



## WINNING BACK REPUBLICAN DISTRICTS

**TO:** INTERESTED PARTIES  
**FROM:** RAGNAR RESEARCH PARTNERS  
**SUBJECT:** ENVIRONMENT AND MESSAGING IN KEY GOP TARGET DISTRICTS  
**DATE:** APRIL 25, 2019

### Introduction

Ragnar Research Partners conducted a poll of 590 likely voters across 11 U.S. Congressional districts. President Donald Trump won each of these districts in 2016 by 6-points or more. In 2018, the districts swung Democrat by 6-points or less.

Despite this swing, data shows these districts are still predominantly Republican leaning. This means Republican candidates can reclaim these districts in 2020 with proper messaging. While the Republican Party needs to win more than these districts to gain a majority, winning these 11 is clearly possible and a good starting place.

*Please refer to the Addendum for methodology, question text, and message text.*

DISTRICT	2016 PRESIDENT	2018 CONGRESS
ME 2	R+10%	D+1%
MI 8	R+7%	D+4%
NM 2	R+10%	D+2%
NJ 3	R+6%	D+1%
NY 11	R+10%	D+6%
NY 19	R+7%	D+5%

DISTRICT	2016 PRESIDENT	2018 CONGRESS
NY 22	R+16%	D+2%
OK 5	R+13%	D+1%
SC 1	R+13%	D+1%
UT 4	R+7%	D+0.2%
VA 7	R+7%	D+2%

### The Generic Ballot

The Republican candidate leads by 12-points on the generic ballot in the 11 target districts. The generic Republican also leads among several key demographic groups.<sup>1</sup>

GENERIC BALLOT					
	% OF TOTAL	REPUBLICAN	DEMOCRAT	UNDECIDED	MARGIN
Overall		49%	37%	14%	R+12
Independents	36%	51%	40%	8%	R+11
Voters 65+	25%	56%	34%	10%	R+21
Suburban	46%	46%	38%	16%	R+8
Women - Suburban	25%	40%	41%	19%	D+1
Women - Married	29%	52%	32%	16%	R+19

The generic ballot shows these races as prime pickup opportunities for Republicans and sheds light on a pathway to winning them back.



## Key Findings

First and foremost, voters are split on Trump (49% favorable, 48% unfavorable)<sup>2</sup>. Unsurprisingly, Republican’s view President Trump favorably while Democrats view Trump unfavorably. Independents are split on the President.

TRUMP IMAGE			
	REPUBLICAN	INDEPENDENT	DEMOCRAT
Favorable	83%	46%	10%
Unfavorable	17%	48%	88%

Voters in target districts are divided on whether our country is on the wrong track (48%) or headed in the right direction (39%). Independents are very close to the average and have only a 13-point difference (wrong track 49%, right direction 36%).<sup>3</sup>

## The Issues That Matter

When voters were asked what they believe is the most important issue facing the United States today, they cited immigration/border security (28%), healthcare/social services (19%), and jobs/economy/taxes/budget (14%).

These issue priorities breakdown along partisan lines. A majority of voters concerned with border security indicated that they prefer conservative solutions like strengthening borders and having stricter enforcement of current laws. A plurality of healthcare voters are interested in expanding coverage and regulating health insurance companies.

MOST IMPORTANT ISSUE				
	OVERALL	REPUBLICANS	INDEPENDENT	DEMOCRAT
Healthcare/Social Services	19%	8%	22%	31%
Immigration/Border Security	28%	43%	22%	17%
Jobs/Economy/ Taxes/Budget	14%	18%	13%	12%

A further analysis of these issues show that border security and economic issue voters are tied to voters with a favorable impression of President Trump, while healthcare is tied to voters with an unfavorable impression of Trump.

TRUMP IMAGE				
	OVERALL	IMMIGRATION/BORDER SECURITY	HEALTH CARE/ SOCIAL SERVICES	JOBS/ ECONOMY/ TAXES/ BUDGET
Favorable	49%	79%	23%	51%
Unfavorable	48%	20%	71%	47%

Lastly, undecided voters cite economic issues - jobs, the economy, taxes, and the budget - as their most important issue. Importantly for these districts, independents make up nearly two-thirds of the undecided voters (60%). Winning these voters will be critical to any effort to recapture these districts.<sup>4</sup>



## Messaging To Voters

Understanding the make-up of these districts and their core motivations is one thing; messaging them appropriately is another. Using SMART Messaging Analysis<sup>5</sup>, Ragnar Research tested both contrast and positive messages.

### Contrast Messaging

Overall, contrast messages on Democrats were more effective at moving voters toward a Republican candidate than positive messages on Republicans.

The best contrast message for persuading voters toward a generic Republican candidate is:

*“Democrats voted overwhelmingly against a bill that would protect newborns that survive abortions by requiring that hospitals give the babies appropriate care.”*

This message was the most effective among a wide variety of subgroups, though results do vary somewhat. Key to this message’s effectiveness, was its narrow focus on the particularly abhorrent practice of denying medical care to infants who have survived a botched abortion.

CONTRAST THEME	TOPLINE
Sample Size	590
Born Alive	0.26
Campaign Corruption	0.22
Socialism	0.21
Violent Crime	0.19

KEY GROUP	% OF TOTAL	MESSAGE
Independents	36%	Born Alive
Undecided Voters	14%	Born Alive
Immigration Voters	28%	Born Alive
Health Care Voters	19%	Born Alive
Economy/ Jobs/Taxes/Budget	14%	Born Alive
Voters w/ Fav. Imp. Of Trump	49%	Born Alive

KEY GROUP	% OF TOTAL	MESSAGE
Voters 65+	25%	Violent Crime
Women - Married	29%	Violent Crime
Women - Suburban	25%	Violent Crime
Urban	16%	Socialism
Suburban	46%	Violent Crime
Rural	37%	Born Alive



### Positive Messaging

While positive messaging was less effective overall, it did resonate with some of the key groups Republicans will need to target for 2020.

The best positive message for persuading voters toward a generic Republican candidate is:

*“Republicans passed historic tax cuts that gave middle class families more of their own money and let small businesses grow and create more jobs.”*

POSITIVE THEME	TOPLINE
Sample Size	590
Tax Cuts	0.19
Job Training	0.14
Environment	0.10
American Dream	0.10
Student Loans	0.09

KEY GROUP	% OF TOTAL	MESSAGE
Independents	36%	Tax Cuts
Undecided Voters	14%	Tax Cuts
Immigration Voters	28%	American Dream
Health Care Voters	19%	Tax Cuts
Economy/ Jobs/Taxes/Budget	14%	Environment
Voters w/ Fav. Imp. Of Trump	49%	Tax Cuts/ Job Training

KEY GROUP	% OF TOTAL	MESSAGE
Voters 65+	25%	American Dream
Women - Married	29%	Job Training
Women - Suburban	25%	Environment
Urban	16%	Tax Cuts
Suburban	46%	Amer. Dream/ Environment
Rural	37%	Tax Cuts

While these messages are ones Republican candidates can use and voters do care about, the limited movement means that candidates will need to offer the voters more, or something new to maximize future movement.

### What’s Next?

Winning these 11 districts isn’t enough on its own to win back a majority in the House, but these districts are the low hanging fruit that is the necessary first step to achieving that goal. Most importantly, this data shows that this goal is highly achievable, especially given that Trump won them all by 6-points or more in 2016, and Democrats won them by 6-points or less in 2018. With the right messaging, these districts are very winnable.



## Addendum

### Methodology

Ragnar Research Partners conducted a poll on April 7 through April 11 of 590 likely voters in Democrat-held U.S. Congressional Districts that President Donald Trump won in 2016 by six points or more. These districts include New York 11, 19, & 22, Maine 2, New Jersey 3, Virginia 7, South Carolina 1, Michigan 8, Utah 4, Oklahoma 5, New Mexico 2.

Interviews were conducted by telephone, including landlines (35%) and cell phones (65%). Quotas on age, gender, ethnicity, education, and region were used to ensure a representative distribution. The study's margin of error is  $\pm 4\%$ .

### Question Text

#### 1: Ballot (Q9)

If the general election for your United States Representative were held today, would you vote for ROTATE a Democrat candidate, ...or... a Republican candidate?

IF CHOICE, ASK:

And, would you DEFINITELY vote for (choice), or just PROBABLY?

IF UNDECIDED/NOT SURE, ASK:

If you had to decide today, would you lean more toward ROTATE (repeat choices)?

#### 2: Images (Q6)

Please tell me if you have an unfavorable or a favorable impression of that person or group.

#### 3: Direction of United States (Q3)

Thinking about the direction the United States is headed today, do you believe things are going in the right direction or would you say things have pretty seriously gotten off on the wrong track?

#### 4: Most Important Issue (Q7)

And what would you say is the single biggest issue you'd like to hear a candidate for the United States House of Representatives address?

### SMART Messaging

#### 5: Scientific Method And Regression Testing

The Ragnar Research SMART messaging analysis relies on an experimental design, complete with control variables, to determine which messages actually move voters and persuade consumers. The messaging portion of a survey acts as a stimulus to our respondents, allowing us to identify what messages decisively affect behavior.

Ragnar Research uses a non-traditional question setup that allows us to get a clear read on the way messaging information is interpreted by respondents. Rather than asking respondents to guess at their reaction to information, we measure which messages changed their opinion.



## Message Text

### **Born Alive**

Democrats voted overwhelmingly against a bill that would protect newborns that survive botched abortions by requiring that hospitals give the babies appropriate care.

### **Campaign Corruption**

The Democrats voted to give themselves over four million dollars of taxpayer money for their political campaigns in a bill the A-C-L-U said would quote unconstitutionally burden free speech.

### **Socialism**

Democrats are reviving the old and failed ideology of socialism which has always created poverty, limited future opportunities, and taken individual civil rights and liberties away.

### **Tax Cuts**

Republicans passed historic tax cuts that gave middle class families more of their own money and let small businesses grow and create more jobs.

### **Violent Crime**

Democrats refuse to pass legislation that would protect us from criminals, including violent criminals who come to this country illegally, making our neighborhoods less safe and putting our children at risk.

### **Job Training**

Republicans believe that Americans are still the best workers in the world and support competitive job training programs to help Americans continue to learn the skills we need to ensure that America remains the world's best economy going into the twenty first century.

### **Environment**

Republicans support legislation that's environmentally responsible without hurting jobs or the economy. That's why they oppose the Democrat's Green New Deal, which is unrealistic, will recklessly raise your taxes and make the everyday products that American families rely on more expensive.

### **American Dream**

Republicans still believe in the American dream. They're continuing to fight for legislation that strengthens our job market so every American has the financial freedom to pursue that dream and guarantee that someday their children can too.

### **Student Loans**

Student loans are crippling the economic future of young Americans. Republicans believe that we need to fix this by reducing the runaway costs of higher education instead of forcing students to take out hundreds of thousands of dollars in student loans just to gain basic skills.