

Candy We Still Believe In: Using Halloween to Measure Change in Extensive and Intensive Support for Barack Obama

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Abstract

In a field experiment conducted during Halloween with children trick-or-treating, we find that in this particular Connecticut neighborhood, Obama's support has not changed since 2008 on either the extensive margin (as measured by the choice children made between two sides of a porch, labeled the Romney and Obama side) or the intensive margin (enthusiasm of supporters measured by the elasticity with respect to candy, by offering some children more candy to go to Romney).

Paper

Children were randomly assigned to one of two conditions, in both of which the children chose which side of the porch they wanted. Thus this choice was presented somewhat as a vote, specifically "which side do you prefer?" Half were randomly assigned to be told they would get the same quantity of candy at either side. The other half were told that they would get 2 pieces of candy at the Romney side but only 1 piece at the Obama side.² 158 children were in the study. Students were randomly assigned by drawing numbered pieces of paper from a bag.

This replicates a similar experiment, on the same porch, during the 2008 election, and reported [here](#). The results replicate fairly precisely. We find perfectly inelastic demand for Obama for children ages 8 and under. In fact, the proportion that chooses Obama when more candy is offered at the Romney side increases by 4 percentage points (82% for Obama with equal candy, versus 86% for Obama when more candy would be given at the Romney side). However, as with 2008, for children 9 and above (with Romney instead of McCain), the incentive to go to Romney shifts 25 percent of the votes to Romney (83% for Obama with equal candy, versus 69% for Obama when more candy would be given at the Romney side).

By comparing (and finding no changes) between these results and those in 2008, we are able to measure the change (or lack thereof) in the overall support (the extensive margin) as well as the enthusiasm of the support (the intensive margin). We find that Obama support remained the same from 2008 to 2012, and that the enthusiasm of the support (as measured by the elasticity of support with respect to candy) has also remained the same.

This research begs an important question for further research: will the act of voting for Romney (as manipulated through the additional candy offered in one treatment arm) change long term voting behavior and political attitudes?

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² We did not test the reverse, more candy at the Obama side, for two practical reasons: first, with equal candy incentives 83% of the children chose the Obama side, hence there was not much room for an increase; second, the ulterior motivation for this pricing treatment was originally to even the lines and thus avoid logjams, and also make it so that children did not choose the Romney side in the equal candy treatment simply to increase their effective wage rate (i.e., minimize wait times and thus be able to visit more homes).

Figure 1: Candy Elasticity of Obama Votes

