Party Contacts in Comparative Perspective

Paul A. Beck[*]

1. Introduction

Direct party and candidate contacts with voters have long been a staple of election campaigns. Before the development of modern media, candidates appealed to voters through doorstep canvassing and mass rallies. They were designed principally to mobilize the party faithful, to make sure that they turned out at the polls. In some countries, partisan newspapers propagandized their readers with candidate-supportive stories. As newspapers turned to mass market appeals, however, they played much less of a role as party organs and were replaced by partisan advertising on radio and then television. With the recent proliferation of narrowcasting in politically fragmented "markets", radio, television, and increasingly the Internet have been devoted to mobilizing party supporters. Whatever the means, personal contacts with voters remain an important tool of political campaigning.

This paper draws upon surveys from the Comparative National Election Project[1] to explore party contacting efforts in election campaigns as reported by voters. Most previous research on party contacting has focused on individual country studies within Anglo-American democracies, places where party effort at the grass roots has long been well established.[2] Only a few studies track party contacting cross-nationally beyond these familiar shores (Karp/Banducci 2007; Karp et al. 2007; Klingelhöfer/Schlozman 2018; Magalhães et al. 2020; Krönke et al. 2022). The CNEP surveys provide a wider range of countries and elections. They focus on respondents' answers to two questions designed to measure party contacts – one about direct, personal contacts and the other about direct contacts of any

* I gratefully acknowledge Darren Lilleker, Pedro Magalhães, and Robert Mattes for their assistance in the research for this paper.

1 For more on the CNEP, see u.osu.edu/cnep. The technical details of each of its surveys are provided there.

2 For the United States, inter alia, see Beck 2022; for Britain, inter alia, see Johnston et al. 2012.

other kind. The paper focusses on four dozen national elections between 1992 and 2022.

In 48 of the CNEP surveys, overall contact was measured for both personal and other kinds of contact by two questions:

> "Did a representative of any of the following political parties or candidates contact you *in person* during the campaign?"
> "Did a representative of any of the following political parties contact you in any other way such as mail, phone, email, text message, social media, etc. during the campaign?"

These questions were combined to capture party contacts broadly using a positive response to either question. This dichotomous measure will be the principal focus of the following analysis. In 46 of the surveys, it is possible to consider the two questions separately and determine how much of the traditional face-to-face party canvass remains and other methods of contact have emerged.[3] Follow up questions were asked to determine the party making the contact.

It is important to emphasize the necessary generality of these questions. While they probably can identify the party of the contact, survey respondents are unlikely to know exactly whether a particular party *candidate* was being supported. In single-member-district legislative contests, the contact is likely to be on behalf of the party's candidate for that constituency. In multi-member legislative districts, however, the contact could be on behalf of one or more different candidates from the same party. In combined elections for both president and the legislature, the contact could be on behalf of the president, the legislative candidate(s) or both. And in some elections, the contact comes in support of the party ticket or party list, not any particular candidate. In each case, respondents should be able to identify the specific party of the contact even if they might have difficulty attributing it to any particular candidate.[4] All of these types of contact were possible inclusions in our measure.

It has become increasingly important to look beyond the *traditional* ways of personal contacting. The hallmark of the party canvass in the older

3 In two country elections (U.S. 1992, Spain 2011), a single question was used to measure overall contact, but there was no way to separate personal from other kinds of contacts.

4 In a few countries with presidential elections (e.g., Indonesia), where parties are weak or transient, the focus had to be on leading candidates, and respondents were asked about them rather than a specific party.

democracies was greeting voters at their doorstep. More modern methods, practiced especially in the industrialized world, involve the mail and telephoning, and recently online contacts via emails. Even if personalized methods may be more effective in mobilizing voters,[5] they are considerably more labor intensive, thus less efficient. Because of their efficiency, online contacts in particular have become more prevalent and should be even more common as a contacting method of choice in the future (Aldrich et al. 2016; Hooghe et al. 2010; Vaccari 2017).[6]

Earlier multi-country studies of party contacting were based on questions asked in varying ways across an ever-increasing and more recent number of elections. Karp et al. (2007) measured contacts by personal visits or telephone calls across seven advanced democracies in elections between 1993 and 2001.[7] Karp and Banducci (2007) used the common Comparative Studies of Electoral Systems (CSES) module 2 question to analyze party contacting between 2001 and 2004 in 23 countries, again unable to differentiate between personal and other means of contact. [8] Bhatti et al.'s (2016) meta-analysis focusses solely on the door-to-door canvas, finding it more effective in mobilizing voters in the United States than in Europe. More recently, Magalhães et al. (2020) analyzed results from surveys in 38 countries from 2011 to 2016 that specified the type of contact, so that they were able to differentiate traditional (mail, phone, and in-person) from new (e-mails, texts, and social networks/micro-blog messages or posts) modes of contact.

These studies provide a firm foundation of both results and theoretically-driven hypotheses for the current study. To parallel them as much as possible, and also to take into account the newer ways of contacting voters, my analysis relies mainly on the combined overall measure as described above. Because face-to-face personal contacts are thought to be the most effective ways on mobilizing voters, however, the paper takes a brief detour to examine responses to the first CNEP question – contacts in person.

---

5 A meta-analysis by Bhatti et al. (2016) of door-to-door canvassing studies in Europe questions whether the advantages found for them in the U.S. are repeated in European elections.

6 For how both scholarly and campaign-led experimental studies can combine to shed light on party mobilization efforts, see Green and Gerber (2016).

7 The questions varied from country to country. Unable to distinguish between personal visits and telephone calls, in all of the countries, they combined them into a single measure of contact.

8 The question was: "During the last campaign did a candidate or anyone from a political party contact you to persuade you to vote for them?".

Most of the election surveys to be analyzed in this paper were conducted in democratic countries, some traditional democracies, others relatively new ones. In a few cases (Hong Kong 2015, Russia 2016, Iran 2016, Serbia 2020), even though elections were held, they were not conducted under the free and fair conditions that would qualify them as democratic (Coppedge et al. 2022). A few of the elections were especially notable because they were early democratic elections after a long non-democratic interlude (Chile 1993) or in the early years of a transition to democracy (Indonesia 2004[9], South Africa 2004). This diversity in election conditions moves us well beyond the study of party contacting in single elections, which has dominated work on this topic, and even the handful of pioneering cross-national analyses.

The following pages focus first at the aggregate level, starting with the frequencies of overall party contacts and personal contacts in each country election. These elections and the conditions under which each is conducted are unique in important ways. As previous studies have shown, electoral conditions can be expected to make a difference in the amount of effort the parties and candidates devote to direct contacting. In particular, the aggregate analysis focuses on differences across elections in the same countries, then country-by-country differences in the longevity of democracy, in contrasting efforts between the major contestants, in contacting by parties of the left vs. right, and in electoral systems. The analysis then drills down to the individual voter level, working with a pooled data file of 57,224 respondents[10] to determine what kinds of people are contacted across this wide variety of places and elections.

2. Party Contacts across Countries and Elections: An Aggregate Analysis

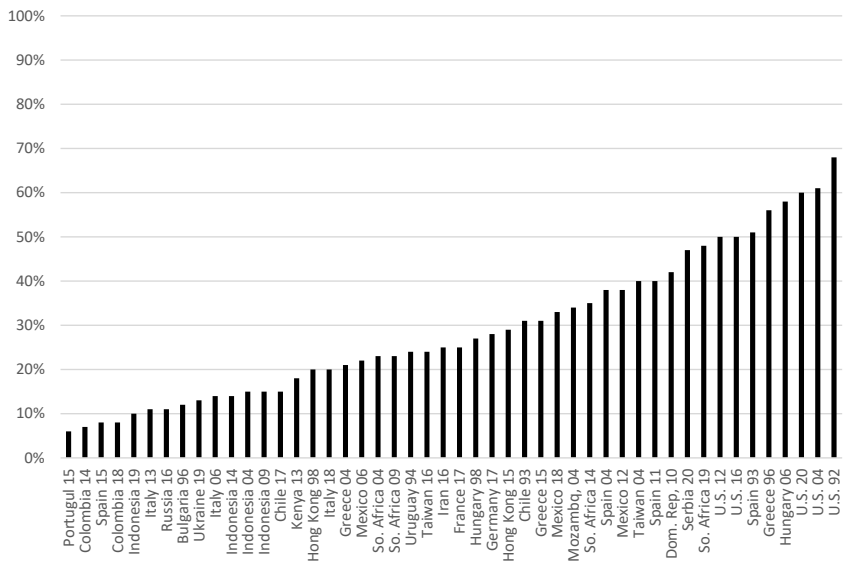
Figure 1 shows overall party contacts by country and election from the smallest to largest percentage of survey respondents reporting contacts. The range is considerable, from six percent of overall contacts in Portugal in

9 Mujami et al. (2018) identify 1999 as the first Indonesian democratic election.

10 The total number of valid cases for the individual-level analysis is 77,936, with the number varying from a low of 900 in Chile 1993 to a high of 3236 in Germany 2017. The pooled data were weighted to N=1200 for each survey to give each election an equal contribution to the results. The weighted number of valid cases in the pooled data set totals 57,224. In the few cases where the respondent did not answer the party contact questions, the case was eliminated as missing data and excluded from the valid cases totals.

2015 to 60 percent or more in three different U.S. elections. In 15 of the 48 country elections, the percentage reporting contacts did not exceed 20 percent. By contrast, in 13 elections, the percentage reached 40 percent or more.

Figure 1: Party Contacts Across Countries and Elections



Source: CNEP surveys.

2.1 Multi-Election Variability in Party Contacting

Multiple elections were surveyed in some countries, which enables comparisons across contests in which country election system is more-or-less held constant. The results show consistently high levels of party activity in contacting voters at 50 percent or more in the five U.S. contests studied, distinguishing the U.S. as a party contacting "exemplar." More common are consistently low levels of party grass-roots effort. Reported contacts in the three Italian elections never exceeded 20 percent. They fell below 15 percent in the four Indonesian elections and below ten percent in the two Colombian elections.

Results for other countries with multiple surveys, however, show that party contacting is more election-specific than country-specific. More than half of Spaniards reported party contacts in 1993 and around 40 percent were contacted in two other election contests, but contacting fell to less than ten percent in the 2015 contest, which marked the denouement of Spain's two-party system. About 15 percent of Chilean respondents reported contacts in 2017, half of the 30 percent of 1993.[11] The return to democratic elections just four years after the Pinochet authoritarian interlude seems to have motivated the parties in 1993 to engage in competitive politics with vigor. Contacts in Greece approached 60 percent in the highly competitive 1996 election, yet dropped to only slightly more than 20 percent in 2004, before rising to over 30 percent in 2015. South Africa was another country with variable levels of reported party contact: Slightly above 20 percent in 2004 and 2009, the rate rose to around 35 percent in 2014, then surged to almost 50 percent by 2019 as opposition to the dominant African National Congress strengthened. Hungary registered close to 30 percent in 1998, then doubled in 2006. Mexico too showed varying contact levels: Slightly above 20 percent in 2006, then up to past 30 percent in 2012 and 2018. Finally, in Hong Kong, under increasingly dire circumstances in terms of its relationship to mainland China, contacting increased somewhat from 1998 to 2015. These results should prompt caution in generalizing from single elections in most countries.

2.2 Party Symmetry in Contacting

Higher levels of party contact can result from disproportionate effort by a single party or can be the product of efforts by more than one party. The CNEP surveys recorded reported contacts for each of the parties competing in the election separately.[12] In the two-party U.S., the Democratic party and Republican party recorded almost equal levels of party contact, always reported by at least 35 percent of respondents. Here seems to be a case

11 The reported contacting level in Chile's 2021 was only two percent. However, this survey was conducted before the second-round election, and it is reasonable to suppose that more contacting may have taken place in the run-up to the second election. Because of the early timing of the survey, Chile 2021 is excluded from our analysis.

12 Virtually all country elections included multiple parties, most of them receiving a small number of votes. The CNEP party contact questions focused on parties or candidates winning at least one percent of the vote.

of symmetry, with the major competitors responding to one another in this aspect of campaign strategy. While more respondents reported Republican party contact in three of five U.S. elections, both major parties were unusually active in reaching out. Only once across five elections studied did a third party or independent candidate (Ross Perot in 1992) show a significant level of party effort, though it fell far short of that for the major parties.

Similar parallelism in party activity appears in elections in some other countries. For the three elections where we have party-specific figures (1993, 2004, and 2011), Spain's major government and opposition parties, PSOE and PP, both contacted at least 35 percent of respondents. Even some of the other opposition parties there showed high levels of party contacting, albeit never quite reaching the levels of the two major competitors. In this respect, Spain joined the U.S. as an exemplar of party contacting activity. Similarly, parallel contacting rates appeared for the major government and opposition parties in the three Greek elections studied. In France 2017, furthermore, all of its principal contenders for the presidency showed comparable levels of activity.

In some of the other country elections with relatively high reported party contacting, by contrast, the results were driven by the disproportionately high levels of contacting achieved by a single party. In Hungary 1998 and 2006, Orban's FIDESZ led by a sizable margin, as did Mozambique's ruling FRELIMO in 2004. In all of the South African elections except 2019, when the Democratic Alliance rallied to match its effort, the African National Congress was significantly more active in contacting voters than any of the other parties. In Serbia 2020, Vucic's ruling Progressive Party dominated in party contacting. In Greece 2015, the two more centrist parties together in a governing coalition, New Democracy and PASOK, were both more active in contacting than any opposition parties. In short, in some elections party contacting effort by one party was more or less matched by another, while in other elections a single party dominated the contacting effort.

2.3 Parties of the Left versus Right in Contacting Effort

It sometimes is presumed that parties of the left are most dedicated to party contacting, given their historic challenge of motivating lower-class voters (Barnes 1977: 61-64; Hill/Leighley 1996; Anderson/Beramendi 2012).

With the effort of populist parties on the right at appealing to working class voters, however, this hypothesis may no longer be valid. Enough parties of the right, center-right, or center – e.g., U.S. Republicans., Hungarian FIDESZ, Serbian Progressives, Spain's Popular Party, Greece's New Democracy, the Dominican Liberation Party, France's *En Marche* – were relatively active in contacting to challenge the hypothesis in the CNEP elections. By contrast, some left parties – Greece's PASOK in 2004, Hungary's Socialists, Germany's Social Democrats – were not especially active, even falling behind competitors on the other ideological side. Parties of the left once may have been leaders in mobilizing working class supporters, but this "conventional wisdom" no longer applies in more modern times.[13]

2.4 Contacting in New versus Old Democracies

Previous studies have compared party contacting rates between newer and older democracies, hypothesizing that party organizations became better developed with more democratic experience. Karp and Banducci (2007) found that, while contacting rates compared favorably to the highest of the old democracies in the newly-democratic Brazil and Czech contests, overall contacting averaged slightly lower in the newer democracies. Other studies have replicated this result (Karp et al. 2007; Klingelhöfer/Schlozman 2018).

Among the 48 CNEP surveys, 21 were conducted in what might be regarded as new democracies: Hungary, Bulgaria and Mexico from the earlier Karp and Banducci (2007) study plus the Dominican Republic, Indonesia, Kenya, Mozambique, South Africa, and Ukraine. The CNEP-surveyed elections in these new democracies also averaged lower contacting rates than in the older countries. Where contacting was measured across several elections, however, the aforementioned variations undermined any ready conclusion that more experience with democratic elections led to enhanced party contacting. In Hungary, Mexico, and South Africa, the contacting rate increased as their democratic experience grew, while others showed little or

13 Parties of the left and the right in recent decades may have focused their attention on other groups that my analysis does not consider. Klingelhöfer and Schlozman (2018) have used CSES expert coding of ideological affinities to differentiate six broad families of parties – two in old democracies competing on the traditional left-right continuum following their mass-party legacy model, four in new democracies following their catch-all efficiency model. Lacking information on parties, I have not followed their thoughtful approach in this paper.

no growth. The previous conclusion that contacting often varies more with the particular elections than other factors is reaffirmed when it comes to the age of democracy.

2.5 Electoral and Party System Differences in Party Contacting

Several studies have found that party effort in contacting voters varies by the nature of the electoral system (Karp et al. 2007; Karp/Banducci 2007; Karp 2012; Magalhães et al. 2018; Sudulich/Trumm 2019; Krõnke et al. 2022). Where legislative candidates face voters directly in single member districts, giving an incentive to individual candidates to reach out to voters, they have found that contacts are more common. By contrast, where candidates serve multi-member districts and are often part of a multi-candidate party list, they have little incentive for direct contacts with voters. It also can be hypothesized, although it remains untested in previous studies, that in presidential elections determined by popular votes, there is an incentive for presidential candidates and their representatives to reach out to voters directly, even if individual legislative candidates do not.

The CNEP studies add further support to the hypothesis that party contact is more frequent where legislative candidates face voters alone.[14] An average of 37 percent of respondents reported contacts in single-member districts versus only 25 percent in multi-member districts. On the other hand, the popular election of presidents does not seem to matter in these CNEP countries. The average reported party contact in country elections containing presidential candidates is 29 percent, not significantly different than in country elections without them. In elections without presidential candidates or single-member districts, moreover, 30 percent of respondents reported party contacts versus 29 percent where either a presidential candidate was on the ballot or legislative districts were single-member. It is legislative candidates in single-member districts rather than presidential candidates who appear to be more engaged in reaching out to voters through various kinds of direct contacts.[15]

14 In a few countries (e.g., Italy), the electoral system changed over the course of the CNEP surveys. These changes were taken into account in the analysis.

15 In the 2017 British CNEP survey, in the classic setting of first-past-the-post elections in single-member parliamentary districts, almost all voters (98 per cent) reported being contacted by a party. These data are not included in the analysis for this paper

The number of parties also is related to party contacting activity in the CNEP studies. Almost all of the country elections saw a multitude of parties and party candidates dividing the vote. I differentiated them into those achieving at least ten percent of the vote versus those falling short of that threshold. About half of the country elections fell into each category. Where competition revolved around two parties, 36 percent of voters reported receiving contacts. In multiparty contests, the figure was 21 percent. It seems that parties have more incentive to contact voters when competition is between two contenders than when it is spread across multiple candidates and parties. Contacts may occur in the latter case, but they are dissipated among many contenders, leading to lower rates of contacting.

3. A Brief Detour to Examine Personal Party Contacts across Countries and Elections

The CNEP party contacting questions can be used to distinguish between perceived "in person" contacts and the other less personal ways that parties can reach out to voters, including the increasing party and candidate efforts to contact voters via the Internet and cell phones. It has long been established in studies of individual country elections that direct personal contacts are the most effective in mobilizing voters in election campaigns (Cutright/Rossi 1958; Cutright 1963; Green/Gerber 2015; Riccardo 2021). They deserve to be singled out for special attention in a brief detour from the continuing focus on overall contacting.

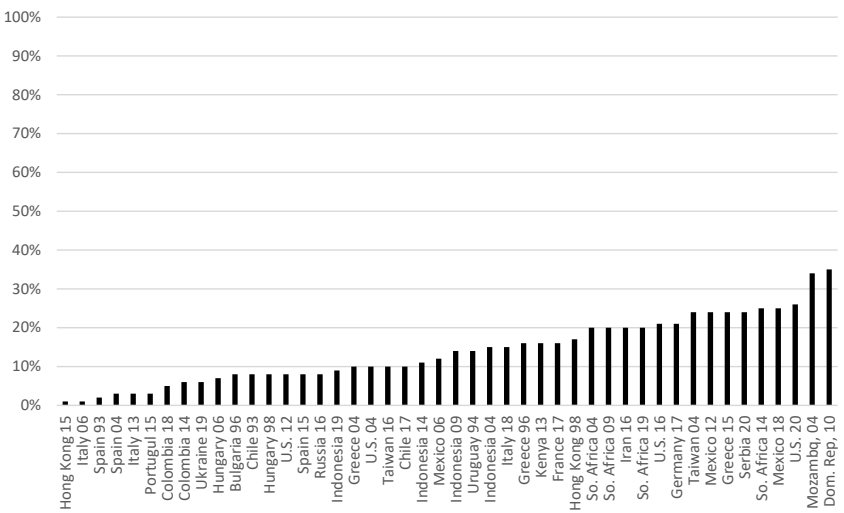
Figure 2 shows the percentages reporting personal contacts.[16] Logically, personal contacting is substantially lower than overall contacting. Whereas an average of 30 percent of respondents reported some kind of contact, only twelve percent characterized the contacts as occurring in person. The percentage peaks at slightly over 30 percent in the Dominican Republic and Mozambique and does not surpass 20 percent in most other elections. Almost half of the surveys report personal contacting rates under ten percent, making it obvious that elections exhibiting relatively high levels of party contacting reached them through other means. In person contacts

because this number appears to be grossly inflated compared to all other studies of party contacting in Britain and in the opinions of experts I consulted. Even if inflated, though, the British data confirm the importance of the electoral system.

16 In two cases (U.S. 1992, Spain 2011), personal contacts were not differentiated in the questioning, so the N is reduced to 46 country surveys rather than 48.

are challenging; they depend on face-to-face encounters at the doorstep or where people congregate. Party canvassers may be uncomfortable with facing voters directly, and few campaigns have enough campaigners to conduct a comprehensive personal canvass. During the Covid pandemic, campaigns especially were reluctant to subject canvassers as well as voters to such exposure. By contrast, telephone call, text, leaflet, mail, and Internet messaging (Magalhães et al. 2020; Vaccari 2017) is easier to accomplish and more efficient in using campaign resources and volunteer time. The Internet is especially efficient and doubtlessly will be employed more and more in the future.

Figure 2: Personal Contacts Across Countries and Elections



Source: CNEP surveys.

It is hardly surprising that the Dominican Republican and Mozambique led the way in contacts of a personal sort, and that Mexico and South Africa too were relatively high. They are relatively poor countries in which many potential voters do not have access to telephones or the Internet and mail service may not be dependable. The easiest way to reach them is through a door-to-door canvass or in the marketplace. That the U.S. and Germany also are relatively high in personal contacts owes more to grass-roots efforts their parties have long been committed to as a major tool in political campaigns. The U.S. has a tradition of the party canvass, a major part of which

involves local party campaigns going door-to-door to mobilize their base (Cutright 1963, Beck 2022). Poorly financed campaigns there, especially in more localized races, often have no recourse but to rely on volunteers and candidates making this effort in the absence of money to devote to television advertising. As telephoning (through cheap long distance rates and mass robo-calls) and Internet messaging have become less expensive and easier to perform on a mass basis from central locations, however, the advantages of the door-to-door canvass may be narrowing – despite peoples' increasing reluctance to answer their phones. As more and more people turn to their devices for communications with the outside world, one might expect face-to-face personal contacts to become less common.

4. Whom Do the Parties Contact; An Individual-level Analysis

The focus on country-level characteristics says little about the choices political campaigns make about which individuals to target in their contacting. To tell that story, I turn from the aggregate analysis to consider the characteristics of the individual respondents within each country.

4.1 Contacts From Own Party

Political campaigns often face a strategic choice between concentrating their attention on their own base of loyalists versus trying to reach beyond the base to attract support (Beck 1975; Rosenstone/Hansen 1993: 162-177; Nuñes 2021). Parties in recent U.S. elections have emphasized a base strategy, especially in devoting scarce resources to direct contacting (Panagopoulos 2016; Beck 2022). Even television advertising, with its potential to reach well beyond the base, often is focused more on inciting their own loyalists rather than persuading others. While party contacts as a mobilizing strategy have received considerable attention in U.S. studies (see Beck et al. 2018 and Beck 2022 and the works cited therein), little attention seems to have been paid to them in other countries (Rohrschneider 2002). Even the few studies of party contacting beyond the American shores tie it more to individual voter characteristics and party and electoral system

properties than to whether parties are mobilizing their own loyalists (Karp/Banducci. 2007; Karp et al. 2007; Magalhães et al. 2020).[17]

The CNEP data provide an opportunity to examine party mobilization strategies across a wide variety of country elections. Partisans' reports of whether their own or different parties contacted them show that mobilization contacts predominate. Across over 40 country elections where partisanship and party contacts were both measured, 79 percent of respondents who reported contacts received them from their own party. Own party contacts ranged from a low three percent in the multiparty 2017 Chilean election, where party contacting in general was negligible, to 95 percent in the two-party U.S. 2012 contest. In only three countries (Chile 1993 and 2017, Italy 2006 and 2018, Ukraine 2019) did less than a majority of those contacted report that the contact came from their own party.

It is to be expected that multi-party contests, particularly in elections with changing coalition partners, would foster contacts beyond co-partisans. By contrast, contacts in essentially two-party systems would be expected to come mostly from the partisans' own parties. Generally, this is the case. No parties in elections with spirited two-party competition devoted much attention to contacting beyond their base: an average of 81 percent of respondents who reported party contacts in these elections received them from their own party. Greece in 2015 (at 63 percent) had the lowest percentage, the U.S. the highest (from 82 to 87 to 95 percent across recent elections). In elections with multi-party competition, on the other hand, 64 percent on average reported contacts from their own party, with multiparty Italy in 2006 (45 percent) and 2018 (44 percent) and Chile in 1993 (43 percent) and 2017 (three percent, albeit with very little party contacting overall) falling below a majority and only Indonesia in 2004 (at 83 percent) surpassing the two-party average.

4.2 Individual Characteristics Beyond Own Party Contacting

Previous cross-national studies of party contacting (Karp/Banducci 2007; Karp et al- 2007; Karp 2012; Magalhães et al. 2020; Klingelhöfer/Schlozman 2018; Krönke 2022) have focused at the individual level on the characteristics of the people who have been recipients of party contacting. They

17 An exception is a recent paper by Krönke et al. (2022), which finds that African parties have focused disproportionate attention on targeting co-partisans.

have studied four types of individual variables: demographic characteristics, social networks, political attitudes, and political behaviors. The CNEP surveys allow us to consider each of many individual-level variables in turn by examining their correlation with whether the respondent was contacted, both scored dichotomously except where indicated otherwise.

Table 1 displays these correlations for all country surveys in Figure 1, ranked from the highest to the lowest. As can be seen from the right-hand column, they are based on varying numbers of respondents, depending upon whether each characteristic was measured in the survey. All of the correlations are significant at the standard .05 level; only the one for gender drops below .001. These correlations are mostly modest, paralleling results in previous research.

Demographic Characteristics. The relationships between the conventional demographics and party contacts are faint. Level of education, measured on a seven-point scale, is the strongest among them at .09. People with higher levels of education are more likely to have been contacted by the parties during the election campaign. Often seen as a demographic partner to education, income shows a somewhat lower correlation, with respondents in the top third of their country's income distribution more likely and those in the bottom third less likely to have been targeted. Reported contacts increase by age, with those 65 years of age or older reporting more than 17–29-year-olds. Only a slight trace of association with party contacting are differences by gender (men > women), by rural versus urban residence (urban > rural), marital status (married > unmarried), and subjective class (middle > working). While all of these correlations are significant at the highest levels given the large number of cases on which they are computed, the story of who is contacted by parties is only modestly a demographics story.

Table 1: Correlations between Party Contacts and Individual Characteristics

Variable	*Correlation*	*Number of cases*
Persuade Others (tried to influence others re vote=1; no=0)	0.24	19,105
Index of media use (0 to 4 different media used)	0.21	54,443
Strength of partisanship (None=0 to strong=4)	0.20	53,258
Worked on political campaign (yes=1; no=0)	0.17	48,177
High political interest (very interested=1; less=0)	0.15	53,503
Some political interest (somewhat or more=1; less=0)	0.15	53,503
Belongs to organization (Yes=1; no=0)	0.15	38,192
Attended campaign meeting (yes=1; no=0)	0.15	53,325
Strong partisan (yes=1; no=0)	0.14	53,258
Election talk with friends (Yes=1; no=0)	0.14	52,879
Election talk with family (Yes=1; no=0)	0.13	52,949
Participated in protest (Yes=1; no=0)	0.13	37,537
Voted in previous election (Yes=1; no=0)	0.12	48,685
Election talk with most important discussant (Yes=1; no=0)	0.11	46,731
Election talk with neighbors (Yes=1; no=0)	0.10	49,403
Voted in this election (Yes=1; no=0)	0.10	56,900
Education level (None=0 to Postgrad=7)	0.10	55,740
Election talk with co-workers (Yes=1; no=0)	0.09	48,997
Ideology (1,10=5; 2,9=4; 3,8=3; 4,7=2; none or 5,6=1 on 1 to 10 scale)	0.08	49,760
Election talk with spouse (Yes=1; no=0)	0.07	46,022
Right-wing ideologue (8-10=1 on 1 to 10 left, right scale; else=0)	0.05	49,760
Left-wing ideologue (1-3=1 on 1 to 10 left, right scale; else=0)	0.05	49,760
Trade union member (Yes=1; no=0)	0.05	54,668
Place of residence (rural=0; not rural=1)	0.05	56,022
Top income (Top 3rd in country in income=1; less=0)	0.04	48,241
Above bottom income (bottom 3rd in country income=0; higher=1)	0.04	48,241
Currently employed (Yes=1; no=0)	0.03	39,979
Age (Years of age from 17 to 100)	0.03	56,871
Gender (Male=1; female=0)	0.03	55,941
Religious (attends church or prays in Moslem countries=1; no=0)	0.02	47,244
Subjective social class (Middle or upper class=1; else=0)	0.02	20,820
Old age (65 or more years of age=1; less=0)	0.01	56,871
Marital status (Yes=1; No=0)	0.01	54,191
Young age (17-29 years of age=1; older=0)	-0.03	56,871

Source: CNEP surveys

Why is it that demographic characteristics are so weakly related to party contacting? Political campaigns target voters based on available information about them. Although there may be considerable variation across countries and elections, the campaigns may have access to voter files that contain basic information on place of residence and turnout history. Residence may be correlated with education and income, particularly in cities where neighborhoods often are segregated by home values that are its by-products. Age and gender sometimes are identifiable from the voter rolls as well. But campaigns want to know more about those voters before trying to mobilize them on their behalf, which should incline them to value voting histories as well as what demographic characteristics are available.

Social Network Involvement. Most people everywhere are embedded in social networks, and these networks may provide convenient connections for party mobilization (Huckfeldt/Sprague 1992). People have ties to family, friends, neighbors, coworkers, and among them are those with whom they may have political discussions. Many belong to organizations such as trade unions and churches that may communicate a particular political position or even openly support a candidate or party. It undoubtedly is challenging for parties to penetrate sufficiently into the personal networks to want to mine them for contacts. But it is easy to imagine a two-step flow of contacting influences from one member of a social network to another (McClurg 2004). Party targeting also may focus on organizations, famously trade unions and in some places churches, which bring their members together in like-minded groups. Organizations that might favor a party or candidate are particularly obvious contacting targets, and members of those organizations can be contacted in group meetings or via group mailings.

Party contacting is more highly correlated with the social network variables than it was for personal demographic characteristics. Among them, association members are most likely to be contacted, though the relationship is relatively modest. Surprisingly, trade union membership, though rare in the aggregate, only faintly positions people for campaign contacts. It no doubt varies by country, reaching its highest levels where unions are actively involved in politics. Those who talk politics within their personal networks, especially their family and friends, also are more likely to report party contacts, although again the correlations are modest. Because the nature of political talk within a personal network is not visible to party campaigns, however, this relationship probably is indirect, more attributable to their other characteristics.

Political Attitudes. It is understandable that peoples' political attitudes would make them more susceptible to being targets for political parties and candidates. Partisanship and ideology, interest in politics and use of the media for political information probably position them for political mobilization, even if these attitudes are not ordinarily visible to the party campaigns. Four-fold strength of partisanship and its dichotomy into strong vs. not strong show among the highest correlations with contacting in Table 1. Joining strength of partisanship in magnitude is reported use of from zero to four media sources (newspapers, radio, television, Internet) for political information, which is an indicator of political attentiveness. Beyond these variables, though, the correlations are more modest. Whether dichotomized into very or at least somewhat versus less interest, political interest falls short of media use and strength of partisanship in its association. To an even lesser degree, ideologues too report more party contacts, with those on the right marginally more than those on the left.

Political Behavior. It is in the realm of political behavior that party contacting is expected to be most pronounced. By engaging in political activity, voters' partisan leanings become visible to the campaigns, so it is logical for them to be designated as targets of party mobilization efforts. Leading the way in the correlations are various kinds of personal involvement in the political campaigns themselves – attempting to persuade others to vote a certain way (especially through a party canvass), working for a party or candidate, attending party meetings, and engaging in political protests all are ways that political campaigns can recognize who is likely to be a productive target for their contacts. Even voting in past elections signals to the campaign who is likely to go to the polls, and therefore warrant attention. To be sure, the campaign will want to know more about a likely voter before investing any effort in targeting them but being identified as a voter is a good place to start.

Given these expectations, it may be disappointing that the correlations with political behaviors do not rise substantially above those for the many other characteristics in Table 1. It needs to be taken into account, as is shown in Figure 1, that many parties or candidates do not engage in direct mobilization efforts or that they do not have access to political behavior characteristics. Even where voters would seemingly be productive targets for contacts, the parties may not have the inclination or the resources to seize the opportunities. Nor do the more visible of these behaviors alone invite party contacts. The parties understandably focus on their support

bases, as was shown earlier and will be illustrated in a pair of case studies below.

Individual Characteristics Summarized: A Logit Analysis. Table 1 presented the relationships between overall party contacting and individual characteristics taken one-by-one. This provides a good first glance at whom the parties are targeting. Of course, many of these characteristics are correlated with one another, leaving it unclear whether it is that variable alone or its shared variance with some other variables that are responsible for the relationship. To clarify the picture, I turn to multivariate Logit regression analysis, which is appropriate for the dichotomous dependent variable of whether people were contacted by a party or candidate.

Table 2 presents the results of this analysis, from the strongest to weakest.[18] The overall variance explained in the Logit analysis was low: Cox and Snell R^2 = .20, Nagelkerke's R^2 = .26. This result is hardly unexpected for two reasons. First, the bivariate correlations from Table 1 were mostly modest. Second, as will become apparent below, it is the partisans within the various groupings who are targeted rather than all of the group's members. All but six of the 25 variables included in the Logit analysis were significant, as would be expected with such a large number of cases for even weak relationships.

The strongest relationships in Table 2 are for the behavioral measures: worked for a party, attended party meetings, and voted in the previous elections. These are activities that often are visible to the parties, making their practitioners obvious targets for contacts. Several of the social network variables also showed strong relationships. Discussing politics with their most important discussant now emerges as the most potent of the network variables. Election discussions with family and, if it can be considered a social network variable, organizational membership come in next. These can be thought of as second-order effects, positioning people for party contacts indirectly. Variables measuring attitudinal involvement in politics,

18 Not all of the variables in Table 1 were included in the Logit analysis. Those derived from other variables, preventing Logit from converging on a solution, were omitted. Variables that were not measured in at least 33 of the surveys, such as tried to persuade others, also were omitted because Logit's list-wise missing data procedures sharply reduced the number of cases. To guard against erroneous results due to minimizing missing data omissions, I employed pair-wise deletions of missing data in a multiple regression analysis. Its results parallel the Logit results except that for persuading others, omitted due to missing data in the Logit analysis, emerges as the strongest relationship.

strength of partisanship, political interest, and use of multiple media for political information also figure prominently in the multivariate picture. Ideological extremism, however, falls well short of significance. Its effects seem to be buried by their covariates. Finally, aside from those 65 and older, the demographic variables are especially weak. Even education, though it attains a significant Logit coefficient, exhibits a relatively weak relationship.

Table 2: Logit Regression Results for Party Contacts on Individual Characteristics

Variable	*B*	*Sig*	*Odds Ratio*
Worked on political campaign (yes=1; no=0)	.930	***	2.535
Attended campaign meeting (yes=1; no=0)	.780	***	2.182
Election talk with most important discussant (Yes=1; no=0)	.511	***	1.667
Voted in previous election (Yes=1; no=0)	.508	***	1.661
Belongs to organization (Yes=1; no=0)	.399	***	1.490
Election talk with family (Yes=1; no=0)	.347	**	1.415
Old age (65 or more years of age=1; less=0)	.330	**	1.391
High political interest (very interested=1; less=0)	.274	***	1.316
Strength of partisanship (None=0 to strong=4)	.182	***	1.200
Index of media use (0 to 4 different media used)	.162	***	1.176
Election talk with friends (Yes=1; no=0)	.162	NS	1.175
Election talk with neighbors (Yes=1; no=0)	.158	*	1.172
Education level (None=0 to Postgrad=7)	.150	***	1.162
Subjective social class (Middle or upper class=1; else=0)	.023	NS	1.024
Religious (attends church or prays in Moslem countries=1; no=0)	.015	NS	1.015
Place of residence (rural=0; not rural=1)	.011	NS	1.011
Left-wing (1-3 on 1 to 10 left, right scale; else=0)	.010	NS	1.010
Election talk with spouse (Yes=1; no=0)	-.005	NS	.995
Right-wing (8-10=1 on 1 to 10 left/right scale; else=0)	-.007	NS	.993
Gender (Male=1; female=0)	-.041	NS	.960
Marital status (Yes=1; No=0)	-.074	NS	.929
Election talk with co-workers (Yes=1; no=0)	-.115	NS	.892
Currently employed (Yes=1; no=0)	-.132	NS	.877
Trade union member (Yes=1; no=0)	-.183	NS	.832
Young age (17-29 years of age=1; older=0)	-.222	*	.801
Constant	-2.861	***	.057

***=.001, **=.01, *=.05, NS=not significant at .05 level

Source: CNEP surveys.

5. Targeting of Party Loyalists within Groups

Party contact with voters by each of the demographic, social network, political attitude, and political behavior groupings is only part of the story. As was shown earlier, the parties and candidates devote their contacts mainly to people who are likely to vote for them, their partisan base. Within each of the groupings are partisans of each party, especially the larger ones. It is to be expected that contacts will be concentrated on them. Without differentiating people in these groups by party, the correlations between contacts and the particular group do not provide a complete picture of party contacting efforts.

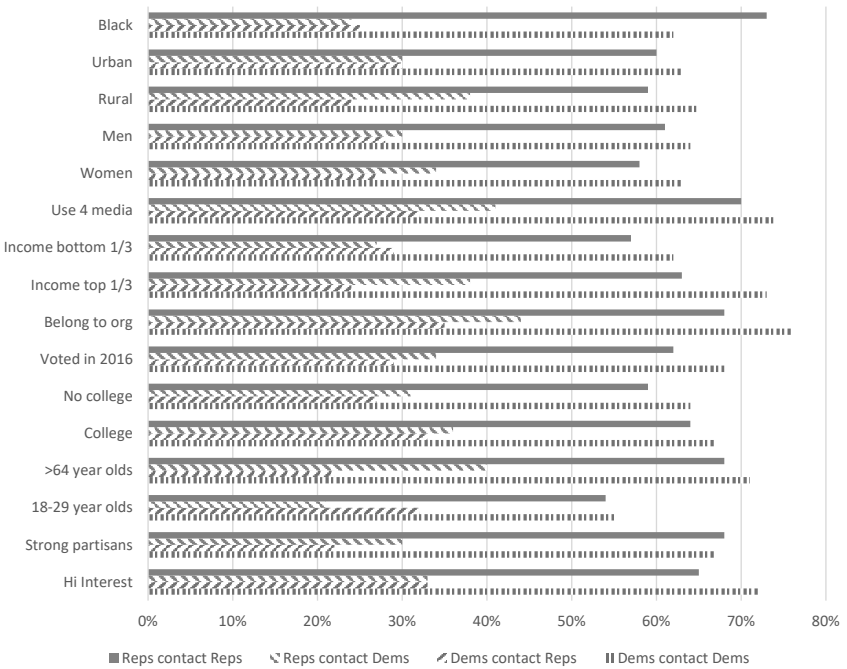
This party targeting can be illustrated by drilling down into recent elections in two of the countries with relatively pronounced party efforts to contact voters – the U.S. in its 2020 presidential election, and South Africa in its 2019 parliamentary election. Around a majority of respondents in surveys of both electorates reported having been contacted by a party: 48 percent in South Africa, 60 percent in the U.S. This pair of elections offers a useful contrast. The U.S. has a presidential system with plurality winners and close competition between its major Democratic and Republican parties nationwide. South Africa has a parliamentary system with proportional representation and dominance by a single party, the African National Congress. Similar patterns of party contacting in each will buttress the contention that parties contact their own base of supporters within each grouping. Attention is focused on a subset of groupings between the countries among those in Table 1, depending upon which ones were most relevant in dividing the electorates.

5.1 The U.S. Example

The American case in 2020, presented in Figure 3, is especially appropriate for this analysis. First, the campaigns can identify their partisan bases from the public records in almost all American states, which makes party targeting of likely supporters easy. 31 of 50 American states record each voter's choice of party when they register; in most of them, voters can vote only in the party primary of their registration. An additional 15 states identify voters' parties by the party primary in which they last voted and provide a public record of this choice. Therefore, in targeting likely party voters in a geographical locale such as a rural area or within a geographically

scattered group like older voters, an American party can identify who are most likely to be its supporters. Second, the calculations for the American two-party system are simple, not necessitating comparisons of multiple pairs of parties or incorporation of third parties. Third, the U.S. consistently ranks at or near the top in the extent of party contacting. Most other countries have so little contacting that differentiating their targeting is irrelevant.

Figure 3: Party Targeting of Party Loyalists, U.S. 2020



Source: CNEP U.S. 2020 election survey

Figure 3 shows that this targeting of likely supporters is pronounced.[19] For every group, both the Democratic and Republican parties concentrate their efforts on their own partisans, almost always by a 2-to-1 margin. Even where they appear to have contacted partisans with the opposite party identification, hoping to persuade them to defect, it is possible in a realigning electoral context that they are contacting people who already have defected.

19 Partisanship is measured by the respondent's self-report of party identification.

One of the prominent stories on the 2020 election, as well as the 2016 election before it, is that Donald Trump was successful in wooing life-long Democrats to support his candidacy. It remains to be seen how much their defections will turn out to be reflected in their party identifications, though the evidence so far is that Trump has induced a realignment among working-class whites and reactions to him may have had the opposite effect among college-educated whites in particular.

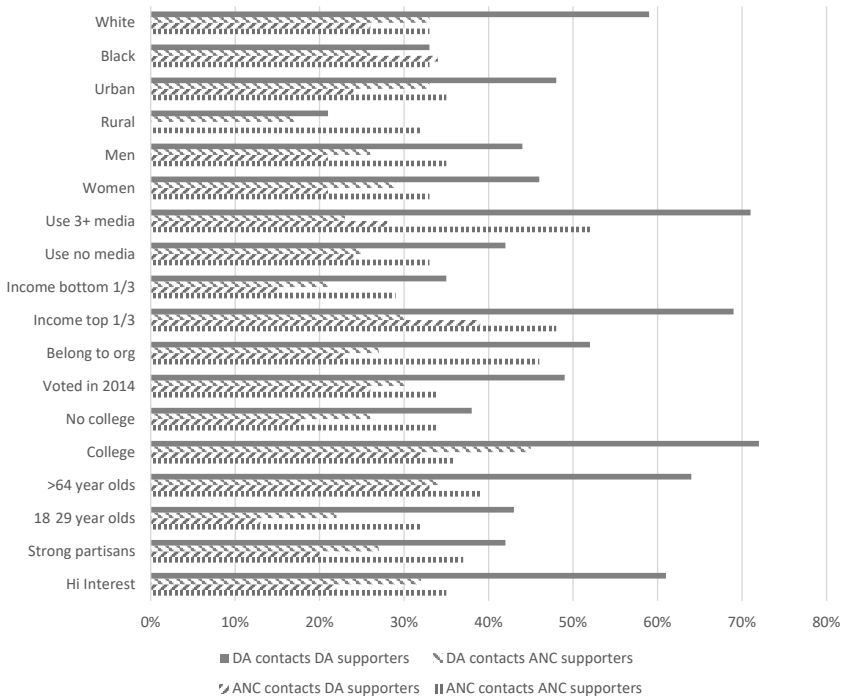
5.2 The South African Example

Figure 4 shows that this targeting of party loyalists also was pronounced in South Africa in 2019 for the dominant ANC and its principal opposition, the Democratic Alliance (DA).[20] The concentration of contacts on their own supporters was repeated, albeit with smaller differences than in the U.S. 2020. The contacting edge for the DA with its own base was built among the better educated, higher income, and more attentive electorates in the Western Cape, the only province which it won. Given that the South African electorate is overwhelmingly black, it is understandable that the only exception to a party targeting its own is the DA, which needs to focus on trying to persuade ANC partisans to defect if it has any hope of challenging ANC dominance. Given the long-standing affinity for the ANC among blacks, it also is to be expected that it does not have to expend as much effort in mobilizing its base as does the opposition.

These contrasting examples illustrate how much parties concentrate their contacting efforts on mobilizing their own partisan supporters. To be sure, there is evidence of some attention devoted to persuading opposing partisans in these two countries, but it pales in comparison with the mobilization of the partisan base. Given the tendency for parties to contact their own supporters on average across all of the elections we have analyzed, it is to be expected that similar patterns would appear in all cases where contacting rises to substantial levels were those individual country election cases to be examined.

20 To include enough media users in South Africa, the media usage comparisons were expanded to using three or four media versus no media.

Figure 4: Party Targeting of Party Loyalists, South Africa 2019



Source: South Africa 2019 election survey

6. Conclusion

Party and candidate campaigns rely on a variety of methods to make their cases to voters. Some, such as television, radio, and newspaper advertising, reach out broadly without directly singling out specific members of the electorate. In the modern age of microtargeting, even some of this campaign messaging, though, is able to focus narrowly on particular groups without targeting specific voters personally. The traditional party canvas, which has relied on direct face-to-face contacts with potential voters, now has been supplemented with direct contacts by telephone (recently including texts and robocalls), mail, leaflets, emails, and social media.

Drawing upon election surveys that have relied on voter reports of party contacts provides much better understanding of what parties and their

candidates do to court voters in election campaigns. Early studies stitched together similar, albeit not identical, questions from different country surveys to measure party contacts. Through the efforts of the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES), especially its module 4, comparable measures of various modes of party contacting have been extended to about forty elections and provide a comprehensive picture of party campaign efforts across the democratic world in the 2011-2016 period.

The Comparative Nation Elections Project goes beyond these earlier studies in several ways. It expands the number of elections studied to four dozen and the time frame from 1992 to 2022. It surveys multiple elections in 13 countries, enabling a more comprehensive examination of variations across elections in the same country.[21] Unlike the first studies but like CSES, it records which parties were performing the contacts. Also, unlike the first studies but like CSES, it differentiates between personal contacts and other modes of direct contact. Its battery of social network and media usage questions facilitates more extensive examination of some of the important individual-level correlates of contacting.

The preceding analysis has drawn upon four dozen CNEP surveys to tell its story of party contacting. What stands out is how variable overall contacting rates are across countries and even across elections in the same country. In some, party efforts are substantial, with overall contacts reaching over half of the electorate. In others, party contacting is rare. Substantially different contacting rates for different elections in the same country defy country-level generalizations based on single election snapshots. When singled out for special consideration, direct personal contacts of a face-to-face nature are found to be much less frequent, exceeding thirty percent in only two elections and not surpassing twelve percent in half of the country cases.

The paper continued with an exploration of party contacts for aggregate-level election characteristics. Party contacting often was symmetrical, with the major parties copying one another in the effort they put into grass-roots voter contacts; but there are some cases where it was not. Other country-level characteristics were also examined. Corroborating results from previous studies, older democracies were more often the sites of greater party effort than the newer democracies, The older democracies presumably have better resourced parties and established traditions of grass-roots mo-

21 Module 4 of CSES shows variation in contacting rates across elections in the two countries where it has multiple surveys.

bilization. Also paralleling previous studies, countries with single-member legislative districts showed higher contacting levels. Single-member districts give more incentive to legislative candidates to seek connections with voters than do proportional and party-list elections. By contrast, parties of the left were not found to be more active than parties of the right, nor were countries with presidential systems or multi-party systems higher in contacting rates.

The analysis then turned to the individual level – to whom the parties were contacting. That they were most often contacting their own partisans was established first by the connection between the party making the contact and the respondent's party identification. When the particular demographic, social network, political attitude, and political behavior groups were correlated with contacting, it was the most political of the factors that stood out among generally weak correlations. Finally, the paper drilled down with examples from the U.S. and South Africa to show that contacts with their own party dominated within the various groupings, thereby depressing the overall correlation between an individual characteristic and reported contacts.

All in all, this paper adds to the studies that preceded it to illuminate party contacting efforts from the perspective of voters across space and time. There is always more to be done of course, including replicating the analysis across more elections in the same countries to determine what limits there may be to country generalizations. It is far too easy to draw a conclusion from only one election as characteristic of a country's party efforts, and the results of this paper suggest that each election may be unique, to be studied in its own right. It also would be valuable to broaden the reach of countries, especially as new democracies come on line.

References

Aldrich, John H., Rachel K. Gibson, Marta Cantijoch, and Tobias Konitzer. 2012. "Getting Out the Vote in the Social Media Era: Are Digital Tools Changing the Extent, Nature, and Impact of Party Contacting in Elections?" *Party Politics* 22: 165-178.

Anderson, Christopher J., and Pablo Beramendi. 2012. "Left Parties, Poor Voters, and Electoral Participation in Advanced Industrial Societies." *Comparative Political Studies* 45: 714-746.

Barnes, Samuel H. 1977. *Representation in Italy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Beck, Paul A. 2022. "The Ground Game in 2020: Party Contacts as Reported by Voters," in John C. Green. David B. Cohen, and Kenneth M. Miller (eds.), *State of the Parties 2022*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, pp.179-195.

Beck, Paul A. 1975. "Environment and Party: The Impact of Political and Demographic County Characteristics on Party Behavior." *American Political Science Review*, 68: 1229-1244.

Beck, Paul A., Richard Gunther, and Erik Nisbet. 2018. "What Happened to the Ground Game in 2016?" in John C. Green, Daniel J. Coffey, and David B. Cohen (eds.), *The State of The Parties: The Changing Role of Contemporary American Parties*. Lanham MD: Rowman and Littlefield, pp. 263-277.

Bhatti, Yosef, Jens Olav Dahlgaard, Jonas Hedegaard Hansen, and Kasper M. Hanson. 2016. "Is Door-to-Door Canvassing Effective in Europe? Evidence from a Meta-study across Six European Countries." *British Journal of Political Science* 49: 279-290.

Coppedge, Michael, John Gerring, Carl Henrik Knutsen, Staffan I. Lindberg, and Jan Teorell, 2022. *Dataset v10. Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Project.*

Cutright, Phillips. 1963. "Measuring the Impact of Local Party Activity on the General Election Vote." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 27: 372-386.

Cutright, Phillips, and Peter Rossi. 1958. "Grass Roots Politicians and the Vote." *American Sociology Review* 23: 171-179.

Green, Donald P., and Alan S. Gerber. 2015. *Get Out the Vote: How to Increase Voter Turnout.* Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution.

Green, Donald P., and Alan S. Gerber. 2016. "Voter Mobilization, Experimentation, and Translational Social Science." *Perspectives on Politics* 14: 738-749.

Hill, Kim Quaile, and Jan E. Leighley. 1996. "Political Parties and Class Mobilization in Contemporary United States Elections." *American Journal of Political Science* 4: 787-804.

Hooghe, Marc, Sara Vissers, Dietlind Stolle, and Valérie-Anne Maheo. 2010. "The Potential of Internet Mobilization: An Experimental Study on the Effects of Internet and Face-to-Face Mobilization Efforts." *Political Communication* 27: 404-431.

Huckfeldt, Robert, and John Sprague. 1992. "Political Parties and Electoral Mobilization: Political Structure, Social Structure, and the Party Canvass." *American Political Science Review* 86: 70-86.

Johnston, Ron, David Cutts, Charles Pattie, and Justin Fisher. 2012. "We've Got Them on the List: Contacting, Canvassing and Voting in a British General Election Campaign." *Electoral Studies 31: 317-329.*

Karp, Jeffrey. 2012. "Electoral Systems, Party Mobilisation and Political Engagement." *Australian Journal of Political Science* 47: 71-89.

Karp, Jeffrey, and Susan A. Banducci. 2007. "Party Mobilization and Political Participation in New and Old Democracies." *Party Politics* 13: 217-234.

Karp, Jeffrey, Susan A. Banducci, and Shaun Bowler. 2007. "Getting Out the Vote: Party Mobilization in Comparative Perspective." *British Journal of Political Science* 38: 91-112.

Klingelhöfer, Tristan, and Daniel Schlozman. 2018. "Between Mass Party Legacy and Catch-All Efficiency: Party Contacting in Old and New Democracies". Paper delivered at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Boston.

Krönke, Matthias, Sarah J. Lockwood, and Robert Mattes. 2022. "Who is Canvassing Whom? Party Electoral Strategies in Africa." Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Montreal, Canada.

Magalhães, Pedro C., John H. Aldrich, and Rachel K. Gibson. 2020. "New Forms of Mobilization, New People Mobilized? Evidence from the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems." *Party Politics* 26: 605-618.

McClurg, Scott. 2004. "Indirect Mobilization: The Social Consequences of Party Contacts in an Election Campaign." *American Politics Research* 32: 406-443.

Mujami, Saiful, R. William Liddle, and Kuskridho Ambardi. 2018. *Voting Behavior in Indonesia Since Democratization*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Nuñes, Lucas. 2021. "The Effects of Local Campaigning in Great Britain." *Electoral Studies* 73: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2021.102384.

Panagopoulos, Costas. 2016. "All About That Base: Changing Campaign Strategies in U.S. Presidential Elections." *Party Politics* 22: 179-190.

Riccardo, Ladini. 2021. "The Differentiated Effects of Direct Mobilization on Turnout: Evidence from the 2013 Austrian Parliamentary Elections." *German Politics* 30: 267-296.

Rohrschneider, Robert. 2002. "Mobilizing versus Changing: How Do Parties Target Voters in Election Campaigns." *Electoral Studies* 21: 367-382.

Rosenstone, Steven J., and John Mark Hansen. 1993. *Mobilization, Participation, and Democracy in America*. New York: Macmillan.

Sudulich, Laura, and Siim Trumm. 2019. "A Comparative Study of the Effects of Electoral Institutions on Campaigns." *British Journal of Political Science* 49-381-399.

Vaccari, Cristian. 2017. "Online Mobilization in Comparative Perspective: Digital Appeals and Political Engagement in Germany, Italy, and the United Kingdom." *Political Communication* 34: 69-88.