

California Today: What to Watch For on Election Day

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By Mike McPhate

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And Finally ...

Image



Stickers given to early voters in San Francisco. Credit Jim Wilson/The New York Times

Think you're voting to make the world a better place?

That may be so, but researchers have also found a less noble driver of voter participation.

Shame, or specifically the fear of it.

Studies have shown that up to half of nonvoters lie when asked if they cast a ballot.

In a [new academic paper](#), behavioral economists from U.C. Berkeley, the University of Chicago and Harvard sought to measure the amount of shame that nonvoters experience.

To figure it out, they went to a Chicago suburb after a 2010 congressional election and surveyed both voters and nonvoters.

Using financial incentives and election turnout data, they were able to measure how painful it was for people who did not vote to acknowledge it.

“The results document substantial shame from admitting to not voting, though little evidence of pride from conversely claiming to vote,” according to the study.

For campaigns, that suggests it may be fruitful to drop hints to potential supporters, for example, that Grandma may be inquiring later about their vote.

Stefano DellaVigna, a professor of economics at U.C. Berkeley and one of the study’s authors, said the reasons people vote are myriad, not least among them a desire to be counted.

But concerns over social standing play a crucial part.

If deployed to your side’s advantage, Professor DellaVigna said, “that might flip it in close elections.”

California Today goes live at 6 a.m. Pacific time weekdays. Tell us what you want to see: CAtoday@nytimes.com.

The California Today columnist, Mike McPhate, is a third-generation Californian – born outside Sacramento and raised in San Juan Capistrano. He lives in Davis. [Follow him on Twitter](#).

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