

# **If You Mobilize Them, They Will Become Informed**

## **Experimental Evidence that Information Acquisition is Endogenous to Costs and Incentives to Participate**

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**Abstract:** Because non-voters are less politically informed than voters, some propose that increasing voter turnout would reduce the quality of information among the active voting population, damaging electoral outcomes. However, this argument incorrectly assumes information levels are fixed. This paper demonstrates that information is endogenous to participation. Encouraging individuals to vote motivates those individuals to acquire more political information. As such, the proposed tradeoff between increased participation and informed participation is a false dichotomy. The results further suggest that institutions that make voting more costly cause the population to become less informed; whereas institutions that encourage participation not only increase voter turnout – mobilizing electoral participation also motivates citizens to become more politically informed. A field experiment integrates an intensive mobilization treatment into a panel survey conducted before and after a city-wide election. The results suggest that subjects who were mobilized to vote became more informed about the content of the election.

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## Introduction

Electoral participation is a central feature of a representative democracy. There are strong normative reasons to want the active voting population to be both representative of the aggregate population, and sufficiently informed about politics. Because non-voters tend to be less politically informed than voters, there is a concern that increasing participation (and representation) might come at the cost of decreasing the information quality of electoral outcomes. This paper demonstrates that this concern is short-sighted. On the contrary, the data suggests that reducing barriers to participation generates an increase in political information.

Although chronologically, individuals choose whether to become informed before the election takes place, this paper suggests that the decision to become informed is influenced by whether or not an individual expects to participate. An empirical study demonstrates that motivating would-be non-voters to cast ballots in an election also motivates those citizens to invest in information about the election. The results suggest that the feared tradeoff between the desire for strong and representative voter turnout and the desire for a well-informed voting population is a false dichotomy: reducing costs and increasing incentives to participate leads to an increase in both participation *and* political information.

**The Desire for Full and Representative Participation:** Increasing voter turnout is appealing because it adheres to norms from traditional democratic theory, such as the notion that participation is an end in itself and the argument that active public engagement is essential for both the quality and the legitimacy of collective decision-making (Rousseau 1762; Mill 1861; Pateman 1970; Cohen 2002). Low voter turnout is of particular concern when voters are not a representative sample of the full population. Compared to voters, non-voters tend to have lower incomes, lower levels of education, and are more likely to be members of underprivileged groups

(Verba and Nie 1972; Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980; Leighley and Nagler 1992; Brady, Verba, and Schlozman 1995). The disparities between voters and non-voters introduce concerns that disadvantaged groups might not be getting equal representation (Lijphart 1997; Schlozman, Verba, and Brady 1999; Griffin and Newman 2005; Bartels 2009). Unequal representation can threaten both the legitimacy and the stability of democracy.

Concerns regarding low and unequal turnout have prompted policymakers to consider various methods of increasing political participation. The academic literature on mobilization has exploded in recent years, providing hundreds of randomized trials intended to estimate the effects of various strategies for motivating citizens to participate in politics. Strategies for increasing participation can generally be clustered into one of three categories: (1) decreasing costs of participation; (2) increasing incentives for participation; or (3) introducing penalties for non-participation. *Participation costs* can be reduced in several ways, such as easing voter registration requirements, providing transportation to the polls, or introducing options for early voting or vote-by-mail. *Incentives for participation* have been offered by candidates<sup>1</sup>, private companies<sup>2</sup>, and academic researchers (Panagopoulos 2013). Government-provided rewards have also been proposed, such as offering a tax break for validated voters (Hicks 2002), or creating a “voter turnout lottery” (La Raja and Schaffner 2012) such as Proposition 200, a statewide referenda on Arizona’s ballot during the 2006 general election. Mobilization treatments that increase the pride or social benefits received for participation (Gerber, Green, and Larimer 2008) can also be characterized as increasing incentives to participate. The most classic examples of *non-participation penalties* are the sanctions introduced by compulsory voting laws

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<sup>1</sup> <http://earc.berkeley.edu/news/2007/December/GiftForVoting.php>.

<sup>2</sup> <http://blogs.wsj.com/washwire/2008/11/03/starbucks-offers-free-coffee-to-voters-on-election-day/>

in 29 democracies. These penalties can be instrumental in nature (including fines, the loss of social services, or even imprisonment), and can also include intrinsic sanctions – such as feeling guilt or shame for disobeying the law (Birch 2009; Funk 2007). Mobilization experiments have also introduced penalties for non-voting by activating feelings of shame for non-participation (Gerber, Green, and Larimer 2010; Panagopoulos 2010). Collectively, academics and policy-makers have learned much about the different methods of motivating and de-motivating electoral participation. Given the strong concerns regarding non-representative and declining participation, this area of research continues to grow rapidly.

**The Desire for a Well-Informed Voting Population:** Another important topic in electoral democracy is the informedness of the voting population and the quality of electoral outcomes. If the level of political sophistication within a given body is low, the ability for that body of people to elect a good government and hold politicians accountable is diminished.

Theories of information aggregation find that individuals are often capable of making better decisions collectively than they are on their own. Mathematically, increasing the number of votes increases the probability of an optimal outcome, as long as the information quality of participants is sufficiently high (Condorcet 1785). However, adding uninformed or random votes would add noise – or even bias – thereby generating the opposite effect, and decreasing the probability that the most-preferred candidate wins (Jakee and Sun 2006; Saunders 2010). The benefits of information aggregation only occur if contributors are sufficiently informed.

A prominent debate questions whether or not citizens are informed enough to make good electoral choices. On the negative side, scholars emphasize that the masses are less informed than elites, and average citizens often demonstrate unstable responses (e.g. Converse 1962). On the positive side, scholars suggest that citizens with low levels of political information are able to

make good electoral choices due to the availability of cues and heuristics (Popkin 1991; Sniderman, Brody, and Tetlock 1991; Lau and Redlawsk 2001).

**The Proposed Conflict between Information and Participation:** Concerns about the quality of political information connect directly to concerns about electoral participation. It has been repeatedly found that non-voters tend to be less politically interested and informed than voters (Palfrey and Poole 1987; Citrin, Schickler, and Sides 2003). Because of the information gap between voters and non-voters, some have expressed concern that increasing voter turnout would reduce the quality of information among the body of people who vote, reducing the quality of electoral outcomes. Rosema (2007) suggests that if high turnout elections are decided by less informed subsets of the population, low turnout might be a “blessing in disguise”.

Policies aimed at increasing participation are often challenged on these grounds. For example, multiple scholars have argued that mandatory voting leads to a decrease in the electoral competence of the active voting population (Selb and Lachat 2009; Jakee and Sun 2006; Saunders 2010). The concern that increasing voter turnout will hurt the information quality of political outcomes has also been expressed in the mass media and within legislative debates. For example, when the National Voter Registration Act (commonly known as “motor voter”) was debated, concerns about the effect of the legislation on voter competence were raised in debates on the floor of the House of Representatives and also expressed in widely circulated editorials.<sup>3</sup>

Higher turnout is appealing because it decreases disparities between the voting and non-voting populations, and is thought to increase representation. However, incentivizing uninformed citizens to join the active voting population could generate negative implications. The potential

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<sup>3</sup> For examples, see: Will, George F. *Voting Blocks*, The Washington Post, September 5<sup>th</sup>, 1991, Page A21; and The Congressional Record, June 16<sup>th</sup>, 1992.

conflict between the desire for increased participation and the desire for an informed voting population has implications regarding the quality of government and the stability of democracy.

**Overview:** This paper explores the relationship between the costs and incentives associated with the act of participation and the decision of whether to invest in political information and informed voting. Admittedly, compelling uninformed individuals to cast random votes would not increase representation or improve electoral outcomes. However, the claim that increasing participation would increase the frequency of uninformed voting fails to account for the possibility that information acquisition is endogenous to participation.<sup>4</sup> This paper argues that, *ceteris paribus*, decreasing costs and increasing incentives for participation will not only increase voter turnout: decreasing costs and increasing incentives for participation will also increase incentives for individuals to invest in political information and informed voting. As such, the proposed tradeoff between representative participation and informed participation is short-sighted; increasing participation will also increase political information.

This paper presents the results from a field experiment designed to test the hypothesis that decreasing costs and increasing incentives for participation in an electoral setting will incentivize actors to become more informed about the election. A field experiment integrates an intensive mobilization treatment within a panel survey conducted before and after the 2011 San Francisco Municipal Election. The experimental treatment generates an exogenous shock in incentives to participate, improving the ability to make valid causal inferences regarding the downstream effects of exogenously-driven participation. An analysis of post-election data provides compelling evidence that information acquisition is endogenous to participation costs.

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<sup>4</sup> Additionally, many institutions which compel participation do not require citizens to mark valid votes, thus enabling actors to abstain in contests for which they feel ill-informed.

In summary, subjects who were exposed to the mobilization treatment not only voted more often, but also became more informed about the content of that election.

Section 1 describes the theory motivating the hypothesis. Section 2 reviews previous empirical work, and demonstrates the need for further study. Section 3 describes the experimental research design. Section 4 presents the effect of the treatment on turnout. Section 5 describes the methods used to assess the effects of the mobilization treatment on information, and Section 6 presents the estimated effects of mobilization on political information.

### **Section 1: Theory – Information is Endogenous to Participation**

From a chronological standpoint, an actor decides whether or not to become informed before an election takes place. Individuals with higher levels of political information are more likely to participate in politics (e.g. Lassen 2005, Larcinese 2007; Prior 2007). Although information acquisition occurs first, information is not fixed. Instead, the decision to become informed is endogenous to the costs and incentives to participate. Decreasing costs (or increasing incentives) to participate will also motivate investment in political information and informed voting.

The intuition behind this theoretical argument is as follows: Informed participation provides some marginal benefit, both because casting a vote for one's preferred alternative has a positive (non-zero) effect on the probability of an optimal outcome, and because casting an informed vote for a preferred candidate can provide expressive benefits which are independent of the electoral outcome (Schuessler 2000). However, in order to cast a vote for one's preferred alternative (and reap these benefits), an actor must invest in both information (to correctly identify the preferred alternative) and participation (to cast a vote for this alternative). An actor evaluates whether the combined cost of information and participation is outweighed by the

expected benefit of informed participation. If the cost of participation decreases, the combined cost of information and participation also decreases, thereby increasing the probability that the actor will find informed participation to be a worthwhile investment. Therefore, decreasing participation costs leads to more information acquisition and informed voting. Similarly, increasing participation incentives or non-participation penalties causes some or all of the cost of participation to become a sunk cost, reducing the considered cost of participation, and thereby also reducing the considered cost of informed participation. As the considered cost of participation decreases, the maximum cost of information that warrants investment in informed participation increases, increasing the likelihood that an actor will invest in informed voting.

## **Section 2: Previous Empirical Studies**

Previous studies have estimated the relationship between participation and information in different ways. One set of studies (e.g. Citrin, Schickler, and Sides 2003; Rosema 2007) uses survey data to estimate the characteristics of voters and non-voters, and then simulates voter characteristics and electoral outcomes under situations where non-voters become active voters (or vice versa). Another method (e.g. Hooghe and Pelleriaux 1998; Selb and Lachat 2009) uses survey responses indicating self-identified hypothetical behavior to estimate and compare counterfactual voting and non-voting populations under alternate electoral rules. The overall conclusion from both sets of studies is that increasing voter turnout would decrease the average quality of information and voter competence among the active voting population. However, both of these methods treat information levels as fixed, assuming that an actor's level of information would be the same if the actor voted as it would be if the actor did not vote. Assuming that

uninformed non-voters would remain uninformed if they were mobilized to vote is problematic because it neglects to allow for information acquisition to be endogenous to participation.

Another set of studies (Gordon and Segura 1997; Bilodeau and Blais 2005; Birch 2009) compare information levels of respondents in voluntary vote (VV) and compulsory vote (CV) areas. However, mandatory voting rules were not randomly assigned in any of these cases. Endogeneity of institutional selection introduces concerns regarding baseline bias: areas with higher levels of political information might be more likely to pass voting requirements. Furthermore, the selection of institutions can be driven by strategic and cultural concerns.

The ideal case would be one that allows information acquisition to respond to randomized variations in costs and incentives to participate. Loewen, Milner, and Hicks (2008) executed a field experiment intended to estimate such an effect. The experimenters surveyed 121 university students at two points in time: immediately after the 2007 Quebec Provincial election was announced, and in the final five days of the campaign. The control group was told they would be paid \$25 (Canadian) for their participation, but the treatment group was told they would only be paid \$25 if they also voted in the election. The authors intended for this treatment to approximate the financial disincentive for non-participation often introduced by compulsory voting. Actual voter turnout records were verified, and the authors compared the post-campaign survey responses of the control and treatment groups. They found no evidence that the treatment increased political knowledge or discussion, but found a small increase in attention to news among subjects who said they already intended to vote before the treatment.

Loewen et al.'s design was clever and the experiment was well implemented. However, the lack of significant results should not be seen as conclusive because the study lacked a critical level of statistical power. The level of voter turnout in the baseline group was high (77.8%) and

the treatment only increased voter turnout by 4 percentage points, causing the analysis to yield imprecise estimates. Turnout has an upper bound of 100%. Implementing a strong mobilization treatment in an election with low baseline turnout would enable a stronger turnout effect, thereby enabling more precise estimates regarding the downstream effects of mobilized turnout.

Section 3 presents the design for a new field experiment, which improves upon Loewen et al's original experiment. The goal of the design is to incentivize participation among a random treatment population, and then estimate the effects of mobilization on information acquisition.

### **Section 3: Experimental Design**

**Overview:** The experimental design consisted of an intensive mobilization treatment integrated into a panel survey conducted before and after the November 8<sup>th</sup>, 2011 San Francisco Municipal Election. The mobilization treatment reduced the costs of registration and voting, and additionally offered citizens a financial incentive to vote.<sup>5</sup>

**Case Selection – San Francisco Municipal Election:** In the November 2011 Municipal Election, the citizens of San Francisco voted on eight ballot referenda, and elected three different city-level offices: the Mayor, the Sheriff, and the District Attorney. All three contests were non-partisan, and were elected using ranked choice voting (RCV). This election was an ideal case in which to apply the experimental design for several reasons. First, a municipal election was likely to have lower voter turnout than a higher level election, which enables greater opportunities for increasing participation. Second, the combination of a local-level contest, a lack of partisan cues, and a plethora of viable candidates all contributed to making this case an election both where subjects would have incentives to seek information and an election where relevant increases in

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<sup>5</sup> The section below provides a summary of the experimental design. Additional details regarding full experimental protocols can be found in Appendix A.

information would be easier to estimate.<sup>6</sup> Third, the combination of three offices, eight referenda, and an alternative voting system provided opportunities for measuring multiple categories of political knowledge. Fourth, the San Francisco voter history file is available for scholarly research purposes, which was critical for verifying actual voter turnout. Fifth, San Francisco has remarkably progressive voter turnout laws, which maximized the ability for the mobilization treatment to reduce the costs of participation. And lastly, the 2011 San Francisco Municipal Election was a case where it was possible to offer incentives for participation. It is illegal to offer money or other material incentives in exchange for voting in all federal elections and within 48 states, but incentivizing participation is not forbidden in local elections in California (see Hasen 2000; Nichter 2008; and CA Election Code Sections 18520-18524).

**Recruitment and Pre-Treatment Survey:** Subjects were recruited through announcements made in classrooms at City College San Francisco and through postings in online job forums. The study was advertised as a money making opportunity, where participants would earn \$25 for filling out two surveys about 6 weeks apart. All 182 subjects completed the first survey in mid-October in person at a private office located in downtown San Francisco.

**Mobilization Treatment:** Half of the sample was randomly assigned to receive an intensive 3-stage mobilization treatment intended to simultaneously decrease costs and increase incentives for casting a ballot in the municipal election.

**Stage 1:** The first stage of the mobilization treatment was delivered in-person immediately after the subject completed the first survey. To reduce the cost of voting, each subject received a packet prepared from official government sources, including details on how to

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<sup>6</sup> A competitive election increases incentives to become informed. However, in a competitive partisan contest, a subject with low information could use the party cue as a heuristic to make a reasonably-informed vote. A non-partisan competitive election incentivizes individuals to seek out unique types of information which are easier to assess through surveys.

register to vote, verify registration, request and submit a vote-by-mail ballot, where and when to vote early, how the voting system (ranked-choice voting) counts the votes, and how to properly mark a ranked-choice ballot (Appendix B: Stage 1 – Mobilization Handout). Subjects were also offered a voter registration card, so they could register to vote, update their address, or request a vote-by-mail ballot. The researcher offered to return the registration card for the subject.

To incentivize participation, the mobilization treatment also provided each subject with a prepaid \$25 Visa gift card (see Figure 1). In place of a name, the card read “THANK YOU FOR VOTING, SAN FRANCISCO 2011” (Appendix C: Stage 1 – Mobilization: Visa Card). After handing subjects the Visa card and describing it as a “gift for you”, the researcher recited a memorized script that explained the following: (1) The \$25 is already on the card, and the subject can spend it however he or she would like; (2) The card has not been activated yet; (3) The researcher has the activation code; (4) The researcher will activate the card after the upcoming municipal election; (5) However, if for whatever reason, the subject does not cast a ballot in the election, the researcher will cancel the card and “take the money back”; and (6) Whether or not the subject casts a ballot will be verified through the official voter history file (Appendix D: Stage 1 – Mobilization: Visa Verbal Script). The Visa card was intentionally presented as a gift, so that subjects felt like they had extra money already in their possession. Threatening to cancel the card and “take the money back” was intended to capture the feeling of a penalty for not casting a ballot. Characterizing this part of the mobilization treatment as a non-participation penalty was intended to mimic the conditions of compulsory voting, as well as to capitalize on the phenomenon that people respond more to losing money they already have than to prospects of receiving new money (Kahneman and Tversky 1979).

**Stage 2:** The second stage of the mobilization treatment was delivered via e-mail on October 28<sup>th</sup>. An e-mail was sent to all 182 subjects, confirming their participation in the study, and reminding them that the second survey would begin November 9<sup>th</sup>. For the 90 subjects receiving the mobilization treatment, the October 28<sup>th</sup> e-mail also included a reminder about the upcoming election, a reminder about the terms of the \$25 Visa card, and a list of resources intended to make it easier to vote (Appendix E: Stage 2 – E-mail Content).

**Stage 3:** A second e-mail was sent to all 182 subjects on November 7<sup>th</sup>, 2011, reminding them that the second survey would begin in two days. For the 90 subjects receiving the mobilization treatment, this e-mail also included a reminder that the election was “tomorrow”, information about how and where to vote, and a reminder that the \$25 Visa card would be canceled if the subject did not cast a ballot (Appendix F: Stage 3 – E-mail Content).

**Post-Election Survey:** The San Francisco Municipal Election took place on Tuesday November 8<sup>th</sup>, 2011. The post-election survey was conducted online through Qualtrics. An e-mail was sent to all subjects on Wednesday November 9<sup>th</sup>, 2011, including a link to the second survey. Subjects were given one week to finish the survey, and were encouraged to complete the survey within 24 hours, in order to be entered into a lottery for a \$100 bonus. More than 70% of subjects completed the survey within 24 hours.<sup>7</sup> Attrition was very low: 97.8% of subjects (178/182) who completed the first survey also completed the second survey.

**Incentives:** All subjects who completed both surveys were paid \$25 for their participation. Subjects in the mobilization treatment received an additional \$25 (through the

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<sup>7</sup> The second survey was conducted online in order to minimize attrition and to enable all subjects to complete the second survey while memory of the election was fresh. Conducting the post-treatment survey online reduced the ability to control the survey environment, and introduced concerns that subjects might “cheat” on the political information questions. An analysis of the average amount of time subjects spent on different types of questions did not indicate irregularities between treatment groups, suggesting cheating was not a concern.

activated Visa card) if they cast a ballot in the election. There was no additional incentive attached to acquiring information or answering information questions correctly.<sup>8</sup>

**Verifying Voter Turnout:** After the election, each subject's voter turnout was validated using the official Voter History File. Subjects were matched based on name, date of birth, gender, and both home and mailing addresses.

#### **Section 4. Estimating the Treatment Effect on Voter Turnout**

The mobilization treatment was incredibly successful at increasing voter turnout. Table 1 presents the validated voter turnout rate in each treatment group for all elections over the previous five years. There is no consistent difference in voter turnout in previous elections, suggesting the two groups were comparable before the experimental intervention. Figure 2 displays the validated voter turnout rates across treatment groups during the Municipal Elections in 2007, 2009, and 2011. Baseline turnout was higher in 2011 because it was a competitive election. The results suggest that the mobilization treatment substantially increased voter turnout

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<sup>8</sup> One might express concern that motivating involvement in the study through a monetary payment, as well as adding a financial incentive for participation, might affect the internal and external validity of the experimental design. By recruiting subjects through a monetary incentive, the experimental design might have restricted the subject pool to include only low-income subjects and people who are particularly motivated by money. However, the sample characteristics suggest that respondents were not particularly poor. For example, more than 15% of the sample reported incomes over \$90,000 per year. The sample characteristics presented in Appendix G further demonstrate the diversity of the sample. Moreover, if the sample were particularly motivated by money, the experiment would be an even stronger test of the hypothesis. The financial incentive to cast a ballot did not add a financial incentive to become informed. Motivating money-seeking subjects to invest in information would be a particularly difficult task. Therefore, increases in information would still support the hypothesis.

There is also concern that offering a monetary incentive for casting a ballot might “crowd out” intrinsic motivations for participation (Gneezy and Rustichini 2000; Panagopoulos 2013). Offering a financial reward for voting should not affect incentives to become informed. However, if shifting incentives to participate did reduce intrinsic incentives to invest in information, this spillover would cause the mobilization treatment to *decrease* incentives to invest in information, making the experiment an even stronger test of the hypothesis.

in 2011: compared to the baseline group, which voted 46.1% of the time, 85.4% of mobilized subjects cast ballots in the 2011 election, a 39.3 percentage point (or 85.2%) increase. With the exception of one study (see Bedolla and Michelson 2013, p. 106), this effect is the largest increase in voter turnout ever documented from a randomized mobilization treatment.

## **Section 5. Methods for Analysis**

Nine estimates of political information are generated, as described below. For each estimate of political information, the effect of the mobilization treatment is estimated by calculating the difference between the average information scores in the baseline and mobilization treatment groups. In order to consider this difference as the effect of the mobilization treatment, two assumptions are required. The first assumption (Stable Unit Treatment Value Assumption, or SUTVA) requires that a person's potential outcomes under all treatment assignments are unaffected by the treatment assignments given to all other actors. This experimental design might have violated SUTVA because the recruitment method potentially drew subjects from within common networks. However, the frequency of such interactions should be minimal. Moreover, any spillover effects would increase the information and participation within the baseline category, suggesting any bias introduced by SUTVA violations would favor the null hypothesis.

The second assumption requires that the assignment to the mobilization treatment is randomly assigned, which it was. Additionally, demonstrating balance across the treatment groups increases confidence in the accuracy of the estimated treatment effects. Information gathered in the pre-treatment survey verifies that subjects between treatment groups were balanced on gender (52% female), age (average = 37), race (57% white, 21% Asian, 10% black, 10% Hispanic), ideological orientation (3.6 on an 11-point scale), strength of partisan identity

(1.7 on a 3-point scale), education (39.3% high school graduates, 9% with associate degree, 36% with college degree, 15.7% with advanced degree), voter registration status (78% registered pre-treatment), political interest, and previous participation history. A fuller presentation of sample characteristics across treatment groups can be found in Appendix G. Given random assignment, any imbalance between groups is due to chance.

**Dependent Variables:** Survey questions were generated to estimate both subjective and objective evaluations of individual-level political information, as well as the existence and intensity of individual political preferences. Nine dependent variables are calculated from responses to six categories of questions from the second survey, which occurred after the treatment and after the election. A description of each dependent variable is provided below. Exact question wording and coding procedures for all variables is detailed in Appendix H.

**1A and 1B. Accuracy of Left-Right Candidate Evaluations:** The 2011 San Francisco Municipal Election presented a unique challenge to voters. Information cues and shortcuts which are often available in national competitions were not present. The races were non-partisan, so there were no party cues on the ballot to guide uninformed voters. Given that the incumbent Mayor was appointed (not popularly elected) less than a year before, many of the traditional sources of incumbency advantage were also lacking. There were multiple candidates in each contest: 4 for Sheriff; 5 for District Attorney; and 16 for Mayor. Furthermore, the Mayoral election was particularly competitive: the preferential ballots had to be redistributed in 12 separate rounds of vote counting before Lee was declared the majority winner. Additionally, the ranked choice voting system asked citizens to not only choose their favorite candidate, but also to indicate their second and third choices. The election provided a rigorous test of information acquisition. Voters had few cues to follow, many candidates to choose from, and were expected

to form multiple preferences. Without a political party as a reference, a candidate's left-right ideology is arguably the best single tool for evaluating candidate-based contests.

The first two dependent variables estimate how accurately subjects were able to identify the ideological positions of the 25 candidates across the three contests. Identifying the left-right positions of political actors is a well-established estimate of political information (Gordon and Segura 1999). A series of expert surveys were distributed in order to estimate the actual ideological position of each candidate, in a similar manner as the expert surveys produced by Hubert and Inglehart (1995) and Laver and Hunt (1992). Potential experts were identified based on their knowledge and experience with local politics in San Francisco. Each expert was asked to evaluate the left-right position of as many candidates as they felt was appropriate, and could select "don't know" for the others. In total, evaluations were gathered from ten experts, including academics, reporters, campaign consultants, and politically active community members.

Subjects were asked to identify the ideological position of each candidate. The distance between the position given by each subject and the average position provided by the expert evaluations is calculated for each candidate, and these distances are then combined into an index intended to measure the overall accuracy of each subject's knowledge regarding the candidate's ideological positions. The index is inverted so that higher numbers mean more accurate evaluations (*IA: Accuracy of Left-Right Candidate Evaluations – Expert Average*).

Out of concern that mass populations might anchor their evaluations on a different scale from political elites, a second variable (*IB: Accuracy of Left-Right Candidate Evaluations – Survey Average*) estimates the accuracy of subject's ideological placements in comparison to the average position given to each candidate from the survey population.

**2. Knowledge of Ranked Choice Voting Rule:** The next dependent variable capitalizes on San Francisco's use of ranked-choice voting (RCV) to elect its local offices. The survey asked subjects to identify how many candidates a voter is able to rank in each of the three candidate-based contests on the ballot. A variable is constructed to represent the percent of contests in which a subject correctly identified the answer three.

**3. Watched Candidate Debates:** The survey asked subjects to self-report whether they watched any of the debates between the candidates in each of the three candidate-based contests. Although there are many methods of gathering political information, an increase in the frequency of debate watching is a good indicator of an increase in effort to seek out political information. The variable is constructed to estimate individual-level attention to candidate debates.

**4A and 4B. Developed Preferences Regarding Electoral Contests:** Being able to express political preferences indicates positive engagement with the political campaign. The next set of dependent variables estimate political information by whether or not subjects developed and expressed preferences between the candidates and ballot measures. The variables only evaluate whether preferences were expressed, and do not attempt to judge whether reported preferences are informed or "correct". A variable is generated to represent the percent of referenda for which each subject expressed a preference (*4A: Ballot Preferences Exist*). A similar variable is generated to capture the level of preference development between the candidates in the three electoral contests (*4B: Candidate Preferences Exist*).

**5A and 5B. Self-Assessment of Election Information:** A series of survey questions asked subjects to self-assess their own level of information about the different contests in the election. Two variables are constructed to represent subjects' self-assessments regarding the

referenda (5A: *Self-Assessment: Informed about Referenda*) and the candidate-based campaigns (5B: *Self-Assessment: Informed about Campaigns*).

**6. General Engagement in Politics:** Several survey questions also assessed whether subjects were engaged with politics in other areas beyond the municipal election. Subjects were asked to identify their political interest, attention to politics, how informed they felt about politics, and how often they discussed politics with three groups of people: family, friends, and classmates or co-workers. For each of these six questions, subjects responded separately with regard to local, national, and international politics. All eighteen responses are combined into an index intended to capture overall engagement with politics beyond the municipal election.

**Modeling Decisions:** Nine dependent variables are constructed in order to estimate different categories of political information and engagement. In order to facilitate easy comparisons of the magnitude of the effects, all variables are re-scaled to an identical 0 – 100 index, with higher numbers indicating higher political sophistication. The effect of the mobilization treatment on each of the nine dependent variables is estimated twice. The first analysis compares the raw average scores in the baseline and treatment groups, as recorded in the post-election survey. Given the random treatment assignment, a comparison of the raw averages across groups can be used to estimate the effects of the mobilization treatment. For each dependent variable, the average treatment effect is also estimated in a second model that includes an extensive set of covariate control variables.<sup>9</sup> For seven of the nine dependent variables,

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<sup>9</sup> The control variables are included in order to decrease noise and thereby increase the precision of the estimates (Pocock, Assmann, Enos, and Kasten 2002). Covariate control variables include age, age<sup>2</sup>, gender, race, education, income, previous participation history (including previous voter turnout, and an index of engagement in non-electoral forms of participation), partisan identity, strength of partisanship, number of years at current address, and dummy variables indicating whether the respondent had children, was currently employed part-time or full-time, was currently in school part-time or full-time, and was married.

similar or identical questions were also asked in the pre-treatment survey. In those seven cases, the second model also includes a control for the information score produced by each subject in the pre-treatment survey.<sup>10</sup>

## Section 6. Results

Table 2 displays the estimated effect of the mobilization treatment on each dependent variable. The raw difference between treatment groups is listed in the first column. The difference estimated by the model including the control variables is listed in the second column. Standard errors are in parentheses, and significance thresholds are indicated within each cell. All analyses were run with OLS regression using a 2-tailed significance test, so as not to exclude the possibility of revealing a negative effect. Given the strong theoretical reasons to suspect that the mobilization treatment will *increase* political information, significance thresholds of ( $p \leq 0.10$ ) are interpreted as an indication of a significant treatment effect. All discussion refers to the models including the covariate controls, which are all estimated using robust standard errors.

Overall, the results provide very strong support for the hypothesis that the mobilization treatment motivated subjects to acquire additional information about the content of the election. The mobilization treatment caused subjects to produce significantly more accurate evaluations of candidate ideological positions, with scores increasing by an average of 7.53 points ( $p \leq 0.05$ ) in Model 1A (expert comparison) and 7.22 points ( $p \leq 0.10$ ) in Model 1B (survey sample comparison). Model 2 estimates that the mobilization treatment increased knowledge of ranked-choice voting rules by 11.56 points ( $p \leq 0.10$ ), and Model 3 estimates that the mobilization treatment increased attention to the candidate debates by 9.92 points ( $p \leq 0.05$ ). Models 4A and 4B suggest that the mobilization treatment increased the percent of the referenda in which

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<sup>10</sup> The pre-treatment survey did not estimate self-assessments of campaign information, nor did it estimate whether subjects had developed preferences between the candidates.

subjects expressed preferences by 10.17 points ( $p \leq 0.10$ ), and increased the number of declared preferences regarding the candidate-based contests by 8.57 percentage points ( $p \leq 0.10$ ). Model 5A finds that the mobilization treatment increased self-perceived information about the referenda (+6.37,  $p \leq 0.10$ ), but Model 5B suggests that mobilization did not generate a significant increase in self-perceived information about the candidates.

Model 6 suggests that the mobilization treatment did not affect subjects' engagement with politics outside of the municipal election. These questions were also analyzed to test for trends across sub-categories of engagement, including isolated comparisons of political information, political interest, and frequency of discussing politics. Separate analyses also combined all three types of questions (information, interest, and discussion) at each level of politics, generating separate estimates for the effects of mobilization on engagement with local, national, and international politics. All alternative specifications yielded insignificant effects, and thus they are combined into a single index here, without losing nuances between the results.

Figure 3 displays the predicted effect of the mobilization treatment on six estimates of political information, using data from the models including the covariate controls. The baseline score is generated by simulating an information score for a typical member of the survey sample, and the difference between the information scores across the treatment groups is equivalent to the estimated effect of the mobilization treatment.<sup>11</sup>

**Analysis:** Overall, the results are incredibly supportive of the hypothesis that being mobilized to participate in the 2011 San Francisco election motivated subjects to invest in (or at least to receive) additional political information about the electoral campaign. The mobilization

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<sup>11</sup> Specifically, the baseline score is calculated as the predicted level of information of a 37 year old married female with a college degree, a full-time job, and no children. Average sample scores are used to account for the effects of income, partisanship, ideology, length of current residency, pre-treatment political information score, and previous participation history.

treatment created a significant increase in information for seven of the eight estimates of political information that were directly connected to the election (Models 1A – 5B). In comparison to subjects who did not receive any experimental treatments (the baseline), subjects who received the mobilization treatment were able to more accurately estimate the ideological positions of the 25 candidates (in comparison to both the expert and survey averages), had stronger knowledge about ranked-choice voting rules, watched more of the debates between the candidates, expressed more preferences on the referenda and between the candidates, and were more likely to evaluate themselves as being informed about the referenda. Mobilizing subjects to cast a ballot motivated them to increase their engagement with multiple types of information that were necessary for making a good vote choice in that election. However, being mobilized to vote did not affect overall engagement with politics outside of the context of the election. The analyses provide strong support for the hypothesis that information is endogenous to participation costs.

**Information Among the Active Voting Population:** The previous analyses tested whether mobilization affected the level of information within each treatment group. Another important question asks whether mobilization affected the average level of information within the active voting population – those who cast ballots – within each treatment group.

Critics of high turnout worry that mobilization efforts will add new voters who are less informed than the original voters, thereby damaging the quality of electoral outcomes. Even if new voters increase their information as a part of the mobilization process – as suggested in the previous analysis – these new voters could still be less informed than the original voters who existed before. Therefore, it is possible to increase the average level of information within a

given group (such as the aggregate population) while simultaneously decreasing the average level of information among the active voting population within that same group.<sup>12</sup>

In order to estimate the effect of the mobilization treatment on the level of information among the active voting population, all nine estimates of political information presented in Table 2 are re-evaluated, restricting the sample to compare the post-election level of information among only the validated voters within the baseline and treatment group. None of the analyses suggest that the mobilization treatment decreased the level of information among the active voting population. There are no significant differences between the average information scores among validated voters in the treatment and control groups. When the covariate controls are added to the analysis, the only significant difference suggests that the mobilization treatment *increased* the percent of candidate debates watched by each voter (+ 11.9,  $p \leq 0.10$ ).

## Conclusion

This paper presented the results of a field experiment specifically designed to isolate the effects of varying costs and incentives to participate on the acquisition of political information. The experimental design intentionally combined several mobilization strategies into a single powerful mobilization treatment intended to dramatically increase voter turnout, in order to generate a test case with strong statistical power. The mobilization treatment increased voter turnout by more

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<sup>12</sup> A decrease in the average level of information among the active voting population does not necessarily make the optimal electoral outcome less likely. A new voter can be less informed on average, but still be “informed enough” to identify the vote choice that best matches her preferences. In either case, establishing that mobilization does not decrease the average level of information among the active voting population would alleviate the concern. Concerns regarding the average quality of information should also be weighed against other advantages of increasing participation, such as the potential for increasing the representation of disadvantaged groups.

than 39 percentage points, yielding unique opportunities for estimating the effects of exogenously driven increases in participation.

As a whole, this study provides strong evidence in support of the hypothesis that information levels are endogenous to participation costs. The results suggest that electoral policies that increase incentives for participation – by reducing participation costs and by increasing participation incentives – will also motivate an increase in the types of political information that are necessary for making a good vote choice. As predicted, mobilized subjects demonstrated significantly higher levels of information relating to the eight ballot referenda, the three city-wide candidate competitions, and the alternative voting system used to elect these offices. With treatment effects ranging from 6.3 to 11.5 points on a 100-point scale, the magnitude of these increases are substantively significant. Moreover, given that the mobilization treatment increased participation by increasing instrumental incentives to vote, these effects should be considered a lower bound of what might be expected in response to strategies that increase mobilization through appeals to civic duty or the ability to change electoral outcomes.

Additionally, the data suggest that adding new voters did not decrease the information quality of the voting population. Although the mobilization treatment increased voter turnout by 39 percentage points, it also generated an increase in political information, such that the active voting population was equally informed across the control and treatment groups. Considering theories regarding the advantages of information aggregation (e.g. Condorcet 1785), this additional result suggests that encouraging participation can lead to both a more informed population, and better quality electoral outcomes. The increase in the quality of information aggregation is further complimented by an increase in representation for otherwise under-represented groups, which also results from increases in electoral participation.

Although the mobilization treatment increased election-specific information, it did not produce an increase in engagement with political matters that were unrelated to the election. All increases in information were restricted to issues directly related to the candidates, the referenda, and the voting system used for municipal elections. Although wider effects on political engagement were not produced in this study, continued participation might generate effects that accumulate over time. Future studies can further investigate whether long-term exposure to political mobilization causes an increase in overall political curiosity or engagement.

Overall, the data provides strong support for the hypothesis that decreasing participation costs and increasing participation incentives will lead to an increase in political information. The feared tradeoff between increasing participation and maintaining a high level of political information appears to be a false dichotomy. Not only are increased participation and increased information possible at the same time: one actually encourages the other. The results suggest that institutions that make voting more costly are causing the population to become less informed; whereas institutions that encourage participation not only increase turnout – mobilizing electoral participation also motivates citizens to become more politically informed. These results are relevant to debates regarding electoral institutions that affect costs and incentives to participate – such as voter identification laws, vote-by-mail, automatic registration, and compulsory voting laws. Understanding downstream effects of participation is also relevant when evaluating recent innovations in mobilization strategies, which have begun to experiment with more coercive methods of motivating participation (Gerber, Green, and Larimer 2008; Mann 2010).

This experimental design provides a framework for isolating the downstream effects of varying costs and incentives to participate. It is the hope that this design will be implemented and expanded in future studies, so we can continue to build our understanding of what motivates

citizens to invest in informed participation. The generalizability of the results presented in this paper can be further tested across other populations and other electoral contexts. Furthermore, future studies can vary the mobilization strategies which are included in each treatment, in order to isolate whether different methods of mobilization have heterogeneous effects on information acquisition. For example, does participation resulting from reduced costs of voting have different effects from participation resulting from increased incentives to vote? Further extensions should also consider the robustness of the results across alternative political systems.

Demonstrating that enabling and incentivizing participation causes an increase in information also encourages further study regarding other proposed effects of participation. For example, it has been proposed that participation might affect political trust (Nadeau and Blais 1993; Anderson and LoTempio 2002), efficacy (Finkel 1985; 1987; Madsen 1987; Clarke and Acock 1989; Valentino and Gregorowicz 2009), and future prospects for participation (Green and Shachar 2000; Gastil, Deess, Weiser, and Meade 2008). Previous studies have been limited because of endogeneity: many of the proposed effects of political participation are also among the characteristics which motivate people to participate. By integrating an intensive mobilization treatment within a panel survey, this experimental design provides new opportunities for empirical estimation of the effects of exogenous shifts in the costs and incentives to participate. In addition to enhancing opportunities for further studies on political information, the template of this experimental design can also be applied to estimate other downstream effects of varying costs and incentives to participate.

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**Figure 1. Prepaid \$25 Visa Gift Card**



**Table 1: Validated Voter Turnout, by Election and Treatment Group**

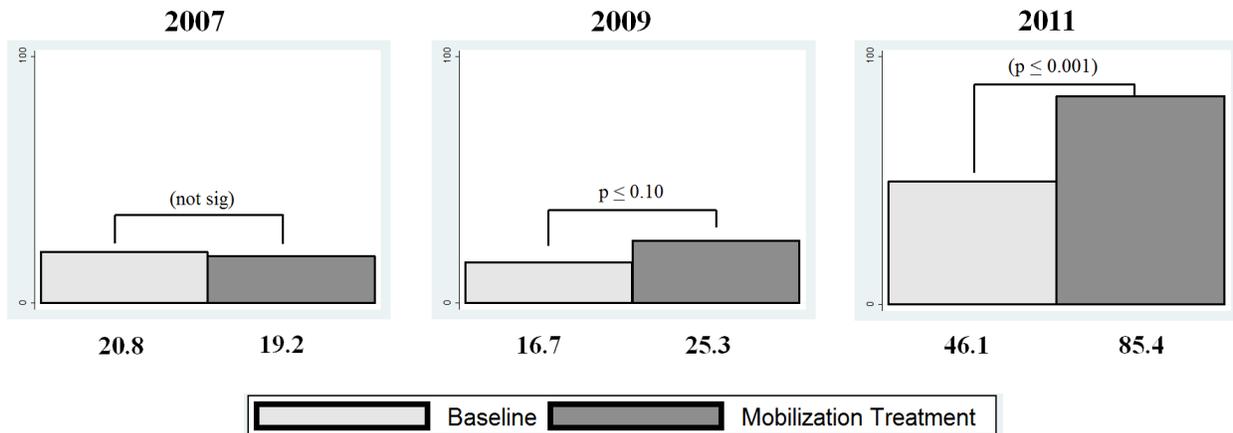
Validated Voter Turnout	Baseline	Mobilization Treatment	Difference
2007 Municipal Election	20.8	19.2	- 1.5
2008 Primary Election	36.6	35.0	- 1.6
2008 General Election	46.3	50.0	+ 3.7
2009 Special Election	26.2	22.9	- 3.3
2009 Municipal Election	16.7	25.3	+ <b>8.6</b> <sup>+</sup>
2010 Primary Election	25.0	28.6	+ 3.6
2010 General Election	44.3	45.2	+ 0.9
2011 Municipal Election	46.1	85.4	+ <b>39.3</b> <sup>**</sup>

**\*\* p ≤ 0.01**

**\* p ≤ 0.05**

**+ p ≤ 0.10**

**Figure 2. Voter Turnout in San Francisco Municipal Elections, by Treatment Group**



**Table 2: Estimated Effects of Mobilization Treatment on Political Sophistication**

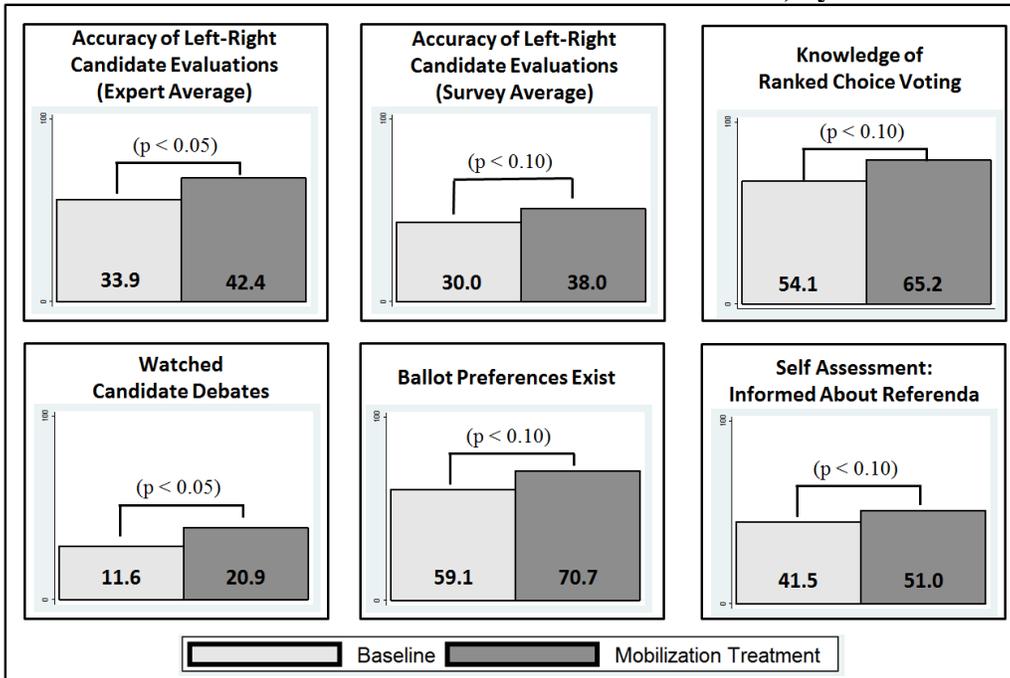
Model	Estimate of Political Sophistication	Pre-Treatment Estimate Control?	Mobilization Treatment Effect	
1A	Accuracy of Left-Right Candidate Evaluations (Expert Average)	Yes	7.80+ (4.60)	7.53* (3.74)
1B	Accuracy of Left-Right Candidate Evaluations (Survey Average)	Yes	7.42+ (4.31)	7.22+ (3.67)
2	Knowledge of Ranked Choice Voting Rule	Yes	10.00 (6.76)	11.56+ (6.22)
3	Watched Candidate Debates	Yes	9.36* (4.11)	9.92* (4.55)
4A	Ballot Preferences Exist	Yes	10.42+ (6.04)	10.17+ (5.59)
4B	Candidate Preferences Exist	No	8.43 (5.33)	8.57+ (4.75)
5A	Self-Assessment: Informed about Referenda	Yes	9.47* (4.06)	6.37+ (3.52)
5B	Self-Assessment: Informed about Campaign	No	4.72 (4.03)	5.81 (4.00)
6	Non-Campaign Political Engagement	Yes	0.91 (2.71)	-1.91 (2.02)
	Controls Included?		No	Yes

\*\* p ≤ 0.01

\* p ≤ 0.05

+ p ≤ 0.10

**Figure 3. Predicted Post-Election Political Information Scores, by Treatment Group**



## Appendix A: Experimental Design

**Overview:** The experimental design consisted of a mobilization treatment integrated into a panel survey conducted before and after the November 8, 2011 San Francisco Municipal Election, during which the citizens of San Francisco elected their Mayor, Sheriff, and District Attorney, and voted on eight ballot propositions. The mobilization treatment reduced the costs of registration and voting, and additionally offered citizens a financial incentive to vote.

**Case Selection: San Francisco Municipal Election:** In the November 2011 Municipal Election, the citizens of San Francisco voted on eight ballot propositions, and elected three different city-level offices: the Mayor, the Sheriff, and the District Attorney. All three contests were non-partisan, and were elected using ranked choice voting (RCV), a preferential voting system.<sup>13</sup>

This election was an ideal case in which to apply the experimental design for several reasons. First, a municipal election was likely to have lower voter turnout than a higher level election, which is key to enabling a test of the hypothesis. Second, the combination of a local-level contest, a lack of partisan cues, and a plethora of viable candidates all contributed to making this case an election both where subjects would have incentives to seek information and an election where I would be able to observe increases in information.<sup>14</sup> Third, San Francisco has remarkably progressive voter turnout laws, which maximized the ability for the mobilization treatment to reduce the costs of participation.<sup>15</sup> Fourth, the combination of three offices elected through an alternative voting system with eight referenda on the ballot provided the researcher with multiple opportunities for measuring different categories of political knowledge. Fifth, the city of San Francisco maintains a well-kept voter history file, and makes this file available for scholarly research purposes. Access to the voter history file was critical for verifying actual voter turnout. And lastly, the 2011 San Francisco Municipal Election was a case where it was possible

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<sup>13</sup> Ranked-choice voting enables voters to indicate up to three ranked preferences in each contest, differentiating between their first choice, second choice, and third choice. If no candidate receives a majority of the first choice votes, the candidate with the fewest first-choice votes is eliminated, and those votes are redistributed to the next choice indicated on the ballots. All the votes are then re-counted, and the process continues until a single candidate has a majority of first-choice votes.

<sup>14</sup> A non-competitive election, on the other hand, would not create strong incentives for subjects to seek out political information. A competitive partisan contest might motivate subjects to invest in making an informed choice, but a subject with little information could easily use the party cue as a heuristic to make a reasonably-informed vote. A competitive election provides incentives to become informed, and a non-partisan election requires individuals to seek out unique types of information, which are easier to observe and compare through survey questions.

<sup>15</sup> For the 2011 Municipal Election, San Francisco allowed registration to occur up until 15 days before the election, any citizen was able to request to vote by mail up until one week before the election, early voting opened at City Hall one month before the election, voters were not required to produce identification at polling stations, there was no minimum residency requirement to register to vote, polling places were close in proximity, and any registered citizen was able to cast a provisional ballot at any polling place in the city. These voting laws enabled the mobilization treatment to greatly reduce the costs of voting by making subjects aware of resources that were already available to them.

to offer incentives for participation. It is illegal to offer money or other material incentives in exchange for voting in all federal elections and within 48 states, but incentivizing participation is not forbidden in local elections in California (see Hasen 2000; Nichter 2008; and CA Election Code Sections 18520-18524).

**Recruitment:** Subjects were recruited through announcements made in classrooms at City College San Francisco (Ocean and Downtown Campuses) and through postings in online job forums, including backpage.org, craigslist.org, and the San Francisco Chronicle's online classified section. The study was advertised as a money making opportunity, where participants would earn \$25 for filling out two surveys about 6 weeks apart from each other.

**Sign-Up:** All potential subjects could view the study website and were directed to an online sign-up form if they wanted to participate. The online sign-up form included a short (2 minute) pre-survey questionnaire. The data from these questions was used to screen subjects for eligibility, as well as to gather other information used to stratify the treatment assignment. The only formal criteria for eligibility in the study were that each participant had to be a United States citizen, at least 18 years old, with no prior felony convictions, and currently residing within the city of San Francisco. These criteria were only required in order to ensure that all participants were eligible to vote in the 2011 San Francisco Municipal Election. All eligible subjects who completed the online sign up form were invited to book an appointment to take the first survey. Every subject was required to take the first survey in person at an office located in downtown San Francisco, easily accessible by car, foot, and multiple methods of public transportation. Subjects were able to book an appointment for any time between 7:30 AM – 8:30 PM during a 14-day consecutive period: October 11<sup>th</sup> – October 24<sup>th</sup>, 2011. Appointments could be booked automatically online through a calendar page, via e-mail, or over the phone.

**Treatment Assignment:** After a subject booked an appointment, data gathered in the pre-survey questionnaire was used to stratify treatment assignment within a randomized block design. Specifically, data from the pre-survey questionnaire was used to generate treatment groups that were balanced with respect to gender, age, race, previous voter registration status, and self-identified political interest and likelihood of voting. Random treatment assignment was intended to split the full sample into groups that were comparable before the treatment was administered. Stratified randomization prevents imbalance between treatment groups, enabling stronger statistical power and increasing opportunities for subgroup analysis (Kernan, Viscoli, Makuch, Brass, and Horwitz 1999). As particular subjects failed to show up for appointments, and others joined the study, the treatment assignments were manually adjusted in order to balance all observable variables recorded during the pre-survey questionnaire. Balance on political interest and likelihood of voting were prioritized first, as these are most likely to affect information acquisition, the outcome of interest. Treatments were also randomized over time, to create balance in the time of day and the closeness of the election. All subjects were assigned to a treatment *before* arriving to take the first survey.

In order to estimate the effects of mobilization in varying information environments, a second test was created. In the second set of treatments, all subjects received an information treatment intended to reduce the cost of neutral information about the candidates and referenda. Half of the subjects in this information treatment sample also received the mobilization treatment. The results from the second set of studies do not contradict or challenge the core results from the primary study. However, the second set of results does not add explanatory power, and so in the interest of space, they are not described fully in the main body of the paper.

A fuller description of the information treatment and supplementary results is provided in Appendix I (Information Treatment).

**Pre-Treatment Survey:** Every subject completed the first survey in person at a private office located in downtown San Francisco between October 11<sup>th</sup> – October 24<sup>th</sup>, 2011. Subjects were instructed to arrive during their selected appointment time, but were accepted at any time throughout the day. The researcher made an effort to follow-up with subjects who missed appointments, both by e-mail and by phone, in order to re-schedule appointments. Subjects were allowed to re-schedule appointments as many times as necessary, within the 14-day period.

Upon arriving at the office, all subjects were registered in an identical manner. Identity and residency were verified through a government-issued photo identification. After also providing proof of San Francisco residency<sup>16</sup>, subjects were escorted to a boardroom down the hall, which included a long table and 12 chairs. Subjects filled out the first survey in silence, and came back to the researcher’s office when they were finished.

**Treatment Delivered:** After subjects completed the first survey, the first stage of the mobilization treatment was delivered in person, in a private office. After the first stage of the treatment was delivered, the subject was instructed that the second survey would be sent via e-mail on November 9<sup>th</sup>, and could be completed online any time that week. The \$25 payment was not provided until a subject completed both surveys. Subjects were contacted by e-mail twice more before the second survey, on October 28<sup>th</sup> to confirm participation in the study, and on November 7<sup>th</sup> to send details about the upcoming second survey. The second and third stages of the treatment were also integrated into these e-mails, as described below.

**Stage 1:** The first stage of the mobilization treatment was delivered in-person immediately after the subject completed the first survey. The first stage consisted of two parts, one designed to subsidize participation costs as much as possible, and the other designed to incentivize participation. To reduce the cost of voting, each subject received a 14-page packet of information prepared from official government sources, including the details on how to register to vote, verify registration, request and submit a vote-by-mail ballot, where and when to vote early, how the voting system (ranked-choice voting) counts the votes, and how to properly mark a ranked-choice ballot (Appendix B: Stage 1 – Mobilization: Handout). Subjects were also offered a voter registration card, so they could register, update their address, or request a vote-by-mail ballot, and the researcher offered to return the registration card for the subject.

To incentivize participation, the mobilization treatment also provided each subject with a prepaid \$25 Visa gift card (see Figure 1). In place of a name, the card read “THANK YOU FOR VOTING, SAN FRANCISCO 2011” (Appendix C: Stage 1 – Mobilization: Visa Card). After handing subjects the Visa card and describing it as a “gift for you”, the researcher recited a

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<sup>16</sup> Proof of residency was established by providing any official government ID listing an address within the city of San Francisco, or by providing an official piece of mail addressed to the subject at an address within San Francisco, such as a utility bill. In cases where a subject failed to bring proof of San Francisco residency to the survey appointment, he or she was still allowed to take the survey that day. All subjects were informed that the compensation for completing the surveys would not be received unless proof of residency was established. Subjects were then able to submit proof of residency at a later time, either via postal mail, in person, or through an e-mail attachment. Reminders were sent to subjects who failed to submit identification. Only one subject from the initial sample failed to provide proof of residency; he was not paid for taking the surveys, and his responses are not included in the analysis.

memorized script that explained the following: (1) The \$25 is already on the card, and the subject can spend it however he or she would like; (2) The card has not been activated yet; (3) I (the researcher) have the activation code; (4) I will activate the card after the upcoming municipal election; (5) However, if for whatever reason, the subject does not cast a ballot in the election, I will cancel the card and “take the money back”; and (6) I will verify whether or not the subject cast a ballot with the official voter turnout record from the Election Office (Appendix D: Stage 1 – Mobilization: Visa Verbal Script).

**Figure 1: Participation Incentive: \$25 Visa Card**



The Visa card was intentionally introduced as a gift, so that subjects felt like they had extra money already in their possession. Threatening to cancel the Visa card and “take the money back” was intended to capture the feeling of a penalty for not casting a ballot. Characterizing this part of the mobilization treatment as a non-participation penalty was intended to mimic the conditions of compulsory voting, as well as to capitalize on the observation that people respond more to concerns of losing money they already have than they do to prospects of receiving new money (Kahneman and Tversky 1979).

By informing subjects that their voter turnout would be validated with official government records, the mobilization treatment also made subjects aware that voter turnout was recorded, and was going to be monitored. Before beginning the first survey, every subject in every treatment group signed an identical copy of a consent form that specified, among other things, that the experimenter could merge the survey data with other information about the subject, “such as your electoral district, your voter registration status, and other information available from the voter history file.” Therefore, subjects in the mobilization baseline were also alerted to the existence of a voter history file, and the fact that their records could be checked.

**Stage 2:** The second stage of the mobilization treatment was delivered via e-mail on October 28<sup>th</sup>. An e-mail was sent to all subjects, confirming their participation in the study, and reminding them that the second survey would begin on November 9<sup>th</sup>. For subjects receiving the mobilization treatment, the October 28<sup>th</sup> e-mail also included a reminder about the upcoming election, a reminder about the terms of the \$25 Visa card, and a list of resources intended to make it easier to vote (Appendix E: Stage 2 – E-mail Content).

**Stage 3:** An e-mail was sent to all subjects on November 7<sup>th</sup>, 2011 – one day before the election. This e-mail was a reminder that the second survey would begin in two days, on November 9<sup>th</sup>, 2011. The November 7<sup>th</sup> e-mail also informed subjects that all participants who completed the second survey within 24 hours of receipt would be entered into a lottery, and one random winner would be selected to receive an additional \$100 bonus. The lottery was intended to motivate subjects to fill out the survey while the election was still fresh in their memory.

For subjects receiving the mobilization treatment, the November 7<sup>th</sup> e-mail also included another reminder that the election was tomorrow, included information about how and where to vote, and included a reminder that the \$25 Visa card would be canceled if the subject did not cast a ballot in the election (Appendix F: Stage 3 – E-mail Content).

**Post-Election Survey:** The San Francisco Municipal Election took place on November 8<sup>th</sup>, 2011. The post-election survey was conducted online through Qualtrics. The second survey was conducted online in order to minimize attrition, and also to enable all subjects to complete the survey soon after the November 8<sup>th</sup> election, while memory of the candidates and issues were still fresh.<sup>17</sup> An e-mail was sent to all subjects on Wednesday November 9<sup>th</sup>, 2011, including a unique personal link to the second survey. Subjects were instructed that they had one week to finish the survey.

Attrition was very low: 97.8% of subjects (178/182) who completed the first survey also completed the second survey. The lottery was quite effective: more than 70% of subjects completed the survey within 24 hours.

**Incentives:** All subjects who completed both surveys were paid \$25 for their participation. Subjects in the mobilization treatment received an additional \$25 (through the activated Visa card) if they cast a ballot in the election. There was no additional incentive attached to acquiring information or answering information questions correctly.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Conducting the post-treatment survey online reduced the ability to control the survey environment, and introduced concerns that subjects might “cheat” on the political information questions. One might worry that subjects who were motivated to cast a ballot by the mobilization treatment might feel guilty or embarrassed about being uninformed, and thus might have stronger incentives to look up answers.

In order to reduce the temptation to look up answers online, before the information questions on the survey began, subjects were shown the following message on the computer screen, and had to wait several seconds before they were able to click on to the next section: “The next questions are intended to assess how much you know about the candidates and issues in the previous election. This is not a test, and you will not receive any reward for correct or incorrect answers. Please answer honestly based on what you actually know. All answers are confidential and will not be linked to your name. Select the answer that best represents your current actual knowledge about each question. Your responses are being timed, so please do not leave the survey to look up answers.”

Every screen on the survey was timed, providing a baseline estimate of how long each subject required to answer questions about political information, as well as about other topics. An analysis of the average time spent on different types of questions across treatment groups did not indicate any irregularities between the treatment and control group that would suggest subjects were cheating.

<sup>18</sup> There is some concern that motivating involvement in the study through a monetary payment, as well as adding a financial incentive for participation, might affect the internal and external validity of the experimental design. By recruiting subjects through a monetary incentive, the experimental design might have restricted the subject pool to include only low-income subjects and people who are particularly motivated by money. If the representativeness of the sample were limited in this way, the ability for the results to provide inferences to a more general population would be limited. However, the sample characteristics suggest that respondents were not particularly poor. For example, more than 15% of the sample reported incomes over \$90,000

**Verifying Voter Turnout:** After the election, actual voter turnout was validated using the confidential version of the Voter History File, acquired directly from the San Francisco Department of Elections. This file was used to validate the actual turnout of all subjects in the study, matching based on name, date of birth, gender, and both home and mailing addresses.

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per year. One can look at an extended presentation of pre-treatment sample characteristics in Appendix G, to further assess the diverse characteristics of the sample. Moreover, if the sample were particularly motivated by money, the experiment would be an even stronger test of the hypothesis. The financial incentive to cast a ballot did not add any financial incentive to become informed. Motivating money-seeking subjects to invest in information would appear to be a particularly difficult task. Therefore, observed increases in information would still support the hypothesis.

There is also concern that offering a monetary incentive for casting a ballot might “crowd out” pre-existing intrinsic motivations for participation (Gneezy and Rustichini 2000; Panagopoulos 2008). If incentivizing participation in this experiment did crowd out instrumental incentives for voting, this process likely also happens when participation is incentivized through typical government policies – such as compulsory voting penalties or voter turnout lotteries. Offering a financial reward for voting should not affect incentives to become informed. However, if shifting incentives to participate did spill over to crowd out intrinsic incentives to invest in information, this spill over would cause the mobilization treatment to decrease incentives to invest in information, thereby making the experimental design an even stronger test of the hypothesis.

## **Appendix B: Stage 1 – Mobilization: Handout**

The information handout included a 14-page packet of information about how to register to vote, how to verify one's registration status, how to update one's registration status, how to locate one's polling location, how to vote early at City Hall, how to register to vote-by-mail, how to submit a vote-by-mail ballot, how to submit a provisional ballot, and how to correctly mark a ranked-choice ballot. You can download a complete copy of this packet here:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B8ncWLLzADEaSURndkx2dV9wdms/edit?usp=sharing>

## Appendix C: Stage 1 – Mobilization: Visa Card

To: THANK YOU FOR VOTING

From: [REDACTED]

Amount: 25.00



Message: THIS \$25 REWARD CARD IS A GIFT FOR YOU. HOWEVER, THE CARD WILL BE CANCELED IF YOU DO NOT CAST A BALLOT IN THE 2011 SAN FRANCISCO MUNICIPAL ELECTION.

### Helpful Tips:

Read the Terms and Conditions on the reverse side to become familiar with the use of your Reward Card. Next, go to [www.wrl.com/cards/activate](http://www.wrl.com/cards/activate) to activate your WRL Visa Reward Card, or call our activation line at 1-877-357-4975.

#### Using your Reward Card:

Although your Reward Card is marked as a "Debit" card, always choose "Credit" at the point of sale.

#### RewardCard use at gas pumps:

Do not swipe your Reward Card at the gas pump. Always present your card to an attendant inside the service station.

#### Reward Card use at restaurants/salons/service locations:

Many service industry merchants will pre-authorize a 20% gratuity when your Reward Card is processed. Your Reward Card may be declined if the Reward Card balance cannot accommodate this additional gratuity.

#### If your Reward Card is declined:

The most common reason for a declined transaction is that the purchase amount exceeds the Reward Card balance. You can check your Reward Card balance at [www.wrl.com](http://www.wrl.com).



A Wolfe.com Company

## **Appendix D: Stage 1 – Mobilization: Visa Verbal Script**

The following script was recited from memory when giving subjects the Visa gift card:

“I have a gift for you. This is a \$25 prepaid Visa gift card. The money is already on the card, and you are free to spend it on whatever you wish. The card has not been activated yet. I have the activation code, and I will activate your card after the upcoming San Francisco Municipal Election. However, if for any reason, you do not submit a ballot in this election, instead of activating your card, I will cancel the card, and I will take the money back. Although who you vote for and who you don’t vote for is always secret, whether or not you submit a ballot is recorded by the San Francisco Election Office. This data is kept in an official Voter History File, which tracks the registration and turnout of everyone in the city. After the election takes place, I will use the official Voter History File to verify whether or not you cast a ballot in the election. Assuming you cast a ballot, your card will be activated. Otherwise, your card will be canceled, and I will take the money back.”

## **Appendix E: Stage 2 – E-mail Content**

### **[FOR ALL SUBJECTS]**

Sent: Friday, October 28<sup>th</sup> 2011

From: [Researcher's Name]

Subject: San Francisco Survey - You Have Completed the First Survey! (details for Survey #2 Included)

To: [Researcher's E-mail Address]

Date: Friday, October 28<sup>th</sup>, 2011

Dear Participant,

Thank you for participating in this research study. You have completed the first survey. The second survey begins on November 9th, 2011.

On Wednesday November 9th, 2011, I will send you an e-mail including a personalized link to a website, where you can fill out the second survey. The second survey must be filled out online, and you can fill it out any time that week, up until November 15th. As soon as you complete the second survey, your payment will be processed, and I will send you a \$25 check immediately via postal mail. You should have your payment within seven days of when you complete the second survey.

### **[FOR SUBJECTS RECEIVING THE MOBILIZATION TREATMENT ONLY]**

Your \$25 prepaid gift card will be activated after the November 8th, 2011 election. However, if you do not cast a ballot in this election for any reason, I will cancel your gift card, and take the money back. I will send you a letter in the mail, as well as a letter by e-mail, informing you whether or not your card has been activated. If you cast a ballot in the election, your card will be active, and you are then free to use that card to buy anything you want.

As I explained before, and as is stated on the handout you were given after the first survey, I will verify your turnout record using the official voter history file. This file is produced by the Election Office, and it records whether or not you submit a ballot in each election. This is the only way to verify whether or not you voted. You do not need to save your ballot stub or call or e-mail to tell me when you vote. This is not necessary, and will not help your card get activated sooner. Your participation will be recorded automatically by the government, and I will use official government records to verify your status

Remember, you can vote in three different ways

1. In person, at your polling place, on November 8th 2011 (Election Day)  
You must have submitted your voter registration on or before October 24th, 2011
2. By mail, using your official vote-by-mail ballot  
You can still request a vote-by-mail ballot, up until Monday November 1st, 2011
3. Early Voting, in-person at City Hall  
You can vote early at City Hall, any day between now and November 8th, 2011.  
Early voting is open on Monday – Friday from 8:00 AM – 5:00 PM, and  
Saturday and Sunday from 10:00 AM – 4:00 PM.

You can watch a short video from the Election Office explaining these options here:  
[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KP44XiQ0Qss&feature=mfu\\_in\\_order&list=UL](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KP44XiQ0Qss&feature=mfu_in_order&list=UL)

If you want to learn more about ranked-choice voting, you can watch either of these videos, which explain how the voting system works:

1. <http://www.sfelections.org/demo/rcvvideo.html>
2. [http://sanfrancisco.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view\\_id=139&clip\\_id=12993](http://sanfrancisco.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view_id=139&clip_id=12993)

**[FOR ALL SUBJECTS]**

Sincerely,

[Researcher's Name and Contact Information]

## Appendix F: Stage 3 – E-mail Content

[FOR ALL SUBJECTS]

Sent: Monday November 7<sup>th</sup> 2011

From: [Researcher's Name and E-mail Address]

Subject: Reminder: Survey #2 Begins Wednesday November 9th, Election Day is Tomorrow (November 8th), and \$100 Bonus!

To: [Researcher's E-mail Address]

Date: Monday, November 7, 2011, 5:48 PM

Dear Participant,

As you remember, you signed up for this research study, where you receive \$25 in exchange for completing two surveys. You already completed the first survey, at my office in downtown San Francisco.

This is a final reminder that the second survey will begin in 2 days, on Wednesday November 9th, 2011. I will send you an e-mail on Wednesday including a link to a website, and you can fill out the survey on that website any time between November 9th - November 15th. You must complete the second survey by November 15th to receive the \$25, and I encourage you to fill it out as early as possible.

**As an added incentive to encourage you to complete the second survey early, if you complete the second survey within 24 hours, you will be eligible for a \$100 bonus.** This \$100 bonus is in addition to the \$25 you will already receive for completing the survey

[FOR SUBJECTS RECEIVING THE MOBILIZATION TREATMENT ONLY]

, as well as the \$25 gift card you received for voting.

[FOR ALL SUBJECTS]

All participants who complete the second survey online within the first 24 hours will be entered in a lottery, and one eligible participant will be randomly selected as the winner. Your odds of winning this lottery depend on how many people finish within the first 24 hours. This bonus will be paid by check and will be sent to the winner along with the \$25 check for taking the survey.

[FOR SUBJECTS RECEIVING THE MOBILIZATION TREATMENT ONLY]

The \$25 check and the \$100 bonus lottery are both in addition to the \$25 gift card you received after you took the first survey.

**Remember, your ballot must be received by the time the polls close tomorrow,  
Tuesday November 8th, 2011.  
Otherwise your gift card will be canceled,  
and I will take the \$25 back.**

If you have not submitted your ballot yet, you can do this in several ways:

1. **Vote In Person at Your Local Election Precinct:** You can go to your polling precinct in the city, and cast a ballot any time between 7:00 AM – 8:00 PM on Tuesday November 8th, 2011. You must be in line by 8:00 PM to vote in person at any precinct. Not sure where your precinct is? You can look it up here: <http://gispubweb.sfgov.org/website/pollingplace/>

2. You can vote in the Election Office at City Hall, any time between 7:00 AM – 8:00 PM. San Francisco City Hall is located at 1 Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett Place. You can drop off your vote-by-mail ballot or pick up a new ballot.

**3. Vote-By-Mail – Important – If you haven't mailed your vote-by-mail ballot yet, don't mail it now! It will not be received in time.**

However, you can still make sure your ballot is received by 8:00 PM on Election Day. You can drop off your vote-by-mail ballot at any of the precinct stations around the city. All precincts will be open from 7:00 AM – 8:00 PM. You can look up the closest station to you on this website: <http://gispubweb.sfgov.org/website/pollingplace/>

You can also drop off your vote-by-mail ballot at City Hall, 1 Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett Place.

Did you lose your original ballot, or make a mistake when marking it? You can still submit a ballot before the election is over! You can request a replacement ballot and submit it provisionally at any polling place in the city, or at City Hall. Once the Election Office confirms that your original vote-by-mail ballot was not received, your provisional ballot will be counted. You can verify that your ballot was counted online here: <http://www.sfelections.org/pv/>

**[FOR ALL SUBJECTS]**

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions. I will send you the second survey on Wednesday, and look forward to receiving the results. As before, all answers are confidential.

Sincerely,  
[Researcher's Name and Contact Information]

## Appendix G: Descriptive Statistics of Sample, by Treatment Group

	Baseline	Mobilization Treatment	Total Sample
Percent Female	52.81 (50.20)	51.14 (50.27)	51.98 (50.10)
Percent White	59.55 (49.36)	53.93 (50.13)	56.74 (49.68)
Percent Asian	19.10 (39.53)	22.47 (41.98)	20.79 (40.69)
Percent Black	8.99 (28.76)	11.24 (31.76)	10.11 (30.23)
Percent Hispanic	6.74 (25.22)	12.36 (33.10)	9.55 (29.47)
Percent Mixed Race	6.74 (25.22)	8.99 (28.76)	7.87 (27.00)
Percent Employed Full Time	32.58 (47.13)	29.21 (45.73)	30.90 (46.34)
Percent Employed Part Time	30.34 (46.23)	22.47 (41.98)	26.40 (44.21)
Percent in School Full Time	<b>16.85</b> (37.64)	<b>28.09*</b> (45.20)	<b>22.47</b> (41.86)
Percent in School Part Time	15.73 (36.61)	16.85 (37.65)	16.29 (37.03)
Percent High School Graduates	35.96 (48.26)	42.70 (49.74)	39.33 (48.99)
Percent Associate Degree	7.87 (27.07)	10.11 (30.32)	8.99 (28.68)
Percent College Degree	38.20 (48.86)	33.71 (47.54)	35.96 (48.12)
Percent Advanced Degree	17.98 (38.62)	13.48 (34.35)	15.73 (36.51)
Percent Married	8.99 (28.76)	8.99 (28.76)	8.99 (28.76)
Percent With Child(ren)	20.22 (40.40)	22.47 (41.98)	21.35 (41.09)
Length of Residency (in years)	7.76 (10.23)	7.44 (9.23)	7.60 (9.72)
Age	36.63 (14.48)	37.27 (15.57)	36.95 (15.00)
Age <sup>2</sup>	1549.08 (1193.97)	1628.64 (1345.32)	1588.86 (1268.93)
Income Category	<b>4.51</b> (3.06)	<b>3.91+</b> (2.99)	<b>4.21</b> (3.03)

Participation Index	19.42 (2.86)	19.24 (2.68)	19.33 (2.77)
Voter Turnout Total: Past 4 Elections	1.09 (1.47)	1.15 (1.47)	1.12 (1.47)
Left-Right Ideology (11-point)	3.48 (2.97)	3.78 (2.34)	3.63 (2.69)
Strength of Partisan Identity (3-point)	1.61 (1.07)	1.72 (1.03)	1.66 (1.05)
Partisan Identity (Democrat – Republican, 7-pt Scale)	2.73 (1.71)	2.73 (1.79)	2.73 (1.75)

## **Appendix H: Question Wording and Coding Procedures for Dependent Variables**

### **1A. Accuracy of Left-Right Candidate Evaluations (Expert Average)**

The survey asked respondents to place all 25 candidates on an 11-point ideology scale, ranging from 0 (Extremely Liberal) to 10 (Extremely Conservative), with 5 (Moderate) in the center. Subjects were also given the option to select “I Don’t Know” rather than being forced to make a guess.

Question Text (Respondent Survey): “All of the candidates below were running for [ Sheriff / District Attorney / Mayor ] in the San Francisco Municipal Election. From what you know about each candidate, please indicate how liberal or conservative you think each candidate is, on a 0 – 10 scale.”

Response categories were labeled as follows: [ 0 = Extremely Liberal; 1; 2; 3; 4; 5 = Moderate; 6; 7; 8; 9; 10 = Extremely Conservative; 99 = “I Don’t Know” ]

This data is used to construct two estimates of political information that are intended to represent how accurately each respondent was able to identify the correct ideological position of the different candidates. This method of measuring information borrows substantially from Gordon and Segura (1997) and is calculated in a multi-step process.

The first step estimates the actual ideological position of each candidate in a similar manner as the expert surveys produced by Hubert and Inglehart (1995) and Laver and Hunt (1992). Ten experts were surveyed about the ideological positions of the 25 candidates across the three contests. Potential experts were identified based on their knowledge and experience with local politics in San Francisco. In total, evaluations were gathered from ten experts, including academics, reporters, campaign consultants, and politically active community members.

Question Text (Expert Survey): “Please evaluate the candidates for [ Sheriff / District Attorney / Mayor ] in the 2011 San Francisco Municipal Election. Indicate how liberal or conservative you think each candidate is, using a 0 – 10 scale, where 0 is “extremely liberal”, 5 is “moderate”, and 10 is “extremely conservative”. If you don’t know enough about a particular candidate to give a good estimate of that candidate’s position, please indicate that you don’t know.”

Response categories were labeled as follows: [ 0 = Extremely Liberal; 1; 2; 3; 4; 5 = Moderate; 6; 7; 8; 9; 10 = Extremely Conservative; 99 = “I Don’t Know” ]

The “actual” position of each candidate is estimated as the average ideological position assigned to that candidate from among the experts who provided an evaluation.

The absolute distance between each respondent’s evaluation and the correct position for each of the 25 candidates is calculated. In some cases, respondents indicated that they did not know the position of a particular candidate. Admitting one does not know is an indication of a lack of information. Dropping these observations from the sample would bias the results to exclude the least informed part of the population. To account for this indicated low level of information, in all cases where a respondent answered “I don’t know” for a particular candidate,

the response is recoded to a value equal to the maximum error made by the respondents who offered a response.

All 25 distance scores are combined into an additive index. The index is inverted and re-scaled to range from 0 – 100, with higher numbers meaning more accurate responses, and therefore a higher level of political information.

### **1A. Accuracy of Left-Right Candidate Evaluations (Survey Average)**

Out of concern that mass populations might anchor their evaluations on a different scale from political elites, a second estimate of the correct position for each party is generated by calculating the average ideological position assigned to each candidate from the survey sample. Using this alternative estimate of the correct position for each candidate, the same methods described above are used to calculate the distance between each respondent's evaluation and the correct position for each of the 25 candidates. These 25 distance scores are combined into an additive index, and the index is inverted and similarly re-scaled to range from 0-100.

### **2. Knowledge of Ranked Choice Voting Rule**

Question Text: "For the previous San Francisco Municipal election on November 8<sup>th</sup>, 2011, indicate how many candidates each voter was able to rank in order of preference for each of the following elected offices: San Francisco [ Mayor / Sheriff / District Attorney ]

Response categories were labeled as follows: [ 0; 1; 2; 3; 4; 5; More than 5; "Don't Know" ]

Each question is coded as a "1" if the subject correctly responded "3", and is coded as a "0" otherwise. The three questions are then added together, producing an index ranging from 0 – 3. This index is then re-scaled from 0 – 100, so that higher numbers mean more correct answers.

### **3. Watched Candidate Debates**

Question Text: "Did you watch any of the debates between the [ Mayoral / Sheriff / District Attorney ] candidates?"

Response categories were labeled as follows: [ 1 = "No, I did not see any of the debates"; 2 = "Yes, I saw one of the debates" ; 3 = "Yes, I saw more than one debate" ; 4 = "I don't know" ]

Responses 1 and 4 are both coded as 0, and responses 2 and 3 are both coded as 1, in order to create a dummy variable to represent whether the respondent reported watching at least one of the debates. The dummy variables for all three elections are combined into an additive index ranging from 0 – 3. This index is then re-scaled from 0 – 100, so that higher numbers mean more debates watched.

#### **4A. Ballot Preferences Exist**

Question Text: “For each proposition, indicate whether you support or oppose the proposed ballot measure. If you don’t have a preference, please select “Don’t Know: [ A: School Bonds / B: Road Repaving and Street Safety Bonds / C: City Pension and Health Care Benefits / D: City Pension Benefits / E: Amending or Repealing Legislative Initiative Ordinances and Declarations of Policy / F: Campaign Consultant Ordinance / G: Sales Tax / H: School District Student Assignment ]”

Response categories were labeled as follows: [ 1 = “Strongly Oppose”; 2 = “Moderately Oppose”; 3 = “Weakly Oppose”; 4 = “Weakly Support”; 5 = “Moderately Support”; 6 = “Strongly Support”; 7 = “Don’t Know” ]

For each referenda question, any response that indicated an opinion (1 – 6) is coded as “1”, and “Don’t Know” is coded as “0”. The dummy variables for all eight referenda are combined into an additive index ranging from 0 – 8. This index is then re-scaled from 0 – 100, so that higher numbers mean more preferences declared.

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#### **4B. Candidate Preferences Exist**

Question Text: “Did you pay enough attention during the San Francisco [ Mayoral / Sheriff / District Attorney ] campaign to determine your preferences between the candidates who were competing?”

Response categories were labeled as follows: [ 1 = “Yes, I did form preferences between the [ Mayoral / Sheriff / District Attorney ] Candidates”; 2 = “I only formed some preferences between the [ Mayoral / Sheriff / District Attorney ] Candidates” ; 3 = “No, I did not form preferences between the [ Mayoral / Sheriff / District Attorney ] Candidates” ]

For each election, response 1 is coded as “2”, response 2 is coded as “1”, and response 3 is coded as “0”. The variables for all three elections are combined into an additive index ranging from 0 – 6. This index is then re-scaled from 0 – 100, so that higher numbers mean more declared preferences between candidates.

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#### **5A. Self-Assessment: Informed about Referenda**

Question Text: “Each of the following were ballot measures proposed during the 2011 San Francisco Municipal Election. For each proposition, indicate how informed you feel about the issue at the current time: [ A: School Bonds / B: Road

Repaving and Street Safety Bonds / C: City Pension and Health Care Benefits / D: City Pension Benefits / E: Amending or Repealing Legislative Initiative Ordinances and Declarations of Policy / F: Campaign Consultant Ordinance / G: Sales Tax / H: School District Student Assignment ]”

Response categories were labeled as follows: [ 1 = “Extremely Uninformed”; 2 = “Moderately Uninformed”; 3 = “Somewhat Uninformed”; 4 = “Somewhat Informed”; 5 = “Moderately Informed”; 6 = “Extremely Informed” ]

For each referenda question, each response is coded from 1 – 6, matching the coding from the original response. The responses for all eight referenda are added together, to create an index ranging from 8 – 48. This index is then re-scaled from 0 – 100, with higher numbers indicating stronger self-reported information.

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### **5B. Self-Assessment: Informed about Campaign**

Question Text: “For each of the three contests in the 2011 San Francisco Municipal Election, indicate how informed you feel about the candidates and issues overall: [Mayoral / Sheriff / District Attorney ] Election”

Response categories were labeled as follows: [ 1 = “Extremely Uninformed”; 2 = “Moderately Uninformed”; 3 = “Somewhat Uninformed”; 4 = “Somewhat Informed”; 5 = “Moderately Informed”; 6 = “Extremely Informed” ]

For each election question, each response is coded from 1 – 6, matching the coding from the original response. The responses for all three elections are added together, to create an index ranging from 3 – 18. This index is then re-scaled from 0 – 100, with higher numbers indicating stronger self-reported information.

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### **6. Non-Campaign Political Engagement**

Question Text: “For each of the following questions, indicate how many days in the past week you did each of the following activities: Discuss [ local politics / national politics / international politics ] with [ family members / friends / co-workers or classmates ]”

Responses were labeled as follows: [ 0; 1; 2; 3; 4; 5; 6; 7 ].

Question Text: “Indicate whether you agree or disagree with each of the following statements: I [ am interested in / pay attention to / am well-informed about ] [ local politics / national politics / international politics ]”

Responses were labeled as follows: [ 1 = “Strongly Disagree” ; 2 = “Disagree”; 3 = “Somewhat Disagree”; 4 = “Neither Agree nor Disagree”; 5 = “Somewhat Agree”; 6 = “Agree”; 7 = “Strongly Agree” ]

The responses from each question were coded from 1 – 7, as originally recorded in the survey, with higher numbers indicating more political engagement. The questions were combined into a series of indexes, which clustered all the questions addressing each level of government (local, national, and international), and which clustered questions addressing each category of assessment of political engagement (discussion, interest, attention, information). A complete index is also created which combines responses to all 54 questions, re-scaled from 0 – 100, with higher numbers indicating increased political engagement.

Given that there were no significant effects on any sub-category, the only result reported in the paper is the analysis regarding the complete combined total. Full results from all models are available upon request.

## Appendix I: Information Treatment

In order to estimate the effects of mobilization across different information environments, a second test was created. In the second set of treatments, all subjects received an information treatment intended to reduce the cost of neutral information about the candidates and referenda. Half of the subjects in this sample also received the mobilization treatment. A 2x2 treatment design assigned all subjects to receive one of the following: an information treatment, a mobilization treatment, both the information and the mobilization treatment, or neither. The mobilization treatment was as described in the core experimental design. The information treatment was also sequential in nature, and consisted of two stages.

The first stage of the information treatment was delivered in-person immediately after the subject completed the first survey. The subject was given a 42-page packet containing selections from the official voter guide, including statements from all candidates from all three races, and a description of each of the eight ballot propositions (Appendix J: Stage 1 – Information: Handout).<sup>19</sup> All materials were gathered from official government sources, in order to minimize any perceived advocacy on behalf of the researcher.

The second stage of the information treatment was delivered via e-mail on October 28<sup>th</sup>. An e-mail was sent to all subjects, confirming their participation in the study, and reminding them that the second survey would begin November 9<sup>th</sup>. For subjects receiving the information treatment, the October 28<sup>th</sup> e-mail also included additional information and resources about the upcoming election, including links to video records of candidate debates, the online official voter guide, a document summarizing the pros and cons of each of the eight ballot measures, and short video recordings from all 25 candidates, and regarding all 8 ballot referenda (Appendix K: Stage 2 – Information: E-mail Supplement). All information came from official government sources and was intended to be factual and unbiased.

**Results:** Table 3 displays the effects of receiving both the information and the mobilization treatment, in comparison to the baseline group, who received neither treatment. Compared to the data presented in Table 2 (which listed the treatment effects resulting from the mobilization treatment alone), the effects of the combined treatment are very similar. The combined treatment produced significant increases in political information among seven of the eight estimates of political information. Among the seven estimates that did display significant increases, the magnitude of the effect of the combined treatment is bigger on average in six of the seven cases, in comparison to the effects of the mobilization treatment alone.

The accuracy of candidate evaluations increased both in response to the expert average (+12.8,  $p \leq 0.01$ , 5.3 points higher than mobilization alone) and the survey average (+11.6,  $p \leq 0.01$ , 4.2 points higher than mobilization alone). Knowledge of ranked choice voting rules increased by 11.6 points ( $p \leq 0.10$ ), an effect nearly identical to the effect from the mobilization treatment alone. Debate watching increased by 7.3 points ( $p \leq 0.11$ ), which was 2.6 points lower

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<sup>19</sup> All of the information provided during Stage 1 of the information treatment was gathered from the official San Francisco voter guide. Therefore, for any subject who was already registered to vote at the correct address, all of the information provided in Stage 1 was a duplicate of materials already being sent to the subject's home. However, for any subject not yet registered to vote (more than 20% of the sample) and for any subject who was registered at the wrong mailing address (unknown quantity), the information provided in Stage 1 was likely a source the subject had not seen.

than the effect of mobilization on its own. Reported preferences increased among the referenda (+14.1 points,  $p \leq 0.05$ , 3.9 points higher than mobilization alone) and among the candidate-based contests (+12.8 points,  $p \leq 0.05$ , 4.2 points higher than mobilization alone). Self-assessments of being informed about the campaign increased by 11.0 points in response to the combined treatment ( $p \leq 0.01$ ), more than 5 points more than the average effect of the mobilization treatment alone.

**Table 3: Estimated Effects of the Combined Treatment (Mobilization + Information) on Nine Estimates of Political Sophistication**

Model	Estimate of Political Sophistication	Pre-Treatment Estimate of Information?	Mobilization Treatment Effect	
1A	Accuracy of Left-Right Candidate Evaluations (Expert Average)	Yes	+ 9.4 <sup>+</sup> (4.8)	+ 12.8** (4.4)
1B	Accuracy of Left-Right Candidate Evaluations (Survey Average)	Yes	+ 8.5 <sup>+</sup> (4.5)	+ 11.6** (4.1)
2	Knowledge of Ranked Choice Voting Rule	Yes	+ 14.6* (6.8)	+ 11.6 <sup>+</sup> (6.9)
3	Watched Candidate Debates	Yes	+ 5.6 (4.1)	+ 7.3 <sup>++</sup> (4.5)
4A	Ballot Preferences Exist	Yes	+ 10.7 <sup>+</sup> (6.1)	+ 14.1* (5.8)
4B	Candidate Preferences Exist	No	+ 13.2* (6.1)	+ 12.8* (5.4)
5A	Self-Assessment: Informed about Referenda	Yes	+ 5.9 (4.1)	+ 6.4 (4.1)
5B	Self-Assessment: Informed about Campaign	No	+ 10.8* (4.2)	+ 11.0** (4.2)
6	Non-Campaign Political Engagement	Yes	- 3.3 (2.8)	- 2.5 (2.7)
	Controls Included?		No	Yes

\*\*  $p \leq 0.01$

\*  $p \leq 0.05$

<sup>+</sup>  $p \leq 0.10$

<sup>++</sup>  $p \leq 0.11$

The only estimate of campaign-specific information that did not increase in response to the combined treatment was self-assessed information about the referenda; this estimate was 6.4 points higher among those who received the combined treatment on average (which is comparable in magnitude to the effect of the mobilization treatment alone), but is not statistically significant. None of the treatments – in any combination – affected political engagement outside of the content of the municipal election.

Although the effects were bigger on average across nearly all campaign-specific estimates of political information, the marginal effect of mobilization after information was

provided, and the marginal effect of information after mobilization was provided – though both are always positive on average – are also both insignificant in every case.

The results suggest that the information treatment increased average information scores on its own, resulting in higher baseline information scores. When mobilization was added to the information treatment, information increases were higher on average and crossed higher significance thresholds. However, because the information treatment also increased average information scores, the marginal effect of mobilization – after information had already been added – was insignificant.

The results from the second set of analyses do not contradict or challenge the core results of the primary study. The data still suggests that mobilization can lead to an increase in political information. Analysis of the information treatment further suggests that the marginal effects of mobilization can be reduced when other stimuli increase the baseline level of information. This is to be expected, as the potential for marginal effects is reduced when baseline values are increased. Although the marginal effects of mobilization were reduced by the presence of the information treatment, all treatments including mobilization (both on its own, and in conjunction with the information treatment) generated strong increases in campaign-specific political information.

## **Appendix J: Information Treatment Handout**

The information treatment handout was a 42-page packet containing selections from the official voter guide, including statements from all candidates from all three races, and a description of each of the eight ballot propositions. All materials were gathered from official government sources, in order to minimize any perceived advocacy on behalf of the researcher. You can view a copy of this handout online here:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B1gapkqmiF36M0c1UVFieDVKalU/edit?usp=sharing>

## **Appendix K: Information Treatment Supplement to E-mail #1**

The following text was appended to e-mail #1, for all subjects receiving the information treatment:

### **[FOR SUBJECTS RECEIVING THE INFORMATION TREATMENT ONLY]**

As you may remember, I offered you an information packet that included excerpts from the official Voter Information Guide. You can also access this information online at this website, which publishes the complete guide in a pdf format:

[http://www.sfgov2.org/ftp/uploadedfiles/elections/NOV2011\\_VIP\\_EN.pdf](http://www.sfgov2.org/ftp/uploadedfiles/elections/NOV2011_VIP_EN.pdf)

You can also view a shorter summary of the 8 ballot propositions, including a list of pros and cons, at this link (prepared by the League of Women Voters):

[http://lwvsf.org/pages/pdf/LWVSF\\_ProConGuide\\_Nov2011.pdf](http://lwvsf.org/pages/pdf/LWVSF_ProConGuide_Nov2011.pdf)

If you want to learn more about any of the candidates running for Mayor, Sheriff, or District Attorney, or about any of the 8 Ballot Propositions, you might find the video links listed below to be useful. These online videos are intended to provide you with easily accessible information about the upcoming election, so you can make a well-informed decision. The videos include:

1. Official statements from each candidate in each election
2. A video record of the Candidate Forum for each elected office; and
3. An informational video about each ballot proposition, including a summary of what the proposition would do, and arguments from either side of the issue.

I hope you find this information useful.

## **San Francisco Mayoral Election, November 2011**

### **Mayoral Forum:**

[http://sanfrancisco.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view\\_id=139&clip\\_id=13385](http://sanfrancisco.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view_id=139&clip_id=13385)

### **Mayoral Candidate Statements (All):**

[http://sanfrancisco.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view\\_id=139&clip\\_id=13144](http://sanfrancisco.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view_id=139&clip_id=13144)

**Jeff Adachi** – Individual Statement:

<http://www.youtube.com/user/SFVotes2011#p/c/3041565B65A0AF0D/0/vQ17mR9O60k>

**Michela Alioto-Pier** – Individual Statement:

<http://www.youtube.com/user/SFVotes2011#p/c/3041565B65A0AF0D/1/Pj0dL06BpCM>

**Cesar Ascarrunz** – Individual Statement:

<http://www.youtube.com/user/SFVotes2011#p/c/3041565B65A0AF0D/2/1yFWFHMKIcU>

**Terry Baum** – Individual Statement:

<http://www.youtube.com/user/SFVotes2011#p/c/3041565B65A0AF0D/3/w6--8Fhk09Y>

**David Chiu** – Individual Statement:

<http://www.youtube.com/user/SFVotes2011#p/c/3041565B65A0AF0D/4/LzegNMYbJ7A>

**Paul Currier** – Individual Statement:

<http://www.youtube.com/user/SFVotes2011#p/c/3041565B65A0AF0D/5/tpaOkIUPJk>

**Bevan Dufty** – Individual Statement:

<http://www.youtube.com/user/SFVotes2011#p/c/3041565B65A0AF0D/6/Pa3NJGEBv3w>

**Tony Hall** – Individual Statement:

<http://www.youtube.com/user/SFVotes2011#p/c/3041565B65A0AF0D/7/bpTtmI6-LhU>

**Dennis Herrera** – Individual Statement:

<http://www.youtube.com/user/SFVotes2011#p/c/3041565B65A0AF0D/8/u8bvykSgF50>

**Ed Lee** – Individual Statement:

<http://www.youtube.com/user/SFVotes2011#p/c/3041565B65A0AF0D/9/78H2948kRLk>

**Wilma Pang** – Individual Statement:

<http://www.youtube.com/user/SFVotes2011#p/c/3041565B65A0AF0D/10/sXxI7WokPI4>

**Joanna Rees** – Individual Statement:

<http://www.youtube.com/user/SFVotes2011#p/c/3041565B65A0AF0D/11/dDZJgTaT7vM>

**Phil Ting** – Individual Statement:

<http://www.youtube.com/user/SFVotes2011#p/c/3041565B65A0AF0D/12/pHb4CniorWE>

**Leland Yee** – Individual Statement:

<http://www.youtube.com/user/SFVotes2011#p/c/3041565B65A0AF0D/13/11Q6iVGT0yM>

## **San Francisco Sheriff's Election, November 2011**

**Sheriff Forum:**

[http://sanfrancisco.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view\\_id=139&clip\\_id=13298](http://sanfrancisco.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view_id=139&clip_id=13298)

**Sheriff Candidate Statements (All):**

[http://sanfrancisco.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view\\_id=139&clip\\_id=13143](http://sanfrancisco.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view_id=139&clip_id=13143)

**Chris Cunnie** – Individual Statement:

<http://www.youtube.com/user/SFVotes2011#p/c/B0F122C401419240/0/i0cC5R9ov-Q>

**Ross Mirkarimi** – Individual Statement:

[http://www.youtube.com/user/SFVotes2011#p/c/B0F122C401419240/1/PMtsT6\\_07C8](http://www.youtube.com/user/SFVotes2011#p/c/B0F122C401419240/1/PMtsT6_07C8)

**Paul Miyamoto** – Individual Statement:

[http://www.youtube.com/user/SFVotes2011#p/c/B0F122C401419240/2/IbJ4zQBYI\\_g](http://www.youtube.com/user/SFVotes2011#p/c/B0F122C401419240/2/IbJ4zQBYI_g)

**David Wong** – Individual Statement:

<http://www.youtube.com/user/SFVotes2011#p/c/B0F122C401419240/3/CEfXMlaW81I>

## **San Francisco District Attorney Election, November 2011**

**District Attorney Forum:**

[http://sanfrancisco.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view\\_id=139&clip\\_id=13070](http://sanfrancisco.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view_id=139&clip_id=13070)

**District Attorney Candidate Statements (All):**

[http://sanfrancisco.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view\\_id=139&clip\\_id=13142](http://sanfrancisco.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view_id=139&clip_id=13142)

**Sharmin Bock** – Individual Statement:

<http://www.youtube.com/user/SFVotes2011#p/c/B5709B6563D883B4/0/GZfXUp4J5FY>

**Bill Fazio** – Individual Statement:

<http://www.youtube.com/user/SFVotes2011#p/c/B5709B6563D883B4/1/EVk-zCUUwkc>

**George Gascon** – Individual Statement:

<http://www.youtube.com/user/SFVotes2011#p/c/B5709B6563D883B4/2/ywm5ozenSn0>

**David Onek** – Individual Statement:

<http://www.youtube.com/user/SFVotes2011#p/c/B5709B6563D883B4/3/AoJsoRdXVKE>

**Vu Trinh** – Individual Statement:

<http://www.youtube.com/user/SFVotes2011#p/c/B5709B6563D883B4/4/SedYf7wYQL4>

## **San Francisco Ballot Propositions, November 2011**

**Proposition A – School Bonds:**

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=49otM5jltw&NR=1>

**Proposition B – Road Repaving & Street Safety Bonds:**

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fFlIEyvBQ5w&feature=related>

**Proposition C – City Pension & Health Care Benefits:**

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l2vq\\_ZOaRFY&feature=related](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l2vq_ZOaRFY&feature=related)

**Proposition D – City Pension Benefits:**

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GRKyjYtTQQU&feature=related>

**Proposition E – Amending or Repealing Initiative Ordinances & Declarations of Policy:**

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jmFRicDCnYY&feature=related>

**Proposition F – Campaign Consultant Disclosures:**

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LF4cm1TNfF8&feature=related>

**Proposition G – Sales Tax:**

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2AbvnANsNmg&feature=mfu\\_in\\_order&list=UL](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2AbvnANsNmg&feature=mfu_in_order&list=UL)

**Proposition H – School District Student Assignment:**

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IwJnwmZi1nA&feature=mfu\\_in\\_order&list=UL](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IwJnwmZi1nA&feature=mfu_in_order&list=UL)