

To: Interested Parties

From: Data for Progress ¹

Subject: Primary Warning Signs for Chris Coons

- Before Delaware Democratic primary voters were shown arguments for and against Senator Chris Coons, he polls behind a generic more liberal, female challenger in his primary by four percentage points. When shown arguments against him, that number grows to 21 points.
- When shown arguments against and for Coons, his favorability rating changes from +38 to -10 points and +14 points, respectively, which suggests that voters' minds are fluid about supporting Coons.
- Young Delaware Democratic primary voters (those between the ages of eighteen and thirty-four) were especially responsive to progressive policy ideas. When made aware of his centrist voting record, they were much more likely *not* to support Coons.
- Delaware Democratic primary voters support democracy reforms such as expanding the Supreme Court (+22) and ending the filibuster (+12).
- Delaware Democratic primary voters also support the Green New Deal (40 percent net support).

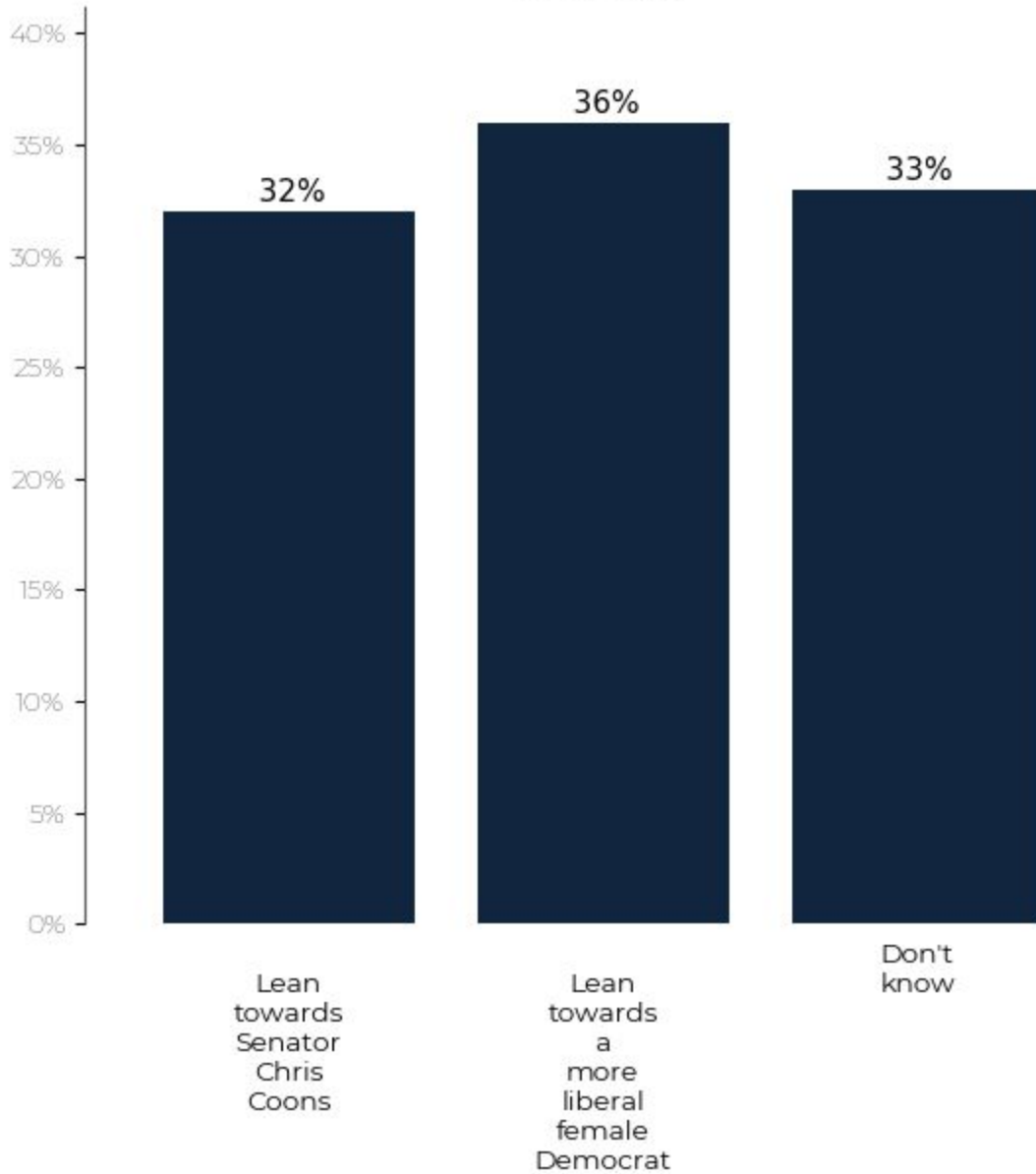
Data for Progress conducted a poll from November 15 through 25, 2019, in the state of Delaware, to assess the upcoming Democratic primary race for Chris Coons's Senate seat. Senator Coons has been serving as the Junior Senator from Delaware since 2010. The primary election in Delaware is separate from the state's presidential primary, and will occur in September 2020. Despite Hillary Clinton winning Delaware by over 10 points, Senator Coons currently sits as the eleventh-most-likely Democrat to vote with the president, according to [FiveThirtyEight's tally](#) of support for President Trump's policies.

Baseline

To test Coon's vulnerability in a primary, we looked at his baseline support against a hypothetical female challenger in the primary who is more liberal than Coons--Congresswoman Lisa Blunt Rochester. Given this hypothetical challenge, Delaware voters preferred Coons over Blunt by four points (35 percent to 31 percent); however, 34 percent of voters were unsure, leaving substantial room for Blunt Rochester to win over voters. We then asked about a generic female candidate more liberal than Coons. Coons was underwater by four points in this matchup (36 percent to 32 percent, with 33 percent undecided).

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DELAWARE VOTERS LEAN TOWARDS A PRIMARY CHALLENGER TO CHRIS COONS



VITMS DE-Senv, 528 Registered Dems, 11/15-11/25

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Next, we showed voters arguments against Coons, and tested voters' support for him. We then showed voters arguments for Coons and tested voters' support for him once more. This

simulates the messaging that voters might see during the primary. All of the arguments we used were based on Coons’s voting record and stated policy preferences.

After seeing a battery of negative arguments against Senator Coons—such as his support for Trump’s judges—voters preferred our hypothetical candidate by 21 points (45 percent to 24 percent).

However, after voters were shown arguments in favor of Coons—such as his introduction of bipartisan legislation to protect Special Counsel Robert Mueller—this 21-point gap shrunk back to the original difference (4 points preferring our hypothetical challenger). This sensitivity to arguments for and against Coons points to the potential for a strong challenger to break through.

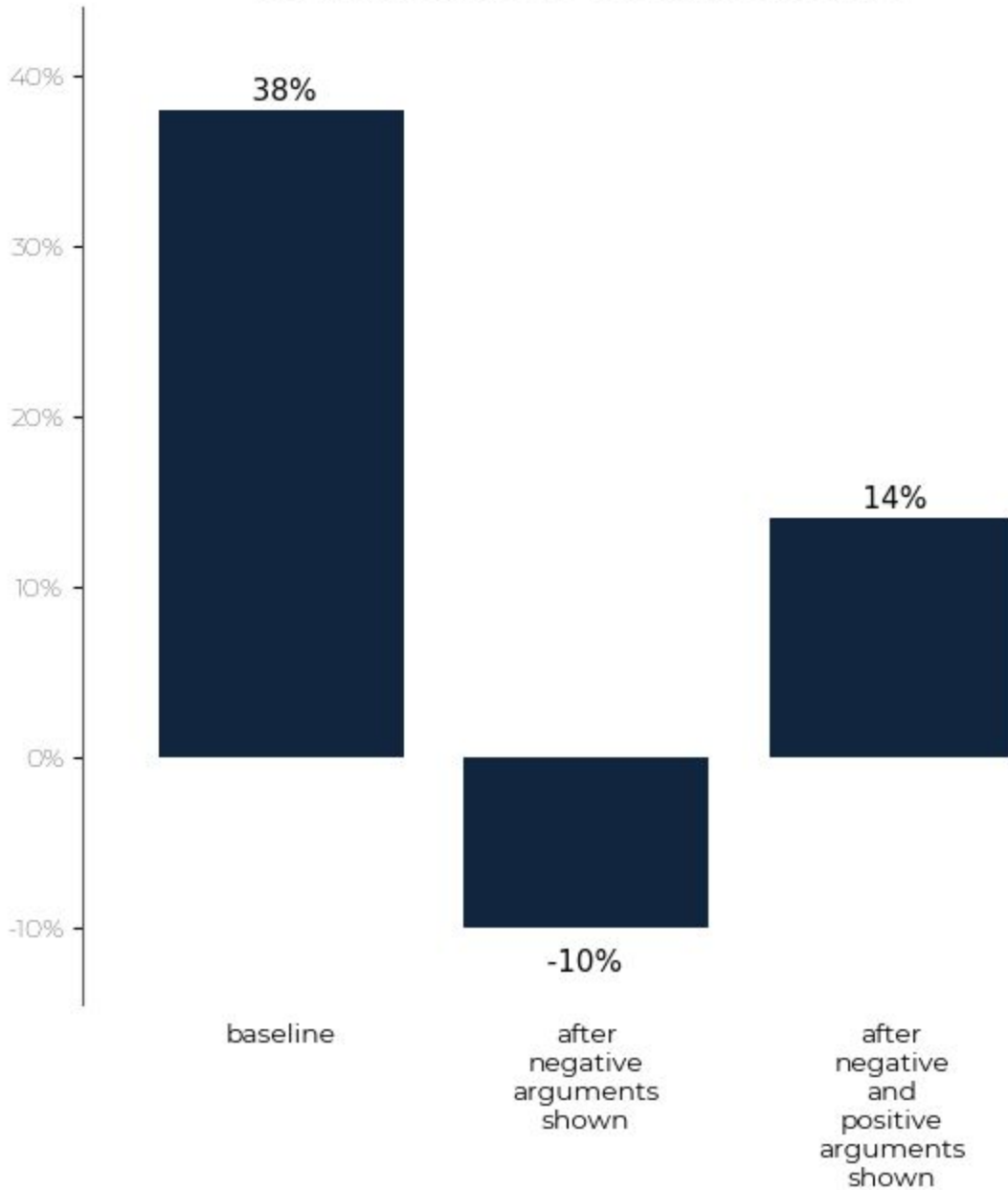
	Baseline	After seeing arguments against Sen. Coons	After seeing arguments for <i>and</i> against Sen. Coons
Lean toward Sen. Coons	32%	24%	32%
Lean toward a more liberal, female Democrat	36%	45%	36%
Don't know	33%	31%	32%

We also examined Senator Coons’s baseline favorability, followed by favorability after negative and positive arguments. As with our “hypothetical challenger” questions, Senator Coons’s favorability decreased sharply after voters were shown negative arguments, with voters initially supporting Senator Coons by 38 points, to voters opposing him by 10 points after seeing negative arguments. Interestingly, his favorability rebounded after voters were shown positive arguments, to a net favorability of 14 points. This is, of course, well below the original net 38-point favorability he enjoyed initially, showing that negative arguments against Senator Coons may be persuasive to some percentage of voters even *after* seeing both positive and negative arguments.

	Sen. Coons Favorable	Sen. Coons Unfavorable	Sen. Coons Net Favorability
Baseline	62%	24%	+38
After seeing arguments against Sen. Coons	38%	48%	-10

After seeing arguments for <i>and</i> against Sen. Coons	49%	35%	+14
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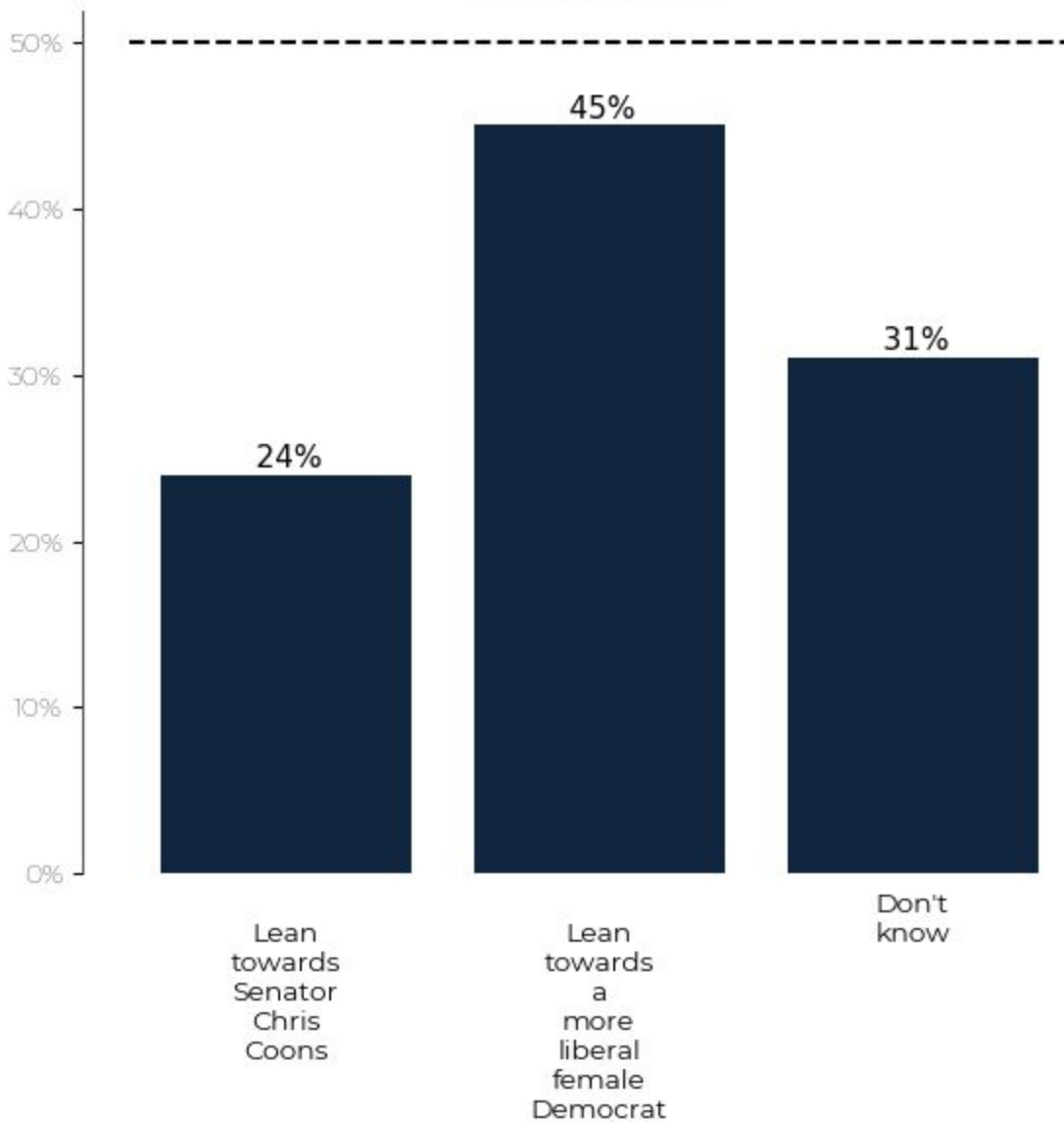
CHRIS COONS NET FAVORABILITY IS INFLUENCED BY MESSAGING



Effective Messages Supporting and Opposing Senator Coons

We tested a number of different arguments in order to determine those most effective against Senator Coons.

AFTER BEING SHOWN ARGUMENTS AGAINST CHRIS COONS VOTERS STRONGLY SUPPORT A PRIMARY CHALLENGE

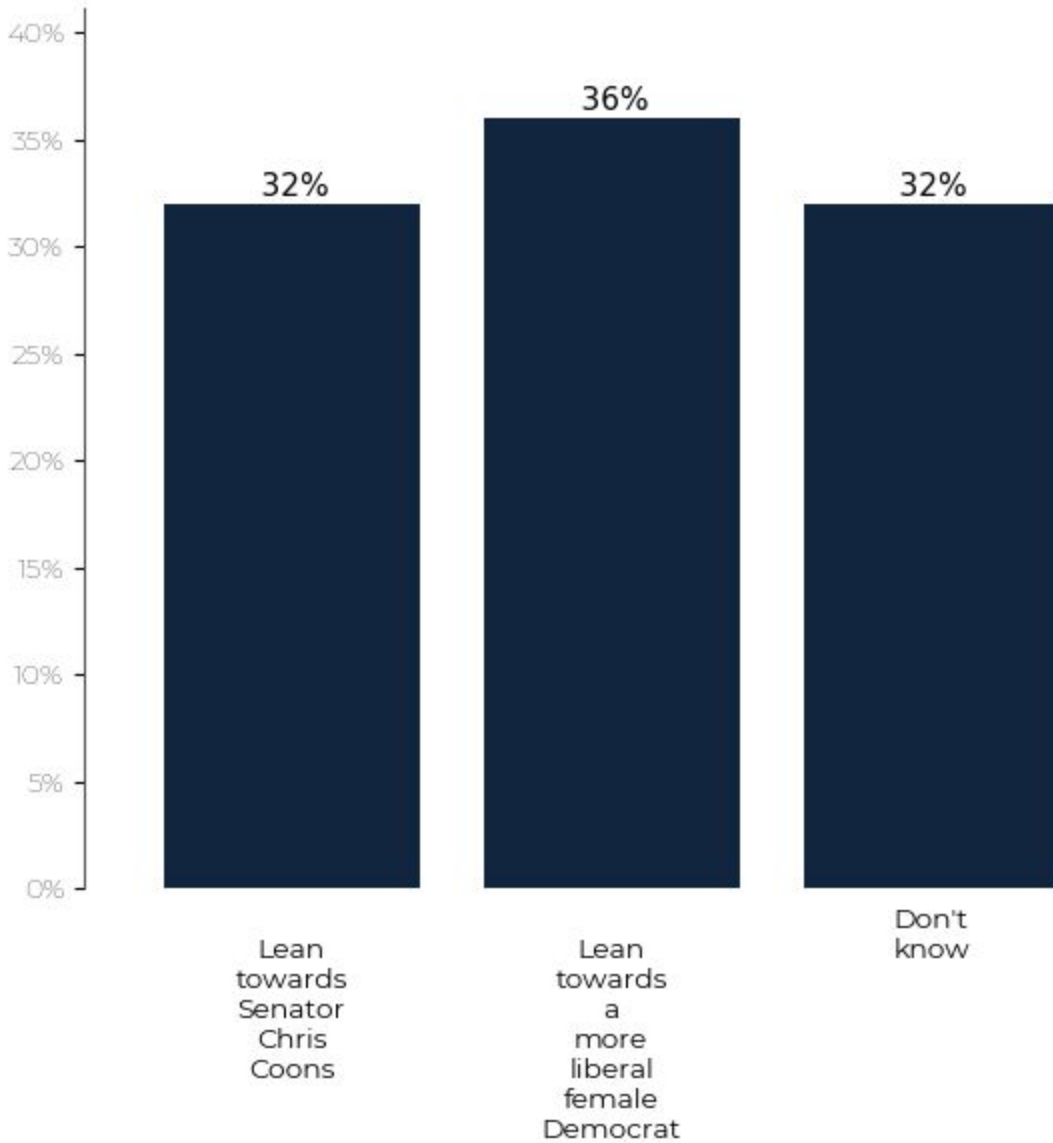


Arguments Against Sen Coons	Very Persuasive + Somewhat Persuasive	A Little Persuasive + Not Persuasive At All	Net Persuasive
Coons voted to confirm 18 Trump judicial nominees opposed by national civil rights groups because of their refusal to endorse Brown v. Board of Education, the ruling that desegregated the nation's schools.	56%	43%	+13%
Coons is the co-chair of a Washington-based group that accepts funding from the Koch brothers and has attacked proposals to expand Social Security.	55%	44%	+11%
Coons joined with Republicans to vote to repeal a major part of the Wall Street reform law that was passed after the 2008 banking crisis.	55%	45%	+10%
Coons opposes the Green New Deal, which is an ambitious set of policies to confront the threat of climate change.	54%	46%	+8%
Coons voted to confirm 10 of Trump's	53%	47%	+6%

cabinet nominees, making him one of the Senate’s most Trump-friendly Democrats.			
Coons is a strong supporter of charter schools that some civil rights groups in Delaware say have contributed to the resegregation of Delaware’s public schools.	52%	48%	+4%
Coons has accepted over \$2.6 million in corporate PAC checks from special interests like the banking, pharmaceutical, and oil industries.	51%	50%	+1%
Coons opposes Medicare-for-All.	50%	50%	Even

When presenting the same voters with supportive arguments for both Coons’s ability to “work across the aisle” and his efforts to beat back against President Trump, Coons narrowly lost to a more liberal, female candidate by four points. However, his favorability strongly rose, with voters supporting him 39 percent to 25 percent.

AFTER SEEING BOTH POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE MESSAGES, VOTERS LEAN TOWARDS A CHALLENGER TO CHRIS COONS



VITMS DE-Senv, 528 Registered Dems, 11/15-11/25

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Argument for Sen Coons	Very Persuasive + Somewhat Persuasive	A Little Persuasive + Not Persuasive at All	Net Persuasive
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<p>Coons has stood up to the Trump Administration to protect gay rights and our diplomats. When the Trump Administration rolled back a policy that granted visas to same-sex partners of LGBTQ diplomats who had unions which were not recognized by their home countries, Coons signed a letter urging Secretary of State Mike Pompeo oppose the change.</p>	<p>61%</p>	<p>39%</p>	<p>+22%</p>
<p>Coons isn't a Trump Democrat. When Trump has overstepped, Coons has responded. His relationships across the aisle allowed him to introduce bipartisan legislation to prevent President Trump from firing special counsel Robert Mueller.</p>	<p>60%</p>	<p>40%</p>	<p>+20%</p>
<p>This is a divided country, which means you sometimes have to work with Republicans to get things done. Senator Coons successfully worked across the aisle to pass bipartisan legislation</p>	<p>60%</p>	<p>40%</p>	<p>+20%</p>

<p>in the Senate to curb the opioid crisis. Someone who can't compromise won't get anything done for Delaware.</p>			
<p>A lot of Democrats make promises they can't meet. Senator Coons doesn't support Medicare-for-All, but Medicare-for-All won't happen. Coons supports practical policies that can actually pass in order to build on the success of the Affordable Care Act.</p>	<p>55%</p>	<p>45%</p>	<p>+10%</p>

Policy Battery

Progressive policy issues proved to be very popular among Delaware Democratic primary voters. The Green New Deal was popular with 64 percent supporting and 24 percent opposing.

We also tested voters' support of less-discussed policies. (Before asking their support, voters were given arguments for and against the policies.) Voters young and old alike strongly supported adding justices to the Supreme Court 49 percent to 27 percent. This policy also enjoyed strong support among those with advanced education (associate's degree or some college, 60 percent; bachelor's degree 46 percent; postgrad, 59 percent). Support was also strong among suburban women, who support court expansion 46 percent to 20 percent. Those who were at least forty-five years old were much more likely to support this issue than oppose it, too.

When asked voters whether they would support a Democratic Senate Majority Leader ending the filibuster, voters supported the measure by 12 points (43 percent supporting to 31 percent opposing).

Conclusion

Even this far out, polls often signal to political shifts in the country, and they can be used to show what messages may or may not be effective. Senator Coons has an impressive fundraising record, and he has yet to hop on the airwaves in his state's expensive media market. However, being tied against both a named possible statewide challenger and a generic, more liberal, female one could signal that Coons is extremely vulnerable to a progressive challenger.

Policy Questions:

Would you support or oppose the next Democratic President adding seats to the Supreme Court? Proponents say that this is necessary to restore balance by reducing the influence of small number of ultra-conservative justices and that without this measure many positive reforms will be impossible to enact. Opponents say that this creates a dangerous standard and only further politicizes the court and that the intended effects will be short term as the Republicans will just add Justices next time a Republican is President. Would you support or oppose the next Democratic President adding seats to the Supreme Court?

Do you support or oppose the next Democratic Senate Majority Leader ending the filibuster? Proponents say that the filibuster results in government gridlock by allowing a small minority to strike down popular legislation to fight climate change and expand healthcare access. Opponents say that the filibuster ensures that the minority party can block legislation, such as Republican attempts to repeal the Affordable Care Act, and that by repealing the filibuster it may hurt Democrats in the long run by removing a valuable tool for the minority party. Do you support or oppose the next Democratic Senate Majority Leader ending the filibuster?

The Green New Deal is a plan to create millions of jobs by transitioning to 100% clean energy and investing in public infrastructure, paid for by increasing income taxes on individuals earning more than \$200,000 a year. Do you support or oppose the Green New Deal?

Questions were answered using response options "strongly support," "support," "oppose," "strongly oppose" and "don't know," which were presented in random order.

Methodology

Between November 15th and November 25th, 2019, Data for Progress conducted a survey of 528 Democratic registered voters matched to the voter file in the Delaware using a text-to-web survey from respondents from a commercial voter file. The sample was weighted to be representative of likely voters by age, gender, education, urbanicity, race, and voting history. The survey was conducted in English.