

Implicit Partisanship Research 2022 - 2023



Methodology

Global Strategy Group and Impact Research conducted a two-year project exploring implicit partisanship in House battleground voters

- March 2022: A survey of **1,175 soft partisan voters nationwide**
- June 2022: A survey of **1,600 registered voters nationwide**
- November 2023: **Online focus groups with swing voters in battleground House districts** conducted among white non-college swing women and Hispanic swing men
- November 2023: A survey of **806 soft partisan likely 2024 voters from districts that flipped their vote between 2020 and 2022**
- December 2023: A survey of **1000 likely 2024 voters in House battlegrounds**

The goals of the research were:

- Understand what issues and message framing voters implicitly associate with Democrats or Republicans
- Explore whether “atypical” partisan messaging – messaging not traditionally associated with Democrats – is more effective than typical messages at moving the vote for Congress
- Learn how base and swing audiences respond to “atypical” messaging to understand any potential backlash from the Democratic base
- Identify the traits and approaches voters want to see from member of Congress
- Understand how implicit partisanship informs how to define Republicans

Key Findings

- **The political environment is challenging for Democrats right now, particularly among the persuadable middle of the electorate.** Despite the toxicity of Trump and MAGA, Democrats are trailing Republicans on several key issues, in large part because voters don't believe Democrats are focusing on the *right* issues. We can improve party brand with voters by communicating several Democratic positions and approaches that are not seen as Democratic by voters. And individual candidates in difficult races can simultaneously distinguish themselves from the party brand and win over swing voters.
- **The Democratic brand has significant vulnerabilities on issues like immigration, public safety, and the economy. However, the party's actual positions on these issues are not accurately defined.** It's not that their positions on these topics are unpopular, but that voters associate Democratic positions (like securing the border while supporting a path to citizenship) with a Republican candidate, not a Democratic one.
- **But the fight for which party has an advantage on the economy is up for grabs.** While the Democratic brand has a weakness on the economy, House Republicans are not seen as doing enough to lower costs, improve economy, or tackle inflation.

Key Findings

- **We can build support by communicating Democratic positions on issues that aren't associated with the party brand.** Voters already associate Democrats with supporting abortion rights, raising wages, and taxing the rich. But voters are much more likely to view other popular Democratic messages with the Republican party brand, including job training for those without a college degree, boosting manufacturing, and fixing a broken immigration system (with a pathway to citizenship).
- **A simulation shows that a Democratic candidate using Democratic themes and messaging that are not associated with a “Typical Democrat” overperforms a Democrat emphasizing messages already associated with party brand.** “Atypical” framing, which invokes Democratic positions in a new light, is more popular with swing voters and yields no backlash with base voters.
- **Across a variety of difficult issues – like spending, immigration, and public safety – Democrats can win debates with Republicans when we use “atypical” language that presents Democratic positions and values in a new light.**

Key Findings

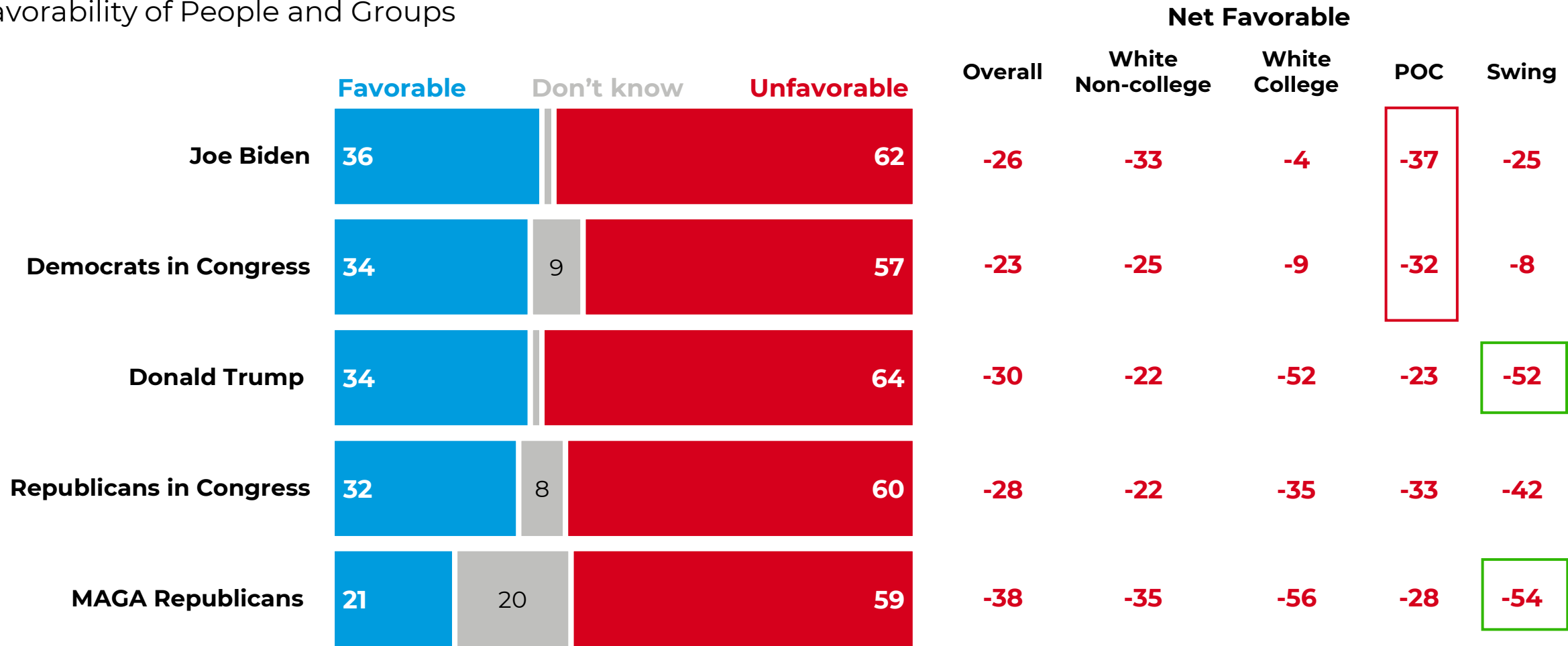
- **All of the above applies to positive messaging. Negative or contrast messaging that emphasizes what voters dislike most about the Republican brand is most effective.** Republicans are associated with extremism, chaos, and corporate greed. To further alienate Republican candidates, we should highlight their “extremism” and connection to the MAGA wing of the party. To credential the attack, highlight their connections to Trump, January 6th, overturning elections, and support for banning abortions.
- **While voters see Republicans as extreme, the Democratic brand is seen as equally extreme.** Once Democrats communicate several messages to prove they are more mainstream, Democrats can win on GOP extremism. Soft partisans are also slightly more likely to consider Democrats willing to work with both sides to get things done. There isn't much this Republican party can say to prove they are mainstream.

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The Challenge with Voters in the Middle

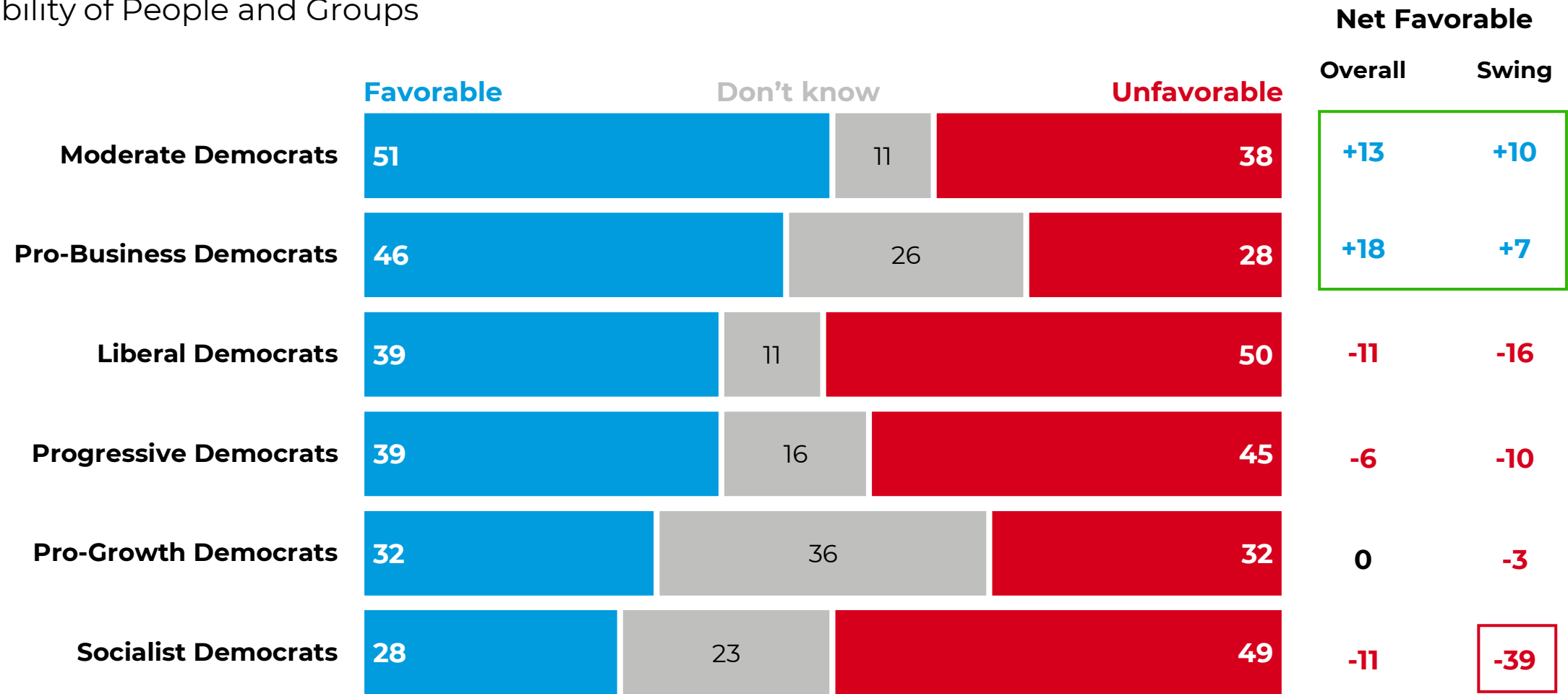
Soft partisan voters are very negative toward both parties and their leaders, with swing voters particularly unfavorable of Trump and MAGA

Favorability of People and Groups



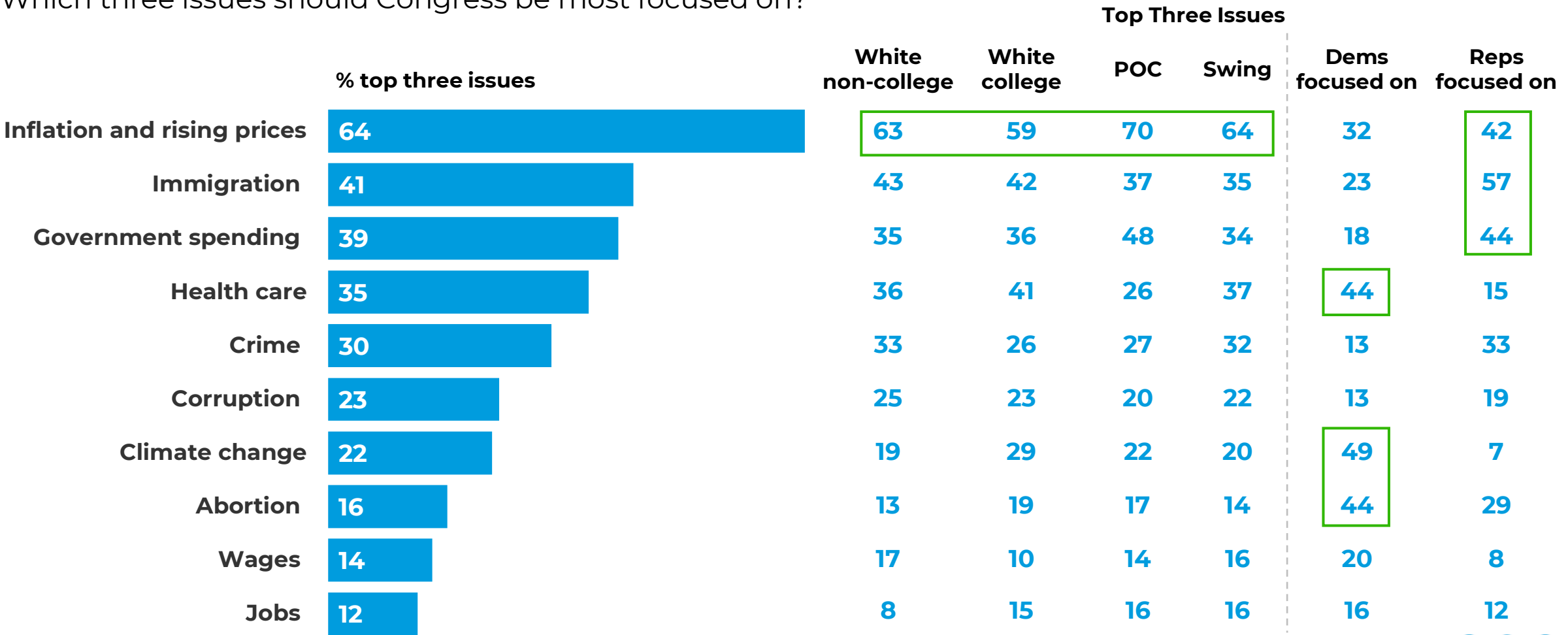
But different types of Democrats elicit different feelings – moderate and pro-business Democrats are popular with voters overall and swing

Favorability of People and Groups



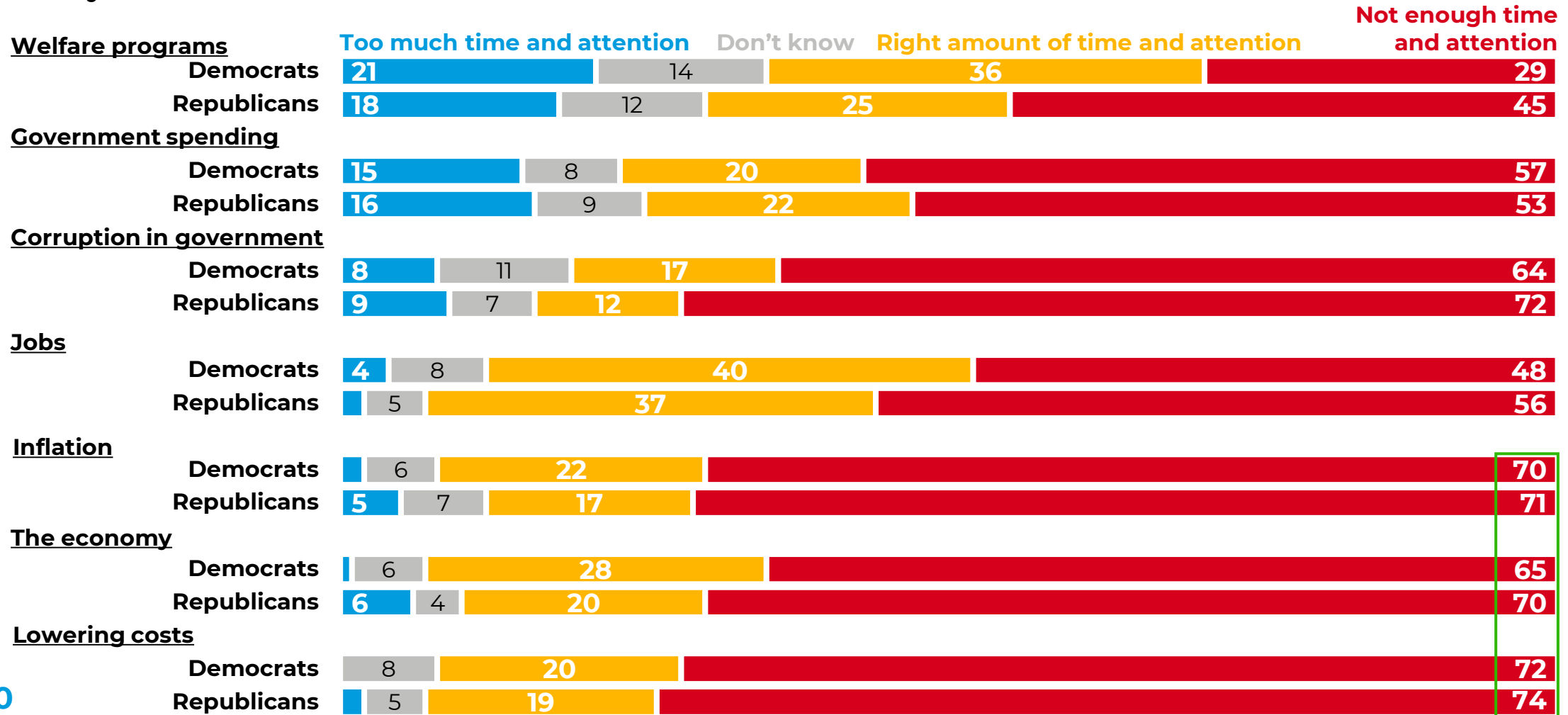
Soft partisans want to see Congress tackle inflation first and foremost; but they see both parties – especially Dems – as focused elsewhere

Which three issues should Congress be most focused on?



Soft partisans say overwhelmingly that neither party is spending enough time on the economy, inflation, and lowering costs

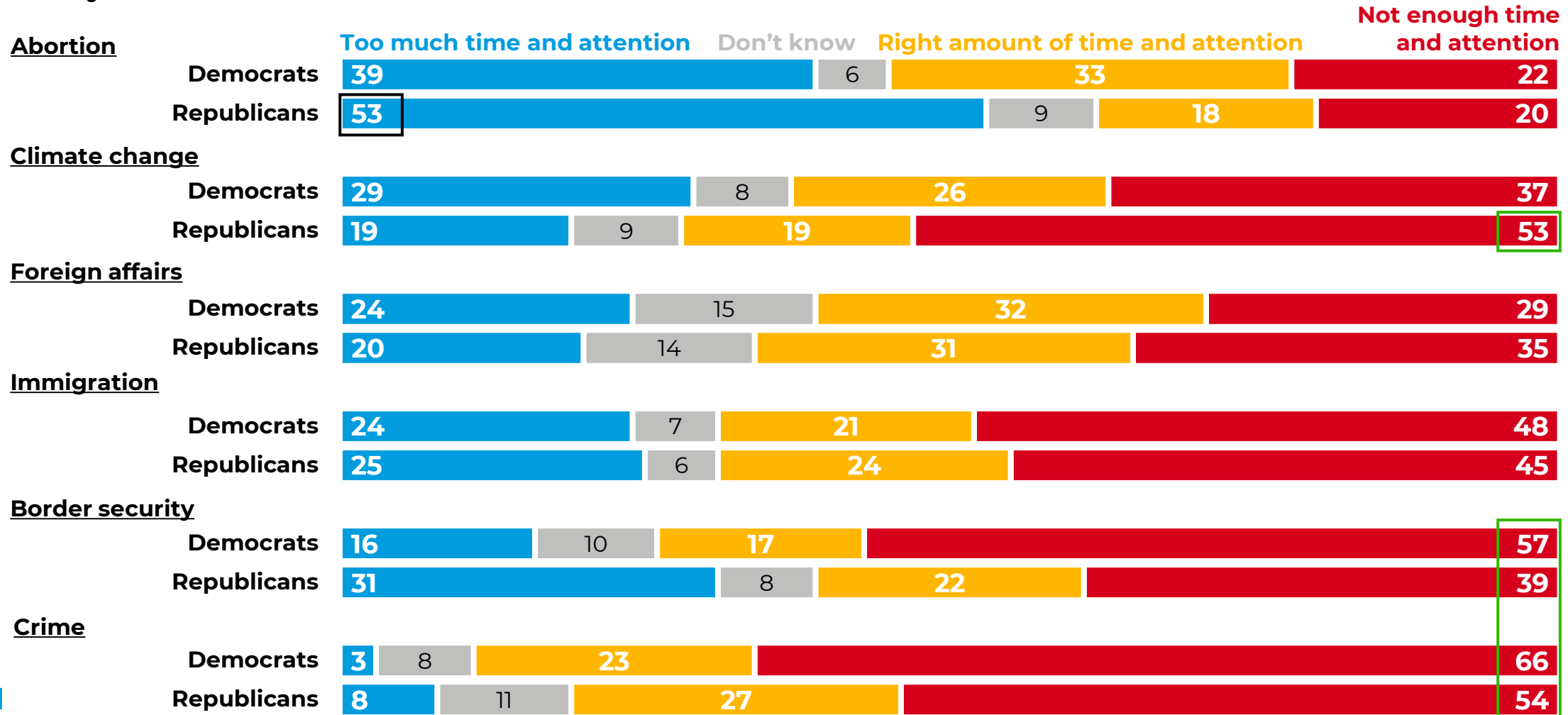
Party Attention on Issues – Soft Partisans



* Soft partisans are voters who do not identify as either Strong Democrats or Strong Republicans.
December 2023

Soft partisans are more likely to say Democrats are not sufficiently focused on border security and crime, and that Republicans are too focused on abortion

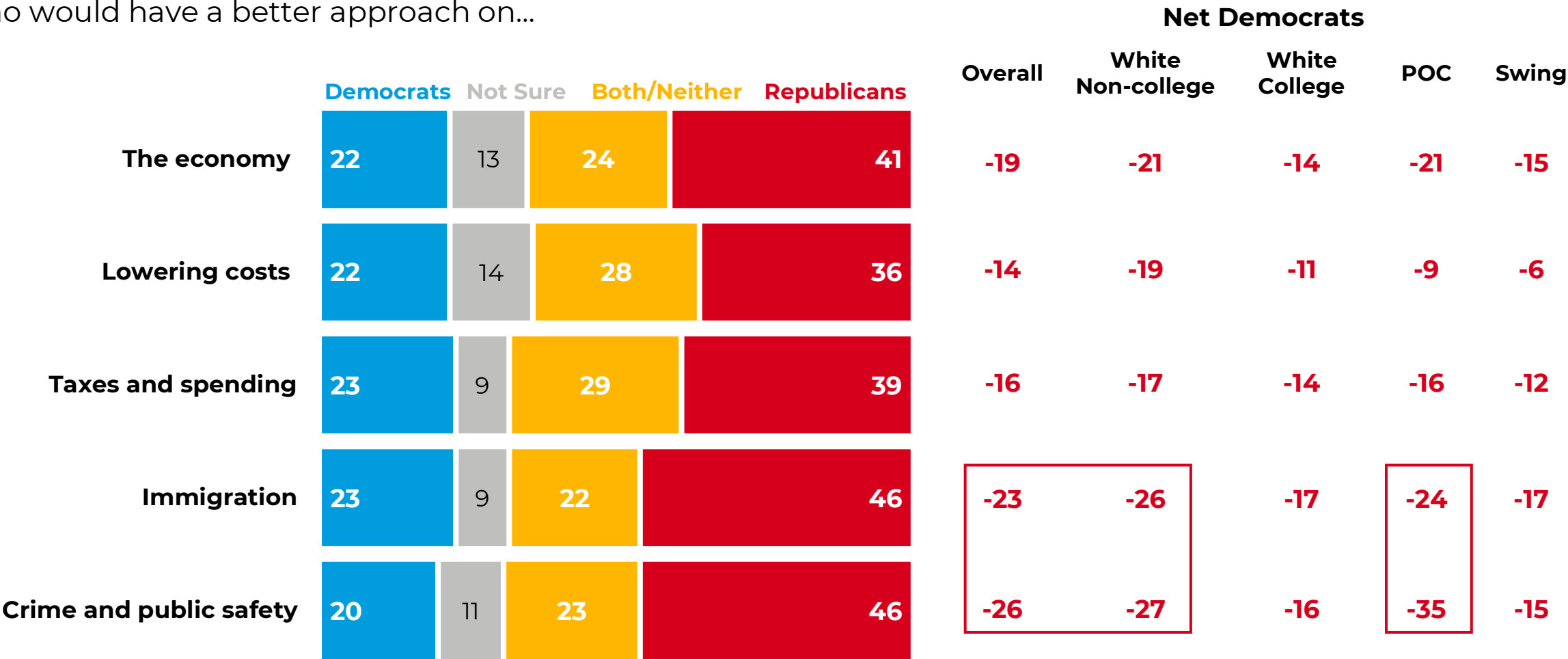
Party Attention on Issues – Soft Partisans



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December 2023

Soft partisans prefer Republicans on a host of issues. Immigration and crime are an acute area of weakness for Democrats, particularly among white non-college and voters of color

Who would have a better approach on...



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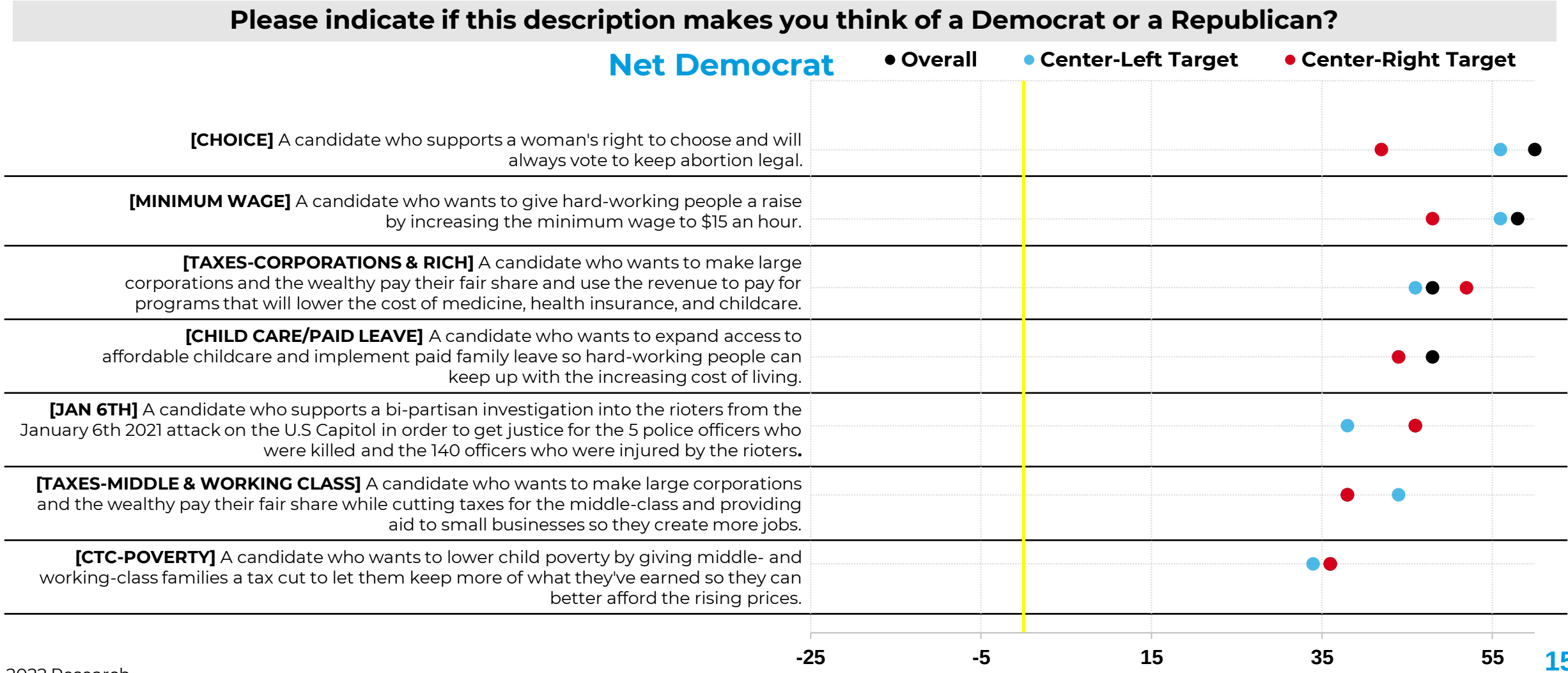
Understanding How Voters Associate Messages with the Political Parties

Democrats are defined as favoring raising wages, creating jobs, and supporting the middle class. Republicans have a strong brand on supporting U.S. manufacturing and fixing immigration

Positives - Does each description sound like a Democrat or a Republican?

A candidate...	Democrat	Don't know	Republican	Overall	Net Democrat Swing	Democrat Ticket splitters	Dem defectors
who will raise wages and create good-paying jobs	48	20	32	+16	+22	+26	+51
whose policies are good for the middle class	46	19	35	+11	+20	+33	+60
[Split] who will lower costs for working families	41	20	39	+2	+21	+39*	+57*
who will surge investments to rural communities that have been left behind	39	28	33	+6	+12	+17	+30
who will honor the 2nd Amendment and pass commonsense policies to keep guns out of the hands of criminals	39	15	46	-7	+8	+14	+29
[Split] who refuses to take corporate PAC money	37	44	19	+18	+23	+39*	+41*
who will help veterans and their families get the services they have earned	33	16	51	-18	-6	-11	+24
[Split] who wants to tackle inflation	30	18	52	-22	-19	-19*	+4*
who will cut wasteful spending when it isn't helping everyday people	26	21	53	-27	-16	-16	-12
[Split] who will bring supply chains back home and support manufacturing in the U.S.	23	17	60	-37	-23	-18*	-7*
who will fix our broken immigration system and secure our borders	17	13	70	-53	-43	-53	-23

Voters expect Democrats to talk about abortion, minimum wage, paid leave, poverty, and taxing the rich, as well as investigating January 6th



Center-Right voters expect a Republican to talk about smarter crime fighting, “comprehensive immigration reform”, lowering the gas tax, and helping small businesses

Please indicate if this description makes you think of a Democrat or a Republican?

Net Democrat ● Overall ● Center-Left Target ● Center-Right Target

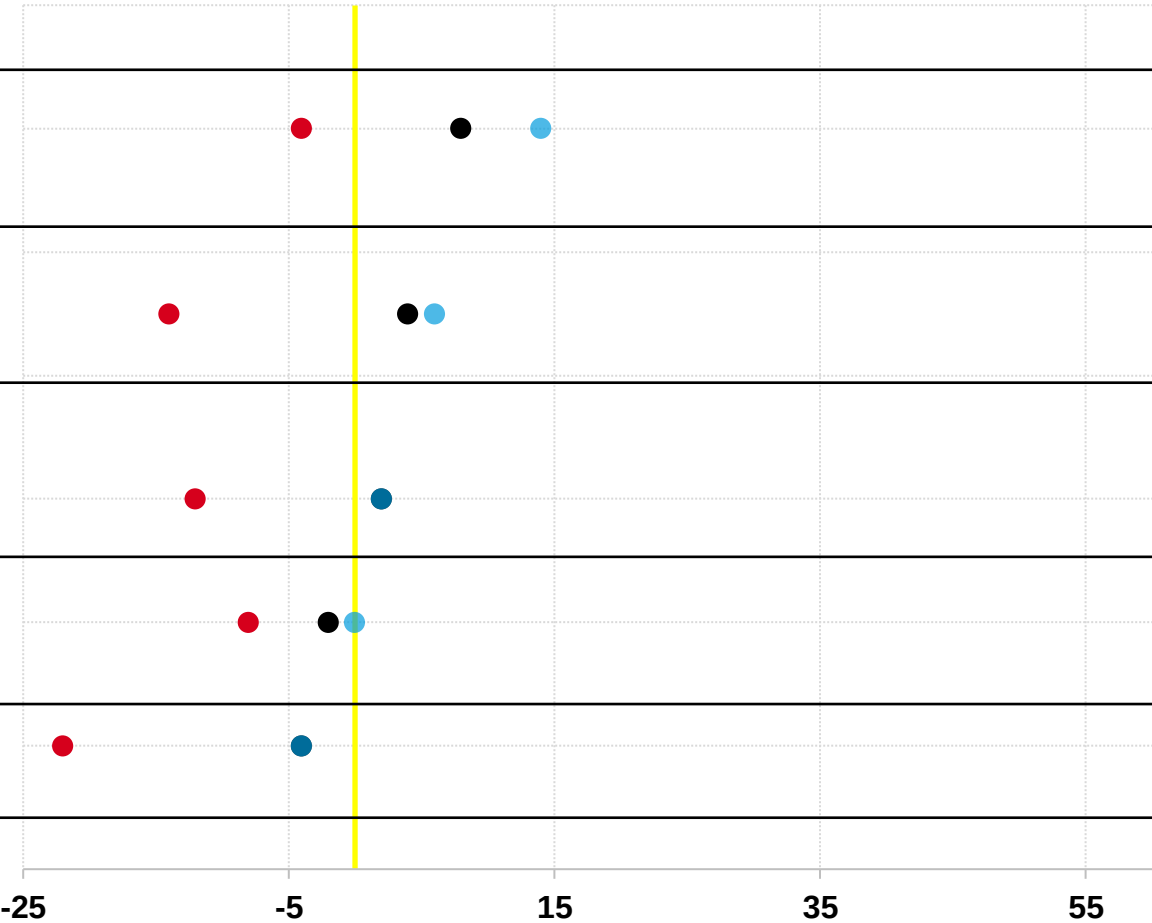
[CRIME-SMARTER] A candidate who wants to increase funding for better police training on how to de-escalate situations before they become violent and smart programs that stop crime before it happens like addiction and mental health treatment.

[IMMIGRATION-GENERIC] A candidate who supports passing comprehensive immigration reform that secures the border and creates a path to citizenship.

[GAS TAX] A candidate who wants to lower gas prices through a temporary suspension of the federal gas tax through the end of 2022.

[COMPETES-NO CHINA] A candidate who wants to make America's workers and businesses more competitive with other nations by strengthening our supply chain and research infrastructure, advancing manufacturing here at home, and making more investments in educational programs focused on science, technology, engineering, and math.

[HARD WORK-OPPORTUNITY] A candidate whose priority is to reward hard work by cutting taxes and creating opportunities for small businesses to succeed.



Focusing on rural issues, veterans, fiscal discipline and getting tough on China will all go against type for a Democrat

Please indicate if this description makes you think of a Democrat or a Republican?

Net Democrat • Overall • Center-Left Target • Center-Right Target

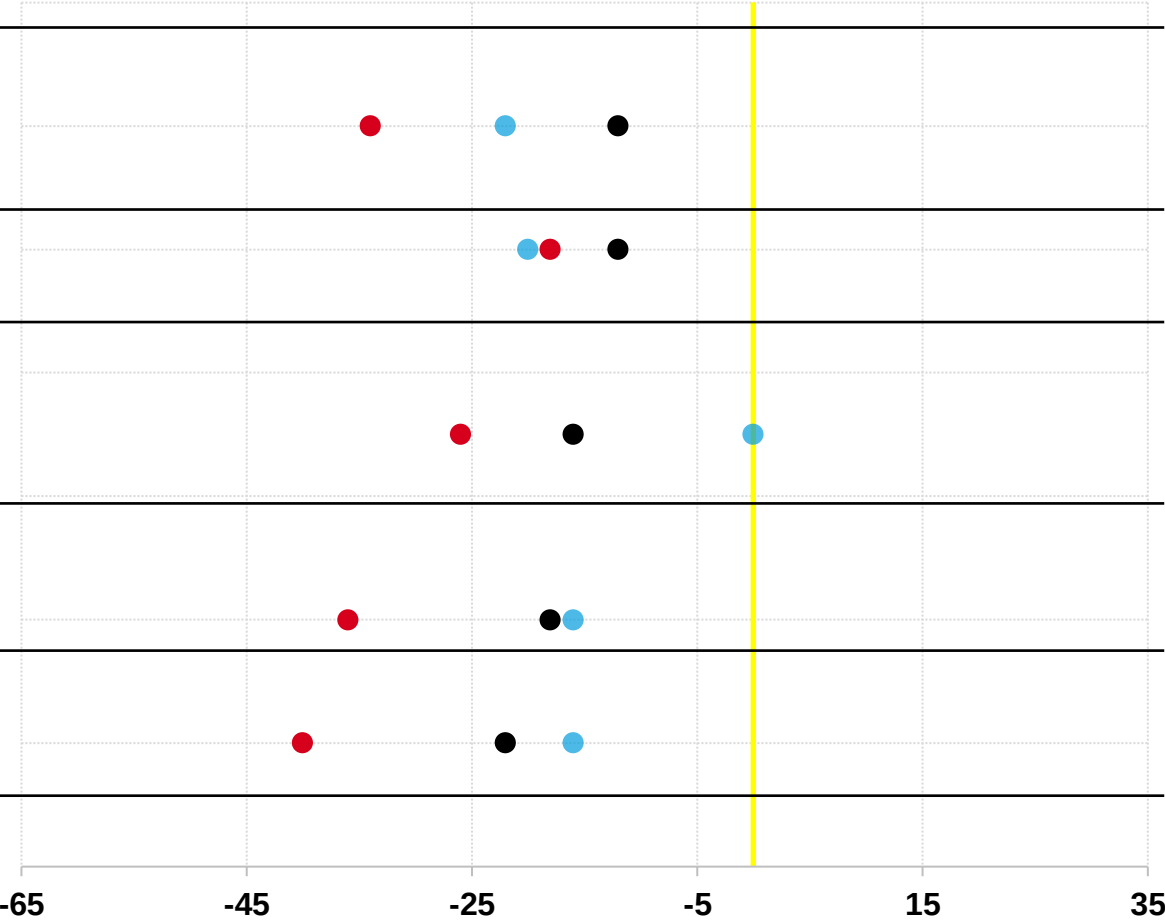
[INFLATION-SUPPLY CHAIN] A candidate who wants to help Americans who are struggling with inflation and rising costs by standing up to China and securing America's supply chain and boosting U.S. manufacturing with stronger Made in America requirements.

[RURAL] A candidate who cares about rural America and will not overlook farmers and the agricultural economies in small towns.

[VETERANS] A candidate who will push to invest in programs that help military veterans and their families, like expanded access to quality health care, and reforms to the Veteran's Administration so it can fire underperforming employees for bad conduct and poor performance.

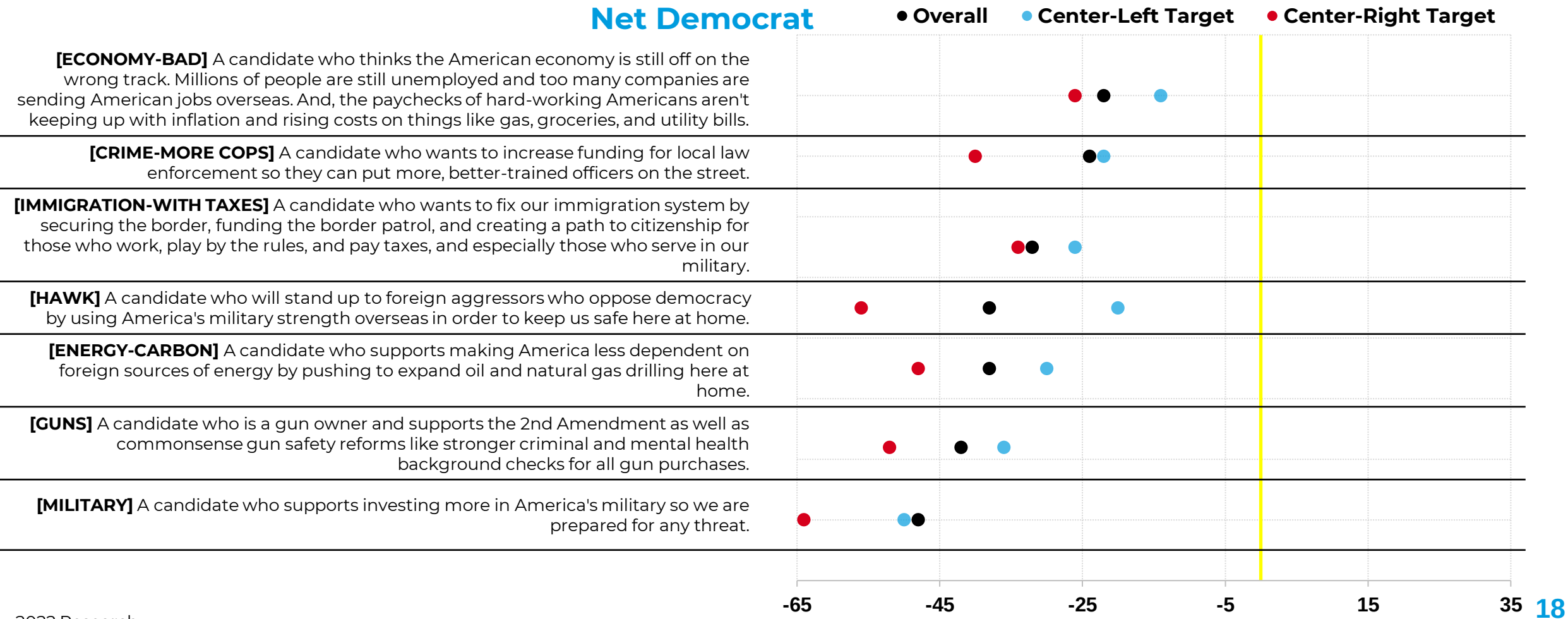
[COMPETES-CHINA] A candidate who wants to make America's workers and businesses more competitive with China by strengthening our supply chain and research infrastructure, advancing manufacturing here at home, and making more investments in educational programs focused on science, technology, engineering, and math.

[SPENDING] A candidate who wants to cut wasteful government spending and reduce the federal deficit.



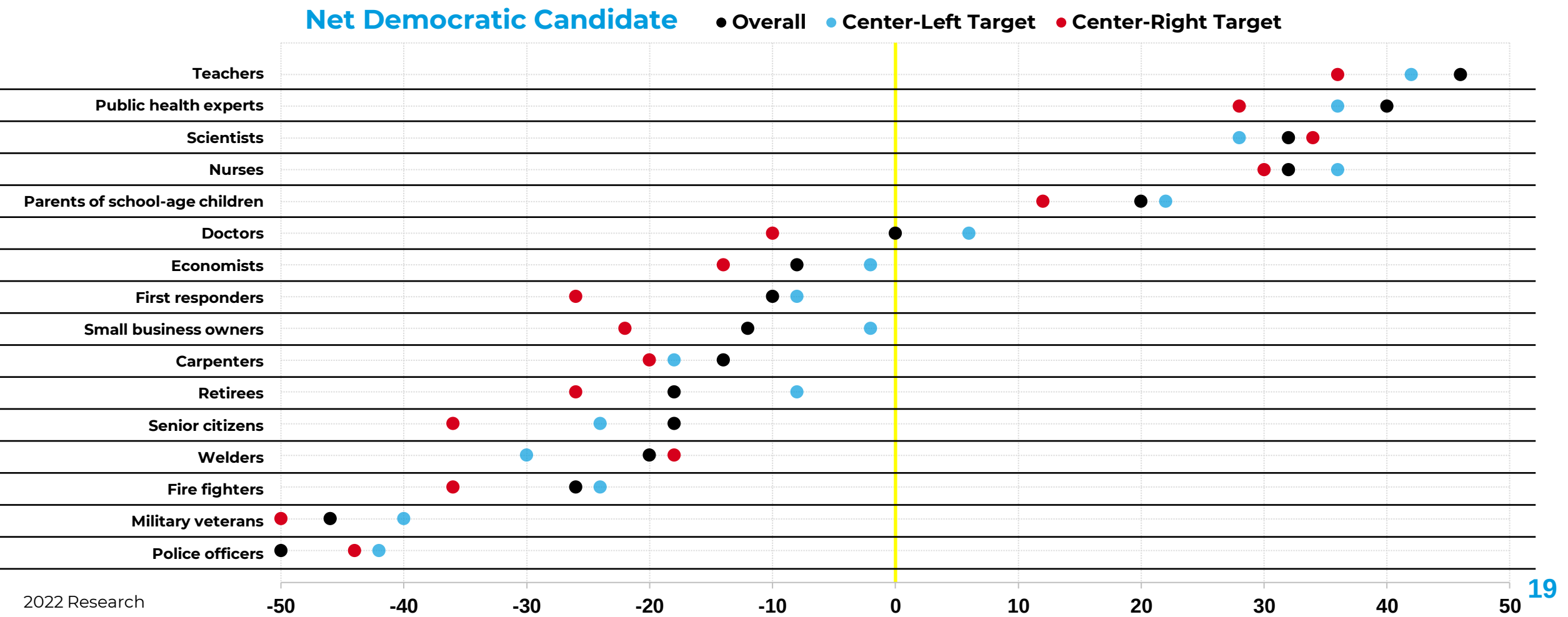
Support for the military and drilling strongly signal Republican, but so does gun control with respect for 2nd amendment

Please indicate if this description makes you think of a Democrat or a Republican?



As endorsers, police, veterans, senior citizens, small business owners and blue-collar workers all signal that a Democratic candidate is different

Please indicate if people in these groups usually support Democratic or Republican candidates for Congress?

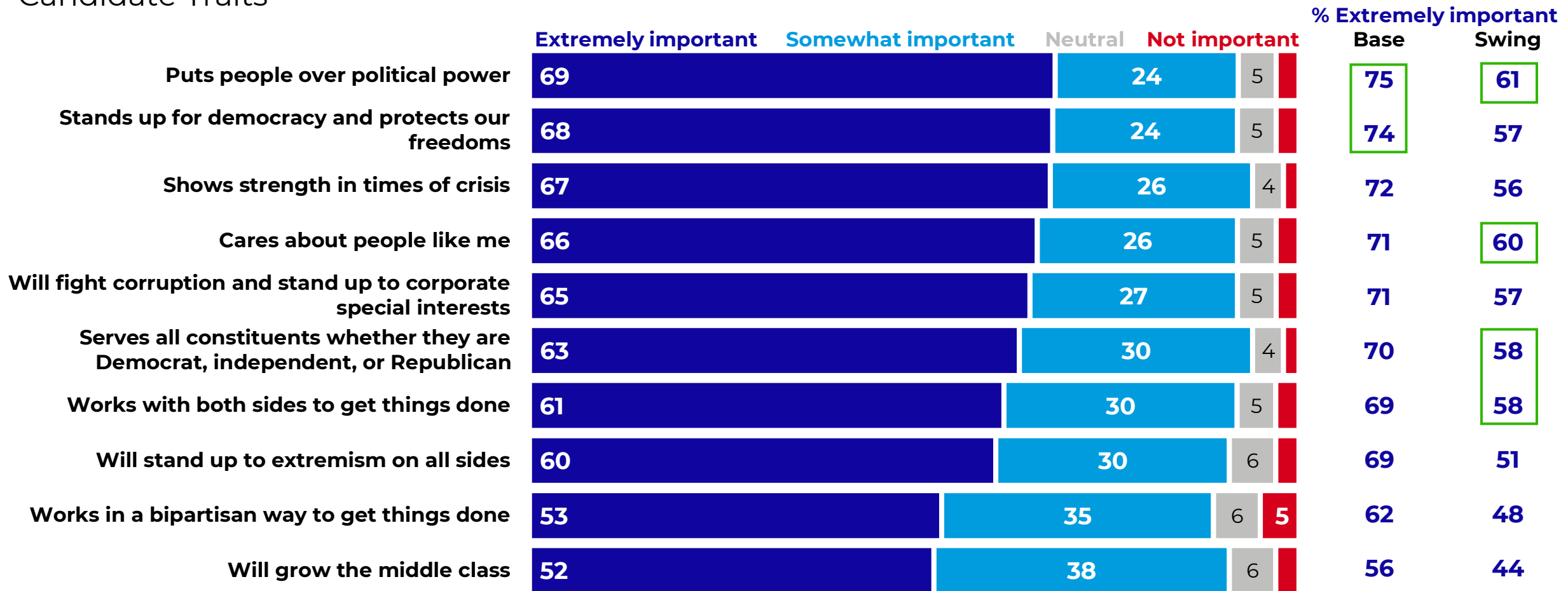


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Traits and Approach

Voters gravitate to a candidate that puts people over their own political power; the base places a premium on democracy and freedoms, while swing voters prioritize bipartisanship

Candidate Traits



21 * Base voters are voters who always vote for the Democrat.

* Swing voters are voters that sometimes vote for the Democrat, but not always, or are always undecided.

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Leveraging Implicit Partisanship

A Democrat who emphasizes themes and issues less tied to the party brand is more appealing to swing voters with no evidence of backlash

Informed Vote

Read to half

[TYPICAL APPROACHES] Democrat Jeff Anderson is running for Congress to stand up for democracy and fight corporate greed. Anderson says our fundamental rights are under attack, including a woman's right to abortion. In Congress, Anderson will fight to lower health care costs, raise wages, create good-paying jobs, and protect investments we rely on like Social Security. Anderson will make millionaires and big corporations pay their fair share in taxes and will pass commonsense gun safety laws to make communities safer.

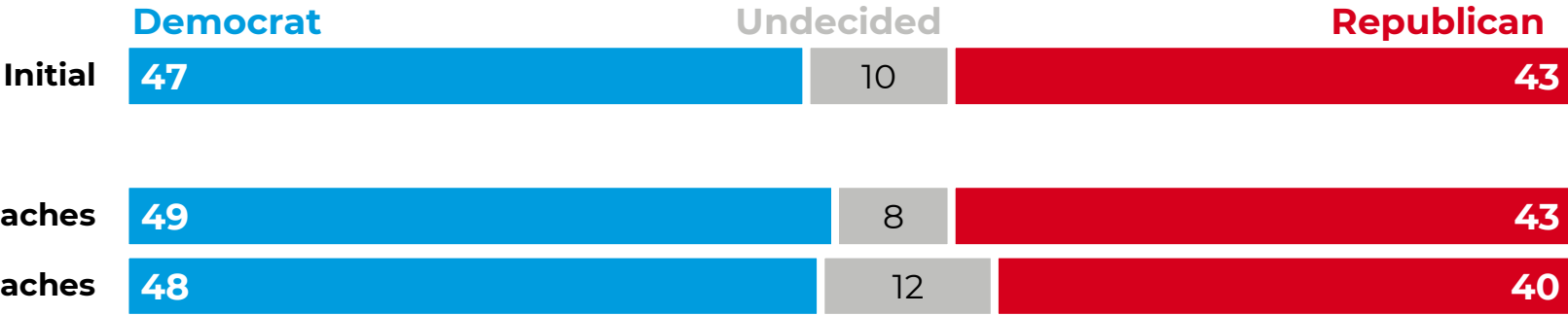
Read to half

[ATYPICAL APPROACHES] Democrat Jeff Anderson is running for Congress to end chaos and dysfunction and stand up to extremism in both parties. Anderson will work for all constituents, whether they're Democrat, independent, or Republican. In Congress, Anderson will tackle inflation by strengthening American manufacturing and invest in apprenticeships for workers who don't have a college degree. And Anderson will prioritize fixing our broken immigration system and funding police to keep communities safe.

Read to all

[REPUBLICAN] Republican Tim Clark says our country is in decline and we need to get government out of the way. That means ending runaway spending that is driving inflation, cutting taxes, and punishing criminals. In Congress, Clark will boost American energy independence by expanding oil and natural gas drilling in the U.S. Clark will stop the flow of dangerous illegal immigrants, support police, and reject soft-on-crime policies that let dangerous criminals on the streets.

% Very appealing % Appealing		Overall		Base		Swing	
37	72	66	98	29	81		
37	84	53	94	32	88		
33	65	7	33	27	73		



Net Democrat
+4
+6
+8

23 * Base voters are voters who always vote for the Democrat.
* Swing voters are voters that sometimes vote for the Democrat, but not always, or are always undecided.
December 2023

Focus group research backs up this finding: voters liked the “atypical” framing because they thought it showed strength, the right priorities, and commitment to helping working people

Participants said this Democrat’s priorities sounded more centrist and that his economic priorities would help day-to-day people and are grounded in middle-class values. Some voters said this reminded them of a more traditional Democratic platform dedicated to helping people, not partisan fights.

Democrat Matt Brown says **rising costs are a problem** and he’ll cut wasteful spending and fraud to reduce the deficit and **lower inflation and support tax cuts for middle-class and working families**. Brown says we can help America’s workers compete with China by **strengthening supply chains, boosting manufacturing, passing stronger Made in America requirements, and investing in apprenticeships** and job training. If elected, Brown said he’ll **fix our broken immigration system, support military veterans** and their families, and increase funding for police departments.

“(Republican Candidate) still just represents a small portion of the country ... **(Democrat Candidate) is acknowledging that ‘yes, I hear you Republicans. These are also concerns of mine as well. Let’s work to fix them.’ And he’s not putting that fear factor into things... he’s willing to work with them and that is important**” – Young Hispanic Man

“**Prioritizing the economy, helping workers and middle-class members get a better footing with their finances, cutting taxes and helping to alleviate inflation...** those are just immediate issues that touch everybody in their day to day lives.” – Older Hispanic Man

Highlighting an atypical Democratic approach is more powerful with older voters, white and Hispanic voters, and Republicans

Profile Appeal

	% Appealing	
	Typical Approaches	Atypical Approaches
Overall	72	84
18-44	80	83
45-64	66	83
65+	71	88
White non-college	71	81
White college	70	86
Black	79	88
Hispanic	68	92
Democrats	96	94
Independents	76	79
Republicans	44	75

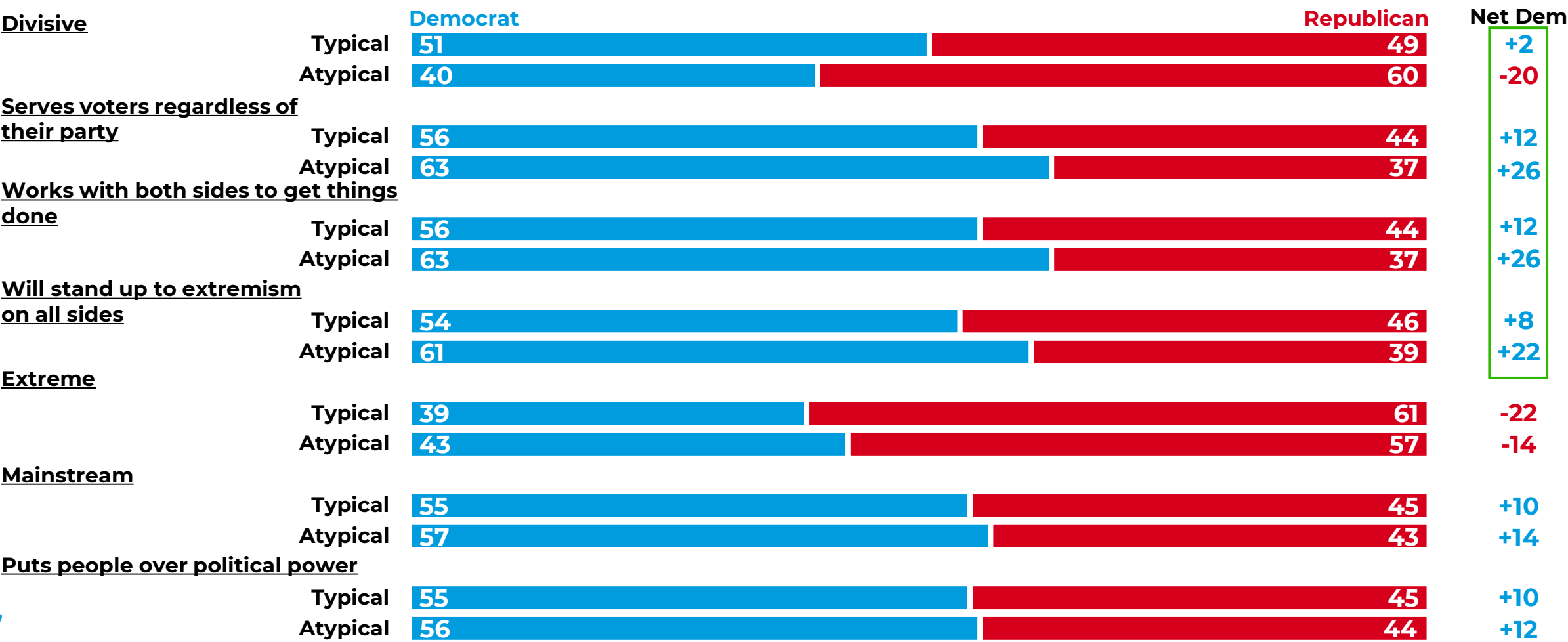
Non-Democrats, voters of color, and white college voters move towards the Democrats more after hearing about an atypical approach

Vote Movement

	Net Democrat					
	Typical Approaches			Atypical Approaches		
	Initial	Informed	Change (Initial to Informed)	Initial	Informed	Change (Initial to Informed)
Overall	+5	+6	+1	+4	+8	+4
18-44	+15	+20	+5	+10	+11	+1
45-64	-10	-7	+3	-11	+2	+13
65+	+9	+5	-4	+13	+12	-1
White non-college	-14	-6	+8	-3	-3	0
White college	+7	+5	-2	-4	+6	+10
Voters of color	+39	+32	-7	+22	+30	+8
Democrats	+90	+79	-11	+92	+82	-10
Independents	+10	+19	+9	-18	-3	+15
Republicans	-92	-78	+14	-89	-69	+20

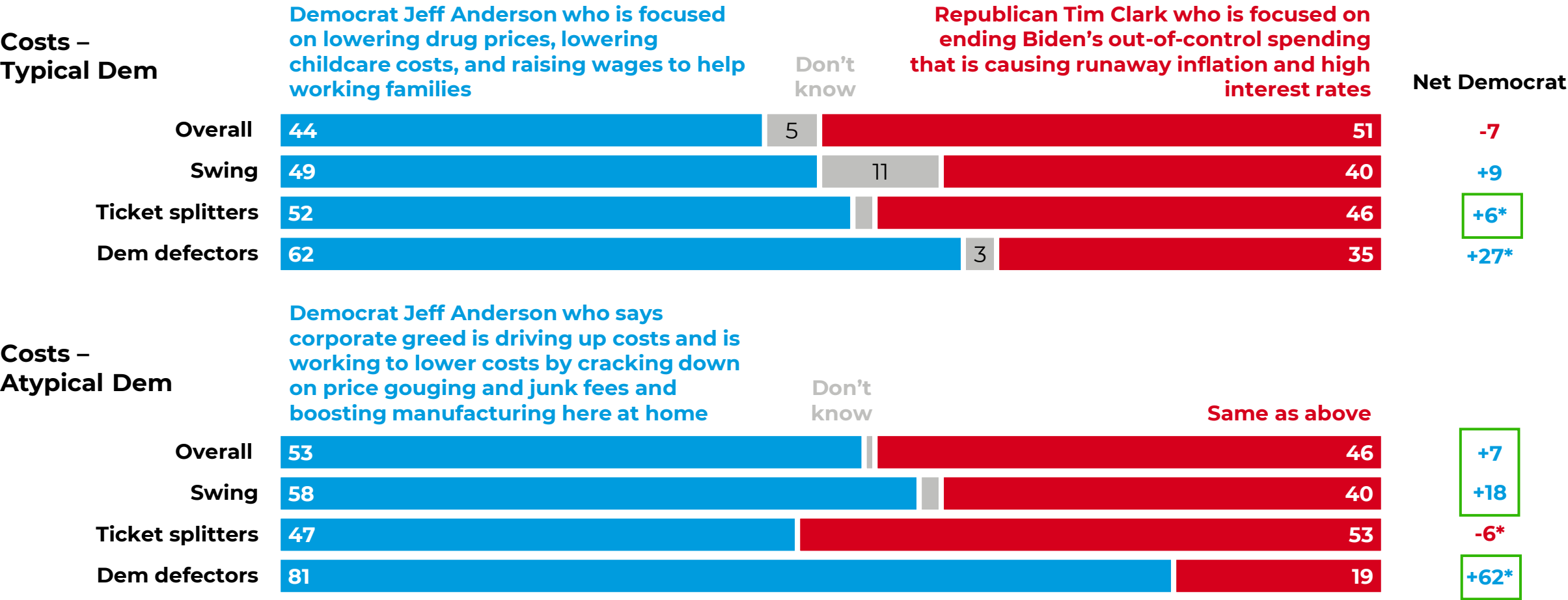
An atypical Democratic profile reads as less divisive and more bipartisan and mainstream

Trait Association



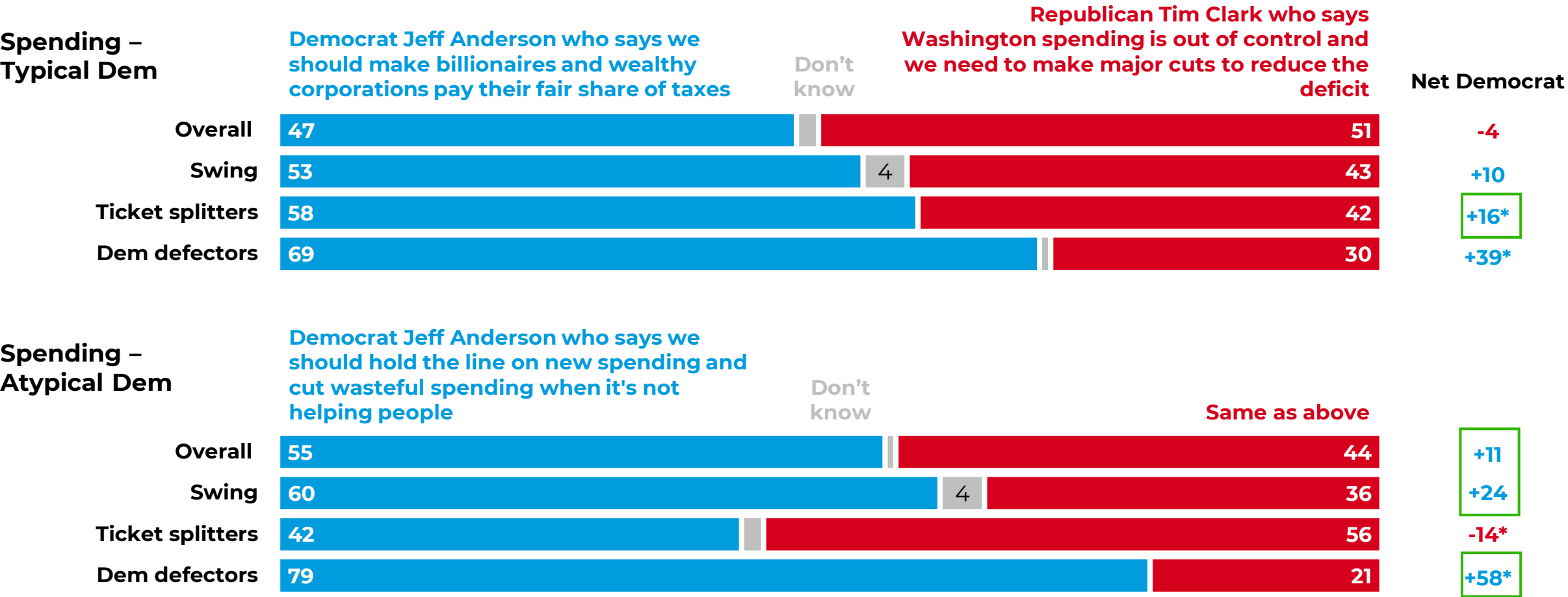
Lowering costs by cracking down on corporate greed and price gouging is a stronger approach for Democrats, particularly for swing and defection risks

Which candidate would you be more likely to support?



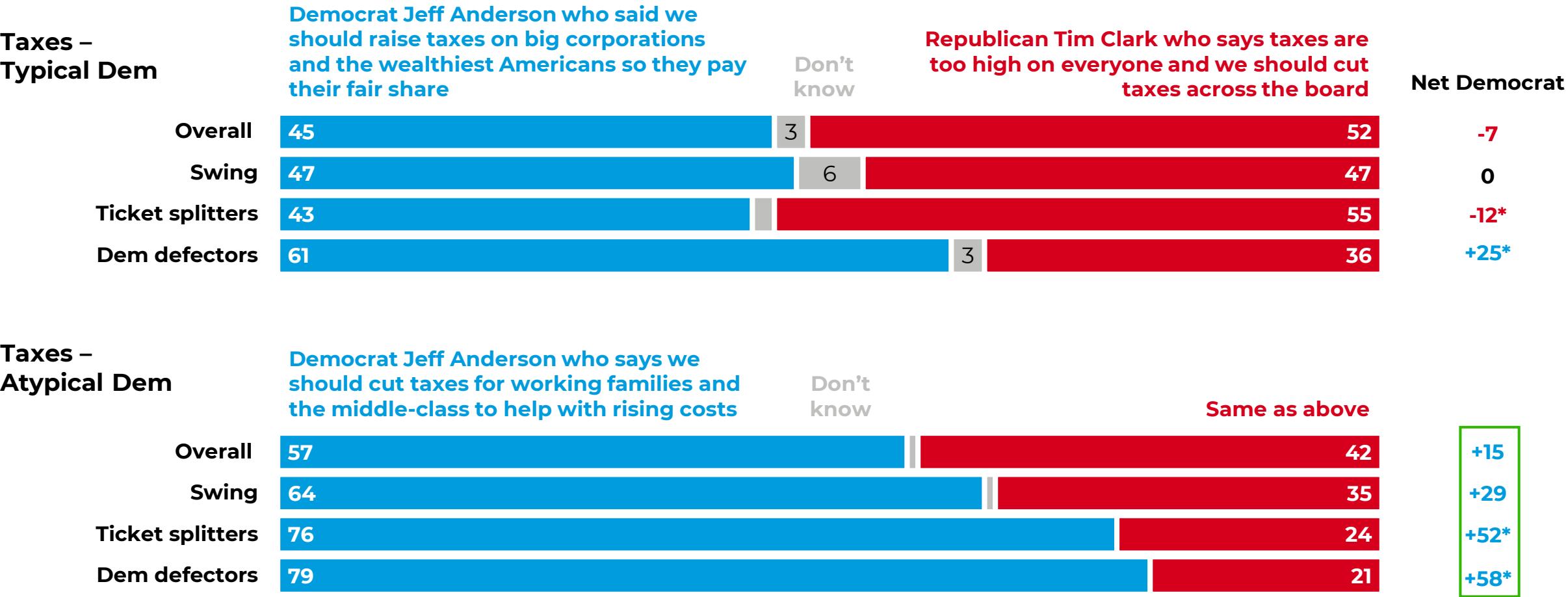
A Democrat loses the spending debate when focusing on raising taxes on billionaires and corporations, but we win by talking about cutting wasteful spending that's not helping people

Which candidate would you be more likely to support?



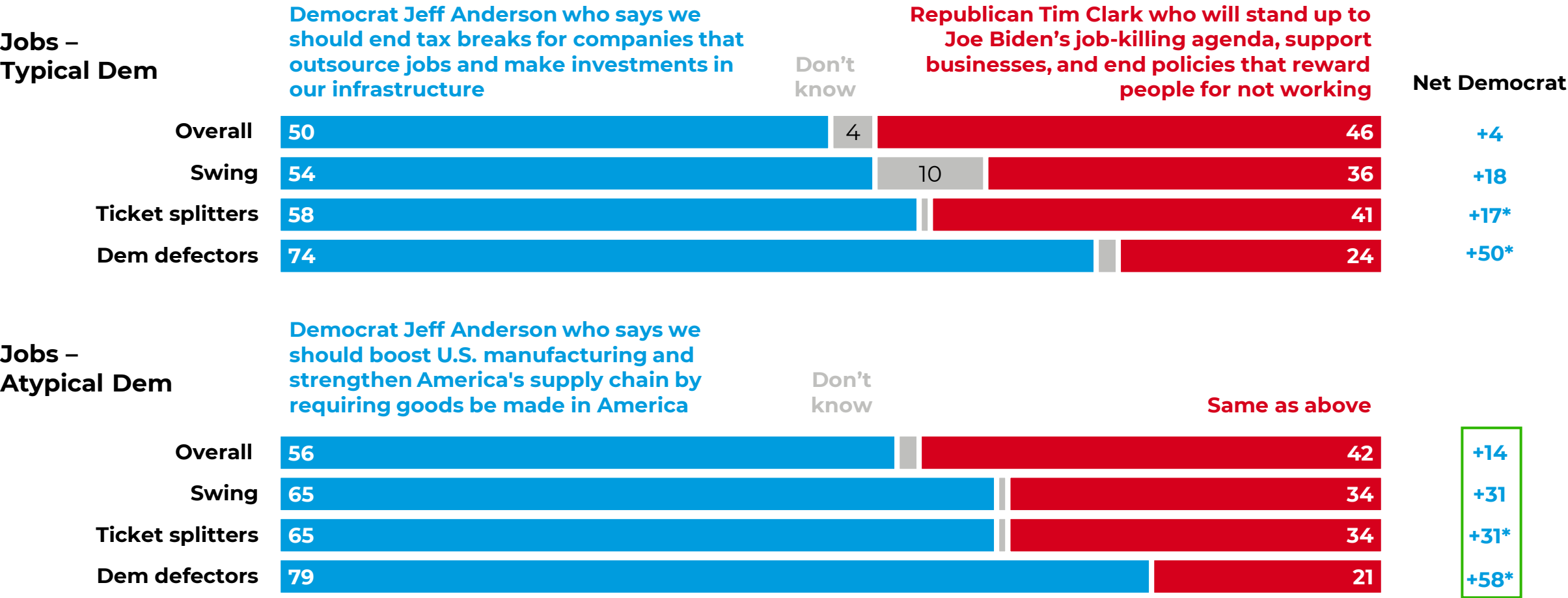
A message that focuses on middle-class tax cuts is significantly more effective than the typical message about tax fairness

Which candidate would you be more likely to support?



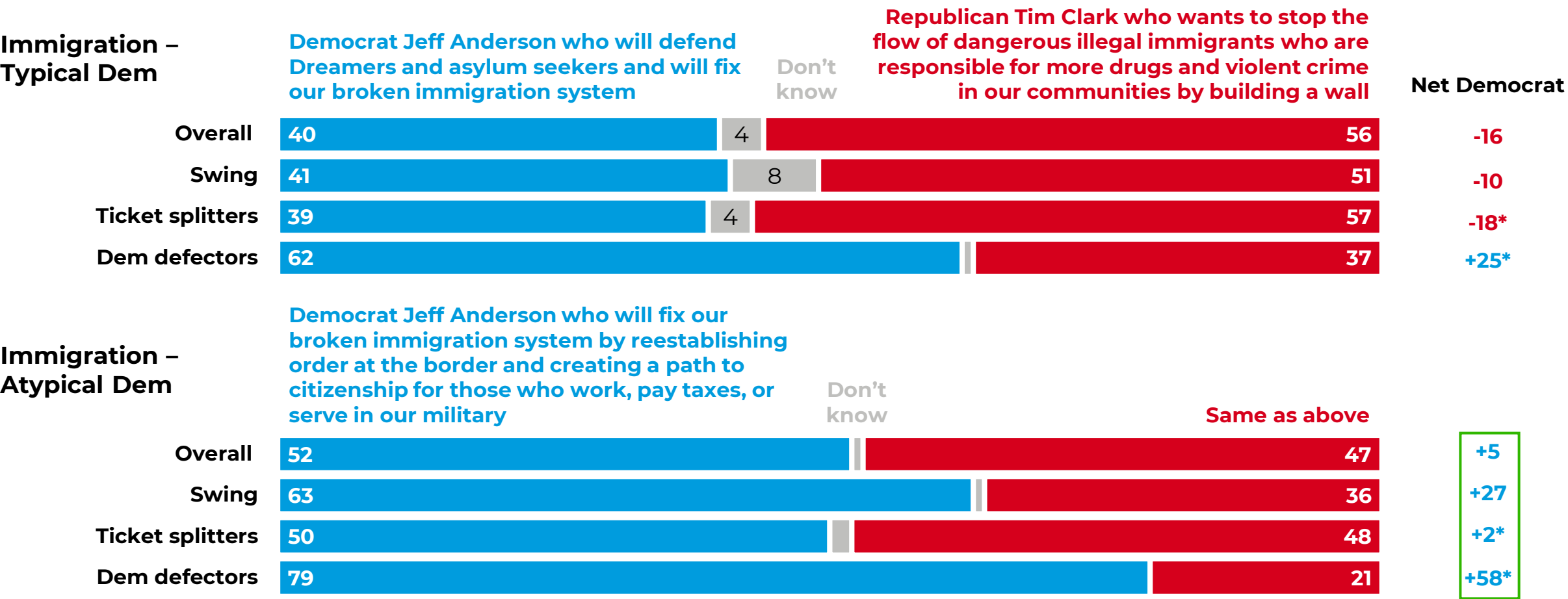
We win by a larger margin when we communicate about strengthening manufacturing and supply chains than cracking down on outsourcing

Which candidate would you be more likely to support?



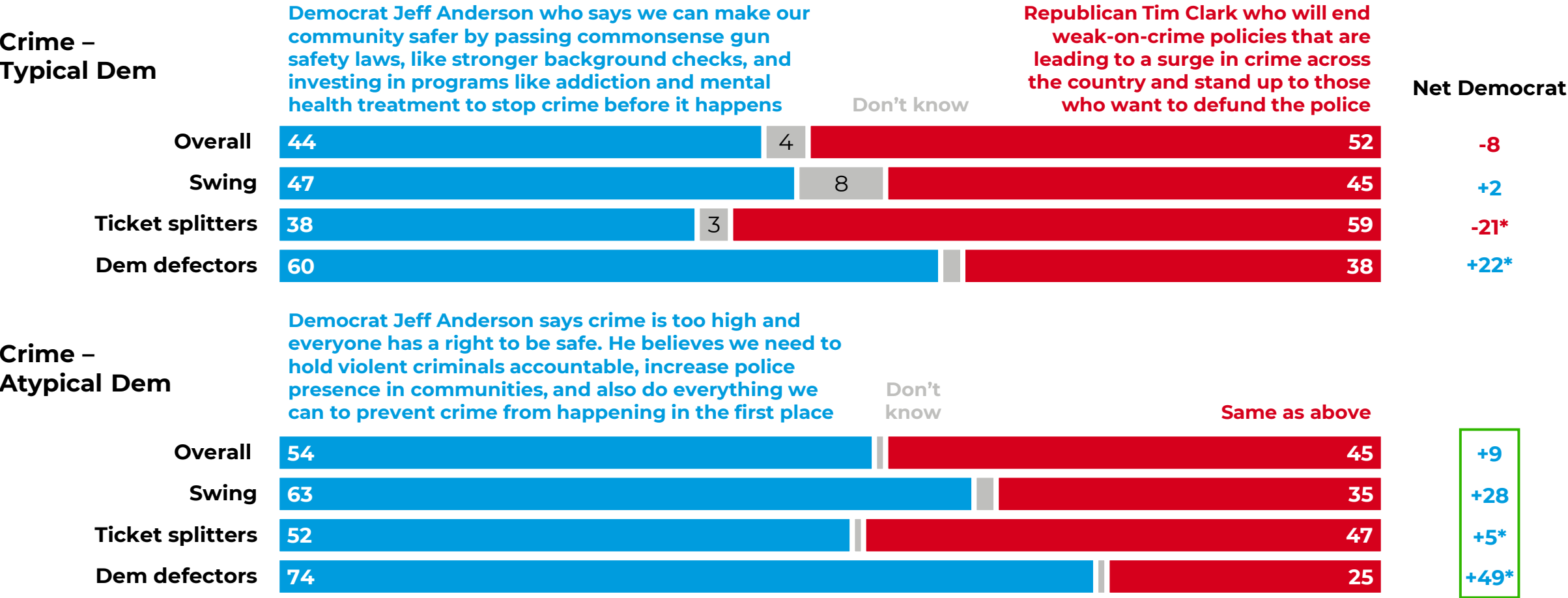
Voters respond better to an immigration message focused on a path to citizenship and restoring order than a message focused on Dreamers and asylum seekers

Which candidate would you be more likely to support?



A crime message that is focused on accountability and increased police presence is much more effective than the typical Dem emphasis on prevention and gun laws

Which candidate would you be more likely to support?



Full Text of Messages Tested

[ABORTION] Jeff Anderson says he will defend our rights and freedoms in Washington, including a woman's right to an abortion. In Washington, Anderson will stand up to the extremists who want to take away abortion rights and will support policies that protect women's access to reproductive health care.

[CLIMATE] Jeff Anderson says that we can fight climate change and strengthen our economy at the same time. In Congress, Anderson will support investments in clean energy technology to create good-paying jobs here at home.

[COMPETE] Jeff Anderson doesn't believe everyone should have to go to college to get a good-paying job. Anderson says we can help American workers compete with countries like China by investing in apprenticeships and job training programs for people who don't have a college degree.

[CORPORATE] Jeff Anderson says that big corporations have too much power and politicians in Washington aren't doing enough to stand up to them. Anderson will hold corporations accountable when they price gouge consumers.

[CORRUPTION] Jeff Anderson says he will take on corruption in Washington. That's why he doesn't accept any corporate PAC donations for his campaign and has pledged to crack down on corrupt politicians who use their positions to make themselves richer.

[COSTS] Jeff Anderson says we need to tackle inflation and the rising cost of energy, gas and groceries. Anderson will lower costs by cracking down on corporations who are price gouging consumers and end hidden junk fees that are taking advantage of working and middle-class families.

[CRIME] Jeff Anderson says that crime is too high and that everyone has a right to feel safe in their community. Anderson believes that far too many Americans don't feel safe. That's why he is working to both hold criminals accountable for their actions, increase police funding, and prevent crime before it happens.

[IMMIGRATION] Jeff Anderson says our immigration system is broken, and he supports fixing it by creating a path to citizenship for those who work, pay taxes, or serve in the military and says we need to reestablish order at the border and surge resources and judges to process cases in a way that's fast, fair, and final.

[JOBS] Jeff Anderson says we can create more good-paying jobs here at home that support families and strengthen communities and our economy. Anderson says we should boost U.S. manufacturing and strengthen our supply chains and he'll support requiring goods to be made in America, not overseas.

[RURAL] Jeff Anderson says Washington politicians have left rural communities behind. Anderson supports investments in rural America to provide Internet, create jobs and lower prices, so rural communities can be a place that future generations can live, work, and support a family.

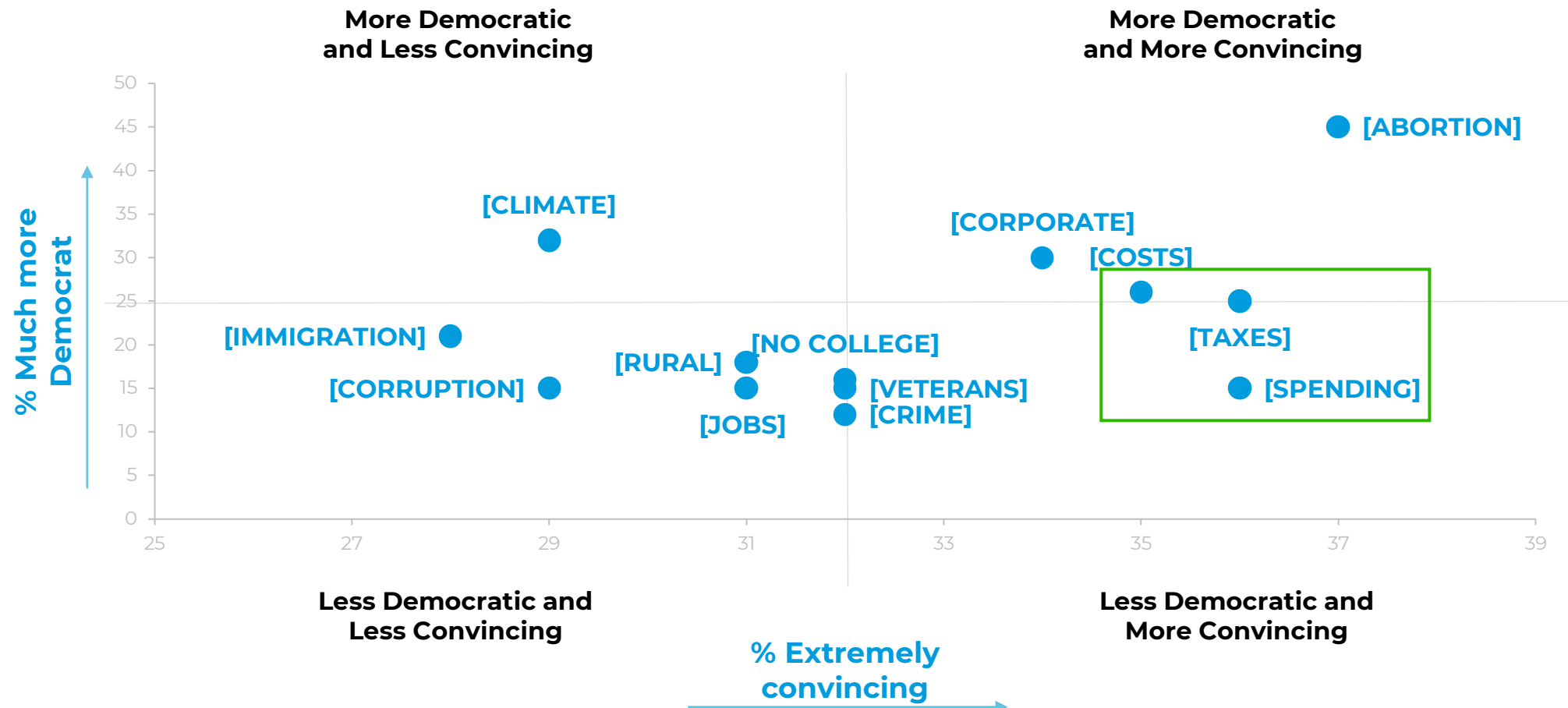
[SPENDING] Jeff Anderson says that we need to always look for ways to cut government spending that is not helping people. That means cutting wasteful spending and reducing fraud and abuse in the system.

[TAXES] Jeff Anderson says that families need help with rising costs and that working and middle-class families are paying more than their fair share in taxes. Anderson supports cutting taxes for working families and the middle class to help people afford the cost of living.

[VETERANS] Jeff Anderson says politicians from both parties have failed to stand up for veterans and their families. Anderson will hold politicians accountable when they turn their back on veterans and make sure that veterans and their families get the services they have earned.

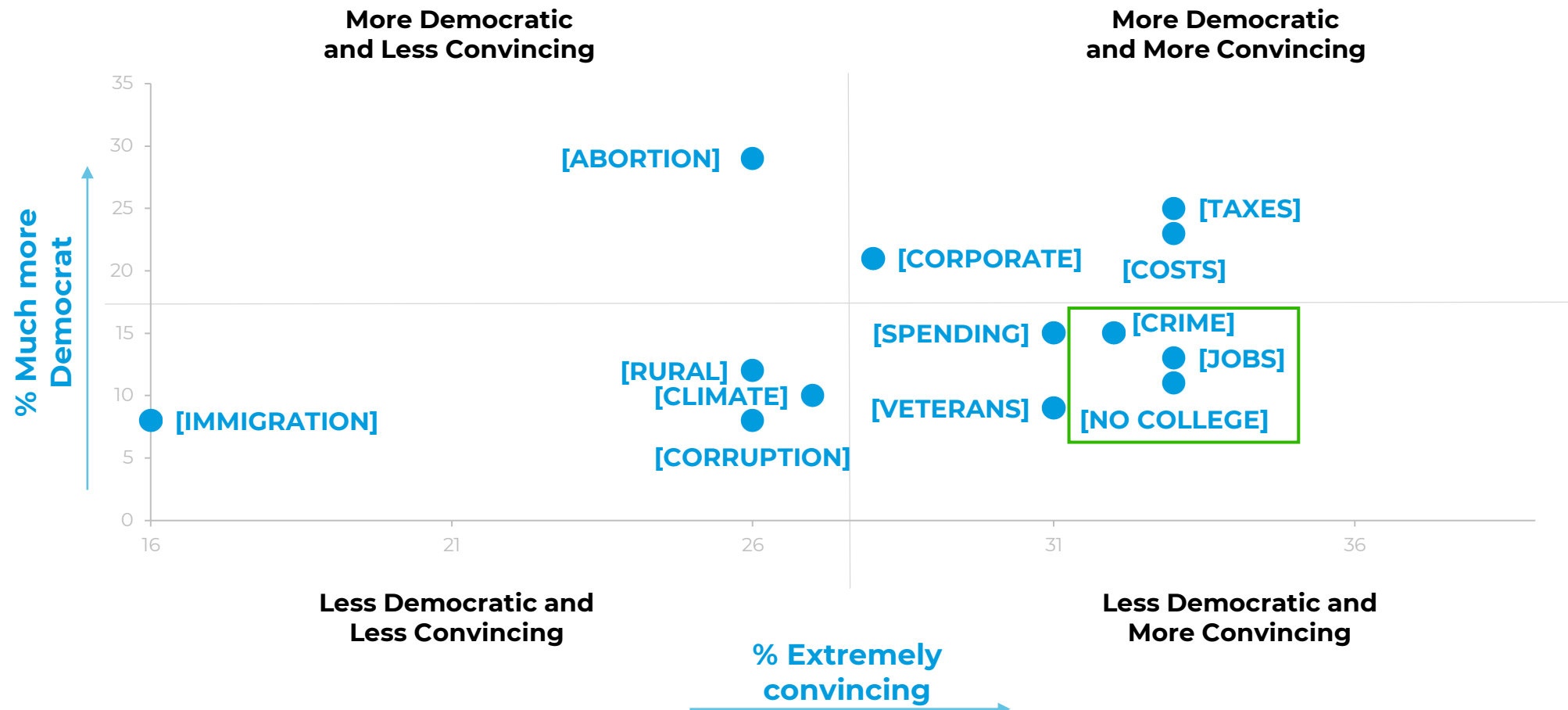
Acknowledging wasteful spending, cutting taxes, and cracking down on price gouging all to lower costs are persuasive and not considered typical Dem messages

Convincing Reason to Vote for a Democrat vs. Party Association - Overall



For swing, jobs for workers without a college degree, strengthening supply chains, and acknowledging crime are convincing and sound less like typical Dem messages

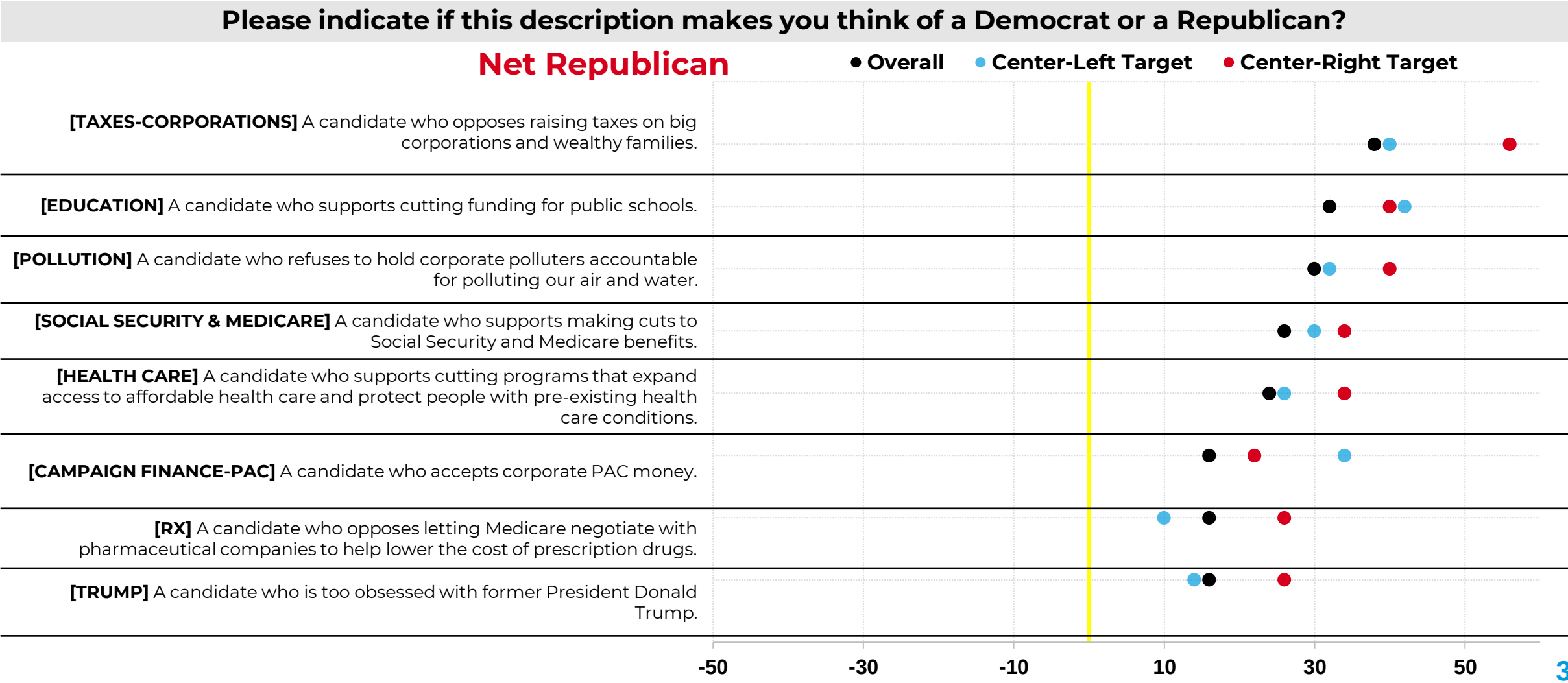
Convincing Reason to Vote for a Democrat vs. Party Association - Swing



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Negative Messaging

Our standard arsenal of attacks are unlikely to surprise swing voters about a Republican candidate

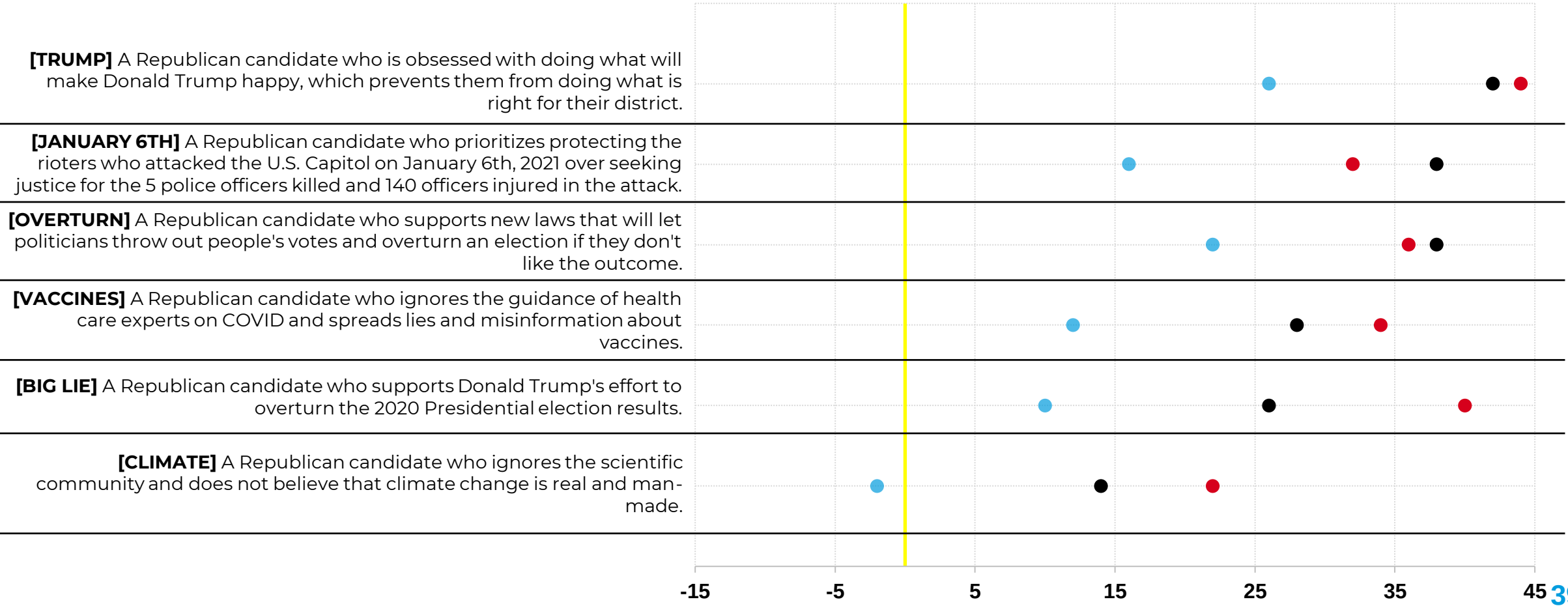


Connections to Trump, Jan. 6th rioters, and overturning elections all signal that a Republican is too radical; being an anti-vaxxer and climate denier only slightly out of the ordinary

Please indicate if it sounds like a typical Republican candidate or like a radical and extreme Republican candidate

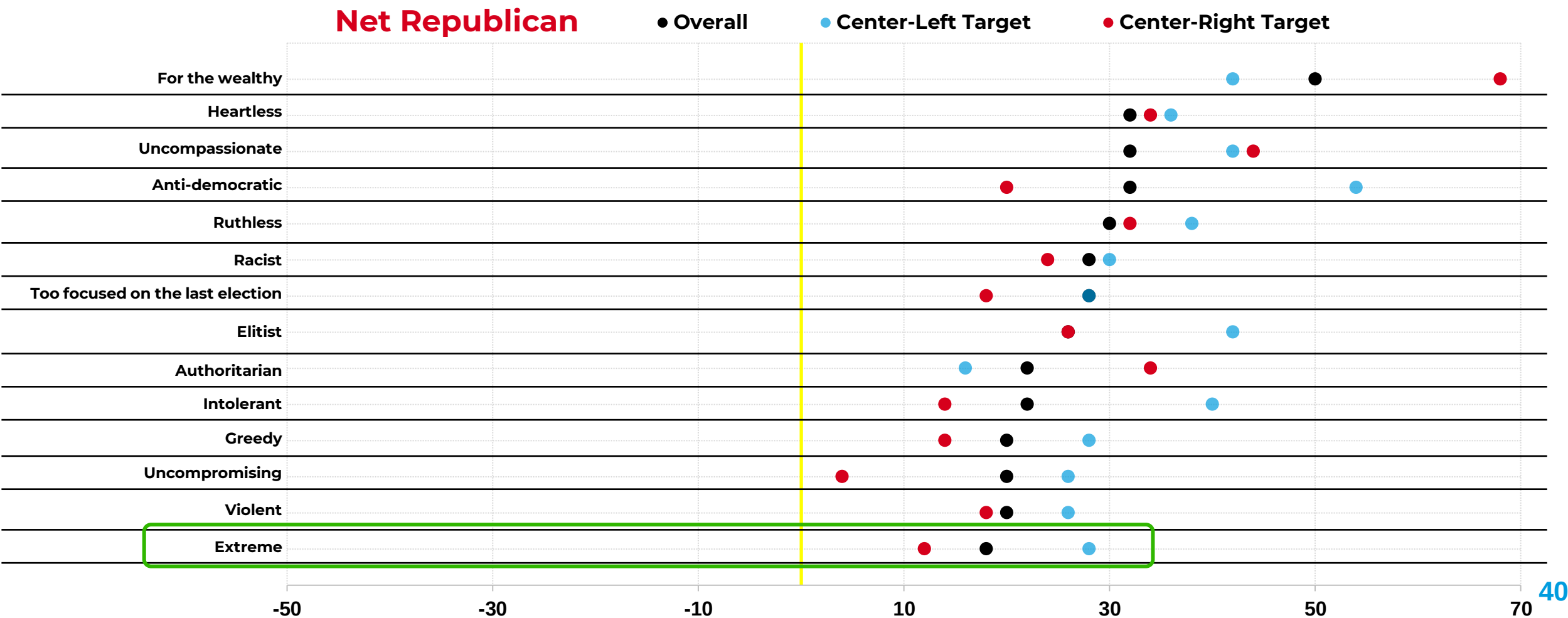
Net Radical & Extreme

● Overall ● Center-Left Target ● Center-Right Target



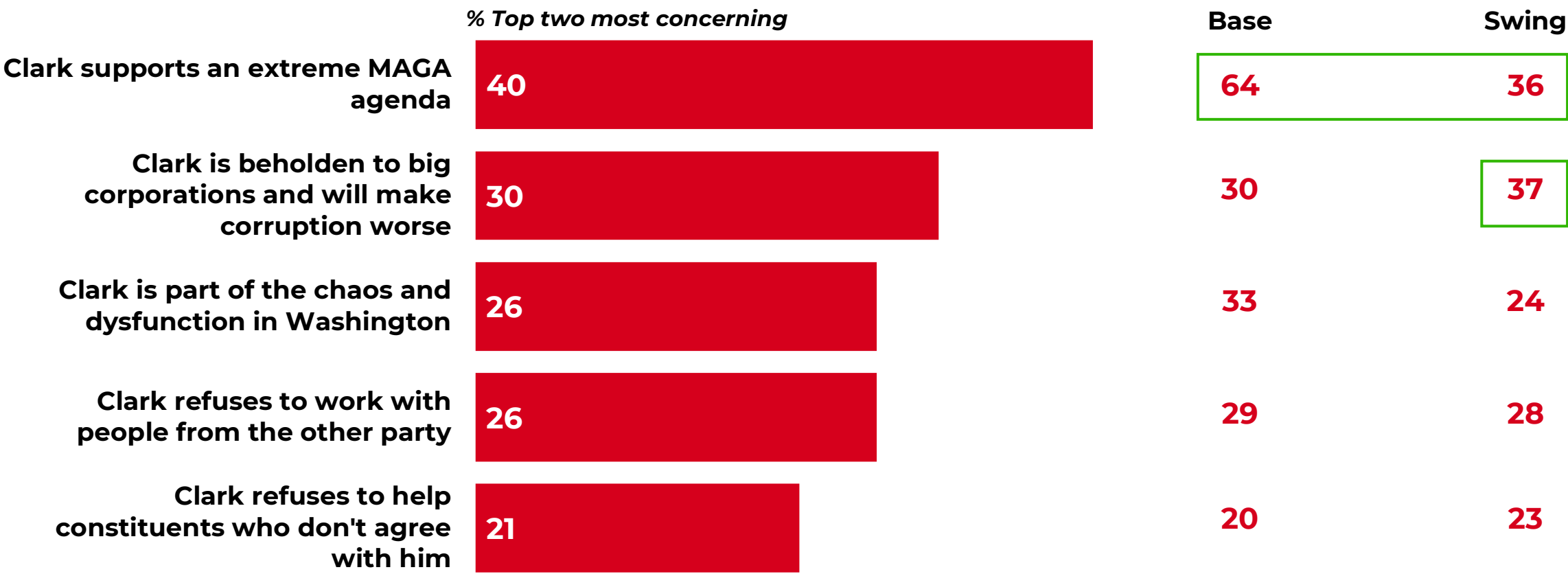
The term “extreme” shows up in our hits on Republicans and most feel it is appropriate, but there are other, more hard-hitting descriptions that many find accurate

Please indicate if this description makes you think of a Democrat or a Republican?



Connecting the Republican with MAGA is the most concerning attack, particularly with base voters; for swing, painting a Republican as beholden to special interests is just as concerning

The following is a list of statements from opponents of Republican Tim Clark. Please select the two that are most concerning to you.



41

* Base voters are voters who always vote for the Democrat.

* Swing voters are voters that sometimes vote for the Democrat, but not always, or are always undecided.

“Stronger” language more typically associated with Republicans performs slightly better among moderates

Vote Movement

Split C “Weaker” Language – Net Dem				Split D “Stronger” Language – Net Dem			
	Post-Positive	Post-Negative	Change		Post-Positive	Post-Negative	Change
Overall	+3	+14	+11	Overall	+3	+14	+11
Democrats	+80	+86	+6	Democrats	+82	+85	+3
Independents	-5	+13	+21	Independents	-10	+18	+28
Republicans	-75	-64	+11	Republicans	-80	-64	+16
Liberal Dems	+90	+98	+8	Liberal Dems	+92	+93	+1
Non-liberal Dems	+65	+70	+5	Non-liberal Dems	+67	+72	+5
Non-con Ind/GOP	-33	-18	+15	Non-con Ind/GOP	-32	-5	+27
Con Ind/GOP	-82	-73	+9	Con Ind/GOP	-86	-73	+13
Motivation Targets	+74	+80	+6	Motivation Targets	+78	+78	0

Motivation targets are Democrats and liberal independents who are voting for the generic Dem but are not extremely motivated to vote.
2022 Research

Thank You

New York

Washington, DC

Hartford

Chicago

Denver

Seattle



Appendix

Soft partisans associate Democrats most with growing the middle class. It's more credible to say Dems will take on corporate greed than special interests

Which three are most likely to describe a Democratic candidate for Congress?



Soft partisans associate Republicans with standing up for rights and freedoms and tackling Washington dysfunction

Which three are most likely to describe a Republican candidate for Congress?

