

To: Interested Parties

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Re: Lessons Learned Countering Anti-Trans Attacks in 2025 Elections

Over the course of 2025, Global Strategy Group conducted research on the role anti-transgender attacks were playing in Virginia, New Jersey, and Wisconsin races and explored how to message around this issue. The key findings below show that while anti-trans attacks can be damaging absent a strong messaging strategy, Democrats can effectively ward off these inflammatory and dangerous anti-trans attacks while staying true to our values.

What Happened

- In 2025, Republicans like Winsome Earle-Sears spent millions on anti-trans attacks. Polling in Virginia shows these clearly broke through: by mid-October the vast majority of likely Virginia voters indicated they had heard anti-trans attacks on Spanberger, and nearly half (47%) say they heard “a lot”.
- But through inoculation and response, Democrats won. Virginia Governor Abigail Spanberger even grew her vote share from 50% in May to 52% in October after nearly \$4 million in anti-trans attack ads – the [focus of the majority of Earle-Sears' ads](#).
- Just 7% of voters even name transgender issues as a top concern in their vote.
- Spanberger’s approach worked. Public and private polling show she is more trusted on transgender issues (+12 Spanberger – [best approach to “transgender rights”](#)).

Key Findings

Voters are not focused on trans people and are frustrated by their elected officials spending so much time on it. Even after Winsome Earle-Sears spent millions demonizing trans people, only 7% of Virginia voters said transgender issues were a top concern.

Republicans are convincing voters that Democrats are driving the conversation. In May, Virginia voters said Democrats were 33 points more likely to be focused on transgender issues than Republicans. We cannot continue to allow this falsehood to stand.

But voters are put off by Republicans’ approach to this issue. Just 14% of voters across these three states say, “being transgender is wrong.” These voters may have hesitations about Democrats’ approach absent hearing from us directly, but they are absolutely not on board with Republicans’ aggressive tone and outright discrimination against transgender people.

Anti-trans attacks are damaging – like any attack – because they suggest Democrats are:

- Extreme, not focused on issues that matter to voters (e.g., costs)
- Elevating a subset of the population rather than all of their constituents
- Putting kids, specifically girls, at risk by creating loopholes ripe for exploitation.

While they damage candidates’ vote share, like any effective attack, they are not a death blow.

However, we have responses that consistently overpower the GOP’s attacks. Wisconsin

research shows we can beat back the attacks: Susan Crawford started with an 8-point lead over Brad Schimel. Crawford's lead in the poll narrowed to 3-points after voters heard a series of anti-trans attacks but jumped back up to net +8 once she responded. **The bottom line is that these attacks are beatable – if you respond.** While we should take them seriously, like we do with attacks on a myriad of other issues, we should not run scared.

Recommendations

Every race will be different, and **it's critically important that candidates take an approach that feels authentic.** That said, research has consistently shown the following can help both inoculate Democrats from anti-trans attacks and set us up for stronger responses:

Don't let the opposition define you. We do not need to respond to every attack they launch, especially if they are not working. However, we also should not continue to let the opposition define us. It has caused voters to see Democrats as too focused on this issue and, at times, too extreme. **Abigail Spanberger, Mikie Sherrill, and Susan Crawford all responded to these attacks in some way, and all three won.**

Exude toughness and fierceness tonally. While very few people see this as a top issue, they want to know we take kids' safety seriously. Calm responses can work at times but risk furthering the perception that Democrats are not tough or listening to voters' concerns.

EXAMPLES:

- “As a mother, I've always been fiercely protective of girls like my daughter, who deserve the same chances in life as boys.”
- “I'll never apologize for protecting our students.”
- “As a mother, I've always stood up for our girls and as a [INSERT OFFICE], I'll fight for all

Show you care about voters' core concerns. [Abigail Spanberger](#), [Mikie Sherrill](#), and [Susan Crawford](#) all showed they shared these values by emphasizing their role as moms and experience cracking down on child abusers.

- **Fairness/Equal rights.** Cisgender voters falsely assume transgender people are getting “special rights” that come at their expense. Being clear we want everyone to have the same rights and emphasizing the importance of fairness in sports alleviates concerns.
- **Safety.** Voters want to make sure cisgender girls will not be at risk or in danger. You can emphasize the importance of keeping kids safe without falsely accusing trans people of being dangerous.
- **Losing a say as a parent.** Most parents don't want to be cut out of the loop out of a place of genuine concern. Emphasize ways Democratic work gives parents the tools to help their kids thrive.

Ensure voters feel a sense of stability and that there are rules in place. Right now, voters feel chaos. Reminding them there are already rules in place, especially rules that protect kids from abuse and government overreach, helps alleviate concerns.

EXAMPLE RESPONSE: “We can all agree sports should be fair, and students should be safe. That’s why school districts and sports associations in [STATE] are making rules about who can participate in different sports and at different levels. Government shouldn’t be forcing blanket bans that override those rules - especially when it means requiring young girls to answer invasive questions or even undergo physical inspections to play sports.”

Highlight a candidate’s bipartisanship and willingness to put party politics aside. Bipartisan proof points are an effective all-around tool at distancing a candidate from the national Democratic brand (which is “too focused” and “too extreme” on trans issues). Showing a candidate is tough and won’t get pushed around by donors or party leaders can also help.

Flip the script. See what content you have available in the GOP’s own words to show that they’re focused on social issues and putting kids in danger – not Democrats. This can take different forms: In Virginia, going on offense meant [showing that Winsome Earle-Sears actively discriminated against LGBTQ people](#) and sought to [ban abortion](#); in New Jersey, the [DGA took Jack Ciattarelli to task for putting kids’ safety at risk](#); in Wisconsin, Susan Crawford showed Brad Schimel [left thousands of rape kits untested and handed out a plea deal to a man with thousands of files of child pornography](#).

Talk about what we want for all constituents – not just transgender constituents. Broadening out the scope of who we are talking about so that we don’t come off as overly focused on trans youth at the expense of their peers. Often, this comes down to language: phrases like “she’ll do what’s best for all of us” to show this is not an either/or.

PUTTING IT TOGETHER: An Example from 2025

explicit mention of girls/daughters **[PROTECTS KIDS]** As a mom, **[CANDIDATE]** has always been deeply protective of her son and daughter, and as a prosecutor and judge, she has protected all of our kids. Crawford took on sex offenders and child abusers who preyed on children and, as our next justice, she will always keep all of our kids safe.

leans into ‘mama bear’ feelings

pivots to talking about ‘all’ our kids

specific proof of her taking on predators, dispelling the notion that she would just let predators into locker rooms

ABOUT THE RESEARCH:

Virginia: Global Strategy Group conducted a phone and text-to-web survey of 800 Virginia likely voters with an oversample to reach 200 interviews of Black voters between May 5 and May 10, 2025. This survey was preceded by four online focus groups among Virginia 2025 likely voters on April 1 and April 3, 2025. Global Strategy Group also conducted a phone and text-to-web survey of 800 Virginia likely voters between October 9 and October 13, 2025.

Wisconsin: Global Strategy Group conducted a phone and text-to-web survey of 800 Wisconsin likely voters between February 20 and February 24, 2025. This survey was preceded by four online focus groups among Wisconsin 2025 likely voters on January 28 and January 29, 2025.

New Jersey: Global Strategy Group conducted a phone and text-to-web survey of 800 New Jersey likely voters with an oversample to reach 200 interviews of Hispanic voters between August 7 and August 11, 2025. This survey was preceded by four online focus groups among New Jersey 2025 likely voters on July 8 and July 9, 2025.

The margin of error for all surveys at the 95% confidence level is +/- 3.5%. The margin of error on sub-samples is greater.