



ACRO
NYM

THE VOTER
FORMATION
PROJECT

EXPANDING THE ELECTORATE

Key Findings from a Large Scale Digital
Voter Registration & Mobilization Campaign

APRIL 2021

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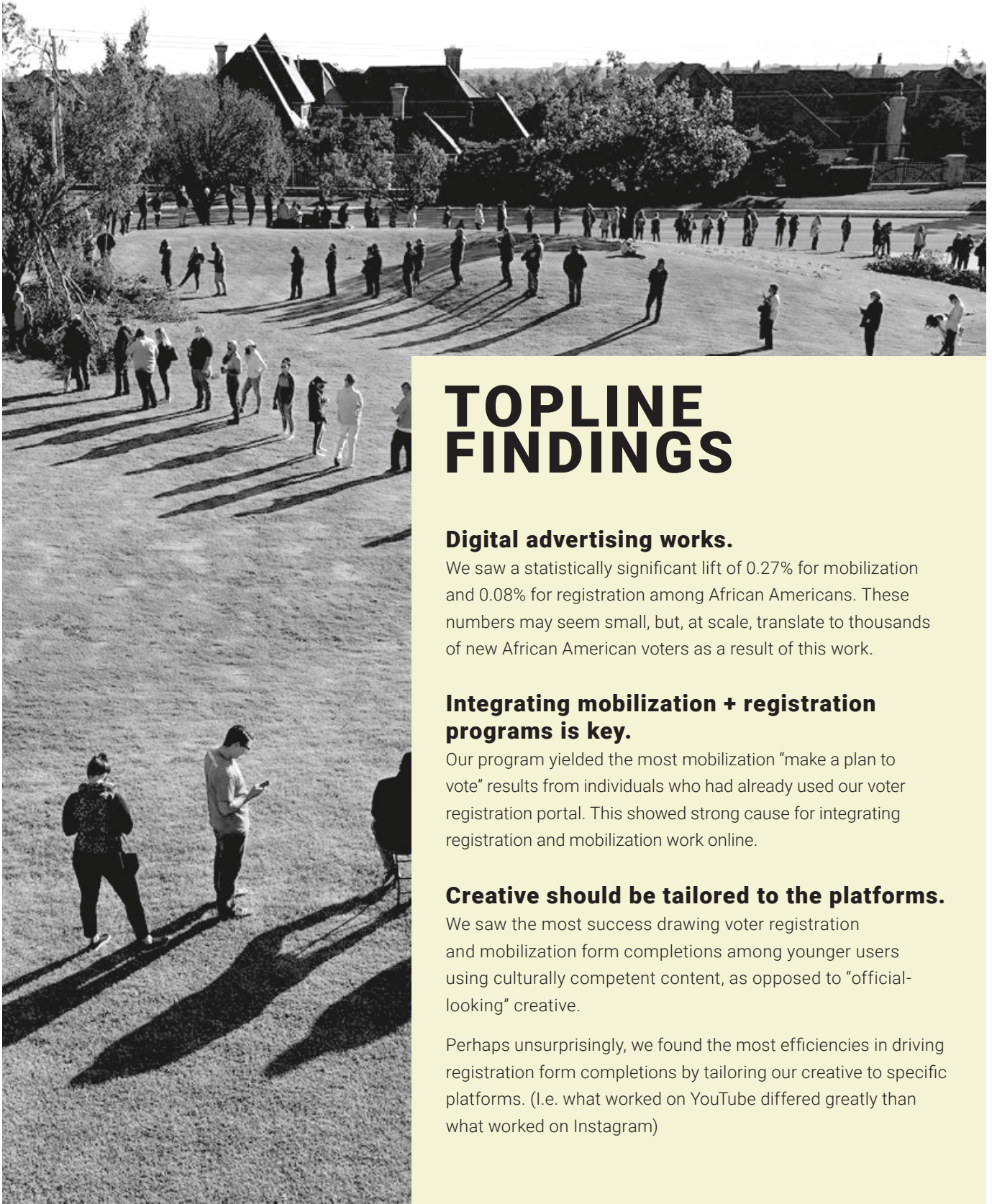
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

During the 2020 General Election ACRONYM ran an \$11M program named Expand the Electorate that sought to increase the number of Black and Latina voters across 8 target states: Arizona, Florida, Georgia, Michigan, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Texas, and Wisconsin.

After the General Election the program expanded to continue work in Georgia during the Senate Runoff elections with just under \$1.5M investment, bringing the full program spend to \$12.5M. This work was designed to challenge the assumptions of what works “best” for online advertising campaigns designed to register and mobilize voters: running campaigns 3 weeks before registration deadlines with government-looking creative. We instead ran a longer-term advertising campaign with robust message testing and culturally-competent ad creative, to demonstrate that this is a more effective tactic for engaging communities of color.

The results of our program have important implications for the progressive movement and for future registration and mobilization programs.

Our advertising program demonstrates that this approach worked for African Americans for both registration and mobilization. While more research is required to understand how to move Latinas in the southwest positively towards registration and voting, we believe that with further testing we will be able to refine what messages and platforms work best for this population. This paper serves as a roadmap for our approach and details the program results and costs.



TOPLINE FINDINGS

Digital advertising works.

We saw a statistically significant lift of 0.27% for mobilization and 0.08% for registration among African Americans. These numbers may seem small, but, at scale, translate to thousands of new African American voters as a result of this work.

Integrating mobilization + registration programs is key.

Our program yielded the most mobilization “make a plan to vote” results from individuals who had already used our voter registration portal. This showed strong cause for integrating registration and mobilization work online.

Creative should be tailored to the platforms.

We saw the most success drawing voter registration and mobilization form completions among younger users using culturally competent content, as opposed to “official-looking” creative.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, we found the most efficiencies in driving registration form completions by tailoring our creative to specific platforms. (I.e. what worked on YouTube differed greatly than what worked on Instagram)

THE PROBLEM

We won't mince words: digital voter registration and mobilization campaigns are difficult. As we see it, they face four central challenges.

1

The voting process itself can be hard, especially for people of color. Voting laws differ drastically by state, as does the state of online voter registration, absentee ballot request, etc.

2

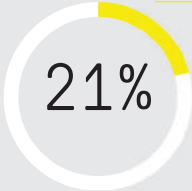
BIPOC audiences are more difficult to target online due to structural racism in data and technology.

3

Online voter registration and mobilization campaigns are under-researched and difficult to measure, which dissuades those in the donor-driven campaign world from taking a chance on them - organizations do not often spend on digital ads for this type of work at scale.

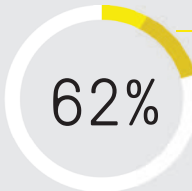
4

Finally, existing online voter registration and mobilization platform technology is not built to optimize for sophisticated advertising programs, so the field has been unable to fully leverage the potential of paid digital investments.



21%

an estimated 21% of eligible Americans are **not registered to vote**



62%

62% of them say they have **never been asked to register**

HERE'S WHAT WE KNOW

Looking at those who are registered to vote, some disparities become clear.

While 71% of eligible white Americans are registered to vote, just 54% of their Hispanic, 64% of their Black, and 54% of their AAPI counterparts are registered, respectively. This isn't the fault of voters. Systemic voter suppression efforts like strict voter ID laws and discriminatory voter purging have made it especially difficult for BIPOC Americans to register and exercise their rights to vote, and these efforts are only accelerating.

We knew there must be a better way to address this disparity, and that traditional online voter registration and mobilization campaigns aren't doing enough to identify and reach voters of color.

We also knew that BIPOC audiences over-index on time spent online, and that private sector marketing best practices are not traditionally applied to these kinds of campaigns. However, the research on digital ad voter registration and mobilization is limited—especially for campaigns focused on reaching Black and brown audiences. Traditional political science research focuses on the effects of in-person efforts like door-to-door canvassing and relational organizing, meaning that's where campaigns have directed their resources.

Even with minimal research, we knew we had to run a robust campaign targeting voters of color with online registration and mobilization ads. However, there was another problem: data and technology in this space are structurally racist. Due to existing systemic inequality, data sets, including those that are widely used in political targeting such as the voter file, are better able to represent complete and accurate information about white people. This means that it is more difficult to target BIPOC audiences with online advertisements because the data we have about them are just not as good. Even when campaigns attempt to direct ads about voting and elections to voters of color, social and search platform algorithms often serve these ads instead to those they have already identified as typical voters: middle-aged, white, and college-educated. The problem of reaching BIPOC audiences online is even more impactful for registration programs since most unregistered people cannot be reached efficiently using first person targeting, and third person targeting techniques systematically lead to many white individuals receiving ads intended for BIPOC communities.



Finally, the existing technology for voter registration and mobilization is not built to work with the types of sophisticated advertising programs necessary to register and mobilize voters. Although the availability of online voter registration expanded significantly with the 2020 election, ten states continue to require voters to register by mail or in person. The websites that facilitate voter registration will direct people to government websites to complete their registration. These sites often require several steps to complete the registration and are rarely mobile-optimized. Programs accessing mobile tools are not able to track user behavior on these websites or retarget people who take specific actions. The current tools allow for the basics for online registration, but online programs - especially advanced advertising programs - need more specialized data to make data-driven decisions about the tactics they employ.

As deep-rooted as the challenges to running an online voter registration and mobilization campaign proved to be, we determined that running a comprehensive digital ad program that deploys corporate marketing best practices can be a complementary and effective approach.

THE SOLUTION

We know that the problems are vast in registering and mobilizing people of color online, and so we know that the solution also must be modern and multi-faceted. ACRONYM launched the Expand the Electorate program to begin dismantling the systemic approaches to online voter registration and mobilization that, in reality, hold back programs from reaching their full potential. Instead of using our investment to further outdated or insufficient models for digital engagement, we used our \$12.5 million dollar investment to expand the electorate by deploying and measuring innovative digital campaigns. Our goal was to incorporate best practices for direct response marketing while testing different creative approaches, messaging, and buying tactics to find what actually works best for our intended audiences - instead of relying on past assumptions.

PROGRAM GOALS

Register 40,000 new people

Mobilize 30,000 new or lapsed voters

WHERE DID THE ADS RUN?

Arizona, Florida, Georgia, Michigan, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Texas, and Wisconsin

WHO DID THEY TARGET?

Black people who were unregistered or had a turnout score under 50 in Florida, Georgia, Michigan, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin and to Latinas who were unregistered or had a turnout score under 50 in Arizona, Florida, North Carolina, and Texas.

HOW LONG WAS THE CAMPAIGN?

5 months prior to Election Day, much longer than the typical campaign duration for voter registration and mobilization campaigns.

WHAT KINDS OF ADS?

We placed registration ads in Arizona, Florida, Georgia, Michigan, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin, and we ran mobilization ads in all 8 states.

WHERE DID THE ADS LEAD?

The ads directed users to two different landing pages on our proprietary tool, ACRONYM CITIZEN. The registration landing page helped users start the registration process for their state, and the mobilization landing page helped users make a plan to vote and get automated reminders.

WHOSE BRAND DID YOU USE FOR THE ADS?

We used two new and distinct brands: An audience-focused brand called "People's Power Grab" and a government-stylized brand called "How to Vote"

CAMPAIGN
SNAPSHOT

Our goal meant that we needed to develop new tools and methods in order to truly apply corporate best practices for digital direct response marketing to our work. Specifically, we identified early the need to develop landing pages and forms that allowed for us to rigorously track platform activities as well as retarget individuals who visit our landing pages. We developed ACRONYM CITIZEN to meet this need and to allow us to have more insights about the user experience of our program than ever before. This level of data allowed us to make the most strategic decisions about our targeting, platforms, creative, and messaging. Given that we were committed to trying to eliminate as many assumptions as possible about what platforms, creative, and messages would work, ACRONYM CITIZEN allowed for us to have as much live information as possible to support our strategic programmatic decisions.



A key aspect of our program that we will continue to measure through our future work is the intersection of digital and community organizing to enhance our shared outcomes. Too frequently the results of digital work are siloed from measurement of traditional on-the-ground organizing efforts, most likely resulting in the loss of efficiency. Just as humans consume messaging through multiple mediums, programs should coordinate across efforts to connect online messages to in-person activities. Our program ran a first-of-its-kind partnership effort with organizations on the ground to share data in order to drive more efficient registrations and votes. We look forward to more deeply measuring this type of cohesive programming in future election cycles.

Research and measurement were at the core of our program, both day-to-day as we optimized our campaign activities and overall as we sought to determine the full efficacy of our work. **Traditionally, digital voter registration and mobilization campaigns rely solely on digital form completions as the key metric of program success.**

For our program, in addition to tracking interim metrics like form submissions on our websites, we also removed people from receiving our advertisements for the entire duration of the program. This randomized controlled trial

Our goal meant that we needed to develop new tools and methods in order to truly apply corporate best practices for digital direct response marketing to our work.

(RCT) helped us evaluate if our overall approach was successful in registering and mobilizing our audiences. While we would have liked to individually test each facet of the program, it was most important to demonstrate that overall, an atypical approach to digital mobilization work, In each of the following sections we dive deeper into the tactics, outcomes and learnings from each facet of our program work to expand the electorate in 2020.

BUILDING MODERN PARTNERSHIPS

Our partnerships model was a first-of-its-kind design, with the intention of bridging the gap between national programs and community field programs to help make both programs more efficient. We believed, and still do, that running online campaigns over time would lift both efforts by reaching digital-first audiences with an opportunity to register or make a plan to vote, or priming communities with messages about registration or mobilization so that when organizers approach people who have seen ads, they are more likely to consider taking action.

We realized this was an opportunity to help bridge the gap between our program and organizing efforts even more closely.



We realized this was an opportunity to help bridge the gap between our program and organizing efforts even more closely. With running a digital program, we were collecting information about people who had already expressed interest in voting. What if we could pass along this information to organizations in the state doing organizing work on the ground in their communities? The organizations could then contact our program responders to encourage them to complete a registration or implement their voting plan. This in turn would help groups spend their time on more qualified leads while also helping to ensure that our targets completed the offline work to finish registrations or actually vote. Through thinking broadly about how we could use our program to help enhance the work of our organizing partners, we were able to build a new model of digital and field coordination that could drive efficiency across all programs involved.

Through this program, we were able to operationalize our premise on partnerships: that field organizing and digital work should never be siloed. While the expansion of digital organizing work has grown immensely over the past two cycles, we still see digital ad programs separated from on-the-ground organizing because of the very different natures of the work: one relies on mass communication and the other relies on personal networks and small group connections. When thinking about our digital registration and mobilization program efforts, we believe that we have more to gain from sharing qualitative learnings about messaging across both the organizing and ads teams, as well as sharing the contact data collected between the two so that the same narratives are repeated across communication modes.

In 2021 and beyond, Voter Formation Project will continue to dig further into researching the efficacy of this model and the cost efficiencies that it can drive across both field programs and digital programs. There is so much more to learn about the most efficient ways to layer communications so that we drive down the cost of developing new voters while also reaching more people with our messages.



OUR CREATIVE BEST PRACTICES

There is a closely held belief in registration and mobilization circles that “official looking” creative, that looks like it could have been delivered by a government entity, performs best for getting people to register or vote. Ample research shows that this tactic is best for direct mail creative, but there is less evidence that it works best for digital outreach, and even less so confirming that it works best for reaching people of color online.

We wanted to challenge this premise because we have seen brand marketers have great success through making digital-first, culturally-relevant advertisements and building influencer marketing campaigns. We developed two brands to run our media through, and consistently tested both brands against our audiences to see which yielded the most people submitting our forms.



howtovote.guide

The first brand that we developed was our official-looking brand, How To Vote. How To Vote’s color schemes, typeface, and imagery all were inspired by the look and feel commonly deployed by different states and their secretaries of state or offices of elections.



**PEOPLE'S
POWER GRAB**

The second brand that we developed was called “People’s Power Grab.” This brand was designed to be more hip, colorful, and commercial-like so that the content replicated what our audiences might be seeing in their feeds from other content creators. We designed this brand to feel inclusive, approachable, modern, and digital-first.

It was important to us to ensure that during our testing phases we developed each message track and creative type (video, static, .gif) across each of the brands, so that we could more easily compare user behavior with the ads themselves and the landing pages (which also were designed in each brand). We also ensured that we initially ran both brands across all of our testing platforms and matched the types of creatives that were running across brands (for example, one video and one static per message on each platform). We quickly saw that while the official-looking creative was “performing best,” meaning that it was generating a number of people completing our forms, it was mostly converting older people in our audiences, almost exclusively on Facebook. When we looked at the content that was performing better on other platforms however, we saw the People’s Power Grab branded content working best on Snapchat and equally as well as How To Vote branded content with younger audiences on Instagram.

We also noted that we saw a different type of creative succeed on YouTube - selfie-style videos. This type of video is essentially inaccessible for an official-looking

brand because the goal is to replicate an entity, as opposed to a person. It was one of the few cases where we ran a type of creative across one brand and not the other, but it also demonstrated the power of our brand. A modern, digital-first brand allowed for us to employ more tactics across a number of platforms. As a result, we were able to find success on YouTube through scaling our selfie-style videos that cut our cost of form completions by over 70%.

While we did not run randomized controlled trials to help us understand which creative treatments worked best, we applied the best descriptive analysis possible of our media delivery and form completions to help us assess the utility of each brand and adjust tactics in close to real time. The biggest lesson we learned from our approach is that we need to do more research to understand what creative brands, treatments, and content types work best for certain people. Because we saw little movement with the official-looking brand on specific platforms, we cannot definitively say that this approach to registration and mobilization creative is the most effective for digital engagement and specifically people of color.

KEY LESSONS

01

Build multiple brands with distinct voices to reach different demographics of your target audiences

02

Build out multiple creative approaches so that you are able to reach more people in your target audience

03

Tailor your creative to each of your platforms so that you are able to maximize the efficiency of your creative.

OUR MEDIA APPROACH

Although we had some learnings about running registration and mobilization campaigns from previous work at ACRONYM, these campaigns were not solely focused on registering and mobilizing people of color. For example, although previous programs and research had shown that “official” looking creative was most efficient at driving form completions, we still tested this presumption to see if it held true for audiences of color.

Another challenge with running media to audiences made up of people of color across platforms is targeting. Wherever possible we wanted to deploy a number of targeting tactics to reach our audience: unregistered and low-propensity African Americans and Latinas. We used list-matching targeting wherever available, as well as in-platform targeting, including lookalike audiences, to reach people of color who either had never voted or sporadically voted. No online targeting solution is going to be 100% accurate, but it’s important to remember that when targeting BIPOC audiences, the actual reach will be even less efficient than other targeting segments. This is due to the lack of self-identifying data that platforms collect on their

The media buying strategy for the program relied on us making as few assumptions as possible as to what would “work” and what would not. Given that we were unable to determine registration or voting rates as we ran media, we decided to use online form submissions as a proxy for success. While this is an imperfect replacement for ultimate completion of a registration or a vote, form completions and other online actions on our websites were something that we could measure and optimize toward during the course of our program. We wanted to garner as many form completions as possible for both the registration and mobilization phases of the campaign, while also taking into account where we saw significant variations in the cost per conversion and opportunities to make our programs more cost-efficient.


users and systemic racism inherent in race models from data vendors. Because of these two factors, which are unlikely to change any time soon, we know that using a multi-pronged targeting strategy is required for efficiency in reaching audiences of color across ad platforms.

Our first media buys were designed to test a wide variety of platforms with the same messages across both of our brands to see which platforms were able to drive the most amount of form completions from our target audiences. We went broad with our platforms, testing the standard social media platforms like Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram, as well as less traditional with other media placements such as Snapchat, Quora, Outbrain, Google Search, and Programmatic platforms. We saw almost a binary result of form completions across placements: some platforms converted people at scale, and others did not.

Facebook gives advertisers the opportunity to A/B test message tracks against each other, so we decided to deploy a number of A/B tests of our message tracks to see which would work best for our target audience on the platform.




REGISTRATION

- + Information 
- + Empowerment
- + Social Pressure
- + Restoration of Rights
- + Information
(How to Vote)




MOBILIZATION

Vote by Mail

- + Education 
- + Safety
- + Security
- + Education
(How to Vote)

Early Vote & GOTV

- + Information 
- + Social Pressure
- + Information
(How to Vote)
- + Social Pressure
(How to Vote)

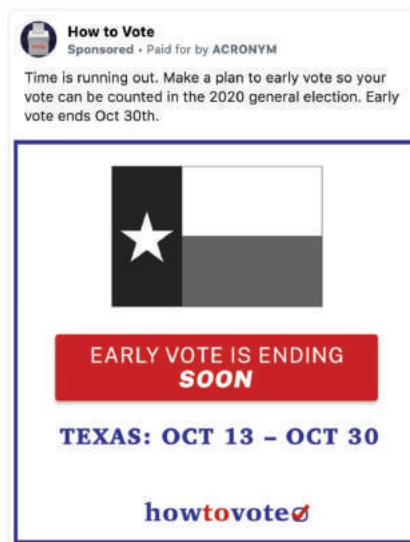
MESSAGES

We saw across the board that the “information” track for both registration and mobilization worked best across all audiences, with the “empowerment” messaging driving form completions among African Americans. The testing also revealed that the “official” looking content from the How To Vote brand received the most form completions. Further investigation of the results revealed that form completions on Facebook were driven by older audiences across both the Latina and African American audiences.

FIGURE 1: HOW TO VOTE – CREATIVE



REGISTRATION: INFORMATION

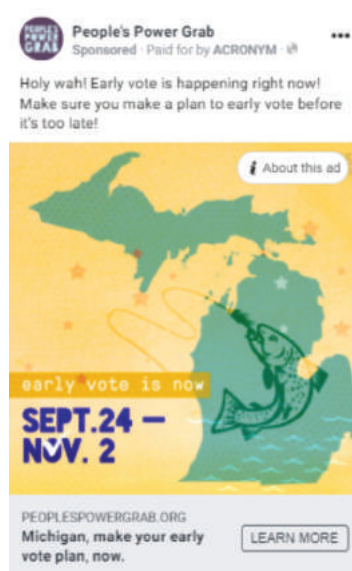


MOBILIZATION: EMPOWERMENT

FIGURE 2: PEOPLE'S POWER GRAB – CREATIVE



REGISTRATION: EMPOWERMENT



MOBILIZATION: INFORMATION

Although Facebook offered us the ability to create mutually exclusive audiences to test message tracks against each other, the application of the “best performing message tracks” could not be universally applied across platforms. For instance, we saw many more conversions from our culture-first brand on Snapchat, where conversions were driven by people in our target audiences under 35. We also noticed that on YouTube, we were receiving roughly equal numbers of conversions across message tracks, however we realized that the creative approach impacted conversion rates the most. Selfie-style videos garnered more form completions than more traditional style videos across message tracks.

Once we had a solid set of learnings about the most effective messages and tactics per platform, we began to scale our program, and we started seeing efficiencies in our media costs. Testing requires creating smaller audiences for short campaign durations, which leads to a sharp increase in the cost per conversions. Once we scaled our program based on the learnings we received, our average cost per form completion dropped to 10% of the cost we experienced for form completions during the testing phase.

Another key driver of our decrease in costs was our ability to retarget people who had landed on our form but did not complete it. Our retargeting campaign had the lowest cost per form completion

of any other targeting cohort. The people in this audience qualified themselves as interested potential voters, however, many programs leave these people behind because they don't incorporate retargeting into their plans. It's imperative to continue to engage with people who have visited the landing page via retargeting so that we can encourage them to finish the process - they are the most ripe for finishing their registrations.

We took an unorthodox approach to media optimization. When thinking about media optimization, many strategists and consultants traditionally think of cost reduction: running the most media at the lowest cost for the most efficient campaign. Because of the challenges we discussed earlier with targeting difficulties, we approached media optimization first through the lens of who completed our forms, and then cost reduction.

Our team consistently ran analyses on our user data of form completers to estimate how many people converting on our sites fell into our target audience and how many did not. This analysis allowed us to build more accurate lookalike audiences by creating seed audiences that most reflected who we wanted: people of color who will respond to a call to action and complete a form about civic engagement.

This approach also allowed for us to remove platforms that did not return a majority of form completions from our target audience, even if the platform was cost-efficient. We

found Google Search had the lowest cost per conversion, but most of the people responding to ads on that platform were not part of our target audience. Removing the platform certainly increased our topline program costs, but doing so allowed us to confidently spend as much of our media as possible on platforms bringing in a larger share of people of color.

KEY LESSONS

- 01 Test all assumptions, especially when working with people of color audiences.
- 02 Deploy a multi-faceted targeting strategy to reach as much of your intended audience as possible.
- 03 Test messages as rigorously as possible in each advertising platform - learnings from one do not necessarily translate across different platforms.
- 04 Retarget page visitors to ensure you reach every person who has demonstrated interest through clicking through to your website.
- 05 Optimize your media for all outcomes that matter to your campaign. Whom you are reaching with your campaigns can matter more than how much a form completion cost.

BUILDING TECHNOLOGY DESIGNED FOR MEASUREMENT

To support our online voter registration and mobilization programs, we knew the technology we used to help users register and make a plan to vote would be critical. Our objectives were twofold: a) provide a seamless experience for users so they could effectively register and access voting information and b) maintain a robust tracking infrastructure to support optimizing our digital ads and reporting on key metrics. Additionally, we wanted to be able to automate retargeting, follow up with our site visitors, and share information with our organizing partners in close to real time. Without any existing tools on the market which could meet these needs, we decided to build our own tech stack we named ACRONYM CITIZEN.

Figure 3: ETE + ACRONYM CITIZEN Product Workflow

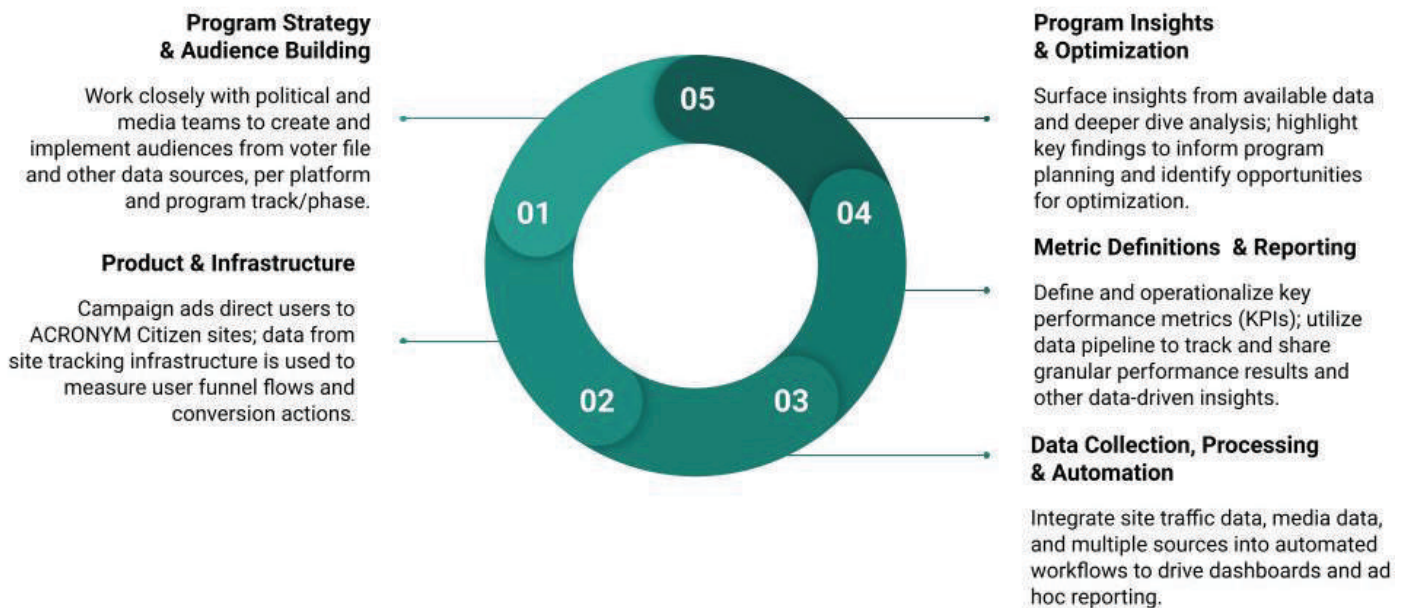


Figure 4: ACRONYM CITIZEN User Flows

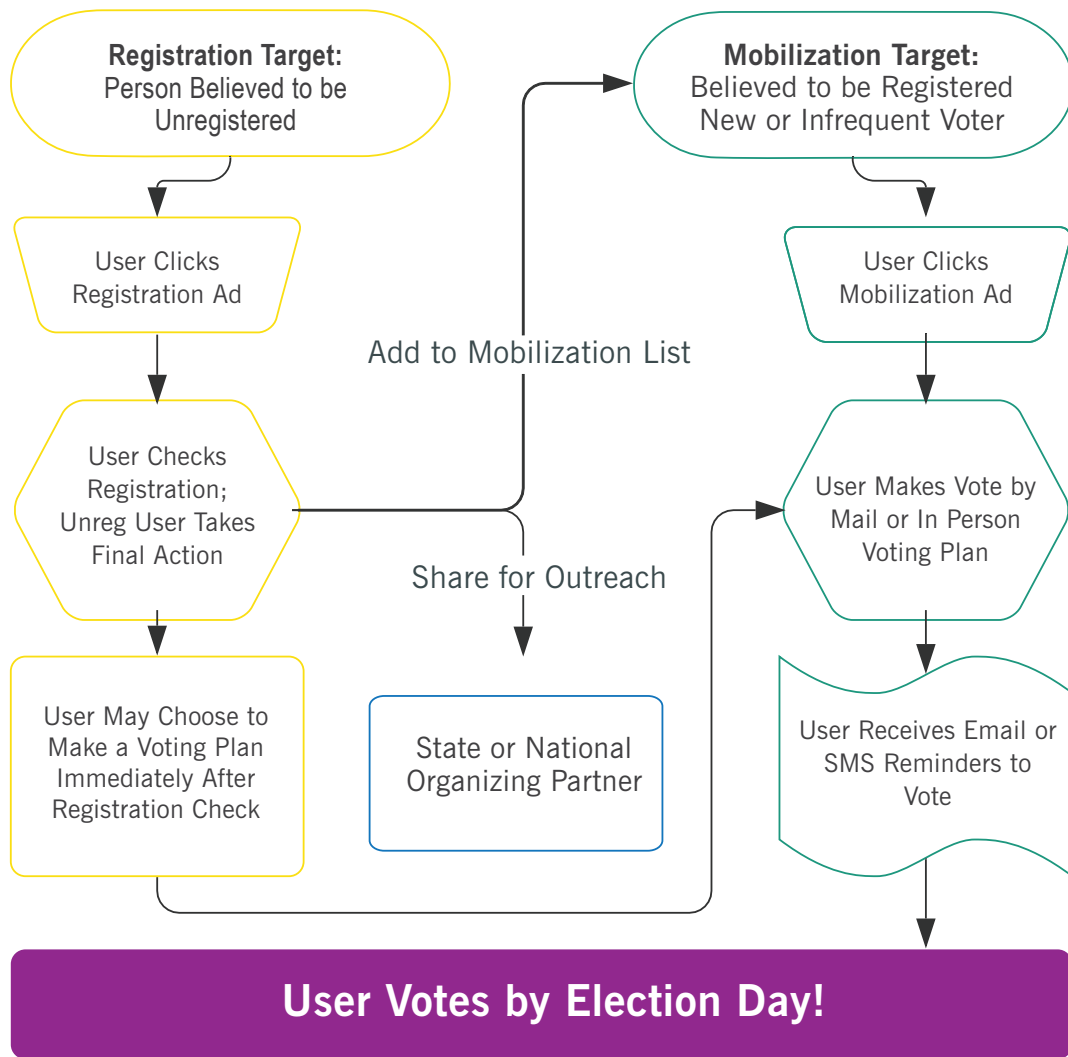
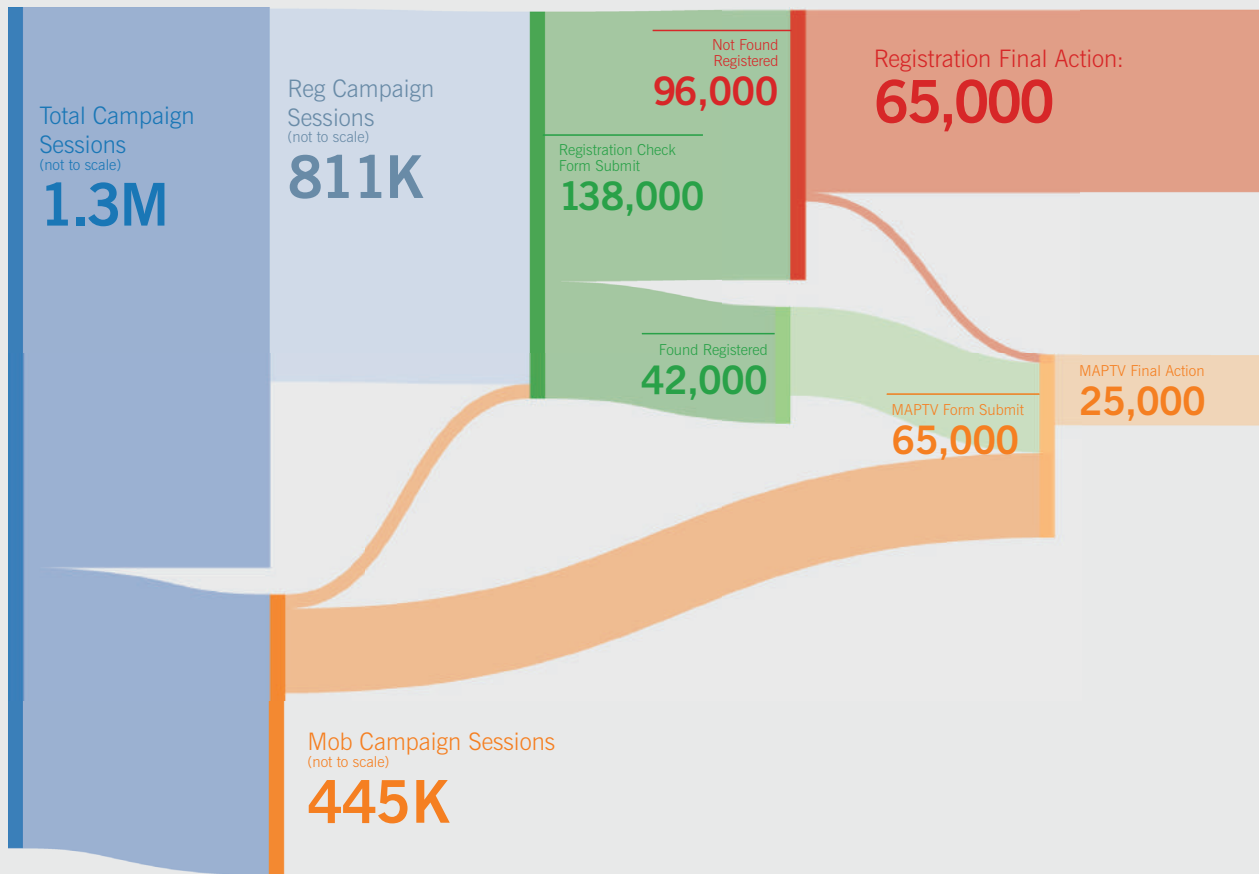


Figure 5: ACRONYM CITIZEN User Flow and Direct Response KPIs (ETE 2020 General Election Program)



DATA INFRASTRUCTURE & TRACKING

In addition to providing a high quality user experience, ACRONYM CITIZEN has a set of advanced tracking tools and data infrastructure designed to support key aspects of program management, operations, and reporting needs.

Our tracking infrastructure enabled us to learn more about who came to our sites from our advertising and to understand the behavior of different types of users on our sites. This allowed us to optimize our campaigns to better find users that would take the actions we wanted.

First, user data from ACRONYM CITIZEN allows for high value program tactics, such as retargeting users who begin a session on our sites but do not complete a final action. Tracking on our sites is also used for in-platform conversion goal optimization. User data—including contact information and identified registration status from our registration checks—is shared with field organizing partners for follow up on a daily basis, using an automated data pipeline.

KEY LESSONS

Data from ACRONYM CITIZEN were also used for analysis and optimization of our programs, media, and other campaign tactics. Daily reporting enabled us to know in close to real time which ads, platforms, and tactics were performing best, in terms of generating conversions, cost efficiency, and reaching our target audiences. Rather than relying on limited in-platform data or third party tools to monitor generic campaign performance, having our own detailed, granular tracking data enabled us to provide more useful insights to our program teams and leadership, enabling them to make smarter outcome-informed decisions.

Thanks to our robust tracking infrastructure, we were able to learn a lot more about the characteristics of our site visitors and could therefore redirect activity (and spending) away from platforms and tactics where our campaigns weren't reaching intended audiences. For example, while our program overall was able to reach an estimated 55% BIPOC (based on voter file race models applied to submitted user information), we found that certain platforms were less capable of effectively targeting BIPOC audiences and as a result drove a majority-white audience to our sites. As soon as we identified this issue in our tracking data, we were able to redirect resources toward platforms and tactics that showed an audience mix closer to our program goals. We were also able to use our tracking data to identify steps in our user funnel where users were dropping off and modify parts of our flow to improve conversions.

D1

Consistent branding from creative to landing pages to tools and a streamlined user experience are key when running a direct response campaign

D2

Integrating voter registration and mobilization capabilities within one tool helps with the limitations of digital targeting, particularly for registration campaigns that may reach voters who are already registered.

D3

Robust tracking of user actions and user data supports data-driven program optimization and decision-making across platforms and tactics.

D4

Additional testing of landing page and user flow design could produce higher conversion rates, particularly for mobilization.

OUR RESEARCH FRAMEWORK & RESULTS

Traditionally, ad campaigns encouraging people to register or turn out to vote are believed to be most cost-efficient closer to election deadlines; however, there aren't enough studies with digital programming to know if this holds when utilizing a full-funnel marketing strategy. Expand the Electorate's long-term media campaign was designed to track and measure whether applying top-of-the-funnel marketing strategies would increase voter registration and mobilization.

Running pilot campaigns in both 2019 and early 2020 allowed us to hone our approach in reaching our target audiences and A/B testing which messages were most effective. After incorporating key learnings from early testing, we designed and set up control groups within our audiences who would not receive treatment—allowing us at a later date to analyze whether we were successful in registering and mobilizing our target audiences. Our primary goal for this research was to determine if our program as a whole had any statistically significant lift against no intervention.

BETA-TESTING

Before the launch of the Expand the Electorate program, we tested some of our assumptions by comparing the effectiveness of different messaging, calls to action, and social media platforms during 2019 general elections in Virginia and Kentucky and 2020 primaries in Texas and North Carolina. Though we didn't get statistically significant results from this testing, we were able to gain insight into how to improve our research and measurement capabilities before and after the full program launch.

ACRONYM collaborated with a researcher to run three pre-cycle experiments. These early experiments aimed to evaluate:

- Employing an educational messaging campaign as part of a full-funnel messaging strategy promoting online voter registration in Virginia's 2019 election
- Utilizing Snapchat ads to mobilize young voters aged 18-34 in Virginia and Kentucky 2019 general elections
- Educational versus partisan messaging and different calls to action (CTAs) to mobilize BIPOC and women aged 18-34 in Texas and North Carolina 2020 primaries



KEY LESSONS

01

Informational and educational messaging worked better than partisan content.

04

Creative should be more informative on how, when, and where to vote.

02

Empowerment messaging was worth further testing.

05

Better ways to find and reach our intended audiences online and identified strategies for increasing social media platform match rates for first-party audience uploads.

03

Specifically targeting young, BIPOC, and urban populations was key.

PROGRAM RESULTS

Our goal was to measure the overall efficacy of our program using modern digital marketing techniques and best practices to reach and have a positive impact on historically disenfranchised groups and communities of color. In order to do this, we designed and implemented randomized controlled trials (RCTs) with control groups in both our registration and mobilization audiences. This enabled us to measure whether our programs produced a change in outcomes for our target audiences in the real and noisy environment of the 2020 cycle.

Control Groups

Each unregistered and registered voter in our target audiences was

randomly assigned to either the “treatment” or “control” group, which were then balanced based on a series of demographic attributes. Control group members were excluded from our digital ad targeting whenever possible to provide a comparison to assess the impact of our programs on our treatment group. However, due to the wide range of targeting methods and platforms utilized in our programs, control group members could not be completely excluded from receiving ETE program ads. As a result, any actual program effects would be harder to detect when analyzing the RCT results, and our RCT findings are likely a conservative estimate of actual program impacts. This approach is

common for an intent-to-treat (or ITT) experimental analysis.

Registration RCT

The primary outcome for the Registration RCT was new voter registrations occurring before their state’s registration deadline to vote in the 2020 general election.¹ The experimental universe for our registration program included over 2 million records of unregistered Black and Latinx voters identified in commercial voter file data in May 2020. At the time of our analysis, the voter file was up-to-date with any registration changes through Election Day for all eight of our target states

¹Note that there are some irregularities in reporting of registration dates on state voter files, and in some cases voter records with registration dates after the state deadline but before election day have vote history indicating that they may in fact have been registered in time to vote. Robustness checks were conducted using registration by election day, and results are largely consistent regardless of which date frame is used. For purposes of this analysis, we opted to use the state registration deadline rather than election day as this timeframe is more clearly aligned with state law and our program design (the date frames when we ran registration ads in each state).

Main Results

Overall, the impact of the Expand the Electorate registration program was directionally positive but statistically insignificant at increasing voter registration in the 2020 general election among unregistered people initially identified on the voter file. We were able to observe that at least **1.98%** of people in our unregistered treatment group and **1.94%** of people in our unregistered control group became registered in time to vote in the 2020 general election. The small difference between the treatment and control conditions (**0.03 pp**) is not statistically significant and may be attributable to chance. In addition, we find that members of our treatment group who became registered voted at a marginally higher rate than members of the control group who became registered—**73.3%** of new registrants from our treatment group voted, compared to **72.9%** of new registrants from the control group (difference of 0.04 pp).²

For our registration program, it is important to note that our ability to identify voter registration changes is significantly impacted by the limitations of available commercial voter file data. **Only about one-third of our initial unregistered targets could be directly matched to records on the voter file ten months later, meaning that two-thirds could not be directly matched to identify their final registration status.** After testing multiple options to identify additional individuals from our initial target audience through indirect matching, we were still unable to determine the ultimate registration status (either changed or not changed) for about one-third of our initial unregistered audience. We also found that some of our initial unregistered targets may have in fact been duplicate records of individuals who were already registered at the time our audiences were created, and as such could not have become newly registered through our program. Overall, we believe that our findings are likely to be directionally correct, but the true impact of our program (statistical significance and magnitude of calculated lift in our RCT results) is likely diluted by these data limitations.

Subgroup Results

We evaluated whether the effects of the Expand the Electorate program varied across age, gender, race, state, turnout scores, education, and urbanicity. Although the main effect of treatment compared to control was insignificant yet marginally positive, we did identify statistically significant exploratory results for some subgroups.³

We see evidence of a statistically significant and positive lift of **0.16 pp (p < 0.05)** on registration for Black women in our treatment group when compared to the control, especially those over the age of 35 (see Figure A). Conversely, we found a negative impact among Black men under the age of 35 of **-0.33 pp (p < 0.10)**. We did not find any statistically significant results for older Black men or younger Black women. We also did not find any significant results for our Latinx audience, though findings for this audience were directionally negative (see Figure B).

We did not observe many notable state-specific results in our registration program analysis, possibly due to the small number of new registrants we were able to affirmatively identify in any given state. We did find a positive lift in our Black audience in North Carolina, at an estimated increase of **0.17 pp (p < 0.10)** among all Black individuals regardless of gender, and **0.23 pp (p < 0.10)** among Black women specifically. Conversely, we did find a negative impact of **-0.38 pp (p < 0.10)** for Black men in Pennsylvania regardless of age.

Mobilization RCT

The outcome for the Mobilization RCT was overall turnout including absentee, early, and Election Day voting in the 2020 General Election. The experimental universe for our mobilization program included over 3 million records of registered Black and Latina new and infrequent voters identified in commercial voter file data in July 2020. At the time of our analysis, vote history was $\geq 98\%$ populated on the voter file for all eight of our target states.

² This comparison illustrates that among those who became newly registered from the treatment and control groups, those in our registration treatment group also voted at slightly higher rates than the registration control group. This indicates a possible secondary impact of our registration programs on voter turnout, distinct from the change in registration alone (program mobilization impact after accounting for registration impact).

³ Subgroup analyses are exploratory. Results should be considered as hypothesis generating and interpreted with caution. The main subgroup findings reported are generally supported by theory and interaction testing, and similar patterns are observed across multiple distinct experiments for the main subgroup differences identified. However, subgroup analysis does present a significant risk of including both false positive and false negative results due to multiple interactions and limited statistical power, particularly in cases where the outcome evaluated is a rare event as is the case in our registration program analysis.

Figure 6: Registration RCT Selected Exploratory Results - Black Audiences

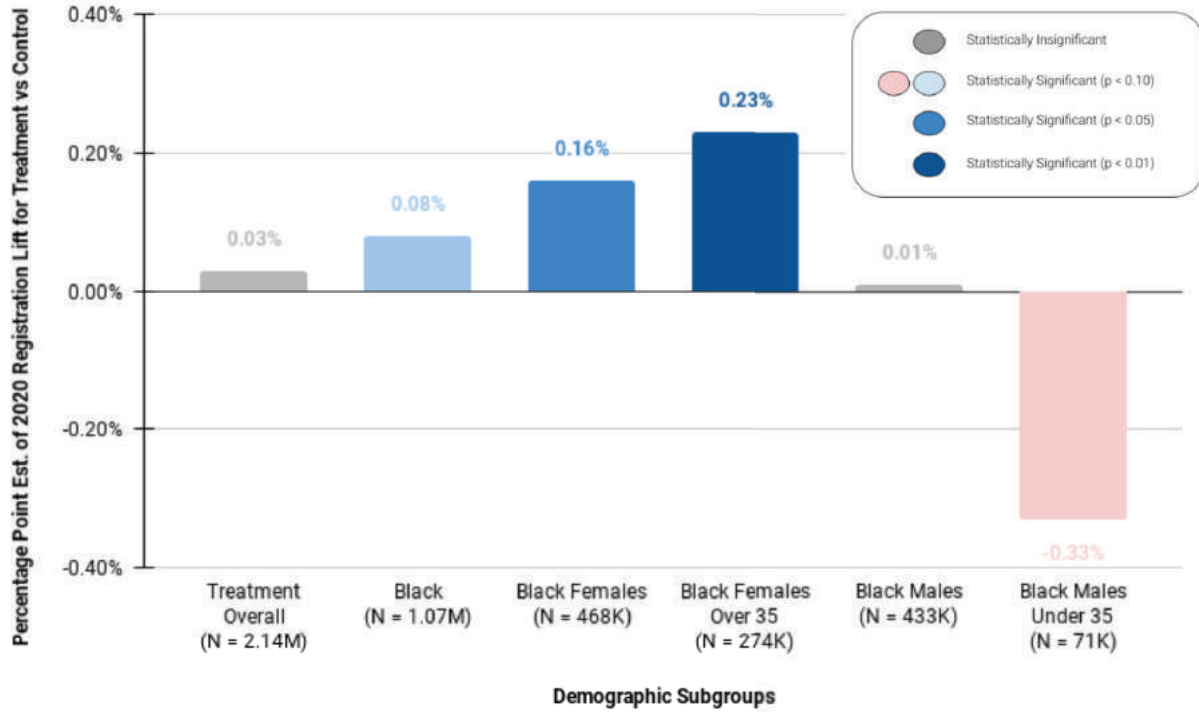
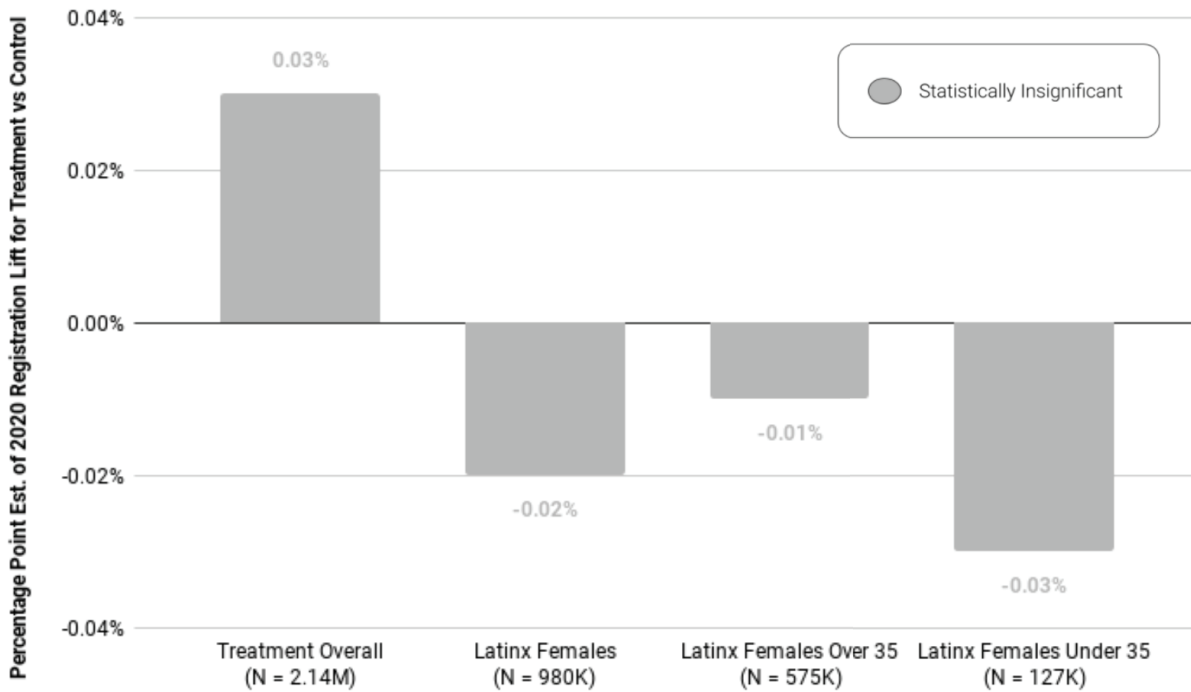


Figure 7: Registration RCT Selected Exploratory Results - Latinx Audiences



Main Results

Similar to our registration program, the impact of the Expand the Electorate mobilization program was directionally positive but statistically insignificant at increasing turnout in the 2020 General Election. Registered voters in both experiment conditions voted at essentially the same rate: **31.21%** of people in the treatment group voted, and **31.14%** people in the control group voted. The small difference between the treatment and control conditions (**0.07 pp**) is not statistically significant and may be attributable to chance.

Subgroup Results

We evaluated whether the effects of the Expand the Electorate program varied across age, gender, race, state, turnout scores, education, and urbanicity. Although the main effect of treatment compared to control was insignificant yet marginally positive, we did identify statistically significant exploratory results for some subgroups.⁴

Findings for our mobilization program are similar to our registration program, described above. We see evidence of a statistically significant and positive lift of **0.53 pp (p < 0.05)** on turnout for Black women in our treatment group when compared to the control, especially those under the age of 35 (see Figure X). In particular, Black women

Figure 8: Mobilization RCT Selected Exploratory Results - Black Audiences

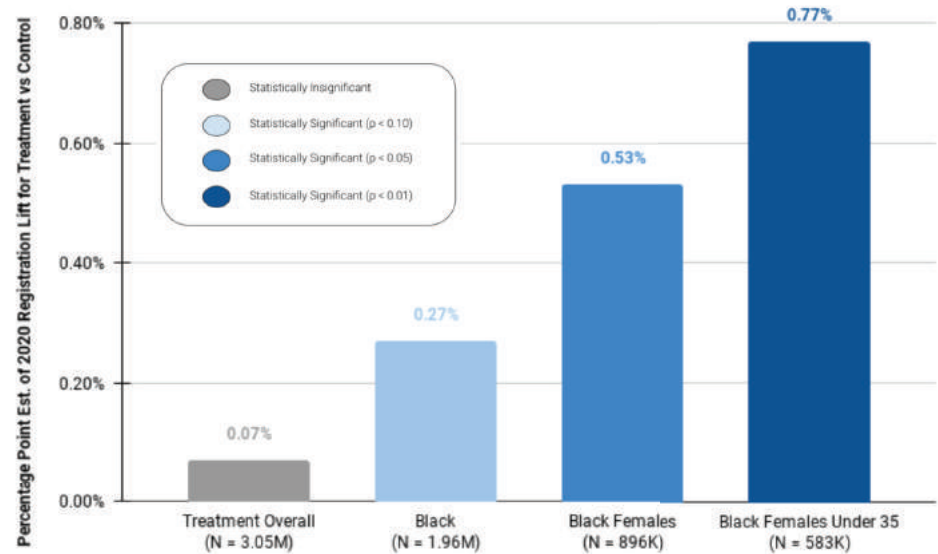
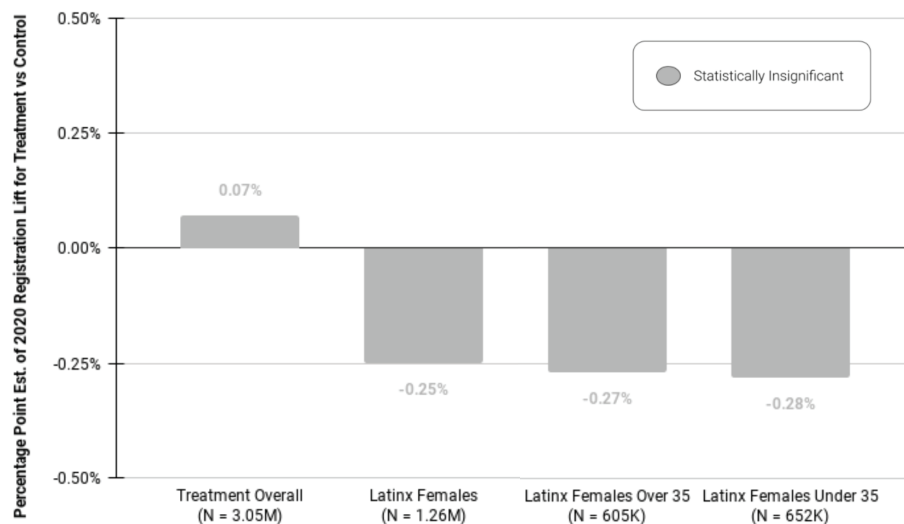


Figure 9: Mobilization RCT Selected Exploratory Results - Latinx Audiences



under the age of 35 in Wisconsin and Florida saw the largest percent lift in turnout with a **7.28 pp (p < 0.05)** and **1.50 pp (p < 0.05)** effect size, respectively. We did not find any statistically significant results for Black men or Black women over 35.

While we observed positive lift amongst Black women in our target audiences, which suggests that our mobilization campaign reached them effectively, we also observed some evidence of possible negative movement with Latinx women⁵ (see Figure Y). Overall these findings

⁴ Subgroup analyses are exploratory. Results should be considered as hypothesis generating and interpreted with caution. The main subgroup findings reported are generally supported by theory and interaction testing, and similar patterns are observed across multiple distinct experiments for the main subgroup differences identified. However, subgroup analysis does present a significant risk of including both false positive and false negative results due to multiple interactions and limited statistical power.

⁵ Latinx women were included as program targets in Arizona, Florida, North Carolina, and Texas. In Arizona and Texas our program targeted only Latinx women, while we targeted both Black voters (of all genders) and Latinx women in Florida and North Carolina.

were directionally negative but not statistically significant, but we did observe statistically significant and negative lift of **-0.52 pp (p < 0.05)** among Latinx women in Texas specifically, and negative but not statistically significant impacts among Latinx women in Arizona. In contrast, results for Latinx women in our other target states (FL & NC) were marginally positive. These findings may indicate that some Latinx population subgroups or Latinx populations in different parts of the country responded to our program differently and presents significant opportunities for future research and testing.

See the full table of statistically significant results for all demographic subgroups in the Appendix.

Cost Evaluation

In addition to evaluating our program's impact, we also wanted to evaluate its costs—per new registration and per vote.

The Expand the Electorate general election program cost about \$10.1M: \$5.3M for the registration program and \$4.8-M for the mobilization program.⁶ Allocating these costs directly to program results, however, is complicated. Evaluating costs using a few different approaches can help us better understand both the impact of our program and the value and limitations of various metrics.

Evaluating Costs Using RCT Results

There are two metrics commonly used to understand program costs using RCT results. “Successful” impacts are people from our treatment groups whom we know took our action: registering to vote for the registration program or voting for the mobilization program. “Attributable” impacts are the people from our treatment groups whom we believe took our action specifically due to our program. We estimate attributable impacts using [RCT Estimated Lift %] * [Size of Treatment Universe].

In evaluating the RCT-based cost results, it's important to understand the complications added by our program design, media approach, and data limitations. We used a large amount of non-first-person media targeting to reach our intended audiences. This means we spent a significant share of our program (and budget) engaging with people who were our intended audience but who were not on our voter file lists or were not findable after loading voter file lists into platforms. We also likely engaged with some targets outside of our intended universe (like those in non-target states or of other racial groups), but using a wide range of tactics was necessary to effectively find and reach our audiences, even if we were over-inclusive as a result.



⁶This includes direct and indirect costs of the Expand the Electorate program through the 2020 General Election.

Some ways these issues impacted RCT evaluation of our programs:

Registration

- » Of the estimated 4M Black and Latina unregistered eligible voters in our target states in early 2020⁷, only 2M were included on a commercial voter file. Knowing the voter file only included a subset of our unregistered targets, only some of our media spend could go toward chasing this voter-file-identified-list, with other spending dedicated to non-first-party targeting.
- » As described in our registration results, voter file data limitations significantly hampered our ability to identify outcomes for a large portion of our universe.

Mobilization

- » Due to limitations of in-platform first-party targeting and matching, we relied heavily on non first-party tactics in our mobilization program to give us a better chance of reaching our intended targets.
- » Consequently, our “successful” and “attributable” cost estimates are significantly higher than the actual costs of individuals who voted due to our program

	REGISTRATION	MOBILIZATION
Total Program Costs ⁸	\$5.3M	\$4.8M
RCT Treatment Costs	\$5.3M	\$2.9M ⁹
RCT Treatment Universe	3.2M	1.8M

	REGISTRATION	MOBILIZATION
“Successful” Impact	Treatment Universe: Total Observed New Registrants	Treatment Universe: Total Observed Voters
Successful Results	36,000 (1.98%)	964,000 (30.27%)
Cost per Successful	\$146.86	\$3.00
“Attributable” Impact	Treatment Universe: Estimated New Registrants Who Registered Because of Our Program (Registration RCT Lift)	Treatment Universe: Estimated Voters Who Voted Because of Our Program (Mobilization RCT Lift)
Attributable Results	557 (0.03%)	2,229 (0.07%)
Cost per Attributable	\$9,561.09	\$1,299.33

Figure 10: ETE General Election Program RCT Cost Results

⁷ Estimate based on third-party analysis of voter file and Census data

⁸ Costs include direct ad spend and allocated indirect program costs (staff, technology, and other overhead)

⁹ A total of \$1.9M of the mobilization program budget was spent on vote-by-mail chase activities which targeted people who were not included in our mobilization RCT treatment universe.

In addition to the RCT-informed cost analysis described above, we can also assess our program costs by activity we witnessed—people clicking through our ads and taking actions on ACRONYM CITIZEN websites. This covers all activity generated by our programs, not just activity of those in our original voter file lists. These

costs better reflect the full number of people who engaged with our programs, however, we're unable to exclude visitors whose demographics didn't match the program's targeting.

	REGISTRATION	MOBILIZATION
Total Program Costs	\$5.3M	\$4.8M ¹⁰
User Sessions / Click-Throughs	Total User Sessions Initiated by Clicking Through ETE Registration Ad	Total User Sessions Initiated by Clicking Through ETE Mobilization Ad
Total Sessions	810,000	445,000
Cost per Session	\$6.57	\$10.68
User Form Submissions First conversion event	User Submits Registration Check Form	User Submits Street Address to Make-a-Plan-to-Vote (MAPTV) Widget
Total Form Submissions	138,000	65,000
Cost per Form Submission	\$38.72	\$72.82
User Final Actions Final conversion event that can be observed on ACRONYM CITIZEN	User is Not Found Registered, Clicks Through to SoS or Downloads Mail Registration Filled PDF Form	User Completes a Vote-By-Mail or In-Person Voting Plan
Total Final Actions	65,000	25,000
Cost per Final Action	\$82.40	\$187.88

Figure 11: ETE General Election Program ACRONYM CITIZEN KPI Cost Results

¹⁰ All mobilization program costs are included here, as VBM Chase results are included in the KPIs

Evaluating Costs Using ACRONYM CITIZEN Registration Program PII

One additional way we can evaluate cost is for people who executed registration checks on ACRONYM Citizen and then registered or updated their registration (known as roll-changing registration) as a result.¹¹ We didn't require names to make a voting plan in our mobilization program, so this analysis is limited to our registration program.

Similar to the registration RCT analysis, analyzing the submitted personal information (PII) of our site visitors

is challenging. A significant number of individuals who checked their registration on our sites cannot be definitively matched to a voter file record as either registered or unregistered. Despite these challenges, we were able to affirmatively match and identify over 15,500 people who were checked as unregistered on our websites and subsequently became registered, as well as 5,500 previously registered individuals who changed or updated their registration information after checking as unregistered at their current address.¹²

	TOTAL ROLL-CHANGING REGISTRATIONS	NEW REGISTRATIONS	ROLL-CHANGING PREVIOUSLY REGISTERED
Registration Dates Before 2020 General Election State Deadline			
Registrations	16,100	12,200	3,900
Cost per Registration	\$330.92		
Registration Dates before 11/3/2020			
Registrations			
Cost per Registration	20,400	15,100	5,300
All Registration Dates			
Registrations	21,200	15,600	5,500
Cost per Registration	\$251.59		

Figure 12: ETE General Election Program ACRONYM CITIZEN PII Cost Results

¹¹ Our program roll-changing registration results are currently being evaluated for an industry-wide voter registration report, with results expected in late 2021. In the interim, we have conducted our own preliminary analysis, which we will validate or update once the third-party evaluation results become available.

¹² A Registration counts and costs will be updated to reflect third-party evaluation results once they are released (expected late 2021).

CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

We were able to demonstrate statistically significant lift with Black audiences and uncovered new best practices for executing the work.

In scope and scale, this program was one of the largest of its kind ever undertaken. Our novel approach to voter registration and mobilization advertising demonstrated that longer-term campaigns with culturally competent creative can be extremely effective in registering and mobilizing communities of color. We were able to demonstrate statistically significant lift with Black audiences and uncovered new best practices for executing the work.

What our testing and program work have made clear is that more investment and research is needed to identify new efficiencies and methods for effectively scaling this type of work online. Particularly more work is needed to understand these three areas:



Through the Voter Formation Project, we are committed to continuing this work in 2021 and beyond. We aim to completely change the way we register and mobilize under-represented communities online and plan to experiment and share our learnings along the way.

01

Which messaging can positively impact increased voter registration and voting for southwestern Latina communities.

02

How Spanish-language content can impact our voter registration and mobilization efforts.

03

How more locally-influenced content can drive positive impacts in the states that we work in.

APPENDIX

Table of Registration RCT Statistically Significant Exploratory Subgroup

Percentage Point Effect	p value	Grouped By	Summary
+ 0.08	< 0.10	Race	Black (n = 1,069,844)
+ 0.16	< 0.05	Race x Gender	Black Females (n = 468,241)
+ 0.23	< 0.01	Race x Gender x Age	Black Females Over 35 (n = 274,001)
- 0.33	< 0.10	Race x Gender x Age	Black Males Under 35 (n = 70,947)
+ 0.17	< 0.10	State x Race	NC Black (n = 300,335)
+ 0.23	< 0.10	State x Race x Gender	NC Black Females (n = 134,308)
- 0.38	< 0.05	State x Race x Gender	PA Black Males (n = 60,685)

Table of Mobilization RCT Statistically Significant Exploratory Subgroup

Percentage Point Effect	p value	Grouped By	Summary
+ 0.27	< 0.10	Race	Black (n = 1,960,142)
+ 0.53	< 0.05	Race x Gender	Black Females (n = 896,169)
+ 0.77	< 0.01	Race x Gender x Age	Black Females Under 35 (n = 583,236)
+ 0.50	< 0.05	State	FL (n = 893,822)
+ 0.51	< 0.10	State x Gender	FL Females (n = 598,554)
+ 0.68	< 0.05	State x Race	FL Black (n = 547,867)
+ 0.93	< 0.05	State x Race x Gender	FL Black Females (n = 252,599)
+ 1.50	< 0.01	State x Race x Gender x Age	FL Black Females Under 35 (n = 146,242)
+ 0.71	< 0.10	State x Gender	NC Females (n = 252,521)
+ 1.02	< 0.10	State x Race x Gender x Age	NC Black Females Under 35 (n = 122,691)
- 0.84 ¹⁵	< 0.10	State	PA (n = 183,698) - Black Voters Only
- 0.52 ¹⁶	< 0.05	State	TX (n = 744,613) - Latinx Females Only
- 0.68	< 0.05	State x Race x Gender x Age	TX Latinx Females Over 35 (n = 362,861)
+ 7.28	< 0.05	State x Race x Gender x Age	WI Black Females Under 35 (n = 4,422)
+ 0.45	< 0.05	Urbanicity	U5 - Highly dense urban areas (n = 1,219,840)

¹⁵ Only Black voters were targeted in PA¹⁶ Only Latinx female voters were targeted in TX



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