Thesis

A New Formula for Voter Turnout

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Signature Page

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ABSTRACT

THIS PAPER PROPOSES A NEW, MODIFIED DECISION MATRIX FOR VOTER TURNOUT: LIKELIHOOD OF VOTING = PERSONAL CONNECTION + SENSE OF DUTY + SELF-INTEREST – DIFFICULTY IN VOTING – SENSE OF APATHY. IT INTRODUCES A NEW VARIABLE, "PERSONAL CONNECTION." THIS VARIABLE COMBINES THE IMPORTANT CONTRIBUTIONS OF SOCIAL PRESSURE AND CANVASSING RESEARCH AS A SUMMARY MOTIVATION OF THE TWO. IN ORDER TO TEST THIS HYPOTHESIS, I COMPLETE AN INITIAL REVIEW OF ANES DATA AND A METANALYSIS OF RELEVANT LITERATURE. THE CONCLUSION IS THAT THERE IS ENOUGH DATA TO SUPPORT FURTHER RESEARCH INTO THE PROPOSED FORMULA AND NEW VARIABLE FOR VOTER TURNOUT.

Dedication

To the love of my life, Whitney Pope. This is a rather boring submission for how thankful I am to walk through life with you. Someday, I'll dedicate something more exciting to you.

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List of Abbreviations

American National Election Studies (ANES)

Get-Out-The-Vote (GOTV)

CHAPTER ONE: RETHINKING VOTER TURNOUT

Introduction

At the center of citizenship in a free society is the right of self-determination, the right of suffrage. If this right is so central, perhaps a duty, to civic engagement, why do so many eligible people in America not vote? This paper examines some of the key psychological factors that drive voter decision making. Most importantly, we need to know why some of the electorate votes and some does not. Voter behavior is the determining factor in winning or losing elections. This study will seek to address the psychological and environmental factors that cause citizens to cast a vote in elections. The goal is to increase understanding in academia of the voter decision process and, in the field, to help campaigners understand how to increase turnout.

My hypothesis is that the most influential tool to affect turnout in any election is personal connection. In this study, I conclude that personal connection drives behavior and better isolates the motivation of voters by linking the effectiveness of social pressure and canvasing into one characteristic. The important caveat is that personal connection must be within the last few weeks before voting to be very effective in raising turnout rates. For many voters, this will be in the last few weeks before the election. For absentee voters, it will be the few weeks before they cast their ballot. This time constraint creates a logistics problem. Therefore, innovative campaigners will look for ways to accomplish mass-personalization.

I define personal connection as a sense of community belonging brought about through human interaction that results in a sense of obligation to participate in societal

norms. Voters must feel that voting brings them personal connection and communal belonging. It is this sense of community that also results in feelings of duty to participate. This is the essence of citizenship; participating in community to determine our shared future.[1]

Importance

The study of voter turnout has practical meaning as voters in the U.S. are generally unwilling to cross party lines. In general elections, party branding is very important.[2] Voters in general elections are becoming very difficult to persuade.[3] Therefore, in general elections, turnout is often more important than persuasion.

Literature on voting behavior has found that in general elections there are increasingly fewer truly independent and persuadable voters.[4] This means that turning out the voters who support a candidate is more critical. This study seeks to help create a decision matrix that can be used by campaigns and activists based on available data to drive Get-Out-The-Vote (GOTV) efforts.

Political campaigns engage in voter persuasion and GOTV efforts. Because persuasion efforts are generally less effective for general elections, campaigns should be more focused on turning out their base. In a primary, all candidates have the same party

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[1] USCIS, Department of Homeland Security, "Citizenship Rights and Responsibilities," USCIS, accessed June 16, 2018, https://www.uscis.gov/citizenship/learners/citizenship-rights-and-responsibilities.
[2] Joandrea Hoegg and Michael Lewis, "The Impact of Candidate Appearance and Advertising Strategies on Election Results," *Journal of Marketing Research* 48, no. 5 (2011): 895–909.
[3] Joshua L. Kalla and David E. Broockman, "The Minimal Persuasive Effects of Campaign Contact in General Elections: Evidence from 49 Field Experiments," *American Political Science Review*, September 2017, 1–19, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055417000363.
[4] Kalla and Broockman.

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branding, so persuasion is much more effective than in a general election. While general elections are about turnout, primary elections are still about persuasion. Smart campaigns should take this information into account when determining a campaign strategy. Resources allocated for persuasion in the primary will be more effective. There should be a pivot to emphasizing turnout efforts in the general election.

This study is important because the GOTV efforts have increased in use over the last few years. This study reviews the relevant literature, develops key findings for understanding the psychology of voter turnout, reviews the application of American National Election Studies (ANES) data to the development of the proposed voter turnout formula, and completes a metanalysis review of relevant literature on developing the characteristic of personal connection as being important to turnout. The results increase our understanding of one of the most practical aspects of politicking. We also catch a glimpse, as in a mirror, of the essential decision making of citizens in a free society.

This study is important to others because it helps us better understand our democratic process. By understanding it, we can better protect it. There are those in the world that would like to undermine the American electoral system. The more that the academic world understands the voter decision process, the more that administrators can protect the process. The more that non-profits and other concerned parties understand the voter, the better they will be able to drive turnout.

If this study was not published, campaigns would miss valuable information that could help in simplifying the resource allocation process. The campaigns that could be helped the most through targeted resource allocation are campaigns with fewer overall finances. Thus, the ideas of this work could empower more everyday Americans to

participate in the election process. The primary audience for this study is campaign managers, strategists, and candidates in the field. In academia, the recipients are other social science researchers and business or government administrators who want to protect the electoral process. These groups have a stake in understanding the voter decision making process. This study is important because it builds our understanding of this important topic.

Research Questions and Methods

We gain the background we need through an analysis of existing scholarship on the topic of voter turnout behavior. Through researching this literature, we can understand a decision matrix of voter behavior. This study will help to isolate important psychological factors that drive behavior. The following research questions guide the inquiry:

What are the key factors that drive voter turnout?

What are the key factors that deter voter turnout?

This research will follow the metanalysis structure. It will seek to identify themes in previously conducted studies and synthesize these into a cohesive decision matrix. The first steps in answering these questions is a review of previous literature on the topic. The following categorically reviews the relevant literature to develop a decision matrix that can be helpful in driving campaign strategy and understanding the decision-making process.

Literature Review

Persuasion

Candidates and campaigns endeavor to win elections. The essence of a democratic country is that citizens participate in choosing their leaders. Electioneering has become a professional business. There are now professional political marketers who make a living out of the democratic process. The basic assumption is that politicians can influence the outcome of elections by persuading voters to support them. This assumption about general elections is coming under increasing scrutiny.

Scientific studies from across the spectrum are beginning to show that in general elections, candidates are not able to persuade voters to violate their preferred brand loyalty. In a statistical field analysis of 56,000 Wisconsin voters in the 2008 Presidential general election, the authors found that persuasion efforts had no effect, or a negative effect, on candidate support suggesting that campaign efforts may actually create backlash.[5] This was a media saturated race, which means that most voters made up their mind about who they were supporting without the need for candidate involvement in persuasion.

In some cases, persuasion can be effective, but it must be selectively targeted and carefully presented. Political advertising is only minimally effective on partisan voters when the candidate is well known. Voters make up their mind based on the party of the

[5] Michael A. Bailey, Daniel J. Hopkins, and Todd Rogers, "Unresponsive and Unpersuaded: The Unintended Consequences of a Voter Persuasion Effort," *Political Behavior* 38, no. 3 (September 1, 2016): 713–46, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11109-016-9338-8.

candidate. Advertising is most effective on independent voters for a little-known candidate.[6] This is because the advertising is reaching people who have not made up their minds or is giving them information they do not already have. Despite the widespread use of online advertising, the findings of two field experiments found that exposure through internet advertising was not enough to increase name identification for the candidate or change the views of voters.[7] These studies should give campaigners pause to consider before continuing to spend campaign funds as they always have.

In a far-reaching, recent review of 49 field experiments, average campaign activity has no effect on persuasion in general elections unless the campaign takes very specific steps to target persuadable voters.[8] Candidates and campaigns should take a moment to think about what the current marketing culture has created. Americans are so over-marketed, that they are no longer listening. They feel disillusioned with the process and do not trust political advertising. Rethinking some basic assumptions may accomplish political persuasion in the future. For the time-being, precision in political marketing is key. Because the art of persuasion has fallen on tough times, voter turnout is even more important. Campaigns can increase their vote tally by turning out voters that they know are supportive.

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[6] Michael M. Franz and Travis N. Ridout, "Does Political Advertising Persuade?," *Political Behavior* 29, no. 4 (December 1, 2007): 465–91, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11109-007-9032-y.
[7] David E. Broockman and Donald P. Green, "Do Online Advertisements Increase Political Candidates' Name Recognition or Favorability? Evidence from Randomized Field Experiments," *Political Behavior; New York* 36, no. 2 (June 2014): 263–89, https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.liberty.edu/10.1007/s11109-013-9239-z.
[8] Kalla and Broockman, "The Minimal Persuasive Effects of Campaign Contact in General Elections."

Personal Connection

There is one thing that stands out in study after study as the gold-standard for increasing turnout. The thing that will get more people to make the decision to go to the polls than anything else is feeling a personal connection that draws them to the polls. Shaking someone's hand, looking them in the eyes, and asking them to show up to vote is more powerful than any other strategy because it is intensely human. Voters cannot ignore it. If they reject the plea, they reject a fellow human, which is much harder to do than rejecting a plea from a robo-call or junk mailer.

The most effective personal connection is that of a candidate. In fact, a randomized field experiment shows that personal contact increases candidate support including a 13.3% increase when canvased by the candidate. Personal contact remains very powerful even in the age of mass social media.[9] Further, another study of local candidates in a general election indicates that regardless of message, personal interactions with the candidate are the most powerful forms of persuasion.[10] Secondarily, personal connection with a volunteer or staff is very effective. Non-partisan, face-to-face voter contact increases voter turnout by 7 percent across a wide spectrum of elections.[11]

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[9] Kevin Arceneaux, "I'm Asking for Your Support: The Effects of Personally Delivered Campaign Messages on Voting Decisions and Opinion Formation," *Quarterly Journal of Political Science* 2, no. 1 (March 2007): 43+.

[10] Jared Barton, Marco Castillo, and Ragan Petrie, "What Persuades Voters? A Field Experiment on Political Campaigning," *The Economic Journal* 124, no. 574 (February 1, 2014): F293–326, https://doi.org/10.1111/ecoj.12093.

[11] Donald P. Green, Alan S. Gerber, and David W. Nickerson, "Getting Out the Vote in Local Elections: Results from Six Door-to-Door Canvassing Experiments," *The Journal of Politics* 65, no. 4 (2003): 1083–96, https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2508.t01-1-00126.

There is however, a very high hurdle that prevents turnout from dramatically

increasing through personal connection. In essence, timing is everything. The effect of

the personal connection degrades rapidly; leaving a matter of weeks, or months at the

most, to create this personal connection. Face to face canvasing has a short-term effect.

This means that canvasing is typically effective for turnout at the end of an election

cycle.[12] Campaigns must create an intense effort at personal connection at the end of the

campaign. Obviously, the larger the election, the more impractical this becomes. A large

campaign must execute a highly sophisticated, volunteer-based effort at GOTV as the

campaign ends. It must accomplish mass-personalization.

Social pressure can accomplish a form of mass-personalization. The indication is

that social pressure works to mobilize voters through publishing of voter history in direct

mail.[13] The is a negative form of personal connection. Voters feel a sense of social shame

if they do not comply. Either way, the point is that voting is a social norm that Americans

want to participate in and will participate in if they feel a personal connection pulling or

pushing them.

Psychological Factors

There are other factors that drive people to the polls as well. There are diverse

ways of analyzing these factors. For the purpose of this paper, they will divide into

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[12] David Niven, "The Mobilization Calendar: The Time-Dependent Effects of Personal Contact on Turnout," *American Politics Research* 30, no. 3 (May 1, 2002): 307–22, https://doi.org/10.1177/1532673X02030003005.

[13] Todd Rogers et al., "Social Pressure and Voting: A Field Experiment Conducted in a High-Salience Election," *Electoral Studies* 46 (April 1, 2017): 87–100, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2017.02.004.

psychological and environmental factors. That is, there are factors internal to the voter and external to the voter. External factors often drive responses to the internal factors. A classic formula for voter turnout is R = (B)(P) − C + D "where R is the total reward a citizen will gain from voting, B is the benefit a person thinks will accrue from having his or her preferred candidate win, P is the person's perception of the probability that his or her one vote will change the election outcome, C is the cost to the individual of voting in terms of time, money, and other resources, and D is the psychic satisfaction."[14]

A modification of this is "Likelihood of voting = (Motivation to vote × Ability to vote)/Difficulty of voting."[15] The authors of the modification therefore conclude that environmental and psychological factors that increase motivation and ability or decrease difficulty will increase turnout. Interestingly, people in social organizations or who are trusting, patient, have a sense of civic duty, or develop a habit, are more likely to vote. Canvassing appears to be the most effect GOTV effort.[16]

Upon review of the literature, I propose the modified formula: Likelihood of voting = personal connection + sense of duty + self-interest – difficulty in voting – sense of apathy about the process or outcome.

The decision matrix can help simplify the resource allocation decisions that campaigns face constantly in a campaign. Personal connection best explains why

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[14] Joshua Harder and Jon A. Krosnick, "Why Do People Vote? A Psychological Analysis of the Causes of Voter Turnout," *Journal of Social Issues* 64, no. 3 (September 1, 2008): 525–49, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4560.2008.00576.x.
[15] Harder and Krosnick.
[16] Harder and Krosnick.

canvassing[17] and social pressure[18] are such effective tools for campaigns. Personal

connection pulls voters through canvassing and pushes them through social pressure. But

in both cases, the voters feel a sense of belonging in community that either pushes or

pulls them to become participants. The two motivations, sense of duty and self-interest,

are isolated because they tend to be inversely influential in voters.[19] The more duty that

they feel to vote, the less personal interest they have in the outcome and vice versa.

Difficulty in voting is a historical and clear way of communicating a deterrence to

voting.[20] Apathy toward the process and outcome is an important addition because it can

negate a high motivation value. For instance, if a voter had a high sense of duty to

participate, but they felt apathetic about the integrity of the electoral process, they may

not vote. Also, if a voter has high sense of personal interest, yet feels apathy about the

outcome being secure, they may not vote. Most of these items are clarifications and more

precise ways of stating previous ideas. The most important contribution to the decision

matrix is personal connection. This idea attempts to synthesize why canvassing and social

pressure are both so effective and give campaigns a practical way to think about voter's

decision making.

One study discusses the historical categories of voter turnout as ethical and non-

ethical. The ethics of civic duty drives many citizens to the polls. Strong preference for

the outcome drives others. However, the authors show that these two motivators are

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[17] Harder and Krosnick.
[18] Rogers et al., "Social Pressure and Voting."
[19] André Blais and Christopher H. Achen, "Civic Duty and Voter Turnout," *Political Behavior*, April 26, 2018, 1–25, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11109-018-9459-3.
[20] Harder and Krosnick, "Why Do People Vote?"

inversely related. Based on the data reviewed, the authors conclude that voters show up to vote out of a sense of morality or a sense of self-interest, but that these two do not tend to motivate the same voter.[21] Duty and self-interest, then become the key psychological factors driving turnout. Campaigns should focus on appealing to these aspects of human nature.

The decision to vote is a decision to overcome the cost, however small, of going to the polls. Voter response to mobilization efforts may very well be rooted in inherent psychological differences. Political participation is costly. The decision to vote is a decision to overcome the cost. Taking all of the different personality types into account, one study concludes that the best overall mobilization efforts will be pro-social, focused on civic duty, and involve face-to-face interactions.[22] These processes lock in behavior over the life of the voter.

In looking at the habitual nature of voting, another study concludes that voting is habit forming under some circumstances. They discuss studies showing that social pressure is influential for increasing voter turnout. The long-term results of these studies are that voter's habits increase the likelihood of voting in similar kinds of elections. In looking at just-eligible voters in 17 states, voting in one election upon turning 18 substantially increased the probability of voting in future elections. In short, voter

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[21] Blais and Achen, "Civic Duty and Voter Turnout."
[22] Ryan Dawkins, "Political Participation, Personality, and the Conditional Effect of Campaign Mobilization," *Electoral Studies* 45 (February 1, 2017): 100–109, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2016.11.018.

mobilization has long lasting effects.[23] Campaigns can look for voters that have shown a

habit of voting in similar elections. Turnout is about finding the voters that are likely to

support the candidate of choice and getting them to the polls. Further, the less involved

an individual is in the political process, the more likely they are to be a swing voter. The

more often someone votes, the more likely they are to vote partisan. This is based on

analysis of Italian election results in a 2-party general election.[24] Turnout efforts focus on

people that are reliable supporters. So, focusing on those who have shown a habit of

voting is the most fruitful.

Apathy decreases when voters are open to believe that elections matter, and their

participation matters. The big-five personality traits effect how a voter responds to the

costs and benefits of voting in GOTV campaigns. The trait of openness is the most likely

to be persuadable to turn out and vote.[25] Indeed, emotions can be very powerful in

mobilizing voters. Increasing anger is one of the most powerful emotions for voter

activation.[26] In order to overcome inertia, voters must have powerful feelings of hope or

hate. When voting blocs feel threatened, it increases group voter turnout by 2-3 percent.

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[23] Alexander Coppock and Donald P. Green, "Is Voting Habit Forming? New Evidence from Experiments and Regression Discontinuities," *American Journal of Political Science* 60, no. 4 (2016): 1044–62.

[24] Lorenzo De Sio, "Are Less-Involved Voters the Key to Win Elections?," *Comparative Political Studies* 41, no. 2 (February 1, 2008): 217–41, https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414007300424.

[25] Alan S. Gerber et al., "Big Five Personality Traits and Responses to Persuasive Appeals: Results from Voter Turnout Experiments," *Political Behavior* 35, no. 4 (December 1, 2013): 687–728, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11109-012-9216-y.

[26] Christopher Weber, "Emotions, Campaigns, and Political Participation," *Political Research Quarterly* 66, no. 2 (June 1, 2013): 414–28, https://doi.org/10.1177/1065912912449697.

A study measured this effect in Latinos who felt threatened by immigration enforcement.[27] When voters care enough, they will turn out and vote.

Environmental Factors

Factors outside of themselves also influence voters. These external factors can influence the internal factors as well. One external factor is the participation of society around us. After statistically examining a century of Presidential voting patterns, one study concludes that there is a geographic trend that indicates that social contagion is an influencer of corporate political choices.[28]

Another study recognizes the importance of social connectedness and influence but asserts not to discount impersonal communication. It asserts that voters who register to vote are signaling some intention to vote. The study tests the impact of text messages on voter turnout. It finds a 3% increase in turnout.[29] More traditionally, in two field experiments looking at independent voters, the authors conclude that both positive and negative partisan mailers impact a voter's intention to vote. The effects of the mailers were, however, short-lived, and increased intention to vote but not actual turnout. Voters indicated increased intention to vote but did not follow through at the polls.[30] Further,

[27] Ariel White, "When Threat Mobilizes: Immigration Enforcement and Latino Voter Turnout," *Political Behavior* 38, no. 2 (June 1, 2016): 355–82, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11109-015-9317-5.

[28] Dan Braha and A. M. de Aguiar, "Voting Contagion: Modeling and Analysis of a Century of U.S. Presidential Elections," *PLoS One; San Francisco* 12, no. 5 (May 2017), https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0177970.

[29] Allison Dale and Aaron Strauss, "Don't Forget to Vote: Text Message Reminders as a Mobilization Tool," *American Journal of Political Science* 53, no. 4 (2009): 787–804.

[30] David Doherty and E. Scott Adler, "The Persuasive Effects of Partisan Campaign Mailers," *Political Research Quarterly* 67, no. 3 (September 1, 2014): 562–73, https://doi.org/10.1177/1065912914535987.

direct mailings are effective at increasing turnout, but after 5 mailings, there results a backlash which actually decreases turnout.[31] These various tactics can, if used carefully, marginally increase turnout. If not used wisely, they can backfire. This shows how important it is to understand the results of effective tactics and why people do what they do.

One of the most used tactics that can backfire is negative campaigning. Voters have sophistication to distinguish between legitimate negative critiques and mudslinging. The former tends to increase turnout, while the latter decreases turnout. The tone of a campaign has more impact on independents than partisan voters.[32] When a campaign becomes truly negative, it will often drive down turnout as a form of backlash. Despite this, many campaigns disregard the warning signs and plunge ahead with the old ways.

Some things are outside of the control of campaigns. In examining the economic fundamentals of the 2012 election, the author concludes that the fundamental economic predictors are still reliable forecasters of elections, and that voters make rational choices about political involvement based on the state of the economy.[33] Voters make their own decisions about voting based on the economy. Perhaps without a great deal of thought on the part of the voter, candidate appearance also impacts outcomes of elections.

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[31] Donald P. Green and Adam Zelizer, "How Much GOTV Mail Is Too Much? Results from a Large-Scale Field Experiment," *Journal of Experimental Political Science; Washington* 4, no. 2 (Winter 2017): 107–18, https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.liberty.edu/10.1017/XPS.2017.5.

[32] Kim Fridkin Kahn and Patrick J. Kenney, "Do Negative Campaigns Mobilize or Suppress Turnout? Clarifying the Relationship between Negativity and Participation," *The American Political Science Review* 93, no. 4 (1999): 877–89, https://doi.org/10.2307/2586118.

[33] Matthew J. Dickinson, "The 2012 Presidential Election: Taking the 'Fun' Out of Fundamentals?," *PS, Political Science & Politics; Washington* 47, no. 2 (April 2014): 309–12, https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.liberty.edu/10.1017/S1049096514000080.

Republican candidates benefit from appearing competent, while Democrats do better to appear intelligent. This is because candidates must conform to their party brand.[34] Candidates cannot much change their appearance, yet this has an impact on support and turnout.

Neither can campaigns control the social structure or health of voters. For instance, couples are more likely to vote if their spouse votes. Canvasing increases the likelihood of the spouse voting by 60%.[35] This is a clue for limited budget campaigns. They may gain more votes with fewer voter contacts. Many things, including illness, can drive up the difficulty of voting, thus lowering turnout. Influenza and other illnesses make voting more difficult and reduce voter turnout.[36] The environmental factors that drive turnout are many and varied, and campaigns often cannot control them.

The likelihood of voting increases most when there is a strong personal connection, sense of duty, or personal gain. On the other hand, turnout goes down when difficulty or apathy goes up. The proposed formula is: Likelihood of voting = personal connection + sense of duty + self-interest – difficulty in voting – sense of apathy about the process or outcome. This original formulation simplifies the resource allocation process for campaigns and gives researchers further avenues of study. It is preferable because of the positive focus on personal connection and the clarity of the duty versus

[34] Hoegg and Lewis, "The Impact of Candidate Appearance and Advertising Strategies on Election Results."

[35] David W. Nickerson, "Is Voting Contagious? Evidence from Two Field Experiments," *The American Political Science Review* 102, no. 1 (2008): 49–57.

[36] R. Urbatsch, "Influenza and Voter Turnout," *Scandinavian Political Studies* 40, no. 1 (n.d.): 107–19, https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9477.12079.

self-interest paradigm. It also emphasizes apathy, which is the blank decision that remains when voters do not care or are over-marketed.

Having looked at the importance of this topic, we can now develop a review of relevant ANES data. This study is important because it provides practical support to campaigns and expands our horizons of understanding in the academic field. GOTV efforts are key to a successful campaign. Having discussed the importance and background to participation in our civil society through elections, we can now examine turnout results and the variables that impact them.

CHAPTER TWO: ANES DATA TRENDS

I completed an overview analysis of ANES studies of Presidential elections for available years from 1952-2012 for voter turnout.[37] For each of the factors of the proposed decision matrix presented in chapter one, I compared a report to turnout seeking to discover any association. I took the highest turnout years and the lowest turnout years and looked for relationships to these two groups with different variables. The highest years of turnout represent turnout in a range from 76% through 79% turnout. The lowest years represent the lowest range from 70% through 73%. These turnout rates are for the presidential election years only as that provides a steady baseline of comparison.[38]

In most cases, the results are as expected, but also provide indication that the motivation only worked in one direction in some cases. For example, a low sense of duty seemed to indicate low turnout, but a high sense of duty did not lead to high turnout. There are of course, many variables that could have affected any given year. But the results do suggest that the proposed formula is at least a plausible explanation for voter decision making in going to the polls.
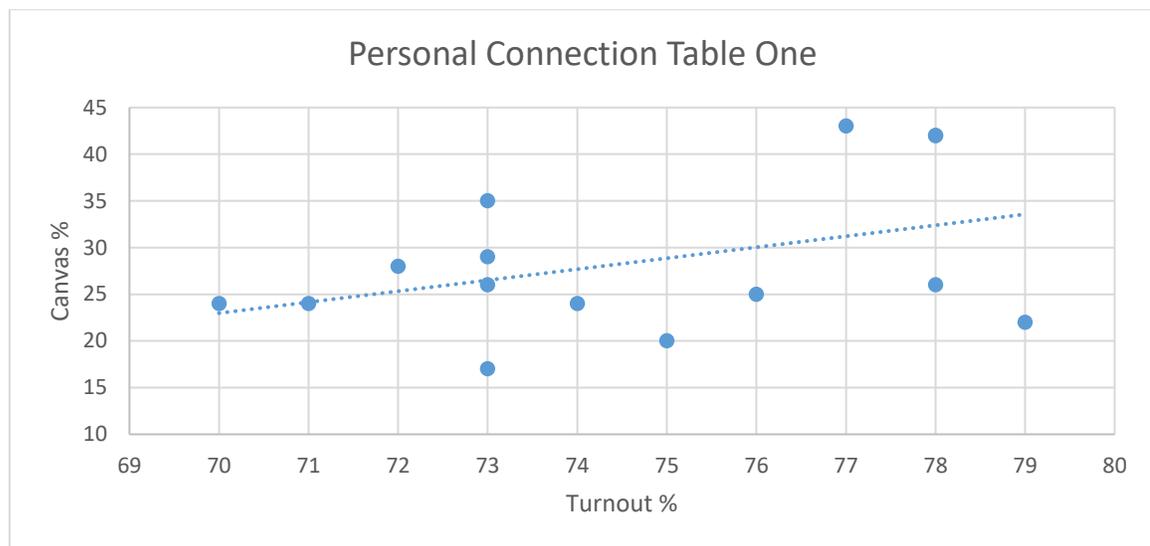
Personal Connection

Personal connection, as evidenced by direct contact by a campaign with a voter, is measured across the full spectrum of elections. The study asked if voters had been contacted in person via canvassing or a phone call by a representative of either major

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[37] American National Election Studies, "Voter Turnout," accessed June 21, 2018, http://www.electionstudies.org//nesguide/toptable/tab6a_2.htm.
[38] American National Election Studies.

party.[39] The combined door knocking and phone calls represents the variable "personal connection." Three out of the four years of highest voter contact were also among the highest years of turnout during the period. Three of the six lowest canvassing years were among the lowest in turnout. This would suggest that there is a relationship between direct, personal contact with voters and turnout. Campaigns seem to have realized this as the four highest years of personal contact have occurred since the year 2000.[40]

These results indicate that there is likely a relationship between personal connection and voter turnout. The scatter plot shows the tendency toward greater personal connection increasing turnout. This justifies the use of personal connection as a positive factor in the formula. Decades ago, personal connection was the major focus of campaigns. With the advent of technology, personal connection may have waivered in
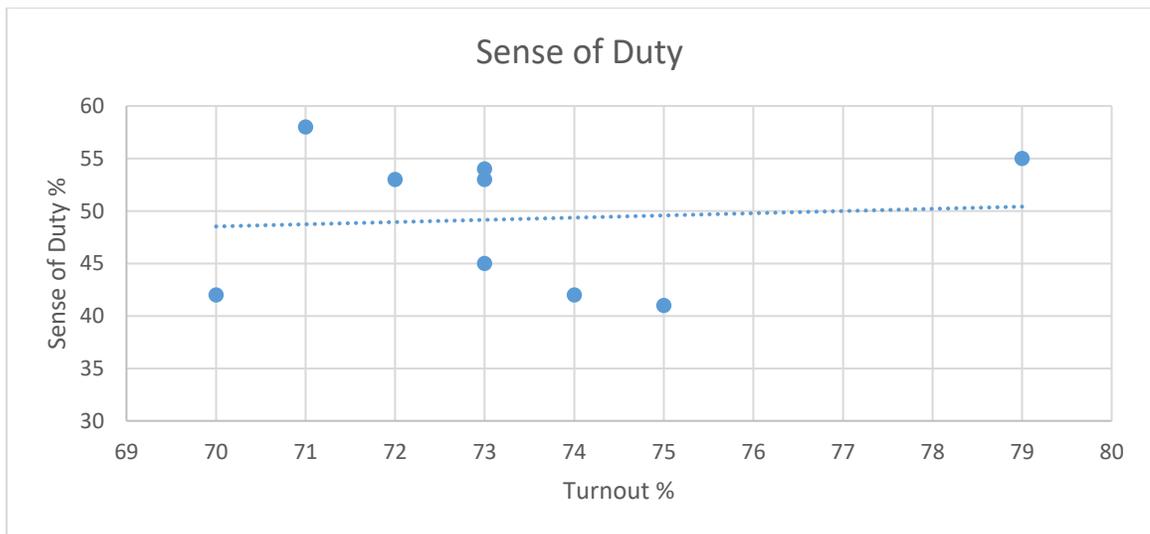
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[39] American National Election Studies, "Contacted by Either Major Party," accessed June 21, 2018, http://www.electionstudies.org//nesguide/toptable/tab6c_1a.htm.
[40] American National Election Studies.

importance. But the data shows that humans are social creatures and strongly react to personal connection.

<div align="center">Sense of Duty</div>

A sense of duty is the next variable. I examined this through a question asking voters to consider if someone should not vote if they do not care about the outcome. If someone should vote even if they do not care about the outcome, then they have a high sense of duty. The ANES study question asks if a person who does not care about the outcome should not vote.[41] A negative answer indicates a keen sense of duty to vote. The findings here are not indicative of a substantial link but do suggest a possible weak connection that one could explore with further research. Only one in three of the years with the highest sense of duty were also part of the high turnout group. However, two out of the four years with the lowest sense of duty were in the lowest turnout group.

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[41] American National Election Studies, "Shouldn't Vote If Doesn't Care About Outcome," accessed June 22, 2018, http://www.electionstudies.org//nesguide/toptable/tab5d_1.htm.

This suggests that turnout is low when duty is low, but that effect may not work in reverse. There is not enough data to be decisive, but there is a suggestion of a relationship. This needs further study to establish more concretely. As the chart shows, there is a slight tilt toward a higher sense of duty reflecting a higher turnout. There is enough suggestion when compared with the available literature to justify inclusion in the formula.

Self- Interest

The variable of economic self-interest can stand in for overall self-interest as a measurement of a turnout motivator. This is one of the many forms of self-interest. There are many things to gain through an election; a better income, government contracts, beneficial regulations, and career advancement to name a few. In this case, the ANES study looked at the financial situation of the respondent over the last year.[42]

For respondents who felt their personal financial situation had gotten worse over the last year, there was a noticeable increase in voting as they endeavored to take steps to rectify the situation. These steps can, and often do, include voting. This suggests a likely association with turnout. Two out of the three highest years of self-reported financial problems correspond to the highest group of turnout years. For further corroboration, three of the five lowest years of personal financial strain correspond to the lowest turnout group.

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[42] American National Election Studies, "Respondent's Financial Situation Over the Last Year," accessed June 25, 2018, http://www.electionstudies.org//nesguide/toptable/tab4e_3.htm.
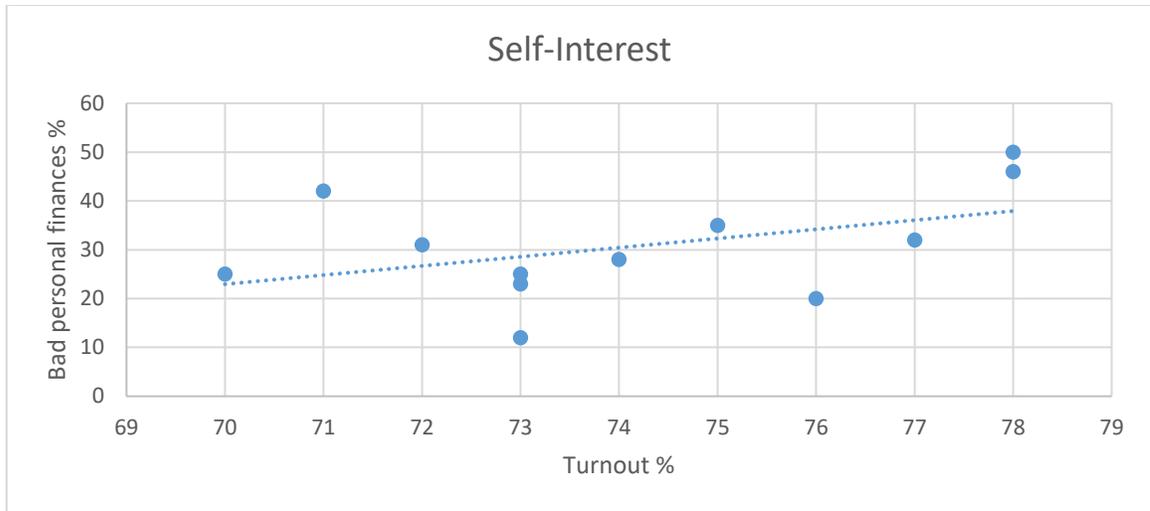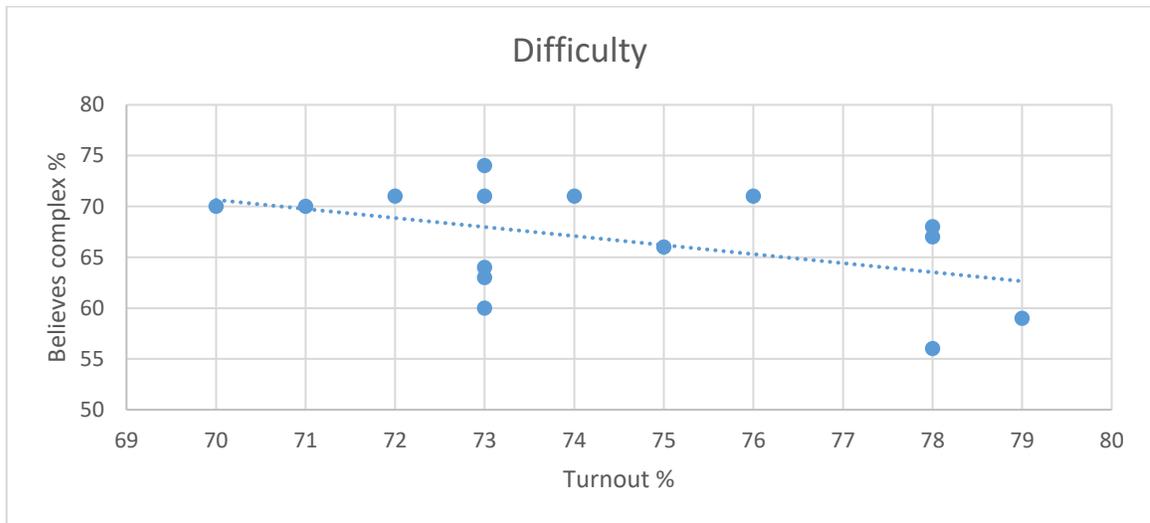
Self-Interest

These results support the inclusion of self-interest as a part of the decision matrix. As the chart shows, the more self-interest there is in the form of economic self-interest, the more voters go to the polls, and vice versa. There appears to be a relationship between self-interest and turnout.

Difficulty in Voting

One measure of difficulty in voting is the perceived complexity of politics. The more complicated politics appears to be, the less likely people are to participate. Respondents in the study were asked if they felt that politics was too complicated for someone like them to understand.[43] Many people who feel politics complicated will still vote, but many will likely be deterred. Indeed, in four of the five years of perceived highest levels of difficulty there was also low turnout. While only two out of the six

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[43] American National Election Studies, "Politics Is Too Complicated," accessed June 22, 2018, http://www.electionstudies.org//nesguide/toptable/tab5b_1.htm.

lowest levels of difficulty found their way into the group of highest turnout, the
relationship of turnout with high levels of difficulty is convincing.

Difficulty

A scatter plot titled "Difficulty" with x-axis "Turnout %" ranging from 69 to 80, and y-axis "Believes complex %" ranging from 50 to 80. Data points show a slight downward trend line from approximately (70, 70) to (79, 62).

It could again be, that this effect only works in one direction. Or it could be that it
works in one direction more than in the other. The plot shows that as difficulty increases,
turnout slightly decreases. All told, there are substantive reasons, based on this dataset, to
include difficulty as a key detriment to turnout in the decision matrix.

<div align="center">Sense of Apathy About the Process or Outcome</div>

Apathy about the process of elections and the outcome of elections would seem to
be a very impactful influence on turnout. Americans may think that their vote does not
count very much in the grand scheme, but they continue to vote. However, the more that
voters feel disillusioned or apathetic about the process, the less they will vote. ANES
developed a scale that rates respondents' affection toward parties.[44] When the scale is at

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[44] American National Election Studies, "Average Feelings Toward Parties," accessed June 22,
2018, http://www.electionstudies.org//nesguide/toptable/tab2b_1.htm.

zero, then there is essentially no difference between the parties. If the scale moves in either direction, then it suggests that there is stronger affection for a party. In other words, there is less apathy. When it is at zero, there is total apathy.
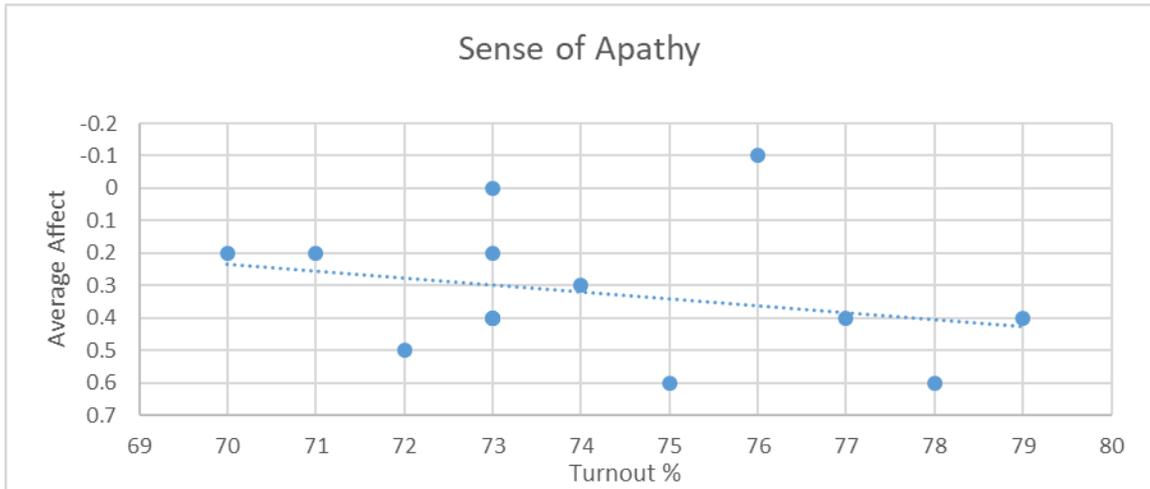

With a likely link, four out of five of the years of highest apathy were in the group of lowest turnout. The scatter plot shows that the more apathy there is (a closer score to zero), the less turnout is likely. The findings on the other side are not as robust. Only one out of three of the years of lowest apathy were in the group of highest turnout. This suggests that high apathy does decrease turnout. This is a key factor in the formulation because apathy can dissuade people from voting even if they have a sense of duty or self-interest in the outcome. Apathy cuts at the roots of a republic.

Strength of Relationship

There may be a connection between these variables and increased turnout. Of the three variables that we would expect to increase turnout, 3 out of 5 elections with the highest variables were also years of highest turnout. In 60% of the elections in which there was the highest levels of the three positive variables, there was also record level

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turnout. There appears to be a relationship between these variables and the years of record turnout. Of the two variables that we would expect to decrease turnout, there were 4 in 5 elections in which these variables were at their highest that were also years of lowest turnout.

Turnout Table
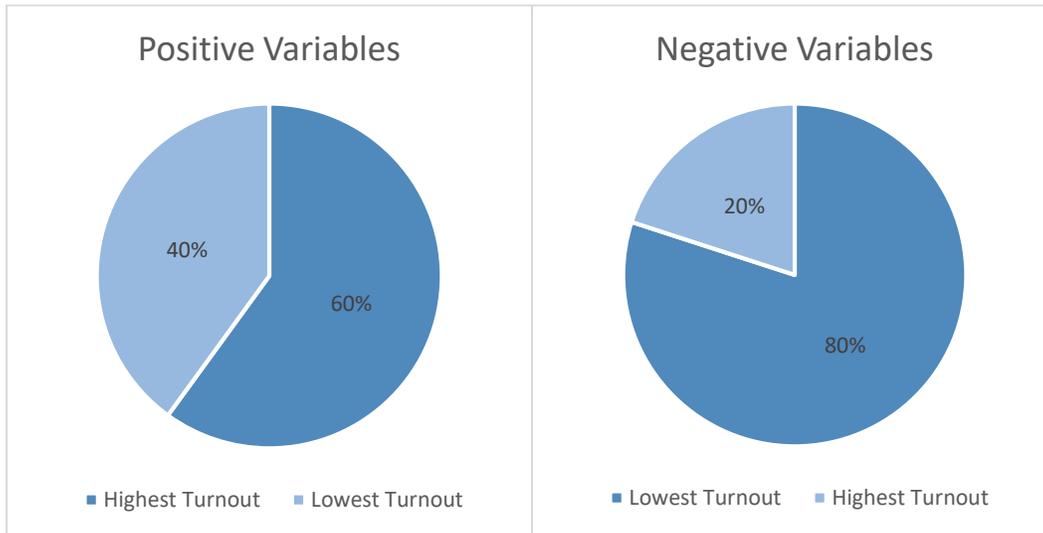
As seen, in 60% of the elections with the variables that should increase turnout, there were also the highest results in turnout. In 80% of the elections where the variables that decrease turnout were highest, turnout was at the lowest levels. These data points lend justification to the further exploration of the proposed formulation of a voter decision matrix. There seems to be a justification that these are key variables to consider when looking to increase turnout. This can be a very helpful tool for campaigns to consider in driving their resource allocation.

The review of ANES data above shows that there does seem to be a link between the variables under consideration and turnout. The ANES data review should only be viewed as introduction to the topic. Further research is required. Having reviewed the

relevant data in the tables above, we are pointed toward a metanalysis that can compare

and contrast the effects of canvassing and social pressure.

CHAPTER THREE: METANALYSIS OF PERSONAL-CONNECTION

Personal-Connection: a More Precise Variable

Through the process of this research, a theme has developed. Personal connection is a powerful motivator in experiments measuring the effectiveness of canvassing and of social pressure. I hypothesize that personal connection is a psychological phenomenon that drives voters to the polls. To test this, I will complete a metanalysis of several recent studies on canvassing and social pressure. This will determine if the motivating factors in voting are similar for social pressure and canvassing. If so, then it will justify the use of personal connection as a variable combining the motivation of canvassing and social pressure.

Personal connection is a social, psychological motivator that drives action. In canvassing it pulls the voter to act. With social pressure, it pushes the voter to act. For context, earlier in this paper, I defined personal connection as a sense of community belonging brought about through human interaction that results in a sense of obligation to participate in societal norms. This sense of belonging in a community that brings with it certain obligations to behave in certain civic ways can go a long way toward explaining the effectiveness of both social pressure and canvassing. It can also help simplify the thought process for campaign coordinators. Another advantage is that it is a positive description rather than carrying negative connotations. Social pressure is a variable which often causes backlash as voters feel manipulated. Therefore I describe social pressure as a push. Voters often do not like the feeling of pressure, even if they respond to it. Personal connection provides a more positive experience.

Social Pressure

I will examine three studies on social pressure to determine the key variables that drive turnout due to this factor. There are three basic categories that describe social pressure that come out of the literature. They are social standard, social consequences, and social accountability. I will exam three studies to help determine any variables that point to a broader understanding.

One study specifically seeks to determine if social pressure, which worked well in local, low salience elections, could be generalizable to larger, high salience elections. The authors presented experimental evidence from 1.96 million voters in 17 states. Their social pressure test raised voter turnout by 0.7 points or 2.2% across the spectrum. They concluded that the effects of social pressure are generalizable across high or low salience elections.[45]

For the purpose of this paper, the important part of their research is how they define the characteristics of social pressure; social standard, consequence, and accountability. In this study they describe the social standard as a social norm born of civic duty. The study describes social consequences in terms of social desirability. The consequences of behaving a certain way in society carry with them certain desirable or undesirable outcomes. Accountability works in the monitoring of a voter's actions. The letters informing voters that their voting record is public record brings awareness of the

[45] Alan S. Gerber et al., "The Generalizability of Social Pressure Effects on Turnout Across High-Salience Electoral Contexts: Field Experimental Evidence From 1.96 Million Citizens in 17 States," *American Politics Research* 45, no. 4 (July 1, 2017): 533–59, https://doi.org/10.1177/1532673X16686556.

monitoring of social behavior.[46] In sum, the study describes the three broad categories

that make social pressure work.

The social rewards and sanctions associated with voting based on an analysis of

social pressure have been examined extensively.[47] In setting the social standard, these

authors describe a social norm. They also discuss voters as social creatures that desire to

conform to their community. Their research into social consequences outlines the social

reward and sanction of voting. Through these rewards and sanctions, society views voters

favorably or unfavorably. However, the reason that this works is because of visibility.

Social convention only works if society is aware of the action. The reason that the letters

to voters are so effective is that they raise the visibility of actions, which changes

behavior.[48] Thus again, all three aspects are present in this study; a standard,

consequence, and accountability.

Another study seeks to determine if findings from recent studies on social

pressure are inclusive of not only low salience, but also high salience, hotly contested

elections.[49] The conclusion of the study is that the effect is less than in a low salience

election, but still very sizable, thus the social pressure seems to affect all levels of

elections to some degree. The study describes prescriptive norms and civic duty as social

standards of conduct. It describes shame as a key motivator of social pressure. It also

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[46] Gerber et al.

[47] Alan S. Gerber et al., "Why People Vote: Estimating the Social Returns to Voting," *British Journal of Political Science; Cambridge* 46, no. 2 (April 2016): 241–64, https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.liberty.edu/10.1017/S0007123414000271.

[48] Gerber et al.

[49] Gerber et al.

explains the importance of public accountability to gain the effect of social pressure.[50]

Once again, all three descriptions of social pressure are present. The following table

shows how each study discusses the three issues.

Social Pressure Table

Social Pressure	Study One[51]	Study Two[52]	Study Three[53]
Standard	Social norm, civic duty	Social norm, conformity	Prescriptive norm, civic duty
Consequence	Social desirability	Social reward and sanction	Shame
Accountability	Monitoring	Visibility	Public accountability

The table shows the three themes that emerge from studies on social pressure.

Having a social standard, consequence, and accountability seem to be key to making

social pressure work. We can then turn to canvassing to determine if there are similar

themes.

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[50] Rogers et al., "Social Pressure and Voting."
[51] Gerber et al., "The Generalizability of Social Pressure Effects on Turnout Across High-Salience Electoral Contexts."
[52] Gerber et al., "Why People Vote."
[53] Rogers et al., "Social Pressure and Voting."

Canvassing

If the variables that drive voter behavior in canvassing are similar to those of social pressure, then we can synthesize the results by identifying personal connection as the driving factor of both social pressure and canvassing. We could view the first as a push and the second as a pull toward action. There are three basic descriptions about why canvassing is effective. Personal canvassing offers value to the voter in terms of social desirability, social connection, and an effective reminder to act.

The first review of canvassing will focus on the effect of a candidate rather than volunteers in a local election doing the door knocking. The study under consideration examines both the persuasion effect and the turnout effect in this experiment. It finds that the persuasion effect is dramatic, but that the turnout among likely voters did not change.[54] There were many explanations for this surprising finding. The important thing for our study is that it discussed what aspects of canvassing work to impact voters.

A key question on this topic is: Does canvassing prove effective because it allows more time for policy discussion or does it simply create personal connection? The conclusion of this study is that it is effective because of costly signaling that communicates to the voter the kind of leader and person the candidate is. This is the value offered to the voter; a quality person and candidate that they can relate to and trust.

Candidate canvassing had no effect on turnout for likely voters, but substantially increased support levels regardless of message delivered. This means that personal

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[54] Barton, Castillo, and Petrie, "What Persuades Voters?"

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connection, not policy position, activated voters. Finally, there is a practical reminder. The authors term it a recognition heuristic that informs voters of what they should do. While turnout did not increase in this study, it is helpful in determining key factors of the effectiveness of canvassing.[55]

Next, we analyze a study on door-to-door canvassing in six local elections. This study concludes that non-partisan canvassing has dramatic positive effects on turnout. For every 12 interactions, one more person votes who would not otherwise have done so.[56] The key for these results is personal connection. Canvassing is more effective than mail or phone calls because it is more personal. Thus, the value offered voters is personal connection. The social connection is present in the face-to-face nature of the interaction. The study identifies the need for face-to-face interaction repeatedly. Finally, the respondent sometimes receives a message through a family member. This helpful reminder was effective even when the respondent was not home.[57] Once again, all three aspects associated with the effectiveness of canvassing were present.

Finally, we must compare the effect of door-to-door canvassing by someone in the respondent's community versus outside their community. Local canvassers have a higher turnout effect even in a historically low turnout community.[58] This shows the essential personal nature of canvassing that makes it effective. Those of the same community exercise greater influence over each other. Community solidarity is thus an

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[55] Barton, Castillo, and Petrie.
[56] Green, Gerber, and Nickerson, "Getting Out the Vote in Local Elections."
[57] Green, Gerber, and Nickerson.
[58] Betsy Sinclair, Margaret McConnell, and Melissa R. Michelson, "Local Canvassing: The Efficacy of Grassroots Voter Mobilization.," *Political Communication* 30, no. 1 (January 2013): 42–57.

offer of value through this non-partisan effort. The collective action that takes place in this case is the social action of a local community, not of an outside force acting on the community. The reminder to act goes beyond the immediate respondent. The social networks of the respondent were also active through the reminder, thus creating ripple effects of turnout through local community involvement. Social networks and community play a key role in turnout.[59]

The following table summarizes how each study explains the meaning of the effect of canvassing. Each one breaks down into three broad categories: received value, sense of social connection, and a reminder.

Canvassing Table

Canvassing	*Study One[60]*	*Study Two[61]*	*Study Three[62]*
Value	Costly signaling of quality	Non-partisan appeal for civic duty	Community solidarity
Social connection	Personal connection	Face-to-face is key	Local community
Reminder	Recognition heuristic	Household reminder	Social networks

[59] Sinclair, McConnell, and Michelson.
[60] Barton, Castillo, and Petrie, "What Persuades Voters?"
[61] Green, Gerber, and Nickerson, "Getting Out the Vote in Local Elections."
[62] Sinclair, McConnell, and Michelson, "Local Canvassing: The Efficacy of Grassroots Voter Mobilization."

Three themes emerge from studies on canvassing as to why voters act. They receive value, they sense a social connection, and they have a practical reminder. These three tend to be present in studies on the effectiveness of canvassing. It is a logical progression of voter decision making. We can now compare similarities and disparities of the two processes. This will help determine if the evidence justifies including personal connection as a variable in the voter decision matrix.

Results of Metanalysis of Six Studies

Both social pressure and canvassing make voting much more personal than other forms of GOTV activities. They also connect the respondent to their community much more than other strategies. We can now more clearly see the similarities of the two activities by comparing them to my definition of personal connection as seen in the following table.

Personal Connection Table Two

Personal Connection	Social Pressure – A Push	Canvasing – A Pull
Social Motivation	Social Standard	Social Value
Sense of Community	Social Consequence	Social Connection
Sense of Obligation	Accountability	Reminder

Personal connection does effectively synthesize the motivations of social pressure and canvassing. Both have a social motivation. One is a push to enforce a social standard, the other a pull to offer a social value. Both involve a sense of community. On the one hand is the push of the consequences of either social reward or shame, on the other is the pull of social connection. Both result in a sense of obligation. There is the push of accountability or the pull of a reminder through the social network. Both the push and the pull are effective at increasing turnout.

By synthesizing both into one variable for the voter decision matrix, it allows us to dig down to the root of the motivation driving voter behavior. In this case, it is the desire for personal connection. The metanalysis suggests enough relationship between the variables to justify the inclusion of personal connection as the motivating factor for both social pressure and canvassing. This also gives rise to further need for research to explore the extent to which personal connection is a good variable for voter research.

Based on the review of the relevant literature and ANES data, I draw the conclusion that further research into my proposals is justified. There seems to be enough indication that the proposed variables and formulation of a voter matrix are reliable measurements that further research should be conducted. Finally, we can review the conclusions.

CHAPTER FOUR: CONCLUSIONS

The most important contributions of this paper are a modified voter decision matrix for turnout and the emphasis on personal connection as a summation of the effect of social pressure and canvassing. The importance of a decision matrix enlightens our understanding of voter thinking and gives a practical tool that is useful to help campaigns allocate resources. Personal connection gives a key test that campaigns can use to determine effective strategies.

The Power of Personal Connection

Personal connection could prove to be the next crucial factor that campaigns focus on to endeavor to bring up their vote share. The definition I provided for personal connection is a sense of community belonging brought about through human interaction that results in a sense of obligation to participate in societal norms. In this study I found that there were similarities in the descriptions of the characteristics of canvassing and social pressure. Personal connection seems to be a good variable to summarize these studies.

Social pressure is a push toward personal connection. It identifies a social norm, holds the voter accountable to it, and makes clear the consequences of conformity or non-conformity. Canvassing has the effect of pulling the voter toward personal connection through offering a valuable connection with an effective reminder to act. Both tools tap into the same human need for personal connection. This shows that voting is a social behavior, not merely a personal decision.

Turnout Matrix

It is important to have a developed theoretical model for voter turnout and decision matrix. A key contribution of the paper is a modified formula. The proposed voter turnout formula is as follows: likelihood of voting = personal connection + sense of duty + self-interest – difficulty in voting – sense of apathy about the process or outcome. The factors of duty, self interest and difficulty are well-documented in the literature.[63] Apathy better helps identify the pull to not participate when the voter feels disillusionment with the process or does not think that their desired outcome is possible. They may have a high self interest score, but if they feel that their choice will surely lose, then they will also have a high apathy score, thus negating their drive to vote.

The most important modification of the decision matrix is the addition of personal connection. As discussed above, this factor best synthesizes recent literature on voter turnout. It is also very practical. Campaigns can ask the simple question, "Does this strategy create a personal connection with the voter?" There should also be a push in large campaigns to accomplish mass-personalization. The standard of campaign advertising should shift more toward micro-targeting that makes the voter feel a personal connection with the candidate and campaign. Personal connection through mass-personalization will likely be the wave of future advertising. Small campaigns will have

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[63] Harder and Krosnick, "Why Do People Vote?"

the ability to create personal connection with smaller constituencies. This voter decision matrix can prove very useful at all levels.

Local versus National Elections

Often, but not always, national elections are high salience elections, and local elections are low salience elections. In high salience elections, voters are often much more aware of the issues and candidates involved. Therefore, tools for campaigning may be effective in one setting but not the other. Or a tool may be effective in both high and low salience elections. There is also a significant difference between primary elections, when all the candidates are from one party, and general elections, when party branding is important. These key differences often change voter behavior and campaign strategy.

Personal connection is more effective as a persuasion element in low salience and primary elections.[64] However, personal connection in the form of canvassing has similar effects on turnout for both low and high salience elections.[65] Thus, the effects of personal connection can fairly transpose between diverse types of elections when it comes to turnout, although the persuasive effects are negligible in a high salience, general election.

The voter decision matrix is useful across various levels of elections as well. The motivation of duty and self-interest are present across the spectrum. Apathy and difficulty are both present as well. They play out differently, but still factor in the equation. For instance, difficulty may be higher in a low salience election because information may not

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[64] Barton, Castillo, and Petrie, "What Persuades Voters?"
[65] Gerber et al., "The Generalizability of Social Pressure Effects on Turnout Across High-Salience Electoral Contexts."

be readily available. In other words, the formula stays the same, but variables may be lessor or greater depending on the context.

Further Research

This paper sets forth the basic ideas for how impactful personal connection and a new formula for voter turnout can be. Further research can create hypotheses based on these suggestions to test the accuracy of the predictions. Researchers can conduct studies toward the key variable of personal connection to help define and explore this concept. If experimental evidence is supportive of the conclusions of this paper, it will be very helpful to the furtherance of knowledge on the topic of voter turnout. It should also lead to further research to determine if there are other manifestations of the power of personal connection in driving turnout. This research will further assist campaigns in encouraging voters to participate in our democratic process.

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