Which citizens do elected officials target with distributive spending? Experimental tests of office holders' targeting strategies*

Adam Dynes†

Word Count: 9,517

Abstract:

The distributive politics literature is unresolved as to whether politicians target swing voters or core supporters with distributive spending and whether citizens’ propensity to turnout affects this targeting strategy. To address this question, I use a unique data set with a novel research design for this literature—a survey experiment on local U.S. policymakers. Respondents are asked to advise a hypothetical city councilor on which of two neighborhoods (whose political characteristics are experimentally manipulated) to target with a local project. Among other things, I find that local officials, on average, target swing neighborhoods over core ones because they believe that swing voters are more likely than core voters to electorally punish politicians for targeting other groups. In addition, they overwhelmingly target high turnout neighborhoods over low turnout ones because they do not believe that distributive spending has much of a mobilization effect. This latter finding has important implications for representation at the local level.

* I would like to thank Leslie Bull, Charlotte Dillon, Allison Dougis, Jason Guss, Walter Hsiang, Josh Kalla, Raphael Leung, Diana Li, Yusu Liu, Shahla Naimi, Cameron Rotblat, and Joyce Shi for research assistance and Daniel Butler, Alan Gerber, Gregory Huber, David Mayhew, Michael Ting, Jessica Trounstine, and seminar participants at Yale University for useful feedback. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 2013 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association. Please send questions and comments via email.
† Assistant Professor of Political Science, Brigham Young University, 745 Kimball Tower, PO Box 25545, Provo, UT 84602 <adamdynes@byu.edu>
The central premise of distributive politics is that politicians target citizens with public spending in order to increase their electoral support. But given that politicians do not have unlimited access to such distributive goods, which types of citizens do they target? Do they focus their efforts on core supporters, those whose support for the politician is already the strongest? Or do they use distributive spending to try to woo swing voters, those whose loyalties are unclear? If politicians believe they can count on the support of their core voters, then the obvious vote-maximizing strategy is to target swing voters (Linbeck and Weibull 1987). However, if politicians are risk averse and uncertain as to how distributive spending will affect swing voters’ electoral behavior, targeting core voters may be their safest bet (Cox and McCubbins 1986).

A complicating factor for a candidate deciding whether to target core or swing voters is whether or not these citizens will actually turnout to vote. If distributive goods only buy support and do not affect turnout, then politicians should target citizens who are more likely to vote in order to minimize wasting effort on non-voters. However, if politicians believe that distributive spending has a mobilizing effect (Chen 2012; De La O 2013), then they have an additional incentive to target core supporters, particularly core supporters who are less likely to turnout but have the potential to do so if mobilized (Nichter 2008).

Despite the importance of these questions to the study of distributive politics (and politics in general when defined as “who gets what, when, how” (Lasswell 1936), the existing literature does not provide a clear answer. Foundational theories make contradictory predictions. In addition, empirical results are mixed and rely on research designs that are unable to identify intended targeting strategies from observable budget allocations.

To shed light on this issue, I use a novel approach for the study of legislative behavior: a survey experiment on elected municipal officials from across the U.S. This
approach directly measures the perceptions of the population of interest and provides causal evidence of politicians’ strategic decision making. In the survey experiment, respondents read a vignette about a city councilor who must decide which of two neighborhoods to target with a local road repair project. Respondents only know how the neighborhoods differ in terms of two factors that are randomized across neighborhoods: 1) the neighborhood’s support for the incumbent and 2) its residents’ turnout propensity. The respondents are instructed to advise the city councilor on which neighborhood to target. In a follow up experiment, respondents predict what the electoral ramifications would be if the city councilor chose one of the neighborhoods over the other. This set up allows for an analysis of which types of voters policymakers believe are the most electorally advantageous to target and why.

Overall, I find that policymakers target swing neighborhoods over core ones and high turnout neighborhoods over lower turnout ones. Although policymakers believe that distributive spending is a net benefit for an incumbent regardless of which neighborhood is chosen, they target the swing neighborhood over the core one because they believe that swing voters, relative to core voters, are much more likely to electorally punish incumbents for directing spending to other groups. In short, policymakers believe they can take the support of core voters for granted. On the other hand, support for this swing voter strategy is not overwhelming. Nearly 43% of respondents still targeted core supporters over swing voters, suggesting that current theory, which often argues for one targeting strategy, is not sufficient for explaining elected officials’ behavior and perceptions on this front. With regards to turnout, I find that local policymakers overwhelmingly believe that targeting citizens who have a high propensity to vote is the vote-maximizing strategy regardless of those citizens’ support for the incumbent. In addition, policymakers are uncertain as to whether the distributive spending will boost turnout in the targeted neighborhood. As such, they would rather target certain voters
than risk wasting distributive goods on an attempt to mobilize their core supporters who have a lower propensity to turnout. I also fail to find evidence that voter turnout and support have an interaction effect on policymakers’ targeting choice. Although respondents are more likely to choose core supporters over swing voters when both groups have a lower propensity to vote (as opposed to a higher propensity), the effect is insignificant and estimated imprecisely.

This paper makes several contributions to the distributive politics literature. The first is its use of a novel dataset and research design to help adjudicate between competing theories on an important question in distributive politics. The responses are from actual elected officials who make distributive choices in the real world and whose motivations are in line with relevant theory. Second, the analysis not only measures whom politicians would target but also examines why they would target one type of citizen over another. I primarily focus on respondents’ choice between core and swing voters and fail to find evidence supporting the assumptions underlying Cox and McCubbins’ core voter model (1986). This suggests that conditional theories (e.g., Fleck 2001; Hirano, Snyder, and Ting 2009) might provide a better explanation of why some policymakers believe targeting core voters is more electorally advantageous. Third, the finding that high turnout voters are rewarded for their participation (see also Martin 2003) has potentially negative implications for representation at the local level given the skew in who participates in local elections (Anzia 2011; although see Oliver et al. 2012).

**Whom should policymakers target and why?**

In this section, I lay out the main predictions of the theories between which this paper helps adjudicate. I begin with the swing voter models. In these models (e.g., Dixit and
Londregan 1996; Lindbeck and Weibull 1987; but see Stokes 2005 for a slight alternative), citizens’ support or ideology is conceptualized as their affinity for two opposing candidates in an open-seat race independent of any distributive promises made by either candidate. Candidates are assumed to have no chance of winning over their opponents’ supporters, so they must decide whether to target a group of their core voters (i.e., citizens who ideologically favor the candidate over the other one) or a group of swing voters (i.e., citizens who are ideologically indifferent between the two candidates). The prediction that politicians will target swing over core stems from the argument that core voters “cannot credibly threaten to punish their favored party if it withholds rewards,” but swing voters can. Thus, politicians “should not waste rewards on [their core voters]” (Stokes 2005, 317). These models make the following hypotheses:

**H1: TARGET SWING VOTERS:** All else equal, policymakers prefer to allocate distributive benefits to swing voters over core voters.

**H1.1: LOYAL CORE VOTERS:** Policymakers believe that core voters will punish them less than swing voters for targeting benefits to other voters.

(Others (Cox and McCubbins 1986; Cox et al. 1984) argue that policymakers actually have a stronger incentive to target core voters over swing voters given the following two assumptions: 1) politicians are risk-averse and 2) citizens’ support for the candidate correlates with the politicians’ familiarity with those citizens. In this framework, core voters are “well-known quantities” to the candidate and have consistently supported her

---

1 I group Dixit and Londregan (1996) with the swing voter models since they predict that candidates should target swing voters over core voters when all else is equal.

2 Notice that my use of the term “swing voters” is rather broad and includes primary voters who are indifferent between two candidates in a primary.
in the past (Cox and McCubbins 1986, 378). She knows how they will react to the allocation of distributive goods. Swing voters, on the other hand, are less familiar or “unattached” to either candidate. They make for “riskier investments” both because the politician is uncertain how distributive benefits will affect swing voters’ electoral behavior and because swing voters may be targeted by the other candidate. As such, risk-averse politicians will “over-invest” in core voters. This leads to the following hypotheses:

**H2: Target Core Voters:** All else equal, policymakers prefer to allocate distributive benefits to core voters over swing voters.

**H2.1: Risk Aversion:** Policymakers’ willingness to allocate distributive spending to core voters increases in their aversion to risk.

**H2.2: Uncertain Swing Voters:** Policymakers are less certain about how swing voters react to the allocation of distributive spending than how core voters do.

Subsequent models have attempted to generalize when politicians should target core or swing voters by considering the effects of other factors such as the “leaky bucket” of government transfers (Dixit and Londregan 1996) or primary elections (Hirano, Snyder, and Ting 2009). Of primary interest to this paper is how citizens’ propensity to turnout affects politicians’ targeting strategy. If policymakers believe that distributive spending also has a mobilizing effect—and recent research suggests that distributing spending does have such an effect (Chen 2012; De La O 2013)—then politicians have another reason to target core supporters, and specifically, those core supporters who have the potential to vote but would be unlikely to do so without being mobilized. By the same logic, targeting core voters who have a high propensity to turnout would be a waste of resources since the policymaker can already rely on their vote (Dunning and Stokes 2008; Nichter 2008).³

³ Although these models were created specifically with clientelistic parties in mind, their logic applies to
Among swing voters, policymakers should only target those who are certain to turnout in an attempt to buy their support. Low turnout swing voters, on the other hand, should be avoided since their support is uncertain and politicians would prefer that they stay home on election day (Dunning and Stokes 2008). Based on this logic, I propose the following:

**H3: TARGET HIGH TURNOUT SWING & LOW TURNOUT CORE:** *All else equal, politicians prefer to allocate distributive benefits to core voters who have the potential to vote if mobilized and swing voters who are certain to vote.*

**H3.1: MOBILIZING EFFECT:** *Policymakers believe that distributive spending increases turnout among the recipients of that spending.*

However, policymakers may not believe that distributive spending has a mobilizing effect, or at the very least, they may believe that the mobilizing effect is too small to compensate for the benefits of targeting certain voters. As such, they should target high turnout voters to maximize their re-election chances (Fleck 1999; Key 1950; Martin 2003), leading to the following:

**H4: TARGET HIGH TURNOUT:** *All else equal, politicians prefer to allocate distributive benefits to voters who have a higher propensity to turnout.*

**H4.1: NO MOBILIZING EFFECT:** *Policymakers do not believe that distributive spending increases turnout among the recipients of that spending.*

A limitation of the theoretical literature is its focus on a specific political context: an open-seat race with two candidates who make binding, ex-ante promises about whom they will target with distributive spending once elected⁴. Like most empirical work,

---

⁴ But see Stokes (2005) for a model without binding promises and Dunning and Stokes (2008) for a model that considers an incumbent machine party with access to public resources against a challenger without that
however, this paper focuses on the distributive decisions made by an incumbent candidate in office.\textsuperscript{5}

**Empirical evidence is lacking**

The extant empirical literature on the targeting strategies of elected officials does not adjudicate between the competing hypotheses derived above. Some of this ambiguity results from a mismatch between the question of interest and the empirics. For example, many studies in comparative politics\textsuperscript{6} and all studies on the distribution of federal outlays in the U.S.\textsuperscript{7} examine the allocation of spending across districts when the question is specifically about the allocation within districts. In short, this amounts to an ecological inference fallacy; even if a majority party in a legislative body targets swing (core) districts, those dollars may not be intended for swing (core) voters within those districts same access.

\textsuperscript{5} One way to reconcile this difference is to assume that the empirical work, including this paper, tests the ex-post fulfillment of distributive campaign promises. This current project could also be considered a test of a new political context—incumbent candidates making distributive choices while in office—that has yet to be formally modeled despite its significance; many distributive decisions are made by current officeholders independent of ex-ante campaign promises. For example, the 2002 U.S. steel tariffs were widely seen as an attempt by President George W. Bush to gain support among voters in key swing states prior to the 2004 Presidential election. This distributive decision was clearly not the ex-post fulfillment of an ex-ante promise.

\textsuperscript{6} E.g., Arulampalam et al. (2009); Crampton (2004); Dasgupta, Dhillon, and Dutta (2004); Denemark (2000); John and Ward (2001); and Milligan and Smart (2005).

\textsuperscript{7} Several studies (e.g., Bickers and Stein 1996; Herron and Theodos 2004; Wright 1974) find that swing states and House districts in the U.S. are targeted while others (e.g., Ansolabehere and Snyder 2006; Balla et al. 2002; Bickers and Stein 2000; Levitt and Snyder 1995) find that core House districts are.
Another mismatch occurs in comparative studies that use data from developing democracies with clientelistic parties (e.g., Calvo and Murillo 2004; Diaz-Cayeros et al. 2006; Stokes 2005). This includes studies that test how the interaction of citizens’ support and turnout affect politicians’ distributive strategies (Nichter 2008; Dunning and Stokes 2008; Stokes et al. 2012). As Stokes et al. (2012) argue, the local party workers who affect the distribution of goods in these polities operate under different incentives than the elected officials who are modeled in the theories. Ambiguity also exists among studies in comparative politics that examine the intra-district allocation of distributive spending in democracies where elected officials, and not party workers, determine those allocations. For example, Case (2001) finds that swing voters in Albania are targeted while Dahlberg and Johansen (2002) find that core municipalities within legislative districts in Sweden are. Besides producing conflicting results, these observational studies are subject to a critical limitation, discussed below.

Turning to the literature on the distribution of urban services, there is evidence that local officials target core voters, but these studies are limited in their ability to adjudicate between the different targeting strategies. In fact, the early consensus in this literature argued that political considerations had no detectable influence on the contemporary distribution of urban services even in cities, such as Chicago, where political influence

---

8 I do not intend to downplay the importance of understanding which types of districts are targeted. Rather, this is a critique of how the results from these studies are cited as evidence of which types of citizens are targeted.

9 Among studies that test how citizens’ turnout propensity and ideology affect the allocation of distributive spending, Nichter (2008) finds that low-turnout core supporters are targeted but does not test whether high-turnout swing voters are as well. Dunning and Stokes (2008) find weak evidence supporting H3 while Stokes et al. (2012), who use a survey experiment on party workers, find no evidence supporting H3.
was assumed to be greatest. Instead, other factors like bureaucratic decision making (e.g., Antunes and Plumlee 1977; Levy et al. 1974; Lineberry 1977; Lipsky 1969; Mladenka 1980) and economic considerations (e.g., Tiebout 1956; Peterson 1981) explained the allocation of government outlays. More recent work overturns this consensus on both theoretical and empirical grounds (e.g., Hajnal and Trounstine 2010; Meier et al. 1991; Tausanovitch and Warshaw 2013). Among these studies is a subset that argues that core voters benefit from this political influence (Cingranelli 1981; Koehler and Wrightson 1987; Levine Einstein and Kogan 2013; Miranda and Tunyavong 1994; Trounstine 2006). These findings, however, have several limitations. The first concerns their generalizability. All four studies focus on urban cities, and only Trounstine (2006) examines outlays in more than one city (nine, in fact). Whether the results would hold across a broader spectrum of municipalities is unclear. Second, the focus of the studies is to identify whether political variables are associated with the distribution of services and not to adjudicate between the competing theories of interest to this paper. As such, the studies do not attempt to account for different targeting strategies.¹⁰

One final limitation of these and other empirical studies is the difficulty of identifying politicians’ targeting strategy from observable budget outcomes when so many factors affect the budget allocation process. In short, this amounts to a problem of omitted variable bias. Knowing the observational equilibrium outcome of budget allocations does not necessarily reveal politicians’ utility function. Instead, the researcher needs to be able to manipulate the politicians’ choice options, which is the approach taken in this

¹⁰ For example, Trounstine (2006) examines expenditures that benefit core supporters but not expenditures that benefit swing voters. Thus, even though she finds that core voters benefit more when a political coalition dominates in a city, the data do not indicate whether this phenomenon affects benefits to swing voters.
Survey sample

Given the difficulty of randomly assigning a neighborhood’s support for a politician or turnout propensity, a survey experiment is a natural research strategy for examining politicians’ targeting strategies. To do this, I embedded an experiment in a survey of elected municipal officials, which was conducted between July and October 2012. To gather the list of municipal officials, I began with the U.S. Census Bureau’s list of 26,566 U.S. municipalities and then conducted an exhaustive online search for each of these municipalities’ websites to gather the title, name, and email address of the municipality’s elected officials. In most cases, this consists of legislators (e.g., aldermen, city councilors, selectmen, or supervisors) and elected executives (e.g., mayors). Throughout the paper, I refer to them collectively as local, city, or municipal policymakers, politicians, or officials. The search for these municipal websites was conducted in random order and resulted in a list of 26,531 elected officials’ email addresses from 5,024 municipalities.

---

11 Spada and de Sá Guimarães (2013) use an email field experiment to examine whether candidates for municipal office in Brazil are more likely to respond to emails from core or swing voters. Their results suggest that candidates target any potential voter with an email response regardless of their support for the candidate.

12 In the survey, municipalities are defined as sub-county governmental units that the U.S. Census Bureau refers to as “general-purpose local governments.” Specifically, these governmental units meet the following definitions used by the U.S. Census Bureau: Minor Civil Divisions in CT, US, MA, MI, MN, NH, NJ, NY, PA, RI, VT, and WI (in these states, they are usually called townships or towns); Incorporated Places (in most states, they are called cities, towns, boroughs, and villages); and Consolidated Cities (these are a “unit of government for which the functions of an incorporated place and its county or Minor Civil Divisions have merged”) (U.S. Census Bureau 2011).
The survey was conducted in five rounds with each elected official randomly assigned to be invited by email to participate in one of the rounds. The questions for this analysis were included in the fourth round of the survey, which was conducted in September 2012. The response rate was twenty percent, on par with recent surveys on elites of this nature (e.g., Fisher and Herrick 2013; Harden 2013) and double the typical response rate for contemporary telephone surveys of the mass public. In each survey round, invitees received three email invitations over the course of several weeks. The email invitations contained a link to the survey, which was conducted online using Qualtrics. In order to keep the survey length to a minimum (around 15 minutes), the questions and vignettes in this analysis were designed to be as brief as possible.

Table A1 in the appendix presents summary data about the cities in the sample. The cities fall under one of three categories: (1) those where none of the email addresses of the city’s elected officials was found; (2) those where emails were found but none of the officials took the survey; and (3) those where at least one of the officials from that city answered a question in the survey. The mean population of cities in category 1 (3,127) is much smaller than those in categories 2 (17,635) or 3 (36,304), which indicates that larger cities were more likely to have websites with emails and their elected officials were more likely to respond. Although the 2,989 cities with responses represent only 11.2% of total cities, they contain 108.5 million inhabitants or 51.2% of the population in the Census Bureau’s list of cities. As figure A1 in the appendix illustrates, the cities with respondents are also relatively evenly dispersed across the U.S.

**Vignette and treatment conditions**

The survey respondents were presented with a vignette-style survey experiment that has two parts. Part 1 sets up the hypothetical scenario and tests whom local policymakers would target with a distributive good. Part 2 tests why policymakers would choose one
type of voter over another by examining policymakers’ beliefs about how citizens would respond to different distributive choices made by a hypothetical city councilor.

The text of the vignette used in Part 1 is presented in Box 1. The vignette asks respondents to imagine that they are the campaign manager for a hypothetical city councilor named Mr. Smith, who has to choose between two neighborhoods for a local road project. The vignette explains that the city councilors were deciding the transportation budget and had room for one more project. The next two on the priority list happened to be in Mr. Smith’s district. The demand and need for the projects are the same in both neighborhoods. Unsure which project to support, Mr. Smith asks for advice from his campaign manager who has electoral data about the two neighborhoods. This information is presented in a two by two table that displays two pieces of information about each neighborhood: 1) the neighborhood’s support for Mr. Smith (core vs. swing voters) and 2) the turnout propensity of the residents in each neighborhood (high turnout vs. low turnout voters). These characteristics of the neighborhoods are experimentally manipulated and discussed in more detail below. At the bottom of the vignette, the survey asks respondents to indicate which neighborhood project they think Mr. Smith should support. The general framework of this survey experiment is similar to one used by Stokes et al. (2012) to test the targeting strategies of local party workers or “brokers.”

Several aspects of the vignette deserve additional explanation. First, I ask respondents to put themselves in the shoes of a hypothetical campaign manager because I wanted respondents’ answer to be motivated by their reelection interests without linking that answer to their view of themselves. Second, the vignette describes the road project in terms that meet the requirements of a distributive good. As Cox and McCubbins (1986) point out, “capital goods do not easily meet the basic requirements of [their] model” except “when geographic and political groups coincide” (384), which they do in the
vignette. Distributive goods should also be finely targetable, which is why the projects are on opposite ends of Mr. Smith’s district involving roads used by local traffic. Furthermore, I wanted the projects to be an issue that nearly all respondents’ deal with in their public service. Third, I purposely avoid describing whether the upcoming elections are a primary or general election. For many local policymakers, the primary election is the most competitive (or potentially competitive) election and might be at the center of their experiences in distributive politics. For these types of respondents, the core and swing voters described in the treatment conditions below might be considered core and swing primary voters.

Part 1 of the survey experiment has three experimental elements that are manipulated. The first is Mr. Smith’s electoral vulnerability, which is mentioned at the beginning of the vignette. This variable was included to test the possibility that Mr. Smith’s electoral vulnerability would affect politicians’ targeting strategy. However, the treatment does not have any discernible effects on respondents’ answers, so for the sake of brevity, I ignore it in this analysis.

The other two experimental elements are the neighborhoods’ support for Mr. Smith and the turnout propensity of voters in each neighborhood. Support for Mr. Smith is described in terms of the percent of residents in the neighborhood who currently support Mr. Smith (i.e. core voters) or are undecided between Mr. Smith and his opponent (i.e. swing voters) 13. In core neighborhoods, “70% [of residents] support Mr. Smith” and “15% are undecided.” In swing neighborhoods, the numbers are switched: “15% support Mr. Smith” and “70% are undecided.” To avoid any bias that might result from number

13 The table in the vignette describing the two neighborhoods indicates that the levels of support for Mr. Smith are evenly spread across both voters and non-voters. Similarly, the residents’ propensity to vote is the same among core and swing voters.
preferences among respondents, I used the same values (15% and 70%) in both conditions. I operationalize support this way for a couple of reasons. First, this is similar to prior empirical work, which measures citizens’ support based on either their partisan identity; their vote choice in the most recent election (e.g., Dahlberg and Johansson 2002); or their stated support for one party or candidate over another (e.g., Stokes 2005). Second, this measure of support likely mimics how elected officials conceptualize voter support across the neighborhoods in their city or district. As Fenno notes in his interactions with members of Congress, elected officials think of their supporters (i.e. their re-election constituency) as those who vote for them in the general election (Fenno 1977).

The neighborhoods’ turnout propensity is presented as the “% of residents who will definitely vote or might vote.” In high turnout neighborhoods, “65% will definitely vote”14 while “10% could potentially vote if mobilized by a campaign.” In low turnout neighborhoods, the numbers are switched: “10% will definitely vote” while “65% could potentially vote if mobilized by a campaign.” In describing the low turnout neighborhoods, I emphasized that these voters could turn out in much higher numbers if they were mobilized. According to the turnout propensity model, politicians target core propensity voters who have the potential to vote but would unlikely do so absent being mobilized by a campaign. It is important that this idea is made clear in the descriptions15.

14 Although 65% turnout is practically unheard of at the citywide level, it would not be impossible for a single neighborhood to have such high turnout. More importantly, the figure clearly indicates that residents in the high turnout neighborhood have a higher propensity to vote than those in the low turnout neighborhood.

15 In their survey experiment testing the targeting strategies of party brokers, Stokes et al. (2012) describe low-turnout/potential voters in a similar fashion.
Subjects were randomly assigned to one of four treatment conditions. Each one
displays a different pairwise comparison of the possible descriptions of the two
neighborhoods in the vignette\textsuperscript{16}. These four pairwise comparisons were:

1. a swing neighborhood and a core neighborhood that both have high turnout;
2. a swing neighborhood and a core neighborhood that both have low turnout;
3. a high turnout neighborhood and a low turnout neighborhood that are both swing;
   and
4. a high turnout neighborhood and a low turnover neighborhood that are both core.

Comparisons 1 and 2 present respondents with a swing neighborhood versus a core
neighborhood. The turnout between the two neighborhoods is fixed. In comparison 1,
both neighborhoods have high turnout. In comparison 2, both have low turnout. Pooling
the results from the respondents assigned to comparison 1 and 2 allows us test whether
policymakers favor swing voters over core voters (H1: Target Swing) or vice versa (H2:
Target Core). Respondents assigned to comparisons 3 and 4, on the other hand, must
choose between a high turnout neighborhood and a low turnout one. In comparison 3,
both neighborhoods are swing while in comparison 4 both are core. If H4 (Target High
Turnout) is correct, then respondents should choose the high turnout neighborhood in
both comparison 3 and 4, but if H3 (Target Low Turnout Core and High Turnout Swing)
is correct, then respondents should choose the high turnout swing neighborhoods in
comparisons 1 and 3 and the low turnout core neighborhoods in comparisons 2 and 4.

\textsuperscript{16} Even though there are eight possible pairwise comparisons, I limit them to four due to power issues and
because these four are sufficient for testing the hypotheses at hand. Furthermore, Stokes et al. (2012) use
these same four pairwise comparisons in their survey experiment testing the targeting strategies of party
brokers.
**Policymakers target swing and high turnout voters**

The results, displayed in figure 1, suggest that policymakers target swing voters over core voters and high turnout voters over low turnout voters. As displayed in panel A of figure 1, 57% of respondents chose the swing neighborhood over the core neighborhood. This percent is statistically significant from 50% at the 0.01 level. When the results in panel A are split up based on the neighborhoods’ turnout propensity, respondents were slightly more likely to choose the swing (core) neighborhood when turnout was high (low) as predicted by H3 (Target Low Turnout Core and High Turnout Swing). However, this 6 point difference is not statistically significant at the 0.1 level. Furthermore, respondents did not choose the core neighborhood over the swing neighborhood as H3 predicts should occur when turnout is low in both neighborhoods. Even though the overall results support the swing voter hypothesis (H1) over the core voter hypothesis (H2), there is substantial heterogeneity in their selection, with a sizable portion (43%) choosing the core neighborhood over the swing one. In part 2 of the survey experiment, I explore why this might be.

(Figure 1, About Here)

Turning to panel B, we see that a large majority of respondents (82%; $p = 0.000$) chose the high turnout neighborhood over the low turnout one. When the results are split up based on the neighborhoods’ support for Mr. Smith, I see a similar pattern as the one displayed in panel A. Respondents were more likely to choose the high turnout neighborhood over the low turnout neighborhood when both neighborhoods were swing. However, the 7-point difference is not very large ($p = 0.09$), and respondents fail to choose the low turnout neighborhood over the high turnout neighborhood as H3 predicts should occur when both neighborhoods are core. Overall, the results in panel B support H4 (Target High Turnout), which predicts that high turnout voters will be targeted regardless of their support for the incumbent.
**Why are swing and high turnout voters targeted?**

Part 2 of the experiment is a continuation of the same hypothetical scenario from part 1 (see box 2 for the exact wording) and tests why respondents chose one neighborhood over another in party 1 of the survey experiment. In part 2, respondents are asked to predict how citizens in the two neighborhoods would respond if Mr. Smith decided to target one of the two neighborhoods in the vignette. The neighborhood chosen by Mr. Smith randomly varies. Thus, subjects who were randomly assigned in the first part to see a swing neighborhood versus a core neighborhood are randomly assigned in the second part to one of two conditions: 1) where Mr. Smith chooses swing over core or 2) where Mr. Smith chooses core over swing. Subjects who saw a high turnout neighborhood versus a low turnout one are similarly assigned to one of two conditions: 1) where Mr. Smith chooses high turnout over low turnout or 2) where Mr. Smith chooses low turnout over high turnout.

(Box 2, About Here)

The respondents are then shown a list of five statements describing possible political outcomes resulting from Mr. Smith’s choice. They are asked to rate on a scale from 0 to 100% the likelihood that each of the statements would ultimately be true given Mr. Smith’s choice. The five statements measure whether respondents agree that Mr. Smith’s choice of one neighborhood (the recipient) over the other (the non-recipient)

---

17 Part 2 was the next screen in the survey and appeared immediately after respondents submitted their answer to the question posed in part 1 of the survey experiment.

18 Respondents were told that 0% means it would never be true; 50% means it’s a complete toss-up; and 100% means the statement is certain to happen. Above the 0 to 100% scale, I also included a 7-point Likert scale with “Very Unlikely” above 10% and “Very Likely” above 90%. This was done for respondents with lower numeracy.
would:

1. Increase the vote for Mr. Smith in the recipient neighborhood;
2. Decrease the vote for Mr. Smith in the non-recipient neighborhood, assuming they discover his choice;
3. Be discovered by the non-recipient neighborhood;
4. Increase turn out in the recipient neighborhood; and
5. Have a positive impact on his re-election;

These statements allow me to test all of the remaining hypotheses, except for Hypothesis 2.2, which concerns respondents’ risk-aversion. How each statement relates to these hypotheses is discussed below in the presentation of the results from part 2 of the survey experiment.

**Swing voters are more likely to punish**

As displayed in figure 2, the results from part 2 of the survey support Hypothesis 1.1 (Loyal Core Voters), which predicts that respondents choose the swing neighborhood over the core one because they believe that swing voters are more likely than core voters to punish Mr. Smith for targeting other groups. Figure 2 displays the mean responses of subjects who were assigned to either the “swing” condition (gray bars), in which Mr. Smith chooses the swing neighborhood over the core neighborhood, or the “core” condition (white bars), in which Mr. Smith chooses the core neighborhood instead.

(Figure 2, About Here)

Although respondents believe that the distributive spending is slightly more likely to increase the vote for Mr. Smith in the recipient neighborhood when the core neighborhood is targeted (mean=56%, statement 1) than when the swing neighborhood is targeted (mean=53%; diff.=-3, \( p=0.295 \)), they believe that swing voters are much more likely to punish Mr. Smith when they are the non-recipients. According to statement 2,
respondents predict that there is a 59% probability that a non-recipient swing neighborhood will be less likely to vote for Mr. Smith if they find out that another neighborhood was targeted over theirs. This probability drops below 50% (mean=47%) when the non-recipient is a core neighborhood. In other words, city officials believe their supporters are more likely to not punish Mr. Smith in this scenario than they (the supporters) are to punish him. In short, respondents believe they can take their core supporters for granted. The 12 point difference between the average responses to statement 2 is statistically significant at the 0.0001 level and appears to be the main consideration, at least of those tested by the five statements, that explains why local politicians, on average, target swing over core.

In order to vote against a politician for targeting other groups, voters must discover the politician’s targeting strategy. As demonstrated in statement 3, respondents believe that residents in both neighborhoods have an equal, and slightly likely, chance of discovering that Mr. Smith targeted another neighborhood over theirs. The mean probability for non-recipient swing neighborhoods is 57% while that of non-recipient core neighborhoods is 56% (diff.=1, \( p=0.798 \)). This finding also counters the assumption in the core voter model that politicians are less familiar with swing voters (H2.1).

The responses to statement 4 in figure 2 also provide evidence in favor of H4.1 (No Mobilizing Effect) and against H3.1 (Mobilizing Effect). Respondents believe that the project is somewhat more likely to increase turnout in the recipient neighborhood when the core neighborhood is chosen (mean=50%) than when the swing one is (mean=44%). This difference (\( p=0.034 \)) might explain why respondents were slightly more likely to choose the core neighborhood when both neighborhoods had lower turnout. However, the difference does not achieve traditional significance levels when applying a Bonferroni correction to account for the multiple dependent variables being tested. Regardless, respondents, on-average, believe that the distributive spending is more likely to not have
a mobilizing effect than it is to have one.

**Why did 43% choose core?**

Although a majority of respondents chose the swing neighborhood, a substantial portion (43%) still chose the core. In this section, I examine possible explanations for this heterogeneity in targeting strategies, beginning with a comparison (displayed in figure 3) of how the responses in part 2 differ based on which neighborhood the respondents targeted in part 1. Even though the respondents’ choice in part 1 was not experimentally manipulated, examining how their beliefs are moderated by that choice is an initial step in developing a more robust theory of local policymakers’ targeting strategies. One finding that emerges from the difference-in-differences across these two groups (right column of figure 3) is that respondents’ choice of whom to target results from distinct beliefs about the political ramifications of different targeting strategies. Four of the five difference-in-differences are statistically significant at the 0.01 level. For those who chose swing in part 1 (left column of figure 3), the likelihood that swing voters will punish incumbents for targeting other groups appears to motivate their targeting strategy. Those who targeted core (middle column of figure 3), on the other hand, think swing and core neighborhoods are just as likely to punish. Their targeting strategy appears to be driven by a belief that distributive spending is much more likely to increase support and turnout among targeted core voters.

(Figure 3, About Here)

What explains these different perceptions about the behavior of targeted citizens? The hypotheses derived from the core voter model provide two potential explanations. The first is that those who chose core are more risk averse than those who chose swing (H2.1: Risk Aversion). In an earlier section of the survey, I measured respondents’ risk aversion by asking them to rate their willingness to take risks on an 11-point sliding scale, where 0
means they are “not at all willing to take risks” and 10 means they are “very willing to take risks.” As displayed in figure 4, respondents’ risk aversion does not correlate with their choice of neighborhood; risk-averse politicians are just as likely to choose the swing neighborhood as risk-accepting politicians. The lack of correlation between risk aversion and targeting strategies persists even when controlling for other variables such as local policymakers’ ideology, years of service, self-reported ambition to run for higher office, and electoral performance. I also do not find that the treatment effects from part 2 of the survey experiment are moderated by respondents’ risk aversion. In sum, I fail to find support for H2.1 (Risk Aversion).

(Figure 4, About Here)

Another possible explanation stemming from the core voter model is that politicians who chose the core neighborhood are less certain about how swing voters respond to receiving distributive spending than core voters (H2.2). As a rough measurement of this uncertainty, I identify whether respondents skipped a statement in part 2 of the survey experiment or indicated that a statement had a 50% chance of being true since this value was labeled in the survey as being a “complete toss-up” and was the de-facto “not sure” response. If H2.2 is correct, then respondents who are randomly assigned in part 2 of the survey experiment to evaluate the behavior of a swing neighborhood should be more likely to provide an “uncertain” answer than those assigned to evaluate the behavior of a core neighborhood. To account for the possibility that H2.2 only applies to respondents

---

19 The exact wording of the question is: “How do you see yourself: Are you generally a person who is fully prepared to take risks or do you try to avoid taking risks? Please choose a number on the scale, where the value 0 means: ‘not at all willing to take risks’ and the value 10 means: ‘very willing to take risks.’” This measure has been shown to correlate with more sophisticated measures of risk aversion (e.g., Dohmen 2011) and is similar to what Van Houweling and Tomz (2009) use in a survey experiment on voters.
who chose the core neighborhood in part 1, I interact the treatment assignment with respondents’ targeting strategy. The results in table 1, however, fail to reject the null hypothesis that respondents, and especially respondents who chose the core neighborhood, are no more uncertain about swing voters’ response to distributive spending than they are about core voters. Although the coefficient on the interaction variable is always in the right direction (positive), it is only statistically significant at the 0.1 level in one instance (model 2), and that is without applying a Bonferroni correction.

In sum, I do not find evidence for the mechanisms derived from the core voter hypotheses even when trying to explain the behavior of local policymakers who chose the core neighborhood over the swing one. Other factors appear to be at play. One possible explanation is that local officials who faced competitive primaries are more likely to target core voters while those who faced greater competition in the general election are more likely to target swing (Fleck 2001; Hirano et al. 2009). Although the survey asked respondents to indicate their margin of victory in their most recent election, there is a large amount of measurement error in the responses as some respondents provided their vote share instead of their vote margin. Another possibility, which is a critical limitation of the research design, and survey experiments in general, is that respondents might infer other politically-relevant characteristics about each neighborhood that are systematically correlated with its swing or core status. These other characteristics could affect how policymakers perceive their electoral incentives. Even though this paper does not provide an explanation for the heterogeneity in policymakers’ targeting strategy when choosing between swing and core voters, the finding that this heterogeneity in perceptions exists and is consistent across a range of questions further validates theoretical work that seeks to identify the conditions that affect whether policymakers target core over swing and vice versa.
Distributive spending does not increase turnout enough

Figure 5 examines local politicians’ targeting strategies with regards to voters’ turnout propensity. The results suggest that politicians targeted the high turnout neighborhood over the low turnout one because they believe that the mobilizing effect of distributive spending is insufficient to justify targeting spending to mobilize low turnout core supporters. The gray bars in figure 5 display the mean responses of subjects assigned to the “high turnout” condition in which Mr. Smith chooses the high turnout neighborhood over the low turnout neighborhood. The white bars indicate the mean responses of subjects assigned to the “low turnout” condition, in which Mr. Smith chooses the low turnout neighborhood instead.

According to the responses to statement 1, local politicians believe that distributive spending is more likely to increase the vote for Mr. Smith in the recipient neighborhood when that neighborhood is full of high turnout voters (mean=62%) than when it is full of low turnout ones (mean=54%). This 8-point difference is statistically significant at the 0.01 level. Neither type of neighborhood appears to be more likely to punish incumbents for targeting other groups—although low turnout neighborhoods are predicted to be slightly more likely to punish (diff.=2; p=0.437), high turnout neighborhoods are predicted to be slightly more likely to find out that they were overlooked (diff.=-5; p=0.101).

A critical factor affecting local policymakers’ targeting strategy is the politicians’ belief about the mobilizing effect of distributive spending. If politicians do not believe that spending helps mobilize voters (H4.1), then they should always target high turnout citizens over low turnout ones, regardless of those citizens’ support for the politician (H4). However, if they believe that distributive spending increases turnout (H3.1), then they have an incentive to target low turnout citizens so long as they are core supporters (H3). According to the responses to statement 4, local politicians are unsure as to whether
distributive spending has a mobilizing effect. The mean response across both conditions is 50%, which was labeled in the surveys as “a complete toss-up.” Further decreasing their incentive to target low turnout core voters is the respondents’ belief that distributive spending is more likely to increase turnout in the high turnout neighborhood (mean=53%) than in the low turnout one (mean=47%). Although this 6-point difference is not statistically significant at the 0.05 level once Bonferonni corrections are applied, it is consistent with voter mobilization research that finds that mobilization efforts are more effective with high turnout propensity voters in low-salience elections (Arceneaux and Nickerson 2009). Although I do not have a direct measure of the salience of the respondents’ elections, municipal elections on average have much lower salience than national elections (Oliver 2012). In sum, local policymakers’ belief that distributive spending has a fifty-fifty chance of mobilizing the recipients of that spending is not sufficient to counter the perceived benefits of targeting certain voters over potential ones.

**Discussion and conclusion**

Whom do politicians target with public spending? To address this central question in the distributive politics literature, I use a novel research design for studies of legislative behavior: a survey experiment on elected municipal officials. I find that incumbent politicians target swing voters over core voters because they believe that swing voters are more likely than core voters to electorally punish incumbents for targeting other groups. In general, these findings support hypotheses derived from swing voter models (e.g., Lindbeck and Weibull 1987, 1993). Even though a sizable minority of respondents believes that the vote-maximizing strategy is to target core supporters, I fail to find evidence that hypotheses derived from the core voter model (Cox and McCubbins 1996) explain these respondents’ distributive choice. Other factors appear to be at play. With regards to targeting citizens based on their propensity to vote, I find that politicians are
unsure as to whether distributive spending has a mobilizing effect on the recipients of that spending. As such, they overwhelmingly target certain voters over citizens with a lower propensity to turnout, including those who are their core supporters. I also fail to find evidence that voter turnout and support have an interaction effect on policymakers’ targeting choice.

A key benefit of this analysis is that it directly manipulates politicians’ choice options. However, the research design is also subject to its own limitations, especially in terms of external validity and generalizability. Respondents’ choices may not reflect their actual behavior. Moreover, their choice of which neighborhood to target may be influenced by political factors that correlate with a neighborhood’s support for the incumbent and its turnout propensity (e.g., wealth). Regardless, policymakers’ targeting strategies are consistent with their perceptions of how different types of voters would respond to the allocation of distributive spending. This finding combined with the heterogeneity in policymakers’ responses suggests that there is no right answer to whether municipal officials target core supporters or swing voters. This highlights the need for the development of new theory and additional empirical work on this question.

Although the theories motivating this research are quite general and have been applied to a broad spectrum of political contexts, municipal legislatures are distinct from other legislative bodies in the U.S. on several dimensions (e.g. Oliver et al. 2012; Trounstine 2009). Municipal elections are usually low information and low turnout affairs that are regularly non-competitive. 33% of the municipal officials in my sample were uncontested in their most recent election. 75% ran in non-partisan elections. Over 60% of municipalities have at-large legislative offices, sometimes in conjunction with legislative districts (Svara 2003). Municipal legislatures are also composed of fewer
members, on average, than legislative bodies at higher levels of government. All of these differences should be carefully considered before generalizing the findings of this project to other contexts.

These concerns also highlight a path for future empirical work. For example, would the results be similar if the subjects were municipal candidates in open seat races rather than incumbents? Unlike incumbents with an established base of supporters, first time candidates are still growing their coalition and, thus, might be more likely than the respondents in this analysis to target swing voters (Fenno 1977). Another question is whether policymakers’ responses would be similar with other types of spending projects and especially spending of a more programmatic nature. The research design from this paper could also be used to test the targeting strategies of politicians at other levels of government—in particular, state legislative candidates and office holders.

The findings of this study also have important normative implications. The first concerns politicians’ strategy of targeting swing voters. If local policymakers believe that they can gain the support of swing voters through distributive spending, they may use this additional leeway to implement programmatic policies that favor their preferences at the expense of the median citizen’s policy preferences. On the other hand, if most local spending is distributive in nature or if local policymakers’ consider citizens’ support when making programmatic decisions in a similar fashion as they do when making distributive decisions, then their strategy of targeting swing voters may have positive

---

20 The median city council in the sample of cities with at least one respondent consists of only seven legislators. An advantage of this smaller size in context of this research design is that, individually, local policymakers have more discretion and a greater impact on legislative outcomes than their state and federal counterparts. Thus, the perceptions and intentions of a local policymaker are more consequential for the polities they govern.
implications for representation. Although the findings from this study do not fully address these implications, they do weaken the claim that distributive spending simply buys support. Recall that local policymakers target swing voters not because they think it will overwhelmingly increase the swing voters’ support for the incumbent (mean = 53% in statement 1 of figure 2), but because they fear swing voters’ reaction when other groups are targeted (statement 2 of figure 2). A similar fear might motivate their decisions on programmatic policies. Subsequent work on this topic could easily test this proposition through a similar survey experiment that manipulates whether the vignette presents a decision about a distributive good or a more programmatic policy.

The second set of normative implications concerns policymakers’ strategy of targeting high turnout voters. In contrast to the previous concern, this strategy, if carried out with programmatic decisions, would bias policy outcomes away from the median citizen to the extent that the preferences of high turnout voters differ from those of low turnout voters and non-voters. Although Oliver et al. (2012) do not “identify any overarching set of political preferences that systematically divide voters and nonvoters in local elections” (85), their analysis primarily focuses on differences in preferences over national issues. Anzia (2011), on the other hand, finds that the timing of local elections has a significant effect on which citizens turnout to vote and the resulting policy outcomes. More work is needed to identify whether municipal voters and non-voters diverge in their preferences over local issues.
References


Dunning, Thad and Susan Stokes. 2008. “Clientelism as persuasion and as mobilization.” Presented at the American Political Science Association annual meeting.


Tables and Figures

Table 1: Are respondents more uncertain when evaluating the behavior of swing voters?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement being evaluated:</th>
<th>(1) Increases Recipient's Vote for Mr. Smith</th>
<th>(2) Increases Recipient's Vote for Mr. Smith</th>
<th>(3) Increases Recipient's Turnout</th>
<th>(4) Increases Recipient's Turnout</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Treatment: evaluate swing=1, evaluate core=0</td>
<td>0.011 [0.049311]</td>
<td>-0.060 [0.061183]</td>
<td>-0.059 [0.048924]</td>
<td>-0.119 [0.061042]^</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chose Core in Pt. 1=1, Chose Swing in Pt. 1=0</td>
<td>-0.071 [0.064527]</td>
<td>0.158 [0.092858]^</td>
<td>0.080</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treatment*Chose Core</td>
<td>0.291 [0.034205]**</td>
<td>0.222 [0.041971]**</td>
<td>0.318</td>
<td>0.244 [0.041875]**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.010</td>
<td>0.004</td>
<td>0.014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>345</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>345</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R-squared</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.010</td>
<td>0.004</td>
<td>0.014</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement being evaluated:</th>
<th>(5) Decreases Recipient's Vote for Mr. Smith</th>
<th>(6) Decreases Recipient's Vote for Mr. Smith</th>
<th>(7) Non-Recipient Finds Out</th>
<th>(8) Non-Recipient Finds Out</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Treatment: evaluate swing=1, evaluate core=0</td>
<td>0.015 [0.047782]</td>
<td>0.017 [0.057589]</td>
<td>-0.022 [0.049015]</td>
<td>-0.024 [0.061862]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chose Core in Pt. 1=1, Chose Swing in Pt. 1=0</td>
<td>0.006 [0.062853]</td>
<td>0.024 [0.087404]</td>
<td>0.017</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treatment*Chose Core</td>
<td>0.259 [0.034418]**</td>
<td>0.150 [0.041902]**</td>
<td>0.301</td>
<td>0.213 [0.045011]**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.002</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>345</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>345</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R-squared</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.002</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Dependent variable is an indicator variable that equals 1 when a respondent provided an “uncertain” response when evaluating the likelihood that the statements in part 2 would be true and 0 otherwise. If local policymakers in general are more uncertain about how swing voters relate to core voters respond to the reception of distributive spending, then the coefficient on the treatment variable should be positive. If uncertainty helps explain why respondents chose the core neighborhood over the swing neighborhood, then the coefficient on the interaction variable should be positive.

Standard errors in brackets
^ significant at 10%; * significant at 5%; ** significant at 1%
Figure 1: Which types of voters do policymakers target with distributive spending?

Panel A: Percent of Respondents choosing Swing neighborhood over Core neighborhood

Panel B: Percent of Respondents choosing High Turnout neighborhood over Low Turnout neighborhood

Note: Whiskers indicate 95% confidence intervals around each estimated percent. The % indicates the percent who chose Swing (High Turnout) over Core (Low Turnout) when results of each panel are pooled. The first p-value in each panel tests the null hypothesis that the percent equals 50. The difference indicates the percent who chose Swing (High Turnout) over Core (Low Turnout) when both neighborhoods were High Turnout (Swing) minus the percent who chose Swing (High Turnout) over Core (Low Turnout) when both neighborhoods were Low Turnout (Core). The second p-value in each panel tests the null hypothesis that the difference equals zero All p-values are two-sided.
Figure 2: Why do local policymakers target swing voters?

Note: Outcomes are the mean response to each statement. Whiskers indicate 95% confidence intervals around each mean. The difference for each statement is calculated as the mean response when the recipient is Swing minus the mean response when the recipient is Core. P-values are two-sided and test the null hypothesis that the difference equals zero.

Respondents were given the following instructions: “Based on the information provided, please indicate how likely you think each of the following statements would ultimately be true if Mr. Smith had decided to push for road repais in the Neighborhood [1/2] (with 0% meaning never, 50% meaning a complete toss-up, and 100% meaning certain to happen—you can choose any number between 0% and 100%).”
Figure 3: How do responses in figure 2 differ based on the neighborhood targeted by respondents in Part 1 of the survey experiment?

Note: This figure displays the results from figure 3 broken down by the neighborhood chosen by the respondents in part 1 of the survey experiment. The left column displays the responses of subjects who chose swing over core. The middle displays the responses of those who chose core over swing. The right column displays the difference in differences between the left and middle columns. Please note that the respondents’ choice of which neighborhood to target in part 1 was not experimentally manipulated.

“R” = recipient neighborhood; “NR” = non-recipient neighborhood.
Figure 4: Policymakers’ risk aversion does not affect which neighborhood they target
Respondents’ estimated probability that the following statements would be true given Mr. Smith’s choice of either targeting High Turnout (gray) or Low Turnout (white).

1. Increases Recipient’s Support
   - Recipient is High Turnout (N=135)
   - Recipient is Low Turnout (N=147)
   - Diff. = 8.09
   - P-value = .003

2. Decreases Non-recipient’s Support
   - Non-recipient is Low Turnout (N=131)
   - Non-recipient is High Turnout (N=149)
   - Diff. = 2.07
   - P-value = .437

3. Non-recipient Finds Out
   - Non-recipient is Low Turnout (N=131)
   - Non-recipient is High Turnout (N=151)
   - Diff. = -4.77
   - P-value = .101

4. Increases Recipient’s Turnout
   - Recipient is High Turnout (N=133)
   - Recipient is Low Turnout (N=144)
   - Diff. = 5.89
   - P-value = .035

5. Choice has Positive Electoral Impact
   - Recipient is High Turnout (N=136)
   - Recipient is Low Turnout (N=142)
   - Diff. = 15.43
   - P-value = 0

Note: Outcomes are the mean response to each statement. Whiskers indicate 95% confidence intervals around each mean. Difference for each statement is calculated as the mean response when the recipient is High Turnout minus the mean response when the recipient is Low Turnout. P-values are two-sided and test the null hypothesis that the difference equals zero.

Respondents were given the following instructions: 'Based on the information provided, please indicate how likely you think each of the following statements would ultimately be true if Mr. Smith had decided to push for road repairs in Neighborhood [1/2] (with 0% meaning never, 50% meaning a complete toss-up, and 100% meaning certain to happen--you can choose any number between 0% and 100%).'
Box 1: Text of Vignette and Survey Question in Part 1 of the Survey

Scenario 1, Part 1: Imagine that you are the campaign manager for a city councilor, Mr. Smith, who [barely / easily] won his last election and [will face a high quality challenger in the upcoming elections / expects to do well in the upcoming elections]. In this municipality, the city council sets the transportation budget and is currently deciding which local road repair projects to fund. After allocating most of the budget, the municipality has sufficient funds for one more project.

The next two projects with the highest priority are in two different neighborhoods on opposite ends of Mr. Smith’s district. Both projects involve roads that are primarily used by residents in that neighborhood. Both have equal merit and need—he has been contacted by residents in both neighborhoods about repairing the road. Mr. Smith mentions the projects to you and the difficulty he’s having in deciding which one to support.

Below is your best guess about the composition of the two neighborhoods based on campaign work, mail-in surveys, voter registration files, census data, etc.—in sum, you’re a very savvy campaign manager.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Neighborhood 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Support for Mr. Smith currently</strong></td>
<td>70% support Mr. Smith. 15% are undecided.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of residents who support Mr. Smith or are undecided about either candidate. (The figures are the same for both voters and non-voters.)</td>
<td>[IF CORE:]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Expected Voter Turnout</strong></td>
<td>65% will definitely vote. 10% could potentially vote if mobilized by a campaign.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of residents who will definitely vote or might vote. (The figures are the same for both Mr. Smith's supporters and the undecided residents.)</td>
<td>[IF HIGH:]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10% will definitely vote. 65% could potentially vote if mobilized by a campaign.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As his political adviser, which neighborhood do you think Mr. Smith should support?
- Mr. Smith should push for the project in Neighborhood 1.
- Mr. Smith should push for the project in Neighborhood 2.
Scenario 1, Part 2: What would happen if Mr. Smith had decided to push for road repairs in Neighborhood [1 / 2], and the project in that neighborhood was mostly completed before the next election?

Based on the information provided, please indicate how likely you think each of the following statements would ultimately be true if Mr. Smith had decided to push for road repairs in Neighborhood [1 / 2] (with 0% meaning never, 50% meaning a complete toss-up, and 100% meaning certain to happen -- you can choose any number between 0% and 100%):

[STATEMENTS, DISPLAYED IN RANDOM ORDER]

[1] The residents in neighborhood [1 / 2] will be more likely to vote for Mr. Smith in this election.
[2] Residents in neighborhood [2 / 1] will be less likely to vote for Mr. Smith if they find out he chose another neighborhood over theirs.
[3] The residents in neighborhood [2 / 1] will find out that their roads could have been repaired but Mr. Smith chose another neighborhood over theirs.
[4] The residents in neighborhood [1 / 2] will be more likely to turn out to vote in this election.
[5] Mr. Smith's decision will have a positive impact on his re-election chances.