

## 2013 ERIC Voter Registration Outreach in Washington State

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*Abstract: The results of this study show that voter outreach communication describing the registration process as “fast and easy” was significantly more effective than attempting to persuade recipients to register using social pressure. Emphasizing convenience was especially effective among 18 year olds eligible to register to vote for the first time.*

### 1. Objectives

In 2013, the Office of the Secretary of Washington State (OSOS) sent postcards urging voter registration before the General Election deadline. In addition to measuring the overall effectiveness of the postcards, this study evaluates the registration and turnout differences between two treatments.

The two treatments were based on best practices recommended by researchers associated with The Pew Charitable Trusts and leading communication design theory. Secretary of State Kim Wyman made the final design selection based on a number of options.

The data on unregistered residents was provided by the Electronic Registration Information Center (ERIC), which matched Washington State Department of Licensing (DOL) issued driver license and ID records with the state voter registration database to create a list of Washington residents who were potentially eligible but unregistered to vote.

### 2. Selected Universe

Postcards were sent to those who were, at the time:

- A resident of Washington State
- At least 18 years of age by November 5, 2013 (the day of the General Election)
- A driver license or state ID holder
- Not registered to vote at the address on file with the DOL

The test included 187,897 non-registered Washington State residents who were randomly assigned treatment groups (46,992 in the control group, and approximately 70,450 in each treatment group). Adams, Franklin, King and Yakima county residents were assigned to sub-groups of the treatment and control groups to accommodate federally mandated translation requirements in those counties.

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<sup>1</sup> Affiliation for identification purposes only.

<sup>2</sup> The authors thank Nick Pharris of the Office of the Secretary of Washington State for his invaluable assistance with the data for this project.

### 3. Treatment Design

This study evaluated two different postcard treatments. Samples of the postcards are in Appendix A of this report.

Visually, the postcard treatments were nearly identical. Likewise, the informational text on the back of both postcard treatments was also identical. Both postcards notified recipients that:

Our records show you are not registered to vote.

To vote in the next election, you must register by the deadline.

Online registration is quick and easy at [www.myvote.wa.gov](http://www.myvote.wa.gov), or call (800) 448-4881 to request a paper registration form.

You're eligible if you are at least 18 years old, a U.S. citizen, and not under Department of Corrections supervision for a Washington felony conviction.

The variations to the two treatments were in the text on the front of each postcard:

1. The [online] treatment stated:  
"3 minutes. Click. Done. Register to vote online."
2. The [community] treatment stated:  
"76% of people like you register to vote. Join the voting community."

The postcards were mailed by OSOS on September 4, 2013. The online and mail-in voter registration deadline was October 7 and the in-person voter registration deadline was October 28.

Each mailing was addressed by name. Although there is no research directly related to voter registration mailings, research on response to surveys, non-profit fundraising, and commercial mailings consistently finds that response rates are stronger for mailings addressed to individuals rather than "Postal Customer" or "Resident" (e.g. Dillman, Smyth and Christian, 2008).

Households with multiple unregistered residents received just one postcard addressed to one recipient. In part, this was to eliminate the possibility of subjects in the same household receiving different treatments, but also allowed measurement of a possible "spillover" effect (i.e. if other household members would register in addition to the addressed recipient). The results of the "spillover" effect are discussed in Appendix E.

#### 4. Intended Effects

The treatments were expected to increase voter registration compared to the control group, which received no contact from the Office of the Secretary of State. The research sought to measure the magnitude of the increase and determine which rhetorical message garners higher voter registration rates: the [community] treatment that increases social pressure to vote, or the [online] treatment that reduces the perceived cost of registration.<sup>3</sup> We also assumed the treatment groups' higher registration rates would translate into increased voter turnout in the 2013 General Election.

#### Design Theory Applied to Both Treatments

To a certain extent, both postcard treatments functioned persuasively to convince recipients that they *should* register to vote. For example:

- Urgency was identified as a motivational factor in Mann's study of voter registration outreach with the Office of the Delaware Commissioner of Elections (2012). Therefore, the warning "deadline approaching" was featured in a bright red call-out banner across the front of both Washington treatments.
- Also, the letter on the back of both postcards starts with, "Our records show you are not registered to vote." Surveillance language like this proved extremely persuasive in a similar voter registration postcard campaign studied by Gerber and Green (2012), who demonstrated that recipients feel greater social pressure to modify their behavior when they know they are being watched or that their actions will be publically known.
- A study by Panagopoulos (2011; see also Mann, 2012) indicated that voters respond to simple gratitude for performing their public duty. Therefore, both treatments close with "Thank you! Your vote makes a difference."
- Additionally, Mann indicated his belief that recipients of the 2012 Delaware postcards may have mistaken treatments featuring colorful patriotic imagery with political advertising or commercial marketing.<sup>4</sup> Based on this, a primary design goal for the 2013 Washington postcards was to align both treatments visually with archetypal government notices that should be less likely to be mistaken for "junk mail". To achieve this, both treatments used a limited color scheme and relied heavily on textual rhetoric rather than high-production imagery.

To function instrumentally, both postcard treatments instructed recipients as to *how* they could register to vote:

- A website for online voter registration was provided on both the front and the back.
- A toll-free phone number was also provided for recipients without internet access to request a paper registration form via mail.
- Voter eligibility requirements were given on the back of both treatments.

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<sup>3</sup> There is no question that both social responsibility and the ease of the registration process play a role in voter participation. However, this study sought to identify the *most* effective motivational tactic for voter outreach communications: emphasizing "persuasive" or "instrumental" rhetoric.

<sup>4</sup> Mann (2012) indicated that patriotic imagery reminding recipients of their civic duty wasn't as effective as archetypal "government notice" imagery emphasizing the urgency of an approaching deadline. While the registration effect between these thematic treatments was statistically significant, it was unclear whether it was the visual imagery or the textual rhetoric that made the difference. Therefore, the 2013 Washington postcards are visually identical, thus removing imagery as a variable and focusing on the impact of textual rhetoric.

#### Instrumental Rhetoric Used in “Online” Postcard

The [online] treatment emphasized instrumental rhetoric, clearly stating the task asked of recipients: "Register to vote online." Johnson (2010) noted that instrumentally functional documents give readers multiple pathways to successfully complete their objective. Therefore, the front of the [online] treatment gave a succinct summation of the registration process for cursory readers (“3 minutes. Click. Done.”) while the back of the postcard provided more detailed instructions for more thorough readers. Although the [community] treatment provided exactly the same registration method, the [online] treatment highlighted the ease and speed by which recipients could register to vote online, thereby reducing their *perceived* cost of time and effort.<sup>5</sup> When asked to describe the difference between the two treatments, pre-test reviewers confirmed the [online] treatment emphasized the process of registering to vote. Key descriptors were "online" and "easy".

#### Persuasive Rhetoric Used in “Community” Postcard

The [community] treatment emphasized persuasive rhetoric, telling recipients that "76% of people like you register to vote" and urging them to "Join the voting community." When asked to describe the difference between the two treatments, pre-test reviewers confirmed the [community] treatment emphasized being a part of the group.<sup>6</sup> Key descriptors were "invitation" and "bandwagon." According to Williams (2010), appeals to social membership are rhetorically persuasive. Therefore, the [community] treatment described social norms and informed recipients that the majority of citizens do participate in the voting process. Hopefully this influenced recipients' perception as to what is expected behavior for group members. While it might have been more succinct to say "76% of people register to vote," the addition of "76% of people *like you* register to vote" was meant to reinforce the recipient's social status within the group they most closely associate themselves (Mann and Sinclair 2014). Likewise, the call to "join the voting community" was intended to appeal to the recipient's assumed wish to be included within a socially desirable peer group.

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<sup>5</sup> A study by Motz (2009) for the Office of the Washington Secretary of State demonstrated that more potential voters will participate given a more convenient, less time-consuming method of registration. Motz found that, compared to a control group that received no treatment, sending unregistered 18-year-olds a postcard listing the online voter registration website garnered an 11 percent increase and that sending a pre-filled voter registration form resulted in a 15 percent increase. Unlike Motz's study that tested two different registration methods, subjects in this study were given identical means of registration; the only difference between the treatments is the *perceived* cost of registration, not the actual cost itself.

<sup>6</sup> Pre-test reviewers were a convenience sample of staff in the Office of the Washington Secretary of State not directly involved in the project. They were asked to characterize their impressions of the mailings.

**Table 1:** summarizes the functional design of Treatments A and B

Design theory applied to both treatments	Instrumental rhetoric emphasized in [online] treatment	Persuasive rhetoric emphasized in [community] treatment
<p>Visually:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Alignment with the archetypal government notice using limited color scheme and state seal</li> <li>• Typographical hierarchy places equal value on test statements in both treatments</li> <li>• Test statement keywords in identical locations</li> </ul> <p>Persuasive Rhetoric:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Surveillance language: <i>"Our records show you are not registered."</i></li> <li>• Urgency: <i>"Deadline approaching"</i></li> <li>• Gratitude: <i>"Thank you! Your vote makes a difference."</i></li> </ul> <p>Instrumental Rhetoric:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provides a website to register online</li> <li>• Provides a phone number to request a paper form</li> </ul>	<p>Clearly states task: <i>"Register to vote"</i></p> <p>Summarizes steps for completion of task: <i>"3 minutes. Click. Done."</i></p> <p>Highlights speed and ease of task, reducing the perceived personal "cost" of registering to vote.</p> <p>Indicates mechanism for completing task: <i>"online"</i> and <i>"click"</i></p> <hr/> <p>Key descriptors by pre-test reviewers were "online" and "easy"</p>	<p>Describes social norms to implicitly encourage similar behavior: <i>"76% of people register to vote"</i></p> <p>Offers method for improving social status: <i>"join the community"</i></p> <p>Uses intentionally vague descriptor of the recipient's social group: <i>"people like you"</i></p> <hr/> <p>Key descriptors by pre-test reviewers were "invitation" and "bandwagon"</p>

## 5. Evaluation Design

The evaluation is based on a randomized trial design (or field experiment) that is considered best practice by The Pew Charitable Trusts and academic researchers. The treatment groups received the direct mail treatments described above and the control group received no contact from the Washington Secretary of State's Office.

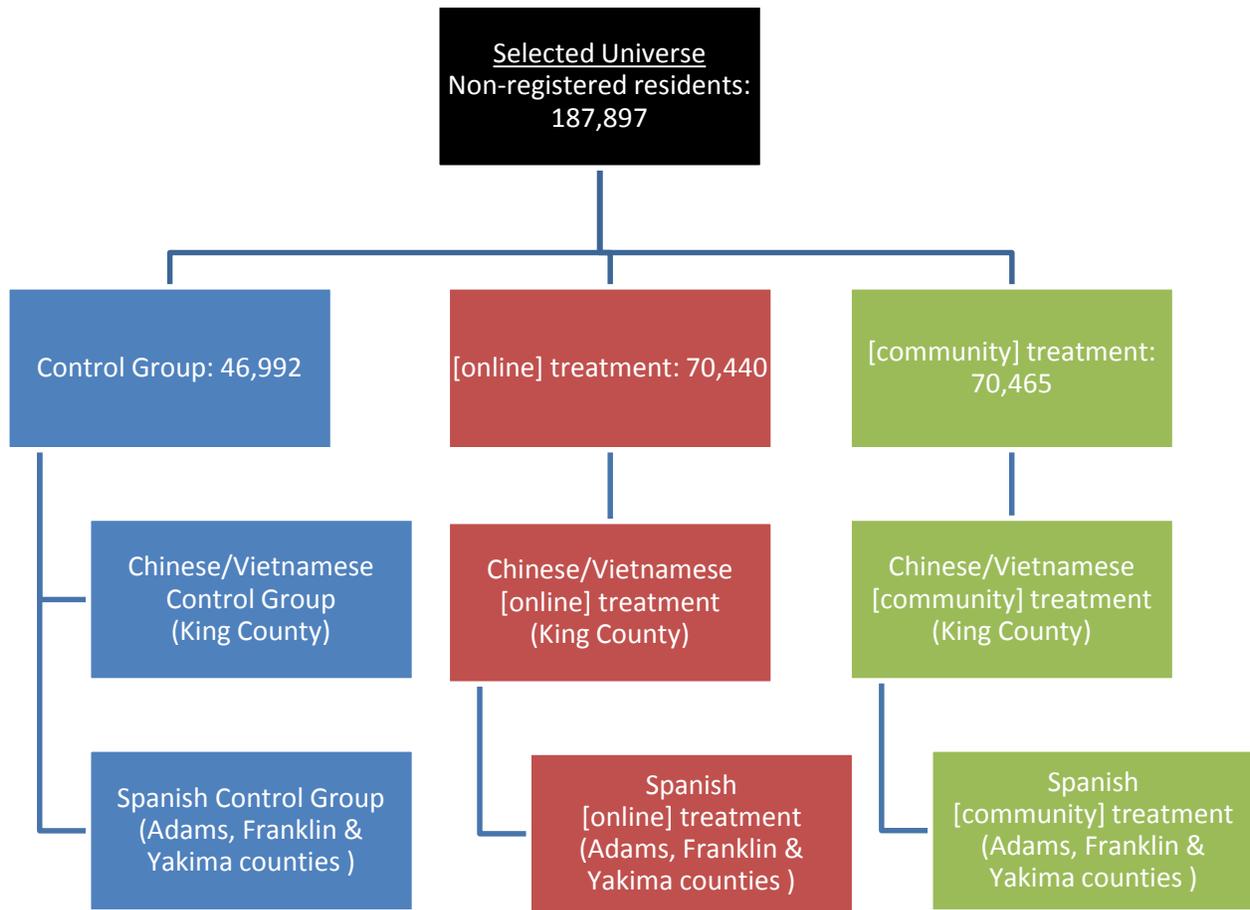
Subgroups were created to accommodate the language requirements mandated by Section 203 of the federal Voting Rights Act. King County requires voting materials be made available upon request in Chinese and Vietnamese; Adams, Franklin and Yakima counties requires bilingual English-Spanish voting materials. Randomly assigned subjects in these counties received language-appropriate variations of the [community] and [online] treatments, or were randomly assigned to a control group within those counties.

The evaluation plan calls for assessing differences in treatment effects within several subgroups:

- 1) Spanish surnames
- 2) Section 203 Counties:
  - a. Adams, Franklin and Yakima counties for Spanish
  - b. King County for Chinese and Vietnamese
- 3) Gender
- 4) Age
- 5) Number of prior transactions with the DOL

Since the behavior of individuals who reside together is likely to be correlated, only one individual per household was randomly selected to receive a postcard. The dispersion of the treatment effect of unselected individuals in multi-target households (N=16,391) is analyzed in Appendix E. The appendix addresses whether any direct treatment effects "spillover" to influence registration by other unregistered residents identified in the ERIC data.

**Figure 1:** diagram of random assignment to treatment and control groups



## 6. Overall Registration Results

The period of evaluation occurs between the mailing date on September 4 and the November 5, 2013 General Election. Compared to the control group that received no mailing, both treatments generated statistically significant increases in voter registration:

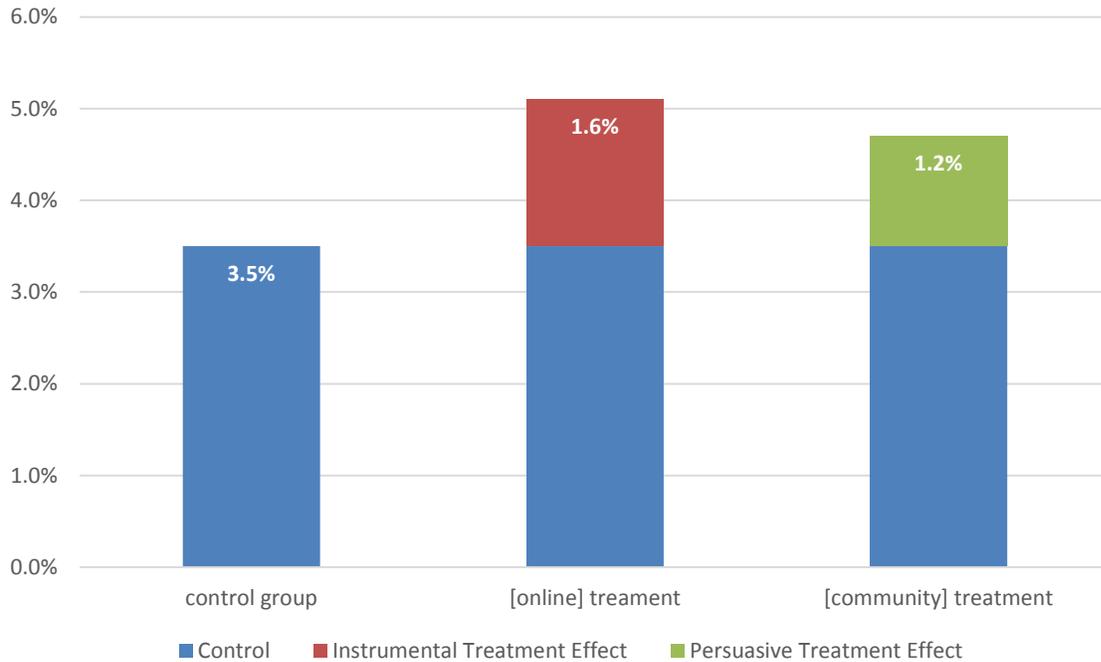
- The control group’s registration rate during this period was 3.5%.
- The [online] treatment generated the largest number of registrations at 5.1%, or an increase of 1.6 percentage points more than the control group.<sup>7</sup>
- The [community] treatment group had a registration rate of 4.7%, or an increase of 1.2 percentage points.<sup>8</sup>
- The [online] treatment effect is significantly larger than the [community] treatment effect on registration (+0.4 percentage points).<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> The effect on voter registration is statistically significant,  $p < 0.001$ .

<sup>8</sup> The effect on voter registration is statistically significant,  $p < 0.001$ .

<sup>9</sup> The difference between these treatments is statistically significant,  $p = 0.001$ , two-tailed.

**Figure 2:** voter registration rates through Nov. 5, 2013



These results show that this type of voter registration outreach by a state agency can increase registration rates by almost 50% in an odd year election. Moreover, the results indicate that emphasizing the convenience of online voter registration is more effective than attempting to increase peer pressure using descriptive social norms.

### 7. Registrations by Demographic Sub-Groups

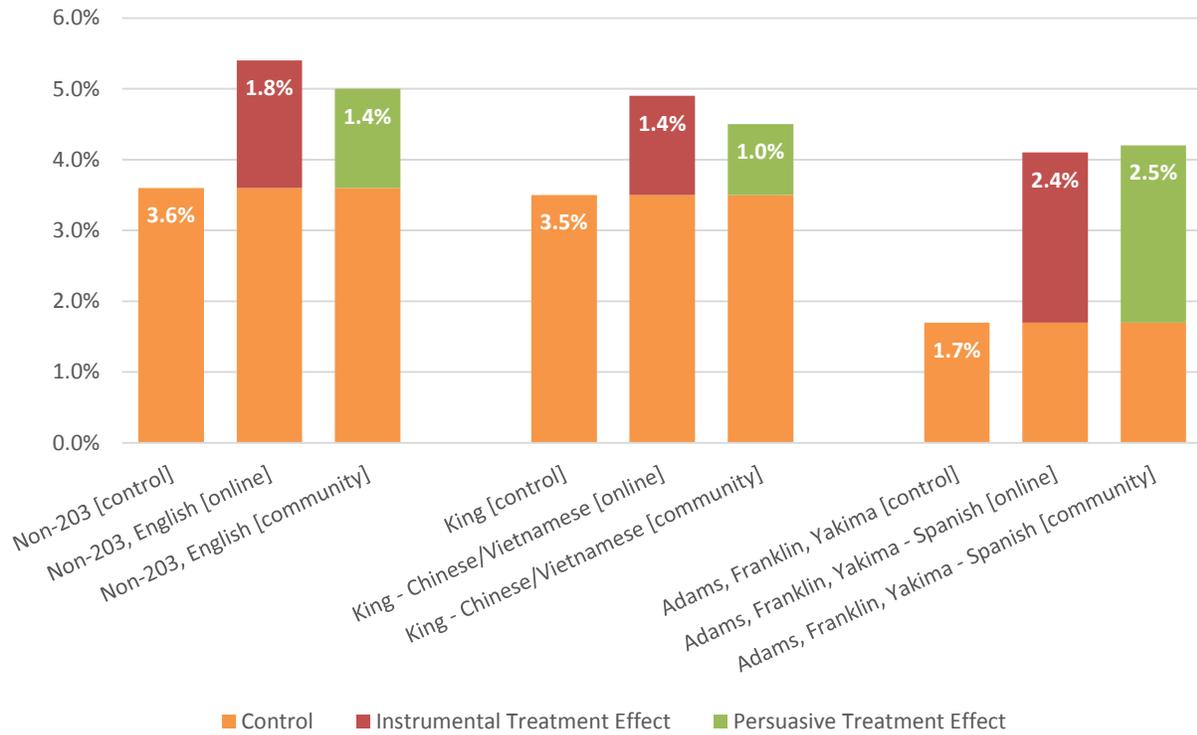
The available data allowed for the study of some demographic subgroups, including residents of Section 203 counties, individuals with Spanish surnames, age, gender, and those with multiple DOL transactions. The effectiveness of the treatments vary across the subgroups, but generally show the [online] treatment to be more successful.

#### Section 203: counties that must provide translated materials

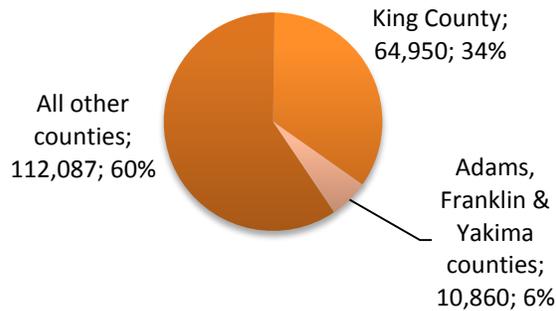
In accordance with Section 203 of the federal Voting Rights Act, recipients in three counties (Adams, Franklin, and Yakima) received bilingual English/Spanish postcards and those in King County were told Chinese and Vietnamese information is available upon request.

The treatments were more effective in the three counties receiving bilingual Spanish postcards than the rest of the state, although the control group had a lower registration rate than the rest of the state. There was no noticeable difference between the two treatment effects in the Spanish bilingual counties. The mailings were less effective in King County compared to the remainder of the state, but showed the same difference (0.4 percentage points) between the treatments as non-Section 203 counties.

**Figure 3:** registration treatment effects on sub-groups receiving postcards in counties covered by the Voting Rights Act, Section 203



**Figure 4:** breakdown of individuals by Section 203 sub-group



64,950 postcards were sent to King County recipients, and 10,860 bilingual postcards to recipients in Adams, Franklin and Yakima counties.

### Spanish Surnames

The ERIC data was matched to the United States Department of Justice list of Spanish surnames. The Spanish surnames are assumed more likely to indicate Spanish speakers, although some of these individuals will speak both English and Spanish or only English. The matching process identified 17,461 individuals with Spanish surnames statewide. The effects of the two treatments were indistinguishable among the Spanish surnames<sup>10</sup>, so the two treatment groups were pooled to analyze the effect of bilingual mailings between those with and without Spanish surnames.

In the three counties required to provide English/Spanish bilingual materials under Section 203, the treatments significantly increase registration among individuals with Spanish surnames (1.0 percentage points)<sup>11</sup> and individuals without Spanish surnames (0.9 percentage points).<sup>12</sup> The treatment effects in these two sub-groups are indistinguishable.<sup>13</sup>

In the remainder of the state, the effect of the treatments is more than six times larger among individuals without Spanish surnames than among individuals with Spanish surnames:<sup>14</sup> 0.2 percentage points among individuals with Spanish surnames<sup>15</sup> and 1.4 percentage points among individuals without Spanish surnames.<sup>16</sup>

Additional testing is needed to determine whether bilingual mailings change the treatment effect among individuals with Spanish surnames. The large differences in the control group registration rates in the three Section 203 counties and the remainder of the state indicate substantial disparity in underlying registration patterns in the Section 203 counties and the remainder of the state. As we will see later in this report, the pattern of voter turnout across these sub-groups also complicates any inferences about the impact of bilingual mailings. These differences suggest the impossibility of drawing conclusions about the effect of bilingual materials without additional testing designed specifically to address this research question.

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<sup>10</sup> The estimated effects are statistically indistinguishable,  $p=0.938$ , two-tailed.

<sup>11</sup> The increase in registration for the pooled treatment groups among individuals *with* Spanish surnames is statistically significant,  $p=0.028$ , one-tailed.

<sup>12</sup> The increase in registration for the pooled treatment groups among individuals *without* Spanish surnames is statistically significant,  $p=0.004$ , one-tailed.

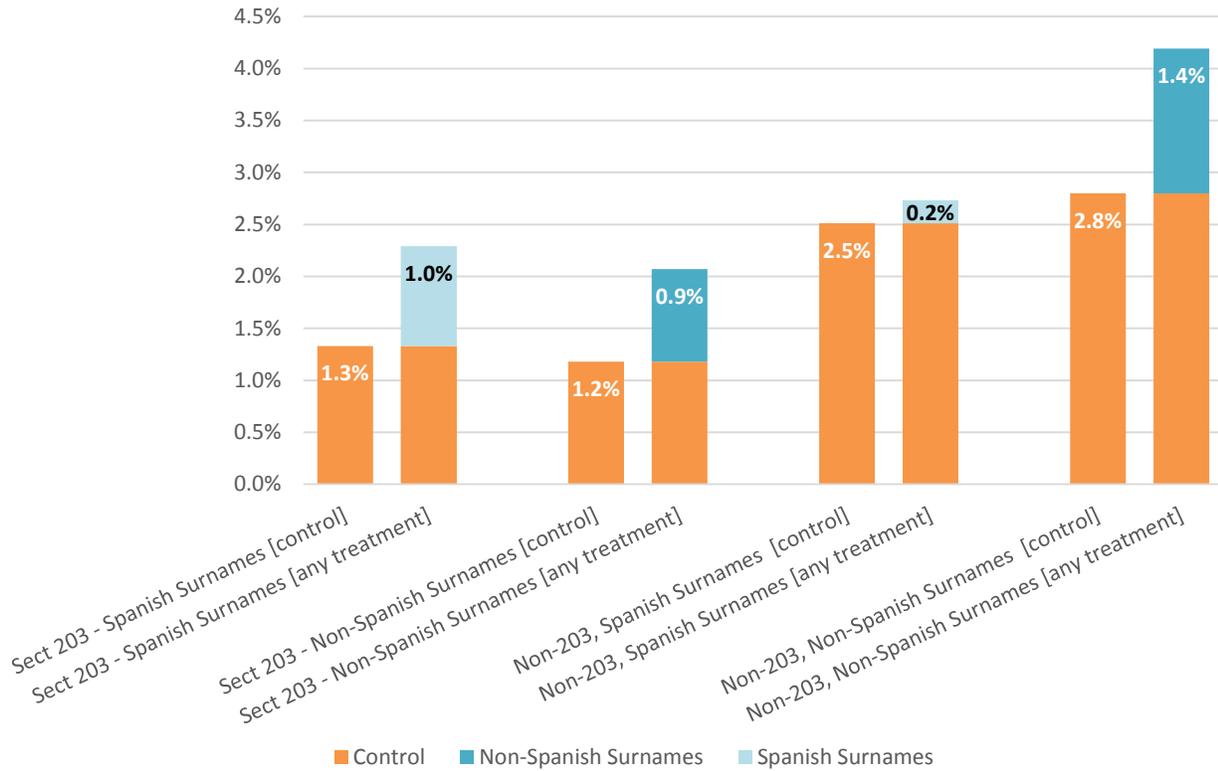
<sup>13</sup> The estimated effects are statistically indistinguishable,  $p=0.944$ , two-tailed.

<sup>14</sup> The estimated difference is statistically significant,  $p=0.007$ , two-tailed.

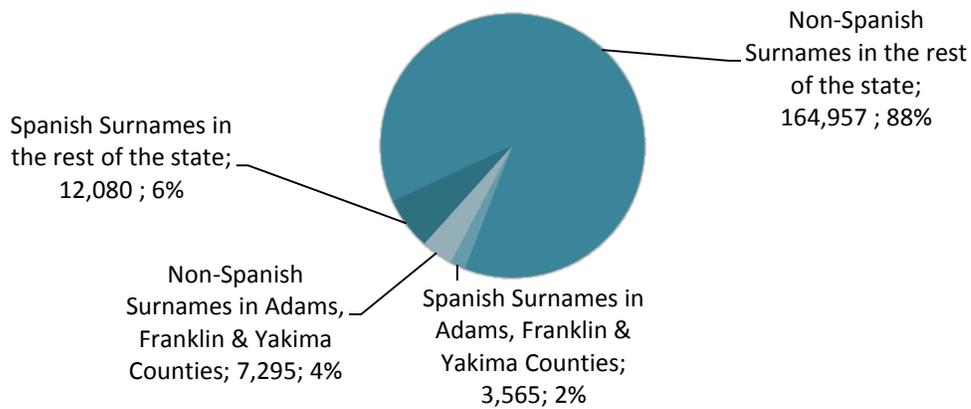
<sup>15</sup> The increase in registration for the pooled treatment groups among individuals *with* Spanish surnames is not statistically significant,  $p=0.248$ , one-tailed.

<sup>16</sup> The increase in registration for the pooled treatment groups among individuals *without* Spanish surnames is statistically significant,  $p<0.001$ , one-tailed.

**Figure 5:** registration treatment effects for individuals with Spanish surnames in Section 203 counties and remainder of the state.



**Figure 6:** breakdown of individuals by Spanish Surnames and Section 203 coverage

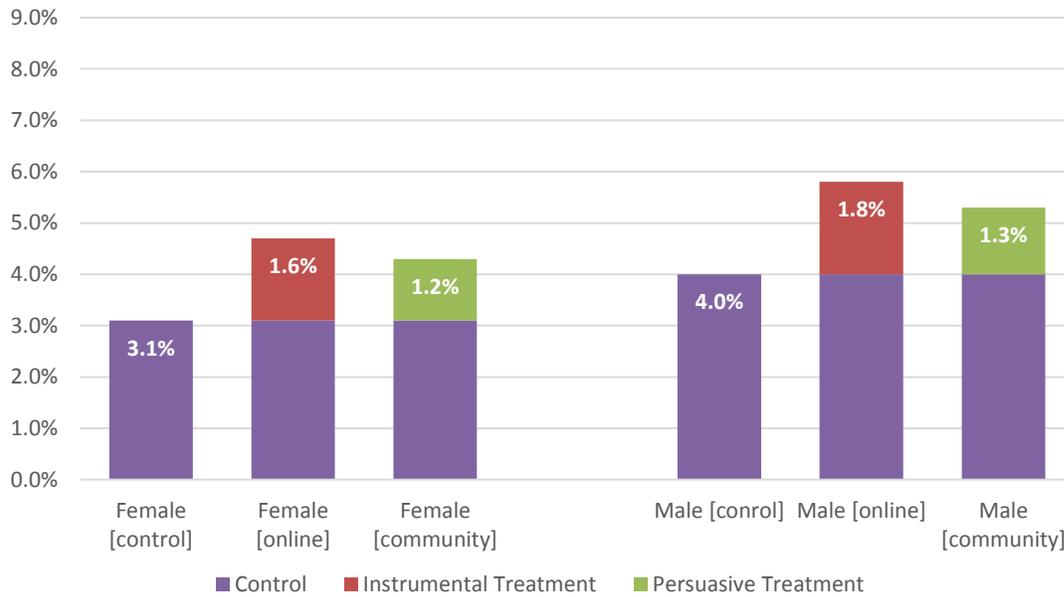


The Department of Justice does not have a list available for Chinese or Vietnamese surnames, so similar analysis is not possible for the Section 203 mailings in King County.

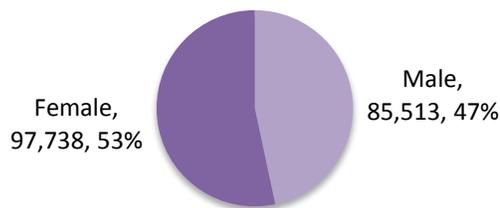
## Gender<sup>17</sup>

The treatments may have had a slightly larger effect on registration among men than women. The [online] treatment significantly out-performed the [community] treatment for both genders. Among men, the control group's registration rate was 4.0%. The [online] treatment increased registration by 1.8 percentage points<sup>18</sup> and the [community] treatment increased registration by 1.3 percentage points,<sup>19</sup> and this 0.5 percentage point difference was statistically significant.<sup>20</sup> Among women, the control group's registration rate was 3.1%. The [online] treatment increased registration by 1.6 percentage points<sup>21</sup> and the [community] treatment increased registration by 1.2 percentage points,<sup>22</sup> and this 0.4 percentage point difference was also statistically significant.<sup>23</sup>

**Figure 7:** registration treatment effects by gender



**Figure 8:** breakdown of individuals by gender



<sup>17</sup> Gender was not available in the original data, but was obtained from the DOL after the election for 97.6% of the individuals. The missing individuals were randomly distributed across the assigned conditions, as expected, so the analysis is unbiased.

<sup>18</sup> The effect on registration for the [online] treatment among men is statistically significant,  $p < 0.001$ , one-tailed.

<sup>19</sup> The effect on registration for the [community] treatment among men is statistically significant,  $p < 0.001$ , one-tailed.

<sup>20</sup> The difference between the treatments is statistically significant,  $p < 0.001$ , two-tailed.

<sup>21</sup> The effect on registration for the [online] treatment among women is statistically significant,  $p < 0.001$ , one-tailed.

<sup>22</sup> The effect on registration for the [community] treatment among women is statistically significant,  $p < 0.001$ , one-tailed.

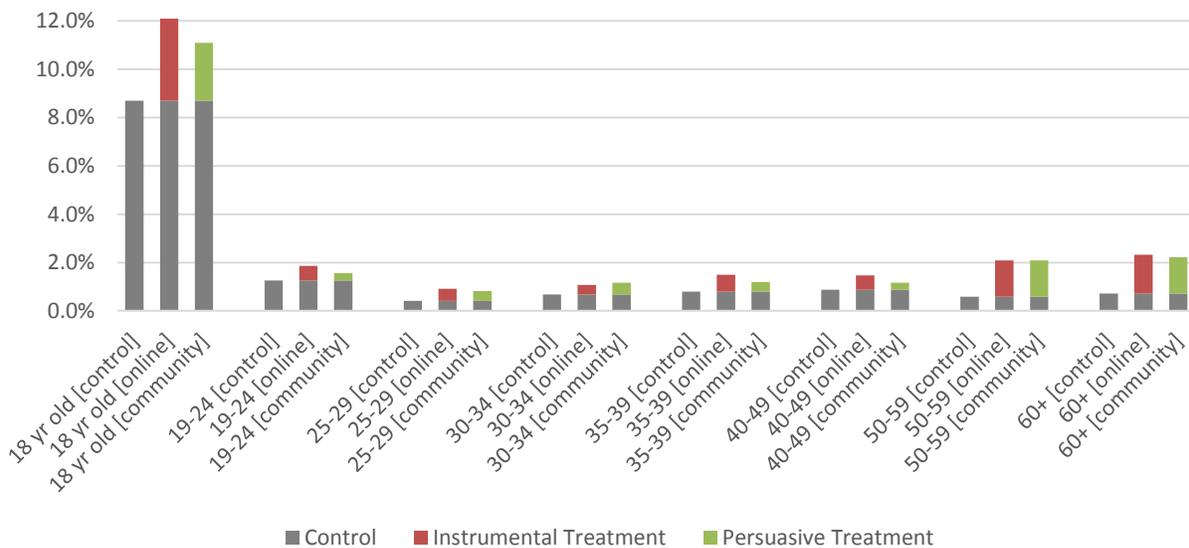
<sup>23</sup> The difference between the treatments is statistically significant,  $p = 0.004$ , two-tailed.

Age

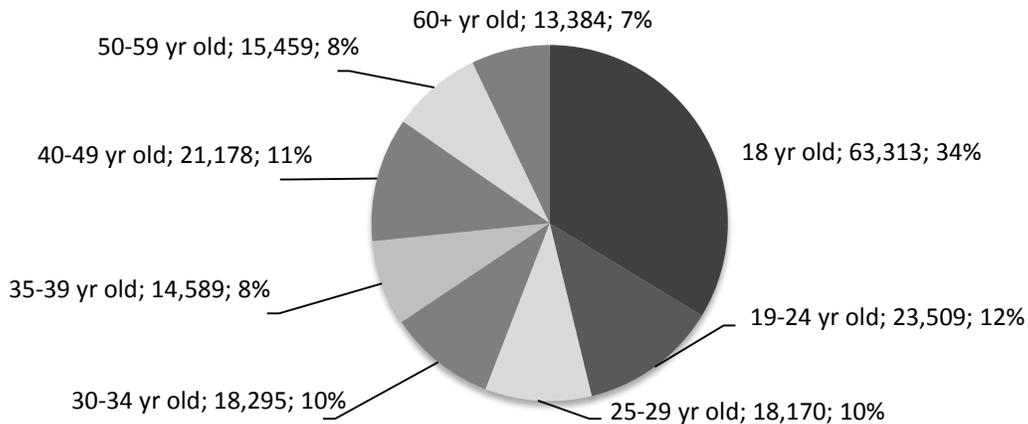
Roughly one-third of the non-registered residents identified by ERIC were 18 years old in 2013 (63,313 individuals). The treatment effects in this group of newly eligible voters were, by far, the largest of any age cohort: [online] treatment = 3.4 percentage points; [community] treatment = 2.4 percentage points.

The treatment effects are much smaller for the age cohorts between 19 and 49, before rising again among residents over 50 years old. Although the treatment effects are small in absolute terms for the cohorts between 19 and 49, they are large relative to the low registration rates in the control group in these cohorts: [online] treatment increases registration by 50%-100% compared to what occurs without treatment. Among individuals over 50 years old, voter registrations triple with treatment. The treatment effects relative to the control group are statistically significant for all age groups.

**Figure 9:** registration treatment effects by age



**Figure 10:** breakdown of individuals by age



## Multiple Department of Licensing Transactions

The ERIC data notes individuals who have conducted multiple transactions with the DOL.<sup>24</sup> These individuals should have been given the opportunity to register with each DOL transaction, and were expected to be less likely to respond to voter registration outreach. Since older individuals are considerably more likely to have had multiple DOL transactions, the effects are examined separately for individuals less than 30 years old.

The results show that, as expected, the treatments generate a smaller registration effect for individuals under 30 years old with multiple DOL transactions. For younger individuals with a single transaction, the effects from both treatments are larger and statistically significant: the [online] treatment= 2.5 percentage points;<sup>25</sup> and the [community] treatment = 1.8 percentage points.<sup>26</sup>

Among individuals over 30 years old, the registration rate in the control group is far smaller than younger voters, and does not appear to be influenced by whether the individual has had multiple past transactions with the DOL. More surprising, the treatment effects are slightly larger among older individuals who have had multiple DOL transactions than a single transaction. For older individuals with a single transaction, the effects from both treatments are statistically significant: the [online] treatment= 0.6 percentage points;<sup>27</sup> [community] treatment = 0.7 percentage points.<sup>28</sup> The difference between these treatment effects was not statistically significant.<sup>29</sup> For older voters with multiple transactions, the effects from both treatments are statistically significant: the [online] treatment= 1.1 percentage points;<sup>30</sup> [community] treatment = 0.8 percentage points.<sup>31</sup> The difference between these treatment effects was not statistically significant at conventional levels.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> The ERIC data indicates whether there has been more than one transaction, but not the number of transactions.

<sup>25</sup> The effect on registration for the [online] treatment among younger individuals with a single DOL transaction is statistically significant,  $p < 0.001$ , one-tailed.

<sup>26</sup> The effect on registration for the [community] treatment among younger individuals with a single DOL transaction is statistically significant,  $p < 0.001$ , one-tailed. The difference between the treatments is statistically significant,  $p < 0.001$ , two-tailed.

<sup>27</sup> The effect on registration for the [online] treatment among older individuals with a single DOL transaction is statistically significant,  $p < 0.001$ , one-tailed.

<sup>28</sup> The effect on registration for the [community] treatment among older individuals with a single DOL transaction is statistically significant,  $p < 0.001$ , one-tailed.

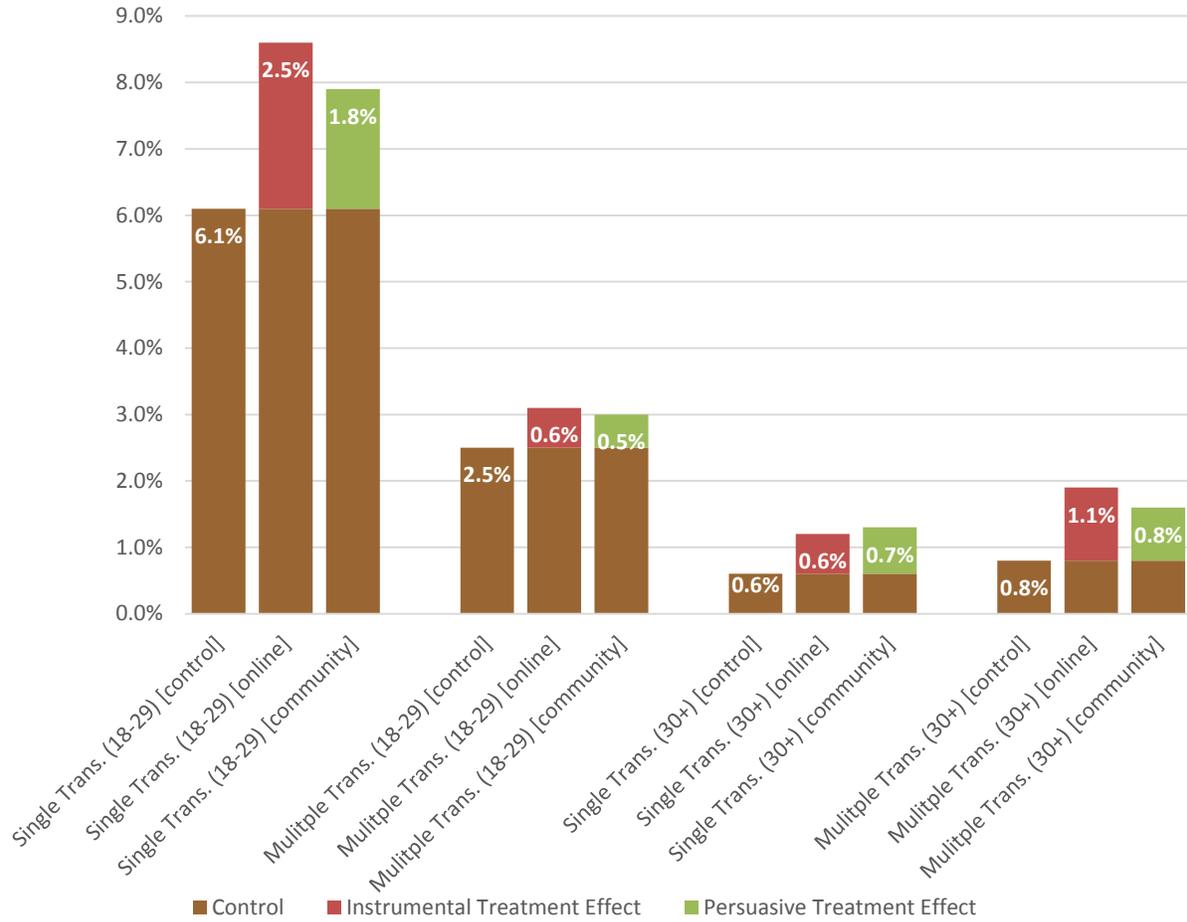
<sup>29</sup> The difference between the treatments is not statistically significant,  $p < 0.392$ , two-tailed.

<sup>30</sup> The effect on registration for the [online] treatment among older individuals with a single DOL transaction is statistically significant,  $p < 0.001$ , one-tailed.

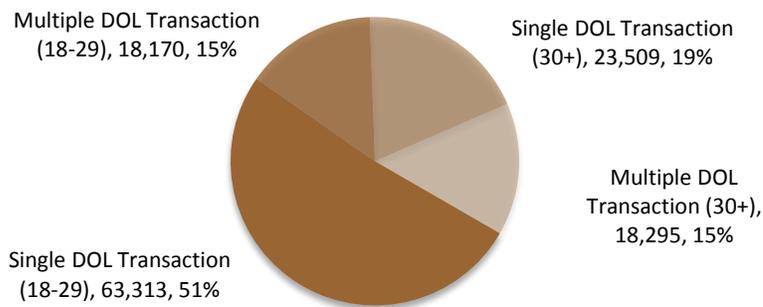
<sup>31</sup> The effect on registration for the [community] treatment among older individuals with a single DOL transaction is statistically significant,  $p < 0.001$ , one-tailed.

<sup>32</sup> The difference between the treatments is not statistically significant,  $p < 0.172$ , two-tailed.

**Figure 11:** registration treatment effects by DOL transactions and age



**Figure 12:** breakdown of individuals by DOL transactions and age



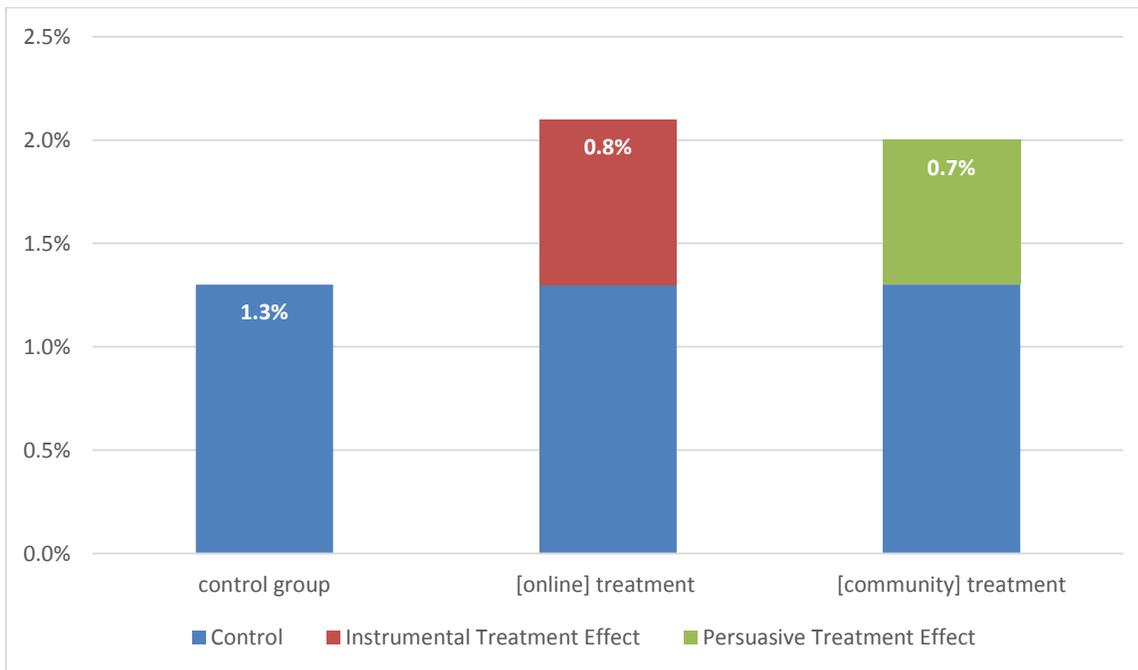
## 8. Effect on Voter Turnout from Mailings

Each of the mailings generated statistically significant increases in voter turnout in the November 2013 General Election:

- In the control group, 1.3% of the residents targeted for registration cast a ballot in the 2013 General Election.
- The [online] treatment generated the largest increase in registrations: 2.1% registration rate, or an increase of 0.8 percentage points.<sup>33</sup>
- The [community] treatment had a registration rate of 2.0%, or an increase of 0.7 percentage points.<sup>34</sup>
- Consistent with voter registration above, the [online] treatment effect may have a slightly larger effect on turnout in 2013 than the [community] treatment effect on registration (+0.1 percentage points), but this difference is not statistically significant.<sup>35</sup>

However, the increase in turnout was about half as large as the increase in voter registration.

**Figure 13:** treatment effect on turnout in November 2013 election



<sup>33</sup> The effect on voter turnout from the [online] treatment is statistically significant,  $p < 0.001$ , one-tailed.

<sup>34</sup> The effect on voter turnout from the [community] treatment is statistically significant,  $p < 0.001$ , one-tailed.

<sup>35</sup> The difference between these treatments is short of the conventional 95% standard for statistical significance,  $p = 0.153$ , two-tailed.

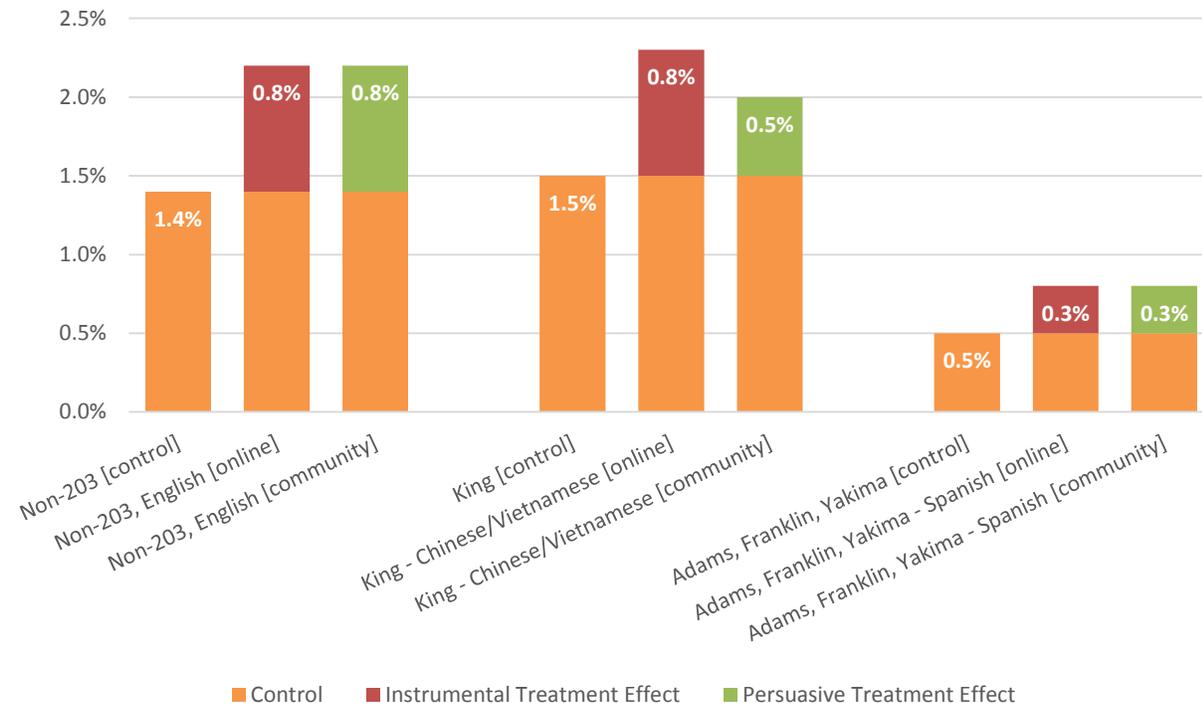
## 9. Turnout by Demographic Sub-Groups

The effects of the treatments vary across some of the subgroups defined by the available data.

### Section 203: Requirement to provide bilingual materials

The effect of the [online] treatment in King County is the same as the rest of the state. King County also has the only statistically significant difference between the treatments for turnout.<sup>36</sup> The control group in the three counties (Adams, Franklin and Yakima) with Spanish language requirements have a lower turnout rate than the control group for the rest of the state. The treatment effect on turnout in these three counties is much smaller and not statistically significant (unlike the registration effect in these counties).

**Figure 14:** treatment effect on turnout in November 2013 election by VRA Section 203 coverage



### Spanish Surnames

The two treatment groups were pooled to analyze the effect on turnout of bilingual mailings between individuals with and without Spanish surnames.

In the counties required to provide English/Spanish bilingual materials, the treatments appear to have equal effect on turnout regardless of surname. The effect is statistically significant among individuals with Spanish surnames (0.3 percentage points)<sup>37</sup> because no one in the control group voted in 2013 in

<sup>36</sup> The difference between the treatments is statistically significant,  $p=0.041$  two-tailed.

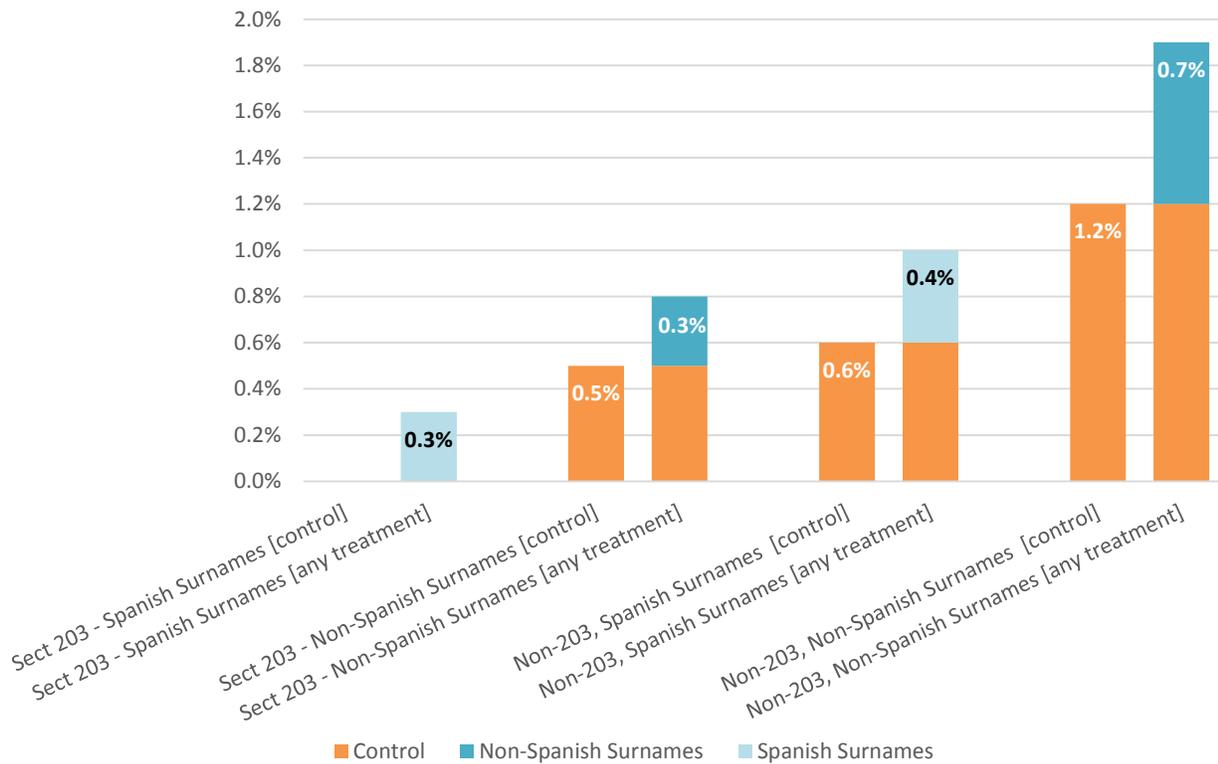
<sup>37</sup> The increase in turnout for the pooled treatment groups among individuals *with* Spanish surnames is statistically significant,  $p=0.004$ , one-tailed.

these counties. The effect is only marginally significant among individuals without Spanish surnames (0.3 percentage points).<sup>38</sup> The treatment effects between the [online] and [community] postcards in these two sub-groups are indistinguishable.<sup>39</sup>

In the remainder of the state, the effect of the treatments is statistically indistinguishable among individuals without Spanish surnames and with Spanish surnames:<sup>40</sup> 0.4 percentage points among individuals with Spanish surnames<sup>41</sup> and 0.7 percentage points among individuals without Spanish surnames.<sup>42</sup>

The similarity in the treatment effects on turnout is quite different from the large disparity in effects on registration, and thus further complicates any attempts to draw conclusions about the effect of bilingual mailings without additional future research designed to address this question.

**Figure 15:** registration treatment effects for individuals with Spanish surnames in Section 203 counties and remainder of the state



<sup>38</sup> The increase in turnout for the pooled treatment groups among individuals *without* Spanish surnames fails to reach conventional levels of statistical significance,  $p=0.120$ , one-tailed.

<sup>39</sup> The estimated effects are statistically indistinguishable,  $p=0.977$ , two-tailed.

<sup>40</sup> The estimated difference is not statistically significant,  $p=0.781$ , two-tailed.

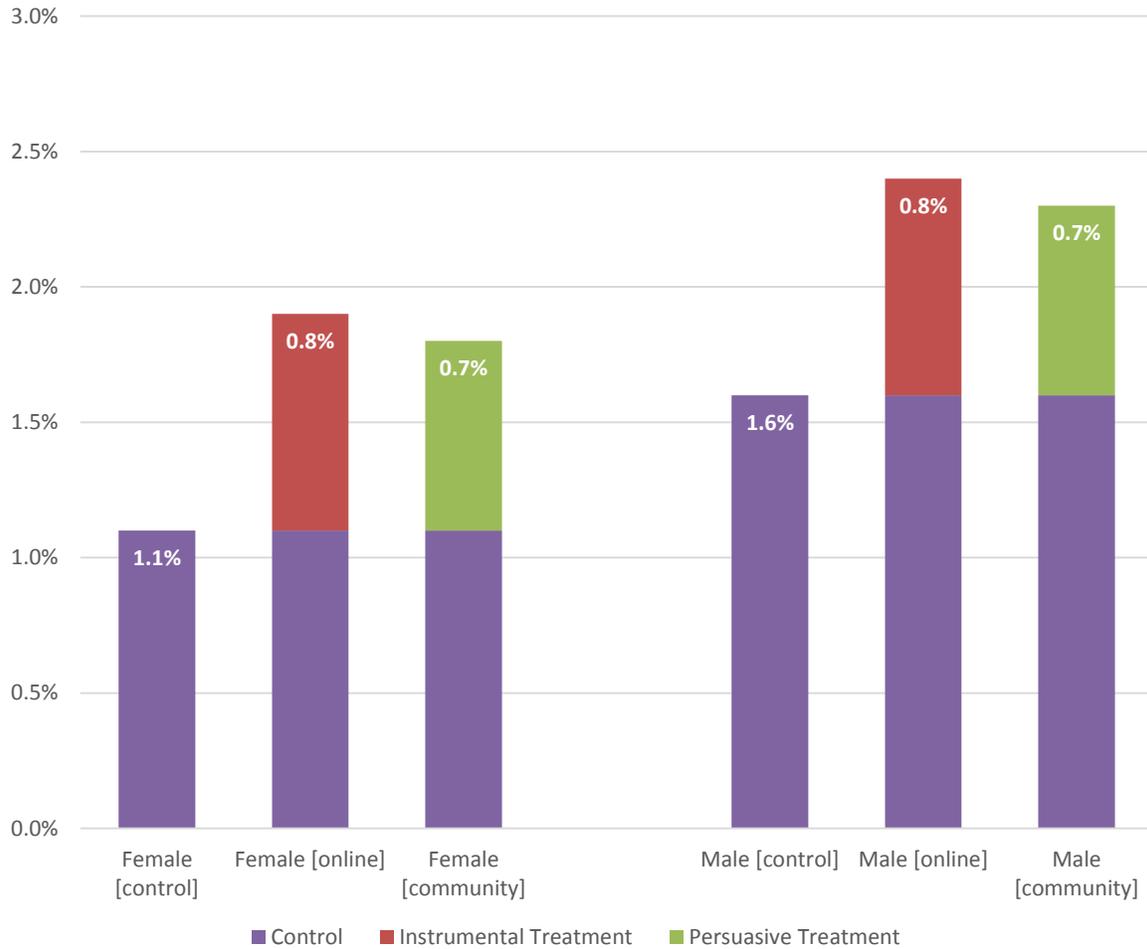
<sup>41</sup> The increase in turnout for the pooled treatment groups among individuals *with* Spanish surnames is statistically significant,  $p=0.010$ , one-tailed.

<sup>42</sup> The increase in turnout for the pooled treatment groups among individuals *without* Spanish surnames is statistically significant,  $p<0.001$ , one-tailed.

## Gender

The effects of the treatments are nearly identical for men and women. Therefore, these effects are the same as the overall effects: The [online] treatment increases turnout by 0.8 percentage points and the [community] treatment increases turnout by 0.7 percentage points.<sup>43</sup>

**Figure 16:** treatment effect on turnout in November 2013 election by gender

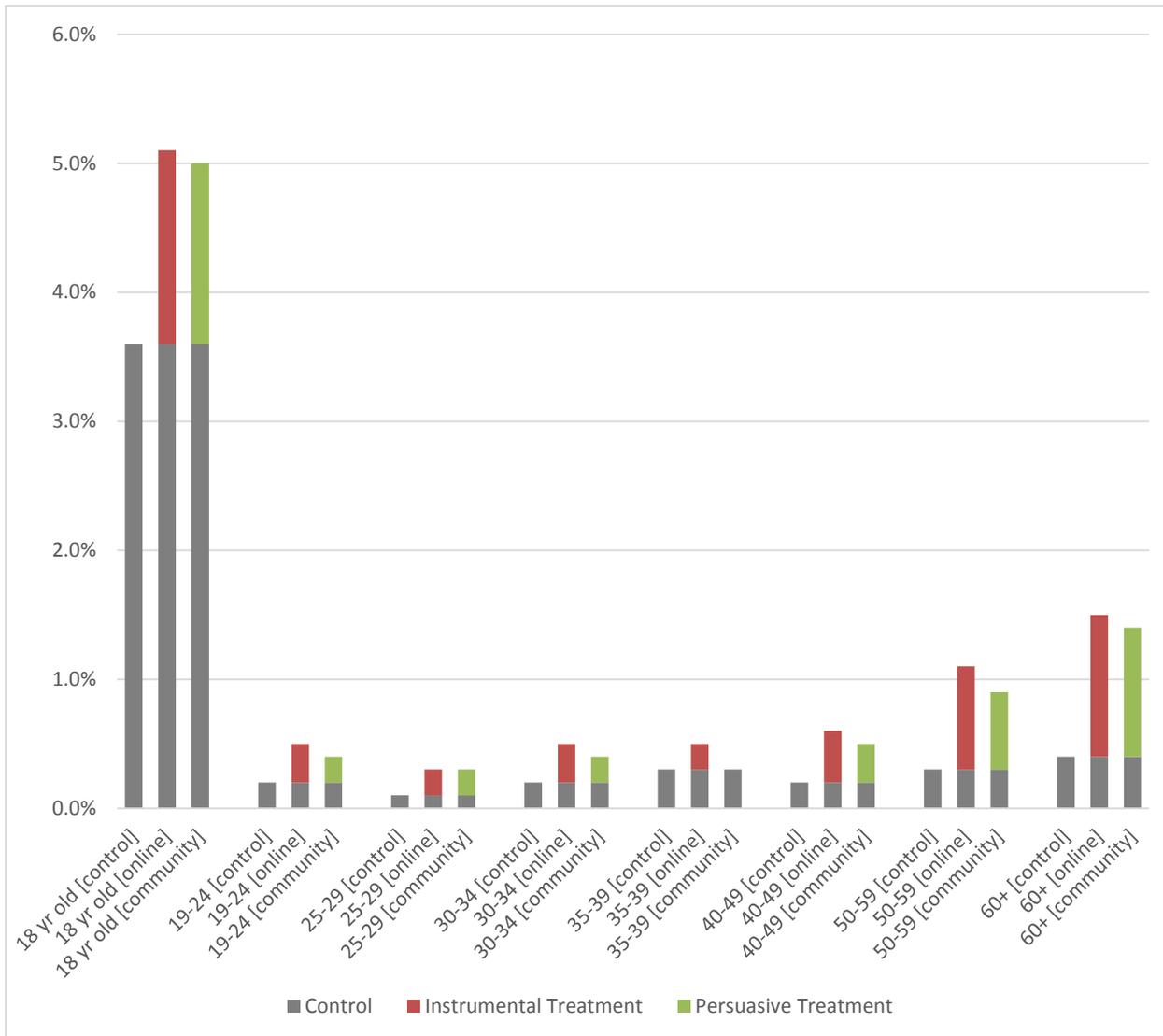


<sup>43</sup> All of the effects are statistically significant,  $p < 0.001$ .

## Age

Similar to the registration effects, the largest increase in turnout was among 18 year olds, with treatment effects rising again for individuals over 50 years old. However, in the middle age groups where the effects are small in absolute terms, they are still large relative to the turnout in the control group. In most of the middle age groups, the treatments double or even triple the turnout in these groups. The [online] treatment was slightly but not significantly higher in most age groups.

**Figure 17:** treatment effect on turnout in November 2013 election by age



### Multiple Department of Licensing Transactions

Among individuals under 30 years old, the treatments generate significant effects on turnout if the individual has had only a single DOL transaction, but fail to generate significant effects if the individual has had multiple DOL transactions. For younger individuals with a single transaction, the effects from both treatments are slightly less than half of the effect on registration: the [online] treatment= 1.2 percentage points;<sup>44</sup> [community] treatment = 1.0 percentage points.<sup>45</sup> The difference between the treatments is not statistically significant.<sup>46</sup> For younger individuals who have had multiple transactions, the registration rate in the control group is far lower and the treatment effects are not statistically significant.

Among individuals over 30 years old, the registration rate in the control group is far smaller than younger voters, as expected, but does not appear to be influenced by whether the individual has had multiple past transactions with the DOL. As for registration, the treatment effect from the [online] treatment appears to be slightly larger among older individuals who have had multiple DOL transactions than a single transaction. For older individuals with a single transaction, the effects from both treatments are statistically significant: the Instrumental [online] treatment = 0.3 percentage points;<sup>47</sup> [community] treatment = 0.4 percentage points.<sup>48</sup> The difference between these treatment effects was not statistically significant.<sup>49</sup> For older voters with multiple transactions, the effects from both treatments are statistically significant: the [online] treatment= 0.7 percentage points;<sup>50</sup> [community] treatment = 0.4 percentage points.<sup>51</sup> The difference between these treatment effects was not statistically significant at conventional levels.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> The effect on turnout for the [online] treatment among younger individuals with a single DOL transaction is statistically significant,  $p < 0.001$ , one-tailed.

<sup>45</sup> The effect on turnout for the [community] treatment among younger individuals with a single DOL transaction is statistically significant,  $p < 0.001$ , one-tailed.

<sup>46</sup> The difference between the treatments is statistically significant,  $p = 0.236$ , two-tailed.

<sup>47</sup> The effect on turnout for the [online] treatment among older individuals with a single DOL transaction is statistically significant,  $p < 0.001$ , one-tailed.

<sup>48</sup> The effect on turnout for the [community] treatment among older individuals with a single DOL transaction is statistically significant,  $p < 0.001$ , one-tailed.

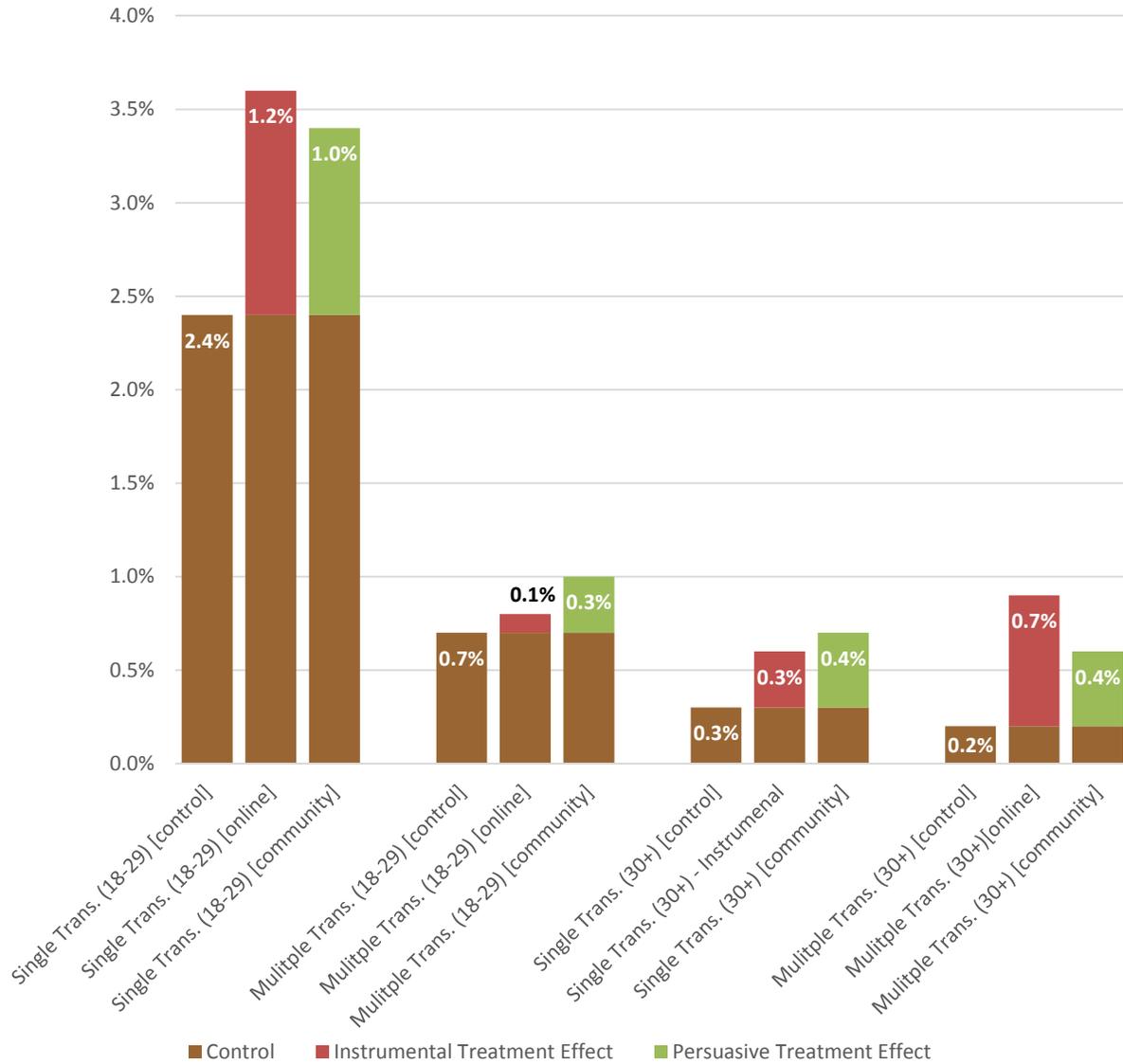
<sup>49</sup> The difference between the treatments is not statistically significant,  $p < 0.522$ , two-tailed.

<sup>50</sup> The effect on turnout for the [online] treatment among older individuals with a single DOL transaction is statistically significant,  $p < 0.001$ , one-tailed.

<sup>51</sup> The effect on turnout for the [community] treatment among older individuals with a single DOL transaction is statistically significant,  $p < 0.001$ , one-tailed.

<sup>52</sup> The difference between the treatments is statistically significant,  $p = 0.015$ , two-tailed.

**Figure 18:** treatment effect on turnout in November 2013 election by past DOL transactions and age



## 10. Lessons Learned

Low cost postcards from the Office of the Secretary of State to non-registered residents can significantly increase voter registration rates. Even in a low-profile, odd-year general election this program increased registration rates by 1.6 percentage points, or almost 50% more than would have occurred without the ERIC registration outreach postcards. The registration postcards also increased turnout, although not as dramatically.

The [online] treatment's focus on convenience was significantly more effective in causing unregistered Washingtonians to register (and vote) than the [community] treatment's attempt to persuade residents to register using social pressure. The larger effect of the [online] treatment was especially pronounced among 18 year olds eligible to register for the first time, and also produced more registrations among residents of Section 203 counties who were sent bilingual English/Spanish postcards.

### Comparison to Third Party Voter Registration Groups

This program by the Washington Secretary of State's Office appears to be more effective than third party voter registration groups, even in off-year elections. For example, the Voter Participation Center's mailings of a paper voter registration application to 18 year olds before the 2010 mid-term election, increased registration by 1.5 percentage points and turnout by 0.4 percentage points. Within the same age group in the 2013 election, Washington's [online] treatment had more than twice the impact on registration (3.4 percentage points) and more than three times the impact on turnout (1.5 percentage points).<sup>53</sup> Moreover, the 2008 experiment by the Office of the Secretary of Washington State in this 18 year-old age cohort suggests the treatment effect on registration could double in a high salience election: a similar treatment caused a 7 percentage point increase in registration.<sup>54</sup> The effect on turnout may also be larger in high salience elections, since the 2008 treatment increased turnout by 2 percentage points in the 2008 General Election.<sup>55</sup>

### Comparison to Past ERIC Registration Tests

In 2012, Delaware conducted a similar test of registration outreach to individuals identified by ERIC. As noted below in the "Cautions" section, every experiment is particular to the state and election in which it is conducted. Washington and Delaware are about as far apart geographically as two states can be, and their political, cultural, and demographic differences are also large. Therefore, the differences in the programs may be due to environment as well as election cycle. Nevertheless, comparisons to other tests done for ERIC registration mailings provide some preliminary lessons.

The first valuable lesson for future ERIC outreach programs is the evidence that voter registration outreach encourages registration (and voting) outside of high profile Presidential election years. The impact of outreach may be larger when high profile campaigns draw public attention (the best treatment in Delaware increase registration by 2.9 percentage points in 2012), but outreach in odd years can make a substantial contribution to registering citizens.

A second, related lesson is that ERIC outreach programs continue to generate significant responses in their second year (Washington, along with Delaware and five other states, conducted ERIC registration outreach in 2012).

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<sup>53</sup> Source: <http://www.voterparticipation.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/10/vpcmannsummit11.pdf>

<sup>54</sup> The increase in registration rate was 9 percentage points when these 18 year-olds were sent a pre-filled, postage paid paper voter registration application.

<sup>55</sup> The increase in voter turnout was 6 percentage points when these 18 year-olds were sent a pre-filled, postage paid paper voter registration application.

## Conclusions

Taken together, these lessons indicate there is long-term public demand for ERIC registration outreach. The large proportion of 18 year olds in the 2013 ERIC data (34% in Washington) is a reminder that each day brings eligibility to more citizens who have not registered. The test results show that these citizens would not have registered in 2013 without the education and outreach effort from the Washington Secretary of State's Office. However, the significant registration effects among the oldest age cohorts indicates that the need for education and outreach is not limited to newly eligible voters.

As noted earlier, the Washington program implemented several lessons learned from the 2012 testing in Delaware to design the 2013 treatments. In 2013, Washington furthered this growing body of knowledge and learned important lessons about the rhetorical aspects of communication design. The accumulation and sharing of research between states builds a foundation of best practices to improve the return on the resources invested in ERIC registration outreach by all states.

## Cautions

The effect of any voter registration mailing is conditional on the execution of the program, the jurisdiction, the type of election, the level of interest in the election, and the activities of other organizations. Common wisdom among election administrators is that registration is driven by what's on the ballot. 2013 was a relatively small election with only a couple statewide initiatives and many local races and measures. If this study were repeated in a larger election generating more public interest, we hypothesize the [online] treatment would still garner the most registrations. However, the difference between the treatments and the control group would certainly vary from the results of this study.

Furthermore, Washington allows voters to register online; in Delaware, postcard recipients were instructed to download an online form and return it by mail (Mann, 2012). Additionally, Washington is one of the few states that is entirely Vote by Mail (sometimes referred to as "permanent absentee"), meaning there are no poll sites. These characteristics of election administration in Washington might affect the results of a similar study conducted in another state with different procedures for registration or voting.

Repeating these treatments in other election contexts or with more diverse images or text could produce different results.

## 11. Looking Forward

The impact of this program in an odd-year, a relatively quiet election, suggests there is consistent long-term need for repeated voter registration outreach.

Based on this test, the [online] treatment was the most effective for encouraging nonregistered residents to register to vote. Therefore, instrumental rhetoric clearly stating the task at hand and emphasizing the convenience of the registration process should be utilized as ‘best practice’ in the future. Alternative treatment designs may explore how to further reduce the *perceived* cost of online voter registration.

Additionally, the [online] treatment contained several visual elements that could be varied in the future to determine the optimal way to present this information. The text elements are the ways in which online voter registration is described. The graphical variation includes the relative importance of the text, the inclusion of background images, and additional ways of highlighting information (colors, fake post-it notes, etc). One direction for the graphical presentation to explore is to be even plainer and “uglier”. The 2012 Delaware test’s most successful mailings were considerably plainer (e.g. black and white) than the 2013 Washington mailings. Third party registration groups like the Voter Participation Center also tout using mailings that are aesthetically unattractive (black and white “scattergrids”, etc), but are intended to align with likely expectations about governmental mailings. Commercial marketers also use these types of mailings to look pseudo-official, which suggest this plain design helps get through the public’s “junk mail” filters.

The examination of the effects in the counties covered by Section 203 suggests that further research is needed to understand the impact of bilingual mailings on the treatment effects.

Or, considering that more than a third of the unregistered residents identified by ERIC were age 18, future research could focus further on how to improve the rhetorical techniques for youth.

Notably, the “spillover” of treatment effects from directly treated individuals to other unregistered members of the household was minimal, indicating that each individual identified by ERIC should be addressed separately (see Appendix E).

## 12. Appendix A: Treatment Postcards

Image 1: back of both postcard treatments (Spanish version for Section 203 counties only)

 <p>Office of the Secretary of State</p>		<p>NONPROFIT ORG. U.S. POSTAGE PAID OLYMPIA, WA PERMIT NO.9</p>
<p>Elections Division PO Box 40229 Olympia, WA 98504-0229</p>	<p>Joe Voter 123 Easy Street Olympia, WA 98506</p>	
<p>— IMPORTANT —</p>		
<p>Our records show you are not registered to vote.</p>		
<p>To vote in the next election, you must register by the deadline. Online registration is quick and easy at <a href="http://www.myvote.wa.gov">www.myvote.wa.gov</a>, or call (800) 448-4881 to request a paper registration form.</p>		
<p>You're eligible if you are at least 18 years old, a U.S. citizen, and not under Department of Corrections supervision for a Washington felony conviction.</p>		
<p>Thank you! Your vote makes a difference.</p>		
<p><b>Already registered?</b> You may have received this postcard in error. Please call (800) 448-4881 to confirm your voter registration is correct.</p>		

 <p>Office of the Secretary of State</p>	<p>Elections Division PO Box 40229 Olympia, WA 98504-0229</p>		<p>NONPROFIT ORG. U.S. POSTAGE PAID OLYMPIA, WA PERMIT NO.9</p>
<p>— IMPORTANT — — IMPORTANTE —</p>		<p>Joe Voter 123 Easy Street Olympia, WA 98506</p>	
<p>Our records show you are not registered to vote.</p> <p>To vote in the next election, you must register by the deadline. Online registration is quick and easy at <a href="http://www.myvote.wa.gov">www.myvote.wa.gov</a>, or call (800) 448-4881 to request a paper registration form.</p> <p>You're eligible if you are at least 18 years old, a U.S. citizen, and not under Department of Corrections supervision for a Washington felony conviction.</p> <p>Thank you! Your vote makes a difference.</p> <p><b>Already registered?</b> You may have received this postcard in error. Please call (800) 448-4881 to confirm your voter registration is correct.</p>	<p>Nuestros récords indican que usted no está inscrito para votar.</p> <p>Para votar en las próximas elecciones, debe inscribirse antes del plazo. Inscribirse por internet es rápido y fácil en <a href="http://www.myvote.wa.gov">www.myvote.wa.gov</a>, o llamando al (800) 448-4881 para pedir un formulario de inscripción.</p> <p>Usted califica si tiene por lo menos 18 años de edad, es ciudadano de EE.UU., y no está bajo la supervisión del Departamento de Corrección por una condena grave en Washington.</p> <p>¡Muchas gracias! Su voto hace la diferencia.</p> <p><b>¿Ya está inscrito?</b> Puede haber recibido esta postal por equivocación. Por favor llame al (800) 448-4881 para confirmar que su inscripción electoral está correcta.</p>		

Image 2: [community] treatment postcards

**76% of people like you register to vote.**

**Join the voting community.**

*deadline approaching*  
[www.myvote.wa.gov](http://www.myvote.wa.gov)

SEAL OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON

**76% of people like you register to vote.**

**Join the voting community.**

*deadline approaching*  
[www.myvote.wa.gov](http://www.myvote.wa.gov)

登記投票 Dăng ký bầu phiếu

SEAL OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON

**76% of people like you register to vote.**

**76% de personas como usted se inscriben para votar.**

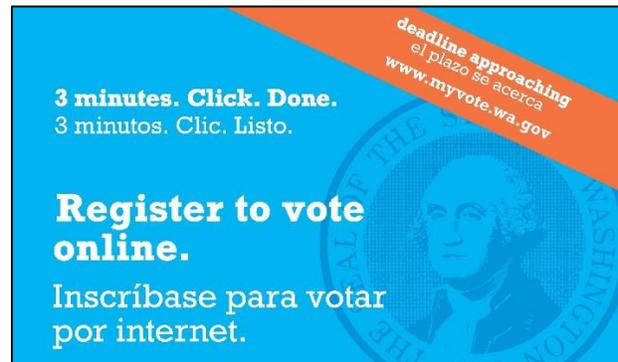
**Join the voting community.**

**Únase a la comunidad de votantes.**

*deadline approaching*  
el plazo se acerca  
[www.myvote.wa.gov](http://www.myvote.wa.gov)

SEAL OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON

Image 3: [online] treatment postcard



### **13. Appendix B: Technical Appendix**

#### Randomization Validity

The random assignment was conducted in Stata 13 using the LKFMN automated re-randomization procedure. The balance of the random assignment was checked using log likelihood ratio tests from logistic regression of the random assignment on available data: age, county, first letter of last name, and date of last activity at the DOL ( $p=0.9579$ ;  $\chi^2=64.73$ , 86 d.f.).

#### Data Source

The analysis is based on a dataset provided on December 5, 2013 by the Washington Secretary of State's Elections Office. These data included registrations as of October 31, 2013 and turnout for the November 5, 2013 General Election.

**14. Appendix C: Registration Data**

	Control Group Rate	Instrumental Treatment Effect	Persuasive Treatment Effect	Count
Overall	3.5%	1.6	1.2	187,897
Section 203: Not Covered	3.6%	1.8	1.4	112,087
Section 203: Chinese/Vietnamese	3.5%	1.4	1.0	64,950
Section 203: Spanish	1.7%	2.4	2.5	10,860
Female	3.1%	1.6	1.2	97,738
Male	4.0%	1.8	1.3	85,513
18 yr old	8.7%	3.4	2.4	63,313
19-24 yr old	1.3%	0.6	0.3	23,509
25-29 yr old	0.4%	0.5	0.4	18,170
30-34 yr old	0.7%	0.4	0.5	18,295
35-39 yr old	0.8%	0.7	0.4	14,589
40-49 yr old	0.9%	0.6	0.3	21,178
50-59 yr old	0.6%	1.5	1.5	15,459
60+ yr old	0.7%	1.6	1.5	13,384
Single DOL Transaction (18-29)	6.1%	2.5	1.8	91,493
Multiple DOL Transaction (18-29)	2.5%	0.6	0.5	13,499
Single DOL Transaction (30+)	0.6%	0.6	0.7	42,024
Multiple DOL Transaction (30+)	0.8%	1.1	0.8	40,881

	Control Group Rate	Treatment Effect (pooled)		Count
Spanish Surnames in Adams, Franklin & Yakima counties	1.3%	1.0		3,565
Non-Spanish Surnames in Adams, Franklin & Yakima counties	1.2%	0.9		7,295
Spanish Surnames in the rest of the state	2.5%	0.2		12,080
Non-Spanish Surnames in the rest of the state	2.8%	1.4		164,957

**15. Appendix D: Turnout Data**

	Control Group Rate	Instrumental Treatment Effect	Persuasive Treatment Effect	Count
Overall	1.3%	0.8	0.7	187,897
Section 203: Not Covered	1.4%	0.8	0.8	112,087
Section 203: Chinese/Vietnamese	1.5%	0.8	0.5	64,950
Section 203: Spanish	0.5%	0.3	0.3	10,860
Female	1.1%	0.8	0.7	97,738
Male	1.6%	0.8	0.7	85,513
18 yr old	3.6%	1.5	1.4	63,313
19-24 yr old	0.2%	0.3	0.2	23,509
25-29 yr old	0.1%	0.2	0.2	18,170
30-34 yr old	0.2%	0.3	0.2	18,295
35-39 yr old	0.3%	0.2	0.0	14,589
40-49 yr old	0.2%	0.4	0.3	21,178
50-59 yr old	0.3%	0.8	0.6	15,459
60+ yr old	0.4%	1.1	1.0	13,384
Single DOL Transaction (18-29)	2.4%	1.2	1.0	91,493
Multiple DOL Transaction (18-29)	0.7%	0.1	0.3	13,499
Single DOL Transaction (30+)	0.3%	0.3	0.4	42,024
Multiple DOL Transaction (30+)	0.2%	0.7	0.4	40,881

	Control Group Rate	Treatment Effect (pooled)	Count
Spanish Surnames in Adams, Franklin & Yakima counties	0.0%	0.3	3,565
Non-Spanish Surnames in Adams, Franklin & Yakima counties	0.5%	0.3	7,295
Spanish Surnames in the rest of the state	0.6%	0.4	12,080
Non-Spanish Surnames in the rest of the state	1.2%	0.7	164,957

## 16. Appendix E: Multiple Target Households

Within the ERIC data, there were 16,931 households with multiple non-registered residents. The design of this test randomly selected one individual in each of these multi-person households in order to examine whether any treatment effect was transmitted from one member of the household to another. Examining the individuals in these households who were not selected for the direct experiment finds *no* “spillover” effect on voter registration or turnout among the unselected individuals.

As in the overall experiment, the treatments significantly increased registration among the directly targeted individuals. The [online] treatment increased registration by 0.6 percentage points above the control group turnout of 1.4%,<sup>56</sup> while the [community] treatment appeared to increase registration by 0.3 percentage points above the control group.<sup>57</sup> The difference between them is consistent with the overall results, but not statistically significant.<sup>58</sup>

The treatments also appear to cause a small increase in turnout among the directly targeted individuals. Turnout in the control group was only 0.4%. The [community] treatment significantly increased turnout by 0.2 percentage points,<sup>59</sup> but the [online] treatment effect (0.1 percentage points) was not statistically significant.<sup>60</sup>

There is no evidence that the increase in voter registration or turnout is transmitted from treated individuals to other non-registered residents.

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<sup>56</sup> The effect on voter registration for the [online] treatment in multi-person households is statistically significant,  $p=0.005$ , one-tailed.

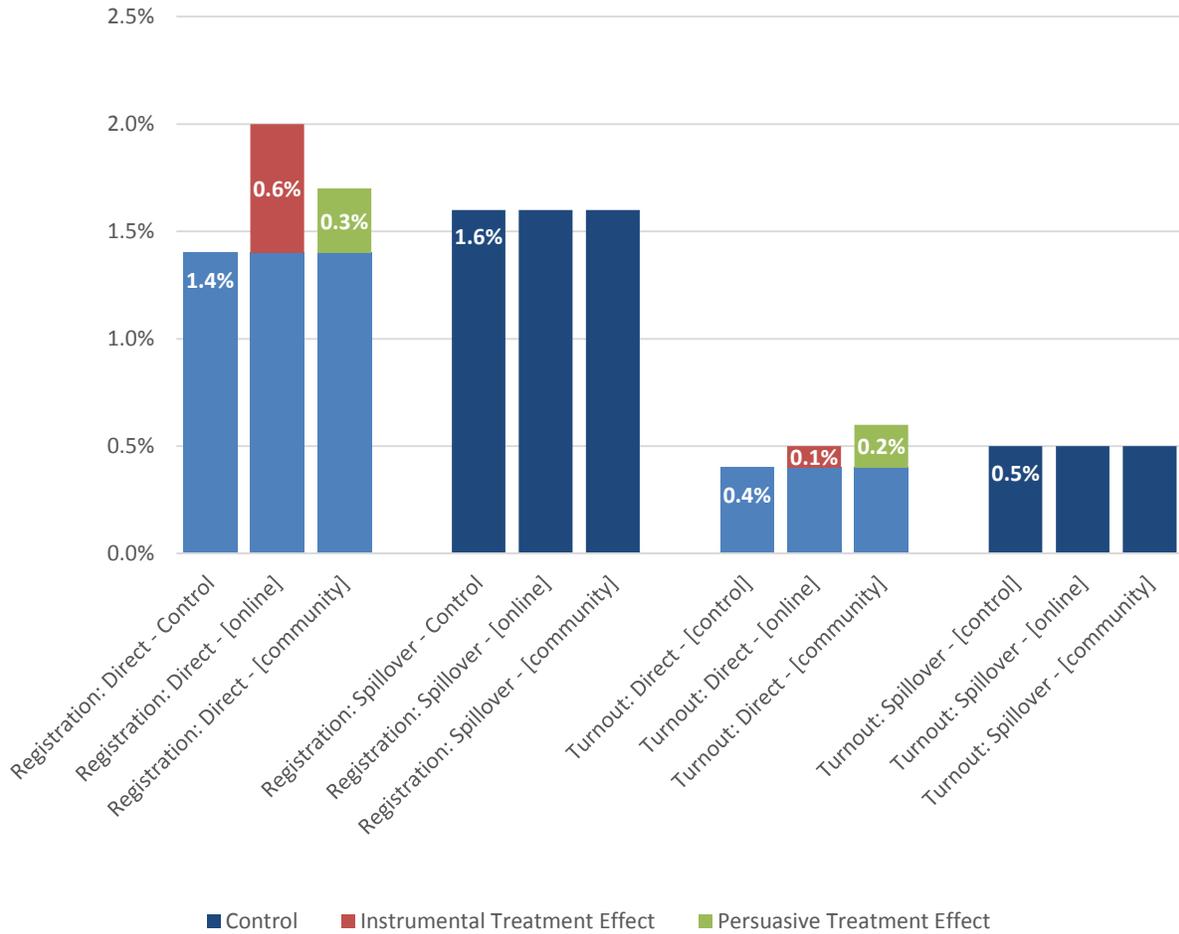
<sup>57</sup> The effect on voter registration for the [community] treatment in multi-person households is short of the 95% conventional standard for statistical significance,  $p=0.084$ .

<sup>58</sup> The difference between these treatments is not statistically significant,  $p=0.283$ , two-tailed.

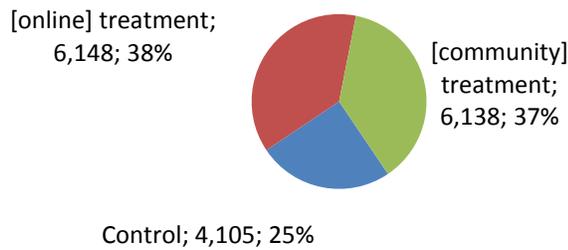
<sup>59</sup> The effect on turnout for the [community] treatment in multi-person households is statistically significant,  $p=0.048$ , one-tailed.

<sup>60</sup> The effect on turnout for the [online] treatment in multi-person households is not statistically significant,  $p=0.238$ , one-tailed.

**Figure A16-1:** treatment effect on registration and turnout in multi-person households



**Figure A16-2:** Assignment of multi-person households



### 17. Appendix F: Costs

Although costs will vary based on the number of postcard recipients and the price of materials and services, this information may be valuable to election administrators.

**Figure A17-1:** cost of 2013 Washington State ERIC outreach postcards

<b>Costs</b>	<b>Both treatments</b>	<b>[online] treatment</b>	<b>[community] treatment</b>
Printing	\$11,985.33		
Mailing	\$12,396.85		
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$24,382.18</b>		
Per postcard	\$0.17		
Per net registration	\$12.36	\$10.82	\$14.41
Per net voter	\$23.07	\$21.62	\$24.73