



Engagious

FPG Focus Pointe
Global

SWING VOTER PROJECT (SVP) SIX MONTH TRENDS REPORT

OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH:

Engagious has conducted a focus group each of the last six months (March through August 2019) with swing voters in Wisconsin (Appleton), Ohio (Bowling Green), Iowa (Sioux City), Pennsylvania (Erie), Michigan (Warren), and Minnesota (Edina), respectively. Our focus groups have included a total of 66 respondents: 49 who voted for President Obama in 2012 and then President Trump in 2016 (Obama-Trump voters), and 17 who voted for Mitt Romney in 2012 and then Hillary Clinton in 2016 (Romney-Clinton voters). We have 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 on the opinions and feedback from 66 swing voters in six locations. They do not represent the views of all swing voters.

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

INTRODUCTION

The Swing Voter Project, co-sponsored by Engagious and Focus Point Global, has completed six monthly focus groups with swing voters from seven swing states. We are using focus groups with dial testing to deep dive into how these crucial voters are feeling about President Trump, what will affect their vote in the next election, and which issues they consider important. This report discusses the key findings of the initial months of the project, including what issues will likely impact the 2020 election.

The President's political prospects rise and fall with the health of the economy, and it will likely determine the outcome of the 2020 election. Most Obama-Trump voters believe the U.S. economy has gotten better for them, their family, and for America overall since Donald Trump became President—and they are ready to stick with him in the next election. Romney-Clinton voters hold a dimmer view of the U.S. economy since Donald Trump became President, and he has failed to win them over. Among Romney-Clinton voters, only one of 17 would vote for the President if another Trump-Clinton presidential election were held tomorrow. Obama-Trump voters are focused on the President's economic performance, while Romney-Clinton voters are largely focused on his personality and the way he treats people (experiencing "Trump fatigue"). His inability to win over Romney-Clinton voters is a major red flag for his re-election campaign.

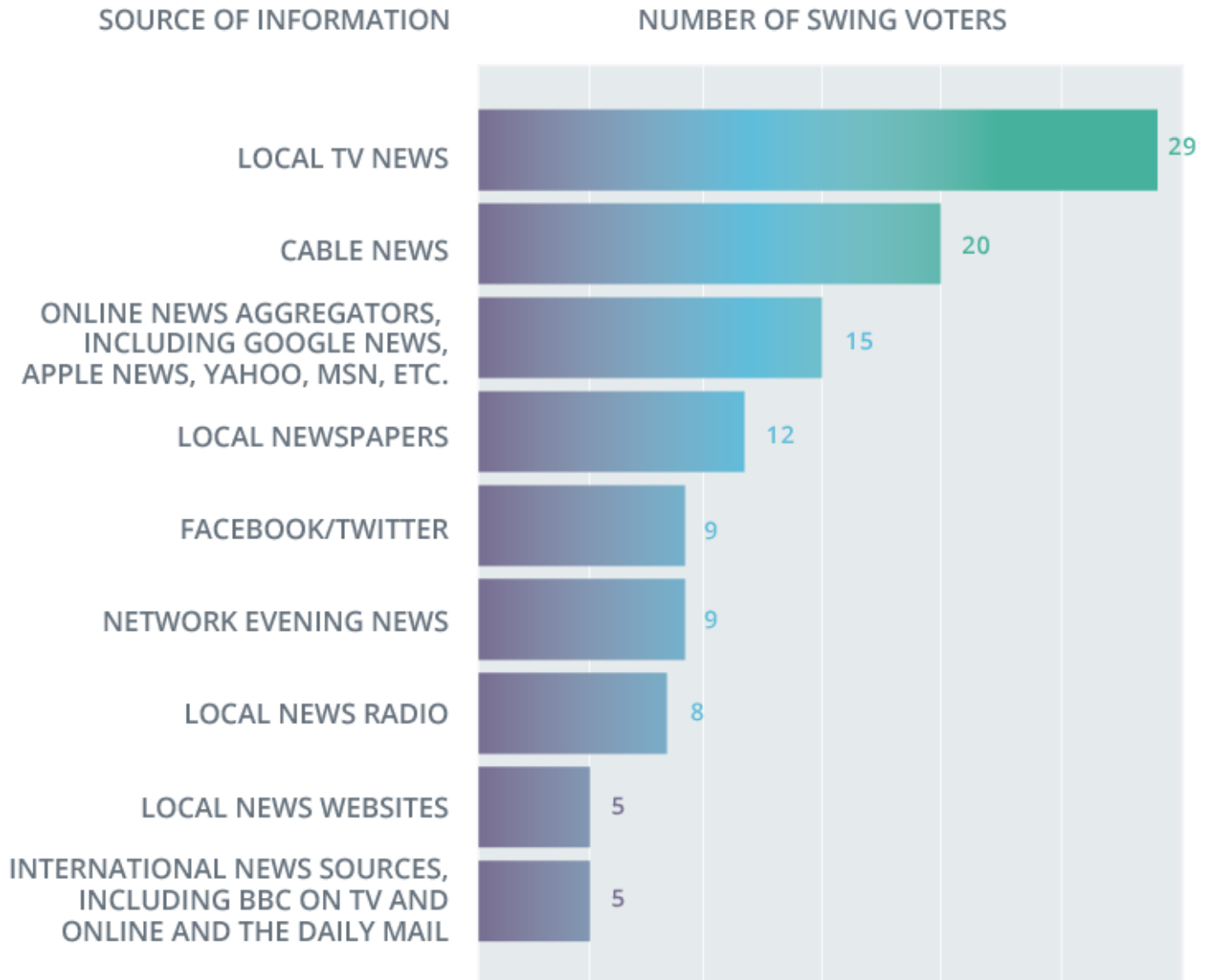
The good news for the Trump campaign is that most Democrats running for President are struggling to gain traction in becoming recognizable to swing voters and even with so many candidates in the race, there was virtually no excitement for any of them.

The top issues of concern for swing voters heading into 2020 are the cost and/or access to healthcare, immigration, and the economy. This report discusses these and other issues that will determine the 2020 election.

1 THE MOST COMMON NEWS SOURCE FOR SWING VOTERS IS LOCAL TV NEWS.

Any presidential candidate who fails to use local TV news to get their message out is missing an opportunity to reach these key voters.

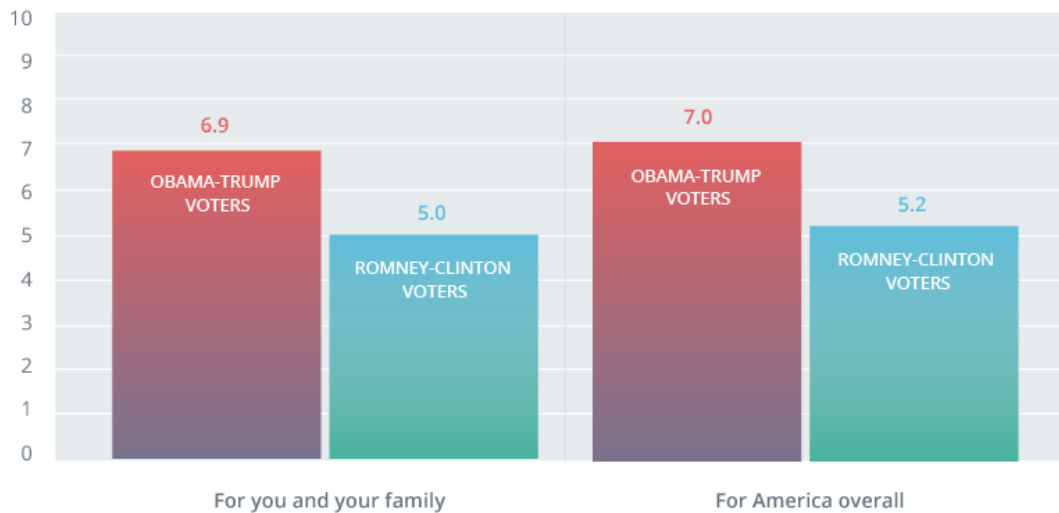
In the last five months, we have asked a total of 54 respondents where they get most of their news. The following chart shows their responses in descending order:



Note: Most swing voters named multiple news sources.

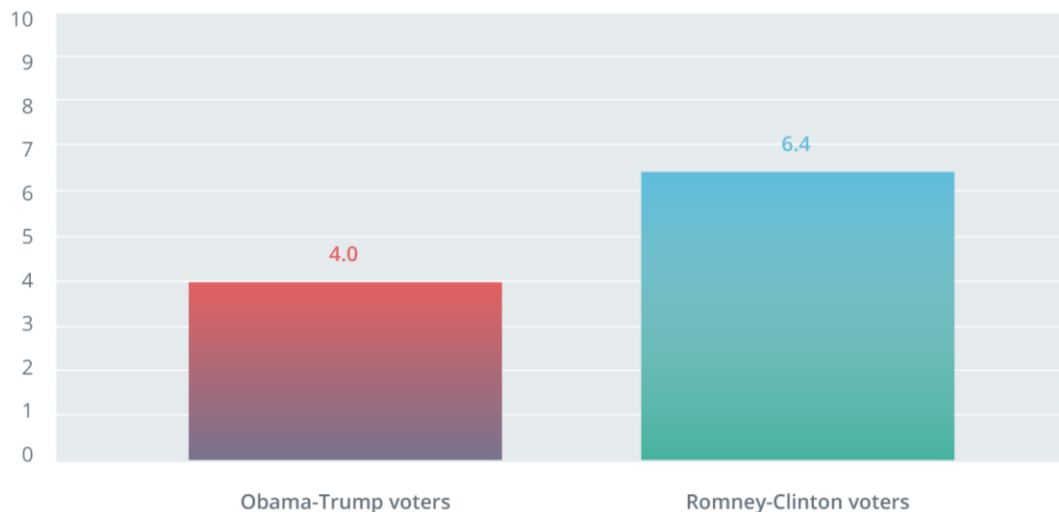
2 PRESIDENT TRUMP'S FATE IS TIED TO THE ECONOMY'S.

Each month, we've asked respondents to rate on a scale from zero to 10 how the U.S. economy has been performing for "you and your family" and for "America overall" since Donald Trump became President. Zero means it has gotten much worse since Donald Trump became President, and 10 means it has gotten much better since that time.



During the past three months, we have also asked:

How likely is it that the U.S. economy will enter a recession sometime in the next year?¹



During a number of our focus groups, swing voters gave the President a fair amount of credit for the good economy, which will work to his advantage as he runs for re-election. However, if the economy were to go in the other direction, many would blame him for that. For many swing voters, their support for the President rises and falls with the economy.

¹We asked this question from June through August (only two focus groups included Romney-Clinton voters).

Each month, we told respondents the unemployment rate was at or near the lowest it has been in five decades and the stock market is hovering at an all-time high. We followed up by asking if they feel the economy is “booming.” At least half of respondents in Appleton, Sioux City, Erie, and Edina say they feel the economy is “booming” (25 of 42 in those four locations). The evidence they cited: their employer is doing well, consumer confidence is high, they know people with new jobs, gas prices are lower, businesses are expanding into different areas, including rural communities, the unemployment rate is low, and the stock market is up.

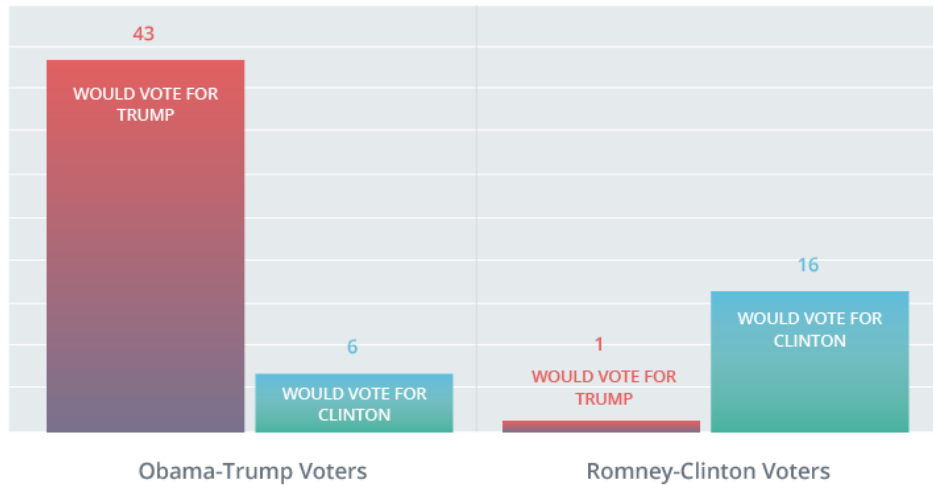
Interestingly, none of the 24 total respondents in Bowling Green and Warren agree, even with the ongoing positive economic news we have been hearing. This suggests the President is vulnerable to sounding out-of-touch with the swing voters he will need to win re-election if he is touting the economic successes during his administration at a time when voters in some locations aren't feeling it. The President promised to help “the forgotten Americans”—and in some places, they still feel forgotten.

In the last five months, we have asked respondents if they have seen a noticeable increase in their wages since President Trump took office. Only three of 54 respondents say they have, with only one even partially attributing that increase to the President. In Edina, we asked those who have not seen an increase in their wages, 10 of 11 in the group, if they blame President Trump. The good news for the President is none blame him for the lack of growth in their wages, saying their wages had been stagnant for years before he took office.

3 MOST OBAMA-TRUMP VOTERS ARE STICKING BY PRESIDENT TRUMP, BUT ROMNEY-CLINTON VOTERS ARE EXPERIENCING “TRUMP FATIGUE.”

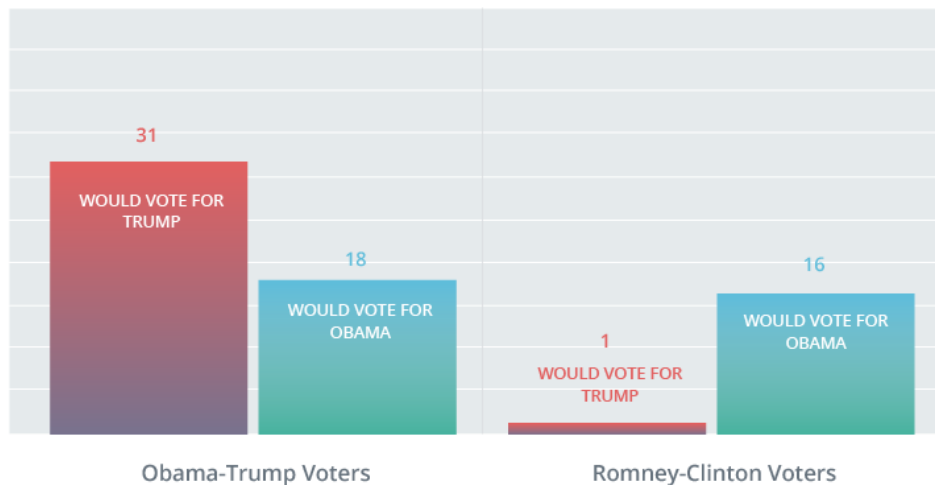
Each month, we asked:

If another presidential election were being held tomorrow between Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton, for which candidate would you vote?



We also asked respondents to consider the following hypothetical scenario in the 2020 election:

Imagine the U.S. Constitution didn't prevent presidents from serving a third term, and former President Obama became the Democratic nominee. He would be challenging President Trump's bid for re-election. In that scenario, for which candidate would you vote?



Obama-Trump voters say President Trump has accomplished good things for our country, with jobs being created, wages going up, fewer people on food stamps, and his willingness to negotiate with North Korea and China, but some just can't get past his “unprofessional” behavior. They don't like the way he treats people, they believe he lies often, and promotes racism. Those who would vote for President Obama in a hypothetical Trump-Obama election told us things were more normal under President Obama, while chaos surrounds President Trump. They say President Obama is an intellectual with good character who was more diplomatic with other countries, bringing a sense of calmness to the job and to our country.

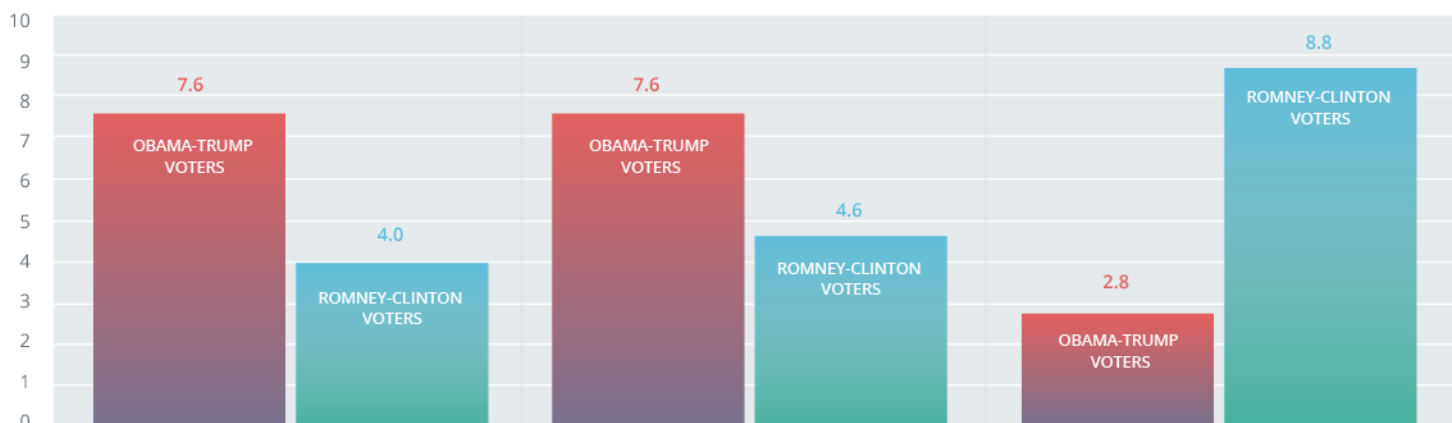
KEY FINDINGS

In the last four months, we asked respondents what they like about President Trump politically. Their responses include:

- He's different from other politicians (i.e. business background)
- He's willing to speak his mind, whether you agree or disagree
- His America-first policies
- His handling of the economy
- His policies are helping small business owners (he understands the whole corporate structure)
- He's trying to change "one-sided" trade deals that hurt our country
- His immigration policies (including a desire for the wall at our southern border)
- He stands up to other countries and tries to make deals (e.g., North Korea)
- His pro-life position
- He wants to bring our troops home

The President will have to hope that these positives outweigh the negatives that have turned some off to him (for his behavior, the way he treats people, etc.).

We asked respondents to evaluate statements about what factors are most likely to influence their vote in 2020:



I've already made up my mind about Donald Trump. Whatever Robert Mueller or the Democrats say about him, good or bad, is not likely to sway me. What is likelier to influence my vote is how the economy is doing, and how my family and I are doing, in November 2020.²

A lot of chaos swirls around President Trump. He is an unconventional President. On Twitter he regularly makes critical statements about other people, including people in his own party and administration. Allegations of bad behavior are leveled against him regularly. While I'm aware of the controversies involving President Trump, what is likelier to influence my vote is how the economy is doing, and how my family and I are doing, in November 2020.³

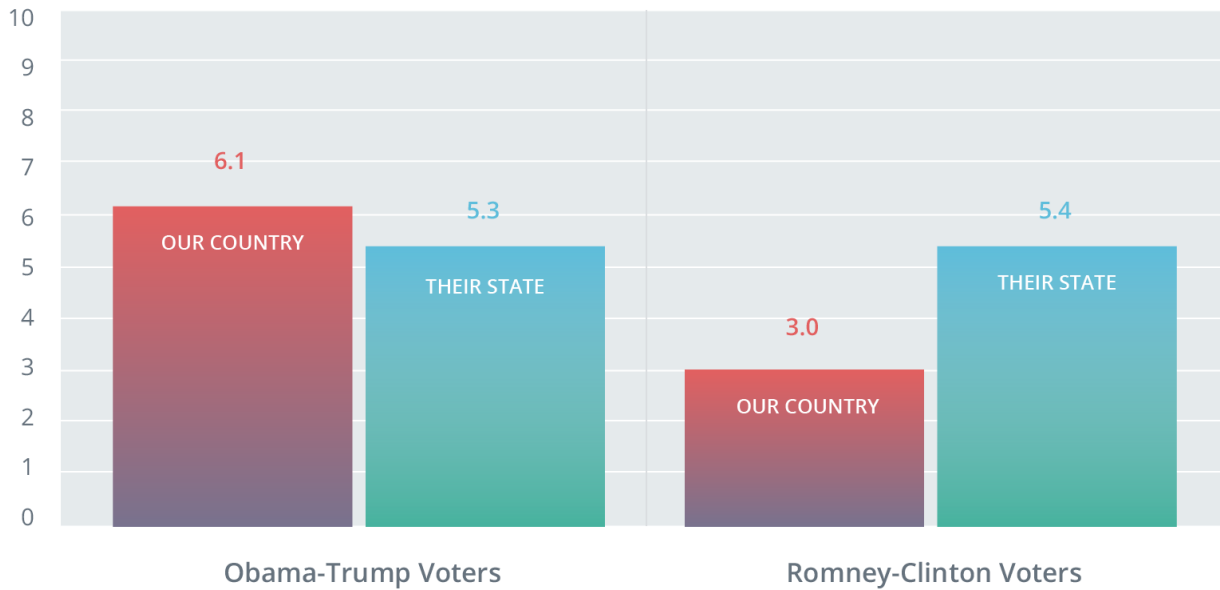
I just can't take it anymore with Trump's antics, and his being in our faces 24/7. I have no patience for another four years. Things in America just don't feel normal, and we need to get back to normal.⁴

² Swing voters rated this statement from March through June (four months).

³ Swing voters rated this statement in July and August (two months).

⁴ Swing voters rated this statement from April through August (five months).

Each month, we asked respondents to rate on a scale from zero to 10 (from “totally wrong direction” to “totally right direction”) the direction of our country and separately, the direction of their state.



Both groups of swing voters agree that their state is moving slightly in the right direction, on average. However, there is a sharp contrast between Obama-Trump voters and Romney-Clinton voters regarding the direction of our country. While Obama-Trump voters believe we are moving somewhat in the right direction, Romney-Clinton voters say we’re headed in the wrong direction. They are troubled by the political division in our country, which they suggested makes it more difficult for us to solve problems. Also, they don’t support President Trump’s policy agenda. One respondent explained:

“The country seems to be in so much conflict and I don’t feel that conflict here [in Minnesota]...We have a good quality of life and we seem to be trying to correct things and make things go the right way.” – Male, Romney-Clinton voter (Edina, MN)

As we know, President Trump’s slogan is “Make America Great Again.” 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 focus on unity and a return to normalcy. The most common responses were:

- United/harmonious/whole/one country (13)
- Proud (9)
- America/normal (7)
- Strong (5)

Their responses suggest the President’s behavior has caused our country to be less united and less strong, and in some ways, less proud of who we are. For a number of swing voters, a Democrat focusing on these themes and promising a return to normalcy would resonate.

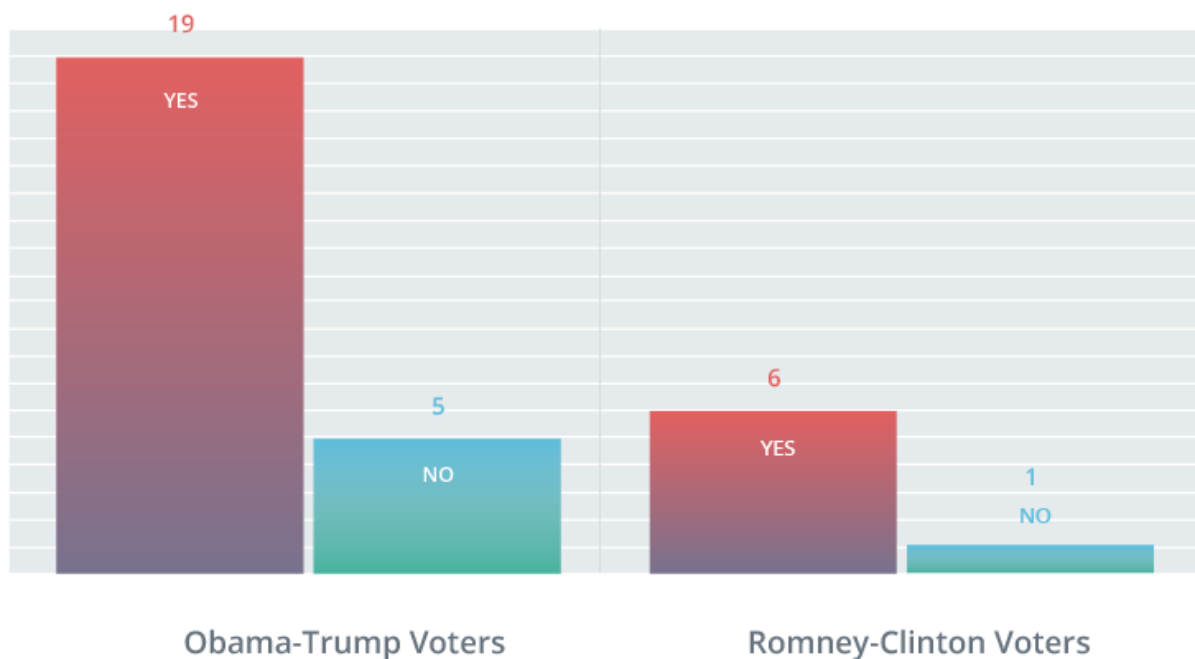
4 TRUMP'S TRADE POLICIES HAVE NOT COST HIM WITH SWING VOTERS AS OF YET. BUT IF A TRADE WAR WITH CHINA MEANS HIGHER PRICES, THEY'LL LIKELY JUMP SHIP.

Swing voters don't know very much about trade and they say it's an issue that hasn't had much of an impact on their lives. They generally feel that the Trump Administration's trade policies have neither helped nor hurt them and the people they know—up to this point. We were interested in hearing what they have heard about trade lately. During the past five months, we asked if the Trump Administration has negotiated a replacement trade deal for NAFTA; only 10 of 54 swing voters said yes. During that time period, we also asked if the Trump Administration is negotiating a new trade deal with China. Far more respondents were aware of that—31 of 54.

There is a fairly sharp divide between Obama-Trump voters and Romney-Clinton voters regarding how they view the trade issue. When asked how much they support or oppose the Trump Administration's actions on U.S. trade policy, on a scale from zero to 10 (from "totally oppose" to "totally support"), Obama-Trump voters rated it 7.0/10 and Romney-Clinton voters scored it 3.2/10.⁵ We also asked them to rate how much they support or oppose the Trump Administration placing tariffs on the imports of certain goods. Obama-Trump voters rated that 7.1/10, while Romney-Clinton voters scored that 4.4/10.

During each focus group over the past three months, we asked:

Are America's efforts to secure a fairer trade deal with China, to help American exporters and to protect our intellectual property, worth the financial pain from higher prices on imports we buy from other countries?⁶

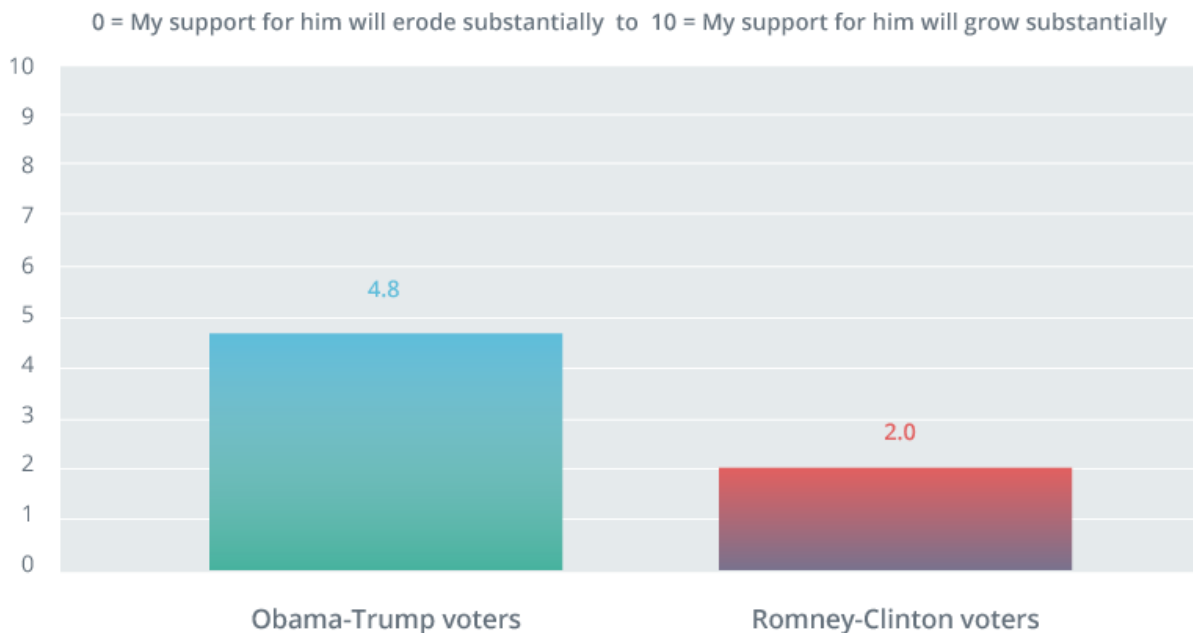


⁵We asked this question in every focus group, except in Bowling Green (April). Only three of the five focus groups included Romney-Clinton voters.

⁶We asked this question from June through August (only two focus groups included Romney-Clinton voters).

Swing voters believe it's worth the financial pain long-term if it creates more jobs and keeps our jobs in the U.S. There is a sense that if we don't deal with this problem, it'll just get worse. However, we learned there is a limit regarding how much financial pain they are willing to deal with.

During the last three months⁷ we asked respondents to assume for a moment that a "trade war" with China causes prices to rise noticeably for them and their family and evaluate how that would affect their view of President Trump.⁷



The President will become more vulnerable to a backlash for this trade war as it drags on, especially if it hurts swing voters economically. Price increases would be burdensome to them and their families, and they don't want to give up what they're used to having.

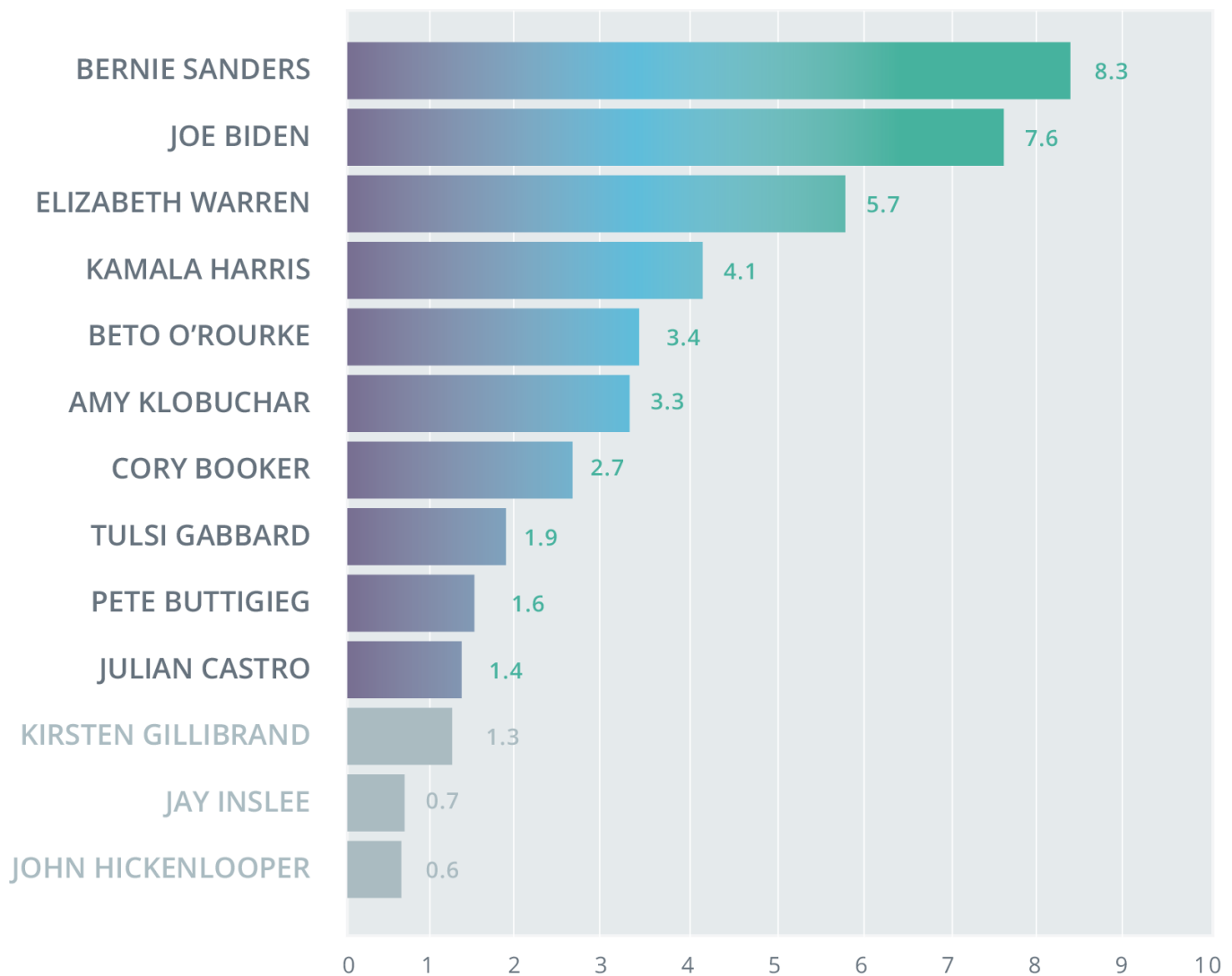
⁷We asked this question from June through August (only two focus groups included Romney-Clinton voters).

5

ONLY JOE BIDEN AND BERNIE SANDERS -- AND ELIZABETH WARREN TO A LESSER EXTENT -- ARE RECOGNIZABLE BRANDS WITH SWING VOTERS.

Each month, respondents have indicated their level of confidence in being able to identify unlabeled photos of each Democrat 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:



Notably, swing voters don't know very much about the most recognizable Democrats running for President.

Bernie Sanders

Swing voters generally know he is a “socialist” who ran for president in 2016 and he supports free college. They are less familiar with his current elected position and what state he is from.

Joe Biden

Biden is known for being President Obama's Vice-President and for the attention he has received lately for his behavior around women. They are unfamiliar with his former position as a U.S. Senator and that he is from Delaware.

Elizabeth Warren

Warren is known by a few for being “Pocahontas” (thanks to President Trump). Some know she is a U.S. Senator but most don't know what state she is from or the public policy issue that made her famous (her role in criticizing Wall Street and creating the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau).

During the last three months, we asked if any of the candidates look too old to be President. Almost two-thirds – 20 of 31 – said yes. During two previous focus groups, we asked about the age issue slightly differently. In Bowling Green, we showed respondents the video that Biden released where he addressed his physical contact with women. Afterwards, we asked, “As you watched this video, did you think to yourself, ‘This man is too old to be President?’ or something similar?” Two said yes, and 10 said no. In Appleton, we asked if age is an issue for Biden and Sanders running for President. In that group, while some thought their age is an issue, none indicated that they would deny Biden or Sanders a vote due to that factor. They might deny them a vote for other reasons, but for them, age is not a factor. One respondent remarked, “As long as they're not 90 years old – or even if they were 90 and sharp and up on everything, age still won't be an issue, really. Age, experience – you've seen a lot.”

Among swing voters, there was virtually no excitement for any of the Democrats running for President. When asked if there is anyone not currently running who would excite them, the most common responses were Michelle Obama and Oprah Winfrey.

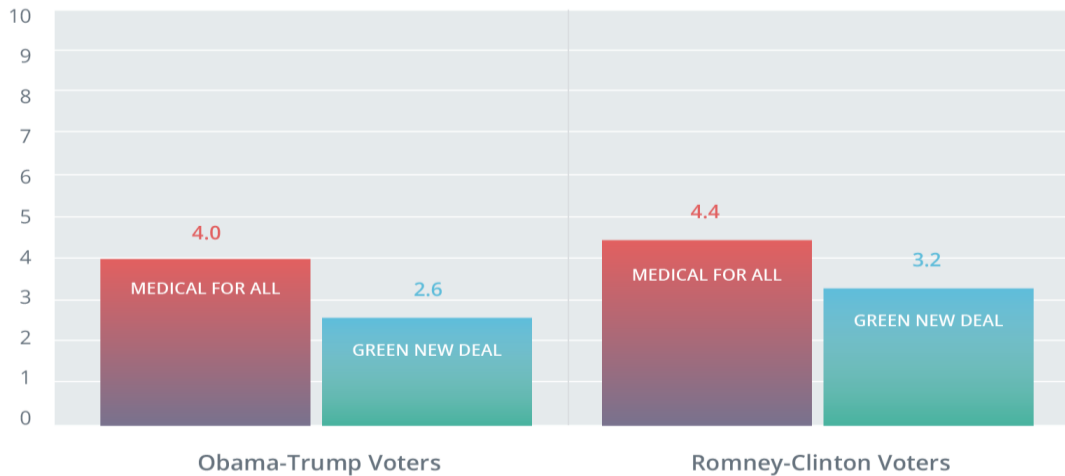
Those who would be “excited” if Michelle Obama were to run for President in 2020 described her as someone who is honest, moral, dynamic, optimistic, shares their values, and has already been vetted (no secrets would be uncovered).

Swing voters who would like Oprah Winfrey to run cited her integrity, professionalism, intelligence, leadership qualities, and her skills as a businesswoman. However, some pushed back on the idea, saying although she is “an extremely successful, intelligent woman,” the job of President is a lot different than what she has been doing, and they questioned her knowledge of foreign affairs.

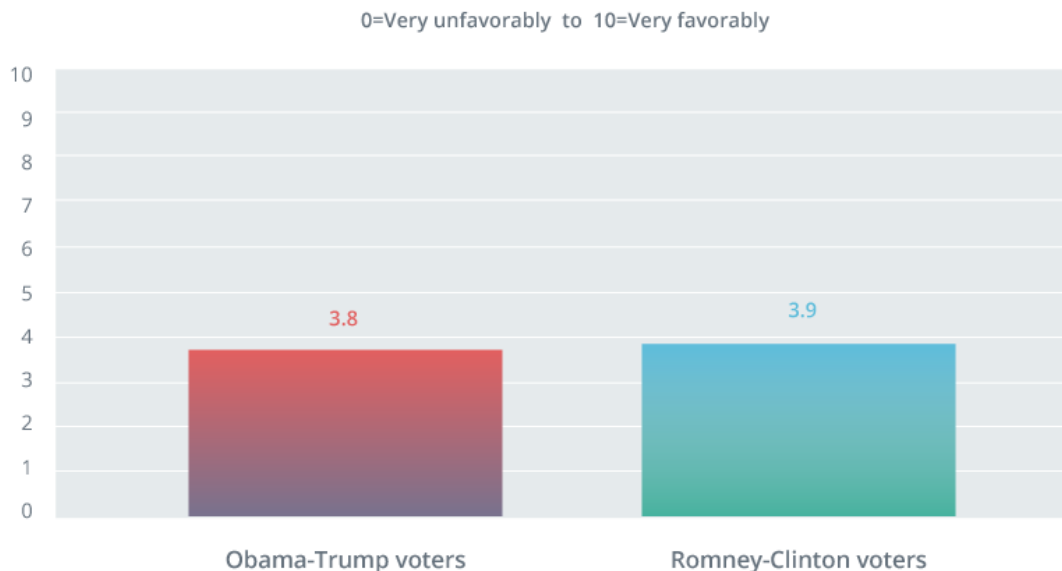
Also, each month we have been conducting what we call the “AOC test.” We show swing voters an unlabeled photo of Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez after showing the Democrats running for President, and ask them to rate how confident they are they could identify her. Their confidence level overall is 4.8/10, which is higher than all but three of the Democrats. During her short time in Congress, she has found a way to become familiar to swing voters in a way that Democrats running for President have not, even after many months of campaigning and two Democratic primary debates (at the time of this report). Most Democrats are not reaching swing voters—and that's a problem for their presidential prospects.

6 SWING VOTERS ARE IN THE DARK ON MEDICARE FOR ALL AND THE GREEN NEW DEAL. BUT WHAT LITTLE THEY KNOW, THEY DON'T LIKE.

We asked respondents to rate on a scale from zero to 10 how much they have heard about the Democrats' priorities of Medicare for All and the Green New Deal over the past several months. Zero means they have heard no news at all, and 10 means they have heard a large amount of news.



When asked how favorably or unfavorably they view the concept of a "Green New Deal," respondents indicated:



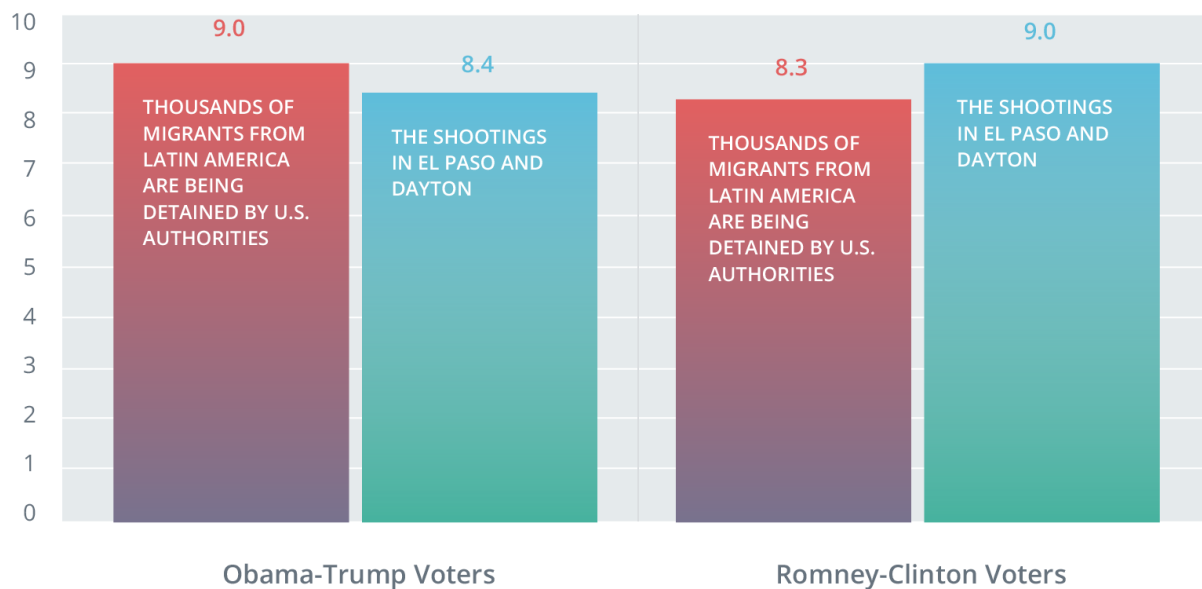
Swing voters haven't heard a lot of news about the Green New Deal, but from what they have heard, they have concerns. They include:

- It doesn't sound realistic
- It would impact our transportation systems, including airplanes and cars
- Some technologies would be more effective in certain areas of our society than in other places (i.e., it would be difficult to implement across the board)

We also heard a number of concerns surrounding the Democrats' Medicare for All plan:

- It will be expensive—and our taxes will go up substantially
- There will be a lack of choice
- It will be difficult to implement
- It won't be a "great fix" for our healthcare system
- It will hurt seniors
- Canadians who need surgery come to the U.S., so their universal healthcare system must not be that great
- It's unclear how it would work in the U.S. (how it would be structured, who it would cover, etc.)

While news about the Democrats' priorities of Medicare for All and the Green New Deal aren't getting through to swing voters, interestingly, other news is. In Warren, MI we asked respondents to rate on a scale from zero to 10 how much news they have heard recently about thousands of migrants from Latin America being detained by U.S. authorities (from "no news" to "a lot of news"). In Edina, we asked respondents to use the same scale to rate how much news they have heard since Saturday (two days before the focus group) about the shootings in El Paso and Dayton.

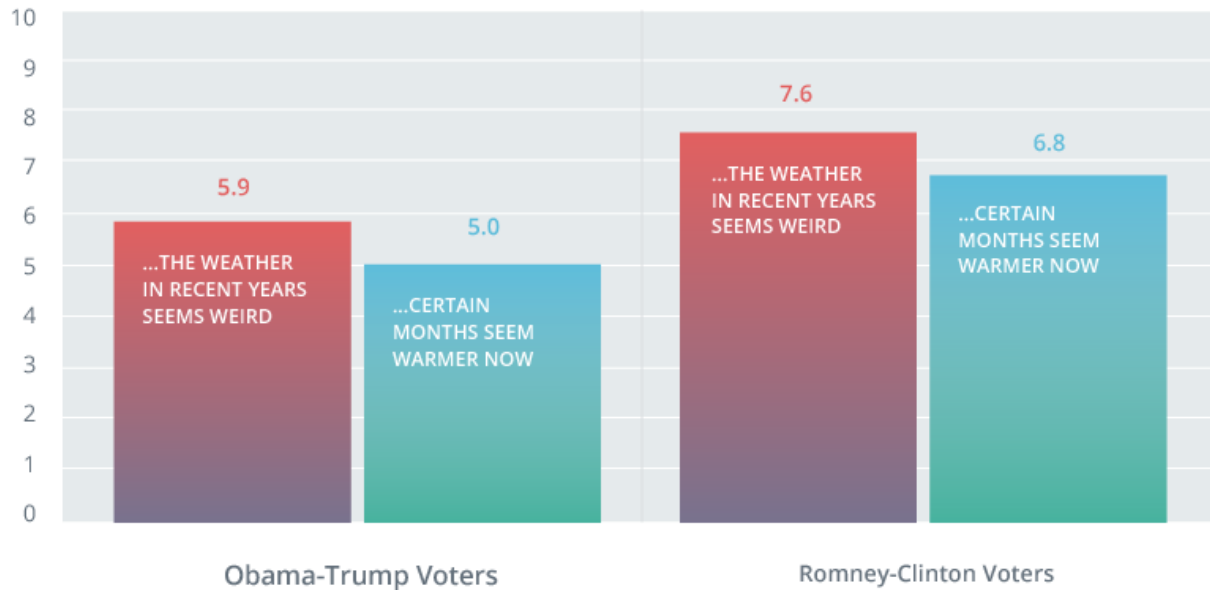


Democrats have experienced a messaging problem. Their policy priorities have been overshadowed by current events, including an issue—immigration—that works in the President's favor. Also, with a large field of Democrats running for President, their messaging on Medicare for All is getting muddled because the candidates are presenting different healthcare plans and calling it "Medicare for All." Swing voters have different perceptions about what "Medicare for All" means. The Democrats' inability to reach swing voters on their policy priorities leaves them vulnerable to having them defined in negative terms by the President and his allies.

7 SWING VOTERS AGREE THAT THE WEATHER HAS GOTTEN WEIRDER DUE TO CLIMATE CHANGE.

We asked respondents to rate how strongly they agree or disagree with two statements. Zero means they strongly disagree, and 10 means they strongly agree.

Compared to when you were much younger...



When asked to cite examples of how the weather in recent years “seems weird,” they offered:

- The seasons have shifted (e.g., both summer and winter are now starting later and ending later)
- Unusual rain cycles
- Increased volatility in temperatures, with more extreme highs and lows
- More fires
- “Crazy” wind gusts
- Less snow

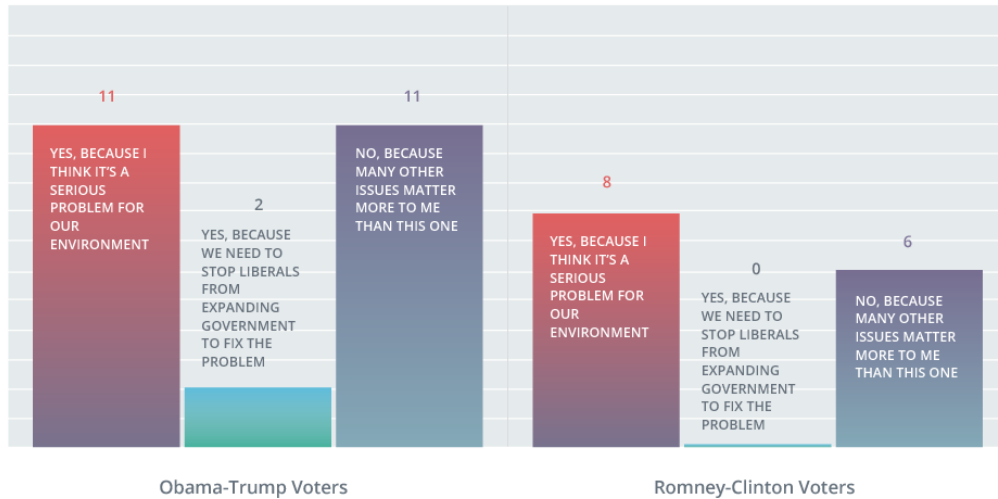
One respondent remarked:

“You have the hurricanes, you have the fires...I mean everything right now is just crazy.” – Female, Obama-Trump voter (Appleton, WI)

KEY FINDINGS

During each focus group over the past three months, we asked:

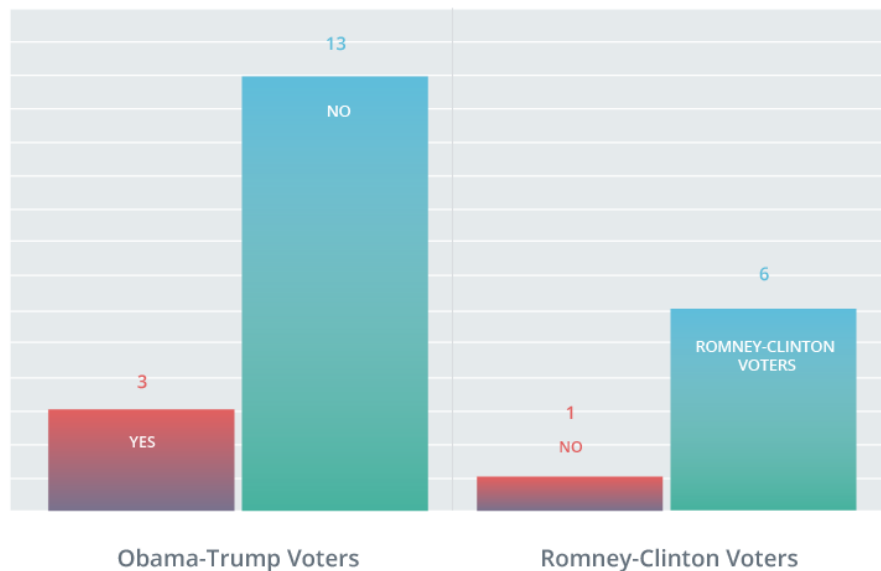
When you think of all the issues that matter to you when you vote next year, would you say climate change is in your top five?



In multiple focus groups, swing voters told us they would like to see our country shift toward a clean energy future in an effort to address climate change. The President has an opportunity to lead that effort—and with the increasing concern among swing voters about climate change, he would be wise to do so.

We have been interested in learning how this issue may impact their vote. In the past two months, we asked:

Imagine a Republican candidate for Congress is vocal about addressing climate change as a serious issue. By itself, would that be a reason to vote against him/her?



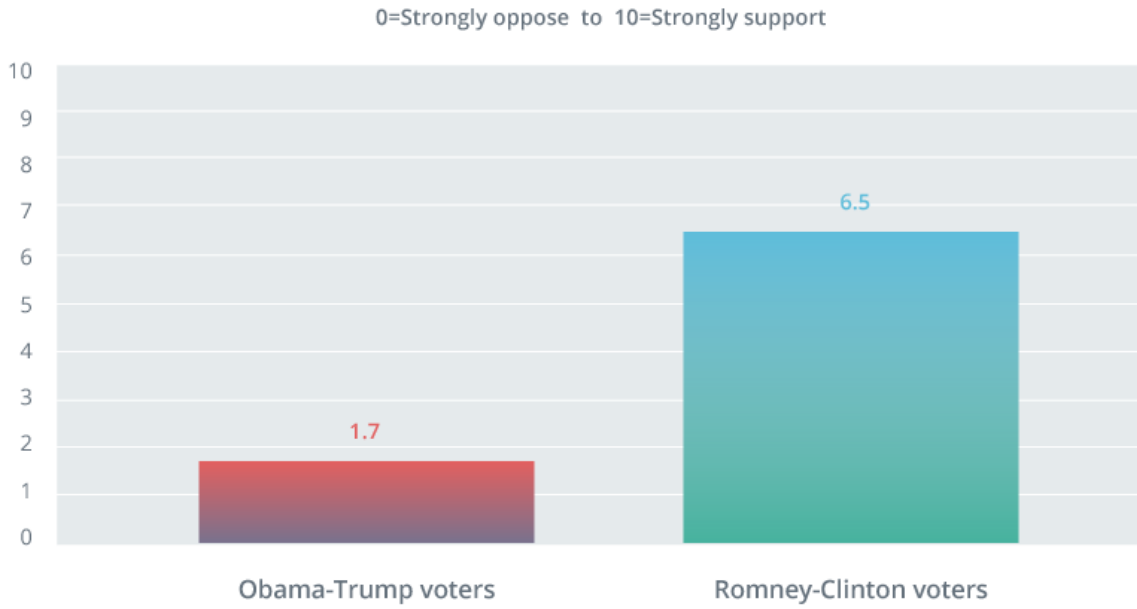
Most swing voters would not be turned off by a Republican candidate for Congress being vocal about addressing climate change as a serious issue. In the past, Republican candidates for Congress have been hesitant to talk about addressing climate change as a serious issue due to the pushback they could receive from their own party. However, swing voters are experiencing significant changes in our weather and they want our leaders to talk about it (and not just Democrats). Republican candidates for Congress who fail to do this are missing an opportunity to connect with swing voters and address a major concern they have.

8

SWING VOTERS DON'T THINK IMPEACHMENT IS A WISE POLITICAL MOVE FOR DEMOCRATS.

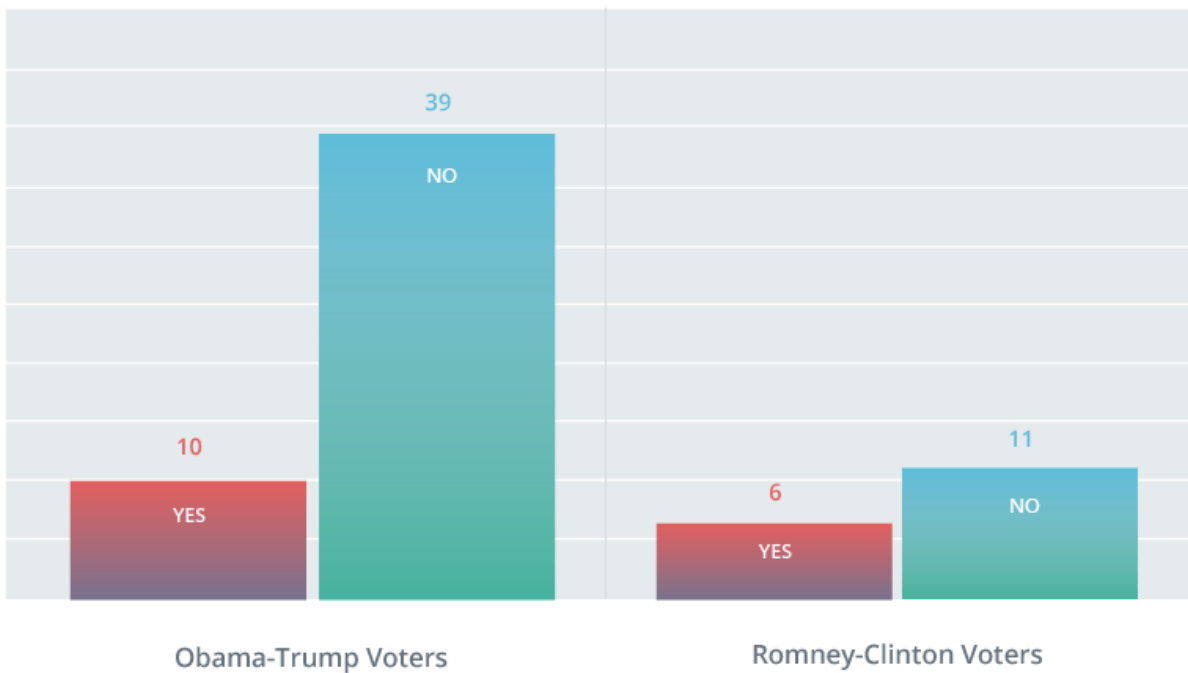
Each month, we asked:

Some Democrats favor impeaching President Trump and removing him from office. How strongly do you support or oppose this idea?



We also asked:

Set aside for a moment how you personally feel about impeachment. Considering the Democrats want to win the White House in 2020, would it be a wise political step for them to impeach President Trump?



Swing voters described the negative consequences for Democrats if they were to impeach President Trump:

- It would show voters that our elected leaders don't trust them
- It's too long of a process, and it would just drag on, wasting time and money
- It would animate Trump supporters, rallying support around the President that would make it easier for him to get re-elected
- A number of them would think worse of the Democrats
- House Democrats can impeach the President, but Republicans control the U.S. Senate and they won't vote to remove him from office. Therefore, impeachment would be a meaningless endeavor if removing President Trump from office is the objective.
- The pushback against Democrats for failing to remove President Trump from office would be "extreme"
- Removing Trump from office (if that were to happen) would lead to Democrats facing a stronger opponent in 2020 (Vice President Pence, who is "less objectionable")

Even some who would like to see it happen did not think it would be a wise political step for Democrats to take, with one remarking:

"I personally would like to see [impeachment] happen, but I don't think it's a good political move [for the Democrats]. I think it would fuel the right-wing." – Female, Romney-Clinton voter (Appleton, WI)

9 SWING VOTERS ARE FOCUSED ON HEALTHCARE, IMMIGRATION, AND THE ECONOMY HEADING INTO ELECTION 2020.

For the last four months, we asked respondents to name their top issue of concern heading into 2020. They named:

- Healthcare—cost and/or access (12)
- Immigration (11)
- The economy/economic issues (8)
- Education (4)

Other issues with two or fewer mentions were civil rights/how the police treat minorities, Donald Trump's behavior, student debt, abortion, protecting Social Security, women's rights, workers' rights, human rights, and gun violence.

If President Trump and the Democrats running for President aren't focusing on healthcare, immigration, and the economy, they will have a difficult time connecting with swing voters.

10 A PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE WILL GET SWING VOTERS' ATTENTION BY PROPOSING POLICIES THAT WILL HELP THEM ECONOMICALLY—REDUCING HEALTHCARE AND COLLEGE TUITION COSTS, LOWERING TAXES, AND FIXING SOCIAL SECURITY.

Over the last three months, we asked swing voters to name one thing a presidential candidate could propose that would help them personally economically. They offered:

- Reduce the cost of healthcare, including premiums and prescription drugs (9)
- Reduce the cost of college/make college more affordable/forgive student loans (6)
- Lower taxes (4)
- Fix and/or protect Social Security (4)

Other issues with two or fewer mentions: provide healthcare to everybody; don't promise to give everything away for free; rein in the budget and reduce the debt; address global warming; forge a solid trade agreement with the world, especially China; get rid of lobbyists; address gun violence; create a flat tax; fund public schools; reduce the cost of car insurance.