

Research Report

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Raising turnout at council elections with social pressure: evidence from a field experiment

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Introduction

Australians generally consider voting to be not just a democratic right, but also a legal obligation. In a country where compulsory voting is the norm at federal elections, state and territory elections, and even at local government elections in most states and territories, South Australia's council elections stand out as being among the largest political elections in the country not to be conducted under a compulsory voting regime. This makes them a valuable window into understanding Australians' voting habits when there is no legal obligation on them.

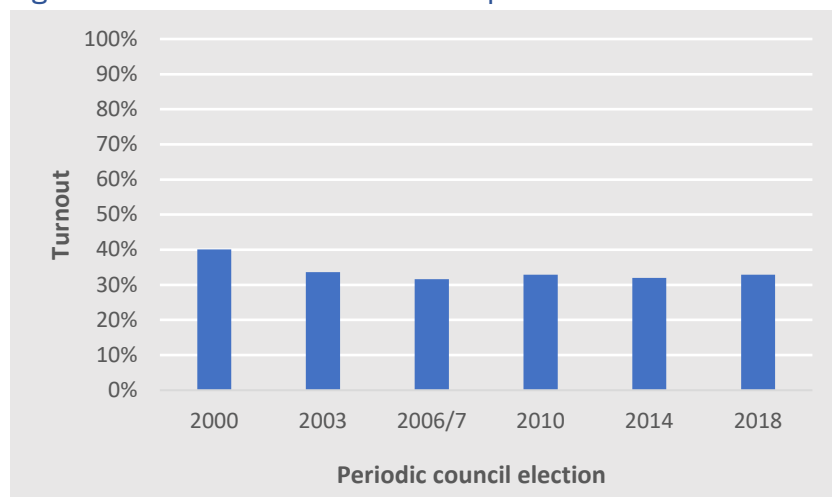
The view through that window is not pretty however. Turnout rates at South Australian council elections over the past two decades have been very low. Since 2000, the average turnout reported at the state's quadrennial periodic council elections has been 33.7%. Compare this with turnout from the same electors at South Australian state elections over the same period: 92.6% on average, some 59 percentage points higher. Put very simply, there are close to 700,000 South Australians who assiduously turn up to vote at state elections but choose to sit out their local council's elections.

This situation is not entirely endemic to South Australia. Participation levels at council elections are lower compared to state and federal elections right around Australia (a little over 20 percentage points lower on average nationally) – even where voting is compulsory. As one would expect, participation rates at council elections vary considerably depending on whether voting is compulsory or not. In the four jurisdictions with compulsory voting (New South Wales, Northern Territory, Queensland and Victoria) participation at the most recent council elections before the COVID-19 pandemic was 76.1 per cent on average. This compares to an average of just 39.9 per cent at the most recent pre-COVID-19 council elections in the three states with voluntary voting (South Australia, Tasmania and Western Australia).

These comparisons demonstrate that the absence of a legal obligation to vote (and therefore, the absence of a fine for failure to vote) only partly explains why so many South Australians choose to sit out their council's elections. Council elections in Australia fit the classic definition of second-order elections – that is, they are viewed as less important by voters, parties and the media than federal and state or territory elections which are both first-order elections.¹ Undoubtedly, there is a wide range of other reasons why turnout is lower: reduced public awareness of the importance of local government, lack of interest in local government and in the council elections themselves, the use of postal voting as the only method of voting, the absence of political party involvement, the lack of media attention – to name but a few key reasons. Survey data taken after council periodic elections indicates that large numbers of electors fail to vote for a combination of the above reasons.²

The low turnout at South Australian council elections has long been a matter of concern.³ In a representative democracy, elected members are meant to represent the people who elected them. But when the number of voters is low, those elected represent only a small part of the wider community. Furthermore, and as political scientists have long known, when participation is voluntary it is also unevenly distributed among members of a community. Low turnout brings with it important issues of legitimacy too. When significant groups, in significant numbers, do not participate at elections, questions can begin to arise about the legitimacy of democratic institutions.

Figure 1: Turnout at South Australian periodic council elections 2000-2018



On a practical level, the three institutions collectively engaged in promoting participation at South Australia’s council elections (councils themselves, the Local Government Association of South Australia, and the Electoral Commission of South Australia) all invest significant effort and resources into attempting to mobilise electors at each election and so raise turnout. Yet despite this effort and expense, the participation rate barely moves. It almost seems, as seen on Figure 1, as if voter participation levels have reached a natural centre of gravity in South Australia, hovering at or about the 32 per cent mark statewide, no matter what the advertising and promotion campaign or the media coverage is like that year.⁴ Post-election survey data also signals that the usual messages and methods of communicating to electors are failing to penetrate or persuade large numbers to vote.⁵ This is by no means a criticism of the efforts of those who run and promote the elections. On the contrary, this finding is consistent with a wealth of political science research indicating that many communication strategies designed to mobilise electors have little to no effect on turnout at all.

But what does work then? In the past 25 years, a great deal of scientific research has been undertaken looking to answer this key question: what are the most effective (as well as cost-effective) ways to increase voter turnout at elections? This burgeoning research has looked at both the effectiveness of different modes of contacting electors and the effectiveness of alternative messages used in communications with electors. Importantly, unlike much of the preceding research into voter turnout based on observational data or historical records, this new wave of political scientific research has been rooted in experimental methods and, in particular, the use of field experiments.

Box 1: Field experiments

Field experiments are experiments in real-world conditions where people (or other study subjects) are assigned at random to treatment and control conditions, and the impact of an intervention on the treatment group is measured. In a voter turnout field experiment, electors are randomly divided into treatment and control groups, and those in the treatment groups are exposed to an intervention while those in the control group are not. The turnout can then be compared in the two groups by looking at individual

voter records, and the difference in turnout will reflect the effectiveness of the intervention.

The key to this method of research is the random assignment of study subjects – e.g. electors – into treatment or control groups. Randomisation has a very particular meaning in this context. It does not refer to ‘randomness’, as in things happening by chance or by accident. It refers instead to ensuring that no pattern exists in the assignment of subjects into the different groups. Every subject is as likely as any other to be assigned to the treatment or the control group. This means that electors in the treatment group of a voter turnout experiment have the same probability of voting as those in the control group, and any difference in the turnout rates can be attributed to the intervention being tested – and not to selection bias, chance or other variables that creep in to confound analysis with other types of selection processes.

The power of field experiments is four-fold. Firstly, thanks to the randomisation of subjects into control and treatment groups, they allow researchers to test for causal effects, instead of merely noting correlations, as is the case with research based on surveys and historical data. Secondly, the findings of a field experiment can be generalised to the real world because unlike other kinds of experiment, they are conducted in real-world settings (e.g. elections). Thirdly, field experiments are generally unobtrusive: subjects are unaware that they are participating in an experiment, and outcomes can be measured without their involvement (for instance using official voting records). Lastly, a well-designed field experiment can be replicated in different settings, allowing for confirmation and greater confidence in accuracy.

In a large and growing number of field experiments over the last two decades, mostly in the United States, political scientists, electoral organisations and campaign groups have demonstrated that some voter turnout strategies, messages and methods of conveying messages are effective, while others simply do not work at all, or worse, can even reduce turnout. One of the most important findings to emerge from this burgeoning research is that messages that exert social pressure on electors, appealing to people’s innate desire to comply with social norms (widely shared ideas about how people ought to behave), can have a very significant impact on turnout. Messages exerting social pressure to vote have been shown to raise turnout by several percentage points (and as much as 8 percentage points in some large-scale experiments).

The aim of this research project is to test whether using messages exerting social pressure on electors can also generate increases in turnout at South Australian council elections.

In July 2020, an application was made to the South Australian Local Government Research and Development Scheme for funding to undertake a series of randomised field experiments at council supplementary elections testing the effectiveness on turnout of messages exerting social pressure on electors. The author’s institution, the Electoral Commission of South Australia, conducts council elections on a strict cost recovery basis and is not funded to conduct research and develop innovations in the local government space. Many South Australian councils are unlikely to be able to sponsor their own electoral research

either, given the financial burden councils already face from elections. The Local Government Research and Development Scheme funding therefore represents an outstanding and unique opportunity allowing research of this kind to take place in South Australia. My application for funding was accepted in September 2020 and the first round of my experiment commenced at the Clare & Gilbert Valleys Council supplementary election in February and March 2021.

This Report presents the background, rationale, design, implementation and results of this research project. After this introduction providing background to the project, in the next section I review previous literature on the psychological explanations for voter turnout and the findings from previous experimental studies using social pressure to stimulate voting. With this theoretical framework in place, I proceed to describe in detail my field experiment and its results. In the final section, I briefly summarise the key lessons learned from this research project and conclude.

Part 1. Psychological explanations for voter behaviour and why social pressure can boost turnout

What motivates people to vote when there is no obligation on them to do so? It has long been argued that the act of voting is not rational. If one considers people to be rational self-interested beings, concerned with maximising their own benefits and minimising their costs, voting does not make sense. After all, if the benefit of voting is to influence the outcome of the election, the probability that one elector actually makes a difference to the outcome of an election is absolutely minuscule. The expected benefit the elector can personally derive from voting is far outweighed by the costs in terms of the time and effort it takes to get informed about the candidates and their policies and then vote. The paradox is that large numbers of people do choose to vote nonetheless, despite the low benefit to cost ratio.

Many explanations have been put forward to explain why voters do bother voting, despite its seeming irrationality.⁶ Political scientists have provided all manner of explanations for voter turnout ranging from different human attributes (education, wealth, class, age, gender, level of politicisation etc), to social customs (family traditions, cultural transmission, habit, duty, etc), not to mention institutional mechanisms (voting systems, enrolment and participation rules, electioneering tactics etc). A particular focus of studies in recent years has been on the psychological underpinnings of voting behaviour. Voters may be driven to vote by a whole range of psychological dispositions and prejudices including altruism, trust, self-expression, self-deception, peer pressure, adherence to social norms, a sense of civic duty, as well as emotions such as fear, shame or pride.

Among the psychological explanations for voter turnout, one that has attracted much scholarly research is people's innate tendency to comply with social norms. Social norms are shared standards of acceptable behaviour - generally unwritten rules, attitudes or behaviours that are understood and accepted by members of a group, community or culture. Examples of social norms abound: forming a queue and waiting one's turn at a supermarket, giving up one's seat on public transport for an elderly or a disabled person, closing the door while using a public toilet, keeping quiet at the cinema, and so on. The power of social norms lies in

people's natural inclination to imitate others, and unwillingness to depart too far from group standards.⁷ At a psychic level, people reap both intrinsic rewards from complying with the norm (satisfaction at doing the right thing), and extrinsic rewards when others observe them doing so (improving their reputation by doing the right thing).

There is abundant evidence that social norms influence people's everyday behaviour and that most people are reluctant to be seen to violate social norms.⁸ Because of this, harnessing social norms has become an increasingly popular way, particularly for governments, to attempt to transform behaviour in all sorts of real-world contexts without imposing laws and regulations. Notable examples include initiatives to influence behaviour by changing perceptions about energy and water consumption, littering, recycling, smoking, drink-driving, alcohol consumption or sexual harassment and violence.

In a democracy, one social norm is that citizens should vote at elections. On reaching adulthood (or on acquiring nationality), individuals are supposed to internalise the norm that good citizens do their civic duty by voting at elections. And then, whenever elections occur, they make the effort to abide by the norm and vote. This theory is supported by data showing that an individual's decision to vote is strongly influenced by the customs of the groups that that person is a member of;⁹ as well as data showing that voters perceive a failure to vote as a violation of a social norm.¹⁰ Studies demonstrate that voting is widely viewed as a duty by citizens of democracies, and for many citizens this sense of duty tends to translate into actual voting.¹¹

However, the mere existence of a social norm is not enough to ensure that it is universally followed. The existence of the social norm is obviously a useful factor in driving people to vote. But it is not a particularly powerful one all on its own – as is demonstrated regularly and repeatedly by the low turnout levels recorded at elections where voting is voluntary, both around the world and here in South Australia. There is a lot of evidence from field experiments that little to no effect on turnout is achieved by messages that simply jog people's memory about the social norm by reminding them they should vote at an upcoming election.¹²

Far greater effects are obtained when another of the psychological mechanisms mentioned earlier is added to the equation: social pressure. Social pressure refers to the forceful assertion of social norms. It can be asserted by praising those who comply with the norm or reproaching those who violate them, with the stronger the praise or the reproaches, the greater the social pressure. But there are at least two other important ways of augmenting social pressure: monitoring people's compliance with social norms, and disclosing whether someone has complied with a norm or not. Social psychology literature shows that people are very sensitive to others' perceptions. People care what others think of them, and tend to comply with norms more often when they know that others are watching. Surveillance, even by strangers, therefore increases the likelihood of norm-compliant behaviour as people try to foster their reputations and social status, and avoid what the academic literature describes as the social "sanctions" associated with norm-deviant behaviour. Publicly disclosing someone's behaviour – or even just threatening to – is one of the most powerful forms of increasing social pressure. When people expect their behaviour to be publicised, they become much more likely to abide by norms.¹³

Scholars have long been interested in harnessing these psychological tendencies in attempts to effect behavioural change in different areas of our lives. Political scientists are no exception. Field experiments demonstrating the effects of social pressure on turnout date back almost a century to the 1920s when a Chicago political scientist Harold Gosnell posted political cartoons to electors before elections depicting non-voters as 'slackers'.¹⁴ Experiments dating back to 1974 in the United States have also demonstrated the positive effect on voter turnout of messaging informing electors that their participation was being monitored using public voting records.¹⁵ But it was not until several decades later that this line of enquiry was revived by political scientists at Yale University who used a series of large-scale field experiments to demonstrate that using social pressure to encourage voter participation can generate impressive increases in turnout. One of their experiments, which I will outline below, sparked a wave of replica and follow-up experiments – which this research project also forms part of.

Box 2: The Michigan experiment

In Alan Gerber, Donald Green and Christopher Larimer's landmark 2006 experiment undertaken at a low-salience election in the U.S. state of Michigan, five randomly assigned groups of electors were created: a control group consisting of 100,000 households, plus four groups of 20,000 households apiece that were sent a single piece of mail that conveyed varying doses of social pressure. The letter to the first of the four groups reminded electors in a forceful tone to do their civic duty and vote. The letter to the second group added to this message an element of surveillance by telling recipients that they were part of an academic study that would monitor whether they voted but not disclose that information to anyone else. The third group received the 'Self' letter, which included a table with information from public voter records listing whether each member of the household had voted or not at two recent elections. The fourth group received the 'Neighbours' letter, which increased social pressure even further by including the turnout history not just of the household but also that of the neighbours on the recipient's block. Both the 'Self' and the 'Neighbours' groups' letters included a promise to send an updated mailing after the election reporting whether the listed individuals had voted or not. Turnout in each group was compared with turnout in the large control group, which received no mail.

The four interventions therefore represented a steep progression of social pressure. And when the authors compared turnout in each group with turnout in the control group, they found a steady progression in treatment effects: the more social pressure exerted, the higher the turnout at the election. The first letter increased turnout by 1.8 percentage points and the second by 2.5 percentage points. But the effect of showing households their own voting records was dramatic: turnout climbed by 4.9 percentage points over the control group. Even more dramatic was the effect of showing households their own voting records and those of their neighbours: a remarkable 8.1 percentage point boost in turnout. Remarkably, years later, the 'Neighbours' letter continues to have a statistically significant effect on the voter turnout rates of the electors who received it back in 2006 – which suggests social pressure mailings can have a powerful long-term habit forming effect.

The Michigan experiment created a groundswell of interest among political scientists, electoral campaign professionals, and both partisan and non-partisan organisations seeking to mobilise voting at elections. It was for many years after among the top-10 most cited articles published in political science. As Gerber and Green later wrote: “*for the first time, experiments had isolated an enormous effect that could be generated on a large scale at a low unit cost*”.¹⁶ It is not surprising therefore that it created a wave of follow-up experiments from political scientists keen to replicate and adapt it. Since that time, hundreds of articles have appeared in political science journals documenting the results of voter mobilisation field experiments. Many attempts have also been made by election campaigns to put the lessons of the experiment into professional practice at American elections.

Follow-up studies to the Michigan experiment have confirmed the basic contours of its results, albeit with sometimes varying treatment effects. Their study has been replicated in a variety of different electoral contexts and formats, and with a range of modifications testing alternative methods of exerting social pressure and different levels of forcefulness. It should be noted that in some contexts the most heavy-handed social pressure treatments have generated blowback (namely complaints and adverse media coverage), particularly use of the ‘Neighbours’ treatment that confronted electors with their voting record and that of their neighbours. This has led to attempts to create messaging strategies that generate the same turnout effect without as many complaints. These have included approaches (among others) where the messaging: softens the ‘scolding tone’ of the Michigan experiment; stimulates feelings of pride around voting; thanks electors for voting; or reduces the threat of disclosure but hints that non-voters will be contacted to explain their failure to vote. In sum, the literature from the past 15 years reveals plenty of alternatives to the most confrontational social pressure messages. Although they may not generate quite such strong effects as the ‘Neighbours’ treatment message did, they produce fewer negative side effects.

Before describing the experiment conducted in this research project and the messaging strategies that I devised for it, it is worth briefly considering *why* some of the social pressure tactics they incorporate succeed in stimulating turnout:

- **Shame** - Shame is an unpleasant, self-conscious emotion that can drive people to conceal misbehaviour, and to avoid or hide from the negative judgement of others. People will generally try to avoid feeling shameful by complying with social norms. Psychologically, someone who fails to respect a social norm may feel that their action has degraded themselves, either in their own eyes or in the eyes of others. Shame generally arises when other people find out and think badly of the individual. But the individual may also feel ashamed even if others do not find out, because they imagine what others would think of them.¹⁷ A number of experiments (including the Michigan experiment) have found that triggering feelings of shame in electors can have a powerful effect on participation.

- **Pride, praise and gratitude** - In some ways the opposite of shame, pride is - in this context - a pleasant, self-conscious emotion that often arises when someone has a feeling of achievement or accomplishment. Because an individual may feel pride when they comply with certain social norms, it has been argued that people may be motivated to engage in costly prosocial behaviour in exchange for the “reward” of feeling pride. Someone may also feel pride when they are praised and valued by others

for an accomplishment. Gratitude is a somewhat different positive emotion, which stems from the perception that an individual has benefited from the help, kindness or generosity of another person. In relation to social norms, there is evidence that gratitude reinforces compliance with norms because expressions of gratitude validate the efforts of the person being thanked, and increase the likelihood they will make the same effort again in future. A small number of experiments have shown that triggering positive emotions like pride and gratitude can significantly increase voter turnout, albeit less than negative emotions like shame. Costas Panagopoulos, the political scientist who has most thoroughly experimented with the effects of positive social pressure on voter turnout, has achieved effects as robust as 4.7 percentage points with messaging triggering pride,¹⁸ 2.3 points with praise,¹⁹ and 2.5 points with gratitude.²⁰

- **Surveillance and follow-up** – As mentioned already, people are very sensitive to what others think of them, and tend to comply with norms more often when they know that others are watching. Surveillance increases the likelihood that someone will ‘do good’ and avoid the shame of being observed failing to comply with a social norm. In the Michigan experiment, the references to monitoring and surveillance were obvious and heavy-handed. But research in psychology has shown that even subtle cues of surveillance can lead to behavioural change. Printing images of a human face or watchful eyes is alone enough to reduce littering and theft, increase charitable giving, and mobilise citizens to vote.²¹ A more palatable adaptation of the surveillance mechanism tested in voter turnout experiments is to hint at potential ‘follow-up’ after the election. This includes the possibility that the elector might be contacted after the election and asked to explain their participation or failure to participate. In a 2013 experiment the simple addition of the line “*You may be called after the election to discuss your experience at the polls*” led to a small but statistically significant increase in turnout.²²

The weight of evidence from the experiments referred to above suggests that social pressure can lead to significant changes in voter participation at voluntary elections. But while all of this evidence comes from robust and reliable experimental studies, the experiments referred to above were all conducted in the context of American elections. Because South Australia is obviously somewhat different from the United States, the question is whether these same results would hold at local government elections here. Field experimentation is needed to assess how South Australian electors respond to social pressure interventions like those described above.

That is the goal of this research project: to test whether certain messages exerting social pressure on electors to vote - messages proven to work at American elections - can also have a significant impact on turnout at South Australian council elections. My experiment takes a number of the social pressure elements discussed above and adapts them to fit the specific context and characteristics of our elections. Obviously, there are some significant differences in our particular context here that should be mentioned:

- Electors here are used to voting being legally compulsory at federal and state elections, but not at council elections. It is unknown whether people’s life-long exposure to compulsory voting ought to strengthen or weaken the social norm that citizens

should vote at all elections across the board. While laws and norms are similar, they are clearly not the same thing (i.e. there is an obvious difference between a law stating ‘people must vote’ and a norm stating ‘people should vote’). The *absence* of compulsory voting at the local government election level, may even cause the norm to be weighed up somewhat differently in the public mind: ‘people *should* vote at state and federal elections, but *don’t need to* at council elections’. If that is the case, it is a challenge that the local government sector might like to consider addressing.

- Voter records are not public in South Australia like they are in much of America. Access to individual-level administrative data on voter turnout was possible in this experiment because the author works at the organisation conducting the elections. But privacy provisions in Australia make it unlikely that it would ever be possible to try here a strategy such as the ‘Neighbours’ treatment (where electors’ turnout history is disclosed to their neighbours).

- The voting method at council elections is full postal voting. One of the disadvantages of postal voting is that it is to a large extent a private - as opposed to a public - activity. Postal voting significantly reduces (and even probably eliminates) the chances of being *seen* by other people to participate at an election. Unlike with attendance voting, where electors go to the polling booth and are able to publicly signal their compliance with the social norm, voting from the privacy of one’s kitchen offers no opportunity for signalling. This is not to say that the social norm to vote does not apply to postal voting, simply that it may be weakened.

- Finally, the social pressure treatments delivered in this experiment were constrained to some extent by institutional considerations that might not have existed in the American experiments. The letters sent to electors in this experiment had the Electoral Commission of South Australia on the letterhead and signature line, and for this reason needed to be officially approved before sending. It goes almost without saying that this ruled out some of the more effective but heavy-handed social pressure tactics used in American experiments. But it was a challenge to adapt the tone and wording of even some of the more palatable social pressure tactics to fit the expected tone and style of public service correspondence. The consequence is that the social pressure messaging exerted in these treatments was perhaps not as strong or as direct as the author originally intended.

Part 2: Research Design

In this section I describe in detail the design of the field experiment including the setting, study population, randomisation, the treatments and the rollout.

Setting

Local government is exercised in most areas of South Australia by democratically-elected councils. Periodic general elections are held to elect positions on councils every four years. In between these quadrennial elections, supplementary elections are held to fill

positions whenever a general election is taken to have failed, is declared invalid, or, more frequently, in certain cases when a position becomes vacant between general elections. On average ten supplementary elections are held in South Australia every reporting year, and by far the most frequent cause of these elections is the resignation of an incumbent mayor or councillor.

As is common at second-order elections (as defined on page 4), turnout is low at council elections in South Australia - typically about 60 percentage points lower than it is among the same electors at state and federal elections. The average turnout at periodic general council elections over the past two decades has been 33.7 per cent, while the turnout at supplementary elections has been almost five points lower at 28.8 per cent on average. Factors explaining this high rate of abstention include the low salience of the elections, the lack of political party involvement in local government in this state, the use of postal voting as the single method of voting, but most especially the fact that voting is voluntary, unlike at federal and state elections.

The setting for this experiment was four supplementary elections that were held in 2021. Supplementary elections are an ideal setting for a controlled field experiment designed to mobilise turnout, given their frequency (10 per year on average), low salience (meaning there is limited potential for interference from other communications) and restricted scale (in terms both of geography and elector numbers). The criteria for an election to be included in the experiment were that each election:

- ultimately be contested (i.e. have more candidates nominate than positions vacant);
- have an electoral roll >2,000 electors;
- have no associated controversy (in order to avoid any issue or issues potentially interfering with electors' usual propensity to vote).

Because supplementary elections arise at random, it was not possible to know or plan in advance which elections would be selected for the experiment. To ensure balance and relevance for councils across the state, I opted to select two elections from country councils and two from the metropolitan Adelaide area. Those elections were as follows:

1. A supplementary election held in March 2021 to fill a vacancy of Area Councillor on the Clare & Gilbert Valleys Council. This followed the resignation of a previous member of this rural council representing 6,714 electors in the mid-north of the state. Four candidates contested the election, with tour operator David Willson elected to office. Overall turnout among enrolled electors was 37.4%.
2. The Copper Coast Council supplementary election that was held in June 2021 to fill two vacancies for Area Councillor following the resignations of two previous members of this country council representing 11,660 electors located on the Yorke Peninsula. Five candidates contested the election, with retired police officer Peter Sims and business owner Sandra Paddick declared elected. Turnout among enrolled electors was 31.2%.
3. A City of Adelaide Council supplementary election that was held in July 2021 to fill a vacancy for Area Councillor following the resignation of a previous member of this council at the centre of the state capital. 27,963 electors were eligible to vote.

Seven candidates contested the election, with hospitality worker Keiran Snape elected. Turnout was only 17.5% among enrolled electors.

4. A supplementary election held in October 2021 to elect a councillor from the City of Port Adelaide Enfield Council Outer Harbor ward which has an electoral roll of 10,249 electors. This followed the untimely death of a previous councillor. Six candidates contested the election with Adrian Wotton finally elected. Turnout was 25.6% of enrolled electors.

Study Population

The sample for this experiment was 21,248 electors enrolled in the four selected South Australian council areas. The 21,248 electors represent a subset of the total 56,686 electors that appear on the official electoral roll for these four areas at the date of their respective elections. I only included electors enrolled on the state electoral roll within the four council areas. This meant excluding any ‘council enrolled electors’ – a category which includes owners and occupiers of rateable properties within the areas (individuals, groups and bodies corporate) among others.²³ The reason for this exclusion was to ensure the experiment only included individual electors and not any businesses or broader entities permitted a vote at council elections. I also directly removed any silent electors (that is any electors who have applied to have their address not appear on the electoral roll because their safety or that of their family is at risk) because their registered addresses may only be used for direct electoral purposes.

These exclusions left an adjusted roll of 40,568 potential electors to include in the sample. Prior to random assignment, I removed from the adjusted roll those people who had never voted before at a state or council election.²⁴ This was done on the grounds that one of the treatments in the experiment involved thanking electors for their participation at past elections. Finally, where multiple enrolled electors shared a household, a single member of each household was randomly selected for inclusion in the experiment. Targeting multiple voters at the same address could lead to contamination effects stemming from householders receiving different messages thus making measurement of the effect of treatments less precise.

Table 1: From electoral roll to study population, by council

Council	Total electoral roll	Adjusted roll	Study population
Clare & Gilbert Valleys	6,714	6,650	3,588
Copper Coast	11,660	11,477	6,167
City of Adelaide	27,963	12,323	6,499
Port Adelaide Enfield (Outer Harbor Ward)	10,249	10,118	4,994
Total	56,586	40,568	21,248

At the end of this selection process 21,248 electors remained in our study. Table 2 (and graphs included in Appendix A) gives the characteristics of the final study population. Some differences between local government areas are evident: in particular, the median age of voters is lower in City of Adelaide, and higher in Copper Coast. There are slightly more female

voters than male voters everywhere except City of Adelaide, which has a higher proportion of male voters. In City of Adelaide there is a higher proportion of single-voter households and a lower proportion of multi-voter households, while Port Adelaide Enfield has a higher proportion of voters in households where there are 3 or more registered voters.

Table 2: Study population characteristics by electorate and overall

Characteristic	City of Adelaide	Clare & Gilbert Valleys	Copper Coast	Port Adelaide Enfield (Outer Harbor ward)	Overall
Age (yrs): Median (IQR)	54 (37, 69)	59 (44, 71)	63 (48, 73)	57 (40, 70)	58 (41, 71)
Gender: N (%) ^a					
- Female	3139 (48.31)	1851 (51.59)	3275 (53.11)	2657 (53.20)	10922 (51.41)
- Male	3358 (51.69)	1737 (48.41)	2891 (46.89)	2337 (46.80)	10323 (48.59)
Household Size: N (%) ^b					
- 1	3628 (55.82)	1529 (42.61)	2519 (40.85)	1765 (35.34)	9441 (44.43)
- 2	2263 (34.82)	1629 (45.40)	2882 (46.73)	2289 (45.84)	9063 (42.65)
- 3+	608 (9.36)	430 (11.98)	766 (12.42)	940 (18.82)	2744 (12.91)

^a Note that there were a small number of electors (3) with missing information on gender

^b Household size indicates number of registered electors sharing an address.

Randomisation

Before each election, the electors selected for the experiment at that election were randomly assigned to either the control group or to one of three treatment groups described next. Groups were all of similar sizes. To ensure that the random assignment had generated treatment and control groups that were balanced in terms of background characteristics (age, gender and household size), a series of randomisation checks were performed. The table and graphs below give breakdowns of participant characteristics by treatment group as well as for each council election. They demonstrate that within each election, there is no substantial imbalance of these characteristics between the treatment groups which might confound estimates of treatment effect.

Table 3: Electorate characteristics by treatment group

Characteristic	Control	Treatment 1	Treatment 2	Treatment 3
City of Adelaide				
Age: Median (IQR)	54 (37, 69)	53 (37, 69)	54 (36, 69)	54 (37, 69)
Gender: N (%)				
- Female	786 (48.37)	798 (49.11)	767 (47.23)	788 (48.55)
- Male	839 (51.63)	827 (50.89)	857 (52.77)	835 (51.45)
Household Size: N (%)				
- 1	911 (56.37)	914 (56.25)	887 (54.58)	911 (56.10)
- 2	549 (33.78)	560 (34.46)	592 (36.43)	562 (34.61)
- 3+	160 (9.85)	151 (9.29)	146 (8.98)	151 (9.30)

Clare & Gilbert				
Age: Median (IQR)	60 (44, 72)	58 (44, 71)	59 (44, 71)	59 (42, 71)
Gender: N (%)				
- Female	465 (51.84)	493 (54.96)	443 (49.39)	450 (50.17)
- Male	432 (48.16)	404 (45.04)	454 (50.61)	447 (49.83)
Household Size: N (%)				
- 1	389 (43.59)	362 (40.36)	387 (43.14)	389 (43.37)
- 2	396 (44.15)	412 (45.93)	413 (46.04)	408 (45.48)
- 3+	110 (12.26)	123 (13.71)	97 (10.81)	100 (11.15)
Copper Coast				
Age: Median (IQR)	62 (47, 73)	63 (49, 74)	63 (46, 73)	62 (48, 73)
Gender: N (%)				
- Female	801 (51.95)	843 (54.63)	814 (52.82)	817 (53.05)
- Male	741 (48.05)	700 (45.37)	727 (47.18)	723 (46.95)
Household Size: N (%)				
- 1	600 (40.86)	647 (41.93)	642 (41.66)	600 (38.94)
- 2	714 (46.30)	688 (44.59)	715 (46.40)	765 (49.64)
- 3+	198 (12.84)	208 (13.48)	184 (11.94)	176 (11.42)
Port Adelaide Enfield				
Age: Median (IQR)	59 (41, 70)	56 (39, 69)	56 (40, 70)	57 (40, 69)
Gender: N (%)				
- Female	672 (53.80)	660 (52.84)	638 (51.08)	687 (55.09)
- Male	577 (46.20)	589 (47.16)	611 (48.92)	560 (44.91)
Household Size: N (%)				
- 1	427 (34.03)	459 (36.75)	454 (36.35)	427 (34.24)
- 2	589 (47.16)	562 (45.00)	559 (44.76)	579 (46.43)
- 3+	235 (18.82)	228 (18.25)	236 (18.90)	241 (19.33)

Figure 2: Electorates & treatment groups, by age

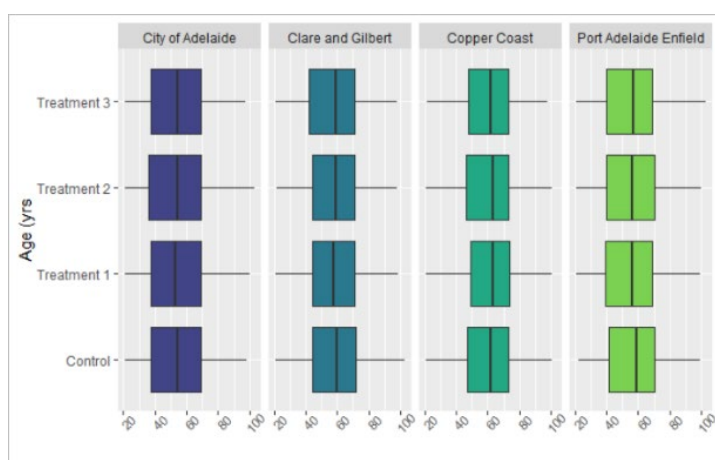


Figure 3: Electorates & treatment groups, by gender

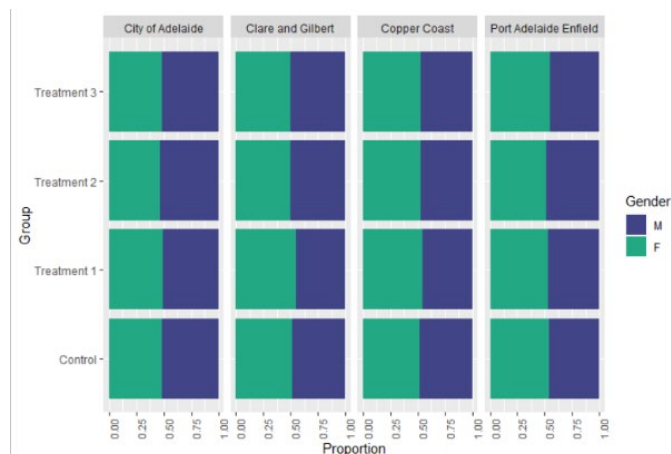
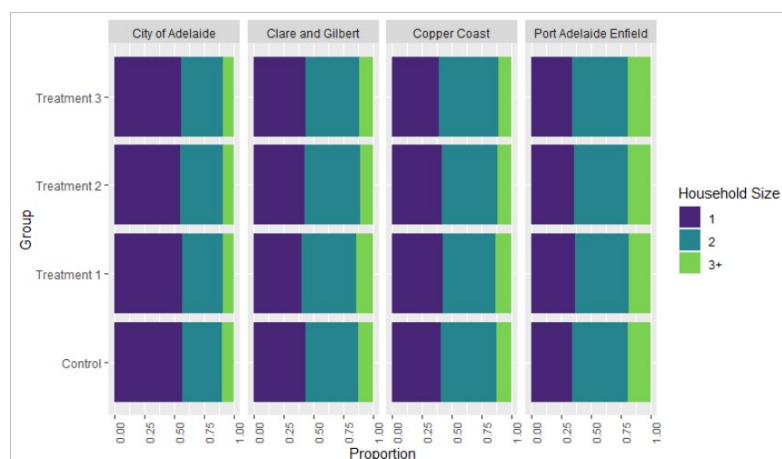


Figure 4: Electorates & treatment groups, by household size



Treatments

Electors assigned to the three treatment groups were sent one of three letters encouraging them to vote. The letters were personally addressed to the elector and were posted in plain windowed envelopes that did not allow recipients to identify the sender or the subject matter without opening and reading the letter contained within. The letters were printed on A4 paper, with the official Electoral Commission of South Australia letterhead at the top. Copies of each of the letters are included in Appendix B.

Treatment One - Remind and encourage

Electors assigned to the first treatment group received a letter reminding them about the upcoming election and encouraging them to vote. The letter listed some of the reasons why councils are important and told electors that voting was one of the most direct ways they could “make a difference” to life in their community. The letter concluded with the gentlest of expressions of social pressure by telling the elector not to leave it to others to decide their community’s future. This was accompanied by a reminder that voting is not compulsory at council elections.

Most of the language in the first letter was lifted directly from actual communications to electors from the 2018 periodic council election campaigns published by the Local Government Association of South Australia ('*Make a Difference*' campaign) and the Electoral Commission of South Australia ('*Be Counted*' campaign). I did not anticipate finding much impact on turnout from this treatment (1 to 2 percentage points at the very most). Communications that merely remind electors of an upcoming election and urge them to vote, even when they come from credible sources, have been repeatedly shown to have nil or negligible effects on voter turnout.²⁵ Providing electors with information about the institution they are electing has also been shown to have no impact on turnout.²⁶ While all treatments employed in this experiment invoked notions of civic duty, the appeal to one's civic duty was weakest in this treatment. It seemed likely as well that any sense of civic obligation would be undermined by the reminder that voting was not compulsory.

Treatment Two - Praise and gratitude

Electors assigned to the second treatment group received a letter politely and repeatedly thanking them for having voted at past elections. The letter tells electors that official records indicated they had played their part in our democracy by voting at previous elections and praised them for that. After reminding electors about the current election taking place, the letter expresses the hope that they will vote again this time as well. It ends by hinting at the possibility that the elector might be contacted by phone after the election and thanked if they participate at this election too.

The letter repeats language developed in a series of successful experiments raising turnout at US elections. As previously discussed, showing praise and gratitude for past good behaviour has been shown to stimulate people's propensity to behave well again in future. This treatment subtly makes people aware that their participation in elections is being monitored, but unlike in Treatment 3 does so in a friendly and non-confrontational manner. Social pressure is further exerted in the letter by the suggestion that a follow-up call to discuss the elector's participation might occur after the election. Because this treatment combined multiple elements to build positive social pressure, I expected it to raise turnout around 3 to 4 percentage points, in line with other experiments reported in the literature.²⁷

Treatment Three - Shame

The letter sent to electors assigned to the third treatment group starts by revealing the low turnout in the local area at the 2018 council elections and asking the recipients to think about why so many electors failed to vote. It then informs people in a lightly scolding manner about the importance in a democracy of people doing their civic duty by voting. After a reminder about the current election taking place, recipients are informed that official records are kept of who votes. The recipient's record of having voted in the past is disclosed, and hope is expressed that they will vote again this time too. The letter finishes with a warning that if the elector fails to vote, they may be contacted by phone to learn about why.

This treatment intensifies the social pressure and appeal to comply with the social norm of voting contained in the first two treatments. Electors are admonished to think about low turnout, and fulfil their civic duty by voting. Social pressure is amplified in three stages: disclosing to individuals their prior voting history, informing them that an official record of voter turnout is kept, and finally hinting that failure to vote may put any non-voters in the

awkward position of having to explain themselves to others over the phone. The mildly chastising tone of the letter was intentional to engender feelings of shame, playing upon the basic human drive to win praise and avoid shame. As noted previously, experiments playing on shame have raised turnout significantly at American elections, and I anticipated this treatment would be the most successful in increasing turnout, probably in the range of 4 to 6 percentage points.

Rollout of the experiment

The letters were timed to arrive in individuals' letterboxes the day after the postal voting packs containing their ballot papers. In preparation for potential negative reactions, the relevant council CEO and Local Deputy Returning Officer, as well as relevant Electoral Commission staff were fully briefed about the experiment prior to the mailout of each round of letters.²⁸ In fact however, negative reaction to the letters ended up being negligible. In total, nine individuals phoned or wrote expressing their disapproval - all relating to the third treatment (nine out of the 5,309 people is equal to less than 0.2 per cent of all those who received the letter).²⁹

Because these four elections were conducted entirely by post, the voting period was a minimum of 14 days. Records were kept of all voting packs and experiment letters that were returned undelivered by Australia Post for a period of four weeks after the deadline for return of ballot papers. I exclude these undeliverable cases from the denominator in calculating the effect of our treatments. One might argue that I should include them, or calculate an equivalent proportion to subtract from the control group denominator, since there was no possibility of returned experiment letters from the control group.³⁰ In fact, the difference was minimal given that every elector was posted a voting pack that could be recorded as returned to sender, regardless of whether they participated in the experiment - control group or treatment group - or not.

At the end of the four-week close-off period I obtained records about each individual's participation in the election from the Electoral Commission of South Australia database and classified them into one of three categories: voted, did not vote, or mail returned to sender.

Part 3: Results

In this next section I present in detail the results of our field experiment both overall and broken down by supplementary election and elector characteristics.³¹ I then report the results of statistical analysis estimating the effects of the three treatments versus the control, and explore the differences in effect according to election, age, gender or household size.

Table 4: Number and Percent Voting with Effects of Treatments on Turnout, overall

Experimental group	Turnout (<i>N</i>)	Turnout (%)	Turnout Effect (%)	Percentage increase in turnout (%)
Treatment 1	1709	33.20	0.67	2.06
Treatment 2	1853	36.09	3.56	10.93
Treatment 3	1902	37.11	4.58	14.09
Control	1682	32.53		

Table 4 reports the basic turnout rates among participants in each of the three treatments and the control group across the four elections combined. As can be seen, turnout in each of the three treatments was increased compared to the control group in our study which participated at a rate of 32.5%. By comparison, in the first treatment group the turnout was 33.2%, which represents a slight turnout boost of 0.7 percentage points above the control group. The second treatment group had a turnout of 36.1%, which implies a more substantial 3.6 percentage point gain in turnout over the control group. Lastly, the third treatment group had a turnout of 37.1%, a notable 4.6 percentage-point increase over the control group. The average percentage increases in turnout among electors in the second and third treatment groups were fairly impressive: around 11 to 14% higher than the control group.

Table 5 drills down further into the results and shows the number and percentage of trial participants who voted according to various characteristics: age, gender, household size and residence in a country vs a metropolitan electorate.

Table 5: Number and Percent voting, overall and by characteristics

Characteristic	Control	Treatment 1	Treatment 2	Treatment 3
Overall	1682 (32.53)	1709 (33.20)	1853 (36.09)	1902 (37.11)
Country/Metro				
- Country	875 (36.97)	923 (38.96)	961 (40.98)	983 (41.87)
- Metro	807 (28.78)	786 (28.28)	892 (31.97)	919 (33.09)
Age Category				
- 18-35	98 (12.56)	109 (13.64)	127 (16.12)	114 (14.56)
- 35-50	168 (16.25)	234 (23.08)	239 (22.91)	232 (22.03)
- 50-65	425 (31.74)	417 (30.82)	449 (33.81)	475 (34.88)
- 65+	991 (49.11)	949 (47.88)	1038 (52.53)	1081 (56.10)
Gender				
- Female	863 (32.57)	895 (33.17)	936 (36.15)	1016 (38.25)
- Male	819 (32.49)	814 (33.22)	917 (36.03)	886 (35.91)
Household Size (Electors)				
- 1	678 (29.68)	724 (31.38)	773 (33.95)	754 (33.75)
- 2	824 (37.22)	800 (37.02)	884 (39.71)	943 (41.84)
- 3+	180 (26.75)	185 (27.21)	196 (31.01)	205 (32.18)

There was not much difference in the voting behaviour of male vs female participants, with percentages voting almost identical across all treatment groups except for Treatment 3

(where a smaller proportion of males voted). In relation to household size (number of electors sharing same address), the percentage voting was highest for 2-voter households compared to both 1-voter and 3+-voter households. But regardless of household size, there was an increase in voting for all treatment groups compared to control.

Figure 5: Percent voting, by gender

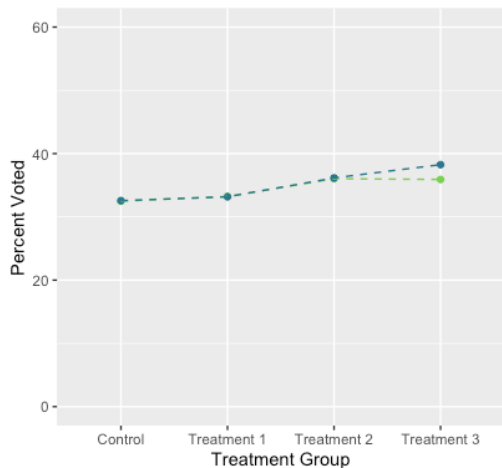
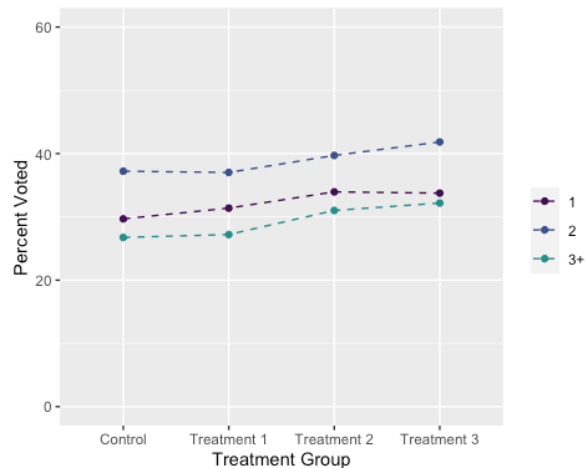


Figure 6: Percent voting, by household size



A higher percentage of participants voted in the two country electorates (Copper Coast and Clare & Gilbert Valleys) compared to the two metro electorates (Adelaide City, Port Adelaide Enfield) across all treatment groups. This is unsurprising given the long-observed trend in South Australia of country council electors voting in greater numbers than their metropolitan counterparts. Treatments 2 and 3 were associated with a similar increase in voting for both country and metro participants (with a slightly higher increase in country participants). But interestingly, while Treatment 1 was associated with a slight increase (2%) in voting in country electorates, it was associated with decreased participation by half a percentage point among electors in metro councils.

There was also a marked difference in voting behaviour by age. For the purposes of reporting, participant age was collapsed into four categories (18-35; 35-50; 50-65; 65+). The lowest proportion of voting, as is habitual at South Australian elections, was in the 18-35 age group, with only approximately 15% of electors in this age range voting in the elections. The proportion of participant voting increased with each increase in age category, with the highest proportion of voting (around 50%) in the 65+ age cohort. There was a general pattern of increased voting in the treatment groups compared to control; however there was some indication that the effect of specific treatments may differ by age: specifically, Treatment 1 had the highest percentage of voters in the 35-50 age group, while Treatment 3 had the highest percentages for those 50-65 and 65+.

Figure 7: Percent voting, by location

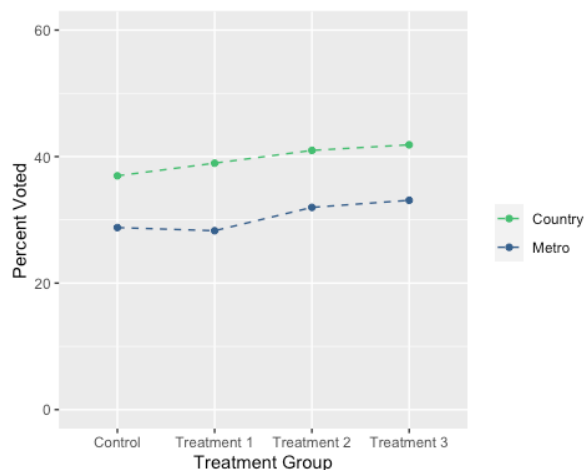


Figure 8: Percent voting, by age

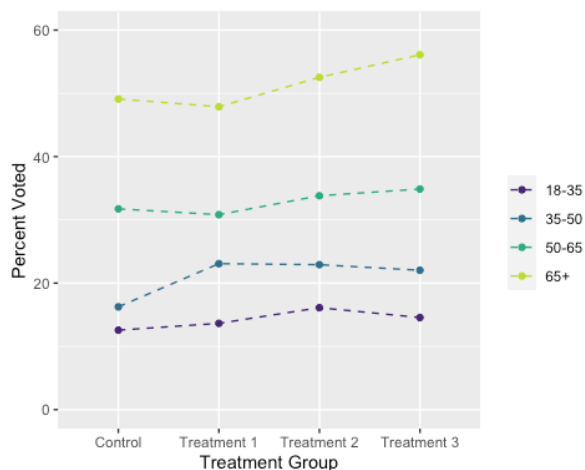
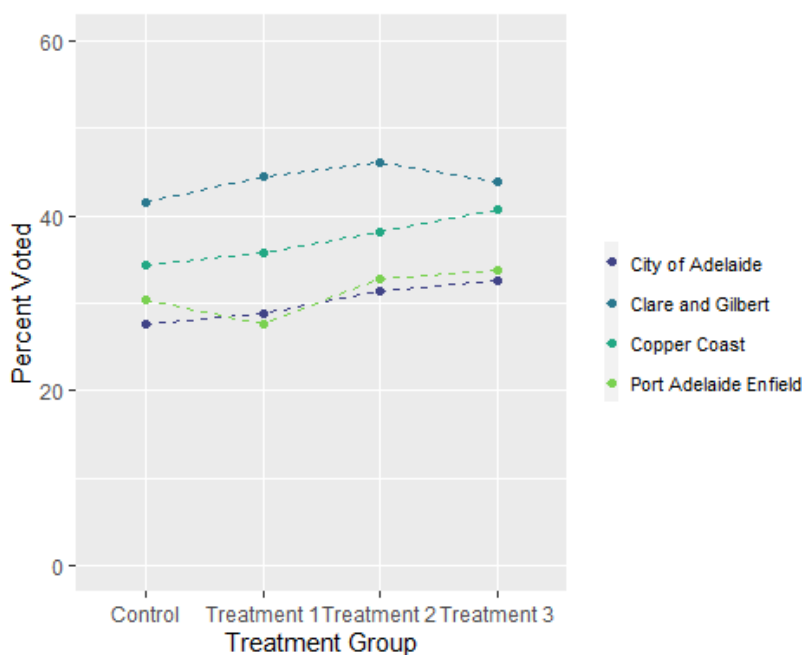


Table 6: Number and Percent Voting by Supplementary Election and Treatment Group

Election	Control	Treatment 1	Treatment 2	Treatment 3
City of Adelaide	432 (27.55)	449 (28.76)	489 (31.29)	507 (32.56)
Clare & Gilbert Valleys	360 (41.52)	384 (44.39)	394 (46.14)	379 (43.97)
Copper Coast	515 (34.33)	539 (35.84)	567 (38.03)	604 (40.65)
Port Adelaide Enfield (Outer Harbor)	375 (30.34)	337 (27.67)	403 (32.84)	412 (33.77)

Table 6 reports the number and percentage of trial participants who voted at each supplementary election separately. There are clear differences in participation between elections, with voting rates lowest in City of Adelaide and Port Adelaide Enfield, and highest in Clare and Gilbert Valleys. However, at all four elections there is a general pattern of voting rates being higher in the treatment groups compared to control. The most substantial increases in turnout were recorded among participants in Copper Coast and City of Adelaide assigned to Treatment 3, who voted at rates 6.32% and 5.01% higher than the control group. Some other potential differences in effect are evident in this table. Specifically, Treatment 1 actually had a lower percentage of voters compared to control in Port Adelaide Enfield (2.7% percentage points lower), while the difference between Treatment 3 and control was smaller in Clare and Gilbert Valleys than in all other elections (turnout being only 2.4 percentage points higher vs 4.6 percentage points higher across all elections). Some of these differences may be due to differences in characteristics (specifically, country vs metro, and age profile of the electorate) between the electorates and not due to differences in reaction to the treatments per se.

Figure 9: Percent voting by election and treatment group



Analysis of the voting behaviour at each one of the four supplementary elections is given separately and in detail in Appendices C-F in the order in which the elections were held. It should be noted when interpreting these results that for some subgroups (e.g. particular age categories) there are fairly small numbers of electors, which means that the proportions voting may exhibit a higher degree of variability.

For more rigorous analysis of the experimental results, a series of log binomial regression models were fitted to estimate the effect of each of the treatments versus the control. Three key calculations – relative risks, 95% confidence intervals and p-values – were reported, all of which I briefly explain below:

- The **Relative Risk (RR)** was estimated to check the likelihood that differences in turnout were indeed triggered by the treatments. The relative risk tells us how much more or less likely it is that an elector in a treatment group will vote, compared to an elector in the control.
- The **95% Confidence Interval** reports the range of values within which the true relative risk will fall 95 per cent of the time if the experiment were performed repeatedly with different samples of the population. We can be strongly confident that the true treatment effect lies between the upper and lower confidence limit.
- The **p-value** tells us the probability that a relative risk as large, or larger, than that observed, would occur due to random chance alone (i.e. in the absence of a true treatment effect). By convention, p-values lower than 0.05 are considered to be statistically significant – that is, they provide strong evidence of a true treatment effect.

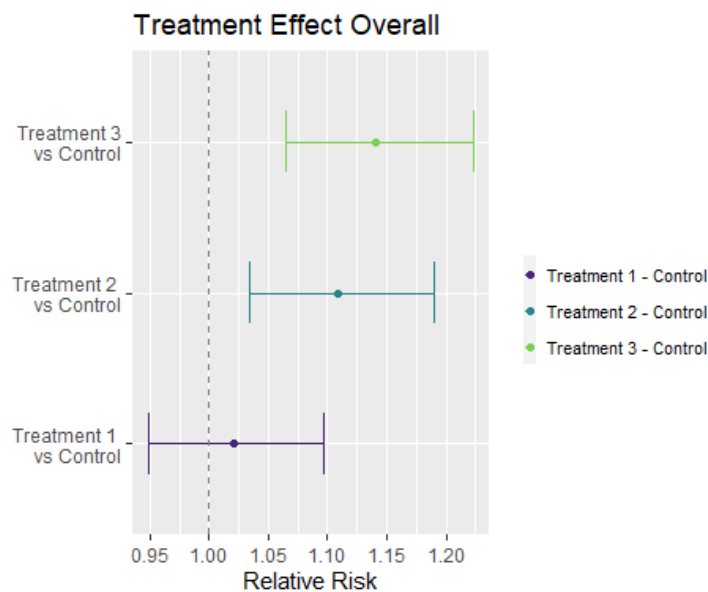
I start by presenting below the results of the statistical analysis for all elections combined. Table 7 reports the estimated overall effect of each treatment vs control, for all four council elections combined. This tells us the average effect of each of the treatments in comparison to control. Figure 10 presents the same information visually.

Table 7: Estimated Treatment Effect (vs Control) Overall

Comparison	Estimated RR (95% CI)	p value
Treatment 1 - Control	1.02 (0.95, 1.10)	0.887
Treatment 2 - Control	1.11 (1.03, 1.19)	<0.001
Treatment 3 - Control	1.14 (1.06, 1.22)	<0.001

RR = Relative Risk; CI = Confidence Interval

Figure 10: Treatment Effect (vs Control) Overall



When interpreting these estimates, note that a relative risk of voting greater than 1 indicates that turnout was significantly more likely to occur among participants in a treatment group than among participants in the control group. Although a relative risk >1 was the outcome for all three of my treatments, in the case of Treatment 1 the relative risk is close to 1 suggesting no difference or very little difference. Note too, the importance of the confidence intervals and p-values. Wherever a confidence interval crosses 1 (as it does in Treatment 1 vs Control, 95% CI = 0.95 - 1.10) there is insufficient evidence to conclude that there was a difference between treatment and control. A p-value greater than 0.05 indicates that there is not a statistically significant difference between groups, while a p-value lower than 0.05 indicates the estimated treatment effect is statistically significant.

In this experiment, participants exposed to Treatment 2 (Praise & Gratitude letter) were on average 1.11 times more likely to vote (or 11 percent more likely) compared to participants in the control group, while participants exposed to Treatment 3 (Shame letter) were on average 1.14 times more likely to vote (or 14 percent more likely) than the control group. These effects are both statistically significant ($p < .001$). Meanwhile, I found no significant difference in propensity to vote between participants who were exposed to Treatment 1 compared to participants in the control group. What little difference in turnout there was among Treatment 1 participants could be attributable to chance as much as it could be to the effects of the treatment ($p = 0.887$). It should be noted that these overall effects should be interpreted with caution when effect modification (interaction effects) are present³².

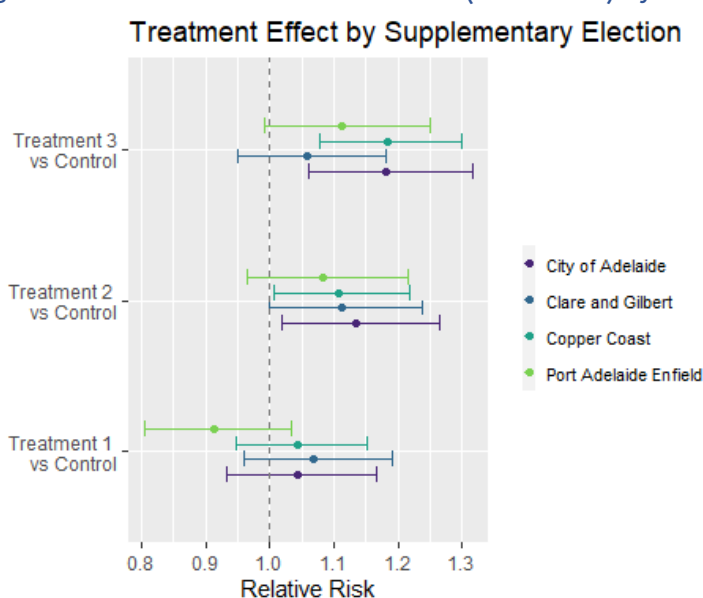
I next present the results of statistical analysis for the four elections separately. This regression model included as variables: treatment, election, and a treatment-by-election interaction term; this allows for different base rates of voting in each supplementary election and for the effect of each treatment to vary across supplementary elections. The estimates are relative risk of voting for each treatment group vs control, and 95% Confidence Interval. Table 8 and Figure 11 report the results of this model.

Table 8: Estimated Treatment Effect (vs Control) by Election

Election	T1 RR (95% CI)	T1 p	T2 RR (95% CI)	T2 p	T3 RR (95% CI)	T3 p
						0.344*
City of Adelaide	1.04 (0.93, 1.17)	0.451	1.14 (1.02, 1.27)	0.022	1.18 (1.06, 1.32)	0.002
Clare and Gilbert	1.07 (0.96, 1.19)	0.228	1.11 (1.00, 1.24)	0.054	1.06 (0.95, 1.18)	0.304
Copper Coast	1.04 (0.95, 1.15)	0.388	1.11 (1.01, 1.22)	0.036	1.18 (1.08, 1.30)	<0.001
Port Adelaide Enfield	0.91 (0.81, 1.03)	0.145	1.08 (0.96, 1.22)	0.181	1.11 (0.99, 1.25)	0.069

* p value for test of treatment-by-election interaction

Figure 11: Estimated Treatment Effect (vs Control) by Election



According to this model, there was no significant difference in voting in Treatment 1 compared to Control at any of the elections. While the risk ratios did suggest some moderate differences in likelihood to vote, the confidence intervals all included 1 and the p-values were all above 0.05 – all of which indicates that there is insufficient evidence to conclude that there are differences in probability of voting between the first treatment group and the control group. However, there were significant increases in voting among both Treatment 2 and Treatment 3 participants compared to Control at both the City of Adelaide election and Copper Coast election. In City of Adelaide, participants randomised to Treatment 2 were 1.14 times more likely (95% CI: 1.02 to 1.27 times more likely) to vote compared with participants randomised to control; those randomised to Treatment 3 were 1.18 times (1.06 to 1.32 times) more likely to vote compared to control. At the Copper Coast election, participants exposed to Treatment 2 were 1.11 times more likely (95% CI: 1.01 to 1.22 times more likely) to vote

compared with participants in the control group, those exposed to Treatment 3 were 1.18 times (1.08 to 1.30 times) more likely. These effects were all statistically significant ($p < .05$).

It is important to note that the p-value for the treatment-by-election interaction term was 0.344, which indicates that we do not have statistical evidence that the effect of the treatments differed between supplementary elections. The estimated treatment effects in each supplementary election were not different enough from each other to allow us to determine conclusively that treatments worked more on one electorate than another. This lack of treatment effect heterogeneity across electorates suggests that voter mobilisation messaging like that in Treatments 2 or 3 is likely to benefit a broad cross-section of council areas in South Australia.

Additional models were fitted which are not reported here, which were performed to investigate whether there was confounding of the treatment effect by various participant characteristics: specifically, country/metro electorate, age category, gender, and household size. There was no evidence that treatment effect estimates varied when adjusting for gender, although the observed effect in Treatment 3 was stronger for females than for males (17% vs 11% more likely to vote than the control). Similarly, there was no evidence of different effect of treatment by household size, although observed treatment effects did appear strongest in 1-electoral households. The effect of treatment vs control was generally similar across country and metro electorates. Tables and figures for each of these assessments of interaction are included in Appendix G.

The one attribute of electors for which there was some evidence of a variation in the effectiveness of treatments was age. As reported in Table 9 below, our analysis of treatment effects across age subgroups showed that the 35-50 age group was the most responsive to all three of the treatments, with statistically significant increases in voting among participants in this age group randomised to all treatment groups compared to those of the same age randomised to control. Among the youngest electors, there was evidence that Treatment 2 was the most effective at increasing turnout: those exposed to Treatment 2 were 1.28 times more likely to vote than those of the same age in the control group ($p < .005$). None of the treatment effects were statistically significant in the 50-65 age category, but among the oldest electors (65+), both treatments 2 and treatment 3 were effective at increasing turnout. This was particularly the case among senior electors exposed to Treatment 3 – they were 1.14 times more likely to vote (or 14 percent more likely) than those in the control group.

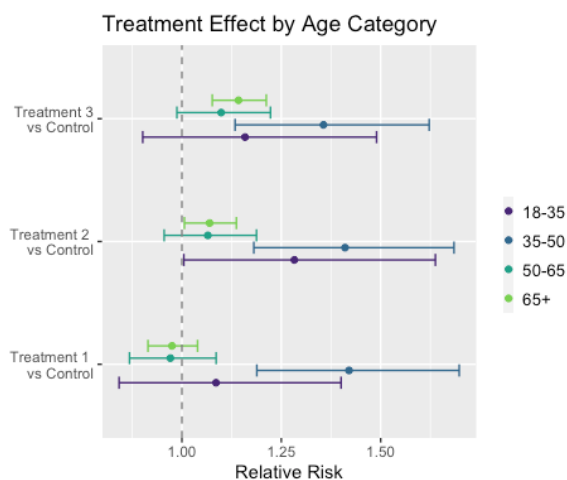
Table 9: Estimated Treatment Effect (vs Control) by Age Category

Age Category	T1 RR (95% CI)	T1 p	T2 RR (95% CI)	T2 p	T3 RR (95% CI)	T3 p
						0.020*
18-35	1.09 (0.84, 1.40)	0.526	1.28 (1.00, 1.64)	0.046	1.16 (0.90, 1.49)	0.250
35-50	1.42 (1.19, 1.70)	<0.001	1.41 (1.18, 1.68)	<0.001	1.36 (1.13, 1.62)	<0.001
50-65	0.97 (0.87, 1.09)	0.607	1.07 (0.96, 1.19)	0.255	1.10 (0.99, 1.22)	0.084
65+	0.98 (0.91, 1.04)	0.438	1.07 (1.01, 1.14)	0.031	1.14 (1.08, 1.21)	<0.001

* p value for test of treatment-by-age interaction

Note that the wider confidence limits for the 18-35 and 35-50 age groups are due to smaller numbers of participants in these groups. As previously indicated, only 15% of participants in this study from the youngest age range actually voted in these elections.

Figure 12: Estimated Treatment Effect (vs Control) by Age Category



The p-value for the treatment-by-age category interaction term was 0.020, which indicates that we have statistical evidence that the effect of the treatments differed between age groups. This discovery is potentially important for councils, the LGA and the Electoral Commission, because it provides some suggestions about possible ways to raise turnout at future elections by selectively targeting different age groups of electors with messaging more likely to have an impact on them.

Part 4: Lessons Learned

The results of this experiment provide a number of valuable lessons – particularly about what works and what does not work to raise turnout at council elections.

Lesson 1: Conventional messaging reminding and encouraging electors to vote is not effective

The first major lesson from this experiment, and possibly the most important, is that the conventional messaging used to encourage voter participation at South Australian council elections has no effect on electors, or a very negligible one at best. Treatment 1 – a fusion of quotes lifted directly from the LGA’s *‘Make a Difference’* and ECSA’s *‘Be Counted’* 2018 periodic election advertising collateral – generated only 27 more votes than no treatment at all. That is less than 1% higher turnout than the control – which is a statistically insignificant difference that could just be due to chance.

It is commonly assumed that a lack of awareness and a lack of information are among the key barriers to voter participation at elections. But my experiment corroborated what multiple other experiments have shown before. Communications that merely remind electors of an upcoming election and urge them to vote have nil or negligible effects on voter turnout, even when they come from trusted and authoritative sources.³³ Similarly, providing electors with information about the election and the institution they are electing has also been

repeatedly shown to have no impact on turnout.³⁴ Electors randomised to Treatment 1 in my experiment were all reminded about the elections taking place and were all given information about some of the services councils provide. Yet electors who received no reminder about the election and no information about these council services voted at virtually the exact same rate.

There is undoubtedly a need to raise awareness about councils, providing South Australian electors with more information about what their councils and councillors do. However, local government bodies would be advised to do this *outside of election time* as it is unlikely to do anything to increase voter turnout *at election time*, and could even get in the way of more effective messaging.

Lesson 2: Messages that exert social pressure on electors are effective at raising turnout

The second lesson from this experiment is that messaging that exerts social pressure on electors can lead to significant increases in participation at South Australian council elections.

One of the goals of this research project was to test whether certain messaging exerting social pressure on electors to vote - messaging proven to work in the context of American elections - could also have a significant impact on turnout at South Australian council elections too. The answer seems to be affirmative. Both Treatment 2 (Praise and Gratitude letter) and Treatment 3 (Shame letter) raised turnout significantly - both in statistical and electoral terms. The percentage increases in turnout among electors in these treatment groups were impressive and statistically robust: around 11 to 14 per cent higher than the control group.

These findings suggest that South Australians are susceptible to social pressure regarding their voting behaviour, and this despite some of the notable differences in the electoral context here (as described at the end of Part 1 of this Report). Advertising and voter mobilisation communications that play on this susceptibility in the lead-up to council elections may succeed in increasing turnout, if done properly.

Importantly, this experiment found that stronger social pressure messaging is substantially more effective at raising turnout than weak or generic appeals to comply with the social norm. While all three treatments employed in this experiment invoked notions of civic duty and applied some degree of social pressure, the particular appeals in Treatment 1 (*“participating in your local council election is one of the most direct ways you can make a difference to everyday life in your community”* and *“don’t leave it to others to decide the future of your community”*) were by far the weakest. It was unsurprising that these appeals had little effect on turnout. The weak or nil response to these appeals among electors assigned to Treatment Group 1 are consistent with the results seen at multiple experiments elsewhere. A meta-analysis of 44 separate experiments testing the impact of nonpartisan mail-outs in the United States found that messages that emphasise civic duty or stress the importance of making one’s voice heard increase turnout on average by less than 0.4 percentage points.³⁵

Lesson 3: The most effective messaging strategy was the one that employed shame to criticise non-voters

Although this experiment attempted to activate both positive and negative emotions to induce electors to vote, the results provided stronger evidence that a messaging strategy that activates negative feelings was *more* effective. The most effective impact on turnout in this experiment came from the third treatment, which attempted to stimulate voting by activating the psychological mechanism of shame. Shame is an unpleasant, self-conscious emotion that can drive people to conceal misbehaviour, and to avoid or hide from the negative judgement of others. People will generally try to avoid feeling shameful by complying with social norms, especially when they are aware that their behaviour is being observed.

Participants in Treatment 3 were gently scolded about the importance of voting at council elections, with non-voting depicted as a failure - and a failure close to home, given the low turnout rate in their local area at the 2018 periodic council elections. After being warned that their voting history was being monitored, they were threatened with the possibility of a follow-up phone call should they fail to vote at the present election. My experiment corroborated the findings of experiments elsewhere that messaging that triggers feelings of shame can have a powerful effect on participation. Participants who received this message were 14 per cent more likely to vote than those in the control group.

South Australian electors are clearly sensitive to messaging that activates negative feelings like shame around failure to vote. Although the language and tone of the letter used in this experiment were somewhat confrontational and would probably not be suitable to incorporate directly in promotional advertising for an election, social pressure appeals based around shame could certainly be harnessed in an official campaign to generate turnout, provided they are couched in carefully crafted language.

Lesson 4: Social pressure based on positive emotions is almost as effective in raising turnout - and is almost certainly more palatable for electoral communication strategies

Although this experiment showed that messaging activating negative feelings was the most effective at raising turnout, the results also show a significant and only moderately smaller effect on turnout from messaging that exerts social pressure on electors using positive feelings of praise and gratitude. Participants assigned to Treatment 2 who were praised and thanked for their participation as voters, were 12 per cent more likely to vote than those in the control group - just two percentage points less than those in Treatment 3. This is consistent with the outcome of a series of experiments in the United States demonstrating that expressions of gratitude can be harnessed effectively to increase turnout at elections, with significant effects albeit less powerful ones than those activating negative feelings like shame.³⁶

From a communication strategy perspective this is an important finding. While it may not generate quite as many votes as negative social pressure messaging, thanking and praising electors for voting is almost certainly a more palatable and less confrontational alternative. Although negative reaction among electors assigned to Treatment 3 was actually extremely limited in this experiment, there have been cases in the United States where use

of heavy-handed, negative social pressure communications have generated significant blowback. Those seeking an effective messaging strategy to raise turnout at council elections with fewer negative side effects would be advised to consider the Praise and Gratitude treatment.

Lesson 5: Electors are more likely to vote when told that participation is being monitored and disclosed

This experiment also confirmed the power of surveillance as an effective tool to increase social pressure. Participants assigned to Treatments 2 and 3 in the experiment were told that their behaviour was being monitored, evidence of their past voting history was disclosed to them, and it was suggested that they might be contacted to discuss their voting experience after the election. The increases in turnout among participants in these two treatment arms corroborated the findings from experiments by various other researchers that electors are significantly more likely to vote when alerted to the fact that others are watching them.

As discussed previously in this Report, there is considerable evidence from the fields of psychology and behavioural economics showing that people are highly sensitive to the perceptions of others, even strangers, and are more likely to comply with social norms if they know their behaviour is being observed and disclosed. In parts of the United States where voting records are publicly available researchers have been able to achieve impressive increases in turnout through a variety of unconventional, albeit heavy-handed approaches to disclosing voter participation.

While it may not be possible (and is probably not desirable) to replicate these exact approaches here in South Australia, researchers have also explored many ways of achieving the same effects more gently, to avoid backlash. Treatment 2 ably demonstrated that people could be made aware their participation in the election was being observed, but in a friendly, non-confrontational way. Even the potentially awkward situation of what I call a “follow-up” - having to explain over the phone to a stranger one’s failure to vote - can be framed in positive language: *“We may call you after the election to discuss your experience voting. We are interested in what voting in this election was like for you and would like to be able to thank you again for voting.”*

Raising the prospect of contacting electors after the election (an approach proven to generate small but statistically significant increases in turnout in U.S. experiments) is an effective strategy because it plays on people’s subconscious desire to be *seen* to be behaving properly by others. This non-confrontational technique to harness the surveillance in a social pressure could easily be adapted for official electoral communications. It is worth considering however, that this approach has the potential to lose its effectiveness if no follow-up contacts are ever made.

Lesson 6: Personally addressed mail to electors works - but it is the messaging that really matters

In this experiment I opted to use personally addressed mail as the vehicle to communicate with electors. Originally, I had planned to conduct separate experiments

comparing the effectiveness of personally addressed mail vs. impersonal, unaddressed mail to the household (e.g. flyers), but advice from the project's statistician was that the number of electors in supplementary elections would be too low to generate the statistical power needed for more than one conclusive experiment.

Personally addressed mail obviously has advantages and disadvantages compared to other methods of electoral communication. In Australia it is expensive to send, but this expense is to some extent counterbalanced by the fact that anyone authorised to have a copy of the electoral roll - including the electoral commission, councils, candidates, political parties - has at their disposition an immensely valuable database containing the (mostly accurate) postal contact details of virtually every single elector.³⁷ The likelihood of personally addressed mail actually being received and read by electors is probably higher than any other mass form of electoral communication (advertising on mass media, signage, letterbox advertising, robo-calls, social media, text messaging, events) - which is also why it lends itself so well to experiments like this one.

The results from my experiment indicate, like a mass of other experiments reported in the literature, that personally addressed mail does in itself raise turnout slightly (an analysis pooling together the results of 85 separate studies found that sending a single piece of mail to an elector increases their turnout by about $\frac{3}{4}$ of a percentage point).³⁸ What really matters in terms of encouraging significant numbers of electors to turn out and vote however, is the contents of the mail, i.e. the messaging. This experiment has shown that personally addressed mail containing the right messaging has the ability to significantly raise turnout - without any use at all of bold colours, stylish fonts, eye-grabbing graphics, or glossy photographs.

Lesson 7: Social pressure messages are far more cost-effective

One of the key considerations with any communication campaign aimed at raising voter turnout is cost-effectiveness. In order to see just how cost-effective a particular tactic is, it is useful to calculate how much it costs to produce each additional vote. The results of this experiment are very revealing in this regard:

- Treatment 1 mailed to 5,314 participants generated just 27 votes more than the control, which equates to one vote generated for every 197 people contacted. With each letter I sent in the experiment costing \$1.39 per piece (printing and postage), it cost \$274 to generate each additional vote in the first treatment.
- Treatment 2 mailed to 5,312 participants generated 171 votes more than the control, which is one additional vote generated for every 31 people contacted. This implies a cost of \$43 per additional vote in this treatment ($\$1.39 \times 31$).
- Treatment 3 mailed to 5,309 participants generated 220 votes more than the control, which is one additional vote generated for every 24 people contacted. This means a cost of \$33 per additional vote in this treatment ($\$1.39 \times 24$).

These figures serve to underline and reinforce several of the lessons noted previously. The dollar cost per additional vote produced by each treatment obviously drops as the treatment effect goes up. The first treatment - which used conventional messaging to encourage voter participation at council elections - was not just ineffective, but at \$274 per vote generated was very far from being cost-effective. The second and third treatments were significantly more cost-effective, demonstrating that the greater the social pressure exerted,

the more ‘bang for one’s buck’. Any organisation considering an electoral communication campaign at South Australian council elections would be advised to think carefully about these figures.

Unfortunately, the cost-effectiveness of these treatments was significantly impacted by how expensive the Australian postal service is. My cost of \$1.39 per unit (including printing, stationery and postage costs) was the lowest possible at this scale. This compares poorly with the United States where mailings of this type are conducted at a cost of US \$0.50 to \$0.75 per unit – a fact which permits experiments like this one and electoral mailing campaigns to be conducted on vast scales there.

Lesson 8: Electors from different areas and demographics react somewhat differently to messaging

Another potentially important finding from this experiment is that different treatments worked differently on different subgroups of the total study population. Some of these findings summarised here should be considered carefully when planning electoral communication campaigns to promote participation at future council elections:

- Electors aged 35-50 were the most responsive to all three of the treatments, with statistically significant increases in voting among participants in this age group assigned to all three treatments compared to those assigned to the control. Given their general responsiveness, electors in this age band may be good targets for *any* future messaging strategies aimed at raising turnout.
- Young electors aged 18-35 were particularly responsive to the Gratitude Treatment. Those exposed to Treatment 2 were 1.28 times more likely to vote than those of the same age in the control group.
- Among electors in the older age groups, Treatment 3 was the most effective treatment and this particularly among electors aged 65+. Given that this is the cohort of electors with the highest propensity to actually vote at council elections, targeting older electors with elements of the Shame Treatment may be a particularly cost-effective way of driving up the overall turnout rate by a few percentage points.
- While Treatment 1 was associated with a 2% increase in voting in the two country electorates, it actually decreased turnout by half a percentage point in the two metropolitan councils.

Given the above findings, a one-size-fits-all approach to communications is unlikely to be a successful or cost-effective strategy for raising turnout at council elections. But if an all-purpose approach is preferred, it would be worth considering the social pressure messaging strategies employed in Treatments 2 or 3 as they are most likely to benefit a broad cross-section of council areas and demographics in South Australia.

Lesson 9: The experiment worked, but it should be just the start of many more studies aimed at improving turnout at South Australian council elections

The final key take-away from this project is that this experiment, which to my knowledge is the first of its kind to be undertaken in Australia, was a success. The hypotheses

I set out to test were largely confirmed. The treatment effects generated by the two social pressure interventions were significant, albeit not quite as large as I would have liked. The four councils that agreed to allow the experiment to be undertaken at their supplementary elections were all very supportive of the project. The experiment was unobtrusive, in the sense that participants in the experiment remained unaware that their behaviour was being studied, and outcomes were measured without relying on their involvement. Lastly, there was absolutely minimal negative feedback about the experiment's letters from participants.

The experiment produced accurate, statistically robust, and useful data about some of the things that work (and some of the things that don't work) at raising turnout among electors at South Australian council elections.

Because of compulsory voting systems at the state and federal levels throughout Australia, as well as at the local government level in most of the country's states and territories, there has never been much interest or need to explore innovative and unconventional strategies to raise electoral turnout. This includes a lack of interest or need to conduct experiments like this one - which while relatively common in the United States, and increasing in frequency in other countries, have never been conducted before now in Australia.

South Australia's council elections are one of, if not the largest political elections in Australia where voting is voluntary. The low historical turnout rate at these elections has long been a matter of concern. There is clearly a need and a place for experiments like this one in South Australia to identify ways of increasing the apparently stagnant voter participation rate. And this experiment should be just the start. Much more research is needed in order to reliably assess how electors respond to an array of other persuasive communication strategies and psychological stimuli. This experiment tested the effectiveness of a number of different social psychological ingredients discussed earlier in this Report: praise and gratitude for those who vote, shame and scolding for those who don't, surveillance, disclosure of past voting history, and the hint of follow-up. But which of the particular ingredients in this 'social pressure soup' were truly effective in the South Australian context? Future experiments should attempt to isolate these ingredients and figure this out. Likewise, there are many other messages and methods not included in this experiment that have been shown to significantly drive up turnout at voluntary voting elections overseas. In short, there is ample scope for more randomised field experiments to be done in South Australia and councils should be encouraged to undertake or commission their own.

Given what we know about the poor participation levels of young electors at council elections, there is particular scope for experiments focussing on mobilising turnout among young and first-time voters. Because voting is a habit-forming activity, someone who votes in one election is more likely to vote again in future. If evidence can be found about how to induce electors to start voting at council elections from an early age, it may be possible to create 'lifetime council voters'. Similar lines of experimental investigation could be followed for 'never council voters' - that is electors who are known to vote at compulsory state and federal elections but never at council elections. Future studies should investigate these possibilities.

ENDNOTES

¹ Reif, Karlheinz; Schmitt, Hermann (1980). "Nine Second-Order National Elections - A Conceptual Framework for the Analysis of European Election Results". *European Journal of Political Research*. European Consortium for Political Research. 8: 3-44

² Colmar Brunton (2018). Electoral Commission SA Council Election Survey 2018.

³ Concern about low turnout levels in the early 2000s led to a target being included in the Rann Government's 2004 State Strategic Plan: to increase overall voter turnout at council elections to 50 per cent by 2014, a goal which was certainly never reached.

⁴ It must be noted that there are considerable differences in turnout between individual council areas, with electors in country councils voting at close to 20 per cent higher rates - on average - than those in metropolitan areas.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Irrationality itself could be one reason why people vote. One much-debated explanation for voter turnout is that voters are in fact irrational beings, moved by their emotions, their biases and a lack of objective information. They opt to vote in the (mistaken) belief that their one vote is likely to make a difference to the outcome of the election.

⁷ Kurt Lewin Lewin, K.Z. *Intention, Will and Need* (1st ed. 1926). In *A Kurt Lewin Reader. The Complete Social Scientist*; Gold, M., Ed.; American Psychological Association: Washington, DC, USA, 1999; pp. 83-115.

⁸ Cialdini,

⁹ Klemens 2004 Social Norms and Voter Turnout, Brookings Institute <https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/social-norms-and-voter-turnout/>

¹⁰ Knack 1992, Civic norms, social sanctions and voting turnout, *Rationality and Society*, 4, 133-156

¹¹ Blais 2000 Blais. 2000. *To vote or note to vote: The merits and limits of rational choice theory*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press.

¹² Green, D. P., & Gerber, A. S. (2019). *Get out the vote: How to increase voter turnout*. Brookings Institution Press, 58.

¹³ Gerber, A.S., Green, D.P. & Larimer, C.W. An Experiment Testing the Relative Effectiveness of Encouraging Voter Participation by Inducing Feelings of Pride or Shame. *Polit Behav* 32, 409-422 (2010)

¹⁴ Gosnell, H. (1926). An Experiment in the Stimulation of Voting. *American Political Science Review*, 20(4), 869-874. doi:10.1017/S0003055400110524

¹⁵ Gross, A. E., Schmidt, M. J., Keating, J. P., & Saks, M. J. (1974). Persuasion, surveillance, and voting behavior. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 10(5), 451-460. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0022-1031\(74\)90013-4](https://doi.org/10.1016/0022-1031(74)90013-4)

¹⁶ Green, D. P., & Gerber, A. S. (2019), op.cit, 147.

¹⁷ Eric B. Rasmusen & Richard A. Posner, "Creating and Enforcing Norms, with Special Reference to Sanctions" (John M. Olin Program in Law and Economics Working Paper No. 96, 2000).

¹⁸ Panagopoulos, Costas. 2010. Affect, Social Pressure and Prosocial Motivation: Field Experimental Evidence of the Mobilizing Effects of Pride, Shame and Publicizing Voting Behavior. *Political Behavior* 32(3): 369-386.

¹⁹ Panagopoulos, Costas. 2013. Positive Social Pressure and Prosocial Motivation: Evidence from a Large-Scale Field Experiment on Voter Mobilization. *Political Psychology* 34(2): 265-275.

²⁰ Panagopoulos, Costas. 2011. Thank You for Voting: Gratitude Expression and Voter Mobilization. *Journal of Politics* 73 (3): 707-717

²¹ Costas Panagopoulos & Sander van der Linden (2016) Conformity to implicit social pressure: the role of political identity, *Social Influence*, 11:3, 177-184.

²² Rogers, T., Ternovski, J., & Yoeli, E. (2016). Potential follow-up increases private contributions to public good. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Science*, 113 (19), 5218-5220.

²³ A natural person who is a resident, sole owner or occupier of a rateable property is eligible to be included on the council voters roll in South Australia. Groups or bodies corporate who own or occupy property are also entitled to be included on the roll and have a person vote on their behalf. As City of Adelaide Council incorporates the chief business district of the state capital, it has a much higher number of council enrolled electors than other councils.

²⁴ Any readers unfamiliar with Australian elections should be reminded that the number of electors who have never voted at a state (or a federal) election is absolutely minimal. Compulsory voting consistently ensures turnout rates northwards of 91 per cent at South Australian state elections. Non-voters unable to furnish a valid and sufficient reason for failing to vote are fined. This tends to dissuade the vast majority of electors from recidivist non-voting at elections where voting is compulsory.

²⁵ Gerber, A. S., & Green, D. P. (2017). Field experiments on voter mobilization: An overview of a burgeoning literature. *Handbook of economic field experiments*, 1, 395-438

²⁶ Bedolla, L. G., & Michelson, M. R. (2012). *Mobilizing Inclusion*. Yale University Press, 30.

²⁷ Panagopoulos, multiple. op.cit.

²⁸ To maintain the right conditions for the field experiment, I stressed how important it was for any potential participants in the experiment to remain unaware that they could in fact be participating in an experiment.

²⁹ The son of one participant was even kind enough to draft an alternative version of the letter that he suggested might be more effective in a future mail-out.

³⁰ The other issue with not including 'return to sender' electors is that these electors may be different to the overall population in a way which is relevant to treatment effect (e.g. they may be younger, or more likely to move often, and the treatments might be more/less effective in this demographic group). This is a limitation of our study, but it just means that the effects of treatments might not be able to be generalised to these electors. Given that 'return to sender' would also apply to the voting packs, it could be argued that they are not actually part of the 'potential voting population' of interest in the study anyway.

³¹ An anonymised dataset presenting the results of the experiment and permitting reproduction of the numerical results will be made available at ecsa.sa.gov.au/research upon publication.

³² An interaction effect means that the effect of a treatment may vary (in magnitude or even in direction) across different subgroups: for example, a treatment may be more effective in some electorates (or in some age groups) than others. In this case, the overall effect of the treatment across all subgroups must be interpreted with caution. For example, if a treatment increases voting by 10% in one electorate, but only increases voting by 2% in another, then on average the treatment increases voting by 6%, but this is not a true estimate of the effect in an individual electorate. Similarly, a given treatment may increase voting by 5% in one age group but decrease voting by 5% in another, resulting in an average effect of 0, but it would be misleading to assume that the treatment had no effect on voting.

³³ Green, D. P., & Gerber, A. S. (2019). *Get out the vote: How to increase voter turnout*. Brookings Institution Press, 58.

³⁴ Bedolla, L. G., & Michelson, M. R. (2012). *Mobilizing Inclusion*. Yale University Press, 30.

³⁵ Green, D. P., & Gerber, A. S. (2019), *op.cit*, 192.

³⁶ Panagopoulos, 2011

³⁷ The exception are silent electors.

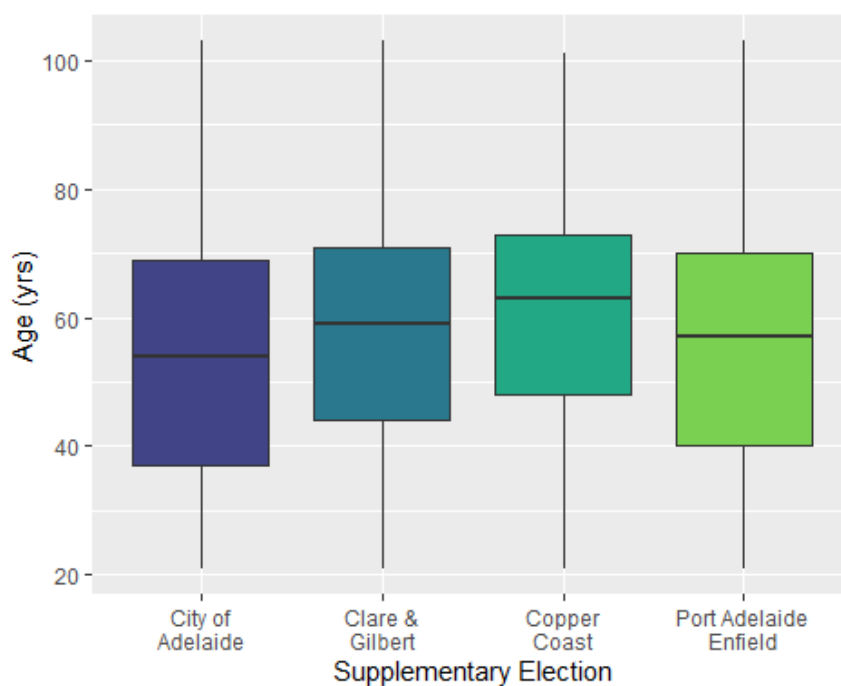
³⁸ Gerber and Green 2016, *op.cit*.

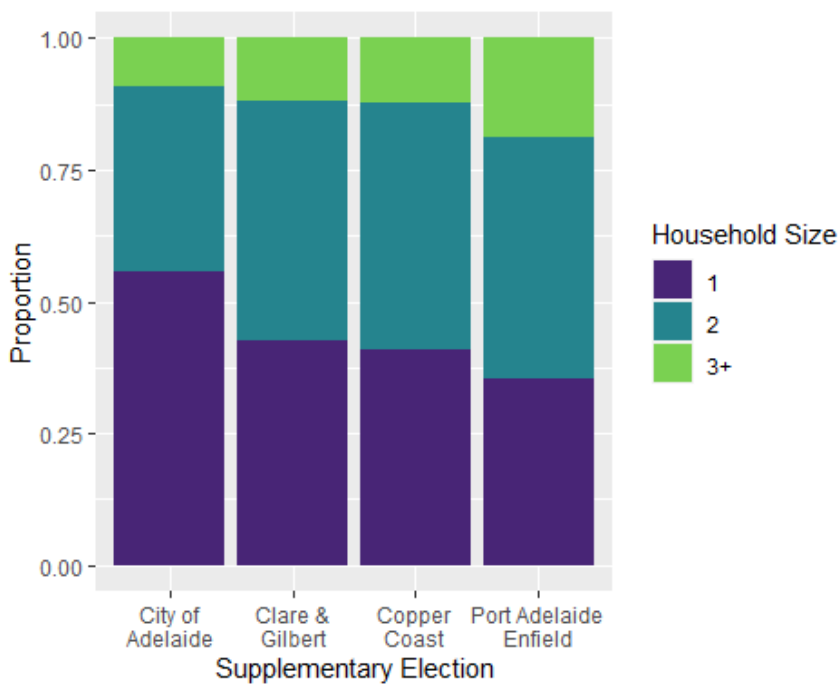
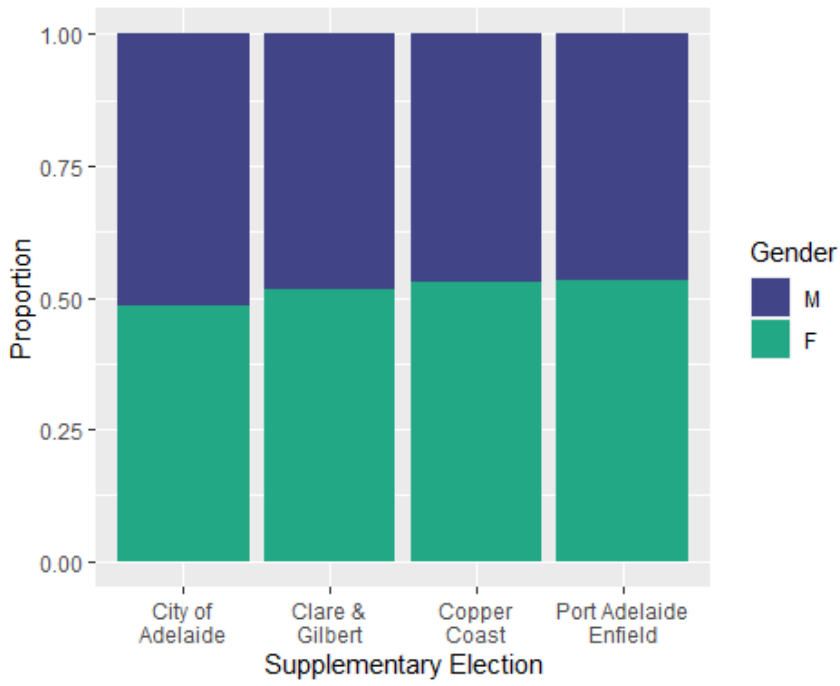
Appendix A. Study Population Characteristics by electorate and overall

Characteristic	City of Adelaide	Clare & Gilbert Valleys	Copper Coast	Port Adelaide Enfield (Outer Harbor ward)	Overall
Age (yrs): Median (IQR)	54 (37, 69)	59 (44, 71)	63 (48, 73)	57 (40, 70)	58 (41, 71)
Gender: N(%) ^a					
- Female	3139 (48.31)	1851 (51.59)	3275 (53.11)	2657 (53.20)	10922 (51.41)
- Male	3358 (51.69)	1737 (48.41)	2891 (46.89)	2337 (46.80)	10323 (48.59)
Household Size: N(%) ^b					
- 1	3628 (55.82)	1529 (42.61)	2519 (40.85)	1765 (35.34)	9441 (44.43)
- 2	2263 (34.82)	1629 (45.40)	2882 (46.73)	2289 (45.84)	9063 (42.65)
- 3+	608 (9.36)	430 (11.98)	766 (12.42)	940 (18.82)	2744 (12.91)

^a Note that there were a small number of electors (3) with missing information on gender

^b Household size indicates number of registered electors sharing an address.





Appendix B. Experiment Treatment Letter 1



27 September 2021

Level 6, 60 Light Square
Adelaide SA 5000
GPO Box 646
Adelaide SA 5001
T +61 8 7424 7400
W ecsa.sa.gov.au
ABN 99 891 752 468



000003 045 - 5031

Mr Samuel Sample - Letter1
FujiFilm DMS
123A Hayward Ave
TORRENSVILLE SA 5031

An important message from the Electoral Commission of South Australia

Dear Samuel,

An election to fill a vacancy on the City of Port Adelaide Enfield Council is taking place over the next three weeks. You are eligible to vote and will have received a voting pack by post.

Participating in your local council election is one of the most direct ways **you can make a difference** to everyday life in your community.

Local democracy is an important feature of life in Australia, and councils have a far greater influence on communities than most people appreciate. Consider for a moment how everyday life is improved by the many services that councils provide. Imagine your community without rubbish collection, libraries, sports club facilities, community halls, senior services – and the list goes on.

Even though voting is not compulsory for council elections, don't leave it to others to decide the future of your community. Vote and be counted.

Make a difference - return your postal vote before 12 noon on 18 October.

Questions? Contact the Electoral Commission at 1300 655 232 or visit ecsa.sa.gov.au.

Yours sincerely,

The Electoral Commission of South Australia

Appendix B. Experiment Treatment Letter 2



27 September 2021

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000001 045 - 5031

Mr Samuel Sample - Letter2
FujiFilm DMS
123A Hayward Ave
TORRENSVILLE SA 5031

An important message from the Electoral Commission of South Australia

Dear Samuel,

We realise voting takes time and effort.

Official voter records indicate that you have voted at past South Australian elections, and we just wanted to say "**thank you.**"

Our democracy depends on **people like you** casting a vote. We appreciate that you have previously made it a priority to cast your vote. Thank you for playing your part.

We also remind you that an election to fill a vacancy on the City of Port Adelaide Enfield Council is taking place over the next three weeks. You are eligible to vote and will have received a voting pack by post.

We hope that you will vote again at this election.

We may **call you after the election** to discuss your experience voting. We are interested in what voting in this election was like for you and would like to be able to thank you again for voting.

Questions? Contact the Electoral Commission at 1300 655 232 or visit ecsa.sa.gov.au.

Yours sincerely,

The Electoral Commission of South Australia



Appendix B. Experiment Treatment Letter 3



27 September 2021

Level 6, 60 Light Square
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ABN 99 891 752 468



000002 045 - 5031

Mr Samuel Sample - Letter3
FujiFilm DMS
123A Hayward Ave
TORRENSVILLE SA 5031

An important message from the Electoral Commission of South Australia

Dear Samuel,

In your area only 34 percent of people voted at the 2018 council elections.

Why did so many people fail to vote? Our democracy depends on **people like you** doing your civic duty and voting. As citizens, we have a voice in government and your voice starts with your vote.

An election to fill a vacancy on the City of Port Adelaide Enfield Council is taking place over the next three weeks. You are eligible to vote and will have received a voting pack by post containing your ballot paper and all the information required to vote.

Official voter records indicate that you have voted at past South Australian elections, so we don't need to remind you how important voting is. We encourage you to **do your civic duty and vote this time too**.

How you vote is secret, but we keep records of who votes. We hope to see that you voted again at this election.

We may **call you after the election** to discuss your experience voting. If you don't vote, we may call you to learn about why.

Questions? Contact the Electoral Commission at 1300 655 232 or visit ecsa.sa.gov.au.

Yours sincerely,

The Electoral Commission of South Australia

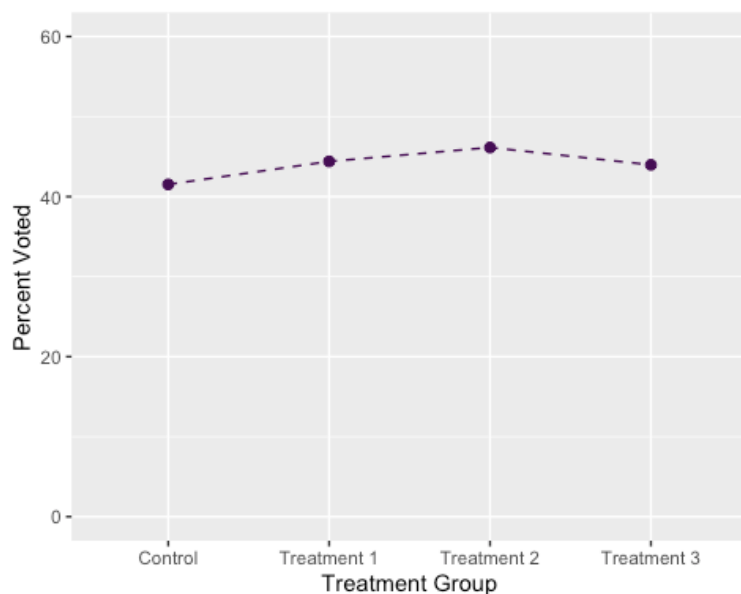


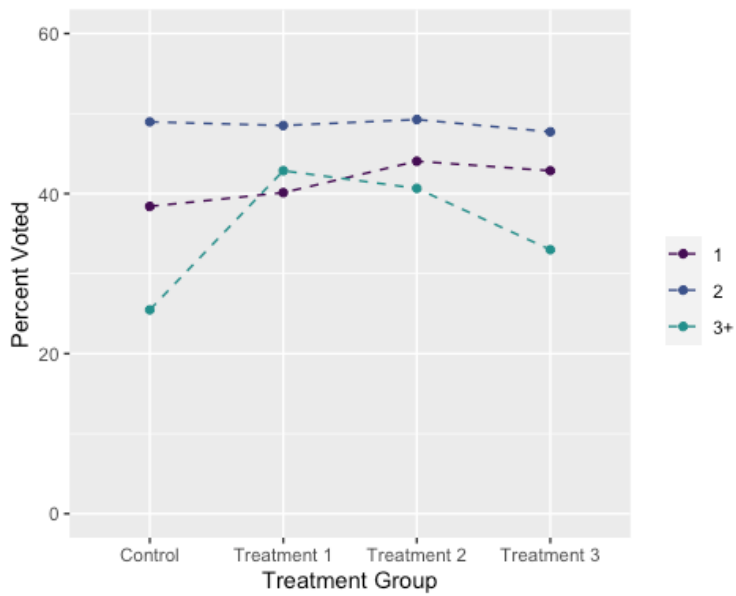
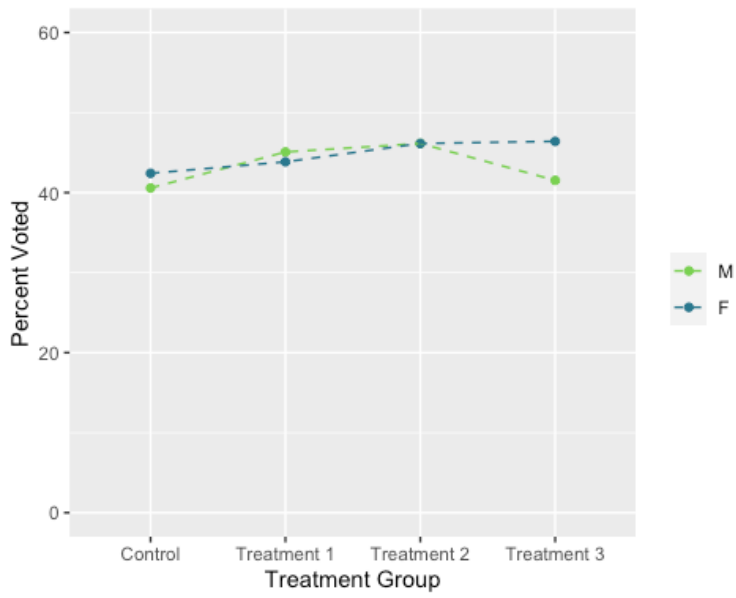
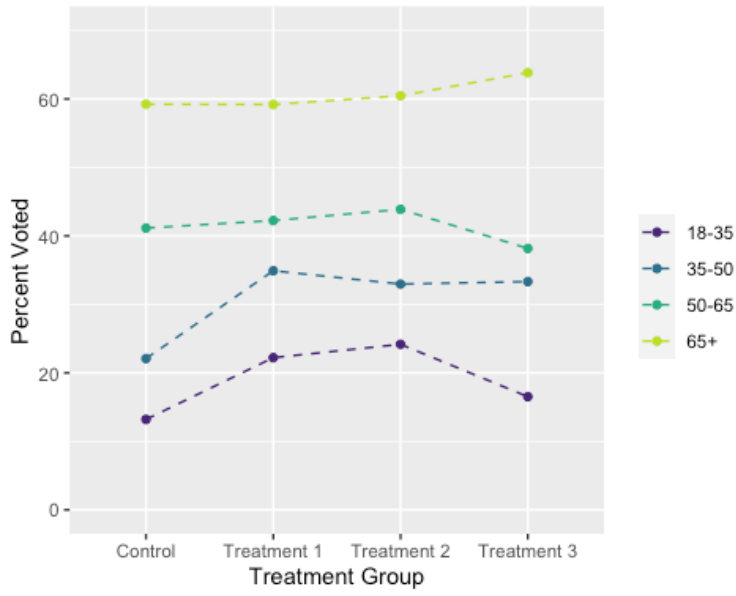
Appendix C. Voting behaviour at Clare & Gilbert Valleys election by treatment group and characteristics

Number and Percent Voting by Treatment Group and Characteristics

Subgroup	Control	Treatment 1	Treatment 2	Treatment 3
Overall	360 (41.52)	384 (44.39)	394 (46.14)	379 (43.97)
Age Category				
- 18-35	14 (13.21)	26 (22.22)	22 (24.18)	20 (16.53)
- 35-50	38 (22.09)	59 (34.91)	60 (32.97)	57 (33.33)
- 50-65	93 (41.15)	109 (42.25)	104 (43.88)	92 (38.17)
- 65+	215 (59.23)	190 (59.19)	208 (60.47)	210 (63.83)
Gender				
- Female	190 (42.41)	210 (43.84)	197 (46.14)	200 (46.40)
- Male	170 (40.57)	174 (45.08)	197 (46.14)	179 (41.53)
Household Size (Electors)				
- 1	144 (38.40)	138 (40.12)	159 (44.04)	159 (42.86)
- 2	189 (48.96)	195 (48.51)	198 (49.25)	188 (47.72)
- 3+	27 (25.47)	51 (42.86)	37 (40.66)	32 (32.99)

Graphs -in order - Percent Voting by Treatment Group overall, by age, by gender, by household size



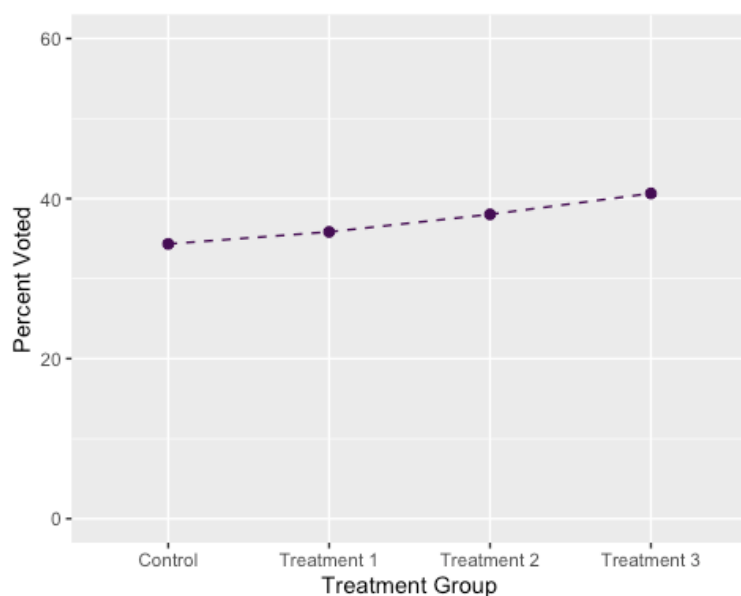


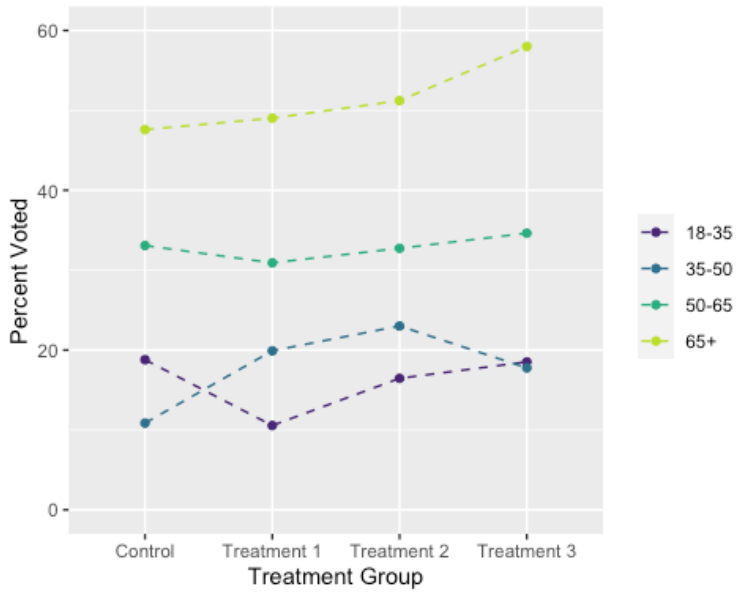
Appendix D. Voting behaviour at Copper Coast election by treatment group and characteristics

Number and Percent Voting by Treatment Group and Characteristics

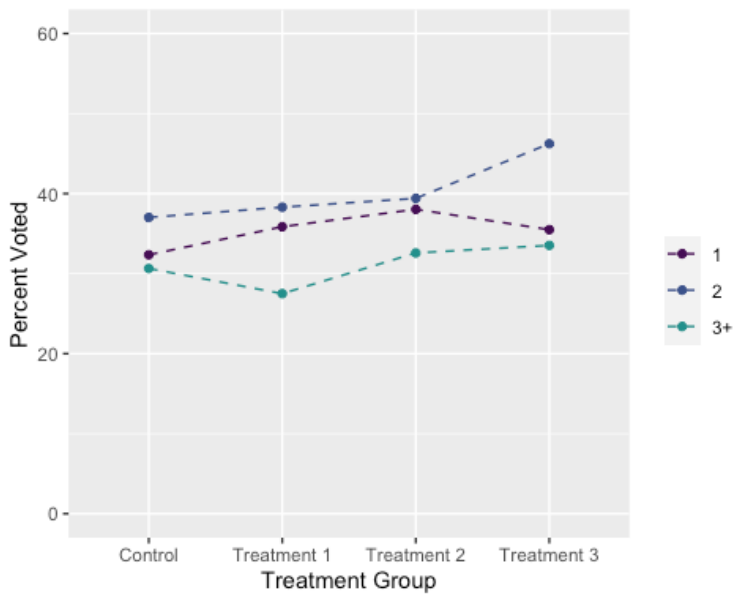
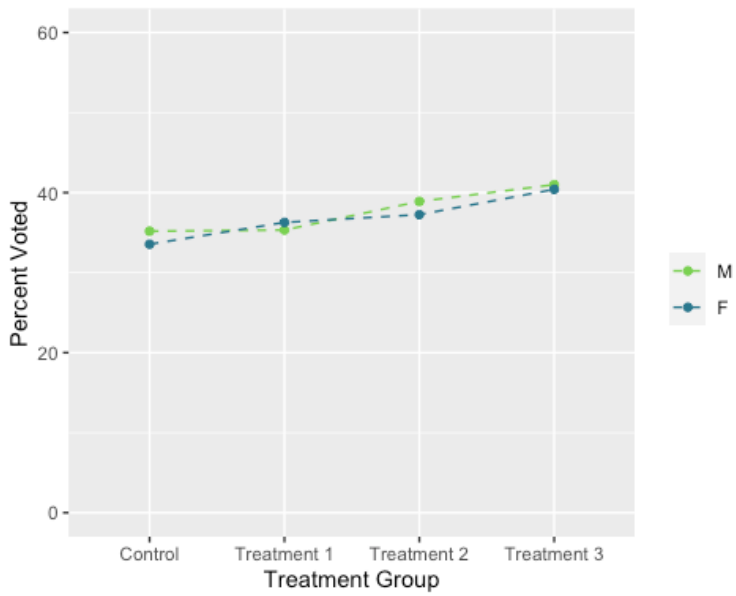
Subgroup	Control	Treatment 1	Treatment 2	Treatment 3
Overall	515 (34.33)	539 (35.84)	567 (38.03)	604 (40.65)
Age Category				
- 18-35	28 (18.79)	17 (10.56)	27 (16.46)	30 (18.52)
- 35-50	29 (10.86)	42 (19.91)	55 (23.01)	43 (17.77)
- 50-65	132 (33.08)	128 (30.92)	128 (32.74)	143 (34.62)
- 65+	326 (47.59)	352 (49.03)	357 (51.22)	388 (58.00)
Gender				
- Female	261 (33.55)	296 (36.27)	292 (37.24)	322 (40.40)
- Male	254 (35.18)	243 (35.32)	275 (38.90)	282 (40.99)
Household Size (Electors)				
- 1	197 (32.35)	227 (35.86)	232 (38.03)	203 (35.49)
- 2	261 (37.02)	257 (38.30)	277 (39.40)	344 (46.24)
- 3+	57 (30.65)	55 (27.50)	58 (32.58)	57 (33.53)

Graphs -in order - Percent Voting by Treatment Group overall, by age, by gender, by household size





Note that the numbers of 18-35- and 35-50-year-old voters in this cohort are quite small; hence the patterns observed in the graph above should be interpreted cautiously.

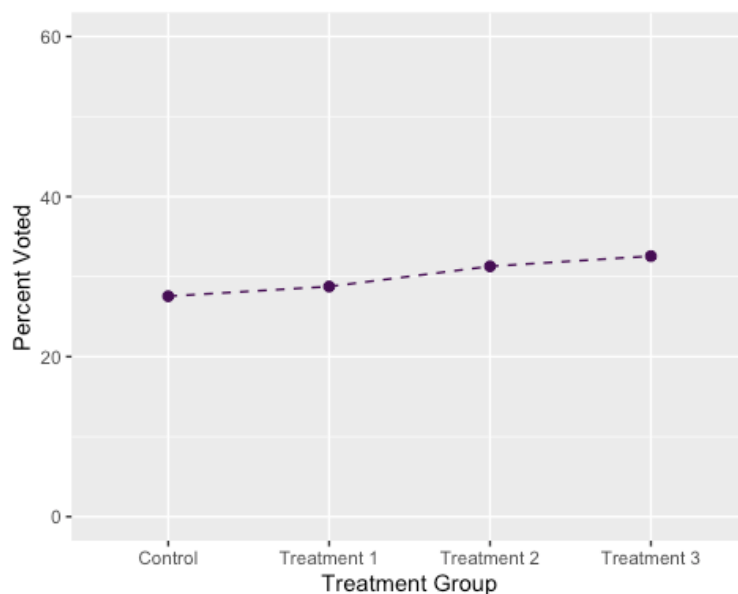


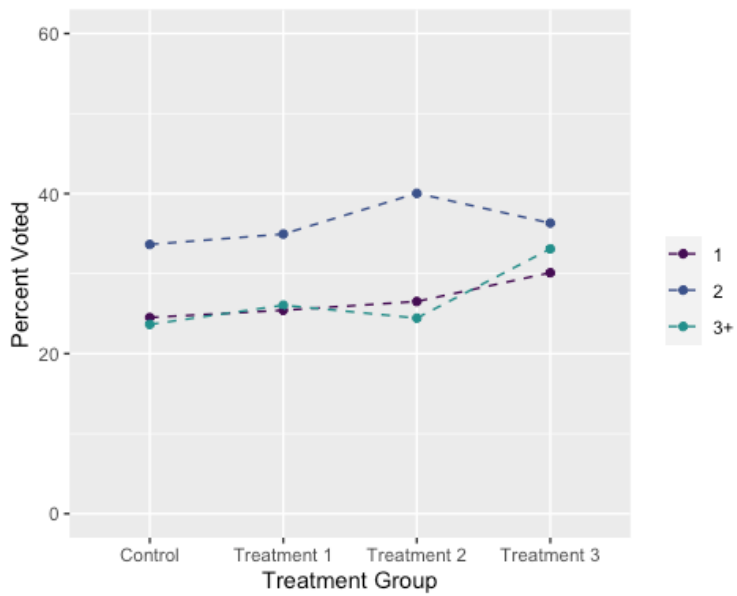
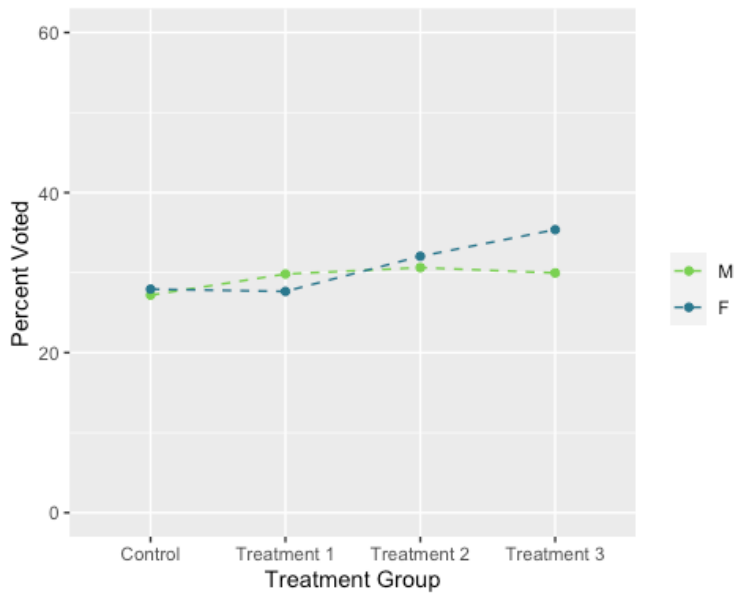
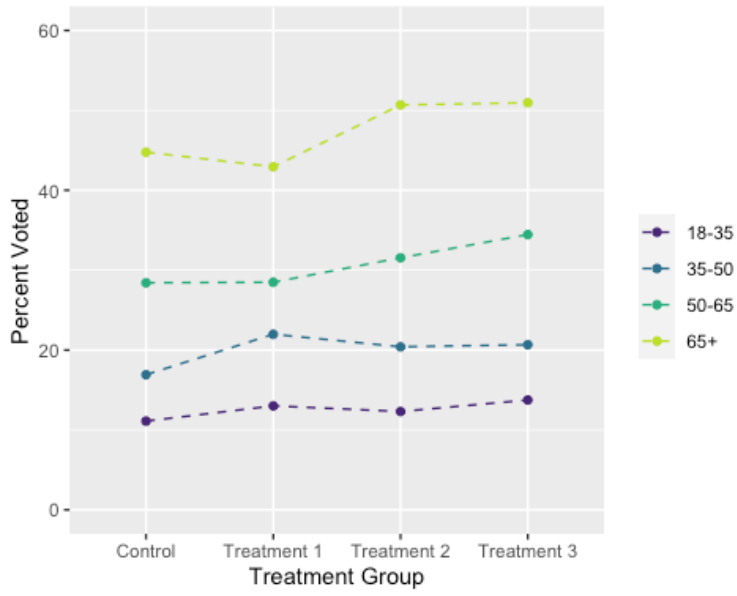
Appendix E. Voting behaviour at the City of Adelaide election by treatment group and characteristics

Number and Percent Voting by Treatment Group and Characteristics

Subgroup	Control	Treatment 1	Treatment 2	Treatment 3
Overall	432 (27.55)	449 (28.76)	489 (31.29)	507 (32.56)
Age Category				
- 18-35	38 (11.11)	41 (13.02)	41 (12.31)	44 (13.75)
- 35-50	57 (16.91)	80 (21.98)	70 (20.41)	74 (20.67)
- 50-65	106 (28.42)	100 (28.49)	118 (31.55)	123 (34.45)
- 65+	231 (44.77)	228 (42.94)	260 (50.68)	266 (50.96)
Gender				
- Female	212 (27.93)	211 (27.65)	240 (32.04)	267 (35.36)
- Male	220 (27.19)	238 (29.82)	249 (30.63)	240 (29.96)
Household Size (Electors)				
- 1	217 (24.52)	224 (25.43)	227 (26.52)	262 (30.11)
- 2	180 (33.64)	188 (34.94)	229 (40.03)	199 (36.31)
- 3+	35 (23.65)	37 (26.06)	33 (24.44)	46 (33.09)

Graphs -in order - Percent Voting by Treatment Group overall, by age, by gender, by household size



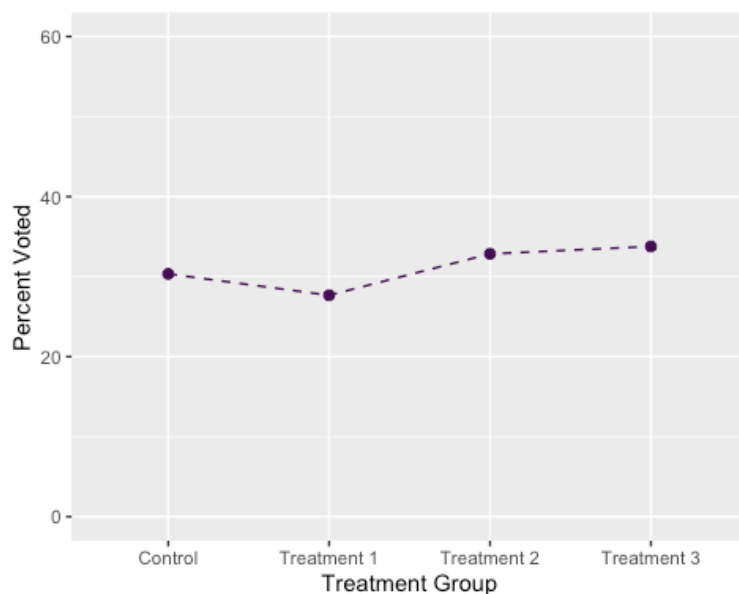


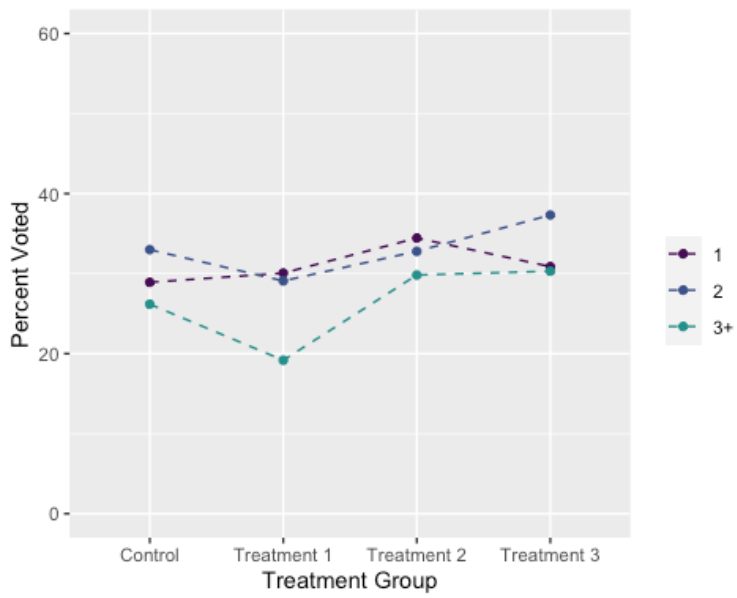
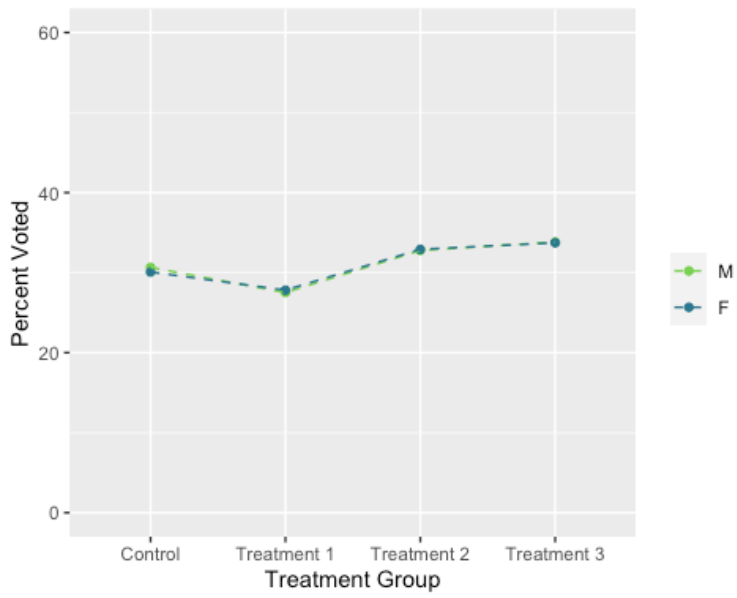
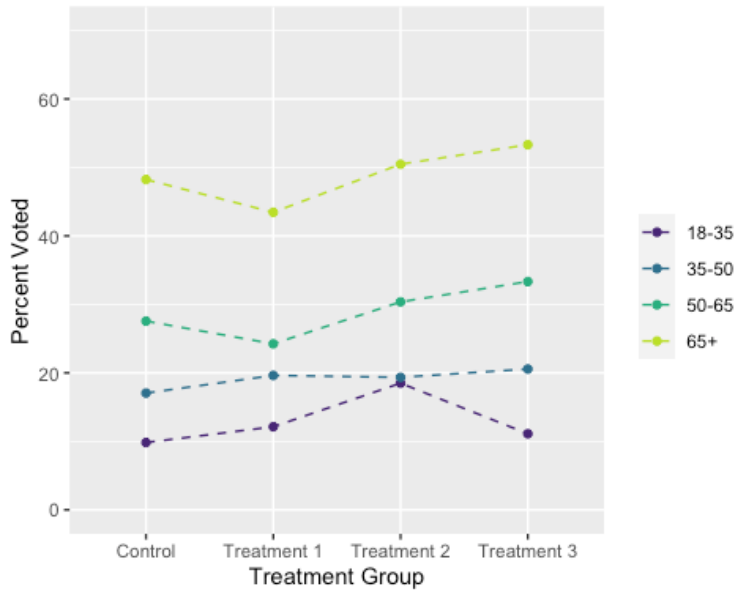
Appendix F. Voting behaviour at Port Adelaide Enfield Outer Harbor Ward election by treatment group and characteristics

Number and Percent Voting by Treatment Group and Characteristics

Subgroup	Control	Treatment 1	Treatment 2	Treatment 3
Overall	375 (30.34)	337 (27.67)	403 (32.84)	412 (33.77)
Age Category				
- 18-35	18 (9.84)	25 (12.14)	37 (18.50)	20 (11.11)
- 35-50	44 (17.05)	53 (19.63)	54 (19.35)	58 (20.57)
- 50-65	94 (27.57)	80 (24.24)	99 (30.37)	117 (33.33)
- 65+	219 (48.24)	179 (43.45)	213 (50.47)	217 (53.32)
Gender				
- Female	200 (30.08)	178 (27.81)	207 (32.91)	227 (33.73)
- Male	175 (30.65)	159 (27.51)	196 (32.78)	185 (33.82)
Household Size (Electors)				
- 1	120 (28.92)	135 (30.07)	155 (34.44)	130 (30.88)
- 2	194 (32.99)	160 (29.09)	180 (32.79)	212 (37.32)
- 3+	61 (26.18)	42 (19.18)	68 (29.82)	70 (30.30)

Graphs -in order - Percent Voting by Treatment Group overall, by age, by gender, by household size



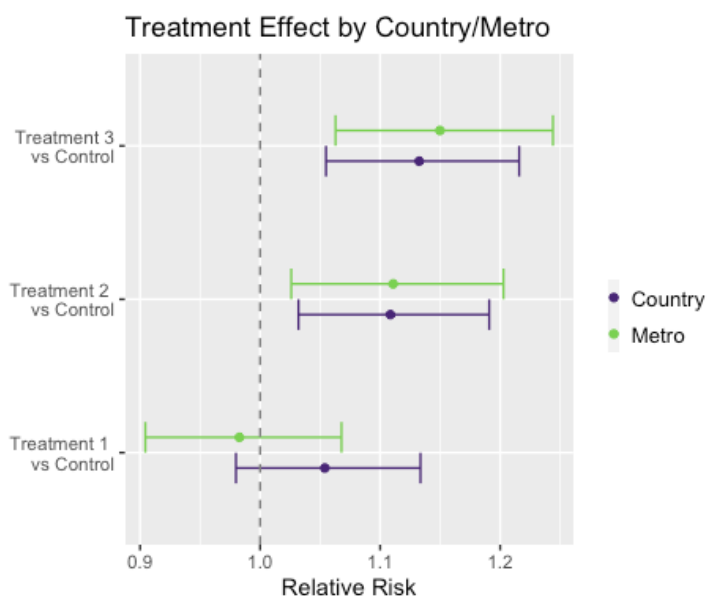


Appendix G. Variation of treatment effects by location, gender and household size

Location: Country vs Metro electorates

Estimated Treatment Effect (vs Control) by Country/Metro

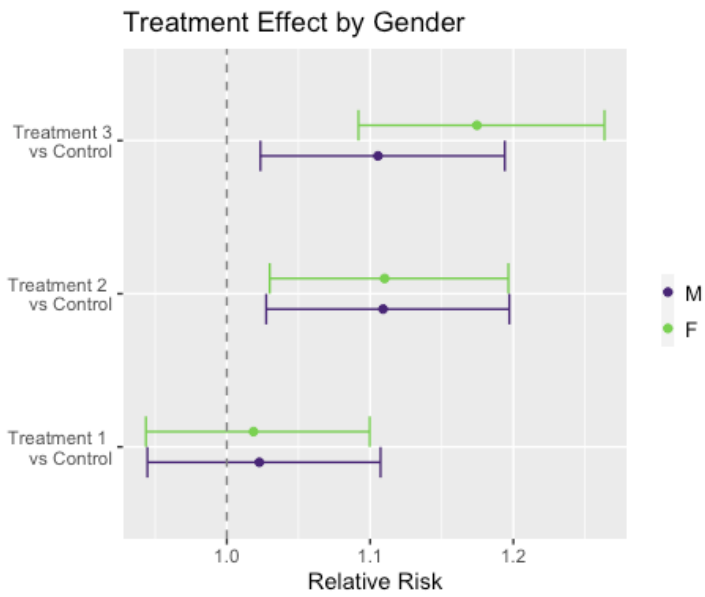
Country/Metro	T1 RR (95% CI)	T1 p	T2 RR (95% CI)	T2 p	T3 RR (95% CI)	T3 p
						0.403*
Country	1.05 (0.98, 1.13)	0.157	1.11 (1.03, 1.19)	0.005	1.13 (1.05, 1.22)	<0.001
Metro	0.98 (0.90, 1.07)	0.681	1.11 (1.03, 1.20)	0.010	1.15 (1.06, 1.24)	<0.001



Gender

Estimated Treatment Effect (vs Control) by Gender

Gender	T1 RR (95% CI)	T1 p	T2 RR (95% CI)	T2 p	T3 RR (95% CI)	T3 p
						0.556*
F	1.02 (0.94, 1.10)	0.637	1.11 (1.03, 1.20)	0.006	1.17 (1.09, 1.26)	<0.001
M	1.02 (0.94, 1.11)	0.580	1.11 (1.03, 1.20)	0.008	1.11 (1.02, 1.19)	0.011



Household size

Estimated Treatment Effect (vs Control) by Household size

Household size	T1 RR (95% CI)	T1 p	T2 RR (95% CI)	T2 p	T3 RR (95% CI)	T3 p
						0.795*
1	1.06 (0.97, 1.15)	0.212	1.14 (1.05, 1.25)	0.002	1.14 (1.04, 1.24)	0.003
2	0.99 (0.92, 1.07)	0.892	1.07 (0.99, 1.15)	0.088	1.12 (1.05, 1.21)	0.002
3+	1.02 (0.85, 1.21)	0.849	1.16 (0.98, 1.38)	0.089	1.20 (1.02, 1.42)	0.031

