SOWING THE SEEDS FOR GRASSROOTS GROWTH: HOW RECRUITMENT APPEALS IMPACT THE CALCULUS OF CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate School
of the University of Notre Dame
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

by

Lauren Marie Keane

________________________________________________________________________

David Nickerson, Director

Graduate Program in Political Science
Notre Dame, Indiana
July 2013
SOWING THE SEEDS FOR GRASSROOTS GROWTH: HOW RECRUITMENT APPEALS IMPACT THE CALCULUS OF CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT

Abstract

by

Lauren M. Keane

In this dissertation I develop a theoretical framework for understanding why citizens do or do not engage in politics and civic society and how organizations, through their appeals, impact these decisions. Specifically, I broaden the “calculus of voting” and borrow from John Zaller’s (1992) theory of how people answer survey questions. Using this framework, I generate a number of hypotheses about what types of people should participate when solicited, as well as which appeals work best in particular contexts and for whom. In the three empirical chapters, I test these hypotheses using survey and field experiments. I conclude with recommendations for future scholarship in this area, noting its practical importance for increasing participation rates generally and decreasing the participatory gap, which are two ailments of American Democracy today.
CONTENTS

List of Figures ..................................................................................................................................... iv
List of Tables ..........................................................................................................................................v
Acknowledgments ................................................................................................................................... viii

Chapter 1: Introduction ........................................................................................................................... 1
  1.1 The Importance of Civic Engagement ......................................................................................... 3
  1.2 Inequalities in Civic Engagement ................................................................................................. 7
  1.3 Mobilization – A Solution to Low and Unequal Participation ................................................. 10
  1.4 Internet Mobilization .................................................................................................................... 14
  1.5 Methodological Approach ........................................................................................................... 18
  1.6 Conclusion .................................................................................................................................... 21

Chapter 2: Citizen Engagement and the Role of Recruitment Appeals .............................................. 23
  2.1 Modeling Civic Engagement ........................................................................................................ 24
  2.2 How Citizens Process Solicitations by Organizations .............................................................. 28
  2.3 Mobilization through Recruitment Appeals ............................................................................... 31
    2.3.1 Manipulating Costs ............................................................................................................... 31
    2.3.2 Manipulating Efficacy ......................................................................................................... 32
    2.3.3 Manipulating Contingent Benefits ...................................................................................... 33
    2.3.4 Manipulating Material Selective Benefits ......................................................................... 36
    2.3.5 Manipulating Social Selective Benefits ............................................................................. 37
    2.3.6 Manipulating Intangible Selective Benefits ....................................................................... 38
  2.4 Theoretical Expectations .............................................................................................................. 42
    2.4.1 Overall Variation across Appeals ......................................................................................... 43
    2.4.2 Heterogeneous Responsiveness ......................................................................................... 48
  2.5 Conclusion .................................................................................................................................... 56

Chapter 3: 2010 Cooperative Congressional Election Study Survey Experiments ............................ 60
  3.1 Survey Experimental Design ........................................................................................................ 62
  3.2 Analytical Method ......................................................................................................................... 65
  3.3 Overall Treatment Responsiveness ............................................................................................. 66
  3.4 Heterogeneous Treatment Responsiveness ............................................................................... 74
    3.4.1 Gender .................................................................................................................................. 77
    3.4.2 Age ....................................................................................................................................... 79
    3.4.3 Income .................................................................................................................................. 84
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.4.4 Education</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4.5 Race</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4.6 Social Capital</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5 Conclusion</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 4: Volunteering To Register Voters</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1 Setting and Protocol</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2 Analytical Method</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3 Overall Treatment Responsiveness</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4 Heterogeneous Treatment Responsiveness</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4.1 Gender</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4.2 Age</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4.3 Income</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4.4 Race</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5 Conclusion</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 5: Volunteering to Make GOTV Calls</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1 Setting and Protocol</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2 Analytical Method</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3 Overall Treatment Responsiveness</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.4 Conclusion</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 6: Project Contributions and Limitations, and Future Scholarship</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.1 Theoretical and Empirical Contributions</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.1.1 Who Participates When Asked</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.1.2 Effectiveness of Appeals for Specific Subgroups</td>
<td>146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.1.3 Which Appeals are Most Effective When</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.1.4 Methodological Contributions</td>
<td>152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2 Limitations and Directions for Future Research</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2.1 Context</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2.2 Appeals</td>
<td>154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2.3 Measurement of Mechanisms</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.3 Concluding Thoughts</td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>157</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 3.1 Social Exchange Prime For Participation...........................................68
Figure 3.2 Differential Effectiveness of Appeals .................................................71
Figure 3.3 Volunteer and Donor Propensity by Gender .....................................77
Figure 3.4 Volunteer and Donor Propensity by Age ..........................................80
Figure 3.5 Social Exchange Effectiveness by Age ..............................................82
Figure 3.6 Volunteer and Donor Propensity by Race .........................................87
Figure 3.7 Effectiveness of Group Identity Appeal by Race .................................89
Figure 3.8 Volunteer and Donor Propensity by Church Attendance ....................91
Figure 3.9 Volunteer and Donor Propensity by Union Membership ...................93
Figure 3.10 Effectiveness of Social Exchange Appeal by Union Membership ....94
Figure 3.11 Volunteer and Donor Propensity by Blood Donor Status ..................95
Figure 4.1 Sample Email.....................................................................................102
Figure 4.2 Clickthrough Rates ..........................................................................114
Figure 4.3 Signup Rates ....................................................................................114
Figure 4.4 Unsubscribe Rates ...........................................................................114
Figure 5.1 Clickthrough Rates ..........................................................................135
Figure 5.2 Signup Rates ....................................................................................135
Figure 5.3 Unsubscribe Rates ...........................................................................136
LIST OF TABLES

Table 2.1 Hypotheses Regarding Which Appeals Should Work When ......................58
Table 2.2 Hypotheses Regarding the Effectiveness of Appeals for Specific Subgroups ..59
Table 2.3 Hypotheses Regarding Who Participates When Asked.............................59
Table 3.1 Social Exchange Prime for Participation..................................................68
Table 3.2 Differential Effectiveness of Appeals (Relative to Standard Appeal).........70
Table 3.3 Correlates of Participation........................................................................75
Table 4.1 List of Appeals............................................................................................104
Table 4.2 Differential Effectiveness of Appeals (Relative to Standard Appeal)........113
Table 4.3 Correlates of Participation........................................................................119
Table 5.1 List of Appeals............................................................................................129
Table 5.2 Differential Effectiveness of Appeals (Relative to Standard Appeal)........134
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This has been a long and winding road with many detours. From the not-so-legitimate ones, like tailgating every Fall Saturday, to the legitimate ones, like marrying the love of my life in 2010 and taking a break in 2011 to welcome two incredible kids into the world, I am extremely grateful to my committee – David Nickerson, Christina Wolbrecht, and Dave Campbell – who stuck with me through it all. You have been extremely understanding and patient, and I have tremendously valued your advice with respect to this manuscript (and life).

To all of my ND friends, thank you for the not-so-legitimate detours, especially Girls Night, ND Football, and all of those Grad School Proms. Graduate school was not as hard as people make it out to be, and it was also much more fun because of all of you.

To my parents and siblings, thanks for all of your love and support, and the countless trips back and forth on Interstate 80/90. Even though I was away from home, I never felt too far.

To my kids, Molly and Eddie (not that you will ever read this thing), thanks for being the smiling faces I see after finishing up work each day.

And finally, thanks to Mike. Finding you at Notre Dame made graduate school worth it. The degree is just bonus at this point.
CHAPTER 1:
INTRODUCTION

The social capital that arises from citizens participating in civic organizations is critical to the health of a society, yet participation rates in the United States have been declining since the 1960s. At the same time, political inequality exists due to unequal participatory rates among specific subgroups of the population, as well as bias among the interest groups that represent their interests. While library shelves are full of books that document these disheartening trends, few offer solutions.

In this dissertation, I explore how solicitations by voluntary organizations impact a citizen’s propensity to participate in or abstain from politics and civic society, and how organizations might more effectively recruit members, solicit donations, and garner volunteers. In this chapter, I first review a large body of work that speaks to the importance of high and equal levels of civic and political engagement among a democratic citizenry, which are currently two unmet conditions in the American civic landscape. I then argue that voluntary associations, through their recruitment appeals, can serve to increase rates of participation, especially among those who traditionally participate at lower rates. I next argue that online mobilization warrants specific attention, due to its prominence and potential for reducing participatory inequality, as well as the
ease of testing in this domain. Finally, I present the methodological approach undertaken in this dissertation.

In the second chapter, I develop a theoretical framework for understanding why citizens choose to participate in voluntary organizations or abstain. This “calculus of engagement” model modifies and extends the “calculus of voting” model used by scholars to understand why citizens vote or abstain (e.g., Riker and Ordeshook 1968). I next develop a theoretical framework for understanding how citizens mentally process appeals they receive from groups seeking their participation and how a citizen’s calculus is impacted by this process. For this, I draw heavily from John Zaller’s (1992) “Receive-Accept-Sample” (RAS) model of answering surveys.

In the three empirical chapters, I test my theoretical framework with a variety of appeals, which I draw from disciplines across the social sciences. In Chapter 3, I use survey experiments I was able to field on the 2010 Cooperative Congressional Election Study (CCES) to examine the correlates of citizens’ expressed willingness to participate, the effectiveness of specific appeals across a variety of contexts, as well as the relative effectiveness of appeals for specific demographic categories of interest.

In Chapter 4, I present the results from an email field experiment I conducted with Rock the Vote, which was designed to recruit volunteers to register voters at concerts, block parties, and other venues. I test nine of the incentives discussed in Chapter 2 against a standard appeal, which serves as the control condition, and I explore differences in treatment responsiveness for specific subgroups.

In Chapter 5, I present the results from a large email field experiment I conducted with an organization that required anonymity to collaborate with me. The test was
designed to recruit volunteers to make GOTV calls from home on behalf of progressive candidates leading up to the 2010 General Election. I test seven of the incentives discussed in Chapter 2 against a standard (control) appeal. However, I was unable to explore differences in treatment responsiveness for specific subgroups because subgroup data was unavailable.

In Chapter 6, I review why this area of study is important, and I discuss the theoretical, empirical, and methodological contributions of my work. I also discuss its limitations and offer suggestions for future research in this area.

1.1 The Importance of Civic Engagement

Scholars spanning almost two centuries have documented the importance of participation in voluntary associations (both political and nonpolitical) for a healthy society (e.g., Putnam 2000; Tocqueville 1835). When an individual participates in an association, social ties are created between the person and others. These networks, along with the norms and sanctions that arise from them, facilitate cooperation and trust between people in a society (Halpern 2005; Putnam 2000; Wollebaek and Selle 2002). The cooperation and trust that arise from participation is commonly referred to as “social capital,” which much like physical capital, can be used to improve the circumstances of individuals (Ferragina 2010; Uzzi and Dunlap 2005) and collectives (Halpern 2005; Putnam 2000). Since social capital is so central to who we are as individuals and societies, scholars across disciplines have sought to evaluate its trends in levels and types, as well as its consequences, in the United States and cross-nationally.
There are many different definitions and interpretations of social capital, ranging from micro-level phenomena, such as relations between friends and family, to macro-level phenomena such as common language and traffic customs (Halpern 2005). Participation in voluntary associations, however, is central to all conceptions (Halpern 2005; Putnam 2000; Wollebaek and Selle 2002), and is the focus of this dissertation.

Voluntary associations vary in the extent to which they join similar and dissimilar people. Groups that facilitate “bonding” social capital are “inward looking and tend to reinforce exclusive identities,” and groups that facilitate “bridging” social capital are “outward looking and encompass people across diverse social cleavages” (Halpern 2005, 19; see also Putnam 2000). “Bridging” social capital is generally thought to be more valuable but less common. In addition, some scholars argue that to the extent that organizations do not rely on face-to-face interactions and instead “involve low-cost, minimal wider social contact activities” (Halpern 2005, 211), their benefits for society may be limited (Putnam 2000; Skocpol 2003). However, others (e.g. Schudson 1998) think advocacy organizations that primarily engage citizens through newsletters and fundraising appeals provide equal benefits. Thus, organizations vary in the extent to which the capital they build benefits society (Foley and Edwards 1997; Putnam 2000). In fact, the capital that arises from some organizations can be considered “unsocial” (Foley and Edwards 1997). To the extent that an organization excludes outsiders, makes excessive claims on group members, restricts individual freedom, or runs counter to societal interests (e.g., the Ku Klux Klan), the capital that arises from the group can be harmful (Fiorina 1999; Knack 2002; Levi 1996; Uslaner and Dekker 2001; but see Wollebaek and Selle 2002).
Even though social capital can undoubtedly be leveraged by individuals or groups in a negative way, social capital is generally considered to be central to the health of a society. It has been connected empirically to a number of positive outcomes, including tolerance (Hooghe 2003), generalized trust (Brehm & Rahn 1997; Claibourn & Martin 2000; McLaren & Baird 2003), deliberation (Delli Carpini et al. 2004; Fishkin 1992; Gutman and Thompson 1996; Mendelberg 2002), economic performance (Halpern 2005), reduced crime (Halpern 2005; McCarthy et al. 2002, Rosenfeld et al. 2001), better health (Halpern 2005; Lindgren, Lindstrom, and Nystedt 2003; Putnam 2000; Starrin and Nilsson 2010), life satisfaction (Halpern 2005; Harlow and Cantor 1996), good governance (Halpern 2005), and political participation (Putnam 2000).

Since social capital has been conceived in a number of different ways, and there are arguably different types, generalizations about whether “a society or community is high or low in social capital” should be avoided (Halpern 2005, 26). However, there has been a well-documented decline in participation in voluntary associations and their corresponding social capital from the 1960s to the present in the United States (Halpern 2005; Putnam 2000; Skocpol 2003).\(^1\) Given the importance of voluntary associations (both civic and political) for society, the decline is troubling. From a political scientist’s standpoint, the decline is even more troubling, since a number of studies have demonstrated the critical connection between civic participation and the political health

\(^1\) There are exceptions, though, which include self help groups, “checkbook-based” social organizations, religious fundamentalist groups, and youth volunteer groups (Halpern 2005; Hodgkinson and Weitzman 1996; Ladd 1999; Putnam 2000).
of democracy (Campbell et al. 2003; Jenkins et al. 2003; Keeter et al. 2002; Putnam 2000).

Most scholars of democracy consider an informed, interested, and engaged citizenry ideal (Almond & Verba 1963; Barber 1984; Berelson et al. 1954; Conover et al. 1991; Theiss-Morse and Hibbing 2005). The link between participation in political organizations and democratic outcomes such as interest in and knowledge about politics, writing a letter to one’s Congressional representative, or voting may seem obvious. However, the link between participation in nonpolitical organizations and these same outcomes may be less evident.

Civic organizations serve as “schools for democracy” by teaching civic skills like running a meeting, speaking in public, writing an effective letter, or debating issues civilly (Ayala 2000; Putnam 2000; Verba et al. 1995). Having the skills that are required to participate in politics can make the political process less daunting, and thus lowers the cost of participating (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993). At the same time, exercising these skills in civic organizations, and witnessing the positive consequences of one’s own participation can lead citizens to feel more politically efficacious too (Clark and Acocke 1989; Finkel 1985; Joslyn and Cigler 2001; Leighley 1991; Pateman 1970; Putnam 2000; Verba et al. 1995), which makes participation more rational from the standpoint of the individual. If a person thinks her involvement in politics makes no difference or that she

---

2 While a vast majority of civic engagement scholars see a positive link between civic and political engagement, others argue that civic associations can serve as an alternative to politics (Maloney 1999). In addition, some are critical of the “transmission belt” model of civil society, in which “the beneficial formative effects of association spill over from one sphere to another” (Rosenblum 1998, 48; see also Carlson 2003).
is ill-equipped to operate in that realm, then she will abstain (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993).

Another reason members of civic organizations are more likely than nonmembers to participate is that they are often recruited into politics by others in the group (Teorell 2003; Rosenstone and Hansen 1993; Verba et al. 1995). Thus, even those who take a more passive role in organizations and do not build civic skills can benefit from being in the group. At the same time, if others in one’s organization are participating in politics, one may choose to participate because he or she does not want to face social sanctions from other members in the group (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993; Putnam 2000).

The discussion to this point has served to highlight the importance of civic organizations for the health of a democratic society and the documented decline in associational life. In addition to identifying the reduced level of engagement among current generations, scholars also have documented a participatory gap. That is, some groups of citizens are more likely than others to be engaged, both civically and politically.

1.2 Inequalities in Civic Engagement

Representation – the idea that the opinions of citizens should be reflected in public policy – is fundamental to democracy (Dahl 1989; Key 1961; Macpherson 1977). Elected officials, as individuals and as bodies of government, are expected to be responsive to those they represent. At the same time, they are expected to be equally responsive to citizens. That is, political equality is also central to democracy. Yet, there is a large body of evidence to suggest that political inequality reigns.
Public policy reflects the preferences of some citizens better than others (Dahl 1971; see also Macpherson 1977; Lijphart 1997; Griffin and Newman 2005; Hill and Leighley 1995; Key 1949; American Political Science Association 2004). For example, Members of Congress and state legislators are quite attuned to opinion in their districts (Miller and Stokes 1963; Bartels 1991), and evidence suggests they differentiate between the opinions of voters and nonvoters. Congressional roll-call voting tracks the opinions of voters but does not track the opinion of nonvoters (Citrin et al. 2003; Griffin and Newman 2005). In addition, pork tends to be allocated to the parts of Congressional Members’ districts with higher voter turnout (Martin 2003). Winning elections is one of the primary goals of elected officials, since without a seat in government a candidate cannot enact his or her policy goals (Downs 1957; Mayhew 1974). Thus, their responsiveness to voters over nonvoters is unsurprising.

Disparities in political participation (voting and otherwise) are perhaps the leading contributor to political inequality (Piven and Cloward 1979; Imig 1996). In general, those who are older, white, affluent, highly educated, and employed in managerial and professional occupations vote more frequently and participate in civic and political organizations at higher rates than their peers (Oxendine 2004; Pearce 1993; Verba et al. 1995; Wilson 2000; Wilson and Musick 1998; Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980). As I will discuss in greater detail below, differences with respect to resources, psychological

---

3 However, some groups, such as African Americans (Dawson 1994; Griffin and Newman 2007; Klinker and Smith 2002) and the poor (Gilens 2009) are disadvantaged with respect to political outcomes even when accounting for disparities in participation.
engagement, and networks that facilitate recruitment account for most of the participation gap between segments of the population (Verba et al. 1995).

Another contributor to political inequality is the “class bias of the Washington pressure system” (Schlozman 1984). Interest groups serve as a mediating link between citizens and government (Schattschneider 1960; Schlozman and Tierney 1986). They lobby government officials, educate members and others in the public about issues of concern, and mobilize supporters during elections. While the number of citizen groups representing the disadvantaged has been increasing since the 1960s, so has the number representing business interests (Baumgartner and Leech 2001; Schlozman and Tierney 1986; Walker 1983). As a result, there are fewer organizations devoted to the interests of the disadvantaged than there are groups devoted to the interests of those with higher socioeconomic statuses (Baumgartner and Leech 2001; Hall and Wayman 1990; Lowi 1979; Schattschneider 1960; Schlozman and Tierney 1986; Skocpol 2003), and even the interest groups intended to represent the underrepresented tend to work on issues that are important to their higher-status constituents (e.g., women’s groups skew toward the interests of middle-class women). Interest groups have been shown to influence roll-call votes to some degree (Baumgartner and Leech 2001), and the committee process to an even greater extent (Hall and Wayman 1990; Hojnacki and Kimball 1998).

The bias in the pressure system is due in part to the bias in civic participation. Organizations that represent the disadvantaged are themselves at a disadvantage because it is harder to develop their membership bases. They have fewer resources at their disposal financially, and with respect to human capital. Motivating their constituents to donate money, sign petitions, or attend meetings is more difficult because resources such
as time, money, and civic skills are scarcer among their target populations (Verba et al. 1995). As noted above, there is a class bias to mobilization itself (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993; Huckfeldt and Sprague 1992; Verba et al. 1995). Put simply, interest groups have limited resources, and so they have incentives to engage those whom they deem most easily mobilized, not the disadvantaged (Verba et al. 1995; Brady et al. 1999).

The section above suggests that identifying effective recruitment appeals for civic and political organizations is critical to boosting rates of participation overall. This discussion suggests that it is perhaps even more critical for reducing political inequality. Since the disadvantaged participate at lower levels, the potential for mobilization effects is greater. Effective mobilization of the less civically engaged could help to balance American civic society (Piven 2000), ameliorating the well-documented upper-class bias (e.g., Dahl 1961; Putnam 2000; Verba et al. 1995). Discovering ways to engage citizens in civic and political associations should be a high priority for academics, politicians, and organizers alike.

1.3 Mobilization – A Solution to Low and Unequal Participation

People become involved with organizations as members, donors, and volunteers largely because of who they are. They have underlying predispositions to participate or not, and with some organizations and not others. A number of surveys have identified a consistent set of attributes and attitudes that predict participation. These include factors that make citizens able to participate such as socioeconomic status (Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980) and resources such as time, money, and civic skills (Verba et al. 1995). They also include factors that make citizens want to participate, including psychological
characteristics such as efficacy, awareness, interest, or sense of obligation (Verba and Nie 1987; Verba et al. 1995). And finally, they include factors that make it more likely that a person will be asked to participate, including social ties through work, church, and other associations (Putnam 2000).

Some of these factors are more causally proximate to participatory acts than others (e.g., psychological engagement versus education), and in fact the effect of some attributes are moderated entirely by those more proximate to the act (e.g., one’s job level is moderated by civic skills learned on the job) (Verba et al. 1995). Others have both direct and indirect effects (e.g., education).

Regardless of each attribute’s stage in the causal chain, theories and models of participation (which are mostly linear) imply that an increase in any given attribute would result in a corresponding increase in participation. Of course, some factors are more easily changed than others. Scholars, politicians, and organizations seeking to engage particular populations can rarely add dollars to paychecks or encourage people to attend the types of churches that foster the development of civic skills. They can, however, vary the manner in which they recruit people to participate.

Mobilization is an exogenously mutable aspect of participation, the importance of which cannot be overstated. Survey research shows that those who report being asked are much more likely than those who do not report being asked to volunteer (Penner, Dovidio, and Schroeder 2005; Wilson and Janoski 1995). A number of other studies have found an association between solicitations for charitable contributions and philanthropic activity (Bekkers 2005; Lee & Farrell 2003; Schlegelmilch et al. 1997; Simmons & Emanuele 2004; Tiehen 2001). In short, most people do not wake up one day
and decide to volunteer or donate, unprovoked. A majority of the time, people participate because someone asks them to do so. Social networks provide many such solicitations (Pearce 1993; Verba et al. 1995; Wilson 2000), and thus disparate social integration is a main contributor to the socio-economic bias in participation (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993; Verba et al. 1995; Wilson 2000). However, organizations themselves provide many solicitations as well.

A massive body of experimental research speaks to the importance of mobilization for electoral participation (e.g., Arceneaux 2005; Gerber and Green 2000; Green and Gerber 2004; Green et al. 2003). For instance, a single knock on the door from a political campaign can increase the propensity of voting by as much as 9% (Gerber and Green 2000). Notably, while there are a large number of experiments on the impact of non-partisan and partisan campaigns on electoral turnout (e.g., Arceneaux 2005; Gerber and Green 2000; Green et al. 2003; Nickerson, Friedrichs, and King 2006), and a smaller but growing number of experiments on vote choice (Arceneaux 2007; Arceneaux and Kolodny 2010; Nickerson 2005), there are few experiments devoted to other forms of political participation such as volunteering, fundraising, and lobbying. The experiments used in this dissertation fill this critical gap.

The very fact of being asked greatly increases a person’s likelihood of participating. Who does the asking also matters. Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1995) find that many appeals come from people a target knows: relatives, close friends, and acquaintances. In their study, they found that these connections account for 47% of all appeals. They found that requests from secondary connections (i.e., friends of friends) account for 31% of solicitations, and requests from strangers account for the remaining
23%. Unsurprisingly, the closer the personal connection between the asker and target, the more likely the target is to comply. Targets reportedly assented to 58% of requests from those they know personally, 35% from people their relatives and friends know, and 26% from strangers (Verba et al. 1995). Given that a person is more likely to remember a solicitation to which he complies, an even greater proportion of solicitations may come from strangers than is suggested by these results. This is important to note, since the solicitations used in this dissertation come from strangers.4

   It stands to reason that how people are asked (i.e., the appeals used) matters a great deal as well. The literature at least implicitly suggests that many of the correlates of participation discussed above could be used explicitly by organizations as levers to foster participation. For instance, an organization could emphasize the large impact a target’s involvement could have on the end goal, thus boosting her sense of efficacy, and in turn her likelihood of getting involved. Or, the organization could tell a target that his or her peers are participating, activating his desire to conform and in turn his propensity to participate.

   Through the use of field and survey experiments, this dissertation explicitly tests the notion that correlates of participation can be used as levers for mobilization. The results from this dissertation speak to the question of which correlates can be leveraged to recruit members, donors, and volunteers. With the right messages, groups may be able to engage citizens who have previously been deemed inert, and boost levels of participation among active constituents.

   4 However, my theory can also be applied to solicitations by friends and acquaintances
The internet, and email in particular, offers a valuable testing ground for competing appeals, since it allows a great number of appeals to be tested simultaneously and organizations are willing to conduct tests because their programmatic costs are low for email and the potential difference in participation rates due to the experimental treatments are significantly lower (in absolute terms) than they would be in other modes of contact wherein baseline participation rates are much higher. In addition, as I discuss in the next section, since Obama’s 2008 campaign, there has been an explosion in internet outreach, which means more testing in this domain is needed.

1.4 Internet Mobilization

Organizations and campaigns can reach members and targets in a great number of ways. Traditional mediums include face-to-face, phone, mail, and television communication. However, web-based organizing, which has been dubbed “netroots” mobilization, is quickly becoming a staple of campaigns and organizations. Online organizing dramatically reduces the marginal cost of reaching additional targets (Garcia-Castanon, Rank, and Barretto 2011). For example, sending an email to 1,000 members costs essentially the same as sending an email to 1 million members. Organizations and campaigns use social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, as well as email Listservs, to inform targets and to directly and indirectly recruit them for online activities (e.g., signing a petition, attending a virtual town hall meeting, fundraising) and off-line activities (e.g., attending a rally, volunteering to knock on doors or to make phone calls, voting).
MoveOn.org was a pioneer in the online arena, using the internet to disseminate information and provide engagement opportunities for opposition to President Clinton’s impeachment and the Iraq War (Krueger 2006). During the 2008 election cycle, the organization mobilized 933,800 volunteers who contributed 20,841,507 hours and $88 million to Barack Obama’s campaign (Vargas 2008).

Obama’s 2008 campaign signaled the height of “netroots” organizing to date and “was the envy, if not outright obsession, of other campaigns” (Vargas 2008). The campaign used online advertising to drive people to Obama’s website, which resulted in a Listserv of 13 million email addresses.\(^5\) An estimated 1 billion emails arrived in targets’ inboxes over the course of the campaign to coordinate volunteer efforts and fundraise. The combination of internet advertising, presence on social networking sites (a.k.a, “socnets”), and email propelled three million people to donate more than $500 million online, which accounted for the great majority of the total $600 million Obama raised. Two million people created profiles on Obama’s own social networking site, MyBO. Through the site, supporters plan 200,000 offline events, wrote 400,000 blog posts, and organized 35,000 volunteer groups. During the final four days before the election, users made 3 million calls using MyBO’s virtual phone-banking platform. Users also generated $30 million through their own MyBO fundraising pages.

In addition to expanding “netroots” organizing to a scale never seen before, the 2008 Obama campaign is credited with bringing new people into politics, particularly youth and minorities (Garcia-Castanon, Rank, and Barretto 2011; Vargas 2008). Whether

\(^5\) For comparison, John Kerry’s list contained 3 million email addresses and Howard Dean’s contained 600,000.
internet mobilization more generally can help to level the political landscape is a debated topic. Since the marginal cost of an additional contact is drastically reduced, the incentive for organizations to limit their mobilization efforts to those most susceptible (i.e., higher-status targets) is lessened. In theory, this should reduce the socioeconomic bias to recruitment, which would in turn reduce political inequality. On the other hand, there is a socioeconomic bias with respect to internet access and political interest that affect the likelihood a person will encounter mobilization efforts online, especially given the cultural norm against unsolicited email (Kreuger 2006). That is, people must in large part self-select into “netroots” mobilization.

Evidence for the ability of the internet to reduce political inequality is clearer with respect to youth participation than minority participation (Garcia-Castanon, Rank, and Barretto 2011; Schlozman, Verba, and Brady 2010). Since young people move around a lot and rely on cell phones, they are often left out of traditional mobilization efforts. “Netroots” organizing reaches young people where they are. Given the trend toward an increasing proportion of organizations’ mobilization efforts stemming from online activities and the prospect of “netroots” mobilization for reducing political inequality, special attention to the subject matter is warranted by those who study participation and mobilization.

For the reasons just discussed, I focus on political internet mobilization in this dissertation. The two field experiments I employ are email recruitment experiments with organizations’ existing member lists. The importance of Listservs is often overlooked by scholars in favor of social networking activities; however they play a critical role.

Organizations use email to inform members about issues, and to recruit them to donate
money and volunteer online and offline. In addition, the size of organizations’ email lists is often used to signal the strength of a movement to funders and elected officials. Since Listserv members opt in to receiving emails from organizations, they are not discarded in the same way unsolicited email is (i.e., “Spam”).

Perhaps the most important function of Listservs is that they keep people linked to the organization during quieter times (e.g., in between elections) when interest has declined and organizations have limited funding to reengage citizens. Most organizations send a steady stream of email to Listserv members. With each email an organization sends, however, a number of members unsubscribe. Thus, it is critical for organizations to learn what types of email generate the highest compliance rates while limiting the number of citizens who disengage altogether by unsubscribing. This dissertation examines that specific topic.

In addition to its practical significance, the email setting is also interesting from a theoretical standpoint. As will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter, numerous studies have shown that participation in organizations, and human behavior more generally, is largely guided by social norms. Increasingly, these are being leveraged to increase rates of participation. The relatively disconnected setting of the online world, and in particular, email communication, presents a challenge for appeals based on norms. When requests are made in person, norms are expected to play a greater role than they do when requests are made impersonally (e.g., direct mail, email solicitations) (Bekkers and Wiepking 2007). It remains an open question as to whether norm-based appeals can be effective without the pressure that arises from in-person interactions or the threat of
surveillance by others. If they cannot, what levers remain to induce participation? This dissertation speaks to these questions.

1.5 Methodological Approach

While survey-based observational studies have provided valuable insights that have dominated the academic study of civic engagement to this point, they also fall short in a number of significant areas that field and survey experiments can more adequately address. Surveys ask respondents to identify which factors played a role in their decision to participate, but respondents’ memories may fail, and instead they may generate plausible explanations of why they participated that may or may not reflect their true motivations (Nisbett and DeCamp 1977). In addition, respondents tend to over-report behaviors that they believe to be a social norm (Berinsky 2004; Silver et al. 1986), a problem to which even those who conduct this type of research admit (Verba et al. 1995). For instance, two studies that compared actual levels of giving to stated levels of giving found over-reporting (Burt and Popple 1998; Slemrod 1989). With respect to motives for civic and political engagement, respondents may be prone to overstate selfless motives and understate selfish motives.

Another limitation of survey-based studies is that respondents can typically list a number of motivations for participation without providing a rank order of importance (e.g., several motivations could tie as “very important” or “somewhat important”). At the same time, since they do not ask about the range of incentives offered by the organizations themselves (and by which they were motivated), it is impossible to know whether the reasons often cited by survey respondents for getting involved can be
successfully leveraged by organizations. In other words, many of the motivations for participation stem from factors other than mobilization such as innate characteristics and socialization. For instance, a person may say that she worked on a campaign because she felt it was her duty, but whether this motivation related to her personality, upbringing, or solicitation by a friend, neighbor, or organization is unknown. Thus, whether an organization can leverage a person’s sense of duty through an appeal is unclear.

This suggests that survey research is extremely useful as a descriptive endeavor (i.e., documenting who participates in what activities and the reasons they give for doing so), but it does not provide much guidance as to whether these motivations, or other correlates of participation (as discussed above) can be leveraged by organizations to improve participation rates. Organizations cannot garner much insight from surveys as to what types of appeals will resonate with their constituents. The causal mechanisms underlying participation generally, and mobilization in particular, remain murky.

Experiments offer the potential for significant improvement over survey-based observational studies of civic engagement, at least with respect to the process of mobilization, by allowing the relative effectiveness of different appeals to be compared and by avoiding response error due to inaccurate reporting (Nisbett and DeCamp 1977) and social desirability effects (Berinsky 2004; Silver et al. 1986). Clear causal effects can be ascertained by directly manipulating carefully designed treatments to isolate theoretically distinct incentives for participation. While they allow for the identification of causal mechanisms, are relatively easy to conduct, and maximize researcher control, lab experiments sacrifice external validity because they are frequently conducted in artificial settings and they tend to employ small, non-random convenience samples.
Whether results from the lab generalize to the population at large and operate similarly in the real world remain open questions.

Field experiments offer the internal validity of lab experiments, and external validity is improved since they are implemented in real-world contexts. Yet, the problem of non-random samples persists and researcher control is sacrificed to the extent that organizations want to control their messaging and methods. Survey experiments, however, can be conducted on representative samples (Bekkers 2007) and give the researcher full control over treatment variations. As with lab experiments, though, the setting is artificial and it is unclear whether people would respond similarly in the real world. They provide better measures of attitudes and predispositions than behavior. In addition, survey experiments can suffer from over-reporting, as with observational surveys.

This discussion suggests that the three types of experiments each have their strengths and weaknesses. However, all three offer improvement over survey-based observational studies with respect to identifying the causal chain of mobilization. They also have the added benefit of being significantly cheaper to conduct than large-scale observational studies. For this dissertation, I employ two field experiments which manipulate how people are asked to participate (i.e., variation in appeals). While these are the first field experiments to test a wide variety of incentives simultaneously, and as such are an important contribution to our body of knowledge as scholars, they are not without deficiencies. In particular, both organizations who agreed to work with me are left-leaning, and their members are in no way representative of the general population. Thus, I must be cautious when discussing how the results from the field experiments
would translate to the general population. In addition, I did not have full control over the stan-
dard message (i.e., what the control group received) or the content of the appeals, and so the standard message contains elements of several of the appeals, and some appeals have essentially been diluted.

For these reasons, I also use survey experiments embedded in the 2010 Cooperative Congressional Election Study. My questions were generously supported by the research funds of Notre Dame faculty. These two types of experiments complement each other since the survey experiments lack realism but offer generalizability and researcher control, and the two field experiments lack generalizability and researcher control but are conducted in real settings. This mixed-method research design offers significantly more explanatory purchase on the causal mechanisms underlying mobilization.

1.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have situated my research at the intersection of a number of academic literatures, including those related to civic engagement, political psychology, interest group formation and maintenance, and experimental methods. My hope is that this dissertation will be of value to both academics, who want to understand why citizens participate in or abstain from politics, and practitioners, who might use the theoretical framework and findings discussed herein to make more effective appeals, thus increasing participation rates and potentially reducing participatory gaps. To these ends, I turn next to a detailed presentation of my theoretical framework for understanding why citizens choose to participate in voluntary organizations or abstain and for understanding how
citizens mentally process the appeal from groups and incorporate them into their decision process.
In this chapter, I provide the theoretical basis of this dissertation. In the first section, I begin with a discussion of rational choice theory and its application in the field of political science. I then develop a revised model of the “calculus of voting,” which I argue is more helpful in understanding why individuals choose to participate in civic and political organizations. In the second section, I develop a theoretical framework for understanding how citizens mentally process solicitations from organizations and how they incorporate the content of solicitations into their participatory decision.

In the third section, I discuss a number of appeals organizations do or could use to impact a citizen’s decision process, which I draw from empirical social science research. I categorize these appeals based on which term in the “calculus of engagement” they have the ability to impact, highlighting with italics the ones tested in the empirical chapters.

In the final section, I outline a number of hypotheses that I derive from the theoretical framework and previous empirical research. These hypotheses fall into three categories: those about which incentives should be most effective overall, those about which subgroups should be more or less likely to participate, and those about which subgroups should be especially susceptible to specific appeals. I put these hypotheses to the test in the ensuing three empirical chapters.
2.1 Modeling Civic Engagement

Rational choice theory has been used by scholars in many fields to understand and predict human decision-making. The definition of rationality in this context is simply that an individual weighs costs and benefits when deciding whether and how to act in order to maximize personal gain (Downs 1957; Riker and Ordeshook 1968). Political scientists have developed rational choice models to understand why people choose to participate in or abstain from political action. While rational choice models can be used to understand any participatory act such as joining an organization, signing a petition, or contributing to a campaign, its widest application in political behavior has been the “calculus of voting” (Riker and Ordeshook 1968).

Current models of the calculus of voting are essentially represented as follows:

\[ R = P \times B - C + D \]

Where R represents the reward of voting, P represents the probability that the individual’s vote will be decisive (i.e., efficacy – the capacity of the individual to produce the desired outcome), B represents the differential benefit afforded to the individual if his or her preferred candidate wins, C represents the cost of voting, and D represents the psychological satisfaction afforded to the individual regardless of whether his or her preferred candidate wins.

For most elections, the number of individuals in the decision process is large. Thus, the probability that an individual’s contribution will be decisive is most often assumed to be essentially zero (Olson 1965), and so the “P*B” term has largely been ignored in the literature. While some studies have shown that turnout is higher in close elections, which could suggest that P is not perceived to be zero, this is quite likely due to
the fact that candidates, interest groups, and parties expend greater efforts in close elections, not because voters are sensitive to whether or not their vote might break a tie (Matsusaka 1993).

The main focus in the literature has been on the duty citizens feel to participate (or more broadly, the psychological satisfaction associated with the act of voting) (Riker and Ordeshook 1968), and to an even greater extent the costs. Numerous studies have focused on the cost of having to register to vote on turnout (e.g., Highton and Wolfinger 1998; Timpone 1998; Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980), others have cited the decrease in turnout associated with consolidating polling locations (i.e., voters must find their new polling locations and drive greater distances to them) (Brady and McNulty 2011), and civic skills are viewed as necessary to overcome the costs of participation (Verba et al. 1995). The literatures on political knowledge and mass opinion have emphasized the informational costs associated with voting (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996), which heuristics such as party identification and opinion leaders’ positions are thought to alleviate (Lupia and McCubbins 2000).

While the model described above fits the participatory act of voting very well, arguably it does not fit other participatory acts neatly. For instance, material benefits are central to theories of interest group formation, but they do not fit easily into the model above. In the following, I create an adapted model to describe an individual’s decision to join or participate in the activities of a voluntary organization. It largely draws on Verba, Schlozman, and Brady’s (1995) categorization of benefits, though they do not adhere strictly to the rational choice framework. In mathematical form, it can be stated as follows:
\[ R = P^* (B_i + B_g + B_c) - C + M + S + I_i + I_e \]

R represents the reward of participating and P represents the probability that the individual’s contribution will be decisive. The next three terms can be categorized as contingent benefits (i.e., benefits that only accrue if the outcome is achieved). \( B_i \) represents the benefit the individual receives if the desired outcome is achieved, \( B_g \) represents the benefit others with whom the individual identifies (in one way or another) receives if the desired outcome is achieved, and \( B_c \) represents the benefit afforded to all others affected by the outcome if it is achieved. C represents the cost of participating, M represents the material selective benefits of participating (i.e., tangible benefits that only individuals who participate receive), and S represents the social benefits of participating (which only those who participate receive). “I_i” represents the intrinsic intangible benefits of participating (i.e., those concerning one’s self-view), and “I_e” represents the extrinsic intangible benefits of participating (i.e., those concerning one’s self-view as shaped by the social monitoring of those around him or her). “R”, “P”, and “C” are essentially the same as in the calculus of voting.

While the “D” term in the calculus of voting has come to encompass a wide range of motivations including the satisfaction derived from affirming the political system or a political party, or complying with the ethic of voting (Riker and Ordeshook 1968), this category does not provide adequate room for the wide range of selective benefits an individual might expect to receive by getting involved with an organization. Thus, the “D” term is changed to “I_i” and “I_e” and the “M” and “S” terms are added in this model. In addition, the “B” term is broken out into three components, “B_i”, “B_g”, and “B_c”, since
outcomes vary in the extent to which they affect various people and an individual’s relationship to those affected also varies.

A concrete illustration might serve to clarify the purpose of each term. Assume that a community organization is raising money to build a playground and is recruiting volunteers and donors to help build it. An individual’s decision to contribute or not could depend on a combination of the following considerations: the extent to which she thinks the success of the endeavor might depend on her own contribution (“P”), the extent to which she will benefit from the existence of the playground (“B_i”), the extent to which her next door neighbors (whom she likes) will benefit from the existence of the playground (“B_g”), the extent to which the rest of the community will benefit from the existence of the playground (“B_c”), the extent to which she may have to sacrifice other pleasures because of the time or finances lost to the contribution (“C”), the extent to which she values the coffee mug offered by the group for contributing (“M”), the extent to which she enjoys meeting new people (“S”), the happiness she will derive from affirming her self-view as charitable (“I_i”), and the shame she will avoid by not saying “no” to someone who asked for help (“I_e”).

An individual may not consider factors from each of these categories when making the decision. Some people might think about opportunity costs whereas others might think more about the benefits or how they might feel if they choose not to participate. For instance, it may not occur to the person above that her neighbors would really like the playground. In addition, individuals may weigh some factors more heavily than others. The coffee mug, while a positive factor, may be a trivial one compared to the benefit the person will gain from having a playground nearby to take her kids. We must
also remember that “P” and the three “B” terms are intertwined. Even if the person values the park for her family and neighbors, if she thinks it will be built regardless, perceptions of those benefits may not be factored in to her decision. Whether the participatory act is voting, joining an organization, signing a petition, or any other, perceptions of costs, benefits, obligation, and the likelihood of affecting the end goal vary across individuals (Cermak et al 1994; Hansen 1985; Mount & Kaciak 2003; Van Slyke et al 2007; Van Slyke & Brooks 2005). For every opportunity, some participate and some abstain. For each individual, that decision is based on whatever considerations are salient and powerful when she has to decide. I discuss this process fully below.

2.2 How Citizens Process Solicitations by Organizations

To borrow from John Zaller’s (1992) “Receive-Accept-Sample” model of how citizens answer survey questions, I argue that when a citizen is deciding whether to say “yes” to an appeal he calls to mind a number of considerations across the categories of the “calculus of engagement.” Citizens hold a great number of latent considerations, and whichever come to the “top of his mind” become salient and are used in the decision process. Through their appeals, organizations offer considerations for citizens to weigh in their decision calculus. These appeals may be entirely new, or overlap with existing latent or salient considerations. In the case of latent considerations, the appeal itself makes the consideration salient as opposed to latent (and pushes another consideration further from the target’s mind). In the case of salient considerations, the appeal can be entirely redundant or it can serve to update the perception of an existing salient consideration.
To simplify the example above, the woman might think to herself, “the kids have so many activities these days, I’m not sure I can squeeze this in (C)…but they sure would love that park (B)…and I’m the kind of person who does my share (I)…” The latter two are positive salient considerations and the former is a negative salient consideration.

When an organization makes an appeal (e.g., “If you volunteer for two hours, we’ll give you a free mug”), it adds a consideration to the citizen’s calculus, and importantly, it pushes another consideration further from the top of a his or her head, a la Zaller’s “accessibility axiom,” which states that people are more likely to sample from the considerations they have thought about more recently. If the consideration is a positive one, the target might be more likely to participate if the consideration pushed further from her mind was negative (e.g., “the kids have so many activities these days, I’m not sure I can squeeze this in”). Or, she could be equally likely to participate as she would be if no incentive were offered if the consideration pushed further from her mind was also positive and equally strong (e.g., “I’m the kind of person who does my share”). There is also the possibility that an incentive could be a positive consideration but less powerful than an existing positive consideration. If the more powerful positive consideration is pushed from his or her mind (e.g., “but the kids sure would love that park…”), the target might actually be less likely to participate, even though the consideration is positive.

On the flip-side, a group might intend for an appeal to be a positive consideration but it could actually be a negative consideration for the target (e.g., “You’re offering me a mug and my cabinet is already overflowing with them. Why would you use funds you raise to give volunteers things they don’t need?”). In this case, while it’s possible the new
consideration will push an equally (or more) powerful negative consideration from mind, it could also push a positive consideration from mind, thus resulting in a lower likelihood of participation. Appeals could also be taken as neutral and replace a positive or negative consideration, thus impacting the calculus.

For most citizens, their existing considerations will place them either firmly in the “abstain” or “participate” categories. In most cases, the introduction of a consideration (or multiple considerations) will make no difference in their ultimate decision. Appeals only affect those on the cusp of participating (i.e., their existing considerations are equally positive and negative). If, however, an organization can make an appeal that is considered strong by many targets (e.g., a new car), more can be affected by it, because stronger considerations carry more weight and can cancel out a greater number of (or relatively strong) conflicting considerations.

While at the individual level an appeal might replace a positive, negative, or neutral consideration for those on the cusp, averaged across individuals, the appeal can be assumed to replace a neutral consideration. The strength of the appeal determines how many targets are on the cusp, and this, together with the ratios of targets taking the appeal as negative and positive, determine its overall success. But how can organizations know which appeals will be taken as positive considerations by their targets and which of those will be most powerful? For the most part, organizations rely on “hunches” and trial and error, though I argue that academic research can also be of some assistance. In the next section, I discuss a number of potential appeals drawn from empirical social science research.
2.3 Mobilization through Recruitment Appeals

Academic research from a variety of disciplines highlights a great number of appeals organizations might use to impact a citizen’s “calculus of engagement.” Each type of appeal might be more or less effective depending on the person, time, place, organization, activity, and mode of appeal (Batson & Shaw 1991; Clotfelter 1997). The same appeal might introduce a positive consideration for some citizens, a negative consideration for others, and a neutral consideration for others still, and the weight targets assign to a consideration introduced by an appeal will also vary. Empirical research is needed to discover which factors can be most effectively leveraged with the least amount of backlash (i.e., fewest number of citizens’ taking the appeal as a negative consideration) (Moe 1980). These incentives are presented in the following sections and tested empirically in the next three chapters of this dissertation.

2.3.1 Manipulating Costs

Costs have been the primary focus of the literature to date. For example, Verba, Schlozman, and Brady’s (1995) theory centers on the resources needed to overcome the costs of participation. There are a number of ways an organization could reduce the costs and perceived costs of participation. The easiest way is by asking for smaller commitments of time and/or money from each individual. Several fundraising experiments support this claim (Eckel & Grossman 2004; Eckel & Grossman 2003; Karlan & List 2006). However, while more individuals participate as a result, total contributions may or may not rise. Groups relate contribution sizes and volunteer hours to other uses, especially frivolous ones (e.g., for the same cost as your daily cup of
coffee…”, “instead of watching TV on Thursday…”), to make the cost of participation seem lower. Groups also ask for small amounts over a wider period of time rather than a large amount all at once, and they ask people to donate time or money at some future point in time rather than now, which can make the cost seem lower.

2.3.2 Manipulating Efficacy

Since most rational choice work in political behavior focuses on voter turnout as the dependent variable of interest, in which the collective number of individuals in the process is quite large and the collective good (from the standpoint of the individual) is achieved entirely or not at all, efficacy (i.e., the perception of one’s impact on the collective good being pursued) has been an undervalued concept in political behavior. Often the collective good pursued by an organization can be achieved to greater and lesser extents (i.e., the outcome is not binary). That is, one could contribute to more or less of the good being produced. At the same time, the number of individuals in the process is drastically smaller for most types of civic and political engagement than it is for electoral decisions. In these two ways, the actual probability of an individual’s contribution mattering is higher. In addition, perceptions of efficacy matter a great deal. People generally overestimate the effectiveness of their own involvement (Kerr 1989).

Efficacy has received more attention in the psychology literature, which has shown that people are less likely to donate when they do not think their contribution can make a difference (Diamond & Kashyap 1997; Radley & Kennedy 1992; Smith & McSweeney 2007). Experiments with public goods games suggest that people are more likely to give when they think their contributions are effective (Parsons 2003, 2007;
Sweeney 1973). Efficacy is also a major predictor of political participation (Verba et al. 1995). Thus, appeals that emphasize that an individual’s contribution matters may induce participation. In other words, organizations can increase perceived efficacy. Of course, if an efficacy appeal is unpersuasive (i.e., taken as a negative consideration on average), this could result in lower participation rates.

2.3.3 Manipulating Contingent Benefits

The literature on interest group formation and maintenance in political science also relies heavily on the rational choice framework. Many of these scholars have argued that selective incentives (i.e., benefits that only those who participate receive) are necessary to get most people engaged (Olson 1965; Salisbury 1969). Otherwise, a rational individual chooses to free-ride when the collective benefits (i.e., those that participants and abstainers attain) are likely to be achieved regardless of his or her participation. Green and Shapiro (1994) suggest that “a peculiar implication of arguing that selective benefits are key precipitants of collective action is that participation in interest groups [and civic organizations in general] becomes incidental to the collective good being pursued.”

The previous discussion suggests that actual and perceived efficacy cannot be assumed to be equal to zero. This suggests that contingent benefits (i.e., those that are only garnered if the collective goal is achieved) should not be ignored either. However, organizations are somewhat limited in the extent to which they can manipulate contingent benefits. Whether or not an individual or group of people will benefit from the outcome depends largely on what the outcome is. The example of the neighborhood park above
can be used to illustrate why. A mother of four young children stands to benefit more from the construction of the park than an elderly shut-in. No appeal to the shut-in’s self interest is likely to affect his or her desire for the park. If the outcome was changed altogether, to, for instance, a food delivery service for the poor and elderly, the value afforded to each person would be the opposite. Organizations have specific missions and agendas, and they cannot (or most often do not want to) modify these to increase rates of participation. However, they can highlight what an individual stands to gain from an outcome, as well as highlight who else stands to benefit if they think the individual cares about those people. Bringing these considerations to the top of the head could help to persuade individuals to act. This discussion suggests that appeals may need to be tailored for specific types of people, which would reduce the possibility of backlash among others.

2.3.3.1 Individual Contingent Benefits

One way an organization can alter individual benefits is by highlighting the aspects of its mission and work that it suspects most appeal to those it seeks to mobilize (Hansen 1985). While the match of values between targets and organizations has gone largely unstudied in the literature, a handful of observational studies suggest that people are more likely to become involved with organizations that share their values (Bennett 2003; Keyt, Yavas, and Riecken 2002). Contributions to political parties are an obvious example. Donors agree with the values espoused by the party they support (and want them to be elected) so perceive the party as worthy of a donation (Francia et al. 2005). To the extent possible, groups might do well to emphasize what the individual stands to gain
from whatever outcome is being sought. Again, for targets who do not value the collective good for themselves, the added negative consideration could reduce the likelihood of participation.

2.3.3.2 In-Group Contingent Benefits

If a person does not stand to benefit directly from the outcome, appealing to an identity that the individual shares with those benefiting from the outcome can boost his or her likelihood of participating. Throughout this dissertation I refer to this incentive as a group identity appeal. Biological theories suggest that kin-selection (i.e., the survival or well-being of those genetically related) and group-selection (i.e., the survival or well-being of one’s race) explain altruistic behavior among family members or those with a shared identity (Piliavin & Charng 1990; Sigmund & Hauert 2002). In addition, people are more loyal to groups with which they identify and work harder for them (Van Vugt & Hart 2004). Thus, an individual may be more inclined to volunteer for an organization that serves a population with whom he or she shares an important common identity than an organization that serves a population with which the individual does not identify.

If an organization speaks with an African-American target and tells her that 500 African-American families are fed each day (rather than 500 families), she may be more likely to get involved because helping other African-Americans may be a greater priority for the individual than helping others in general. This type of appeal can only work if the target does in fact associate with the group identity being leveraged. Otherwise, the potential for the appeal to be a negative consideration exists, resulting in backlash for some.
2.3.3.3 Collective Contingent Benefits

If a person is already thought to care about those affected by the outcome (or does not share characteristics with those affected that can be leveraged), a group can make an argument for why others deserve to benefit from the outcome being sought. Psychological research suggests that awareness of need is an important factor associated with citizen involvement. People are more likely to get involved when they believe that help is actually needed (Berkowitz and Daniels 1964; Levitt & Kornhaber 1977; Schwartz 1974, 1975). Field experiments in this area typically vary the “neediness” of the victims. Subjective perceptions, rather than objective conditions, are particularly important, since whether the beneficiary is perceived as deserving is a moderating factor (Miller 1977; Wagner & Wheeler 1969). The fact that the largest health charities include organizations dedicated to rare diseases such as muscular dystrophy and cystic fibrosis support this claim (Milofsky and Blades 1991). Organizations can alter their appeals to emphasize the neediness of those benefiting from the cause. As with in-group contingent benefit appeals, collective contingent benefit appeals present the possibility of backlash.

2.3.4 Manipulating Material Selective Benefits

As stated above, many scholars have argued that selective benefits are needed to induce participation for most people. The literature typically offers three categories of selective incentives: material, solidarity (i.e., social), and expressive (Clark and Wilson 1961; Hansen 1985; Moe 1980; Salisbury 1969; Walker 1983; Welch and Walters 1975). Material incentives are tangible benefits that can be expressed monetarily such as t-shirts, insurance programs, concert tickets, and lotteries (Hansen 1985). Some field experiments
have demonstrated the effectiveness of such benefits (Buraschi & Cornelli 2002; Landry et al. 2006), though others provide less support. Offering a bottle of water to a potential donor was effective in one study (Sagaren and Johnson 2007), but offering a cookie increased donations in only one of three experiments (Harris et al. 1973). An online fundraising campaign that offered mouse pads, book lights, and CD cases was also ineffective (Chen et al. 2006).

This discussion suggests that material incentives vary in their attractiveness to targets. Organizations can vary the incentives they offer, or they can highlight the value of the material incentives they do offer. If, however, a target does not value the material incentive being offered, the appeal could add a negative consideration, which might make the target less likely to participate.

2.3.5 Manipulating Social Selective Benefits

Solidarity benefits are “rewards created by the act of associating” with the organization (Wilson 1966, 34). Survey research reveals that many people value socializing with staff, other volunteers, and those whom the group serves (Verba et al. 1995; Wuthnow 1998). While experimental manipulations of solidarity benefits have not been conducted, arguably groups can emphasize the opportunity to build friendships, engage in recreational activity, or belong to a team (Moe 1980; Olson 1965) and thereby increase rates of participation. However, some types of activity, such as contributing money, are inherently less social than others, so solidarity appeals in these cases are likely to be negative, rather than positive, considerations for targets.
2.3.6 Manipulating Intangible Selective Benefits

Intangible (i.e., expressive or psychological) selective benefits are “rewards that derive from a sense of satisfaction at having contributed to the attainment of a worthwhile cause” (Wilson 1966, 34). They can also be viewed as avoiding the dissatisfaction of failing to act for a worthy cause. A number of observational studies point to the importance of psychological predispositions (e.g., a sense of duty, party identification) for volunteering and civic engagement more generally (Berry 1977; Gamson 1975; Hansen 1985; Marsh 1976; Moe 1980; Salisbury 1969; Verba et al. 1995; Walker 1983; Wilson 1962).

While different, at its core, each of the psychological incentives discussed below seeks to foster a sense of obligation, which is a known correlate of participation across disciplines. The extent to which each can be manipulated, and in what contexts, remains an open question, and the possibility of backlash is arguably high for these appeals. The interest group literature does not generally differentiate among the various psychological benefits organizations offer, however Gerber, Green, and Larimer (2008) argue that duty has both an intrinsic and extrinsic component. Essentially, an appeal only fits in the extrinsic category if a person perceives that his or her action or inaction will be under the surveillance of others. The success of these appeals depends on whether targets view participating as a way of avoiding the psychic displeasure associated with breaking a social norm.
2.3.6.1 Intangible Selective Benefits - Extrinsic

Social pressure appeals often involve surveillance. Avoiding shame is a powerful motivator. Several field experiments suggest that when one perceives social costs to abstention, he or she is more likely to participate (Baston 1991; Cialdini and Goldstein 2004; Cialdini and Trost 1998; Gerber, Green, and Larimer 2008; Lerner and Tetlock 1999). Surveys reveal that donors dislike fundraising techniques that attempt to leverage social influence (Polonsky et al. 2002; Sargeant and Woodliffe 2005) and are simultaneously susceptible to them (Bekkers and Schuyt 2008; Mathur 1996; Pitts and Skelly 1984; Smith and McSweeney 2007). Scholars have noted the potential for “reactance” (Brehm and Brehm 1981) with social pressure appeals, which is essentially the backlash I have argued is possible for every type of appeal. That is, individuals might reject heavy-handed or offensive demands, and so care must be taken. However, organizations can alter both the perceived and real social costs of participating in a number of ways. For instance, an organization could publish a list of voters and nonvoters in the newspaper (Lijphart 1997) or threaten to mail a citizen’s turnout record to his or her neighbors after an election (Gerber, Green, and Larimer 2008). In this way, both the real and perceived social costs of abstention can be raised.

2.3.6.2 Intangible Selective Benefits - Intrinsic

Most often, intangible benefit appeals are intrinsic rather than extrinsic. Appeals that employ social pressure language but do not actually apply social monitoring fit in the intrinsic intangible benefit category. In addition, organizations can leverage a target’s identity as prosocial and altruistic (Hart et al. 1996; Schervish & Havens 1997; Snow and
Anderson 1987). Donors reported “feeling good” as a reason for contributing to charity (Wunderink 2000), and contributions increased in an experimental study in which potential donors were labeled as “charitable” (Kraut 1973; see also Swinyard and Ray 1979). By complying, an individual can avoid the feelings of guilt associated with not living up to his own expectations of himself, and potentially experience psychological pleasure as well. Of course, for those who do not view themselves in this light, the appeal could be demobilizing.

When one participates he or she might experience the psychic utility of fulfilling an obligation. Numerous observational studies speak to the importance of civic duty (Bekkers 2004; Monroe 1996; Oliner and Oliner 1988; Piliavin and Charng 1990; Smith 1994). Organizations can emphasize moral principles such as fairness and justice, or even use the term “duty” to increase levels of participation. In other words, they can remind an individual of his duty. Whether an organization can convince a person that a particular action is his or her duty when he or she did not previously think it was remains an open question.

Researchers across a number of disciplines have identified the behavior of others as an important motivator for participation. Observational and experimental research indicates that people tend to conform to what they believe their peers are doing, whether it be with respect to alcohol consumption (Haines and Spear 1996; Perkins 2003), recycling (Schultz 1999), or voter turnout (Gerber and Rogers 2009). Descriptive social

---

6 While they rarely do, groups also could explicitly reference this type of psychological pleasure – the warm glow an individual will feel after getting involved. One experiment provides evidence that such an explicit appeal to self-satisfaction can work (Benson and Catt 1978).
norms, also called the bandwagon effect, can be leveraged by organizations to increase compliance. For instance, a field experiment by Gerber and Rogers (2009) suggests that telling an individual that lots of others are voting is substantially more effective than telling people that lots of others are abstaining. Rational calculus would predict that a person would respond more positively to the latter, since it could serve to increase his or her perception that participating will matter. In the former case, “crowding out” can occur (Ferris & West 2003; Hungerman 2005; Payne 1998; Schiff 1990). That is, the contributions of others are seen as a substitute to one’s own contribution. However, the fact that others are participating can signal that the organization is trustworthy and the cause is of value. Appeals to descriptive social norms can be viewed as a softer version of social pressure appeals. For those who would rather not view themselves as part of the pack, again, backlash could occur.

A variant of descriptive social norms is peer group norms. A person’s affiliations with others (e.g., family, community, work, etc.) greatly influence his or her sense of norms. People tend to behave in ways that accord with the norms present in their peer groups (Terry and Hogg 1996; White and Hogg 1994). The more cohesive the group, the more likely a person is to conform to the expectations and behaviors of the group (Simon, Strumer and Steffens 2000). Studies of peer group norms are typically observational. For instance, Carman (2006) finds that charitable giving is similar among co-workers in the same salary quartile. Of course, omitted variable and self-selection bias loom in such studies. Still, organizations can potentially increase the perception of a need to conform to one’s peers by highlighting the compliance of those peers. They can change the reality by actually inducing one’s peers to get involved.
Economists have identified reciprocity as an important motivator for participation. 

*Social exchange* theory suggests that people volunteer in anticipation that they will require help in the future (i.e., build a credit in society) or in repayment for previous aid offered to them (Black and DiNitto 1994; Blau 1967; Cnaan and Goldberg-Glen 1991; Qurishi et al. 1983; Wilson 2000; Wilson and Musick 1999). The purpose of participating can be to avoid shame if one received help in the past but is unwilling to help now, or to ensure that one can feel justified for seeking help in the future based on his or her current contribution. Social exchange can also be viewed as the desire to pass on one’s good fortune (Frank 2004). A concrete example of social exchange is blood donations. Those who have received blood in the past are more likely to give it (Frank 2004). As with all of the appeals, social exchange appeals will work better to the extent that they introduce positive rather than negative considerations for targets.

### 2.4 Theoretical Expectations

I have now outlined a number of ways in which organizations can (and in some cases do) alter the rational calculus of individuals for civic engagement by introducing new “considerations” which replace others in a target’s mind. For several of these, organizations can impact both perception and reality. This dissertation focuses on how groups can change perceptions through their appeals, since an organization cannot easily manipulate its mission or the real-world context in which it acts, or in some cases even the material benefits it uses. By varying a few lines of text, however, it can manipulate which incentives are highlighted, and in doing so provide an empirical test of which appeals work best.
The discussion above reveals that most studies of motivations for participation only consider one mechanism at a time. What Brown (1997, 183; see also Drezner 2006) said over two decades ago still rings true: “No single model captures all the motivations that underlie charitable action.” Bekkers and Wiepking (2007) argue that multiple mechanisms should be studied simultaneously, which would contribute to theoretical advances. That is the primary aim of this dissertation. Absent an all-encompassing model, I draw theoretical expectations using the “calculus of engagement” and my theory about how people incorporate new considerations, in conjunction with previous empirical research. In the following sections, I discuss three sets of hypotheses. The first set regards which appeals I expect to be the most successful overall, given contextual factors. The second regards which demographic subgroups of the population I expect to be most responsive in general and the third regards which incentives I expect to produce greater effects among specific subgroups.

2.4.1 Overall Variation across Appeals

The characteristics of individuals and the organizations trying to mobilize them undoubtedly impact the probability of success with each type of appeal, and the methodological discussion in Chapter 1 highlights the fact that surveys of organizations and individuals do not adequately speak to the relative effectiveness of various mobilization appeals. Respondents frequently make inaccurate judgments of past behavior and they tend to over-report behaviors that fit social norms. My theory of how people mentally process appeals suggests that the “considerations” at the top of one’s
mind when acting in the past may not be the same ones that come to mind when a person answers a survey months later about why they did so.

In addition, correlates of participation and other reasons people give for participating may be more or less stable and more or less salient to targets, and as a result, more or less open to manipulation by organizations. In short, strong correlates may not make for good levers. At the same time, appeals vary in the extent to which they might create backlash among subsets of targets. Thus, I do not rely on surveys that ask respondents to give reasons for past behavior when generating hypotheses about which appeals should work best and for whom. Instead, I draw on the two theories outlined above to derive the conditions under which some appeals can be expected to be more effective than others and for whom. While one appeal might shine in a particular context, it could have the exact opposite effect in another. Thus, the hypotheses below are tailored to context.

The success of any appeal depends on several factors. First it depends on whether the appeal introduces a new consideration or overlaps with an existing latent or salient consideration. It also depends on whether the appeal is considered by a target to be a positive, negative, or neutral consideration, and in the case of overlapping considerations, it depends on whether the consideration it serves to update is more or less positive and powerful than the consideration introduced by the appeal. This discussion suggests that there are many moving parts, and this is the case for each target. The overall impact of an appeal depends on these same factors, averaged across all targets. The experiments I employ in this dissertation in most cases do not have measures of preexisting considerations and/or targets’ evaluations of the considerations introduced by the appeals.
Thus, I must use previous empirical research and, to be frank, hunches to guide my interpretation of the results with respect to these mechanisms.

In most cases, a material appeal introduces an entirely new consideration. Its overall effectiveness depends only on how many targets are attracted to them and the extent to which those targets value what is being offered (i.e., the strength of the consideration). For example, if an organization could offer a new car to volunteers, this would essentially introduce an extremely powerful positive consideration for most people, one that would trump any reasons they had to not participate. It would not only tip those typically on the cusp of participating, but also those further from the cusp because the incentive is so strong. A bumper sticker, on the other hand, would have more limited appeal. Some might like to have it and others might view it as waste of program funds, and in both the positive and negative case, it would likely be a relatively weak consideration compared to others in a target’s calculus. Thus, it would not impact the decision of as many targets as the introduction of a free car would. Yet, even a bumper sticker could boost participation rates if on average people on the cusp consider it a positive. Thus, my general hypothesis regarding material appeals is a commonsensical one: better incentives will generate higher levels of engagement. While beauty, or in this case, value, is in the eye of the beholder, scholars and practitioners can guess ahead of time as to whether a specific material incentive will be attractive to targets.

The effectiveness of solidarity appeals will also vary according to whether many targets value the social opportunity and to what extent, with the added complication that some targets may have preexisting latent or salient solidarity considerations, which the appeal could replicate or update. For example, the Oregon Bus Project recruited
significantly more volunteers for their “Trick or Vote” GOTV canvass when they told
targets that there would be an after-party for all of the volunteers rather than just
mentioning what volunteers would do when canvassing (Analyst Institute, 2010). A
target may have considered that he or she would make friends with other volunteers while
canvassing (i.e., a positive “S” consideration), but the appeal likely served to update this
consideration and made it stronger relative to other considerations. Others may not have
been thinking about the social component at all when deciding, so for them the appeal
was new or updating a latent consideration.

Contingent benefits, like social ones, can be entirely new or overlapping with
existing latent or salient considerations. In addition, efficacy serves to moderate the
strength of these consideration, since efficacy (“P”) and contingent benefits (“B_i”, “B_g”,
and “B_c”) are directly related (i.e., “P” is multiplied by each “B” term in the model).
Even if an organization can make a person aware that he will be personally affected by an
outcome when he did not know otherwise (e.g., “If this bill passes, you’ll pay $500 more
in taxes per year), if he feels as though his participation will not make a difference (e.g.,
“There’s no way my one phone call is going to change my representative’s mind”), the
consideration, though positive and entirely new, may not be weighed heavily in his
decision process.

Similarly, appeals to efficacy could be especially effective or ineffective
depending on existing perceptions of the contingent benefits. If one does not personally
value the collective good being sought (e.g., he or she is elderly and will not make use of
a new community park), does not identify with a specific group of people who will
benefit, and does not see others who will benefit as worthy, emphasizing that his or her
contribution could make an enormous impact could introduce a neutral (or even negative), rather than a positive consideration. At the same time, if a person values the contingent good being sought – for herself, for others she likes, or for others in general, emphasizing that his or her contribution could make an enormous impact might introduce a strong positive consideration. Thus, efficacy appeals should be more effective when individuals being targeted value the contingent good being pursued. Conversely, efficacy appeals should be less effective (and potentially demobilizing) when individuals being targeted place a low value on the contingent good being pursued.

I argue that efficacy is most often a salient consideration. People naturally think about whether their involvement is needed to achieve the outcome. Thus, appeals to efficacy should in most cases serve to update an existing salient consideration. As such, they are dangerous because as stated above, many people tend to overestimate the impact of their involvement and so telling them precisely what their contribution will do could serve to decrease their propensity to participate. Groups might do better to use non-specific efficacy appeals, like “You can make a difference!” or “We can’t do it without you!”.

Intrinsic and extrinsic intangible benefit appeals also often overlap with existing considerations, both latent and salient. For example, some people say they vote because they think it is a civic duty. If this is the case and an organization makes a civic duty appeal, it would only serve as a neutral consideration. If there are others recruited with the same appeal who do not see voting as a duty (and hence take the appeal as a negative consideration), the overall impact of the appeal could be negative. There are, of course, instances where an intangible benefit appeal is not redundant. For instance, Gerber et al.’s
(2008) experimental condition in which some targets received a postcard containing turnout records of everyone in their neighborhood (as well as their own) introduced an entirely new “I,e” consideration – surveillance – and the results were stunning, an eight percentage point boost in turnout.

Having now considered the contexts in which each type of appeal might be more or less effective, I turn now to a discussion of what types of people should be particularly susceptible to mobilization in general and to specific appeals.

2.4.2 Heterogeneous Responsiveness

Archival and survey research over the past several decades have provided a wealth of knowledge about who joins, contributes to, and volunteers for various types of organizations. They have shown that some groups of citizens are more likely than others to be engaged, both civically and politically. In some cases, this is due primarily to the fact that some people are presented with more opportunities to participate than others (i.e., they have denser social networks through which they are recruited), and in others the differences can be attributed to varying resources (e.g., time, money, civic skills). To the extent that disparities exist due to the former, appeals themselves can serve to level participatory gaps. To the extent that disparities exist due to the latter, however, participation gaps should still be expected. I use the vast engagement literature, and the theoretical framework I developed above, to develop hypotheses about which subgroups will be most responsive to the appeals of organizations. I examine the following demographic categories: gender, age, income, education, race, and social capital (with
church attendance, union membership, and blood donor status serving as proxies). One or more of the empirical chapters includes data that allow for tests in each category.

2.4.2.1 Gender

The observational literature suggests that women and men engage in politics and society in different ways. While the two groups are equally likely to volunteer for political campaigns (Verba et al. 1995), women are slightly more likely to volunteer in general (Gaskin and Smith 1997, Hodgkinson and Weitzman 1996; Hall et al. 1998). With respect to contributions, men are more likely to give to political campaigns, however most studies find that women are more likely to give overall but give lesser amounts than males (Bekkers 2004; Belfield and Beney 2000; Lyons and Passey 2005; Sokolowski 1996; Weyant 1984). Men are also more likely than women to belong to political organizations, but the two groups are equally likely to belong to non-political groups (Verba et al. 1995). It is difficult to tell what differences between men and women are due to underlying values and proclivities, as well as efficacy, and what are due to differences in mobilization.

Men have an advantage with respect to efficacy. They tend to have occupations that develop civic skills (Gallagher 1994; Rosenthal et al. 1998). Women have an advantage with respect to underlying values and proclivities. They feel they are expected to care for the needs of others (positive “B_c” considerations) (Daniels 1988; Negrey 1993), they feel guiltier when they do not express compassion (positive “I_i” considerations) (Flanagan et al. 1998), and they score higher on psychological measures of altruism and empathy (positive “B_c” and/or “I_i” considerations) (Wilson and Musick
1997). In addition, they more often view volunteering as a means to a social life (i.e., they have more positive “S” considerations than men) (Wuthnow 1995).

This discussion leads to several hypotheses regarding the relative responsiveness of men and women. Given their advantage with respect to most terms in the calculus, I expect women to be more likely than men to volunteer for civic and political causes, and I expect the same pattern with respect to fundraising, but more subtly, since the advantage with respect to the social component is removed.

Given their differences in values, it is tempting to suggest that women should be more susceptible to the intangible benefit and contingent collective benefit appeals, however, given that these may already be relevant considerations for many women, these appeals may in some cases lead to greater participation among men (if their latent considerations match the appeal, and these considerations are made salient by it). At the same time, solidarity appeals should work better for women than men to the extent that they offer face-to-face interaction. Since solidarity appeals in most cases offer a new consideration, or serve to update a salient consideration in a more positive light, women should be more responsive than men.

2.4.2.2 Age

While older generations (age 45 and older) are much more likely than younger generations (age 44 and younger) to be politically engaged, the differences are not nearly as stark with respect to civic engagement (Zukin et al. 2006). Studies suggest that the relationship between volunteerism and age is curvilinear, with its peak in middle age (Herzog et al. 1989; Menchik and Weisbrod 1987; Schoenberg 1980; Zukin et al. 2006).
In middle-age, people tend to have acquired civic skills through work (i.e., stronger and more positive “P” considerations) and are most socially connected (so they are more likely to be asked to participate).

Not distinguishing between civic and political engagement, a large body of observational studies suggests that age and giving are positively related (e.g., Bekkers 2003; Bekkers & Wiepking 2006), while others point to a leveling off or decline after a certain age, ranging from 45 (Brown and Lankford 1992) to 75 (Hodgkinson and Weitzman 1996). In most cases, these effects hold when controlling for disposable income. Thus, the trend cannot simply be explained by varying considerations of cost, and these differences could also relate to different perceptions of efficacy.

At the same time, scholars have argued that feelings of social responsibility develop with age (Bandura 1977; Bandura and Walters 1963; Piliavin and Charng 1990; Putnam 2000). One study demonstrated that as young people move toward middle age, they volunteer less because of self- and career-oriented motivations and more because of community-oriented motivations (Janoski & Wilson 1995). Thus, “P”, “I”, and “B” are likely more positive and salient for older people. However, some scholars have found that social motives are uniquely strong among adolescents (Haski-Leventhal et al. 2008; Jones 2000; Omoto et al. 2000; but see Schondel and Boehm 2000). Thus, younger targets may have more positive “S” considerations.

With advantages in nearly every category, I expect older targets to be more likely to participate, both civically and politically, than younger targets. I expect the leveling off to occur more with respect to giving time than money, since the oldest cohort of citizens may not physically be able to volunteer their time (and hence they would not have
positive “P” considerations). As with women, I expect solidarity considerations to work better for younger citizens, at least when they introduce a new consideration, or serve to update existing salient considerations.

While older citizens arguably have more positive and salient considerations of “I_i” and “B_c,” whether these types of appeals will work better or worse for older people depends on what ratio of both young and old hold salient considerations from these categories without the appeals, as well as what ratio of each groups’ existing salient and latent considerations are congruent. If older citizen already hold the considerations, a greater boost is possible among younger citizens in cases where their latent considerations match the appeals.

2.4.2.3 Income

Those with higher income tend to participate at higher rates than those with lower income, both politically and civically (Verba et al. 1995), though the differences are less pronounced for the latter. This is unsurprising since those with more disposable income can more easily bear the financial costs of civic and political participation (Hansen 1985). Of those who do participate, the rich give greater amounts of money but equal amounts of time (Freeman 1997; Verba et al. 1995). This makes sense, since the opportunity cost with respect to time is similar for the two groups but is proportionally higher for poorer citizens with respect to money.

Given that the only difference between rich and poor is income (if other related factors are controlled for, which my analyses do), I argue that rich and poor should be equally likely to donate time, but the rich should be more likely to donate money (since
their considerations of cost should be less negative). I also hypothesize that the poor will be relatively more susceptible than the rich to material appeals, since the rich can more easily purchase similar benefits (Hansen 1985). Of course, the type of material benefit offered matters a great deal.

2.4.2.4 Education

Education and participation are positively related with respect to group membership (Brown and Ferris 2007; Putnam 2000; Verba et al. 1995), financial contributions (Brown and Ferris 2007; Escholz and Van Slyke 2002), and volunteerism (McPherson and Rotolo 1996; Sundeen and Raskoff 1994). The specific reasons are a matter of some debate. Some scholars suggest that rates of contributions and volunteerism are higher mainly because of greater levels of group membership (Herzog and Morgan 1993) among the educated. Group members have a greater probability of being asked to participate (Brady et al. 1999) and they have more opportunities to develop civic skills, which are related to more positive “P” considerations (Brady et al. 1995). Others suggest that education increases self-efficacy (again, “P”) and empathy (“I_i”), and also makes people more aware of social problems (“B_c”) (Brady et al. 1995; Rosenthal et al. 1998). This discussion suggests that the better educated should be more responsive than the less educated to civic and political appeals.

While more educated citizens arguably have more positive and salient considerations of “I_i” and “B_c,” as I have argued is the case with older people and women, whether these types of appeals will work better or worse for more educated people depends on what ratio of both groups hold salient considerations from these
categories without the appeals, as well as what ratio of each groups’ existing salient and latent considerations match up. If more educated citizens already hold the considerations, a greater boost is possible among less educated citizens, again in cases where their latent considerations match the appeals.

2.4.2.5 Race

Many studies have found that whites are more likely than racial minorities (specifically African-Americans and Latinos) to join organizations (Verba et al. 1995), donate money (Eschholz and Van Slyke 2002; Van Slyke and Brooks 2005) and volunteer (Hodgkinson and Weitzman 1996). However, these differences tend to disappear once other mechanisms of participation are controlled for, including education, income, and occupational status (Clary et al. 1996; Lee and Farrell 2003; Steinberg and Wilhelm 2005; Wuthnow 1998). Given that whites are more frequently asked to participate, African-Americans and Latinos might actually be more likely to agree to participate when the opportunities for participation are leveled, though my theoretical framework only predicts equal levels of participation, since the three groups should not significantly differ with respect to any term of the “calculus of engagement” once other factors are taken into consideration. Group identity appeals should work better for racial minorities than other groups because the sense of “linked fate” is higher among these groups (positive $B_g$ considerations) (Dawson 1994).
2.4.2.6 Social Capital

As discussed in Chapter 1, social capital is an outcome of citizen engagement (Putnam 2000; Tocqueville 1835). The more individuals join and participate in voluntary organizations, the more social capital is built. The relationship between civic engagement and social capital is a virtuous circle. Engagement builds social capital, which leads to even higher levels of engagement. Previous engagement can serve to boost all terms in the calculus. For instance, participating might make a person feel more efficacious, which makes him more likely to participate in the future. Or, a person developed friendships through previous engagement and so she is more likely to see the social benefits of participating when asked again.

Thus, I argue that groups of people who have more social capital should be more likely to volunteer and donate when asked. However, only one of the empirical chapters allows me to test this hypothesis (Chapter 3), and with imperfect proxies of social capital. These include union membership, blood donor status, and church attendance. Union members (as members of unions) have at least one group association that others do not, and so they may have higher levels of social capital. The nature of donating blood, an altruistic act, leads me to believe that blood donors may also have higher levels of social capital. Both of these proxies are questionable, however the final proxy, church attendance, is better.

Observational studies have found a positive relationship between church membership or frequency of attendance and financial contributions (Bekkers 2003; Brown and Ferris 2007; Feldman 2007; Lyons and Passey 2005; Van Slyke and Brooks 2005), volunteerism (Topp and Kirsch 2003), and affiliation with other organizations.
In church, members often learn principles of altruism (Toppe and Kirsch 2003), and their social networks make voluntary acts more visible to others (Putnam and Campbell 2010). However, several field experiments have failed to show a positive relationship with respect to giving (Bekkers 2006, 2007; Eckel and Grossman 2004). This suggests the relationship may be due to the fact that church members are more likely than others to be asked to participate (Bekkers and Schuyt 2008).

Since the experiments used in this dissertation level opportunities for participation, the only relevant difference between the two groups should be varying considerations of “Bc” and “Ii”. If churchgoers are more altruistic, they should be on the whole more likely to volunteer their time and donate money. At the same time, these differences in values could also impact the effectiveness of appeals from these categories. If they are redundant considerations for churchgoers but new ones for non-churchgoers, their relative effectiveness would depend on whether or not non-churchgoers take the appeals as positive or negative considerations. If they are not redundant considerations for churchgoers, they could be expected to perform better among that group because a greater proportion would have underlying values that match up. If union membership and blood donorship are good proxies for social capital, the trends should be the same as for church membership.

2.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have outlined a theoretical framework for understanding why citizens participate in or abstain from the activities of voluntary associations, and for understanding how they incorporate the appeals from organizations into their decision
process. This “calculus of engagement” broadens the calculus of voting to encompass a wider range of political and civic activities (in particular by introducing material and solidarity benefits and by differentiating among contingent and intangible benefits). The theory of how people incorporate appeals into their decision process borrows from Zaller’s (1992) critical work on how people answer survey questions. It is useful for understanding when and for whom appeals can be expected to work or backfire. I then introduced a number of appeals groups could and/or do use to manipulate a citizen’s “calculus of engagement,” thereby inducing participation. I categorized these according to the terms of the calculus. Finally, I used the theoretical framework to develop hypotheses about the contexts in which each appeal should work better or worse and for whom. The usefulness of any theory hinges on its predictive power. The following three empirical chapters test the hypotheses generated from my theory, which are summarized in Table 2.1, Table 2.2, and Table 2.3.
TABLE 2.1

HYPOTHESES REGARDING WHICH APPEALS SHOULD WORK WHEN

1. The effectiveness of different types of appeals depends on the context. Appeals that work well in some will be ineffective or demobilizing in another.

2. Appeals can lead to both higher and lower levels of engagement since they can introduce both positive and negative considerations. Even seemingly innocuous appeals can introduce negative considerations for some targets, and if these are not canceled out by a greater proportion of targets who take the consideration as a negative, the overall result can be demobilization.

3. Stronger incentives will result in greater levels of engagement because they not only introduce overwhelmingly positive considerations but they enlarge the cusp of participation.

4. Efficacy appeals will have a greater impact on participation rates when existing salient considerations regarding the contingent benefit ("B_i", "B_g", and/or "B_c") are relatively high.

5. Contingent benefit appeals will have a greater impact on participation rates when existing salient considerations regarding efficacy ("P") are relatively high.
### Table 2.2

**Hypotheses Regarding the Effectiveness of Appeals for Specific Subgroups**

1. Given their advantage with respect to “Bc”, “Ii”, and “S”, and only disadvantage with respect to “P”, I expect women to be more likely to participate when asked by an organization, especially for volunteer (as opposed to fundraising) solicitations.

2. Given their advantage with respect to “P”, “Bc”, “Ii”, and only disadvantage with respect to “S”, I expect older and more educated targets to be more likely to participate when asked by an organization. For older targets, the effect may level off for volunteer opportunities, if physical ability plays a role.

3. Given that they should have less negative “C” considerations with respect to finances, I expect wealthier targets to be more likely to donate when solicited but equally likely to volunteer.

4. With other factors taken into consideration, I expect whites, African-Americans, and Latinos to exhibit equal levels of engagement when solicited, since none enjoys an advantage with respect to any terms of the calculus.

5. Since those with greater levels of social capital have an advantage with respect to every term in the calculus, they should be more responsive to all types of solicitations.

### Table 2.3

**Hypotheses Regarding Who Participates When Asked**

1. Since women and young targets are more likely to view “S” appeals as positive and stronger considerations (and they most often serve as a new consideration or update an existing one to be stronger and more positive), I expect them to be more responsive than men and older targets to this type of appeal.

2. Since women, older targets, more educated targets, and those with higher levels of social capital are more likely to have preexisting salient “Bc” and “Ii” considerations (and thus the appeals’ considerations are likely to be redundant), I expect men, younger targets, less educated targets, and those with lower levels of social capital to be more susceptible to these appeals, but only if their latent considerations match those of the appeals.

3. Those who identify with a group should be more susceptible to appeals that reference the group identity, as they introduce positive “Bg” or “Ii” considerations.
CHAPTER 3:
2010 COOPERATIVE CONGRESSIONAL ELECTION STUDY SURVEY
EXPERIMENTS

While many targets of organizations’ membership, volunteer, and fundraising campaigns are not open to persuasion (i.e., nothing the organization is able to say or do could induce them to participate), those on the cusp of participation (i.e., those who have both positive and negative considerations, which are equally weighted) might participate if an organization’s appeal strikes a chord (i.e., introduces a positive consideration). In this chapter, I examine the effectiveness of various appeals for both the general population and specific subgroups of the population using survey experiments fielded on the 2010 Cooperative Congressional Election Study (CCES). This chapter serves as an important test of the theoretical framework I presented in Chapter 2, and the results could potentially help groups to determine which appeals to use for which targets.

The strength of this chapter is that the appeals are tested on a representative sample of the American public as opposed to the inherently unrepresentative nature of field experiments. However, the problem of social desirability (Berinsky 2004; Silver et al. 1986) still looms with survey experiments.7 Below, I discuss how this problem might be mitigated to some degree, since the survey is self-administered, but there is no way to assess empirically whether this is actually the case.

7 This should be mitigated to some degree, since the survey is self-administered, but there is no way to assess empirically whether this is actually the case.
impact the findings. The problem of social desirability highlights the need for field experiments, which the next two chapters employ. To the extent that the results from this chapter are replicated in the field experiments from the ensuing chapters, they serve as a link of generalizability between the experimental populations and the general population.

These survey experiments also allow for heterogeneous treatment effects across demographic categories of interest to be estimated in a rigorous way. This is important, since my theory does not involve all-encompassing hypotheses that certain appeals will dominate in all cases. Rather, I have argued that the strength of each type of appeal depends entirely on context: What kind of organization is making the appeal? Who is the organization targeting? How is it targeting them (e.g., by phone, mail, email, in person)? What does the organization want targets to do (e.g., join, volunteer, donate)? While this dissertation does not contain experiments that illuminate the relative effectiveness of appeals in every context, it does address some, and this chapter in particular allows for subgroup testing better than the others, since a nationally representative sample was surveyed. In addition to shedding some light on which appeals might work best for specific types of people and in specific contexts, these results, to some degree, speak to the question of what disparities in participation exist due to differences in the likelihood of being asked to participate (since the questions eliminate this factor) and what exist due to other factors.

Of course, the weakness of this chapter is that the solicitations are hypothetical, rather than actual, and so the question remains as to whether the appeals that work herein would actually work in practice, and whether specific subgroups would respond at the same relative rates in actuality as they do in the hypothetical. Some groups might be more
likely to overstate their likelihood to participate than others, whether it be due to social desirability or other factors. Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1995, 616) cite a body of observational and experimental literature that suggests “differential social desirability may be a phantom,” and so I consider it reasonable to analyze subgroup effects. Replication in the field experiments employed in the next two chapters would only serve to bolster the findings regarding subgroups in this chapter.

3.1 Survey Experimental Design

The first question a respondent was asked for this study was designed to measure whether social exchange theory (“I,” in this instance because there is no threat of social surveillance) can be leveraged to increase compliance with volunteer and fundraising appeals. It asks: “Sometimes, in our daily lives, we may find ourselves in difficult situations where a stranger helps us – for instance, helping to change a tire, or returning a lost phone or wallet. In the past, have you ever been in a difficult situation and received help from a stranger?” It is intentionally asked of only half the sample so that differences between the two groups on all questions that follow can be measured.

The next two sets of questions are vignettes that describe hypothetical organizations and offer hypothetical incentives. At this point, a defense of hypothetical questions is needed. Surveys like the Citizen Participation Study routinely ask respondents to identify which factors played a role in their decision to participate. These questions would seemingly provide more insight as to what types of incentives influence participation. For instance, of the three types of incentives discussed by political scientists, Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1995) find that people report being involved
with organizations overwhelmingly from a sense of duty (“I_i” and “I_e”), secondarily for ideological reasons (“B_1”, “B_5”, and “B_c”), and least for material incentives (“M”) (Verba et al. 1995). Thus, one might be tempted to conclude that organizations should emphasize feelings of responsibility and duty in their appeals. However, this is not necessarily the case, especially since responses related to intangible benefits are socially desirable, and thus could be inflated.

In Chapter 2, I argued that the effectiveness of intangible benefit appeals are difficult to predict, because of an additional factor, which is that some targets already have existing intangible benefit considerations that weigh into their calculus. For those with existing positive, salient considerations, intangible benefit appeals would have no impact because they are redundant. For those with existing negative, latent considerations, these appeals would make the consideration salient and cause backlash. The only room for positive treatment effects is among those with existing positive, latent considerations (i.e., their values match that of the appeal, but the consideration would not enter their calculus aside from the appeal). Thus, the relative ratios of each type of person determine the overall effectiveness of intangible benefit appeals.

Each of the two vignettes describes a hypothetical organization (e.g., civic or political) and offer hypothetical incentives (material “M”, solidarity “S”, efficacy/mission “P/B”, civic duty “I_i”, and standard [no additional text]).\(^8\) Note that the mission appeal is not categorized as a specific type (i.e., individual, in-group, or collective), and it is

\(^8\) The survey instrument instructed the programmer to rotate the order of the two vignettes and their follow-up questions. It also rotates the order of the volunteer and financial contributions questions within each vignette. This is done in order to guard against question order effects.
labeled as both a collective benefit and efficacy appeal. The question wording was
general and a respondent could think about it in reference to any or all three types of
benefits. Since it refers to “advancing the goals” of the organization, it also involves
efficacy. This type of combination appeal makes sense since the two terms are directly
related in the “calculus of engagement.” Also note that the civic duty appeal is labeled as
intrinsic since there is no threat of social surveillance.

The two hypothetical scenarios are similar except that the first features a civic
organization, a Food Kitchen, and the second features a political organization, a citizen
group that works to hold elected officials accountable. For each scenario, a respondent is
randomly assigned to one of the five appeals. After each scenario, the respondent is asked
to report how likely he or she would be to volunteer with and donate to the organization,
with the response options being, “not very likely at all,” “not likely,” “likely,” or “very
likely.” Since treatments are randomly assigned, groups receiving each appeal can be
compared to determine which appeals are most effective. The civic organization vignette
reads as follows:

Helping Families Food Kitchen is a charitable organization that
provides food to families in need because of poverty or illness. Thousands
of families with children are helped each year. Volunteers and donors
enjoy helping neighbors in need [and proudly wear the Helping Families t-
shirts they received for getting involved (“M”) and enjoy meeting like-
minded people with whom they form friendships (“S”)] and enjoy
advancing the goals of an organization whose cause they believe in
(“P/B”) and enjoy feeling that they have fulfilled their civic duty to
contribute to their community (“Ii”) (no additional appeal, control
group)]."

The political organization vignette reads as follows:

Republicans/Democrats/Independents (based on party identification) for
Accountability is an organization that works to educate people about
important issues Congress is debating. Volunteers and donors enjoy helping others stay informed so that they can hold their elected officials accountable [and proudly wear the Republicans/Democrats/Independents for Accountability t-shirts they received for getting involved (“M”)/and enjoy meeting like-minded people with whom they form friendships (“S”)/and enjoy advancing the goals of an organization whose cause they believe in (“P/B”)/and enjoy feeling that they have fulfilled their civic duty to contribute to their community (“I”)/(no additional appeal, control group)].

Because the appeals are identical for both the civic and political scenarios, I can cautiously assess whether some appeals work better for one type of organization or the other. Of course, these organizations have many differences besides the fact that one is political and one is civic, and I keep these in mind when interpreting the relative effectiveness of appeals. The final question is designed to test the group identity appeal (“Bₙ”). The vignette varies according to the race/ethnicity of the respondent. It reads:

STARS is a mentor program whose goal is to help under-achieving Latino/African-American/minority/(no text, control group) students improve their grades. Volunteers spend two afternoons per week helping students do their homework and study for tests. How likely would you be to volunteer with STARS?”

Half of Latinos received the version that just read “students” and the other half received the version that read “Latino students.” Likewise, half of African-Americans received the version that just read “students” and the other half received the version that read “African-American students.” The rest of respondents received either “students” or “minority students.”

3.2 Analytical Method

In the analysis below, I first present the results for the social exchange appeal’s ability to introduce a positive consideration that results in more favorable responses to
later questions. I then examine the effectiveness of the material, solidarity, efficacy/mission, and civic duty appeals for both the Food Kitchen and Good Governance vignettes. For all of these, I report the analysis of predictions generated based on logit analysis, collapsing the bottom two response categories ("not very likely at all" and "not likely") and top two response categories ("likely" and "very likely"). In cases where the results meaningfully differ, I also report the results from alternative specifications. I report analyses that control for variables that proved to be unbalanced in treatment assignment randomization checks and are predictive of the outcome.

In the second part of this chapter I explore heterogeneous treatment effects based on the following categories of interest: gender, age, income, education, race/ethnicity, and social capital (which include church attendance, union membership, and blood donor status as proxies). I report the results from ordered logit models that includes all of these variables (and others), as well as the results from models that specify interaction terms for hypotheses regarding the interplay of these subgroups and specific appeals. I perform the latter analyses separately for each subgroup of interest.

### 3.3 Overall Treatment Responsiveness

I turn first to the question of reciprocity, and whether social exchange theory (e.g., Wilson and Musick 1999) can be leveraged to boost participation rates. My intention was to design a question to which most respondents would answer “yes,” which 81% of respondents did. I take this to mean that roughly four out of five respondents perceived this as a positive consideration, and only one out of five perceived it as a negative consideration. If these considerations were integrated into respondents’ decision
processes for the solicitations that followed, I should see greater willingness to participating among the half of respondents who received the social exchange question than the half who did not. However, since I do not know who in the control group would have answered “yes” and who would have answered “no,” I cannot measure whether those who answered “yes” were more likely to express a willingness to participate as a result of the prime and those who answered “no” less likely, which is what my theory predicts.

The results from Table 3.1 show a positive impact of the social exchange prime for each of the volunteer and fundraising solicitations (with effects ranging from five to eight percentage points). However, the results are only statistically significant for the Food Kitchen volunteer and fundraising solicitations. The fact that the effect for Food Kitchen volunteering is strongest is somewhat unsurprising, since it is most similar to the social exchange question itself. To put this in the theoretical framework, I would argue that the consideration was positive for most people with respect to each solicitation, but it may have been strongest (i.e., weighed more heavily in one’s calculus) for the Food Kitchen volunteer opportunity because it would be the most equivalent “social exchange.” The prime served primarily to move respondents away from the lowest response category (see Figure 3.1). These results serve as preliminary evidence that social exchange appeals can introduce positive considerations that lead to greater levels of engagement.
TABLE 3.1
SOCIAL EXCHANGE PRIME FOR PARTICIPATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Four Category</th>
<th>Two Category</th>
<th>Low v. Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Food Kitchen Volunteer</td>
<td>.321*</td>
<td>.197</td>
<td>.637**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[N=1,234]</td>
<td>(.065)</td>
<td>(.185)</td>
<td>(.265)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food Kitchen Donate</td>
<td>.263</td>
<td>.223</td>
<td>.605*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[N=1,076]</td>
<td>(.182)</td>
<td>(.197)</td>
<td>(.315)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading Program Volunteer</td>
<td>.136</td>
<td>.033</td>
<td>.199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[N=1,171]</td>
<td>(.181)</td>
<td>(.197)</td>
<td>(.245)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good Governance Volunteer</td>
<td>.245</td>
<td>.187</td>
<td>.269</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[N=1,055]</td>
<td>(.169)</td>
<td>(.186)</td>
<td>(.222)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good Governance Donate</td>
<td>.052</td>
<td>-.169</td>
<td>.246</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[N=1,237]</td>
<td>(.172)</td>
<td>(.192)</td>
<td>(.214)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ordered logit analysis performed for the four category analysis and logit analysis performed for the two category analyses. Treatment assignment is balanced across observables. Therefore, controls are excluded from the analyses. Linearized standard errors reported in parentheses. * denotes p<.10, ** denotes p<.05
Figure 3.1: Social Exchange Prime For Participation

Note: The lines represent the 95% confidence intervals surrounding each estimate, which are based on predictions derived from the logit models.

I next examine whether the appeals were differentially effective at inducing people to respond favorably to the Food Kitchen and Good Governance solicitations. As I stated previously, I do not expect one appeal to dominate in all cases. Rather, each appeal should work better in contexts where they can reasonably thought to introduce positive considerations. For example, the solidarity appeal should not work well for either fundraising appeal, and could potentially be demobilizing (i.e., it introduces a negative consideration), since it is essentially saying that other people get involved with the organization for social reasons, which the fundraising solicitation does not offer.

To give another example, the efficacy/mission appeal should work better for volunteering than fundraising solicitations because one can more easily visualize what impact her volunteering will have than she can visualize what impact her financial contribution will have. The civic duty appeal is also likely to be more effective for volunteering than fundraising solicitations because more people would see physically
helping as a duty than simply giving money (i.e., more people would take the appeal as a positive consideration with the former). The results reported in Table 3.2 and Figure 3.2 support these hypotheses.

**TABLE 3.2**

DIFFERENTIAL EFFECTIVENESS OF APPEALS (RELATIVE TO STANDARD APPEAL)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Food Kitchen Volunteer</th>
<th>Food Kitchen Donate</th>
<th>Good Governance Volunteer</th>
<th>Good Governance Donate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Efficacy/Mission</td>
<td>.491* (0.274)</td>
<td>.033 (0.298)</td>
<td>.365 (0.280)</td>
<td>-.227 (0.299)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Material</td>
<td>.184 (0.288)</td>
<td>.113 (0.315)</td>
<td>.024 (0.287)</td>
<td>-.109 (0.291)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solidarity</td>
<td>.039 (0.276)</td>
<td>-.072 (0.296)</td>
<td>-.014 (0.260)</td>
<td>-.628** (0.262)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civic Duty</td>
<td>.662** (0.277)</td>
<td>-.151 (0.302)</td>
<td>.273 (0.288)</td>
<td>-.390 (0.298)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>1,196</td>
<td>1,207</td>
<td>1,230</td>
<td>1,225</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Logit analysis performed. Categories are “not likely at all/not likely” and “likely/very likely.”
Covariates for Food Kitchen Volunteer are age 60 to 69, widowed, children, retired, disabled, homemaker, party identification, political knowledge, political interest, and mobilized in 2008.
Covariates for Food Kitchen Donate are age 60 to 69, African-American, children, disabled, student, political involvement, political knowledge, political interest, and mobilized in 2008.
Covariates for Good Governance Volunteer are age 30 to 39, employed full-time, blood donor, and mobilized in 2008.
Covariates for Good Governance Donate are employed full-time, employed other, disabled, party identification, and mobilized in 2008.
Linearized standard errors reported in parentheses.
Standard condition is baseline category.
* denotes p<.10, ** denotes p<.05
Figure 3.2: Differential Effectiveness of Appeals

Note: The lines represent the 95% confidence intervals surrounding each estimate, which are based on predictions derived from logit analysis controlling for imbalanced covariates.

The most striking pattern of Table 3.2 is that at first glance there appears to be no pattern. There is a mix of positive and negative coefficients (often for the same appeal), and there are some significant effects in both directions. This speaks to my theory that the same appeal can be interpreted by some as a positive consideration and by others as a negative one, and that this varies by context (e.g., volunteering versus fundraising, civic versus political). From a practical standpoint, it means that it is not always better for a group to say more rather than less when approaching prospective volunteers and donors. Appeals that are perceived negatively by some can result in lower participation rates if they are not perceived positively by an equal or greater number of others.

As for specific appeals, the civic duty appeal significantly increased willingness to participate compared to all but the mission appeal (including the standard appeal) for
the Food Kitchen Volunteer scenario. Interestingly, it generated the least willingness to participate for the Food Kitchen fundraising scenario, though the differences are not statistically significant. The same trend is present with respect to the Good Governance solicitations, but to a lesser degree. The civic duty appeal generated a greater willingness to volunteer (6% higher compared to the control), but a lesser willingness to donate money (8% lower compared to the control). However, the differences between the civic duty and standard appeal in both cases are statistically insignificant.

That the civic duty appeal appears to work for volunteer opportunities (and to a greater extent for the Food Kitchen scenario) but not for fundraising opportunities suggests that more people may have viewed the appeal as a positive consideration. If people see physically lending a hand to those in need (or talking to neighbors about political issues) as an obligation but do not see contributing money so that others can do so as one, then the civic duty appeal is likely to work better for volunteerism than fundraising. Importantly, this also means that the consideration must have been latent, rather than salient, for a sizable portion of respondents. Otherwise the net impact would only have been neutral.

Given my hypotheses regarding the relationship between efficacy and contingent benefits, I find an interesting pattern with respect to the efficacy/mission appeal and donating time versus money. Those assigned to the mission appeal were 12% more likely than those assigned to the standard appeal to express a willingness to volunteer for the

———

9 The fact that the sign is positive only in the case of Food Kitchen volunteering and Good Governance volunteering also may speak to the lack of social desirability bias. If social desirability was a serious problem, I would expect to see greater willingness to participate (compared to the control group) among targets assigned to the civic duty condition for all four solicitations.
Food Kitchen (p=.074), and they were 9% more likely than those assigned to the standard appeal to express a willingness to volunteer for the Good Governance organization (but this difference is statistically insignificant). On the other hand, they were only 1% more likely than the standard group to donate to the Food Kitchen and 5% less likely than the standard group to donate to the Good Governance organization (again, these differences are statistically insignificant).

As I argued above, even if a respondent believes in the cause and an organization tells him that his contribution will have an impact, he cannot know well what that impact will actually be with a financial contribution, and so the appeal was less effective than in the volunteer scenarios. However, he could more easily think about what impact his volunteering will have (e.g., help to feed 100 people in a few short hours, or have actual conversations with 10 or 20 people while canvassing with the Good Governance organization). Thus, the efficacy/mission appeal was more likely to register as a positive consideration in the volunteer scenarios.

In Chapter 2, I argued that the solidarity appeal can potentially introduce a positive consideration for the two volunteer solicitations, but that it can introduce a negative consideration for the two fundraising solicitations. This hypothesis is supported in the data. Those assigned to the solidarity appeal were 13% less likely to express a willingness to donate to the Good Governance organization (p=.017) and no more likely to express a willingness to donate to the Food Kitchen. The null effects of the solidarity appeal with respect to the two volunteer opportunities are somewhat surprising, though perhaps less so when considering surveys that suggest solidarity motivations rank low on the list of reasons respondents give for participating, especially for political organizations.
(Verba et al. 1995) and observational studies of interest groups, who are presumably in
tune with member’s desires, that suggest less than a quarter offer social benefits through
local chapters (Berry 1997). The null results potentially suggest that an equal number of
people viewed the appeal as a positive and negative consideration (and others may have
viewed it as a neutral one).

I also argued that material benefits are new considerations when introduced by an
organization, and since they are not redundant, their effectiveness depends entirely on the
extent to which they are viewed as positive or negative considerations by targets. Thus,
the simplest explanation for the null effects regarding the material incentive is that it was
simply not a good enough incentive to make any marked difference. For many, it may
have been a positive consideration, but one weighed so lightly that it did not push them
over the cusp of participating. These slight positives might also have been countered by a
group of respondents who viewed the t-shirt as a waste of program funds.

3.4 Heterogeneous Treatment Responsiveness

I next turn to an examination of various subgroups of interest and their overall
propensities to participate, as well as their relative propensities to participate based on
which incentives they were offered. Table 3.3 presents a full model of participation,
without distinguishing between appeals. In the sections that follow, I discuss each
subgroup in turn.
### TABLE 3.3

**CORRELATES OF PARTICIPATION**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Food Kitchen</th>
<th>Reading Program</th>
<th>Good Governance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Volunteer</td>
<td>Donate</td>
<td>Volunteer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Female</strong></td>
<td>.493** (.198)</td>
<td>.523** (.248)</td>
<td>.859*** (.214)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Under 30</strong></td>
<td>.755 (.570)</td>
<td>-.291 (.644)</td>
<td>.653 (.576)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>30-39</strong></td>
<td>.750 (.571)</td>
<td>-.411 (.635)</td>
<td>.381 (.588)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>40-49</strong></td>
<td>.786 (.528)</td>
<td>-.038 (.611)</td>
<td>.494 (.526)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>50-59</strong></td>
<td>1.243*** (.481)</td>
<td>-.004 (.548)</td>
<td>.492 (.483)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>60-69</strong></td>
<td>1.203*** (.401)</td>
<td>.288 (.517)</td>
<td>.614 (.454)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Income</strong></td>
<td>.028 (.041)</td>
<td>.057 (.037)</td>
<td>-.009 (.038)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Education</strong></td>
<td>-.092 (.077)</td>
<td>-.058 (.077)</td>
<td>.033 (.075)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Latino</strong></td>
<td>.733 (.475)</td>
<td>.128 (.479)</td>
<td>.387 (.418)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>African-</strong></td>
<td>.131 (.378)</td>
<td>.831* (.425)</td>
<td>1.500*** (.418)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American**</td>
<td>(.813)</td>
<td>(.425)</td>
<td>(.418)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Religious</strong></td>
<td>.265*** (.064)</td>
<td>.206*** (.064)</td>
<td>.070 (.062)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Attendance</strong></td>
<td>(.064)</td>
<td>(.064)</td>
<td>(.062)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Union Member</strong></td>
<td>.313 (.221)</td>
<td>.324 (.241)</td>
<td>.552** (.230)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Blood Donor</strong></td>
<td>-.234 (.275)</td>
<td>-.249 (.329)</td>
<td>.481* (.272)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Married</strong></td>
<td>-.088 (.299)</td>
<td>-.329 (.319)</td>
<td>-.336 (.411)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Divorced</strong></td>
<td>.029 (.392)</td>
<td>-.293 (.445)</td>
<td>.264 (.392)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Widowed</strong></td>
<td>1.000* (.526)</td>
<td>-.610 (.590)</td>
<td>-.1286* (.694)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Children</strong></td>
<td>.916*** (.279)</td>
<td>.779*** (.297)</td>
<td>.447 (.282)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Part Time</strong></td>
<td>-.108* (.109)</td>
<td>-.162 (.492)</td>
<td>-.312 (.411)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### TABLE 3.3 (CONTINUED)

**CORRELATES OF PARTICIPATION**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Food Kitchen</th>
<th>Reading Program</th>
<th>Good Governance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Volunteer</td>
<td>Donate</td>
<td>Volunteer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Full Time</strong></td>
<td>-1.018***</td>
<td>-.003</td>
<td>-1.114***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.361)</td>
<td>(.371)</td>
<td>(.344)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other Employ</strong></td>
<td>.311</td>
<td>-.793</td>
<td>.427</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.800)</td>
<td>(.563)</td>
<td>(.928)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Retired</strong></td>
<td>-.800*</td>
<td>-.087</td>
<td>-1.372***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.453)</td>
<td>(.456)</td>
<td>(.436)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Disabled</strong></td>
<td>-.1309**</td>
<td>-.958*</td>
<td>-.648</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.534)</td>
<td>(.575)</td>
<td>(.512)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Homemaker</strong></td>
<td>-1.151**</td>
<td>-.620</td>
<td>-1.493***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.486)</td>
<td>(.518)</td>
<td>(.477)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student</strong></td>
<td>-.955</td>
<td>-1.417*</td>
<td>-.112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.660)</td>
<td>(.737)</td>
<td>(.653)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Party Identification</strong></td>
<td>-.127**</td>
<td>.0542</td>
<td>-.019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.051)</td>
<td>(.050)</td>
<td>(.050)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Partisanship Strength</strong></td>
<td>.180*</td>
<td>-.017</td>
<td>.069</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.093)</td>
<td>(.093)</td>
<td>(.088)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Political Involvement</strong></td>
<td>.097</td>
<td>.662***</td>
<td>.543**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.219)</td>
<td>(.236)</td>
<td>(.245)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Political Knowledge</strong></td>
<td>-.606***</td>
<td>-.432*</td>
<td>-.145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.226)</td>
<td>(.233)</td>
<td>(.247)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Political Interest</strong></td>
<td>.351**</td>
<td>.282*</td>
<td>.155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.137)</td>
<td>(.147)</td>
<td>(.145)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mobilized in 2008</strong></td>
<td>.484**</td>
<td>.546**</td>
<td>.422*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.238)</td>
<td>(.240)</td>
<td>(.268)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Voted in 2008</strong></td>
<td>-.222</td>
<td>-.515*</td>
<td>-.422</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.299)</td>
<td>(.311)</td>
<td>(.287)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>N</strong></td>
<td>1,028</td>
<td>1,036</td>
<td>1,030</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ordered logit analysis performed.
Reference group for age is those age 70 and older. Reference group for marital status is “single.”
Linearized standard errors reported in parentheses.
* denotes p<.10, ** denotes p<.05, *** denotes p<.01
3.4.1 Gender

Given their advantage over men with respect to “B_c” and “I_i” (and only disadvantage with respect to “P”), I expect women on the whole to be more likely to express a willingness to participate. Since the two volunteer opportunities contain a social component, which is more likely to be a positive consideration for women, I expect women to be especially more responsive to the three volunteer opportunities. The results from Table 3.3 and Figure 3.3 support these hypotheses to some degree.

Figure 3.3: Volunteer and Donor Propensity by Gender
Note: The lines represent the 95% confidence intervals surrounding each estimate, which are based on predictions derived from logit analyses that include all variables from Table 3.3.

Women responded more positively to every solicitation, but they were only significantly more likely than men to express a willingness to volunteer for the Food Kitchen (62% responding “likely or “very likely” versus 50% for men) and Reading Program (45% versus 26%), as well as donate to the Food Kitchen (74% compared to
63%). These results actually match up better with previous observational studies than with my theory itself. Previous research demonstrated advantages for women with respect to civic engagement but not with respect to political engagement. Perhaps men’s advantage with respect to efficacy is greater for political engagement than civic engagement.

Regarding the effectiveness of specific appeals, I have argued that intangible benefit appeals may in some cases overlap with existing considerations, and the extent to which this is the case likely varies by context. While in general I expect fewer women than men to backlash against the social exchange and civic duty appeals (i.e., take the appeals as negative considerations), for those who consider them a positive, they could be redundant with existing salient considerations, which essentially makes these appeals net neutral. If that is the case, men might be more responsive to these appeals if on balance they view the appeal as a positive consideration.

The only statistically significant difference in responsiveness between men and women with respect to the social exchange appeal was in relation to the Food Kitchen volunteer solicitation. The success of the appeal can be attributed mostly to men. The social exchange appeal resulted in a gain of 11 percentage points for men (p=.111). On the other hand, women only experienced a gain of 0.3 percentage points (p=.953). Men who received the social exchange treatment responded “yes” at a rate of 79% and women at a rate of 82% (a difference that is statistically insignificant). Thus, the two groups were about equally likely to take the consideration as positive. A similar pattern is present with respect to the civic duty appeal and volunteering for the Food Kitchen. The appeal
resulted in a 21 percentage point boost for men (p=.014) and only a 7 percentage point boost for women (p=.377).

I argue that the difference in treatment responsiveness for both of these appeals has to do with the salience of the consideration for each group. I have argued that “I_i” considerations are more likely to be salient for women, and so the appeal, though positive, may have been redundant for most. On the other hand, the appeal may have activated a preexisting latent positive consideration for men.

I also expected the solidarity appeal to favor women for volunteer opportunities, as they more often view volunteering as a means to social life, and emphasizing the friendships one might gain is likely a new consideration for most (Wuthnow 1995). However, the appeal did not work with respect to either solicitation for men or women.

3.4.2 Age

I have argued that older respondents should respond more positively to each of the solicitations because observational studies have shown that they have more positive considerations of “P”, “B_c”, and “I_i”. However, I have also argued that there could be a leveling off effect with respect to volunteering, since the oldest respondents may be incapable of physically volunteering (i.e., less positive “P” considerations). I do not expect this leveling off with respect to the two fundraising appeals.

The results from Table 3.3 and Figure 3.4 lend limited support to these hypotheses. People in their 70s or older were significantly less likely to express a willingness to volunteer for the Food Kitchen than people in their 50s and 60s (33% compared to 64% and 63% respectively). Those in their 20s, 30s, or 40s fall in between
and are not distinguishable from either group (52%, 52%, and 53%, respectively).

Engagement propensities with respect to donating to the Food Kitchen and volunteering for the Reading Program are more level and none of the differences achieve statistical significance. I do not find statistically significant differences among the age cohorts with respect to the Good Governance volunteering and fundraising solicitations. Again, it is impossible to decipher with the data at hand what combinations of responses led to null results with respect to the latter appeals.

Figure 3.4: Volunteer and Donor Propensity by Age

Note: The lines represent the 95% confidence intervals surrounding each estimate, which are based on predictions derived from logit analyses that include all variables from Table 3.3.

With respect to the effectiveness of specific appeals, for volunteer opportunities I expected the solidarity appeal to work better among younger targets, since they more often get involved for social reasons, and the appeal should serve to update these salient considerations to be stronger. I find evidence of this, but only for the Food Kitchen...
volunteer solicitation. Whereas those under age 40 were 18 percentage points more likely to participate, as a result of the appeal, those 40 and over were 9 percentage points less likely to participate, for a difference of 27 percentage points (p=.058).

I also argued that the relative effectiveness of the efficacy/mission and intangible benefit appeals depends on several factors: for how many the consideration was preexisting and salient and what ratio of each age cohort considers it a positive. In the case of social exchange, I have at least a proxy measure of the latter factor. Across age cohorts, 81% of respondents answered “yes” to the social exchange question. Since I expect a greater proportion of older people to hold the consideration as salient, independently, I expect the social exchange appeal to exhibit a greater net positive impact on younger cohorts. Figure 3.5 displays the results, which lend support to this hypothesis.
Figure 3.5: Social Exchange Effectiveness by Age

Note: The lines represent the 95% confidence intervals surrounding each estimate, which are based on predictions derived from logit analysis controlling for imbalanced covariates.

When considering a linear pattern, younger respondents were significantly more likely to display greater boosts in expressed willingness to volunteer or donate due to the social exchange treatment for the Food Kitchen volunteer solicitation ($p=.051$), the Reading Program Volunteer solicitation ($p=.062$), and the Good Governance fundraising solicitation ($p=.027$). In fact, those in the older cohorts appear to be negatively affected by the social exchange treatment in most cases, though the only statistically significant negative impact was among 40-49 year-olds for the Good Governance fundraising appeal.
To give an example, regarding the Food Kitchen volunteer solicitation, those under age 30 in the control group were only 39% likely to express a willingness to volunteer whereas 57% in the treatment group expressed a willingness to do so. This means the social exchange treatment resulted in an 18 percentage point boost among the youngest cohort. In comparison, those 70 or older in the control group were 42% likely to express a willingness to volunteer, whereas those in the treatment group were only 29% likely to express a willingness to volunteer. This means the social exchange treatment resulted in a 13 percentage point decrease among the oldest cohort. Though statistically insignificant, the negative sign of the social exchange treatment among the oldest cohort could suggest that those among these cohorts whose values line up with the appeal would have independently weighed the “I” consideration, so the appeal did not provide any additional boost. For the minority among the older cohort whose values do not line up, highlighting social exchange might actually have activated a latent negative consideration, thus resulting in an overall decrease in willingness to participate among the older cohorts.

The results with respect to social exchange and age are not replicated with the civic duty appeal, which is also an intangible benefit appeal. Older and younger cohorts were equally likely to express a willingness to participate as a result of the appeal. While I do not have measures of what ratios of each cohort considered it a positive, I suspect that fewer older respondents would have already held the consideration as salient than in the social exchange treatment (i.e., having a self-image as someone who helps others is likely more common than believing it is one’s duty to volunteer for and donate to civic and political organizations). If this is the case, it means there would be more room for
influence among all age cohorts, in both directions (positive and negative). Differences between the older and younger respondents were not present with respect to the efficacy/mission appeal, either.

3.4.3 Income

In Chapter 2, I hypothesized that those with higher incomes would be more likely to donate to both civic and political causes, but equally likely to volunteer for them, since the only relevant difference between the two groups (when controlling for other factors) is income, which essentially means that the rich have less negative considerations of cost in the “calculus of engagement.” As expected, I do not find differences by income of willingness to volunteer, but I also do not find differences with respect to donating money. It could be the case that people are equally likely to give but give an amount proportional to their incomes.

The null results with respect to income highlight the role of solicitation in civic and political engagement. Poor citizens may participate at lower rates more because they are asked less frequently and less because they do not have the resources to do so. Of course, these scenarios are hypothetical, and so poorer citizens may be equally likely to express a willingness to volunteer and donate when they might not actually be able to do so in practice.

I also expected the material appeal to be more effective among poorer respondents, since the appeal should more likely be viewed as a positive consideration, but this was not borne out in the subgroup analysis either. This could simply be due to the
fact that the material appeal was ineffective in general. Or it could be due to the fact that a t-shirt does not really help poorer respondents in any meaningful way.

3.4.4 Education

I expected to find a positive relationship between education and both civic and political engagement, and for both volunteer and fundraising opportunities, since observational data suggests more educated people have more positive salient considerations of “P”, “I”, and “B”. However, these trends are not evident in the data, which suggests imbalances in these variables of the calculus may not be as large as observational studies suggest, and rather differences in participation have mostly to do with different amounts of solicitation. This survey levels the participatory playing field. Again, whether the less educated would respond at similar rates to actual solicitations remains an open question.

As with women and older respondents, I expected respondents who are more educated to be less responsive to the social exchange and civic duty appeals, since they more likely already held intangible benefits as positive considerations. I also expected them to be less responsive to the efficacy/mission appeal, since they likely already held collective contingent benefit considerations as positive ones.

While I did not find any significant differences with respect to the social exchange or efficacy/mission appeals, with respect to volunteering for the Food Kitchen, the less educated responded more positively to the civic duty appeal (p=.028). Those with some college experience or a lesser education were 18 percentage points more likely to express a willingness to volunteer as a result of the appeal, whereas those with a two year
college degree or more were only 8 percentage points more likely to do so. On the other hand, the civic duty appeal resulted in significant backlash for the less educated with respect to the Good Governance volunteer solicitation (17 percentage points, p=.068). The effect was positive but statistically insignificant for the more educated (7 percentage points, p=.377). I take this as evidence that those with more education are in fact more likely to see political volunteering as an obligation, and that the appeal activated a latent negative consideration for less educated targets. Interestingly, the civic duty appeal resulted in a statistically significant boost in willingness to donate to the Good Governance campaign among more educated respondents (14 percentage points, p=.044), and had a negligible negative impact among less educated respondents (2 percentage points, p=.794). This could mean that the appeal served to activate a latent positive consideration among more educated respondents.

3.4.5 Race

The theoretical framework I developed in Chapter 2 leads me to hypothesize that whites, Latinos, and African-Americans should participate at similar rates for each solicitation, when controlling for other dimensions along which they vary. This is because race itself should not contribute to more positive or negative considerations for any terms in the calculus of engagement. However, the results, which are reported in Figure 3.6 suggest that minorities, and especially African-Americans were more likely to express a willingness to participate. African-Americans were significantly more likely than whites to respond favorably to all but the Food Kitchen Volunteer opportunity, with the differences ranging from 15% for the Food Kitchen fundraising (p=.056) to 37% for
the Reading Program (p=.000). Blacks were also significantly more likely than Latinos to express a willingness to volunteer for the Reading Program solicitation (27%, p=.036). While none of the differences achieve statistical significance (which could be due to the small number of Latinos in the study), Latinos expressed a greater willingness to participate than whites for each of the scenarios (with the differences ranging from 3% for the Food Kitchen volunteer solicitation to 18% for the Good Governance volunteer opportunity). These results are encouraging for those who want to lessen participatory gaps, though which factors in the calculus led to more positive considerations for African-Americans and Latinos remains unclear.

Figure 3.6: Volunteer and Donor Propensity by Race

Note: The lines represent the 95% confidence intervals surrounding each estimate, which are based on predictions derived from logit analyses that include all variables from Table 3.3.

Finally, if the group identity appeal is effective for minorities in the study (i.e., the appeal introduces positive “Bg” considerations, the half of respondents who receive the
vignette that ascribes benefit to students of their own race or ethnicity should report a higher likelihood of volunteering than the half who receives no racial/ethnic cue. In addition, whites in the treatment group might be less likely to express a willingness to participate since the reference is to an out-group rather than an in-group (i.e., the consideration could be taken as negative, rather than positive).

I expected the group identity appeal to work for Latinos and African-Americans (i.e., increase perceptions of $B_g$) and potentially create backlash for whites (i.e., decrease perceptions of $B_g$), however, the sample size for these subgroups made it very unlikely that differences would achieve statistical significance. They are, however, in the direction I hypothesized. These results are reported in Figure 3.7. Whites assigned to the treatment condition, which read “minority students,” were 5% less likely than those assigned to the standard condition, which simply read “students,” to express a willingness to volunteer for the Reading Program. African-Americans in the treatment condition were 7% more likely to express a willingness to volunteer and Latinos were 11% more likely to express a willingness to volunteer, compared to their counterparts assigned to the standard condition. While the confidence intervals are much too large to conclude that the group identity appeal worked for minorities and/or induced backlash for whites, these results are suggestive.
3.4.6 Social Capital

Three variables on the CCES can potentially serve as proxies for social capital. These include church attendance, union membership, and blood donation. My hypothesis is that people who go to church, are union members, and donate blood have higher levels of social capital (and hence more positive “I” and “Bc” considerations), and so they should express a greater willingness to participate. This also leads me to hypothesize that appeals from these categories (i.e., social exchange, civic duty, and mission) have the potential to work better for their counterparts. This, of course, depends on whether their counterparts on the whole have latent values that match the appeals, and thus the appeals themselves introduce positive considerations. To this point, the values match appears to have been the case most with respect to the Food Kitchen volunteer solicitation. Below, I
examine overall patterns and patterns with respect to the specific intangible benefit appeals for each proxy of social capital.

3.4.6.1 Church Attendance

The evidence with respect to the relationship between religiosity and civic engagement is mixed. Observational studies repeatedly find a positive relationship between the two (e.g., Putnam 2000), which some have argued is due to the principles of altruism they learn while attending (i.e., more positive “I,” and “Bc” considerations) (e.g., Toppe and Kirsch 2003). However, previous experimental studies find no such relationship with respect to giving (e.g., Bekkers 2007). Others have argued that differences in participation can be largely explained by differences in densities of social networks. Members develop extensive networks at church, which make it such that churchgoers are more likely to be asked to participate, and fellow congregants exert some degree of social monitoring (“Ic” considerations) (Putnam and Campbell 2010). These experiments remove this factor, and so they serve as a good test of these competing theories. If I detect differences based on church attendance, it is likely due to differences in values (“I”). The results from Table 3.3 and Figure 3.8 support this interpretation, at least with respect to the Food Kitchen solicitations.
The results suggest that churchgoers were significantly more likely to express a willingness to volunteer for and donate to the Food Kitchen. For example, the volunteer rate is 74% among those attending services more than once a week compared to 42% among those who never attend services (p=.000). Similarly, those attending more than once a week were 80% likely to express a willingness to give to the Food Kitchen, whereas only 58% of those who never attend services did so. While the results trend in the same direction for the Reading Program and two political scenarios, none achieved statistical significance. These results provide some support for the hypothesis that altruistic principles explain why religious people participate in civic causes at higher rates, at least those that truly involve “helping one’s neighbor.”
As with female, older, and more educated respondents, I expected churchgoers to be less responsive to intangible benefit and efficacy/mission appeals, since they are more likely to already hold these as positive salient considerations. In the case of volunteering for the Food Kitchen, this was the case. The civic duty appeal generated only a 6 percentage point boost among those who attend services once or twice a month or more (p=.519), and a 23 percentage point boost among those who attend a few times a year or less frequently (p=.002). Similarly, the efficacy/mission appeal generated a 17 percentage point boost among those who attend more frequently (p=.030) and did not generate a boost among those who attend more frequently (-0.5 percentage points, p=.953).

3.4.6.2 Union Membership

I also use union membership as a proxy for social capital. If other measures of group membership were available, I would have used those as well. Union members responded at a higher rate for each of the solicitations, however the only statistically significant difference is for the Reading Program, for which they were 13 percentage points more likely to express a willingness to volunteer than their non-union counterparts. These results, which are displayed in Table 3.3 and Figure 3.9, lend support to the hypothesis that those with greater levels of social capital should be more likely to express a willingness to participate.
Figure 3.9: Volunteer and Donor Propensity by Union Membership

Note: The lines represent the 95% confidence intervals surrounding each estimate, which are based on predictions derived from logit analyses that include all variables from Table 3.3.

I have argued that those with more social capital are likely to have more positive and salient considerations of intangible and collective contingent benefits. Thus, the social exchange, civic duty, and efficacy/mission appeals should actually work better for their counterparts, which in this case are non-union members. This was only the case with respect to the social exchange appeal. The results are displayed in Figure 3.10.
Figure 3.10: Effectiveness of Social Exchange Appeal by Union Membership

Note: The lines represent the 95% confidence intervals surrounding each estimate, which are based on predictions derived from logit analysis controlling for imbalanced covariates.

In general, non-union members responded positively to the treatment, while union members responded negatively. The interaction between union membership and treatment is statistically significant with respect to the Food Kitchen (p=.050) and Reading Program (p=.040) volunteer solicitations. I argue that this is because the social exchange appeal was accepted by both groups as a positive consideration (i.e., about 80% in each group), but it was more likely to activate a latent consideration for non-union members. For a vast majority of union members, the appeal might have been a redundant positive consideration (and hence net neutral) and for the remaining union members (i.e., those who did not say “yes” to the social exchange appeal) the appeal might have been a
negative consideration. This could explain overall negative effects for union members, though only statistically so for the Reading Program (p=.044).

3.4.6.3 Blood Donors

Finally, I expected blood donors to be more likely to express a willingness to participate, due to their hypothesized greater levels of social capital. The results, which are displayed in Figure 3.11, are decidedly mixed.

![Figure 3.11: Volunteer and Donor Propensity by Blood Donor Status](image)

Expressed willingness to volunteer and/or donate was higher among blood donors for the two Good Governance scenarios, statistically so for the volunteer solicitation (15%, p=.038). The rate was also statistically significantly higher among blood donors for the Reading Program volunteer solicitation (11%, p=.077). However, rates were lower
among blood donors for the two Food Kitchen scenarios, though the differences are not statistically significant. These results either suggest that those with higher social capital are not always more likely to participate when opportunities are leveled or that blood donation is not a good proxy for social capital. In addition, while all of the results with respect to blood donor status and specific appeals were null, the trend with respect to the civic duty appeal and the Food Kitchen volunteer solicitation also point in the direction of the appeal favoring non-blood donors, who gained 17 percentage points as a result of the appeal (p=.012), whereas blood donors only gained 1 percentage point (p=.927).

3.5 Conclusion

Most people are not susceptible to incentives organizations can typically offer, but those on the cusp of participating are. Thus, discovering which appeals work best in specific contexts is of value to both academics and practitioners. In this chapter, I tested appeals from most categories in the “calculus of engagement” on a representative sample of the United States population. While limited, because appeals and responses are hypothetical rather than actual, the results lend preliminary support to the theoretical framework I proposed in Chapter 2.

First, the appeals did not perform uniformly well, as my theory predicts. Their relative success depended on context. For example, the civic duty appeal generated significantly more favorable responses in the Food Kitchen volunteer scenario (compared to the control group), and had a negative (though statistically insignificant) impact in the Food Kitchen and Good Governance fundraising scenarios. I argue that this was due to the fact that more people’s values match in the volunteer scenario (i.e., they agree that
volunteering for something like a Food Kitchen is a civic duty but they do not think
donating money to it or a political organization is), and for those for whom the
consideration was latent rather than salient, mobilization was possible. For fundraising,
the results suggest that a consequential subset of respondents took the appeal as a
negative, rather than positive consideration.

I made a similar argument for the negative performance of the solidarity appeal
for donating to the Good Governance campaign. Since a social opportunity is not actually
present when a person donates money rather than time, the appeal likely introduced a
negative, rather than a positive or neutral, consideration for a substantial subset of
respondents.

In the case of the efficacy/mission appeal, the results suggest that it worked better
for both volunteer solicitations than for the two fundraising solicitations. In this case, I
argued that the appeal served for most as an update for an existing salient consideration,
and only in the case of volunteering could one be led to believe that his involvement
would actually affect the outcome.

The results from the second part of the chapter also lend support to my theory. I
argued that men, younger respondents, less educated respondents, and those with lower
levels of social capital should be more susceptible to contingent collective benefit appeals
(i.e., the efficacy/mission appeal in this case) and intangible benefit appeals (i.e., the
social exchange and civic duty appeals), in cases where their latent values are thought to
match the appeal. I argued that their counterparts were more likely to hold these
considerations as salient ones without reference to the appeals, and thus they would not
be impacted by them (i.e., the considerations introduced by the appeals are redundant).
The match between values and appeals appears to have been present for these subgroups only with respect to volunteering for the Food Kitchen. Men, younger respondents, and non-union members, were especially responsive to the social exchange appeal for this solicitation. In addition, men, the less educated, those who do not attend church frequently, and people who do not donate blood were especially responsive to the civic duty appeal, compared to their counterparts, and those who do not attend church frequently were significantly more responsive to the efficacy/mission appeal than their counterparts who attend frequently.

In addition to speaking to my hypotheses about overall and subgroup responsiveness to specific appeals, the results from this chapter also speak to my hypotheses regarding disparities in participation, which I have argued could exist largely because of unequal opportunities to participate. That is, different subgroups of the population are recruited to be volunteers and donors at different rates. When opportunities for participation are leveled (as is the case with the hypothetical scenarios used in this chapter), many of these disparities disappear. Given that the scenarios are hypothetical rather than actual, the obvious question remains as to whether certain demographic groups are more likely to overestimate the extent to which they would actually participate. The next chapter addresses this concern and examines subgroup responses to actual appeals in the field.
Registering to vote is a well-documented hurdle to electoral participation (Highton and Wolfinger 1998; Timpone 1998). Rock the Vote is a leader among organizations dedicated to youth participation and has registered more young people than any other organization over the past two decades. During the summer of 2010, the organization conducted an email campaign to recruit members of their Listserv in five states to volunteer to register voters at concerts, bars, and block parties, among other locations. The purpose of the email was to make a recipient aware that Rock the Vote would be operating in his or her state during the 2010 election cycle and to induce present or future engagement, since the email was only one of several to be sent.

Volunteering for several hours at a time is a large commitment compared to other types of engagement (e.g., signing a petition). Participation of this type is exceptional, even among those who self-select into receiving communication from an organization. For most recipients, the number of negative considerations would dramatically outweigh the number of positive considerations, no matter the appeal. Thus, Rock the Vote did not expect to generate high rates of compliance with a single email appeal. At the same time, gaining even a handful of volunteers per state was perceived to be very useful, since a single field organizer was sent to each state and he or she was expected to grow the
operation organically. For those on the cusp of participating, the right appeal could convert them from an abstainer to a participator.

Rock the Vote was interested in learning what types of appeals are most effective at recruiting volunteers, and so the organization agreed to experimentally vary the content of the email. Ten different email appeals were used, which allows for the direct comparison of most of the incentives discussed in Chapter 2. The availability of demographic information for a sizable portion of the list allows for the detection of heterogeneous treatment effects within demographic categories of interest. The results from this chapter, with respect to the effectiveness of appeals in general, and with respect to specific subgroups, serve as a complement to those presented in the previous chapter regarding hypothetical solicitations. To the extent that these results replicate the former when my theory predicts that they should, these results serve as proof that testing in the hypothetical is a worthwhile endeavor.

I begin this chapter with a discussion of the setting and protocol for the experiment. I next discuss the method used for the analyses that follow. I then outline my theoretical expectations about which appeals I expect to perform best and worst, based on the theoretical framework outlined in Chapter 2, and subsequently compare treatment responsiveness across appeals. I discuss the extent to which the empirical results match my theoretical expectations. I then explore whether different subgroups of interest were especially responsive to some appeals or others, again testing the hypotheses generated in Chapter 2. I conclude with a summary of the main findings.
4.1 Setting and Protocol

Rock the Vote is a nonpartisan organization that seeks to engage young people in the political process. Staff and volunteers register young voters at concerts and other events, on high school and college campuses, and online. When voters register, they also can sign up to be on Rock the Vote’s email list to receive election reminders and information about issues and volunteer opportunities. In addition, Rock the Vote’s website provide links to the same. Before sending field organizers to five specific states in June to gear up for the 2010 General Election, Rock the Vote planned to send an email solicitation recruiting 18-35 year-olds on its email list in the five states. The purpose of the email was to recruit targets to join the Rock the Vote Street Teams in their communities and on their campuses, which would register young people to vote.

The email list for the five states (Colorado, Florida, North Carolina, Ohio, and Pennsylvania) was randomly divided into nine different treatment conditions and a control condition. Originally, the list contained 204,613 people, but only 126,618 remained after an email system algorithm removed bad addresses and opt-outs just before the emails deployed. For each recipient, the email was sent from the state coordinator, but the email only mentioned that the person was the state coordinator in the signature of the email. What appeared in the Inbox was the state coordinator’s first and last name, followed by a comma and “Rock the Vote.” Subject lines for the email varied by appeal. The body of the email was identical across all treatment conditions, except for a statement that appeared in bold in the center of the email and a side box that contained the same statement with an action button that read “Volunteer,” which could be clicked
by recipients. The email was sent on June 1, 2010. The layout can be viewed in Figure 4.1.

Add info@rockthevote.com to your address book to ensure that you continue to receive our emails.

Dear Jason,

There are big elections across the country in 2010. And here in Colorado, with your help, Rock the Vote is going to register young people to vote at concerts and festivals, bars and block parties, on campus and off. Will you join the Rock the Vote Street Team in your community or on your campus?

You'll get to see the best shows for free and do important work at the same time!

Click here to sign up to volunteer with Rock the Vote in Colorado.

Rock the Vote is committed to engaging young people in Colorado. This year we're focusing on people who have turned 18 since the 2008 election and those who have moved - they need to re-register at their new address! Be part of the movement to get young people registered to vote and back to the polls in 2010.

We already have a few great events planned, so click here to check out the events and sign up to volunteer.

I'm looking forward to working with you.

Sincerely,

Kyle
Colorado State Coordinator

This message was sent to: jason@rockthevote.com.

You may manage your account or unsubscribe at http://www.rockthevote.com/unsubscribe.

Figure 4.1: Sample Email
The control condition also was identical to the treatment conditions except that it did not contain the additional bolded statement in either the body of the email or in the side box. However, it did contain the action button that simply read “Volunteer.” The control condition was the standard version of the email that Rock the Vote would have used for everyone had they not agreed to perform the experiment. Each of the nine treatment conditions was constructed to emphasize one of the specific motivations discussed in Chapter 2. These include an efficacy, material, and solidarity appeal, as well as two contingent benefit appeals – mission and awareness of need. These also include several appeals from the internal intangible benefit category: civic duty, social exchange, descriptive social norm, and peer group norm.
Table 4.1 below gives the wording of each treatment appeal’s subject line, as well as the additional text that appeared in the body of the email and above the action button. These are grouped by category, in order of the rational calculus equation defined in Chapter 2. Note that the number of people in each condition varies slightly across conditions due to the removals made by the algorithm before deployment.
TABLE 4.1

LIST OF APPEALS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Appeal</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Subject Line</th>
<th>Email Body and Side Box</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Standard</td>
<td>13,334</td>
<td>Volunteer with Rock the Vote</td>
<td>[Nothing additional]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Efficacy</td>
<td>13,341</td>
<td>Make a difference: give your community a voice</td>
<td>Everyone deserves a say in politics. You have the power to make new voices heard!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mission</td>
<td>13,303</td>
<td>Move our country in the right direction</td>
<td>Move our country in the right direction by getting your peers involved in politics!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contingent Benefits</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness of Need</td>
<td>13,337</td>
<td>Millions of young people need to be registered</td>
<td>Help us get the millions of young people who aren’t registered to step up!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Material</td>
<td>6,656</td>
<td>Want to attend events for free?</td>
<td>You’ll get to see the best shows for free and do important work at the same time!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solidarity</td>
<td>13,354</td>
<td>Have fun and do good</td>
<td>We have a lot of fun and do important work at the same time!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civic duty</td>
<td>13,294</td>
<td>Step up for democracy</td>
<td>Democracy only works when people are engaged, so step up!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intangible Benefits</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Exchange</td>
<td>13,264</td>
<td>Registered to vote? It’s your turn to register others</td>
<td>Remember that someone probably helped you register to vote. Now it’s your turn to help others!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Descriptive Norm</td>
<td>13,315</td>
<td>Thousands are getting involved</td>
<td>Many like you are getting involved in this important work!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer Group Norm</td>
<td>13,420</td>
<td>Thousands of young people in [state] are getting involved</td>
<td>Many young people in [state] are getting involved in this important work!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Some appeals more clearly tapped the intended motivation than others. In some cases, this is due to the inherently blurry boundaries between the motivations themselves, and in other cases, this is due to a compromise between the organization and researcher to write appeals that were satisfactory to both. In fact, one compromise entailed using a half sample size for the material incentive, since Rock the Vote was uncomfortable using it but it was a critical appeal for the test from a research standpoint. Another involved adding “do good” and “doing important work” to the solidarity appeal, which is essentially a purposive layer.

Another reason some appeals more strongly tap the intended motivation is due to the nature of the solicitation. While arguably email can convey material and solidarity benefits reasonably well, its ability to convey intangible benefits may not be as strong. Email lacks in-person interaction and the ability to apply surveillance, so to the extent that the intangible benefit appeals rely implicitly or explicitly on social monitoring they might be a weak stimulus. The purpose of the experiment is to test the relative strength of various types of stimuli, and so these appeals were not excluded at the start. I leave open as an empirical question whether psychological appeals can work in the relatively disconnected world of email. Given the evidence regarding social exchange and civic duty from the previous chapter, these appeals warrant exploration in the field.

The body of the standard email, which is retained in each of the treatment conditions, attempts to elicit participation through several of the mechanisms discussed above. The strongest of these is probably the social component. The email asks the recipient to join a “team” and indicates that the team will register voters at concerts, bars, and block parties. In addition, the email tells the recipient that the effort will focus on
those who have turned 18 since the 2008 Election and those who have moved and need to re-register at their new addresses. Thus, one could argue that this makes the recipient aware of the need to help. This means that the bodies of the “treatment” emails were not pure in the sense that they only invoked the experimentally assigned incentive. It is possible that the substance of the email around the experimental variation interacts with the experimental variation itself. For instance, an appeal might be less effective when it is also stated elsewhere, or it could be more effective if stated elsewhere because the message is consistent. While the results of one experiment cannot support these types of assessments conclusively, the potential interaction between each appeal and the rest of the message should not be ignored, and I reference these in my discussion of the results.

4.2 Analytical Method

In the analysis below, I first examine the overall effectiveness of the various appeals, using logit models that include dummy variables for each appeal (with the standard condition serving as the reference group). I then explore heterogeneous treatment effects based on the following demographic categories of interest: gender, age, income, and race/ethnicity. I report the results from logit models that includes all of these variables, as well as the results from models that specify interaction terms for hypotheses regarding the interplay of demographic categories and specific appeals. The latter analyses are performed separately for each subgroup of interest.

Since both the subject line and content of the email varied by condition, there are two experimental stimuli. However, there is no foolproof way of tracking open rates, and
so I do not use open rates as a dependent variable in the analyses. \footnote{The typical method for tracking open rates is to embed a tiny invisible graphic (i.e., one pixel by one pixel) in the email. An email registers as having been opened when the image is downloaded from the web server. There are two problems, however. First, many email programs have a “preview pane” option wherein users register as having “seen” the image even if their only intention is to delete the email. The bigger and more prevalent problem is that most email programs do not display images by default. The user has to click the option to display images or change his or her default setting to display them automatically. Users that do neither never register as having “seen” the image but could have read the email top to bottom. For instance, one third of those clicking through the email from the next chapter did not register as having opened the email by the web server.}

Upon reading the email, a target can do nothing, click-through to sign-up, or click on the unsubscribe link. Thus, I examine both clickthroughs and unsubscribe rates in the analyses below. If a target chooses to click through, he or she is not presented with another stimulus but still has to decide whether to submit the signup form or not, and so signups are another outcome measure. \footnote{The ultimate dependent variables of interest are whether the target actually shows up to volunteer, how often, and for how long. Unfortunately these data are not available. It is possible that rates of actual volunteerism of those who sign up might differ across conditions, but the best proxy for these variables is whether the target submitted the signup form.} Once a target clicked on the link or action button in the email, he or she was brought to a Rock the Vote webpage that repeated the information included in the general email body and instructed the target to fill out his or her first and last name, email address, city, state, zip code, phone number, cell phone number, and date of birth. Targets could choose which events to sign up for of those currently available or they could check a box that indicated they would like to volunteer but could not attend any of the current events. Only the name, email address, city, state, zip code, and phone number fields were required. A person is counted as having signed up if he or she filled out the required information and clicked “Submit.”

While clickthroughs and signups are good measures of an appeal’s strength, whether a target unsubscribes is also an outcome of interest, since it can signal backlash.
and since organizations want to keep as many people linked in as possible. In addition, the size of an organization’s list can be used to signal its strength to funders and elected officials. However, unsubscribes are not as costly as signups are beneficial. That is, organizations are willing to tolerate unsubscribes because they signal a low-value “member” who would likely have never engaged anyway.\footnote{12}

4.3 Overall Treatment Responsiveness

In Chapter 2, I argued that the effectiveness of an appeal depends on several factors. First, it depends on the extent to which it is viewed by targets as a positive or negative consideration, and the strength of the consideration relative to others in a target’s calculus. Second, the effectiveness depends on the extent to which the consideration is new, is redundant with an existing salient consideration, updates an existing salient consideration, or activates an existing latent consideration. These two sets of factor vary based on context, which in this case involves a youth-centered political organization reaching out to members, who are predominately young, via email for a labor-intensive volunteer opportunity.

Since targets of the solicitation are age 35 and under, I expect the solidarity appeal to perform relatively well. The body of the email implies a social component of the volunteer opportunity, and so the solidarity appeal most likely serves to update an

\footnote{12 This discussion suggests that one cannot simply model the utility of an appeal to an organization as a function of unsubscribes subtracted from signups. Instead, unsubscribes should be analyzed as a separate dependent variable of interest to be used in conjunction with the other dependent variables when discussing how effective various appeals are. In practice, organizations have to decide what weight to attribute to signups versus unsubscribes.}
existing salient consideration. I expect that generally members can be expected to agree that they might “have fun” by getting involved, which is what the appeal states. Thus, the consideration is likely a positive one for most, though it may not be much stronger than what is already implied in the standard message.

I also expect the material appeal to perform relatively well. While the test does not contain any other material appeals, attending concerts for free is likely a strong material incentive, and one that few young people would view as a negative. While one might gather from the standard message that she would not be expected to pay for his own ticket to a concert for which he agreed to register voters, it may not occur to every target (i.e., it may not be a salient consideration), and so the explicit reference could boost participation rates by introducing a new positive consideration, activating a latent consideration, or by updating a salient consideration to be more positive and stronger.

The success of the efficacy appeal is difficult to predict. The appeal states that a target can “make a difference” and suggest that “you have the power,” but whether the appeal serves as an ego-boost (i.e., activates a latent positive or updates an existing positive consideration) or serves to remind a target that he is actually fairly powerless (i.e., activates a latent negative consideration or updates a salient positive consideration to be less positive) is debatable and the strength of the consideration is as well.

At the same time, the effectiveness of an efficacy appeal also depends on a target’s salient considerations of contingent benefits. I have argued that efficacy appeals should work better when the target values the collective outcome for himself, for others with whom he identifies, and/or for others in general. If a person does not find the outcome compelling for at least one of these groups, no boost in efficacy should result in
increased participation. In the rational choice model from Chapter 2, if each of the “B” terms equals zero, then the product of them and any value of “P” (efficacy) will still equal zero.

On the one hand, registering like-minded individuals to vote could indirectly improve the likelihood of electing candidates for office who enact policies that benefit the target. However, it is unlikely that targets actually hold this self-interested, positive consideration as a salient one, let alone a strong one. Thus, I assume that “B_i” is not a salient positive consideration.\(^\text{13}\)

In addition, while it is clear from the appeals that many young people are not registered to vote, arguably their lives will not likely be dramatically impacted if they do not register (i.e., Rock the Vote is not, for instance, asking targets to provide food for people so that they will not starve). Thus, “B_g”, the benefit accrued to each young voter being registered is not likely to be a salient consideration.

Of the three contingent benefit categories, “B_c”, which in this case is the benefit afforded to society as a whole, is likely the strongest. Presumably those who self-select into receiving emails from an organization like Rock the Vote care about politics and their impact on society. However, the consideration may not be very strong, and targets may not believe that getting the millions of unregistered young voters registered is an effective way to influence politics. Thus, “B_c” considerations may or may not be salient for targets and they may or may not be positive. Given these assessments about the three “B” considerations in this context, average perceptions of “B” could be positive,

\(^{13}\) In fact, the lack of positive, salient “B_i” considerations might help to explain why participation rates are so low.
negative, or neutral. Thus, the efficacy appeal could perform better, worse, or similarly compared to the standard appeal.

My hypotheses about the potential effectiveness of the two contingent benefit appeals follow the same logic as those about efficacy. If existing efficacy considerations are negative and/or not salient, which is likely the case in this context, appeals to contingent benefits should not work well. A target might expect to register a few dozen people during a volunteer opportunity, but there are millions of people who need to be registered. Thus, the contingent benefit appeals should be weak, given that considerations of efficacy are likely negative.

While existing research speaks to the importance of intangible (psychological) benefits for participation, I expect the social exchange and civic duty appeals to perform relatively poorly, since they lack social monitoring and might create backlash for those whose existing psychological motives and perceptions of self and others does not match the stated appeal. For instance, the social exchange appeal suggests that someone probably helped the target register to vote, and thus he should help others. Certainly this was not the case for every target.

Similarly, the civic duty appeal suggests that the target should “step up” because democracy only works when people are engaged. However, many might think they’ve fulfilled their civic duty simply by getting to the ballot box themselves. For those who consider this type of participation an obligation, the consideration might already be salient, and so the appeal would be redundant, whereas for those who do not consider it an obligation, these appeals might activate a latent negative consideration. The
descriptive norm and peer group norm appeals, while in the intangible benefit category, are less likely to backfire since they do not reference a specific obligation.

Given the discussion above, I expect the material and solidarity appeals to perform better than the standard appeal, and the other appeals to perform only as well or worse. At this point, it is worth emphasizing again that a vast majority of targets will not click through and signup. Typical clickthrough rates for solicitations of this type are about 1%. The solicitation is relatively weak (email) and the commitment requested is relatively high (in-person volunteering for several hours). Results are reported in Table 4.2, and Figure 4.2 through Figure 4.4.14

14 The substantive results for these analyses do not change significantly with the inclusion of control variables.
### TABLE 4.2
DIFFERENTIAL EFFECTIVENESS OF APPEALS (RELATIVE TO STANDARD APPEAL)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Clickthrough</th>
<th>Signup</th>
<th>Unsubscribe</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Efficacy</strong></td>
<td>-.767***</td>
<td>.222</td>
<td>.119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.233)</td>
<td>(.670)</td>
<td>(.135)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mission</strong></td>
<td>-1.117***</td>
<td>-.691</td>
<td>.068</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.264)</td>
<td>.866</td>
<td>(.137)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Awareness of Need</strong></td>
<td>-.661***</td>
<td>-.000</td>
<td>.009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.225)</td>
<td>(.707)</td>
<td>(.139)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Material</strong></td>
<td>.487**</td>
<td>1.255**</td>
<td>.121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.196)</td>
<td>(.627)</td>
<td>(.164)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Solidarity</strong></td>
<td>-.768***</td>
<td>-.694</td>
<td>.271**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.233)</td>
<td>(.866)</td>
<td>(.131)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Civic Duty</strong></td>
<td>-.969***</td>
<td>-.284</td>
<td>.078</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.250)</td>
<td>(.763)</td>
<td>(.137)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social Exchange</strong></td>
<td>-1.493***</td>
<td>Dropped¹</td>
<td>-.130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.307)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(.144)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Descriptive Norm</strong></td>
<td>-1.066***</td>
<td>-1.385</td>
<td>.180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.259)</td>
<td>(1.118)</td>
<td>(.134)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Peer Group Norm</strong></td>
<td>-.485**</td>
<td>.804</td>
<td>.139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.212)</td>
<td>(.601)</td>
<td>(.135)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>N</strong></td>
<td>126,618</td>
<td>113,354</td>
<td>91,823</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Logit analysis performed.
Linearized standard errors reported in parentheses.
* denotes p<.10, ** denotes p<.05, *** denotes p<.01
¹The appeal generated zero sign-ups, so the variable predicts failure perfectly and cannot be included in the model.
Figure 4.2: Clickthrough Rates
Note: The bars represent the rate of activity for each condition and the lines represent the 95% confidence intervals surrounding each estimate.

Figure 4.3: Signup Rates
Note: The bars represent the rate of activity for each condition and the lines represent the 95% confidence intervals surrounding each estimate.
As expected, clickthrough and sign-up rates were extremely low. On average, only 2 people in every 1,000 clicked through. Only 37 people out of 126,618 actually signed up to volunteer (0.03%). This is 3 out of every 10,000 targets. Given the nature of the solicitation and the extent of the commitment, however, these rates are not shocking.

Since sign-ups are most proximate to the actual outcome of interest (i.e., the number of volunteers who show up due to each treatment), it is most important to examine the differential effectiveness of appeals for this outcome. As Table 4.2 and Figure 4.3 demonstrate, the material appeal was the only one to result in significantly more signups than the standard appeal. It was nearly 4 times as effective, generating a 0.08 percentage point boost, when the baseline was 0.02% (p=.045). It was also significantly more effective than all but the efficacy and peer group norm appeals. These results lend credence to my hypothesis that the material incentive offered (attending concerts and events for free) was something of considerable value to the target audience.
It was likely a strong consideration for those on the cusp of participating who considered it a positive, and it was likely not a negative consideration for many.

The only two appeals to generate higher signup rates than the standard appeal (though neither statistically so) were the efficacy and peer group norm appeals. Interestingly, both of these appeals generated significantly fewer clickthroughs than the standard appeal. This could suggest that these appeals generated backlash among a subset of targets (which resulted in lower clickthrough rates), but activated a latent positive and/or made an existing positive consideration stronger among another subset of targets (resulting in higher signup rates). This is evidenced by the fact that, conditional on clicking through, those who received the peer group norm appeal were significantly more likely to sign up (18%, p=.010) and those assigned to the efficacy appeal were nearly so (12%, p=.118).

While the coefficients for each of the other appeals (i.e., mission, awareness of need, solidarity, civic duty, social exchange, and descriptive social norm) were negative for signups, relative to the standard appeal, none of these differences were statistically significant. However, every appeal but the material appeal generated significantly fewer clickthroughs than the standard appeal. Thus, as with the efficacy and peer group norm appeals, these appear to have created backlash among a subset of targets (again, resulting in fewer clickthroughs), but this backlash was balanced against a set of targets for whom the appeal actually generated higher signup rates (though still lower than signup rates among those in the standard condition).

Interestingly, while the appeals may have been taken as negative or redundant by a sizable portion of targets on the cusp, only the solidarity appeal produced a significantly
higher unsubscribe rate than the control. Perhaps the appeals were worded innocuously enough that even if they tipped targets away from clicking through, they did not cause them to actively disengage, though it is worth noting that the standard appeal did generate the second to lowest number of unsubscribes.15

Before turning to an analysis of subgroup effects, I want to highlight another interesting finding. The peer group norm appeal, while it did not generate significantly more signups than the standard appeal, did generate significantly more signups than the descriptive social norm appeal (0.06%, p=.038), among others. It also generated significantly more clickthroughs than the social norm appeal (0.12, p=.037). Since the two appeals were identical except that the peer group norm referenced “young people” in one’s state rather than people “like you,” these results speak directly to the question of whether group identities can be leveraged to induce greater levels of participation. Age cohort is generally thought to be a relatively weak identity (Zukin et al. 2006), and while I am not aware of any research related to state identities, I suspect they are even weaker. Thus, these results are encouraging. The danger with both appeals, and perhaps one of the reasons neither outperformed the standard appeal, is that one might see others’ involvement as a substitute to one’s own (i.e., “crowding out”). However, these results suggest that when this type of appeal is used, reference to a peer-group might help to boost overall rates of participation. The results from the subgroup analysis below regarding age lend further support to this conclusion.

15 Curiously, the unsubscribe rate was lowest for the social exchange appeal, which was the worst performing with respect to positive engagement (i.e., clickthroughs and sign-ups). This might be due to the fact that targets were least likely to open the social exchange email and so fewer targets had the opportunity to be turned off by the content of the email body.
4.4 Heterogeneous Treatment Responsiveness

While civic organizations can certainly benefit by discovering which appeals work best overall, learning whether specific subpopulations are especially susceptible to specific appeals provides added value. This type of analysis can help organizations determine whether and how to segment their lists for different messaging to maximize recruitment gains. From a theoretical standpoint, it can reveal how the participation gap might be reduced through mobilization. I examine overall propensities to participate based on several demographic categories (i.e., gender, age, income, and race),\(^\text{16}\) as well as relative propensities to participate based on which incentives were offered. Table 4.3 presents the results from logit models that include the available demographic information, without distinguishing between appeals. These are referenced in each subgroup section below.

\(^{16}\) The demographic data used in the following analysis come from Catalist, a company that collects demographic, commercial, and political information and provides it to organizations who subscribe. The analysis for race is limited to the 78% of the universe for whom data was available and who classified as white, African-American, or Latino. All other races are excluded because the sample sizes are too small for meaningful analysis. The analysis for gender is limited to the 80% of the universe for whom data was available, the analysis for age is limited to the available 79%, and the analysis for income is limited to the available 81%.
TABLE 4.3
CORRELATES OF PARTICIPATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Clickthrough</th>
<th>Signup</th>
<th>Unsubscribe</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>.405***</td>
<td>1.016*</td>
<td>-.069</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.150)</td>
<td>(.556)</td>
<td>(.073)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-.050***</td>
<td>-.261***</td>
<td>.046***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.017)</td>
<td>(.081)</td>
<td>(.008)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>-.000</td>
<td>-.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.000)</td>
<td>(.000)</td>
<td>(.000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>.103</td>
<td>-.040</td>
<td>-.259</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.280)</td>
<td>(1.039)</td>
<td>(.160)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>.302*</td>
<td>1.04**</td>
<td>-.376***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.180)</td>
<td>(.484)</td>
<td>(.115)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>91,823</td>
<td>91,823</td>
<td>91,823</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Logit analysis performed.
Linearized standard errors reported in parentheses.
* denotes p<.10, ** denotes p<.05, *** denotes p<.01

4.4.1 Gender

I first explore the differences in treatment responsiveness between men and women. Given their advantage over men with respect to “B”, “S”, and “I” (and only disadvantage with respect to “P”), I expected women to be more likely to participate. The results suggest that women were 1.5 times more likely to clickthrough (p=.006) and twice as likely to sign up (p=.068). They were also less likely to unsubscribe.

As for variation across appeals, I expected the solidarity appeal to work better for women than men since women report volunteering for social purposes at higher rates (e.g., Wuthnow 1995), but this hypothesis was not supported. I also expected the social exchange, civic duty, and awareness of need appeals to work better for men than women,
since the considerations were more likely to be redundant for women, but again, the analyses do not support these hypotheses.

4.4.2 Age

I next explore differences in treatment responsiveness based on age. All targets in the experiment were between the ages of 18 and 35, and so I only consider linear patterns. Since I expect older targets to have more positive considerations for “P”, “Bc”, and “Ii”, and only less positive considerations for “S”, I expected older targets to be more likely to participate. Contrary to this expectation, the youngest targets (age 18) were actually 2.4 times as likely to click through, 70 times more likely to sign up (p=.001), and 2.2 times less likely to unsubscribe (p=.000) as the oldest targets (age 35). This suggests that the advantage enjoyed by older citizens in observational data may have more to do with the higher likelihood of being asked than with values or resources. At the same time, since social motives tend to be stronger among the young, the fact that the email body of each appeal centered on the social aspect of the volunteer opportunity may have provided additional benefit to younger targets. Rock the Vote is also an organization that most people get involved with when they are younger and registering to vote. Older targets were more likely to be Listserv members who have simply never bothered to unsubscribe.

Regarding specific appeals, I expected younger targets to be more susceptible than older targets to the solidarity appeal, but this interactive effect was not present. I also expected the younger cohort to be substantially more susceptible to the following intangible benefit appeals: civic duty, social exchange, and descriptive social norms. However, I did not find evidence for any of these hypotheses.
I expect the peer group norm appeal to be more effective for younger targets, who should more readily identify as “young.” The data suggest that an 18 year-old was 21.7 times as likely to click through than an otherwise similar 35 year-old (p=.005). In comparison, for those assigned to the standard condition, an 18 year-old was only 1.8 times more likely to click through than a 35 year-old.

Since the awareness of need appeal also references “young people,” I expected it to perform better for the younger cohort too (i.e., by introducing more positive “B_g” considerations), which it did. The data suggest that an 18 year-old was 89 times as likely to click through for the awareness of need appeal than an otherwise similar 35 year-old (p=.001). In comparison, for those assigned to the standard condition, an 18 year-old was only 1.6 times as likely to click through.

### 4.4.3 Income

While individual-level income data were unavailable, block-level income data were. In the following analyses, I use block-level income as a proxy for each target’s income. As expected, since the solicitation is to volunteer time rather than money, I did not find any significant differences in participation due to income. I also expected the appeals to be equally effective for both groups except for the material appeal, which should be significantly more effective for less wealthy targets. However, this hypothesis was not supported by the data.

---

17 The average income was $48,473, with a standard deviation of $22,201.
4.4.4 Race

My theory predicts that participation rates should not vary by race, however, as in the hypothetical solicitations of the previous chapter, African-Americans were more likely to participate than whites. They were 1.4 times more likely to click through (p=.099), 3.0 times as likely to sign up (p=.032), and 1.5 times less likely to unsubscribe (p=.001). There are no statistically significant differences between whites and Latinos or between Latinos and African-Americans. Overall, these results suggest that mobilization itself serves to level disparities in participation, as hypothesized in Chapter 2, and with the results from the previous chapter, they suggest that African-Americans may actually be more likely to participate when opportunities are leveled. I cannot determine precisely why this is the case with the data at hand, though.

4.5 Conclusion

The only appeal that worked (i.e., resulted in significantly higher clickthrough and signup rates), compared to the standard appeal was the material appeal. Had only the standard appeal been used, one could expect a yield of 38 total signups across the five states, and had only the material appeal been used, one could expect a yield of 133 total signups. These estimates would suggest that on average, a state would have had 27 rather than 8 volunteers to initially draw from to register voters and recruit other volunteers at events. In practice, this is a sizable difference since a solid base is needed to get a registration drive off the ground initially.

While encouraging from a practical standpoint (i.e., the results reveal a clear directive for Rock the Vote in future solicitations), they are also somewhat discouraging
because many of the appeals not only failed to generate higher signup rates, but they actually generated fewer clickthroughs than the standard appeal. My theory allows for the possibility that any appeal can potentially be demobilizing, depending on the context. These results suggest that this may be more the rule than the exception. Every target has a different set of motives (Cermak et al. 1994; Van Slyke and Brooks 2005) and they attach different values to the same volunteer work (Serow and Dreyden 1990; Sundeen and Raskoff 1995). Implicitly, this suggests that every appeal is likely to result in backlash (i.e., negative considerations) for a subset of targets. For appeals that do not generate an equal or greater positive push for another subset of targets, as was the case for the material appeal here, the overall impact can be negative. The significantly lower clickthrough rates for every appeal but the material testify to this.

While there is little evidence to support most of my hypotheses regarding the effectiveness of specific appeals for specific subgroups, one subgroup finding warrants emphasis. I found support for my hypothesis that young people would be more responsive to the two appeals that cited “young people” – the peer group norm appeal (by boosting “I,”) and the awareness of need appeal (by boosting “Bg”). This is an important finding for future research and practice. It suggests that group identities (even those which are thought to be relatively weak) can be leveraged. However, this finding must also be viewed in light of the evidence that none but the material appeal provided a statistically significant boost in participation rates, compared to the standard appeal.

The general results from this experiment, together with the other experiments of this dissertation, begin to answer the question of which incentives work best in particular contexts. For instance, the material incentive of a T-shirt was ineffective in the
experiments of the previous chapter, but the material incentive of free concert tickets performed exceedingly well in this test. I argue that this difference is due to the strength of the appeal itself. Concert tickets are valued more by targets than t-shirts and thus can affect the calculus of a greater number of targets in a positive way.

To give another example of how the results from these chapters, together, allow for contextual interpretations, in this chapter I found that the social exchange and civic duty appeals performed terribly, whereas they performed very well with respect to Food Kitchen volunteerism in the previous chapter. I argue that these differences have to do with the ratios of people whose latent or salient considerations match the appeals. People feel more of an obligation to volunteer at a Food Kitchen, helping needy families, than they do registering young people who are well-off enough to attend concerts. Of course these interpretations are speculative and many more tests are needed to tease out contextual effects. Nonetheless, these experiments lend preliminary support to my theory and give priors for future testing in this area.

The results regarding specific subgroups are less bleak than those regarding the overall effectiveness of various appeals because they lend credence to my hypothesis that mobilization itself serves to level disparities in participation. While men ordinarily volunteer for political causes at higher rates than women, the reverse was actually true in this test. Similarly, middle-age people tend to participate at higher rates than young people for political causes, but again, the reverse was true in this test. At the same time, African-Americans were significantly more likely to participate than whites and whites were no more likely to participate than Latinos. In the previous chapter, I also found evidence that mobilization serves to level participatory gaps, but I warned that these
effects may be apparent in hypothetical scenarios but not in the field. The results from this chapter, which test appeals in real-world conditions, lend more support to this claim.
CHAPTER 5:
VOLUNTEERING TO MAKE GOTV CALLS

Just as voter registration, the topic of Chapter 4, is a central component of political participation, so too is mobilization. A massive body of experimental research speaks to the importance of mobilization for participation (Arceneaux 2005; Gerber and Green 2000; Green and Gerber 2004; Green et al. 2003; Nickerson 2005). For instance, a single knock on the door from a political campaign can increase the propensity of voting by as much as 9% (Gerber and Green 2000), and GOTV phone calls can also be effective. Particularly, calls from volunteers that are sufficiently personal have accounted for a 4% boost on average (Nickerson 2006), which is cost competitive with door-to-door canvassing.

In this chapter, I discuss the results from a field experiment conducted with a national progressive organization with a large email list just before the 2010 general election. The organization planned to send an email soliciting volunteers to make GOTV calls from home for progressive candidates across the country who were battling tough opponents. The organization asked for a time commitment of two hours, and volunteers could sign up to make calls for any day leading up to the election. As in the voter registration experiment, the commitment sought is relatively high compared to other forms of participation (e.g., contributing a few dollars or signing a petition). Thus, the
organization did not expect to generate high levels of participation. However, given that
the solicitation was nearly costless, any volunteer hours gained were meaningful.

Eight different email appeals were used, which allows for the direct comparison
of many of the incentives discussed in Chapter 2. I begin the chapter with a discussion of
the setting and protocol for the experiment. I next discuss the method used for the
analyses to follow. I then recall the specific hypotheses developed in Chapter 2 that apply
to the appeals in this chapter, compare treatment responsiveness across the appeals, and
discuss the extent to which the findings match my expectations. Demographic
information is unknown for the targets of the email. Thus, only overall differences across
treatments are reported. I conclude with a summary of the main findings.

5.1 Setting and Protocol

During the month of October 2010, a national progressive organization ran a
program wherein volunteers could sign up to make calls from home for progressive
candidates running in tight races across the country. On Wednesday October, 20th, the
chair of the organization sent an email to a list of 743,680 to ask targets to make calls for
one specific progressive candidate on the following Sunday. Recipients of the email
could also sign up to make calls on another day if they could not volunteer on Sunday.
Email variations were constructed to tap various incentives highlighted in academic
research. The subject line of the email stated how many calls had been made and then
said “and we’re just getting started.” The body of the email was plain in style, utilizing

---

18 The organization agreed to participate in the experiment and allow me to use the results only if I agreed to keep its identity anonymous. Thus, a copy of the email cannot be included.
the same size black Arial font throughout, except for the hyperlinks to participate, which appeared in blue, and the treatment variants, which appeared in bold.

The email first stated the number of calls that had already been made and the progressive candidates on whose behalf the calls were made. This section concluded with the following: “We’re making a huge difference in these races. With just 12 days left to win, we need all hands on deck to double our impact.” The email next stated on which candidate’s behalf volunteers would be calling on the following Sunday. To this point, the email was 152 words long. The email variations were stated next in bold just before the first opportunity for a recipient to click through to sign up. They were the only phrases to appear in bold. The next two lines provided hyperlinks, one for a target to click through to volunteer Sunday, and the other for a target to click through to volunteer for a different shift.

The next section of 95 words stated that making the calls was easy and volunteers would be trained by an organizer after signing up. It then reminded targets that Election Day was less than two weeks away and the program would be making 30,000 calls per day for its endorsed candidates. It concluded by asking whether the target would join the thousands of other members who had already made calls “in these critical last days.” Two more hyperlinks were provided for targets to click through, one to make calls for Sunday and the other to make calls later. A third hyperlink allowed targets to click through to donate $5 to the program if he or she could not make calls. The final statement suggested that “Democrats everywhere are getting fired up to vote and we know turnout will be high on Nov. 2nd.” It urged targets to keep up the momentum by volunteering to make calls.
Targets were randomly assigned to a control condition or one of seven treatment conditions: efficacy, mission, solidarity, identity, social pressure, civic duty, and peer group norm. Table 5.1 provides the text that appeared in bold for each appeal.

### TABLE 5.1

**LIST OF APPEALS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Appeal</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Email Body</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Standard</strong></td>
<td>92,965</td>
<td>[no additional text]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Efficacy</strong></td>
<td>92,966</td>
<td>We can’t do it without you!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mission</strong></td>
<td>92,964</td>
<td>Keep a Progressive Hero in office!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Solidarity</strong></td>
<td>92,966</td>
<td>Join the [Organization Acronym] Call Out the Vote team!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Identity</strong></td>
<td>92,928</td>
<td>You’re a volunteer -- not a spectator!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social Pressure</strong></td>
<td>92,962</td>
<td>[Organization Acronym] members nationwide are stepping up and so should you!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Civic Duty</strong></td>
<td>92,964</td>
<td>It’s our civic duty to do more than just vote!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Peer Group Norm</strong></td>
<td>92,965</td>
<td>[Organization Acronym] members nationwide are stepping up!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A few of these appeals were already present to some degree in the body of the email. The overall gist of the email was that several elections with progressive candidates were close and the calls “we” have been making were actually affecting the outcomes of these races. Thus, the mission of the program was central to the email, and the collective language of “we” and “us” is suggestive of a solidarity message. The email did not, however, suggest that the target herself or himself could affect the outcome. Thus, personal efficacy was not central. Since it is possible that the substance of the email
surrounding the experimental variation interacts with the experimental variation itself, the basic message of the email across conditions must be kept in mind. I explore potential interactions in the discussion of the results.

5.2 Analytical Method

In the following analysis, as in the previous chapter, I examine the relative effectiveness of the various appeals, using logit models that include dummy variables for each appeal (with the standard appeal serving as the reference group). Again, demographic data was not available, and so I cannot analyze subgroup differences.

Volunteer shifts is the ultimate dependent variable, but clicking through is a step in the sequential process. Two appeals may be equally likely to encourage a target to click through, but one may make a target more likely to follow through. Thus, clickthroughs are also an interesting outcome to analyze. Unsubscribes are also analyzed to determine whether some appeals were more likely than others to cause targets to disengage.¹⁹

5.3 Overall Treatment Responsiveness

As I have done in previous chapters, for this experiment I tailor my hypotheses about the relative effectiveness of appeals to the particular context of the solicitation. The organization is similar to Rock the Vote and it is also an email solicitation to its Listserv.

¹⁹ As in Chapter 4, I do not analyze open rates, since it is not possible to reliably measure them. Since every appeal used the same subject line, in theory, open rates should not differ anyway. Differences in measured open rates would actually be driven by the email content of those who use preview panes.
However, the volunteer opportunity itself is very different. First, it involves getting people to vote rather than getting them to register. Second, it involves making calls in isolation rather than physically showing up at a concert or bar. The opportunity is inherently less social. Of course, volunteers interact with voters while making calls, but solidarity incentives are about bonding with other volunteers. In this case, the appeal references being part of a “team.” Given that the appeal cannot offer any real opportunity for socialization, I suspected that it would not be a positive consideration for many, and that it could actually be a negative, because it unintentionally highlights that there is not a social opportunity.

In Chapter 4, I suggested that “Bt” and “Bg” considerations were not likely to be salient ones, since a person was unlikely to think about how registering other people would ultimately benefit himself, nor does being a registered voter greatly impact one’s life directly (and so a target was not likely to think of the benefit afforded to those whom he registers). “Be” on the other hand, could be a salient consideration, since people who opt-in to receive updates and solicitations by the organization most likely do so because they care about politics and their impact on society.

I expect targets’ evaluations to be similar in this test, though “Be” considerations may be somewhat stronger given that the volunteer opportunity involves turning out voters for specific elections, rather than registering them to vote. If the program is successful, it is more likely to have a direct impact on public policy than would the Rock the Vote program of registering voters. The success or failure of progressive candidates could affect the balance of power in Congress, which creates public policy. Enacted policies have real consequences for citizens. Thus, the attainment of policy change is
much more proximate to the volunteer ask in this context than in the Rock the Vote test. This means that the potential impact of the efficacy appeal is somewhat greater than in Rock the Vote’s case. Since it was one of only a few appeals to result in higher, rather than lower, signup rates (though not statistically so) for Rock the Vote, it is possible the appeal will add significant value over the standard appeal in this case. Of course, the success of an efficacy appeals also depends on its own strength. The Rock the Vote test used language like “you can make a difference” and “you have the power,” whereas the appeal from this test states “We can’t do it without you.” A priori, there is no reason to expect one appeal is stronger than the other, but any differences seen, in addition to a variety of factors, could also be attributable to language.

Since efficacy and contingent benefit considerations impact each other, as I argued for Rock the Vote’s solicitation, the successfulness of the mission appeal here depends on its own strength, as well as existing efficacy considerations. In both cases, I argue that existing efficacy considerations are negative. In this case, a person might expect to make 40 or 50 calls of the tens of thousands being made each day. Her own contribution is a tiny fraction of the total effort. So, while she may want to “Keep a Progressive Hero in office,” she is not likely to think her calls would tip the scale. Thus, the mission appeal is not likely to be an improvement over the standard appeal.

As in the Rock the Vote test, the intangible benefit appeals used here lack social monitoring and could potentially create significant backlash among a subset of targets whose values do not match. For instance, the identity appeal states, “You’re a volunteer – not a spectator,” the social pressure appeal states “[Organization Acronym] members nationwide are stepping up and so should you,” and the civic duty appeal states, “It’s our
civic duty to do more than just vote!” For all three appeals, a subset of targets on the cusp of participating may disagree and take these as negative considerations. For those who agree, the appeals might be redundant. The peer group norm appeal was identical to the social pressure appeal except it did not say “and so should you.” Whereas some who receive the peer group norm might see others’ participation as a substitute for their own, a smaller proportion should take the social pressure appeal this way since it calls the target to action explicitly. On the other hand, the social pressure appeal is more heavy-handed, so aside from whether a target takes the “substitute” angle, he may be more likely to be turned off by the social pressure appeal. Thus, while both have the potential to be demobilizing, it is unclear which could be worse. Both the social pressure and peer group norm appeals reference one’s identity a member of the organization. In the Rock the Vote test, it appeared that leveraging one’s identity as “young” is potentially beneficial. However, since most people’s membership in the group consists simply of receiving emails, I argue that this is a weaker identity than age cohort. Thus, the potential for positive, rather than neutral, considerations due to group identity is likely not great.

In summary, while each of the appeals used in this experiment have the potential to create both positive and negative conditions, none stands out as an obviously strong appeal. Given the results of the previous chapter in which the efficacy appeal performed relatively well, though not significantly better, than the standard appeal, and the fact that it is likely better-positioned in this case because existing “B” considerations are likely more positive, it could perform relatively well here. The results, which are reported in Table 5.2, Figure 5.1, Figure 5.2, and Figure 5.3, suggest this is the case.
### TABLE 5.2
DIFFERENTIAL EFFECTIVENESS OF APPEALS (RELATIVE TO STANDARD APPEAL)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Clickthrough</th>
<th>Signup</th>
<th>Unsubscribe</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Efficacy</td>
<td>-.079 (.132)</td>
<td>.131 (.181)</td>
<td>-.554** (.241)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mission</td>
<td>-.088 (.133)</td>
<td>-.305 (.203)</td>
<td>-.384* (.229)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solidarity</td>
<td>-.097 (.133)</td>
<td>-.405* (.209)</td>
<td>-.449* (.233)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity</td>
<td>-.060 (.132)</td>
<td>-.281 (.202)</td>
<td>-.294 (.223)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Pressure</td>
<td>-.060 (.132)</td>
<td>-.236 (.199)</td>
<td>-.323 (.225)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civic Duty</td>
<td>-.043 (.131)</td>
<td>-.516** (.216)</td>
<td>-.294 (.223)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer Group Norm</td>
<td>-.088 (.133)</td>
<td>-.546** (.218)</td>
<td>-.294 (.223)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>743,680</td>
<td>743,680</td>
<td>743,680</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Logit analysis performed.
Linearized standard errors reported in parentheses.
* denotes p<.10, ** denotes p<.05, *** denotes p<.01
Figure 5.1: Clickthrough Rates
Note: The bars represent the rate of activity for each condition and the lines represent the 95% confidence intervals surrounding each estimate.

Figure 5.2: Signup Rates
Note: The bars represent the rate of activity for each condition and the lines represent the 95% confidence intervals surrounding each estimate.
On average, 1.31% of those who opened the email clicked through to sign up to make calls and 0.51% actually submitted the form, which is 39% of those clicking through. The results suggest that none of the appeals was significantly better at generating clickthroughs than the others, though it is worth noting that the standard appeal was the largest rate substantively, as in the previous chapter. However, it is still possible that actual shift sign-up rates could vary. This would be the case if some appeals were ultimately more motivating than others, which would increase a target’s likelihood of following through once he or she clicked through and had to fill out a form.

Individual-level records of who signed up and for how many shifts were not available. However, the number of shift sign-ups per condition was. Thus, it is still possible to analyze which appeals were most effective, but with limitations. The analysis cannot distinguish between appeals that were good at generating single signups versus appeals that were good at generating multiple signups. The analysis proceeds as if each shift was
signed up for by a different email recipient. Even though the appeals produced statistically equivalent clickthrough rates, the type of people who clicked through for each might vary.

Most of the appeals were statistically equivalent to each other with respect to signups. However, the efficacy appeal, which stated “We can’t do it without you!” was significantly better than every appeal except the standard: solidarity (0.35%, p<.01), social pressure (0.26%, p<.05), civic duty (0.38%, p<0.0024%), mission (0.29%, p<.05), peer group norm (0.40%, p<0.0024%), and identity (0.28%, p<.05). Since sign-up rates were low in general, ranging from 0.4% to 0.8%, the advantage of the efficacy appeal is remarkable. For instance, the signup rate among those in the efficacy group was double that of the peer group norm.

These differences must be viewed in light of the fact that the efficacy appeal, while generating a greater number of signups, was not statistically distinguishable from the standard appeal, and the standard appeal was substantively higher than every other appeal for signups, statistically so for three (solidarity p=.053, civic duty p=.017, and peer group norm p=.012). This means that the significant differences between the efficacy appeals and others are more due to the fact that the others were demobilizing than the fact that the efficacy appeal was mobilizing.

In the previous chapter, I suggested that higher unsubscribe rates (compared to the standard appeal) could be a signal of backlash. In that test, all but one appeal generated higher unsubscribe rates, though only one statistically so. In this test, surprisingly, the standard appeal resulted in the greatest number of unsubscribes, statistically so compared
to the efficacy (p=.022), mission (p=.093), and solidarity appeals (p=.055). This result runs contrary to my theory, and is one I cannot easily explain.

5.4 Conclusion

While each of the appeals is solidly grounded in previous research, efficacy is a topic that has received considerable attention. The collective action problem is inherent in any large scale effort, political or otherwise. Thus, it is completely rational for individuals to sit out and let everyone else do the work. Appeals to efficacy (e.g., “We can’t do it without you!”) serve as an important counterweight because they can convince people that their individual contributions matter even when they might not. As I have argued throughout, this type of logic only holds in contexts where perceptions of contingent benefits are relatively high. Given that those on the Listserv opted in to receiving emails from the organization, they are likely interested in politics and believe that public policy impacts society. Thus, this condition may have been met.

Another reason targets may have been relatively susceptible to the efficacy appeal is that the body of the email highlighted how effective the program already was and invoked collective language like “we’re making a huge difference,” but in all versions but the efficacy appeal, a target’s individual potential contribution was not highlighted. A target might have been left to think that the program was hugely successful and would continue to be without his or her help. Because there are a number of differences between this study and the Rock the Vote test, it is unclear whether the language of “We can’t do it without you” is itself more effective than the empowerment language used by Rock the vote (e.g., “you can make a difference” and “you have the power”). I suspect that it may
be, because it could trigger some targets to think about universalizability (to borrow from the philosophy of Immanual Kant). While a target may know that the statement, “We can’t do it without you,” on its face is false, he might also consider the fact that if every target acted on that rationale the effort would in fact fail. This is, of course, entirely speculative, and further testing would be needed to learn with any certainty which language works better and why.

The efficacy appeal, while significantly more effective than every other appeal, was not significantly more effective than the standard appeal. This means that it may have generated as much backlash as it did enthusiasm, though the sign of the coefficient suggests the latter may have held a slight edge. Overall, these results largely mirror those from the previous chapter. If anything, the major takeaway is that saying more (i.e., giving an additional consideration), is not always better, and in many cases may actually result in demobilization.
CHAPTER 6:

PROJECT CONTRIBUTIONS AND LIMITATIONS, AND FUTURE SCHOLARSHIP

The declining rate of citizen participation in voluntary organizations in the United States over the past half-century is one of the most thoroughly documented trends by social scientists, and this attention is warranted. Social capital, which is essentially the cooperation and trust that arise from citizen participation in organizations, is critical for societies to operate well. Political inequality in the United States is another of the well-documented phenomena. Those who are better off enjoy public policies that disproportionately reflect their interests, and this is largely due to the fact that they participate in politics at higher rates.

In this dissertation, I have argued that effective recruitment appeals by organizations can help to reverse both of these alarming trends. With the right appeals, organizations can boost participation rates overall, and especially for subgroups of the population that currently participate at lower rates. While many of the traditional correlates of participation (e.g., income and education) are not easily influenced, organizations can easily tailor their recruitment appeals to maximize gains. Thus, I argue that this is an extremely fruitful area of study. In this concluding chapter, I discuss the theoretical, empirical, and methodological contributions of my work. I also recall the
specific limitations of this project and close by offering thoughts on what shape future work in this area might take.

6.1 Theoretical and Empirical Contributions

There are two main theoretical contributions of my work, which I fleshed out fully in the second chapter. First, I expanded the “calculus of voting” model to incorporate a broad range of motivations that underlie citizen engagement. I argued that the traditional model misses key factors that can play a role in the decision process for participatory acts other than voting. In particular, material (“M”) and solidarity (“S”) selective benefits, which for good reason are left out of the calculus of voting, should be included for other types of engagement.

I also broke out the contingent benefit (“B”) term of the calculus into three constituent parts: “Bᵢ”, which is the self-interested component of the contingent benefit, “B₉”, which is what other people whom an individual knows personally or identifies with gain from the outcome, and “Bₑ”, which is what other people, with whom the individual does not know personally or identify, gain from the outcome. This formulation of the contingent benefit is admittedly more altruistic than the traditional calculus of voting because it allows for a person’s decision to be at least partially based on how the outcome will affect others. I argue, however, that it is inherently more accurate. People do care about others, though to varying degrees.

In the traditional calculus, altruistic motives are lumped in with the “D” term. These motives are not viewed as truly altruistic. Rather, a person helps others to avoid the feeling of guilt associated with not helping. While it is impossible to judge individuals’
hearts, it is also unnecessary for this theoretical framework. To the extent that one’s other-regarding considerations are tied up with one’s ability to help (i.e., efficacy, the “P” term in the calculus), they belong in the “B” category. To the extent that a person feels compelled to participate (because they truly care about others or because they will feel bad if they fail to participate), regardless of whether she can affect the outcome, other-regarding considerations belong in the “D” term, which I have changed to “I_i” (internal intangible benefits) and “I_e” (external intangible benefits, i.e., those that involve social monitoring). Overall, I argue that the “calculus of engagement” model I presented in Chapter 2 offers advancement over the traditional calculus for understanding why citizens choose to participate in or abstain from civic and political activities.

The second theoretical contribution of my work was using John Zaller’s (1992) “Receive-Accept-Sample” (RAS) model of answering survey questions to develop a framework for understanding how a solicitation by an organization impacts a citizen’s engagement calculus. Specifically, I argued that when a citizen is asked to participate, he or she calls to mind a number of considerations (i.e., reasons to participate or abstain), some of which are stronger than others. If, on balance, these considerations are positive, he will choose to participate, and if they negative, he will choose to abstain. The appeal by an organization contains one or more considerations, which are then incorporated into the citizen’s calculus. The considerations of some appeals overlap with existing salient considerations, and may be entirely redundant or serve as an update (e.g., changing a positive consideration to a negative one or making a positive consideration stronger). Others overlap with and activate an existing latent consideration (i.e., one the target does in fact hold but would not have thought about if it had not been mentioned in the appeal),
and others are new entirely (e.g., material appeals often fit this category). For a target on
the cusp of participating (which is determined by the strength of the appeal), whether the
appeal is taken as a negative or positive consideration, impacts whether he or she will
participate or abstain.

I used this theoretical framework, and the modified “calculus of engagement,” to
categorize various appeals stemming from the social science disciplines (which was,
itsel, no small task) and predict which type of appeals would be successful in specific
contexts and to predict which appeals should work best for specific types of people. This
theoretical framework led to a number of hypotheses, some obvious and seemingly
tautological, and others more novel. These hypotheses fit into three categories: those
regarding the impact of appeals generally, depending on context, those regarding the
impact of appeals with respect to specific subgroups, and those regarding the relative
rates of participation due to mobilization itself (no matter the appeal).

Below, I restate these hypotheses in italics and then summarize my findings with
respect to each. I begin with my hypotheses about which subgroups should be most
responsive to solicitations, follow with my hypotheses about which specific appeals
should perform best among specific subgroups, and conclude with my hypotheses about
which appeals should work best overall, given different contexts.

6.1.1 Who Participates When Asked

*Given their advantage with respect to “B”, “I”, and “S”, and only disadvantage
with respect to “P”, I expect women to be more likely to participate when asked by an
organization, especially for volunteer (as opposed to fundraising) solicitations. This*
hypothesis was largely supported in Chapter 3 and Chapter 4. I found that women were significantly more likely to express a willingness to volunteer for the Food Kitchen and Reading Program (in Chapter 3), and they were significantly more likely to click through and sign up to volunteer for Rock the Vote’s volunteer solicitation. They were not significantly more likely to express a willingness to volunteer for and donate to the Good Governance campaign, which could suggest that the advantage of men with respect to efficacy is greater for political engagement.

*Given their advantage with respect to “P”, “B”, “I”, and only disadvantage with respect to “S”, I expect older and more educated targets to be more likely to participate when asked by an organization. For older targets, the effect may level off for volunteer opportunities, if physical ability plays a role.* I did not find much evidence of this hypothesis in Chapter 3 or Chapter 4. More educated targets were no more likely to express a willingness to volunteer and/or give in the CCES solicitations, and while those in their 50s and 60s were most likely to volunteer for the Food Kitchen, which supports the hypothesis, there were no significant differences with respect to the two fundraising solicitations or the other two volunteer solicitations.

Younger targets were actually more likely to click through and sign up to volunteer with Rock the Vote, and they were less likely to unsubscribe. I attributed this to the fact that people tend to get involved with Rock the Vote when they are young, and older targets could largely be “dead weight,” who simply have not chosen to actively disengage (i.e., unsubscribe). In addition, social considerations are greater among the young and the solicitation was for a highly social volunteer opportunity.
Given that they should have less negative “C” considerations with respect to finances, I expect wealthier targets to be more likely to donate when solicited but equally likely to volunteer. In Chapter 3, I did not find any statistically significant differences between wealthier and poorer respondents with respect to any of the solicitations, which supports my hypothesis regarding volunteer solicitations but runs contrary to my hypothesis regarding fundraising solicitations. As expected, wealthier and poorer respondents were equally likely to volunteer for Rock the Vote. The lack of difference with respect to fundraising might suggest that people are equally likely to give when asked, but simply give in proportion to their income. If this is the case, “C” considerations might actually be relatively equal.

With other factors taken into consideration, I expect whites, African-Americans, and Latinos to exhibit equal levels of engagement when solicited, since none enjoys an advantage with respect to any terms of the calculus. In the CCES case, African-Americans were significantly more likely to express a willingness to participate than whites, and they were also significantly more likely to click through and sign up to volunteer with Rock the Vote. The differences between whites and Latinos were not significantly different, as expected. It is unclear what terms of the calculus led to higher rates of participation among African-Americans, rather than the equal levels predicted by my theory.

Since those with greater levels of social capital have an advantage with respect to every term in the calculus, they should be more responsive to all types of solicitations. I found some support for this hypothesis in the CCES chapter. Those who attend church were significantly more likely to volunteer for and donate to the Food Kitchen, union
members were significantly more likely to volunteer for the Reading Program and blood
donors were significantly more likely to volunteer for the Reading Program and Good
Governance programs. In most other cases, the results trend in the hypothesized
direction, but they are not statistically significantly different.\textsuperscript{20}

The results from Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 regarding the relative responsiveness of
specific subgroups to solicitations stand in contrast to what would be predicted by simply
extrapolating from the existing observational literature. This literature would predict
higher rates of participation among men, whites, wealthier, and more educated citizens,
which was not the case. While my theory was more predictive with respect to gender,
race, and income, it also missed with respect to age and education. In both cases,
participation rates were level when my theory predicted greater rates of participation
among higher status citizens. Taken as a whole, the results potentially suggest that “being
asked” is the greatest hurdle to participation, and so when opportunities are leveled,
participation rates are leveled to a great degree as well. These results are thus
encouraging for civic engagement scholars and organizations seeking to activate
disadvantaged citizens.

6.1.2 Effectiveness of Appeals for Specific Subgroups

While making the ask is the best thing an organization can do to boost
participation rates overall and get traditionally less-engaged citizens involved, they can
improve rates further by discovering specific appeals that work for specific subgroups.

\textsuperscript{20} The two exceptions are blood donors with respect to volunteering for and donating to the Food Kitchen.
My theory offers guidance as to which appeals should work for whom, and I tested these hypotheses in the empirical chapters.

Since women and young targets are more likely to view “S” appeals as positive and stronger considerations (and they most often serve as a new consideration or update an existing one to be stronger and more positive), I expect them to be more responsive than men and older targets to this type of appeal. While I did not find any evidence for this hypothesis with respect to women, I did find that younger respondents were significantly more likely than older respondents to express a willingness to volunteer for the Food Kitchen due to the solidarity appeal.

Since women, older targets, more educated targets, and those with higher levels of social capital are more likely to have preexisting salient “Bc” and “Ii” considerations (and thus the appeal’s consideration is likely to be redundant), I expect men, younger targets, less educated targets, and those with lower levels of social capital to be more susceptible to these appeals, but only if their latent considerations match those of the appeals. While many of the hypothesized differences are not statistically significant, the vast majority of the differences that are trend in the right direction. Men were significantly more responsive than women to the social exchange and civic duty appeals for the Food Kitchen volunteer scenario. Younger respondents were significantly more responsive to the social exchange treatment for the Food Kitchen volunteer, Reading Program volunteer, and Good Governance fundraising solicitations. Less educated respondents were significantly more responsive to the civic duty appeal with respect to the Food Kitchen volunteer scenario. However, they were also significantly less responsive to the appeal for the Good Governance volunteer and fundraising solicitations,
which suggests that for a sizable group of less educated respondents, their latent values did not match up, resulting in backlash.

There is also some support for my hypothesis based on social capital. Those who attend church less frequently were significantly more responsive to the civic duty and efficacy/mission appeals for the Food Kitchen volunteer solicitation. In addition, non-blood donors were significantly more responsive to the civic duty appeal with respect to the Food Kitchen volunteer scenario, and non-union members were significantly more responsive to the social exchange appeal with respect to the Food Kitchen and Reading Program volunteer scenarios.

Those who identify with a group should be more susceptible to appeals that reference the identity, as they introduce positive “Bg” or “Ii” considerations. While the results trend in the direction hypothesized for the group identity appeal based on race in Chapter 3, the sample of minorities was too small for the differences to achieve statistical significance. However, the two appeals that referenced “young people” for the Rock the Vote solicitation both performed significantly better for younger targets, which suggest that even relatively weak identities can be leveraged.

Taken as a whole, the results from these experiments with respect to the relative responsiveness of subgroups to specific appeals do not always support the hypotheses generated from my theory. However, they do in many cases, and they rarely contradict. More experimental testing of these hypotheses is needed before drawing any strong conclusions.
6.1.3 Which Appeals are Most Effective When

The effectiveness of different types of appeals depends on the context. Appeals that work well in some will be ineffective or demobilizing in another. When considered altogether, the results from the empirical chapters of this dissertation strongly suggest that context matters a great deal. For instance, for the CCES solicitations, the civic duty appeal was much more successful for the volunteer solicitations than the fundraising solicitations, which makes sense if people view physically volunteering as a duty but do not view financial contributions that way. Arguably, duty considerations are likely most positive for the Food Kitchen volunteer scenario (even compared to the two solicitations from the field), and indeed the civic duty appeal performed best in that context. In fact, even though the solicitations in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 were for volunteering, the civic duty and other intangible benefit appeals did not perform well. I argue that on the whole, people do not see these types of political engagement as obligations, but they do see volunteering in places like a Food Kitchen as one.

Appeals can lead to both higher and lower levels of engagement since they can introduce both positive and negative considerations. While conventional wisdom might suggest that specific appeals should mobilize some and simply not affect others, my theory suggests that even seemingly innocuous appeals can introduce negative considerations for some targets, and if these are not canceled out by a greater proportion of targets who take the consideration as a negative, the overall result can be demobilization. The strongest evidence of this hypothesis is that nearly all of the Rock the Vote appeals led to significantly lower clickthrough rates than the standard appeal. The significantly negative impact of the solidarity appeal for the Good Governance
fundraising appeal also supports this hypothesis, as does the general pattern displayed in Table 3.2, which shows both positive and negative coefficients when the CCES appeals are compared to the standard.

The effectiveness of the social exchange appeal for the CCES solicitations and its ineffectiveness for the Rock the Vote appeal is also telling. The core of the appeal is the same – others have helped you, so it’s your turn to help others – however, the rate at which targets agreed with the statement likely varied. While 81% of targets agreed with the CCES appeal (i.e., said “yes” to the question of whether they had received help in the past from a stranger), it is likely that a much smaller proportion registered to vote because someone else helped them to do so. In fact, many people register automatically when applying for driver’s licenses (i.e., through Motor Voter). Thus, the appeal probably generated a fair number of negative considerations in the Rock the Vote scenario, which actually led to lower clickthrough and signup rates.

**Stronger incentives will result in greater levels of engagement because they not only introduce overwhelmingly positive considerations but they enlarge the cusp of participation.** The material appeal provides the best illustration of this hypothesis. While the T-shirt offered in the CCES solicitations failed to generate greater responsiveness than the standard for any of the volunteer or fundraising opportunities, the free concert tickets offered by Rock the Vote proved to be effective, and it was the only incentive that generated significantly higher participation rates.

**Efficacy appeals will have a greater impact on participation rates when existing salient considerations regarding the contingent benefit ("B_i", "B_g", and/or "B_c") are relatively high.** Here, I take as evidence the fact that the efficacy appeal worked when
soliciting volunteers to make GOTV calls but it did not work when soliciting volunteers to register voters. Existing considerations of the contingent good were likely higher in the case of the former.

*Contingent benefit appeals will have a greater impact on participation rates when existing salient considerations regarding efficacy (“P”) are relatively high.* Here, I take as evidence that the efficacy/mission appeal worked better for the CCES volunteer solicitations than the fundraising solicitations. Existing perceptions of efficacy were likely higher in the case of the former since one can easily think about what impact his time will have on the outcome, whereas what his financial contribution will buy for the cause is less clear.

The literatures on philanthropy and volunteerism suggest that different motives underlie participation for different people and that these motivations vary by context (e.g., Cermak et al. 1994). This implies that different targets require different treatments (Polonsky et al. 2002). Overall, the results from the experiments contained in this dissertation support this notion. The results imply that groups seeking participation must carefully consider the context and choose appeals they expect to work relatively well. My theory, and the empirical results I present, provides some guidance as to which will be effective in specific contexts and for specific types of people, however as with the previous two sections, more testing is needed before groups should base programmatic decisions on this theory or these results.
6.1.4 Methodological Contributions

As a scholarly community, most of what we know about civic and political engagement stems from large-scale surveys that ask people to report about past behavior. As I have argued throughout, these surveys are ill-equipped to speak to the question of mobilization (i.e., what makes people say “yes” when they are asked to get involved). While these survey ask respondents to give reasons as to why they got involved, response error and inaccurate reporting confound the results (Nisbett and DeCamp 1977) and social desirability looms (Berinsky 2004; Silver et al. 1986). In addition, they do not ask about the full range of incentives organizations offered. Thus, it is unclear which appeals are most effective and for whom. The field and survey experiments employed for this dissertation, while limited, are a unique contribution to the existing literature. With experiments, multiple appeals can be tested simultaneously and causal effects can be clearly measured.

Using both field and survey experiments allowed me to draw broader conclusions than if I had used one method exclusively. While the field experiments were performed on very unique populations, they were conducted in real settings, and so I can be sure the effects are real. On the other hand, the survey experiments were conducted on a representative sample, but I can be less certain that the same effects would be present in real-world settings. Since I have argued that the effectiveness of appeals depends on context, I did not expect the same appeals to perform best across these experimental settings. However, I did expect my hypotheses about which subgroups should be most

21 It is also worth noting that the experiments used cost significantly less than traditional surveys and more scholars could employ them with relative ease.
responsive overall and to specific appeals to hold, and they did for the most part. The results provide stronger support for my theory because they are consistent across experimental modes.

6.2 Limitations and Directions for Future Research

While this dissertation project adds to both our theoretical and empirical understanding of why citizens participate in civic and political organizations and how organizations’ solicitations impact their decisions, there are a number of shortcomings as well. These fall into three categories, each of which I discuss in turn: context, appeals, and measurement of mechanisms.

6.2.1 Context

While I have sought to test appeals in numerous contexts, the biggest limitation of this project is that it does not cover the plethora of contexts in which organizations actually operate. In particular, the two field experiments are similar, in that they are both volunteer solicitations made via email to organizations’ listservs. Whether the same appeals would work well if the solicitations had been conducted by some other means (e.g., phone, mail, in person) remains an open question. Specifically, the intangible benefit appeals might be much more effective when delivered by phone, and especially in person (i.e., when they can be classified as “Ie” rather than just “Ii”).

Given that both are progressive organizations, whether similar appeals would be successful for conservatives is also unclear. It is also important to note that both field experiments are for political, rather than purely civic causes. The CCES survey
experiments shed some light on contextual differences, but until these differences are replicated in the field, caution must be exercised. My hope is that this dissertation influences both scholars and practitioners to conduct a great number of field experiments so that we come to a better understanding of the contexts in which particular appeals might be effective.

6.2.2 Appeals

A second limitation of this dissertation pertains to the appeals themselves. While I have tried to test as many simultaneously as possible, none of the experiments test all of the appeals discussed in Chapter 2 at the same time. In particular, I was not able to include any appeals related to cost, which is a critical factor in the “calculus of engagement.” In addition, in the field experiments, the appeals that were used were not in all cases worded as I would have preferred. When working with organizations, they ultimately have final say over which appeals are included and the language that is used. When piggybacking on existing campaign efforts, which is often what keeps tests from being cost-prohibitive, researchers have less control over the treatments themselves.

While it is generally more expensive to conduct survey experiments than field experiments, future work in this area should employ both. The fact that many of the results from my field experiments were replicated in the survey experiments suggests that survey experiments can be very useful, especially in piloting appeals for the field. Researchers can use results from pilot survey experiments to convince practitioners which appeals are worth testing in the field. While the priority should be to test appeals from the categories of the calculus against one another, survey experiments could also be
used to test specific language variations of the same appeal (e.g., the efficacy appeal was worded differently in each of my experiments, and survey experiments could be used to test which of those is most effective and for whom).

6.2.3 Measurement of Mechanisms

In Chapter 2 I developed what I believe to be a very reasonable theoretical framework for understanding why citizens choose to participate in civic and political organizations and how the solicitations of organizations impact their decisions. However, only in the case of the social exchange question on the CCES do I have what approximates a measure of “considerations,” and this only captures the proportions of respondents taking the appeal as positive and negative. It does not measure the strength of the consideration, nor does it measure whether the consideration was absent, latent, or salient. In most cases, the mechanisms by which appeals translate into greater or lower levels of participation remain “black boxed.”

When interpreting the results, I have made statements like “The appeal must have been considered as a negative by a sizable group of targets,” which is essentially retrofitting the results to the theory rather than using the theory to generate hypotheses that predict the results and measuring both the mechanism and outcome. Future scholarship should more fully integrate the theories of decision-making and information processing developed by those who study political psychology and related fields, and it should seek to measure the mechanisms whenever possible.
6.3 Concluding Thoughts

Notwithstanding its limitations, I hope the theory I have developed, hypotheses I have generated, and experiments I have conducted serve as valuable contributions to the related academic literatures. More importantly, I hope that the relative ease with which these experiments were undertaken spur other scholars to pick up the torch and pursue a great number of studies to address the weaknesses of this project and improve our collective body of knowledge about the topic of mobilization in civic and political engagement. As I have argued throughout, expanding this knowledge base (and disseminating it to organizations that actually run programs) might help to improve participation rates generally and close the participatory gap, which are two major problems that currently plague American Democracy.
REFERENCES


Effect of Religion on Charitable Giving and Volunteering.” Review of Religious
Research 50: 74- 96.

Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly 32: 596-615.


Bekkers, René. 2005. “Participation in Voluntary Associations: Relations with
Resources, Personality, and Political Values.” Political Psychology 26: 439- 54.

Bekkers, René. 2006. “Traditional and Health- Related Philanthropy: The Role of

Sociologica. 50: 99-114.


Bennett, Roger. 2003. “Factors Underlying the Inclination to Donate to Particular Types
of Charity.” International Journal of Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Marketing
8: 12-29.


Berinsky, Adam. 2004. Silent Voices: Public opinion and Political Participation in

Responsibility Norm: Effects of Past Help on the Response to Dependency


Black, B. and D. DiNitto. 1994. “Volunteers Who Work With Survivors of Rape and
Battering: Motivations, Acceptance, Satisfaction, Length of Service and Gender


Capital—Implications of Social Interactions for the Production of Health." Social

159


161


Schwartz S. H. 1974. “Awareness of Interpersonal Consequences, Responsibility Denial, and


