



# California Voter Guide

Communicating with  
California's Voters since 1986

## **GOTV (Get Out The Vote)**

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GOTV is the final phase of a political campaign when the objective turns from persuading the voters to vote for you to getting them to actually show up at the polling place or return their absentee ballot. The concept of GOTV as the massive final push during the final days of the campaign is no longer practical or effective. If you wait until the last days of your campaign to start moving ballots, you are very likely to be defeated.

In most districts in California, almost half the votes will be cast by absentee ballot prior to Election Day. Campaigns often refer to their returned absentee ballots as “in the bank” which I believe to be a good analogy. The ballots “in the bank” are safe and will accumulate without any additional effort required by your campaign. This allows your campaign to focus on the unreturned ballots and poll voters.

A good voter data vendor will be able to identify which voters vote by absentee ballot, which voters vote at the polls. They will also be able to identify exactly when a voter returns their absentee ballots. Having this information makes it possible to manage your campaign resources by using real time data to contact the right voters at a time that reflects their voting pattern.

Contacting absentee voters to encourage them to return their ballots is usually accomplished by telephone. Some data vendors have information for when absentee voters have historically returned their ballots. Campaigns can then prioritize their calls based on which voters have returned their ballots early in previous election cycles. Another approach is to piggyback your precinct walks with a special message for absentee voters. This approach allows campaigns to encourage absentee voters to return their ballots while they are performing their traditional precinct walk effort. Walk lists with identified absentee voters are available from most data vendors.



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As Election Day approaches, you will need to focus resources on your GOTV (Get Out The Vote) strategy. Voter targeting will be an important part of your strategy. As a general rule, GOTV campaigns should only contact individuals they confidently believe will vote in support of their campaign and have at least some propensity to vote (but have not already voted). All voters should be excluded unless they meet the following criteria:

- Voters who have been identified as supporters
- Voters who meet a highly desirable and safe demographic profile
- Likely supporters with an Absentee Ballot who have not already voted
- Undecided contacts with a highly desirable demographic profile

Campaigns frequently differ in how they execute their GOTV campaigns and targeted universes. Just keep in mind that contacting voters outside of the voters listed above may involve some risk in turning out voters who oppose your campaign. Assess your resources and find the most effective way to contact your voters. I have always found GOTV to be a great way to end a campaign as it provides an endless amount of work but with a finite deadline.

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