

**From: Data For Progress and YouGov Blue<sup>1</sup>**

**To: Interested Parties**

**Re: Pre- and Post-Debate Survey**

**Date: July 2019**

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Most days on the campaign trail offer few opportunities for candidates to stand out and make news, particularly in a crowded field of over 20 candidates. But there are a few exceptions, including national primetime debates. To measure the impact of the first 2020 Democratic Primary debates on the candidates' prospects, Data for Progress and YouGov Blue conducted a large survey of likely Democratic primary voters—half of which fielded immediately before the debates on June 24th-26th, and the second half after on June 28th-July 2nd.

### **Executive Summary**

- Democratic voters do not share pundits' view that the most "electable" candidate is the most moderate. Clear majorities of Democratic voters value honesty, knowledge, and leadership most—with less than half valuing "willingness to compromise."
- Democratic voters prioritize turning out voters who stayed home in 2016 over persuading Trump voters.
- After the debate, Democratic voters' preferences for who they "wished to be the nominee" and who they "predicted to be the nominee" moved closer together, indicating an increasing belief that a variety of candidates can win the nomination.
- Senator Kamala Harris saw the biggest gains after the debate, across various questions.

### **Key Changes in Name Awareness**

Early in the race—with several months until the first primary in Iowa—[name recognition is a significant predictor of favorability](#). Candidates who have run before (e.g., Mitt Romney in 2012) or who have been in the spotlight for many years (e.g., Hillary Clinton in 2016) often start fast. Debates offer a unique opportunity for lesser-known candidates to make a name for themselves with the debate-viewing portion of the Democratic primary electorate.

Participating in the debate itself, despite being temporarily in the national spotlight, does not guarantee a bump in name recognition. Senator Amy Klobuchar, Senator Kirsten Gillibrand, former Congressman Beto O'Rourke, and Mayor Pete Buttigieg did not see such a spike after participating in the debate. However, several candidates did. The number of respondents who said they had heard "a lot" about Harris increased from 49 percent to 62 percent, with similar (if slightly smaller) increases for Senator Cory Booker (36 percent to 46 percent) and former U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Secretary Julian Castro (12 percent to 21

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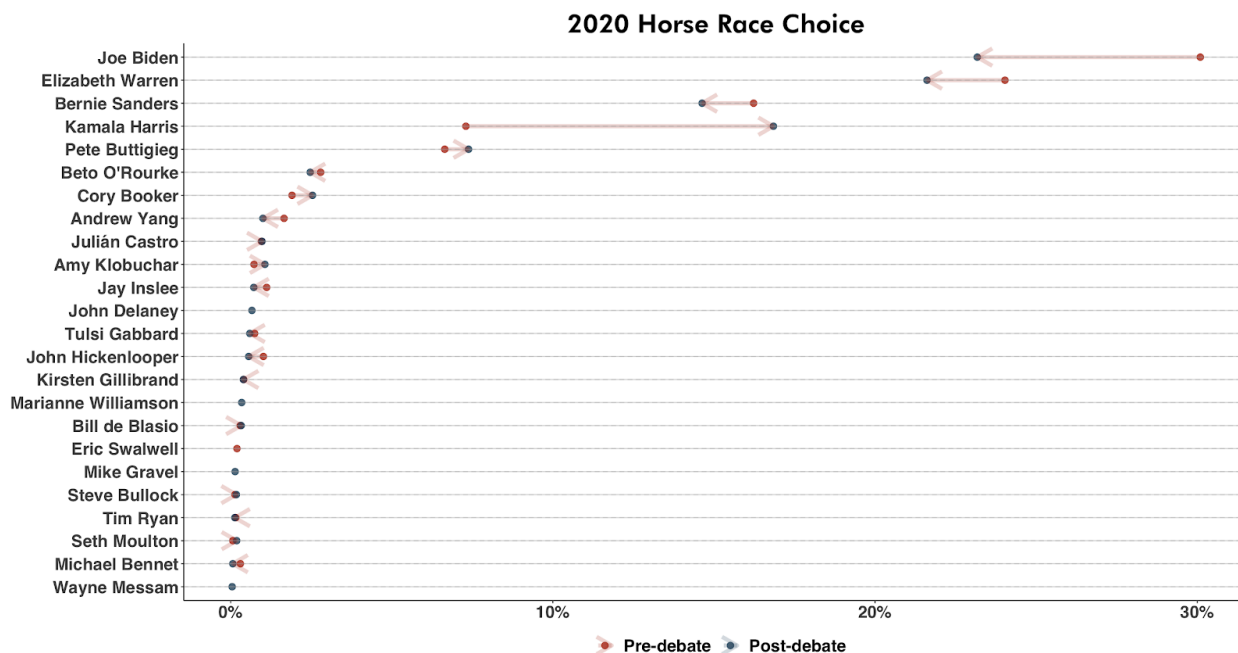
percent). No other candidates saw movement of more than 5 percentage points in either direction.

The item read:

*“For each person, please tell us if you’ve heard a lot, heard some, heard a little, or have not heard of that candidate.”*

### Biden and Warren Now Statistically Indistinguishable

These changes in name recognition correspond with changes in overall support. We asked respondents for whom they would vote in their state’s primary or caucus “if you had to choose today.” Harris’ topline support number significantly increased from 7 percent to 17 percent. But there was another movement in topline support, outside of those who gained more name recognition: Support for former Vice President Joe Biden, who Harris tussled with over bussing policy, significantly fell 7 percentage points to 23 percent. Given that support for the other front-runner—Senator Elizabeth Warren—was effectively stable (from 24 percent to 22 percent), Biden and Warren are now statistically indistinguishable from one another. The debates’ essentially neutral impact on Warren’s polling was shared with the other progressive frontrunner Senator Bernie Sanders, whose polling also went virtually unmoved from 16 percent to 15 percent.



*If you had to choose today, which candidate would you vote for in the 2020 Democratic presidential primary or caucus in your state?*

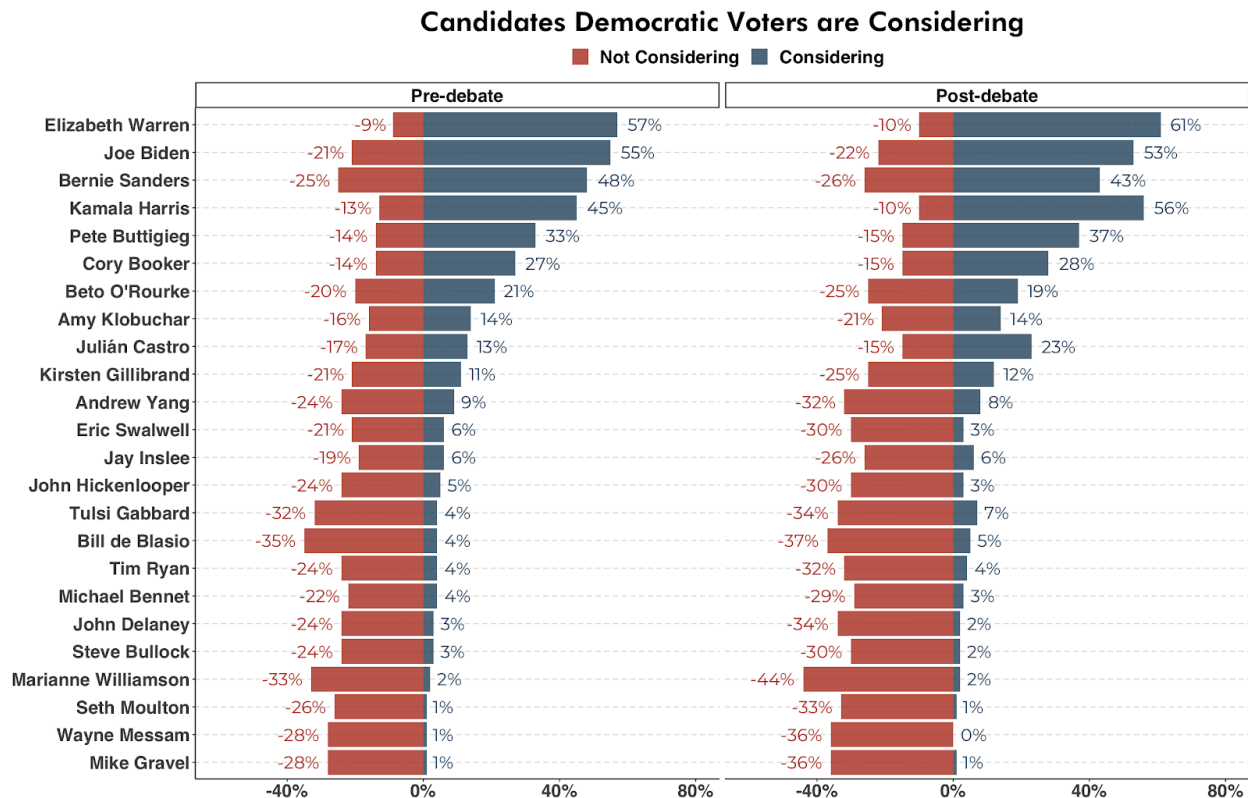
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## Key Changes in Considering Horse Race

These topline support numbers can be misleading this early in the race. Often the percentage of the electorate even considering—or decidedly *not* considering—voting for a given candidate is more telling. Toward the beginning of the survey, we asked respondents:

*“Thinking about the 2020 Democratic presidential primary or caucus in your state, which candidate or candidates are you considering voting for? Select all that apply.”*

We then asked respondents to report the candidates for whom they were actively *not* considering voting. The following chart summarizes the results of the “considering” and “not considering” horse race for the pre- and post-debate waves of the survey. The red bars out to the left indicate the share of Democratic primary voters reporting they are “not considering” voting for a candidate. The blue bars out to the right indicate the share of Democratic primary voters who are “considering” voting for that candidate. Each pane represents the pre- and post-debate waves of the survey.



Harris' pre-post debate movement for "considering" was 11 points and Castro's was 10 points. Among the rest of the major candidates, there was little movement on this question: Biden, Warren, O'Rourke, and Buttigieg were within the margins of error of one another on this item.

As to what candidates are being actively *not* considered, most remain either flat or directionally consistent with our other findings. Warren, Biden, Sanders, and Buttigieg were virtually unchanged. The largest change was author Marianne Williamson, whose actively *not* considering number increased by 11 points to 44 percent.

Similar to the previous item, we asked respondents:

*"Thinking about the 2020 Democratic nomination for president, who will you NOT consider voting for in your state's primary or caucus?"*

### **Key Takeaways on Electability**

Our survey included several items measuring the perceived electability of the Democratic nominees. Electability is a nebulous concept, and we approached it from multiple directions to investigate how voters perceive it, to the extent that they do. We focus on the results of those various approaches here.

The fundamental question of electability concerns whether a candidate who is suitable for winning a Presidential general primary is suitable for winning a Presidential general election. Voters who participate in primaries and caucuses are different from voters who participate in general elections, and so there is a question as to whether primary voters are calibrating their preferences to better position their party's candidate in the general election.

We asked respondents who they *think* will win and who they would *want* to win if they could have a particular candidate skip the general election entirely. We refer to this latter item as the "magic wand":

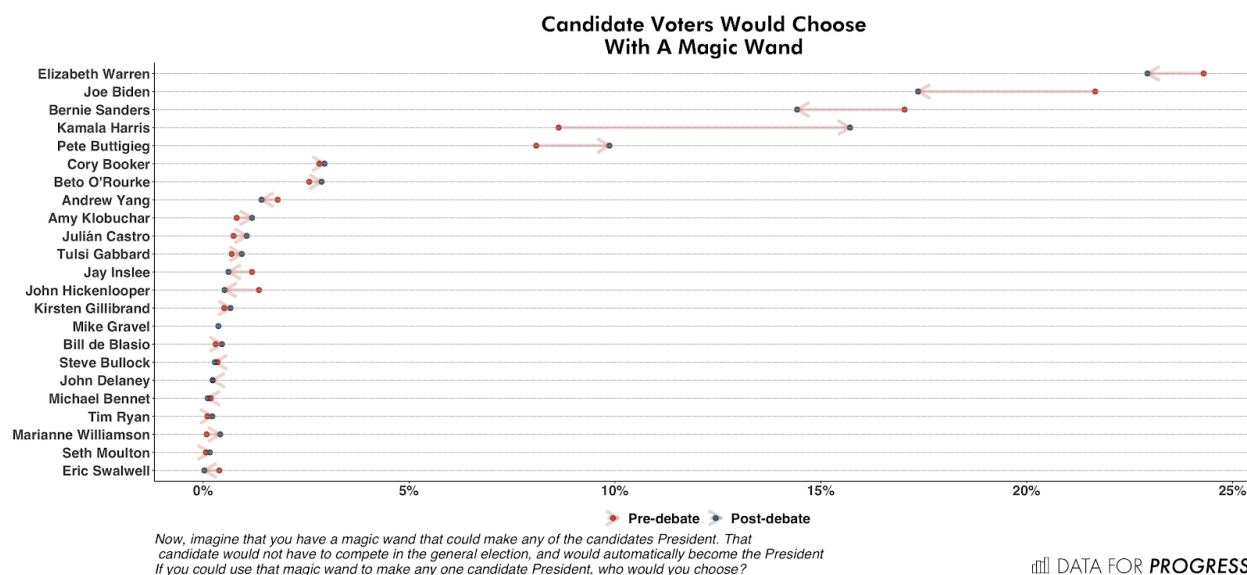
*"Now, imagine that you have a magic wand that could make any of the candidates President. That candidate would not have to compete in the general election, and would automatically become the President. If you could use that magic wand to make any one candidate President, who would you choose?"*

For each, respondents were then shown the full list of candidates.

In the pre-debate wave, 22 percent of respondents reported that they would prefer to automatically make Biden President, down to 17 percent in the post-debate wave. Harris experienced an increase in the share of voters who would prefer to make her President automatically, jumping from 9 percent in the pre-debate wave to 16 percent in the post-debate

wave. Other major candidates like Warren and Buttigieg were unchanged, while Sanders' percent fell about 3 points, from just over 17 percent to about 14 percent. Despite a widely perceived strong debate performance, we did not find that Castro's share changed to a statistically significant degree.

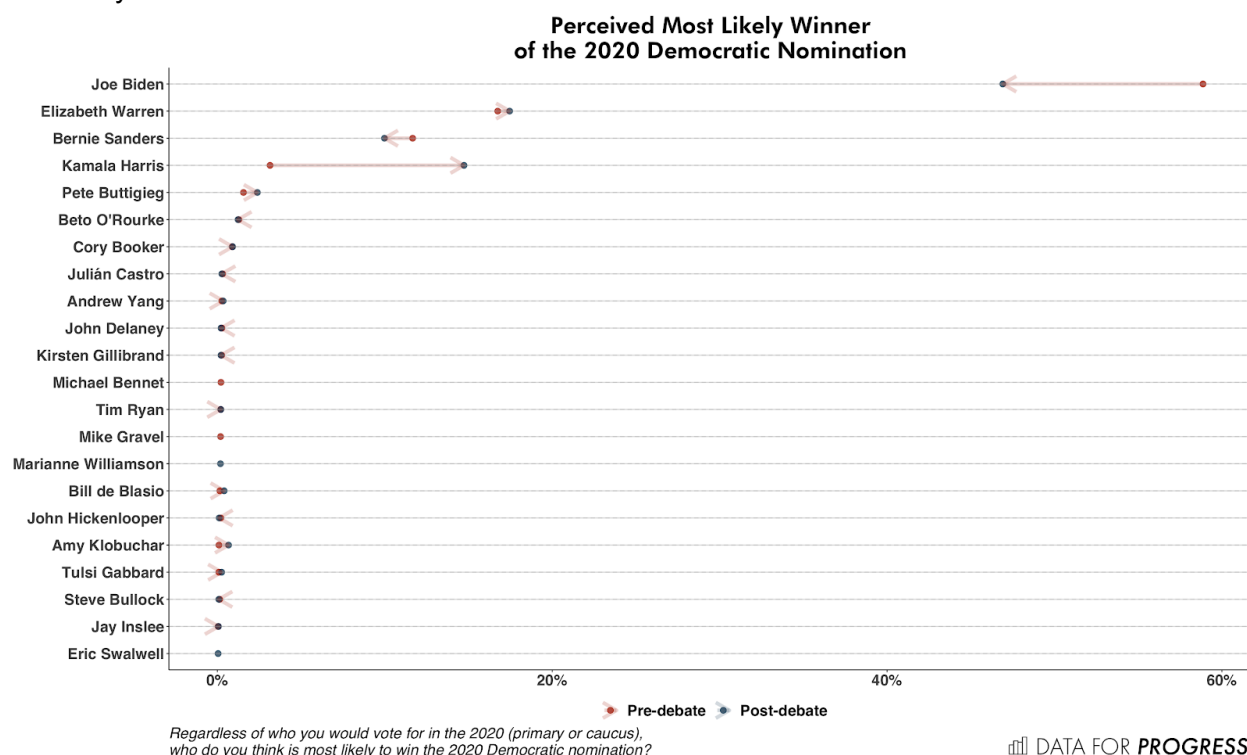
In both waves of the survey, Warren was the most-preferred “magic wand” candidate, with 24 percent of respondents before and 23 percent after reporting that she would be the candidate they'd nominate if they didn't have to worry about the general election. In the first wave, this was only a slight lead over Biden, but Biden slipping and Harris rising during the debate period put her squarely in the lead on the magic wand question in the second wave (with Biden and Harris coming in a statistical tie for second). This is particularly interesting as our [previous research](#) suggests that Biden voters and Harris voters each rank the other candidate highly. As our survey waves involve independent populations, we can not draw definitive conclusions about movement within-voters, but we see movement across the electorate that is consistent with this preference set.



We also asked respondents who they thought would win the nomination, regardless of who they were personally considering. The overall topline on these items were quite different, as one might expect, but the main takeaway from this item is that it *changed* between waves in a similar direction as the individual support items. Biden moved from being a prohibitive favorite, with 59 percent of respondents in the first wave saying he was the candidate most likely to win, down to a strong favorite with 47 percent of respondents in the second wave. Once again, the data indicate Harris' strong debate performance, with 3 percent of wave one respondents and 15 percent of wave two respondents indicating they thought Harris would be the eventual winner.

Other major candidates did not move much, with Sanders at 12 percent in the first wave and at 10 percent in the second wave, and Warren at 17 percent in both waves. While it is generally

agreed that Castro performed well, less than 1 percent of voters in either wave thought that he was likely to be the eventual nominee.

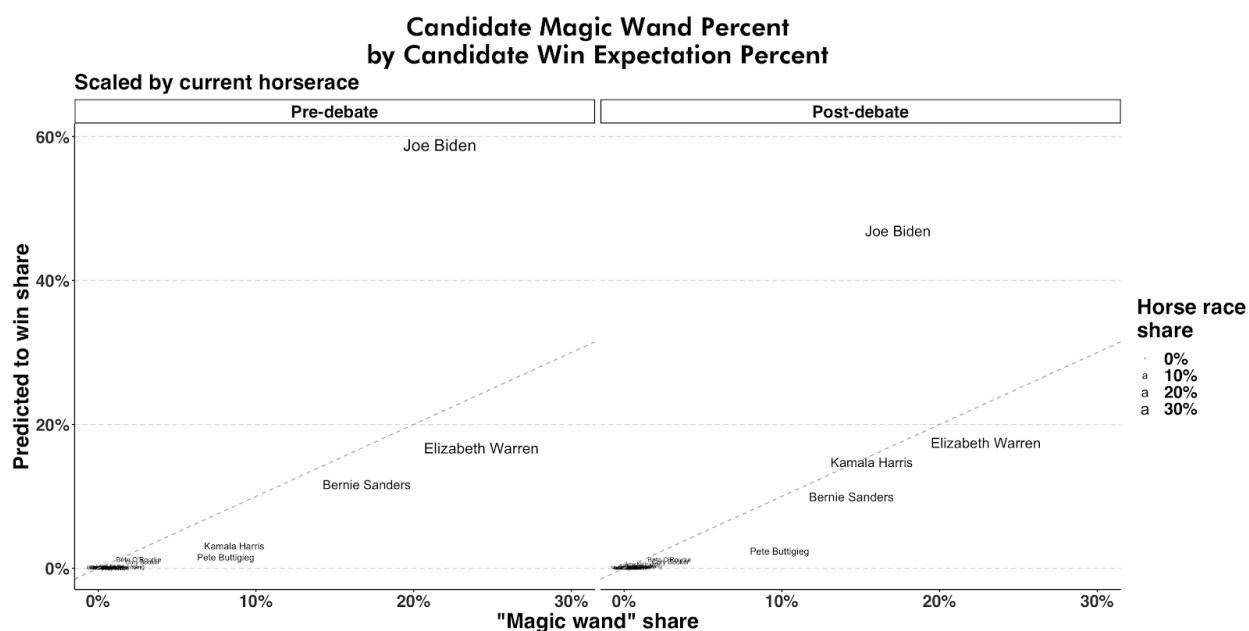


How does this relate to electability? In the following plot, we show the relationship between “magic wand” share, “eventual winner prediction” share, and horse race share. We plot each candidate’s total percent of the “magic wand” item in both waves against their total percent in the “eventual winner prediction” item to compare the shares of voters who *wish* a candidate would win and the shares of voters who *predict* a candidate will win. Each candidate name is scaled so that candidates with higher shares of the horse race item are larger.

Additionally, we include a dotted “ninety-degree line” in each plot. If a candidate were placed directly on that line, then they would have exactly as many voters that *wish* for that candidate to win as there are voters that *believe* that candidate will win. If a candidate is placed above the line, more voters *believe* the candidate will win than *wish* for the candidate to win. For a candidate below the line, more voters *wish* that the candidate would win than *believe* that the candidate will win.

Viewed this way, we see that Biden is the only candidate who is more likely to be expected to win than wished to win, while all other candidates are more likely to be preferred than expected. While about 24 percent of respondents in the first wave selected Warren in the “magic wand” item, only about 17 percent of respondents in the first wave reported believing she would be the eventual nominee. In contrast, while slightly *fewer* respondents in wave one would wish Biden to win the Presidency, 59 percent of respondents in the first wave reported believing he would be the nominee.

Each of the major candidates moved closer to the ninety-degree line after the debate. That is, the distance between the share of respondents who *wish* a candidate would be the nominee and who *believe* the candidate will be the nominee decreased for each of the major candidates. Post-debate, Harris sits almost precisely on the line. After the first debate, the gulf between who voters would most like *personally* and who they think is most likely to win *independent of their own preferences* has begun to narrow.



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In many contexts, "electability" is the gulf between the passions of the primary electorate and the capacity of their chosen candidate to make a case to a general electorate. Biden's strong support despite his low "magic wand" number suggests voters are aware of this tension. Democrats appear to have the reasonable expectation that their candidate will need to be one who can appeal to the general electorate. The movement between the two debate waves also indicates that the spotlight of the debate was perceived to help some candidates appear more electable than they had previously appeared.

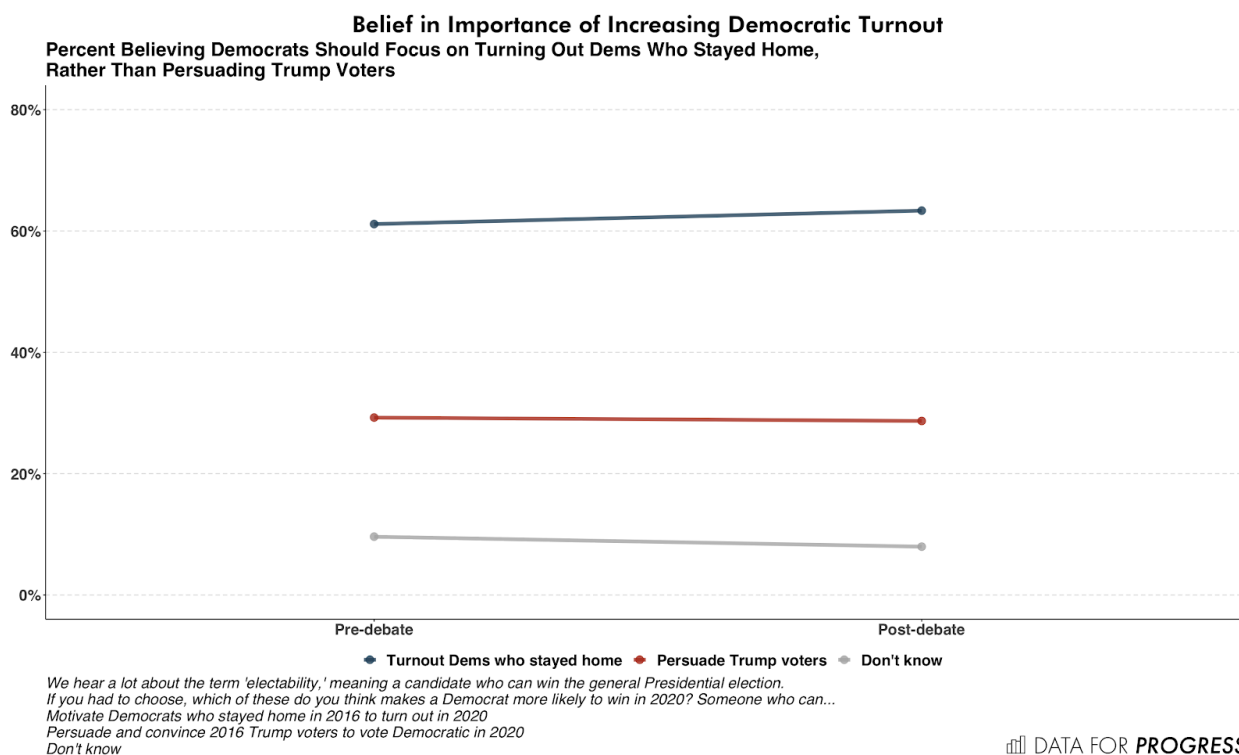
Democratic primary voters by and large do not believe the best way to be electable is by reaching out to Trump voters: 61 percent of pre-debate voters and 63 percent of post-debate voters believe that their candidate should focus on turning out Democrats who stayed home, rather than by reaching out to Republicans. In our survey, we asked voters to explicitly choose between these two strategies:

*"We hear a lot about the term "electability," meaning a candidate who can win the general Presidential election. If you had to choose, which of these*

do you think makes a Democrat more likely to win in 2020? Someone who can...

- Persuade and convince 2016 Trump voters to vote Democratic in 2020
- Motivate Democrats who stayed home in 2016 to turn out in 2020
- Don't know

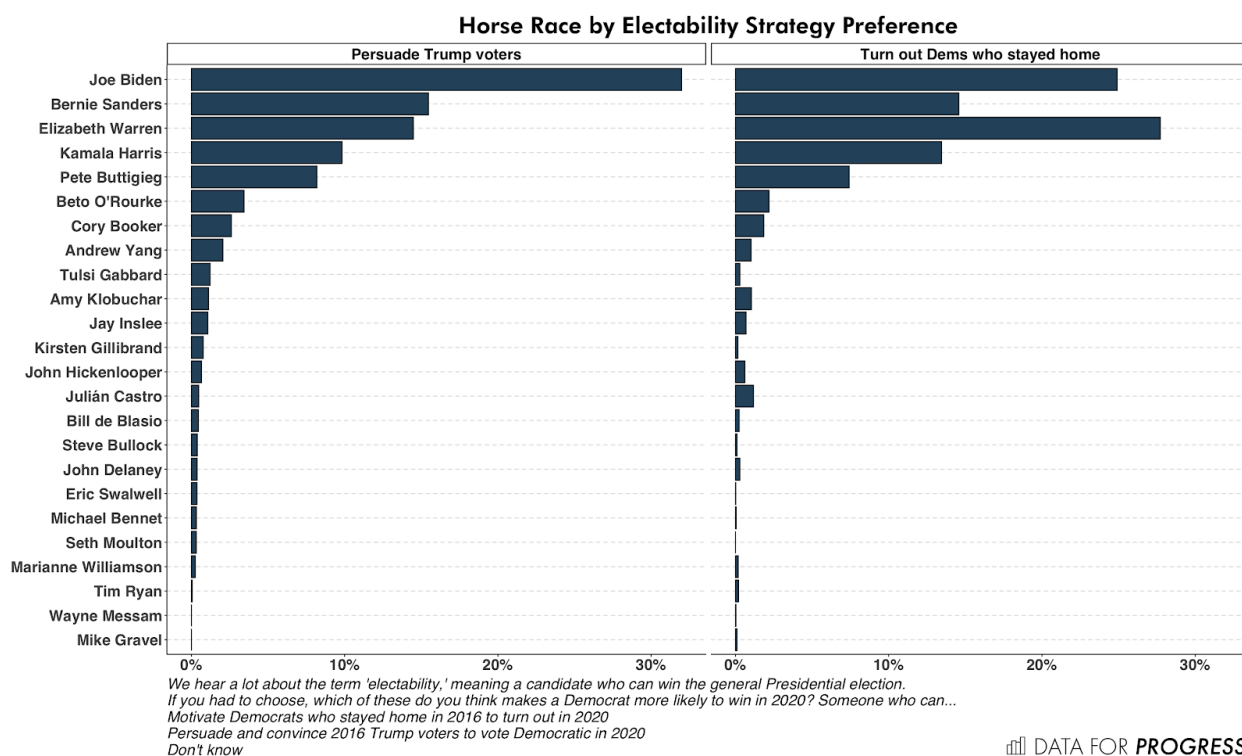
These differences are not statistically significant, and we do not see major movement on this item across the two debate waves.



Past analysis by Data for Progress and YouGov Blue suggests there is some merit to this preference. After the 2018 midterm elections, [we found that](#) Independent and “swing” voters scored much higher on measures of hostile sexism and racism than did Democrats, even among those who voted Democratic in 2018. In 2020, when the top of the Republican ticket includes the most well-known racist and sexist person in America, relying on those supposedly “middle of the road” centrists is unlikely to be a surefire strategy.

After the debates, a majority of voters who support any of the major candidates now believe that turning out Democrats who have stayed home in the past is a better strategy than relying on persuasion of Trump voters: 58 percent of Biden supporters, 68 percent of Harris supporters, 76 percent of Warren supporters, and 60 percent of Sanders supporters prefer the turnout strategy. While the media debates whether Democratic primary voters are being sufficiently “strategic” in

their choice of candidates, Democratic primary voters' values are clear: Whether they support a moderate or a progressive, they believe increasing turnout among those who stayed home but would have voted Democratic in 2016 is essential to beating Trump.



We also looked at how the horse race differed between those who prefer the two different strategies of persuasion and turnout. Biden's support is being driven by the relatively lower share of voters who believe that persuading Trump voters is the best 2020 strategy. Among those voters, Biden is clearly in first place; among voters who prefer the Democratic turnout strategy, Biden narrowly trails Warren. Sanders's support is stable across voters who prefer either strategy, with Sanders being statistically tied for second with Warren among voters who prefer the persuasion strategy, and tied for third with Harris among voters who prefer the Democratic turnout strategy.

We also asked respondents to describe the notion of "electability" to us in their own words:

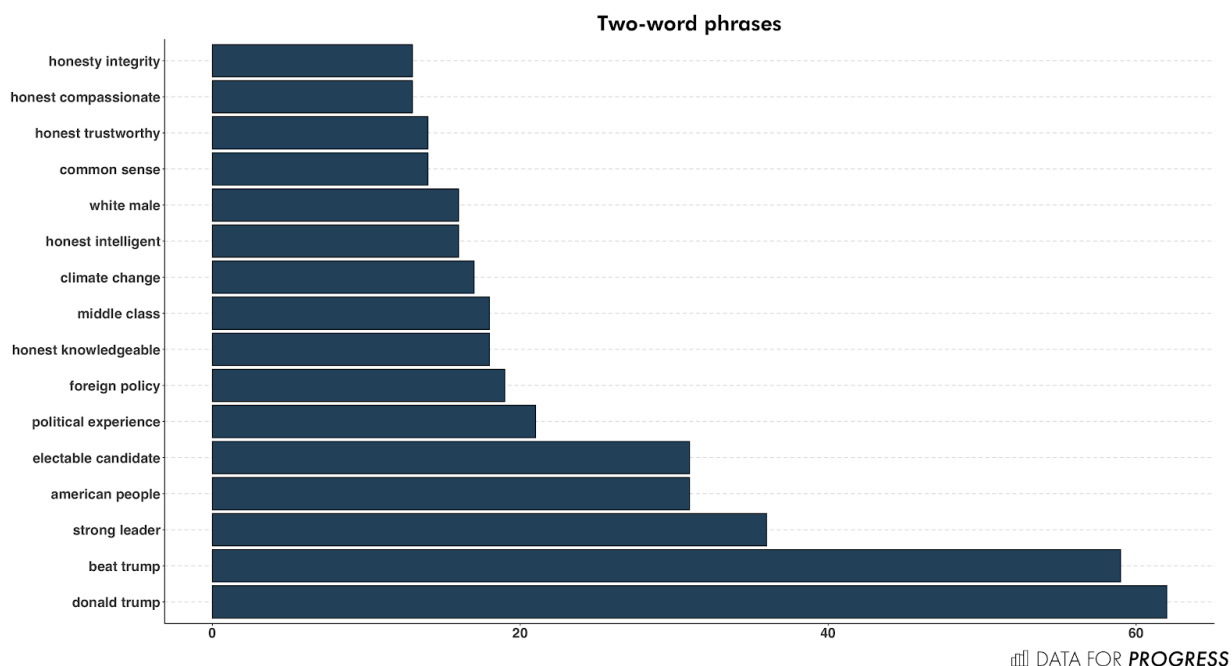
*Lately, there has been a lot of talk about whether candidates for office are "electable" or not. When you hear this being talked about, what do you think people mean by "electability"?*

Data for Progress has been invested in the question of "electability" throughout this cycle and has written on it [extensively](#) in the past. Our results here will be familiar to readers of our previous analyses: Voters themselves do not write about the topic of "electability" as if they care about it very much, and those that do recognize that the term is used cynically by pundits

seeking to characterize certain “familiar traits” in a way that is palatable to the public (such as “white male,” see below).

Across our respondents, the most common attribute mentioned included some form of the word “honest” or “honesty”; 22 percent of responses included these words. About 15 percent of respondents used the word “people,” often referring to someone who can “can relate to people” or “brings people together,” and so on. 13 percent of responses included the name “Trump,” and almost unanimously those statements included an explicit reference to “being able to beat Trump.”

The following plot shows the most common two-word pairs in our open-ended electability item. Since being electable means being Trump, it is unsurprising that Trump features prominently. Additionally, phrases like “strong leader,” “American people”, and “political experience” feature heavily. “White male” and “middle class” appear here, often used ambivalently by respondents. Reinforcing the quantitative analyses above, it is clear that Democrats are well-aware of and considering the tension between a candidate they would really like and one that they think is appealing for the general electorate. For example, respondents wrote: “When I hear the word electable, it seems to mean white male which is massively annoying”, “electable... seems like a euphemism for part of the establishment or the status quo white male”, and “...they have to be a white male because many parts of America are racist and misogynistic.”

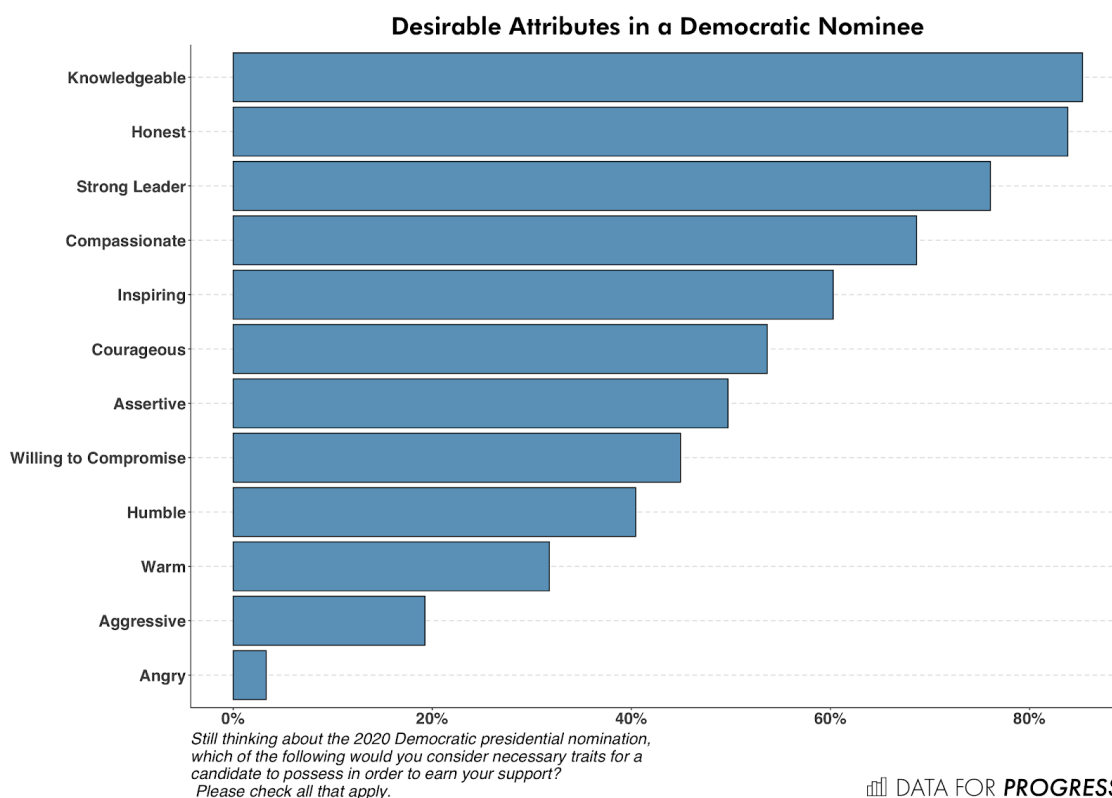


We then asked respondents to choose among an explicit, pre-defined set of attributes to better understand what would make candidates “electable” overall. We asked respondents:

*“Still thinking about the 2020 Democratic presidential nomination, which of the following would you consider necessary traits for a candidate to possess in order to earn your support? Please check all that apply.”*

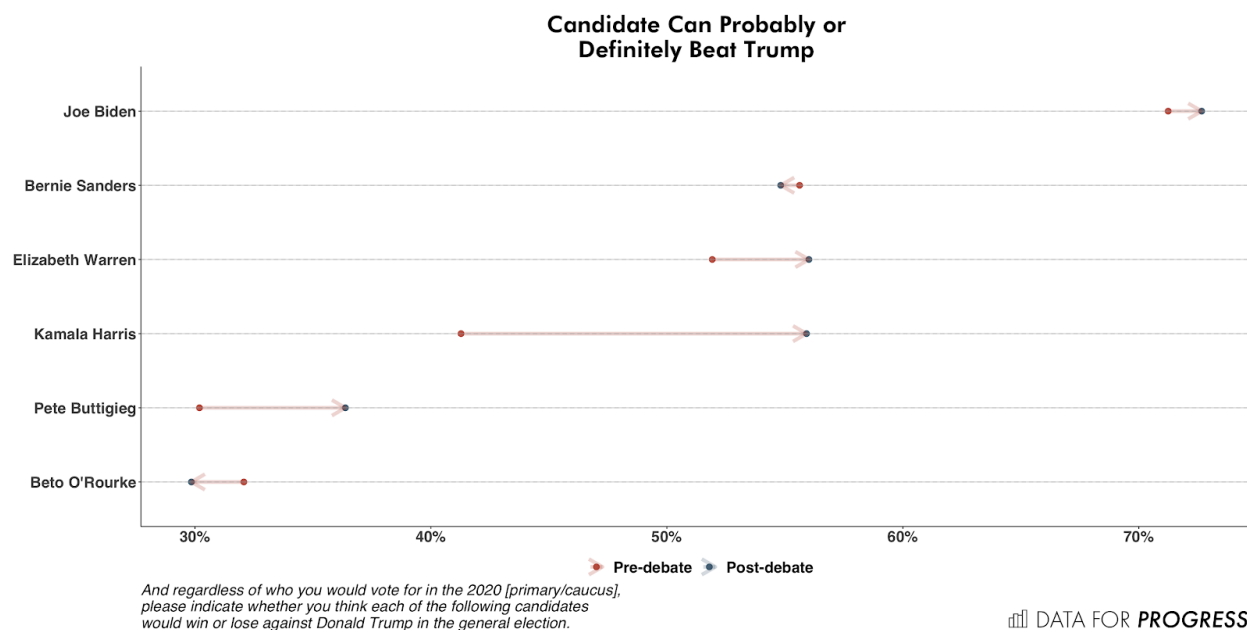
From which respondents could select “honest,” “knowledgeable,” “strong leader,” “compassionate,” “warm,” “humble,” “aggressive,” “courageous,” “inspiring,” “assertive,” “willing to compromise,” “angry,” or “none of these.” Respondents were given the list of traits in random order.

Our data show that 85 percent of Democratic primary voters reported that being “knowledgeable” was important, and 84 percent selected “honest.” Less than half of Democratic voters viewed being “willing to compromise” as being an important trait. Democratic voters do not view “electable” candidates as those who will gravitate to the middle; Democratic voters believe the most important attribute is knowing how to do the job. They also believe a candidate must be someone who cares: “Compassionate” was the fourth-most selected attribute. In an arena of historically male candidates, it is encouraging to see Democratic primary voters value an attribute that has been traditionally viewed as more feminine. This is also an understandable reaction to some of Trump’s most negative qualities and policies.



The ability to beat Trump is one of the most attractive features that Democratic primary voters find in a candidate. We asked respondents—regardless of if they would vote for this

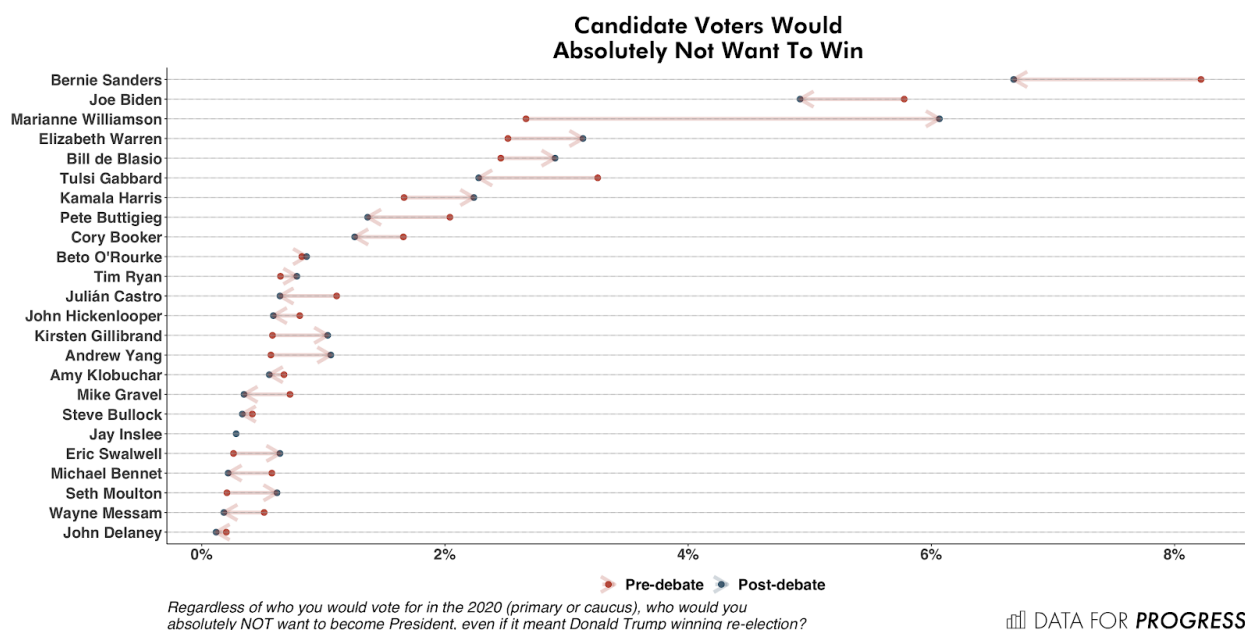
candidate—to indicate how likely each candidate is to beat Donald Trump in a general election (on a definitely lose, probably lose, not sure, probably win, and definitely win scale). We asked this of some of the top candidates: Buttigieg, Harris, Biden, Warren, O'Rourke, and Sanders, who were chosen based on their performances in pre-debate polls. We examined the percentage of voters saying the candidate could “probably” or “definitely” beat Trump in a general election, comparing before and after the debate.



The only significant change was Harris, increasing 15 percentage points from 41 percent to 56 percent, now indistinguishable from Warren and Sanders in terms of perceived capability of defeating Trump. Buttigieg saw a 6 point increase, although this was not a significant increase. All other candidates had 4 points or less of a change. Biden still has a lead in perceived ability to beat Trump, but Harris, Warren, and Sanders now equally trail him on this dimension.

### Strong Anti-Trump Priority

While we observed considerable movement on some key issues over the course of the first pre- and post-debate period, Democratic voters are nearly unanimous in preferring not to let Trump win in 2020. We asked respondents if there were any candidates they would absolutely NOT want to win in 2020, “even if it meant Donald Trump winning re-election.” After the first debate, no candidate earned more than 7 percent of respondents saying they would “absolutely NOT” want that candidate to be President. While pundits debate how divided Democrats are over their choice of nominee, the reality is that virtually all Democrats are currently ready to support any nominee over four more years of Trump.



## Demographics and the Horse Race

Demographic support for the top candidates was the same over the two waves; the composition of support (as measured by the aforementioned horse race question) pre-debate was the same as it was post-debate. We collapsed across waves when looking at the demographic crosstabs for candidate support. We display candidate support by subgroup (e.g., 16 percent of men support Bernie Sanders) as well as subgroup by candidate support (e.g., 60 percent of Joe Biden supporters are women).

We see the biggest demographic differences in favor of Biden. His Black support sits at 43 percent, while his support among all other racial groups sits 25 percent or lower. His support among all three age groups 45 and older is above 30 percent, while both of the age groups younger than 45 support him below 20 percent. Biden (30 percent) also has an 8 percentage point lead above Warren (22 percent) among women, but these two candidates are tied at 23 percent among men.

Warren (32 percent), however, leads Biden (21 percent) among college-educated voters by 11 points; Biden (31 percent) leads both Warren (16 percent) and Sanders (18 percent) among non-college educated respondents.

Table 1: Horserace by Key Demographic Groups

Candidate	Sanders	Warren	Biden	Harris	Other	Total
<b>Gender</b>						
<i>Male</i> (N = 1,245)	16%	23%	23%	11%	27%	100%
<i>Female</i> (N = 1,672)	14%	22%	30%	13%	20%	100%
<b>Education</b>						
<i>Non-College</i> (N = 1,563)	18%	16%	31%	12%	24%	100%
<i>College</i> (N = 1,354)	12%	32%	21%	13%	22%	100%
<b>Race</b>						
<i>White</i> (N = 1,986)	14%	28%	22%	11%	24%	100%
<i>Black</i> (N = 495)	13%	11%	43%	15%	19%	100%
<i>Hispanic</i> (N = 271)	22%	16%	25%	12%	26%	100%
<i>Other</i> (N = 164)	20%	24%	17%	14%	25%	100%
<b>Age</b>						
<i>18-29</i> (N = 389)	26%	23%	12%	7%	30%	100%
<i>30-44</i> (N = 733)	20%	26%	18%	12%	24%	100%
<i>45-54</i> (N = 521)	14%	20%	30%	15%	22%	100%
<i>55-64</i> (N = 569)	10%	20%	36%	12%	22%	100%
<i>65+</i> (N = 705)	6%	23%	38%	14%	19%	100%

**Table 2: Demographic Composition of Each Candidate's Supporters**

<b>Candidate</b>	<b>Sanders</b> (N = 412)	<b>Warren</b> (N = 717)	<b>Biden</b> (N = 767)	<b>Harris</b> (N = 372)	<b>Other</b> (N = 648)
<b>Gender</b>					
<i>Male</i>	49%	46%	40%	42%	52%
<i>Female</i>	51%	54%	60%	58%	48%
<i>Total</i>	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
<b>Education</b>					
<i>Non-College</i>	67%	42%	67%	56%	61%
<i>College</i>	33%	58%	33%	44%	39%
<i>Total</i>	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
<b>Race</b>					
<i>White</i>	58%	75%	52%	57%	64%
<i>Black</i>	18%	10%	34%	26%	17%
<i>Hispanic</i>	16%	8%	10%	11%	13%
<i>Other</i>	8%	6%	4%	7%	6%
<i>Total</i>	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
<b>Age</b>					
<i>18-29</i>	30%	18%	8%	10%	22%
<i>30-44</i>	34%	30%	18%	26%	27%
<i>45-54</i>	16%	16%	20%	21%	17%
<i>55-64</i>	12%	16%	25%	18%	17%
<i>65+</i>	8%	21%	30%	24%	17%
<i>Total</i>	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

## **Methodology**

### *Pre-Debate Survey:*

This survey is based on 1,397 interviews conducted by YouGov on the internet of registered voters likely to vote in the Democratic presidential primary in 2020. A sample of 2,868 interviews of self-identified registered voters was selected to be representative of registered voters and weighted according to gender, age, race, education, region, and past presidential vote based on registered voters in the November 2016 Current Population Survey, conducted by the U.S. Bureau of the Census. The sample was then subsetted to only look at respondents who reported they were likely to vote in their state's Democratic primary or caucus. The weights range from 0.2 to 6.5 with a mean of 1 and a standard deviation of 0.7.

### *Post-Debate Survey:*

This survey is based on 1,556 interviews conducted by YouGov on the internet of registered voters likely to vote in the Democratic presidential primary in 2020. A sample of 3,248 interviews of self-identified registered voters was selected to be representative of registered voters and weighted according to gender, age, race, education, region, and past presidential vote based on registered voters in the November 2016 Current Population Survey, conducted by the U.S. Bureau of the Census. The sample was then subsetted to only look at respondents who reported they were likely to vote in their state's Democratic primary or caucus. The weights range from 0.2 to 6.4 with a mean of 1 and a standard deviation of 0.5.