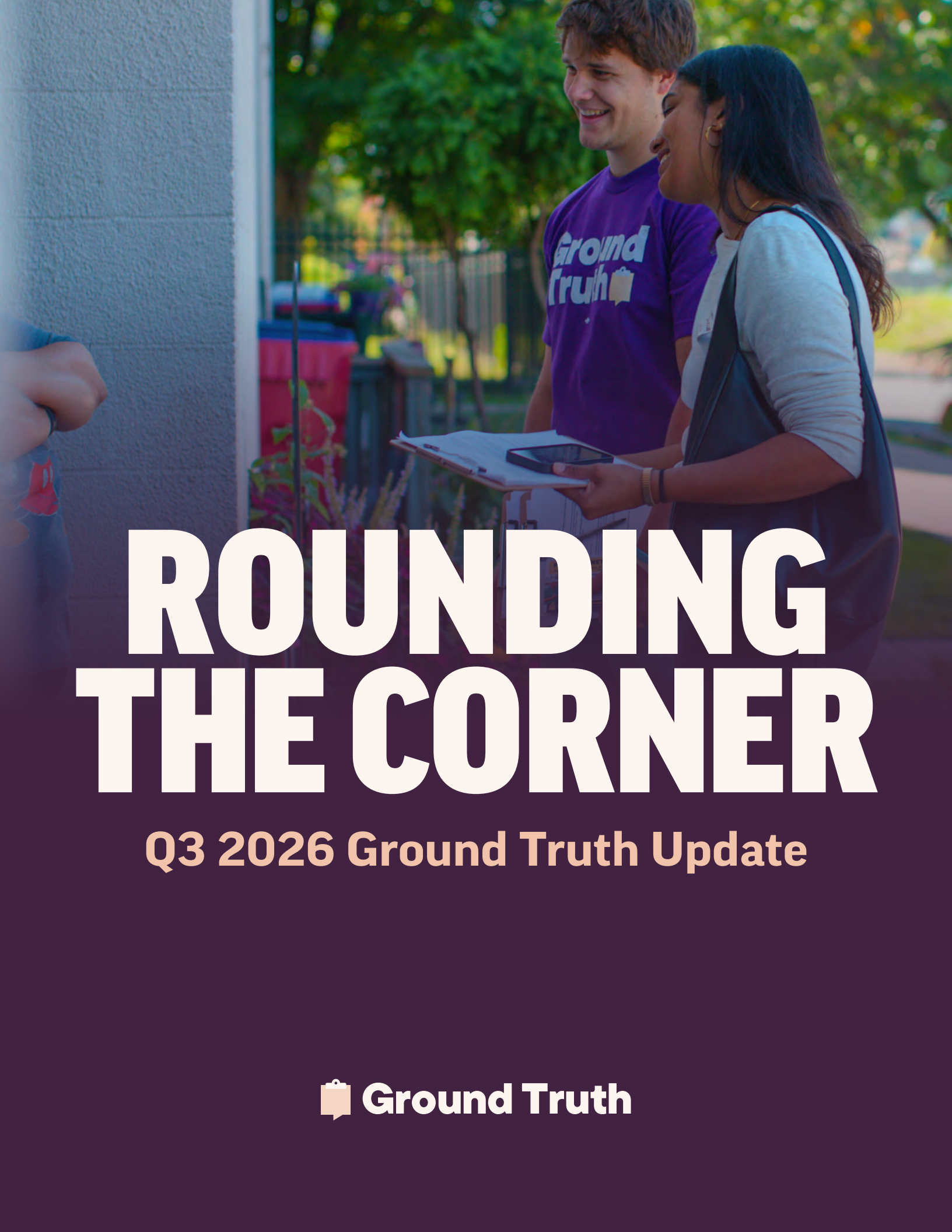
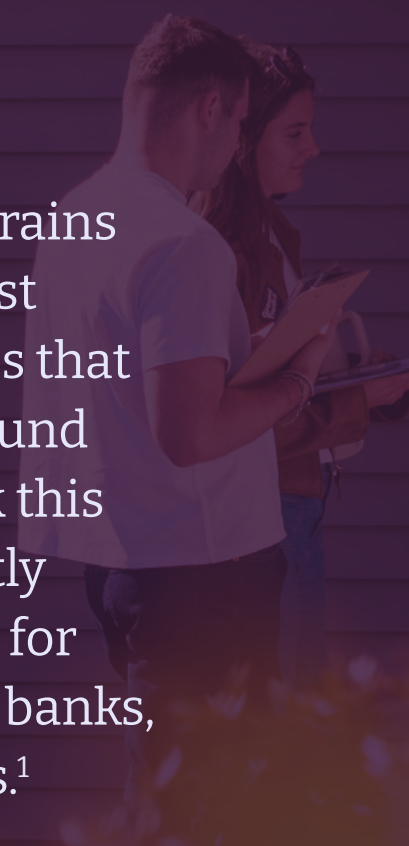




ROUNDING THE CORNER

Q3 2026 Ground Truth Update

 **Ground Truth**



Swing Left's Ground Truth program trains volunteers to have long, listening-first conversations with voters in the races that will decide the balance of power. Ground Truth is one part of Swing Left's work this cycle, alongside raising money directly for candidates, recruiting volunteers for campaign-run canvasses and phone banks, and organizing social banking events.¹

This update, our last before Election Day, focuses on the 41,334 Ground Truth conversations across 58 House and Senate races we've had through the end of Q3.

The story is simple: Ground Truth is operating across the 2026 battlefield, it's changing how things are done, and it's making a real difference for candidates, volunteers, and voters.

¹ **Social banking** is coordinated online engagement where volunteers like, comment on, and share pro-Democratic posts at the same time so the algorithm shows that content to more people. The goal is to reach voters online, where they already spend much of their time.

Executive Summary

Ground Truth heads into the final weeks of the cycle coming off its biggest quarter yet and working the way we hoped it would. Volunteers are active in **58 of the most competitive House and Senate races** in the country, we are persuading undecided voters at the stage of the election when most campaigns are only focused on turnout, and campaigns are putting what they learn from the program to use in innovative and varied ways.

Ground Truth is:

- 1. Making the case for Democrats to the right voters.** In September, as planned for the final stretch, Ground Truth conversations became more explicitly about persuasion. Volunteers also stopped knocking every door and—to avoid turning out opposition votes—now skip voters who will almost certainly vote Republican. The focus now is on finding and talking with voters who can still be moved.
- 2. Growing steadily and building momentum.** Through September 30, Ground Truth volunteers had 41,334 conversations with voters. During Q3, 1,644 volunteers took part in Ground Truth (up 46% from Q2) in 58 House and Senate races across 23 states.
- 3. Delivering value for campaigns, voters, and volunteers.**
 - Democratic House and Senate campaigns are using Ground Truth to expand their lists of people to follow up with for persuasion conversations, as well as their lists of strong Democrats who will need a reminder to turn out.
 - Ground Truth is listening to voters most campaigns skip, with early signs pointing to these conversations shifting attitudes in Democrats' direction.
 - Of Ground Truth volunteers who responded to our surveys, 93% say their volunteering makes a difference, and 400 of them came back for more than one shift in Q3.



The Shift to Persuasion

In September, we executed on our planned expansion of the deep-listening Ground Truth script to include directly making the case for Democratic candidates.

Ground Truth is built on deep canvassing, an approach that randomized field trials have shown can durably change people's attitudes on contested issues such as transgender rights and immigration ([Broockman and Kalla 2016](#); [Kalla and Broockman 2020](#)). Ground Truth aims to extend this approach to partisan persuasion, with the goal of winning votes for Democratic candidates.

For most of this year, Ground Truth volunteers knocked on every door on their turf. That was the point: due to limited resources, Democratic campaigns typically focus on just a small set of people to talk to. By listening to everyone, Ground Truth showed us whom campaigns had been missing. **In Q2, a third of the voters we talked with had Democratic support scores below 40.** These are people that most Democratic campaigns would rarely contact, yet we were finding significant portions of them were frustrated with Republicans and open to voting for Democrats. This finding encouraged us to continue casting a wide net during this phase of the program.



As the election got closer, the priority became netting votes for Democrats, so in September we narrowed our targeting as planned.

Volunteers now skip the voters with the lowest modeled support for Democrats, since a knock on their door could remind them to vote for the opposition. Instead, volunteers spend their time with people who are undecided, cross-pressured (meaning that they have some views that align with Democrats and some with Republicans), or unsure whether to vote at all.

Even after this narrowing, Ground Truth still reaches a broader group than a typical campaign does at this stage. We want to make sure we're continuing to talk to some of the persuadable voters that Democrats typically don't compete for at this stage.

Volunteers built the persuasion script.

A script that reads well on a computer can sound robotic at the door, which means volunteers will stop using it. So Ground Truth tested its persuasion script in the field.



For six months, **39 Swing Left volunteers on our Script Iteration Team worked closely with the deep-canvassing experts at the New Conversation Collaborative.** They tried the script on real calls and doors, met every Monday to compare what worked, and rewrote it 17 times. Some volunteers ran test phone banks alongside their regular Ground Truth shifts so they could report back on exactly how a persuasion conversation differed from a listening one.

The first seven versions alone were tested across nearly 39,000 calls. **The result is a conversational playbook that volunteers can actually stick to that also has the best chance of successfully persuading voters.**

In the last several weeks before an election, most campaigns narrow their lists to known supporters who just need to turn out. (That work is also essential, and in many cases, Swing Left will recruit our volunteers to help campaigns with it.) **Ground Truth complements the campaigns' turnout work by staying with the voters those programs are not built to reach: people who lean Democratic but rarely vote, and people who have not made up their minds.** Ground Truth coordinates with campaigns to avoid knocking on the same doors, and will also work closely with campaigns to further tighten targeting in the final days.

The foundation for Ground Truth's persuasion conversations is still the same research-informed listening approach. Listening lets a volunteer connect what a voter cares about to what the candidate has done and will do. The new part of the script equips volunteers with talking points about the candidates and asks voters to rate their support for the Democratic candidate at the start of the conversation and again at the end. Some early findings from those ratings are presented below.

How we report our impact

Many campaigns and organizations use the number of doors knocked or calls made as the primary metric for measuring the success of their programs. That's not what Swing Left does. What matters in moving voters and winning elections is the number of voters we actually talk with. That's why you'll see our "conversations" number highlighted throughout this report.

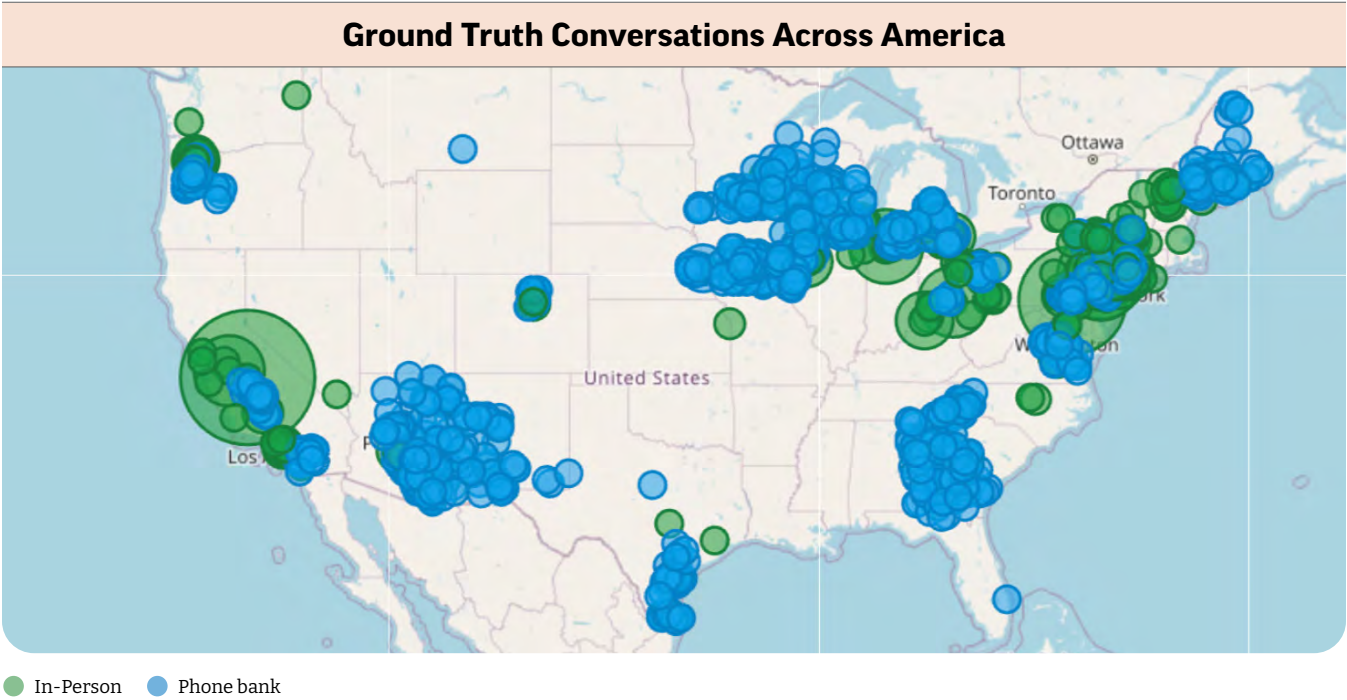
A "**conversation**" is any voter contact where the volunteer records something the voter said: an answer to one of our rating questions (e.g., on a 1-10 scale, their likelihood to vote and their likelihood to vote for the Democrat) or a note about the voter.

As part of Ground Truth, we're also tracking what we call "**substantive conversations**." This is the deeper subset, where a volunteer has captured detailed notes and data that meet our quality standards.



Ground Truth Is Building Momentum

This quarter was our biggest to date, and volunteers have now had 41,334 conversations with voters in battlegrounds across the country.



At the end of Q2, Ground Truth had reached 38 of Swing Left’s federal targets. **By September 30, Ground Truth had been active in 58 of its federal targets (49 House races, 9 Senate races) across 23 states**, with trained volunteers talking to the voters that will decide the federal balance of power.

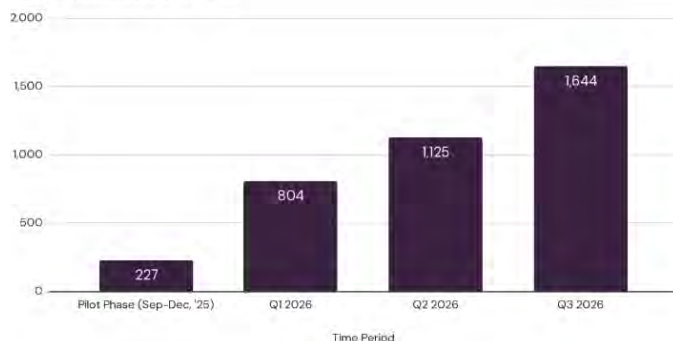
The table below shows Ground Truth’s activity in each quarter of this year, plus totals since the program launched in September 2025.

Metric	Q1 (Jan–Mar)	Q2 (Apr–Jun)	Q3 (Jul–Sep)	Total to date
Total Conversations	8,063	14,300	17,664	41,334
Doors knocked	14,365	28,004	40,575	86,185
Door conversations	5,555	10,453	12,991	30,148
Phone calls made	227,110	340,234	545,770	1,125,460
Phone conversations	2,508	3,847	4,673	11,186
Substantive conversations	3,792	7,375	9,507	20,906
Unique volunteers	804	1,125	1,644	3,142
Volunteer shifts	1,147	1,720	2,501	5,627
Repeat volunteers <i>(volunteered twice within the same period)</i>	205	324	400	937

Our volunteer base grew by nearly 50%

In Q3, 1,644 volunteers took 2,501 Ground Truth shifts, up from 1,125 volunteers and 1,720 shifts in Q2. September was our busiest month yet, with 916 volunteers taking 1,086 shifts, and 400 volunteers came back for more than one shift during the quarter. In all, by the end of Q3, 3,142 volunteers had participated in Ground Truth.

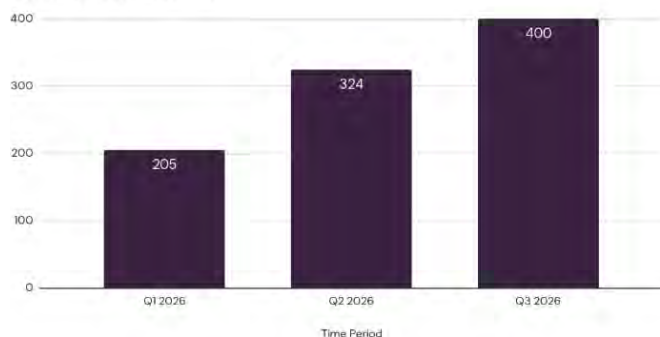
Unique Volunteers Over Time



Volunteer Shifts Over Time



Repeat Volunteers Over Time



Ground Truth Is Working for Campaigns, Voters, and Volunteers

Changing the way Democrats engage with voters is a complex, ongoing process, but campaigns are already working with Ground Truth in a variety of innovative ways.

What Swing Left's support looks like in each of our target races depends on what each campaign wants and needs. Some campaigns have made Ground Truth central to their own field program. Others have asked Swing Left volunteers to join the canvasses and phone banks that they already run.

Overall, Swing Left follows the campaigns' lead when it comes to deciding where and what kind of program we offer to support them. Adoption of new tactics takes time. Because this is a new program with a new way of doing things, we have been learning how best to integrate with the campaigns as we go. All of these learnings will directly inform how Swing Left interacts with and supports campaigns as we build toward the 2028 election.

Out of Swing Left's entire target list, 5% declined to incorporate Ground Truth (we still raise funds for these campaigns and channel volunteers looking to take action into their voter contact events).

The ways the rest of our campaigns integrate with Ground Truth are varied and tailored to each campaign's needs and capacities, as well as Swing Left's resources. To give a sense of how the remaining 95% of our target campaigns are working with us, we created the table below.

95% of Our Target Campaigns Are Ready for Ground Truth.

This table details the percentage of campaigns that are currently using Ground Truth coupled with the ways Swing Left and Ground Truth currently support campaigns.

	29% Deeper Ground Truth integration	24% Mixed Ground Truth adoption	42% Open to Ground Truth, but we lack capacity to deploy*
Swing Left raises money for the candidate.	✓	✓	✓
Swing Left channels volunteers into campaign-run canvasses and phone banks.	✓	✓	✓
Ground Truth volunteers canvass and phone bank in the district.	✓	✓	
Ground Truth qualitative and quantitative data flows directly into the campaign's data tools (through Swing Left's data-sharing agreement with the Democratic National Committee).	✓	✓	
Ground Truth provides the campaign with its own dashboard to directly access the conversations and voter stories from its area.	✓	✓	
The campaign directly acts on Ground Truth data or builds Ground Truth into its own field program, as in the examples below.	✓		

* this includes most of the races only recently added to our target list



Here are some of the ways campaigns are integrating Ground Truth data more deeply:

- **Following up with persuadable voters.** In one House race, the campaign is adding the undecided voters identified by Ground Truth volunteers straight into its own texting program. Then the campaign follows up on the issue each voter raised. In another, the candidate has personally followed up with undecided voters. In a third, the campaign reached out to Republicans who told volunteers they were open to voting Democratic.
- **Surfacing issues before they show up anywhere else.** In a top House district, voters in one town kept raising a rusted water tower and expressed worries about their water quality. This localized issue hadn't made its way to the candidate, and gave the team a new opening to connect with a critical part of the district.
- **Sharpening the message.** Campaigns are able to see the specific pressures and language voters use, not just the topic. One candidate shared concrete ways she changed her messaging based on what Ground Truth surfaced.
- **Finding validators and storytellers.** Conversations turn up voters with compelling stories who could appear in campaign content or get involved themselves. One campaign is following up on these leads one by one, while our Ground Truth organizer helped another campaign follow up with Republican voters who had told us they were supporting Democrats this year.
- **Building it into the field program.** In at least one key House race, Ground Truth is a big part of the campaign's own volunteer field operation in the final weeks, and another campaign plans to run its field program using Ground Truth's technology.



An early signal it's working: when voters' support shifted during a Ground Truth conversation, it moved toward the Democrat about 9 times out of 10

In mid-September, volunteers began asking voters to rate their support for the Democrat from 0 to 10 at the start and again at the end of each conversation. In the first three weeks of using this new process, both the beginning and ending ratings were recorded in 557 door conversations with voters who had room to move up (didn't start at 10). This is a small subset of the persuasion conversations volunteers had in that time because voters don't always answer the rating question at both the start and the end of the conversation.

While not validated findings, the early signals we can glean from those 557 voters show the following:

- **200 voters (36%) moved toward the Democrat.** 22 (4%) moved away. The rest (60%) held steady.
- **85 of the 341 voters (25%) who started undecided or leaning toward the Republican (5 or below) ended the conversation leaning toward the Democrat (6 or higher).**
- **Most moves were modest.** Nearly three-quarters of voters who moved toward the Democrat moved 1 or 2 points.
- **The closer voters started to supporting the Democrat, the more likely they were to move.** Nearly half of voters at 6–7 moved toward the Democrat, and about a third of voters at 3–5 did too. Those who started at 0–2 rarely moved (13%), which backs up how volunteers are trained: when a voter says they're at 0 or 1, volunteers wrap up the conversation instead of trying to persuade.

Starting support (0–10)	Conversations	Moved toward Democrat	Moved toward Republican
0–2	89	12 (13%)	3 (3%)
3–5	252	88 (35%)	6 (2%)
6–7	120	57 (48%)	6 (5%)
8–9	96	43 (45%)	7 (7%)
Total	557	200 (36%)	22 (4%)

How to read this

These are the ratings voters gave volunteers at the start and end of a single conversation. They show how the conversation concluded, not yet how people will vote. The sample includes only conversations where volunteers recorded both ratings.

What we heard from voters who shifted

Persuasion means changing people's attitudes about voting for Democrats. It also means making sure voters who are open to Democrats, but whom most campaigns skip because they rarely vote, actually turn out. These stories from volunteers' notes include both: voters who moved toward the Democrat during the conversation, and infrequent voters who indicated by the end of the conversation that they were planning to vote.



Scott, new voter, from Watervliet in MI-04

Scott had never voted and at first didn't plan to start. He follows what's happening in the country and is critical of politicians. Health care costs are his biggest issue; he can't afford ACA coverage anymore. By the end of the conversation, he planned to vote for the Democrats, and so did his wife.



Rose, 45-year-old likely Democrat, from Saint Francis in WI-01

Rose feels the justice system doesn't treat minorities fairly, and she's struggled to pay back her student loans. At first she wouldn't say how she was voting. After talking at length about the Democrat running for Congress, she said she's a 10.



Jesus, 19-year-old new voter, from Stroudsburg in PA-08

Jesus is 19 and voting for the first time, in a family new to voting there. Gas prices worry them, and he's frustrated that the president says we're not at war when we are. He got excited about a candidate who cares about honesty.



Brenda, 59-year-old registered Democrat, from Los Banos in CA-13

Brenda doesn't follow politics and wasn't sure which party was which. She voted for Trump in 2016, skipped 2024, and now thinks he has made the country less civil. One of her sons wants to leave California because he can't afford a life there. Once volunteers explained who the Democrat on her ballot was, she wrote a "D" on her hand, made a plan to vote by mail, and said she'd work on the rest of her household.



Joann, 41-year-old registered Democrat, from Fullerton in CA-45

Joann told volunteers she and her two kids now make hard choices at the grocery store about what to leave on the shelf. She doesn't vote regularly and didn't think her vote mattered. After hearing how close her district is, she said she'd pull her ballot out of the trash and vote.



Nondas, 57-year-old registered Republican, from Stroudsburg in PA-08

Nondas voted for Trump mostly on immigration, but now says most immigrants aren't criminals. After hearing about the Democrat's record, he's leaning her way.



Brittany, 41-year-old registered Democrat, from Bakersfield in CA-22

Brittany voted for Trump the first time and is disappointed with how things are going, especially the wars. After volunteers told her about the Democrat in her race and where he stands on the issues, she went from a 7 to a 10.



Mark, 31-year-old likely Democrat, from Athens in GA-10

Mark is an engineer who makes medical devices, and federal cuts to NIH and CDC funding have made his work much harder. He says he votes on policy, not party, and that Democrats are the ones who trust science.

Ground Truth is helping volunteers fall back in love with canvassing

Door-to-door canvassing is hard to sustain. Ground Truth volunteers are having a different experience. They spend their shifts in real conversations instead of racing through a list of doors, they come away feeling like they made a difference, and, as noted above, many come back for more (in Q3, 400 volunteers took more than one Ground Truth shift).

Among respondents to our post-canvass survey:

- **8.9/10** average likelihood to recommend volunteering with Ground Truth, with more than 67% of GOTV season respondents rating a 9 or 10.
- **93%** agree their Ground Truth volunteering makes a difference.
- **90%** say taking action through Ground Truth makes them feel better about politics.
- **85%** feel confident in their abilities as deep canvassers.



Reflections from the field

"As the mother of five children, I have learned the power of listening FIRST, giving them the chance to say what matters to them, and then engaging with them where they are rather than where I want them to be... I believe that Ground Truth's approach to deep listening is a way to find common ground."

Dawne, First-Time Canvasser in AZ-01

"Sometimes we have this impression in our polarized society that there's going to be a lot of rejection on the doors—but that wasn't it at all. People just wanted to talk, to share. I was really taken aback by the positivity that we found."

Emerson, Canvasser in PA-08



"It felt great to talk with people uncommitted to voting or with no knowledge of the candidate and walk away having convinced someone to vote for a strong candidate. The work really makes a difference."

Sandra, Repeat Canvasser in PA-08

"This country needs to come together, and I think by listening and understanding we are moving forward with repairing the damage of us vs. them."

Lisa, Experienced Canvasser in CA-48

"To have honest and open conversations with neighbors who I don't [often] engage with is very reassuring."

Ann, Repeat Canvasser in Texas

"One of the homes we visited, the homeowner had been a registered Democrat. She changed to a Republican, but now she's soured on Trump... Prices of gas and groceries. Her son had to move back home... By talking to her we did push the needle for her to move back to voting as a Democrat, at least this election."

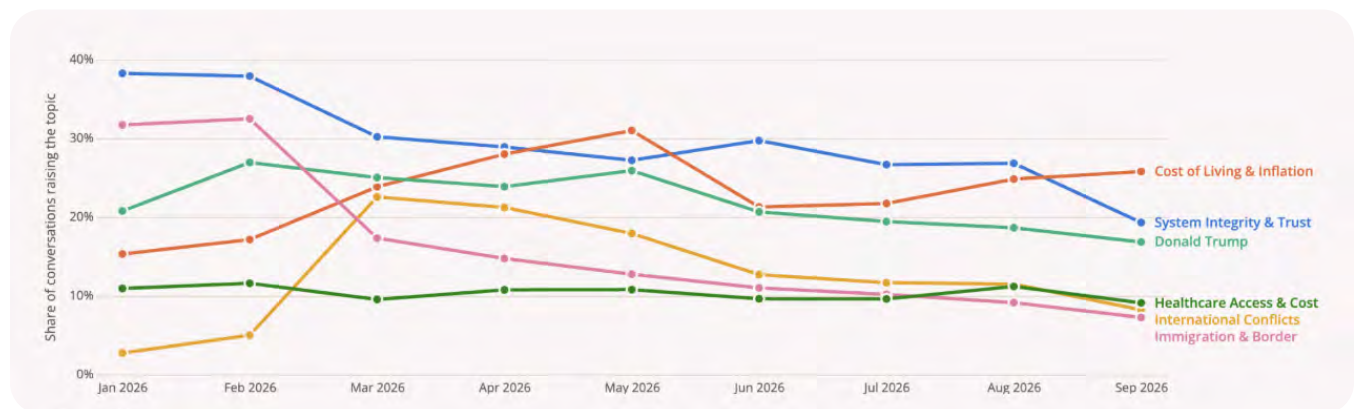
Alisa, Experienced Canvasser in PA-10



The topics voters are raising

Volunteers don't bring a list of issues to the door. They ask open questions and record notes on what each voter says, in the voter's own words. An AI model then reads each set of notes, checks it against a fixed list of topics such as the cost of living or immigration, and flags every topic the voter raised. That lets us see how often each topic comes up across tens of thousands of conversations. At the same time, we give campaigns access to read the original notes so they can directly see how voters are talking about the issues.

The chart below shows how often each topic came up, as a share of all conversations, by month. This isn't a poll and isn't designed to be representative, but it does give us a sense of how the public mood and attention shift over time. Across all conversations this year, voters most often raised trust in the system and its institutions (28%), the cost of living (24%), and President Trump (21%), followed by international conflicts (13%), immigration (13%), and healthcare (10%).



As in previous quarters, trust in the system and the cost of living came up most often. But as the election loomed closer over the course of Q3, the share of conversations that mention the cost of living rose. **The two issues often come up together: of voters who raised either the system being broken or affordability, about a third raised both.** Conversations about immigration and the border became less common over the quarter.

We can also query our data for specific topics to see how often and in what ways they come up organically in conversations. For example, we learned that when the Iran war comes up, it's often in the context of voters blaming it for higher costs. We also were able to track an increase in mentions of AI over the last two quarters, but it is still not a top-of-mind concern for the vast majority of voters.



Ground Truth Is Everywhere

Ground Truth is reaching far beyond the doors. This quarter, outlets from CNN and *TIME* to *The Guardian* and *GQ* featured the program, and celebrities and creators shared it with new audiences on social media. That visibility is key to our strategy for scaling Ground Truth: it brings in the new volunteers the program depends on for growth. Media coverage also helps us make the case to a broader audience that listening first is how Democrats can start to win back the voters the party has lost.



Instagram Reel from creator @ericsaymore



Swing Left Executive Director Yasmin Radji and actor Adam Brody canvassing in CA-48

Press highlights

TIME

TIME (Sep 30): [How James Talarico Made Texas Competitive Again](#)

CNN

CNN (Sep 28): [Yasmin Radji on CNN This Morning](#)

The Guardian

The Guardian (Sep 27): [What Democrats are getting right—and wrong—in run-up to midterms](#)

GQ

GQ (Sep 25): [The Celebrity Activism Slump Hasn't Gotten to Adam Brody](#)

THE CONTRARIAN

The Contrarian (Sep 22): ['Must Flip': Inside the Strategy to Turn Red Seats Blue](#)

MS NOW

MS NOW (Aug 31): Three separate segments all featured Ground Truth - [Deadline: White House](#), [The Moment with Katy Tur](#), and [Money Power Politics with Stephanie Ruhle](#)

The Grassroots Connector
amplifying the power and voices of the grassroots

The Grassroots Connector (Aug 26): [Five times as many canvassing conversations](#)

Content highlights from the community, celebrities, and creators



Instagram story from Kathryn Hahn (left) and Bryan Andrews canvassing in Kansas (right)



Content Creator Eric Say More (Sep 29): an [Instagram Reel](#) (and TikTok!) promoting Ground Truth

Actor Kathryn Hahn (Sep 23): an [Instagram story](#) urging Ohioans to knock doors for Greg Landsman in OH-01

Actor Adam Brody (Sep 19): joined volunteers at a [Ground Truth canvass in CA-48](#) and spoke at the kickoff.

Country musician Bryan Andrews (Sep 19): the singer knocked doors with volunteers at a Ground Truth canvass for the Senate race in Kansas, then [shared Swing Left's post](#) about it on Instagram

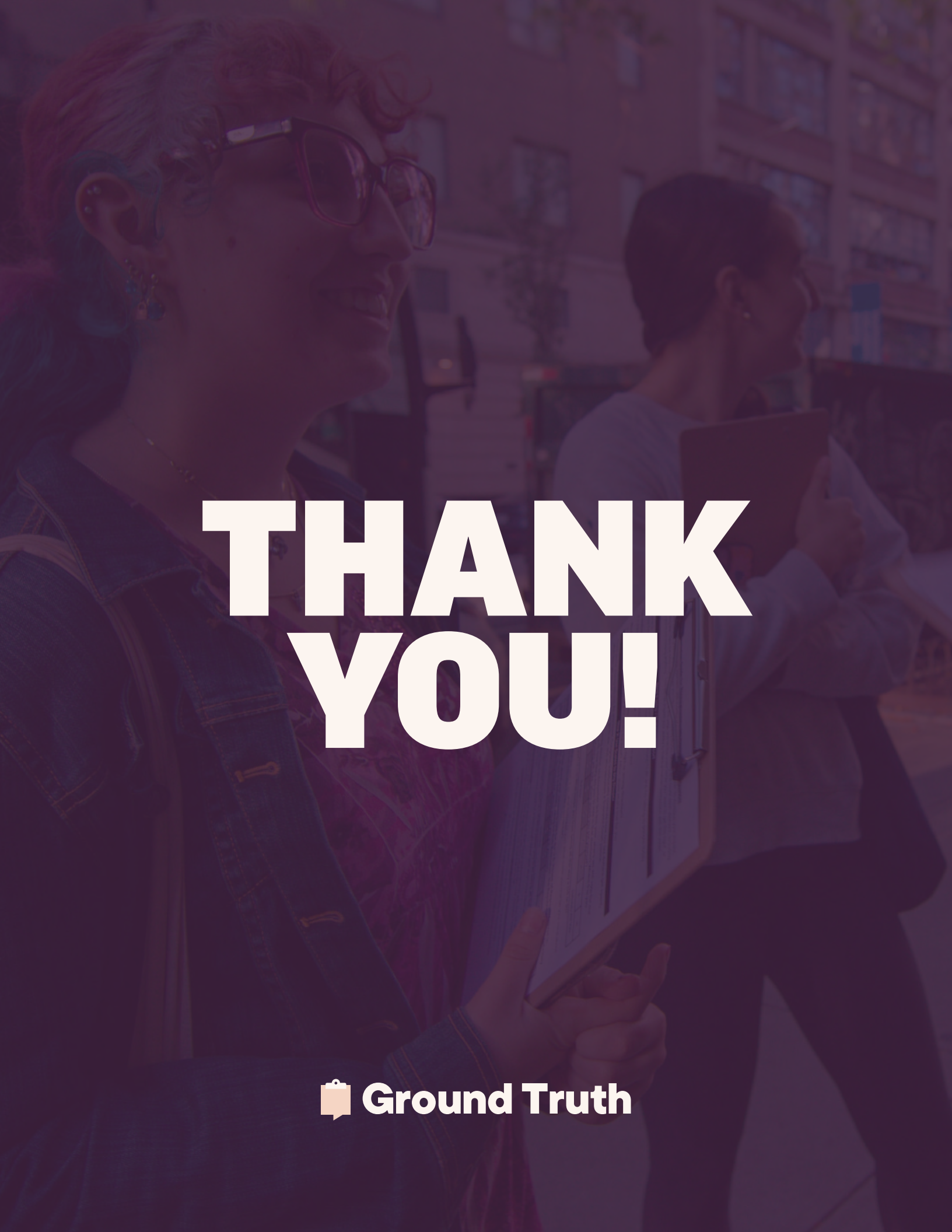
Looking Ahead to Election Day and Beyond

Ground Truth enters the final weeks at its fastest pace yet, and it's built to keep growing through Election Day.

- **Starting from a strong foundation.** September brought Ground Truth's two biggest volunteer weekends of the year, with more than 300 volunteer shifts on the weekends of September 12–13 and 19–20, and nearly 5,000 doors knocked on each of the last two weekends of the month.
- **A Weekend of Action every weekend.** Large mobilization weekends are planned for every weekend between now and the election, building to the final weekend of October 31–November 1, and we expect each to be bigger than the last.
- **Buses from blue cities to battleground races.** Our bus program is up and running, with plans for 40 buses to carry volunteers from places like Boston, New York, and Washington, DC to the closest target races, paired with recruiting events in those cities the week before.
- **Self-service canvassing any day of the week.** Since late September, a Ground Truth organizer has run a daily virtual canvass launch, so anyone who lives near a target race can get trained and knock doors on their own schedule.
- **Students organizing students.** Our College Organizing Fellows program has trained 37 students to organize their peers to join canvasses throughout these final weeks.
- **Marketing and social pushes to bring in new volunteers.** The Big Swing Challenge, launched September 22, asks supporters to commit to their biggest action of the cycle and matches them to a canvass, phone bank, or other shift near them through our new [Take Action tool](#). Digital ads, email, and a reminder series that goes daily in the final weekend will keep moving people from commitment to action.
- **November and beyond.** All the data and voter insights that volunteers gather as part of Ground Truth will stay with campaigns and the Democratic Party through our data-sharing agreement. After the election, we'll publish a full end-of-cycle report on what Ground Truth did and what we learned so we can continue building the program in 2027 and 2028.

Thank You

Every number in this update started with a volunteer knocking on a door and a voter deciding to talk. Thank you to the volunteers, donors, and partners who made those conversations possible.

A woman with short, curly hair, wearing glasses and a denim jacket, is smiling and looking to the right. She is holding a clipboard with a pen. In the background, another person is visible, also holding a clipboard. The image has a purple tint.

THANK YOU!



Ground Truth