

2024 ELECTION POSTMORTEM

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Allies for Democracy just completed its most robust canvassing effort ever in the lead up to the 2024 elections. We recruited 383 volunteers, conducted more than 40 canvasses in Pennsylvania and Maryland, completed 900 canvass shifts and, all told, knocked on more than 27,000 doors.

Unfortunately, the results were not commensurate with that effort. At the federal level, Donald Trump carried Pennsylvania by about 120,000 votes, a larger margin of victory than Biden's in 2020 or Trump's margin over Hillary Clinton in 2016.⁽¹⁾ Bob Casey's bid for reelection to the United States Senate fell short by approximately 16,000 votes.⁽²⁾ However, Angela Alsobrooks, for whom Allies also canvassed, carried Maryland by approximately 350,000 votes, a margin of victory of just under 12%.⁽³⁾ Finally, Janelle Stelson fell about 6,000 votes short, or 1.6%, in her bid to unseat far right Congressman Scott Perry and represent Pennsylvania's 10th Congressional District. Stelson's strong showing was the closest Democrats have come to capturing that seat since the 2008 election.⁽⁴⁾

In the state races that Allies targeted, the results were more mixed. Patty Kim defeated Republican Nick DiFrancesco by approximately 21,000 votes in her bid for the open PA SD 15 seat, a margin of victory of about 17%.⁽⁵⁾ In the process State Senator Elect Kim became the first Democrat to hold that seat since 2012⁽⁶⁾, as well as the only Democrat to flip a State Senate seat from red to blue in the 2024 election cycle.⁽⁷⁾ However, Mechanicsburg Councilwoman Sara Agerton fell about 4,000 votes short, or about 10%, in her bid to oust incumbent Sheryl Delozier in HD 88, a margin similar to that in 2022, when the same two candidates faced off against one another for that same seat.⁽⁸⁾

Overall, Pennsylvania Democrats maintained their one seat majority in the House, 102-101, while Republicans retained their 28-22 majority in the State Senate.⁽⁹⁾

The fact that Allies for Democracy does not have more to show for its canvassing efforts this year begs the question as to whether we were knocking on the right doors and whether our message to voters needs to change. Undoubtedly, changes are needed, but until more election

data and analysis become available, the precise nature of the changes needed remains speculative.

However, a more basic question is whether canvassing remains as effective a campaign tool as it has proven to be in the past. Again, we probably need more data before we can draw any firm conclusions, but there is reason to believe that canvassing continues to be one of the most effective election tools that political candidates have at their disposal.

First, canvassing has always been considered a more effective tool for mobilizing and turning out a candidate's supporters than in changing voter's minds. [\(10\)](#) Second, although an effective ground game can be decisive in races in which the candidates are separated by a point or so, it is usually insufficient to carry a candidate to victory in a race in which he or she trails much more than that.

Therefore, voter turnout numbers may be the most telling statistic in gauging the success of a canvassing effort. By that metric, Allies' efforts appear to have paid off, at least as regards the three down ballot Pennsylvania candidates whom Allies for Democracy supported. Although those candidates lost two of their three races, Stelson, Kim, and Agerton each received more votes than their Democratic counterparts did when running for the same seats in 2020. [\(11\)](#)

Canvassing appeared to drive turnout on a national scale as well. That becomes clear when comparing election results in the seven battleground states, to which both campaigns committed an unprecedented level of resources, with turnout in the 43 non-battleground states, to which dramatically less time and effort was devoted.

Voter turnout for the 2024 Presidential election was down compared to 2020 in 45 states. [\(12\)](#) That includes every non-battleground state.

In contrast, turnout was up in five of the seven battleground states, including Pennsylvania. [\(13\)](#) In other words, canvassing appears to have succeeded in its mission of bringing more voters to the polls in the states in which it was employed most extensively.

Canvassing also appears to have positively impacted candidate performance. In the 43 non-battleground states, Trump's vote percentage was approximately 8% higher than it had been in 2020, on average. [\(14\)](#) In the seven battleground states, however, although Trump also increased his vote percentage compared to 2020, he did so by closer to 3%. [\(15\)](#) In other words, canvassing and other voter outreach efforts appear to have succeeded in holding down Trump's margins of victory in the battleground states, and likely contributed to down ballot success stories.

Given the sour mood of the electorate, the Democrats' success in holding Senate seats in the battleground states of Nevada, Arizona, Michigan, and Wisconsin may come to be recognized as their most important achievement in the 2024 elections. In the 2016 and 2020 election cycles, Democrats lost every Senate race in a state that Trump carried. [\(16\)](#) The Democratic Senate victories this year in those four states, each by less than 2.5% [\(17\)](#), leave Republicans with a 53

to 47 majority in the Senate, as opposed to what easily could have been a 57 to 43 majority. That difference has already complicated Trump's efforts to force through a number of his more controversial cabinet and other high level nominees who require Senate approval.