

CAP Action Fund & Third Way: Battleground Immigration Survey



What We Did

What We Did

- Global Strategy Group & GBA Strategies conducted an online survey of **2,849 November 2018 battleground voters** from July 27th to August 3rd, 2018. The precision of online surveys is measured using a credibility interval and in this case, the interval is +/- 1.9%. This battleground voter sample included:
 - 1,266 interviews in battleground Congressional districts (spread across 60 competitive districts throughout the country)
 - 1,056 interviews in battleground Senate states (spread across the ten Trump-carried states being defended by Democrats this year – FL, IN, MI, MO, MT, ND, OH, PA, WI, and WV)
 - 527 interviews in four states with competitive gubernatorial races (spread out across FL, MI, OH, and WI), separate from the battleground Senate respondents in those states
- Every survey respondent was assigned to one race (for U.S. Congress, U.S. Senate, or Governor) and received questions in the context of that race, with the Democratic and Republican candidates referred to by name.
- This survey builds on previous qualitative research conducted in June, when Global Strategy Group & GBA Strategies conducted a three-day online discussion board with 26 likely November 2018 voters recruited from several Senate battleground states (FL, IN, MO, MT, ND, OH, PA, WI, and WV). These discussion board participants were all White voters who were open to voting for Democrats but had concerns about sanctuary cities or “illegal immigrant gangs.”

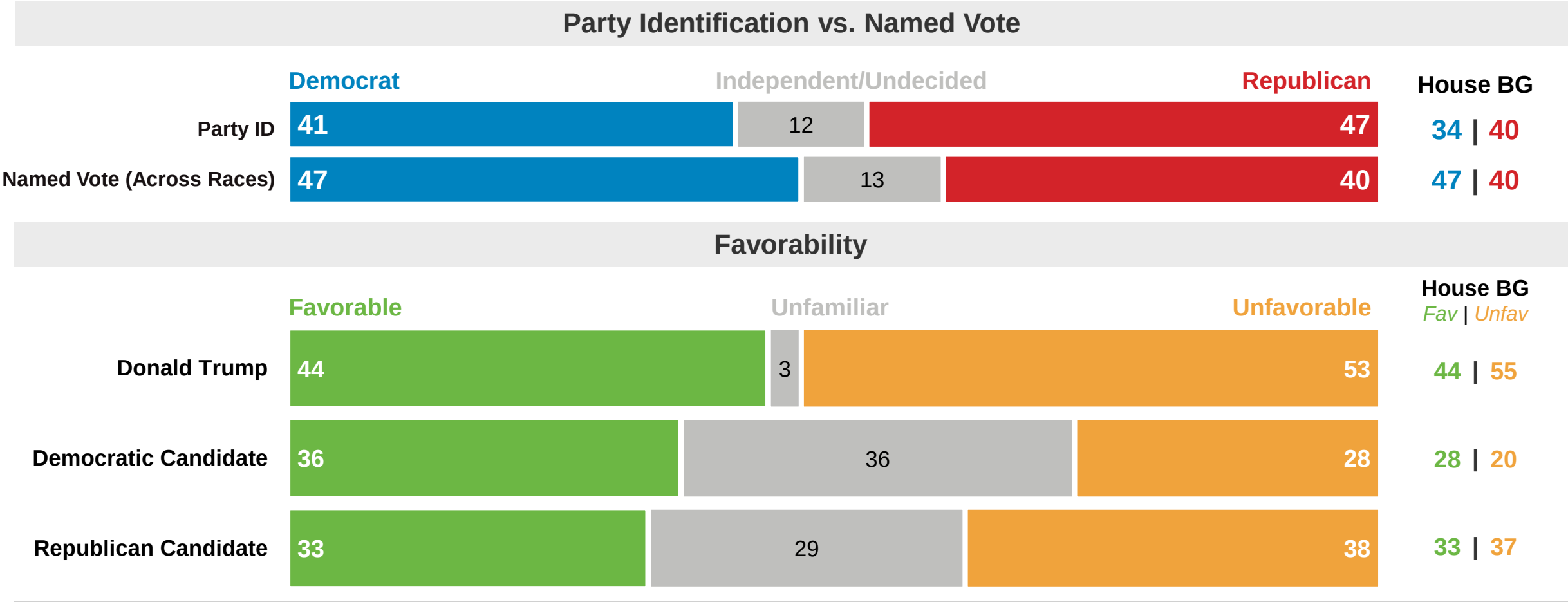
Key Findings

Key Findings

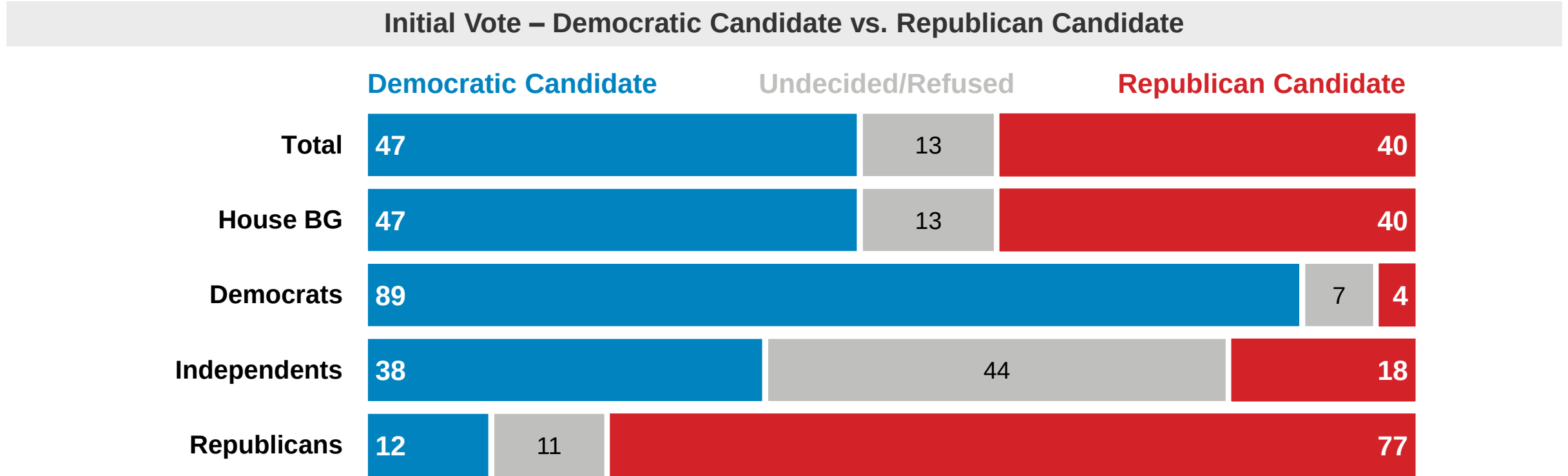
- **Sanctuary city attacks pack a lot of punch.**
- **Part of why the attack works is that voters don't know what Democrats stand for on immigration.** And to the degree that they know, they think we stand for “open borders.”
- **There are ways to neutralize the sanctuary city attack.** Talk about solutions to immigration problems and blame both parties for not fixing them yet. To avoid a backlash with our base we should NOT explicitly say we “oppose sanctuary cities,” but we do need to reassure voters that we're against violent crime.
- **It is important to move the overall debate back to better terrain.** Health care and taxes are both better issue fights for us with vulnerable voters who we risk losing with sanctuary city attacks. We need to ensure we're having a robust debate.

Political & Issue Environment

The partisan environment in battleground areas favors Democrats



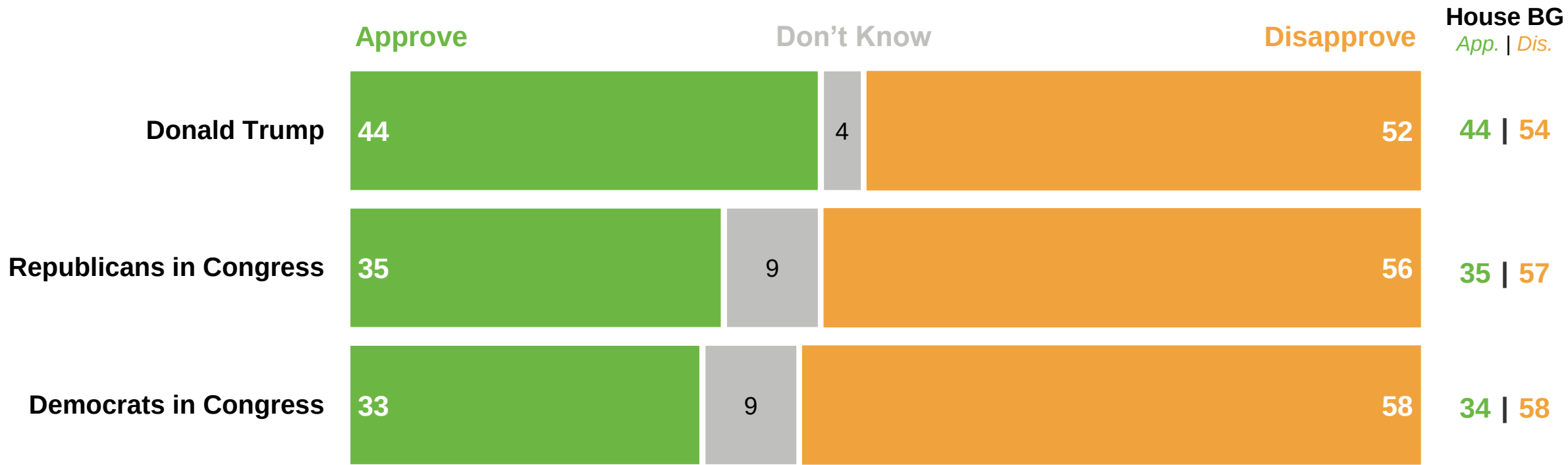
Battleground voters are tilting toward Democrats, with Democratic candidates better consolidating their party's voters and winning independents



NOTE: 36% of battleground voters are **Core Democrats** who self-ID as Democrats and vote for the Democratic candidate, and 36% are **Core Republicans** who self-ID as Republicans and vote for the Republican candidate. The remaining 27% we define as **Swing Voters** for the rest of this deck.

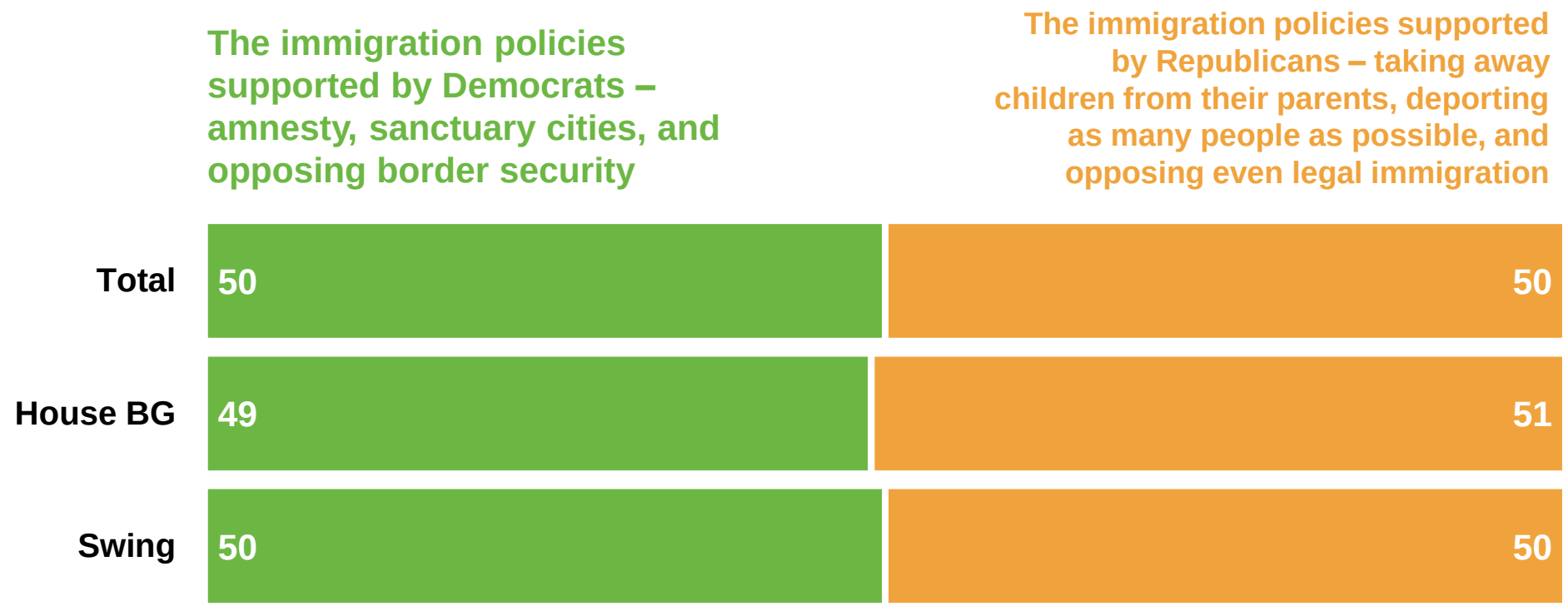
Voters are dissatisfied with the ways both parties in Congress are handling immigration, while Trump’s rating on the issue mimics his overall rating

How much do you approve or disapprove of how each of the following people and groups are handling immigration?



Neither party has an advantage on immigration writ large, with battleground voters equally concerned about both sides' vulnerabilities on the issue

Which of the following concerns you more?

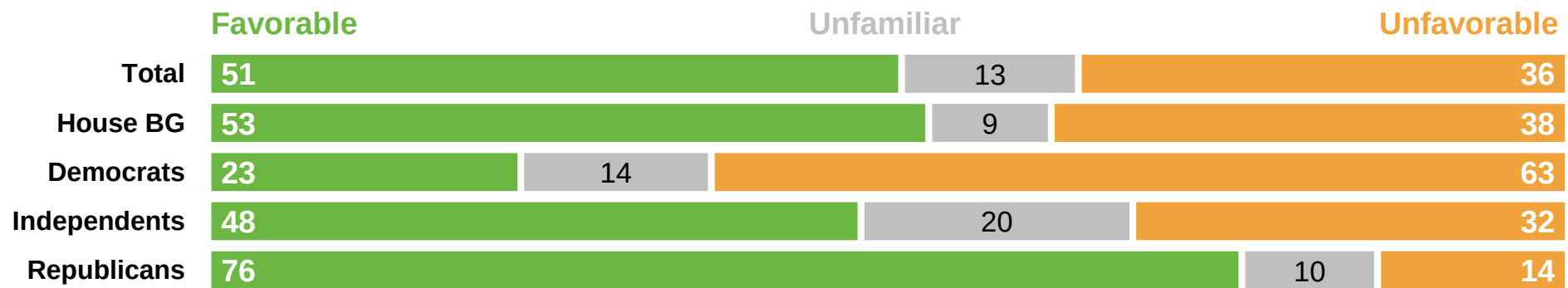


Battleground voters widely approve of how local law enforcement in their area is handling immigration; ICE is politically polarizing but still above water

Do you approve or disapprove of how local law enforcement officials in your community are handling immigration?



Favorability of the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement Agency (ICE)



To the degree that voters know what Democrats stand for on immigration, they think we're for open borders; sanctuary cities are their top concern

In a few sentences, how would you describe the immigration policies that Democrats want?

“Embrace those who want to come to the US legally to live the American dream.”

“They want open borders.”

“Democrats support DREAMers and people who come here lawfully and want them to find a path to citizenship.”



“Keep families together and to allow people to apply to enter the country.”

“Open borders and sanctuary cities that hide illegal criminals.”

“Reasonable and logical.”

Which of the following concerns you most about the kinds of immigration policies that Democrats support?



In qualitative research, the phrase “sanctuary cities” draws a negative reaction from persuadable voters

From what you know, do you favor or oppose sanctuary cities and why?

“I think I oppose sanctuary cities because of all the negative things you hear on the news. They make it seem like these cities and states are hiding and protecting illegals that have criminal records.”

“Federal law dictates immigration. If people are in a city illegally and are wanted by federal officers for deportation, the cities should do as such.”

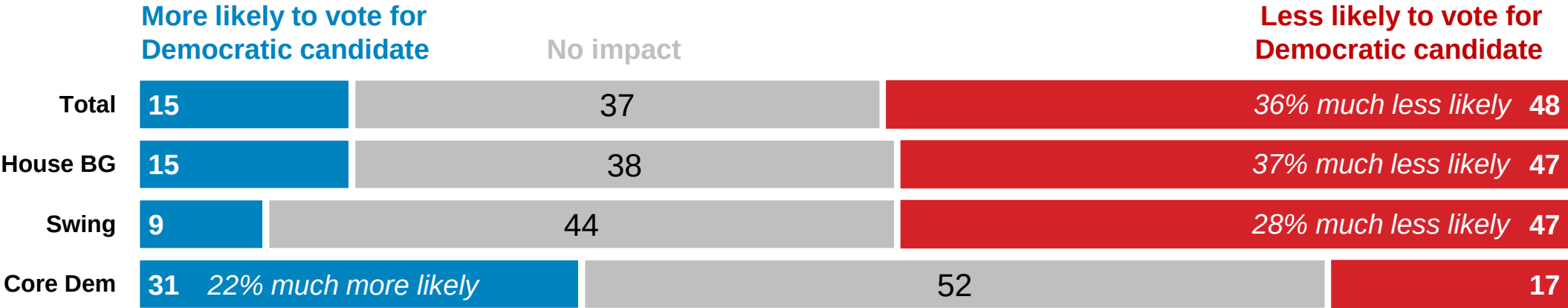
“I don't know all the ins and outs but if you're in this country according to the laws then what are they needed for? Why should one ‘city’ be able to not enforce the federal laws. What other federal laws will these ‘cities’ decide they don't want to follow anymore?”

The Sanctuary Attack

Sanctuary city attacks are powerful at dissuading voters from supporting Democrats; concerns raised among swing voters outweigh the backlash against this tactic from base Democrats

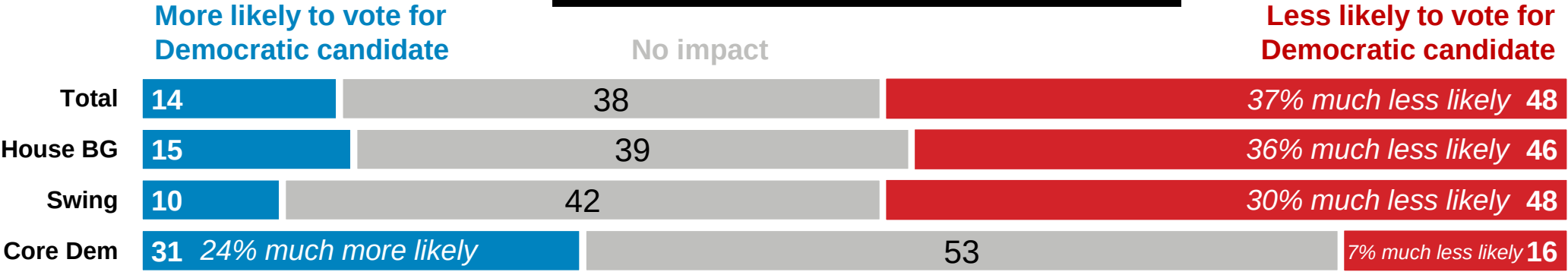
Having read this statement, does it make you...

[DEMOCRATIC CANDIDATE] has sided with Washington liberals to put criminal illegal immigrants ahead of the safety of law-abiding Americans. [DEMOCRATIC CANDIDATE] supports sanctuary cities that refuse to cooperate with immigration officials, even though sanctuary cities make us less safe by creating a safe haven for criminals and MS-13 gang members who are in our country illegally. A vote for [DEMOCRATIC CANDIDATE] is a vote for open borders and high crime in our communities.

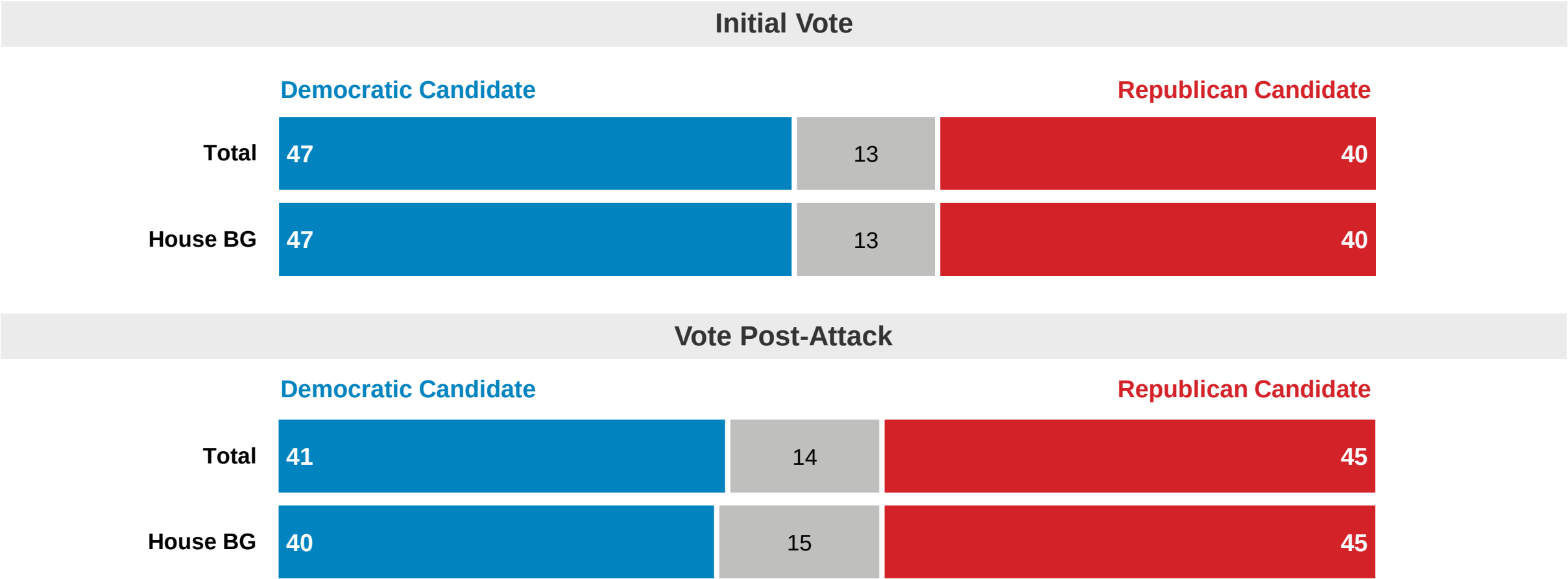


A simulated mailer with over-the-top, dark imagery also creates far more concerns about Democratic candidates than backlash toward our side

Having seen this image, does it make you:

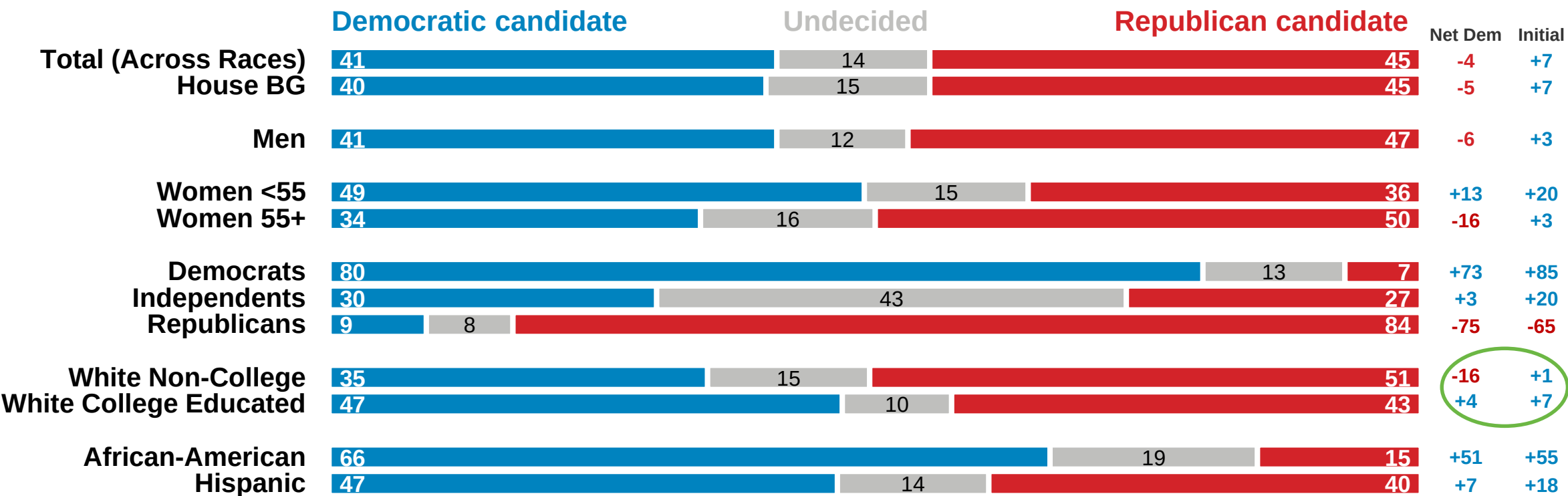


The sanctuary attack is damaging as our initial lead flips to a modest deficit



The sanctuary attack has a major impact in Congressional races and with independents, white non-college voters, and older women; the hit does little to move college educated white voters and African-Americans

Vote – After Sanctuary City Attack



NOTE: Voters who shift away from Democratic candidates as the result of back-and-forth messaging on immigration make up 14% of all voters, and are referred to as **vulnerable voters** for the rest of this deck

Rebutting the Sanctuary Attack

We tested four distinct messaging lanes as rebuttals to the sanctuary attack, with varying effectiveness

Rebuttals to Sanctuary Attack

REBUTTAL LANE (Each seen by ¼ of the full survey sample – 700+ respondents each)

SOLUTIONS & BLAME BOTH PARTIES: [Democrat] believes that our immigration system is broken because both parties are playing politics instead of trying to fix the problem. Instead of just trying to score political points, [Democrat] supports a bipartisan solution to fix our immigration system by increasing border security and creating an earned pathway to citizenship for undocumented immigrants currently living here if they keep out of trouble, work hard, learn English, and pay taxes.

AGAINST VIOLENT CRIME: These attacks against [Democrat] are misleading and false. [Democrat] strongly opposes any policy that would create safe havens for criminals and gangs or threaten the safety and security of our communities. [Democrat] is committed to protecting our communities from violent crime and believes that anyone who commits a serious crime should be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law.

ATTACK BACK & PIVOT TO FAVORABLE TERRAIN: [Republican] is attacking immigrants because [Republican] wants to divide us and pit us against each other in order to gain power and give kickbacks to campaign donors. These attacks are just a distraction from what [Republican] is doing to give massive tax breaks to millionaires and big corporations that are paid for by taking away regular people's health care and cutting Medicare and Social Security.

PIVOT TO PUBLIC SAFETY: These attacks against [Democrat] are about politics, not public safety. If local police spent their time chasing down every construction worker, landscaper, and small business owner who is an undocumented immigrant then they would have no time or money to go after violent criminals. [Democrat] thinks we need to put public safety before politics by focusing on helping local police stop violent crime and combat gun violence, not rounding up and deporting immigrants who are working hard and pose no threat.

WHAT WE FOUND

Most effective overall at pushing the vote margin back in our favor

Most effective overall at reducing concerns about sanctuary cities specifically

Effective at reducing GOP vote share, especially among swing and white non-college voters who are difficult to win over on immigration

Generally ineffective

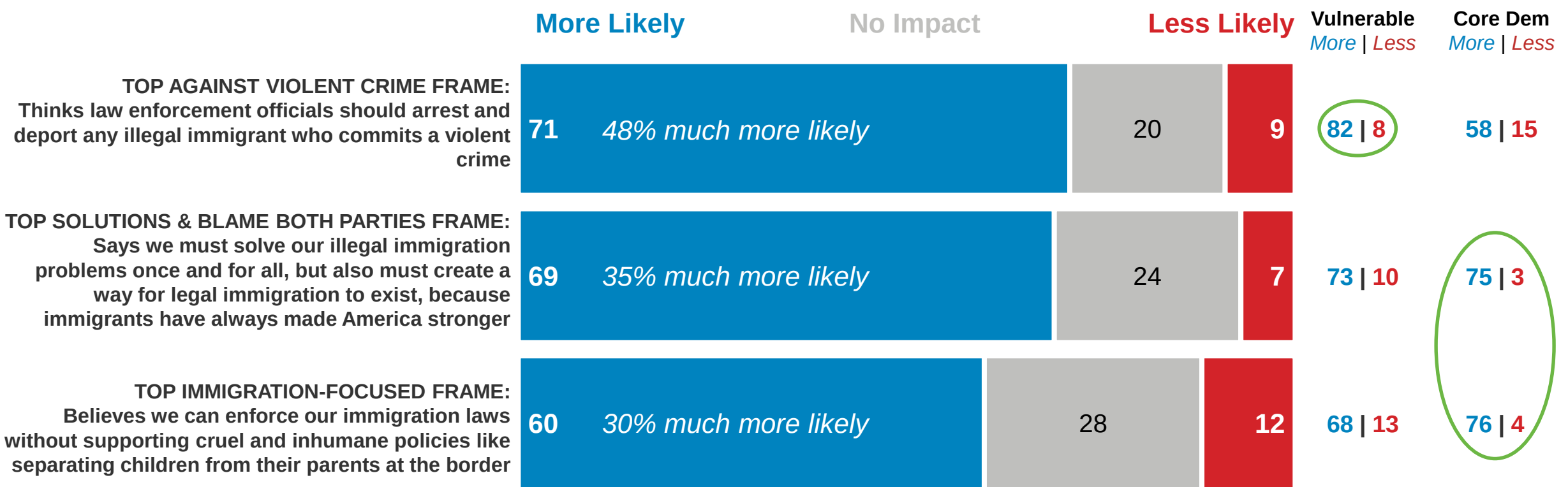
Re-framing the conversation around immigration solutions is most effective electorally, though there are also merits to clarifying opposition to (misperceived) sanctuary city policies or attacking back at GOP candidates

Rebuttals to Sanctuary Attack								
Change in Metric	TOTAL (ACROSS RACES)				HOUSE BG			
	Solutions & Blame Both Parties	Against Violent Crime	Attack Back + Pivot to Favorable Terrain	Public Safety	Solutions & Blame Both Parties	Against Violent Crime	Attack Back + Pivot to Favorable Terrain	Public Safety
Vote for Democrat	+5	+3	0	+1	+5	+5	-1	+1
Vote for Republican	-4	-3	-3	0	-5	-5	-3	-1
Net Vote Margin	+10	+6	+4	+2	+10	+10	+2	+2
% Very concerned about Dem's sanctuary city stance	-4	-6	-1	-3	-3	-5	-1	-4

Messaging & Framing: How to Talk About What Democrats are For & Against on Immigration

Vulnerable voters respond to anti-crime framing. For the base, talking about solutions is just as engaging as talking about humane immigration enforcement

Would you be more or less likely to vote for a candidate who...



A variety of **solutions-focused** frames work – but they have one thing in common which is the acknowledgement that there is a problem that needs to be fixed

Would you be more or less likely to vote for a candidate who...

More Likely

No Impact

Less Likely

Vulnerable
More | Less

Core Dem
More | Less

Says we **must solve illegal immigration problems once and for all**, but also create a way for legal immigration to exist because immigrants have always made America stronger

69 35% much more likely

24

7

73 | 10

75 | 3

Says both parties in D.C. have failed to fix the immigration problem and we **should focus on a solution that fixes the problem** for the future without tearing families apart today

64 31% much more likely

29

7

68 | 10

76 | 3

Supports a **bipartisan plan** that increases border security and creates a path for undocumented immigrants currently living here to earn the ability to stay here legally

63 28% much more likely

23

14

66 | 18

74 | 6

Even when contrasting against unpopular GOP policies like mass deportation, it is important to explain what **solutions** Democrats support

Would you be more or less likely to vote for a candidate who...

	More Likely	No Impact	Less Likely	Vulnerable More Less	Core Dem More Less
Believes we can enforce our immigration laws without supporting cruel and inhumane policies like separating children from their parents at the border	60 30% much more likely	28	12	68 13	76 4
Says that we can't realistically deport all 11 million undocumented immigrants in the country, so we should focus on removing the smaller number of undocumented immigrants who pose a serious threat to our communities	59 24% much more likely	28	13	59 15	68 6
Believes we should be focusing less on deporting as many people as possible, and focusing more on public safety threats like street crime and the opioid crisis that are harming our communities	51 25% much more likely	30	19	52 23	73 7
Says that we can't realistically deport all 11 million undocumented immigrants in the country	42 17% much more likely	34	24	44 26	61 8

The best message in a solutions frame is to hit both parties and support a bipartisan plan to fix the problem

[SOLUTIONS & BLAME BOTH PARTIES MESSAGES] Which of the following is the most convincing statement to you?

Total	House BG	Swing <i>% Top Response</i>	Vuln.	Core Dems	
31	31	32	32	40	[Democrat] says both parties have failed to fix the problem and supports a bipartisan plan to secure the border, provide a way for some of the 11 million people already here today to stay legally, and fix the system for the future
22	23	19	26	28	[Democrat] supports allowing those who have been here for many years to stay here legally if they keep out of trouble, work hard, learn English, and pay taxes
15	16	14	15	24	[Democrat] thinks we need a realistic plan to fix our immigration system instead of rounding up and deporting 11 million people
32	29	36	27	8	None of these are convincing to me

The best response to GOP scare tactics is to attack them for playing politics and not wanting to solve the problem

Which is the most concerning about the image you saw earlier from the GOP opponent of [Democratic Candidate]?

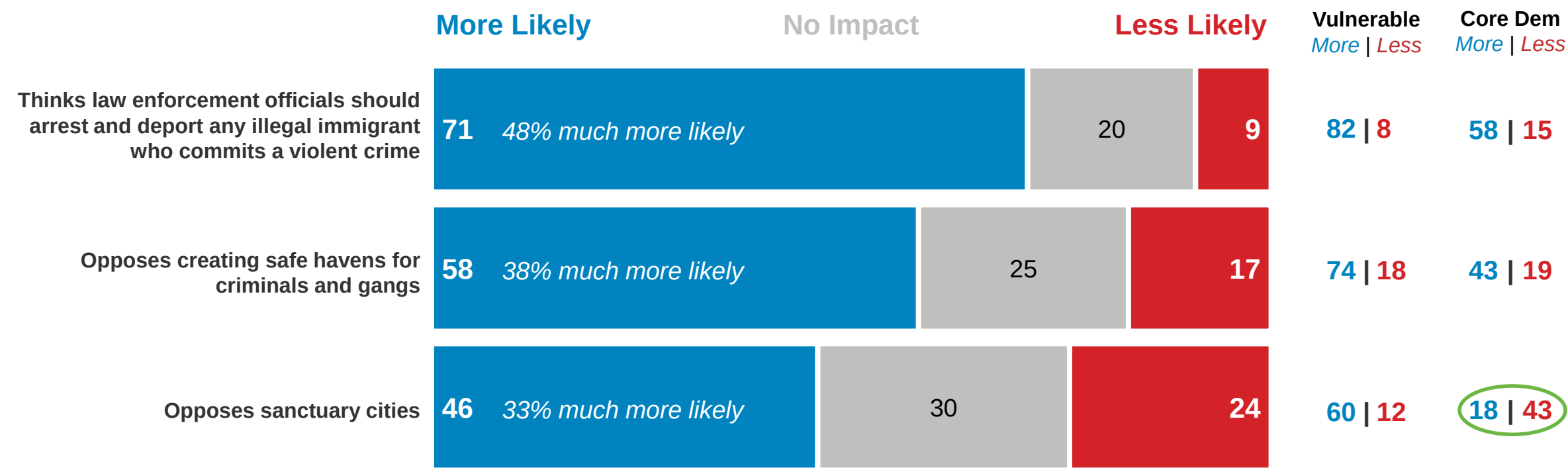
Total	House BG	Swing <i>% Top Response</i>	Vuln.	Core Dems	
20	21	15	11	39	This Republican attack is misleading and dishonest
19	20	25	30	23	This Republican attack is playing politics with immigration, making it harder to solve the real problems in our immigration system
12	11	13	19	15	This Republican attack is distracting from more important issues like the economy and health care
11	11	8	8	17	This Republican attack unfairly demonizes immigrants
38	37	39	32	6	None of these are concerning to me



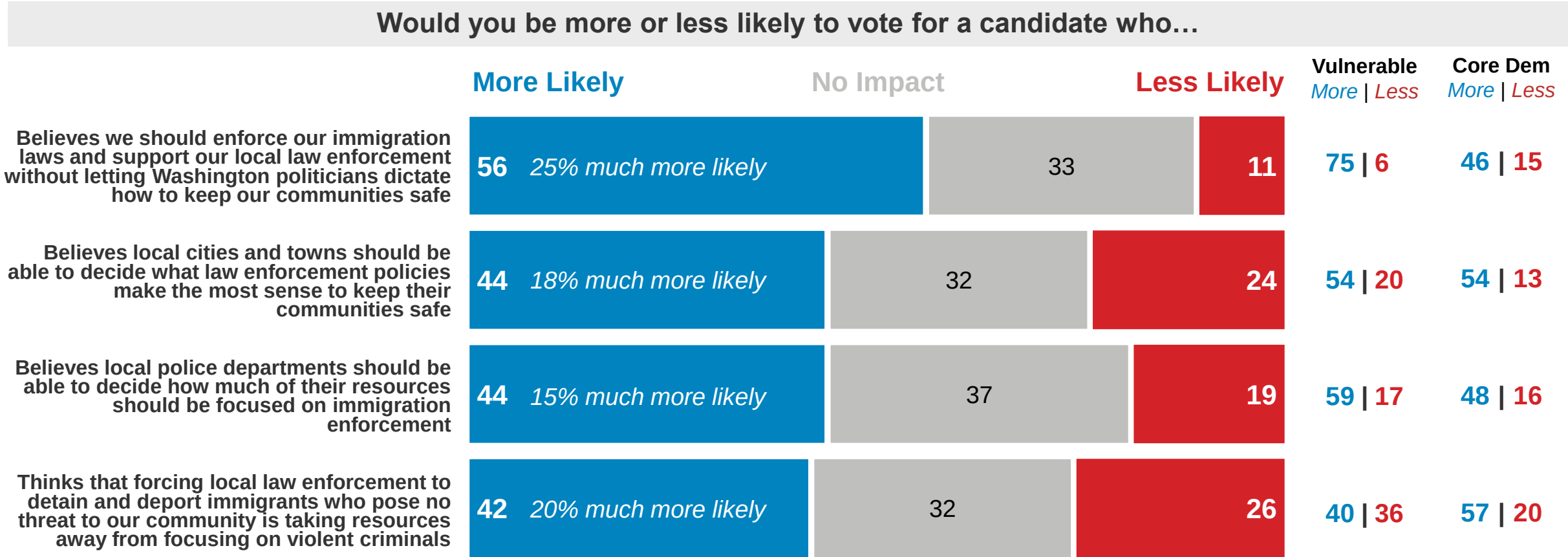
When asked to choose, voters split roughly evenly between saying this ad “raises legitimate concerns” (43%) and that it “is offensive and goes too far” (41%).

The most aggressive posturing on crime tests best but it is much better to state that you oppose safe havens than to say you oppose sanctuary cities; opposing sanctuary cities provokes a backlash from our base

Would you be more or less likely to vote for a candidate who...



The local law enforcement frame only works if you pit ‘local vs. DC’ – it is far less effective as a stand-alone



Messaging & Framing: How & When to Pivot & Attack Back

Attacking back moves key constituencies away from the GOP, including swing and non-college educated white voters

Rebuttals to Sanctuary Attack

REBUTTAL	CHANGE IN NET VOTE MARGIN BY GROUP				CHANGE IN GOP VOTE SHARE BY GROUP			
	Total	White Non-College	White College	Swing	Total	White Non-College	White College	Swing
Solutions & Blame Both Parties	+10	+11	+10	+16	-4	-4	-5	-10
Against Violent Crime	+6	+8	+3	+8	-3	-5	-2	-6
Attack Back + Pivot to Favorable Terrain	+4	+7	-2	+9	-3	-6	+1	-9
Public Safety	+2	+3	+1	+6	0	-1	-1	0

Democrats are more likely to win a tax vs. immigration debate than an immigration vs. immigration debate

[TAXES COMPARISON] Which of the following concerns you more?



[FAMILY SEPARATION COMPARISON] Which of the following concerns you more?



White college (54% GOP Candidate/46% Democratic candidate) and white non-college voters (53% GOP candidate/47% Democratic candidate) feel similarly on the tax comparison. However, on the family separation comparison, white college voters have more concerns about the GOP candidate's position (52% GOP candidate/48% Democratic candidate) than white non-college voters (46% GOP candidate/54% Democratic candidate).

When pivoting, Democrats may as well move to more favorable issue terrain than try to pivot within the issue of immigration

[PUBLIC SAFETY MESSAGES] Which of the following is the most convincing statement to you?

Total	House BG	Swing	Vuln.	Core Dems	
% Top Response					
37	36	36	43	50	[Democrat] says we need to fix our immigration problem and then move on to growing the economy, improving schools, and making health care more affordable
14	16	14	16	21	[Democrat] says we should focus law enforcement less on chasing down people based on their immigration status and more on keeping our communities safe
13	14	11	12	22	[Democrat] thinks we should take the tax dollars we're using to deport those who pose no threat and invest that money in our communities
36	34	39	29	7	None of these are convincing to me

When attacking back, it is most effective to lean in on core GOP weaknesses like health care and tax breaks for the wealthy; a straight hit back on immigration only draws in a small segment of vulnerable voters

Which of the following concerns you most about [Republican candidate]?

Total	House BG	Swing	Vuln.	Core Dems	
% Top Response					
25	23	25	27	38	[Republican] says they are serious about people's health and public safety, but then cuts health care protections and blocks common sense gun safety laws
19	22	20	27	28	[Republican] runs campaign ads attacking immigrants but then turns around and gives big tax breaks to their wealthy campaign donors
18	19	18	22	26	[Republican] supports immigration policies that have led young children to be pulled out of their parents' arms at the border and threatened DREAMers with deportation
38	36	37	24	8	None of these are concerning to me

Conclusions

Language to Use

- Our immigration system is broken because [both parties in D.C. have failed to fix the immigration problem](#). Instead of playing politics with the issue, we should focus on a solution that fixes the problem for the future without tearing families apart today.
- [We support a bipartisan plan to finally fix our immigration system](#). This plan increases border security and creates an earned pathway to citizenship for undocumented immigrants currently living in the country if they keep out of trouble, work hard, learn English, and pay taxes.
- We must solve our illegal immigration problems once and for all, but also [create a way for legal immigration to exist because immigrants have always made the United States stronger](#).
- Republican attacks are misleading and false. [We strongly oppose safe havens for criminals and gangs](#), and believe that [anyone who commits a violent crime should be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law](#).
- [Republican attacks are playing politics with immigration](#), making it harder to solve the real problems in our immigration system. These attacks against immigrants are just a way to divide and [distract us from what Republicans are doing to give massive tax breaks to millionaires and big corporations that are paid for by taking away regular people's health care and cutting Medicare and Social Security](#).

Thank You