



November 2023 Experiment Testing Impact of Trending Norms Mail

Key findings from a randomized controlled trial testing direct mail with “trending norms” messaging sent to low propensity environmental voters in the November 7, 2023 Texas General Election



1. Key Findings

- The Environmental Voter Project’s one-piece direct mail campaign during the November 7, 2023 Texas General Election **increased turnout by +0.4 percentage points (pp)** over our control group, which was a statistically significant result.
- The mail piece’s “trending norms” messaging had a **particularly large impact among voters aged 35 and older, whose turnout increased by +1.3pp** over a control group in the same age range.

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) discover which messages work best with certain subgroups of voters. For the November 7, 2023 Texas State General Election, EVP mailed a single 6” x 11” mail piece to a “treatment group” of 166,437 Texans whom EVP had identified as having the following characteristics:

- Each recipient was registered to vote
- 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 therefore deemed unlikely to vote in the November 7, 2023 Texas State General Election

167,717 similarly identified voters were randomly set aside in a “control group” that received no mail or other communications from EVP.

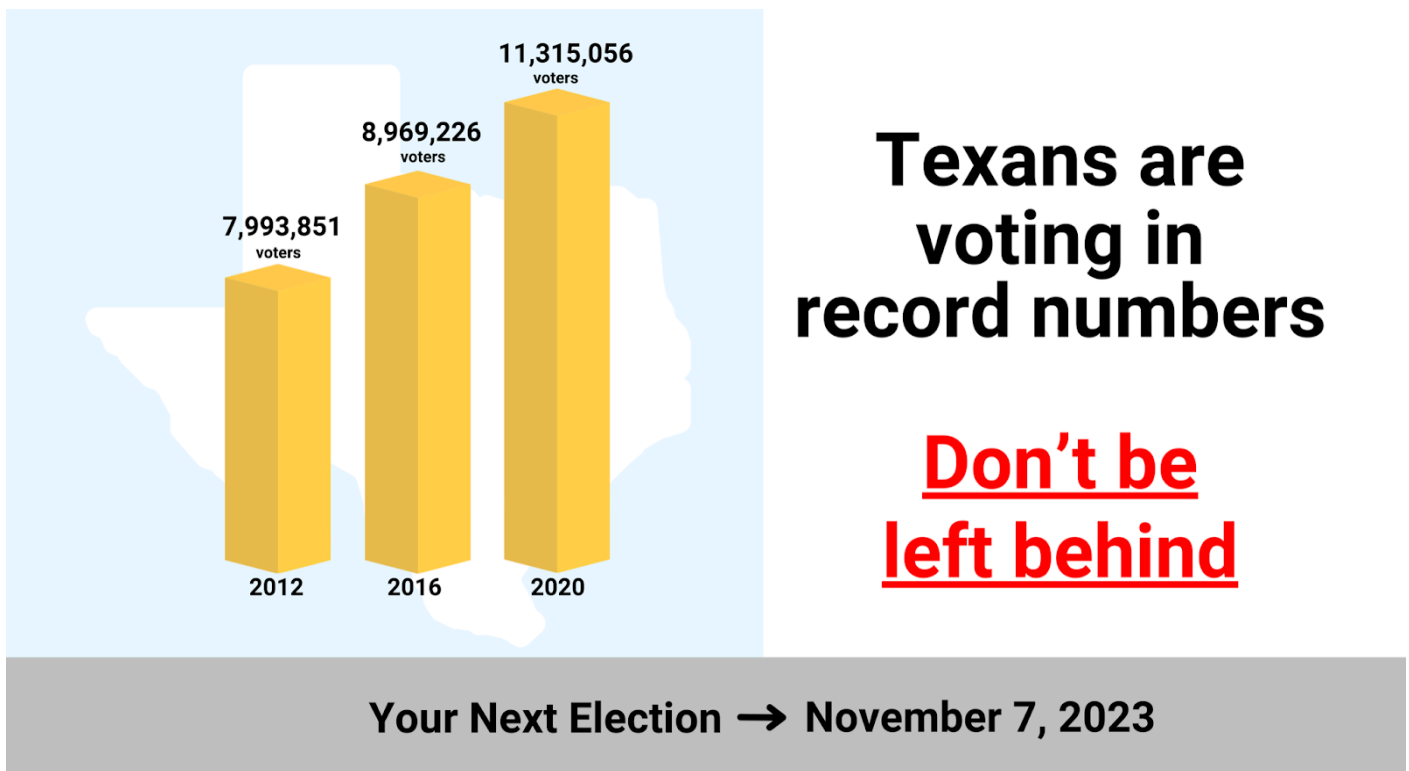
EVP’s single mail piece led to +0.4pp higher voter turnout in EVP’s treatment group than in the control group. The mail piece performed particularly well among registered voters aged 35 and older, who voted at a +1.3pp higher rate than voters of the same age in our control group.

3. Message Tested

This particular experiment tested whether the behavioral science concept of “trending norms” could be used to increase voter turnout. Social norms are a powerful way to change a voter’s behavior by encouraging them to adhere to the “typical” way in which their peers behave (i.e., “most of your peers do X, so you should do X too!”). The related concept of trending norms takes this a step further by also claiming that a growing number of people are adhering to that norm over time, thereby instilling a “fear of missing out” among those whose behavior you’re trying to change (i.e., “Don’t be the last person left who isn’t doing X!”).

We wanted to use trending norms concepts to improve voting behavior among low propensity environmental voters in Texas by making it seem like (a) a huge number of Texans are regularly voting, and (b) that number of voters is growing with each passing year. First, we said that “Texans are voting in record numbers” and highlighted the trend with a simple bar graph showing rising turnout from 2012 to 2016 to 2020. Second, we stated “Don’t be left behind” in bold red letters to heighten voters’ FOMO (“fear of missing out”), which is an integral part of trending norms messaging.

Side A of the mail piece:



Side B of the mail piece:

Who you vote for is secret

Whether you vote is public record

**Each year more and more Texans vote.
Don't be left behind in 2023.**

Your Texas General Election is on November 7.

Early voting is from Oct. 23 – Nov. 3.

**For questions and voting locations:
www.VoteTexas.gov**

Environmental Voter Project
PO Box 962002
Boston, MA 02196

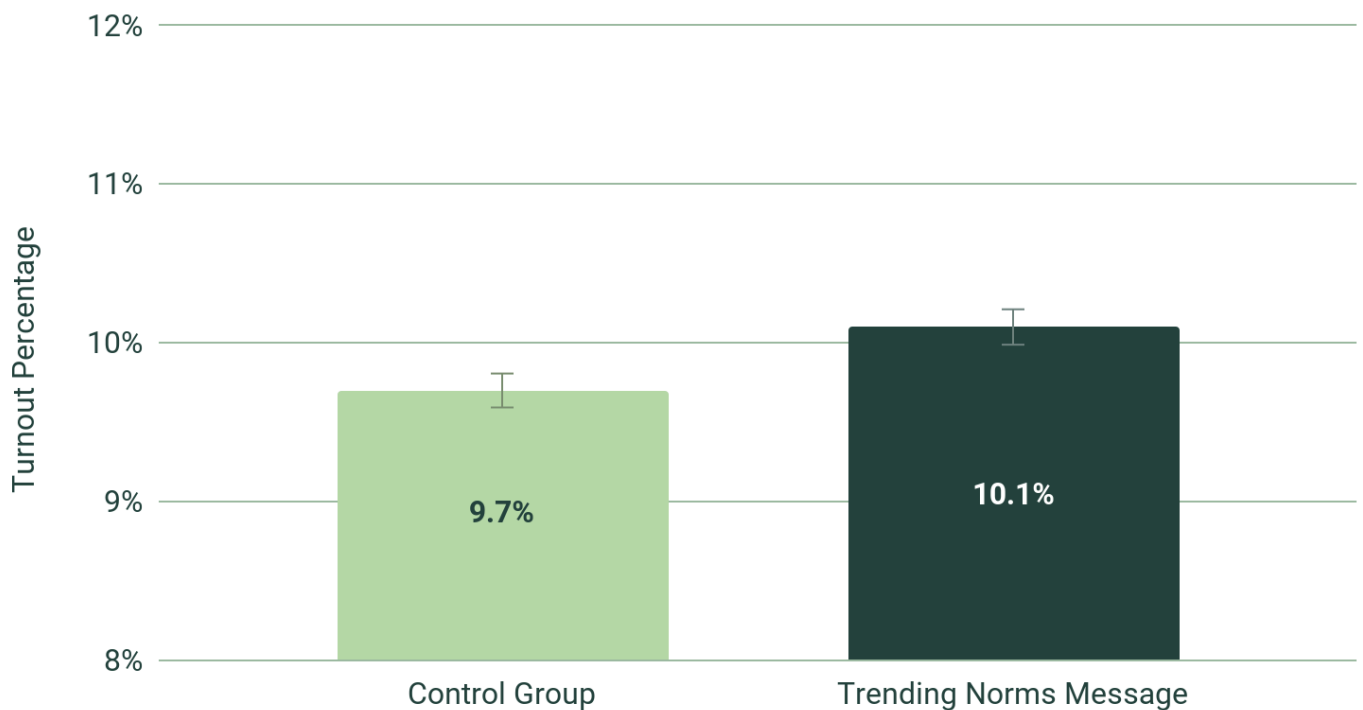


On the address side of the mail piece, we reiterated “Each year, more and more Texans vote. Don’t be left behind in 2023.” This side of the mail piece also included helpful voting information and some proven “social pressure” messaging notifying voters that their voting history is public record.

4. Overall Impact on Turnout

This single trending norms mail piece led to a statistically significant +0.4pp 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 as dramatic of an impact in higher-turnout even-year general elections, this result is still instructive in that it highlights the power of trending norms messaging, whether as part of a larger messaging campaign or as an isolated communications stream.

Turnout: Treatment vs. Control



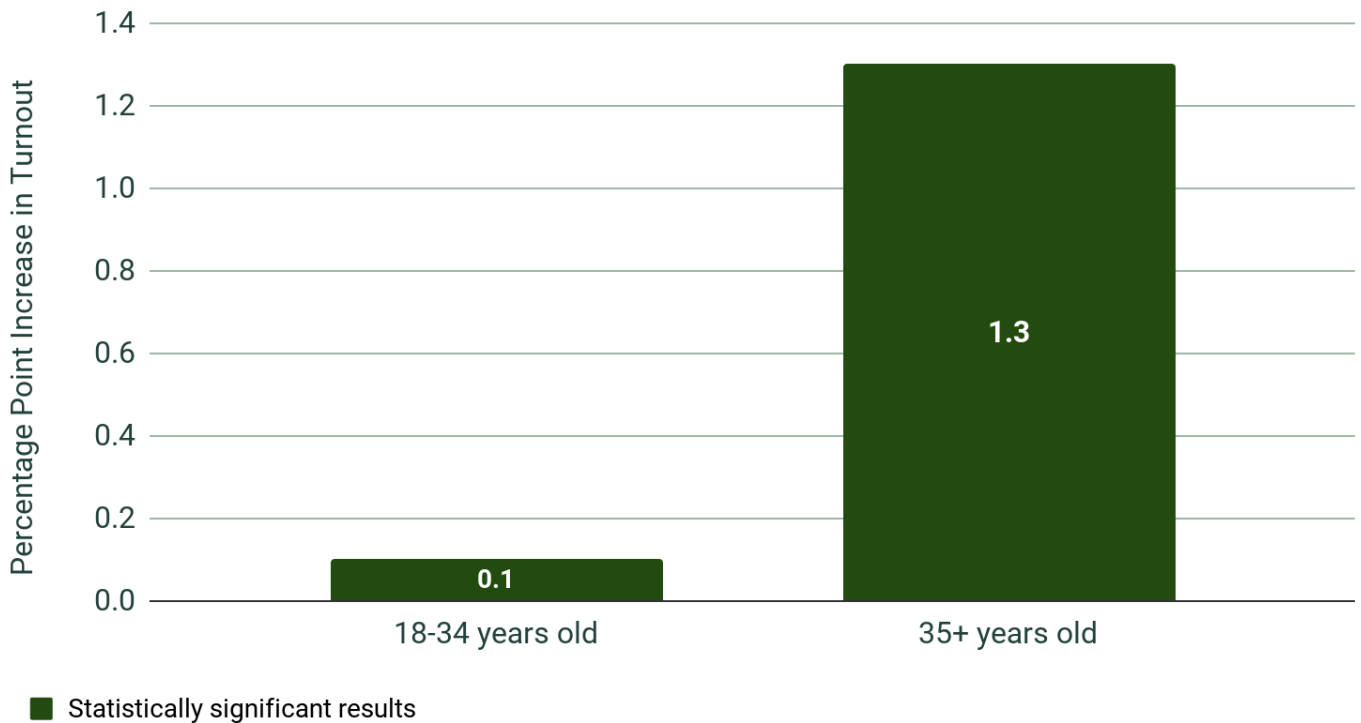
¹ Statistically significant at the p = 0.05 level.

5. Differential Treatment Effects by Age

Not only did this trending norms mail perform well across our full treatment group, but subgroup level data (broken out by age) reveal the message could be particularly impactful with voters aged 35 and older.

When comparing this mail piece's impact on voter turnout among different age groups, we discovered that the message's overall success in this experiment was almost solely due to its +1.3pp statistically significant impact on turnout among voters aged 35 and older (compared to a control group of the same age range). In short, trending norms mail like this could be even more impactful than our full treatment group data suggests, were the messaging solely focused on middle-aged and older voters.

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



6. 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 Texas General Election. This further adds to the long-term impact we have had in Texas, where from 2021–2023, we helped 150,353 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 “trending norms” messaging may be particularly effective at mobilizing middle-aged and older environmental voters, and we look forward to more experimentation along these lines.