THE MOVEMENT COOPERATIVE

Wisconsin Primary Handwritten Postcards Test Results

Indivisible Chicago Alliance and Postcards to Swing States

BACKGROUND

- In 2018, Coalition for a Better Illinois 6th partnered with The Movement Cooperative (TMC) to measure the **effect of handwritten postcards on turnout in the 2018 IL-06 primary election** and the downstream effects of those postcards on turnout in the 2018 IL-06 general election

- The study found a **1.2-pp increase in primary turnout** and a 0.7-pp increase in general election turnout

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THIS STUDY

In this study, Indivisible Chicago Alliance, Postcards to Swing States, and TMC build upon that research by testing the efficacy of **different postcard messages** and **message length** on turnout in the **2020 WI primary** and general elections*

*General election results will be available after the Wisconsin voter file updates with 2020 general election turnout data

2020 WISCONSIN PRIMARY CONTEXT

- Held on April 7, only 3.5 weeks after the US declared a state of emergency for **Covid-19**

- The **Democratic presidential race was not competitive**. Only Joe Biden and Bernie Sanders remained, and Sanders was a longshot. He dropped out the next morning before Wisconsin results were released

- In the Republican primary, Donald Trump had **no competitors**

2020 WISCONSIN PRIMARY CONTEXT

- It was the **first in-person election since stay-at-home orders were issued**

- After the CDC raised concerns about the safety of in-person voting, Governor Tony Evers tried to instate all mail-in voting, delay the election, and extend absentee voting. However, these efforts were denied by the Repubican-controlled state legislature and the US Supreme Court

- **Turnout was lower than 2016**; statewide, 34% of eligible voters turned out, compared to 47% during the 2016 WI primary. However, by historical standards, both elections had high turnout.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- Did contacting voters with **handwritten postcards** increase **turnout** in the 2020 Wisconsin presidential primary election?

- What was the **downstream effect** of handwritten postcards delivered prior to the primary election on turnout in the 2020 Wisconsin general election?

*General election results will be available after the Wisconsin voter file updates with 2020 general election turnout data

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What was the effect of a **social pressure message**, compared to a **plan-making message**, on primary and general election turnout?

  - *Might be the first test of social pressure on handwritten postcards*

- How does **message length** affect primary and general election turnout?

*General election results will be available after the Wisconsin voter file updates with 2020 general election turnout data

EXPERIMENTAL DESIGN

Universe: Nearly all Wisconsin voters with primary turnout scores between 5 and 95, partisanship scores of 75 or higher, and mail deliverability scores of "somewhat likely deliverable" or higher. (N = 587,767)

Control N = 338,441	Plan-Making N = 83,087 2 flights of handwritten postcards		Social Pressure N = 166,239 2 flights of handwritten postcards	
	Long N = 41,625	Short N = 41,462	Long N = 83,043	Short N = 83,196

Outcomes: Turnout in the 2020 Wisconsin primary and general elections

*The numbers above are based on the full experimental universe. We ran the analysis on the full universe and on a subset of the universe based on two different definitions of "household". These analyses produced similar results. We present the results from the subsetted universe in this deck; using a narrower definition of household removes the possibility that multiple people in the same household were included in the experimental universe and exposed to multiple conditions.

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WISCONSIN POSTCARD PROGRAM

- Indivisible Chicago recruited **thousands of volunteers from 46 states** through social media, grassroots groups, and word-of-mouth

- Volunteers wrote and sent **almost 500,000 postcards**

- By relying heavily on volunteers, the costs of the half-million postcard program were kept extremely low: **$27,156** for shipping, printing, software, and supplies

  - The postcard was **volunteer-designed**

  - Volunteers provided their own stamps, totalling almost **$175,000 in in-kind donations**

WISCONSIN POSTCARD PROGRAM

- Volunteers chose to write **social pressure or plan-making messages** (to voters in the appropriate conditions)

- Volunteers were **instructed to mail the postcards on specific dates**

- The first flight of mail was scheduled to land between 3/24 - 3/30, and the second between 3/30 - 4/4. This plan meant that voters received 2 postcards in the **last two weeks before the primary election**

VOLUNTEER COMPLIANCE

- In their general election program, Postcards to Swing States **followed up with 442 volunteers,** mostly by phone, from a random sample and found that **compliance with the program was high**.* Compliance was likely similarly high for this program.

- 94% of volunteers reported completing all of their postcards

- 91% of volunteers reported that they stuck to the exact message, without modification

- 95% of volunteers reported that they followed the mailing dates, while 4% reported sending their postcards earlier

*These self-reported numbers may be biased upward, but even so compliance is likely very high

Postcard
FRONT

The volunteer-designed postcard featured bright colors; a fun, Wisconsin-focused image; and a link to the state's voter information website

April 7th 2020
polls open 7am–8pm

election day, early, or absentee
http://myvote.wi.gov

Social Pressure Message - Long
BACK

This message told voters that their vote is public record, and that organizations may follow up after the election to let them know how they compared to other Wisconsin voters

Joe, Thank you for being a previous/first time voter! Who you vote for is secret, but whether you vote is public information. After the primary election on Tuesday, April 7, local organizations may follow up with you about your participation and let you know how you compare to Wisconsin voters.

- David

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13

Social Pressure Message - Short

BACK

The short message was a condensed version that still informed the voter that their vote is public record

Sally, Thank you for being a previous/first time voter! Who you vote for is secret, but whether you vote is public information. Vote Tuesday, April 7th!

- Jane

Plan-Making Message - Long
BACK

This message encouraged the voter to make a plan to vote and included the link to check registration status and polling location

Sam, The primary election on Tuesday, April 7th is one of the most important of our lifetimes! Have you made a plan to vote? How will you get to the polls? Will you vote before or after work? Visit http://myvote.wi.gov to check your registration status and polling location.

- Betsy

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Plan-Making Message - Short
BACK

The short message was a condensed version that still encouraged the voter to make a voting plan

Ben, what's your plan to get to the polls on Tuesday, April 7th? See you there!

- Peggy

MAIN RESULTS

Out of the experimental universe of high-partisan ship score voters...

...approximately 20% were voters of color, 60% were women, and 84% had voted in the 2016 general election

Modeled Black	13%
Modeled Non-Black POC	5%
Modeled White	77%
Women	59%
Men	32%
Turnout Score (mean)	51
Partisanship Score (mean)	89
Age (mean)	49
Voted 2016 General	84%
Voted 2016 Primary	50%
N	587,767

Overall, the program increased turnout in the Wisconsin primary
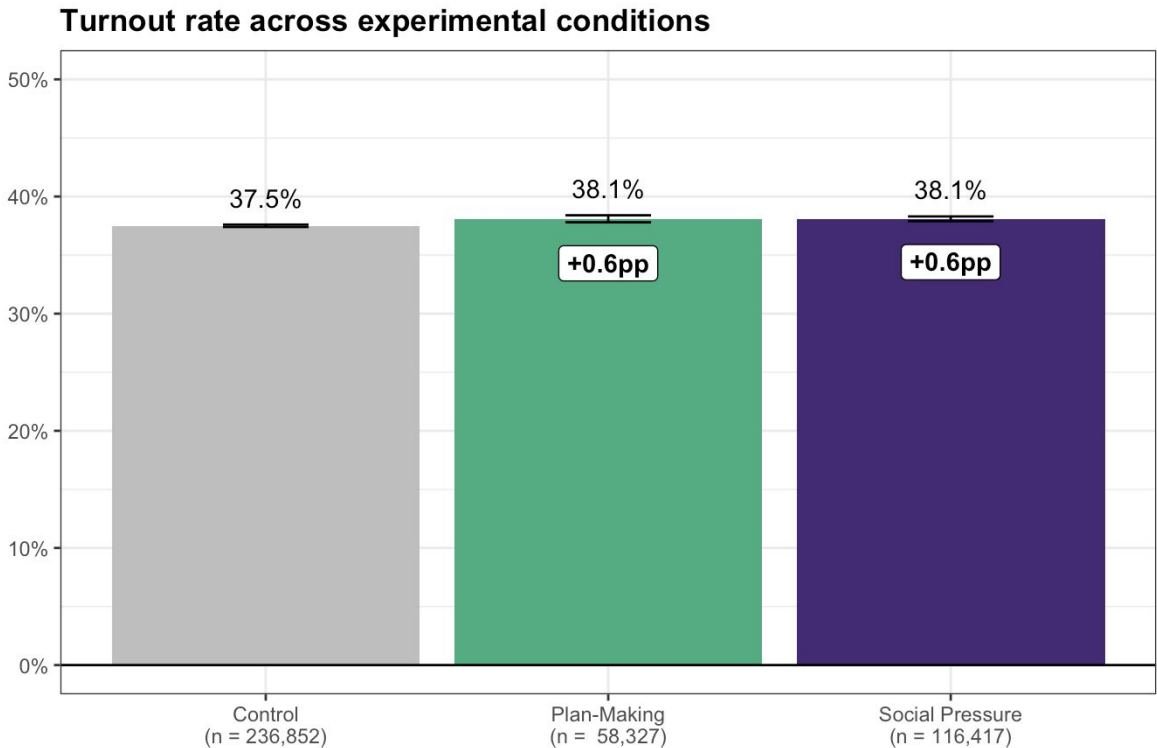
The handwritten postcard program moderately increased primary turnout, by 0.6 percentage points (pp).
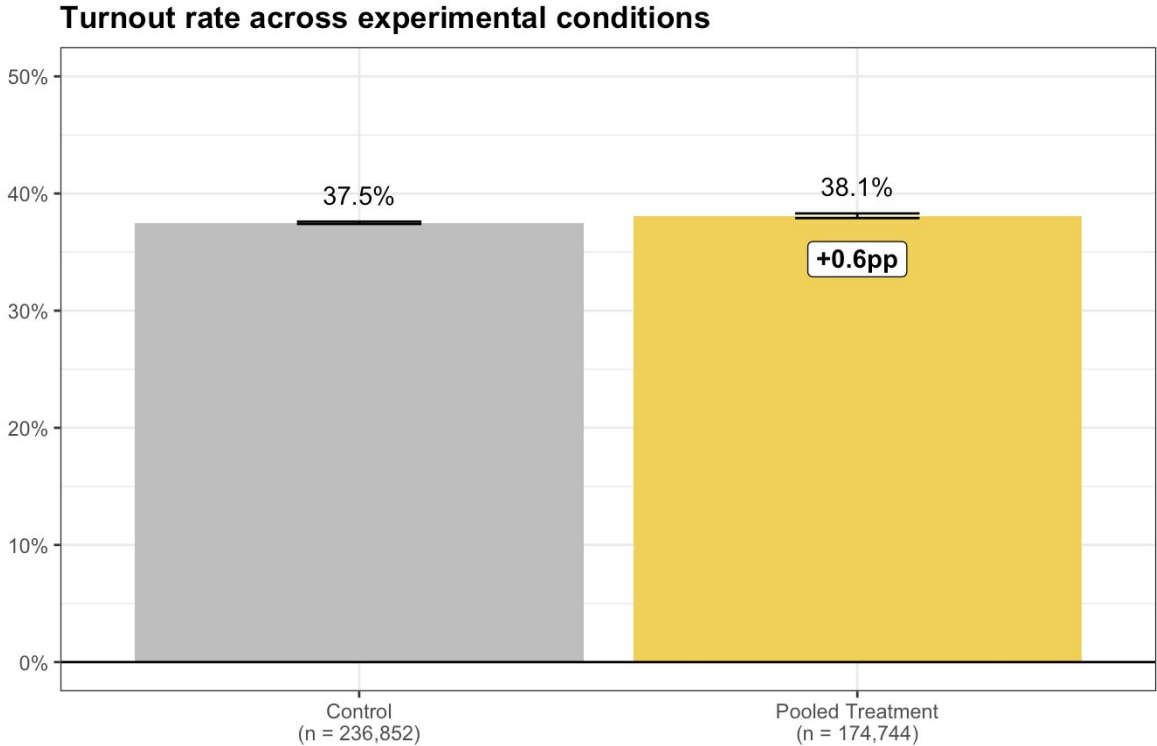
Turnout rate across experimental conditions

The Movement Cooperative, Indivisible Chicago Alliance, and Postcards to Swing States, 2020

Overall, social pressure and plan-making messages were similarly effective
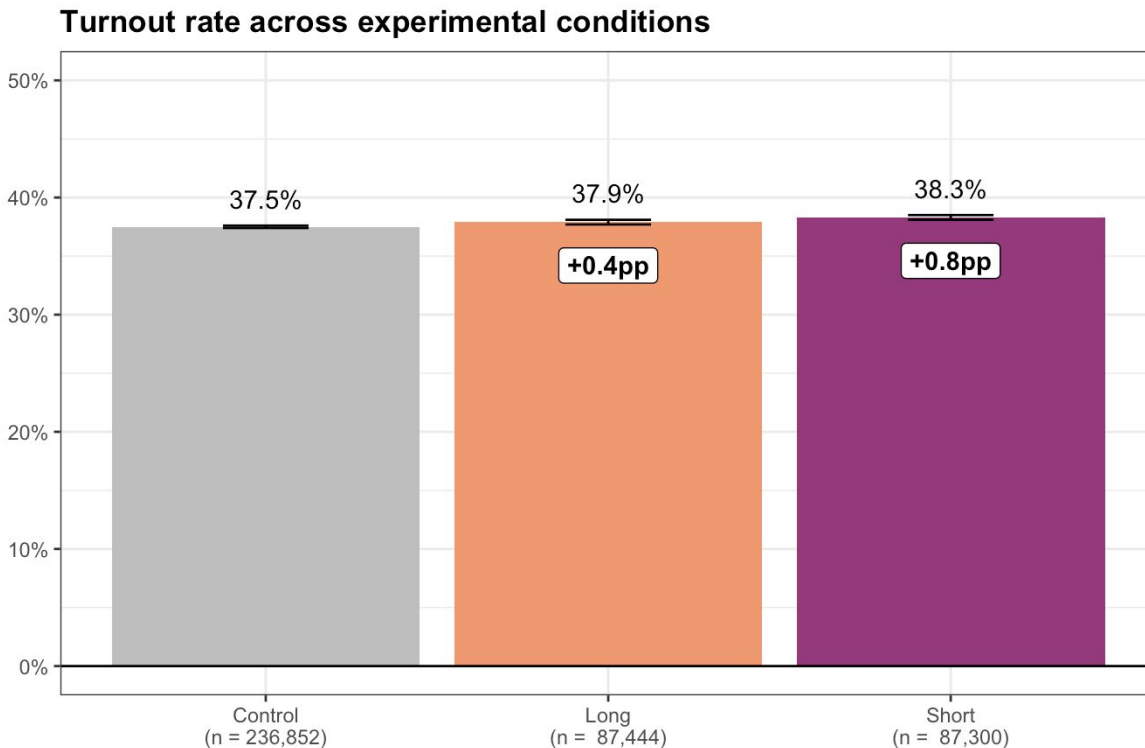
Each increased turnout by 0.6pp.

Turnout rate across experimental conditions

- Control (n = 236,852): 37.5%
- Plan-Making (n = 58,327): 38.1% (+0.6pp)
- Social Pressure (n = 116,417): 38.1% (+0.6pp)

The Movement Cooperative, Indivisible Chicago Alliance, and Postcards to Swing States, 2020

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Faster-to-write, short messages didn't appear to be any less effective than long messages

In fact, the effect of short messages may have been larger than the effect of long messages

Turnout rate across experimental conditions

Control (n = 236,852): 37.5%
Long (n = 87,444): 37.9% +0.4pp
Short (n = 87,300): 38.3% +0.8pp

The Movement Cooperative, Indivisible Chicago Alliance, and Postcards to Swing States, 2020

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Every condition increased turnout

The short social pressure message appeared to be particularly effective, as did the long plan-making message

**Turnout rate across experimental conditions**
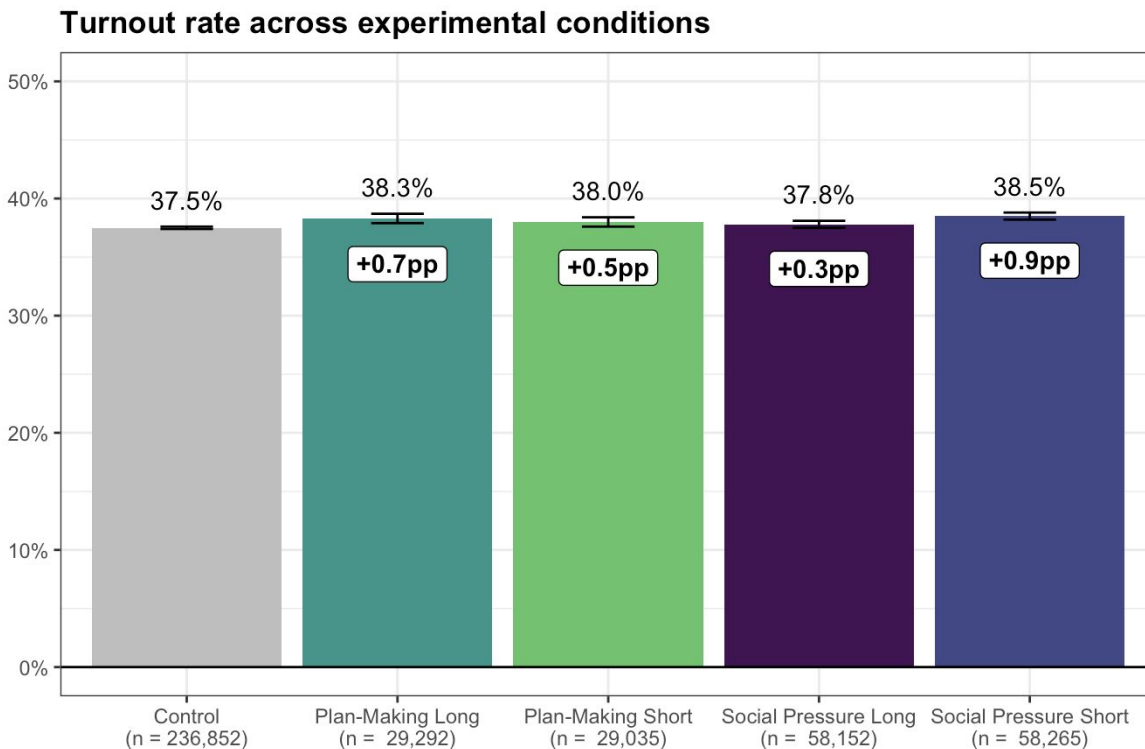
The Movement Cooperative, Indivisible Chicago Alliance, and Postcards to Swing States, 2020

The program had a large spillover effect on others living in the household

While the program had a 0.6-pp effect on targeted voters, the effect on other household members was almost as large, 0.4-pp. Baseline turnout was larger among targets compared to other household members, due to targeting strategy.

Turnout rate among experimental targets and their householders
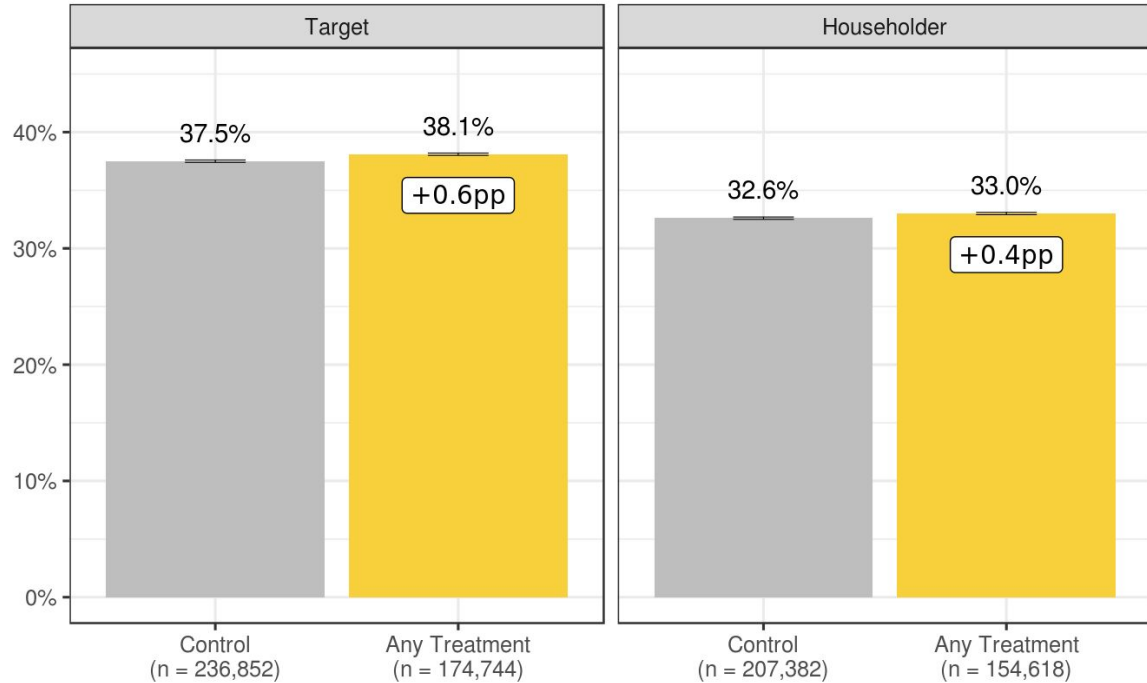
The Movement Cooperative, Indivisible Chicago Alliance, Postcards to Swing States, 2020

COST- AND TIME-EFFICIENCY

Our best estimate is that the program added 2,289 net primary voters

This includes voters added by spillover effects

Size of treatment group	**249,326**
Number of additional household members of treatment group	**198,336**
Effect on turnout among treatment group	**+0.6pp**
Effect on turnout among household members	**+0.4pp**
Estimated voters added	**2,289**
Margin of error	**±519**

*In order to estimate the full effect of the program, the N sizes are based on the full, rather than the subsetted, universe

In total, we estimate that the program generated roughly 8 voters per 100 volunteer hours

The short postcards may have generated approximately 11 voters per 100 volunteer hours, while the long postcards may have generated approximately 5 voters per 100 volunteer hours

Condition	Effect Size	Estimated Minutes Per Postcard	Voters Added Per 100 Estimated Volunteer Hours
Any Treatment	+0.6pp	3.5	8
Short	+0.8pp	3	11
Long	+0.4pp	4	5

By harnessing volunteer enthusiasm, the program was extraordinarily cost-effective by paid voter contact standards

In context: 7x greater than the average VPK for "other" elections in Analyst Institute's meta-analysis.

Also, compared to general presidential elections, this is 7x greater than the average effect of social pressure mail; 17x greater than non-social pressure mail

Program cost	**$27,156**
Estimated number of voters added in experimental universe	**1,496**
Estimated number of voters added by spillover effects	**793**
Estimated number of total voters added	**2,289**
Voters added per $1,000 spent (including spillover effects)	**84**
Voters added per $1,000 spent (not including spillover effects)	**55**

*In order to estimate the full effect of the program, the N sizes are based on the full, rather than the subsetted, universe

# SUBGROUP ANALYSIS RESULTS

PREVIEW OF SUBGROUP ANALYSIS RESULTS

- The program was **substantially more effective among older voters (over 40)** compared to younger voters

- It appeared to be **more effective among women** compared to men

- It worked **across all turnout score ranges**

- The program had a moderate effect among white voters. It may have had a large effect among Asian and Native American voters. If there was an effect on Black and Latinx voters, it was unlikely to have been large.

# The program was substantially more effective among older voters

While the program may have slightly increased turnout among voters under 40, it substantially increased turnout among voters over 40, by 0.8pp.
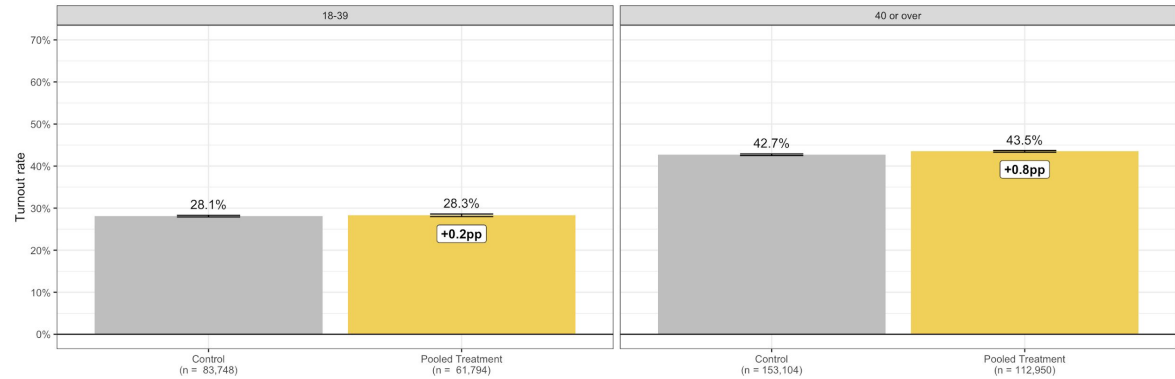
The Movement Cooperative, Indivisible Chicago Alliance, and Postcards to Swing States, 2020

# The program appeared to be more effective among women than men

While the program was effective among both groups, it increased turnout among women by 0.8pp compared to 0.4pp for men.
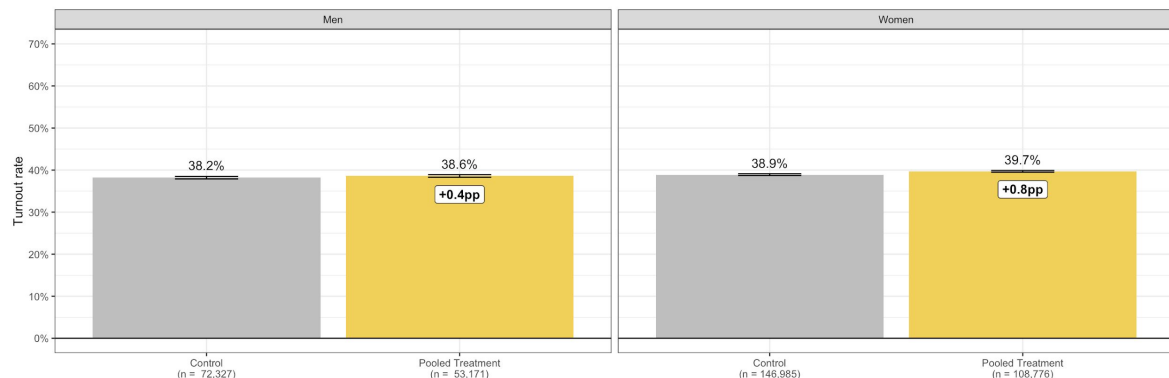
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The program worked across the turnout score

That said, the program increased turnout the most among voters with a presidential primary turnout score of 35-64, followed by voters with higher turnout scores, and then by voters with lower turnout scores.
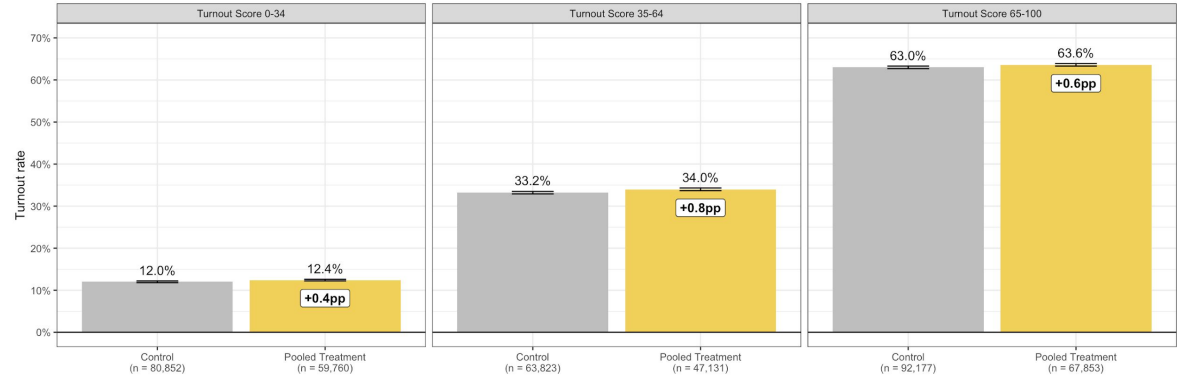
The Movement Cooperative, Indivisible Chicago Alliance, and Postcards to Swing States, 2020

Effects may have differed by race

The program had a moderate effect among white voters. It may have had a large effect among Asian and Native American voters. If there was an effect on Black and Latinx voters, it was unlikely to have been large.

The Movement Cooperative, Indivisible Chicago Alliance, and Postcards to Swing States, 2020
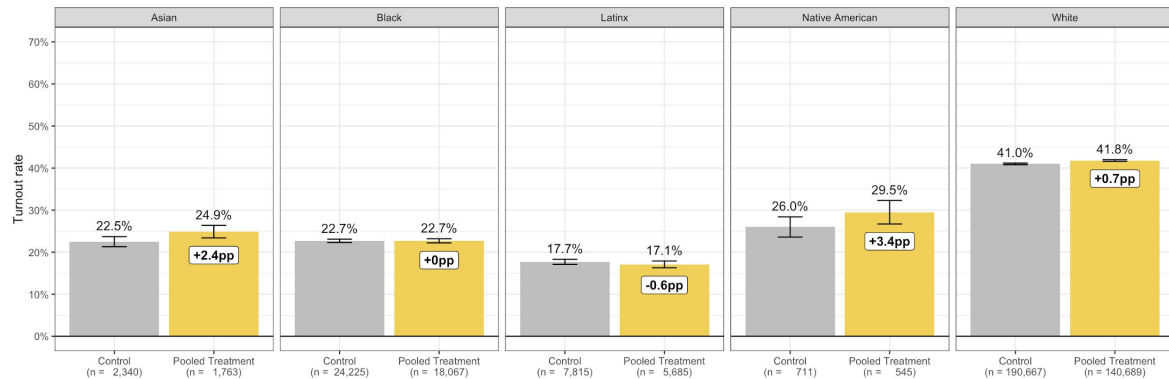
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MAIN TAKEAWAYS

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS

- Overall, the Indivisible Chicago and Postcards to Swing States program moderately increased turnout in the 2020 WI primary election

- Our best estimate is that the program added 2,289 voters, at an incredibly cost-efficient rate of 84 voters per $1,000 spent. The program generated roughly 8 voters per 100 volunteer hours

- Social pressure and plan-making messages both worked, and the faster-to-write short messages did not appear to be less effective than long messages

- The short social pressure message appeared to be particularly effective, as did the long plan-making message

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SUMMARY OF SUBGROUP FINDINGS

- The program appeared to be substantially more effective among older voters and more effective among women. It was effective across all turnout score ranges.

- The program increased turnout among modeled white, Asian, and Native American voters. If it increased turnout among modeled Black or Latinx voters, the effect was unlikely to have been large

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CONTEXTUALIZING EFFECT SIZES

- In a presidential primary, the estimated 0.6-pp average effect could be understood as "moderately" large

- According to Analyst Institute's meta-analysis, on average:

  - Mail programs in *general* presidential elections produce an effect of ~0.2pp for non-social pressure mail and ~0.7pp for social pressure mail

  - In "other" elections (e.g., primaries, state, local, and special elections), they produce a ~0.9-pp effect

- The previous test found a 1.2-pp effect in the 2018 IL-06 congressional primary; however, that was in a midterm year, where effect sizes are typically larger than in a presidential year

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CONTEXTUALIZING EFFECT SIZES

- The onset of the pandemic 3.5 weeks before Election Day complicated the 2020 Wisconsin presidential primary, and may have reduced the effect of the program

- Had we known how the pandemic would have impacted the election, the program might have been designed with sensitivity to critical vote-by-mail deadlines, given how many people ended up voting-by mail (60% in 2020, compared to <10% prior)

- The second flight of postcards was scheduled to land between March 30 and April 4. VBM ballots had to be requested by April 3 and postmarked by April 7

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MAIN TAKEAWAYS

- Handwritten postcard programs, where volunteers provide their own stamps, are incredibly cost-effective. In exchange, they require serious volunteer organizing

- Short messages were just as effective, if not more effective, than long messages, when a strong message was used. Importantly, this suggests that volunteers can write more postcards more quickly, without compromising efficacy

- In contrast to research on printed mail, plan-making postcards were just as effective as social pressure postcards, on average. Still, a short social pressure postcard appeared most effective

- In line with previous research on plan-making, walking the voter through details of *how* to make a plan was more effective than simply asking them to make a plan

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RECOMMENDATIONS

- For handwritten postcards, fast-to-write, short social pressure messages (2-3 simple sentences) seem to be effective

- Volunteer-powered groups looking to mobilize voters on a tight budget can do so through large-scale handwritten postcard programs, in which volunteers provide their own stamps

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FUTURE RESEARCH

- Indivisible Chicago, Postcards to Swing States, and TMC are conducting two follow-up studies to this project, focused on the 2020 general election

- They test the efficacy of a Race-Class-Narrative-based message compared to a social pressure message; the efficacy of receiving 1 vs 2 vs 3 postcards; and the efficacy of handwritten postcards vs printed voter report cards

- By targeting almost 8 million voters with 15.7 million postcards across 14 states, these tests will be able to precisely assess the efficacy of handwritten postcards across multiple contexts

- Results from these two tests will be available in 2021, after the voter file updates with 2020 general election turnout

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FUTURE RESEARCH

- When state voter files update with 2020 general election turnout data, we will assess the downstream effects of the Wisconsin primary handwritten postcard program on the Wisconsin general election

- Future research can continue to assess the most effective uses of volunteer hours, while taking into account volunteers' personal preferences, skill sets, and what keeps them engaged and coming back
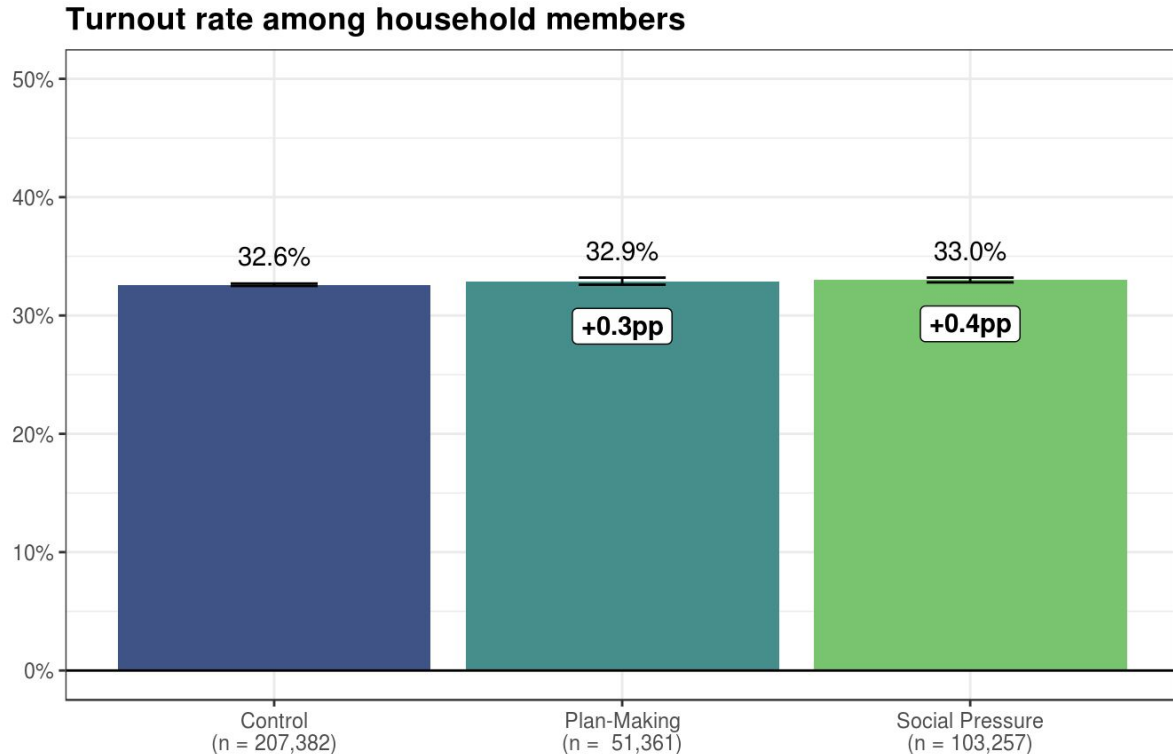
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THANK YOU

Elizabeth Zack, Chanita Intawan, and Leo Liu

APPENDIX

Social pressure may have produced a slightly larger spillover effect, compared to plan-making

Turnout rate among household members

The Movement Cooperative, Indivisible Chicago Alliance, and Postcards to Swing States, 2020

Short messages may have produced a slightly larger spillover effect, compared to long messages

This is in line with the main finding that short messages appeared to be more effective than longer ones

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Turnout rate among household members

The Movement Cooperative, Indivisible Chicago Alliance, and Postcards to Swing States, 2020