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The Effects of Information and Self Interest on Turnout in a Tax Reform Election

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ABSTRACT

Analysis of the effects of general and targeted postcard-delivered messages to voters in the days leading to an initiative election reveals the importance of self-interest as a motivator of political participation. Voter responses to a message claiming they would save money if a tax reform item passed were heightened as voter property tax liability increased. The effectiveness of a message noting that passage of the item would result in the loss of some public services declined as property tax liability increased. These results underscore the power of tax reform messages for motivating voters.

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Strategists in tax reform elections typically invoke one of two principal appeals for voter support. Opponents of the changes claim that the proposed reforms will result in widespread cuts to public services. Proponents typically appeal to voters' pocketbooks, claiming that the proposed changes will improve tax fairness, save taxpayer dollars, or some combination of the two. This research evaluates the effects of messages designed to prompt voter participation that were delivered in a field experiment.

In particular, we seek to address two related questions. First, are voters motivated to turn out by issue-based get out the vote messages? Here, we test the effects of two distinct messages: one that invokes threats of cuts to public services and another that mentions the prospect of tax cuts if the measure passes. Second, is voter response to the messages contingent on their self interest? That is, can citizens be motivated to vote based upon issue position that happen to interact with their material self-interest?

Although theories of turnout are based upon rational utility calculations (Downs 1957), studies investigating the link between self interest and voter participation have offered mixed conclusions (see, e.g., Citrin 1979). For example, Lowery and Sigelman (1981) report little evidence for a self-interest explanation for support of reform elections, invoking the explanation that voters see little personal benefit for reforms, instead believing that cuts will help others (971). More recently, however, Tedin, Matland and Weheir (2001) report a link between self interest and votes in education finance elections.

This study evaluates the utility of service loss and tax savings messages for voter mobilization and assesses whether self-interest helps drive people to the polls. In order to determine whether voters' self-interest increases turnout, we provided information in a field experiment and merged the data from our samples of voters with data on home ownership and property taxation, which is a measure of the extent to which voters would be affected directly by the proposed tax amendment. Previous research on the effects of policy-specific information in get-out-the-vote messages on participation in ballot initiatives indicates the messages' effects to be greatest where information is lowest, i.e., on less salient initiative items. On a crowded ballot, one with several initiatives to be decided, the effect of an issue-specific get out the vote message is greatest where items are less salient, i.e., where the get out the vote message has the least competition for attention (Barabas, Barrilleaux and Scheller 2008; cf., Smith 2001). Given that the ballot item addressed here was the sole initiative on a ballot that otherwise included only presidential candidate preference votes in a closed primary, and that it was the focus of tremendous media and political attention and was thus highly visible, it seems unlikely that any information provided through the field experiment will help fill an information void. Thus the key question addressed here is the third, which asks whether issue-specific get-out-the-vote messages are more effective when they address voters' self interest directly.

We test the effects of an issue-focused mailed field experiment on the probability that individuals vote in a Florida tax reform amendment election conducted during January,

2008.¹ We implemented a field experiment in Florida in which randomly selected voters were sent a postcard that informed them of the expected tax savings that would accrue to them if the measure passed and urged them to vote. A second group of randomly assigned voters were sent cards that noted opponents' claims that passage of the amendment would result in a loss of revenue to local government and urged them to vote. A third group was sent a card that provided only the get out the vote message that was included on the other cards. We use the remaining voters in the state as a control group.²

We explore the research questions noted above by estimating models of turnout that include information about individual voters—age, gender, past voting behavior, and party affiliation—in which a binary indicator of whether they voted in the 2008 primary is dependent variable. The questions about the link between participation and self interest are estimated by using the aforementioned data plus information about respondents' residences—whether they own or rent, the house/condo value, and the property taxes paid that are contained in a dataset constructed using information from Florida county-level tax rolls. Expectations about the relationship between self interest and participation are mixed. Our initial expectation is that property owners will be more likely to vote than non-owners, all things being equal, as they stand to gain more from the reform. Beyond that, we expect the tax savings message to be more effective than the public service cuts messages among property owners, as it appeals directly to their self interest.

Issue Information and Voter Participation

A large number of studies have documented how randomly assigned get-out-the-vote messages delivered in a variety of different ways (mail, phone, in-person, door hangers, etc.) affect turnout across federal, state, and local elections in dozens of field experiments across as many jurisdictions with thousands of randomly selected subjects (Gerber and Green 2000a; 2000b; 2001; 2002; Green, Gerber, and Nickerson 2003; Nickerson 2006; 2007). Recent efforts have extended these techniques to studying efforts to mobilize Asians, Indians, Latinos, and other minority groups (Michelson 2003; 2005; 2006; Ramirez 2005; Trivedi 2005; Wong 2005). Further extensions of this research approach assess the effects of get out the vote messages that provide policy-specific information on participation in an initiative vote, with those results indicating that the greatest impact of these elections is seen in low salience areas, i.e., those that have not been the subject of much press or other pre-election attention (Barabas, Barrilleaux and Scheller 2008).

Florida's Amendment 1, or the "Portability of Save Our Homes Amendment" of 2008

Florida is an anti-tax state, so much so that legislators regularly vote against even additional taxes on cigarettes and alcohol to avoid giving their opponents a pro-tax vote to

¹ The initiative was included on the same ballot as the 2008 Florida Democratic and Republican presidential primaries. Clearly, these are high visibility contests that stimulate greater-than-average competition for media attention.

² The control group is approximately 10 million, but space constraints (even on a modern computer with up-to-date software) forced us to randomly sample 50% of that 10,000,000 plus, leaving 5,086,563 in our control group.

use against them in a campaign. This anti-tax sentiment is manifest in a number of ways: the state has no income tax, its corporate income tax is under constant attack from business and development interests, public institutions including state and local governments, public schools, state universities and community colleges, and other organizations that rely on public funding are chronically under funded and constantly seek new sources of income or revenue.

Despite this general antipathy toward taxes, local governments and school districts experienced tax collection windfalls during the 2000s, as the state's real estate boom fueled increases in property tax collections over those years. The revenue increases allowed expansions of local and school district services and employment even while the state reduced many of its taxes. The state government, despite spending much of the boom years abolishing large portions of the state's tax system under the leadership former two term governor Jeb Bush, who left the statehouse in 2006 with popularity ratings over sixty percent and whose policy heirs now control the lower house of the state legislature, continued to enjoy healthy budgets by relying on the fees that were generated by real estate transactions and the normal robust sales taxes the state collects. However, these increases in property tax collections did not go unnoticed: conservative politicians and anti-tax groups identified property taxes as a target for reform efforts. As a result of this attention and tax increases, the property tax's unpopularity rose rapidly. In 1979, 39% of respondents to a statewide survey claimed that property taxes in the state were "much too high" or "somewhat too high" (Deseran, 1999, p. 10). By 2004, the negative evaluations rose to 46%, reflecting rises in property taxes that attended rising housing prices as the state experienced a real estate boom (MacDonald 2004, p. 12). By 2007 antipathy to the property tax was so great that a plurality of Floridians (48%) identified it as their most disliked tax, far outstripping the second-most disliked federal income tax, which was invoked by only 21% of respondents (Quinnipiac University Poll, Oct. 24, 2007).

This rising anti-tax sentiment, as well as legitimate concerns about inequities in taxation that existed due to a loophole in an earlier amendment designed to lessen property tax hikes, created a fertile ground for the January, 2008 ballot initiative, which was placed on the ballot by legislative referral. The Save our Homes Portability, Inc. organization had collected over 15,000 signatures to get the item placed on the ballot, an effort made irrelevant by the legislative action. The group was well short of the more than 600,000 signatures required to place an item before the state's voters (Florida Division of Elections 2008) at the time the legislature acted. The initial political support for the initiative came primarily from the state's House Speaker, Marco Rubio, a young, term-limited Miami-area Republican with strong ties to the conservative wing of the state party, who was joined by the state's popular Republican governor Charlie Crist when the issue's popular traction became apparent. The initiative passed with over 64% of the vote despite opposition from key business groups, long-time tax policy opinion leaders, and teacher and public employee groups.

Amendment 1 was designed to extend protections of an earlier Florida amendment, known as "Save our Homes", which passed in 1992 and was implemented in 1995. Save our Homes placed a 3% annual cap on the taxable value of homes in the state, but was lost to homeowners who moved to a new home. This loss of protection led to enormous disparities in property tax assessments, especially during the recent period of real estate boom in Florida. People who stayed put were subject to at most 3% increases in appraised value. People who moved were at risk of larger increases. The 2008 Amendment allows

homeowners to move up to \$500,000 of their 3% cap to a new home, thereby allowing them to avoid much of the tax increase that often attends moving. The Amendment also doubled the state's homestead exemption to \$50,000 on all but the least expensive houses and extended protections to non-homestead real estate, thereby providing tax relief for some business owners. The bill's supporters claimed that it would reduce taxes for most homeowners and would stimulate the housing market since people would no longer be kept from moving by the fear of increased taxes. They also noted that none of the bill's provisions applied to property taxes for school districts, thereby allowing them to claim that public schools would be held harmless by the legislation. Opponents claimed that the reduction in taxes would result in a loss of public sector jobs and a loss of key public services.

A Field Experiment

As noted above, we seek to answer three questions. First, do voters respond to pre-election, issue-based, get out the vote messages? Second, are voters more likely to respond if appeals to their self interest are included in the message? To answer these questions we conducted a field experiment in which random samples of voters were subjected to treatments that were delivered via bright yellow 4 X 6 postcards that were mailed to randomly chosen active voters. Our sample is drawn from a list of all active voters in the state that was obtained from the Florida Secretary of State, Division of Elections. We drew three random samples of 2250 for this research: each sample includes 750 Republicans, 750 Democrats and 750 Independents. A sample of 50% of the state's remaining registered voters comprises the control group.

The overall goal is to compare the turnout rates of those who received the messages with potential voters who did not. However, a number of cards were returned because the voter moved or because the records kept by the Department of Elections were outdated. Most previous work has "assumed that all of the households we intended to treat by mail received the treatment, an assumption implicitly made in all previous mail experiments" (Gerber and Green 2000, 659, fn. 10). Since the number of returned cards is usually low, about ten percent, attrition is often not a problem. However, to improve our estimates of who was actually treated, we recorded and refined our analyses to concentrate on only those voters who were actually treated (i.e., the cards were not returned).

The postcards were mailed persons in the respective treatment and control groups on January 24, 2008, five days before the election, providing enough time for cards to reach even the most distant parts of the state. We used first-class postage and requested that all non-deliverable cards be returned; we recorded all unreturned cards so that we could distinguish more reliably between those who were treated and those we intended to treat. Determining that the card was delivered does not ensure that the addressees actually read the cards, but as is common in experiments of this type we assume that the voter actually saw the card. Recipients received a single, 4 X 6 yellow postcard produced and sent by a university print shop/post office. Each postcard read "January 29, 2008 is Election Day here in Florida. Now more than ever, your community, state and nation need to hear what you think. Please remember to vote on January 29," and noted that the message was sent from the Florida State University College of Social Sciences. This "get out the vote" (GOTV) message was mailed to a sample of 2250. (See appendix A for examples of the cards.)

A second card, which contained the neutral message as well as the statement “Supporters of Amendment 1 claim that it will save the average Florida homeowner about \$240 per year,” was sent to 2250 registered voters---725 Republicans, 725 Democrats and 725 Independents.³ Treatments are stratified by party affiliation to bolster the sample’s representativeness, as the initiative balloting occurred with Florida’s closed primaries, elections that were expected to show suppressed turnout due to Democratic and Republican Parties’ protests over the state’s moving its primary election date forward. A third card, also sent to 2250 registered voters, includes the GOTV message plus the statement “Some opponents of Proposition 1 claim that it will lead to cuts in local government services.”

Although the messages focused on the information function, the cards also reminded voters that their vote matters, as each contains the statement “Now more than ever, your community, state, and nation need to hear what you think,” followed by “Please remember to vote on January 29.” These statements are intended to engender feelings of civic duty and to increase the perceived probability that their vote mattered (Riker and Ordeshook 1968). Since these messages were a part of every treatment, no one treatment is advantaged.

Why a case study?

Case study research designs have distinct limitations, and specifically are limited in that they yield information that has high internal validity but low generalizability. In the case of studies of turnout in state-level initiative elections, we contend that focusing on a single state’s experience provides benefits over existing research that assesses multiple state-level initiatives. Our core concern is that every state’s initiatives differ in content and salience, thereby forcing an “apples to oranges” comparison. In addition, the initiative process varies among states (see, e.g., Tolbert and Smith 2004 for discussion), further confounding comparisons. Comparative cross-state analyses that use states as units of analysis (e.g., Tolbert, Grummel and Smith 2001) are especially daunted by this problem and even studies that use individual level data (e.g., Tolbert and Smith 2005; Smith 2001) must contend with difficulties of controlling for variations in state rules, issue content and issue salience that are not in play in a single state study in which a single initiative item faces voters. Thus we believe that the controls imposed by a single state study provide some benefits.

The Data

Voter registration data were obtained from the office of the Florida Secretary of State, Division of Elections. The data are provided on a cd-rom and contain demographic information about voters including age, gender, race and ethnicity, address, partisan affiliation, and history of voting over the past twenty elections. The file contains over 10,000,000 records. Because of its size we are unable to analyze the full file using Stata SE on a large microprocessor so randomly assigned one-half of the observations to our control group.

The sole independent variable used other than the treatment conditions or the items included on the state-provided dataset is gleaned from data from the Florida Department of Revenue, Office of Property Tax Administration and is information about home sales transactions and the appraised value of property. Using a file of these data that covers all real

³ The \$240 figure was based upon economic estimates published before the election (Deslatte 2007)

estate currently on tax roles in the state, and all property transactions over the period 1995-2006, we merged information on property ownership by the name and address of voters in our sample. This provides us information about the value of property owned by registered voters, whether registered voters own property, and the number of properties upon which a voter is paying property taxes. This information captures the economic self interest item for our analysis.

Analysis

The treatment and control data and voter turnout are described in table 1. Column 1 shows the over 5 million voters in the control group and the 2,250 registered voters to whom we applied each of the three treatments. Columns 2 and 3, respectively, report the number of the attempted treatments that succeeded, i.e, that were not returned, and the percentage success. The lowest rate of success was 91% and the greatest was 91.8%; the average among all treatment groups was 91.3%. Column 4 displays the number of voters who turned out for the January 29 election in the control and treatment groups, and column shows the percentage turnout for each group. In each, turnout was between just under 39% and just over 40%. The simple differences between turnout percentages for groups, none of which are statistically significant, are reported in column 6. These descriptive data reveal no overall effect of the treatments on voter turnout.

While the data in table 1 suggest no effects, the reports of multivariate analyses in table 2 are be more revealing in that they allow us to control for voter characteristics beyond those introduced by simple randomization. Estimates are provided in three columns. The first addresses those we intended to treat, the second addresses those who were treated, and the third reports the results of a two-stage estimation designed to control for possible selection bias. Even though the assignments to groups are random, receiving a card is not. We account for this by generating two-stage estimates in which the initial random assignment, which is only correlated with treatment receipt and not at all with the other variables, is used as an instrumental variable (see Gerber and Green 2000 for more on the logic and use of this procedure). Thus the third column results are a linear probability model, which has the problem of out-of-sample predictions of probabilities, among others.

In each of the three columns, control variables perform as expected: Republicans and Democrats are both more apt to vote than Independents, which is to be expected given that the main focus of the vote was the presidential primary and Florida's is closed. Women are more likely to vote than men, and whites and other race voters are more apt to vote than African American or Hispanic self-identifiers. Controls for prior voting behavior likewise perform as expected for the most part: prior abstentions are negatively associated with the probability of voting in the 2008 election and past participation is associated positively. The sole deviation is the 2002 general election, in which participation is negatively associated with participation in the 2008 vote in each of the probit models.⁴ The variable "early/absentee voter" is a dummy indicating whether voters used either of those options.

Looking across the three models, the "Get out the Vote Message" variable is positive in each and statistically significant in the actually treated group probit model (col 2) and the

⁴ Participation in the 2002 election may have been artificially high following the Florida 2000 voting controversy, which means that the likelihood of artificially elevated voting in 2002 could result in lower turnout in 2002 on individual-level basis.

two-stage model (column 3), indicating some effect of the simple message. Neither of the targeted messages—“Property Tax 1” or “Property Tax 2”—shows a consistent significant effect. However, the continuous measure of tax liability, “Amount of Property Tax”, which is a summation of the dollar amount of property taxes paid (sometimes on several properties) by a registered voter, has a positive and statistically significant effect in each model. The “No Property Tax” dummy variable has a consistent negative and statistically significant effect. The simple meaning of this seems to be that voter interpretations of self-interest, controlling for partisanship, prior voting participation, and personal characteristics, appears to be an important determinant of voting in a state election.

To better understand the effect of self-interest in the decision to vote, we estimate interactive relationships between each the three treatments (GOTV, Property Tax 1 and Property Tax 2). Results show consistent signs in the expected directions although statistical significance varies across the three models. The most interesting findings are those between the “Amount of Property Tax” and “Property Tax 1” and “Property Tax 2” treatments. The first property tax variable indicates the tax savings message, and the results show a significant net effect of this message’s interactive effect with the amount of taxes paid. The second property tax message, which is the “cuts to public services” message, reduces turnout among property holders. Together, these effects suggest that the effect of the issue message is contingent on the extent of property tax liability. The effectiveness of a tax savings message to mobilize voters increases as the amount of voter tax liability increases. A threat to public spending message’s effect is less effective on inducing turnout as a voter’s tax liability increases. Thus there appears to be a strong element of economic self interest in voter responses to these issue-specific get out the vote messages.

Table 3 shows these estimates more clearly. The first row, which includes information about the control group, there is no effect of home ownership as we move from low to high tax liability. The second row shows a two percent increase in voter turnout among those who received the simple GOTV message as we move from lowest to highest tax liability. The most substantial effect is seen in the third row, where there is a nine percent increase in turnout from the two standard deviations below the mean of tax liability (\$0) to two standard deviations above it (\$1.1 million) in response to the Property Tax 1 tax savings message. Finally, row four shows the slight reduction in voter turnout that occurs as we move along the property tax liability continuum: the “cuts to public services” message actually reduces voter turnout by about 3 points among those who pay the highest taxes.

Although the coefficient on property tax amounts was significant, the calculations in Table 3 did not show much of an effect for this variable alone. Part of this is due to the extreme range of property tax liabilities in our dataset. To illustrate the point, Figure 1 displays the full range of effects of property tax liability on voter turnout across the entire range of the sample. The predicted turnout rates change relatively little as we move from 0 to \$128 million in liability, which captures virtually all of the state’s population. However, as we get into the tails of the taxpayer distribution, those paying tens or over a hundred million dollars in property taxes, the effect on predicted voter turnout in this election increases dramatically to nearly 80%. Thus the effect of property tax liabilities on voter participation is particularly pronounced for some extremely wealthy members of the sample.

Discussion and Conclusion.

Voting calculations are often characterized as cost-benefit calculations. When the benefits exceed the costs, it makes sense to vote (Downs 1957). One often needs to invoke concepts like civic duty to make the voting decision more rewarding (Riker and Ordeshook 1968), but in many instances the actual benefits of voting are abstract. That is, instead of a direct monetary benefit, more often than not we focus on costs such as a lack of information (Downs 1957) or perhaps costs associated with distance to the polls (Brady and McNulty 2004) or even hassles due to inclement weather (Gomez, Hansford, and Krause 2007). Yet, in 2008, the benefits of voting for a property tax amendment were explicitly economic. Voters stood to gain personally if the tax amendment passed, and the savings were particularly pronounced for some property owners.

In a field experiment, we demonstrated that economic self-interest matters. Individuals with higher levels of property tax liabilities who were reminded of the amount they stood to gain were more likely to vote. On the other hand, individuals with property became less likely to vote once the costs to the larger community were made more explicit. These differences between egocentric and sociotropic forms of self-interest have been noted in other areas of politics (Kinder and Kiewit 1979; 1981; Kramer 1983; MacKuen, Erikson, and Stimson 1992; Markus 1988). In our study, personal self-interest proved to be a powerful motivator when it comes to voting, both in terms of increasing turnout when the benefits were personal or decreasing it when costs are imposed on others in the community.

However, it is important to remember that this was a single study in one state. Also, the treatments were fairly generic in nature. The average \$240 savings on property taxes glossed over a lot of important heterogeneity. Some people save a lot while others might not save much at all. We capture some of this with our interactions with any individual's personal situation, but one could imagine more detailed treatments specific to each person's tax situation. Moreover, citizens are often treated multiple times in the real world (i.e., multiple mailers or commercials). In that sense the effects we observed were impressive, although other formats such as phones or in-person appeals might have produced even bigger results.

Nevertheless, tax reform election campaigns typically revolve around two strategies. One is visceral: it promises voters tax savings if the item passes. The second plays on voter fears of lost jobs and services and warns of dire cuts to crucial services if the item passes. Floridians received those messages in the run-up to the January 29, 2008 vote on Proposition 1. We devised treatments that reflected those messages. Results suggest that the general get out the vote message and the issue-specific messages themselves had only modest effects on voter participation. The greatest effects are seen in the conditional relationships with property tax liability. There, we find the tax savings message to have a strong effect on property tax payers and the cuts to services messages actually to suppress turnout in that group.

This may be interpreted cynically as evidence that voters respond to their self interest, something that would not be likely to surprise practical politicians or strategists. However the fact that a single message could have an effect among a targeted group, most of whom were in all likelihood being bombarded with information about the election through the state's media and via mailings and other contacts from the initiative's backers and opponents, is surprising. In addition, the fact that the message mentioned a savings of less than \$1 a day on a year's taxes may reflect the power of any tax savings message.

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Table 1. Florida Field Experiment Design, Turnout Rates, Contact Rates, and Treatment Effects

	1	2	3	4	5	6
	Intended to Treat	Received Mail	Contact Rate	Voted in 2008	Turnout Rate	Treatment Effect
Experimental Group	N	N	%	N	% (s.e.)	% (s.e.)
Control Condition	5,086,563	0	n/a	1,977,418	38.9 (.02)	n/a n/a
Any Treatment	6,750	6,163	91.3	2,441	39.6 (.62)	0.7 (.62)
Specific Treatment						
General GOTV	2,250	2,051	91.2	825	40.2 (1.08)	1.3 (1.08)
Property Tax 1 (Save \$240)	2,250	2,047	91.0	795	38.8 (1.08)	0.0 (1.08)
Property Tax 2 (Local Loss)	2,250	2,065	91.8	821	39.8 (1.08)	0.9 (1.08)

Table 2. Statistical Analysis of the 2008 Florida Statewide Field Experiment

	Intended to Treat		Actually Treated		Actually Treated	
	Probit		Probit		Two Stage Instr. Variables	
	coeff.	(s.e.)	coeff.	(s.e.)	coeff.	(s.e.)
Get Out The Vote Message	.038	.032	.075	.034 *	.020	.009 *
Property Tax 1 (Save \$240)	-.034	.036	.022	.038	.004	.009
Property Tax 2 (Locals Lose)	.009	.033	.060	.034 *	.014	.009
Amount of Property Tax	.014	.002 **	.014	.002 **	.003	.000 **
No Property Tax	-.178	.007 **	-.178	.007 **	-.044	.002 **
GOTV X Amt Property Tax	.089	.084	.063	.068	.017	.009 *
Tax 1 X Amt. Property Tax	.526	.242 *	.361	.231	.082	.039 *
Tax 2 X Amt. Property Tax	-.082	.067	-.107	.062 *	-.028	.016 *
GOTV X No Property Tax	.142	.222	.105	.222	.035	.059
Tax 1 X No Property Tax	.092	.246	.037	.246	.027	.063
Tax 2 X No Property Tax	.121	.344	.069	.344	.024	.086
Voted 2006 General	.460	.007 **	.460	.007 **	.177	.002 **
Abstained 2006 General	-.447	.007 **	-.447	.007 **	-.121	.002 **
Voted 2006 Primary	.425	.007 **	.425	.007 **	.140	.002 **
Abstained 2006 Primary	.010	.007	.010	.007	.008	.002 **
Voted 2004 General	.008	.004 *	.008	.004 *	-.003	.001 **
Abstained 2004 General	-.288	.005 **	-.288	.005 **	-.061	.001 **
Voted 2004 Primary	.275	.004 **	.275	.004 **	.084	.001 **
Abstained 2004 Primary	.048	.004 **	.048	.004 **	.011	.001 **
Voted 2002 General	-.002	.001 **	-.002	.001 **	.008	.000 **
Abstained 2002 General	-.191	.004 **	-.191	.004 **	-.032	.001 **
Voted 2002 Primary	.188	.004 **	.188	.004 **	.035	.001 **
Abstained 2002 Primary	.052	.004 **	.052	.004 **	-.006	.001 **
Early/Absentee Voter	1.711	.007 **	1.711	.007 **	.382	.001 **
Democrat	.284	.002 **	.284	.002 **	.063	.000 **
Republican	.399	.002 **	.399	.002 **	.097	.001 **
Age	.049	.000 **	.049	.000 **	.012	.000 **
Age-Squared	.000	.000 **	-.000	.000 **	-.000	.000 **
Female	.028	.001 **	.028	.001 **	.006	.000 **
Black	-.215	.003 **	-.215	.003 **	-.052	.001 **
Hispanic	-.011	.002 **	-.011	.002 **	-.006	.001 **
Constant	-2.19	.006 **	-2.19	.006 **	-.109	.001 **
Pseudo R ² / Adjusted R ²	.32		.32		.37	
Number of cases	5,093,313		5,092,726		5,092,726	

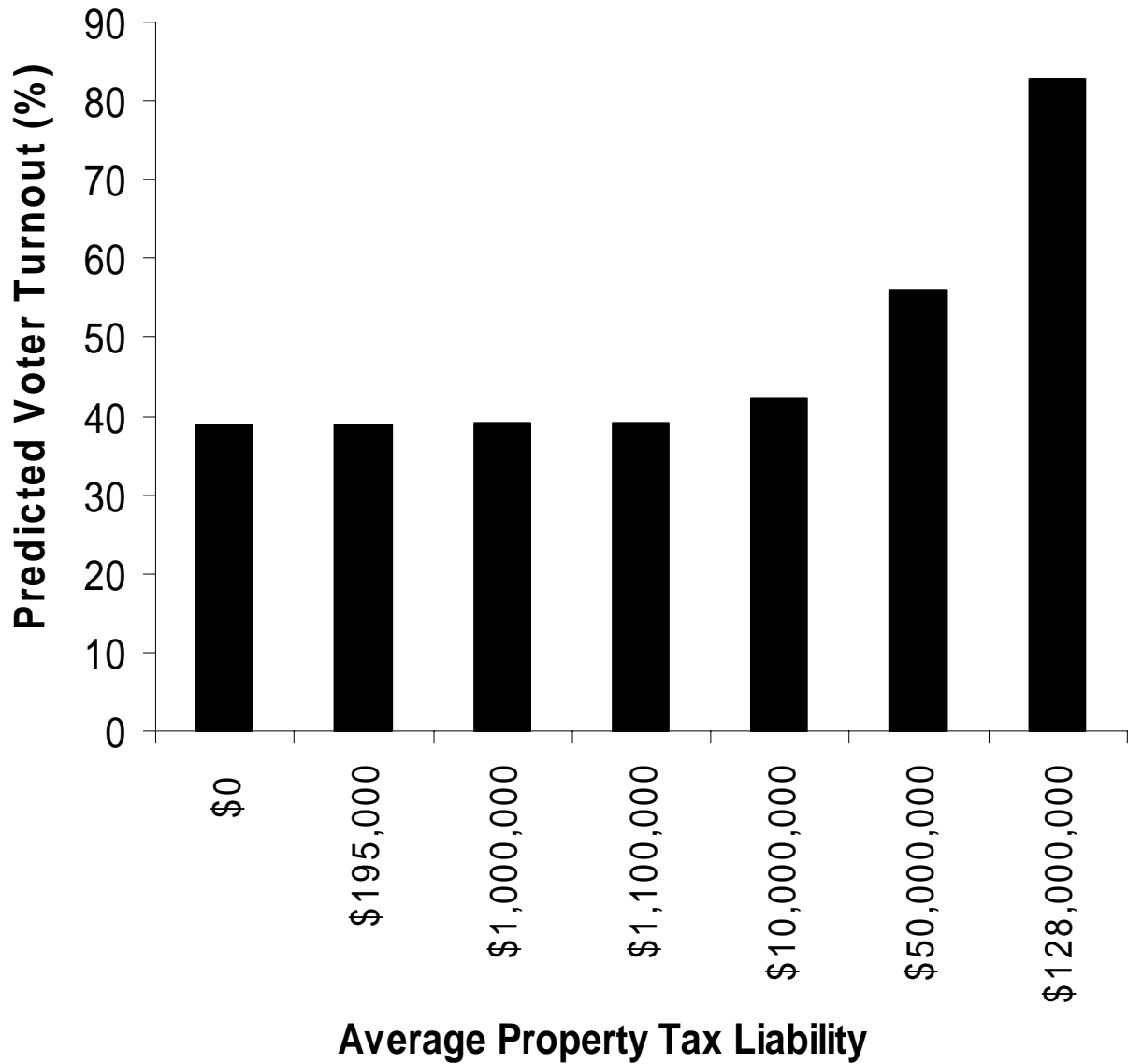
** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$ (one-tailed)

Table 3. Estimated Turnout Effects by Treatment Group and Property Tax Liabilities

Treatment Group	Low Level of Taxable Property	High Level of Taxable Property	Estimated Effect on Turnout
Control Group	.39	.39	.00
Get-Out-The-Vote Message	.41	.43	.02
Property Tax 1 (Save \$240)	.39	.49	.09
Property Tax 2 (Locals Lose)	.40	.38	-.03

Note: Low level of property taxes = \$0 and high level of property taxes = \$1.1 million.

Figure 1. The Effects of Property Tax Liabilities on Voter Turnout in Florida



Appendix A: Treatment Postcards

Card 1: GOTV general

January 29, 2008 is Election Day here in Florida.

Now more than ever, your community, state and nation need to hear what you think.

Please remember to vote on January 29.

This message brought to you by the FSU College of Social Sciences

Card 2 Tax 1 (average savings)

January 29, 2008 is Election Day in Florida.

Supporters of Amendment 1 claim that it will save the average Florida homeowner about \$240 per year.

Now more than ever, your community, state, and nation need to hear what you think.

Please remember to vote on January 29.

This message brought to you by the FSU College of Social Sciences

Card 3 Tax2 (cuts in local services)

January 29, 2008 is Election Day in Florida.

Some opponents of Proposition 1 claim that it will lead to cuts in local government services.

Now more than ever, your community, state, and nation need to hear what you think.

Please remember to vote on January 29.

This message brought to you by the FSU College of Social Sciences

Return address:

Project Vote 2008
College of Social Sciences
DMC
Florida State University
Tallahassee, FL 32306-2220

First Class
US Postage
Paid
Tallahassee
FL
Permit 55

Place Address Label Here

Appendix B. Proposition 1 Ballot Language. Source: Florida Department of State, Division of Elections.

<http://election.dos.state.fl.us/initiatives/initdetail.asp?account=10&seqnum=68>

Reference:

ARTICLE VII, SECTIONS 3, 4, AND 6; ARTICLE XII, SECTION 27

Summary: [View Full Text \(pdf\)](#)

This revision proposes changes to the State Constitution relating to property taxation. With respect to homestead property, this revision: (1) increases the homestead exemption except for school district taxes and (2) allows homestead property owners to transfer up to \$500,000 of their Save-Our-Homes benefits to their next homestead. With respect to nonhomestead property, this revision (3) provides a \$25,000 exemption for tangible personal property and (4) limits assessment increases for specified nonhomestead real property except for school district taxes.

In more detail, this revision:

- (1) Increases the homestead exemption by exempting the assessed value between \$50,000 and \$75,000. This exemption does not apply to school district taxes.
- (2) Provides for the transfer of accumulated Save-Our-Homes benefits. Homestead property owners will be able to transfer their Save-Our-Homes benefit to a new homestead within 1 year and not more than 2 years after relinquishing their previous homestead; except, if this revision is approved by the electors in January of 2008 and if the new homestead is established on January 1, 2008, the previous homestead must have been relinquished in 2007. If the new homestead has a higher just value than the previous one, the accumulated benefit can be transferred; if the new homestead has a lower just value, the amount of benefit transferred will be reduced. The transferred benefit may not exceed \$500,000. This provision applies to all taxes.
- (3) Authorizes an exemption from property taxes of \$25,000 of assessed value of tangible personal property. This provision applies to all taxes.
- (4) Limits the assessment increases for specified nonhomestead real property to 10 percent each year. Property will be assessed at just value following an improvement, as defined by general law, and may be assessed at just value following a change of ownership or control if provided by general law. This limitation does not apply to school district taxes. This limitation is repealed effective January 1, 2019, unless renewed by a vote of the electors in the general election held in 2018.

Further, this revision:

- a. Repeals obsolete language on the homestead exemption when it was less than \$25,000 and did not apply uniformly to property taxes levied by all local governments.
- b. Provides for homestead exemptions to be repealed if a future constitutional amendment provides for assessment of homesteads "at less than just value" rather than as currently provided "at a specified percentage" of just value.
- c. Schedules the changes to take effect upon approval by the electors and operate retroactively to January 1, 2008, if approved in a special election held on January 29, 2008, or to take effect January 1, 2009, if approved in the general election held in November of 2008. The limitation on annual assessment increases for specified real property shall first apply to the 2009 tax roll if this revision is approved in a special election held on January 29, 2008, or shall first apply to the 2010 tax roll if this revision is approved in the general election held in November of 2008.

Sponsor:

The Florida Legislature