

FIELD RESEARCH OVERVIEW



Bottom Line: Traditionally, methods using live conversation (e.g., canvassing and phonebanking) are more effective than other methods of voter outreach.

ALL FIELD TACTICS

- Research shows that voter outreach tactics are more effective in “quieter” election contexts. They are most effective in odd-years and special elections, which means that a greater volume of voter outreach is needed in even years, e.g., presidential years.
- Industry research¹ generally finds that tactics are especially impactful closer to the election. The final weeks before the election are generally referred to as GOTV (Get Out the Vote).
- On average, industry studies estimate that turnout effects across tactics are in the range of 0.2-3.0% (this is more than enough to sway an election, especially state/local elections).
- On average, academic studies find larger effects. This may be due to academics running studies in quieter elections, using more random samples, or a bias towards reporting positive results.
- Volunteer field efforts often outperform paid field efforts (but not always; quality is key).²

CANVASSING

- Canvassing reliably produces some of the best results in increasing turnout.
 - In Green and Gerber’s book, *Get Out the Vote*, they report that canvassing increased voter turnout in 44 out of the 51 studies they considered.³
- Canvassing has traditionally been the most effective volunteer tactic out of the major 4 (canvassing, phonebanking, textbanking, handwritten postcarding/letter-writing; Industry source).³

PHONEBANKING

- Phonebanking is the best choice for remote volunteering.
 - Many industry tests show it is up to twice as effective as textbanking and postcarding.
- Phonebanking helps to boost voter turnout.
 - Nickerson and colleagues found that nonpartisan GOTV calls helped to boost turnout by 1.6-3.8% in several different studies across election contexts.^{4,5}

FIELD RESEARCH OVERVIEW

TEXTBANKING

- Text messages have a small effect on voter turnout.
 - Texting has been found to boost turnout from 0.2 - 3.0% depending on targeting/message quality and election type.^{Industry source,⁶}
 - Industry meta-analyses from 2020 suggest that text messaging is gaining efficacy and could even be more effective than some of the traditional methods.
- Keep it informational.
 - Voters are best mobilized by information about how to vote during GOTV.

POSTCARDING AND LETTER-WRITING

- Postcarding and letter-writing both appear to have small, modest effects.
 - They have been found to boost turnout from 0.1-3.4% depending on targeting/message quality and election type (Industry source).
- Only one direct comparison of handwritten or partially handwritten postcards and letters exists.
 - SDAN conducted a head to head study with voter registration chase in 2020 and found both modes ineffective compared to controls (not getting a postcard/letter) and no different from one another.⁷

References:

1. Industry source (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).
2. Nickerson, D. W. (2007). Quality is job one: Professional and volunteer voter mobilization calls. *American Journal of Political Science*, 51(2), 269-282. (<https://sites.temple.edu/nickerson/files/2017/07/Quality.Nickerson.2007.pdf>)
3. Green, D. P., & Gerber, A. S. (2015). *Get out the vote: How to increase voter turnout* (3rd ed.). Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press.
4. Nickerson, D. W. (2006). Volunteer phone calls can increase turnout: Evidence from eight field experiments. *American Politics Research*, 34(3), 271-292. (<https://sites.temple.edu/nickerson/files/2017/07/Nickerson.APR2005.pdf>)
5. 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)
6. Dale, A., & Strauss, A. (2009). Don't forget to vote: text message reminders as a mobilization tool. *American Journal of Political Science*, 53(4), 787-804.
7. <https://sisterdistrict.com/letters-vs-postcards/>