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- To: Interested Parties
- From: Beatriz Lopez, Director of Political Research and Communications, Immigration Hub Sergio Gonzales, Executive Director, Immigration Hub

### Ref: President Biden and Democratic Immigration Solutions are Opportunities to Win the Debate and Voters [CONFIDENTIAL//POLLING INCLUDED]

#### **Introduction**

Immigration has played a pivotal role in shaping the public narrative and election cycles, up and down the ballot. Unlike in past election cycles prior to 2016, polling, social listening, digital research, partner analyses and election results now consistently show that Democrats can win the public debate and persuade critical voters by pushing forward their vision and solutions on immigration, and that Republican efforts to politicize the issue have backfired and have cost the party seats up and down the ballot.

A common and now outdated misconception is that humane and commonsense immigration solutions are a political loser for Democrats and their outreach to white working America or swing voters at large. Even now, some operatives and pundits continue to push the easy but baseless narrative that President Biden's approach to immigration, including the border, is a political liability for the 2022 and 2024 election cycles. Not only is this notion riddled with dog whistles and dated assumptions, memos outlining this framing are not backed with up-to-date facts, examples, or data. Simply, it may be one person's opinion, but it is not *public* opinion.

The Immigration Hub's previous and current research underscore what is now a tried-and-true strategy and trend: Democrats can effectively push back against the opposition's focus on fear and prevent voter backlash by **publicly articulating** bold, transformative immigration policies - much of which is reflected by President Biden's immigration plans - in stark contrast to the Republican hardline, cruel and ineffective immigration approach of the past.

The strategy is not to moderate immigration positions, but rather to lean in through a values- and solutions-based frame that demonstrates a seriousness to voters about tackling these challenges with a new vision for our immigration system. The following memorandum highlights findings and recommendations based on 2021 and previous research to recapture the public narrative, lay the foundation for critical victories in the next election cycles, and successfully modernize and move the nation's immigration system into the 21st century.

#### **Summary of Findings**

1. Immigation solutions work with voters-- both the base and the middle. Voters across the political spectrum believe the nation's immigration system is broken and want to see it fixed. As such, according to our <u>March 2021</u> <u>national survey conducted by Global Strategy Group</u>, voters are far more supportive of an approach that builds a functioning and humane immigration system over the "crackdown" approach of the Republican Party. Consistent with our previous research, the 2021 poll found that the majority of voters, including Independents, support fair and humane immigration solutions: citizenship for undocumented immigrants, smart border management, and a robust plan to manage migration in a orderly and safe way and by addressing the root causes of migration.

- 2. President Biden's immigration solutions for the border are highly supported when articulated. Currently, most voters do not know what President Biden stands for on immigration. When his solutions are articulated, however, there is a dramatic shift in support of Biden's approach to immigration and the border. The latest 2021 findings show a majority support for Biden's solutions and approach to the border, with or without Republican cooperation. This reflects the Hub's 2018 and 2020 research which showed that values-based, pro-immigrant messaging and policies are not only supported by battleground voters, but are also persuasive.
- 3. Immigration is an opportunity for Democrats, a vulnerability for Republicans. Ignoring immigration attacks is simply dangerous, and moderating on solutions does little to shift voter sentiment. When Democrats fail to articulate a bold, values- based vision for immigration, Republicans fill the vacuum and voters fail to understand what Democrats stand for. As our 2021 poll finds, voters want humane and fair solutions and do not believe Republicans are good faith actors on the issue and instead are opting to score political points. This belief is so deeply held that voters support Democrats going at it alone. Democrats have an opportunity to shift the narrative to win the public debate and gain or inoculate voters from Republican rhetoric and attacks.
- 4. Ultimately, immigration is a winning issue. Voter contact programs and research in 2018 and 2020 demonstrated that by contrasting Trump and Republican position on immigration with values-based, pro-immigrant messaging and solutions, including on the border, critical blocs of voters in battleground states can be persuaded to support Democratic candidates and inoculated against divisive, anti-immigrant attacks and policies. We saw this most notably in 2018 when voters overwhelmingly rejected Republican messaging around the "caravan" and opted for pro-immigrant candidates, helping flip the House. Delivering both rhetorically and legislatively on immigration increases voter support, not backlash. This is not lost on Republicans who are staging border visits in an attempt to balance their old playbook with feigned concerns over the treatment of migrant children -- a messy dance that has failed to work in their favor. Democrats can and should seize center stage to win the public and policy debate, laying the foundation for 2022 and 2024 gains.

#### Immigation solutions work with voters — both the base and the middle.

Consistently, the Immigration Hub's research has found that the majority of voters, including battleground voters, support solutions to fix America's immigration system and stand firmly behind the policies embraced by Democrats. In 2019 and 2020, we found that both swing and Democratic primary voters supported reforming the immigration system, reducing wait times for legal immigration and creating a path to citizenship, smart border management instead of a wall, an efficient and fair asylum process instead of separating families, and greater accountability at ICE. In fact, much of what we <u>determined among voters in</u> 2019, such as their support for increasing humanitarian efforts to protect migrant families and children at the border by ensuring better facilities, access to education, and child welfare and medical professionals, has continued to grow and underscore the fundamental adoption of progressive, values-based immigration policies.

Today, the trend in favor of values-based, pro-immigrant solutions continues. Polling continues to show consistently high public support for citizenship for the nation's undocumented, ranging from the 70th to 80th percentile of voters. In fact, a <u>poll</u> commissioned by FWD.us and America's Voice found **support for citizenship for Dreamers, farmworkers, and essential workers at above 70% among swing voters**. A <u>2021 Global Strategy Group national poll</u> was fielded in March in the face of an immigration news environment focused on the migrant situation at the border. The majority of voters, including Independents, are far more supportive of an approach that builds a functioning and humane immigration system over the Republican "crackdown" approach. **Consistent with our previous research, the 2021 poll found that the majority of voters, including Independents, support fair and humane immigration solutions: citizenship for undocumented immigrants, smart border managemenet, and a robust plan to manage migration in a orderly and safe way and by addressing the root causes of migration.** 

#### On citizenship for undocumented immigrants,

- Nearly three-quarters of voters (72%) support a pathway to citizenship for undocumented immigrants living in the U.S. if certain requirements are met, while just 28% support deporting them.
- 67% support the DREAM Act , including 88% of Democrats, 64% of Independents, and 45% of Republicans.
- 67% support citizenship for undocumented essential workers (just 24% oppose), including 91% of Democrats, 71% of Independents, and 40% of Republicans.
- 65% support citizenship for undocumented farm workers (just 27% oppose), including 91% of Democrats, 62% of Independents, and 38% of Republicans.
- Voters see these citizenship proposals as an opportunity to help America's economic recovery: 66% of voters see providing a pathway to citizenship to the aforementioned groups as helping our economic recovery over hurting it.

# On smart border management,

- By a 52%-41% margin, voters prefer "smart border management" to "strong border security," disproving the idea that all the public wants is strength at the border.
- 73% of voters agree that "improving technology and infrastructure at the border to modernize the way the border is managed" is an "excellent" or "good" idea.

# On managing migration,

- 58% agree that "the best way to handle migrants at the border is to build a functioning immigration system to process people in a humane way, while developing a robust plan to address the root causes of migration."
- Just 42% agree that "we need to combat migrant surges at the border with more border security, more border patrol agents, and crackdowns on illegal immigration." With Independents, the progressive solution wins by a 63% to 37% margin.
- 62% say it is an "excellent" or "good" idea to be "prioritizing keeping families together in all aspects of our approach to immigration," including 81% of Democrats and 57% of Independents.
- 66% say it is an "excellent" or "good" idea to be "creating a new, fair, and orderly process for those seeking asylum to apply in their home country to come to the United States legally," including 74% of Democrats and 63% of Independents.

Majority of voters, both the base and middle, support aforementioned immigration solutions which reflect President Biden's stated immigration plan and stand in contrast to the Republican draconian approach to the border, including increasing border agents and crackdowns on migrants.

# President Biden's immigration solutions for the border are highly supported when articulated.

In 2020, the Immigration Hub worked with BlueLabs Analytics to test a series of real-world political, immigration-focused ads on voters in the key battleground states where they <u>found</u> that not only did voters move away from Trump, but **Biden's vision for immigration reform drove voter enthusiasm in his favor, while also damaging Trump's support among crucial voting blocs: men and undecided voters**.

While voters view the situation at the border as serious, many are still unsure of where President Biden currently stands, which accounts for low support in the administration handling of the border. However, Biden's proposed solution to the border is popular with the public once voters hear the president's stance on the border. According to our latest poll, 63% approve and just 28% disapprove of Biden's approach to the border when explained in this way:

President Biden says that what is happening at the border is a direct result of a broken immigration system that has been ignored for too long. That's why Biden is working to safely and securely manage the southern border with new investments in technology and infrastructure, while also addressing the root causes of migration and building capacity to process migrants and children in a humane way that is in line with American values. The finding is in line with <u>previous research</u> and <u>voter outreach programs</u> that have confirmed when Democrats publicly articulate pro-immigrant, values-based messaging and policies, they gain support and can persuade voters or inoculate them against anti-immigrant attacks. By pushing forward the Democratic vision on immigration in contrast to the Republican agenda, Democrats can take a swath of critical voters - such as 'family patriots' who are mostly white, not college-educated, suburban voters - that Republicans (and previously Trump) bank on.

### Immigration is an opportunity for Democrats, a vulnerability for Republicans.

According to our <u>2021 poll</u>, Republicans in Congress are vulnerable on immigration should they continue to act as obstructionists and refuse to fix the problem. Democrats should be prepared to go it alone as voters prioritize effective solutions over bipartisanship. In message-testing, Republicans' greatest vulnerability on immigration is their refusal to work with Biden on solutions to the problem -- instead opting to score political points. By a 47% to 23% margin, voters see Republicans in Congress as "blocking President Biden from taking action" instead of working "with Biden on bipartisan solutions." And, when presented with a range of criticisms of Republicans' approach to the southern border, the following item is most concerning: *That Republicans in Congress refuse to work with President Biden on solutions to address what's happening at the border, instead opting to block everything Biden is doing on immigration to score political points.* 

Voters want solutions. So if Republicans are unwilling to come to the table and help fix the problem, this presents an opportunity for Democrats to deliver solutions they support. The public would prefer Biden solve the problem without Republican support than to do little on the issue.

- 64% prefer Biden and the Democrats "focus on doing what's necessary to fix the country's immigration system, even if it means doing so without Republican support."
- Among Independents, Biden and Democrats focusing on "doing what's necessary" wins by a 70% to 30% margin.

It's no surprise that now Republicans are trying to moderate their language on immigration as they stage visits at the border, feigning concern over migrant children after having enabled Trump's family separation policy.

# Ultimately, immigration is a winning issue.

In 2018, President Trump made immigration the focal point of the midterms and made clear that he believed it was "going to be an election about the caravan." From Lou Barletta and Scott Wagner in Pennsylvania, to Walker Stapleton in Colorado, Kris Kobach in Kansas, Scott Walker in Wisconsin, and a whole host of House and legislative races, the majority of voters roundly rejected these candidates and the Trump playbook of anti-immigrant political stunts and rhetoric they employed. The Hub also conducted ad tests, including Trump's anti-immigrant "caravan" ad, in both states and found that the majority of moderate voters were turned off by Trump and the GOP's extreme immigration rhetoric and policies.

In the same election cycle, Democratic candidates in battleground states and congressional districts who argued and demonstrated their support for Dreamers, immigrant families and fair immigration reforms gained major wins. Colorado's Governor Jared Polis and Rep. Jason Crow (CO-6), Rep. Colin Alred (TX-32) who expressed support for refugees and asylum, <u>Sen. Jacky Rosen</u>, and Wisconsin's Gov. Tony Evers are all models of victorious candidates in swing districts and states who drove pro-immigrant messages and positions forward despite their opponents' attacks on the issues.

In 2020, the Trump and Republican Party incorporated immigration into their fear based-messaging to scare swing voters against the "radical left". Three major battleground state polls, one <u>Michigan</u> poll on the presidential and Senate races, two <u>post-election</u> surveys of Michigan and Pennsylvania voters, and <u>ad testing</u> further demonstrated that voters at large disapproved of Trump's divisiveness, including his approach to immigration. Trump's immigration policies and disparagement of immigrants was considered by voters to be key contributors to his division. In fact, in a <u>post-election survey</u> of Michigan voters, Trump's divisive approach to the presidency was a key reason why he lost the election and his approach to immigration contributed to perceptions of Trump as "divider-in-chief".

As America's Voice noted in a <u>post-election analysis</u>, "Democrats <u>Ron Kind</u> (WI-03), <u>Colin Allred</u> (TX-32), <u>Elissa Slotkin</u> (MI-08), and <u>Anthony Brindisi</u> (NY-22), were all hit with ads attacking them for voting to give 'stimulus checks to illegal immigrants' under the HEROES Act. Kind, Allred, and Slotkin went on to win their races with the xenophobic dog-whistling attacks failing to move the needle enough for the GOP to flip these seats."

While the Republican Party's immigration strategy was a loser, our research from 2018 to 2020 consistently found growing support for pro-immigrant policies and candidates, including President Biden. As voters in battleground states moved further away from Trump and Republicans on immigration than ever before - a consequential backlash to Republicans on the issue - Democrats gained the edge on immigration. Voter outreach programs in 2020 centered on employing pro-immigrant, solutions-based messaging, ads and policies shifted voter sentiment on the issue and moved voters in favor of Democrats, such as President Joe Biden, Pennsylvania's <u>Rep. Susan Wild (PA-07</u>), Michigan's Rep. <u>Elissa Slotkin (MI-08</u>), Arizona's Sen. Mark Kelly, Georgia Lucy McBath (GA-6) and Colorado's Sen. John Hickenlooper.

This backlash against Republicans on the issue, and the Democratic advantage, is not missed on the congressional leaders. Recent visits to the border by a GOP delegation led by Senators Ted Cruz and John Cornyn of Texas have demonstrated how Republicans are trying to balance their old playbook with "concerns" over the treatment of migrant children. It's an attempt at a delicate messaging dance they still haven't quite figured out, which Democrats should fully seize at center stage with pro-immigrant, humane solutions.

In a <u>randomized controlled test</u>, conducted by BlueLabs and the Immigration Hub, of voters in Michigan and Pennsylvania before and after being exposed to the Hub's pro-immigrant content, swing voters moved toward Biden by five percentage points and away from Trump by seven percentage points - among other movements on views in favor of immigration policy solutions. As previously mentioned, another BlueLabs test also found that Biden's vision for immigration reform moved voters in favor of the president while a <u>2020 voter study</u> identified nearly 6 million swing voters in PA, MI, CO, and WI who moved away from President Trump and toward Democrats on vote choice when targeted with values-based immigration messaging.

The trend and opportunity stands true today as long as Democrats publicly deliver on pro-immigrant, values-based rhetoric and solutions. By doing so, Democrats can effectively position themselves as the serious actors on fixing what is broken, inform voters, gain their support on solutions already popular, and lay the groundwork for 2022 and 2024.