



Putting Families First: Good Jobs for All

Over the past two years, the Center for Community Change has been in collaboration with partners across the country on a bold new campaign to **confront poverty in America**. We're fighting to improve pay and conditions at existing jobs while pushing to create new ones. In this, we discovered that the ways people – advocates, policymakers, politicians and experts – talk about wages, benefits, access to employment and economic injustice aren't breaking through. The messaging is often too bland, relying on abstractions, trying to please all at the expense of energizing the base, inspiring people to sustained action and persuading the middle to our view. We want audacious change; we need language to match it.

Because our campaign puts low-income people at the center, we made their voices and insights central to our message exploration and testing. And, our research shows that low-income people do not see themselves or their lives represented in current language. We also looked at how to frame the gender and racial elements of economic struggles as well as the impact language has on people of color and women.

To engage and sustain the interest of a powerful coalition with our messages, we knew we had to do things differently. We had to develop messages that did the following:

- Draw a clear contrast between our position and our opposition and bring the middle to us
- Challenge dominant conservative notions of the purpose of the economy
- Build a common identity for the purposes of asserting political power
- Diffuse major points of contention, such as race and gender
- Move our target constituencies to action

Our multi-year process began with linguistic analysis of current advocacy, opposition and media discourse as well as what popular culture pitches about wealth and poverty. Through listening sessions and advocate interviews, we uncovered how people reason about the issues and what language comes naturally to affected communities. We tested our values and messages in focus groups and two online surveys with robust samples and significant oversamples of African Americans, Latinos, people under 30 and people at or below 200% of the poverty line. These messages handily beat the best of the opposition and standard Democratic approaches with persuadable voters and galvanize our base to action.



Messaging Principles

Describe lived experience - “can’t make ends meet”, “can’t pull ahead no matter how hard they try;” avoid abstractions like “inequality” and “poverty.”

Embrace and lead with progressive **values** like *family, freedom and fairness.*

Barrier – “trapped” “can’t get ahead” – and balance – “economy swung out of balance” – are better metaphors than gap or top and bottom.

Name cause of harms – “CEOs decided” or “leaders chose;” avoid passive constructions like “wages have stagnated” or “wealth was lost.”

Use verbs like produce, manufacture, create, decide to imply economic conditions deliberately created.

Name ends, not means: e.g. “setting kids off to a bright future,” “building the things America needs” – not policies that accomplish these ends.

Worded right, \$15 minimum wage is popular – key is “phased in” and “keeps up with cost of living.”

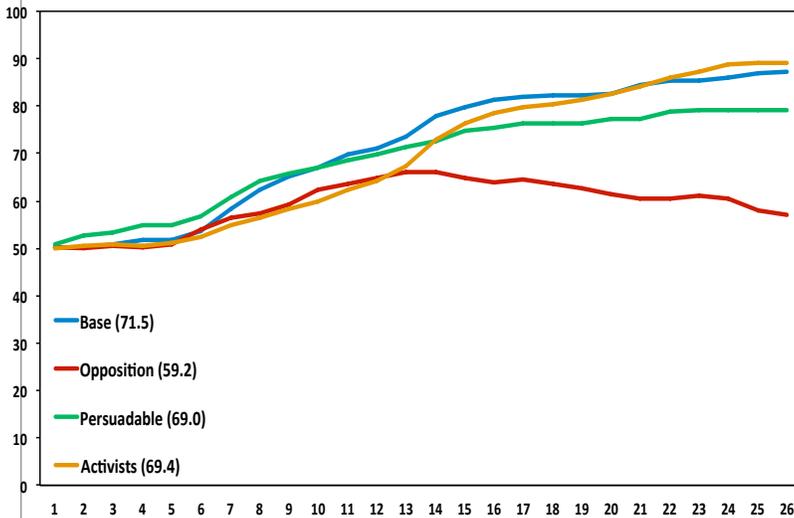
Populism is effective but aspirational call is better for mobilizing. Temper “game is rigged” with “we **can** change the rules.”

Get comfortable alienating opposition - energize your base and persuade the middle to your view.

Words to replace	Words to embrace
Marginalized, underserved	Americans/People struggling to get ahead
Increase minimum wage, adequate wage	Paid enough to sustain a family, make ends meet, set kids off to bright future
X earn less than Y	X are paid less than Y
We can’t survive on \$X, low pay not ok	Respect people’s real contributions with fair wages
Wages you can raise a family on	Wages you can sustain a family on
Good for the economy	Good for the nation/for Americans
Conditions persist, X experience	Lawmakers make rules, employers deny X
If we do X	When we do X
We should do X	We can do X
Wages have fallen, gains were lost	Greedy few rigged the game, CEOs decided
A, B, C policies	Different set of rules that give everyone a chance, Changes the rules about work and wages
Including communities of color	Everyone means everyone - no exceptions Places that need it most

These messages were tested in an online survey registering moment-to-moment attitudes toward job quality, job creation and the role of government in the economy with 1043 representative registered U.S. voters, including oversamples of African Americans, Latinos and voters under 30. We also tested with 100 advocates. Below are top messages that **beat leading opposition arguments by at least 10 points** among target audiences. Dial testing was led by **Celinda Lake**, President of Lake Research Partners and author of Public Opinion Polling: A Handbook for Public Interest and Citizen Advocacy Groups in collaboration with Vice President **Jonathan Voss**. Language analysis and research collaboration by **Anat Shenker-Osorio**, author of Don't Buy It: The Trouble with Talking Nonsense about the Economy.

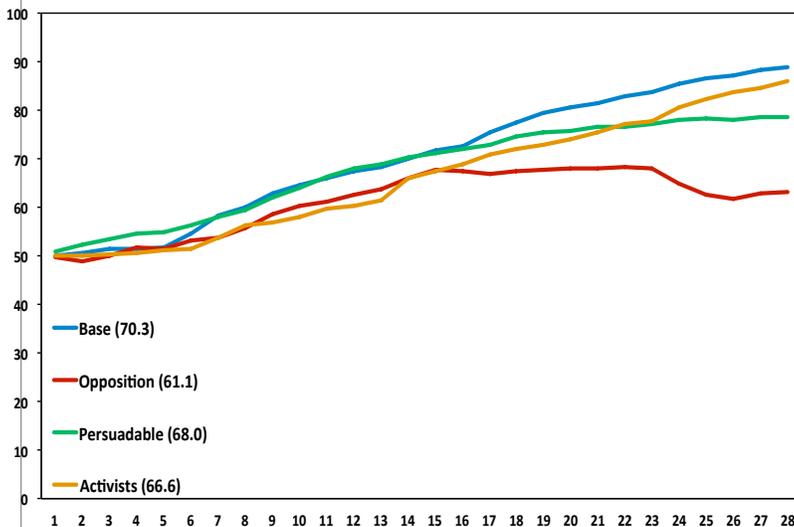
Family Comes First (as tested)



Family Comes First*

They may drive you crazy but everyone knows, family comes first. Providing for your family and being there when they need you isn't negotiable. Every working parent should get paid enough to care for their kids and set them off toward a great future. If politicians want to talk "family values", it's time they start valuing families - and that means making sure all Americans have work that allows them not just a decent living, but a decent life.

Patriotism with Ending Discrimination



Patriotism with Ending Discrimination

You wouldn't know it from politicians, but Americans stand largely united. We work for our families. We pitch in for our communities and we believe in America. We want to leave things better for our children. To get there, we have to create good stable jobs for anyone willing to work that provide benefits and pay you can sustain a family on and end racial and gender discrimination. We believe everyone means everyone, no exceptions.

* Messages revised to exclude unpersuasive language & profile what engages base & moves middle.

Out of Balance*

America has swung out of balance. Our work creates record wealth, but profits don't get to the working people who produce them. Our economic rules unfairly favor the rich because they are written by politicians beholden to wealthy special interests. No one lobbies for average Americans. Everyone who works should make ends meet, have a say about their futures, and everyone who wants to work should be granted a decent job with benefits.

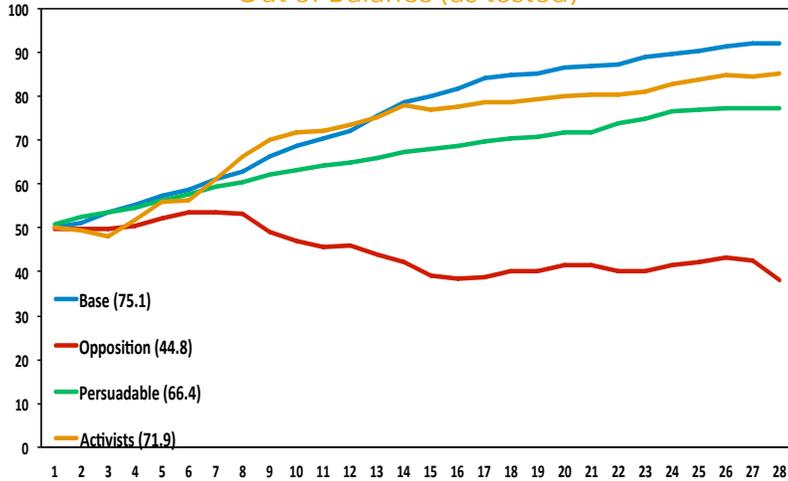
Through Tough Times - Caring Economy

America is a nation of strivers -- people working hard to make ends meet, offer their children a better future and support their elders. America has come through tough times before and we can do it again. We can improve our jobs by guaranteeing good wages and benefits while also creating new jobs that sustain our families by meeting America's needs for infrastructure, education, childcare and a better future.

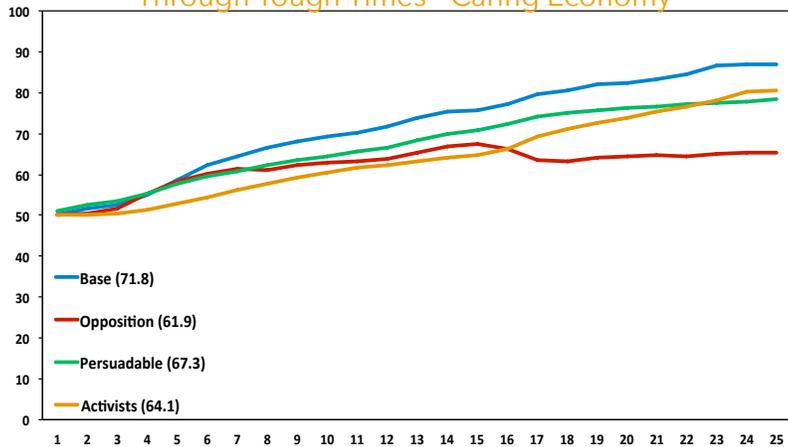
Community

Our country's strength is grounded in our ability to work together. You and I know, our society is at its best when we grant every provider the opportunity to pursue their dreams. And that means we need to create good jobs. America succeeds when everyone is paid enough to care for his or her family, when every entrepreneur has the tools to make their vision a reality, and when every American can retire in dignity.

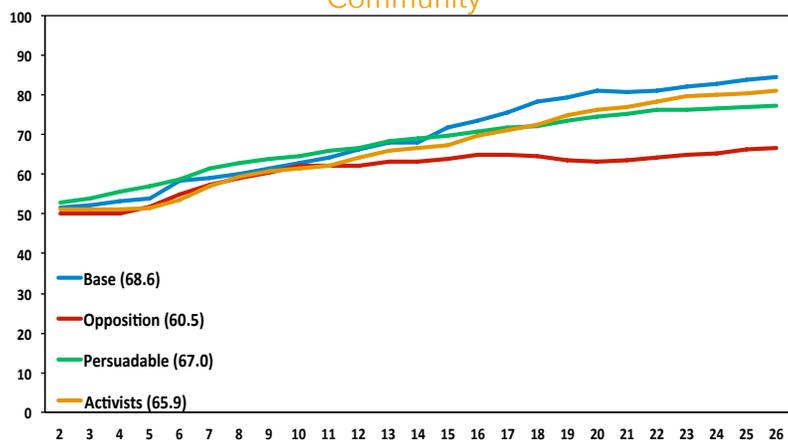
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