Voter outreach campaigns can reduce affective polarization among implementing political activists: evidence from inside three campaigns

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Abstract

Campaigns regularly dispatch activists to contact voters. Much research considers these conversations' effects on voters, but we know little about their impacts on the implementing activists—an important population given the outsized influence politically active Americans wield. We argue personal persuasion campaigns can reduce affective polarization among the implementing activists by creating opportunities for *perspective-getting*. We report unique data from three real-world campaigns wherein activists attempted to persuade voters who had opposing viewpoints: two campaigns about a politicized issue (immigration) and a third about the 2020 Presidential election. All campaigns trained activists to persuade voters through in-depth, two-way conversations. In pre-registered studies, we find that these efforts reduced affective polarization among implementing activists, with reductions large enough to reverse over a decade's increase in affective polarization. Qualitative responses are consistent with these conversations producing *perspective-getting*, which reduced animosity by humanizing and individuating outpartisans. We discuss implications for theories of prejudice reduction.

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Rising affective polarization—animus towards supporters of rival political parties—represents a serious concern in the contemporary United States and worldwide (e.g., Druckman and Levendusky 2019). Affective polarization is growing most sharply among politically engaged strong partisans and political activists—one of the most influential groups in the mass public (Ladd 2018).

In this paper, we argue that engaging in a form of partisan campaigning can actually reduce affective polarization among these political activists. In particular, we argue that implementing personal persuasion campaigns that involve two-way conversations with outpartisan voters, such as through door-to-door canvassing, can reduce affective polarization among the implementing activists. Despite how widespread interpersonal persuasion efforts are in American politics and the importance of the population that implements them (Enos and Hersh 2015), we know remarkably little about their effects on the activists who implement them.

Theoretically, the effects that implementing such a campaign would have on activists are ambiguous. On the one hand, influential theories of intergroup relations might suggest that such activity would only make affective polarization among activists worse. Political persuasion campaigns are fundamentally about winning intergroup competitions. Although contact between groups is often assumed to reduce prejudice, intergroup contact often *exacerbates* prejudices in competitive contexts (e.g., Enos 2014; Lowe 2021). Consistent with this, Paluck (2010) finds that intergroup discussion of longstanding group conflicts can backfire, and Michelitch (2015) finds that affective polarization rises during elections.

On the other hand, research on *perspective-getting* offers reasons to be more optimistic. This research finds that hearing narratives about outgroup members can durably reduce prejudice, potentially by humanizing and individuating outgroup members (Audette, Horowitz and Michelitch 2020; Kalla and Broockman Forthcoming). Many political persuasion campaigns instruct canvassers to ask questions of voters who do not agree with them, prompting these voters to talk about themselves. But when canvassers ask these voters to share their views and stories,

canvasser *perspective-getting* may be an unintended byproduct: those who implement these campaigns end up hearing personal narratives from a number of voters with opposing views. Perspective-getting could reduce affective polarization in this context through several mechanisms. First, two-way conversational exchanges may humanize outpartisans by revealing experiences to which the canvasser can relate and facilitating emotional connections. Second, such exchanges could individuate outgroup members by revealing that individuals who disagree have a variety of individual experiences and reasons for doing so. We argue that just this is likely to occur.

To test our argument, we report three within-subjects studies from real voter outreach campaigns which encouraged activists to have in-depth conversations with voters they sought to persuade. In these studies, we analyze changes in affective polarization among the political activists who chose to participate in these campaigns. These campaigns spanned efforts to persuade voters both by phone and door-to-door, about both a partisan election and an issue, and both during an active election and outside of an electoral context. As we discuss in greater detail, features of these contexts and the diversity of their time, place, and manner lend support for our statistical identifying assumptions. Across all these contexts, we find that participating activists' levels of affective polarization considerably declined in the days and weeks following their participation. Furthermore, qualitative responses are consistent with these conversations reducing prejudice by creating opportunities for *perspective-getting*, wherein activists heard outpartisans' perspectives, humanizing and individuating them.

This research provides theoretical and empirical insights. On a theoretical level, our results provide new insight into the necessary conditions for efforts to reduce affective polarization and intergroup prejudices to be successful. As we elaborate in the Discussion section, our results join other results on perspective-getting as an approach for reducing intergroup animosity. On an empirical level, this research also provides some of the first evidence on the impacts of *naturally occurring* political activity on affective polarization, which is substantively important to

understand in its own right. Substantively, it suggests that political campaigns’ “ground games” may have unappreciated benefits for democracy.

Contributions to the Literature

Our research contributes to two literatures.

First, a growing body of research has studied methods to reduce affective polarization (e.g., Levendusky 2018; Levendusky and Stecula Forthcoming; Rossiter 2021). (This is an extensive literature and, given space constraints, we provide further examples in Online Appendix Table A1.) We build on this research in two ways. First, despite intergroup contact’s prominent place in theories of prejudice reduction, very few existing studies examine the effects of interpersonal contact between partisans in field settings (see Appendix Table A1). Moreover, the few studies that do so generally sideline discussions of political differences, instead focusing on discussions of similarities across party lines (for one exception, see survey-based experiments from Rossiter 2021). Second, although affective polarization is most sharply increasing—and its effects are arguably the most politically worrisome—among political activists, little previous research has focused explicitly on this population.

A second body of research has found that interpersonal conversations can be effective tools for campaigns to change voter attitudes and behaviors (e.g., Gerber and Green 2000; Kalla and Broockman 2020). But this large literature has been entirely focused on the effects of these conversations on the *voters* campaigns target. We contribute to this literature by providing unique data on how these campaigns influence those who implement them.

It would be good news if interpersonal persuasion campaigns reduced affective polarization among implementing political activists, as these campaigns are incentive-compatible for political elites to implement: the very same tactic that builds support for their cause also reduces affective polarization among their base. Moreover, reducing affective polarization could remove a barrier to

democratic deliberation (Chen and Rohla 2018) among activists, making them more likely to be willing to engage across partisan lines in the future.

In the next section, we describe and report the results of three studies examining the effect of participation in interpersonal conversation campaigns on the implementing activists' attitudes towards their political opponents.

Data and Methods

Context of Voter Persuasion Programs

We embedded surveys into the baseline training and endline debriefing materials for political activists implementing three separate voter persuasion programs. Studies 1 and 3 were both pre-registered while Study 2 followed the same analysis as we pre-registered for Study 1.

We first describe the context of these programs. Studies 1 and 2 were embedded within programs attempting to reduce exclusionary attitudes towards undocumented immigrants (AUTHOR CITATION REMOVED). Study 1 ($n = 23$) involved door-to-door conversations and was conducted in Winter 2019–2020 with a median of 23 days between political activists' last conversation and when they completed the endline survey.¹ Study 2 ($n = 23$) involved phone conversations and was conducted in Summer 2020 with a median of 7 days between the the last conversation and the endline survey.²

Study 3 ($n = 104$) took place in the context of a persuasion program conducted by a political organization, People's Action. Political activists from People's Action had phone conversations with voters to persuade them to support Biden over Trump for president.³

¹A pre-analysis plan is available at https://osf.io/c5e94/?view_only=e38a43b662cc4a4ba809398d76853be5.

²This study was not pre-registered. Instead, we follow the same analysis plan as Study 1. The surveys were identical across both studies.

³A pre-analysis plan is available at https://osf.io/7em2a/?view_only=c40755b3b86b43f58aca65df5397d015. We do not have data on when political activists called, so we are unable to calculate the average number of days between the last call and when political activists took the survey.

Additional survey and campaign implementation details are available in Appendix Section C.

Propitious for the generalizability of our conclusions, these studies capture the effects of canvassing across a variety of contexts: as detailed in Appendix Section C, spanning multiple states; campaigns to persuade voters both door-to-door (Study 1) and by phone (Studies 2 and 3); about both a partisan election (Study 3) and a politicized issue (Studies 1 and 2); and both during an active election (Study 3) and outside of an electoral context (Studies 1 and 2). The canvassers for all three studies were paid hourly to canvass.

An important commonality between all of these persuasion programs is that the implementing political activists engaged in two-way conversations with voters. In particular, in all three programs, the political activists would begin the conversations by informing voters that they were there to discuss the political issue at hand. Political activists would then ask voters about their opinion and reasons for it. The political activist would then share a personal story about the issue being discussed. The political activist would also ask the voter if they had a similar story they would like to share. Voters shared a story in 74% of the conversations. After this exchange of narratives, the political activist explained why they were canvassing and why they hoped the voter would become more supportive towards their political cause. The political activist then answered any questions the voter may have and responded to any concerns. Finally, the conversation ended with the political activist asking the voter if and why the conversation changed their mind about the political issue. These conversations typically lasted for 10 minutes. Canvassers received an initial training and ongoing coaching. This approach produced in-depth, two-way conversations conducive to perspective-getting on the part of the implementing political activists, but we stress that our conclusions likely would not generalize to outreach programs that did not have these components.

In none of these studies did we measure affective polarization among the voters, as reducing affective polarization was not the goal of any of the programs; they were focused on changing voter attitudes towards immigrants (Studies 1 and 2) and the 2020 presidential election (Study 3).

As reported elsewhere (AUTHOR CITATION REMOVED), the campaigns were all successful at achieving these objectives, although canvassers were not aware of those results when they completed our surveys.

Surveys

Canvassers were encouraged to participate in the baseline surveys by the implementing organizations as part of their onboarding process. The baseline surveys gathered canvassers' email addresses. After the programs completed, we sent the canvassers follow-up surveys. Both the baseline and endline surveys contained a standard feeling thermometer question that asked separately about feelings towards Republican voters, Democratic voters, Trump supporters, and Trump opponents.

A number of factors reduce the possibility that demand effects would contaminate our findings. The endline surveys were clearly not from the organization, but from us. The surveys were only gathered after the program (and their employment) had ended. The survey also promised that we would keep responses anonymous and confidential. Furthermore, the respondents were blind to our hypotheses regarding affective polarization when they completed these surveys. The programs themselves were not intended to reduce implementing activists' level of affective polarization, nor were they ever described as such to canvassers; they were focused on changing voter attitudes. Finally, the surveys included many other questions, provided by the partner organizations, about political activists' motivations and reflections.

Demographic details on the political activists who completed both the baseline and endline surveys are presented in Tables A3-A5. Of particular note is that, as one would expect, the political activists in each study were highly politically liberal. For example, 74% of political activists in Study 3 identified as very liberal while only 5% identified as moderate and 0% identified as conservative or very conservative. (Nationally, about 25% of Americans identify as liberal or

very liberal and 36% identify as conservative or very conservative.⁴) Furthermore, across all three studies, 60% stated that they had previously volunteered or worked for a political campaign, around 10 times the 2016 national average (Ansolabehere and Schaffner 2017). In Table A10 we assess the predictors of responding to the endline survey and find no meaningful differences between the canvassers who did and did not respond to this survey.

Since all three programs largely were implemented by liberal activists who were advocating in a liberal direction (for relaxing immigration restrictions (Studies 1 and 2) and for Joe Biden's election (Study 3)), we consider views towards Trump supporters and Republican voters as capturing attitudes towards outpartisans.

Statistical Model and Identifying Assumption

To estimate the effect of participating in this political canvassing on the attitudes of these political activists, we use paired *t*-tests, comparing activists' endline and baseline responses.⁵

The key identifying assumption is that political activists' attitudes would not change over time for other reasons; i.e., their levels of affective polarization would not have decreased absent their participation in these programs. We believe this assumption is very likely to hold for several reasons. First, as shown in Table A2, the surveys typically took place over a short timespan (of only a few weeks), making it unlikely that other events would have affected their views. Second, as affective polarization has generally increased over time, especially among political activists, we would expect any bias to cut against our findings, as we should see affective polarization increasing over time, not decreasing, due to background changes. Third, the only salient event that took place during one of our studies was the 2020 election that took place during Study 3, but previous research again suggests that this should have made affective polarization increase, not

⁴See <https://news.gallup.com/poll/328367/americans-political-ideology-held-steady-2020.aspx>.

⁵Our pre-analysis plan called for us to run regressions on data stacked at the subject-time level with subject fixed effects. In Online Appendix D we show that this produces identical estimates and standard errors as paired *t*-tests. We focus on the paired *t*-tests for simplicity.

decrease (Michelitch 2015). (The campaigns in Studies 1 and 2 were not timed to coincide with any particular local or national political events.) Our results thus may understate the causal effects of program participation. Finally, these studies were all conducted at three different points in time yet produced substantively similar results. It seems unlikely that affective polarization would have happened to meaningfully decrease at the three different time periods that happened to coincide with when these three projects occurred.

It also bears mention that our estimates are specific to the kind of political activist who will agree to take part in such a program. This is arguably the most relevant group—we estimate the treatment effect of participation among the kind of individuals who actually agree to participate in it. However, we note that this population does not appear to be unusually open to outpartisans; as described below, their average feelings towards outpartisan voters at baseline were still quite negative.

Results

Across all three studies, we find that participating in the canvassing program decreases out-partisan animus and affective polarization.

Figure 1 shows the raw baseline (x axes) and endline (y axes) ratings of Trump voters (Figure 1a) and Republican voters (Figure 1b) among canvassers who completed both surveys. The black lines show 45 degree lines, so dots above the line show cases when individuals' views towards Trump supporters grew more positive. As can be seen, there was a general improvement in canvassers' views between baseline and endline.⁶

To more formally test for these differences, we conduct paired *t*-tests, as described above. Figure 2 shows these results (exact numerical values are given in Appendix D).

⁶Note that we would expect random measurement error to produce some dots below the line (i.e., apparent decreases) even if no change occurred, so this is not evidence that there were meaningful declines among some canvassers. Estimates of changes over time are not affected by random measurement error, however, so random measurement error would not bias our primary conclusions away from zero.

Figure 1: Raw Data: Baseline and Endline Feeling Thermometer Ratings

Notes: Jitter added to all plots.

First, on the feeling thermometer towards Trump voters, there is an average feeling thermometer rating of 17.9 in the baseline surveys (averaging across studies), quite low. Participating in the canvassing program increases this by a statistically significant 4.5 points on average ($SE = 1.5; p < 0.01$). Similarly, on feelings towards Republican voters, we find a statistically significant increase in the feeling thermometer of 3.8 points ($SE = 1.4; p < 0.01$) from a baseline of 30.6.

Second, there are similar results when we code the dependent variable as *affective*

Figure 2: Results from paired t -tests

Notes: Point estimates from paired t -tests are surrounded by one standard error (thick lines) and 95% confidence intervals (thin lines).

polarization, the difference in affect towards one's own side minus one's affect towards the other. In particular, the bottom two panels of Figure 2 show that affective polarization declined by 6.0 points on Trump supporters minus opponents ($SE = 2.5; p < 0.05$) and by 4.0 points on Democrats minus Republicans ($SE = 1.9; p < 0.05$).

We see no signs of change in views towards Democrats or Trump opponents, so these effects on affective polarization are driven by changes in views towards Trump supporters and Republicans. We also see no meaningful changes in views towards Republican or Democratic politicians, consistent with prior work showing that people have distinct attitudes towards political elites as opposed to ordinary voters (Druckman and Levendusky 2019). Importantly,

however, these results show that the results are not due to canvassers who enjoyed participating in the programs simply rating all groups more highly; the effects are specific to evaluations of outpartisan voters.

These results appear largely consistent across the three studies despite their differing contexts. Although large standard errors in some cases mean that the coefficients are not statistically significant in every study, the point estimates are quite similar.

The magnitudes of the effects we observed are also substantively large. Boxell, Gentzkow and Shapiro (2020) find that affective polarization has been increasing at a rate of approximately 0.42 points per year, making our findings equivalent to reversing approximately one to one-and-a-half decades of increases in affective polarization.

Qualitative Evidence on Mechanisms

What is causing these reductions in out-partisan animus? Allowing us to probe mechanisms, the endline survey for Study 3 (the partisan presidential program) asked the political activists “What aspects of this project most surprised you?” This broad question should avoid inducing demand effects.

The results are summarized in Table A11, where we coded each response into one mutually exclusive category. Not all canvassers described experiences with outpartisans in response to this broad question, but a majority did. Moreover, the most common categories of responses reflect experiences that come with perspective-getting.

First, 26% of responses noted that the experiences humanized outpartisans through emotional connections formed while exchanging narratives. Second, 12% of political activists noted that getting outpartisans’ perspectives led them to see outpartisans as non-monolithic, heterogeneous individuals.

Less common were respondents noting that they learned they shared values with Republican-leaning and Trump voters. Similar to learning that not all out-partisans are

monolithic, this information about shared values surprised the political activists.

This open-ended question also revealed negative reactions among about 7% of respondents. Among these respondents, the out-partisans they talked with may have reinforced whatever negative stereotypes they held. However, these negative reactions represent a small minority.

Figure A1 shows the average pre-post differences in Study 3, broken down by open ended response category. The sample sizes are small, but the largest increases in ratings of outpartisans appear to be among the canvassers who made comments describing outpartisans as less monolithic or who formed humanizing emotional connections.

Discussion

Across three studies, we found that when political activists participate in personal persuasion programs involving two-way conversations with voters who disagree, this can reduce activists' own affective polarization.

The linchpin of the improvements we observed appear to be perspective-getting. Prior research found that voters who hear perspectives of outgroups from canvassers grow more tolerant towards those outgroups (Kalla and Broockman Forthcoming). Our research shows that, in the process of having these conversations, the stories voters tell canvassers back also change the canvassers' own attitudes in turn. The conflictual nature of the context (elections) and highly partisan nature of the subject pool (political activists) made this setting a hard test for the potential for perspective-getting to reduce prejudice, but we nevertheless found meaningful effects.

This study does have two limitations worthy of reiterating and that future research can examine. First, we do not know whether the reductions in affective polarization we observed were permanent. Across Studies 1 and 2, a median of 15 days passed between activists' last conversations with voters and their participation in the endline survey (we do not have this data for Study 3). This is a long period relative to the immediate outcome measurement that took place

in many of the lab and survey experiments in previous literature (see Table A1), but nevertheless leaves open whether the reductions are more permanent. Second, this study relied on a within-subject design, although in our settings it is highly unlikely that affective polarization would have gone down for some other reason during all three of the separate time periods when the studies were conducted. This research design also limited our ability to definitively probe mechanisms.

Nevertheless, our results suggest both theoretical and practical lessons.

First, on a theoretical level, our findings further bolster perspective-getting as a paradigm for prejudice reduction that operates through different mechanisms than contact theory. Much research on prejudice reduction follows from Allport's (1954) insights that common goals and intergroup cooperation helps facilitate intergroup comity, whereas competition does the opposite. Prior research on perspective-getting has shown that hearing perspectives from outgroup members can reduce outgroup prejudices even without having contact with an outgroup member (e.g., Kalla and Broockman 2020; Forthcoming). The present research now shows it can do so in a context suffused with intergroup competition. These findings therefore support an additional paradigm for thinking about prejudice reduction which places greater emphasis on individuals' emotional responses and perceptions of individual outgroup members.

Second, our results suggest a set of lessons for political campaigns. As noted above, not all political campaigns conduct personal persuasion programs that center around facilitating perspective-getting. Prior research suggests that introducing perspective-getting may allow these campaigns' conversations to more effectively achieve their goal of persuading voters (Kalla and Broockman 2020; Forthcoming), but our findings suggest they may also make these conversations more beneficial for campaigns' own staff and volunteers, not to mention potentially for American democracy. As political campaigns already conduct personal outreach on a tremendous scale, introducing opportunities for perspective-getting into more political outreach represents an incentive-compatible approach for reducing affective polarization, helping campaigns more

effectively achieve their goals in a manner that also may have benefits for democracy.

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Online Appendix

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A Additional Tables and Figures

Figure A1: Study 3: Changes in Affective Polarization, by Coding of Open-Ended Response

Notes: See Table A11 for examples of each category.

Table A1: Prior research on inter-partisan contact and reductions in affective polarization

(a) Studies of in-person interpersonal conversations conducted by activists, or as part of campaigns

No prior literature; only this paper

(b) Studies of in-person interpersonal conversations between partisans in field settings

Citation	Intervention	Sample
Levendusky and Stecula (Forthcoming)	Read article about common ground between parties; discuss article in heterogeneous group that includes outpartisans	Metropolitan Philadelphia lab-in-the-field experiment
Baron et al. (2021)	Braver Angels workshop on how to bridge political divides (field experiment)	College students

(c) Online interpersonal conversations between partisans

Citation	Intervention	Sample
Rossiter (2021)	Online text-based discussions about issues	Democrats and Republicans on Mechanical Turk

(d) Non-exhaustive examples of other studies not involving interpersonal conversation or contact

Citation	Intervention	Sample
Wojcieszak and Warner (2020)	Read a mock news story (Study 2); Imagined contact (Study 3)	Nationally representative online survey experiment with pure independents excluded.
Huddy and Yair (2021)	Read a mock news story	Democrats and Republicans on Mechanical Turk
Levendusky (2018)	Prime American identity with a news article	Nationally representative online survey experiment
Levendusky (2018b)	Inducing partisan ambivalence; self-affirmation	Nationally representative online survey experiment.

Notes: There are a number of studies that test approaches for reducing affective polarization and Table A1d does not attempt to review them exhaustively; it merely provides examples. There are also other studies that do not examine impacts on affective polarization, such as Klar (2014), that we do not include here.

B Ethical Considerations

The authors declare that the human subjects research in this article was reviewed by the REDACTED University Human Subjects Committee and was determined to be exempt. The authors affirm that this article adheres to the APSA's Principles and Guidance on Human Subjects Research. Participants provided informed consent.

C Additional Details on Survey and Campaign Context

The three programs where we embedded these surveys are summarized in Table A2.

Table A2: Overview of Studies

Study	Topic of Canvassing Program	Baseline Survey Dates	Endline Survey Dates	Median Days Between Last Conversation and Endline Survey
Study 1	Immigration	Oct. 31, 2019 - Feb. 8, 2020	Jan. 12 - March 7, 2020	23
Study 2	Immigration	June 18 - July 16, 2020	August 2 - 27, 2020	7
Study 3	2020 Presidential Election	Oct. 2 - 20, 2020	Oct. 28 - Nov. 3, 2020	Unknown

Study 1 was administered to the canvassers who implemented the program studied in (AUTHOR CITATION REMOVED). Canvassers had door-to-door canvass conversations in California and Tennessee in an attempt to reduce exclusionary attitudes towards undocumented immigrants. 48% of the conversations were with voters who identified as Republican or conservative. 38 political activists completed the baseline survey between October 31, 2019 - February 8, 2020. Canvassing then took place from January 12 - March 7, 2020. 23 political activists completed the endline survey between March 22-29, 2020 (61% reinterview rate).⁷ A median of 23 days elapsed between political activists' last conversation and when they completed the endline survey.

Study 2 surveyed the canvassers who implemented the program studied in (AUTHOR CITATION REMOVED). Canvassers had phone conversations in California and Tennessee in an attempt to reduce exclusionary attitudes towards undocumented immigrants.⁸ 44% of the

⁷A pre-analysis plan is available at https://osf.io/c5e94/?view_only=e38a43b662cc4a4ba809398d76853be5. Other than the feeling thermometers, we do not report the other outcome measures. No significant movement was detected on them.

⁸This also includes an additional program in Fresno California that did not have the difference-in-differences design reported in (AUTHOR CITATION REMOVED).

conversations were with voters who identified as Republican or conservative. 29 political activists completed the baseline survey between June 18 - July 16, 2020. Calling then took place between July 6 - August 3, 2020. 23 political activists completed the endline survey between August 2-27, 2020 (79% reinterview rate).⁹ A median of 7 days elapsed between political activists' last phone call and when they completed the endline survey.

Study 3 took place in the context of a persuasion program conducted by a political organization, People's Action. People's Action is a multi-state grassroots political organization that made phone calls during the 2020 presidential campaign to persuade voters in targeted swing states to support Biden over Trump for president. As part of their efforts, political activists from People's Action had phone conversations with voters the organization estimated to be Republican-leaning in Arizona, Colorado, Michigan, Minnesota, North Carolina, New Hampshire, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin. 161 political activists completed the baseline survey between October 2-20, 2020 and 104 political activists completed the endline survey between October 28-November 3, 2020 (65% reinterview rate).¹⁰

⁹This study was not pre-registered. Instead, we follow the same analysis plan as Study 1. The surveys were identical across both studies.

¹⁰A pre-analysis plan is available at https://osf.io/7em2a/?view_only=c40755b3b86b43f58aca65df5397d015. We do not have data on when political activists called, so we are unable to calculate the average number of days between the last call and when political activists took the survey.

C.1 Sample Demographics

Table A3: Study 1 Summary Statistics

	mean	sd
Age	24.26	4.86
Female	0.74	0.45
Latino	0.30	0.47
Immigrant	0.22	0.42
Very Liberal	0.48	0.51
Liberal	0.22	0.42
Moderate	0.30	0.47
Conservative	0.00	0.00
Very Conservative	0.00	0.00
Prior Campaign Experience	0.57	0.51
Observations	23	

Table A4: Study 2 Summary Statistics

	mean	sd
Age	20.96	3.44
Female	0.70	0.47
Latino	0.39	0.50
Immigrant	0.48	0.51
Very Liberal	0.30	0.47
Liberal	0.43	0.51
Moderate	0.26	0.45
Conservative	0.00	0.00
Very Conservative	0.00	0.00
Prior Campaign Experience	0.57	0.51
Observations	23	

Table A5: Study 3 Summary Statistics

	mean	sd
Age	31.60	13.55
Male	0.44	0.50
Female	0.48	0.50
White	0.75	0.44
African American	0.15	0.36
College Grad	0.68	0.47
Democrat	0.60	0.49
Independent or Other	0.40	0.49
Republican	0.00	0.00
Very Liberal	0.74	0.44
Liberal	0.21	0.41
Moderate	0.05	0.21
Prior Campaign Experience	0.62	0.49
Observations	104	

D Regression and Paired t-test Numerical Results

Following our pre-analysis plans, the following tables create a stacked dataset with each row corresponding to a separate survey response from a political activist. We then regress each outcome on an indicator for survey wave and use political activist fixed effects to estimate the within-political activist change from the baseline to the endline. As can be seen in Table A9, this produces identical numerical results to the paired *t*-tests we report in the main text for simplicity.

Table A6: Study 1 Regression Results

	Trump Supporters	Trump Opponents	R Voters	D Voters	R Pols	D Pols	Dis. Imm.	Agree Imm.
Change	9.565*** (3.163)	1.870 (4.239)	3.696 (3.096)	0.174 (3.291)	3.087 (3.244)	-0.174 (3.644)	4.957 (4.772)	0.130 (2.685)
Const.	16.48*** (2.236)	74.13*** (2.997)	35.04*** (2.189)	71.17*** (2.327)	26.30*** (2.294)	67*** (2.576)	29.43*** (3.374)	85.78*** (1.899)
N	46	46	46	46	46	46	46	46

Standard errors in parentheses
All models include canvasser fixed effects
* *p* < 0.10, ** *p* < 0.05, *** *p* < 0.01

Table A7: Study 2 Regression Results

	Trump Supp.	Trump Opp.	R Voters	D Voters	R Pols	D Pols	Dis. Imm.	Agree Imm.
Change	2.957 (2.753)	-5.174 (3.271)	2.130 (3.337)	-4.348 (3.056)	1.174 (2.980)	-0.130 (3.591)	2.826 (5.591)	-4.783 (5.670)
Const.	14.87*** (1.947)	85.52*** (2.313)	30.13*** (2.360)	76.65*** (2.161)	20.35*** (2.107)	67.22*** (2.539)	28.74*** (3.954)	85.96*** (4.010)
<i>N</i>	46	46	46	46	46	46	46	46

Standard errors in parentheses

All models include canvasser fixed effects

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$ **Table A8:** Study 3 Regression Results

	R Voters	Trump Voters	R Pols.	D Voters	Not Trump Voters	D Pols.
Change	4.221** (1.759)	3.683* (1.896)	1.952 (1.330)	0.712 (1.378)	-1.442 (2.113)	0.394 (1.490)
Const.	29.65*** (1.244)	18.83*** (1.341)	10.10*** (0.941)	76.67*** (0.975)	83.84*** (1.494)	60.67*** (1.054)
<i>N</i>	208	208	208	208	208	208

Standard errors in parentheses

All models include canvasser fixed effects

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Table A9: Paired *t*-tests

Outcome	Study	Difference in Means	Std. Error	<i>p</i>-value
People who support Donald Trump	1	9.57	3.16	0.01
	2	2.96	2.75	0.29
Trump voters	3	3.68	1.90	0.05
Trump supporters/voters	Pooled	4.65	1.40	<0.01
Republican voters	1	3.70	3.10	0.25
	2	2.13	3.34	0.53
	3	4.22	1.76	0.02
	Pooled	3.75	1.39	<0.01

E Endline Survey Attrition

One potential threat to validity could be that respondents to the endline survey are distinct from the broader set of canvassers in these three studies who took the baseline survey. To assess this, we regress an indicator for whether or not a canvasser participated in the endline survey on a series of baseline measures. The results are shown in Table A10.

Table A10: Predictors of responding to the endline survey

	Responded to Endline Survey
Female	-0.026 (0.065)
Person of Color	-0.139 (0.072)
Age	0.007 (0.003)
Very Liberal	0.051 (0.103)
Liberal	0.115 (0.113)
Feeling therm: Dem voters	0.001 (0.002)
Feeling therm: Trump voters	-0.001 (0.002)
Constant	0.820 (0.193)
Study Fixed Effects	Yes
N	213

Note: Standard errors in parentheses.

The only statistically significant predictor is age. However, substantively, the average age of canvassers who took the endline survey (26.38), is only modestly different from canvassers who did not (28.84). Overall, there do not appear to be meaningful differences between canvassers who did and did not take the endline survey.

F Qualitative Evidence from Study 3

Table A11: Open-ended coding from Study 3, response to “What aspects of this project most surprised you?”

Category	Frequency	Example
Humanizing emotional connections	26%	“How willing people are to talk to a stranger on the phone. The thing I’ll take away from this job most of all is that everyone wants someone to ask them how they’re doing, and to really listen, and pay attention. A lot of people hang up on you when you ask them about their life, it’s true, but a shocking number of people also desperately want to build a connection with you as long as you’re brave enough to ask them how they are, and patient enough to REALLY listen to their answer. Everyone is always just reaching out and looking for human connections”
Individuated, non-monolithic	12%	“I was expecting more similarities among the ideals held by undecided voters, but it really is true that no two voters are the same and it really challenged my ideas of what a trump-leaning voter would sound like.”
Shared values	6%	“The humanity of Trump voters most surprised me in this project. Even while being able to identify how both political parties demonize the other, I still fell victim to viewing Trump supporters in this way. I realized, however, when encountering them on the phones, that most Trump supporters are not that different from ourselves—they want the same things and hurt for the same reason. Most are not hateful in the way that they are portrayed to be, and it was refreshing to make emotional connections with some of them.”
Other (Program)	28%	“My coworkers. I didn’t expect the environment to be quite this good.”
Other (Personal skills)	7%	“The emotional labor that can go into this work. Having Leaders like [NAMES] that were transparent about the work and their willingness to supported us in any way as we did this work. 10 years in the work force and this was the first job I felt truly valued for my individuality skill set and still pushed to developed those skills rather than pushed to conform to a work style that was uncomfortable to me.”
Negative	7%	“The surprising vitriol and racism from certain individuals”
Skipped	15%	n/a

Notes: $n = 104$. Each response coded into only one category. The authors individually coded each statement, blind to each other’s coding. The authors agreed on 90% of the codings after this initial pass. For the remainder, the authors discussed an appropriate coding.

G References for Online Appendix

References for Appendices

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