

PHONEBANKING RESEARCH



Definition: Calling to talk to voters on the phone.

Bottom line: If canvassing is not an option, phonebanking has traditionally been the next best thing.

CONSIDERATIONS

Pros - Best way to talk to voters remotely; most evidence it works compared to other tactics you can do remotely; helps reach rural and exurban areas; remote two-way communication

Cons - Somewhat less effective than canvassing; low contact rates

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Phonebanking is the best choice for remote volunteering if two-way communication is desired..

- Industry tests¹ have traditionally shown that back and forth text messaging is less effective than single messages, and postcards are a one way communication by nature.

Phonebanking helps to boost voter turnout.

- Academics (Nickerson) found that nonpartisan GOTV calls boosted turnout by 3.8% in 8 different studies across election contexts, compared to similar voters who didn't receive the GOTV calls.²
- Academics (Nickerson, Friedrichs, and King) found that GOTV phone calls around the 2002 gubernatorial election in Michigan boosted turnout by 1.6%, compared to similar voters who did not receive the GOTV calls.³

Phonebank quality matters.

- Academics (Nickerson) found that phone calls that are unhurried, personal, and allow room for a genuine dialogue with the voter (3-5% boost in turnout) are more effective than calls by hurried, poorly trained callers who were focused on call volume rather than quality (0.5% boost in turnout).⁴
- Robo-calls are generally ineffective in increasing turnout, demonstrating the need for personal connection (but there is some indication that they may be gaining efficacy).¹

Deep “canvassing” can be done via phone as well as by door.

One deep canvassing phone test found that deep canvassing voters by phone to persuade right-leaning voters to vote for Biden in the 2020 general increased voting for Biden by over 3% among targets⁵



Calls to warm contacts are better than cold during GOTV.

- Recontacting committed voters close to election day to GOTV is more effective than cold-calling people who have not already been identified as supporters.⁶ This means that phonebanking before GOTV is critical, so that when GOTV rolls around, we are calling people the campaign has already talked to.

Areas for further exploration:

- Effectiveness of phonebanking in combination with other tactics, e.g., postcarding.
- Completed/planned SDAN studies:
 - Full “3 rings” study

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. (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>)
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. (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>)
5. Kalla, J. L., & Brockman, D. E. (2021). Voter outreach campaigns can reduce affective polarization among implementing political activists. *OSF Preprints*. June, 18.
6. Green, D. P., & Gerber, A. S. (2019). *Get out the vote: How to increase voter turnout*. Brookings Institution Press