B.J.Pol.S. **38,** 565–574 *Copyright © 2008 Cambridge University Press*
doi:10.1017/S0007123408000288 *Printed in the United Kingdom*

Notes and Comments

How Different Are Telephoning and Canvassing? Results from a 'Get Out the Vote' Field Experiment in the British 2005 General Election

PETER JOHN AND TESSA BRANNAN*

Can the positive impact of non-partisan 'Get Out the Vote' (GOTV) campaigns be generalized to a variety of institutional and cultural contexts? Gerber, Green and colleagues tested for the effects of these campaigns in a series of pioneering field experiments, which show that a face-to-face contact from a non-partisan source, carried out by a field force calling at the homes of citizens seeking to persuade them to vote, can increase voter turnout.[1] Further experiments find that telephoning has an impact ranging from ineffective to positive, depending on the nature of the call; and there are positive, if weaker, results for other forms of intervention, such as door postings and leafleting; none

* Institute for Political and Economic Governance, School of Social Sciences, University of Manchester. The authors wish to thank the University of Manchester and the McDougall Trust, which funded the project. They also wish to thank the research students who carried out the canvassing and Vision 22 for the telephone survey. The comments and support of colleagues at Manchester and from Don Green at Yale have been greatly appreciated. Helpful points were made at a panel on the experimental method in political science at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Philadelphia, 2006.

[1] Kevin Arceneaux, 'Using Cluster Randomized Field Experiments to Study Voting Behavior', *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 601, Special Issue, edited by Donald P. Green and Alan S. Gerber, *The Science of Voter Mobilization* (2005), 169–79; Elizabeth A. Bennion, 'Caught in the Ground Wars: Mobilizing Voters during a Competitive Congressional Campaign', *Annals AAPSS*, 601, Special Issue (2005), 123–41; Alan S. Gerber and Donald P. Green, 'The Effects of Canvassing, Direct Mail, and Telephone Contact on Voter Turnout: A Field Experiment', *American Political Science Review*, 94 (2000), 653–63; Alan S. Gerber and Donald P. Green, 'The Effect of a Nonpartisan Get-Out-the-Vote Drive: An Experimental Study of Leafleting', *Journal of Politics*, 62 (2000), 846–57; Alan. S. Gerber and Donald P. Green, 'Do Phone Calls Increase Voter Turnout? A Field Experiment', *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 65 (2001), 75–85; Alan S. Gerber and Donald P. Green, 'Do Phone Calls Increase Voter Turnout? An Update', *Annals AAPSS*, 601, Special Issue (2005), 142–54; Alan S. Gerber, Donald P. Green and Matthew N. Green, 'The Effects of Partisan Direct Mail on Voter Turnout', *Electoral Studies*, 22 (2003), 563–79; Donald P. Green, 'Mobilizing African-Americans Using Direct Mail and Commercial Phone Banks: A Field Experiment', *Political Research Quarterly*, 57 (2004), 245–55; Donald P. Green, Alan S. Gerber and David W. Nickerson, 'Getting Out the Vote in Local Elections: Results from Six Door-to-door Canvassing Experiments', *Journal of Politics*, 65 (2003), 1083–96; Donald P. Green and Ron Shachar, 'Habit Formation and Political Behaviour: Evidence of Consuetude in Voter Turnout', *British Journal of Political Science*, 30 (2000), 561–73; Melissa R. Michelson, 'Meeting the Challenge of Latino Voter Mobilization', *Annals AAPSS*, 601, Special Issue (2005), 85–101; John E. McNulty, 'Phone-Based GOTV – What's on the Line? Field Experiments with Varied Partisan Components, 2002–2003', *Annals AAPSS*, 601, Special Issue (2005), 41–65; David Nickerson, 'Volunteer Phone Calls Can Increase Turnout', *American Politics Research*, 34 (2006), 271–92; Ricardo Ramirez, 'Giving Voice to Latino Voters: A Field Experiment on the Effectiveness of a National Nonpartisan Mobilization Effort', *Annals AAPSS*, 601, Special Issue (2005), 66–84; Neema Trivedi, 'The Effect of Identity-Based GOTV Direct Mail Appeals on the Turnout of Indian Americans', *Annals AAPSS*, 601, Special Issue (2005), 115–22; Janelle S. Wong, 'Mobilizing Asian American Voters: A Field Experiment', *Annals AAPSS*, 601, Special Issue (2005), 102–14. Many of these studies are summarized in Donald P. Green and Alan S. Gerber, *Get Out The Vote: How to Increase Voter Turnout* (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 2004).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123408000288 Published online by Cambridge University Press

for e-mail; and weakly positive or null impacts from rote telephoning. Many of these results derive from single cases or from a limited number of research sites; however, the culmination of these findings allows political scientists to be confident of the impact and hierarchy of these interventions. Although GOTV studies of this kind cannot adjudicate authoritatively on theories of mobilization, the difference in impact between the types of intervention, in particular the greater success of personalized messages, implies that it is the personal and face-to-face basis of influence that has an effect, rather than the types of message received and the simple provision of information.

So far most of this kind of research has been carried out in the United States, which means that, even with its variety of groups and locations, the range of variation in the institutional frameworks and social conditions is limited to the one-country case.[2] For a greater degree of universality, interventions in non-US research sites can ascertain whether the impacts of GOTV interventions may be generalized comparatively. In addition, they can appraise the strength of effects discovered in the United States and find out the extent to which context matters in the efficacy of GOTV campaigns. The British political system has many core institutional features similar to those of the United States, such as the dominance of two main political parties and a first-past-the-post electoral system for national and local polls, which make it a good candidate for replication of the method. Though Britain does not have such a tradition of non-partisan GOTV campaigning, in recent years the concern with declining voter turnout has led official bodies, such as the Electoral Commission, to sponsor such activities.[3] However, the United States has a tradition of strong group membership and a particular style of campaigning and voter mobilization, which may mean that the impact of GOTV campaigns could vary when applied elsewhere. In addition, British electoral rules differ from those in the United States, such as its compulsory electoral registration, which may moderate the impact of a GOTV effort. The question to ask is whether institutions and cultures are so different as to make GOTV programmes contingent on a variety of local circumstances or whether the salience of electoral mobilization techniques transcends these contexts?

To begin to answer this question, this Note reports on the effects of two individual-level GOTV interventions on voter turnout, implemented in the campaign period before the British general election of 5 May 2005. The only previous study of this kind in Britain was carried out in 1970 by Bochel and Denver, who canvassed one of two tower blocks on a public housing estate in Dundee on the assumption that their residents were largely identical in background, and then compared the impact of the canvassing on voter turnout between the two locations.[4] This was a classic contribution to the study of campaigning, but it did not meet the requirements of a randomized control trial – where the investigators randomize the allocation of subjects to the control and treatment groups – so it cannot be used in a comparison with the impacts of the US studies, especially in today's changing electoral context. An additional innovation in our GOTV experiment is its direct comparison of door-to-door and telephone canvassing in the same study design.

STUDY DESIGN AND METHODS

We selected one constituency in which to carry out the research. A single or limited number of locations is needed to co-ordinate a ground force for a door-to-door campaign, and this kind of selection follows the pattern of the US studies, such as the location of the first Gerber and Green study in New Haven.[5] A larger sample size would offer the potential for comparative analysis, for example of constituencies of different party political hues or levels of competitiveness. However,

[2] The main non-US study is Mei Guan and Donald P. Green, 'Noncoercive Mobilization in State-Controlled Elections: An Experimental Study in Beijing', *Comparative Political Studies*, 39 (2006), 1175–93.

[3] The Electoral Commission funds projects involving voter mobilization at the community level, see Electoral Commission, *New Initiatives Fund: Information for Prospective Applicants* (London: Electoral Commission, 2003).

[4] J. M. Bochel and David Denver, 'Canvassing, Turnout and Party Support: An Experiment', *British Journal of Political Science*, 1 (1971), 257–69.

[5] Gerber and Green, 'The Effects of Canvassing, Direct Mail and Telephone Contact on Voter Turnout'.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123408000288 Published online by Cambridge University Press

the current design is an ideal testing ground for the implementation of this experimental method and provides the baseline for future studies. Subsequently, more complex research designs involving comparative elements could be introduced, varying the types of intervention, or the characteristics of areas or individuals.

We opted for Wythenshawe and Sale East in Manchester which had a turnout in the 2001 general election of 48.6 per cent, much lower than the national average of 59.4 per cent. It also had a very safe majority for the sitting Labour Member of Parliament, which, on one hand, protected us from any allegation of seeking to influence the outcome – as well as the level of turnout – of the election in that constituency. On the other hand, a safe seat presents its own problems because, from a short-term perspective, it is not instrumentally rational for voters to go the polls if the outcome is predetermined, which privileges justifications based on civic duty rather than those that appeal to the likely impact on outcomes. In practice, we did not find any voters in Wythenshawe who raised this problem directly. Logistical considerations, such as proximity and accessibility to the university, were also taken into account in the selection of the constituency.

We sourced the names, addresses and telephone numbers of individuals in the constituency from the electoral register, which was matched with BT OCIS, a central repository database which is updated daily and matches contacts with telephone numbers. As such, we only included in our sample registered voters for whom we were able to obtain landline telephone numbers. We randomly selected three groups of 2,300 from the 9,976 available for the treatment and control groups.[6]

Carrying Out the Interventions

We selected one treatment group to receive the telephone call (the telephone group); the other to receive the visit (the canvassing group). We had no contact with the control group. We sent letters to everyone in the treatment groups to forewarn them of the imminent contact. In the letters we badged ourselves as a university 'Get Out the Vote Campaign', a non-party political group supported by the McDougall Trust interested in increasing electoral turnout. The letters advised recipients that we would be contacting them to discuss voting and provided contact details to enable recipients to register any concerns. We are confident that such letters are not an additional treatment as the US studies show that letter-based campaigns are ineffective.[7] In addition, while it provided details of the campaign website, which listed reasons to vote and sources of further information and support, the letter itself was neutral and concentrated on alerting the respondent to the visit.

The door-to-door canvassing was co-ordinated by a research institute within the university. The canvassers were predominantly postgraduate students, who were enthusiastic about raising electoral turnout, had a good knowledge of the research topic, and an interest in the objectives of the project. As well as offering training and setting up procedures to ensure their safety, we devised a script for the canvassers and callers to work from, which we modified after the pilots for both canvassing and telephoning; this was intended as a guide to be used in a fairly informal conversation rather than a text to which they should rigidly adhere. In the course of the conversation, which was planned to last up to five minutes, the callers and canvassers were instructed to ask three questions: generally speaking, do you think voting is important; do you intend to vote; and will you be voting by post?

However, the main purpose of the conversation was to persuade the citizen to vote, both by providing reasons why it is important and by attempting to respond to any concerns about the voting process. The reasons we provided for the importance of voting were:

—It keeps our democratic system working. If not many people voted it could threaten our democracy. Turnout has been falling in recent elections and was only 59 per cent in the last general election.

[6] The randomization was carried out using Microsoft Excel.

[7] Gerber and Green, 'The Effects of Canvassing, Direct Mail and Telephone Contact on Voter Turnout'.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123408000288 Published online by Cambridge University Press

—Earlier generations fought for the right to vote and in many countries people are still fighting for that right.
—Voting gives you a voice and a chance to express your views about issues which affect your life. You *can* influence the outcome and politicians have to listen to communities where more people turn out to vote as their position depends on those people.
—Voting is easy to do. It doesn't take much time or effort but it is your chance to make a difference.

We also invited respondents to add their own reasons.

Contrary to Gerber and Green, we did not randomly or systematically vary the message conveyed by the canvassers.[8] This decision primarily reflected our desire to ensure the largest possible sample size in order to establish statistical significance in comparing both treatment groups with the control group and with each other. However, future studies offer the potential to compare the effects of, for example, civic duty, neighbourhood solidarity and close election messages. While the variation of message in Gerber and Green's studies had little impact on level of turnout, it would be interesting to ascertain whether this is also the case in other national contexts.

For twelve days (usually during the afternoons and early evenings as well as Saturday mornings) over the two weeks prior to the general election, canvassers knocked on doors, following pre-assigned routes around the sample addresses in the constituency. They conducted brief conversations with named contacts when they attempted to persuade them of the merits of voting. The results were recorded on the sheets we provided. Time and resources permitting, the team carried out repeat visits if the initial attempted contact had been unsuccessful.[9]

The telephone calls were conducted by a local survey company and took place between 20 and 27 April 2005.[10] They used the same script as the canvassers, thus enabling a comparison of the impact of each method. They made up to two repeat calls.

Collecting and Categorizing the Responses

Following completion of the canvassing and calling, we coded the contacts into categories to reflect the diverse range of responses we encountered. While the most important distinction for the purposes of the experiment was whether contact had been made or not, there were also a variety of other responses. Recording these was of practical benefit, as well as of wider interest, ensuring that we did not call back at addresses where the intended respondent did not want to participate or no longer lived.

During the survey we encountered families or others who reported the person we were seeking had died. Even with electoral registers updated just before the intervention, we were concerned about the quality of these data, and raised the issue with the company that supplied it. Whilst assuring us that the data were up to date, in the end the company supplied a list of people who had been registered deceased.[11] However, as the list of responses shows (see Table 1), this strategy did not remove all the people whom the canvassers found to be dead. We can only speculate why this is the case. Do people lie to the canvassers as an easy (if macabre) way of getting rid of them? More likely, is the version of the electoral roll that commercial companies use to generate samples like the one used here inaccurate or out of date? Indeed, upon receiving the marked registers following the election, we were able to remove from both treatment and control groups additional individuals registered as deceased. If these rolling registers are inaccurate, then data quality may affect the response rate and diffuses the campaign effort, though it does not introduce bias. The only way to overcome this

[8] Gerber and Green, 'The Effects of Canvassing, Direct Mail and Telephone Contact on Voter Turnout', pp. 65–8.

[9] Callbacks were made for 21.7 per cent of the sample, with a small number (0.2 per cent) receiving a second visit.

[10] Telephone calls took place between 3 p.m. and 8 p.m. each evening.

[11] There are similar proportions of registered deceased in the canvassing and telephone groups at 1.2 and 1.3 per cent respectively.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123408000288 Published online by Cambridge University Press

TABLE 1 *Responses to Canvassing*

	N	%
Successful interview	1,099	47.8
Successful interview, on deceased list*	3	0.1
No response (no answer/not available)	753	32.7
No response, on deceased list	19	0.8
Moved	47	2.0
Moved, interviewed someone else	2	0.1
Deceased, on deceased list	11	0.5
Deceased, not on deceased list	23	1.0
Deceased, not on deceased list, interviewed someone else	4	0.2
Respondent not available, interviewed someone else	3	0.1
Wrong address	25	1.1
Wrong address, interviewed someone else	7	0.3
Refused to participate	72	3.1
Unable to participate, ill	19	0.8
Unable to participate, ill, interviewed someone else	4	0.2
Unable to participate, deaf	1	0.0
Did not attempt, unable to locate	16	0.7
Did not attempt, unable to access	5	0.2
Did not attempt, did not reach	117	5.1
Did not attempt, 'no canvassers' sign on property	21	0.9
Successful interview, already voted	28	1.2
Requested not to canvass, deceased, not on deceased list†	7	0.3
Requested not to canvass, not interested†	6	0.3
Requested not to canvass, elderly†	5	0.2
Requested not to canvass, ill†	1	0.0
Requested not to canvass, will vote anyway†	1	0.0
Requested not to canvass, wrong address†	1	0.0
Total	2,300	100.0

*It is most likely that this was an error on the part of the canvasser in failing to confirm the identity of the individual canvassed.
†Those who requested us not to canvass did so in response to our letter, either by telephone or be email.

would be to carry out a pre-survey of all the respondents, and weed out the dead and others from both the treatment and control groups. But this strategy would risk affecting the control group, thus biasing the experiment. In research where it is not necessary to tie together voters with landline telephones, it should be possible to use a more accurate version of the electoral register. However, the landline selection did offer an advantage in securing a sample with no household contamination, either between the treatment groups or between the treatment and control groups, as it was almost impossible to select individuals with two landline telephones in the same household. Checking that this was the case, we examined the addresses of all three groups and found no cross-membership.

The responses to the attempts to canvass are reported in Table 1, with the most important figure being the response rate of 47.8 per cent. The twenty-eight respondents who had already voted reflect the postal-voting system, which can diminish the scope of this kind of intervention. Whether in future it may be possible to canvass those who applied for a postal vote earlier than the others is an issue that needs to be addressed in subsequent British research. However, for the purposes of this study, the postal voters had to be removed from the sample in the end because the electoral regulations do not require records of votes cast by postal voters to be available for public inspection.[12]

[12] These regulations have now been amended, ensuring that in future elections such records will be kept and will be available to consult.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123408000288 Published online by Cambridge University Press

TABLE 2 *Responses to Telephoning*

	N	%
Successful interview	990	43.0
Successful interview, on deceased list*	31	1.3
No response (no answer/not available)	678	29.5
Moved	8	0.3
Deceased, not on deceased list	48	2.1
Wrong address	84	3.7
Number not in service	79	3.4
Refused to participate	382	16.6
Total	2,300	100.0

*It is most likely that this was an error on the part of the canvasser in failing to confirm the identity of the individual canvassed.

Turning now to the telephone interviews, Table 2 shows a similar pattern but with different responses, reflecting the technology. Here the lower response rate of 43 per cent was caused by fewer people being available or answering, as well as a higher number refusing to participate. In addition, some callers have 'anonymous call barring'. One way to improve the data collection exercise in future would be to check the telephone numbers in the treatment and control groups shortly after the election is called, noting down those who have a barring mechanism.[13] There were several wrong addresses or numbers not in service, which may be because the respondents have moved, or because of problems with the dataset. It would not be possible to remove these from the whole dataset without being intrusive (but it may be possible to do a telephone survey of both the treatment and the control groups after the election).

This kind of recommendation is akin to one of Nickerson's 'scaleable protocols' whereby the statistical power of an experiment can be improved without a massive increase in resources.[14] Nickerson offers three sets of protocols which can be used to ameliorate some of the difficulties associated with such experimental methods, specifically the failure to treat intended members of the treatment group (predominantly attributable to insufficient resources) which, in turn, reduces the statistical power of any results.[15] These reflect the labour-intensive and resource-intensive nature of such research, particularly where interventions must be systematically applied and recorded simultaneously. His first proposed solution is to assign randomly the order in which treatments are applied to subjects, enabling those subjects for whom treatment was never attempted (note that this is not the same as those for whom treatment was never achieved) to be moved into the control group. This strategy could work well where telephone canvassers have a list of numbers to call but where there may be insufficient resources to attempt to contact them all. However, it is not logistically viable for door-to-door canvassing where walking routes must be devised. Nickerson's second proposal is to match treatment and control groups within the discrete units of analysis of the experiment, for example by dividing the residents of each street or ward into treatment and control groups. That way, if circumstances or resources preclude the attempted application of treatment to all streets or wards, no systematic biases are introduced and the statistical power of the experiment is maximized. His final idea is to introduce a placebo treatment in which individuals or households are randomly assigned into two treatment groups, one being encouraged to vote and the other, for example, being encouraged to recycle.

For the purposes of our study, the first of these protocols would have been of limited use as the telephone company attempted to call all of the numbers provided. Problems were caused not by

[13] Note that this would need to be done in a manner that avoids having the telephone actually ringing.

[14] David W. Nickerson, 'Scalable Protocols Offer Efficient Design for Field Experiments', *Political Analysis*, 13 (2005), 233–52.

[15] Nickerson, 'Scalable Protocols Offer Efficient Design for Field Experiments'.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123408000288 Published online by Cambridge University Press

insufficient resources but by inaccurate information which led to inefficient use of these resources and reduced sample size. The second proposed solution might have proved useful to the co-ordination of door-to-door canvassing, given the resource-intensive nature of this process. However, given the geographical spread of the population from which we drew our sample (a result of including only those for whom we were able to obtain a landline telephone number), it might still have proved infeasible. Those properties for which canvassing was not attempted tended to be either relatively isolated from other properties in our sample or fell at the end of walking routes so that canvassers ran out of time. The final strategy is not particularly of relevance to our study but may be a consideration for future research in this area.

RESULTS

After removing postal voters and the registered deceased from the three groups, checking the official marked electoral registers yielded the turnout rates for control and treatment groups, reported for canvassing in Table 3 and for telephoning in Table 4. Both tables report turnout rates within the treatment groups according to whether we contacted the individual or not, which are the first set of numbers in each panel. The voter turnout figure in the non-contacted canvassing treatment group is a little lower than the control group, which is a slight contrast to the telephone group and US studies which have turnout at the same rates. This difference does not affect the estimation of the treatment effect because the instrumental variable method of calculating it (described below) depends on three different assumptions for the turnout in the control, contact and non-contacted groups.

When turning to the difference between the voting rates of the treatment and control groups, the second set of figures in Tables 3 and 4, we find differences as expected from the interventions, with turnout in the canvassed group 3.6 per cent higher than the control group, and a similar figure of 3.5 per cent higher for telephoning. This figure is known as the 'intent to treat' effect. We cannot, however, make inferences about the impact of the interventions from these figures because they contain electors whom we were unable to contact. To calculate the treatment effect, which is in the last set of figures in the tables, we report the calculations from a well-known procedure elaborated by Gerber and Green,[16] who subtract the turnout rate of the control group from that of the treatment

TABLE 3 *The Effect of Personal Canvassing on Personal Turnout*

	No personal contact	Personal contact
The turnout rate in the treatment group		
Per cent voting	46.3	62.0
Number of persons	573	664
	Assigned to the control group (no personal contact)	Assigned to the treatment group (attempted personal contact)
The turnout rate in the control and treatment groups		
Per cent voting	51.5	55.1
Number of persons	1,273	1,237
Numbers contacted		664
Contact rate		53.7
Estimated Effect of Personal Contact on Voter Turnout		
Turnout differential (3.6%)/Contact rate (53.7%) = 6.7%		
$p = 0.035$ (one-tailed)	Standard error = 3.7	Statistical power = 56.5%

[16] Gerber and Green, 'The Effects of Canvassing, Direct Mail and Telephone Contact on Voter Turnout', pp. 657–8.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123408000288 Published online by Cambridge University Press

TABLE 4 *The Effect of Telephoning on Personal Turnout*

	No personal contact	Personal contact
The turnout rate in the treatment group		
Per cent voting	52.3	63.8
Number of persons	670	611
	Assigned to the control group (no personal contact)	Assigned to the treatment group (attempted personal contact)
The turnout rate in the control and treatment groups		
Per cent voting	51.5	55.0
Number of persons	1,273	1,281
Numbers contacted		611
Contact rate		47.7
Estimated Effect of Telephone Contact on Voter Turnout		
Turnout differential (3.5%)/Contact rate (47.7%) = 7.3%		
$p = 0.038$ (one-tailed)	Standard error = 4.14	Statistical power = 55.2%

group, then divide by the contact rate. As Green *et al*. write, 'This estimator is equivalent to performing a two-stage least squares regression of vote on contact using randomisation as an instrumental variable'.[17] This procedure is particularly appropriate to the British system of recording votes where there is no other data from the electoral registers than the name, address and vote, thereby preventing an alternative method of estimation, such as propensity score matching as advocated by Imai, which would need a series of covariates.[18] In any case, Imai's criticisms of the Randomized Control Trials (RMT) methodology largely depend on detecting a possible violation of the experimental conditions, which did not occur in our case. We also concur with Gerber and Green that Imai's critique does not show the superiority of matching over estimation methods when the assignment to the treatment and control groups is fully randomized, a point acknowledged by Imai.[19]

Overall the experiment was a success as both interventions had positive, strong and statistically significant impacts, with one-tailed tests showing a probability of 0.035 for canvassing and 0.038 for telephoning, as well as the effective implementation of the two campaigns. Both experiments have acceptable statistical power (i.e. the probability of rejecting the null hypothesis using a one-sided test, given the treatment effect estimated in this sample): 56.5 per cent for canvassing and 55.2 per cent for telephoning. The treatment effect of 6.7 per cent from canvassing is in the same margins as the US studies;[20] but the effect of 7.3 per cent from telephoning is in excess of Gerber and Green's original negligible estimates. However, more recent studies produce higher estimates closer to ours. Nickerson revises the expectations of telephoning in the Gerber and Green research by drawing attention to its extensive use in the commercial sector and the opportunities of volunteer telephone banks.[21] Nickerson carried out a series of experiments using volunteer telephoning, involving personalized, chatty and informal calls, which produced an average treatment effect of 3.8 per cent. Although Nickerson concludes by saying that on average 'volunteer phone calls are

[17] Green, Gerber and Nickerson, 'Getting Out the Vote in Local Elections', p. 1085.

[18] Kosuke Imai, 'Do Get-Out-the-Vote Calls Reduce Turnout? The Importance of Statistical Methods for Field Experiments', *American Political Science Review*, 99 (2005), 283–300.

[19] Alan S. Gerber and Donald P. Green, 'Correction to Gerber and Green (2000): Replication of Disputed Findings and Reply to Imai (2005)', *American Political Science Review*, 99 (2005), 301–13.

[20] Gerber and Green, 'The Effects of Canvassing, Direct Mail and Telephone Contact on Voter Turnout', p. 657.

[21] Nickerson, 'Volunteer Phone Calls Can Increase Turnout', p. 283.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123408000288 Published online by Cambridge University Press

roughly half as effective as face-to-face meetings',[22] the range of treatment effects is between 0.5 and 9.3 per cent, which puts the British GOTV experiment within the upper range. In addition, our results have large standard errors because of relatively small sample sizes, which also places the estimates closer to those in the United States.

Nonetheless, the telephoning effect is still high and also comparable with the canvassing effect, which no US study has found. There were also special features of this experiment that may explain this effect. Recall that we used a commercial company to make the calls so we should expect results nearer the Gerber and Green than the Nickerson levels, and never at the same level as face-to-face contact. There are two possible inferences to draw. One is that our intense mentoring of the company – a small local firm keen to have the work from the university – which involved: briefings of the managers and field force so that they would not treat the script as a standard survey; the promise by the company to select their best workers; and monitoring of the phone calls by the researchers, may have *de facto* created the conditions of a volunteer telephone bank, obliging the company to behave in a similar way to the student field force. And, in fact, many of the employees of the survey company were students. However, even these features of the experiment would not lead us to anticipate equivalent results to canvassing. The other explanation may be to do with the sample, which was telephone accessible and therefore arguably ready to be influenced by this method. It also may be the case that Britain is not as saturated as the United States by professionalized telephone calling, both generally and to encourage voting, making citizens less resistant and a telephone-based GOTV campaign more viable. Such explanations are, however, speculative and further research would be required to validate them.

CONCLUSIONS

This GOTV experiment in the British general election of 2005 is a successful replication of the field experiment method pioneered by Gerber and Green, both in its practical implementation and its results. Gerber and Green, and the rest of the experimental voter turnout research community, may be assured that GOTV campaigns are efficacious outside the US context in countries with less of a tradition of group politics and volunteer presence, and with different party and electoral registration systems. Of course, it remains to be seen whether GOTV campaigns work outside first-past-the-post electoral systems, but given that the incentive to vote is much higher there, we should expect an impact – other things being equal.

The results for door-to-door canvassing are much the same as in the United States, but the comparable results for telephoning from a private company are unique in a study where the voters were randomized into two comparable treatment groups, so we can be sure that the results have not been caused by a particular study design. As discussed, there are some special features of this GOTV campaign that may explain this finding, such as the landline-accessible nature of the sample and the intensive mentoring of the private company by the GOTV team, but it may also reflect the British context which makes telephoning a more feasible method of getting out the vote than it is in the United States. These findings suggest the need for more research to ascertain the exact causes, but already provide a useful extension of the lessons of the GOTV studies: different national contexts do not undermine the validity and impact of GOTV campaigns, but they may alter the hierarchy of the kinds of intervention and give different findings on the level of their impact. Finally, there is the wider possible policy application of the research findings. There is scope for the Electoral Commission and other bodies concerned with voter turnout to expand its role further beyond national campaigns into individual-level or more targeted interventions. Local councils may also have a role to play here.

Ultimately, however, experimental research around 'what works' in mobilizing voter turnout must be seen as part of a wider and deeper body of analysis around declining electoral participation and democratic disengagement. These studies help to determine the usefulness of personalized

[22] Nickerson, 'Volunteer Phone Calls Can Increase Turnout', p. 283.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123408000288 Published online by Cambridge University Press

individual-level interventions and suggest the potential benefits of such an approach. However, these are clearly not a panacea for voter 'apathy' and may simply demonstrate an impact on some voters. From a practical perspective, this marginal effect may be sufficient for the needs of government but does not address the more fundamental causal factors in disengagement. The greatest worth of GOTV experiments is perhaps in providing some possible directions for more theory-building which may, in turn, become the basis for further experimental research.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123408000288 Published online by Cambridge University Press