The Ground Game in 2020:

Party Contacts as Reported by Voters*

by

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From the very beginnings of politics, politicians have valued direct contacts with voters as a resource in their campaigns. Face-to-face contacts on the doorstep and other places where people congregated have been important components of their campaign arsenals. In more modern times, political campaigners have reached out directly to voters through the mail, telephone, twitter, and increasingly the Internet. Although not all have the intimacy of face-to-face contacts, all of them can be subsumed, with some allowance for evolving technologies, under the heading of the more labor-intensive "ground game." What unites them is that the voter is identified personally as a recipient of the campaign message. By contrast, with the advent of the mass media, campaigns also have tried to reach voters through mass-media advertising in newspapers, radio, and television, with the latter often labeled the "air war".[1] The campaign message is just "put out there" without an attempt to identify and target any specific recipient personally, though particular groups may be reached through micro-targeting of particular markets. A more capital-intensive way of reaching large numbers of voters, use of the mass media is less personal and probably less effective.[2]

Measuring the Ground Game

Researchers have measured the ground game in several different ways. First, relying upon survey reports by voters, across elections as early as 1956 from the American National Election Studies, they have assessed personal contacts made directly by political parties and candidates during the election campaign (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993, pp. 162-177; Beck and Heidemann 2014a and works cited therein). The advantage of these reported party contacts is that they directly report campaign contacts from the perspective of those who receive them. One disadvantage of these reports is that often they are unclear about how these contacts were made. In some cases, they are the product of face-to-face contacts between party workers and candidates and voters through the traditional party canvas. In other cases, they may result from phone calls, emails, or mailings, which vary in how personal they may be. Another disadvantage is that it is indeterminant how accurate are these respondent perceptions of contact. Over the course of a long political campaign, voters may not remember whether they were contacted and how. Unfortunately, there are no easy ways to validate survey reports of party contacts.[3]

A second measure of ground game effort is often indirectly inferred from the presence of local campaign field offices through which they often are managed (Darr 2020; Masket, Sides, and Vavreck 2016; Darr and Levendusky 2014; and the works cited therein). The advantage of using campaign offices is that they typically are known and thereby measurable. These offices organize the activities of party workers at the local level, pinpointing where and how often to contact particular voters. They operate phone banks that can reach out to voters, with the up-to-date knowledge of whether they are registered and (with early voting) have not yet voted, prompting follow-up efforts to mobilize them on behalf of party candidates. Increasingly, even personalized efforts have been directed from centralized locations rather than the local arena through campaign

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[1] On the distinction between the air war and the ground game, see *inter alia* the study by Zhang and Chung (2020).

[2] For an insightful study of modern ground game techniques and their effectiveness, see Issenberg 2012.

[3] An indirect form of validation comes from predictive validation: contacts reported from each party by party's base groups. Democrats should be more likely to receive Democratic contacts, Republicans to receive Republican contacts; and so forth.

field offices, however, so relying on identification of field offices may underestimate the ground game effort.

Third, classic studies of party contacting relied on party leader reports at the local level to determine their campaign efforts, which in turn were connected to voting results (Gosnell 1927; Cutright and Rossi 1958; Katz and Eldersveld 1961; Cutright and Rossi 1963). Local party machines are legendary for the effectiveness of their contacts with voters. In machine cities, it was the responsibility of local precinct captains to maintain contacts with their residents and to make sure those known to be supportive of the party were mobilized in election campaigns. They were most assiduous in these efforts in support of local candidates, whose victories were necessary for a continuation of machine control. Their canvassing efforts also carried over to presidential campaigns, especially when the presidential election was coterminous with local elections such as in contests for Congress.

This paper relies on the first type of measure: how ground game efforts reached voters in the 2020 presidential election campaign as reported by survey respondents. It draws upon surveys conducted under the aegis of the Comparative National Elections Project (Gunther *et al.* 2016)[4] that asked respondents to report party contacts by presidential candidate representatives and their parties during the campaign. What is unique about the questions from these surveys is that they asked separately about personal and other kinds of party contacts, which enables analysis of each kind of contact.[5]

The following analyses begin with the frequencies of reported party contacts in 2020 overall by party and then separately by personal vs. other kinds of contact. For purposes of comparison, they are presented and discussed along with frequencies from earlier CNEP U.S. surveys in 2016, 2012, and 2004 in which the same questions were asked.[6] To test the hypothesis that ground game efforts were focused, strategically, on the swing or battleground states in that campaign, this analysis was replicated for those two types of states as they emerged in each campaign. The paper then goes on to identify key characteristics of respondents who were contacted in 2020, with occasional references to how they had differed from earlier years.

Overall Party Contacts in 2020 and Before

Figure 1 shows the percentages CNEP survey respondents who reported having been contacted by representatives of political parties and candidates during the 2020 presidential campaign -- and, for comparison, in 2004, 2012, and 2016. These results can be employed to test several hypotheses about party contacting.

First, even in these times of huge presidential campaign spending on mass-media advertising (the air war), grassroots party contacts have been an important part of campaign

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[4] CNEP surveys have been conducted in over 60 elections in 29 countries, almost always employing the same questions to ask about party contacts. For more on the project, see u.osu.edu/cnep.

[5] The other leading U.S. survey asking about party contacts, the American National Election Studies, does not separate personal from other kinds of contacts.

[6] Appendix A contains descriptions of these surveys and their party contact questions,.

strategies. Modern campaigns have focused on mobilizing their voter base, assiduously contacting their supporters to make sure that they turn out at the polls. (Particularly with the prevalence of early voting, many of us have personally experienced personal contacts from the party we are registered with that suddenly end once we have cast an early vote, which is recorded regularly in the official voter data base.) Figure 1 shows that about 40% of respondents reported being contacted by either the Democrats or Republicans during the 2020 campaign. Contacts by both parties were greater than four years before, at similar levels to 2012, somewhat lower than in 2004.

Second, a prominent feature of modern campaign ground game strategies is that they are directed towards their voter base. This hypothesis will be tested more fully later, but a surprising percentage of voters reported having received contacts from both parties. That this percentage is significantly lower in in 2016 and 2020 suggests that base mobilization strategies, directed only to a party's supporters, may have become more common in recent years

Third, it is presumed that Democrats pour more effort into grass roots contacts than do Republicans. Since the 1930s at least, their strength has been concentrated in big cities, where local machines and their campaign efforts were most prevalent.[7] Although their base is still largely urban, it is doubtful that the political machines are as strong as they were in the past and, therefore, are not as dedicated to mobilizing loyal voters. These expectations are borne out in Figure 1. While Democratic contacts were slightly more frequent in every year, the differences fall short of significance. In short, both Democratic and Republican efforts were substantial.

Figure 1
Party Contacts by Party

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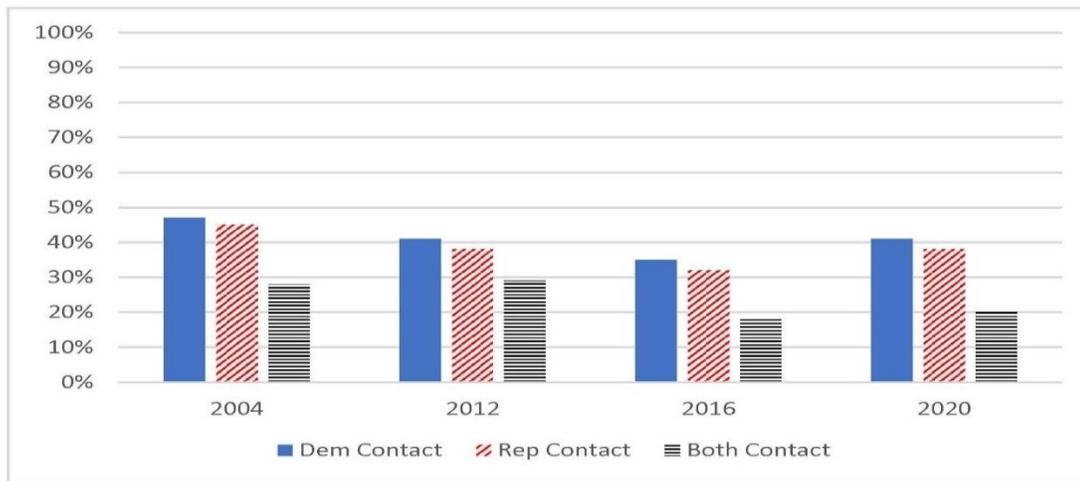
[7] This is not to say that political machines were solely city based. Some of the most storied machines were located in rural areas, for example Plaquemines Parish in the Cajun country of Louisiana. Nor were political machines only Democratic organizations. Prior to the New Deal realignment, some of the most powerful political machines were Republican, located in such large cities as Chicago, Philadelphia, and Pittsburgh. For more on political machines and their activities historically, see Brown and Halaby (1987).

Fourth, according to the conventional wisdom, 2016 and 2020 sharply contrasted in presidential campaigns' attention to the ground game. The Trump campaign in 2016 eschewed traditional ground game activities, especially the opening of local field offices, to concentrate on twitter in particular in reaching supporters directly. The ground game then was widely seen as a strategic advantage for the Clinton campaign (Francia 2018; Sides, Tesler, and Vavreck 2018). In 2020, the tables were turned, with the ground game advantage attributed to Trump. The Trump campaign invested much more heavily in field offices (Darr 2020), and the ground game effort that they supported, than did the Biden campaign. The reason, it was widely noted, is that the Biden camp was much less inclined to expose its campaign workers to personal contacts, with voters or even among themselves, to minimize their Covid exposure. The great disparity in field offices between the two campaigns reflects this strategic decision (Darr 2020).

The Figure 1 data belie these impressions. The Trump campaign reached more voters through ground game activities than was immediately apparent in 2016, dramatically eating into what was supposed to be a Clinton advantage. In 2020, there was an upsurge in reported party contacts on **both** sides. The Biden campaign seems to have been able to overcome its dearth of field offices, and the grassroots efforts they supported, by alternative ways of contacting voters. The differences in reported contacts between the two parties were insignificant then. One lesson to be learned from these results is that there are alternative ways for the ever-resourceful campaign organizations to contact voters beyond field offices and the grassroots efforts they lead. The lesson the Trump campaign learned, despite its electoral win in 2016, is that ground game efforts are worth the investment – even if they did not prove to be sufficient to carry Trump to victory four years later. And the lesson that the Biden campaign learned is that the absence of field offices does not doom the ground game to ineffectiveness.

Personal and Other Types of Party Contacts in 2020 and Before

Overall party contacts of course are only part of the story. The advantage of the CNEP measurements of party contacts is that they distinguish between those that are personal, presumably face-to-face, versus the Internet, telephone, twitter, and mail. Telephone phone banks have been valuable resources in reaching out to voters in recent decades. The Internet has become more and more important in various ways. Campaigns directly email campaign messages and fundraising appeals to voters. They rely on twitter to maintain regular contact with their followers. They insert campaign advertisements into social media posts. Their creativity in finding ways to reach voters, especially their supporters, is impressive. These methods must be captured to paint a complete picture of party contacting.

The CNEP U.S. surveys asked separately about personal versus other types of party contact (see Appendix A for the question wording). The distinction proves to be instructive in several important ways.

Figure 2 shows how infrequently respondents report having received a personal contact from a representative of a political party or candidate. Even though personal contact has been shown to be more effective in achieving the desired result, whether it is a donation to a charity or

turnout in an election (Green and Gerber 2008), it is challenging for political campaigns. It depends upon labor intensive face-to-face interactions between party workers and voters at the doorstep or in public settings such as shopping malls, county fairs, and other congregate settings. It is hardly surprising that no more than 16% of respondents reported having been contacted personally in any year across the 2004 to 2020 period. Nor is it surprising that Democratic contacts were more frequent than Republican. Because they are younger and less educated minorities, with a lower propensity to vote, potentially Democratic voters are more in need of a "nudge" to induce them to vote, and Democratic campaign organizations are more dedicated to providing such a nudge through personal contacts (Arceneaux and Nickerson 2009).

What is surprising, considering the ground game strategies of the Trump campaign in 2016 and the Biden campaign in 2020, is that personal contacting rose from less than 10% in the two earlier elections to 10% and more in 2016 and 2020. The hypothesized drops in personal contacting of the Trump campaign in 2016 and the Biden campaign in 2020 did not materialize. As hypothesized, however, reported personal contacts by both parties were rare.

By contrast, Figure 2 also shows that party contacts through the Internet, mail, and telephone (including twitter most recently) were much more likely to be reported by voters – and at essentially the same levels for the two parties. By this measure, party contacting fell off in 2016 by both parties, but it was restored almost to previous heights in 2020. However, in the two most recent elections, significantly fewer respondents reported receiving other types of contact from both parties, suggesting that the campaigns were more selective in their targeting.

Figure 2
Personal and Other Party Contacts by Party

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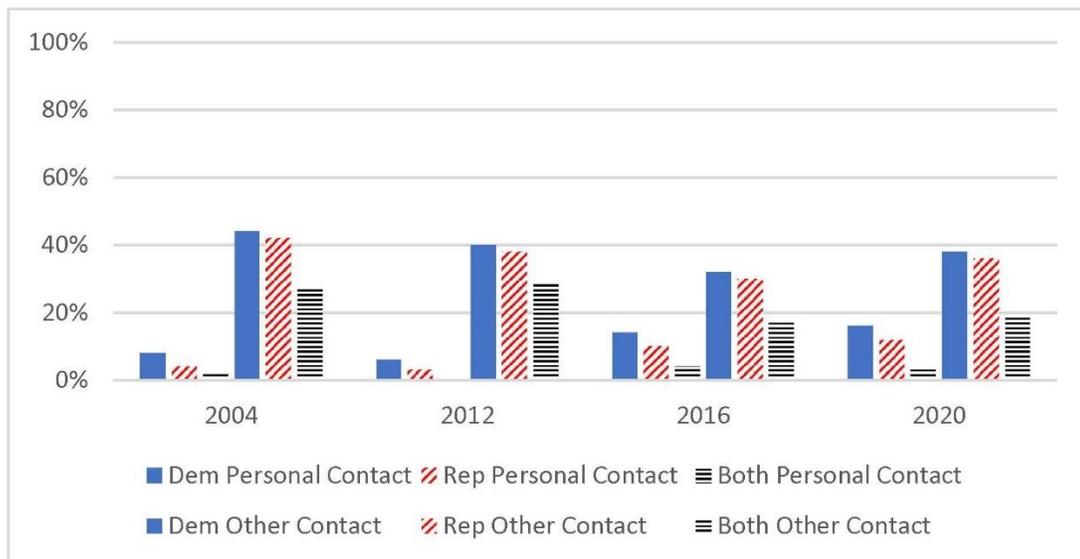
Party Contacting in Battleground States

It is an inefficient usage of scarce party resources, of both labor and capital, for campaigns to devote their attention to all places that choose presidential electors. Most states are not competitive in presidential elections, and presidential campaigns virtually ignore them. Field offices are not established there, candidates "fly over" but do not visit them, and campaign ads do not flood their television markets.[8] The ability to reach potential voters via the Internet and telephone mitigates this strong tendency to ignore the non-competitive states, however, as messages can be communicated virtually cost-free without regard to where a recipient lives. Indeed, in fund-raising, dollars from donors in a non-competitive state are just as valuable as those from people in competitive states.

Presidential elections are won by candidates with the Electoral College majority rather than popular votes. In recent years, the number of states that are truly competitive for these Electoral College votes has dwindled to about a dozen. Campaigns develop their own strategies about where to concentrate their resources, but the overwhelming tendency is to focus them on these so-called "battleground" or "swing" states (Gimpel *et al*. 2007). The election will turn on how well candidates do in them. Their importance is well illustrated by the states that were battlegrounds in the 2016 and 2020 presidential contests. Arizona, Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, Michigan, Nevada, New Hampshire, Pennsylvania, Texas, and Wisconsin were targeted by both campaigns in 2016 and 2020. By winning most of them, Trump captured the presidency in 2016. By losing Georgia, Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin, which he had won in 2016, the 2020 victory went to Biden.

This paper defines battleground states as those that turned out to be the most competitive in presidential popular votes: specifically, where the margin between the two major-party candidates was 6% or less. This measure employs the same objective standard across the four presidential elections rather than depending upon subjective assessments by campaign experts of what states were battlegrounds. Using a competitiveness margin of 6% has the added advantage of including more states in the battleground category than a smaller margin might.[9]

Alternative designations of battleground states are not easy by any subjective measure. The presidential campaigns are not always transparent about where they choose to invest their resources, wanting to hide their strategies from the opposition. And their strategies can change over the course of the campaign, as states they thought were safe for one party become competitive and previously-identified swing states emerge as solid for one party or the other.[10] As it turns out,

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[8] See Darr (2020) on field offices and https://www.nationalpopularvote.com/map-general-election-campaign-events-and-tv-ad-spending-2020-presidential-candidates for FairVote's data on concentration of presidential campaign resources on the 2020 battleground states.

[9] The CNEP surveys included respondents from all of the states defined as battlegrounds using a competitiveness measure.

[10] A thoughtful illustration of this comes from Shaw (2006, p, 57). In his analysis of the 2000 and 2004 campaigns, he distinguishes among the Bush campaign's 29 publicly listed targeted states, 23 "real" targeted states, and the "real real" list of 15 states. The Democrats' priority list presumably did not exactly replicate that of the Bush campaigns.

the competitiveness measure overlaps considerably with the subjective designations. The results of this paper's analysis were essentially unchanged by alternative designations of battlegrounds.

Previous research, primarily based on American National Election Study data, has documented that a battleground state effect emerged in the 2000s For both Democratic and Republican campaigns in 2000, 2004, and 2008, the difference in overall party contacts between competitive and non-competitive states was sizable (Beck and Heidemann 2014b). This gap persisted into the 2012 and 2016 elections (Beck *at al.* 2018).[11] For both parties, the gap was much smaller, usually insignificant, from 1956 through 1996. By most accounts, the disproportionate effort in the Electoral College battlegrounds reflected a change in presidential campaign strategies to concentrate primarily on mobilizing the party's base where the competition was most intense.

The CNEP surveys enable us to compare party contacting between competitive and non-competitive states in 2020, also drilling down into the types of contacts. As stated earlier, face-to-face personal contacts, albeit rare, have been found to be the most effective in mobilizing people to donate to charities and support candidates for office. Where a battleground strategy is employed in presidential campaign, it should be expected to show up most clearly in personal contacts. Other ground game activities, on the other, should not differ as much between the two types of states.

Using the CNEP data, Figure 3 tests the hypothesis that overall party contacting was more frequent in the competitive battlegrounds than in the non-competitive states. The differences were as expected in 2004, 2012, and 2016 (see also Beck and Heidemann 2014b; and Beck *et al. 201*8). For both parties, more contacts were reported in the battlegrounds. By contrast, the gap was not nearly as large in 2020 for both parties, falling far short of significance for the Democrats.

Figure 3

Contacts by Party in Battleground vs. Non-Battleground States

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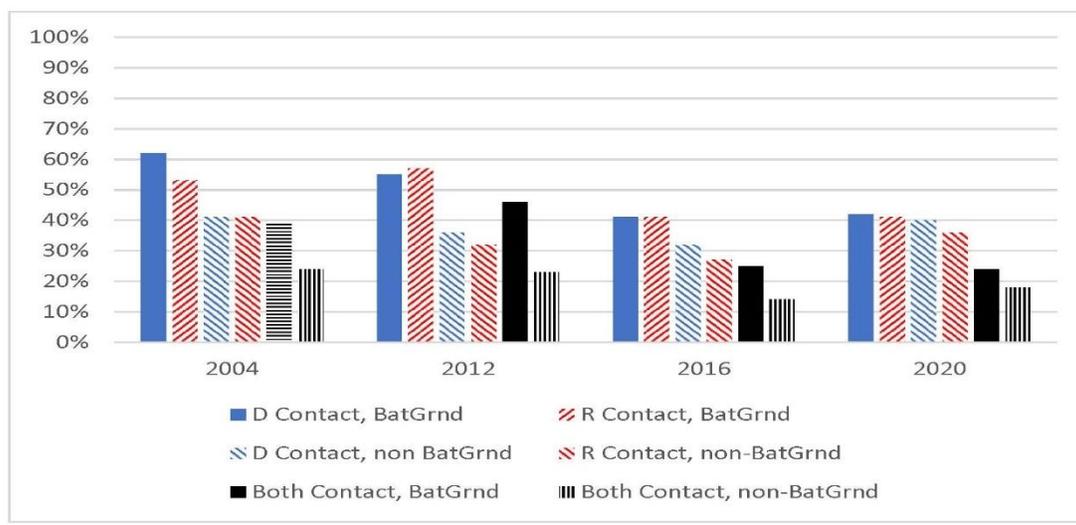
[11] It appears in the ANES data and is replicated in the 2012 and 2016 CNEP surveys.

Why did a pattern that persisted for almost two decades virtually vanish in 2020? The focus on mobilizing the base had not disappeared, if anything it had quickened, even if overall party contacting did not reach earlier levels. It is hard to explain the vanishing battleground effect with any confidence, but two possibilities are plausible. First, the pandemic may have constrained some ground game activities. The Biden campaign decided not to establish as many field offices as the Clinton campaign had in 2016 and seemed to be more reluctant to send its volunteers personally into homes and crowded events (Darr 2020). Second, riding the tide of technological advances, both campaigns also relied more extensively on tweets and on-line appeals, flooding the Internet and social media with campaign messages. They were cheap and could be easily targeted to base supporters, identified through various email and twitter lists of followers and by demographic characteristics, even if the supporters did not reside in battleground states. The focus on these kinds of messages over traditional ground game canvassing may not be only a product of the pandemic, but also it exploits opportunities provided by new technologies that will become even more attractive in the future.

CNEP survey data separating personal from other types of party contacts, presented in Figures 4 and 5, allow us to explore these possibilities. As Figure 4 shows, reported personal contacts by the Democrats did not differ between the battleground and non-battleground states. The Biden campaign had consciously avoided traditional ground efforts due to the pandemic, and it reduced to insignificance the gap between the two kinds of states. On the Republican side, however, this gap remained, even though voters continued to report less contact from its campaign than from the Democrats in both types of states. As Figure 5 shows, differences in reports of other types of party contact beyond the personal were insignificant for both parties in the battleground vs. non-battleground states in 2020 in sharp contrast to their divides in the earlier years.

Figure 4

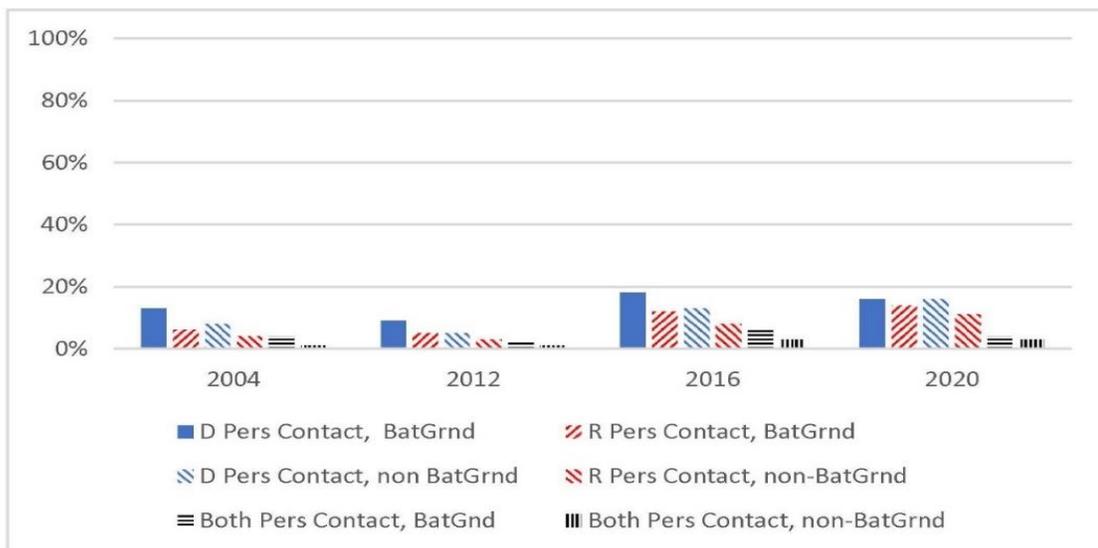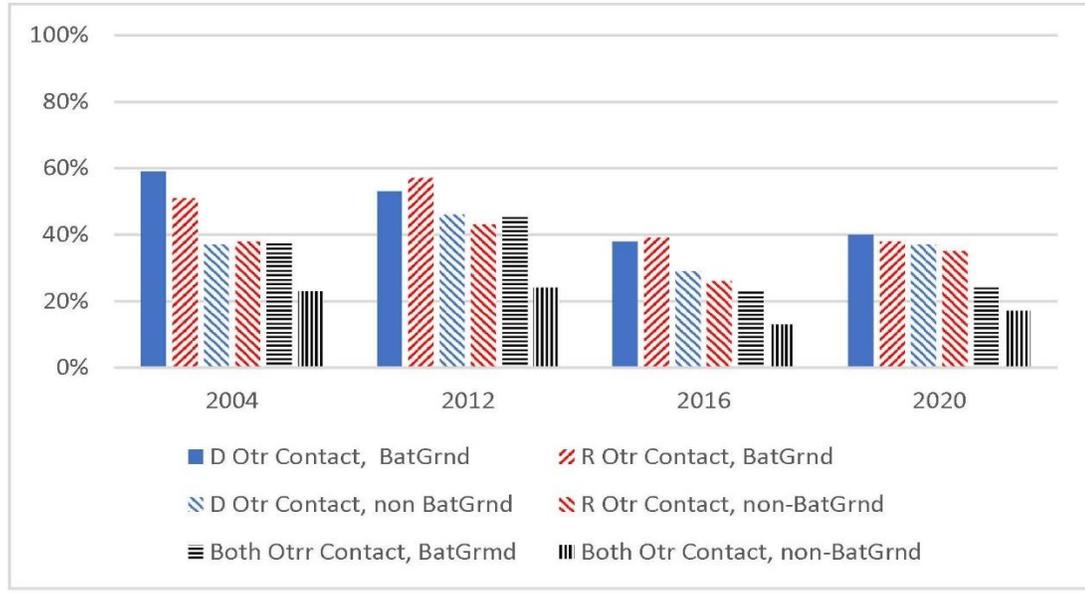Personal Contacts by Party in Battleground vs. Non-Battleground States

Figure 5

Other Contacts by Party in Battleground vs. Non-Battleground States

Whom Did the Parties Contact?

Our attention now turns to whom the parties contacted through their ground game efforts. The conventional wisdom is that they have been targeting their base supporters in recent decades, mobilizing them to vote in the upcoming election (Beck *et al*. 2018; Panagopoulos 2016). Seen from the perspective of voters, then, the hypothesis is that reports of contact should be significantly higher among those in the party's base than it is for others. Research drawing upon CNEP surveys of previous elections (Beck et al. 2018) also shows that some demographic characteristics were related to party contacts beyond a party's base supporters. They are best thought of "low hanging fruit" that a party ground game should target, especially fellow partisans among them, because of their high propensity to vote.

Table 1 presents the Pearson product-moment correlations between the various reports of party contact and a variety of respondents' demographic and political characteristics. As before, party contacts are measured by the presence (=1) or absence (=0) of contact and separated into personal and other types, with the two combining into a measure of overall contact. With only a few exceptions,[12] the respondent characteristics are similarly measured in dichotomous terms as either the presence (=1) or absence (=0) of the particular characteristic. To simplify the presentation, cell entries in Table 1 are provided only for correlations that reach significance at the

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[12] Income is measured in categories of actual dollars; Age is in years; Internet elec news in days per week; and Regular Voter in number of times (from 0-3) voting in 2016 and 2020 general election and 2020 primary.

.95 level of confidence. Where the cell is empty, the relationship is insignificantly different from 0.

It is hypothesized that the parties will target their partisan supporters in the ground game, and the evidence is clear that they did in 2020. Most notably, both personal and other types of Democratic party contact are reported by Democratic party identifiers (the signs are positive and significant) and Republicans are not likely to report them (the signs are negative and significant).[13] The reverse is the case in reports by Republican party identifiers: both types of Republican party contact were received by them, whereas both types of Democratic party contact were not. This base-mobilization pattern is repeated for how respondents had voted in the 2016 and 2020 general elections and (with a single exception) in which party's primary they had participated. Similarly, Democratic and Republican party activists are more likely to report contacts of both types from their own parties, but not from the opposite party. Relatively robust correlations indicate a substantial concentration of effort on the party's partisan base.

Typically, these base-mobilization patterns are more pronounced for other types of party contact than they are for personal contacts. Personal contacts are difficult to achieve in any election campaign, especially one waged during a health pandemic. In 2020, as shown earlier, personal contacts were rarely reported by survey respondents compared to the less direct face-to-face contacts by telephone, mail, and Internet. Interestingly in light of the Biden campaign's reluctance to launch an aggressive ground game, however, these personal contacts were not significantly less likely to be reported by Democratic voters and activists than by their Republican counterparts.

Several other political characteristics are significantly correlated with party contacts that only indirectly reflect the base-mobilization strategy. Respondents who were highly interested in the political campaign, who had regularly voted in the most recent elections, and who consulted party websites on the Internet were targeted by both parties. When controlled by party identification, however, it becomes clear that in most cases the parties were contacting partisan supporters who also possessed these characteristics, not people on the other side. Again, the relationships are typically stronger for other types of party contact than for personal contacts, where they fail to reach significance for people with high levels of campaign interest.

Finally, there are the voters who are not a dependable part of a party's base. Chief among them are nonpartisans, who were significantly less likely to report contacts from either party, both overall and for other types of contacts. Even though their support often spells the difference between winning and losing, mobilizing them through party contacts may be counterproductive without additional information about their preferences.

A different picture from one of extensive base-mobilization emerges when one looks at the demographic correlates. First, as mentioned earlier, fewer of them attain significance, signifying that the contacting levels do not diverge often by party on them. Second, the coefficients of many of the significant ones are generally weaker, indicating less party difference between contacts and

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[13] It is important to reiterate that the overall measure of party contacts combines both personal and other types. Personal contacts are rare, which means that the other types contribute disproportionately to the overall contacting score.

non-contacts. Third, both parties are less likely to contact younger voters, while the Republicans are likely to concentrate their efforts on older people. Finally, there is evidence that both Democratic and Republican parties sometimes targeted the same groups: higher income voters, college graduates and college degreed women, union members, and social media users. Controls for party identification show that their targets, though, are usually partisan supporters within these groups.

Two correlations in Table 1 are of particular note. Union members reported receiving contacts from both parties in 2020, Traditionally an important part of the Democratic base, this seems indicative of the realignment of the party constituencies that was particularly pronounced in the two Trump elections. Union leaders still typically line up on the Democratic side of the aisle in 2020 and encouraged their rank and file to support Biden. But, a significant number of the rank and file resisted their leaders' appeals to support Trump, and the Trump campaign targeted them. The youngest group of voters, aged 18 to 30, were less likely to report contacts from either party. They always have been more difficult to track down, partly because of their greater residential mobility, compared to older voters. With college campuses closed due to the pandemic, 2020 was an especially challenging year for Democrats to mobilize this important voting base, and they underperformed in reaching out to them.

The base-mobilization pattern reappears for several key demographic groups: minorities and white Christians. Both blacks and Hispanics, and minorities overall, were generally more likely to have received Democratic contacts and less likely to have received Republican contacts in 2020. Contrastingly, other types of contact were noticeably absent for the Republican campaign where these groups were concerned. Personal contacts by the Democratic campaign were especially pronounced for these minorities and less likely or insignificant by the Republican party. What is perhaps unexpected is the weakness of this pattern for groups that were an essential component of the Democratic voter base. Clearly, the Democrats in 2020 underperformed in its mobilization of blacks and Hispanics, as had been the case also in 2016 (Beck *et al.* 2018).

The results of Table 1 also show evidence of Republican mobilization of its voter base. Whites who identified as born-again Christians reported more personal and other contacts from the Republican campaign – and correspondingly less from the Democratic campaign. Whites who attended church at least weekly reported more Republican attention of both types, but less from the Democrats, albeit only for personal contacts. The GOP also was more likely to contact rural residents, the Democratic campaign less likely.

Table 1
Demographic and Political Correlations of Party Contacts

	Dems Overall	Dems Personal	Dems Other	Rep Overall	Rep Personal	Rep Other
Income	0.08		0.10	0.11		0.12
Income lower 3rd			0.12	-0.09		-0.09
Income middle 3rd						
Income top 3rd	0.09		0.09	0.12		0.12
BA degree	0.11		0.12	0.10		0.09
BA degree women	0.09		0.10	0.06		0.06
Female				-0.05	-0.06	-0.05
White		-0.18		0.16	0.05	0.17
Black	0.05	0.17		-0.09		-0.09
Hispanic		0.07	-0.06	-0.13		-0.14
Minority		0.18		-0.16	-0.05	-0.17
Age		-0.09	0.07	0.19		0.21
Age 18-30	-0.06		-0.08	-0.15	-0.07	-0.15
Age 31-59		0.07			0.09	
Age 60 & older		-0.10	0.05	0.15		,15
City resident		0.07		-0.12		-0.12
Suburban resident						
Rural resident	-0.11	-0.08	-0.09	0.07		0.07
White Wkly Church		-0.07		0.17	0.11	0.17
White born again	-0.07	-0.07	-0.05	0.18	0.09	0.19
Union member	0.08		0.10	0.07	0.09	0.06
Internet elec news	0.24	0.07	0.24	0.12		0.12
Internet sharer	0.20	0.10	0.20	0.15	0.09	0.15
Strong PID	0.11	0.06	0.12	0.08		0.08
Republican PID	-0.19	-0.15	-0.17	0.27	0.14	0.27
Democratic PID	0.33	0.18	0.33	-0.13	-0.13	-0.12
Hi Interest	0.21		0.23	0.21		0.23
Rep Activist				0.12	0.16	0.11
Dem Activist	0.21	0.15	0.22			
Clinton Vote	0.35	0.22	0.33	-0.32	-0.19	-0.30
Trump16 Vote	-0.34	-0.19	-0.32	0.30	0.20	0.27
Biden Vote	0.36	0.26	0.31	-0.33	-0.24	-0.30
Trump20 Vote	-0.36	-0.25	-0.31	0.33	0.26	0.31
Dem Primary Vote	0.42	0.28	0.38	-0.06	-0.10	
Rep Primary Vote	-0.17	-0.13	-0.15	0.29	0.26	0.28
Registered	0.17	0.06	0.18	0.20	0.07	0.20
No PID	-0.17		-0.18	-0.16		-0.18
Regular Voter	0.36	0.22	0.34	0.15		0.15
Used party website	0.26	0.13	0.25	0.19	0.12	0.18

Beck *et al*. (2018) reported the correlations between party contacts and these political and demographic characteristics for the 2016 presidential election. In most cases, the results were similar. However, two noteworthy differences between 2016 and 2020 appeared for Hispanics and union members. At least in terms of personal contacts, the Democratic campaign was more likely to contact Hispanics in 2020 than it had been four years before. Hispanics have been an important part of the Democratic base for recent elections. What is perhaps paradoxical is that Democratic mobilization efforts were significantly focused on them in 2020, even though Hispanics ended up voting more for Trump than they had in 2016 – without significant Republican targeting efforts. Whereas union members were more likely than non-members to report contacts only from Democrats in 2016, they reported significantly more targeting from Republicans in 2020. This signifies the Republican campaign's realization that it could draw union voters away from their traditional allegiance to the Democratic party.

Conclusion

The ground game traditionally has been an important part of a presidential election campaign. This paper has explored ground game efforts by the 2020 presidential campaigns through the lens of survey respondents' reports as to whether they had been contacted by one or both of the major-party campaigns. It drills down to differentiate direct personal from other types of contacts, while combining the two into overall contacts. To provide some perspective on the 2020 campaigns, its results are compared with earlier election campaigns for which we have parallel evidence from earlier surveys conducted by the Comparative National Elections Project.

The parties' ground games were active in 2020, as they had been in earlier years. Almost 40% of voters reported having been contacted by party representatives, with contacts perceived from Democrats slightly more than those from Republicans and slight increases in both after a dip in 2016. Surprising numbers of voters reported contacts from both parties, documenting that they had reached beyond base mobilization strategies. Personal, face-to-face contacts were rare compared to other types of contact in 2020 – as they had been before. Despite the Biden campaigns' reluctance to commit its workers to personal encounters due the pandemic, surprisingly it still appeared to practice them more than the Trump campaign.

The principal difference between party contacting in 2020 and other recent contests is that the parties did not concentrate their contacts disproportionately on the small number of battleground states. After a persistent emphasis in contacting in the battlegrounds earlier in the 2000s, the presidential campaigns appeared to give equal attention to battlegrounds and non-battlegrounds in 2020, at least as perceived by voters. Why is not clear, but one possibility is that the ease of reaching voters via telephone, twitter, and the Internet made contacting less dependent on having state campaign organizations in place. Moreover, if not to mobilize the party base in key states, such efforts may be devoted more universally these days to raising campaign funds. The Covid pandemic also may have figured into these efforts, and earlier patterns may be restored after it has ended.

What is unchanged from before is that both of the 2020 campaigns targeted their base supporters in their contacting efforts, especially when identified by partisan rather than by demographic characteristics. Understandably, Democrats were devoted to mobilizing likely

Democratic voters while Republicans were reaching out to likely Republican voters. Both party campaigns targeted some demographic groups in relatively equal measure, probably because they were the "low hanging fruit" in ease of contact, hoping to reach voters within them who were party supporters. Democrats underperformed in their efforts to reach 18-to-30-year-olds in 2020, though they did better in reaching Hispanic voters than they had in earlier elections. A distinctive characteristic of 2020 was that union members were more likely to report contacts from both campaigns, perhaps signifying the appeal of candidate Trump to white working class Americans.

American presidential elections in recent years have been highly competitive in a hyper-polarized political world. A shift of fewer than 80,000 votes in only a handful of battleground states would have swung the 2016 election to Clinton and the 2020 election to Trump. Consequently, party strategies seem to have focused more than ever on mobilizing their base of supporters through, among other things, direct party contacts rather than persuading nonpartisans to vote their way. The presidential candidates and their campaigns understand that a ground game disproportionately favorable to one party rather than its opponent can spell the difference between winning and losing in close election contests. Following this logic, both parties have devoted considerable attention to mobilizing their voter bases. Due to space limitations, this paper has not undertaken the challenging effort to estimate the vote gains that can be achieved from a ground game advantage. Previous research found substantial gains from effective grass-roots organizing at the local (Cutright 1958, Cutright and Rossi 1958) and presidential levels (Beck *et al.* 2018) over and above the standard predictors of the vote. The presidential campaigns too seem to appreciate that, even if the advantages of an effective ground game are marginal, it is at the margins that close elections are won and lost.

The CNEP U.S. Surveys

This paper is based on four national on-line surveys conducted in the United States under the aegis of the Comparative National Election Project (CNEP). The 2020 survey, which is the centerpiece of this paper, was conducted on-line by YouGov with 2000 respondents. The 2016 survey also was conducted on-line by YouGov, with 1600 respondents. The 2004 and 2012 surveys were conducted on-line by Knowledge Networks/GfK Knowledge Networks with 1816 and 1289 respondents, respectively. The survey samples were drawn from respondent panels. YouGov used propensity scores to match respondents to the national electorate. Knowledge Networks relied on random selection from its panel. All four surveys employed weights to make their respondents demographically representative.

The advantage of these CNEP surveys is that they relied on the same pair of proximate questions to elicit reports of direct party contacts, both personal and of specified other types. The two were then combined to into a measure of overall contacts, with the more frequent "other types" contributing the most to the total. The survey questions were:

"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?"

The 2020 questions explicitly allowed for multiple selections from the following list: Joe Biden / Democratic Party, Donald Trump / Republican Party, Jo Jorgensen / Libertarian Party, Howie Hawkins / Green Party, Some other party, and None of the above. The earlier surveys allowed for multiple selections from a list of major and leading minor party candidates.

Appendix B
The Battleground States

2020: 9 states met the 6% or less major-party-vote margin criterion: Arizona, Florida, Georgia, Michigan, Nevada, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Texas, Wisconsin. Survey respondents resided in all 9, N=691, 35% of total.

2016: 13 states met the 6% or less major-party-vote margin criterion: Arizona, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Maine, Michigan, Minnesota, Nevada, New Hampshire, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Virginia, Wisconsin. Survey respondents resided in all 13; N=537, 34% of total.

2012: 8 states met the 6% or less major-party-vote margin criterion: Colorado, Florida, Iowa, New Hampshire, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Virginia. Survey respondents resided in all 8; N=294, 23% of total.

2004: 12 states were decided by a margin of 6% or less in the major-party-vote: Colorado, Florida, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Mexico, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin. Survey respondents were drawn from all 12; N=528, 29% of total.

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