

**Are Negative Campaign Messages More or Less Effective?  
Evidence from Two Field Experiments**

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## **Abstract**

Considerable research indicates that personal contact from political campaigns can mobilize people to vote, but little attention has been given to the tone of the personal contact. Studies of message tone have mostly been confined to mass media campaigns and ignored the growing role grassroots techniques play in contemporary political campaigns. This paper wedges the two literatures by asking whether personally delivered negative campaign messages are more effective than similar positive messages. Two randomized field experiments were conducted to determine the importance of message tone in campaign contact. We find evidence that personally delivered messages can be effective at influencing voting preferences, but neither experiment uncovered a systematic difference between negative and positive messages on voter turnout, choice, or favorability ratings.

A great deal of research demonstrates that personal contacts from campaigns can effectively mobilize people to vote (e.g., Gerber and Green 2000; Green, Gerber, and Nickerson 2003; Nickerson 2006; Nickerson 2007; Rosenstone and Hansen 1993; Vavreck, Spiliotes, and Fowler 2002) and can even affect for whom they vote. It is less clear, though, whether stylistic aspects of personally delivered messages, such as their tone or argumentation, matters apart from their general content. Campaigns behave as if the tone of messages matter because they are quite strategic in when and where to employ positively and negatively framed appeals (Damore 2002; Sigelman and Buell 2003). Yet studies of message tone have focused almost exclusively on messages disseminated through the mass media, such as television commercials (e.g., Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1995; Clinton and Lapinski 2004; Finkel and Geer 1998; Freedman and Goldstein 1999; Kahn and Kenney 1999; Lau and Pomper 2002; Wattenberg and Brians 1999).<sup>1</sup>

The preoccupation with mass-based appeals is understandable since they are the most visible form of campaigning and constitute the largest expense for national political campaigns. However, it is important to recognize that campaigns also rely upon grassroots tactics to contact voters. Bergan et al. (2005) report that the two major party in the 2004 United States Presidential Election knocked on a combined 17.1 million doors and completed 50.7 million volunteer phone calls.<sup>2</sup> In an analysis of the use of soft money by political parties in 2000, La Raja and Jarvis-Shean (2003, Table 1) discovered

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<sup>1</sup> Gerber, Green, and Green (2003) provide a notable exception to the overwhelming focus on mass media. They demonstrate that negatively toned political messages disseminated through direct mail have a small, statistically insignificant negative effect on turnout.

<sup>2</sup> These numbers do not include the 21.6 million doors knocked and 145.6 million phone calls made by major third parties such as American's Coming Together and MoveOn.org.

that the national parties spent only 25% less on voter mobilization and grassroots outreach than on media. While state parties devoted a larger percentage of soft money to media (44%) than mobilization (15%), local parties spent 7.5 times more soft money on mobilization than on media.<sup>3</sup> Old-style shoe leather campaigning may not be as glamorous as television commercials, but it is well-worn message-delivery tool used across a variety of settings, from sleepy local elections to the all-consuming U.S. presidential race.

We investigate how the tone of personally delivered campaign messages affects voting behavior with the help of two randomized field experiments. By exogenously manipulating the type of message subjects receive, the causal effects of message tone on voting behavior can be isolated, much like a laboratory experiment. Because the experiment is conducted in the field, we are able to estimate the effects of message tone in the context of an actual campaign. Overall, we find little evidence that the specific tone of campaign messages matters much apart from the general content. Simply delivering a campaign message in a personal way appears to be enough to influence voting behavior.

## **2. Explanations for Why and How the Tone of Messages Matter**

Although the effect of message tone in the context of personally delivered campaign appeals has received no attention (theoretically or empirically), the rich literature on the effects of message tone in campaign television commercials provides a

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<sup>3</sup> LaRaja (2003, Table 8.1) provides a time series for state party use of soft money. The percentage devoted to mobilization and grassroots outreach remains relatively constant.

convenient starting point.<sup>4</sup> On the surface, the competing theoretical models and conflicting findings that abound in this literature appear to offer less guidance than one would hope. Yet with closer scrutiny given to the pattern underlying the conflicting results in this literature points us in a fruitful direction.

At a general level, there is consistent evidence in psychological research that not only do people weigh negative information more heavily in the formation of attitudes than positive information, but negative attitudes are more likely to motivate behavior than positive attitudes (Jordan 1965; Lau 1982). The asymmetric effect of negative and positive attitudes has long interested scholars of voting behavior, leading many to conclude as Key (1966: 60) so succinctly put it, "...people only vote against, never for" (cf. Bloom and Price 1975; Kernell 1977; Lau 1982, 1985; Cover 1986; Doherty and Gimpel 1997; but see Fiorina and Shepsle 1989). Nevertheless, it is unclear exactly how the psychology of negative information processing affects people's behavioral reactions to negative campaign messages.

The initial research in campaign television commercials argued that the negative information contained in a negatively framed advertisement is more effective at influencing viewers to dislike the ad sponsor's opponent than a positively framed ad is at boosting support for the sponsor. At the same time, though, the negative tone of the ad poisons people's view of politics, alienating them and depressing their desire to vote. Drawing on numerous, well-crafted laboratory experiments, Ansolabehere and Iyengar (1995) find evidence for their theory (see also Fridkin and Kenney 2004; Kahn and Kenney 1999; Lau and Pomper 2002).

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<sup>4</sup> Proprietary studies of message tone in direct mail have been conducted, but the results of the studies are often contradictory and not available for broader release.

Subsequent research offers competing theoretical claims and empirical findings. In terms of vote choice, other scholars argue that negatively framed commercials reflect poorly on the sponsor and depress his or her support (e.g., Kahn and Geer 1994). Under this model, voters attend to negative information to a great degree than positive information, but see negative campaign ads as a legitimate ploy to influence their voting behavior. With respect to turnout, an alternative model argues that negative campaign message pique voters' interest in the campaign, so that rather than alienating them from the political process, negative ads actually mobilize voters (e.g., Freedman and Goldstein 1999; Wattenberg and Briens 1999). Finally, other scholars have argued that in the context of mass communication, negative ads vis-à-vis positive ads are no more likely to influence voting behavior in a particular (e.g., Clinton and Lapinski 2004; Finkel and Geer 1998; Lau et al. 1999).

Surveying all available studies of message tone and voter turnout, Lau, Sigelman, and Rovner (2007) conclude “the research literature provides no general support for the hypothesis that negative political campaigning depresses voter turnout. If anything, negative campaigning more frequently appears to have a slight mobilizing effect.” However, disaggregating the studies used by Lau, Sigelman, and Rovner into laboratory and observational studies complicates the null interpretation (see Appendix). On average, laboratory experiments find that exposure to negative advertisements decrease turnout ( $\partial = -0.36$ ), while observational studies find negative advertisements increase turnout slightly ( $\partial = 0.03$ ). Raw counts create a similar perspective: only 2 of 13 laboratory experiments conclude negative advertisements increase turnout, and only 8 of 25 observational studies conclude negative turnout decrease turnout. A similar pattern

emerges with respect to the effects of negative campaign ads on sponsor support. Based on this body of empirical work, two competing hypotheses can be derived.

***Laboratory Hypothesis:*** Negatively framed campaign messages *decrease* voter turnout and sponsor support relative to positive messages.

***Observational Hypothesis:*** Negatively framed campaign messages slightly *increase* voter turnout and sponsor support relative to positive messages.

It is striking that different methodologies come to opposing conclusions. Each side of the debate on the effect of message tone has valid theoretical arguments to support its findings, but it is difficult to adjudicate between theories when the results are entirely dependent upon the methodology used. The difficulty is even greater when each methodology has advantages over the other.

A strength of laboratory experiments is that the researcher knows the exposure of each subject to the positive and negative messages within the laboratory. Random manipulation of this exposure ensures that, on average, differences between people seeing positive commercials and people seeing negative commercials are due to the commercials themselves and not other confounding factors. While laboratory experiments have unparalleled internal validity, the external validity is a question. Subjects in the laboratory pay close attention to the commercials relative to people in the real world. Subjects are also only exposed to very few commercials in contrast to the sweep of an entire campaign. Furthermore, laboratory experiments often measure the effect of viewing a commercial very soon after exposure, where voters see campaign

materials days, weeks, and months prior to Election Day. The immediacy of measurement may bias laboratory studies to overstate the effect of negative advertisements.

Observational studies have precisely the opposite strengths and weaknesses of laboratory experiments. Observational studies examine the ad strategies employed by candidates and parties during real campaigns. Official turnout records can be referenced and behavior is measured post-Election day after campaigns end. External validity is less of a concern because the actual behavior of campaigns and voters is observed.

Unfortunately, relying upon actual campaign behavior has the downside of introducing possibly confounding factors. Campaigns target particular types of voters, so voter-type and ad effect need to be untangled. Voters pre-disposed to turnout may be more attuned to ads in general and to the ads of the candidate they support in particular, so self-selection of exposure may bias results. Campaigns are also strategic about the placement of advertisements and their content. Negative advertisements are run in the most competitive elections, and competition elections are associated with higher turnout. Most of these problems associate negative advertisements with traits correlated with higher turnout. Thus, observational studies may be prone to overstating the degree to which negative advertisements increase turnout.

### ***Studying the Effects of Personally Delivered Messages***

By considering the differences between personally delivered and mass-based appeals and applying the lessons learned from the foregoing discussion, we are able to derive some testable implications for the effects of personally delivered negative messages. Relative to televised campaign ads, personally delivered messages can be

better targeted at specific subpopulations. By disseminating messages through the mass media, campaigns have little control over who will see them. Supporters, opponents, and the undecided alike may come across a television ad (even ones that are placed at timeslots and on programs designed to reach specific demographic groups). By personally screening individuals, canvassing allows campaigns to tailor a specific message for a specific target group. Targeting means grassroots mobilization techniques are less likely to have unintended consequences, such as mobilizing the opposition or depressing turnout among supporters when compared to mass-media tactics. As a result, personal forms of communication prove quite effective at motivating a broad array of behaviors, from voting (Gerber and Green 2000) to blood donation (Jason et al. 1984) to recycling (Reams and Ray 1993). That is, personalized campaigns can be maximally potent for a broad array of individuals.

Furthermore, personally delivered messages are difficult to ignore. It is a simple matter to stop paying attention to a television ad, but norms of politeness require even disinterested individuals to listen to someone standing in their doorway.<sup>5</sup> Consequently, there is an *ex ante* reason to believe that individuals are more likely to receive a message when exposed to personal communication than when they are exposed to TV commercials. Television commercials are impersonal and easy to tune out, and people often do not pay enough attention to politics for messages in the mass media to have much effect (Sigelman and Kugler 2003). Thus, personalized messages are more potent than television advertisements so differences between positive and negative messages may be highlighted.

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<sup>5</sup> Naturally, there are some individuals who close doors, hang up phones, fail to answer knocks, or screen calls. However, we have found these instances to comprise less than 5% of our sample households.

Consequently, if negative information biases voting behavior, one should be more likely to observe the effects of negative messages when they are personally delivered relative to when they are disseminated via public air waves. If so, this may explain why laboratory experiments have consistently found negative campaign effects – subjects are motivated to pay attention to them. However, because political groups target personally delivered messages at sympathetic voters, unlike researchers in lab settings, we expect personally delivered negative messages to boost sponsor support and turnout. In contrast, if voters do not attend to the negative information contained in personally delivered messages more than positive information, no marginal difference in sponsor support or voter turnout between the two messages is expected.

In order to surmount the methodological criticisms of previous research, we employ field experiments in this paper combine the internal validity of the laboratory with the external validity of observational studies. Actual campaigns agreed to randomly vary the tone of the message used for personalized voter outreach. Working with the campaigns affords the researcher knowledge of the tone of the message to which each subject was exposed, and the random assignment avoids confounding factors. This research paradigm is only practical where campaigns cooperate fully, but when possible, field experiments constitute a useful new direction for empirical inquiry on the effect of campaign message tone.

It should be noted that in keeping with prior lab experiments (e.g., Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1995), we are not testing the effects of negative *campaigns* on voting behavior. Rather, we are testing the effects of a single message. Both previous lab and field experiments have demonstrated that a single message is able to influence voting

decisions. As we show below, we also find evidence that a single message is able to affect subjects' political attitudes and factual knowledge. Consequently, we believe that the dosage level of our treatment is sufficient to uncover the effects of message tone if they exist. Of course, only replications of our experiments that vary the dosage level will be able to address this concern for certain and we leave these for future research.

### **3. Study A: Minnesota Youth Voting Project Campaign**

#### **3.1 Data and Protocols**

In the 2004 presidential contest, the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Democrats targeted undecided voters between the ages of 18 and 29 living in Minnesota, using conversational phone scripts in an effort to increase support for the Democratic ticket. Previous research has demonstrated that these types of phone scripts can influence voting behavior (Nickerson 2007; Nickerson 2006; Nickerson, Friedrichs, and King 2006). The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Democrats identified their target universe using two approaches. One set of names were harvested by standing at sites where young people congregate (e.g., concerts, retail spaces, clubs, and bus stops), and the other set was obtained by purchasing contact information from a vendor. Beginning in early September, the campaign identified “undecided” voters and determined their particular issue of concern.<sup>6</sup> In the harvested sample this was done by asking people questions while collecting their contact information and in the purchased sample it was accomplished with an initial phone call a month prior to the election. Then, the weekend prior to Election Day, campaign

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<sup>6</sup> While subjects were asked an open ended question earlier in the campaign to identify their critical issue, most of the answers fell within eight broad topic categories. For the handful of subjects whose key issue was unknown or did not fall into one of the eight categories, callers used the jobs and wages script.

volunteers called these undecided voters and delivered a persuasive script specially tailored to issue area deemed most important by the subject.<sup>7</sup>

While limiting the campaign to purely undecided voters decreases the number of subjects in the experiment, it minimizes the noise associated with the estimate (i.e., maximizes efficiency) by focusing only upon those subjects who could be persuaded to vote for the Democratic ticket. Consequently, if the negative tone of scripts has a differential persuasive effect, we would particularly expect to observe it among this population of persuadable voters who, thus, act much like canaries in the coal mine.

We worked in collaboration with the campaign to craft scripts that would isolate the effects of negatively framed messages. Both positive and negative scripts focus on a single issue and are phrased in nearly identical ways, pointing out similar pieces of information. The only thing that distinguishes these messages is whether the information is used to critique the incumbent Republican administration (negative frame) or extol the benefits of Democratic proposals (positive frame). We present the scripts in Reviewer's Appendix A. In this way our negative messages closely mirror the coding scheme of the Wisconsin Advertising Project (Goldstein, Franz, and Ridout 2002), which is often used to study the effects of tone in political commercials.<sup>8</sup> In short, by holding the structure

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<sup>7</sup> Campaign finance laws prevented the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Democrats from explicitly endorsing John Kerry as President. Despite this minor hurdle, the intent of the scripts was clear.

<sup>8</sup> The following instructions given to coders for the Wisconsin Advertising Project (Goldstein, Franz, and Ridout 2002: 10) to categorize the tone of campaign advertising mirrors the way in which we experimentally manipulate the tone of our messages:

In your judgment, is the primary purpose of the ad to promote a specific candidate ("In his distinguished career, Senator Jones has brought millions of dollars home. We need Senator

and issue content of the messages constant and only manipulating the tone of the messages, we are able to isolate the effects of negatively framed messages vis-à-vis positively framed messages.<sup>9</sup>

Subjects were randomly assigned to a positive (N = 3,084) or negative message group (N = 3,122; total N = 6,206).<sup>10</sup> The random selection of subjects means there are no ex ante differences between groups (within sampling variability). Thus, if we find differences between the groups it constitutes strong evidence that subjects responded differentially to the frame of the message. In keeping with the majority of the extant laboratory and observational studies of advertising, we do not include a control group in this design and are only able to test expectations regarding the effects of negatively framed messages vis-à-vis positively framed messages.

Immediately after the election, a survey was conducted by a professional polling firm that is independent of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Democrats to measure the vote choice of the subjects in the experiment (see Reviewer’s Appendix B for question wording). The overall response rate was 22 percent (n[positive group] = 680, n[negative group] = 705,

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Jones.”), to attack a candidate (“In his long years in Washington, Senator Jones has raised your taxes over and over. We can’t afford 6 more years of Jones.”) or to contrast the candidates (“While Senator Jones has been cutting your taxes, Representative Smith has been cutting them.”)?

Note that we strictly vary positive or negative tone, and do not construct “contrast” messages.

<sup>9</sup> Volunteers reported no difficulties in switching between scripts, reading the portion of the script dedicated to each issue, or encountering hostile subjects. By all measures, the calling went smoothly and roughly 85 percent of the attempted calls were completed.

<sup>10</sup> A check to see whether assignment to a script was correlated with past voter history or age failed to detect any systematic difference in either the harvested sample (p = .73) or purchased sample (p = 0.81).

total  $n = 1,385$ ).<sup>11</sup> If this were an observational survey, such a low response rate would raise concerns of non-response bias. However, because treatment was randomly assigned, this is not a concern.<sup>12</sup> Within the pool of survey respondents, the subjects receiving the positive script should have equal pre-study propensities to vote and support Bush as the subjects receiving the negative script. This, of course, does not eliminate concerns about external validity, since it is impossible to know how non-respondents felt about the candidates. Yet, similar to all studies that use observational survey data, we can only make inferences about the impact of message tone on voting preferences to the population of survey takers. In contrast, we were able to verify voter turnout for all of the subjects in the experiment using the official turnout lists of the Minnesota Secretary of State. Consequently, our findings with regard to voter turnout unequivocally generalize to our full target population.

### **3.2 Findings**

Since the harvested and purchased target populations were formed using different approaches, it is conceivable that subjects from each population may respond differently to the messages. While random assignment neutralizes differences between treatment groups, it is still possible that heterogeneity exists in treatment effects across individuals.

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<sup>11</sup> Serving as a manipulation check, the post-election survey asked subjects if they remembered being contacted by various groups. Over half of those surveyed reported being contacted by the Minnesota Young Voter Project (the name under which the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Democrats were calling), compared to one-third contacted by the Democrats and one-fifth by the Republican Party.

<sup>12</sup> Subjects assigned to the positive and negative groups were equally likely to respond to the survey. A chi-square test accepts the null hypothesis that the two groups possess homogenous response rates at ( $p = 0.89$ ).

To account for this possibility, we present separate results for the harvested and purchased populations in addition to pooling them. We begin our discussion of the results with the effects of message tone on observed turnout, which are shown in Table 1. Because treatments groups were formed randomly and subjects from each group were called by volunteers using similar scripts, a straightforward comparison of mean voting rates between groups provides an unbiased estimate of the average treatment effect.

[Table 1 about here]

We find evidence that negative messages caused a modest 3.1 percentage point boost in turnout relative to positive messages in the harvested group, but this fails to reach traditional thresholds for statistical significance (s.e. = 2.3,  $p = 0.09$ , one-tailed). However, we do not find any evidence of a mobilization effect among subjects whose names a numbers were purchased (see Table 1, column 2), and, thus, only find marginal evidence of a mobilization effect from the negative message in the pooled data (Table 1, column 3).<sup>13</sup>

Turning to the effects of message tone on vote preferences, we report results from data on attitudes toward Kerry and Bush collected in the post-election survey. We measured voting preferences by asking respondents to rate the major presidential

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<sup>13</sup> The coefficients for the harvested and purchased populations are not statistically different from one another. Nevertheless, it is striking that across the analyses that we tend to find modest effects (to the extent we find them at all) among the harvested population. Despite the fact that individuals from both populations self-identified as “undecided,” it may be that the harvested group, whose members self-selected into the population, nonetheless was more sympathetic to the Democratic Party than the purchased group, who did not self-select. Testing the receptivity of groups to messages as a function of their selection is something we leave for future research.

candidates on a four-point scale and identify which presidential candidate they preferred in a head-to-head match-up. These results are displayed in Table 2. The negative message did not appreciably increase support for the Democratic candidate, John Kerry, but did slightly decrease support for Republican George W. Bush relative to the positive message. Taken together, these results corroborate the *laboratory hypothesis* that negatively framed personal messages, at best, have a weak (i.e., small and statistically insignificant) positive effect on turnout and support for the sponsor.

[Table 2 about here]

#### **4. Study B: Los Angeles Ballot Proposition Campaign**

##### **4.1 Data and Protocols**

Study B was conducted in Los Angeles, CA where a different non-profit organization targeted minority voters of all adult ages in an effort to boost support for two statewide ballot propositions. One ballot proposition aimed at relaxing the “three-strikes” law, making it so that only a violent offense on the “third strike” would qualify for a life sentence. The other proposition would have required that large companies pay at least 80 percent of employees’ health insurance. We randomly assigned households on their target list into treatment groups (N[positive] = 29,694 individuals; N[negative] = 24,638 individuals) and a control group (N = 9,022 individuals) in which individuals received no message.<sup>14</sup> The group’s get-out-the-vote (GOTV) strategy unfolded in two stages. In the first stage, both paid and volunteer door-to-door canvassers attempted to contact subjects assigned to the treatment group to ascertain their level of support for the

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<sup>14</sup> A randomization check demonstrated that previous voting behavior, age, gender, registration date, and household size were not systematically related to assignment ( $p = 0.85$ ).

ballot proposition and deliver a persuasive message regardless of support. In the second stage, which occurred in the week prior to the election, canvassers returned to deliver the persuasive message only to supporters and undecided voters and encourage these individuals to vote on Election Day (see Reviewer's Appendix A for question wording of scripts). Canvassers were able to reach 15,083 subjects in the treatment groups (27.8 percent), which is a respectable contact rate in a door-to-door operation.

In order to facilitate the comparison of persuasive messages, we randomly assigned half of the precincts in the treatment group to be given a negative message and half to be given a positive message.<sup>15</sup> Precinct-level randomization was useful for two reasons. First, it allowed canvassers to spend the entire day delivering one message, reducing errors that might have occurred if they were asked to switch between messages in the field. Second, it kept message tone confined to a geographic area, reducing the possibility that subjects could hear the competing messages through cross-contamination (e.g., from a neighbor). Because the precincts were randomly assigned, it poses no threat to internal validity, but does require special care be taken when estimating the standard errors of the treatment effect estimates (see Arceneaux 2005).

Consonant with Study A, actual voter turnout was measured using official records obtained from the State of California after the election and vote choice was measured with a post-election survey conducted by a professional polling firm (see Reviewer's Appendix B for question wording). Given the sheer size of the experiment, we randomly sampled 6,756 individuals to be called by the independent polling firm (3,416 were

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<sup>15</sup>A check of the precinct-level randomization also failed to find that previous voting behavior, age, gender, registration date, and household size were systematically related to message assignment ( $p = 0.60$ ).

drawn from the treatment group and 3,340 from the control) and completed 359 interviews (n[positive] = 107; n[negative] = 79; n[control] = 173). The overall response rate was quite low (5.3 percent), but as discussed above this does not compromise the internal validity of the experiment since random assignment ensures that subjects in even the survey sample are identical (within sampling variability) save for the intervention of the campaign message.<sup>16</sup>

## 4.2 Method

The experimental design of Study B offers a few complications not encountered in Study A, requiring a brief description of our methods employed to estimate quantities of interest. Because random assignment took place at the precinct level in Study B, it is necessary to adjust the individual-level standard errors to account for the fact that individual-level outcomes are correlated within clusters. Failure to do so will result in *underestimating* the standard errors, biasing *t*-statistics upward. Following the practice of scholars who conduct cluster-randomized experiments in education and medical research, we use a clustered robust estimator to adjust the standard errors (Arceneaux 2005). To compensate for the loss in effective N, we include covariates (age, indicator for females, indicator for newly registered voters, and previous voting behavior in the past five elections) to increase the precision of these estimates. Note that the inclusion or exclusion of these covariates does not affect the treatment effect estimates themselves because treatment assignment is orthogonal to these variables.

The campaign, like all campaigns, was not able to deliver a message to everyone in the treatment group, creating a classic failure-to-treat problem. An inappropriate

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<sup>16</sup> There was no difference in the survey response rate between the treatment and control groups ( $p = 0.63$ ).

analysis strategy would be to compare those whom the campaign contacted to those whom it did not (see Gerber and Green 2005). Contacted individuals may be different from un-contacted individuals in ways that are confounded with outcome variables of interest, which raises the issue of endogeneity bias inherent in observational studies.<sup>17</sup> In contrast, we adopt two different (but related) approaches to calculate unbiased causal estimates. One approach compares all individuals of the treatment groups to those in the other groups, regardless of contact. This causal estimate is commonly referred to as the intent-to-treat (ITT) effect. Substantively, this quantity indicates how many individuals the campaign induced to vote (or support a proposition) given the total number of individuals it *attempted* to contact. The other approach estimates the causal effect among those *exposed* to the message, which is accomplished by adjusting the ITT estimate by the contact rate and is called the average treatment-on-treated effect (ATT).<sup>18</sup>

### 4.3 Results

The ITT and ATT estimates for voter turnout and vote preferences regarding both ballot propositions are shown in Table 3. In terms of turnout, neither the positive nor the negative message had a statistically significant effect (see column 1 of Table 3). Subjects in the negative message treatment group were actually 0.2 percentage points less likely to

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<sup>17</sup> Indeed, to take this approach ignores the experimental design and treats these data as if they were observational.

<sup>18</sup> In the simple case, the ATT estimate can be calculated by dividing the ITT estimate by the contact rate, which can be achieved by using random assignment as an instrument for contact in a two-stage equation. See Angrist, Imbens, and Rubin (1996), Gerber and Green (2000), and Arceneaux, Gerber, and Green (2006) for an explanation of why field experiments of this variety meet the assumptions underlying IV regression.

vote than subjects in the control group, although this quantity is not statistically different from zero ( $p = 0.86$ , two-tailed  $t$ -test). By testing for a difference between the ATT coefficients, we are able to compare the messages to one another, as we did in Study A. Here we find evidence that those exposed to the negatively toned message were, as expected, slightly more likely to vote (+1 percentage point), but this difference is statistically insignificant ( $F[1, 116] = 0.04, p = .84$ ).<sup>19</sup>

[Table 3 about here]

The last two columns of Table 3 display the treatment effect estimates with respect to voting preferences. Overall, the campaign was able to increase support for the three-strikes-you're-out ballot proposition, but not the health care proposition. The negative message increased support for the three-strikes proposition by roughly 10.2 percentage points over support in the control group ( $p = 0.05$ , one-tailed  $t$ -test). Among those actually exposed to the negative message, the average treatment effect is 23.8 percentage points ( $p = 0.05$ , one-tailed  $t$ -test). However, the positive message also generated positive treatment effects and an F-test demonstrates that the coefficients for the positive and negative treatment groups are not statistically different from one another ( $F[1, 110] = 0.26, p = 0.61$  for ITT coefficients and  $F[1, 110] = 0.46, p = 0.5$  for ATT

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<sup>19</sup> Contrary to the *general personal message effect hypothesis*, we do not find evidence that simply receiving a personally delivered message boosted turnout. Since the level of turnout in the control group was nearly 75 percent, we believe these null results are the product of a ceiling effect. Numerous studies demonstrate that personally delivered messages boost turnout (e.g., Gerber and Green 2000; Green, Gerber, and Nickerson 2003; Rosenstone and Hansen 1993).

coefficients). Consequently, simply receiving a positive or negative message is sufficient to boost support for the sponsor.<sup>20</sup>

## 5. Discussion

By personally delivering messages, campaigns are able to target their appeals in a way that is difficult, if not impossible, with mass communication strategies. The question explored in this paper is whether campaigns benefit by crafting messages to focus on the shortcomings of their opponent rather than the positive aspects of their platform. Not only does cognitive research find that individuals are more likely to heed negative information (Lau 1982), but there is some evidence that citizens tend to vote against candidates and causes, rather than for them (Key 1966). Consequently, it seems intuitive that by personally delivering negatively framed messages to a targeted audience, a campaign would have better success motivating citizens to vote for their cause or candidate than a more positive approach.

However, we find that exposure to a negatively framed message, at best, causes a modest boost in turnout relative to positive message and does not appear especially effective at persuading individuals to support the sponsor of the message. We recognize that a simple response to our findings is that our treatments were not “strong enough” to detect more arresting differential effects. Yet we doubt this alternative explanation for

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<sup>20</sup> As shown in Appendix B, the post-election survey for Study B also included items tapping subjects’ factual knowledge about both ballot propositions. Since the impact of message tone on issue knowledge does not fall in the scope of this paper, it is not reported in Table 6. Nevertheless, these findings do not depart from those with respect to turnout and voter turnout. To summarize, while these messages had an overall effect on boosting knowledge about these propositions, negative messages were not particularly effective at increasing (or diminishing) knowledge.

several reasons. First, both campaigns remarked to us after the study that the negative messages were in some sense easier for volunteers to deliver, which if anything should have boosted their effectiveness. Second, both experimental studies have a great deal of statistical power. With over 6,000 subjects in Study A and 63,000 in Study B, the sample sizes of these experiments is enormous compared to both laboratory experiments and observational studies, which average samples sizes of 289 (median = 163) and 1,911 (median = 405), respectively (Lau, et al. 1999).

Finally, we do detect *general* message effects. Being exposed to either a positive or negative message did boost support for one of the propositions in Study B. Moreover, there is considerable evidence that personal contact is capable of increasing one's probability of voting (Gerber and Green 2000; Green, Gerber, and Nickerson 2003; Nickerson 2006; Nickerson, Friedrichs, and King 2006; Nickerson 2007). So, it is not simply the case that a single message is unable to appreciably affect people's voting behavior. Therefore, in absence of compelling evidence to the contrary, it is quite possible that the tone of the message is mostly unimportant compared to the act of personally contacting potential supporters. Of course, the only way to be certain about the effects of message tone is through further replication. Aside from replicating these results in other settings, it will be important to vary other aspects of the environment, such as the incumbency status of the sponsor, which have been suggested by observational studies as conditioning the effects of message tone (Fridkin and Kenney 2004; Lau and Pomper 2002).

While few would disagree with the statement that replication is essential for scientific progress, it has become fashionable in political science to inflate the ability of

nationally representative studies to resolve questions. This perception is unfortunate because it is often used to extol the benefits of national surveys vis-à-vis more localized experiments. We hope political scientists come to reject this reasoning on several grounds. First, as is roundly accepted by now, randomized experiments routinely provide a level of internal validity that cannot be reached in even the best observational studies. Second, external validity is important, but it is not clear that a biased nationally representative observational study is somehow more “generalizable” than an unbiased local experiment. Third and more to the point, external validity is best attained through replication of unbiased research designs. Therefore, we do not believe that these two field experiments provide the final word on the effects personally delivered message tone, nor do we believe *any* single study could reasonably claim to do so. We provide an initial foray into the topic, and anticipate that future field experiments will only add to our understanding.

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## **Appendix Prior Studies of the Effect of Negative Advertisements on Turnout**

Laboratory Studies	Turnout Delta
Ansolabehere and Iyengar, 1995	-0.1
Brader, 2005	0.2
Brooks, 2000	-0.01
Brooks, 2006	-0.6
Crigler, Just, and Belt, 2002	-0.24
Freedman, Wood, and Lawton, 1999	-0.4
Garramone, Atkin, Pinkleton, and Cole, 1990	-0.18
Houston and Doan, 1999	-0.21
Houston, Doan, and Roskos-Ewoldsen, 1999	-0.56
Kaid, Chanslor, and Hovind, 1992	-2.4
McBride, Toburen, and Thomas, 1993	-0.06
Min, 2004	-0.13
Stevens, 2002	0.07
Laboratory Average	-0.36
Observational Studies	Turnout Delta
Ansolabehere, Iyengar, and Simon, 1999	-1.27
Brader & Corrigan, 2006	-0.04
Djupe and Peterson, 1999	0.92
Finkel and Geer, 1998	0.01
Freedman and Goldstein, 1999	0.24
Garand and Graddy, 2001	-0.05
Geer and Lau, 2003	0.06
Geer and Lau, 2006	0.7
Goldstein, 1997	0.09
Jackson and Carsey, 2007	0.22
Jackson and Sides, 2006	0.07
Kahn and Kenney, 2004	0.08
Landi, 2004	0.09
Lau and Pomper, 2004	0.01
Lawton and Freedman, 2001	-0.21
Lemert, Wanta, and Lee, 1999	-0.13
Leshner and Thorson, 2000	0.04
Luskin and Bratcher, 1994	-0.12
Pinkleton and Garramone, 1992	0.01
Sides, Lipsitz, Grossmann, and Trost, 2005	-0.04
Stevens, no date	0.02
Thorson, Ognianova, Coyle, and Denton, 2000	0
Wattenberg and Brians, 1999	-0.04
Brooks and Geer, 2007*	0.02
Clinton and Lapinski, 2004*	0.02
Observational Average	0.03

Source: Lau, Sigelman, and Rovner 2007.

\* Survey based study

**Table 1: Voter Turnout by Randomly Assigned Message Tone in Minnesota**

	<b>Harvested</b>	<b>Purchased</b>	<b>Pooled</b>
Turnout in Negative Group	55.7% [911]	39.3% [2211]	
Turnout in Positive Group	52.5% [910]	39.8% [2174]	
Difference (Negative – Positive)	+3.1% (2.3)	-0.5% (1.5)	+0.6% (1.3)
p-value (one-tailed)	0.09	NA	0.32

Numbers in brackets represent N.

Numbers in parentheses represent standard errors.

**Table 2: Voter Preference and Favorability Ratings by Randomly Assigned Message Tone in Minnesota**

	<b>Harvested</b>	<b>Purchased</b>	<b>Pooled</b>
<b>a. Vote Preference</b>			
Percent Voting Kerry in Negative Group	57.3% [262]	72.9% [443]	
Percent Voting Kerry in Positive Group	59.6% [277]	72.9% [403]	
Difference (Negative – Positive)	-2.3% (4.3)	0.0% (3.1)	-0.8% (2.5)
p-value (one-tailed)	NA	0.50	NA
<b>b. Kerry Favorability Ratings</b>			
Average Favorable Kerry Rating in Negative Group	2.81 [254]	2.97 [436]	
Average Favorable Kerry Rating in Positive Group	2.81 [267]	2.96 [397]	
Difference (Negative – Positive)	-0.00 (0.07)	0.00 (0.06)	0.00 (0.05)
p-value (one-tailed)	0.50	0.50	0.50
<b>c. Bush Favorability Ratings</b>			
Average Favorable Bush Rating in Negative Group	2.20 [255]	1.77 [434]	
Average Favorable Bush Rating in Positive Group	2.31 [271]	1.74 [399]	
Difference (Negative – Positive)	-0.10 (0.09)	+0.03 (0.07)	+0.02 (0.06)
p-value (one-tailed)	0.13	NA	0.37

Numbers in brackets represent N.

Numbers in parentheses represent standard errors.

Rating scale is 1 = Very Unfavorable; 2 = Somewhat UnFavorable; 3 = Somewhat Favorable; 4 = Very Favorable.

**Table 3: ITT and ATT Estimates for the Causal Effect of Message Tone on Turnout and Voting Preferences in Los Angeles**

	<b>Voter Preferences on Propositions</b>		
	<b>Turnout</b>	<b>Three-Strikes</b>	<b>Health Care</b>
<b>ITT Effects</b>			
Negative Message Assignment	-0.2% (1.1)	10.2% (6.0)	2.1% (5.6)
Positive Message Assignment	-0.6% (0.8)	6.3% (6.8)	-0.1% (5.3)
N	63,354	333	312
F-statistic	493.17	1.03	1.07
R <sup>2</sup>	0.19	0.06	0.06
<b>ATT Effects</b>			
Negative Message Exposure	-1.0% (4.1)	23.8% (14.1)	4.9% (13.3)
Positive Message Exposure	-2.0% (3.0)	12.7% (13.7)	-0.2% (10.0)
N	63,354	333	312
F-statistic	490.31	1.04	1.07
R <sup>2</sup>	0.19	0.07	0.06

*Note:* ITT effect parameters were estimated with OLS regression, and ATT effect parameter were estimated with 2SLS using random assignment as an instrument. Covariates for age, gender, recency of registration, and past voting history were included, along with fixed effects for randomization strata. These variables were included to merely increase the precision of the treatment effect estimates and account for the experimental design. Consequently, their parameter estimates are of little importance for the evaluation of the model and are suppressed. Numbers in parentheses represent clustered standard errors.

# Reviewers' Appendix A

## Scripts used in Study A (Minnesota)

### Negative

1. Hi, is this \_\_\_\_\_? Hi, \_\_\_\_\_, my name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I am a volunteer with the Minnesota Young Voter Project.

**How are you tonight?** Great, I am calling you tonight because you signed a pledge with us to cast your ballot in the upcoming election and when we last spoke, you mentioned you were still not sure who you were planning on supporting this November.

2. **If the election were held today, who would you support?**  
(If they have changed their mind, notate it under id on call sheet. Do not continue script with those who identify as strong Bush- say thank you, and hang up. Feel free to continue w/ lean Bush)
- 3.
- *If "I don't know: Are you leaning in a particular direction? (If still undecided, or only leaning, go to talking point below.)*
  - *If a strong Kerry supporter (1): Thanks, that's fantastic. As young people, we need to make our voice heard for change on November 2<sup>nd</sup>. Please remember to Vote.*
  - *\*\*\*\*If still leaning Kerry, or undecided – 2,3,4,6,7:  
I just wanted to take a minute to talk a little about \_\_\_\_\_ (their issue) \_\_\_\_\_. This election will have major implications for young people and we are calling you tonight to share with you how this decision will impact the issues that affect our lives:*

(Please go to the issue that corresponds to the issue identified on your call sheet. If they do not have an issue- Use Jobs/Wages)

#### Jobs/Wages- 1

Do you know someone who has lost a job? You know the job market is really tight for young people because we've lost 1.8 million jobs over the past 4 years and now it's even harder to find good paying jobs that provide health insurance. Minnesota's unemployment rate is up by 33% and nationally there are fewer young people working now than at any time since the government began tracking such data in 1948. This will be the first since the Great depression that any president will lose jobs over the course of his term. As young people, we deserve good jobs with good wages and health insurance. We deserve better

### Positive

1. Hi, is this \_\_\_\_\_? Hi, \_\_\_\_\_, my name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I am a volunteer with the Minnesota Young Voter Project.

**How are you tonight?** Great, I am calling you tonight because you signed a pledge with us to cast your ballot in the upcoming election and when we last spoke, you mentioned you were still not sure who you were planning on supporting this November.

2. **If the election were held today, who would you support?**  
(If they have changed their mind, notate it under id on call sheet. Do not continue script with those who identify as strong Bush- say thank you, and hang up. Feel free to continue w/ lean Bush)
- 3.
- *If "I don't know: Are you leaning in a particular direction? (If still undecided, or only leaning, go to talking point below.)*
  - *If a strong Kerry supporter (1): Thanks, that's fantastic. As young people, we need to make our voice heard for change on November 2<sup>nd</sup>. Please remember to Vote.*
  - *\*\*\*\*If still leaning Kerry, or undecided – 2,3,4,6,7:  
I just wanted to take a minute to talk a little about \_\_\_\_\_ (their issue) \_\_\_\_\_. This election will have major implications for young people and we are calling you tonight to share with you how this decision will impact the issues that affect our lives:*

(Please go to the issue that corresponds to the issue identified on your call sheet. If they do not have an issue- Use Jobs/Wages)

#### Jobs/Wages- 1

Do you know someone who has lost a job? The job market is really tight for young people because we've lost 1.8 million jobs over the past 4 years. We need to change that. Looking at the alternative, Clinton created more than 22 million new jobs when he was in office and Democrats have pledged to create 10 million new jobs by closing tax loopholes that encourage foreign outsourcing. As young people, we deserve good jobs with good wages and health insurance.

leadership.

[Source: U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, January 2001 & May 2004; Northeastern University youth unemployment study 2004 National Economic Council, October 2000.]

#### Cost of College/2:

Do you know someone who is paying college loans? In the last four years tuition at public universities has skyrocketed- Minnesota students and their families are paying over 35% more in tuition than they were just four years ago. Over 4 years, the Republicans have refused to fund over 33 billion dollars for public education and on top of that, here in Minnesota the Republican budget denied the 102.5 million dollars in tuition grant money that had been promised to the state. We deserve a quality education that we can afford. We deserve better leadership.

[Source: Congressional Budget Office, February 2004, "Another Education President?" National Association of College and University Business Officers, February 2001; "From Capitol to Campus," National Education Association, May 2001; "FY04 Education Funding Charts: State-by-State Information," "Bush's Tax Shakedown," Progressive Policy Institute, June 30, 2003; "Public College Tuition Soars, Higher Education Appropriations Plummet – College Affordability in Jeopardy," National Center for Public Policy in Higher Education, 2/11/03; USA Today, 1/4/04].

#### Economy/3:

In the last four years, we've lost 1.8 million jobs and Minnesota's household income has declined by \$1,251 since 2000. Republicans claim that huge tax cuts for the rich are helping boost the economy, but the economy is 2 million jobs short of what was promised. In 6 of the past 7 months, wages have actually decreased and the jobs that are being created make 23% less and are less likely to have health benefits. Additionally, Republican leadership opposes raising the minimum wage for the more than 17.3 million U.S workers. We deserve good quality jobs and opportunities for the future. We deserve better leadership.

[Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, January 2001 to June 2004, <http://jec.senate.gov/democrats/ber.htm>, Economy.com, July 2004 and the U. S. Census Bureau, Economic Policy Institute, July 16 2004, Economic Policy Institute, March 2001 through March 2004].

#### Education/4:

Over four years, Minnesota has been deprived of over \$344 Million in federal education funding. Republicans failed to fund their own "Leave No Child Behind" law and stuck Minnesotans with the cost. Over the last four years, nearly one-third of American students are allowed to dropout of high school and on top of that funding for after-school programs, vocational education and

[Source: U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, January 2001 & May 2004; Northeastern University youth unemployment study ,004National Economic Council, October 2000.]

#### Cost of College/2:

Do you know someone who is paying college loans? In Minnesota students and their families have seen tuition costs rise by 35% in just 4 years! We need to change that. Democrats will help college students and their families afford tuition by offering a college opportunity tax credit of up to \$4000 for every year of college. They plan on offering four years of tuition-free college for people willing to serve America for 2 years in a school, healthcare center or strengthening America's security. We need leadership that will make college more affordable, so Minnesota students can attend and complete college.

[Source: Congressional Budget Office, February 2004, "Another Education President?" National Association of College and University Business Officers, February 2001; "From Capitol to Campus," National Education Association, May 2001; "FY04 Education Funding Charts: State-by-State Information," "Bush's Tax Shakedown," Progressive Policy Institute, June 30, 2003; "Public College Tuition Soars, Higher Education Appropriations Plummet – College Affordability in Jeopardy," National Center for Public Policy in Higher Education, 2/11/03; USA Today, 1/4/04].

#### Economy/3:

In the last four years we have gone from record surpluses to a record deficit of over \$420 billion dollars (US Treasury Department) and as young people, we will be left to pay for this mounting debt. We need to change that. Democrats will work to improve the economy by ending the tax cuts for the rich and getting rid of corporate give-aways. Also, Democrats are going create 10 million new jobs and closing tax loopholes that encourage foreign outsourcing. As young people we deserve a healthy economy, good jobs and the opportunity to succeed.

#### Education/4:

Quality public education is the foundation for a strong economy and a successful future. By fully funding the No Child Left Behind Act, Democrats, plan to provide more resources, smaller class sizes and more textbooks to public schools. They will invest 1.5 billion additional dollars in after-school programs giving 3.5 million kids a safe and quality place to go after-school. We need to insure that every child receives a good education.

#### Iraq/Draft/Security/5:

The situation in Iraq has had a huge impact on our generation. We are the ones fighting the war and we are the ones who will pay the costs. In order to

bilingual educational programs has been slashed. We deserve good quality public education and opportunities for the future.. We deserve better leadership.

[Source: "Passing Down the Deficit," Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 5/12/04, <http://www.cbpp.org/5-12-04sfp.htm>, Education Week, 7/28/04].

#### Iraq/Draft/Security/5:

The war in Iraq has cost Minnesotan's \$3.4 billion dollars, that's money that could have been invested here at home. As young people we are the ones fighting the war and we are the ones who will bear the burden of paying for it. With that 3.4 billion dollars, we could have provided healthcare for almost 1.5 million children or hired more than 64,000 elementary school teachers.

And instead of finishing the job in Afghanistan to capture Bin Laden, Republican leadership redirected troops to Iraq. We have still not caught Osama Bin Laden and Iraq has been growing more instable and violent by the month. We need to change the direction of this country. As young people, we need leadership that will protect our future at home and abroad.

["Growing Pessimism on Iraq: Doubts Increase Within U.S. Security Agencies" by Dana Priest and Thomas E. Ricks  
Washington Post *Wednesday, September 29, 2004; Page A01*.

*"Federal Budget Trade-Offs" National Priorities Project, May 2004*

#### Environment/6:

In the last four years, the Republicans have gutted the Clean Air Act and abandoned federal regulations meant to protect endangered species, selling public lands to oil and logging company's and allowing polluting industries to write the laws that are meant to their activities. And here in Minnesota, rising mercury levels in our lakes and rivers are having a severe impact on our economy and our way of life. As young people, we deserve water we can drink and air we can breath. We deserve better leadership.

[ *Published by the December 11, 2003 issue of [Rolling Stone](#) Crimes Against Nature by Robert F. Kennedy Jr.*]

#### Tolerance/Equality Issues/7:

In the last four years, the equal rights of gay Americans has been under attack. By advancing the Defense of Marriage Act, Republican leadership wants to pass a constitutional amendment denying more than 1,100 rights, protections and benefits to millions of devoted couples and their children. Additionally, Republican leadership has begun working to remove hard won protections for gay and lesbian workers from civil service labor contracts. As young people, we deserve leadership that honors and protects the rights of all of its citizens. We deserve better leadership.

stabilize the situation and to prevent more deaths, we need to build alliances around the world, not bully and alienate our allies. To do this we need a change in leadership. Democratic leadership will reach out and rebuild alliances to help share the burden in tracking down Al-Qaeda and rebuilding Iraq. As young people, we deserve to live in a safe world.

#### Environment/6:

Today, almost 50% of our water does not meet "drinkable, swimmable and fishable" standard set out by the Clean Water Act 30 years ago. We're back tracking and we need to change that. Democrat's have a strong record on the environment and plan to implement a "Restore America's Waters" campaign to protect our precious, limited water resources. And they will close loopholes in the Clean Air Act to reduce acid rain and mercury emissions. As young people, we deserve clean air and water and need to protect our quality of life.

#### Tolerance/Equality Issues/7:

**In the last four years, the equal rights of gay Americans has been under attack.** As young people we need to change that. Democrats have introduced legislation prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and have played a leadership role in protecting the rights of all Americans in their workplace and in their communities. As young people, we deserve a nation that honors and protects the rights of all of its citizens.

#### Health Care/8:

Do you know someone without healthcare? 17.9 Million 18-35 year olds don't have health insurance and we need to change that. Well, Democrats have a plan to cover over 95% of all Americans and provide healthcare to all children. According to an independent analysis done by Emory University, their plan would provide health insurance coverage to nearly 27 million Americans who now to not have health insurance. They will push to reduce the price of prescription drugs through the re-importation of cheaper drugs from Canada. As young people, we deserve to have access to quality and affordable health insurance.

#### 4. **At this point, do you know who you'll be supporting in the upcoming presidential election?**

*(Let them respond, and be sure to re-id them as necessary. Be precise in choosing an ID code, and don't be afraid to ask again.)*

- **If No Issue Identified:** And what issue is most important to you in the upcoming election?

#### 5. **Just two more questions:**

- What is your current address? Are you registered to vote at this address? And, what is your date of birth?
- The situation in Iraq has had a huge impact on our

Health Care/8:

Do you know someone without healthcare? In the last four years, more than 3.8 million Americans have lost their health insurance. In 2002 alone, the number of uninsured increased by 2.4 million- the largest one-year increase in a decade. And 18-35 year olds are the most under-insured population- 17.9 million of us (18-35) do not have health insurance and those of us who do have insurance have seen premiums increase by an average of \$2,600. As young people, we deserve to have health insurance that we can afford. We deserve better leadership.

[Sources: Census Bureau, Sept. 2003 report; "Census Finds Many More Lack Health Insurance," Washington Post, 9/30/03, Kaiser family foundation, 2004,].

4. **At this point, do you know who you'll be supporting in the upcoming presidential election?**

*(Let them respond, and be sure to re-id them as necessary. Be precise in choosing an ID code, and don't be afraid to ask again.)*

➤ **If No Issue Identified:** And what issue is most important to you in the upcoming election?

5. **Just two more questions:**

- What is your current address? Are you registered to vote at this address?
- And, what is your date of birth?

**Thanks, have a great day!**

**Thanks, have a great day!**

## *Scripts used in Study B (Los Angeles)*

### **Negative**

Hello, my name is \_\_\_\_\_, I'm with *Neighborhoods United*. We're talking to our neighbors today about the November election and how it will impact our communities.

Of course there is the Presidential election, but there are also some Statewide Propositions on the ballot that will have a major impact on our community. Here are some things you should know about Prop 66:

- Proposition 66 gives us a chance to slow down the mass incarcerations in our community caused by the Three Strikes Law.
- The Three Strikes Law is discriminatory and criminalizes our community.
- It sends people to jail for 25 years to life for non-violent offenses such as shop- lifting.
- Currently 30,000 second and third strikers have been sentenced for petty crimes!
- The additional cost to tax payers for all of this is \$500,000 per year.

**WE URGE YOU TO VOTE YES ON PROP 66. IF THE ELECTIONS WERE HELD TODAY, HOW WOULD YOU VOTE ON THIS PROPOSITION?**

And here's what I want you to know about Prop 72:

### **Positive**

Hello, my name is \_\_\_\_\_, I'm with *Neighborhoods United*. We're talking to our neighbors today about the November election and how it will impact our communities.

Of course there is the Presidential election, but there are also some Statewide Propositions on the ballot that will have a major impact on our community. Let me tell you this about Prop 66:

- Proposition 66 for us is a chance to bring fairness to sentencing requirements that are adversely affecting our community.
- Strengthen the community's voice in creating positive judicial reforms.
- Ensure that non-violent offenders are protected from excessive sentencing.
- Voting "yes" on 66 will save California tax payers \$500 Million per year.

**WE URGE YOU TO VOTE YES ON PROP 66. IF THE ELECTIONS WERE HELD TODAY, HOW WOULD YOU VOTE ON THIS PROPOSITION?**

This is what I want you to know about Prop 72:

- "Yes" on Proposition 72 will guarantee over 1 million working Californians will receive health insurance through their employers.

- Big business supporters want to confuse people and make them vote no on providing health care for working Californians.
- The idea is that most people don't get educated on the ballot issues and so are less inclined to vote yes, even on something like Prop 72 which will benefit them.
- There are over one million working families without health insurance in California.
- Prop. 72 will require billionaire companies like McDonalds and Wal-Mart to give their workers and their families' affordable health insurance.

**AGAIN, WE URGE YOU TO VOTE YES ON PROP 72.  
CAN WE COUNT ON YOUR YES VOTE ON THIS  
IMPORTANT PROPOSITION?**

- In so doing, a burden will be kept off of an already stretched healthcare system.
- "Yes" on Prop. 72 will make for a healthier California.

**AGAIN, WE URGE YOU TO VOTE YES ON PROP 72.  
CAN WE COUNT ON YOUR YES VOTE ON THIS  
IMPORTANT PROPOSITION?**

## Reviewers' Appendix B

### *Study A Survey Questions*

Hi, may I speak with \_\_\_\_\_. I'm calling on behalf of researchers at Yale University with a short four-question survey that takes about one minute.

1) In Tuesday's election, which candidate did you prefer [rotate] George Bush or John Kerry?

- a) John Kerry;
- b) George Bush;
- c) Nader [Volunteered];
- d) Neither [Volunteered];
- e) Other [Volunteered];
- f) Don't know [volunteered].

2) Would you say that your impression of John Kerry was very favorable, somewhat favorable, somewhat unfavorable, or very unfavorable?

- a) very favorable;
- b) somewhat favorable;
- c) somewhat unfavorable;
- d) very unfavorable;
- e) Don't know [volunteered].

3) Would you say that your impression of George Bush was very favorable, somewhat favorable, somewhat unfavorable, or very unfavorable?

- a) very favorable;
- b) somewhat favorable;
- c) somewhat unfavorable;
- d) very unfavorable;
- e) Don't know [volunteered].

4) Parties and organizations often contact people like yourself over the phone during the campaign. Could you please tell me whether the following groups contacted you by phone (yes, no, not sure)?

- 4a) The Minnesota Democratic party;
- 4b) The Minnesota Republican party;
- 4c) The Minnesota Young Voter Project.

Thank you for completing our survey. I hope you have a pleasant evening.

## ***Study B Survey Questions***

Hello, My name is \_\_\_\_\_. I'm calling on behalf of election researchers at Yale University. We are conducting a very short public opinion survey that will take no more than a minute of your time. Are you: [PERSON 1].

**[If the person says no then ask, may I speak with PERSON 1, and read introduction again]**

**[If unavailable]**

Thanks, we'll try back later.

**[If you get PERSON 1 and PERSON 1 refuses to participate then say]**

Sorry to disturb you. Have a nice evening/day. See instruction sheet for further instructions.

**[If PERSON 1 agrees to take the survey]**

I want to let you know that this survey is strictly confidential and will be used only for research purposes, and you do not have to answer any question you do not wish.

Q1. As you know there were a number of propositions on the ballot this year. We want to ask your opinion on two. Did you support or oppose proposition 66, which would amend the state's three strikes law? [If respondent says s/he didn't vote: We just want to know your preference – it doesn't matter if you didn't vote.]

1. Support
2. Oppose
3. No opinion [DON'T READ]
8. Don't Know [DON'T READ]
9. Refused [DON'T READ]

Q2. And what about proposition 72, which was about employee health insurance. Did you support or oppose this proposition? [If respondent says s/he didn't vote: We just want to know your preference – it doesn't matter if you didn't vote.]

1. Support
2. Oppose
3. No opinion [DON'T READ]
8. Don't Know [DON'T READ]
9. Refused [DON'T READ]

Q3. Now, we want to ask you just a few factual questions about these propositions. I'm going to read some statements. Tell me which one is true.

1. A YES vote for Proposition 66 gets rid of the three strikes rule.
2. A YES vote for Proposition 66 only requires the three strikes rule to be applied in cases when the conviction is for a violent or serious felony.

3. A YES vote for Proposition 66 requires the three strikes rule to be applied in all cases, both misdemeanors and felonies.
4. Other [DON'T READ]
8. Don't Know [DON'T READ]
9. Refused [DON'T READ]

Q4. Now let me read a few statements about proposition 72. Again, tell me which one is true.

1. A YES vote for Proposition 72 allows companies to decide whether or not they want to provide health insurance to their employees.
2. A YES vote for Proposition 72 requires companies to pay all the health care cost of their employees.
3. A YES vote for Proposition 72 requires that employers pay at least 80% of coverage cost.
4. Other [DON'T READ]
8. Don't Know [DON'T READ]
9. Refused [DON'T READ]

Thank you for your time. Have a nice day/evening.