

How to Identify and Analyze Likely Voters

Local candidates are elected by a small, unique set of voters. As a result, knowing how to identify and target these likely voters is critical to a campaign's success.

The vast majority of races are won or lost during the Primary elections, where competition is greatest – and turnout is lowest. In 2005 in New York City, for example, 30 percent of Council members ran uncontested in the General Election. Of those candidates who had competitors, only one candidate had a margin of victory of less than 25 percent.

Knowing and understanding likely voters are within your district is step one for any campaign. You should never assume that likely voters are representative of the population at-large

BUILD OR PURCHASE A LIST OF VOTERS IN YOUR DISTRICT

Voter lists are an essential foundation for your campaign. This easy-to-read list includes the name, address, gender and age of the voters in your district. You can then determine which filters you would like placed on this list (i.e. prime, double prime, triple prime). Additionally, ethnicity and phone numbers can be added.

You can either purchase a voter list or build one yourself using raw data from the Board of Elections. Unless you have a tech-savvy campaign staff that is familiar with parsing and combining raw data, purchasing a voter list is the best bet for most campaigns.

Key considerations before purchasing lists

- ✓ Get data in a format that is easy to work with & manipulate (MS Excel)
- ✓ Get lists that are filtered by voter history (*i.e.* Prime, Double Prime, Triple Prime)
- ✓ File should always include names, addresses, gender, age and registration date
- ✓ Ensure that the data includes voter history through the most recent election

Supplemental (add-on) information

All voter lists should include voter information that is supplied when an individual registers to vote (name, address, gender, age and registration date) as well as details on their voting history (what elections have they voted in). This data can be supplemented with additional information such as ethnicity and phone numbers.

Race/Ethnicity

- Calculated based on each voter's first name, last name and census track
- Breakdowns can be highly specific, (*i.e.* differentiating Dominicans from Puerto Ricans) however, matching is not an exact science

Phone Numbers

- Voter lists are matched against 411 databases that are updated every 24 hours
- Cell phones are excluded from 411 databases therefore phone matches are more successful for older voters
- On average, 50-55% of likely voters can be matched for phone numbers

BREAK VOTERS INTO CATEGORIES BASED ON THEIR LIKELIHOOD OF VOTING

Identify your target voters

One way to target voters is with *demography* or the characteristics of populations. Certain groups of people tend to vote for particular parties and types of candidates. For example, younger people tend to vote more liberally. People also tend to vote for candidates that are members of similar groups as themselves such as veterans or single mothers. Identify trends and voting patterns using voter data and determine which groups are likely to vote for you. While hiring your campaign staff and creating your outreach materials, it is best to consider how to reach people within each of the demographics. Main characteristics to consider are: gender, age and ethnicity. Additional variables to consider include: religion, income level, union membership, numbers of families, number of public housing residents, home owners versus renters and length of residency in the neighborhood.

Removing Voters who May have Deceased or Relocated

- One of the greatest problems when using raw voter data is the prevalence of voters who may no longer live in the district or have deceased
- To “clean-up” your list, you can easily filter by the most recent Presidential elections. If a voter did not vote in 2008 (February Presidential Primary, September Primary or November General Election), it is safe to assume that voter is no longer in the district or is unlikely to vote in a lesser municipal election.

Common Breakdowns/categories

Knowledge of individual voting history allows you to streamline your outreach approach.

Breakdown by Voting History

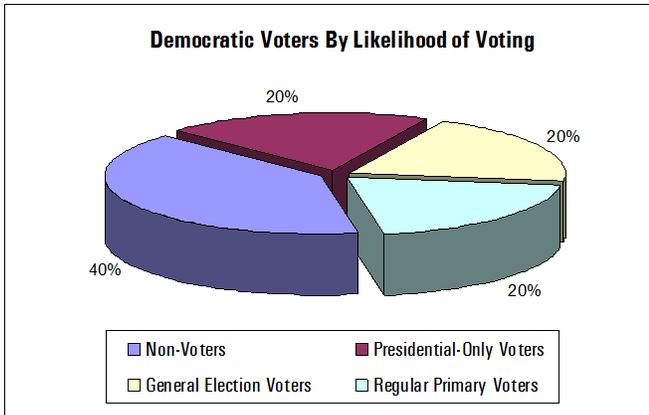
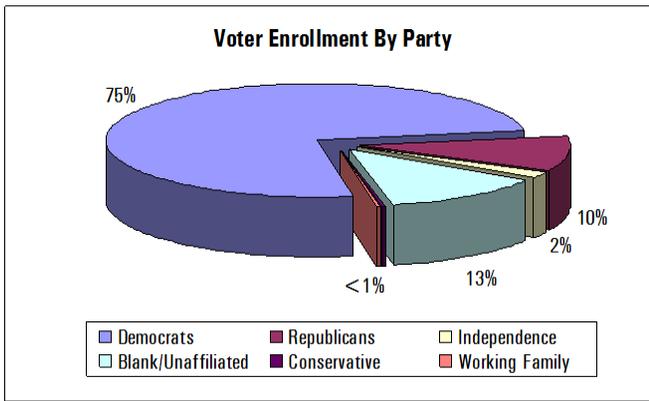
- Extended Prime: people who have voted in any primary since 2001
- Standard Prime: people who have voted in any primary since 2005
- Double Prime: people who have voted in a minimum of 2 primaries since 2005
- Triple Prime: people who have voted in a minimum of 3 primaries since 2004

On average, the number of voters in each group is about half that of the tier above them- for example, if you have 20,000 Standard Prime voters, you will likely have 10,000 Double Prime voters and 5,000 Triple Prime voters.

ANALYZE DEMOGRAPHICS OF LIKELY VOTERS

Understanding the Voter Data

Now that you know the relevance of voting history, it's time to understand who these voters are. Voter data is comprised of two main components- voting history and voter's personal information. When you register to vote, basic information such as, name, address, date of birth and gender are provided. Voter history is documented information on how often an individual has voted in the past. By combining this information, specific, targeted voter lists can be created.



Voters for Council District 99
 Total Population: 165,000
 Total Voters: 80,000
 Total Democratic Voters: 60,000
 "Prime" Democratic Voters: 18,000
 Likely Voters for City Council Race:
 12,000 (about 1 in 14 people living in the district)

Do a quick analysis of who your likely voters are. They are not representative of the general population.

- What percentages of likely voters are male?
- What is the breakdown by age?
- Within different age groups, is the gender breakdown consistent?
- What buildings have the largest concentration of prime voters?
- What is the ethnic breakdown of the district?

Knowing voting trends within groups can help you identify who your campaign focuses on reaching. Election consulting firms can work with you to decide which groups will relate to your platform.

Gender

- Sixty percent of likely voters are females
- 52% of prime voters are of family age

Age

- Older voters have the highest rates of participation
- There is minimal participation from younger voters

Gender and Age

- Within female voters, most likely voters are under the age of 45

Ethnicity

- Within ethnicities, there are a number of potential subgroups including African-American, Caribbean, Latino, South Asian and Jewish.