

# Addressing Misconceptions on Democrats' Build Back Better Act



**Ryan Pougiales**

Former Deputy Director of Politics

[@RyanPougiales](https://twitter.com/RyanPougiales)



**Lanae Erickson**

Senior Vice President for Social Policy, Education & Politics

[@LanaeErickson](https://twitter.com/LanaeErickson)

Democrats' Build Back Better (BBB) Act would be a long-overdue investment in the American people, delivering support for working families, middle-class tax cuts, and overdue action on climate. But as Democrats negotiate over what will be included in the bill, there's a void in the public debate. If voters have heard anything in this debate, it is the proposed price tag of the bill, which elevates the cost of it over what it would do for people. Because of this void, misconceptions are growing that could threaten the bill's long-term popularity. Most voters do not know what the bill would do (or even the pieces being discussed), and this lack of awareness leaves them susceptible to Republicans' lies and attacks that could poison support for the bill before it even passes.

To understand voters' misconceptions, Third Way and ALG Research recently conducted a 90-minute "Remesh session"—a research tool for gaining qualitative insights at scale—with 50 base

Democrats and 50 swing voters. (The findings should be read as broad and directional rather than precisely representative of the electorate.)

These findings show that most base and swing voters—72% in total—support BBB right now. But just 27% say they know “a lot” about the infrastructure and BBB bills. This void between initial support for the bill and voters’ awareness of its content is where misconceptions can take hold and undermine public support.

Three primary misconceptions jumped out in this research:

- **Voters do not believe they will receive a tax cut from BBB.** Just 13% of base and swing voters believe BBB will lower their taxes, even after hearing a description of the bill that includes working- and middle-class tax cuts.
- **Swing voters worry the bill will be full of giveaways and will keep people from returning to work.** When asked what they “dislike” in a fully described BBB, 60% of swing voters reference too many “handouts,” and a similar share are concerned it will keep some from returning to work.
- **Swing voters also believe the bill will increase the deficit.** More than 60% of swing voters erroneously think that the bill will increase the deficit, despite hearing that it will be paid for by taxes on the wealthy and corporations.

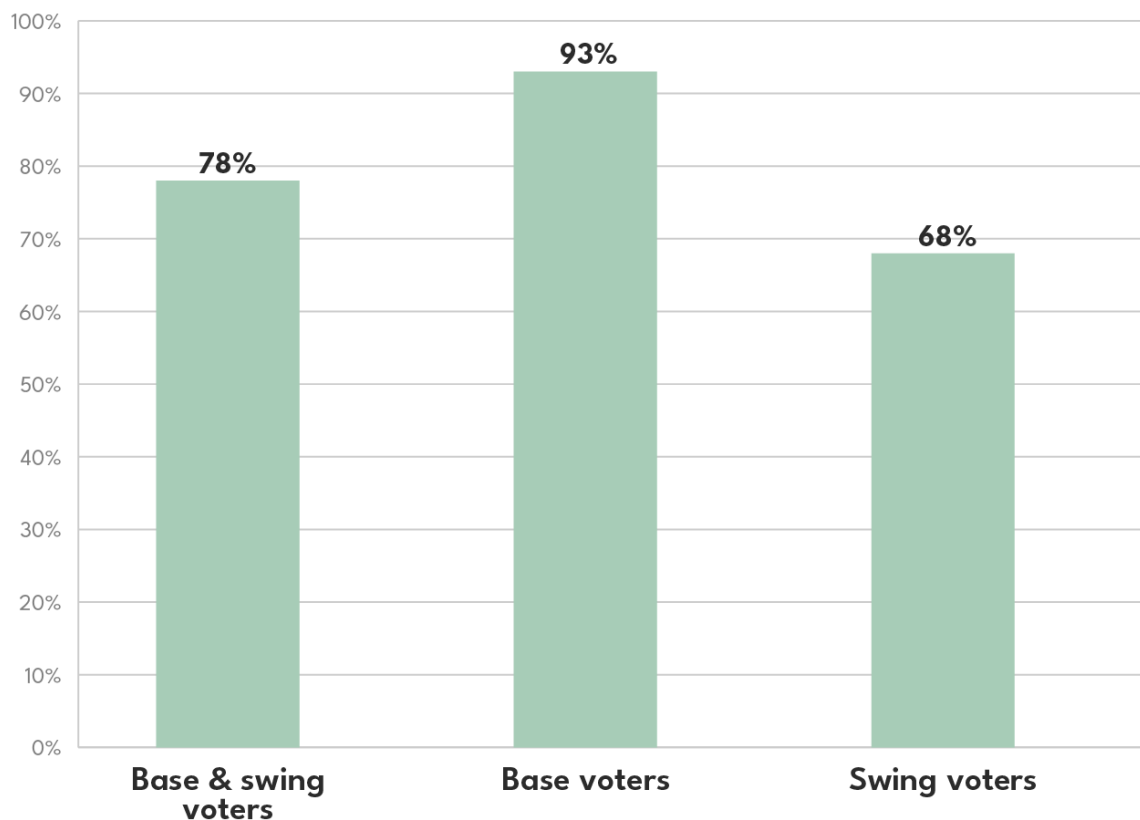
The BBB bill has initial support from voters, but it does not have resilient support yet. Voters’ low awareness of BBB leaves them vulnerable to Republican attacks that could degrade their support. Soon, Democrats will finalize the scope and content of the bill, and this will be the time to reassert the case for the bill. For now, much can be done to affirmatively address voters’ misconceptions to help brace support for the bill and preserve the opportunity for it to be an electoral asset in 2022.

## **Voters do not believe they will get a tax cut from BBB.**

Voters love the idea of working- and middle-class tax cuts in the BBB bill. After voters in the Remesh session read a description of the bill, 78% said that they like that it includes tax cuts for the working and middle class. This sentiment is shared by 68% of swing voters and 93% of base voters. In open-ended responses, it was the most frequently mentioned positive element of the bill.

## Voters Like Tax Cuts for the Working & Middle Class in the Bill

Share indicating tax cuts for working and middle class  
as a feature they "like" in the bill

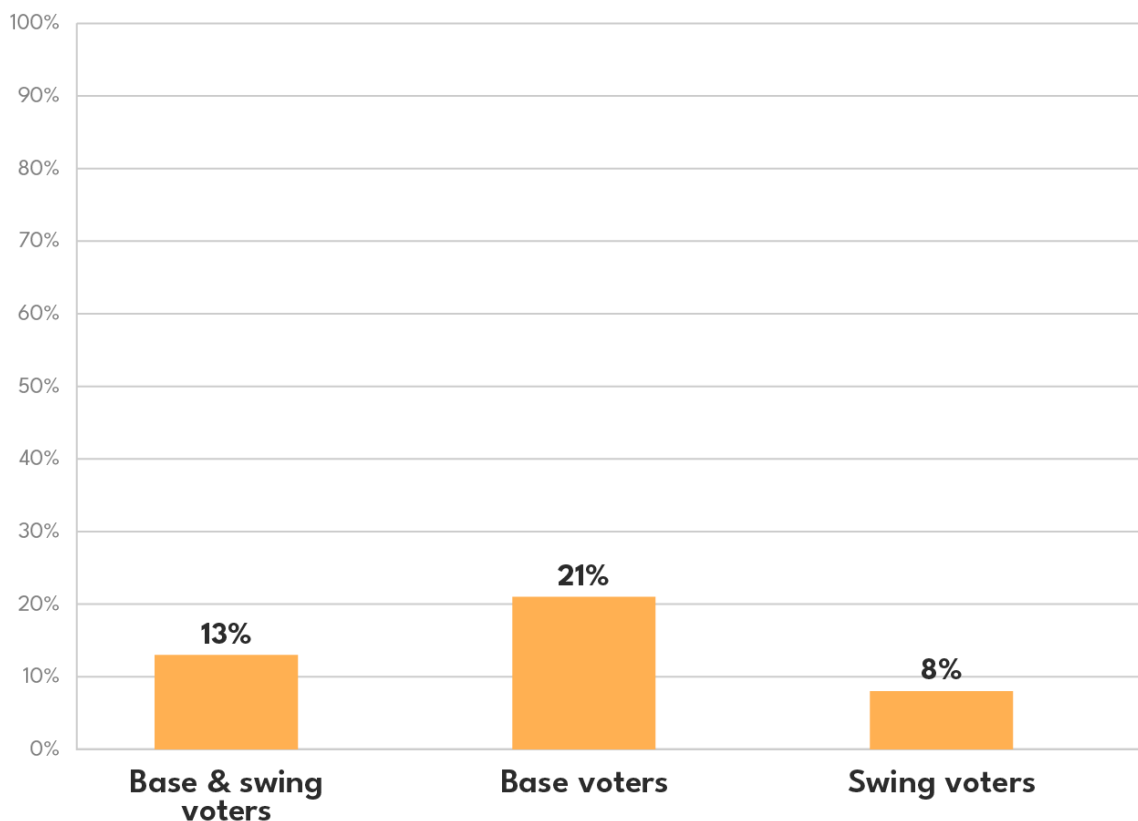


**Source:** Findings are based on the results of online focus groups conducted Third Way and ALG Research on September 16, 2021 among n=50 Democratic base voters and n=50 swing voters.

But even after reading about the bill, most voters do not believe they will receive a tax cut. Just 13% say they will receive a tax cut, with 21% of base voters and 8% of swing voters indicating they'll receive tax relief. This is a major misconception that Republicans are already amplifying through paid media in swing districts.

## Voters are Skeptical that the BBB Will Lower Their Taxes

Share saying the BBB bill will lower their taxes



**Source:** Findings are based on the results of online focus groups conducted Third Way and ALG Research on September 16, 2021 among n=50 Democratic base voters and n=50 swing voters.

Taking on this misconception and Republicans' lies exacerbating it requires directly addressing this falsehood. In message testing in the Remesh session, 52% said a message that the BBB bill would support working families through tax cuts and other benefits was "very convincing." Voters need to know that there are tangible benefits for them in BBB, but they are skeptical about that right now.

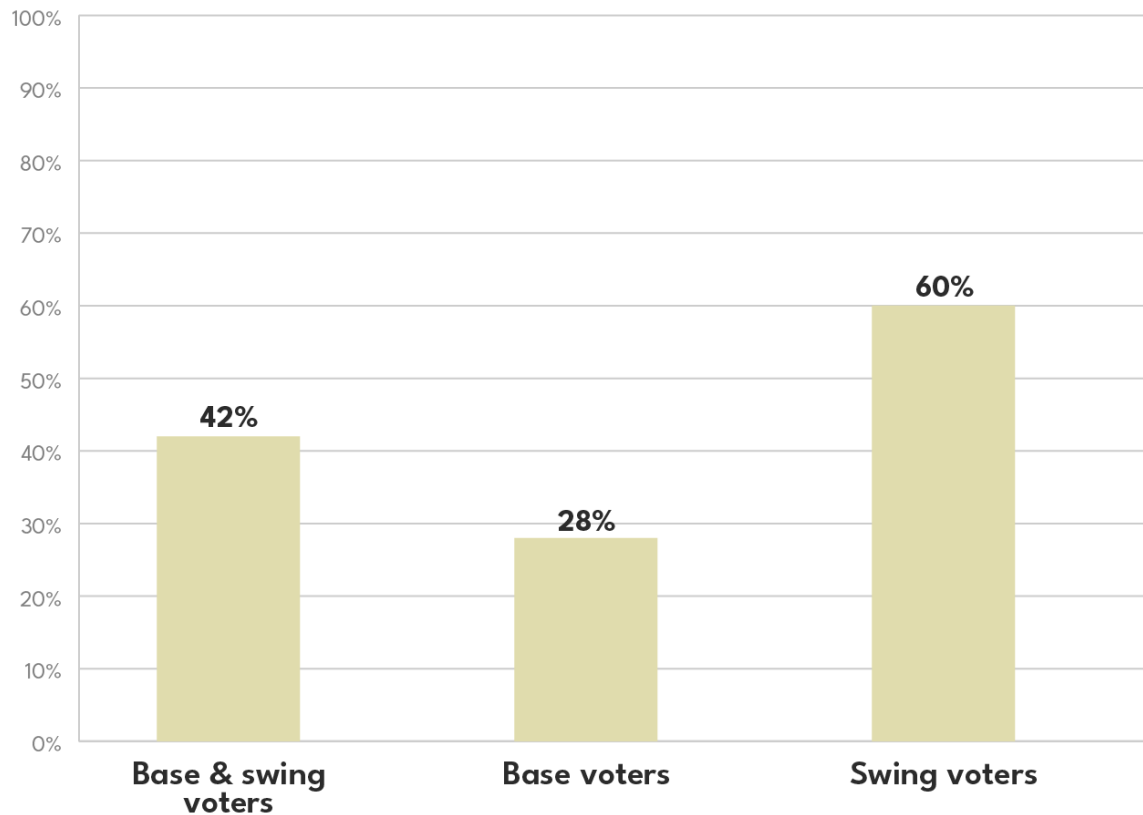
## Swing voters think BBB is full of giveaways and could discourage work.

There is a longstanding misconception among many voters that Democrats prioritize support for the poor over the middle class. This view has leached into swing voters' thinking about the BBB, which could worsen their skepticism that they will see tangible benefits from the bill. Sixty percent of swing voters say they believe that the bill will lead to "handouts." This view is mostly isolated to swing voters, with just 28% of base voters saying the same.



## Swing Voters Worry BBB Will Lead to 'Handouts'

Share indicating the BBB bill will lead to handouts



**Source:** Findings are based on the results of online focus groups conducted Third Way and ALG Research on September 16, 2021 among n=50 Democratic base voters and n=50 swing voters.

A related concern is that BBB will discourage people from returning to work. This sentiment is a holdover from the unemployment debate this summer and aligns with another longstanding misconception about Democrats, which is that the party does not particularly value hard work. Again, among swing voters, 61% say that the bill may keep people from returning to work. Only 27% of base voters share this misconception about the bill.

In reality, the bill is intended to create jobs and opportunities for Americans to work hard and earn a good life. Messages that focus on these priorities are an effective foil to the giveaways and return to work misconceptions. Fifty-one percent of voters say a message on how the bill will bring supply chains back home and create jobs is “very convincing.” The BBB bill is about empowering people, not making them dependent. Voters need to hear that from Democrats.

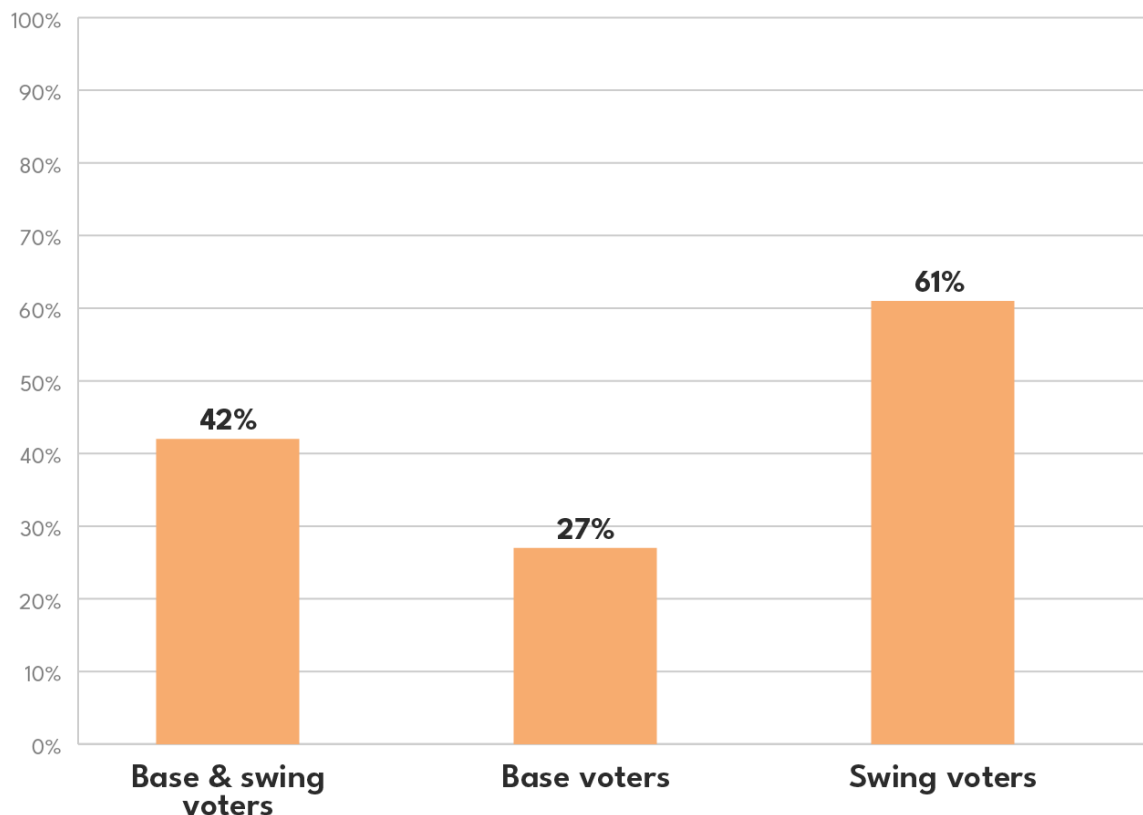
**Swing voters believe the bill will increase the deficit.**

Swing voters in the Remesh session held the misconception that the BBB bill would increase the deficit and burden future generations. This misconception could lead voters to incorrectly judge the bill's costs as too great compared to its benefits. Sixty-one percent believe we all will have to pay for the bill down the road, despite language in the bill description that it would not increase the deficit or lead to tax hikes for those making under \$400,000 a year.



### Swing Voters Believe BBB Will Increase the Deficit

Share saying we all will pay for the bill "down the road"



**Source:** Findings are based on the results of online focus groups conducted Third Way and ALG Research on September 16, 2021 among n=50 Democratic base voters and n=50 swing voters.

Voters' misconception here requires messaging that addresses the effect on the deficit and clearly explains who will ultimately pay for the bill. A message that the bill will improve the long-term future of America is "very convincing" with 51% of voters. This focus on the future is an effective counter to the powerful misconception that the bill will have unsustainable long-term costs.

While it is crucial to directly confront this notion of increasing the deficit, Democrats should not overread that advice and think that the tax increases are a major selling point for the bill overall. Only 37% of voters (and 8% of swing voters) say that a message that explicitly champions taxes on the wealthy to pay for the bill is a "very convincing" reason to support it. Given the scale of BBB, it

is important to talk about who will pay for it, but it's clear that this is not a convincing substitute for what it will do to help working families.

## **Conclusion**

Democrats and the media have dedicated an immense amount of time discussing and debating the overall price tag of the BBB bill. While the level of funding is important, this endless price tag conversation reinforces the sheer cost of BBB over what it would *do* for voters.

The void created by this debate has allowed misconceptions about the bill to take hold. After Democrats reach an agreement on the bill's size and scope, they will have an opportunity to re-frame what the bill *will* do for people. In the interim, it is crucial to push back against voters' misconceptions of the bill; specifically, the falsehoods that voters would not receive a tax cut from the bill, that it will lead to giveaways, and that it will increase the deficit. Taking on voters' misconceptions about the bill now will buoy support for it and retain the opportunity for it to be an electoral asset for Democrats next year.

## **Messaging Appendix**

### **Pro-BBB Messages**



## Messages on Tax Cuts, Jobs, and Support for Working Families Test the Best

Pro-BBB bill message	% Very convincing
This agenda supports American families by giving working parents a tax cut, making public education affordable for everyone from pre-K through community college, and mandating paid family leave so workers don't have to go to work sick or choose between earning a paycheck and caring for a loved one.	52%
This bill includes bringing critical supply chains home, for everything from semiconductors to medical equipment, so that we can create good manufacturing jobs here and we aren't so dependent on China and other countries for everything we need.	51%
Rather than just thinking about the next year or the next election, this plan focuses on the long term future of America and making us stronger, more resilient, and more competitive for the next generation. If we don't think big and tackle the long-term problems we face, we'll keep falling further behind.	51%
This plan invests in all types of affordable education. It provides universal pre-school to 3- and 4-year olds and two years of free community college for anyone who wants it, plus job-training and apprenticeship programs that train people to fill good-paying jobs. That will give kids the tools they need to succeed and reward people willing to work hard, whether college is right for them or not.	48%
The child tax cut and other tax cuts in the bill will be the largest tax cut for working Americans ever passed, paid for by the wealthy and big corporations. After decades of Washington failing the middle-class and almost two years of struggling through the pandemic, this will give working people a break and a chance to rebuild stronger than ever.	42%
This plan tackles inflation by cutting the cost of big-ticket items that are holding back working Americans who are trying to get back to normal life. It will crack down on the exorbitant price of prescription drugs and make health insurance premiums, housing costs, and utility bills more affordable.	41%



The data shows that poverty fell last year due to coronavirus relief aid, including over 8 million people who were lifted out of poverty instead of falling deeper into it. This plan will continue to cut poverty in America, giving those starting at the bottom an equal opportunity to succeed.	40%
This plan will strengthen the economy in a way that rewards work, not wealth. It helps the middle class so those who work hard can get ahead, while asking the richest among us to invest a little more in the same system that helped them succeed.	37%
Democrats say Republican critics are lying about the bill – it is fully paid for using left over coronavirus relief funds and higher taxes on the mega-rich and corporations who hide their profits overseas. It does not add to the national debt and will not raise a dime of taxes on anyone making less than \$400,000.	37%

**Source:** Findings are based on the results of online focus groups conducted Third Way and ALG Research on September 16, 2021 among n=50 Democratic base voters and n=50 swing voters.



## Anti-BBB Messages

## GOP Attacks on Tax Hikes, the Deficit, and ‘Handouts’ Perform Best

Anti-BBB bill message	% Very convincing
Given all the spending in this bill, it's only a matter of time before this bill means middle-class tax hikes. It also includes higher taxes on small businesses and family farms.	30%
Democrats are using accounting gimmicks to hide that the bill is not fully paid for and will add hundreds of billions of dollars a year to our \$28 trillion debt. Our kids and grandkids will be paying for this, with interest, for generations to come.	28%
This bill is packed with handouts including giving people free money. It encourages people to live off the government instead of working even as businesses are struggling to find workers. It will slow the economic recovery and force those who work hard to pay more to support those who don't want to work.	27%
This is a massive and reckless \$3.5 Trillion spending plan that we can't afford, especially at a time when our economy is struggling, we just spent trillions of dollars dealing with the coronavirus, and inflation is making everything more expensive.	25%
This agenda is a socialist wish list written by Bernie Sanders and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. It includes paying people permanently not to work, massive tax increases on business, and a further government takeover of the health care system.	21%

**Source:** Findings are based on the results of online focus groups conducted Third Way and ALG Research on September 16, 2021 among n=50 Democratic base voters and n=50 swing voters.



## Methodology

Results are based on online focus groups conducted September 16, 2021, on the Remesh platform among n=50 Democratic base voters and n=50 swing voters. Base voters were screened to be consistent Democratic voters at both the presidential level and down-ballot. Swing voters were screened to have voted for both Democrats and Republicans in the past ten years at either level. Because this is qualitative research, participants' views cannot be projected onto the U.S. electorate as a whole.