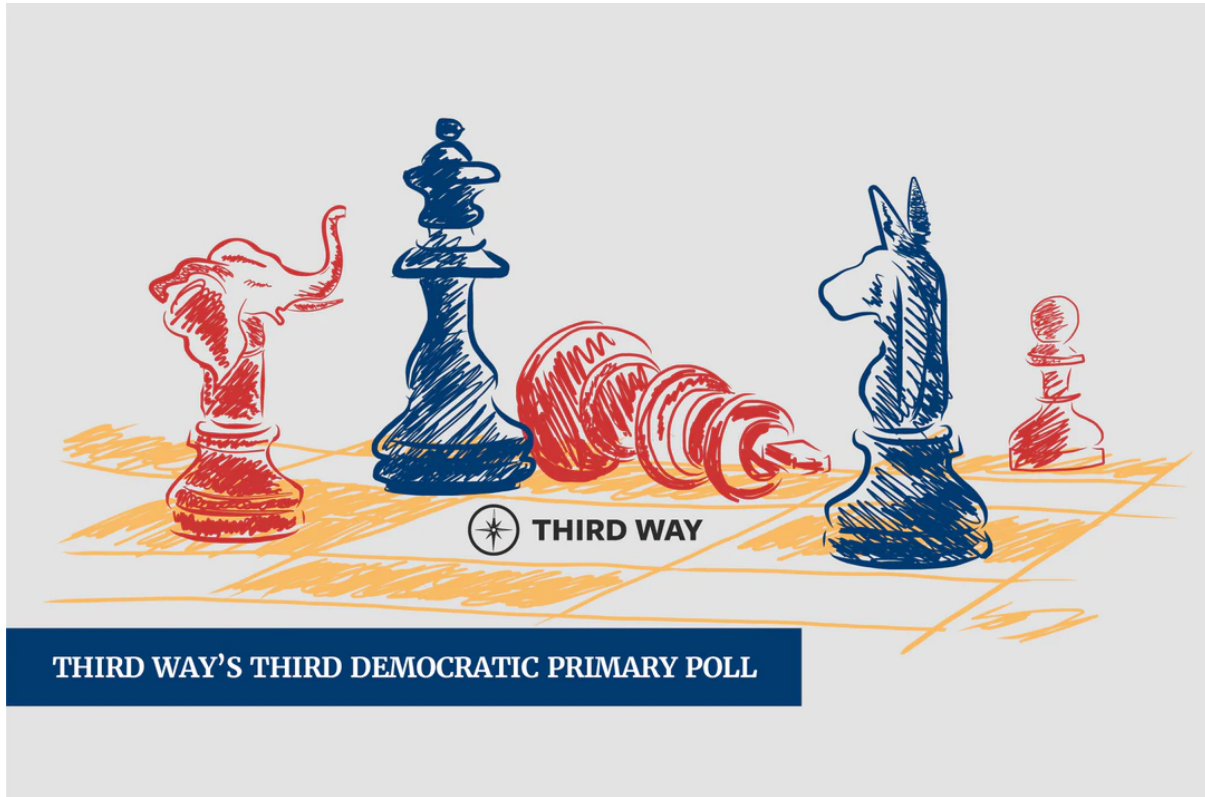


Democratic Primary Voters to Candidates: Run the 2018 Playbook



Lanae Erickson

Senior Vice President for the Social Policy & Politics Program

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



Ryan Pougiales

Senior Political Analyst

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

Third Way's latest national poll of likely 2020 Democratic primary voters shows that four months out from Iowa, the race for the Democratic nomination still is anyone's game:

- Former Vice President Joe Biden leads the field with 34% support, Senator Elizabeth Warren is second at 17%, and Senator Bernie Sanders is third at 15%. California Senator Kamala Harris (7%) and South Bend Mayor Pete Buttigieg (5%) round out the top tier.

• One-in-four primary voters are currently undecided or are supporting a candidate

- One-in-four primary voters are currently undecided or are supporting a candidate outside of the top tier, and fully half of undecided voters say they won't decide until the weeks leading up to their state's contest.

What primary voters do know for sure is that to win in 2020, Democrats should take a page from their own 2018 playbook:

- Three-in-four primary voters are motivated by the same priorities that brought them to the polls in 2018.
- A majority want a Democratic nominee who is a unifier who can get things done—just like the Democrats who delivered victory in 2018.
- Two-thirds think it's important for the 2020 candidates to take positions in the primary that they can defend against attacks in the general election.
- Yet when asked if they feel the candidates are speaking to them when they discuss their ideas and solutions, or instead to other people, primary voters are divided. For the one in 10 who post on Twitter daily, they feel candidates are speaking more to them by 34 points. For those who don't tweet, there's only a five-point margin between those who think the candidates are speaking to them versus others.

Primary voters know how Democrats won with a broad coalition in 2018, and candidates who embrace that playbook are likely to rise going into Iowa and beyond.

The race for the nomination is still up in the air.

All year, Third Way has worked with David Binder Research to conduct quarterly polls of Democratic primary voters. The latest, fielded from September 19th to 22nd, shows Joe Biden leading the field with the support of 34% of voters. This gives him a two-to-one lead over his nearest competitor, Elizabeth Warren at 17%, while Bernie Sanders is at 15%. Kamala Harris (7%) and Pete Buttigieg (5%) round out the top five, while no other candidate reaches 4%.



A Top Tier Has Emerged in the Democratic Primary

CANDIDATE	SUPPORT W/LEANERS
Joe Biden	34%
Elizabeth Warren	17%
Bernie Sanders	15%
Kamala Harris	7%
Pete Buttigieg	5%
Cory Booker	3%
Beto O'Rourke	3%
Tulsi Gabbard	2%
Andrew Yang	2%
Julian Castro	1%
Tom Steyer	1%
Amy Klobuchar	<1%

Source: Third Way/David Binder Research national 2020 Democratic primary survey, 1,200 likely 2020 Democratic primary voters +550 oversample of African Americans and Latinos, conducted online September 19-22, 2019.



Biden draws support from a multi-racial coalition; he leads with white (33%), African American (43%), and Latinx voters (32%). But compared to public polls earlier in the summer, Warren has increased her support with voters of color from single digits to 13% with African Americans and 15% with Latinx voters. Age is a major cleavage in the primary; Sanders leads Biden by 13 points with voters under 35, while those over 45 back Biden over Warren by 24 points. But notably, those in the 35-44 age cohort are split between Biden and Warren.

Among 2016 primary voters, Biden leads Warren by 26 points with voters who supported

Among 2016 primary voters, Biden leads Warren by 20 points with voters who supported Hillary Clinton, while Sanders retains a meager 37% of his 2016 supporters.

Despite Biden's substantial lead in the current horserace, the primary is far from over:

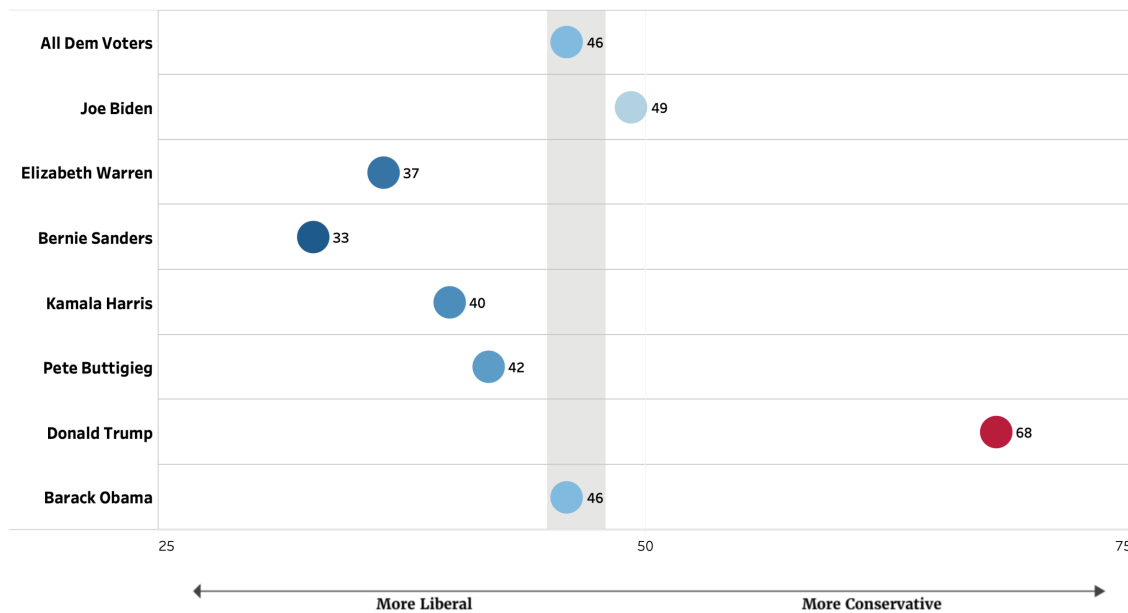
- One-in-four voters are undecided or supporting a candidate outside of the top five. This quarter of primary voters is enough to put any candidate in the delegate hunt, if they break the right way.
- Among the voters who are undecided right now, fully half say they won't decide until the weeks leading up to their state's contest.
- But while they're far from solidified, some voters are ruling *out* certain candidates: 23% say they will not back Sanders, compared to 14% for Biden and 13% for Warren, while lower-tiered candidates like Tom Steyer (24%), Julián Castro (23%), and Andrew Yang (22%) are also being ruled out at comparatively high rates.

As the contenders compete for votes ahead of the primaries and caucuses, one evaluation voters will make is where candidates fall on the ideological spectrum relative to their own worldview. We asked Democratic primary voters to identify themselves on an ideological scale from 0 (liberal) to 100 (conservative), and then to identify the top 2020 contenders, as well as Trump and Barack Obama, on the same scale.

to sharp relief why candidates are at great risk if ord or stray too far from the mainstream path he

The top takeaway is that Democratic primary voters align themselves with Obama. As seen on the chart below, the average self-identified ideology score for all primary voters is 46. And in turn, these voters also perceive Obama to be a 46 on the scale. This data point throws into sharp relief why candidates are at great risk if they attack Obama's record or stray too far from the mainstream path he blazed for the party. Among the 2020 candidates, Biden is perceived as the closest ideological match, and every other candidate is perceived to be to the left of the primary voters they are attempting to woo. Strikingly, Democratic primary voters perceive Sanders and Trump to be equal distances from the ideological center.

AVERAGE SELF-ID IDEOLOGY FOR ALL DEM VOTERS AND FOR POLITICAL FIGURES (0 - 100)



Source: Third Way/David Binder Research national 2020 Democratic primary survey, 1,200 likely 2020 Democratic primary voters +550 oversample of African Americans and Latinos, conducted online September 19-22, 2019.

The race for the Democratic nomination is in a fluid state four months out from Iowa. It is clear that a top tier of five candidates has emerged, but there is a large chunk of the vote that is still up for grabs—enough to put any candidate in the hunt for the nomination.

Voters want a candidate who will run the winning 2018 playbook to defeat Trump.

The Strategy Playbook

Primary voters are perfectly clear on one thing: They want a nominee who will bring together a broad coalition of supporters around an agenda that addresses the urgent problems people are enduring in their daily lives. They want a unifier who can get things done. This is how Democrats won back the House and offices across the country in 2018. And primary voters are convinced it is how Democrats can win in 2020 too.

In poll after poll, primary voters consistently say that they would prefer a Democratic nominee best positioned to beat Trump over one that matches their policy preferences on every issue. That desire held in this survey, 68% to 28%. And while some have argued that it doesn't matter what positions a Democratic candidate takes because Republicans will launch the same attacks no matter what when it comes time for the general election face-off, Democratic primary voters vociferously disagree with that notion. A full two-thirds say, "It's important for the Democratic candidates to take positions that they can defend against attacks in the

general election," compared to only 28% who think "Republicans are going to attack the

general election, compared to only 28 % who think Republicans are going to attack the Democratic nominee no matter what in the general election, so it doesn't matter what the Democratic candidates say during the primary election."

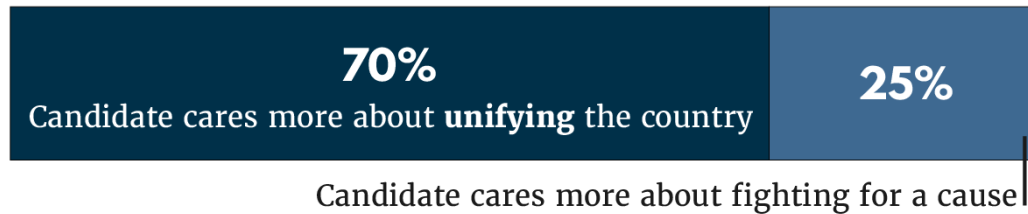
There were plentiful indicators that Democrats are dead set on winning in 2020.

- Primary voters feel a unifier is best positioned to take on the divisive incumbent. By a 70–25% margin, they want a Democratic candidate who cares more about unifying the country than fighting for a cause.
- They also believe a broad path is the way forward—not a reflexive shift to the left. By a 69–25% margin, primary voters want a candidate to appeal to a broad range of voters, including some who may have backed Trump, over moving left to motivate progressives and liberals.
- Six in ten say they want someone who “stays focused on repairing trust and uniting the country,” compared to just over a third who prefer someone who “stays focused on pushing back on the white supremacists and racists who have become more outspoken under President Trump.” Latinx primary voters prefer that focus by 12 points, as do African American primary voters by 19 points.
- Primary voters prefer a focus on solving urgent problems to shifting the “Overton Window.” By an 80–16% margin, they want a candidate who offers ideas to address urgent problems over one fixated on shifting the national debate.
- By a three-to-one margin, they want a candidate who puts forward ideas that mend but do not end capitalism—not a Democratic Socialist bent on upending the system.
- And a full three-quarters of primary voters say they'd prefer a standard bearer who “works across party lines to bring the country together and get things done, even if it means not getting everything they want,” while only 20% want a candidate who “will take bold policy stances, standing firm even if it means policies may not be passed.”

While there is unanimity around many strategic questions, one issue where primary voters are split is over the best way to take on Trump: 48% want a candidate who will go toe-to-toe with Trump, but 44% want one who will mostly ignore his attacks. Democrats certainly want their candidate to stand up to Trump, but this split could indicate a difference in opinion about whether they want someone who will fight on Trump's terms or someone who will set his or her own agenda.

Primary voters want a candidate who can win and unify the country to solve urgent problems

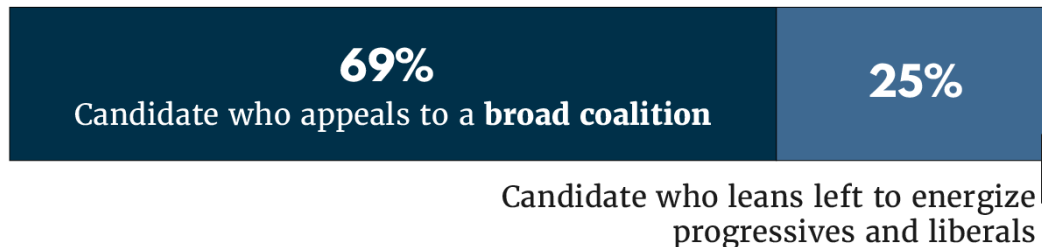
Democratic voters want a unifier



Democratic voters want a sense of urgency & action



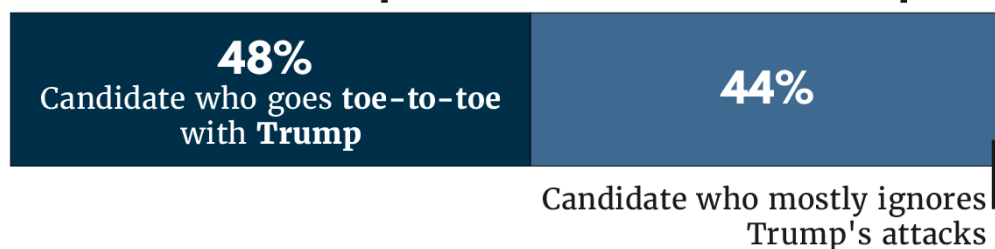
Democratic voters want to build a broad coalition to win



Democratic voters want to make capitalism work



Democratic voters split on how to take on Trump

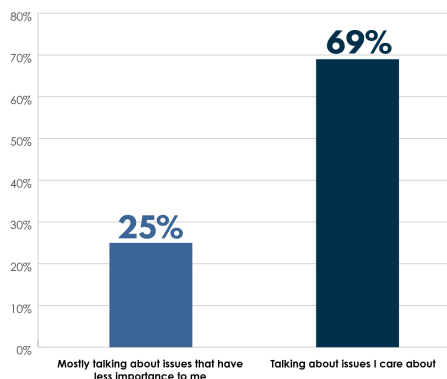


their ideas and solutions or to other people, this margin narrows to 40–39 %. Among the 29 % of primary voters who call themselves Democratic Socialists, they say that the candidates are speaking to *them* by a 35–point margin. But the 71% of primary voters who do not identify as Democratic Socialists say that the candidates are talking to *others* by a two–point margin. Similarly, for the 11% of primary voters who post on Twitter daily, they feel the candidates are speaking to them by 34 points. For those who do not tweet, there’s only a five–point margin between those who think candidates are speaking to them versus others.

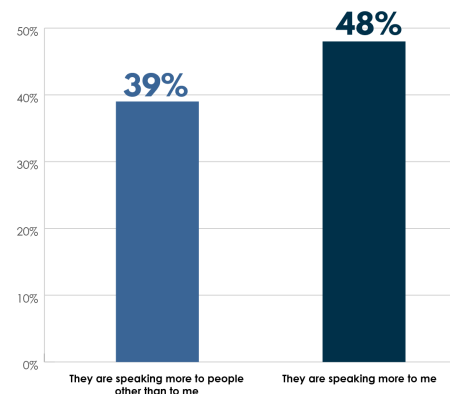
Primary voters who call themselves Democratic Socialists The candidates are speaking to them by a 35-point margin Primary voters who do not identify as Democratic Socialists Candidates are talking to others by a two-point



VOTERS SAY CANDIDATES TALKING ABOUT THE RIGHT ISSUES



VOTERS ARE LESS SURE CANDIDATES ARE TALKING TO THEM



Source: Third Way/David Binder Research national 2020 Democratic primary survey, 1,200 likely 2020 Democratic primary voters +550 oversample of African Americans and Latinos, conducted online September 19–22, 2019.

The disconnect between most voters saying candidates are talking about the right general issues but are less convinced candidates are talking to *them* becomes more acute when they are probed on more granular policy ideas. On health care, voters identify it as a top priority for 2020, and it has been the most talked–about issue in the primary to date. Much of the discussion has focused on whether to replace the Affordable Care Act with Medicare for All. But when voters are asked about the specific issues that matter most for 2020, a plurality (43%) identify reducing the cost of health care as a top priority, while just 16% say passing Medicare

for All is a top priority. In 2018, winning Democrats focused on lowering the everyday costs of

for All is a top priority. In 2018, winning Democrats focused on lowering the everyday costs of health care, and primary voters are begging candidates to return to that important conversation.

Primary Voters' top three issues for a Democratic candidate to focus on to beat Trump (Multiple response, up to three answers)

1	Reducing the cost of health care	43
2	Passing gun safety legislation	39
3	Addressing climate change	30
4	Making the wealthy and corporations pay more in taxes	26
5	Reducing taxes on the working and middle class	26
6	Fixing our immigration system including the pathway to citizenship for undocumented immigrants	24
7	Creating good-paying jobs and raising wages	19
8	Protecting a woman's right to choose	18
9	Passing a single-payer, Medicare for All government-run health plan	16
10	Raising the minimum wage	16
11	Getting money out of politics	12
12	Reforming the criminal justice system	10
13	Nominating liberal Justices to the Supreme Court	8
14	Guaranteeing a federal government job to every American who wants one	5
15	Something else	3
16	Don't Know	1

Source: Third Way/David Binder Research national 2020 Democratic primary survey, 1,200 likely 2020 Democratic primary voters +550 oversample of African Americans and Latinos, conducted online September 19-22, 2019.



On the issues, primary voters are saying that the 2020 candidates are mostly on-topic but often missing the point. To course correct, those who seek to represent them as a presidential

nominee in 2020 should borrow from the 2018 playbook

nominee in 2020 should borrow from the 2018 playbook.

Conclusion

Four months out from Iowa, Biden has the lead, but the contours of the race could shift significantly by February. Most voters feel that candidates are generally talking about their top priorities in terms of issues, but far fewer believe candidates' ideas and solutions are directed at them. To address this, candidates would do well to draw from Democrats' 2018 playbook, championing an agenda of reducing health care costs, creating economic opportunity, and cleaning up Washington. This offering resonated with voters in 2018 and could reap serious benefits for the 2020 candidates, both over the next four months and through the heat of the general election season.

Methodology

Third Way and David Binder Research partnered to conduct a national survey of likely 2020 Democratic primary voters. The base sample was 1,200 likely 2020 Democratic primary voters, and we also oversampled 250 African American primary voters and 300 Latinx primary voters. This gave a margin of error of 2.8% on the base sample. The survey was conducted online using a panel matched to vote history, in English and Spanish, from September 19th to 22nd, 2019.

TOPICS

ELECTIONS 155