TO: NextGen Climate
From: Joshua Kalla
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RE: Results from 2016 Illinois Text Message Experiment

During the 2016 general election, NextGen Climate conducted an experiment to assess whether peer-to-peer texting is effective at increasing voter turnout. NextGen Climate randomly assigned 94,257 individuals to receive a text message encouraging them to vote and 94,229 to a control group that received no outreach from NextGen Climate through Relay, the program they used for peer-to-peer texting.¹ Individuals targeted were under 40 years old (average of 25) and had an average partisanship score of 81 (SE=15). The text messages were sent on November 5th, three days before Election Day.

Overall, we find that 32.50% of the treatment group voted while 32.26% of the control group did. After adjusting for pre-treatment covariates, we find that the peer-to-peer text message increased turnout by 0.25 percentage points ($p=0.20$; $SE=0.20$).

This means that our best guess is that peer-to-peer texting generates 1 additional vote per every 400 individuals targeted. This experiment therefore generated 236 total votes for the 94,257 individuals targeted in the treatment groups.

Overall, this experiment cost \$17,410.² With these costs, and assuming that the experiment generated 236 new votes, we can conclude that the cost per vote is \$74. To contextualize this, Chris Mann and I calculated the expected effect of various campaign tactics in a presidential election year. We estimated that social pressure mail can generate 1 new vote for every 217 mailers sent. So long as printing and shipping social pressure mail costs more than \$0.34 per piece, text messages would appear to be more cost effective. With further message testing and acquisition of better data linking voter file records to cell phone numbers, we should be able to further increase the cost effectiveness of these text messages.

One particularly interesting subgroup finding that warrants further attention in future experimentation is the text messaging effects among people who voted in no general election from 2008-2014 or the 2016 presidential primary. Among this group of never voters, the text messages increased turnout by 0.30 percentage points ($p=0.23$; $SE=0.25$), while among people who voted in at least one election, the text messages increased turnout by 0.19 percentage points ($p=0.56$; $SE=0.33$).

While these results are not overwhelmingly strong (the 95% confidence interval ranges from -0.14 to +0.64), they nevertheless suggest that further testing with peer-to-peer texting messaging is warranted as a

¹ Text messages are in the appendix. Half received the emoji condition and half received the no emoji condition. We report pooled results.

² 94,257 cell phone numbers were acquired for treatment, at \$0.02 per record (\$1885). 208,216 outgoing text messages were sent via Relay, at \$0.07 per message (\$14575). Relay charged \$50 per 5,000 contacts managed (\$950). Messages were sent by volunteers. These costs do not reflect the costs of recruiting and managing the volunteers.

potentially cost-effective way to increase voter turnout, particularly among individuals who might have lower propensities to vote.

Emoji:

"Hey Stephanie, I'm Linda, a volunteer working to get folks in Illinois out to vote 😊 Election Day is Tues Nov 8 & IL has early voting locations open now 🗳️ You can find your polling location at <http://nxtgn.us/vote> – can we count on you to vote no matter what? 🇺🇸"

No Emoji:

"Hey Farrah, I'm Justine, a volunteer working to get folks in Illinois out to vote. Election Day is Tues Nov 8 & IL has early voting locations open now. You can find your polling location at <http://nxtgn.us/vote> – can we count on you to vote no matter what?" |