

Property takes a toll on Democrats

IN THE BRIDGEGATE SCANDAL, allies of New Jersey Governor Chris Christie shut down lanes onto the George Washington Bridge from nearby Fort Lee, ostensibly as retribution against Fort Lee's Democratic mayor. However, new research suggests instead that streamlining traffic to Fort Lee would've been the better move. Researchers at Harvard University compared neighborhoods near E-ZPass toll plazas versus neighborhoods near exit ramps of non-E-ZPass highways in New Jersey and Pennsylvania, which both introduced E-ZPass on their toll roads in 2002. Neighborhoods near E-ZPass toll plazas experienced a significantly greater increase in property values — as a result of lower commuting times — which, in turn, increased the share of votes for Bush in the presidential election of 2004, compared to 2000, by 1 to 2 percentage points.

Jerzak, C. & Libgober, B., "Do Higher Housing Values Make Communities More Conservative? Evidence from the Introduction of E-ZPass," Harvard University (January 2016).

The devil is in the details

"IMAGINE YOU ARE asked to predict the winner of a baseball game. Would your prediction be better or worse if, prior to making your winning team prediction, you were asked to predict additional details about the event, such as the exact final score of the game or how many hits each team will accumulate?" That's what a new study asks, and in experiments with predictions on MLB, NHL, NBA, and FIFA games, it finds that people who were simply asked to predict the winner made better predictions than people were also asked to predict the final score or other details of the game. People making detail-laden predictions were less responsive to key factors like the team's record and home-field advantage. This effect of detail on predictions did not extend to irrelevant details like game duration.

Kelly, T. & Simmons, J., "When Does Making Detailed Predictions Make Predictions Worse?" Journal of Experimental Psychology: General (forthcoming).

The force is strong with you

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IF YOU WANT your significant other to feel closer to you — but you’re too lazy for the romance part — consider the gift of magnets. Psychologists from Texas A&M University asked romantically involved students to report on their relationships. Before doing so, the students were instructed to take a “mental break” with a “simple physical activity” by repeatedly joining and separating toy blocks for one minute. For some students, the blocks had been magnetized to attract each other. These students subsequently reported having better relationships.

Christy, A. et al., “Animal Magnetism: Metaphoric Cues Alter Perceptions of Romantic Partners and Relationships,” PLoS ONE (May 2016).

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