

Candidate Issues Pages – Best Practices

April 2022



Top Line

1. The Issues Page is the part of your website where voters (and others, such as journalists) learn where you stand on the issues. It needs to tell them why you are the right person to represent your district.
2. Issues pages should appeal to a broad range of the electorate. An issues page that addresses only a few issues or is extremely partisan is unlikely to get you elected.
3. We have identified 5 best practices for candidate issues pages:
 1. Make it easy to find and navigate
 2. Head and heart – not just facts, but also why you care
 3. Cover the key issues to attract a wide range of voters
 4. Pay attention to framing (how you say it)
 5. Keep it concise and organized.

A good issues page is critical to attracting supporters, donors, and votes!

Backup

1. **A good issues page is essential – it quickly tells voters where you stand, and why they should support you.**

Voters often focus on two categories of information – **where you stand on the issues they care about**, and **your experience**. They can learn about your experience from your “about” page. The best place for them to learn about your stand on the issues is your “Issues” pages.

2. Your issues page needs to appeal to a broad range of the electorate. A page focused on extreme positions is very unlikely to attract the broad support needed to win elections.

a. In many states and districts, you will need more than your share of moderate voters and Independents to win.

- As an example, a February 2022 survey of likely voters in Texas shows that neither major party has a majority in Texas – 33% Democrats, 41% Republicans, and 26% Independents (1).
- The data below breaks down Texas voters by party affiliation and their political views (liberal vs. conservative).

Using a 7-point scale where 1 is extremely liberal and 7 is extremely conservative, how would you rate your political views.

	Total	Dem.	Ind.	Rep.
Extremely Liberal	8%	14%	5%	4%
Liberal	11%	24%	6%	2%
Slightly Liberal	8%	14%	8%	2%
Moderate, Middle of the Road	27%	32%	39%	15%
Slightly Conservative	11%	6%	14%	13%
Conservative	20%	3%	15%	37%
Extremely Conservative	12%	3%	4%	25%
Don't know	4%	3%	9%	2%
Total	101%	99%	100%	100%
Percent of Total		33%	26%	41%

Source: <https://www.uttyler.edu/politicalscience/files/dmn-uttyler-feb2022.pdf>
 (Totals may not add to 100% due to rounding)

- Multiplying the percentages in the columns by the percent of voters in the respective party lets us see how much of the total electorate falls into each category. For example, since 33% of voters identify as “Democrat” and of those 14% say they are “Extremely Liberal”, then 4.6% of Texans describe themselves as both “Extremely liberal” and “Democrat” (33% times 14%).
- This allows us to break down the total Texas voter base, as shown in the table below.

Likely Voters - Percent to total electorate

	Percent of total (adds to 100%)		
	Dem.	Ind.	Rep.
Extremely Liberal	4.6%	1.3%	1.6%
Liberal	7.9%	1.6%	0.8%
Slightly Liberal	4.6%	2.1%	0.8%
Moderate, Middle of the Road	10.6%	10.1%	6.2%
Slightly Conservative	2.0%	3.6%	5.3%
Conservative	1.0%	3.9%	15.2%
Extremely Conservative	1.0%	1.0%	10.3%
Don't know	1.0%	2.3%	0.8%
Total	32.7%	26.0%	41.0%

Sum of shaded area:

51.8%

Democrat's potential appeal

Sum of dark bordered area:

61.7%

Republican's potential appeal

Source: <https://www.uttyler.edu/politicalscience/files/dmn-uttyler-feb2022.pdf>

There are a couple of important implications from the tables above:

- First, a progressive candidate can't win in most Texas districts just by appealing to liberal Democrats, and a conservative can't win with just conservative Republicans. Voters who consider themselves to be Democrats, and to be at least slightly liberal represent only 17.1% of the electorate in Texas. And voters who classify themselves as Republican and at least slightly conservative are less than one-third of the electorate in Texas.
- Second, throwing a wide net is critical. The way to win in Texas is to run a campaign that:
 - ✓ **Excites your base and maximizes their turnout, and**
 - ✓ **Attracts more than your share of Independents and Moderates**

3. Issues pages best practices:

Here are five best practices we have gleaned from looking at lots of issues pages, and noting what works and what doesn't:

1. **Easy to find and navigate on your website** – the best way is to have a very visible “Issues” button in your main navigation bar (along with things like “About me”, “Contact”, and “Donate”). Don't get creative in what you call it. Voters will be looking for your Issues page, make it easy to find by calling it that.

Make the format and navigation easy and intuitive. People won't spend much time trying to figure it out. Two good options:

- a. On the main Issues page, a button for each issue, which links to a page for each issue
 - b. On the main issues page, a brief statement of where you stand on each issue, and a “More” button linked to a page for each issue.
2. **Appeal to Head and Heart** – include a few facts to support your positions, but also explain where your beliefs come from – someone you know or a family member affected, or what you saw in your community that convinced you of the need for change. Your issues discussion needs to appeal to both emotions and reason. Stories are much more memorable and impactful than a bunch of statistics.
 3. **Cover the bases** - Don't just address the issues you care most about or are most comfortable with. Cover the key things that most voters care about. Here are the issues that every candidate should address:
 - Jobs and the Economy
 - Health Care
 - Immigration and border security
 - Education
 - Ethics in government
 - Environment or Climate Change

In addition, any state or local issues that are relevant.

As shown above, to win in most districts you will need to attract more than your share of Independents and moderate voters. Of course, your issues pages need to be true to who you are and what you believe, but to the extent possible focus on common sense solutions and realistic proposals, not an extreme wish list. Your issues pages are a place to make lots of friends.

4. Pay attention to “framing” – framing refers to the words that are chosen to convey an idea. Facts are important, but without effective framing good ideas get less credit than they deserve. Good examples of framing that will appeal to a broad group of voters include:

- “Improving gun safety while protecting 2nd Amendment rights”
- “Access to healthcare”
- “Responsible environmental policies”
- “Immigration reform that protects our borders while also respecting human rights”.
- “Policing reform” instead of “defunding the police”.

5. Keep it concise and organized – you should be able to quickly state your position (15 or 20 words), tell a short story explaining where your belief comes from (50 words or so) and then say “Here is what I will support” followed by 4 or 5 concise bullet points.

An example of a clear, concise issues page is shown in the Appendix.

We will be happy to review your issues page and make suggestions. Email us at info@centerforpolicyprogress.org

Sources

1. Dallas Morning News/UT Tyler Survey (Field Dates February 8 – 15 2022), <https://www.uttyler.edu/politicalscience/files/dmn-uttyler-feb2022.pdf>

Appendix – Example of a good Issues Page

Evan McMullin, who is running for US Senator for Utah as an Independent, provides a good example of an issues page. Although he does not address all of the key issues, on the issues he does address he is clear and concise. He also combines a few relevant facts with his own feelings and experience.

His issues page is at <https://evanmcmullin.com/priorities/>.

2 – LOWER HEALTH CARE COSTS

We have a moral obligation to ensure that every American has access to quality, affordable health care. Yet Americans pay more for health care than anyone else in the world. Too many politicians in Washington focus only on how to pay for continually rising costs of quality care rather than working to lower them. They protect the special interests who benefit at the expense of hard-working families paying thousands of dollars in premiums, deductibles, copays and other costs every month. It's time to finally start improving care while lowering its financial burden by making sensible reforms including:

- Negotiating lower drug prices
- Promoting competition in the prescription drug market
- Improving patient choice in insurance and care providers
- Requiring hospital price and quality transparency
- Cutting administrative waste
- Expanding telemedicine