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Mobilizing Young Voters to the Polls: Lessons Learned from the Power California Network

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Between the 2014 and 2018 midterm elections, the number of Californians aged 18 to 34 who voted increased by 292%. While contentious federal politics and the local concerns of youth populations helped motivate this turnout, deliberate efforts to mobilize young adults of color also made a significant difference. Using an experimental strategy, we assessed the campaign efforts of Power California, a network of youth organizing and civic engagement groups that implements youth-led campaigns to educate and mobilize eligible young voters of color in low-income and communities of color. Here we summarize findings from our experiments to demonstrate how the network's collective efforts to get out the vote via telephone calls, texting, and social media increased turnout.

In line with the Integrated Voter Engagement (IVE) approach used by grassroots groups across California and other states (such as Texas, Arizona, Ohio, Florida, and Virginia), Power California conducts voter outreach as a key strategy to build political power. IVE strategies generally seek to enhance ongoing grassroots organizing efforts aimed at developing the leadership and advancing the political interests of groups negatively impacted by social inequalities (Lin et al. 2019). Power California and its affiliates have uniquely adapted IVE approaches in engaging young leaders of color to conduct outreach efforts in their communities among their peers. Their goal is to build an informed and active electorate that will represent the diverse voices of young people of color.

Funded by the James Irvine Foundation, this report presents results from experiments comparing turnout among potential voters targeted by Power California and its affiliated organizations to turnout in a randomly selected group residing in the same neighborhoods. Power California's strategy includes registering and pre-registering young people, as well as conducting workshops, teach-ins, conferences, and cultural arts events that complement grassroots organizing efforts. This report focuses on efforts undertaken between September and November 2018 that sought to mobilize young voters directly. Relying on de-identified records provided by Power California staff,

we conduct separate experiments for telephone, texting, and social media outreach strategies. We begin by sharing findings for the overall impact of each strategy on turnout among 18- to 34-year-olds. We then examine how effects differed for voters who submitted ballots at their local polling location versus those who voted by mail. Next, looking at findings by age group, we demonstrate how the impact of these outreach strategies varied among 18- to 24-year-olds, 25- to 30-year-olds, and 31- to 34-year-olds. Finally, we highlight the importance of Power California's efforts for first-time voters aged 18 to 24, who are typically considered among those least likely to vote.

KEY FINDINGS

- Peer-to-peer telephone calls, texting, and social media outreach via Facebook and Instagram all had positive impacts on turnout among 18- to 34-year-olds.
- Overall, peer-to-peer telephone calls had a greater impact on turnout than texting and social media outreach.
- Voter outreach efforts had a greater impact on turning out young adults who vote at the polls than those who are registered to vote by mail.
- The impacts of voter outreach on turnout varied by age group; that is, those in the 18-24, 25-30, and 31-34 age groups all responded differently to telephone calls, texting, and social media outreach.
- Power California's efforts had a notable impact on first-time voters aged 18-24, thus highlighting the importance of conducting targeted outreach to this large population.
- Texting undecided poll voters might convince them to turn out on election day.

Power California's Voter Mobilization Strategies

To help maximize young voter turnout for the November 6, 2018 election, Power California reached out to voters by phone, text, and social media. The network utilized PDI's (Political Data Incorporated) online platform to identify and track individual outreach to voters in targeted communities.

Peer-to-peer phone calls were the most labor-intensive but also the most effective strategy for reminding voters to get to the polls and making sure they understood the electoral process. With training and guidance from Power California, partner organizations engaged adolescent and young adult volunteers in conducting telephone outreach in their own communities. In the first round of calls during the beginning of the campaign in September and early October 2018, youth leaders used scripts provided by Power California. Youth leaders identified themselves as members of the partner organization, then explained that they were calling to let the voter know about the age gap in voting and the importance of young people going to the polls. They then asked the respondents if they were planning to vote and reminded them of the election date.

If the voter was registered to vote by mail, youth volunteers were additionally prompted to ask if the voter had received their ballot. In cases where the voter reported that they had not received their mail-in ballot, the youth leader would then instruct the voter to go to the polls and use a provisional ballot if they did not receive the ballot or find it by a certain date. These instructions helped ensure that voters exercised their right to vote even if there had been an error in the voter registration process, the ballot had been lost in the mail, or the ballot had been received but accidentally discarded by the voter or a member of their household. In phone conversations, voters sometimes asked youth leaders specific questions about the voting process or about items on the ballot. Youth volunteers were prepared to

answer questions about the ballot and direct voters to nonpartisan voter guides. As such, phone calls served as an important medium to educate young voters, including those who had never voted before about how to participate in the process. In addition to the set script, individual partner organizations also added additional questions when making initial phone calls. At the end of every attempt to reach a potential voter, volunteers used PDI to track the outcomes of the call—whether they successfully reached the voter and whether or not the voter was planning to go to the polls or was still undecided. Youth leaders also entered into PDI voters' responses to any additional questions that were asked.

The second round of calls were conducted within the week leading up to the election. These targeted voters who reported that they were planning to go to the polls or submit their ballot by mail. When speaking to individuals who received their ballot in the mail, youth volunteers asked if they had already sent in their ballot. If the voter had not yet mailed in their ballot, youth leaders reminded the voter that the ballot had to be postmarked by Tuesday, November 6, or directly dropped off at a polling place. If the voter reported that they had never received their ballot, the youth volunteer instructed the individual to vote provisionally at a polling place. When speaking to young adults who were registered to vote at the polls, youth leaders reminded the voter of their polling location (since this can change from one election to another), and asked them specific questions about when they were planning to go to the polls. This line of questioning helped ensure that the voter had thought through their availability to vote on election day. Volunteers were prepared to answer questions about the voting process or refer voters to a nonpartisan voting guide. All attempts to call voters, as well as voters' responses to questions, were tracked using PDI.

As evidenced by our observations, youth leaders built rapport with young voters when they managed to reach them on the phone. Youth leaders were friendly, and conversations were generally upbeat. Indeed, some voters expressed gratitude for the reminder to vote, information about the polling location, and answers to questions about the voting process. First-time voters seemed to be particularly appreciative of these phone banking efforts. Needless to say, some voters were annoyed by the calls, particularly as the election approached, likely because they were being contacted by multiple campaigns. In spite of the challenges associated with phone banking, youth leaders generally maintained a high level of energy and excitement and remained focused on campaign goals. Campaign leads at partner organizations played a key role in ensuring that youth leaders felt appreciated, built community, and had fun during the process.

Photo credit: Power California

In the days leading up to the election, Power California and their partner organizations also texted voters an additional reminder to turn in their mail-in ballot or get to the polls. These texts targeted voters who had reported they were intending to vote. Voters in the Central Valley undecided about whether to vote received these texts as well. The text opened with a warm greeting, identifying the name of the partner organization sending the text and explaining that the message was a follow-up reminder of the phone banking campaign. It also asked whether the voter knew what issues or elections were on the ballot. Texts included voters' polling locations if they

were registered to vote in person. Overall, approximately 10% of voters responded to text messages.

Finally, Power California sent voters in Los Angeles County and the Central Valley Facebook and Instagram ads that reminded them to vote. To this end, Power California downloaded the list of voters who had provided them with email addresses and targeted them with three separate ads. Each reminded them of the approaching election day and featured young people of color. The first ad was sent out about a month in advance of the election, the second about two weeks before the election, and the third about a week before the election.

Appendix A describes the statistical methodology used to assess the three types of voter mobilization strategies deployed—phone banking, texting, and social media outreach.

The Impact of Phone Banking, Texting, and Social Media Outreach on Young Adult Voters

We assessed the overall impact of Power California's strategies to turn out voters aged 18 to 34. As shown in Table 1, we found that the network's phone banking efforts had a positive impact on turnout. Overall, attempts to reach potential voters increased turnout by 2.5 percentage points in target communities (regardless of whether they answered the phone) when compared to a randomly selected non-targeted group. As further discussed in the Methodological Appendix, this analysis measures what are called the "Intent to Treat" (ITT) effects. Based on a standard error of 0.2, we can be 95% confident that Power California's phone banking outreach efforts increased turnout between 2.1 and 2.9 percentage points.[1]

Table 1. Impacts of Power California's Voter Mobilization Strategies on Turnout, Aged 18-34

	Phone Bank	Text	Social Media
Overall impact (ITT)	2.5*** (0.2)	1.0* (0.5)	1.9*** (0.1)
Impact on voters who answered the phone (TOT)	8.7*** (0.4)	NA	NA
Contact rate	28.7%	NA	NA
% in treatment group	60.5%	81.9%	59.3%
Sample size	630,789	46,872	537,837

Notes: Robust standard errors in parentheses. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

To measure the impact of phone conversations among voters who were successfully contacted, we made a statistical adjustment for the fact that many of our targeted voters did not answer the phone. For the purpose of this study, "contacted" is defined as a targeted voter picking up the phone and having a conversation with a Power California volunteer. Voters who do not fall under the "contacted" category did not answer, had outdated phone numbers listed on their registration information, had moved, or told the volunteer to stop calling. Power California's records indicate that 28.7% of targeted eligible voters were successfully contacted and were thus encouraged to vote by a volunteer. Our results demonstrate that voting rates are 8.7 percentage points higher among these voters when compared to a similar group of eligible voters who were not targeted for calls. These findings reveal what are known as the "Treatment on the Treated" (TOT) effects and highlight the importance of directly

[1] The 95% confidence interval is calculated by multiplying the standard error by 1.96 and subtracting and adding this number to the estimated turnout. In this example, our estimated effect on turnout is 2.5 and our standard error is 0.2. We calculated: 2.5 +/- (1.96 * 0.2) to give us a confidence range of 2.1-2.9 percentage points.

speaking to residents to increase their likelihood of voting.

Power California's strategy included sending text reminders in early November about the election to a randomly selected proportion of eligible voters who had answered their phone and reported they were planning to vote. We found that text reminders increased turnout by 1 percentage point. The limited impact of this outreach strategy may be explained by the following: (1) this group of targeted voters had already committed to voting, and texts did not alter their intended behavior; (2) the majority of these voters (62%) were registered to vote by mail, and some of these voters received texts after they had already mailed in their ballot; (3) other campaigns texted voters (including some of those in both the treatment and control groups), thus limiting the impact of Power California's texts for subgroups who received text messages from multiple campaigns; and/or (4) some voters did not see the texts or ignored them because they came from an unfamiliar number. Unfortunately, we cannot ascertain the proportion of voters who actually saw the texts, as only 10% responded to messages. Although this experiment demonstrated the limited overall impact of texts on turnout among individuals who planned to vote (ITT effects), it does not necessarily mean that these texts did not increase turnout among those who actually read the messages (TOT effects).

Our experimental results also indicate that Power California's strategy of running Facebook and Instagram ads increased voter turnout. Among those targeted for these ads, turnout was 1.9 percentage points higher than those who were not targeted for ads (ITT effects). As with the texting initiative, we do not know who actually saw the ads. However, these results indicate that in the 2018 election cycle, social media outreach increased the likelihood that young people would exercise their right to vote.

The Impact of Outreach Strategies on Young Adults Voting at the Polls Versus by Mail

Turnout among 18- to 34-year-olds who usually vote at the polls tends to be much lower than those who receive a mail-in ballot, with the former exhibiting overall turnout rates of 37.6% and the latter 53.6%. It is therefore not surprising that Power California's outreach strategies had a greater impact on poll voters, who perhaps needed and were receptive to the reminders about election day. Our experiments demonstrated clear differences in the impact of voter outreach strategies between those voting at the polls versus those voting by mail. For example, phone banking boosted turnout rates among poll voters (regardless of whether they were successfully contacted) by 4.0

Photo credit: Power California

percentage points, compared to 1.6 percentage points among those voting by mail. Among those who answered the phone, phone banking increased turnout by a whopping 16.9 percentage points among poll voters, compared to 4.8 percentage points among mail voters.

Table 2. Impacts of Power California's Voter Mobilization Strategies on Turnout, Poll vs. Mail Voters, Aged 18-34

	Phone Bank		Text		Social Media	
	Poll	VB Mail	Poll	VB Mail	Poll	VB Mail
Overall impact (ITT)	4.0***	1.6***	2.4***	0.3	3.4***	0.7***
	(0.2)	(0.2)	(0.9)	(0.7)	(0.2)	(0.2)
Impact on voters who answered the phone (TOT)	16.9***	4.8***	NA		NA	
	(0.8)	(0.5)				
Contact rate	23.7%	33.3%	NA		NA	
% in treatment group	56.6%	62.9%	84.0%	80.5%	52.9%	63.9%
Sample size	243,947	386,842	17,757	29,115	226,455	311,382

Notes: Robust standard errors in parentheses. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Text outreach increased turnout by 2.4 percentage points among poll voters who had previously indicated that they were planning to vote. However, we don't have sufficient evidence that texting made a difference for those who voted by mail. Given that Power California texted eligible voters a week before the election, some of the voters who received their ballots in the mail may have already submitted their ballot when they received the text, and therefore the reminder was no longer relevant.

Our experiments also indicated that social media outreach increased turnout among poll voters by 3.4 percentage points, but only by 0.7 percentage points among mail voters.

The Impact of Voter Outreach Strategies by Age Group

Our analyses also show differences in the impact of Power California's outreach efforts across different age groups of young adults. In general, the impact of phone call and social media outreach on turnout increased with age, while text messaging primarily increased turnout among 25- to 30-year-olds who were registered to vote at the polls.

Voters in their early 30s were more receptive to phone calls than their younger counterparts. Specifically, phone calls boosted turnout by 2.3 percentage points among 18- to 24-year-olds, 2.4 percentage points among 25- to 30-year-olds, and 2.8 percentage points among 31- to 34-year-olds. In line with these findings, the impact of having a phone conversation with voters also increased with age. Among those who answered the phone (the contacted voters), turnout increased by 7.7 percentage points for 18- to 24-year-olds, 8.6 percentage points for 25- to 30-year-olds, and 10.1 percentage points for 31- to 34-year-olds.

Photo credit: Californians for Justice

Table 3. Power California's Voter Mobilization Strategies on Turnout, by Age Group and Voting Method (Poll vs. VBM)

	Phone Bank			Text			Social Media		
	All	Poll	VB Mail	All	Poll	VB Mail	All	Poll	VB Mail
Age: 18-24									
Overall impact (ITT)	2.3***	3.9***	1.5***	0.8	0.1	1.3	1.2***	2.2***	0.4
	(0.2)	(0.4)	(0.3)	(0.9)	(1.6)	(1.2)	(0.2)	(0.4)	(0.3)
Impact on voters who answered the phone (TOT)	7.7***	14.4***	4.5***		NA			NA	
	(0.7)	(1.3)	(0.9)						
Contact rate	29.9%	27.1%	33.3%		NA			NA	
% in treatment group	60.7%	56.2%	63.1%	82.4%	84.0%	81.5%	60.7%	54.2%	64.4%
Sample size	230,450	80,299	150,151	18,304	6,563	11,741	194,339	70,735	123,604
Age: 25-30									
Overall impact (ITT)	2.4***	3.7***	1.5***	0.4	3.9**	-1.2	1.9***	3.1***	0.8***
	(0.2)	(0.3)	(0.3)	(0.9)	(1.6)	(1.2)	(0.2)	(0.3)	(0.3)
Impact on voters who answered the phone (TOT)	8.6***	16.4***	4.9***		NA			NA	
	(0.7)	(1.3)	(0.9)						
Contact rate	27.9%	23.2%	30.6%		NA			NA	
% in treatment group	60.4%	56.7%	62.8%	81.7%	84.4%	79.9%	58.7%	52.5%	63.5%
Sample size	255,485	102,135	153,350	17,774	6,807	10,967	220,115	95,731	124,384
Age: 31-34									
Overall impact (ITT)	2.8***	4.4***	1.7***	1.6	3.4	0.9	2.7***	4.5***	1.0***
	(0.3)	(0.4)	(0.4)	(1.2)	(2.2)	(1.5)	(0.3)	(0.4)	(0.4)
Impact on voters who answered the phone (TOT)	10.1***	19.6***	5.1***		NA			NA	
	(0.9)	(1.7)	(1.1)						
Contact rate	28.0%	22.4%	33.3%		NA			NA	
% in treatment group	60.2%	57.0%	62.6%	81.3%	83.6%	79.8%	57.9%	51.8%	63.6%
Sample size	144,854	61,513	83,341	10,794	4,387	6,407	123,383	59,989	63,394

Notes: Robust standard errors in parentheses. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Consistent with the previously summarized findings, phone banking had a greater impact on poll voters than on mail voters. For example, among 18- to 24-year-olds, phone banking increased overall turnout by 3.9 percentage points for poll voters and by 1.5 percentage points for mail voters. Among the contacted 18- to 24-year-olds, phone conversations increased turnout by 14.4 percentage points among poll voters and 4.5 percentage points for those voting by mail. These patterns remained consistent for the 25-30 and 31-34 age groups.

As with phone banking, the impact of social media outreach increased with age. Overall, Facebook and Instagram ads increased turnout rates by 1.2 percentage points among 18- to 24-year-olds, 1.9 percentage points among 25- to 30-year-olds, and 2.7 percentage points among 31- to 34-year-olds. Additionally, social media had a greater impact on poll voters than on mail voters across these three age groups.

Our experiments yielded interesting results for texting. We found that texting increased turnout among one subset of the population—25- to 30-year-olds voting at the polls—but it did not positively contribute to turnout among 18- to 24-year-olds, 31- to 34-year-olds, or 25- to 30-year-olds voting by mail. We suspect that the high volume of text communication among the youngest voters could have caused them to overlook Power California's texts, as our data shows that this group had the lowest text response rate among the three age groups. Meanwhile, the oldest voters (including those in the treatment and control groups) were particularly likely to receive texts from multiple campaigns during the election season, as they have a higher propensity to vote. In fact, those in the oldest age group were most likely to text back "STOP," as some were likely annoyed by the multiple text messages they received from different campaigns.

The Impact of Voter Outreach Strategies on First-Time Voters Aged 18-24

Power California's phone banking and social media efforts seem to have uniquely resonated with the youngest voters and young first-time voters. The impacts on 18- to 19-year-olds were particularly impressive. This is a unique group of voters, 88% of whom had never before voted. Power California's phone banking efforts raised the turnout rate among these very young first-time voters by 4.5 percentage points (ITT effects). Among those who had been successfully contacted, the turnout rate increased by as much as 13.2 percentage points (TOT effects). Specifically, the overall efforts increased the turnout rate among the youngest first-time voters who went to the polls by 6.4 percentage points compared to 3.4 percentage points among those who voted by mail. Social media outreach (Facebook and Instagram ads) also generated significant impacts on the 18- to 19-year-olds, with the overall turnout rate increasing by 2.4 percentage points (ITT effects). In line with the pattern noted above, social media outreach was more effective in increasing turnout among poll voters (4.4 percentage points) than mail voters (1.3 percentage points).

Among 20- to 24-year-olds, we found some marked differences between first-time voters and those who had participated in a prior election. For example, Power California's phone banking efforts increased turnout among first-time voters aged 20-24 by 3.0 percentage points, compared to only 1.2 percentage points among their counterparts who had voted in a prior election. Among those who had been successfully contacted, turnout increased by 10.9 percentage points for first-time voters compared to 4.0 percentage points for those who had previously voted.

In line with the experimental results above, phone banking had a greater impact among 20- to 24-year-olds voting for the first time at the polls compared to those voting for the first time by mail. Specifically, Power California's phone banking efforts increased turnout in this age group by 4.3 percentage points among poll voters, as compared to 2.1 percentage points among mail voters (ITT effects). Meanwhile, among those 20- to 24-year-olds who were not first-time voters, phone banking increased turnout by 2.7 percentage points for poll voters but did not have any statistically significant impact on turnout for mail voters.

Photo credit: Central Valley Freedom Summer

Table 4. Power California's Voter Mobilization Strategies on Turnout, by Age, Voting History and Voting Method (Poll vs. VBM)

	Phone Bank			Social Media		
	All	Poll	VB Mail	All	Poll	VB Mail
Age: 18-19, First-Time Voters						
Overall impact (ITT)	4.5*** (0.6)	6.4*** (1.1)	3.4*** (0.9)	2.4*** (0.6)	4.4*** (1.0)	1.3* (0.8)
Impact on voters who answered the phone (TOT)	13.2*** (1.9)	20.2*** (3.4)	9.8*** (2.5)		NA	
Contact rate	34.1%	31.7%	34.7%		NA	
% in treatment group	60.2%	54.6%	62.8%	58.0%	49.7%	62.1%
Sample size	30,760	9,929	20,831	25,872	8,701	17,171
Age: 20-24, First-Time Voters						
Overall impact (ITT)	3.0*** (0.3)	4.3*** (0.5)	2.1*** (0.5)	1.5*** (0.3)	2.6*** (0.5)	1.0** (0.4)
Impact on voters who answered the phone (TOT)	10.9*** (1.2)	18.2*** (1.9)	6.9*** (1.6)		NA	
Contact rate	27.5%	23.6%	30.4%		NA	
% in treatment group	58.2%	52.4%	62.4%	57.5%	49.2%	63.2%
Sample size	76,766	31,661	45,105	64,499	26,126	38,373
Age: 20-24, Non-First-Time Voters						
Overall impact (ITT)	1.2*** (0.4)	2.7*** (0.6)	0.5 (0.4)	0.4 (0.3)	1.4** (0.6)	-0.2 (0.4)
Impact on voters who answered the phone (TOT)	4.0*** (1.1)	9.5*** (2.1)	1.6 (1.2)		NA	
Contact rate	30.0%	28.4%	31.3%		NA	
% in treatment group	62.4%	59.7%	63.6%	63.3%	58.9%	65.6%
Sample size	118,625	37,656	80,969	100,683	34,919	65,764

Notes: Robust standard errors in parentheses. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

We found a somewhat similar pattern in the outcomes of social media outreach. Facebook and Instagram ads increased turnout by 1.5 percentage points among 20- to 24-year-olds voting for the first time. The impact was greater among those voting at the polls (2.6 percentage points) than those voting by mail (1.0 percentage point). Among non-first-time voters, we found that the ads increased turnout among poll voters by 1.4 percentage points but did not have an impact on those voting by mail.

Tentative Impacts of Texting on Undecided Poll Voters

Our final experiment examined the effects of text reminders on turnout among eligible voters who had indicated in phone conversations that they were undecided about going to the polls. This experiment was restricted to Central Valley residents of Calaveras County, Fresno County, Madera County, Mariposa County, and Merced County. We found tentative evidence that texting increased turnout among those who were unsure if they were going to vote. Given that this experiment only included 590 voters, we hesitate to draw conclusions and recommend additional research for more conclusive results. We should also note that our experiment failed to produce any evidence that text reminders within a week of the election increased turnout among these noncommittal voters registered to submit their ballot by mail.

Table 5. Tentative Impacts of Texting on Undecided Central Valley Poll and Mail Voters, Aged 18-34

	Poll Voters	Mail Voters
Impact of text reminders (ITT)	6.7***	0.6
	(0.0)	(5.4)
% in treatment group	96.3%	80.3%
Sample size	36	554

Notes: Robust standard errors in parentheses. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Summary and Recommendations

Our experiments demonstrate some hopeful signs for democratic practices in California. Young voters of color are more likely to vote when they receive targeted outreach from their peers in their communities. As evidenced by Power California's collective efforts during the 2018 midterm election, engaging young people of color in reaching out to their peers via phone conversations can have a particularly strong impact in motivating many young people to vote. The network's strategies were especially effective in turning out first-time young voters (aged 18-24) and those voting at the polls. Moreover, the positive impact of phone calls on turnout increased with age. Given these findings, we recommend that Power California continue the labor-intensive but vital strategy of training adolescents and young adults to engage their peers in phone conversations and other direct outreach about the importance of exercising their voting rights. Moving forward, we recommend that the network fine-tune its outreach strategy, the timing of phone calls, and messaging for mail voters so as to further enhance their impact on turnout among this subset of young voters.

Our research also indicated mixed results for Power California's strategy of sending text reminders to individuals they had successfully contacted by phone and had agreed to vote. These text reminders, sent within the week prior to the election, seem to have helped nudge 25- to 30-year-olds voting at the polls to show up on election day. However, we could not find evidence that they impacted other subsets of voters, except perhaps for registered voters who were undecided about whether to show up at the polls. In future elections, Power California should consider modifying the timing and messaging of its texting strategy for those voting at the polls and by mail and for those on the fence about whether to vote. Power California should also consider texting those voters who did not answer their telephones.

As for social media outreach, Power California increased turnout among young voters by sending them Facebook and Instagram ad reminders about the importance of voting. These ads seemed to work best with those voting at the polls, with effectiveness increasing with age. In planning future social media outreach, Power California should be attentive to the evolving ways in which young people utilize social media, as well as to the evolving nature of ad campaigns. Therefore, the strategy utilized in 2018 may not have the same impact in subsequent elections. Consequently, Power California can and should draw on the expertise of its youthful and racially diverse leadership base, as well as on the latest research on best practices in digital media outreach, to adapt for future campaigns. Given the centrality of digital media use among contemporary youth, Power California has the potential to further harness diverse media to help educate this large segment of the electorate.

In conclusion, our research suggests that investments in peer-to-peer voter outreach in low-income communities of color can have a lasting impact on the electorate. Efforts by Power California and its partners will likely contribute to a reduction in the racial and socioeconomic gap in voting in future election cycles. Voting is habit-forming, and mobilizing young voters at an early age prompts them to become civically engaged over the course of their lives.

METHODOLOGICAL APPENDIX

This report tests the impact of Power California's voter mobilization strategies through a series of experiments that compare turnout between eligible voters targeted by the network and a randomly selected comparison group. Eligible voters in the comparison group reside in the same neighborhoods (defined by zip codes) as those targeted by the Power California network. Focusing on those aged 18-34, the research team used de-identified voting records in their analysis.

Target Populations

Phone Banking Experiments. To test the effects of telephone banking on voter turnout, we divided eligible voters across the state into a potential treatment group that could receive telephone calls emphasizing the importance of voting and reminders about the voting process, and a control group that did not receive calls from any Power California-affiliated groups. Drawing on the entire population of California voters, this control group was created by Power California staff based on statistical programming for random selection written by the research team. It is important to note that the control group was created on September 5, 2018, days before Power California finalized the separate "turfs"—regions or types of voters that each of their affiliate organizations would target in their campaigns. Notably, Power California's collective efforts did not include all potential voters in the state. We therefore defined our control group as all pre-selected voters who resided in 1,059 zip codes targeted by Power California and their partner organizations. The final sample used in the analysis included 630,789 eligible voters, 60.5% of whom belonged to the treatment group and were targeted for outreach. The remaining 39.5% were part of the control group.

A limitation of this approach is that the treatment group disproportionately contained younger residents who registered to vote after the control group was created. We acknowledge that imbalances between the treatment and control groups may slightly bias estimates in either direction. Some newly registered voters (including those who attended fall 2018 voter education workshops and were registered by Power California affiliates) may have been particularly motivated to vote, while others who may have been reluctantly registered at tabling events or through canvassing may have been less motivated. Accordingly, newly registered voters may include both highly and less motivated voters. Additionally, the control group contains a potentially higher proportion of White voters when compared to those in the target sample. Because White voters tend to vote at higher rates than their non-White peers (California Civic Engagement Project 2019), we suspect that including a greater proportion of White voters in the control group might contribute to a conservative bias in our estimates. We add voter characteristic-related variables, such as voting history and ethnicity, in our empirical strategy to address those issues. Our analyses controls for neighborhood characteristics by incorporating zip code fixed effects. This allows us to account for the possibility that access to voting information may vary by neighborhood. Additionally, this allows us to control for the fact that Power California affiliates target different communities.

Text Outreach Experiments. We conducted two types of experiments on text outreach efforts. The first experiment examined the impact of text reminders to eligible voters who had been successfully contacted by telephone and said they were planning to vote in the November 2018 general election. We worked with Power California to create a randomly selected control group of approximately 18.1% of 46,872 voters who were part of the phone banking treatment group and had expressed their intention to vote—this control group did not receive any texts. The remaining 81.9% in the treatment group received texts reminding them to vote or informing them of their polling location.

Social Media Outreach Experiments. Finally, we worked with Power California to test the impact of Facebook and Instagram messaging reminding voters to go to the polls. These ads targeted 537,837 voters in the Central Valley and Los Angeles County who had provided an email address at the point of registration. We worked with Power California to select 40.7% of voters to be part of the control group. Power California then sent those voters in the treatment group three separate ads in the month leading up to the election. The remaining 81.9% in the treatment group received texts reminding them to vote or informing them of their polling location.

Analysis

We conduct separate ordinary least squares (OLS) regressions to measure the percentage point impact of telephone banking, texting, and social media ads on overall turnout among the various target populations. In other words, we looked at the extent to which eligible voters in the treatment groups turned out at higher rates than those in the comparison group. We ran separate models for each type of experiment, initially controlling for voting history, first-time voter status, gender (inputted by PDI), Democratic Party registration, age, number of registered voters per household, voting method (mail or poll), neighborhood characteristics, and zip code-level fixed effects (using data from de-identified zip codes). Additional models for subsets of the populations excluded appropriate controls (i.e., age and voting method).

The OLS regression does not account for whether the voter picked up the telephone, read the text, or saw the social media ad. Since Power California kept records of who answered the telephone, we analyzed the direct impact of an actual telephone conversation on turnout. We thus apply a two-stage least squares regression to estimate the effect of Treatment on the Treated (TOT) (Green et al. 2003), meaning the impact of actually talking to the potential voter on the telephone. The two-stage least squares regression accounts for the likelihood that someone will pick up the phone. Our analysis also controls for the aforementioned variables. Unfortunately, we cannot conduct the same analysis for our other experiments since we cannot verify who reviewed text messages and social media ads.

Our analysis proceeded in several stages. First, we assessed the impacts of phone banking, texting voters who had committed to vote, and social media outreach among 18- to 34-year-olds in targeted communities. For each type of outreach, we then conducted separate analyses for those who arranged to vote by mail versus those who intended to go to a polling place. Next, we conducted separate analyses for poll voters versus mail voters for different age groups (aged 18-24, 25-30, and 31-34). We then looked at the impact of the various Power California interventions on first-time voters, disaggregated by mail versus poll voters and by age groups.

We concluded with a small experiment that examined the effect of text message outreach on Central Valley voters who were undecided about whether to vote. Because of small sample sizes, we simply present findings for texting this group of voters disaggregated by whether they intended to vote by mail or at the polls.

References

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This research has been generously funded by the James Irvine Foundation

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