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To: Interested Parties

From: Stanley Greenberg

## **Battling to a Democratic win in 2022**

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Democrats face the most daunting internal problems and headwinds battling to a winning margin in the 2022 midterms, yet it's possible.

This is a survey that I think you can have confidence in. It is a 2,500 national and battleground state survey with large oversamples of the Black, Hispanic, and Asian American (AAPI) communities.

Trump's campaigns raised the proportion of working class voters in the electorate, and this survey maintains the level from 2020. That translates into 61 percent not having a four-year college degree (my definition of working class), and the white working class still forms forms 46 percent of the survey respondents, just short of half. We have learned to push up positive feelings toward cultural actors, like the NRA and pro-life groups to offset the social liberal bias of online samples.

And to protect against Trump voters' distrust of polls and elites — something I learned about polling from Netanyahu in Israel and Brexit voters in Britain — I put up the recalled Trump vote for white working class women to 57 percent (17-point Trump margin) and for the men to 65 percent (27-point margin).

And this survey certainly shows an electorate that looks miserable for Democrats. Only 28 percent believe the country is on the “right track;” they view Republicans more favorably than Democrats, “Republicans in Congress” more favorably than “Democrats in Congress,” and give Donald Trump a higher job approval rating right now than they do Joe Biden.

The top issue by far is the cost of living. After that, it is the economy and jobs, crime, and violence. And Republicans have a fast building advantage on each, going from 4 points on the cost of living to 14 points on crime, to 15 points on the economy. Democrats struggle to be more trusted on the economy with its diverse base, with the exception of Blacks and unmarried women.

Crime hangs over this election. For Blacks, concern with it is at parity with the cost of living. Crime is in the top tier of two issues with Hispanics, Asian Americans (AAPI), Gen Z, and millennials. We lose Asian Americans by 9 points on who is better on crime. And the biggest worry if Democrats were to win control of the Congress would be a surge of crime and homelessness and attacks on police. A major part of our diverse base accepts Trump's dire warning that America has never been more at risk from crime, open borders, disrespect for police, and a lack of pride in America.

And all produce an electorate where 54 percent of Republicans say they are following the election with the highest level of interest on 10-point ladder scale. That is a full 8 points higher than Democrats. To estimate likely turnout, we highlight which voters put themselves from 8 to 10 on that ladder. All voters are at 67 percent, but Blacks, Hispanics, and AAPI voters trail that level by about 10 points and Gen Z voters by 20.

Yet Democrats are remarkably at a 2-point advantage in the generic congressional vote, and remarkably, still have more cards to play.

This poll shows Democrats could lose their lead and fall behind however, if they make the wrong choices, particularly on the cost of living and crime. There are deep frustrations running through the electorate that Republicans will never cease to exploit.

What has changed the 2022 midterms? And what do we learn from that in conducting a strategy to prevail?

### **Roe v. Wade, the Supreme Court, and the January 6<sup>th</sup> Committee**

A great portion of the change has got to be to do with the repeal of Roe v. Wade, but not all of it.

Women of all classes and races responded with almost identical anger to the Supreme Court decision. That is reflected here in their visceral reaction to the words, "Supreme Court overturning Roe v. Wade" and their intense "disapproval" of the decision itself.

- All women disapprove by 61 to 39 percent, with 43 strongly. The numbers are identical for white women.
- Working class women disapprove by 60 to 40 percent, 40 strongly.
- College women disapprove by 63 to 37 percent, 49 percent strongly.
- Working class women under 50 years disapprove by 70 to 30 percent, 49 percent strongly.

- White college women under 50 disapprove by 67 to 33 percent, 51 percent strongly. They topped the intensity scale.

The translation into Democrats gaining electorally can be seen in Democrats now performing respectively well with white college women (+17 point margin) who are delivering some base-like numbers after a few years of being diverted on other issues. While all white working class women look stable from 2020, that is not true of the women under 50 where Republicans have only a 4-point lead.

Almost 60 percent of moderate Republicans disapproved of the decision too, and 14 percent are already voting Democratic. That is a touch ahead of previous cycles.

For the nearly 500 in the sample who heard the debates on Roe, the race shifted to the Republicans. They did reasonable in arguing for protecting life, but that is misleading, as both the Republicans and Democrats have nationalized the issue around making abortion illegal.

We tested a list of outcomes if Republicans win control of the US Senate and House. “Passing a law to ban abortion nationally and women losing an equal right forever” is virtually the top worry for Black and Hispanic voters, and under 50 white college and working class women, unmarried, and white unmarried women. That is also true for Gen Z voters and white millennials.

Campaigns, I believe can make further gains using ensuring abortion is not made illegal nationally.

Roe cannot account for all the changes in the state of the race, however, since the decision mainly angered women.

In this same period, we have watched the massacres with assault rifles and Republicans limiting the government’s response, Supreme Court justices acting as conservative activists on Roe, gun safety, and climate change. And then, the January 6<sup>th</sup> Committee has finally brought the full work of a Democratic Congress on Trump’s insurrection.

Republicans were already fully consolidated behind Republican candidates in November. But now, both liberal and moderate Democrats are just as fully consolidated behind the Democratic candidates. Only 4 percent of the former and 8 percent of the latter are voting Republican. The Republican defectors from the Trump era are giving Democrats big margins again. Some voters are mentioning a fear of white supremacists being emboldened and the elections being challenged again.

Liberal Democrats are just as engaged as the Trump loyalists.

The Asian American vote is very worrisome here, but both the Black and Hispanic vote margins are more than respectable compared to previous years.

And put all that together and you end up defying the fundamentals of the midterm to make November look close.

### **Managing the crime issue**

Democrats are in such a weakened position on crime that they have to get their strategy and message just right.

If you used the message many Democrats are using, it would be a mistake to join the debate.

Half the respondents heard the Republican message on crime and Democrats contesting the issue with their position. In that portion of the sample, Democrats lost 2 points off of the starting margin. The race would be even again.

In the other half, Democrats were attacked but did not respond; there is no change in the margin at the end. Democrats hold onto their 2-point lead.

I am suggesting, *for now*, not joining the debate.

In this survey, we lose the crime debate by 10 points, 12 points behind the congressional margin.

I fought for years against political consultants and candidates who argued talking about crime or welfare puts you on the terrain of the opponent and thus, don't address it. In this case, what Democrats are proposing is just not reassuring. If you look at the text below, we have added policies that are part of Democratic plans, including declaring a health emergency that suggest addressing gun violence is a higher priority than supporting the police.

**Asked in current survey:** Democrats say we are fighting crime. Preventing crime and protecting our communities is an obligation we hold dear. Democrats have declared gun violence as a public health crisis and allocated \$3.9 billion for state and local law enforcement to make our cities safer. More criminals must be prosecuted. Ban assault weapons. And we need more police. It is a tough job, and they should be respected. We should fund, not defund the police. At the same time, our plan includes urgent reforms, including better training and accountability to prevent excessive use of force and racial profiling that singles out Blacks or Latinos. Fighting crime, gun violence, and for safe communities is our top priority.

In earlier surveys, we conducted a similar exercise where the focus was on the police: both funding and respect and reform. That exercise led to Democrats growing their margin by 3 points compared to not addressing the issue.

**Asked in previous surveys:** Democrats say, we have an obligation to make sure everyone can live in a safe community. Preventing crime and protecting our communities is a top priority, and we need to help our cities have the police and resources they need to protect their communities. It is a tough job, and they should be respected. We should fund, not defund the police. At the same time, we also need urgent reforms, including better training and accountability to prevent excessive use of force and racial profiling that singles out Blacks and Latinos, and people with disabilities. Our common need for reduced crime and security should unite, not divide us.

We will revisit what is the best way to manage in our next survey around Labor Day.

### **Contesting the cost of living**

To succeed, Democrats must be consumed with addressing the cost of living, highlight what they are doing, and draw a powerful contrast with the Republicans.

Despite the headwinds, this survey shows they can get heard and defeat the Republicans on an issue where the Republicans have a strong advantage.

It starts with seeing working people — the non-four-year college graduates who dominate in the electorate and our base.

In reality, wages and median income have not remotely kept up with rising prices. President Biden used to talk about people living paycheck to paycheck, and that got him an audience. Well, that is even more true today. Being seen is a precondition to getting heard.

In fact, most Americans lost wages in the Bush decade of spiking inequality, lost wages, and wealth after the financial crash under Obama, getting back to pre-crisis levels only in his last year of his term. And then unemployment spiked with COVID, and some sectors got higher pay, but not most Americans. Inflation is a huge slap for most working Americans who've seen only decades of wage decline.

Here we test the candidate saying, “most Americans haven’t seen a real wage increase in 40 years.” In our focus groups, Biden and Trump thanked the moderator for saying that. That comment gives them the space to talk about what’s happening with the cost of living.

Leaders in Britain, Australia, and France have made the employment and jobs argument and lost. President Biden has too and lost ground on his overall approval and handling of the economy.

Basically, Democratic candidates need to join their own battle against big corporations, their prices, and profits that are enriching the CEOs and shareholders, and using their influence to

keep their taxes low. Democrats say enough and work to stop price gouging, raise taxes on billionaires, and fight unlimited campaign spending. (It would have been stronger if it included the increased tax relief for poor, working class, and middle class families.)

The message gets a net positive of 3 points when Democrats are losing the cost of living by 4 points and the economy by 15. Taking on the big corporations and corporate monopolies that are driving up prices lifts Democrats.

Corporate profits are at a 70-year high, yet corporations are raising their prices. They are not raising their prices because of the increasing costs. They're using the cover of inflation to increase their profits. They're doing so because they face little competition. Most American workers haven't seen a real wage increase in 40 years. Income and wealth are being distributed up to CEOs and shareholders, while working people are living paycheck to paycheck. And they are now paying a lower tax rate than working people. Republican leaders in the Congress won't stop price gouging and let working people pay higher taxes. Democrats say enough. They are raising taxes on big corporations and billionaires. And they are fighting against unlimited secret campaign funds.

Liberal Democrats responded to this critique of big corporation profits driving up prices, but it got a two-to-one warm response among white working class voters, men and women, under 50 years. And white millennial and Gen Z voters gave it a positive response by a 20-point margin.

And then, look at the Republican factions. One fifth of the Trump loyalists gave this tough populist response by a Democrat a warm response. So did a quarter of the moderate Republicans.

It turns out voters have a deep distaste of CEOs of big corporations, corporate monopolies, and many of big tech companies. One can hardly find a more popular idea than taxing billionaires. Fully 63 percent of voters are warm to it, triple the number against it. It gets a positive response from over 40 percent of Trump loyalists, 50 percent of moderates, and 60 percent of Republican defectors.

Half the sample heard the Democrat candidate hitting the big corporations on driving prices and offering the contrast on what Democrats would do. At the end of the survey, the Democrats held their 2-point margin — even after all the Republican attacks on inflation, crime, and borders.

When Democrats contest the cost of living with the message we proposed, it has a powerful impact on the Democratic Party's brand. Looking at the margin on which party would be better on a range of issues, Democrats gained 11 points on "getting things done;" 7 points on "standing up to elites;" and 7 points on "prioritizing my community and seeing government looks out for it."

Intriguingly, Democrats gained significantly on "not pushing America to be polarized." Confronting the big corporate power on wages, prices, and power was unifying.

**Weapons in battling the cost of living — cutting taxes and cutting health care costs**

Has anybody noticed what Democratic and Republican governors are doing to address the cost of living? They are trying to give families more money through tax cuts.

They are cutting the gasoline tax, cutting the income tax, and sending rebates to households and car owners.

Democrats have a unique chance because of how favorably and unique the help provided to people was during the pandemic when both parties in Congress and President Trump provided direct payments to individual households. After years of income decline and uncertainty, the government was helping people and saving businesses, without bureaucracy and new programs.

That transformed perceptions of working class voters under 50 years who were the main beneficiaries, as well as least burdened by the culture wars that made others more anti-government.

The \$1,400 direct payments were the most popular for Trump voters in our research, and Democrats promising to continue it, accounts for Democrats winning two Senate seats in Georgia.

For some reason Democrats have not embraced the expansion of the Child Tax Credit on their watch as their main policy offer and contrast in the battle over the cost of living with Republicans. The Child Tax Credit was received directly and monthly into household checking accounts in payments of \$300 or \$250, depending on the age of the child.

Why haven't they done that? It is less popular among college graduates and higher income voters where Democrats have won more of the seats. It is more popular with working class voters where Republicans have won more of theirs.

It helps dramatically Blacks and Hispanics, lifting more than half out of poverty while in place, yet it has not been embraced as part of a strategy to engage those voters.

In the poll we conducted in June, “the higher child tax credit a month that gives tax relief to poor, working, and middle class families with children” those with a favorable view it outnumbered those viewing it unfavorably by 10 points. It rose to a margin of over 25 points with Blacks, white millennial and Gen Z voters, parents, CTC recipients and white working class women under 50 years.

This is not theoretical. When we give voters a list of things Democrats have accomplished, at the top was what they did on guns and to push up wages with federal contractors and unions, but “the increased Child Tax Credit received monthly that provided tax relief for poor, working and middle class families with children. It was the biggest tax cut for working families ever and “cut child poverty in half” was next with Blacks, Hispanics, Gen Z, millennials, and CTC recipients. That it was ranked in same way with under 50 white working class voters should stop the debate.

Infrastructure did not make the top ranking for these voters.

Tax cuts are the most powerful tool we have for motivating our so-called base and reaching targeted white working class voters.

That Republicans would take away the Child Tax Credit and raise their taxes was the second strongest attack among these same groups.

When we asked, what do you fear with Republicans gaining full control of the Senate and House, “them ending the Child Tax Credit, raising taxes on working families and forcing low-wage workers to pay federal income taxes” was the top worry with millennials and white millennial and Gen Z voters, as well as CTC recipients. For the white working class under 50, it ranked just behind them making abortion illegal nationally and the rich not paying higher taxes.

So, cutting taxes is weapon number one — combined with voters’ overwhelming support for raising taxes on billionaires on big corporations. There could not be a more powerful choice in contesting who will help with the cost of living.

The other is health care costs, the consuming issue of every election and where Democrats still have an 8-point advantage on which party will do a better job.

Democrats are about to deliver in a reconciliation bill — one desperately hopes — sustained subsidies to keep health insurance premiums low and to give Medicare the ability to negotiate lower prescription drug prices. Democrats have been capping premiums at 8.5 percent of income, though nobody knows it. Democrats being able to push down drug prices will feature one of the most popular policies Democrats have sought to achieve.

And of course, Republicans opposed all policies to restrain health care costs. The attack — “Republicans voted against allowing the government to negotiate lower drug prices. They even voted against the government setting a lower price for insulin” — was the third strongest attack and right near the top for Hispanics, AAPI, and white millennial and Gen Z voters.

So, Democrats can contest the cost of living on taxes and health care costs.

### **The Democratic message**

We conducted a powerful message for the midterm election that learns from all the findings of this survey. It identifies with people living paycheck to paycheck. It says, working people haven’t seen a pay increase in years, and Washington doesn’t get it. These are very tough times, and voters have to see you get it and feel it.

You talk about inflation killing people, recognizing how much they are the edge. (This is a hard message to deliver if you think Democrats are delivering good paying jobs.) Going after the big corporations, oil companies, Big Tech, and their monopolies puts you the right side of an imbalance they want political leaders to fight, including their price gouging.



Democrats then highlight credibly what they did to help — tax relief for poor, working families and the middle class, reduced health care premiums, and negotiating lower prescription drug costs. Republicans get their money from big oil and drug companies and oppose tax relief for working people and raising taxes on big corporations.

It includes with Democrats wanting safe communities where we can grow the middle class again.

Democrats say people are living paycheck to paycheck and working people haven't seen a real pay increase in years. Those in Washington don't get it. The big corporations, billionaires, oil companies, big tech monopolies and their lobbyists are calling the shots. Democrats gave tax relief to the poor, working families, and the middle class, reduced health care premiums on exchanges, and are negotiating lower prescription drug costs. With inflation killing people, they are going after the monopolies and price gouging. Republicans get their money from big oil and the drug companies, and they oppose tax relief for working people and raising taxes on big corporations. Democrats are working for safe communities where workers get a break, and we grow the middle class again.

We did not test this message on its own, but against a Republican saying America has never been more at risk from crime, people pouring through the borders, canceled history, and threats to police.

The Democratic message was powerfully motivating for both liberal and moderate Democrats. It united this fractious party.

And it was chosen by 15 percent of Trump loyalists, 11 percent of Cheney conservatives, and a third of moderate Republicans. And stunningly, the Democratic message won a big majority of white millennial and Gen Z voters and a majority of under 50 white working class voters.

At the end of the survey, the Democrats gained 3 points of margin with under 50 white working class voters (17 percent of the electorate) and CTC recipients (17 percent). They gained 9 points with disability families (15 percent) who remain invisible to those trying to make gains in the working class.

But Democrats have problems in the base that are impacting the turnout of Blacks and Hispanics and the vote of Asian American (AAPI) voters. In this survey exercise, I asked voters to choose between a Democratic message with its hugely popular policies and a Republican message embodying Trump's words on making America great again. It led with crime and borders and ended with the police.

A stunning 28 percent of Blacks chose the America First message but more alarming, 45 percent of AAPI voters and 47 percent of Hispanics did too.

Republicans say America has never been more at risk for those who made America Great. Crime in our country is escalating. People are pouring through our borders totally unchecked. We must act to save America and define the future of our beloved country. We take pride in our country, we teach the truth about our history, not canceling our history. We believe in the men and women of law enforcement. We trust people and families to make their own choices and they have the right to be able to make their voices heard.

Other questions on transgender in women’s sports, education about gender issues and Critical Race Theory suggest erosion on other parts of the social liberal agenda.

But that choice did not shift the produce defections in the Democratic vote among Blacks, Hispanics, and AAPI voters. It also did not raise their interest in voting in a midterm election where the engagement was very low.

**Massacres and assault weapons**

The clear attack on the massacres and assault weapons produces the biggest shift to the Democrats in the poll — a 2-point gain in margin in the split sample that heard Democrats addressing the gun violence is an urgent priority. This is all potential gain.

The issue had not translated into partisan gains yet, like Roe, because of the negotiations of a bipartisan bill that had strong public support, but not one that resolved the issue. Also, the issue might have slipped into its usual skepticism and powerlessness, but there now seemed a very clear way to address the issue.

The Democratic message on thoughts and prayers attacked the Republicans for refusing to consider comprehensive background checks or raising the purchase age for assault weapons to 21. A 52-seat majority will do all those and allow cities to get to fully regulate guns. That message built off of Republicans blocking action and Democrats finally doing something about the massacres.

The Democratic message got a lot of warm responses — 14 points more than the cool ones — with a 32 point intensity.

Republicans say our thoughts and prayers after massacres of children in schools, year after year, and will do nothing that puts them at odds with the NRA and gun industry lobbyists. 20 babies at Sandy Hook and 19 children at Robb Elementary. Now, the Supreme Court is stopping states and cities from regulating handguns. Democrats say enough. The House Democrats passed laws, including safe storage, red flag laws, requiring background checks for ghost guns, and raised the age to purchase assault weapons from 18 to 21, but Republicans would not consider comprehensive background checks or raising the age. With control of Congress and a 52-seat majority in the Senate, we will ban assault weapons, high-capacity magazines, and begin comprehensive background checks. It will allow cities and states to fully regulate guns.

And in the end, Republicans having control of Congress means “assault weapons can still be bought by 18-year olds and no stop to massacres” was the outset that most upset voters. Asian Americans, Blacks, and Hispanics were off the chart upset. They were joined in the Democratic base by liberal and moderate and Democrats, white college women, and Democratic defectors.

It is at the top of the upset chart for Cheney conservatives and moderate Republicans. It was the strongest for Republican defectors who seem to be coming back to their earlier position.

There is a good reason why those hit with the Democratic message on the massacre and guns shift their actual vote the most.

### **Getting it right**

This is an ugly time to hold an election, and there are so many things Democrats have to do right to stay in the game.

The gun massacres, Roe, the activist Supreme Court, and the January 6<sup>th</sup> Committee have put the Democrats into a very close race in the generic ballot but getting really ahead requires they succeed in three things.

First, they have to make inflation their consuming priority and contest it with the Republicans. Democrats are not yet there.

Second, Democrats have to manage the crime issue, and that is a work in progress.

And third, Democrats have to get the most out of massacres and gun issue, and that message asks for 52 votes and ending the filibuster.