



THE GREAT CHILI DEBATE

EXAMINING THE EFFECTS OF PLEDGING ON VOTER TURNOUT

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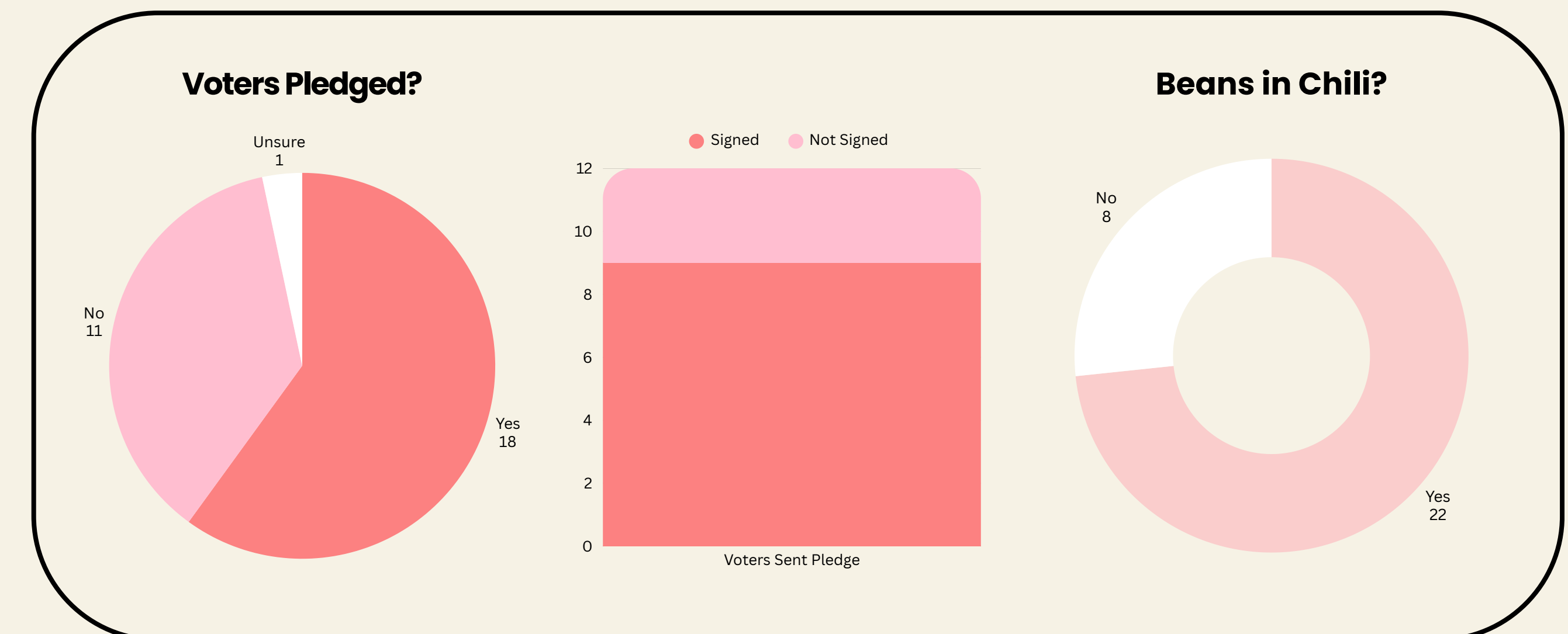
ABSTRACT

Civic participation has been a challenge for democracies since their inception. Thus, this experiment aimed at determining if pledging to vote positively influences one's decision to exercise their suffrage. Ironically, due to low voter turn out, no correlation can be determined. The results instead emphasize the importance of voter engagement, and further replications of this study on a larger scale must address this shortcoming.

METHODOLOGY

This experiment was simulated to mirror the upcoming mayoral election for the city of Sugar Land. In a purely quantitative fashion, experimental and control groups were sent an informational flyer one week before voting would be held in a neutral location on the first floor; at this time, only the experimental group was asked to sign the pledge. On election day, voters were told to meet in the disclosed room from 3-5 p.m. to cast their vote, and for those who had been sent a pledge form, they were asked to determine how they responded, if at all, to the form. Elements from real elections were kept consistent so that the data could be extrapolated for such purposes as comparison.

DATA & RESULTS



INTRODUCTION

Democracy requires participation for its upkeep. Historically, voter turnout in the United States has remained low with the 2020 election cycle witnessing the first-time turnout reached roughly two thirds of eligible citizens [1]. Thus, this widespread issue has seen 27 countries according to the International Institute of Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) opt for compulsory voting to dramatically increase civic engagement [2]. Despite attempts at American reform throughout the country's history, this idea has proved overall unattractive and unattainable. However, an obligatory response clearly felt under compulsory voting conditions may be reproduced under certain psychological triggers such as having prospective voters pledge to vote. This could simulate a sense of commitment that brings people out to the polls in higher volumes [3].

For the purposes of my study, I intend to evaluate the correlation, if any, between voters that pledge to vote and follow through with action. This can further be broken down by demographic differences such as the voter's district in the city, race, age, or any other pertinent characteristic. Ultimately, the goal of this study is to advocate for increased community participation in election cycles through an effective intervention.

FINDINGS

The majority of voters were surprisingly not a part of the experimental group; therefore, they did not receive the pledge. Out of 200 potential voters, I only recorded 30 votes. The discrepancy between voters in the experimental group was minimal, for the 12 who exercised their vote only one-fourth did not fill out the pledge form. Both groups were determined by using randomizing software, and they consist of city employees throughout city hall and in adjacent areas. Unexpectedly, this experiment deduced the likelihood of voter turnout from an engaged civilian base. Voters were tasked with deciding if "beans belong in chili" due to the controversial nature and history of this debate within the office space and office sponsored events. It was decided that **yes**, beans do in fact belong in chili.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this experiment was to test the correlation, if any, between pledging and a call to action. Although the lack of an experimental group alone could disprove my hypothesis, voter turnout was not enough of a considerable percentage of my sample size to extrapolate nor draw any definitive conclusions. While controls such as uniform emails informing participants of the upcoming simulated election, a neutral location on the first floor, and the exclusivity of the voter base belonging to city staff persisted, an election window of 3-5 p.m. could have seriously inhibited voter turnout. Therefore, further simulations of this nature must be conducted to determine the potential psychological impact of pledging. According to this study's unintended findings, voter turnout appears to be correlated to perceived importance, accessibility, and dependent upon the convictions of the stakeholders involved. Future endeavors may also benefit from a perceived award or tangible artifact denoting victory in line with proving psychological compulsion contributes to voter engagement.

1. "A case for compulsory voting." Washingtonpost.com, 5 Nov. 2014. Gale Academic OneFile, link.gale.com/apps/doc/A389086626/AONE?u=j079907&sid=bookmark-AONE&xid=ela390a3.

2. "Compulsory Voting." Compulsory Voting | International IDEA, www.idea.int/data-tools/data/voter-turnout-database/compulsory-voting.

3. Costa, Mia, et al. "Walking the walk: Experiments on the effect of pledging to vote on youth turnout." PLoS ONE, vol. 13, no. 5, 29 May 2018, p. e0197066. Gale Academic OneFile, dx.doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0197066.