



# Engagious

**FPG** Focus Pointe  
Global

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

REPORT FOR SEPTEMBER 2019

APPLETON, WISCONSIN

### OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH:

Engagious conducted a focus group in Appleton, WI on September 16, 2019 with nine female swing voters: seven who voted for President Obama in 2012 and then President Trump in 2016, and two who voted for Mitt Romney in 2012 and then Hillary Clinton 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 nine swing voters in one location. They are not a representative sample, nor should they be viewed as such.

### TERMS OF USE:

Recipient is free to reuse content within this document such as data, quotes, and visuals. Content usage must be accompanied by a written citation in the body copy of the content or article, with a link back to the original web page:

<https://engagious.com/swingvoters/>

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



1

THE MOST IMPORTANT ISSUE FOR APPLETON SWING VOTERS HEADING INTO 2020 IS FOREIGN POLICY / THE POSSIBILITY OF WAR. ON AVERAGE, THEY VIEW NATIONAL SECURITY AS MORE IMPORTANT THAN THE HEALTH OF OUR ECONOMY WHEN THEY VOTE.

In the beginning of the focus group, we asked respondents to name their top issue of concern heading into 2020. They cited<sup>1</sup>:

- Foreign policy/the possibility of war (5)
- Cuts to public programs (e.g., Medicare, Medicaid, mental health, food programs) (2)
- Immigration (taking American jobs) (1)
- More equal rights (1)
- Abortion rights (1)

The issue of foreign policy/the possibility of war was a consistent area of concern for swing voters throughout the session.

If our swing voters were advising the president's Democratic challenger and were asked to come up with a phrase built upon "Make America \_\_\_\_\_ Again," they would choose:

- **Safe** (3)
- Real/Realistic (2)
- Successful (1)
- Proud (1)
- Moral (1)
- Free (1)

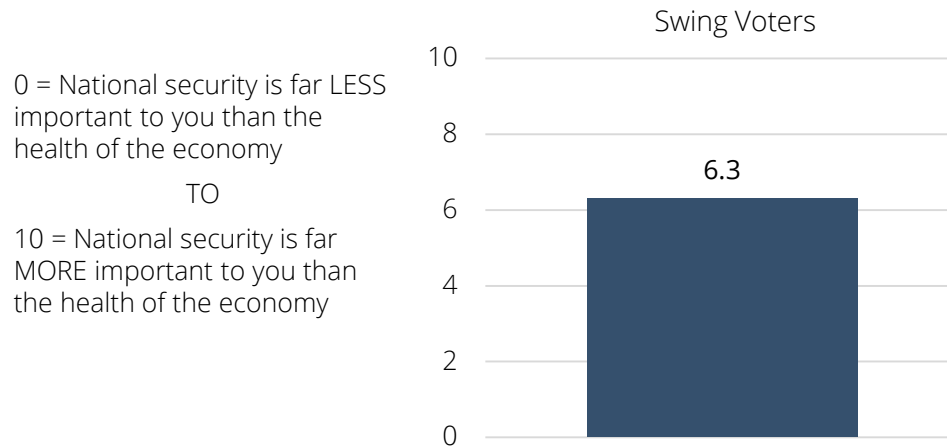
---

<sup>1</sup> Note: One respondent provided two answers.



This is further supported by the response we received to a question we asked later in the session:

Imagine you're standing in the voting booth in November 2020 and about to cast your ballot. You may be thinking about the issues that matter to you. Compared to the state of the economy, how important are national security issues (North Korea, Iran, Russia, etc.) to you when you vote next year?



In our discussion, some of our swing voters confirmed that national security is more important when they vote than the health of the economy. One swing voter explained:

*"The economy could be great, but if we're fearful for our lives every day...To me, it's not all about the money. If I can feel safe and sound in my own country and not have to worry about North Korea and not have to worry about every time you turn on the news that some other way that we're fighting with someone else—to me, it's just way more important than the health of the economy is."*

*– Jodi, Romney-Clinton voter*

## 2

FATIGUED SWING VOTERS IN APPLETON WOULD LIKE TO SEE TRUMP FACE A PRIMARY CHALLENGE; EVEN A STRONG ECONOMY MAY NOT SECURE SWING VOTER SUPPORT IN WISCONSIN.

If another presidential election were being held tomorrow between Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton, six of seven Obama-Trump voters would stick with the president; both Romney-Clinton voters would stick with Clinton.

Hypothetically, 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, only four of seven Obama-Trump voters would vote for Trump again. President Obama would peel off three Obama-Trump voters, and both Romney-Clinton voters would also vote for President Obama. Those who would vote for President Obama told us that they are troubled that Trump doesn't act "more presidential." One swing voter remarked that Obama was "more calm" and "Trump is driving me nuts."

We asked swing voters to tell us how they feel when they watch President Trump on TV or on their device. They offered:

- Annoyed (3)
- Frustrated (2)
- Confident (2)
- Disgusted (1)
- Irritated (1)

Those who are experiencing Trump fatigue say he's a "loose cannon" and some fear we will end up going to war as a result. They also criticized him for his "Twitter rants." In fact, when we asked swing voters to rate how they feel about President Trump's tweets, on a scale from zero to 10 (from "I hate them" to "I love them"), they scored it 2.7/10.

While they don't like his tweets, they also don't particularly trust the media's coverage of President Trump, on average, scoring it 4.6/10 (from "totally mistrust" to "totally trust").

Swing voters strongly agree that "it would be good for our country if at least one Republican ran against President Trump in the primaries next year," scoring this 7.8/10 (from "totally disagree" to "totally agree"). Those who want to see President Trump face a challenger told us "he's too sure of himself" and "there have to be better options than him."

Notably, only one swing voter knows that the president is being challenged in the 2020 Republican primaries. When showed unlabeled photos of each of his challengers, the candidates were barely recognizable on a zero-to-10 scale: Mark Sanford (1.0/10), Joe Walsh (0.8/10), and William Weld (0.2/10).

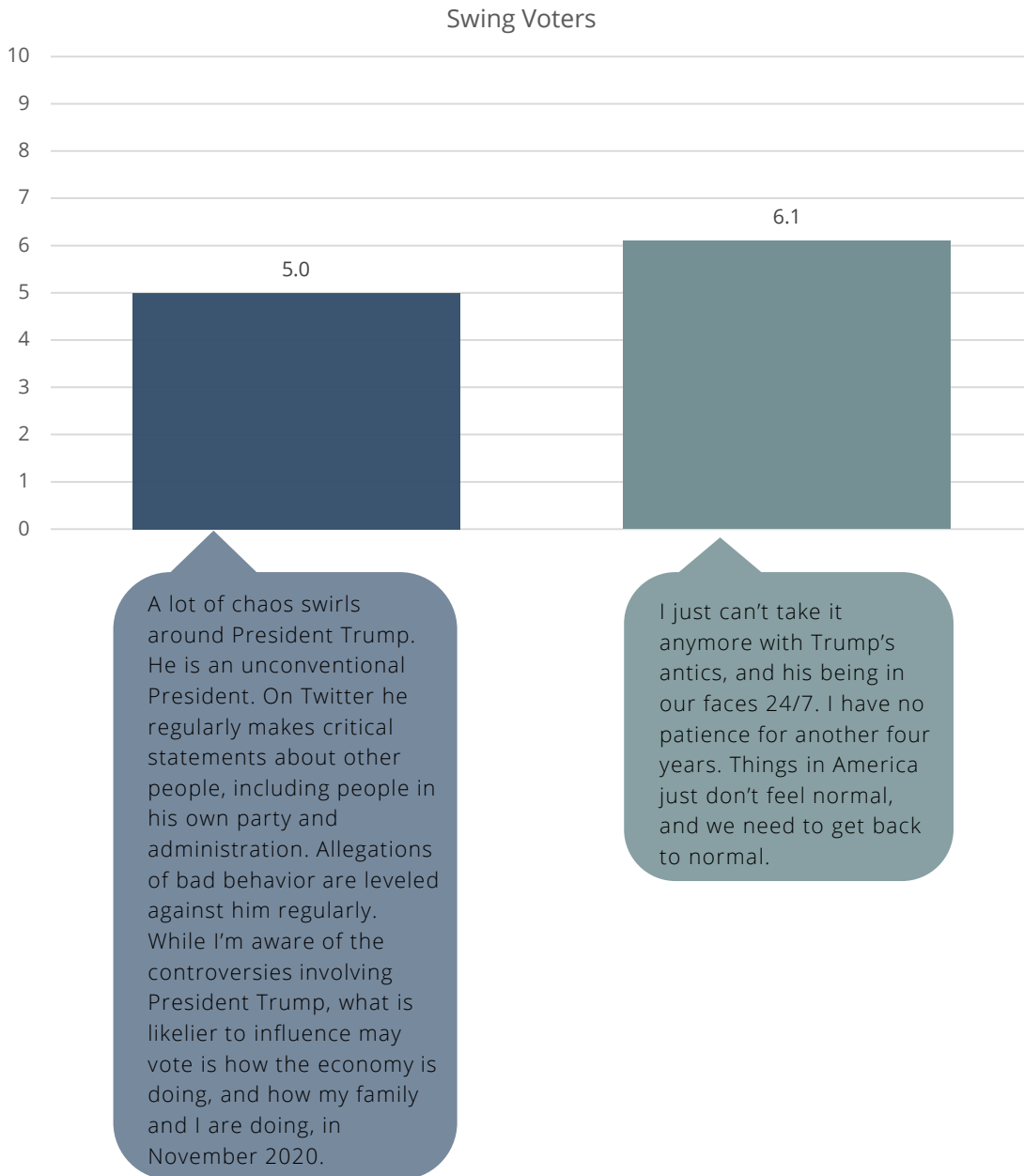




When we asked respondents what they like about President Trump politically, they cited<sup>2</sup>:

- He follows through on what he says he'll do (5)
- He's not a politician (1)
- He'll make good financial choices because he's a businessman (1)

Respondents told us how much they agreed or disagreed with the following statements about President Trump, on a zero to 10 scale. Zero means they totally disagreed, and 10 means they totally agreed.



The first score of 5.0 shows it's not just about the economy for these respondents; the president's behavior is part of their calculation, which is different from what we've heard recently in Minnesota and Michigan, where the president's behavior was discounted more.

<sup>2</sup> Note: Two swing voters provided no answer, saying they couldn't think of anything they like about him politically.

## 3

THERE ARE A NUMBER OF QUESTIONS THAT SWING VOTERS WANT BOTH DEMOCRATS RUNNING FOR PRESIDENT AND PRESIDENT TRUMP TO ADDRESS DURING THE CAMPAIGN.

During the focus group, we asked swing voters to tell us what questions they would ask the Democrats running for president and President Trump.

Swing voters would ask Democrats:

- Where are you going to take our current state and bring it forward in a positive manner (on every issue)?
- What are your plans for healthcare?
- What are your plans for immigration?
- How are you going to defeat President Trump?
- How do you think our government is running? How do you feel President Trump is doing?
- What's your strategy for getting along with other countries?
- How are you going to unite the party?

Questions for President Trump included:

- Could you put down your phone at 3 a.m.?
- Why are you cutting funding to public health programs?
- Why aren't you talking about the national debt?
- Will you ever release your taxes?
- How can you not realize you're not a good role model?
- Are you going to continue to try to "Make America Great Again?"



## 4

## SWING VOTERS BELIEVE THE ECONOMY HAS GOTTEN BETTER FOR THEM AND THEIR FAMILY AND FOR AMERICA OVERALL SINCE TRUMP TOOK OFFICE, BUT SOME THINK A RECESSION IS LOOMING.

With the unemployment rate at 3.7% nationally, nearly the lowest it has been in five decades, and the stock market hovering near an all-time high, swing voters, on average, believe the economy for them and their family (6.1/10) and for America overall (6.4/10) has gotten modestly better since the President took office (on a zero to 10 scale from the economy has “gotten much worse since Donald Trump became president” to “gotten much better since Donald Trump became president”). Two would describe our economy as “booming,” while everyone would describe our economy as “growing.” Interestingly, none of our swing voters have seen a noticeable increase in their wages (only small increases, if any)—and none blame the president for that.

Notably, they are somewhat pessimistic, on average, about the direction of the economy, with the group saying it’s fairly likely that the U.S. economy will enter a recession sometime in the next year (5.6/10), on a zero to 10 scale (from “no chance it will enter a recession” to “it’s already in recession”).

We told our swing voters to assume for a moment that an economic recession occurs before the next election and asked them how that would affect their view of President Trump. On a scale from zero to 10 (from “my support for him will erode substantially” to “my support for him will grow substantially”), swing voters scored this 4.2/10. This indicates that a recession in the next year would threaten the president’s bid for re-election.

We asked about the direction of our country and the direction of Wisconsin. Swing voters, on average, scored the direction of Wisconsin higher at 6.0/10, while they scored our country 5.0/10 (from “totally wrong direction” to “totally right direction”). In the group, we heard that they don’t like some of what President Trump has been doing, including on immigration, while they support their new governor’s efforts to improve education.

Also, the issue of wealth inequality is not particularly troubling to swing voters. We asked:

Over the past several decades there has been a growing gap between the very rich and everyone else in American society. How much does this problem trouble you, if at all?

On a scale from zero to 10 (from “it does not trouble me at all” to “it troubles me a lot”), swing voters scored this 5.3/10.

## 5

WARREN'S POLICIES OF LEFT-WING POPULISM  
SUPERSEDE PRESIDENT TRUMP'S POLICIES OF RIGHT-  
WING POPULISM, BUT SWING VOTERS DON'T LOVE HER  
PERSONALLY.

Near the end of the session, we showed respondents a chart with two columns. The left column contained the following policy ideas:

- Impose an annual 2% tax on every dollar of net worth above \$50 million, and a 3% tax on every dollar of net worth above \$1 billion.
- Impose an additional 7% tax on any corporation with profits above \$100 million.
- Cancel \$50,000 in student loan debt for every person with household income under \$100,000.
- Pass a Medicare for All plan and make large corporations and wealthy people pay for it.

The right column listed the following policy ideas:

- Build a wall between the U.S. and Mexico.
- Ban citizens from certain countries from coming to the U.S.
- Impose tariffs on goods coming from China and Mexico, to force these countries to negotiate more favorable trade deals with the U.S.
- Weaken Obamacare with the goal of dismantling it.

Then, we asked our swing voters to imagine that these are their two policy choices next year, and we asked which one they would select. Seven of our nine swing voters chose the left column, which is representative of Warren's policy ideas; two chose the right column, which is representative of President Trump's policy ideas.

Swing voters said the left column displayed policy proposals that would address their financial struggles, including student loan debt and the cost of health insurance. To them, canceling significant student loan debt and providing Medicare for All to people sounds appealing. Also, some in the group believe the wealthy should be paying more taxes because "it helps everyone in the long-run."

Swing voters told us that the right column's policy ideas don't really help a lot of people like the policy ideas in the left column would. The problem for Warren, though, is that our swing voters don't really like her. Some dislike the way she acts, based on the debate video clips they watched, and none would say they "feel passion for her." However, if she is able to increase her likeability over the course of the campaign, she would pose a strong challenge against the president in the general election.





## 6

## OUR SWING VOTERS GENERALLY DO NOT HAVE CONCERNS ABOUT VOTING FOR A FEMALE PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE, BUT THEY COMMENTED ON WHY OTHERS MIGHT.

We asked our swing voters how much they agree or disagree with the following statement, on a scale from zero to 10 (from “totally disagree” to “totally agree”):

In general, I have some concerns about voting for a female Presidential candidate.

This scored 3.3/10. We followed up asking if they know someone personally who did not vote for Hillary Clinton specifically because she is a woman; two respondents told us they know someone who did not vote for Hillary Clinton for that reason. When asked what concerns they think are out there about a female candidate for president, that they or other people may have, respondents told us that some may feel women are too “soft,” too emotional, and it would be really hard for “man-based governments” to deal with a woman president (e.g., China, North Korea). They may view her as “not strong enough” and try to take advantage of our country. Also, it would be challenging for a female president to be seen as a leader in a male-dominated Congress.



## 7

## SWING VOTERS BELIEVE THE DEMOCRATS' POLICY PROPOSALS SOUND FAIRLY REALISTIC—AND THEY EVEN MAKE THEM MORE LIKELY TO VOTE FOR THE DEMOCRATIC NOMINEE IN 2020.

During the focus group, we learned that eight of our nine swing voters watched no more than 15 minutes of the most recent Democratic debate (if any at all), which lasted nearly three hours. One watched more than two hours. Then we showed an 11-minute video montage from the most recent Democratic debate, where the candidates outlined some of their policy proposals. After the video, we asked swing voters to provide feedback. We asked them to tell us, taken together, how realistic these candidates sound, on a zero to 10 scale (from “completely unrealistic” to “completely realistic”). They scored this 6.4/10, suggesting they think these ideas are fairly realistic. We followed this by asking how the policy options offered by these candidates might impact their vote in 2020, on a zero to 10 scale (from “much more likely to vote for the Democratic presidential nominee” to “much more likely to vote for President Trump”). Swing voters scored this 3.9/10, which is notable because seven of our nine respondents voted for Trump in 2016, and now, as a group, they are leaning toward the Democratic presidential nominee.

Swing voters described the policy options offered by the Democrats as “thoughtful,” “well-planned,” “hopeful,” “encouraging,” and “interesting.” Some of the negative feedback included “broad,” “too good to be true,” and some were described as “ridiculous.”

We were also interested in hearing from swing voters if any of the candidates look too old to be president. Five said yes, and four said no. Bernie Sanders looked and sounded too old according to these respondents, but they didn't think Biden did. One remarked that while Biden looked old, he behaved much younger.

The highest-scoring dial test debate snippet occurred when Warren was speaking about Afghanistan, which included her saying, “We cannot ask our military to keep solving problems that cannot be solved militarily.” She also talked about the importance of working with our allies to address terrorism. This scored in the low 90s (on a zero to 100 scale, from “dislike” to “like”). It was the highest-scoring clip throughout the seven months of this project. This makes sense given these swing voters' concerns about foreign policy and getting involved in war.

Also, Warren talking about trade scored very high, reaching the mid-80s. Swing voters really liked the idea of giving everyone a seat at the table (unions, environmentalists, etc.) to discuss our trade issues. They said more diversity of opinions will produce better ideas.

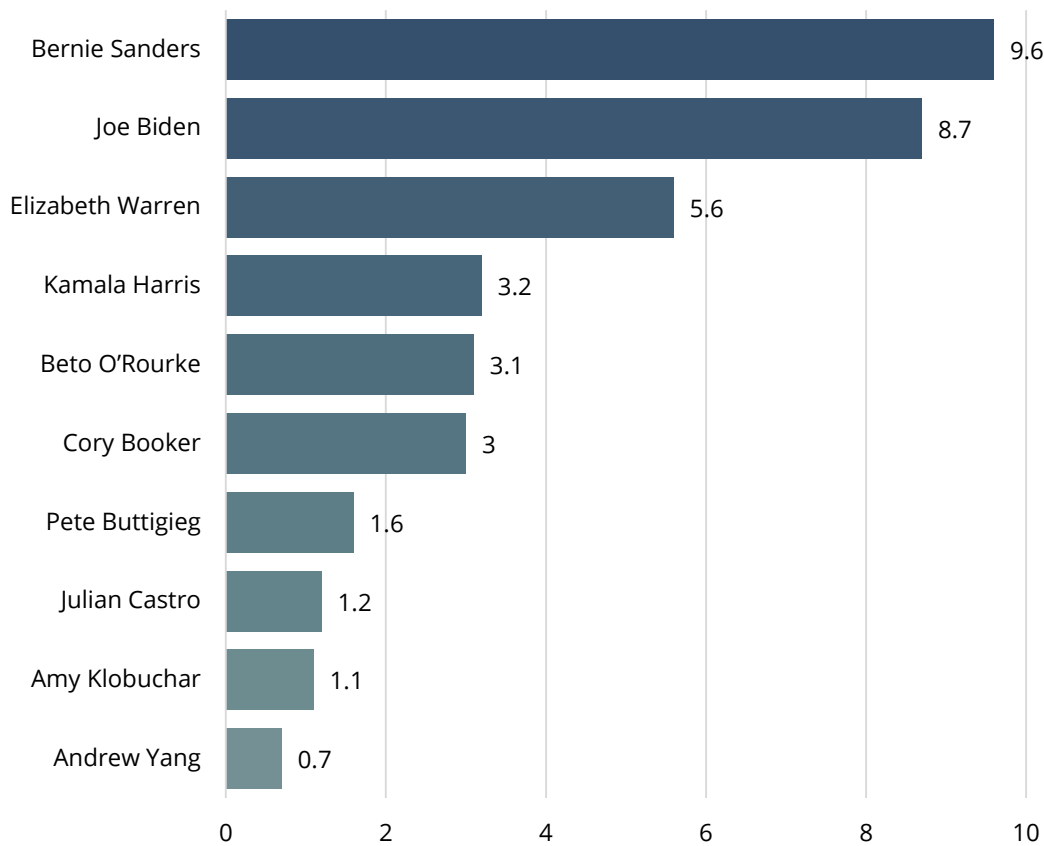


## 8

## SWING VOTERS STILL AREN'T VERY FAMILIAR WITH THE DEMOCRATS RUNNING FOR PRESIDENT OR THEIR POLICY PRIORITIES.

Respondents used dials to rate on a zero to 10 scale their level of confidence in being able to identify unlabeled photos of each of the Democrats running for president in 2020 who made the debate stage this month. 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:



Months after Democrats began announcing their candidacies for president and following three primary debates, swing voters still don't know who most of these candidates are. In fact, we also showed an unlabeled photo of Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez to find out how recognizable she is to swing voters. She scored 1.8/10 (much lower than in other recent groups), but still making her slightly more recognizable than four of the 10 Democrats running for president who we asked about. Even among the most recognizable candidates, they know very little.

Notably, we asked swing voters at the beginning of the session where they get most of their news. All of them cited local news (TV or online) as a major source for their news. Only one of our nine swing voters told us she watches cable news. Where they get their news has a significant impact on their potential exposure to these Democrats running for president.



Some knew that Sanders is a U.S. Senator, but only one knew he is from Vermont. Most know that Biden was the Vice President under President Obama. Some knew he was a U.S. Senator before that, but no one knew which state he is from. One mentioned he had a son who died of cancer. Swing voters knew virtually nothing about Warren, including what job she has now, which state she is from, or what public policy issue brought her to prominence.

There was no consensus in our focus group that any of the Democrats running for president “excites” them. One Romney-Clinton voter told us Cory Booker excites her, but for the other eight swing voters, no one fit that description. When asked if there is anyone not running who would excite them, respondents named Warren Buffett and Stephen Colbert. However, only two would like to see Buffett run and only one would like to see Colbert run.

The good news for Democrats is, although swing voters don’t recognize most of their candidates running for president and they aren’t really excited about any of them, most — six of nine — feel that the Democratic presidential candidates are speaking about the national issues they care most about. Those who feel that the national issues they care most about are not being addressed would like to hear the candidates talk about how we are going to make peace with other countries and how we are going to protect Medicare and Medicaid without cutting those programs.

Swing voters indicated they haven’t heard very much news about the Democrats’ policy priorities, including Medicare for All and the Green New Deal. We asked them to rate on a scale from zero to 10 how much they have heard about these proposals (from “no news at all” to “a large amount of news”). They scored them 3.4/10 and 1.3/10, respectively.

Also, we asked respondents to tell us how much they support or oppose eliminating private health insurance and replacing it with Medicare for All, on a zero to 10 scale (from “totally oppose” to “totally support”). They scored this 4.1/10. They haven’t heard much about the proposal. They told us that Sanders is a big proponent of Medicare for All, and Warren is helping to advance the idea. To them, it sounds like a universal health plan that would cover everyone, but they aren’t sure how realistic it is or how they feel about it because we have had private insurance in our country for so long.

The concept of a “Green New Deal” was slightly more popular, scoring 4.6/10 on a zero to 10 scale (from “very unfavorably” to “very favorably”).

9

SWING VOTERS BELIEVE “VAPING” IS A VERY SERIOUS PROBLEM AMONG TODAY’S TEENAGERS — AND THEY FAVOR BANNING INTERNET SALES AND ADVERTISING OF THOSE PRODUCTS.

We asked respondents to tell us, using their dial, how serious a problem “vaping” is among today’s teenagers on a zero to 10 scale from “not at all serious” to “very serious”. The average for the group was 8.9/10. With their view that this is a very serious problem, we asked what the government should do when it comes to JUUL, a company that produces vaping products. There was overwhelming support for banning internet sales and advertising for those products. Other, less popular solutions included making them prescription-only products for people who are trying to quit smoking and cracking down on businesses who sell to minors.

10

SWING VOTERS ARE NOT SATISFIED WITH THE PRESIDENT’S EFFORTS TO ENSURE HEALTHCARE IS AFFORDABLE FOR THEM AND THEIR FAMILY.

Swing voters rated on a scale from zero to 10 how satisfied they are with President Trump’s efforts to ensure healthcare is affordable for them and their family (from “not at all satisfied” to “very satisfied”). They scored this 4.3/10, saying he hasn’t made healthcare more affordable, as costs have continued to increase. They partly blame the president and partly blame Congress because its members shut down his efforts to repeal and replace Obamacare.

The entity they believe is most responsible for escalating healthcare costs is pharmaceutical manufacturers (four), followed by insurance companies (three), new medical technologies (one), and too little government regulation of the healthcare market (one). Those not selected at all included The Affordable Care Act (Obamacare), hospitals, and “too much government regulation of the healthcare market.”

Also, with modern medicine advancing at a breathtaking pace, we wanted to know what is most responsible for these advances over the past few decades. Eight of our nine swing voters said “medical technology is providing doctors with better tools and equipment to diagnose and treat patients” while one pointed to “some other reason.” None selected “doctors are better educated and trained than ever before” or “pharmaceuticals give patients less-invasive options to treat illness.”



## 11

## SWING VOTERS STRONGLY OPPOSE THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION'S EFFORTS TO ROLL BACK REGULATIONS RELATED TO THE ENVIRONMENT.

Toward the end of the focus group, we asked swing voters how much they support or oppose the efforts of the Trump Administration to roll back “a wide variety of regulations related to the environment,” on a scale from zero to 10 (from “totally oppose” to “totally support”). They scored this 4.3/10.

Then we showed a list of 17 environmental regulations the Trump Administration has rolled back, including those that would protect us from air pollution and water pollution, hold polluters accountable, and protect our natural resources. We followed up by asking the initial question again regarding how much they support or oppose the efforts of the Trump Administration to roll back these environmental regulations. Swing voters scored this 2.4/10, a substantial drop after seeing the list. Two respondents said knowing this information would affect their votes next year.

12

ALMOST HALF OF SWING VOTERS SAY CLIMATE CHANGE IS A TOP-FIVE ISSUE FOR THEM WHEN THEY VOTE “BECAUSE IT’S A SERIOUS PROBLEM FOR OUR ENVIRONMENT.”

On average, swing voters agree that the weather in recent years seems “weird” (7.1/10), but not so much that “certain months seem warmer now” (4.4/10). When asked to provide examples of how our weather in recent years seems “weird,” they cited the heat waves they have experienced, tornados and hurricanes are stronger, colder winters, lots of rain, and stronger storms.

When asked to consider all the issues that matter to them when they vote next year, four swing voters told us that climate change is a top-five issue for them “because it’s a serious problem for our environment.” One said it’s a top-five issue “because we need to stop liberals from expanding government to fix the problem.” And four said it’s not a top-five issue “because many other issues matter more to me than this one.”

We asked swing voters to fill in the blank for “Climate change is \_\_\_\_\_.” Respondents listed:

- A problem (3)
- Real (1)
- Something scary (1)
- Inevitable (1)
- A way of life—the climate keeps changing (1)
- A mystery (1)
- A joke (1)

When asked if a Republican candidate for Congress vocal about addressing climate change as a serious issue would, by itself, be a reason to vote against him/her, none responded affirmatively.

Even though a number of swing voters are concerned about climate change, they don’t see a close link between the recent fires in the Amazon and climate change. When asked to rate how closely linked they are, on a scale from zero to 10 (from “there’s no linkage at all” to “there’s a very close linkage”), swing voters scored this 4.7/10. They had heard a moderate amount of news over the past few weeks about the fires in the Amazon rain forest in Brazil, scoring their news consumption on the issue 5.1/10, on a scale from zero to 10 (from “no news at all” to “a large amount of news”).



## 13

SWING VOTERS DON'T THINK LARGE U.S. CORPORATIONS CARE ABOUT WHAT'S IN AMERICA'S BEST INTEREST, BUT REDEFINING THE PURPOSE OF A CORPORATION IS SIGNIFICANT.

Swing voters rated how much they think large U.S. corporations care about what's in America's best interest on a scale from zero to 10 (from "not at all" to "a lot"). This scored 3.7/10. However, large U.S. corporations have taken a step in the right direction by redefining the purpose of a corporation. During the group, we asked them to rate on a scale from zero to 10 how significant this redefinition is (from "very insignificant" to "very significant"):

In August, 181 CEOs of major American corporations issued a statement that redefined the purpose of a corporation. It's no longer to just provide profits to shareholders. It now includes creating "value for customers," "investing in employees," fostering "diversity and inclusion," "dealing fairly and ethically with suppliers," "supporting the communities in which we work," and "protect[ing] the environment"—along with "generating long-term value for shareholders."

Swing voters scored the significance of this statement at 7.6/10. Almost all of them support the CEOs coming out with this statement, if it's not just a statement. Our swing voters want them to actually follow through with this redefinition of the purpose of a corporation. They like that the focus is shifting away from "greedy" corporations and moving toward investing in employees, supporting local communities, and helping people across the board, not just those at the very top.





# 14

## TRADE IS NOT A MAJOR ISSUE FOR SWING VOTERS AS THEY CONSIDER THEIR VOTE IN 2020.

Respondents were asked to rate on a scale from zero to 10 how much President Trump's actions on trade will affect their vote in 2020 (from "have no impact on my vote" to "have a significant impact on my vote.") They scored this 5.3/10. They indicated they don't know anyone who has been helped or harmed by the president's trade policies.

They also rated how much they support or oppose the tariffs the Trump Administration has placed on the imports of certain goods, on a scale from zero to 10 (from "totally oppose" to "totally support"), which they scored 5.7/10. Six of the nine swing voters in the group told us they support the tariffs. Their hope is that American companies will bring jobs back to the U.S. from China to avoid paying the tariffs. They believe America's efforts to secure a fairer trade deal with China, to help American exporters and to protect our intellectual property, are worth the financial pain from higher prices on imports we buy from other countries.

There are warning signs about trade that require the attention of the Trump Administration. First, all nine swing voters believe that American consumers pay for the tariffs imposed on imported goods (as opposed to those costs being paid by others). Also, seven of the nine swing voters feel like they're paying higher prices for goods because of the tariffs imposed by the Trump Administration.

We asked them to assume for a moment that a "trade war" with China causes prices to rise noticeably for them and their family and then rate on a zero to 10 scale how that would affect their view of President Trump (from "my support for him will erode substantially" to "my support for him will grow substantially"). They scored this 4.1/10, suggesting the president may become vulnerable on trade in a prolonged "trade war."

