

To: Interested Parties

From: Global Strategy Group

Date: June 2025

Re: Messaging Guidance on Countering Anti-Trans Attacks in 2025 Elections

Global Strategy Group recently executed a multi-phase research plan centered on the role anti-transgender attacks are playing in 2025 races, including in Virginia. The research explored voter attitudes on transgender-related topics and policies, how these attacks impacted the vote, and ultimately, how we might best ward off these anti-trans attacks.

Key Findings

Voters are not focused on trans people and are frustrated to see their elected officials spending so much time on it. Only two percent of voters said “issues related to transgender people” were a top three issue for them in 2024. In focus groups, voters say they want their representatives focused on what will help their constituents at large – not with what they deem “niche” issues that “only affect a few people.”

Problematically, Republicans have convinced voters that Democrats are driving the conversation. Two-in-three Virginia voters say Democrats are more focused on transgender issues (66%) than Republicans are, and half say Democrats have more extreme views on this topic (50%). It’s important we get our message out there but are mindful of falling into this trap the other side has laid for us.

But voters are put off by Republicans’ approach to this issue. Just one-in-six voters say “being transgender is wrong.” And in Virginia, voters are split on who is more extreme on this issue: 50% Democrats/48% Republicans. These voters may have hesitations about Democrats’ approach **absent hearing from us directly**, but they are similarly uncomfortable 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 helping the whole of Virginia, and putting kids, specifically girls, at risk by creating loopholes ripe for exploitation. And 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. Despite the damage these attacks can do, a strong message can beat back the attacks. Our research in Wisconsin was a clear example of this: Susan Crawford started with an 8-point lead over Brad Schimel. Crawford’s lead in the poll narrowed to three points after voters heard a series of anti-trans attacks but jumped back up to +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's causing voters in places like Virginia to see Democrats as too focused on this issue and at times, too extreme.

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 of our kids."

Show you care about voters' core concerns: Fairness and safety. Voters worry cisgender girls will be at a disadvantage in sports and in danger more generally. We can show we care about and share these values without suggesting trans people are bad actors. For example, candidates can lean on the record tracking down child abusers while in law enforcement and as parents protecting school-aged daughters.

EXAMPLES:

"[DEMOCRAT] has dedicated her life to protecting kids across the Commonwealth. She has investigated child predators, arrested drug dealers, and cracked down on big pharma CEOs who profit off teenage addiction."

"We can all agree that sports should be fair, and students should be safe."

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 Virginia 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) and building trust on child safety. Showing a candidate is tough and won’t get pushed around by donors or party leaders can also help.

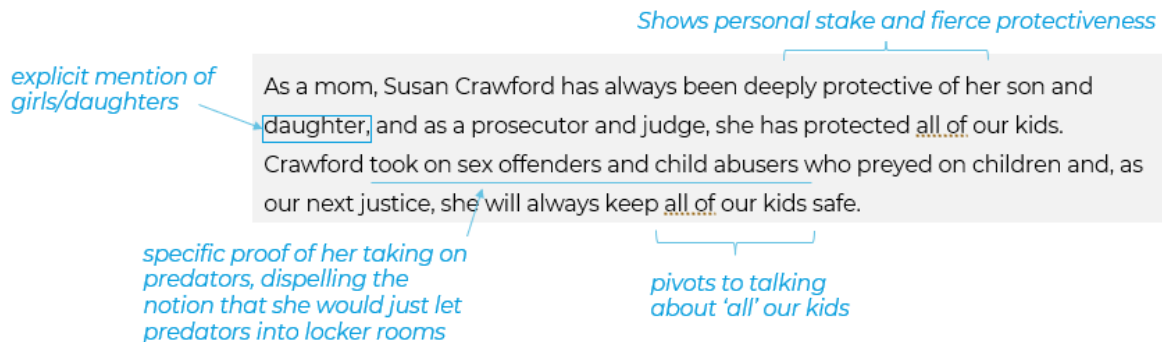
When attacking the GOP, flip the script. See what content you have available in their own words to help drive the notion that they’re focused on this – not Democrats.

Where possible, we should highlight for voters the GOP’s extreme position on transgender issues like taking away transgender people’s passports, denying health care to transgender people, and kicking transgender servicemembers out of the military and their intense focus on an issue that many voters see as only impacting a small subgroup of the population, rather than everyone.

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 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 Wisconsin



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.

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.

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