BLUE WAVE ANALYTICS

A CAMPAIGN MANAGER'S GUIDE TO GOTV WITH POSTCARDS

One of the most exciting developments in political activism since the 2016 election is that huge numbers of newly engaged volunteers have embraced the tactic of writing postcards to Democratic voters in an effort to raise voter turnout. Indeed, **postcards are helping to drive the blue wave**.

Blue Wave Analytics has assessed various approaches to postcard writing to determine postcard **best practices**. Using the same market research techniques that big companies use to tailor products to consumers' tastes, we have identified the elements that are most likely to motivate a Democrat receiving a postcard to vote. There is reason to believe that these findings cannot be generalized to Republican voters.

The most exciting finding is that a **partially pre-printed** card with just a small handwritten note at the end works as well or better than a fully handwritten message. Printing a postcard allows a campaign to control exactly what message a voter receives and allows volunteers to complete postcards much faster, greatly increasing the reach of the campaign.

Beginning the message with the phrase "**I am a volunteer** writing to ask you to please vote for............" significantly enhances the effectiveness of a postcard. Recipients like to know why they are receiving a postcard from someone they don't know and appreciate when volunteers identify themselves as such.

The **quality of handwriting** makes a difference to how favorably recipients view the postcard they receive. This element is harder for campaigns to control, which is another reason that partially pre-printed postcards are ideal. In all cases, postcard writers should be urged to write neatly.

Recipients were more motivated to vote by postcards that explained the **policy positions of a candidate** than by a shorter note just telling them to vote for the candidate and specifying the election date.

Hand-drawn decorations were greatly appreciated by some recipients. However, a significant number of people, especially higher income voters, are actively put off by decorations. Given the mixed reactions to decorations, we believe the best practice is to tell postcard writers that they need not feel obliged to decorate cards, but not to discourage them if they love to decorate.

A majority of voters (generally younger people) prefer to have a postcard **addressed to them by name**, while others (more likely to be older) prefer to receive a card addressed to a non-specific "Valued Voter."

Voters want **help in finding their polling place** and might appreciate being directed to the website **vote. org** or equivalent.

Postcards have been proven to work to get out the Democratic vote. These **best practices** will make sure your team's postcards are as effective as possible and help to bring about a blue wave in 2020.

Study Protocol and Design

The purpose of this research was to understand what impact various format choices have on the effectiveness of GOTV postcards. **Effectiveness was defined as whether a recipient is likely to read, keep, or share the card and to what degree the card makes the voter more engaged with the election; i.e. more likely to pay attention to this election, more like to vote, more likely to vote for the candidate described in the card, and/or more likely to make sure people they know are registered to vote.**

Six different postcard formats were tested.

- **Base version**–represents a typical hand-written message which asks the voter to vote for a specific candidate on election day. This version is addressed to "Valued Voter."
- **Volunteer version**–same as Base version but adds a phrase at the beginning "I am a volunteer asking you to please vote for……"
- **Decorated version**–same as Base but includes colorful hand-drawn decorations.
- **With Name version**–same as Base but instead of Valued Voter, it says Dear (First Name here) and (Full Name) is noted as part of the address.
- **Short version**–this version is very brief and leaves out any information related to the candidate's stand on the issues. It is simply a reminder to vote and to vote for this candidate.
- **Preprinted version**–same as Base except that all the base text is preprinted leaving some room for a short-handwritten closing and signature.

Online interviews were conducted among registered Democrats screened from a nationally recognized commercial online panel, Dynata.
- 1,217 interviews of 10 minutes in length
- Interviews were conducted May 14-24, 2019
- Six groups of ~200 respondents each evaluated one of the six postcard formats
- The composition of each group was monitored to ensure they matched on demographics and key attitudes which ensures any differences in response are due to the postcard version and not sample differences
- Quotas were set so each group of ~200 had readable bases of at least 100 respondents by gender, age, and region
- Statistical testing of differences was conducted at the 90% confidence level. Only significant differences were cited in the findings.
- The base size of 200 has a margin of error of plus or minus 6.5%

After exposure to one of the postcard versions, respondents were asked:
- Thoughts and feelings (open-ended)
- What would do with the postcard if received in the mail (read/skim/throw away/keep/share)
- Impact on likelihood to take action (pay attention to election, vote, vote for this candidate)
- Likes/dislikes (open-ended)

Following individual postcard evaluations, respondents were exposed to a second version and asked their preference and why. While it is unlikely in the real world that the same person would receive two different versions of the postcard, this exercise served to crystallize respondents' reactions and preferences.

This research was conducted for Blue Wave Analytics by Sandra Radoff, a professional survey researcher with over 40 years of experience including most recently as head of her own firm, S. Radoff Associates. She has worked in a variety of industries including services, technology, packaged goods, arts and culture, and non-profits. For a full report on the survey methods and findings, please contact Sandra Radoff at sandy@sradoff.com.