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NEW MEXICO 2026 · CAMPAIGN REPORT & STRATEGIC EVALUATION

From Winning the Right to Vote to Organizing Independent Voters

The first open primary campaign: results, lessons, and the next experiment

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“We won this right. Now we’ve got to use it.”

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

After a decade of organizing by Open Primaries and local leaders, New Mexico opened its primaries to independent voters. But winning the right to vote was only half the battle. Election officials did little to tell independents the rules had changed, and most county clerk websites didn’t mention it at all. If independents were going to learn about their new right—and be inspired to exercise it—someone else had to tell them. So Open Primaries and Let Us Vote New Mexico did.

Our answer was to have independents talk to independents. Volunteers who had fought for the reform became the faces and voices of the campaign. This was more than a get-out-the-vote program. We helped a new electorate vote in a primary for the first time, and we tested a new way to organize it.

We did it. We developed a methodology that significantly increased independent voter participation in the primary. And it’s completely replicable.

47,102	30,061	3,832
independents voted statewide	voters we contacted cast a ballot	new supporters signed up

HOW THE MESSAGE WORKED

AWARENESS

“You can vote now.”

Tell independents the primary is open.

OWNERSHIP

“Independents won this.”

Frame the right as earned, not granted.

ACTION

“This election is yours.”

Invite them to vote and stay involved.

THE KEY FINDING

The independent-to-independent connection works.

Among 2024 voters, independents we contacted turned out at a much higher rate than those we didn't reach.

23.78% CONTACTED

16.54% NOT CONTACTED

THE CHALLENGE & THE RESULTS

This is not just GOTV. It is enfranchisement.

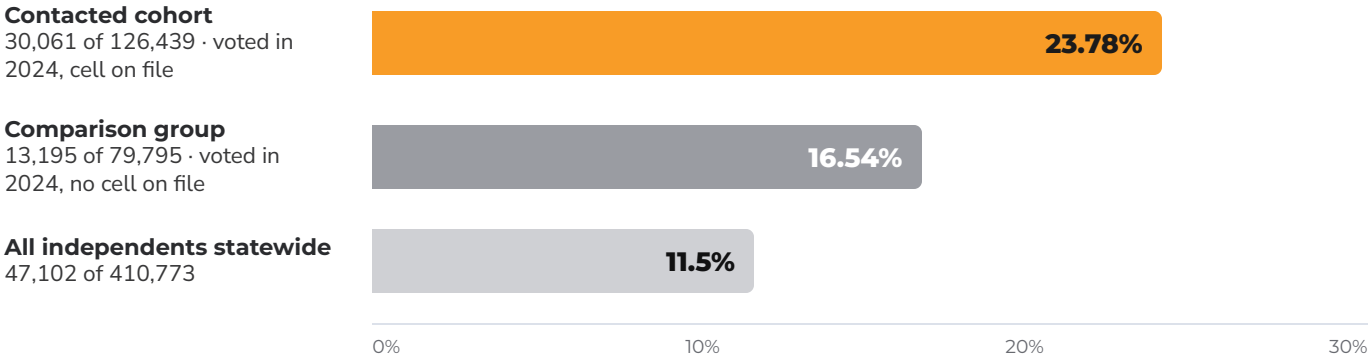
Traditional GOTV reminds voters to do something they already understand. Newly enfranchised independents had been excluded from primaries for New Mexico's entire history, so many didn't know the law had changed, and the state wasn't telling them. With election officials doing little to spread the word, voter education fell to the campaign. Before asking anyone to vote, it had to:

- → Establish that the election is open to them
- → Explain what changed
- → Make the opportunity personally meaningful
- → Invite them to take ownership of the process

> **"You have a right to participate. This election is yours. What will you do with it?"**
>
> Speaking to independents as independents, not as prospective Democrats or Republicans.

MATCHBACK · JUNE 2, 2026 PRIMARY TURNOUT

Contacted voters turned out 44% higher than comparable independents



SHARE OF THE INDEPENDENT VOTE

31% of independents were in the contacted cohort. They cast 64% of independent ballots.



READ WITH CARE The comparison group wasn't randomized. Both groups voted in 2024, but the comparison group was left out of outreach only because it had no cell phone on file. The 7.24-point gap is the strongest comparison available and a meaningful one, but it isn't proof the campaign caused the higher turnout. As New Mexico's first open primary, this election sets the baseline future programs will be measured against.

CAMPAIGN STRATEGY

Independent voters should hear about their new rights from people who understand what it means to be independent.

1

Establish awareness

Make sure independents knew the rules had changed and they could vote in the June 2 primary.

2

Create ownership

Independents won this opportunity. Peer messengers made it feel personal, real and politically meaningful.

3

Build participation & relationships

Use SMS, voter information and volunteers to drive action and identify a continuing organizing base.

EACH CHANNEL HAD A DISTINCT JOB

Paid media	Direct outreach	Volunteers	Earned media
Built awareness at scale	Created conversation and action	Reinforced it through trusted relationships	Exposed gaps in public information

A FRAMEWORK FOR FUTURE CAMPAIGNS

The independent voter organizing funnel, and what moved at each stage

Awareness Learns independents can now vote	**2.9M** YouTube impressions and **223,000+** completed views; CTV reached viewers **8.15×** on average
Recognition Sees the change applies to them	An interactive SMS question (“Did you know you can now vote?”) **beat** both video-education and standard GOTV messages
Engagement Responds, asks, watches, visits	**5,700+** SMS replies and **6,114** Meta link clicks at $0.82 each
Participation Casts a ballot	**30,061** contacted independents voted (23.78% turnout)
Organization Joins, volunteers, recruits	**3,832** textable supporters, **156** email leads, **144** volunteer ambassadors

PAID MEDIA & DIRECT OUTREACH

Reach built awareness. Peer storytelling made it land.

CHANNEL	SPEND	IMPRESSIONS / SENDS	REACH	TOP RESULT
YouTube	$7,500	2,882,743	625,356	223,000+ completed views
Dynamic display	$5,000	1,078,497	60,164	1,280 clicks
CTV / OTT	$18,000	563,411	69,153	8.15 impressions per viewer
Peer-to-peer SMS	$15,000	495,679 segments	~126,000	5,700+ direct responses
Meta	$5,000	441,190	110,517	6,114 clicks · $0.82 CPC · 1.39% CTR

Plus $20,000 for video production and voter-file data, $20,000 staff time and $5,000 digital development. Full budget on page 6.

THE STORYTELLING EFFECT · META

When volunteers who won the reform became the faces of the ads, performance jumped

WEBSITE CLICKS

+78%

vs. the earlier creative

AVERAGE CPC

$1.14 → $0.63

about 45% lower

THE CHANGE

HD videos made with filmmaker Graham Elwood, featuring four independent volunteers who helped open New Mexico's primaries

Creative and audiences changed at the same time, so the lift can't be credited to video alone. The scale and direction still make authentic peer storytelling a core part of the model.



BEST-PERFORMING VIDEO AD

A decline-to-state volunteer from Los Ranchos de Albuquerque speaks directly to fellow independents.



TOP ANIMATED DISPLAY AD

Volunteer faces paired with practical voting information and a clear call to vote.

From voter contact to an organizing base

WHAT THE SMS TEST FOUND

A question beat a reminder.

Asking voters whether they knew about their new right outperformed both a video-education text and a traditional GOTV text. For newly enfranchised voters, the first step may be recognition: *I'm eligible now. This election includes me.*

> **Did you know New Mexico independents can now vote in the June 2 primary?**

SMS PROGRAM	MESSAGES	RESULT	TAKEAWAY
Initial voter education	125,891	4,732 responses	3.76% engagement
Voter survey	3,966	491 completions	97%+ of people who clicked finished it
Final GOTV	112,543	873 responses	Election-week reinforcement
Fundraising test	4,492	101 clicks	**No donations, 526 opt-outs**

Lesson on sequencing: new voters welcomed education and conversation, but an immediate money ask fell flat. Next time, test asking for money only after a voter has responded, voted or volunteered.

EARNED MEDIA

~2 in 3

county clerk websites didn't mention independents' new primary voting rights. The government wasn't educating voters about the change, so the campaign did, and Open Primaries' research drove a **Source NM investigation** that exposed the gap and held election officials accountable.

GRASSROOTS MOBILIZATION

144
volunteer ambassadors shared materials through their networks

36
volunteers joined phonebanks (three dozen)

33
independents served as Early Bird Poll Monitors

4
volunteer organizers became the faces of the video campaign

CAMPAIGN INVESTMENT & KEY FINDINGS

$95,500, fully loaded



Voter outreach & paid media
$35,500 ads + $15,000 SMS

Infrastructure & creative
Video, voter data, website

Staffing & program management
Strategy, execution, organizing

$0.76	$3.18	$2.63	$3.91
per targeted voter (126,439)	per contacted voter who cast a ballot (30,061)	per SMS response (5,700+)	per retained SMS supporter (3,832)

These are efficiency figures, not a causal cost per vote.

KEY STRATEGIC FINDINGS

1	**Lead with empowerment, not grievance**	Independents responded most when voting was framed as an opportunity they had won. Practical information plus empowerment may beat a message centered on exclusion, a hypothesis to keep testing.
2	**The first contact is a conversation**	Asking voters whether they knew about their new rights drove more engagement than telling them to vote.
3	**Authentic storytelling is a core organizing value**	Professionally produced video of volunteers who won the reform sharply improved Meta results. Next, isolate messenger, production quality and audience effects.
4	**Winning the right is only the beginning**	Public information and election administration decide whether a right is real in practice. Organizing may need to hold those institutions accountable.
5	**A new organizing base, not a one-election audience**	3,832 supporters and a volunteer network are the start of an ongoing independent voter organization. The question is how many stay active beyond one election.

LOOKING AHEAD

A replicable model, and a more rigorous next experiment

THE NEW MEXICO MODEL FOR VOTER EDUCATION AFTER A STRUCTURAL REFORM

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Identify the newly eligible electorate with voter-file data	Build broad awareness through video	Drive voters to clear, practical election information	Use SMS for two-way engagement	Test creative and audiences continuously	Reinforce with volunteers and earned media	Evaluate with digital, survey and matchback data

Running through every step: **independent-to-independent messengers.**

DESIGN FUTURE CAMPAIGNS TO ANSWER FIVE QUESTIONS

1. **Who is being organized?**
   Separate first-time primary voters, past open-primary voters, recent general-election voters and low-history voters.
2. **What are we asking them to do?**
   Measure awareness, education, engagement, voting, volunteering and advocacy separately.
3. **Which messages work?**
   Test practical education, empowerment, independent identity, peer testimony and issues by group.
4. **Which channels work?**
   Judge channels by movement toward participation, not just reach and cost.
5. **What is the incremental impact?**
   Use experimental or quasi-experimental designs to isolate what the campaign caused.

OPEN RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- Do independents tune out partisan messengers, or only partisan messages?
- Does a nonpartisan or independent identity build more trust?
- Which message matters most: the new right, the mechanics of voting, or the stakes?
- Do first-time primary voters need more education than experienced open-primary voters?
- Are peer messengers more effective than institutions?
- Does the model work equally across age, race, geography, income and voting history?
- Is it strongest in a first open primary, or can it sustain ongoing organizing?

New Mexico showed that independent voters can be organized as independents. It is the first iteration of this work, not the final answer.

The next campaign should keep direct contact, credible independent messengers, strong production and practical education, and measure success by whether independents vote at higher rates than comparable voters, stay engaged and bring others in.

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