



Testing New Technologies in Mobilizing Voters of Color

An Analysis from the November 2014 Elections



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In 2014, through the Voter Outreach and Technology (VOTE) Initiative, The James Irvine Foundation funded a set of nonprofit organizations to test how to increase voter participation among underrepresented communities by incorporating newer technologies into voter outreach strategies. The Initiative also funded a research team to assess the effectiveness of various strategies.

This report summarizes the analysis of the results from the November 2014 experiments conducted by participating VOTE organizations.¹

The following is a synthesis of findings from this series of studies, followed by descriptions of each study.

¹ Also invited to participate in the VOTE Initiative: The Center for Community Action and Environmental Justice in partnership with the Warehouse Worker Resource Center. Due to the organizations' specific interest in social media, and the significant voter outreach scale necessary to observe findings within that context, CCAEJ and WWRC focused their 2014 efforts on other proven voter outreach strategies, outside of an experimental design.

Foreword

The James Irvine Foundation has a deep commitment to ensuring that all Californians have the opportunity to fully participate in the political process, and that their voices can be heard loud and clear.

We have a wonderfully diverse state, but one where many sizable communities aren't actively shaping our public debates. For example, young voters are by far the least politically engaged group in the state. In the last general election, a paltry 8 percent of eligible voters in California ages 18 to 24 cast a ballot. People of color are also dramatically underrepresented at the polls. In our state, only 24.9 percent of eligible Latino voters, 26.8 percent of Asian voters, and 29.9 percent of eligible African American voters participated in the 2014 election.

While many factors contribute to low voter engagement, research shows that if done well, voter outreach can be effective at increasing awareness and interest in the political process, and in boosting voter turnout. However, there has been limited research about which outreach efforts work best in populations as diverse as California. Towards this end, in 2009 Irvine published a California Votes Initiative report, which assessed the impact of traditional outreach strategies statewide and identified a set of best practices for the field.

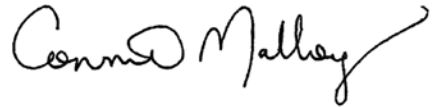
Since 2009, however, the world has changed dramatically. Smart phones and social media have reshaped the way we receive information and communicate with each other. A number of Irvine's grantee partners have been integrating newer technology and tools into recent efforts, but absent much of an evidence base, technology's potential to help groups better connect with their constituents and scale their reach is not well understood.

With this in mind, in 2014, Irvine launched a nonpartisan project called the Voter Outreach and Technology (VOTE) Initiative, a set of field experiments designed to explore whether technology could play a part in deepening and expanding voter engagement. The organizations that participated in the initiative experimented with targeted data analysis and newer mobilization strategies, enabled by technology, to encourage voters from traditionally underrepresented populations to vote in the upcoming election.

In order to measure the results, we commissioned a team of academic researchers to work closely with the participating organizations and design a randomized control trial, the gold standard of field research. Using this approach, the team carefully assigned "treatment" and "control" groups of voters, and conducted observations of each organization's voter contact work in the field. Using this approach, researchers could assess the impact of outreach efforts with statistical confidence.

As you will see, some experiments showed a statistically significant effect, although other experiments were inconclusive. One result was clear: Organizations that had sophisticated approaches to communicating directly with underrepresented voters about issues they cared about, either in person or on the phone, generally were able to increase the level of engagement of their constituents.

We would like to thank the members of the research team for their diligence and hard work and for all the insight they have provided. We also want to commend the spirit of innovation and persistence that this set of participating organizations exhibited to learn, take risks and adapt along with us. We hope that voter groups, funders, researchers, campaigns and voter engagement vendors all benefit from this report, and as always, we are eager to hear your thoughts about the kinds of projects from which our field can continue to learn.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Connie Malloy". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping tail on the "y".

Connie Galambos Malloy

California Democracy Program Director

The James Irvine Foundation

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Lessons Learned

Effective Outreach Strategies

Personal contact, either on the phone or at the door, remains the most effective way to turn out voters of color in California. Efforts of this type need to continue to be the mainstay for groups interested in mobilizing the state's diverse electorate.

Texting, which has been found to move high propensity voters in other contexts, seems to have had an inconsistent impact in moving voters of color to the polls. This underlines the importance of testing get-out-the-vote strategies with voters of varying voter propensities — in different geographic areas and of different demographic backgrounds, including ethnicity, race and age — in order to see if these strategies work in the same ways with different voters.

Personal contact, either on the phone or at the door, remains the most effective way to turn out voters of color in California.

The results of the experiments with regard to text messaging also suggest that, with technology changing so quickly, today's effective strategy can quickly become obsolete. These changes suggest the need for groups to continually test their assumptions about the effectiveness of particular get-out-the-vote technologies in the context of how voters use technology to communicate.

Technological approaches, such as social media, were not effective in turning out Latinos or youth overall, suggesting more meaningful contact, such as in person, is critical for mobilizing these voters.

Campaign Recommendations

Before adding a new technological component to a campaign, such as a mobile app, groups should conduct a preliminary study to ensure that the software is compatible with their hardware and that it functions as intended within the target area. Vendors should be encouraged to provide this trial period for free in order to ensure that groups are able to use the technology best suited to their target voters and their own organization's ability to use it properly.

Adopting new technology requires significant training, both of an organization's staff and its canvassers. Groups interested in changing how they run campaigns, and the funders they partner with, need to take these extra costs into consideration when planning their mobilization effort.

The time and effort necessary to collect cellphone opt-ins and enter them into a data management system are not insignificant.² It will be important for groups to develop more effective ways to accomplish these tasks if they plan to use text messaging as part of their get-out-the-vote strategies.

2 Federal Communications Commission (FCC) law requires that respondents to political activities via cell phone provide their permission to be contacted.

The data expertise and capacity necessary to run a sophisticated field campaign, even without an experimental component, is also significant. Given that most community organizations experience a great deal of staff turnover between elections, it is important that organizations and their funders understand the importance of developing and maintaining ongoing data capacity, preferably in-house, to enable them to better use information and build the base of evidence informing their efforts.

Participating Organizations

The VOTE research team conducted field experiments to determine the extent to which each of the approaches was effective, and by how much. A detailed description of the team's research methodology appears in the appendix.

The following organizations participated in the VOTE Initiative research project:

Asian Americans Advancing Justice — Los Angeles (AAAJ — LA) is the nation's largest legal and civil rights organization for Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders.

California Public Interest Research Group (CALPIRG) is a consumer advocacy organization that is part of a national federation of similar state organizations.

Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles (CHIRLA) is a Los Angeles-based immigrant rights organization that conducts programs throughout California and is a policy advocacy leader at the local, state and national levels.

Community Coalition (CoCo) is a grassroots organization in South Los Angeles that empowers everyday residents to transform their communities, specifically in the areas of education, neighborhood improvement, foster care and civic engagement.

Mi Familia Vota (MFV) is a national nonprofit organization working to unite the Latino community and its allies to promote social and economic justice through increased civic participation.

National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials (NALEO) Educational Fund³ is a national nonprofit organization that facilitates the full participation of Latinos in the American political process, from citizenship to public service.

Oakland Rising is a multiracial, multilingual collaborative of social justice organizations that educates and mobilizes voters in Oakland's low-income, immigrant and communities of color to advance issues of racial and economic justice.

Orange County Asian and Pacific Islander Community Alliance (OCAPICA) works to improve lives of Asians and Pacific Islanders in Orange County through education, advocacy, organizing and research.

Rock the Vote is a national organization that uses pop culture, music and technology to mobilize the millennial voting block and youth vote.

Strategic Concepts in Organizing and Policy Education (SCOPE) is a grassroots organization based in Los Angeles that seeks to bring together people from the immigrant, Latino and African American communities to provide social and economic opportunity.

³ The NALEO Educational Fund is the 501 (c)(3) counterpart to the national organization NALEO. All references to NALEO in this report refer to the Educational Fund.

Interpreting the Numbers

In reviewing the findings, it is important to note that the timing of these experiments may have affected the results. The 2014 general election in California represented a difficult environment for voter mobilization as it was an “off year” relative to the national presidential elections, with relatively few contentious ballot measures, low public information or campaign advertising, and modest interest and intensity around the race for governor. In comparison to statewide turnout for the presidential elections of 2008 and 2012 (when 79.4 percent and 72.3 percent of registered voters cast a ballot), the statewide rate of voting in the 2014 general election among registered voters was 42.2 percent. Voting turnout in Los Angeles County, where many of the VOTE groups were attempting to organize voters, dropped to a historic low in November 2014, with only 31 percent of registered voters casting a ballot. An election with this little interest is a difficult context within which to mobilize voters.

Nevertheless, some approaches fared better than others, and much may be learned not only from the experiments that demonstrated an impact on voter behavior but, just as important, from those that did not.

When considering the results, it also is important to keep in mind that a non-result in an experiment does not mean a group’s mobilization efforts did not have an impact. All data are subject to both statistical and human error, so there is always the possibility that a problem with the data could have created an incorrect result (e.g., not detecting an impact that actually occurred). Or a group’s efforts could have had an impact that was too small to be detected statistically due to the size of the experiment (e.g., not enough voters were part of the experiment).

The following sections present the results, examined by get-out-the-vote tactic. Corresponding data tables appear in the appendix.

Phone Banking and Door-to-Door Canvassing

A number of organizations attempted to get registered voters to the polls by setting up phone banks and calling voters directly, or they went door-to-door, urging people to vote.

When analyzing these findings, it is important to keep in mind that existing field research demonstrates that a typical door-to-door canvassing effort can be expected to increase turnout by 7 to 9 percent. A high-quality phone bank can increase voting by 3 to 5 percent. Several of the groups studied within the VOTE Initiative were more effective at increasing turnout than would be expected, resulting in significant changes in voter behavior across a variety of ethnic and racial groups. Canvassing and phone banking were by far the most effective strategies that VOTE groups used to mobilize voters in November 2014, outperforming texting and social media.

Canvassing and phone banking were by far the most effective strategies that VOTE groups used to mobilize voters in November 2014, outperforming texting and social media.

Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles (CHIRLA) contacted 38,844 Latino voters by phone and through door-to-door canvassing in the San Joaquin Valley, Central Valley, Antelope Valley, San Fernando Valley, San Gabriel Valley, and Riverside and San Bernardino counties. The organization's campaign included three contacts. CHIRLA's messages focused on encouraging Latino voters to elect representatives in state government and Congress in order to provide Latinos with the services they need. The final outreach urged Latino voters to turn out to vote for the sake of their families. CHIRLA also provided voters with flyers asking them to join the millions of Latinos who would be voting on Election Day. In addition, CHIRLA increased its use of voter technology by using tablet computers as part of its canvassing program in November 2014, which the organization found significantly increased its efficiency in the field.

The VOTE study found that CHIRLA's canvassing efforts had a statistically significant 4.4 percent impact on voter turnout. In other words, voters who had been contacted through this strategy were 4.4 percent more likely to turn out to vote than similar voters who were not contacted. (Table 1)

Phone mobilization conducted by Community Coalition (CoCo) targeted unlikely to occasional voters living in South Los Angeles. The aim was to mobilize voters to the polls by connecting voting to important issues in their community. The call script focused specifically on an issue-based conversation about whether state spending should focus on prisons as opposed to education. Callers used conversations with voters to highlight the importance of voting in the upcoming general election. Six of CoCo's experienced outreach workers who had been involved in other CoCo civic engagement programs were on the phones daily with the exclusion of Sundays. The callers contacted 1,656 voters via landline and cell phone. In addition, CoCo collected 164 email addresses and 135 cell phone numbers from these voters to target in future efforts.

The VOTE study found a statistically significant positive effect of 8 percent for mobilization contact by CoCo on voter turnout. (Table 2)

From September 15 to November 4, 2014, Mi Familia Vota (MFV) contacted 11,254 voters by phone and in person. MFV used teams of canvassers from its regional offices in Riverside, Indio, Fresno and Modesto to contact newly registered Latino voters and people who don't normally vote. A total of 5,030 people were contacted by phone and 5,258 in person, with 806 contacted both ways. MFV's get-out-the-vote script focused on activating Latino voter engagement based on the voter's ethnic and racial identities.

The approach included asking contacted voters to sign a pledge card committing to vote on Election Day. The pledge card also offered voters the opportunity to opt in to receive text messages from the organization. Over the course of these efforts, 3,018 voters pledged to vote in this way. MFV also experimented with the use of iPods in the field.

Taken together, the seven VOTE canvassing campaigns increased turnout by a statistically significant 5.4 percent.

The VOTE study found that being contacted by MFV increased voter turnout by 7.9 percent. (Table 3)

Not all organizations that participated in the project showed significant increases in voter turnout relative to the control groups, however. Again, it is important to remember that a non-result in an experiment does not necessarily mean that the canvassing effort did not have an impact. It means only that the impact was not evident after the statistical analysis.

Outreach by Asian Americans Advancing Justice — Los Angeles (AAAJ — LA) targeted registered voters who don't tend to vote often by determining the language and ethnicity of the voter and ensuring that the phone canvassers were of the same ethnicity and spoke the same language. The goal of the effort's "Your Vote Matters 2014" campaign was to find these infrequent voters and encourage them to become regular voters. Working in 17 different languages, the canvassers targeted potential voters early in the campaign and then followed up with get-out-the-vote calls just prior to the election. The difference in turnout among voters between the control group and the treatment group was not statistically significant. (Table 4)

California Public Interest Research Group (CALPIRG) attempted to mobilize young voters with outreach by college students. This peer-to-peer design was intended to pair canvasser students at University of California campuses with young voters (ages 18 to 29) in California. CALPIRG volunteers used phone banks to contact voters in the weeks prior to the general election in November of 2014. The difference in turnout among voters between the control group and the treatment group was not statistically significant. (Table 5)

Oakland Rising ran a 20-day canvassing campaign before the November 2014 election in which it contacted 13,799 voters by phone and 3,053 in person, with 414 voters contacted both ways. The organization's campaign focused on educating Oakland voters about several issues on the ballot that it considered important to its constituents. To be certain that voters had the facts about these measures, canvassers distributed education-only voter guides in English and Spanish. One of the organization's main goals was to test the effectiveness of its paid field campaign, which doubled in size from 20 to 40 canvassers. In addition to the

time needed to train this expanded team, Oakland Rising also invested considerable time in training its expanded team, which was unfamiliar with the mobile technology used for the canvassing campaign. The difference in turnout among voters between the control group and the treatment group was not statistically significant. (Table 6)

National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials (NALEO) Educational Fund ran two canvassing experiments during the November 2014 election. One focused on Latino voters who did not live in multivoter households, and the second targeted Latino voters living in multivoter households with different kinds of voters — in these households, some family members were high propensity voters, and some were not. The strategy was to call the high propensity voters in the household and ask them to mobilize their household members that did not vote as frequently. The hypothesis was that household members would be better able to mobilize their family members than would a NALEO caller. NALEO partnered with three nonprofit organizations: the United Farm Workers (UFW) Foundation (Bakersfield Office), Training Occupational Development Educating Communities (TODEC) Legal Center, and the Council of Mexican Federations (COFEM). The UFW Foundation worked on the get-out-the-vote phone bank campaign in Fresno, Kern and Tulare counties. TODEC called voters in Riverside and San Bernardino counties, and COFEM contacted voters in Los Angeles. NALEO provided individual trainings on voter outreach methods to each of the campaign leads from the partner organizations who, in turn, trained each site’s canvassers. Ongoing training and supervision was critical to the phone bank efforts. In addition to daily reporting and motivational discussions with phone canvassers, staff continually monitored efforts, provided suggestions, and addressed questions and problems as they arose.

Adopting new technology requires significant training, both of an organization’s staff and its canvassers.

In its non-multivoter campaign, NALEO made 2,019 contacts. VOTE study analysis suggests that this effort did not have a statistically significant impact on voter turnout. (Table 7)

NALEO’s multivoter household experiment can be understood in two parts. The first part attempted to measure the effect that a NALEO canvassing call had on regular voters being contacted. The second was the impact that same contact had on a regular voter’s household members, compared to the household members in the control group. The experiment included over 51,000 households, which varied in size from two to eight voters. The average household size was 1.7 voters. NALEO contacted 4,863 regular voters in November 2014. VOTE study analysis suggests that NALEO’s canvass of these voters did not have a statistically significant impact on its turnout. (Tables 8 and 9)

Orange County Asian and Pacific Islander Community Alliance (OCAPICA) partnered with Asian Americans Advancing Justice — Los Angeles (AAAJ — LA) and used a strategy of targeting low-likelihood Asian American voters in Orange County in November 2014 with telephone calls from callers who were of the same ethnicity and spoke the same language as the targeted voters. The focus of the OCAPICA general election mobilization campaign “Your Vote Matters 2014” was to enhance the electorate by encouraging sporadic voters to go to the polls regularly. Working with their Los Angeles partner, AAAJ — LA, OCAPICA targeted voters both by matching national origin and language to phone canvassers, and by separating

permanent absentee voters from voters who cast their ballots in person. OCAPICA conducted this outreach in seven different languages. While more modest in terms of overall numbers and Asian languages than the AAAJ — LA effort, the “Your Voter Matters 2014” mobilization campaign conducted by OCAPICA represents one of the few systematic efforts to mobilize Asian Pacific Islander voters in Orange County. Although the difference in turnout between the treatment and control groups in the OCAPICA data was large (9.1 percent), the VOTE research team found statistically significant imbalances between OCAPICA’s treatment and control groups, which calls into question the validity of the findings.

Pooled Canvassing Results

To determine the overall impact of these canvassing campaigns, the VOTE research team conducted a meta-analysis, which demonstrates the impacts across all these efforts.⁴ This meta-analysis showed that, if taken together, the seven canvassing campaigns conducted in November 2014 increased turnout by a statistically significant 5.4 percent. (Table 10)

⁴ Because of the irregularities found in the OCAPICA data, this organization’s results are not included in the meta-analysis. The included groups are: AAAJ — LA, CALPIRG, CHIRLA, CoCo, MFV, NALEO’s non-multivoter experiment and Oakland Rising.

Text Messaging and Email

Text messaging would seem to be an appealing get-out-the-vote strategy because it is fairly inexpensive and can allow groups to contact many voters at once. All the VOTE groups that tested the effect of texting did so in order to see the results that texts had when layered onto an in-person canvassing campaign.⁵ Previous research finds that text messaging is effective with likely voters, creating about a 3 percent increase in these voters' propensity to turn out. None of these previous studies, however, specifically targeted voters of color or less likely voters. As described below, in November 2014, text messaging was not a consistently effective strategy for mobilizing the voters being targeted by the VOTE groups. Only one of the VOTE groups, Oakland Rising, had get-out-the-vote text messages that resulted in a statistically significant increase in voting. Contextual factors, discussed below, may help to explain why texting was effective in that particular case.

Oakland Rising sent texts and emails to target voters in order to encourage them to vote in November 2014. Consistent with the educational focus of the organization's campaign, the email messages contained information about what was on the ballot in Oakland. Both the emails and texts included links to voter guides to provide voters with more information. Election Day emails emphasized to voters that their votes mattered and provided a link to information on election protection. Of the 1,176 individuals in the text treatment group, 988, or 84 percent, also received email messages.⁶ Here, VOTE analysis for this group explores the impact of multiple emails and text messages on top of a canvassing campaign, rather than just text messages alone. In the email experiment, three emails were sent to 6,613 voters. The difference in turnout between the treatment and control groups was 1.1 percent. It is important to note that the turnout rate among the email targets was quite high — more than twice the rate of turnout for the state and more than 20 points higher than the 48 percent turnout rate for Oakland overall. The regression analysis finds that these emails had no statistically significant impact on turnout. It is likely that the exceptionally high base turnout among these voters made it difficult to move more of them to the polls. (Table 11)

Only one of the VOTE groups had get-out-the-vote text messages that resulted in a statistically significant increase in voting.

Oakland Rising also sent six texts to voters from October 15 through Election Day, urging them to vote. The environment for the text message campaign (and all of Oakland Rising's efforts in November 2014) was quite different from that of the other VOTE groups. Oakland had a competitive mayoral race and two important initiatives on the ballot: a local measure to increase the city's minimum wage and Proposition 47, a sentencing reform effort that was very high profile in Oakland. This helps to explain why turnout in the city was 18 points higher than for the state overall.

Of the 1,176 individuals in the text treatment group, 988, or 84 percent, also received email messages. Thus, this analysis explores the impact of multiple emails and texts on top of a canvassing campaign, rather than just text messages alone. As noted, the turnout rates among the treatment and control groups in the text campaign were significantly higher than

⁵ We did not analyze the canvassing program for Strategic Concepts in Organizing and Policy Education (SCOPE), because this particular activity was financed by 501 (c) (4) political spending that fell outside the purview of this study.

⁶ Because of some issues with attaching Primary IDs to the text list, the VOTE research team was not able to match voting information to over 1,000 people within the text treatment and control groups, shrinking the overall size of the experiment significantly. The smaller treatment and control groups were checked to make certain they remained balanced along the lines of vote propensity, age and gender.

those for the other VOTE text experiments. As previous studies show texting to be effective among higher propensity voters, it may make sense that the strategy worked in the particular electoral and voter context within which Oakland Rising was working in November 2014. The difference in turnout between the treatment and control groups was 10.9 percent. This difference was statistically significant, meaning these texts had a 10.9 percentage point impact on recipients' vote propensities. This strong result is all the more surprising given the small size of the sample included in this analysis. (Table 12)

Beyond the Oakland Rising experiment, which occurred within a unique electoral environment, the use of text messaging did not appear to increase voter turnout.

CHIRLA sent two Election Day get-out-the-vote texts to 2,834 supporters asking them to join the millions of Latinos who would be voting in November 2014. The difference in turnout between the treatment and control groups was -0.1 percent, but this effect is not statistically significant, indicating that the texts had no significant impact on voter turnout. (Table 13)

MFV conducted a text message experiment in which the organization sent two text messages to voters who opted into a text program. The first text, sent on November 2, 2014, was received by 2,965 supporters, with 83 supporters choosing to opt out. The difference in turnout between the treatment and control groups was 2.5 percent, but this effect was not statistically significant. (Table 14)

SCOPE conducted a text message experiment for the November 2014 general election cycle. The universe of voters for this experiment was collected from three voter engagement activities that SCOPE conducted in 2014, in which the organization asked voters to opt-in to receive text messages from SCOPE. The message was sent the morning of Election Day. The VOTE analysis indicates that the text messages had no statistically significant effect on turnout. (Table 15)

Pooled Text Results

The VOTE research team conducted meta-analysis to examine the overall impact of these text message campaigns. This analysis showed that together the four text message campaigns conducted in November 2014 had a statistically significant 3.1 percent impact on voter turnout. (Table 16)

New Technologies/Social Media

In addition to the text messaging experiments described above, the VOTE groups used a variety of new technologies to mobilize voters in November 2014, including Facebook ads, a telephone town hall and a peer experiment where students at the University of Southern California used phone calls and a variety of social media to attempt to contact other young people in Los Angeles County. The fact that these approaches did not move a significant number of voters to the polls suggests that impersonal tactics, even using social media, may not be an effective way to mobilize voters of color or youth.

Facebook Ads

Research on the mobilization impact of social media spaces, like Facebook, is an emerging field. Because of privacy concerns, Facebook could not tell VOTE researchers who, within the voter list, could be matched to a Facebook profile and therefore receive the ads displayed by these two organizations. This experiment, then, compares the entire treatment and control groups to one another, understanding that significant proportions of both groups did not have matching Facebook profiles and therefore were not treated. The structure of the experiments needs to be kept in mind when considering these results.

Impersonal tactics, even using social media, may not be an effective way to mobilize voters of color or youth.

MFV used Facebook advertising to attempt to increase voter turnout among all Latino voters in California who were not living in the areas targeted by other VOTE groups. This resulted in a target group of 1,989,028 Latino voters. Of those, 44 percent were matched to Facebook profiles. The ad was designed to cue Latino identity, telling Latino targets that they had the power to vote and that they should exercise that power for the sake of their community. The ad ran from October 19 to November 4, 2014, and was located in users' newsfeeds. It was seen by 522,614 Latino voters and led to 24,014 unique clicks.

Overall, the difference in turnout between the treatment and control groups was 0.1 percent and not statistically significant. (Table 17)

The VOTE study also conducted the analysis by age group, on the assumption that young voters might be more likely to be moved to the polls by viewing these sorts of ads. But the ad did not have a significant impact on young Latino voter turnout, either.

Rock the Vote partnered with Facebook to target youth ages 18 to 29. The organization created several different ads with varying content in an attempt to mobilize these voters. Rock the Vote placed these ads in the user's newsfeed in order to maximize the number of impressions for both desktop and mobile users.⁷ The organization made this decision in light of previous research suggesting that sidebar ads fail to receive the same level of attention as newsfeed ads (this is likely due to the fact that images cannot be shared or liked, or receive comments when placed on the sidebar). Rock the Vote also removed low-performing ads from the experiment. The treatment group comprised 1,900,926 voters and the control group

⁷ According to Facebook, "impressions are the number of times [the ad] is displayed, whether the [ad] is clicked or not." <https://www.facebook.com/help/274400362581037>

comprised 472,141 voters. In addition, Rock the Vote worked with the research team to only incorporate Latino youth that were not part of MFV's Facebook experiment. Rock the Vote also worked with CALPIRG to divide voters who had jointly registered with Rock the Vote/CALPIRG since 2012 in order to incorporate a segment of this population into each organization's respective experiments.

The difference in turnout between the treatment and control groups was 0.1 percent and not statistically significant. (Table 18)

Telephone Town Hall

CoCo was the only VOTE group that implemented a telephone town hall during this election cycle. For this experiment, CoCo targeted likely voters residing in South Los Angeles ZIP codes. Households in this area received a call inviting them to participate. Then, on the day of the telephone town hall they received another call inviting them to opt in. The 42-minute call discussed the effects of mass incarceration and the need to reform the criminal justice system. It also urged participants to vote in order to make their voices heard on these issues. Several prominent speakers were featured on the call. A total of 28,969 unique household numbers were invited to participate in the call and 3,960 individuals did. Participants stayed on the call for an average of 7.35 minutes with 14.5 percent of households staying on the call for 20 minutes or more. The overwhelming majority of people who participated in the town hall were women (64 percent) and people 60 years of age or older (70 percent).⁸ The fact that older individuals participated at higher rates than younger individuals is understandable given that the invitations were sent only to landlines.

The treatment-on-treated (TOT) effect indicates no statistically significant effect for participation in CoCo's telephone town hall on voter turnout. (Table 19)

⁸ Eighteen percent of the call participants were between the ages of 46–60 and the remaining participants were between 18–45 years old, although only 175 participants were willing to report their age.

Conclusion

In the 10 years since The James Irvine Foundation launched its path-breaking California Votes Initiative, much has changed in terms of how community organizations engage in get-out-the-vote efforts. Data vendors now have online databases that provide groups with detailed demographic information and vote propensity models. Canvassers can use mobile phones or tablet computers to find target voters and record the results of their conversations with them. Organizations can use various social media platforms to educate target voters and encourage them to vote. Yet, little is known about whether and how these changes are affecting voter behavior, especially among low-propensity voters and voters of color.

The VOTE Initiative was, to the researchers' knowledge, the first attempt to systematically examine the role technology plays in voter mobilization among voters of color. The findings demonstrate that in-person efforts are still key for those voters who are not regular participants in elections. They also show that technology is not a "magic bullet" but rather another mobilization tool to be layered with more personal approaches that take resources to implement and must be tailored to the particular needs of each organization and its target audience. Finally, the findings make clear that technology tools are in constant motion and need to be continually tested and updated in order to be effective.

This study underscores the importance of culturally competent and contextually appropriate outreach, both in terms of the tools and strategies being used and how they are being employed to mobilize voters.

Future work needs to consider how these tools should best be applied within different electoral contexts. But most important, this study underscores the importance of culturally competent and contextually appropriate outreach, both in terms of the tools and strategies being used and how they are being employed to mobilize voters. The voters targeted by these organizations were the ones generally ignored by political campaigns — unlikely voters who currently represent a large share of the population and are dramatically underrepresented in the voter and civic engagement sphere. VOTE study findings demonstrate that it cannot be assumed that the strategies used to mobilize high propensity voters will work with those who do not vote regularly. Yet, finding the most effective strategies for moving low propensity voters of color to the polls is essential for California's electorate to reflect its population.

Appendix A: Methodology

In each instance, we used randomized field experiments to test each strategy the groups employed. To do this, we compared groups of individuals that were randomly assigned to be part of a particular experimental approach with groups of similar individuals that had been randomly assigned not to be part of the experiment. In other words, we wanted to be able to estimate the extent to which the activity may or may not have made a difference in the outcome.

During the course of any election, voters may be contacted by any number of special interest groups, political parties, and they certainly see advertisements and other media regarding a particular election. Our research design holds those variables constant by randomly assigning similar individuals to treatment or control groups. Since both sets of individuals are situated within the same electoral context, any significant differences in turnout between them can be considered the result of the mobilization effort.

We began our analysis with a direct comparison of turnout between the so-called “treatment” group — the voters who were targeted by a particular experiment — and the “control” group — the voters who were not targeted in any special way. This produces what we call the “Intent to Treat,” or ITT, effect. If there is a statistically significant difference between the two groups, we might assume that the mobilization effort was effective.

But this only compares the overall treatment population, which includes voters not contacted, with the control. It is important to isolate the effect of contact itself. We know from previous research that canvassing campaigns are not random, and that voters campaigns are able to contact are more likely to vote.

As a result, we conducted a second layer of statistical analysis to isolate the precise impact of the contact itself. We used two staged least squares to determine the “Treatment on Treated,” or TOT, effect. If the TOT reaches statistical significance, we can say that the contact had the resulting percentage point effect on voter turnout.

In the text message and Facebook experiments, only ITT effects are calculated. The nature of these GOTV mobilization efforts assumes that everyone in the treatment group was contacted, therefore a TOT analysis is not appropriate.

Appendix B: Data

The following tables include the statistical data from each experiment.

TABLE 1: CHIRLA CANVASSING EXPERIMENT

% VOTING CONTROL GROUP	% VOTING TREATMENT GROUP	CONTACT RATE	N	ITT	TOT (SE)
20.7 (14,015/67,710)	21.3 (58,060/272,692)	14.3 (38,844/272,692)	340,402	0.6	0.044** (0.02)

** p <= .004, two-tailed. Robust cluster standard errors are by household.

TABLE 2: COCO CANVASSING EXPERIMENT

% VOTING CONTROL GROUP	% VOTING TREATMENT GROUP	CONTACT RATE	N	ITT	TOT (SE)
23.6 (456/1,934)	25.2 (4,051/14,598)	11.3% (1,656/14,598)	16,532	1.6	0.08*** (0.02)

*** p <= .000, two-tailed. Robust cluster standard errors are by household.

TABLE 3: MFV CANVASSING EXPERIMENT

% VOTING CONTROL GROUP	% VOTING TREATMENT GROUP	CONTACT RATE	N	ITT	TOT (SE)
13.4 (1,866/13,901)	14.6 (8,282/56,804)	16.7% (9,482/56,804)	70,706	1.2	0.079** (0.03)

** p <= .002, two-tailed. Robust cluster standard errors are by household.

TABLE 4: AAAJ — LA CANVASSING EXPERIMENT

% VOTING CONTROL GROUP	% VOTING TREATMENT GROUP	CONTACT RATE	N	ITT	TOT (SE)
20.4 (2,383/11,690)	20.6 (9,823/47,725)	9% (4,282/47,725)	59,415	0.2	0.02 (0.05)

Robust cluster standard errors are by household.

TABLE 5: CALPIRG CANVASSING EXPERIMENT

% VOTING CONTROL GROUP	% VOTING TREATMENT GROUP	CONTACT RATE	N	ITT	TOT (SE)
13.4 (946/7,061)	14.3 (971/6,795)	17% (1,159/6,795)	13,856	0.09	0.06 (0.06)

TABLE 6: OAKLAND RISING CANVASSING EXPERIMENT

% VOTING CONTROL GROUP	% VOTING TREATMENT GROUP	CONTACT RATE	N	ITT	TOT (SE)
51.5 (12,842/24,926)	51.2 (50,728/99,091)	17.1% (16,962/99,091)	124,017	0.3	0.18 (0.023)

Robust cluster standard errors are by household.

TABLE 7: NALEO NON-MULTIVOTER EXPERIMENT

% VOTING CONTROL GROUP	% VOTING TREATMENT GROUP	CONTACT RATE	N	ITT	TOT (SE)
20.6 (2,433/11,828)	20.7 (9,865/47,595)	4.2% (2,019/47,595)	59,423	0.1	0.04 (0.12)

Robust cluster standard errors are by household.

TABLE 8: NALEO MULTIVOTER HOUSEHOLD EXPERIMENT: HIGH PROPENSITY VOTERS

% VOTING CONTROL GROUP	% VOTING TREATMENT GROUP	CONTACT RATE	N	ITT	TOT (SE)
54.4 (11,048/20,296)	54.3 (42,036/77,419)	6.3% (4,863/77,419)	97,715	-0.1	-0.02 (0.08)

Robust cluster standard errors are by household.

TABLE 9: NALEO MULTIVOTER HOUSEHOLD EXPERIMENT: HOUSEHOLD MEMBERS

% VOTING CONTROL GROUP	% VOTING TREATMENT GROUP	N	ITT (SE)
19.8 (1,910/9,657)	20.9 (7,235/34,545)	44,202	0.12** (.0305)

** p <= 0.012.

TABLE 10: POOLED CANVASSING RESULTS

POOLED ESTIMATE	P-VALUE	NUMBER OF GROUPS
0.054***	0.000	7

TABLE 11: OAKLAND RISING EMAIL EXPERIMENT

% VOTING CONTROL GROUP	% VOTING TREATMENT GROUP	N	ITT (SE)
70.1 (821/1,171)	71.2 (4,708/6,613)	7,784	1.1 (.014)

TABLE 12: OAKLAND RISING TEXT EXPERIMENT

% VOTING CONTROL GROUP	% VOTING TREATMENT GROUP	N	ITT (SE)
42.5 (57/134)	53.4 (628/1,176)	1,310	0.109** (.05)

** p <= 0.017.

TABLE 13: CHIRLA TEXT EXPERIMENT

% VOTING CONTROL GROUP	% VOTING TREATMENT GROUP	N	ITT (SE)
38.5 (145/377)	38.4 (1,089/2,834)	3,211	-0.1 (.03)

TABLE 14: MFV TEXT EXPERIMENT

% VOTING CONTROL GROUP	% VOTING TREATMENT GROUP	N	ITT (SE)
25.8 (93/361)	28.3 (904/3,190)	3,551	2.5 (.025)

TABLE 15: SCOPE TEXT EXPERIMENT

% VOTING CONTROL GROUP	% VOTING TREATMENT GROUP	N	ITT (SE)
33.2 (92/277)	36.9 (722/1,962)	2,289	0.037 (0.03)

TABLE 16: POOLED TEXT EXPERIMENT RESULTS

POOLED ESTIMATE	P-VALUE	NUMBER OF GROUPS
0.031*	0.04	4

TABLE 17: MFV FACEBOOK EXPERIMENT

% VOTING CONTROL GROUP	% VOTING TREATMENT GROUP	N	ITT (SE)
25.7 (94,935/464,504)	25.8 (381,381/1,859,837)	2,324,341	0.001 (0.001)

TABLE 18: ROCK THE VOTE FACEBOOK EXPERIMENT

% VOTING CONTROL GROUP	% VOTING TREATMENT GROUP	N	ITT (SE)
17.0 (80,429/472,141)	17.1 (325,922/1,900,926)	2,373,067	0.001 (.0006)

TABLE 19: COCO TELEPHONE TOWNHALL EXPERIMENT

% VOTING CONTROL GROUP	% VOTING TREATMENT GROUP	CONTACT RATE	N	ITT (SE)	TOT (SE)
59.7 (5,554/9,307)	58.4 (21,328/36,502)	10.8% (3,960/36,502)	45,809	-1.3	-.14 (0.07)

Robust cluster standard errors are by household.

About Insight

Insight is a periodical publication of The James Irvine Foundation, designed to provide nonprofit and community leaders, grantmakers, policymakers and other audiences with information about what we are learning from our grantmaking programs. Insight and its partner publication, Insight Brief, are available free of charge from the Foundation's website, www.irvine.org.

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