

Online Supporting Information

for

Parents, Peers, and Political Participation: Social Influence among Roommates

Brad T. Gomez and Matthew T. Pietryka
Florida State University

Abstract

Political participation has long been viewed as a social act. But the influence of social relationships on participation is often impossible to disentangle from the factors that select people into these relationships. To overcome this challenge, we study randomly assigned college roommates, thus reducing these selection biases and other confounds. We examine short-run social influence of roommates on voter participation in 2016 and longer-term effects in the 2018 and 2020 elections. We collected consent from over 2,000 first-year students, allowing us to obtain a matched voter file indicating which students voted and the public voting histories of students' parents, an indicator of students' pre-college political environment socialization. Our evidence suggests that roommates' influence on turnout decisions rivals the association between students' turnout and that of their parents. Yet this parity masks gender differences. For women, the effect of roommates is larger. For men, the student-parent association exceeds the roommate effect.

Table of Contents for Online Supporting Information

SI A	Roommate Selection Process	1
SI B	Recruitment and Consent Process	2
SI C	Parental Match	6
SI D	Regression Models	8

A. Roommate Selection Process

Overall, about 85% of first-time college students at Florida State University live in the university's residence halls. Students granted admission for the entering class of Fall 2016 were offered the opportunity to enter into a housing contract in February 2016. Within seven days of the contract submission deadline, students were required to pay a deposit and, if under the age of 18, submit a Parent/Guardian Contract Consent Form. Students were then assigned by lottery a random contract number, and those with the lowest numbers were given priority in the room assignment process.

Incoming students who wished to room with a specific individual—also an incoming student—were able to submit roommate request forms by mid-April. Students with a mutual roommate request were then paired together and their priority status was based on the worst (highest) contract number of the roommate pair. The remainder of the students entered the room assignment process individually.

Rooms were allocated in order of the randomly assigned contract number with students basing their choices on their building and room type preferences. In 2016, Florida State University had 18 residence halls, housing just over 6,700 undergraduates, from which to choose. One of the dorms, Landis Hall, is reserved for students in the Florida State University Honors Program, and six buildings house small Living-Learning Communities (LLC), where students with shared academic interests can live together—importantly, students in LLCs are confined to the same floor of their building.

Students without requested roommates select among available rooms without knowledge of their roommates—the identities of the roommates are not revealed until after the room assignment process is completed.

Florida State University Student Housing provided the principal investigators with information about whether students in the resulting sample requested a roommate or were assigned one randomly.

B. Recruitment and Consent Process

This research reported here was approved by Florida State University's Institutional Review Board (HSC 2016.18277, HSC 2018.23704, and HSC 2019.27019) and supported by funding from the LeRoy Collins Institute at Florida State University, the Florida State University Department of Political Science, and a Planning Grant from the Florida State University.

The study's subject population included over 6,000 first-year students at Florida State University (FSU) who enrolled at the university in the Fall 2016, lived in on-campus housing, and American citizens over the age of 18. To ensure the closest direct link to the family unit, the population was limited to students who were enrolled in high school and presumably living in the family home in the Spring 2016. This restriction eliminated students who transferred to FSU from other colleges or universities.

The investigators engaged in multiple efforts to acquire informed consent from targeted students. In round one, with the cooperation of FSU Student Housing, consent was solicited at the time students moved into student housing before the Fall 2016 semester. Students were required to "check in" to their residential dorms, where they were given their room keys and other move-in information. Students were presented with paper Informed Consent Forms (see below), requesting access to their university-held directory information and academic records, and asked to return their signed forms to staff at the residential hall's front desk. Students were not incentivized at this stage to participate, and the resulting yield was relatively low.

In round two, graduate student research assistants held “tabling events” outside of residential halls attempting to obtain consent from members of the subject population. The solicitation was passive, as graduate students did not approach students as they entered/exited their residence halls. Instead, a banner adjacent to the table informed students they could “Win one of ten \$50 Amazon gift cards (takes ~two minutes of your time).” Interested students who were eligible to participate in the study and provided informed consent were subsequently entered into a lottery to win the gift cards.

In round three, participants were recruited via an email solicitation sent to their university email address. Recipients of the message were unable to determine the names, addresses, or other identifying information of fellow recipients. The email included a link to an online consent form. Consenting students received at least \$5 with an opportunity to receive up to \$100. Specifically, when students arrived to claim their cash payment, they drew a number from a hat. The hat contained one \$100 winner, two \$50 winners, and five \$20 winners; all remaining participants received \$5 each.

Our Informed Consent Form appears below:

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Freshman Political Participation Project
Department of Political Science
Florida State University

You are invited to help us in a research study examining students' political participation. To help, you simply must sign this form, consenting to allow the researchers to use your university-held Directory Information, Educational Records, and Housing Information. No other action is necessary.

Our research seeks to gather data from all entering (first-year) students at Florida State University, who are at least 18 years old and also reside in FSU Student Housing. You are selected as a possible participant in this study because we believe that you meet these criteria. We ask that you read this form carefully before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by Professor Matthew Pietryka and Professor Brad T. Gomez from FSU's Department of Political Science.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is examining how changes in an individual's social environment might affect his/her interest in politics and political participation. We are particularly interested in investigating the political attitudes and behaviors of new college students and their experiences at FSU.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, you would be providing the investigators with access to your university-held Directory Information, Educational Records, and Housing Information. Directory Information includes (but is not excluded to) your name, date and place of birth, local and permanent addresses, major, and dates of attendance. Educational Records include (but are not excluded to) enrollment records, grades, and course schedules. Housing Information includes (but is not excluded to) information regarding housing preferences, roommate requests, and housing transfer requests. The researchers are required by law—the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)—to obtain your consent to access this information.

Access to student information will be given only to the principal investigators, Professors Pietryka and Gomez. If student information is provided on paper, it will be properly stored and secured in the principal investigators' university offices. All electronic data files will be transferred from university sources to the investigators using Advanced Encryption Standard (AES) encryption and/or password-protection via Dropbox or flash drive. These data will be used for research purposes only, and, once the final data set is assembled, all identifying information (e.g., names, addresses) will be removed from the dataset.

Though you may be contacted via email and asked to participate in a separate (voluntary) survey portion of this study, by providing consent here, you are fulfilling all of your responsibilities as a participant in the study. There are no additional tasks. The investigators simply wish to use the records outlined above in order to examine students' backgrounds and the diversity of the social environment among first-year students, who reside on campus, at Florida State University.

Risks and benefits of being in the Study:

There are some risks inherent in the transfer and storage of personal information. However, by limiting access to the data only to the principal investigators and by securing all paper and electronic data, the researchers will take every precaution to minimize the risks associated with their use of your private records. No identifying information will ever be provided to a third party (unless required by law). The results of the investigators’ research will likely be published, but your name (nor any identifying information) will be used.

You are unlikely to experience any direct benefits from your participation in this study. Yet by participating in this study, you can help the researchers to shed important new light on fundamental aspects of democratic citizenship.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept private and confidential to the extent permitted by law. In any report we might publish, we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a study participant. However, research information that identifies you may be shared with the FSU Institutional Review Board (IRB) and others who are responsible for ensuring compliance with laws and regulations related to research, including the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP).

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the University. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent at any time without affecting those relationships.

Contacts and Questions:

If you have any questions that you would like to ask before agreeing to be in the study, please contact either Professor Pietryka (by email: mpietryka@fsu.edu, or phone: [omitted] or Professor Gomez (by email: bgomez@fsu.edu, or phone: [omitted]).

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researchers, you are encouraged to contact the FSU IRB at 2010 Levy Street, Research Building B, Suite 276, Tallahassee, FL 32306-2742, or 850-644-8633, or by email at humansubjects@fsu.edu

If you would like to receive a copy of this information to keep for your records, please email one of the principal investigators and an electronic copy of your signed form will be sent to you.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

Print Name

Signature

Date

C. Parental Match

To measure parental participation, we first had to identify students' parents. Although we obtained students' home addresses from their university records, these records, unfortunately, do not identify the students' parents by name. Thus, using the national voter file obtained from Catalist, we identified parents of all individuals registered to the students' home addresses. We then determined which of these individuals were likely to be the students' parents based on name, age, race, and date of registration. Although most parents were easily identified due to shared last names and generational differences in age, the coding task featured some ambiguity arising from households with multiple parent-aged residents and cases where parents and children had different last names. We therefore also coded our confidence in our ability to identify the individual's relationship to the student. Two coders independently evaluated a sample of 1,238 occupants, about 5% of the households, selecting entire households at random, and the coders split the remaining households evenly, also selecting households at random. We achieved a 90% agreement score when identifying residents' relationships with the student (Cohen's Kappa = .87) and 86% agreement for confidence (weighted Kappa = .84 with squared weights). We reconciled discrepancies in residents' relationships to the student by choosing the relationship assigned by the coder with the greatest confidence rating. We reconciled confidence discrepancies by choosing the lowest value. For our analysis we rely only on parents identified with confidence of two or three on the three-point scale.

As noted in the main text, for each parent we identified, we measure their participation as the percentage of midterm and presidential elections from 2008 to 2014 in which they were recorded as voters in the voter file. We begin with 2008 because it is the earliest year provided in the national voter file obtained from Catalist. In households where we found only one parent, we

use that parent's vote history. In households where we identified two parents, we take the average of both vote histories. In households where we found no parent, we assume that parents did not vote since the absence from the voter file typically indicates a nonvoter.

D. Regression Models

TABLE S1. Regressions of a student’s turnout on their roommate’s turnout (in the same year) and their parents’ turnout (in earlier years).

	Turnout in 2016			Turnout in 2018			Turnout in 2020			Number of elections voted		
	Est.	s.e.	<i>p</i>	Est.	s.e.	<i>p</i>	Est.	s.e.	<i>p</i>	Est.	s.e.	<i>p</i>
Roommate voted in election (0 = No; 1 = Yes)	0.12	(0.076)	0.03	0.15	(0.073)	0.01	0.04	(0.061)	0.13			
Roommate’s number of elections voted (0-3)										0.16	(0.067)	< .01
Parents’ turnout, ’08-14 (as a proportion)	0.09	(0.047)	0.01	0.09	(0.045)	0.01	0.05	(0.062)	0.10	0.24	(0.12)	0.01
Intercept	0.56	(0.059)	< .01	0.46	(0.052)	< .01	0.66	(0.067)	< .01	1.55	(0.155)	< .01
N	450			450			450			450		
AIC	579			627			567			1346		
RMSE	0.46			0.48			0.45			1.07		
R ²	0.021			0.029			0.004			0.034		

Note: Linear regression models fit in R with the estimatr package (Blair et al 2025). Standard errors clustered by first-year residence hall with the CR2 variance estimator (Bell and McCaffrey 2002) and one-tailed p-values.

Observations are directed dyads. The outcomes for the first three models are indicators of whether the focal student voted in the election. The outcome in the fourth model is the number of elections in which the focal student voted.

References

Bell R and McCaffrey D (2002) Bias reduction in standard errors for linear regression with multi-stage samples. *Survey Methodology* **28**(2), 169–82.

Blair G, Cooper J, Coppock A, Humphreys M and Sonnet L (2025). estimatr: Fast Estimators for Design-Based Inference. R package version 1.0.4, <https://github.com/DeclareDesign/estimatr>, <https://declaredesign.org/r/estimatr/>.