

Presidential Battleground Survey

Findings Prepared by Global Strategy Group for End Citizens United



Key Takeaways

- 1. Corruption and money in politics are top issues for independent voters in 2020, and the debate between the two parties on these issues is largely unsettled.**
- 2. Voters understand that corruption and money in politics are intertwined with every major priority they care about, and by committing to reform, Democratic candidates gain trust, particularly among independents.**
- 3. Voters don't start with a clearly formed opinion on Trump's independence. What could be a strength for him of "not being bought" can be undermined effectively with messaging about the money he has accepted from corporate special interests and pushing policies that hurt everyday Americans.**
- 4. Proof points about Trump's support from corporate special interests make our messages against him on health care, taxes, drug prices, and guns more effective with persuadable voters.**
- 5. Mitch McConnell is deeply unpopular, and a more effective villain than Trump for our messaging in down-ballot races. Campaigns should explore this in their own testing, using McConnell as a wedge.**

Methodology

Global Strategy Group conducted an online survey of 1,212 likely 2020 voters in 12 battleground states, including 460 interviews in pivot counties (counties that voted for Donald Trump in 2016 after voting for Barack Obama in 2008 and 2012), between April 26th and May 8th, 2019.

Battleground States

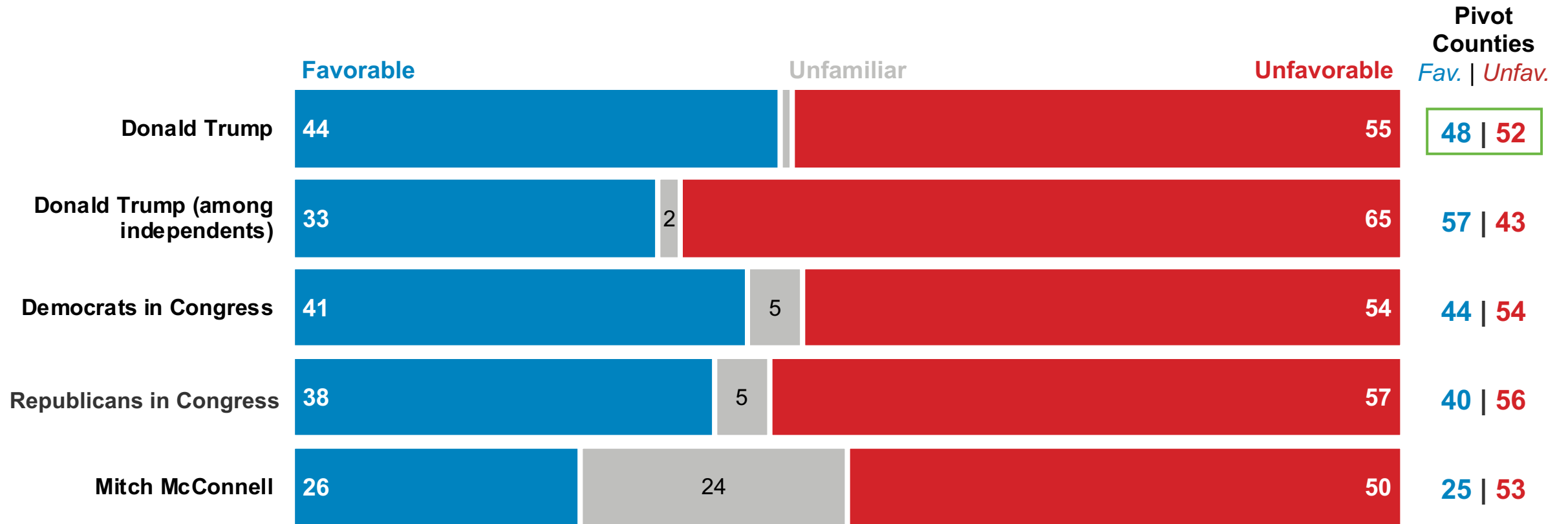
Arizona	Nevada
Colorado	New Hampshire
Florida	North Carolina
Georgia	Ohio
Iowa	Pennsylvania
Michigan	Wisconsin

In the 2016 presidential election, these states voted for Trump by an average margin of 2.4 points (48.5% Trump/46.1% Clinton).

Lay of the Land

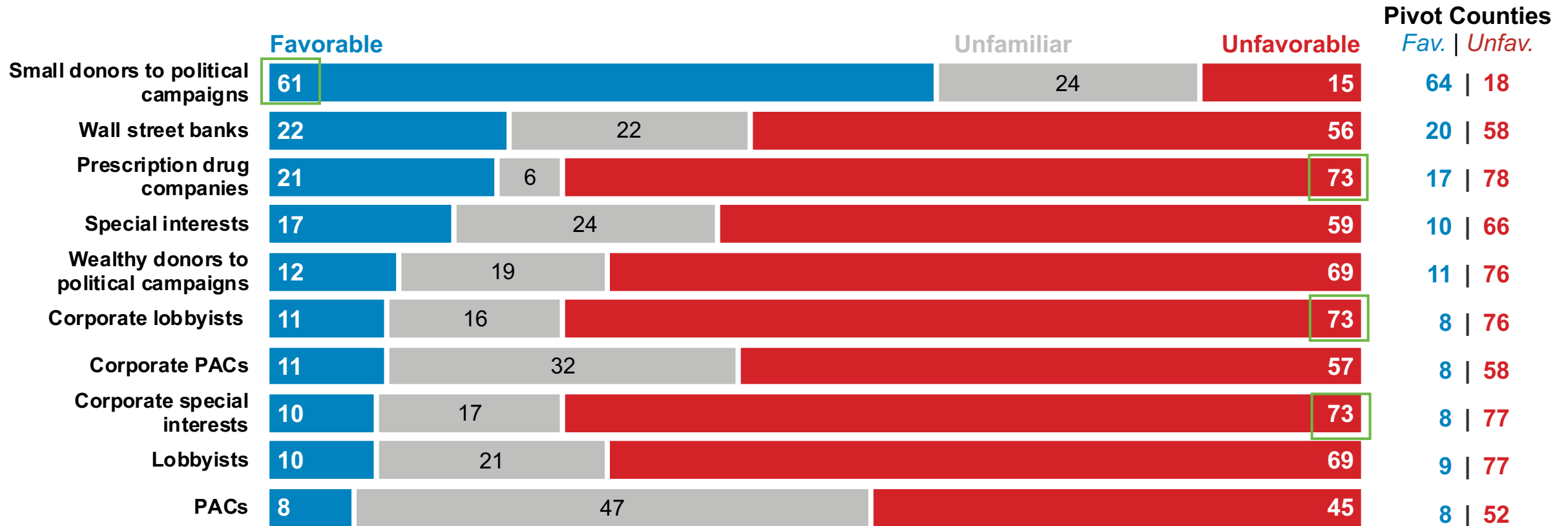
The GOP's brand is weaker than Democrats' in battleground states, but Trump still has residual strength in pivot counties

Favorability of People and Groups



While lobbyists, corporate special interests, and drug companies are particularly salient villains, battleground voters are notably favorable to small donors

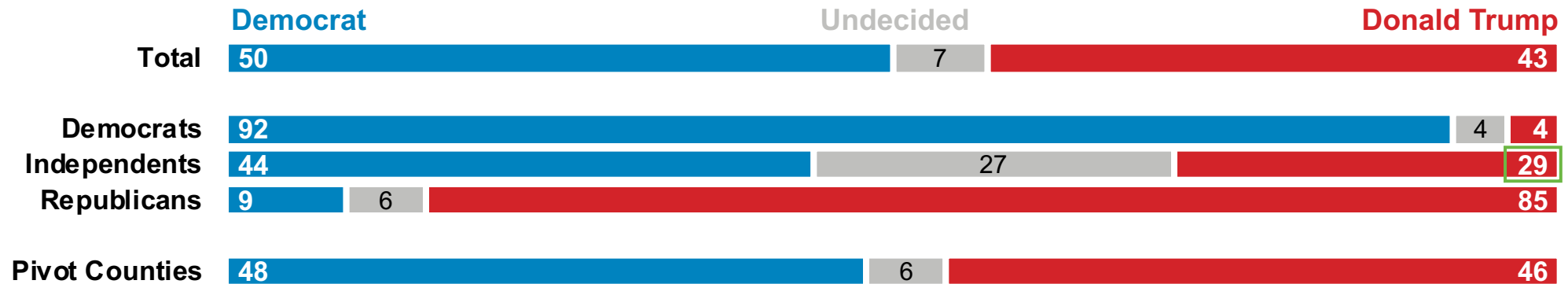
Favorability of People and Groups



The 2020 Election

Lack of GOP consolidation leaves Trump trailing a generic Democrat among battleground voters, with independents generally disapproving of his performance

If the 2020 election for U.S. President was today, would you vote for Donald Trump or the Democratic candidate for president?

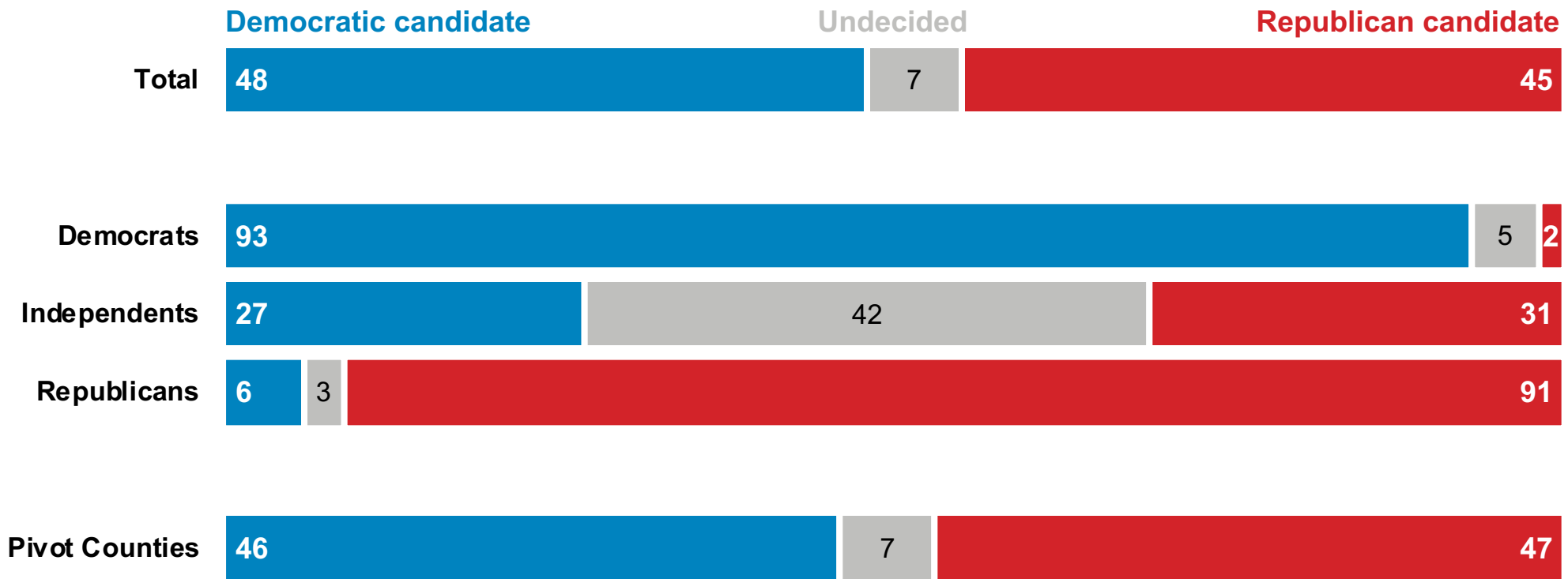


Donald Trump Job Approval



Democrats hold a slight generic advantage in 2020 Congressional races, though independent voters are largely up for grabs

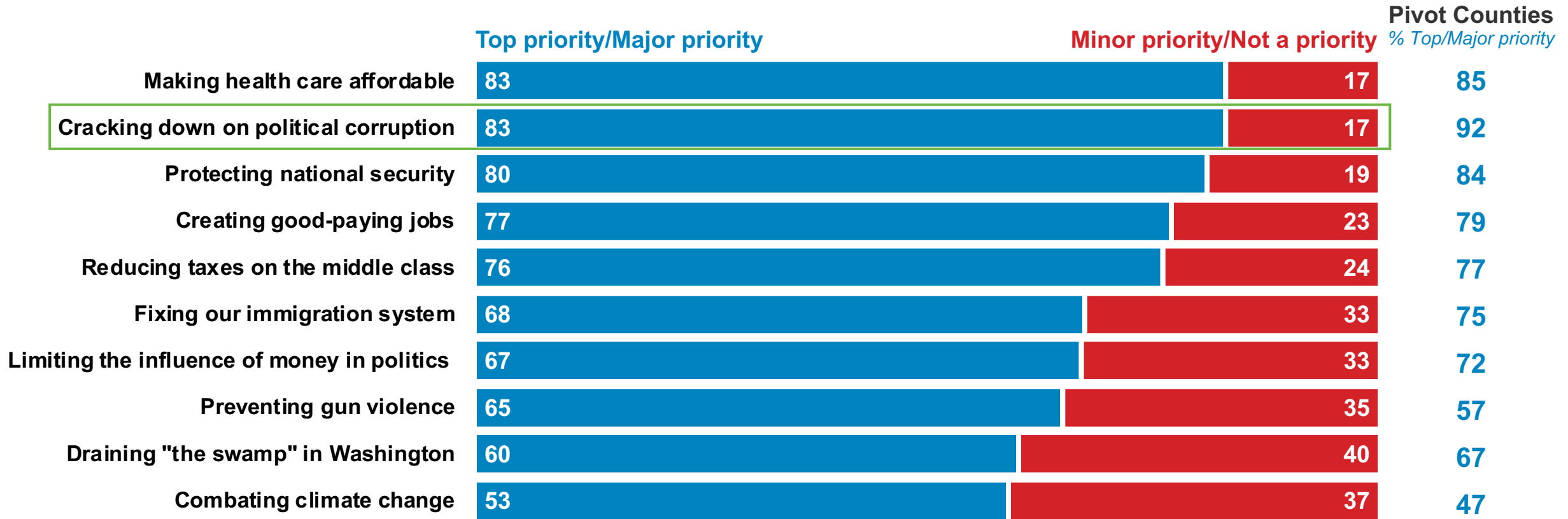
If the election for U.S. Congress were today, would you vote for the Democratic candidate or the Republican candidate?



The Debate on Money in Politics

Political corruption is as salient a priority for 2020 as any other issue, including health care

Indicate how high of a priority each issue is to you personally in deciding who you will vote for in November 2020 for President and Congress:



Battleground voters believe we can't make progress on other major issues unless we first crack down on corruption and big money

Which of the following statements do you agree with more?

Cracking down on corruption and getting big money out of politics should be the top priority in Washington because it affects everything, including the cost of health care, and nothing will change until politicians stop being influenced by special interest money

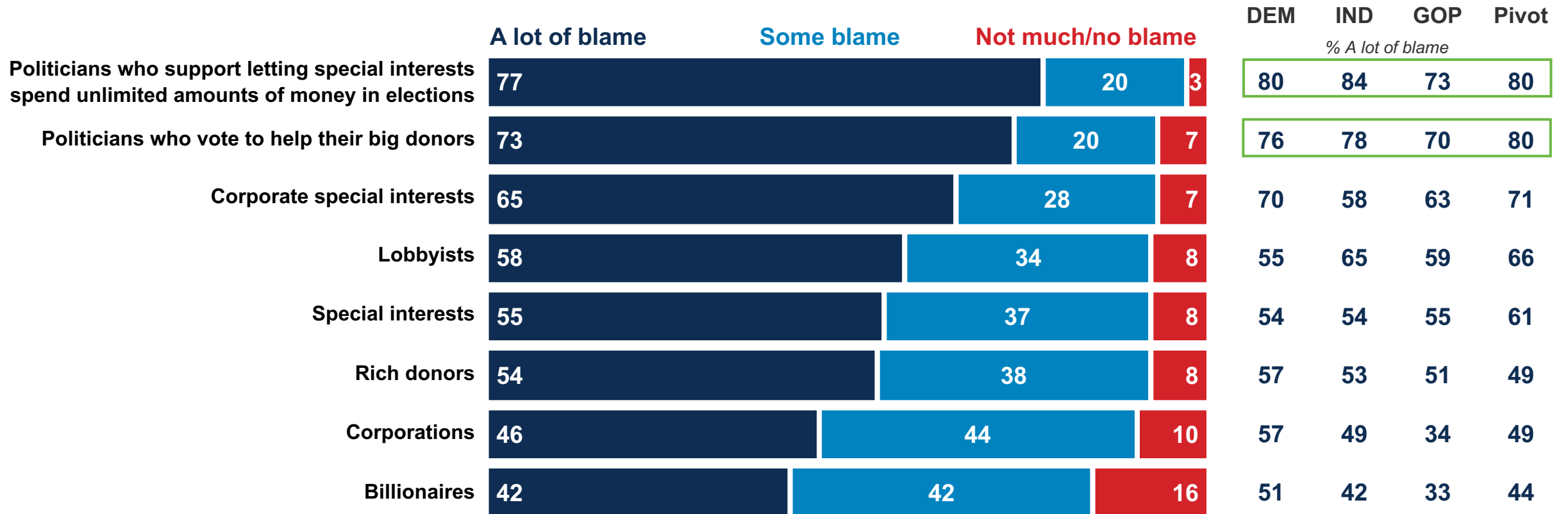
Cracking down on corruption and getting big money out of politics is important but more important issues need to be addressed first, like the cost of health care and the economy



Among white, non-college educated males, 66% say cracking down on corruption should be a top priority, while 34% say more important issues need to be addressed first.

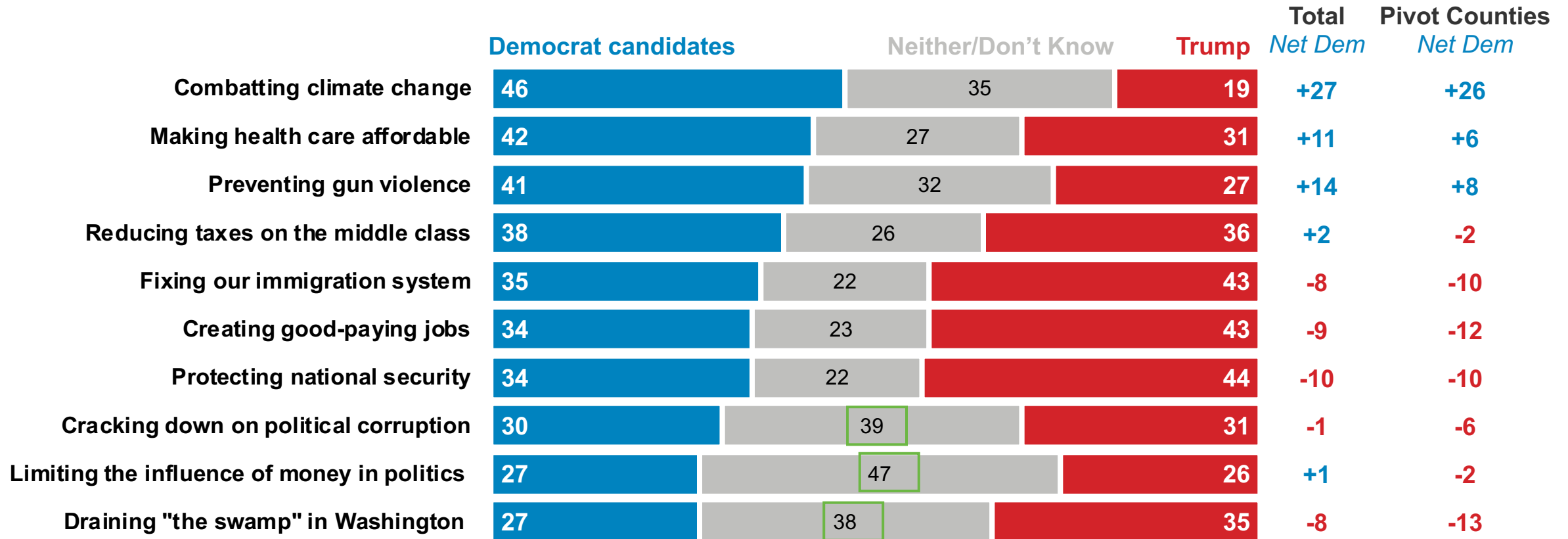
Politicians who are enabling corporate special interests deserve the most blame for the problem of money in politics

For each group, indicate how much blame you think it deserves for the amount of money in politics:



There is far more room to define the debate on corruption and money in politics than other major 2020 issues

Please indicate who you trust more on each issue – Donald Trump or the Democratic candidates for president?



Battleground voters from across the political spectrum overwhelmingly support HR1 legislation

Do you support or oppose the Senate passing and the President signing this legislation into law?

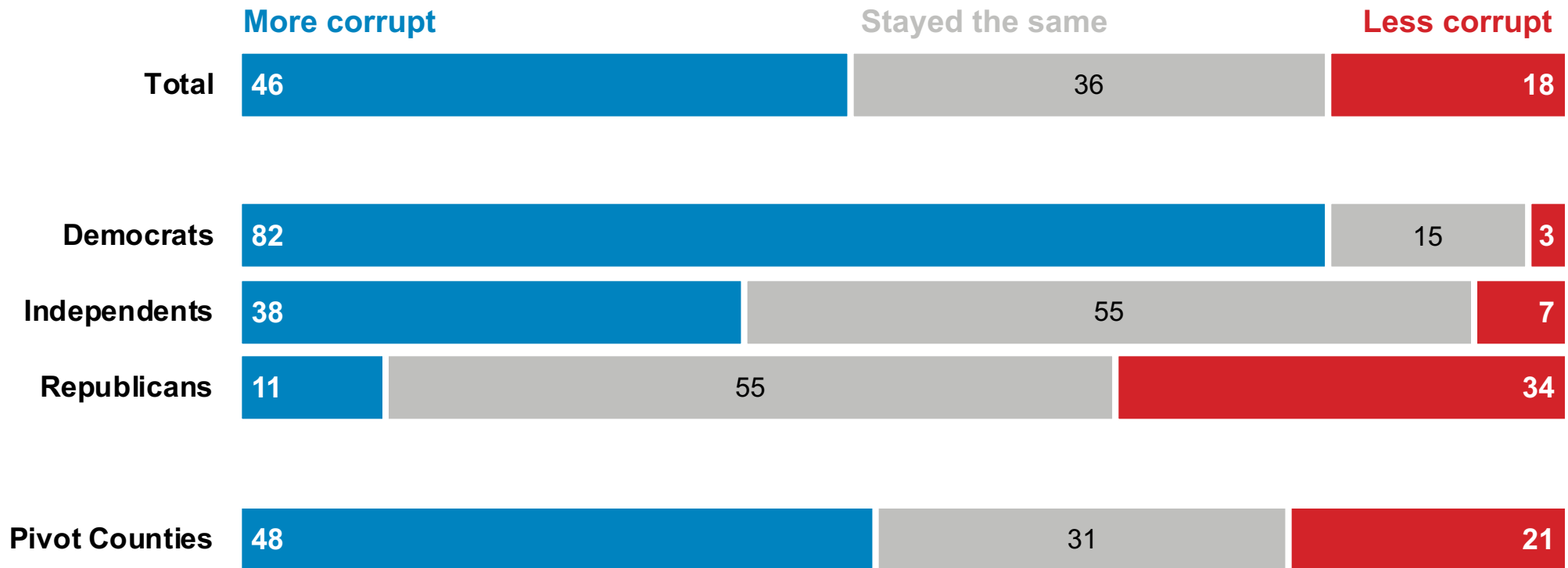
As you may know, the U.S. House of Representatives passed legislation earlier this year that supporters say will crack down on political corruption in both parties and strengthen our democracy. It will limit the influence wealthy donors have over politicians, prevent foreign money from coming into America's elections, strengthen ethics laws to prevent politicians from enriching themselves, create more transparency and accountability in Washington, and make sure all eligible citizens have their voting rights and access to the ballot box protected. This bill will only become the law if the U.S. Senate also votes to pass it and the President signs into law.



Trump

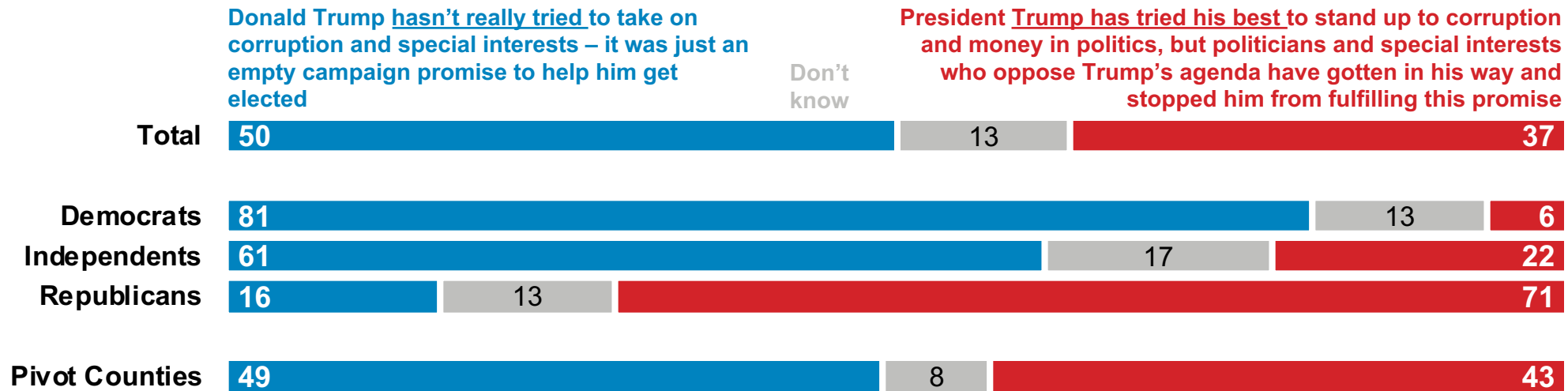
Independents side more with Democrats than Republicans in believing that DC corruption has gotten worse under Trump

Since Donald Trump became President, would you say that Washington has become...

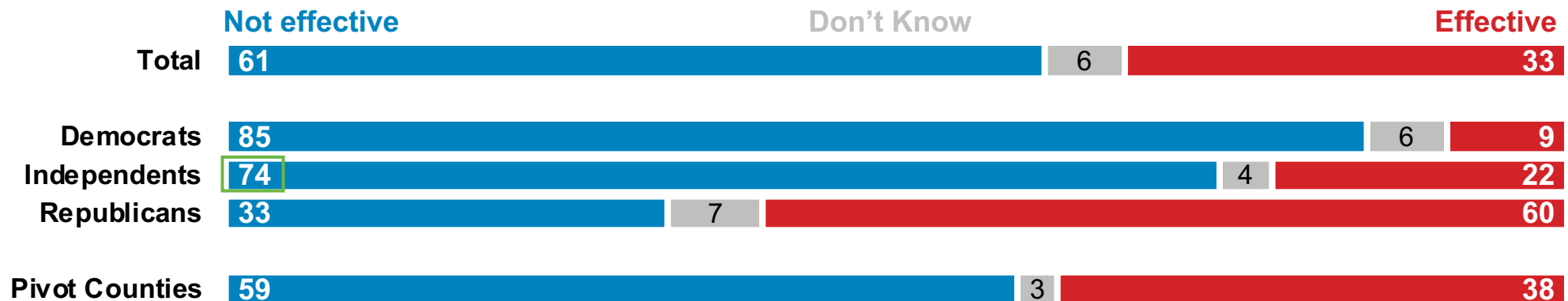


Voters do not believe Trump has been effective at “draining the swamp,” and view Trump’s slogan as an empty campaign promise

Which of the following statements about Donald Trump’s campaign promise to “drain the swamp” do you agree with more?

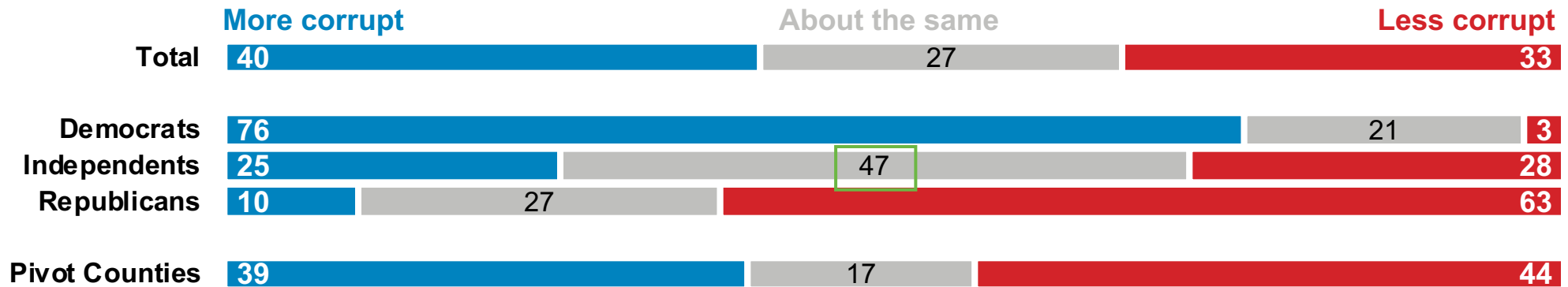


How effective do you think Trump has been at fulfilling this specific campaign promise [“draining the swamp”]?



Independents don't see Trump as uniquely bad and largely see him as corrupt as other politicians in Washington today

Compared to other politicians in Washington today, would you say that Donald Trump is...



[IF LESS CORRUPT] In a few sentences, what makes you think Donald Trump is less corrupt?

“He **does not owe any big money donors** since he ran on his own money. He **cannot be bought**, unlike members of Congress...”

“He’s a businessman and **doesn’t need the money** associated with all the corrupt politicians.”

“He is **not beholden to special interests...** He’s **already a billionaire, donated his salary**, etc. He removed the temptations.”

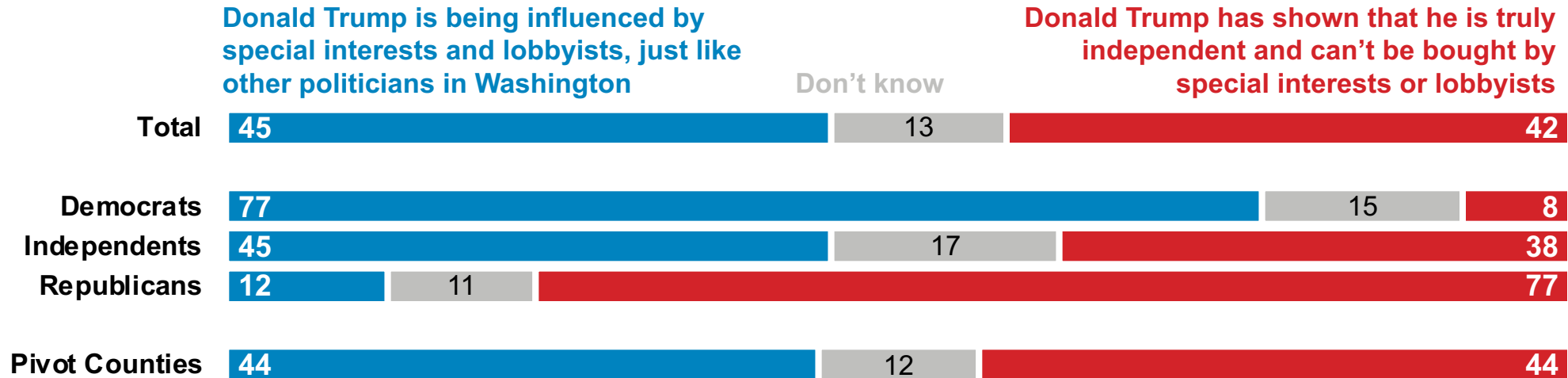
“He gets the job done, he has his own money, **he does not need anyone else’s money.**”

“He **doesn’t take money from PACs or lobbyists.** He **doesn’t even take a paycheck** to be President.”

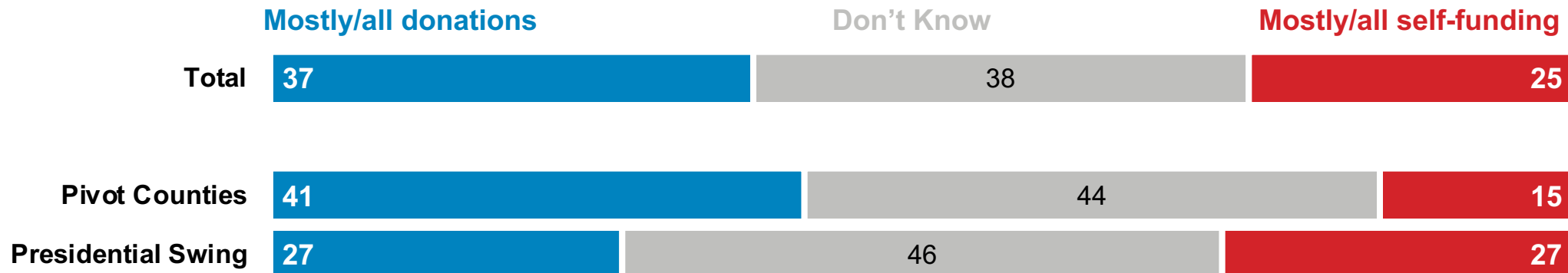
88% of liberal Democrats say that Donald Trump is **more corrupt** than other politicians in Washington today.

The narrative that Trump “can’t be bought” still has resonance with key electoral groups

Which of the following statements about Donald Trump do you agree with more?



As far as you know, is President Trump mostly/completely self-funding his campaign or mostly/completely relying on campaign donations?



Messaging

By tying Trump's positions on health care, drug prices and guns to political contributions, we can win the debate among persuadable voters

Which of the following concerns you more? (SHOWING MARGIN IN FAVOR OF DEM. ARGUMENT)

HEALTH CARE

[WITHOUT CORRUPTION] That Trump's health care plan would let health insurers discriminate against people with pre-ex, raise premiums for older Americans by \$3K a year, and kick millions off coverage

[WITH CORRUPTION] That Trump has taken hundreds of thousands in donations from big health insurance companies and his health care plan would let health insurers discriminate against people with pre-ex, raise premiums for older Americans by \$3K a year, and kick millions off coverage

That Dem candidates for president support a \$32 trillion takeover of health care that would raise taxes, put gov't in charge, and limit choices

W/o corruption angle: W/ corruption angle:

Total: **+2** Total: **+8**

Pivot Counties: **+2** Pivot Counties: **+2**

Prez Swing: **-14** Prez Swing: **+8**

DRUG PRICES

[WITHOUT CORRUPTION] That Trump is protecting drug companies' massive profits by giving them billions in tax breaks and backing off his promise to lower drug prices

[WITH CORRUPTION] That Trump has taken over \$1.5 million in donations from drug companies and even made a pharma exec his Health Secretary, and is now protecting drug companies' massive profits by giving them billions in tax breaks and backing off his promise to lower drug prices

That Dem. candidates for president want to put the federal gov't in charge of setting drug prices, like in socialist countries, instead of having prices set by the free market

W/o corruption angle: W/ corruption angle:

Total: **+2** Total: **+18**

Pivot Counties: **0** Pivot Counties: **-2**

Prez Swing: **-14** Prez Swing: **+20**

GUNS

[WITHOUT CORRUPTION] That Trump opposes even common sense gun safety laws like background checks on all gun purchases in order to keep guns out of the hands of criminals, dom. abusers, and the violently mentally ill

[WITH CORRUPTION] That Trump has received over \$11 million in support from the corp. gun lobby and has protected gun companies' profits at every turn, including opposing common sense gun safety laws like background checks on all gun purchases

That Dem. candidates for president want to roll back the Second Amendment and put more restrictions on law-abiding gun owners, violating Americans' Constitutional rights

W/o corruption angle: W/ corruption angle:

Total: **+6** Total: **+12**

Pivot Counties: **-4** Pivot Counties: **0**

Prez Swing: **-16** Prez Swing: **+14**

Compared to traditional Democratic messages, corruption and money in politics messages move the presidential ballot significantly among non-college educated males

Democratic Candidate vs. Trump – Vote After Messaging

½ SAMPLE SAW 4 STANDARD DEMOCRATIC MESSAGES:

[HEALTH CARE] *The Democratic candidates for President believe that access to affordable health care is a right. That's why they support plans that will protect coverage for people with pre-existing conditions...*

[MEDICARE & SOCIAL SECURITY] *With funding for Medicare and Social Security under threat, the Democratic candidates for President will ensure that these vital programs are fully funded into the future...*

[CLIMATE] *The Democratic candidates for President will combat climate change, which is already contributing to extreme weather events like floods, hurricanes, and wildfires and will lead to even more...*

[WOMEN'S RIGHTS] *The Democratic candidates for President will always defend a woman's right to make her own health care decisions, including protecting women's access to reproductive health care services...*

½ SAMPLE SAW 4 MESSAGES ABOUT CORRUPTION & MONEY IN POLITICS:

[FLOODGATES] *Special interests have more influence in elections now than any time in history and are further drowning out the voices of real people. That's why the Democratic candidates for President support a plan to limit how much special interests can spend...*

[FOREIGN DONATIONS] *Our current system allows unlimited money to be spent in our elections in secret... That's why the Democratic candidates for President support legislation to make all political donations public...*

[LOBBYING] *Special interests and lobbyists have corrupted politics and caused too many politicians to vote their way. That's why the Democratic candidates for President support a plan to clean up the corruption in Washington by reforming lobbying laws...*

[PLEDGE] *The Democratic candidates for President support capitalism but they have pledged not to accept campaign donations from corporate PACs, because we need...*

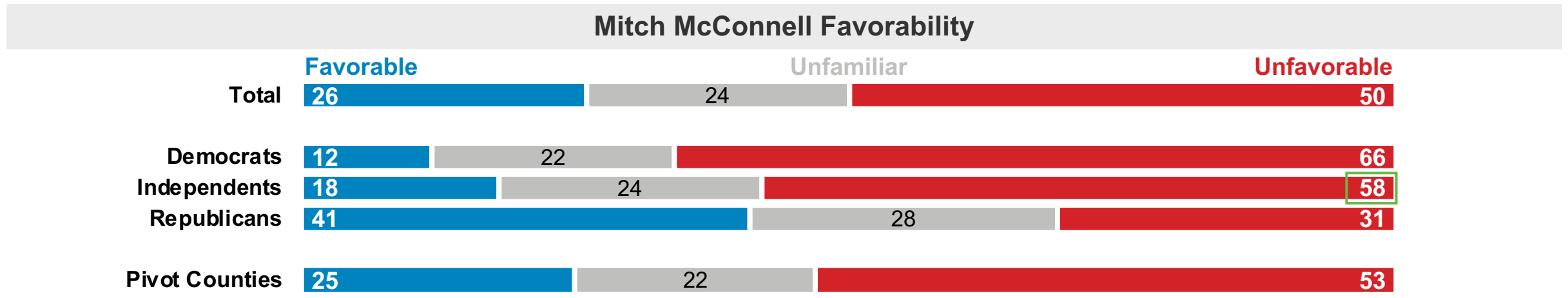
DEMOCRAT VS. TRUMP – DEM MARGIN

Total		
Before Messages	After Standard Dem. Messages	After Corruption/ Money in Politics Messages
+11	+10	+11
Non College Men		
Before Messages	After Standard Dem. Messages	After Corruption/ Money in Politics Messages
-4	-11	+1

NOTE: Before the post-messaging vote, respondents were also shown back-and-forth statements that included attacks against Democrats

McConnell

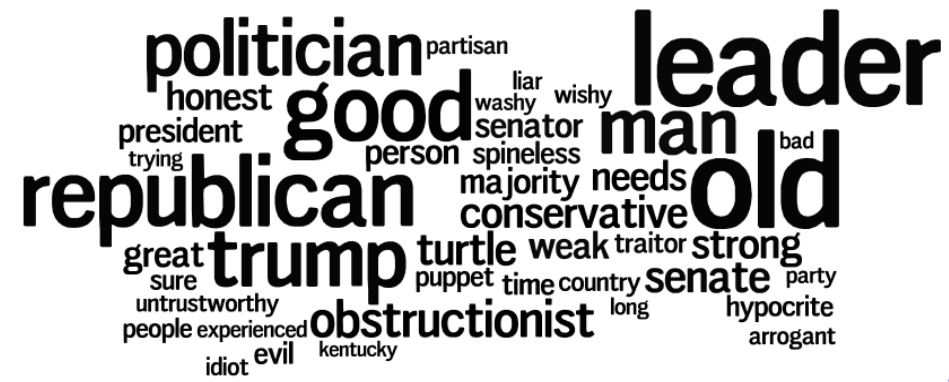
McConnell is deeply underwater, particularly with independents; battleground voters attack his character and see him as an obstructionist



In one or two words, how would you describe Mitch McConnell?

“A **partisan obstructionist** who does not care about the country as a whole.”

“Self-serving **hypocrite**.”



“**Total supporter of Trump**, whether it’s right or wrong.”

“**Old and paid for**.”

McConnell is a more effective villain than Trump for moving voters in down-ballot races

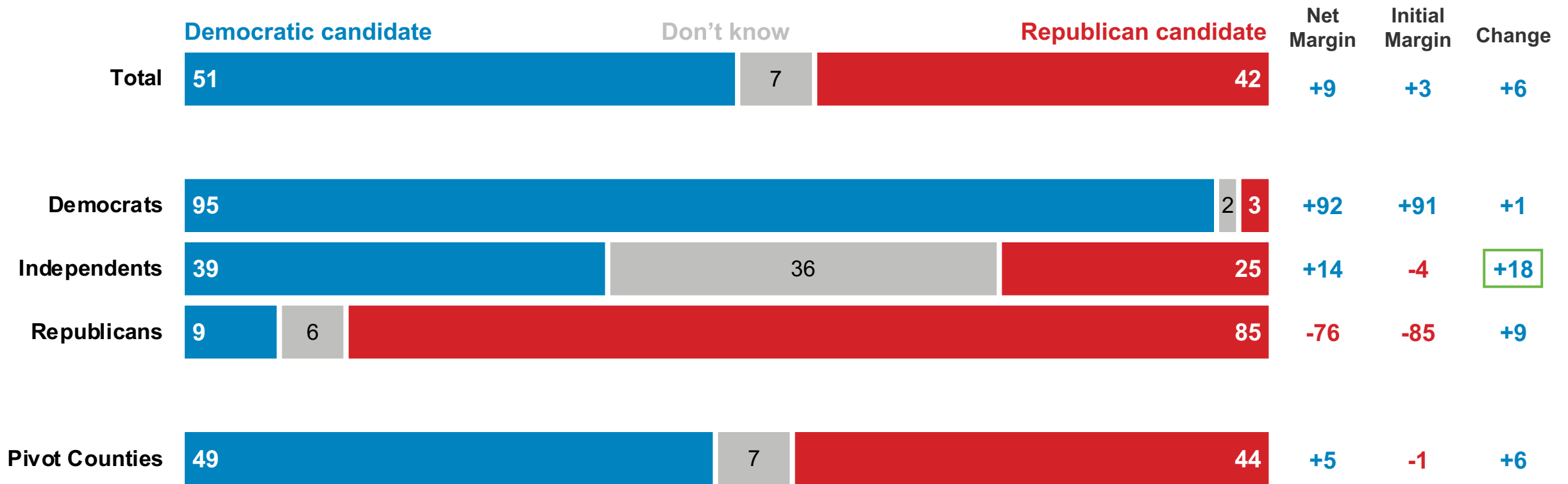
Generic Ballot for Congress – Vote After Health Care/Tax/Drug/Transparency Messaging

DEM MARGIN	INITIAL	AFTER MESSAGES ABOUT GOP IN CONGRESS (1/3 SAMPLE)	AFTER MESSAGES ABOUT MCCONNELL (1/3 SAMPLE)	AFTER MESSAGES ABOUT TRUMP (1/3 SAMPLE)
		E.g. Republicans in Congress oppose legislation that would crack down on political corruption...	E.g. Mitch McConnell is refusing to debate legislation that would crack down on political corruption...	E.g. President Trump opposes legislation that would crack down on political corruption...
Total	+3	+9	+12	+6
Pivot Counties	-1	+5	+6	+3

Movement & Targets

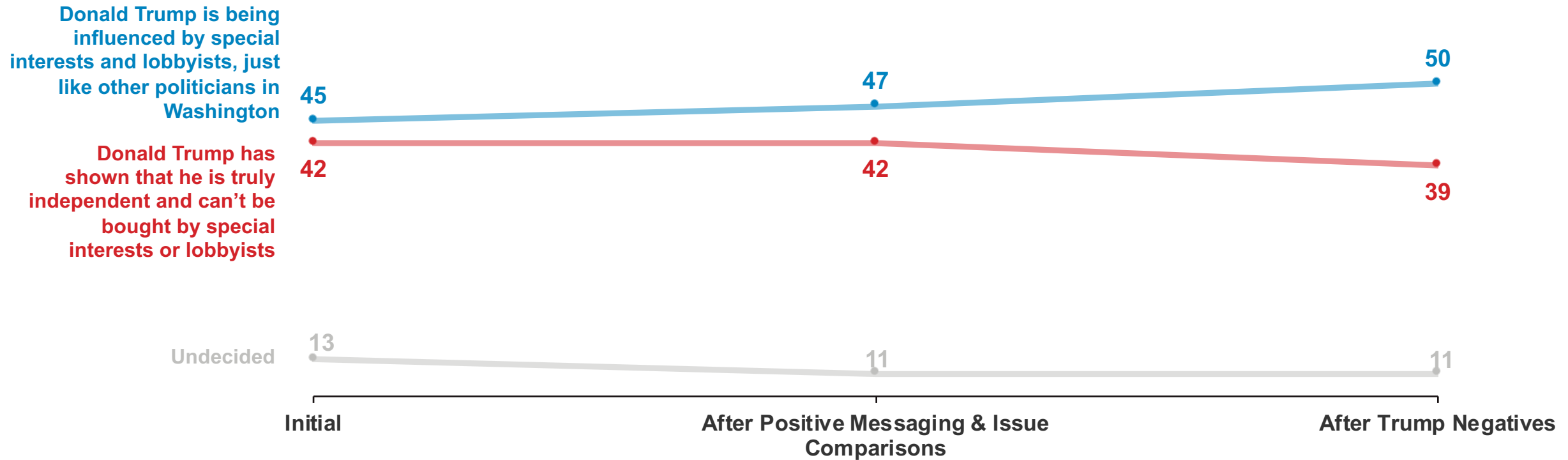
Our messaging results in a more significant shift in the generic Congressional ballot, particularly among Independents

[AFTER MESSAGING] If the election for U.S. Congress were today, would you vote for the Democratic candidate or the Republican?



Our messaging combats the notion that Trump can't be bought by special interests and slightly boosts Democrats' margins against him

Which of the following statements about Donald Trump do you agree with more?



In addition to independents, we see the most movement in the Presidential ballot among suburban, upscale, and GOP-leaning women

Vote Targets in the Race for President



Base

Always votes Democratic for President

Democrats (89% are base)

- Liberal Democrats (95%)

Black voters (84%)

Younger voters 18-44 (52%)

Swing

Sometimes votes for Trump but not always, or only lean toward Trump and don't end up agreeing that "Trump can't be bought"

Independents (39% are swing)

Republican women (24%)

College educated women (20%)

Suburban (18%)

Non-college (16%)

Oppo

Always solidly for Trump

Republicans (75% are oppo)

- Conservative Republicans (83%)

Older voters 65+ (44%)

Rural voters (44%)

Men (43%)

Congressional swing gravitate more toward corruption arguments on drug prices and guns than the electorate overall. McConnell messaging is particularly persuasive with this group.

Vote Targets in the Race for Congress



- A high percentage of Congressional swing voters (58%) believe cracking down on corruption and getting big money out of politics should be the top priority in Washington.
- Swing voters were much more likely to agree with Democratic arguments on drug prices and guns when those arguments included a strong corruption angle.
 - Swing voters side with the Democratic argument on drug prices by 36-points with the corruption angle and 14-points without the corruption angle.
 - Swing voters side with the Democratic argument on guns by 24-points with the corruption angle and side with the Republican argument on guns by 8-points without the corruption angle.
- Swing voters were most persuaded by “McConnell” messaging and more persuaded than the electorate overall. The final vote post McConnell messaging was +29 for a Democratic candidate among Swing, and +12 among the electorate overall.

Recommendations

Recommendations

1. **Rooting out corruption and the influence of big money in politics is a top priority for key voters who believe it affects every other issue we care about – from health care to the economy.**
2. **By committing to reform, Democratic candidates gain trust, particularly among independents.**
3. **Tying Trump to corporate special interests boosts our messaging against him, particularly on drug prices and guns.**
4. **We can undercut a core strength of Trump’s (the idea that he “can’t be bought”) by calling his pledge to take on those special interests just empty campaign promises. Remember that independents don’t see Trump as uniquely bad and largely see him as corrupt as other politicians in Washington today**
5. **Democratic candidates at every level should use Mitch McConnell as a “bogeyman.”**

Thank You

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