

Messaging Climate Action in 2020 Battlegrounds

Research Findings Prepared by Global Strategy Group for EDF Action



Methodology

Online Discussion Board

GSG conducted an online discussion board among white swing voters in battleground Congressional districts from April 4th to April 7th, 2019.

Voter File Matched Online Survey

Global Strategy Group conducted a voter file-matched online multimodal survey of 2,126 likely 2020 election voters between April 19th and 24th, 2019.

The sample included:

- 1,518 voters across 42 battleground Congressional districts nationwide, including 736 middle partisan voters
 - Trump won 27 of these districts and Clinton won 15
- 608 voters across 3 Senate battleground states: Michigan, Minnesota. and New Hampshire.
 - Approximately 203 interviews in each state

Respondents were selected via online panels or texted a link to complete the survey on their mobile phones. Respondents from both modes were matched back to voter files.

We intentionally simulated a scenario where opponents message first and communicate more to understand the potential of attacks:

Initial Vote – “Do you support or oppose the Green New Deal?”



Opponents' Attacks Against the Incumbent using the Green New Deal – Taken from CLF, CFG ads and GOP statements



Re-Vote



Democratic Incumbent Statement on the Green New Deal (Split-Sample):

Supporting the GND:

“...I support the Green New Deal because we can no longer ignore the increasingly strange and severe weather that we’re seeing – or the economic inequality that is tearing our society apart...”

Opposing the GND – w/ socialism:

“...I won’t vote for the Green New Deal because I don’t support some of its provisions about the economy – they get too close to socialism for my liking...”

Opposing the GND – w/o socialism:

“...I won’t vote for the Green New Deal because I don’t support some of its provisions about the economy...”



Re-Vote

Key Findings

Key Findings:

Battleground voters overwhelmingly support strong action to combat climate change – including moving to 100% clean energy.

- Strong majorities of voters – including those who are swing on sentiments toward their incumbent Senator or Representative – believe that climate change is a serious problem and support the government taking strong action to combat climate change.
- As such, voters look very favorably upon lawmakers who support strong climate action and very unfavorably upon those who do not.
- Voters also support requiring the U.S. to get 100% of its energy – economy-wide – from clean energy sources by the year 2050 by a more than 2-to-1 margin.
- Voters are by far more concerned about climate deniers blocking progress than liberal alarmists pushing the country too far – though swing voters have some concern about both.

The Green New Deal has succeeded in focusing the national conversation on climate and in setting the parameters of the debate in an advantageous way for climate advocates...

- By staking out such aggressive territory, the Green New Deal has moved the window of the climate debate significantly.
- As a result, an ambitious plan to move the country to 100% clean energy economy-wide by 2050, which would likely have been viewed by battleground voters as unrealistic just a few years ago, now firmly occupies the middle ground, enjoys strong support, and is seen by voters as “thoughtful,” “moderate,” and “reasonable.”

Key Findings: *(cont'd)*

...But false attacks about the Green New Deal can be a real potential vulnerability for some Democratic incumbents.

- Battleground voters are initially split on the Green New Deal with a the third of the electorate remaining undecided on supporting or opposing the plan.
- Most of the Green New Deal's components earn net positive ratings, with upgrading infrastructure particularly popular. A federal jobs guarantee, however, is unpopular with voters. The plan's target of 100% clean energy is popular, but many voters express skepticism about the 10-year timeline to hit that target.
- However, attacks on "The Green New Deal proposed by [INCUMBENT MEMBER]'s liberal allies in Congress" resonate and have a real impact on the standing of incumbent Representatives and Senators if not addressed head on. Attacks on the potential cost of the Green New Deal and its supposed "socialist" policies have a particular impact with swing voters.
- A response to these attacks that fully embraces and defends the Green New Deal is only partially successful, and still leaves incumbents worse than when we introduced the issue.

Key Findings: *(cont'd)*

By moving the window, the GND has created a real opportunity for incumbents who have chosen not support the proposal to position themselves as “thoughtful,” “reasonable,” and “forward-looking” while embracing specific aggressive climate action like 100% clean energy.

- A response to these attacks that enthusiastically embraces strong climate action (including support for 100% clean energy by 2050) but opposes the Green New Deal because of its non-climate components is effective at countering the attacks – particularly when there is an explicit labeling of some of the GND’s economic provisions as “too close to socialism for my liking.”
- Perhaps more important, this response also leaves solid majorities of voters viewing the incumbent as “thoughtful and reasonable,” “forward-thinking,” and “having the right priorities.” It also leaves strong majorities rejecting the idea that the incumbent is “too liberal” or “socialist.”
- Moreover, as noted above, the potential costs associated with the Green New Deal are one of the bigger vulnerabilities for supporters, but we handily win a debate on costs if we say we can pay for strong climate action by eliminating subsidies for oil and gas companies while also highlighting the high cost of inaction.

Recommendations

Recommendations for All Incumbents:

While all incumbents should do their own research and take district- and incumbent-specific information into account, we would generally recommend the following across these battleground districts and states based not only on this research, but other research we have conducted on climate in the last three to four months:

- **Don't be afraid to support aggressive – but thoughtful - action on climate, or to make it a focus of your messaging.** The salience of climate change as an issue has clearly increased over the last year and the debate has moved decisively in favor of climate action. Voters believe climate change is a serious problem, they want strong action, and they are ready to reward lawmakers who support action – and punish those who don't. But it is important to position the action you support as “thoughtful” and “innovative” rather than “bold.”
- **Make it clear what you are for and what you are against – moving the country to 100% clean energy is a strong and safe policy to support.** Whether you are for or against the Green New Deal, it is important to make it clear to voters what policies you're supporting, what you're opposing, and why. Moving the country to 100% clean energy is a strong and safe place to be.
- **Push off of anti-climate politicians' fealty to big oil and coal companies.** Voters believe we should have already taken stronger action to move to clean energy and that the main reason we haven't – and the main reason many politicians deny the consensus on climate – is that they are in the pockets of big oil and coal companies. Moreover, supporters of climate action put themselves in a stronger position when they make this a choice between siding with the scientific consensus for action (see below) and siding with politicians who deny the problem because they are trying to protect the status quo.

Recommendations for All Incumbents: *(cont'd)*

- **Focus on the consensus behind the real problem:** 97% of climate scientists, NASA, and the Department of Defense agree that climate change is real and a threat, yet big corporations and the politicians they've bought in Washington deny the problem exists and risk leaving the real threat of climate change unaddressed.
- **Remind voters why we need to act now – an obligation to future generations:** we have a basic responsibility to address climate change in order to leave our kids a better world. And climate action can protect our kids' health, spur innovation, strengthen our economy, and save regular Americans money.
- **Use the other side's most ridiculous claims to discredit their attacks.** Remind voters that fact checkers have called these claims (particularly around cost) as “false” and “bogus” and that no one wants to ban hamburgers, cars, or airplanes. These over-the-top attacks aren't credible with voters.
- **Respond on cost attacks by highlighting big oil subsidies and the cost of inaction.** We can defeat the cost attacks from opponents by pointing out that we can pay for climate action by eliminating subsidies to oil and coal companies and reminding voters that the cost of inaction would be far greater.

Recommendations for Supporters of the Green New Deal:

- **Define the Green New Deal on your terms before opponents define it for you.** Attacks on the GND can be strong and credible, but there is also a lot that voters like in the proposal. Making sure that voters understand those core components before the other side defines it for them will be crucial.
- **Make combatting inequality secondary to the climate and energy aspects of the proposal in your messaging.** Voters respond to the climate and energy aspects of the proposal, and arguments in support of those elements, much more favorably than arguments about how the GND will mobilize our economy to combat inequality. The federal jobs guarantee is the weakest component of the proposal.
- **Don't over-play the need for a 10-year timeframe.** This and other research we have recently conducted indicate that arguments about the need to act in a 10-year time frame can be polarizing and potentially counter-productive. And while voters support the concept of 100% clean energy or net-zero emissions, many don't see a 10-year timeframe as realistic, thoughtful, or reasonable.
 - If you are talking about a time frame of about 10 years it is actually better to talk about moving to 100% clean energy or zero emissions "by 2030" rather than "in the next 10 years."
- **Do feel free to highlight the infrastructure aspect of the proposal.** That portion is very popular, but it is important to tie broad infrastructure upgrades to the overall goal of reducing emissions.

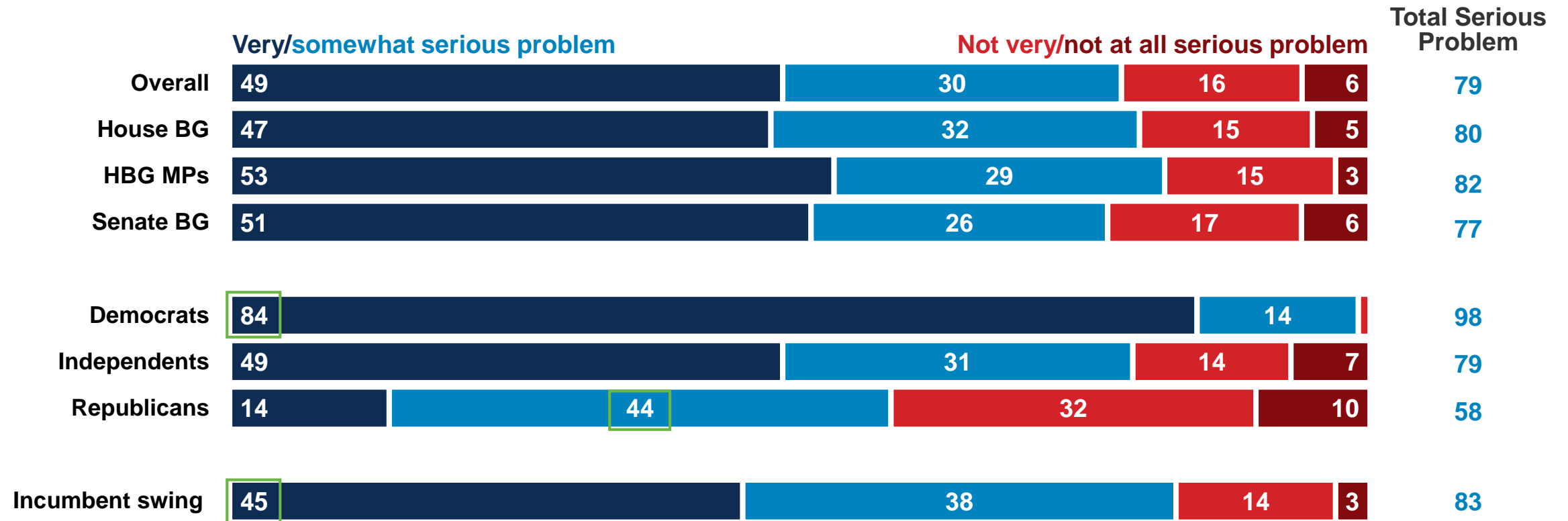
Recommendations for Supporters of Strong Climate Action But not the Green New Deal:

- **Highlight the need for strong action on climate while opposing the GND because of its specific economic provisions.** It is more than safe to praise proponents of the Green New Deal for thinking big and bringing more attention to the issue of climate change. Praising the overall climate ambitions (if not the timeline) of the GND while opposing some of the specific non-climate provisions meets voters where they are.
- **Push off of socialism or a top-down government approach.** This research was clear that explicitly opposing expansive economic provisions because they “get too close to socialism for my liking” has a real impact on boosting favorability of the incumbent and positioning them as “thoughtful and reasonable” and countering attacks that they are socialist or “too liberal.” Though we did not test it, we have also seen recent language about opposing those provisions as “too much top-down, government solutions,” and we think that language may also work in this scenario.
- **Embrace an alternative approach, such as 100% clean energy by 2050.** It’s not enough to just speak in platitudes about acting on climate while also opposing the GND. Voters want to see a specific alternative, and 100% clean energy is seen as both appropriately ambitious but also as the thoughtful and innovative approach.
- **Beware of timelines that seem too ambitious.** Voters question how much is doable in 10 years, so stressing that this approach is both reasonable and technologically and economically feasible in a 20- or 30-year timeframe can be important in shoring up support.

Views on Climate & Energy

Majorities of battleground voters, including 83% of voters who are swing on incumbent, think climate change is a serious problem.

Would you say that climate change is a...



There is consensus that climate change is a serious problem and voters believe it's time for the government to take necessary action.

Online Discussion Board Responses

*“It’s obvious that the Earth is warming up. Floods, hurricanes, and earthquakes are more and more common. **Climate change is definitely something that needs to be addressed.**” – Democratic voter*

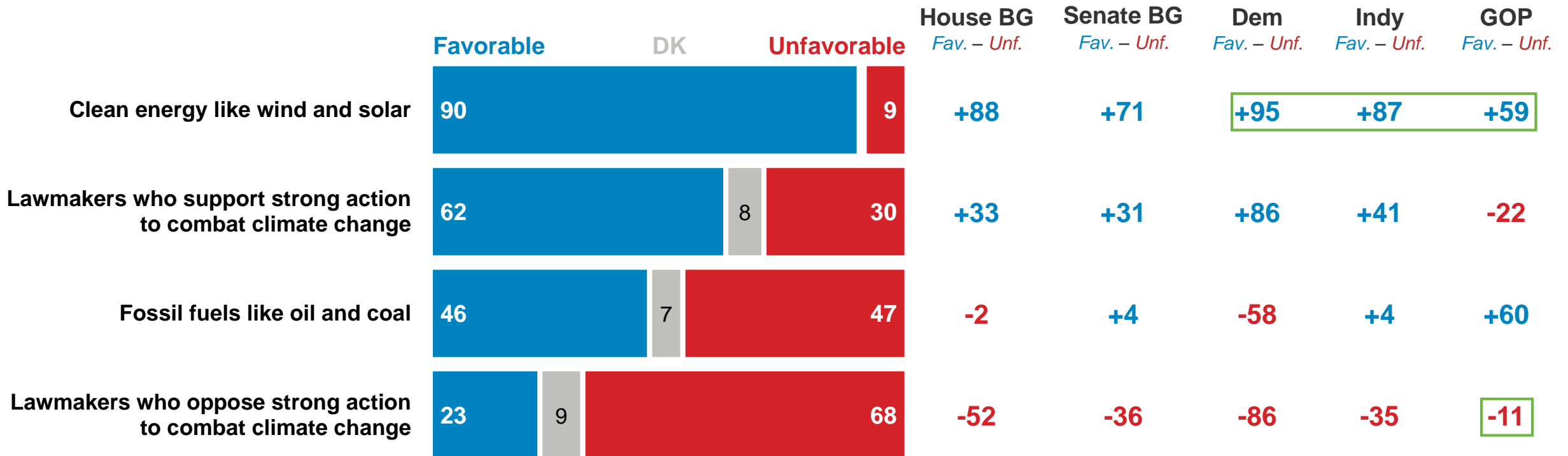
*“Absolutely, **I think our government should do more to combat adverse climate change.** Our current administration seems hell bent to reverse policies put in place to protect our environment. I believe that is being done to protect big industries interests, not the average American. **We are way behind other industrialized nations** when it comes to protecting our environment.” – Independent voter*

*“**Climate change is an extremely serious problem...**We can’t rely on the private sector alone here, we need sweeping changes. The technology is there now – but true implementation and widened use **will not happen until our government encourages, supports and eventually mandates these changes...**” – Independent voter*

*“**Scientists have been warning us for decades** that we must change the way we treat the Earth or life here will be seriously affected or may even cease to exist. **We now know that they were right.** Droughts are getting worse. Storms are getting worse.” – Independent voter*

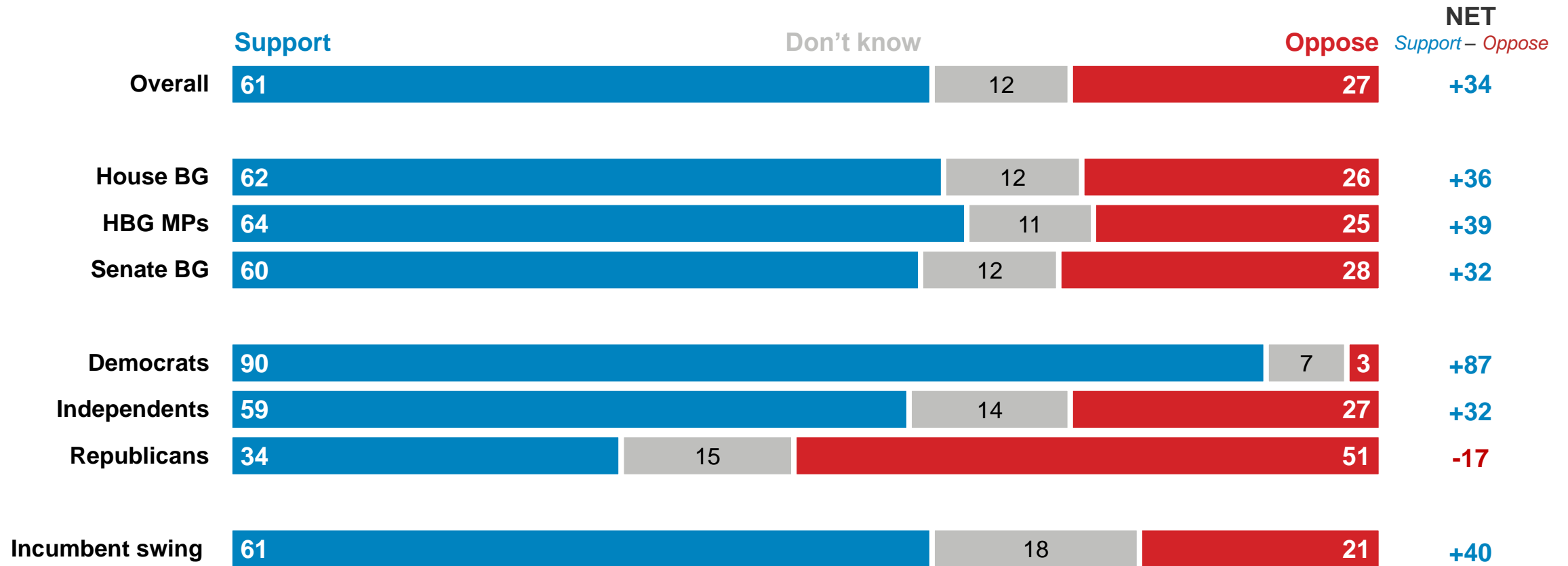
Clean energy is overwhelmingly popular, but fossil fuels aren't hated. Overwhelming opposition to anti-climate lawmakers.

Favorability of People & Groups (Overall)



There is strong support among battleground voters for a requirement to move to 100% clean energy.

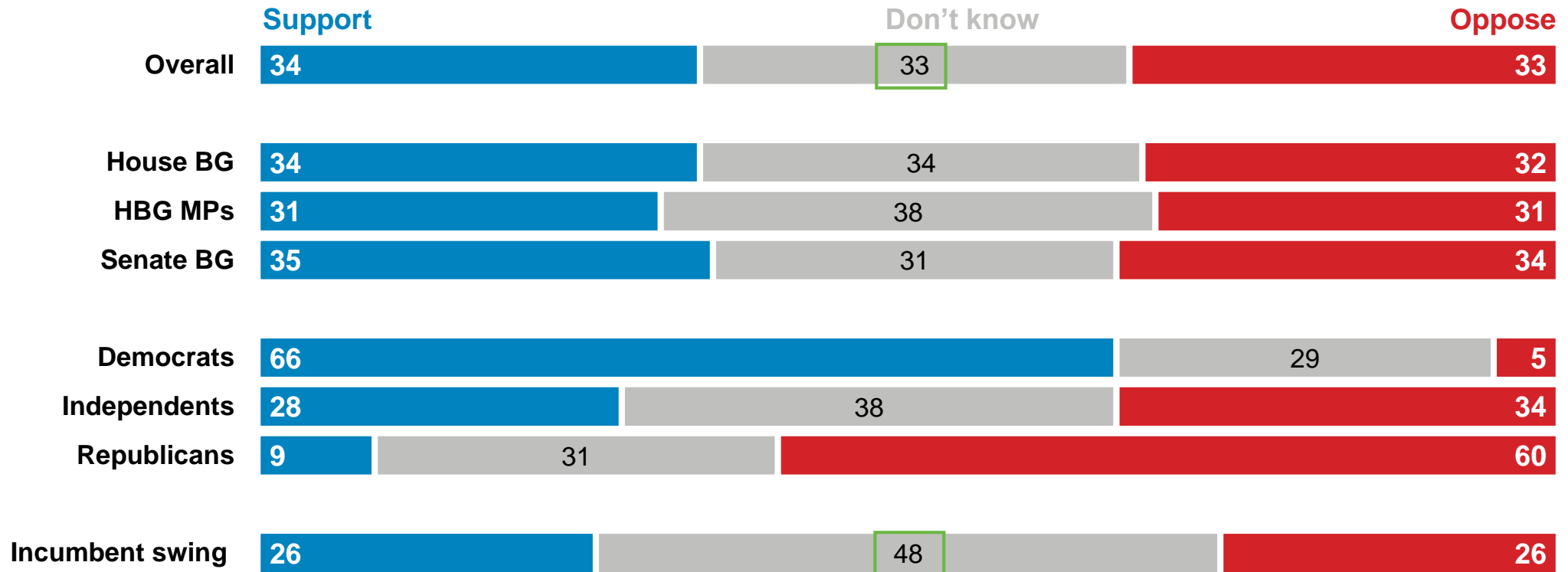
Do you support or oppose requiring the U.S. to get 100% of it's energy, including electricity and energy used to power cars and trucks, from clean energy sources like wind and solar by the year?



The Green New Deal

Swing voters are initially split on the Green New Deal though nearly half nearly are unsure.

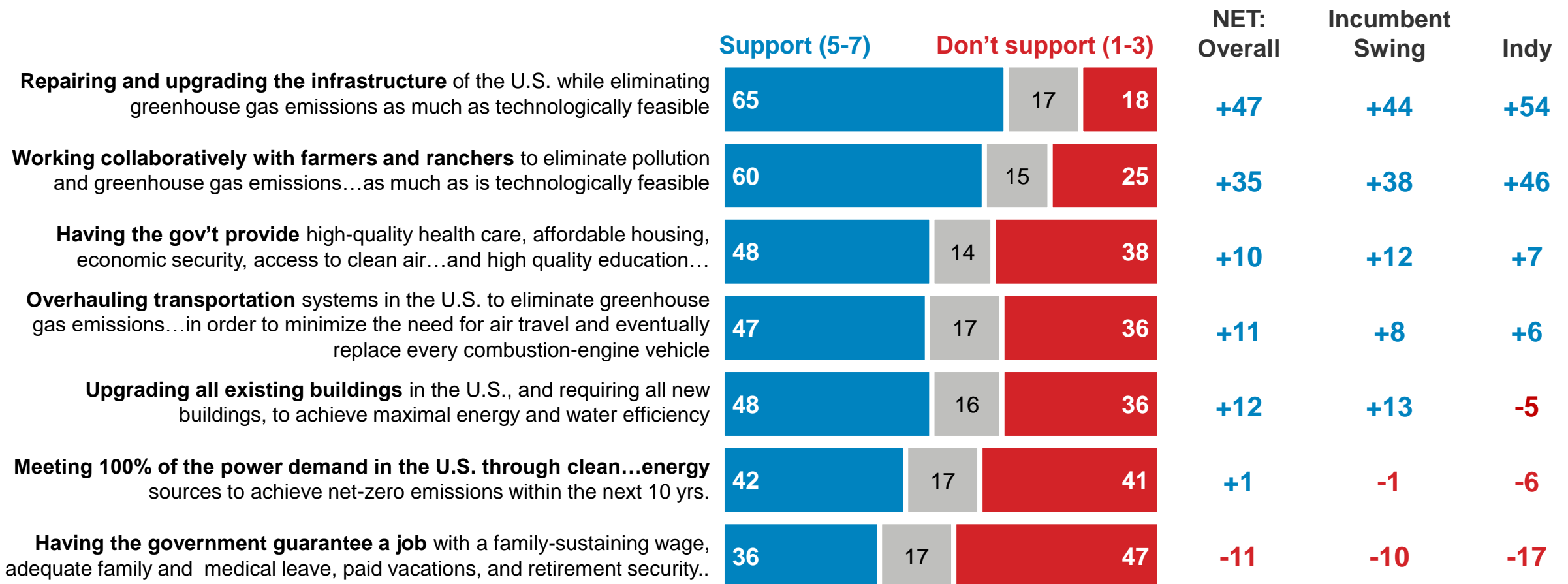
Based on what you know, do you support or oppose the Green New Deal?



Most of GND's components are supported by battleground voters, especially infrastructure. Jobs guarantee and 10-year timeline are most problematic.

Support for Components of the Green New Deal (Overall)

Note: this was asked at the end of the survey, after back-and-forth messaging



Impact of Climate and Green New Deal Debate

Democratic Incumbent Statements:

Green New Deal Support:

Right now, the economy is controlled by big corporations whose profits are dependent on producing climate pollution. So even while 97% of climate scientists, NASA and the Department of Defense all agree climate change is real and a threat to our country, these special interests and the politicians they've bought in Washington deny the problem exists and make ridiculous claims about the Green New Deal to scare Americans and keep the real threat to our country – climate change – unaddressed.

I support the Green New Deal because we can no longer ignore the increasingly strange and severe weather that we're seeing – or the economic inequality that is tearing our society apart. If we act now, we can protect our kids' health while spurring innovation, making our economy stronger, and eventually saving Americans thousands of dollars a year in energy and health care costs.

Yes, the Green New Deal will require significant government investment, but nowhere near what opponents are claiming – independent fact checkers call those claims “false” and “bogus.” More important, the cost of inaction would be much greater. Scientists and economists say that if we listen to the climate deniers and do nothing, climate change will end up costing future generations trillions of dollars and hundreds of thousands of Americans will die or lose their homes.

It's far less costly to get shovels in the ground now, before disaster strikes, by taking bold and fearless action to combat climate change. The Green New Deal will mobilize our economy in a way not seen since World War II to build the infrastructure we need to move to entirely clean energy like wind and solar, while also making sure that all Americans have access to quality health care, education, and housing and that any American who is willing to work can have a job.

Climate Action Support:

The big oil and coal companies, and the politicians who they've bought in Washington D.C., are trying to protect the status quo and block any action to combat climate change in order to protect their profits. So even when 97% of climate scientists, NASA and the Department of Defense all agree climate change is real and a threat to our country, they deny the problem exists and make ridiculous claims about the Green New Deal to scare Americans and keep the real threat to our country – climate change – unaddressed. Independent fact checkers have called these claims “false” and “bogus.” No one wants to ban hamburgers, cars or airplanes.

I won't vote for the Green New Deal because I don't support some of its provisions about the economy (SPLIT SAMPLE: – they get too close to socialism for my liking.)

But I'm glad that the issue of climate change is getting more attention and people are thinking big, because we can no longer ignore the increasingly strange and severe weather that we're seeing. We have a basic responsibility to address climate change and leave a better, healthier, and safer world for our children and grandchildren.

That's why I am co-sponsoring legislation to take immediate action on climate change by requiring the United States to move to 100% clean energy sources, like solar and wind power, by the year 2050. By moving to clean energy in a thoughtful and aggressive way, we will not only spur innovation, create jobs, and eliminate the carbon pollution that causes climate change, we will also eliminate the carbon, sulfur, and mercury pollution that comes from burning dirty fuels like coal. Doctors say this will reduce asthma, heart and lung disease, and even cancer – leaving behind a better, healthier, and safer world to our children and grandchildren.

While a defense of the GND gets us back to even on the proposal, it leaves incumbents underwater on favorability. A response that embraces climate action, but opposes the GND and pushes off socialism does much better.

Vote Movement Throughout the Survey

Key Metrics	Initial	Following Negatives	Following Incumbent Response		
			Support GND	Oppose – w/ socialism	Oppose – w/o socialism
Incumbent favorability	42/32 +10	41/49 -8	44/47 -3	47/40 +7	45/45 +0
Support for climate action	61/26 +35	N/A	56/33 +23	56/29 +27	55/28 +27
Support for the GND	34/33 +1	43/57 -14	51/49 +2	48/52 -4	48/52 -4

A response that embraces GND leaves a majority viewing incumbents as “too liberal,” “socialist,” and not “fiscally responsible”

Now that you’ve read (incumbent member/Senator)’s position on the Green New Deal, please read each description and indicate how well you think it describes (incumbent member/Senator).

Incumbent Traits <i>% describes well</i>	Following Incumbent Response		
	Support GND	Oppose – w/ socialism	Oppose – w/o socialism
Forward thinking	55%	59%	54%
Thoughtful and reasonable	46	55	52
Has the right priorities	49	55	49
Has the right approach to energy and climate	46	51	46
Too liberal	53	41	42
Fiscally responsible	31	39	41
Socialist	50	31	39

Pro-Climate Messaging

Most appealing part of statement supporting the GND focuses on overall climate threat. Parts focusing on inequality, economic components less effective.

Text Highlighting – Incumbent Statement Supporting the Green New Deal:

Right now, the **economy is controlled by big corporations** whose profits are dependent on producing climate pollution. So even while **97% of climate scientists, NASA and the Department of Defense all agree climate change is real and a threat to our country**, these special interests and the politicians they've bought in Washington deny the problem exists and make ridiculous claims about the **Green New Deal to scare Americans** and keep the **real threat** to our country – climate **change – unaddressed**.

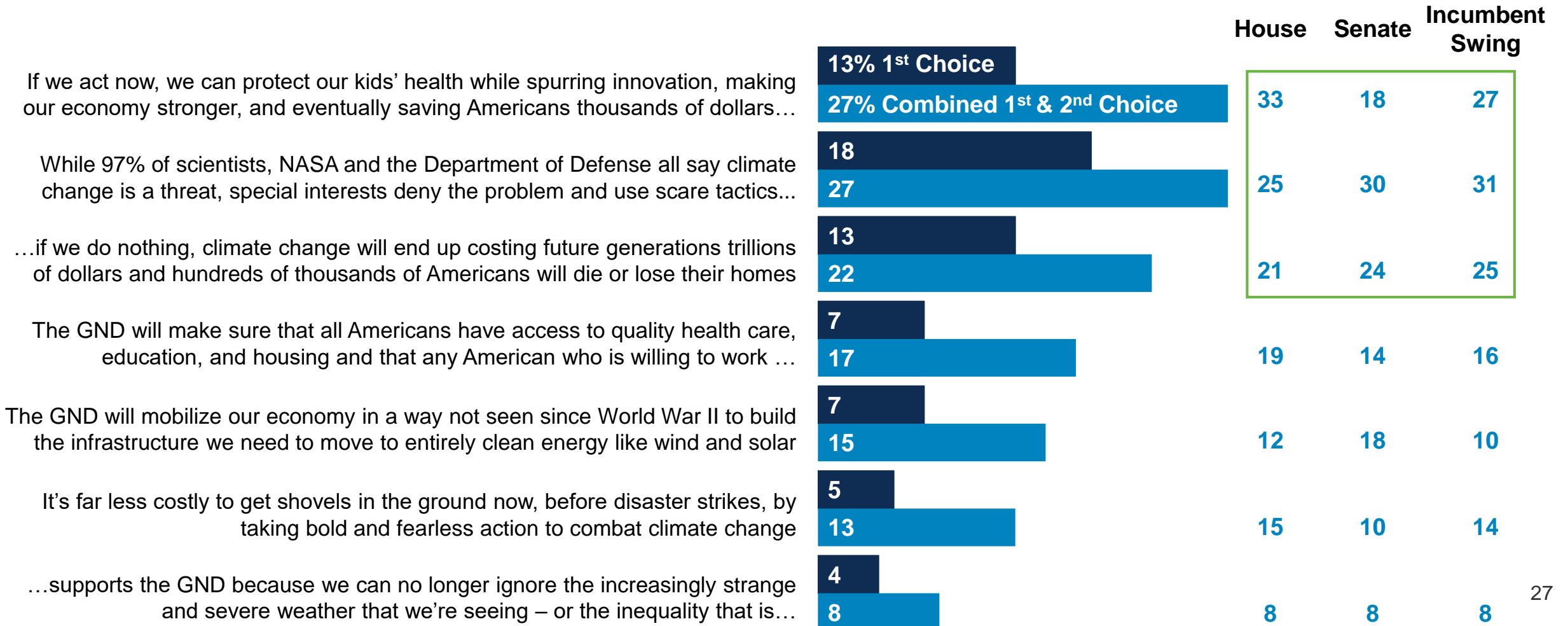
I support the **Green New Deal because we can no longer ignore the increasingly strange and severe weather that we're seeing – or the economic inequality that is tearing our society apart**. If we act now, we can **protect our kids' health while spurring innovation, making our economy stronger, and eventually saving Americans thousands of dollars a year in energy and health care costs**.

Yes, the Green New Deal will **require significant government investment**, but **nowhere near what opponents are claiming – independent fact checkers** call those **claims “false” and “bogus.”** More important, the **cost of inaction would be much greater**. Scientists and economists say that if we listen to the climate deniers and do nothing, **climate change will end up costing future generations trillions of dollars and hundreds of thousands of Americans will die or lose their homes**.

It's **far less costly** to get **shovels** in the ground **now**, before disaster strikes, by taking bold and fearless action to combat climate change. **The Green New Deal will mobilize our economy in a way not seen since World War II** to build the infrastructure we need to move to **entirely clean energy** like wind and solar, while also **making** sure that **all Americans have access to quality health care, education, and housing and that any American who is willing to work can have a job**.

Within the statement, battleground and swing voters find parts that focus on the costs of climate change to future generations, spurring innovation, and listening to the scientific community convincing.

Select the most convincing/second most convincing statement.



Discussion board participants liked parts of this statement, but they still aren't sold on the Green New Deal.

Online Discussion Board Responses

"This statement seems pretty reasonable and I can agree with most of it. I think it sounds like the right approach but I would like to see more numbers in regards to a timetable and costs."

– Independent voter

"I like the general idea behind the GND but I don't think it's a feasible proposal at this time in our society. Still, I think this statement is reasoned and thoughtful and I agree with most of it. But, I think that parts of the GND need to be altered to make it a more realistic plan, so I don't fully agree with his statement."

– Independent voter

"I do not generally agree with it. It still contains some of the things that I feel are too extreme and unnecessary. It is closer to something that I would endorse, but seems like it is prettied up so that it would get approval. I continue to have the same concerns."

– Republican voter

"I think it's a good statement. I don't support the green deal, but I think it's more logical."

– Republican voter

"I think that something should be done, but it shouldn't be a drastic solution. It is a good approach."

– Democratic voter

Statement supporting climate action but not GND gets most positive reaction, especially language on consensus for action, responsibility to our kids.

Text Highlighting – Incumbent Statement Opposing the Green New Deal

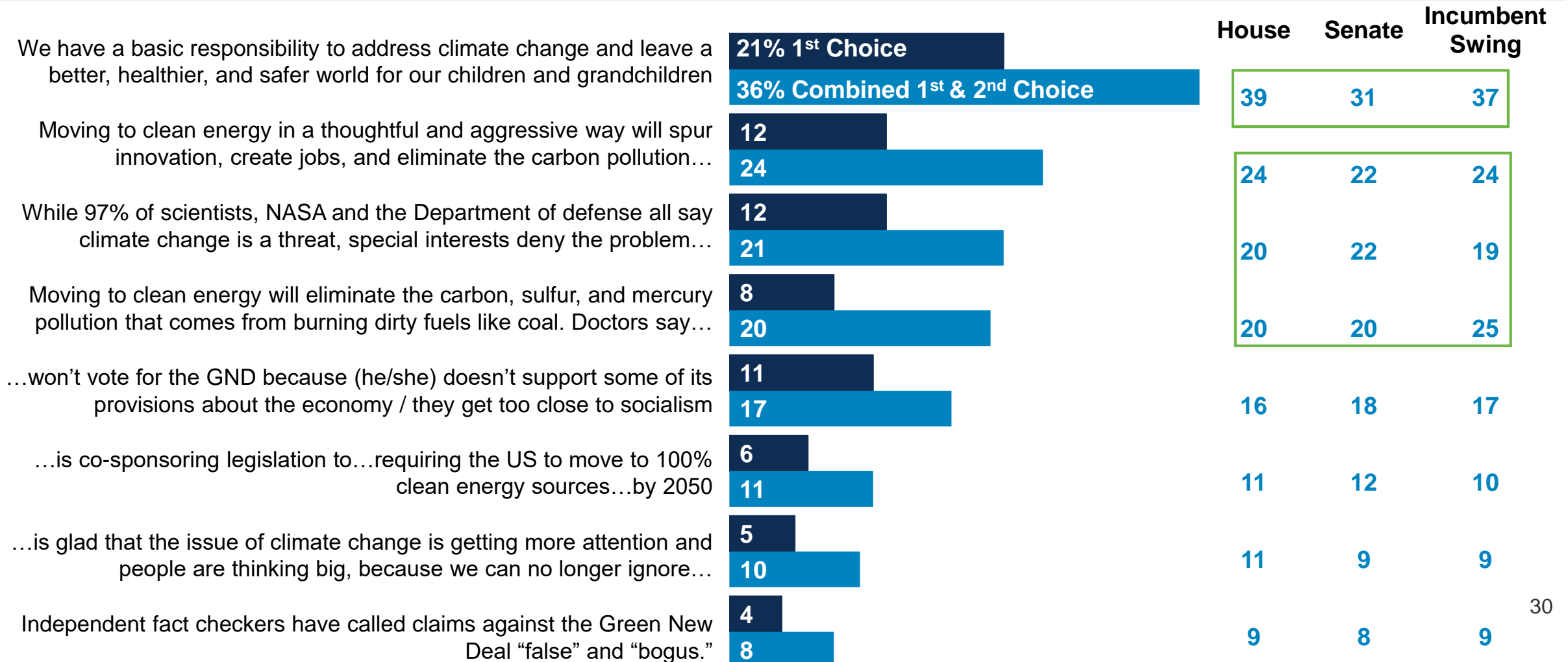
The **big oil and coal companies**, and the **politicians who they've bought in Washington D.C.**, are trying to protect the status quo and block any action to combat climate change in order to protect their profits. So even when **97% of climate scientists, NASA and the Department of Defense all agree climate change is real** and a threat to our country, they deny the problem exists and make ridiculous claims about the Green New Deal to scare Americans and keep the real threat to our country – climate change – unaddressed. Independent fact checkers have called these claims “false” and “bogus.” [Split Sample: **No one wants to ban hamburgers, cars or airplanes.** That's just silly.]

I won't vote for the Green New Deal because I don't support some of its provisions about the economy – [Split Sample: **they get too close to socialism for my liking**]. But I'm glad that the issue of climate change is getting more attention and people are thinking big, because we can no longer ignore the increasingly strange and severe weather that we're seeing. **We have a basic responsibility to address climate change and leave a better, healthier, and safer world for our children and grandchildren.**

That's why I am co-sponsoring legislation to take immediate action on climate change by **requiring** the **United States** to move to **100% clean energy sources**, like solar and wind power, by the year **2050**. By moving to clean energy in a thoughtful and aggressive way, we will not only **spur innovation, create jobs**, and **eliminate** the carbon pollution that causes climate change, we will also eliminate the carbon, sulfur, and mercury pollution that comes from burning dirty fuels like coal. **Doctors** say this will **reduce asthma, heart and lung disease**, and even **cancer** – leaving behind a better, healthier, and safer world to our children and grandchildren.

Responsibility to future generations is a particularly convincing part of this statement, along with climate consensus and the positive impacts of moving to clean energy.

Select the most convincing/second most convincing statement.



In boards, embracing strong climate action and 100% clean energy while opposing the GND resonates strongly with independent voters.

Online Discussion Board Responses

“I love this statement. I think it’s reasoned and thoughtful. I do think it sounds like the right approach to the Green New Deal because it’s more realistic while still taking aggressive action to combat climate change.”

– Independent voter

“I’m glad that the GND has brought much more attention to the issue of how climate change is affecting the U.S. It is frustrating to know so many crooked politicians have been bought by the big oil and coal companies, and then are put in the position to thwart any real legislation to address the climate crisis. We must act with urgency to addressing this issue. However, I don’t agree with some of the far-fetched economic proposals.”

– Independent voter

“I like that she addressed why she’s not backing the GND – not because climate change doesn’t exist, but because of its socialist undertones.”

– Independent voter

“I like it and agree with it. It gets down to the important issues and how we can realistically solve them. It dismisses the outrageous claims like banning meat and taking away transportation. This is exactly the response that I hope my local representative would have.”

– Independent voter

We have effective rebuttals on cost – a focus on big oil subsidies is more convincing than focusing on costs of inaction among swing voters (though both solid overall)

Even if you don't agree with either completely, which do you find more convincing?

Can't Afford

Taking massive government action to prevent climate change would cost America trillions of dollars, raise taxes on regular Americans, and add trillions to the national debt. Combined with their “social justice” reforms, these proposals on climate change from liberals in Congress would cost \$93 trillion and liberals like Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez are already suggesting we raise taxes to 70% to pay for it. We just can't afford that.

Climate Costs

Independent fact checkers say these claims about the cost of addressing climate change are “false” and “bogus.” In fact, scientists and economists say that it will cost far less to act now to combat climate change, than to do nothing. In just the last two years, climate-related natural disasters have cost the country more than \$300 billion and killed more than 3,000 Americans. And if we fail to act, climate change will cost the country several trillion over the coming decades.

44% agree with Can't Afford

56% agree with Climate Costs

Incumbent Swing: 47% Can't Afford/**53%** Climate Costs

Big Oil Subsidies

Independent fact checkers say these claims about the cost of addressing climate change are “false” and “bogus.” Thoughtful action to combat climate change and transition our country to clean energy doesn't need to be expensive. We can pay for it without raising taxes on regular people by eliminating the hundreds of billions in subsidies we currently give to big oil and coal companies and requiring energy companies to pay an impact fee based on the amount of carbon pollution that they produce.

43% agree with Can't Afford

57% agree with Big Oil Subsidies

Incumbent Swing: 39% Can't Afford/**61%** Big Oil Subsidies

Thank You

New York

215 Park Ave South
15th Floor
New York, NY 10003

Washington, DC

1001 G Street NW
6th Floor East
Washington, DC 20001

Hartford

185 Asylum St
16th Floor
Hartford, CT 06103

Chicago

222 W. Ontario St.
Suite 600
Chicago, IL 60654

Denver

1120 Lincoln Street
Suite 905
Denver, CO 80203

Seattle

2608 2nd Ave
#293
Seattle, WA 98121

Appendix: List of House Districts

Urban/Dense Suburban

CA-10
CA-25
CA-39
CA-49
CO-06
GA-06
KS-03
NV-03
NY-11
OK-05
SC-01
TX-07
TX-32
UT-04
VA-02

Sparse Suburban

IA-03
IL-06
IL-14
MI-08
MI-11
MN-02
NJ-03
NJ-07
NJ-11
PA-07
PA-17
WA-08

Rural/Rural-Suburban

AZ-01
CA-21
CA-45
CA-48
IA-01
IA-02
ME-02
MN-07
NH-01
NJ-02
NM-02
NY-19
NY-22
PA-08
VA-07