



# Poll Worker Mobilization and Recruitment: Two Field Experiments to Increase Participation Rates

Joshua D. Hostetter, The Citadel  
M. Liz Lebrón, Voto Latino

## ABSTRACT

We present the first field experiments on how local election officials can recruit and mobilize more voters to serve as poll workers. We used two randomized trials to examine the effect of different methods and messaging on poll worker recruitment. In the first study, we find that outreach by local election officials to people who previously served as poll workers did not increase participation rates compared to the control group. Those who want to serve as poll workers are likely already doing so. In the second study, registered voters who had not previously served as poll workers were 800% more likely to participate relative to a control group when prompted to safeguard the electoral process by a recruitment mailer. The second study further shows that male and older registered voters are more likely to participate after they receive a recruitment mailer.

## CONTACT

Joshua D. Hostetter  
Assistant Professor, The Citadel  
Email: josh.hostetter87@gmail.com  
Phone: (843) 953-4481  
Cell: (225) 330-1668

## INTRODUCTION

**Problem:** More than half of LEOs report a difficult time mobilizing enough poll workers to run an election.

- We have treated poll workers as street-level bureaucrats in mobilization and recruitment efforts, when we should approach them as voters first.
- Instead, apply findings from voter turnout literature to poll worker mobilization and recruitment.

## EXPERIMENT 1

Field experiment with the same appeal via phone, email, and mail to registered voters (n = 2,251) who had previously served as poll workers:

Dear (Insert Poll Worker Name):

Thank you for volunteering to be a poll worker in the past! The Charleston County Board of Elections needs your help again to volunteer as a poll worker for the Statewide Primary election on June 14, 2022. Can we count on you again? Please call, email, or visit our website by April 30th to volunteer.

- **Hypothesis 1:** Poll workers who receive a mobilizing message from a LEO are more likely to sign up to work again compared to poll workers who are not contacted. (Null)
- **Hypothesis 2:** Younger poll workers are more likely to serve again if LEOs contact them via email. (Null)
- **Hypothesis 3:** Older poll workers are more likely to serve again if LEOs contact them via mail. (Confirmed)

## EXPERIMENT 2

Field experiment with mailers sent to registered voters who had not previously served as poll workers with three appeals: (1) Safeguard, (2) Election Accessibility, and (3) Social Pressure.

• **Hypothesis 4:** Registered voters who are contacted to serve as poll workers are more likely to do so relative to those who were not contacted. (Confirmed)

• **Hypothesis 5:** The *Social Pressure* treatment will increase poll worker participation rates relative to the control group. (Confirmed)

• **Hypotheses 6a, 6b, 7a, 7b:** Partisan valence. (Null)

**Hypothesis 8:** Older registered voters will be more responsive to the treatments than their younger counterparts. (Confirmed)

• **Hypothesis 9:** Female registered voters will be more responsive to the treatments compared to their male counterparts. (Null)



Figure 1. Safeguard



Figure 2. Accessibility

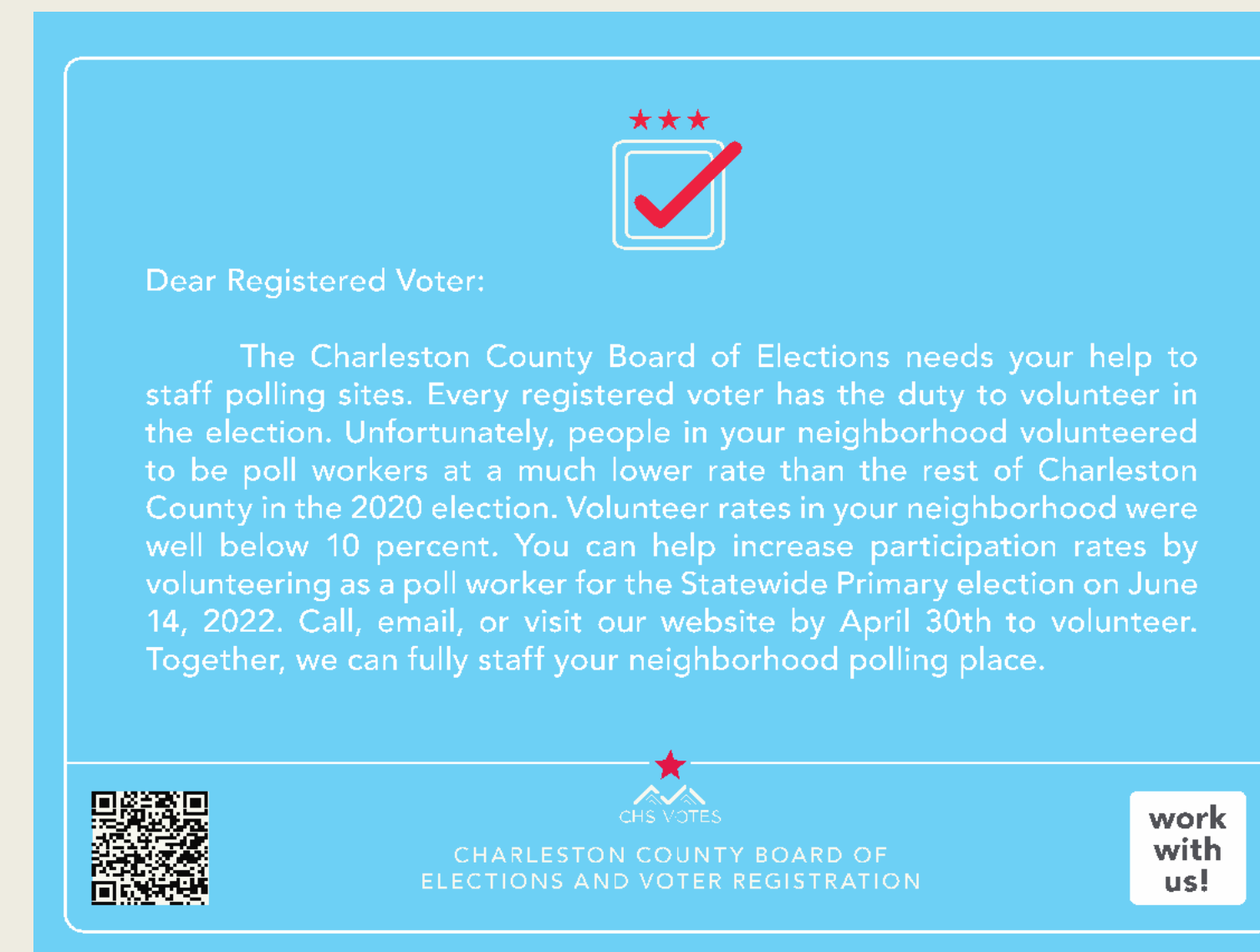
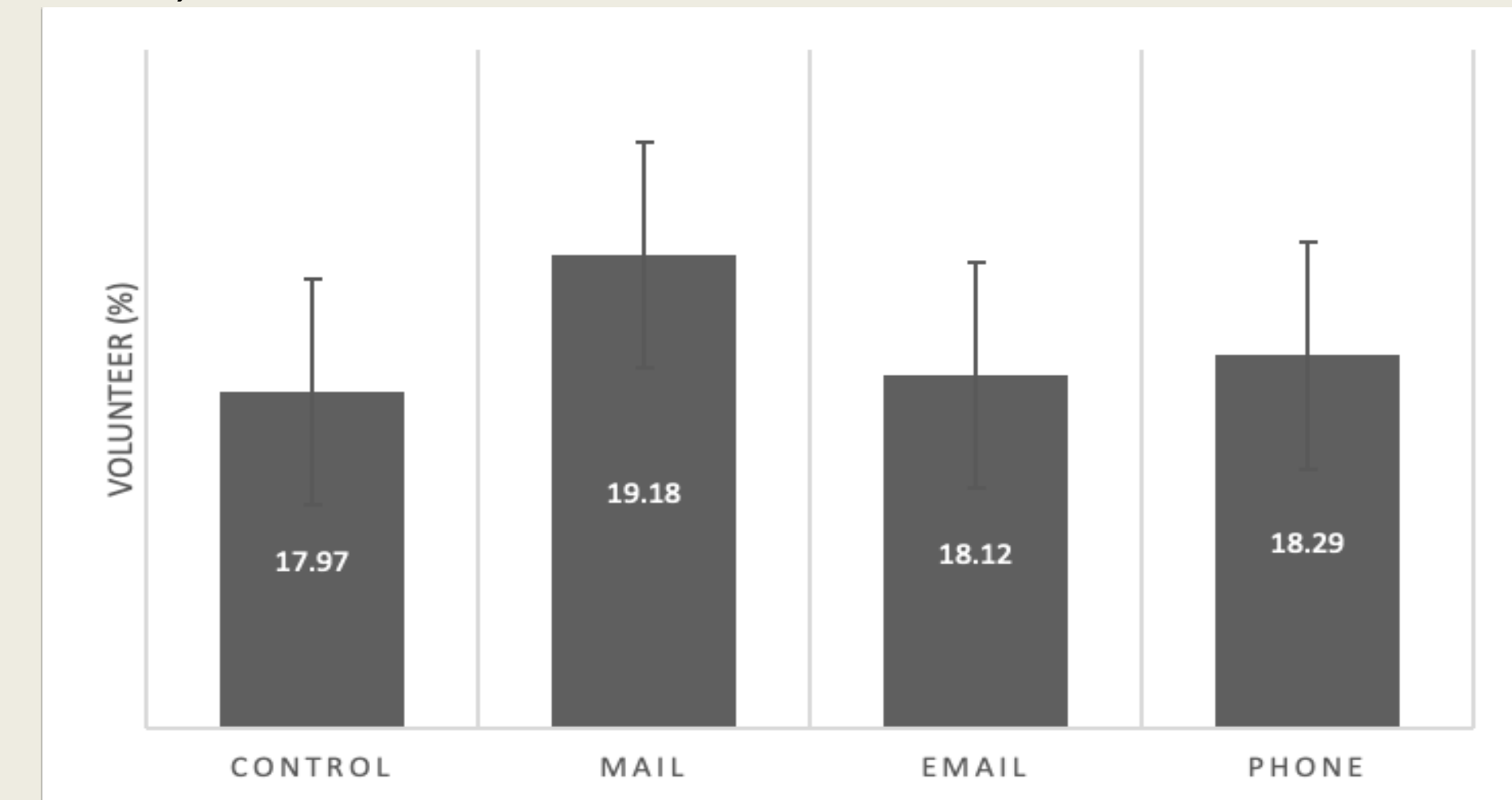
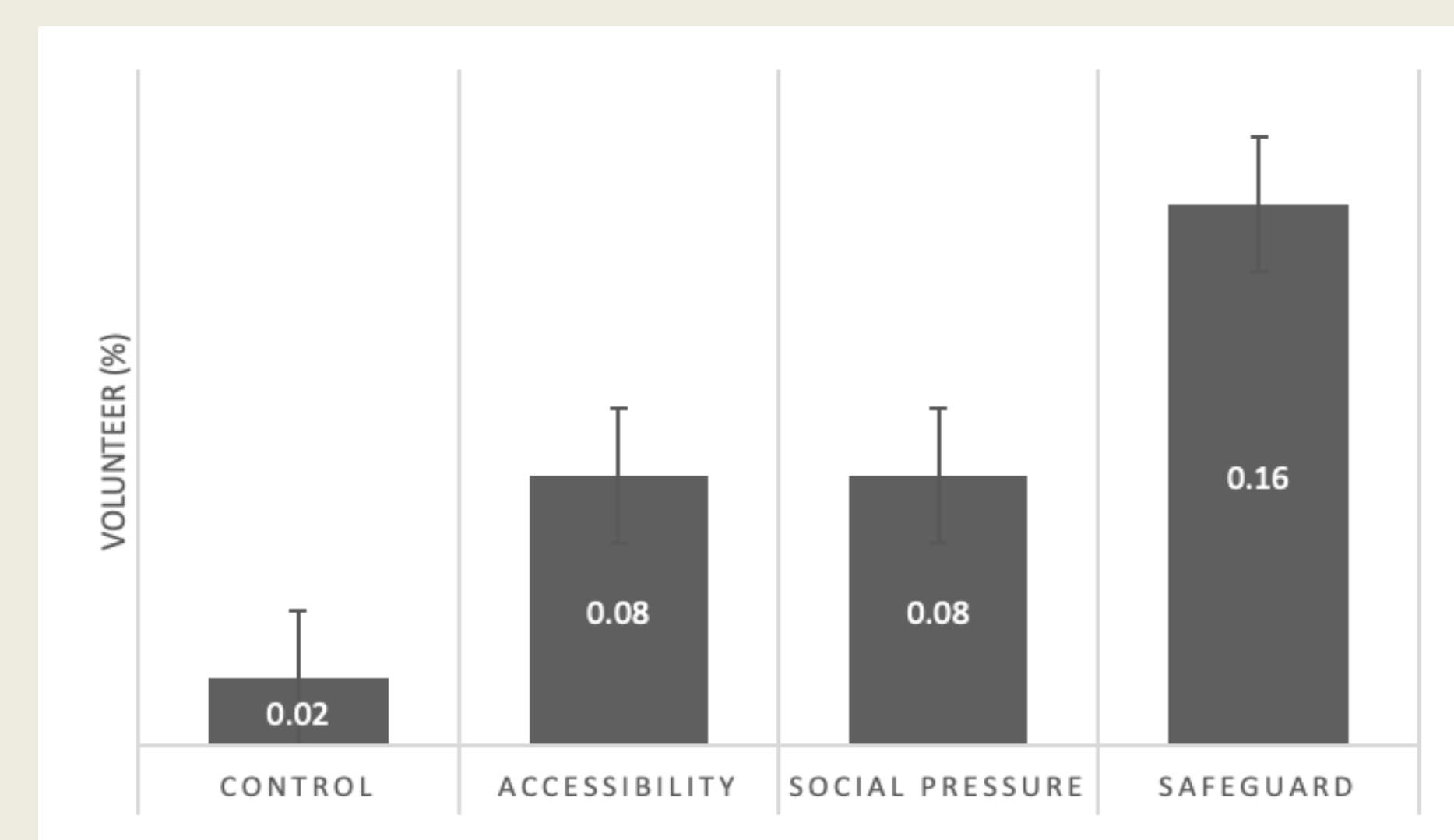


Figure 3. Social Pressure

Study 1: Average Treatment Effects on Poll Worker Participation in the May 2022 Primary Election



Study 2: Average Treatment Effects on Poll Worker Participation in the May 2022 Primary Election



## FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

1. The Safeguard treatment increased poll worker recruitment rates by 800% relative to the control group.
2. Rather than view poll workers as street-level bureaucrats, election administrators should regard them as voters first.
3. There is no difference between control and treatment groups for mobilizing existing poll workers.
  - Those who wanted to be poll workers are likely already doing so.
4. Similar to voters, poll workers who have served in past elections are going to do so again in future ones.
  - New poll worker recruits respond to similar messages as the voters.
5. There is potential to expand the methodological approach scholars use to study election administration.