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To: Page Gardner, Voter Participation Center & Women's Voices Women Vote Action Fund

From: Stanley Greenberg, Greenberg Research & Democracy Corps

Anti-Trump Presidential Race Defined Early: First Presidential and Senate Battleground Poll

The contest for president has taken form early, shaped by the intense engagement of ordinary voters and the building and intense reaction against the president, his signature issues, and his re-election. That is particularly true for Democrats, the Rising American Electorate, and women in every corner of the electorate. And this has put the current two leading Democratic candidates — or others that could take their place — in a strong position to decisively defeat President Donald Trump.

Vice President Joe Biden, Senator Elizabeth Warren, or another eventual nominee will need to grow their vote and create insurance against yet unforeseen events and Trump and Republican efforts to suppress the vote and mobilize white working class men in key states. To do so, they will need to, among other things:

- Reverse the erosion of support among African American, Hispanic and white millennial men.
- Target the surprisingly large bloc of anti-Trump third party voters who need to break more strongly for the Democrats.
- Bernie Sanders' primary voters are not consolidated and a potential target for meddling, as happened in 2016.
- Make bigger headway with moderate Republicans who gave Democrats greater support earlier in the year and in 2018.
- Make sure Trump is not able to regain his support with white working class women.

These conclusions are based on our analysis of the first phone and web survey in the full presidential and Senate battleground for the 2020 election, one that includes Georgia, Texas,

Wisconsin and Ohio.¹ It was conducted by Democracy Corps for the Voter Participation Center (VPC) and the Center for Voter Information (CVI) and is focused on bringing the new majority of voting eligible citizens into the electorate, embodied in their work with African Americans, Hispanics, unmarried women and millennials (the Rising American Electorate) and reaching swing voters, particularly white working class women.

Clinton lost this battleground by 1 percentage point in 2016, while winning nationally by 2. In 2020, Vice President Joe Biden currently enjoys a 6-point lead over President Trump, 47 to 41 percent, with 8 percent voting Libertarian or third party. Senator Elizabeth Warren is in a nearly identical position, 46 to 41 percent, with the same third-party vote.

Nationally, we tested Bernie Sanders in Democracy Corps' last poll, as we try to rotate and test plausible nominees. In this battleground survey, we tested Pete Buttigieg who loses by five points, making him less competitive against Trump at this point. In the primary, Biden and Warren lead the field with 28 and 27 percent, respectively; Sanders follows at 17 percent, with Pete Buttigieg at 7 percent and Kamala Harris and Andrew Yang at 4 percent; other candidates securing 2 percent or less.

The third party vote will be a big factor in how this election plays out state by state. It is intensely anti-Trump, so progressive efforts will focus on consolidating them, but the Russians and other campaigns could well play a role in tarnishing the Democratic nominee and fracturing the vote. Such efforts were successful in 2016, and recent reports on Russians targeting Sanders voters suggest they will continue to try to fracture Democratic voters.²

Surprisingly, the battleground of presidential and Senate battleground states is not more inviting for President Trump. His job approval is at 43 percent, compared to 41 percent nationally. The proportion disapproving of his performance outnumber those approving by 10 points. And Democrats have an 8-point advantage with the proportion of the electorate choosing to vote in the primaries and caucuses of the two parties, just 1-point short of the Democrats' national advantage.

President Trump faces deep and growing opposition, and his already weak 41 percent of the vote, critically, did not bump up even a single point at the end of the survey, despite respondents hearing all of Trump's robust messages of his success, the Democratic attacks on each other, and the Republican and Trump attacks on the Democratic candidates. His best messages are no higher than his vote.

¹ A phone poll of 1,000 registered voters in a 17-state Presidential and Senate battleground was conducted by phone October 5-9, 2019 from a voter-file sample. 67% of respondents were reached on cell phones in order to accurately reflect the American electorate. A large-scale web survey of 2,500 registered voters in the 17-state battleground was conducted online October 4-10, 2019 from a voter-file sample.

² Igor Derysh, "New data suggests Russians targeted Bernie Sanders voters to help elect Trump," Salon, April 12, 2019, <https://www.salon.com/2019/04/12/new-data-suggests-russians-targeted-bernie-sanders-voters-to-help-elect-trump/>; Donie O'Sullivan, "Facebook: Russian trolls are back. And they're here to meddle with 2020," CNN, October 22, 2019, <https://www.cnn.com/2019/10/21/tech/russia-instagram-accounts-2020-election/index.html>

Each day, the president's actions on immigration, the trade war, self-enrichment, and probably Turkey and Ukraine are producing a growing and intense anti-Trump reaction. As we saw earlier in focus groups for VPC with unregistered voters and focus groups for the American Federation of Teachers in non-metropolitan areas, Trump speaking out drives away voters without Democrats having to make the case against him.

In the base of African American and Hispanic women, unmarried and white unmarried women, and millennials and white millennial women, both Biden and Warren are building landslide wins over Trump. These margins are unprecedented. It is part of a female wave that is becoming more and more dramatic.

It is now playing itself out in the white working class. White working class women nationally moved dramatically away from Trump in the 2018 mid-term elections, a trend that continued in the surveys for Democracy Corps in mid-2019, but, in this first battleground poll, both Biden and Warren break even, with Biden slightly stronger. That brings an end to Trump's white working class revolt in 2016, as the women are a majority of the white working class. Additionally, white working class women make up 43 percent of unmarried women nationally, making them a key registration and mobilization target. Keeping Trump from regaining an audience with this key bloc is key to a big victory.

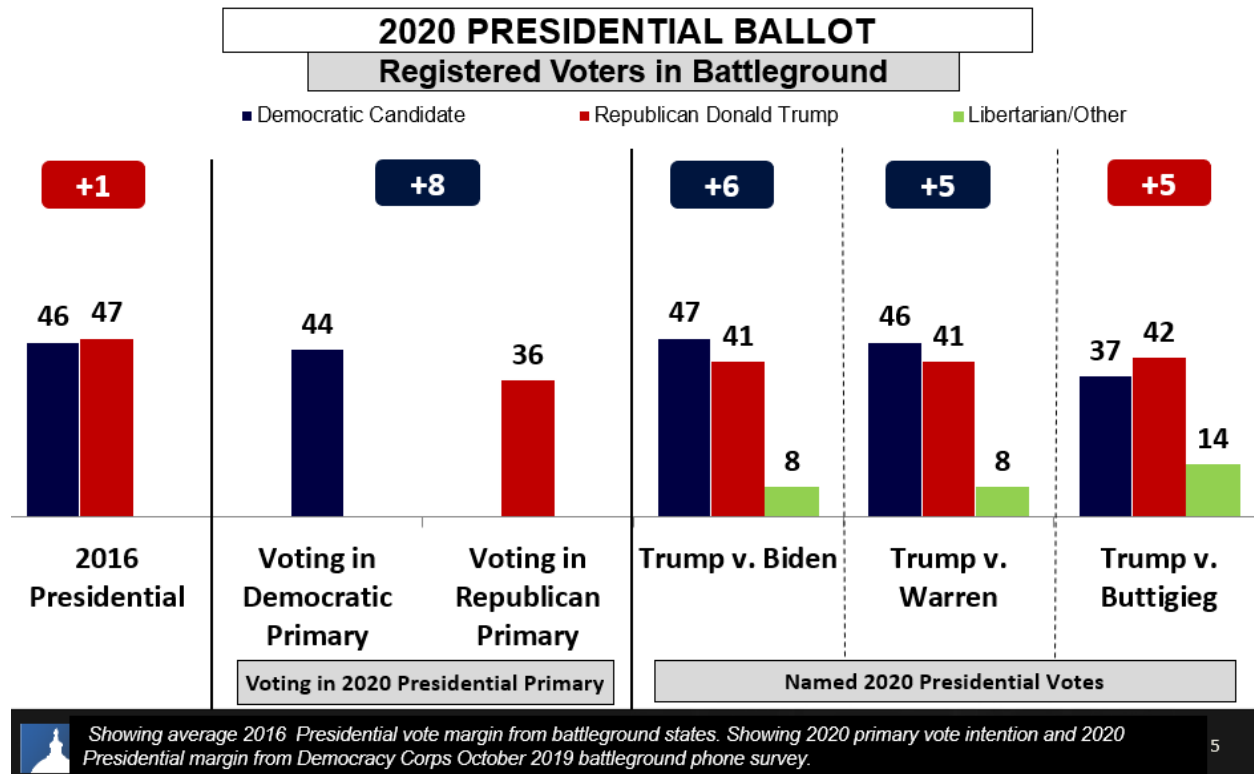
Trump is maintaining margins comparable to 2018 with the working class men, though he is not getting the kind of rapturous support he did in 2016. Trump still wins them by two-to-one, which makes them a critical mobilization target.

Trump is making some headway with men in the RAE. He gets 15 percent of the vote with African American men and narrowly leads with Hispanic and white millennial men. That is identical to what happened in the 2016 presidential election, though Democrats ran better with them in the 2018 mid-terms. That suggests progressives can target and make important gains.

Biden runs slightly better than Warren in the Democratic base, voters in the Midwest, white working class women, and non-millennial men. He runs much better with the men in Gen X and Silent Generation.

Warren runs slightly better in the West and much better with millennial men and Gen X women.

This survey simulates the full campaign using the language of the candidates, and the President most all. In the end, both Biden and Warren hold strong leads; Trump makes no vote gains, because Trump is creating a country that is more pro-immigration and more free-trade in reaction to his policies. He is making gains with some men, but at the price of historic margins among women within the RAE, white working class, and college and suburban women. The more voters hear him, the more it re-enforces the big trends shaping the country.



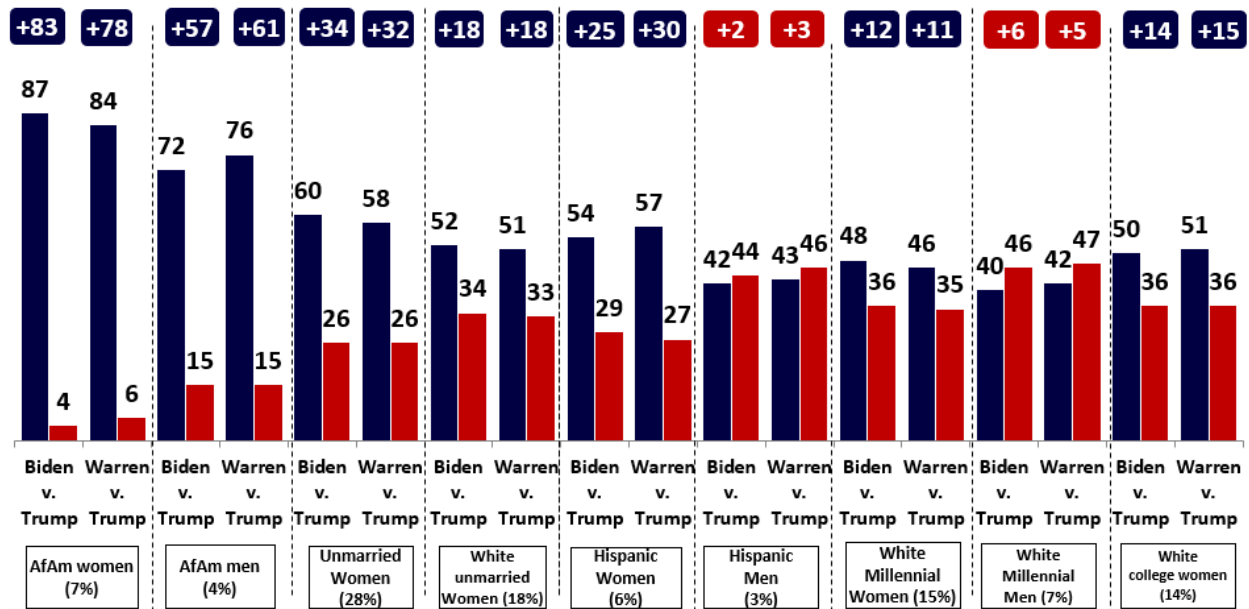
The state of the race

Both Biden and Warren hold strong leads over Trump because 79 percent of Democrats “strongly disapprove” of Trump, and there are many more voters identifying with the Democratic Party and voting in Democratic primaries. The smaller Republican bloc is equally consolidated for Trump right now, but his “strong approval” is at only 51 percent. So, more Republicans could fracture, as happened in the mid-terms, and join the independents that both Biden and Warren carry by 5 points.

Many Bernie Sanders voters are opting for the third party candidate in these different scenarios. It is greater with Biden as the nominee (81 percent support him in the general); with Warren, it is 83 percent, but not as fully consolidated as one would hope. The Sanders voters are looking for a country after the Trump era that is more fair, less racist, and where everyone is rising together.

The starting point is the Rising American Electorate, which will represent 64 percent of the voting eligible population. Biden and Warren are racking up blowout margins within key parts of the RAE, and critically, voters do not care whether the candidate is Warren or Biden. They bring very different personal histories, issue priorities, and one is a woman and the other a man, yet African American women, unmarried and white unmarried women, Hispanic women, white millennial women, and white college women give them unprecedented and nearly identical support.

I know it's a long way off, but thinking about the election for President in 2020, if the election for President were held today, would you vote for -- (ROTATE CANDIDATES) the Democratic candidate or Republican Donald Trump?

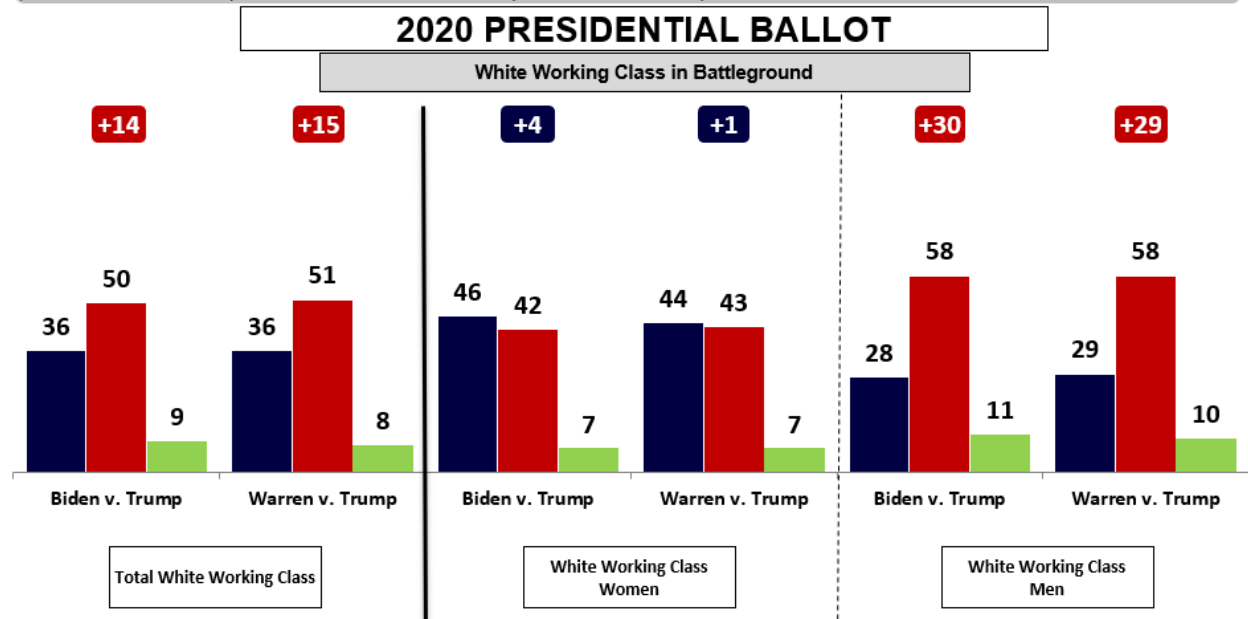


Trump’s weakened position is led first and foremost by the white working class women who form nearly a quarter of the electorate and over half the white working class. Nationally, it was white working class women and men who shifted the most in the high turnout 2018 mid-terms (13 and 14 points, respectively). It was news when our combined data for the summer of 2019 showed both Biden and Warren bringing the Trump margin down to about 10 points.

But this poll in the presidential and Senate battleground shows both Biden and Warren running even with the white working class women — which would be historic, indeed, wiping out Trump’s 2016 margin of 27 points with them.

Both candidates are losing among white working class men by a stunning 32 points, but that is roughly the same as in 2018. Trump has not regained his 2016 position with the white working class men where he won by 48 points. Here, Democrats have gone from losing by more than 3-to-1 to 2-to-1. There is no evidence that Trump’s attempts to rally the base are working, at least with the men, and indeed, may be pushing the women away.

I know it's a long way off, but thinking about the election for President in 2020, if the election for President were held today, would you vote for – (ROTATE CANDIDATES) the Democratic candidate or Republican Donald Trump?



Generationally, Warren is much stronger than Biden with millennial men - that is a significant factor in her performance. On the other hand, Biden runs much better with men of Gen X and the Silent Generation.

Both candidates perform impressively in the South - that includes Florida, Georgia, and North Carolina; also well in the West - that includes Arizona, Nevada, and Texas; and the Midwest - that includes Ohio, Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota and Iowa. Biden runs slightly better in the Midwest and Warren in the West.

What puts limits on Democratic gains right now is not the prospect of Trump gaining more support, it is the 8 percent bloc who are voting third party with the top two candidates and the Democratic candidates not making more gains with the moderate Republicans. In the 2018 mid-terms, 12 percent voted Democratic and 19 percent did not vote. Earlier in 2019, Biden was winning 9 percent among all Republicans.

Warren’s primary voters want a country after the Trump era where “all rise together,” but also “united.” Interestingly, that coincides with the hopes of Republicans, remembering it is a mostly working class party reshaped by Trump. Biden’s primary voters want a “united” country and “without racism.”

The moderate Republicans want to go “back to traditional values” and when “hard work [was] rewarded,” values hardly mentioned by other Republicans.

The dislodged third party voters with Biden in a two-way choice against Trump want to go “back to traditional values,” a country “united,” and “at peace.” And with Warren, these dislodged voters are looking to go back “to traditional values” and “at peace” – not values highlighted by

Warren primary voters – but also “united”. This is a window into pushing the third party vote that does not break for Warren with the same margin as other candidates.

The message battle

There are two dynamics driving the race against President Trump: first is the surging embrace of positions opposed to his priorities; and second is the strength of Warren’s and Biden’s messages compared to the president’s. (In our last national poll, we tested Sanders’ message, but it was less well received than Biden and Warren’s.) Warren’s best message on corruption gets 14 points more positive responses than Trump’s best message on the economy (57 versus 43 percent). Biden’s best message on contrasting values scores 7 points higher.

First, the anti-Trump reaction on Trump priorities. President Trump’s actions are creating a country that is embracing policies and positions that are counter-poised to his presidency.

- On immigration, the percent nationally reacting positively to the phrase, “immigrants to the U.S.” has jumped from 52 percent in January to 59 percent in July to 67 percent in September of this year. The percent giving a very warm reaction went from one third at the beginning of the year to over half.
- On “free trade”, Pew shows the proportion of Democrats saying it is a “good thing” has jumped from 59 percent to 67 percent this year.
- In this battleground poll, over 70 percent of Democrats and nearly 60 percent of the RAE, unmarried women, and independents view “the new tariffs on Trade with China” negatively.

Second, the Warren and Biden messages. In half the sample, we tested Democratic messages advanced by Biden in the debates (without telling respondents who said them), as well as the attacks on Biden by other Democrats. In the other half of the sample, we tested Democratic messages advanced by Warren, as well as the attacks on her by other Democrats. All the messages were developed using the actual words of the candidates in the debates.

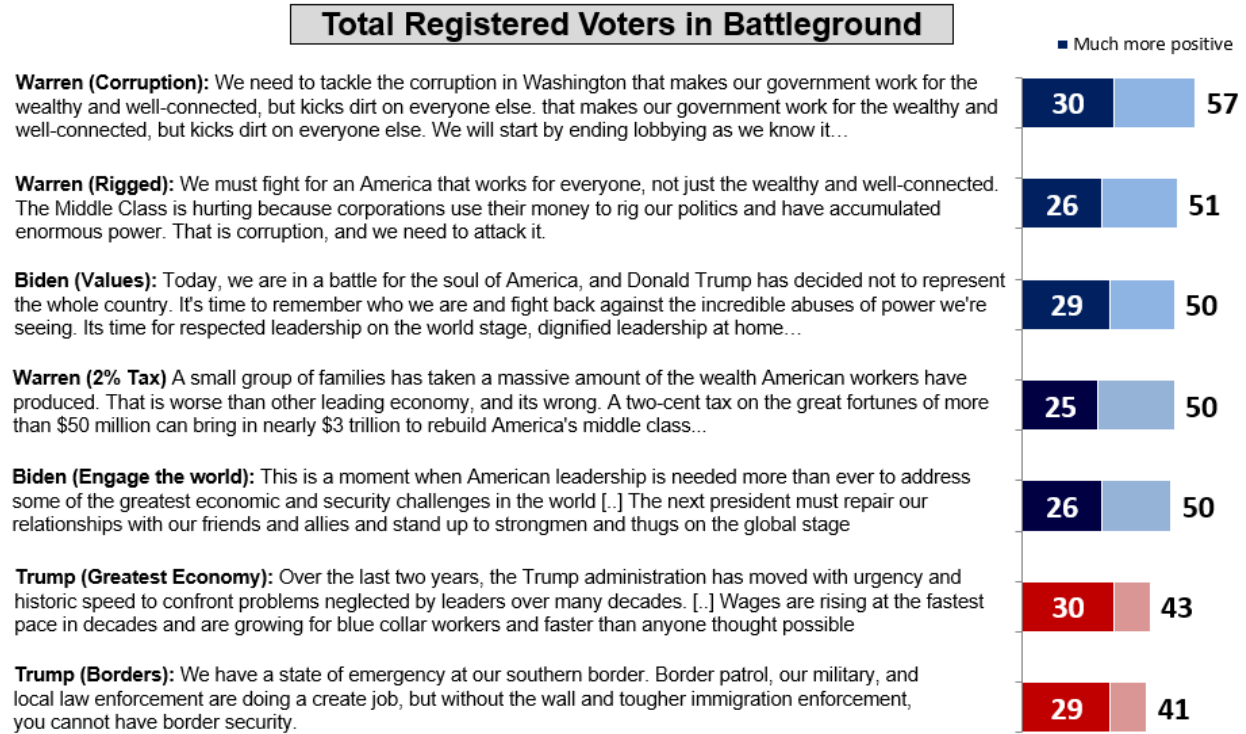
Warren’s messages are stronger, and at the end of the survey, Biden’s vote wobbled a bit, and they both end up with a 4-point margin in this very big battleground. That 5-point swing from Clinton’s 2016 performance would produce a very robust Electoral College win.

Warren’s corruption message is very strong, as well as her argument that the middle class faces a rigged political system. Both messages score more strongly than Biden’s top messages, but this survey is looking at the impact on the general: Warren’s message is 14 points stronger overall and 22 points stronger with independents where intense positives are 11 points higher.

The “rigged” message is strongest with Biden voters, while Sanders voters respond to “think big” and the “2 percent tax on wealth”.

While many assume Warren will have trouble with independents, 57 percent of independents say it will make them more positive, 29 percent much more. That overall response is 13 points stronger with independents than Biden’s top message and 24 points stronger than Trump’s best with independents. (For the full text, please look at the full slide deck.)

Top 2020 campaign messages



Biden’s messages on Trump and Democratic values, building a middle class, and building on the Affordable Care Act score very well with all voters, independents, and white working class women. “Engage the world” is equally strong, driven by Democrats rather than the working class and swing voters.

Biden’s own primary voters responded most strongly to “build on the ACA” and “values”. Warren’s primary voters engaged with the Democratic values message, but they were the most intense supporters of Biden’s “engage the world” message.

Attacks

To fully simulate the campaign, we tested the attacks on Biden and the attacks on Warren from the debates, as well the attacks by Trump and the Republicans. Not surprisingly, it was the Democratic attacks that were potentially more impactful.

The Republican attack on the Green New Deal proved pathetic. It was the highest, but only raised serious doubts for 37 percent of independents and 39 percent of white working class women.

The strongest attack in the Democratic debates was the attack on Elizabeth Warren for the Medicare for All plan that “kicks millions off private insurance.” That did resonate with independents (47 percent doubts) and white working class women (49 percent).

But do not expect that to affect Warren’s position with Democrats. It only raised serious doubts for 29 percent of Democratic primary voters, with just 10 percent saying they had very serious doubts. The attack on Biden for doing fundraisers with big corporate donors raised slightly more doubts with primary voters.

Further, we tested Warren doubling down on her plan or transitioning to Medicare for All — it had no impact on her vote, conducted right after the experiment. There are obviously bigger forces shaping the vote choice in the general election.

The Simulated Campaign

The full campaign played out in this survey — with the full panoply of messages, attacks by Democrats on each other, and attacks by Republicans — nearly lock in a strong Democratic lead and leave President Trump still at an electorally dangerous 41 percent.

The moderate Democrat in this survey used Biden’s message, and he wobbled, probably because his messages were not as strong with Democrats and independents and because of Ukraine, but he still won by 4 points — with Trump at 41 percent and 7 percent still voting 3rd party.

The populist and liberal Democrat saw a stable vote at the end, winning by 4 points as well. That scenario similarly left Trump at 41 percent. The anti-Trump third party vote remained at 6 percent, which could play a big part raising the Democratic margin.

Both types of Democratic candidates are winning by 4 points in a battleground Clinton lost by 1 and Trump remains at 41 percent after a comprehensive simulated campaign. This says that the leading Democratic candidates are entering a general election battle structured by big forces and trends. No doubt the primary will enter new phases with new frontrunners, but the rules of this election are becoming very clear.

