There are many facets of an election campaign ranging from postal, email, social and phone canvassing. However, each of these areas, whilst important in their own right, pale in comparison to the positive effects of door-to-door canvassing. The 2012 French Presidential election was won by Francois Hollande and his campaign was tracked by researchers from MIT who found that the critical swing in his favour could be attributed to the extensive door-to-door canvassing that his campaign team undertook.

It has been shown that just one in-person conversation had a profound effect on a voter’s likelihood to go to the polls, boosting turnout by a whopping 20 percent (or around 9 percentage points).

The research which resulted in the above was conducted nearly 20 years ago by Alan Gerber and Don Green in 1998. The professors randomly assigned voters to receive different political campaign messaging techniques to vote: some received leaflets, some received phone calls, some received a visit from a canvasser, and some received nothing.

Apart from Gerber & Greens Field Experiments, plenty of academics and election campaigns have tested the impacts of various campaign tactics with randomized field trials. All of which showcase the high impact of in-person canvassing. On the flipside, impersonal tactics have consistently failed to deliver the same high impact as canvassing.

So political campaigning is a pure numbers game?
Plenty of political campaigns make a lot of noise regarding the number of doors knocked on a particular night. But the reality is that these large stats can paper over the cracks of an average election campaign. Why so? Well, a truly successful field canvass depends on the number of relevant conversations on the doorsteps, not the number of doors knocked.

Studies of the 2004 US Presidential campaign showed that the quality of the canvass was far more important than the number of canvasses.

Further research has identified that three elements that are necessary for a successful doorstep interaction, namely, messaging, timing and monitoring. The idea here being canvassers should avoid cramming in election campaign messaging on the doorstep. Instead canvasser’s should engage in authentic personal conversation with a voter.

In order for an election campaign’s canvassers to genuinely engage with voters. There is a need for effective training and supervision.

**PREPARING YOUR CANVASSERS**

**Show appreciation**

Start by thanking all your volunteers or workers for their assistance with the canvass. Canvassing should be contextualised as one of the most important face-to-face interactions with voters in the run up to an election and a critical way of gaining the real data that will help your candidate to speak to voter issues.

**Personal safety advice**

Personal safety of canvassers is a concern for the campaign team. To that end, canvassers are dispatched in teams of two at least and canvassers should look out for each other and make sure they can contact HQ or emergency services if necessary. If a canvasser feels they are in any danger they should alert the campaign manager and avoid any unnecessary risks. Be aware of threats from voters, people on the streets and traffic hazards.
Potential hazards

Outline specific risks at this time: night time conditions, weather, busy traffic intersections, roadworks, anti-social behaviour and so on. Also, outline personal safety equipment that might be necessary such as high visibility clothing, wet weather gear, etc.

Familiarize them with canvassing areas

Go over all the canvassing area and, specifically, the canvassing area being covered on this day. Let them know the boundary streets and the divisions with the aid of a group map.

Introduce them to their teams

Clarify who is canvassing with whom and who the canvass leader is. Tell each team which areas they will be canvassing and any specific information that might be relevant to them.

Attitudinal and doorstep behaviour

Clarify the standards the canvass team are expected to achieve while on the doorsteps and the overall messaging from the campaign team to the voters. Emphasize politeness at all times and any specific messaging that the team require.

REMEMBER TO TAKE

Campaign Literature

Give each voter one of these. If the person is not at home, leave the literature with someone else or on his/her doorstep.

Pens and a Clipboard

Be prepared by making sure you have supplies to make canvassing easier, have enough pens and clipboards for your entire canvass team.

Comfortable Walking Shoes and Water

Tell your canvassers to be prepared for spending a few hours on their feet and to bring water for while they’re out.

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