

TO: Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee; Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee; Democratic National Committee
FROM: Sunrise Movement
DATE: March 16, 2022
RE: **Message to 2022 Candidates: To Turn Out Young Voters, Run on Climate**



OVERVIEW

Democrats are heading into an election year with a president with low approval ratings, a Congress that has not passed Build Back Better, and a still-raging pandemic leading to growing frustration among Americans. Importantly, Biden has seen his steepest decline in approval ratings among young people; and if Democratic morale is low, young voters are among the most likely to stay home in 2022. Winning 2022 will be a tough fight for Democrats regardless, but if the party fails to engage and turn out young voters, we might as well give up the gavel now.

The 2020 elections critically showed that when candidates center bold climate policies, they can activate young voters and volunteers, and the results showed that when candidates did that, they won. Recent polling conducted by Sunrise and Data For Progress also backs this up and makes clear that young voters want bold climate legislation.

Drawing on lessons from the 2020 elections, Biden's deteriorating approval ratings during his first year (especially among young people), and Sunrise's new polling, it's clear: **if Democrats want to win in 2022, they must run on a strong climate agenda.** Young people are a key voting bloc and the future of the Democratic party — Democrats must recognize this and pivot to a winning message that will re-engage them.

LESSONS FROM 2020: THE YOUTH BLOC

2020 showed the sheer political power of young people — both in primary and general elections. In congressional Democratic primaries, candidates found success when they centered the Green New Deal—and when Sunrise deployed its army of young people on their behalf. Candidates like Jamaal Bowman and Ed Markey, who both trailed in polls at various points in their races, boldly embraced the GND and won big, powered largely by young [voters and organizers](#).



And Biden's campaign and win in the general election proved that climate was not solely a winning message in deep blue districts and states, but also for a nationwide general election. His team recognized this, and in the final months of the campaign, they [made climate a](#)

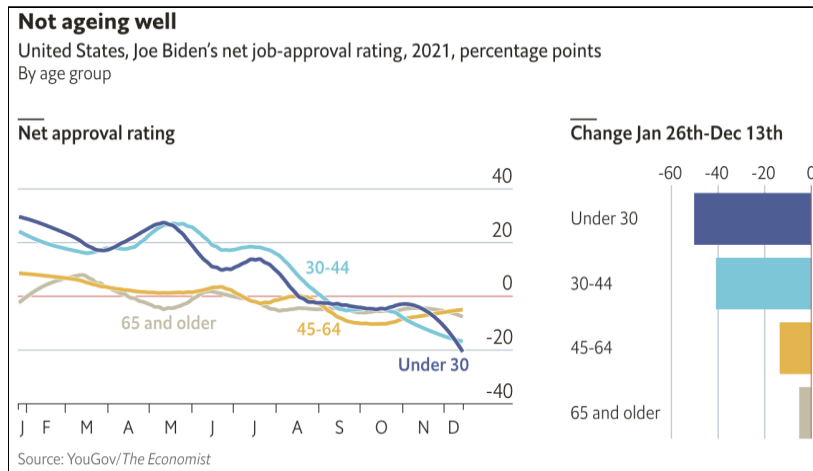
[centerpiece of their platform](#), and state parties, including in swing states like Michigan, advocated for Biden by citing the Green New Deal (see above). His [website](#) still reads, “Biden believes the Green New Deal is a crucial framework for meeting the climate challenges we face.” **This strong climate messaging was used by his campaign to successfully drive young voters to the polls.**

The youth vote made the difference in the election. [50% of young people](#) (18-29 years old) voted in the 2020 presidential election, up 11% from 2016. **But vitally, running strong on a bold climate platform also drove young people to organize and mobilize in key swing states**, knocking doors and making calls in the midst of a deadly pandemic. By running on climate, Biden fostered enthusiasm among young people, which caused them to not only vote but help turn out their communities.

DEMOCRATIC FRUSTRATION

Frustration within the Democratic voter base is rampant. With razor thin margins in both the House and Senate, and President Biden’s plummeting approval ratings, the midterm elections will be a tough uphill battle for Democrats. Though many factors have impacted Biden’s numbers, the president’s failure to follow through on key campaign promises—especially on climate and Build Back Better—has undoubtedly hurt his popularity.

Notably, at the beginning of 2021, of all age groups, Biden had the [highest net-approval](#) rating among young people. But at the end of year, young people gave Biden a lower net-approval rating than every other age group. And many of the respondents cited the administration’s shortcomings in combating the climate crisis.

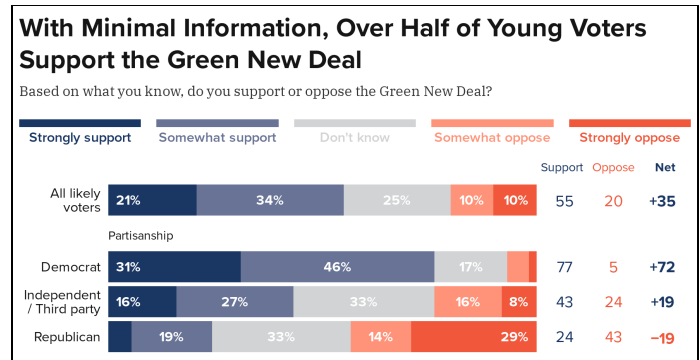
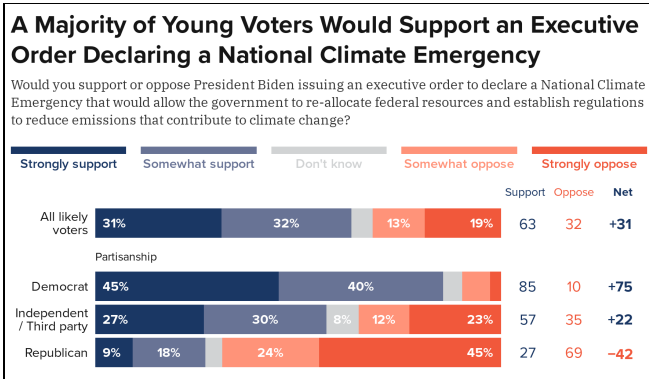


SUNRISE x DFP NEW POLL: YOUNGER VOTERS WANT TO GO BIG ON CLIMATE

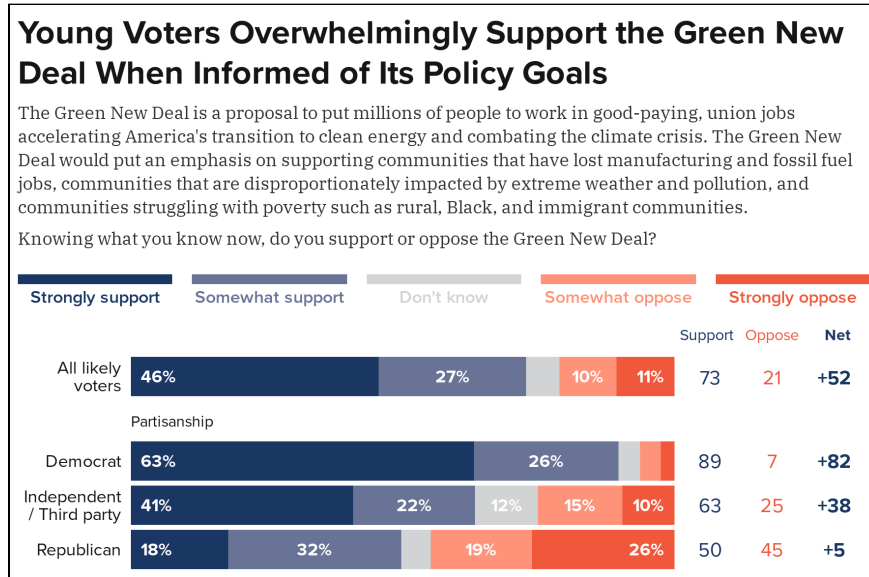
A December Data for Progress and Sunrise Movement poll of 855 likely voters ages 18-35, further demonstrated that **climate change is a driving force for young voters, and young voters want to see bold federal action.** This provides further evidence that running strong on climate, and

specifically embracing a platform of the Green New Deal, just might be how Democrats can bring young people back into the fold.

The recent poll shows that young voters overwhelmingly support ambitious federal climate actions such as an executive order to declare a National Climate Emergency and the Green New Deal.



Critically, the poll also found that the popularity of the Green New Deal skyrocketed once voters were informed of its main policy goals. The polling indicates that not only should candidates *run* on policies like the Green New Deal, but they should *center* them — especially if they want to engage young voters.



Heeding the guidance from this polling, it is even more important that candidates run on a bold climate agenda, like the Green New Deal, given the current reality of Democrats continuing to disillusion young people by failing to pass Build Back Better and other legislation to address the crises they face.

CASE STUDY: 2022 TEXAS PRIMARIES

Despite the uphill battle Democrats are facing this midterm season, Democratic primary elections in Texas proved that running boldly on climate is a winning strategy. Greg Casar (TX-35) and Jessica Cisneros (TX-28), who ran on the Green New Deal and were endorsed by Sunrise Movement, inspired an army of young people to mobilize and vote for them. With Greg Casar's strong win yesterday, he's all but ensuring his victory in November. And Jessica Cisneros, who was up against "[Big Oil's Favorite Democrat](#)," is now facing a historic runoff that was unimaginable a few years ago.

Greg Casar and Jessica Cisneros' strong showing in the polls last Tuesday wasn't an accident. Young people are ready and willing to mobilize and turnout for candidates that support the Green New Deal. Sunrise led a massive youth turnout operation in TX-28, recruiting volunteers and making thousands of dials for the campaign since December, surpassing its original goal of 300,000 dials, and ultimately exceeded 700,000 voter contact attempts. Let's be clear: mobilization of young people like this doesn't happen for candidates and causes that appeal to a broken status quo and toeing a moderate party line.

CONCLUSION

There is overwhelming frustration among Democrats and Americans overall. That, coupled with historical midterm trends for the party in power, could spell trouble for Democrats in 2022. If Democrats do not re-engage young people—both to get them to the polls and to get them on the phones and knocking on doors—there is no path to the House and Senate. And the best way to do that is running on an unapologetically bold climate platform. By centering climate this cycle (and delivering while they remain in power), the Democratic Party can reinvigorate young peoples' faith in the party—which would help position Democrats for success not just in 2022 but also in future elections.

Just as Democrats did with health care in '18, Democrats have the opportunity to turn a strong climate platform into a political asset and a unifying force in 2022. But only if they have the political will to do so.