



Climate and Clean Energy: Winning Issues in 2020

Key findings and messages from a national survey of Democratic primary voters and a survey of general election voters across 2020 battleground states

Defining the problem

Beyond calling climate change an existential threat, candidates must **define the problem in economic terms** and **discuss specific examples** of how climate change is affecting people today. The most powerful reasons why primary voters, as well as general election voters, care about climate are:

- Climate-related natural disasters have cost the country more than \$450 billion in the past three years and could **cost \$54 trillion worldwide by 2040.**
- The U.S. economy could shrink by as much as 10 percent or upward of **\$500 billion a year in crop damage, lost labor, and extreme weather damages.** This is almost double the economic blow of the Great Recession of 2009.
- In the past two years, more than **3,000 Americans died in climate-related disasters.**
- Scientists report that more than **1 million species are on the verge of extinction** because of climate change and human activity.
- Public health experts say that **climate change threatens the quality of the air we breathe and the water we drink.**

Voters want to move to a 100 percent clean energy economy

Democratic primary voters: Addressing climate change and developing a clean energy economy is one of Democratic primary voters’ top issues. Primary voters expect and demand that candidates offer clear and effective plans that address climate change and move the country to 100 percent clean energy. They want candidates to offer plans that will beat President Donald Trump and do what scientists say is necessary to address the climate challenge. **What Democratic primary voters most want is a plan that does the following.**

DEMOCRATIC PRIMARY VOTERS

Essential/very important element in a Democratic plan to address climate change

	Essential element	Essential/important
✓ Helps the candidate defeat Trump	47%	71%
✓ Realistic , can actually be turned into law	42%	79%
✓ Meets scientists’ recommendation to limit global warming to 1.5°C, requires cutting global greenhouse gas emissions 45% by 2030/100% by 2050	32%	74%
✓ Inspires a new generation of voters to demand action on climate change	31%	73%
✓ Transforms U.S. economy with scope, scale, speed to avoid worst effects of climate change	30%	76%
✓ Is able to attract bipartisan support in Congress	30%	71%
✓ Creates millions of good-paying jobs	29%	73%
✓ Effectively eliminates greenhouse gas pollution by no later than 2050	27%	69%
✓ Prioritizes pollution reductions first in communities with worst air quality , particularly communities of color	26%	71%
✓ Ensures workers in fossil fuel industry meaningful work opportunities in green economy	25%	72%
✓ Is broadly popular with the American people	18%	59%

Democratic primary voters support a plan to move to a 100 percent clean energy economy. When asked about specific policies to address climate change, primary voters are more likely to vote for a candidate who supports a plan to move the United States to a 100 percent clean energy economy, and it is broadly popular.

- **Primary voters are 83 percent more likely** to support a candidate who supports moving the United States to a 100 percent clean energy economy.

General election voters: General election voters now think that climate change is a very serious problem. It is not merely Democratic primary voters and caucus-goers who care about climate change. A majority, or 55 percent, of general election voters says that it is a crisis or a very serious problem, including 57 percent of independent voters and 30 percent of Republicans. Moreover, climate change is a problem to large majorities of Latinx voters, at 68 percent, and African American voters, at 63 percent.

- **General election voters also support moving America to 100 percent clean energy** and believe this will create jobs. It is important for Democratic candidates to communicate their commitment to climate and energy policies that work for working families and promote a growing economy.

President Trump's climate denial and alliance with Big Oil

Climate change is an area of competitive advantage for Democrats among general election voters in battleground states. A large majority of voters disapprove of Trump's handling of these issues, and **general election voters are concerned that Trump denies climate science, allies with big polluters, and sides with oil and gas over everyday Americans.**

When asked how concerning President Trump's actions have been on a variety of issues, general election voters rate those relating to Trump's climate record as highly concerning, assigning their concern a 7, 8, 9, or 10 on a 0 to 10 scale. Three in 5 voters are highly concerned about Trump's record, including his record on doing the bidding of his oil and gas donors, siding with polluters, and denying climate science.

- **Pay to play (60 percent high concern):** After oil, gas, and coal companies poured millions of dollars into Trump's campaign, Trump let former lobbyists for the fossil fuel industry take over key positions in the administration that oversee corporate polluters. Now, these former oil and coal lobbyists are rewriting laws to weaken environmental protections and have opened up the nation's public lands and coastal areas to drilling and mining.
- **Populist (60 percent high concern):** Donald Trump promised to look out for everyday people and hold special interests accountable. But as president, he has repeatedly sided with big oil companies and other corporate polluters, giving them billions in new tax cuts. While oil companies have gotten richer, everyone else is left with dirtier air and more health risks like asthma and polluted water.
- **Climate denier (59 percent high concern):** Donald Trump continues to deny the overwhelming scientific evidence of climate change—he calls it a hoax—while putting the interests of polluters ahead of the environment and public health. While scientists say that the worst

consequences of climate change will be unavoidable unless we take action to address carbon emissions, Trump named a climate change denier to head the climate scientist committee.