Data For Progress:
Green New Deal Messaging

Qualitative Research Findings by The Pollux Group
on behalf of Data For Progress

May 2019

Research Overview

Background

- Data For Progress sought to ascertain general perceptions of the Green New Deal among persuadable voter profiles, as well as determine which messages resonate most with particular groups of voters.

- To this end, Data for Progress commissioned three focus groups: one with base Democrats, one with unaffiliated voters, and one with persuadable voters who had switched from Romney to Clinton or Obama to Trump in their presidential vote from 2012 to 2016.

- All three focus groups were conducted in Los Angeles, CA on April 2, 2019. Focus groups were moderated by David Atkins of The Pollux Group, a qualitative research firm specializing in political, non-profit and consumer technology research.

Objectives

- More specifically, this research sought to answer the following questions:*

  - What do they see as the biggest issue facing the country?
  - What are their main criteria when deciding how to vote?
  - What are the main issues they're worried about in the future?
  - What is their reaction to the Green New Deal?
  - What messages are most effective to promote the Green New Deal?
  - What parts of the Green New Deal are most intriguing?
  - What are the most influential arguments against the Green New Deal?

As the data gathered was qualitative in nature, conclusions should always be drawn with caution due to the limited sample population in the study.

Schedule of Sessions

Date	Time	City	Segment
4/2/2019	2:30PM	Los Angeles	Base Democrats
4/2/2019	5:30PM	Los Angeles	Independents
4/2/2019	7:45PM	Los Angeles	Persuadables

Key Respondent Specifications

Overall Criteria:

- Mix of self-identified genders
- Standard employment and past participation security screens
- Registered to vote at current address
- Voted in November 2018 midterms
- Votes at least most of the time
- Mix of educational attainment
- Mix of employment status and income
- Mix of ages and marital status
- Representative sample of ethnic backgrounds
- Able to articulate top three policy concerns

Further Respondent Specifications

Base Democrats:

- Self-described Democrat
- Voted in the Democratic presidential primary in 2016
- Aware of 2016 presidential primary choice
- Voted for Barack Obama in November 2012
- Voted for Hillary Clinton in November 2016
- Self-identified liberal or progressive political beliefs
- Identifies more with liberal political positions as evaluated by an issue question battery

Further Respondent Specifications

Independents:

- Did not vote in the Republican Primary in 2016
- Voted for either Obama or Romney in 2012 (majority Obama)
- No more than 2 Self-described Independent
- Trump 2016 voters and one 3rd-party 2016 voter
- November 2016: 2 Trump voters, 1 third-party voter, rest for Clinton
- Self-identified moderate/middle-of-the-road political beliefs
- Identifies more with moderate political positions as evaluated by an issue question battery

Further Respondent Specifications

Persuadables/Switch voters:

- Majority self-described Independent
- No more than 1 who voted in the Republican Primary in 2016
- Voted for Mitt Romney in 2012 and Hillary Clinton in 2016, OR
- Voted for Barack Obama in 2012 and Donald Trump in 2016
- Self-identified moderate/middle-of-the-road political beliefs
- Majority identify more with moderate to center-right political positions as evaluated by an issue question battery

Focus of Research Report

- **Note that this report focuses only on the aspects of the research directly related to the Green New Deal.**

- Part of this research also delved into the perceptions of Base Democrats and Independents regarding the current political climate and the 2020 presidential election. The results of that research are available upon request.

Summary of Insights

Summary of Insights

- **The Green New Deal already has support from base Democrats, but there are pathways to expand its base of support among independent and persuadable voters.**

- Base Dems are already on board: they understand the impending climate catastrophe and favor bold, structural solutions to solve it.

- Independents and swing voters can be swayed by focusing on local impacts and tangible benefits, such as clean air and clean water, as well as messaging about leaving a better world to the next generation.

- Economic benefits, especially job creation, were seen as especially strong selling points to independent and swing voters.

Summary of Insights

- **Taxing the wealthy and major corporations to fund the Green New Deal is popular among all segments.**

- The threat of a personal tax hike was the most persuasive talking point against the Green New Deal, but all segments were eager to have wealthy individuals and corporations like Amazon pay for it through an increase in their taxes.

- Other arguments against tackling climate change, such as the idea that American efforts were useless without buy-in from other countries, were not persuasive.

- Private-sector involvement is seen as positive, which seems to indicate that companies can enhance their reputation by offering climate solutions.

Summary of Insights

- **Swing voters support other supposedly radical parts of the Green New Deal, including a jobs guarantee for work to decarbonize.**

- Other aspects of the Green New Deal were also political winners for swing voters: ending reliance on fossil fuels was seen as a way to end reliance on Middle East oil and extricate the United States from military adventurism that caused war and refugee crises.

- Creating sustainable agriculture was also universally positive: for base Democrats, it promoted an ethical sustainable food supply, while for swing voters, it was seen as a way to reduce reliance on imports.

Green New Deal: General Reactions

Awareness of the Green New Deal Very High

- **Most participants had heard of the Green New Deal (GND).** Even those least familiar with it understood that it had to do with fixing climate change.

- **Base Dems and Independents were best-informed.** Independents understood that the GND primarily involved a broad transformation of infrastructure toward renewable energy, while base Dems also had some awareness of the jobs guarantee aspect of the proposal.

- **Persuadables were influenced by disinformation.** Some members of the persuadables group repeated right-wing attacks on the GND, such as the "trains to Hawaii" or "cow farts" attacks.

- **AOC was seen as the main proponent.** Senators Warren and Sanders were also mentioned as supporting it.

What They Said

"Tear down everyone's house and build everyone a new house. And a bullet train to Hawaii." – Persuadable

"If you think humans aren't causing it, you won't care as bad, but if you do, then this is the all-in approach you're going to have to it." – Independent

"I've also heard about guaranteed employment from the government, which sounds great if it actually works." – Base Dem

Reaction to Intro GND Outline Was Mixed

- **Base Dems were enthusiastic.** They agreed with the Green New Deal in principle and agreed that it was necessary.

- **Other groups were skeptical.** While most agreed with the ideas of the Green New Deal, they were very skeptical that it could be implemented, or that it was possible to get off fossil fuels without economic harm.

- **Taxing Amazon was very popular.** Both the Independent and Persuadable groups mentioned the idea that Amazon paid no taxes, and that they and similar corporations should be taxed to support GND objectives.

- **Local action was important.** Even those who were skeptical saw the possibilities of implementing GND-style infrastructure and efficiency programs at the local government level.

What They Said

"Big business will try to get out of it like they always do, so what's the plan for that?" – Independent

"This is for effects that will be felt decades from now, so there will be pushback because of that." – Base Dem

"Why not just have Amazon pay for it? They don't pay for anything at all." – Persuadable

Green New Deal: Concept Evaluation

Ten GND Elements Were Tested

Respondents were shown ten elements of the Green New Deal and asked to rank them.

A. Ensuring clean air and clean water for all Americans

B. 100% electric vehicles on America's roads

C. Investment in a 100% renewable energy grid

D. A tax on carbon pollution

E. A job for whoever wants one building and maintaining green and energy-efficient infrastructure

F. Removal of lead from America's water and infrastructure

G. Large-scale reforestation of lands damaged by high-pollution industrial activity

H. Ending America's reliance on fossil fuels both from domestic and international sources

I. Justice for low-income communities and communities of color, which are disproportionately affected by pollution

J. Developing America's sustainable agriculture system, ensuring a healthy and reliable food supply

Clean Air and Water Was Most Popular

- **A clear majority in every group picked Element A as favorite: "Ensuring Clean Air and Clean Water for all Americans."** Clean air and clean water were immediately relevant to health concerns, and relatable for all respondents.

- **Immediate health impacts of pollution were well understood.** High asthma rates in polluted communities were mentioned several times, and the clean water crisis in Flint, Michigan was also top of mind.

- **Local impacts were an overriding concern.** All groups were interested in making sure that the effects of the Green New Deal would be felt locally in their communities, rather than just systemically.

- **In the independent group, removal of lead from water came in third.** Fifth in the other groups, the focus on lead was not only connected to Flint, but to broad concerns about safe water.

Sustainable Agriculture Was Key

- **Sustainable Agriculture was the second most important concern overall**: it was second among persuadables, and third among base Dems. Notably it was only fifth among independents.

- **Like air and water, respondents felt it had immediate impacts on human well-being.** Issues that related most strongly to immediate health and wellness concerns tended to override systemic or long-term problems.

- **It was understood by most that droughts, fires and floods would impact agriculture.** While the connection between climate and agriculture was not immediately clear for some, most grasped the impact warming would have on food production.

- **Nationalism and pesticides also played different roles for different groups.** For persuadable switchers, much was about reducing the need for foreign agricultural imports. To base Dems, factory farms and pesticide use played a larger role.

Ending Reliance on Fossil Fuels Was Also Crucial

- **Ending reliance on fossil fuels was the second most important for base Dems and independents.** However, it was toward the bottom for persuadables, who tended to be the biggest skeptics of human causes, and who were most concerned about the economic impact of reducing fossil fuel use, and who feared rising fuel costs as a result.

- **Ending reliance on fossil fuels was both a security issue and a climate issue, especially for independents.** Base Dems tended to focus most on actual climate and warming impacts, while independents and sympathetic persuadables also mentioned the strategic advantage of relying on the Middle East for America's energy needs, both to reduce conflict and immigration/refugee concerns.
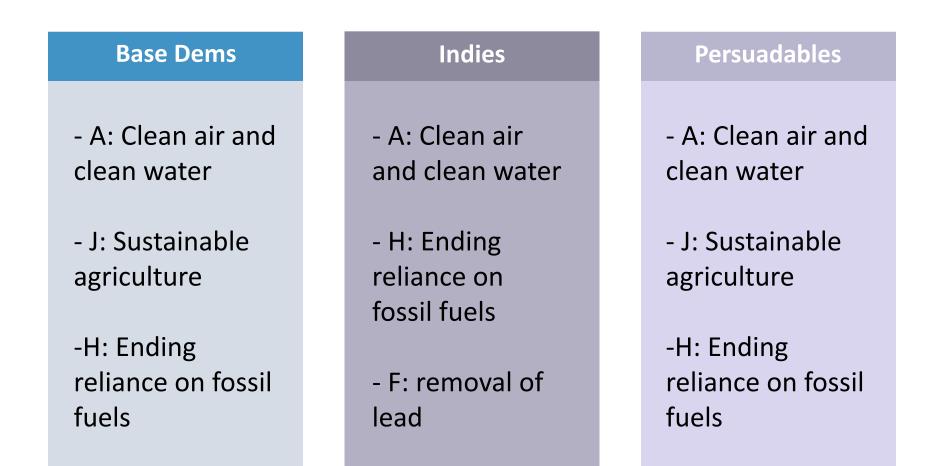
Dems & Persuadables Cared About A Renewable Energy Grid

- **Investment in a 100% renewable energy grid** was third among persuadables, fourth among base Dems, and seventh among independents. It seemed like a realistic and helpful goal that would provide a lot of green jobs without negative impacts.

- **By contrast, 100% electric vehicles on America's roads was much less compelling**. This was mostly because it seemed unrealistic: respondents felt that gas-powered cars would be on the road for quite some time, and that a transition to 100% electric cars would not be feasible until the charging infrastructure were put in place first, and until electric cars with adequate range could become widely affordable.

- **Notably, while the notion of "a job for whoever wants one building and maintaining green and energy-efficient infrastructure"** was toward the bottom among base Dems and at the very bottom among independents, it was 4th place among persuadables. Jobs and economic issues were key overriding concerns for these switch voters, and while they were most conservative on many issues they were very open to a range of aggressive jobs and economic sustenance proposals, including UBI and job guarantees.

- **Base Democrats and especially independents felt that a jobs guarantee would be a hard promise to keep.** They felt that logistical and economic hurdles made it unrealistic, some felt it would be unfair to those who did have jobs already.

- **By contrast, 100% electric vehicles on America's roads was much less compelling**. This was mostly because it seemed unrealistic: respondents felt that gas-powered cars would be on the road for quite some time, and that a transition to 100% electric cars would not be feasible until the charging infrastructure were put in place first, and until electric cars with adequate range could become widely affordable. There were also concerns about battery disposal.

Most Popular Elements

Base Dems

- A: Clean air and clean water

- J: Sustainable agriculture

-H: Ending reliance on fossil fuels

Indies

- A: Clean air and clean water

- H: Ending reliance on fossil fuels

- F: removal of lead

Persuadables

- A: Clean air and clean water

- J: Sustainable agriculture

-H: Ending reliance on fossil fuels

What They Said

"I'm always going to put the human element first." – Base Dem

"Who would be against clean air and water? If you don't have that, you die." – Independent

"Reduction of international fossil fuels. Because that way we won't be spending on wars in the Middle East, which will then cause migration, immigration issues, and refugees." – Persuadable

Nine GND Favorable Arguments Were Tested

Respondents were shown nine arguments in favor of the Green New Deal and asked to rank them.

A. *We owe it to our children to provide a clean energy future.*

B. *It is vital to the security of the United States that we end our energy dependence of foreign oil and fossil fuels.*

C. *Air and water pollution are threats to public health.*

D. *A large investment in new jobs is vital in today's economy.*

E. *America's existing infrastructure is in severe need of repair, making large updates like this one a necessity.*

F. *A major policy undertaking of this kind will help bring Americans together and heal the rifts that have grown between us.*

G. *We are headed for a climate catastrophe that endangers us all unless drastic action is taken immediately.*

H. *Climate change will cost us trillions of dollars over the long term if we don't act.*

I. *The private sector and markets aren't going to fight climate change; we need a strong role for government investment.*

- **Base Dems were most motivated by the climate catastrophe argument.** Because they believed the science indicating that a catastrophe was imminent, they found this argument the most immediately compelling—but this attitude was not shared by other groups.

- **Independents favored a focus on pollution.** In keeping with the impact of the focus on clean air and water, the most compelling argument for independents was the immediate threat to public health.

- **Leaving a better world to our kids was overwhelmingly effective with persuadables.** This argument was also effective with base Dems, but for them, it went hand-in-hand with avoiding a climate catastrophe.

Clean air and clean energy were compelling

- **As in the concepts, air and water pollution were the strongest arguments overall.** These issues were seen as having the most immediate effect on public health and safety, especially among independents.

- **"We owe it to our children to provide a clean energy future"** was compelling, especially to persuadable switchers, both for the emphasis on children and for clean energy. It triggered positive responsible sensibilities even for conservative leaners, and meshed well with more progressive frameworks around climate as well.

Catastrophe was strong for Dems and Indies

- **Democrats and most independents were strongly motivated by language around climate catastrophe endangering us all.** This was the strongest message for base Democrats and second strongest among independents.

- **Most in these groups recognized climate change as an urgent present problem, not a future problem.** Even if they were not convinced of the proper pathways toward achieving the goal or other potential economic elements of the Green New Deal, the necessity of immediate action to solve the crisis was unquestioned for them.

- **Persuadable switchers, however, were less convinced of the urgency**. This was in large part because some doubted the anthropogenic nature of climate change, or that humans could reasonably mitigate the problem.

Appeals to Cost Were Less Persuasive—With a Caveat

- **While Base Dems understood the cost argument, it was only mildly compelling to them; others did not understand it.** While they understood that climate change was problem in broad terms, most did not understand the mechanism by which it would cost trillions in the future and thus doubted it. Nevertheless, when the mechanism was explained in terms of much more frequent, much bigger natural disasters, the argument became far more compelling.

- **While independents did rank this argument third, arguments that the private sector would not act were notably weak in the other groups.** Most felt that the private sector would need to take significant action for the problem to be resolved, and some noted that many companies were already doing some work toward sustainability. Interestingly, this argument was weaker among base Dems than any other group.

Achieving Bipartisanship Was About Ending Corruption

- **Bipartisanship was desired by independents and persuadables, but was more about rejecting corruption that adopting moderate policy.** While independents and persuadables did hope that politicians would work together on solutions, they largely believed the reason for partisan rancor was corruption by special interests intent on maintaining the status quo.

- **They were also pessimistic about the chances for bipartisanship overall.** On both the climate and economy, few independents and persuadables thought the parties were likely to set aside their differences.

- **Base Democrats were sour on bipartisanship, especially on climate.** Few Democrats believed that Republicans would join them in seeking climate solutions, and felt that Republicans were too dominated by fossil fuel interests to make adequate policy changes.

Investments in Jobs were Most Appealing to Persuadable Switchers

- **As before with the concepts, persuadable switchers found investment in new jobs strongly attractive compared to other groups.** While base Dems gave middling scores to the jobs argument and independents placed it near the bottom, persuadables ranked it third. They felt that if renewable energy and economic growth could be linked together, it would be a win-win for everyone.

- **Repairing infrastructure was vaguely appealing, but the connection to climate change wasn't immediately apparent.** Persuadable switchers rated this argument more highly than did other groups because of its connection to jobs, but it was a secondary argument that seemed only tangentially related to climate issues.

Best Arguments For

Base Dems	Indies	Persuadables
- G: Climate catastrophe	- C: Air and water pollution	- A: We owe it to our kids
-C: Air and water pollution	- G: Climate catastrophe	- C: Air and water pollution
- A: We owe it to our kids	- I: Private sector won't act	-D: Investment in new jobs

What They Said

"We have to be dependent on ourselves and get away from fossil fuels." – Independent

"The climate catastrophe is the most extreme of them all, but it's also the most compelling because it's the truth." – Base Dem

"I've got young children, and I think about them and their future, their lives and well-being."– Persuadable

Questions?

Thank you for your time, and
please contact us if you have any further questions...

David Atkins

323-353-5229

David.Atkins@polluxresearch.com