without</b> in-person	958	1451	1486	1522	5417
	<b>with</b> 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)**

**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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- Ebonya Washington. How black candidates affect voter turnout. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 121(3): 973–998, 2006.