

## CANVASSING RESEARCH



**Definition:** Visiting voters at their homes to talk to them about voting.

**Bottom Line:** Canvassing is the most effective form of voter contact because of the opportunity for face-to-face communication.

### CONSIDERATIONS

**Pros** - Best way to talk to voters (face to face); traditionally most evidence it works compared to other field tactics

**Cons** - Time consuming; must be done in person; harder to do in rural or exurban areas

### RESEARCH FINDINGS

#### Canvassing reliably increases turnout.

- Academics (Green & Gerber) report that canvassing increased voter turnout in 44 out of 51 studies they reviewed.<sup>1</sup>
- Academics (Green, Gerber, and Nickerson) ran 6 GOTV canvassing experiments before the 2001 municipal elections and found increases in turnout among canvassed voters ranging from 0.1%-4.6% with an average effect of 2.1%.<sup>2</sup>
- Industry sources report that site-based mail and canvass VR programs effectively drive turnout and registration through several subsequent election cycles.
- Canvassing effects vary widely due to differences in election types, election competitiveness, canvass timing, canvass training and quality, contact rate, etc.<sup>2</sup>
- Academics (Nickerson) found a 16.8% increase in turnout for the 2002 Michigan Gubernatorial election (but the standard error was 15, indicating a lot of uncertainty about that estimated increase).<sup>3</sup>

#### Canvassing can be a good voter registration tool.

- Academics (Nickerson) found an increase in registration of 4.4% across 6 experiments in a variety of election year types (i.e., president, congressional, municipal).<sup>4</sup>

**Canvassing** has traditionally been the most effective volunteer tactic out of the major 4 (canvassing, phonebanking, textbanking, handwritten postcarding/letter-writing; Industry source).<sup>5</sup>



### Areas for future exploration:

- Effectiveness of canvassing in combination with other voter contact tactics, such as text messaging.
- Completed/planned SDAN studies:
  - 2019 phonebank/canvass postcard chaser pilot study (MS/LA - results expected summer 2020)
  - 2020 Phonebank/canvass postcard chaser study (TX)

### References:

1. Green, D. P., & Gerber, A. S. (2015). *Get out the vote: How to increase voter turnout* (3rd ed.). Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press.
2. Green, D. P., Gerber, A. S., & Nickerson, D. W. (2003). Getting out the vote in local elections: Results from six door-to-door canvassing experiments. *The Journal of Politics*, 65(4), 1083-1096. ([https://sites.temple.edu/nickerson/files/2017/07/Green\\_Gerber\\_Nickerson.JOP\\_.2003.pdf](https://sites.temple.edu/nickerson/files/2017/07/Green_Gerber_Nickerson.JOP_.2003.pdf))
3. Nickerson, D. W., Friedrichs, R. D., & King, D. C. (2006). Partisan mobilization campaigns in the field: Results from a statewide turnout experiment in Michigan. *Political Research Quarterly*, 59(1), 85-97. ([https://iop.harvard.edu/sites/default/files\\_new/research-policy-papers/king\\_nickerson\\_2005.pdf](https://iop.harvard.edu/sites/default/files_new/research-policy-papers/king_nickerson_2005.pdf))
4. Nickerson, D. W. (2015). Do voter registration drives increase participation? For whom and when? *The Journal of Politics*, 77(1), 88-101. ([https://sites.temple.edu/nickerson/files/2017/07/Nickerson\\_registration\\_JOP.2015.pdf](https://sites.temple.edu/nickerson/files/2017/07/Nickerson_registration_JOP.2015.pdf))
5. Green and Gerber, 2015 + Industry sources (SDAN has access to various research reports by progressive organizations that we are not allowed to disseminate or cite but are sharing broad strokes of here).