

Voicing Our VALUES

A message guide for
policymakers and advocates

THIRD EDITION

JUSTICE



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by Bernie Horn and Gloria Totten

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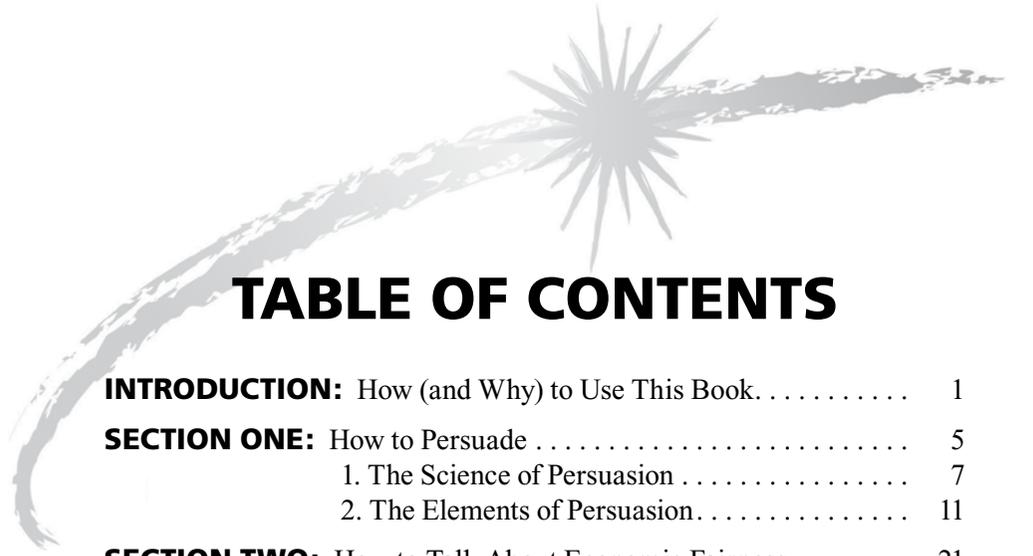
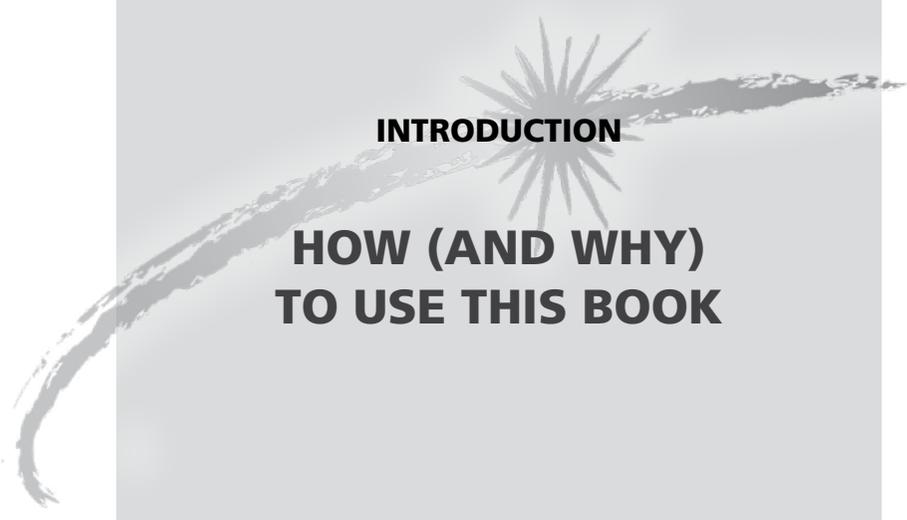


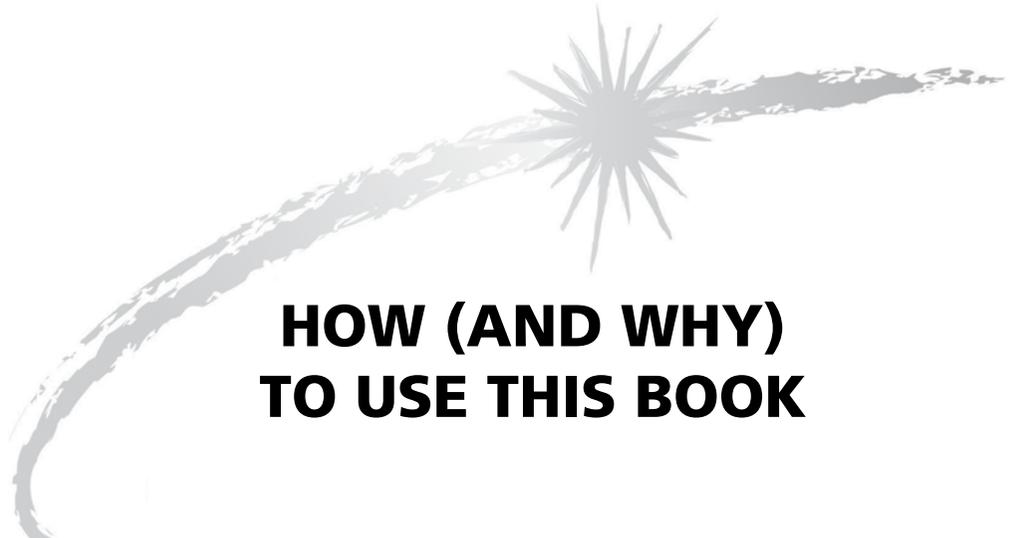
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INTRODUCTION

**HOW (AND WHY)
TO USE THIS BOOK**



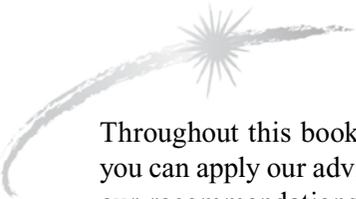
HOW (AND WHY) TO USE THIS BOOK

Most Americans are progressive on most issues. By margins of at least two to one, our fellow citizens agree that the U.S. economy is rigged to benefit the rich and powerful; think wealthy individuals and corporations pay too little in federal taxes; favor a major increase in the minimum wage; want to require businesses to provide paid sick leave to their employees; believe prescription drug costs are unreasonable; favor restricting carbon emissions from coal power plants; want health insurance to be affordable for all Americans; say we should require background checks for all gun buyers; oppose the deportation of unauthorized immigrants; support federal funding for Planned Parenthood; say that LGBTQ people should be protected against discrimination in jobs, public accommodations and housing; and do not want the Supreme Court to overturn *Roe v. Wade*.

Progressives will cheer and conservatives will grumble about those facts. But persuadable Americans, the people who swing advocacy and political campaigns one way or another, don't particularly care. They are not focused on a list of issues. When they engage in politics, they're mostly asking themselves a much broader question—who is on my side?

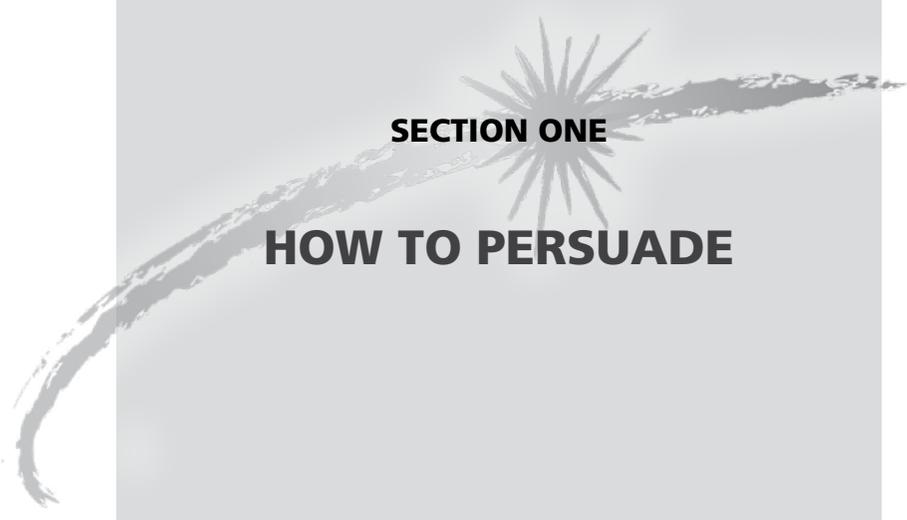
The purpose of this book is to suggest how to communicate to those undecideds, over and over again, that you and your cause(s) are on their side.

As you will see, facts and logical arguments, by themselves, are not persuasive. You need to be aware of your listeners' preconceptions and biases, start from a point of agreement, declare your progressive values, show listeners how they benefit, and speak in a way that nonpolitical citizens can grasp.



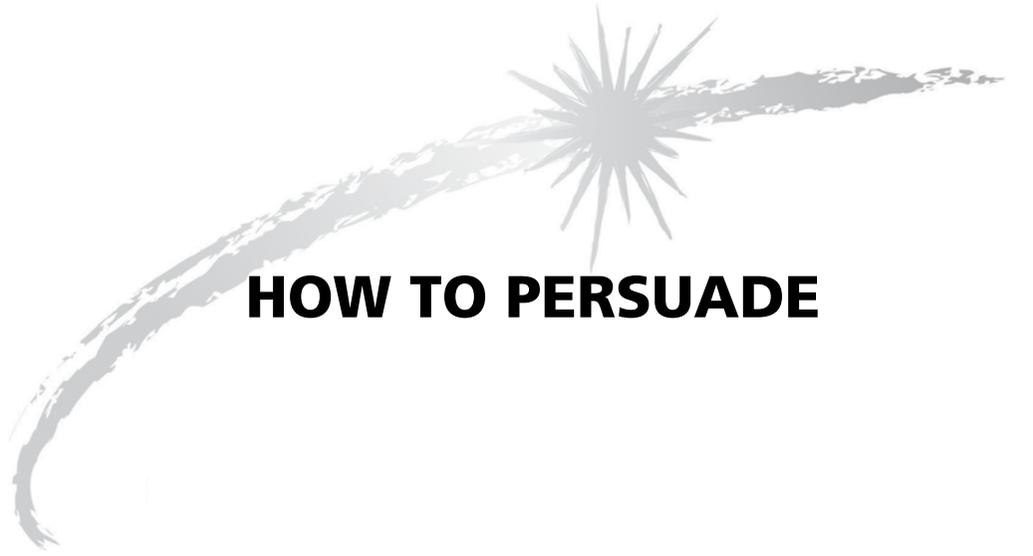
Throughout this book, we suggest specific language that illustrates how you can apply our advice. As long as you understand the reasoning behind our recommendations, we encourage you to adapt the examples to your own voice. Make the language authentically yours, fully integrating it with the knowledge and experience that you bring to any issue.

Message framing is not a silver bullet. It's just one tool to help win political battles, albeit one that progressives could use a lot more effectively. Still, if we combine better messaging with a lot of other hard work, we can mobilize that majority of Americans who agree with us, win our campaigns, and change the world.



SECTION ONE

HOW TO PERSUADE



HOW TO PERSUADE

1. The Science of Persuasion

Politics is the art of persuasion. But persuasion is hard and getting harder. Today, facts are rationalized away and lies are ubiquitous. Without a grasp on objective truths, how can we get voters to even comprehend what's in their self-interest, much less what's best for our nation?

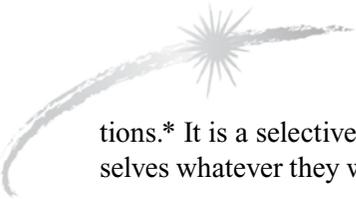
This book will provide some solutions. But first, let us explore the problem. Why are people so willing to believe false “facts” and fallacious arguments?

Confirmation bias

For most of the 20th century, political science, economics and philosophy relied on the premise that people base their opinions and choices on facts and logical reasoning. More recently though, thousands of studies have proven that people actually rely on emotion and ingrained beliefs far more than they employ objective facts or logic.

In his book *Thinking Fast and Slow*, Nobel Prize-winning scientist Daniel Kahneman summarized this field of research, describing dozens of ways that cognitive biases skew human reasoning. Many other scientific books and articles confirm that human minds are predisposed to believe falsehoods and exaggerations because of biases, heuristics and fallacies. But there is one cognitive bias that is particularly important to understand if we are to be successful in politics.

It is “confirmation bias.” This is when people seek out information that conforms to what they already believe or want to believe, while—inside their minds—ignore or refute information that disproves those assump-



tions.* It is a selective use of evidence in which people reinforce to themselves whatever they want to believe. It is self-delusion.

Confirmation bias is one of the oldest-known and best-proven cognitive biases. Sir Francis Bacon explained it 400 years ago. In the 21st century, it is accepted science.

If a person believes that violent crime keeps increasing, he or she will retain information about recent crimes and disbelieve or ignore the fact that crime rates have declined for decades. If someone thinks the Earth is thousands, instead of billions, of years old, he or she will not believe the truth even when shown fossils in a museum. For that matter, if someone believes that Friday the 13th is unlucky, he or she will pay attention and remember the times bad things happened on this date but will fail to remember all the Friday the 13ths when no misfortune occurred. (Confirmation bias plays a major role in superstition.)

In short, when faced with facts that contradict strongly-felt beliefs, people will almost always reject the facts and hold on to their beliefs.

Confirmation bias is crucial to us because, when it comes to politics, all of us carry in our heads a long list of preexisting beliefs, stereotypes and biases. So, if you present evidence or use language that seems to challenge your listeners' key beliefs, they will stop listening. If they think you are saying "you're wrong," a switch clicks in their brains turning off rational consideration and turning on negative emotions.

Why do people's brains work that way?

Bias inside the brain

Psychologists widely use the labels System 1 and System 2 to describe two main memory systems in the human brain. System 1 is the "fast" system which reacts instantaneously, reflexively and emotionally. This part of the brain is automatic, intuitive and subconscious. System 2 is the "slow" system that is deliberate, controls abstract thinking, and stores memories such as facts and events. The System 2 part of the brain is more rational and reflective.

Because System 1 operates in milliseconds, its reactions can override or redirect System 2's slower reasoning. If your listener's reflexive system determines that you are attacking his or her important beliefs, it will

* We use this term generically, as others do, to encompass associated labels which describe how people irrationally confirm and defend their beliefs and desires, such as *motivated reasoning*, *desirability bias*, and *disconfirmation bias*.

divert thinking away from the rational mechanisms in the brain to emotional ones. Simultaneously, the listener's mind will cherry-pick memories to reinforce the preexisting belief that seems to be under attack. In other words, System 1 will engage the "fight or flight" reflexes that protected the evolving homo sapiens in order to protect our modern-day beliefs.

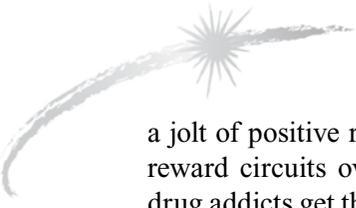
Let us imagine you are discussing voter fraud with a crotchety old uncle who believes it's a problem and you say, "There is no evidence of massive voter fraud," which is unquestionably true. His brain will perceive your words as an attack, he will feel a strongly negative emotional reaction, he will then remember and focus on the very real-to-him fake news that supports his belief in voter fraud, and you will have no chance to persuade him of anything. Your effort at persuasion has failed.

As political activists, we wish that we could reason with people and have calm, cool, dispassionate discussions about public policy. But instead, we tend to trigger in our listeners a negative emotional response, reminding them of "facts" (which may be falsehoods) that reinforce those negative emotions. We are arguing with ghosts from our listeners' pasts—and losing.

Clinical psychologist Drew Westen of Emory University used functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) to examine what was going on in the brains of partisans who supported either George W. Bush or John Kerry during the 2004 presidential contest. He gave test subjects a series of openly contradictory statements from each candidate. Based on confirmation bias, he expected that each partisan would overlook the contradictions of his or her own candidate while indignantly protesting the contradictions of the other guy. And just as Westen (and Sir Francis Bacon) would have expected, the test subjects did precisely that.

When Drew Westen looked at the fMRIs, the subjects—not too surprisingly—had not engaged the logical parts of their brains. They had engaged their emotions instead. And then, after rationalizing away legitimate attacks on their favored candidates, the brain's pleasure center released the neurotransmitter dopamine. As Westen explained in his book *The Political Brain*:

Once partisans had found a way to reason to false conclusions, not only did neural circuits involved in negative emotions turn off, but circuits involved in positive emotions turned on. The partisan brain didn't seem satisfied in just feeling better. It worked overtime to feel good, activating reward circuits that give partisans



a jolt of positive reinforcement for their biased reasoning. These reward circuits overlap substantially with those activated when drug addicts get their “fix,” giving new meaning to the term political junkie.

This means that when you attack preexisting beliefs, not only are your arguments rejected, but you are also helping to emotionally reward partisans for their stubbornness, deepening their attachment to false ideas.

The leaders of the radical right seem to understand all of this. They know that conservative voters are not searching for truth. They are, instead, consciously or unconsciously, seeking out information that conforms to their preexisting beliefs. That’s why those voters watch Fox News, listen to Rush Limbaugh, and read Breitbart. That’s also why conservatives are so susceptible to “fake news” on the Internet. They believe the lies because they want to—it quite literally feels bad to admit one is wrong and feels good to assert one is right.

In sum, there are tremendous barriers in the path of persuasion. How do we work around those obstacles?

2. The Elements of Persuasion

Avid partisans are invested in their preexisting beliefs, so they're very hard to persuade. There are conservatives, for example, who remain immovable no matter how many scientists testify to the truth of climate change, no matter how much evidence shows that the death penalty doesn't deter murder, no matter the incontestability that voter fraud is too rare to be concerned about.

These conservatives are completely locked into their confirmation bias. They will even alter or forget previous core beliefs (e.g., for personal morality, against deficits, opposed to Russia) in order to hold on tightly to current ones. Facts are completely overrun by their emotions.

But among less-partisan *persuadable* Americans, confirmation bias can be overcome. These swing voters don't lack political beliefs, biases and stereotypes. Rather, they carry in their minds both progressive and conservative ideas and can be persuaded by either. In addition, because they don't hold onto those beliefs with the intensity of partisans, they don't feel as much emotional need to defend them.

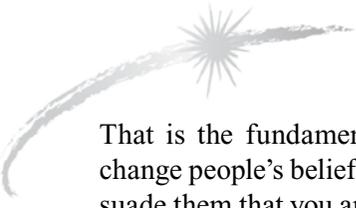
That presents us with a golden opportunity for persuasion, if only policymakers, advocates and activists understand these Americans. They're not like us.

Progressive activists know a great deal about issues and we tend to pick our favored candidates based on the policies they trumpet. When progressives talk to each other about politics, we assume our listeners know (and care) quite a lot.

Persuadables, in contrast, don't pay much attention to public policy. They don't often read or watch the political news. As a result, they are the citizens who tend to know the least about issues, legislation and the political process. And as polls have consistently shown, they care the least too. (Walk door-to-door for a candidate or cause and you'll quickly learn this first hand.)

Therefore, progressives' other problem in persuasion is that we tend to talk to swing voters the same way we talk to each other. We assume these voters know what we know, think the way we think, and are persuaded by the facts and arguments that persuade us. That simply doesn't work.

If you are to persuade undecided Americans, the most important thing to understand is that when they are considering political candidates and causes, there is one overriding (but vague) question in their minds: "Who is on my side?"



That is the fundamental element of persuasion. And since you cannot change people's beliefs, you must use *beliefs already in their minds* to persuade them that you are *on their side*.

Here are five basic rules to help you accomplish that:

First: Begin in agreement and stay in agreement

This is a very old rule of persuasion. Eighty years ago, Dale Carnegie explained it in his book *How to Win Friends and Influence People*:

In talking to people, don't begin by discussing the things on which you differ. Begin by emphasizing—and keep on emphasizing—the things on which you agree. Keep emphasizing, if possible, that you are both striving for the same end and that your only difference is one of method and not of purpose.

Start every argument from a point of agreement and then give your audience a bridge from their preconceptions to your solutions. The goal is not to change people's minds, it is to show your listeners that they agree with you already.

In order to make a progressive argument, we virtually always have to get past the brain's instantaneous System 1 and engage the thoughtful System 2. You need your listeners' minds to reflect on your argument, not react to it. When you begin in agreement, it both demonstrates that you're on their side and helps your audience listen with the calm and rational aspects of their minds.

Finding a point of agreement is not so difficult. You can start by identifying a fairly universally-accepted problem: "Prescription drugs cost too much!" Or by empathizing with your listeners' concerns: "You are right to be worried about the environmental impact of this proposed new bridge." Or by stating a policy ideal: "Every child in our city should have access to world-class public schools."

You never have to compromise your political principles to begin in agreement, you just need to consider a wider range of possibilities. For example:

- If your listener is complaining about taxes (even in a conservative fashion), agree that our tax system is unfair.
- If your audience is worried about government budgets (even when they're no current problem), agree that our government has an obligation to be careful with taxpayer money.

- If someone is concerned about crime (even in a low-crime community), agree that personal safety must be a top priority for government.
- If an individual thinks the neighborhood is going downhill (even if that doesn't seem to be the case), agree that we need to preserve the quality of life.

When you give a speech, find out ahead of time what concerns your audience. When you are in a conversation, listen carefully to what others say—they will provide you with opportunities to agree. Skip the parts where you flatly disagree and steer the discussion toward the elements where you're on the same side. Repeat over and over that you understand the problem, you empathize with your audience, and you share the same policy ideals.

You may wonder: Where do I take the discussion from there? What about facts and statistics? What about our progressive solutions?

For example, let us say you are talking about making taxes more progressive. Start in agreement, like this:

Say . . .

Our tax system is unfair. The tax burden on working families has increased while rich people and powerful corporations pocket more and more tax giveaways. And that's unjust.

Almost nobody disagrees with that. Then you might provide a statistic or, better yet, tell a story that illustrates the issue, and finish with a very brief explanation of how your policy is consistent with those statements of shared belief and how it addresses the problem.

Whatever you do, never say—and try to avoid even implying—that the listeners are wrong. Your audience will stop listening. Similarly, never let your own emotions do the talking. When you are about to speak in anger, take a deep breath and shake it off. Voicing your emotions will make you feel good—you'll get a shot of dopamine in your brain—but it will almost certainly end your opportunity to persuade.



Second: Use progressive values

Values are words with positive meanings built into them. Words like trustworthy, loyal, helpful, friendly, courteous and kind are values that describe personal behavior. But more than that, they implicitly communicate that the behavior is admirable. You could describe the same conduct as *brave* or *foolhardy*, you could call a person *thrifty* or *penny-pinching*. By choosing to use the value brave over foolhardy or thrifty over penny-pinching, you are framing the behavior as positive.

In politics, values are ideals that describe the kind of society we are trying to build. When you use progressive values, you communicate two things. First, because values are, by definition, beliefs that we share with our listeners, you are starting and staying in agreement with your audience. Values suggest that, whatever the specific policy, your overall goals are the same.

Second, if you understand how to use them, progressive values allow you to describe a consistent political philosophy using concepts that every voter can grasp.

The stereotypical conservative values are small government, low taxes, free markets, strong military and traditional families. These few words do a pretty good job of laying out a popular philosophy. When conservative values are stated this way, our side too often has no effective response.

Progressives usually want to answer the conservative approach not with our own values but with a laundry list of policies. Or, when we do use values, they tend to evoke negative stereotypes about bleeding-heart liberals: compassion, cooperation, and concern for our fellow citizens. These may appeal to our base, but they do not persuade undecided Americans.

There's another way. It is a set of political values that are poll-tested and proven to work.

When you're talking about an issue where government has no proper role—like free speech, privacy, reproductive rights or religion—declare your commitment to *freedom* or use a similar value from the chart on page 15. When you discuss an issue where government should act as a referee between competing interests—like court proceedings, wages, benefits, subsidies, taxes or education—explain that your position is based on *opportunity* or a value from that column. When you argue about an issue where government should act as a protector—like crime, retirement, health care, zoning or the environment—stand for *security* or a similar value.

Family of Progressive Values

Freedom or similar values:



- Liberty
- Privacy
- Basic rights
- Fundamental rights
- Religious freedom

Opportunity or similar values:



- Equal opportunity
- Justice; equal justice
- Fairness; fair share
- Level playing field
- Every American

Security or similar values



- Safety; protection
- Quality of life
- Employment security
- Retirement security
- Health security

Moreover, put these values together and explain that you stand for *freedom, opportunity and security for all*. This phrase polls better than conservative values, and more important, it's an accurate description of what we stand for. The right wing favors these principles but only for some—the affluent. Progressives insist on providing freedom, opportunity and security to each and every American. (For a more detailed explanation of progressive values, see Chapter 18.)

Imagine you are a state legislator visiting constituents door-to-door and you are asked what you're going to do to clean up the stream that runs through a particular neighborhood. And cleaning up that stream is not really the state legislature's job.

A typical progressive might launch into an explanation of the clean water legislation he or she supports. A particularly inept one might say the stream is the responsibility of the city or county and there's little the state can do. A good communicator would start in agreement:

Say . . .

It's a terrible shame that our stream has deteriorated like that. It's unsafe, it's unhealthy, it's wrong for our community.

Why . . .

The only way to connect with this resident is to agree wholeheartedly. Note that you should call it *our* stream and *our* community, even when you live in a different neighborhood. If you can, go on to say you remember what the stream was like when it was clean and beautiful. Then describe your positive values, your goals:



Say . . .

I believe the state needs to make it a top priority to ensure cleaner streams and safer parklands. We need to protect the quality of life in our community.

Why . . .

These are values that you share with every voter: *cleaner, safer, and a better quality of life*. At this point you are welcome to explain your clean water legislation, but keep it simple; you have probably already won a friend. The average voter is really only listening for one thing: Are you on my side? By using values that you share with your listener, you demonstrate that you are.

Every time you have the opportunity to speak to a persuadable audience, don't forget to express your values. Even if the listener grumbles about your policy solution, you might very well win his or her support if you have made clear that you share the same concerns and are trying to achieve the same goals.

Third: Show listeners how they benefit

Progressives favor policies that benefit society at large. We want to help the underdog. We wish that a majority of Americans were persuaded, as we are, by appeals to the common good. But they aren't.

In fact, it's quite difficult to convince average citizens to support a policy that appears to benefit people other than themselves, their families and their friends. Celinda Lake, one of our movement's very best pollsters, explains that "our culture is very, very individualistic." When faced with a proposed government policy, "people look for themselves in the proposal. People want to know what the proposal will do for me and to me."

That means, whenever possible, you need to show voters that they personally benefit from your progressive policies. Usually that's not so hard. When talking about climate change, emphasize how it affects the listeners' children and grandchildren. When arguing for criminal justice reform, show how it makes us all safer.

Sometimes it's more of a challenge. For example, if you're arguing for programs that benefit people in poverty, do not focus on the way your proposal directly helps the poor, instead find a way that it indirectly benefits the middle class. Persuadable voters are rarely in poverty themselves and they will relate better to an argument aimed at them.

For example, when you argue for an increase in the minimum wage:

Say . . .

Raising the minimum wage puts money in the pockets of hardworking Americans who will spend it on the things they need. This, in turn, generates business for our economy and eases the burden on taxpayer-funded services. It's a win-win. Raising the minimum wage helps build an economy that works for everyone.

Why . . .

Every progressive policy benefits the middle class, often directly but at least indirectly. In contrast, nearly every right-wing policy hurts the middle class, even if it more directly hurts the poor. Since persuadable voters are nearly always in the middle class and they want to know how policies affect them personally, you must tell them.

That does not mean you can explain your positions without mentioning program beneficiaries. In fact, the example above mentions them. The important thing is to connect with persuadable voters and frame the beneficiaries, in one way or another, as deserving.

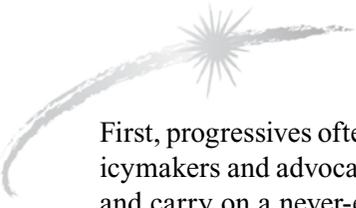
Americans are not very kind to the poor. Outside of the progressive base, a lot of voters assume that people in poverty failed to help themselves, and they should “pull themselves up by their bootstraps.” Unfortunately, you cannot argue voters out of this belief. So, when you talk about lower-income Americans, you need to go out of your way to describe them as deserving. The people you seek to help “work hard and play by the rules,” as Bill Clinton used to put it. (See Chapter 14 for more detail.)

By telling Americans how a policy benefits them, you are once again staying in agreement and demonstrating that you are on their side.

Fourth: Use their language, not ours

Since persuadable Americans don't pay much attention to politics, they know very little about issues and ideologies. After all, with America's highly polarized parties, anyone who pays attention has probably already taken a side.

In talking to our less-politically aware fellow citizens, progressive policy-makers and advocates tend to make two mistakes.



First, progressives often use insider language instead of plain English. Policymakers and advocates tend to speak the technical language of lobbying and carry on a never-ending conversation about bills from the past, measures under consideration and current law. You probably realize that most Americans don't know anything about CBO scoring or Third Reader or the Rules Committee. But average voters also don't know an amendment from a filibuster. Insiders tend to use abbreviations freely, like ENDA for the Employment Non-Discrimination Act or TABOR when talking about a Taxpayer Bill of Rights. They refer to SB 234, paygo requirements, the ag community and the Hyde amendment. This is a tough habit to break.

Insider jargon serves a useful purpose. It is shorthand that allows those who understand to communicate more efficiently. But it is also a means to be exclusive, to separate members from nonmembers of the club. That's exactly why such language is pernicious; you can't expect persuadable voters to understand a language that was designed, in part, to exclude them.

Second, progressives often use ideological language even though persuadables are the opposite of ideologues. You should not complain of *corporate greed* because persuadable Americans don't have a problem with corporations. You should not say *capitalism* or any *ism* because most Americans don't relate to ideology. Don't say *neo-* or *crypto-* anything! Like technical policy language, ideological language is a form of shorthand. But to persuadable voters, this just sounds like the speaker isn't one of them.

You need to accept persuadable voters as they are, not as you wish they were. They don't know what you know. And yet, if you use language they understand, you have the upper hand in any argument. Progressive policies benefit nearly all Americans. Progressive values reflect the aspirations of the vast majority of our fellow citizens. You're on the voters' side, you just need to speak in a way that communicates it.

Fifth: Focus on arguments, not facts

Progressives embrace facts—the more, the better. That's important in governing but less effective in persuasion. Advocates will pack a speech with alarming facts and figures like: “30 million Americans are uninsured;” or “one in five children live in poverty;” or “32 million Americans have been victims of racial profiling.” When you speak this way, you are assuming that listeners would be persuaded—and policy would change—if only everybody knew what you know.

But that's not how it works. Politics is not a battle of information, it is a battle of ideas. Facts, by themselves, don't persuade. Statistics, especially,

must be used sparingly or listeners will just go away confused. Your argument should be built upon ideas and values that the persuadable voters already hold dear.

If you're addressing an audience, a few well-placed facts may help illustrate why the progressive solution is essential, while too many facts will diminish the effectiveness of your argument. If you're speaking one-on-one or in a small group, let your listeners ask for more facts. When people do that, they're helping you persuade them.

Stories are usually more persuasive than statistics. Humans are much more comfortable and familiar with learning lessons from stories. The Bible is full of stories. As children, we learn from fairy tales and mythology. Much of the news is delivered through anecdotes. Our hearts are always ready to embrace a hero or turn against a villain.

We will give few examples of story-telling in this book because the stories need to be personally meaningful to you. If you use examples that clearly connect you and your audience, preferably about something that happened in your own town or county, it will be powerful.

* * * * *

Let's finish with a couple examples of bad messaging:

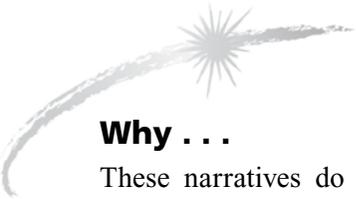
Don't say . . .

Taxes are the dues we pay for a civilized society. Our economic problem is not taxes, it's corporate greed. The average pay of CEOs has risen 800 percent over the past 20 years while the percentage corporations pay in taxes has declined by 40 percent. But that shouldn't surprise us—maximizing wealth is the whole point of capitalism.

And:

Don't say . . .

Almost 6 in 10 high school graduates go on to college. But according to a new study, 18 percent never finish college because they can't afford tuition, the cost of which has increased 3 times faster than inflation over the past 20 years. The Miller bill would help, but it's stuck in a filibuster in the Senate. We need you to call targeted Senators and demand they vote for cloture.



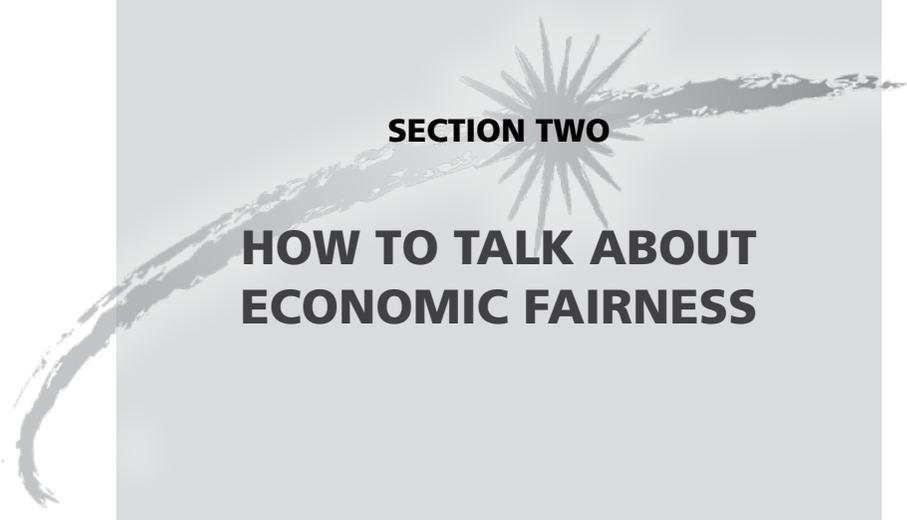
Why . . .

These narratives do not start in agreement and use no values. They employ ideological and insider language and greatly overuse statistics. Although they violate every rule of persuasion, these examples aren't too far removed from the way progressives argue every day.

Keep in mind that in politics our goal is not to educate Americans, it is to persuade them to do something: to vote, to volunteer, to contribute. If they vote for our ballot measure or send the letter we want sent to their legislator, it doesn't matter if the facts in their heads are different from the ones in ours. The goal in politics is not to change people's beliefs, which is nearly impossible, it is to get people to take action on our behalf.

To persuade, you need to understand your audience's preconceptions and where you share common ground. Avoid triggering negative emotional reactions and confirmation bias. Start from a point of agreement and provide voters with a bridge from their preconceptions to your solutions. Show that your policies are consistent with values that they already hold dear and explain how they benefit.

In sum, remind them over and over again that you are on their side.



SECTION TWO

**HOW TO TALK ABOUT
ECONOMIC FAIRNESS**



HOW TO TALK ABOUT ECONOMIC FAIRNESS

We believe that, for the foreseeable future, the most powerful contrast between progressives and conservatives is and will be economic fairness. Progressives side with the middle class while conservatives side with the rich.

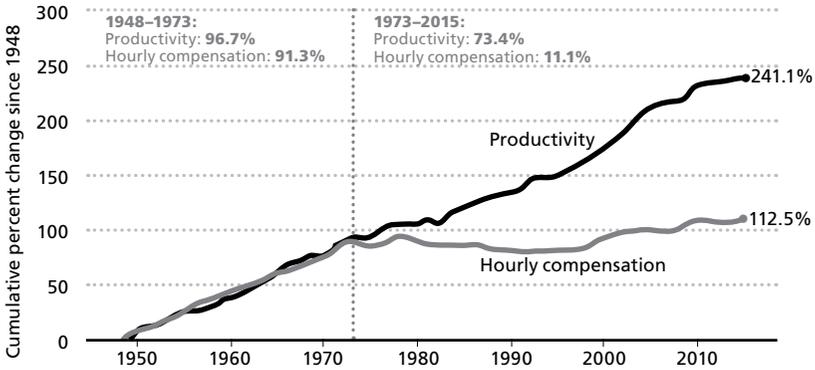
Donald Trump turned this contrast on its head, using a conservative economic message and amplifying negative attitudes about people of color to convince non-college educated White voters that conservatives side with the middle class while progressives side only with people of color. We can take back the economic narrative in a way that clearly articulates that no one needs to be left behind, and we must.

3. America's Economic Problem

President John F. Kennedy repeatedly used the aphorism “a rising tide lifts all boats,” and it came to mean that a stronger economy benefits all Americans. At that time, Kennedy was correct. As demonstrated by the chart on page 24, the benefits of increased productivity—that is, the creation of wealth across the U.S. economy—were fairly distributed to average workers from the post-war period into the Nixon Administration.

But starting in the 1970s and greatly accelerating during the Reagan Administration, real compensation (that is, wages and benefits, adjusted for inflation) stopped rising. While the economy continued to grow at a rapid pace, typical workers no longer received a reasonable share of the wealth they helped to create. Instead, nearly all of that money was, and still is, diverted to the most affluent.

Disconnect between productivity and a typical worker's compensation, 1948–2015



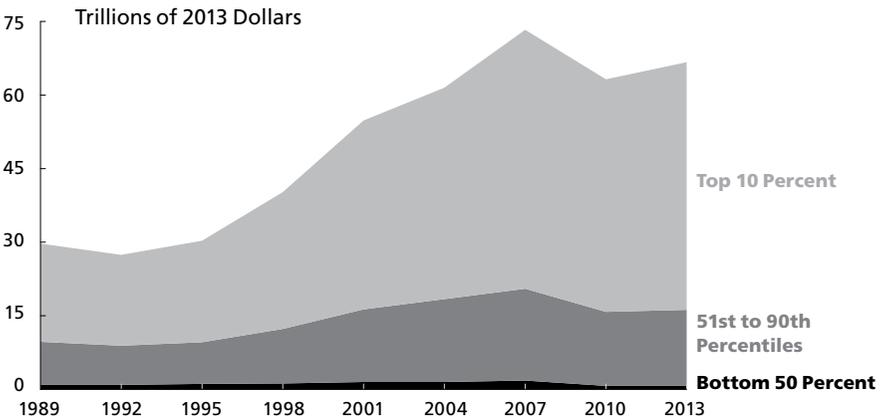
Note: Data are for average hourly compensation of production/nonsupervisory workers in the private sector and net productivity of the total economy. “Net productivity” is the growth of output of good and services minus depreciation per hour worked.

Source: Adapted from Figure K in Josh Bivens and Hunter Blair, Financial recovery and fairness by going where the money is, Economic Policy Institute Report, November 15, 2016.

Economic Policy Institute

This can also be seen another way. The chart below demonstrates that since the end of the Reagan Administration, the richest 10 percent of Americans doubled their wealth while the bottom 90 percent gained only slightly, and the bottom half—which own just one percent of all the nation’s assets—gained nothing.

Holdings of Family Wealth



Source: Congressional Budget Office, Trends in Family Wealth (2016)

Today, the richest one percent of Americans own more private wealth than the bottom 95 percent combined. The 20 wealthiest Americans own more assets than the entire bottom half of the U.S. population. And just eight people, six of them Americans, own as much wealth as half of the world's population (that is, 3.6 billion people) combined.

While conservatives assert it was just normal functioning of “the market,” the redirection of wealth to the wealthy was consciously accomplished in myriad ways, large and small. Management pay was exponentially increased, workers' benefits were minimized, key government regulations were amended or abolished, taxes were evaded, unions were destroyed, corporations sent factory jobs overseas, businesses cut costs by minimizing customer service and instead making their customers do part of the work, and most recently, Wall Street embraced money-making schemes that were little more than scams. The wealth that all Americans created together didn't just passively flow to the rich, they actively took it for themselves.

If this sounds to you like a harsh assessment, we urge you to read about it yourself. It is essential to understand what underlies the populist uprising that fueled both the Trump and Sanders campaigns in 2016. Without knowing any of the details of these charts and statistics, typical American workers feel that they have been treated unfairly, that their families are worse off than they were some decades ago, and *somebody is to blame for it*. And, in that at least, they are right.

Obviously the right-wing media, owned by and operated for the rich, are not going to talk about this concentration of wealth. But neither will the mainstream media. Thus, the economic truth is both unseen and unheard—it remains hidden in plain sight—and, as such, it can trigger some Americans to blame people of color, immigrants, low income workers, and others, rather than the real culprits.



4. The Radical Right's Narrative

Throughout his presidential campaign, Donald Trump told conservative voters exactly who to blame for their pain—people of color. He very vocally attacked Latinos and Muslims, and a bit more subtly attacked African-Americans and anyone else who is not White.

While Trump said this in the grossest ways, he was just expressing the right-wing narrative of grievance against nonwhites that has been repeated for decades and which greatly increased in volume during the presidency of Barack Obama.

What leaders of the right have been doing all these years is to encourage less-educated White voters to make political decisions, not based on policies that benefit them, but through the filter of their social identity.

Psychology tells us that a great deal of average people's self-image comes from their social identity—the group or groups that they see themselves as a part of.

Social identity divides the world into us and them or the in-group and the out-group. The *us* can be something as unimportant as which football team a person supports. It can be about an individual's social class or family, college or country. Being part of the group makes people feel good inside. It enhances pride and self-esteem, and usually there's nothing wrong with that.

But people also enhance their self-image by denigrating *them*. Like the subjects in Drew Westen's experiments (on page 9), individuals can feel good emotionally by blaming, being prejudiced against, or discriminating against their out-group. Surely, Donald Trump seems to enjoy himself when he attacks his political opponents. And so do many of his supporters.

In a political debate, there are two possible groups to blame for the troubles of non-college educated Whites. The truthful and rational explanation is the rich have been and still are squeezing everyone else, making all of us relatively poorer. The phony emotional explanation is it's the out-group, the non-Whites. Persuadable voters tend to hold both of these beliefs in their heads.

How can we direct them to the truth?

5. The Progressive Narrative

For at least a decade, virtually every poll has shown that, if they hear the argument, persuadable voters will agree that the rich deserve blame. For example, among American voters:

- 72 percent agree “the American economy is rigged to advantage the rich and powerful.”
- 83 percent say “there are different rules for the well-connected and people with money” while only 14 percent believe “everyone more or less plays by the same rules to get ahead.”
- 85 percent believe “the wealthy and big corporations are the ones really running this country.”
- 67 percent think corporations are “paying too little...in federal taxes” while only 9 percent say they are “paying too much.”
- 92 percent agree that “there are already too many special tax loopholes for the wealthiest Americans” and 90 percent agree there are too many “for corporations.”

Nevertheless, Barack Obama rarely made this point as President and Hillary Clinton largely avoided it as a candidate. So, the partisan debate on economics—what was heard by voters—was quite one-sided. That simply cannot continue.

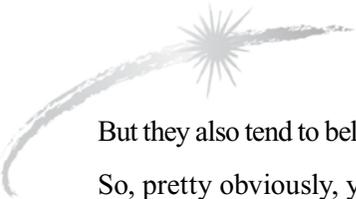
This is an easy message to deliver because Americans already believe our narrative, if only we will say it. And there are many ways to communicate it effectively. For example:

Say . . .

For typical working Americans, the economy is a wreck. To fix it, our policies must benefit all the people, not just the richest one percent. Our system works when everyone gets a fair shot, everyone gives their fair share and everyone plays by the same rules.

Why . . .

Persuadable voters believe in a series of stereotypes about progressives and conservatives. In economic policy, persuadable voters like the concept of a conservative who supports low taxes and free markets. But they also believe that today’s conservatives favor the rich rather than the middle class. At the same time, persuadable voters like a progressive who fights for economic fairness.



But they also tend to believe that liberals favor the poor over the middle class.

So, pretty obviously, you need to emphasize that conservative policy supports the rich while progressive policy supports the middle class. That does not mean you should lessen your commitment to fight poverty or move your policies to the right, it means you should focus attention on the fact that your economic policies benefit the middle class while conservative policies don't.

The narrative above uses simple, non-ideological language to express that idea. The first sentence expresses agreement. If you know something specific about your audience's economic woes, use it. Do not imply that the economy is okay because you will likely get a very angry response. The third sentence was used by President Obama and polls extremely well.

This is another version of the same theme:

Say . . .

Our economy is upside down. The majority of Americans are struggling while the rich are doing better than ever. We need an economy that works for Main Street, not Wall Street. Every hardworking American should have the opportunity to earn a decent living, receive high-quality affordable health care, get a great education for their children, and retire with security. [Their right-wing policy] favors the rich, [our progressive policy] sides with the rest of us.

Why . . .

It is important to use language that explicitly blames the rich. A Hart Research poll demonstrated this by asking persuadable voters which candidate they would support in two circumstances. When given a choice between a Republican who “will grow the economy” and a Democrat who “will make the economy work for all of us,” these voters chose the Republican by 55-to-45 percent. But when given the choice between a Republican who “will grow the economy” and a Democrat who “will make the economy work for all of us, *not just the wealthy*,” they chose the Democrat by 61-to-39 percent. By explicitly indicting the wealthy, the Democrat gained 16 points!

Here are some additional phrases that work:

Say . . .

- Too often the system is rigged to favor the wealthy over ordinary Americans, or big corporations over small businesses.
- It does not have to be that way—we can change the rules.
- We need an economy that works for all of us, not just the wealthy few.
- To build a strong economy, we need a strong middle-class.
- It’s time to rewrite the economic rules to benefit all Americans, not just the rich and powerful.

Why . . .

These narratives and messages appeal to just about every persuadable voter without sounding ideological. That’s important because most voters think that “free enterprise has done more to lift people out of poverty, help build a strong middle class, and make our lives better than all of the government’s programs put together.” So don’t attack capitalism, condemn economic unfairness.

More specifically:

Don’t say . . .

- Corporations/businesses are bad
- Anything negative about small business

Say . . .

- Wall Street speculators
- Unfair tax breaks and giveaways to Wall Street, giant banks, and major corporations
- Anything positive about Main Street

Why . . .

Voters feel good about corporations and businesses—most work for one. Voters believe that businesses create jobs and America needs jobs. Americans especially adore the concept of Main Street. And as pollster Celinda Lake says, “Americans are in love with *small business*. It’s a concept that voters see as almost synonymous with America.” By small business, they mean family-run businesses with five or perhaps ten employees.



Don't say . . .

- Income inequality
- Economic disparity

Say . . .

- Richest one percent, the super-rich, billionaires
- All the rest of us
- Economic injustice or unfairness
- The disappearing middle class

Why . . .

Understand that the rich, or the major banks and corporations, are not unpopular for who they are, but for what they've done. To be effective, you need to connect the bad guy to the bad deed, such as unfair tax breaks, moving jobs overseas, accepting bailouts, or paying outrageous CEO bonuses. Americans expect some people to earn more than others. It's not income inequality that voters oppose, it is economic injustice, economic unfairness and people who cheat or rig the system.

Don't say . . .

- Capitalism
- Free markets, free enterprise, free trade

Say . . .

- The economic system isn't working for working families
- Fair markets, fair trade, level playing field
- Rigging the rules, gaming the system
- Stacking the deck
- An economy that works for all of us

Why . . .

If you attack the market system, you marginalize yourself. In addition, there are a lot of economic phrases that, in the minds of most Americans, may mean something different from what you intend. Don't say *capitalism*, *socialism*, or *fascism* because the far-right has succeeded in confusing voters about their meaning. Don't use the phrases *free markets* or *free enterprise* because, in this context, "free" triggers positive thoughts about conservative economics.

And yet, you should explicitly support a fair market system. You need to draw a distinction between conservative anything-goes economics and a progressive system that enforces basic rules-of-the-road to level the playing field and keep markets honest and fair for everyone.

The argument for capitalism is that by harnessing individuals' economic drive, all of society is enriched by their hard work and innovation. Progressives are for that. But society does not win—in fact, it loses—when people get rich by gaming the system, by exploiting tax or regulatory loopholes, by dismantling viable companies, or by creating scams that aren't technically illegal but should be.

Conservatives relentlessly warp markets to benefit the rich and powerful. They use subsidies, loopholes, trade policy, labor law and economic complexity to corrupt markets. It is progressives who seek to build *fair markets*. Help voters visualize such a system.

Say . . .

We need an economy that's fair to everyone. That means structuring a system that not only rewards people for hard work and innovation, but also discourages people from gaming the system or passing costs on to the community. We need rules of the road that make economic competition fair, open and honest. A fair market system energizes our economy, creates jobs, and allows every American to pursue the American Dream.

Why . . .

When you talk about the American Dream—fair pay, health insurance, homeownership, education, retirement security—it provides the opportunity to explain that none of this is possible without a change in direction. It lays out an overarching goal; only progressive policy will ever get us any closer to turning that Dream into a reality.

Finally, when talking about economics, don't limit the conversation to income inequality. In our country, the biggest inequalities involve assets.

Say . . .

Our economic system should reward hard work and innovation. That's the American way. But right now, the richest one percent in America own more wealth than the bottom 95 percent of Americans combined. The rich don't need more subsidies and loopholes. They need to pay their fair share.



SECTION THREE

**HOW TO TALK ABOUT
PROGRESSIVE POLICIES**



HOW TO TALK ABOUT PROGRESSIVE POLICIES

6. Civil Rights & Liberties

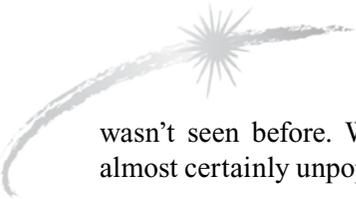
Begin in agreement, for example: What makes America special is our commitment to freedom and justice for all.

Our values: Freedom, liberty, fundamental rights, fundamental fairness, basic rights, constitutional rights, personal privacy, justice, equal opportunity, fairness, stopping discrimination and government intrusion.

Our vision: *Our nation was founded and built upon the self-evident truth that all men and women are created equal. That ideal calls us to defend liberty and justice for all people, with no exceptions. In the 21st century, three policies are of foremost importance: (1) outlaw discrimination based on race, gender, age, disability, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation or gender identity; (2) guarantee fundamental fairness for immigrants; and (3) protect our privacy from intrusion by governments or businesses, including the collection, use and sale of data without individuals' active consent.*

Civil rights ensure that people will be treated equally regardless of their gender, race, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or any other differentiation that is irrelevant to our inherent rights as residents and citizens. Civil liberties guarantee fundamental human rights that are, or should be, protected by our Constitution.

The individual circumstances that require the protection of civil rights and liberties tend to be unpopular. It's unpopular to defend the rights of criminals. It's often unpopular for a minority to play a role where that group



wasn't seen before. Whenever free speech needs to be protected, it is almost certainly unpopular speech, because popular speech isn't attacked.

But even when causes are unpopular, we can defend popular ideals: equal opportunity for civil rights, and freedom for civil liberties.

Let us consider a few examples:

Immigrants

Polls show that there is a tremendous difference in the way Americans feel about unauthorized immigrants depending on whether or not they are perceived as *criminals*. Seventy-eight percent of Americans would “deport all people currently living in the country illegally who have been convicted of other crimes while living in the U.S.” (Additional research demonstrates that these must be “serious crimes.”) Without being prompted about *criminals*, 71 percent say we “should not attempt to deport all people currently living in the country illegally.” More specifically, if “illegal immigrants have been in this country for a number of years, hold a job, speak English, and are willing to pay any back taxes that they owe,” 90 percent favor allowing them to stay in the U.S. “and eventually allow them to apply for U.S. citizenship.”

So, it's important to focus on immigrants who have been playing by the rules. For example:

Say . . .

America is a nation of values, founded on the idea that all of us are created equal. We need to be true to those values and protect everyone's right to due process and fair treatment under our Constitution. The millions of immigrants who have lived here for years, work hard, pay taxes, and play by the rules—they make our economy and our country stronger. That's why [the solution you advocate...]

Why . . .

Right-wing advocates want to make this debate about crime. Don't help ingrain those ideas by repeating them, and don't use the word *illegal* even to make the entirely truthful statement that “no human is illegal.” Unless you are specifically talking about immigrants who may be criminals (e.g. in the debate about *detainers*), assert that you are talking about people with no criminal background.

Nothing you say is going to sway the right-wing base. In a one-on-one conversation, it is futile to keep arguing with an anti-immigrant stalwart. But if persuadable voters are watching you debate the issue, you can take another step and address the real problem: that our immigration system is obsolete.

Say . . .

Our immigration system should be completely fair; it should embody justice. But due to years of gridlock in Washington, that system is a mess. It's time for the Congress to stop playing politics and create an immigration process that recognizes the value of people who have lived here for years, working hard and playing by the rules. We need a system that keeps families together, creates a roadmap for those who aspire to become citizens, and strengthens our economy for years to come.

Overall, you need to move the conversation away from individual immigrants who are stereotypically portrayed as bad people, to the real problem: a bad immigration process. The word choices in these short examples require some explanation.

Don't say . . .

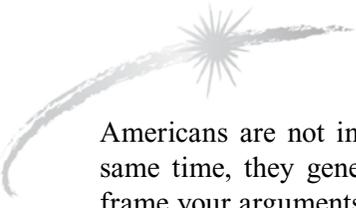
- Illegal aliens
- Illegal immigrants
- Undocumented immigrants

Say . . .

- New American immigrants
- New Americans
- Aspiring citizens

Why . . .

Don't say *aliens* because that implies they are different from *us*, which is both inaccurate and offensive. Don't say *illegal* because it suggests that they are criminals deserving of punishment, which is false. *Undocumented* has been thoroughly tested and, unfortunately, does not work. If you have to be more specific, you might say *immigrants who are not authorized to be here*. On the positive side, *new American immigrants*, *new Americans* and people who *aspire to be citizens* are poll-tested and move the conversation in a productive direction.



Americans are not inclined to *give* anything to immigrants, but at the same time, they generally don't want to *deny* rights or necessities. So frame your arguments accordingly. For example, if you are arguing for a state DREAM Act to allow the children of new American immigrants to be eligible for in-state tuition rates:

Say . . .

We should reward hard work and responsibility. When young aspiring Americans graduate from a local high school after they have lived here for years and stayed out of trouble, we should not deny them access to college tuition rates that are available to all their graduating classmates. Education is the cornerstone of our democracy and our economy, so when we enable young people to go to college we all reap the benefits.

Or if you are arguing to allow immigrants access to driver's licenses:

Say . . .

The laws about driving on our highways should be designed to make us all safer. So it doesn't make sense to deny new American immigrants the ability to get a driver's license. We should want them licensed to ensure that every driver on the road is trained, tested and covered by insurance. It's a policy that benefits all of us.

LGBTQ Rights

Most Americans don't understand the inequalities faced by LGBTQ people, and how those inequalities affect their lives. Regardless, in just the past few years, Americans have moved rapidly to accept marriage equality and reject discrimination against gay and transgender people.

For example, as recently as 2011, a majority of Americans opposed marriage between same-sex couples and it was still a fairly effective wedge issue for conservatives as recently as 2009. Today, Americans support marriage equality by a margin of 2-to-1.

By an even stronger margin, Americans support LGBTQ anti-discrimination laws. Seventy percent favor and only 26 percent oppose "laws that would protect gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people against discrimination in jobs, public accommodations and housing." Even Republicans support such laws by a margin of 60-to-33.

We can continue this heartening trend by pointing out that, when it comes to what's important about being an American, LGBTQ people have the same values as everyone else.

Say . . .

This is about everyday Americans who want the same chance as everyone else to pursue health and happiness, earn a living, be safe in their communities, and take care of the ones they love.

Why . . .

Say that all of us want the same things in life and we should all be treated fairly and equally.

Don't say . . .

- Protect or grant rights
- Benefits
- Civil rights

Say . . .

- Fairness and equality
- Equal opportunity
- Remove unfair barriers

Why . . .

Talking about *rights*, *benefits* or what LGBTQ people *deserve* does not help persuadable voters understand the issues and it tends to sound like you want something different or special for LGBTQ people. Also, civil rights comparisons can alienate some African Americans.

Use language that is inclusive, language that shows unfair barriers prevent LGBTQ people from doing things that we hold dear or even take for granted, like fulfilling obligations to their loved ones, their families, their friends, their neighbors, their communities and their country. Use examples that help Americans acknowledge LGBTQ people as average, hard-working Americans who deserve to be treated as such.

When you are advocating for anti-discrimination statutes, it's essential to understand that Americans are not aware that LGBTQ people can lose their jobs or be denied housing simply because of who they are. You must tell them.



Say . . .

All hardworking people in our community should have the chance to earn a living, provide for themselves and their families, and live like everyone else. But in our state/city, it's currently legal to fire employees or refuse to rent an apartment to people just because they are gay or transgender. Nobody should have to live in fear that they can be fired or evicted just because of who they are.

Why . . .

Most states do not have anti-discrimination laws to protect gay people and fewer still cover transgender people. In states that don't provide protection, it is usually possible for cities and counties to enact their own local laws, and many have already done so.

Don't say . . .

- Employment or housing rights
- Discrimination

Say . . .

- Employment or housing protections
- Treating people fairly and equally
- Equal opportunity

Why . . .

Avoid talking about *giving* or *granting* any *rights*, which implies special treatment. Instead, say that we should not deny protections, which implies these rights are inherent to everyone. Obviously, we oppose discrimination but that language can lead to a polarized debate, so it's better to talk about treating people fairly, or protecting equal opportunity.

Finally, we may be sorely tempted to take some swings at our political opponents, to brand them negatively. But it is better to let them negatively brand themselves.

Don't say . . .

- Hate, haters, hatred
- Bigot, bigots, bigotry
- Prejudice
- Religious extremists
- Anti-gay Christians

Say . . .

- Love, standing for love
- Exclusion, rejection and intolerance
- Anti-gay activists
- Radical right activists

Why . . .

When we make clear that we're on the side of love, our opponents are against love. This implication is enough. It's not useful to employ emotionally charged words like haters or bigots, no matter how tempting or true it might be. And we certainly don't want to use language that seems to imply that an entire religious tradition or denomination is anti-gay. You can say *this is the kind of exclusion and intolerance that divides our community* or *the hurtful rhetoric of anti-gay activists*. But generally, stick to the positive and your audience will understand that you believe everyone deserves the same chance at happiness and stability, while our opponents simply do not. For example:

Say . . .

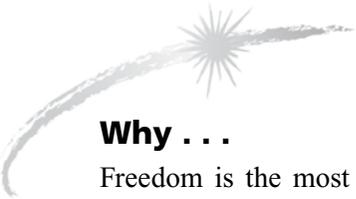
If America stands for anything, it's equal opportunity for all. If you have two children or grandchildren, and one is straight and the other gay, you still love them equally. You know the government should treat them fairly and equally. That is why [explain your policy solution here...]

The Ten Commandments

Hopefully you won't have to debate a proposal to display the Ten Commandments in government buildings. But you might, and we use it here to represent issues where religious advocates seek to impose their religion upon others. And, to understand the difficulty of the progressive position, it is important to realize that Americans favor posting the Ten Commandments in government buildings by a margin of more than 3-to-1.

Say . . .

The Ten Commandments are a moral inspiration and I applaud churches and synagogues that post and teach them. Another inspiration is the First Amendment of the United States Constitution, because it guarantees our most important freedoms. Our country is based on freedom. Hundreds of thousands of Americans have fought and died for our freedom. The First Amendment guarantees the right to display the Ten Commandments everywhere *except* government property—where it is prohibited. To maintain our freedom, this is the rule we must follow.



Why . . .

Freedom is the most powerful word in the American political lexicon. Conservatives understand this and use it—in inappropriate situations—again and again. So when progressives have the opportunity to defend freedom, we must do it explicitly and enthusiastically.

7. CONSUMER PROTECTION

Begin in agreement, for example: We need a marketplace that is fair to everyone.

Our values: Justice, equal justice, civil justice, equal opportunity, fairness, fair rules, fair markets, level playing field, security, safety

Our vision: *We need a marketplace that is fair to everyone. That requires fundamental rules to ensure consumer products are safe and the terms of sales and investments are open and honest. In four ways, we need to guarantee that everyone plays by the same fair rules by: (1) ensuring that food is safe, drugs are pure, and products are free from dangerous defects; (2) requiring that financial institutions not cheat their customers, and further, that their services provide a legitimate benefit to society; (3) compelling all businesses to follow basic rules of economic decency; and (4) guaranteeing justice for average Americans and small businesses in civil litigation.*

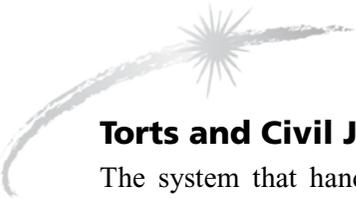
Conservatives argue against consumer protections on the grounds that such requirements interfere with the *free market*. But American markets are not, and never have been, free of government influence. Governments not only inspect food and drugs, regulate pollution, and impose safety and health standards, they also provide subsidies, contracts, tax breaks, patents and copyrights, protection from imports, and erect barriers to labor organizing.

There is never a question of whether government is involved in markets, the only question is who benefits from the involvement.

That's why progressives favor *fair markets* instead of *free markets*. By fair, we mean markets where governments work to create a level playing field so that individuals and small businesses compete on a reasonably fair basis against the rich and powerful. That is the point of consumer protection. (For more about *fair markets*, see Chapter 19.)

When you fight for laws that protect customers from unfair contract provisions and outright scams, state your arguments in favor of fair rules and level playing fields and against policies that rig the system to benefit the rich.

One type of consumer protection that has been under continuous attack is labeled *tort reform* by conservatives.



Torts and Civil Justice

The system that handles lawsuits among individuals and corporations should be called the *civil justice* system.

Don't say . . .

- Tort reform
- Lawsuit abuse
- Trial lawyer
- Personal injury lawyer

Say . . .

- Civil justice
- Equal justice, justice
- Just and fair compensation
- Hold corporations accountable when they duck responsibility for misconduct
- Rig the system

Why . . .

The right-wing *tort reform* strategy is to focus attention on the victim's lawyer and ignore the victim, the injury, the misconduct and the perpetrator. We must do the opposite: focus on victims, injuries, misconduct and perpetrators, not the attorneys. Americans understand that courts must deliver *justice*, so use that term. And polls show that voters are actually more worried about corporate abuse of consumers, employees and shareholders than abuses by lawyers or plaintiffs.

Make it clear that what our right-wing opponents call tort reform isn't reform at all. It's actually a cruel shifting of costs from rich companies that caused injuries to the unfortunate people who were injured. And that's unfair. Whenever possible, use local examples to make your case and get the focus back where it should be.

Say . . .

Our courts need to deliver justice. We cannot deny innocent people just and fair compensation for injuries, especially when they're taking on rich and powerful corporations. We need a level playing field. This extreme right wing proposal would rig the system to shift the cost of injuries from a corporation that's at fault to the victim who is innocent. We need policies that uphold equal justice for all.

Why . . .

Why say *we cannot deny . . . just and fair compensation* instead of *we must ensure they receive just and fair compensation*? Persuadable voters are more strongly moved by a plea framed as protecting people from being *denied* something than one framed as *giving* or *providing* that same right.

Don't say . . .

- Give rights

Say . . .

- Don't deny rights

Right wing argument: Tort reform saves everyone money by stopping frivolous litigation.

Say . . .

The goal of our legal system is justice. This kind of legislation rigs the system to make it harder for injured Americans to hold wrongdoers accountable. Rich and powerful corporations push for this special treatment because it shifts the responsibility of paying for the cost of injuries from them—the ones who caused the damage—to the innocent victim. That is clearly not justice.

Right wing argument: We need tort reform because medical malpractice lawsuits jack up health care costs.

Say . . .

The inherent purpose of our court system is justice. We should not rig the system to benefit either one side or another. In addition, the Congressional Budget Office found that restricting lawsuits for medical negligence would have virtually no effect on the price we pay for health insurance. At the same time, it would punish innocent victims. That's not justice.



8. EDUCATION

Begin in agreement, for example: We need public schools for our families and our communities that provide each and every child the opportunity to achieve their fullest potential in life.

Our values: Opportunity, equal opportunity, fairness, fair share, opportunity for each and every child

Our vision: *Our public schools must provide each and every child the opportunity to achieve his or her fullest potential in life. Children are not standardized; each one needs and deserves personalized instruction. That requires both fully qualified professional teachers and opportunities to learn outside of school. Every jurisdiction needs to: (1) provide adequate funding for public schools; (2) deliver instruction in a way that recognizes the differences in both the interests and needs of specific children; (3) provide opportunities to learn outside of classroom time including afterschool, arts and recreational programs, and libraries; and (4) make schools a safe and fair environment for everyone.*

Public education is under attack from conservatives who are, in essence, promoting a corporate takeover of public schools. To push back, you need to understand where voters stand on K-12 education issues.

On standardized testing: Sixty-four percent of Americans believe “there is too much emphasis on standardized testing in public schools.” Only 26 percent think there is the right amount or not enough testing. Fifty-five percent oppose linking teacher evaluations to students’ standardized test scores. The public is simply not on the testing bandwagon.

On charter schools and vouchers: Nearly two-thirds express support for charter schools, yet surveys of parents show that what they want for their children is “a good quality neighborhood public school” (68 percent) much more than “more choices of which schools I can send my children to” (24 percent). Only 31 percent of Americans favor private school vouchers.

On trust in teachers: Seventy percent of Americans rate the honesty and ethical standards of teachers to be high or very high. The only professionals with a higher rating are nurses. Teachers are substantially more trusted than police, judges and clergy, and are three times more trusted than lawyers, business executives and news reporters.

On the quality of schools: When asked to grade schools “A, B, C, D or Fail,” only 21 percent say that public schools nationally deserve an A or B. Among the same Americans, 51 percent believe public schools in their own communities deserve an A or B. And among Americans with a child in school, 72 percent would give their school an A or B.

Because Americans like and trust their local schools and teachers, and because voters generally care more about how policies affect their own communities, you should lean heavily on arguments based on how an education policy will impact local schools and schoolchildren.

Say . . .

We need public schools for our families and our communities that provide each and every child the opportunity to reach their fullest potential in life. To accomplish that, we should recognize there are no standardized children; every child has different strengths and weaknesses. That’s why our schools must offer a complete curriculum provided by professional teachers who have the training to give the individualized attention every child needs.

Why . . .

The monologue above uses four strategies:

1. Focus on the listener’s own children and neighborhood schools rather than education in the abstract.
2. Indirectly push back against the overuse of standardized tests and teaching-to-the-test by explicitly pointing out something that every parent knows: every child is different and requires individualized attention.
3. Change the narrative about school quality measured by average test scores to a narrative about how well our schools provide each and every student the opportunity to learn and excel.
4. Insist that only professional teachers, rather than amateurs or computer programs, have the knowledge and skills to do the job right.



Don't say . . .

- The nation's schools
- High-poverty schools
- Failing schools, failing teachers
- Soft bigotry of low expectations
- Student achievement

Say . . .

- Our children, local schools, schools in our community
- Opportunity to learn, to succeed
- Teaching-to-the-test, one-size-fits-all
- Each and every child is different, is unique, is an individual
- Professional teacher; teaching profession

Why . . .

The American value behind public education is equal opportunity for all. Instead of addressing the problem that too many children are denied an equal opportunity to learn, the right wing tries to exacerbate it with vouchers, or as they call them, *opportunity scholarships*. Their strategy is to take advantage of the fact that Americans believe public schools outside of their own communities are failing and, instead of fixing them, offer vouchers to enable individual students to escape. The political goal of vouchers is to set some parents against others, particularly within communities of color.

The right wing also appeals to Americans' fervent belief in the market system and urges that parents be treated as consumers and schools be run like corporations. But schools are not businesses, teachers are not factory workers, and students are most certainly not products for sale. After more than a decade of right wing education policy, there is still no evidence that any of their proposals actually benefit schoolchildren.

The major difference between the partisans on education is that progressives accept responsibility for improving our public schools while conservatives want to abandon them entirely. That's how we should distinguish our positions in public debate. For example, say you are arguing against larger class sizes:

Say . . .

Each and every child in our community deserves the opportunity to grow up to live a successful life. So every child needs excellent schools and professional teachers. Smaller class sizes help children learn because they allow teachers to spend more one-on-one time with each student, providing the individualized instruction they need.

Why . . .

Whatever your progressive solution—whether it’s smaller class sizes, modernized school facilities and equipment, programs to attract and retain excellent teachers, a broader and richer curriculum—emphasize the underlying value of equal opportunity and focus on what’s best for *each and every child*, which our listeners visualize as their own child or grandchild. If your solution is more resources for public schools, specify how you’d use the money: *for art, music, science labs, technology...what every child needs to succeed*.

Similarly, if you are opposing legislation that would drain resources from local public schools, emphasize that. For example, if you are speaking against spending taxpayer dollars for private school vouchers.

Say . . .

Each and every child in our community deserves access to an excellent neighborhood public school so that child has the opportunity to grow up and be successful in life. There is a proposal to spend your tax dollars on vouchers for private schools, which would mean less money spent on public schools. There is no credible study that shows vouchers improve student performance. So vouchers are neither wise nor fair.

Why . . .

There are lots of statistics about vouchers and you are welcome to use a few. But voters already overwhelmingly oppose vouchers if they come at the expense of the public schools, so focus on that.

Finally, don’t repeat the anti-teacher and anti-child message frames. They do not support progressive arguments.

Don’t say . . .

- School reform, education reform
- Run schools like businesses
- Achievement gap

Say . . .

- Each child deserves an excellent education, personalized instruction
- Opportunity gap

Why . . .

Our nation’s future is on the line. Progressives need to re-take the moral high ground on public education. A little smart message framing can make a real difference.



9. ENVIRONMENT & SMART GROWTH

Begin in agreement, for example: We need to protect our community's health and safety, and our quality of life.

Our values: Security, safety, health, protection, quality of life

Our vision: *We have a responsibility to protect the quality of life, not just for ourselves, but for our children and grandchildren. To do that we need to both stop the degradation of our environment now and pursue policies that build a better future. These goals fit into three categories, laws that: (1) reduce the pollution of our air, water and land—including gases that accelerate climate change; (2) conserve energy and quickly develop clean and renewable sources of energy; and (3) pursue policies that build infrastructure to create environmentally friendly cities and towns for the future.*

Americans are more worried about “the quality of the environment” than they’ve ever been in this century and 57 percent think the environment will be worse “for the next generation than it is now,” while only 12 percent think the environment will get better.

Nevertheless, when you speak to voters, they are mostly concerned about how environmental issues affect them directly. They are worried about their own air quality and local parks, streams and wetlands. So you should personalize your language—it’s about the *air we breathe*, the *water we drink*; it’s about health and safety *for our children*. Here is a generic message that you can adapt to fit issues in your community:

Say . . .

We’ve got to protect our community’s health and safety, and our quality of life. We understand that includes [keeping our rivers and streams clean. The Big Bend Project would eliminate a great deal of our city’s water pollution problem.] This is the time for our [city/county] to take the responsibility to preserve the quality of life in [Big Bend], not just for ourselves, but for our children and grandchildren.

Why . . .

First agree with your audience and explain the progressive values that underlie environmentalism which are all in the *security* column of values: safety, health and quality of life. Make the issue personal by talking about *our* rivers and *our* health, and remind them that any environmental cause benefits their families.

Of course, you need to explain how your specific solution delivers the security that voters seek, and some audiences require more facts than others. Progressives almost always give too many facts upfront and ignore crucial message framing. Focus more on staying in agreement, voicing your values, and helping your audience understand how they benefit.

Don't say . . .

- Opportunity

Say . . .

- Our safety, security, health
- Our quality of life
- For our children and grandchildren

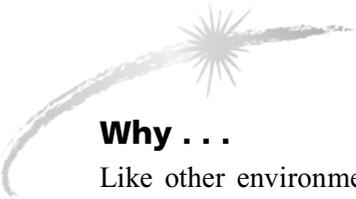
Why . . .

In the environmental debate, the right wing tries to use the value of *opportunity*: the opportunity to mine, drill or develop, for short-term profit. Your job is to move your audience from an opportunity or business/consumer conversation to a discussion about our families' current and long-term security.

For example, let's say you are arguing for restrictions on the drilling technique called hydraulic fracturing, which you should refer to as *fracking*.

Say . . .

We need to guarantee that our drinking water is safe. We need to protect our community's rivers and streams. There is plenty of evidence that fracking can pollute groundwater. Right now, companies engaged in fracking aren't even required to disclose crucial information to scientists so we can know how dangerous it is. We need a fully effective reporting system [or a moratorium] to protect our health and safeguard our quality of life.



Why . . .

Like other environmental issues, base your arguments on the value of security and personalize the issue to your audience.

Anti-environmentalists want to soften the negatives associated with exploiting the environment, so they call drilling and mining *exploring for energy*. Obviously, say *drilling, mining, fracking* and *exploiting* instead.

Don't say . . .

- Exploring for energy

Say . . .

- Drilling for oil/gas
- Fracking
- Exploiting our natural resources

Climate Change

Polling shows that 76 percent of Americans are “very” or “somewhat concerned” about climate change and 66 percent are very or somewhat concerned “that climate change will affect them or a family member personally.”

However, there is an enormous partisan gap on the issue. Fully 66 percent of Democrats but only 17 percent of Republicans are “very concerned” about climate change. While 84 percent of Democrats believe that “climate change is primarily caused by human activity,” only 38 percent of Republicans accept that fact. And when asked: “Thinking about the past few years, do you think there has been more extreme or unusual weather in the United States,” 80 percent of Democrats but only 33 percent of Republicans say the weather is more extreme. This is a classic example of confirmation bias, stoked by the right-wing media.

Persuadable Americans’ views on climate change are closer to the Democrats than the Republicans. But, like so many issues, the persuadables know very little about the facts. Because only about one-in-ten Americans know that there is a strong scientific consensus on this issue, a Yale study suggests that one fact is especially persuasive: Over 97 percent of climate scientists agree that humans are causing climate change.

Say . . .

We must protect the health, safety and security of our children and grandchildren, and they face a serious problem. Over 97 percent of climate scientists agree that humans are causing climate change. We need to apply commonsense strategies now. We know how to implement clean energy solutions and we know that reducing fossil fuel dependence will make America stronger and our kids safer. It's time to step up and get it done...our children's futures depend on it.

If you're engaged in a longer back-and-forth conversation, you might add: Last year was the hottest year ever recorded for global temperatures, and 16 of the 17 hottest years on record have occurred since 2000.

Expanding Renewable Energy

The fact is, at the state and local levels, you rarely argue about the general problem of climate change. Instead, you are trying to enact specific legislation, to expand the percentage of energy generated by renewable energy, for example.

When you're talking about such a policy, avoid the partisan gap over climate change. Use arguments that are more personal, like *we need to reduce air pollution to cut down on respiratory diseases like asthma*, or more generally, promote renewable energy with *we need to work toward a cleaner energy future for [your jurisdiction]*.

A prominent conservative polling firm found that Trump voters “support taking action to accelerate the development and use of clean energy” by a margin of 3-to-1 and soft Republicans favor it by 6-to-1. (Democrats support this by 48-to-1.) According to that research:

When Republicans hear the phrase *clean energy*, they think of solar and wind power. They say it is non-polluting and leads to clean air and renewable energy. There is some concern about the cost and government regulations, but that is outweighed by the positives.



10. GOVERNMENT PERFORMANCE

Begin in agreement, for example: Our laws, rules and programs should be enforced fairly and equally to ensure that everyone gets a fair shot, everyone gives their fair share, and everyone plays by the same rules.

Our values: Opportunity, equal opportunity, justice, fairness, fair share, level playing field

Our vision: *State and local governments play a powerful role as rule-makers and enforcers, and as employers and contractors. A progressive government will: (1) ensure that the workers of both the government and its contractors are paid wages and benefits that support a decent standard of living; (2) guarantee that economic development subsidies are used sparingly and only to create middle-class jobs; and (3) operate with transparency and the highest ethical standards.*

Conservatives have worked very hard to denigrate government, and to some extent they have been successful. Voters are quite cynical about *Washington*. Despite negative stereotypes about the federal government, however, citizens like their state governments and appreciate local governments even more.

Further, even when people say they don't like *government*, they still like what government does. For example, when asked about federal spending programs individually, there's only one program that most Americans would cut: aid to foreign countries. Voters do not want to cut federal spending on health care, environmental protection, energy, scientific research, infrastructure, education or Social Security. And when asked if they have a favorable or unfavorable impression of well-known federal agencies, Americans favor the FDA, OSHA, and the Consumer Product Safety Commission by margins of 2-to-1 or more. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), which has been the subject of unrelenting attack by conservatives, is still favored 52-to-33.

In short, when talking about government and its performance, avoid generalities and focus on the benefits of government programs.

Don't say . . .

- Government
- Bureaucracy
- Washington

Say . . .

- Public health and safety
- Roads, schools, parks, libraries
- Consumer protection, environmental protection
- Fair treatment of workers, fair markets, fair trade

Why...

Stay away from *government*, *bureaucracy*, and especially *Washington* to avoid triggering negative stereotypes. And yet, don't hesitate to say *rules*, *laws*, and even *regulations*.

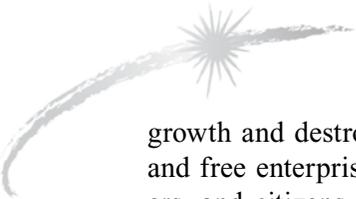
Lake Research Partners performed two rounds of in-depth public opinion research to probe people's feelings about government rules, regulations, agencies and enforcement. This research found that Americans want more enforcement of rules and regulations, not less. The problem people have with government enforcement is that they feel the rules are not being applied fairly. They think the rich and powerful can get away with whatever they want, that the privileged class can break the rules without consequences.

When asked, "do you think that increased enforcement of our national laws and regulations is a good thing or a bad thing," citizens answered it is a "good thing" by a margin of 71-to-14. State enforcement is even more popular than federal enforcement. More than 2/3rds complain that laws and regulations are not "equally" or "fairly" applied.

These findings do not only apply to enforcement of laws and regulations currently on the books. They can also be used to justify new laws and regulations. Americans don't really know the difference between making laws and regulations stricter and having stricter enforcement of what's on the books. Here's why that's important.

Lake Research gave respondents a choice between two narratives. The conservative narrative was:

Protecting consumers is important but government regulation has gone too far, so that some politicians seem to think government is the answer to every problem. Increased regulation, bureaucratic red tape, mandates, and uneven enforcement hold back economic



growth and destroy jobs. America was built on the free market and free enterprise. Forcing entrepreneurs, small business owners, and citizens to submit to arbitrary government regulations puts all the power in the hands of out-of-touch bureaucrats. It raises the costs of goods and services at a time when we can't afford higher prices.

That's an excellent description of the conservative message. The progressive narrative went like this:

Say . . .

Proper enforcement of our laws and regulations can ensure that everyone plays by the same set of rules. Today, the system is too often rigged to favor the wealthy and powerful over ordinary Americans, or big corporations over small businesses. That's an argument for better enforcement. Whether prohibiting big banks from destroying our economy, stopping the credit card industry from charging hidden fees, or preventing the wealthiest one percent from hiding billions of tax dollars in offshore tax havens—we need stronger, more just enforcement of our laws and regulations to ensure that everyone has a fair shot.

Given this choice, Americans agreed with the progressive narrative by a margin of 80-to-16. That's a landslide. It means this is a powerful way to frame our arguments. And this progressive narrative promotes policies that could be accomplished by either new regulations or new statutes.

11. HEALTH

Begin in agreement, for example: For decades, our healthcare system has been overpriced and unfair.

Our values: Health, health security, safety, protection, quality of life

Our vision: *Every American should be able to get the health care they need, when they need it, at a price they can afford. But for years, insurance companies charged too much, their policies were full of holes, and coverage was easily denied or revoked. The Affordable Care Act changed that, providing families with a new and greater measure of health security. Now that the ACA is under attack, there is much to be done: (1) guarantee coverage to every American as a matter of right; (2) encourage healthy behavior and protect others from unhealthy behaviors; and (3) allow people to make their own health care choices.*

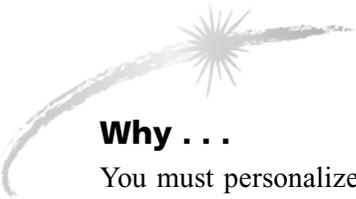
Affordable Care Act/American Health Care Act

As this book was published, there was no resolution of the debate between the merits of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) versus the American Health Care Act (AHCA). One thing is certain, however: persuadable voters do not want to lose their health insurance coverage or any guarantee of coverage, pay more in premiums or deductibles, or see a cut in government funding for their health care programs.

The key to persuasion is to focus on what they will or may lose.

Say . . .

For decades, our healthcare system has been overpriced and unfair. It would be much worse under the new plan. That bill in Congress will hurt you and your family—even if you get insurance through your employer—by handing the system over to the big insurance companies, allowing them to deny coverage for essential medical care, jack up premiums for women and older Americans, and make insurance completely unaffordable for anyone with a wide range of preexisting conditions.



Why . . .

You must personalize the debate. You are welcome to say that millions of Americans will lose health insurance, but don't reference Medicaid. The fact is, few persuadable voters think their own insurance is actually at stake. But it is! Focus on the aspects of the GOP bill that directly or indirectly affect families that get health insurance through an employer. Emphasize over and over that each and every one of their families will likely be harmed if this proposal is enacted. Here's another version.

Say . . .

Protect your own health. Don't let TrumpCare put insurance companies back in control of your health care, allowing them to deny you coverage for essential medical care, jack prices way up if you have a preexisting condition, and charge you unfairly high prices if you are in your 50s or 60s, or you're a woman, or simply because you happen to live in an unprofitable state. You must understand: TrumpCare will devastate health care for everyone, including people who get insurance through their jobs.

Why . . .

As we emphasize throughout this book, persuadable voters want to know how the policy affects themselves, their families, and their friends. Tell them!

Don't say . . .

- Them
- The poor, people in poverty
- Give health insurance

Say . . .

- You and your family
- Hardworking Americans
- Families, children, people with disabilities
- Don't deny the security of health care

Why . . .

When the conversation turns to the uninsured, avoid language about poverty because it evokes negative ideas about welfare. Use the terms *hard-working*, *families*, *children*, and *people with disabilities* because these suggest the recipients need and deserve basic medical coverage. And as we have explained elsewhere, it's more effective to say *don't deny them the security* instead of *give them the security*.

Prescription drugs

Just before the 2016 election, Americans said their top health care policy priority was to lower prescription drug prices, especially high-cost drugs for chronic conditions like HIV, hepatitis, mental illness and cancer. Three-quarters of the public believe that the prices of brand-name drugs are unreasonable. On the state level, there is overwhelming support for legislation that addresses the rising cost of prescription drugs, so it's easy to start from a point of agreement.

Say . . .

Prescription drug prices are skyrocketing. To protect our health, all of our families need access to medicines that are affordable. No one should ever have to choose between buying medicine or paying their rent. A new proposal in our state legislature would [require price transparency for drug companies and empower the state Attorney General to stop price gouging]. The bill helps all of us, and for someone you know, it may actually be a matter of life and death.

Why . . .

You are welcome to cite facts and figures, and there are a lot of them on this topic. But average Americans are already convinced of the need, you just have to connect their preexisting beliefs about prescription drug prices to specific legislation that requires their support.

Tobacco

Despite decades of education, smoking continues to be a tremendous public health problem in the United States.

Don't say . . .

- Smokers' freedom or rights

Say . . .

- Smoke-free, secondhand smoke
- Health, disease, cancer, clean air
- Protect children, protect nonsmokers



Why . . .

People don't have the freedom or right to hurt others. There are a number of phrases that work for tobacco control, listed above. On the state and local levels, most of the debate revolves around two health policies. First, smoke-free workplaces:

Say . . .

We have a responsibility to protect the public health, especially when it comes to children. Years of research have clearly shown that secondhand smoke is dangerous and cancerous. Doctors and scientists have concluded that the only way to protect nonsmokers from secondhand smoke is to require smoke-free workplaces. That's what we should do to defend everyone's right to breathe clean air.

Why . . .

Americans overwhelmingly believe that secondhand smoke is harmful. They are concerned about their own health, and it is persuasive to talk about children's health. Less than 20 percent of voters smoke and even a good percentage of them support smoke-free laws.

The other common tobacco-related political debate is about raising the tobacco tax.

Say . . .

As adults, we have a responsibility to protect children from harm. Sadly, one-third of kids who smoke cigarettes will die prematurely from smoking-related illnesses. The most proven, effective way to protect those children is to raise the tobacco tax. Studies show that when the tax goes up, teen smoking goes down. It's a small price to pay to protect the health of our children.

Why . . .

For voters, deemphasize tax revenues and focus on health benefits. Legislators are interested in what they can do with the tax dollars but that's not a strong argument to persuadable voters.

Right wing argument: Secondhand smoke is not a health hazard.

Say . . .

We need to protect our health. The Centers for Disease Control, the U.S. Surgeon General, and all the other important health organizations unanimously agree that smoke is just as dangerous to another person exposed to it as it is to the smoker. Children are the ones most often affected. The American Lung Association estimates that, in the U.S., secondhand smoke causes more than 40,000 deaths per year.

Right wing argument: Anti-tobacco laws infringe on a person's right to smoke.

Say . . .

I feel for smokers, tobacco is extremely addictive. I would certainly support programs to help them. But everyone has the right to breathe clean air and to avoid damaging their own health. These laws do not stop anyone from smoking; they simply stop some of the harms that smoking inflicts on others.



12. PUBLIC SAFETY

Begin in agreement, for example: The most basic job of our city/county/state is to keep you safe from crime.

Our values: Security, safety, protection, justice

Our vision: *The most fundamental job of government is to protect its citizens from crime. Progressive government focuses on strategies that make us safer and serious felonies deserve serious punishment. But there is a great deal that can be done to prevent crime while also ensuring justice: (1) reform police procedures, including interrogations and use of force, that lead authorities toward the wrong suspects; (2) reform judicial procedures that hurt the innocent, thereby helping the guilty; (3) reform prison procedures that increase recidivism; and (4) reform criminal laws to prevent the commission of crimes.*

When you're talking about crime, you must tell voters how your policies will make them safer, not how they benefit the perpetrator or suspect.

Don't say . . .

- Rights (of criminals)

Say . . .

- Security, safety, protection
- Responsibility
- Justice

Why . . .

Do not begin a discussion of crime with the ideas of fairness or equal opportunity. Persuadable voters want to know how your criminal justice policies will *protect* them. It shouldn't be hard to explain since that's what all good progressive criminal justice policies accomplish—they prevent crime, reduce recidivism and improve the quality of life for everyone in the community.

Conversely, right wing policies—like giving long prison sentences to non-violent drug offenders—take hundreds of millions of dollars away from strategies that more effectively fight drug abuse and prevent crime.

Say . . .

It's a fundamental job of government to protect you from crime, to make law-abiding people safer. For dangerous felons, lock 'em up for a long time. But for nonviolent and young offenders, we need to do everything we can to divert them away from a life of crime. For example, nonviolent drug offenders sentenced to treatment facilities instead of regular prisons are far less likely to commit future crimes. That's the goal, to make all of us safer and more secure.

Why . . .

Everyone wants safer communities. But what if the progressive policy is specifically about the rights of the accused? For example, policies to require electronic recording of interrogations, reform police procedures for lineups, and create commissions to research whether imprisoned people are actually innocent.

Emphasize that for every wrongly convicted person there is an actual perpetrator who has escaped justice and remains a threat to our public safety. Don't blame the police, but suggest that there are more modern practices that have been proven to work better than current police procedures. Say that we owe it to the victim, as well as the whole community, to find and punish the real criminal. For example:

Say . . .

The whole point of this legislation is to protect you from crime. A lot of other jurisdictions get better evidence from suspects and witnesses by requiring that all police questioning be electronically recorded. It protects the innocent and makes it easier to convict the guilty. Technology has changed rapidly and we should take advantage of it.

Gun Violence

Persuadable Americans know almost nothing about gun laws and have no idea how easy it is for dangerous people to buy firearms. When asked about gun policies, they overwhelmingly support background checks and other modest gun laws. (Many think such policies have always been the law.)

Pro-gun advocates know that they lose the argument on the merits, so their tactic is to sidetrack the discussion. Prepare to spend most of your time trying to steer the conversation back to the specific proposal at hand.



Don't say . . .

- Gun control
- Stricter gun laws
- You oppose the 2nd Amendment

Say . . .

- Prevent gun violence
- Stronger gun laws
- Support for the 2nd Amendment goes hand-in-hand with keeping guns out of the hands of dangerous people

Why . . .

The National Rifle Association (NRA) has done an effective job of making people associate the words *gun control* or even *stricter laws* with confiscating guns or banning handguns entirely. Of course, no one is proposing that. You need to make it clear that you are advocating for what voters perceive as a moderate position. Like them, you support the 2nd Amendment. Like them, you don't have a problem with NRA members in your community. (If the situation requires you to attack the NRA, then condemn *NRA lobbyists* or the *NRA's out-of-touch leaders*. Never attack average NRA members or local NRA leaders; that doesn't work.)

To introduce your argument, start with the fundamentals:

Say . . .

We need to do everything we can to keep our community safe and secure from violence. But every day, far too many of us are victims of gun violence. Dozens of Americans *will* be murdered, hundreds of others *will* be shot, and about one thousand *will* be robbed or assaulted with a gun...*today*. (If you can, tell a personal story here.)

Why . . .

Don't skip the universally shared values we are fighting for: *safety* and *security*. And then, don't ignore the fundamental facts that motivate us: there are more than 10,000 gun murders, 100,000 people shot, and 400,000 Americans robbed or assaulted with firearms, every single year. Let people recognize that every day, wherever we go in America, we are all at risk of gun violence. And then:

Say . . .

It is obvious why so many people are killed or victimized with guns, day after day: we have some of the weakest gun laws in the world. To make us, our families and our communities safer, we need to change a few of those laws...now.

Why . . .

Don't assume people understand why we need new laws. Link the problem to the solution. If you're arguing for background checks for all gun sales, this is your basic argument:

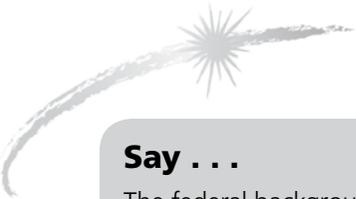
Say . . .

Our community can't be safe if we allow guns to be sold to felons or the dangerously mentally ill. That's why current law requires that no gun can be sold by a *licensed gun dealer* without a criminal background check. But millions of guns are sold by *unlicensed* sellers at gun shows and through Internet sites with no background check. We need a simple change in the law in order to cover all gun sales. The few minutes it takes to complete a computerized check will save lives. It's just common sense.

Why . . .

Since 1968, federal law has banned the possession of firearms by convicted felons, domestic abusers and people who are dangerously mentally ill. The Brady Law, enacted in 1993, requires a criminal background check before any licensed dealer can sell any firearm. (Some states require more.) A National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS) for gun purchases, operated by the FBI, began in 1998. Poll after poll shows that Americans overwhelmingly support background checks for all gun sales.

The only direct argument against background checks by the pro-gun lobby is that *criminals will get guns anyway*.



Say . . .

The federal background check law has blocked millions of illegal gun sales. It works. The problem is that the law doesn't apply to private sales, so felons can currently avoid a background check and get any kind of gun, no questions asked. It's time to close the private sales loophole.

Why . . .

Nobody suggests this law will stop all criminals. To be successful, it doesn't have to. No law stops *all* crime. It's simply common sense to block as many illegal sales as possible. All the other arguments raised in this debate are designed to change the subject. Here are some examples:

Right wing argument: The Second Amendment forbids the proposed gun law.

Say . . .

I support the 2nd Amendment. In fact, the Supreme Court ruled, just a few years ago, that reasonable gun laws are constitutional, and since then, other federal and state courts have consistently held that a rule on guns like the one we're talking about does not violate the 2nd Amendment. Let's return to the real issue. It is just plain common sense to require background checks for all gun purchases.

Why . . .

The 2008 Supreme Court opinion in *District of Columbia v. Heller* guarantees Americans the right to have a handgun in the home for self-protection. The Court also said: “[N]othing in our opinion should be taken to cast doubt on longstanding prohibitions on the possession of firearms by felons and the mentally ill, or laws forbidding the carrying of firearms in sensitive places such as schools and government buildings, or laws imposing conditions and qualifications on the commercial sale of arms.” And that ruling explicitly reaffirmed the Supreme Court's 1939 *U.S. v. Miller* opinion that upheld a law banning sawed-off shotguns (the same law bans machine guns, silencers and grenades) and stated that policymakers have the power to prohibit “dangerous and unusual weapons.”

Right wing argument: The assault weapon law wouldn't have stopped the Newtown massacre, or other claims that a particular gun law wouldn't have prevented a particular crime.

Say . . .

The goal of public safety legislation is to protect citizens, but no law is 100 percent effective. The law against murder doesn't stop all murders. The law that lowered the blood alcohol level for driving didn't stop all drunk driving. This policy will not stop every gun crime, but it will save some lives. Let's talk about that.

Right wing argument: This law will give the federal government the data to create a gun registration list, and that'll lead to us getting our guns taken away.

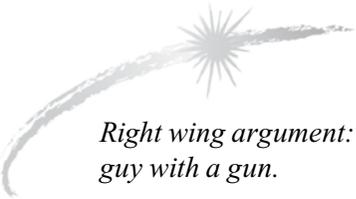
Say . . .

The goal of this legislation is to protect citizens, and it will do that. There is nothing in the background check proposal that creates a registry. In fact, existing law forbids the federal government from establishing a gun registration list. Let's return to the real issue. This legislation would require background checks for all gun purchases and that's just simple common sense.

Right wing argument: We should provide armed guards/do something about mental health/make parents take responsibility/ban violent video games instead.

Say . . .

We should make our communities safer. If you've got a good proposal, that's fine. But this is not an either-or debate; one policy does not exclude another. Can we get back to the legislation on the table: why should we sell these guns to any adult, without any background check, no questions asked?



Right wing argument: The only way to stop a bad guy with a gun is a good guy with a gun.

Say . . .

We want a public policy that makes our communities safer. Unfortunately, your “good guy with a gun” story doesn’t work in real life. Columbine High School had an armed deputy sheriff. Virginia Tech had an entire police force, including a SWAT team. At the Tucson shooting, not only was there an armed civilian who failed to stop the shooter, but he almost shot one of the brave unarmed people who tackled and disarmed the shooter. The Fort Hood massacre happened at a military base filled with soldiers. President Reagan and his press secretary Jim Brady were surrounded by armed police and Secret Service, and yet both were shot. Let’s get back to the real debate over this legislation.

13. REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

Begin in agreement, for example: The decision about whether or when to become a parent is a deeply personal and private matter.

Our values: Freedom, privacy, personal responsibility

Our vision: *Decisions about contraception and abortion should be made by the individuals involved, not by politicians or the government. To make these decisions responsibly, people need access to: (1) complete and medically accurate information; (2) birth control; (3) constitutionally protected abortion services; and (4) protection from discrimination based on a person's decision to take contraception, give birth, or have an abortion.*

A strong majority of Americans favor keeping abortion legal and oppose overturning *Roe v. Wade*, the Supreme Court decision that legalized abortion. At the same time, Americans often hold conflicting feelings about abortion and struggle to resolve the conflict. When it comes to public policy, this means that while support for legality remains strong, it is often easy to get the public to favor restrictions on a woman's right to have an abortion, such as waiting periods, sonograms, burdensome rules for abortion clinics, parental consent laws, insurance bans, and more.

The Public Leadership Institute commissioned Ann Selzer (who FiveThirtyEight called “the best pollster in politics”) to conduct an in-depth nationwide poll on reproductive rights. That research found that three abortion rights narratives all work quite well.

Say . . .

Once someone has made the important and very personal decision to have an abortion, it's not for politicians to interfere. Our job is to promote people's health and well-being, not impose our beliefs on others.

Why . . .

Some conflicting feelings are resolved when people focus on what a person's experience should be *after* she has made the decision to have an abortion, rather than *on* her decision. Once a person has made the decision to have an abortion, a strong majority want her experience to be positive—that is, non-judgmental, informed by medically-accurate information, supportive, affordable and without pressure or added burdens.



Say . . .

We cannot know all the personal and medical circumstances behind someone's decision to have an abortion. Every person's situation is different, and we should respect that this decision is hers to make, with her family and in accordance with her faith.

Why . . .

By reminding people that they don't know a woman's circumstances, it tends to dispel negative stereotypes that your listeners may hold about women choosing abortion. It increases empathy and decreases a rush to judgment.

Say . . .

I appreciate that abortion is a complex issue for the individuals involved. That's why I feel that politicians should stay out of the very personal and private decision whether or not to have an abortion.

Why . . .

Choose the argument that feels right to you. Elected officials and people running for office may feel that this last version fits best. Note that the first sentence puts you in agreement with persuadable voters by recognizing that they hold conflicting feelings about abortion.

There is another popular way to voice support for abortion rights, but it's not quite the same as the more generic statements above.

Say . . .

I support the constitutional right to an abortion declared by the U.S. Supreme Court more than 40 years ago in the case of *Roe v. Wade*.

Why . . .

About 70 percent of Americans want to uphold *Roe v. Wade*, so the narrative above is perhaps even more popular than the first three. However, because the courts have upheld a variety of abortion restrictions despite *Roe*, it's a less sweeping statement of support for the abortion rights movement.

Generally, when talking about reproductive rights:

Don't say . . .

- They, them
- Women, all women, families
- Choice, pro-choice
- Pro-life
- Right
- Listing details or reasons why a woman is having an abortion (e.g., rape, incest, fetal anomalies, etc.)
- Abortion should be safe, legal and rare
- Using the terms fair, unfair, or discriminatory

Say . . .

- We, us
- A woman, a person, her family
- Personal decision, important life decision
- Anti-abortion, abortion opponents
- Ability, should be able to, need
- Mention her decision-making process: "thinking through her decision," "talking it over with loved ones"
- Legal abortion must be available and affordable
- We shouldn't treat people differently just because... (they receive their insurance through Medicaid, live in a certain zip code)

Why . . .

Personalize the conversation. Don't let this be about an abstraction, it's an issue that affects millions of individuals. Unfortunately, the *choice* frame, which worked for many years, now triggers confirmation bias. So, while *pro-choice* remains popular with our base, it won't help you persuade.

Right wing argument: Abortion is immoral/against my beliefs/not what God wants.

Say . . .

Each of us has strong feelings about abortion. Even if we disagree, it's not my place to make a decision for someone else. It is better that each person be able to make her own decision.



Right wing argument: Too many women use abortion as birth control.

Say . . .

In my own experience, I know women weigh their decision carefully, think it through with their family and loved ones, and rely on their spiritual beliefs. We don't know every woman's circumstances. We aren't in her shoes. I don't want to make such an important decision for anyone else, that's not my place.

Right wing argument: Abortion hurts women.

Say . . .

Most important decisions in life trigger complex and conflicting emotions, and abortion is no exception. Some kind of reaction to serious life decisions is normal. Strong feelings are certainly not a reason to take away every person's ability to make important life decisions based on her own unique circumstances.

Right wing argument: Taxpayers shouldn't have to foot the bill for abortion.

Say . . .

However we feel about abortion, politicians shouldn't deny a woman's health coverage for it based simply on her inability to pay.

14. SOCIAL SERVICES

Begin in agreement, for example: We have a responsibility to protect innocent children in our communities.

Our values: Security, safety, protection, quality of life, responsibility

Our vision: *As a society, we have a responsibility to protect people in our communities who are vulnerable and can't meet basic needs on their own. Whether they are children, the elderly, disabled, or victims of illness, crime, natural disaster or something else, we cannot deny our fellow citizens the basic necessities of life. Three policies are crucial: (1) expand basic services to cover all the vulnerable people who need them; (2) stop the war on drug users that has cut them off from assistance; and (3) help charities that provide important social services, including food, housing, clothing, job training and legal representation.*

Progressive policies often involve the delivery of social services. They require the active participation of government as a protector, manager or referee. You need Americans to accept government in those roles, but it can be a challenge. Progressives must navigate a minefield of negative stereotypes and preconceptions.

When you describe progressive social policies, what's the best way to talk about government services? The short answer is to avoid the processes of government and focus on the benefits.

Don't say . . .

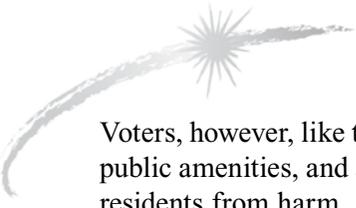
- Government
- Bureaucracy
- Washington

Say . . .

- Public health and safety
- Security
- Protection

Why . . .

Persuadable voters don't like government in the abstract. The words *government* and *bureaucracy* bring to mind scenes of unfairness, inefficiency and frustration, so don't provoke those negative associations. Similarly, don't call the federal government *Washington* unless you intend to invoke a powerful negative reaction.



Voters, however, like the results of government—public health and safety, public amenities, and a powerful entity mediating disputes and protecting residents from harm. So when you can, focus on the ends of government and avoid the means.

In fact, avoid saying *government* altogether.

Don't say . . .

- Government

Say . . .

- Community, Society
- America
- We

Why . . .

When voters hear the word *government*, they may think of stereotypical examples of frustration: the surly health inspector, the incompetent tax help line, or the slow-as-molasses Department of Motor Vehicles.

Instead of government, talk about how *we*, *our community*, or *our society* should protect children, the elderly, the disabled, or hardworking families that can't make ends meet. Government may not always be popular, but *we* are. People will understand what you're saying.

When you're talking about basic social services:

Don't say . . .

- Welfare
- Social services
- Safety net
- Entitlements

Say . . .

- Basic needs, basic living standards
- Necessities
- Assistance, support
- Can't make ends meet

Why . . .

As you surely know, there is a strong stigma attached to the word *welfare*; don't use the term. The stigma is connected to the idea that recipients of government assistance are lazy and/or cheaters. Whenever possible, avoid phrases like *social services* and *safety net* and instead talk about *basics* or *necessities*.

Even more important than the way you describe a social services program is how you describe the people who receive services.

Don't say . . .

- Beneficiaries
- The poor, people in poverty
- Welfare recipients
- Seniors

Say . . .

- People in need of temporary assistance
- Children, people with disabilities, the vulnerable
- Working families, working to provide for their families
- Elderly

Why . . .

Outside of the progressive base, it is difficult to convince Americans to support a policy that appears to benefit people other than themselves, their families and their friends. So whenever possible, show voters that they personally benefit from your policy, even when that benefit is indirect. Argue that the policy is for *us*, not *them*.

When you can't avoid talking about aiding other people, make sure to describe them as deserving. You can explain they are the vulnerable in society—such as children, the elderly, and people with disabilities—some of whom need assistance. When the recipients are adults, say that they are *hardworking* or *want to work*. And because the programs you support undoubtedly benefit them, freely use the word *families*. We are pro-family, the radical right is not.

And as mentioned previously, persuadable voters are more strongly moved by a plea framed as protecting people from being *denied* needs, necessities or protections than one framed as *giving* the exact same public service, especially when it's called a right or benefit.

Don't say . . .

- Give rights or benefits

Say . . .

- Don't deny necessities or protections



15. TAXATION

Begin in agreement, for example: The rich don't pay their fair share in taxes.

Our values: Fairness, fair share, justice, equal opportunity, level playing field

Our vision: *On the federal, state and local levels, our tax policies must be fair to everyone. The fact is, our tax system is thoroughly unfair; it is rigged with loopholes and giveaways that benefit only a few, usually rich individuals and big corporations, at the expense of all the rest of us. Everyone should pay their fair share, and to accomplish that, we must: (1) require disclosure of tax giveaways; (2) eliminate those giveaways that unfairly benefit the rich and powerful; (3) raise tax rates on the rich; and (4) cut taxes for people who cannot reasonably afford to pay them.*

Voters are pretty cynical about taxes. About half believe that both lower- and middle-income Americans pay too much in federal taxes. That can be a problem if they think you are trying to raise their taxes.

At the same time, by a 2-to-1 margin they believe that upper-income people and corporations are paying too little, and favor "increasing taxes on wealthy Americans and large corporations." But the desire to tax the rich is heavily affected by partisanship. While 84 percent of Democrats and 63 percent of Independents would increase taxes on wealthy individuals and large corporations, only 38 percent of Republicans would do so.

Americans think that taxes are unfair, and you certainly agree that tax laws have been engineered to unfairly benefit the rich and special interests. So don't defend taxes, defend tax fairness.

Don't say . . .

- Tax relief
- Taxes are a necessary evil

Say . . .

- Tax fairness
- Tax giveaways and tax loopholes
- Private tax subsidies
- Rigged tax system

Why . . .

Don't say *tax relief* because it frames taxes as an affliction in need of a remedy. The problem is not the existence of taxes, it is that federal, state, and local taxes are riddled with giveaways and loopholes for the politically powerful. You can also call them *private tax subsidies*. Whatever you do, don't defend the unpopular tax system. And don't begin with a raft of statistics either. Start by agreeing with voters.

Say . . .

Our tax system is unfair. The tax burden on working families has increased while rich people and large corporations pocket more and more tax giveaways, and that's wrong. We need to change the rules to create a tax system that works for all of us, not just the wealthy few.

Why . . .

No one likes to pay taxes, and persuadable voters don't want to hear a lecture that taxes are the dues we pay for a civilized society. But people generally accept that they should pay their fair share.

Interestingly, a progressive monologue about taxes becomes less popular if it begins with unfairness and then goes on to say what government could do with the money. This is because persuadable voters don't really believe the government needs more money; they believe one-third to one-half of tax dollars are wasted. Talking about the good things government can do with the taxes it collects also evokes voters' biases against tax-and-spend politicians. So stick with your plea that the powerful need to pay their fair share.

Here are a couple of assertions you may have to deal with:

Right wing argument: Forty-seven percent of Americans pay no taxes.

Say . . .

Everyone needs to pay their fair share of taxes. And in fact, everyone who earns a salary pays taxes for Social Security and Medicare. Everyone who buys products at a store or owns a home pays taxes. Everyone who has a telephone or cable service pays taxes. When all the federal, state and local taxes and fees are added together, almost everybody pays about 20 to 30 percent of their income. But, the fact is, the richest individuals and largest companies in America do not pay anywhere near their fair share in taxes.



Right wing argument: We're all hurt by the "death tax."

Say . . .

Everyone should pay their fair share of taxes. If we repealed the tax on inheritance, the system would be far more tilted to benefit the rich. That's because you and I don't pay any inheritance tax, it only applies to the very wealthiest people. They already have more than their fair share of tax breaks. And worse, if we eliminated that source of taxes to the government, you and I would have to make up the difference. If you're for tax fairness, you're for keeping the inheritance tax.

16. VOTING & ELECTIONS

Begin in agreement, for example: In a democracy, the right to vote is a fundamental freedom.

Our values: Freedom, liberty, fundamental rights, basic rights, democracy

Our vision: *In America, the right to vote is a fundamental freedom. And because we are the leading democracy in the world, our election system ought to be completely free, fair and accessible. The way we conduct elections today is obsolete. We need to eliminate long lines, cut costs, make it more convenient for eligible citizens to vote, maintain the integrity of the voting system, and stop the rich and powerful from exercising undue influence on the process. In short, we must: (1) guarantee that every citizen can register to vote; (2) ensure that all citizens can cast their ballots; and (3) crack down on the way campaign financing corrupts public policy.*

In general, progressives seek to make voter registration simpler and more accurate, and voting more convenient. Right wingers try to make it harder for eligible Americans to register and vote. Your argument is based on freedom, patriotism and the modernization of our outmoded voting systems. Their argument is based on the unfounded fear of voter fraud, often imagined as fraudulent voting by immigrants.

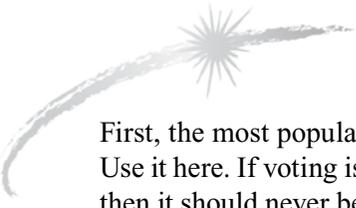
Whether you are arguing for a progressive reform or against a right-wing restriction, begin with a statement of your values.

Say . . .

In America, the right to vote is a fundamental freedom. And because we are the leading democracy in the world, our election system ought to be completely free, fair and accessible.

Why . . .

You must put the conversation in context. When talking about voting, progressives have two great advantages that are too-rarely used by our side:



First, the most popular and powerful value in political debate is *freedom*. Use it here. If voting is understood as a basic right like freedom of speech, then it should never be curbed unless it risks an immediate, serious threat to public security (shouting fire in a crowded theater). Our freedom to vote should never be limited without an overriding reason, and none exists. If you can win the frame that voting is a fundamental freedom, you'll ultimately win the argument.

Second, Americans are proud of American democracy and an appeal to that feeling of patriotism helps to persuade them.

What to say about voter fraud

If someone tries to cast a ballot by impersonating an eligible voter, that's a crime punishable by years in prison. Because the penalty is severe, with no real advantage to the perpetrator, this crime almost never happens. And yet, impersonation is the only kind of voter fraud that could be prevented by requiring people to display photo identification.

The problem is, many Americans firmly believe that voter fraud exists. According to a Washington Post/ABC News poll, 46 percent of all voters and 69 percent of Trump voters believe that very or somewhat often “the same person vot[es] multiple times or someone vote[es] who is not eligible.” Americans probably believe that because we do have an anecdotal history of “voting from the graveyard,” and the 2000 election exposed the fact that some election administrators are extremely inept.

Don't say . . .

- Voter fraud
- Illegal voting
- Voter suppression or disenfranchisement

Say . . .

- Fundamental freedom
- Most basic right in a democracy
- Free, fair and accessible
- Making it harder to vote

Why . . .

Expect the right wing to cry *voter fraud* no matter what legislation is being considered. The best messaging advice is—don't say the F-word. You cannot win the argument by educating voters that fraud is rare. Instead, acknowledge the importance of protecting the integrity of our elections and push the debate away from fraud and toward the goal of making elections *free, fair and accessible*. That poll-tested phrase is discussed in the report *How to Talk About Voting* from the Brennan Center for Justice and

the Advancement Project. It works. And don't use the language *voter suppression or disenfranchisement* because those are polarizing terms; say "making it harder to vote" or "making it harder to exercise our freedom to vote" instead.

When arguing against voter ID legislation, appeal to freedom and patriotism as suggested in the narrative above, and then:

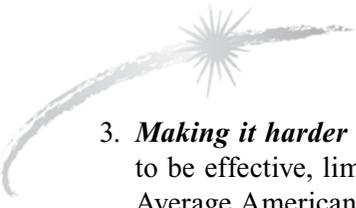
Say . . .

Protecting the integrity of our elections is absolutely essential. In the process, we cannot infringe on freedom; we cannot deny voters an election that is free, fair and accessible. If we require Election Day precinct officials to scrutinize each and every voter's identification and limit the types of qualified ID to just a few, it will create long lines for everyone, increase election costs by millions of dollars, and make it much harder for Americans who don't have a driver's license—including senior citizens and military veterans—to vote in our democracy. There are more effective ways to keep our elections honest without making it harder for all of us to exercise our fundamental freedom to vote.

Why . . .

The narrative above never uses the word *fraud* and does not dispute the existence of voter fraud. It suggests instead that this particular legislation is flawed. Specifically, it makes three points:

1. ***Long lines***—In considering any policy, people first want to know how it affects them personally. Voter ID will increase everyone's waiting time at the polls, perhaps by a lot. Let voters understand they will be personally inconvenienced by this law.
2. ***Taxpayer costs***—Right now any unnecessary government spending is unpopular. A photo ID requirement means the government will have to pay to educate voters about the new rules, educate precinct officials, and perhaps pay for staff or machinery in order to speed up the delays it will cause. This may sound like a small point, but it played a big role in winning the Minnesota referendum on voter ID.

- 
3. ***Making it harder to vote***—This is the most important argument but, to be effective, limit your examples to the most sympathetic victims. Average Americans can be persuaded by focusing on seniors and veterans who are lifelong voters; often they no longer have valid driver’s licenses and they would have a hard time getting substitute ID. Swing voters are less likely to be persuaded by hearing about people in poverty who lack identification.

Do not underestimate the difficulty of the progressive argument. Average Americans generally believe the conservative talking points are true. After all, they have to show photo ID whenever they get on an airplane and even when they buy Sudafed at the drugstore. Why not require it to vote? Understand that you start this debate at a severe disadvantage, so you must be mindful of Americans’ beliefs and use the best-informed messaging to win them over.

Progressive voting reforms

In many states, the voter registration and Election Day systems are ancient, inefficient and inaccurate. That’s why we need to modernize these systems with processes and technologies that are commonplace everywhere else except in the administration of elections.

Say . . .

We need to uphold the freedom to vote for every eligible American citizen. One important step is to modernize the election process with [online registration/early voting/automatic transfer/another reform]. This will benefit all of us by eliminating long lines at the polls, cutting administrative costs, making it more convenient for eligible citizens to vote, and maintaining the integrity of the voting system. It will help make our elections free, fair and accessible for every one of us.

Why . . .

Progressives usually want to talk about how automatic, online or Election Day registration helps people who are not registered. They want to explain how early or absentee voting helps people who aren’t otherwise able to vote. But overwhelmingly, the audience you’re trying to persuade is registered and manages to vote. So you need to talk about how progressive reforms benefit them personally—for example, how listeners deserve the convenience of their voter registration being automatically transferred to a new address when they move.

There are many important proactive election reforms. When you argue for any of them, appeal to modern technologies and modern life. “The system needs to be modernized and brought into the 21st century.” “Today’s outdated system is vulnerable to manipulation and human error.” “In this day and age, no one should ever be denied the fundamental freedom to vote when commonplace technology can ensure our elections are free, fair and accessible.”

Right wing argument: Online registration will lead to voter fraud.

Say . . .

We need to ensure that our elections are free, fair and accessible for everyone who is eligible to vote. Most states now use online voter registration because it saves money, reduces errors, and speeds up the line to vote on Election Day. Those states have proven that online registration actually leads to more accurate voter rolls, not more mistakes. It’s time to replace our outmoded and inaccurate voting systems with modern technology.

Right wing argument: Early voting is not worth the cost.

Say . . .

Our elections should be free, fair and accessible for every eligible voter. Restricting the vote to one particular Tuesday is inconsistent with the requirements of modern life. That’s why most states now allow citizens to vote before Election Day or vote absentee. This increases convenience, and at the same time, diminishes the number of people who vote on Election Day which eliminates long lines at the polls. The fact is, it costs very little to replace our ancient and inefficient policy of Election Day voting with a modern system that benefits everyone.



17. WAGES & BENEFITS

Begin in agreement, for example: America should be a land of opportunity, where hard work is rewarded.

Our values: Opportunity, equal opportunity, fairness, fair share, justice, level playing field

Our vision: *Our economic system is unfair because the rules are rigged to favor the rich and powerful over the middle class and working families. We need to ensure that lower-level jobs provide at least a living wage and that middle-class jobs support a middle-class standard of living. Four policies are fundamental, laws that: (1) set a floor on wages for different types of work; (2) guarantee a minimum set of job benefits; (3) ensure that hiring and retention processes are fair; and (4) protect the right to collective bargaining in order to secure for workers a fair share of the profits.*

Progressives have often focused on legislation to create jobs, and that's a worthy goal, of course. But in today's economy, voters are much more interested in policies that provide better wages and benefits. A CBS News/*New York Times* poll, for example, found that more than 70 percent of Americans favor a substantial increase in the minimum wage, 80 percent favor paid leave for parents to take care of newborn children and sick family members, and 85 percent favor paid sick leave for employees when they are ill.

So, audiences are prepared to agree with progressive narratives about improving wages and benefits. For example:

Say . . .

Every hardworking American requires and deserves decent wages and employment benefits. Something is very wrong when millions of American workers struggle to make ends meet while big corporations and the wealthy reap the benefits of their hard work. We need to rewrite the economic rules so that workers get a fair deal by [specific legislation]. This policy helps us build an economy that works for everyone, not just the rich.

Why . . .

Every message about wages and benefits should explicitly say the beneficiaries are hard working. Use the values associated with equal opportunity, such as *fairness*, *fair share*, *fair deal*, and *level playing field*. And again, explicitly indict the rich and powerful.

Minimum Wage

The federal minimum wage is only \$7.25 an hour. More than 70 percent of voters support raising it to \$10 an hour, around 60 percent support \$12 an hour, and a majority would raise it to \$15 an hour. This cause is both great politics and great policy; every progressive should embrace the issue.

Generally, persuadable voters earn more than the minimum wage. So you need to show them that they indirectly benefit from an increase in the minimum wage and that the people receiving direct benefits are deserving.

Say . . .

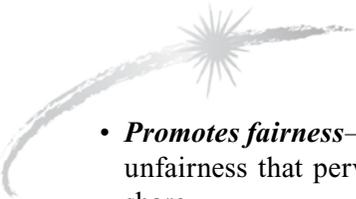
America must be a land of opportunity, where hard work is rewarded. But today's minimum wage is not enough for a family to make ends meet. Raising the minimum wage puts money in the pockets of hardworking Americans who will spend it on the things they need. This, in turn, generates business for our economy and eases the burden on taxpayer-funded services. It's a win-win. Raising the minimum wage helps build an economy that works for everyone, not just the rich.

Why . . .

Many progressive advocates want to start with facts and figures. Please don't. Most Americans are already on your side so take this opportunity to show how the policy they already understand and favor is based on your progressive values.

Here are the key arguments to make. An increased minimum wage:

- **Rewards work**—raising the minimum wage shows that we value hard work over welfare;
- **Boosts the economy**—the public already believes this, so say it loudly;
- **Saves taxpayer money**—if families make a decent wage, it diminishes the need for government benefits; and

- 
- **Promotes fairness**—people remain quite angry about CEO pay and the unfairness that pervades today’s economy; workers deserve their fair share.

There is also language to avoid. Don’t make the minimum wage about alleviating poverty. The reality is that persuadable voters will default to negative stereotypes they hold about people in poverty: they shouldn’t have taken such a lousy job, they should have gotten a better education, they’re lazy or unreliable or did something that got themselves into their situation. So it is particularly important to frame the minimum wage as good for the entire economy, or all of us.

Don’t say . . .

- Help the poor
- The working poor

Say . . .

- An economy that works for all of us
- An honest day’s pay for an honest day’s work

Why . . .

By all means, you can say that “in the wealthiest nation on Earth, no one who works full-time should have to live in poverty.” And it would be hard to testify on the minimum wage before a legislative committee without mentioning the federal poverty level. But when you’re talking to average voters, avoid referring to beneficiaries in ways that evoke a welfare frame.

Right wing argument: The free market takes care of wages.

Say . . .

In America, everyone who works hard should be able to live a decent life. Currently, minimum wage workers earn less than \$300 a week. No matter where you live, that’s just not enough to make ends meet. This is about people who work hard every day so their employer can make a profit. At the very least, they deserve to be able to pay their bills.

Why . . .

An individual who works full-time at the current \$7.25/hour federal minimum wage earns \$14,500 a year (for 50 weeks), which is below the poverty level for a family of two or more. Congress last raised the minimum wage in 2007. The minimum wage in 1968, if adjusted for inflation, would be about \$11 today; so raising it to \$10-\$12 would be modest by historical standards.

Right wing argument: The minimum wage affects only a tiny percentage of workers.

Say . . .

Every hardworking American should get a decent wage. In fact, a minimum wage increase to \$10 [or \$12] an hour would improve pay for about one in four private sector workers across the country. And it would benefit everyone else by putting money back into local businesses and getting our economy moving again.

Why . . .

A \$10/hour minimum wage would directly boost the wages of about 17 million workers. In addition, because of a “spillover effect”—that increasing everyone below \$10/hour would indirectly boost the pay of workers who earn between \$10 and \$11/hour—the minimum wage increase would benefit 11 million more. Obviously, a minimum wage above \$10 an hour would benefit a far greater number of Americans.

Right wing argument: Raising the minimum wage will cost jobs.

Say . . .

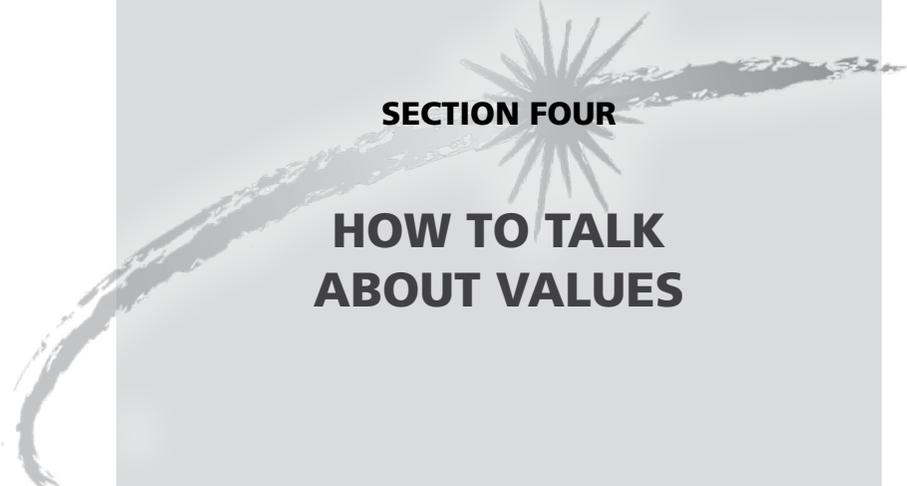
Hardworking people deserve a wage that pays the rent and puts food on the table. A minimum wage increase would help do that without reducing the number of jobs available. Over the past few years, many states have increased their minimum wage far higher than neighboring states, and economists have been able to study what happens to jobs in the state with the higher wage in comparison to its neighbors. According to seven Nobel Prize-winning economists, “increases in the minimum wage had little or no negative effect on the employment of minimum-wage workers.”



Right wing argument: Tipped workers are already paid enough. They don't need a raise.

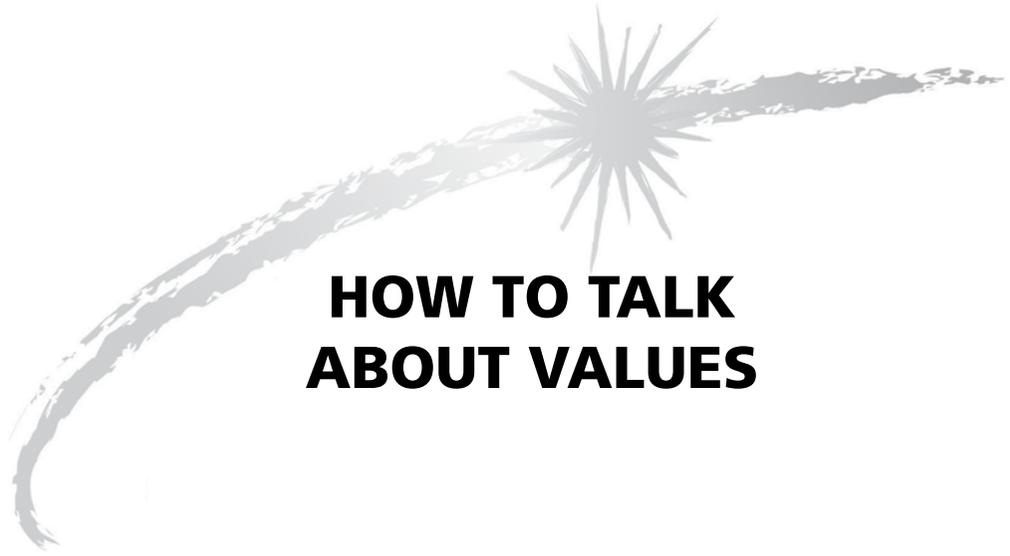
Say . . .

Tipped employees, like waiters, work hard for their pay. And yet, incredibly, the minimum wage for tipped workers is only \$2.13 an hour, and it has not increased since 1991. No wonder the poverty rate for tipped workers is more than double the rate for other employees. Raising the tipped minimum wage does not hurt restaurants. In fact, seven states—including California, Minnesota, Nevada and Washington—have the same minimum wage for tipped workers as they have for everyone else, and the restaurants in those states are thriving. Everyone who works hard deserves to make a decent living.



SECTION FOUR

**HOW TO TALK
ABOUT VALUES**



HOW TO TALK ABOUT VALUES

18. Progressive Values and Philosophy

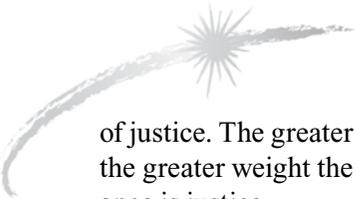
The beginning of this book provides a short primer on values. This section is for those who are interested in a deeper discussion of how those same progressive values describe a consistent and politically effective progressive philosophy.

To articulate a philosophy that persuades, you need to understand persuadable voters. They are extremely individualistic. Even when they say they want what's best for the larger community, they are actually persuaded by how policies affect them personally.

Individualism is our nation's greatest strength and greatest weakness. It drives innovation and progress, but it also consigns millions of Americans to poverty. In the same spirit, competition is the very bedrock of our governmental, economic and social systems. Elections and court cases, education and job-seeking, are all competitions. Our economy is a gigantic and complex competition. Obviously, where there's competition there are both winners and losers.

Progressives would gladly espouse a communitarian philosophy. We wish American culture was more oriented toward altruism and community, but it isn't. A realistic progressive philosophy is one that accepts our national culture of individualism and competition and, nevertheless, seeks to make the American Dream accessible to all. So how can one envision such a philosophy?

Imagine a balance scale: the old-fashioned kind with two pans, one suspended from each end of a bar. It's the scale that symbolizes equal justice under law. In a progressive world, the role of government is to help balance the scale when powerful individuals or organizations compete against weaker ones. Government should function as a counterweight on the scale



of justice. The greater the disparity of power between competing interests, the greater weight the government should provide to the weaker side. Balance is justice.

A system in balance rewards hard work, efficiency, and innovation—which benefit all of society, and discourages crime, corruption, and schemes to game the system—which rob all of society. As a practical matter, to apply the broad principle of balance, we must break down public policy into three situations, where: (1) government has no proper role; (2) government acts as a referee; and (3) government acts as a protector.

Freedom

Where government has no proper role, because public action would violate our individual rights, progressive policy is based on **freedom**. Freedom means the absence of legal interference with our fundamental rights: freedom of speech, religion, and association; the right to privacy; the rights of the accused; and the right of all citizens to vote.

Compared to an individual, government wields tremendous power, so a progressive policy adds great weight—in the form of strong legal rights—to the individual’s side of the scale. For example, freedom of speech is absolutely sacrosanct unless it immediately and directly puts others in danger, “falsely shouting fire in a theater” as Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes put it.

Thus, freedom is a fairly simple concept. It is a defense of our basic human rights and civil liberties. Nevertheless, progressives rarely say the word freedom. They’re embarrassed, or think it’s been co-opted by the right wing, or don’t understand when to say it. But freedom is the most powerful political value in America. If you can’t cry *freedom*, you can’t explain why you are progressive.

Opportunity

Where government acts as a referee between private, unequal interests, progressive policy is based on **opportunity**. Opportunity means a level playing field in social and economic affairs: fair dealings between the powerful and the less powerful, the elimination of discrimination, and a quality education for all.

Competing interests usually hold unequal power, so progressive policy adds weight—guarantees of specific protections—to the weaker interest. For example, unskilled low-wage workers have no leverage to bargain for fair pay, so government needs to mandate a minimum wage.

More than anything, opportunity stands for a fair marketplace. Although progressives tend to feel most comfortable advocating for the rights of consumers and employees against businesses, we need to make clear that opportunity also ensures fairness between businesses—especially helping small businesses against large ones—and fairness for stockholders against corporate officers.

Security

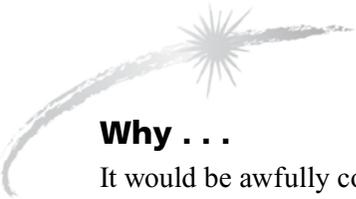
Where government acts to protect those who cannot reasonably protect themselves, including future generations, progressive policy is based on **security**. Security includes protecting Americans from domestic criminals and foreign terrorists, of course. But it also means insuring the sick and the vulnerable, safeguarding the food we eat and products we use, and preserving our environment.

There is always a threat that larger or unexpected forces will attack any one of us, so progressive policy adds weight, in the form of government institutions and programs, that helps protect us from harm. For example, society has a responsibility to protect the elderly, the disabled, widows, and orphans and that’s why an aptly named federal program has functioned in that role for more than 80 years: Social Security.

Progressives certainly support the concept of security, but we usually detour around that word. Like *freedom*, the word *security* seems to stick in the throats of progressives, perhaps because we’re concerned that we’ll sound like conservatives. But in fact, when you say security it makes you sound like a mainstream American.

You saw this chart previously on page 15.





Why . . .

It would be awfully confining to say the words freedom, opportunity and security in every debate, over and over. But you don't have to. Instead, substitute other terms from the same family of values. If you're talking about auto emission standards, for example, you don't have to say the word *security*, but it's essential to evoke the concept.

As this book has tried to demonstrate, every issue can and should be supported by one of these three values. Moreover, you can use all these values together.

When you say that you support *freedom, opportunity and security for all*, you are expressing a progressive message that polls better than any other. And it's an accurate description of what we stand for. The right wing favors these principles, but only for some, the affluent. Progressives insist on providing freedom, opportunity and security to each and every American.

It is true that progressives also believe in softer values, like compassion and communalism. Those appeal to our base but not to individualistic persuadable voters. Freedom, opportunity and security succeed because they project our strength; they declare that progressives accept the responsibility to extend freedom, opportunity and security to all while conservatives shirk that responsibility.

If this concept sounds vaguely familiar to you, perhaps you are remembering our nation's foundational values. When Thomas Jefferson wrote "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness," his *life* meant the same as security, his *liberty* meant freedom, and his *pursuit of happiness* meant opportunity. Thus, our values are the principles that fueled the flame of the American Revolution. This same torch of American ideals was passed from Jefferson to Lincoln, and from TR to FDR to JFK. Let us stop hiding our glorious light under a bushel!

19. Values-Based Progressive Economics

Conservative philosophy is wrapped up in the language of *free market* economics. To right wingers, freedom means *laissez-faire* policies, opportunity means unregulated markets, and security means defending the rich and their wealth.

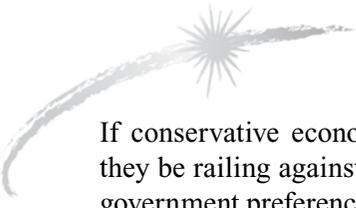
The fundamental challenge for progressives is that typical American voters believe in *free markets*. Why shouldn't they? They hear no real arguments to the contrary. But the truth is, there's no such thing as letting the market decide. It's a myth, a fantasy, a fairy tale about a place that does not exist.

American markets are not, and never were, free of government influence. Just open up the business page of any major newspaper and look for yourself. One company seeks to change a law or regulation to its benefit. Another receives a tax abatement from local government. A manufacturer threatens to move overseas unless government provides a subsidy. The Fed increases or decreases the prime rate, affecting everyone's ability to borrow.

We're all familiar with some of the laws and regulations that police markets in order to protect employees, consumers, stockholders, and competing businesses. The government inspects food and drugs, keeps unsafe consumer products off the market, regulates air and water pollution, requires minimum safety and health standards for employees, prevents monopolies, protects consumer privacy, insures bank deposits, and so on.

Voters are less familiar with the many ways that governments warp markets on behalf of the rich and powerful. To name just a few: governments pay direct subsidies (like farm subsidies), indirect subsidies (like loan guarantees), tax abatements (for construction), tax credits (for everything conceivable), and tax loopholes (which allow many big corporations to pay no taxes at all); governments may overpay favored firms or industries for construction, products or service contracts, or allow unconscionable cost overruns; governments set up markets with only a few privileged owners (like the gambling industry); our federal government is one of the most protectionist in the world; and our federal labor laws tilt strongly anti-union (in labor-organizing elections, for example).

In sum, the government is always involved in business, always biasing market results, always nudging and twisting and bumping around the so-called invisible hand. In fact, markets would be more accurately visualized as a multiplicity of hands all engaged in a vast wrist-wrestling contest...with many of them controlled by governments.



If conservative economists actually believed in free markets, wouldn't they be railing against all the pro-corporate market distortions caused by government preferences? But they aren't. That's because they don't really want government to keep its nose out of economic decisions; they want the government to step in and prejudice the market in their favor. They use the term free market not as a philosophy to follow but as a rhetorical device—albeit a hugely effective one—to skew public opinion toward conservative economic policy.

So, Americans are stuck in the wrong debate and it's your job to change that. The question is not whether government should be involved in the marketplace. It is. The question is, what principles should guide government's involvement?

Fair markets

Progressives lack an easily explained, competing economic theory. We need a convincing progressive vision of what makes our economy work, and what would make it work better. What's the first step?

Don't say *free markets* when you're talking about the economy, say *fair markets*.

Don't say . . .

- Free markets

Say . . .

- Fair markets

Why . . .

Progressives support fair markets. By fair, we mean markets that are balanced—with government as a counterweight when necessary—so that weaker individuals and organizations compete on a reasonably equal basis against more powerful ones. In many cases, balancing markets doesn't require more government involvement, it requires less: taking away the subsidies and other unfair advantages that some individuals and businesses enjoy over others.

It is balanced markets that do the most to lower prices, spur innovations, and encourage the kind of hard work that benefits all of society. In contrast, society does not benefit—instead, everyone loses—when people get rich by gaming the system, by exploiting tax or regulatory loopholes, by dismantling viable companies, or by creating scams that aren't technically illegal but should be.

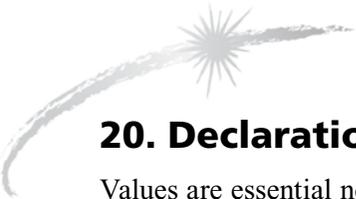
Unbalanced markets weaken competition by giving special advantages to certain companies or specific industries. When a company makes its money through unfair competition, it has little incentive to *build a better mousetrap*. And when a company sells faulty mousetraps to the military at inflated prices, there's even less incentive to change. In fact, the dominant free market ideology gives corporate leaders and their right-wing cheerleaders a strong incentive to corrupt the system. So that's what they've done.

Because Americans accept unfair markets—and in fact, take the unfairness for granted—we don't consider the enormity of the special interest game-playing in Washington. In the current Administration, nearly every economic effort is designed to make markets more unfair. Whether it's tax policy, health care, the federal budget, financial regulation, education policy—or anything else—the proposed policies are designed to tilt the economic playing field even farther toward the rich.

Progressive economist Dean Baker summarizes the situation better than we can:

The market is just a tool, and in fact a very useful one. It makes no more sense to lash out against markets than to lash out against the wheel. The reality is that conservatives have been quite actively using the power of the government to shape market outcomes in ways that redistribute income upward. However, conservatives have been clever enough to not own up to their role in this process, pretending all along that everything is just the natural working of the market. And, progressives have been foolish enough to go along with this view.

Let us muster a little cleverness of our own. Let's reject the language of free markets and embrace the progressive principle of fair markets.



20. Declaration of Progressive Values

Values are essential not just when you're talking about politics, but when you're writing about it as well. Below is an illustration of how an officeholder, candidate, advocate or group might use progressive values to describe their state and local policy priorities.

Declaration of Progressive Values

As progressives seek popular support for our policies, it is crucial that we convey the values that underlie our political philosophy. Three pillars support our common vision for the role of government:

First, progressives are resolved to safeguard our individual freedoms.

For two centuries, America has been defined by its commitment to freedom. We must fervently guard our constitutional and human rights, and keep government out of our private lives.

Second, progressives strive to guarantee equal opportunity for all.

America's historic success has come by providing all citizens, not just a privileged few, with the opportunity for a better life. We must vigorously oppose all forms of discrimination, create a society where hard work is rewarded, and ensure that all Americans have the chance to achieve the American Dream.

Third, progressives are determined to protect our security.

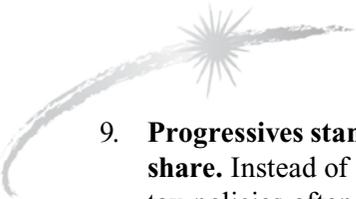
To make us truly secure, America must not only stop domestic criminals and foreign threats, it must also promote our health and welfare. While forcefully continuing to protect lives and property, we must strengthen programs that insure the sick and vulnerable, safeguard the food we eat and the products we use, and protect our environment.

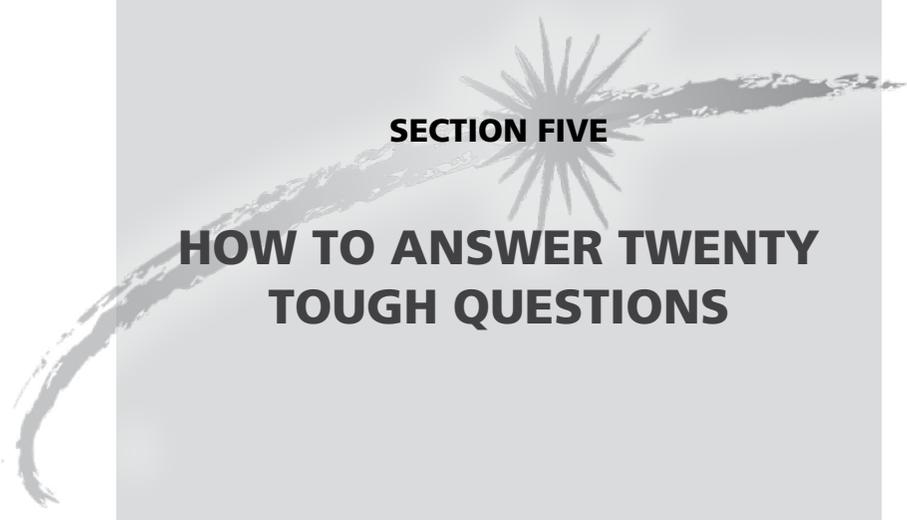
Our progressive values differ fundamentally from those of conservatives. While conservatives work to protect freedom, opportunity and security only for a select few, progressives accept the mission and responsibility to extend these protections to all Americans, and to preserve them for future generations.

Our progressive values of freedom, opportunity and security mean that:

1. **Progressives stand for decent wages and benefits for working Americans.** Our economy should provide the opportunity for all hardworking individuals and families to enjoy life. Therefore, we support legislation to increase the minimum wage, guarantee earned sick days, and create viable pensions for all.

2. **Progressives stand for affordable, high-quality health care for all.** Every American should have the security of comprehensive health insurance. Therefore, we support the strongest possible legislation to ensure that every American has the health care coverage they need at a price they can afford.
3. **Progressives stand for a public education system that is the best in the world.** Every child should have an equal opportunity to learn. Therefore, we support legislation to invest in our children's education through smaller class sizes, more after-school initiatives, and universal pre-K programs.
4. **Progressives stand for a clean, safe environment.** We must conserve our natural resources both to secure our own health and well-being, and to fulfill our responsibility to future generations. Therefore, we support legislation to reduce air and water pollution, including greenhouse gases, and encourage both energy efficiency and the use of renewable energy.
5. **Progressives stand for the elimination of discrimination.** Discrimination against anyone diminishes freedom for everyone. Therefore, we support legislation to eliminate the practice of racial and ethnic profiling, protect immigrants from harassment, and ban discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity.
6. **Progressives stand for real security for the most vulnerable Americans.** We must protect the security of our nation's children, elderly, disabled and disadvantaged. Therefore, we support legislation to make healthcare, child care, elder care, companion care and housing programs more accessible, efficient and effective.
7. **Progressives stand for the protection of privacy.** For Americans to be truly free, the government must stay out of our private lives. Therefore, we favor legislation to keep abortion safe and legal, and ensure access to all reproductive health services.
8. **Progressives stand for a criminal justice system that focuses on security instead of retribution.** Tough sentences alone don't make us safer. We also need to prevent crime with more programs for at-risk youth, and provide more opportunities for education and rehabilitation. Therefore, we support legislation to strengthen deterrence programs and stop the cycle of addiction by requiring rigorous treatment instead of incarceration for non-violent drug crimes.

- 
9. **Progressives stand for a tax system where everyone pays their fair share.** Instead of following the principle of equal opportunity for all, tax policies often deliver an unfair share of benefits, giveaways, and loopholes to wealthy special interests. Therefore, we support legislation to eliminate wasteful tax subsidies and tax breaks that are both unfair and not worth the cost.
 10. **Progressives stand for an inclusive, open government.** Every American must have an equal opportunity to participate in our democracy. But average Americans are increasingly shut out by the influence of big money in politics. Therefore, we support laws that protect our freedom to vote and reduce the influence of money in the political process.



SECTION FIVE

**HOW TO ANSWER TWENTY
TOUGH QUESTIONS**



HOW TO ANSWER TWENTY TOUGH QUESTIONS

The following questions are phrased from a relatively hostile point of view. Whether the questioner is actually hostile or just curious, your best answer always starts at a point of agreement and uses values.

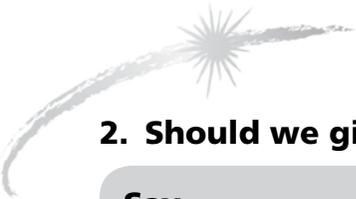
1. Do you favor abortion on demand?

Say . . .

I appreciate that abortion is a complex issue for the individuals involved. That's why I feel that politicians should stay out of the very personal and private decision whether or not to have an abortion.

Note . . .

The first sentence agrees with the great majority of voters who hold conflicting feelings about the issue. The second sentence, by calling it a *personal and private decision*, brings to mind the value of privacy and works in poll after poll. However, keep in mind that most people are not persuadable and anyone who asks the question in such a biased manner is not likely to change positions. Give your best answer and move on. For a longer explanation, see page 69.



2. Should we give special rights to gay people?

Say . . .

If America stands for anything, it's equal opportunity for all. If you have two children or grandchildren, and one is straight and the other gay, you still love them equally. You know the government should treat them fairly and equally. So LGBTQ people should be treated like everybody else and the law should ensure they're not the victims of discrimination just because of who they are.

Note . . .

The equal opportunity frame usually works best. Appeal to love and finish with the antidiscrimination law that Americans overwhelmingly support. For more discussion, see page 38.

3. Do you favor “opportunity scholarships”?

Say . . .

We all want what's best for our own children. If parents decide private school is best for their child, that's great. But taxpayer dollars should not be taken out of our public schools to fund private schools. We need to focus our scarce tax dollars on the goal of having top-quality public schools so that each and every child has the opportunity to succeed, achieve, and live the American Dream.

Note . . .

The substance works because Americans oppose vouchers if they take money from the public schools. The bottom line: shift the debate away from failing schools and toward the importance of providing *opportunity for all*. For more about education, see page 46.

4. Aren't public employees like teachers, firefighters and police getting too many health and pension benefits that taxpayers just can't afford?

Say . . .

Our state/city/county should not waste a penny. We should pay fair wages and benefits, nothing more and nothing less. Based on what I've seen, I do not believe that the teachers, police officers and firefighters in our community are overpaid. But there are some government contractors with excessive subsidies or sweetheart contracts and we've got to crack down on those to save taxpayer dollars.

Note . . .

Polls show that die-hard conservatives think public employees are overpaid, but persuadable voters generally don't feel that way. Refer to teachers and other public employees *in our community* because voters are much more supportive of public employees they know, especially schoolteachers, than faceless bureaucrats. Then move the discussion to the related issue of overpaid government contractors. This works best if you can show an example of corporations being overpaid in your jurisdiction. It shouldn't be hard to find one.

5. Do you favor gun control?

Say . . .

I support the Second Amendment. But like most Americans, I also support reasonable laws that help keep guns out of the hands of convicted felons, domestic abusers and the dangerously mentally ill. This particular gun violence protection legislation is just a modest, common sense measure to protect our public safety.

Note . . .

Persuadable voters support the Second Amendment. At the same time, 80-to-90 percent support closing the gun show loophole and requiring background checks for all gun purchases. By all means, appeal to *common sense*. For more about gun legislation, see page 63.



6. Do you favor prayer in schools?

Say . . .

I'm for freedom of religion. Children can freely pray in schools now, if it's voluntary. The problem is government-sanctioned prayer, which was ruled unconstitutional by the U.S. Supreme Court 60 years ago. It violates our freedom of religion for school boards, public schools or teachers to tell children how or when to pray.

Note . . .

People favor prayer in schools. But they also favor upholding our basic constitutional rights.

7. Shouldn't we lock up repeat criminals and throw away the key?

Say . . .

We certainly should lock up repeat *violent* offenders because that makes us safer. At the same time, we are safer if we prevent juveniles and petty criminals from becoming violent career criminals. We can lower the rate of repeat crimes if we send nonviolent drug offenders to addiction treatment instead of putting them in prison. Let's focus on what works to make our communities safer.

Note . . .

Progressives tend to talk about helping criminals. We're right, of course, but that won't work with persuadable voters. Focus on public safety, not the criminal. For more about public safety, see page 62.

8. Do you believe in global warming?

Say . . .

We must protect the health, safety and security of our children and grandchildren. And they face a serious problem. Over 97 percent of climate scientists agree that humans are causing climate change. So we need to apply commonsense strategies now. We know how to implement clean energy solutions and we know that reducing fossil fuel dependence will make America stronger and our kids safer. It's time to step up and get it done...our children are counting on it.

Note . . .

Progressives say *climate change* rather than *global warming*. It polls a little better and it more accurately describes the impact of excessive greenhouse gases. The one key fact that most persuadables don't know is that there is a strong consensus among scientists that climate change is real and humans are causing it. Tie that to the security of your listeners' children and grandchildren. For more about climate change, see page 52.

9. Shouldn't we require drug tests for welfare recipients?

Say . . .

We should certainly discourage people from using illegal drugs. But we need to do it without wasting a lot of taxpayer dollars. States that have tried this policy have found that they spend much more tax money on drug testing than they save in cutting people off from assistance. Drug addiction is a problem across the nation and across income groups. Let's focus on treatment and prevention programs that work.

Note . . .

Polls show that voters support drug testing for public assistance. Right wingers have introduced such legislation in dozens of states. It's a tough issue.

10. Illegal immigrants broke the law. Shouldn't they be deported?

Say . . .

We should be true to American values and protect everyone's right to due process and fair treatment under our Constitution. There are millions of immigrants who work hard and play by the rules, and they make our economy and our country stronger. Further, everyone agrees that it would be logistically impractical and outrageously expensive to seize and deport millions of people. The solution is for Congress to fix the federal immigration process, creating a roadmap to legal residence and citizenship.

Note . . .

Only the far-right base wants to deport all immigrants. Everyone else wants to fix the system.



11. Shouldn't schools teach the controversy between evolution and intelligent design?

Say . . .

The founders of our nation strongly supported freedom of religion. After all, many of their families came here to escape governments that imposed religion upon their citizens. So freedom of religion is the very heart of America. Virtually all scientists agree that intelligent design is not science, it is religion. That's why children should learn about it in church, not in public school science classes.

Note . . .

Intelligent design is a difficult issue because half of Americans believe in some form of creationism, so you've got to lean heavily on their values. Religious people value freedom of religion.

12. Do you favor the death penalty?

Say . . .

Our criminal justice system should be focused on making all of us safer. Since there is not an ounce of evidence that the death penalty deters any crime at all, we shouldn't spend the enormous amounts of time and money needed to implement it. Instead, we should insist that our courts, prosecutors and police divert those resources toward efforts that actually diminish crime. Besides, there are so many people who have been sentenced to death who were later proven innocent. That's an awful injustice, and it also pretty well guarantees that the real murderer remains at large and continues to threaten everyone's safety.

Note . . .

Again, as much as possible, focus on public safety instead of injustice.

13. Do you think that “corporations are people”?

Say . . .

Corporations are not people. They are pieces of paper; they are contracts with the state. Corporations are necessary for doing business and our laws should enable people to run businesses successfully. But corporations don't deserve rights that are fundamental to people, like freedom of speech, freedom of religion, and freedom of assembly. Those rights belong to you and me.

Note . . .

It was Mitt Romney who said, “Corporations are people, my friends.” The idea that corporations have the right to freedom of speech is central to the *Citizens United* ruling that has resulted in uncontrolled spending in elections.

14. Doesn't environmental regulation lead to higher energy prices?

Say . . .

None of us likes it when prices rise. But I only support new rules that provide more benefit than cost. Environmental rules protect something that we all own together—our air, water, forests and parks—from abuse by just a few people. When they pollute for profit it is at our joint expense. We need fair and transparent rules to make sure environmental costs aren't dumped on all of us.

Note . . .

Make the environment real to listeners. For more about the environment, see page 50.



15. Shouldn't we stop the construction of a mosque in our neighborhood? They're terrorists!

Say . . .

Freedom of religion is fundamental to America. The key to defending freedom is this: if we deny freedoms to other hardworking law-abiding people, that's how we lose them ourselves. In this case, if a town can block construction just because it's a mosque, then it can block Mormons or Seventh Day Adventists, Methodists or Catholics...or your own denomination. None of us are free unless all of us are free.

Note . . .

People adore freedom but honestly don't understand it. You may have to explain it to them.

16. Wouldn't it hurt small businesses and cost jobs if we increased the minimum wage?

Say . . .

Our economy depends on small businesses. We have to encourage them. But all the evidence shows that increasing the minimum wage puts money in the pockets of people who will spend it almost immediately, which quickly generates business for the local economy. If we do it right, raising the minimum wage is a win-win.

Note . . .

Americans almost worship small businesses. Embrace them! The fact is, voters overwhelmingly support a substantial raise in the minimum wage, so this is not a difficult sell. To appeal to persuadable voters, focus on how the minimum wage stimulates the economy for everyone rather than how it helps the poor. For more, see page 85.

17. Why are you running for office?

Say . . .

The economy is terrible, people are hurting, and our state/city/county is not doing enough to solve the real problems. I'm running because we can do better. Our system works when everyone gets a fair shot, everyone gives their fair share, and everyone plays by the same rules. My opponent's policies are not fair; they rig the system to benefit the rich over the rest of us. My policies would ensure that everyone who works hard and plays by the rules has the opportunity to live the American Dream.

Note . . .

Everyone who runs for office must be ready to answer this question without hesitation. This is a generic example. If you run for office, personalize this to your campaign and your community, and then memorize it and repeat it every chance you get.

18. Are you a tax-and-spend liberal?

Say . . .

I am a pragmatic and commonsense progressive. I support a balanced budget for our city/county/state. And I support tax fairness. We need to identify and cut tax breaks and loopholes that benefit the wealthy few at the expense of all the rest of us. Our overall goal should be to maintain and improve the quality of life here in [location], not just for ourselves, but for our children and grandchildren.

Note . . .

Don't get defensive. Smack this softball out of the park.



19. Are you trying to knock down the free enterprise system?

Say . . .

No, I favor equal *opportunity* for everyone. That requires a system with rules of the road that make economic competition fair and open and honest. We need to ensure that everybody gets a fair shot, does their fair share, and plays by the same fair rules. Our goal must be to ensure that everyone who works hard and acts responsibly has the opportunity to live the American Dream.

Note . . .

Americans are opposed to economic unfairness. This harsh question gives you the opportunity to lay out your basic progressive economic theme.

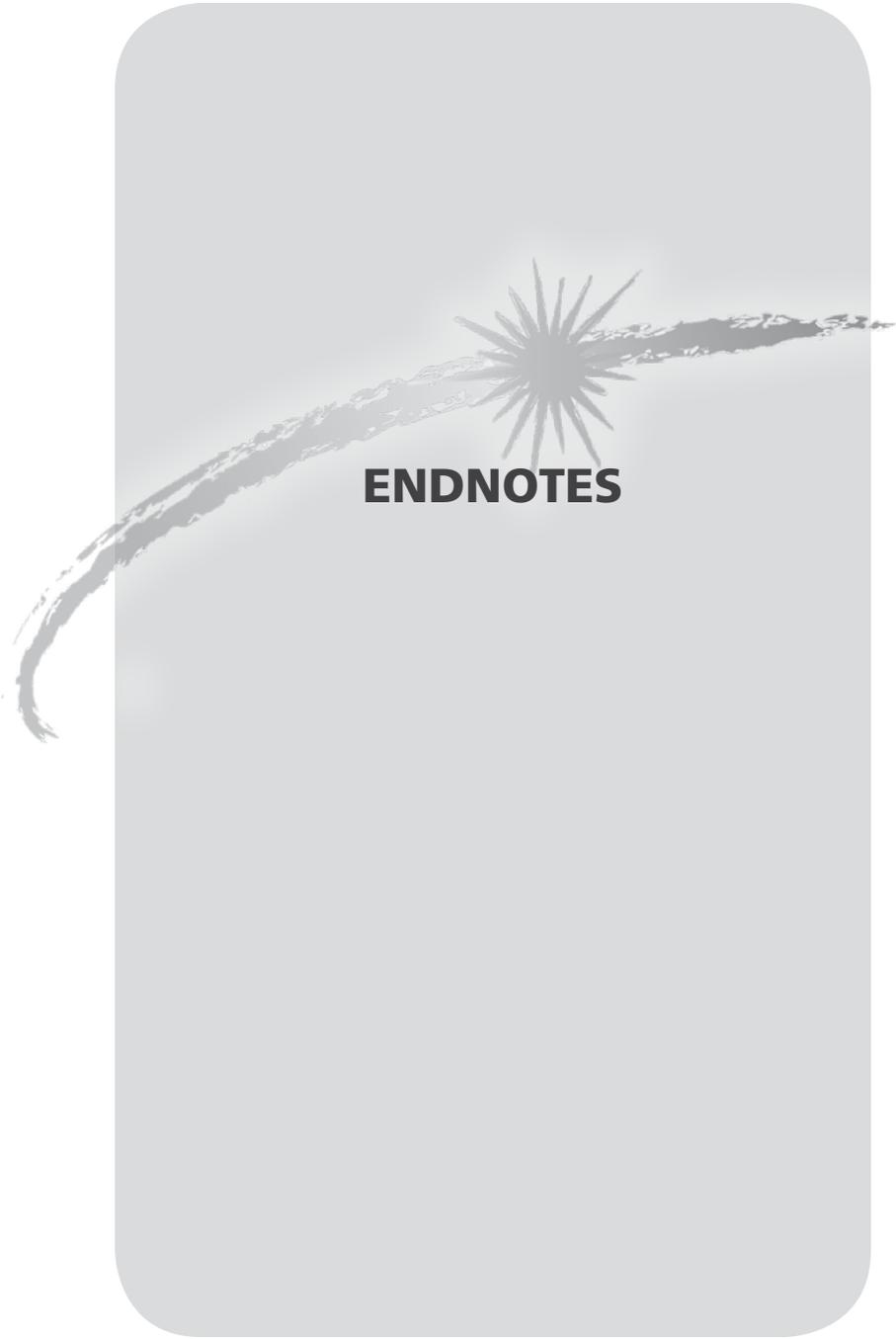
20. Are you a Socialist?

Say . . .

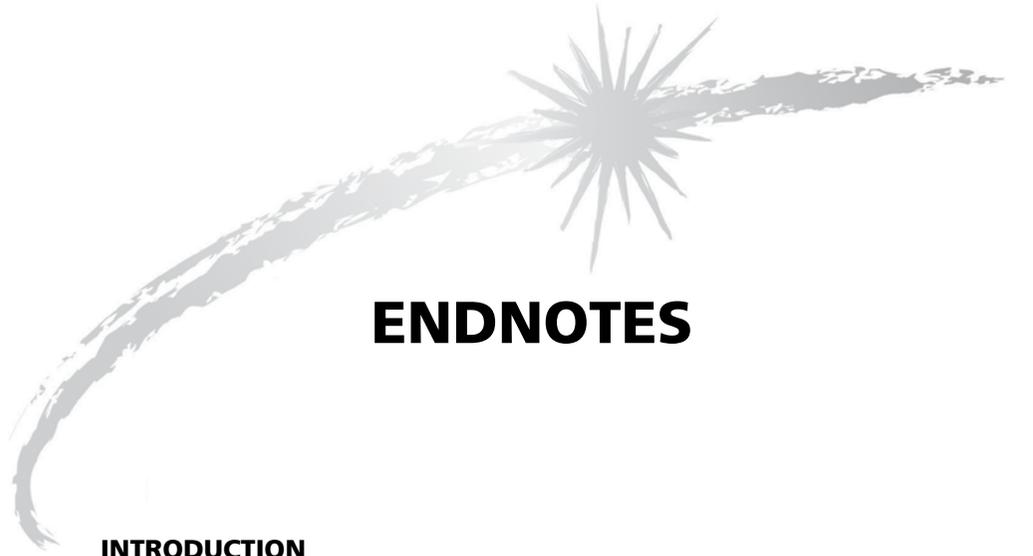
I support freedom, opportunity and security for all. We call that a Progressive.

Note . . .

If you're in a crowd, smile. That ideologue just did you a favor.



ENDNOTES



ENDNOTES

INTRODUCTION

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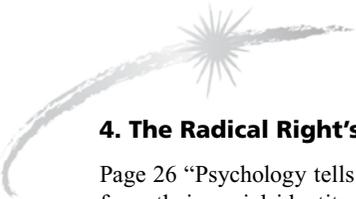
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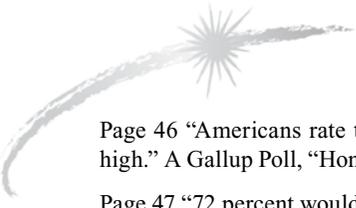
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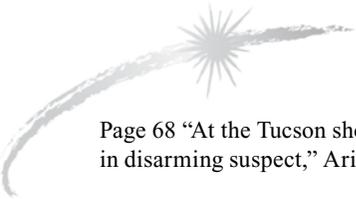
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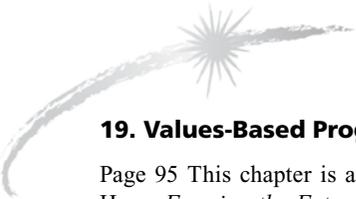
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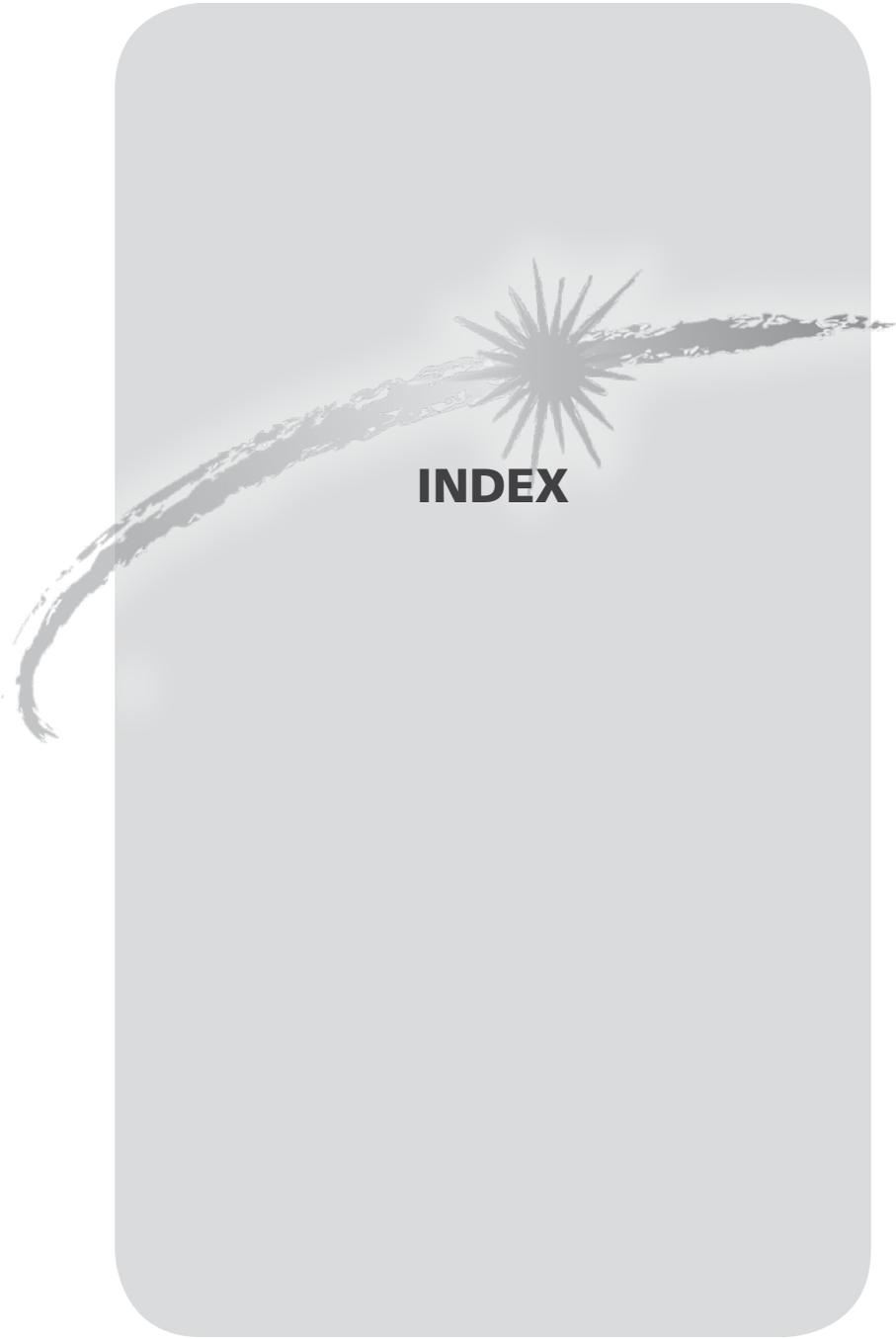
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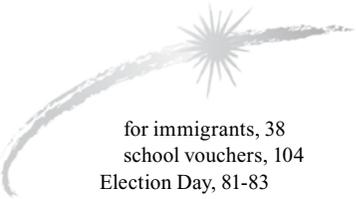
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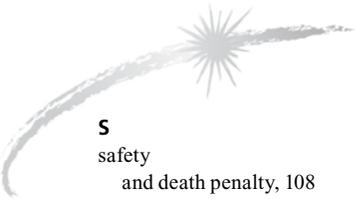
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Our Story: The Hub for American Narratives (ourstoryhub.org) suggests language for discussing the economy, climate, health care, democracy, immigration, education, criminal justice and more. It's an invaluable resource for progressive messaging.

Some of the messaging recommendations in this book rely on research published or provided by: American Federation of Teachers (education); Americans for Tax Fairness (taxes); America's Voice Education Fund, ASO Communications and The Opportunity Agenda (immigrants); The Bauman Foundation (regulation and enforcement); Breakthrough Strategies & Solutions (climate change); Brennan Center for Justice (voting); Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids (tobacco); ConwayStrategic (reproductive rights); Dēmos (government); Fair Elections Legal Network (voting); LGBT Movement Advancement Project (LGBTQ); OMP and KNP Communications (gun violence); and Topos Partnership (wages).



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Right wing groups spend millions of dollars on message framing and then send poll-tested advice to their candidates, interest groups and activists who persistently repeat that language, e.g., activist judges, class warfare, death panels, death tax, job creators, job killer, nanny state, personal injury lawyer, tax relief, union boss and values voter.

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