

TO: Texas Gubernatorial Project  
 FROM: Adam Schaeffer, Partner & Director of Research, Evolving Strategies LLC  
 RE: Online Message Experiment Report  
 DATE: March 9, 2015

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## Overview of the Experiment

The Texas Gubernatorial Project (TGP) commissioned Evolving Strategies to test the effectiveness of pro-life messages in shifting vote preferences in the Texas gubernatorial election.

ES executed a randomized-controlled experiment using an online survey sample of respondents matched to the Texas voter file the week of September 29th, 2014.

Our target population was broadly representative of the registered voter population in Texas. We randomly assigned each voter to one of 4 conditions in a true experiment – 3 treatment groups and a control group (details on the experiment can be found in later sections). Just over 2,000 respondents

completed the survey experiment, with about 500 in each condition. Hispanic voters comprised over 12 percent of the respondents.

All respondents took the same survey; the only difference between groups was whether the voter was exposed to one of three pro-life radio ads *before* answering vote preference and other survey questions (treatment groups) or did not view these before the questions (control group). Please see below for the exact wording of the radio ads.

Statistical analyses were then performed to identify significant treatment impacts on vote preference and other outcomes measured in the survey.

## Use of the Experiment

The data from this experiment was used to model the expected impact of the ads on the vote probabilities for each of the approximately 13 million voters in Texas.

In other words, it allowed us to identify the best targets for persuasion across *all* of Texas, based on the impact of the ads on the survey response and their demographic, consumer, and past voting data. We did not model what voters thought of the ads, but rather how the ad was likely to shift their probability of supporting Greg Abbott or Wendy Davis.

We then combined these modeled targeting data with the results of a previous, large scale field experiment using phone messaging to produce the best possible targets for specific messages to be delivered in the final days of the gubernatorial election.

These results were also used to guide the development and deployment of Hispanic-language radio ads on stations across Texas in the final weeks of the election, as well as online ads.

## Overview of the Core Findings

The message experiment results indicate pro-life messages that attack the extremism of Wendy Davis have a generally positive impact, although there are significant differences in how voters respond based on gender, ethnicity and age in particular.

- 1) Women respond particularly well, while we see significant pockets of backlash from white male respondents.
- 2) Hispanic voters overall move significantly and very consistently away from Davis toward Abbott. Hispanic women respond best out of all subgroups analyzed.

- 3) The Standard and Hispanic Babies messages appear to outperform the Not Personal message.
- 4) Younger voters respond very well, the average impact decreasing with age.
- 5) Weak Democrats respond best among partisan segments, followed by Weak Republicans and Strong Dems. The impact among Strong Republicans is much diminished, and in the case of male Strong Reps turns negative on average.

Details on the distribution of the estimated vote impacts can be found in sections below.

## Overview of Treatments

Below you will find the text for the radio ads tested in this experiment and later deployed live in the field on radio stations across Texas.

### 1 - Standard

*Hello, I'm from Principios, and we wanted to let you know Wendy Davis is an extreme liberal who supports abortion on demand at any time for any reason, all paid for by Texas taxpayers.*

*She opposes commonsense, popular legislation that would limit late-term abortions after the age when a baby can feel excruciating pain.*

*Davis is too extreme to represent our state. To reach us, you can call 713-XXX-XXXX.*

### 2 - Not Personal

*Hello, I'm from Principios, and we wanted to let you know this election is not about Wendy Davis' personal life. This is about her position on the issues. Wendy Davis is an extreme liberal who supports abortion on demand at any time for any reason, all paid for by Texas taxpayers.*

*There are difficult cases, but many are straightforward. Wendy Davis supports late-term abortions of healthy babies after the age when a baby can feel excruciating pain.*

*Davis is too extreme to represent our state. To reach us, you can call 713-XXX-XXXX.*

### 3 - Hispanic Babies

*Hello, I'm from Principios, and we wanted to let you know Wendy Davis is an extreme liberal who supports abortion on demand at any time for any reason, all paid for by Texas taxpayers.*

*There are some communities that are hit hardest by abortion. Twenty-two Hispanic babies are aborted for every 100 who are born. That's more than one and a half times the rate of abortions for white babies.*

*But Davis opposes commonsense, popular legislation that would limit late-term abortions after the age when a baby can feel excruciating pain.*

*Wendy Davis wants our votes, but why should we vote for someone who doesn't want our babies?*

*Davis is too extreme to represent our state. To reach us, you can call 713-XXX-XXXX.*

Experimental Design	
Condition	Message
0	Placebo
1	Standard
2	Not Personal
3	Hispanic Babies

## Overview of the Impact Distribution Graphs

On the following pages, we have detailed graphs for some subgroups of voters showing the distribution of impacts on their net vote probabilities.

These graphs are called “kernel densities,” and they give us a quick visual sense of the proportions of voters who responded positively or negatively to a treatment.

For instance, in the graph below, you see two lines; the blue line represents the distribution of individual treatment impacts on men, and the pink line represents the distribution of treatment impacts on women.

The dotted, red vertical line centers on zero impact; this indicates no impact on the net vote preferences of these voters.

To the *left* of the line are negative numbers; this indicates a negative impact in percentage points. In this chart, for instance, the biggest estimated impact on any male voters is a net shift of in vote preference of around -25 points away from Abbot towards Davis. That means their probability of voting for Abbott has decreased by 25 points.

To the *right* of the line are positive numbers; this indicates a positive impact in percentage points. In this chart, for instance, the biggest estimated impact on any female voters is a net shift of in vote preference of around +35 points away from Davis towards Abbott. That means their probability of voting for Abbott has increased by 35 points.

You can see that the distribution of impacts on *male* voters is mostly on the *negative* side, with a peak (the higher the line, the more voters are at that impact estimate) just behind the zero center line, in negative territory. This means the net effect on male

voters in general is negative; about -3 points on average.

You can also see that the distribution of impacts on *female* voters is mostly on the *positive* side, with a peak (the higher the line, the more voters are at that impact estimate) just ahead of the zero center line, in positive territory. This means the net effect on male voters in general is *positive*; about +6.5 points on average.

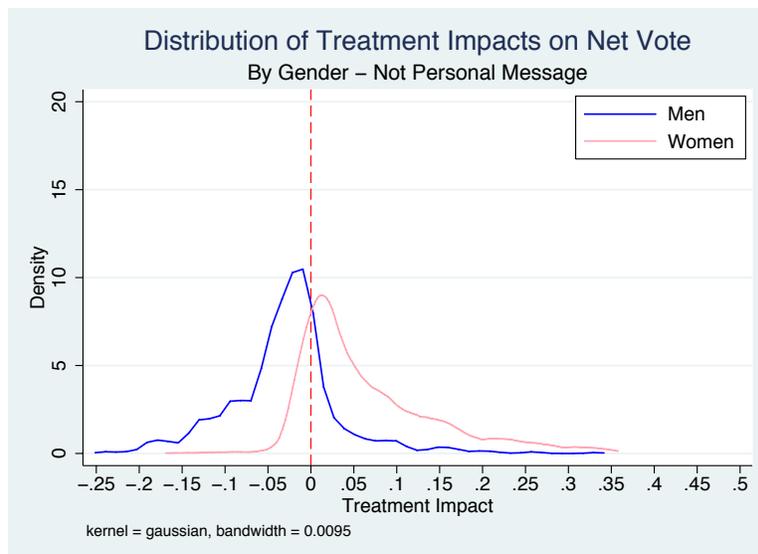
In short, at a glance we can see in this graph that men and women are impacted in distinct ways by this treatment; men respond mostly negatively, and women respond almost entirely positively to the message, with little backlash at all.

Sometimes, we might see two peaks in the graph for one group, possibly one peak in negative territory and one in positive. That means the reaction is binary; there are fairly distinct subgroups within that group that respond very differently.

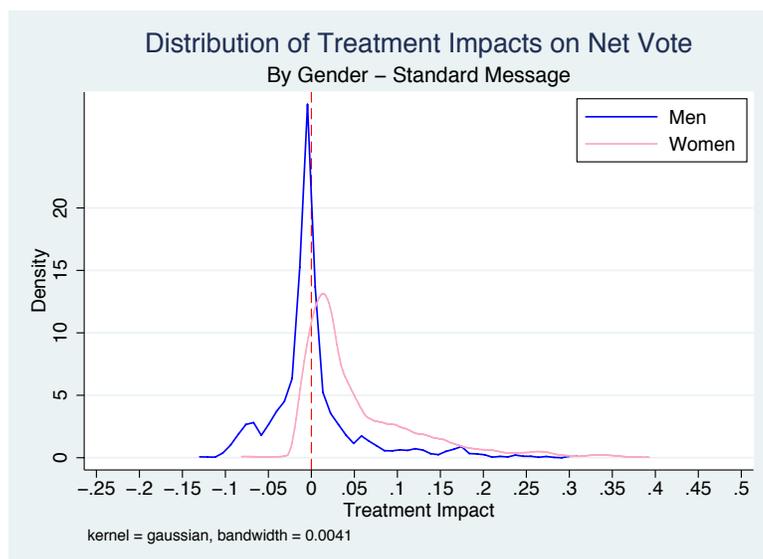
These distributions can help identify misleading average impacts; a peak at -3 and +3 could average out to zero impact on average, but that is a very different thing from a distribution where most all of the impacts are clustered around zero. In the first case, we have a great persuasion group and dangerous backlash, and in the second case, we simply have a generally ineffective message.

In the following pages, we have displayed these kinds of impact distribution graphs for some subgroups that displayed particularly interesting differences in their response to the treatments.

These graphs and these differences will help give us an intuitive grasp of how different demographic groups are moved by the messages, and the extent of variability within each subgroup.



## Treatment Impact Distributions - By Gender



The graphs on this page show the distribution of estimated impacts from each treatment on the net probability of voting for Greg Abbott vs Wendy Davis.

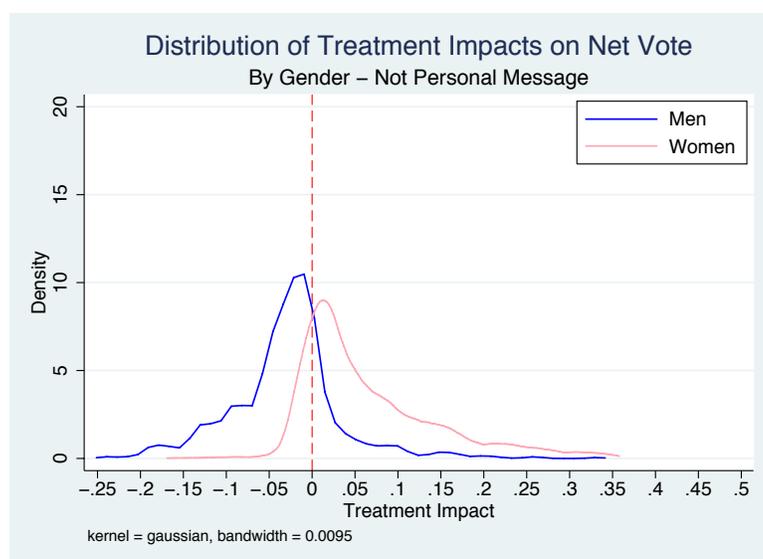
The red line marks an estimate of zero impact.

To the left of the line is the distribution of negative estimates, which range to about -.25. This would translate into a 25 points reduction in the probability of voting for Greg Abbott.

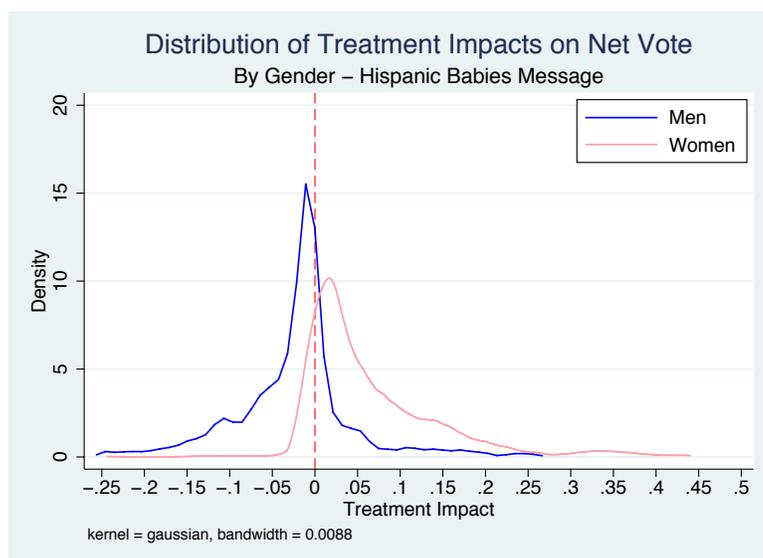
To the right of the red line is the distribution of positive impact estimates, which range up to about .45. This would translate into a 45-point increase in the probability of voting for Greg Abbott.

As you can see, *female* voters respond much more positively to the treatments, and the response is quite stable across the various messages.

There is significant *backlash* among *men*, however, particularly in response to the Not Personal message.

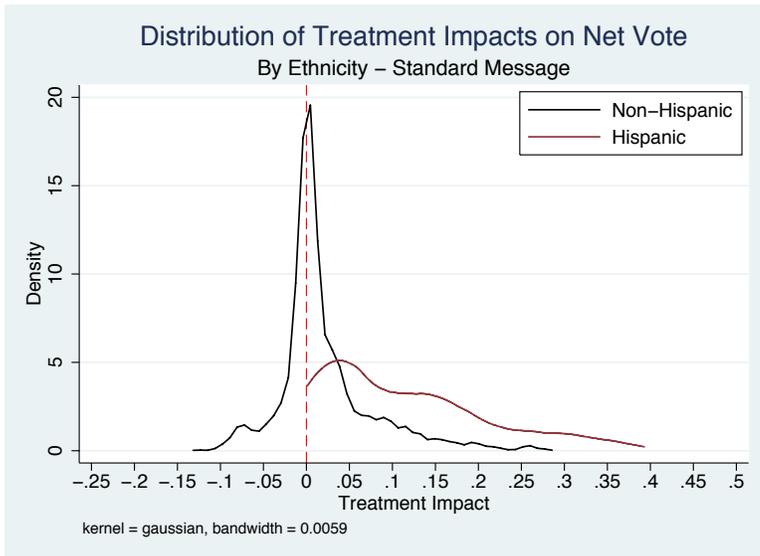


For the Standard message, most men are not impacted at all by the treatments, but there is a clear segment of “backlash” men, who move away from Abbott toward Davis in response to the message.



Impact Estimates		
Treatment	Male	Female
Standard	+0.2 points	+5.5 points
Not Personal	-3.0 points	+6.5 points
Hispanic Babies	-2.3 points	+6.6 points

## Treatment Impact Distributions - By Ethnicity



The graphs on this page show the distribution of estimated impacts from each treatment on the net probability of voting for Greg Abbott vs Wendy Davis.

The red line marks an estimate of zero impact.

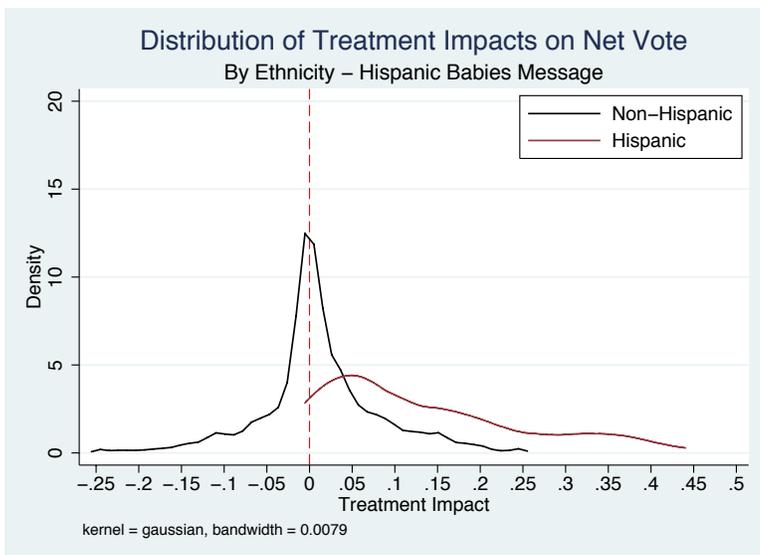
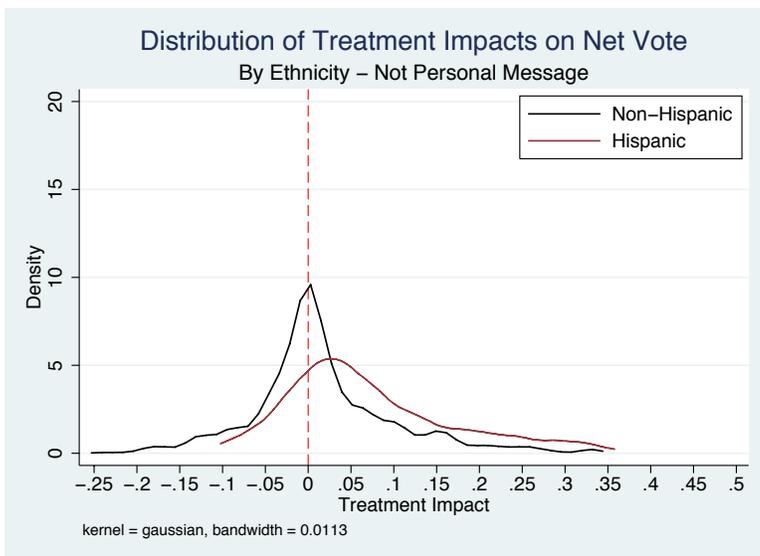
To the left of the line is the distribution of negative estimates, which range to about -.25. This would translate into a 25-point reduction in the probability of voting for Greg Abbott.

To the right of the red line is the distribution of positive impact estimates, which range up to about .45. This would translate into a 45-point increase in the probability of voting for Greg Abbott.

As you can see, *hispanic* voters respond much more positively to the treatments than do non-hispanics. The response of hispanic voters is much more stable across genre and other characteristics than for non-hispanics.

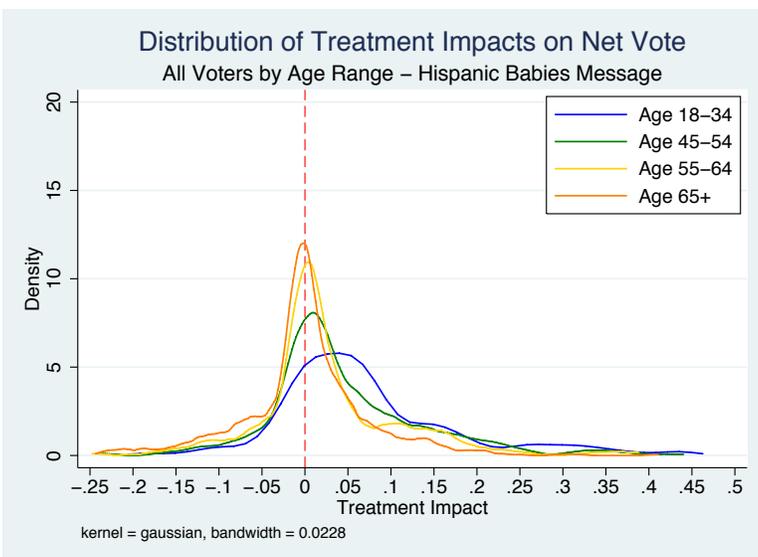
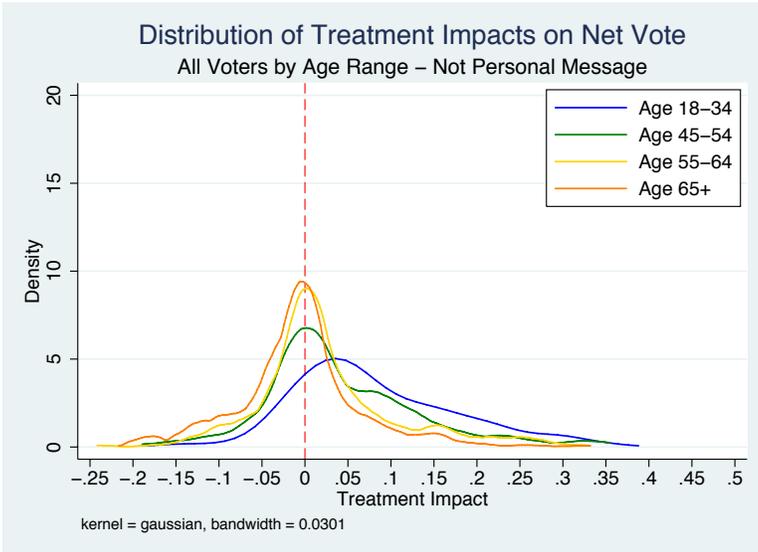
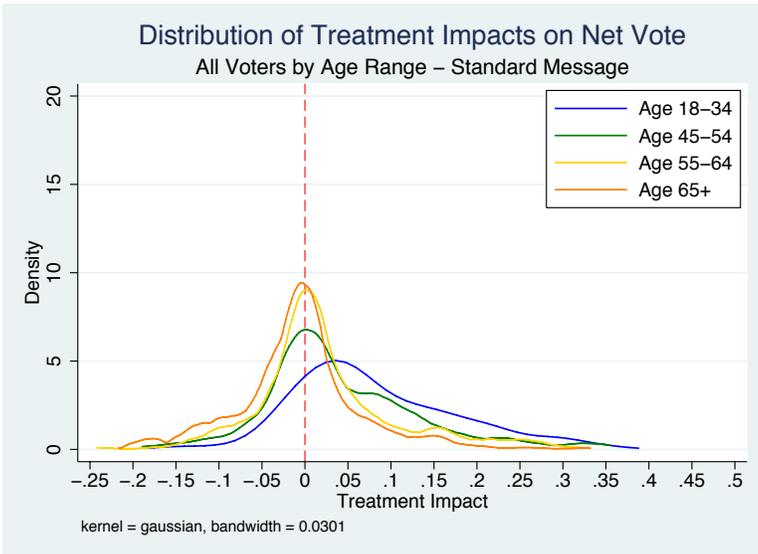
These messages, in other words, appear to be broadly and powerfully effective with Hispanic voters in general.

Furthermore, the most effective message appears to be the most aggressive one, the Hispanic Babies message. The least effective is the most “moderate” message, Not Personal.



Impact Estimates		
Treatment	Non-Hispanic	Hispanic
Standard	+2.1 points	+11.3 points
Not Personal	+1.7 points	+7.1 points
Hispanic Babies	+1.2 points	+13.3 points

## Treatment Impact Distributions - By Age Range



The graphs on this page show the distribution of estimated impacts from each treatment on the net probability of voting for Greg Abbott vs Wendy Davis.

The red line marks an estimate of zero impact.

To the left of the line is the distribution of negative estimates, which range to about -.25. This would translate into a 25 points reduction in the probability of voting for Greg Abbott.

To the right of the red line is the distribution of positive impact estimates, which range up to about .45. This would translate into a 45-point increase in the probability of voting for Greg Abbott.

As you can see, *the youngest voters* respond best to the treatments, the effectiveness decreasing with age.

For the 18-34 age segment, the treatments increase the probability of voting for Abbot by 7-8 percentage points, and the distribution of the impact estimates is clearly skewed heavily in the positive direction, with little indication of any substantial backlash.

As age increases, we see a shift toward the zero center line, or no impact.

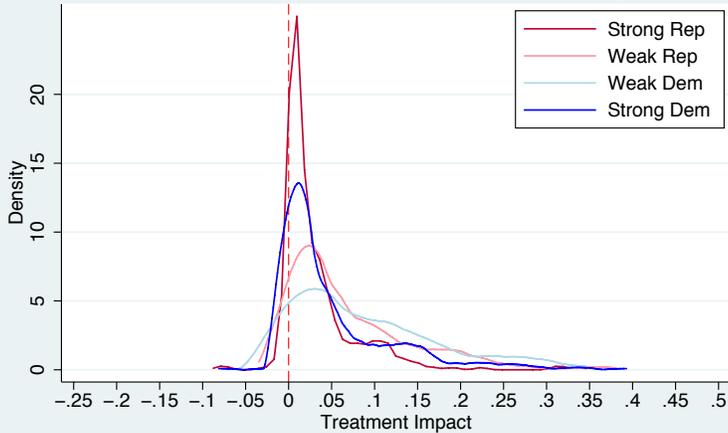
For the 35-54 age group, there remains a substantial “bump” on the positive side of the distribution, indicating a smaller but still observable chunk of voters in this group who are moved substantially towards Abbott.

For the 55-64 and especially the 65+ age groups, we see that there are many more voters we estimate to move little or not at all in response to the treatments. The distribution for 55-64 year olds remains slightly positive, but small. The average for 65+ is approximately zero, with little indication of substantial impacts on significant numbers of voters, positive or negative.

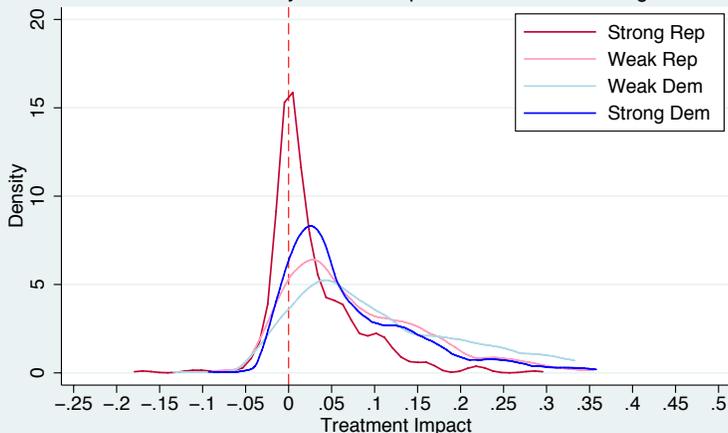
Impact Estimates				
Treatment	Age 18-34	Age 35-54	Age 55-64	Age 65+
Standard	+8.2 points	+4.7 points	+3.0 points	+1.0 point
Not Personal	+8.2 points	+4.0 points	+2.4 points	-0.6 points
Hispanic Babies	+7.1 points	+4.6 points	+2.8 points	+0.1 points

## Treatment Impact Distributions - Female Voters, By Partisanship

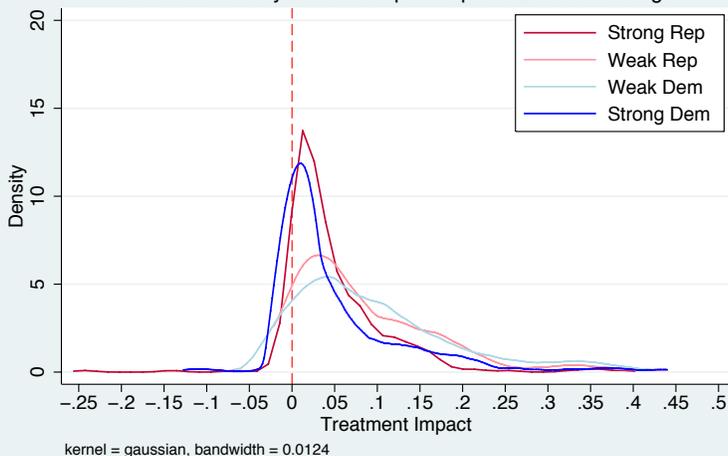
Distribution of Treatment Impacts on Net Vote  
Female Voters by Partisanship – Standard Message



Distribution of Treatment Impacts on Net Vote  
Female Voters by Partisanship – Not Personal Message



Distribution of Treatment Impacts on Net Vote  
Female Voters by Partisanship – Hispanic Babies Message



The graphs on this page show the distribution of estimated impacts from each treatment on the net probability of voting for Greg Abbott vs Wendy Davis.

The red line marks an estimate of zero impact.

To the left of the line is the distribution of negative estimates, which range to about -.25. This would translate into a 25 points reduction in the probability of voting for Greg Abbott.

To the right of the red line is the distribution of positive impact estimates, which range up to about .45. This would translate into a 45-point increase in the probability of voting for Greg Abbott.

As you can see, *weak Democratic female voters* respond the most positively to the treatments, followed by weak Republicans.

The impact on strong Democrats, however, is still substantial on average, and there is very little indication of any backlash in response to the treatments. Although we estimate that a substantial portion of these voters are not impacted at all, what impact there is looks to move them toward a greater likelihood of voting for Greg Abbott.

The impact on strong republicans is similar, but with an even greater proportion of respondents estimated to not be impacted at all by the treatments.

We present only the findings from female voters here, but the pattern is similar with men. For men, however, the average treatment impacts are often negative, and there is a substantial group of men who exhibit a backlash response to the messages.

Impact Estimates - Female Voters

Treatment	Strong Dem	Weak Dem	Weak Rep	Strong Rep
Standard	+5 points	+8.8 points	+6.8 points	+3.2 points
Not Personal	+7.3 points	+10.4 points	+7.9 points	+2.7 points
Hispanic Babies	+5.2 points	+9.6 points	+8.4 points	+4.7 points

## About Us

### Adam B. Schaeffer

Adam Schaeffer is founder and director of research for Evolving Strategies. He is consumed by an itch to understand what makes people tick, why they think and do the things they do.

Adam has spent the last ten years running sophisticated experiments in the field and in the “lab” to maximize the impact of advertising and optimize messaging tactics. He led the design, execution and analysis of the largest applied political science field experiment in history, involving more than half a million test subjects.

Adam’s focus and passion is designing experiments that go beyond mundane A/B testing to get at bigger questions and much greater ROI for clients. He helps clients discover not just what works, but why it works, and that understanding provides hugely valuable strategic advantages.

Adam received his Ph.D. from the University of Virginia in political psychology and behavior. His dissertation assessed how different combinations of school choice policies and messages can expand and mobilize elite and mass support. He received his M.A. in Social Science from the University of Chicago, where his thesis integrated aspects of evolutionary theory and psychology with political theory and strategy.

Adam’s academic research and teaching centered around social psychology and human behavior, and this emphasis continues to animate his applied research. He considers himself akin to a research biologist who happens to have the great privilege of studying the behavior of the most complex and fascinating animal on the planet; *Homo sapiens*.

### Alexander J. Oliver

Alex is a partner at Evolving Strategies. He tends to be a bit preoccupied — colleagues might say borderline obsessed — with precision and details: from the exotic ink in his fountain pen to managing public opinion during wars and natural disasters.

Over the last seven years in both academic and private sector contexts, he’s executed survey and field experiments to gain global strategic insights about how people think and act during crises—from political campaigns to combat missions abroad—and how to respond to them.

Alex co-authored the definitive review article on the politics of disaster relief for the forthcoming *Emerging Trends* project, which New York Times bestselling author and neuroscientist Daniel J. Levitin has called “an indispensable reference work for the 21st century” and the director of the Harvard Institute for Quantitative Social Science Gary King has called an “unconventional guide to the future.”

He’s held faculty positions at Brandeis University and Boston University where he taught both undergraduate and graduate courses in the use of force abroad, public opinion, voter behavior, congressional behavior, and campaign strategy. His research has been presented at both national and international conferences.

Alex received his MA in economics from Tufts University, where he received the department’s most prestigious endowed scholarship, and his BA in mathematics and economics from Merrimack College. He will receive his PhD from Boston University in quantitative methods and public opinion in 2015.

### The ES Network

Evolving Strategies taps a broad network of academics with a range of specialized skills and domain expertise – experimental designs, political behavior/psychology, statistics, etc. – across disciplines such as political science, psychology, economics, marketing, statistics and computer science. Every project is unique, and we bring the best set of people and skills together for each engagement.