



November 2023 Experiment Testing Impact of Endowment Effect Messaging in Heads-up Mail

Key findings from a randomized controlled trial testing “endowment effect” direct mail delivered to low propensity environmental voters prior to them receiving mail ballots for the Nov. 7, 2023 Colorado General Election



1. Key Findings

- The Environmental Voter Project’s one-piece direct mail campaign during the November 7, 2023 Colorado General Election **increased turnout by +0.5 percentage points (pp)** over our control group, which was a statistically significant result.
- The mail piece’s notice to voters that their mail ballots would be arriving soon, combined with “endowment effect” messaging, had a **particularly large impact among (a) voters aged 35 and older, whose turnout increased by +1.0pp, and (b) women, whose turnout increased by +0.6pp.**

2. Introduction

The Environmental Voter Project (EVP) works year-round in hundreds of elections to improve the voting habits of low propensity environmental voters. As part of that work, we run randomized controlled trials to (a) measure our impact on voter turnout and (b) learn which messages work best with certain subgroups of voters. For the November 7, 2023 Colorado State General Election, EVP mailed a single 6” x 11” mail piece to a “treatment group” of 65,515 Coloradans whom EVP had identified as having the following characteristics:

- Each recipient was an active, registered voter who would therefore be receiving a mail ballot
- Each recipient had an in-state address that had been validated by the US Postal Service
- Each recipient had a high likelihood of listing climate/environment as their top issue priority
- Each recipient had a history of skipping odd-year general elections – as well as lower-turnout elections – and was deemed unlikely to vote in the November 7, 2023 Colorado State General Election

71,721 similarly identified voters were randomly set aside in a “control group” that received no mail or other communications from EVP.

EVP’s single mail piece – which arrived as a “heads-up” to voters before their ballots arrived in the mail – yielded a +0.5pp higher turnout in EVP’s treatment group than in our control group. The mail piece performed particularly well among voters aged 35 and older (+1.0pp) and women (+0.6pp).

3. Message Tested

This particular experiment tested whether two messaging techniques could be used in tandem to increase voter turnout in states where ballots are mailed to all active voters: (1) “heads-up” messaging, which warns voters that their mail ballots will arrive soon, and (2) “endowment effect” messaging – also known as “divestiture aversion” – which leverages people’s tendency to over-value things they own (in this instance, the right or opportunity to vote).

On the front of the mail piece – in big, bold lettering – we exhorted voters “Don’t throw away your vote!” accompanying it with pictures and text alluding to both the value of the recipient’s vote as well as the importance of not overlooking their ballot when it arrives in the mail.

Side A of the mail piece:



Side B of the mail piece:

YOU EARNED THE RIGHT TO VOTE.
USE IT.
DON'T THROW YOUR BALLOT OUT BY MISTAKE.

Your Colorado General election is on **November 7**.

Your ballot will be mailed to you the 3rd week of October.

- When you receive your ballot in the mail, make sure to open it up
- If you don't receive your ballot – or if you have any questions about voting – you can visit the Secretary of State's website at www.GoVoteColorado.gov
- BE A VOTER – it's quick and easy

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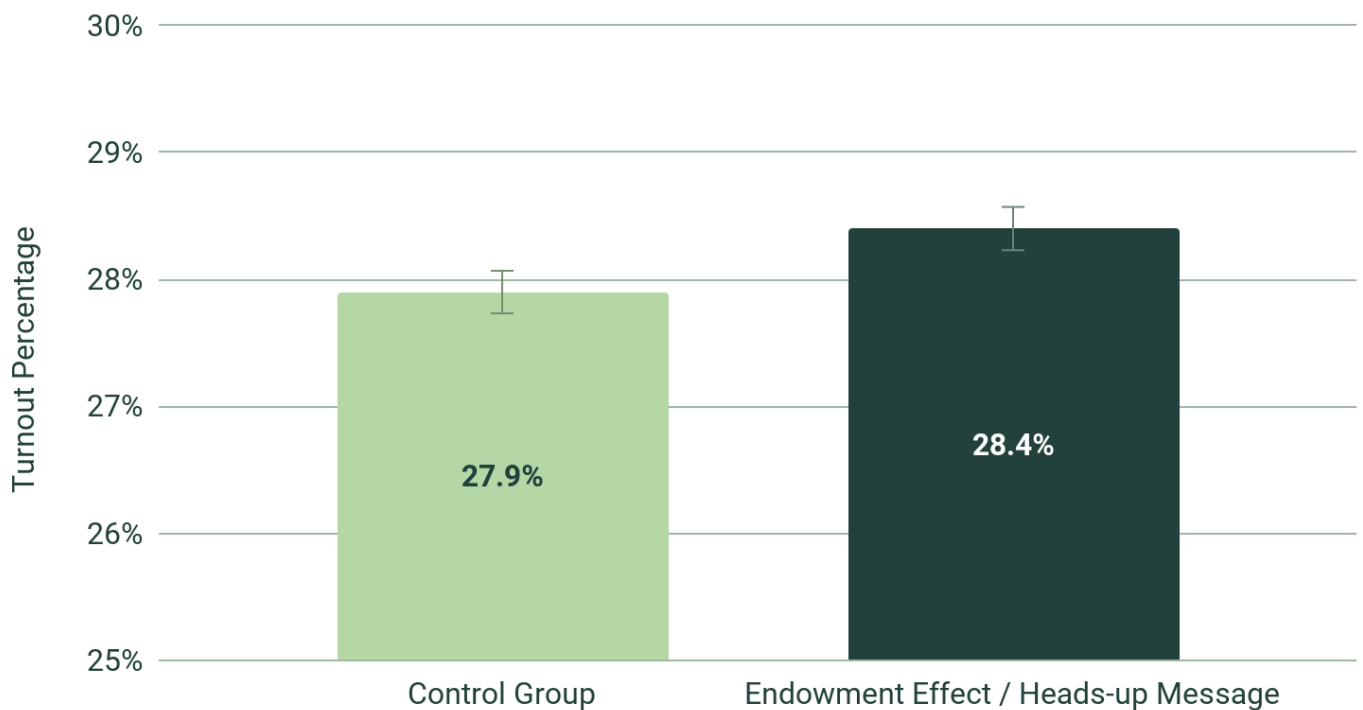


On the address side of the mail piece, we more explicitly pushed the endowment effect messaging (“You earned the right to vote. Use it.”) as well as the heads-up purpose of the mail (“Don’t throw your ballot out by mistake.”). We also informed voters about when to expect their ballot and how to get a new one if necessary.

4. Overall Impact on Turnout

This single endowment effect mail piece led to a statistically significant +0.5pp increase¹ in voter turnout over our control group of similar voters who did not receive any communications from EVP. Although we do not anticipate that a single mail piece like this would have a dramatic impact in high-turnout even-year elections, this result is still instructive in that it highlights the power of combined endowment effect / heads-up messaging, whether as part of a larger messaging campaign or as an isolated communications stream.

Turnout: Treatment vs. Control



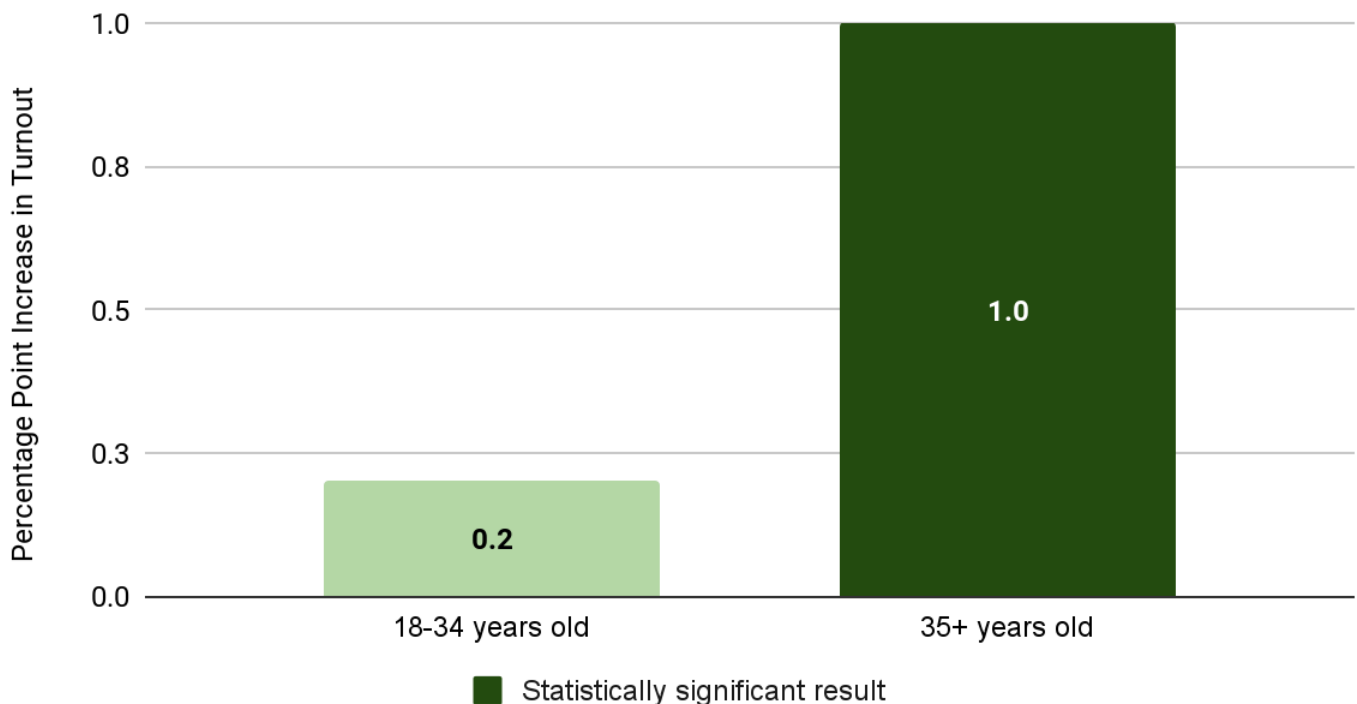
¹ Statistically significant at the $p = 0.05$ level.

5. Differential Treatment Effects by Age

Subgroup level data (broken out by age) reveals that the heads-up / endowment effect mail piece was particularly impactful with voters aged 35 and older.

Among 18-34 year-olds, this mail piece did not have a statistically significant impact on voter turnout; however, among voters aged 35 and older it increased turnout a full +1.0pp, which was a statistically significant result. Although some of this difference in impact is likely due to older people being more likely to read mail, these results nevertheless reveal a powerful way to boost turnout among middle-aged and older environmental voters.

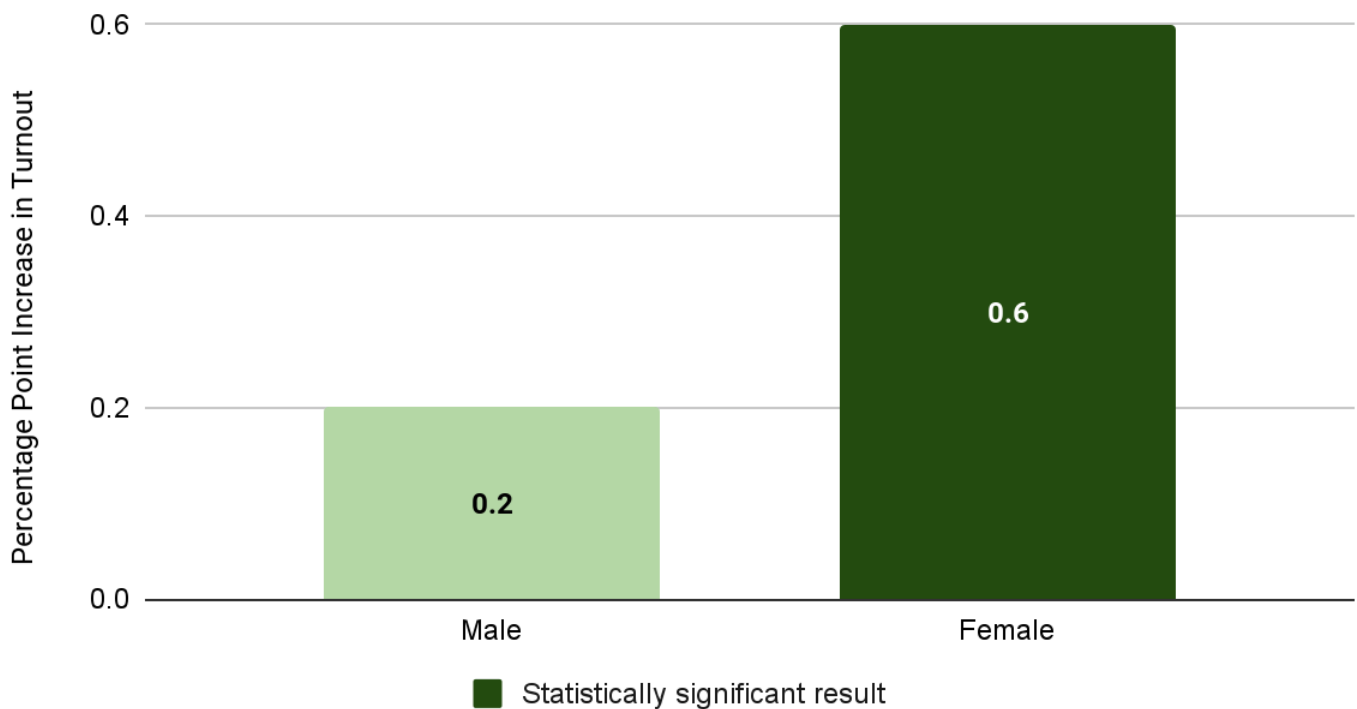
Impact on Turnout: age 18-34 vs. age 35+



6. Differential Treatment Effects by Sex

There was also a stark difference in how the heads-up / endowment effect mail piece impacted the turnout rates of male voters vs. female voters.² Among men, turnout increased by only +0.2pp compared to men in our control group; this result was not statistically significant, so we cannot be certain that it wasn't due to random occurrence. Among women, however, the mail piece led to a statistically significant +0.6pp increase in turnout compared to the control group, suggesting that mail such as this piece yields much better results when targeting women.

Impact on Turnout: Male vs. Female



² Voter file data includes sex – rather than gender – as a demographic category. In some instances, this identifier is self-selected by the voter and in others it is state-identified or modeled. Since sex is not analogous to gender, this report presents only the “male” and “female” identifiers categorized as sex in Smart VAN voter files. In our narrative discussion, we use the term men to encompass the group identified as male and the term women for the group identified as female.

7. Conclusion

Every election is an important opportunity to improve environmentalists' voting habits, and the Environmental Voter Project is proud to have had a measurable impact on turnout among our targeted voters in the 2023 Colorado State General Election. This result further adds to the long-term impact we have had in Colorado, where from 2017–2023, we helped 136,378 non-voting and seldom-voting environmentalists become consistent super-voters who now vote in every election. We are also pleased to have gained insights into how early-delivery “endowment effect” messaging may be particularly effective at mobilizing women and older environmental voters, and we look forward to more experimentation along these lines.