

# BETTER TARGETING?!?!?

Patrick Ruffini riffs on Zack Exley's description of the Obama ground game, rightly worrying that Obama is "whipping" McCain's "ass" (McCain's words, not Ruffini's).

In many ways, this is like the pyramid volunteer structure often attributed to Bush-Cheney '04, in which a meritocratic leadership structure was built outside local Republican Parties. Except that this is happening lower down in the food chain, at the level of the individual volunteer in a precinct. Obama volunteers are expected to do more than volunteers on other campaigns, which is basically to park your butt in a headquarters and make lots of phone calls.

And the McCain campaign? They're relying on better targeting (this is useful, but you also sense it's a way to explain away a smaller operation). And lots and lots and lots of phones. From the *Chicago Tribune's* writeup of GOTV in NoVA:

"We know who we need to talk to," said Trey Walker, McCain's campaign manager for Virginia and nearby states. "We know how to talk to them, and we know we can do it in a more cost-effective manner on the phone than by deploying teams of college kids out into the suburbs like the Obama campaign."

Huh? Since when are phones more effective than door knocks? Virtually every study I have seen on this finds that a volunteer going door to door is more effective than a volunteer phone

call, which is in turn more effective than paid knocks / calls.

While I agree with his comment about door knocks being better than phone calls, I have big problems with his crediting of the McCain claim that they've got better targeting.

At a basic level, that claim is based on the tried-and-true microtargeting the Republicans have used, compared to the new Democratic Catalist database. The latter is new and untested, so we won't know whether—as Harold Ickes claims about his work—it's actually better than the Republican version until after the election.

But I'm writing this from MI, which was, until ten days ago, a swing state. And from my perspective, the McCain team's targeting is piss poor. I live in one of the most Democratic precincts in the state outside of Detroit. Yet I've gotten a fair amount of direct mail from McCain and some robocalls. Just last week, I got this mail piece, designed to convince me Palin is a nice moderate mommy who will bring peace and joy to the McCain campaign. It was a badly targeted piece in any case, but more so because I got it in the same week when the McCain team unleashed Palin to lead lynch mobs chanting racist and violent chants. It was so absurd getting that, at this point, that I've set it aside to keep as a political oddity.

Meanwhile, everything Obama has sent me has been online—everything. (He's got more ads on my teevee, but McCain had more on the teevee here in MI in August).

In other words, whatever they're doing on targeting, the McCain campaign is still sending fancy mailers to me, whereas the Obama campaign's touches have all been emails for which the marginal cost is almost nothing.

Obama's spending big on teevee and offices because he has raised more—a new record in September, according to reports. But he's also

spending more on those things because he's  
wasting less money talking to a solidly decided  
voter like me.