

**EXIT POLLING: FIELD RESEARCH AND PEDAGOGICAL
BENEFITS OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

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This article explores how bringing students into the research process provides pedagogical benefits for undergraduate students, while also offering faculty original data collection opportunities to further their research agendas. The data described in the article come from an Election Day exit poll fielded by sixty-one students in twelve diverse precincts in Oklahoma City and capture over 1200 voters. Response papers from students demonstrate the educational benefits of involving students in research, which cannot be easily replicated in a traditional classroom environment. Bivariate regression analysis of several 2016 state questions demonstrates the quality and utility of the data collected by students: the analysis shows that voters' support for reclassifying certain non-violent felonies as misdemeanors is negatively associated with anti-Black racial attitudes; that preferences for lower levels of regulation did not drive support for the so-called alcohol modernization initiative; and that the repeal of the ban on spending public money on religion was not particularly popular—even among the most religiously observant voters in the sample. In total, this article shows that when faculty merge their research agendas with their teaching priorities, they can accrue significant gains in both areas.

INTRODUCTION

University faculty have two primary, and often-competing, interests: research and teaching. With limited time and resources, faculty must decide how to appropriately balance these two concerns. Particularly at research universities where tenure is decided largely on the basis of research productivity, teaching can be given short shrift. However, by incorporating students into the research process, faculty can bridge these two potentially disparate parts of their jobs with positive outcomes for both. This paper examines how training students as field researchers for an election exit poll provides positive learning benefits that may be difficult to achieve in a traditional classroom, while simultaneously offering research opportunities for faculty with relatively few monetary resources. In total, the results of this study demonstrate the academic benefits of this type of methodology for both researchers and students. This approach facilitates a more comprehensive understanding of how voters behave regarding ballot initiatives; going beyond “how they voted” questions, this type of research can provide a better understanding of why voters approved or rejected particular policies.

CAN WE COLLECT A HIGH QUALITY SAMPLE?

Exit polls have long been a staple of election coverage in the United States. Well-designed exit surveys of voters provide accurate projections of vote outcomes in the hours before the polls close and ballots are counted (Mitofsky and Waksberg 1989). In the 2016 Presidential Election, exit polls were used throughout the primary process to describe how demographic groups voted in particular states and to infer which candidates might advance to the general (Cohn 2016; Jones 2016). However, the potential benefits of exit poll methodologies extend beyond calling election results. Political scientists utilize exit poll surveys to analyze how voters make their decisions (Abramowitz and Saunders 2008; Carsey 1995; Carsey and Wright 1998; Druckman 2004; Lupia 1994). And, exit polls provide an excellent opportunity for students to learn the rich context in which political science research is conducted, through the lens of a more active form of learning.

Community-based learning (CBL) encompasses a range of activities outside the traditional classroom, which complement academic material learned in the classroom. CBL activities include “academically based community service, civic education, environmental education, place-based learning, service learning and work-based learning” (Melaville, Berg, and Blank 2006, 2). Research on CBL shows that engagement in these activities is associated with a plethora of positive outcomes, both academic—higher grades, increases in academic achievement and relevant knowledge, decreased behavioral issues, reduced dropout rates, higher attendance—and civic—connection to community, civic and social responsibility, advanced life skills, increased political efficacy, knowledge of current events, and decreased prejudice (Astin and Sax 1998; Astin, Sax, and Avalos 1999; Balazadeh 1996; Bringle and Kremer 1993; Dalton and Petrie 1997; Eyler and Giles 1999; Fenzel and Leary 1997; Gorman, Duffy, and Heffernan 1994; Heldman and Israel-Trummel 2012; Hones 1997; Hughes, Bailey, and Mechur 2001; Kirby 2001; Knee 1999; Oliver 1997; Yates 1999).

The 54 undergraduate participants in the 2016 Oklahoma City exit poll completed open-ended post-election reaction essays, which were used to assess the effects of students’ CBL exit polling experiences. Students were asked to reflect on their experience, but were free to interpret that prompt broadly. Some essays provided general impressions related to conducting field research, while others focused more upon how the experience had shaped their feelings about government, and views toward voters. Altogether, the student reactions provide a picture of active learning and a desire for further political engagement that is much more difficult to achieve within the classroom.

The most common reaction from students was to cite what they had learned about social science research. Their reactions exhibit positive student learning outcomes as the result of incorporating activities that cater to a “bodily-kinesthetic,” e.g., hands-on, learning style (Campbell, Campbell, and Dickinson 1996; Gardner 1983; Johnson, Johnson, and Smith 1991). For example, some students noted their

surprise at how much effort goes into a systematic survey of voter attitudes:

Over this semester I have learned a lot about surveying and research. Being a part of it live and in the field is so much different than reading about it.

I think it is such a great thing that professors are able to include students in their research; hands on experience gives students much more of an insight to their field of study than a lecture can. Through this interactive exit polling course, I was able to learn and take away a lot both from the time I was able to spend exit polling, as well as the time spent in the classroom.

These students emphasized the novel experience of engaging in interactive forms of learning, which they then compared to their classroom learning experiences. Their enthusiasm towards the multiple approaches to learning survey research offers an important lesson to instructors who aim to meet the needs of students' "multiple intelligences" (Campbell, Campbell, and Dickinson 1996; Gardner 1983). By offering diverse types of instruction that can cater to various student-learning styles, college educators can reach students who exhibit learning styles that do not match up with the classic classroom lecture format (Fox and Ronkowski 1997). When presented with different styles of instruction, greater and more meaningful forms of student learning can therefore occur.

Other students offered more specific insights into what they had taken away from the survey design aspect of the course. For example, one student noted:

When we went through the surveys beforehand, we had to ask ourselves if a question would come off as offensive, if a question was worded correctly, if a question was too confusing or redundant. I learned that how the poll is developed can shape how the responses come in, and I discovered ways to create

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questions that will yield the least biased results possible.

While many students described their surprise at the intricacies involved in crafting valid survey questions, several students also described what they had learned about effective survey sampling strategies. At first blush, sampling for the exit poll seems a simple enough task, as one student comically remarked, “it meant counting to two...and possibly having to face rejection (which I most certainly did).” However, this simple counting process comes with a variety of challenges, one of which involves limiting one’s own biases towards more familiar survey respondents. One student detailed the difficulties involved once sampling is taken from the classroom to the field:

Regarding the research component, I was most caught off guard by how hard the “every second person” rule could be. It was interesting noting the difference between my impulse and following this pattern. It definitely made me more aware of my implicit bias when I found myself requiring more confidence and effort to approach men than women as well as older people versus younger people. If I had listened to those somewhat subconscious impulses, my data would have been far more skewed and not as unbiased which isn’t something I’d ever thought about before.

Pairing classroom instruction with active CBL had an undeniable influence on the ease with which students were able to learn complex concepts related to survey research methodology. Research shows that not all students learn well from traditional lecture formats (Fox and Ronkowski 1997; Gardner 1983). Classroom time was valuable, yet as one student commented, “being in the field and actually giving people the survey made me feel like I am vested in it.” The active learning environment seems to have increased student enthusiasm for conducting research, accelerating the process of learning.

Some students also seemed substantially and positively affected by the hands-on exit polling experience beyond the course’s methodological

component, with many students admitting that the experience made them question previous stereotypes they held about Oklahoma voters as well as other social groups. In stark contrast to some students' initial perceptions of Oklahoma citizens as unkind and intolerant, by the end of the course many initially cynical students remarked on the incredible kindness and community-oriented behaviors they observed:

I will remember the expectations that I brought and how many of them were wrong. I will remember with the utmost certainty the kindness of the people of our state no matter what we go through.

It was almost comical how normal the voting process appeared when compared with the madness, volatility, and passion that had marked the candidates' campaigns. It was honestly somewhat unnerving to see all these very regular, subdued, people enter and exit the church without any trace of the anger or fear that had fueled nearly everyone's interactions and opinions for the past year.

The entire day was an eye opening experience for me personally, because it gave me a sense of belonging to my community, the political science department, The University of Oklahoma, Oklahoma City, a registered voter casting my ballot on Election Day, and being a part of important research that may not come around again in my lifetime.

Students came away from the polling experience with a newfound respect for Oklahoma voters and the voting process. Moreover, the comments here further reflect an activated sense of belonging on the part of several students who started out less excited to engage with the community. The student reactions here mirror important research that demonstrates student exposure to diversity positively influences engagement levels with groups that differ from one's own ingroup (Antonio et al. 2004; Lopez 2004; Denson and Chang 2009).

Many students also wrote about their surprise at the diversity of people and views in Oklahoma City, which challenged their previous perceptions of Oklahomans as homogenous, White, and, as several students stated, “ultra-conservative.” One Black student detailed a surprising interaction with an older White voter:

One gentleman came to me with his survey to ask who the Democratic candidates were for Congress stating, “I don’t know who all these are! I just went straight Democrat down the ballot!” Then he hugged me and gave me pat on the shoulder, which all seemed strange coming from a 60+ year old white man in Oklahoma.

The student then went on to remark that exit polling research could be used to uncover the diverse views that exist in Oklahoma, beyond the “common ‘ultra-conservative’ perception.” Similarly, other students noted how their perceptions regarding Oklahoma voters were challenged throughout the exit polling experience. One student’s reaction mirrors many of her peers’ surprise about Oklahoma City’s diversity and community-oriented nature:

This experience in Oklahoma City definitely introduced me to a part of Oklahoma City that I had never been to before. This particular community was interesting because you could certainly feel a sense of community within the area. Many of the voters seemed to know each other or have no problem conversing with one another. Going to a part of Oklahoma City that I had never been to before showed me that the city does have a group of diverse opinions and people.

Many students expressed similar positive reactions to interacting with people of different races, a novel experience for at least one student:

I noticed a lot of African American couples, alongside some Hispanic families... All in all, being able to see

the various types of people who were expressing their right to vote was new and interesting to me.

This comment magnifies the importance of teaching students to interact with people who differ from them. Engagement with diverse persons remains a crucial skill for effective public servants and political leaders, who are tasked with solving important political problems through collective action and engagement with a variety of different populations. It is unclear how quickly this student would have been able to gain a knowledge and potential appreciation of the diversity of American voters and her local community with classroom instruction alone.

Generally, each of these students expressed surprise that their views about Oklahoma had changed as a result of conducting field research in a new community. This finding is consistent with existing research on the positive effects of CBL. Research shows that community engagement in the college years is associated with decreases in endorsements of racial stereotypes, greater awareness of racism and inequality, and improved cross-cultural understanding (Bringle and Kremer 1993; Dalton and Petrie 1997; Heldman and Israel-Trummel 2012; Hones 1997).

A handful of students additionally expressed interest in public service professions as a result of their participation in the course, illustrating a substantial impact of the course's CBL format to encourage political leadership and civic engagement. These reactions are consistent with findings from Heldman and Israel-Trummel (2012), but are striking given the much shorter amount of time spent in the community for exit poll research compared to the higher stakes community engagement in that research. The impact on at least two students suggests that even short time spent engaging with the community, when coupled with classroom academic learning, can positively affect career trajectories and foster political interest:

Personally, this research made me think about politics as a possible career. Being "in the field" talking to voters and seeing how impassioned many of them were about issues, without even asking, was a great

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feeling. This project gave me a newfound respect for our political process and the people involved in it.

This experience was by far one of my best college experiences I have had. I feel like I learned more from this experience than I have from any other classes I have ever had. Being out in the field and learning how to relate to people and how to collect data made me realize that this is something I could see myself doing as a career.

Meanwhile, another student became passionate about issues of polarization as the result of the course, which caused her to apply to a non-profit whose mission is to combat problems of partisan polarization:

Because of this independent study I have applied for a research internship in D.C. with a non-profit called No Labels. I would have never thought of doing that before this class, so I am pleased to find something I could potentially be very passionate about and carry out throughout my whole life.

Importantly, these comments exhibit the degree to which the CBL-based exit polling course, consistent with other forms of CBL, was transformative in its ability to increase efficacy on the part of students (Astin, Sax, and Avalos 1999; Eyler and Giles 1999; Gorman, Duffy, and Heffernan 1994; Heldman and Israel-Trummel 2012). Their remarks show that by taking part in a hands-on exit polling experience, many students gained an elevated sense of institutional trust and empowerment. This is a starkly different finding from research on high-cost forms of CBL, which can increase political efficacy while simultaneously decreasing trust in government institutions (Heldman and Israel-Trummel 2012). It appears that this type of CBL fosters efficacy, while also solidifying pro-democracy views. Participating students related that they felt they could make a difference by working through the government and/or by engaging in political advocacy. Similarly, other students did not necessarily feel compelled to link the

experience to a potential career trajectory, but still held this same enthusiasm for democratic citizenship:

I was most affected by the presence of children at the polling place, huddled around the legs of their parents, or in a stroller or someone's arms. It struck me this is what is so highly necessary to continue the American tradition and legacy of democratic freedom.

While in the field, seeing the voters really was inspiring because these people cared so much and went out of their way to ensure their voice was heard. As long as the people of this country see the importance and value of our government, I will educate myself in working to make it a better one. To better the government so that it is more representative of the needs of not only the majorities but also the minorities. I believe research like this has the opportunity to do just that and I am very proud to have taken part in it this semester.

As the student reactions to participation on Election Day illustrate, including students in the research process promoted civically-oriented views of their government and surrounding community. This is a crucial achievement, as Checkoway (2001) notes that faculty members at research universities often study civic disengagement, but rarely attempt to provide solutions to the declining civic engagement of students. CBL not only presents students with an opportunity for deeper engagement with political science scholarship and research, but also allows them to reflect on the value of democratic freedom, the voting process, and community diversity and closeness. CBL-based courses such as the one presented in this paper can shift the priorities of higher education institutions in favor of embracing a civic mission, which should be a primary concern of institutions and individual faculty members who are tasked at educating well-rounded democratic citizens (Boyt and Kari 1996; Mathews 1997). Having discussed the merits of CBL, both in general and in reference to

student reactions, this article now turns to a discussion on student training and preparation for fieldwork, which is followed by a discussion of sampling and a presentation of research findings.

TRAINING STUDENTS FOR FIELD WORK

The exit poll survey was conducted on the day of the 2016 Presidential Election in Oklahoma City from the time polls opened until they closed. The sample includes over 1200 voters across twelve precincts and eight polling locations. To execute the poll, 54 undergraduate and 7 graduate students from the University of Oklahoma were recruited. The undergraduate students received course credit for completing IRB-mandated human subjects research training through the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI), attending three instructional sessions, conducting the exit poll on Election Day, and attending a data entry session. In total, students received between 10 and 12 hours of instruction, some in-person and some online. While the authors were at the polling locations collecting data all day, each undergraduate typically recruited respondents and offered initial explanations of the survey for two to four hours.

In the mandatory field training sessions, students learned about the questions on the survey and discussed best practices for question wording, practiced a randomizing mechanism used to select potential respondents, learned when to direct a participant with questions toward one of the authors or supervising graduate students, and practiced interacting with several different types of respondents. The latter practice was particularly instrumental in quickly identifying and resolving pollster idiosyncrasies, with the aim of having consistent survey delivery across all pollsters and polling locations. Both paper surveys and electronic surveys administered on tablets were used to increase the number of respondents. All surveys were self-administered by respondents rather than completed face-to-face in order to comply with Oklahoma election law and to decrease social desirability bias (Bishop and Fisher 1995; Traugott and Price 1992).

In accordance with the general standard in survey-based data collection, this exit polling effort aimed to acquire a high quality sample of voters. To that end, undergraduate survey enumerators were trained to randomly approach every other voter who exited the polling location and attempt to recruit them into the sample. This approach helps ensure random selection, although it is difficult to be certain that everyone was equally likely to agree to participate in the survey. The next section of this article evaluates the success of the sampling procedure by comparing the exit poll sample to the population of registered voters in the selected precincts.

COLLECTING A HIGH QUALITY SAMPLE

In the interests of collecting a racially diverse sample of voters in Oklahoma City, the exit poll made use of the city's racial segregation. Examination of precinct maps and maps of racial demography were used to select four types of precincts: predominantly Black, predominantly Latino, predominantly White, and racially mixed. The survey was offered in both English and Spanish, and there was at least one Spanish-speaking pollster at every Latino precinct throughout the day. While undergraduate survey enumerators were trained to follow a randomization mechanism, uncertainty regarding the quality of the sample remained as participants may not be equally likely to agree to participate and as enumerators may make mistakes. However, by comparing the demographics and presidential vote choice of the sample to known population characteristics, the usefulness of the sample can be inferred.

The partisanship of the sample—measured by asking respondents with which party, if any, they are registered—was compared with the known partisan registration at each precinct type. While each precinct is in the urban part of Oklahoma City, the precinct types vary dramatically in terms of partisanship, with Republicans only comprising a majority in predominantly White precincts. This is unsurprising given the continuing relationship between race and partisanship in the United States, even as increasing numbers of voters prefer to identify as independents (Hajnal and Lee 2011; McDaniel and Ellison 2008; *Pew Research Center* 2015). Table 1 shows the estimates, pooling together each precinct type from the registration

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statistics provided by the Oklahoma County Election Board. Overall, the estimates are quite close to the precinct population. Sampling of Democratic voters is never greater than 7.19 percentage points different from the population, and sampling of Republican voters is always within at least 5.47 percentage points of the population. Additionally, even if the sample were a perfect representation of who showed up to vote, it might not perfectly match registration numbers as turnout rates could vary across partisanship.

Table 1
Explaining Voter Behavior on Three State Questions

Precinct Type	% Dem. Registered	% Rep. Registered	% Dem. in sample	% Rep. in sample
Black	78.44	11.37	74.24	15.40
Latino	50.64	24.73	57.35	24.17
White	32.03	56.73	39.22	51.26
Racially mixed	51.53	27.20	58.02	23.15

Party registration population statistics come from the County Election Board. Sample statistics come from a survey question, which asked respondents about their partisan voter registration. Percentages do not sum to 100 because voters can also register as Libertarian or non-affiliated.

Next, the presidential vote by precinct was compared to sample estimates. Eight sampled precincts shared a polling location and voters from the two precincts that voted together cannot be differentiated. Therefore those sample estimates were pooled but then compared to the known population parameters. Table 2 shows that the estimates tended to be positively biased for Hillary Clinton and negatively biased for Donald Trump. In other words, it appears that Clinton voters were somewhat more likely to agree to participate in the survey

than Trump voters.¹ However, these biases are relatively small, with Clinton support overestimated by 3.46 percentage points and Trump support underestimated by 4.30 percentage points. The average bias on the estimation of Gary Johnson's vote share is less than 1 percentage point.

Table 2
**Exit Poll Presidential Vote, Precinct-Level Results
 and Survey Estimates**

Precinct	Clinton Vote	Trump Vote	Johnson Vote	Clinton Estimate	Trump Estimate	Johnson Estimate
66	77.10	18.50	4.40	1.88	-4.30	2.42
99	55.00	37.70	7.30	-9.51	7.79	1.72
100	58.40	33.50	8.10	-12.91	11.99	0.92
196	47.30	45.10	7.60	16.99	-17.72	0.73
201	64.20	26.20	9.60	9.80	-8.20	-1.60
202	60.60	30.80	8.50	9.83	-10.96	1.23
203	62.60	25.90	11.50	7.83	-6.06	-1.77
206	63.40	30.00	6.60	10.28	-6.32	-3.97
211	58.20	34.90	6.90	3.44	-4.08	0.65
212	51.30	41.17	7.10	10.34	-10.88	0.45
241	81.70	12.10	6.20	3.15	-6.04	2.89
243	94.50	2.90	2.60	-9.65	3.16	6.49

Precinct vote results in Table 2 above come from *Oklahoma Watch*. Our results pool together eight precincts into four 99/100, 202/203, 211/212, and 241/243 because those sets voted at the same location. Therefore the estimates for those polling places do not match the precinct vote results as closely. Overall, we overestimate Clinton's vote share by 3.46 percentage points and Johnson's by 0.85 percentage points, on average. We underestimate Trump's vote by 4.30 percentage points, on average.

¹ An alternative explanation would be that Trump voters were more likely to vote early and therefore the sample was unable to capture this part of the population on Election Day.

The evidence suggests that it is possible to capture a high quality sample of voters using an exit poll survey with well-trained student enumerators. However, the study aims included not only whether data reflects vote totals, but whether this data can provide an *explanation* of voters' decision-making calculus. To test this possibility several of the state questions that appeared on the ballot were examined.

USING EXIT POLL DATA AS RESEARCHERS

In 2016 Oklahoma voters were asked to decide whether to amend the state constitution or laws in seven different state questions ranging from creating a new constitutional right to farm to reclassifying some non-violent felonies as misdemeanors. Analysis of three state questions demonstrates how exit poll data can be used to help explain voters' decision process on these nonpartisan ballot initiatives.

State Question 780 proposed reclassifying certain non-violent felonies as misdemeanor offenses. While this applied to some property crimes, it was widely discussed as a reclassification of drug crimes; State Question 780 was coupled with State Question 781, which would apportion money for increased drug treatment if SQ 780 passed. Proponents of the measure argued that this was the best strategy for reducing prison overcrowding in a state with the second highest imprisonment rate in the country, the highest imprisonment rate for women, and the highest per capita imprisonment of African Americans in the United States (Cosgrove 2017). Opponents, which included many district attorneys and the Oklahoma Association of Police Chiefs, argued that law enforcement needed to retain the ability to incarcerate drug offenders to prevent violent crimes, and that SQ 780 would be too liberal for the state (Green 2016; *Oklahoma Gazette* 2016; *Tulsa Beacon* 2016). To the surprise of many observers, SQ 780 passed with 58% of the vote.

Oklahoma voters were also asked to decide whether to repeal Article 2, Section 5 of the state constitution, which bans public money from being spent on religious purposes. State Question 790 was introduced

in the wake of the Oklahoma Supreme Court ruling that the presence of a Ten Commandments monument on state grounds violated Article 2, Section 5 (Wendler 2016). The ACLU announced that if SQ 790 passed, they would immediately challenge it in court (Wendler 2016). Two weeks before the election, Senator James Lankford (R) and Lieutenant Governor Todd Lamb (R) authored an opinion article in the *Tulsa World* comparing Article 2, Section 5 to Jim Crow laws in their discriminatory intent and effect, and urging Oklahomans to vote “Yes” to expand religious freedom (Lankford and Lamb 2016). Despite Oklahoma’s large population of self-identified religiously observant citizens, SQ 790 ultimately failed, garnering only 43% of the vote.

One of the most widely discussed state questions on the November 2016 ballot was the so-called alcohol modernization initiative. State Question 792 would allow for the sale of full-strength beer and wine at grocery stores, including on Sundays. SQ 792 largely pitted grocery store owners, liquor distributors, and consumers against liquor store owners. Arguments in favor of SQ 792 centered on increased free market competition to benefit consumers and modernizing state laws to match other U.S. states (Jolley and Bice 2016; *Yes on 792*). Those in opposition argued that the state question would benefit large corporations and would damage local businesses (Kringen 2016). Ultimately, SQ 792 passed with nearly two-thirds approval.

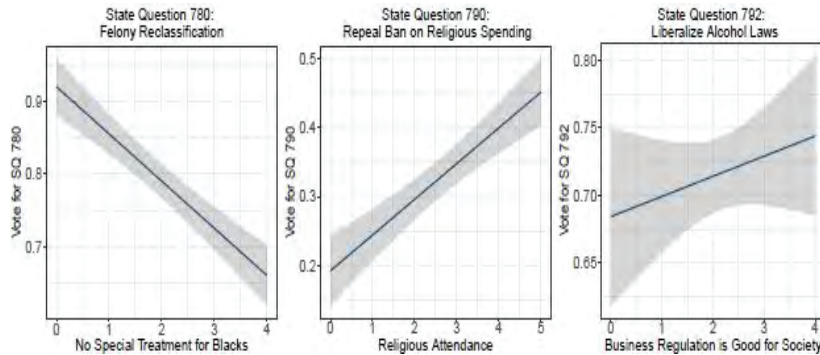
Several of these results were surprising to political commentators. Why did generally conservative Oklahoma voters decide to soften drug laws? Why did mostly religious voters opt to keep Article 2, Section 5 of the constitution? What led voters to change longstanding limits on the sale of alcohol? Exit poll data allows analysis of what contributed to these decisions. First, the vote on felony reclassification (SQ 780) was examined in relation to anti-Black attitudes. Political science research demonstrates that issues that are associated with particular racial groups activate racial attitudes in political decision-making (Gilens 1995; Gilens 1996; Hancock 2004; Nelson and Kinder 1996; Winter 2005, 2006, 2008). Drug use is one such issue. While Whites use and abuse drugs at similar, if not higher rates, than people of color, drugs have long been associated with racial minorities, particularly Black Americans (Alexander 2010; Israel-Trummel and

Shortle n.d.; Murakawa 2011; Reeves and Campbell 1994). This association fuels attitudes toward drug punishment, policing, and incarceration (Eberhardt et al. 2006; Gilliam and Iyengar 2000; Green, Staerkle and Sears 2006; Israel-Trummel and Shortle n.d.; Peffley and Hurwitz 2002; Unnever and Cullen 2007). Therefore, while most of the debate about the ballot initiative was not explicitly about race, an association between anti-Black attitudes generally and the vote on SQ 780 might be anticipated.

Figure 1 employs linear smoothed regression to show the relationship between respondents' racial attitudes and vote on SQ 780. To measure anti-Black racism, respondents were asked to consider the following statement: "Some people think that blacks have been discriminated against for so long that the government has a special obligation to help improve their living standards. Others believe that the government should not be giving special treatment to blacks. Where would you put yourself on this scale?" Respondents then place themselves between 0 ("government should help") and 4 ("no special treatment"). Importantly, this measure does not capture attitudes about drug use or punishment, but rather focuses on the relationship between African Americans and the government. This measure captures a type of racist attitude known in the literature as "racial resentment." In comparison to old-fashioned, biologically justified racism, racial resentment captures the idea that, "government had been too generous, had given blacks too much, and blacks, for their part, had accepted these gifts all too readily... Blacks should work their way up without handouts or special favors in a society that was now color-blind" (Kinder and Sanders 1996, 105). Figure 1 shows clearly that there is a strong and significant relationship between these two variables. As anti-Black attitudes rise, the probability of voting for SQ 780 declines by over 20 percentage points. While this analysis cannot show that racial attitudes caused voters decisions on SQ 780, this is evidence of a strong association between racial resentment and vote choice. This finding provides evidence that the success of this state initiative appears to have been driven by voters with significantly lower levels of anti-Black racial resentment. This helps explain why voters chose to reclassify some non-violent felonies. It is possible, however, that other issues—such as the costs associated with prison overcrowding—

may have also played a significant role in voters' decision-making in the context of this initiative. As the exit poll did not include questions that would address alternative explanations such as this one, the findings cannot speak to this possibility. It would be worthwhile to pursue this and other competing explanations in future research endeavors to understand the conditions under which citizens are likely to support efforts to shrink the carceral state.

Figure 1



The exit polling results also help to explain the failure of SQ 790, which called for the repeal of the ban on public expenditures on religion in a state with heavy religious observation. Regressing SQ 790 vote choice on religious attendance shows that religiosity certainly mattered for voters' decision-making. Those who attend religious services most often were approximately 45 percentage points more likely to vote for the repeal compared to those who never attended services. However, even among those who attend most frequently, the measure failed to garner even 50% of the vote. The data provide evidence that while religious attendance shaped support for the initiative, the initiative was not very popular even among the most faithful voters.

Finally, the results provide insight into how regulatory attitudes shaped support for SQ 792, the alcohol modernization initiative. *Ex ante* analysis might predict that support for this state question would

be associated with anti-regulatory attitudes, as the law would increase the number of vendors who could sell beer and wine and remove restrictions on Sunday sales. Moreover, the Yes on 792 Campaign often used free market rhetoric to argue for the benefits of the initiative. Therefore, support for SQ 792 was regressed on attitudes toward regulation. To measure regulatory attitudes, respondents were asked, “How much government regulation of business is good for society?” Respondents answer on a scale ranging from 0 (“none at all”) to 4 (“a great deal”). Figure 1 reveals a surprising relationship between regulatory attitudes and SQ 792 vote. Voters who prefer greater regulation were slightly more likely to vote for the initiative than those who prefer less, although the difference is not statistically significant. This suggests that the free market rhetoric used by the SQ 792 campaign may not have been key to its passage. Indeed, across all levels of preference for regulation, more than two-thirds of voters in the exit poll sample supported the initiative.

In total, these regression results help identify possible explanations for how voters made their decisions on ballot initiatives in November 2016. Further tests could be performed on this data to analyze voter decisions. This type of analysis is impossible to perform with national survey data, as voters in each state are asked to make decisions about different policy outcomes. At the national level voters decide on candidates, but never particular policies. Election returns alone within states are also insufficient. This data may show how states or even precincts voted, but this does little to *explain* the vote. Only by sampling voters within one state and capturing vote choice in addition to political opinion can researchers begin to understand how political attitudes translate into particular policy preferences.

This research demonstrates a fruitful avenue for gathering original data at relatively low cost in order to gain insight into how voters’ decision-making reflects their political attitudes. Future efforts would do well to expand the range of questions to examine voters’ level of familiarity and agreement with the major arguments made by the proponents and the opponents of the ballot initiatives. The questionnaire used in the 2016 exit poll did not include such questions and thus the explanations offered for why voters supported the

three initiatives are necessarily limited. In the future, researchers from universities across Oklahoma and in surrounding states could partner together to conduct exit polls with a core of identical survey content in their own cities to provide for comparisons across the region. Finally, a sustained effort to conduct an exit poll during every major election would provide valuable longitudinal data at the precinct level and could provide insight not only into why and how voters decide to vote on particular initiatives but also how their opinions change over time.

Finally, the use of the original data generated by the exit poll is not limited to faculty. Undergraduate students have used the exit poll data in several other courses in the Political Science department at the University of Oklahoma. Most notably, in a sophomore-level American politics course, fifty-two undergraduate students so far have developed and tested their own hypotheses using the data their peers helped collect. Others analyzed the data in their capstone research papers, which are a part of the course that concludes their undergraduate education as Political Science majors. The option of performing their own analysis session original data provides the students with the opportunity to fully engage in the process of producing knowledge from start to finish. This deepens their engagement with political science research and encourages them to produce good work themselves; an award-winning paper written by a second-year student attests to that potential.

CONCLUSION

Exit polling offers an exciting opportunity for social scientists in Oklahoma and elsewhere, providing unique opportunities to collect original data at relatively little overhead cost. Such an approach can generate deeper insights into how voters make decisions on policy initiatives. Linking political attitudes to policy preferences is not possible at the national level, where voters only decide on candidates and not particular policies. Capturing political opinion and vote choice at the state level, in contrast, presents an excellent opportunity for scholars to learn more about how voters' political and policy attitudes translate into policy preferences (Abramowitz and Saunders 2008;

Carsey 1995; Carsey and Wright 1998; Druckman 2004; Lupia 1994). This paper contributes to this body of research in political science by demonstrating how students can be brought into the research process to allow for excellent data collection while enhancing the educational opportunities available to undergraduates.

The analysis of the exit poll data demonstrates that faculty can work with students to collect high-quality data that allows researchers to understand voter decision-making. The analysis suggests that the passage of the state initiative to reclassify certain non-violent felonies as misdemeanors may have been driven by voters with low levels of anti-Black racism (State Question 780). The study also demonstrates that although religious attendance shaped support for a repeal of the ban on public money being spent on religion, this initiative was not particularly popular even among most religiously observant voters (State Question 790). Finally, the result that the alcohol modernization initiative garnered support not only from voters who prefer lower levels of regulation but also by those who prefer more regulation suggests that the free market rhetoric used in the pro-initiative campaign may not have led to its passage (State Question 792).

Additionally, election exit polling provides a unique teaching opportunity for social scientists looking to blend their research agenda with their teaching responsibilities. Students' reactions demonstrate the numerous advantages of CBL. Practical engagement led to a deeper understanding of the process of political science research and enhanced the ability to teach challenging concepts in survey design and implementation. A number of students confronted their preconceived notions about Oklahoma voters and tackled their own negative stereotypes. For many, active participation in exit polling led to increased respect for the voting process, and, for a handful, to a desire to pursue a career in civic engagement or public service. In addition to helping us gain valuable insight into Oklahomans' support for policy initiatives, election exit polling helped students graduate from being consumers of knowledge to being active participants in its production.

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