

## MEMORANDUM ON THE EFFECTS OF PRENOTIFICATION ON VOTER RESPONSE RATES

TO: INTERESTED PARTIES  
 FROM: RAGNAR RESEARCH PARTNERS  
 DATE: July 2022

One of the foundational beliefs of Ragnar Research is that survey research needs to drag itself out from the early 2000s. As part of our continuing effort to advance the science of polling, Ragnar Research recently completed several experiments on prenotification using text messages as a tool to increase response rates in survey research. We think the results are fairly interesting.

### Why Prenotification?

Prenotification has been a longstanding and well-researched tool that has been proven to boost response rates in donor and non-profit research as well as corporate branding research. Notifying a selected group of donors or customers that a third-party research firm will be contacting them has consistently led to improved response rates. While a number of experiments have been conducted on prenotification, the results have been mixed. To date, we have not found a study that has used this technique in political opinion research. We were optimistic that this might help boost response rates for surveys, leading to better quality and less expensive polling.

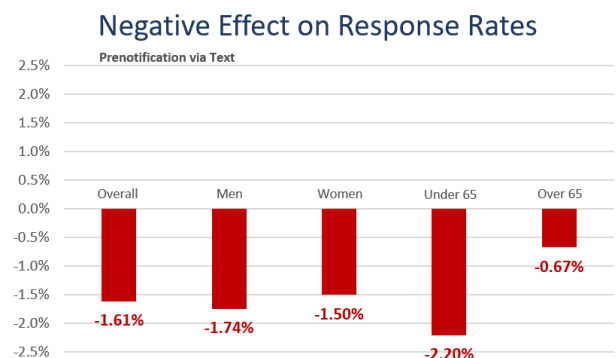
### The Test and Results

To test this, we conducted a live-interviewer survey of n=600 likely voters with half of the sample file receiving a text message notifying them that they might receive a call about their opinions and half of the sample file not receiving any advance notification.

The results were the opposite of the hypothesis: prenotification was not successful in increasing respondents' interest in participating in polling research. In fact, prenotification via text message alerts was found to reduce response rates across all measured demographics. There is a clear drop-off of .67% to 2.20% between samples that were notified and those that were not. Digging into our data, there are several reasons why this is the case, with implications for polling at-large in the 2022 General Election.

It is clear that prenotification works in donor and corporate contexts by leveraging the existing relationship with a potential respondent. On the other hand, when there is no pre-existing relationship, as is the case with political opinion research, prenotification just presents respondents an opportunity to decline to participate before they are exposed to the interpersonal effects of a live interviewer.

It is equally clear that connecting a respondent to a live caller as soon as possible is critically important to maximizing voter participation in public opinion surveys.



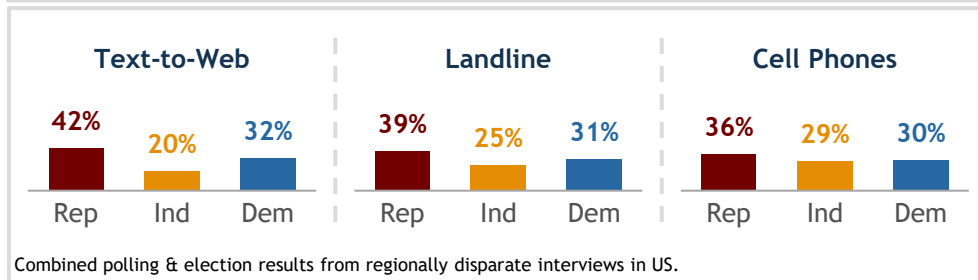
## Text to Web and the Dangers of Impersonality

This research validates our previous findings on live dialing versus text-to-web research. In that research we showed that text-to-web had the following effects on a survey:

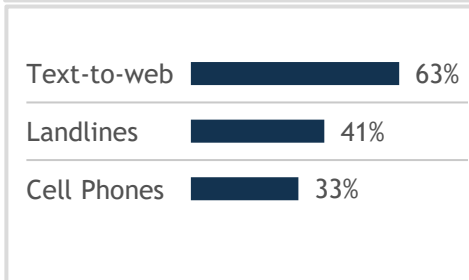
1) Text-to-web surveys have a significantly more engaged population of respondents than live-interviewer surveys. Text-to-web respondents are significantly more likely to have heard of candidates than respondents of other methods.

2) Text-to-web surveys are more partisan than the likely voter universe. Both Republican and Democratic respondents are much more likely to engage the text-to-web format than independents. The negative implications of this on strategic decision making are obvious.

### Stated Party ID by Methodology



### Heard Info on Candidates



## Conclusions

Live interviewer contact remains the most effective tool for measuring public opinion in political polling. The cycle where that stops being the case is the cycle you will see us move away from it. While the findings of this research are limited, they support an increasing body of research that shows that automated contact methods, such as IVR, text-to-web, and online panels, encourage only the most engaged to participate in the survey.

Good survey research helps campaigns separate the signal from the noise. Based on our findings, prenotification and other automated contact methods only serve to amplify the voices of the most engaged elements of the electorate. This can lead to situations where a campaign, in an effort to cut costs, uses an automated survey contact approach and ends up believing that its messaging is penetrating further than it is, that voters are more engaged than they are, and that the electorate is less open to persuasion than it really is.

Ensuring that polling is as accurate as it can be remains our core focus as a firm, and this research further demonstrates the critical importance of live interviewers to maximize survey participation, giving campaigns and decision makers a clear and accurate view of a race.