

# The Credibility Factor

**What one competitive race tells  
us about winning elections in 2018**





# What campaigns can learn from Virginia

**The Virginia race for governor in 2017 was among the year's most watched and hotly-contested political races in the country, and widely viewed as a bellwether for campaigns in the 2018 midterm cycle. Candidates spent \$65 million – making it the most expensive governor race in the Commonwealth's history\*.**

If the Virginia race serves as a sign of things to come, it begs several questions:

- What captured voters' attention?
- Which mediums were most credible?
- And most importantly—what motivated voters to go to the polls?

The American Association of Political Consultants (AAPC) and the United States Postal Service® joined forces to get answers to these questions. Conducted by Summit Research on behalf of the Postal Service™, the survey compiled responses of 900 Virginia voters in the days immediately following the gubernatorial election, on November 7-9, 2017.

This exit poll gives us insight into the voter mindset – illustrating the ways that political outreach can most effectively capture voters' attention.

\*According to the nonpartisan Virginia Public Access Project.

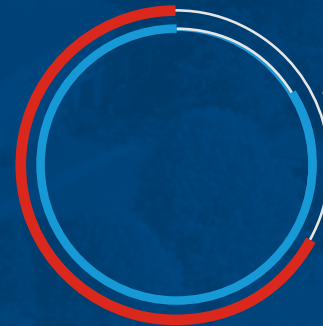
## Voter reach

**83%** of surveyed voters go to their mailboxes at least 5 times per week.



## Voter recall

**Mail Recall is High:** When recalling which types of political advertising they received during the 2017 campaign, surveyed voters overwhelmingly pointed to “TV ads” and “mail sent to their home” as the most frequent forms of political outreach.



**83%** Recall TV ads

**68%** Recall mail sent to their home

## Millennial recall

**53%** of Millennial voters recall receiving mail just as often as digital ads.



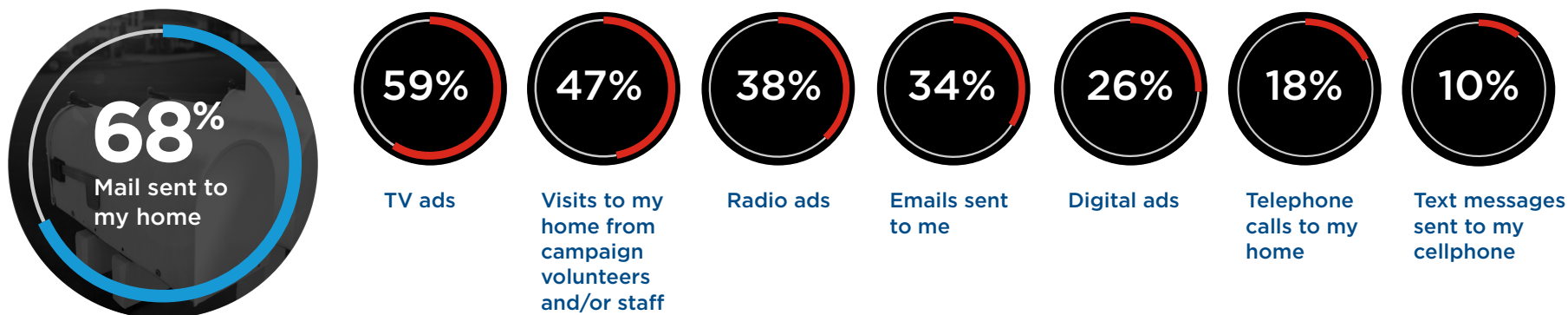
**Source:** Summit Research post-election survey on behalf of the Postal Service among 900 actual Virginia voters, conducted immediately following the gubernatorial election (November 7-9, 2017).

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# Direct mail is the most *credible* form of political outreach

In today's highly competitive media environment, communication sources are coming under heavy scrutiny. In the era of fake news, it's paramount for campaigns to ensure that they're sending their message out to voters through a credible source.

Please rank the three most credible political outreach techniques:\*



\*Percentage top 3 choice ranking

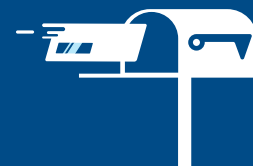
## Key voting groups

Percentage of voting demographics that found mail among most credible:



## Breaking it down

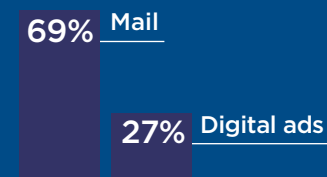
Boomers are more likely to say mail sent to their home is credible (78% among top 3) than TV ads (60%).



Just over one-third of Millennials surveyed (38%) said digital ads were among the most credible.



College-educated voters are also far more likely to say mail sent to their home is more credible than digital ads.

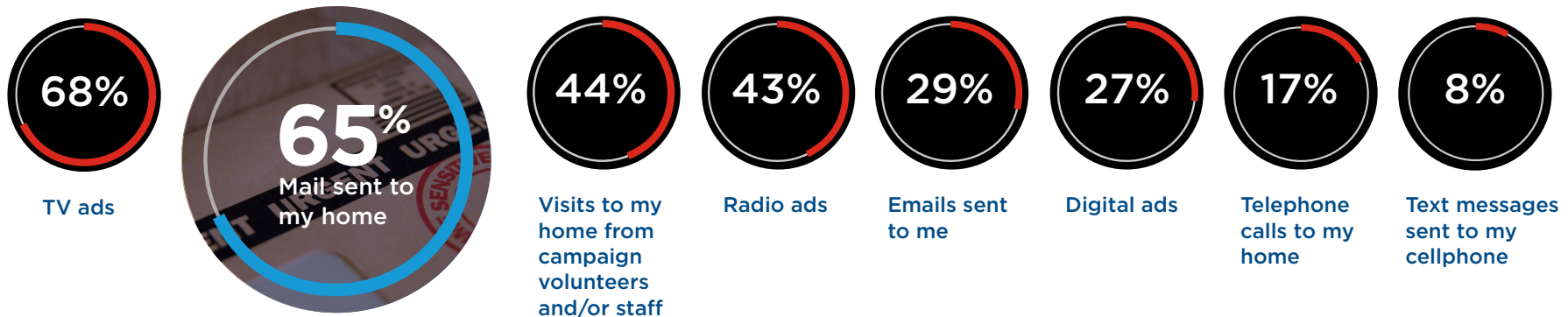


Source: Summit Research post-election survey on behalf of the Postal Service among 900 actual Virginia voters, conducted immediately following the gubernatorial election (November 7-9, 2017).

# 2 Direct Mail and TV are the two most *persuasive* forms of political outreach

For campaigns, it isn't just about contacting voters -- it's about persuading voters with messages that resonate with them. When testing and modeling your messages, it's as important to consider the channel you are using to deliver the message as it is the message itself. When asked to rank the three most persuasive political outreach techniques, surveyed voters indicated that television (68 percent) and mail (65 percent) ranked highest.

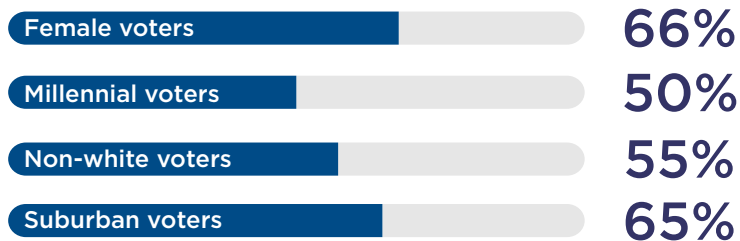
Please rank the three most **persuasive** political outreach techniques:\*



\*Percentage top 3 choice ranking

## Key voting groups

Percentage of voting demographics that found mail among most persuasive:

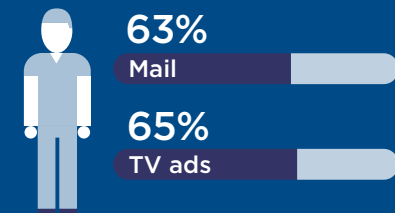


## Breaking it down

Boomers rank mail (73%) on equal footing with TV ads (73%).



Male voters rank mail just behind TV ads in terms of persuasiveness.



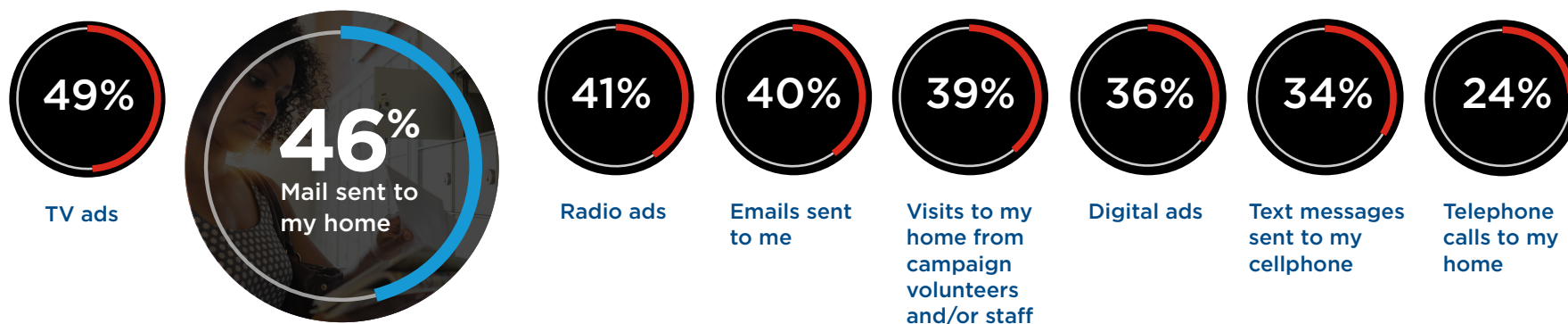


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## Political mail helped surveyed voters *decide* how to vote

Most successful campaigns rely on an integrated, multi-channel approach, but in the days leading up to Election Day, mail and television played the biggest role in helping surveyed voters decide how to cast their ballots. Forty-six percent of surveyed voters – including 55 percent of all Millennials surveyed – indicated that mail proved helpful in making their voting decision.

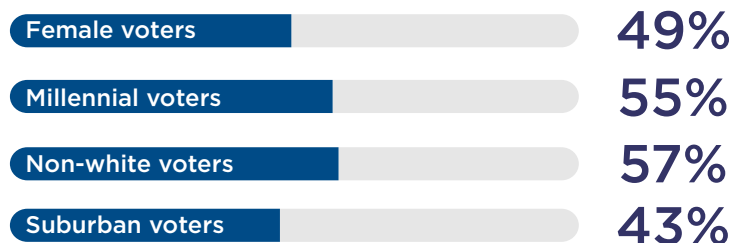
In the gubernatorial election, how helpful did you find the following sources in making your voting decision?\*



\*Very/Somewhat Helpful Ranking

### Key voting groups

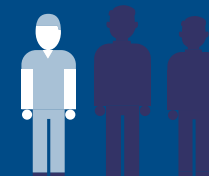
Percentage of voting demographics that found mail helpful in making voting decision:



### Breaking it down

Rural voters (56%) surveyed are more likely to say visits to their home from campaign staff or volunteers are helpful than suburban (38%) or urban (35%).

Only about one-third of male voters (32%) say digital ads are helpful in making their voting decision.



College-educated voters are more likely to say mail sent to their home is helpful (44%) than digital ads (33%).



# Direct mail and voting

## The path to the ballot box

From the mailbox to the ballot box, mail can inform, persuade and motivate voters. That path to the ballot box is filled with critical mail touchpoints – giving campaigns an opportunity to connect early and deliver a greater impact.

**1** **Checking the mail:**  
I typically check my mailbox at least five times a week (**83%**).

**2** **Reading the mail:**  
I'm likely to read a mail piece with information about a candidate or candidates upon seeing it (**67%**).

**3** **Exploring the issue:**  
After receiving a mail piece with information about a candidate or candidates, I'm likely to go to the internet to learn more about that race (**46%**).

**4** **Remembering the issue:** I find mail to be the most memorable form of political advertising I received (**44%**).

**5** **Casting the vote:** I find mail had an impact on my voting decision (**43%**).



# Three insights to remember during this election cycle

- 1 Mail is considered the most credible source of political outreach.
- 2 Mail is considered a highly persuasive form of political outreach.
- 3 Nearly half of surveyed voters find mail had an impact on their voting decision.

## IN ASSOCIATION WITH AAPC

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

**Source:** Summit Research post-election survey on behalf of the Postal Service among 900 actual Virginia voters, conducted immediately following the gubernatorial election (November 7-9, 2017).

## Get in touch

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



To find out more,  
visit us at:

**[DeliverTheWin.com](http://DeliverTheWin.com)**





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