



Overview of Experiments Testing the Impact of Volunteer Postcards

Key findings from multiple randomized controlled trials conducted from 2022 – 2025 testing which types of volunteer-written postcards tend to increase turnout among low propensity voters

1. 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 organization's impact on voter turnout and (b) discover which messages work best when used with particular communication methods. In this report, we analyze 16 randomized controlled trials in which EVP mailed volunteer-written postcards to low-propensity voters. Our findings show that "loss aversion" postcards are the most reliable way to increase voter turnout through volunteer postcarding campaigns.

Whenever this report details an increase in voter turnout, it is measuring our target voters' rate of turnout when compared to a similar, randomly separated control group that did not receive any postcards or other messaging from EVP. Unless otherwise stated, all statistically significant results mentioned in this report are statistically significant at the $p = 0.05$ level.

2. Loss Aversion Messaging

The Environmental Voter Project has run multiple successful experiments with volunteer postcarding campaigns that leverage the psychological concept of "loss aversion" to increase voter turnout. Loss aversion is a cognitive bias where people fear losing things more than they appreciate gaining items of the same value. In short, people tend to really hate losing things, and that fact can be used to change their behavior.

EVP leverages loss aversion to improve voting behavior by targeting so-called "drop-off voters" — people who vote in high-turnout elections but not low-turnout elections — with a message that presents the act of voting in lower-turnout elections as a way to avoid loss. On the front of the postcard, we heighten our target voters' sense of potential loss by endowing the voters with something of value: a good voting record they began to establish in a previous election.

Side A of a typical EVP “loss aversion” postcard:

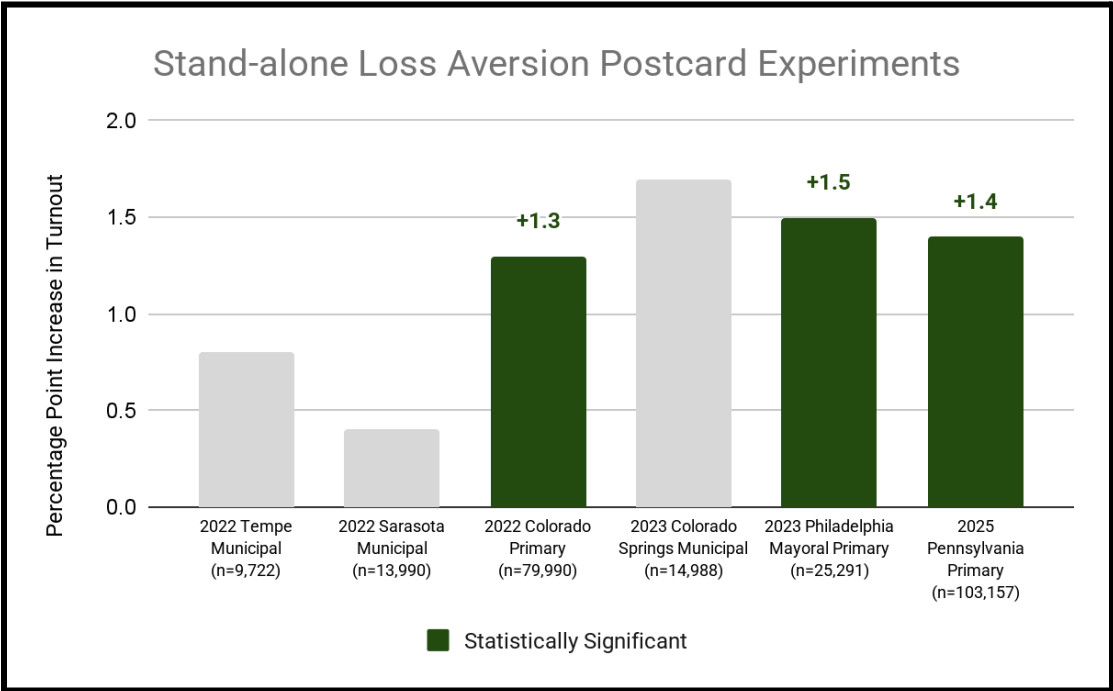


Side B of a typical EVP “loss aversion” postcard:

<p>REMINDER: Who you vote for is secret, but whether you vote is public record.</p> <p>New York City Mayoral Primary Election: June 24 Early Voting: June 14 - June 22 Voting info: www.vote.nyc</p> <p>Voters are eligible to vote by mail, ballot drop off, early in-person, or on Election Day.</p> <p><i>Zoey,</i></p> <p><i>Thanks for being a good voter in 2024.</i></p> <p><i>Keep your good voting record by voting in the 6/24 mayoral primary!</i></p> <p><i>-Kai, Environmental Voter Project volunteer</i></p>	<p>FROM: Environmental Voter Project PO BOX 962002 Boston, MA 02196</p> <p>To:</p> <p><i>Zoey Smith</i></p> <p><i>123 Margo St</i></p> <p><i>Apt #1</i></p> <p><i>Brooklyn, NY 11238</i></p>
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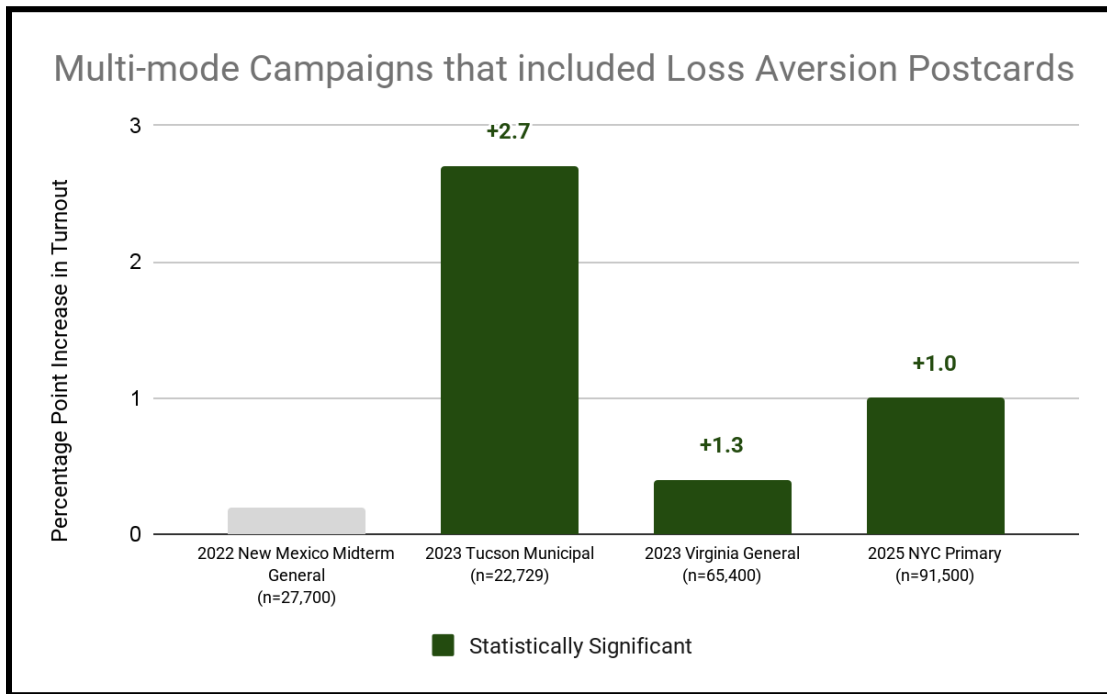
For example, to mobilize drop-off voters for a 2025 mayoral election, the front of the postcard read “Thank you for voting in 2024.” Then, on the address side, our volunteers handwrote a short message that framed skipping the upcoming lower-turnout election as a potential loss that voters should try to avoid: “Thanks for being a good voter in 2024. Keep your good voting record by voting in the 6/24 mayoral primary!” This side of the postcard also included helpful printed voting information and some proven “social pressure” messaging notifying voters that their voting history is public record.

Across six different randomized controlled trials, **EVP’s loss aversion volunteer postcards increased turnout by a statistically significant amount three separate times (+1.3pp, +1.4pp, and +1.5pp¹)**. In each of the three other elections the results suggested increases in turnout as well, though EVP targeted fewer than 15,000 voters which meant increases of this magnitude were not statistically significant and could have been due to random occurrence.



Additionally, EVP included volunteer-written loss aversion postcards as part of campaigns that also included contacting voters by phone, direct mail, digital ads, and/or canvassing. Although these experiments do not prove the impact of postcards in isolation, they continue to demonstrate the utility of postcards in combination with other modes of voter contact.

¹ The 2023 Philadelphia Mayoral Primary result of +1.5pp was statistically significant at the p = 0.1 level, rather than the p = 0.05 level.

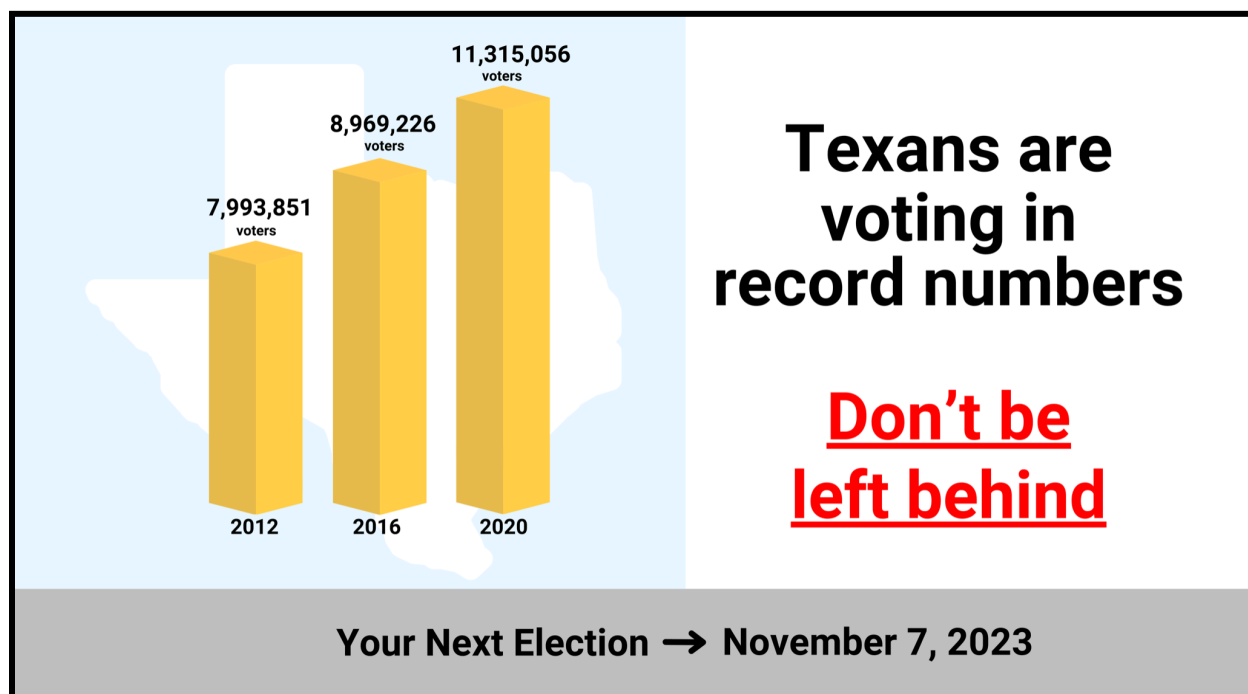


3. Trending Norms Messaging

Loss aversion messaging — although consistently successful in EVP’s volunteer postcarding campaigns — cannot be used (a) in presidential general elections (because presidential elections do not follow higher-turnout elections) or (b) with voters who have not voted in any recent election. In order to find additional successful postcard messages, EVP has run a handful of experiments using the behavioral science concept of “trending norms” 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 idea 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!”).

EVP previously found success in a [direct mail experiment](#) in which a single 6”x11” trending norms piece of mail increased turnout by +0.4pp among our target voters in the 2023 Texas General Election. This piece of direct mail encouraged low-propensity environmental voters to cast ballots by making it seem like (a) a huge number of Texans regularly vote, and (b) that number of voters is growing with each passing year.

Side A of EVP's 2023 "trending norms" direct mail piece:



Side B of EVP's 2023 "trending norms" direct 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.

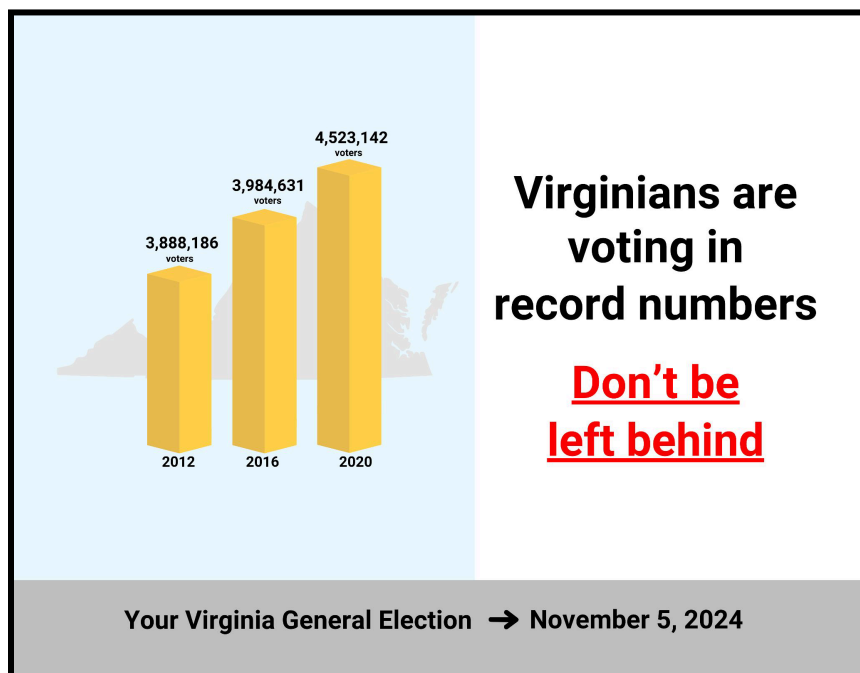
**For questions and voting locations:
www.VoteTexas.gov**

Environmental Voter Project
PO Box 962002
Boston, MA 02196

POST 023
NOV 07 2023
BOSTON
FOLIO 001 023
NOV 07 2023

Based on the success of this previous direct mail experiment, EVP included similarly designed “trending norms” volunteer postcards as part of four multi-modal campaigns in high-turnout elections in 2024.

Side A of a typical EVP “trending norms” postcard:



Side B of a typical EVP “trending norms” postcard:

Who you vote for is secret

Whether you vote is public record

All voters are eligible to vote early (Sept. 20 - Nov. 2), by mail, by ballot drop off, or on Election Day (Nov. 5).

Voting info: Vote.Elections.Virginia.Gov

Branden,

Each year more Virginians vote.

Don't be left behind on November 5!

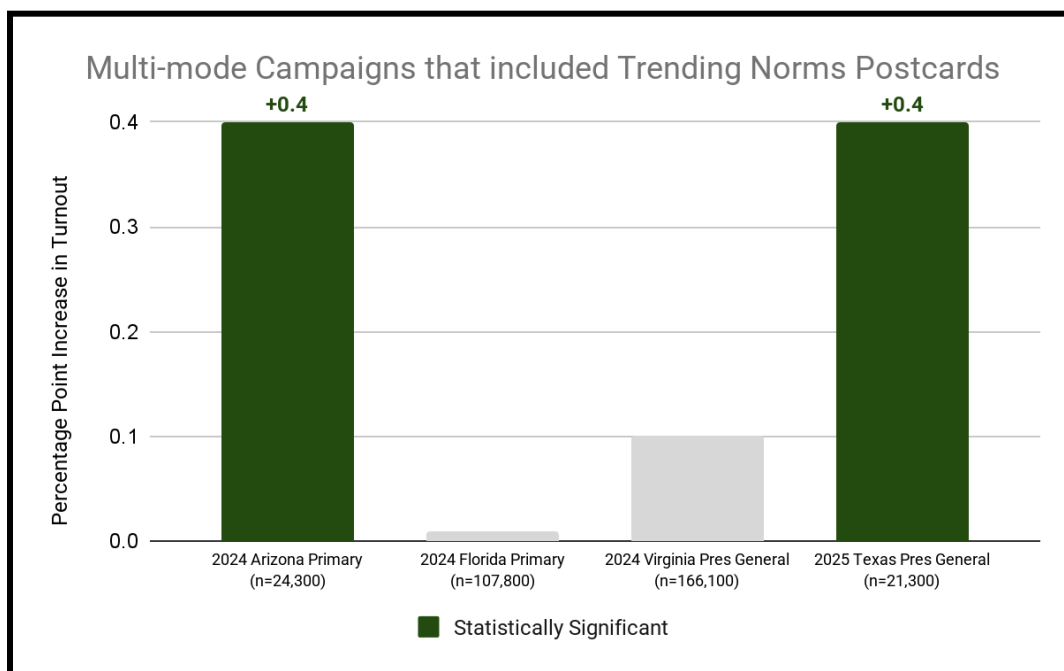
-Ren, Environmental Voter Project volunteer

FROM:
Environmental Voter Project
PO BOX 962002
Boston, MA 02196

To:

Branden Smith
123 Margo St
Apt #1
Richmond, VA 23219

Although EVP's campaigns caused **statistically significant increases in turnout in two of these four elections (+0.4pp and +0.4pp)**, they were not stand-alone experiments testing if trending norms volunteer-written postcards could be impactful on their own. In these instances, volunteer postcards were elements of campaigns that included contacting voters by phone, direct mail, digital ads, and/or canvassing as well. This data suggests that trending norms messaging is a promising strategy for volunteer postcards, but further experiments are needed to prove whether they can increase turnout on their own.



4. Friends and Family Messaging

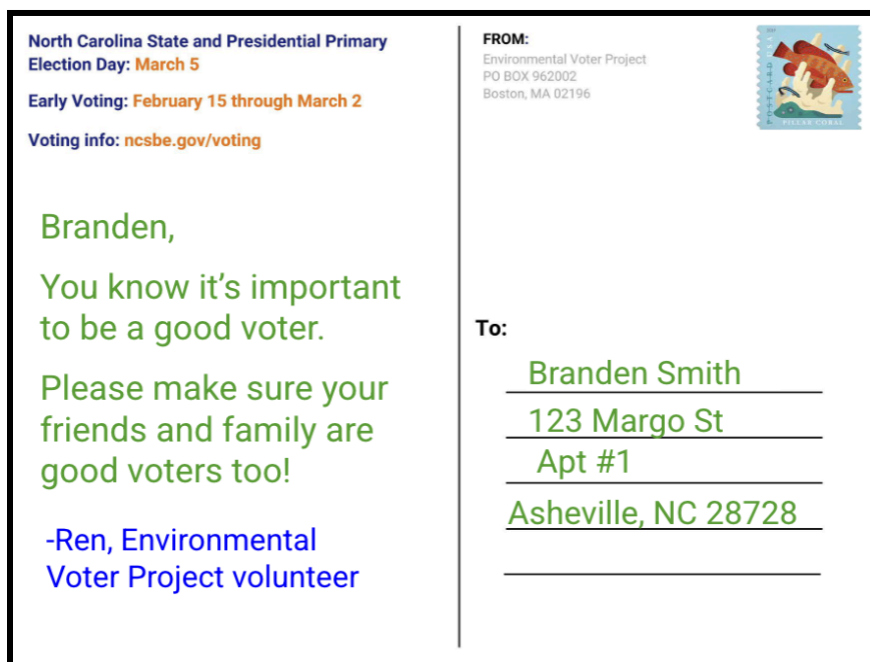
Rather than messaging to targeted voters' about their own behavior, "friends and family" messaging recruits low-propensity voters to enforce voting norms on other people — their friends and family. By doing so, the hope is that these deputized norm enforcers will actually become more likely to vote themselves. Like "trending norms" messaging, "friends and family" messaging can be utilized with voters regardless of their recent voting history and in both high and low turnout elections.

EVP has run [successful "friends & family" experiments](#) when texting voters, but we do not have any examples of this messaging producing a statistically significant impact from volunteer postcards alone.

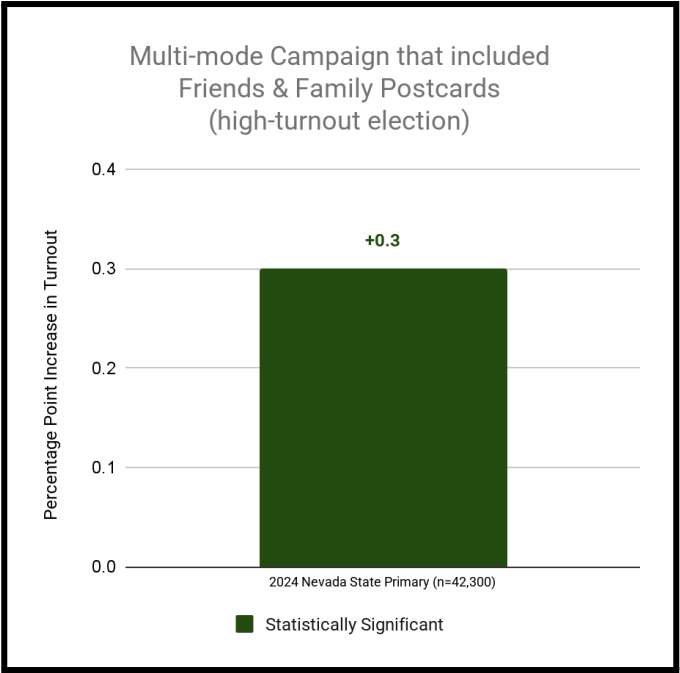
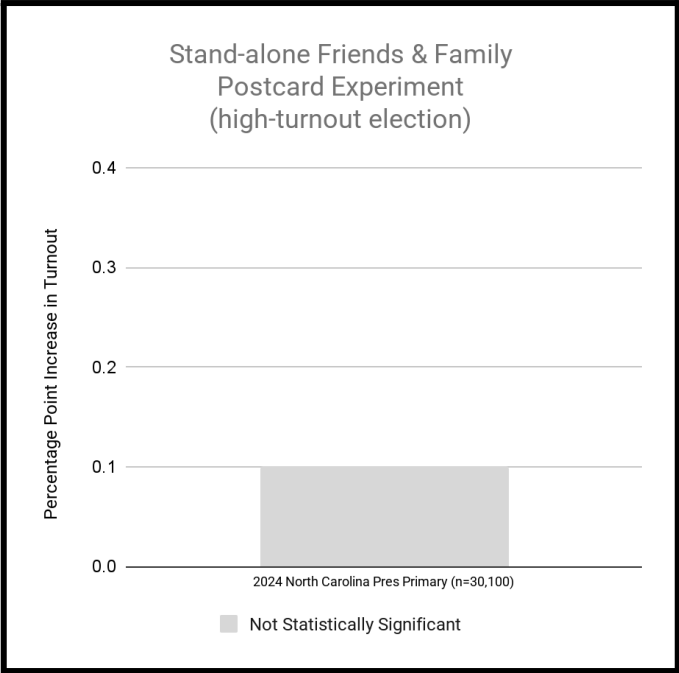
Side A of a typical EVP “friends and family” postcard:



Side B of a typical EVP “friends and family” postcard:



EVP’s one isolation test that sent only “friends and family” volunteer postcards to voters did not yield statistically significant results. Although our multi-mode campaign for the Nevada 2024 state primary did yield statistically significant results, postcards were sent in conjunction with other proven interventions, so the measurable impact does not necessarily prove that the “friends and family” message is a successful postcarding strategy.



5. Actionable Findings for Postcarding Campaigns

- **The Gold Standard.** EVP's research shows that volunteer postcards that highlight "loss aversion" messaging — yet also include some social pressure language — have increased turnout among low-propensity voters in multiple randomized controlled trials across elections with varying levels of turnout. Unfortunately, loss aversion messaging can't be used with every low-propensity voter in every election because (a) the messaging must reference a recent higher-turnout election, and (b) the targeted low-propensity voters must have actually voted in that recent higher-turnout election.
- **A Promising Alternative.** "Trending norms" messaging shows promise for volunteer postcarding campaigns and can be used to target almost any low-propensity voter in almost any jurisdiction (assuming that jurisdiction's underlying voter-turnout numbers show an upward trend). EVP's research has shown that this message (a) yields successful results in direct mail campaigns, and (b) can easily be transferred to volunteer postcards, but more research is needed before we can fully recommend its use as a stand-alone voter-turnout intervention.
- **A Nice Try.** Although "friends and family" messaging has increased voter turnout in non-mail interventions, we do not currently have evidence that "friends and family" volunteer postcards increase voter turnout.