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Motivating Future Voters: Comparing the Effects of 'I Voted' and 'I Will Vote' Stickers on Intention to Vote

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ABSTRACT

"I Voted" stickers have long symbolized civic pride and voter participation in American political culture. This study examines the impact of these stickers' language on voting intentions, comparing the effects of future tense ("I Will Vote") with past-tense stickers ("I Voted") and control stickers. Through two pre-registered experiments involving low-propensity voters (Total $N = 1500$), we find that "I Will Vote" stickers significantly enhance voting intentions compared to "I Voted" and control stickers. We also find that "I Will Vote" stickers induce more positive attitudes toward voting and greater voting self-efficacy. These findings contribute to the understudied intersection of language and political behavior, illuminating how linguistic choices in voter outreach can shape civic engagement. We conclude with a call for scholars to explore how incorporating the future tense in get-out-the-vote campaigns can effectively boost turnout.

KEYWORDS

Language; vote intention; future orientation; communication

Understanding and addressing voting barriers is essential for fostering a more inclusive and representative democracy (Cancela & Geys, 2016). Thus, a central question in political science is how to ensure voter turnout (Green & Gerber, 2019), particularly among low-propensity voters (Bedolla & Michelson, 2012; Michelson et al., 2024; Scott et al., 2021). Although many drivers of voting turnout are unmodifiable structural factors (Kostelka & Blais, 2021), communication strategies are important to increase participation (Mann & Bryant, 2020). "I Voted" stickers constitute a communication strategy frequently used to signal who has voted in an election, serving as both a symbolic reward for voters and a normative signal for others to vote (Butkowski, 2023). This paper explores the effects of voting stickers on voting intentions, contributing to the under-studied area of language and political science (Newman et al., 2021; Pérez, 2015). Given that previous research on behavioral prediction (Ajzen, 1991) has demonstrated that intentions are key determinants of actions, including voting (Hansen & Jensen, 2007; Netemeyer & Burton, 1990), examining voting intentions is particularly important for understanding how linguistic choices can influence civic engagement.

Focusing on "I Voted" stickers is valuable because they comprise a staple within American voting culture, with media reports of this tradition dating back to the early 1980s (Waxman, 2016). Distributed at polling stations across the country, these stickers can

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serve as not only a badge of honor for voters but also a social cue encouraging others to vote as well. To further enhance political participation, some states and local jurisdictions have initiated "I Voted" sticker design contests following guidelines provided by the US Election Assistance Commission (EAC).[1] These competitions involve state partnerships with schools and other community organizations, promoting creativity and drawing media attention to election-related activities. Samples from EAC award winners and community-generated stickers appear in Appendix Figure B1.

"I Voted" stickers have been so popular that they are also visible on social media. Every election, as Americans go to the polls, their social media feeds are flooded with selfies of friends proudly displaying their "I Voted" stickers, showcasing who has participated in the electoral process and inspiring others to vote as well. Moreover, social media companies such as Meta often provide "I Voted" buttons like the ones displayed in the bottom panel of Appendix Figure B1. The social media impact of the "I Voted" message was examined as part of a social message in a large-scale experiment involving Facebook users. In a study by Bond et al. (2012), participants received information about voting presented either alone or accompanied by faces of Facebook friends showing that they had clicked the "I Voted" button. Relative to the control participants, those presented with the social "I Voted" message, were significantly more likely to click on polling location information, vote, and display the "I Voted" button (also see: Jones et al., 2017). However, this experiment used "I Voted" messages in conjunction with other information, making it impossible to isolate the impact of the "I Voted" message.

Considering that no previous study has examined the impact of "I Voted" messages alone, we still do not know whether the "I Voted" sticker itself is effective in motivating voters. In this paper, we hypothesize that relative to "I Voted" stickers, "I Will Vote" messages will have a greater impact on voting intentions, as well as commitment to voting, attitudes toward voting, and/or voting self-efficacy. To examine these possibilities, we conducted two pre-registered experiments involving US adults who did not vote in previous presidential elections. Participants were randomly assigned to virtually view and sort either "I Will Vote," "I Voted," or control stickers, after which they reported their voting intentions. To further test the underlying process, they also reported their commitment to voting, attitudes toward voting, and voting self-efficacy (Ajzen, 1991; Hansen & Jensen, 2007; Huang & Cheng, 2022; Zhang et al., 2022).

Overall, our findings show that "I Will Vote" stickers strengthen voting intentions significantly more than either "I Voted" or control messages. This effect is consistent across different model specifications and observed in both experiments. Moreover, participants exposed to the "I Will Vote" stickers also reported greater voting commitment and, most notably, significantly more positive attitudes toward voting and higher levels of voting self-efficacy. These results suggest that incorporating "I Will Vote" language in get-out-the-vote campaigns could enhance their effectiveness, possibly leading to higher voter turnout in elections.

Theoretical Framework

A growing body of literature has examined how the language used in political messages influences voters' attitudes and behavior. For example, providing Spanish-language election materials increases turnout among Spanish-speaking citizens with limited English

proficiency (Hopkins, 2011). Also, referring to voting with nouns rather than verbs in pre-election surveys improves voter turnout (Bryan et al., 2011), and simpler, more accessible ballot wording enhances ballot support (Shulman et al., 2022). Now, although these findings highlight the important role that linguistic choices can play in shaping political engagement, one unexplored question is whether the temporal perspective of verbs used in political messages plays a role in shaping individuals' intentions to vote. This study aims to address this gap by considering the role of verb usage in "I Voted" stickers as part of strategies to increase voter turnout.

The intentions behind human actions, including political behavior, are often formulated and solidified through thoughts that are strung together in a verbal but rapid way (Albarracín, 2021; Carrera et al., 2012; Lohmann et al., 2019). Intentions, as mental representations of one's willingness to perform a behavior, are rarely full-fledged propositions but, rather, unfold as fragmentary thoughts or feelings that cue behavioral procedures (Albarracín, 2021). For example, asking questions is likely to strengthen intentions to engage in future behaviors (Conner et al., 2011) and may also modulate the default response (Lohmann et al., 2019). Moreover, describing a past action as ongoing using the imperfective aspect, "I was walking," leads to a greater likelihood of repeating the action compared to describing it in the perfective aspect, "I walked" (Hart & Albarracin, 2009). Similarly, the presentation of words in a particular order can lead to the formation of intentions, as when seeing unrelated "Will" and "I" promotes the willingness to perform an upcoming task (Dolcos & Albarracin, 2014).

To begin, from a linguistic point of view, a statement like "I will come tomorrow" constitutes an illocutionary act (Austin, 1975; Kannetzky, 2002). Going beyond the communication of semantic meaning, an illocutionary act performs an action, as when "I do" changes the civil status of a person from single to married or the word "declare" introduces a law (Searle & Vanderveken, 2005). Accordingly, "I will" can comprise the illocutionary act of promising to perform an action in the future (Celle, 2008; Ranger, 2018). Importantly, the illocutionary act "I will" may not only signal a commitment to an observer but also affect a person's motivation to perform the action in the future (Kissine, 2008) locutionary. This may occur spontaneously because "I will" can directly introduce an "I will" thought in the person, leading to stronger feelings of commitment.

Another reason why "I Will Vote" stickers may be more effective in promoting intentions to vote than "I Voted" stickers is that anticipating a behavior can shape one's attitudes toward it. For example, thinking about an action in the past tense (e.g., "I drank") decreases the use of attitudes as a basis for intentions compared to thinking about the action in the present tense (e.g., "I drink") (Albarracin & Shavitt, 2018; Carrera et al., 2014). When reflecting on past behavior, such as voting during a previous election, the thought of the previous behavior is often sufficient to evaluate the behavior as desirable (Albarracin & Wyer, 2000; Bem, 1965). For example, false feedback that one unconsciously supports or opposes a policy has a large impact on attitudes toward the policy (Albarracin & Wyer, 2000). More generally, messages are more persuasive when they promote thoughts in line with their arguments, leading to the notion that all persuasion is, in a way, "self-persuasion" (Greenwald, 1968; Janis & King, 1954; Loman et al., 2018; Perloff, 2020).

A third reason why "I Will Vote" stickers could promote voting intentions more than "I Voted" stickers is that a future orientation can increase planning and self-efficacy (Ebreo & Vining, 2001; Essl et al., 2023; Wallentin & Nedergaard, 2023). For example, considerations

of future consequences are related to individuals' self-reported recycling behavior (Ebreo & Vining, 2001). Moreover, future time perspectives are positively associated with goal setting, goal monitoring, goal operating, self-regulatory ability, and outcomes (Baird et al., 2021). By focusing on future actions, individuals are more likely to think proactively about their participation in the anticipated process (Wallentin & Nedergaard, 2023). When individuals think about and plan for the future, they are more likely to set, strive for, and achieve goals (Conner et al., 2011; Ireland et al., 2015). For example, thinking about voting in the future may allow people to imagine doing it and consider possible obstacles and solutions. In turn, this cognitive activity may induce self-efficacy among people who are exposed to "I Will Vote" stickers.

In sum, we hypothesized that compared to "I Voted" stickers, "I Will Vote" stickers may lead to stronger voting intentions in three different ways. First, "I Will Vote" may directly induce commitment to voting as the message itself overlaps with mental representations of intentions. Second, "I Will Vote" may induce thoughts about the desirability of voting, shaping more favorable attitudes. Third, "I Will Vote" may instill self-efficacy by facilitating a mental simulation of behavior and associated feelings that one is capable of voting. Based on this theoretical framework, we hypothesize that "I Will Vote" stickers will lead to stronger voting intentions compared to "I Voted" stickers. Furthermore, we compare the effects of "I Will Vote" and "I Voted" stickers on voting commitment, voting attitudes, and voting self-efficacy.

Methods and Results

Our methodological approach involves two complementary experiments about the influence of "I Will Vote" and "I Voted" stickers on voting intentions among US adults who did not vote in the previous presidential elections. Focusing on this demographic allows us to understand how these messages impact low-propensity voters. Both experiments were preregistered at AsPredicted #166071 and #171133, designed in Qualtrics, and performed on the survey platforms Prolific and Forthright.[2]

Experiment 1 - Preregistered Study of the Impact of Different Types of Stickers on Voting Intentions

Experiment 1 explores the impact of different sticker messages on voting intentions. We hypothesize that participants exposed to the "I Will Vote" sticker will report a higher intention to vote compared to those who do not receive this message. Initial findings from a pilot study suggested a Cohen's d effect size of 0.18. We estimated that a sample size of 600 would provide sufficient statistical power to detect such an effect, with an alpha level of 0.01 and a power of 0.95.

Design

The study enrolled 600 participants through Prolific, selecting a sample of US adults who did not vote in previous presidential elections (see Appendix Table A5 for demographic data). Consistent with our preregistration, all participants indicated that they did not vote in the previous elections. The experiment ran from March 14–17, 2024, following our preregistration on AsPredicted (see #166071). Participants were randomly assigned to one of

three conditions – "I Will Vote," "I Voted," and a control condition concerning traffic safety – in a between-subjects experiment.

Participants received the following directive according to their assigned condition: "In this activity, we need your insights and ask for your help to design stickers. Your task involves examining a series of newly designed ("I Will Vote" / "I Voted"/ "Buckle Up") stickers. Consider the designs' appeal and clarity. Arrange the seven stickers in order of their effectiveness: place the sticker you find best at the top of your list and the one you believe is the worst at the bottom. To rank the listed items, drag and drop each item." Subsequently, participants were shown seven sticker designs in a randomized sequence (see Figure 1). The first group sorted "I Will Vote" stickers, the second group "I Voted" stickers, and the third group "Buckle Up" stickers.

Dependent Variable

Following the sorting task, we assessed participants' voting intentions. We developed a *Voting Intention Index* that closely aligns with the wording used in the American National Election Studies (ANES), which asks about the intention to vote for specific political offices.[3] This index comprises six items rated on a 7-point scale, ranging from 1 ("extremely unlikely"/'not at all') to 7 ("extremely likely"/'very much so'). The index is designed to be comprehensive by measuring intention to vote across various political offices, including the presidency, Senate, House of Representatives, governorship, and state justice positions, as well as a general inclination to vote (see Appendix Table A1 for list of questions and Table A3 for Cronbach's alpha values). This approach acknowledges that motivations to vote may stem from a desire to influence electoral outcomes for specific

Figure 1. Manipulations in experiments 1 & 2.

offices, thereby enhancing the index's ability to capture the diverse reasons behind voter participation and improving respondents' recall by providing concrete examples.[4]

Analysis

The left panel of Figure 1 displays a comparison of the Voting Intention Index among the three experimental conditions. As shown, participants in the "I Will Vote" condition reported stronger intentions to vote (Median = 4.33, SD = 2.06), with scores ranging from 2.67 (25th percentile) to 6.33 (75th percentile). Those in the "I Voted" condition (Median = 4.17, SD = 2.19, IQR: 2.00–6.17) and control task condition (Median = 4.00, SD = 2.12, IQR: 1.83–5.67) showed much lower voting intentions. This difference was verified in a baseline regression model and a covariate-adjusted model. The baseline model regressed the Voting Intention Index solely on the experimental conditions, while the covariate-adjusted model also accounted for participants' party affiliation, age, gender, and race.

The baseline model's findings, shown in the first column of Figure 2, reveal that the "I Will Vote" condition yielded significantly higher voting intention scores relative to the control conditions, while the "I Voted" condition did not. To better understand the magnitude of these effects, we calculated the predicted values for each condition (see Table 1). In the baseline model, the "I Will Vote" condition had an effect of 4.34 (SE = 0.15), compared to 4.10 (SE = 0.15) in the "I Voted" condition and 3.85 (SE = 0.15) in the control condition. The inclusion of covariates, as shown in the second column of Table 1, did not modify the implications of these results, with similar predicted values of 4.37, 4.10, and 3.84 for the "I Will Vote," "I Voted," and control conditions respectively, thereby affirming the robustness of our findings. To also explore the null finding for the "I Voted" condition, we conducted equivalence tests for the full model, with margins of ± 0.5 units. The results for the "I Voted" (Appendix A11) were inconclusive – we could neither reject the null hypothesis of a meaningful positive effect nor confirm equivalence to the

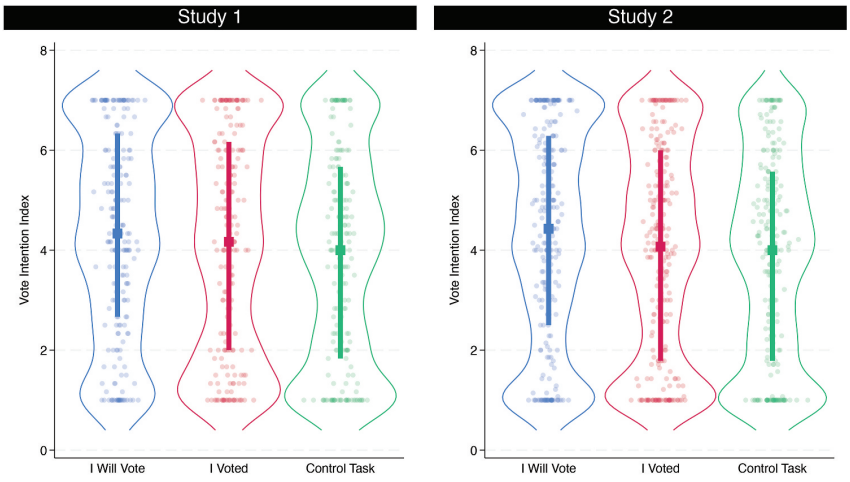

Figure 2. Experiments 1 & 2 - results.

Table 1. Regression analyses: voting intentions across experiments.

	Experiment 1		Experiment 2	
	Baseline	With Covariates	Baseline	With Covariates
I Will Vote	0.483	0.523	0.478	0.470
	(0.024)	(0.012)	(0.013)	(0.013)
I Voted	0.250	0.252	0.167	0.127
	(0.246)	(0.230)	(0.380)	(0.498)
Party Id		−0.203		−0.161
		(0.086)		(0.159)
Age		−0.044		−0.028
		(0.000)		(0.000)
White		0.255		0.368
		(0.149)		(0.023)
Female		0.350		−0.160
		(0.042)		(0.302)
Constant	3.854	5.169	3.806	4.872
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
F	2.57	7.40	3.24	5.21
Prob > F	0.0777	0.0000	0.0397	0.0000
RMSE	2.124	2.065	2.109	2.080

Note: p-values in parentheses. Control group: Experiment 1: Mean=3.854, SD=2.118. Experiment 2: Mean = 3.852, SD = 2.026 (see Appendix Table A7)

control condition.[5] These outcomes provide support for our hypothesis that "I Will Vote" stickers are associated with an increased likelihood of voting intention.

Experiment 2 - Preregistered Study on Effects on Voting Intentions and the Roles of Commitment, Attitudes, and Efficacy

Although the prior study is consistent with the hypothesis that the "I Will" sticker will increase voting intention among recipients, the study does not directly investigate the underlying process. Hence, in the second study, we aim to replicate the results from Experiment 1 and also examine the impact of sticker messages on voting commitment, voting attitudes, and voting self-efficacy. Specifically, we hypothesize that the "I Will Vote" sticker may positively influence voting commitment, attitudes, and self-efficacy, which may then strengthen voting intentions. In this survey, we planned a sample of 900 participants, which exceeds the required number to detect a small effect size ($r = .10$) with $\alpha = .01$ and a power of .95.

Design

Following our preregistration plan, we targeted US adults who had not voted in previous presidential elections. This stringent pre-screening criterion substantially reduced our eligible pool, as many potential participants in Prolific's general sample either had voted in previous elections or had not answered the voting history question. Therefore, we recruited 600 participants through Prolific, and to reach our target sample size of 900, we recruited an additional 300 participants through Forthright (see demographic data in Appendix Table A6). As specified in our pre-analysis plan, participants flagged as bots by Qualtrics were excluded from the analysis. Since the second group of participants came from a different survey platform, we asked participants at the end if they had taken this survey before, and those who answered "yes" were also excluded from the analysis.[6] While

participants who failed the posttreatment attention check were not excluded from the analysis (Montgomery et al., 2018), as an additional robustness check, we report results excluding these participants in Appendix Table A8; the findings remain substantively similar. The experiment was executed from April 17 to May 1, 2024, after the study was preregistered at AsPredicted (#171133). Similar to Experiment 1, participants were randomly assigned to one of the three conditions: "I Will Vote," "I Voted," and a control condition concerning traffic safety. The task and instructions were identical to those in Experiment 1.

Dependent Variables

After the ordering task, we assessed participants' voting intentions using the *Voting Intention Index*, which comprises seven items rated on a 7-point scale (see Appendix Table A1).[7] Additionally, we constructed three indices to measure the mediators. First, a *Commitment* Index, which measures the commitment to voting in the upcoming elections, includes five items on a 7-point scale, with 1 indicating "no commitment" and 7 indicating "absolute commitment." This index, which follows Klein et al. (2021)'s conceptualization of commitment, includes the following items: "I will integrate voting into my civic responsibilities," "I will prioritize voting as a key expression of my civic identity," and "I feel I am committed to voting." Second, the *Voting Attitudes* Index measures attitudes toward voting with four items on a 7-point scale, with 1 indicating negative attitude and 7 indicating positive attitude. This index, which is informed by established measures of voting attitudes (Farc & Sagarin, 2009), includes the following questions: "How unbeneficial or beneficial do you think it is to vote in the 2024 elections?," "How unnecessary or necessary do you think it is to vote in the 2024 elections?," "How unimportant or important do you think it is to vote in the 2024 elections?," and "How unpleasant or pleasant do you think it is to vote in the 2024 elections?." Third, the *Self-Efficacy* Index, which measures participants' confidence in their ability to vote, includes three items on a 7-point scale, with 1 indicating strong disagreement and 7 indicating strong agreement. Our approach to measuring self-efficacy is based on the Pearlin Mastery Index (PMI) (Seeman et al., 1991) as utilized by Condon and Holleque (2013) in their study of voting behavior among young people. While the PMI assesses general self-efficacy, we have adapted this concept to focus specifically on voting-related self-efficacy, as recommended by behavioral prediction models (Ajzen & Madden, 1986; Ajzen et al., 2018; Bandura et al., 1980). The index includes the following items: "I will vote without needing a reminder," "I will overcome any obstacles to ensure my participation," and "I will make an effort to fit voting with my schedule" (see Appendix Table A4 for Cronbach's alpha values).[8]

Analysis

As in Experiment 1, we first assess the direct effect of sticker messages on voting intentions. The results, presented in the third column of Table 1, reproduce the findings from the previous study. Specifically, the "I Will Vote" sticker leads to significantly stronger voting intentions than either the "I Voted" and control stickers (see Appendix Table A7). In the baseline model, the predicted value of the "I Will Vote" condition is 4.29 (SE = 0.13), compared to 3.97 (SE = 0.13) in the "I Voted" condition, and 3.80 (SE = 0.14) in the control condition. Following this, we test a similar model with covariates for party affiliation, age, gender, and race. These results, which appear in the last column of Table 2, also show the

Table 2. Predicted values: vote intention index - experiment 1.

	Experiment 1				Experiment 2			
	Baseline		With Covariates		Baseline		With Covariates	
	Mean	SE	Mean	SE	Mean	SE	Mean	SE
I Will Vote	4.337	0.147	4.366	0.144	4.285	0.134	4.293	0.132
I Voted	4.103	0.149	4.095	0.146	3.973	0.132	3.950	0.130
Control Task	3.854	0.154	3.843	0.151	3.806	0.136	3.823	0.135

significantly more positive impact of "I Will Vote" compared to the other two conditions. Moreover, we see similar effects in the model with covariates, with predicted values of 4.29 for "I Will Vote," 3.95 for "I Voted" and 3.82 for the control task. Here, we also used equivalence tests to explore the null finding for the "I Voted" condition, with margins of ± 0.5 units (Table A11). Unlike the inconclusive results in Experiment 1, these tests revealed that with greater statistical power, the "I Voted" condition was statistically equivalent to the control condition.

To better understand the mechanisms behind these experimental effects, we examine how sticker messages influence voting commitment, self-efficacy, and attitudes toward voting. The regression models, which include the covariates age, race, gender, and party identification, reveal pathways through which the "I Will Vote" sticker can affect voting intentions (see Table 3 and Table 4). While exposure to the "I Will Vote" message shows

Table 3. Experiment 2: Additional Outcomes.

DV	Voting Commitment	Voting Attitudes	Voting Self Efficacy
I Will Vote	0.306	0.420	0.587
	(0.096)	(0.007)	(0.018)
I Voted	0.103	0.228	0.199
	(0.572)	(0.143)	(0.420)
White	0.294	0.099	0.351
	(0.062)	(0.459)	(0.099)
Female	−0.157	0.242	−0.399
	(0.297)	(0.059)	(0.049)
Age	−0.031	−0.018	−0.024
	(0.000)	(0.001)	(0.004)
Party Id	−0.047	−0.090	−0.003
	(0.671)	(0.339)	(0.982)
Constant	4.629	4.711	4.947
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
F	5.00	4.16	3.16
Prob > F	0.0000	0.0004	0.0046
RMSE	2.025	1.722	2.727

Note: p-values in parentheses. Control group.
Note: p-values in parentheses. Control group: Voting Commitment: Mean=3.686, SD=1.976; Voting Attitudes: Mean=4.255, SD=1.756; Voting Self Efficacy: Mean=4.213, SD=2.579 (see Appendix Table A7).

Table 4. Predicted values: Additional outcomes - Experiment 2.

	Voting Commitment		Voting Attitudes		Voting Self Efficacy	
	Mean	SE	Mean	SE	Mean	SE
I Will Vote	3.949	0.129	4.588	0.109	4.751	0.173
I Voted	3.746	0.127	4.395	0.108	4.363	0.171
Control Task	3.643	0.131	4.168	0.112	4.164	0.177

a positive but non-significant effect on voting commitment ($\beta = 0.31$, $p = .10$), it significantly enhances both attitudes toward voting ($\beta = 0.42$, $p = .01$) and voting self-efficacy ($\beta = 0.59$, $p = .02$). In contrast, the "I Voted" sticker shows consistently weaker and non-significant effects across all three variables: commitment ($\beta = 0.10$, $p = .57$), attitudes ($\beta = 0.23$, $p = .14$), and self-efficacy ($\beta = 0.20$, $p = .42$).

Overall, the regression results provide robust support for our hypotheses and replicate the findings from Experiment 1. This second experiment adds value by illuminating the psychological mechanisms underlying the sticker effects. While both "I Will Vote" and "I Voted" stickers were tested against a control condition, only the "I Will Vote" message showed significant positive effects on attitudes toward voting and voting self-efficacy. This suggests that participants exposed to the "I Will Vote" message feel more favorably disposed toward voting and more confident in their ability to vote, which can subsequently heighten their intention to vote.

It is important to address potential concerns related to social desirability and demand effects. To mitigate these, we implemented measures to enhance transparency and minimize participant deception. At the outset of the study, we explicitly informed participants that the research focused on American politics, ensuring that all participants were aware of the study's general domain. Thus, since both the "I Voted" and "I Will Vote" sticker conditions were presented within the same framework, any social desirability biases arising from participants inferring the study's objectives would equally influence responses in both conditions. Consequently, the differential effects observed between the sticker messages are unlikely to be solely attributable to social desirability or demand characteristics, thereby reinforcing the validity of our findings. More importantly, the study provided data on possible demand effects. Specifically, a funnel question at the conclusion of the survey asked respondents to identify the study's primary focus as follows "What do you think the study was about?" Answers to this question are coded to determine if any participants guess the study hypothesis, in which case they might produce bias results in the direction of the hypothesis. However, the vast majority of participants (about 90%) reported that the study was about politics, but none reported the actual study hypothesis.

Limitations and Future Directions

Our study has two main methodological limitations that should be kept in mind when interpreting the results. First, as we measured only immediate effects on voting intentions, we do not know for how long these intentions persist. Future research could explore how to maintain the motivational boost from "I Will Vote" stickers in the weeks and months leading up to election day. Such research would be particularly valuable for developing comprehensive get-out-the-vote strategies that leverage and sustain the promising effects we observed with "I Will Vote" messages.

It is also important to acknowledge that our study assessed voting intentions, not actual voting behavior. Although intentions are often considered a strong predictor of future electoral participation (Netemeyer & Burton, 1990), with meta-analyses across various types of behaviors showing correlations between intentions and behavior in the range of $r = .44–.47$ (Armitage & Conner, 2001), the translation of intentions into behavior depends on individuals' capacity to overcome various personal and institutional barriers (Holbein & Hillygus, 2020). Personal and social factors, such as civic knowledge, perceived ability to

navigate the voting process, and social support networks, might influence whether enhanced voting intentions translate into electoral participation.

A key distinction to consider is that while "I Voted" stickers are typically distributed at the polling place to those who already voted, "I Will Vote" messages are intended to be presented before voting to encourage participation. Yet, mobilization tactics, such as direct mailing of voting material, may not always be effective (Green & Gerber, 2019; Unan et al., 2024), and that can depend on the election context (Mann & Haenschen, 2024). With this in mind, we propose the following avenues to explore how to utilize the findings from this study in GOTV efforts. First, future research could examine the connection between our findings and Cialdini's work on social influence (Cialdini et al., 1978; Kiesler & Corbin, 1965; Kiesler et al., 1966, 1974), which suggests that individuals tend to act in ways that maintain consistency with their prior statements/commitments, especially when they are public. Future studies could examine whether individuals who publicly display "I Will Vote" stickers have stronger psychological pressure to maintain consistency between stated intentions and future behavior.

Second, future research should explore engaging delivery strategies to maximize the effectiveness of "I Will Vote" messages. Specifically, implementing pre-election distribution through trusted community organizations, such as canvassers affiliated with local nonprofits or community groups, could enhance the credibility and personal impact of the message. This approach leverages personal interaction and trusted sources to foster a stronger commitment to voting, potentially increasing the likelihood that individuals will follow through on their voting intentions.

Finally, community-based competitions to create and disseminate "I Will Vote" stickers represent another promising avenue for future research. Engaging local communities in the design and distribution process can enhance ownership and engagement with the message. Additionally, such competitions could facilitate the development of various future-oriented GOTV messages, allowing researchers to assess the effectiveness of different linguistic variations in promoting voter engagement. This strategy not only promotes creativity and community involvement but also provides a platform to test the scalability and adaptability of future-oriented messaging in diverse contexts.

Conclusions

Are "I Voted" stickers effective at influencing citizens' voting intentions, or could there be more impactful alternatives? How might these alternatives work? The present research leverages two preregistered experiments to examine whether "I Will Vote" stickers could more effectively enhance voting intentions among low-propensity voters compared to "I Voted" stickers. Our findings reveal that the "I Will Vote" condition leads to stronger voting intentions than the control condition, while the "I Voted" condition does not have a similar effect. The results, which are robust for different model specifications, show that "I Will Vote" messages may be a promising avenue to increase voter turnout.

The second goal of this research was to explore potential psychological mechanisms through which "I Will Vote" messages might influence voting intentions. We hypothesized that future-oriented messages, such as "I Will Vote," can affect voter motivation by influencing commitment, attitudes toward voting, and self-efficacy. Our analysis revealed that exposure to "I Will Vote" stickers significantly enhanced both attitudes about future

voting participation and voting self-efficacy, while showing a positive but non-significant effect on commitment. These findings demonstrate that "I Will Vote" messages can effectively shape key psychological factors that are known to be associated with behavioral intentions.

Our findings contribute to the growing body of literature on the intersection of language and voting. By demonstrating that messages such as "I Will Vote" can significantly enhance voting intentions, our research highlights the importance of verb tense in political communication strategies. This research also bridges insights from political science, linguistics, and psychology, offering a multidisciplinary perspective on voter mobilization. Our findings suggest that the temporal framing of political messages can tap into cognitive and motivational processes that shape civic engagement. Beyond the context of voting, this study underscores the broader importance of linguistic strategies in shaping behavioral intentions. While many studies on temporal framing in the area of risk communication emphasize the benefits of present-oriented messages (Wang et al., 2024), our findings suggest that future-oriented frames may be particularly effective for planned civic behaviors. This approach reveals new possibilities for how language might be used to encourage political participation, social responsibility, and collective action while also contributing to ongoing debates about the impact of linguistic variations on political behavior (Bryan et al., 2016; Gerber, Huber, Biggers, & Hendry, 2016; Gerber, Huber, Biggers, Hendry, et al., 2016). Future research should examine the long-term effects of verb tense and other forms of temporal framing in political messages, investigating whether these linguistic strategies can have a sustained impact on political norms and actual voting behavior.

Notes

1. https://www.eac.gov/blogs/best-practices-i-voted-sticker-contests
2. The code and data that support the findings of this study are available here: https://osf.io/e782q/
3. For example the ANES asks, "Do you intend to vote in the November election for President?," "Do you intend to vote in the election for the U.S. Senate?," and "Do you intend to vote in the election for the U.S. House of Representatives?," "Do you intend to vote for a candidate for Governor?."
4. Appendix Table A9 shows the results of the experiments for each component of the index.
5. It should be noted that the difference between the "I Voted" and the "I Will Vote" stickers is not statistically significant.
6. A total of 21 participants were excluded based on this exclusion criterion. While this criterion deviates from our preregistration plan, the results remain similar even when we do not apply this exclusion (see Appendix Table A8).
7. In this study, we added another question on general intention to vote in the 2024 general elections.
8. In addition to the *Self-Efficacy* Index, we measured alternative indices of efficacy: collective, internal, and external (Bandura, 2000; Chan et al., 2023; Gearhart, 2020; Niemi et al., 1991). However, our analysis revealed that none of these alternative efficacy measures had a statistically significant effect on voting intention.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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Data Availability Statement

All data and code are available here:https://osf.io/e782q/. The analysis was conducted using Stata/MP 18.5 for macOS.

Ethical Approval

Ethical approval was obtained from the corresponding author's affiliated institution: Institutional Review Board of the University of Pennsylvania (Protocol ID: 854683). It was confirmed that the research complied with ethical standards and was performed in accordance with relevant guidelines/regulations.

Informed Consent

Informed consent was obtained from all adult participants prior to data collection. Participation was entirely voluntary. Participants were informed of the study's purpose, their rights, and data protection measures. All personal information has been anonymized.

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