

WHAT WE DID TOGETHER:

THE MOST ACCESSIBLE AMERICAN ELECTION IN HISTORY

In March 2020, the nation came to a sudden standstill as a new global pandemic reached our communities. The Voting Rights Lab, sensing the far-reaching implications for what was already certain to be the most important general election in our lifetimes, turned to you, our supporters, for help in crafting a swift, adequate, strategic response to these new threats. Together, we leveraged a \$15M-budget into newly revamped election systems across battleground states, radically expanded access to mail-in ballots and early voting, and ultimately helped to secure the largest voter turnout in American history.

To say you made a difference would be a vast understatement. Together, we expanded voter access to a degree never before seen. And we secured those votes *and* the integrity of the election in the weeks that followed, ensuring that no politician or election official would usurp the will of the people and interfere with the count and certification of the votes. Because of your commitment to the right of every American citizen to cast a ballot, and your agility in responding to renewed calls to action throughout the summer and fall, our democratic machine survived the 2020 election season.

► OUR IMPACT WAS FELT NATIONWIDE

We showed the nation that when we invest in protecting, defining, and fighting for the right to vote — we *can* begin to deliver on the promise of our democracy. We showed that when we protect our election administration systems from assault, **we can begin to rebuild forward.**

You helped to carry us from the havoc of the primaries to achieving the widest ever array of voting methods in American history, and the vast majority of voters getting the options they needed and deserved. And in record numbers, too — over **100 million** voters took advantage of the options to cast their ballots early in-person, by mail, or drop box. We saw a 10% increase in youth voter turnout over 2016, as expanded opportunity gave new voters the access they needed. An estimated **46 states** shattered turnout records. Your support, and the work we did together, means that this election was the most representative that this country has ever seen.

The eight months between March and November 2020 were simultaneously the shortest and longest ever — a compressed timeline for ambitious goals, while being so packed with new information and crises that each news cycle buried the last. Throughout it all, you held steady in your commitment to the American voter, and in your allyship to the voting rights movement.

Here's a brief overview of our eight months of successes, all of which combined to bring us our ultimate victory: the stewardship and protection of our democracy for the next generation.

➤ WE TRANSLATED NATIONAL URGENCY INTO STATE & LOCAL ACTION

Throughout this Covid-19 response campaign, we were uniquely positioned to carry a sweeping national outlook to the deep and concentrated work we do in the states, sharing resources and tactics across regions and bringing our Beltway access to bear for local organizers. **Our COVID response campaign ensured that county officials, embedded state advocates, and state decision-makers had access to the resources and the context they needed to protect millions of voters' access to the ballot.**

RESPONDING TO THE GLOBAL PANDEMIC

VRL raised the alarm early: a once-in-a-lifetime pandemic that would change the face of our society would also demand swift and aggressive changes to our election systems. Crowded and consolidated polling places, long lines, and an aging poll worker roster couldn't bear the added strain of the highly contagious and deadly disease. **State by state, we hammered out plans for response**, leaning into existing infrastructure and rapidly scaling up in states that would demand the most work. **We shifted resources and staffing to the states that mattered most to the election**, building a plan for the primaries and the November general.

ENSURING THAT STATES GOT THE MONEY THEY NEEDED

When the CARES Act was introduced in the early spring, we lobbied behind the scenes to secure funding for the states that would support adapting election systems to the reality of 2020. Once the law was signed on March 27, we got right to work in the states, coordinating with Governors and Secretaries of State on accepting the allocation and redistributing it to centers of need. **Our implementation of that funding** was critical to the success of the general election, as it funded key initiatives such as drop boxes, early voting hours, PPE for poll workers, and printing and mailing of absentee ballots.

CONTROLLING THE MESSAGE AND SHAPING THE STORY

We gave people the language they needed to talk about the election, and **our shared democratic values**, in ways that resonated best. Together, we conducted deep, qualitative state and national polls, testing language and identifying the frameworks that tapped into our collective vision for a democracy that represents all voters. Months of message shaping, briefings, digital meme design, time spent locating and grooming appropriate and persuasive messengers, and using just the right language to advocate with elected officials **all resulted in a powerful and coherent**

call for safe, sanitary, and equitable elections, as well as a confident voting public. This effort gave election administrators time to complete and certify their counts in the context of that essential support from the public.

BUILDING CONFIDENCE IN ELECTION INTEGRITY & PROTECTING THE COUNT

When key high-ranking elected officials began a campaign to convince voters that mail-in voting would lead to fraudulent ballots, we anticipated a brewing controversy over the validity of the election results. We pulled together a broad coalition of national and in-state organizations to build and shape the in-state and national media environments; worked at the state level to lift up trusted, nonpartisan election administrators to explain and demystify the process; and ran critical, under-the-radar battleground state campaigns to **stabilize and draw a line around key GOP legislatures to prevent interference.** Working with election administrators in MI, NC, and WI, we created 16 face-to-camera videos and 10 animation videos to set expectations with voters about delayed election results, *garnering over 5 million impressions.* After November 3, **we controlled the narrative**, seeding the *Count Every Vote* mantra and ensuring that election administrators had the space they needed to tally ballots without interference from legislatures or others. With partners, we built a library of shareable content to reiterate key messages, which *received 892 million views.*

In those localities where election officials did appear to be swayed by pressure coming from the White House and GOP state affiliates, such as in Wayne County and at the Michigan State Board of Canvassers, we helped to mobilize thousands of voters to answer the call to action, flooding the streets and the airwaves with messages that demanded counting the votes and certifying the results. We also placed joint op-eds by respected conservative and cross-partisan voices, noting the security of the election and calling for broad acceptance of the election results. **This flurry of anticipation and effort paid off:** on December 1, 2020, the final battleground state certified its vote count and upheld the will of the American voters.

➤ WE BROUGHT IT HOME IN THE BATTLEGROUND STATES

Across the Midwest and much of the Southeast, **thanks to your commitment,** voters had unprecedented access to expanded absentee voting for the November election. And the access was meaningful and productive: more voters turned out for the 2020 general election than ever before in the nation's history.

At each step of the process—requesting ballots, completing ballots, and mailing them—we **dismantled barriers** and supported voters who wanted to be heard and counted. The powerful tech you supported, our one-of-a-kind State Rights Tracker, was indispensable to activists on

the ground as well as federal lawmakers as they coordinated plans and beat back threats to access.

ARIZONA

We ensured that Arizona voters could cast their ballots without undue health risks, despite the raging pandemic. Our organizing and advocacy in the state resulted in an executive order from the governor, providing PPE for polling locations and allowing state employees to serve as poll workers on Election Day. We also prevented closures of polling places in Maricopa and Pima Counties. Voters across the state benefited from the ability to cast their ballots in fully staffed, uncrowded, and sanitary polling locations. After Election Day, when the false narrative of fraud began to coalesce within the state, we drove a campaign thanking Arizona election officials for their service to the secure election, and worked with lawmakers to coordinate a messaging campaign that disregarded the flimsy protests of fraud and instead focused on the work ahead. Ultimately, the atmosphere we built up scaffolded Governor Doug Ducey in standing by the election results and dismissing presidential pressure to interfere – thereby **safeguarding the integrity of Arizona’s election.**

FLORIDA

Our efforts resulted in large-scale election reforms for Florida voters, making voting safer and the count more efficient. Our Florida advocacy targeted both the Governor and the Supervisors of Elections, driving reforms in the form of an executive order to allow for protection of in-person polling options, provision of essential protective gear for poll workers, and for the preprocessing of absentee ballots. These reforms gave voters the power, the protection, and the access they needed to participate in the election — and to be reassured that their votes were counted and respected.

GEORGIA

From the secure 24/7 ballot drop boxes to the preprocessing of absentee ballots, there’s no question that our investment in Georgia’s election reform resulted in more representative election results than ever before. And when national politicians attacked the integrity of the vote and Georgia’s officials after Election Day, when the losing candidate continued to question the integrity of the partial recount and spread misinformation – **our coordinated messaging campaign to scuttle that false fraud narrative.** Together, we lifted up the voices of experienced, conservative election administrators, reiterated the security of November’s election, and built a powerful, multi-faceted chorus supporting the actions of the Republican Secretary of State in standing up to attempted interference.

KENTUCKY

We offered Kentucky voters the opportunity to safeguard their wellbeing without sacrificing their right to the vote. Together, we moved the Secretary of State and the Governor to form a cross-partisan partnership to support any Kentucky voter's request for an absentee ballot for fear of contracting or spreading Covid-19, to return ballots via drop boxes, and to vote early and in person. Your support of Kentucky voters also resulted in *doubling* the number of polling places in Louisville — the state's most populous city and home to half of the state's Black population.

MICHIGAN

We showed up for Michigan voters, expanding their access to mail-in ballots and dropboxes before the Election and standing firm beside them when their votes and their voices were threatened in the weeks after. This effort was a pivotal element in placing ballot dropboxes, passing legislation that allowed preprocessing of ballots, and maintaining adequate and in-person polling options. In late November, when two members of the Wayne County certification board attempted a craven and cynical interference in the election, **our state partners responded swiftly and victoriously** — mobilizing their grassroots, making use of our back-channel lobbying, and amplifying testimonials from lawyers who had served as poll watchers. *And again*, just a week later, as President Trump publicly called for state legislators to illegally set aside the election results, and as the state board of canvassers faced tremendous external pressure, *we were there*: creating a direct line between Michigan constituents and the canvassing board, calling for lawmakers to focus on the Covid-19 crisis actually affecting their state.

NORTH CAROLINA

We helped give all North Carolina voters safe voting options. We were hard at work lobbying the state general assembly, the State Board of Elections, and the Governor, and we racked up wins for North Carolina voters: reducing the mail ballot witness requirement, allowing online requests for absentee ballots, and establishing an equitable cure process.

PENNSYLVANIA

Our imprint on Pennsylvania's electoral systems was felt both before and after election day, as voters had more options for voting than ever, and as the country rallied around vote counting efforts in the days following the election. Our innovative county strategy resulted in more drop-box locations, along with clear standards for saving ballots with minor errors. And when actors in Washington and on the streets tried to disrupt the ballot count, your support meant that our state partners were ready to counter the chaos with a unified call to "Count Every Vote." Behind the scenes, we lobbied vulnerable lawmakers to publicly accept the results of the

election, and mobilized the necessary actors to defeat the broad challenges to provisional ballots.

TEXAS

In Texas, we succeeded in *making it easier* for voters to cast their ballot during the pandemic.

Texas voters benefited from earlier voting options and in-person ballot drop-off after we worked together to press the Governor into an emergency executive order.

WISCONSIN

We shaped Wisconsin's election into an accessible and secure contest, and safeguarded the integrity of the vote when it was under threat. We achieved an early victory: a state order inviting municipalities to send absentee ballot applications *directly to every voter*. Together, we took the fight to the local level, coordinating advocacy, lobbying, and pro-democracy messaging, and *achieving victory* in eight of our target municipalities. Post-election, we helped to shape the story — emphasizing the will of the voters, the democratic principles we all share, and the absolute imperative for Wisconsin lawmakers to move forward and focus on the state's future amidst the raging pandemic.
