CHANGING *the* **CONVERSATION**

APRIL 2021

RESEARCH   REPORT

EVALUATING IMPACT 2020

WHAT IS CTC?

Changing The Conversation Together (CTC) is building a corps of deep canvassers in order to grow an American electorate that embraces compassion and inclusion. We've trained and mobilized for campaigns that successfully flipped Staten Island in 2018, Pennsylvania in 2020, and Georgia in 2021. Along the way, we've created a community of volunteers from New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania and other northeastern states dedicated to disseminating and expanding this work.

Deep canvassing is a unique method of voter engagement that involves approaching voters with respect, offering and eliciting life stories, and connecting over shared concerns. While these face to face conversations take 10-15 minutes, their impact can last much longer.

CTC invests heavily in training volunteers, iterating methods and evaluating our approaches. You can read more in our 2020 Year End Report as found on our website.

And our methods work. In 2020, the turnout rate among people we deep-canvassed, most of whom rarely voted before, was 80%. That's 14 points higher than the record-breaking 66% turnout nationwide.

Just as importantly, we kept it safe. In the midst of a global pandemic, CTC partnered with the LA Leadership LAB (funded by the LGBTQ Connection PAC) to reinvent door-knocking. Our Safety-First Deep Canvass protocols ensured the health of our canvassers, our voters … and our democracy.

WHY EVALUATE?

Throughout CTC's history, we've been dedicated to rigorously evaluating our work's impact. It would be easy to keep our gaze exclusively forward, toward the next pressing battle. But we believe in holding ourselves accountable - to citizens, volunteers, and donors - by continually testing whether our methods and strategies are yielding meaningful results.

Yes, Biden won Pennsylvania and Philadelphia. But how do we know what impact CTC volunteers made, if any? Wouldn't these Philadelphians, for example, have voted Democratic anyway?

In other words, was all the effort - building a ground game, adding a phone campaign, inventing Safety First Canvassing, pivoting from swing voters in Bucks to infrequent Democratic voters in PhIlly - worth it?

Only a rigorous evaluation can attempt to answer such questions. We begin with comprehensive raw data, consistently collected in real-time on each interaction with a potential voter. We then analyze that data with multiple statistical queries. Finally, we base our conclusions on the classic scientific paradigm, comparing the outcomes of a treatment group (those we canvassed) to those of a control group (their otherwise-comparable neighbors whom we did not).*

Thus can we answer the bottom-line question: how, and how much, did CTC canvassing affect voting behaviors?

* In what follows, we first report the total number of interactions recorded by CTC volunteers. We then analyze and compare them to the "control group" of those we did not canvass, utilizing records from the VAN database. In this analysis, we had to discard a small portion of CTC interactions which weren't traceable in VAN. Thus, the total number of interactions tallied will not match the total analyzed. We believe that the small number of records we discarded does not vary in any meaningful way from those we analyzed. Original tabulations and calculations can be accessed here.

SIZE AND REACH OF CAMPAIGN

Over 15 months leading up to the 2020 election, CTC recruited and trained 834 volunteers who completed at least one action, either in person or by phone. Those volunteers canvassed in three very different counties: Bucks, Montgomery, and Philadelphia, where the bulk of our efforts were ultimately concentrated.

Altogether, they had conversations with 14,787 potential voters - in a state where Biden's margin of victory was just 80,000 votes.

Here are some further measures of our campaign's

IN PERSON CANVASSING

389 in-person canvassers

1,650 canvasser shifts

41,000+ doors knocked

12,821 in-person conversations

5,672 registered to vote, signed up for mail voting, and/or made voting plans

PHONE BANKING

1,111 canvasser shifts

1,966 conver-sations

1,180 conversations with low-propensity voters

THE CTC EFFECT

AGGREGATE TURNOUT

We evaluated our impact by comparing voting patterns among people we canvassed (Canvassed Voters) with voting patterns among people from the same voting wards we didn't canvass (Neighbors).

For 2020, the aggregate turnout rate among Neighbors was 70%.
The aggregate turnout rate among Canvassed Voters was 80%.

That 10-point turnout bump is undeniably meaningful. It's even more impressive viewed proportionally: canvassing by CTC made it 14.2% more likely that a given resident would turn out to vote.*

CANVASSING BY CTC MADE IT 14.2% MORE LIKELY

that a given resident would turn out to vote.

We call that proportional increase THE CTC EFFECT.

OVERALL TURNOUT

8 out of 10 among Canvassed Voters

7 out of 10 among Neighbors

CTC EFFECT = 14.2% boost

OUTPERFORMING TRENDS

It's widely known that election turnout increased from 2016 to 2020 - though in Philadelphia, it didn't grow as much as Democratic strategists hoped.

However, CTC significantly outperformed that trend.

For the non-canvassed Neighbors, turnout grew 11% from 2016 to 2020.
For Canvassed Voters, it grew 24% - more than twice as much.

INCREASED TURNOUT COMPARED TO 2016

2.4 new voters for every 10
Canvassed Voters

1.1 new voters for every 10
non-canvassed Neighbors

CTC EFFECT = 112.5% boost

LOW PROPENSITY VOTERS

Breaking down residents by their prior voting history yielded the most remarkable results.

As detailed in our 2020 Year End Report found on our website, CTC's strategic focus pivoted in Spring 2020 from swing voters to Democratic-leaning infrequent voters. That motivated our pivot from Bucks County to neighborhoods in Montgomery County and North Philly. There we found large concentrations of "low-propensity" voters—people at serious risk of not voting. Often working-class, poor, and/or BIPOC, this population is overlooked or unreached by most campaigns and GOTV efforts; but it was precisely whom CTC worked to motivate.

Of the 11,584 Safety First conversations, 65% (7,138) were with low-propensity voters. We've defined this as people who'd voted in zero, one, or two of the three prior presidential elections, which notably included both high-turnout Obama elections.

CTC canvassing made it **24.6% more likely** a low-propensity voter would go to the polls in 2020.

LOW-PROPENSITY VOTER TURNOUT

7.3 out of **10** among Canvassed Voters

5.8 out of **10** among Neighbors

CTC EFFECT = **24.6%** boost

When we drill down further, though, the results are even more revealing. Chart 1 compares the CTC Effect for different groups of low-propensity voters.
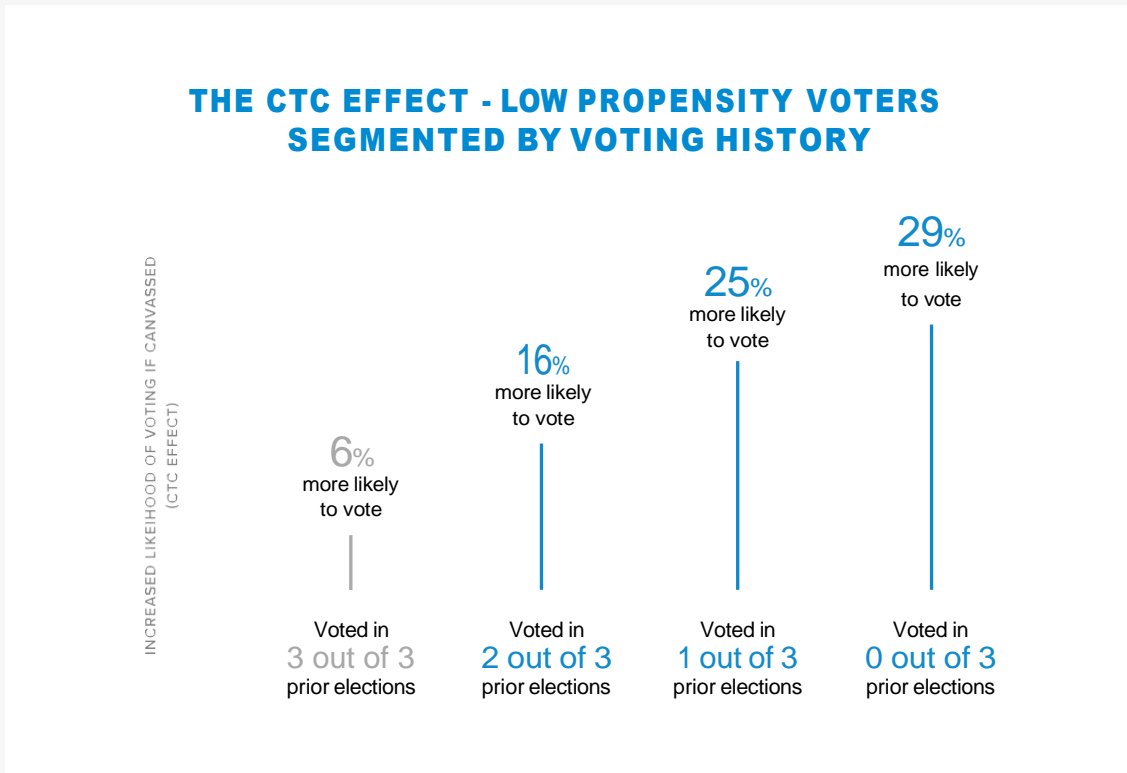

THE CTC EFFECT - LOW PROPENSITY VOTERS SEGMENTED BY VOTING HISTORY

INCREASED LIKELIHOOD OF VOTING IF CANVASSED (CTC EFFECT)

6% more likely to vote — Voted in 3 out of 3 prior elections

16% more likely to vote — Voted in 2 out of 3 prior elections

25% more likely to vote — Voted in 1 out of 3 prior elections

29% more likely to vote — Voted in 0 out of 3 prior elections

Chart 1

THE LESS OFTEN SOMEONE VOTED IN THE PAST, THE GREATER THE IMPACT CTC'S CANVASSING HAD ON THEM.

The pattern is striking. Among the voters we canvassed, our impact on the lowest propensity voters was **5x greater** than our impact on frequent voters.

That impact was strongest among voters who voted in *none* of the prior three presidential elections. For those most-disaffected voters, talking with a CTC volunteer boosted the likelihood they'd vote by 29%.

Too often Democrats merely curse the wind, wondering "Why don't more people vote?" These numbers give us hope.

DEEP CANVASSING VS. GOTV

Deep Canvassing is the core of our strategy, and was our focus in Pennsylvania from Fall 2019 all the way to late October 2020. But in the 11 days leading up to November 3, the numbers of volunteers showing up doubled and tripled. With this onslaught we switched gears to a *Get Out the Vote* style of canvassing. Rather than training every new canvasser in the telling and eliciting of personal stories, in that late stage volunteers mostly used quicker interactions focused on making voting plans for Biden voters.

By dividing our data into two periods - before October 23rd when we were Deep Canvassing and after October 23 when we switched to GOTV-style canvassing - we can compare the outcomes of those two forms of voter outreach.

Chart 2 shows that *both* forms of CTC interaction boosted turnout substantially over the 70% rate of those we didn't canvass.

But while residents with whom we had more conventional GOTV interactions were 8% more likely to turn out than non-canvassed Neighbors, those with whom we had Deep Canvassing conversations were a full 17% more likely to vote.

87% turnout — Deep Canvassing

78% turnout — GOTV

70% turnout — No Canvassing

Chart 2
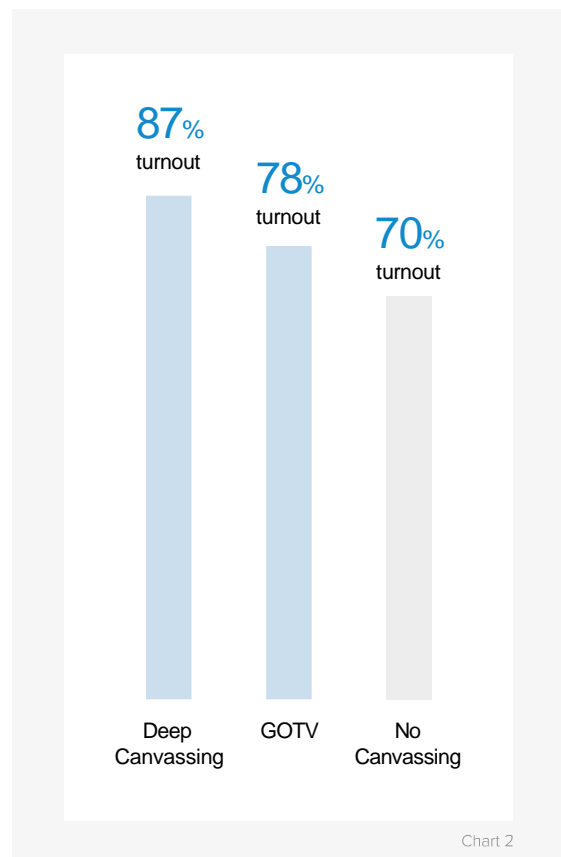
A CRUCIAL POTENTIAL

Across multiple dimensions of analysis, it's clear that CTC's canvassing boosted turnout among Democratic-leaning voters, **especially** among those at greatest risk of not voting. This is an obvious plus for those who care about electing Democrats, advancing a progressive agenda, and building an electorate that embraces compassion and inclusion.

Yet we can only grasp the true importance of these results by looking at the big picture of national politics - and at the choices currently facing strategists, organizers, and funders.

BIG MEANING OF SMALL MARGINS

Many elections are won or lost at the margins. In 2018, 33 of 40 House seats that Democrats flipped were won by less than 3.5% of the vote. So were three Senate seats and four Governors' mansions.

In 2020, President Biden topped Trump by nearly 7 million votes nationally. But his actual Electoral College victory depended on a margin of 123,473 votes, stitched together in four swing states: GA, AZ, WI, and PA. That's 0.08% of the 159 million votes cast nationwide.

Any method that measurably boosts turnout for Democrats in a competitive state or district can have an outsized effect on the electoral future of America.

PHONING IT IN JUST ISN'T THE SAME

In this hyper-mediated, high-tech era, campaigns often look to phone- and text-banking to fill the role once played by door-to-door canvassing. During the pandemic, of course, there were compelling reasons to eschew face-to-face interactions with voters.

We at CTC pivoted to phone-calling for that reason, and organized a total of 1,111 volunteer phone shifts over just a few months. Our volunteers had complete deep canvassing conversations with 1,966 voters on the phone, 95% of whom were infrequent voters.

Still, we returned to door-knocking as soon as it could be done safely, because we knew it was more effective. Most others, including the Biden campaign, waited much longer. It's easy to imagine the trend toward "virtual canvassing" accelerating even after Covid is behind us.

But CTC's experience showed that phone banks just cannot compare to in-person canvassing. Whereas our phone bankers completed on average about two conversations per shift, our Safety First canvassers completed almost seven conversations per shift. And all available evidence shows that the in-person conversation is more persuasive.

These issues are exacerbated when campaigners try to connect with at-risk voters. As the TX Democratic Party explained in their 2020 post-mortem:

> *Reaching low propensity voters by phone is challenging due to limited or non-existant contact information for many of our highest priority turnout targets. We struggled to reach voters for whom we did not have phone numbers, who were disproportionately young, folks of color.*
>
> *We need to invest heavily in direct voter contact as much as possible, especially to newer voters or those with inconsistent voting history.*

LAST-MINUTE IS TOO LATE

The Biden campaign did eventually turn to door-knocking in the final weeks before November 3. And CTC saw a surge in volunteer interest in the same period, a surge that significantly expanded our reach into Philadelphia neighborhoods.

Late-breaking spikes in volunteer interest (and voter interest) are inevitable. But we know that without the groundwork we'd laid in the preceding 15 months of Pennsylvania canvassing, CTC could never have absorbed and deployed hundreds of brand-new canvassers. And Deep Canvassing, the most effective form of persuasion, can increase voter engagement well before "election season."

To maximize the potential of canvassing for political change, you can't wait until the last minute. The progressive organizations behind January's GA Senate victories - which CTC helped support - are unanimous in reaching the same conclusion: the key to making political change is **year-round** organizing.

GOOD THINGS COME IN MODEST PACKAGES

The 2020 election cost a total of $14 billion, blowing away previous records. Staggering sums were spent on paid ads, branding strategies, robo-calls and other techniques with dubious-at-best effectiveness, according to scientific research.

Face-to-face deep canvassing, by contrast, is highly effective. And by its nature, this technique is relatively inexpensive - especially where most canvassers are volunteering their time.

Deep canvassing could be scaled up in a major way, and still constitute a relative bargain. As Priorities USA just reported, "If we took just 1% of the late spending [on TV ads and the like] and invested it in additional organizing infrastructure on the ground, we could generate an immensely higher longer-term return on investment." That would be smart investment in our democratic future.

UNSILENCING THE MAJORITY

The Republican Party is working quickly to make voting more difficult. But truly *motivated* voters will ultimately find a way. As this dreadful pandemic has reminded us, people can endure and overcome even previously-unimaginable obstacles.

The data makes clear that Deep Canvassing holds special promise for reaching and mobilizing those currently left behind by our democracy - and too often by Democratic politics. Our work helps people connect their vision of the world as it should be with the act of voting. We help people who rarely vote convince *themselves* that they must.

One can speculate on why low-propensity voters are alienated from politics, and why most political strategists neglect them. But whatever the reasons, Deep Canvassing works to engage them. And that holds the key to a progressive future.

At-risk voters are disproportionately working-class, poor, and/or BIPOC. If we can re-engage them with voting - and we can - they will vote disproportionately for a progressive agenda. It's their agenda.

Strategically, there's one more compelling reason to invest in a technique proven to mobilize low-propensity voters: numbers. Our canvassing increased turnout among those who almost always vote from 89 to 93%; but among those who almost never vote, we moved turnout from 50 to 64%. The latter category not only grew more thanks to Deep Canvassing - *it also has room for much more future growth*.

LOOKING AHEAD

CTC plans to keep building in Pennsylvania.

It's one of the few states Biden won that has an open Republican Senate seat in 2022. Given the Democrats' barely-functional Senate majority and the opposition's historic midterm advantage, the stakes couldn't be higher. Which Pennsylvanians go to the polls 18 months from now will play a huge role in deciding our country's future.

It is an uphill battle. Biden won PA by just 1.15%, midterm turnout is traditionally low, and the Keystone State has voted to keep at least one Republican Senator since 1946. That's all the more reason to get to work now, wielding the most effective tool known for persuading and mobilizing voters.

And Pennsylvanian's Republican Party is already positioning itself as a leader in voter suppression efforts. CTC's year-round organizing can help fight those voting restrictions, and help Democrats maintain control of the Governor's mansion, both of which are crucial to 2024.

Most importantly, our proven methods can help motivate more people to vote, despite any obstacles thrown in their way. In the end, that's the very best hope we have for the future.

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