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Meeting the Challenge of Latino Voter Mobilization

By
MELISSA R. MICHELSON

Latino political participation rates are consistently lower than those for other racial/ethnic groups. While some of the disparities can be attributed to low levels of Latino citizenship, socioeconomic status, and age, lack of mobilization by political parties and candidates also contributes to the problem. Field experiments in voter mobilization have found that personal canvassing can have a significant effect on turnout. This article reviews four experiments in Latino voter mobilization, conducted over a period of three years in a variety of electoral settings. The results demonstrate that Latinos are very receptive to voter mobilization campaigns. Getting Latinos to the polls does not require unusually large budgets or special "Latino" approaches. Latino voters can be mobilized to vote by the same sorts of door-to-door, personal efforts that are currently in vogue among campaign professionals. Canvassing can increase Latino turnout substantially, and relatively cheaply, and may even influence election results.

Keywords: Latino; mobilization; canvassing; turnout

Nationwide, less than a third of Latinos vote in presidential elections, while less than one-fourth participate in congressional elections. Latinos lag in their rates of participation at every level of the process: the voting rate based on the voting-age population, the voting rate based on the voting-age citizen population, and the voting rate based only on registered voters (Jamieson, Shin, and Day 2002). Some, but not all, of this discrepancy in participation can be attributed to low rates of citizenship among Latinos, as well as the relatively low socioeconomic status (SES) and high rate of noncitizenship (about 40 percent) of the Latino population (see, e.g., DeSipio 1996; Hero and Campbell 1996). Another strong explanatory

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factor is the relative youth of the Latino population; the median age of Latinos is only 25.8, compared to 38.6 for non-Latino whites (Anglos). A Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC) survey on political behavior conducted in August, September, and October of 2002, while subject to the usual caveats about self-reported participation, found that only 39 percent of Latinos and Asians claimed to vote regularly, compared to 59 percent of whites and 52 percent of blacks (Ramakrishnan and Baldasarre 2003). Ramakrishnan and Baldasarre (2003) also found that first-generation immigrants are much less likely to vote than are other citizens and that some (but not all) of the disparity in voting rates is due to lack of English proficiency.

Recent years have seen a surge of interest in the power of mobilization efforts to increase Latino political participation (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995; Garcia 1997; Wrinkle et al. 1996; Diaz 1996; DeSipio, de la Garza, and Setzler 1999; de la Garza and Lu 1999; Hritzuk and Park 2000; Shaw, de la Garza, and Lee 2000; de la Garza and Abrajano 2002). These survey-based studies suggest that mobilization can increase Latino turnout, but the results are not entirely consistent. Despite this scholarly interest, Latinos have largely been excluded from get-out-the-vote (GOTV) efforts conducted by the major political parties (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995; Hero et al. 2000).

Field experiments in voter mobilization inspired by Gerber and Green (2000) have found that personal canvassing can have a significant effect on turnout. This includes my four experiments in Latino voter mobilization (Michelson 2003a, 2003b, 2004a, 2004b), conducted over a period of three years in a variety of electoral settings. This article reviews those experiments and their findings, summarizing what we now know about increasing Latino voter turnout through door-to-door mobilization efforts.

Dos Palos 2001¹

The first Latino voter mobilization effort consisted of a door-to-door nonpartisan GOTV drive for the November 6, 2001, school board election of the Dos Palos–Oro Loma Unified School District, which includes portions of Merced and Fresno Counties, in central California. The major population hub in the district, Dos Palos, is about sixty-five miles northwest of Fresno. From a total list of 2,775 registered voters, 1,709 were randomly assigned to the treatment group and were targeted for mobilization. During the two weekends prior to the election, thirty bilingual Latino canvassers (students from California State University, Fresno) visited individuals on the treatment lists. Canvassers delivered a one-page flyer to each contacted voter that indicated the four candidates, their contact telephone numbers, and the address and telephone number of the voter's polling place.

Overall, 76.7 percent of voters on the treatment lists were successfully contacted. Some were randomly selected to receive a mobilization message that stressed voting as a civic duty; others received a message that emphasized voting as a tool for ethnic group solidarity.

TABLE 1
DOS PALOS: INTENT-TO-TREAT EFFECTS (PERCENTAGE VOTING)

	Civic Duty	Ethnic Solidarity	Control
Non-Latino Democrats	29.5	32.0	28.3
<i>N</i>	84/285	83/259	93/329
Non-Latino non-Democrats	27.0	25.4	23.8
<i>N</i>	93/344	90/355	102/429
Latino Democrats	21.7	25.2	14.6
<i>N</i>	30/138	35/139	25/171
Latino non-Democrats	14.3	8.6	12.6
<i>N</i>	12/84	9/105	16/127
Contact rates			
Non-Latino Democrats	75.1	75.7	
<i>N</i>	214/285	196/259	
Non-Latino non-Democrats	79.7	80.3	
<i>N</i>	274/344	285/355	
Latino Democrats	68.1	72.7	
<i>N</i>	94/138	101/139	
Latino non-Democrats	81.0	75.2	
<i>N</i>	68/84	79/105	

Using validated voter records obtained from local elections offices, I analyzed effects by dividing registered voters into four groups: Latino Democrats, Latino non-Democrats, non-Latino Democrats, and non-Latino non-Democrats. Because all of the canvassers were Latino, I expected that Latinos would be more receptive to the mobilization effort than non-Latinos. Because voters assumed the canvassers, being Latino, were Democrats, I expected that registered Democrats would be more receptive to the mobilization effort than non-Democrats.

I found significant and interesting differences in effects among the four groups. Intent-to-treat effects, comparing those in the treatment groups to those in the control group, are shown in Table 1. By far, the largest effect is found among Latino Democrats. Turnout for these voters increases by 7.1 percentage points from the control group to the civic duty group (14.6 vs. 21.7 percent) and 10.6 percentage points from the control group to the ethnic solidarity group (14.6 vs. 25.2 percent). No message effect was found (not shown); in other words, there was no significant difference in turnout between those targeted with the solidarity message and those targeted with the civic duty message.

The effects of actual contact were tested by comparing members of the two treatment groups to the control group, taking into account the contact rates for each group (not shown). Control variables for voting history, gender, and age were included in the regression models. The results confirmed that the mobilization effort had a large and statistically significant effect on voter turnout among Latino Democrats but no effect on other voters.

Overall, the experiment was remarkably successful, and several important findings were obtained. Most important, the experiment provided solid evidence that face-to-face canvassing can have a statistically significant and substantively large effect on voter turnout when the canvasser and the targeted voter share ethnicity and political partisanship. That shared ethnicity matters confirmed theories long held by de la Garza and others that Latino activists can effectively mobilize the Latino vote (see, e.g., Shaw, de la Garza, and Lee 2000). The experiment also suggested that altering the delivered message did not affect the power of the mobilization effort.

Fresno 2002²

As much as the Dos Palos experiment contributed to our understanding of how to mobilize Latino voters, its external validity was limited in that it did not include any non-Latino canvassers. Only bilingual canvassers had been hired because it was expected (accurately as it turns out) that many registered voters in the rural Oro Loma/Dos Palos area would not be proficient in English. To determine whether Latino canvassers are more or less effective than non-Latino canvassers at mobilizing Latino voters, an experiment using canvassers of a variety of races and ethnicities was necessary. This second experiment was conducted the following year, in the fall of 2002. To ensure that registered voters targeted for the mobilization effort spoke English, only young people were targeted.

The second experiment consisted of a door-to-door nonpartisan GOTV drive for the November 5, 2002, general (gubernatorial) election in Fresno, California. A randomly selected list of about 3,000 young registered Latinos (aged eighteen to twenty-five) in the city was divided into two equally sized treatment and control groups. After the election, a list of actual voters was purchased from the county elections office. The final data set was 2,882 individuals, 47 for whom no information about turnout in the 2002 election is available. There were 1,490 individuals in the treatment group and 1,392 in the control group. Canvassers were eighty students of various races and ethnicities, including fifty Latinos, two African Americans, thirteen Anglos, and fifteen Asians, all students at California State University, Fresno. Many of the Latino canvassers had worked on the Dos Palos experiment, and several recruited friends and family members to participate in this second effort.

Canvassing was conducted during the two weekends prior to the election. Canvassers were divided into forty matched pairs (either two Latinos or two non-Latinos), and assigned a list of registered voters. Each individual on the treatment list was randomly assigned to receive a message that emphasized either civic duty or ethnic group solidarity. Canvassers also distributed to each contacted voter a one-page flyer that reinforced the content of the treatment message and listed the address of the local polling place and the times it would be open for voting.

Turnout in the election, particularly among Latinos, was expected to be very low. Factors expected to depress Latino turnout included negligible outreach efforts by the two major political parties and the veto by Democratic Governor

Gray Davis, in early October, of a bill that would have allowed some undocumented immigrants to obtain driver's licenses. This led to a significant drop in support for Davis among Latino voters; however, rather than vote for his Republican opponent, it was predicted that many Latinos would instead abstain from voting.

On the other hand, some factors present were expected to increase Latino turnout. It is well known that the presence of a viable Latino candidate increases Latino turnout (Arteaga 2000; Kaufmann 2003). The 2002 election included several viable Latino candidates running for reelection, including Lieutenant Governor Cruz Bustamante, as well as some Latinos running in close races for open seats. In addition, the Farm Worker Vote Project worked during the final months of the election season to mobilize Latino voters, although their campaign focused only partly on the city of Fresno and was more active in other parts of central California.

*[T]here was no significant difference
in turnout between [registered voters]
targeted with the solidarity message and those
targeted with the civic duty message.*

Overall, 50 percent of voters on the treatment lists were contacted.³ Contact rates were higher for Latino canvassers than for non-Latino canvassers (see Table 2). To test whether the stronger contact rates for Latino canvassers were due to experience, contact rates were calculated separately for teams that did or did not include a canvasser who had worked on the earlier experiment. As shown in Table 2, Latino canvassers (both experienced and new) were both more effective at contacting Latino voters than were non-Latino canvassers. Experienced Latino canvassers were more effective at reaching Latino voters than were inexperienced non-Latino canvassers, but inexperienced Latino canvassers were the most effective of all. This suggests that there is something about being a Latino canvasser trying to reach Latino voters that makes such canvassing more effective, regardless of the experience level of the canvasser. It is unclear, however, whether this is due to increased motivation or an increased willingness on the part of Latino voters to open their doors, if not a combination of both factors.

That contact rates were higher for inexperienced Latino canvassers than for experienced Latino canvassers is somewhat of a mystery. It may be that experienced canvassers were not as eager and that having done this sort of work before, they were less enthusiastic than those who were new on the job. Those who had canvassed for a previous experiment may have been more mechanical in the deliv-

TABLE 2
FRESNO 2002: CONTACT RATES

	All	Non-Latino Canvassers	Latino Canvassers		
			All	Experienced	New
Percentage of voters reached	50.0	43.0	56.1	51.3	60.6
N	745/1,490	297/691	448/799	200/390	248/409

ery of their messages, while new canvassers may have sounded more “authentic” to voters. Because canvassers were not observed during the experiment, however, it is difficult to determine the true cause of this difference in contact rates.

Those assigned to the treatment group were more likely to turn out, but the two mobilization messages did not have distinct effects. Overall, 9.4 percent of the individuals in the treatment group voted in the 2002 election, compared to only 7.0 percent of those in the control group. This difference is statistically significant ($p = .013$, Fisher’s exact test). Turnout for those targeted to receive the civic duty message is 9.4 percent, compared to 9.3 percent for those targeted to receive the ethnic group solidarity message, and the difference is not statistically significant. In other words, while door-to-door canvassing significantly increased turnout, altering the message delivered during that canvassing effort did not have an effect. Nor did it matter whether the canvasser delivering the message was Latino or non-Latino.

Turnout rates were calculated separately for individuals assigned to Latino or non-Latino canvassers, comparing those who had never voted before and those who had voted in at least one of the previous four elections (1998 general election, 2000 primary, 2000 general election, and 2002 primary) (see Table 3). Turnout rates are also calculated separately for individuals living in precincts not immediately adjacent to the university and therefore unlikely to be students, and for voters registered as Democrats and voters registered as Republicans. Because each pair of canvassers was assigned to a specific precinct, control groups are shown separately for Latino and non-Latino canvassers. This holds constant other variables that might be unique to each precinct, making the treatment versus control comparisons more accurate. Most individuals in the experiment had never voted before. Turnout was increased for these individuals from 5.5 percent in the control group to 8.1 percent in the treatment group for those assigned to non-Latino canvassers, and from 8.0 to 8.6 percent for those assigned to Latino canvassers. The difference for voters assigned to non-Latino canvassers is statistically significant.

Individuals who had voted in at least one of the previous four elections were not only more likely to turn out but were also more likely to be influenced by the GOTV effort. For those assigned to non-Latino canvassers, turnout increased from 13.3 to 27.3 percent. For those assigned to Latino canvassers, turnout increased from 9.7 to 35.0 percent. It should be noted that very few young Latinos had ever voted and

TABLE 3
 FRESNO 2002: INTENT-TO-TREAT EFFECTS (PERCENTAGE VOTING)

	Latino Canvassers		Non-Latino Canvassers	
	Treatment	Control	Treatment	Control
All registered voters	10.0	8.1	8.7*	5.7
<i>N</i>	78/782	60/742	59/680	35/615
Nonvoters (have never voted)	8.6	8.0	8.1*	5.5
<i>N</i>	64/742	57/711	53/658	33/600
Voters (have voted before)	35.0*	9.7	27.3	13.3
<i>N</i>	14/40	3/31	6/22	2/15
Non-university students	9.8	7.6	8.7*	5.7
<i>N</i>	66/673	48/634	59/679	35/614
Democrats	11.3	9.4	10.8	7.1
<i>N</i>	49/432	38/404	39/361	23/326
Republicans	7.1	6.9	4.4	4.4
<i>N</i>	18/252	16/233	10/228	9/203

*Significantly different from the control group at $p < .05$ (Fisher's exact test, one-sided).

the frequencies for these cross-tabs are quite small. Still, the difference for voters assigned to Latino canvassers is statistically significant.

That the effect was so much stronger among those who had voted in a previous election to some extent validates current practices. Candidates and political parties focus on mobilizing "likely voters," those voters who have participated in a previous election, because they are more likely to turn out again. As shown in Table 3, turnout among voters who had voted before was doubled (for non-Latino canvassers) and tripled (for Latino canvassers), compared to voting rates for the control groups. For individuals who had never voted before, turnout was also increased, but by a much smaller amount. Even for a low-turnout population such as Latino youth, focusing on individuals who have voted before seems to be a more cost-effective strategy than trying to mobilize all registered individuals.

Intent-to-treat effects were also calculated for voters living in areas not immediately adjacent to campus. This isolates young Latino voters less likely to be students at the university and therefore more representative of young Latino voters in general. As shown in Table 3, turnout among voters unlikely to be students and assigned to Latino canvassers increased from 7.6 percent in the control group to 9.8 percent in the treatment group. Turnout among those assigned to non-Latino canvassers increased from 5.7 to 8.7 percent, and this difference is statistically significant.

Because of the importance of partisanship in elections, intent-to-treat effects are also estimated based on the political party registration of voters. Young Latinos registered to vote in Fresno overwhelmingly choose to affiliate with either the Democratic or Republican Parties. Just more than half (53.0 percent) are registered as Democrats, and a third (32.0 percent) are registered as Republicans. Anal-

ysis of the intent-to-treat effect was calculated separately for Democrats and Republicans; however, because so few young Latinos were registered with other parties, or chose "Decline to State," separate statistics are not estimated for the effect of the mobilization effort on those voters. As shown in Table 3, Democrats were more likely to vote and were also more likely to respond to the canvassing effort than were Republicans. However, none of these differences are statistically significant.

The effect of the mobilization effort was also tested using bivariate (maximum likelihood) probit models (not shown). These regressions included independent variables for voter history, age, neighborhood, and canvasser ethnicity. These results confirmed that voters who had been contacted were more likely to vote.

Fresno 2003⁴

The Latino voter mobilization effort conducted in 2002 confirmed the Dos Palos experiment finding that Latino voters are best mobilized by coethnics—that the messenger matters. It also seemed to confirm that the message—the actual content of the mobilization message delivered by various messengers—does not matter. One possibility left unanswered by these two studies, however, was that the nonpartisan messages being tested against one another were too similar and that message effects might be found if partisan messages were tested against nonpartisan messages. Given that most U.S. elections are overtly partisan, and that partisanship is a strong determinant of vote choice, it seemed likely that partisan messages might be more effective, particularly in a partisan election.

This hypothesis was tested with a voter mobilization effort conducted during the October 7, 2003, gubernatorial recall election, again targeting young voters in Fresno. Precincts with large numbers of young (aged eighteen to thirty) registered voters were randomly selected until 6,715 names were selected. Older voters were not included in the experiment. These young voters were then randomly divided into treatment and control groups, and the treatment group was then randomly divided into two groups, one of which was selected to receive a partisan mobilization message, the other a nonpartisan message.⁵

Students from my political science classes were assigned to complete the canvassing as part of their course work. Overall, one hundred students participated, including fifty-nine women and forty-one men, thirty-three Latinos, forty-three Anglos, nineteen Asian Americans, and five African Americans. Students were allowed to choose their own partner, and as a result many of the pairs were of mixed gender and race/ethnicity. Students were also allowed to choose whether they wanted to do partisan canvassing or nonpartisan canvassing, and those who chose partisan canvassing were assigned only voters of their preferred political party. Students who chose nonpartisan canvassing were either assigned a list of mixed (Democratic and Republican) partisans or of only one political party, but they were not informed of the partisanship of their assigned voters. Overall, fifty-six students

chose to conduct nonpartisan canvassing, twenty chose Democratic canvassing, and twenty-four chose Republican canvassing.

Canvassers went door-to-door to mobilize individuals on their lists between Sunday September 28 and Monday October 6, working around their individual schedules. Registered voters chosen to receive the nonpartisan message were reminded that the recall was a historic event, that the future of California was being decided, and that voting would help the concerns of young people to be heard in Sacramento. They were also reminded that voting is a civic duty. Registered Republicans chosen to receive a partisan message were told that Gray Davis was a failed governor and were reminded of the car tax, the energy crisis, and other alleged failures of the Davis administration. They were told that electing a Republican governor would turn the state around and would lead to lower taxes and more jobs. Registered Democrats chosen to receive a partisan message were told that the recall was sour grapes from a party that had lost last November fair and square; that the problems faced by California were created by a national recession, not by Davis; and that recalling the governor could make things worse by putting into office someone who did not share their values or who did not know how government works. All canvassers were instructed to stay neutral on the two ballot propositions also being decided in the election, although they were allowed to provide factual information about those propositions if asked.

*[In the second experiment,] inexperienced
Latino canvassers were the most effective of all.*

Voter participation in the recall election was expected to be higher than usual, due to the unusual nature of the election, Schwarzenegger's candidacy, and extensive media coverage. On Election Day, more than 56 percent of registered voters in Fresno County went to the polls. Two-thirds supported the recall, and almost 52 percent supported Schwarzenegger. After the election, a list of actual voters was purchased from the county elections office. Of the 6,715 voters on the treatment and control lists, 166 names were duplicates—individuals who were registered either twice ($n = 160$) or three times ($n = 6$). These individuals were not included in the analysis below. In addition, 509 of the individuals could not be found on the postelection list of voters. The most likely explanation for this is that these individuals had either changed their names or reregistered in another county. The final data set was therefore reduced to 6,043. This includes 2,464 Democrats and 3,579 Republicans. The treatment group ($n = 3,371$) includes 1,384 (41.1 percent) Dem-

ocrats and 1,987 (58.9 percent) Republicans. The control group ($n = 2,672$) includes 1,080 (40.4 percent) Democrats and 1,592 (59.6 percent) Republicans.

Canvassers visited each address multiple times, as time allowed, to try to contact voters who were not home. Of the 3,371 individuals in the treatment group, 1,135 (33.7 percent) were successfully contacted.⁶ This contact rate falls toward the high end of the contact rates for the six-city study of young people conducted by Nickerson (2002), in which contact rates ranged from 18.3 to 37.8 percent.⁷

Green and Gerber (2004) found that quality canvassers are key to a successful canvassing effort. A proxy measure of quality for this experiment is the class in which the canvassers were enrolled. While most of the students were from an introductory American government course that is required of all university students regardless of major and is generally taken in the first or second year of college, some were from an advanced political science elective on political parties. In other words, students in the intro course were less likely to be quality canvassers than were students from the political parties class. This is borne out in the contact rates. For canvassing teams made up of two intro students, the contact rate was 30.7 percent (787/2,560). For teams including at least one student from the political parties class, the contact rate was 42.2 percent (227/538). More contact rates are shown in Table 4.

Intent-to-treat effects, comparing voter turnout among those assigned to the treatment groups to those in the control group, are shown in Table 5. In some cases, turnout is higher in the treatment group; in others, it is higher in the control group. However, none of the differences are statistically significant. Neither is there any statistically significant effect found between the two messages; the mobilization experiment simply did not work.

Multivariate regressions (not shown) confirm that voters in the treatment group were no more likely to vote than were those in the control group and that neither message was more or less effective than the other. Voter history (whether the voter had participated in the 2002 gubernatorial election) was a consistently positive and statistically significant predictor of turnout. In the end, the only significant finding from this experiment was the confirmation that quality canvassers are key to a mobilization effort, as shown by the significantly higher contact rates for canvassing teams with a student from the advanced political science class.

Maricopa County 2003⁸

The partisan field experiment conducted during the Davis recall election suggested that partisan messages might be less effective than nonpartisan ones, but the results were far from conclusive. Another opportunity to explore whether the message matters was explored with an experiment conducted in Maricopa County, Arizona, just a few weeks later.

On November 4, 2003, Maricopa County held a special election to determine the future of the county hospital. Proposition 414 asked voters to create a special hospital district, establish a supervising board, institute a property tax, and set a tax

TABLE 4
FRESNO 2003: CONTACT RATES

	All Canvassers	Intro Class	Political Parties Class
All canvassers			
All voters	33.7	30.7	42.2
<i>N</i>	(1,135/3,371)	(787/2,560)	(227/538)
	Partisan Message	Nonpartisan Message	
All canvassers			
All voters	35.0	32.6	
<i>N</i>	(517/1478)	(618/1,893)	
Republican voters	39.8	32.1	
<i>N</i>	(315/791)	(384/1,196)	
Democratic voters	29.4	33.6	
<i>N</i>	(202/687)	(234/697)	
Intro class			
All Voters	33.8	31.2	
<i>N</i>	(363/1,073)	(424/1,487)	
Republican voters	40.4	29.4	
<i>N</i>	(184/456)	(276/939)	
Democratic voters	29.0	34.3	
<i>N</i>	(179/617)	(188/548)	
Political parties class			
All voters	38.0	55.6	
<i>N</i>	(154/405)	(73/133)	
Republican voters	39.1	59.6	
<i>N</i>	(131/335)	(62/104)	
Democratic voters	32.9	41.4	
<i>N</i>	(23/70)	(12/29)	

TABLE 5
FRESNO 2003: INTENT-TO-TREAT EFFECTS (PERCENTAGE VOTING)

	Treatment Group	Control Group	Partisan Message	Nonpartisan Message
All voters	14.9	15.2	15.0	14.8
<i>N</i>	(502/3,371)	(406/2,672)	(222/1,478)	(280/1,893)
Democrats	17.1	15.7	18.3	15.8
<i>N</i>	(236/1,384)	(170/1,080)	(126/687)	(110/697)
Republicans	13.4	14.8	12.1	14.2
<i>N</i>	(266/1,987)	(236/1,592)	(96/791)	(170/1,196)

rate. It was the only countywide question on the ballot, although in some areas of the county citizens were asked to vote on other questions. Voter participation was expected to be less than 15 percent and, in fact, was only 12 percent (Leonard 2003).

Proponents of Proposition 414 included the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN), whose heavily Latino membership relied on the hospital's service. ACORN worked for the approval of Prop. 414 by mobilizing Latino voters in twenty-nine low- and moderate-income precincts where it either had a significant membership or hoped to build one in the near future. The GOTV effort took place between Monday October 13 and Tuesday November 4. The twenty-eight paid canvassers included a mix of full-time ACORN community organizers and inexperienced locals and an equal mixture of monolingual Spanish speakers, bilingual English-Spanish speakers, and monolingual English speakers, of various races and ethnicities. Women, by a small margin, made up the majority of the canvassers.

ACORN's program consisted of a voter identification phase followed by a GOTV phase. The voter ID phase ran from Monday October 13 through Thursday October 30. Canvassers went door-to-door and attempted to contact each voter on the list and deliver a memorized script that reminded voters of the hospital's service to the Latino community and then described the hospital's uncertain future without a yes vote. At the conclusion of the script, voters were asked if they could be counted on to vote yes. When voters agreed to vote yes, canvassers then asked voters to sign a pledge sheet.

The campaign originally sought to visit each of the twenty-nine precincts three times to ID (identify) voters. This consisted of identifying voters who were planning to vote yes or were undecided, to be targeted for contact a second time, as well as identifying those planning to vote no, who were not targeted for a second contact. These efforts were completed on Tuesday October 28. ACORN then decided to canvass for a fourth time precincts with more than 25 uncontacted voters. At the conclusion of the voter ID phase on October 30, ACORN had contacted 3,924 (75.2 percent) of the targeted universe of 5,216 voters and eliminated 626 (12.0 percent) as moved and 49 (0.9 percent) as deceased. The contacted group included 3,204 individuals (61.4 percent) who signed the pledge to vote yes on Prop 414, as well as 6 individuals (0.1 percent) who said that they had already voted absentee in favor of the ballot measure.

Initially, 905 (15 percent) of the registered voters from the twenty-nine targeted precincts were assigned to be in a control group. Because randomization was conducted at the level of the individual rather than at the household level, some households initially contained voters in both the treatment and control groups. This was corrected to include all individuals in those households in the treatment group, thus decreasing the control group by 360 individuals. Those living in households with more than two registered voters were eliminated from the project entirely. This means that the final treatment group comprised 5,216 individuals and the control group comprised 545 individuals.

The GOTV phase of the campaign began on Saturday November 1. ACORN's plan was to contact all voters who had been identified as either yes or undecided during the ID phase of the campaign. The goal was to contact each target three times: once on Saturday and Sunday, a second time on Monday, and a final time on

Tuesday. The script used by canvassers reminded voters of the hospital's importance and emphasized that in a low-turnout election, every vote counts. ACORN also phoned a small number of voters for whom phone numbers were available. During this phase of the mobilization effort, because the aim was to contact everyone on the lists, ACORN did not keep records of which voters were contacted and which were not. However, they did do a "rough tally" at the end of the effort and found that they had managed to successfully make at least one second contact with almost all of the voters on their target list.

*Even for a low-turnout population
such as Latino youth, focusing on individuals
who have voted before seems to be a more
cost-effective strategy than trying to mobilize
all registered individuals.*

The experimental analysis separates voters residing in one-voter ($n = 3,139$) and two-voter ($n = 2,622$) households. These two groups were randomly assigned to the treatment and control groups at different rates; combining the two groups without controlling for household size would introduce a potentially misleading correlation between household size and treatment assignment. A logistic regression was performed within each type of household to confirm that registered voters were distributed randomly to the treatment and control groups. Assigned group (treatment or control) was regressed on a variety of independent variables, including gender, age, precinct, and vote history. The results (not shown) find that none of the coefficient estimates are statistically significant, confirming that the groups are random.⁹

Because each household in the treatment group was exposed to ID canvassing and Election Day canvassing, the independent effect of each of these components cannot be ascertained. Instead, the treatment effect should be considered the overall effect of this particular combination of mobilization tactics. It should be noted that the contact rates in this study were very high: 71 percent of the treatment group in one-voter households were contacted at least once. The rate was even higher (80 percent) among two-voter households. Given the high contact rate, the intent-to-treat effects (gauged by a simple comparison of those assigned to the treatment and control groups, ignoring whether people in the treatment group were actually contacted) and the actual treatment effects (the intent-to-treat effects divided by the contact rates) are similar.

The ACORN effort produced large mobilization effects in both one-voter and two-voter households. In one-voter households, turnout increased from 7.4 to 15.9 percent. The intent-to-treat effect is 8.5 percentage points with a standard error of 1.8. In two-voter households, the control group voted at 6.9 percent and the treatment group at 21.0 percent. This implies an intent-to-treat effect of 14.1 percentage points with a robust standard error (taking clustering within households into account) of 3.6. In both cases, the treatment effects are statistically significant at the $p < .01$ level, using a one-tailed test.¹⁰

Moving away from the single-stage, nonpartisan efforts conducted by various academics, this study demonstrated that such real-world efforts are indeed effective at increasing turnout. Given a ballot issue of local significance, and mostly using a door-to-door mobilization campaign of local residents, turnout in the November 2003 Maricopa County special election was more than doubled. In one-voter households, turnout increased from 7.4 percent in the control group to 15.9 percent in the treatment group. In two-voter households, turnout tripled, from 6.9 percent in the control group to 21.0 percent in the treatment group.

Discussion

Latino voter turnout continues to lag significantly behind that of other groups, but it does not have to be this way. Latinos are often ignored by voter mobilization campaigns because they do not vote, but the results from this series of experiments suggest that Latinos are very receptive to voter mobilization campaigns. Getting Latinos to the polls does not require unusually large budgets or special “Latino” approaches. However, the effectiveness of mobilization efforts directed at Latinos will benefit if the lessons from these experiments are kept in mind by groups trying to get out the vote.

First, and most important, Latino voters can be mobilized to vote by the same sorts of door-to-door, personal efforts that are currently in vogue among campaign professionals. Latino voters are pretty much just like other voters. Former Speaker of the House Tip O’Neill used to tell the story of his elderly neighbor, Elizabeth O’Brien, who told him after one election that she had not voted for him. “I’ve lived across the street from you for eighteen years,” he said. “I cut your grass in the summer and shovel your walk in the winter. I didn’t think I had to ask for your vote.” Mrs. O’Brien replied, “People like to be asked.” She is not the only one. Increasing the Latino vote is, at the most basic level, a simple matter of asking for it.

Second, the messenger matters. Latino voters are more likely to be receptive to appeals to participate when those appeals are made by coethnics and by copartisans. While mobilization messages delivered by non-Latinos can be just as effective, contact rates by Latino canvassers are significantly higher enough to make using Latino canvassers an important component of a successful mobilization effort. In other words, if the messenger somehow is able to establish a common bond with the voter—either through shared ethnicity or through shared partisanship—then

the voter is more likely to hear and be affected by the mobilization effort. Mobilization messages delivered by those unable to establish “messenger rapport” are less effective.

Third, quality matters. Low-quality canvassers, such as students forced to go door-to-door as part of their course work, are less likely to be convincing mobilizers than are paid canvassers or volunteers who are there by choice. Those interested in turnout, who by their own free will (either paid or not) are devoting their time to talking people into voting, are much more likely to be effective than are those coerced into doing so. Canvassers need to be enthusiastic about what they are doing or they are unlikely to make voters enthusiastic about voting.

Finally, the same methods work to increase Latino turnout in a variety of settings, in a variety of types of elections. From a low-salience school board election in rural Dos Palos, to a statewide partisan gubernatorial contest, Latinos can be effectively mobilized to vote. Although most of these experiments were conducted in central California, the consistency of the results in a variety of settings increases the likelihood that the same results would obtain in other locations.

Latinos are more likely to vote if someone asks them, but candidate- and political party-driven GOTV efforts generally concentrate on likely voters, which tends to exclude young people and people of color. In addition, most of these mobilization efforts are manned by non-Latinos. To increase Latino turnout, more Latinos need to have face-to-face contact with a voter mobilization activist. To successfully reach those Latino voters, more canvassers should be Latino. Unless candidates and campaigns adopt the practices shown effective in these experiments, Latino turnout is likely to remain low. But using the same integrated campaign tactics currently focused on likely voters, Latino turnout can be increased substantially, and relatively cheaply, and may even influence election results.

Notes

1. For more details on this experiment, see Michelson (2003a).
2. For more details on this experiment, see Michelson (2003b).
3. Due to the mobile nature of young individuals (Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980; Squire, Wolfinger, and Glass 1987; Highton and Wolfinger 2001), many had moved. Among the 1,490 registered voters on the treatment lists, at least 551 (37 percent) had moved. This does not include those who may have moved from addresses where no contact was made.
4. For more details on this experiment, see Michelson (2004b).
5. Either 75 or 150 names were selected from each precinct to be in the treatment group; remaining names were left in a control group. The treatment groups were selected in this way to create precinct walk lists of identical size (75 voters) for each canvassing team that would be contained within a small geographic area. Because the likelihood of selection for treatment therefore varies by precinct, dummy variables for each precinct are included in the statistical analyses.
6. Contacts are defined as the canvassers actually speaking with the targeted voter personally and delivering the intended mobilization message. Voters who were reached but did not allow the canvassers to deliver their intended message are not included as contacts, and messages were not left with third parties (such as siblings, spouses, or parents).
7. Contact rates varied widely by precinct, from a low of 9.7 percent to a high of 70.4 percent.
8. For more details on this experiment, see Michelson (2004a).

9. Cross-tab analysis of one-voter households comparing voter history across treatment and control groups results in a chi-square value of 2.03 ($df = 4$, sig. = .73); for two-voter households, the chi-square value is .716 ($df = 4$, sig. = .949).

10. Instrumental variables (IV) regression was used to calculate the average treatment effect in both samples combined, using dummy variables to differentiate between one-voter and two-voter households. This analysis reveals an intent-to-treat effect of 9.3 percentage points (with a robust standard error of 1.7), which is the largest intent-to-treat effect observed in any field experiment involving at least one thousand subjects.

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