BIG DATA IS WINNING ELECTIONS FOR DEMOCRATS—TIME FOR REPUBLICANS TO CATCH UP

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Modern elections are like an arms race, with both sides itching to develop the latest super weapon. Unfortunately, conservatives are losing that race.

The market for political data is one of the fastest-growing in the nation. Yet since 2008, the Right has fallen ever-further behind the Left in acquiring the tools needed to find, register, and turn out voters in their tens of millions. While Republicans spend a fortune on political advertisements and Election Day turnout, Democrats put the lion's share of their resources into voter registration, door-knocking, and mail-in ballot harvesting.

We've seen the result: Many elections are decided long before the first Tuesday in November.

The Left is innovating while the Right remains mystified by defeat-after-defeat. Yet two decades ago those roles were reversed. So what went wrong? Conservatives got complacent while leftists set their sights on a permanent majority in Washington.

The results speak for themselves: Today's Democrats are masters of

squeezing a ballot from every last likely Democratic voter in the country, but today's Republicans are content to let voters sort themselves out.

We're on the path to a cycle-after-cycle drubbing unless conservatives commit themselves to beating "progressives" at their own game—and they can. That turnabout starts by exposing the secrets of the Democrats' Big Data machine.

Restoration of America has already revealed how the Left uses data on 200 million Americans to discover its preferred voters, and how partisan nonprofits use that data to register new voters and win elections. Now we dive into the engine powering the Democratic Party's vast turnout operation: NGP VAN.

Winning Elections 101

"Everything You Need to Run a Winning Campaign. Get Elected with NGP VAN."

Few outside campaign circles have heard of NGP VAN, yet this company may be the most powerful factor behind Democratic Party election victories in the country. NGP VAN sits at the center of a nexus of sophisticated firms that together offer a one-stop shop for "progressive" campaigns: Phonebanking and mass texting, strategy and political advertising, fundraising and compliance, and—most importantly—the best voter data money can buy.

It's no wonder that virtually every Democrat seeking office nationwide—be it the Oval Office or mayor—makes NGP VAN his first stop. A glance at the Federal Election Commission (FEC) website reveals nearly 55,000 hits for NGP VAN since 2004, many ranging in the high 6-figures from the Obama reelection campaign and the Democratic National Committee (DNC).

Ditto the hundreds or perhaps thousands of left-wing activist groups working to elect Democrats and push policy in Washington. As true believers they know that without this nexus' services they stand little chance against their Republican opponents (who must rely on a constellation of competing vendors to fill those needs).

Bernie Sanders is among them. In the 2016 Democratic primary, pundits marveled when the Vermont socialist nearly rocketed past Hillary Clinton in the polls—only for his

campaign to have its access to NGP VAN voter data cut off by the company following a kerfuffle with the Clinton campaign.

Lawsuits ensued; senior Sanders staffers accused the DNC of "us[ing] this incident" to "undermine our campaign." Without the data, Sanders' campaign lost some $600,000 in potential donations every day. Access was only restored after he granted concessions to the DNC. But the lesson is clear: In an instant, Sanders' momentum was wiped out by this "powerful gatekeeper"—while Clinton went on to win her primary.

The Rise of Big Election Data

Data software and voter persuasion tools are decidedly unsexy. But doing them well is often the difference between triumph and defeat.

Before the early 2000s, both parties did everything on paper. Voter contact lists were typed up using lists of registered voters printed out in street order by precinct. Phone numbers had to be gathered door-to-door and handwritten. Campaigns had to do all of this by themselves—either with an army of volunteers (assuming they could create one) or, beginning in the 1980s, by paid canvassers and pricey phonebanking firms. Understandably, most political action committees opted to shell out instead for TV and radio ads. And perhaps most amazingly, very little of this voter data was carried over into the next election.

Then came the "digital revolution." Suddenly, the internet made online fundraising possible. It encouraged rapid data-sharing that simply

couldn't be done by fax, phone, or "snail mail." Cell phones (later smart phones) made it easier to contact potential voters. Email became a cheap way to reach millions of potential voters day-after-day. Platforms like YouTube made it possible to personalize ads for a niche audience—seniors, college students, suburban moms—while social media accumulated unfathomable amounts of useful, purchasable data on Americans (which they happily supplied themselves).

NGP VAN is the result of a 2010 merger between two pioneering firms born during this explosion in new campaign techniques. NGP Software was created in 1997 by Nathaniel Pearlman, a programmer and early proponent of internet- and data-driven campaigning who cut his teeth on Gary Hart's 1984 and 1988 presidential campaigns, and was later chief technology officer for Hillary Clinton's 2008 presidential campaign.

NGP's killer app was its affordability and accessibility. Pearlman's software could record fundraising vendors, track the FEC's tedious compliance requirements, and collate campaigns' contact lists cheaper than its competitors. But he ultimately envisioned "an integrated political campaign database operable through a single, understandable, coherent interface" to replace the "antique databases" and "overlapping spreadsheets" ubiquitous in Democratic campaigns—who soon rushed to his firm in spades.

"By 2007," Pearlman writes, "'familiarity with NGP was a standard line in the resumes of would-be Democratic software."
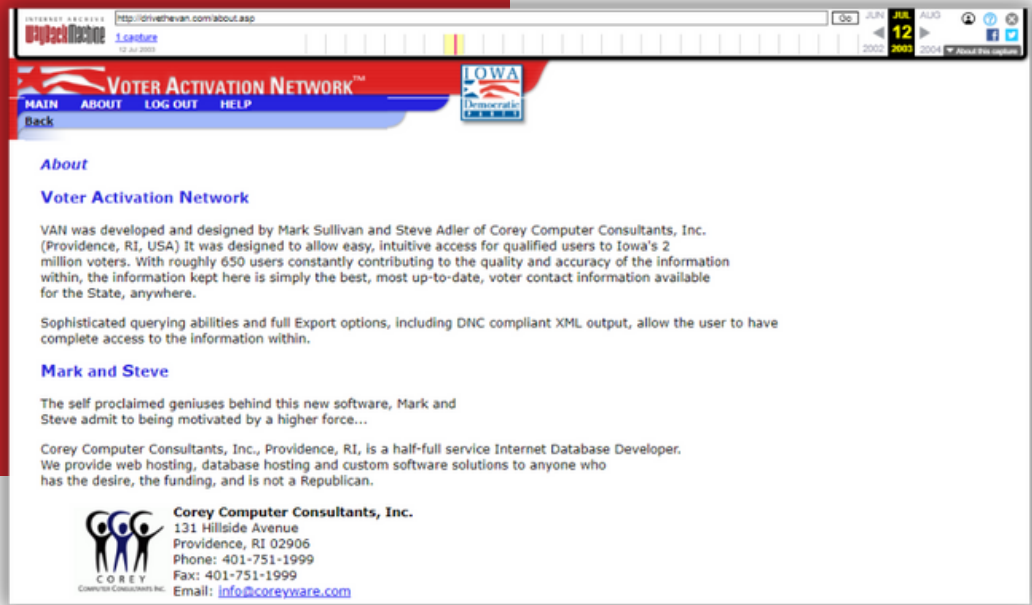
By 2010, more than 75 percent of congressional Democrats and every major Democratic Party campaign arm was an NGP client. That software is still in use, with the company rolling out its latest iteration ahead of the 2018 midterm elections to integrate with Zoom webinars, Google software, and Facebook's targeted ad services.

Meanwhile, the Voter Action Network (VAN) was filling a different need: Building comprehensive voter lists. VAN is the brainchild of Mark L. Sullivan, a campaign operative who created VAN to move Democrats "from an era of 3"x5" index cards and handwritten notes" to "many thousands of users simultaneously entering and extracting vast amounts of data." The test was Iowa Sen. Tom Harkin's (D) 2002 reelection campaign, widely expected to be a closely run thing (at best).

Sullivan's strategy hinged on turning out absentee and marginal voters, who often miss midterm elections. Harkin's campaign hired 100 staffers who soon generated a massive online voter file accessible by any Democratic campaign across the state.

"Never again would resources be spent twice calling the same bad phone number or mailing to the same dead voters," Sullivan writes. That voter file could be used to quickly generate walk lists for paid, Palm Pilot-armed canvassers and ballot harvesters, who between them knocked on 250,000 doors and harvested some 50,000 absentee ballots. Sullivan recalls:

"[Harkin's campaign] enjoyed two advantages our Republican counterparts clearly lacked—a giant lead in absentee voting and reliable knowledge of just how big that lead was...We entered Election Day with the confident knowledge that we held a virtually unsurpassable lead of more than 60,000 Democratic voters over Republican voters among the votes already cast."

In fact, Sen. Harkin won reelection by over 103,000 votes. The Voter Activation Network was born.

VAN's canvassing software is called "MiniVAN," and it's been in constant use by Democrats since at least the 2004 election. That's when VAN served as the voter data platform for America Coming Together, the biggest get-out-the-vote PAC created to date thanks to $40 million in funding from George Soros and Progressive Insurance's Peter Lewis. (Notably, America Coming Together's then-state director, Michael Frias, now heads the Left's other big data firm, Catalist.)

Using MiniVAN, canvassers could access voter data in 17 states using the Palm Pilot (later iPhone) tactic devised in Iowa—generating 7 million more votes for John Kerry than Al Gore received four years prior.

By 2006, VAN had developed into VoteBuilder, a technology used to great effect by Barack Obama's 2008 presidential campaign (and still marketed by NGP VAN.) VoteBuilder was created to help the Obama team catch up with microtargeting techniques pioneered by Republican strategists, most famously Karl Rove—and was often given away for free.

It works by tracking the interactions between canvassers and potential voters to enhance "voter persuasion" techniques—essentially informing campaigns about which voters they're likely to win and what messages they respond to.

Over time (and across enough states), that creates an enormous nationwide database of likely Democratic voters that can be used again and again. And it's extremely valuable—in 2010 alone, the AFL-CIO paid VAN nearly $900,000 for access to its coveted voter file. Even small groups will pay for access; Minnesota Voice, a small get-out-the-vote group, shelled out over 12 percent of its entire budget in 2017 just to access VAN's voter file.

Per Sullivan:

No staffer on any Democratic campaign would ever again do without the best tools in the industry for efficiently managing their voter contact problem. Staff moving from campaign to campaign would always hit the ground running with familiar and reliable tools . . . . Data collected at every level would be preserved for future campaigns and would feed the best possible nationwide modeling and targeting programs.

Indeed, Democratic campaigns won't even consider hiring managers and field directors who aren't versed in "the VAN." Fundamentally, Nathaniel

Pearlman sees these slick applications - microtargeting, online voter files, text message advertising—as "new tools to implement old strategies . . . fundraising, organizing, tracking supporters, persuasion and communications, and getting out the vote."

And that's what the merger of NGP Software and the Voter Activation Network achieved in December 2010. Democrats now had a single shop for arming themselves with the latest weapons for the electoral battlefield... while Republicans arguably peaked in 2006.

Cogs in the Machine

When NGP Software and VAN merged, they did more than join forces—they purchased a technology empire for themselves. Today NGP VAN is owned by EveryAction (though the acquisition date and details are muddy), a software developer-turned-umbrella group for numerous subsidiaries on the Left.

EveryAction was already huge when it integrated the services of a key competitor: ActBlue, a major fundraising platform for left-wing PACs and nonprofits. Even its closest "rival," Catalist, is functionally an NGP VAN partner. A 2015 FEC complaint filed by the conservative Foundation for Accountability and Civic Trust explains why: Catalist isn't interested in profit, but in winning elections for Democrats.

By structuring itself as a limited liability corporation rather than a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, Catalist can "do business with candidate campaigns, parties, and outside groups like unions all at once" and (in some cases) even offer "discounted prices" below fair-market value. By offering its voter file to NGP VAN at such a cheap rate, the report adds:

This collaboration has provided an opportunity for Democratic federal campaigns, Democratic party committees and liberal outside groups to use the advantages of a common vendor to ensure that their voter contact efforts are complementary.

Later in 2018 the private equity firm Insight Venture Partners bought a big enough stake in EveryAction to appoint a new board chairman. EveryAction was sold again in late 2021 to the massive London private equity firm Apax Partners—itself partially owned by the Saudi government—to progressive consternation. Activist clients complained that Apax would "hollow it out" while three NGP VAN executives quit. A few months later, EveryAction announced it was rebranding itself "Bonterra" and assimilating each of its satraps into a single brand, a new bid to grow even larger on the Left. And they are numerous.

Blue State Digital was created by staffers from Howard Dean's ill-fated 2004 presidential campaign and specializes in strategic communications, "grassroots" mobilization, and digital advertising. Its clients include Britain's Labour Party, Obama's reelection campaign, and the pro-gay marriage campaign Freedom to Marry.

GiveGab provides custom-built donation forms that plug into activist groups' websites and tracks reporting for IRS and FEC compliance, simplifying one of the more tedious (but legally important) parts of nonprofit management.

Salsa Labs is a "digital engagement platform" for advocacy organizations whose software manages email blasts, marketing, fundraising, and supporter communications. It was acquired by EveryAction in 2021 using capital from Insight Venture Partners.

Mobilize hosts event management and volunteer recruitment software for activist groups created after Democrats' defeat in 2016. The group was acquired by EveryAction shortly after the 2020 election; prior to that Mobilize had already integrated into NGP VAN's products.

It's easy to find this nexus in action just by visiting a typical "progressive" group's website. The email sign-up page is probably run by Salsa Labs. The volunteer page was designed by Mobilize. Click "donate" and you'll find a form generated by GiveGab or EveryAction. And it's likely that the slogans attacking "white supremacy" and teaching "anti-racism" were manufactured by Blue State Digital, which hosts guides on "unlearning, relearning, educating, and repeating" how to live an "anti-racist" lifestyle.

EveryAction's systems enable lobbying groups to send mass emails to elected officials or submit comments on proposed regulation changes—fake grassroots advocacy—using voter file data to identify where volunteers live and match them to the appropriate member of Congress or state legislator.

To stem labor unions' steep membership decline since the 2020 Supreme Court Janus v. AFSCME, NGP VAN created organizing software to enable "virtual labor organizing"—an evolution away from paper membership cards that's been adopted by practically every major union from AFSCME, to the National Education Association, AFL-CIO, and SEIU.

The supposedly "nonpartisan" Rock the Vote has paid $360,000 for the firm's consulting services. We've uncovered other 6-figure payments to NGP VAN from NARAL Pro-Choice America, one of the top pro-abortion lobbying groups in the country; radical Greenpeace; anti-Trump "resistance" group

Indivisible; and America Votes, the self-appointed "coordination hub" of the Left. Monitoring Influence, a left-wing knock-off of the right-leaning website InfluenceWatch, runs its supposedly nonpartisan email blasts through NGP VAN. State Voices, the nonprofit that's coordinated Democrats' get-out-the-vote strategy since the 2008 election, has paid close to $3.4 million for NGP VAN's services since 2014.

According to the Capital Research Center's Parker Thayer, State Voices has trained at least 520 NGP VAN "data practitioners" since 2017, using its software to help leftist groups win nab new votes.

How does NGP VAN pricing work?

Since the NGP VAN tool is sales-driven, with many of the customers coming in through contracts, you will have to talk to one of their experts to figure out your exact pricing.

Voter lists:

NationBuilder	NGP VAN
NationBuilder acquires voter data directly from county and state election offices. Once you request a voter file, they sync it to your campaign account. The free voter file offers data such as party affiliation, voter location, and voting history.	Managed by the DNC, VoteBuilder has extensive data on everything from a voter's political affiliation, voting history, down to who put up lawn signs for which candidates in an election. For progressive nonprofits, State Voices offers access to the Voter ActivationNetwork, and thereby the Catalist data file, at low or no cost.

Credit: Verity Vote

In the lead-up to the 2020 Census, State Voices coordinated a campaign to boost census results in blue states—which conveniently yielded a better voter file in those states, thanks to NGP VAN's software.

As for the rest of EveryAction's subsidiaries, we've traced their services to numerous leftist groups, including People for the American Way, the Rockefeller Foundation, Planned Parenthood, NAACP, Southern Poverty Law Center Action Fund, Nature Conservancy, the LGBT lobbying group Ultraviolet, and even the Obama Foundation.

In each case, NGP VAN ranks among their top vendors, and it isn't hard to see why. This is infrastructure on an imperial scale, enabled by over 15 years of steady, calculated investment. The end-goal is to help "progressives" pop up new organizations with short notice and help existing groups focus on winning elections instead of administrative tasks —and "at low or no cost."

While there's no shortage of data vendors and consultants available to political groups on both sides of the aisle, this network—if it's not already clear—is completely off-limits to conservatives. Take it from EveryAction's general manager for digital products, Mike Liddell, who wrote in 2021:

> We remain committed to working with Democratic and progressive campaigns...We have declined, and will continue to decline, to work with organizations that focus on being anti-choice, anti-LGBTQ rights, anti-action on climate change, anti-racial justice, etc.

Put simply, this is a factory for stamping out legions of new activist groups, Henry Ford-style, and the Right has nothing to rival it. So why are America's cities and states contracting with this partisan outfit?

Who Runs Our Elections?

From Lenin to Alinsky, leftists love organizing and list-making. Perhaps that's why "progressives" have succeeded in inserting activists—and now entire organizations—into America's election machinery, taking it over from the inside-out.

NGP VAN is one of them. In April 2020, the Michigan Department of State contracted with two firms—among them NGP VAN—for COVID-19 contact tracing to "provide software to help organize remote phone banking and track information and contacts," which ran to $200,000 over eight weeks. (The other group was a nonprofit run by Democratic consultant Michael Kolehouse, who's written on Facebook that Trump should "get Coronavirus ASAP" and someone should "do the country a favor and cough on that man.")

Understandably, Republicans were aghast. Even Gretchen Whitmer, the state's notoriously rabid Democratic governor, balked at sharing sensitive personal information on state residents with a partisan campaign vendor. A day later her office canceled the contract, explaining:

> The executive office is uncomfortable with this vendor for the same reason others are. The public needs to have confidence that this tracing work is being done by a nonpartisan firm.

More accurately, Whitmer's office got caught trying to pull a fast one on the public. The contract was only cancelled after Wes Nakagiri, a Republican county commissioner, brought the scheme to light. "This enables NGP VAN to share this confidential information with both the MDHHS and Democrat candidates," he revealed. Nakagiri wrote:

> This scheme is an insidiously clever and deceitful way to take political advantage of the biggest public health crisis of our lifetimes. Providing confidential information collected from contact tracing to Democrat candidates is an egregious violation of the public trust.

Credit: Verity Vote

Trouble in Philly

But that pales in comparison with NGP VAN's cozy relationship with the city of Philadelphia.

Public filings reveal that in October 2021 the city signed a sole source contract with NGP VAN—meaning it was awarded without competitive bidding—to "collect, track, and utilize engagement data" on Philadelphia residents. ("Engagement" is a common euphemism on the Left for voter turnout.) Further filings reveal a relationship with NGP VAN dating back to at least 2019. And Philadelphia job postings for an NGP VAN software administrator show that the data-collection is citywide.

Mary Jim Kenney (D)'s office claims that NGP VAN is the "only program available to capture the data necessary for this process." But that's ridiculous; there are dozens of nonpartisan data vendors that could perform the same service. Kenney's claim only makes sense if the true objective is feeding voter data into the Democratic Party's get-out-the-vote machine.

Consider that the city's website solicits donations to partisan pro-abortion organizations like Planned Parenthood, New Voices for Reproductive Justice, and the Abortion Liberation Fund, which describes its mission as using "community organizing to lift the insurance bans [on] and eradicate all other barriers" to abortion-on-demand. It also asks visitors to "call your state legislators" and oppose SB 106, a proposed constitutional amendment that would've declared that "there is no constitutional right to taxpayer-funded abortion" or abortion in general.

Credit: Verity Vote

It's little wonder, then, that the Mayor's office of Civic Engagement and Volunteer Service—an agency with a $600,000 budget—is powered by NGP VAN.

The office offers services to teach activists "how to plan for recruitment, build a contact list, and track your work along the way"—in other words, how to use NGP VAN software to run a successful campaign. That includes allowing subscribers to give their pronouns (with a choice of nearly two dozen sets), their sexual orientation, and announce whether they "identify as transgender"—all on a website hosted by NGP VAN.

Credit: Verity Vote

Consider the value of the information pumped into this partisan company by the city of Philadelphia. Good campaign data is the difference between victory and defeat. NGP VAN already has critical information on voters across the state thanks to years of campaign list-building; now it's supplemented by official municipal data handed out at taxpayer expense... and only Democrats benefit.

That's the equivalent of giving valuable voter data to the Democratic National Committee. Leftists would never abide giving it to a Republican-aligned group; yet the watchdog media is utterly silent.

Pennsylvania state law (25 Pa. Stat. § 2705) prohibits "directly or indirectly soliciting, receiving, collecting, handling, disbursing or accounting for assessments, contributions or other money for a partisan political purpose." Public employees who violate this law "shall be removed from employment."

25 Pa. Stat. § 2607 adds that:

> State and local governments, including their public officers, public officials, employees and agents, acting in their official capacity, may not solicit, apply for, enter into a contract for or receive or expend gifts, donations, grants or funding from any individual, business, organization, trust, foundation, or any nongovernmental entity for the registration of voters or the preparation, administration or conducting of an election in this Commonwealth.

It seems likely that Philadelphia broke the law by contracting with NGP VAN, but we won't know for certain until legal action is taken. We do know that Democrats Josh Shapiro and John Fetterman won a stunning 86 percent and 83 percent of the votes in Philadelphia, respectively—their largest margins anywhere in the state—in the race for governor and U.S. senator last year. In contracting with NGP VAN, the city opened a data pipeline to the biggest get-out-the-vote machine in the country—and it belongs entirely to the Democrats.

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