



To: Interested Parties
From: Mark Riddle, President and CEO of Future Majority
Re: What Works and What Does Not Work
Date: January 6, 2021

Future Majority and our partner Change Research surveyed 1,474 voters in every Congressional district decided by 5 points or less in the 2020 election (37 total districts – 20 Dem/17 GOP) from December 29, 2020 - January 2, 2021. This survey reaffirms the findings of surveys with the 74,911 voters Future Majority has surveyed in battleground states over the past 36 months.

What Works

Future Majority tested nearly 20 short, three-word slogans and asked voters how likely they would be to consider or vote for a candidate if the slogan was all they knew about them. The bottom line is that the “For the People” message and more specifically its 3-point agenda, detailed below, works. It worked in 2018, when the whole House Caucus and all candidates ran on it, under the direction of the DPCC and DCCC, and it continues to work today. Party discipline around a unified message and an agenda is required at this critical time in order to avoid going backwards in 2022 and 2024.

- **“For the People”** is a broadly popular slogan, across every subsection of voters. 57% of voters would vote for or considering voting for a “For the People” candidate (62-4 Dems and 40-8 Independents) and is even positive among GOP voters (50-11).
 - We tested the longer “For the People” message that the House successfully used in 2018. “I am running on a “For the People” agenda to clean up corruption, lower health care costs, create jobs with higher wages for workers, and rebuild our nation’s infrastructure.” In this survey, **85% of voters** overall would vote for or consider voting for such a candidate versus only 6% who would vote for someone else. More on support around these specific policies can be found in our [October 2020 Governing Survey](#).
- In addition, there are slogans (or key phrases) that should be a part of Democrats’ everyday vocabulary including: **“working for working people,” “dignity of work,”** and **“personal freedom.”**
 - “Working for Working People” performs well with Democrats. 73% agree with that slogan vs. 3% who are against it. However, the reason we are not recommending this slogan is that is 10 points less resonant among Independents and 7 points less resonant with Republican voters compared to “For the People.”
 - 56% of voters would vote for or a consider a candidate that speaks to the **“dignity of work”** versus only 9% against.
 - **“Personal freedom”** is ranked as more important to voters than economic freedom (66% to 23%, 12% not sure). This cuts across age, race, identity, community type and gender. Democrats’ failure to engage with this issue has left it wide open for Republicans.
- We also looked at President-elect Biden’s slogan **“Build Back Better”** and one of the taglines used in their advertising “Build the Future.” Neither really achieve the intended goal, however, “future” tests 13 points better.

- Only 37% of voters would be more likely to vote for a candidate based on Build Back Better versus 50% who would be more likely to vote for a candidate based on Building the Future. Build Back Better backlashes with Independents (net -13) while Building the Future performs positively (net +12). We recommend the best way to handle this issue is make this a policy agenda on jobs and not lead with it in 2022. Though “future” is positive, voters have been shown in poll after poll to favor candidates who focus what specifically in the future the candidate is going to do. The correct answer is jobs, jobs, jobs.

What Doesn't Work (Hard Data Truths)

- **“Justice Democrat”** and **“Progressive Democrat”** receive strong negative backlash (25% for/45% against and 35% for/50% against, respectively).
 - Just 50% of Democrats themselves in these tough swing districts would consider or vote for a candidate that led with “Justice Democrat.” 75% of Democrats support “Progressive Democrat” but there is intense backlash among Independents (56% would vote for someone else). The idea that young people are drawn by these ideas is just that a myth. Only 25% of young voters would vote for a “Justice Democrat” versus 39% who wouldn't.
- **“Defund the Police”** is overwhelmingly negative. Only 20% of voters would vote for or consider voting for a candidate with the slogan, including only 41% of Democrats. The phrase backlashes with voters of color and white voters alike, including a sharp rebuke among people of color 65 years and older (13% for/75% against). Once again, despite Twitter wisdom, just 34 percent of all voters under 34 years old support the phrase.
 - We probed the internal argument among some Democrats on defund the police versus community policing. 40% of all Democrats back the phrase ‘community police’ versus 23% ‘defund the police’.
 - **A BIG WARNING SIGN:** As this is debated, keep in mind this question that we asked after seeing it on repeat on Fox News over the holidays: *Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: “Calls by far left Democrats to ‘Defund the Police’ are endangering and demoralizing the men and women of law enforcement who put their lives on the line every day, like those who rushed to the scene of the Christmas Day suicide bombing in Downtown Nashville”?* 64% of voters agree – including 70% of Independents.
 - [We have taken a deeper look at polling](#), Independent voters, and how they impact the outcome of general elections with our partners at Change Research.
- Two top progressive policy slogans, “Green New Deal” and “Medicare for All” really hurt our candidates with all voters:
 - Green New Deal: 36% for/50% against. 22% of Independents support.
 - Medicare for All: 42% for/47% against. 31% of Independents support.

Issues and Values

- And the winners are: Voters would be more likely to vote for a candidate if all they knew was that they supported the following progressive policies:
 - Fighting corruption: 89% for/1% against
 - Providing the same healthcare members of Congress receive: 77% for/9% against
 - Taking on China: 67% for/8% against
 - Immigration reform: 64% for/15% against
- However, many hot-button progressive policy snapshots produce a negative backlash with Independent voters, even while some are popular with Democrats.
 - Open Borders (19% for/64% against); only 40% of Democrats and 17% of Independents support
 - Socialism (24% for/59% against); 51% of Democrats and only 11% of Independents support.
 - Abolishing ICE (29% support/59% against); 61% of Democrats support, 19% of Independents support
 - \$15/hour minimum wage (44% for/43% against), extremely popular among Democrats but 53% of Independents oppose.
 - Building a green energy economy (Democrats - 89% for/2% against; Independents – 37% for/44% against). The climate agenda needs to be about the jobs of the future.
 - Tax the rich (51% for/34% against); 91% of Democrats support but only 38% of Independents support. Democrats should be specific on their tax plans as President-elect Biden did in the general election.

Closing frame:

- **Freedom** is the quintessential American value. 57% of voters cite “freedom” as the more important value to them versus 35% who cite “justice.” When asked to select two values, “equality” pops among Democratic voters, though “justice” resonates highly and equally among Democratic, Independent and even GOP voters. “Freedom” is far and away more important to voters than “capitalism” (79% vs. 11%).
- **Personal freedom** is ranked as more important to voters than economic freedom (66% to 23%, 12% not sure). This cuts across age, race, party, community type and gender. Democrats skew slightly more toward economic freedom. Voters overwhelmingly agree that “true individual freedom cannot exist without economic security and independence.”

- Progressives are right that voters are hungry for reform. 67% say that the U.S. government and economy are **“fundamentally broken and need large structural reforms.”** Only 11% say that they are “basically running fine and need no significant adjustments.” 63% of voters say that the government is working not too well or not well at all in their own lives (only 6% very well). If we get the words correct, the voters are ready. The most important reform, with 90% support, is anti-corruption.

Bottom line: Governing is Message

Democrats have to stop coming up with three-word slogans not based on data. And one has to think how the right will use it. Branding is an exercise that needs to be taken very seriously because the stakes are too high.

- An agenda matters more than a three-word slogan. But Democrats have to stop thinking we can force people who don't want them to eat their vegetables. It is killing us in elections.
- Discipline. Discipline. Discipline. Democrats are getting crushed by being negatively branded by right wing media as a result of sloppy language and misguided Twitter fever. Joe Biden won the Presidency with more votes and money than anyone in history without using dumb language that conventional political wisdom thinks works on Twitter or in fundraising emails.
- Democrats must make the American worker the hero of their story. According to our latest survey, battleground district voters already trust Democrats on issues involving racial justice (D+14), combating climate change (D+28), and improving the U.S. healthcare system (D+13). However, they fall behind on who is best equipped to address issues like jobs and the economy (R+9), cleaning up corruption (R+1), having a plan to get the economy back on track (R+5), and creating jobs in small towns and rural communities (R+11). Democrats must make up ground on economic issues, which is consistently the top driver of vote choice. President-elect Biden struck this balance and is a case study in ways Democrats can reclaim the mantle of leadership on economic issues while recognizing the shifting cultural landscape in America.

The travails of the Democratic Party over the last 40 years have taught us that if you don't brand yourself, you will be branded. Reagan did this to us, and Democrats have been victimized by the same tactics over and over again with no proper response, which is message discipline. Branding is not, and can never be, a casual exercise, based on hunches and gut feelings. If a large corporation had the kind of branding problems we might suspect Democrats have, especially with Independents, they would not have random employees of the corporation come up with whatever three-word slogans they wanted, and then start them as memes. When we tested some of the best-known ones, in tough swing districts across the country, there were highly negative results, predictably from Republicans, but Independents and even large portions of Democrats were allergic.

Incoming DCCC chair, Rep. Sean Maloney said, if you are not God, bring data. We couldn't agree more.