



Election Push to Turn Out Voters

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WASHINGTON — Young volunteers walk down a neighborhood street knocking on doors in Washington. Their message is short and simple: "Please vote."

Similar scenes are happening around the United States as political parties and a broad spectrum of advocacy groups try to persuade Americans to vote in the November 8 midterm elections.

"I know the election is important and a lot of people have approached me about making sure I vote," said Evelyn Newman, a retired African American health care worker who believes the country is heading in the wrong direction. "I think people are upset about inflation hitting everybody hard, especially those on limited incomes."

Stakes are high to drive voter turnout as the outcome of the contests will determine which political party controls Congress and decide the fate of President Joe Biden's remaining legislative agenda. The election comes as the Biden administration has worked to make voting more accessible to eligible Americans, while many Republican-led states have imposed limits on how people can vote and where.

Typically, midterm elections generate much lower turnout than contests held during a presidential election year. A recent NBC News public opinion survey, however, found 57% of voters said this midterm election cycle is more important than previous ones.

It's a big reason that groups representing the Republican and Democratic parties and affiliated organizations are spending millions of dollars to connect with voters before the election.

Political analysts believe high voter dissatisfaction and a polarized electorate will generate a larger than normal turnout in the election.

"A lot of Americans fear that if the other party wins the election, they will have fewer rights and freedom," said Emily Ekins, who directs polling at the Cato Institute in Washington. Ekins noted that polls show seven out of 10 Americans, both Republicans and Democrats, fear the other party will strip them of their rights. "They feel threatened, they feel fearful."

With in-person early voting under way in some states, groups have ramped up mobilization drives to connect with voters. More than 8 million Americans have already cast ballots in early voting, including more than 1 million in the southern state of Georgia.

"[If] you value where you live, you vote. If you value your children, you vote. That's your responsibility," said Francine Sims-Gates, from Atlanta. She cast her ballot on the first day of early voting in the state.

A recent Associated Press public opinion poll suggests eight in 10 registered voters say it's extremely or very important to them to cast a ballot in this year's elections.

"That's part of being citizens of this United States of America. We've worked hard for the opportunity just to vote," said Sims-Gates.

Targeting minority voters

In Nevada, the state's Republican Party unveiled "Operación ¡Vamos!" a voter mobilization drive in the state's Latino community. Republicans have sought to increase engagement with Latino voters who could support Republican candidates.

Meanwhile, nonprofit organizations like "Make the Road Action" has teams of canvassers knocking on doors, making calls and sending texts to persuade Latinos to support Democratic Party candidates.

"Each election is an opportunity to make sure that our community does not get ignored, that our community does not get put aside," said Democratic Las Vegas City Councilwoman Olivia Diaz.

Democrats in the state hope to reverse an election trend that had seen slight gains in the number of Latino voters supporting the Republican Party in 2016 and 2020. Other groups, like powerful labor unions, are spending millions of dollars courting Hispanic voters to show up at the polls on the day of the election.

The NAACP, the nation's largest civil rights organization, is mobilizing voters in the Black community. The group is working with churches to transport worshippers to polling locations after Sunday services for early voting. "Our power lies within our vote, and we become even greater when we put our collective power together at the polls," said Derrick Johnson, NAACP president.

In Michigan, the group Human Rights Campaign created a coalition to mobilize nearly 1.2 million pro-equality voters who are part of the LGBTQ+ community or supporters of sexual minorities. The group also launched a digital ad campaign, "Hate Won't Win."

"We have had three anti-LGBTQ bills introduced in the state legislature this year and our folks know equality is on the line," said Amritha Venkataraman, Michigan state director for Human Rights Campaign.

The organization is trying to connect with voters with a combination of door-to-door conversations, phone calls, and digital communication. "Reminding our supporters of the challenges ahead often fires them up and gets them ready to go to the polls and vote," Venkataraman told VOA. "We know that our strength is in numbers."

Voters in several states will face a slew of new restrictions that make it harder to cast ballots. The laws were passed by Republican-led legislatures after former President Donald Trump's false claims that voter fraud cost him reelection in 2020. Republicans have pushed back, maintaining they support expanded early voting.

In Georgia, one of the laws includes a ban on giving food and drinks to waiting voters at polling locations. "We are telling people to show up at polling locations despite the restrictions," said Deborah Scott, head of the community organizing group Georgia STAND-UP.

"We will host block parties near some voting precincts so people can get water and food before they get in line to vote," she said. The organization plans to use tape measures to make sure the events are more than 46 meters from the precinct to comply with the new law.