



Words to avoid	Words to embrace
Representation gap	Barriers to running
Gender gap	Obstacles to running
Racial gap	Political exclusion
Leadership pipeline	Recruit and support qualified women and people of color
Women or POC candidates/ leaders/politicians	Best and the brightest Talent and energy of all
Women candidates Voters of color	New American Majority
Women are more [X] Women are wired to...	Varied perspectives and life experiences New ideas and solutions
Women People of color	A woman, a person of color As varied as "we the people"
Campaign finance reform	Free and fair elections Deserve a real democracy
Inflow of money Rising tide of campaign cash	Political rules unfairly favor the rich Political loopholes
Our democracy is eroding	Changing who has access to power
only [X%] of seats are held by	[X] denied representation, excluded from power
Marginalized, oppressed	Resilient and resourceful Successful despite all odds

The Challenge

People elected to represent America look very little like America. While women outnumber men and people of color are an emerging majority, white men hold four times as much political power as these other groups. The Women Donors Network (WDN) created **Who Leads Us** to expose the lack of real representation in our democracy, showing who holds power and who is excluded at every level of government.

The Investigation

WDN wanted to go beyond detailing where things stand. Bringing together experts in public opinion, persuasion and messaging, we explored how to activate our base and persuade skeptics to **want more women and people of color in office**. Beyond this, we also tested the best arguments to increase support for **dismantling structural barriers to office**. Rather than tackling only gender or race, we conducted this research to bring these elements together.

Over three months, our team assessed current ideas and assumptions about elected leadership, analyzed existing attempts at persuading the public and conducted extensive quantitative testing to figure out **how to make our best case for a Reflective Democracy**.





New Approach, Winning Results

Language Analysis

Using **cognitive linguistic analysis**, we looked at over 500 unique expressions revealing underlying reasoning on political representation. Most messaging about the lack of women or people of color in office is written in the passive voice, unwittingly masking the origins of the problem. Phrases like “gender gap” leave blank *why* white men dominate, triggering notions that women and people of color aren’t qualified or lack ambition.

Focus Groups

Participants in our 10 groups, especially women of color, largely agreed that lack of diverse representation is problematic, but without much intensity. Further, cynicism has them believing new leaders would revert to politics as usual once sworn in. Addressing gender proved easier than tackling race.

Phone Survey

800 likely 2016 voters largely agreed that the lack of people of modest means, under 40 and women in elected office is problematic. Ambivalence about *why* these groups are under-represented hinders desire for dismantling structural barriers to office. People want representatives to be “the best and brightest” but see an “old boys’ club.”

Redefining and Testing Winning Words

To ensure we’re persuading for solutions we favor, not activating status quo beliefs, we tested for messages that **engage the base, persuade the middle and alienate the opposition**. Testing among 1500 participants, we swung the public 9 points toward seeking more people of color in office.

Key Principles

Lead with **solutions** and position having more women and people of color in office as a way to fix the widely recognized problem of concentration of power in too few, very wealthy hands.

Don’t introduce underrepresentation, or misrepresentation, as yet another problem we must solve.

Emphasize **creating a positive** by mentioning the benefits of having different people governing: responsiveness to “everyday Americans”, “tapping into America’s full talent pool” and allowing young people to see themselves reflected in office.

Don’t frame the issue as eliminating a negative: having fewer white men and less corruption.

Calls for “fewer millionaires” and more younger people in office prove most popular. Reference our changing demographics to **bundle gender and race with class and age concerns**.

Don’t assume that describing class concerns automatically makes the case for women and people of color. Because they’re not automatically linked to wealth, **gender and race issues must be made explicit**.

Embed within the description of the problem the source of the problem. Phrases like “changing who has access to power” and “eliminating barriers to running for office” **make it clear the fault lies in the system**. Get specific about the barriers, e.g. “access to donors.”

Don’t rely on the facts about women’s lack of representation relative to men to make your case. They can just as easily prime assumptions of incompetence or lack of interest in office. Numbers are even less persuasive when describing people of color.

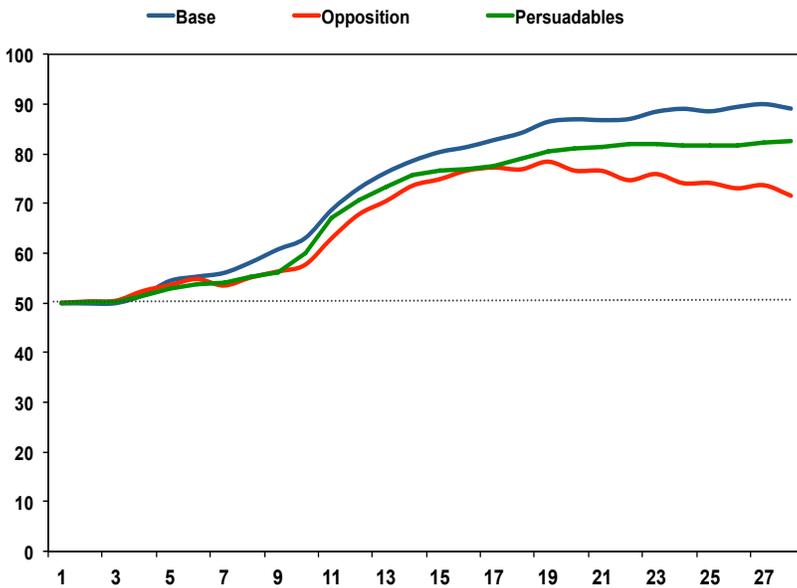
Winning messages center on **equality** and are **aspirational appeals** that adapt language from our founding documents.



Top Testing Messages

Using an online survey to register moment-to-moment attitudes toward political representation, barriers to elected office and their intersections with race, gender, class and age, we dial tested a sample of 1,000 representative registered U.S. voters, and an additional 100 African Americans, 100 Latinos, 100 Asian Americans, 100 people under 30 and 100 unmarried women under 55. Below are top messages that **beat leading opposition arguments by at least 8 points** among target audiences.

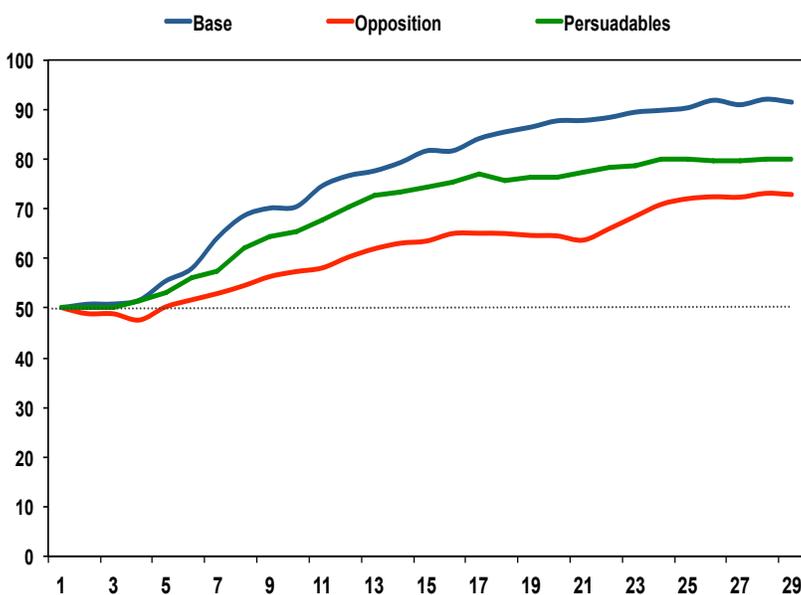
Need Full Team (as tested)



Need Full Team*

Our country is changing. To harness the opportunities before us as a nation, we need to tap into the talent and energy of all Americans, whether they are men or women, white or Black, Latino or Asian-American. A team working together is smarter and accomplishes more with varied perspectives and life experiences. Every American must have equal access to lead; when power is not shared, things break down. When our political leaders reflect the full array of talent that America's team has to offer, there is no problem we can't solve.

Solutions (as tested)

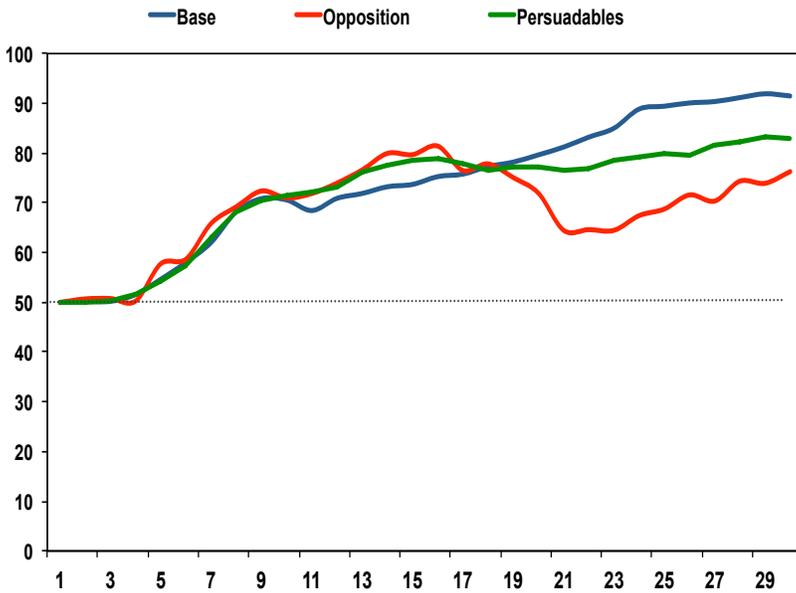


Solutions*

We can change things in America by changing who has access to power. Changing the way political campaigns work—and getting big money out of politics—would make it possible to include qualified people who aren't already rich and powerful in decision making, so younger people, women and people of color also represent us. We should change elected officials' salaries and hours so more of us can afford to hold office, and educate the public about whether their elected representatives reflect who we are as Americans. A government that looks more like America would better represent us.



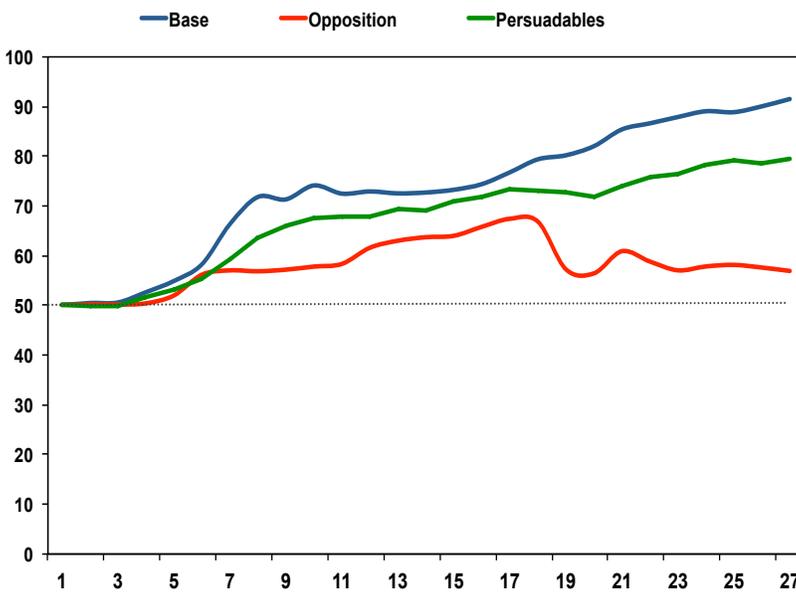
More Perfect Union (as tested)



More Perfect Union*

America is a nation founded on an ideal of government of, by and for the people. We deserve qualified leaders able to solve our problems. Our current representatives don't hold the monopoly on these abilities. Women and people of color make up a majority of the electorate, yet they've never been equally heard in the halls of power. We need to correct the balance. The best and the brightest of any background must have equal access to lead. America's promise is that any kid can achieve his or her dreams. When this includes leading at every level, then we'll have a more perfect union.

Money in Politics (as tested)



Money in Politics*

Our political system doesn't respond to the needs of everyday Americans like you and me. To be elected, you need to be rich or have access to big donors. It's no surprise that over half the members of Congress are millionaires –and so few women and people of color can run. We deserve a real democracy, where our representatives are as varied as we the people. Only then will we have a real voice and a real choice in how America works.

* Messages revised to remove unpersuasive language, profile how to engage the base and move the middle.

