



Blue waves:

Do 2 waves of primary GOTV postcards increase voter turnout?

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Objective: This study sought to determine if voter turnout among low-to-mid turnout propensity, high support voters could be improved by sending a GOTV/voter education postcard to voters ahead of each of the 2020 state and presidential primaries in Florida, Georgia, and Minnesota.

Background: Recent industry research suggests that sporadic voters are being somewhat ignored by political operatives. This lack of engagement may, in turn, keep fueling these voters' low chances of voter turnout. Further, a dearth of communication may leave these voters uneducated about important aspects of the electoral system in their state, including the fact that, in many states, separate primaries are held on different dates to nominate presidential candidates and candidates running for all other state and federal offices. Candidates running in the state primary, usually held at least a couple of months after the Presidential primary, tend to see lower voter turnout than candidates running for President, and both primary elections see lower voter turnout than the general election. For this reason, it is important to turn out as many voters as possible for both primary elections. Sending voter education/GOTV postcards may help to educate voters about the existence of the two primary system in their state (as well as the information they need to vote), and mobilize voters to the polls.

Specifics: SDAN pulled a list of all registered voters who fit inclusion criteria (have a partisanship score of 80-100, indicating high support for Democrats, and a mid to low non-Presidential primary election voter turnout propensity scores of 25-60) in several state legislative districts in Florida, Georgia, and Minnesota. We randomly selected 10,000 voters from each state's list, and randomized each state's list into the 2 conditions: control or postcard. This resulted in a sample size of 30,000.

We recruited Sister District volunteers to write the GOTV postcards and mail them to an in-state partner approximately two weeks before each election (Florida on March 3, 2020 and August 4, 2020; Georgia on March 10, 2020 and May 26, 2020; Minnesota on February 18, 2020 and July 28, 2020). In-state partners put postcards in the mail for local mailing 3-5 days after the volunteer mailing deadline. It is assumed that participants received postcards approximately a week before the election encouraging them to vote. SDAN then reviewed the voter file to determine if voters in the sample voted in either or both of the primary elections held in their state. During the year, the Presidential primary in Georgia was cancelled and Georgia held only 1 primary, and thus they were removed from this analysis. 100% of the voters in our sample were matched to the voter file. Postcard scripts can be found in the Appendix.

Key Findings:



- **Postcards boosted presidential and state primary voting significantly in Minnesota and Florida.** People who received postcards were significantly more likely to vote in the primary elections than people who did not receive postcards ($p = 0.010$).
 - For the *presidential* primary, postcard receivers were approximately 8.3% more likely to vote than people who did not receive postcards.
 - For the *state* primary, postcards receivers were also approximately 8.2% more likely to vote than people who did not receive postcards.

Presidential Primary Outcome

Variable	Odds Ratio (Robust Std. Err.)	Z score	95% Conf. Interval	p-value
Condition (Ref=controls)				
Received postcard	1.083078 (0.0334616)	2.58	1.019441-1.150688	0.010*
State (Ref=Florida)				
Minnesota	1.612249 (0.0696482)	11.06	1.48136-1.754703	<0.001*
Age (continuous)				
	0.9970315 (0.0008722)	-3.40	0.9953233-0.9987425	0.001*
Gender (Ref=Female)				
Male	1.055645 (0.0352393)	1.62	0.9887883-1.127022	0.105
Unknown	0.8104336 (0.0673885)	-2.53	0.6885556-0.9538846	0.011*
Race (Ref=white)				
African-American/Black	0.5576558 (0.038873)	-8.38	0.4864417-0.6392954	<0.001*
Asian	1.087458 (0.1031432)	0.88	0.9029793-1.309626	0.377
Hispanic	0.5223238 (0.0271311)	-12.50	0.4717651-0.5783007	<0.001*
Native American	0.6998849 (0.082761)	-3.02	0.5551016-0.8824311	0.003*
Other	0.8824311 (0.1296739)	-0.57	0.7770743-1.252333	0.570
Uncoded	0.9042966 (0.088798)	-1.02	0.7234626-0.9549394	0.306
Primary turnout (continuous)				
	1.036553 (0.0016383)	22.71	1.033347-1.039769	<0.001*



Dem score (continuous)				
	1.038526 (0.0035945)	10.92	1.031505-1.045595	<0.001*

$\chi^2(13) = 1101.56, p < 0.001, \text{pseudo } R^2 = 0.0434 (n=20,000)$

- For the state primary, postcards receivers were also approximately 8.2% more likely to vote than people who did not receive postcards.

State Primary Outcome

Variable	Odds Ratio (Robust Std. Err.)	Z score	95% Conf. Interval	p-value
Condition (Ref=controls)				
Received postcard	1.083068 (0.0334896)	2.58	1.019379-1.150736	0.010*
State (Ref=Florida)				
Minnesota	1.236176 (0.0540609)	4.85	1.134632-1.346807	<0.001*
Age (continuous)				
	1.006851 (0.0008755)	7.85	1.005137-1.008569	<0.001*
Gender (Ref=Female)				
Male	0.9168848 (0.0306742)	-2.59	0.8586932-0.9790199	0.009*
Unknown	0.7167254 (0.0649857)	-3.67	0.6000315-0.8561138	<0.001*
Race (Ref=white)				
African-American/Black	1.13012 (0.0735842)	1.88	0.9947207-1.283949	
Asian	1.205227 (0.1167041)	1.93	0.9968864-1.457109	0.060 †
Hispanic	1.017106 (0.0496016)	0.35	0.9243903-1.119121	0.054 †
Native American	0.5812095 (0.0772655)	-4.08	0.4478935-0.7542072	0.728
Other	1.652089 (0.2223311)	3.73	1.269061-2.150723	<0.001*
Uncoded	0.7934674 (0.0849106)	-2.16	0.6433396-0.9786286	<0.001*
Primary turnout (continuous)				0.031*



	1.035325 (0.0016167)	22.23	1.032161-1.038499	<0.001*
Dem score (continuous)				
	1.007893 (0.0034153)	2.32	1.001221-1.014609	0.020*

$\chi^2(13) = 767.79, p < 0.001, \text{pseudo } R^2 = 0.0306 (n=20,000)$

Additional Findings:

- The cost per vote for this tactic is quite good compared to many other tactics. The postcard condition generated 1.54% more voters than the control condition in Florida and Minnesota in the general primary (10,000 * 0.0154=154), indicating that the votes generated by the postcards in the general primary cost about \$32 each (10,000*\$0.50=\$5,000 / 154 = \$32.47). The postcard condition generated 1.61% more voters than the control condition in Florida and Minnesota in the general primary (10,000 * 0.0161=161), indicating that the votes generated by the postcards in the general primary cost about \$31 each (10,000*\$0.50=\$5,000 / 161 = \$31.06).
- In the presidential primary, as expected, African-American/Black, Hispanic, and Native American voters all voted significantly less than white voters. Unexpectedly, however, younger people were significantly more likely to vote than older people. Further, Minnesotans were significantly more likely to vote than Floridians. While none of these factors are related to this study’s intervention, they are interesting to note.
- For the state primary, we also saw some surprising and some unsurprising results. In the state primary data, age had conventional effect, with older people voting more than younger. Also as expected, male voters were less likely to vote in the state primary than women. Surprisingly, however, African-Americans were more likely to vote than white voters.
- Unsurprisingly, people with higher predicted turnout scores were more likely to turnout to vote in the election.

Takeaways:

- Handwritten postcards were effective in increasing voter turnout in Florida and Minnesota. Both effects are statistically significant and the effect is larger than we generally see in postcarding studies.
- The cost of this tactic was relatively cheap, coming in at \$31-\$32 a vote. Since these communications targeted Democratic leaning voters, almost all of these were likely net Democratic votes.

Caveats and limitations:

It is important to consider the unique factors of this experiment and the ways that limits the generalizability of the data. First, this study was run during primary elections, which is known to be a quieter environment than a general election. It is expected that tactics run in less noisy



elections will be more effective than tactics run during a general election. In this case, the quieter environment of the primary election may have allowed the postcards to be a tactic that caught voters' attention. Since primaries mark the beginning of the election cycle (while generals mark the end), people have not yet been inundated with campaign materials from both candidates and outside organizations, which may mean that people are more likely to notice and pay attention to election-related mail since they are simply receiving fewer inputs. It would also be useful to test this tactic in special elections, as those are also quieter environments.

Second, this study specifically targeted voters with low- to mid- voter turnout propensity scores for the primary (25-60). This means that the study results may not generalize to voters in the 0-25 or 60+ propensity range. More research is needed to determine how this tactic works for voters outside of the target propensity range.

This sample also targeted specific, competitive state house and senate districts in Minnesota and Florida, and did not draw a random sample from the entire state. This may have affected results in the sense that the people targeted in this study may have had more salient or active primary elections than folks in less competitive districts. For this reason it may not be appropriate to generalize these results to less competitive primary elections.

Other demographic factors that were significant were also of note. For instance, though competitive districts were targeted in both states, Minnesotans voted significantly more than people in Florida, suggesting that Minnesotans in these competitive districts were more motivated to vote in the primary election than similarly situated Floridians (this may be due to the primary in Florida being so close to the national emergency declaration over coronavirus).

Race and age effect swaps between the presidential and general primaries also warrant future exploration. In this sample, younger people were more likely to vote in the presidential but older people were more likely to vote in the state primary. Also, white people were more likely to vote in the presidential primary than African-American/Black voters, but this was the opposite for the state primary. Because some of these findings differ from what the literature suggests, they should be explored in the future. For instance, a hypothesis coming out of these findings might be that younger voters care more about presidential politics but are less interested in state politics than older voters.

Finally, a post-hoc power analysis indicates that we are underpowered to detect the true effect of postcards, which means the same study should be replicated in a larger sample to determine if these effects are reliable.



Appendix

Florida-

First postcard:

Hi [Voter Name],

Reminder: Florida has TWO primaries!

- The Presidential primary is March 17 (polls open 7:00am-7:00pm).
- The primary for all other offices (including state legislature) is Aug 18..
- Visit vote.org/polling-place-locator to find your polling location.

Thank you for voting in both primaries!

[Volunteer Name]

Second postcard:

Hi [Voter Name],

The Presidential primary is over - but there's still a primary to elect folks to state legislature and Congress!

- The state primary election is Aug 18 (polls open 7:00am-7:00pm).
- Visit vote.org/polling-place-locator to find your polling location.

Thank you for voting in both primaries!

[Volunteer Name]

Minnesota-

First postcard:

Hi [Voter Name],

Reminder: Minnesota has TWO primaries!

- The Presidential primary is March 3 (polls open 7:00am-8:00pm).
- The primary for all other offices (including state legislature) is Aug 11.
- Visit vote.org/polling-place-locator to find your polling location.

Thank you for voting in both primaries!

[Volunteer Signature]

Second postcard:

Hi [Voter Name],

The Presidential primary is over - but there's still a primary to elect folks to state legislature, Congress, and Senate!

- The primary election is August 11 (polls open 7:00am-8:00pm).
- Visit vote.org/polling-place-locator to find your polling location.

Thank you for voting in both primaries!

[Volunteer Signature]