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YouGov Blue

From: Sean McElwee of Data for Progress and Emily Bello-Pardo, John Ray, and Mark White of YouGov Blue
To: Interested parties
Date: August 22, 2019
Subject: Favorability of Major Political Figures and Organizations in Battleground Districts

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Pundits have asserted that Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's progressive agenda threatens the Democratic Party's chances of making broad gains in the 2020 election and beyond. Unsourced polling leaked to *Axios* suggested that white, likely voters without college degrees view Ocasio-Cortez overwhelmingly unfavorably—a population *Axios* deemed crucial to the Democrats' future as the voters who will be "needed by Democrats in swing House districts." As this narrative unfolded in the media in recent weeks, Data for Progress and YouGov Blue began fielding a survey that included, among other things, a battery of favorability items measuring how voters felt toward several American political figures and organizations. This survey had the advantage of representing 1,033 registered voters in forty-two battleground congressional districts, making it particularly important for learning how these groups and individuals are viewed in the areas where control of the government is most likely to be decided in the future. In order to ensure that district selection did not bias the results, we relied on a collection of frontline districts compiled by a different, well-respected pollster—a list shown in Appendix A. In addition, we asked the pollster Civiqs to replicate our result, and a companion memo available on the Data for Progress website.

Additionally, Data for Progress and YouGov Blue conducted two oversample surveys. One was fielded on a sample of 215 Obama-Trump voters in our battleground districts who reported having voted for President Barack Obama in 2012, but then voting for Donald Trump in 2016. The second was fielded on a sample of 306 registered voters in our battleground districts who reported not having voted at all in 2016.
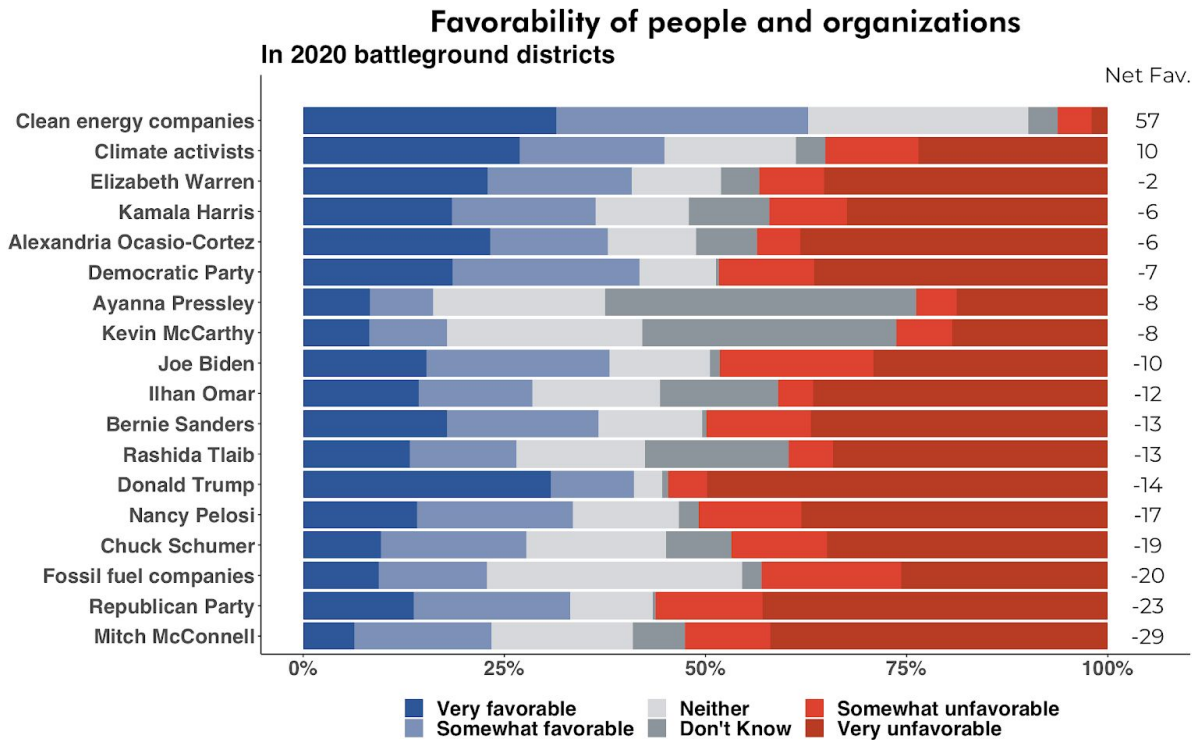
Key Findings:

- On net, among voters in battleground districts, Ocasio-Cortez polls at least as well as other major Democratic figures. Although all political figures had negative net favorability, Ocasio-Cortez is viewed roughly as favorably on net as Joe Biden, and more favorably on net than President Donald Trump and Democratic leadership.
- "Clean-energy companies" and "climate activists" both poll more favorably than "fossil fuel companies."
- Senator Elizabeth Warren had the highest net favorable ratings among the presidential candidates we tested.
- Each member of "the Squad"—Representatives Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Ayanna Pressley, Ilhan Omar, and Rashida Tlaib—has a higher net favorability than President Donald Trump, Senator Mitch McConnell, and the Republican Party in battleground

districts. While Trump's net favorability is lower, we note that his raw favorability is higher than each member of "the Squad."

Favorability, Main Sample

Early in our survey, we asked voters to report whether they felt very favorable, somewhat favorable, neither favorable nor unfavorable, somewhat unfavorable, or very unfavorable toward a given individual or organization, or if they have not heard of them. The red bars represent the proportion of respondents who have a somewhat or very unfavorable view of that person or organization, the blue bars represent the proportion with a somewhat or very favorable view, and the gray bars represent those who are unsure or have not heard of them. They are sorted by the net favorability, which is the share of respondents who view that person or organization favorably minus those who view that person or organization unfavorably with the net favorability displayed in the right column.

Favorability of people and organizations
In 2020 battleground districts

	Net Fav.
Clean energy companies	57
Climate activists	10
Elizabeth Warren	-2
Kamala Harris	-6
Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez	-6
Democratic Party	-7
Ayanna Pressley	-8
Kevin McCarthy	-8
Joe Biden	-10
Ilhan Omar	-12
Bernie Sanders	-13
Rashida Tlaib	-13
Donald Trump	-14
Nancy Pelosi	-17
Chuck Schumer	-19
Fossil fuel companies	-20
Republican Party	-23
Mitch McConnell	-29

Legend: Very favorable, Somewhat favorable, Neither, Don't Know, Somewhat unfavorable, Very unfavorable

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Our results suggest that in battleground congressional districts, Ocasio-Cortez is more popular than House leadership, is viewed on net significantly more favorably than other Republicans we included in our survey sample, and is statistically seen as favorably as Biden, the frontrunner in the Democratic primary for president. Voters hold roughly similar views of Ocasio-Cortez and Biden. About 38 percent of voters approve of Ocasio-Cortez and 44 percent disapprove of her, while 38 percent of voters approve of Biden and 48 percent disapprove of him.
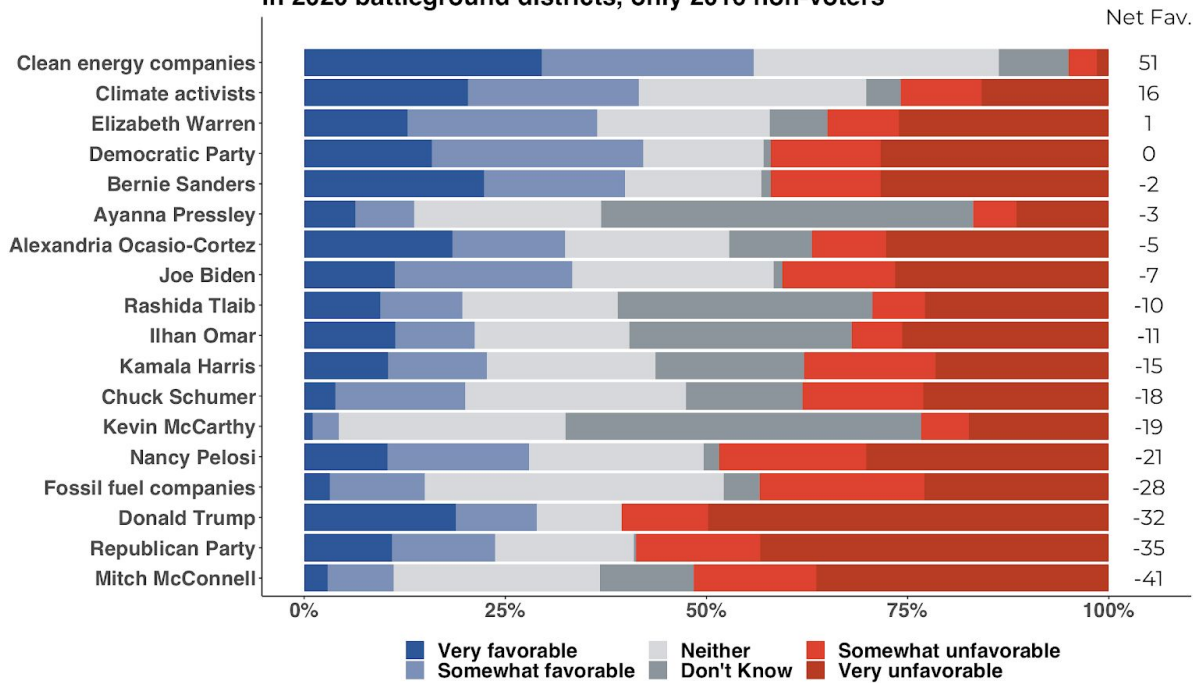
Our results suggest that top-tier presidential candidates Senators Elizabeth Warren and Kamala Harris are among the most popular political figures asked about in our survey. In line with [similar polling on this subject](#), Warren's net favorability is -2 percent. Harris and Ocasio-Cortez are tied in net favorability at -6 percent. These results are perhaps unsurprising: About one in six of our battleground districts are located in California—a state where Harris performs particularly well—and Warren is currently the rising second-place candidate in the primary.

Two broad classes of environmental groups, "clean-energy companies" and "climate activists," poll at the top of the list we asked respondents to evaluate. While the broad appeal of a company that can provide "clean energy" is not surprising, it is more surprising to see "climate activists" poll highly. Most political activists do not poll particularly well, even compared to other divisive political figures and organizations.

Favorability, Oversamples

The following plot shows favorability for respondents in our 2016 nonvoter oversample. That oversample included 306 respondents living in battleground districts who did *not* vote in the 2016 election. There are some similar patterns to the previous graph: Clean-energy companies and climate activists polled surprisingly well, Warren has a positive net favorability, and Republican figures have the lowest net favorability. Among nonvoters, respondents were much more likely to report being unsure or having no opinion either way about the candidates and groups in our list. Clear majorities of 2016 nonvoters had not heard of or had no opinion of Representatives Tlaib or McCarthy, for example, and pluralities reported the same for other members of "the Squad." Net favorability was similar among well-known candidates like Elizabeth Warren, Bernie Sanders, and Joe Biden, and among well-known organizations like the Democratic Party.

Favorability of people and organizations
In 2020 battleground districts, only 2016 non-voters

	Net Fav.
Clean energy companies	51
Climate activists	16
Elizabeth Warren	1
Democratic Party	0
Bernie Sanders	-2
Ayanna Pressley	-3
Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez	-5
Joe Biden	-7
Rashida Tlaib	-10
Ilhan Omar	-11
Kamala Harris	-15
Chuck Schumer	-18
Kevin McCarthy	-19
Nancy Pelosi	-21
Fossil fuel companies	-28
Donald Trump	-32
Republican Party	-35
Mitch McConnell	-41

Legend: Very favorable, Somewhat favorable, Neither, Don't Know, Somewhat unfavorable, Very unfavorable
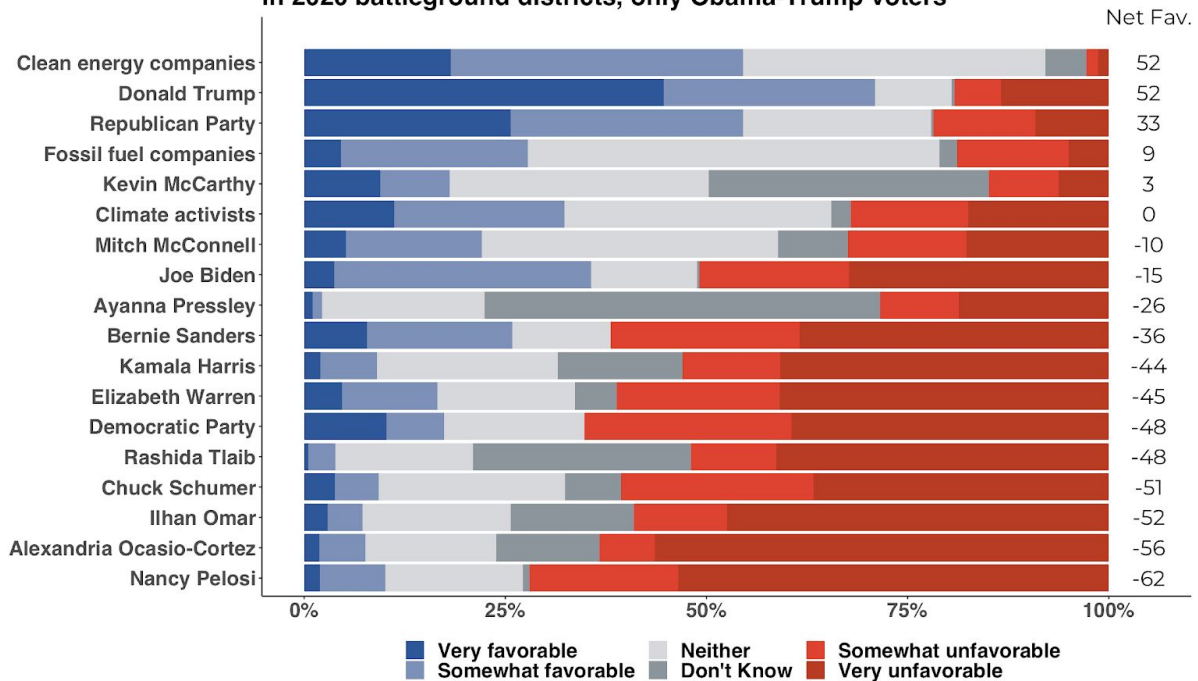
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We looked at another oversample of 215 respondents living in battleground districts who voted for Barack Obama in 2012 and Donald Trump in 2016. Their favorability attitudes are far different than the figures above. Donald Trump is the most favorably-viewed politician suggesting that most Obama–Trump voters are likely to stay in the Republican coalition. The Democratic politician with the best net favorability (-15 percent) was Joe Biden, showing that this is a subgroup within 2020 battleground districts that he performs better than other presidential frontrunners and Democratic politicians. However, his net favorability among this group is 5 points lower than his net favorability among the broader sample of these battleground voters.

When looking at net favorability, Ocasio-Cortez and Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi are the two least-liked politicians among this group. Despite Ocasio-Cortez earning more media criticism for progressive policies, people feel no more unfavorably toward her than Pelosi.

Favorability of people and organizations
In 2020 battleground districts, only Obama-Trump voters

	Net Fav.
Clean energy companies	52
Donald Trump	52
Republican Party	33
Fossil fuel companies	9
Kevin McCarthy	3
Climate activists	0
Mitch McConnell	-10
Joe Biden	-15
Ayanna Pressley	-26
Bernie Sanders	-36
Kamala Harris	-44
Elizabeth Warren	-45
Democratic Party	-48
Rashida Tlaib	-48
Chuck Schumer	-51
Ilhan Omar	-52
Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez	-56
Nancy Pelosi	-62

Legend: Very favorable · Somewhat favorable · Neither · Don't Know · Somewhat unfavorable · Very unfavorable
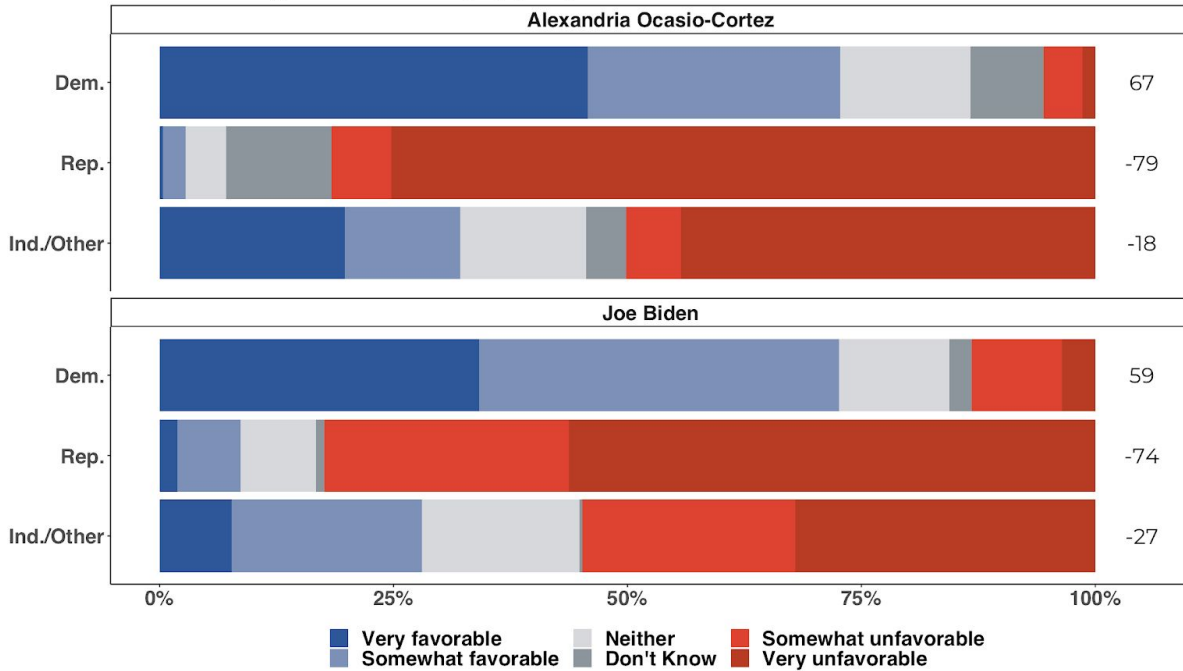
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The smaller sample sizes of 2016 nonvoters and Obama–Trump voters limit our ability to draw conclusions from multivariate analysis in the same way we can for the full sample. All remaining analysis in this memo focuses on the full battleground sample.

Favorability by Political Identification, Main Sample

In the following figure, we break out favorability of Biden and Ocasio-Cortez by party identification, with independent and third-party grouped together. We see that Biden and Ocasio-Cortez polarize both Republicans *and* Democrats, though Ocasio-Cortez is a more polarizing figure than Biden, as we would expect. Specifically, while 46 percent of Democrats feel very favorably and just 27 percent of Democrats feel somewhat favorably toward Ocasio-Cortez, Democrats are split 34 percent/39 percent on whether they feel very or somewhat favorably toward Biden. Similarly, Republicans feel very unfavorably toward Ocasio-Cortez by an overwhelming 75 percent, with just 6 percent somewhat unfavorable—a much more lopsided split than the 56 percent/26 percent very/somewhat unfavorable share on Biden. That split is just as strong for independents, 20 percent/12 percent of whom feel very or somewhat favorably toward Ocasio-Cortez compared to 8 percent/20 percent of whom feel very or somewhat favorably toward Biden. It's important to recognize though that while the intensity varies, neither Biden nor Ocasio-Cortez is winning over members of the opposite party. Instead, the variation is only in movement within intensity of favorability and unfavorability.

Favorability of Ocasio-Cortez and Biden
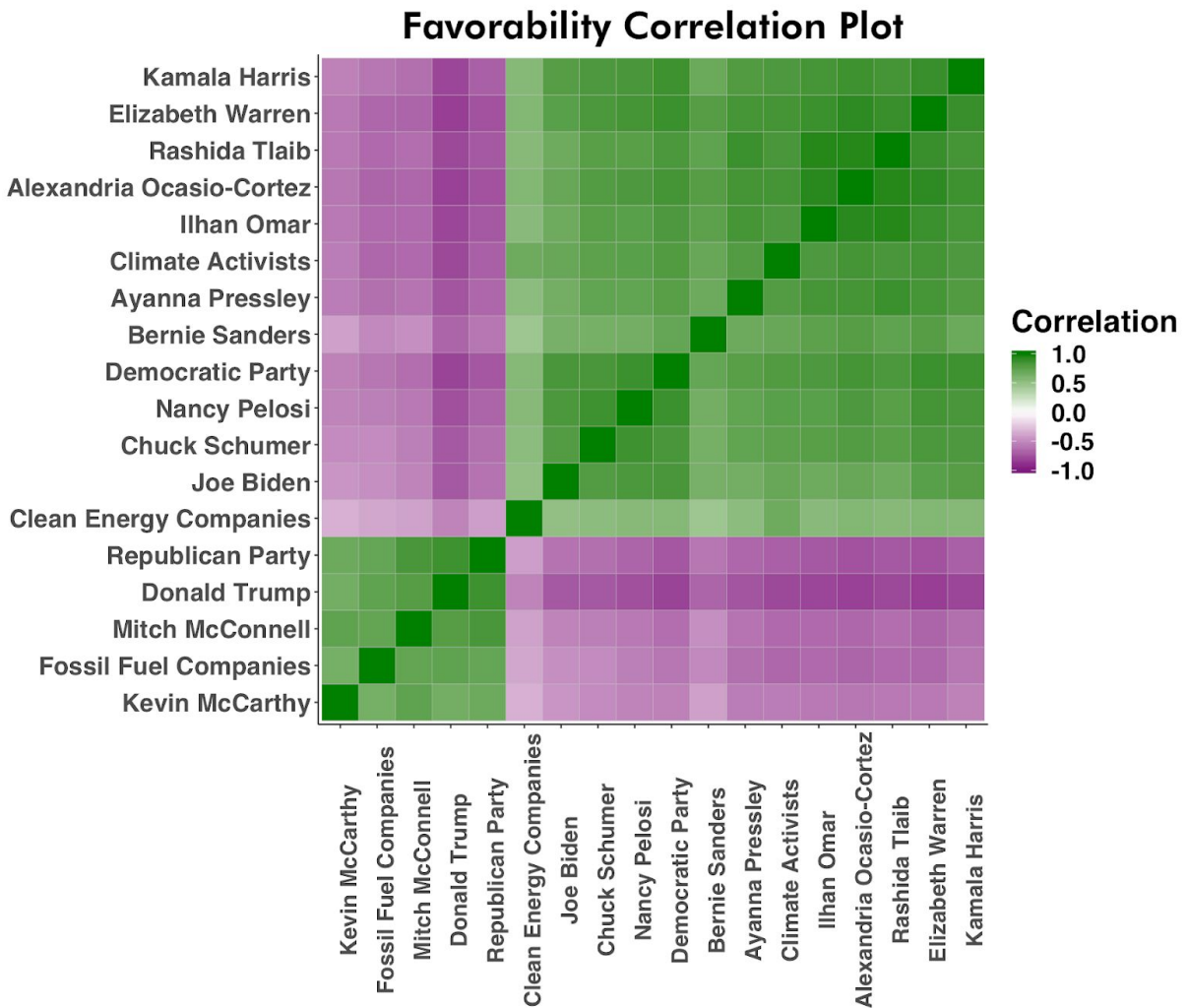### In 2020 battleground districts, by party identification

Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez

Dem.	67
Rep.	-79
Ind./Other	-18

Joe Biden

Dem.	59
Rep.	-74
Ind./Other	-27

0%   25%   50%   75%   100%

- ■ Very favorable
- ■ Somewhat favorable
- ▢ Neither
- ▨ Don't Know
- ■ Somewhat unfavorable
- ■ Very unfavorable

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Favorability correlations

We calculated correlations between each candidate and organization's approval in our dataset to get a detailed picture of "what goes with what" in these favorability ratings. In the analysis visualized below, we calculated pairwise correlations between each political figure or organization in our favorability dataset, among respondents who reported having an opinion about that person or organization. These correlations can range from -1 (a strong negative correlation, which we would shade as more purple here) to 1 (a strong positive correlation, which we would shade as more green here). The variation in the shades of each color represents the strength of the relationship, with a darker shade representing a stronger correlation.For example, the very first cell, which corresponds to approval of House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy on the x-axis and Senator Kamala Harris on the y-axis, is medium-purple, indicating that respondents who approve of McCarthy are likely to disapprove of Harris, and vice versa. For ease of reading, we organized the plot so that clustering together people and organizations that are similar to one another are clustered together.

Approval or disapproval of the candidates and groups in our data correlate as one would expect. For example, presidential candidates, "the Squad", mainstream Democrats, and Republicans all cluster together, and partisanship is the main driver. Candidates who approve of one Democrat tend to approve of another Democrat, and the same with Republicans. The green sections of the graph show the positive correlations between Democrats and other Democrats (in the top

right of the graph) and between Republicans and other Republicans (in the bottom left of the graph). In contrast, the purple shows the negative correlations between approval or disapproval of Democratic and Republican figures.

Harris and Warren are strongly correlated, contrary to the general view that either candidate represents particularly divergent "lanes" of the Democratic party. While Warren and Sanders are usually clustered together in popular discourse, the results here show that Sanders is not very strongly associated with any other Democratic figure—the lighter shading across his horizontal and vertical lines convey this finding. Biden, usually associated with Harris, appears in another section of the graph altogether, clustering with establishment organizations and figures like the Democratic Party, Pelosi, and Senator Chuck Schumer.

Favorability Correlation Plot

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"The Squad"—composed of Representatives Tlaib, Ocasio-Cortez, Omar, and Pressley—are mostly clustered together. Similarly, the Republican Party, President Donald Trump, Mitch McConnell, and Representative Kevin McCarthy.

Conclusion

Favorability and unfavorability of the politicians we polled is largely polarized along partisan lines. Perhaps surprisingly, "the Squad" is viewed more favorably on net than many other prominent political figures and organizations, including many of their fellow Democrats. However, opinions of these legislators are more polarized than are opinions of other legislators included in our favorability battery, and subject to lower awareness among parts of the electorate. However, the idea that Ocasio-Cortez is a unique electoral liability is not consistent with our polling. Her net favorable numbers are comparable to Biden's. In addition, we do not find any evidence that Biden is uniquely "electable," in our survey, both Senator Warren and Senator Harris had higher net favorable numbers.

Methodology

On behalf of Data for Progress, YouGov Blue fielded a survey of 1,033 voter-file-verified US voters in a sample of forty-two congressional districts widely considered to be "2020 battleground districts"—i.e., the congressional districts considered most likely to flip party control or to be highly competitive in the 2019-2020 cycle. The battleground district sample portion of the survey fielded from July 27, 2019–August 9, 2019 on YouGov's online panel while the oversamples fielded through August 15. The survey was weighted to be representative of the population of US voters who live in these districts by age, race/ethnicity, sex, education, US Census geography, and 2016 Presidential vote choice. The weights ranged from 0.2 to 6.1, with a mean of 1 and a standard deviation of 0.7. We also sampled 215 Obama–Trump voters and 306 2016 nonvoters in these districts. Weights for Obama–Trump voters ranged from 0.09 to 6.2, with a mean of 1 and standard deviation of 1.2. Weights for 2016 nonvoters ranged from 0.08 to 6.6, with a mean of 1 and a standard deviation of 1.2. An appendix at the end of this memo lists the districts in our sample.

Appendix A: Congressional districts in sample

Congressional Districts	
AZ-01	NH-01
CA-10	NJ-02
CA-21	NJ-03
CA-25	NJ-07
CA-39	NJ-11
CA-45	NM-02
CA-48	NV-03
CA-49	NY-11
CO-06	NY-19
GA-06	NY-22
IA-01	OK-05
IA-02	PA-07
IA-03	PA-08
IL-06	PA-17
IL-14	SC-01
KS-03	TX-07
ME-02	TX-32
MI-08	UT-04
MI-11	VA-02
MN-02	VA-07
MN-07	WA-08