THE MOVEMENT COOPERATIVE

Optimizing Two Waves of People-Powered Postcards:
A 2022 Experiment on 5.3 Million Voters

Progressive Turnout Project
The Movement Cooperative

BACKGROUND

- **Postcards to Swing States (PTSS)**, an initiative by **Progressive Turnout Project**, has organized over 100 thousand volunteers to send more than 41 million handwritten GOTV postcards to swing state voters since 2020.

- PTSS and TMC Research have collaborated on 5 field experiments, each of which has shown that their handwritten postcard program **increased voter turnout**, and did so **very cost-effectively**.

BACKGROUND

- In particular, our previous experiments showed that:

  - As expected, **incorporating social pressure resulted in higher turnout than alternative messaging**. We saw this in the 2020 general election (+0.14pp) and the 2022 Pennsylvania primary (+1.0pp).

  - More isn't necessarily better. **Sending one postcard (+0.2pp) was just as effective as sending two (0.2pp)** in the 2020 general election. But we were left with the suspicion that **postcards landing very close together and sharing the same message may have reduced the potential impact** of the second postcard.

BACKGROUND

- We wanted to empirically measure the potential effect of sending different messages across two waves of postcards. If a different second message could effectively complement social pressure, that would help with the volunteers who express discomfort writing a social pressure message.

THIS STUDY

- In this study, Progressive Turnout Project and TMC measured the effect of **sending two waves of handwritten GOTV postcards to voters in 6 swing states**, in the context of the 2022 midterm general election.

- We compared the effectiveness of four different messages at increasing turnout: **Early Vote, Social Pressure, Family & Friends, and Plan-Making**.

- In particular, our design allows us to see how **varying those messages across two waves of postcards** affected turnout.

The Movement Cooperative

2022 MIDTERM ELECTIONS CONTEXT

- The study focused on voters in 6 competitive states, which included Arizona, Georgia, Nevada, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin.

- Nationwide, more than 107 million voters participated in the 2022 midterms elections. This represented approximately 45% of the voting-eligible population and a slight drop from 2018, when we observed the highest midterm turnout rate in a century.

- In higher-salience elections, we expect get-out-the-vote (GOTV) programs to have lower average turnout effects.

The Movement Cooperative

MAIN TAKEAWAYS

- In the 2022 general midterm election, we found that the postcard program increased turnout (+0.23pp). Consistent with previous findings, social pressure was the most effective single message (+0.26pp).

- Plan-making and family & friends were the next most effective messages. Early vote was the least effective of the four that we tested.

- We did not observe a penalty for sending the same message twice.

- PTSS's postcard program continues to scale very well and be cost-effective. Both are driven by the program's low costs ($0.06/postcard), thereby generating 19 voters per $1000 spent this year.

The Movement Cooperative
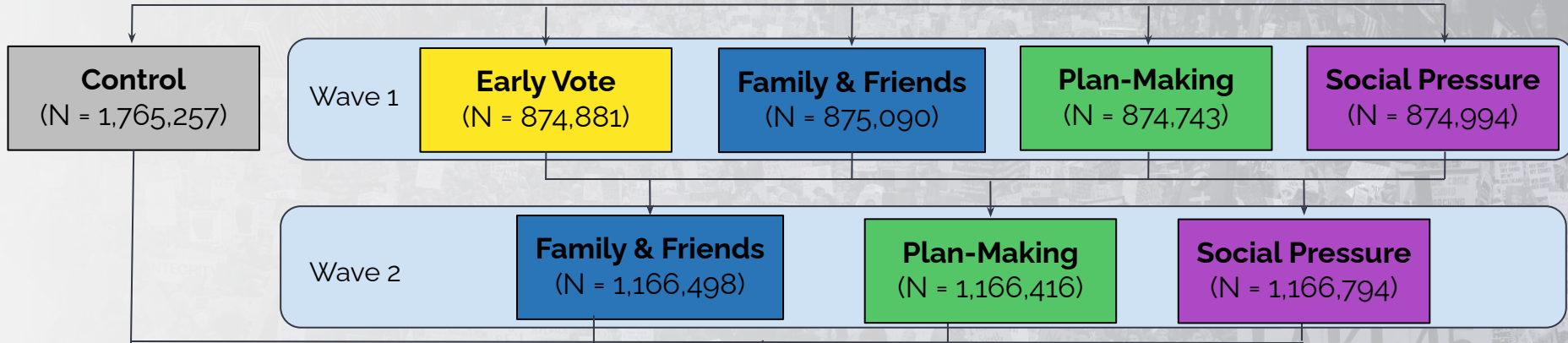
STUDY DESIGN

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- Did contacting voters in Arizona, Georgia, North Carolina, Nevada, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin with a handwritten postcard program shortly before the 2022 general election increase turnout?

- How did social pressure message, family & friends, plan-making, and early vote messages compare in increasing voter turnout?

- Was there a penalty for sending the same message twice?

The Movement Cooperative

EXPERIMENTAL DESIGN

5,264,965 voters in AZ, GA, NC, NV, PA, and WI
with partisanship scores of 70 or higher, midterm general election vote propensity scores between 10 and 90, and mail deliverability scores of "somewhat likely deliverable" or higher

*Randomly assigned into either **Control** or into **a combination of Wave One and Wave Two messages***

Control (N = 1,765,257)	Wave 1	**Early Vote** (N = 874,881)	**Family & Friends** (N = 875,090)	**Plan-Making** (N = 874,743)	**Social Pressure** (N = 874,994)

Wave 2	**Family & Friends** (N = 1,166,498)	**Plan-Making** (N = 1,166,416)	**Social Pressure** (N = 1,166,794)

2022 general election turnout compared across experimental conditions

PROGRAM

THE 2022 POSTCARD PROGRAM

- Over 23,000 volunteers participated. They chose to write Early Vote, Family & Friends, Plan-Making, or Social Pressure messages (to voters in appropriate conditions). The content of these messages are shown next.

- Volunteers were instructed to mail the first wave of postcards on 10/10 or 10/17 (depending on state) and the second wave of postcards on 10/28.

- All voters were claimed by volunteers. We found high compliance in our previous research of PTP's program and believe we can safely assume the same in this program.

The Movement Cooperative

THE 2022 POSTCARD PROGRAM

- The program cost of $424,957 (which includes the cost of staff time) was extremely low, especially given the scale and reach of this program.

- Each postcard only cost $0.06. In comparison to larger political mailers, postcards have lower costs thanks to volunteers providing postage and inexpensiveness of printing something small.

The Movement Cooperative

Example Postcard (AZ)

FRONT

The front of the each postcard was designed to look like the state's license plate. It included the election date and a link to a voter information website.

SOCIAL PRESSURE MESSAGE (SP)
BACK

All handwritten messages began with positive social pressure by thanking the voter for being either a previous or first time voter. The SP-specific message then informed voters that whether they vote is public information followed by an encouragement to vote.

Robert,

Thank you for being a previous/first time voter! Who you vote for is private, but whether you vote is public record. Please vote in the Tues, Nov 8 election!

- Patricia

EARLY VOTE MESSAGE (EV)
BACK

The Early Vote message reminded voters of early voting dates in their respective state and provided a link to vote by mail.

Arizona example:

Jennifer,
Thank you for being a previous/first-time voter! You can vote early from Oct 12 to Nov 4 or by mail if you sign up at VotingMattersAz.org. Please vote!
- John

The Movement Cooperative

FAMILY AND FRIENDS MESSAGE (FF)
BACK

The Family and Friends message encouraged voters to remind their family and friends to vote.

The Movement Cooperative

Mary,
Thank you for being a previous/first-time voter! Your friends and family may need your reminder to vote. Please ask them to vote in the Tues, Nov 8 election!
- James

PLAN-MAKING MESSAGE (PM)
BACK

This message asked voters about their plan in the form of a question. In Wave 1, the message also reminded voters to vote early or by mail. In Wave 2, the message reminded the voter to plan ahead.

Wave 1

Mary,

Thank you for being a previous/first-time voter! When will you vote in the Tues, Nov 8 election? You can vote early or by mail!

- James

Wave 2

Mary,

Thank you for being a previous/first-time voter! When will you cast your ballot in the Tues, Nov 8 election? Please plan ahead!

- James

The Movement Cooperative

Approximately 48% of the universe were voters of color, 58% were women, and 53% had voted in the 2020 general election

Modeled Black	**31%**
Modeled Latine	**10%**
Modeled White	**52%**
Modeled Asian	**2%**
Women	**58%**
Men	**36%**
Age (mean)	**44**
Voted in 2020 Primary	**53%**
N	**5,360,978**

The Movement Cooperative

MAIN RESULTS

Overall, the program increased turnout in the 2022 general election

The handwritten postcard program increased turnout by 0.23 (±0.06) percentage points (pp).*

* Please see the appendix for a detailed table of estimates including confidence intervals and p-values.

The Movement Cooperative

Turnout by pooled treatment

50.4%

50.6%

+0.23pp

Control
(n = 1,765,257)

Received Postcard
(n = 3,499,708)
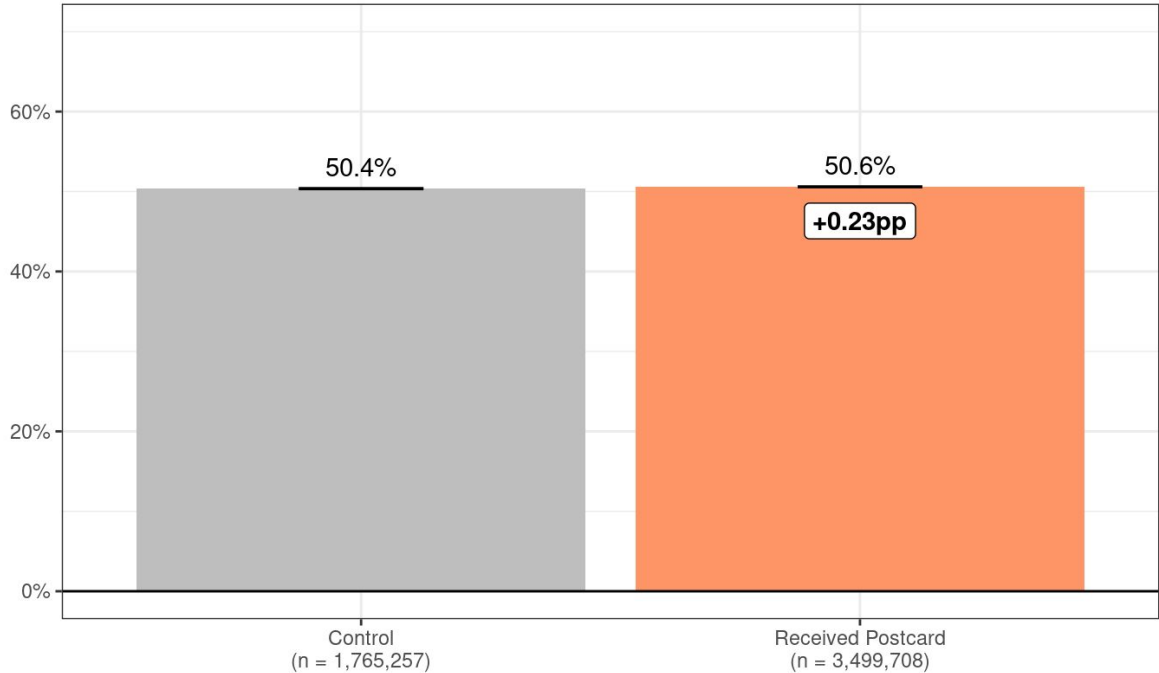
The Movement Cooperative and Progressive Turnout Project, 2023

Looking at each message one at a time, social pressure performed best

Across two waves of postcards, voters who received any SP messages (+0.26pp) appeared more likely to vote than those who received non-SP messages (+0.20pp).
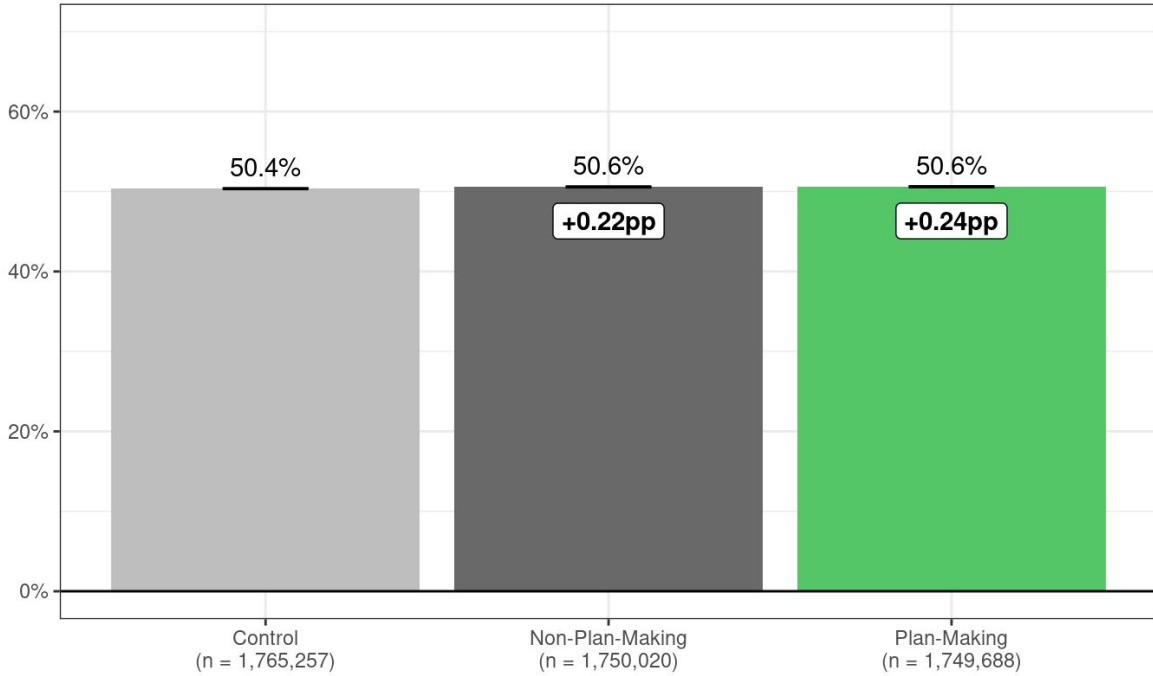
Turnout by message (Social pressure)

The Movement Cooperative and Progressive Turnout Project, 2023
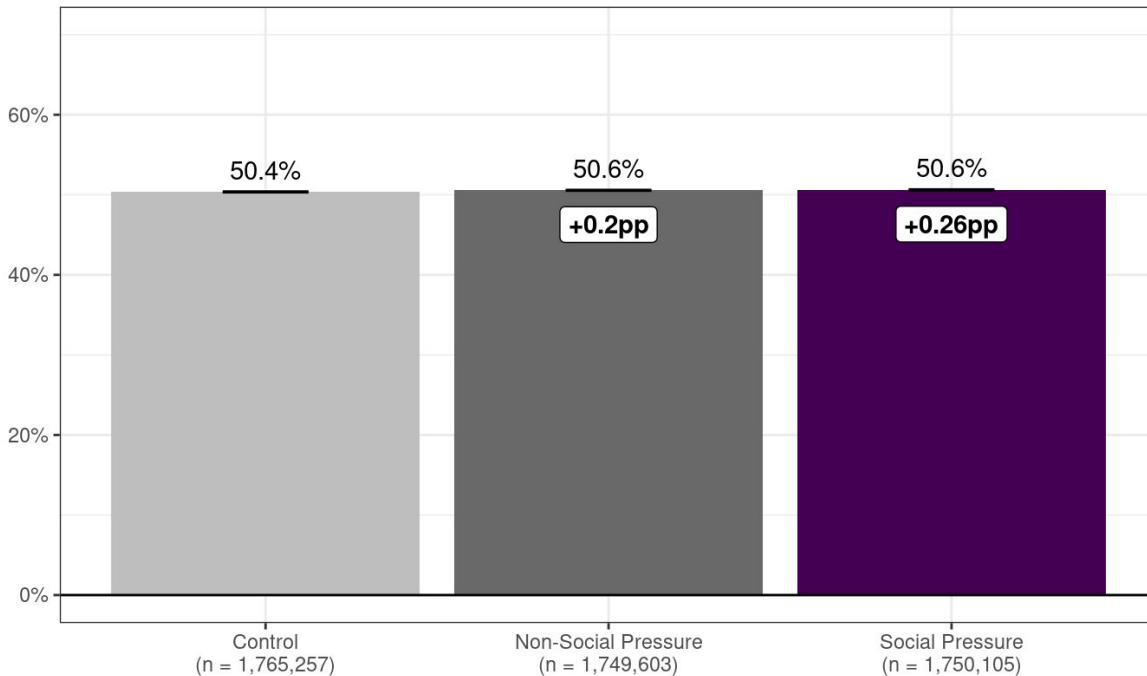
The Movement Cooperative

Voters who received postcards urging them to make a voting plan voted at a similar rate than those who didn't receive that message

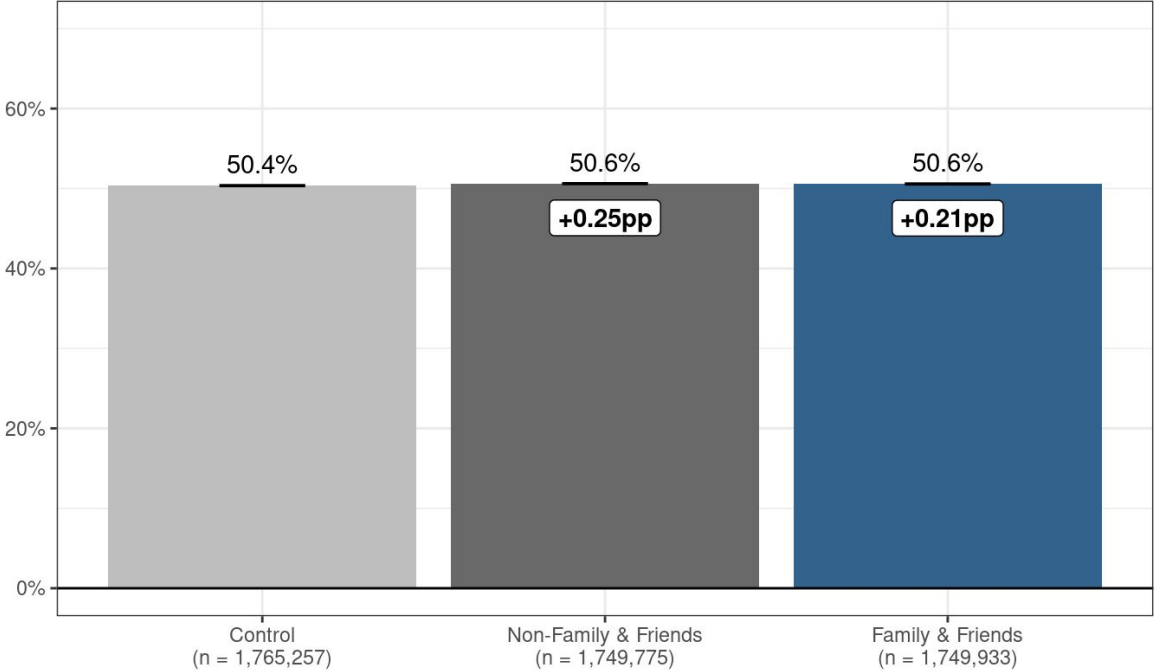### Turnout by message (Plan-Making)

| | 50.4% | 50.6% +0.22pp | 50.6% +0.24pp |

Control (n = 1,765,257)　Non-Plan-Making (n = 1,750,020)　Plan-Making (n = 1,749,688)

The Movement Cooperative and Progressive Turnout Project, 2023

The Family & Friends message may be slightly less effective than the non-FF messages
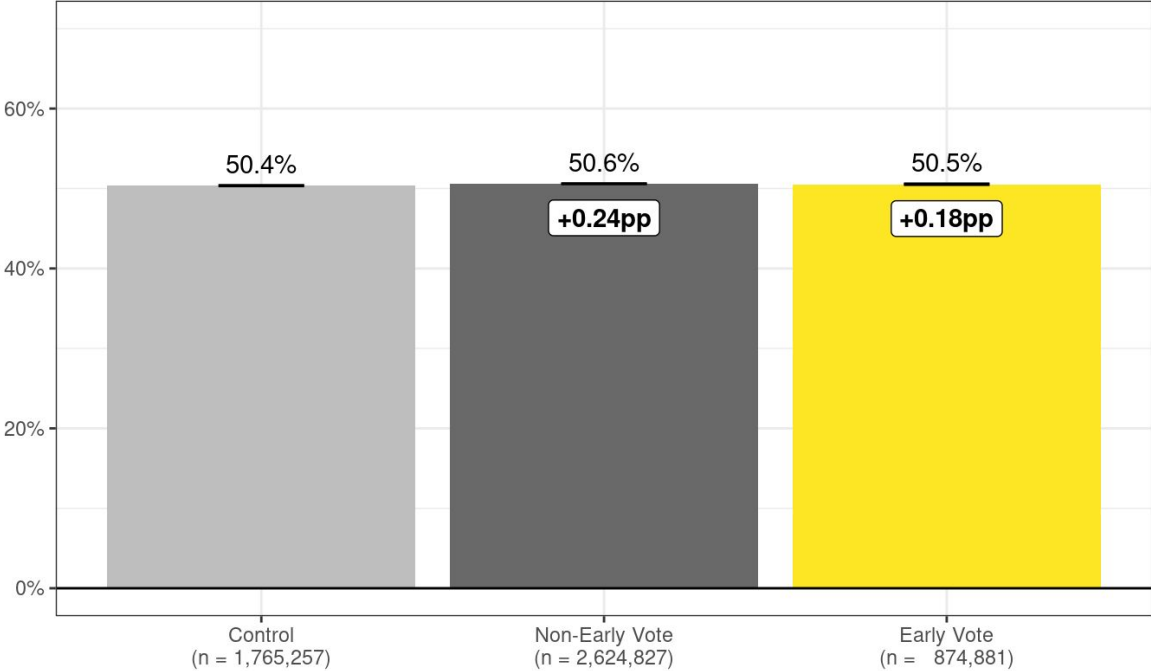
Turnout by message (Family & Friends)

The Movement Cooperative and Progressive Turnout Project, 2023

The Movement Cooperative

The Early Vote message was the least effective among the four that we tested
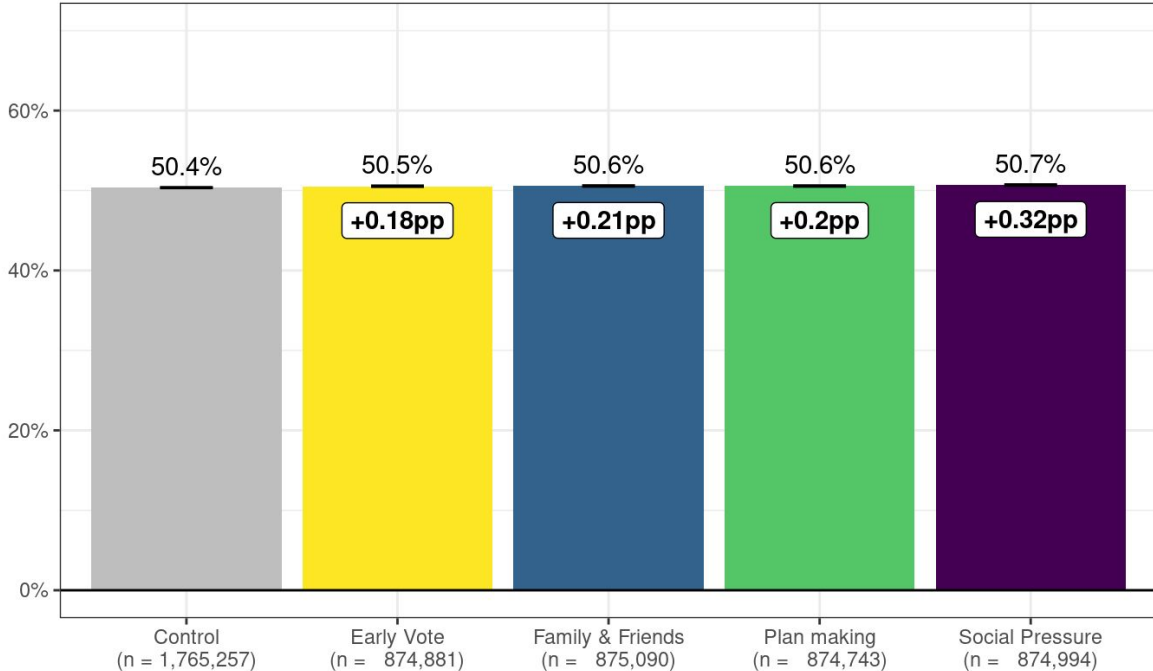
Turnout by message (Early Vote)

The Movement Cooperative and Progressive Turnout Project, 2023

Looking only at first wave postcards, social pressure (+0.32 pp) outperformed the other messages
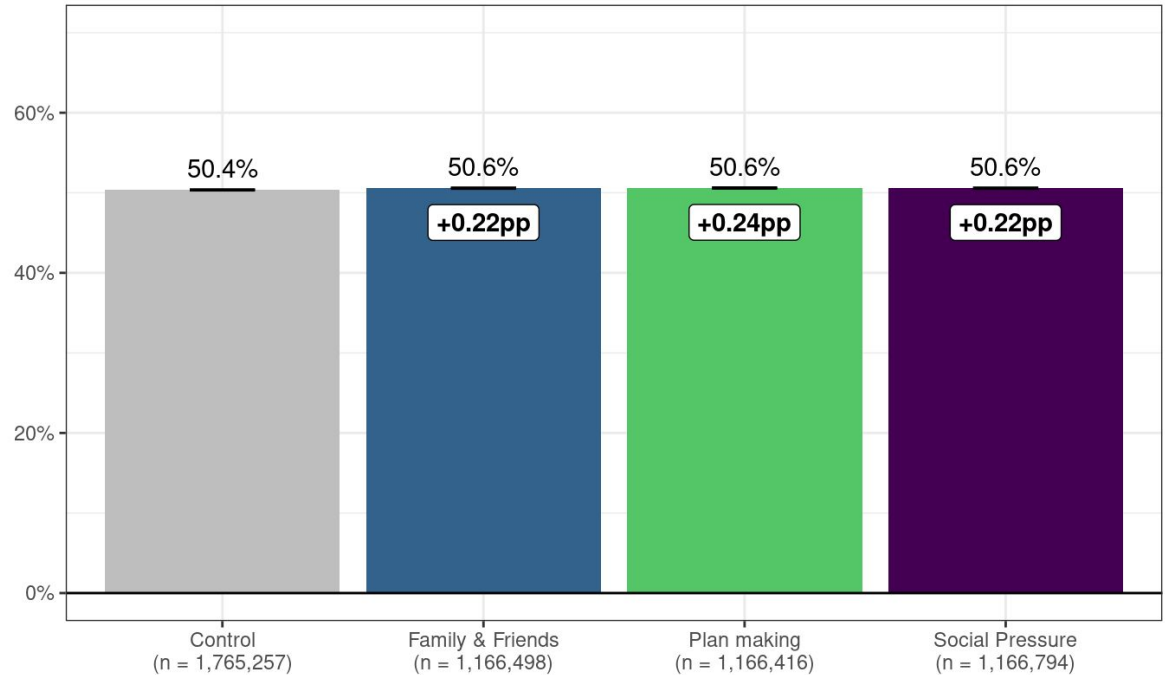
Turnout rate by message in Wave 1

	Control (n = 1,765,257)	Early Vote (n = 874,881)	Family & Friends (n = 875,090)	Plan making (n = 874,743)	Social Pressure (n = 874,994)
Turnout	50.4%	50.5%	50.6%	50.6%	50.7%
Effect		+0.18pp	+0.21pp	+0.2pp	+0.32pp

The Movement Cooperative and Progressive Turnout Project, 2023

Looking only at second wave messages, however, all postcards were similarly effective
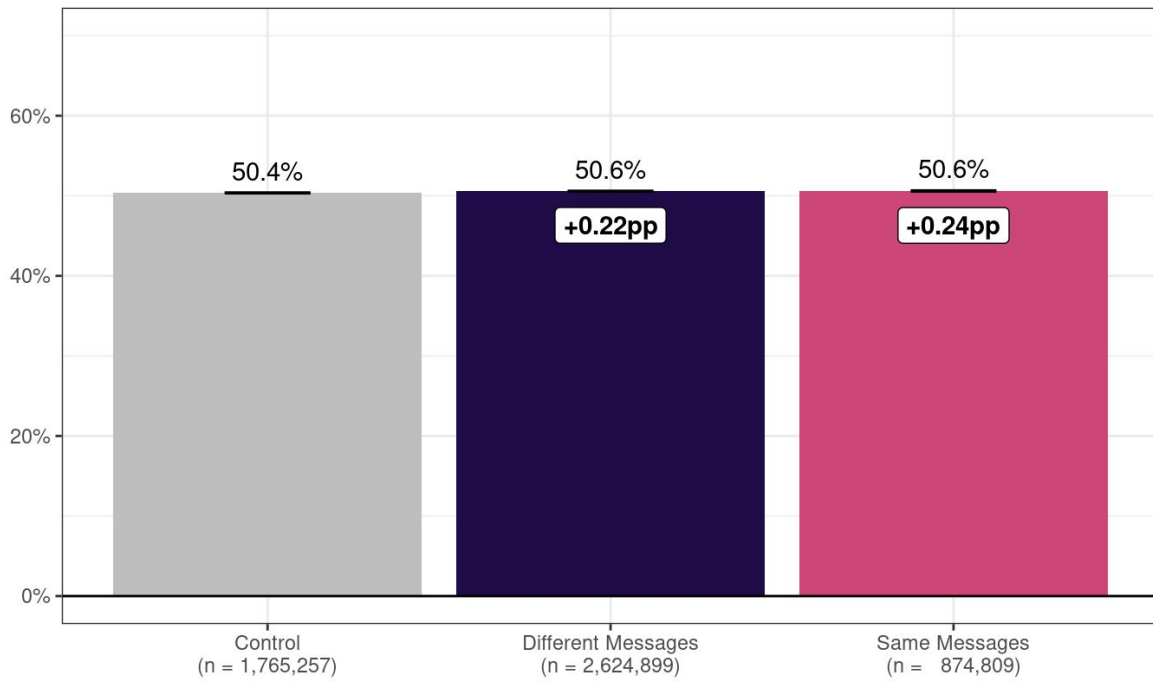

Turnout rate by message in Wave 2

50.4%	50.6%	50.6%	50.6%
	+0.22pp	+0.24pp	+0.22pp
Control (n = 1,765,257)	Family & Friends (n = 1,166,498)	Plan making (n = 1,166,416)	Social Pressure (n = 1,166,794)

The Movement Cooperative and Progressive Turnout Project, 2023

Sending the same message twice didn't lead to a penalty on turnout

Turnout rate by message variation

50.4% — Control (n = 1,765,257)
50.6% +0.22pp — Different Messages (n = 2,624,899)
50.6% +0.24pp — Same Messages (n = 874,809)

The Movement Cooperative and Progressive Turnout Project, 2023

SUBGROUP FINDINGS

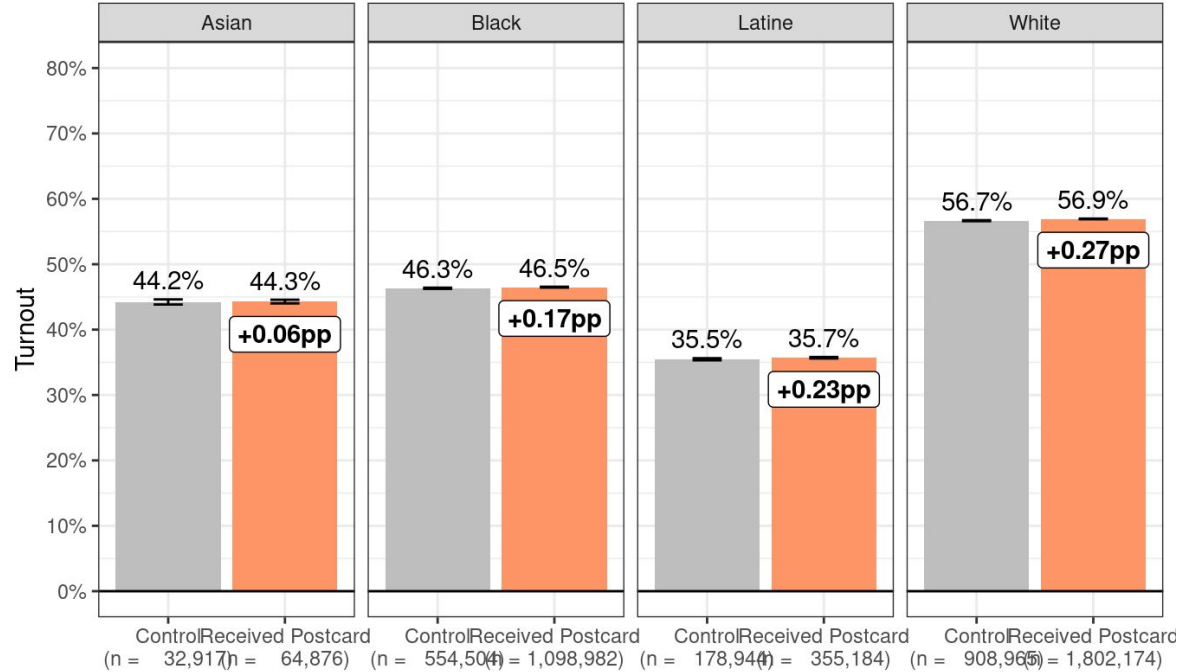# The program appears to be effective across all age groups...

Turnout rate by pooled treatment and age group

The Movement Cooperative and Progressive Turnout Project, 2023

The Movement Cooperative

30
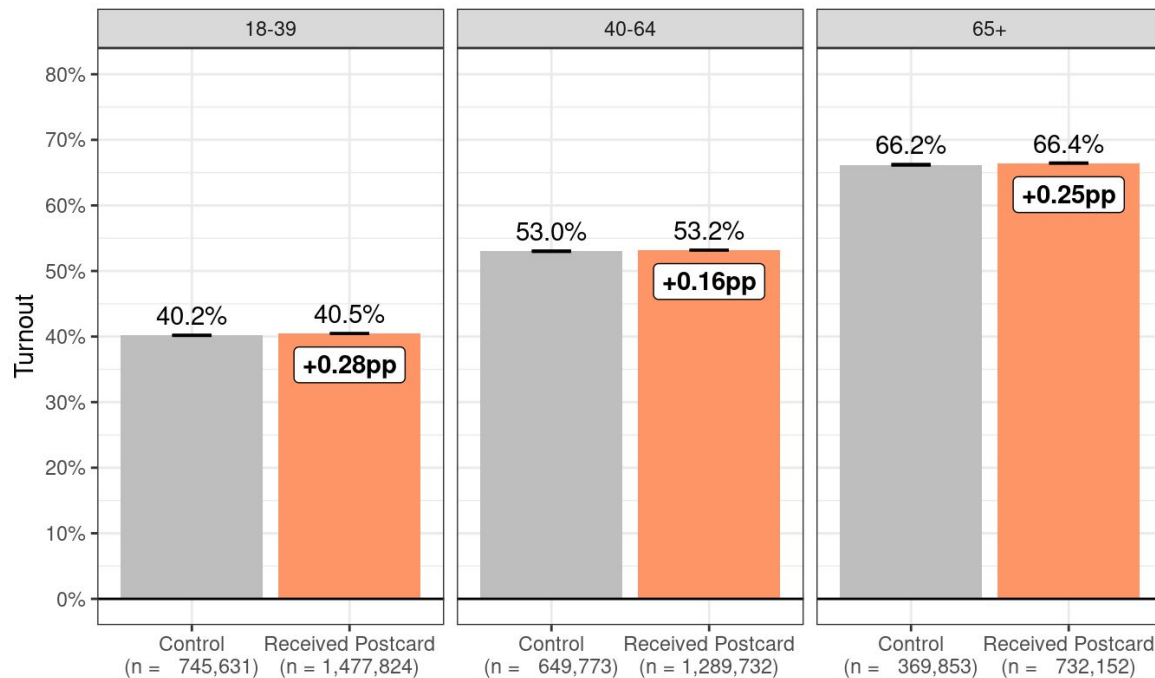
Across all racial groups...

Turnout rate by pooled treatment and modeled race

The Movement Cooperative and Progressive Turnout Project, 2023

The Movement Cooperative

... And across all included partisanship scores

Turnout rate by pooled treatment and partisan score
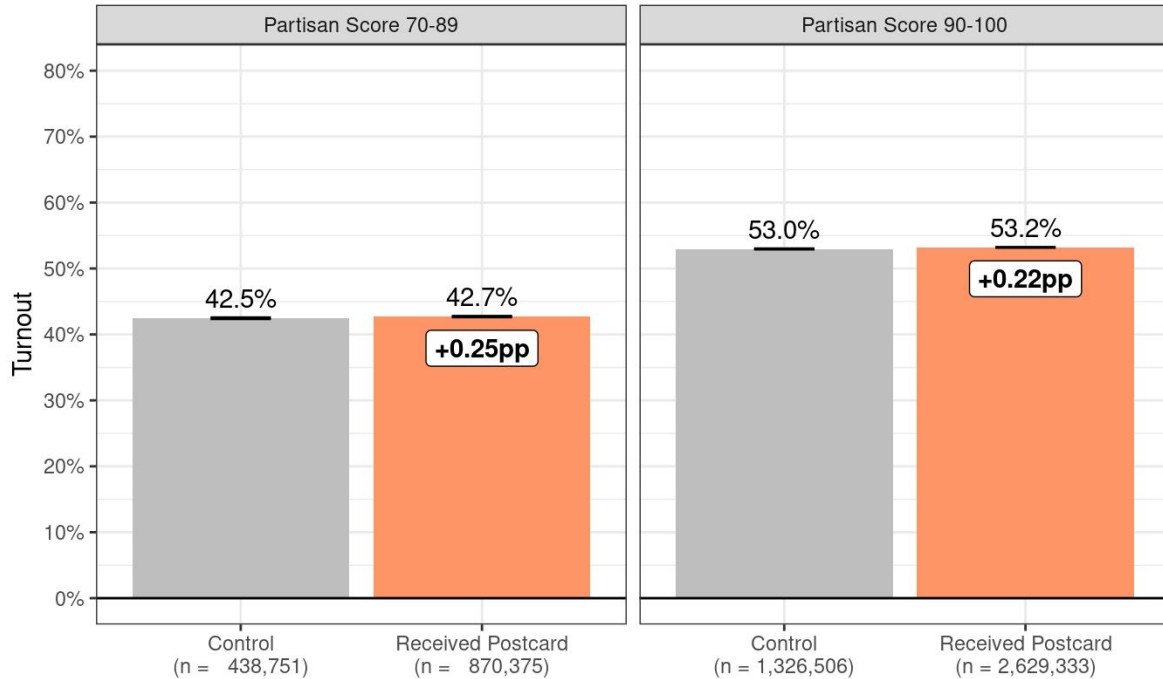
The Movement Cooperative and Progressive Turnout Project, 2023

In this program, the effect may have been highest among middle turnout voters

In another 2022 test with PTSS, we observed the same pattern.

The Movement Cooperative

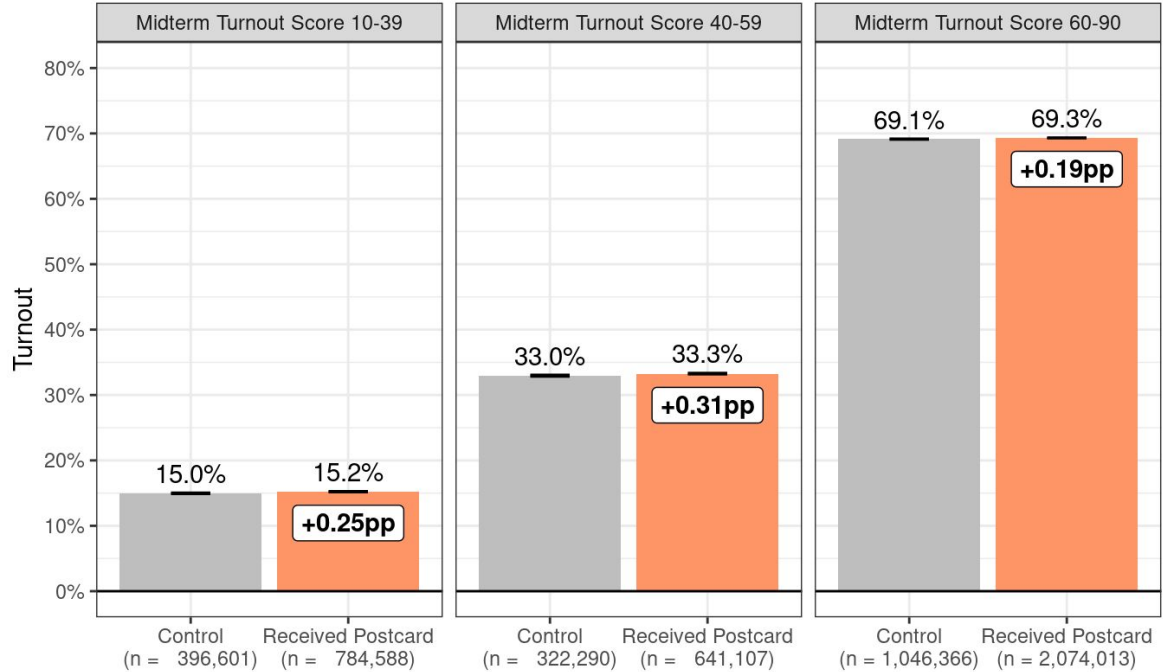**Turnout rate by pooled treatment and turnout score**

The Movement Cooperative and Progressive Turnout Project, 2023

COST AND TIME EFFICIENCY

Like previous PTSS postcard programs, this one was quite cost effective

On average, we estimate the program added 19 voters per $1000 spent (VPK).

WAVE 1 POSTCARDS	N-SIZE	EFFECT SIZE	VOTERS ADDED	VOTERS ADDED PER $1000 SPENT (VPK)
Social Pressure	**874,994**	**0.32**	**2,800**	**26**
Plan-Making	**874,743**	**0.20**	**1,749**	**16**
Family & Friends	**875,090**	**0.21**	**1,838**	**17**
Early Vote	**874,881**	**0.18**	**1,575**	**15**
Full program	**3,499,708**	**0.23**	**8,049**	**19**

The Movement Cooperative

Overall, the program likely generated between 7-14 voters per 100 volunteer hours

These scenarios consider that we can't know exactly how many postcards were ultimately written and sent

% OF POSTCARDS WRITTEN & SENT ON TIME	EFFECT SIZE	ESTIMATED MINUTES PER POSTCARD	VOTERS ADDED PER 100 ESTIMATED VOLUNTEER HOURS
50%	+0.23pp	2	13.8
60%	+0.23pp	2	11.5
70%	+0.23pp	2	9.9
80%	+0.23pp	2	8.6
90%	+0.23pp	2	7.7
100%	+0.23pp	2	6.9

COMPARING POSTCARD PROGRAMS, PAST & PRESENT

PTSS POSTCARD PROGRAMS FROM 2018–2022

- Including this experiment, PTSS and TMC have conducted tests of **five different postcard programs** since 2018. They comprise:

  - **Three primary election** tests including in 2018 IL-06, 2020 WI, and 2022 PA

  - **Two general election** tests across multiple swing states in 2020 and 2022

- At a glance, what initial trends might we observe when comparing the results from these experiments?

The Movement Cooperative

Consistent with expectations, postcards have been more effective in lower-salience elections

The Movement Cooperative

Direct and Downstream Turnout Effects of PTSS Postcard Programs[1]
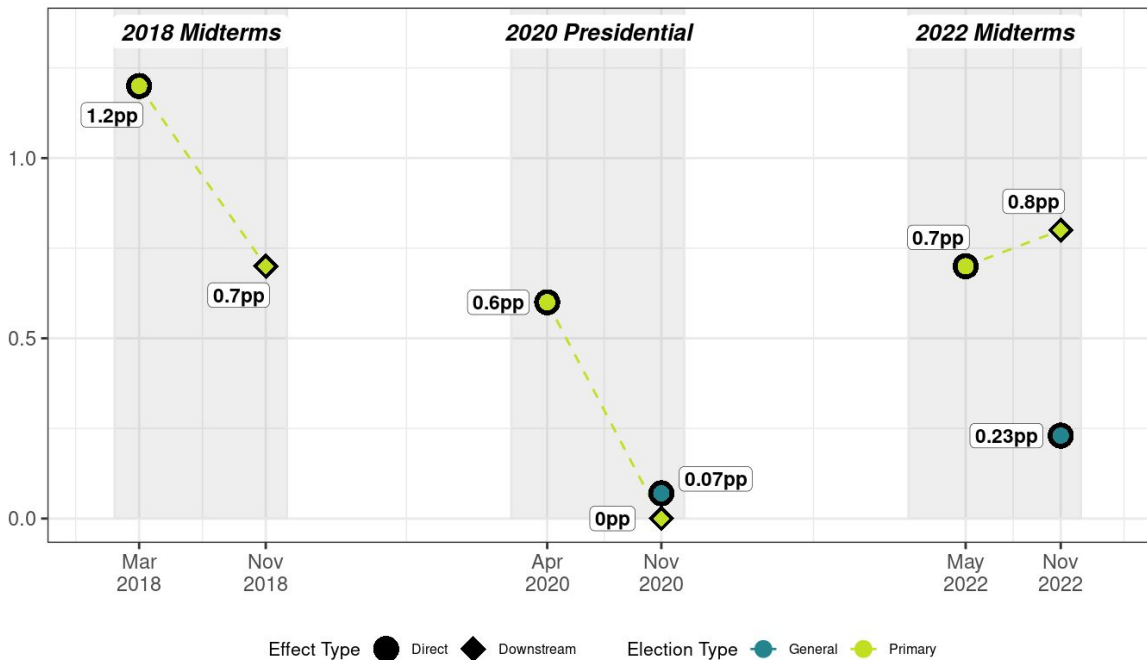
The Movement Cooperative and Progressive Turnout Project, 2023

[1] Note about the graph: Each circle represents one experiment.

Both midterm primary programs had sizeable downstream effects on the proximate general election

Direct and Downstream Turnout Effects of PTSS Postcard Programs

2018 Midterms | 2020 Presidential | 2022 Midterms

1.2pp
0.7pp
0.6pp
0.07pp
0pp
0.7pp
0.8pp
0.23pp

Mar 2018 | Nov 2018 | Apr 2020 | Nov 2020 | May 2022 | Nov 2022

Effect Type — Direct ● Downstream ◆   Election Type — General ● Primary ●
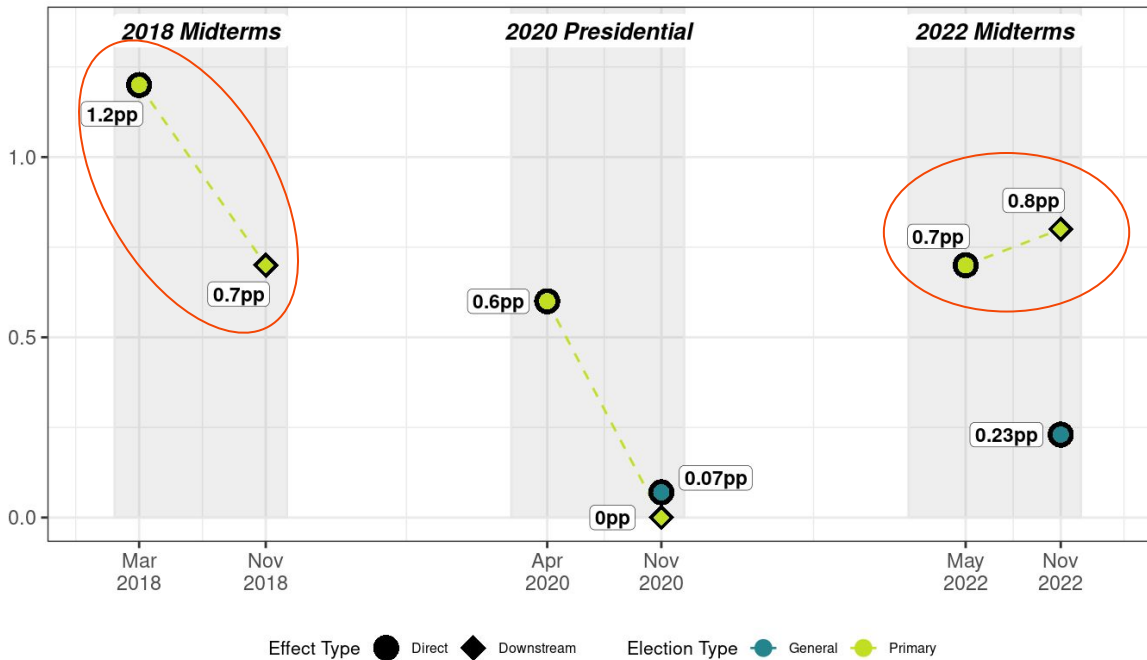
The Movement Cooperative and Progressive Turnout Project, 2023

In 2022, the downstream effect from the primary election program was higher than the direct effect from the general election program

Direct and Downstream Turnout Effects of PTSS Postcard Programs

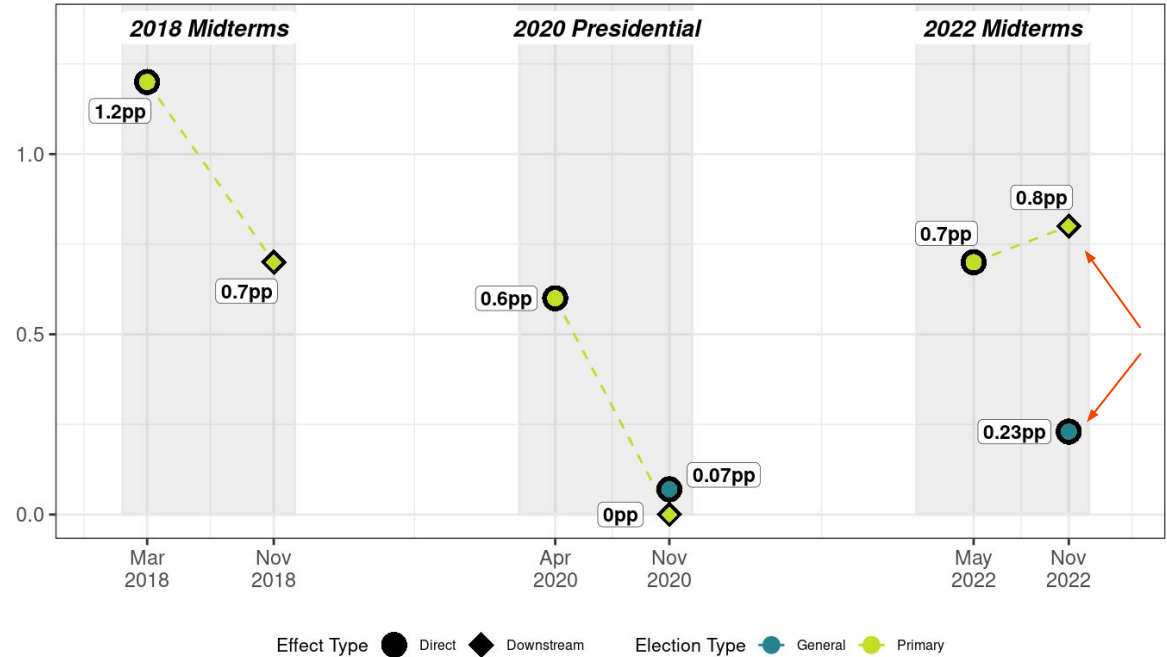The Movement Cooperative and Progressive Turnout Project, 2023

WHY WAS THE EFFECT SMALLER IN THE GENERAL THAN THE DOWNSTREAM EFFECT OF THE PRIMARY?

The current study can't answer that question, but two possibilities include:

- **Hypothesis 1:** The crowded general election context made the downstream effect of the primary election program comparatively effective.
- **Hypothesis 2:** A different level of volunteer compliance between the primary and general election programs contributed to different effect sizes.

The Movement Cooperative

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS

- Overall, we found that the postcard program **increased turnout in the 2022 general election (+0.23pp) and was very cost effective (19 VPK spent)**.

- Across two waves of postcards, **social pressure was the most effective message** (+0.26pp), followed by family & friends (+0.21pp) and plan-making (+0.24pp). While still effective, the early vote message garnered the lowest increase in turnout (+0.18pp) among the four messages that we tested.

- The largest turnout difference between messages **occurred in the first wave of postcards**.

The Movement Cooperative

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS

- There wasn't a penalty for sending the same message twice.

- In PTSS's midterm postcard programs, we have observed that the downstream effect of primary programs exceeding the direct effect of general election programs.

The Movement Cooperative

CONTEXTUALIZING RESULTS

- According to the Analyst Institute's meta-analysis, SP mail programs in midterm elections have an average effect of about +0.82pp.

- However, the higher the election salience, the smaller the effect size tends to be — and the 2022 midterm election produced the second-highest midterm turnout in decades.

- Additionally, the combination of PTP's large volunteer base and low programs costs allowed this program to scale well, reaching 5.3 million voters with highly diverse turnout propensity scores.

- To really know how 0.23pp compared requires comparing to other 2022 studies looking at programs that reached a similarly wide scale.

The Movement Cooperative

CURRENT RECOMMENDATIONS

- Handwritten volunteer postcard programs continue to be cost-effective.

- As expected, at least one postcard needs to use the social pressure message to maximize effectiveness.

- If a second postcard is sent, what are the options? Plan-making, family & friends, or another social pressure postcard were all reasonably effective. We didn't observe a penalty for sending the same message twice. On the other hand, the early vote message wasn't very effective.

- Primary programs can cause sizeable downstream effects, sometimes even larger than the direct effect of general election programs. Scaling primary programs may be an effective way to maximize impact.

The Movement Cooperative

DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

- How does volunteer compliance differ between primary and general elections? Between differently sized postcard programs?

- What organizing tactics can help organizations recruit, engage, and retain a committed membership to support their postcard programs?

- Qualitative: How does writing postcards compare with other volunteer experiences like door-to-door canvassing or phone banking?

The Movement Cooperative

CREDITS

CREDITS

- **Progressive Turnout Project**: Reid McCollum

- **The Movement Cooperative Research**: Darren Kwong, Chanita Intawan, Emily Wager, Leo Liu

APPENDIX
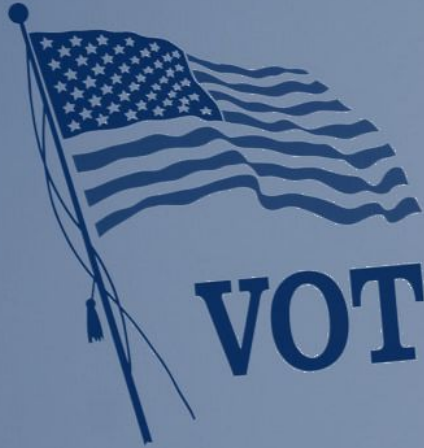
ESTIMATES FOR EACH MESSAGE COMBINATION

Turnout by message combination

	Control (n = 1,765,257)	FF+SP (n = 291,864)	EV+FF (n = 291,687)	PM+PM (n = 291,471)	EV+PM (n = 291,687)	PM+FF (n = 291,532)	EV+SP (n = 291,507)	PM+SP (n = 291,740)	FF+FF (n = 291,655)	FF+PM (n = 291,571)	SP+FF (n = 291,624)	SP+SP (n = 291,683)	SP+PM (n = 291,687)
Turnout	50.4%	50.4%	50.5%	50.5%	50.5%	50.6%	50.6%	50.6%	50.6%	50.6%	50.6%	50.7%	50.7%
Effect		+0.08pp	+0.13pp	+0.13pp	+0.18pp	+0.21pp	+0.22pp	+0.26pp	+0.27pp	+0.27pp	+0.29pp	+0.32pp	+0.37pp
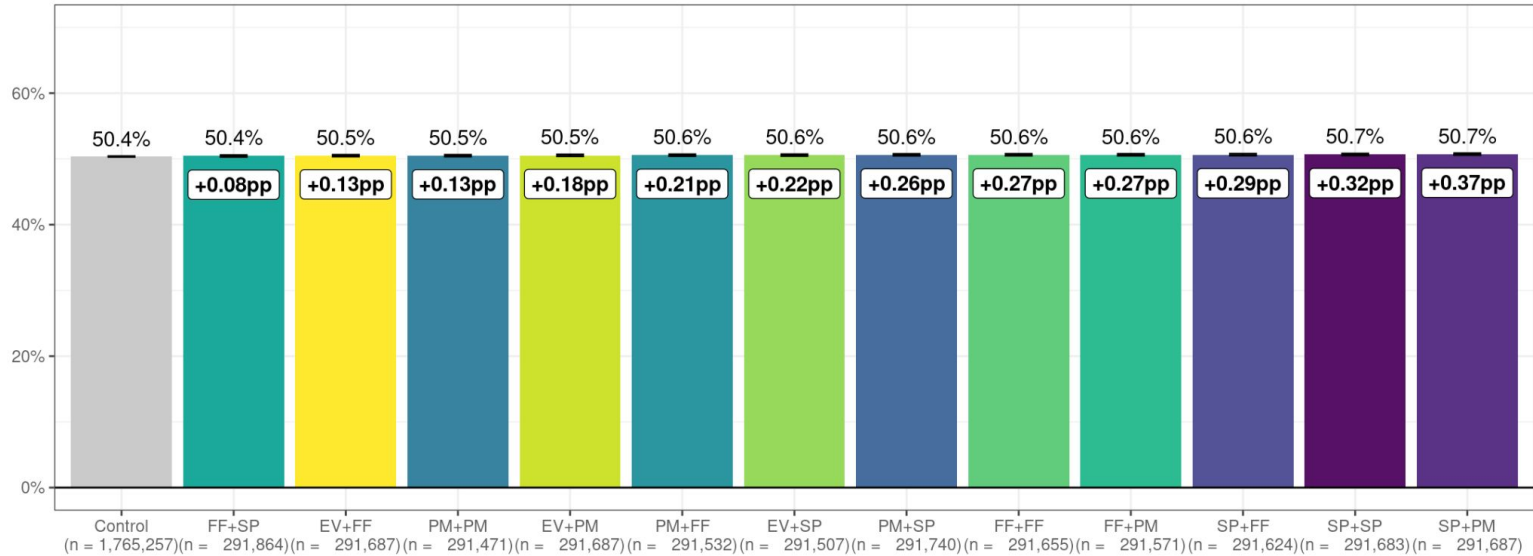
The Movement Cooperative and Progressive Turnout Project, 2023

Note: Each x-axis label indicates the respective first and second wave of messages sent. For instance, "EV+FF" indicates an Early Vote message was sent in Wave 1 and a "Family & Friends" message was sent in Wave 2.

It appears that the most effective combination is sending a social pressure message in Wave 1 and then following up with either a plan-making or another social pressure message in Wave 2.

POSTCARD
DESIGNS

GEORGIA (Front)

NORTH CAROLINA (Front)

NORTH CAROLINA

VOTES

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 8

For voting info visit VotingMattersNC.org
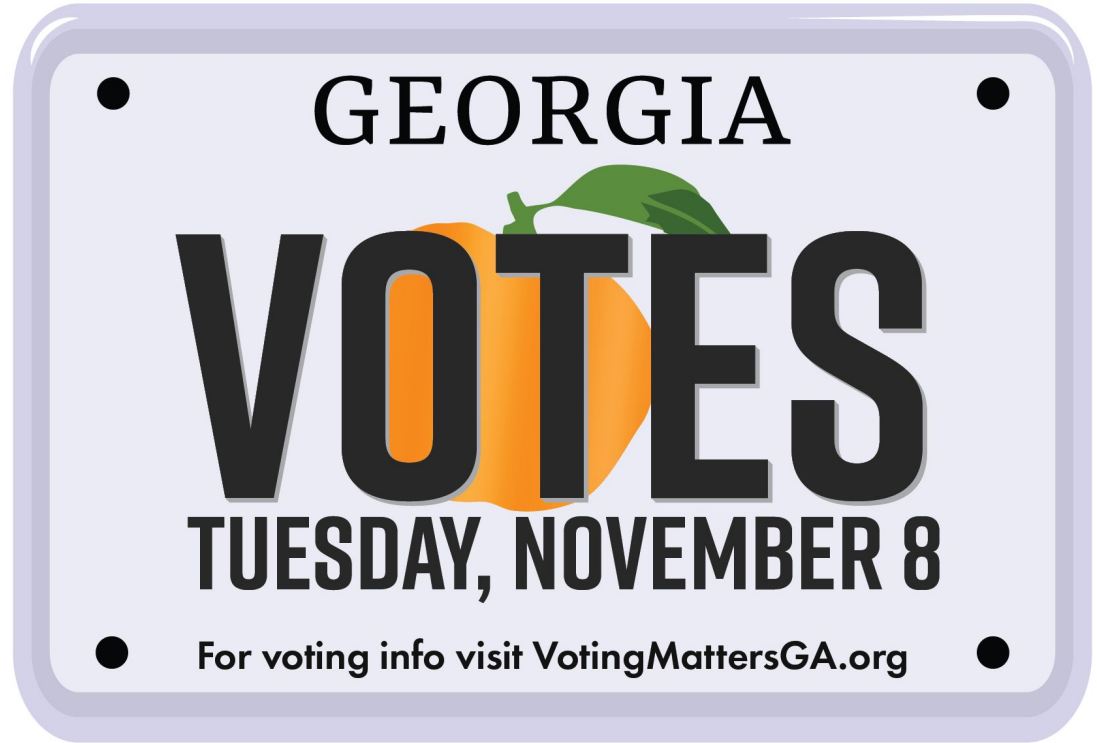
NEVADA
(Front)

PENNSYLVANIA (Front)

PENNSYLVANIA

VOTES

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 8

For voting info visit VotingMattersPA.org

WISCONSIN (Front)
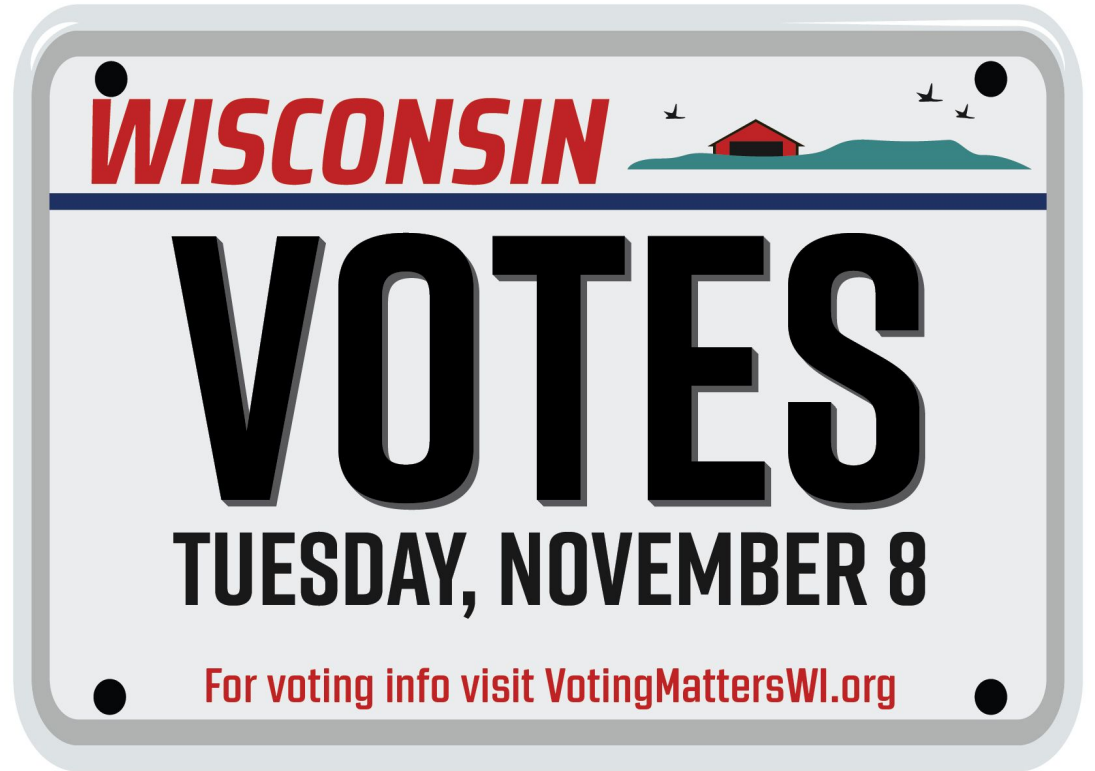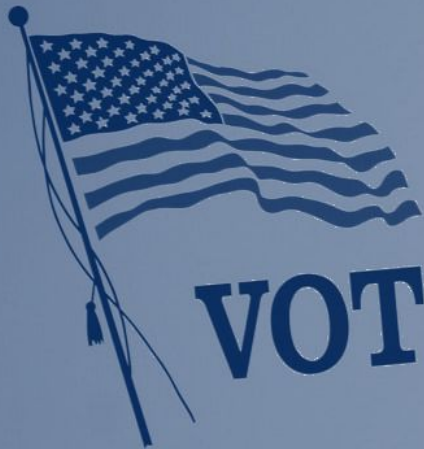
EXPERIMENTAL ESTIMATES

EXPERIMENTAL ESTIMATES

GROUP	CONDITION	N	LEVEL	90% +/-	EFFECT	90% +/-	P
Overall	Control	1,765,257	50.4%	0.05%			
Overall	Received Postcard	3,499,708	50.6%	0.04%	0.23pp	0.06pp	<0.001
Overall	Control	1,765,257	50.4%	0.05%			
Overall	Non-Social Pressure	1,749,603	50.6%	0.05%	0.20pp	0.07pp	<0.001
Overall	Social Pressure	1,750,105	50.6%	0.05%	0.26pp	0.07pp	<0.001
Overall	Control	1,765,257	50.4%	0.05%			
Overall	Non-Plan-Making	1,750,020	50.6%	0.05%	0.22pp	0.07pp	<0.001
Overall	Plan-Making	1,749,688	50.6%	0.05%	0.24pp	0.07pp	<0.001
Overall	Control	1,765,257	50.4%	0.05%			
Overall	Non-Family & Friends	1,749,775	50.6%	0.05%	0.25pp	0.07pp	<0.001
Overall	Family & Friends	1,749,933	50.6%	0.05%	0.21pp	0.07pp	<0.001
Overall	Control	1,765,257	50.4%	0.05%			
Overall	Non-Early Vote	2,624,827	50.6%	0.04%	0.24pp	0.07pp	<0.001
Overall	Early Vote	874,881	50.5%	0.07%	0.18pp	0.09pp	.001

The Movement Cooperative

EXPERIMENTAL ESTIMATES

GROUP	CONDITION	N	LEVEL	90% +/-	EFFECT	90% +/-	P
Overall	Control	1,765,257	50.4%	0.05%			
Overall	Wave 1 SP	874,994	50.7%	0.07%	0.32pp	0.09pp	<0.001
Overall	Wave 1 PM	874,743	50.6%	0.07%	0.20pp	0.09pp	<0.001
Overall	Wave 1 FF	875,090	50.6%	0.07%	0.21pp	0.09pp	<0.001
Overall	Wave 1 EV	874,881	50.5%	0.07%	0.18pp	0.09pp	0.001
Overall	Control	1,765,257	50.4%	0.05%			
Overall	Wave 2 SP	1,166,794	50.6%	0.06%	0.22pp	0.08pp	<0.001
Overall	Wave 2 PM	1,166,416	50.6%	0.06%	0.24pp	0.08pp	<0.001
Overall	Wave 2 FF	1,166,498	50.6%	0.06%	0.22pp	0.08pp	<0.001

The Movement Cooperative

EXPERIMENTAL ESTIMATES

GROUP	CONDITION	N	LEVEL	90% +/-	EFFECT	90% +/-	P
Age 18-39	Control	745,631	40.2%	0.08%			
Age 18-39	Received Postcard	1,477,824	40.5%	0.06%	0.28pp	0.10pp	<0.001
Age 40-64	Control	649,773	53.0%	0.09%			
Age 40-64	Received Postcard	1,289,732	53.2%	0.06%	0.16pp	0.11pp	0.015
Age 65+	Control	369,853	66.2%	0.11%			
Age 65+	Received Postcard	732,152	66.5%	0.08%	0.25pp	0.13pp	0.002
Partisan Score 70-89	Control	438,751	42.5%	0.11%			
Partisan Score 70-89	Received Postcard	870,375	42.7%	0.08%	0.25pp	0.13pp	0.002
Partisan Score 90-100	Control	1,326,506	53.0%	0.06%			
Partisan Score 90-100	Received Postcard	2,629,333	53.2%	0.04%	0.22pp	0.07pp	<0.001

EXPERIMENTAL ESTIMATES

GROUP	CONDITION	N	LEVEL	90% +/-	EFFECT	90% +/-	P
Midterm Turnout Score 10-39	Control	396,601	15.0%	0.09%			
Midterm Turnout Score 10-39	Received Postcard	784,588	15.2%	0.07%	0.25pp	0.11pp	<0.001
Midterm Turnout Score 40-59	Control	322,290	33.0%	0.13%			
Midterm Turnout Score 40-59	Received Postcard	641,107	33.3%	0.10%	0.31pp	0.16pp	0.002
Midterm Turnout Score 60-90	Control	1,046,366	69.1%	0.07%			
Midterm Turnout Score 60-90	Received Postcard	2,074,013	69.3%	0.05%	0.19pp	0.09pp	<0.001
Asian	Control	32,917	44.2%	0.4%			
Asian	Received Postcard	64,876	44.3%	0.3%	0.06pp	0.5pp	0.838
Black	Control	554,504	46.3%	0.09%			
Black	Received Postcard	1,098,982	46.5%	0.06%	0.17pp	0.11pp	0.014
Latine	Control	178,944	35.5%	0.16%			
Latine	Received Postcard	355,184	35.7%	0.11%	0.23pp	0.2pp	0.058
White	Control	908,965	56.7%	0.07%			
White	Received Postcard	1,802,174	56.9%	0.05%	0.27pp	0.09pp	<0.001

The Movement Cooperative