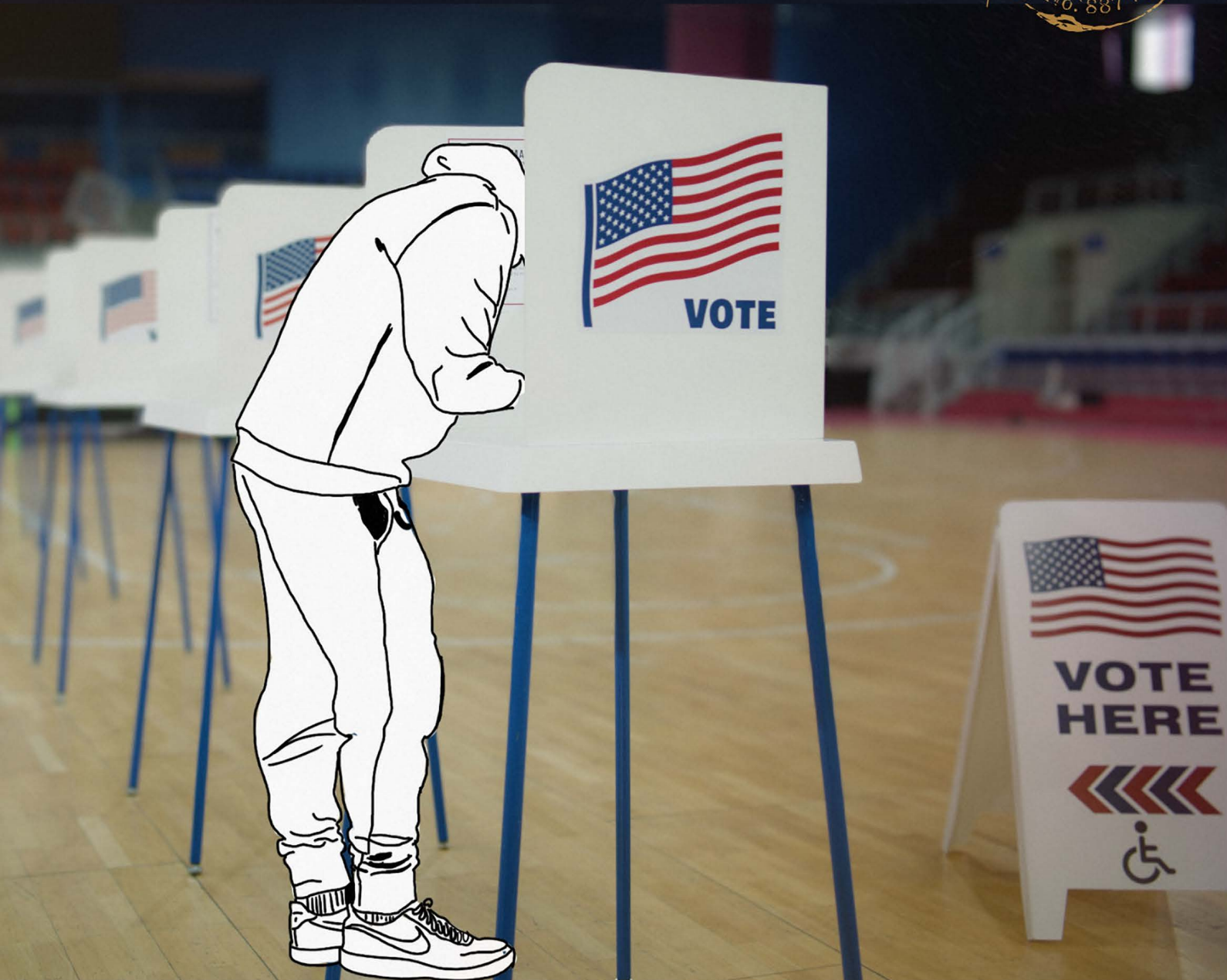


From the Block to the Ballot 3.0

Measuring the Effectiveness of Innovative Mailers



Acknowledgements

This report was co-authored by MacKenzie Farrington-Youngblood, MNJRC Research Manager, Dr. Katie Remington Cunningham, MNJRC Research Director, and Dr. Robert Stewart, University of Maryland. We are immensely grateful to the advisory team that met with us and supported the design of the mailers. We are also grateful for the support from MNJRC Research Intern Sam Dahlberg for his support on the draft. Our reports at the MNJRC are designed by the talented Paulina Buitrago whose deep skills bring the work to life! Paulina also designed the final mailers we sent.

Finally, this work would not have been possible without generous funding from the Joyce Foundation and Arnold Ventures, foundations committed to building safe communities and minimizing injustice.

Executive Summary

The Minnesota Justice Research Center (MNJRC) conducted an experimental study to determine whether mailing different volumes of postcard mailers to formerly disenfranchised voters would increase their participation in the 2024 election. While the postcards alone did not significantly boost turnout, the broader landscape of voter engagement efforts appears to have had a positive impact on this historically excluded population.

In March 2023, Minnesota restored voting rights to over 50,000 residents who were living in the community but previously couldn't vote because they were on felony probation or supervised release. The 2024 election was the first major election where these newly eligible voters could participate. Voting rights restoration is crucial for democracy. When millions of people impacted by the criminal legal system cannot vote, policymakers design policies without their perspectives. And this exclusion disproportionately affects communities of color.

We sent mailers to Minnesotans with past felony convictions, dividing them into four groups: a control group of 24,000 people who received no postcards, and three treatment groups who received either one, three, or six postcards (24,000 people each). The postcards were designed in collaboration with formerly disenfranchised Minnesotans and included messages like "No longer about us without us," along with information about voting eligibility and how to vote. Postcards were mailed between October 16-28, 2024.

Across all experimental groups - whether people received no postcards, one postcard, or six postcards - turnout rates were statistically similar. The postcards alone did not have a measurable effect on whether people voted. But overall turnout was extremely encouraging. Despite the lack of effect from our specific intervention, **25.8% of formerly disenfranchised people in our sample voted in 2024**. This included 31.3% of those who had already completed their sentences (already eligible voters) and 17.4% of those newly eligible due to the 2023 law change (those still on community supervision).

We found that prior registration was the strongest predictor of voting behavior. People who had been registered to vote at any point in the past decade were far more likely to vote: 58.7% of previously registered people voted compared to only 6.4% of those who hadn't recently registered.

The saturation of efforts and a culture of voting in Minnesota may have made a significant difference, too. At least six community organizations and two state agencies conducted extensive voter outreach efforts in 2024, including mailings, phone banking, and door-to-door canvassing. For example, Minnesota Voice - a coalition of organizations

“working toward permanent social, racial, and economic justice by increasing civic engagement and voter participation across the state” - reported reaching over 30,000 newly eligible voters and documented a 19.8% turnout rate among this population. The saturation of coordinated efforts, rather than any single intervention, likely contributed to the relatively strong turnout among a population that historically votes at much lower rates. In addition, Minnesota consistently ranks first or second nationally in voter turnout and has a strong “culture of voting.” Previous effective mailer studies were conducted in states with much lower turnout rates.

Finally, simple postcards may not be compelling enough in an era when Americans receive enormous volumes of junk mail. We found that *less than one quarter of a percent* of the mailers we shipped had scanned QR codes showing engagement.

The overall results suggest that direct, personal, coordinated, multi-organizational voter engagement efforts can successfully mobilize formerly disenfranchised populations. Rather than relying on a single and somewhat impersonal tactic, communities should invest in:



- ◆ Comprehensive outreach strategies involving multiple organizations and methods (especially more personal approaches like phone, door-knocking, and deep canvassing)
- ◆ Early voter registration efforts that target new voters, given that prior registration was the strongest predictor of turnout
- ◆ Partnerships between community organizations and government agencies to create saturation effects
- ◆ Credible messengers with lived experience in the criminal legal system

The work of expanding democracy continues. While postcards alone may not be the answer, the collective efforts of many organizations working together show promise for not just opening the door for voters who have been systematically excluded from our democracy, but actually welcoming them in.

Introduction

“The vote is precious. It is almost sacred. It is the most powerful non-violent tool we have in a democracy.” –John Lewis

True system transformation requires having a say in who represents us as decision-makers in the criminal legal system - who better to cast a vote for a judge than those who have experienced their delivery of justice. But voting is not a passive process. Eligible voters need to be mobilized to exercise their right to vote.

Voter mobilization is complex and often entails activities like canvassing (e.g., in-person engagement and conversations through door-knocking or street outreach), phone banking (e.g., cold-calling eligible voters or sending texts), sending direct mailers, or running paid ads. Canvassing requires large amounts of time and resources for a limited number of conversations; phone banking takes less time and money, but the majority of phone bank calls are disconnected numbers and non-pickups; mailers can be expensive, and while research shows they can improve voting likelihood, they often don't have as big an impact as the other methods. This is for voter mobilization with the general population. Much less is known about effective voter mobilization among formerly disenfranchised voters - those who have had their voting rights taken from them.

Typical voter mobilization efforts don't target formerly incarcerated populations, and little research has been done to understand what efforts are effective to mobilize system-impacted people to vote. At MNJRC, we believe expanding democracy is critical to transforming the criminal legal system. When people impacted by the system are unable to vote, policymakers design justice-related policies without considering their perspectives and voices. By systematically excluding millions who the criminal legal system has impacted, we perpetuate systems that fail to promote true community safety through fairness, equity, accountability, and restoration.

Importantly, formerly disenfranchised voters are not a political monolith, and they represent diverse viewpoints across the political spectrum. Their exclusion isn't about partisan advantage; it's about fundamental democratic participation and the right to have a voice in the policies that govern their lives.

“From the Block to the Ballot 3.0” builds on two past pilot programs that demonstrated the power of targeted outreach to formerly disenfranchised voters in Minnesota. These previous door-knocking and phone-banking efforts showed promising results. Therefore, this project explored the impact of mailers – designed in collaboration with previously disenfranchised Minnesotans – on the voting behavior of those with past felony records, many of whom recently had their right to vote restored.

The Minnesota Justice Research Center (MNJRC) is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization dedicated to transforming the criminal legal system through rigorous and community-cen-

tered research, education, and policy development. We connect research to tangible action by partnering with communities to develop the information and tools needed to create a criminal legal system that truly delivers justice.

Background

VOTER DISENFRANCHISEMENT

When we think about voting behavior, we generally consider two factors: the decision or motivation to vote, and the ability or access to voting. The number of Americans who did not vote in the 2024 presidential election increased significantly from the 2020 presidential election, with over 89 million Americans not voting (about 36% of the country's voting-eligible population), up from 34% in 2020. In Minnesota, 725,000 (about 24% of the voting-eligible population) did not participate in the 2024 election, up from 20% in 2020 ([UF Election Lab](#)).

One of the most significant barriers to voting is disenfranchisement – the systematic exclusion of people with felony convictions from voting. Voter disenfranchisement has deep roots in American history, with many disenfranchisement laws dating back to the post-Reconstruction era in the late 1800s. Today, 48 U.S. states ban people with felony convictions from voting in three different ways: while incarcerated in prison, while on probation or parole, and sometimes permanently, even after completing their sentences.

In 2024, 4 million Americans (1.7% of the voting-eligible population) could not vote due to felony convictions. Disenfranchisement disproportionately affects communities of color. For example, 4.5% of African Americans of voting age are disenfranchised, more than triple the rate of non-African Americans (1.3%) ([Uggen et. al, 2024](#)). Beyond legal disenfranchisement lies “de facto disenfranchisement,” which occurs when eligible voters don’t participate due to confusion about their rights, fear of prosecution, or misinformation. In fact, many Minnesotans who never lost their right to vote or have completed supervision still believe they cannot vote despite the recent law change. However, recent efforts, including our previous two pilot efforts, show that justice-impacted voters can be receptive to civic engagement efforts.

Since 2020, eleven states have expanded voting rights to people on probation, parole, or post-sentence, demonstrating growing recognition that civic participation aids successful reintegration. In March of 2023, the Minnesota Legislature restored voting rights to over 50,000 Minnesotans who were living in the community but were disenfranchised at that time because they were serving felony probation or supervised release. However, the law change only re-enfranchised people living in the community; it did not restore voting rights to people in jail or prison serving a felony sentence. A large share of Minnesotans - 9,500 as of this year - are unable to participate in our democracy, and this disenfranchisement disproportionately impacts people of color, mirroring the disproportionate impact of the criminal legal system ([Uggen et al., 2024](#)).

While the restoration of voting rights in 2023 was a significant step forward, the work isn't finished. We must address both legal barriers and the ongoing effects of misinformation that suppress participation among eligible voters.

PREVIOUS EFFORTS

✦ **From the Block to the Ballot 1.0**

Our first pilot effort, [From the Block to the Ballot 1.0](#) (B2B 1.0), sought to explore best practices to educate and mobilize formerly disenfranchised voters in Minnesota leading up to the 2022 election. Over the four-week pilot effort led by community partners at T.O.N.E. U.P. and in partnership with WILD, staff and volunteers contacted about 13,000 eligible voters in Minnesota who had been disenfranchised because of a felony conviction at some point since 2004 via phone call and text.

This pilot was a powerful lesson in what is possible when community members call and text formerly disenfranchised community members to discuss voting. We found a slight increase in the likelihood of voting among individuals we reached compared to those we did not reach. The pilot also provided powerful insight into the importance of prioritizing high-quality lists, using rigorous and targeted documentation systems, and investing in training volunteers and staff. All in all, we demonstrated that phone calls had a promising impact on the voting behavior of formerly disenfranchised voters in Minnesota.

✦ **From the Block to the Ballot 2.0**

Months after Restore the Vote went into effect, in the fall of 2023, we launched our second pilot effort, [From the Block to the Ballot 2.0](#) (B2B 2.0). Still in partnership with T.O.N.E. U.P. and WILD, we decided to focus locally and prioritize in-person relationship-building to expand mobilization efforts in the local elections. We also piloted a brand new tool called OurVoice, a phone app developed by the Florida Rights Restoration Coalition through which staff and volunteers could seamlessly make calls or follow doorknocking routes.

We found that there is power in the relational process of B2B 2.0, but it is challenging to document in-depth. We observed that training matters for volunteers to prepare them for more relational and empathetic engagement on the phones and doors. Ultimately, we found it is the who and the how that made this effort distinct: Its leadership and participants were credible messengers with criminal legal system experience. We also used a very targeted list in the OurVoice app, and the outreach prioritized a relational approach. Those who had a conversation with our team were almost twice as likely to vote; this relational approach is powerful and effective, but hard to scale.

WHY MAILERS IN 2024?

We are committed to exploring options that best engage formerly disenfranchised Minnesotans in exercising their right to vote. In the 2022 election, we showed the power of statewide phone calls; in 2023, we showed the local and relational power of connecting with Minnesotans on the doors. In addition to phone calls and door-knocking, campaigns often use political mailers to reach their target population, yet not much is known about using mailers in this population, nor the ideal mailer frequency to impact voter turnout. Therefore, we focused the 2024 project on postcard mailers.*

✦ Voter Engagement via Mailers

Research has demonstrated that both message content and mailer frequency can lead to increased voter turnout, with the positive effect typically peaking around 5-7 mailers for the general population (Gerber et al., 2003; Green & Gerber, 2019; Green & Zelizer, 2017). Does this translate to the population of eligible voters with felony records? Formerly disenfranchised voters are less likely to vote compared to the general population, which may suggest that a mailer strategy will be relatively less effective. However, standard get-out-the-vote efforts use databases such as NGP Van or NationBuilder to access state-level voter file data (Igielnik et al., 2018). People who have never registered to vote or rarely voted – which includes a disproportionately large portion of those with criminal legal system involvement – are often not included in those databases. Thus, our target population likely receives less election-related or campaign mail than those in the general population, which may result in a traditional mailer-based voter engagement strategy that is relatively more effective.

Recent promising field experiments in states such as New Jersey, North Carolina, and Connecticut have tested the effect of a single contact – sending a single mailer, often while varying message content – on voter registration and turnout (Doleac et al., 2022; Gerber et al., 2014; White et al., 2025). In 2019, New Jersey expanded voting rights to individuals with past criminal convictions, presenting a unique opportunity to engage a group often overlooked by traditional political campaigns. Ariel White and colleagues sent one of two mailers - one with registration information and one with registration information *and* a personal letter from a formerly incarcerated organizer with his story about voting - to individuals who recently had their right to vote restored. They found that the mailer with a story had a statistically significant effect on voter registration - that is, the group of voters who received the letter was more likely to register beyond just chance. This study highlights the importance of using trusted, credible messengers to share information about political (re-)engagement and to tap the collective identity of system-impacted individuals when developing outreach messaging.

In North Carolina, researchers tested whether mail-based outreach could increase voter registration and turnout among individuals with past felony convictions using a basic mailer, a few different versions that left out resources like registration and eli-

*Note: Throughout this report, we use the terms postcards, mailers, and postcard mailers interchangeably.

gibility requirements (which didn't have an impact), and a mailer with an additional, motivational paragraph about how voting can help determine criminal justice policy and civil rights. They found the addition did not appear to increase voter registration. However, receiving any mailer increased voter registration and turnout but only for those with past felony convictions (Doleac et al., 2022). This research suggests that some formerly disenfranchised individuals want to exercise their civic right and that a simple mailer intervention can effectively increase voter registration and turnout in this group.

Finally, researchers in Connecticut partnered with the Connecticut Secretary of State's office to test whether a simple intervention could improve voting participation. The research team mailed one of two letters - one with specific information to alleviate concerns a person with a felony status might have regarding voting - to a randomly selected group of formerly incarcerated individuals, informing them of their eligibility to vote. The letters that emphasized voter eligibility and registration significantly increased voter registration and turnout compared to eligible formerly disenfranchised individuals who did not receive any mailing, with no difference between the two types of letters. This study highlights that targeted, low-cost "bland" outreach efforts can meaningfully reduce the political disengagement associated with incarceration and can help (re-)integrate returning individuals into the political process.

Based on previous research, we know that simple mailers can significantly impact voter registration and turnout. We also see that innovative strategies to build targeted lists of formerly disenfranchised voters while including justice-impacted individuals in the creation of messaging are key to an effective mailer strategy. In this current study, we wanted to expand our knowledge in this area and test through an experimental approach (see, Gerber & Green, 2017) whether increasing the **volume** of mailers to eligible voters would lead to higher turnout rates in the 2024 election in Minnesota.

✦ Minnesota Context

Minnesota has what has been characterized as a "culture of voting" (Minnesota Secretary of State, 2022), as demonstrated by regularly ranking as the highest or second-highest voter turnout state in at least the last seven presidential elections. Moreover, Minnesota is relatively voter-friendly as voters can register up to and on election day, and the state passed election reforms that established automatic registration and allowed voters to opt-in to the permanent absentee voter list (Hailperin, 2023). However, Minnesotans with felony convictions had to complete their felony sentences before they were eligible to vote until Minnesota passed the Restore the Vote Act in 2023. Although Restore the Vote went into effect in July 2023, the fall 2024 election was the first major election since nearly 50,000 Minnesotans had their voting rights restored.

At the same time, Minnesota might also be described as having a "culture of community supervision." Minnesota's criminal legal system has prioritized community super-

vision over incarceration for decades; the state consistently ranks in the lowest quintile in incarceration rates but the highest quintile in community supervision rates (Carson & Klurow, 2023; Kaeble, 2023). Furthermore, these community sentences can be lengthy, with a statewide average of 64 months in cases sentenced from 2012-2017 (Stewart, 2019).

Thus, Minnesota's simultaneous cultures of voting and community supervision present a compelling opportunity to learn about voter turnout and engagement among formerly disenfranchised people.

From the Block to the Ballot 3.0

LANDSCAPE OF ENGAGEMENT EFFORTS

In the fall of 2024, many organizations and groups conducted outreach efforts leading up to the election. In Table 1, we map out the various efforts our research team found in conducting outreach to organizations in the Twin Cities region. This demonstrates both the potential saturation of contacts that eligible voters may have received and allows us to explore what external forces may have come together to encourage registration and voting.

From what we could gather, none of these efforts were explicitly research-based and thus did not include a "control group" to more accurately measure effectiveness and isolate what approaches work best. Furthermore, we only found one group that clearly [documented their efforts](#) in terms of both reach and impact, [Minnesota Voice](#). Using their data, Minnesota Voice - a coalition of organizations "working toward permanent social, racial, and economic justice by increasing civic engagement and voter participation across the state" - reported a turnout of 19.8% among newly re-enfranchised voters in the 2024 election. In addition, they conducted outreach (mail, phone, and door-knocking with partners) to over 30,000 Minnesotans currently on probation or parole but newly eligible to vote.

Table 1. Snapshot of Voter Engagement with Formerly Disenfranchised Voters in MN in 2024*

ORGANIZATION/GROUP	OVERVIEW OF EFFORT(S)	REACH
Office of the Minnesota Secretary of State (SOS)	• Sent mailer • Visited correctional facilities in person for educational outreach • Attended and tabled at Transition Fairs • Handful of “RTV-specific” events (e.g., presented to a recovery org in Richfield, MN) • Held media events • Partnered with the DOC to create and distribute voting information • Attended and presented at Transition Coalition meetings • Attended and presented at Parole Officer meetings • General partnerships with targeted orgs (e.g. Better Futures)	State-wide
Minnesota Department of Corrections (DOC)	• Targeted mailers and broadcast messaging through both email and text re: RTV • “Signage in the lobbies” of correctional facilities • Individual conversations and outreach via officers/agents	State-wide
Minnesota Voice (MN State Voices Coalition)	• Targeted mail pieces (3 rounds) • Phone and text outreach • Door knocking • Partnerships with other orgs (e.g., SOS, TONE UP)	State-wide
TONE UP	• Voter mobilization efforts through door-knocking and phone banking	Twin cities
League of Women Voters	• Partnered with SOS	State-wide + rural MN focus
ACLU	• Conducted “Reclaim the Vote” campaign • Held several community events (e.g., Protecting Voting Rights in MN, GOTV events) • Launched Smart Justice Fellowship	State-wide
ISAIAH MN	• RTV event at All Square	Twin Cities
Justice-Impacted Individuals Voting Effectively (JIIVE)	• Educational workshops about voting rights and process • Voter registration drives • Information campaigns: distributed informational materials via mail, social media, and community events • Personal outreach, including phone calls and community visits	Twin Cities

***Note:** The table above does not represent a comprehensive landscape but instead offers a snapshot of many of the key efforts that groups in and around the Twin Cities have led to increase turnout for formerly disenfranchised Minnesotans.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Although prior research has found evidence that a mailer-based strategy may be effective for engaging community members who are formerly disenfranchised, Minnesota—with its longstanding culture of voting—presents a compelling opportunity to learn whether a mailer strategy would be effective in a state with among the highest turnout rates in the United States. In this research, we explore whether mailers are an effective mode for encouraging formerly disenfranchised voters to participate in the electoral process. American residents are regularly inundated with junk mail; 63% of all mail received by residents was “marketing mail” in 2019, compared to 32% in 1982 (Gordon, 2020). Therefore, it is possible that the sheer volume of junk mail could hinder the effectiveness of a mailer-based approach, especially one that uses postcards.

We also explored whether mailer volume affected voter turnout (Gerber et al., 2003; Green & Gerber, 2019; Green & Zelizer, 2017). We varied the number of mailers: zero, one, three, or six mailers—and developed six similar but distinct postcard designs to avoid desensitizing recipients by sending the same mailers multiple times.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- ◆ **Question 1:** Are mailers an effective tool to encourage formerly disenfranchised Minnesotans to vote?
- ◆ **Question 2:** Is mailer volume positively associated with voter turnout?

METHODS

✦ Study Design

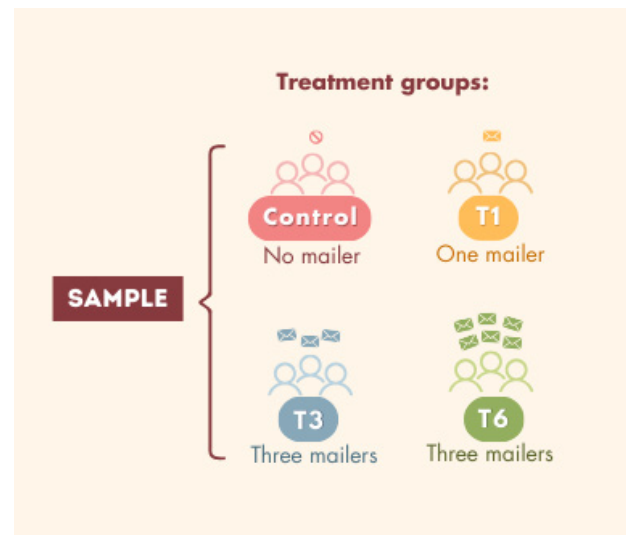
We used a between-subjects design - that is, we compared voter turnout between four distinct groups of people - to determine whether mailers are an effective turnout tool and whether effectiveness is connected to mailer frequency. Previous research finds that the mailer frequency and volume matter, and the positive effect typically peaks between five and seven mailers (Green & Gerber, 2019; Green & Zelizer, 2017).

To identify eligible Minnesotans, we merged data from multiple administrative data sources, including the Minnesota Sentencing Guidelines Commission (1991-2022; MSGC), the Minnesota State Court Administrator’s Office (2004-2024; SCAO), the Minnesota Department of Corrections (1980-2024; DOC, and the Bureau of Criminal Apprehension (2005-2024; BCA). We linked these data sources using the “Name Match” Python library (Jelveh et al., 2022), which is a probabilistic linking tool that is particularly well-suited for data sources with unique identifiers (in this case, state identification and district court case numbers). Based on a comprehensive analysis of each individual’s prior felony conviction history, including overall sentence length,

custodial sentence length, sentence expiration, and DOC status, we categorized each individual in the merged dataset as (1) already eligible (i.e., the individual was not serving any felony sentence or were expired by November 5, 2024); (2) newly eligible (i.e., the individual on community supervision, such as felony probation or supervised release on Election Day but had their voting rights restored by RTV); or (3) ineligible (i.e., they were incarcerated on Election Day). We identified 170,909 Minnesotans with at least one felony conviction since 1991 who were either already eligible voters (n=114,948) or newly eligible voters because of RTV (n=55,960).

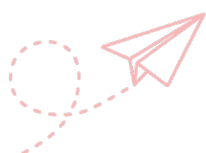
We contracted with a consumer identity management firm to append address information to this list. The firm was able to locate address information for 144,591, with 117,506 of those listing addresses in Minnesota. From this group, we selected 96,000 people for our sample, including every person who was newly eligible because of RTV (n=52,410) and a random selection of those who would have already been eligible regardless of RTV (n=43,590).

We randomly assigned each person in our sample to one of four groups, consisting of 24,000 individuals in each: a control group that received none of our mailers (C); a treatment group that was sent one mailer (T1); a treatment group that was sent three mailers (T3); and a treatment group that was sent six mailers (T6). We included three levels of mailer volume to provide leverage for a potential cost-benefit analysis that would allow us to identify the optimal number of mailers.



Following the election, we linked our sample to publicly available voter data to measure turnout in 2024. The Minnesota Secretary of State's Office conducts standard voter list maintenance to remove those who are inactive (that is, the voter has not registered or voted in the previous 4 years), no longer registered, no longer eligible (e.g., because of a conviction or moved out of state), or deceased. Therefore, to account for those who had previously registered or voted but were not active or registered for the 2024 election, we used voter registration data that spanned from the 2014 midterm election through the 2024 presidential election. We again used a probabilistic matching approach to link our sample to the voter data. We also removed those we later determined were ineligible or had undeliverable mail addresses, which produced a final analytical sample of 87,504 (52,551 who were already eligible and 34,953 who were newly eligible following RTV).

Mailer schedule:



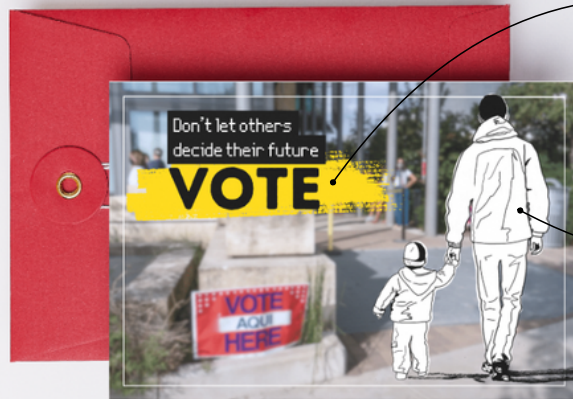
OCTOBER 2024						
SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16 T6	17	18 T6	19
20	21 T6	22	23 T6	24	25 T6	26
27	28 T6	29	30 T3	31	1 T3	2
NOVEMBER 2024						
3	4	5 Election Day VOTE	6	7	8	9

✦ Mailer Design Process

At the Minnesota Justice Research Center, we know that in order for research to be both rigorous and impactful, directly-impacted community members must be at the center of the work. We invited Minnesotans directly impacted by the criminal legal system (specifically those who were formerly disenfranchised) to be part of an advisory group for this project. The advisory group's primary role was to design the mailers that we eventually sent to tens of thousands of Minnesotans.

During our first advisory group meeting in the fall of 2024, seven advisory group members joined MNJRC staff and Arc Initiatives communications staff to brainstorm a consistent message and the art, design, layout, and colors for the mailers. MNJRC communications and design staff then drafted a variety of mailers for the advisory group to review. We originally planned to design one mailer to remain consistent with the design variable and only vary the volume. However, discussion with the advisory group led to consensus that designing six slightly different mailers with cohesive messaging and design would address potential inundation effects. The advisory group met twice more for iterative design feedback and discussion, and the MNJRC produced the final designs for approval from the group (see below). We compensated each advisory group member for their time.

FRONT OF THE MAILER:



Message

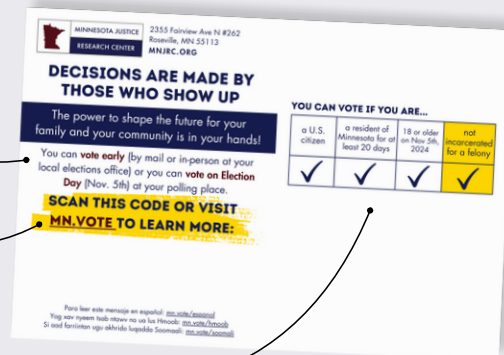
Image

BACK OF THE MAILER:

Information on how to vote

Custom URL

Information about voting eligibility



OTHER DESIGNS:



The mailers were two-sided postcards with an image and message on one side (e.g., “No longer about us without us”) and information about voting eligibility (highlighting the ability to vote if not incarcerated), and where and how to vote on the back. In order to evaluate engagement with mailers (and thus, go beyond intention-to-treat), we included a unique QR code and custom URL (mn.vote) which redirected to the MN Secretary of State voter information website (<https://www.sos.mn.gov/elections-voting>). Each QR code included a randomly assigned ID number linked to each recipient and indicators for mailer design and delivery batch. We were then able to track who scanned the QR code or visited the site (and therefore looked at the mailer) to conduct a deeper level of analysis on mailer impact.

We sent the final versions to Minuteman Press to print and send the mailers according to the determined schedule (see above). Furthermore, postcard designs and orders were randomized to minimize individual design effects.

FINDINGS

Before examining the experimental results, we begin with a brief overview of turnout among our sample. Overall, 22,536 formerly disenfranchised people in our sample (or 25.8%) voted in the 2024 election. However, turnout was significantly stratified by supervision status (that is, whether individuals were already eligible to vote or newly eligible to vote via the 2023 Restore the Vote (RTV) legislation) and by prior registration history.

Of those who were not under any felony-level correctional control – that is, those who would have been eligible to vote before RTV – 31.3% turned out, compared to 17.4%¹ of those who were still under community supervision but were newly eligible to vote, having regained their voting rights following RTV.

When we examined other factors that may have effected turnout, we found that those who had been **registered to vote in the past** (specifically, those who were registered to vote some time in the past decade) were significantly more likely to vote in 2024: In the full sample, 58.7% of those who were previously registered at any point since 2014 voted compared to only 6.4% who had not registered in the previous decade. This difference held when examining the turnout based on past registration status among the already eligible and newly eligible groups as well: For those with a registration in the past ten years, 47.2% of those in the newly eligible group and 63.9% of those in the already eligible group voted compared to 5.2% and 7.3% with no prior registration since 2014.

1) Note that Minnesota Voice reported a turnout of 19.8% of newly eligible voters. The difference is likely explained by the variation in contact information sources, sample sizes, and matching procedures. Although we drew our original lists of newly eligible people from similar official sources, we used a different consumer data vendors to append address and other contact information, producing somewhat different samples of newly eligible voters (MNJRC $n \approx 35,000$, Minnesota Voice $n \approx 30,000$). We also used somewhat different procedures to match our respective sample lists to the voter file. Nonetheless, the difference is likely negligible.

Table 2. Voting Data of Sample By Eligibility Status

		N	# WHO VOTED IN 2024	% WHO VOTED IN 2024
Full sample		87,504	22,536	25.80%
	Previous registration*	32,400	19,017	58.70%
	No recent registration*	55,104	3,519	6.40%
Already Eligible (not under correctional control)		52,551	16,442	31.30%
	Previous registration	22,256	14,224	63.90%
	No recent registration	30,295	2,218	7.30%
Newly Eligible (on community supervision)		34,953	6,094	17.40%
	Previous registration	10,144	4,793	47.20%
	No recent registration	24,809	1,301	5.20%

***Note:** Prior registration is limited to 2014-2024. Those who were registered prior to 2014 but not after 2014 would be categorized as “No recent registration.”

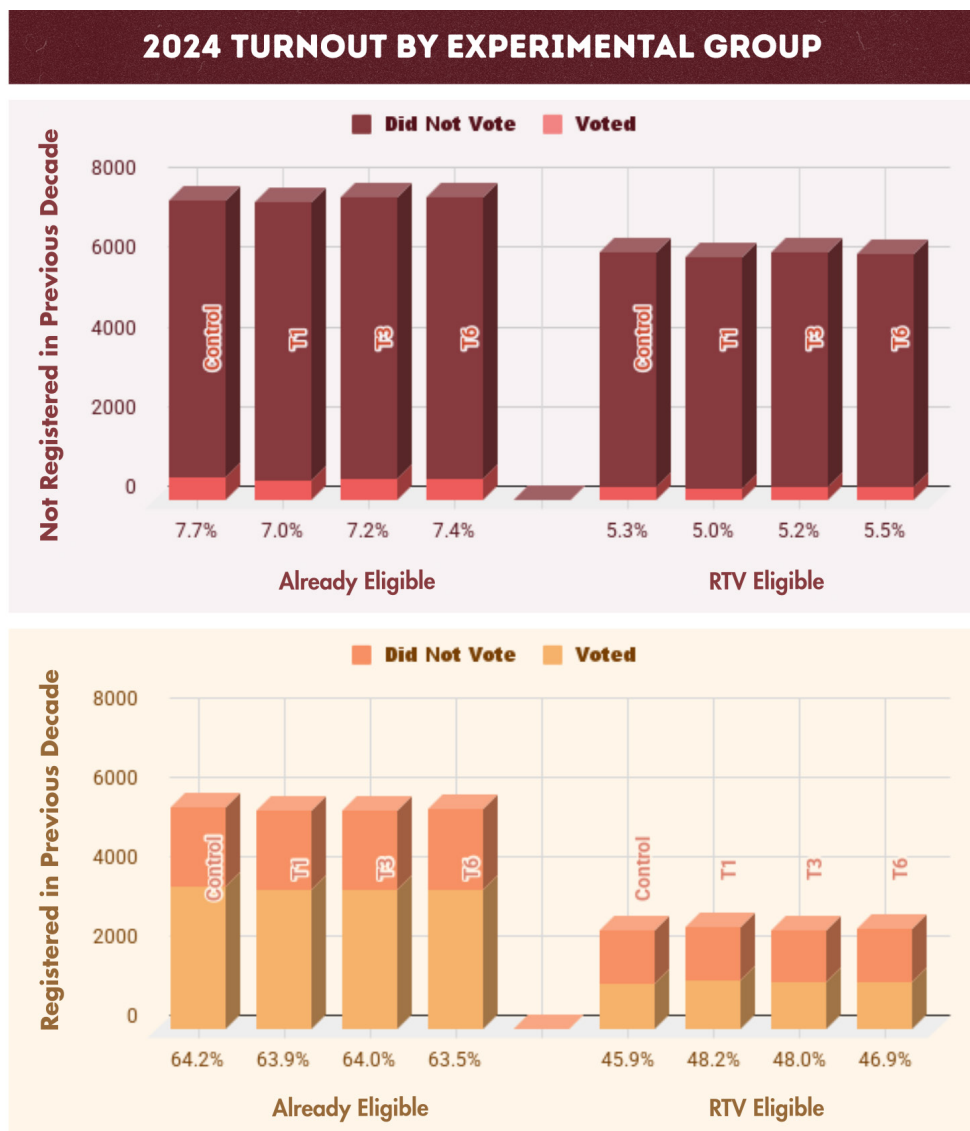
Turning to our primary question, we did not find evidence to support a postcard mailer-based strategy as an effective mode for engaging formerly disenfranchised people in the electoral process. The figures on page 14 compare turnout by experimental group, split between prior registration status and recency of eligibility. Within each registration status and eligibility group, turnout rates were statistically indistinguishable between assigned experimental subsamples. That is, the postcards did not seem to have an appreciable effect on turnout.

Minnesota’s unique culture of voting may provide some explanation for these null effects. First, as described above in Table 1, at least six community organizations and two state agencies engaged in considerable voter education and engagement efforts in the Twin Cities and throughout the state, including sending direct voter education mail similar to the ones used in this project. Thus, it is plausible that our mailers’ potency was substantially diluted by the high volume of direct voter education mail targeting this population in the first post-RTV general election.

Further, notable previous studies that have tested the effectiveness of mailers have been focused on states with significantly lower average turnout than Minnesota (Gerber et al., 2014; White et al., 2025; Doleac et al., 2022). In the previous four general elections, Minnesota was ranked 1st (2018), 1st (2020), 3rd (2022), and 2nd (2024) in voting-eli-

gible turnout among the 50 states and D.C. ([U.S. Elections Project, 2025](#)), whereas Connecticut was ranked 12, 17, 19, and 19, respectively; New Jersey was 20, 15, 43, and 21; and North Carolina was 31, 12, 24, and 12. It is therefore possible that, as Minnesota is a state with a preexisting culture of voting not present in other states where similar efforts were undertaken, those who were already going to vote voted.

While preexisting turnout motivation may be a partial explanation, it is also possible that postcard mailers just are not an effective mode of voter engagement. Research shows that mailer effectiveness can depend on the nature and the content of mailers (Green, McGrath, & Arnow, 2013). Each mailer we sent out had a unique QR code that, when scanned, would link to the Minnesota Secretary of State's voter registration page. This allowed us to track who in fact engaged with the mailer. **We found that less than one quarter of a percent of the mailers we shipped were scanned.** Thus, it is also possible that the mailers were lost among the vast volumes of junk mail that Americans receive.



IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Although these results are disappointing on the surface - the postcards did not have an effect - they are very helpful. They suggest traditional mass-mailing engagement approaches are not effective at motivating people to vote—or at least not effective for a population that has been historically excluded from the civic process in Minnesota. Although direct mail is relatively easy, it is also expensive and impersonal. Therefore, organizers may find more success shifting their engagement resources toward strategies that focus on direct, personal engagement, such as phone-banking and door-knocking, especially with formerly disenfranchised Minnesotans. After all, it is not enough to simply open the door to the democratic process—true inclusion comes when we extend our hand to welcome people in.

The turnout for the Minnesotans off of any correctional supervision shows promise for future research and advocacy work. As nearly one-third of those with past criminal records participated in the voting process, future research could explore journeys to civic engagement following the restoration of voting rights.

These findings also lend credence to the power of a culture of voting. The power of voting for the first time not only impacts a single election, but begins a process of likely voting in future elections. The predictive power of past voting suggests future research might target those who have never voted with their resources and efforts in order to bring new voters into a culture of voting.

While our postcard intervention did not independently increase turnout, the overall results suggest coordinated, multi-organizational voter engagement efforts - especially efforts that are direct and personal - can successfully mobilize formerly disenfranchised populations.

Rather than relying on a single tactic, communities should continue to invest in comprehensive outreach strategies that involve multiple organizations in collaboration with one another and use multiple methods of outreach, especially phone and door-knocking. Additionally, given that prior registration was the strongest predictor of turnout, organizations should focus on early registration efforts that target new voters. Furthermore, by building and resourcing partnerships between community organizations and government agencies, we can better tease out the impacts of different approaches and continue to saturate the outreach space. Finally, our efforts continue to demonstrate the importance of connecting with credible messages in voting outreach strategies.

The work of expanding democracy continues. While postcards alone may not be the answer, the collective efforts of many organizations show promise for engaging voters who have been systematically excluded from our democracy.

Work Cited

- Burch, T. (2011). *Socioeconomic patterns of incarceration and the consequences of criminal justice policy*. *Sociological Perspectives*, 54(4), 623–648. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23012031>
- Carson, A., & Kluckow, R. (2023). *Prisoners in 2023*. Bureau of Justice Statistics.
- Doleac, J. L., White, A., Yang, C., & Young, M. (2022). *Getting out the vote for people with felony convictions*. (National Bureau of Economic Research Working Paper No. 30039). <https://doi.org/10.3386/w30039>
- Gerber, A. S., & Green, D. P. (2017). Field experiments on voter mobilization: An overview of a burgeoning literature. In A. V. Banerjee & E. Duflo (Eds.), *Handbook of economic field experiments* (Vol. 1, pp. 395–438). North-Holland.
- Gerber, A. S., Green, D. P., & Larimer, C. W. (2008). Social pressure and voter turnout: Evidence from a large-scale field experiment. *American Political Science Review*, 102(1), 33–48.
- Gerber, A. S., Green, D. P., & Larimer, C. W. (2014). *An experiment testing voter mobilization among formerly incarcerated people*.
- Green, D. P., & Gerber, A. S. (2019). *Get out the vote: How to increase voter turnout* (4th ed.). Brookings Institution Press.
- Green, D. P., & Zelizer, B. (2017). How much GOTV mail is too much? Results from a randomized field experiment. *Journal of Experimental Political Science*, 4(1), 41–59.
- Green, J., McGrath, M., & Arnow, B. (2013). Field experiments and the study of political behavior. *Political Communication*, 30(2), 307–313.
- Gordon, G. (2020). *Marketing mail trends report*. U.S. Postal Service Office of Inspector General. <https://www.uspsoig.gov/document/marketing-mail-trends>
- Hailperin, M. (2023). *Minnesota adopts automatic voter registration*. Ballotpedia News.
- Igielnik, R., Keeter, S., & Hartig, H. (2018). *Commercial voter files and the study of U.S. politics*. Pew Research Center.
- Jelveh, Z., Luca, M., & Johnson, J. (2022). *Name Match: A probabilistic record linkage library* [Computer software].
- Kaeble, D. (2023). *Probation and parole in the United States, 2023*. Bureau of Justice Statistics.

Kronenberg, A. (2024, November 15). How many people didn't vote in the 2024 election? *U.S. News & World Report*. <https://www.usnews.com/news/national-news/articles/2024-11-15/how-many-people-didnt-vote-in-the-2024-election>

Meredith, M., & Morse, M. (2015). *Do voting rights notification laws increase ex-felon turnout?* (Working paper). <https://scholar.harvard.edu/files/morse/files/iowa.pdf>

Minnesota Secretary of State. (2022). *Voter turnout data*.

Napal, M., & Budd, K. (2025). *Minnesota should restore voting rights to over 9,500 citizens*. The Sentencing Project. <https://www.sentencingproject.org/fact-sheet/minnesota-should-restore-voting-rights-to-over-9500-citizens/>

The Sentencing Project. (2024). *Expanding electoral engagement among justice-impacted people*. <https://www.sentencingproject.org/policy-brief/expanding-electoral-engagement-among-justice-impacted-people/>

UF Election Lab. (2024). *2024 general election turnout*. <https://election.lab.ufl.edu/2024-general-election-turnout/>

Uggen, C., Larson, R., Shannon, S., & Stewart, R. (2022). *Locked out 2022: Estimates of people denied voting rights due to a felony conviction*. The Sentencing Project. <https://www.sentencingproject.org/reports/locked-out-2022-estimates-of-people-denied-voting-rights/>

Uggen, C., Larson, R., Shannon, S., & Stewart, R. (2024). *Locked out 2024: Four million denied voting rights due to a felony conviction*. The Sentencing Project. <https://www.sentencingproject.org/reports/locked-out-2024-four-million-denied-voting-rights-due-to-a-felony-conviction/>

U.S. Elections Project. (2025). *2024 voter turnout data*.

Weaver, V. M., & Lerman, A. E. (2010). Political consequences of the carceral state. *American Political Science Review*, 104(4), 817–833. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40982899>

White, A., Walker, H., Michelson, M., Roth, S., 2025, Replication Data for: Getting Out the (Newly-Enfranchised) Vote: Encouraging voter registration after rights restoration, <https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/N150HF>