Can Text Messages Mobilize Voters to the Polls?

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Main Questions

- Under what circumstances is text messaging an effective GOTV strategy?

- Does its effectiveness vary by target population, vote propensity and electoral context?

Previous Research

- Two existing published GOTV text message experiments (Dale and Strauss 2009; Malhotra et al 2011).

  – Heterogeneous treatment effects across vote propensity and election context.

- Personal contact is critical to mobilizing low-propensity voters of color (García Bedolla and Michelson 2012).

2014 General Election

- Conducted four GOTV text message experiments across CA.
  - Partnered with organizations working with low-propensity, voters of color
- Voters were randomly assigned to either treatment group (GOTV text messages) or control group.
  - Quantity and content of treatment varied by group
- Text treatment was on top of canvassing effort

The Effect of Text Messages on Turnout in the 2014 General Election

Organization	Control (N)	Treatment (N)	Intent-to-Treat Effect
Oakland Rising	42.5% (134)	53.4% (1176)	10.9%*
CHIRLA	38.2% (292)	38.6% (2859)	0.4%
Mi Familia Vota	25.8% (680)	28.3% (2871)	2.5%
SCOPE	33% (233)	36.9% (1995)	3.9%

*statistically significant at p <.02

Regression Estimates of Effect of Text Messages on Turnout

Organization	Treatment Coefficient	Standard Error	P-Value	N
Oakland Rising	0.109*	0.04	0.02	1310
CHIRLA	0.004	0.03	0.9	3151
Mi Familia Vota	0.02	0.02	0.3	3551
SCOPE	0.04	0.03	0.2	2289
Meta analysis (fixed effects)	0.031	--	0.04	--

What did we Learn?

- Expand existing GOTV research to look at:
  - Voters of color
  - Low propensity voters
  - Test GOTV text on top of canvassing campaign

- Efforts consistent with previous studies
  - For voters in need of a greater cognitive shift, text messages don't seem to be enough.

Going Forward

- Text messages are potentially effective when done in conjunction with a canvassing campaign
  - "Final Touch"
  - Cost-effective reminder

- BUT..
  - Context of election matters and perhaps the number of messages as well