



**To: Interested Parties**

**From: Betsy App, Change Research**

**Date: December 4, 2024**

**Re: Ads attacking Democrats on transgender issues failed to move votes**

New research<sup>1</sup> conducted by Change Research in eight battleground states (AZ, MI, MT, NV, OH, PA, TX, and WI) shows that negative advertisements targeting Democratic candidates on transgender issues **failed to impact support for these candidates**, and voters who saw these ads found them intensely off-putting regardless of whether they aligned with their own views.

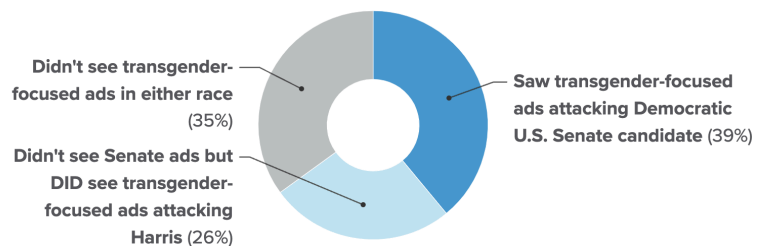
### Many voters saw ads attacking Democratic candidates on issues related to transgender people

More than \$200 million was spent in the 2024 election on advertisements attacking Kamala Harris and Democrats running for U.S. Senate for their positions on transgender issues.

Unsurprisingly, many voters recall having seen these ads: 65% saw

transgender-focused attacks on either the Democratic candidate for U.S. Senate and/or Kamala Harris. These ads, along with ads attacking Democrats on immigration, the economy, and crime, had tremendous potential to impact votes for these candidates.

### 2 in 3 voters saw transgender-focused CHANGE RESEARCH™ ads attacking Democrats in U.S. Senate and/or presidential race



### No evidence that transgender-focused ads attacking Democrats impacted votes for U.S. Senate

A comparison to Biden's margin over Trump in 2020 shows no differences in 2024 U.S. Senate vote choice between those who saw ads on transgender issues versus those who didn't see these ads in the leadup to Election Day. Biden lost to Trump by 2% (42% to Trump's 44%) among voters in these battleground states who participated in the 2020 election. In 2024, Democratic candidates for U.S. Senate lost to their GOP opponents by 3%. This one-point drop in margin is exactly the same for 39% of voters who saw negative ads on transgender issues and the 61% who didn't see these ads.

<sup>1</sup> A total of 1,455 voters in AZ, MI, MT, NV, OH, PA, TX and WI were interviewed online November 1-5, 2024, and the survey has a modeled margin of error of 2.8 percentage points. Post-stratification weighting was performed on gender, age, race/ethnicity, state, 2024 presidential vote and 2024 U.S. Senate vote. Weighting parameters were based on voter file data and election results from each state. See the methodological statement [here](#) for full details. In-depth interviews were conducted November 15-23, 2024, with nine voters who participated in the survey.

## No evidence that transgender-focused ads attacking Harris impacted votes for President

Similarly, we see no evidence that transgender-focused ads attacking Harris moved the needle among the 61% of voters who didn't see these types of ads in the U.S. Senate race. Biden lost these voters by 14 points in 2020 and Harris lost them by 19 points. This 5-point drop in margin is essentially the same for those who saw ads attacking Harris on issues around transgender people (a 4-point decline relative to Biden 2020) and those who didn't see these ads in the presidential race (a 6-point decline).

## Shifts in Democratic margins relative to Biden's 2020 margin are the same regardless of whether voters saw transgender-focused attack ads

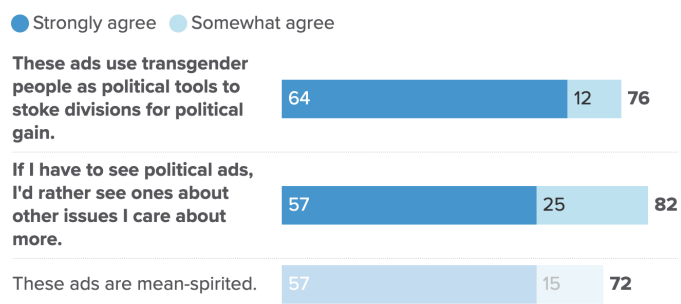
	U.S. Sen: Saw Trans-Focused Ads	U.S. Sen: Didn't See Trans-Focused Ads		Presidential: Saw Trans-Focused Ads	Presidential: Didn't See Trans-Focused Ads
Biden 2020	54	37	Biden 2020	47	31
Trump 2020	38	51	Trump 2020	43	57
3rd Party 2020	1	3	3rd Party 2020	3	3
Did not vote 2020	6	9	Did not vote in 2020	8	9
<b>Margin - Biden</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>-14</b>	<b>Margin - Biden</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>-25</b>
U.S. Sen Dem 2024	56	41	Harris 2024	48	32
U.S. Sen Rep 2024	41	56	Trump 2024	47	64
<b>Margin - Dem</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>-15</b>	<b>Margin - Harris</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>-32</b>
Dem 2024 Margin - Biden 2020 Margin	-1	-1	Harris 2024 Margin - Biden 2020 Margin	-4	-6

We also see no evidence that transgender-focused attack ads motivated 2020 non-voters to participate in the 2024 elections in these states. Among those who saw transgender-focused ads in the U.S. Senate race, fewer (6%) were 2020 non-voters than those who didn't see the ads (9%). We see the same rate of 2020 non-participation among those who did and didn't see transgender-focused ads in the presidential race, with 8% and 9% of 2020 non-voters, respectively.

## Voters across the partisan spectrum who saw negative ads on transgender issues find them off-putting

The majority of voters who saw these ads were turned off by them in multiple ways: 76% of all voters (and 55% of Republicans) agree that these ads use transgender people as political tools, including 64% who *strongly* agree; 82% of all voters (including 72% of Republicans) say they'd rather see ads about other issues.

## Voters hold intensely negative perceptions of transgender-focused attack ads



In-depth-interviews conducted November 15-23, 2024, provide insight into the various ways in which voters found transgender-focused attack ads distasteful.

**Many interviewees were confused or disappointed that issues pertaining to transgender people were a prominent feature of campaign ads this election when this wasn't a top issue for voters.**

For one ticket-splitting voter, the transgender-focused attack ads aligned with his personal views on this topic, yet they didn't make him feel good about this position, nor did they change his views of the candidates, while ads on topics like border policy were quite influential.

*"[The ads] did not make me feel any better about it or good. I think they should have focused on other issues. It felt like a pie-throwing contest. Felt like name-calling...Those attacks did not change how I felt about [the candidates]."*

*(Trump/Allred supporter, TX Latino man 35-49, Business owner)*

*"I think that [politicians] need to focus more on political stuff than people's preference on their sexuality. Their job is to get inflation down, find a way to get the cost of living down so people aren't struggling every day to make ends meet."*

*(Trump/Brown supporter, NV white woman 65+, retired)*

**Others took issue with the blatantly false narrative these ads were pushing.**

Some were offended that the campaigns behind the ads thought voters would believe them. For these voters, the ads seem to have grabbed their attention but failed to persuade; if anything, the ads may have had a backlash effect, pushing left-leaning voters more strongly toward Democratic candidates.

*"I was kinda mad. You could tell that [the ads] were saying that [Harris] was going to pay for all trans people to have sex changes, but you could tell that these were false."*

*(Harris/Casey supporter, PA white woman 50-64, Non-profit employee)*

*"I saw a commercial saying, You send your kids off to school and they come back and they're a different gender...That's not how it really is. We're not stupid."*

*(Harris/Allred supporter, TX Black woman 18-35, Cosmetologist)*

**Finally, interviewees on the left and the right were frustrated by the partisan gamesmanship at the expense of transgender people.**

Some even suggested that winning was the only thing driving these ads. These sentiments are driving the survey finding that the vast majority (86%) agree that politicians should stay focused on the issues that matter instead of stirring up divisions around transgender people for their own political gain.

*"Politicians are pushing [issues pertaining to transgender people] so that they can gain an extra couple voters."*

*(Trump supporter, NV white man 18-35, Mover)*

*"It's frustrating because [Trump] knows what he's doing. I don't think he believes any of it...I think he said that because that is a wedge issue that he knew riled up his base."*

*(Harris supporter, PA white men 18-34, Bartender)*

## Strategic takeaways

Trump and the Republicans tried and failed to influence election outcomes by stoking divisions around issues pertaining to transgender people. We have zero evidence that the hundreds of millions of dollars spent attacking Democrats on this issue moved votes away from Harris and the Democrats.

What we *do* know is that the people who watched these ads, even those with socially conservative policy preferences, saw them as intensely distasteful. We also know that voters don't want politicians' focus to be on transgender issues, and pointing this out may be the reason why some Democratic candidates like Senator Tammy Baldwin in Wisconsin were able to come through the 2024 election victorious in an electoral environment that was fundamentally unfavorable to Democratic incumbents.

President-elect Trump and others are already making moves to further restrict the rights of people who are transgender under the false impression that their transgender-focused attacks contributed to their victories. Democrats and other transgender rights supporters should call them out for having their priorities wrong—fueling culture wars for their own political gain while ignoring real problems Americans are facing.