

TEXTBANKING RESEARCH



Definition: Sending text messages to voters using a third party app like Hustle or ThruText.

Bottom line: The effectiveness of textbanking needs more research. There's evidence that text messaging has small effects on voter turnout and voter registration.

CONSIDERATIONS

Pros - Can send several in a short period of time; can send people links to follow.

Cons - The unsubscribe rate can be high (which means you can't contact the person via text again); cell phone number data is harder to get than landline data; time-consuming for campaigns to administer; not as useful for persuasion

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Text messages have a small effect on voter turnout.

- Academics (Dale and Strauss) found that reminder-to-vote texts to newly registered voters boosted voter turnout 3.0% in the 2006 midterm elections, over similar voters who did not receive reminder-to-vote texts.¹
 - A conceptual replication by Malholtra et al found a treatment effect of 0.72% and that SMS was more effective for regular voters for low salience elections and for sporadic voters in high salience elections.²
- Industry tests³ find that texting voters for GOTV provides average boosts in turnout of about 0.2-0.3%, compared to similar voters who do not receive GOTV texts. Some recent industry meta-analyses indicate that the efficacy of texts may be rising, with favorable comparisons to phonebanking and canvassing.
- To maximize turnout, industry sources recommend contacting voters as close to voting as possible (e.g., towards the end of the GOTV period)³.
- Some industry sources found that SMS vote by mail reminders were especially helpful. A recently released industry study found SMS chase effects in the range of approximately 0.1-2.2% for a variety of combinations of messages and timing.³ The best performing messages included no questions and provided individualized instructions for ballot return. SDAN similarly found that text message reminders to people who requested VBM ballots were effective in increasing turnout significantly.⁴

Text messages have a small effect on voter registration (VR).

- Progressive partners ([Vote.org](#) and [Analyst Institute](#))⁵ found that voter registration targets that received text messages with a link to [Vote.org](#)'s registration form for their state registered at a 0.3% higher rate than targets that did not get a text message.

Keep it informational.

- Progressive partners ([Hustle](#), [Vote.org](#), and [Analyst Institute](#))⁶ have found that text messages that provided voters' polling places were more effective (increase in turnout of 0.2% compared to similar voters who did



not receive texts) than plan-making texts that required a response (decrease of 0.1% in turnout compared to similar voters who did not receive texts).

- Industry tests reliably find that text messages that focus on information about how people can vote (election day, polling place, polling hours, etc) perform better than other types of text messages (e.g., plan-making).³

“Warm” contacts are better than “cold.”

- Industry studies and academic work show that text messages to people who have opted into a text / phone list (warm contacts) are up to twice as effective in increasing turnout on average than text messages to people who have not consciously opted in (cold contacts).^{1,2,3}

Requiring replies increases opt-out rate and decreases efficacy.

- Industry tests with back and forth text messages tend to perform worse than single messages and are much more likely to produce opt-outs than single messages.³

Areas for further exploration:

- Messaging other than GOTV - Research on engaging voters via messenger apps to build conversation about civic issues particularly promising (e.g., PushBlack on Facebook)
- More work on voter registration effects
- Planned SDAN studies
 - GOTV texting + persuasion around voting (focused on issues, without mentioning candidate)

References:

1. Dale, A., & Strauss, A. (2009). Don't forget to vote: text message reminders as a mobilization tool. *American Journal of Political Science*, 53(4), 787-804.
2. Malhotra, N., Michelson, M. R., Rogers, T., & Valenzuela, A. A. (2011). Text messages as mobilization tools: The conditional effect of habitual voting and election salience. *American Politics Research*, 39(4), 664-681.
3. Industry source (SDAN has access to various research reports by progressive organizations that we are not allowed to disseminate or cite but are sharing broad strokes of here).
4. <https://sisterdistrict.com/b/research/vote-by-mail-ballot-chase-text-messages/>
5. <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1wDO8oReryb8pSVLSY-mIOt2WxLui49AJ/view>
6. <https://medium.com/votedotorg/increasing-voter-turnout-with-texts-voteorg-e38bd454bd64>