

The Growing Impact of **DIRECT MAIL**

Insights from the 2022
Midterm Elections on How to
Directly Reach Voters and the
Future of Campaigning



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

Directly Reaching Voters

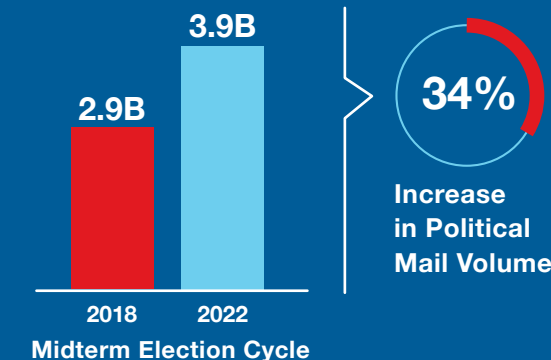
The 2022 Midterm Election cycle saw historic political advertising spending, with many campaigns striving to reach voters that increasingly want political messaging that is easy to understand, tangible, and personalized. Many campaigns recognized that direct mail is a critical part of the media mix to reach target demographics, which resulted in roughly one billion additional direct mail pieces being sent by political campaigns this past election cycle compared to the 2018 Midterm Election cycle.¹

Since 2016, the United States Postal Service has conducted post-election research and developed eight joint reports with the American Association of Political Consultants (AAPC). In our ninth joint report, we are releasing a detailed and informed analysis of voter perceptions of political advertising channels from a 2022 post-election survey conducted by Summit Research and KRC Research and funded by the Postal Service,² as well as comparisons to our previous post-election research following the 2020 Presidential Elections.³ We also conducted four voter focus groups — one national focus group of minority voters and three regional focus groups of younger voters in Georgia, Nevada, and New York.

This report aims to go deeper than past research through oversampling of key demographics and bellwether states to examine the effectiveness of direct mail and uncover new insights on how to increase its impact through tailoring, timing, and targeting. It serves as a guide for political campaigns, capturing what has shifted and stayed the same with voter behaviors and preferences, while outlining how direct mail has a growing and evolving role within political campaigns.



Political Mail Volume¹



62%

of surveyed voters recalled receiving political mail **at least weekly** during the 2022 Midterm Election cycle — **up from 48%** during the 2020 Presidential Election cycle

National Survey Profile



Research Methodology

Post-Election Survey of 2,236 National Voters in November-December 2022

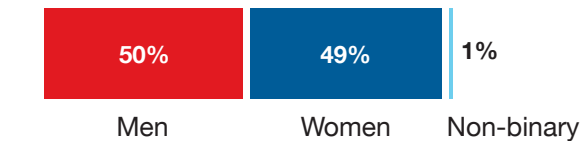


15-Minute Survey Conducted Online

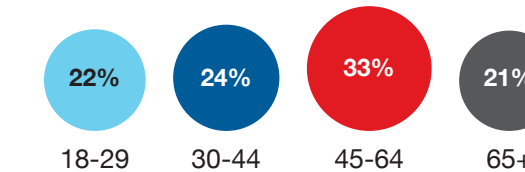
4 Voter Focus Groups of Minority and Younger Voters in January 2023



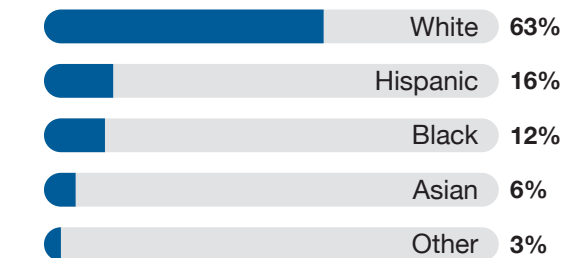
Gender



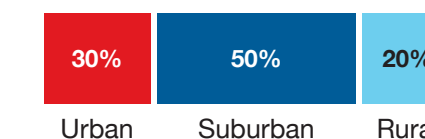
Age



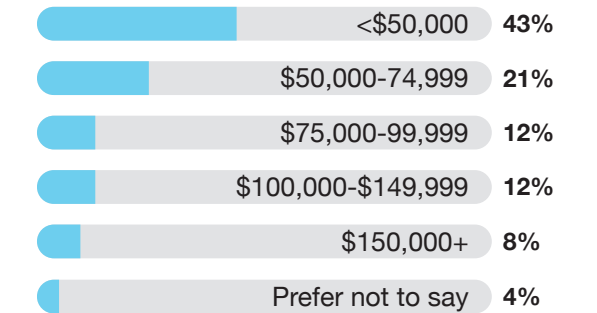
Race/Ethnicity



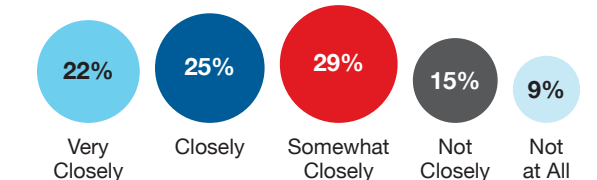
Location



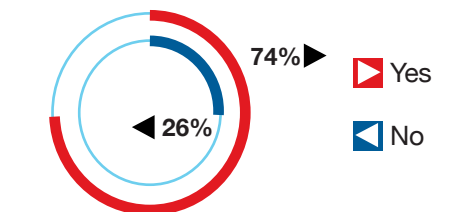
Household Income



Followed Midterm Elections



Recalled Receiving Direct Mail



1 : Leverage Direct Mail as Part of the Media Mix

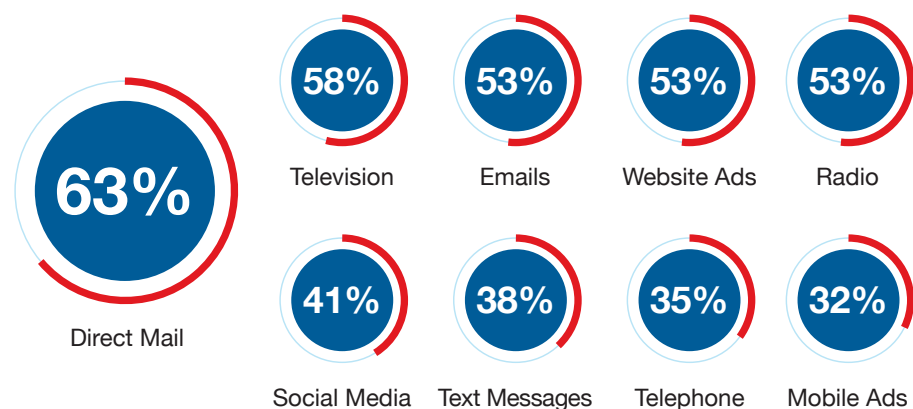


64%

of surveyed voters agreed that **political mail reinforced information** they saw on television and online political advertising.

Direct mail is a vital piece of the communications puzzle that is informative, educational, and persuasive — and should, therefore, continue to be included as part of any integrated political campaign. The research found that direct mail remains the most credible political advertising channel for 63% of surveyed voters — with a majority (56%) also continuing to believe direct mail includes more facts than other channels — which contributes to voters taking more action after reading direct mail pieces. Voter trust in direct mail can be harnessed as a powerful device for initial voter outreach — and to reinforce outreach on other political advertising channels.

Direct Mail Remains the Most Credible Political Advertising Channel

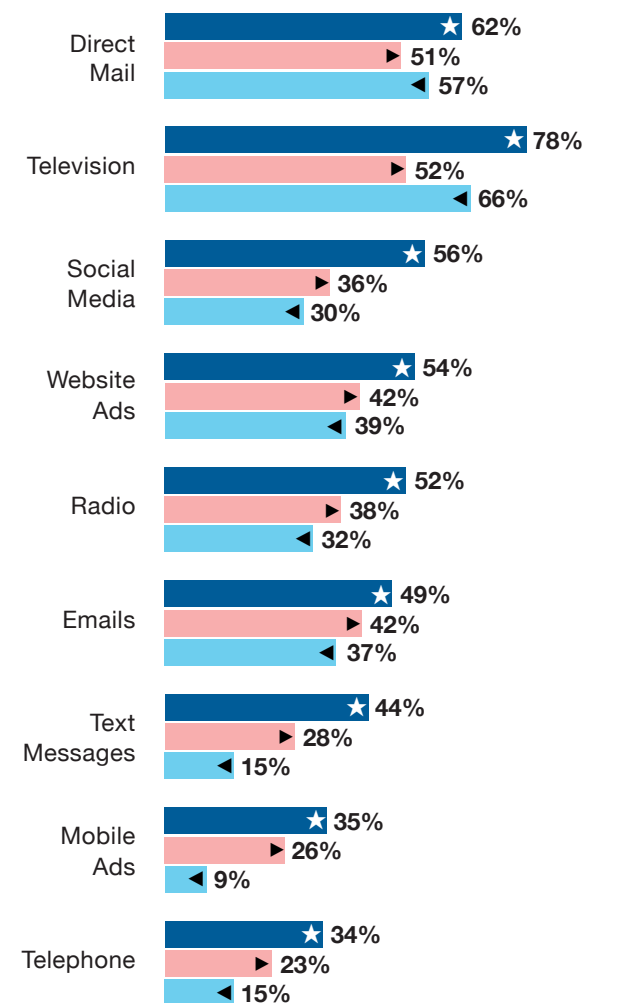


“The [ads] in my mailbox weren’t really talking about the other candidates. So, it was more [about campaigns] saying what they stood for. What are their points? What is their platform? I got a lot more information [from mail pieces] than the [ads] I saw on TV.”

– Minority Voter



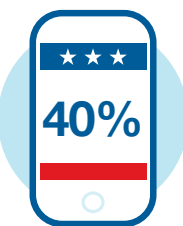
Direct Mail is Informative, Educational, and Persuasive — and Drives High-Recall Rate with Voters



★ Recallable ► Informative/ Educational ◀ Persuasive



The Digital Mailbox

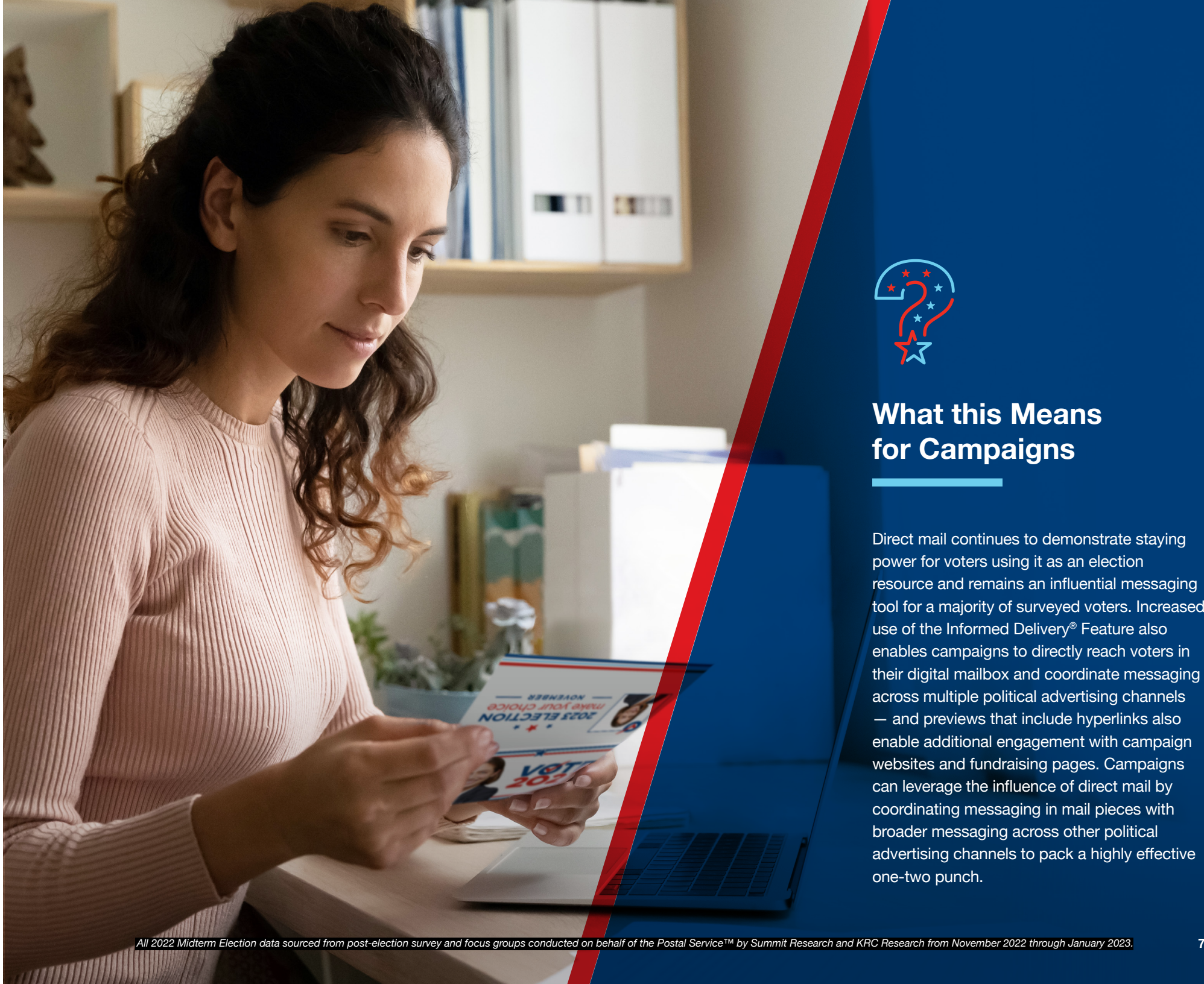
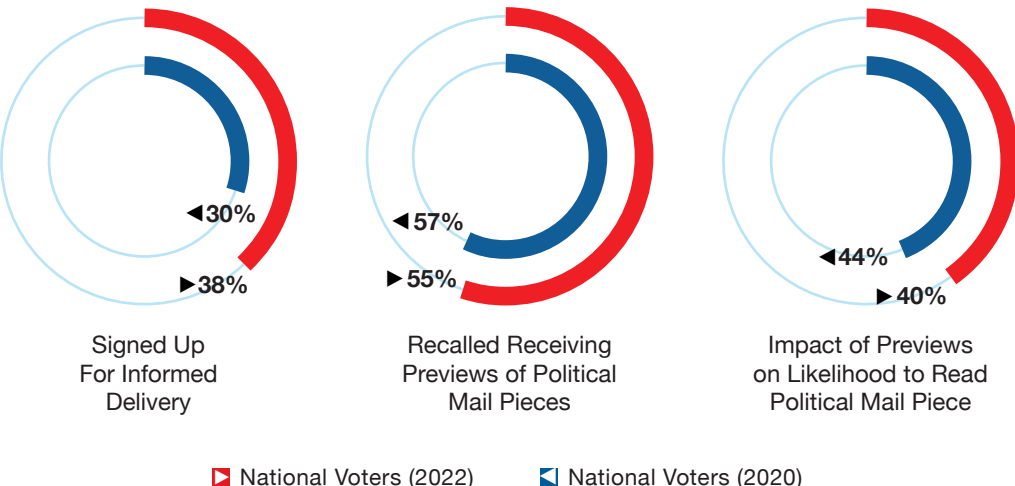


For those using the Informed Delivery® Feature⁴ who recalled seeing political mail previews, 40% were more motivated to read the direct mail piece when it arrived in person.

The Postal Service has several tools — including Informed Delivery® Feature — that allow campaigns to interact with voters beyond the traditional mailbox and digitally integrate their direct mail program with other political advertising outreach.

Informed Delivery® Feature is free to the American public and currently reaches more than 50 million Americans, with daily direct mail previews being sent to roughly 30% of households. And almost two-thirds of Informed Delivery® Feature preview emails are opened — three times more than other advertising emails.

Recall Rates for Political Messaging Previews on Informed Delivery



What this Means for Campaigns

Direct mail continues to demonstrate staying power for voters using it as an election resource and remains an influential messaging tool for a majority of surveyed voters. Increased use of the Informed Delivery® Feature also enables campaigns to directly reach voters in their digital mailbox and coordinate messaging across multiple political advertising channels — and previews that include hyperlinks also enable additional engagement with campaign websites and fundraising pages. Campaigns can leverage the influence of direct mail by coordinating messaging in mail pieces with broader messaging across other political advertising channels to pack a highly effective one-two punch.

2 Utilize the Mail Moment® Experience to Reach Voters

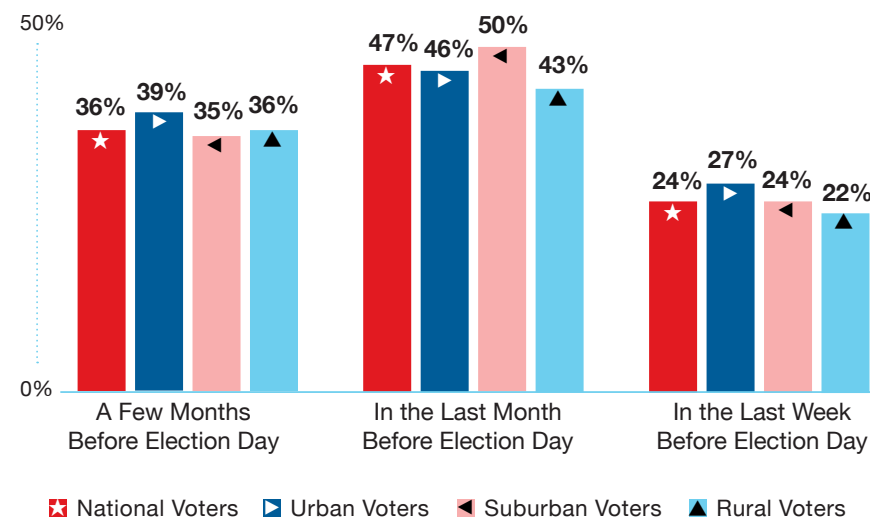


77%

of surveyed voters still check their mailbox at least 4 days a week — a number that is similar to the results of the 2020 national survey (81%).

The voter relationship with direct mail can be utilized to directly reach voters with the campaign information they want at the time they want to receive it during the election cycle. 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 continue to have a similar relationship with direct mail — with 48% stating that direct mail was the most memorable form of political advertising this past election cycle.

When Voters Prefer to Receive Direct Mail



“When I get [mail pieces] last minute, I don’t feel like I have enough time to really understand or know what that candidate believes in or is running for.”
— New York Voter

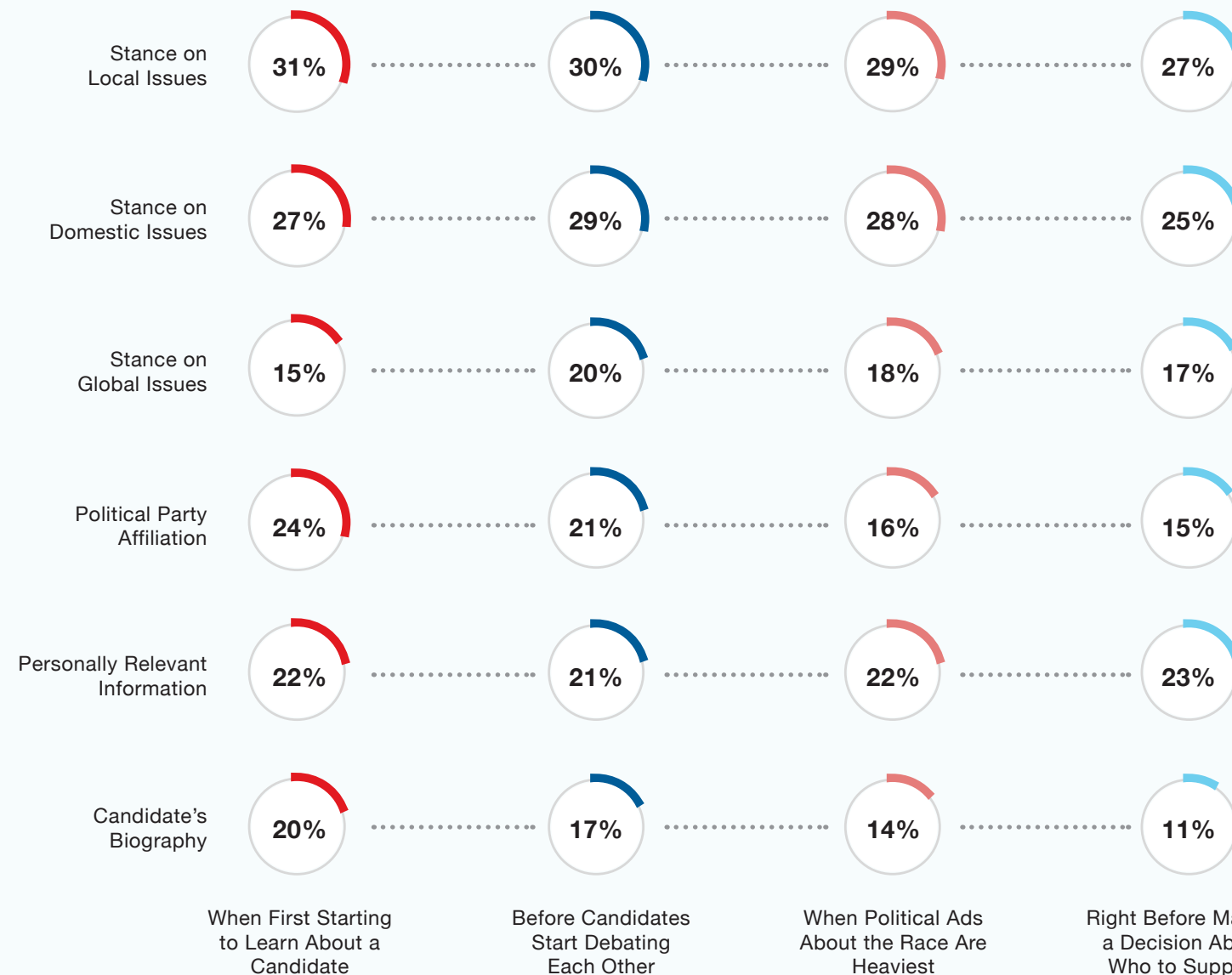


67%

of suburban voters recall receiving political mail pieces daily or weekly during the Midterm Election cycle — compared to 57% of both urban and rural voters.



When Voters Want to Receive Direct Mail Pieces with Key Information About the Candidate

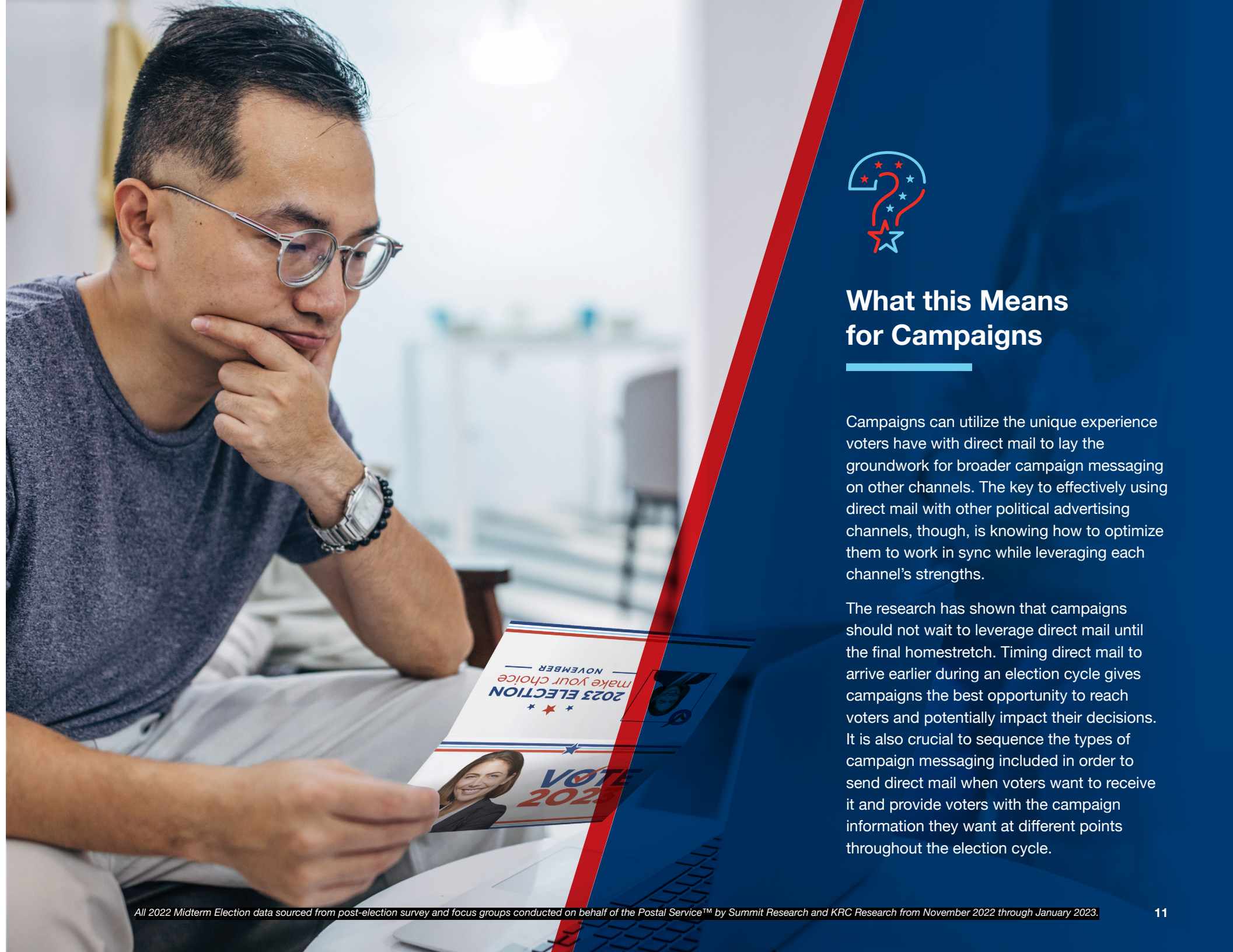


72%

of surveyed voters agreed that the mail pieces they received were **easy to understand**.

The Sweet Spot for Engagement

The voters in the focus groups highlighted the importance of finding the “sweet spot” to have the most impact and influence — too early in the election cycle (more than 3 months) and some voters aren’t engaged yet; too late in the election cycle (less than 1 month) and some voters have already made their decision.



What this Means for Campaigns

Campaigns can utilize the unique experience voters have with direct mail to lay the groundwork for broader campaign messaging on other channels. The key to effectively using direct mail with other political advertising channels, though, is knowing how to optimize them to work in sync while leveraging each channel’s strengths.

The research has shown that campaigns should not wait to leverage direct mail until the final homestretch. Timing direct mail to arrive earlier during an election cycle gives campaigns the best opportunity to reach voters and potentially impact their decisions. It is also crucial to sequence the types of campaign messaging included in order to send direct mail when voters want to receive it and provide voters with the campaign information they want at different points throughout the election cycle.

3 : Engage Voters by Delivering Personalized Messaging



80%

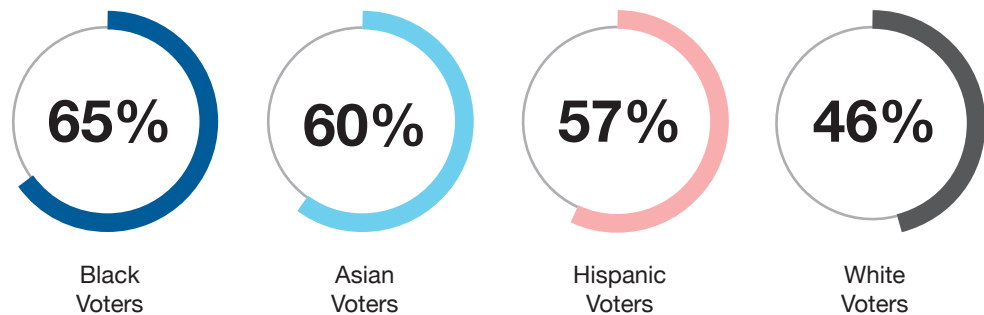
of White voters check their mailbox at **least 4 days a week** — compared to an average 69% of minority voters.

45%

of Black voters are using Informed Delivery — a **17% increase from 2020** and 7% more than the national average in 2022.

Voters now have the opportunity to consume campaign information from several different political advertising channels, which can lead to them potentially becoming overwhelmed and not absorbing the content. An integrated political campaign that includes direct mail can help reset this dynamic by communicating with voters through a highly personalized political advertising channel that has been proven to engage and inform across all demographics. Direct mail can be used to not only precisely target voters by demographic, but to also coordinate messaging with other political advertising channels.

Direct Mail is Informative and Educational for Minority Voters

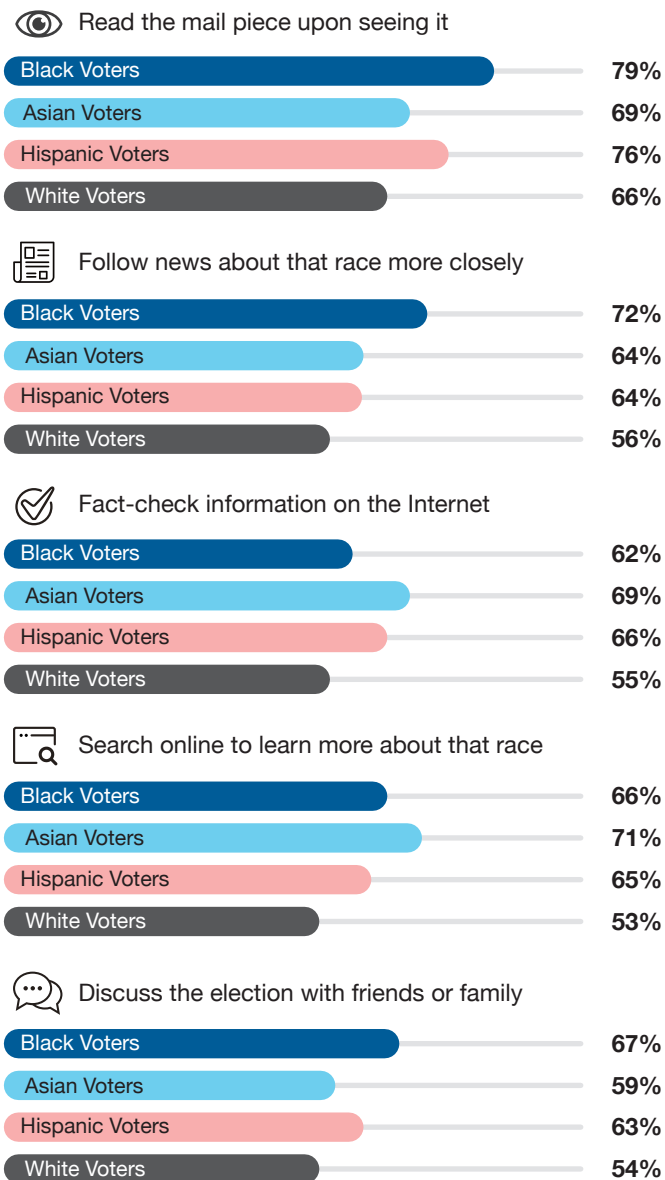


“It made me a little bit more appreciative, seeing myself represented. I was willing to actually read that postcard... just because that [personalization] caught my eye, and I appreciated the effort they took to try to address all their [constituents].”

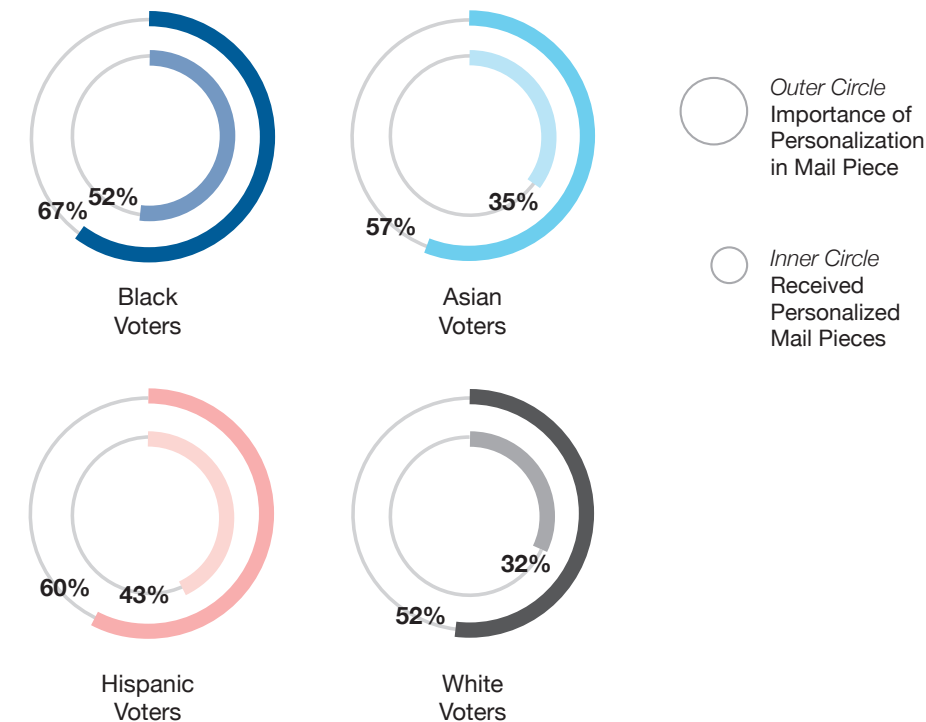
— Minority Voter



Minority Voters Take More Action After Receiving Direct Mail



Personalization of Direct Mail is Important with Minority Voters — But Many Did Not Receive Mail Pieces That Spoke to Them Personally



39%

of Hispanic voters have received political mail in Spanish — this **increased the likelihood to read the mail piece for 51% of Hispanic voters.**

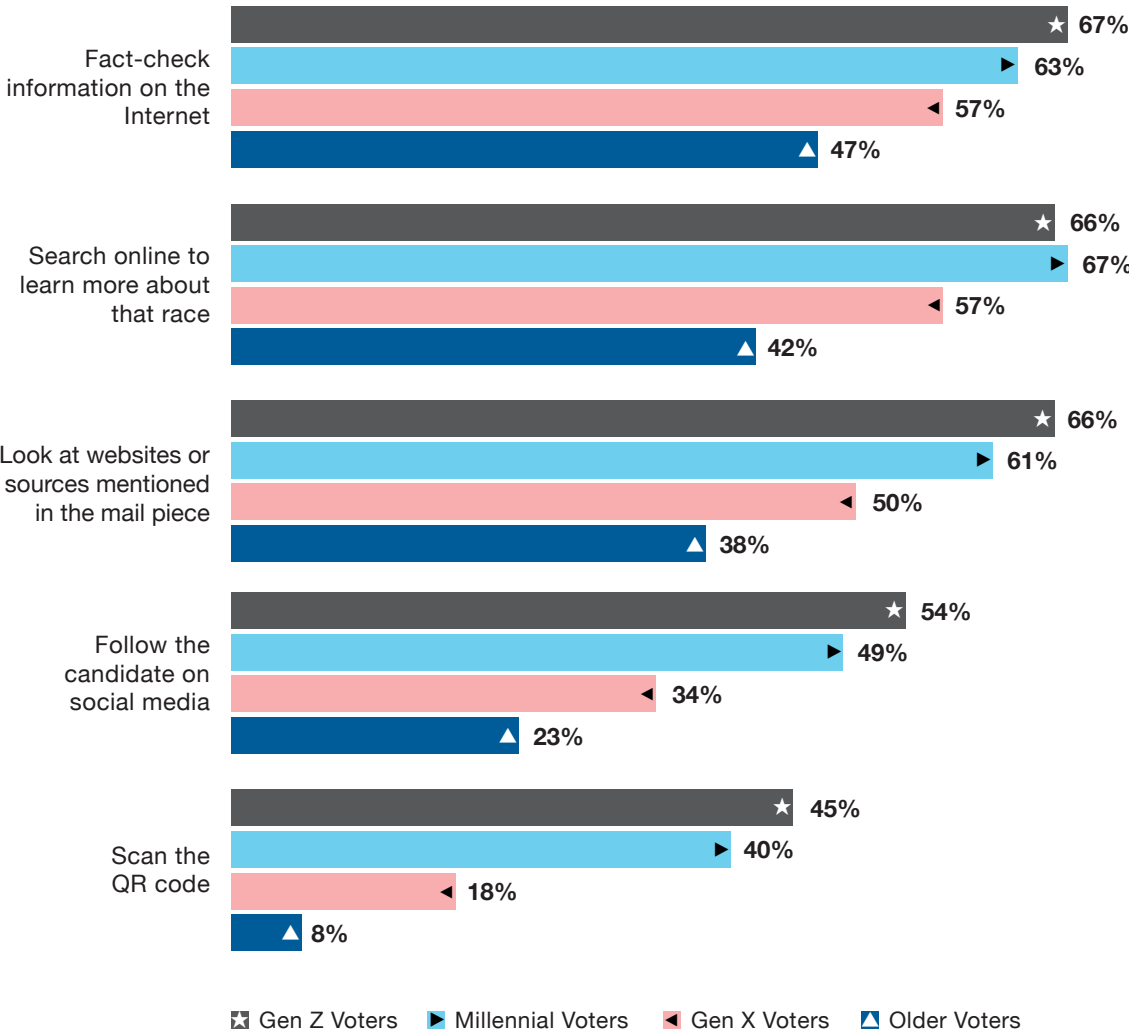
Connect with a New Generation

The 2022 Midterm Elections confirmed that Gen Z is highly engaged in the political process, with turnout among younger voters the second highest for a Midterm Election cycle in the past 30 years.⁵ Unsurprisingly, for a generation that grew up in the digital age, Gen Z checks their mailbox less frequently, with only 59% checking at least 4 days a week — compared to 86% of older voters.

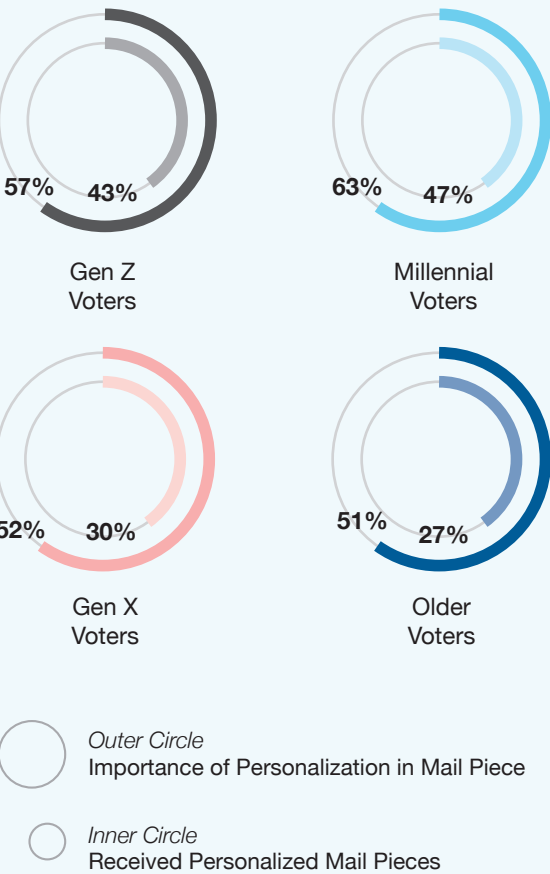
However, when Gen Z does engage with direct mail, they have a higher tendency to take action. They have a unique relationship with direct mail that runs counter to the narrative of a digital-first culture. This allows campaigns to create a tangible connection with this generation as it comes of voting age.

62%
of Gen Z voters trust direct mail more than online political advertising — compared to 42% of older voters.

Gen Z Takes More Action Online After Reading Mail Pieces — Even Though They Check Their Mailbox Less Often

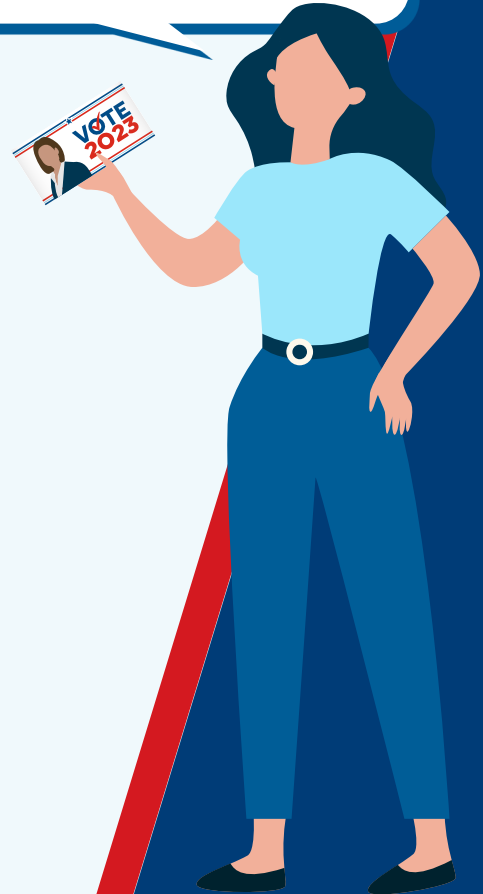


Campaigns Are More Successful at Personalizing Direct Mail Messaging with Younger Voters



“It’s very difficult to get young people enthused, because there are so many distractions now, [but then there are some mail pieces] you can’t throw aside...it’s super important to engage young people by involving them.”

— Younger Voter



What this Means for Campaigns

While direct mail is influential with voters, it should not be used as a one-size-fits-all advertising channel across all demographics. Voters value customized messaging and engagement from campaigns — and direct mail’s ability to precisely target voters by demographic makes it an ideal advertising channel for personalized messaging. Crucially, younger voters have embraced direct mail just as their generation begins to have a meaningful impact on election cycles. Campaigns can also increase the likelihood of voters taking action after reading mail pieces by utilizing personalized messaging and customization by demographic.

Georgia Survey Profile

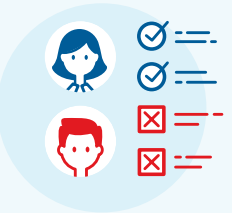
Research Methodology

Oversampling
of 408 Georgia
Voters



15-Minute Survey
Conducted Online

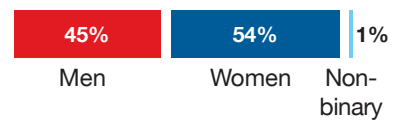
Voter Focus
Group of
Younger Voters



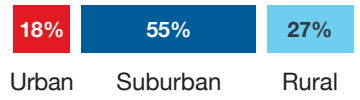
The Spotlight State

The national attention on Georgia's runoff race following the 2020 Presidential Election continued unabated leading up to the 2022 Midterm Elections, resulting in Georgia voters witnessing some of the most significant campaign spending this election cycle. We oversampled 408 voters from across the state to determine how this sustained focus and large volume of political advertising impacted their perspective and the effectiveness of campaign messaging.

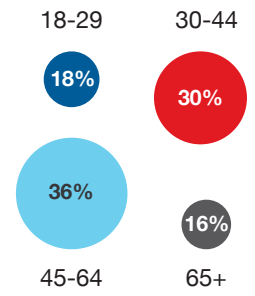
Gender



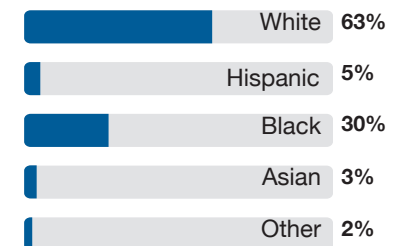
Location



Age



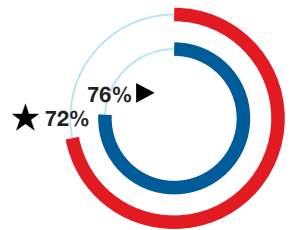
Race/Ethnicity



*Respondents were able to select all that apply.

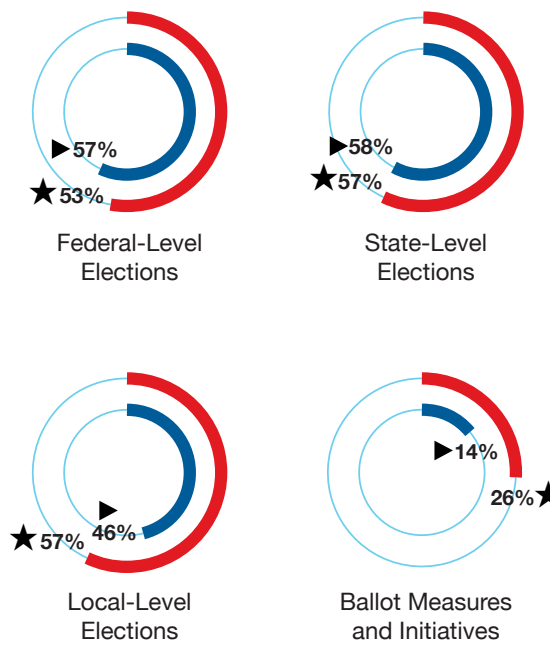
“ [Campaigns] should focus on why they want to run in that position to get my trust. To keep my trust, send me follow-up [mail pieces and]... just focus on you and what you need to do. – Georgia Voter ”

Georgia Voters Find Direct Mail is Easy to Understand

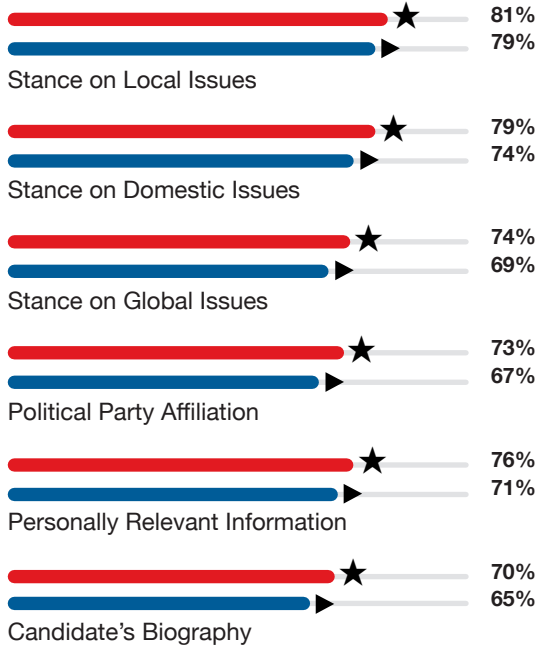


★ National Voters ▶ Georgia Voters

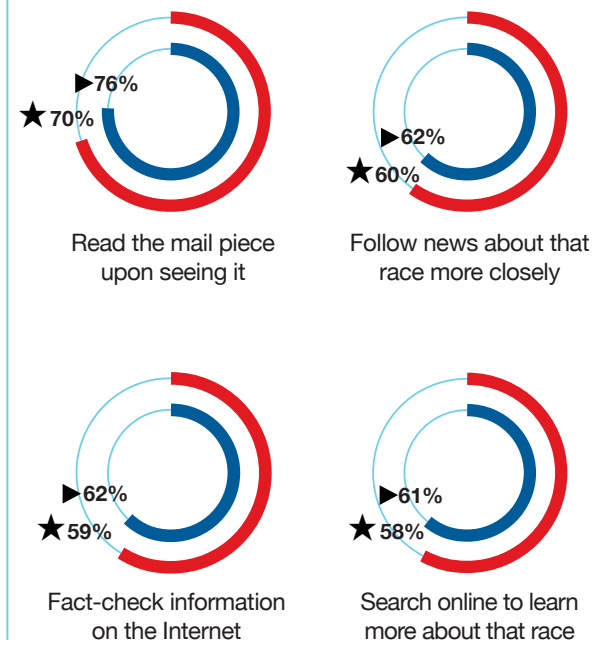
Focus of Direct Mail Received by Georgia Voters



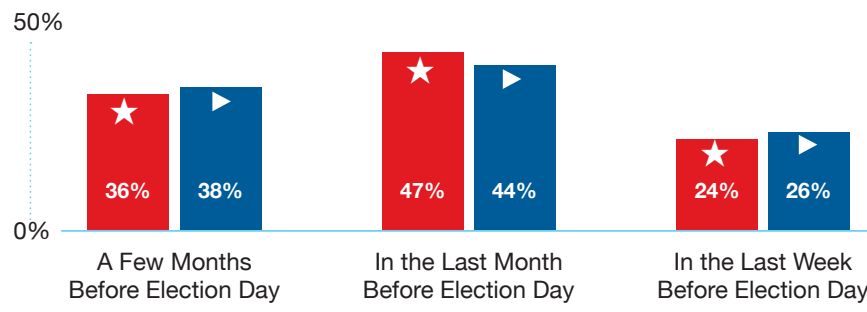
Georgia Voters Want Key Information About Candidates



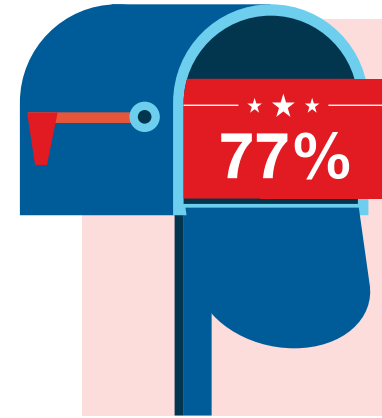
Georgia Voter Engagement with Direct Mail



When Georgia Voters Prefer to Receive Direct Mail



★ National Voters ▶ Georgia Voters



Over 3 in 4
Georgia voters check their mailbox at least 4 days a week — a number that is consistent with national trends (77%)

Nevada Survey Profile

Research Methodology

Oversampling
of 410 Nevada
Voters



15-Minute Survey
Conducted Online

Voter Focus
Group of
Younger Voters



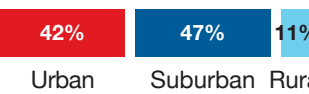
The Swing State

A perennial swing state, Nevada's changing demographics leading up to the 2022 Midterm Elections and the impact this had on campaign results made it an important case study for voting patterns and potential national trends. We oversampled 410 voters from across the state to gain insights into their perspective and relationship with political advertising channels.

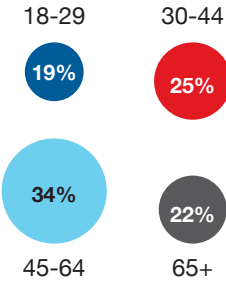
Gender



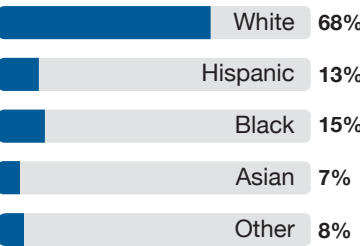
Location



Age



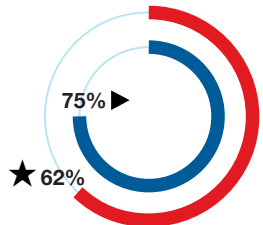
Race/Ethnicity



*Respondents were able to select all that apply.

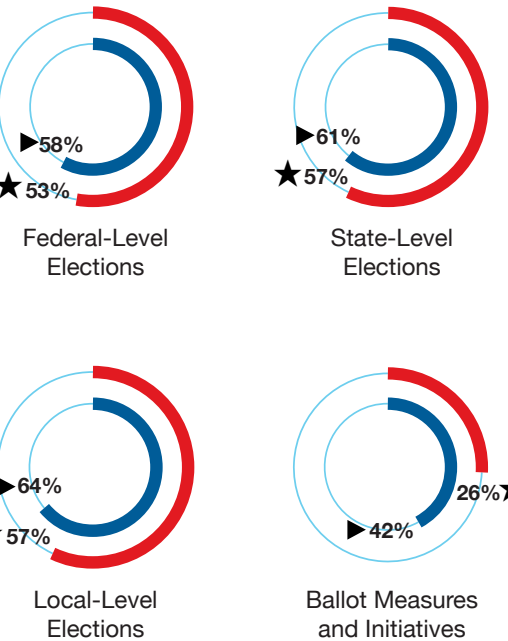
“The mail I ended up getting in person was helpful. It was just [campaigns] selling themselves. So, I would read it and decide if I wanted to vote for [them].”
— Nevada Voter

Nevada Voters Find Direct Mail is Easy to Recall

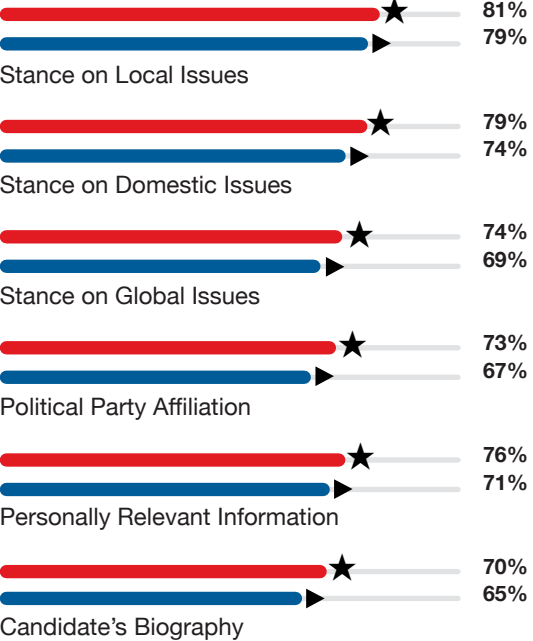


★ National Voters ▶ Nevada Voters

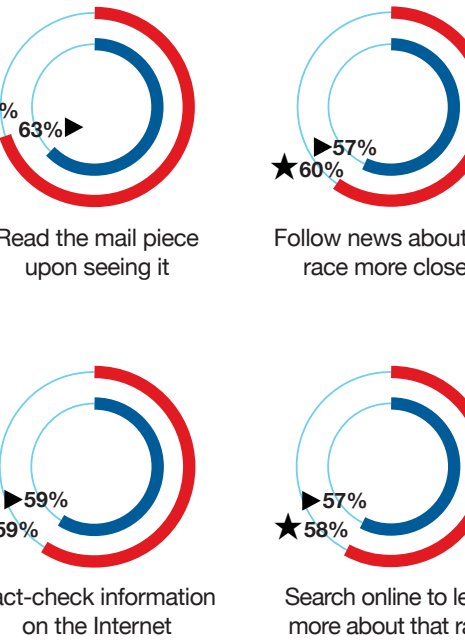
Focus of Direct Mail Received by Nevada Voters



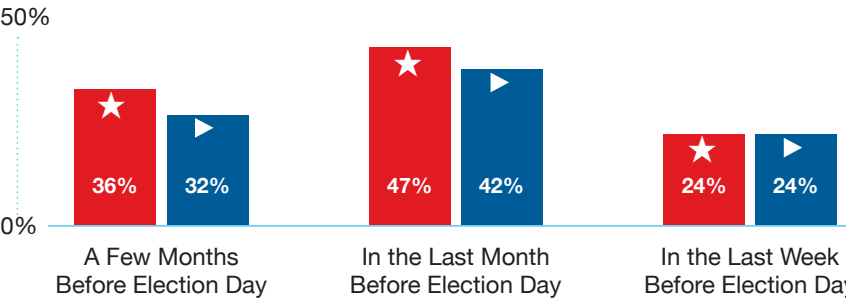
Nevada Voters Want Key Information About Candidates



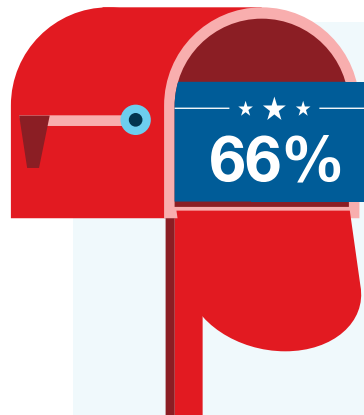
Nevada Voter Engagement with Direct Mail



When Nevada Voters Prefer to Receive Direct Mail



★ National Voters ▶ Nevada Voters



Roughly 2 in 3
Nevada voters check their mailbox at least 4 days a week — a number that is slightly lower than national trends (77%)

New York Survey Profile

Research Methodology

Oversampling
of 408 New
York Voters



15-Minute Survey
Conducted Online

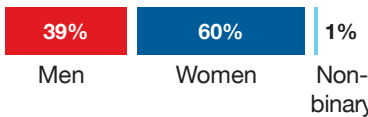
Voter Focus
Group of
Younger Voters



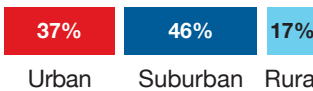
The Shifting State

New York saw unanticipated demographic and partisan shifts in voting patterns during the 2022 Midterm Election cycle that made it an important case study for future campaigns. We oversampled 408 voters from across the state to understand how direct mail and other advertising channels resonated in a state where campaign results varied compared to other states.

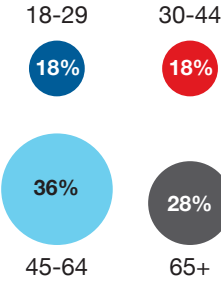
Gender



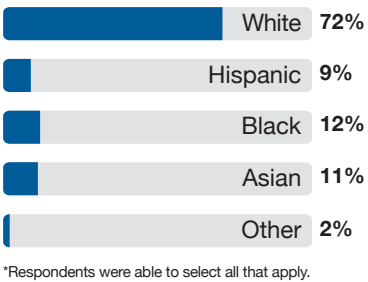
Location



Age

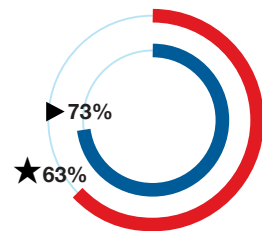


Race/Ethnicity



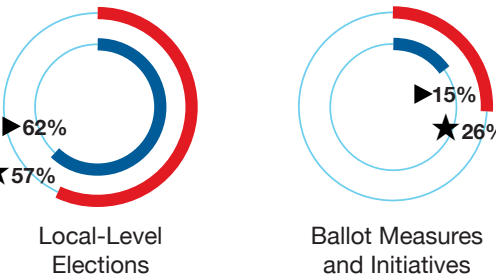
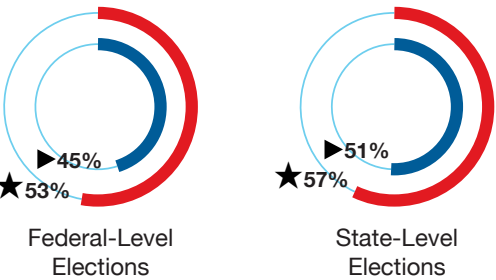
“ If [mail pieces] were more personable and approached topics that affect me in the local area, I would be more engaged in learning more about what [that campaign] stands for. – New York Voter ”

New York Voters Find Direct Mail is Credible

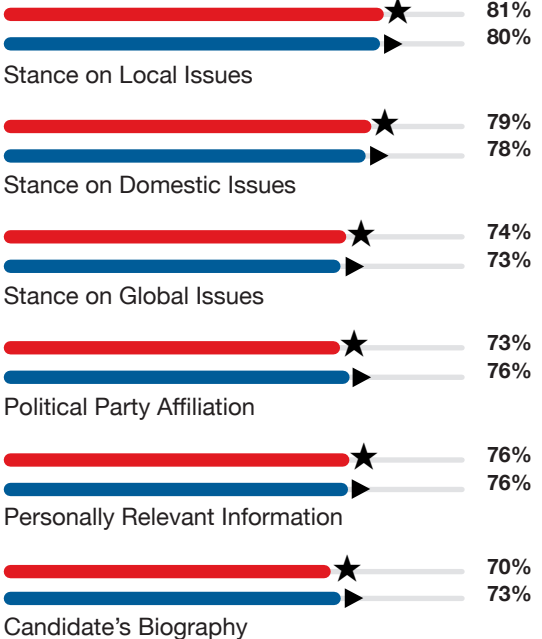


★ National Voters ▶ New York Voters

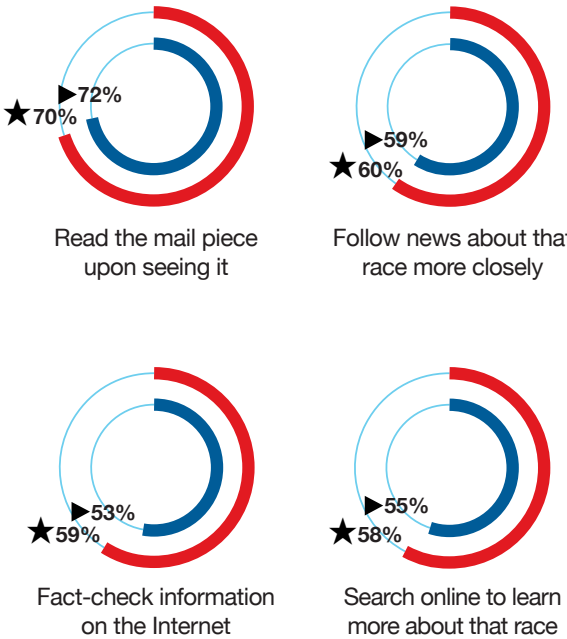
Focus of Direct Mail Received by New York Voters



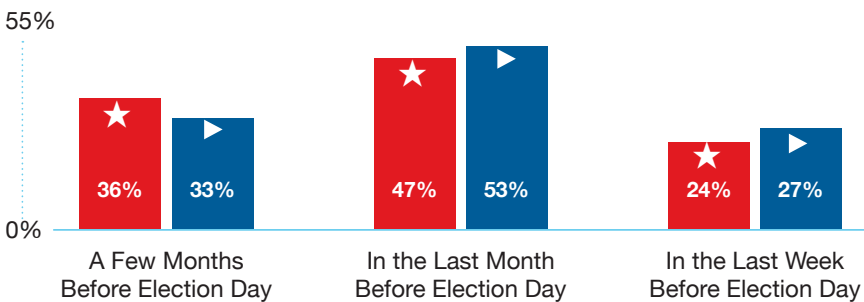
New York Voters Want Key Information About Candidates



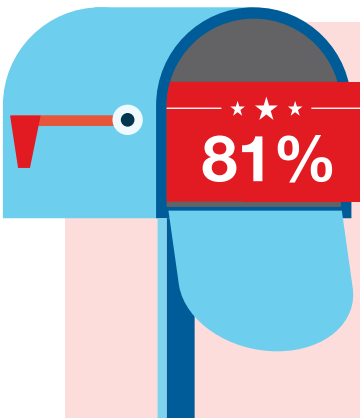
New York Voter Engagement with Direct Mail



When New York Voters Prefer to Receive Direct Mail



★ National Voters ▶ New York Voters



Over 4 in 5
New York voters check their mailbox at least 4 days a week — a number that is slightly higher than national trends (77%)

The Future of Campaigning

A constant we have seen from election cycle to election cycle is that campaigns continue to evolve their strategy and tactics to communicate with voters. The future of campaigning could see an increase in newer tactics — like user-generated content and artificial intelligence (AI) — and the role of direct mail will need to evolve in order to continue bridging the traditional and digital forms of voter outreach. While direct mail has had a growing impact during recent election cycles — it is not a one-size-fits-all tactic or advertising channel. In order to harness the full potential impact of direct mail, campaigns should consider these actionable insights when developing messaging strategies for the upcoming election cycle, including:



1

**Leverage
Direct Mail
as Part of the
Media Mix**



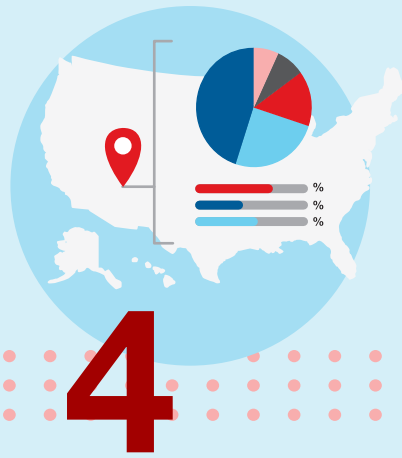
2

**Utilize the
Mail Moment®
Experience to
Reach Voters**



3

**Engage Voters
by Delivering
Personalized
Messaging**



4

**Understand the
Unique Political
Landscape in
Your State**

References

1. USPS Internal Data.
2. All 2022 Midterm Election data sourced from post-election research conducted on behalf of the Postal Service™ by Summit Research and KRC Research from November 2022 through January 2023. The research includes post-election voter surveys and focus groups.
3. Summit Research post-election survey on behalf of the Postal Service among 4,000 Americans conducted following the 2020 elections (December 15-22, 2020).
4. Informed Delivery by USPS. <https://informedelivery.usps.com/box/pages/intro/start.action>
5. CIRCLE Tisch College of Civic Life. Youth Voter Turnout and Impact in the 2022 Midterm Elections, December 2022. https://circle.tufts.edu/sites/default/files/2022-12/early_data_youth_vote_report.pdf



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