

The Illinois Voter Project: An Experiment in Using Issue Information To Increase Citizen Participation in the 1994 Illinois Gubernatorial Election


Barry Rundquist
Sharon Fox
Gerald Strom

Department of Political Science
University of Illinois at Chicago

A Great Cities Institute Working Paper



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The Great Cities Institute

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Additional Copies

Great Cities Institute (MC 107)
College of Urban Planning and Public Affairs
University of Illinois at Chicago
412 S. Peoria Street, Suite 400
Chicago IL 60607-7067
Phone: 312-996-8700
FAX: 312-996-8933

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Abstract

This paper describes the Illinois Voter Project (IVP) conducted by the Illinois League of Women Voters and the University of Illinois at Chicago during the 1994 Illinois gubernatorial election. It summarizes the project's approach to increasing voter participation, some of its research on citizen views regarding problems in the state, and the evaluation of the impact of the IVP on voter participation.

The problem the IVP addressed is nonvoting. It is often observed that voter turnout in the United States is lower than in other democracies and is declining. A variety of solutions to nonvoting, focusing mainly on easier registration processes and civic education, have been suggested. The question addressed by the IVP is whether increasing citizen involvement in defining what issues receive media coverage and candidate discussion during an election might increase voter participation.

The IVP generated a considerable amount of media coverage of citizens' policy views and the citizens' agenda, conducted a statewide poll showing that most Illinoisans agreed with proposals in a "citizens' agenda," and hosted a televised Town Hall Meeting in which citizens and reporters asked questions of candidates Dawn Clark Netsch, the Democratic challenger, and Jim Edgar, the Republican incumbent.

Did the IVP work? A post-election survey suggests that, depending on the measures used, the IVP reached anywhere from one-sixth to one-third of the eligible (over age 18) electorate. It also reached disproportionately more traditional non-voters (less educated, poorer citizens) than traditional voters. Moreover, the evaluation survey found that people reached by the IVP were more likely to have voted than were people unfamiliar with the IVP. This voting effect was apparent between different socioeconomic groups and among citizens with varying levels of information about the election.

The paper concludes that involving citizens in issue definition and discussion and the creation of a citizen-initiated policy agenda should be considered in future efforts to stimulate voter participation.

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Introduction

Although there is a large body of scholarly research on the correlates of voter participation, there have been few systematic attempts to use this knowledge to create action programs designed to increase voter participation.¹ In 1993 and 1994, the League of Women Voters of Illinois and the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC) developed the Illinois Voter Project (IVP), a comprehensive effort to increase citizen participation in the 1994 Illinois gubernatorial election.² This paper discusses the implementation of the IVP, describes its research on Illinoisans' views about solutions to the state's problems, and evaluates the project's impact on voter participation.

Political scientists and good government groups have long considered declining voter turnout to be a serious problem and have produced a large body of research and commentary on citizen participation (see, for example, Wolfinger and Rosenstone, 1980; Fishkin, 1991; and Aldrich, 1993). Among other things, research suggests that low motivation and political alienation may result when candidates focus on issues that are not perceived to be important by citizens and/or offer vague and indistinguishable policy solutions (Conway, 1993). The media are thought to contribute to the problem by accepting and reporting solutions defined by the candidates rather than providing neutral or contrasting information about policy alternatives. The information that reaches citizens is frequently perceived as irrelevant, misleading, and alienating (Kettering Foundation, 1988). With little substantive information on which to base their voting decision, a majority of eligible voters stay home on election day. Ragsdale and Rusk (1993) find that many non-voters are well-informed about candidates and issues and do not vote in order to protest the alternatives facing them in election. Aldrich (1993) attributes the decline in voter turnout to the perception that government cannot do anything to solve social problems that citizens care about, as well as to the decline in party allegiances.

The idea that motivated the IVP was that citizen participation might increase if people were given a chance to create an agenda of policy proposals designed to address the issues that they identified as important. By having their own agenda rather than reacting to the candidates' agendas, people would see that they had more to gain from the election of one candidate or another (or either candidate if they took similar positions on the citizens' agenda), and therefore would be more likely to vote. In other words, the IVP model focused on increasing citizens' perceptions of how they might benefit from voting rather than increasing their sense of duty or decreasing their costs of voting (Aldrich, 1993). However, by stimulating media coverage of the citizens' agenda so that other citizens and the candidates would learn of it and discuss it, the IVP model also hoped to reduce the costs of citizens obtaining information about policy solutions and

the candidates' issue positions.

Contrasting with the IVP model is a candidate-centered model in which candidates conduct polls to find out what issues people consider important. Candidates then produce their own agenda of solutions to those problems and present it to the electorate. This (in addition to all the other things that affect political participation) may actually contribute to lower voter turnout if citizens do not feel they can relate to the candidates' proposals. The candidate-centered model cuts citizens out of the process of devising solutions, essentially putting them in a reactive mode. The policy solutions that the candidate-centered model forces citizens to react to may not coincide with citizens' own proposed solutions, hence alienating them from voting. In addition, candidate policy solutions may be viewed as unlikely to materialize because there is no implicit contractual relationship between citizens and candidates of the form "we think x will reduce crime/you say you'll promote x." Rather, the contract is of the form "you don't know what we think should be done about crime/you say you'll promote x." The IVP assumed that the former kind of contract would produce more of an incentive to vote than would the latter.

Figure 1 illustrates one way of representing the basic assumptions of the IVP experiment. It shows that exposure to the issue information disseminated by the IVP should increase citizens' interest in the election, and citizens' interest in the election should increase the likelihood of their voting.

Vote ← Interest in Election ← Exposure to IVP

Figure 1: Basic Process Underlying the Illinois Voter Project Experiment

The foregoing is, of course, an abstract model. It is particularly unclear how a citizens' agenda might be identified; whether the press, the candidates, and the citizens themselves would pay any attention to a citizens' agenda if it was identified; and whether people who are aware of the citizens' agenda would in fact vote. The IVP was designed to identify a citizens' agenda, get it disseminated by the press, and encourage the candidates' to react to it.

The methods the IVP used to do these things were in part inspired by the so-called "civic journalism movement." In particular, two elements, one in Charlotte, North Carolina, and one in Wichita, Kansas, suggested ways of using issue information to stimulate voter participation. The *Wichita Eagle* and the *Charlotte Observer* focused their election coverage during the entire 1992 campaign on issues that their readers had identified as major concerns. In both cities, the newspaper and local television stations featured discussions of these problems, based on surveys and extensive interviews with a broad range of residents. Problems and solutions in other communities were also described. Citizens were encouraged to brainstorm and communicate their ideas to the newspapers and to participate in community events designed to explore locally relevant solutions to the problems. Project evaluations suggested that these efforts resulted in significant increases in political interest, knowledge, and participation. The Pew Center for Civic Journalism supported similar efforts in a number of 1994 elections.

The next part of this paper briefly describes activities of the IVP and how the citizens' agenda was identified. Then we summarize the evaluation of the effectiveness of the IVP. Part IV discusses the implications for understanding voter turnout.

Identifying the Citizens Agenda

The first goal of the IVP was to identify what citizens perceived as the state's most important policy problems and the solutions that they wanted the next governor to implement. A brief description of some of the conclusions of this research, more extensive versions of which were distributed to the media during the election, is presented in this section.³

The March Survey

The March survey was a state wide telephone poll that asked a random sample of Illinoisans over 18, including registered voters who regularly voted, registered voters who never voted, and people who were not registered to vote, a series of open-ended questions about problems and possible policy solutions. The survey found that most people perceived crime, education, job loss, and taxes, in that order, as the most important problems in Illinois. The open-ended questions also produced a variety of suggestions about what respondents felt caused these problems and how they would like to see them solved.

The Focus Groups

Focus groups were held in June and early July. The 14 groups consisted of voters and non-voters representing the city, the suburbs, African-Americans, Latino-Hispanics and Caucasians. For example, there was a city voters group, a city non-voters group, a Caucasian voter group, and a Caucasian non-voter group. Focus groups were also conducted with senior citizens, members of Generation X (18-to-25 year-olds), homeless men, and women making the transition from welfare to work. Contrary to our assumption in designing the focus groups, the differences in the policy views of the various groups turned out to be minimal.

The focus groups revealed a clear consensus on the need for the gubernatorial candidates to recognize the interrelatedness of the state's problems. Five problems--crime, education, job loss, family breakdown, and community breakdown -- were seen as causing one another. The focus group participants agreed that politicians should justify policy proposals by explaining how they would affect the underlying causes of the problem. For example, they wanted candidates to explain how their education proposals would decrease the effects of crime, job loss, family breakdown and community breakdown on education problems like the high dropout rate and poor preparation for future job markets.

Skepticism was widespread among the focus group participants. They agreed that current government programs to deal with the state's problems are largely ineffective: "Nothing is working." And they felt the gubernatorial candidates were not going to come up with effective solutions. In the words of participants, "We are hearing the same things over again ... the candidates are bickering and discrediting each other instead of addressing the issues." "They get to Washington or Springfield and forget where they come from."

The focus groups viewed the candidates as too concerned with getting elected and reelected to respond to the public's ideas about Illinois problems. "Even if they really wanted to do something productive, they have to worry about reelection as soon as they are elected so they won't risk trying new programs." "Four years isn't long enough to get something good done."

The Citizen Panels

Both a city and a suburban citizen panel met in September of 1994. These panels were assigned the task of proposing solutions to the state's crime, education, jobs, and tax problems. After three

days of discussion among themselves and with experts, the panel members decided which of the hundreds of proposals discussed they would rank as most important for gubernatorial candidates and the public to consider.⁵ Tables 1 and 2 show the city and suburban "top ten" lists of policy proposals.

Two points about these lists are especially noteworthy. First, half of the proposals in each list deal with education, illustrating the point made earlier that people recognized the interconnectedness of problems and wanted to focus on underlying causes. For example, the panelists concluded that educational programs were at least part of the answer to crime; throughout the election our polls and others showed that crime was seen as the state's most serious problem. Second, both city and suburban panelists looked to streamlining or re-engineering state government to provide the financial resources for the programmatic approaches they had suggested. But both groups also suggested tax changes to support the programs they had developed. Their willingness to pay more taxes for these programs probably reflects the fact that they were actively involved in recommending the programs.

The October Survey

In October 1994, the IVP conducted a statewide telephone survey of 577 Illinois residents over the age of 18. The goal of the survey was to determine the impact the gubernatorial campaign was having on citizens' perceptions of the state's problems and to determine the extent to which people statewide agreed or disagreed with the citizens' agenda.⁶

Eighty-one percent said they were "very concerned" with the crime problem in Illinois.⁷ Education and "how government is spending your tax dollars" ranked close behind, with 72 percent and 74 percent, respectively, saying that they were "very concerned" with these issues. Fifty-seven percent said that they were very concerned about jobs and the economy.

Table 1. The Citizens' Agenda of the City Panel

1. Require the state to provide a minimum of 50 percent of education funding so that all students receive a quality education, and reliance on the property tax is reduced.
2. Expand early intervention programs such as Head Start. Target high-risk populations and require the participation of public aid recipients.
3. Distribute state education funding in a way that equalizes resources between school districts and promotes equal education opportunity for all students.
4. Separate non-violent from violent offenders by expanding community based sentencing programs (including restitution) for the former. Provide swift and certain sanctions for all offenders.
5. Assist small and micro-businesses with start-up funds and on-going support to stimulate the creation of new jobs and contribute to neighborhood stability.
6. Create a favorable business climate by eliminating roadblocks in such areas as tax policy, worker compensation laws, and access to information.
7. Ban ownership of all hand guns and assault weapons. Establish an amnesty period for the return of guns and impose severe penalties on those who ignore the ban.
8. Establish technical, educational, and training programs linked directly to business needs to increase employment opportunities, promote job stability, and retain businesses.
9. Provide classes in parenting skills to reduce child abuse and enhance educational success for children.
10. Expand resources for community policing programs to reduce gang and drug activity in the neighborhoods.

Fiscal Policy Recommendations to provide revenues, as needed, for these programs:

- Restructure the income tax to make it more productive and more equitable. To generate needed revenues in the short term, raise the flat rate and increase the personal exemption. In the long term, impose a graduated income tax linked to property tax reduction.
- Streamline state and local government (for example, consolidate government agencies, eliminate duplicative units of government) to improve efficiency and cost-effectiveness.
- Reform public aid to reduce fraud and waste. Reallocate the savings to programs that promote self-reliance and independence.
- Tax retirement income using current federal tax guidelines.
- Impose alcohol and cigarette taxes as a percentage of the price of the product. Impose a tax on billboard advertising of these products.

Table 2. The Citizens' Agenda of the Suburban Panel

1. Place greater emphasis on reading, writing, and critical thinking skills and provide alternative educational programs to prepare students to enter the workforce and to keep them from turning to crime.
2. Emphasize substance abuse treatment within the criminal justice system and provide for post release care to reduce the number of repeat offenders.
3. Reduce the incidence of domestic violence and child abuse which are major contributors to crime.
4. Identify problem students early and intervene promptly to keep kids in school.
5. Establish long-term economic plans and goals with accurate and relevant ways to measure their success.
6. Promote initiatives to support small and mid-sized businesses because this is where most new jobs are being created.
7. Expand programs and services for pre-school children (health, nutrition, education, parenting classes) so that all children start school ready to learn.
8. Promote school curriculum and staff development programs.
9. Encourage programs that promote parental involvement to enhance student learning and promote accountability.
10. Promote neighborhood economic development in conjunction with job support programs and centers.

Fiscal Policy Recommendations to provide revenues, as needed, for these programs:

- Reengineer state government to reduce the workforce by 10 percent.
- Promote accountability and effectiveness of programs through regular review and sunset laws.
- Redistribute state education funds to reduce disparities between districts and to promote equal educational opportunity.
- Increase the individual income tax by 1 percent (from the current 3 percent to 4 percent) and increase the personal exemption to \$2,500.
- Eliminate the sales tax exemption for service nonprofit groups.
- Impose a state sales tax on consumer services
- Tax pension income as it is taxed by the federal government.

The survey also found that a large majority of respondents did not know where the candidates stood on these issues. Only 25 to 30 percent could say which candidate had addressed these

issues with specific policy proposals. Moreover, when asked if they agreed or disagreed with a list of specific policy proposals made by the candidates and the IVP's citizens' agenda panels, from 60 to 90 percent of the sample agreed with the proposals of the citizens' panels, and smaller numbers agreed with the candidates' proposals.

In sum, the IVP's polls, focus groups, and citizen panels revealed a stable set of citizen policy concerns and proposed solutions, as well as a general and continuing distrust of politicians' inclinations and/or abilities to solve the state's most serious policy problems.

The findings of the IVP surveys, focus groups, and citizen panels were disseminated through various media outlets, including a series of news stories and editorials in the *Chicago Tribune* and the suburban *Daily Herald*, continuous coverage on a cable news channel, television and radio appearances, and news stories in a number of other newspapers in Illinois.

Evaluating the Illinois Voter Project

To examine how the IVP affected citizens in the 1994 gubernatorial election, we asked three questions:

1. To what extent did the IVP reach Illinois citizens?
2. Were people who knew of the IVP more interested in the election?
3. Were people who knew of the IVP more likely to vote?

Using data from a December 1994 survey to examine the reach and impact of the IVP, we concluded as follows:⁸

1. The reach of the IVP was greater than anticipated. Fifteen percent of those surveyed said they knew of the IVP and 5 percent said they may have heard of it. Almost half of the over-18 population *either* knew of the project *or* watched the televised Town Hall Meeting. Moreover, the project reached more people who are less educated and therefore traditionally less likely to vote.
2. Among people reached by the IVP, more responded that they were interested in the election.
3. People reached by the IVP were more likely to vote in the November election than were people not reached by the IVP. This conclusion holds for people of all educational levels and with different levels of information about the election and candidates. The effect of the IVP on voting ranged from 10 to as much as 30 percent in different segments of the over-18 population. We also concluded that citizens' choices between candidates Edgar and Netsch were unaffected by whether or not they were reached by the IVP: about two-thirds of both the people reached by the IVP and those not reached said they voted for Edgar; one-third said they voted for Netsch. Why didn't the IVP affect the direction of voting? Probably in part because the IVP was nonpartisan, but mostly because neither candidate took a stand on proposals in the citizens' agenda. For example, an analysis of campaign advertising showed that most of the issues addressed in the candidates' ads were not in the citizens' agenda, and almost none of the items in the citizens' agenda were in the campaign ads.⁹

IVP Reach

In the December survey we asked two questions: "During the campaign, did you hear anything about the Illinois Voter Project, the research project conducted by the League of Women Voters and the University of Illinois at Chicago?" and "During the campaign, did you watch the televised debate between Edgar and Netsch?" The responses to these questions were as follows:

- Five percent said that they had heard of the IVP. Fifteen percent said that "maybe" they had heard of the IVP. Eighty percent said they had not heard of the IVP at all. Combining the "yes" and "maybe" responses, 20 percent can be said to have had some degree of familiarity with the IVP.
- Twenty-nine percent said they watched the Town Hall Meeting; 71 percent did not. Clearly, more people watched the Town Hall Meeting sponsored by the IVP than were aware of the IVP itself. It should be noted that much of the publicity about the Town Hall Meeting referred to it as an event sponsored by the Illinois League of Women Voters and did not mention the IVP.
- Eight percent said they both watched the Town Hall Meeting *and* were familiar with the IVP.
- Thirty-eight percent – more than one-third of the sample -- either was familiar with the IVP or had watched the Town Hall Meeting.
- Sixty-two percent responded that they had neither watched the debate nor heard of the IVP.

We checked to see whether the project reached more people in the Chicago area than elsewhere in Illinois. The answer was "Yes." Forty-four percent of the sample with 312 (Chicago) and 708 (suburban) area codes had either heard of the IVP or watched the debate, as compared with 31 percent in the rest of the state.

We also checked to see whether those citizens who are usually less likely to participate in elections, the poor and less educated, were as familiar with the IVP as wealthier and better-educated Illinoisans. We found that people with high school, college, and graduate school educations were about equally likely to have encountered the IVP or the debate. But people who had not obtained a high school degree were much more likely to have watched the debate than better-educated people. Thus, awareness of the IVP was *not* simply a byproduct of education. Specifically, 34 percent of the 137 respondents with high school diplomas had either heard of the IVP or watched the debate. This was true of 35 percent of the 190 respondents with some college education; 35 percent of the 122 with college degrees; and 39 percent of the 77 with graduate work or more. In contrast, among the 29 respondents with less than a high school diploma, 66 percent reported having either heard of the IVP or watched the debate.

We also found that minorities were somewhat more likely to have heard of the project than Caucasians. Forty-four percent of the African Americans, 53 percent of the few Hispanics in the sample, and 35 percent of the Caucasians reported having either heard of the IVP or watched the debate.

Thus, the survey indicates that the IVP reached a substantial cross-section of the state's population and that it reached larger numbers of less educated persons and minorities than of

the better-educated and Caucasians.

IVP Effects

Prior bivariate analyses of the survey results suggest that people reached by the IVP were more interested in the election, more likely to consider themselves well informed about the election, and more likely to vote, but that exposure to the project had no effect on which candidate they voted for (Rundquist et. al., 1995). However, while our bivariate analyses suggest positive effects of the IVP, it is necessary to examine the relationships between the IVP and voting in a multivariate context. Using the data gathered from the December 1994 evaluation survey, we explore three components of the following basic model:

$$\text{Vote} = \text{Interest in the Campaign} = \text{Exposure to the IVP}$$

First, we explore the relationship between interest in the campaign and voting. In this model the dependent variable is equal to one if the respondent said that they voted (VOTE) in the gubernatorial election, and is equal to zero otherwise. Interest in the campaign is also a dichotomous variable equal to one if the respondents indicated that they were "very interested" or "somewhat interested" in the gubernatorial campaign and zero if they were "uninterested" in the campaign. This yields the following univariate model:

$$\text{VOTE} = \text{INTEREST}$$

Presumably, exposure to the IVP had an impact on people's interest in the campaign, which in turn could influence their decision to vote. A model estimating the impact of exposure to the IVP on interest in the campaign is developed. The dependent variable (INTEREST) in this model is a dichotomous variable equal to one if the respondents indicated that they were "very interested" or "somewhat interested" in the gubernatorial campaign and zero if they were "uninterested" in the campaign. With respect to the independent variables, two IVP exposure variables are used. The first is a dichotomous variable equal to one if the respondent said that they had watched the IVP televised debate between the two gubernatorial candidates (DEBATE), and zero otherwise. The second is a dichotomous variable equal to one if the respondent said that they had heard of the IVP (HEARD), and zero otherwise. We expect a positive relationship between exposure to the project and interest in the campaign. In order to control for potential socioeconomic differences among respondents, we include three dichotomous variables to account for the level of education a respondent had completed: less than high school (LHS), high school (HS), and college graduate (CG). Using these variables the following basic model is derived:

$$\text{INTEREST} = F(\text{DEBATE}, \text{WATCH}, \text{LHS}, \text{HS}, \text{CG})$$

While this model allows us to assess the impact of the project on interest in the campaign, it is also necessary to explore the impact of the project on voting. For this analysis, the dependent variable is measured as a dichotomous variable equal to one if the respondent said that they had voted in the gubernatorial election and zero otherwise (VOTE). The same independent variables, exposure to project, and level of education specified in the model above are presumed to have an impact on voting. In addition, the level of interest in the campaign is included in the model as follows:

$$\text{VOTE} = F(\text{INTEREST}, \text{DEBATE}, \text{WATCH}, \text{LHS}, \text{HS}, \text{CG})$$

These models are estimated using Ordinary Least Squares regression. An examination of the correlation matrix revealed no significant problems with multicollinearity. However, the Breusch-Pagan-Godfrey Lagrange Multiplier statistic indicated the presence of heteroskedasticity. To correct this problem, the OLS estimates were obtained using White's heteroskedasticity consistent covariance matrix (see Greens, 1993).

The results presented in Table 3 suggest that interest is a positive and significant factor in explaining voting. This implies that the more interested a respondent was in the gubernatorial campaign, the more likely he or she voted in the election.

Table 3: Reported Voting as a Function of Interest in the Gubernatorial Election

VARIABLE	COEFFICIENT	STANDARD ERROR
R2=.07, N=602		
Constant	-.022	.199
Interest	.949	.240***

*** P<.01 **P=.05 *P=.10

Did hearing of the IVP or watching the debate have any impact on people's interest in the campaign? With respect to interest in the campaign, the results shown in Table 4 indicate that interest is positively explained by hearing of the project and by watching the debate, and negatively by having a high school education. This indicates the individuals who watched the debate were more interested in the campaign; likewise for those who had heard of the IVP.

In addition, the results shown in Table 5 suggest that voting is significantly explained by both interest in the election and having heard of the IVP. Having watched the debate, while significant in explaining interest, was not significant in this context with respect to voting. In addition, the results suggest that having graduated from college is positively related to voting.

Table 4: Interest in the Gubernatorial Election as a Function of Having Heard of the IVP, Watched the Debate, and Education Level

VARIABLE	COEFFICIENT	STANDARD ERROR
R2=.05, N=602		
Constant	.791	.024***
Hear	.140	.027***
Debate	.096	.030***
LHS	-.035	.066
HS	-.073	.041*
CG	.026	.037

*** p<.01 **p=.05 *p=.10

Table 5: Reported Voting as a Function of Having Heard of the IVP, Watched the Debate, Education Level, and Interest in the Gubernatorial Election

VARIABLE	COEFFICIENT	STANDARD ERROR
R2 = .18, N=602		
Constant	.082	.039***

Interest	.514	.040***
Hear	.099	.050**
Debate	.051	.042
LHS	-.112	.086
HS	-.070	.045
CG	.086	.047**

*** p<.01 **p=.05 *p=.10

Implications

What are the implications of these findings? First, these statistical models support the findings of our previous analyses of the data using descriptive statistics and cross tabulations. Clearly, the results suggest that the IVP *did* have a significant impact on stimulating interest in the campaign, as well as on voting. Second, the results of these models lead us to conclude that the ability of the IVP to impact voting may in fact be a multistage process in which exposure to the IVP can impact interest in the campaign, which in turn can impact voting. Future analyses of this data and of the impact of the IVP on voter turnout should consider estimating models using Two-Stage Least Squares estimation procedures. In sum, the December evaluation survey suggests that projects such as the IVP that involve citizens in identifying policy problems and solutions can increase both the total amount of voter participation and the participation of people who traditionally tend not to vote.

Of course, a project as ambitious as the IVP has limitations. For example, the IVP was, after all, a study of a single case. Whether the effects reported here would be obtained in other states or in more competitive elections is a question that requires further study. Moreover, if we were to implement the IVP again, we would try to start earlier and have a survey-validated citizens' agenda ready for dissemination at least two months before the election.

Regarding the evaluation, we recognize that exposure to the IVP, as we have measured it, is not necessarily equivalent to familiarity with the citizens' agenda. It is possible that people who did not know of the IVP did know of the citizens' agenda, or conversely, that people reached by the IVP did not know about the citizens' agenda. It is also possible that some respondents lied about knowledge of the IVP or lied about voting---post-election responses to voting questions often over-report voting.¹⁰

Finally, although we think we have demonstrated that the information on citizens' policy views and the citizens' agenda that the IVP disseminated had an effect on voter turnout, our understanding of the mechanism by which this effect was produced remains incomplete.

Conclusion

This paper has provided an overview of the IVP, a project designed to stimulate voter participation in Illinois by involving citizens in the definition of policy problems and their solutions. The experience of the IVP suggests that, even in a large political system like that of Illinois, citizens' policy views can be identified and publicized so that large numbers of people are exposed to them. We think that the lesson to be learned from the IVP is that citizens are more likely to vote if they, or people like them, are involved in deciding how the problems that they define as problems should be solved.

Perhaps because the poll-validated citizens' agenda of specific approaches to solving such problems was not available until late October, the candidates did not, for the most part, address

the citizens' agenda. This may have decreased the number of persons reached by the citizens' agenda, and therefore may have decreased turnout. Even so, the evaluation survey suggests that more of the people who *were* reached by the IVP's efforts to disseminate citizen policy views and the citizens' agenda did turn out to vote in November. Exposure to the IVP had no effect on the direction of their vote -- most voted for Edgar. However, the availability of citizen-originated policy information appears to have resulted in *more* people voting.

Perhaps if a citizens' agenda were available earlier in the election, candidates would discuss it more. Perhaps this would result in more citizens being exposed to the citizens' policy agenda. And perhaps if candidates took different positions on proposals in the citizens' agenda, citizens' choices between the candidates would be affected. These are, of course, conjectures. But even in the absence of the conditions noted in these conjectures, the IVP experience suggests that turnout can be increased by a project that allows citizens to produce their own policy agenda instead of relying solely on the policy agenda produced by the candidates. Why? As the IVP focus groups and citizens panels demonstrated, people like to participate in solving community problems and will participate in elections and even pay taxes in order to support policies that they have had a hand in creating.

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Notes

1. There is a large literature on voter turnout. Space limitations preclude including a discussion of this literature. Recent studies that informed the creation of the IVP include Aldrich (1993); Kettering Foundation (1988); Ragsdale and Rusk (1993); Texeira (1987); Verba, Scholzman, Brady, and Nie (1993); and the other work listed in the reference section.
2. The Illinois Voter Project began in response to a solicitation from the Joyce Foundation for proposals to encourage citizen participation in the electoral process. In addition to the Joyce Foundation, the project was funded by grants from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the Pew Charitable Trusts, the Chicago Community Trust, the Chicago Tribune Foundation, the Fel-Pro Mecklenburger Foundation, and the New Prospect Foundation. The Project was also supported by in-kind donations. Pro-bono public relations services were provided by Landon/Gordon Public Relations and the University of Illinois at Chicago Office of Public Affairs. Production of a documentary on the Project was donated by ChicagoLand TV (CLTV), a subsidiary of the *Chicago Tribune*, which also provided film for the IVP's media efforts. Meeting rooms for the citizen panels were provided free of charge through the auspices of the Minority Leader of the Illinois House of Representatives. Undergraduate and graduate students from UIC helped conduct the surveys and with other aspects of the project.
3. Information on citizens' views on crime, education, taxes, economic development, and politicians is available by contacting the authors.
4. A list of experts is available from the authors on request. Note that, in allowing panelists to consult experts during their deliberations, the IVP model resembles Fishkin's "deliberative opinion poll." (See Fishkin, 1991).
5. Proposals in these lists were selected from about 30 proposals that had been selected during the first two-and-one-half days of the panel meetings. The method of selection, a version of Borda voting, was to give each participant 10 sticky-dots to distribute among the proposals any way they wanted -- they could put them all on one alternative, two on five alternatives, etc. The alternative with the most sticky dots was ranked first, that with the second most sticky-dots, second, etc. Thus the choice method allowed participants to express the intensity with which they preferred the various alternatives.
6. The poll was held from Friday, October 21 to Tuesday, October 25. The respondents were chosen at random and the margin of error for a sample this size is plus or minus 4 percent.
7. The response categories for the crime, education, jobs, and taxes questions were "very concerned," "somewhat concerned," and "not very concerned."
8. This poll was part of the evaluation of the IVP. The poll was conducted between December 8 and 11, 1994; 602 residents over the age of 18 were interviewed by phone. The purpose of the poll was to try to determine the extent to which the IVP affected the quantity and quality of participation in the election.

9. This analysis is available on request.

10. In order to correct as much as possible for over-reporting, we excluded people who said they had voted if (1) in answering a question nine questions before the voting question, they said they were not registered to vote; or (2) in answering a closed-ended question immediately following the voting question, they could not indicate who they voted for governor (Netsch, Edgar, or another candidate). The first condition resulted in four respondents who said that they had voted being switched to non-voters; the second condition produced 57 additional non-voters. Even with these corrections, there is substantial over-reporting. Fifty-eight percent of the sample of 602 people over 18 met our criteria for having voted in this election. Actually, only about 38 percent of people over 18 in Illinois voted. Studies that verify reported votes by checking with state election commission records show that, in post-election surveys, the norm is a 12 to 15 percent over-report. Our over-report is 20 percent. For research on over-reporting, see Katosh and Traugott (1981). It has been shown that over-reporting voting is more prevalent among more educated than less educated people.

