

# 2020 ELECTION REPORT



**THIS IS  
WHAT  
HAPPENED.**

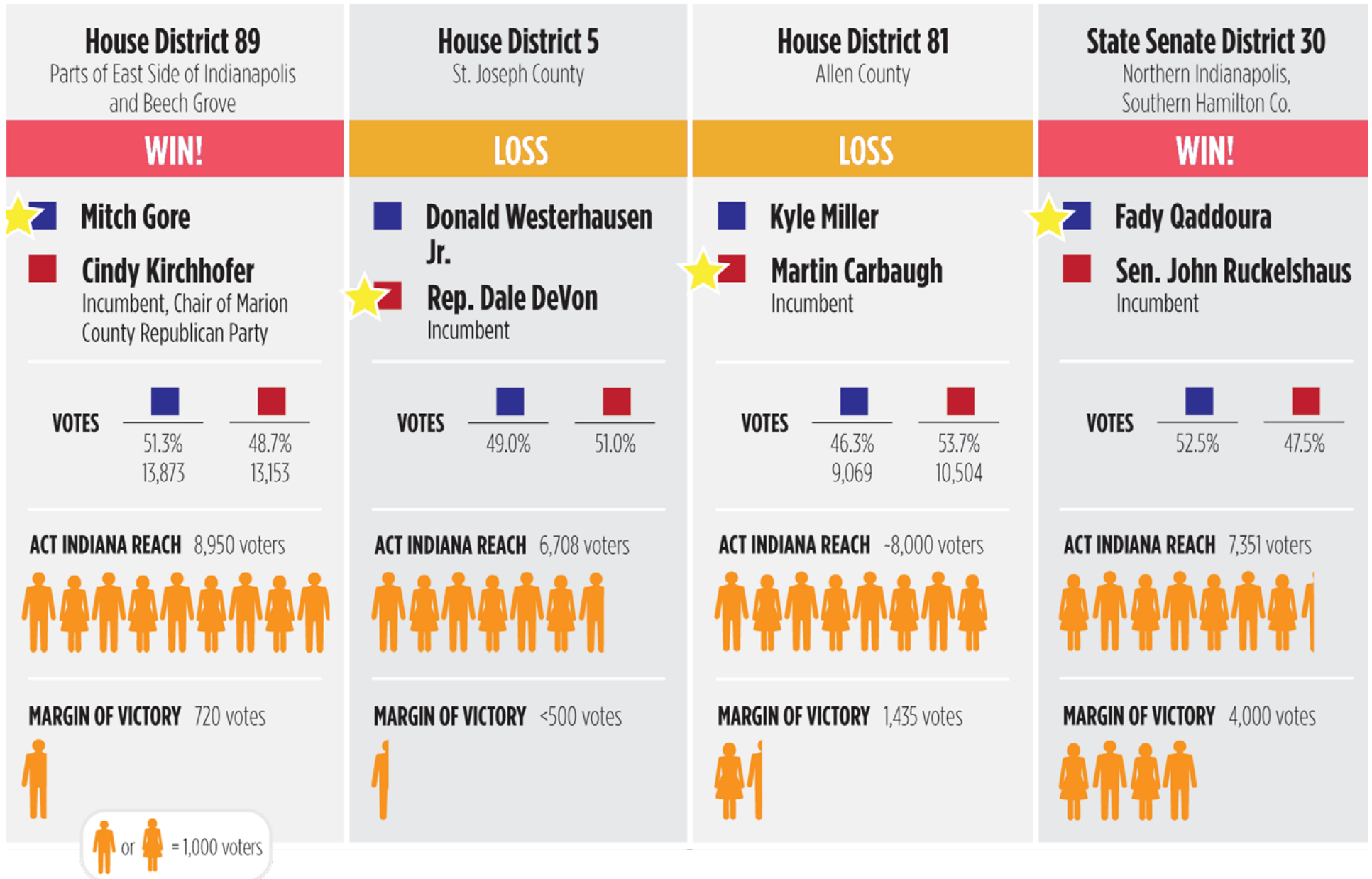
Community organizing took back our country. The hard work of grassroots community leaders and organizers played a critical role in Joe Biden's victory two weeks ago, rebuilding a Democratic majority in [Arizona](#), [Georgia](#), [Pennsylvania](#), and [elsewhere](#) -- states that had previously fallen to the GOP. In Indiana, we've demonstrated three election cycles in a row that the same thing can happen here: when we organize and build grassroots political power, we can win elections. Now is the time for an investment in Indiana's future.

There was good news and bad news for Indiana in this election. The bad news: Trump stirred up a massive "red wave" across our state, as he did across much of the Midwest. His voters turned out in force. Unlike states like Michigan and Wisconsin, Indiana was considered a lost cause by national political players, so we didn't receive the support in money or volunteers that poured into the swing states around us. This lack of investment had consequences up and down the ballot. At the end of the day, the GOP picked up seats in both the state House and Senate, and strengthened their already formidable grip in local communities.

**Here's the good news: In the places where Act Indiana focused our organizers and volunteers, we won. And in the last year, we've begun to build the infrastructure that can power future growth and turn Indiana around.**

# RESULTS IN OUR TARGET RACES

Our #WeMakeIndiana voter program targeted four state races (presented here in order of priority) where we hoped we could flip districts from red to blue. We won two of them.



### House District 89:

Win! 28-year-old Mitch Gore defeated incumbent Cindy Kirchhofer. Kirchhofer, who had been in office since 2010, is also the chairwoman of the Marion County Republican Party. Gore received 13,873 votes (51.3%), while Kirchhofer received 13,153 (48.7%). The margin of victory was just 720 votes. Act Indiana volunteers talked to 8,950 voters in this district, twelve times the victory margin. House District 89 includes parts of the east side of Indianapolis, including Beech Grove.

### House District 5:

Loss. Donald Westerhausen Jr. lost to incumbent Rep. Dale DeVon in St. Joseph County. This was a close race: 51.0% to 49.0%. DeVon won by fewer than 500 votes. We talked to 6,708 voters in the district.

### House District 81:

Loss. In Allen County, challenger Kyle Miller failed to unseat incumbent Martin Carbaugh. Carbaugh received 53.7% of the vote (10,504 votes), while Miller got 46.3%, or 9,069 votes. Our volunteers held conversations with almost 8,000 people in the district.

### Senate District 30:

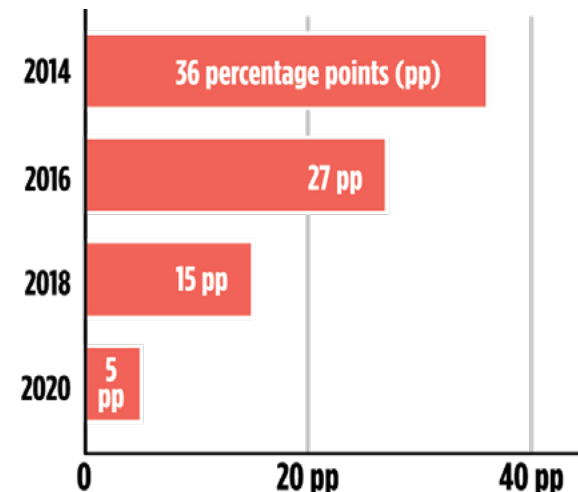
Win! Fady Qaddoura became the first Muslim elected to the state legislature when he defeated Sen. John Ruckelshaus. He received 52.5% of the vote, compared to 47.5% for his GOP rival, about a 4,000-vote margin in Senate District 30, which stretches from northern Indianapolis into southern Hamilton County. Our volunteers engaged 7,351 voters in Fady's district.

## WHAT THIS MEANS

Because of limited resources (both personnel and financial), Act Indiana focused on these offensive races. Unfortunately, Trump-inspired voters took back three legislative seats we had helped win in 2018. If we'd had the resources to fight on offense and defense at the same time in 2020, we might be celebrating our role in narrowing the GOP's majority in the state legislature. The races we lost were decided by small margins of a few hundred votes, however, so we are hopeful about retaking these seats in future elections.

The news was mixed in a contested congressional race. In the fifth congressional district, the most competitive congressional district in the nation (as well as the state), the Republican candidate, Victoria Spartz, defeated Democrat Christina Hale. The defeat was disappointing, but the trend was hopeful. In the last six years, the district has become bluer with each passing election. The GOP candidate won by 36 points in 2014, 27 points in 2016, twelve points in 2018, and just five points in 2020. Next time around, this seat could turn blue!

### INDIANA CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT 5 VICTORY MARGIN SINCE 2014



**THIS IS  
WHAT  
WE DID.**

## OUR PROGRAM

In one of the country's reddest states, Act Indiana has developed a winning strategy: organize year-round to engage people on the issues that matter to them. Equip them with research-tested narratives and a bold issue agenda. Campaign for policy changes that can improve the daily lives of regular Hoosiers. When the election rolls around, reach out to young people, women, and people of color – the new electorate who can tip the scales, if we talk to them. Fueled by a love of Indiana and a hatred of injustice, we work tirelessly to build power for the people who have been left out of our state's democracy.





OVERALL, HERE'S WHAT WE ACCOMPLISHED THIS YEAR:

840

HOOSIERS VOLUNTEERED TO TALK TO VOTERS

558,803

VOTERS ACROSS THE STATE WERE CONTACTED BY ACT INDIANA

73,039

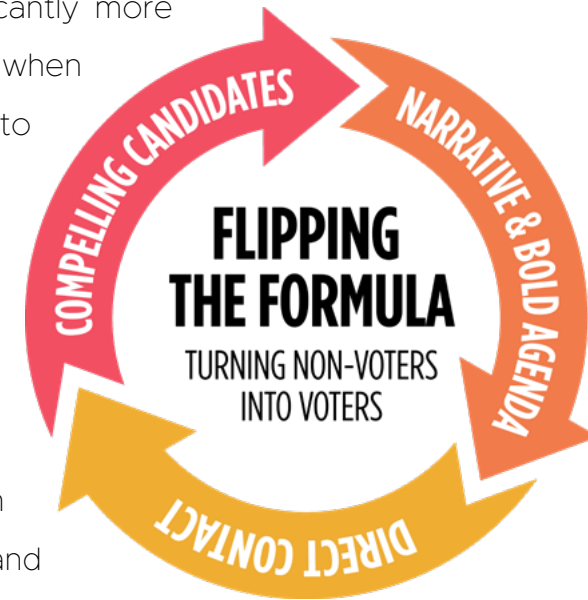
CONVERSATIONS WITH VOTERS

In our four target districts, we identified a universe of low-propensity voters, with a focus on single mothers, Black people, Latinx voters, and young people under 35.

We reached out to these voters in an unusual way. Unlike mainstream voter contact programs, in which canvassers deliver a quick pitch and then check off a box, we prioritized deep, meaningful, authentic conversations. Research suggests these [deep canvass conversations](#) are significantly more effective than the speedier variety, particularly when we use language and messages designed to dampen racial polarization and encourage a more inclusive, welcoming approach to politics.

Our conversations in the fall of 2020 weren't one-off chats with voters. We talk to the same voters every election cycle. We also engage them between elections, updating them on controversial issues in their communities and inviting them to take action for policy change.

Indiana is a diverse state, particularly in the urban and suburban counties where we work most intensively. So we ran a Spanish-language program to encourage Latinx voters to go to the polls. We worked with the Indiana Muslim Advocacy Network to co-host a Muslim-to-Muslim voter program. And we collaborated with Black churches to run a Souls to the Polls campaign.





## CHANGING THE ELECTORAL ENVIRONMENT

A few phone calls, no matter how meaningful, are no match for the media environment that today's voters swim in. Act Indiana worked with partners and the national Race Class Narrative Action project to change the conversation.

First we commissioned research to understand what kind of language and messaging would work best, both to inspire our natural allies (young people, people of color, etc.) and to persuade confused moderates.

Then we launched a surround-sound campaign to deliver this messaging through social media, earned media, paid advertising, voter contacts, and any other delivery vehicle we could think of.

Act Indiana trained 70 local partners, with the hope of creating an echo chamber effect, in which our messages reverberated from all sides. We used the banner of [#WeMakeIndiana](#) to dampen racial polarization and promote a narrative of inclusion and tolerance.

**195,290**  
voters reached  
through paid ads on social  
media, resulting in **637,297**  
individual impressions



**1,077**  
articles generated  
in news outlets across Indiana  
about the work of Act Indiana  
staff and volunteers



**172**  
leaders trained

in Race Class Narrative  
messaging, including clergy,  
elected officials, candidates  
for office, organizational  
directors and staff



**25,461**  
individual engagements  
with our digital ads, including  
watching most of a video,  
clicking through to our  
website, or sharing



## ACT INDIANA VICTORIES

Act Indiana doesn't exist to win elections. We exist to take back our state and make it work better for the people who have been left out and left behind. So it's important that in this election year, our grassroots organizing and outreach also produced critical policy reforms.

- Thanks to our work, the city of **Indianapolis passed the country's strongest civilian oversight over law enforcement.**
- We persuaded the mayor of Indianapolis to **dedicate \$25 million in rental relief fund to people struggling with the pandemic and the shut-down**, including undocumented immigrants.
- In South Bend, we **wrote new rules to hold police officers accountable for misconduct.**
- We persuaded Fort Wayne to **open COVID testing sites in Black and Latinx neighborhoods.**



## ANALYSIS

The GOP wins by keeping people from voting. Since 2010, the Indiana GOP has been systematically making it harder for people of color and urban residents to vote. Polls close at 6pm in our state, one of the earliest times in the country, making it hard for many working people to vote. Even during the pandemic, voters can only vote by mail if they will be away from home, are over 65, or have a documented disability or illness. Early voting was only permitted in urban centers, and even there it was tightly controlled to favor Republicans. In 2020, there were four early voting sites in the city of Indianapolis, population 876,000, while the white suburb of Hamilton County, population 338,000, had eight. Voters in Indianapolis waited in lines for hours.

**It turns out that voter suppression is highly effective.**

But for the last three years, Act Indiana has proven it can be overcome. In 2016, during the election that brought Trump to office, we won a ballot measure on public transit by 19 points, leading with a message of racial equity and inclusion. In 2018, we defeated the state's most notorious white supremacist, replaced him with Indiana's first out gay elected official, and sent both the first Asian lawmaker and the youngest legislator ever to the state house. In 2020, amidst a GOP rout, we flipped two Republican legislative seats. Our formula works. The only thing missing is adequate funding to apply it more widely.

## LOOKING FORWARD

2021 will be a redistricting year, in which the GOP will likely strengthen its grip on the state even more. And yet, despite this, there are grounds for optimism.

Indiana has lagged behind other Midwestern states in building a state infrastructure to advance Democratic goals. But no more. During 2020, Act Indiana worked with partners and philanthropists to create a state donor table, the Indiana Democracy Collaborative, to fund the work of social movement organizations and win elections and progressive policy. With unions, environmentalists, and other community-based organizations, we also launched two alignment tables (one for political work, one for non-political work) that will help member organizations coordinate their messaging, targeting, voter engagement, legislative priorities, and other strategies.

There is no magic formula for dismantling the power of a political party that has systematically weakened the avenues for democratic participation that could challenge its domination. The only way to change our state's politics is to build our power from year to year, from election to election, and strengthen public engagement between elections. The antidote to voter suppression is more democracy, more voting, more organizing, and more engagement of the community. Over multiple election cycles, we've demonstrated that our strategy works in Indiana, just as it worked in Midwestern swing states across the country in 2020. Now is the time to invest in the foundation we've set and bring it to scale.

How we move forward together from here is more critical than ever. Act Indiana's success provides a roadmap for the next decade. Only by continuing to grow a statewide, multi-racial movement across race, class, age, faith, and zip code will we counter cynicism and despair, reinstall hope in our democracy, and build a brighter future for Indiana: one where everyone is safe and free, with an economy and a democracy that work for us all.





We believe a fair and inclusive democracy is a key ingredient to propel Indiana forward. That's why we activate the leadership of youth, people of color, women, and people in poverty, to run large-scale electoral programs that engage hundreds of thousands of voters directly impacted by mass incarceration, mass deportation, and economic inequality. We align around a shared theory of change and equip our deep bases with shared tools and capacities to speak with the boldest voice possible.

Act Indiana provides movement leadership through the Faith in Action Fund, Community Change Action, and the Midwest Project of Race-Class Narrative Action.