The Effects of Probabilistic Forecasts and Policy Stakes on Electoral Participation in an Experimental Setting

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ABSTRACT

This study looks at the effect of probabilistic forecasts and policy stakes on vote intention in an experimental setting. This study examined stakes and forecasts through exposing subjects to mock newspaper articles in two experiments: a fictitious mayoral election and the 2018 U.S. Senate race in Arizona. The study found that varying the policy stakes of an election had a significant impact on intention to vote, while varying the probabilistic forecasts did not have a significant effect on intention to vote. In the mayoral experiment, when the mock article said that the candidates disagreed on a major policy (high stakes treatment), subjects were significantly more likely to indicate that they would vote in that election in comparison to the article where subjects were told that the two candidates agreed on that same policy issue (low stakes treatment). In the Arizona experiment, I found that low stakes made subjects significantly less likely to say they would vote in comparison to the control treatment. Both stakes and probability had some effects on candidate favorability and candidate preference in my mayoral experiment. My results lead me to conclude that the media has the potential to influence political participation levels through the way they cover elections.

INTRODUCTION

The United States has one of the lowest voter turnout rates in the developed world (DeSilver, 2018). Low voter turnout is problematic because it discourages elected officials from acting in the interests of the majority of the public and encourages them to cater to special interest groups and large donors instead (Rauch, 2016). To make elected officials more responsive to the needs of the larger populace, the United States must increase its voter participation levels.

The purpose of this study is to understand how media messaging affects voter intention and can be altered to potentially increase voter turnout levels. Past research has shown that public opinion polls and probabilistic forecasts can affect an individual’s inclination to vote. Previous studies have also shown that raising the stakes of an election through emphasizing the election’s consequences can increase individual intention to vote. I build on previous research through using two quantitative experiments to examine the simultaneous causal effects of probabilistic forecasts and stakes messaging on intention to vote in a fictitious local mayoral race and the effects of stakes messaging alone on intention to vote in the 2018 Arizona U.S. Senate race between Kirsten Sinema and Martha McSally. In my first experiment, the mayoral race, I decided to use a fictitious race to test my key dependent variables to avoid interference from confounding variables that may have come into play with a real election. Potential confounding variables include the possibility that some subjects had heard of and developed opinions about the city or one of the candidates, which could have influenced their answers. In my experiments, higher stakes indicate more significant consequences of a particular election outcome, while lower stakes indicate less dramatic consequences. In my second experiment, I tested the effects of stakes messaging in a real-life upcoming political election — all subjects in my second experiment took my survey before the Arizona U.S. Senate race took place on election day 2018.

The results from my study indicate that exposure to varying information about policy stakes has a causal effect on intention to vote, but probabilistic forecasts did not. My results lead me to make two
conclusions. First, my results highlight how journalists may be able to help the United States deal with its issue of low voter turnout and encourage electoral engagement through emphasizing policy differences between candidates and the potential consequences of an election outcome. Second, my results suggest that contrasting media information about probabilistic forecasts may not have any major effect on the decision to vote. This study provides insight to journalists who want to positively influence the democratic process through their coverage of political campaigns.

**PREVIOUS TURNOUT AND VOTE CHOICE RESEARCH**

Limits to rationality in voting

While my specific study focuses on voter intention, an understanding of previous voter turnout literature is essential to my experimental design.

Early political science literature primarily examined voter turnout through the rational choice model, which Blais (2000) describes as the theory where a citizen “decides to vote if, in her view, the benefits of voting are greater than the costs.” According to Downs (1957), voting goes against the rational choice model because even though it benefits democratic society, when more people vote, the costs of voting outweigh the benefits for individuals. It takes time to cast one’s vote, and it is highly unlikely that a single vote will influence the outcome of an election. Still, in the United States, tens of millions of people choose to vote in elections. Therefore, most modern turnout literature has concluded that the rational choice model is limited in that it cannot explain why millions of people choose to cast their votes in elections. What motivates people to turn out to vote has become one of the most compelling problems to study in political science research.

Two of the scholars who attempted to understand the conundrum of voter turnout was Riker and Ordeshook (1968). Riker and Ordeshook agree with Downs’ conclusions when they assert that “voting, the fundamental political act, is typically irrational” (p. 25). Riker and Ordeshook expand on Downs’ work by explaining why people choose to vote even though voting is irrational. The authors developed a helpful formula for assessing the decision process that individuals undergo when deciding whether or not they will vote: \( R = (PB) - C + D \) (p. 28). In this formula, \( R \) equals the reward that comes from casting one’s vote. This reward must be greater than 0 for one to vote in an election.

Riker and Ordeshook include \( PB \) in their voting formula, where \( P \) is the probability that one’s vote will be consequential in achieving the benefit \( B \) they desire. While this probability is extremely small, the value of \( P \) in this context may be raised for an individual if they perceive that an election is highly competitive and believe their vote is more likely to be consequential. Though this perception is mostly a fallacy, rational choice theory tells us it may help motivate an individual to turn out to vote because it fulfills their desire to be “influential” regarding an election outcome (p. 25-28).

Riker and Ordeshook define \( B \) as the benefit that comes from voting. If an individual’s candidate wins, that candidate will be able to enact policies that benefit the individual. For example, a candidate may promise to implement a single-payer system, so an individual who cannot afford health care or is not provided it by their employer will have a high reward \( R \) if that candidate wins and successfully enacts a single-payer plan. When people feel that they will benefit from a particular election outcome, the “stakes” of an election are high for them (p. 25-28). Riker and Ordeshook use \( C \) to define the costs of voting. The costs of voting include the time it takes to learn about the candidates, fill out a ballot, take off work to go to a polling place or pay postage for a mail-in ballot.

Most of the time, the product \( PB \) is incredibly small. The likelihood that a single vote will be consequential in altering the election results and bringing about the benefit of a particular election outcome is close to zero. For this reason, the quantity of \( C \) usually outweighs the quantity of \( B \) and \( P \). This is why Riker and Ordeshook and other scholars acknowledge that voting is irrational. Riker and Ordeshook’s major contribution to voter turnout studies is their introduction of \( D \), which represents citizen duty or civic duty. Due to civic duty, citizens feel grateful that they have a right to choose the leaders that make decisions about their lives and feel a duty to engage in the voting process as a result. Additionally, exercising one’s civic duty can make an individual feel good. Even if someone recognizes that their single vote will likely not affect the outcome of the race, they may benefit from voting through the satisfaction they receive when expressing their support for a candidate. For this reason, Riker and Ordeshook suggest that \( D \) probably has a larger impact on whether one decides to vote than either \( P \) or \( B \) (p. 36).

According to Kahneman (2011), one way that individuals make decisions in their lives is through heuristics. Heuristics are mental shortcuts that make decision making less of an arduous process. One heuristic Kahneman discusses is the availability heuristic, where individuals make decisions based on information that immediately comes to mind. Kahneman uses the example of people being more afraid to fly when they hear about a dramatic plane crash or more afraid to drive when they see a car in flames. These fears may not be well-founded or rational, but they are immediately available in an individual’s mind and, therefore, may be used as a criterion that the individual uses in deciding how often to fly or drive. Individuals may also use the availability heuristic when making decisions about voting. A recently seen poll or probabilistic forecast can serve as the basis for a
decision about whether or not the election is competitive enough for their vote to make a difference. Alternatively, an individual may look at the stances of the candidates on a particular policy issue to evaluate whether they would significantly benefit from a particular election outcome, and therefore whether it is worth it for them to cast a vote. Individuals can use heuristics to raise and lower the values of both (P) and (B) in Riker and Ordeshook’s formula.

Simon (1955) says that individuals are limited by alternatives in their ability to behave rationally. Simon writes that “in most global models of rational choice, all alternatives are evaluated before a choice is made. In actual human decision-making, alternatives are often examined sequentially...when alternatives are examined sequentially, we may regard the first satisfactory alternative that is evaluated as such as the one actually selected” (p. 110). Simon’s research can apply to voting. When individuals are making decisions about whether to vote in an election or which candidate they want to vote for, they will likely select only a few criteria to base their decision on rather than evaluating all possible criteria. A poll about how close the election between two candidates is may drive individuals to cast their vote or stay home. When picking a candidate, individuals may use party affiliation to decide who to vote for. Individuals may assume that those who share their party share their policy views. This assumption can serve as a mental shortcut that an individual uses to select a candidate without learning everything about that candidate. In terms of mental shortcuts, heuristics and sequential alternatives act in a somewhat synonymous fashion.

Other voters may use a candidate’s position on a single policy issue (such as gun violence prevention, climate change, or abortion) as their litmus test for candidate selection without knowing much else about a candidate. These are not the only criteria that individuals can evaluate in the voting process, but they may be the first satisfying alternatives an individual comes across in an election. Once individuals have settled on their criteria, they will usually not search for alternative criteria that could change their mind. Simon’s research illustrates why individuals are limited in their ability to make “rational” decisions about casting their vote and selecting a candidate.

How social pressure and stakes can motivate people to vote

Political science researchers have found that it is possible to use various tactics to increase the number of people who vote or intend to vote. Gerber, Green, and Larimer (2008) found that they could use social pressure to incentivize people to vote. In their study of 180,000 Michigan households during the 2006 election, the researchers found that households who received a “social pressure” treatment, a letter from the researchers saying that the researchers would mail the person’s voting records to their neighbors after the election, had an eight percent higher turnout rate than those in the control group who received no letter from the researchers. This effect was stronger than effects yielded by letters sent to other treatment groups that characterized voting as a civic duty, informed subjects that researchers were studying their voting records, or explained that voting records were public information (p. 38).

Gerber, Green, and Larimer’s research illustrates a potential negative side to the express benefit of voting as a civic duty. Just as one casts a vote to feel good about having expressed their support for a candidate, people also turn out to avoid the perceived shame of being publicly shown to be people who did not vote. By using social pressure to raise the stakes of the election, the researchers made the benefit (B) of doing one’s civic duty (D) much higher than the cost (C) of voting.

Social pressure can raise the stakes of an election. Accordingly, the stakes of an election may also be raised if the personal benefits of an election outcome are clearer or made more salient. Andersen, Fiva, and Natvik (2013) found in their analysis of a local election in Norway that when citizens in a particular locality were primed to think about how a particular election outcome could lead to hydropower production income and more tax revenue for the locality, they believed the election was more important (i.e. had higher stakes). As a result, local citizens actively sought more information about the election. Because those citizens gathered more information, they feel more inclined to participate in the election (p. 156-66). Matsusaka (1995) found a direct relationship between how informed someone was about politics and policy and how likely they were to vote (p. 97). The results of these studies imply that providing voters more information about the stakes of an election can make it more clear to voters what the benefit of a certain election outcome (B) will be. When voters have a concrete idea of the benefit they will receive, they feel more inclined to play a role in bringing about that benefit through casting a vote.

Certain types of policy stakes may matter more than others. Smith and De Mesquita (2011) found in their meta-analysis of the literature on voter turnout that voters are more motivated to vote by promises of spoils that they will receive in the form of “pork” or local public goods, than they are by more general promises of policy reform, where the personal benefit of an election outcome is not as clear. The authors write that sometimes people vote for candidates who they disagree with on policy because they believe that they will reap greater personal benefits from that candidate winning the election (p. 374). An example of this could be someone who votes for their incumbent congressperson of the opposite party because they believe that the incumbent’s seniority gives that incumbent a greater ability to bring political pork,
or government spending for local projects such as dams or bridges, to the congressional district. The authors also found in their review that stronger partisans are more heavily influenced by promises of political pork. Alternatively, weaker partisans are more inclined to look at how competitive the election is when deciding to vote and are “more likely to turn out when the election is expected to be close,” (p. 387). The research of these authors indicates that both the stakes of an election and how competitive the election is can affect turnout for different subgroups of voters.

How the media can influence turnout and candidate preference

Research has demonstrated that exposure to general media coverage can increase voter turnout and affect candidate preference. Using data taken from the 2008 American National Election Study, Hyun and Moon (2014) found that “news attention predicts issue importance, issue knowledge, and perception of closeness on issue positions for one presidential candidate over another, which relates to vote choice” (p. 687). When the media covered an issue more extensively, voters placed more importance on that issue. This was especially true for voters who identified as independents. These voters relied on the news media more than traditional partisans, and in turn, made their voting choices based on the way the media covered issues. This study shows that the media coverage of issues can have an impact on candidate favorability and vote preference.

While Hyun and Moon’s study focused primarily on the way the media framed campaign issues, other studies have looked at the effect of more general media exposure on voter turnout and preference. In Gerber, Karlan, and Bergan’s (2009) field experiment, the authors provided two treatment groups with ten-week subscriptions to The New York Times or The Washington Post during the 2005 Virginia gubernatorial election. Although being exposed to either the Times or the Post did not have a significant effect on voter turnout in 2005, they did find “some evidence of increased voter turnout in the 2006 election” for those subjected to the 10-week newspaper subscription treatment in comparison to the control group that did not receive a free newspaper subscription (p. 37). Based on their findings, the authors conclude that “even short exposure to a daily newspaper appears to influence voting behavior and may affect turnout behavior,” (p. 47). Knowing more about an election can have positive long-term effects on voter turnout (p. 48). Gerber and his co-authors also found that media exposure can affect candidate preference. They discovered that exposure to the Times and Post increased support for the Democratic gubernatorial candidate in Virginia (p. 37). However, the authors are careful to note that the topics the two papers were covering at the time could have shifted support away from the Republican candidate due to negative coverage about the Iraq War and President George W. Bush’s controversial Supreme Court nominee Harriet Miers (p. 47).

How perceptions about level of competition affect turnout

Media campaign coverage can influence an individual’s conclusions about how competitive an election is, which, in turn, affects turnout. Current academic literature is consistent in its findings that there is a direct relationship between how competitive voters perceive a political race to be and their incentive to turn out to vote. Even though it is highly improbable that one vote will be pivotal to the election outcome, putting more weight on (P) through emphasizing how competitive an election is can still motivate people to vote.

In their examinations of the effect of previous elections on voter turnout, Nicholson and Miller (1997) discovered that living in an area where a landslide election victory had occurred made an individual less likely to vote than if they lived in an area where a candidate won by a smaller margin (p. 204). According to Sudman (1986), looking at the margins of exit polls from previous elections in an experimental setting could affect an individual’s expressed intention to vote based on how close the margins between the two candidates were (p. 338). Blais (2000) writes that in his analysis of election studies that “closeness has been found to increase turnout in 27 out of 32 different studies that have tested the relationship, in many different settings and with diverse methodologies. There is good reason to believe that, as predicted by rational choice theory, more people vote when the election is close,” (p. 60).

The relationship between competition and turnout has been consistent throughout United States history. One meta-analysis of United States House of Representatives elections from 1840 to 1940 by Engstrom (2012) demonstrates that there is a direct relationship between the level of perceived political competition and voter turnout in particular House districts (p. 373). Engstrom discovered a negative correlation between margin of victory and turnout in the races he studied: for every one-point increase in a candidate’s margin of victory, there was a 0.27% decline in district-level turnout. “To put this in context,” Engstrom writes, “all else being equal, a 15-point decrease in competition—roughly equal to the average decline between 1870 and 1920—would have reduced turnout by 4.1%” (p. 382-83). One reason for this negative correlation could be that people in less competitive elections thought that their votes would matter less. Additionally, when people felt their vote could be decisive in determining House control, they were more inclined to turn out and vote (p. 337-38). People were incentivized to vote both when they thought
their vote could be decisive in that particular election and if they believed that the congressional election as a whole could determine control of the House.

Grober and Schram (2010) make similar claims and provide insight into what kinds of voters might be particularly affected by the perceptions that an election is more or less competitive. Grober and Schram discuss the role of competition in electoral turnout as “level of disagreement” in polls. Polls depicting a close race indicate high levels of disagreement because more people disagree on which candidate they prefer. Polls showing one candidate with a formidable advantage indicate a low level of disagreement because fewer people disagree about which candidate they prefer. Highly competitive elections draw in more voters. As a result, some of the voters in the highly competitive election are classified by the authors as “floating voters:” those who do not feel strongly attached to a particular political party and have more lukewarm attitudes about the importance of voting in comparison to strong partisans. Floating voters are less committed to voting as a matter of civic duty and therefore may not choose to vote in what they believe are less competitive or less consequential elections (p. 700-711).

One reason floating voters may not vote in less competitive elections is because they fall victim to a “false consensus effect,” whereby these voters “overestimate the number of other ‘floaters’ supporting the same candidate. This increases the incentive to free ride, causing a depressed turnout by this voter type,” (p. 715). These floating voters often support a candidate not because they strongly prefer that candidate, but because they believe that others also support that candidate. This tendency to support a candidate because one believes others are supporting that candidate is an example of the “bandwagon effect,” which Psychology Today defines as “a psychological phenomenon whereby people do something primarily because other people are doing it, regardless of their own beliefs, which they may ignore or override,” (Bloom & Bloom, 2017). However, if a candidate has a formidable advantage, this could also discourage floating voters from turning out to vote for that candidate because they believe the candidate will easily win without their vote.

The media can affect how people think about elections through the amount of “horse-race” coverage they engage in. “Horse-race” coverage includes media coverage of how candidates are faring compared to their competition. This might include news stories about poll numbers, stories about why one candidate has an advantage over the other in the election and reporting on probabilistic forecasts that give one candidate a greater chance of winning than the other candidate. Banducci and Hanretty (2014) examined the horse-race coverage of 160 newspaper and TV outlets in 27 European countries and discovered a positive association between close elections and the amount of horse-race coverage the media engaged in (p. 622).

Broh (1980) analyzed horse-race coverage in the 1976 election between Jimmy Carter and Gerald Ford. Broh found election reporters often emphasized uncertainty and competitiveness in an election, writing that “journalists will report the resulting differences in candidate support as attitude change, and thus make a campaign appear much more volatile than it really is,” (p. 523). Emphasizing high levels of competition drums up political intrigue, but can also prevent voters from evaluating candidates based on their policy positions (p. 524). However, Broh argues that there are also potential positive effects of horse-race coverage. Horse-race coverage can make elections more sports-like, and therefore more exciting to voters, which may increase electoral engagement (p. 527).

Mutz (2012) found in her analysis of presidential primaries that horse-race coverage in the form of the extent of media coverage suggesting a candidate is gaining or losing political support - helps determine the frequency of campaign contributions,” (p. 1015). In a political election, individuals can engage in “strategic contributions,” donating to a candidate who they like and who they think is viable. Perceptions of viability can be determined by the frequency and tone of media coverage about the candidate (p. 1024). Mutz’s data showed that the number of donations to a particular candidate increased “when the candidate’s popularity was perceived to be on the upswing,” (p. 1032). Mutz’s analysis led her to conclude that “news about changes in candidate status may draw potential donors’ attention to the campaign and act as an important motivating force fueling a campaign’s progress,” (p. 1039). In the same way that media coverage affects the number of donations a candidate receives, it may also influence the number of votes a candidate receives come election day.

Patterson (1993) found that there is a positive association between a candidate’s poll numbers and the degree of favorable media coverage the candidate receives, especially when the candidate is perceived to be gaining momentum (p. 117-19). However, media coverage of “frontrunner” candidates who have a substantial polling advantage and “likely loser” candidates who poll significantly behind other candidates becomes increasingly negative over time. Patterson found that both types of candidates experienced about a 10 percent decline in positive coverage as time went on (p. 122-23). Patterson also writes that a candidate’s level of support can depend on their perceived chances of victory, writing that “my study of the 1976 campaign found that half or more of [Jimmy] Carter’s support [in the primary] came from voters who knew he was leading the pack and had a vague notion he could be trusted but not much else,” (p. 133). Patterson’s work shows that horse-race coverage
may trigger the bandwagon effect in that people feel more inclined to support a candidate who they believe most other people are supporting as well.

**Probability and voting behavior**

Probability forecasts of an election can be considered a type of horse-race election coverage. Probability forecasters average polls and use this average to give candidates a probability percentage of winning an election. One of the most prominent probability forecasts used in American politics today is Nate Silver’s website, FiveThirtyEight, where he conducts forecasts for congressional, gubernatorial, and presidential races. Graefe (2014) writes that “in the week prior to the 2012 election, almost three out of four politics visits at The New York Times website included a stop at FiveThirtyEight. The day before the election, one in five nytimes.com visitors looked at Silver’s site,” (p. 224). However, Silver himself has noted that members of the public and journalists often confuse probabilistic forecasts and polls and do not give enough consideration to the role that uncertainty plays in any kind of probabilistic forecast, whether it be weather or politics (Silver, 2017). Because of the increasing prominence of probability forecasts, various studies analyze how probability forecasts affect voting behavior, including how voting behavior is affected when individuals misinterpret probabilistic forecasts.

Forecasts have found diverse audiences in the political realm. Rothschild (2009) argues that election forecasts have become crucial for three groups of people: researchers looking for a more systematic way of looking at campaigns, journalists engaging in horse-race coverage, and “practitioners” looking for which races are worthy of investing in (p. 897). Additionally, the public looks to forecasts for assessments and assurances about how their preferred candidate is doing, articulated by the Wired article titled “I Just Want Nate Silver to Tell Me That Everything’s Going to Be Fine” (Wohlsen, 2017). Rothschild details multiple cases where the probabilistic forecast advantage that FiveThirtyEight assigned a certain candidate was both higher or lower than that candidate's margin of victory on election day, even if the website correctly predicted the outcome of the race. Rothschild (2009) emphasizes that probabilistic forecasts are not the same things as vote share estimates, which is what polls display (p. 907). However, Rothschild notes that in the 2008 FiveThirtyEight “offered to the general public a more accurate forecast than raw poll numbers or raw prediction market prices,” (p. 913), which helps explain why various audiences rely on probabilistic forecasts to provide them with information about the state of the election.

Some people who use probability forecasts may put too much stake in their ability to provide definitive answers about an election. Westwood, Messing, and Lelkes (2018) conducted a controlled experiment on the effects of probabilistic forecasts and found that when looking at varying probabilistic forecasts, “participants are less likely to vote as the probability their team will win increases,” (p. 19). Saying that one’s preferred candidate had a high chance of winning lowered intention to vote when compared to those who were told that their preferred candidate was in a highly competitive race with their opponent. Forecasts can exacerbate one’s sense of whether their candidate can win or lose, and their voting behavior may be affected as a result.

The Westwood, Messing, and Lelkes study also highlighted several other important findings relating to viewership and the effects of forecasts. First, the authors found that forecasts were more likely to be shared on social media than other types of polling (p. 8). Second, they point out that probabilistic forecasts are more likely to appear on blogs and news websites that lean left (p. 8-9) and get seen by those who lean left ideologically (p. 11), meaning that most of the effects of these probability forecasts on voter turnout probably affect those inclined to vote for Democratic candidates. Third, the authors find that probabilistic forecasts can be fundamentally misunderstood. The experiment that they conducted found that approximately 10 percent of those that saw probabilistic forecasts confused them with a vote share estimate (p. 14), thinking that, for example, a forecast saying that a candidate had an 80 percent chance of winning meant that the forecast was predicting the candidate would receive 80 percent of votes cast. Partially because of these forecasts, left-leaning voters were highly confident their candidate would win by a healthy margin, which made them feel like their votes were less needed (p. 11).

Westwood and his co-authors write that “it is unclear how these results map out in the real world,” though they note that “in some states the 2016 election was extremely close— Clinton ultimately lost by 0.7% in Pennsylvania, 0.2% in Michigan, 0.8% in Wisconsin, and 1.2% in Florida,” (p. 19). This study could lead to a reasonable inference that Hillary Clinton’s disproportionate probability advantage on websites like FiveThirtyEight (FiveThirtyEight, 2016) made some voters who preferred her over Donald Trump less likely to vote in the 2016 election in the same way it did in the experiment. This may have had some effect on the election results. Riker and Ordeshook (1968) substantiate these claims in their research when they write that “for many people the subjective estimate of P [the probability that your vote will make a difference] is higher than is reasonable, given the objective circumstances,” (p. 38). Forecasting models could potentially distort one’s estimate of (P) as much as or more than vote share models could, which could then affect an individual’s decision to vote.
METHODS: THE MAYORAL EXPERIMENT

Building on previous research about voter turnout, I used an experiment to test the effects of media messaging about election probability forecasts, a form of horse-race journalism, and the “stakes” of a given election outcome on intention to vote and candidate preference. I used a 2 (close or lopsided election as conveyed through a probability forecast) x 2 (high or low stakes election) experimental design along with a control condition. The design of my study is similar to that of Smith and De Mesquita (2011), who looked at the effect of the distribution of prizes or rewards both as it related to what the prize of an election outcome was and whether an individual’s vote choice could impact the distribution of that prize. Although previous literature, such as Smith and De Mesquita (2011), examined the effects of polls on voting, I chose to limit my study to examining the effect of probability forecasts on vote intention, as previous data has shown that probabilistic forecasts have become an increasingly more accurate and trusted way of examining the horse-race of an election than polls are (Rothschild, 2009, p. 913).

I used Amazon’s Mechanical Turk, a crowdsourcing platform that allows individuals to perform tasks such as surveys virtually, to recruit approximately 2,900 subjects (N = 2,842) to participate in my study. These individuals were randomly assigned to one of five mock newspaper articles (a control article or one of the four experimental treatments) about a fictitious special election for mayor in the town of Kenosha, Wisconsin in December of 2019 and then asked various questions about the article. These questions included how likely subjects would be to vote in the election, how warmly they felt about each candidate, and which candidate they would vote for. The premise of these articles was that the current mayor of Kenosha was stepping down from his post due to health reasons, and two city councilmembers named James Jones and Tom Smith were running to replace him. The control article simply announced that the mayoral election would be taking place and the two candidates who would be running. The experimental treatments varied the probability forecast for the leading candidate James Jones (he has either a 51 percent chance of winning or an 85 percent chance of winning) and the stakes of the election (the candidates agree on nearly all issues or

| TREATMENT 1 - HIGH STAKES, CLOSE RACE | High Stakes: James Jones wants to spend the sales tax revenue on infrastructure repairs, while Tom Smith wants to forgo infrastructure repairs and put the sales tax revenue into a rainy day fund. Close Race: Jones has a 51 percent chance of winning, Smith has a 49 percent chance of winning. |
| TREATMENT 2 - HIGH STAKES, LOPSIDED RACE | High Stakes: Same as Treatment 1. Lopsided Race: Jones has an 85 percent chance of winning, Smith has a 15 percent chance of winning. |
| TREATMENT 3 - LOW STAKES, CLOSE RACE | Low Stakes: Jones and Smith largely agree on all major issues, including infrastructure repairs. Close Race: Same as Treatment 1 (51-49 percent probabilistic forecast) |
| TREATMENT 4 - LOW STAKES, LOPSIDED RACE | Low Stakes: Same as Treatment 3 (candidates largely agree on all policy issues). Lopsided Race: Same as Treatment 2 (85-15 percent probabilistic forecast) |
| CONTROL | Announcement of the candidacies of Jones and Smith. Generic statements from both candidates. No information about stakes or probability forecasts is given. |

TABLE 1. Description of treatments
### Demographic Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DEMOGRAPHIC</th>
<th>MY STUDY</th>
<th>CENSUS BUREAU NATIONAL DATA</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ethnicity</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>White:</td>
<td>71.2%</td>
<td>White alone: 76.5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Black or African-American:</td>
<td>13.1%</td>
<td>Black or African-American alone: 13.4%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Native American:</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
<td>American Indian and Alaska Native alone: 1.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian:</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
<td>Asian alone: 5.9%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Latino:</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
<td>Hispanic or Latino: 18.3%</td>
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<td>Hawaiian or Pacific Islander:</td>
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<td>Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander alone: 0.2%</td>
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<td>Two or more:</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
<td>Two or more: 2.7%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other/Unknown:</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
<td>Other/Unknown: N/A</td>
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<td>White alone, not Hispanic or Latino:</td>
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<td><strong>Income</strong></td>
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<td>Less than $25,000:</td>
<td>420 (14.9%)</td>
<td>Median Income: $57,652</td>
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<tr>
<td>$25,000-$49,000:</td>
<td>842 (29.8%)</td>
<td>(My survey median income was $50,000-$99,000)</td>
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<tr>
<td>$50,000-$99,000:</td>
<td>1114 (39.4%)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>$100,000-$200,000:</td>
<td>350 (12.4%)</td>
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<td>726 (25.5%)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age 30-49:</td>
<td>1607 (56.5%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age 50-64:</td>
<td>401 (14.1%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age 65+:</td>
<td>89 (3.1%)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Political Party Affiliation</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>From ANES study 1952-2016:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democrat:</td>
<td>1326 (47%)</td>
<td>- Democratic: 46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republican:</td>
<td>678 (24%)</td>
<td>- Republican: 39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent:</td>
<td>749 (26.5%)</td>
<td>- Independent: 15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other:</td>
<td>69 (24.4%)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Education Level</strong></td>
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<td>High School Graduate or Higher: 87.3%</td>
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<tr>
<td>No high school:</td>
<td>6 (0.2%)</td>
<td>Bachelor's Degree or Higher (25+): 30.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some high school:</td>
<td>33 (1.2%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school graduate:</td>
<td>295 (10.5%)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Some college:</td>
<td>861 (30.6%)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor's degree:</td>
<td>1219 (43.2%)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-graduate education:</td>
<td>404 (14.3%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>Females: 50.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male:</td>
<td>1481 (52.5%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female:</td>
<td>1331 (47.2%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other:</td>
<td>10 (0.3%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TABLE 2. Demographic data**

The candidates disagree over whether to spend sales tax revenue on infrastructure repairs. In my survey, I used probability forecasts to distinguish how competitive the race between the two candidates was.

To vary the stakes of the election, I provided certain subjects with a low stakes treatment, where the two candidates agreed on policy matters and therefore the policy consequences of a given candidate winning were not significant, or a high stakes treatment, where the two candidates sharply disagreed on a policy issue, making the consequences of a given candidate winning more significant. Specifically, I presented the two candidates as disagreeing over how to spend the tax revenue from an infrastructure bond, Measure P, passed by Kenosha voters in 2017, that raised sales taxes to fund the infrastructure repairs in Kenosha. The money from the bond would not be eligible to be spent until 2020 − after the new mayor had already been elected. Those in a high stakes condition were told that James Jones wanted to spend the money on the infrastructure repairs, whereas Tom Smith wanted to put the money into a rainy day fund rather than repairing the city’s infrastructure. The disagreement between the candidates on infrastructure spending “raised the stakes” of the Kenosha mayoral election, because it made it so that there would be a significant consequence to voters if Smith won − no repaired infrastructure. As noted above, I vary the probability forecast to suggest a close race or a lopsided race, though Jones is always ahead. Table 1 summarizes the experimental treatments. The full text of the articles can be found in Appendix A.

I articulated two research questions before distributing my survey:

**Research Question 1:** What is the effect of differing probabilistic forecast messaging on intention to vote?
Research Question 2: What is the effect of reminding people about the stakes of an election on intention to vote?

I formulated the following hypotheses before distributing my survey:

**Hypothesis 1 (probability hypothesis):** Subjects exposed to probability forecasts that show an election between the two candidates to be close (Treatments 1 and 3) will be significantly more likely to express intention to vote than subjects exposed to probability forecasts that show the race as lopsided (Treatments 2 and 4) or an article including no information about how close a race is (Control).

**Hypothesis 2 (stakes hypothesis):** Subjects exposed to the article that frames the Kenosha election as having high stakes (Treatments 1 and 2) will be significantly more likely to express intention to vote than subjects exposed to an article that frames the election as having low stakes (Treatments 3 and 4) or an article including no information about stakes (Control).

Subjects were asked a series of pre- and post-treatment questions along with their assigned article. All survey questions for this study can be found in Appendix A. Before reading the article, subjects answered relevant demographic questions, the results of which can be seen in Table 2. Table 2 compares my demographic data with demographic data from the Census Bureau. The distribution of income levels, ethnicity, income level, and gender distribution in my study was similar to that of the Census Bureau. The biggest differences between my demographic data and the national demographic data is that Whites, Latinos, and Republicans were underrepresented in my survey in comparison with the Census data. Additionally, people with a bachelor's degree or higher were slightly overrepresented in my survey compared to that of the American National Election Studies.

After answering the demographic questions, subjects read their assigned treatment article and were then asked how likely they would be to vote in the election (1 = “extremely unlikely”, 2 = “somewhat unlikely”, 3 = “neither likely nor unlikely”, 4 = “somewhat likely”, 5 = “extremely likely”). They were then asked to use a feeling thermometer to rank how warmly they felt about each candidate on a scale of 1-100, with “1” meaning you felt very cold and negatively towards the candidate, “100” meaning you felt very warm and positively towards the candidate, and “50” meaning you felt neither warmly nor coldly. Finally, subjects were also asked to pick the candidate they would vote for – subjects were given the option to pick James Jones, Tom Smith, or neither. These three questions were the key dependent variables in my survey, and they were asked in the order described. After answering my key dependent variables, subjects were asked about their trust in media and their evaluation of the articles. The study was run on November 6, 2019, using Amazon’s Mechanical Turk platform. Subjects were paid $1.25 each to take the survey. I conducted a randomization check and verified that randomization had been successful across conditions. This study was approved by The George Washington Internal Review Board before it was distributed to participants.

To understand the effect of probability forecast messages portraying a close or very lopsided race and the effects of messages suggesting a higher or lower stakes election, I looked at the means by condition on my three key dependent variables. All significance tests were two-tail tests. I also ran Ordinary Least Squares Regression (OLS) models for all of my key dependent variables, which can be found in Appendix C.

---

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONDITION</th>
<th>LIKELIHOOD OF VOTING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Treatment 1 (High Stakes, Close Race)</td>
<td>4.29*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treatment 2 (High Stakes, Lopsided Race)</td>
<td>4.27*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treatment 3 (Low Stakes, Close Race)</td>
<td>4.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treatment 4 (Low Stakes, Lopsided Race)</td>
<td>4.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>4.02</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TABLE 3.** Likelihood of voting across conditions

Mean likelihood of voting across conditions – 1-5 Scale

* Significant compared to Treatments 3, 4, and the Control at p<.05

---

3 The analysis discussed in the text was also estimated using a Bonferroni adjustment for multiple comparisons. In almost all cases the results are not changed when using this more stringent test. The only difference I found was in the favorability of James Jones and Tom Smith. For both the favorability of Jones and Smith, the significant difference between the low stakes, lopsided race treatment (treatment 4) and the control treatment noted below was no longer significant when I applied the Bonfer-
RESULTS: THE MAYORAL EXPERIMENT

I found that learning about a high stakes election significantly increased intention to vote relative to the control condition and relative to the low stakes treatments (p < 0.05 in all cases, see Table 3). On the other hand, the two articles that framed the election as having low stakes did not significantly differ from the Control (low stakes, close race treatment p = 0.48; low stakes, lopsided race condition p = 0.92). These results confirmed my stakes hypothesis (hypothesis 2). My probability hypothesis (hypothesis 1) was not confirmed. Subjects in the high stakes, close race condition were slightly more likely to vote than subjects in high stakes, lopsided race conditions and subjects in low stakes, close race condition were slightly more likely to vote than subjects in the low stakes, lopsided race condition, but these differences in likelihood of voting were not significant. Therefore, based on these results, I can conclude that stakes mattered more than probability in affecting intention to vote in my experiment.

My second dependent variable examined how exposure to different treatments would affect candidate favorability. I found that subjects viewed Tom Smith significantly more favorably when he was portrayed in a more neutral light in the low stakes treatments than in the high stakes treatments, where subjects learned that Smith would halt the city’s planned infrastructure repairs. Subjects ranked James Jones significantly more favorably in the high stakes conditions than in the low stakes conditions and the control. This was likely because they felt more favorable towards Jones’s view on infrastructure than Smith’s in the high stakes conditions, whereas in the low stakes and control conditions, subjects felt similarly about both candidates. In all experimental treatments, subjects ranked Jones more favorably on average than Smith.

When Smith had an unpopular stance on the city’s infrastructure spending in the high stakes conditions, he was viewed significantly more favorably by subjects when he was in a dead heat with Jones in the high stakes, close race conditions than when he trailed Jones in the probabilistic forecast in high stakes, lopsided race

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONDITION</th>
<th>JAMES JONES FAVORABILITY</th>
<th>TOM SMITH FAVORABILITY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 (High Stakes, Close Race)</td>
<td>71.7*</td>
<td>45.5**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 (High Stakes, Lopsided Race)</td>
<td>71.98***</td>
<td>36.8*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 (Low Stakes, Close Race)</td>
<td>62.5</td>
<td>60.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 (Low Stakes, Lopsided Race)</td>
<td>63.8****</td>
<td>58.9****</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 (Control)</td>
<td>60.7</td>
<td>62.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TABLE 4.** Candidate favorability by position

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONDITION</th>
<th>MEAN ACROSS CONDITIONS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Treatment 1 (High Stakes, Close Race)</td>
<td>.780*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treatment 2 (High Stakes, Lopsided Race)</td>
<td>.829*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treatment 3 (Low Stakes, Close Race)</td>
<td>.535**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treatment 4 (Low Stakes, Lopsided Race)</td>
<td>.660</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>.374</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TABLE 5.** Likelihood of voting across conditions

Mean likelihood of voting across conditions – 1-5 Scale

* Significant compared to Treatments 3, 4, and the Control at p<.05
** Significant compared to Treatments 1, 2, 4, and Control at p<.05
conditions. However, when the stakes were low, Smith and Jones did not have significantly different favorability ratings between treatments. Electoral competition only had a significant influence on favorability in my study when the stakes of the election were high.

In addition to candidate favorability, I also examined candidate preference across conditions to see whether subjects would be more likely to express support for a certain candidate based on the treatment they were exposed to. In analyzing candidate preference, I coded Tom Smith as “0,” and James Jones as “1.” The results in Table 5 represents the average of how likely subjects were to vote for James Jones in comparison to Tom Smith. If the mean of a condition exceeds 0.5, subjects exposed to that condition were more likely to support James Jones than Tom Smith on average. In every experimental treatment, subjects were more likely to express an intention to vote for James Jones than Tom Smith. Subjects exposed to the high stakes, lopsided race treatment were the most likely to vote for Jones over Smith on average. The high stakes treatments were significantly different from the low stakes and control treatments, although the high stakes treatments were not significantly different from each other. This indicates that raising the stakes of the election influenced candidate choice in favor of James Jones both in comparison to the Control and the low stakes treatments.

The level of competition in the race did not have an effect on candidate choice when the stakes were high. However, when the stakes of the election were low and the candidates were presented as having the same views, subjects were significantly more likely to support James Jones when he had an 85 percent chance of winning the election than when he only had a 51 percent chance of winning the election.

**METHODS: THE 2018 U.S. SENATE RACE EXPERIMENT**

During the fall 2018 election, I tested the effects of stakes on subjects exposed to mock newspaper articles about the United States Senate race in Arizona between Martha McSally and Kyrsten Sinema. This survey was distributed to 393 subjects via Mechanical Turk on November 5, 2018, one day before the election on November 6. Unlike my mayoral experiment, which tested the effects of stakes in a fictitious local race, this stakes experiment was intended to be more realistic because it was administered in the context of an actual upcoming election. In this study, I conducted a randomization check and found that with the exception of gender, the treatments are balanced. In my analysis, I included a control for gender. This study was approved by The George Washington Internal Review Board before it was distributed to participants.

In my Arizona experiment, subjects were exposed to one of three mock newspaper articles, one control and two experimental. The articles had varying messages about the consequences of a particular outcome in the Arizona U.S. Senate election: a high stakes treatment (Treatment 1), a low stakes treatment (Treatment 2), and a control article. Subjects were then asked how likely they would be to vote in the election between McSally and Sinema if they were a voter in Arizona. I used the same likelihood scale that I did for the Kenosha experiment (1 = "extremely unlikely," 2 = "somewhat unlikely," 3 = "neither likely nor unlikely," 4 = "somewhat likely," 5 = "extremely likely").

The “stakes” issue I used in my Arizona experiment was a potential Supreme Court nomination after the 2018 election and before the 2020 election. In the high stakes treatment, the headline of the article stated that the outcome of the U.S. Senate race “could decide the swing Supreme Court Justice seat.” Subjects were told that Arizona could decide which party controlled the U.S. Senate. If Democrats controlled the Senate and had the power to confirm President Trump’s nominee, President Trump would have to nominate a much more moderate justice who would be more likely to uphold precedents that Democrats value on issues such as abortion. In the low stakes treatment, the headline of the article stated that the Arizona U.S. Senate race was “unlikely to have impact on next Supreme Court Justice.” In this article, subjects were told that it was unlikely that President Trump would have the opportunity to appoint another justice before his first term ends. In the control article, subjects were told that McSally and Sinema were facing off, but did not include a discussion of a potential Supreme Court pick. My entire survey for the Arizona experiment can be found in Appendix B. In this experiment, I proposed the following hypotheses:

**Hypothesis 1:** Raising the stakes of the Arizona election in the high stakes treatment will have a significant

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONDITION</th>
<th>MEAN ACROSS CONDITIONS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Treatment 1 (High Stakes)</td>
<td>4.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treatment 2 (Low Stakes)</td>
<td>4.03*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>4.39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TABLE 6.** Mean Likelihood of Voting Across Conditions
* Statistically significant in comparison to control at p<.05
positive effect on intention to vote in comparison to control.

**Hypothesis 2:** Lowering the stakes of the Arizona election in the low stakes treatment will have a significant negative effect on intention to vote in comparison to control.

**RESULTS: THE 2018 U.S. SENATE RACE EXPERIMENT**

I found in my Arizona experiment that exposing subjects to the low stakes treatment had a marginally significant negative effect (p = 0.051) on intention to vote in comparison to the Control treatment, corroborating my second hypothesis. When subjects were told that the stakes of the race were not as high (i.e. there was unlikely to be another Supreme Court nominee before the end of Trump’s first term), subjects felt less inclined to participate in the election. However, raising the stakes of the Arizona election did not increase intention to vote in comparison to Control, meaning that my first hypothesis was not confirmed. In fact, subjects in the high stakes condition were slightly less likely to vote than subjects exposed to the control article, although this difference was not significant. While I did not find exactly what I was expecting for both of my hypotheses, the results of this experiment demonstrate that stakes affect intention to vote in articles about a real U.S. Senate race as well as a fictitious local race. The OLSR for the Arizona survey can be found in Appendix C.

**LIMITATIONS**

There are several limitations to my study that I want to underscore. First, in both my mayoral and U.S. Senate experiments, I tested intention to vote, not whether someone casts a vote in an election. Taking a five-minute survey is much less of a time commitment than filling out a ballot and taking the other necessary steps that come with casting one’s vote. Therefore, it is likely that some people who indicated in my surveys that they would be somewhat or extremely likely to vote would not actually take the time to vote in these elections if they lived in these communities. As a result of this limitation, I am unable to draw any conclusions about whether my news articles compelled people to vote, only whether it made them feel more inclined to cast their vote.

I am also limited in my ability to make generalizable conclusions from my mayoral experiment. Because I exposed subjects to articles about a fictitious, local, and non-partisan race, I cannot conclude that my results would also apply to non-local or partisan races.

**DISCUSSION**

Previous studies have looked at what metrics factor into an individual’s decision about whether or not to vote. Riker and Ordeshook (1968) asserted that an individual would decide to vote if they weighted their civic duty (D), the probability that their vote would make a difference in the election (P), and the benefit of casting a vote (B) more heavily than the costs that come with voting (p. 25). Other studies looked at the effect of varying (P), (B), and (D) when applying social pressure or priming people to think about policy stakes, polls, and probabilistic forecasts. I sought to expand on previous research by looking at the effects of probabilistic forecasts and stakes to see how these factors would affect intention to vote and candidate preference when presented together with varying messages. My work specifically focuses on the ways in which media coverage of elections have the potential to alter individual perceptions of stakes (B) and probability (P) when citizens are considering whether to vote.

In the high stakes treatments, I raised the stakes and thereby made the election more relevant to subjects by introducing the potential for the implementation of “political pork” in the form of the building of new infrastructure. I decided to use political pork stakes because of the findings of Smith and De Mesquita (2011) that political pork stakes had a larger positive impact on intention to vote in comparison to other kinds of policy stakes where the direct benefit to the individual is not as obvious (p. 374). The research design of Smith and De Mesquita was similar to mine, in that they tested the effects of stakes and level of electoral competition together. I found the research of Andersen, Fiva, and Natvik (2013) on the effect of stakes on turnout to be useful when deciding what issue I wanted to vary the stakes about. These researchers examined the effect of making subjects think about the potential for hydropower tax revenue if a particular outcome occurred (p. 156-166). I had subjects consider how their tax revenue would be spent depending on which mayoral candidate was elected.

I found that the high stakes articles had a positive causal effect on intention to vote in comparison to the control and low stakes treatments in my mayoral experiment. The significant difference between my high stakes and control treatments indicates that the nature of media coverage of “political pork” can influence intention to vote. In my high stakes treatments, I primed subjects to think about their potential to benefit from an election outcome by discussing “political pork” in the form of infrastructure repairs. In the high stakes treatments, it is likely that Tom Smith’s proposal to divert the Measure P sales tax revenue away from infrastructure repairs and into a rainy day fund angered subjects because they believed that Smith’s proposal was breaking the city’s promise to voters. As a result, subjects in the high stakes treatments had a stronger incentive to vote in the election: making sure that Smith would not have the power to stop the city’s infrastructure repairs.
My results suggest that journalists can help encourage democratic participation among their readership by emphasizing contrasting policy positions between candidates and discussing the implications of a particular election outcome. This kind of coverage will help individuals think about how they might benefit from or be harmed by a certain election outcome and may increase their motivation to cast a ballot. Through discussing policy differences and electoral consequences, journalists may be able to prime emotions such as anger and make casting one’s vote a more emotionally compelling course of action. Downs (1957) asserted that voting is irrational because the costs of voting exceed the benefits. However, my results show that raising the stakes of an election plays a role in convincing an individual that the benefits of voting exceed the costs. When the stakes of an election are higher, individuals are more likely to see casting a vote as a rational course of action.

In my Arizona experiment covering the U.S. Senate race between Kyrsten Sinema and Martha McSally, the low stakes treatment was significantly less likely to express intention to vote in the Arizona election than voters exposed to the control. When the low stakes article implied that an election was likely not going to be as consequential as it could have been, it deterred subjects from wanting to vote in the election. My Arizona experiment was also conducted in the context of an actual election, one day before the 2018 midterm election. In this context, individuals were more likely to be engaged in the process, and therefore my experiment was more realistic.

My results show that the high stakes treatments raised vote intention by 0.27 (high stakes, close race treatment) and 0.25 (high stakes, lopsided race treatment) on a scale of five, an approximately five percent increase in intention to vote compared to subjects exposed to control. Gerber, Green, and Larimer (2008) saw an approximately eight percent increase in voter turnout in comparison to control for their social pressure treatment. Percentage-wise, raising the stakes of the election had a smaller effect on increasing vote intention than applying social pressure had on increasing voter turnout levels. While stakes may raise the perceived benefit of voting (B), my results indicate that stakes do not increase (B) as much as applying social pressure increases (B).

While increasing the stakes of an election had significant effects on vote intention, varying the probabilistic forecasts of an election did not. The low stakes, close race condition was not significantly different from low stakes, lopsided race condition. The high stakes, close race condition was not significantly different than the high stakes, lopsided race condition in terms of vote intention. Before I had conducted the study, I hypothesized that subjects would be significantly more likely to vote when the race was close, with the candidates having a 51-49 percent respective probability of winning, than when the candidates had a respective 85-15 percent probability of winning.

Before conducting my experiment, I thought that making the election more competitive would raise the value of (P) in Riker and Ordeshook’s (1968) formula because subjects would feel that there was a greater probability that their vote would be pivotal in a close election than in an election where one candidate had a wide probabilistic lead over the other. I based my hypothesis largely on the research of Westwood, Messing, and Leikes (2018), who found that simulated races with a small probability margin between two candidates made subjects more motivated to vote in comparison to races that were probabilistically lopsided in favor of one candidate (p. 19).

In my experiments, I modeled the language depicting the race as close or as lopsided after real-life news articles from recent U.S. elections. The language used in both of the lopsided race conditions, which described James Jones as continuing to “press his advantage over Smith” when he was far ahead probabilistically, was taken from a New York Times story about Hillary Clinton’s perceived lead over Donald Trump (Burns & Chozick 2016). One of my motivations for conducting this experiment was my worry that after the 2016 election, Hillary Clinton’s heavy lead over Donald Trump in Nate Silver’s FiveThirtyEight forecast may have had a demobilizing effect on some of her supporters.

My results, which demonstrate that probabilistic forecasts did not have a significant effect on intention to vote, suggests that my fear about the demobilizing effects of probabilistic forecasts may have been misplaced. My results indicate that the nature of media coverage about probabilistic forecasts has minimal effects on raising or lowering (P) in Riker and Ordeshook’s formula, contrary to what I assumed before conducting my experiment. Probabilistic forecasts such as Silver’s will likely be used in U.S. national elections for years to come, and my data provides some evidence that exposure to these forecasts is unlikely to exacerbate the problem of low voter turnout in the U.S.

My results about probabilistic forecasts and stakes on intention to vote may be instructive to campaign strategists. My results indicate campaigns may be more successful in motivating voters to turn out if they focus their Get Out the Vote and mobilization efforts on the policy consequences of the election rather than whether an election between two candidates is more or less competitive.

While probabilistic forecasts did not have a significant impact on likelihood of voting, probabilistic forecasts had an impact on candidate favorability when the stakes of the election were high. In both of the high stakes treatments, voters were told that Smith would break the city’s promise to voters and forego using the collected sales tax revenue to repair the city’s infrastructure. However, Smith’s favorability increased significantly...
in the high stakes, close race condition, when he was framed as having a 49 percent chance of winning in comparison to Jones's 51 percent, in contrast to the high stakes, lopsided race condition, when Smith was framed as only having a 15 percent chance of winning. James Jones saw a significant decline in favorability in the low stakes and control conditions, where the two candidates were portrayed as having largely the same views, in contrast to the high stakes conditions, where subjects were told that Jones would administer the infrastructure repairs as promised. This is because subjects in the low stakes and control conditions felt more equally favorable towards both candidates and gave the candidates similar favorability numbers, causing Smith's favorability to go up and Jones's favorability to go down. My results indicate that being exposed to news about an election can impact candidate favorability, especially if that coverage portrays a candidate in a negative light.

I saw similar results for candidate preference/vote choice that I saw for candidate favorability. Overall, subjects were significantly more likely to vote for James Jones in the high stakes conditions than in the low stakes and control conditions, indicating that subjects wanted to vote for the candidate who would provide them with their promised "political pork." However, there was a distinction between my results for candidate favorability and candidate preference. For candidate favorability, there was not a significant difference between favorability for either James Jones or Tom Smith when the stakes were low. For candidate choice, there was a significant difference in who subjects chose when the stakes of the election were low. In the two low stakes treatments, subjects were significantly more likely to select Smith as their candidate when Smith was more viable (49 percent chance of winning) than when Smith was less viable (15 percent). When the stakes were low, subjects were significantly more likely to vote for James Jones than Tom Smith when James Jones had a formidable lead over Tom Smith than when the treatment framed the candidates as neck-in-neck.

Even though viability mattered in different settings for candidate favorability and candidate choice, my results still indicate that viability had some effect on subjects' views of the candidates. Smith's increase in favorability and vote share when he was more viable probabilistically may have to do with the bandwagon effect illustrated in the work of Grober and Schram (2010, p. 700-711) and Patterson (1993, p. 133), where people feel inclined to support someone or something because others are also supporting that person or thing.

Subjects felt more favorably towards Smith and his controversial views when they thought he had a better chance of winning. Participants liked a viable candidate with controversial views better than a controversial candidate who looked like a loser, which reflects current literature on the effect of social pressure on voting. Subjects exposed to the high stakes, close race treatment also may have hypothesized that since Smith had practically the same support as Jones according to the probabilistic forecast, he may have had a justifiable reason for his controversial view on infrastructure spending. My results indicate that "horse-race" media coverage of elections may influence how favorably individuals feel about a particular candidate and how inclined they are to support a certain candidate in an election.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals that the way journalists write about an election and the information they provide voters concerning an election can impact an individual's likelihood of voting and how they feel about the respective candidates running for political office. Through emphasizing policy disagreements and electoral consequences, journalists may be able to motivate people to vote and help increase democratic participation rates in the United States.

Probabilistic forecasts had insignificant effects on vote intention in my experiment, providing some counterevidence to the notion that viewing these forecasts can dissuade an individual from voting. However, probabilistic forecasts did have some effects on candidate favorability. Political messages have power, and my results provide guidance for journalists who want to use their messaging power to raise voter turnout levels and improve the health of democracy in the United States.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This study was submitted as my special honors thesis in the School of Media and Public Affairs (SMPA), done under the supervision of Professor Kim Gross. I want to thank Professor Gross for the many hours she spent helping me design my study, secure funding for my research, analyze my data, and write up my thesis project. Additionally, thank you to SMPA Professors Ethan Porter and Dave Karpf for serving on my thesis defense committee and providing me with helpful feedback throughout my thesis project. I want to thank my classmate in my special honors research seminar, Lily Werlinich, for reading drafts of my thesis and providing me with helpful feedback. I want to thank The George Washington University and the Center for Undergraduate Fellowships and Research for funding for my thesis research through the Luther Rice Enhancement Award, without which this project would not have been possible. I would like to thank God for continually protecting and providing for me throughout my undergraduate career. Finally, I want to thank my mom, my dad, and my family for supporting me in this and all my other collegiate ventures.
APPENDIX A: MAYORAL EXPERIMENT FULL SURVEY

Welcome Message

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. Please read the questions carefully. First we would like to ask some questions about you.

Demographic Questions

In which of the following elections did you vote? (Please check all that apply):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes I voted</th>
<th>No I did not vote</th>
<th>Not sure</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2018 midterm congressional elections</td>
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<td>2016 presidential general election in November</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016 presidential primary election</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your state's last gubernatorial race</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your most recent local elections</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What is your age?
- 18-29
- 40-49
- 50-64
- 65+

In the year of 2018, what was your total family income?
- Less than $25,000
- $25,000-$49,000
- $50,000-$99,000
- $100,000-$200,000
- More than $200,000
- Unsure
- Prefer not to answer

What is your ethnicity?
- White
- Black or African-American
- Native American
- Asian
- Latino
- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- Two or more races
- Other/Unknown

Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a _____?
- Democrat
  - Strong Democrat
  - Weak Democrat
- Independent
  - Lean toward the Democratic Party
  - Lean toward the Republican Party
  - Neither
- Republican
  - Strong Republican
  - Weak Republican
- Other
Who did you vote for in the 2016 presidential election?
• Hillary Clinton
• Donald Trump
• Gary Johnson
• Jill Stein
• Other
• I did not vote in the 2016 election
• I was not able to vote in the 2016 election

What is the highest level of education you have completed?
• No high school
• Some high school
• High school graduate
• Some college
• Bachelor’s degree
• Post-graduate education

Next, we would like you to read an article about an upcoming local mayoral race in Kenosha, Wisconsin.

**Treatment Message**

Treatments

**Treatment 1: High Stakes, Close Race**

**Mayoral Race Between Smith and Jones Too Close To Call. Candidates At Odds Over Proposed Infrastructure Spending.**

By Jamie Weiss

Two city council members, Tom Smith and James Jones, will face off in the December race to replace Bob Kerrigan as Kenosha mayor. Kerrigan announced he stepping down as mayor due to health concerns.

One of the issues that has come to define the race is the spending of the city’s tax revenue. In 2017, voters overwhelmingly approved Measure P, a ballot initiative that raised sales taxes to fund repairs for the city’s crumbling infrastructure. The sales taxes the city has collected are not authorized to be spent until 2020, after the mayoral election has already taken place.

The two mayoral candidates are at odds about whether to spend the allocated tax revenue on the city infrastructure repairs. Smith has said that as mayor he would forego the infrastructure project and divert the revenues into a rainy day fund. Jones has blasted Smith’s proposal as breaking the city’s promise to voters. He said that as mayor he would spend the tax revenue on the infrastructure repairs as promised.

The candidates have similar positions on other major issues, including bringing more high-tech job opportunities to Kenosha, accelerating the city’s transition to renewable energy, and addressing the city’s homelessness crisis.

The race between the two candidates is too close to call. The University of Wisconsin projects that Jones has a 51 percent chance of winning the election compared to Smith, who has a 49 percent chance of victory, based on an average of polls conducted on the race. Both candidates continue to vigorously campaign across the city, hoping to edge out the other in the race.

“This is going to be a very interesting race to watch,” political analyst Dan Anderson said. “Both Smith and Jones are excellent candidates, and I am looking forward to hearing them both make their case for why they want to be our next Mayor.”
Two city councilmembers, Tom Smith and James Jones, will face off in the December race to replace Bob Kerrigan as Kenosha mayor. Kerrigan announced he stepping down as mayor due to health concerns.

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The candidates have similar positions on other major issues, including bringing more high-tech job opportunities to Kenosha, accelerating the city's transition to renewable energy, and addressing the city's homelessness crisis.

Jones is in a formidable position to win the mayoral race. The University of Wisconsin projects that Jones has an 85 percent chance of winning the election compared to Smith, who only has a 15 percent chance of victory, based on an average of polls conducted on the race. Jones continues to press his advantage over Smith as he makes campaign stops throughout Kenosha to talk about the policies he would implement as mayor.

“This is going to be a very interesting race to watch,” political analyst Dan Anderson said. “Both Smith and Jones are excellent candidates, and I am looking forward to hearing them both make their case for why they want to be our next Mayor.”
Two city councilmembers, Tom Smith and James Jones, will face off in the December race to replace Bob Kerrigan as Kenosha mayor. Kerrigan announced he stepping down as mayor due to health concerns.

The two candidates share similarities in their policy positions. Both candidates support using the tax revenue from Measure P as intended by the voters. Measure P was a sales tax increase overwhelmingly approved by voters in the city's 2017 election to repair the city's infrastructure. The two candidates also have similar positions on other major issues, including bringing more high-tech job opportunities to Kenosha, accelerating the city's transition to renewable energy, and addressing the city's homelessness crisis.

Jones is in a formidable position to win the mayoral race. The University of Wisconsin projects that Jones has a 85 percent chance of winning the election compared to Smith, who only has a 15 percent chance of victory, based on an average of polls conducted on the race. Jones continues to press his advantage over Smith as he makes campaign stops throughout Kenosha to talk about the policies he would implement as mayor.

“This is going to be a very interesting race to watch,” political analyst Dan Anderson said. “Both Smith and Jones are excellent candidates, and I am looking forward to hearing them both make their case for why they want to be our next Mayor.”

Two city councilmembers, Tom Smith and James Jones, will face off in the December race to replace Bob Kerrigan as Kenosha mayor. Kerrigan announced he stepping down as mayor due to health concerns.

Smith says his lifelong commitment to Kenosha make him the clear choice for mayor. “I grew up in Kenosha, and I have tirelessly worked to improve the city on the city council,” said Smith. “I would be honored to continue serving Kenosha residents as Mayor.”

Jones says that his service on the city council and commitment to constituents make him the best choice for mayor. “I want to bring the same energy, enthusiasm, and skill that I have brought to the City Council to the Mayor’s Office.”

“This is going to be a very interesting race to watch,” political analyst Dan Anderson said. “Both Smith and Jones are excellent candidates, and I am looking forward to hearing them both make their case for why they want to be our next Mayor.”

Post-Treatment Message

Now we would like to ask you some questions about the article you read.

Post-Treatment Questions

What was the name of the analyst who was quoted in the article you just read?

- Brad Thompson
- Bob West
- Dan Anderson
- Do not remember

If you were a voter in Kenosha, how likely is it that you would vote in this election?

- Extremely likely
- Somewhat likely
- Neither likely nor unlikely
- Somewhat unlikely
- Extremely unlikely
How do you feel about each candidate running for mayor? Please tell us how you feel about the candidates using a “feeling thermometer” where a rating of 0 means you feel very cold and negatively about the candidate, a rating of 100 means you feel very warm and positive about the candidate, and a rating of 50 meaning you feel neither warmly nor coldly (subjects could move dial with their mouse):

If you a voter in Kenosha and the election were held today, which one of these candidates would you vote for?
- Tom Smith
- James Jones
- Neither

How likely do you think it is that your preferred candidate will win the election?
- Extremely likely
- Moderately likely
- Neither likely nor unlikely
- Moderately unlikely
- Extremely unlikely

How much, if at all, do you trust information that you receive from national news sources?
- A great deal
- A moderate amount
- A little
- Not at all

How much, if at all, do you trust information that you receive from local news sources?
- A great deal
- A moderate amount
- A little
- Not at all

Did you find the article about the Kenosha mayoral race informative?
- Yes
- No

Did you think that the article represented the views of both candidates fairly?
- Yes
- No

Debriefing Statement

The purpose of this study is to learn about how media coverage of elections affects an individual’s intention to vote. You were randomly assigned to read an article about a local election which varied 1) how close the race was between the two mayoral candidates (e.g. vary information on the probability of a given election outcome) and 2) whether the candidates agreed or disagreed about spending sales tax revenue on infrastructure repairs (e.g. vary the policy consequences of the election outcome). The article that you read was adapted for the purposes of the experiment but is based on how local news organizations cover campaigns and may be similar to stories you may have read in the news.

Please note that there are no correct responses to this study. To reiterate, your responses will remain confidential and will only be analyzed as part of group responses. No identifying information was collected.

Should you have any questions about the study, you may contact Mark McKibbin at markmckibbin12@gwu.edu or you may contact Professor Kimberly Gross at kimgross@gwu.edu.

Thank you for participating in this study. Please copy the completion code below and return to MTurk and enter this in the HIT.

${e://Field/random}$
APPENDIX B: U.S. SENATE EXPERIMENT FULL SURVEY

Welcome Message

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this survey. On the next page, you will be asked to read a newspaper article about the upcoming Arizona Senate election and answer a series of questions about that article.

Treatments

Control

Republican Martha McSally To Face Democrat Kyrsten Sinema In This Fall's Arizona U.S. Senate Election

Republican Congresswoman Martha McSally will face Democratic Congresswoman Kyrsten Sinema in this fall's Arizona U.S. Senate race to replace retiring Republican Senator Jeff Flake. Sinema was a heavy favorite to win the Democratic nomination, and McSally bested her two challengers, former Sheriff Joe Arpaio and former Arizona State Senate Kelli Ward, to secure the Republican nomination.

“This is one of the most closely watched Senate races in this election,” said David Brooks on PBS NewsHour. “It is going to be interesting to see what happens.”

Sinema claims that the voters of her state need someone who will go to Washington, D.C. as an independent voice. “Martha McSally will be a rubber stamp for Donald Trump and the Republicans. I won't let anyone in Washington tell me how to cast my vote. The only voices that matter to me are those of the people of Arizona,” said Sinema.

The general election will be held on Tuesday, November 6.

Treatment 1: High Stakes

U.S. Senate Race Between Democrat Kyrsten Sinema And Republican Martha McSally Could Decide The Swing Supreme Court Justice Seat.

Whoever wins the U.S. Senate race in Arizona between Democratic Congresswoman Kyrsten Sinema and Republican Congressman Martha McSally could be a deciding vote in which party controls the U.S. Senate and has control over confirming Supreme Court Justices that President Trump could appoint in the next two years.

“Make no mistake, Arizona could be the race that decides if Democrats take back the Senate or not,” said David Brooks on PBS NewsHour. “The stakes could not be higher.”

Whoever the next Supreme Court Justice is could be a swing vote on incredibly important cases, such as abortion and gun violence prevention. If President Trump is able to nominate another justice under a Republican-held Senate, or a 50-50 Senate with Mike Pence casting the tie-breaking vote, he has a better chance of appointing a justice who will fulfill his campaign promise to overturn Roe vs. Wade. However, if Democrats take control of the U.S. Senate, the President's pick will likely have to be a much more moderate nominee to pass muster with Senate Democrats and who would be more likely to uphold crucial precedents that Democrats cherish.

The general election will be held on Tuesday, November 6.
TREATMENT 2: LOW STAKES

U.S. Senate Race Between Democrat Kyrsten Sinema And Republican Martha McSally Unlikely To Have Impact On Next Supreme Court Justice

One of the selling points that both candidates for U.S. Senate in Arizona made for their election was that their election could decide which party controlled the Senate after the midterm elections and had the power to confirm a potential Supreme Court nomination by President Trump. However, with the retirement of Justice Anthony Kennedy in July and confirmation of Brett Kavanaugh to the Supreme Court, it seems unlikely that President Trump will be appointing another Supreme Court Justice before the end of his first term, stealing the talking point from both McSally and Sinema.

“The lack of a likely impending Supreme Court Battle certainly takes the wind out of both of their sails,” said David Brooks on PBS NewsHour. “Neither of the candidates will be able to continue using this talking point as a reason for voters to vote for them.”

If President Trump is able to nominate another justice under a Republican held Senate, or a 50-50 Senate with Mike Pence casting the tie breaking vote, he has a better chance of appointing a justice who will fulfill his campaign promise to overturn Roe vs. Wade. However, if Democrats take control of the U.S. Senate, the President pick will likely have to be a much more moderate nominee to pass muster with Senate Democrats and who would be more likely to uphold crucial precedents that Democrats cherish.

Post-Treatment Questions

What was the name of the political commentator who was quoted in the article you just read?
- David Brooks
- Bret Stephens
- Mark Shields
- Do not remember

If you were a voter in Arizona, how likely is it that you would vote in this election?
- Extremely likely
- Somewhat likely
- Neither likely nor unlikely
- Somewhat unlikely
- Extremely unlikely

If the election were held today, which one of these candidates would you vote for?
- Martha McSally (Republican)
- Kyrsten Sinema (Democrat)
- Neither

How likely do you think it is that your preferred candidate will win the election?
- Extremely unlikely
- Somewhat unlikely
- Neither likely nor unlikely
- Somewhat likely
- Extremely likely

How likely do you think it is that President Trump will nominate another Supreme Court Justice before the end of his first term in 2020?
- Extremely likely
- Somewhat likely
- Neither likely nor unlikely
- Somewhat unlikely
- Extremely unlikely
Demographic Message

Now we would like to know a little bit about your background for demographic purposes.

Please select all the elections you have voted in:
- 2016 Presidential General Election
- 2016 Presidential Primary
- 2014 Congressional Elections

What is your age? (subjects fill in age)

What is your sex?
- Male
- Female
- Other

What is your political party affiliation?
- Democratic
- Republican
- Libertarian
- Green
- Other

Who did you vote for in the 2016 presidential election?
- Hillary Clinton
- Donald Trump
- Jill Stein
- Gary Johnson
- Other
- I did not vote in the 2016 election
- I was not able to vote in the 2016 election

What is your education level?
- No High School
- Some High School
- High School Graduate
- Some College
- Bachelor’s Degree
- Post-Graduate Education

Debriefing Statement

Thank you for participating in this survey.

Please copy the completion code below. After pressing the arrow to submit your responses please return to Mechanical Turk and enter the completion code so that you can be compensated for your participation in the study.

157992
APPENDIX C: ORDINARY LEAST SQUARES REGRESSION MODELS

Table entries are unstandardized regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. Control is excluded comparison condition.
* indicates p<.01
** indicates p<.05

Table C1: Likelihood of voting regression, mayoral experiment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VARIABLE</th>
<th>REGRESSION B VALUE (WITH STANDARD ERROR)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Condition 1 (High Stakes, Close Race)</td>
<td>.265 (.063) *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Condition 2 (High Stakes, Lopsided Race)</td>
<td>.260 (.063) *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Condition 3 (Low Stakes, Close Race)</td>
<td>.053 (.064)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Condition 4 (Low Stakes, Lopsided Race)</td>
<td>-.004 (.064)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td>.072 (.045)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.153 (.028) *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party ID</td>
<td>-.067 (.024) *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>.096 (.040) **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Income</td>
<td>.065 (.019) *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education Level</td>
<td>.136 (.023) *</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 White coded as 1, nonwhite coded as 0
2 Coded on an ascending scale of young to old
3 Democratic coded as 1, Independent coded as 2, Republican coded as 3
4 Males coded as 1, Females Coded as 2
5 Coded on an ascending scale of lowest to highest income
6 Coded on an ascending scale of least to most educational attainment

Table C2: Favorability regression for James Jones

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VARIABLE</th>
<th>REGRESSION B VALUE (WITH STANDARD ERROR)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Condition 1 (High Stakes, Close Race)</td>
<td>10.696 (1.158) *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Condition 2 (High Stakes, Lopsided Race)</td>
<td>11.268 (1.161) *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Condition 3 (Low Stakes, Close Race)</td>
<td>1.747 (1.164)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Condition 4 (Low Stakes, Lopsided Race)</td>
<td>3.056 (1.167) **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td>-1.018 (.813)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>2.829 (.510) *</td>
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<tr>
<td>Party ID</td>
<td>-.303 (.445)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>1.585 (.730) **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Income</td>
<td>.218 (.350)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education Level</td>
<td>.721 (4.16)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table C3: Favorability regression for Tom Smith

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VARIABLE</th>
<th>REGRESSION VALUE (WITH STANDARD ERROR)</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>-16.433 (1.288) *</td>
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<td>Condition 2 (High Stakes, Lopsided Race)</td>
<td>-25.347 (1.292) *</td>
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<td>Condition 3 (Low Stakes, Close Race)</td>
<td>-1.136 (1.295)</td>
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<td>Condition 4 (Low Stakes, Lopsided Race)</td>
<td>-3.044 (1.298) **</td>
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<tr>
<td>Race</td>
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<td>1.157 (.496) **</td>
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<td>Gender</td>
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<tr>
<td>Family Income</td>
<td>.080 (.350)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Education Level</td>
<td>1.145 (4.62) **</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table C4: Candidate choice regression – James Jones coded as “1”, Tom Smith coded as “0”

<table>
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<tr>
<th>VARIABLE</th>
<th>REGRESSION VALUE (WITH STANDARD ERROR)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>Condition 1 (High Stakes, Close Race)</td>
<td>.400 (.029) *</td>
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<tr>
<td>Condition 2 (High Stakes, Lopsided Race)</td>
<td>.456 (.029) *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Condition 3 (Low Stakes, Close Race)</td>
<td>.160 (.030) *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Condition 4 (Low Stakes, Lopsided Race)</td>
<td>.285 (.030) *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td>.051 (.021) **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.037 (.013) *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party ID</td>
<td>-.028 (.011) **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>.028 (.018)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Income</td>
<td>-.001 (.009)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education Level</td>
<td>-.030 (.011) *</td>
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</table>

Table C5: Likelihood of voting regression, U.S. Senate experiment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VARIABLE</th>
<th>REGRESSION VALUE (WITH STANDARD ERROR)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Condition 1 (High Stakes)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Condition 2 (Low Stakes)</td>
<td>-.331 (.147) **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
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<tr>
<td>Party ID</td>
<td>-.347 (.135) *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education Level</td>
<td>.233 (.071) **</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
REFERENCES


26. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123411000342


About the Author

Mark McKibbin is a senior at The George Washington University (GW) majoring in Political Communication at the School of Media and Public Affairs. In college, Mark has served as an intern for the Mayor of Sacramento, the Attorney General of California, the Democratic National Committee, and the Brookings Institution. Mark is a prolific writer whose work has appeared in the GW Undergraduate Law Review and the Digital Encyclopedia of George Washington. Mark is originally from Sacramento, California and has been actively involved in California Democratic party politics since the age of 10.

Mentor Details

This paper was written with mentorship from Professor Kim Gross.

Kim Gross is an Associate Professor in the School of Media of Public Affairs at The George Washington University. Gross studies public opinion, media framing, and the impact of race and racial appeals on political behavior. She has received the Russell Sage Foundation and National Science Foundation grants for her work on trust in government after the 9/11 terrorist attacks. She has also served as a fellow at the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University. Gross received her bachelor's degree in political science from the University of Wisconsin and her Ph.D. from the University of Michigan.