

# The Direct Mail Effect with Voters

A Guide from the 2021 Virginia Elections on How to Effectively Build Integrated Campaigns



A Joint Study by the United States Postal Service and American Association of Political Consultants (AAPC)





# Connecting the Dots



Direct mail is a vital piece of the communications puzzle—it is a highly customizable messaging channel that inspires trust with voters.

Every election cycle, it seems the bar is higher for candidates to ensure their messaging is heard above all the background noise — and the 2021 Virginia Gubernatorial Election was no exception, as it drew attention not just in Virginia, but nationally as well. This made the state a compelling bellwether and case study in understanding views on different forms of political outreach and advertising channels leading up to the 2022 Midterm Elections.

Since 2016, the United States Postal Service has conducted post-election research and developed seven joint white papers with the American Association of Political Consultants (AAPC). This year, we are including insights from a 2021 post-election survey in Virginia<sup>1</sup> as well as comparisons to similar surveys conducted by the Postal Service following the 2017 Virginia Gubernatorial Election and the 2020 National Elections.<sup>2,3</sup>

These insights and comparisons provide an opportunity for us to reflect on what shifted and what stayed the same in voters' behaviors and preferences when it comes to campaign messaging and political advertising channels. The white paper serves as an overview of what voters think about when viewing political advertising as well as a guide for how and when they want to receive messaging. Through timing, tailoring, and targeting, a path is provided to a more effective and efficient use of direct mail as part of an integrated political campaign.

## 2021 Post-Election Survey Demographics

### Research Methodology



1,007  
Virginia  
voters

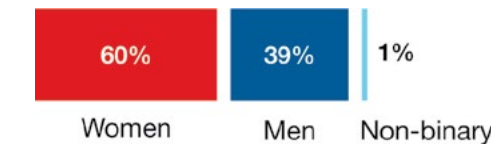


15-minute survey  
conducted online  
in January 2022

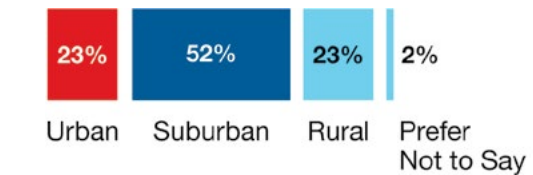


All respondents  
were registered to  
vote in Virginia

### GENDER



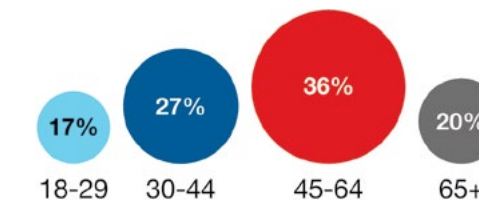
### LOCATION



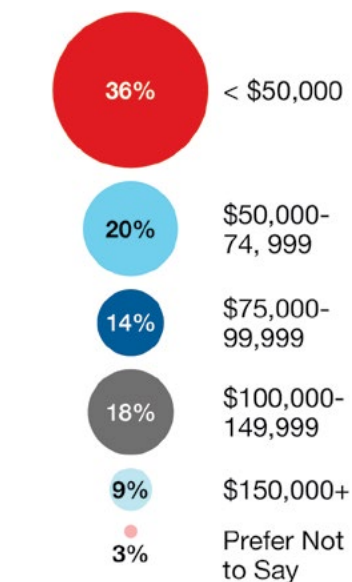
### RECALLED RECEIVING DIRECT MAIL



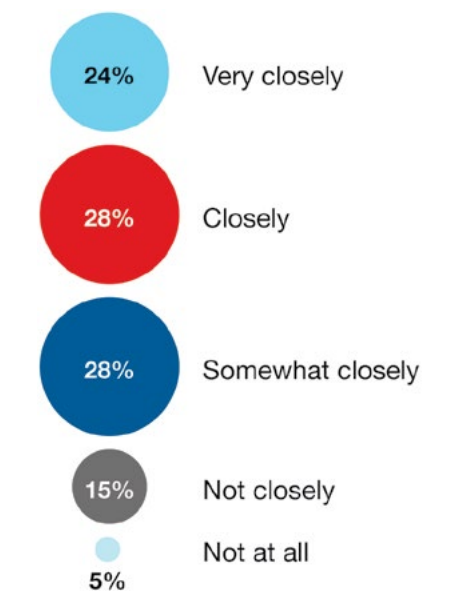
### AGE



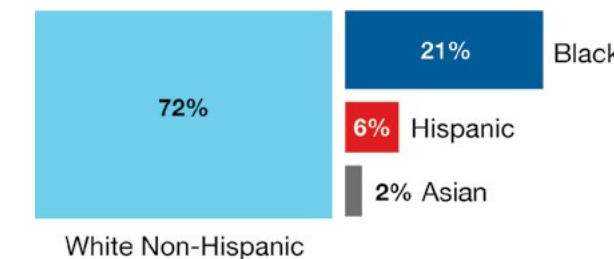
### HOUSEHOLD INCOME



### FOLLOWED GUBERNATORIAL RACE

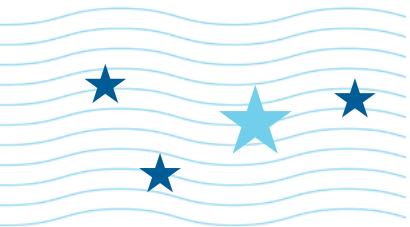


### RACE/ETHNICITY\*



\* respondents were able to select all that apply





# 1 Prioritize Timing and Sequencing



80%

of surveyed voters said direct mail increases awareness of which candidates are running



72%

of surveyed voters agreed that direct mail reinforced information on television and online political ads

**The key to effectively using direct mail with other advertising channels is knowing how to optimize them to work in sync while leveraging each channel's strengths.**

Direct mail can lay the groundwork for broader campaign messaging because of the trust voters place in mail and the ability direct mail has to drive voters to learn more after reading mail pieces.

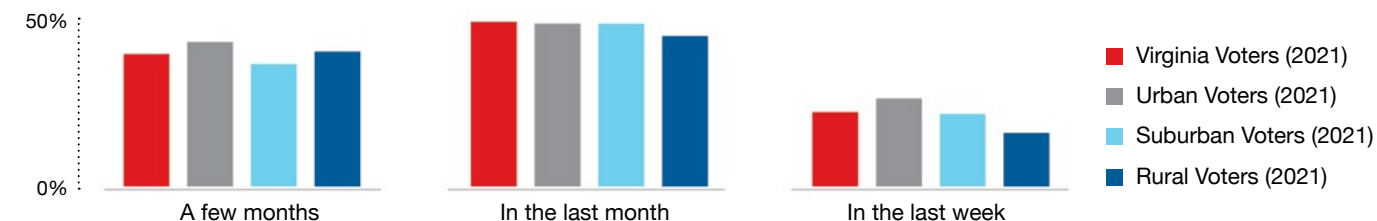
## WHEN TO SEND DIRECT MAIL

Many surveyed voters preferred to start receiving direct mail several months before the election and then continue receiving mail through the last month before election day. During this timeframe, direct mail was more likely to capture voters' attention and had the most potential to begin impacting their opinions. This was consistent across voters in urban, suburban, and rural areas.

Using direct mail earlier during an election cycle allows campaigns to introduce candidates and messaging to voters — 80% of surveyed voters said direct mail increases awareness of which candidates are running and 75% said direct mail provides a helpful starting point to learn more about candidates and their positions on issues. Direct mail can also reinforce campaign messaging — 72% of surveyed voters agreed that it reinforced information on television and online political ads.

**For many surveyed voters, direct mail received early in the election cycle had the most potential to impact their opinions.**

## When Voters Prefer to Receive Direct Mail

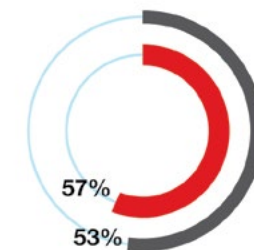


## Mail Establishes Trust with Voters

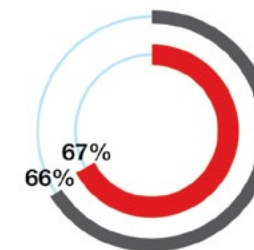
Percentage who agreed with the below statements:

Virginia Voters (2021)

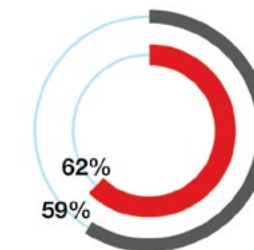
National Voters (2020)<sup>2</sup>



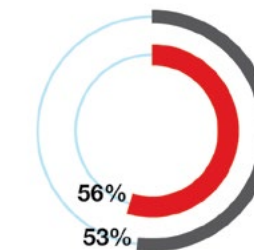
Direct mail more trustworthy than television or online advertising



Direct mail more transparent than other political advertising



Direct mail includes more facts than other political advertising



Direct mail harder to ignore than other political advertising

## SEQUENCING OUTREACH AND MESSAGING

The research found that surveyed voters took action online after reading mail pieces with almost two-thirds (64%) going online to fact check the information, more than half (55%) searching online for more information, and over one-third (38%) following the candidate or issue on social media.

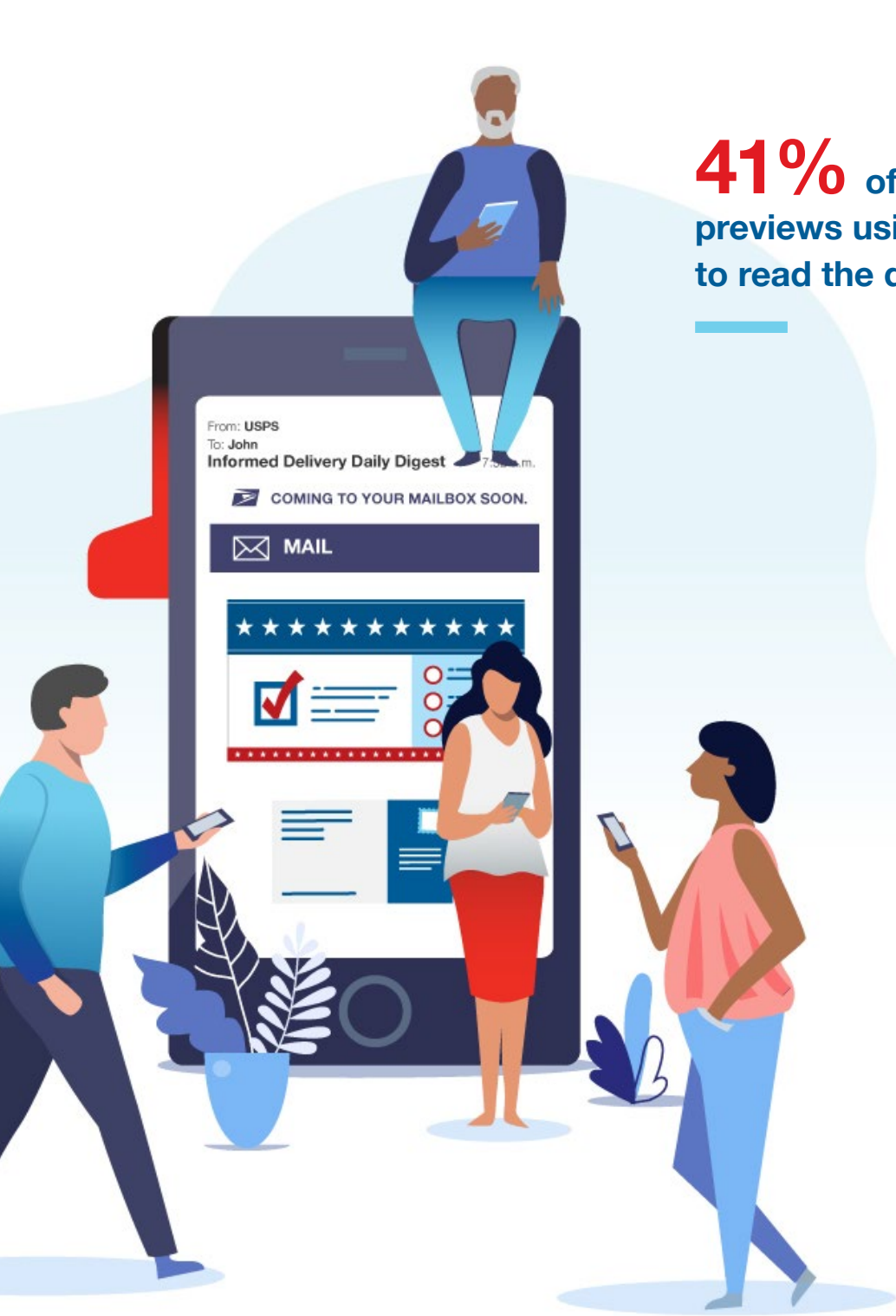
These actions represent an opportunity for campaigns to organically drive traffic and engagement to new messaging and content on their platforms through mail pieces.

The Postal Service also has several tools — such as Informed Visibility<sup>®</sup> Feature<sup>4</sup> and Informed Delivery<sup>®</sup> Feature<sup>5</sup> — that allow campaigns to track their direct mail pieces and digitally integrate their direct mail program, allowing campaigns to sequence and layer messaging across channels.

For those using Informed Delivery Feature who recall seeing political mail previews, 41% were more motivated to read the direct mail piece when it arrived in person.

All data sourced from post-election surveys conducted on behalf of the Postal Service<sup>™</sup> by Summit Research.

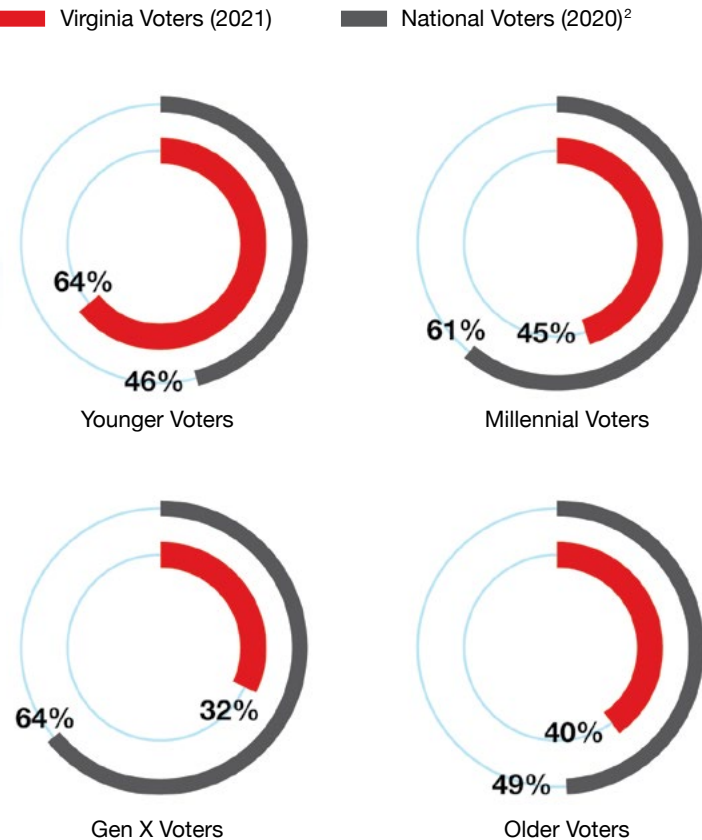




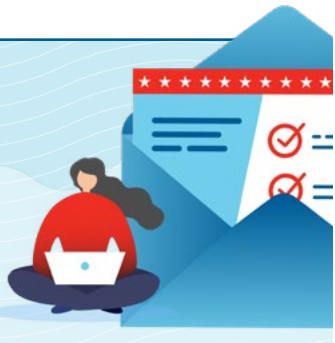
**41%** of voters who recalled seeing political mail previews using Informed Delivery were more motivated to read the direct mail piece when it arrived in the mail.

**Informed Delivery Recall Rates Soared with Younger Voters in 2021 Compared to 2020**

Percentage who recall seeing previews of campaign mail in their Informed Delivery Digest:

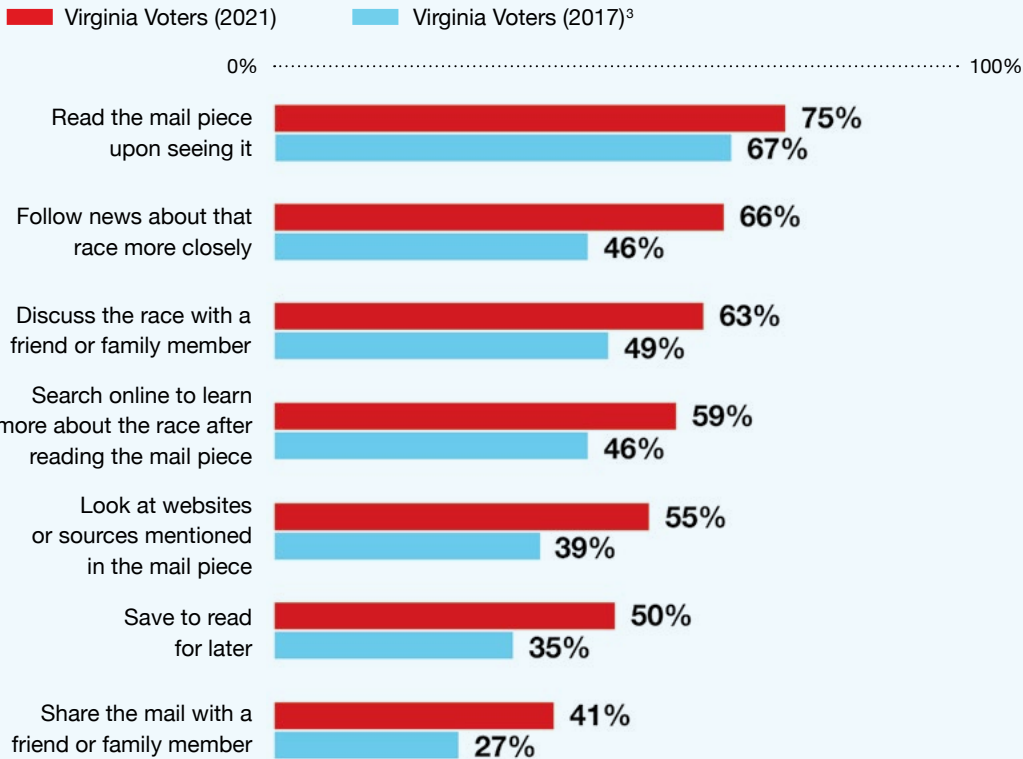


**WHAT HAS CHANGED?**  
**Mail Still Inspires Action with Voters**



**Direct Mail Generated More Engagement in 2021 Than 2017**

Percentage who agreed with the below statements:



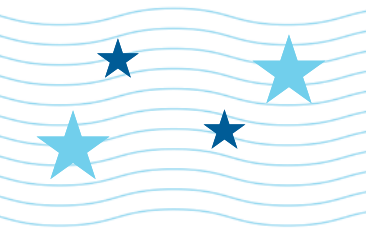
All data sourced from post-election surveys conducted on behalf of the Postal Service™ by Summit Research.



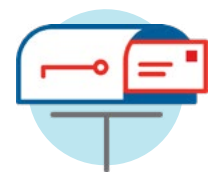
**What this Means for Campaigns**

In a time when trust in public institutions seems to be waning among the American public, the trust that voters have in mail can lay the groundwork for campaign messaging on other channels. The research has shown that candidates shouldn't wait to leverage direct mail during the get-out-the-vote phase of a campaign. Sequencing direct mail to arrive earlier during an election cycle gives campaigns the best opportunity to reach voters and potentially impact their decisions by increasing awareness of who is running and providing a helpful starting point for voters to learn more about the candidates and their positions.





## 2 Tailor and Refine Messaging By Channel



71%

of surveyed voters still check their mailbox at least 5 days a week.

Voters want their messaging to be refined by advertising channel — and campaigns can leverage the reliability of direct mail by incorporating helpful information into mail pieces.

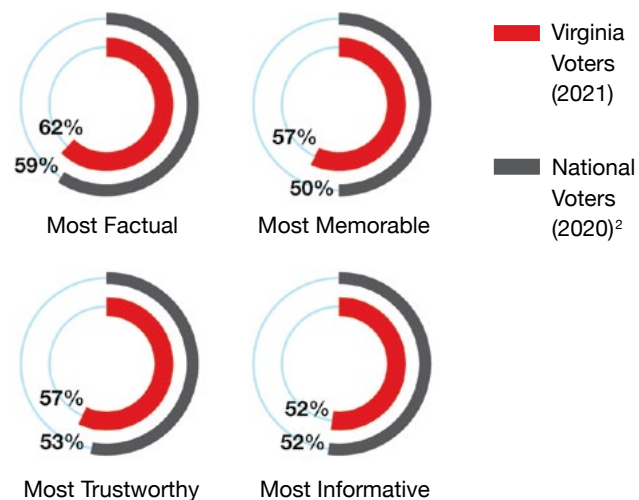
### VOTER RELATIONSHIP WITH MAIL

A majority of surveyed voters (71%) still check their mailbox at least 5 days a week — a number that is consistent with the results of the 2020 national survey (62%).<sup>2</sup>

In previous white papers, we have discussed the “Mail Moment® Experience” — the unique experience voters have when they open their mailbox and sort through their mail. The research illustrates that surveyed voters are continuing to have a similar experience with direct mail — with 57% stating that direct mail was the most memorable form of political advertising this past election cycle.

### Direct Mail is a Reliable Source of Information for Voters

Percentage who agreed direct mail is the most factual, most memorable, most trustworthy and/or most informative:

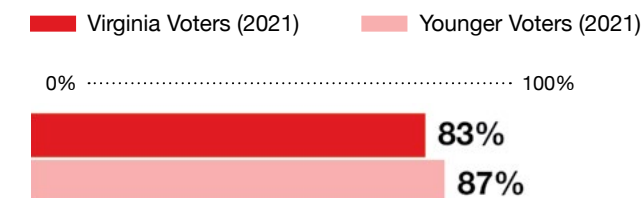


### IMPACT OF MESSAGING IN MAIL

Direct mail continues to be influential in helping voters learn about candidates and their positions and to provide new information. When used effectively, almost two-thirds (61%) of surveyed voters also found direct mail to be one of the most persuasive political advertising channels. And 83% of surveyed voters found direct mail pieces were easy to understand — and the number increases with younger voters (87%).

### Direct Mail Pieces are Easy to Understand

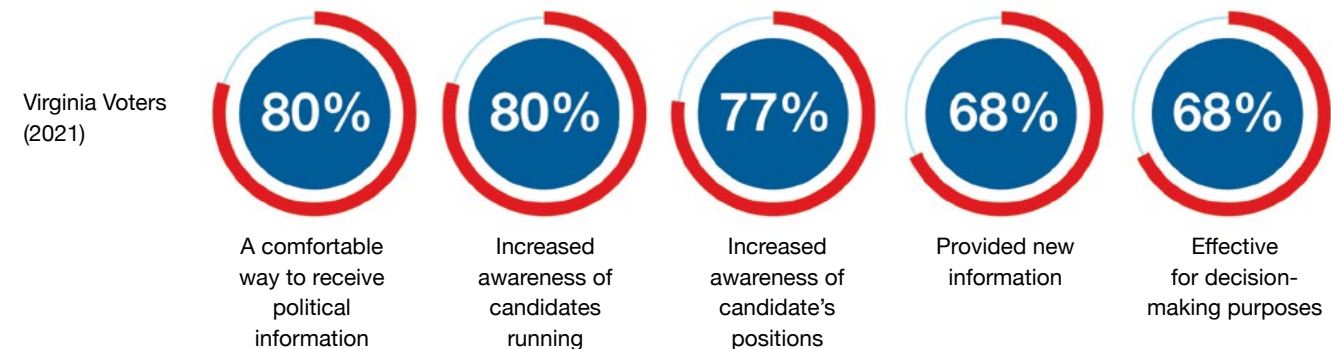
Percentage who agreed direct mail is easy to understand:



57% of surveyed voters said that direct mail was the most memorable form of political advertising this past election cycle.

### Direct Mail is a Helpful Source of Information for Voters

Percentage who agreed with the below statements:



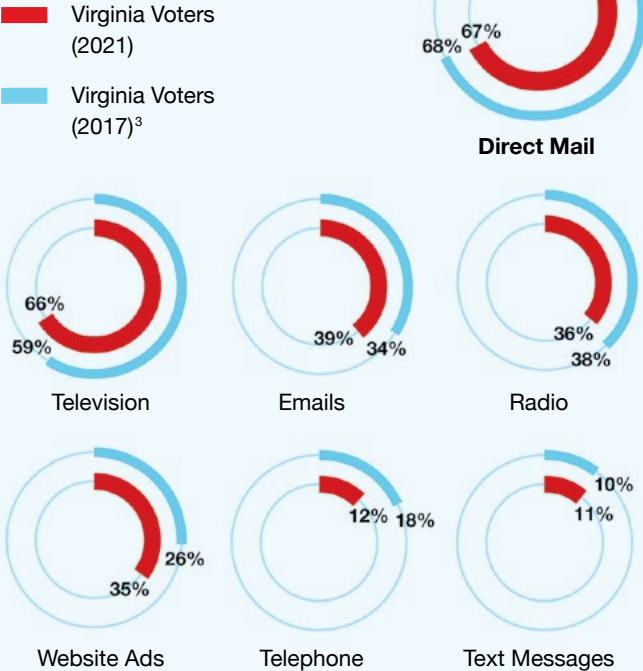


WHAT HAS CHANGED?  
Direct Mail Still Has  
“The Credibility Factor”



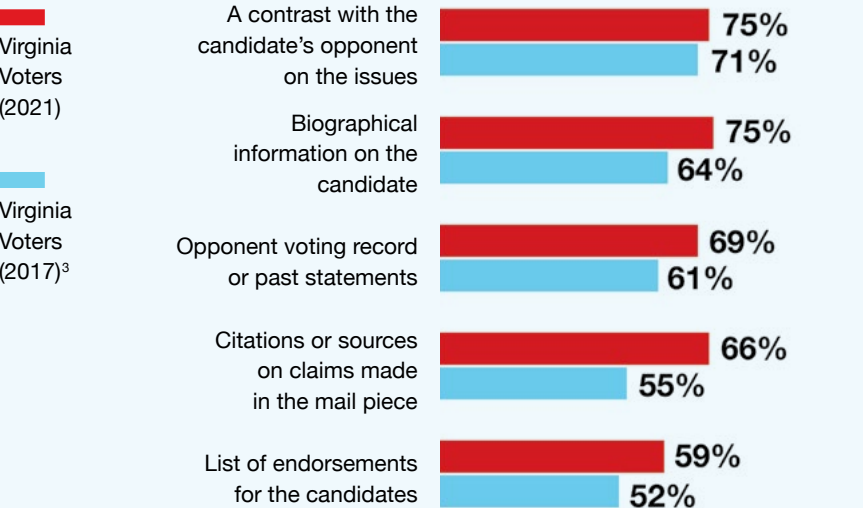
Voters Continue to View Direct Mail as  
the Most Credible Advertising Channel

Percentage who ranked direct mail  
in the top three political advertising  
channels:



Voters Continue to Want Information  
About Candidates in Mail Pieces

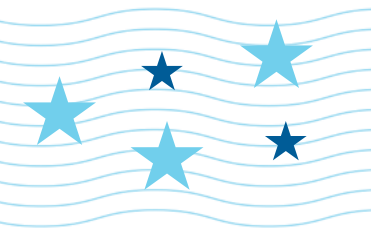
Percentage who  
would be more  
likely to read  
a mail piece  
if it included  
the following  
information:



What this Means  
for Campaigns

Direct mail continues to show staying power for voters using it as an election resource. It remains an influential messaging tool for a majority of surveyed voters — with an even higher rate seeking additional campaign information after reading mail pieces compared to four years ago. Campaigns can leverage direct mail as a reliable and helpful source of information to provide the messaging voters want to receive via mail pieces — and combine that messaging with broader messaging across other political advertising channels to pack a highly effective one-two punch.





# 3 Customize Targeting with Authenticity



64%

of surveyed voters think personalized messaging in political campaigns is important.

Voters value customized, authentic engagement from campaigns — and direct mail’s ability to precisely target voters by demographic makes it an ideal advertising channel for personalized messaging.

## PERSONALIZATION OF DIRECT MAIL

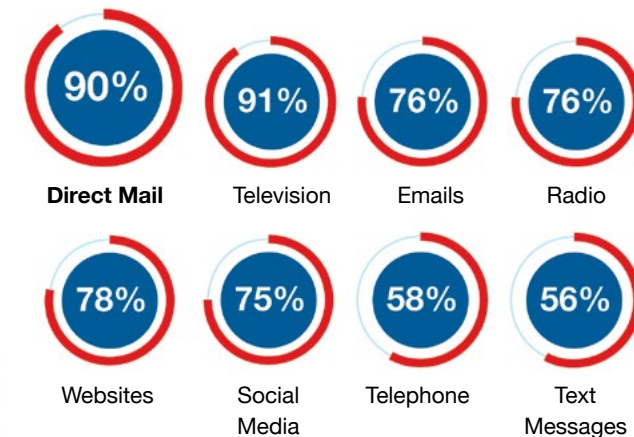
Most surveyed voters (64%) think it is important to personalize messaging in political campaigns, but only 43% agreed that political advertising channels were successful in personalizing messaging to the issues and concerns they care most about.



## Voters Value Personalization in Political Advertising

Percentage who value personalization in political advertising messaging:

Virginia Voters (2021)

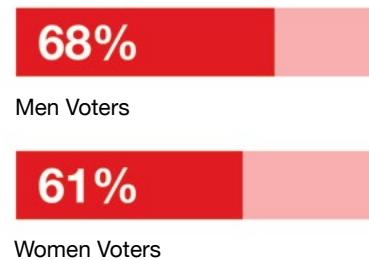


## Importance of Personalized Messaging in Mail Pieces

Percentage who agreed it is important for messaging in mail pieces speak to them personally about the issues/concerns they care most about:

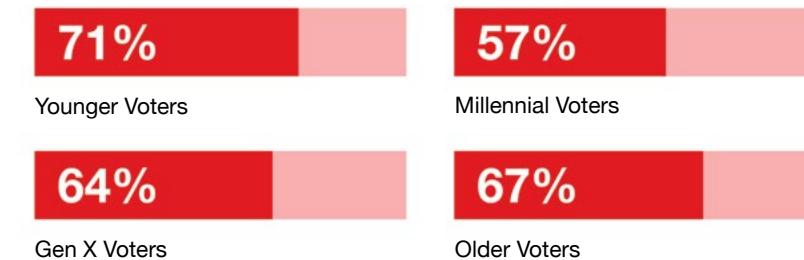
### GENDER

Virginia Voters (2021)



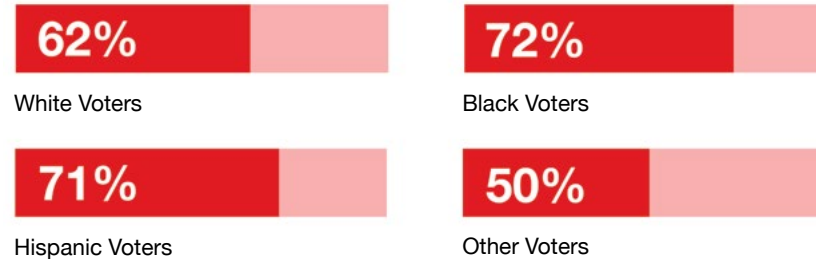
### AGE

Virginia Voters (2021)



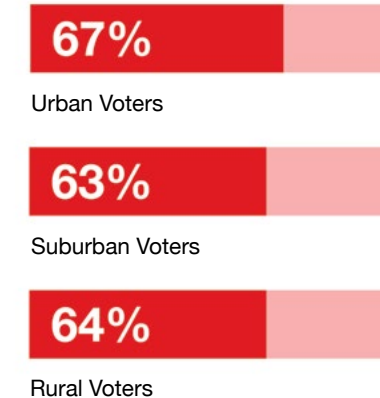
### RACE

Virginia Voters (2021)



### LOCATION

Virginia Voters (2021)





# Targeting the Right Voters, The Right Way

Almost two-thirds (65%) of surveyed voters agree that direct mail had an impact on their decision-making process, but it should not be used as a one-size-fits-all advertising channel. Direct mail should instead be customized and targeted by demographic – but with authenticity.

As an example, if targeted messaging is leveraged successfully with Hispanic voters, the impact it has increases 20% (from 65% of all surveyed voters to 85% of Hispanic voters). It can also increase the memorability of direct mail (57% of all surveyed voters compared to 74% of Hispanic voters) – and result in a general trend towards Hispanic voters being more likely to take action after reading mail pieces.

## Impact of Direct Mail in Shifting Voter Opinions About Candidates

Percentage who agreed direct mail had an impact on their opinion of the candidates:

### GENDER

Virginia Voters (2021)



Men Voters



Women Voters

### AGE

Virginia Voters (2021)



Younger Voters



Millennial Voters



Gen X Voters



Older Voters

### RACE

Virginia Voters (2021)



White Voters



Hispanic Voters



Black Voters



Other Voters

### LOCATION

Virginia Voters (2021)



Urban Voters



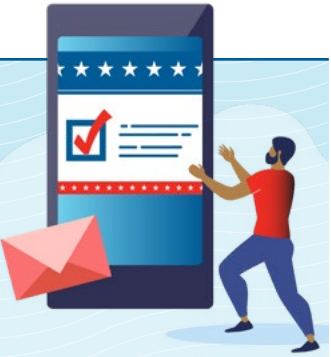
Suburban Voters



Rural Voters

## WHAT HAS CHANGED?

# The Resurgence of QR Codes

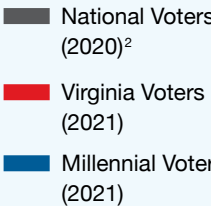


QR codes have been around for decades, but the lack of usability had made them almost obsolete. Even after the accompanying technology on smartphones caught up in recent years, most Americans still weren't using QR codes – until the pandemic. And our post-election surveys only started including QR codes as part of the voter experience in the last couple years.

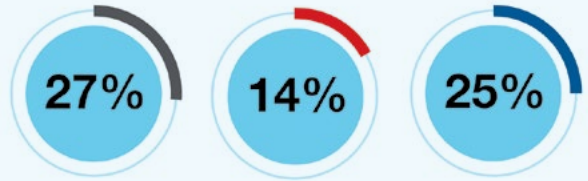
The most recent research shows that, while 82% of surveyed voters describe using QR codes as easy to use in general, not all voters are interacting with QR codes on mail pieces – yet. It also highlighted the importance of providing different access points for messaging so voters can choose how they want to engage with campaigns.

Younger generations are still the most comfortable interacting with QR codes and campaigns can leverage the technology to provide additional targeted messaging with these demographics, including a call-to-action for campaign donations directed to their website.

## Voters Who Visited Campaign Websites Using QR Codes



Percentage who visited a campaign website using a QR Code in a mail piece:



# What this Means for Campaigns

As voters get information from an increasing number of sources, direct mail can be used to not only precisely target voters by demographic, but to also cross-pollinate with other political advertising channels. Campaigns can allow voters to authentically engage on the advertising channel they prefer — and are the most comfortable with — by providing different access points on mail pieces through strong, customized call-to-action messaging encouraging voters to visit a campaign website with a QR code or follow a candidate on social media.





# Conclusion

Direct mail plays an important role as part of the media mix and understanding certain nuances can increase the impact of a campaign strategy. The power of direct mail lies in its ability to enable campaigns to lay the groundwork and coordinate campaign messaging on other channels, customize and personalize messaging voters want to receive via mail pieces, and precisely target demographics at their mailbox while cross-pollinating with messaging on other channels.

Campaigns can leverage this effect by carefully considering timing, tailoring, and targeting for not only direct mail – but for all political advertising channels.

# Leverage the Direct Mail Effect





# References

1. Summit Research post-election survey on behalf of the Postal Service among 1,007 Virginians conducted following the 2021 gubernatorial election (January 2022).
2. Summit Research post-election survey on behalf of the Postal Service among 4,000 Americans conducted following the 2020 elections (December 15-22, 2020).
3. Summit Research post-election survey on behalf of the Postal Service among 900 Virginians conducted immediately following the 2017 gubernatorial election (November 7-9, 2017).
4. Informed Visibility by USPS. <https://postalpro.usps.com/informedvisibility>
5. Informed Delivery by USPS. <https://informeddelivery.usps.com/box/pages/intro/start.action>

Direct mail plays an important role as part of an integrated campaign – introducing, supporting, and amplifying messaging used in other advertising channels.





## Get In Touch



The Postal Service has specialists available to help campaigns capitalize on their direct mail outreach with voters. Whether you're interested in direct mail insights, mail piece design analysis, or operational support, the Postal Service is committed to helping you and your campaign.

To find out more, visit us at:  
**[DeliverTheWin.com](https://www.deliverthewin.com)**



## In Association with AAPC

Thanks to the American Association of Political Consultants (AAPC) for their participation in this study. Founded in 1969, the AAPC is a multi-partisan organization of political and public affairs professionals dedicated to improving democracy. It is the largest association of political and public affairs professionals in the world. AAPC members consist of political consultants, media consultants, pollsters, campaign managers, corporate public affairs officers, professors, fund-raisers, lobbyists, congressional staffers and vendors. Membership is open to everyone associated with politics from the local level to the White House.

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