

To: Interested Parties

From: Immigration Hub

Date: April 18, 2022

Re: NEW BATTLEGROUND SURVEY - If Democrats hope to counter escalating Republican anti-immigrant attacks, they need to communicate popular solutions with voters

Background

The Immigration Hub commissioned a poll in battleground Senate states and congressional districts, fielded March 3 - 16, 2022 among 1,200 battleground voters with a 500 interview oversample of Latino voters in those same geographies. The public opinion research centered on identifying key voting blocs who are crucial to persuading and motivating on immigration in the midterms, measuring sentiment on key immigration policies, and determining winning immigration messages to both appeal to critical voters and counter Republican anti-immigrant attacks.

Key Findings

President Biden and the Democrats are facing a challenging political environment on a number of issues, including immigration. While immigration is not the top issue for a majority of voters, the findings do underscore that

- (1) the issue remains important to a segment of voters - made up of swing, Democratic base and Latino voters - who can be motivated and/or shifted on the issue, and
- (2) despite Republicans holding a notable communications advantage on immigration, Democrats can counter and remain competitive on immigration by communicating popular, balanced immigration solutions and messaging that avoid repeating GOP talking points.

The poll found that voters are mostly hearing from Republicans on the issue of immigration, creating an environment where misleading attacks are affecting President Biden and Democrats' ratings and misconstruing their position on the issue. This research provides a path forward for Democrats to counter anti-immigrant attacks and stand behind popular immigration solutions that can motivate key voting blocs.

- There are signs of a motivation problem among the Democratic base heading into the midterms, and talking about immigration in the wrong way to constituencies that care about it can contribute to the problem. **As such, Biden and the Democrats need to respond to Republican attacks, but must do so in a way that doesn't alienate their own voters.**
- **Democrats are still competitive with Republicans on the issue, trailing on the issue by just 3 points.** The path forward on the issue relies on talking about Democrats' immigration solutions, including President Biden's border solutions, in a way that is appealing to both swing voters and "immigration motivation targets" - Democratic base and Latino voters - alike.
- Immigration messaging approaches that rely exclusively on security or enforcement-only will turn off both "immigration motivation targets" and "Latino swing voters" and do not test significantly better with swing voters in general.
- **A majority of voters support several of President Biden's border solutions.** The most popular solutions to stress around the border include the president's efforts to crack down on cartels and human smugglers, invest in smart border infrastructure, create a fair and orderly process at the border, and prioritize families.
- **A majority of voters also continue to show strong support for highly motivating policy solutions for undocumented immigrants currently in the U.S.,** such as a path to citizenship for undocumented immigrants,

Temporary Protected Status for qualifying immigrants including Ukrainians and Cameroonians, and protecting Dreamers from deportation.

While immigration is not the top issue for many in the electorate, President Biden’s ratings are under water on the issue. Further, there are Democratic mobilization voters who are frustrated by a lack of progress on the issue, particularly Latinos.

While the top issues for most voters heading into the midterms continue to be inflation and the economy, far more than immigration, President Biden’s approval rating on immigration continues to be low (35% approve/56% disapprove – a -21 rating, similar to where his numbers were in polling conducted last year). **Among Independent voters, the President’s rating is even lower (-37), revealing a persuasion concern for Democrats.**

At the same time, Democratic voters are less motivated to vote than their Republican counterparts, and there is a sizable audience of potential voters who need to be engaged by the party to turn out this fall. **Within that mobilization audience, there is a group of voters we call “immigration motivation targets” – base Democratic voters who are both less motivated to vote this year and upset about policy inaction on immigration.**

This survey estimates each audience which either needs to be persuaded and/or motivated to be:

Immigration Swing Voters

- 14% of the overall electorate
- 25% of the Latino electorate

Immigration Motivation Voters

- 5% of the overall electorate
- 14% of the Latino electorate

Voters are not hearing enough from Biden and Democrats on immigration, leaving Republicans to fill in the blanks about where the party stands. A strong majority of voters (57%) say they hear more from the Republicans on this issue, while just 24% say they hear more from the Democrats. The consequence of that is that few voters know where the President or Democrats stand on the issue, and what they do hear is mostly negative.

- Just 30% of voters know “very well” where Biden stands on the issue and since May of 2021, there has been a 6-point decline in the share who say they know “well” where Biden stands on immigration (from 75% to 69%).
- Meanwhile, two-thirds (68%) of battleground voters say they are hearing negative information about how Biden is handling the issue (42% “mostly negative”, 26% “mix of positive and negative”). Just 17% say they are hearing “mostly positive” things.

Despite all this, there is opportunity in that Democrats are still competitive with Republicans on the issue: just under half (44%) of battleground voters still trust Biden and Democrats more on immigration while 47% say the same of Republicans.

The path forward on the issue relies on talking about Democrats’ immigration solutions and approach to the border in a way that is appealing to both swing voters and motivation targets alike. In talking about the border specifically, there are several popular ideas and solutions that are supported by swing voters and motivation targets alike:

- 66% of voters give a positive rating to “prioritizing keeping families together in all aspects of our approach to immigration,” including 60% of swing voters and 95% of “immigration motivation targets.”
- 66% of voters give a positive rating to “creating a new, fair, and orderly process for those seeking asylum,” including 58% of swing voters and 96% of “immigration motivation targets.”
- 81% of voters give a positive rating to “cracking down on illegal actions of cartels that cross our border and bring drugs like fentanyl into the United States,” including 74% of swing voters and 76% “immigration motivation targets.”

- 74% of voters give a positive rating to “improving infrastructure at the border to modernize the way the border is managed,” including 70% of swing voters and 85% of “immigration motivation targets.”

Beyond the border, Democratic solutions on immigration that focus on citizenship and legal status for the undocumented have always been popular and continue to be popular, with support from both the middle of the electorate and the Democratic base.

These issues are highly motivating for our mobilization target audience.

- 72% of voters, including 75% of swing voters and 99% of “immigration motivation targets,” say there should be a way for undocumented immigrants to gain legal status and a pathway to citizenship. Just 28% think they should be deported.
- 62% of voters agree that providing a path to citizenship for undocumented immigrants – like farmworkers, those who work in medical care, and those who have supported America’s small businesses throughout the pandemic – would help our economic recovery.
- 61% of voters, including 63% of swing voters and 99% of “immigration motivation targets,” support President Biden using Temporary Protected Status (TPS) to allow certain undocumented immigrants to stay and work in the U.S. Just 32% oppose.
- This support for TPS extends to both Cameroonian (65% support) and Ukrainian immigrants living in the U.S. (81% support).
- If DACA is struck down by the courts, 60% support and 29% oppose Congress taking action to provide Dreamers with permanent protections, as do 67% of Latino voters. Both swing voters (57%) and “immigration motivation targets” (98%) support this. Three in four Latinos (74%) also would feel upset if DACA was struck down by the courts, including 45% who would feel “very upset.”
- Additionally, 73% of voters support “a functioning immigration system, that works for both businesses and people,” that would improve our economy and allow “a way for immigrants to work here in a legal, fair, and safe way.”

Immigration messaging approaches that rely exclusively on “security forward” or enforcement-only approach will turn off both “immigration motivation targets” and “Latino swing voters” and do not test significantly better with swing voters in general. A more balanced approach is more effective. “Security forward” approaches like those listed below appeal strongly to Republicans and therefore often test well in broad-based polling, but **they backlash with both “immigration motivation targets” and “Latino swing voters.”**

- *A Democrat who says they oppose open borders and thinks we need to invest in border security to crack down on cartels and keep drugs and dangerous criminals out.*
- *A Democrat who says we need to address the migrant crisis at the border with greater investments in border security, including hiring and deploying more border patrol agents.*

The following more balanced approaches are appealing to swing voters and are also well received by the “immigration motivation targets” that Democrats need to mobilize.

- *A Democrat that believes that our immigration system is broken and supports a plan that solves the problem with smarter border management and creating a way for undocumented immigrants currently living in the country to earn citizenship if they meet certain requirements.*
- *A Democrat who believes that a functioning immigration system, that works for both businesses and people, would help improve our economy so that there is a way for immigrants to work here in a legal, fair, and safe way.*

Finally, it is worth noting that the “immigration motivation targets” respond most favorably to a Dreamer citizenship message, which is the best way to engage them on the issue.

ABOUT THIS SURVEY

Global Strategy Group*, in collaboration with BSP Research, conducted an online survey of 1,200 likely 2022 battleground voters between March 3-16, 2022. Half of the sample was composed of battleground Senate voters from Arizona, Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, Nevada, New Hampshire, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin. The other half of the sample was made up of House battleground interviews nationwide. There was also a 500 interview oversample of likely 2022 battleground Latino voters conducted by BSP Research. The survey had a confidence interval of +/- 3.1%. All interviews were conducted via a web-based panel. Care has been taken to ensure the geographic, political, and demographic divisions of the electorate are properly represented.

***Note:** The Immigration Hub commissioned Global Strategy Group and conducted the poll before it learned of the consulting firm's role with Amazon. Currently, the Immigration Hub has terminated all future work with Global Strategy Group.