February DCC Club Reports

Resistance Group Activity
February, 2021
eric.siegel@comcast.net

Summary:

In this report, I'll look at two major national resistance groups, Sister District and Swing Left, which are very active and enthusiastically preparing for the next set of elections this year (in Virginia) and in 2022.

- **Sister District** primarily focuses on state legislative races, with secondary interest in federal House and Senate. I attended the Annual Summit in February.
- **Swing Left** primarily focuses on federal House races, with secondary interest in Senate and state legislative. I attended the National Strategy Update in February.

Following are notes about the plans of both of these groups and their comments about the 2020 elections. I'm also including a summary of the excellent talk by Anat Shenker-Osario at the Sister District Summit.

Anat Shenker-Osario of "Words to Win" podcast:

==> Recording here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BoSHrYSW3kE

-- Politics isn't solitaire; the opposition won't shut up! We can't avoid talking about abortion, etc.; the opposition will.

-- Racial fears lead to economic resentment and disgust with government. The Republican goal is to undermine the "United" States of America, to insist that there is a "them" that won't teach their children, that just want to riot and loot, that take "our" money through the mechanism of government. To win, we need to emphasize the intertwined "us" and help people feel less isolated.

-- Find an "affirmative demand"
- Say what you're for, not what you're against; talk about David, not Goliath. "What you fight you feed"; what you put attention on grows. You have to be attractive to attract people to your cause. For example, pro-Biden ads were 3x more effective than negative ads.
- Don't talk about how the situation is difficult, or "impossible."
- If you depict "harms and horrors," you may create sympathy, but you'll make "those people" into an "other." "We shouldn't be forcing people to show their pain to let us accept their humanity."
- If you make a negative demand, you may get a poor win; e.g., ending family separation by putting them in the same cage.
- If your opening is a statement of a problem, the bridge to hope is difficult, because people are quickly cynical. Instead, start by seizing the moral high ground with a positive "shared value", not a problem, then introduce the problem afterwards, which creates the dissonance. Instead of (Anger -> hope -> action) use (shared value -> hope -> solution).
- Example: Instead of "Seeking asylum is not illegal" use "There are people on the planet you can help by doing simple things #BringThemHere"

-- Pull back the curtain on dog-whistles. They attempt to divide by pointing the finger at Blacks, youth, whomever; name that, expose it! Note that they are "trying to divide us so we don't join together to get what every family needs."

-- Use known mobilization techniques.

- Rely on research, not your intuition. If you're a politically connected person, your ability to judge what works is probably not good. It's surprisingly difficult to put yourself in the non-politically-connected person's shoes.
- Identity-based motivation works. It's more effect to ask people to "BE" a voter than to vote. Transfer / associate existing positive identities (baker, homemaker, etc.) into "BEING" a voter.

-- Negative messaging does not work for us, although it does work for Republicans:

- Both Democrats and Republicans need to rile up their base, so they'll carry the message to the middle and those not politically connected.
- Republican base is riled up by fear, threat, and resentment. Ours can be also, but Republicans are always going to be better at being frightening, and it's not a natural fit.
- Our base is primarily riled up by "creation of good," inclusivity, love.
- You also have to create "permission to change your mind." Screeching about the evils of Republicans or Trump makes people defensive.
- In extensive testing, pro-Biden ads were 3x more effective than negative ads.
- Lincoln Project ads were useless, or even negative, at persuading voters who weren't already solidly against Trump. There was a backlash effect. Uncommitted voters stopped paying attention after the first second, so they weren't good for mobilization. They also weren't good for persuasion, as they didn't target the low-hanging fruit (younger women, for example). The only thing the Lincoln Project ads were good at was extracting money from progressives. (These notes were made before the recent Lincoln Project scandals, which reinforced that possibility.)

Sister District:
Focuses on state legislatures; "they're the policy and leadership pipeline, are key to voting rights, and there's a high return on volunteer and donor investment."

Sister District is a "hard side" group that legally coordinates with campaigns; it is not an "independent expenditure" group that is not allowed to coordinate.

==> Full recording and slide decks here: http://www.sisterdistrict.com/summit
(includes various recordings about fundraising, social media, etc., that are not in these notes!)

Comments on 2020 Elections:

-- Over the past four years, Sister District helped win 70 elections in key states, flipped five State chambers, created three trifectas (VA, CO, WA) that have now moved forward with progressive laws.

-- Many wins, but we didn't flip any state chambers in 2020. Causes may be:

- Pandemic depressed field operations, Democratic canvassing, whereas Republicans canvassed.
- Democratic voters don't understand that they have to vote down the ticket; they were focused solely on defeating Trump. "Democratic state legislative candidates received far fewer votes (1-5%) than Joe Biden in most of our 2020 chambers." Republicans, in contrast, voted more heavily down-ballot than for Trump (0-6%). ("enthusiasm gap" worst in FL House, WI Assembly)
- "Much of the low-hanging fruit in gerrymandered chambers had been won in 2018. In 2020 we were competing for harder seats, mostly on the same bad maps. E.g., in NC Democrats garnered over 49% of the vote but only received 42.5% of the seats."
- See: https://sisterdistrict.com/2020-election-results-early-analysis/
- See: https://www.rollcall.com/2020/12/17/did-gerrymandering-hurt-democrats-down-ballot-in-2020-yes-and-no/
- http://bit.ly/2Mo8TWB (hour-long video of NC debrief)

-- Deep, year-round organizing and building infrastructure worked; e.g., Georgia.

-- Some things must be led from within the states. Outside organizations can identify effective in-state organizations and offer help.

-- Republicans are working hard to inhibit Democratic voting.

-- Examples of what Sister District did:
- Funding
- Phone calls, Texting, letters (frees up local staff for canvassing and local events)
- Made arrangements for big-name (e.g., Broadway star) endorsements and events

-- Reminder for Volunteers:
o Movements take time! Don't be discouraged. See https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/06/opinion/virginia-election-democrats.html
o GOP is desperate and will work very hard and will disenfranchise
o Sister District is now working on "full stack" and using Stacey Abrams style of deep organizing
o *Avoid all exaggeration and misrepresentation!* It erodes our brand, can obscure real problems.
  o E.g., memes that claim to share facts, unverified photos and quotes. Do a "reverse image search" to find origin of images; they may be mis-represented.
  o It's easy to fall into trap of accepting sentiments, theories that confirm our prejudices
  o Only post things that are true AND that move us forward. Cite your sources.
  o Don't interact with false information (no likes, comments, shares)
  o Don't repeat false talking points, even to refute (e.g., don't talk about "voter fraud"; it doesn't exist)

-- Political research
- Dr. Mallory Roman, director of data & analytics. mallory@sisterdistrict.com Partnered with U of MI, Voter Participation Center, Virginia Tech, The Movement Cooperative, Mississippi NAACP, Analyst Institute.
- The Analyst Institute https://analystinstitute.org is the "premier" research organization, but you have to pay to see it. Sister District's research is open to all.
- Sister District's political research program: statistically valid testing of methods for voter registration and voter and volunteer engagement. See http://www.sisterdistrict.com/research
  o On average, academic studies find larger effects than our or industry studies. Possibly because they run them in quieter elections; maybe there is bias towards publishing positive results.
  o Be wary of causal conclusions based solely on correlation, unsubstantiated claims.
  o Look for true random sampling, controlling for variables, statistical measures (e.g., p-value, confidence intervals)
- Findings so far:
  o Voter outreach is more effective in "quieter" election contexts; e.g., odd years, specials
  o Tactics are especially impactful closer to the election
  o On average, across techniques, turnout effects are in range of 0.2% to 3%.
  o Volunteer field efforts often outperform paid efforts, but quality, authenticity is key.
  o Canvassing is most effective. Increased turnout in 44 of 51 studies.
    - In one study, increased turnout 2.1%
    - Could increase voter registration up to 4.4%

- Phonebanking was next in effectiveness. Small to modest boost in turnout.
    - Most effective remote volunteer activity
    - Unhurried, personal calls with genuine dialogue: 3-5% boost in turnout
    - Hurried calls: 0.5% boost in turnout
    - Robocalls generally ineffective
- Postcarding and letter writing (fully or partially handwritten)
    - Postcarding boosts GOTV 0.1% to 1.4%
    - Sister District found turnout increase of 1.25% - 2.17% in NC, TX, FL, MN 2020 primaries, but no boost in 2018 postcard experiment (that may have been faulty)
    - Vote Forward's partially handwritten letters had small boosts (e.g., 0.9%)
    - Chaser postcards to people who already had received voter registration forms in the mail boosted turnout 0.26%. But no boost for initial contact postcards.
    - Content probably matters; no evidence about postcards vs. letters.
    - [Complaints from attendees about Sister District postcard text and training; e.g., "messages are too long and often poorly written." and "Postcarding leads must check their volunteers' postcards to avoid problems!"]
- Textbanking (e.g., with Hustle or ThruText)
    - Large variability in effectiveness (0.2% to 3.0%)
    - Texts with link to voter registration form provided 0.3% higher rate
    - Texts with polling place location increased turnout 0.2%
    - Back-and-forth messages were worse than single messages and much more likely to result in opt-out, which removes voter from further contact, e.g., during GOTV

Plans:

"We will partner when people are working already; if they aren't, we'll lead. We will fill critical gaps at every point in the political life cycle."

-- Identify the most strategic and competitive state legislative races.
- Protect wins, and look to expand
- Look for "nested" races, where organizers can support multiple parts of the ticket; decrease "rolloff" of bottom of ticket (e.g., Senate: WI, PA, NC, OH; Gov: AZ, FL, GA, TX; plus holds)
- Opportunities due to fairer redistricting, Governor, courts: AZ, CO, PA, MI
- Key state races have been tentatively identified for 2021 and 2022:

- Blue Flips: AZ House & Senate; MN Senate; MI House & Senate; NH House & Senate
- Blue Holds: CO Senate; NV Senate
- Blue Inroads: TX House; GA House & Senate; WI Assembly & Senate; PA House & Senate; FL House & Senate; NC House & Senate

-- Support effective local organizers
- "State Bridges" fundraising program for state organizations doing year-round power-building
- "Organizing Fellows" program to train new local organizers
- Social Media expert Ariana Rodriguez for messaging: Ariana@sisterdistrict.com

-- Educate
- Provide educational material, partnering with National Democratic Training Committee https://traindemocrats.org/training-overview/?partner=dlcc
- Book Club and Fireside Chat Series https://www.sisterdistrict.com/book-club
- Resources https://sisterdistrict.com/library
- Voting rights legislation information: https://tracker.votingrightslab.org/

-- Develop legislators and the pipeline.
- Train legislators in how to create public support, research and draft bills, etc. (The GOP helps their people advance a conservative agenda from Day One.)
- Sister District Alumni Program links 50+ alumni who won their races
- Purple District Network links alumni who flipped seats or who are in marginal districts
- Future Winners links people who lost narrowly last time

-- Virginia has state elections in 2021.
- Probably running on current maps due to census delay

Local Group Recruitment / Phonebank Suggestions:

-- Basic recruitment techniques:
- Invite your friends; recruit by phone.
- Intra-organization texting to find volunteers for phone banks, training. No more than once a week, and it was good for building skills later used in a campaign.
- See https://sisterdistrict.com/organizing-fellow-calling-volunteers/
- Connect about values you share, and how the community is welcoming and the impact they have.
- One sentence about work in VA, one sentence about work in PA, and bullet points about current action items. Make the "ask": What are you interested in doing? (One successful Sister District would get 2-3 volunteers per month, but they turned out to be very active.)
- "Upshift" volunteers into phonebanking and fundraising by having phonebankers and fundraisers working at the same party with, e.g., postcard writers or texters. They can see how it's easier and possibly enjoyable, instead of being what they had feared. Have small group leaders who also work to upshift their volunteers

-- Regular meetings and communications
- Meet at a cafe 2x/month, have a Zoom meeting once a week at a regular time. Friendly, non-negative welcome signs (not "Dump Trump"). Lighthearted, collaborative small group leaders, no micro-managing. Text "Are you coming to the meeting?" reminders. "Wear cat ears to indicate leaders in meetings and Zoom conferences."
- In newsletter / Facebook / etc., ask volunteers ten questions, get photos for publication. Showcase volunteers and their specific skills and backgrounds. Why did they join Sister District?
- A Team Page "about our team" shows the depth and breadth of volunteers, helps attract new volunteers to the community, and also shows that we're really volunteers, not paid staff.
- Meet at breweries to attract men! And remember to ask them to join.

-- Phonebanking
- Always start with a ten minute chat before starting; build community; welcome newcomers.
- Emphasize "cadence" of a regular phonebank, building community, togetherness.
- Start a new phonebank within a larger one, with your own breakout room, then possibly bud off.
- Have phonebank leaders meet regularly and exchange stories, build community.
- Virtual phonebanks have in some ways been better than phonebanks at a single location!
- Partner with other groups, e.g., Marin Democrats, Indivisible.
- Sister District's Neal Morgan will do phonebank trainings.
- From a candidate who made thousands of phone calls: "I also left thousands of messages. I made them warm, personable, and genuine and often had people call me back. A key is smiling as I made the call; it really comes across to the voters."

Organizational Notes:

-- Co-Founder Lala Wu is the new Executive Director, replacing Rita Bosworth, who led for four years and will now be Senior Advisor.

-- Co-Founder Gaby Goldstein is Political Director gaby@sisterdistrict.com

-- Social Media expert Ariana Rodriguez for help with messaging: Ariana@sisterdistrict.com

-- Over 500 people signed up for the Sister District Annual Summit (held on Zoom), and most showed up! There was a LOT of enthusiasm for this TWO DAY summit.

-- 155+ Sister District Teams and Affiliates; 50,000 members.

Swing Left:
Focuses on Congressional elections, now broadening into state legislatures; e.g. Virginia in 2021.

Swing Left partners with the DNC.

==> Information here: https://swingleft.org/p/2020-impact and https://swingleft.org/p/power-up-2021

Plans:

-- Working to build community, skills, infrastructure

-- Virginia elections!

-- Vote Forward is an affiliate of Swing Left
- Many Swing Left volunteers write letters through Vote Forward.
- Each Vote Forward campaign is set up as a randomized control trial, o each is measured scientifically. One of Vote Forward's goals for 2021 is to be more open with the public about the outcomes from previous campaigns.
- Vote Forward showed letters make a greater difference in turn out than postcards
- If people don't have printers for letters, local volunteers printed batches of letters and delivered them to other volunteers for completion.
- Postcarding is great when there's actual information to convey; e.g., Reclaim Our Vote gives info on registering to vote and Postcards for Virginia gave info on how to vote in the pandemic. For down-ballot races, the candidate's name and website may be important information that many voters won't have.

-- State legislature races were the only ones that weren't over-funded in 2020; we need to look at legislatures.

-- Blueprint tool to maximize impact of funding: https://blueprint.swingleft.org/

-- The biggest difference between now and 4 years ago is that we have been doing this for four years! We are organized and mobilized; we are not going to let up!

Organizational Notes:

-- Flippable joined Swing Left in 2019.

-- Tori Taylor and Catherine Vaughan are Co-Executive Directors; Ethan Todras-Whitehill is President

-- 2000+ volunteers on the one-hour call; Swing Left has 500 groups

<u>Election Integrity Report</u>

Hello Good Dems-

We are looking to the new secretary of state Dr. Weber for security upgrades in California.

The recent Solar Winds hack clearly evidences the need to remove private software in national security venues. We will continue our advocacy for AGPL open source / paper ballot systems and appreciate the San Mateo County Democratic Party history of support.

We will also be pushing for national reform in this area

Best regards,

Brent Turner