

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.¹
- 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%.²
- 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.²
- 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).³

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).⁴

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



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)
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)
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)
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).