

How to Tackle Campaign Challenges with Direct Mail

Actionable Insights For
Campaigns to DelivertheWin[®]
this Election Cycle



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



Turning Challenges into Opportunities

Voters have always been the ultimate test of what captivates, resonates, and motivates. The 2024 Presidential Election cycle will be driven by an American electorate that is closely divided and increasingly skeptical of what they hear, see, and read in their day-to-day lives.

Campaigns will be faced with the challenge of engaging with potential voters who are harder to reach as their media consumption behaviors continue to evolve and relationships with certain targeting tactics weaken. Campaigns will also have to contend with historic political advertising spending that will cost more than in past election cycles.

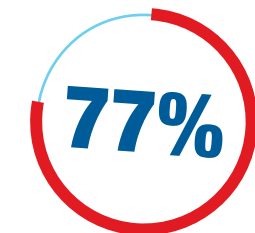
The United States Postal Service (USPS) has conducted post-election research and previously developed nine joint reports with the American Association of Political Consultants (AAPC) to provide actionable insights as a resource for campaigns. In our tenth joint report, we are releasing detailed and informed analysis from 2023 election research in order to capture what has shifted and stayed the same during recent election cycles.¹

The report highlights three unique challenges and experiences of campaign consultants through survey results and in-depth interviews. Post-election voter surveys were also conducted following key bellwether gubernatorial and mayoral elections to measure current perceptions of political advertising channels. Our research can serve as a guide on how the voter relationship with direct mail can be the solution to the challenges campaigns are facing through tailoring, timing, and targeting.



“Mail is a great mechanism to drive an issue and a credibility conversation to a voter because... I can use that mail to saturate voters that I am targeting... Where mail becomes very persuasive is that it’s a very personal, intimate way to have a direct conversation with a voter on something that may help solidify why they may believe my message.”

Consultant Interview



77% of Surveyed Consultants Anticipate **Direct Mail Will Be a Very Effective Political Advertising Channel** During the 2024 Presidential Election Cycle – Up From 61% during the 2020 Presidential Election cycle.

Research Methodology

1

Post-Election Survey of **2,529 Voters** from **Key Gubernatorial and Mayoral Elections** in November 2023

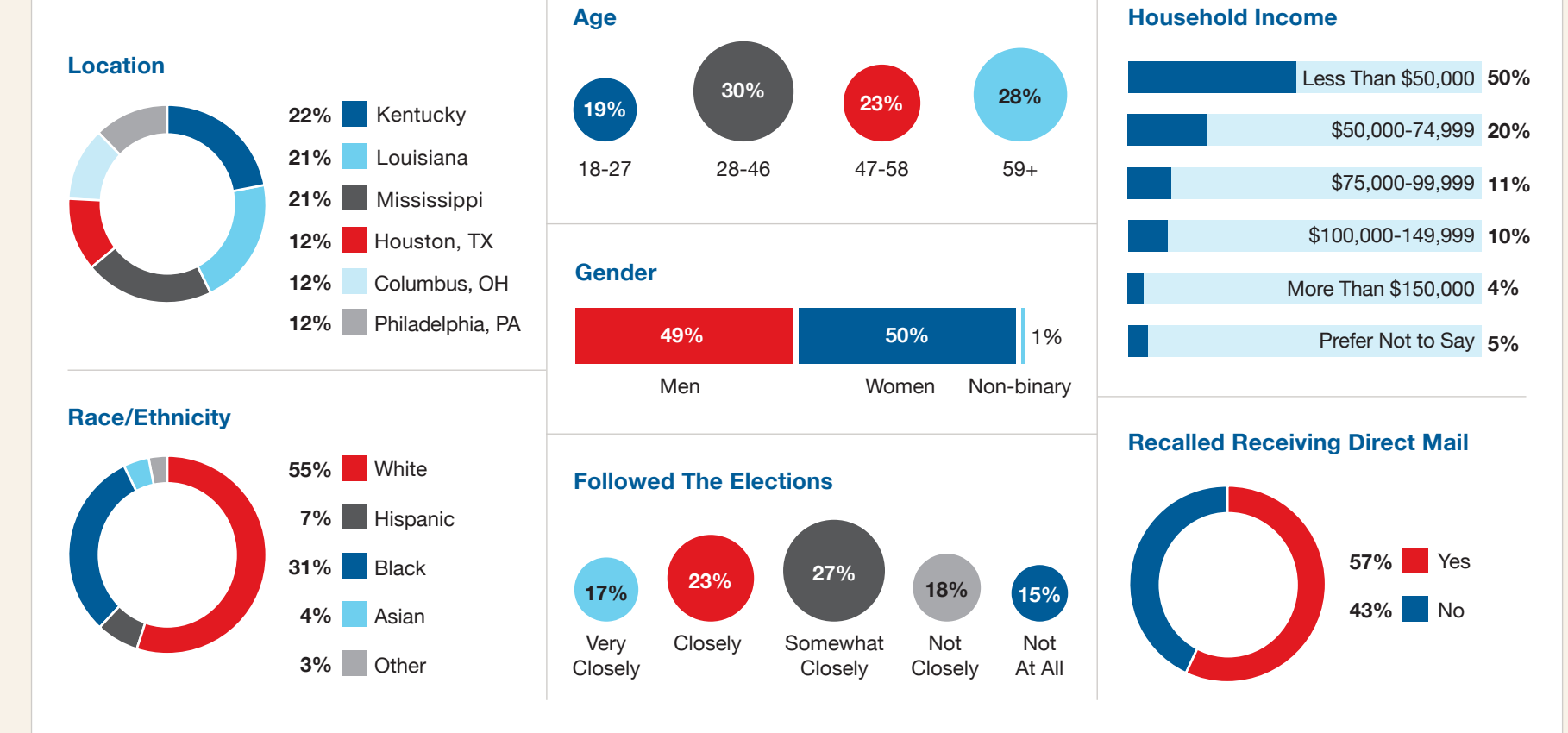
2

Post-Election Survey of **171 Campaign Consultants** in January 2024*

3

11 In-Depth Interviews with **Campaign Consultants** in September-October 2023

Voter Survey Profile



*Respondents who partially completed the consultant survey were included in the analysis.



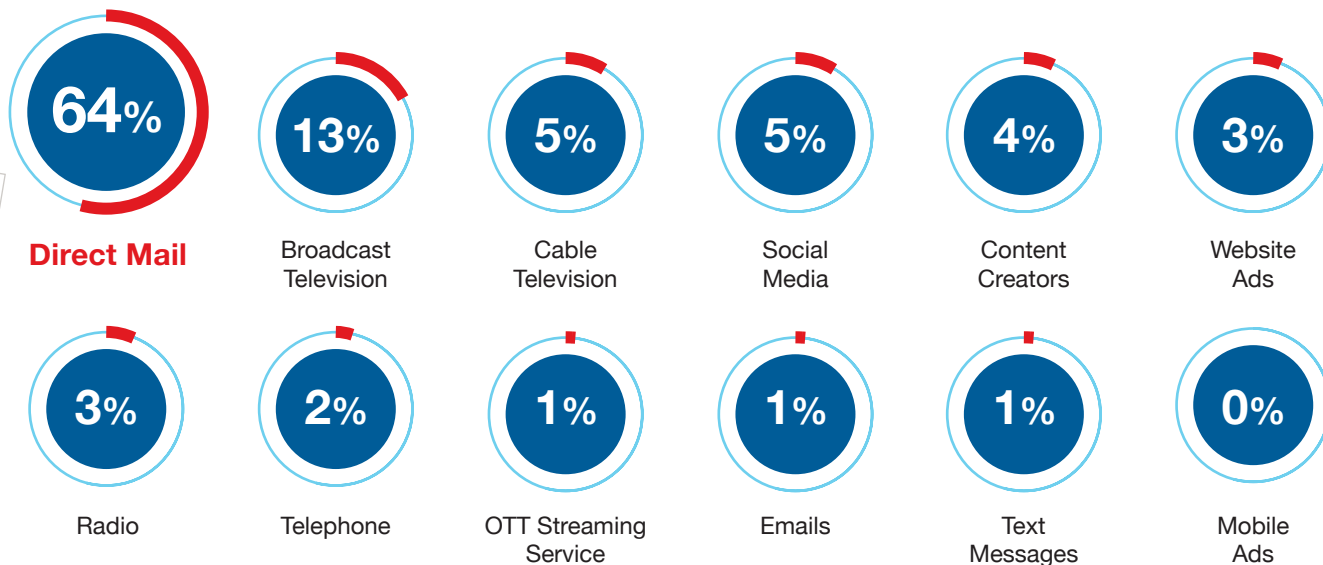
90%
of Surveyed Consultants Are Extremely Concerned About Standing Out and Maintaining Relevance in a Crowded Media Landscape.

59%
of Surveyed Consultants Are Extremely Concerned About Integrating Messaging Across Channels During the Upcoming Election Cycle.

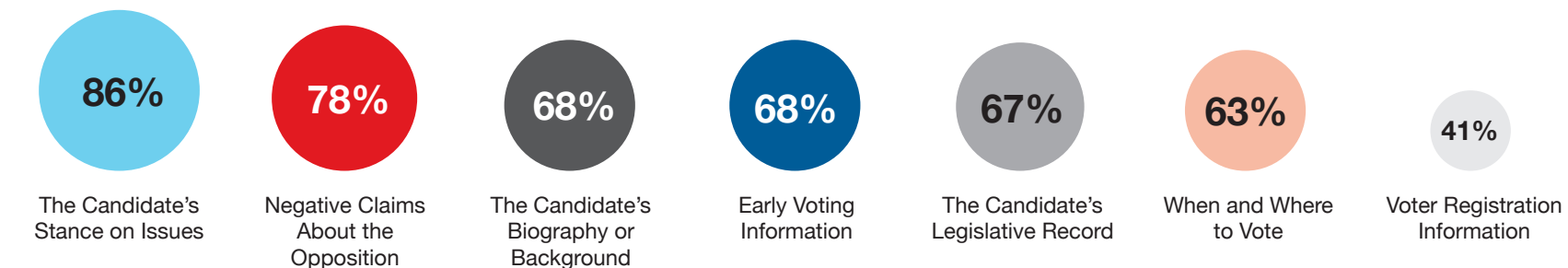
Standing Out in an Oversaturated Political Landscape

Campaigns are constantly looking for ways to optimize breaking through the noise of not just political advertising from other candidates, but advertising in general as well. Notably, a recent Pew Research Center study found that voters on both sides of the aisle feel that no matter where they go on the Internet, there is always a campaign ad meeting them – and that is where the right media mix can make the difference.² In an oversaturated media landscape, Americans also tend to trust traditional forms of advertising more than digital advertising. Campaigns can capitalize on this sentiment by aligning messaging across a media mix that includes direct mail to effectively deliver that messaging through a channel that does not contribute to advertising fatigue experienced by many voters.

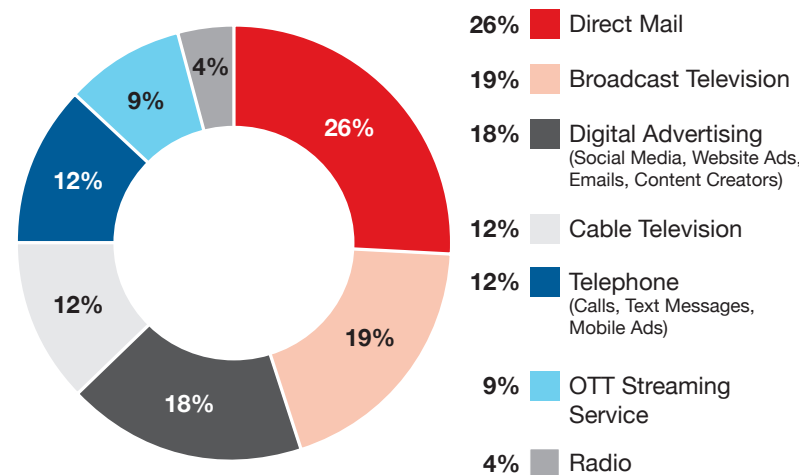
Most Surveyed Consultants Believe Direct Mail is the Most Informative and Educational Advertising Channel to Communicate Political Information



Many Surveyed Consultants Think Direct Mail is an Effective Political Advertising Channel to Communicate the Following Types of Campaign Information



Surveyed Consultants Are Allocating More Budget to Direct Mail Than Other Political Advertising Channels



“ We can't throw everything into one basket and think it's going to solve it... you've got to pick the right mix and direct mail has to be part of that mix...[it] can amplify [messaging on other channels] or even stand out by delivering it directly to a house especially if you've done your targeting right because you're hitting that message to the person who wants to see it in their mailbox.”

Consultant Interview





Break Through the Clutter with the Right Media Mix

51%

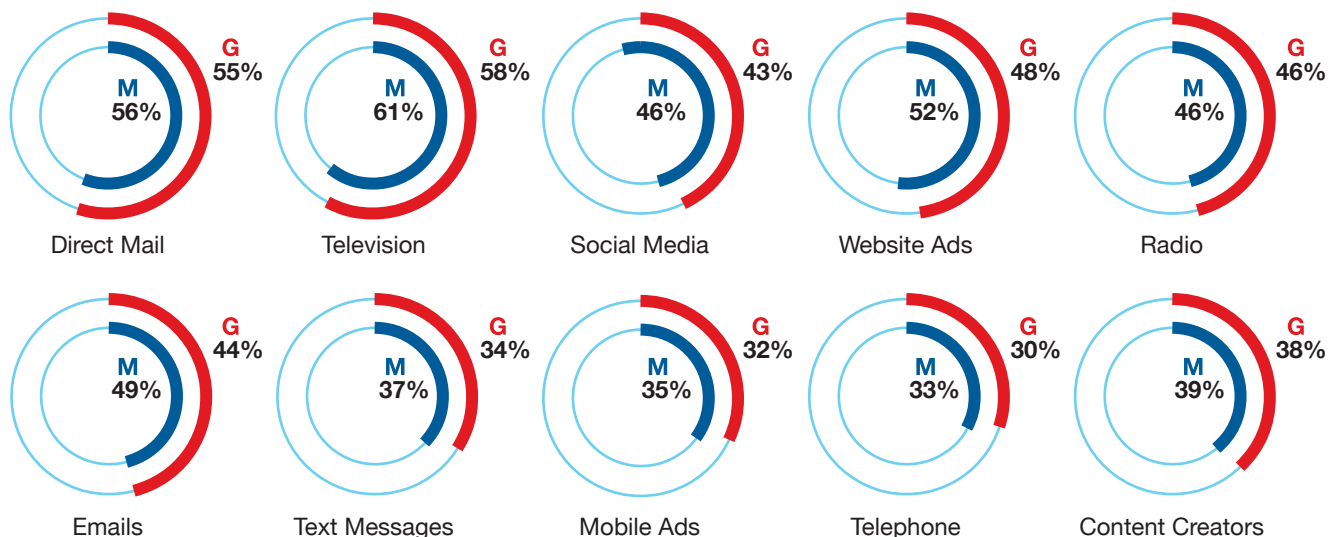
of Surveyed Consultants Believe Direct Mail is One of the Best Solutions to **Stand Out and Maintain Relevance in a Crowded Media Landscape.**

48%

of Surveyed Consultants Believe Direct Mail is One of the Best Solutions to **Integrate Messaging Across Channels.**

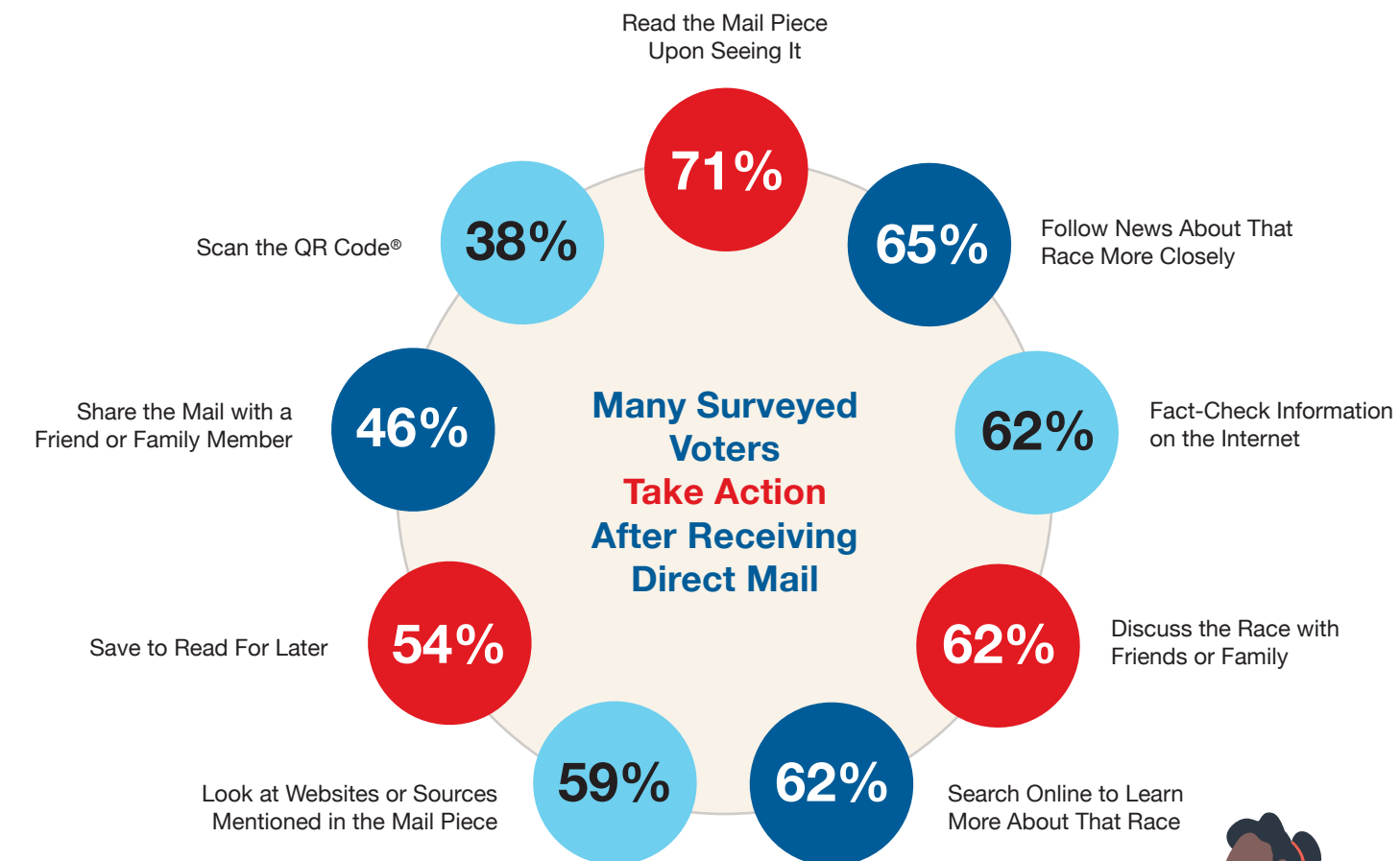
Direct Mail Continues to be an Informative and Educational Advertising Channel to Communicate Political Information

G Gubernatorial Voters **M** Mayoral Voters



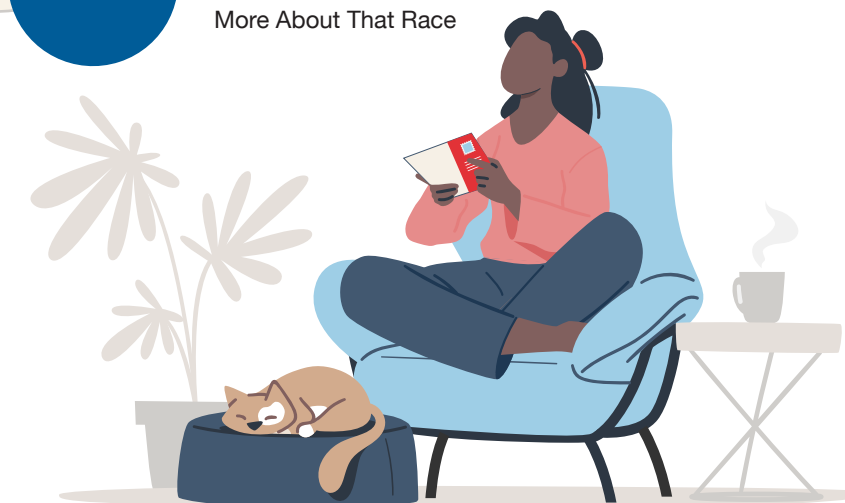
57%

of Surveyed Voters Feel That **Direct Mail Was Harder to Ignore** Than Online and Television Ads.

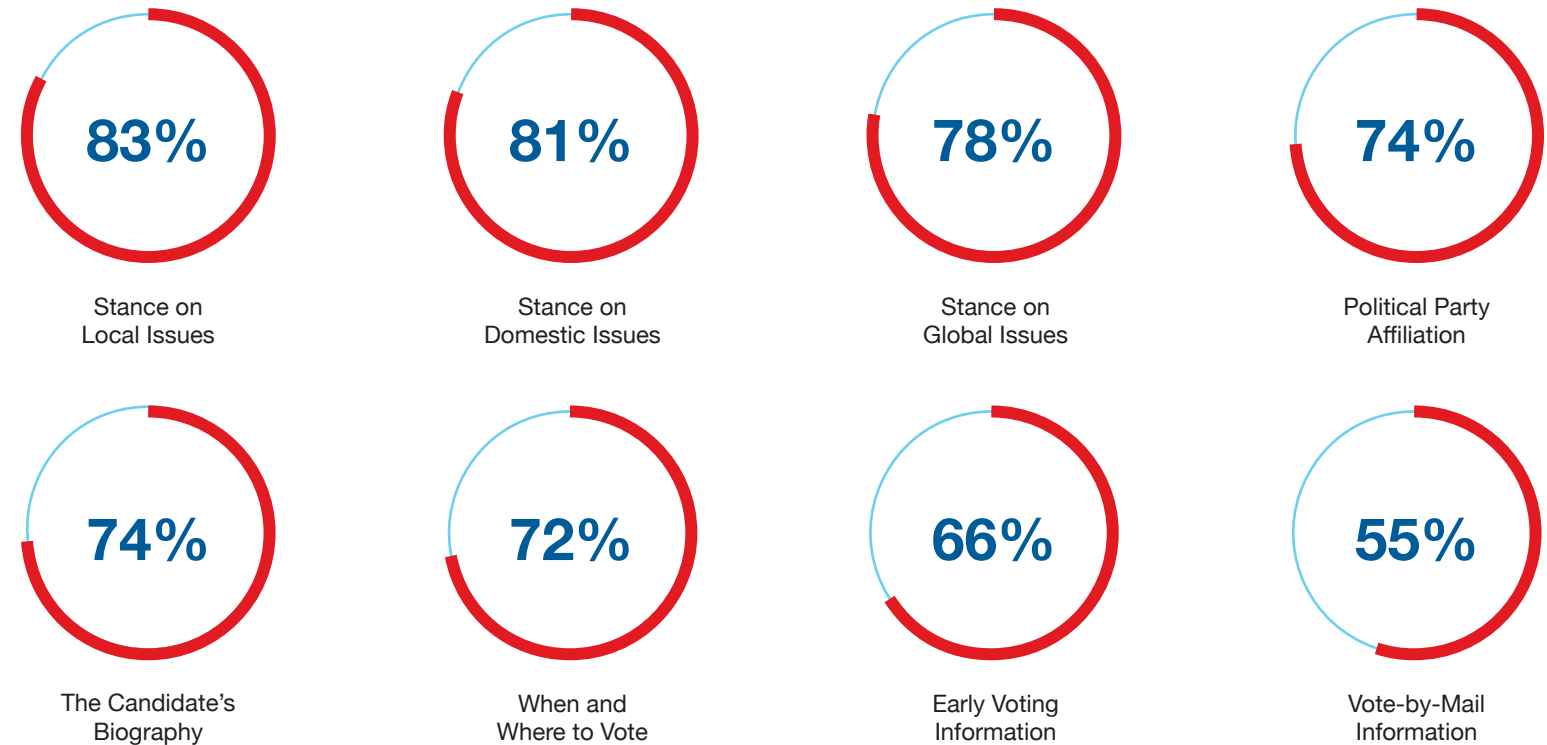


62%

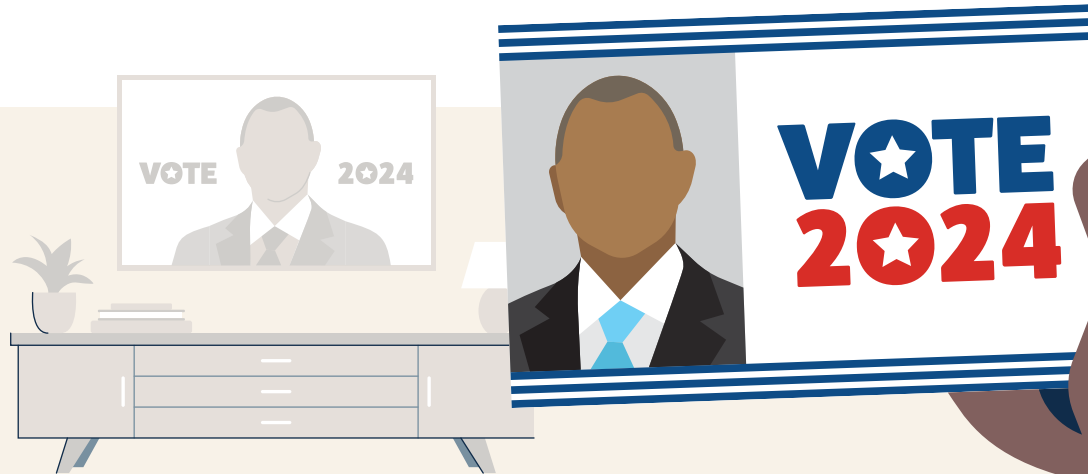
of Surveyed Voters **Believe Direct Mail Includes More Facts** – And 56% Trust Direct Mail More Than Other Advertising Channels.



Many Surveyed Voters Want to Receive the Following Types of Campaign Information Through Direct Mail Pieces



68%
of Surveyed Voters Agree That **Direct Mail Reinforces Information They Saw** on Television and Online Political Advertising.



Working With USPS

The Postal Service has guidance to ensure accurate delivery of your political mail piece – including optimizing use of a QR Code® as part of a strong media mix campaign.

The integration of technology on a mail piece enhances the informational potential of direct mail by providing an opportunity for the potential voter to engage with additional digital campaign resources – but a clear call-to-action that includes a QR Code® should never be on the address side to ensure proper processing.

We have USPS Mailpiece Design Analysts (MDAs), specially trained Postal Service employees who can provide advice on mail piece design requirements and evaluate mail pieces for machinability and automated-based prices. They can also share new opportunities, like the option to design a political mail piece with Commercial FCM Larger sized postcards (6 inches x 9 inches).³



50% of Surveyed Voters Reported Receiving a QR Code® in a Political Mail Piece – and 36% Used it to Verify or Fact-Check Information That They Read in the Mail Piece.

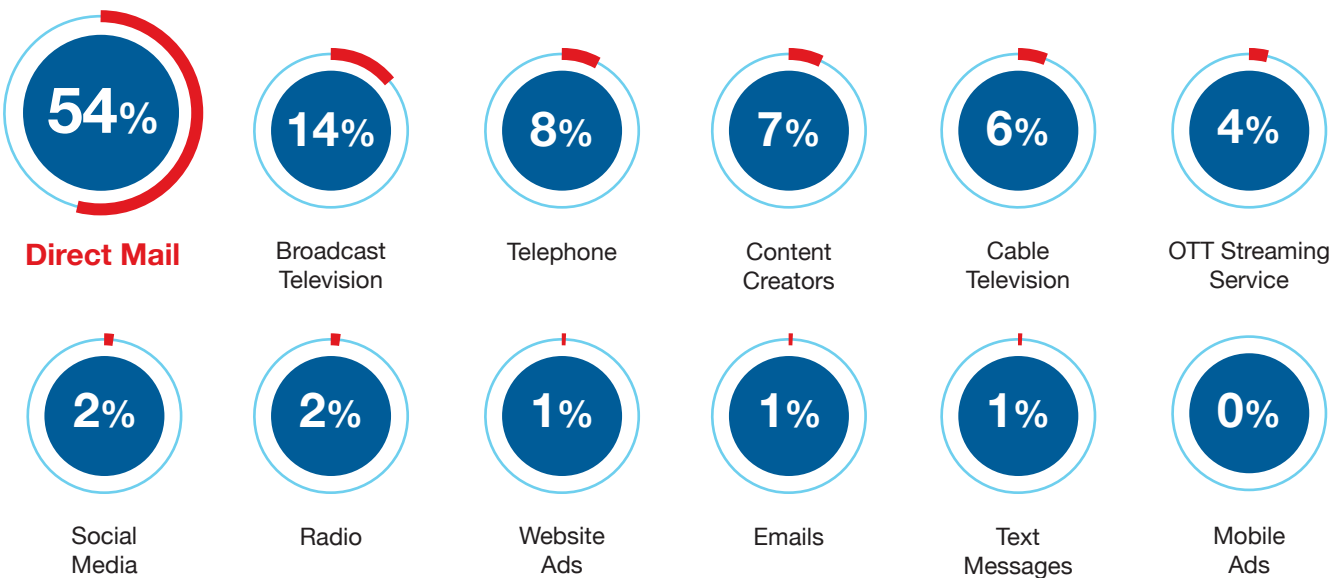




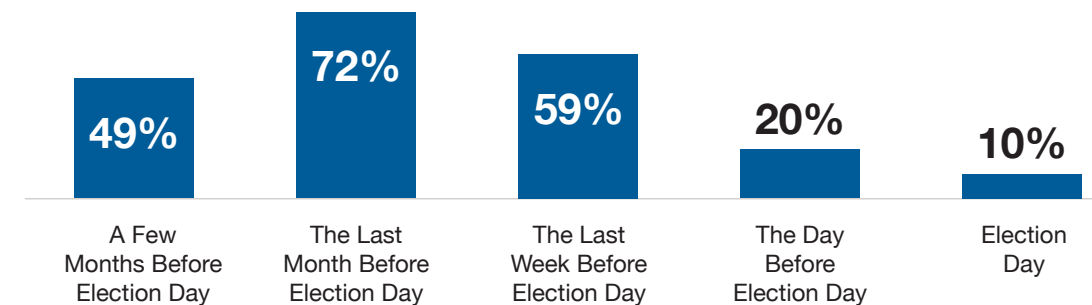
Establishing Credibility Early in the Election Cycle

The extended timeline created by varying early, absentee, and vote-by-mail options in many states means that timing of political advertising can increasingly make or break a campaign. Campaigns need to establish credibility with voters as early as possible during the election cycle in order to effectively influence their decision. The voter relationship with direct mail should be utilized by campaigns to directly reach voters with the campaign information they want at the time they want to receive it – and communicate with voters through the same channel that many of them will be voting this year.

Most Surveyed Consultants Perceive Direct Mail as the Most Credible Advertising Channel to Communicate Political Information



Most Surveyed Consultants Believe Direct Mail Is Most Impactful at Key Points During the Election Cycle



42%

of Surveyed Consultants Believe **Direct Mail Should Be Sent Twice a Week** to Be Most Effective.



“Mail still has a lot of credibility compared to the other mediums... anything that [voters are] receiving on the Internet doesn't hold a lot of weight with [them], but if we use that same soundbite and put it on a piece of mail in black and white with more context and deliver that message in a week or so, it will still be sitting on someone's counter for the next 48-72 hours. We've not only brought that message into their home but created a little bit of time for them to absorb it.”

Consultant Interview



Leverage the Unique Mail Moment[®] Experience

67%

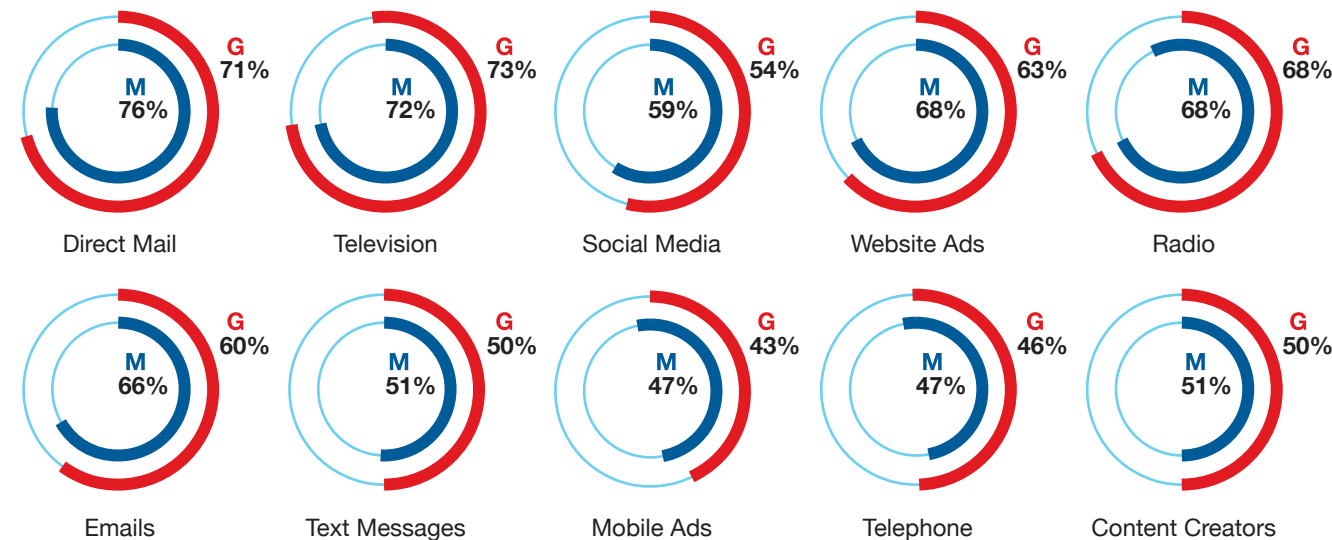
of Surveyed Consultants Believe **Credibility Among Voters** is One of the Advantages of Using Direct Mail.

60%

of Surveyed Consultants Believe Direct Mail is One of the Best Solutions to **Prevent Voters from Becoming Overwhelmed or Disengaged.**

Direct Mail Remains One of the Most Credible Advertising Channels to Communicate Political Information

G Gubernatorial Voters **M** Mayoral Voters

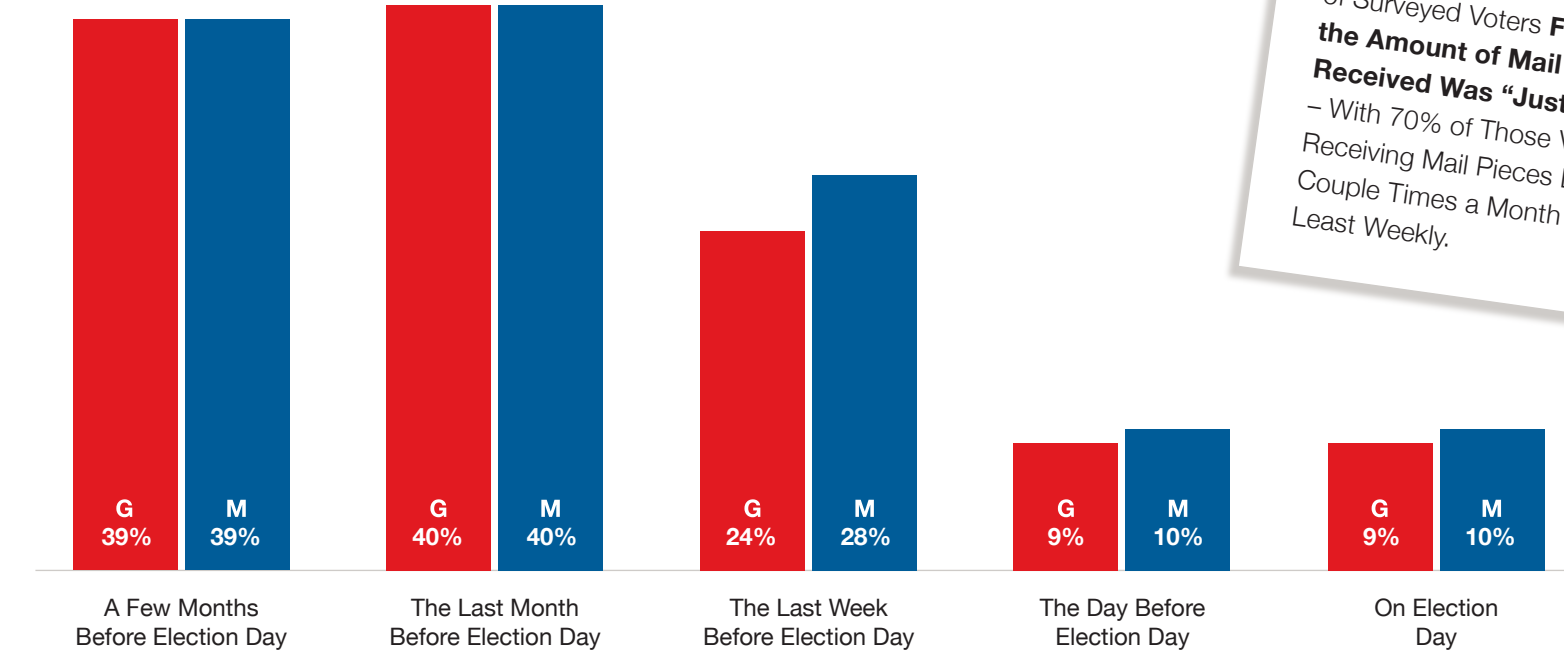


68%

of Surveyed Voters **Feel Less Overwhelmed by Direct Mail** Than Other Political Advertising Channels, Such as Television or Online Ads.

When Surveyed Voters Prefer to Receive Direct Mail

G Gubernatorial Voters **M** Mayoral Voters



56% of Surveyed Voters **Feel That the Amount of Mail Pieces Received Was "Just Right"** – With 70% of Those Voters Receiving Mail Pieces Between a Couple Times a Month and at Least Weekly.

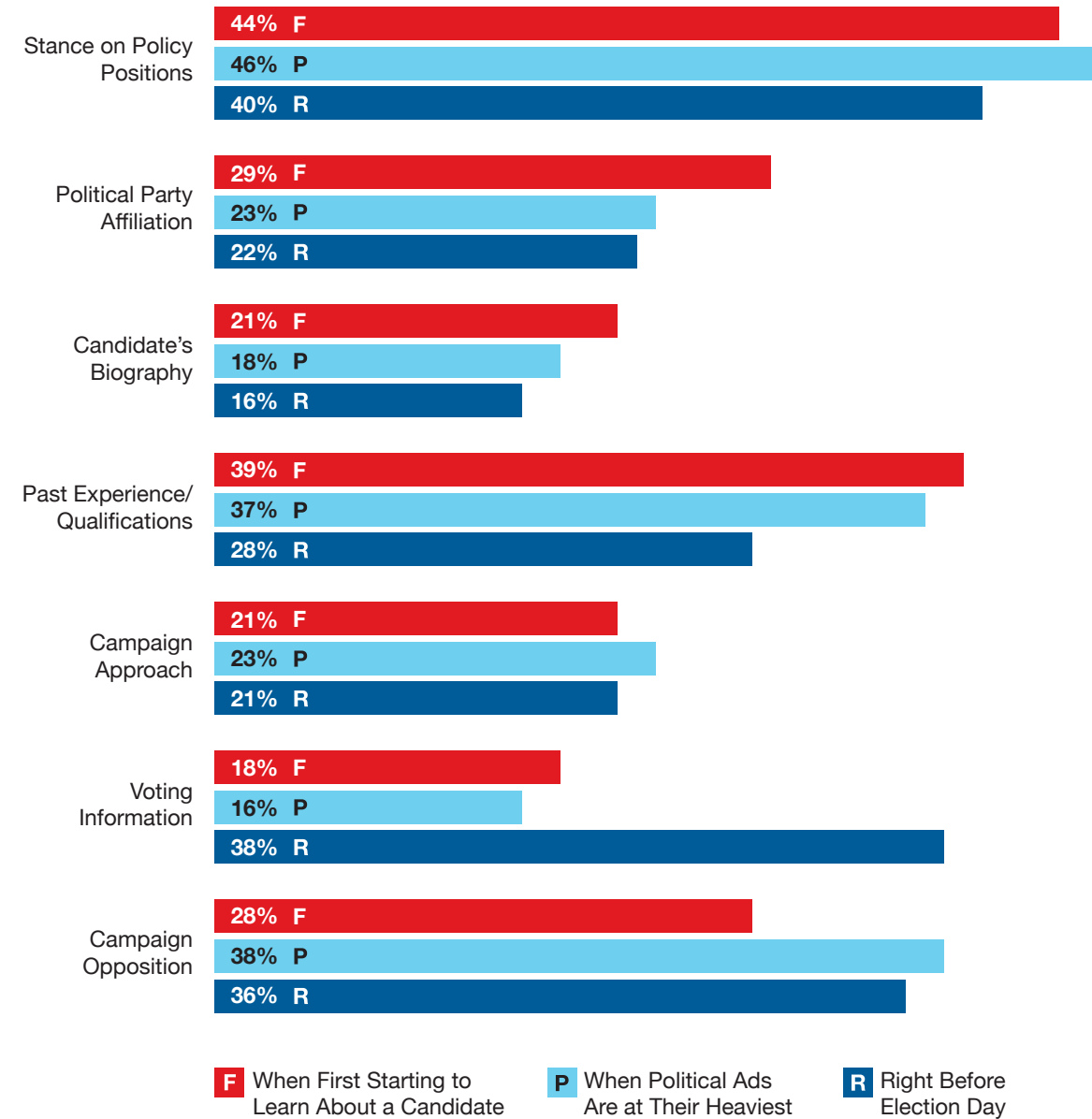


71%

of Surveyed Voters **Still Check Their Mailbox at Least 4 Days a Week** – And **42% Recall Receiving Political Mail Pieces** Daily or Weekly During the 2023 Elections.



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



63%
of Surveyed Voters Agree That the Mail Pieces They Received Were **Easy to Understand.**



Working With USPS

The Postal Service has several tools – including PS Tag 57, Political Campaign Mailing – to ensure increased visibility of your political mail pieces during the election cycle.

Also known as “red tagging,” this optional red container tag is used to identify political mail and provide greater visibility to trays, sacks, and pallets of First-Class Mail and Marketing Mail items as they go through USPS processing and distribution operations. In the rare case where an issue may occur, mailers may complete a dedicated web form that directly alerts the appropriate postal officials to provide a solution.⁴

65% of Surveyed Consultants Use Tag 57 All the Time for Political Mail Campaigns.





Maximizing Return on Investment by Reaching the Right Voters

A constant from one election to the next is the need to successfully identify the sweet spot to both efficiently and effectively reach the right voters. Some political advertising channels require paying for engagement with those who are not eligible to vote in that specific election in order to also reach the right voters – while others political advertising channels are not able to guarantee engagement with every target demographic. In contrast, every voter has a mailing address and can be reached with customized messaging and direct mail engagement from campaigns. And with a closely divided electorate that only has a few swing voters in play, direct mail's targeting power can be the difference between winning and losing. Campaigns can increase the likelihood of voter engagement by utilizing the precise targeting and segmenting capabilities of direct mail to deliver authentic messaging this election cycle.

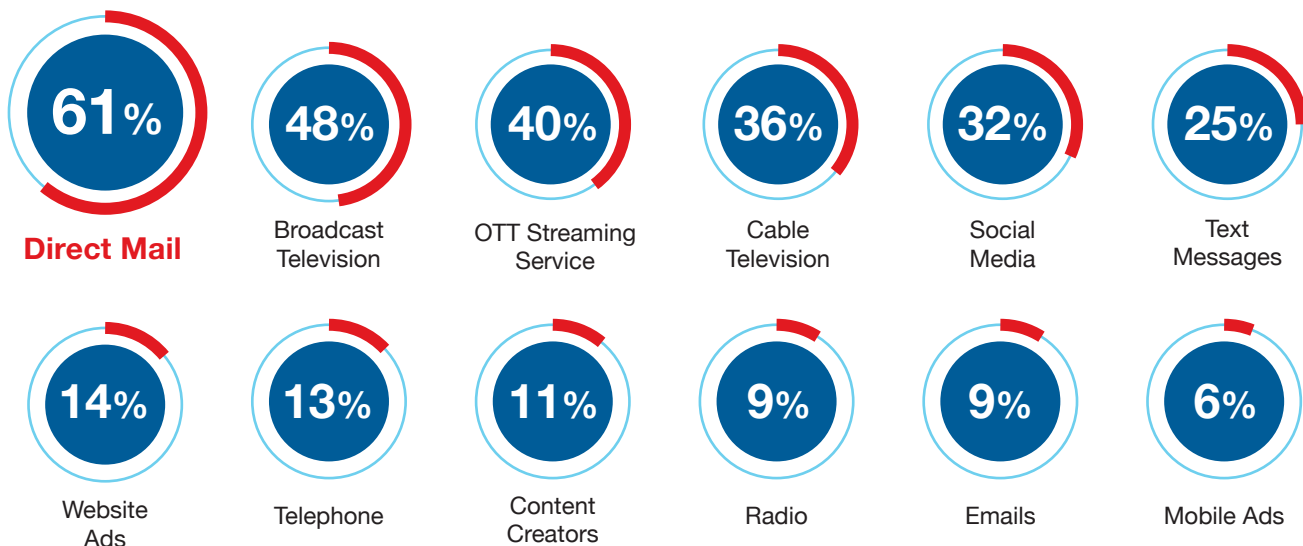
73%

of Surveyed Consultants Are Extremely Concerned About Effectively Reaching the Right Target Demographic.

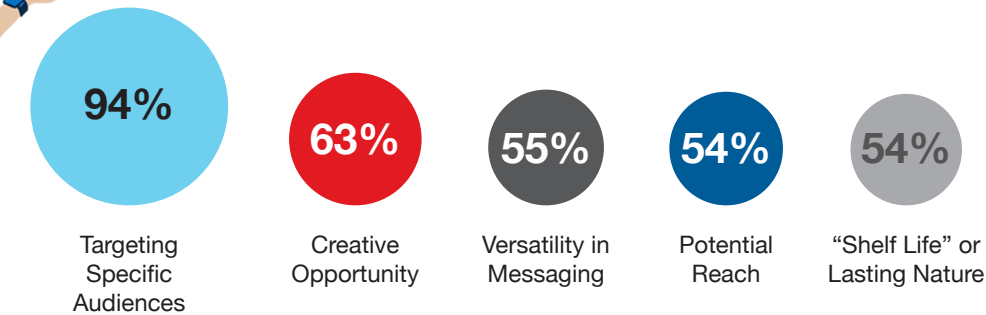
71%

of Surveyed Consultants Are Extremely Concerned About Maximizing Return on Investment During the Upcoming Election Cycle.

Most Surveyed Consultants Think Direct Mail is a Highly Important Political Advertising Channel for Impacting Voter Behavior



Many Surveyed Consultants Recognize the Advantages of Using Direct Mail as a Political Advertising Channel



I think the biggest thing [about direct mail is that] – because it is tangible – it is real. It gives you instant credibility. If you have a nice-looking mail piece it just clicks in a voter's brain that this is a legitimate candidate...[and] if you have well done, well executed mail and you send it to the right people, you can be targeted and move certain voter segments... And I think it's the only medium that can do that."

Consultant Interview



Precisely Target Voters with Personalized Messaging

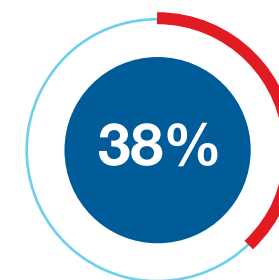
72%

of Surveyed Consultants Believe Direct Mail is one of the Best Solutions to **Effectively Reach the Right Target Demographic.**

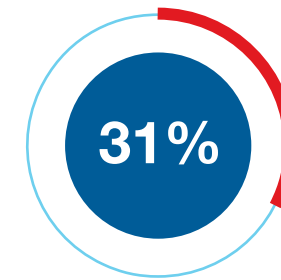
51%

of Surveyed Consultants Believe Direct Mail is One of the Best Solutions to **Maximize Return on Investment.**

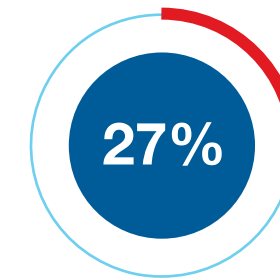
Ways Some Surveyed Voters Believe Campaigns Can Increase Likelihood of Voter Engagement By Personalizing Mail Pieces



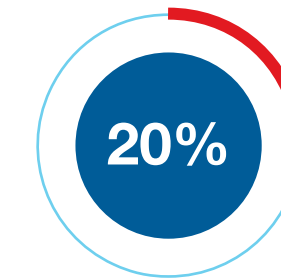
Including Personally Relevant Information



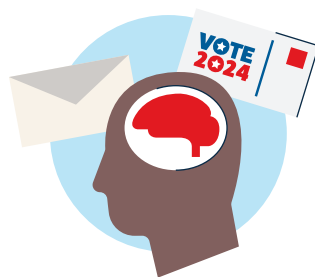
Providing Credible Sources or Fact-Checking Information



Prioritizing Design and Visual Appeal



Personally Addressing the Mail Piece

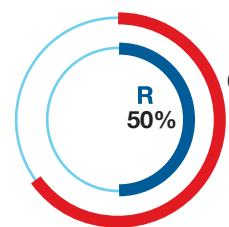


55%

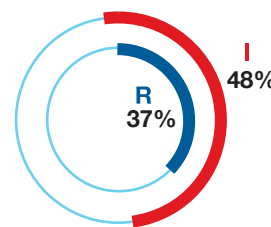
of Surveyed Voters Agree That **Direct Mail was the Most Memorable Form of Political Advertising** This Past Election Cycle.

Personalization of Direct Mail is Critical Across Demographics – But Many Surveyed Voters Did Not Receive Mail Pieces That Spoke to Them Personally

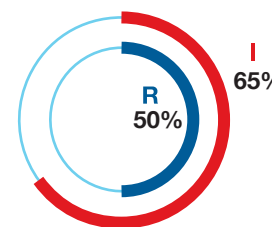
I Importance of Personalization in Mail Piece **R** Received Personalized Mail Pieces



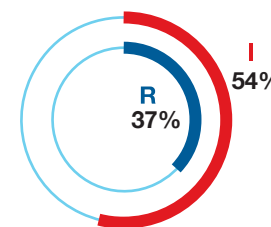
Black Voters



Asian Voters



Hispanic Voters



White Voters

78%

of Surveyed White Voters **Check Their Mailbox at Least 4 Days a Week** – Compared to an Average 63% of Surveyed Minority Voters.

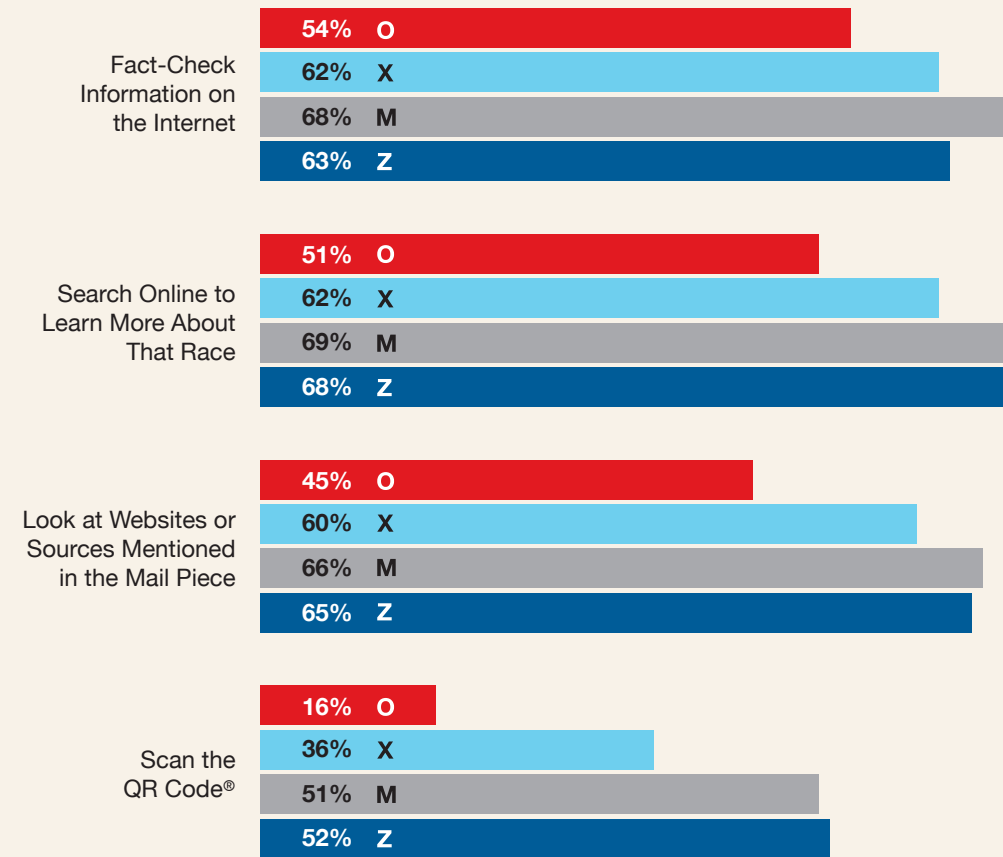


57%

of Surveyed Voters Are More Likely to **Read the Mail Piece** If They Find It **Visually Appealing.**

Reach a Shifting Electorate and Younger Generation with Direct Mail

Surveyed Younger Voters Continue to Take More Action Online After Reading Mail Pieces

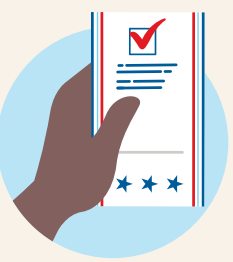


O Older Voters **X** Gen X Voters **M** Millennial Voters **Z** Gen Z Voters

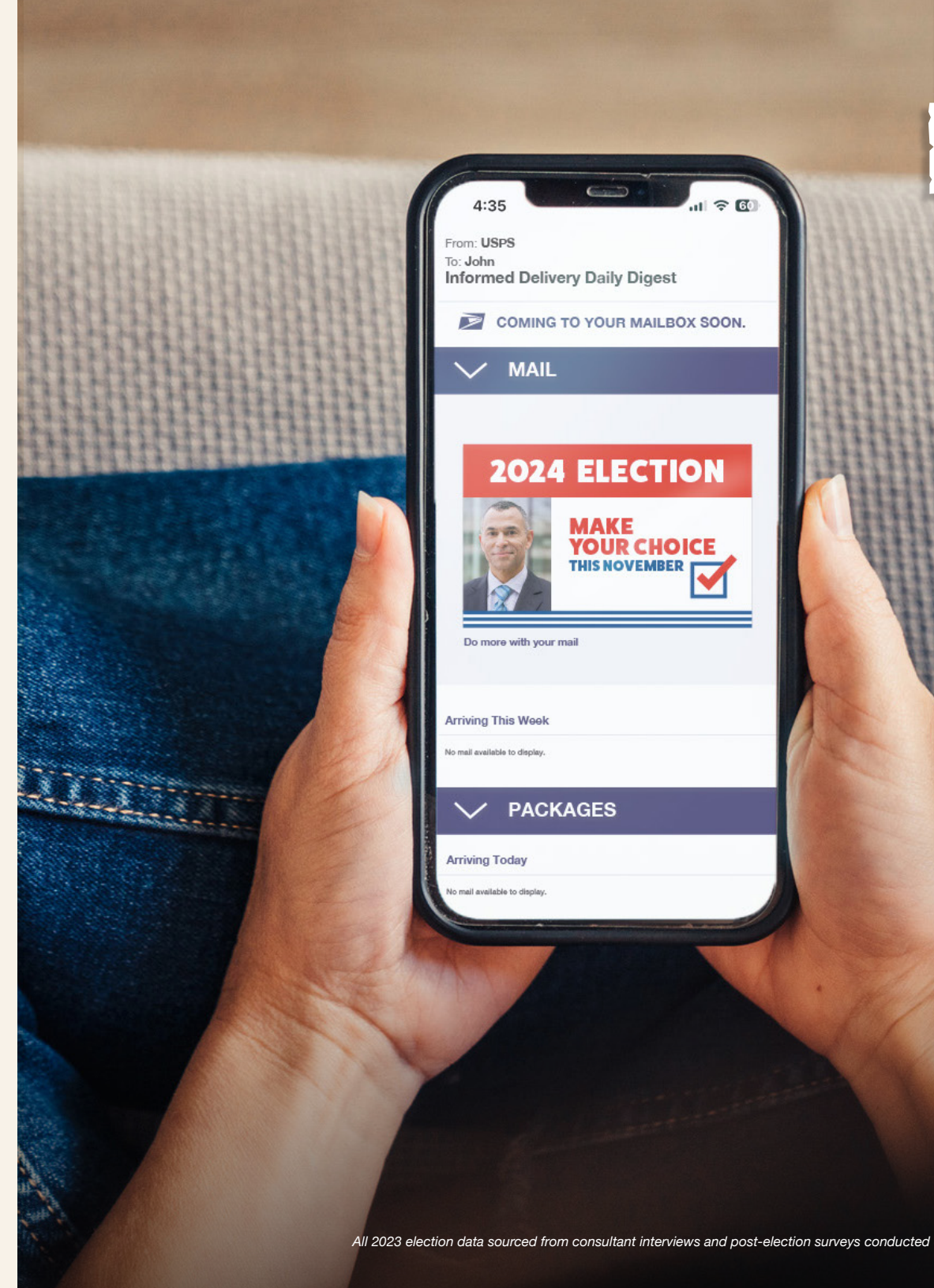
63% of Surveyed Gen Z Voters Feel That **the Amount of Political Mail Received Was “Just Right”** – With 59% Wanting to Receive Mail Pieces At Least Once a Week During the Election Cycle.

“We know how busy [younger people] are, so how do you capture them? We know that mail on its own can move voters, but mail and digital together moves voters and in greater numbers... We are seeing that more and more mail continues to be a medium that works for them, depending on where they live and how they’re living... Their mailbox doesn’t get as many things, so the novelty of mail that comes to them is important.”

Consultant Interview



60% of Surveyed Gen Z Voters Feel That **Direct Mail Was Harder to Ignore Than Online and Television Ads** – Compared to 52% of Surveyed Older Voters.



Working With USPS

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 over 60 million Americans, with daily direct mail previews being sent to roughly 30% of households. And over 63% of Informed Delivery® Feature preview emails are opened – three times more than other advertising emails.⁵

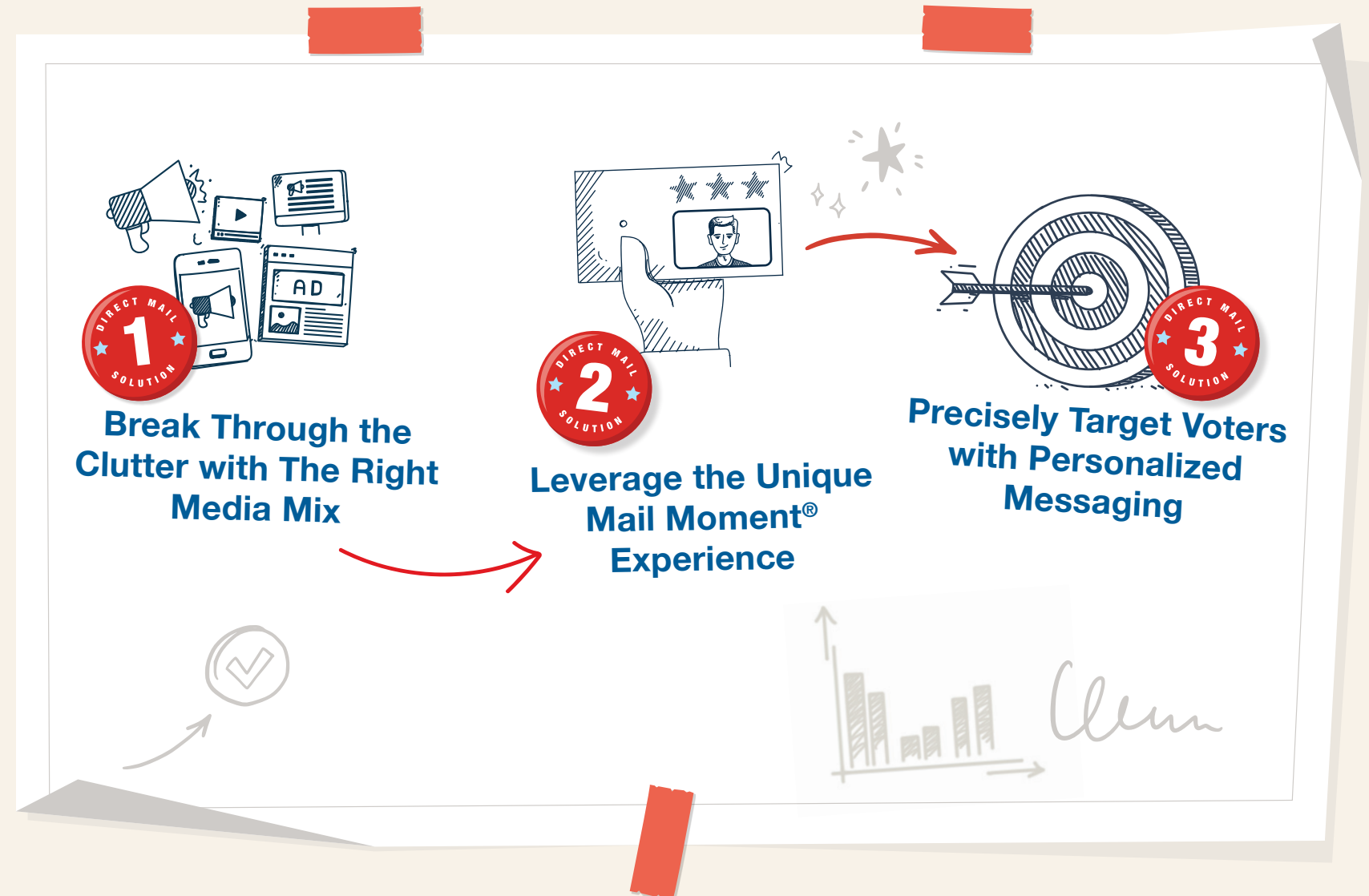
We offer an interactive map tool on our DelivertheWin® microsite to view the number of registered Informed Delivery users by state and ZIP Code™ areas.⁶

47%

For Those Using the Informed Delivery® Feature Who Recalled Seeing Political Mail Previews, 47% of Surveyed Voters Were More Motivated to Read the Direct Mail Piece When It Arrived in Person.

The Solution to Campaign Challenges

A winning campaign strategy is fueled by an understanding of voter behaviors and preferences – a desire to uncover the latest trends from the previous election cycle and implement lessons learned for the upcoming election cycle. The actionable insights captured in this report will help campaigns crack the code to better understanding how to effectively influence, resonate, and motivate voters – and turn challenges into opportunities this election cycle.



References



1. All 2023 election data sourced from consultant interviews and post-election surveys conducted on behalf of the Postal Service™ by Summit Research and KRC Research from September 2023 through January 2024. The research includes 11 in-depth interviews with campaign consultants, an online post-election survey of 171 campaign consultants, and an online post-election survey of 2,529 voters from Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Houston, TX, Columbus, OH, and Philadelphia, PA.
2. “Tuning Out: Americans on the Edge of Politics.” Pew Research Center, Washington, D.C. (January 2024) <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2024/01/09/tuning-out-americans-on-the-edge-of-politics/>
3. USPS Mailpiece Design Analyst. <https://pe.usps.com/MailpieceDesign/Index>
4. Tag 57, Political Campaign Mailing. https://about.usps.com/postal-bulletin/2008/html/pb22239/html/ElectMailkit_008.html
5. Informed Delivery by USPS. <https://www.usps.com/manage/informed-delivery.htm>
6. Informed Delivery User Interactive Map. <https://www.deliverthewin.com/research-center/informed-delivery-user-interactive-map/#/map>



Get In Touch



The United States 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, USPS is committed to helping you and your campaign.

To find out more, visit us at:

DeliverTheWin.com



In Association with AAPC

Thanks to the American Association of Political Consultants (AAPC) for participating 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 include political consultants, media consultants, pollsters, campaign managers, corporate public affairs officers, professors, fund-raisers, lobbyists, congressional staffers, and vendors. Membership is open to anyone associated with politics from the local level to the White House.

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