

CANVASSING RESEARCH



Definition: Visiting voters at their homes to talk to them about voting or other political issues.

Bottom Line: Canvassing has traditionally been known as the most effective form of voter contact because of the opportunity for face-to-face, two-way 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 A large industry canvassing program from 2018 found a similar effect of 2.2%.³
- Industry sources report that site-based mail and canvass VR programs effectively drive turnout and registration through several subsequent election cycles.³
- 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).⁴

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).⁵

Canvassing has traditionally been the most effective volunteer tactic out of the major 4 (canvassing, phonebanking, textbanking, handwritten postcarding/letter-writing; Industry source).^{1,3}

Deep canvassing programs have had some promising results for persuasion.

- Deep canvassing is a longer, non-judgemental way of canvassing folks on the opposing side of an issue aimed at deeply engaging in personal, values-based conversation with the person in order to persuade.⁸
- Broockman and Kalla found that deep canvassing addressing transphobia reduced prejudice towards trans people for 3 months.⁷



Areas for future exploration:

- Effectiveness of canvassing in combination with other voter contact tactics, such as text messaging.
- Effectiveness of canvassing in periods of social distancing

References:

1. Green, D. P., & Gerber, A. S. (2019). *Get out the vote: How to increase voter turnout*. 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. 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).
4. 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)
5. 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)
6. Demetrious, K. (2021). Deep canvassing: Persuasion, ethics, democracy and activist public relations. *Public Relations Inquiry*, 2046147X211033838.
7. Broockman, D., & Kalla, J. (2016). Durably reducing transphobia: A field experiment on door-to-door canvassing. *Science*, 352(6282), 220-224.