

Author(s): Oliver, Eric and Raymond E. Wolfinger
Title: Jury Duty as a Deterrent to Voter registration
Date: January 22, 1992
Dataset(s): 1991 Pilot Study

Abstract

Oliver and Wolfinger use data from the 1991 Pilot Study to gauge whether the threat of selecting jurors from voter registration lists depresses voter registration. The authors found that only about one-half the sample professed to know how courts selected jurors. However, respondents who thought that jury lists came only from voter registration records were less likely to be registered than those who believed that they were also vulnerable for jury duty in other ways. In turn, respondents who belong to the later group were less likely to be registered than respondents who do not mention voter registration lists as a juror source. Oliver and Wolfinger also find that those respondents reluctant to serve on juries are less likely to be registered to vote, irrespective of their knowledge of the sources of jury lists. The authors argue that this trend emerges because the item measuring willingness to serve jury duty is, in effect, a variant of the old NES civic duty item. The authors also conduct a multivariate analysis to uncover the determinants of voter registration. Oliver and Wolfinger find that jury source knowledge has a statistically significant relationship with the decision to register to vote. This relationship, however, is substantively small, especially in relation to the effect of other significant variables, such as residential mobility and attention given to politics. Furthermore, a respondent's willingness to serve on a jury has no statistical impact on the likelihood of registering to vote. In sum, the impact of the threat of jury duty on voter registration rates, to the extent it exists at all, seems to be modest. The authors conclude that the great majority of voters are either ignorant of the sources of juror lists or are not significantly disturbed by the threat of jury duty to avoid registering to vote.