



To: Campaign for a Family Friendly Economy and Women Effect Action Fund
From: Jill Normington and Krystal Ortiz, Normington Petts
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RE: Arizona Swing Voter Focus Group Findings

The following is a summary of findings from two qualitative, online focus groups conducted September 13 and 14, 2021 among Arizona voters who reported voting for Kyrsten Sinema in 2018 and Donald Trump in either 2016 or 2020. The first group included six women aged 27 to 55; 3 participants from Phoenix, 1 from Scottsdale, 1 from Peoria, and 1 from Cave Creek; 3 White, 2 Hispanic, and 1 Black; 3 Democrats, 2 Independents, 1 Republican. The second group included six men aged 26 to 57; 2 participants from Mesa and 1 each from Phoenix, Goodyear, Prescott, and Tolleson; 1 White, 2 Hispanic, and 3 Black; 3 Democrats, 3 Independents.

Key Findings

- Trump-Sinema voters in Arizona overwhelmingly support the policies in the Build Back Better plan.
- Care economy policies, particularly affordable childcare and paid family leave, are among the most important issues that should be included in the final package.
- Arizona swing voters believe that the Build Back Better plan should pass and that Senator Kyrsten Sinema should support it.
- Voters want the Build Back Better agenda to pass whether or not the plan has Republican support.

Political Environment

Arizona swing voters are generally split on the direction of the country. All but one of the women believe the country is on the wrong track and four out of six men say the country is headed in the right direction. Regardless of the direction they believe the country is heading, COVID and the economy are top of mind for everyone. Those who believe the country is on the wrong track cite political division and partisanship as a top concern. When asked what feels off track, one woman captured the dominant sentiment by saying *“just the division of what’s right and what’s wrong, my party is better than yours. A lot with COVID, not just the impact that it has on the adults with losing jobs and so forth, but being a mom of five, I see the mental health aspect of not just us, but children, as well.”* Seven out of twelve participants mentioned concerns about the health risks associated with COVID and those who will not get vaccinated, but these voters are more universally concerned with the economic uncertainty caused by COVID. One man and two women admitted to falling behind on bills since the onset of the pandemic. In fact, more than half of participants said they have recently started receiving the Child Tax Credit, which has helped them catch up on bills.

Most (seven out of twelve participants) acknowledged inflation or the rising cost of living as a concern for their family. Women mainly focused on increased costs for food and groceries and nearly every woman agreed that these rising costs are negatively impacting their household finances. When asked about the cost of living and what specifically is going up, one woman responded the *“grocery store, number one. Everything. Just your basics, things that you just need to survive, nothing fancy.”* Although the men were less open about personal financial challenges, only one reported benefitting from the rising value of real estate investments. The men contrasted the rising cost of living with conversation about stagnant wages and increased difficulty making ends meet. One man shared, *“everything seems like it’s going up higher, but your pay at your job is not going higher...it just makes it a little harder to survive.”*

Care Economy

Childcare

Nine out of twelve total participants reported having children under the age of 18 in their home, although all participants said their kids have aged out of childcare. Still, nearly all participants shared personal experiences paying for childcare in the past or familiarity with the financial strain childcare can put on families. Two of the female swing voters shared that their current employment situations – and decisions about what jobs and schedules they can and cannot work – are a result of their need to be available for their children. Male swing voters echoed making these kinds of decisions with their spouses. Both groups referenced arrangements where one spouse stays home with the kids instead of both spouses working and paying for childcare:

- *“I stay with the company that I’m with because of flexibility, but do I want to go work for a larger company where I can have better medical benefits for my family? Of course I do. But then I start thinking about the childcare issue. I have a nine-year-old now. Who’s going to pick her up? Who’s going to drop her off? It’s difficult for my husband to be able to help in that aspect, so I think I just settle.”*
- *“I do think workers are at a disadvantage here when it comes specifically to childcare. I’ve worked some extra jobs so my wife could stay home with the kids, which I know is not available to everyone... Whoever is the lowest earner in the family, one of the two, better be making decent money, otherwise daycare is just not even worth it. If you’re going to go with good daycare, it’s \$300 or \$400 a week, so somebody better be earning three times that, at least... just for that to make sense. Otherwise, one person should just stay home with the kids.”*
- *“There was a time where I was away because I did eight years in the Army. I was active duty, so I wasn’t in the same state as my family. Just thinking back on those times, childcare, it is, it’s a pistol trying to pay for it. I think that’s a lot of people. If it wasn’t for family or close friends, if we all had to rely on actual childcare for our young ones, yes, we would all probably be in a lot of trouble.”*
- *“Any childcare, it’s a big financial burden... I look back on my friends who had younger kids or who have younger kids now, and it takes up so much of their income that they have to work out arrangements with their spouses, like okay, until they get to kindergarten, I can’t work, because it’s too much of our household budget to pay for daycare.”*

Beyond the financial reality, the practical challenges of childcare were evident through participants’ engagement with the online focus groups. Unlike in-person focus groups where everyone is in the same physical space, groups conducted on Zoom provide a window into participants’ environment. During the groups, one of the men was sitting in the car trying to participate in the group while also watching his son at football practice. One of the women shared that it was “bedtime” in her house with her children’s voices and crying in the background.

All respondents supported a government role in providing families with access to quality, affordable childcare.

- *“When I had to go back to work at six weeks, and the local childcare places were literally like \$800 or \$1000 a month to put him in, and I only made, I don’t know, \$2000 a month or whatever it was back then. I remember realizing, “I can’t do this,” and just the stress of that. How am I supposed to—how do people do that? Everybody, obviously, you figure out a way to do it, but the stress and how much of my paycheck went to childcare, and then juggling—you’re going to pick them up. I’ve lost jobs because I had to leave to pick my kid up. I’m sure everybody has stories. Imagine if we could all go to someplace and drop your kid off safely at 7:00 or 8:00 in the morning, where they’re going to feed him, teach him, or something so I could come back at 5:00 or 6:00 and know that that was nice, safe, and secure. Wouldn’t that be nice for everybody?”*
- *“When you hear about the political campaigns...they tell you what you want to hear, and they talk about childcare and healthcare and education...but when they get in office, you don’t really hear about them as much...But these issues are very pertinent, because if they have households where a majority of your income is spent on daycare, it affects your mindset as far as like—“Okay, maybe I’ll have to go*

get a second job just to be able to pay the rest of the bills.” Then you’re not really fully present for your kids and family. It has long-term, additional effects or impact by just having so much to pay in daycare. So, if there are programs available to say, okay, based on your financial threshold, we can offer you this amount of discount for daycare, it will help as far as parents not having to get a second job, and they can be there with their families, because they don’t have to pay for all of that.”

These swing voters enthusiastically support any programs that will make childcare more affordable.

Paid Family and Medical Leave

None of the participants in either group reported having paid family or medical leave at their jobs, other than maternity leave. Some of the participants, especially those who are self-employed said they had some flexibility and could likely take time off if needed, but they would not be paid. Asked if they could take paid leave if they were to get sick or needed to take time to care for a sick family member, nearly all of the participants said no with some caveats:

- *“I would work from home, but I’d still have to work, kind of like I’m going on vacation next week, and even though I’m on vacation, I’m still working.”*
- *“I teach for a high school, so I have a little bit more options there working for the government. They do give you seven paid sick days a year, and you can do—if you want to take family leave, you have to use your sick days, so it’s not totally free.”*
- *“I could take a day off, but it’s not paid.”*

When asked whether they would support the idea of “a public paid leave program so that everybody would have that kind of benefit,” all participants were in favor.

- *“My biggest concern would just be if I needed to take my parents to appointments, and they only rely on me, because I’m the only daughter, then how often is my employer going to allow me to do this, or is it going to get to a point where they’ll find something to get rid of me for?”*

Senior Care

Across both groups of swing voters, five out of twelve participants reported caring for a parent or an elderly or disabled relative. Three participants said they live with their parents to help take care of them and four participants said they take care of their aging parents or share responsibilities of caring for parents with a sibling or family member. None of the participants had personal experiences with in-home care, but they acknowledged it was probably in their future and would likely come at a significant cost: *“My parents are going to come first, no matter what. I don’t care how much money I lose.”*

Government assistance or programs to help older Americans who need care are supported by all of these swing voters, but especially resonant with women: *“I’ve seen how much it is at these care places, these rehabilitation places and care facilities are outrageous, and it’s so stressful, and it’s humiliating...because it’s like you just can’t focus on anything but just trying to get your loved one feeling good and comfortable. To have to deal with finances, all of that, it’s just like...at the funeral parlor. You’ve got to buy the stone and the plot, and it’s at the worst time where you’re pushed into doing this. This would take the burden off and make somebody’s life a little better at the end...They’re already going through a grieving process, seeing their loved one going downhill, so taking that burden off would be huge.”*

Attitudes Toward Build Back Better

The Build Back Better plan is largely undefined among these Arizona swing voters. When asked what they have heard about the plan, roughly half said they never heard of it while the other half could associate the plan with Biden and/or share basic information:

- *“Infrastructure plan proposed by Biden, in reality won’t do much but better than nothing”*
- *“I am still learning Build Back Better, I will say that any program takes time, like 5 years or so”*
- *“I know it is supposed to prevent future disasters, not 100 percent sure though”*

- *“I’ve heard Biden say we would build back better but don’t know what exactly it means – it sounds good”*
- *“Build your finances and life better and get back what you once had and more”*
- *“I’ve heard about this during the Biden campaign as a way to bring back trust and stability to our economy, political system, education system back to where we used to be prior to the last four years”*

After sharing their initial impressions of Build Back Better, voters were presented with the following description of the plan:

Build Back Better is Joe Biden’s plan that will create a national program for paid parental, family care and personal medical leave, and reduce the cost of and expand access to childcare, and reduce the costs of in home care for seniors. It also includes new investments in job training, fighting climate change, and expanded coverage under Medicare. The plan also includes tax cuts for families with children. It does not increase the deficit because it is paid for by raising taxes on people making over \$400,000 a year and higher taxes on big corporations.

Once they learn the details of the Build Back Better plan, these voters are generally supportive of the plan and like that it is deficit neutral. When asked what keeps swing voters from supporting the Build Back Better plan, they most often cite doubts about follow through and Congress’s ability pass it. Voters support these policies, they just do not believe Congress can get them done.

- *“No negatives, as a proposal I like it, but again it has to pass Congress”*
- *“It sounds good, but I don’t trust or feel that this will be followed through and completed”*
- *“I love that rich will have to pay – doubt it will happen that way, but I love the idea”*

Political Realities and Debate Around Build Back Better

As evidenced by their doubts around Congress’s ability to pass the Build Back Better plan, these swing voters are very aware of the political realities around who might support and oppose a plan like this. When asked who would support the plan, swing voters point to Democrats, and those who have the potential to be most impacted by the policies:

- *“Families with smaller children.”*
- *“Democrats, Mark Kelly, anybody that cares about people.”*
- *“Democrats...people who fit within the categories...so it makes it more relatable to you.”*
- *“It’s Democratic because when I look at a lot of the policies that have been made or proposals, Democrats seem for the people and the care and concern for the people. Democrats seem to have a heart and empathetic and trying to create programs that help families and individuals, and Republicans seem to oppose everything that comes from Democrats that makes reasonable and sensible sense”*

These swing voters think the Build Back Better plan should pass even after hearing the Republican argument against it:

Republicans say that Joe Biden and the Democrats are spending trillions on liberal wish list items focused on forcing radical policies into reality. The \$3.5 trillion price tag is too high and filled with reckless waste. Republicans say that Biden’s plan will explode the debt to over \$45 trillion, create an inflation bomb with runaway cost increases for working families and that Democrats will end up raising taxes on working Americans and small businesses to pay for it.

These voters were largely not persuaded by this argument against Build Back Better and saw it as a typical Republican rebuttal to Democratic proposals. They were quick to point out that Republicans did not, and consistently do not, offer any alternatives – they are just opposed to Democrats.

- *“They explain everything wrong with Biden’s plan but offer no tangible or real solution or counter offer to find a middle ground between the two. It’s always all or nothing with republicans and never a middle*

ground”

- *“and...the Republican plan is???? Just buzz words that mean and say nothing – at least Joe has a plan. Trump had zero plans in 4 years and they have zero plans now!!”*
- *“The republicans will block any good ideas which are for the people”*

When it comes to passing a final Build Back Better plan, these swing voters in Arizona overwhelmingly believe Democrats should pass the plan with or without Republican support. Every one of these voters said Democrats should move forward with the plan regardless of Republican votes: *“I don’t care who passes it. It’s for the people, and it’s going to do the best good for the—I mean, this country was founded to protect the people. We need help. Help us!”*

To conclude, each participant was asked to write a short message to Senator Kyrsten Sinema about the Build Back Better Plan:

- *“Dear Senator Sinema, I think this plan is a great proposal to get our country ahead. It will help lots of families that really need it. Being able to have single mothers not have to worry about having to choose whether to work or not because they can’t afford childcare. I think it’s a great idea to be able to help the working person expand their job training. Also, for older people and seniors not to have to worry about putting their family into debt by accepting being put into a senior home. I think that this proposal is to help everyone from a younger family with a preschool age and also help people in college and seniors*
- *“Kyrsten Sinema, I believe you should support these present changes to be incorporated in our country because it’s for the sake of the country’s well-being and right to be able to afford health and childcare assistance to take the pressure off of affording these costs in our current economy.”*
- *“Dear Kyrsten Sinema, please support the bill because it would help a lot of working-class families.”*
- *“No matter what your party is, the people come 1st – it’s time to get the stress off people and help – in the long run it will help everyone and our communities – quit arguing about with party is right and wrong and go with what the people need.”*
- *“Dear Ms. Sinema, as an elected official who is supposed to create laws and policies for your local Arizona constituents, I think passing a law/bill/policy that’s designed to help working families take care of their families during a health crisis or challenge is paramount to our economy. If families/adults have the opportunity to take care of their loved ones while also earning income, the stress of relying on public assistance is reduced because they have the income to help sustain their households. Please consider the people, their wants and needs should a crisis arise and make us feel like we have elected officials who are truly here to serve us and not their own needs.”*
- *“Dear Kyrsten, please support the Build Back Better Plan. You were elected as a Democrat in Arizona so for that reason I would expect you to vote Yes. As a person with any type of morals I would expect you to vote YES. As a woman, I would expect you to vote YES. I would hope that our future is important to you and you focus on Arizona and why we elected you. No political games, just help everyone of all economic classes have a future. Let climate change end and be supportive of it. Please be a part of the change.”*
- *“Senator, I believe you should support this bill because it can help my parents with Medicare, help my family with child car and take time off if absolutely necessary. It works well in other countries in the world, why can’t it work here?”*
- *“I think she could just do a better job at maybe helping the children a little better and putting more money in the economy.”*
- *“To Senator Sinema of Arizona, you should support this bill, the reason helping your cause and your party, why? Well it is your party that can make the country better you are open to more ways of how to secure the welfare and future strength of this country and Senator Sinema the reason I voted for you, well you are bad, bad butt kicker when it comes to being honest, integrity and being real.”*