



Guide to Effective Conversations with Voters 2024

California Grassroots Alliance

CALIFORNIA GRASSROOTS ALLIANCE

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This edition date: 2024-04-23

1. Introduction & Invitation

- [People are often reluctant to phonebank and canvass.](#)
- [We're talking to strangers about voting because we are here to get in good trouble!](#)
- [Calling and knocking doors are super effective in getting out the vote....](#)
- [...And they help campaigns allocate their resources efficiently.](#)
- [The glad surprise of talking to strangers about voting: it's often very rewarding!](#)
- [This document shares accessible guidance.](#)
- [How this document is organized](#)
- [Pep talk!](#)

2. Setting up Your Voter Conversations for Success

- [How will you make the voter feel?](#)
- [Get in the voter conversation zone](#)
- [Build a mini-relationship with a stranger](#)
- [Support voters to feel a sense of their own agency](#)

3. The Basic Conversation Arc

- [What are the elements of conversations with voters?](#)
- ["Hooking" a voter and establishing rapport quickly](#)
- [Initial discovery: steering the conversation in the right direction](#)
- [Persuasion conversation part 1: exploring what's on the voter's mind](#)
- [Persuasion conversation part 2: Making the case to vote for the Democrat](#)
- [Saying goodbye](#)

4. Mobilization Conversations: Addressing Voting Pessimism

- [Types of deeply pessimistic views about voting, and how they shape conversations with voters](#)
- [First, don't say: "your vote matters"](#)
- [Build trust and discover their reasons for voting pessimism](#)
- [Making the case to a rightfully cynical voter with the "table-setting/collective power" narrative](#)
- [Making the case to a disengaged voter with the "personal is political" narrative](#)
- [Making the case to a hyper-rationalist voter with the "miniscule margins" narrative](#)
- [Making the case to a political nihilist with the "contrast" narrative](#)
- [Making the case to a double hater with the "country not candidate" narrative](#)

5. Messaging on Specific Topics COMING SOON!

- [Introduction](#)
- [Democracy](#)
- [Economy](#)
- [Abortion](#)
- [Immigration](#)
- [Gaza](#)
- [Democrats' Accomplishments](#)

Appendix A: Sample Script Compendium COMING SOON!

Appendix B: Credits and Sources COMING SOON!

1. Introduction & Invitation

Polling shows that 99% of people would rather go to a movie than call up strangers or knock on their doors to talk about voting.

Let's be honest, we didn't need a poll to learn that! (Certainly not an entirely fictional one - but, Dear Reader, we're pretty sure these numbers are solid.)

Approaching a stranger to talk about voting is uncomfortable. Our instincts tell us to *avoid* situations where we might irritate people, and where they might let us know that we have irritated them. We imagine that everyone would find this intrusion into their day irritating. They could snub us (not fun) or even lash out (not fun *at all*).

Why in the world would we put ourselves in this uncomfortable situation *on purpose*?

We're talking to strangers about voting because we are here to get in good trouble and make our ancestors proud!

We come from a long line of good troublemakers - many of whom did extraordinary things. They endured emotional abuse, jail time, beatings, and worse. They walked straight into danger. Some people risked their lives, and some lost them. They did all of this for justice.

Behind these dramatic scenes were legions of people doing the less visible movement work: things like finding meeting space, printing out flyers, making sandwiches, cleaning up after the events, and - yes - calling strangers and knocking on their doors.

Conversations with strangers are a critical part of power-building, especially during elections. So let's do it. Let's get in good trouble and get our coalition to the polls, one voter at a time.

Calling and knocking doors continue to be two of the most effective ways to get voters to the polls.

By far the most effective way to turn out a voter is to *know that voter personally and talk to them about the stakes of the election*. That voter trusts you and will listen to what you have to say because they know you.

For voters we *don't* know, the next best thing is to connect with them live so you can hear one another's voice, either in person or over the phone. Generally speaking: the more personal the connection, the more effective the conversation.

That's why a single conversation with a friend is the most effective, a single in-person conversation (on the doors) is the *next* most effective, and a single phone conversation comes in third.

The magic of phone calls, though, is that you can have *many conversations per hour*: with a predictive auto-dialer (a platform that connects you only with the people who have already picked up the phone), you might have 30-60 "connects" per hour (such wide variation is related to how long the conversations are). These numbers can translate into around 15-30 real conversations.

And although it takes a while to walk from door to door and many people won't answer when you knock, in-person conversations remain the gold standard of campaign field methods.

So whether you are calling or canvassing, you are doing the beautiful and effective work of bringing our coalition to the polls!

Even just learning whether voters support, oppose, are undecided, or not planning to vote is incredibly valuable! It helps campaigns allocate their resources efficiently.

We hope that seeing how valuable every conversation is to the campaign makes you proud of the work you do, and even *more* fired up to call and canvass!

VOTER STANCE	HOW THE CAMPAIGN USES THIS INFO TO EFFICIENTLY ALLOCATE RESOURCES
Supports the candidate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learns that this voter is part of the <i>run universe</i>: supporters that the campaign needs to “run to the polls.” • Uses data from the voter file to find out whether they are a high- or lower-propensity voter • Puts lower-propensity voters on the list of “mobilizables:” supporters they can potentially turn out to vote • Focuses their mobilization resources on the mobilizable voters
Opposes the candidate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learns that they should remove this voter from their contact list • Conserves resources by not reaching out to them again
Is undecided	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learns that this voter is a persuasion target • Focuses their persuasion resources on these voters
Isn't planning to vote	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gets additional information about the fact that this person is a low-propensity voter • (Unless you convert them to a supporter, in which case they go to the top row)

The glad surprise of talking to strangers about voting: it's often rewarding - and it's especially rewarding when you are skilled up!

It's natural to want to avoid phonebanking and canvassing. In fact, though, the worries about what will happen when we talk to voters far outstrip the way things typically go - or *could* go, under optimal conditions. Consider these comparisons for making calls:

WHEN YOU PHONEBANK	
WHAT YOU WORRY ABOUT	HOW IT ACTUALLY GOES
Most people will hang up immediately	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some people <i>will</i> hang up immediately - but probably not as many as you expect • It's actually not so bad - you just roll on to the next call
A lot of people will be irritated	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some people won't want to talk and will tell you that - <i>most</i> of them will say it matter-of-factly or kindly • Some of the people who don't want to talk will sound slightly irritable • When people are irritable, you have the chance to brighten their day by being kind to them 💖
Some people will be hostile	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It's <i>extremely rare</i> for anyone to be hostile

WHEN YOU PHONEBANK	
WHAT YOU WORRY ABOUT	HOW IT ACTUALLY GOES
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When this happens, you may wonder what type of pain they are in that they were hostile to a kind-hearted stranger, and you can send them some lovingkindness • Usually these calls are a little amusing!
All of the above	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most people are polite, many are nice • More people than you expect will have a whole conversation with you • Some people will really appreciate that you called and will thank you ❤️ • On each phonebank you will have a few truly memorable conversations • <i>When you are well-prepared:</i> You will have more effective conversations, will be more likely to make “heart connections” with strangers, and will enjoy yourself more!

This document shares accessible guidance on how to have more effective, rewarding, and enjoyable conversations on the phones and doors.

There is a *ton* of excellent information out there on holding conversations with voters. This guide:

- Compiles some of this excellent information in one place,
- Draws on the rigorous work of researchers and voter-engagement experts,
- Organizes the information so that you can (we hope) easily find what you need,
- Shares [links to the information sources](#) (so that anyone wanting to dig deeper can explore the original document or video), and
- Is a living document and will be continually updated. Feedback and requests are warmly welcomed! If you have either, please write to Nancy at nancylatham@indivisibleeb.org.

How this document is organized:

- [Setting up your Voter Conversations for Success](#). This chapter focuses on how to build a mini-relationship with the voter so that you can successfully get across the effective messages. It includes learning how to evoke positive feelings in the voter and getting in the *voter conversation zone*.
- [The Basic Conversation Arc](#). This chapter walks through (most of) the basic elements of voter conversations, including “hooking” the voter, initial discovery to identify the voter’s stance (which will then help you figure out how to steer the conversation), having conversations with supporters and non-supporters, having persuasion conversations with undecideds, and saying goodbye.
- [Addressing Voter Pessimism](#). Some voters are deeply pessimistic – but for a range of reasons. This chapter describes the types of voter pessimism, and shares how to have tailored mobilization conversations to address each type.
- [Messaging on Specific Topics](#). This chapter shares a lot of messaging content: on democracy, economy, abortion, immigration, gaza, Biden’s age, and Democrats’ accomplishments.
- [Script Compendium](#). Appendix A puts in one place a range of sample scripts that you can use for all different types of conversations and conversation elements.

Pep talk!

Battleground elections will be won or lost with razor-thin margins. This margin is often called a margin of error, but activists and organizers know it better as the [margin of effort](#).

We close these margins - *we win elections* - when we talk to voters.

There are people (you might be one of them!) who say: "I'm just not (or wouldn't be) good at calling or door-knocking, so I don't do it."

Real talk: phonebanking and canvassing are outside of just about everyone's comfort zone¹ (at least at first). But across the country, thousands of activists are making calls and knocking doors anyway.

Most people are not naturals. That's because talking to strangers about voting is a *skill*. As with anything that takes skill, you will keep improving the more often you do it, the more you learn, and the more (good) support you have along the way. And the better you get, the more you'll enjoy it.

We promise: *anyone can be good at this with training and practice*. We hope that you will attend some excellent trainings. We especially recommend that you:

- Attend a [Deep Canvassing training](#) (deep canvassing can be done on the phones *or* doors) and
- Sign up for [movement briefings](#) by the [Research Collaborative](#): these briefings share the best messaging guidance on the planet.

In the meantime, read on! **This guide is chock-full of resources and tips** that can help make you feel confident and prepared for your conversations with strangers about voting.

If our ancestors could walk straight into danger for justice, we can summon the courage it takes to talk to lots of strangers.

We know you can do this. In fact, we know you'll be great.

NOW LET'S GET OUT THERE AND WIN SOME ELECTIONS, PEOPLE!!

¹ There *are* some rare exceptions. My friend George says "hold my beer and hand me the phone," and gets on one phonebank (minimum) per day, every day he can find one. I aspire to George status.

2. Setting up Your Voter Conversations for Success

How will you make the voter feel?

This guide has information on what to say, how to frame what you say, the order to say things in, etc. Before we get to those specifics, **let's take a step back**. As Maya Angelou said:

At the end of the day people won't remember what you said or did, they will remember how you made them feel.

WHEN VOTERS TALK WITH YOU:	
THEY SHOULD FEEL LIKE THIS...	...NOT LIKE THIS
That you're interested in what they have to say	That you're overloading them information
Seen, heard, listened to	Talked <i>at</i>
Empathized with, heard with non-judgment	Judged, finger-wagged
That they have important things in common with you	That you don't identify with them at all; that you have no shared experience; that they know nothing about you
That Candidate XX / Democrats care(s) about them, has their back, is fighting for them	Politicians swing around right before an election only to get my vote
Hope for the future	That you're trying to talk them out of their own direct experience that things are not great in the present
Powerful, the hero of the story	Elected leaders are the heroes, giving things to the voters and making change happen
Loss aversion activated (awareness of what they are losing and what else they could lose)	Terrified and full of dread about how bad things are and how much worse they can get
When hearing or talking about the stakes of the election, <i>defiant</i> : "this bad thing <i>will not happen</i> on our watch"	

This chapter is designed to help you evoke the feelings on the left-hand side of the table, and has tips and tools for how to do this by:

- **Getting in the voter conversation zone**, so that you feel *ready* to make the voter feel listened to, empathized with, that you have things in common, etc.
- **Building a mini-relationship with a stranger**: specific guidance on how to build rapport and trust quickly, and communicate that you care.
- **Supporting the voter to feel a sense of their own agency**, so that they see themselves as the hero of the story, and inspired to stand up (with others) for our freedoms, families, and future.

Get in the voter conversation zone²

Job one is to set up the conversation so that the voter is receptive to the *content* of what you want to say to them. If the voter isn't receptive, *what* you say won't matter much. It turns out that you have more control than you might think about how receptive the voter is.

Before calling voters or knocking doors, try getting in the *voter conversation zone*: a state of mind in which you're ready to listen deeply and empathically in order to build trust with a voter. In this zone, you will find it easier to evoke more friendly responses from those you speak with.

Of course the voter conversation zone won't make every voter you speak with friendly! But it will help a lot, and *you* will have a better experience - even when voters aren't as cheerful as we'd like.

The experience of being in the voter conversation zone will look different for everyone, but will include mental states like the ones listed in the table below. **The first one - a learning orientation - is the most important - try adopting that mindset every time.**

In addition to adopting a learning orientation, **choose one more mindset to focus on before a phonebank or a canvass.** Bringing your awareness and intention to this mindset will often be enough! You could also spend a few minutes thinking through the corresponding reflection questions in the right-hand column. (Or quickly journal about them, if that's your jam!)

MINDSET	WHAT THIS MIGHT LOOK LIKE	REFLECTION QUESTIONS
Learning orientation	Try this perspective on for size: <i>one</i> goal of a phonebank or canvass is to engage voters - <i>another</i> key goal is for you to continue building your critical voter conversation skills! If you approach each phonebank and canvass with a learning orientation, you will see each conversation as the opportunity to practice. Practice might mean intentionally adopting a mindset from this table, and you might also choose a <i>single</i> skill or technique to focus on - for example, improving your opening line to better "hook" a voter early in the conversation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When you expand your view of calling and knocking doors to include the opportunity for you to practice and improve your skills, how do your feelings about talking to voters shift? The skills for talking to voters are valuable for <i>all</i> conversations. What are the ways that building a skill in this context might support you in your daily life?
Full-heartedness	You are about to reach out to your fellow humans, with the goal of building a future where all of us can thrive. This is a beautiful thing. When you focus on this goal, and acknowledge the real beauty of what you're doing, your heart will feel full. You should feel proud to be part of this effort.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When you think about connecting to your fellow humans, how does that make you feel? What does the phrase "we're all in this together" mean to you?
Curiosity	These conversations give you a chance to hear what's on the mind of your fellow humans: what worries them, what they hope for, who and what matters to them. Everyone has a story, and by putting your natural curiosity in the driver's seat, you will	<p>Think about the last time you met a person you really "clicked" with right away, or someone really different from you.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What were you curious about? What did you want to ask them about their life?

² The idea of the conversation zone derives from experiences with deep canvassing training (however, the deep canvassing curriculum does not use the term "voter conversation zone"). The best way to build these is to participate in a deep canvassing training: visit the [Deep Canvass Institute](#) for more information.

MINDSET	WHAT THIS MIGHT LOOK LIKE	REFLECTION QUESTIONS
	genuinely wonder what each person's story is, and find yourself absorbed in these conversations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How did it feel to ask them questions and learn about them?
Empathy	You realize that when we boil things down, we all want similar things: for us and our families to be safe, healthy, and happy. Your heart is open to whatever people share with you - taking what comes with non-judgment because you understand that the range of human experience is vast.	<p>Think about a time someone shared an opinion you disagreed with.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Looking back, do you see ways that their opinion reflects values or needs you have in common? What can you imagine are the reasons they might hold that opinion?
Radical hospitality	Many people you will talk to are <i>rarely</i> truly listened to, and you're about to offer the gift of listening. With a "radical hospitality" mindset, your open-heartedness will shine through, and you will brighten the day of many people you speak with.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When's the last time you felt deeply listened to? What was that like? When's the last time you deeply listened to someone? What did you do? How did that make you feel?
Lighthearted stoicism	When someone hangs up or closes the door quickly, or (in rare cases) is impolite, it just rolls off your back. You might say a version of "oh well!" And then just head to the next call or door.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If someone on the phones or doors is dismissive or rude, what's one thing you could do - or say to yourself - that would help you to move to the next call or door without feeling burdened by the experience?

To review, you're in the voter conversation zone when:

- You're approaching a phonebank or canvass as a learning opportunity: a chance to hone your skills as a badass voter-conversation-haver,
- You're intentionally focusing on *one* additional mindset from the voter conversation zone list, *and/or*
- You're planning to use the voter conversations to practice and hone *one* new technique, skill, or type of message (which you will learn about in the remainder of this Guide).

Build a mini-relationship with a stranger

The more the voter trusts you, the more effective the conversation will be. But the voter has no reason to trust a stranger. Amazingly, *you can build trust in a very short time*. Why is this the case?

- Voters are humans! And humans are deeply social animals, hardwired for relationships.
- You (also a human!) have the innate skills to create a mini-relationship fast: you simply need to identify and practice those skills.

Although you have the skills you need to build trust, you will find yourself *naturally pushed away* from using them on a phonebank or canvass. This is because your *primary* goals are typically to communicate information that campaign expects you to share in order to:³

³ Voter engagement can have other goals too. Especially early in the cycle, goals can include: cleaning lists, learning *whether* the voter supports your candidate or is undecided, finding out what issues voters care about. Then during GOTV, the goal for many lists is simply to make sure your supporters vote.

- **Mobilize** people to vote (if they are likely to vote for your candidate), and/or
- **Persuade** people to support your candidate (if they're conflicted on whom to vote for).

WHEN YOU PHONEBANK OR CANVASS:	
YOU WILL OFTEN NATURALLY DO THIS:	IN ORDER TO:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Talk <i>way</i> more than listen 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Make sure you've shared all the most important information from the campaign
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● When you're making calls: talk at <i>lightning speed</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Make sure you've shared all the info before the voter hangs up!
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Try to <i>convince</i> the voters of something ● <i>Lead with facts</i> to convince them 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Get the voter to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Vote for your candidate ○ Vote at all

All of this undermines trust-building. **Instead, try this menu of approaches and techniques you can use to build mini-relationships.**

TO BUILD A MINI-RELATIONSHIP WITH THE VOTER	
TRY THIS:	BECAUSE:
<p>DO NOT DEBATE! Resist the temptation to <i>debate</i> the voter. (This is at the top of the list for a reason!)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● People simply <i>cannot</i> be argued out of their beliefs. ● Anything that feels like debate or argument will make them want to leave the conversation. ● Debate causes people to double down on their beliefs.
<p>Don't lead with facts/information. Note that we did <i>not</i> say: "don't <i>share</i> facts/information"! More on how to use facts in the Persuasion conversation section below.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Leading with facts/information</i> comes off as debating.
<p>Affirm the voter when they express an opinion (although you hope to later change their mind). <i>When you want to debate them, this is your cue to affirm them instead.</i> Use phrases like "I hear you," "I see what you're saying," or "I get that."</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Affirming the voter makes them feel listened to. ● Feeling listened to builds trust. ● Counterintuitively, affirming a belief you'd like to change lays the groundwork for a <i>future</i> shift in beliefs/opinions.
<p>Affirm the voter's experience. Say things like: "that sounds really hard."</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Again, affirming the voter makes them feel listened to. ● Feeling listened to builds trust.
<p>Reflect back. This is active listening, to ensure that you're getting what they say. For example: "it sounds like you're frustrated that you believed Biden when he said things would get better, but they haven't for your family."</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● This is yet another way to make the voter feel listened to. ● Feeling listened to builds trust.

TO BUILD A MINI-RELATIONSHIP WITH THE VOTER

TRY THIS:	BECAUSE:
<p>Slow down. After you have “hooked” them with your opening lines (which you indeed may want to deliver on the faster side), you can afford to slow down.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Slower speech, especially when your tone is warm, makes people feel calm and comfortable.
<p>Ask questions. Let your natural, authentic curiosity shine. Find out what’s on their mind, what worries them, what they hope for, what they want to see for their family.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People feel seen and welcomed when you’re curious about them, their experience, and their opinions. • Questions are the best way to keep people engaged in the conversation. • Engaging people longer allows for more time to develop trust.
<p>Allow for silence. After you’ve asked a question and they don’t answer right away, try counting to seven. If they still haven’t answered, gently prompt them (perhaps with a new version of the same question).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Letting silence happen is a way of slowing down after you’ve asked a question. • While it can feel awkward to you, often people are just collecting their thoughts. • If you jump in again too quickly, the voter is likely to feel rushed.
<p>Backchannel. The term “backchanneling” refers to what people say <i>while</i> someone else is talking - <i>without</i> interrupting them. You can say: “mm” “mm-hmm” “wow!” “totally!” “seriously?” “my goodness.”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Backchanneling is something engaged humans naturally do. • It signals that you’re listening.
<p>Share your story; be vulnerable. While you want the voter to talk more than you do, it’s also important to share your own stories. In sharing how you feel about a candidate or policy, try relating it to something that’s challenging. For example: “I support Candidate XX because they want to preserve Obamacare. I have a serious pre-existing condition with expensive treatments, and without the ACA I wouldn’t be able to get insurance.”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The best conversations include reciprocity. • Voters trust you more when you reveal something to them about yourself. • It helps to be vulnerable, since you’re asking them to be vulnerable with you.
<p>Relate in. As you talk about yourself, try to find something you have in common. For example, if someone says that they don’t vote, you may be someone who can say: “I get it, I didn’t vote for years because I didn’t see the point!”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When people find they have something in common with someone else, they feel closer. • They might feel like: “we’re on the same team,” “this person gets it,” or “they’re one of us!”
<p>Connect on values, even when your opinions differ. For example, maybe they think Biden has done a terrible job on the economy; you can relate to the desire to make sure you have enough money to feed your family.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You may not be able to relate to the voter’s surface opinions, but you can relate in by surfacing values in common. • You can probably relate to their deeper values and needs.

Support voters to feel a sense of their own agency

When “voter enthusiasm” is high, voters turn out. And we can generate voter enthusiasm by inspiring in voters a visceral sense of their own agency: hope, defiance, collective power, and belief that change is possible when we act *together*.

TO INCREASE VOTERS’ SENSE OF THEIR AGENCY	
TRY THIS:	BECAUSE:
DO NOT try to scare the voter (for example, by telling them about Project 2025 (the Heritage Foundation’s chilling plan for our country if trump is re-elected))	Fear actually <i>demotivates</i> people, so scaring them is likely to backfire.
Activate loss aversion (share with them what Republicans have taken away, and what <i>more</i> they will take away, if they win; as in this digital ad, Rights)	Loss aversion is a powerful psychological force, and motivates people <i>more</i> than a potential gain; it tends to make people respond with <i>defiance</i> : “oh <i>hell</i> no, not on <i>our</i> watch!”
Paint a picture of the beautiful tomorrow (describe what you want to see and make it tangible; like this Message from the Future video with AOC)	The ability to imagine a beautiful future helps convince people that change is possible, and galvanizes them to want to take action to make this beautiful tomorrow real
Remind them that voters have come together to get things done for the American people, we can do it again (as in these digital ads: Gang Back Together , and Freedom for All)	Talking about what <i>voters</i> can do by electing Democrats makes voters the hero of the story (rather than politicians), and is a tangible reminder can evoke the visceral <i>feeling</i> of our collective power

3. The Basic Conversation Arc

What are the elements of conversations with voters?

A campaign’s phone or canvass script has a lot of important information that the campaign really wants you to communicate to the voter. Because the scripts contain so much information, it’s often the case that following scripts closely will lead to conversations where you mostly talk *at* the voter. The guidance here is, instead, that you should ask open-ended questions and listen more than talk - even if that means deviating from the campaign’s script quite a bit.

This section of the guide walks you through the way that several types of voter conversation would unfold. In real life, of course, conversations will often not be so linear - but this arc gives you a rough order to follow. The conversation elements shared in this chapter are in the orange rows. Talking points for specific topics and guidance for mobilization conversations have their own chapters; those are shown with hyperlinks below.

“Hooking” a voter and establishing rapport				
YES				NO
Initial discovery to identify the voter’s stance				No contact, or Handling a very short call
OPPOSE	SUPPORT	UNDECIDED	NOT PLANNING TO VOTE	
Polite thank-you	Conversation to affirm support; volunteer ask; vote tripling ask	Persuasion conversation (See also: Messaging on Specific Topics)	Mobilization conversation (See: Mobilization Conversations; Addressing Voter Pessimism)	
Goodbye				

“Hooking” a voter and establishing rapport quickly

Typically once people open their door, they tend to stay and chat. This guidance is more useful for calling (special canvassing advice is in parentheses). But don’t worry! There’s guidance for very short calls too, when voters don’t hang up right away but hop off quickly. It all starts with your opening line.

Crafting a good opening line - especially to avoid early hang-ups

You will develop (and refine over time) your *own* opening line (or a few of them) - something that’s authentic to *you*. Use the table below to help you develop it.

ELEMENTS OF A GOOD CONVERSATION OPENER	
TRY THIS:	BECAUSE:
Establish <i>right away</i> that you are warm and friendly: smile when you say your first line	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Much of communication is non-verbal • Smiles draw other people in • People can hear a smile over the phone
Say “Is this [name]?” rather than “is [name] available?” (On the doors, say “Are you [name]?”)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People have the automatic tendency to say “yes” when you ask if it is them, and use their name • When you ask if someone is available, this makes it easy to say “no”
If you’re calling for the Democratic Party or a candidate, avoid saying “Democratic Party;” instead, say “I’m calling with the [State] Democrats;” or “I’m calling for Democratic [candidate/officeholder XX]” (On the doors, say “I’m out knocking doors for the [State] Democrats”)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many people have a negative association with political parties • The word “party” triggers this negative association • You <i>do</i> want to emphasize that you’re calling for Democrats
Don’t ask: “Do you have a moment to speak?”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asking “permission” to talk to them gives them a reason to say “no”
Say “I’m a volunteer” (On the doors, you might add: “I’m out knocking doors in the neighborhood”)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People tend to have warm feelings about volunteers • They tend to see people paid to reach out to voters as “telemarketers”
Include in your first line something to indicate it will be a short call, ⁴ for example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I’d like just a moment of your time” • “Just real quick” • “This will take only a minute” • “This is just a one-minute/short check-in call about the election” • “I have a couple of quick questions – it will take only a minute” (On the doors, the good lines differ a bit: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I’d like just a few moments of your time” • “This will take only a few minutes” • “I have a couple of quick questions – this will take only few minutes”) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This tells people what to expect – it can be a quick conversation • This line activates people’s “politeness response” – it’s hard to hang up when another human has made such a small ask • Of course, the call will often end up taking more than a moment – but that’s only if the voter ends up wanting to keep talking (they are in control)
If it feels natural to you, try adding to your opening line: “I’m not asking for money!” or “I won’t ask you for money, I promise!” (or similar)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On political calls, people often expect that you want them to donate, and are turned off by this • This line can disarm them

⁴ Don’t use any of these lines if you’re doing a deep canvass, since those are longer conversations.

ELEMENTS OF A GOOD CONVERSATION OPENER	
TRY THIS:	BECAUSE:
(This is usually unnecessary on the doors)	
Say: "I'm a volunteer, making calls for Candidate XX. I'm volunteering because s/he stands for XX, and that's really important to me too."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This line can activate warm feelings about volunteers • Furthermore, it cues that you're giving up your time because you really care (this makes a stronger impression than just saying you're a volunteer) • It immediately lets them know important information about what the candidate stands for
Close out your opener with: "Can we count on your support in this election for Candidate XX?"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You want to know ASAP if they support or oppose the candidate or are undecided - and whether they plan to vote • You're gathering important info (1) for the campaign, and (2) that you will use to figure out where to take the call next (see the Initial discovery section below)

For some sample openers that put all these elements together, see [Appendix A](#).

Keeping people on the phone when they say "I need to go" after your opening line

People usually don't hang up right away, but they might say a version of: "I can't talk right now/don't want to talk."

You may want to let them go! For example: if they're at work or picked up the phone only because they thought you were a doctor calling them back. In this case, thank them and let you know someone will call them back when it's more convenient to talk, and mark them as "call back."

But often if you simply forge ahead, you can keep them on the phone for a bit longer (sometimes a *lot* longer!).

WHAT TO SAY WHEN PEOPLE TELL YOU THEY DON'T WANT TO TALK	
TRY THIS:	BECAUSE:
Use the lines shared in the previous table to indicate this is a short call. If you've already used one of them, use another one that's a little different: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "I'd like just a moment of your time" • "Just real quick" • "This will take only a minute" • "This is just a one-minute/short check-in call about the election" • "I have a couple of quick questions - it will take only a minute" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You are reassuring them that it can be a quick conversation • These lines activate people's automatic politeness response - it's hard to hang up when another human has made such a small ask

WHAT TO SAY WHEN PEOPLE TELL YOU THEY DON'T WANT TO TALK

TRY THIS:	BECAUSE:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• “It would just be so valuable if you could give me a minute to share some of your thoughts about where things are headed in the country.”	

Making the most of very short conversations

Many conversations will be very short, but you can accomplish a lot in just a few minutes! *When the voter has indicated they are going to rush off the phone*, share the most important information without pausing to hear if they are familiar with the candidate. Say the candidate’s name (often name recognition is enough to get people to vote for someone) and communicate 1-2 key policy stances.

- “Since you’re busy, here’s the most important thing: Candidate XX is in favor of XX and has supported XX.”
- “Before you go, I want to just share one thing: Candidate XX has XX policy position.”

An example of a fruitful short conversation:

Grace Q. Caller: Hi! Is this John?

John Q. Voter: Yes.... Who’s this?

Grace: Hey John, this is Grace. I’m volunteering for Democrat Will Rollins, who’s running for Congress in our district –

John: I really don’t have time to talk.

Grace: I get it! Since you’re busy, here’s just one thing to know: Will is going to fight for corporations to stop their price gouging at the grocery store – grocery bills have been so high and I know that Will gets how hard high grocery prices are for my family. If ending price gouging is important to you too, he might be the candidate for you. Can Will count on your support this November?

John: I’m not sure, I’ll need to learn more – but I really do need to go.

Grace: Gotcha! I hope Will Rollins can earn your vote for Congress – he’s really fighting for the middle class. Thanks for giving me a few moments and thanks for being a voter! Have a great weekend!

Initial discovery: steering the conversation in the right direction

In the first minute, people will answer the question that concluded your opener: “can we count on your support for Candidate XX?”

At that point, you’ll know how to steer the conversation.

VOTER STANCE	WHAT YOU'LL DO	WHY THIS IS GREAT
Opposes the candidate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Smile and warmly thank them for letting you know Mark the voter as an opponent Say goodbye 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You can put good vibes out in the world by being kind to someone you disagree with If they are rude, you can be sweet as pie anyway, hopefully making them feel a little guilty 😊
Supports the candidate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ask <i>why</i> they support the candidate: “What do you like best about them?” “Why are they the right candidate for you?” Ask them if they want to volunteer (this is usually part of the script) Ask them if they will ask three friends to vote (this may <i>not</i> be part of the script) Say goodbye! 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When the voter tells <i>you</i> why the candidate is good, this helps cement their support. Having a nice conversation with you will help the voter feel that the candidate cares about them, and this further reinforces their support It’s always exciting when people agree to volunteer - happens more often than you’d expect! Often supporters are cheerful and fun to talk to; many will thank you for calling ❤️
Is undecided	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have a persuasion conversation See the next section: Persuasion conversation part 1 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You might be able to swing a voter to the Democrats Even if it doesn’t happen in this conversation, you’ve planted a seed
Is a voting pessimist (isn’t planning to vote)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have a mobilization conversation Skip to the Addressing voter pessimism section 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You have the chance to expand the electorate - to swing someone from non-voter to voter! Even if it doesn’t happen in this conversation, you’ve planted a seed

Persuasion conversation part 1: exploring what’s on the voter’s mind

Once you’ve learned that this is a persuasion conversation, you want to find out what issues are really important to them. You’ll use this information to decide which issue(s) to highlight in part 2 of the persuasion conversation: [Making the case](#).

WHAT TO SAY AFTER A VOTER TELLS YOU THEY’RE UNDECIDED	
TRY THIS: ⁵	BECAUSE:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If you could change three things about the country/state/community, what would you change? If you were in charge, what are the two or three things you’d most want to change about the country? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> These questions help the voter to think creatively and expansively The questions also evoke feelings of agency by putting the voter in the driver’s seat; feeling that one has political agency increases the likelihood of voting

⁵ Almost all the lines in this table are from online recordings of trainings from Elizabeth Chur (a [Swing Left San Francisco](#) phonebanking trainer). Links to her trainings are in [Appendix B](#). The “What’s on your heart?” line comes from Dennessa Atilas, the West Coast Senior Regional Organizer with Indivisible National.

WHAT TO SAY AFTER A VOTER TELLS YOU THEY'RE UNDECIDED	
TRY THIS: ⁵	BECAUSE:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If you were in an elevator with Candidate XX, what would you ask them to put at the top of their to-do list? 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What keeps you up at night? What's on your heart? (<i>Use if this phrasing feels authentic to you.</i>) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> These questions also help the voter to think creatively and expansively The phrasing of these questions are tender, and may evoke in the voter a the feeling that the caller or canvasser truly cares about them / cares about what worries them
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> That's great that you're being so thoughtful about making your decision! 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A statement like this is good to say when the voter tells you something like: "I want to do the research," or "I don't know enough about them - I want to read more before making up my mind" Because you are <i>affirming</i> them, they will be more open to hearing what you have to say about the candidate
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Don't ask: "what issues are important for you?" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The word "issues" is too policy-wonky; it doesn't sound like a normal person in a regular conversation.

Persuasion conversation part 2: Making the case to vote for the Democrat

Undecided voters *can* be persuaded! This section is all about what you can do to increase the likelihood that you will succeed in your persuasion conversations.

Many voters hold conflicting viewpoints; you can help them to tune into and strengthen the viewpoints that align with your case

Many voters are undecided because they are *conflicted*: they hold some progressive views and some conservative/regressive views. Across the electorate, about 20% are solidly progressive, about 20% are solidly regressive, and about 60% are conflicted. (Not every conflicted voter will also be undecided, but a lot of them will. For example, polling from March showed that 40% of voters are up for grabs in the presidential contest.⁶)

As you talk to them, you can elicit their progressive viewpoints.⁷ As the voter processes those views aloud with you, they will *tune into* something *they themselves think*, and strengthen their *own* progressive views. To elicit and strengthen progressive viewpoints, you can ask questions and reflect back.

⁶ Anat Shenker-Osorio cited this figure in her [interview with Ryan Grim on the Deconstructed podcast](#).

⁷ Again we recommend trainings from the [Deep Canvass Institute](#) to deepen your skills here; they teach you how to systematically explore the ways that voters' views are internally contradictory.

Now that you have built trust, you can use information to persuade

Remember the advice that to build a mini-relationship with the voter, you *should not lead with facts and information in an attempt to convince*? Still true! In sharing information right out of the gate, you run the risk of sounding like you're arguing or debating. If that's how you come off, the voter is going to ignore you (and you may annoy them). But people actually *can be* swayed by information when it comes from someone they trust – and by this point in the conversation they trust *you* because you've built a mini-relationship with them.

Furthermore, not only will the mini-relationship help you to persuade, but – contrary to what you may have heard – facts matter in persuasion.

Social science research on opinion-formation has – over the past few decades – shifted *away* from rationality and facts and *toward* emotions and identity. It's become fashionable in political communication circles to say: “facts don't change people's minds.” Emotions and identity are absolutely critical, but *facts matter too* (under the right circumstances). Important research on the 2020 presidential election⁸ showed that:

- Information changes how voters feel about a candidate,
- Information changes vote choices,
- Persuasive messages (with information) can cause partisan defection,
- Voters are more persuadable when they know *less* about a candidate, and
- Messages with more informational content are more persuasive

For a guide to the information to share during the persuasion conversation, see [Messaging on specific topics](#).

Offer a vision of a future where Democrats win, and make it concrete

As discussed in the section on [Supporting voters to feel a sense of their own agency](#), it's important to paint a picture of the beautiful tomorrow. Emphasize the vision for what life can look like if we are able to implement progressive solutions that benefit all of us. People are more receptive to persuasion when they get a visceral sense of how life can improve in the future.

You can give voters a visceral sense of the beautiful tomorrow by using plain English, rather than policy jargon. For example, don't say: “pro-choice,” say: “the freedom to decide whether and when to have kids.” The [Messaging on specific topics](#) section offers more examples of how to speak in plain English about progressive policies.

Current political messaging research shows that people are more swayed by visions of the future than they are by demonstrations of past accomplishments – so prioritize visions of the future in your persuasion conversations.

Share Democrats' accomplishments – but do it carefully!

While visions of the future are *more* important than past accomplishments, accomplishments are absolutely still important to communicate. This is at least partly because promises of a better future can ring hollow if people believe that *past* promises haven't been fulfilled.⁹

⁸ Broockman, David .E., and Kalla, Joshua L. 2023. “When and Why Are Campaigns' Persuasive Effects Small? Evidence from the 2020 U.S. Presidential Election.” *American Journal of Political Science* 67(4): 833–849.

⁹ Terrance Woodbury from [HIT Strategies](#) made this point (based on their research) on the April 17, 2024 episode of Pod Save America: [Black Voters' Views on Biden](#).

Guidance about how to talk about specific past accomplishments is in the [Messaging on specific topics](#) chapter. The key here is to **place accomplishments in a larger frame**:

- **Here are the accomplishments in plain English.** Don't use policy jargon, or throw around the names of bills. For example, instead of saying "the Inflation Reduction Act lowered costs," say: "President Biden just capped insulin prices at \$35 a month for seniors on Medicare. Major drug companies responded by lowering their prices on insulin and other drugs too. Three major drug companies capped prices for asthma inhalers to \$35 a month for anyone who uses them."¹⁰
- **Lots of families are struggling; not everything is awesome.** We all saw the "Democrats deliver" message fall flat. That's because it was tone-deaf: it didn't acknowledge the very real pain that voters are experiencing. Voters will have an angry "WTF?" response when they are served a version of "Mission Accomplished." It's important that voters feel heard and seen in terms of what they're going through right now.
- **We're on our way but we still have a ways to go.** Again this framing (importantly) acknowledges that things are not awesome. But in pointing to real progress, it offers an encouraging and hopeful message.
- **Democrats are pushing for *more* progress and fighting for you.** Voters want to know that Democrats care about them and are on their side. Accomplishments are evidence that Democrats are fighting for the American people, *and* Democrats aren't resting.
- **Make the voter the hero of the story.** Remind the voter that Democrats accomplished this only because we came out in record numbers to put them in office. Similarly, Winning the Jobs Narrative has consistently found that messages centering what *people* do perform far better than messages centering what the *government* does. An example of messaging centering the voter is: "Hardworking Americans are bringing our economy back, and Democrats are getting things done for them."¹¹

As much as you can, talk about the accomplishments from a personal perspective

Abstract, jargony facts don't resonate with people. Concrete information resonates much better. Personal stories resonate most of all.

Here are some ways to make accomplishments personal:

- **Share a story about how a policy passed by Democrats has made your life better.** If you have any personal stories like this, tell them! For example, "I lost my job during COVID, but I just got a great job installing solar panels. The company that hired me hired 600 new people to do this because of funding they got from a huge climate investment bill that President Biden and the Democrats in the House and Senate passed."
- **Share a story about how a policy passed by Democrats has improved the life of a friend or family member.** Telling a story about someone you know personally can work just as well – this is a personal story too!
- **Use "first person" phrasing.** If you don't have a story about yourself or someone you know, you can still make things personal by starting sentences with phrases like:
 - "I'm so glad that..."
 - "It makes me so happy that..."
 - "I'm looking forward to..."

¹⁰ This message comes from the [Winning the Jobs Narrative's April briefing deck](#) (slide 18).

¹¹ This message comes from the [Winning the Jobs Narrative's April briefing deck](#) (slide 19).

- “For me...”
- “The way I look at it...”
- “This is how I see things...”

Help the voter “metabolize” the persuasive case you’ve made

Finally, you want to turn your “case” back over to the voter because you want them to take it on – or take on their own version of it. The ultimate goal is not exactly for *you* to persuade *them*, but for them to persuade *themselves* (while you help!).

You can turn things back to the voter by asking questions like these:

- What do you think?
- Does that make sense to you too?
- Does that resonate at all with you?
- Does that strike a chord with you?
- Does that ring true for you?
- Does that hit home for you?
- Does that line up with how you think about it at all?

Saying goodbye

At the end of the conversation, you want to tie things up with a bow. You want to finish strong! Below are some ways to deliver a high-quality goodbye.

Saying goodbye to people who oppose the candidate

No reason to put a *ton* of thought into saying goodbye to these voters. However, given the hostility between Republicans and Democrats, it can be a lovely thing to be friendly and get some good vibes out there in the world. And in fact, there are plenty of Republicans who are very polite about telling you that they should be taken off the list!

When they *aren’t* polite, it’s extremely satisfying to be *extra* kind to them (I imagine that this makes them feel guilty for being such jerks, and that they might be nicer to the next caller).

Saying goodbye to people who are still undecided

People who start out undecided will often remain undecided. You can make one final pitch that sums things up – something like: “I’m spending my afternoon/evening/Saturday/Sunday volunteering to make calls for Candidate XX because they stand for XX issue, and that’s so important to me. If that’s important to you too, I hope Candidate XX can earn your vote!”

Volunteer ask

Usually this is part of the campaign’s script. You will use context cues to see if you should ask it – it’s not always appropriate. You’re most likely to ask it of people who said they were supporters right out of the gate, rather than those who came around to support after a persuasive conversation.

Plenty of voters will surprise you by being interested, so err on the side of asking! You might say something like: “you’re clearly such an enthusiastic Democrat! Would you be interested in volunteering with the campaign?”

Appreciation

Not only has a perfect stranger taken time to talk with you, but voters with whom you've had a persuasion conversation have possibly shared personal things. You've also probably had a great conversation! You can share your authentic appreciation with lines like:

- "I really appreciate that you took time to talk with me today!"
- "It's been so delightful to talk with you/get to know you a bit!"
- "It was great to hear your story about _____."
- "I really appreciate that you shared your story with me."
- "This call really made my day."
- "I loved chatting with you."
- "I appreciate you!"

Vote Tripling¹²

A vote tripling ask is often in the script, but not always. If it's not there, go ahead and ask anyway! *Especially* when you've reached an enthusiastic supporter. (Research shows it has an effect on turnout.) There are lots of ways to ask it, but one way is: "The best way to get out the vote is to ask people you know. Can you think of three friends or family members that you could urge to vote, and vote for Candidate XX?"

Thank them for being a voter

For supporters and undecideds, sign off at the very end by saying: "thank you for being a voter!" Research shows that saying "*being a voter*," rather than "thank you for voting" has an effect on turnout by mobilizing that person's identity *as* a voter - and makes them want to live up to that identity.

¹² For the sticklers out there, this is actually vote *quadrupling* (vote tripling would be asking *two* additional people to vote) - but asking three people is good and *not* calling it "vote tripling" would be confusing. (As the forward to a [book on punctuation](#) says: "Sticklers of the world unite! You have nothing to lose but your sense of proportion.")

4. Mobilization Conversations with People who Don't Plan to Vote: Addressing Voting Pessimism

Types of deeply pessimistic views about voting, and how they shape conversations with voters

When you talk with voters, you will sometimes encounter people with deeply pessimistic views on voting and/or the candidates *in general*. These views may swamp any opinions voters have on specific issues, and so you need to address these views first.

There are different *types* of voting pessimism. All five could lead to non-voting, and two of them are also likely to lead to voting third party. The table shows narratives we can use to address them, and the rest of the chapter walks you through how you might approach these conversations: building rapport, learning what type of pessimism the voter feels, and using the narrative guidance to support them in finding a reason to vote.

PESSIMISTIC VOTER TYPE	POTENTIAL ACTIONS		NARRATIVES TO ADDRESS PESSIMISM
	NOT VOTE	THIRD PARTY	
Rightfully Cynical. Nothing changes, no matter who gets elected, so why bother voting?	✓		Table-Setting/Collective Power. Shows that elections don't <i>directly</i> make our lives better; instead their role is to set the table so that advocacy and movements can make progressive change. We vote to set the table so that advocates will have a shot at winning progress.
Disengaged. I'm just not political.	✓		The Personal is Political. Makes politics concrete, showing how it shapes daily life.
Hyper-Rationalist. One vote won't tip the balance, so the cost outweighs the benefit.	✓		Miniscule Margins. While the hyper-rationalist is often right, there are some cases of very close elections (especially local ones) that might appeal to voters like these.
Political Nihilist. Democrats and Republicans are the same, and equally bad.	✓	✓	The Contrast. Demonstrates the contrast between Democrats and Republicans, as well as why Democrats are better.
Double-Hater. I can't stand <i>either</i> Biden <i>or</i> trump.	✓	✓	Country, Not Candidate. Shifts the focus away from the individual <i>candidate</i> , and toward what kind of a <i>future</i> they want.

First, don't say: "your vote matters"

When you encounter a voting pessimist you might be tempted to say: "Your vote matters!" "Your vote is your voice!" or similar. We – the people reaching out to voters – believe this at our core. But we are very different from the people we're trying to convince! Approaches like this fall flat with low-propensity voters.

Build trust and discover their reasons for voting pessimism

As with all conversations, you want to build rapport right from the beginning. The [Build a mini-relationship with a stranger](#) section has general guidance on how to do that; the table below tailors this guidance for pessimistic voters.

- As you get curious, **use a warm, light tone of voice to convey complete lack of judgment.** Anything smacking of finger-wagging will cause the voter to shut down.
- As you ask them to share more, **listen for their underlying reason(s):** are they rightfully cynical, disengaged, hyper-rational, a political nihilist, or a double-hater? Use what you learn to steer the conversation in a fruitful direction, using the narrative guidance below.

TO BUILD RAPPORT WITH A PESSIMISTIC VOTER	
TRY THIS:	SAMPLE LINES
When they say they don't plan to vote, ask questions, get curious.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I'm sorry to hear that. Can I ask how come you don't plan to vote? (<i>Note that here, "how come" is softer than "why."</i>) [NGP script from DPI - they stop after "come"] • Oh interesting, tell me more about that!" [Chur] • Do you mind telling me more about that? • Can you share more about why you'd rather not vote?
Don't debate them or try to convince them that voting is worthwhile; instead, affirm their feelings.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I get it! / I hear that! / I hear you! • That makes sense / I see what you mean. • It sounds like you feel like it's really not worth it to vote. • It sounds like you feel like your vote doesn't matter.
Relate in; see if you can find some common experience or area of agreement. <i>Relate in <u>only</u> in a way that is authentic to you.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I really identify with you/what you're saying. • I hear that and I used to feel the same. [NGP] • I also used to not see the point of voting / I also didn't vote for years. • I've definitely found the voting experience frustrating myself - like sometimes I vote for the candidate I want, but then I feel let down once they're in office.
Reflect back.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It sounds like you're saying that no matter who's in office, nothing really changes for you/your family. • It sounds like politics just isn't an important part of your life - you have enough going on without that! • It sounds like you don't see the point in voting since a single vote rarely tips the balance.

Making the case to a rightfully cynical voter with the “table-setting/collective power” narrative

About the rightfully cynical voter type

The [Ohio Organizing Collaborative](#) (OOC) identified this voter type (or “cluster”) as they sought to understand the different clusters of Black voters in Ohio.¹³ People in this voting cluster don’t see that any particular candidate winning office makes a difference for them, their family, or their community. This voter feels powerless and alienated from our electoral system. One rightfully cynical voter summed things up well by saying: “My hood ain’t got no better under Obama and no worse under Trump. So why vote?”

“Table-setting/collective power” narrative

There are two aspects to the rightfully cynical voter’s perspective: (1) elections don’t change anything; and (2) the voter feels powerless. The narrative likewise has two aspects:

- **Table-setting.** The dominant narrative about elections is that they will *bring change*. When we elect people, we believe that they can get something done for us – and if they do things we like, then our lives will be better. This narrative sets us up for disillusionment and cynicism when the people we voted for win, and then we *don’t* get the change we expected. The narrative of table-setting puts elections in a very different historical role. In this way of looking at things, *elections* aren’t the source of change; instead change comes from people power and advocacy. For example, without the Sunrise Movement, we wouldn’t have the Inflation Reduction Act: a massive climate bill. And the Biden administration set the table for passing the IRA; the same bill *never* would have passed under a second Trump term. So what elections do is “set the table” for that advocacy: they make it *more* likely or *less* likely that mass movements can succeed. So our goal is to elect people who raise the odds of success, but we can’t expect elections *alone* to get us where we want to go. Electing the “right” people is *necessary* but not *sufficient* for progressive change. Elections are *one* tool in the toolbox – but not the only one.¹⁴
- **Collective power.** The collective power narrative highlights the fact that when *voters come together* they can create change. First they can set the table by electing people who raise the odds that mass movements succeed, and then they can fight for change directly. An incredible example is Georgia, where voters put Biden over the top, and then elected *two* Democratic Senators in run-off elections on January 5. With a Democratic White House and Senate majority, we got the IRA – which was not only a massive climate bill but also capped insulin at \$35/month for seniors. We got Ketanji Brown Jackson on the Supreme Court. With so many activists fighting for student debt relief, we have more student loans zeroed out every few months. We need to keep flexing our power – and to tilt the playing field in our direction, we need to come together once again, and vote to elect Democrats (so we can set the table!).

TABLE-SETTING AND COLLECTIVE POWER LANGUAGE	
TRY THIS: ¹⁵	BECAUSE:
I totally hear you – it’s frustrating to feel like we did what Biden asked, we gave him our vote – but we still face a ton of challenges.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Affirms their feelings

¹³ Learn more about OOC’s cluster study [here](#) and [here](#).

¹⁴ You can listen to Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez explaining table-setting [here](#), and Anat Shenker-Osorio talking about the same idea [here](#). Also read Tom Benthin discussing table-setting [here](#).

¹⁵ The lines in this table are from notes taken at a 2024 Movement Briefing from the Research Collaborative. In this briefing, Anat Shenker-Osorio modeled what we could say to voters.

TABLE-SETTING AND COLLECTIVE POWER LANGUAGE	
TRY THIS: ¹⁵	BECAUSE:
For me, what was really disappointing is when he didn't stand up enough for the Freedom to Vote Act. That bill would have made it way harder to suppress the vote, which is still happening - mostly to people of color, poor people, and young people. <i>[Use an example of something that has disappointed you.]</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shows that you relate to them Gives a concrete example
But I'm still really proud that I joined with other voters to get Biden into office. We came out in record numbers, and because we did that, we got some things we never would have had if trump had won that election. We're the reason that insulin is capped at \$35. We're the reason that there's been \$XXMM in student loan debt relief. We're the reason that Obamacare has been protected and even expanded under Biden.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shows that the election <i>set the table</i> - the table with Biden made things possible that would have been impossible at a table with trump Highlights <i>collective power</i> - voters came out <i>together</i>, and are the heroes of the story

See [Appendix A](#) for additional sample script lines.

Making the case to a disengaged voter with the “personal is political” narrative

COMING SOON! (Asking about what issues are important to the voter, and then sharing how policies affect those things and connecting something that Democrats are working on (or have accomplished) to what's important to the voter.)

Making the case to a hyper-rationalist voter with the “miniscule margins” narrative

A voter who presents as hyper-rationalist may actually be a different type of voting pessimist in disguise (like the rightfully cynical or the disengaged), but the “one vote won't make a difference” argument is an easy way to rationalize not voting. So you might try with a “miniscule margins” narrative, and if that doesn't work, try out “table-setting/collective power” or “personal is political.”

For the true hyper-rationalist, the sample lines below may help.

MINISCULE MARGINS LANGUAGE	
TRY THIS:	BECAUSE:
I get it! When there are so many votes cast, it would be rare for one vote to <i>literally</i> determine the outcome.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Affirms their feelings
But I keep hearing about how close elections are these days, and got curious. So I googled this, and what's kind of crazy is that there <i>are</i> actually a bunch of elections where the margin	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Helps to build rapport by sharing a personal story (about how you were curious and investigated)

MINISCULE MARGINS LANGUAGE	
TRY THIS:	BECAUSE:
<p>was so close that just one vote – or only a few votes – really <i>did</i> tip the balance! The ones that stick in my head are Bernie Sanders, who won his first race for mayor in Burlington, VT by 10 votes; John Fetterman, who won a primary race for mayor of Braddock, PA by one vote, and the election in the VA state legislature in 2017 that was a tie (they drew lots to decide the winner).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● If they are a <i>true</i> hyper-rationalist (and not actually a different type of voting pessimist), evidence like this could be convincing to them
<p>The reason I’m even calling you is that this race is expected to be super close! It’s one vote from you, and one vote from a bunch of other people I’m calling today – if even a few of the folks I talk to vote, these calls could really make a difference.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Links back to the race you’re calling for ● If you’ve built some rapport, they might feel pulled toward voting because <i>you</i> are making the effort to get just a few more votes out
<p>I used to wonder if my one vote made a difference, but now that I’m phonebanking I can see how each of these single votes adds up – but only if each of these people I’m talking with actually does follow through and votes, so I really hope you do!</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Relating in; identifying with their doubt that a single vote could make a difference ● Sharing about yourself to help build the rapport that could influence them to shift their perspective

Making the case to a political nihilist with the “contrast” narrative

COMING SOON! (Info about the political nihilist, plus additional language for the contrast narrative, especially abortion, climate, Social Security and Medicare, gun violence.)

CONTRAST LANGUAGE	
TRY THIS: ¹⁶	BECAUSE:
<p>One way to look at things is that when Democrats are in charge and when they can really pass the laws they want, things are a lot better. We know this because things are going really well in states where Democrats are in the majority in the legislature and the governor is a Democrat. Take Minnesota and Michigan: that became true for both those states recently and they’ve passed a ton of great laws [include examples].</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● This argument makes things extremely concrete about Democrats fighting for us ● It subtly raises the point that that Democrats would do more for voters if Republicans were not obstructing them (without making excuses, which can put people off)
<p>While not all Democrats fight for the things I want them to – like unions and a ceasefire in</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Makes the contrast with Republicans clear.

¹⁶ The lines in this table are from notes taken at a 2024 Movement Briefing from the Research Collaborative. In this briefing, Anat Shenker-Osorio modeled what we could say to voters.

CONTRAST LANGUAGE	
TRY THIS: ¹⁶	BECAUSE:
Gaza - it is the Democrats who fight for those things, and Republicans don't. Same with abortion access.	
So I know which side I'm on.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Makes the contrast clear and personal.

Making the case to a double hater with the “country not candidate” narrative

COMING SOON! (More on how this works, including, from [ASO on the Deconstructed podcast](#): “When we shift, instead, from “Trump is” to “Trump will do,” away from identity and towards a future agenda, that is where we are on much more solid ground. And even more solid ground is when we shift away from the candidates at all toward, this election is really about which country we will be, which future we will have, as opposed to which man ... we’re going to elect....”)

5. Messaging on Specific Topics COMING SOON!

Introduction

Democracy

Economy

Abortion

Immigration

Gaza

Democrats' Accomplishments

**Appendix A: Sample Script Compendium COMING
SOON!**

Appendix B: Credits and Sources COMING SOON!