

# Message Handbook for Progressives from Left to Center

## *Voices for Progress* Project

Administered by American Family Voices

**To:** Interested Parties

**From:** Westen Strategies &  
Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research

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### Project Summary

Through years of message discipline Republicans have successfully branded their party, in that liberals, conservatives, and swing voters alike can all recite the core Republican cannon of low taxes, small government, family values, and strength on national security. Unfortunately, however, voters cannot do the same for Democrats or progressives.

The Democratic Party is undefined in the minds of many voters who claim that they still don't know what Democrats stand for. Equally problematic is the success at which Republicans have infused key catch phrases into the public lexicon such as “tax and spend,” “moral values,” and “war on terror.” This branding and language gives even weak Republicans a core narrative about themselves and their philosophy that is easy for them to espouse and for voters to internalize. These disparities have consistently left Democrats and progressives more generally at a disadvantage in campaigns and in debates over key issues.

The **Voices for Progress (VFP)** project is a collaborative research project between Westen Strategies and Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research, funded by American Family Voices, to overcome this disadvantage. Its mission is to assist progressives by developing language and narratives that connect with voters on a personal, emotional level in the short-term, as well as help the progressive movement brand themselves effectively in the long-term.

The goal of the VFP is to develop and test *principled stands* on issues—emotionally compelling values statements and narratives about where we stand—so that progressive leaders, elected officials, and others do not need to practice the politics of avoidance (trying to change the subject instead of addressing issues head-on), resort to off-putting or euphemistic language, offer defensive hedges without clear underlying principles (particularly on wedge issues, e.g., “I believe we should register new handguns but not old ones”), or adopt “conservative-lite” positions designed to avoid offending certain constituent groups perceived to be opposed to a progressive position. Embedded in these narratives should be readily remembered phrases or sentences that evoke the broader principles underlying them.

The goal of this project is not to develop “talking points.” Progressives are by definition free thinking, and their values range from center-to-left progressive. Rather, the goal is to develop a *menu* of well-tested principled stands, from center to left, which progressive organizations and individuals advancing progressive causes can use if they find them helpful and consistent with

their own values and goals, so that they are not constantly reinventing the wheel or speaking to the public in ways that do not resonate emotionally. The evidence is clear that the language on the left needs an “extreme makeover” so that we stop recycling the tired, poor, and huddled phrases of the left (e.g., “the environment,” “reproductive health,” “I’ll fight for people”) that lost their appeal decades ago and have little appeal in the political center.

## Message Development

The goal of the project was to develop, test and refine messages on 10 key issues:

- The role of government
- Immigration
- Guns
- Abortion
- Gay rights
- The economy
- Taxes
- Healthcare<sup>1</sup>
- National security/Foreign policy
- Iraq

In drafting language, we drew widely from available sources,<sup>2</sup> relying extensively on existing polling data to identify the often conflicting, multifaceted thoughts, feelings, images, metaphors, and values underlying voters’ complex emotional attitudes toward major political issues.<sup>3</sup>

## Focus Group Research

The first round of research consisted of focus groups conducted among independent and/or weakly partisan likely 2008 voters who tended to split their tickets. We tested a variety of messages for each issue up against standard Republican and conservative rhetoric. We listened to how voters reacted to messages and language, what resonated or what turned people off, and identified narratives that had promise and themes to develop further.

Groups in Nashville, TN and Columbus, OH

- 4 focus groups (1 men and 1 women, in each location)
- Tested messages and language on the role of government, immigration, guns, abortion, and gay marriage/civil unions

Groups in Denver, CO and Billings, MT

- 4 focus groups (1 men and 1 women, in each location)
- Tested language on the economy, taxes, healthcare, energy, national security, and Iraq

## Internet Survey Research

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<sup>1</sup> Because of time and budget constraints, and parallel work conducted by Westen Strategies and Lake Research Partners on health care reform for Families USA and the Herndon Alliance, we do not include that research here but refer interested parties to a memo of June 8, 2008 available from Celinda Lake at Lake Research Partners at 202.776.9066 or Drew Westen at Westen Strategies ([dwesten@westenstrategies.com](mailto:dwesten@westenstrategies.com)). We will, however, be testing refined health care messages in the final phase of this research.

<sup>2</sup> We would like to express our appreciation to a range of progressive thought leaders and organizations (e.g., Center for American Progress, Third Way, Campaign for America’s Future, Democracy Corps) who whose work and advice was tremendously helpful in developing initial language. Special thanks to Mike Lux, Robert Borosage, Celinda Lake, Rachel Kleinfeld, and others who offered comments on some of the language we tested.

<sup>3</sup> See Westen, D. (2007). *The Political Brain: The Role of Emotion in Deciding the Fate of the Nation*. NY: PublicAffairs.

We followed this first stage of largely qualitative research of focus groups with online surveys designed to research the impact of our revised messages when voters heard them delivered via an audio format. By testing messages in an audio format designed to mimic a short speech, we were able to implement online dial testing and other measures to assess the resonant elements of the messages among a large group of voters (approximately 400 voters for each message). We were also able to test the potential electoral impact of each of 10 messages on each of the issues we addressed by presenting likely voters with a strong, well crafted conservative message on each issue, described as the position of a Republican candidate for Congress, along with one of the 10 progressive messages we were testing, described as the position of a Democratic candidate for Congress, and asked respondents not only to provide continuous dial-test ratings of their emotional response to the messages but to choose the candidate whose position they preferred.

For each message we obtained (a) continuous ratings of components of the messages (scored on a 0-100 scale, from very negative to very positive), (b) ratings of the extent to which the “candidates” statements would make respondents more or less likely to vote for the candidate (scored on a similar 0-10 scale, where 6-10 means they would be more likely to vote for the candidate and 0-4, less likely), and (c) a head to head electoral comparison of which candidate the respondent would be more likely to support after hearing a Republican and Democratic “candidate’s” message on a given issue.

## Progressive Principled Stands

What follows is a menu of principled stands that overall scored positively for each issue, ranging from progressive-center to progressive-left (but largely focused on messages that may appeal to the center). What we have essentially done is to start with progressive values and to develop emotionally compelling messages that express those values in ways that resonate with voters.

It is important to note that these data reflect an internet survey sample weighted to match the demographics of the voting population, rather than a sample obtained by random telephone dialing. However, this medium does allow for testing the spoken word version of messages and dial testing of moment by moment reactions. These messages will be refined further, followed by a final product reflecting a telephone survey testing messages that have undergone one more round of revision based on the dial-test data and providing more refined data on both the general voting population and specific demographic groups. We report here both the messages that proved effective as well as key points in messaging on each issue identified in dial testing.

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## Role of Government Messages

**Conservative Message:** Big government is the problem, not the solution. We need limited government, not the politics of tax and spend. The government's job is to provide for our national security, protect our borders, keep our streets free from criminals, and provide basic services. We should cut taxes so Americans can keep more of their hard earned money and keep it out of the hands of politicians in Washington, who think they know how to spend it better than the American people do. And we don't need government to impose burdensome regulations and red tape on businesses that just hamper our economy and our ability to create jobs. The best government is a small government, which gets out of the way of the free market and lets it create prosperity and jobs.

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**Progressive Message C:** We need leaders who take personal responsibility for their actions and expect the same from our government. Government is our shared investment in our shared future, and our leaders need to shepherd that investment wisely. That means investing in our greatest national treasure—our children—by strengthening public education and giving real tax breaks to middle class parents struggling to pay for day care and college tuition. It means investing in our nation's health, by investing in science that saves lives and in solutions to a broken health care system, so people who work for a living can take their kids to a doctor and can't be denied insurance because of "preexisting conditions." And it means investing in the infrastructure that allows business to thrive and create good jobs, starting with investing in alternative energy that will end our dependence on foreign oil.

**Progressive Message D:** It's time politicians stopped running for or against government and started running it well. We've had a failure of leadership in Washington, and it's time for a change. True leaders work for the people who elected them, not the special interests who paid for their campaigns. True leaders don't give themselves health care plans the rest of us can't afford and vote themselves pay raises while the rest of our wages aren't keeping pace with the price of gas, groceries, and prescription drugs. True leaders don't sit idly by as our country becomes increasingly dependent on foreign oil and Chinese products. A government is only as good as the people who run it, and we need leaders with the values and the courage to do what it takes to make government work again for the people it's supposed to serve.

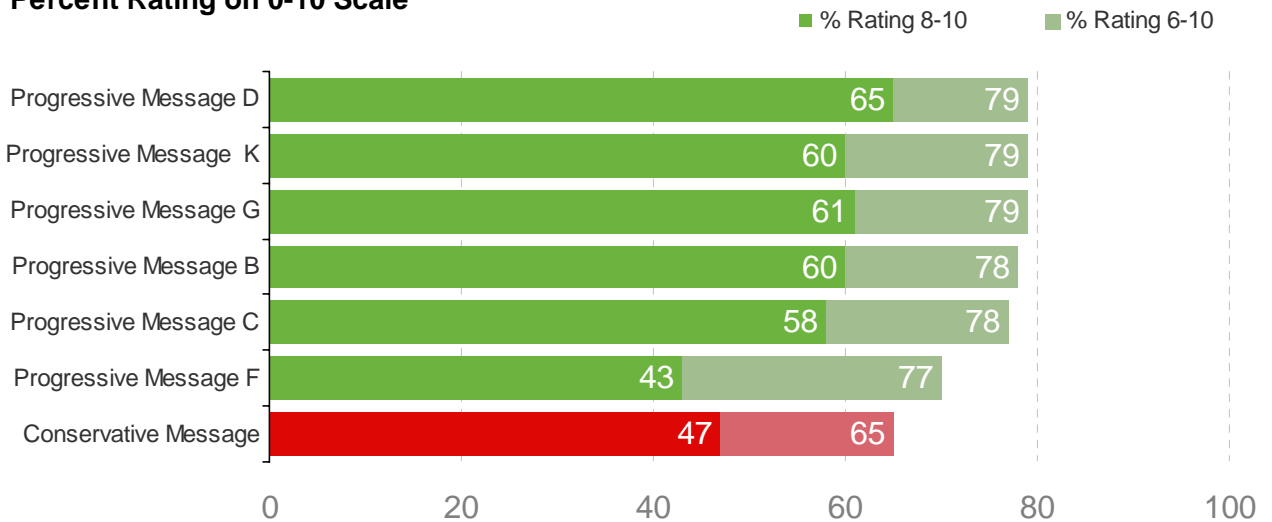
**Progressive Message B:** Government should work for working Americans. We need a government that partners with business, and creates the conditions for small businesses to thrive, because business is the engine of our prosperity and jobs. But our leaders should work for the people who elected them, not for wealthy corporations and lobbyists. We need leaders who will put the interests of middle class Americans, education for our kids, and the health and welfare of our men and women in uniform above tax breaks for millionaires and big corporations that ship our jobs overseas. We need leaders who will pass health care reform that benefits working families and seniors, not insurance and drug companies. And we need leaders who will bring us into the 21st century with an energy policy that cuts the price of gas at the pump, ends corporate welfare for big oil companies, and frees us from our dependence on foreign oil.

**Progressive Message K:** It's time politicians stopped running for or against government and started running it well. We need leaders who understand the value of business, because business is the engine of our prosperity and jobs. But we also need leaders who understand what happens when you let big business call all the shots. People who work full time shouldn't be struggling to put food on the table or gas in their tanks. People who retire with a pension and benefits shouldn't find themselves with a handful of empty promises. The most powerful nation on earth shouldn't be held hostage to Middle Eastern tyrants because we're addicted to their oil. True leaders don't sit back and hope things work out as big businesses move American jobs to China or triple the price of gas. Leadership means knowing when to step back, when to step up, and when to step in to make sure the system works for people who work for a living.

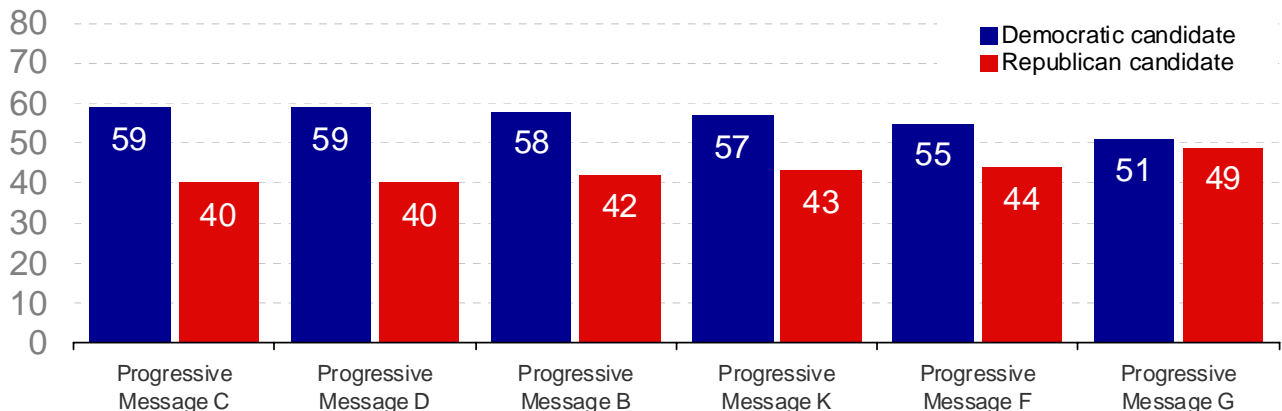
**Progressive Message G:** The quality of government depends on the quality of the people who lead it. We need leaders who tell us the truth and keep their promises. We need leaders who represent the people who elected them, not the special interests who paid for their campaigns. We need leaders who worry less about their own job security and worry more about ours. We need leaders who will routinely look at every program and ask, “Do we still need this, and if we do, how can we make it better or more efficient?” We need leaders who are more interested in solving problems than scoring political points. We need leaders who aren’t afraid to reach across the aisle when that’s the best way to solve our national problems, because reality doesn’t come in black and white, and it doesn’t come in red and blue. We need leaders who focus on solutions, not ideology. We need leaders, not labels.

**Progressive Message F:** It’s time we had an honest conversation about what business and government can and can’t do. Business is the engine of growth, and small business has always been the key to American prosperity and jobs. But we can’t count on big multinational corporations to regulate themselves. If we could, gas wouldn’t be four dollars a gallon and medications wouldn’t be increasingly out of reach for working Americans and seniors while the profits of oil and drug and insurance companies soar. And only government can maintain the infrastructure that makes America a good place to do business and a safe place to raise our kids, with good schools, police on the street, and clean air and water. But good government should be lean government. It’s too easy for politicians to create a program for every interest group, when the only interests they should be serving are our common interests.

**Percent Rating on 0-10 Scale**



**Post-Message Issue Vote**



### Key points in messaging on the role of government:

- Use the language of **leaders**, **leadership**, and **true leaders** instead when talking about government.
  - Populist language about **people who work for a living** and **middle class Americans** versus **corporate special interests** performs well.
  - Messages that emphasize the importance of business (especially small business) in economic growth, but also the pitfalls of businesses writing their own rules help dispel the branding of progressives and Democrats as “anti-business.”
  - **Partnering with business** is a positive framework in which to discuss the government’s role in the economy.
  - Messages that tie the costs of unregulated markets to voters’ everyday experience, but avoid the language of regulation, perform well (e.g., “True leaders don’t sit back and hope things work out as big businesses move American jobs to China or triple the price of gas. Leadership means knowing when to step back and when to step up...”)
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## Abortion Messages

**Conservative Message:** I believe in a culture of life. I believe that life begins at conception, and we have a moral obligation to protect it as God's creation. We need to restore legal protection to innocent human life and stop activist judges who think they can change morality with the bang of a gavel. This is about the sanctity of life, about whether we preserve and promote a culture that values innocent life, or a careless and reckless culture in which anything goes—where abortion is a commonplace method of birth control, and we allow the murder of the innocent simply because their parents don't want to take responsibility for the choices they make.

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**Progressive Message C:** Abortion is a matter between a woman, her doctor, and her God. This is a moral and a personal issue, not a political one, and politicians need to stop using it to try to score political points. But we need to do everything possible to reduce the number of unwanted pregnancies, teen pregnancies, and abortions. That means teaching our kids not only about abstinence but also about responsible use of birth control, so that all the children born in this country are wanted children. And we need to prevent late-term abortions, except when the mother's life or health is in danger, because abortion shouldn't be used as a form of birth control, and it shouldn't be used when a fetus is able to live on its own.

**Progressive Message I:** Freedom and responsibility go hand in hand. That's why I'm both pro-choice and pro-personal responsibility. Politicians shouldn't intrude on a woman or couple's most personal, private, and painful decisions, and no one has the right to use government to impose their personal religious beliefs on somebody else. But that doesn't mean people should engage in unprotected sex and use abortion as a form of birth control. We should stop arguing about our differences and focus instead on what we can agree on: that the way to reduce abortions is to reduce unwanted pregnancies, particularly teen pregnancies. The best way to do that is to make sure every adult has access to medically accurate information and birth control, and to provide honest, age appropriate sex education to our kids.

**Progressive Message D:** With one out of every five pregnancies ending in abortion, we should do everything we can to reduce unwanted pregnancies, because abortion shouldn't be a form of birth control. But government has no business intruding on personal freedom, and this is one of the most personal decisions a woman or couple can make. The best way to reduce the number of abortions is to reduce the need for abortions. That means educating our children about birth control and responsible sex and making family planning available to people who aren't ready to start a family. And it means doing everything we can for teenagers who need guidance to get themselves a job or a college education instead of getting pregnant before they have the resources and responsibility to be good parents.

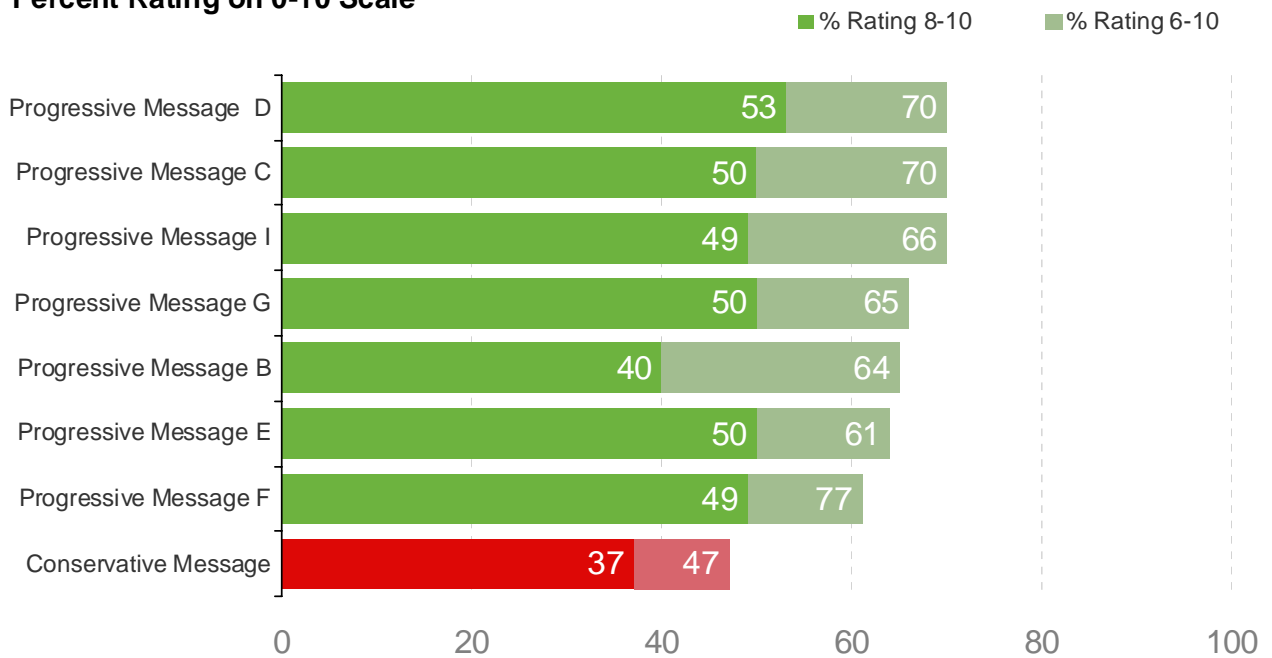
**Progressive Message G:** We need to have an honest discussion about sex and birth control in this country. It's been a long time since most people were virgins when they got married, and most people aren't going to wait until their 20s or 30s to have sex. The idea that we should teach our kids about abstinence but not about other forms of birth control may sound good to some of us with teenagers, but it doesn't prepare them for adulthood, and everywhere it's been tried, the number of teen pregnancies, abortions, and sexually transmitted diseases has gone up. We need to teach our kids good values, including the importance of responsible sex and contraception, so they don't use abortion as a form of birth control. It's time we speak honestly and stop playing political games with our children's lives and health. When we have abstinent politicians, we can talk about abstinence-only education.

**Progressive Message E:** When a majority of people don't agree on a moral question like abortion, we should leave it to the person's own faith and values, not the government, to make personal decisions, because no one's actions should be dictated by another person's faith. At the same time, we should do everything possible to reduce the number of unwanted pregnancies, by teaching our children about responsible birth control, not just abstinence, so they understand the risks and responsibilities of sex, and have both the values and the knowledge to make good decisions.

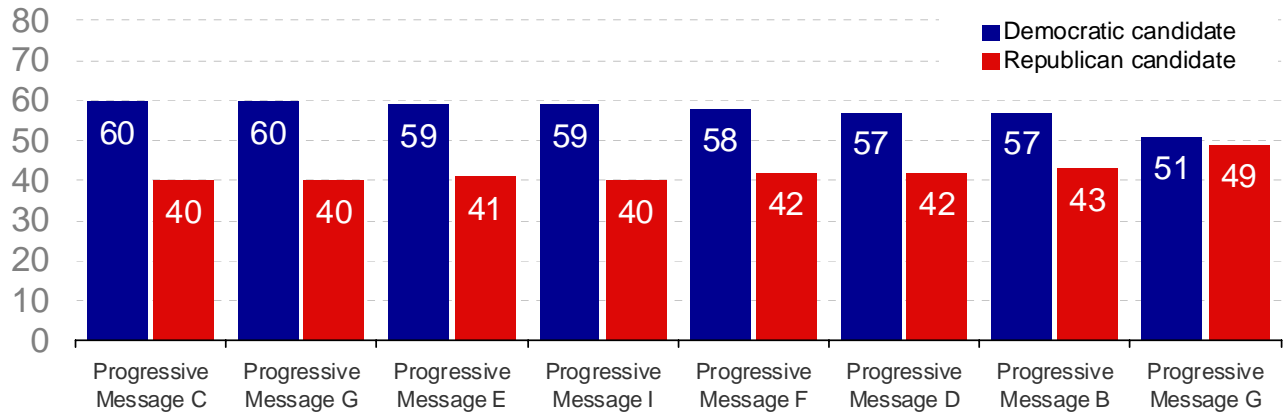
**Progressive Message B:** I'm not pro life, I'm not pro choice, I'm pro common sense. None of us truly knows what's in the mind of God, and the government shouldn't be telling a man and a woman when they should and shouldn't have kids based on somebody else's interpretation of Scripture. But people shouldn't use abortion as a form of birth control, and they shouldn't have late-term abortions unless the mother's health or life is in danger.

**Progressive Message F:** As strongly as we may feel about our own beliefs about when life begins, we have to respect the rights of other people to live by their faith, not ours. Whether or not to have an abortion is a painful and difficult decision for a woman or couple to make, and it's a decision they have to make based on their own faith and values, not someone else's. But they should make that decision as early as they can, so we're not faced with the conflict posed by late-term abortions, when a fetus is viable to live on its own. And we should do everything we can as parents and as a nation to reduce the number of unwanted and teen pregnancies, starting with instilling in our kids both the values and the knowledge to make responsible decisions about sex and birth control.

**Percent Rating on 0-10 Scale**



## Post-Message Issue Vote



### Key points in messaging on abortion:

- Use a **religious freedom** and **intrusive government** network against the conservative position.
- Establish the shared goals of reducing unwanted pregnancies and teen pregnancies and to avoid the use of abortion as a form of contraception.
- Emphasize that abortion is not only a deeply personal decision but also a painful one.
- An alternative to pro-choice vs. pro-life: “no one’s actions should be dictated by another person’s faith.”
- Re-enfranchise the other 50% of the population when discussing abortion: no one should tell “a woman or **a couple**” or “**a man and a woman**” when “they should or shouldn’t start their family.”
- People want comprehensive sex education and access to contraception.
- Recognize that the majority of voters do not consider an early-term fetus a person but become progressively less comfortable with abortion as a pregnancy proceeds. Reducing late term abortion is a goal that people to agree on.

## Gun Messages

**Conservative Message:** The Constitution guarantees the right to bear arms, which the founding fathers understood as the cornerstone of individual liberty and the final guard against government tyranny. America has always had a deep tradition of gun-ownership, going back to the revolution and the frontier, and throughout the generations the lessons of hunting and sportsmanship have been passed down from father to son. Those who advocate for gun control don't understand those traditions, and they don't understand that police can't be everywhere but criminals can, including at our own doors. Criminals aren't going to obey gun laws, so law-abiding citizens need the right to protect their homes and their families. Any infringement on gun rights is an infringement on our freedom.

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**Progressive Message E:** My view on guns reflects one simple principle: that our gun laws should guarantee the rights and freedoms of *all* law-abiding Americans. That's why I stand with the majority who believe in the right of law-abiding citizens to own guns to hunt and protect their families. And that's why I also stand with the majority who don't believe that right extends to felons, terrorists, and gang members. We need to roll up our sleeves and deal with the gun violence that plagues our schools and streets in a way that reflects the traditions, values, and common sense of the American people. If you're a law-abiding citizen, you should be able to buy a gun. But we need to start enforcing the laws on the books, make background checks faster and more accurate, make sure we can track down a gun's serial number from the cartridges left at a crime scene, and close the loophole that lets criminals and terrorists buy guns at gun shows without a background check.

**Progressive Message H:** There's no contradiction between protecting the rights of law abiding citizens to hunt and protect their families and getting illegal guns off the street to keep our kids and cops safe. We need common sense gun laws and tougher enforcement of the laws already on the books. That means untying the hands of law enforcement, so they can share information to find out where a gun used in a crime was bought and sold. It means cracking down on gun dealers who repeatedly sell to known criminals and drug dealers. It means fixing our broken background check system, so felons and the mentally ill can't slip through it. It means making sure that every gun has a distinctive ballistic fingerprint, so if it's used to commit a crime, we'll know where to start looking. And it means stricter laws on who can purchase the kinds of handguns that account for most school massacres and gun violence in our big cities.

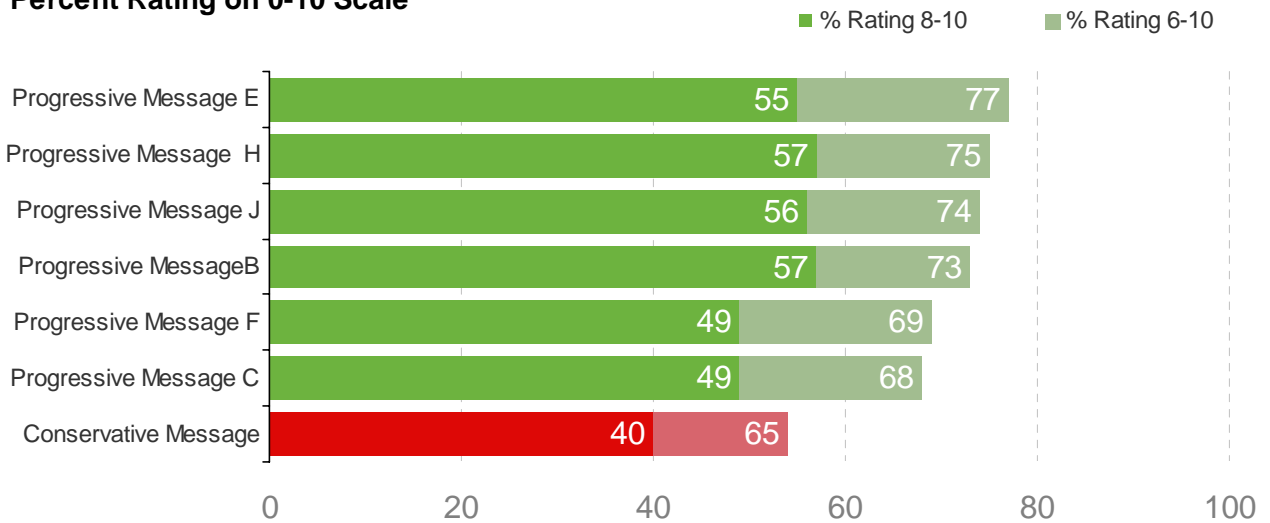
**Progressive Message B:** Every law-abiding American has the right to own a gun to hunt and protect his family. The Second Amendment is crystal clear on that. But you don't need a semi-automatic weapon to hunt deer, and if you do, you shouldn't be anywhere near a gun. The last thing we need is to give every criminal and terrorist the right to buy assault weapons at our gun shows. And there's no excuse for government record-keeping that's so poor that the vast majority of dangerously mentally ill people slip past background checks. Or for letting people buy a firearm who have a restraining order out against them after threatening violence against their ex wife or co-workers I believe in safe, responsible gun ownership by law-abiding citizens.

**Progressive Message J:** We need to be as serious in combating gun violence as we are in combating terrorism. Every year, 30,000 people die from gun violence in this country. That's ten times the number who lost their lives on 9/11. This has nothing to do with law-abiding gun owners, who have every right to hunt or protect their families. It's about getting illegal guns off our streets and out of the hands of criminals. We need tough enforcement of the laws we have, and we need to close the loopholes in existing laws that allow terrorists, criminals, and people who are mentally unstable to buy assault weapons at gun shows. We need to crack down on unscrupulous gun dealers who sell guns that repeatedly wind up in the hands of criminals. And we need to crack down on the kinds of guns criminals use to hold up liquor stores and turn policemen's wives into widows.

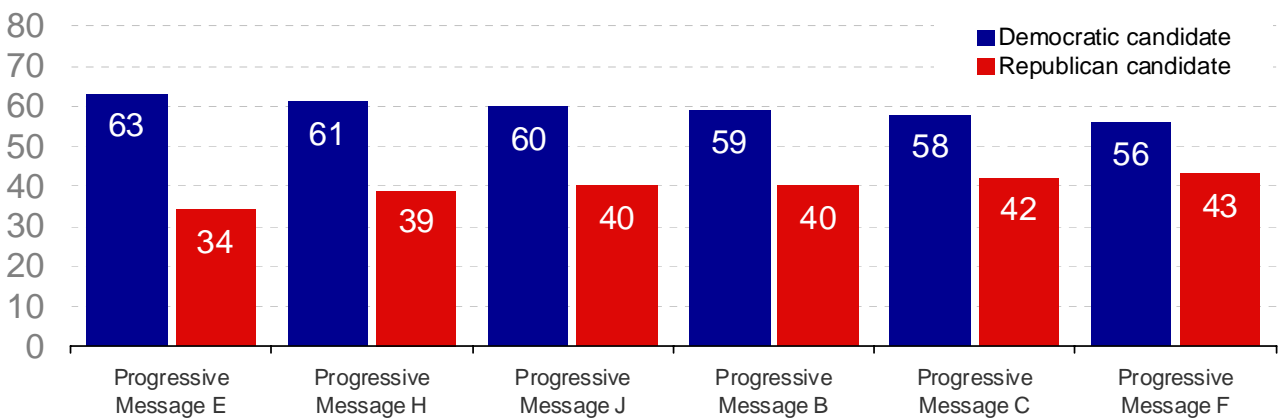
**Progressive Message C:** We ought to be able to find a common sense solution that protects the rights of law-abiding Americans to own guns to hunt and protect their families, but also protect the rights of law-abiding citizens to know their kids will be safe in school. It seems like every other week we hear about another shooting at a school, a mall, or even at a church. If you're carrying an assault weapon and you're not in the military or a gun collector, you're not shooting quail. The right to bear arms doesn't extend to criminals, the dangerously mental ill, or terrorists who can currently buy whatever they want without a background check at our gun shows. And it makes no sense that our government is more likely to audit a law-abiding taxpayer than to prosecute a criminal who tried to obtain a gun illegally. We need to protect the rights of all responsible, law-abiding citizens.

**Progressive Message F:** Every law-abiding citizen has the right to bear arms to hunt and protect his family. But that right doesn't extend to criminals, terrorists, and the dangerously mentally ill. We need tough enforcement of the laws we already have, and common sense gun laws to keep firearms out of the wrong hands. Right now, we have laws preventing different branches of law enforcement from sharing information on who bought and sold a gun used in a crime. There's no excuse for tying the hands of the people whose job is to protect our safety. And if we want to reduce violent crime, we should hold gun dealers accountable who don't enforce background checks and repeatedly sell firearms to known criminals. We also need to use some common sense in deciding what kind of weapons we want on the streets. I don't know any hunters who keep stockpiles of munitions in their basements, and I don't think the Founding Fathers had AK-47s in mind when they wrote the Second Amendment.

**Percent Rating on 0-10 Scale**



**Post-Message Issue Vote**



**Key points in messaging on guns:**

- Emphasizing ***law-abiding citizens*** on both sides of the debate draws strong support across the spectrum: the right to hunt and protect your family *and* the right to have your kids come home safely from school.
  - Acknowledging the right to hunt and protect your family from the start makes voters comfortable with progressives on guns.
  - Make this about us (law-abiding citizens) vs. them (e.g., terrorists, gang members, drive-by shooters).
  - Slippery slope arguments, often used against the progressive position, can be used both ways—majorities across the political spectrum have no desire to see the wrong guns in the wrong hands (e.g., criminals, the dangerously mentally ill, assault weapons that can't be used to hunt).
  - Use the language of ***common sense gun laws*** instead of “gun control.”
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## Gay Rights Messages

**Conservative Message:** Marriage has always meant the union of a man and a woman. Activist judges, however, have begun redefining marriage by court order, disregarding both our most sacred traditions and the will of the people. I support protecting the sanctity of marriage and oppose gay marriage and civil unions. I don't believe in discriminating against anybody. If gay people want to live an alternative lifestyle, that's their choice, but we shouldn't grant them special rights, and we shouldn't grant legal status to their relationships, which undermine the institution of marriage. The well-being of children is best accomplished when they are nurtured by their mother and father, anchored by the bonds of marriage. Our laws and Constitution should respect the institution of marriage, and not grant legal recognition or benefits to anything other than that unique and special union of one man and one woman.

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**Progressive Message C:** For most Americans, marriage is a religious term, not just a legal one, and we need to respect that. My faith teaches that marriage is between a man and a woman. But in this country, we don't force one person to live by another person's interpretation of Scripture. And politicians who stir up anger or disgust toward gay people or anybody else aren't speaking from a place of faith. Gay people are people, and they're children of God like the rest of us. They should have the rights all Americans have to a job, a house, or health benefits, and to choose who they want to spend their lives with without government interference. What we call their relationships under the law should be up to the people of each state, not the federal government, which has no business meddling in people's private lives. And it's up to pastors, priests, and rabbis to decide who they will or won't marry, based on the teachings of their own faith.

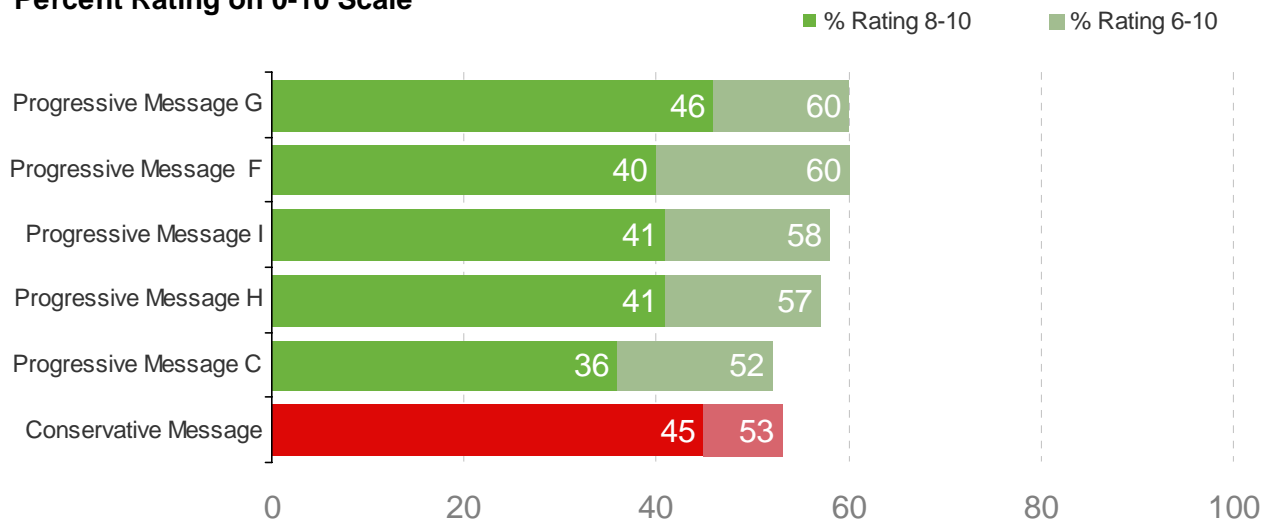
**Progressive Message H:** We need to stop turning a personal issue into a political one, and to speak honestly about the mixed feelings many of us have about same-sex relationships. As Americans, we don't believe in discrimination. A person's race, sex, ethnic background, or sexual orientation shouldn't determine what they're paid, or what benefits they receive for a hard day's work. But many people are also uncomfortable with homosexuality, whether that's because of their religious convictions, or the way they were brought up, or because it just doesn't feel right to them. But whatever our feelings and beliefs, at the heart of all of our values is that simple golden rule, that we treat each other the way we'd want to be treated, with respect and dignity. It's time to put this issue behind us, find the common ground, and stop using it to score political points.

**Progressive Message F:** Gay people don't deserve *special* rights, but they shouldn't be discriminated against, either. Right now, it's legal in 30 states to fire a hard working person just because he's gay, and children can be taken away from a woman who's raised them if her partner is killed in a car accident. That's not right. It doesn't matter to me so much what we call their relationships. That's probably better left up to the states, just like it's up to churches and synagogues, not the government, to decide whether they want to recognize gay relationships at all. What matters is that we uphold the central value that defines who we are as a nation: that we are all created equal. That means that no one should be discriminated against in the workplace or housing or anywhere else because of their race, gender, or sexual orientation.

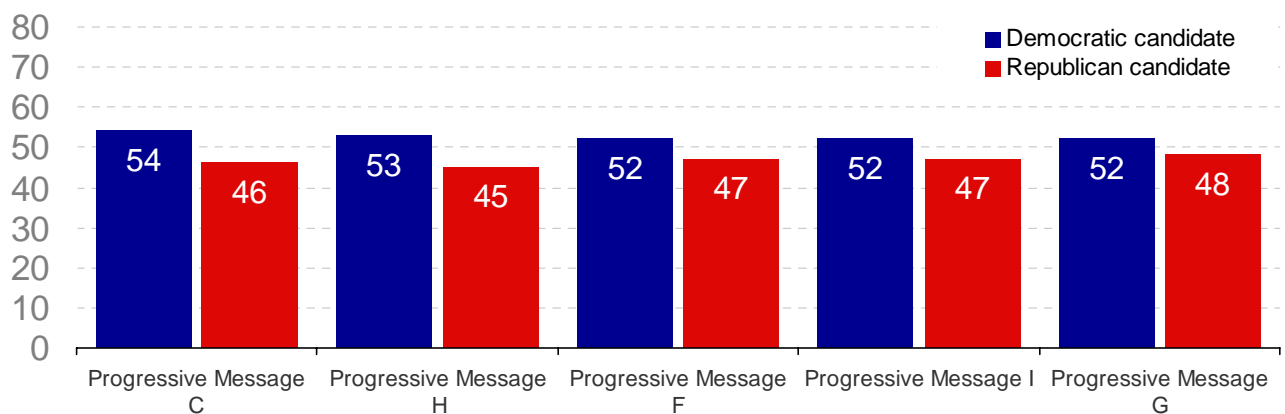
**Progressive Message I:** Right after 9/11, our government fired some of the only Arabic-speaking interpreters in our military just because they were gay, putting politics above our national security. Most of our senior military leaders now believe gay people ought to be able to serve openly and honorably. What matters in the military isn't whether you're straight but whether you can shoot straight. And what's true in the military is true in civilian life: If someone's works hard and does their job well, it's not right that they can be fired just for being gay. And there shouldn't be one set of benefits for straight people and another one for gay people. In this country, we don't discriminate against people in the workplace because of their race, sex, ethnic background, or sexual orientation.

**Progressive Message G:** Gay people should be treated with the same respect and dignity as everybody else in this country. They don't deserve *special* rights, but they shouldn't be discriminated against, either. It's up to religious institutions, not the government, to decide whether they want to recognize gay relationships. But it's up to our leaders to guarantee that everyone is treated fairly under the law. We need leaders who remind us of what we all share as Americans, not what divides us. We may differ in our religious beliefs, but at the heart of who we are as nation, and at most of our faith, is one simple value: that we are all created equal. And that means no one should be discriminated against in the workplace, housing, or anywhere else because of their race, gender, or sexual orientation.

**Percent Rating on 0-10 Scale**



**Post-Message Issue Vote**



**Key points in messaging on gay rights:**

- Emphasize people's conscious values about treating people fairly and without discrimination; discrimination is both un-American and against the teachings of most people's faith.
  - Emphasize the distinction between marriage as a religious and a legal institution.
  - Acknowledge first that you understand that many people consider marriage a religious term with a specific meaning, and you respect other people's views.
  - Make conscious voters' ambivalence about gay relationships.
  - Talk about specific, concrete areas in which majorities are supportive of non-discrimination such as in the workplace and housing, as way to discuss other issues like partner benefits.
  - Remind people of what we all share as Americans, not what divides us.
  - Avoid the words "same" and "rights."
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## Immigration Messages

**Conservative Message A:** Illegal Immigration is one of the most serious problems we face as a nation. Our borders are broken and we need to secure them. Illegal aliens broke the law to come here, and they take away jobs from hard working Americans. They drain our tax dollars by getting government services without paying taxes. We need to build a wall across the border with Mexico and send illegal aliens back where they came from. We shouldn't be giving amnesty to people who broke our laws to get here. It's time to put Americans first. I'm tired of spending my tax dollars paying for people who aren't American citizens and slipped across our borders illegally. We have to restore the rule of law, and you can't do that if you give amnesty to lawbreakers.

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**Progressive Message G:** We need to secure our borders and crack down on employers, who hire illegal immigrants. And people who come here need to learn our language, because if you can't speak English then you can't make it in this country and your kids will never know the American Dream. But politicians who say they are going to round up 12 million illegal immigrants who are already here aren't telling the truth. We need a common sense solution that reflects who we are as Americans, a strong but compassionate nation. We should hire more border guards, prosecute illegal employers who exploit cheap labor and require people who crossed our border years ago to register, work hard, learn our language, obey our laws and pay extra taxes, so we turn illegal immigrants into tax paying citizens. So let's solve this problem now. Tell politicians in Washington we've had enough of partisan bickering, and start dealing with the other problems we face; like spiraling prices, healthcare and the economy.

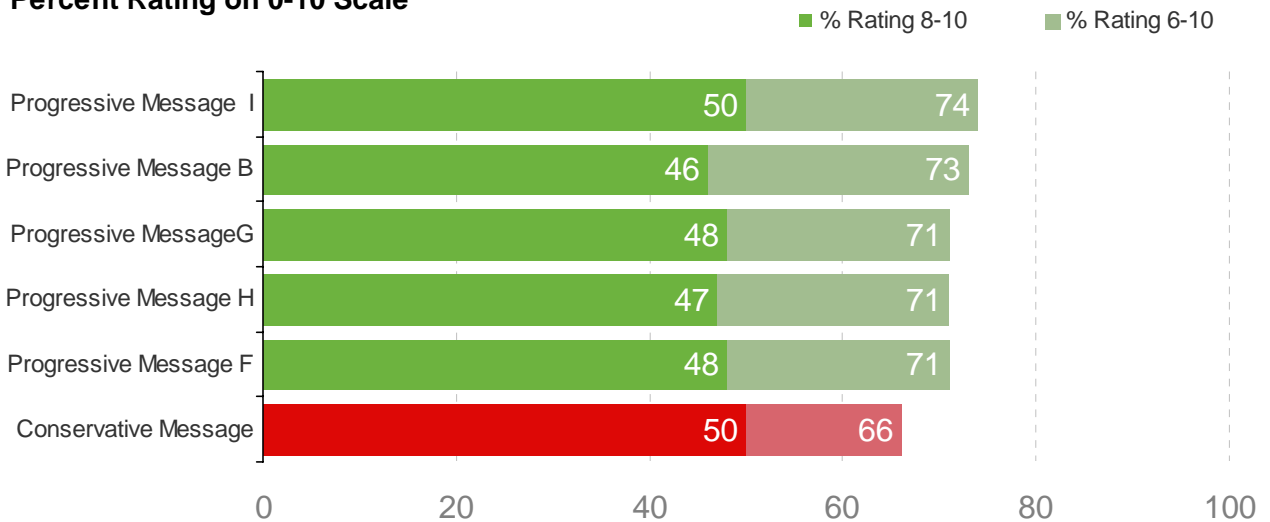
**Progressive Message B:** The first and most important job of government is to protect its people, and you can't protect your people if you can't protect your borders. It's unbelievable that seven years after 9/11, we still haven't secured our borders. We need to hire more border guards and to crack down on employers who violate the law and undercut American jobs with cheap labor. But politicians who say we can find and deport 12 million illegal immigrants aren't being honest, and I don't like the way they use this issue to stir up people's anger rather than to solve a national problem. True leadership isn't about scoring political points. It's about solving problems, and we need to solve this one now. That means taking tough measures to secure our borders, and requiring those who came here illegally to get in line, work hard, obey our laws, and learn our language.

**Progressive Message I:** We need immigration reform that's tough, fair, and practical. We need to be tough at the border and tough on employers who hire illegal immigrants. We need to be fair to American citizens, who shouldn't have their wages and jobs undercut by cheap labor and pay for services for people who have come here illegally. And we need to be practical, restoring the rule of law while recognizing that there's no way we're going to find and deport 12 million people. It's time to stop playing politics with a problem we should have fixed a long time ago. We need to secure our borders, crack down on illegal employers, and require that those who came here without our permission register, obey our laws, work hard, and pay taxes, so we turn illegal immigrants into productive, tax-paying citizens.

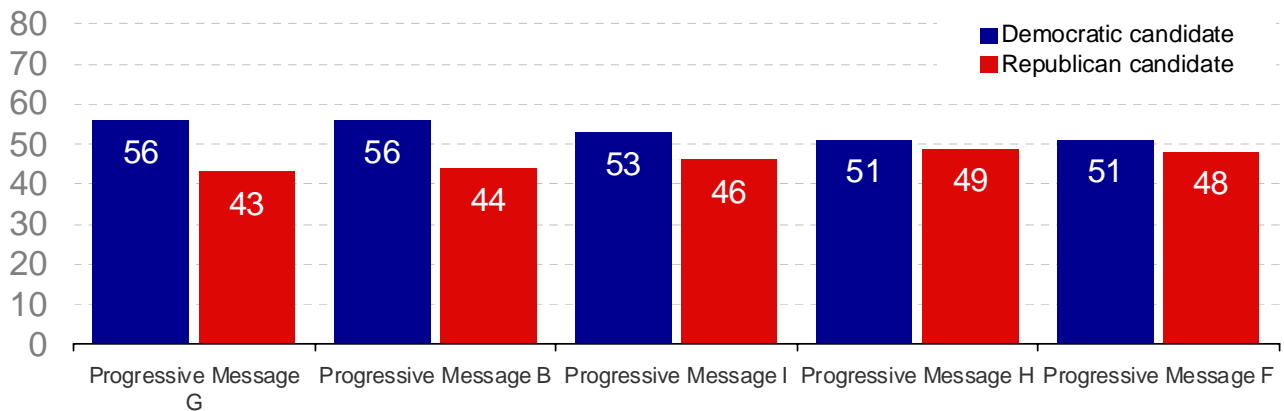
**Progressive Message F:** The best way to solve a problem is to tell the truth about it. Our borders are broken, but there's a reason they haven't been fixed: A lot of big businesses make big profits on the backs of cheap immigrant labor. If we want to solve our immigration problem, we should crack down on illegal employers who undercut American jobs, drive down American wages, and undercut law abiding businesses that play by the rules. So we can argue about this problem forever, or we can solve it, by securing our borders, increasing legal immigration so there's no market for illegal workers, cracking down on unscrupulous employers, and turning people willing to work hard and obey our laws into taxpaying citizens. We should direct our anger where it belongs: at the special interests that exploit cheap labor and drive down American wages, and on the politicians who'd rather stoke the flames of division than solve our problems.

**Progressive Message H:** We need leadership on immigration, not partisan bickering and divisiveness. A nation can be secure if its borders are not secure. In the wake of 9/11, it's unbelievable that we've lost control over who is or isn't in our country. In an era of declining wages we can't afford to let employers undercut American jobs by exploiting cheap labor. But we need to treat this as a problem to be solved, not as an opportunity for politicians to score political points, by preying on both our legitimate concerns, and our fears and prejudices. We are a nation of laws, but we are also a nation of immigrants. Most of the people who came across our southern border looking for work are hard-working people who just want a job to feed their families. It's time to solve this problem now, by securing our borders, enlisting the help of business and labor to figure out how many immigrants we need to let in legally each year, and requiring those who came here before without our permission, to get in line, obey our laws, learn our language and pay our taxes.

**Percent Rating on 0-10 Scale**



**Post-Message Issue Vote**



**Key points in messaging on immigration:**

- First establish with people in the center that you take the problem of illegal immigration seriously.
  - People want practical solutions, not politics; it's unrealistic to find and deport 12 million people.
  - Emphasize law and order: any position on immigration should also include **securing the borders** and points of entry and **cracking down on illegal employers**.
  - Use the language of requirement: **Require** (not allow) illegal immigrants to earn citizenship by obeying our laws and paying our taxes.
  - Emphasize the **big business** component to the immigration problem: The reason we have illegal immigrants is because big business wants cheap labor. We need to bring business and labor together to decide what makes sense for legal immigration.
  - What doesn't work: relying on people's sympathy and using euphemisms like "undocumented workers."
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## Economic Messages

**Conservative Message:** Americans are most inventive people in the world. The economy has taken a downturn, but many politicians in Washington have made things a lot worse by refusing to make President Bush's tax cuts permanent and continuing to fund wasteful government programs rather than cutting spending and getting our budget under control. So rather than letting government get in the way of business with high taxes and burdensome red tape, we should allow Americans to keep more of their hard earned money, so they can create and innovate, and let the market do what it has done for generations: create prosperity for the American people. Making the tax cuts permanent for all Americans, reducing taxes on businesses, and cutting wasteful spending in Washington will expand the U.S. economy and create new jobs and opportunities and allow us to lead the way again in the world market.

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**Progressive Messages D:** I want to see the words "Made in America" again. Becoming the world's leader again in manufacturing and agriculture isn't just essential to our economic security. It's essential to our national security. Imagine if we'd had to fight World War II without manufacturing plants and American-grown food. I'm tired of calling the phone company and talking to a person in India, if I ever reach a person at all. It's time we negotiate trade agreements that lift workers up, not bring the pay and benefits of American workers down to the level of Mexico and China. If we trade with a country whose workers don't get health insurance, retirement, and safety standards like ours, we need to put a tariff on their products so American workers and businesses are playing on an even playing field. And if our companies ship jobs overseas, we should tax those goods when they come back to this country, so corporations will have an incentive to keep jobs here. It's time to put America first again.

**Progressive Message K:** We need to return to fundamentals on the economy, starting with investing in America again: in small businesses and new industries that put people to work; in public education, technical schools, and affordable college tuition so American workers can compete in the global economy; and in new energy sources that reduce the price of gas, create millions of jobs, and free us from our dependence on petty dictators in unstable regions for their oil. Returning to fundamentals means stimulating the private sector but not letting big businesses abuse the public trust. With the price of gas and groceries skyrocketing and people turning to their credit cards to make ends meet, we shouldn't be letting credit card companies raise their rates and hide extra fees in the small print. And returning to fundamentals means ending wasteful government spending, eliminating tax cuts for the super-rich, and deploying our troops wisely so we don't overburden both our military and our economy.

**Progressive Message F:** We need leaders who don't just talk about family values but actually value families. Parents are working harder to keep up with the cost of living, often taking two jobs to make ends meet, and seeing less and less of their kids. We need an economy that works for people who work for a living, giving parents the chance to read to their kids and teach them the values that made this country strong and prosperous. We need leaders who will make our public schools the best in the world again and stop taxing middle class Americans on the money they spend for daycare, college tuition, and care for their ageing parents. We need leaders who will make health care and prescription drugs affordable again, so people who work for a living can take their kids to the doctor when they're sick and seniors can pay for their medicine. We need leaders who walk the walk for American families, not just talk the talk.

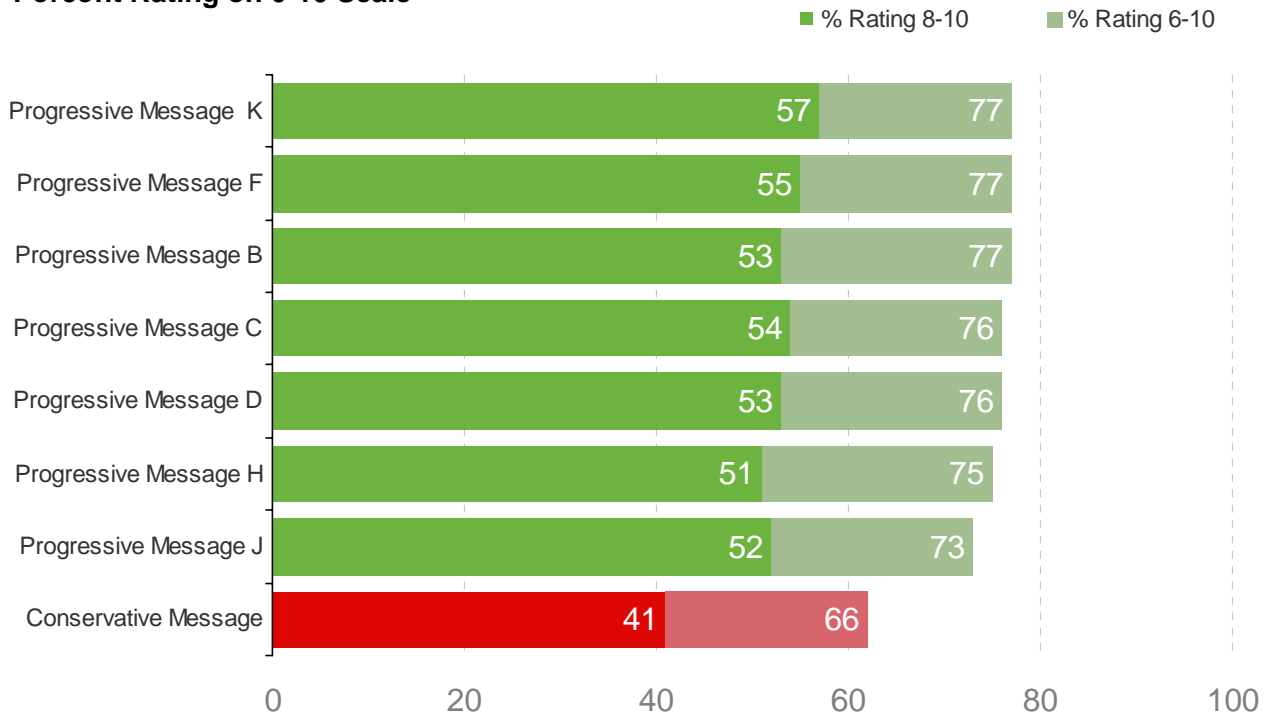
**Progressive Message J:** It's time to start expanding our economy and stop shrinking the middle class. We need leaders who will stop giving tax breaks to oil companies that triple the price of gas. We need leaders who won't sign another trade deal with anybody until we have a carefully thought-out global trade strategy that will bring good jobs back to America. We've watched one after another of our industries shipped overseas: first textiles, then steel, then automobiles, now electronics. We've lost over 3 million manufacturing jobs since 2000, and we're about to lose 3 million white-collar jobs on top of that. We need leaders who will invest in our future: in public education and affordable college, in an infrastructure that can protect our levees and bridges from the Midwest to the Gulf Coast, and in alternative energy sources that protect the earth we leave our children and create millions of new jobs. It's time our major import was something other than oil, and our major export was something other than American jobs.

**Progressive Message B:** It's time we have an economy that works again for people who work for a living. In the last 30 years, productivity in this country has nearly doubled. That means the average family should be twice as wealthy as it was then. But that's not what's happened. Corporate profits and CEO salaries and bonuses have skyrocketed, but middle class Americans haven't shared in the wealth they worked so hard to create. It isn't right that CEOs today make more money in one day than their average employee makes in an entire year. It isn't right that every time a big corporation shutter the doors of a plant in America and moves the jobs overseas its profits go up. We need leaders who understand that the best way to keep jobs in America is to educate our children well, partner with local businesses to make sure our colleges and technical schools prepare workers for jobs in the global economy, and negotiate trade deals that are written to ease the burden on hard working Americans, not on multinational corporations.

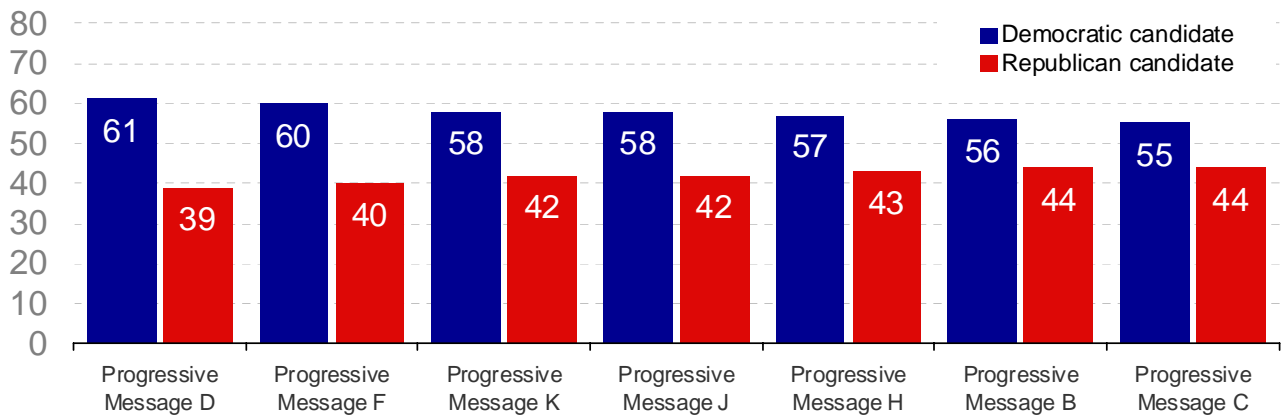
**Progressive Message C:** The backbone of this country is and has always been the middle class and those who aspire to it. We need an economy that works for people who work for a living, with good jobs, health care that doesn't cost an arm and a leg, and benefits we count on for a lifetime. Too many people are working harder and longer but still falling behind. We need leaders we can trust to protect the interests of ordinary Americans, not special interests. We need leaders who understand the value of investing in small business and new industries that create jobs. We need leaders who won't let banks hide provisions in the fine print that allow them to double mortgage rates, foreclose on the dreams of young homeowners, cause the value of all our homes to plummet, and then expect us to bail them out with our tax dollars. Most importantly, we need leaders who share the dreams, aspirations, and values of middle class Americans: education, fairness, hard work, and personal responsibility.

**Progressive Message H:** We need an economy that works again for middle class families. We've lost three million manufacturing jobs since George Bush became president, and now white collar jobs are disappearing at the same rate. Companies are cutting back on benefits and treating their pension obligations as if they're optional. For the first time in nearly a century, the average family is spending more than it earns, as the cost of gas and groceries soars. We need leaders with the vision to lead, not more speeches about the virtues of the free market. We need leaders who will invest in education, energy, and jobs. We need leaders who will make education beyond high school—at community colleges, technical schools, and four-year colleges—affordable again. And we need leaders who care about the security of our seniors, who will make prescription drugs affordable and let middle class Americans put more of their income away for retirement tax free.

**Percent Rating on 0-10 Scale**



**Post-Message Issue Vote**



### Key points in messaging on the economy:

- Emphasize ***middle class*** and ***working Americans*** (“It’s time we have an economy that works again for people who work for a living.”)
  - It isn’t the rich vs. the poor: it’s ***corporate special interests*** vs. against middle class families.
  - People are worried and angry about the rising cost of living—tuition, gas, and groceries.
  - People feel rightly insecure of their jobs, health care, and retirement.
  - Take nationalism back with a populist message about trade, outsourcing, and American jobs. Phrases such as “I want to see the words ‘Made in America’ again,” garner broad support.
  - Emphasize both protecting good American jobs with American benefits (and our manufacturing base) and retraining for the jobs of the future.
  - Redefine family values as valuing families.
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## Tax Messages

**Conservative Message:** Some politicians think the government knows best how people should spend their hard-earned money. I think Americans ought to be able to make their own decisions, and the government should keep its hands out of our pockets. The philosophy of tax and spend has proven a failure. We need a tax system that is flatter, fairer, and pro-growth, where everybody pays the same low percent of their income and we don't saddle businesses with taxes that make them unable to compete. Some say we can just raise taxes on the rich. But we shouldn't be punishing Americans who do well by jacking up their taxes to pay for all the wasteful spending in Washington. Americans aren't under-taxed, they're over-taxed. We pay income taxes, business taxes, sales taxes, property taxes, capital gains taxes, social security taxes, and even death taxes. The real problem is that Washington spends too much money.

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**Progressive Message G:** The last thing we need in the midst of a recession is to raise taxes on middle class Americans, who need more money in their pockets, not less. It's time our tax code reflected the interests of everyday Americans, not special interests and their lobbyists. In the last few years, we've given oil companies billions in tax cuts while they've doubled the price of gas, and given millionaires hundred-thousand dollar tax cuts while giving the average American family \$500. We've been spending over ten billion dollars a month in Iraq that we could have been spending here in America, and signing trade agreements that cost American jobs and industries. The question isn't, "Who's going to raise your taxes?" It's "Whose taxes are your elected officials going to cut, yours or their campaign contributors?" We need to make our tax code fair to people who work for a living and start investing in America again.

**Progressive Message D:** I believe every poor child in this country should have a chance at becoming a middle-class adult, and every middle class adult should have a chance at a secure and healthy retirement. If you work full-time, you shouldn't have to worry about putting food on the table for your kids, getting them to the doctor when they're sick, or paying for the gas to get to work. We need a tax code that makes it easier, not harder, to better yourself, by giving tax credits for job training, technical school, and vocational school. We need middle class tax cuts that offset the skyrocketing costs of gas, food, health care, and college. We need to give tax incentives to companies that raise the salaries of their workers to make up for the cost of living. And we need to use our tax code to make companies think twice before outsourcing American jobs or lavishing huge salaries and bonuses on CEOs while pleading poverty when it's time to raise the salaries or guarantee the benefits and pensions of the people who work for them.

**Progressive Message I:** It's time to make our tax code both simple and fair. Since George Bush came into office, the tax code has increased by 20,000 pages, and those weren't 20,000 ways of lightening the load of the average working family. For every dollar a middle class taxpayer gets from the Bush tax cuts, a millionaire gets \$300. It's time to give real tax cuts to middle class Americans, starting with letting parents deduct every dime they spend on childcare and college tuition. If a company can write off the costs of a private jet, middle class parents should be able to write off the costs of good daycare so they can go to work. We should use tax credits to limit the percent of family income anyone has to pay in property taxes. That would preserve the quality of public schools and law enforcement, which often rely on property taxes, without driving people from their homes, especially seniors on fixed incomes. And we should tie middle class tax deductions to the cost of living, so if costs go up, taxes go down.

**Progressive Message B:** We need tax cuts for middle class Americans, who are getting squeezed by the rising cost of gas, groceries, and health care. Every dollar working people spend on child care should be tax exempt, because we shouldn't be taxing people for going to work. The same is true for every dime people spend on tuition, which is our best investment in our kids. But it's irresponsible for any politician to say he'd never eliminate tax breaks for big businesses and the super-rich, when he has no idea what challenges we'll face in the years ahead. We shouldn't be giving tax breaks to billionaires in wartime. It's easy to tell people what they want to hear, but courage is when you tell them the truth. The truth is we have the biggest deficits in our history, our roads, bridges, and levees are falling apart, and we've been waging a war for five years and paying for it by taxing our kids and grandkids. Americans work hard for their paychecks, and we have the right to expect our tax system to be fair and our leaders to be honest.

**Progressive Message C:** The Bush tax cuts have given somebody \$70 billion a year, but it sure isn't middle class families, who get back about \$500 a year. That doesn't even offset the cost of gas. We need to stop cutting taxes to millionaires and giving corporate welfare to oil companies, and focus instead on real tax breaks for the middle class. That means making every dollar spent on college tuition tax deductible, because there's no better investment in our children—and our country—than a good education and a well-educated workforce. And people who work for a living should get tax credits for every dime they spend on childcare. Childcare is a business expense, and if corporations can write off private jets, parents should be able to write off the cost of going to work.

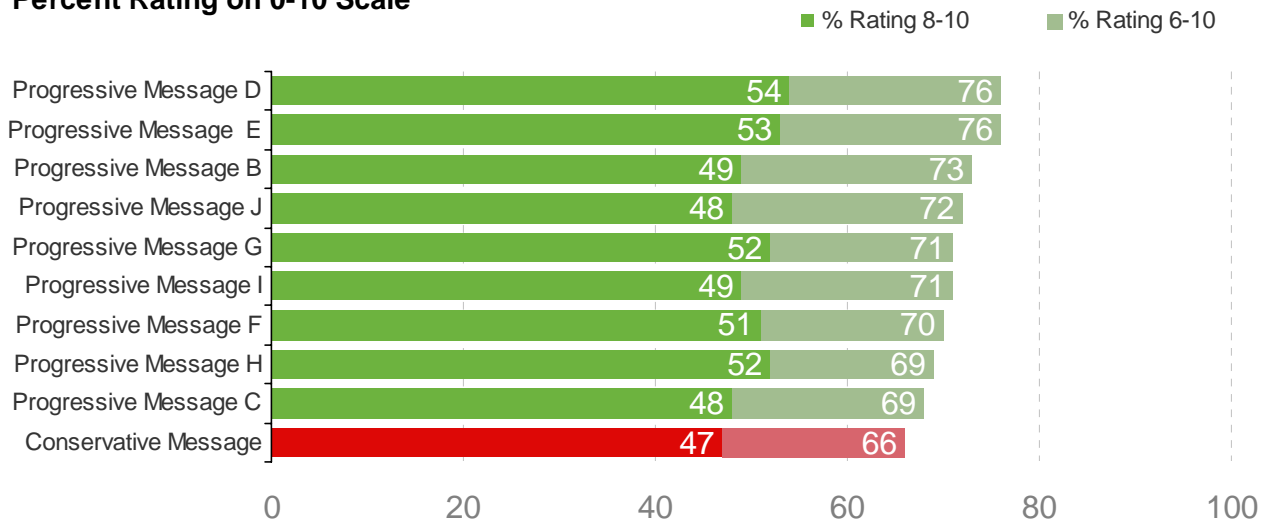
**Progressive Message E:** It's time for tax reform that looks out for middle class families, who need tax cuts to offset the rising prices of gas, groceries, and health care. We need a tax system that's fair, that eliminates tax breaks for special interests and millionaires, and instead helps people pay for their kids' college. We should be giving tuition tax breaks and low-interest loans to people who've lost their jobs, so they can afford to go to community colleges and technical schools and retool for better jobs. Instead of giving big corporations tax breaks for outsourcing American jobs, we should reward businesses that offer good benefits to both part-time and full-time employees, like health care and retirement, and provide real cost of living increases every year to their employees, not just big bonuses to their CEOs.

**Progressive Message F:** We need to invest in this country again. That means investing in alternative energy that's essential to our economic prosperity and national security. It means investing in our children, by funding preschool programs that help kids start school ready to learn and public schools that prepare our children to compete in the global economy. It means investing in the middle class, by making college tuition tax deductible, because a college education is no longer a luxury, and it shouldn't be taxed like one. But you can't pay for 21<sup>st</sup> century investments with a 20<sup>th</sup> century tax code. We need to eliminate tax loopholes for big business, stop giving corporate welfare to oil companies, and make sure CEOs and hedge fund managers pay more money than their secretaries. We need to stop wearing down our military and our economy by spending money we don't have in an endless war in Iraq. And we need to audit every government program to make sure we're investing in solutions, not in bureaucrats or in no-bid contracts to big campaign contributors.

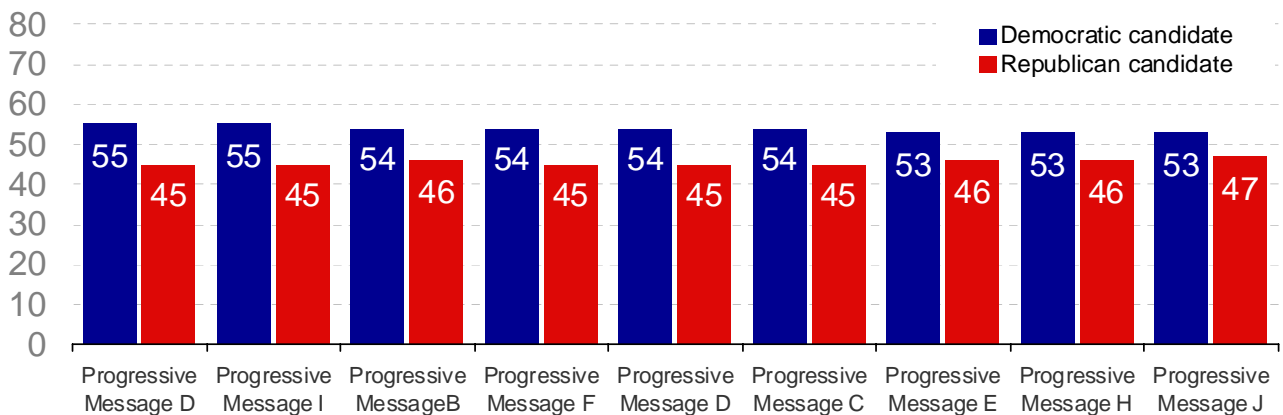
**Progressive Message H:** The question isn't who's going to cut your taxes, it's whose taxes they're going to cut. With the rich getting richer and the middle class getting the squeeze, this isn't the time for tax cuts for millionaires. While the average family has gotten back \$500 a year from the Bush tax cuts, the average millionaire has gotten \$100,000. And while oil companies have seen their profits go through the roof, they've been getting huge tax breaks courtesy of the same taxpayers they've been gouging at the pump. We need to make investments in this country, in schools, bridges, and technology that keeps us the world's economic leader in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. And we need to invest in rebuilding our military and setting us on a path to energy independence. Someone's got to pay for those investments, but it shouldn't be working Americans struggling to get ahead or just to keep their head above water. Our tax laws should be simple and clear: You get the most, you pay the most.

**Progressive Message J:** Our tax code should reflect our beliefs about who really creates prosperity in this country. The free-market extremists who've driven our economy into the ground believe that the wealthy are the engine of our economy, and if you just give enough handouts to the super-rich and big business the economy will thrive. We've tested that theory for eight years, and we've seen the results. I have a different view of who creates wealth in this country. I believe our prosperity comes from the people who go to work every day and create it. If you think giving oil companies, corporations that outsource American jobs, and billionaires huge tax breaks will stimulate the economy, just keep waiting for that prosperity to trickle down. I'd rather put money directly into the hands of middle class Americans, giving them tax deductions for every dollar they spend on childcare and college tuition, so they can invest in their kids and we can invest in our country again. And I'd rather give tax credits that limit the percent of family income anyone has to spend on property taxes or health care.

**Percent Rating on 0-10 Scale**



**Post-Message Issue Vote**



**Key points in messaging on taxes:**

- Change the question from “Who’s going to cut your taxes?” to “Whose taxes are they going to cut?”
  - Contrast the need for middle class tax cuts with tax breaks for special interests, oil companies, and the super-rich. Remind people of whom has benefited from the Bush tax cuts
  - Emphasize practical concerns (skyrocketing prices, day care, college tuition) and the need to offset them.
  - Emphasize simplicity, fairness, and accountability for spending. Reassure the middle class, then remind people why we need to invest in our country again.
  - Take property taxes back from conservatives by suggesting offsetting federal tax credits, and tax credits for businesses (especially small businesses) that “do right by” their employees, including benefits, secure retirement, and cost of living increases.
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## Iraq Messages

**Conservative Message:** It would be a terrible mistake to pull out of Iraq before Al Qaeda in Iraq is defeated and before a competent, trained, and capable Iraqi security force is in place. If we leave now, a civil war could break out and spread throughout the region. We need to support our troops and win in Iraq, not cut off their funding and leave our troops in jeopardy. Iraq is now the central front in the war on terror, and we have to fight them there so we're not fighting them here. But the surge is working, and the determination and sacrifice of our brave men and women is starting to pay off. Violence has decreased sharply, and Iraqis are stepping up to achieve stability and create a future for their country. We have made some mistakes so far, and finishing the job won't be easy. But to pull out early would be a disaster for the Middle East, a dishonor to the sacrifices made by our troops, and a lesson to America's enemies and allies alike that we lack the resolve of a great nation. America doesn't buy peace through surrender.

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**Progressive Message I:** Some politicians say that anyone who opposes another decade in Iraq doesn't "support our troops." That's playing politics with the lives of our soldiers. You want to know what it means to support our troops? Don't send them to war unless it's truly the last resort. Armor their bodies and their vehicles so they don't lose their lives and limbs when they don't have to. Give them as much time at home in the loving arms of their families as in the crosshairs of their enemies. And if they make the ultimate sacrifice for their country, returning home to shores they will never see, don't whisk them into this country in the middle of the night because it's bad for public relations. Do what every administration in the 225-year history of this nation has done to honor our fallen heroes: Proudly display their flag-draped coffins, so that all Americans can honor their lives and their sacrifice. And if you really want to support our troops, bring them home. It's time for a responsible withdrawal, guided by our generals and conditions on the ground, not by politics.

**Progressive Message H:** We can't just get up and leave Iraq, but we can't keep tens of thousands of troops there for decades, either. There are no easy solutions, but if we don't chart a different course now, we're going to be in exactly the same place four years from now. After five years of violence and civil war, with tens of thousands of American soldiers killed or seriously wounded, the President got the troop escalation he said would give the Iraqis time to work out their political differences. The "surge" was supposed to take six months. Well it's 18 months later, and we've seen little political progress and a resurgence of violence. More time isn't a strategy. We're not going to find a military solution to a centuries-old conflict between Sunnis and Shiites. It's time to use diplomacy to bring together Iraq's leaders and its neighbors to broker the best solution we can in a situation without perfect solutions. The Iraqis need to take more responsibility for their country, and we need to start taking care of ours again.

**Progressive Message C:** The time has come for a responsible withdrawal from Iraq, guided by the advice of our military commanders, not by political considerations. If we'd listened to our generals, we wouldn't have fought this war, or we would have sent the 400,000 troops senior military officers said we'd need to prevent chaos. Iraq is broken, and we have an obligation to try to fix it, but we've been trying for five years, and this could go on forever. No matter when we leave, the Iraqis are going to have to choose between civility and civil war. We need to turn our attention back to Afghanistan and Pakistan, where the people who attacked us on 9/11 have regrouped. And we need to rebuild our armed forces, which our senior military leaders have warned are now stretched beyond belief. We need to end the burden we've placed on both our career soldiers and our National Guard and their families, who signed up for service in times of emergency, not for multiple tours of duty in someone else's civil war.

**Progressive Message D:** When politicians declare that we need to stay in Iraq until we “win,” they’re either playing politics or they don’t know anything about war. We won the war less than eight weeks after it started, when our soldiers marched in record speed into Baghdad and toppled the regime of Saddam Hussein. Since then, we’ve been an occupying force caught in a civil war, and you can’t “win” an occupation. We should have brought in U.N. and Arab peacekeepers once we’d won the war, not stranded American soldiers in the desert. The last thing we need is a permanent occupation of a Muslim country, which we can’t afford and would only breed more terrorists. It’s time we broker a solution with the warring factions and with Iraq’s neighbors, who have the most to lose if Iraq deteriorates further. It’s time we bring our troops home in a way that’s orderly, responsible, and long overdue.

**Progressive Message B:** Politicians have been telling us for 5 years that anyone who doesn’t support staying in Iraq doesn’t “support our troops.” That’s playing politics with the lives of our soldiers. You want to support our troops? Don’t send them to war unless it’s the last resort. Armor their bodies and their vehicles so they don’t unnecessarily lose their lives and limbs. Give them as much time home in the loving arms of their families as in the crosshairs of their enemies. And if you really want to support our troops, bring them home. It’s time for a responsible withdrawal, guided by our generals, not by politics. It’s time we take care of our problems here in America and stop spending hundreds of billions a year in somebody else’s civil war. A responsible withdrawal isn’t a sudden, precipitous withdrawal. But staying in Iraq indefinitely isn’t in our interest, and it isn’t in the interest of the Iraqis, who need to learn to govern themselves.

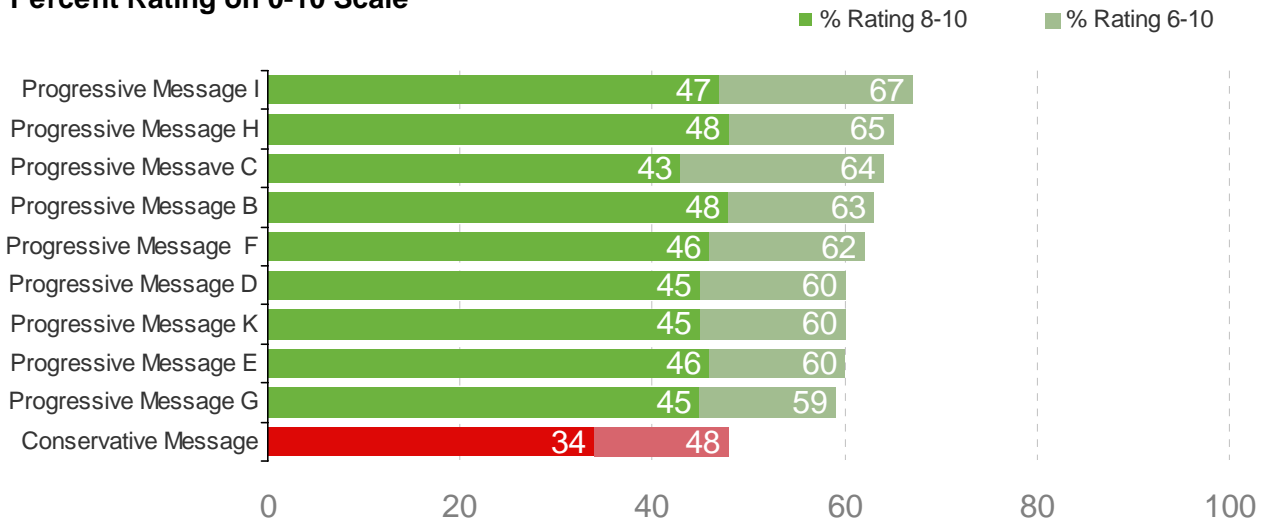
**Progressive Message E:** The best way to support our troops is to send them to war only when we have no other option, to bring them home when they’ve done all they can do, and to take care of their families the way they take care of ours. Our men and women in uniform have fought valiantly in Iraq. But our civilian leaders entered this war recklessly, prosecuted it incompetently, and treated our troops without due respect for their lives, safety, and families, sending them into battle without the armor they needed and a strategy for success. No one has a crystal ball or all the answers. But we need to find a middle ground between a precipitous withdrawal and an endless commitment. We can’t continue weakening our military and sending our soldiers through a revolving door to Baghdad, and we’re not going to find a military solution to a centuries-old conflict between Sunnis and Shiites. It’s time to use the diplomacy we should have used at the beginning to bring together Iraq’s leaders and its neighbors to broker the best solution we can in a situation with no perfect solutions.

**Progressive Message F:** We can’t protect our national security if we’re bogged down in Iraq. Our generals have warned that the Iraq War has put such a strain on our military that we couldn’t protect ourselves if another military confrontation broke out. Just this year, our military leaders were denied the troops they requested to fight al Qaeda in Afghanistan and Pakistan, where the terrorists who attacked us on 9/11 are regrouping, because we don’t have enough combat-ready troops. We have soldiers on their third and fourth tours of duty, who are being ordered back to the front lines while they’re still injured or disabled. Armor, weapons, and vehicles are in short supply. And the war has put an unbelievable strain on our economy, contributing to a severe recession, and draining resources we should be investing in alternative energy technologies that would free us from the dependence on foreign oil that threatens both our economic and our national security. It’s time for the Iraqis to take charge of their own destiny, and for us to take charge of ours.

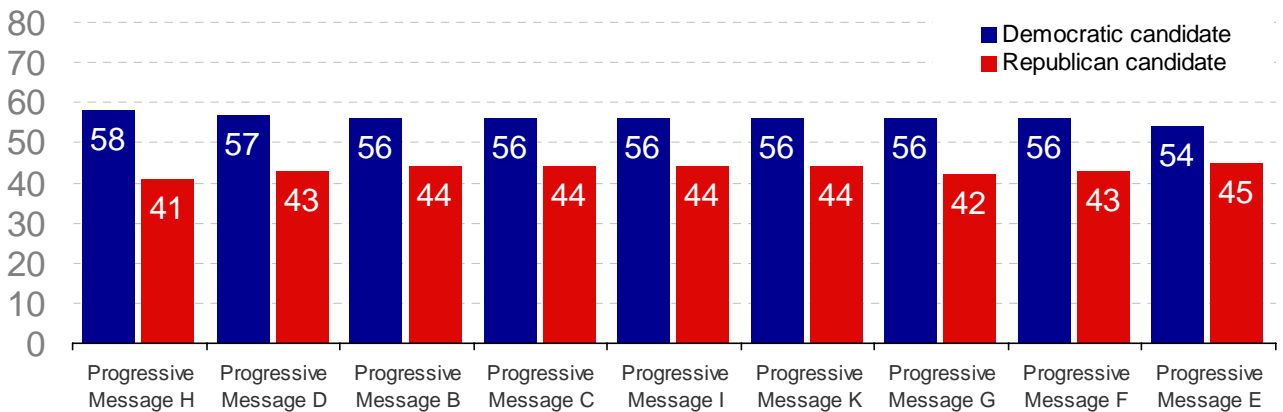
**Progressive Message G:** The best way to support our troops is to send them to war only when we have no other option, to bring them home when they’ve done all they can do, and to take care of their families the way they take care of ours. Our leaders broke faith with our men and women in uniform by deploying them to Iraq before exhausting all other options. We wouldn’t have fought this war if our leaders had asked themselves one simple question: Is this a war worth sacrificing my own child for? The Iraq War didn’t pass that test from the start, and it doesn’t pass it now. It’s time we bring the people with the biggest stake in this conflict—Iraq’s leaders and its neighbors—to the negotiating table, and to begin a responsible, orderly withdrawal of our troops, guided by conditions on the ground. There aren’t going to be any perfect solutions, but there aren’t going to be any after another 4000 American lives lost and 30,000 more wounded, either.

**Progressive Message K:** No one is winning the war in Iraq—not us, not the Sunnis, and not the Shiites. We’ve been losing American lives and limbs for too long, and we should be rebuilding our own bridges, roads, and schools right here in America, rather than pouring money we don’t have into a black hole in the desert. We can always put more boots on the ground, temporarily decrease the violence, and declare the surge a success, because we have the best military in the world. But that’s not a long-term solution, and it’s now threatening our national security, as our generals are warning that our military is stretched so thin that we couldn’t respond to a crisis elsewhere if one erupted. The warring factions in Iraq have no reason to make the hard decisions and no motive to take responsibility for their own security as long as American troops are doing all the heavy lifting. We can keep the training wheels on forever, but the Iraqis won’t start to pedal for themselves until we let go.

**Percent Rating on 0-10 Scale**



**Post-Message Issue Vote**



### Key points in messaging on Iraq:

- Acknowledge that there are no perfect solutions.
  - Be clear on what ending the war will look like. The key term is “responsible and orderly withdrawal”.
  - Brand those who talk about “surrender” as playing politics or not understanding war.
  - Contrast the effectiveness of our troops with the failure vision that has put them in the middle of someone else’s civil war with no exit strategy.
  - Put the end goal center stage—taking care of our own country and letting the Iraqis take care of theirs.
  - Emphasize how the war is diverting resources from threats in Afghanistan and Pakistan.
  - Emphasize what the war is doing to military families.
  - Emphasize the need to bring the parties to the table that have the most stake in the outcome—regional players and the Iraqis.
  - Redefine what it means to “support our troops;” progressives have a historic opportunity to retake the high ground on veterans.
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## National Security Messages

**Conservative Message:** In a dangerous world, protecting America's national security requires a strong military. We face historic threats, from Islamic terrorists out to kill Americans because they hate our way of life, to a dictator in Iran trying to acquire nuclear weapons. America has the most capable, best-trained and best-led military force in the world, but we need to deal with dictators and madmen from a position of strength. The best way to keep America safe is to stay on the offense in the war on terror, so that we don't have to fight terrorists here at home, and that means using every resource we have. We should deploy missile defenses to reduce the possibility of strategic blackmail by rogue nations. And we shouldn't be tying the hands of the CIA when it comes to listening in on terrorists' phone calls, closing down Guantanamo, or giving rights to terrorists like trials in our courts. This is a war, and we should be fighting to win.

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**Progressive Message I:** We can't afford any more of the reckless foreign policy that has cost us over half a trillion dollars and thousands of lives over the last eight years. We need a foreign policy based on reality, not ideology. That means a responsible withdrawal of our soldiers from Iraq, guided by our senior military officers and conditions on the ground. It means finishing the job we should have finished after 9/11: destroying the Taliban, finding and killing bin Laden, and routing Al Qaeda out of the hills and caves of Afghanistan and Pakistan. It means rebuilding our alliances and restoring our reputation around the world. It means never again exempting ourselves from the international laws we led the world in creating. And it means leading in the development of clean, safe, alternative energy that will protect us from ever again having our economic and national security held hostage to unstable regimes that control the world's oil.

**Progressive Message G:** Our national security depends on three pillars: the strength of our military and intelligence, our alliances, and our diplomacy. In the last seven years, we've weakened all three, and it's time to rebuild them. We strengthen our security by fulfilling our solemn oath to our soldiers to take their lives and the welfare of their families as seriously as they do ours. We strengthen our security by fighting 21<sup>st</sup> century dangers with 21<sup>st</sup> century intelligence, and never manipulating that intelligence for political ends. We strengthen our security by restoring our alliances, respecting international law, and regaining respect for America abroad. And we strengthen our security through tough diplomacy, by talking to friends and foes alike. It doesn't take courage to talk to our friends. A powerful nation is one whose weapons and words assure its allies and lead its enemies to negotiate.

**Progressive Message J:** We need leaders who understand what Teddy Roosevelt meant when he said America should walk softly but carry a big stick. We don't need politicians who send our soldiers to war recklessly and wage it incompetently, putting ideology over intelligence. We don't need politicians who say they support our troops while forcing many of their families to live on food stamps and denying them an education when they return home. We don't need leaders who cut and run from our alliances and from the treaties we led the world in writing. We need leaders who understand that American strength lies in both our superior firepower and our superior diplomacy. It's easy to talk with countries you like. A strong leader is willing to talk with both friends and foes. We need leaders who are decisive but not reckless, who have the courage both to hold their fire when they can and to unleash its full force when they must.

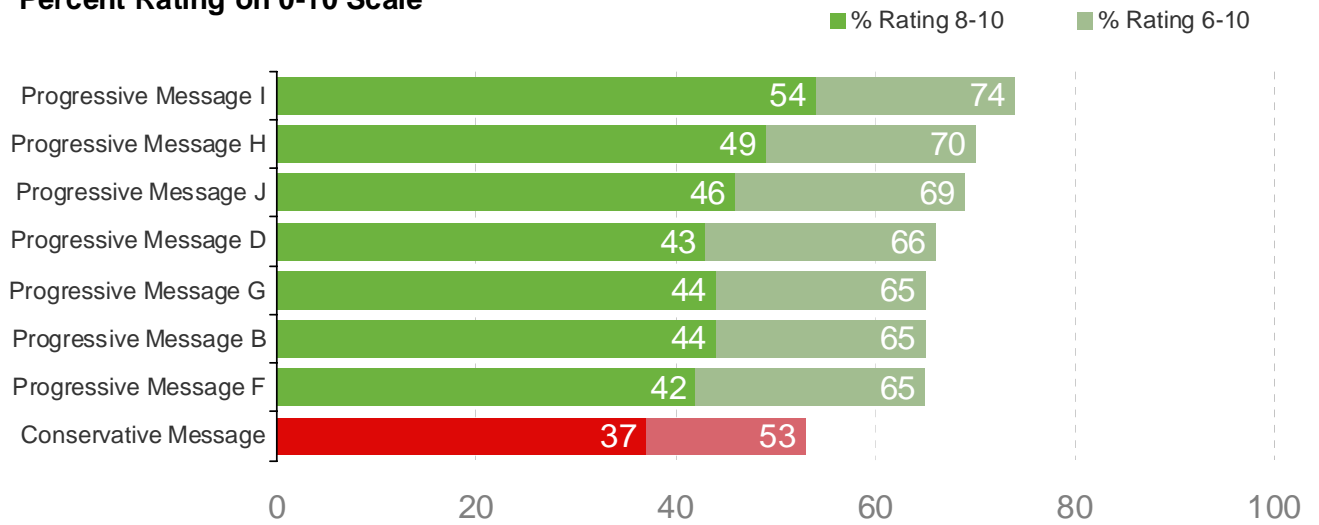
**Progressive Message B:** It's time to return to fundamentals on national security. We need to rebuild our military, with well-armed, well-rested soldiers, and to send them to war only with a clearly defined mission and exit strategy. Returning to fundamentals means knowing when to use weapons and knowing when to use words. Only a bully says, "I have nothing to say to you until you agree to my terms." That's weakness, not strength. From Roosevelt to Reagan, American presidents never liked the Soviets, but they always talked to them, because American lives depended on it. And returning to fundamentals means returning to the values that made us strong. As a nation, we have always led by our might but also by our example. When we reserve the right to torture, when we lock people up for years without trials on the basis of suspicions, when we ignore the advice of our own generals to abide by the Geneva Conventions, we not only set the standard for others to use against our citizens and soldiers but we lose the moral authority that has always defined this nation. It's time to restore our place as the leader of the free world.

**Progressive Message D:** It's time we develop a national security strategy for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We need to rebuild our military, regain the confidence of our men and women in uniform, and develop a fighting force designed for the military challenges we face in this century, not the last. But military strength is not enough. As John F. Kennedy said, we should never negotiate out of fear, but we should never fear to negotiate. Throughout American history, our leaders have always talked to leaders they didn't like. In an increasingly global world, where our security relies not only on our might but on the goodwill of our neighbors, we can't practice bully diplomacy, where we refuse to talk to someone until they agree to our demands. That's not tough, it's arrogant, and it alienates our friends and strengthens the resolve of our enemies. To be a leader requires followers, and that means listening and collaborating as well as speaking with authority. It's time we lead again through military strength, diplomacy, and strong alliances, without ever giving up our right to protect ourselves.

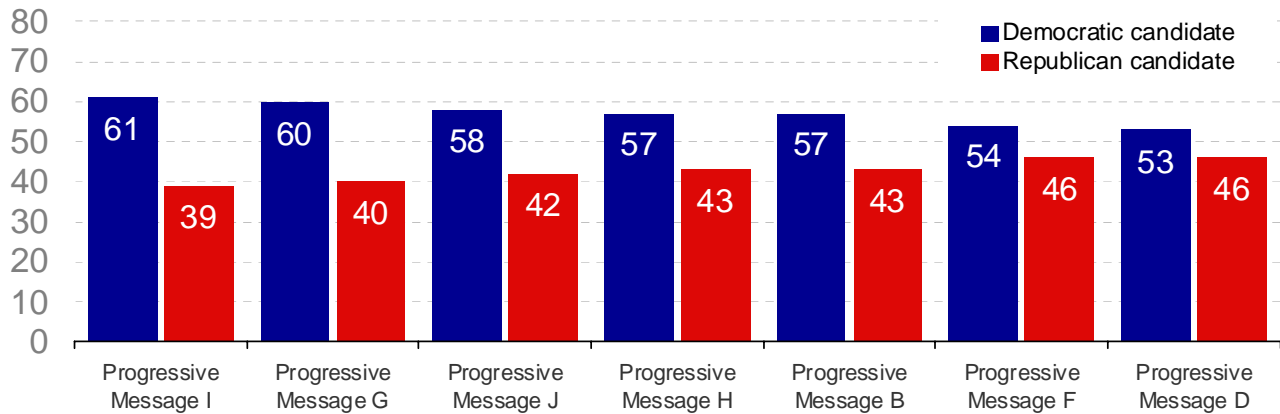
**Progressive Message F:** If we detain people without hearings, wiretap our own citizens, and torture people on mere suspicions, the terrorists have won, because we have given up everything our country has stood for over 200 years. America is the only nation ever founded on an idea, the idea of freedom. We have always led by our right as well as by our might. We have always set the standards to which other nations aspired. We have the most powerful military in the world, and it is time to rebuild it. We have had the strongest alliances in the world, and it's time we restore them. America won two World Wars and the Cold War without resorting to torture, and we prosecuted Japanese soldiers for it in World War II. We need to send a clear message to every terrorist organization that no one can take away our freedom or our values—not them, and not our own government—and that we will destroy them long before they destroy us or the idea of freedom this nation represents.

**Progressive Message H:** Our security as a nation depends on both our strength abroad and on our strength at home. Restoring our strength abroad isn't about talking tough, it's about being tough. That means restoring our alliances, rebuilding our military, and supporting our troops with actions, not just words. In World War II, we gave soldiers a month's rest after every three months on the front line and a GI Bill when they returned home. In Iraq, our soldiers spend up to 15 months in continuous combat, only to be repaid with a second, third, or fourth tour of duty. But you can't project strength abroad without a strong economy at home. We can't continue to lose our manufacturing base and depend on foreign oil if we want to maintain our security. And we can't keep spending two billion dollars a week on a failed policy in Iraq that prevents us from investing at home and rebuilding our economy.

**Percent Rating on 0-10 Scale**



**Post-Message Issue Vote**



### Key points in messaging on national security:

- Progressives have a historic opportunity to retake national security.
  - Americans want realistic ideas and goals in foreign policy, not ideology.
  - Distinguish strength and decisiveness from recklessness.
  - Start with emphasizing support for military strength before describing other forms of strength (e.g., tough diplomacy, intelligence).
  - Talk about our leadership role in the free world. Leading the world by returning to fundamentals: military strength, strong alliances, tough diplomacy, and leading by our principles.
  - Project strength, and you can win strongly with messages about civil liberties, but use concrete example (e.g., torture) and talk about **freedom and American values**, not civil liberties (which is too abstract).
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