

# Political Efficacy And The Use Of Local And National News Media Among Undecided Voters in a Swing State: A Study of General Population Voters And First-time College Student Voters

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# PURPOSES OF STUDY

- Analyze the news media usage behaviors of undecided voters and compare different levels of undecidedness of undecided voters in a swing state
- Examine the role of national and local news media in political decision making and participation among the undecided voters (relationship between political efficacy and geographic scope of news media)
- Analyze the political use of online media and how social media is used for political information
- Provide a clear picture between news media use and political efficacy of undecided voters
- Compare the similarities and differences in undecided voters and relationship between local and national election efficacy
- Compare first-time and general population undecided voters

# METHOD

- Mail and web survey in a mid-size U.S. local market from September 6 to 30, 2012.
- General Population: a simple random sample from Northwest Ohio residents database (n=1500) with \$1 cash incentive (mail survey)
- College students (1<sup>st</sup> time voters): convenience sample recruited from 36 small general education classes and two large lecture classes from BGSU (web survey)

# MEASURES

- **Totally undecided voters:** those who planned to vote but have not decided on any candidate
- **Partially undecided voters:** Those who planned to vote and have decided to vote for some of the candidates.
- **Political efficacy:** Niemi, Craig & Mattei's (1991) 4-item scale
- **Election efficacy:** whether their vote will affect the outcome of the election

## MEASURES (CONT'D)

- **Local news media use:** use of local TV news, local daily newspapers print or online, suburban newspapers and free tabloids, ethnic newspapers and radio news in hrs/wk
- **National news media use:** National broadcast network news, cable TV network news, news magazines, social network sites, non-newspaper web sites, blogs, online video & audio news in hrs/wk
- **Online social media as source of election info:** from none to more than 50 posts
- **Political online media use:** based on March 2011 Pew Internet & American Life Survey 10 items. e.g., “Tell others your candidates’ preference or opinion about the election”

# RESULTS

- A total of 647 responses received:
  - 253 residents (response rate was 21.32% excluding the undeliverable surveys)
  - 394 college students
- Age: Residents average: 56
- Students average: 19
- More partially undecided voters than totally undecided voters

# PROFILES OF UNDECIDED VOTERS

- General population much less undecided voters than first-time college student voters:
  - ❖ 67% of students totally undecided
  - ❖ 47% of general population totally undecided
- General population, lower education and lower income were more likely to be totally undecided voters
- College students, women and lower income were more likely to be totally undecided
- Political ideology: **overwhelmingly neutral**, no liberal in general population and very few liberal in first-time voters

## **POLITICAL EFFICACY, LOCAL AND NAT'L NEWS MEDIA USE**

- **Overall internal political efficacy was low (12.1/20 general pop, 9.7/20 students)**
- **Internal political efficacy positively correlated with national election and local election efficacy.**
- **Totally undecided voters have lower internal political efficacy score than partially undecided voters**



# POLITICAL EFFICACY OF UNDECIDED VOTERS

- Despite low internal efficacy score, majority believe in their vote will affect the outcome of the election
- **General population: 65.3% national, 61.3% local**
- **Students: 54.7% national, 58.5% local**
- Local news media use ( $r=.34$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) more significantly correlated with political efficacy than national news media ( $r=.17$ ,  $p < 0.01$ )
- Stronger relationship between news media use and gen. population than students

## POLITICAL ONLINE AND SOCIAL MEDIA USE

- Low use of online media for political activities even among college students
- More than one half did not participate in any political related activities.
- Posts related to social media is only significant predictor of political efficacy for students, not for general population

# PREDICTORS OF POLITICAL EFFICACY

	GENERAL POPULATION (N=252)		STUDENTS (N=394)	
	beta	t	beta	t
<b>POLITICAL ONLINE MEDIA USE*</b>	<b>0.40</b>	<b>5.34</b>	<b>0.35</b>	<b>6.13</b>
NATIONAL NEWS MEDIA USE	0.13	1.56	-0.07	-1.15
LOCAL NEWS MEDIA USE	0.07	0.90	0.04	0.71
<b>AMOUNT OF POLITICAL SOCIAL MEDIA POSTS RECEIVED*</b>	<b>-0.09</b>	<b>-1.22</b>	<b>0.12</b>	<b>2.05</b>
<b>GENDER*</b>	<b>-.22</b>	<b>-3.08</b>	<b>-0.14</b>	<b>-2.50</b>
TOTAL HOUSEHOLD INCOME	.00	.00	0.03	0.51
<b>AGE*</b>	<b>.17</b>	<b>2.37</b>	<b>.17</b>	<b>3.03</b>
EDUCATION	.25	3.27		N.A.

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ADJUSTED R<sup>2</sup>

0.34

0.17

## LOCAL & NATIONAL NEWS MEDIA USE

- **First-time voters:** Totally undecided voters used more local news media than partially undecided, not statistically sig.
- **General population voters:** Partially undecided voters used more news media in both national and local news media than totally undecided voters, not statistically sig.

## MOST IMPORTANT MEDIUM FOR ELECTION INFO

- General population: **TV most important (53.8%)**, Internet distant second (18.2%), newspapers only mentioned by 11% of totally undecided voters
- College students: **Internet most important (44.3%)**, TV (36.1%), only 2% newspapers as most important

# DISCUSSION

- Swing states display moderate level of political efficacy (over 50% believe their vote can change the outcome of the election).
- Big gap between internal political efficacy and election efficacy shows importance of environmental factors – “swing state” framing
- Higher use of news media by partially undecided voters – campaign effort in news media should target at partially undecided voters more than totally undecided voters

# DISCUSSION

- Lack of Liberals in undecided voters show campaigns should target at conservatives or those who are neutral in pol ideology.
- First time voters slower in political decision making and lower political efficacy
- Strong correlation between online political media use and political efficacy shows self-selection trend. No significant relation between news media use and political efficacy shows that news media is not mobilizing, but creating public space to share common political info/agenda
- Effect of social media is still limited to college students mostly