Vote Rev 2018 Experiment
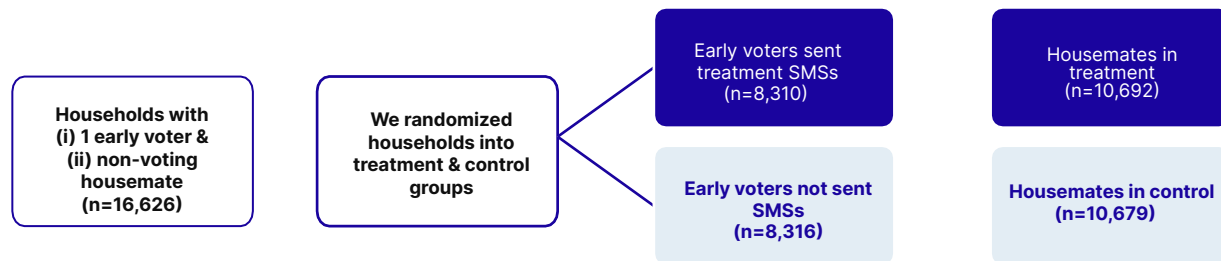
Do vote tripling SMSs spark Democrats to mobilize friends?

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RCT Overview

Part-way through early voting, we identified Texas Dems who voted early and had 1+ housemates who hadn't yet voted. We sent a random half of those early voters vote tripling SMSs to see if it prompted them to mobilize their housemates.

Households with (i) 1 early voter & (ii) non-voting housemate (n=16,626)

We randomized households into treatment & control groups

Early voters sent treatment SMSs (n=8,310)

Early voters not sent SMSs (n=8,316)

Housemates in treatment (n=10,692)

Housemates in control (n=10,679)

Note: There are more early voters than housemates because some early voters had 2+ housemates who hadn't yet voted

Timeline

- In the 2018 general election, early voting was available in Texas from Monday Oct 22 – Friday Nov 2
- On Monday Oct 29, we pulled a list of Dems who had already voted and lived with 1+ Dems who hadn't yet voted
- On Thursday Nov 1, we sent all the early voters randomized to our treatment group a vote tripling SMS
- On Monday Nov 5, we sent the treatment group a reminder SMS that the next day was Election Day
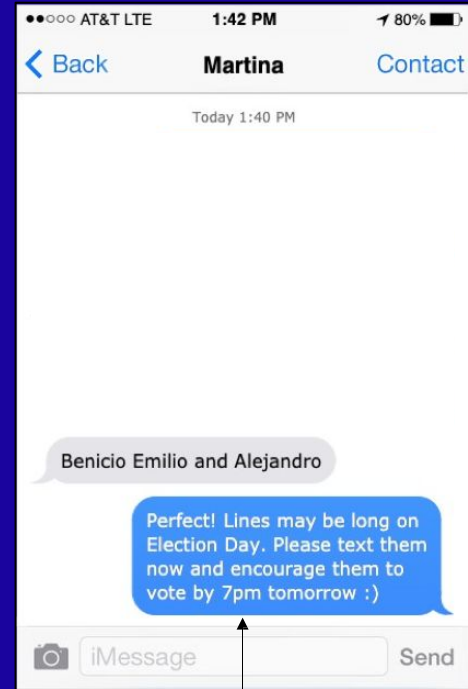
Phase 1 treatment: 1-3 vote tripling SMSs (11/1/18)
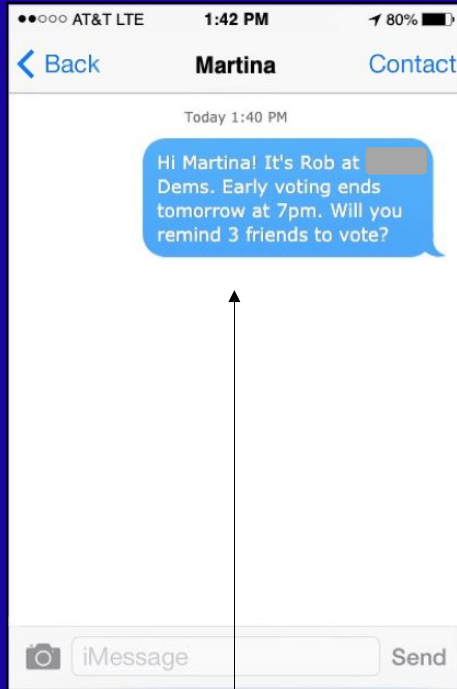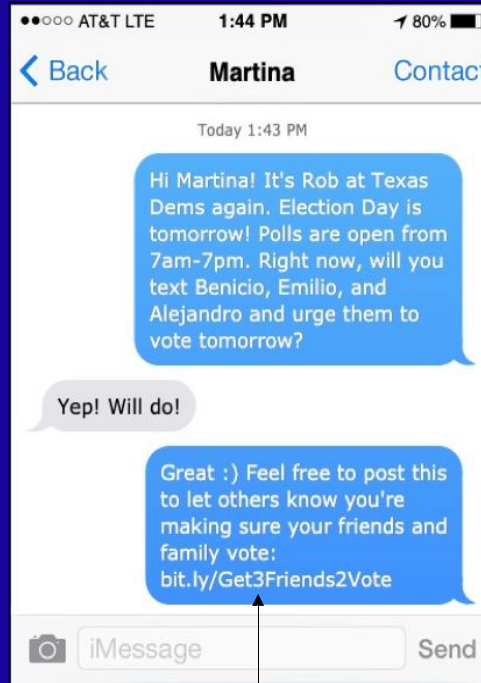

Sent to entire treatment group
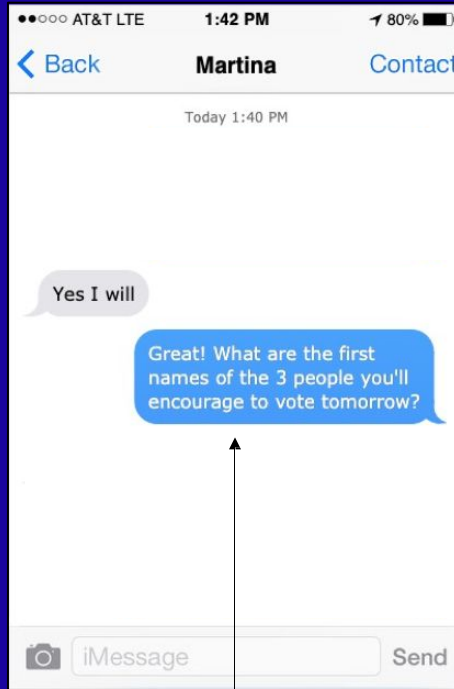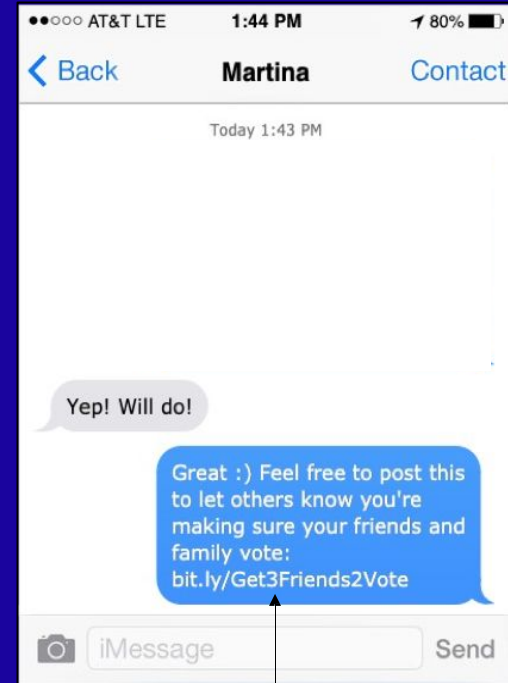
Sent to all who said 'yes'-5%

Sent to all who gave names-1%

Phase 2 treatment: 1-2 vote tripling SMSs (11/5/18)

If the recipient did not share names of friends on 11/1/18, this sentence said "Right now, will you text 3 friends and urge them to vote tomorrow?"
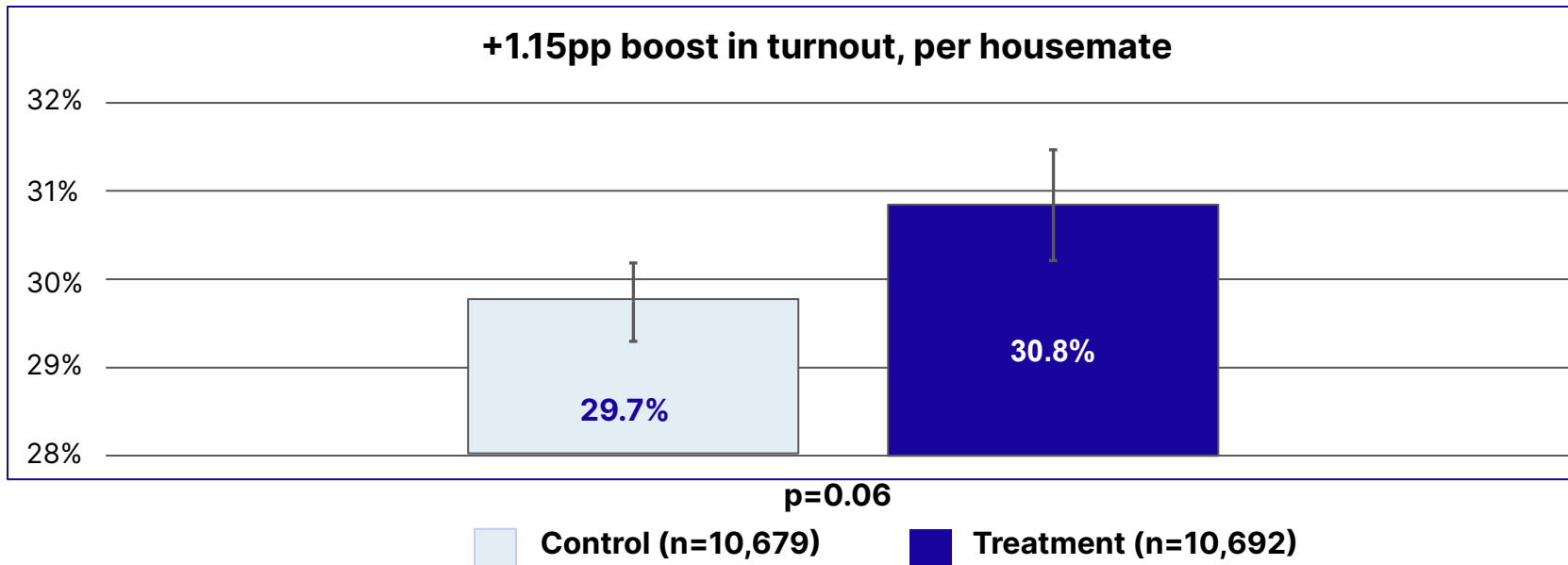

Sent to treatment group targets who didn't opt out after 11/1/18 SMS

Sent to all who replied positively

Vote tripling SMSs boosted turnout

+1.15pp boost in turnout, per housemate

Control (n=10,679) — 29.7%
Treatment (n=10,692) — 30.8%
p=0.06

For two reasons, this finding estimates the "floor effect" of vote tripling. First, we only measure the boost in turnout of housemates, which is a subset of the peers our targets mobilized. Our anecdotal observation is that vote triplers mobilize non-housemates 75% of the time. Second, this is the intention-to-treat effect. When campaigns implement vote tripling, they only send reminder SMSs to people who opt-in. Thus, a treatment-on-treated analysis would more accurately estimate the impact of the vote tripling programs campaigns utilize. See Appendix 2 for a discussion of the estimated TOT effects.
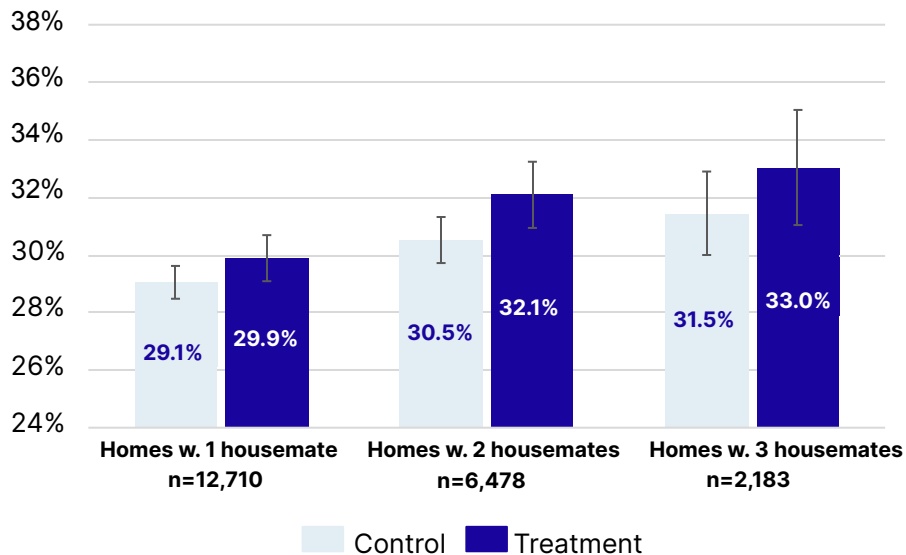
Cost per net Democratic vote=$27.50

Cost		*Votes yielded*	
SMS sent	25,645	Turnout in control	29.7%
Cost/SMS	$0.05	Turnout in treatment	30.8%
Cost of SMSs & staff time	$1,594	Total votes yielded	116
Cost Per Vote = $13.75			
We assume a 75% partisan lean; yielding 50% net Dem votes			
Cost per Net Democratic Vote = $27.50			

Appendix 1:
Triplers appear to boost turnout of several friends

Turnout rate, per housemate

	Control	Treatment
Homes w. 1 housemate n=12,710	29.1%	29.9%
Homes w. 2 housemates n=6,478	30.5%	32.1%
Homes w. 3 housemates n=2,183	31.5%	33.0%

Control   Treatment

If triplers only affected 1 friend, we'd see the largest difference in treatment vs. control group turnout rates in households with just one housemate. After that, we'd see turnout differences diminish as the number of housemates increases. As we see here, that's not the case.

Additional votes, per household

	Treatment
Homes w. 1 housemate n=12,710	0.008
Homes w. 2 housemates n=3,239	0.031
Homes w. 3+ housemates n=677	0.042
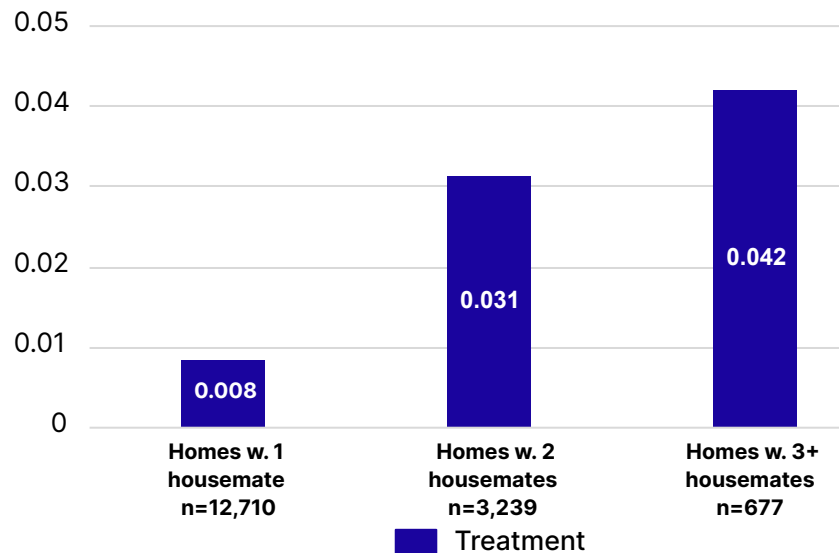
Treatment

If triplers only affected 1 friend, we'd see no difference in votes/household between households with 1 housemates and households with more housemates. As we see here, that's not the case.

Appendix 2:
Estimated treatment-on-the-treated (TOT) effects

	Low Estimate	Medium Estimate	High Estimate
ITT	1.1	2	4
Compliance rate (assumed)	40%	20%	10%
TOT	2.75	10	40

We estimate that compliance rate in this RCT, the rate at which targets contacted their housemates, could have anywhere between 10% to 40%. Thus for an ITT of 1.1 percentage points, which is the estimated effect we found in this RCT rounded down, with a compliance rate of 40% the TOT would have been 2.75 percentage points. If the ITT had been as high as 4 percentage points and the compliance rate as low as 10%, the TOT would have been 40 percentage points.