

Text / SMS Messaging is an Effective Method for Engaging Young Voters

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The Student PIRGs' New Voters Project and Working Assets, in cooperation with researchers from the University of Michigan and Princeton University, recently released a study demonstrating the effectiveness of using text / SMS messages to mobile phones to mobilize young voters in the November 2006 elections. **The study found that text message reminders to new voters increased an individual's likelihood of voting by 4.2 percentage points.**

The full report is available at

<http://www.newvotersproject.org/research/text-messaging>

The Study

On the day before the election in November 2006, researchers sent text message voting reminders to over 4,000 mobile phone numbers chosen at random from a pool of over 8,000 mostly young people who had completed voter registration applications. Afterward, participants were matched to voter records to determine if they had voted in the election, and a sample was surveyed to gauge their reaction to the messages.

Comparison With Other Mobilization Tactics¹

Tactic	Mobilization Effect	Cost / Vote Generated
Text / SMS Messages	4-5%	\$1.56
"Quality" Phone Calls	4-5%	\$20
Door-to-Door Canvassing	7-9%	~\$30
Leafletting	1.2%	\$32
Direct Mail	~0.6%	\$67

The Youth Vote

For the past three elections young people have turned out in bigger numbers.

- In 2004, 20.1 million 18-29 year olds voted, up 4.3 million votes over 2000. More 18-29 year olds voted in 2004 than voters over the age of 65.
- In 2005, turnout in student-heavy precincts in New Jersey and Virginia increased 15 to 19 percent, even though turnout for other age groups decreased.
- In 2006, 18-29 year old turnout increased by 3 percent (nearly 2 million votes), nearly twice the increase of voters of all ages.

By the year 2015, young voters will represent one-third of the U.S. Electorate² and as such they'll have the ability to shape key issues and the direction of the country. Research has also found that young people turn out in bigger numbers if they are asked to vote, and targeted by non-partisan and partisan voter mobilization efforts.

Why Text Messaging?

Young voters matter and they are a very mobile population and are increasingly difficult to reach by traditional campaign outreach channels such as telephone calls to landlines.

- A quarter of Americans under the age of 25 used a mobile phone as their only telephone in the first half of 2006.
- The mobile-only population is projected to reach nearly 30 percent of the entire American public by the 2008 Presidential election.
- Text / SMS messaging is already widely used among young people as a form of communication.

Important Results

- Across the board, **text message reminders increased the likelihood of an individual voting by 4.2 percentage points.**
- Of the different messages tested, **a short, to-the-point reminder was most effective**, with a boost of nearly 5 percentage points.
- In a follow up survey, **59% of recipients reported that the reminder was helpful**, versus only 23% who found it bothersome.
- **Hispanics had especially positive feelings** about the reminders.
- At just **\$1.56 per additional vote generated**, text messaging was extremely cost effective.³

¹ Nickerson, David. "Quality Is Job One: Professional and Volunteer Voter Mobilization Calls." *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 51, No. 2, April 2007, Pp. 269-282.

² According to an analysis conducted by [Young Voter Strategies](#) of the [U.S. Census Bureau population projections for 2000 to 2050](#).

³ Calculated from costs of deploying text messages at between \$.035 and \$.06 per message. List acquisition and validation costs were minimal in this instance, but may vary for other campaigns.



Study Partners

The Student PIRGs' New Voters Project is a nonpartisan, national effort to register young people and get them to the polls on Election Day. Since our launch in 2003, we have registered more than 600,000 young people and made 650,000 personalized peer-to-peer voter turnout contacts either face to face or via the phone.

www.newvotersproject.org



Working Assets is a wireless telephone company that helps people make a difference in the world by doing the things they do every day. The company works to connect cutting-edge communications technology – including mobile phone applications – with current political issues and non-partisan civic participation programs. To date, Working Assets has raised over \$50 million for groups working to build a more humane, just, and sustainable world, and since 2003 has helped register more than 1.2 million voters, including 700,000 new voters online.

www.workingassetswireless.com

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