TO: NextGen America
From: Alan Yan and Joshua Kalla
Date: 8 September 2017
RE: Results from 2017 Virginia Text Message Experiment

In 2017, NextGen America conducted an experiment to evaluate whether peer-to-peer texting increases voter turnout in the Virginia gubernatorial primary. NGA randomly assigned 250,000 people to a treatment group and 125,000 people to a control group. People were contacted through Relay, a peer-to-peer texting program¹, during a four-day period starting on June 8th. The universe of people in the experiment are 40 or younger (average age of 30), and had an average partisanship score of 87.15 (SE=11).

Overall, we found that 11.32% of the treatment group voted, while 10.73% of the control group voted. After controlling for pre-treatment covariates, we found that peer-to-peer texting increased turnout by .62 percentage points ($p < .0001$; SE=.001).

This means that peer-to-peer texting generates one additional vote for every 167 people we target. Therefore, this experiment generated 1,550 votes in the treatment group of 250,000 voters.

Overall, this experiment cost \$28,466.² With these costs, and assuming that the experiment generated 1,550 new votes, we can conclude that the cost per vote is \$18.37. To contextualize this, David Broockman and Don Green conducted a similar peer-to-peer texting program with One Arizona. They sent 185,885 texts to non-white unmarried females ages 35 and younger with a control group of 41,113 voters. They found texting increases turnout by .55 percentage points ($p < .0018$). Additionally, we ran a similar experiment in Illinois during the presidential election targeting voters under 40 years old (average age of 25) with an average partisanship score of 81 (SE=15). We found that 32.50% of the treatment group voted while 32.26% of the control group voted. In Illinois, peer-to-peer texting increased turnout by .25 percentage points ($p < .2$; SE=.2).

One interesting finding to note is that the question conditions where we ask voters if they will vote dramatically increased reply rates, but did not have a meaningful impact on turnout. This suggests that including a question in texts incurs additional time costs on volunteers because they have to respond to voters, without providing an additional turnout benefit. However, providing polling place information did increase turnout rates. Of those who received polling place information, 11.61% voted, while 11.26% in the no polling place information voted. If more reliable and stable polling place information is available in the future, then polling place information may be able to more effectively increase turnout.

¹ Text messages are in the appendix. We used a 2x2 factorial design which means we randomized people to receive a question or no question, and receive polling place information or no polling place information.

² 241,856 cell phone numbers were acquired for treatment, at \$0.0315 per record (\$7,616). 241,856 outgoing text messages were sent via Relay, at \$0.07 per message (\$16,930). Relay charged \$50 per 5,000 contacts managed (\$3,900). Messages were sent by volunteers. These costs do not reflect the costs of recruiting and managing the volunteers.

	Polling Place Info	No Polling Place Info
Question	11.45% Turnout	11.14% Turnout
No Question	11.53% Turnout	10.88% Turnout

Another study conducted by Vote.org and the Analyst Institute came to a similar conclusion. They sent 714,151 texts to a treatment group, of which 422,591 contained polling place information, the voter's address, and poll location hours, and did not text a control group of 301,920 voters. They found that providing polling information created a .2 percentage point bump in turnout.

These findings are fairly robust and suggest that peer-to-peer texting does increase turnout. Because our results perfectly replicated Broockman and Green's test, we feel fairly comfortable claiming that peer-to-peer texting increases voter turnout.

Plots

Main takeaway: Texting someone increases their likelihood of voting.

Main takeaway: Texting works across all age groups, but it is less effective on younger people than older people. When comparing the texted and not texted groups across age groups, the gap between the treatment and control groups decreases as we increase in age group.

Main takeaway: Barring small sample sizes in some racial and ethnic groups, it seems that texting works for almost every group. It should be noted that we see the clearest positive effects for Whites and Hispanics.

Main takeaway: There does not seem to be a difference in texting's effect by gender, and it shows a consistent positive effect for both groups.

Main takeaway: When breaking partisanship scores into two groups (60 to 79 = Somewhat Dem; 80 to 100 = Very Dem), we see that the effect of our texting program is much stronger on very partisan Democrats.

Main takeaway: For those who did not vote in 2016, it seems that texting made no difference for them, while texting those who voted in 2016 does have a noticeable effect.

Main takeaway: Texting affects both those who did not vote in 2014 and those who did. The biggest effect was on those who did vote in 2014.

Appendix

Polling place and question:

Hi Bridget, I'm Alan w/ NextGen Virginia helping folks vote. There's an important election in VA on Tuesday (June 13) to help pick our next Governor. Based on the best publicly available info from election officials, if you're still registered at 4816 Mill Park Ct, you can vote at HUNGARY CREEK MIDDLE SCHOOL from 6am - 7pm. Can we count on you to vote no matter what?

Polling place and no question:

Hi Terika, I'm Alan w/ NextGen Virginia helping folks vote. There's an important election in VA on Tuesday (June 13) to help pick our next Governor. Based on the best publicly available info from election officials, if you're still registered at 917 N 26th St, you can vote at CITY HALL EAST from 6am - 7pm. Hope to be able to thank you for voting. Please vote!

No polling place and question:

Hey Sarah, it's Alan w/ NextGen Virginia helping folks vote. There's an important election in VA on Tuesday (June 13) to help pick our next Governor. Polls are open from 6am - 7pm. Find out where to vote: <http://nxtgn.us/VoteVA>. Can we count on you to vote no matter what?

No polling place and no question:

Hey Nana, it's Alan w/ NextGen Virginia helping folks vote. There's an important election in VA on Tuesday (June 13) to help pick our next Governor. Polls are open from 6am - 7pm -- and you can find out where you vote at <http://NXTGN.US/VoteVA2>. Hope to be able to thank you for voting. Please vote!