

GRASSROOTS MOBILIZATION AND VOTER TURNOUT IN 2004

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Abstract Voter turnout increased sharply in 2004. At the same time, 2004 marked a change in campaign strategy, as both presidential campaigns and allied organizations placed unprecedented emphasis on voter mobilization. This article attempts to assess the degree to which grassroots mobilization efforts contributed to the surge in voter turnout. We conclude that although grassroots efforts generated millions of additional votes, they probably account for less than one-third of the observed increase in turnout. Increased turnout in 2004 primarily reflects the importance that voters accorded the presidential contest.

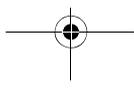
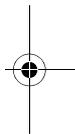
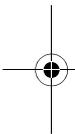
The 2004 presidential election witnessed a dramatic increase in voter turnout. Of 202.7 million eligible voters (excluding noncitizens and adults ineligible to vote due to felony convictions), 122.3 million (60.3 percent) cast ballots for president (McDonald 2005). The 2004 figure represents a dramatic increase over the numbers in the 2000 election, in which 105.4 million votes were cast for president (54.2 percent of the voting-eligible population), and the second highest voter turnout rate of any election since the 1960s. This surge is all the more remarkable in an era when declining turnout has become an expected feature of Western democracies (Dalton and Wattenberg 2002).

Why did turnout increase in 2004? This essay focuses primarily on the role of voter-mobilization campaigns. A sharp change in campaign strategy occurred in 2004, with both parties placing unusual emphasis on voter mobilization. By this account, the increase in voter turnout reflects the sheer volume of mobilization activities such as door-to-door canvassing and calls from volunteer phone banks.

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An alternative explanation holds that the ideological polarization of the candidates in the context of a close election made this choice unusually important to voters. Throughout 2004, the press characterized the election as “historic,” a referendum on the invasion of Iraq, and a decision that would have profound implications for the ideological complexion of the Supreme Court. Voter turnout tends to be higher in elections where the presidential candidates are perceived to be ideologically distinct (Green and Shachar 2000). The fact that the 2004 election was widely perceived to be a toss-up further increased voter interest.

Although one explanation points to campaign tactics, while the other focuses on voter perceptions, the two explanations are complementary. The ideological divide between John Kerry, a liberal senator from Massachusetts, and George W. Bush, a president whose administration’s policies were more conservative than many expected based on his stances in the 2000 campaign, created an environment in which each party’s ideological base was unified and determined to win. Both campaigns and their allied organizations spent record sums of money and attracted unprecedented numbers of campaign workers, resources that were used to mobilize each candidate’s supporters. The ideological divide did not go unnoticed by the electorate. The 2004 American National Election Study respondents perceived the candidates in 2004 to be more ideologically distinct than did respondents in 2000.¹

This essay attempts to provide a rough estimate of how much of the surge in turnout in 2004 may be attributed to mobilization activity. We begin by describing the shift in campaign strategy that in 2004 caused both campaigns to place new emphasis on voter mobilization. Next, we show how this allocation of resources translated into campaign contacts, as reported both by campaigns and by survey respondents. In order to assess the number of votes produced by these mobilization efforts, we report two different analyses. The first analysis uses the experimental literature on the effectiveness of mobilization tactics in order to generate a direct calculation of the number of votes generated by canvassing and phone calls. The second analysis provides an upper bound on the mobilization effect by modeling state-level turnout as a function of past voter turnout and whether the state was declared a “battle-ground” in 2004. The final section discusses the implications of these results for the study of presidential campaign strategy.

The Strategic Logic of the 2004 Campaign

The contours of the 2004 campaign strategy began to take shape shortly after the 2000 election. In a January 2005 interview with PBS, Matthew Dowd, chief campaign strategist for the Bush/Cheney 2004 campaign, explained the emergence of its voter-mobilization strategy:

1. According to the ANES 2000 and 2004 surveys, the mean perceived absolute differences on the seven-point scales describing the candidates’ locations were larger in 2004 than in 2000 on defense, guaranteed jobs, aid to blacks, women’s equality, and liberalism/conservatism.

Obviously, as you looked at 2000, approached 2000, motivating Republicans was important, but most of our resources [were] put into persuading independents in 2000. One of the first things I looked at after 2000 was what was the real Republican vote and what was the real Democratic vote, not just who said they were Republicans and Democrats, but independents, how they really voted. . . .

And what came from that analysis was a graph that I obviously gave Karl [Rove], which showed that independents or persuadable voters in the last 20 years had gone from 22 percent of the electorate to 7 percent of the electorate in 2000. And so 93 percent of the electorate in 2000, and what we anticipated, 93 or 94 in 2004, just looking forward and forecasting, was going to be already decided either for us or against us. You obviously had to do fairly well among the 6 or 7 [percent], but you could lose the 6 or 7 percent and win the election, which was fairly revolutionary, because everybody up until that time had said, "Swing voters, swing voters, swing voters, swing voters, swing voters, swing voters."

. . . [N]obody had ever approached an election that I've looked at over the last 50 years, where base motivation was important as swing, which is how we approached it. We didn't say, "Base motivation is what we're going to do, and that's all we're doing." We said, "Both are important, but we shouldn't be putting 80 percent of our resources into persuasion and 20 percent into base motivation," which is basically what had been happening up until that point. (2005)

Based on their view that what the GOP did "wrong was not to have enough person-to-person contact and on-the-ground staff and people to motivate folks . . . in their neighborhoods" (Dowd 2005), the Republicans formed the 72-Hour Task Force, which in 2002 sought to develop and refine voter-mobilization tactics with an eye toward 2004. As Dowd explains, the result was a fundamental shift in the quality of voter contact:

Much more person-on-person contact in individual communities. So much more building it up, having an infrastructure where somebody could call into a neighborhood or precinct, to call up voters that they knew. A different kind of mail. There would have been a lot in the past that the mail was not as emotional as it should have been, so the mail was more emotional. More actual, real phone calls, as opposed to what they call robo-phone calls, which are sort of robotic phone calls where you say, "Go vote, go vote." These were more people in a community that might know a list of 100 people that they could call—things like that. (2005)

On the Democratic side, voter mobilization was less of a departure from standard campaign practice but nonetheless received special strategic emphasis after the nomination of John Kerry, who, unlike Bill Clinton, had little chance of carrying states by winning over moderates. Working through allied organizations such as Americans Coming Together, Democrats sought to register and mobilize large numbers of people in battleground states who were discontented with Bush policies. This strategy was focused primarily in urban areas, where the concentration of Democratic sympathies was greater. In April 2004, Kerry declared, "We are going to build the strongest grass-roots movement in the history of our party

and the history of this country” (Johnson 2004, p. C1). Even as early as 2003, veteran Democratic organizer and CEO of Americans Coming Together Steve Rosenthal argued, “There will be some real hand-to-hand combat in at least 17 states leading up to this election. If we talk to people in as personal a way as we can and as many times as we can, we will win them over” (Malone 2003, p. A27).

The emphasis on grassroots efforts was apparent early in 2004 as voter-registration campaigns added record numbers of new voters to the rolls in several battleground states. Having devoted the summer to registration activity, both campaigns entered the fall with an unusually large and seasoned group of local campaign workers. As the press began to devote increasing coverage to this facet of the presidential campaign (Fessenden 2004), both sides became increasingly confident of their capacity to surprise poll watchers with the magnitude of their supporters’ turnout on Election Day.

Campaign Contacts

In order to assess the quantity of voter-mobilization activity, we examined two data sources: (1) the 2004 American National Election Survey (ANES) and (2) public and private communications from various campaigns about the nature and extent of their grassroots efforts.² Survey data provide a measure of the proportion of people who were contacted at least once by a campaign, whereas campaign reports tell us the total volume of campaign contacts without specifying how many distinct individuals were contacted at least once. Thus, the two sources of information complement one another.

Table 1 shows the frequency distribution of reported campaign contact for the period 1988–2004. Campaign contact is measured first by asking the respondent whether anyone from one of the political parties called or “came around” to “talk to you about the campaign” and second by asking whether someone other than the political parties called or came around to “talk to you about supporting specific candidates in this last election.”³ Table 1 shows a striking acceleration in the proportion of adults who report grassroots contact. In 1988 and 1992, approximately one-quarter of adults reported contact with a caller or canvasser. In 2000 this figure rose to 40 percent. In 2004, slightly more than half of the population reported receiving some form of direct campaign communication.

When we divide the ANES respondents from 2004 into those living within or outside battleground states, we find, as expected, that reported contacts are much more prevalent among those living in closely contested states. Fully 68 percent of those living in battleground states reported some form of campaign

2. A third potential data source, the 2004 Annenberg election study, was not publicly available at the time of this writing.

3. Note that the stipulation about supporting specific candidates could in principle exclude non-partisan organizations or organizations whose aim was issue advocacy rather than candidate promotion. We do not know whether respondents attended to this criterion when describing their campaign experiences.

Table 1. Party and Nonparty Contacts

Contacted by Party or Someone Else	1988	1992	1996	2000	2004
Contacted	27.8	25.5	31.5	40.0	50.4
Not Contacted	72.2	74.5	68.5	60.0	49.6
Valid <i>N</i>	1,768	2,247	1,533	1,553	1,066

NOTE.—“Contacted” respondents reported being contacted by either a party, or someone else, or both (even if they responded “Don’t know” or refused to answer the other of the two questions below). Respondents with “Don’t know” or refusals to both questions were excluded.

Question wording: “As you know, the political parties try to talk to as many people as they can to get them to vote for their candidate. Did anyone from one of the POLITICAL PARTIES call you up or come around and talk to you about the campaign this year?” and “Other than someone from the two major parties, did anyone (else) call you up or come around and talk to you about supporting specific candidates in this last election?”

SOURCE.—American National Election Studies (2004).

contact, as compared to 42 percent of those in non-battleground states.⁴ Although the latter percentage seems high, it should be noted that some non-battleground states had competitive congressional and state elections, and the ANES question wording does not limit the focus to presidential campaigns.

Turning to the raw number of campaign contacts, we see from table 2 that the volume of grassroots activity by the two presidential campaigns was roughly comparable. The Kerry/Edwards campaign knocked on more than eight million doors, as compared to over nine million for the Bush/Cheney campaign. Similarly, the Bush/Cheney campaign held a slight edge in terms of phone calls from volunteer phone banks, completing 27.2 million, as compared to the Kerry/Edwards figure of 23.5 million. The Democrats, however, enjoyed a contacting edge by virtue of independent organizations campaigning on issues that worked in Kerry’s favor. The American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) “Labor 2004” campaign claimed to have made more than 100 million volunteer phone calls and to have knocked on six million doors. Overall, the AFL-CIO claimed to have tripled its voter-mobilization activities in 2004 over 2000. The Sierra Club reportedly knocked on more than one million doors and made 1.5 million calls. The largest of these independent organizations, Americans Coming Together, reported canvassing 4.6 million doors. Pro-Bush independent organizations had less of a presence on the ground, but the U.S. Chamber of Commerce claims to have placed 2.1 million phone calls to its members in eight targeted states.

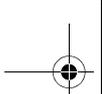
Deriving an overall total number of contacts through canvassing and volunteer phone banks involves some guesswork. On the one hand, the list of organizations

4. According to CNN, the following were battleground states in 2004: Colorado, Florida, Iowa, Maine, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Mexico, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, and Wisconsin.

Table 2. Reported Voter-Mobilization Activity of Campaigns and Organizations, 2004

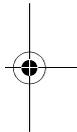
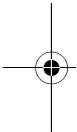
Organization	Door-to-Door Canvassing	Volunteer Phone Calls	Other Activities	Source
Kerry/Edwards	8 million doors	23.5 million	n/a	Lawrence and Kasindorf 2004
Bush/Cheney	9.1 million doors	27.2 million	n/a	John Ginsberg, RNC Strategy, personal communication with Costas Panagopoulos, July 19, 2005
Sierra Club	1 million doors	1.5 million	2.2 million pieces of mail	Pope 2004
American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO)	6 million doors	100 million	32 million leaflets 4 million pieces of mail	Common Dreams 2004; Gruenberg 2004; <i>LaborTalk</i> 2004
Service Employees International Union (SEIU) ^a	10 million doors	19 million	16 million pieces of mail; 11 million leaflets	SEIU 2004 Justice 2004;
Americans Coming Together (ACT)	4.6 million doors	23 million	3 million pieces of direct mail; 20 million e-mails	Murphy 2004
Chamber of Commerce	n/a	2.1 million	2.3 million pieces of mail	Birnbaum and Edsall 2004
Progress for America	n/a	n/a		Justice 2004

^a Includes activities done in conjunction with other groups including AFL-CIO and ACT. This figure, therefore, should be heavily discounted when calculating the overall volume of visits and calls.

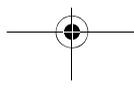


in table 2 is by no means exhaustive; on the other hand, the reported number of contacts might be exaggerated. A rough guess would place the total volume of grassroots activity at 30 million canvassed households and 120 million volunteer phone contacts.⁵ On top of this figure would be vast but unknown quantities of leaflets, direct mail, e-mail, and calls from commercial phone banks. For the purposes of calculating the effects of grassroots activity, however, we will take the conservative approach of focusing solely on the putative effects of canvassing and volunteer calls. Later, we will return to the question of how our figures would change if other mobilization tactics were included in our calculations.

How do the survey data square with the campaign contacts tallied across campaigns? Let us assume that 95 percent of this grassroots campaign activity was directed at battleground states. Thus, given that the voting-eligible population in battleground states is 62.6 million people, the average voter in those states received 0.46 visits from canvassers and 4.2 volunteer phone calls. Note that these rates exclude calls from commercial phone banks. Since the ANES survey question includes both phone calls and visits, one would expect that almost every registered voter (approximately 75 percent of the population) would have received some kind of contact. The ANES responses (69 percent rate of contact) are a bit lower than this figure, and even among *registered* ANES respondents living in battleground states, we find that more than one-quarter report no contact. One possibility is that recall data of this kind are susceptible to error. An experimental study in 2000 that randomly assigned phone calls and then followed up with a survey asking ANES questions about campaign contact found that even when phone and in-person efforts had a combined contact rate of 79 percent, only about one-third of the treatment group reported any contact (as compared to approximately one-sixth of the control group). Even among those in the treatment group who had conversations with callers or canvassers, the rate of reported contact was less than 50 percent (Green and Gerber 2001). Another possibility is that contacts in battleground states were concentrated in certain areas that were known to



5. This figure discounts to some extent the AFL-CIO's reported number of volunteer phone contacts and supposes that the bulk of SEIU's phone and door-to-door contacts occurred in conjunction with other organizations. To avoid overcounting or double counting these contacts, we assume that the 40 million total in table 2 is in fact closer to 30 million. It is also not clear whether these organizations are using the same definition of "volunteer phone bank." Some groups may have used unpaid volunteers; others, paid volunteers. It is also not clear whether these figures are referring to unique addresses/phone numbers or individual voters. If we assume that each household has an average of 1.5 voters, 30 million canvassed doors translates into 45 million canvassed voters, and 120 million phone numbers translates into 180 million called voters. However, if we include the extra voters in the household, we must also make allowance for the fact that canvassers did not speak directly to everybody and that indirect communications are less effective. In order to err on the conservative side, we have interpreted the reported number of "doors" as though they refer to the number of individual voters contacted, which essentially assumes that indirect contact had no effect.



be strongholds of one party or the other.⁶ Democrats and their allies, in particular, seem to have focused their ground efforts on heavily Democratic precincts. This second explanation, however, cannot explain why phone calls failed to reach a large segment of the adult population. We are inclined to think that while the 2004 ANES correctly detects an upward trend in contacting activity, it may understate the magnitude of the upward shift.

Analyzing Inputs and Outputs

The task of figuring out how many votes to attribute to grassroots mobilization in 2004 can be divided into two separate issues. The first is figuring out the total number of voters who were mobilized by phone calls or visits associated with the presidential campaigns. The second is gauging the degree to which change in turnout between 2000 and 2004 may be attributed to change in mobilization activity over the two elections.

In order to calculate the cumulative effects of grassroots activity in 2004, we multiply the number of contacts by the average marginal effect of those contacts. Although simple in principle, the exercise is complicated by two factors. First, we have information about the overall number of contacts but not about the distribution of repeat contacts of the same people. If returns from canvassing diminish with each successive visit to the same door, we cannot simply multiply the number of contacts by the marginal effect of a fresh, first-time visit. Second, to the extent that the diminishing returns logic applies also to combinations of grassroots activity, the marginal return of canvassing may be diminished by a steady barrage of phone calls. Our approach to this estimation problem is to calculate an upper bound. How many votes would canvassing and volunteer phone calls produce if there were no diminishing returns?

In order to obtain an estimate of the effects of grassroots activity, the large and rapidly growing experimental literature on canvassing and phone calls is instructive. Since 1998 (Gerber and Green 2000), 21 distinct experiments have assessed the effects of door-to-door canvassing. As table 3 indicates, almost all of these experiments have been conducted in the context of low- and medium-salience elections. In that sense, the experiments arguably provide an estimate of the effectiveness of the initial canvassing visit. (The one experimental study of canvassing in the context of a heavily canvassed congressional district [Bennion 2005] found an unusually weak effect.) Table 3 presents a meta-analysis of the 20 experimental results. The effect size for each study is estimated using bivariate probit (Greene 2002), which takes into

6. The 2004 ANES data suggest, for example, that battleground state voters residing in urban areas who claimed to have been contacted by one party were twice as likely to have been contacted by Democrats than by Republicans. The pattern was reversed in rural areas.

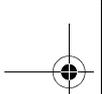
Table 3. Meta-analysis of Experimental Studies of Door-to-Door Canvassing

Site	Year	Election	Canvassing Group	Target Population	Voting Rate in the Control Group (%)	% of Treatment Group Actually Contacted	Bivariate Probit <i>b</i>	Bivariate Probit SE
New Haven	1998	federal midterm	academic	registered	42	32	0.369	0.109
Bridgeport	2001	municipal	ACORN	registered	10	28	0.548	0.265
Columbus	2001	municipal	Youth Vote	high youth neighborhood	8	14	0.505	0.533
Detroit	2001	municipal	ACORN	registered	43	31	0.212	0.118
Minneapolis	2001	municipal	Youth Vote	registered	25	19	0.307	0.282
Raleigh	2001	municipal primary	Youth Vote	registered	~29	~45	-0.015	0.086
St. Paul	2001	municipal	Youth Vote	registered	38	32	0.366	0.169
Dos Palos	2001	municipal	academic	registered	22	77	0.113	0.098
Fresno, 2002	2002	federal midterm	academic	registered, 18-25	8	45	0.161	0.096
Denver primary	2002	municipal primary	Youth Vote	registered	39	100	0.220	0.107
Minneapolis primary	2002	municipal primary	Youth Vote	registered	16	100	0.379	0.135
South Bend	2002	federal midterm	academic	registered	38	41	0.100	0.181
Michigan, Democrats	2002	federal midterm	Democrats	registered, 18-35	36	9	0.359	0.364
Newark, May	2002	municipal	academic	registered	50	6	-0.165	0.742
Newark, June	2002	municipal	campaign	registered	18	30	0.080	0.215
St. Louis	2002	federal midterm	Youth Vote	registered, 18-25	28	37	-0.018	0.084

Table 3. (Continued)

Site	Year	Election	Canvassing Group	Target Population	Voting Rate in the Control Group (%)	% of Treatment Group Actually Contacted	Bivariate Probit <i>b</i>	Bivariate Probit SE
Phoenix	2003	municipal	ACORN	Latinos who voted in 1+ elections	~7	~75	0.645	0.125
Kansas City	2003	municipal	ACORN	precinct level, voted in 1+ elections	29	63	0.318	0.099
Fresno, 2003, partisan	2003	gubernatorial recall	academic	registered, 18–29, strata	15	37	-0.177	0.137
Fresno, 2003, nonpartisan	2003	gubernatorial recall	academic	registered, 18–29, strata	16	33	0.104	0.155

NOTE.—Random effects estimate across all studies: *b* = 0.205, SE = 0.045. Bivariate probit estimates were calculated using the biprobit procedure in Stata 8/SE. Bivariate probit coefficients are interpreted in the same manner as probit coefficients and indicate the effect of contact with door-to-door canvassers on the probability of turnout. ACORN = Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now.

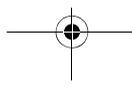
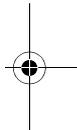
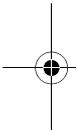


account the fact that both the dependent variable (voter turnout) and the endogenous independent variable (contact by a canvasser) are dichotomous. In order to maximize the comparability of estimates across studies, each of the bivariate probit estimates is based on the simplest possible model specification, without covariates and excluding experimental conditions in which canvassing is combined with other treatments. The meta-analytic estimate is obtained from a random effects model that allows for some variation in the parameters across experimental settings.⁷ The resulting probit coefficient ($b = 0.205$, $SE = 0.045$) implies that a voter with a 50 percent chance of voting would have a 58.1 percent probability of voting after a visit from a canvasser. Applying this result to the number of door-to-door contacts during the 2004 campaigns provides an upper bound for the number of canvassing-induced votes. Multiplying 30 million contacts by 8.1 percentage points yields a total of 2.4 million additional voters.

Fewer experimental studies have examined the effects of volunteer phone banks conveying issue advocacy or partisan appeals. The most directly relevant study conducted during the past decade is by Nickerson, Friedrich, and King (2003), who gauged the effects of a Democratic phone bank in Michigan that used volunteers to call voters aged 18–35 prior to the 2002 state and federal elections. This study found a statistically significant three percentage point effect. Volunteer phone banks making nonpartisan appeals to vote have, on average, found similar effects (for somewhat stronger effects, see Ramirez 2005; for somewhat weaker effects, see McNulty 2005; Wong 2005). Complicating this picture is the possibility that “volunteer” phone banks operate in practice like commercial phone banks, generating a large volume of calls but communicating with respondents in a mechanical and unpersuasive fashion. The two large-scale studies that examine the effectiveness of commercial phone banks making calls on behalf of issues or candidates find negligible increases in turnout (Cardy 2005; McNulty 2005), a finding echoed in several large-scale studies of nonpartisan get-out-the-vote (GOTV) calls by commercial firms (Gerber and Green 2005). If we assume an average treatment effect of two percentage points—again making no allowance for diminishing returns—the implication is that 120 million calls generated 2.4 million votes.

The total of these two figures is approximately five million votes. Because this figure ignores diminishing returns, it probably exaggerates the number of votes generated by canvassing and volunteer phone calls. On the other hand, these calculations have ignored the contributions of other forms of political communication that arguably influence turnout. The presidential campaigns and allied organizations, for example, sent hundreds of millions of pieces of direct mail. The experimental literature on partisan direct mail finds weakly

7. The null hypothesis of fixed effects (i.e., all of the experiments estimate the same parameter, subject to sampling variability) is rejected at $p = .001$.

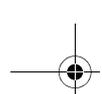


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positive effects on turnout. It appears that partisan mail has its greatest mobilization effects when sent to strong partisan supporters, but no experimental mail campaign (of up to nine mailings) has found more than a 1.9 percentage point increase in turnout, and often the estimated effects are zero (Gerber, Green, and Green 2003). Across all of the partisan mail experiments, one vote is generated for every 600 mailings. Thus, one could imagine adding an additional one million voters as the result of 600 million direct mailings, especially if, as Dowd pointed out above, the mail is suffused with emotional appeals designed to increase turnout. As far as other tactics are concerned—prerecorded phone calls, e-mail, leaflets—it would be surprising if combined they generated more than a million votes. None of the studies of prerecorded calls finds any effect on turnout (Green and Gerber 2004; Ramirez 2005). Experimental studies of e-mail find no turnout effect (Green and Gerber 2004, chap. 7). Only leaflets seem promising in this regard, and just one of two studies has found a significant increase in turnout of one percentage point (Nickerson, Friedrich, and King 2003). If we suppose that 50 million leaflets and “door-hangers” were distributed, the net effect would be at most 500,000 votes. In sum, an upper bound on votes mobilized through grassroots activity does not go above 6.5 million. Given the likely prospect of diminishing returns from repeated contacts, a plausible estimate is probably closer to four million.

What about the effects of change in grassroots activity between 2000 and 2004? Every organization appears to have placed greater emphasis on voter mobilization in 2004, but quantification of the difference is made difficult by the lack of comparable record keeping. The largest voter-mobilization activities involving canvassing and volunteer calls in 2000 were those conducted by labor and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People National Voter Fund (NVF; Green 2004). According to labor organizers, the 2004 activity was at least three times larger than the corresponding effort in 2000. The NVF’s campaign in 2000 involved fewer than 10,000 canvassers and relied on commercial phone banks rather than volunteer phone banks; it was also much smaller and was deployed much later than campaigns launched by comparable organizations in 2004. On the Republican side, 2000 featured little by way of GOTV canvassing and volunteer calls. Thus, our back-of-the-envelope calculations about change go as follows. Suppose that (1) 40 percent of the grassroots activity occurred on the Republican side in 2004 and the GOP effort in 2004 was ten times as large as its 2000 counterpart and (2) grassroots activity on the Democratic side was three times larger in 2004 than in 2000 because both the number of organizations conducting GOTV drives increased and the level of GOTV activity by given organizations increased. This calculation implies that of the four million votes in 2004 generated by GOTV activity, approximately three million can be attributed to an increase in GOTV activity.



State-Level Turnout Patterns

To check the plausibility of the claim that grassroots activity generated a total of four million votes in 2004 and an increase of three million over the votes garnered in 2000, we used state-level voter turnout patterns to examine the relationship between grassroots mobilization activity and turnout. Although aggregate turnout data cannot tell us how many votes to attribute specifically to grassroots mobilization efforts when predicting the level of turnout in 2004, they do provide some sense of how many votes were generated through the sum of all of the campaign activity directed at battleground states (e.g., grassroots activity, televised advertisements, candidate campaign visits) as well as the interest generated by the prospect of a close election. Thus, by estimating the “battleground effect,” we obtain an upper bound on the effect of grassroots activity.

PREDICTING STATE TURNOUT LEVELS IN 2004

Using data from McDonald (2005) on voter turnout rates among the voting-eligible population of each state, we regressed turnout in 2004 on four independent variables. The first is a dummy variable marking whether a state was considered a battleground. The second is an average of the turnout rate in the two preceding midterm elections (1998 and 2002), which enables us to control for statewide voting rates absent the influence of the Electoral College. The last two are dummy variables marking whether a state held senatorial elections in 1998 and 2002, factors that might potentially distort our measure of baseline turnout levels. (Because senate elections occur on six-year cycles, these dummy variables also effectively control for senate elections occurring in 2004.) The data are weighted according to the voting-eligible population in each state.

The estimates from this model are presented in table 4. The results indicate that battleground states had turnout rates that are five percentage points higher than those of non-battleground states with similar rates of turnout in midterm elections ($p < .001$). In order to convert this percentage point figure into votes, we multiply by the voting-eligible population in the battleground states (62.6 million), which yields the number 3.1 million. Thus, if battleground turnout was on average five percentage points higher on account of all of the campaign activity directed there, we can attribute at most 3.1 million votes to grassroots activity generated by the presidential contest.⁸ The five percentage point estimate is somewhat lower than predicted but subject to sampling variability. We can place an upper bound on this upper bound estimate by noting

8. Our “bounds” argument presupposes that none of the campaign activities that battleground states were exposed to demobilized the electorate. This argument would be false if, for example, negative advertising depressed turnout (Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1997). Recent scholarship has cast doubt on this hypothesis (Lau et al. 1999). Krasno and Green (2005) further argue that presidential TV ads, regardless of tone, have no effect on turnout.

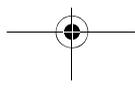
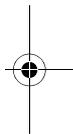
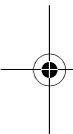


Table 4. Estimated Effect of Battleground Status on State Voter Turnout Levels, 2004

Independent Variable	Regression Coefficient
Battleground state 2004	4.96* (1.07)
Average turnout 1998 and 2002	0.52* (0.08)
Senatorial election held in 1998	-1.30 (1.25)
Senatorial election held in 2002	-0.86 (1.11)
Constant	40.25
Adjusted R-Square	.66
<i>N</i> = 51 (including the District of Columbia)	

NOTE.—Standard errors are in parentheses. The dependent variable is the number of votes cast in 2004 divided by the voting-eligible population. This regression is weighted by the voting-eligible population in each state. Analytic weights were implemented using Stata 8/SE.

* *p* < .001.

that the 90 percent interval surrounding our regression estimate extends as high as 6.8 percentage points, in which case 4.3 million additional voters turned out in battleground states. Thus, the input–output analysis and the aggregate regression analysis provide compatible assessments of the quantity of votes generated in 2004.

PREDICTING CHANGE IN TURNOUT

A similar exercise can be used to estimate the change in turnout from 2000 to 2004. The idea behind this model is to assess how a change in battleground status affected the change in turnout. This model can be estimated in two ways. The first way is to regress change in turnout on battleground status in both presidential elections, including controls for midterm turnout and senate elections:

$$\begin{aligned}
 Turnout_{2004} - Turnout_{2000} = & b_0 + b_1 Battleground_{2004} + b_2 Battleground_{2000} \\
 & + b_3 MidtermTurnout + b_4 SenateElection_{1998} \\
 & + b_5 SenateElection_{2002} + U_i,
 \end{aligned}$$

where U_i represents unobserved causes of the dependent variable.⁹ Notice that this regression model is equivalent to a regression in which *Turnout* 2004 is

9. According to CNN, battleground states in 2000 were Arizona, Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Illinois, Iowa, Louisiana, Maine, Michigan, Missouri, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Mexico, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Washington, and Wisconsin. See note 4 for a comparable list for the 2004 election.

Table 5. Estimated Effect of Battleground Status on Change in State Voter Turnout Levels, 2000–04

Independent Variables	Dependent Variable:	
	Change in Turnout Coefficient	Turnout in 2004 Coefficient
Battleground state 2004	3.55* (0.89)	3.67* (0.84)
Battleground state 2000	-0.18 (0.79)	0.12 (0.75)
Turnout in 2000	1.00 (0 by assumption)	0.78* (0.09)
Average turnout 1998 and 2002	-0.11 (0.05)	0.03 (0.07)
Senatorial election held in 1998	1.32 (0.81)	0.67 (0.80)
Senatorial election held in 2002	0.69 (0.71)	0.32 (0.68)
Constant	8.33	15.37
Adjusted R-Square	.87	.88
<i>N</i> = 51 (including the District of Columbia)		

NOTE.—Standard errors are in parentheses. The dependent variable is the number of votes cast in 2004 divided by the voting-eligible population. Both regressions are weighted by the voting-eligible population in each state. Analytic weights were implemented using Stata 8/SE based on the number of voting-eligible people in each state.

*** $p < .001$.

the dependent variable and *Turnout2000* is constrained to have a coefficient of 1. A second and more flexible version of this model relaxes this constraint. Change is modeled by including 2000 voter turnout as a predictor.

The results from this regression exercise are reported in table 5. Both models are weighted to reflect the voting-eligible population in each state. The estimated effect of battleground status in 2004 is similar in both specifications, suggesting an increase of 3.6 or 3.7 percentage points ($p < .001$). When multiplied by the voting-eligible population in battleground states, these estimates suggest that battleground campaigns in 2004 generated an increase of 2.3 million voters. Reaching to the top of the 90 percent confidence interval raises this estimate to 3.2 million. Again, these numbers are in line with the input–output figures derived above.

Discussion

The back-of-the-envelope calculations presented above suggest that the surge in voter turnout between 2000 and 2004 is only partly attributable to grassroots

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activity. Approximately 17 million more votes were cast in 2004 than in 2000, four million of which were expected due to population growth. The remaining 13 million votes far exceed what can be explained by a shift in campaign tactics between the two elections. Even if we were to assume a complete absence of voter-mobilization efforts in 2000, the growth in turnout would be roughly three times as large as what one could plausibly attribute to grassroots activity.

That the surge in voter turnout reflects something more than mobilization activity is further suggested by the fact that an upward drift in turnout occurred in *every* state, even solidly Republican or Democratic states. States that were battlegrounds in neither 2000 nor 2004 (e.g., Indiana, Maryland) nevertheless experienced a 5.2 percentage point average increase in turnout, as compared to the 8.4 percentage point average surge in turnout associated with states that were battlegrounds in 2004 but not 2000. Increased turnout in uncompetitive states such as South Carolina (5.8 percent) and Rhode Island (3.4 percent) cannot be attributed to grassroots campaigning for the presidency. Nationwide, 86.5 percent of the 2004 ANES respondents claimed to “care a good deal” about the outcome of the election, as compared to 77.6 percent four years earlier.¹⁰ The 2004 election evidently attracted special voter interest even in states where the Electoral College outcome was a foregone conclusion.

This accounting exercise has three important implications for the study of campaigns. First, our results speak to the ongoing debate about whether and how campaigns matter. The number of votes that may be attributed to grassroots campaigning, while substantially less than the observed swing in voter turnout, is large enough to be politically consequential. We lack the data to assess the size and effectiveness of the competing campaigns in states like Ohio, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, Iowa, New Hampshire, and New Mexico, where victory margins were less than 200,000 votes (and in several cases less than 10,000 votes). Assuming that the two parties together mobilized four million voters, even a slight asymmetry in their effectiveness may have been decisive.

Second, mobilization campaigns are limited in what they can achieve. Grassroots campaigns produce results by making personal contacts with voters on a very large scale. The sheer size of an effective campaign operation makes it difficult to conceal from one’s opponent. If campaigns respond strategically to one another, the advantages of grassroots campaigning for one party will be largely offset by an opponent responding in kind. It is telling that mobilization campaigns were confined to battleground states—an implicit admission that mobilization campaigns cannot overcome preelection polling deficits of more than a few percentage points.

10. This question asked: “Generally speaking, would you say that you personally care a good deal who wins the presidential election this fall, or that you don’t care very much who wins?”

Third, despite these limitations, mobilization strategies provide campaigns with relatively dependable returns on their investments. Unlike television ads or new policy announcements, creating a grassroots infrastructure is almost certain to pay dividends in terms of votes. The rate of return is probably much smaller than that of a highly successful ad campaign but also less risky. From that standpoint, the 2004 election may prove to be a turning point in the investment portfolios of presidential campaigns. Whereas previous campaigns tended to invest the preponderance of their resources in persuasive communication, campaigns operating in an era of partisan parity may be gravitating toward the small but steady returns of grassroots activity.

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