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Changing strategies in grassroots canvassing: 1956–2012

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Abstract
Grassroots party contacts with voters have again become an important feature of presidential campaigns. In a bygone era, mobilization efforts were the work of local party organizations – the product of their various capabilities and needs and, consequently, less systematically patterned across the country. With the demise of these organizations, grassroots contacts declined, reaching only 18 percent of the electorate by 1992, before rebounding to over 40 percent by 2008. Using respondent reports of party contacts from the American National Election Studies, this article documents how the recent surge in mobilization is tied to the strategic priorities of the national parties and presidential campaigns. They concentrate their efforts on the most likely voters in the most competitive 'battleground' states, resulting in both positive and negative consequences for American democracy. In ramping up party contacts, who is contacted has changed, becoming more readily predictable, and the American electoral process has been transformed.

Keywords
contacting voters, ground game, longitudinal analysis, party change/adaptation, presidential election campaigns

Introduction

The headline is simple: In recent presidential elections, the major parties have become much more active in contacting voters at the grassroots on behalf of their candidates. Campaign strategists, pundits and scholars alike have recognized this new attention to the so-called 'ground war'. Less widely recognized is the story behind the headlines: The upsurge in party contacting is the product of the nationalization of presidential campaigns and its resulting rationalization of grassroots strategies.

A century ago, grassroots canvassing was the province of local party organizations, which supplied dedicated campaign workers to mobilize voters for the party. The vaunted political machines of that era – at their peak, machines controlled over 70 percent of American cities (Brown and Halaby, 1987) – specialized in providing these labour resources to campaigns. Where strong local party organizations existed and presidential elections were coterminous with important local contests, grassroots canvassing was a powerful contributor to the presidential campaign, albeit largely as a by-product of the local organization's efforts to elect local candidates through mobilizing support for the party ticket. Because they were hollow organizations prior to the mid-20th century, neither of the national parties was much involved in campaigns at the grassroots.

With the virtual elimination of the 'patronage armies' under the weight of Progressive reforms, locally driven grassroots canvassing atrophied – often to the point of disappearance in many locales, except where individual local candidates mobilized their own volunteers. For decades, nothing took its place and the ground war was at most an incidental part of campaigns. Parties and candidates were investing their resources increasingly and almost exclusively in media advertising (West, 2010).

But beginning with the 2000 presidential election, attention to the ground war rebounded to a level not seen since the glory days of vibrant local party organizations. In contrast to the earlier era, this new emphasis on grassroots

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canvassing seems to be a product of national forces – the national parties and the presidential campaigns themselves.[1] Not surprisingly, it is driven by their strategic considerations rather those of the local parties.

The national parties' recent entry into grassroots canvassing has followed two paths. First, in the final decades of the 20th century, the Democratic and Republican National Committees began providing an extensive array of services to state and local parties and their candidates, and transferring funds to the state parties to build up their organizational capacities (Aldrich, 1995: ch. 8). The Republicans inaugurated these efforts in the 1960s, with the Democrats belatedly following suit in the 1980s. 'Soft money' funnelled from the national to the state parties substantially underwrote this party building, until the Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act of 2002 all but eliminated this source of funding. Now using hard money, the DNC and RNC have continued investing in state party organizations (La Raja, 2011). The results have been much more robust state organizations, and national and state parties that are more closely aligned in their efforts. Second, after several decades of heavy reliance on television advertising, the presidential campaigns began investing resources to establish a presence at the grassroots, including staff to coordinate personal contacts with voters. Both parties' presidential campaigns since 2000 have placed a new emphasis on voter mobilization.

As party canvassing in presidential elections has shifted from being a prime function of the local parties to a priority of the national parties and presidential campaigns (through nationally arranged funding), it should come as no surprise that the ground war is more dictated by national campaign needs and strategies than diverse localized capabilities and interests. Indeed, modern campaign resources seem to be devoted to where they will most enhance the Electoral College prospects of their presidential candidates – in the dozen or so 'battleground' states that are most competitive in the presidential contest (Shaw 1999a, b, 2006).[2]

Our study relies on reports of party contacts from respondents to the 1956–2012 American National Election Studies surveys to tell the story of changes in party contacts at the grassroots. With some minor variations in wording from year to year, people were asked:

> '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? (If so) Which party was that?'

Their answers, collected across nearly 60 years of nationwide election surveys, provide the only consistent national barometer of party canvassing in presidential campaigns. For decades, there was little patterning to these reports, reflecting, we surmise, wide variation in the needs and capacities of the local party organizations and candidates who engaged in whatever grassroots canvassing was conducted. While these surveys illustrate the modern era of the ground war well, they may have unfortunately begun too late to capture anything more than the faintest trace of an earlier era when strong local party organizations were heavily invested in grassroots canvassing. Nonetheless, the ANES series documents how party canvassing has changed across 15 presidential elections, and how the targets of party efforts may have been redirected in the process to satisfy the strategic priorities of the presidential campaign, rather than those of the local party organizations.

Previous research on party canvassing

The effects of local party canvassing in a presumably by-gone era are shown in the classic studies of Gosnell (1927, 1937), Cutright and Rossi (1958a, b; see also Cutright, 1963), Eldersveld (1956) and Katz and Eldersveld (1961). Since the national parties were not involved in grassroots activities during these pre-modern times, there was no reason to pay any attention to them. Variously using aggregate and experimental data,[3] these studies estimated that effective canvasses by local party organizations added a bonus of 2–4 percent of the vote and suggested what made them so productive.

The seminal survey-based research on party contacting is the work of Rosenstone and Hansen (1993: esp. 162–177), who, using ANES data from 1956–1988, find that age, education and income dominate contacting strategies, with strength of party identification, indicators of social involvement, and characteristics of the ballot contests all affecting the probability of contact. But it is Wielhouwer who has documented more comprehensively than any other scholar how contacting has varied by party and year, and what strategic factors have guided these efforts (Wielhouwer and Lockerbie, 1994; Wielhouwer, 1995, 2000, 2003). In a series of articles using ANES data from 1956 to the late 1990s, he conceptualizes respondents' contacts as a function of their likelihood of political participation, partisan preferences, social connectedness and the political environment in which they reside. He also emphasizes voter characteristics that the parties are most likely to be able to identify from voter registration records, aggregate neighbourhood characteristics, and voter information that parties gather in their canvassing efforts (2003).

Gershtenson (2003) carries the analysis of the ANES party contacting question through the 2000 presidential election, adding a refined measure of presidential competition and developing a more theoretically based differentiation of time periods. Overall, his results echo those of the earlier studies. Parties contact their own identifiers; habitual voters; older, better educated, and higher income individuals; union households; and married people, home owners, and those who regularly attend church. More competitive elections

promote greater contacting, and it is less frequent in the South. More recently, using both 2000 and 2004 ANES data, Gimpel et al. (2007) showed that living in a battleground state where presidential campaigning was intense led to more party contacts.

One common characteristic of these studies is that variations in party contacting are only weakly explained despite the incorporation of a rich array of theoretically relevant individual-level and contextual predictors. Such low explanatory power can result from divergent party contacting efforts across locales where national strategies are lacking. If this is the case, then we would expect patterns of party contacting to emerge more clearly and consistently when party contacting is more a function of nationally directed efforts.

Our article builds on these two earlier streams of research in several ways. First, by extending analysis of the ANES party contacting question through the 2012 election it allows greater coverage of the recent period in which presidential campaign canvassing increased substantially and was guided by the strategic priorities of the presidential campaigns. Previous studies at most provided only an early glimpse into this 'new era' of grassroots activity. Second, the article incorporates measures of electoral competition and party organizational strength to better represent the influence of these contrasting sources of party grassroots effort. We hypothesize that statewide competition in presidential contests is an important driver of contemporary contacting. We also hypothesize that earlier contacting efforts were the work of strong local party organizations; including a variable to measure them enables us to search for whatever vestigial traces remain of traditional contacting patterns. Third, and most important, this article anchors analysis of changes in party contacting in a theory of party change and its consequent shifts in grassroots campaign strategies that captures the new realities of presidential election politics.

Data and methods

Our study spans the period 1956–2012 – the length of time party contact has been measured in the ANES presidential election studies. Three different binary dependent variables are analysed: 'Contact by Major Party', 'Democratic Contact' and 'Republican Contact'.

Our heavy reliance on these self-reports warrants a brief discussion of their response validity. As with measurement of turnout, self-reports of party contacts are not free of error. Research on turnout-related misreports indicates that most are the product of either a social-desirability bias, memory failure or an inadvertent misattribution of the 'intention' to vote as remembered behaviour (Belli et al., 1999). It is far less likely that self-reports of party contact are plagued by the same problems. First, while voting is viewed as a civic responsibility in our political system – the 'good' citizen votes – being contacted by a political party does not carry the same social pressure that would encourage respondents to mislead interviewers. Second, while survey respondents can 'forward telescope' a distant voting experience onto the most recent election, thus misbelieving they have voted, we doubt that the typical person holds on to a memory of a phone call or a knock at the door for more than a month or two following the election, making memory conflation of political contact unlikely. Lastly, people do not have the 'intention' to be mobilized, so measurement error of party contact reports cannot be caused by misattribution.

An additional concern has been raised by proponents of mobilization field experiments that the researcher in survey-based studies 'has no control over, and often little knowledge of, the frequency or nature of political contact' (Green and Gerber 2000, 654). While it is true that we do not know whether a respondent reporting party contact received one call or half-a-dozen, field experimenters similarly lack control over exogenous forces that may threaten internal validity. They control only their own manipulations, not the plethora of competing contacts made by canvassers from 'real-life' campaigns. Ostensibly, randomization neutralizes the potentially confounding effects of exogenous forces. But as Imai (2005, 299) documents, 'the real world is a messy place . . . [rife with] unforeseen complications in the field,' making true randomization no sure bet. In short, we do not maintain that survey-based studies such as ours are superior to other methods of inference – only that it would be incorrect to discount our findings on the unsubstantiated belief that self-reported political contact stands alone in a world of sub-optimal measurement and methodology.

Theoretically crucial to our analysis is a measure that differentiates states based on the nature of competition in each presidential campaign across the entire 1956–2012 time series. For our purposes, Shaw (1999b, 2006) (Huang and Shaw, 2009) has developed the most attractive classification of 'battleground' and non-battleground states based on the strategic choices of the campaigns themselves. Unfortunately, it is not available prior to the 1988 election, forcing us to turn in other directions.

An alternative measure, based on attention from the campaigns, is an enumeration of presidential and vice-presidential candidate state visits, with some sort of threshold to differentiate competitive states from the uncompetitive. This strategy has an intuitive appeal, since the most precious resource of any presidential candidate is time (Althaus et al., 2002). It stands to reason, therefore, that candidates will allocate this resource primarily to those states where the competitive environment demands it. But data from the first two decades of the series, especially in a form that enables us to separate 'campaign' visits for actual campaigning from those for fundraising in states that candidates have no realistic chance of winning, are scarce to non-existent.

The only viable direction is to differentiate battlegrounds from non-battlegrounds based on election results. The most obvious measure, the difference in the two-party presidential vote within each state, however, is problematic in that for several elections (especially the landslides of 1964 and 1972) the threshold for battleground status must be set ridiculously high, lest the resulting measure has too little variation to afford much in the way of comparative analysis with other presidential elections. Another pitfall with using presidential election results to establish competition in a particular state is that campaign dynamics can be easily masked, such as when a state is competitive at the campaign's start, but ends safely in one party's column (e.g. Michigan and Pennsylvania in 2008 and 2012), leading us to expect little in the way of political contact when the opposite may have been the case.

Only one measure proved adequate for our purposes in both its availability throughout the years we study and its sensitivity to the possibility of winning a state for each party: Peter Nardulli's (2005) state-level measure of the 'normal vote'. It is based on a moving average of elections and interpreted as an expected margin of victory for the advantaged party. We dichotomize Nardulli's measure into 'safe' versus 'competitive' states, with safe states being those that exceed a 10 percent expected normal vote edge for either party. A positive coefficient indicates a greater probability of party contact in competitive states.[4] Our confidence in the validity of the Nardulli measure is increased by its strong Cramer's V association with those states Huang and Shaw (2009) deemed to be battleground states (and those both campaigns agreed 'leaned' to one party) in 2008.

Our model includes a variety of variables previously found to be related to party contacting. First, we incorporated variables measured in each election year: 'age', 'income', 'church attendance', 'household union membership', 'race', 'religion', 'strength of partisanship', residence in the 'Confederate South', an additive index of 'campaign activities' and 'voter registration status'. To them, we added three familiar correlates of party contacting that, unfortunately, were not measured in every year: 'home ownership' (not asked in 1956 or 1960), 'length of residence in home' (not asked in 1956 or 1968–1972), and 'voted in the previous election' (not asked in 1984). Finally, we added three state characteristics – the dichotomized Nardulli 'battleground state' measure of competition, statewide scores of average local party 'organizational capacity, and the 'Electoral College vote' of the respondent's state of residence.[5]

Because our dependent variables are binary, we estimate them via logistic regression. Our analysis uses the ANES Cumulative File with the Type 0 post-stratified weight, and the face-to-face subsample and accompanying weight from the 2012 ANES. Statistical significance is determined using standard errors that have been clustered by state to correct for non-independence among errors.

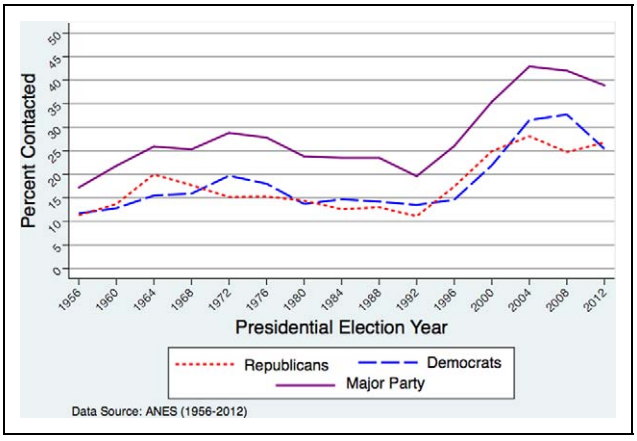

Figure 1. Major party contacting, 1956–2012.

Changes in contacts from parties, 1956–2012

The most obvious feature of voter-reported party contacts during the presidential election campaigns in the ANES series is that, after three decades of fluctuation within the narrow 17–27 percent range, they surged in the 2000 election and beyond. Figure 1 shows these changes for respondents contacted by either major party, and Democratic and Republican contacts separately. Overall contacts rose between 1956 and 1972, then steadily fell to less than 20 percent of the electorate in 1992 – despite a highly competitive race for the presidency that year. From this low point, reported contacts then steadily rose from 1996 to 2004, before tapering off a bit. By then, more than twice as many survey respondents reported party contact than did so in 1956 or as recently as 1992. Interestingly, it is 2004 that shows peak party contacting, not 2008 or 2012 as the conventional wisdom might have it. Nonetheless, the 'headline' that the ground war had become a prime component of modern presidential campaigns is well justified.

Figure 1 also shows that each major party has ramped up its voter canvassing in recent years. Reported contacts from the Democrats and the Republicans failed to show statistically significant differences in most presidential contests of the series. Prior to 2008, only in the landslide elections of 1964 and 1972 did one party appear to outperform the other in the ground war, and in each case it was the loser. The largest party gap in contacting came in 2008 – a likely product of the financial superiority of the Obama campaign, coupled with its greater devotion to grassroots organizing. But Democratic declines remedied this discrepancy by 2012, bringing the parties into contacting parity. All told, Democratic and Republican contacts track one another closely over the course of the series, suggesting that the parties operate in parallel, duelling fashion, as befits competitors.

The major story behind our headline, however, is the metamorphosis from voter mobilization driven by local party organizations according to their interests, capacity

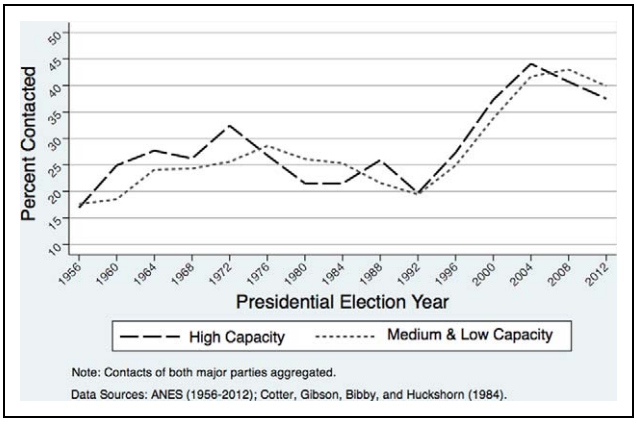

Figure 2. Party contacting by local party organizational capacity, 1956–2012.

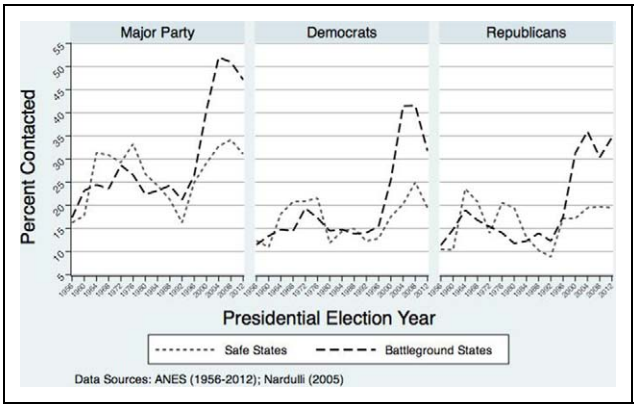

Figure 3. Party contacting by state competitiveness, 1956–2012.

and needs to a ground war organized and substantially underwritten by the national parties and presidential campaigns, where state competitiveness as related to Electoral College math is the overarching consideration. Taking this metamorphosis into account, then, we would expect interpersonal mobilization to be more prominent in locations featuring those local organizations most capable of conducting canvass operations. This should occur early in the time series, if at all, before the presidentialization of electoral mobilization took hold.

Unfortunately, the ANES platform is not conducive to isolating areas where local party canvassing is common from those where it is not, even in the early years of the series. Restrictions on respondent residential information preclude adding such election-specific contextual measures to the samples, even if they happened to exist. Our only recourse in assessing local party capacity is to employ the statewide measures of local party organizational strength developed by Cotter et al. (1984) in their landmark Party Transformation Study. Through survey responses from the leaders of over 4,000 county party organizations in 1979–80, Cotter et al. (1984) estimate statewide measures of local organizational strength for each major party. Their data, while cross-sectional in nature, provide one of the only empirical glimpses into the historical capacity of local party organizations to mobilize their supporters and potential supporters in all of the 50 states. While we have reservations over using a static measure to help identify temporal changes in the patterns of party contacts, our hesitancy is assuaged by one of Cotter et al.'s (1984) major findings: Comparing their data on local organizations to the only other previous empirical analysis known to exist (a 1964 University of Michigan Center for Political Studies survey of county parties), they note that, 'county-level organizations at the end of the 1970s were "*at least as strong*" as in the early 1960s' (emphasis added). While the investments of that era made by the national parties into their state counterparts had noticeably altered the structure and strength of many state organizations, the local parties remained virtually unchanged (1984: 56 f.). A reasonable inference is that local party organizations are a product of tradition, political culture and the state laws by which they are regulated, and are thus insulated from rapid change. Therefore, we view the Cotter et al. (1984) measure as a serviceable, albeit less than optimal, index of local organizational capacity with which to identify changes in the pattern of party contacting across the ANES time series.

Figure 2 compares party contacting in high vs. medium/low organizational capacity states.[6] There is modestly more contacting in the states featuring stronger local organizations, and it occurs throughout the 1960s well into the early 1970s, as we would expect. After fluctuating somewhat throughout the 1980s, there is no noticeable difference between categories of organizational strength from the 1990s onward, when national considerations began to dictate mobilization efforts. This is circumstantial evidence, to be sure, and one is reluctant to make very much of such small differences. The storied local organizations of the late 19th century had so atrophied that by 1960 we can detect little more than faint whispers of the past. Furthermore, the Cotter et al. (1984) measure of local party strength is aggregated to the 'state' level, rather than to the county-level where individual respondents reside. Nevertheless, at least some trace of local party dominance jumps out early in the series in Figure 2.

Figure 3 documents mobilization's metamorphosis in the recent upsurge of voter contacts in the competitive over uncompetitive states. For most of the 1960s and 1970s, more contacting took place in 'safe' states than in competitive states where the outcome was much less certain. This is further evidence that voter mobilization in the early years of the ANES series was not driven by national considerations. Yet by 2000, 'battleground' contacts outpaced contacts in safe states by 10 percent. By 2004, this figure had doubled, before tapering off slightly by the end of the decade. The inference from these results is obvious: The strategy of the national parties and presidential

campaigns, now heavily invested in the business of grassroots canvassing, is to devote their resources to the battlegrounds of the presidential campaign.

It is plausible to expect that national strategic considerations will also extend to the likely targets of the canvassing efforts. Previous studies, anchored largely in the 1956–1996 period, failed to explain much variation in party contacting. We believe this result can be attributed to the absence of a unified strategy in targeting voters before the emergence of the national parties as the primary architects of presidential campaign canvassing. We have shown that as late as the 1960s canvassing was the product of local party organizations, which varied widely in both the capacity for and interest in grassroots efforts on behalf of presidential candidates. Our next step, then, is to test this hypothesis systematically by analysing year-by-year the factors most associated with party contacting.

Changes in the targets for party contacting, 1956–2008

There are a host of possible targets for presidential campaign canvassing. With increased information on voters, the parties' capacities for micro-targeted canvassing efforts are far greater in recent years than they have been since local machine leaders regularly 'walked their precincts' (Gosnell, 1937). At early stages of our analysis, we examined many possible variables that might be relevant to identifying voters for targeting. Few proved to be significant even in recent years, and of course information on most of them was not available to parties until the build-up of voter data bases in the contemporary period. Instead, we focused primary attention on voter characteristics that parties can readily identify – from public voter records, aggregate census and vote figures for areas in which voters reside, and in a few obvious cases, past canvassing efforts. Table 1 presents the results of our regression models employing these variables to predict contact by a major party. [7]

This analysis confirms, now with controls for other predictors, our earlier finding about the transition of voter mobilization effort from a function of local organizational capabilities to a national geopolitical strategy geared toward winning the most competitive states in presidential elections. Throughout the decade of the 1960s, the coefficients for the organizational capacity variable are positively signed (albeit below conventional levels of statistical significance). But from 1972 onward, the signs reverse, making contact less likely 'ceteris paribus' among respondents in states featuring high local party capacity. This relationship is beyond the bounds of sampling error in 2004, and in both 2008 and 2012, if using a more charitable standard of significance ($p < 0.10$, one-tailed). Party canvassing was also significantly more widespread in competitive than in uncompetitive states in the four elections since 1996. By contrast, only once before (in the three-way contest of 1992) did the major parties contact more voters in the battlegrounds. Taken together, these findings suggest that most potential voters are mobilized not because they live near a strong local party, but rather because their home state is contested in a presidential campaign.

Figure 4 displays the discrete change in the probability of major party contact (based on the model in Table 1) from low/medium to high organizational capacity states and from safe to battleground states. We see a now-familiar pattern: local party organizational capacity increased the likelihood of mobilization in the 1960s and early 1970s, before becoming supplanted by state competitiveness after the 1996 election. The presidentialization of the ground war is clearly evidenced in these results.

Table 1 shows that party contacting efforts changed in the past decade in another important respect. As is evidenced by increased values of pseudo-R^2s and the higher number of significant predictors, the targets of party contacts became more predictable as well. Our models fit twice as well in 2000–2012 as they did in 1956–1996. To some degree, of course, this is the product of greater attention to competitive states. Yet the parties were targeting their contacts more consistently in other ways too. The greater control over the ground war exerted by the national parties and presidential campaigns results in greater attention to registered and regular voters in non-southern states, older voters and home owners among them, and on people already involved in campaign activities. Contrary to impressions that parties are trying to mobilize non-voters, it seems that they are focused on the most likely voters – hunting 'where the ducks are'.

Yet, there is some over-time continuity as well in the predictors of reported party contacts. One variable, the number of campaign activities respondents undertook, was significantly related to major-party contacts at the $p < 0.001$ level in each election year from 1956 through 2012. It stands to reason that the parties, then and now, would be contacting those who had visibly demonstrated support for them through attendance at rallies, work for candidates, donations and attempts to influence other voters.[8] A second variable, whether the respondent was registered to vote, attained significance in virtually all of the years. It is understandable that the parties would not be wasting their time on people who were not eligible to vote because they had failed to register in time for the election.[9] Additionally, whether the respondent had voted in the last presidential election also proved to be an important predictor in most years, especially since the early 1970s. A matter of public record, prior voters are obvious targets for party contacts.

Only income comes close to these factors in the consistency of its association with contacting, and where it is not significant, home ownership (which is related to income) often is. People with higher incomes and home owners,

Table 1. Probability of contact by a major party, 1956–2012.

	1956	1960	1964	1968	1972	1976	1980	1984	1988	1992	1996	2000	2004	2008	2012
Org. capacity	–0.16	0.38	0.09	0.04	–0.09	–0.18	–0.19	**–0.56**	–0.29	–0.13	**–0.47**	–0.15	**–0.63**	–0.51	–0.58
	(0.34)	(0.28)	(0.26)	(0.22)	(0.29)	(0.24)	(0.37)	(0.27)	(0.29)	(0.19)	(0.23)	(0.15)	(0.23)	(0.31)	(0.36)
Battleground	0.27	0.21	–0.37	**–0.35**	–0.18	–0.23	–0.01	0.02	–0.09	**0.37**	–0.02	**0.49**	**0.78**	**0.79**	**0.63**
	(0.30)	(0.28)	(0.24)	(0.18)	(0.21)	(0.22)	(0.26)	(0.27)	(0.32)	(0.17)	(0.19)	(0.12)	(0.19)	(0.21)	(0.26)
EC vote	–0.01	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.01	–0.01	–0.01	–0.01	0.01	0.00	0.01	**0.01**	0.01	0.01	0.00
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.00)	(0.01)	(0.00)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
South	–0.27	0.11	–0.15	–0.34	**–0.69**	**–0.49**	–0.05	**–0.52**	–0.41	0.12	**–0.80**	**–0.74**	**–1.42**	**–0.62**	**–0.76**
	(0.37)	(0.30)	(0.27)	(0.29)	(0.27)	(0.26)	(0.27)	(0.27)	(0.33)	(0.25)	(0.30)	(0.19)	(0.19)	(0.27)	(0.38)
Gov. toss-up	0.03	**0.27**	–0.01	0.04	0.16	–0.16	0.03	0.01	–0.03	**0.21**	**0.23**	**0.23**	0.15	**0.27**	0.13
	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.13)	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.14)	(0.16)	(0.10)	(0.19)	(0.09)	(0.10)	(0.09)	(0.14)	(0.14)	(0.25)
Age	0.00	–0.02	–0.06	0.02	–0.05	**0.08**	**0.13**	**0.11**	0.07	0.03	0.08	**0.21**	**0.11**	**0.24**	**0.33**
	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.07)	(0.05)	(0.06)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.06)	(0.03)	(0.06)	(0.05)	(0.06)	(0.05)	(0.05)
Income	–0.05	**0.29**	**0.20**	**0.15**	0.09	**0.15**	**0.23**	**0.12**	0.05	**0.23**	0.00	**0.09**	**0.24**	–0.02	**0.15**
	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.10)	(0.06)	(0.07)	(0.06)	(0.08)	(0.07)	(0.08)	(0.05)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)
Relig. attend.	0.09	0.06	–0.01	0.00	–0.03	0.09	0.11	0.02	0.10	0.07	0.11	**0.12**	0.04	0.04	0.09
	(0.07)	(0.09)	(0.10)	(0.09)	(0.06)	(0.05)	(0.08)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.06)	(0.08)	(0.07)	(0.08)	(0.06)	(0.06)
Union HH	–0.22	0.06	0.13	–0.11	–0.08	**0.30**	0.11	**0.27**	0.01	**0.30**	0.01	0.04	–0.08	–0.08	0.19
	(0.19)	(0.12)	(0.17)	(0.13)	(0.16)	(0.14)	(0.15)	(0.14)	(0.16)	(0.16)	(0.18)	(0.16)	(0.24)	(0.17)	(0.21)
Black	0.12	–0.15	–0.26	**0.44**	–0.34	–0.10	–0.22	0.19	0.13	0.08	–0.25	0.00	–0.32	–0.01	–0.10
	(0.36)	(0.40)	(0.38)	(0.24)	(0.27)	(0.21)	(0.27)	(0.26)	(0.22)	(0.27)	(0.24)	(0.32)	(0.20)	(0.15)	(0.36)
Other race	0.73	**1.72**	–0.54	0.02	–0.33	**–0.53**	–0.43	0.14	–0.15	0.10	–0.53	**–0.41**	–0.59	0.05	0.10
	(1.33)	(0.29)	(0.33)	(0.63)	(0.35)	(0.26)	(0.42)	(0.27)	(0.15)	(0.22)	(0.34)	(0.18)	(0.36)	(0.28)	(0.13)
Catholic	–0.12	**–0.72**	–0.19	0.25	0.05	–0.21	–0.10	0.10	0.19	0.12	0.00	0.03	–0.30	**–0.37**	**0.37**
	(0.24)	(0.36)	(0.20)	(0.20)	(0.22)	(0.13)	(0.26)	(0.17)	(0.15)	(0.13)	(0.22)	(0.16)	(0.19)	(0.19)	(0.21)
Jewish	–0.03	**–1.91**	0.30	–0.28	–0.08	**0.72**	0.64	0.46	–1.23	**–1.37**	–0.09	–0.07	–0.31	–0.38	–
	(0.38)	(0.45)	(0.48)	(0.58)	(0.52)	(0.26)	(0.39)	(0.59)	(0.76)	(0.59)	(0.51)	(0.43)	(0.62)	(0.61)	
Other religion	0.41	–0.38	0.32	**–0.86**	–0.23	0.07	0.20	0.05	**0.06**	0.10	0.07	–0.16	–0.44	0.20	0.15
	(0.31)	(0.58)	(0.38)	(0.43)	(0.27)	(0.28)	(0.27)	(0.21)	(0.28)	(0.19)	(0.27)	(0.27)	(0.29)	(0.23)	(0.49)
Campaign activity	**0.39**	**0.37**	**0.53**	**0.46**	**0.32**	**0.33**	**0.39**	**0.48**	**0.32**	**0.49**	**0.46**	**0.49**	**0.32**	**0.31**	**0.40**
	(0.06)	(0.09)	(0.08)	(0.07)	(0.09)	(0.07)	(0.09)	(0.06)	(0.07)	(0.06)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.05)	(0.09)
Partisan	**–0.23**	0.01	–0.04	–0.08	0.22	–0.15	0.02	0.02	–0.08	0.14	–0.01	0.25	0.01	0.02	–0.24
	(0.13)	(0.19)	(0.12)	(0.14)	(0.16)	(0.11)	(0.15)	(0.12)	(0.16)	(0.09)	(0.11)	(0.16)	(0.23)	(0.12)	(0.21)
Registered	**0.74**	0.30	**0.84**	0.56	**0.79**	**0.46**	**0.47**	**1.17**	**0.42**	**0.58**	**0.72**	**0.73**	**0.75**	**0.72**	0.48
	(0.33)	(0.49)	(0.28)	(0.35)	(0.28)	(0.22)	(0.24)	(0.21)	(0.23)	(0.24)	(0.37)	(0.38)	(0.26)	(0.23)	(0.30)
Voted prev. election	**0.57**	–0.27	0.29	0.16	**0.46**	**0.45**	0.04	—	**0.75**	**0.54**	**0.55**	**0.44**	**0.59**	**0.65**	0.32
	(0.22)	(0.30)	(0.21)	(0.20)	(0.23)	(0.17)	(0.20)		(0.21)	(0.16)	(0.26)	(0.21)	(0.23)	(0.14)	(0.23)
Home-ownership	—	—	0.20	**0.38**	–0.10	**0.43**	–0.10	0.09	**0.34**	0.15	**0.63**	**0.55**	**0.69**	**0.64**	**0.33**
			(0.16)	(0.16)	(0.24)	(0.20)	(0.23)	(0.18)	(0.17)	(0.14)	(0.15)	(0.14)	(0.22)	(0.16)	(0.20)
Length of res.	—	0.01	–0.02	—	—	–0.08	0.10	**0.12**	**0.10**	**0.10**	**0.11**	**0.14**	**0.12**	0.05	0.11
		(0.06)	(0.05)			(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.05)	(0.06)	(0.05)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.09)
Constant	**–2.58**	**–2.87**	**–2.53**	**–2.54**	**–1.88**	**–2.47**	**–3.11**	**–3.27**	**–3.28**	**–4.21**	**–3.10**	**–3.95**	**–3.02**	**–3.03**	**–3.56**
	(0.51)	(0.36)	(0.54)	(0.56)	(0.44)	(0.37)	(0.42)	(0.51)	(0.31)	(0.40)	(0.45)	(0.36)	(0.58)	(0.52)	(0.43)
Nagelkerke R^2	0.10	0.18	0.19	0.14	0.13	0.16	0.12	0.16	0.15	0.18	0.21	0.28	0.34	0.27	0.30
No. of cases	1,607	1,023	1,319	1,206	994	1,686	1,164	1,717	1,576	1,901	1,375	1,257	915	1,834	1,697

Notes: Dependent variable is the probability of contact by one or both major parties. Entries are weighted logistic regression coefficients with standard errors (in parentheses) clustered by state. For race and religion of respondent, white and Protestant are the respective reference categories. Jews coded as 'Other Religion' in 2008 due to respondent restrictions in the 2012 ANES preliminary data release. Coefficients in **boldface** indicate statistical significance at $p < 0.10$, two-tailed tests.

Data source: American National Election Studies (1956–2012).

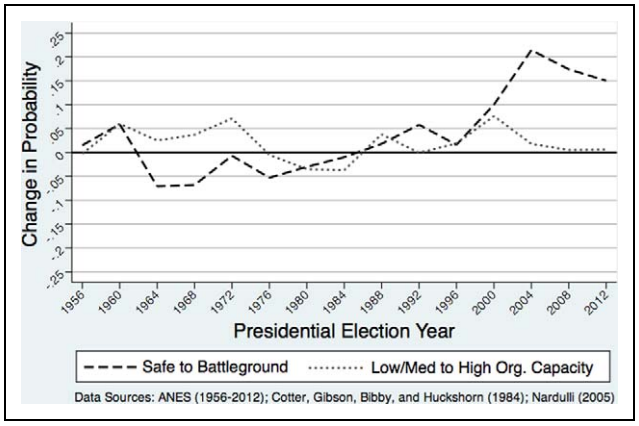

Figure 4. Discrete change in the probability of major party contact, 1956–2012.

who we know from previous research are especially likely to vote, are almost invariably more likely to have been canvassed by a party.[10] Since 1976, age and length of residence have joined these predictors more often than not as significant factors in reported contacts: The older the voter and the longer the resident, the more likely s/he is to have been canvassed. No other factors consistently emerge as significant.

Tables 2 and 3 replicate this analysis for the Democratic and Republican parties separately. In some respects, the parties followed more or less similar contacting strategies as is witnessed by respondent reports: focusing on the battleground states in the 2000s but not before, campaign activists and registered, regular voters. Contacts from each party were also better predicted post-1996 than before. The parties diverged most in their contacts in ways that are consistent with their coalitional bases. Throughout the decades, the Republicans have assiduously courted wealthier voters, and, since the 1970s, older Americans as well. However, it is worth noting that the evidence accumulated since 2000 belies a great deal of journalistic lore suggesting that Democrats have focused on mobilizing the young. Beginning in the late 1990s, Republicans have also directed their energies toward marshalling the support of whites, to the significant neglect of non-whites. It should come as no surprise that this decade-and-a-half brush off has contributed to the increasing detachment towards Republican candidates among non-whites. Democrats, for their part, appear to have written off the South, likely adapting to the realities of the regional realignment begun in 1968. This variable's coefficient is negative in every equation of Table 2, and it is significant in seven of the fifteen; four of the seven significant coefficients are observed in the last five elections alone.[11]

One of the most interesting – and consequential – findings to emerge in Tables 2 and 3 is the recent disparity with which the two parties contact their own partisans: In five of the last six presidential elections, only the Democratic Party was significantly more likely to mobilize its partisans, and the lone exception (2004) was the only one of these contests in which the Democrats lost the popular vote. The Republicans, by contrast, have displayed a more haphazard pattern of mobilization. Only in 1996 and 2008 did the party significantly 'avoid' contacting Democratic partisans, but this did not translate into a greater tendency to mobilize its own. This behaviour is perplexing, given that in well over half of the states citizens must register to vote by party, or at least declare an affiliation as a condition of voting in a primary (making it easier to identify partisans),[12] and may have contributed to the party's lacklustre performance in recent elections.

Of greatest theoretical interest, though, is how much contacting the individual parties did in the states with strong local party organizations early in the time series and with electoral competition in more recent years. Without exception, every post-1996 election has featured a greater emphasis on grassroots canvassing by both parties in competitive over uncompetitive states – a strong and notable departure from the past. The results for local organizational capacity, on the other hand, are more suggestive than definitive. From 2000 to 2008, Democrats diverted their focus from states with traditionally strong local organizations to those that were instead defined as competitive. Prior to this, the Democrats benefited from local organizational capacity only in the high-profile election of 1960, when a big city Catholic was at the top of the ticket, hinting that at least some of the local Democratic organizations survived long enough to positively influence contacting patterns. But, for Republicans, it appears their local organizations had so atrophied as to become relics of the past by the inauguration of the ANES. Indeed, the 'absence' of any significant, positive and patterned effect of local organizational capacity for Republicans only buttresses our contention that the transformation of mobilization in presidential elections is now complete.

Figure 5 displays the change in predicted probability of receiving contact from each party (from the models in Tables 2 and 3) based on changes in local party organizational capacity and state competitiveness. While 2004 remains the high-water mark for mobilization throughout the entire series, the overall inference from these probabilities is unmistakable: both parties are now in the business of professionalized, strategic contacting based on political geography.

Conclusion

This article was motivated by the widespread perception among the political 'cognoscenti' that the ground war has once more become important in American electoral campaigns. The effort presidential campaigns have put into grassroots canvassing and the apparent successes of those efforts in the four elections since 1996 underlie this

Table 2. Probability of contact by Democratic Party, 1956–2012.

	1956	1960	1964	1968	1972	1976	1980	1984	1988	1992	1996	2000	2004	2008	2012
Org. capacity	–0.28	**0.84**	0.02	–0.05	–0.12	–0.25	0.11	**–0.82**	–0.44	–0.13	**–0.48**	**–0.46**	**–0.53**	**–0.50**	–0.41
	(0.07)	(0.31)	(0.27)	(0.27)	(0.27)	(0.24)	(0.42)	(0.29)	(0.39)	(0.20)	(0.28)	(0.16)	(0.26)	(0.28)	(0.31)
Battleground	0.07	–0.26	–0.30	**–0.53**	–0.31	–0.19	0.23	0.13	–0.31	0.11	0.15	**0.36**	**1.01**	**0.88**	**0.55**
	(0.36)	(0.25)	(0.23)	(0.22)	(0.24)	(0.20)	(0.27)	(0.26)	(0.34)	(0.21)	(0.21)	(0.10)	(0.27)	(0.20)	(0.21)
EC vote	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.01	0.01	**–0.01**	–0.02	0.00	0.01	0.00	0.01	0.01	0.00	0.01	0.00
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.00)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
South	–0.46	–0.08	–0.12	–0.48	**–0.85**	**–0.58**	–0.14	**–0.87**	–0.47	–0.04	**–0.86**	**–1.11**	**–1.31**	**–0.69**	–0.40
	(0.38)	(0.33)	(0.28)	(0.32)	(0.27)	(0.25)	(0.29)	(0.27)	(0.37)	(0.27)	(0.35)	(0.18)	(0.27)	(0.23)	(0.31)
Gov. toss-up	–0.05	0.17	**0.21**	0.12	**0.19**	**–0.21**	0.06	0.15	0.06	**0.32**	**0.24**	–0.02	0.10	**0.37**	0.07
	(0.14)	(0.14)	(0.13)	(0.12)	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.16)	(0.13)	(0.21)	(0.08)	(0.13)	(0.13)	(0.20)	(0.16)	(0.19)
Age	–0.05	–0.06	–0.05	0.02	–0.03	0.05	0.04	0.10	0.07	0.05	0.10	**0.14**	**0.13**	**0.16**	**0.26**
	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.08)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.06)	(0.04)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.04)	(0.07)	0.06	(0.06)	(0.05)	(0.07)
Income	**–0.16**	0.14	0.11	0.11	0.10	**0.13**	0.03	0.10	0.06	**0.20**	0.07	0.04	**0.27**	–0.10	**0.23**
	(0.09)	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.08)	(0.10)	(0.06)	(0.04)	(0.07)	(0.09)	(0.07)	(0.10)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.09)	(0.08)
Relig. attend.	0.14	0.12	–0.19	0.11	–0.08	**0.12**	**0.17**	–0.02	0.12	0.10	**0.14**	0.08	0.03	–0.03	0.06
	(0.10)	(0.13)	(0.12)	(0.09)	(0.08)	(0.07)	(0.10)	(0.07)	(0.08)	(0.07)	(0.08)	(0.07)	(0.08)	(0.05)	(0.08)
Union HH	–0.12	**0.34**	0.29	**–0.38**	0.04	**0.41**	0.27	0.12	0.01	0.28	0.06	0.16	0.13	–0.03	0.22
	(0.25)	(0.20)	(0.25)	(0.19)	(0.18)	(0.12)	(0.18)	(0.18)	(0.18)	(0.19)	(0.19)	(0.25)	(0.23)	(0.16)	(0.22)
Black	0.15	0.07	0.38	0.57	–0.32	0.18	0.02	–0.02	0.14	0.24	–0.06	**0.47**	–0.11	–0.02	–0.03
	(0.37)	(0.48)	(0.36)	(0.36)	(0.32)	(0.26)	(0.31)	(0.33)	(0.32)	(0.31)	(0.23)	(0.28)	(0.26)	(0.19)	(0.33)
Other race	0.86	**2.05**	0.06	–0.04	–0.15	–0.39	–0.38	0.22	–0.08	0.23	–0.27	–0.18	–0.35	–0.07	0.16
	(1.24)	(0.33)	(0.51)	(0.90)	(0.48)	(0.25)	(0.60)	(0.33)	(0.22)	(0.32)	(0.38)	(0.21)	(0.35)	(0.28)	(0.20)
Catholic	–0.09	**–0.90**	0.10	0.16	0.02	–0.16	0.03	0.14	**0.43**	0.08	0.21	0.29	0.00	–0.30	**0.52**
	(0.29)	(0.45)	(0.23)	(0.23)	(0.29)	(0.13)	(0.25)	(0.20)	(0.23)	(0.14)	(0.19)	(0.18)	(0.20)	(0.21)	(0.22)
Jewish	–0.32	**–1.87**	0.24	**–0.97**	0.22	**0.98**	0.68	0.30	–1.28	–0.87	0.70	0.56	0.35	0.08	–
	(0.50)	(0.48)	(0.40)	(0.55)	(0.58)	(0.27)	(0.52)	(0.53)	(1.16)	(0.60)	(0.44)	(0.47)	(0.61)	(0.63)	
Other religion	**0.71**	–0.40	0.01	–0.41	–0.21	0.25	0.30	0.14	**0.97**	0.25	0.23	–0.23	–0.16	0.00	0.03
	(0.40)	(0.40)	(0.23)	(0.49)	(0.35)	(0.32)	(0.38)	(0.24)	(0.26)	(0.27)	(0.27)	(0.32)	(0.35)	(0.23)	(0.60)
Campaign activity	**0.43**	**0.28**	**0.50**	**0.43**	**0.30**	**0.30**	**0.36**	**0.47**	**0.38**	**0.45**	**0.43**	**0.30**	**0.13**	**0.27**	**0.24**
	(0.06)	(0.10)	(0.09)	(0.08)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.06)	(0.09)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.04)	(0.10)
Dem. partisan	–0.07	0.36	0.01	–0.17	**0.55**	0.11	0.06	0.24	0.24	**0.42**	**0.37**	**0.42**	0.04	**0.42**	**0.40**
	(0.21)	(0.24)	(0.19)	(0.22)	(0.21)	(0.15)	(0.23)	(0.21)	(0.23)	(0.14)	(0.17)	(0.16)	(0.28)	(0.14)	(0.19)
Rep. partisan	**–0.44**	–0.27	–0.12	**–0.61**	–0.26	**–0.32**	–0.21	–0.18	**–0.93**	–0.11	–0.23	–0.32	**–0.61**	**–0.67**	**–0.68**
	(0.19)	0.33	(0.25)	(0.24)	(0.28)	(0.17)	(0.26)	(0.20)	(0.22)	(0.20)	(0.27)	(0.22)	(0.23)	(0.19)	(0.29)
Registered	0.57	0.25	**0.69**	0.32	**0.76**	**0.59**	**0.54**	**1.76**	**0.81**	**1.45**	**0.81**	**0.66**	0.44	**0.68**	0.29
	(0.39)	(0.64)	(0.29)	(0.41)	(0.30)	(0.26)	(0.32)	(0.40)	(0.24)	(0.41)	(0.48)	(0.39)	(0.33)	(0.24)	(0.29)
Voted prev. election	**0.62**	–0.07	0.22	0.19	0.25	0.28	**0.51**	–	**0.61**	**0.79**	0.12	**0.61**	**0.55**	**0.49**	0.41
	(0.26)	(0.34)	(0.18)	(0.21)	(0.27)	(0.20)	(0.21)		(0.27)	(0.26)	(0.32)	(0.19)	(0.29)	(0.17)	(0.25)
Home-ownership	–	–	0.22	0.19	–0.12	**0.38**	–0.31	–0.07	0.26	0.00	0.31	**0.79**	**0.53**	**0.81**	0.25
			(0.19)	(0.19)	(0.22)	(0.20)	(0.27)	(0.26)	(0.22)	(0.18)	(0.19)	(0.27)	(0.25)	(0.16)	(0.26)
Length of res.	–	–0.01	0.01	–	–	–0.05	**0.18**	**0.15**	**0.17**	**0.09**	0.11	0.07	0.01	–0.04	0.08
		(0.08)	(0.08)			(0.06)	(0.07)	(0.06)	(0.08)	(0.05)	(0.07)	(0.06)	(0.08)	(0.06)	(0.09)
Constant	**–2.60**	**–3.03**	**–2.85**	**–2.59**	**–2.08**	**–2.97**	**–3.59**	**–4.17**	**–4.11**	**–5.39**	**–4.00**	**–4.21**	**–3.31**	**–2.58**	**–4.02**
	(0.55)	(0.52)	(0.55)	(0.51)	(0.52)	(0.38)	(0.46)	(0.61)	(0.33)	(0.59)	(0.54)	(0.38)	(0.56)	(0.48)	(0.54)
Nagelkerke R^2	0.09	0.13	0.14	0.12	0.12	0.14	0.11	0.17	0.19	0.18	0.16	0.23	0.28	0.24	0.22
No. of cases	1,607	1,023	1,319	1,204	976	1,644	1,152	1,662	1,542	1,878	1,354	1,240	915	1,834	1,663

Notes: Dependent variable is the probability of contact by the Democratic Party. Entries are weighted logistic regression coefficients with standard errors (in parentheses) clustered by state. For race and religion of respondent, white and Protestant are the respective reference categories. Jews coded as 'Other Religion' in 2012 due to respondent restrictions in the ANES preliminary data release. Coefficients in **boldface** indicate statistical significance at $p < 0.10$, two-tailed tests.

Data source: American National Election Studies (1956–2012).

Table 3. Probability of contact by Republican Party, 1956–2012.

	1956	1960	1964	1968	1972	1976	1980	1984	1988	1992	1996	2000	2004	2008	2012
Org. capacity	–0.19	–0.16	0.11	0.25	–0.31	–0.07	–0.53	–0.04	–0.01	**–0.47**	–0.23	–0.28	–0.26	–0.48	–0.21
	(0.41)	(0.27)	(0.27)	(0.20)	(0.37)	(0.30)	(0.33)	(0.33)	(0.27)	(0.23)	(0.29)	(0.27)	(0.31)	(0.37)	(0.36)
Battleground	0.37	**0.63**	–0.27	–0.08	0.01	–0.40	–0.19	–0.24	0.02	**0.46**	–0.10	**0.76**	**0.88**	**0.68**	**0.63**
	(0.34)	(0.33)	(0.27)	(0.19)	(0.33)	(0.27)	(0.29)	(0.30)	(0.32)	(0.20)	(0.25)	(0.24)	(0.24)	(0.21)	(0.29)
EC vote	–0.02	0.00	–0.56	**–0.01**	0.02	0.00	0.01	**–0.02**	0.00	0.01	0.00	**0.02**	0.01	**0.02**	0.00
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.29)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
South	–0.28	0.22	–0.19	–0.11	**–0.64**	–0.20	0.03	–0.18	–0.43	0.14	–0.55	**–0.46**	**–0.97**	–0.41	–0.48
	(0.50)	(0.34)	(0.35)	(0.29)	(0.36)	(0.29)	(0.29)	(0.33)	(0.34)	(0.24)	(0.38)	(0.27)	(0.21)	(0.33)	(0.32)
Gov. toss-up	0.13	**0.32**	–0.11	0.08	0.18	–0.04	0.08	–0.23	–0.06	0.20	0.22	**0.32**	0.07	–0.03	0.07
	(0.14)	(0.11)	(0.13)	(0.09)	(0.16)	(0.21)	(0.18)	(0.20)	(0.23)	(0.12)	(0.15)	(0.15)	(0.15)	(0.16)	(0.20)
Age	0.04	0.00	–0.05	0.00	0.02	**0.15**	**0.16**	**0.16**	**0.11**	**0.13**	0.08	**0.23**	0.14	**0.32**	**0.40**
	(0.06)	(0.07)	(0.08)	(0.06)	(0.09)	(0.06)	(0.08)	(0.06)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.08)	(0.06)	(0.08)	(0.04)	(0.05)
Income	0.06	**0.32**	**0.22**	**0.23**	**0.19**	**0.18**	**0.38**	**0.24**	**0.20**	**0.35**	–0.04	**0.18**	**0.20**	**0.19**	0.08
	(0.08)	(0.11)	(0.09)	(0.12)	(0.10)	(0.07)	(0.08)	(0.07)	(0.11)	(0.07)	(0.10)	(0.07)	(0.06)	(0.07)	(0.09)
Relig. attend.	–0.04	0.05	0.06	–0.01	–0.03	0.05	0.03	0.07	0.03	0.11	0.13	0.12	0.07	0.06	**0.14**
	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.10)	(0.11)	(0.22)	(0.05)	(0.09)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.07)	(0.09)	(0.07)	(0.09)	(0.07)	(0.07)
Union HH	–0.36	**–0.33**	0.08	–0.19	–0.04	0.33	–0.08	**0.39**	–0.08	0.15	–0.26	–0.01	–0.27	–0.14	–0.11
	(0.29)	(0.19)	(0.17)	(0.19)	(0.22)	(0.20)	(0.18)	(0.16)	(0.19)	(0.20)	(0.23)	(0.22)	(0.24)	(0.23)	(0.30)
Black	0.24	–0.26	**–0.95**	–0.38	–0.63	–0.30	**–1.27**	–0.27	0.20	–0.33	–0.50	–0.49	**–0.89**	**–0.87**	**–1.11**
	(0.53)	(0.53)	(0.41)	(0.32)	(0.45)	(0.32)	(0.66)	(0.45)	(0.29)	(0.29)	(0.37)	(0.37)	(0.40)	(0.22)	(0.41)
Other race	–	**2.33**	–	0.64	–1.50	–0.45	–0.50	–0.46	0.06	–0.40	**–0.86**	**–0.41**	**–0.88**	–0.17	–0.08
		(0.32)		(0.62)	(0.92)	(0.38)	(0.47)	(0.40)	(0.25)	(0.33)	(0.39)	(0.23)	(0.39)	(0.14)	(0.26)
Catholic	–0.08	**–0.62**	**–0.47**	0.27	0.00	–0.18	–0.08	0.29	0.06	–0.02	0.01	–0.10	**–0.45**	**–0.23**	–0.01
	(0.32)	(0.35)	–0.225	(0.18)	(0.32)	(0.22)	(0.33)	(0.21)	(0.14)	(0.22)	(0.22)	(0.18)	(0.24)	(0.12)	(0.26)
Jewish	–0.24	**–1.53**	0.14	–0.37	–0.10	0.06	–0.22	0.85	–0.64	**–2.17**	–1.22	–0.84	**–1.32**	–0.86	–
	(0.51)	(0.59)	(0.60)	(0.57)	(0.62)	(0.39)	(0.94)	(0.62)	(0.78)	(1.13)	(1.13)	(0.60)	(0.55)	(0.58)	
Other religion	–0.29	–0.48	0.02	**–0.97**	–0.06	–0.01	–0.21	–0.02	0.19	0.14	0.03	–0.22	**–0.59**	0.08	0.51
	(0.57)	(0.68)	(0.41)	(0.50)	(0.34)	(0.30)	(0.39)	(0.32)	(0.35)	(0.23)	(0.44)	(0.28)	(0.31)	(0.25)	(0.49)
Campaign actvity	**0.31**	**0.30**	**0.49**	**0.36**	**0.18**	**0.34**	**0.33**	**0.37**	**0.21**	**0.44**	**0.32**	**0.34**	**0.13**	0.07	**0.19**
	(0.07)	(0.11)	(0.09)	(0.07)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.06)	(0.07)	(0.06)	(0.09)	(0.07)	(0.09)	(0.08)
Dem. partisan	–0.29	–0.41	–0.13	–0.11	0.13	**–0.31**	–0.25	–0.17	**–0.42**	–0.23	**–0.38**	–0.02	–0.21	**–0.36**	–0.22
	(0.21)	(0.35)	(0.20)	(0.20)	(0.29)	(0.18)	(0.23)	(0.24)	(0.23)	(0.15)	(0.19)	(0.24)	(0.28)	(0.18)	(0.27)
Rep. partisan	–0.17	0.22	–0.02	0.53	0.37	**0.33**	0.01	0.26	**0.41**	0.18	0.00	0.04	0.23	0.19	0.14
	(0.20)	(0.34)	(0.21)	(0.32)	(0.27)	(0.18)	(0.26)	(0.19)	(0.16)	(0.16)	(0.15)	(0.17)	(0.29)	(0.18)	(0.24)
Registered	**1.07**	**0.94**	**1.59**	**0.53**	**0.73**	0.43	0.55	**2.34**	0.22	**0.44**	0.38	**0.99**	**0.65**	0.56	**0.65**
	(0.44)	(0.44)	(0.37)	(0.32)	(0.42)	(0.31)	(0.34)	(0.57)	(0.31)	(0.25)	(0.47)	(0.46)	(0.37)	(0.41)	(0.38)
Voted prev. election	**0.54**	**–0.51**	0.23	0.20	0.40	**0.70**	–0.10	–	**0.93**	0.28	**1.04**	**0.41**	**0.53**	**0.91**	0.23
	(0.26)	(0.30)	(0.23)	(0.25)	(0.28)	(0.21)	(0.27)		(0.21)	(0.20)	(0.32)	(0.23)	(0.27)	(0.19)	(0.31)
Home-ownership	–	–	0.13	**0.47**	0.00	0.26	–0.06	0.14	**0.34**	0.21	**0.79**	**0.39**	0.38	**0.46**	**0.66**
			(0.17)	(0.18)	(0.28)	(0.24)	(0.26)	(0.21)	(0.19)	(0.21)	(0.22)	(0.16)	(0.26)	(0.20)	(0.20)
Length of res.	–	0.04	–0.05	–	–	–0.11	0.09	0.02	0.05	**0.11**	**0.10**	**0.13**	**0.12**	0.09	0.04
		(0.07)	(0.06)			(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.06)	(0.07)	(0.05)	(0.06)	(0.08)
Constant	**–3.44**	**–3.91**	**–3.62**	**–3.14**	**–3.35**	**–3.62**	**–3.87**	**–5.77**	**–4.40**	**–5.19**	**–3.47**	**–4.82**	**–3.53**	**–4.98**	**–4.48**
	(0.65)	(0.48)	(0.74)	(0.65)	(0.57)	(0.50)	(0.47)	(0.72)	(0.44)	(0.43)	(0.60)	(0.57)	(0.67)	(0.62)	(0.47)
Nagelkerke R^2	0.10	0.19	0.21	0.13	0.10	0.16	0.14	0.17	0.15	0.17	0.20	0.24	0.28	0.28	0.31
No. of cases	1,607	1,023	1,319	1,204	976	1,644	1,152	1,662	1,542	1,878	1,354	1,240	915	1,834	1,663

Notes: Dependent variable is the probability of contact by the Republican Party. Entries are weighted logistic regression coefficients with standard errors (in parentheses) clustered by state. For race and religion of respondent, white and Protestant are the respective reference categories. 'Other Race' dropped from models in 1956 and 1964 for lack of variation. Jews coded as 'Other Religion' in 2012 due to respondent restrictions in the ANES preliminary data release. Coefficients in **boldface** indicate statistical significance at $p < 0.10$, two-tailed tests.

Data source: American National Election Studies (1956–2012).

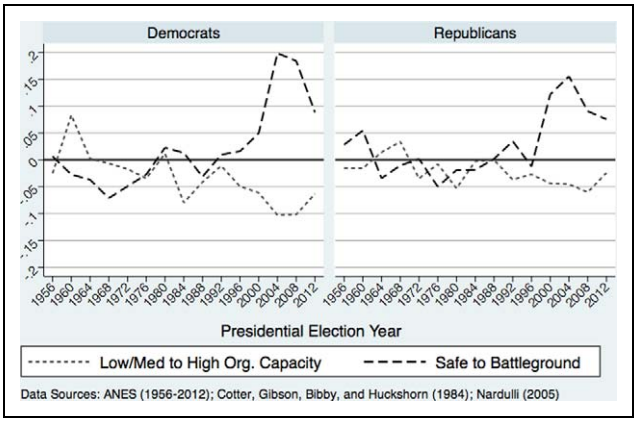

Figure 5. Change in probability of contact by democrats and republicans, 1956–2012.

perception. Our objectives were to provide systematic empirical grounding for these observations and to demonstrate that the ground war of recent years is very different from the much-hallowed ground war of earlier times, when local political machines were its principal practitioners.

The evidence we have assembled from the 1956–2012 American National Election Studies clearly shows that grassroots contacting by the political parties has increased quite dramatically over the last four presidential elections and that this increase is the work of both parties, operating in competitive tandem. What the ANES data cannot show, but our empirical findings strongly suggest, is that this grassroots effort is now driven by the national strategies of the presidential campaigns and their allies in the national party committees, rather than the local party organizations of an earlier era. Our evidence shows clear tracks of such a nationally driven effort: Party contacting in recent presidential elections is focused predominantly on the competitive battleground states, and it is more consistent in its targeting of campaign activists, registered, regular voters and those who are older and more residentially stable. Except for campaign activists, these patterns represent a stark contrast to the indiscriminate efforts that reflected wide variations in local capabilities and local needs of earlier times.

The upsurge in party contacting and its nationalization have consequences for American electoral politics and American democracy. For one thing, they reflect pervasive nationalization and presidentialization of campaign politics in presidential election years. The vacuum left by the atrophy of local party organizations is now filled by the national parties and presidential campaigns. That they have stepped up to make personal contacts with voters is beneficial to the democratic process. Field experiments have repeatedly shown that mobilization heightens turnout (Green and Gerber, 2008). Beyond that, interpersonal contacting provides a conduit for feedback from ordinary people to office-seekers. Political candidates and their emissaries quickly learn that their messages are not resonating at the grassroots when doors are slammed in the face of campaign workers and phone calls are not answered. Moreover, those engaged in mobilization can easily discover in which constituencies they are particularly welcome. In short, so-called 'retail' politics is conducive to a healthy democracy.

Yet, there is a downside to contacting that is driven primarily by national strategic considerations. Presumably there has always been great variation across such a diverse country in personal contacts from parties and candidates, and that continues. But, the variation now lies in the contrast between presidential battleground states and safe states. Americans who live in battlegrounds are the focus of extensive contacting efforts, just as their television screens are filled with political ads. Although party contacts at the grassroots are still reported in the safe states, more Americans there experience the ground game only vicariously, if at all. If the battleground and safe states are consistent year after year (the tendency in recent years), then some Americans regularly experience retail politics, but many others do not have that opportunity. If too much political polarization and negative campaigning turn off some voters, then the electoral engagement that competitive campaigns can stimulate is healthy for democracy – and its diminution in safe states can be detrimental.

There may be a downside to strategic nationalization in another important respect. Contacts were more targeted in the 2000s than in the past on older, politically active, registered and residentially stable Americans – those who already are most likely to vote. All the talk of enrolling new voters and mobilizing the younger voters who have not turned out in past campaigns does not, on balance, seem to have been translated into action – at least not across most election settings. This strategic concentration on likely voters does nothing to enlarge the electorate of a political system that stubbornly brings up the rear in voter turnout among established democracies. The modern presidential campaigns seem to be ignoring the very people in most need of mobilization efforts, perhaps in the same way the machines of yore restricted their focus to dependable supporters.

Whatever its implications for democratic practice, the main headline of our story is that party canvassing in presidential elections reached a crescendo in the 2000s that is unprecedented in 60 years of national polling. And the story behind the headline is that this is the product of national campaign calculations that leave visible traces of an emphasis on competitive states and on mobilizing the most likely voters. Party canvassing in contemporary campaigns, in short, is much changed from what it was in the past, with uncertain consequences for American politics.

Appendix A

Measures

(Refer to ANES Cumulative File and 2012 Time-Series codebooks for question wording)

(Cumulative File variable name; 2012 Time-Series Study variable name)

'Contacts by Major Parties.' (VCF9030; mobilpo_party) Coding: 1 = contacted by the Republican or Democratic Party, 0 = otherwise.

'Contacts by Democratic Party.' (VCF9030b; mobilpo_wparty) Coding: 1 = contacted by Democratic Party or by both parties, 0 = otherwise.

'Contacts by Republican Party.' (VCF9030c; mobilpo_wparty) Coding: 1 = contacted by Republican Party or by both parties, 0 = otherwise.

'Local Party Organizational Capacity.' Based on the average of each state's Democratic and Republican factor scores of local organizational strength (from Table 3.8 of Cotter et al., 1984). Coding: 1 = lives in state with high local organizational capacity (top third of state averages), 0 = otherwise.

'Battleground state.' Based on Nardulli's (2005) classification scheme, a state with 'normal' margin of victory <10 percent in either Republican or Democratic direction. Coding: 1 = battleground state, 0 = otherwise.

'Electoral College vote.' Number of Electoral College votes for respondent's state in that year.

'Confederate South.' (VCF0113; sample_state) The eleven states of the Old Confederacy. Coding: 1 = South, 0 = otherwise.

'Governor Toss-up.' Governor's race in state considered toss-up or leaning to one party. Based on Congressional Quarterly race ratings (1956–2004) and Larry Sabato's Crystal Ball (2008–2012). Coding: 1 = toss-up or leaning to one party, 0 = safe for one party, –1 = no governor's race.

'Age.' (VCF0102; dem_agegrp_iwdate) Respondent age coded: 1 = 17 to 24, 2 = 25 to 34, 3 = 35 to 44, 4 = 45 to 54, 5 = 55 to 64, 6 = 65 to 74, 7 = >74.

'Income.' (VCF0114; incgroup_prepost) Respondent's family income, coded: 1 = 0 to 16th percentile, 2 = 17th to 33rd percentile, 3 = 34th to 67th percentile, 4 = 68th to 95th percentile, 5 = 96th to 100th percentile.

'Church attendance.' Composite of VCF0131 (1956–1968) and VCF0130 (1972 and later); (relig_churchoft). Coding: 0 = never attends ('never' in 1956–1968), 1 = a few times per year ('seldom' in 1956–1968), 2 = once or twice per month ('often' in 1956–1968); 3 = every week or almost every week ('regularly' in 1956–1968).

'Union household.' (VCF0127; dem_unionhh) Household union membership. Coding: 1 = someone in household belongs to a union, 0 = otherwise.

'African-American.' (collapsed form of VCF0106a; dem_raceeth) Coding: 1 = African-American, 0 = otherwise.

'Other race.' (collapsed form of VCF0106a; dem_raceeth) Coding: 1 = Latino or other race, 0 = otherwise.

'Catholic.' (VCF0128; relig_4cat) Coding: 1 = Catholic, 0 = otherwise.

'Jewish.' (VCF0128; no 2012 equivalent) Coding: 1 = Jewish, 0 = otherwise.

'Other religion.' (VCF0128; relig_4cat) Coding: 1 = other or no religion (including Don't Knows), 0 = otherwise.

'Campaign activity.' (VCF0723) Sum of 'yes' responses to: Did R try to influence others to vote? (VCF0717; mobilpo_rmob); Did R attend political meetings? (VCF0718; mobilpo_rally); Did R work for party/candidate? (VCF0719; mobilpo_otherwork); Did R display candidate button/sticker? (VCF0720; mobilpo_sign); Did R donate money to party/candidate? (VCF0721; mobilpo_ctbcand and mobilpo_ctbpty). Coding: 0 = no activities through 5 = 'yes' to all.

'Partisan identifier.' (VCF0302; pid_self) Response to first party identification question. Coding: 1 = Democrat or Republican, 0 = otherwise.

'Democratic partisan.' (VCF0302; pid_self) Response to first party identification question. Coding: 1 = Democrat, 0 = otherwise.

'Republican partisan.' (VCF0302; pid_self) Response to first party identification question. Coding: 1 = Republican, 0 = otherwise.

'Registered to vote.' Composite of VCF0701 (pre-election question in 1956–1980) and VCF0737 (asked in 1980 and later post-election questionnaires); (composite of prevote_regist_addr and prevote_regist_noaddr). Coding: 1 = registered, 0 = otherwise.

'Voted in Last Election.' (VCF9027; interest_voted2008) Vote in previous presidential election. Coding: 1 = voted, 0 = otherwise.

'Home owner.' (VCF0146; dem3_ownhome) Coding: 1 = family owns home, 0 = otherwise.

'Length of residence.' (VCF9002; dem3_lenaddr) Years of residence in home. Coding: 1 = 4 years or less, 2 = 5–9, 3 = 10–19, 4 = 20–29, 5 = >29, 6 = 'all of life' (regardless of number of years).

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Notes

1. Federal campaign finance regulations limit the coordination that can occur between the national, state and local political party organizations and the presidential campaign organizations, and even between the national parties and the presidential campaigns, so much that it is important to focus on the strategies and efforts of both. Voters are unlikely to be able to distinguish between them in the contacts they receive, so we assume that reported party contacts were by either the party or campaign organizations.
2. This starkly disparate concentration of resources had become so visible that Gimpel et al. (2007) and Lipsitz (2009) were moved to compare 'battleground' to 'blackout' or 'spectator' states.
3. For a comprehensive overview of field experiments, see Green and Gerber (2008) and Arceneaux and Nickerson (2009).
4. According to Nardulli (2005), since 1828 or a state's admission into the union, electoral 'upsets' happened in 26 percent of instances where the margin is less than 10 percent compared to only 9 percent of the time in cases where the margin exceeds 10 percent ('safe' states). This, we believe, justifies a normal vote edge of up to 10 percent as 'competitive'. As a check on validity, we obtained essentially identical results using a more restrictive competitiveness measure of normal vote differences of up to 3 percent.
5. Gershtenson (2003), Weilhouwer (1995, 2003), Weilhouwer and Lockerbie (1994) and Rosenstone and Hansen (1993) include statistical controls for contested and open House and Senate seats in their models of party contact, but a recent analysis of elections from 1972–2008 finds no pattern of longitudinal association between these contextual variables and party contacting (Heidemann, 2013). We believe this results from the 'candidate-centred' nature of congressional campaigns, and their overwhelming reliance on paid media electioneering, in addition to the paltry number of competitive House races in any given congressional election. Furthermore, our theory posits that in earlier years, local party organizations directed their resources towards mobilizing voters for local races considered important to maintaining control of local levers of power. We should thus not expect much of an organizational presence in congressional races, the districts of which frequently overlap multiple political jurisdictions.
6. The factor scores for local Democratic and Republican organizations (see Cotter et al., 1984, Table 3.8), aggregated to the state level, have been averaged to provide one score for local party strength in each state. This is theoretically and empirically justified because 'the strength of local party organizations varies significantly by region, but not by state' (Cotter et al., 1984: 57). The correlation between scores for each party within states is a healthy r = 0.78. We divided the scores into thirds, then dichotomized the groups into high v. medium/low organizational capacity.
7. We report statistics for two-tailed tests of significance ($p < 0.10$). Because most of the relationships we hypothesize are directional, one-tailed tests are appropriate, in which case the reported significance level should be halved.
8. We acknowledge that campaign activism can be a product of party contact, as well as a predictor of it. However, when we operationalize campaign 'activists' as those who partake in at least two activities, in every year the percentage of those contacted by parties outstrips the percentage of activists (in the elections since 1996, by at least twice as much). So activism cannot be entirely a function of party contact, especially in recent years.
9. In the earlier years of the ANES time series, of course, registration closed well before the election in most states, making it even more rational for parties to target only registered voters. The variable is just beyond our standard for statistical significance in 2012, we surmise, because we employed a composite of 'pre-election' registration variables. The proliferation of Election Day Registration states in recent years adds an element of convenience for many would-be voters that would not be captured in a pre-election interview.
10. Education is more highly correlated with voting turnout than income, and it is regularly associated with party contacting. We have focused our attention on income, however, because income (or at least residual wealth) is more easily identified from aggregate census statistics (or by walking the precinct) than their education.
11. The coefficient is not significant for Democrats in 2012, we surmise, because 40 percent of the southern face-to-face subsample came from the battleground states of Florida, North Carolina and Virginia. Twice as many southern respondents of these contested states reported contact by the Democratic Party than did the remaining southern subsample ($\chi^2 = 26.8$, $P < .001$).
12. We have coded 'partisans' as strong and weak identifiers, according to the Michigan 7-point scale, since extant research shows these levels of self-identification most correspond to legal registration status in those states that require party registration (Finkel and Opp, 1991).

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The late **Erik D Heidemann** was an Assistant Professor in the Department of Political Science at Kent State University. His research focused on political parties, voting behavior, and voter turnout in the US. He earned his PhD in 2011 from The Ohio State University, where he had won a distinguished teaching award as an instructor. Erik passed away as this article was in the publication process, cutting short his promising scholarly career. This article stands as a tribute to him and his longstanding interest in party mobilization efforts.