

THE MOVEMENT COOPERATIVE

# Social pressure vs Race-Class Narrative? Or both?: A field experiment on handwritten postcards in the 2022 PA Primary

Progressive Turnout Project  
ASO Communications  
The Movement Cooperative



# BACKGROUND

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- Postcards to Swing States (PTSS), an initiative by Progressive Turnout Project (PTP), organizes over 100 thousand volunteers to send more than 20 million handwritten GOTV postcards to mobilize swing state voters, each electoral cycle.
- Previous research collaborations between PTSS and The Movement Cooperative (TMC) have found handwritten GOTV postcards to be highly effective, scalable, and cost-efficient, generally mobilizing thousands of voters who wouldn't have voted otherwise at a cost between 14-55 voters per \$1,000 spent.

# BACKGROUND

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- At such scale, PTSS is especially interested in optimizing its basic postcard message — a choice with the far-reaching potential to either energize or put off both its many volunteers and target voters.
- Of special interest is how insights from the Race-Class Narrative (RCN) might integrate with the current social pressure message. In the 2020 general election, PTSS and TMC ran a large-scale experiment finding that a social-pressure-only (SP) message (+0.14 pp) outperformed an RCN-only message (+0 pp) in mobilizing voters.
- This cycle, PTSS and TMC worked directly with ASO Communications to improve the RCN-only message, as well as to test a message that combined RCN with social pressure.

# THIS STUDY

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- In this study, Progressive Turnout Project, TMC, and ASO Communications collaborated on a volunteer postcard field experiment comparing the effectiveness of the following messages on turnout in the 2022 Pennsylvania primary election:
  - 1) Race-Class Narrative,
  - 2) Social Pressure,
  - 3) Race-Class Narrative + Social Pressure
- Down the line, we will also examine whether the programs led to any downstream turnout effects in the 2022 general election.\*

\*General election results will be available after the Pennsylvania voter file updates with the 2022 general election turnout data in Spring of 2023

# 2022 PENNSYLVANIA PRIMARY CONTEXT

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- The Pennsylvania Primary was held on May 17.
- Primary voters chose their party's nominees for a number of offices, including the Governor and the U.S. Senate.
- Voters turned out in record numbers (1.2 million). This was the highest primary turnout in a midterm year, and the fourth highest primary turnout in the last 25 years. Only the presidential years of 2008, 2016, and 2020 had higher primary turnout.

# MAIN TAKEAWAYS

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- In the 2022 PA primary, both postcards with the RCN-only message (+0.4pp) and the SP-only message (+0.8pp) were effective at mobilizing voters. By themselves, we estimate the SP-only message was twice as effective as the RCN-only one
- Combining both messages had the most powerful effect on turnout in the primary election (+1.0pp), improving upon the SP-only message's effect size by an estimated 25%.
- In line with previous studies, the program scales extremely well and is very cost effective (generating 10 voters per \$1,000 spent).



# STUDY DESIGN

# RESEARCH QUESTIONS

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- Did contacting voters in Pennsylvania with handwritten postcards shortly before the 2022 primary election increase turnout?
- Which message was most effective at increasing turnout: a race-class narrative message, a social pressure message, or a message that combines both?
- Did contacting voters in the primary increase turnout in the 2022 general election?\*

\*General election results will be available after the Pennsylvania voter file updates with the 2022 general election turnout data in Spring of 2023.

# EXPERIMENTAL DESIGN

**1,335,980 registered voters in Pennsylvania**

with partisanship scores of 75 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 1 of 4 experimental conditions*



*Outcomes: Turnout in the 2022 primary elections in Pennsylvania*

# PENNSYLVANIA POSTCARD PROGRAM

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- Over 5,000 volunteers participated.
- Volunteers chose to write race-class narrative, social pressure, or race-class narrative + social pressure messages (to voters in appropriate conditions).
- Volunteers were instructed to mail the postcards on May 6, ensuring it arrived before May 17.
- 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 program cost of \$36,750 (includes staff time) was extremely low.



# PROGRAM

## Example Postcard

*FRONT*

The postcard featured a happy cartoon ballot box, the voting deadline, and a link to Pennsylvania's official voter information website.



# RACE-CLASS NARRATIVE MESSAGE (RCN)

*BACK*

Crafted by ASO Communications based on previous research, the RCN message highlights positive changes voting has accomplished, identifies and calls out the opposition, and encourages voters to come together to vote.

Mary,

In 2020 our votes delivered stimulus checks and vaccines. But some politicians want to divide us and block what our families need. Together, as voters on May 17, we can fight back!

- James

# SOCIAL PRESSURE MESSAGE (SP)

*BACK*

Using recommended language from social pressure research, this short message told 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. Be a voter on May 17!

- Patricia

# RACE-CLASS NARRATIVE AND SOCIAL PRESSURE MESSAGE (SP+RCN)

*BACK*

This message combines the language from the social pressure and race-class narrative messages, in an attempt to merge the evidence-based merits of each.

Jennifer,

In 2020 our votes delivered stimulus checks and vaccines, we rejected division for a better future. Who you vote for is private, but whether you vote is public record. Be a voter on May 17!

- John

## The voter universe in the experiment

In the experimental universe, approximately 25% were voters of color, 59% were women, and 48% had voted in the 2020 primary election.

<i>Modeled Black</i>	<b>17%</b>
<i>Modeled Latinx</i>	<b>3%</b>
<i>Modeled White</i>	<b>75%</b>
<i>Modeled Asian</i>	<b>1%</b>
<i>Women</i>	<b>59%</b>
<i>Men</i>	<b>39%</b>
<i>Age (mean)</i>	<b>54</b>
<i>Voted in 2020 Primary</i>	<b>48%</b>
<i>N</i>	1,335,980



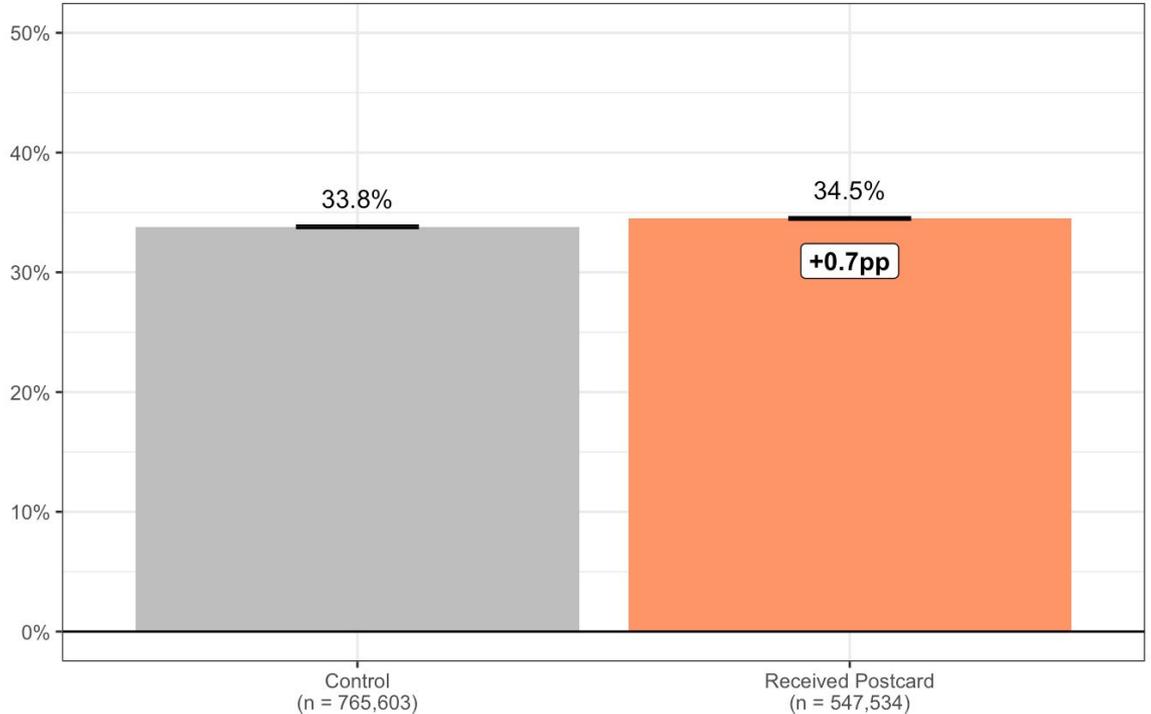
# MAIN RESULTS

Overall, the program increased turnout in the Pennsylvania primary.

The handwritten postcard program moderately increased primary turnout by 0.7pp.\*

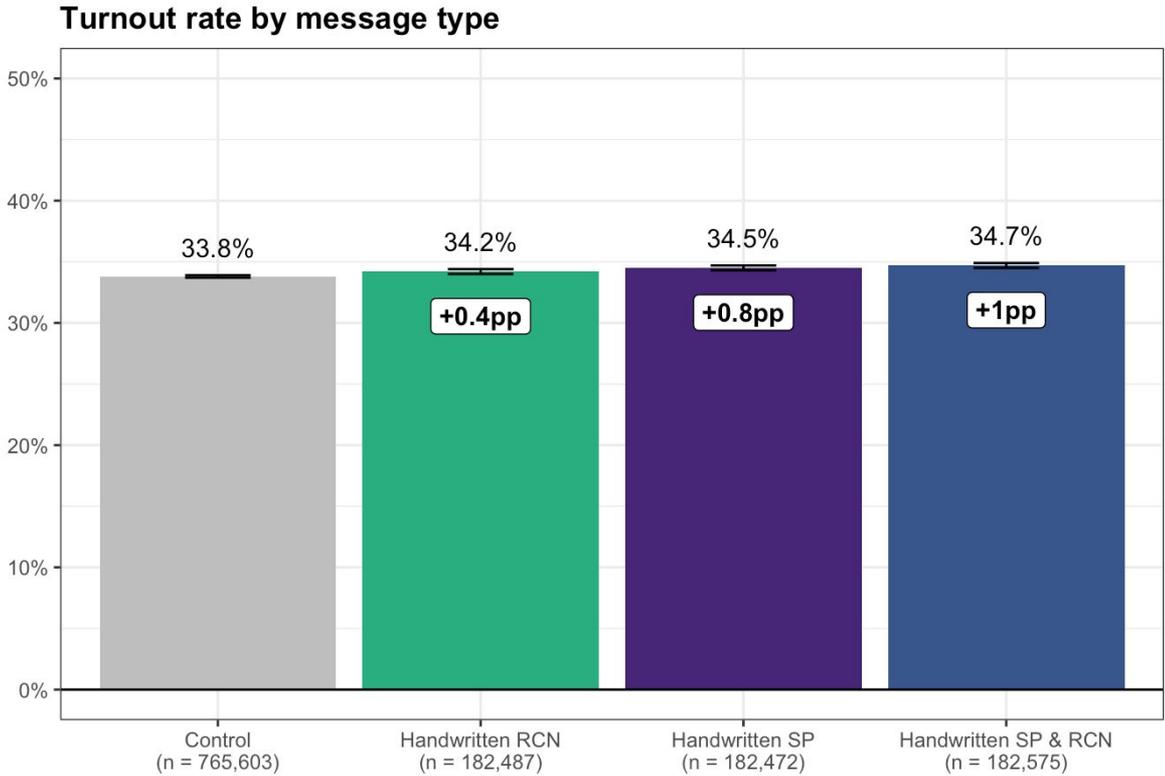
\* Please see the appendix for a detailed table of estimates including standard errors and p-values.

Turnout rate by pooled treatment



# All three handwritten messages increased turnout.

The most powerful message in this primary election combined potent social pressure language and RCN. Social pressure alone performed quite well. RCN-alone showed a positive, albeit smaller effect.



The Movement Cooperative and Progressive Turnout Project, 2022

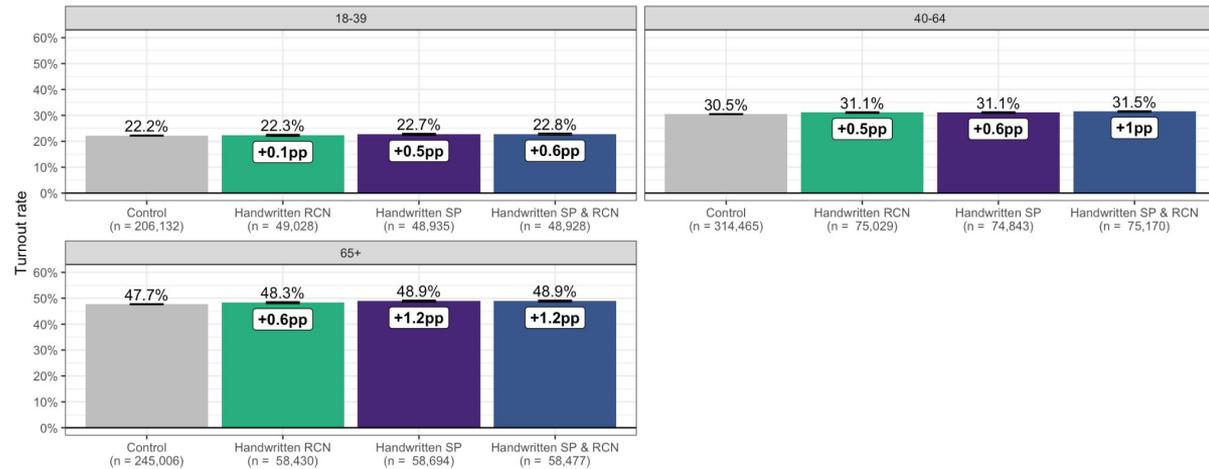
# SUBGROUP ANALYSIS FINDINGS

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- The program appeared to be **more effective among older voters** (over 40) compared to younger voters, consistent with prior research on postcard programs.
- The program was **effective at increasing turnout across all categories of race and gender.**
- The program **worked across all included partisanship scores (75+)**, with the largest effect among those with the highest partisanship scores (90+).

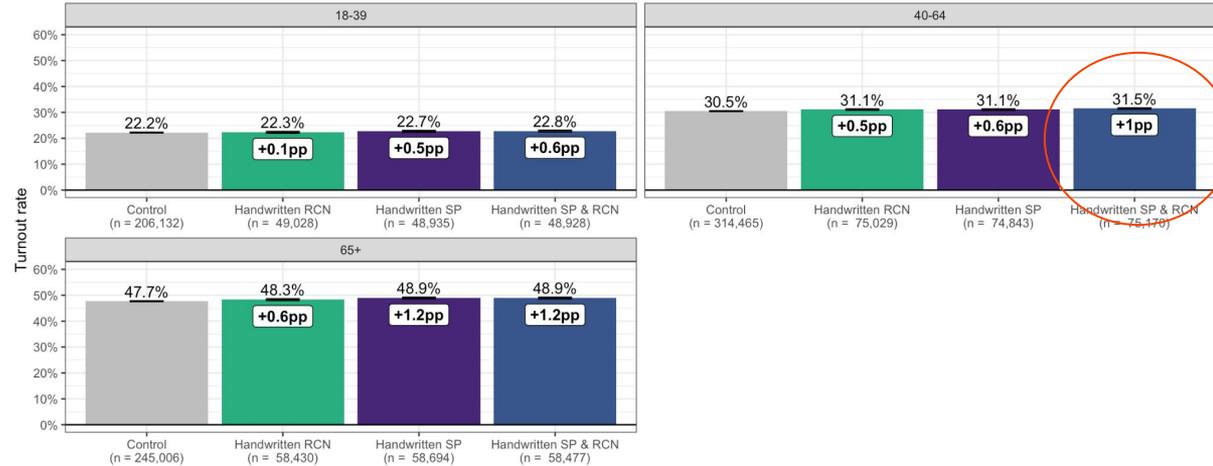
Among different age groups, there were notable differences.

The social pressure and combined messages were similarly effective among voters 18-39 and 65+....



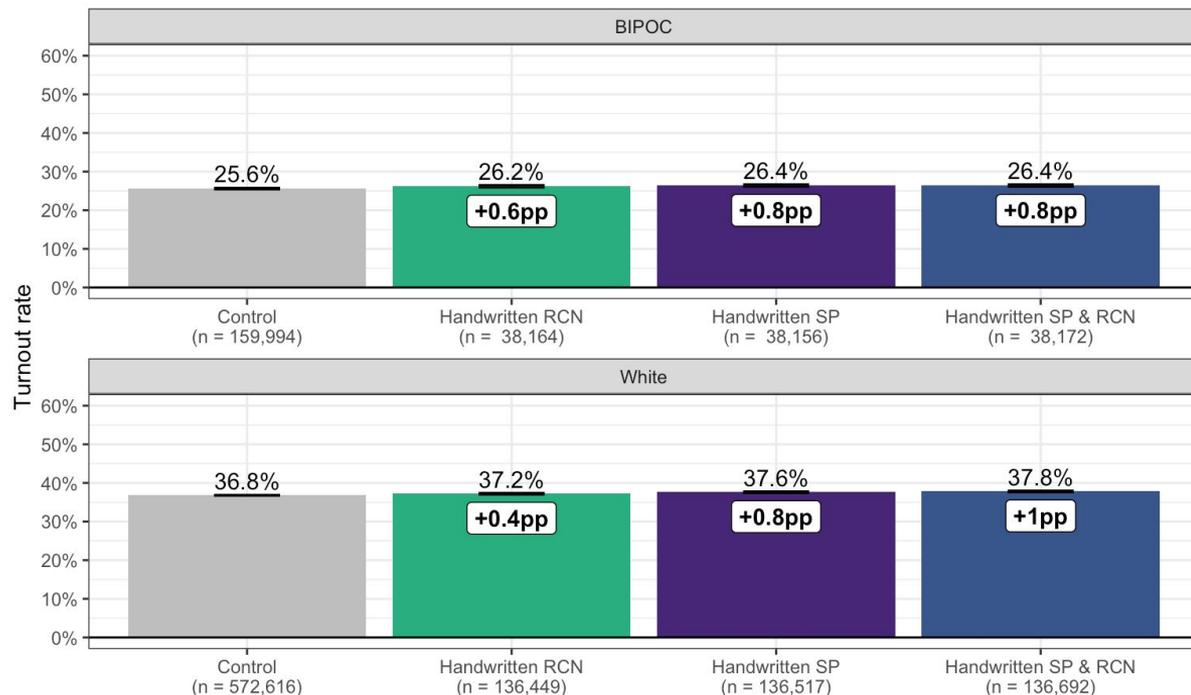
The Movement Cooperative and Progressive Turnout Project, 2022

...However, the combined message was noticeably more effective than both RCN and social pressure messages among voters 40-64 years old.



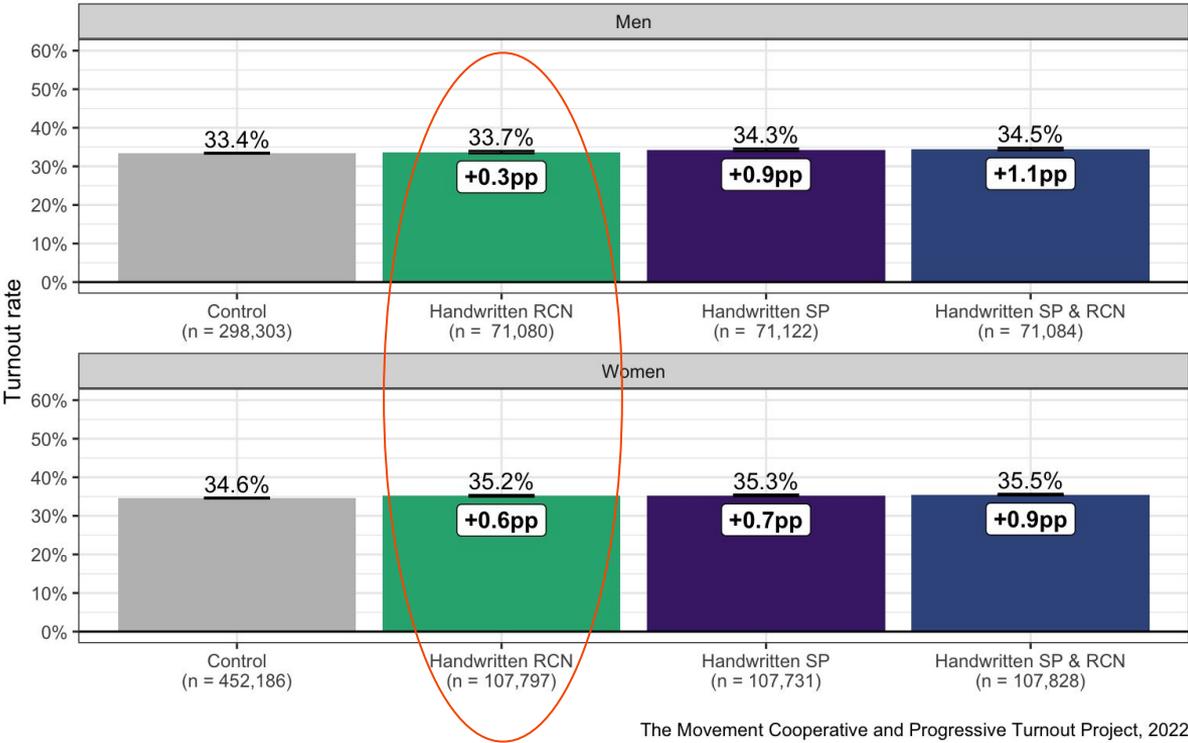
The Movement Cooperative and Progressive Turnout Project, 2022

All three messages were similarly effective among BIPOC and white voters.



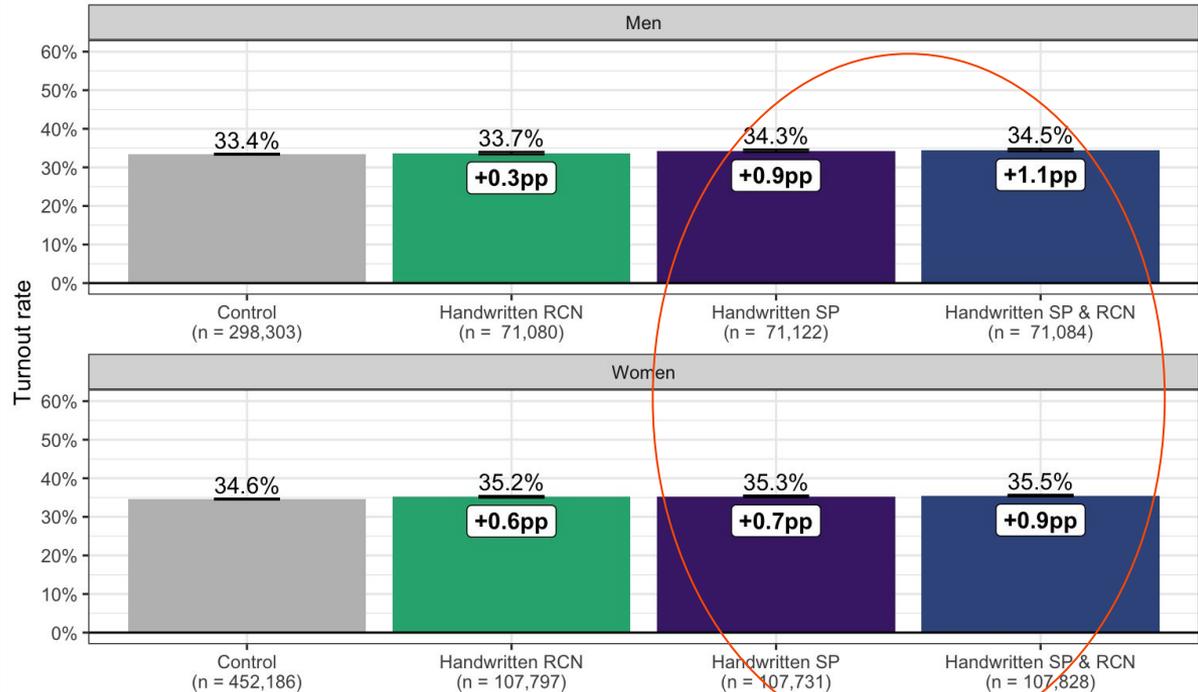
The Movement Cooperative and Progressive Turnout Project, 2022

While the RCN message was slightly more effective with women than men...



The Movement Cooperative and Progressive Turnout Project, 2022

... The social pressure message and combined RCN+SP messages were most effective for both.

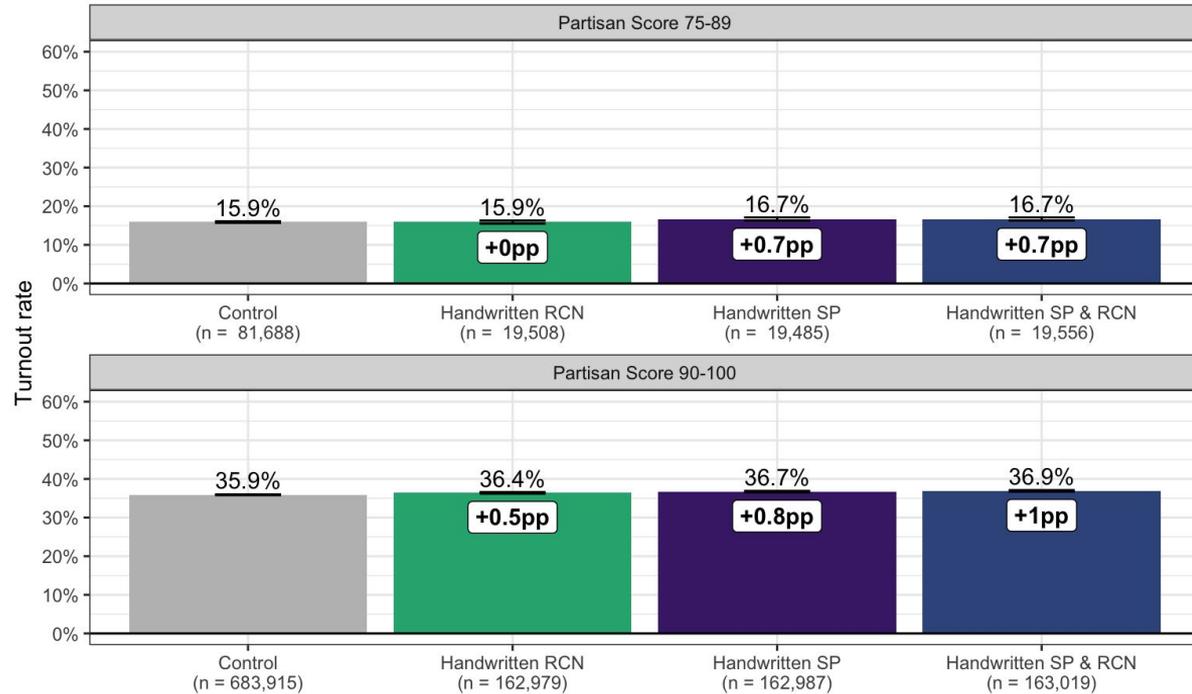


The Movement Cooperative and Progressive Turnout Project, 2022

Among partisan scores, there were also some key differences.

Voters with partisan scores between 90 and 100 were more receptive to an inclusion of RCN elements in their postcard message.

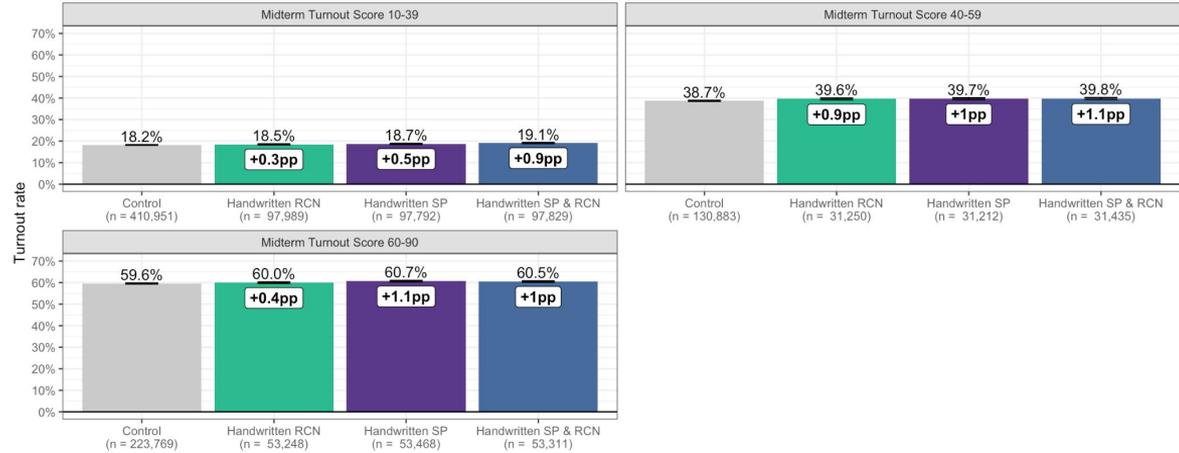
RCN message had no effect among voters with partisanship scores between 75 and 89.



The Movement Cooperative and Progressive Turnout Project, 2022

The combined RCN+SP messages were effective across voters with low, middle, and high turnout scores.

Among voters with low turnout scores, the combined message outperformed the social pressure message by 0.4pp.



The Movement Cooperative and Progressive Turnout Project, 2022



# **COST AND TIME EFFICIENCY**

The program was very cost effective. We estimate that it added 10 voters per \$1000 spent (VPK). Much of it can be attributed to the social pressure message.

	<i>N size</i>	<i>Effect Size</i>	<i>Voters Added</i>	<i>Voters Added per \$1000 Spent (VPK)</i>
<i>RCN</i>	<b>182,487</b>	<b>0.04</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>6</b>
<i>SP</i>	<b>182,472</b>	<b>0.08</b>	<b>146</b>	<b>12</b>
<i>SP &amp; RCN</i>	<b>182,575</b>	<b>0.10</b>	<b>183</b>	<b>15</b>
<i>Full program</i>	<b>547,534</b>	<b>0.07</b>	<b>383</b>	<b>10</b>

# Overall, the program likely generated between 1-3 voters per 100 volunteer hours

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

	<i>N size</i>	<i>Voters Added</i>	<i>Estimated Time per Card (minutes)</i>	<i>Voters Added per 100 Volunteer Hours</i>
<i>RCN</i>	182,487	73	3	1-2
<i>SP</i>	182,472	146	2	2-5
<i>SP &amp; RCN</i>	182,575	183	3	2-4
<i>Full program</i>	547,534	383	3	1-3



# SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

# SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS

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- Overall, the program **moderately increased turnout in the 2022 PA primary election.**
- **In the primary context, both race-class narrative and social pressure messages were effective** at increasing voter turnout, though social pressure was more so. **The combined message, however, was most powerful.**
- **All three messages increased turnout across the demographic groups including race, gender, and age.** The only exception is that **race-class narrative had no effect on turnout for individuals with partisan scores of 75-89.**
- Our best estimate is that **the program added 383 voters** at a cost efficient **10 VPK figure.**

# CONTEXTUALIZING RESULTS

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- The estimated 0.7pp average effect is moderate. According to the Analyst Institute's meta-analysis, mail programs in “other” elections, which includes primaries, have an average effect of about 0.81 pp.
- We observed this effect in a highly salient primary that had a historically high voter turnout.
- This study focuses on voter turnout and does not account for other potential benefits of using Race-Class Narrative messages. For instance, it may shift the narrative of voting and democracy in positive ways.

# CURRENT RECOMMENDATIONS

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- Keep doing volunteer handwritten postcard programs!
- In the primary context, the combined SP and RCN message provides the largest measured effect. Whether this finding holds true in a general election context has yet to be seen.
- The social pressure-only message is quick to write and reliable, accounting for 80% of the estimated effect here, and performing well in all previously tested electoral contexts.
- If volunteer capacity is an issue, focus program outreach on voters who are 40 or older, a group that has been repeatedly demonstrated to be particularly responsive to mail programs

# DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

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- How well does the handwritten Race-Class Narrative and social pressure postcards work in a general election context, where the average partisanship score in the target universe is lower?
- Are volunteer postcard programs effective for other types of outcomes (e.g. membership recruitment, grassroots fundraising)?
- What other potential effects, besides voter turnout, do handwritten Race-Class Narrative postcards have?



# CREDITS

# CREDITS

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- **Progressive Turnout Project:** Reid McCollum
- **ASO Communications:** Anat Shenker-Osorio, Jillian Marcellus, Anthony Torres
- **The Movement Cooperative Research:** Darren Kwong, Chanita Intawan, Emily Wager, Leo Liu

# THANK YOU

Contact TMC at [research@movementcooperative.org](mailto:research@movementcooperative.org)



**POSTCARDS TO  
SWING STATES**

A Progressive Turnout Project Initiative





# APPENDIX

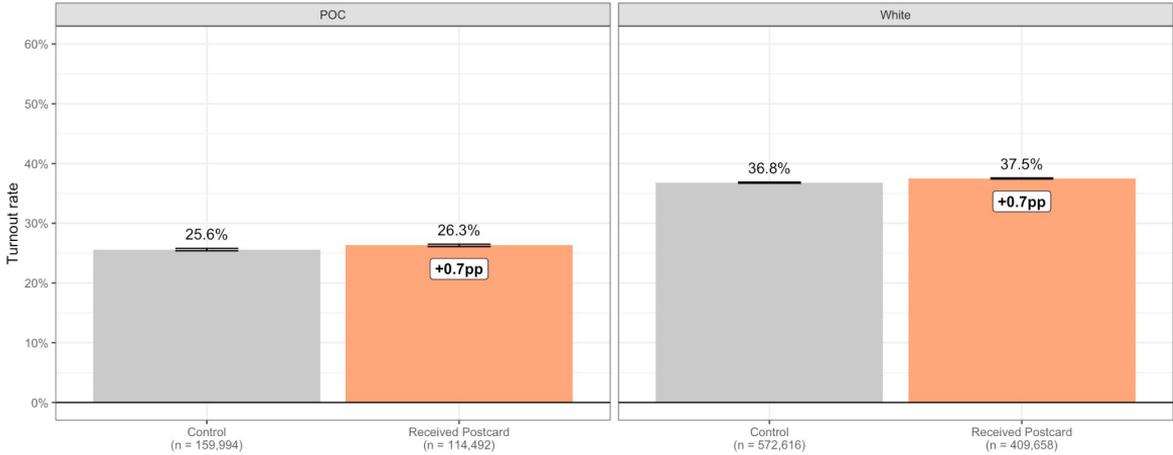


**VOTE**

**FOUR STAR**  
BLACK HAWK  
COUNTY

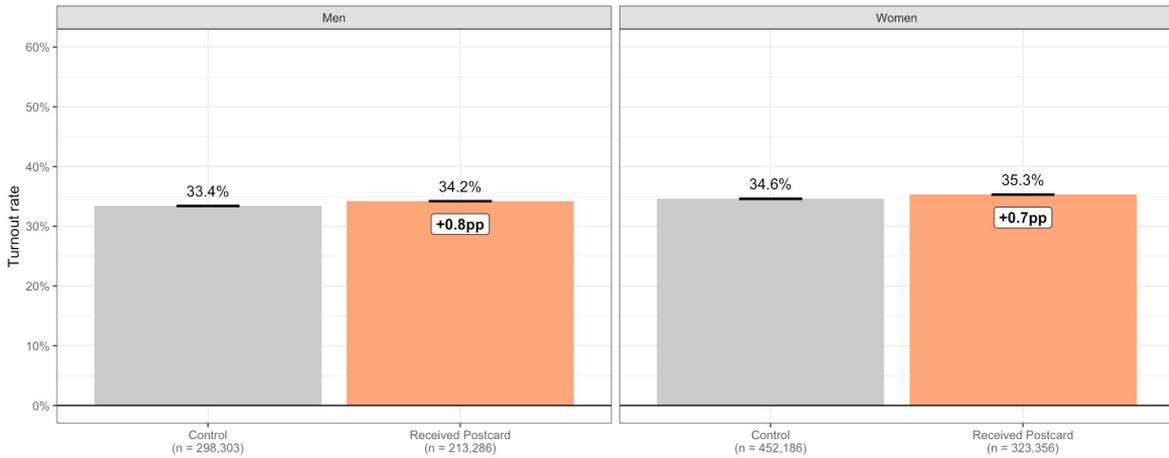
**POOLED  
RESULTS**

The overall effect was similar among BIPOC and white voters.



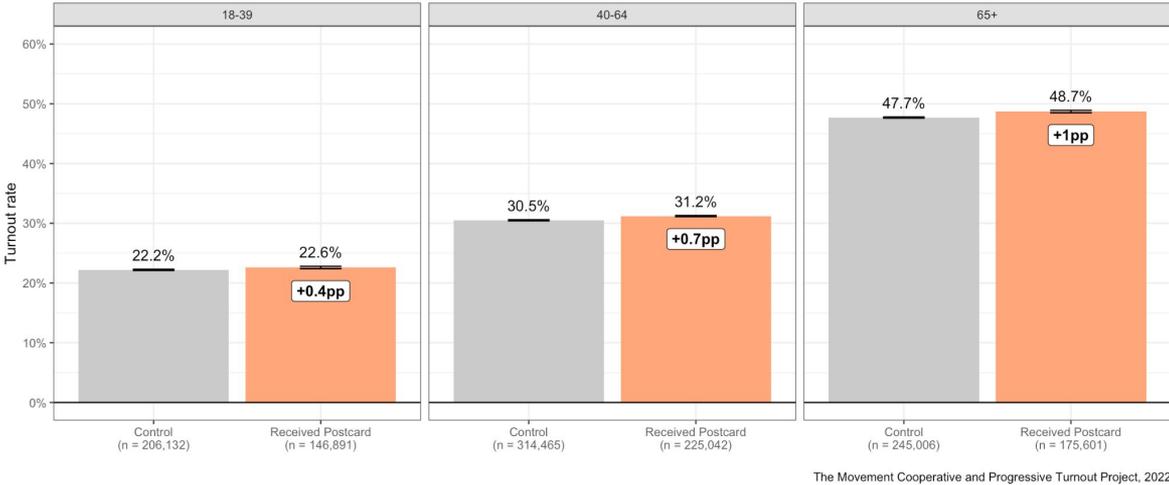
The Movement Cooperative and Progressive Turnout Project, 2022

Similarly, the overall effect was the same among men and women.

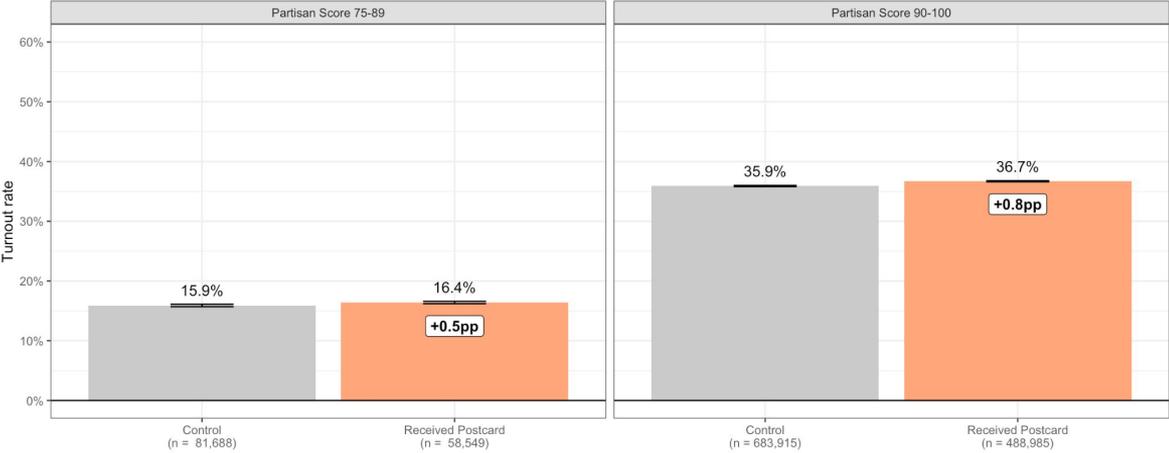


The Movement Cooperative and Progressive Turnout Project, 2022

The program boosted turnout across age brackets, but especially among older voters. This is consistent with prior research on social pressure.



The program was more effective among those with the higher partisanship scores.



The Movement Cooperative and Progressive Turnout Project, 2022



**VOTE**

**FOUR STAR**  
BLACK HAWK  
COUNTY

**EXPERIMENTAL  
ESTIMATES**

# EXPERIMENTAL ESTIMATES

Group	Condition	N	Level	90% +/-	Effect	90% +/-	p
Overall	Control	765,603	33.8%	0.1%	0.0%	0.0%	–
Overall	Race-Class Narrative	182,487	34.2%	0.2%	0.4%	0.2%	<0.001
Overall	Social Pressure	182,472	34.5%	0.2%	0.8%	0.2%	<0.001
Overall	Combined RCN + SP	182,575	34.7%	0.2%	1.0%	0.2%	<0.001
BIPOC	Control	159,994	25.6%	0.2%	0.0%	0.0%	–
BIPOC	Race-Class Narrative	38,164	26.2%	0.3%	0.6%	0.3%	0.005
BIPOC	Social Pressure	38,156	26.4%	0.3%	0.8%	0.3%	<0.001
BIPOC	Combined RCN + SP	38,172	26.4%	0.3%	0.8%	0.3%	<0.001
White	Control	765,603	36.8%	0.1%	0.0%	0.0%	–
White	Race-Class Narrative	182,487	37.2%	0.2%	0.4%	0.2%	0.002
White	Social Pressure	182,472	37.6%	0.2%	0.8%	0.2%	<0.001
White	Combined RCN + SP	182,575	37.8%	0.2%	1.0%	0.2%	<0.001

# EXPERIMENTAL ESTIMATES

Group	Condition	N	Level	90% +/-	Effect	90% +/-	p
Age 18-39	Control	206,132	22.2%	0.1%	0.0%	0.0%	–
Age 18-39	Race-Class Narrative	49,028	22.3%	0.2%	0.1%	0.2%	0.580
Age 18-39	Social Pressure	48,935	22.7%	0.2%	0.5%	0.2%	0.005
Age 18-39	Combined RCN + SP	48,928	22.8%	0.2%	0.6%	0.2%	0.001
Age 40-64	Control	314,465	30.5%	0.1%	0.0%	0.0%	–
Age 40-64	Race-Class Narrative	75,029	31.1%	0.3%	0.5%	0.3%	0.001
Age 40-64	Social Pressure	74,843	31.1%	0.3%	0.6%	0.3%	0.001
Age 40-64	Combined RCN + SP	75,170	31.5%	0.3%	1.0%	0.3%	<0.001
Age 65+	Control	245,006	47.7%	0.1%	0.0%	0.0%	–
Age 65+	Race-Class Narrative	58,430	48.3%	0.3%	0.6%	0.2%	0.003
Age 65+	Social Pressure	58,694	48.9%	0.3%	1.2%	0.2%	<0.001
Age 65+	Combined RCN + SP	58,477	48.9%	0.3%	1.2%	0.2%	<0.001

# EXPERIMENTAL ESTIMATES

Group	Condition	N	Level	90% +/-	Effect	90% +/-	p
Men	Control	298,303	33.4%	0.1%	0.0%	0.0%	–
Men	Race-Class Narrative	71,080	33.7%	0.2%	0.3%	0.2%	0.107
Men	Social Pressure	71,122	34.3%	0.2%	0.9%	0.2%	<0.001
Men	Combined RCN + SP	71,084	34.5%	0.2%	1.1%	0.2%	<0.001
Women	Control	452,186	34.6%	0.1%	0.0%	0.0%	–
Women	Race-Class Narrative	107,797	35.2%	0.2%	0.6%	0.2%	<0.001
Women	Social Pressure	107,731	35.3%	0.2%	0.7%	0.2%	<0.001
Women	Combined RCN + SP	107,828	35.5%	0.2%	0.9%	0.2%	<0.001

# EXPERIMENTAL ESTIMATES

Group	Condition	N	Level	90% +/-	Effect	90% +/-	p
Partisan Score 75-89	Control	81,688	15.9%	0.2%	0.0%	0.0%	–
Partisan Score 75-89	Race-Class Narrative	19,508	15.9%	0.2%	0.0%	0.4%	0.857
Partisan Score 75-89	Social Pressure	19,485	16.7%	0.4%	0.7%	0.4%	0.007
Partisan Score 75-89	Combined RCN + SP	19,556	16.7%	0.4%	0.7%	0.5%	0.006
Partisan Score 90-100	Control	683,915	35.9%	0.1%	0.0%	0.0%	–
Partisan Score 90-100	Race-Class Narrative	162,979	36.4%	0.2%	0.5%	0.2%	<0.001
Partisan Score 90-100	Social Pressure	162,987	36.7%	0.2%	0.8%	0.2%	<0.001
Partisan Score 90-100	Combined RCN + SP	163,019	36.9%	0.2%	1.0%	0.2%	<0.001

# EXPERIMENTAL ESTIMATES

Group	Condition	N	Level	90% +/-	Effect	90% +/-	p
Turnout 10-39	Control	410,951	18.2%	0.1%	0.0%	0.0%	–
Turnout 10-39	Race-Class Narrative	97,989	18.5%	0.2%	0.3%	0.2%	0.009
Turnout 10-39	Social Pressure	97,792	18.7%	0.2%	0.5%	0.2%	<0.001
Turnout 10-39	Combined RCN + SP	97,829	19.1%	0.2%	0.9%	0.2%	<0.001
Turnout 40-59	Control	130,883	38.7%	0.2%	0.0%	0.0%	–
Turnout 40-59	Race-Class Narrative	31,250	39.6%	0.4%	0.9%	0.5%	<0.001
Turnout 40-59	Social Pressure	31,212	39.7%	0.4%	1.0%	0.5%	<0.001
Turnout 40-59	Combined RCN + SP	31,435	39.8%	0.4%	1.1%	0.3%	<0.001
Turnout 60-90	Control	223,769	59.6%	0.3%	0.0%	0.0%	–
Turnout 60-90	Race-Class Narrative	53,248	60.0%	0.3%	0.4%	0.4%	<0.001
Turnout 60-90	Social Pressure	53,468	60.7%	0.3%	1.1%	0.4%	<0.001
Turnout 60-90	Combined RCN + SP	53,311	60.5%	0.3%	1.0%	0.4%	<0.001



**VOTE**

**FOUR STAR**  
BLACK HAWK  
COUNTY

**VOTERS PER  
VOLUNTEER  
HOURS**

**Overall, the program likely generated between 1-3 voters per 100 volunteer hours**

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

<b>% of Postcards Written &amp; Sent On Time</b>	<b>Effect Size</b>	<b>Estimated Minutes Per Postcard</b>	<b>Voters Added Per 100 Estimated Volunteer Hours</b>
50%	+0.07pp	3	2.8
60%	+0.07pp	3	2.3
70%	+0.07pp	3	2.0
80%	+0.07pp	3	1.7
90%	+0.07pp	3	1.6
100%	+0.07pp	3	1.4

# The social pressure postcards likely generated between 2-5 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%	+0.08pp	2	4.8
60%	+0.08pp	2	4.0
70%	+0.08pp	2	3.4
80%	+0.08pp	2	3.0
90%	+0.08pp	2	2.7
100%	+0.08pp	2	2.4

# The Race-Class Narrative postcards likely generated between 1-2 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%	+0.04pp	3	1.6
60%	+0.04pp	3	1.3
70%	+0.04pp	3	1.1
80%	+0.04pp	3	1.0
90%	+0.04pp	3	0.9
100%	+0.04pp	3	0.8

# The Social Pressure + Race-Class Narrative

postcards likely generated between 2-4 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%	+0.1pp	3	4.0
60%	+0.1pp	3	3.3
70%	+0.1pp	3	2.9
80%	+0.1pp	3	2.5
90%	+0.1pp	3	2.2
100%	+0.1pp	3	2.0