

To: Interested Parties
From: Global Strategy Group and End Citizens United
Date: March 31, 2020
Re: Senate Battleground Survey Key Findings & Messaging Recommendations

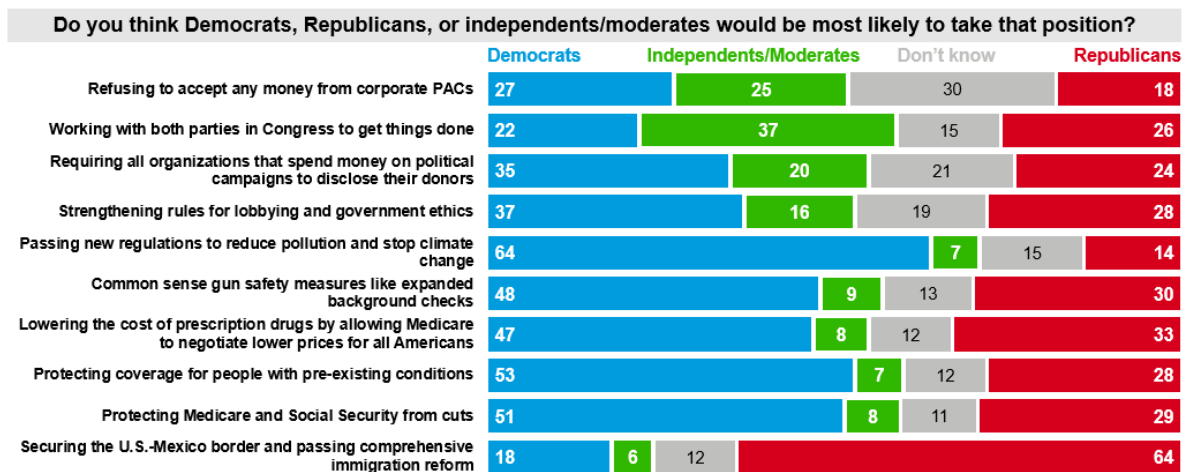
New research, conducted by Global Strategy Group (GSG) and End Citizens United (ECU) in Senate battleground states, finds money in politics and anti-corruption issues help candidates demonstrate their independence and trustworthiness with key constituencies, especially in the face of charges of hypocrisy from Republican opponents over the No Corporate PAC pledge.

In key Senate and House races, Republicans are increasingly trying to find ways to damage Democrats' credibility by undermining the strength of the Democrats' message about corruption and reform. In both a written exchange and a creative test where respondents view real-life television ads from a key 2020 Senate race, Democratic candidates are able to effectively respond to these attacks by restating their commitment to reform and attacking Republican opponents for taking special interest money and supporting a special interest agenda. In the end, this is a debate we want to have.

GSG and ECU's key findings and messaging recommendations from the research are outlined below.

Key Findings

- Democrats are well-positioned, while Trump shows signs of weakness, especially with independents.** Of the nine states surveyed in this research, Donald Trump won six in 2016. Before the coronavirus pandemic took hold in the U.S., voters in these key battleground states disapproved of the job Trump was doing in office (46% approve/54% disapprove, -8 NET approval) and favored Biden over Trump by a 5-point margin (50% to 45%). Similarly, a generic Democratic candidate for Senate leads a generic Republican by 5 points (49% Democrat/44% Republican), and named Democrats have consolidated their bases for an average lead of 6 points against their Republican opponents (49% Democrat/43% Republican).
- The issue of money in politics raises candidate favorability as much as or more than any other issue and can help brand Democrats as independent.** 61% of voters would be more likely to vote for a candidate who refuses to accept any money from corporate PACs. But a majority of voters do not ascribe partisanship to the No Corporate PAC pledge and other reform issues that are more associated with moderates and independents. Therefore, these money in politics issues can help position Democratic candidates who take these positions as independent, as opposed to other issues traditionally identified with Democrats, such as protecting coverage for people with pre-existing conditions or passing regulations to combat climate change.



- When Republicans level false attacks on this issue, responses focused on changing the system and Republicans being in the pockets of special interests work.** A Republican hit on the

hypocrisy of a Democrat who has taken the no corporate PAC pledge is impactful and gives a Republican a 2-point lead (45% Democrat who took the pledge/47% Republican), down from an initial Democratic 4-point lead (48% Democrat who took the pledge/44% Republican). But when voters hear a response that reiterates they are taking no money from corporate PACs and support the largest anti-corruption legislation in history – while their Republican opponent is taking corporate PAC money, protecting special interests, and blocking reform—the Democratic candidate retakes a 4-point lead in the head-to-head. Democrats not only make up the ground that was lost but gain marginally with independents and white voters (with and without college degrees). However, one group with whom the Democrats do not fully regain support following this exchange is voters of color, and candidates in diverse states are encouraged to explore augmenting the core response to emphasize efforts to protect voting rights and eliminate discriminatory election laws.

Republican Hypocrisy Attack: *[Democratic candidate] is just another typical politician who says one thing and does another. She/he “pledged” not to take a dime from corporate PACs, but fundraising reports reveal she/he took tens of thousands directly from groups funded by corporate PACs. [Democratic candidate] is a typical “say one thing, do another” politician who we can’t trust. (After attack: 45% Democrat who took the pledge/47% Republican)*

Democratic McConnell Response: *[Democratic candidate]’s opponents are lying. They’re attacking her/him because they depend on the status quo, where corporate special interests fund campaigns in exchange for calling the shots in Washington. [Democratic candidate] refuses corporate PAC money and relies on support from thousands of small donors. She/he supports the biggest anti-corruption bill in generations. The bill will crack down on corruption in both parties by strengthening ethics laws and forcing politicians to disclose where dark money funds come from. Mitch McConnell and [Republican candidate name] are stopping that bill because they’re trying to maintain the status quo, where special interests fund campaigns and get their way in Washington. (After “McConnell” response: 48% Democrat who took the pledge/44% Republican)*

Democratic Special Interest Response: *[Democratic candidate]’s opponents are lying. They’re attacking her/him because they depend on the status quo, where corporate special interests fund campaigns in exchange for calling the shots in Washington. [Democratic candidate] refuses corporate PAC money and relies on support from thousands of small donors. She/he will stand up to special interests, like the drug companies who fight to keep prescription drug prices high, and crack down on corruption in both parties. Her/his opponent accepts corporate PAC money and will always be beholden to corporate special interests who buy influence in Washington. (After “Special Interest” response: 48% Democrat who took the pledge/43% Republican)*

- **Democrats have more credibility than Republicans on these issues, and they can respond effectively to different versions of the “hypocrisy” attack.** When the Democrat is charged with being “hypocritical,” voters are more convinced that Republicans are attacking Democrats because they want to protect the status quo, which allows them to take millions of dollars from special interests in return for supporting their agenda (54% more convincing). And when voters hear the Democratic candidate was “caught sending secret messages to... special interest groups,” voters still side with the Democrat when she or he highlights the benefits of HR1 as the strongest anti-corruption bill in generations, which will crack down on corruption in both parties, strengthen ethics laws, and force politicians to disclose where dark money funds come from (61% more convincing). Not only do Democrats (82%) and independents (67%) favor this second rebuttal, but 40% of Republicans are also more convinced by it, proving the bill appeals to members of both parties.

Which of the following is more convincing?

Opponents say it is hypocritical of [Democratic candidate] to say she/he does not accept corporate PAC money for her/his campaign when it has quietly laundered hundreds of thousands of dollars from groups funded by big corporate PACs and special interests.

Supporters say Republicans are lying. [Democratic candidate] does not take a dime of corporate PAC money, she/he relies on support from thousands of small donors. [Republican candidate] is attacking her/him in order to protect the status quo. [Republican candidate] has taken millions from corporate special interests while she/he has supported their agenda, including denying coverage for people with pre-existing medical conditions and protecting tax breaks for billionaires.

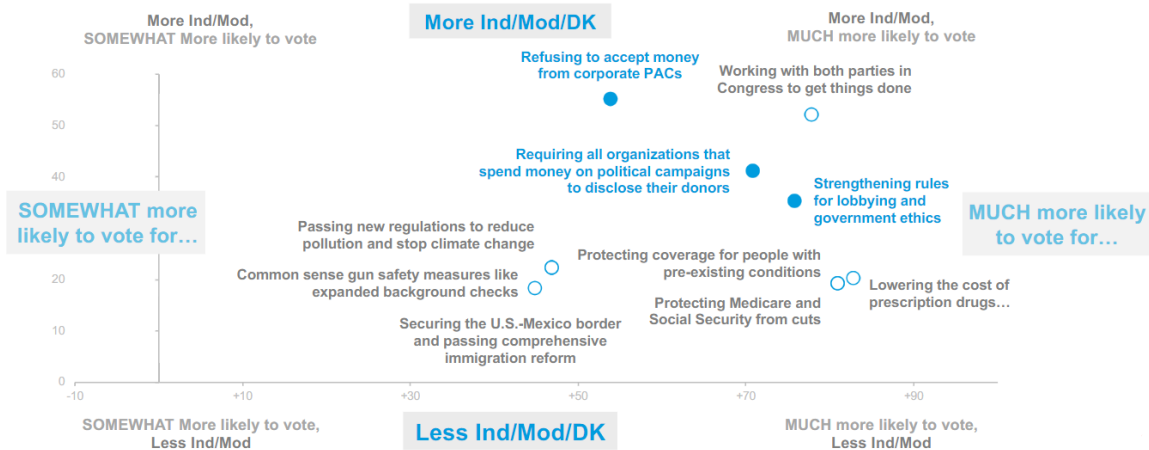


Opponents say [Democratic candidate] says one thing and does another. She/he says she/he will fight dark money but was caught sending secret messages to those very special interest groups to support her/his campaign. Millions of dollars in dark money ads have already propped up [Democratic candidate]’s campaign, with more to come. She/he will never be able to stand up to them in Washington.

Supporters say [Democratic candidate] is the only one running who refuses corporate PAC money and believes we need big change to stop the special interests from calling the shots in Washington. [Democratic candidate] has pledged that one of her/his first votes in Congress will be to pass the strongest anti-corruption bill in generations. The bill will crack down on corruption in both parties, strengthen ethics laws, and force politicians to disclose where dark money funds come from.



Independent/Moderate Positions & Candidate Vote Likelihood Matrix (Percentage Ind/Mod and NET more-less likely)



- **A simulated exchange with real ads from the Maine Senate race shows the effectiveness of the No Corporate PAC pledge and the strength of a rebuttal to GOP attacks.** Voters across the battlegrounds were shown an introductory ad from Sara Gideon that mentions her No Corporate PAC pledge and widely found the ad to be believable (62% believable/20% not believable); after viewing the ad voters also like Gideon (73% fav/8% unfav) and trust her (64% trust/18% not trust). In an open-ended question about what voters liked most about the ad, respondents highlighted the No Corporate PAC pledge. An attack ad from Susan Collins focused on the corporate PAC issue damages Gideon's strong likability (30% fav/49% unfav), though notably voters do not view the ad to be nearly as believable as Gideon's introduction (39% believable/38% unbelievable). Gideon's rebuttal, which specifically lists Collins' own campaign donors, causes Gideon's favorability to rebound (54% fav/26% unfav). Voters find the response, which specifically names the special interests from which Collins has accepted millions of dollars in contributions, to be believable (54% believable/24% unbelievable).

Conclusions & Recommendations

- Committing to anti-corruption efforts and getting money out of politics is popular, but importantly demonstrates independence and makes the case that a candidate is not a typical Democrat.
- The PAC pledge and support for anti-corruption efforts builds trust in candidates introducing themselves to voters, and provides a credible contrast with Republican incumbents. Because of the strength of this appeal, GOP attacks claiming "hypocrisy" will come and should not go unanswered.
- Democrats should restate their rejection of corporate PAC money and remind voters their Republican opponent accepts corporate money and supports policies favored by the very special interests contributing this money.
- Candidates should explore in their own research options to optimize the response among voters of color with reference to protecting voting rights and opposing discriminatory election laws.

Specific language candidates should use to respond to the "hypocrisy" attack:

[Republican opponent] is lying. [Democrat] won't take a dime from corporate PACs and relies on support from thousands of small donors.

- + **Commit to reform:** [Democrat] believes we need big change to stop the special interests from calling the shots in Washington. [Democrat] has pledged that one of her/his first votes in Congress will be to pass the strongest anti-corruption bill in generations. The bill will crack down on corruption in both parties, strengthen ethics laws, and force politicians to disclose where dark money funds come from.

[To consider in states with large communities of color: “expand voting rights” or “eliminate discriminatory voting laws”]

- + **Push back on GOP:** [Republican candidate] is attacking her/him in order to protect the status quo. [Republican candidate] has taken millions from corporate special interests while she/he has supported their agenda, including denying coverage for people with pre-existing medical conditions and protecting tax breaks for billionaires.

ABOUT THIS POLL: Global Strategy Group conducted a multi-modal online survey of 1,204 likely voters sampled evenly from nine battleground Senate states (AZ, CO, GA, IA, ME, MI, MT, NC, and NH) from March 10th-16th, 2020. Respondents were selected via online panels or texted a link to complete the survey on their mobile phones. All respondents were matched to the voter file. The results have a margin of error of +/- 2.8%. The margin of error among subgroups is larger.