

WHAT MAKES VOTERS TURN OUT: THE EFFECTS OF POLLS AND BELIEFS

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Abstract

We use laboratory experiments to test for one of the foundations of the rational voter paradigm – that voters respond to probabilities of being pivotal. We exploit a setup that entails stark theoretical effects of information concerning the preference distribution (as revealed through polls) on costly participation decisions. We find that voting propensity increases systematically with subjects' predictions of their preferred alternative's advantage. Consequently, pre-election polls do not exhibit the detrimental welfare effects that extant theoretical work predicts. They lead to more participation by the expected majority and generate more landslide elections. (JEL: C92, D02, D72)

The editor in charge of this paper was Juuso Valimaki.

Acknowledgments: We thank Guillaume Frechette, Salvatore Nunnari, Tom Palfrey, the Editor, and two anonymous referees for very useful comments and suggestions. We gratefully acknowledge financial support from the European Research Council (ERC Advanced Investigator Grant, ESEI-249433), the National Science Foundation (SES 0963583), and the Henry and Betty Moore Foundation.

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