

## POSTCARDING AND LETTER-WRITING RESEARCH



**Definition:** Sending fully or partially handwritten postcards or letters to voters in the mail.

**Bottom line:** The effectiveness of postcarding needs more research.<sup>1</sup> There's evidence that postcarding has small effects on voter turnout and voter registration.

### CONSIDERATIONS

- **Pros** - Postcards and letters can reach addresses inaccessible by canvassing; introvert-friendly volunteer activity; relatively cheap
- **Cons** - Not as effective as personal contact methods; handwriting varies in legibility; limited space for message

### RESEARCH FINDINGS

**Postcarding generally has a small effect on voter turnout.**

- Industry research<sup>2</sup> generally finds a small, positive boost from GOTV postcarding (~0.1-1.4%). Results will always vary, but the largest effect (1.4%) was found in a 2007 Gubernatorial election when targeting unmarried women.
- Good targeting matters. Our [2018 GOTV postcard experiment](#)<sup>3</sup> found null results, but the voters we sent postcards to were not representative of all Democratic voters in the district, which likely attenuated those results.

**Letter writing may offer promising results with small effects on voter turnout.**

- While no results have been made public, Vote Forward reportedly found in 2 studies that partially handwritten letters provide a small positive boost to special election turnout. One study had small, statistically significant results, while a second study did not have significant results.

**Postcarding appears to be effective when “chasing” another contact.**

- SDAN ran two studies sending chaser postcards to people who had already received voter registration forms in the mail.
  - In the [first study](#)<sup>4</sup>, people who received chaser postcards registered at a 20% higher rate than people who did not receive postcards.
  - In the [second study](#)<sup>5</sup>, people who received chaser postcards registered at a 12% higher rate than people who did not receive a postcard (increase in registrants of 0.26%).

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### Areas for Further Exploration:

- Motivating/educating voters who need a nudge to vote (low propensity voters) but who will likely vote Democratic if they do (high support voters).
- Planned/ongoing SDAN studies:
  - GOTV postcard experiments - replication with more representative sample
  - Head-to-head comparison between handwritten letters and postcards
  - Two primaries - relevance of education in increasing primary turnout
  - Postmark - relevance of postmark location (local vs non-local)
  - 2019 Phonebank/canvass postcard chaser pilot study (MS/LA - results expected summer 2020)
  - 2020 Phonebank/canvass postcard chaser study (TX)

### References and notes:

1. We are aware of postcarding/letter writing reports from groups like Tony the Democrat (Postcards to Voters), Blue Virginia and Blue Wave Analytics, but they aren't experiments or they are purely market research studies. Therefore we cannot draw reliable conclusions from these reports and so we have not included them in this overview.
2. Industry source (SDAN has access to various research reports by progressive organizations that we are not allowed to disseminate or cite but are sharing broad strokes of here).
3. <https://sisterdistrict.com/research/2018-gotv-postcarding-results>
4. <https://sisterdistrict.com/research/postcarding-experiment-results>
5. <https://sisterdistrict.com/research/voter-registration-postcards-replication>