

A young woman with vibrant red hair is shown in profile, looking towards the right. She has her hand resting on her head, and she is wearing a light-colored top. The background is a blurred city street with buildings and a car. The entire image is framed by a thin green border.

Avalanche Insights **2020 Impact Report**

Our 2020 Impact



This year, Avalanche helped to guide messaging strategy for over \$1 billion in media spending on the Presidential election.

We are proud to say that our partners leveraged our insights to reach and move more than 70 million voters. Between January - November 2020, we fielded and briefed the Democratic ecosystem on our findings over 30 times, reaching over 400 key decision makers working on the registration, persuasion, and mobilization of voters in battleground states. We interviewed 163,148 voters and surfaced insights on key perceptions, emotions, and values shaping their attitudes on the Presidential election, voting, and ensuring a democratic transfer of power.

**We are grateful to our partners.
Thank you for fighting for a more fair and just world.**



AVALANCHE IN THE PRESS

VANITY FAIR

The New York Times

POLITICO

The Atlantic

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Our Insights & Strategy

Avalanche in 2020

1

During the Democratic primaries, Avalanche uncovered key pathways to victory and deepened understanding of how COVID-19 was shaping attitudes about the Presidential election

2

In the summer, Avalanche measured support for mass protests for racial equality & justice and guided messaging to counter Trump's law & order narrative

3

In the fall, Avalanche engaged a broad progressive community by defining Joe Biden's brand of 'courageous leadership' and key strategic contrasts with Donald Trump

4

After Joe Biden and Kamala Harris secured the nomination, Avalanche guided messaging on voting by mail and provided post-election rapid response framing on election legitimacy



Avalanche's Key 2020 Moments

Jan - March

Defining electability and the agenda for youth and women voters during the primaries

June - July

Building support for the movement for racial justice

Pro-Biden messaging for Latinx voters

August - September

Defining Joe Biden's strengths and most compelling contrasts with Trump

October

Framing closing arguments on the importance of courageous leadership on COVID, healthcare, and the economy

April - May

Understanding the impact of COVID on voters' lived experience and emotional state

August

Countering the federal crackdown and law & order messaging

Understanding what Biden voters wanted in a VP candidate

September

Messaging security of vote by mail among key voter segments

November - December

Ensuring every vote is counted

Outlining a progressive mandate for the Biden/Harris administration



A photograph of three diverse women sitting at a wooden table outdoors, laughing joyfully. The woman on the left is of Asian descent, wearing a dark red top. The woman in the middle is Black, wearing a bright green cardigan over a white top. The woman on the right is white with long blonde hair, wearing a yellow top. They are all smiling broadly and looking towards each other. In the foreground, there are white coffee cups on the table. The background is a soft-focus outdoor setting with green foliage.

Defining a 2020 Women's Agenda

Defining a 2020 Women's Agenda

KEY INSIGHT

An intersectional frame that centers racial justice as a core pillar of gender equity is activating for a winning coalition. A gender equity frame that doesn't take into consideration racial justice falls short for many women of color. A coalition of women of color & moderate to progressive white women representing 64.6% of women agree on top priorities and solutions.

THE STRATEGY

A winning strategy would activate a winning coalition of women by centering on women of color, and inviting everyone to unite and rise together. It would organize around shared priorities including healthcare, long term economic wellbeing, and elections working how they should. Finally, it would adopt an integrated racial justice and gender equity frame.



73% of women & 86% of Black women agree with an intersectional gender equity and racial justice message:

"Most of us want America to be a place where we can all work hard, live our best lives, and realize our own dreams no matter what we look like or where we come from. But today a handful of people who gain from systems of injustice hold us back based on our color and our gender. Together, we can bring down the systems that lock women into a constant battle for equal pay and opportunity, and keep Black and brown women in particular struggling to secure the basics like healthcare, livable wages, and physical safety. Only by standing united and rejecting any attempt to divide us can we rewrite the rules so that women are able to claim the fruits of their efforts."

A photograph of Joe Biden and his family at a campaign event. Joe Biden is in the center, wearing a dark suit and sunglasses, with his hands clasped. To his left is a woman in a black hooded jacket, and to his right is a woman in a bright green coat. They are surrounded by a large, diverse crowd of people. The text "Understanding Presidential Qualities Primary Voters Want" is overlaid on the left side of the image in a white, bold, sans-serif font.

Understanding Presidential Qualities Primary Voters Want

Presidential Qualities Primary Voters Want

KEY INSIGHT

Experience, integrity, vision, and strength were perceived as key qualities required to beat Trump across Democratic primary voters. However, there was a key generational divide; older voters (36+) emphasized experience, integrity, and restoration, where younger voters (18-35) emphasized inspiration, action, and forward progress.

THE STRATEGY

The strongest archetype for the Democratic nominee would blend qualities of someone who is honest, decent, an expert, an inspirational organizer, and a strong fighter. Biden's pathway to the nomination depended on highlighting these traits to mobilize the right voters.

THERE WAS A MAJOR GENERATIONAL DIVIDE IN TERMS OF THE QUALITIES DEMOCRATIC PRIMARY VOTERS MOST WANTED IN A PRESIDENT

- Older voters preferred an experienced 'Expert'
- Younger voters wanted an inspiring 'Organizer'
- Voters under 35 were nearly twice as likely (35%) than older voters (16%) to cite qualities associated with the Organizer archetype like having bold plans and authentically connecting with specific communities.





Inspiring Millennial Voters

Inspiring Millennial Voters

KEY INSIGHT

Addressing healthcare, inequality, and climate outperform the need to simply win the election (pre-COVID), underscoring a genuine aspirational idealism among millennials – especially among the youngest segments (18–24). Conversely, expressions of looking for a candidate who could simply win were less than half as frequent among voters under 36.

THE STRATEGY

Candidates must show millennials that they understand how economic inequality intersects with all top issues, and want leadership that is cooperative but also commanding and willing to show bold leadership to move beyond the status quo or simply preventing the damage of the opposition.

YOUTH EXPRESS A GENUINE & URGENT DESIRE FOR CANDIDATES TO LIVE UP TO IDEALS

The youngest voters (18–24) are more than twice as likely to say they prefer the candidate they agree with on the issues, even if they don't have the best chance of winning

Older voters (30+) are equally likely to say they prefer the candidate who is most likely to win as they are to prefer the candidate they agree with on the issues





Sustaining support for Protests and Racial Justice

Protests and Racial Justice

KEY INSIGHT

In the days following the George Floyd killing and in the rise of protests across the country, Avalanche was the first to provide deep qualitative insights about the sentiments and beliefs shifting across America. The majority of Americans felt supportive of protests, but competing narratives were fighting for hearts and minds. Police brutality ranked most important among Black respondents, younger voters, and Biden supporters who cited Justice as the dominant value, while equal opportunity lead for lean Trump, lean Biden and mixed voters, who were concerned about violent protests.

THE STRATEGY

A winning strategy would seize the moment in which there is bipartisan support for police reform as part of a call for racial justice, and center on the experience of people of color who are most likely to be driving support for reform and whose stories are the most powerful unifier among soft supporters.



AS PROTESTS GREW ACROSS THE COUNTRY THREE COMPETING NARRATIVES EMERGED:

- **32%** described the moment being about protestors exercising rights peacefully
- **30%** described the moment being about ending police brutality
- **33%** described the moment being about creating opportunity for all people regardless of race

Sustaining support required centering on the experience of racialized Americans and aligning with shared values about freedom, equality and opportunity.

A young Black man with short, curly hair is the central focus. He is wearing a grey t-shirt, a blue surgical face mask, and a thin necklace with a circular pendant. His right arm is raised, with his fist clenched. He is looking directly at the camera with a determined expression. In the background, several police officers in white shirts, black vests, and black hats with silver emblems are standing with their arms crossed, looking towards the man. The setting appears to be an outdoor urban area with buildings in the background. The entire image is framed by a thin green border.

Countering Trump's Law and Order Narrative

Countering Trump's Law & Order Narrative

KEY INSIGHT

Despite widespread support for protester's cause (racial justice), perceptions and attitudes about violence and safety varied greatly between Biden voters and undecided voters, who were more susceptible to Trump's tough guy persona and Law & Order narrative. Additionally, Biden voters expressed feelings of personal safety at much lower rates than Trump Voters. Undecided voters were divided.

THE STRATEGY

Rather than give oxygen to Trump's Law and Order narrative, Democrats needed to stay focused on why people were protesting in the first place. They also needed to make voters feel safe by highlighting Biden's strength, without compromising on his values by blaming "both sides," or trying to cast him as someone he is not.

TRUMP WEAPONIZED FEAR TO INFLUENCE MANY UNDECIDED VOTERS

Trump deployed "Law and Order" rhetoric to incite division and justify his abuse of power.

In September, we surveyed 10,000 voters in battleground states. Nearly half of undecided voters— 49% — agreed with the deployment of "law enforcement," and roughly a third were "unsure," creating an opportunity for Trump's narrative to take hold if not effectively countered.





Framing Biden's leadership and closing arguments



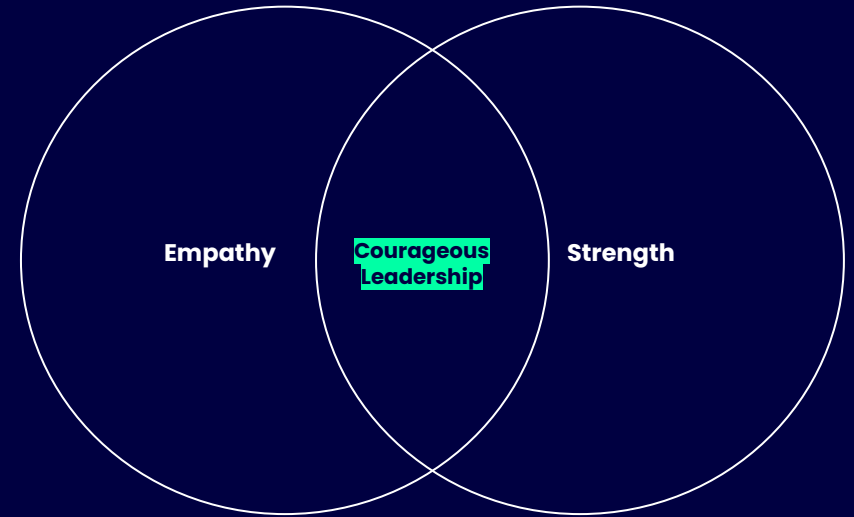
Framing Biden's Leadership & Closing Argument

KEY INSIGHT

Toward the end of the summer, support for racial justice protests had dropped precipitously, and the vast majority of undecided voters were unsure if Trump or Biden would do a better job keeping them safe. Voters were expressing themselves as reaching an emotional breaking point. Support for Biden was softening as Trump's narrative began to gain traction with undecideds. When asked what differentiated Biden most, voters named compassion.

THE STRATEGY

Democrats needed to go on offense, build social trust, and showcase Biden's brand of courageous leadership. We needed voters to see that Biden would be a President for all Americans: someone who was strong, compassionate, honest, hardworking, and empathetic. And we needed to refocus the conversation on COVID, economic well being, and healthcare.



Messaging Vote By Mail



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Messaging Vote By Mail

KEY INSIGHT

While vote by mail was the most popular voting method among the electorate, many were afraid that their mail-in-ballot might not be counted. These fears stemmed from worries about ballots being delayed or lost in the mail, due to operational challenges at the USPS. These fears were largely assuaged when voters read about security measures, historic use, and the accessibility and ease of the process.

THE STRATEGY

Democrats needed to show voters that voting by mail was convenient, accessible, secure, and safe. We encouraged our partners to emphasize historic use and ballot tracking measures whenever possible. And we recommended spotlighting election administrators and working through earned media to work from a place of existing trust.



VOTE BY MAIL FEARS WERE PROMINENT MOSTLY AMONG TRUMP VOTERS

In an election marked by voter anxiety, clear trends emerged with respect to vote by mail. In August, only 9% of Biden voters and 12% of voters leaning Biden told us they believed VBM posed a very big threat. 16% of undecided voters said it posed a very big threat. But Trump voters were living in a different reality.

57% of those voting Trump, and 19% of those leaning Trump saw VBM as a very big threat.

The above numbers reflect data collected on August 20, 2020.

Messaging Biden's Win and Election Legitimacy



Messaging Biden's Win & Election Legitimacy

KEY INSIGHT

Despite widespread agreement with the idea that every vote should be counted and election officials should declare the winner of the Presidential race, our data showed that Biden voters and Trump voters have been living in dual realities, with opposing perceptions of the legitimacy of the election results. And Trump voters, in particular, report the lowest rates of social trust.

THE STRATEGY

Despite opposing views of what transpired, many Biden and Trump voters could find agreement on a core set of principles: every vote must be counted, the voters must pick their President (not the other way around), and it's vital to have a peaceful transfer of power. While polarization isn't going away anytime soon, these ideas were critical to messaging the legitimacy of Biden's win.



PRESERVING LEGITIMACY REQUIRED ADDRESSING ERODING SOCIAL TRUST

Only 48% of Americans say that other people can generally be trusted (indicating social trust), while 52% say you can't be too careful.

Social trust is particularly low among Trump voters, 64% of whom say you can't be too careful (compared to only 38% of Biden voters).

The above numbers reflect data collected on November 19, 2020.

What we're thinking about as we head into 2021...



OVERCOMING THE POLITICS OF FEAR

Even before the COVID pandemic took hold in the United States, fear and anxiety were the most dominant emotions cited by nearly every segment of the electorate. Trump weaponized these feelings and used them to drive distrust and division. Trump may be leaving the White House, but his supporters are highly activated, and his brand of politics will not evaporate upon his departure. Developing a better understanding of how to effectively combat the politics of fear will be crucial in the months and years ahead.

REPAIRING SOCIAL TRUST & COMBATING POLARIZATION

We are observing some of the lowest levels of social trust in our lifetimes. This is marked by distrust for democratic institutions, media, science, and even one another. Eroding social trust is particularly prevalent among Trump supporters and may well be a contributing factor in the sampling bias of polling this cycle. And our data consistently showed that Biden and Trump voters didn't just have different points of view; they were living in dual realities. Building strategies and messaging that help to repair social trust will be essential in combating polarization.



Let's work together in 2021
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