

TO: Interested Parties

FROM:



DATE: January 2022

RE: **Critical Takeaways from Deep Research into Americans for the Midterms and 2024**
(Pulled from Deep Dive Studies into the Democratic and Republican Party Brands, How Americans Know What's True, and Multiple Ethnographies of the Electorate in Florida, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Nevada, Virginia, and Texas)

Understanding the critical nature of the upcoming midterms and 2024, Future Majority and Way to Win joined forces to partner on a series of research initiatives to uncover a deeper understanding of what's going on below the surface in order for Democrats to more effectively persuade and mobilize multiracial voters.

What follows are a series of study findings that represent key insights about the American electorate to integrate into policy and messaging efforts for Democrats. The research in key states, which included voters from diverse backgrounds – white, Black, Latino, and AAPI – leveraged metaphor elicitation and long-form ethnographies in order to gain a deeper understanding of the American unconscious mind than might be obtained through traditional research efforts and get at the “why behind the what.” Through this methodology, we can surface not only what voters are thinking about but why they think and feel as they do.

We worked with 289 “gettable” voters in these studies – from soft Trump to strong Biden – across all races, and varying education-level, economic-status, age, and geographical backgrounds, and it stood out that these voters saw the world in more aligned ways than one might think. They are exhausted by COVID, they are worried about their children getting a good education, they want better jobs with better pay and benefits as they see costs increase, they are worried about racism and discrimination and they want better infrastructure and a government that is on their side. **Democrats can tell a powerful story that unites this multiracial coalition, which includes white voters and voters of color.**

The number one thing that we saw in the research after listening to voters in every state we were in is that they don't know, nor understand what the Biden administration has done to improve their lives, and they consistently said they wished more would have changed like Biden promised in the 2020 campaign. Moreover, they do not believe that the things he has done will benefit them personally. The critical opportunity is to communicate that Democrats have delivered tangible benefits to their lives and to clearly identify the forces keeping them from making the system more fair.

Research Summaries by Topic and State

SWING STATE STUDIES

FLORIDA | WHITE VOTERS

1. We must reclaim Family, Finances, and Freedom - the three most important values to white Floridians.
2. We have to seize on policy opportunities dropped by Republicans (unemployment, potholes), and clean up our own policy missteps (gas prices, the cost of the ACA, economic messaging and education), all while speaking the same language as Floridians.
3. We have to understand and connect with the emotion behind the policies, driving Floridians' voting behavior. White Floridians want and need to be acknowledged for being good citizens.

NORTH CAROLINA | NEW BIDEN VOTERS, BLACK/LATINOS, WHITE SUBURBANS

1. In North Carolina, voters want to be in control of the chaos around them (COVID, Climate Change, Cost of Living) but don't want the government to control them.
2. There's also a good deal of tension that showed up in the state — Black/Latino voters want a piece for themselves while White Suburban voters want to hold onto their own pie. We have to find a way into abundance vs scarcity — creating an economy with larger or more pies so that everyone has enough.
3. North Carolinians are aware of corruption- and they're over it. They want a government that's representative and responsive, that listens, that authentically represents them, and delivers.
4. Our voters want to build prosperity (they want to build wealth through higher paying jobs while saving money on the cost of living), preserve their future (whether it's their family legacy, stopping the pandemic, or addressing climate change) and want the freedom to thrive (enjoying their families and each other without excessive government control).

NEVADA | MULTIRACIAL COALITION, CLARK COUNTY

1. Nevada must be for Nevadans - not for tourists, not for Californians, not for corporations (but they will take the money).
2. And Nevadans need to see how the government is making that happen for them. They need to see the plan forward and their role in it. This is a conspiratorial bunch — transparency is key.
3. We have to deliver on policies that clear the way for Nevadans to achieve their dreams (delivering jobs that pay well, meaningful public health measures [COVID/addressing the drought], affordable housing, and creating a sense of order (addressing rising crime/homelessness)).
4. Despite being anti-vax, anti-mask and prolonging this pandemic with their anti-science positions, Republicans are not being blamed for the continued pandemic.
5. And we must remember that the government is an assistant to success — Nevadans value freedom and want a government that serves them, but doesn't get in the way.

PENNSYLVANIA | ALLEGHENY/PHILADELPHIA AND SMALL TOWN VOTERS

- 1.** We have a fragile coalition in PA. We're losing men of color who often sound like Republicans (e.g. freedom, success, prosperity and wealth building) and feel that the Democratic party takes them for granted.
- 2.** Pennsylvania voters feel stuck when it comes to being heard and getting things done. They're tired of old systems and old ways of doing things (e.g. red lining, unresponsive government, PennDot and the *&!*@ potholes) and want to build new roads to the future.
- 3.** Voters' patience is running thin with the administration's lack of progress. They're tired of paying too much and waiting too long, creating opportunities for Republicans. They want the admin to deliver, take off the kid gloves and fight.
- 4.** We need to speak to and make policies around the two big dreams our voters hold — accessible, affordable healthcare for all and being financially free and able to thrive.
- 5.** PA voters prioritize family and education, and have a lot of lingering anxiety about COVID and paying the bills — all areas Democrats could tap into.

VIRGINIA | MULTIRACIAL COALITION

- 1.** Our voters want someone who works for them, not Trump. Leaning into kitchen table issues from COVID (let's kick it to the curb already, while not shutting down the economy) to the cost of living (higher wages), instead of conservative talking points and inaction that do nothing for the people of Virginia.
- 2.** Remind voters that a better future is possible with Democrats. They've gone through a tough time and they're not feeling safe, prosperous, and free. McAuliffe needs to remind voters of his plan to keep everyone safe (from COVID to gun safety to racism), his plan to create prosperity (by investing in our kids, raising wages and being a good steward of Virginia's natural resources, and his plan to keep everyone free (protecting women's freedom over their own bodies).
- 3.** We need to remind voters what we have to lose. The radical right is anti vax, anti women, anti climate — and Virginians, both now and into the future, deserve better than that. Together, voters of all backgrounds and races can create a better Virginia for everyone.

TEXAS | MULTIRACIAL COALITION ACROSS ENTIRE STATE

1. Multiracial voters, even in the Dem base, don't feel valued by their government and don't feel the positive impact of the Biden Administration in their lives. The concrete benefits of the Biden economy, American Rescue Plan and the Infrastructure bill should be played on a broken record across Texas.
2. Voters feel that Gov. Abbott overstepped by passing "reckless" laws like permitless open carry, the anti-abortion law and the prohibition of mask mandates. Freedom and safety were huge themes in what voters care about, from the desire to legalize marijuana to concerns about school shootings.
3. Democrats need to be prepared to speak to the issue of safe communities with these voters (which includes crime, COVID, school shootings). Views on crime were mixed - many participants felt safe in their communities but thought crime was bad elsewhere, while others (AAPI, Suburban Latino, Suburban Black) did not feel safe in their communities.
4. Voters were dismayed by the increased cost of living – especially housing and healthcare – and failing of infrastructure, particularly the electrical grid and education system. Increasing funding for schools was a runaway winner in an exercise that enabled voters to design their own state budget. Texas energy politics are challenging, but Dems have an opportunity to lead on the build out of sustainable energy infrastructure, which appealed to these voters, especially young voters.
5. For voters living around the border, anxiety still looms large, and they are looking for leaders to embrace some kind of immigration reform. Many voters empathized with immigrants and people crossing the border, while many, especially Latino voters in border areas, felt that this had led to "chaos," and wanted clearly established rules and more order.

Brand Study on Democratic and Republican Party

Democrats are bunnies and snails and are associated with the future (but Americans are afraid of the future). Republicans are scary but good at money. Democrats need to tell a better story about how their policies open doors of opportunity and that under their leadership, the economy has actually gotten better for Americans. Also, Democrats ought to continue to embrace the language of investment and talk about economic freedom, ensuring that Americans are the shareholders of the American economy, not just bystanders or servants to it. Lastly, Democrats must remember to keep calling people in, not out. We are supposed to be the nice ones.

The Truth Study

It's bad out there, but most believe truth exists and truth really matters when it comes to our kids. Our social media ecosystems set us up to fail and people lack skills to manage it (it's possible they'll never be able to have enough skills to manage it). Human stories and facts with a history seen as more truthful. Switching truths sparked by incongruence, corruption, and a change in context. We need off ramps for people coming over to our side and a means to bolster people on the journey of changing their minds, by encouraging people to go from certainty to uncertainty. There is a truth nihilism we're seeing on the far right, that may only be healed by cultivating a sense of empathy (in them), as seeing other human perspectives as worthy of consideration requires empathy.

3 Big Takeaways from All Our Research

1. VOTERS ARE THE HEROES OF THE STORY

It's not about the politicians, it's about the people – their work, their hopes, and their dreams. Americans, and American workers in particular, need to see themselves as central to the narrative of getting through COVID and given a sense of their role into the future. They see corporate greed as a driver of economic inequality and want leaders who will stand up to corporate power. Voters by and large want racial harmony but in some ways have bought into the GOP's narrative that it's Dems who are racially “divisive” – so we need to fight that. Voters responded positively to stories that named GOP extremism as a villain, tying the Jan. 6 Capitol attack to their extreme views on other issues, including COVID and reproductive freedom.

2. WE CAN DEFUSE GOP CULTURAL ATTACKS BY RESPONDING AGGRESSIVELY AND TALKING ABOUT WHAT WE SUPPORT

Republicans have openly stated their entire strategy will revolve around divisive, status-threat based cultural issues: schools, CRT, policing, immigration, LGBTQ rights, masks/vaccines, etc., and the right's media machine can make these issues salient at will. We saw plenty of early evidence of the effectiveness of this strategy in our studies. Status threat is a potent trigger for voters because it taps into Americans' feeling that they have limited control, needing to be affirmed and acknowledged for being good citizens, and wanting to feel part of a good legacy. But it's also true that voters are already largely with us on the need for Democratic priorities. Just going on defense won't be enough to overcome cultural attacks. But there's mounting evidence we can defeat them by coupling pragmatism with a strong case for our ideas, while setting up a contrast with Republican obstruction, inaction, extremism, and use of racial division.

3. OUT WITH SCARCITY, IN WITH ABUNDANCE

In America everyone wants a piece of the pie. Voters who don't already have some want some for themselves while those who do, want to hold onto their own piece. This tension has become ever greater recently as the American Dream is increasingly feeling further out of reach for our voters, and with increased cost of living, this feeling has compounded. Democrats need to meaningfully acknowledge this tension that voters feel, talk in real terms about how we solve it together, and share a hopeful vision of the future with voters that includes everyone where every person has enough. For example, when presented with an article about how the economy performs better under Democrats across nearly all metrics, voters were receptive to this argument, but still weren't sure it meant better results for them. Connecting these dots for voters is a big potential opportunity for Democrats.

Conclusion

To win the midterms and set the stage for winning in 2024, we recommend the following:

- Stay focused on getting through COVID, jobs and the economy, and cost of living. Americans want to know you're listening, they want to know you care, and they need to know that someone is looking out for them and responding to them on the federal level.
- Keep Americans front and center — voters are the heroes of the story, and in particular the American worker. They need to see themselves as central to the narrative, be acknowledged, and given a positive future vision where they - and everyone - has enough of the pie.
- Because voters are not feeling the positive impact of the Biden Administration in their lives, the concrete benefits of the Biden economy, American Rescue Plan and the Infrastructure bill need to be played on a broken record starting yesterday.

We have the vision and policies that invest in all Americans to move past this COVID moment and win America's future.

Endnotes

Please scan the QR codes to learn more.



**Way to Win Midterm Message
Project Research Hub**



Future Majority Research Hub