

To: Interested Parties  
 From: Catalyze/Citizens  
 Re: **2022 GOP Electoral Messaging and Ad Spending on Immigration Provides A Roadmap to the GOP's 2024 Playbook**

---

## Executive Summary

In response to President Biden's reelection campaign announcement, the national Republican Party deployed a video that spotlighted the issues their party would use to attack Biden, Vice President Harris and Democrats at large: the economy, crime, and immigration. To no one's surprise, these are recycled themes from the 2022 cycle and previous presidential cycles. Immigration, in particular, has long become the weapon of choice for Republicans since candidate Donald Trump popularized "build the wall," "bad hombres" and other divisive messaging on the issue. Now and throughout 2024, immigration will continue to be weaponized.

Last year's cycle provides a glimpse of what voters can expect in 2024, with exaggerated budgets and even higher stakes. In 2022, the Republican Party and its candidates embraced extremism and doubled-down on anti-immigrant messaging rhetoric. **On broadcast TV alone, GOP candidates and right-wing groups spent over \$171 million in ads, attacking Democrats on immigration, across ten battleground states**—on top of millions more spent on digital ads and other paid communication to voters (i.e. mailers, billboards, and emails). The GOP strategy on immigration was further amplified by right-wing media, which in the same cycle generated over 61,000 mentions of the "border" to an estimated audience of 59 million, according to an Immigration Hub [report](#). In fact, Fox News dedicated about 32% of its coverage to the border and immigration across all platforms in the same year.

While the GOP saw major losses in 2022 despite enormous spending on anti-immigrant advertising, they have been successful in monopolizing the immigration conversation. In a [2023 battleground states survey](#) conducted by Global Strategy Group, voters reported they hear more from Republicans than Democrats on immigration by a 52%-27% margin, which contributes to Republicans' 8-point advantage on who voters trust more to handle the issue. As the GOP dominates the conversation on immigration, the impact on voters' view on President Biden is not lost – the survey found that a majority of voters believe the president is ignoring the issue. This distorted view, given that the Biden administration has undertaken [over 400 immigration-related executive actions](#), is in large part due to a lack of political advertising and socialization of immigration solutions and counter-offense against the GOP. Allowing Republican attacks to go unanswered deepens voter misunderstanding of the Democratic position on the issue, flattens base enthusiasm, and moves a set of moderates vulnerable to GOP messaging and misinformation.

With President Biden's reelection bid launched, it is critical to look back at the GOP strategy on immigration as a means to understand their 2024 playbook and how the Biden-Harris campaign and Democratic Party can go on offense to deliver a winning message on immigration to key battleground voters.

## 2022 Analysis of Right-wing TV Spending on Immigration

According to analysis\* conducted by [AdImpact](#), commissioned by Catalyze/Citizens, over \$171 million was spent on 258 anti-immigrant TV ads in 2022 senate, congressional and governor races by candidates, PACs and other groups in ten battleground states (AZ, CO, FL, GA, MI, NC, NH, NV, PA, and WI). The ads aired over 346,500 times. The following is a breakdown of these findings:

- Most of these ads were concentrated in Arizona, with 51.22% of ads focused on immigration compared to 48.78% non-immigration ads. Followed by Florida, where 18.34% of ads were focused on immigration, and New Hampshire with 16.67% of immigration-related ads. Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, Nevada, North Carolina, Georgia and Colorado all had less than 15% of ads focused on immigration. In terms of total anti-immigrant ads per state, Arizona saw 105 ads, Colorado 2 ads, Florida 31 ads, Georgia 16 ads, Michigan 9 ads, North Carolina 16 ads, New Hampshire 15 ads, Nevada 20 ads, Pennsylvania 32 ads, and Wisconsin 15 ads.

- The majority of ads mentioned the “border” 173 times, the “wall” 53 times, “fentanyl” 12 times, “invasion” 12 times, “crime” 47 times and “crisis” 20 times.
- 6 of the total of 31 anti-immigrant ads from Florida were run by the Republican Party of Florida in support of Ron DeSantis’ 2022 gubernatorial reelection campaign. They mostly focused on attacking Charlie Crist for his support of Dreamers, among other positions. A total of \$12,962,832 was spent in Florida
- 105 anti-immigrant ads ran in Arizona during the 2022 cycle. 51 of those ads were run for Blake Masters’ senatorial bid and 33 for Kari Lake’s gubernatorial campaign. Almost all of the ads were focused on falsely painting migrants as an invading force that were supposedly overrunning the border and committing crime. A total of \$38,916,181 was spent in Arizona.
- In Pennsylvania, Doug Mastriano’s gubernatorial bid ran 4 anti-immigrant ads and Mehmet Oz’s campaign ran 16 ads. Both candidates’ ads focused on “open borders”, falsely attacking Democrats for allowing “illegal immigration to run wild.” A total of \$9,560,676 was spent in Pennsylvania.
- Republicans in Michigan ran 9 different anti-immigrant ads that attempted to tie pro-immigration policies with crime and defunding the police. A total of \$1,880,144 was spent in Michigan.

### The Immigration Factor Now and in 2024

Despite the collapse of the expected GOP “red wave” in 2022, Republicans are still doubling down on the same failed white nationalist messaging that seeks to divide Americans by demonizing hard working immigrant families. They started off 2023 with performative threats to [impeach](#) Secretary Mayorkas, racist depictions of migrant “invasions,” and congressional hearings focused on the “open border” and fentanyl, recycling the same electoral attacks of the previous year. According to monitoring by Catalyze/Citizens, the right-wing media has additionally multiplied the anti-immigrant messaging by generating over 16,717 mentions of the border and immigration to an estimated audience of 80 million since the start of the year.

With the pending revocation of Title 42, Republican members of Congress have already [promised](#) a package of harmful policies that would jeopardize the lives of migrants, gut America’s asylum system and revert to Trump-era measures. These tactics are samples of red meat messaging to continue weaponizing the issue throughout the year and into 2024 despite lacking the support of the American people on this issue. In fact, in the [April 2023 survey conducted by Global Strategy Group](#), a majority of battleground voters not only supported President Biden’s border solutions, but also found GOP immigration stunts and policies to be too extreme and out of line:

- **Voters overwhelmingly support a path to citizenship, work permits, and Temporary Protected Status (TPS).** 76% want a way for them to “gain legal status and a pathway to citizenship if certain requirements are met, including background checks,” and 64% support the Biden administration using its TPS authority.
- **Majority support (69% support v. 21% oppose) President Biden taking action** to make it easier for undocumented immigrants, including DACA recipients, who meet certain criteria to apply for work permits and protection from deportation.
- **68% of all voters, including 74% of swing voters, want “a balanced approach that includes both border security and protects Dreamers**, providing them and other eligible immigrants with a pathway to citizenship.”
- Only 32% of all voters, and only 26% of swing voters, want “an enforcement-only approach that exclusively focuses on border security and limiting the use of asylum.”
- **65% of voters surveyed support modernizing and improving the infrastructure at ports of entry and (59%) working with Latin American countries to enhance legal pathways** over Republican policies such as detaining families and separating families.

- **Republicans are vulnerable on their extremism, and new proposals from Ron DeSantis and Greg Abbott put them far outside the mainstream.** The most concerning aspect of Republican positioning on immigration is that they support “MAGA positions far out of line with the mainstream, including separating children from their parents at the border and the mass deportation of Dreamers and other undocumented immigrants.” Further, a strong majority of voters think recent anti-immigrant proposals from these states go too far:
  - **64% say the following proposal from Ron DeSantis “goes too far”** (vs. just 25% who say it is an appropriate policy): “Making it a felony for U.S. citizens to have an undocumented immigrant in their home or to give them a ride in their car.”
  - **63% say the following proposal from Greg Abbott “goes too far”** (vs. just 24% who say it is appropriate): “Giving ordinary citizens the authority to arrest migrants who cross the border, and providing them immunity from any criminal prosecution related to their actions.”

Past [research](#) and previous cycles (specifically in [Pennsylvania](#), [Arizona](#) and [Nevada](#)) have consistently shown that when Democrats lean in and push forward - publicly and clearly - their vision and values-based solutions on immigration in stark contrast to the Republican attacks, they win the public debate and persuade voters while also inoculating swing voters who are targeted by the opposition. By countering Republicans on the issue and socializing what solutions they have delivered to create legal pathways, secure the border and address forced global migration, Democrats are able to prevent voter backlash on immigration, validate pro-immigrant sentiment, and move voters in favor of Democratic candidates. Bottom line, Democrats cannot remain silent on immigration.

**\*Methodology:** AdImpact conducted this research through a team of analysts who watch and label each ad with an issue tag based on its content. After filtering down the ads with the “Immigration” issue tag to only those aired by Republican advertisers in the specified states and races, the analysts used a keyword search of each transcript to determine the total number of ads each term appeared in. (Note: To view any of the ads mentioned in this report, please contact [info@catalyzecitizens.org](mailto:info@catalyzecitizens.org).)