



# Engagious

**FPG** Focus Pointe  
Global

## **SWING VOTER PROJECT (SVP)**

REPORT FOR JUNE 2019  
ERIE, PENNSYLVANIA

### OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH:

Engagious conducted a focus group in Erie, PA on June 3, 2019 with eight “swing voters” who voted for President Obama in 2012 and then President Trump in 2016. We explored questions and topics surrounding the President, Democrats running for president, and 2020 issues more broadly.

### DISCLAIMER:

The key findings in this report are based upon the opinions and feedback from eight swing voters in one location. They are not a representative sample, nor should they be viewed as such.

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Example: “30% of female respondents disagreed with the Medicare statement” (according to research conducted by Engagious/FPG).



## 1

ERIE SWING VOTERS ARE USUALLY “CHANGE VOTERS,” BUT FOR 2020 THEY’RE STICKING WITH TRUMP—AND THINK IMPEACHMENT IS A TERRIBLE IDEA THAT WOULD BACKFIRE ON DEMOCRATS.

A number of our respondents wanted change from Bush, so they voted for Obama. Then they wanted change from Obama, so they voted for Trump. Many see themselves as “change voters,” but with the 2020 election cycle gearing up, they aren’t looking for a change from Trump. Instead, most want to further the change they have experienced during Trump’s presidency.

If another presidential election were being held tomorrow between Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton, seven of the eight swing voters in our focus group would vote for Trump again. And, if the U.S. Constitution didn’t prevent presidents from serving a third term, and former President Obama became the Democratic nominee to challenge President Trump’s re-election, again, seven of the eight swing voters would support Trump’s re-election—even though they had voted for both men previously.

When we asked respondents what they like about President Trump politically, they cited:

- He’s different, not a politician.
- His economic policies, which have reduced the unemployment rate and the number of people on welfare.
- He understands finance and the whole corporate structure, suggesting that’s helpful to American businesses.
- He’s not a pushover to other countries.
- He’s in favor of the wall at the southern border.
- His America-first policies

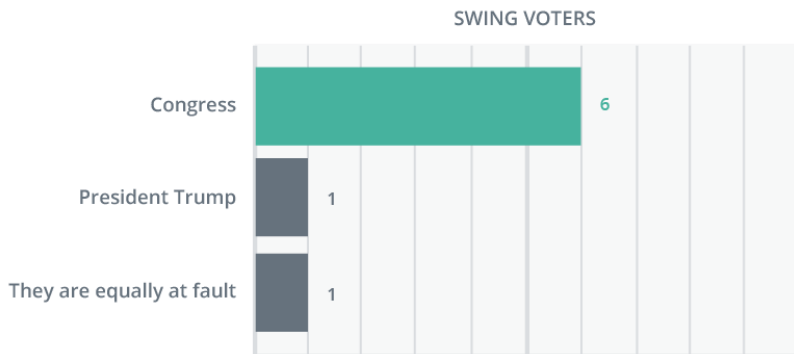
We also asked what the single most important characteristic is that they want in a leader.

They offered:

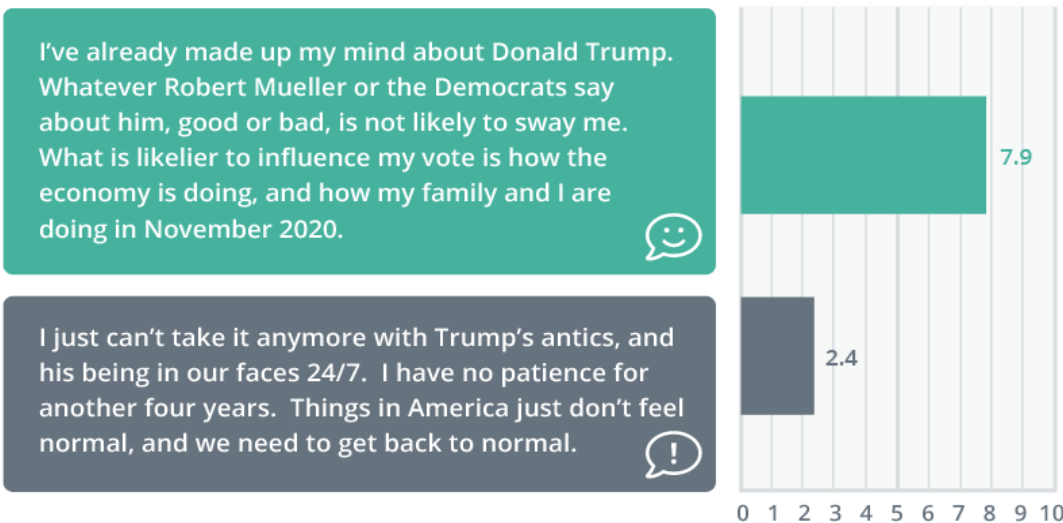
- Tolerant and Christian
- Integrity
- Problem-solver
- Strong
- Educated and assertive
- Negotiator with strong leadership abilities
- Follows through
- Powerful



Swing voters in our focus group believe the President possesses many of these characteristics. However, many believe Congress is getting in the way of helping our country move forward. When asked: “Who’s more responsible for the ongoing tensions between Congress and President Trump?” swing voters responded:



During the focus group, we asked swing voters to tell us how much they agreed or disagreed with the following statements about President Trump, on a zero to 10 scale. Zero means they totally disagree and 10 means they totally agree.



There is no appetite for impeaching the President, with respondents scoring it at 0.9/10, on a zero to 10 scale of “strongly oppose” to “strongly support.” Only two of the eight swing voters believe it would be a wise political step for Democrats to impeach the President, considering they want to win in 2020. The group explained that if Democrats want President Trump out of office, they need to defeat him. If they start impeachment and it doesn't end with Trump's removal from office, they'll “stir the pot more” and rally support around him, making it easier to re-elect him. They also believe pushback against Democrats would be “extreme” if they were to fail in their efforts to remove him from office through impeachment.

## 2

## AMONG THE “SENIOR CITIZEN” PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES, JOE BIDEN IS VIEWED AS POSING THE BIGGEST THREAT TO PRESIDENT TRUMP’S RE-ELECTION.

During the focus group, we showed respondents approximately two minutes of campaign ads from each of the five “senior citizen” Democrats running for president (all are age 67+). Afterward, we asked how concerned they would be if they were in President Trump’s position and had to consider the electoral threat posed by these candidates on a scale from zero (not at all concerned) to 10 (very concerned). On average, this group believes President Trump should be most concerned about Joe Biden (6.3/10), followed by Bernie Sanders (5.8/10), John Hickenlooper (5.5/10), Elizabeth Warren (5.3/10), and Jay Inslee (3.3/10).

They didn’t react favorably to Joe Biden’s ad, which focused on the protests in Charlottesville that turned violent and resulted in the death of a young woman. Half of the respondents believe that Biden’s claim that President Trump called neo-Nazis and white supremacists in Charlottesville “very fine people” was a “complete lie.” However, there was a general perception in the group that Biden is more of a moderate Democrat and would pose a significant risk to the President’s re-election.

Swing voters generally believe that Bernie Sanders is sincere about his opinions on public policy, but his ideas are seen as “unrealistic” and they are skeptical that the “socialism” he is advocating would work. They wonder where all of the money would come from to pay for his proposals, including free college.

Hickenlooper’s ad scored very well in the dial test, steadily increasing from beginning to end. He has a compelling personal story. To these swing voters, he seemed like a regular guy—not a politician—who has experienced unemployment and was still able to come back and succeed in business. They feel good about him as a person and what he has accomplished, although some are skeptical that he knows enough to run the country. One respondent remarked that he focused so much on his personal story that he didn’t talk about the policies he supports or what he would do in office—and they wanted to hear more about that. Based on the results of the dial test, Hickenlooper is one candidate to keep an eye on in the Democratic primary.

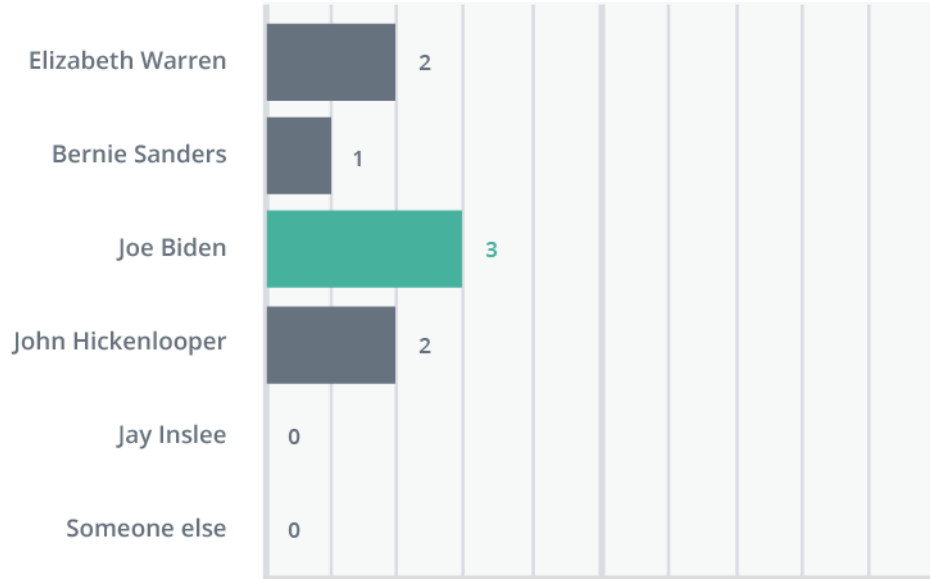
Warren was described as a “powerful speaker” who “connects well” by talking about families and the middle class, but they questioned her honesty on multiple fronts. First, in her ad, she said she never thought about running for office, “not in a million years,” which they found hard to believe. Second, some in the group believe she lied about being a Cherokee Indian, and they dislike the dishonesty.



Inslee’s ad was narrowly focused on addressing climate change, which is not a winning strategy. The group questioned whether he knows about the other issues. This makes him seem like a one-issue candidate—and if climate change isn’t the issue they care most about (and it’s not)—his candidacy won’t resonate.

We also asked:

*If Democrats choose as their nominee the one person who is most likely to beat Donald Trump, they would nominate...*



Four of the eight swing voters believe Biden looks too old to be President, but none said that would be disqualifying for them.

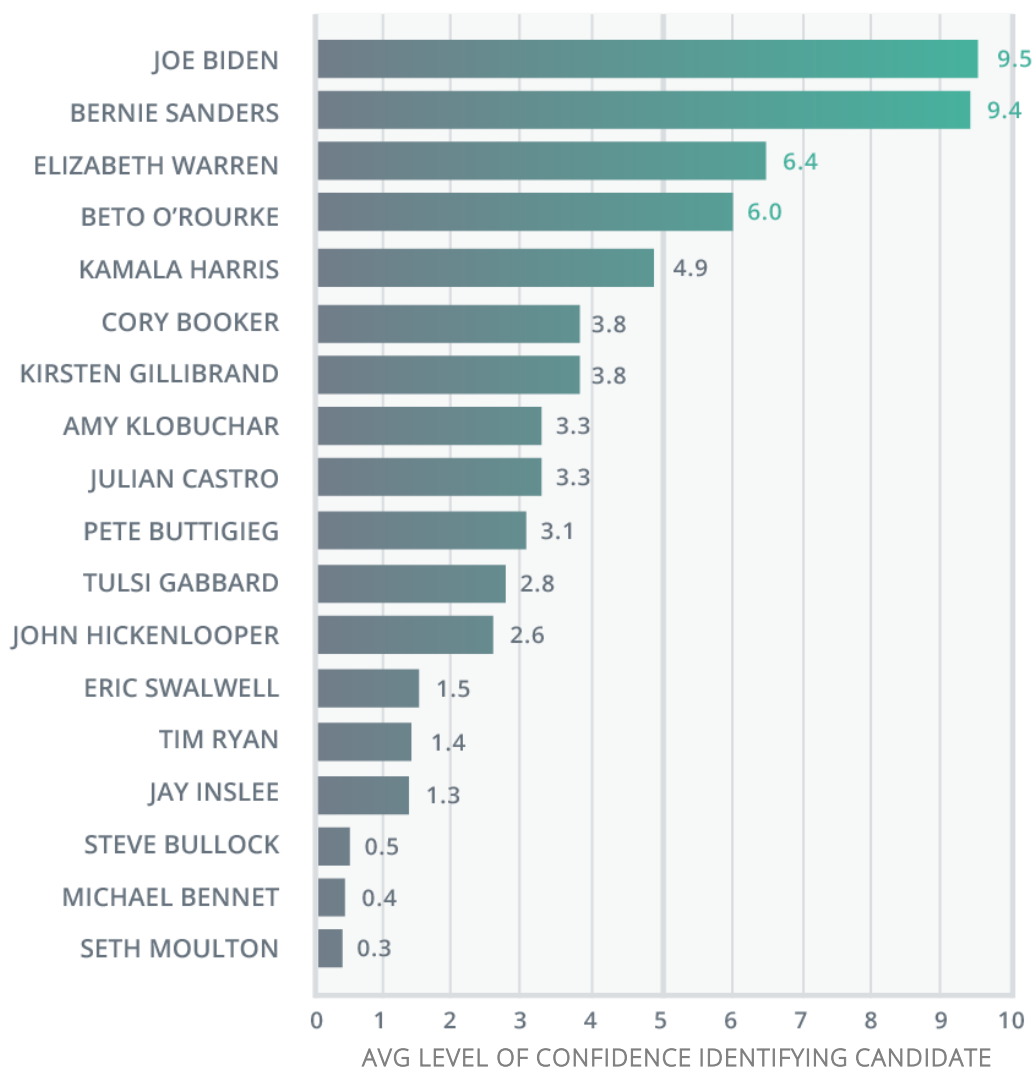


3

BIDEN, SANDERS, AND WARREN ARE THE MOST RECOGNIZABLE CANDIDATES RUNNING FOR THE DEMOCRATIC NOMINATION, WHILE O'ROURKE CONTINUES TO GAIN STEAM.

Respondents indicated with dials their level of confidence in being able to identify unlabeled photos of each of the Democrats running for President in 2020, on a zero to 10 scale. Zero means they had no idea who the candidate is, and 10 means they were totally confident they know who the candidate is.

The following chart shows the results, on average, in descending order:



## 4

## THE MOST IMPORTANT ISSUES HEADING INTO 2020 RELATE TO THE ECONOMY, HEALTHCARE, IMMIGRATION, EDUCATION, AND ABORTION.

In the beginning of the focus group, we asked respondents to name their top issue of concern heading into 2020. They cited:

- Economic issues (3)
- Healthcare (2)
- Immigration (2)
- Education (1)
- Abortion (1)

Also, we asked them to tell us one thing a presidential candidate could propose that would help them personally economically. We heard:

- Make college education more affordable (e.g. student loan debt relief, lower the interest on student loans, make college more accessible) (3)
- Fix and/or protect Social Security (3)
- Reduce healthcare premiums (1)
- Get rid of lobbyists (1)

Swing voters strongly agreed that “Congress should take bipartisan action to improve retirement security for American workers,” scoring it 8.9/10 on a zero to 10 scale of agreement. When asked what they want Congress to do, we heard it should fully fund Social Security, raise the FICA tax, protect private pensions, and protect Social Security from people who are abusing it (people receiving SSI who never contributed much to the program and who have many children receiving those benefits, as well).

## 5

## THESE SWING VOTERS FEEL STRONGLY THAT THE ECONOMY HAS GOTTEN BETTER SINCE TRUMP BECAME PRESIDENT. ALMOST ALL WOULD SAY IT’S “BOOMING.”

With the unemployment rate at 3.6% nationally, the lowest it has been in five decades, and the stock market hovering near an all-time high, these swing voters say the economy for America overall has gotten better since Donald Trump became president, scoring it 7.6/10 on a scale from zero, “gotten much worse,” to 10, “gotten much better,” since that time. For them and their family, they have a similar sentiment with regard to the economy, scoring it 7.5/10 using the same scale. Seven of the eight swing voters would describe our economy as “booming.” They cited the new jobs being created, the increases in the stock market, and increasing wages (for some people). However, none of the respondents in our group have seen a noticeable increase in wages since the President took office.

## 6

## SWING VOTERS SUPPORT THE PRINCIPLES DRIVING PRESIDENT TRUMP'S TRADE POLICIES, INCLUDING PROTECTING AMERICAN JOBS AND FAIRNESS FOR OUR COUNTRY.

These swing voters strongly support the Trump Administration's trade policies, scoring them at 7.9/10 on a zero to 10 scale of "totally oppose" to "totally support." A slight majority knows the administration has negotiated a replacement trade deal for NAFTA, and it is currently negotiating a new trade deal with China (five of eight, for each). When they were told that the US-Mexico-Canada Agreement, the replacement for NAFTA, contains changes that have stronger labor rules and stronger intellectual property protections, seven of the eight swing voters told us Congress should approve it.

Erie swing voters support the Trump Administration's efforts to place tariffs on the imports of certain goods (7.5/10). Notably, all eight swing voters believe that America's efforts to secure a fairer trade deal with China, to help American exporters and to protect our intellectual property is worth the financial pain from higher prices on imports we buy from other countries. Only three of eight know about tariffs on imported steel.

In principle and spirit, Erie swing voters agree with the President that tariffs would help to keep jobs in America, make us more competitive with other countries, and provide long-term benefits by sticking up for our country. They recognize the short-term downside of increased prices, but they don't see the higher prices as permanent. However, if a trade war were to drag on and the increases in prices were sustained over a long period of time, the President could be vulnerable politically, especially from those who are struggling financially and working multiple jobs to survive.

Right now, even if a "trade war" with China causes prices to rise noticeably for them and their family, it wouldn't significantly erode their support for the President. On a zero to 10 scale of "my support for him would erode substantially" to "my support for him would grow substantially" if prices were to rise noticeably for them and their family, the average score was 5.6/10.

Six of the eight swing voters indicated that they haven't noticed that prices are rising for the things they buy in recent months.

Finally, it's important to point out that this issue remains distant in their minds: none of these swing voters know anyone who has been helped or harmed by the President's trade policies, and only one knows anyone who has been harmed by higher prices from imports.





## 7

## THE MUELLER REPORT DOESN'T MATTER VERY MUCH TO THEM—AND ALMOST ALL IN THE GROUP QUESTIONED ITS INTEGRITY.

When asked to rate on a scale from zero to 10 how much the Mueller Report and the issues around it matter to them (“doesn’t matter at all” to “matter a lot”), they scored it at 3.9/10. Respondents told us that the legal basis for creating the report lacked legitimacy because most of the people on the investigative team had been on the payroll of Hillary Clinton. Mueller’s job as a prosecutor was to determine whether those under investigation were guilty or not guilty of criminal activity. In their view, the Mueller Report did not follow through with the original intent of the investigation. Instead, he is handing it off to Speaker Pelosi, whose caucus may impeach the President.

There was no collusion with the Russian government, and swing voters questioned how you can obstruct if there was no collusion. There was a sense in the group that Mueller’s team really wanted to “get” Trump on something, but they were unable to, so it seems doubtful that the President did anything wrong. Also, they questioned how long Mueller and his team knew there was no collusion—and whether they prolonged the investigation to hurt Trump in the 2018 midterm election. Some swing voters believe the Mueller investigation has obstructed Congress’s ability to take on other priorities for the country, which troubles them.

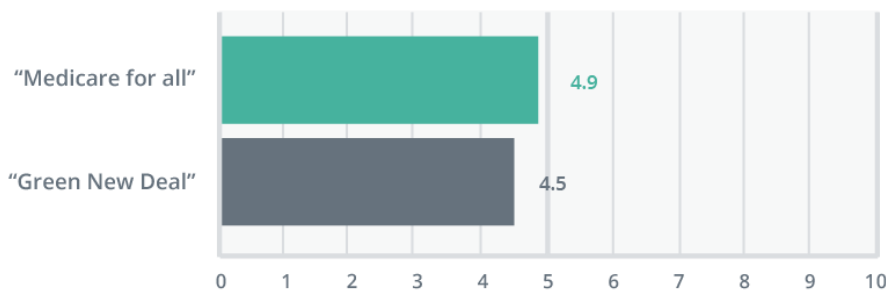


## 8

MONTHS INTO THE 2020 CAMPAIGN, SWING VOTERS HAVEN'T HEARD MUCH ABOUT THE DEMOCRATS' PRIORITIES OF "MEDICARE FOR ALL" AND THE "GREEN NEW DEAL."

During the focus group, we asked:

*"How much news have you heard over the past several months about a concept called..."*



The aspect of "Medicare for all" that stands out to this group is that it will be expensive. They are skeptical it would be a "great fix" for our healthcare system, with one respondent pointing out that Canadians who need surgery come to the U.S. for it, suggesting their single-payer healthcare system is not working very well. Also, some wondered how it would work and if it would cover illegal immigrants.

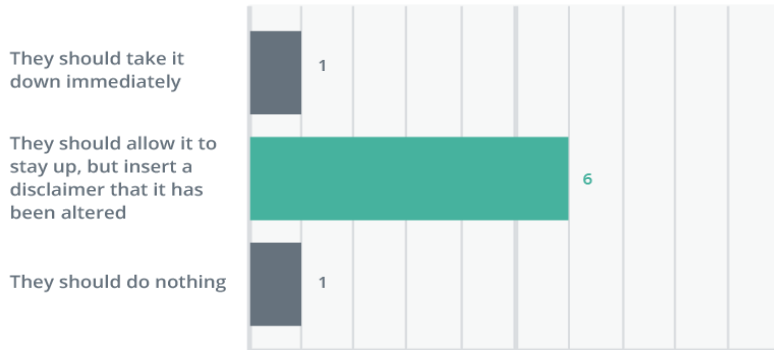
With regard to the "Green New Deal," respondents have heard that Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez is leading the effort to get it passed, and to many it doesn't sound like a realistic plan, and it would impact our transportation systems, including airplanes and cars. We heard that some technologies would be more effective in certain areas of our society than in other places, so the plan doesn't sound feasible based on what our swing voters have heard.

## 9

## SWING VOTERS BELIEVE THAT ALTERED POLITICAL VIDEOS SHOULD STAY UP ON SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS, WITH A DISCLAIMER.

During the focus group, we asked:

*“Once they become aware of content like [the doctored Pelosi video] on their sites, what is the proper response of social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter?”*



Respondents told us that if the social media sites were to have a blanket policy of taking such content down immediately, people are going to be upset. If a video has been altered, they believe it is sufficient to have a disclaimer because it would highlight the truth about the content, and it would shine a light on the “bull-shitter.”

## 10

## SWING VOTERS WILL NOT PUNISH TRUMP POLITICALLY IF STATES TIGHTEN THEIR ABORTION LAWS OR IF *ROE V. WADE* IS OVERTURNED.

Erie swing voters have heard a lot of news lately about abortion. They support the efforts of various state governments to enact strict new restrictions on abortion, responding on a zero to 10 scale of “strongly oppose” to “strongly support” with an average score of 6.5/10. Most notably, when asked how the states’ enactments of strict new restrictions on abortion or having the U.S. Supreme Court overturn *Roe v. Wade* would affect their vote for president next year, none of the eight swing voters indicated it would make them any less likely to support the President. In fact, in both scenarios, it would make a few slightly more likely, on average, to support the President’s re-election. These respondents said they do not like the idea that in some areas of the country abortion is all-but-promoted (rather than looking for other options), and that some Democrats tolerate infanticide.

## 11

## SWING VOTERS SOMEWHAT AGREE THAT COMPARED TO WHEN THEY WERE MUCH YOUNGER, THE WEATHER SEEMS “WEIRD” AND “WARMER NOW”.

Our swing voters agree that the weather now seems “weird” (5.5/10) and “warmer now” (6.1/10) compared to when they were much younger. They cited a shift in our seasons (summer starts and ends later, in July, August, and September), unusual rain cycles disrupt farmers, winters are colder and springs wetter, there is less snow, autumn is warmer, and extreme temperatures occur at unexpected times.

It’s important to note, though, that climate change is only a top-five issue for two respondents who believe it’s a serious problem for our environment. Two others say it’s a top-five issue because we need to stop liberals from expanding government to fix the problem, and four say it’s not a top-five issue because many other issues matter to them more than this one, including jobs and healthcare. Most would not hold it against a candidate who is serious about addressing climate change. In fact, several told us they are troubled that the President has called climate change a “hoax.”

Our swing voters would like to see us shift toward a clean energy future. Right now, only two of the eight swing voters believe the U.S. is winning the economic race for jobs in wind, solar, batteries, and other clean energy industries, with six saying Europe is winning that race and none saying China is. However, they are hopeful for the future of these industries in the U.S. All eight swing voters believe that 30 years from now, the industries that tomorrow’s adults will be working in are wind, solar, and renewable energy rather than coal, oil, and natural gas.

Among our swing voters, there is no consensus regarding the impact of Pennsylvania’s energy industry, specifically natural gas, on climate change. We asked them to complete this sentence: “By being a major producer of natural gas, Pennsylvania is...” Two respondents said, “worsening the climate change problem” three said, “helping fix the climate change problem,” and three said, “no idea one way or the other.”



## 12

THERE IS FAIRLY STRONG SUPPORT FOR  
INFRASTRUCTURE SPENDING—AND THEY WANT LARGE  
AMERICAN CORPORATIONS TO PAY FOR IT.

When asked how important it is to them that infrastructure legislation is drafted and passed into law within the next year or two, swing voters rated it at 6.6/10, on a zero to 10 scale from “not at all important” to “very important.” They believe the benefits they would receive are safer roads and bridges that would last longer and improved water infrastructure for the city of Erie. There is strong agreement among the respondents that because President Trump is a “builder,” they expect him to lead our country in building and upgrading our infrastructure, rating that at 8.1/10, on a zero to 10 scale of “totally disagree” to “totally agree.”

To pay for infrastructure, we presented a number of options and asked them to rate on a zero to 10 scale how strongly they would support different proposals. The idea they support most is placing a new tax on large American corporations, such as big banks (6.5/10), followed by increasing the federal gasoline tax, which has remained flat at 18.4 cents per gallon since 1993 (3.9/10), and borrowing the money from other countries (1.5/10). We heard large American corporations, such as big banks, can afford to endure another tax to pay for infrastructure.

