



## MEMORANDUM

**From:** Michael Slater and Lori Minnite  
**To:** Interested Parties  
**Date:** February 19, 2010  
**Re:** **Sustaining Voter Participation Levels in 2010: Summary of Findings**

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The 2008 election resulted in record turnout of young Americans and Americans of color. Recent elections in Massachusetts, Virginia, and New Jersey did not result in similarly high rates of participation by these two groups. What will turnout in the 2010 general election look like compared to 2008? What strategies can organizations use to reduce the drop-off in voting by young and minority Americans?

The accompanying research memorandum seeks to answer these questions by using available data to estimate the turnout of the 2010 general election, assess strategies for building on the gains made by independent voter registration drives since 2004, and to make recommendations to foundations and funders interested in continuing this work.

Key findings and recommendations include:

### Estimated Turnout

- Due to population growth, the 2010 voting-eligible population will expand by 2.1 percent over 2008 levels, to approximately 212.4 million.
- 2010 turnout will fall by an estimated 20 percentage points from 2008.
- Based on a three-cycle average of mid-term elections, we can estimate that voting by Blacks will drop off by 14.5 percentage points, voting by Latinos will drop off by 13.7 percentage points, voting by Americans under 30 by 19.5 percentage points, and voting by Whites will drop off by 13.9.
- Turnout in 2010 may range between 40.5 percent (the turnout rate in the last off-year election) and 42 percent, a difference of 3.2 million voters.
- If turnout increases to 42 percent of the voting-eligible population, and if the shares racial groups obtain among all voters casting ballots in 2010 remain stable at their averages over the last three mid-term elections, we estimate that approximately 600,000 of the 3.2 million additional voters identified above will be non-white minorities.
- We can, therefore, estimate that Black turnout will range from 9,117,000 to 9,455,000, Latino turnout will range from 4,558,000 to 4,727,000, and turnout by other non-White citizens from 2,494,000 to 2,587,000. We estimate White turnout to range from 69,009,000 to 72,426,000, but expect political forces to drive turnout by Whites towards the higher end of the distribution.

## Cost Analysis

- The comparative costs of voter registration and Get-Out-the Vote programs depend on estimates of unit costs, the rate at which registration applicants vote, and the number of voter contacts required to turn out a single additional voter.
- Research indicates that door-to-door field programs produce one additional vote for every 14 registered voters contacted. Therefore, a simple formula for determining the cost of a basic GOTV program is 14 multiplied by the number of votes desired, multiplied by the unit cost of contacting voters. For example, if the per unit cost of a door-to-door program is \$3 and the goal is to generate an additional 600,000 votes (the upper turnout boundary in our 2010 estimate) the cost would be \$25.2 million.
- Analysis of voter registration drives in the 2008 election suggest that 82 percent of voter registration applications convert to unique, successful applications. If we assume turnout will remain at 2006 levels, and that we want to generate 600,000 additional votes, we would need to collect 1.8 million applications. (The formula is desired number of additional votes divided by the estimated turnout rate, then divided by the voter registration conversion rate.) If it costs \$15 to collect a voter registration application, it would cost \$27.8 million to generate 600,000 additional votes.

## Recommendations

In light of the cost differences between voter registration and GOTV, the large number of registered voters who would likely vote if encouraged, and the challenges and risks of running large-scale voter registration programs, we recommend the following:

- Organizations should focus their resources primarily on Get-Out-the-Vote programs, recognizing that these efforts could yield as many as 600,000 additional votes cast nationwide by Americans of color. This is particularly true of the African-American population, whose drop-off rates are higher than whites.
- Youth are low-propensity voters and also will need encouragement to remain in the electorate in 2010. We recommend GOTV efforts that targets only those young voters who cast ballots in 2008, a strategy which build on the investment of 2008 and contribute to habituating these individuals to voting; and,
- To help build the electorate for 2012 while contributing to 2010 turnout, independent voter registration groups should target under-registered groups and undertake voter registration drives in Latino and Asian American communities.

Research has found that careful geographic targeting of resources – to specific populations and places – is critical to the cost effectiveness and ultimate success of voter registration and mobilization efforts. Our analysis, however, is limited to understanding national trends and estimating national turnout outcomes; we do not make recommendations about *where* efforts to register and mobilize voters should be targeted. Our projected outcomes and cost estimates, therefore, are based on the assumption that careful geographic targeting must and will be incorporated into the planning of voter registration and get-out-the-vote campaigns recommended here.



## RESEARCH MEMORANDUM

**From:** Lori Minnite  
**To:** Interested Parties  
**Date:** February 19, 2010  
**Re:** **Sustaining Voter Participation Levels in 2010**

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### Introduction

The election of Barack Obama as the first African American President of the United States was a milestone. Obama ran an exciting campaign that attracted unprecedented numbers of young people to get involved in electoral politics for the first time; he and his opponent, Sen. John McCain, and their parties and allied supporters broke spending records and deployed new technologies for reaching voters. As a result, turnout was the highest it has been in more than a generation.

Buried beneath this account of the remarkable 2008 election, however, is another important story, one that has gotten less attention from journalists or scholars. Over the course of the 2007-2008 period, one of the largest independent non-partisan voter registration and voter mobilization campaigns in recent memory helped to register millions of new voters, most of them racial minorities, young adults and other citizens who had never voted before. It is more accurate, in fact, to speak of *campaigns*, as dozens of organizations, from small civic groups like the Oregon Bus Project, to large, venerable organizations such as the NAACP, ran separate drives targeting different constituencies and using a variety field, mail, phone and online techniques for registering and mobilizing voters. New research suggests that the activities of these and many other organizations to expand the electorate and make it more representative of the American people were largely successful in meeting their goals.<sup>1</sup>

Historical patterns in mid-term electoral participation suggest that despite the high levels of enthusiasm and interest in the previous presidential race, turnout will fall precipitously in 2010, as it has in mid-term elections for a hundred and seventy years.<sup>2</sup> The purpose of this memo is to assess strategies for building on the gains made by independent voter registration drives since 2004, and to make recommendations to foundations and funders interested in continuing this work.

After a summary of our conclusions, the first part analyzes in detail recent trends in voter turnout, “drop-off” in mid-term voting, and the voting behavior of traditionally under-represented groups in the U.S. electorate – African Americans, Latinos, and youth – who are the target populations considered for analysis. The second part presents cost estimates and summarizes the recommendations.

This analysis relies on a variety of sources, including peer-reviewed research on voter mobilization, and unpublished studies of voter registration drives and get-out-the-vote campaigns by Polimetrix, the New Organizing Institute, and the Analysts Institute; official reports on election results compiled by the Clerk of the U.S. House of Representatives; the Census Bureau’s Current Population Survey November Supplement files; estimates of the “voting-eligible” population by Prof. Michael McDonald of George Mason University; and reports on “representational bias” prepared by Doug Hess and Jody Herman at Project Vote.

We offer not so much a prediction of turnout in the 2010 election, as a plausible scenario of what might happen if we make reasonable assumptions about voting behavior based on empirical evidence from recent mid-term elections. At each stage of the analysis, from the projection for growth in the voter-eligible population, to the comparative cost analysis for different kinds of registration and mobilization activities, we invite the reader to evaluate our assumptions. It is not the purpose of this memo to present all possible turnout outcomes or all possible strategies for elevating turnout in 2010, but only the most reasonable ones based upon what we have learned about nonpartisan voter registration and mobilization efforts. Thus, our recommendations seek to protect the substantial investment in nonpartisan voter activities already made by foundations and other non-profit groups, to extend the goals behind those investments to the upcoming mid-term election, and to continue the productive use of resources that will pay off – in terms of a more inclusive and representative electorate – in the future.

Two important caveats:

1) Research has found that careful geographic targeting of resources – to specific populations and places – is critical to the cost effectiveness and ultimate success of voter registration and mobilization efforts. Our analysis, however, is limited to understanding national trends and estimating national turnout outcomes; we do not make recommendations about *where* efforts to register and mobilize voters should be targeted. Our projected outcomes and cost estimates, therefore, are based on the assumption that careful geographic targeting must and will be incorporated into the planning of voter registration and get-out-the-vote campaigns recommended here.

2) Research has also found that with get-out-the-vote efforts, the more personal the voter contact, the more effective the campaign. This is why door-to-door canvassing is “by far the most powerful way to increase a person’s likelihood of voting.”<sup>3</sup> Because mid-term elections are low salience elections for most voters, we believe it is more important to pursue “effectiveness,” or the power of the voter contact method to generate voting, than it is to chase “cost effectiveness,” which may be more optimal in presidential contests. We say this because the factors affecting how much it costs to produce one additional voter through any one registration or mobilization method vary widely. Moreover, we know of no research that estimates costs under different electoral conditions that may make mobilization or less difficult. For example, in presidential elections, the sensitivity of voters to presidential candidates motivates participation, thus lowering the costs of mobilization to non-partisan groups. Until more research can be done, the cost savings that accrue to GOTV efforts in presidential over mid-term elections are intangible; therefore, in thinking about the special turnout problems in mid-term elections that could shift the cost estimates in unknown directions, we recommend pursuing the most effective, rather than simply the most cost effective methods for mobilizing voters because the latter can not be known with as much certainty as the former. Our focus, therefore, is on “field” models that consist primarily of door-to-door campaigns, but may also integrate the limited use of mail and follow-up phone calls.

## Summary of Conclusions and Recommendations

- Between 2000 and 2008, the size of the voting-eligible population of the U.S. grew an average 2.1 percent every two years. Therefore, we project that the 2010 voting-eligible population will expand by 2.1 percent over 2008 levels, to approximately 212.4 million.<sup>4</sup>
- In keeping with recent trends in drop-off in turnout from presidential to mid-term elections, and in the changing size and shape of mid-term electorates in 1998, 2002, and 2006, we project that turnout in the 2010 mid-term election will drop by at least 20 percentage points from 2008 levels.
- Turnout in the 2006 mid-term election was 40.5 percent of the voting-eligible population. If turnout in 2010 remains stable at 40.5 percent, because of the growth in the voting-eligible population, 3.6 million more voters will vote in 2010 than did in 2006.
- Trends in two different measures – the likely growth in the size of the mid-term electorate, and in mid-term turnout (the percent of the voting-eligible population casting ballots) – suggest that voting in 2010 will expand over 2006 levels:
  - if the absolute number of mid-term voters grows by 8.4 percent, about the same percentage by which the 2002 and 2006 electorates expanded, turnout will increase by 2.9 million voters over turnout in 2006;
  - looked at another way, if turnout in 2010 increases to 42 percent of the voting-eligible population, an additional 3.2 million voters (on top of the 3.6 million identified above) will cast ballots;
  - these measures suggest that the number of voters in the 2010 election could increase by 2.9 to 3.2 million over the number predicted by holding the 2006 turnout rate constant; overall, we think it is possible that at least 3.6 million, the number of additional voters if turnout remains flat in 2010, and maybe as many as 6.8 million more voters (3.6 million, plus the 3.2 million added if turnout increases by 1.5 percentage points to 42 percent) will cast ballots in 2010 than did in 2006.
- There are good reasons to believe turnout in 2010 will exceed 2006 levels and increase to at least 42 percent of the voting-eligible population. These include spillover effects from the expansion in registration and the surge in presidential voting in 2008; the trend in growth rates in the size of the mid-term electorate since 1998; the emergence of a rightwing populist movement and the channeling of anger into electoral politics; and the de-regulation of corporate spending limits on political advertising anticipated in the wake of the Supreme Court's recent decision in Citizens United v. Federal Elections Commission.<sup>5</sup>
- If turnout increases to 42 percent of the voting-eligible population, and if the shares racial groups obtain among all voters casting ballots in 2010 remain stable at their averages over the last three mid-term elections, we estimate that approximately 600,000 of the 3.2 million additional voters identified above will be non-white minorities.

- To protect and build upon the gains in expanding and diversifying the electorate made by foundations and independent voter registration groups, we recommend a three-pronged voter mobilization strategy. Carefully designed, voter registration and get-out-the vote campaigns among minorities and youth have the potential to generate an additional 850,000 registered minority and youth voters in 2010. Specifically,
  - 1) to sustain investments in minority-targeted voter registration drives, we recommend a targeted get-out-the-vote campaign to bring to the polls 600 thousand registered, minority, primarily African American voters (including 34 thousand registered younger (under 30) voters) who, as likely but, perhaps, not certain voters in 2010, could benefit from some additional encouragement; research suggests that producing 600 thousand additional voters will require contacting 8.4 million registered voters;
  - 2) to continue to lay the foundation for a more inclusive electorate, we should take advantage of the successful registration drives of the recent past and aggressively incorporate another 150 thousand young (under 30 years of age) voters into the electorate. Youth are low-propensity voters and will also need encouragement to remain in the electorate in 2010. We recommend a youth-targeted get-out-the-vote effort that contacts an additional 2.1 million young registered voters. We strongly recommend precision targeting of only those young, registered voters *who cast ballots in 2008*;
  - 3) to augment these group-targeted get-out-the-vote campaigns and to help expand the representativeness of the 2012 electorate, independent voter registration efforts should target under-registered groups and undertake voter registration drives in Latino, Asian American communities to register and then mobilize 100 thousand new voters. We estimate that to produce 100 thousand new Latino and Asian American voters through a voter registration drive, organizations will need to collect approximately 301 thousand voter registration applications.
- In sum, we estimate the get-out-the-vote campaign will require contacting approximately 11.9 million minority and youth registered voters, and the voter registration drives will need to collect approximately 301 thousand voter registration applications. These targets are guided by two primary goals:
  - 1) to staunch as best we can the effects of drop-off on minority and youth voters by pushing up likely turnout in 2010; and,
  - 2) to extend the successful voter registration work of the past six years by continuing to lay the foundation for a more inclusive electorate.

## Voting in 2010: Turnout Should Expand Over 2006 Levels

Between 2000 and 2008, the “voting-eligible” population of the U.S. (VEP) grew an average 2.1 percent per two-year federal election period. Thus, in 2010, we project the voting-eligible population of the U.S. in 2010 will be about 212.4 million.<sup>6</sup>

It is difficult to predict exactly how many voters will cast ballots in the upcoming election. Even professional election forecasters tend to avoid questions about voter turnout, preferring to stick with picking winners and losers. The difficulties stem from the sensitivity of turnout to unique election dynamics, unknown campaign, candidate, party and interest group spending and voter mobilization efforts, and unforeseen events that unfold over the months and weeks leading up to an election.

Accounting for all of these factors is beyond the scope of this memo. Instead, we will keep it simple by focusing on recent trends over the last 12 years in two numbers – the voting rate of the voting-eligible population, and the quadrennial growth rate of the mid-term electorate.<sup>7</sup> First, using the turnout rate observed in 2006 and increasing it by 1.5 percentage points, the average percentage point increase in turnout over the last three mid-term election cycles, we estimate the likely number of voters in 2010 will be about 89.2 million or 42 percent of the voting-eligible population. At this rate, “drop-off,”<sup>8</sup> or the decrease in votes cast over the immediately prior presidential election is estimated at 32.1 percent of the presidential vote, about what it was in 2006. (See Table 1.)

There are good reasons to assume that turnout in 2010 will continue the gentle upward swing in midterm voting rates we’ve seen in the recent past. First, the electorate remains polarized. With victories in gubernatorial contests in New Jersey and Virginia, and a stunning upset in the special election to replace Senator Edward Kennedy in Massachusetts, the Republican Party clearly is recovering from its losses after the 2008 election and has momentum on its side. Various experienced political analysts such as Larry Sabato are watching the emerging “Tea Party” movement and predicting that larger than usual turnout among Independents in support of Republican candidates will drive a likely increase in voter participation in November. Others predict that the Supreme Court’s recent decision in Citizens United v. The Federal Election Commission will unleash a torrent of corporate spending on political advertising that could fuel turnout by the base of the Republican Party.

Second, in general, a surge in presidential voting leads to higher turnout in the mid-term election that follows. Though it seemed to come as a surprise, (relatively) high turnout in the much-discussed 1994 mid-term election in which the Republican Party took control of the House of Representatives for the first time in nearly fifty years could have been predicted by the surge in presidential voting in 1992. When turnout dipped in the 1996 presidential election, it was followed by a dip in mid-term voting two years later. Mid-term turnout rates in 2002 and 2006 swung upward following successive presidential elections in which turnout has increased, and we should expect the turnout rate to increase again in 2010 following the expansion of the presidential electorate in 2008. (See Table 2.)

Thus, predicting turnout will increase by 1.5 percentage points over 2006 levels is in keeping with the observable upward trend in mid-term voting since 1998. This slightly higher predicted turnout rate of 42 percent is also consistent with the stable pattern of 8.3 to 8.5 percent growth in the size of the mid-term electorate in 2006 and 2002, respectively. (See Table 3.)

If the 2010 electorate were to grow at 8.4 percent (or put another way, if turnout of the voting-eligible population were to grow to 42 percent), approximately 2.9 to 3.2 million more voters would cast ballots than if we held turnout to its 2006 rate of 40.5 percent. Holding everything else constant that impacts turnout (an impossible assumption, but one we will make), it is reasonable to conclude that these approximately 3 million voters are “soft targets” for voter mobilization campaigns by all sides in the 2010 election. (See Table 4.) In other words, it seems reasonable to conclude that even if the turnout rate in 2010 were the same as it was four years earlier, there are some 3 million or more registered voters who are more likely to vote than the average non-voter in a mid-term election, and therefore especially receptive to carefully targeted get-out-the-vote campaigns.

What do we know about the composition of the mid-term electorate, what segments of the potential electorate are most likely to benefit from voter registration drives, and which groups would benefit from get-out-the-vote campaigns? An older research tradition in political science suggested that off-year voters were different from presidential voters in their attachment to political parties (stronger for off-year voters), and their sensitivity to election specific phenomena like their feelings toward presidential candidates (weaker for off-year voters). The cycle of surge and decline in the intensity of partisanship from presidential to mid-term election has been used to explain why the party that controlled the White House lost House seats in every mid-term election from 1934 to 1998 (the Republican Party broke this long-standing pattern in 2002, when it expanded its majority in the House by eight seats).

According to Gary Jacobson, however, more recent research no longer finds support for the partisan intensity thesis concerning mid-term voters.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, this newer research suggests that mid-term voters today are demographically similar to presidential voters, with one exception: on the whole, mid-term electorates are somewhat older than presidential electorates.

#### *Patterns in Mid-term “Drop-off”*

While presidential voting is on the rise, participation in mid-term congressional elections is stable or up slightly for most groups. Data from the Current Population Survey’s November Supplements for the last three off-year election cycles shows that turnout in mid-term elections among blacks remains at about 41 to 42 percent of the citizen voting-age population; similarly, turnout among Latino citizen voters is stable at about 32 percent, while white turnout rates are up from 47 percent in 1998 to 52 percent in 2006. Turnout among younger (under 30 years of age) voters is anemic, just half to a third of that of older groups, though it was up in 2006 over 1998 levels (26 percent compared to 22 percent in 1998).

Despite the improvement by whites in these relatively low-turnout elections, their share of the electorate has been stable due to the growth of minority populations in the U.S., and their increasing incorporation into the electorate. (See Table 5.)<sup>10</sup> We can infer from the fact that minority voters are more likely than whites to register through the mechanism of a voter registration drive,<sup>11</sup> that the past work of independent voter registration drives targeting under-represented groups has contributed to these developments. Analysis of the 2008 voter registration drives by the NOI confirms that these efforts disproportionately registered minority voters.<sup>12</sup>

Thus, because presidential voting is on the rise as mid-term turnout remains stable, drop-off, or the gap between turnout rates from presidential to mid-term elections, is growing. And it is most precipitous among younger voters whose spike in turnout in 2008 strongly contributed to President Obama’s historic victory. (See Table 6.)

## **Voter Registration vs. Get-Out-the-Vote Campaigns**

Pulling together these trends, what can we say about likely turnout and the composition of the electorate in 2010? First, we must stress that predicting turnout is a fool's errand. Voters continually surprise analysts and defy trends. We press on, nonetheless. To summarize, we are projecting an overall turnout rate of between 40.5 and 42 percent of the voting-eligible population, which we believe has likely grown by about 2.1 percent over the last federal election cycle. We expect that black and Latino voters will maintain their shares of the mid-term electorate at about 11 and 5 percent, respectively, but because mid-term electorates do differ from presidential electorates in that they tend to be older, we expect drop-off, or the drop in turnout rates from 2008 to 2010 to be larger for younger (under 30 years of age) voters than for blacks and Latinos. And in fact, among these targeted groups, drop-off has been largest for younger voters in the last several mid-term elections.<sup>13</sup>

Using as a baseline patterns in turnout in 2006, and average distributions within the electorate of our target groups over the last three mid-term elections, Table 7 reports projections of the potential turnout in 2010 among racial groups at the 40.5 and 42.0 percent rates of voting-eligible population. (See Table 7.)

In addition to these estimates, we break out youth as a separate cohort for targeted registration and get-out-the-vote campaigns. Based on the percentage of the black and Latino vote in 2006 that was cast by voters under the age of 30, we can calculate the youth component of our 600 thousand minority voter goal at about 34 thousand. (See Table 8.)

These calculations suggest that 3.2 million additional voters that could show up at the polls in 2010 if turnout exceeds 2006 by 1.5 percentage points; approximately 600 thousand of these likely voters are minorities (including 34 thousand minority voters under the age of 30). The odds are these voters are already registered, though we cannot be certain.

Which strategy, then, will be most cost-effective for the independent civic groups who seek to expand the electorate, making it more representative of the population – voter registration drives or get-out-the-vote campaigns aimed at (already) registered voters?

Before we turn to cost calculations, it is important to note that we know of no peer-reviewed research that directly compares the cost of registering one voter who votes to the cost of producing an additional voter through a face-to-face voter contact campaign. In fact, there is very little published peer-reviewed research on the effectiveness of voter registration drives at all. The unpublished studies by Polimetrix of the 2004 voter registration drives and the New Organizing Institute of the 2008 drives are innovative and important, but await peer-review and publication.

The foregoing analysis relies on peer-reviewed research on voter mobilization (work by Alan Gerber, Donald Green and their colleagues<sup>14</sup>), Polimetrix's 2006 study, and the New Organizing Institute's December 2009 report. The problem with drawing inferences from the Polimetrix and NOI studies is that in estimating unit costs and voting rates of citizens registered in 2004 and 2008, we have no way of knowing whether registrants who cast ballots were also contacted to vote by get-out-the-vote campaigns. The NOI's reported 59.3 percent voting rate for all "successful" voter registration applications collected through field programs, therefore, is not an unadulterated number because it may reflect unmeasured contributions by groups or political

parties, campaigns or candidates to turn them out. In other words, we know that in 49 states, voters must register before they may cast ballots, but we do not know if the 59.3 percent voting rate of those who successfully registered through the assistance of field programs voted *because* they got registered, or because someone contacted them after they registered to encourage them to vote. We need to know what other intervening expenditures were made on mobilization in order to isolate the real cost of registering a voter who votes. For now, these additional costs are unknown and therefore unmeasured in the cost calculations for voter registration discussed below.

Targeted get-out-the-vote campaigns should be a priority for under-represented groups in low-turnout elections. There are two good reasons for this. First, for African Americans and youth, the gap in turnout between the last full presidential and mid-term election cycle grew faster than it did for whites (by 4.7 and 5.8 percentage points, respectively, over the 1998-2002 cycle; see Table 6). Moreover, research suggests that voters who would not have otherwise voted, but are induced to vote through GOTV campaigns, are then more likely to vote in subsequent elections.<sup>15</sup> Mid-term elections present opportunities for engaging registered voters who are not yet habituated to voting. Because looming drop-off promises to create a vast pool of registered, minority voters, many of whom are not yet in the habit of voting in low-salience elections, get-out-the-vote efforts have an abundance of worthy targets.

As Table 9 indicates, nationally, African American registration rates still lag white rates (69.7 percent compared to 73.5 percent for whites), but considered historically, the black-white registration gap is closing, and African American turnout rates in at least 12 states with large black populations were actually equal to or exceeded those of whites in the 2008 presidential election. (See Table 10.)

However, while presidential turnout levels for Latinos are sure to dip in 2010, as they will for every other group, registration rates among Latino citizens also remain far lower than those for blacks. Given the relatively smaller share of Latinos in the average mid-term electorate, it makes more sense to continue to lay the foundation for the expansion of this group in the voting electorate by building up their registration rates. Doing this work now will create a larger pool of registered Latino voters available for voter mobilization campaigns. Voter registration should remain a priority for this group, including Latino youth.

In conclusion, we recommend combining voter registration drives and GOTV campaigns to generate 850 thousand more registered minority and youth voters in 2010. The 850 thousand includes the 600 thousand additional registered minority voters identified earlier; another 150 thousand young voters who cast ballots in 2008; and 100 thousand more Latino and Asian American new voters mobilized into the electorate through a voter registration drive.

### *Cost Calculations*

We argued for an approach that emphasizes field campaigns for both voter registration and GOTV. Here, we present a formula for estimating the cost of producing an additional voter for both strategies, drawing on the work of Project Vote which ran the largest voter registration field program in the 2008 cycle, to illustrate a real-world example.

### Voter Registration Drives

To compute a formula for estimating the cost of producing an additional voter through a voter registration drive, we will rely on two numbers from the NOI report. The first is the rate at which

“unique” applications become “successful” applications; this is the ratio of registration applications that appear on the voter rolls to all registrations collected in a drive. The NOI report estimated that for field programs in 2008, this rate was 81.9 percent. The second number is the rate at which voters successfully registered by drives actually voted, and in 2008, NOI estimate this rate was 59.3 percent.<sup>16</sup> Combining these two numbers,<sup>17</sup> we have the following formula,

$$2.06(\text{goal}) * (\text{cost per single registration})$$

where ‘goal’ is the number of voters to be produced by the voter registration drive.

But off-year turnout is unlikely to reach 59.3 percent for citizens registered through field programs this year; we will substitute the 2006 turnout rate (40.5 percent of the voting-eligible population), and suggest using the following formula for 2010 calculations,

$$3.01(\text{goal}) * (\text{cost per single registration})$$

Using budget estimates from Project Vote’s experience, if we want to produce 100 thousand more voters through a voter registration drive, we will need to assist 301 thousand registrants; at \$15.20 per application, our total cost for the drive is about \$4.6 million.

### GOTV Campaigns

Analyzing a series of experiments in voter mobilization techniques, Green and Gerber conclude that as a general rule, fourteen individual voter contacts by door-to-door canvassers are required to produce one additional voter.<sup>18</sup> They calculate the cost of a single field program voter contact to be \$1.33, based on paying canvassers \$16 an hour to make 12 contacts an hour.<sup>19</sup> This calculation does not include the cost of overhead, and therefore under-estimates the true unit cost to voter registration groups. Project Vote incorporates overhead into their budget analysis and estimates that one door-to-door voter contact costs about \$3. We estimate the following formula for estimating the cost of producing an additional voter through a GOTV campaign,

$$14(\text{goal}) * (\text{cost per contact})$$

where ‘goal’ is number of voters to be produced by the GOTV campaign

We will use Project Vote’s budget numbers in our example. If we wanted to produce 100,000 more voters through a GOTV field program, we would need to contact 1.4 million voters; at a cost of \$3 per contact, our total budget would be \$4.2 million.

## **Conclusions**

We share the goal of a more inclusive and therefore more representative electorate as a necessary condition for democracy. The conclusions in this memo draw on an analysis that is based on a set of reasonable but arguable assumptions and scientific research on voter mobilization. From these we offer a set of recommendations for how foundations and non-partisan voter registration and civic groups should approach their work in the upcoming election. We can expect that turnout in 2010 will drop precipitously over 2008 levels. If we want to protect the financial and organizational resources expended on voter registration activities in the past, we should work to expand the 2010 electorate through carefully designed get-out-the-vote campaigns that will bring an additional 850 thousand registered minority and youth voters who might not otherwise vote, to the polls in November. In addition, we should not halt the progress we've made in increasing the pool of registered voters. To build on our past work, we should continue to expand registration among those groups with the lowest voter registration rates (primarily Latino citizens). We recommend a targeted voter registration drive to assist at least 301 thousand minority citizens in registering to vote. Overall, we believe these strategies will help to protect the success of our past work and continue its promise in the future.

**Table 1**  
**Turnout and Drop-off, 1998 – 2010 (projected)**

	1998	2002	2006	2010
<b>Turnout As A Percentage of Voting-Eligible Population</b>	37.4	39.0	40.5	42.0
<b>Drop-off As A Percentage of Presidential Vote</b>	27.2	27.8	32.5	32.1

**Source:** Statistics of the Presidential and Congressional Election of November 5, 1996, Compiled by Robin H. Carle, Clerk of the House of Representatives (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1997); Statistics of the Congressional Election of November 3, 1998, Compiled by Jeff Trandahl, Clerk of the House of Representatives (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1999); Statistics of the Presidential and Congressional Election of November 7, 2000, Compiled by Jeff Trandahl, Clerk of the House of Representatives (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 2001); Statistics of the Congressional Election of November 5, 2002, Compiled by Jeff Trandahl, Clerk of the House of Representatives (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 2003); Statistics of the Presidential and Congressional Election of November 2, 2004, Compiled by Jeff Trandahl, Clerk of the House of Representatives (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 2005); Statistics of the Congressional Election of November 7, 2006, Compiled by Jeff Trandahl, Clerk of the House of Representatives (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 2007); Statistics of the Presidential and Congressional Election of November 4, 2008, Compiled by Lorraine C. Miller, Clerk of the House of Representatives (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 2009); “Voter Turnout,” Spreadsheet Compiled by Prof. Michael McDonald, available online [http://elections.gmu.edu/voter\\_turnout.htm](http://elections.gmu.edu/voter_turnout.htm).

**Table 2**  
**Patterns in Turnout**  
**Presidential and Mid-term Elections, 1996-2006**

	<b>Type of Election</b>	<b>4-Year Change in Previous Turnout Rate (in percentage points)</b>
<b>1996</b>	Presidential	-6.5
<b>1998</b>	Mid-term	-1.2
<b>2000</b>	Presidential	+3.4
<b>2002</b>	Mid-term	+1.6
<b>2004</b>	Presidential	+6.1
<b>2006</b>	Mid-term	+1.5
<b>2008</b>	Presidential	+2.0

**Source:** See Table 1.

**Table 3**  
**Change in Turnout and Growth of the Mid-term Electorate, 1998-2006**

<b>Mid-term Election Year</b>	<b>Voters (1,000s)</b>	<b>Turnout (% VEP)</b>	<b>VEP (1,000s)</b>
<b>1998</b>	70,142	37.4	187,689
<b>2002</b>	76,084	39.0	195,318
<b>Change</b>			
	+5,942	+1.6 pts.	+7,629
<b>Growth</b>			
	+8.5%		+4.1%
<b>Mid-term Election Year</b>	<b>Voters (1,000s)</b>	<b>Turnout (% VEP)</b>	<b>VEP (1,000s)</b>
<b>2002</b>	76,084	39.0	195,318
<b>2006</b>	82,361	40.5	203,524
<b>Change</b>			
	+6,277	+1.5 pts.	+8,206
<b>Growth</b>			
	+8.3%		+4.2%

**Source:** Statistics of the Congressional Election of November 3, 1998, Compiled by Jeff Trandahl, Clerk of the House of Representatives (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1999), adjusted; Statistics of the Congressional Election of November 5, 2002, Compiled by Jeff Trandahl, Clerk of the House of Representatives (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 2003), adjusted; Statistics of the Congressional Election of November 7, 2006, Compiled by Jeff Trandahl, Clerk of the House of Representatives (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 2007), adjusted; McDonald.

**Table 4**  
**Turnout Projections for the 2010 Mid-term Election**

<b>Mid-term Election</b>	<b>Turnout (% VEP)</b>	<b>Voters (1,000s)</b>	<b>VEP (1,000s)</b>
<b>2006</b>	40.5	82,361	203,524
<b>2010 Projections</b>			
@ 2006 Turnout Rate	40.5	86,009	212,369
1) @ 8.4% Growth in Electorate		88,940	
<i>Difference</i>		+2,931	
@ 2006 Turnout Rate	40.5	86,009	212,369
2) 2006 Turnout Rate Inflated by 1.5 Percentage Points	42.0	89,195	
<i>Difference</i>		+3,186	

**Source:** Statistics of the Congressional Election of November 7, 2006, Compiled by Jeff Trandahl, Clerk of the House of Representatives (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 2007), adjusted; McDonald.

**Table 5**  
**Turnout Rates, Group Shares of Electorate, and Drop-off Rates<sup>20</sup> in Mid-term Elections**  
**1998, 2002, 2006**

	<b>Whites</b>	<b>Blacks</b>	<b>Latinos</b>	<b>Young Voters (&gt; 30 years)</b>
<b>1998</b>				
Turnout	47.4	41.8	32.8	22.3
Share of Electorate	81.9	10.9	4.9	10.6
Drop-off from 1996	-13.3	-11.2	-11.5	-17.3
<b>2002</b>				
Turnout	49.1	42.6	30.4	22.3
Share of Electorate	81.3	10.6	5.3	10.0
Drop-off from 2000	-12.7	-14.3	-14.7	-17.7
<b>2006</b>				
Turnout	51.6	41.0	32.3	25.5
Share of Electorate	80.4	10.4	5.8	11.2
Drop-off from 2004	-15.6	-19.0	-14.9	-23.5
<b>1998- 2006 Average</b>				
Turnout	49.4	41.8	31.8	23.4
Share of Electorate	81.2	10.6	5.3	10.6
Drop-off per cycle	-13.9	-14.8	-13.7	-19.5

**Source:** U.S. Commerce Department, Bureau of the Census, Current Population Survey: Voter Supplement Files (Computer files for 1996, 1998, 2000, 2002, 2004, 2006, ICPSR version, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census [producer], Ann Arbor, MI: Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research [distributor]).

**Table 6**  
**Patterns in Drop-off in Mid-term Elections, 1998 to 2006**

	<b>Percentage Point Change in Drop-off Rates 1998-2002</b>	<b>Percentage Point Change in Drop- off Rates 2002-2006</b>	<b>2-Cycle Average</b>
<b>Whites</b>	-0.6	+2.9	+1.2
<b>Blacks</b>	+3.1	+4.7	+3.9
<b>Latinos</b>	+3.2	+0.2	+1.7
<b>Young Voters (under 30s)</b>	+0.4	+5.8	+3.1

**Source:** U.S. Department of Commerce, Current Population Survey: Voter Supplement Files for 1996, 1998, 2000, 2002, 2004, 2006.

**Table 7  
Projected Turnout, 2010**

	2008 CVAP		2010 VEP	1998-2006 Average Share of Mid-term Electorate	Projected Turnout		Difference
	(1,000s)	%	(1,000s)		@ 40.5% of 2010 VEP	@ 42.0% of 2010 VEP	(1,000s)
<b>Total<sup>21</sup></b>	206,072	100.0	212,369		86,009	89,195	3,186
<b>Whites</b>	151,321	73.4	155,879	81.2	69,839	72,426	2,587
<b>Blacks</b>	24,940	12.1	25,697	10.6	9,117	9,455	338
<b>Latinos</b>	19,537	9.5	20,175	5.3	4,558	4,727	169
<b>Others</b>	10,274	5.0	10,618	2.9	2,494	2,587	93

**Source:** U.S. Department of Commerce, Current Population Survey: Voter Supplement Files for 1996, 1998, 2000, 2002, 2004, 2006; McDonald.

**Table 8  
Youth Targets for Minority Voter Mobilization Campaigns in 2010**

	<b>Total "Soft" Target Population (1,000s)</b>	<b>Young Adult (under 30) Voter Share of 2006 Electorate</b>	<b>Young Adult Voter Target Population (1,000s)</b>	<b>Older Voter Target Population (1,000s)</b>
<b>Blacks</b>	338	6.2	21	317
<b>Latinos</b>	169	5.5	9	160
<b>Asians and Others</b>	93	4.3	4	89
<b>Total 2010 Targets</b>	600		34	566

**Table 9**  
**Voter Registration Rates, November 2008**

	<b>Registration</b>
<b>Whites</b>	73.5
<b>Blacks</b>	69.7
<b>Latinos</b>	59.4
<b>Young Voters (under 30s)</b>	61.0

**Source:** U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Current Population Survey: Voter Supplement File for, 2008.

**Table 10**  
**Turnout of the Citizen Voting-Age Population, November 2008**

	<b>Black</b>	<b>White</b>
<b>Alabama</b>	62.5	62.5
<b>Georgia</b>	67.9	64.1
<b>Maryland</b>	74.2	67.1
<b>Michigan</b>	71.1	68.0
<b>Mississippi</b>	72.9	68.4
<b>Missouri</b>	73.9	65.3
<b>Nevada</b>	77.2	62.5
<b>North Carolina</b>	68.3	68.3
<b>Ohio</b>	70.3	65.4
<b>South Carolina</b>	72.6	63.5
<b>Tennessee</b>	59.3	55.8
<b>Texas</b>	64.9	64.7

**Source:** U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Current Population Survey: Voter Supplement File for, 2008.

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Ethan Roeder, "Voter Registration Analysis '08: Evaluating Independent Voter Registration Efforts from the 2008 Election Cycle," New Organizing Institute, December 2009, unpublished report.

<sup>2</sup> Jerrold G. Rusk, A Statistical History of the American Electorate (Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 2001), 46-7, and table 3.6, p. 55.

<sup>3</sup> Todd Rogers and Regina Schwartz, "Measuring GOTV Effectiveness: What Works and What Does Not?" (Washington, D.C.: Analyst Institute, June 2008), unpublished memorandum.

<sup>4</sup> This number exclude estimates of overseas citizens.

<sup>5</sup> It is too early to tell what this decision will do to U.S. electoral campaigns. There is considerable debate among experts about whether corporations will seek to take advantage of the lifting of spending restrictions, and what the nature of any new spending will be, as the ban on direct corporate contributions to candidates remains in place.

<sup>6</sup> See note 4.

<sup>7</sup> The term "electorate" is used to indicate 'voters who cast ballots' in a particular election. "Turnout" may mean the same thing, but more often, we use "turnout rate" to indicate the proportion of eligible citizens who cast ballots.

<sup>8</sup> Our use of the term "drop-off" follows Burnham (1965); others, such as the U.S. Elections Commission, have used this term to mean what Burnham calls "roll-off," or the tendency of voters to vote for higher prestige offices and not lower offices down ballot in the same election. See, Walter Dean Burnham, "The Changing Shape of the American Political Universe," American Political Science Review, vol. 59, no. 1 (March 1965), 7-28.

<sup>9</sup> Gary C. Jacobson, The Politics of Congressional Elections, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (New York: Longman, 2001), 102-110.

<sup>10</sup> In the foregoing analysis, we focus only on minorities and youth and therefore, totals for the groups do not sum to the total population. The data are derived from the Current Population Survey which uses the following Census Bureau definitions: "whites" are non-Hispanic whites alone; "blacks" are blacks alone; "Latinos" are Hispanics of any race; and young voters are of any race.

<sup>11</sup> Douglas R. Hess and Jody Herman, "Representational Bias in the 2008 Election," Washington, D.C.: Project Vote, November 2009, 3; available online [http://www.wvww.org/assets/2009/11/23/Project\\_Vote\\_-\\_Representational\\_Bias\\_the\\_2008\\_Electorate.pdf](http://www.wvww.org/assets/2009/11/23/Project_Vote_-_Representational_Bias_the_2008_Electorate.pdf).

<sup>12</sup> Roeder, 27.

<sup>13</sup> Thus, younger voters should comprise a smaller share of the electorate in mid-term elections. And they do: compare the young voter shares of the mid-term electorates reported in table 5 to the following young voter shares of presidential electorates in 2000 (14.3 percent), 2004 (16.0 percent) and 2008 (17.1 percent).

<sup>14</sup> See, Donald P. Green and Alan S. Gerber, Get Out the Vote! How to Increase Voter Turnout (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 2004); Ricardo Ramirez, "Giving Voice to Latino Voters: A Field Experiment on the Effectiveness of a National Nonpartisan Mobilization Effort," The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, vol. 601 (September 2005), 66-84; Melissa R. Michelson, "Meeting the Challenge of Latino Voter Mobilization," The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, vol. 601 (September 2005), 85-101; Janelle S. Wong, "Mobilizing Asian American Voters: A Field Experiment," The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, vol. 601 (September 2005), 102-114; Alan S. Gerber, Donald P. Green and Christopher W. Larimer, "Social Pressure and Voter Turnout: Evidence from a Large-Scale Field Experiment," American Political Science Review, vol. 102, no.1 (February 2008), 33-48; Kevin Arceneaux and David W. Nickerson, "Who Is Mobilized to Vote: A Re-Analysis of 11 Field Experiments," American Journal of Political Science, vol. 53, no. 1 (January 2009), 1-16.

<sup>15</sup> Rogers and Schwartz, 14.

<sup>16</sup> This, again, may be under-stating the cost because, 1) some amount of voter enthusiasm stimulated by the 2008 electoral contest and Obama's improbable march to the White House will be missing in 2010; and 2) as noted above, we do not know whether unmeasured get-out-the-vote efforts contributed to the voting rate of field registrants. They very well may have, as a number of voter registration organizations also ran GOTV campaigns.

<sup>17</sup> The formula for computing the total number of applications that need to be collected to produce a desired number of votes is: (Total Applications to Collect) = ((Vote Goal)/(Turnout Rate))/(Conversion Rate), where 'Turnout Rate' is the percentage of all voters registered through a field program (in our example) who vote; and 'Conversion Rate' is the percentage of all applications collected that result in a successful registration.

<sup>18</sup> Green and Gerber, 34-35.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>20</sup> Here, we measure "drop-off" as the percentage point decrease in the presidential year turnout rate.

<sup>21</sup> "Other" non-white not shown.