



GREENBERG RESEARCH

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To: Interested Parties

From: Stanley Greenberg

The Trump horror show and stark choice

The Biden campaign has a theory on how to change its fortunes in the 2024 election. It believes that Democratic base voters much later in the race will watch the Trump horror show and face the stark choice of voting for either Trump or Biden, and they will come home. Most of the world and I pray it is right.

Unfortunately, this first test of the theory with Hispanics in Las Vegas and Blacks in Detroit was not encouraging. But fortunately, the strategy was hugely successful with the moderate Republicans in suburban Philadelphia. Almost 40 percent switched to vote for Biden or became undecided and supported the House Democrats.

We expect to conduct focus groups with Cheney conservatives soon to see the impact, as well as with young voters. The groups were recruited and moderated by Nancy Zdunkewicz and her firm Z to A Research.

The Experiment

Respondents first watched five minutes of videos of Biden's top content — his speaking to rallies in Wisconsin and to the [UAW in Michigan](#), followed by his [announcement spot](#), and then, his [press conference](#) showing his anger at Donald Trump killing the bipartisan border deal because "it would be bad for him politically."

Respondents then watched five minutes of Trump, supposedly at his worst. It started with Trump promising to be "[dictator on day one](#)" to "close the border" and "drill." Then, they watched Trump demand Biden "[release the J 6 hostages](#)." It was followed by [over a minute](#) of Trump deploring "Biden's extremist open borders, agenda destroying innocent lives." They watched an [ad comparing](#) the Trump and Biden economies. And, at the end, they watched an [interview](#) where Trump declared, "I got rid of Roe v. Wade."

They also watched Nikki Haley describe the “[chaos](#)” surrounding Trump.

Respondents were asked their reaction after each clip and at the end, to give their takeaways. After the Biden segment, they were asked, “Does this make you more enthusiastic about voting for Biden?”

The Democratic base

The Black Detroit group began with one Trump voter and one undecided. After watching the videos, Trump ended up with two votes and one chose “No Labels.”

They began with pretty strong doubts: “bad things about Biden is his age and health;” “he’s too old, can’t relate to our generation, he doesn’t do enough for the African American community.”

They did not push back on Biden’s economic message because many worked in the auto industry or in related sectors. One said, “I lean toward it being true.” Mostly, they viewed it as “a political speech” to get “Black votes.” They engaged more on the border deal, and it raised a lot of doubts, “we need to get our own people at work before we let other people;” they mentioned New York City “putting people in hotels and giving people money.”

When the moderator asked whether the videos made anyone “more enthusiastic,” they took a long pause. One summarized for the group:

It doesn’t make me more enthusiastic. I will vote for him either way. I wish it was someone else, but the alternative is dystopia. I am excited about the things he is getting done but I wish it was someone else.

A majority of the Las Vegas Hispanic group were voting for Biden, and they too watched the Biden, Trump, and Haley videos. The group remained largely unchanged because one wavering Biden voter came back on immigration, and one of the undecideds moved to Trump because of the economy.

The wavering Biden voter wrote, “I voted for Biden, but I haven’t seen anything he promises, and I don’t know what to think about him, inflation is crazy, economy, more crazy.” She wrote in the good things about Trump, “he is a businessman, as president economy was good.” She called him out on “the way he treats immigrants, the way he expresses himself about immigrants, and racist comments in public, but I still think he was a good president.” But in the end, she voted for Biden “because I still believe he can do something for immigrant people.”

The group pushed back hardest after hearing Biden speak in Wisconsin and Michigan.

Where is he living? This is not like living in my country.

It is always talking about gas money or grocery money.

As much as I want to believe what he says, how is the economy right now? I have seen a lot of people shutting down all the unemployment. I know he shuts down the middle class.

I wish I could believe it. I understand he said we have the lowest inflation versus other countries, but it is still crazy. I can't believe they cannot acknowledge that.

That last comment was from the wavering Biden voter, and she was just looking for the president to see what they experienced.

At the end, three voted for Trump, writing:

Trump because I am familiar with him, and he has a winner's spirit and a lot of confidence and smarts.

Trump because I feel he cares and does for the country.

I would currently vote for Trump because of how his last time in office went.

The Trump horror show and choice did move moderate Republicans

Trump's Republican Party is composed of his base of Trump loyalists (42 percent of party), Evangelical loyalists (12 percent), and aligned (11 percent). It also includes the Cheney conservatives (15 percent) and moderate Republicans (17 percent).

They were recruited in suburban Philadelphia. Two-thirds were college graduates, and interestingly, half were observant Catholics.

Three of the eight pulled back from Trump, with two voting for Biden and the third was a long undecided:

I would have to vote for Joe Biden without enthusiasm but only because I am too afraid of what Trump might do. A second presidency for Trump would be a dictatorship and it would be the end of democracy as we know it. Unless Trump really changes his tune and shows me something that indicates he won't be a dictator I'd have to go with Biden.

I don't know...I might not vote. I don't want to throw away my vote for a third-party candidate. Maybe Donald Trump because he could get things done, but I don't know. I don't like Joe Biden, and I don't think he will make it through the entire next term.

Joe Biden. I can't handle the chaos, the violence that directly affects my life, the voice it gives to evil people, etc.

January 6th is a touchstone that produced an intense reaction with the moderate Republicans.

When asked what comes to mind, they quickly went to:

I thought it was a publicity stunt – it may have been. You see that they were all held hostage in a building all night and that was pretty scary. There were injuries.

The lights were on, and no one was home. It was just free for all. Hard to imagine that could happen.

It seemed like somebody did this because they thought they had the okay to do it. They just went crazy, and I think it just made our country look like no one was in control. It made me think of 9/11 but it was ourselves.

It was a disgrace. It was disgusting.

So, you can believe that Trump getting more outrageous may move them away. After watching Trump talk about “the hostages,” they reflected:

I mean, it is like there are so many lesser of all evils. Biden’s son is in the bed with China. Trump with insurrection.

At that point, one woman said, “I thought I had a plan, but here I am back to ground-zero again because he said this dumb thing.” Ground-zero means undecided.

You can see that they are impacted by Trump’s continually pushing beyond the barriers.

And abortion was an added factor in these women pulling back. We tested Biden’s statement on opposing any national abortion ban. Most commented on his “speaking so softly,” but his message got through: “I said the same thing about rape and incest, but for that reason alone, I am with him on that.”

It may seem that these moderate, suburban, mostly college graduates are really a window into a broader potential reaction to Trump’s escalating and violent rhetoric. How would they react to Trump’s attack on Michael Haley and his service? How will they react to Trump inviting Russia to invade countries not spending enough on NATO?

And at some point, President Biden may acknowledge what people have experienced in this economy and grow the number of voters open to supporting him.