Comprehensive Message Research: How to Message Against Trump and Defeat Him on Guns

The values, frames, messages, and messengers that take Trump down

GIFFORDS
COURAGE TO FIGHT GUN VIOLENCE

GSG
GLOBAL STRATEGY GROUP

Methodology

Phase 1: Focus Groups

Global Strategy Group conducted **six focus groups** among swing voters between March 10 and March 12, 2020:

- Denver, CO
  - Swing-voting women
  - Swing-voting men

- Grand Rapids, MI
  - Swing-voting women
  - Swing-voting men and women

- Charlotte, NC
  - Swing-voting women
  - Swing-voting men and women

Phase 2: Messaging Survey

Global Strategy Group conducted a nationwide survey of **1,004 "swayable" voters** (voters who are neither very favorable nor very unfavorable toward Donald Trump) between April 28 and May 5, 2020.

Phase 3: Video Message Survey

Global Strategy Group conducted a nationwide survey of **801 "swayable" voters** (voters who are neither very favorable nor very unfavorable toward Donald Trump) between July 6 and July 12, 2020.

Phase 4: Video Messenger Survey

Global Strategy Group conducted a nationwide survey of **1,250 "swayable" voters** (voters who are neither very favorable nor very unfavorable toward Donald Trump) between August 12 and August 17, 2020.

Landscape

Most of these swayable voters are a tough get – they hold favorable views and approve of Trump, even if they don't feel strongly

Donald Trump Favorability

	Somewhat favorable	Don't know	Somewhat unfavorable	Net Favorable
Overall	64	3	33	+31

Donald Trump Job Approval – Initial

	Strongly approve	Somewhat approve	Somewhat disapprove	Strongly disapprove	TOTAL Approve	TOTAL Disapprove
Overall	8	59	30	3	67	33

Donald Trump Job Approval on Guns – Initial

	Strongly approve	Somewhat/Lean approve	Somewhat/Lean disapprove	Strongly disapprove	TOTAL Approve	TOTAL Disapprove
Overall	10	58	27	6	68	33

Presidential Vote – Initial

	Definitely Biden	Probably/Lean Biden	Completely undecided	Probably/Lean Trump	Definitely Trump	Net Biden
Overall	9	17	8	27	39	-40

Source: GSG and Giffords survey of 1,004 swayable voters, April 28 - May 5, 2020

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Swayable voters praised Trump for how he does whatever it takes to get the job done and doesn't take no for an answer

"He doesn't take no for an answer ever. I think he thinks he's right. I feel like it's a positive because things have been going very well with him for our country in past 4 years – the economy is going well, even our trade situation."

"Bold. He's not afraid to do what he needs to do. If you throw something at him, he'll throw it right back at you. He's done what he said he'd do and that's why he got elected."

Initial Perceptions of Donald Trump

"I think he's putting America first and isn't apologizing for that."

"Before I thought of him as a powerful businessman and know-it-all. Now I feel better because he's a president and a leader – not always a great leader, but he's doing things in a good way."

Swayable voters support background checks and assume Trump does as well

Do you support or oppose background checks on all gun sales?

	Strongly support	Somewhat support	Oppose
Swayable	66	27	7

Based on what you know, how does President Trump feel about background checks on all gun sales?

	Supports	Opposes	% Incorrect on Initial
Swayable	72	28	85

Based on what you know, does President Trump want to make gun laws in the U.S. stronger, less strong, or keep them the same?

	Stronger	Keep the same	Less strong	% Incorrect on Initial
Swayable	19	61	20	85

Do you approve or disapprove of the job President Trump is doing on the issue of guns?

	Approve	Disapprove	% Not Sure on Initial
Swayable	67	33	26

Entering quantitative messaging research we knew…

- Voters not only gave Trump the benefit of the doubt generally, they also believed he was with them on background checks and gun violence prevention. New information to the contrary was jarring.

- The voters we needed to win have seen Trump be attacked for the last four years, and they feel there is a ton of disinformation out there. Simply giving them more information and facts showing Trump was not with them would not be enough to change their votes. We also needed to tap into emotion – something gun violence prevention does well.

- Swayable voters can simultaneously dislike certain things about Trump (his ego and his tweeting, for example) and still want to vote for him because he represents something different. He's not more politics as usually in their eyes. We had to use research to determine what negatives both apply to Trump and move the vote with this swayable group of voters.

Our Message

Voters believe a lot of things about Trump, but only a few beliefs – namely that he is "not the strong leader we elected," no longer "represents change for the better," and "does more for donors than people" – drive their vote choice

Regression Analysis: Impact of Believing a Trait Describes Trump

Drives vote movement at some point in survey

- Puts himself first***
- Ignores the experts when it matters most***
- Isn't the strong leader we elected***
- Puts people at risk**
- Plays politics while people suffer**
- Not perfect but, does represent change for the better***
- Effective**
- Does more for his donors than the people**
- More focused on getting re-elected than getting things done*

Doesn't drive vote movement

- Wishy washy
- Isn't doing enough even as people suffer
- Dealmaker
- Independent thinker
- Puts America first
- Honest with the American people
- Takes our safety seriously
- Looks out for special interests first
- Delivers for the wealthy
- More focused on riling up his base than getting things done
- Self-absorbed
- Listens to the wrong people
- Listens to whomever is in his ear at the moment
- Went in a businessman and came out a politician
- Just another politician
- Doesn't take a stand on what matters most

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; *** p<0.01, **** p<0.001. **** is most meaningful.
🟩 : drives vote choice before statement and vote movement after statement, meaning it is particularly important

It is critical to model the emotional journey from hope to disappointment and to diminish voters' pride around Trump. Statistical analysis shows that moves the vote.

Regression Analysis: Impact of Emotions Felt on Vote

Drives vote movement at some point in survey

- Disappointed***
- Proud**
- Secure*
- Hopeful**
- Distrustful*

Doesn't drive vote movement

- Concerned
- Confused
- Uncertain
- Excited
- Exhausted

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; *** p<0.01, **** p<0.001. **** is most meaningful.

■ : drives vote choice before statement and vote movement after statement.

In focus groups, Trump's flip on BCs after talking to the NRA, took voters on this journey from hope to disappointment and showed he wasn't strong

"He has cowered to the NRA…This is confusing to me because I thought as a Republican he would take society's safety more seriously."

"What is most concerning is that Trump changes his opinion/stance after talking with NRA leaders. Have they purchased our president?"
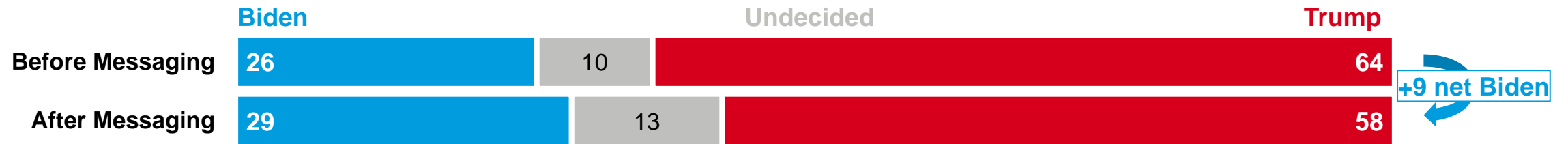
Responses to Messaging

"I believed him to be an independent thinker and not a politician…then I found out Trump got a lot of money from the NRA and backs down to them. Because of this I am not planning to vote for him in the upcoming election."

"Trump is strongly influenced by the NRA, as they undoubtedly secured him members' votes in 2016."

Messaging that talks about this flip effectively moves swayable voters toward Biden and take down Trump's approval – especially on guns

Presidential Vote

	Biden	Undecided	Trump	
Before Messaging	26	10	64	
After Messaging	29	13	58	+9 net Biden

Donald Trump Job Approval on Guns

	Approve	Disapprove	
Before Messaging	69	31	
After Messaging	45	55	-24 approve

Donald Trump Job Approval

	Approve	Disapprove	
Before Messaging	67	33	
After Messaging	59	41	-8 approve

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Within this swayable group, young voters, and especially younger women, are apt to move making them prime targets

Vote Targets

Movers
35% of swayable electorate

Move toward Biden after initial vote OR become more open to Biden OR become less open to Trump at some point in the survey

Black Voters (59% are movers)*

Ages 18-29 (55%)

Latinx Voters (48%)*

Women (38%):

Women 18-54 (42%)

Non-college women (41%)

Democratic women (50%)

Non-gun owning women (41%)

True Swing
9% of swayable electorate

Sometimes votes for Trump but not always

Ages 18-29 (18% are true swing)

Latinx Voters (14%)*

Black Voters (12%)*

Women (11%):

Women 18-54 (13%)

Independent women (12%)

Non-college women (12%)

*While we see movement among Black and Latinx voters, they make up small portions of these audiences. 14% of Movers are Black and 8% are Latinx, while 11% of True Swing are Black and 9% are Latinx.

Layering this message with appeals to voters' core values – purity, authority, in group and merit – makes our communications even more powerful

Most Powerful Values Among Different Groups (% of Voters Who Have a Score Greater Than 80)		
	Swayable Overall	Movers	Swing
Purity	27%	23%	31%
Authority	33%	25%	30%
In group	29%	27%	28%
Patriotism	33%	24%	27%
Security	33%	25%	27%
Achievement	16%	24%	26%
Emotionality	21%	21%	25%
Merit	37%	28%	24%
Nostalgia	28%	24%	24%
Independence	19%	24%	22%
Excitement	14%	22%	22%
Power	17%	18%	21%
Environmentalism	16%	19%	20%
Politeness	26%	23%	19%
Hedonism	14%	21%	19%
Compassion	19%	21%	18%
Equality	15%	18%	12%

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Purity

Purity, or sanctity, is the desire to protect the sacred. It can also be understood as protecting against anything that contaminates or pollutes.

This foundation is often related to people's religious beliefs, although religiosity is not required to follow a strict code of conduct. For people who hold this value, certain acts and policies are problematic because they violate common decency.

This foundation is the same principle that makes some people become vegan or mistrust vaccines and GMOs -- and at the other end of the spectrum, support the sanctity of marriage.

Authority

Authority is a principle rooted in protecting the social order and the importance of following rules. It should not be interpreted simply as support for authoritarian governments, since there are many who believe in the value of authority while being vehemently anti-authoritarian.

For people who value authority, there's nothing more important than deference to their group's hierarchy and respect for tradition.

They generally oppose policies that challenge traditions, disrupt order, or question sources of authority, such as the government, police, or the military.

In-group Care

In-group care is the act of helping and caring for the well-being of those around you, especially your family and friends (your 'in-group').

People who hold this value as a large part of their belief system are more likely to be devoted to the welfare of people they are close with, and more generally of people whom they frequently see and interact with.

They are motivated by family and protecting the welfare of others.

Merit

Merit, or proportionality, is a form of fairness that values people being rewarded based on how good of a job they've done or the work they've put in, regardless of their needs.

People who strongly value the principle of merit tend to believe that those who produce more should be rewarded more than those who just tried hard. Beyond that, they tend to value hard work and take offense at people they think are asking to be rewarded without doing their fair share.

They generally oppose government redistribution of income, as they believe inequality is caused by differences in merit, and therefore fair.

Messaging that ties together the flip on BCs and these values helps move voters from hope to disappointment
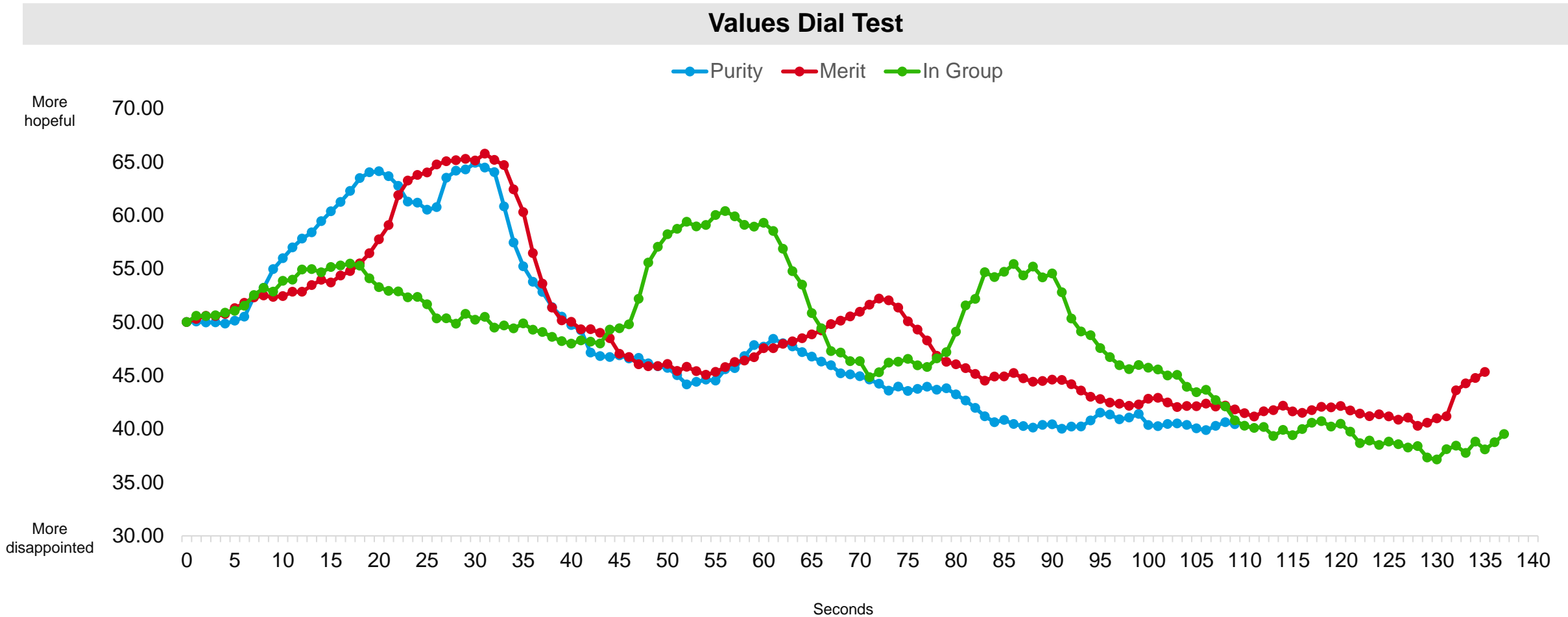
Values Dial Test

Note: Swayable voters watched a video and were asked to evaluate it in real-time, moving a dial to the right when they felt hopeful and to the left when they felt disappointed.

Dial testing and text highlighting also reveal the importance of language

Instead of Saying…	Say…

Our communications should take voters on a journey from hope to disappointment by telling them about Trump's flip on background checks while weaving in the values of purity, merit, and in group. Beyond that…

Make the weekend 31 Americans died active and visceral

31 Americans **died** ➡ 31 Americans were **bloodied in our streets by mass shooters**

When talking about Trump's support of background checks, use Trump's own words…

Trump **supported** background checks ➡ Trump said that he "**supported strong and meaningful background checks**"

When talking about Trump's flip, tie it to lobbyists and clarify the timeline…

Trump **reversed his position** on background checks ➡ After talking with **lobbyists from the NRA,** Trump **suddenly** flipped his position

When talking about the NRA, use Trump's own words…

Trump **sided with NRA donors** ➡ The **NRA spent $30 million** helping to elect Trump in 2016 and he told them **"You came through for me. I'll come through for you."**

When talking about donors, don't make it about corruption. Make it about weakness…

Trump **is corrupt** ➡ Trump reversed his stance, **dirtying the office just like every other politician**

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Our Core Narrative

I am sick of the way Washington usually works, so when Donald Trump started talking about draining the swamp, I was hopeful he could **clean up Washington** and **deliver for us**.

Then, last year, after **31 Americans were bloodied in our streets by mass shooters** in one day, Trump responded and said he **"supported strong and meaningful background checks"** on guns. I thought he'd be different and get it done.

[Law enforcement: This is an important issue; as a cop I worry about gun violence every day.]

[Teacher: I'm a teacher; every day I imagine what I will have to do if a shooter walks into my classroom. I needed Trump to step up.]

[Parent: I'm a (mom/dad), I know my kid goes through lockdown drills at school, and I think about what could happen if a shooter walks into the classroom. I needed Trump to step up.]

But President Trump **hasn't stood strong**. After one call with **lobbyists from the NRA,** Trump suddenly flipped his position and opposed the background checks Americans support, **dirtying the office** just like every other politician. The **NRA spent $30 million** to elect him, so he told them, "**You came through for me. I'll come through for you**."

[Gun owner: I'm a gun owner, and my neighbors and I strongly support background checks.]

That makes me think Trump **doesn't deserve** a second term. Trump **hasn't cleaned up Washington**, and I don't know whose side he's on.

The Messengers

We tested a variety of potential messengers to understand the impact of gender and background with this very small slice of the electorate

Initial metrics:
Traits
Emotions
Votes

Police Officer

Gun Owner

Teacher
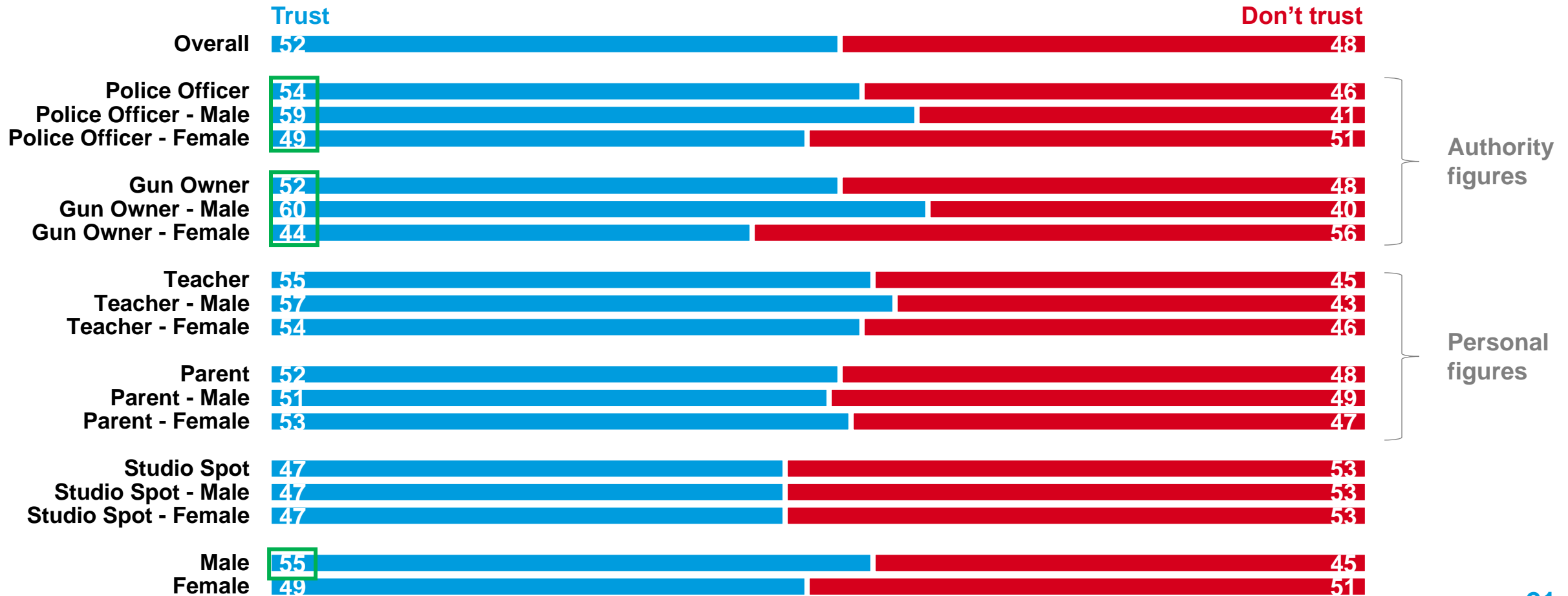
Parent

Male Narrator

Female Narrator

Informed metrics:
Traits
Emotions
Votes

Note: When we talk about the profession/role throughout the deck, it includes both genders tested in the video, and when we talk about gender it is across all professions/roles.

Swayable voters trust the speakers pretty evenly, though a man in a traditionally masculine role is trusted much more than a woman
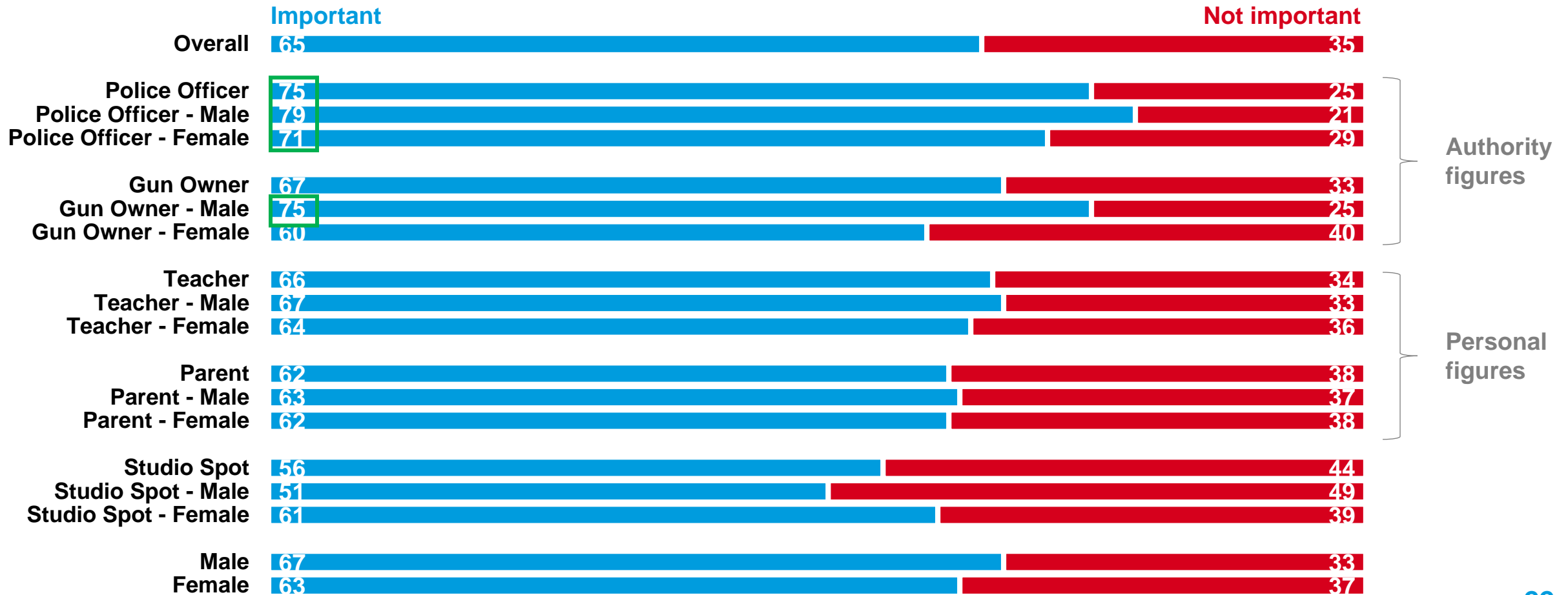
How much do you trust the (person/narrator) from the video?

Trust   **Don't trust**

	Trust	Don't trust	
Overall	52	48	
Police Officer	54	46	Authority figures
Police Officer - Male	59	41	
Police Officer - Female	49	51	
Gun Owner	52	48	
Gun Owner - Male	60	40	
Gun Owner - Female	44	56	
Teacher	55	45	Personal figures
Teacher - Male	57	43	
Teacher - Female	54	46	
Parent	52	48	
Parent - Male	51	49	
Parent - Female	53	47	
Studio Spot	47	53	
Studio Spot - Male	47	53	
Studio Spot - Female	47	53	
Male	55	45	
Female	49	51	

Source: GSG and Giffords survey of 1,250 swayable voters, August 12 - 17, 2020

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Voters value a police officer's voice on guns, though a male gun owner and male teacher are nearly as important

How important do you think it is to hear from someone like this (person/narrator) on the issue of guns?

Important

Not important

Label	Important	Not important
Overall	65	35
Police Officer	75	25
Police Officer - Male	79	21
Police Officer - Female	71	29
Gun Owner	67	33
Gun Owner - Male	75	25
Gun Owner - Female	60	40
Teacher	66	34
Teacher - Male	67	33
Teacher - Female	64	36
Parent	62	38
Parent - Male	63	37
Parent - Female	62	38
Studio Spot	56	44
Studio Spot - Male	51	49
Studio Spot - Female	61	39
Male	67	33
Female	63	37

Authority figures

Personal figures

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While a police officer is most effective at moving the vote overall, a male gun owner or a studio spot can work; male voices are more effective with female voters

Presidential Vote Movement (Net Biden After Messaging - Net Biden Before Messaging)							
	Authority figures		**Personal figures**				
	Police Officer	**Gun Owner**	**Teacher**	**Parent**	**Studio Spot**	**Male**	**Female**
Overall	+6	+5	+4	+4	+5	+6	+4
Men	+4	0	+9	+3	+3	+3	+4
Women	+8	+11	0	+3	+6	+9	+2
White	+6	+3	+2	+5	+3	+5	+3
POC*	+8	+15	+13	-3	+8	+11	+6
Non-GOP	+1	+4	+1	+9	-2	+6	-1
GOP	+11	+6	+6	0	+10	+6	+7

*Small sample size

Messengers that people perceive as authority figures on guns better drive disappointment; teachers trigger anger, which can also be helpful

In one or two words max, how do you feel watching this video? In other words, what emotion do you feel?
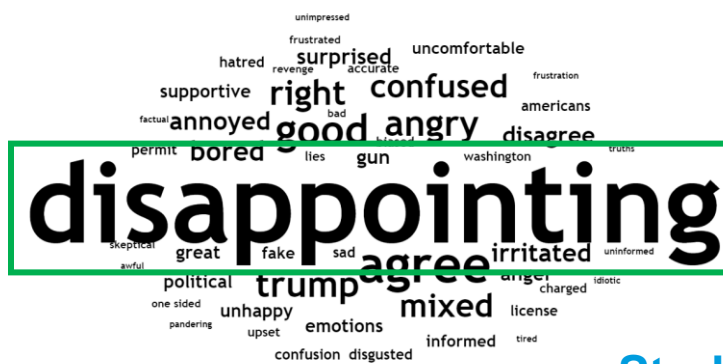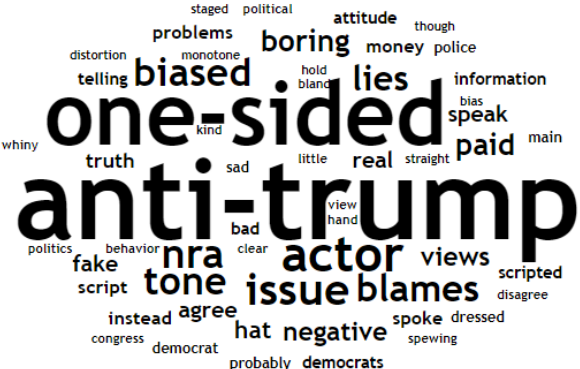
A female speaker seems to be a source of distraction: it's what voters take away over the message they are delivering
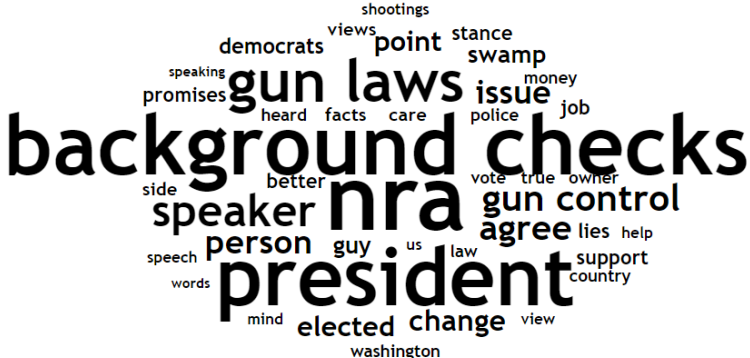
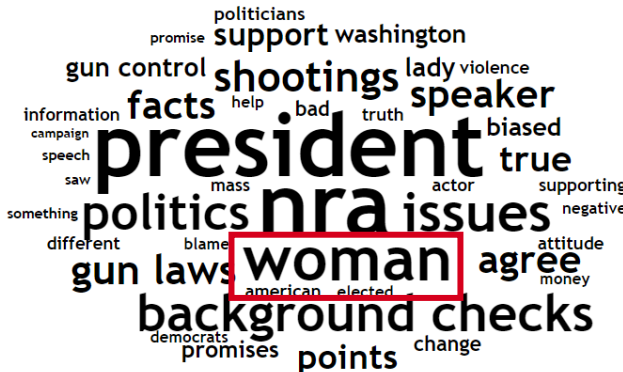**What did you dislike about the speaker in the video?**

Male

Female

What specifically that you saw or heard made you feel that way? Please try to be as descriptive as possible.
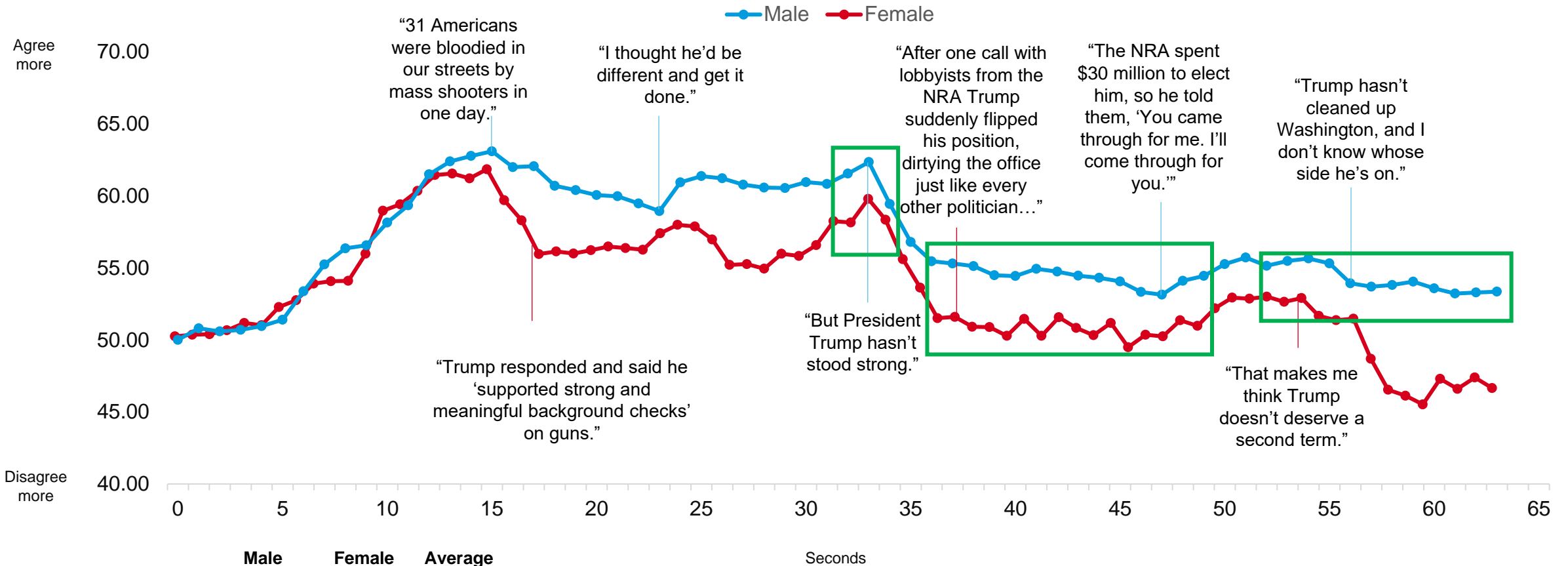
Male

Female

These swayable voters tend to agree with a police officer throughout, especially a male police officer who appears more credible even when hitting Trump


Police Officer Dial Test

Male   Female

"31 Americans were bloodied in our streets by mass shooters in one day."

"I thought he'd be different and get it done."

"After one call with lobbyists from the NRA Trump suddenly flipped his position, dirtying the office just like every other politician…"

"The NRA spent $30 million to elect him, so he told them, 'You came through for me. I'll come through for you.'"

"Trump hasn't cleaned up Washington, and I don't know whose side he's on."

"Trump responded and said he 'supported strong and meaningful background checks' on guns."

"But President Trump hasn't stood strong."

"That makes me think Trump doesn't deserve a second term."

Agree more — 70.00, 65.00, 60.00, 55.00, 50.00, 45.00

Disagree more — 40.00

Seconds: 0, 5, 10, 15, 20, 25, 30, 35, 40, 45, 50, 55, 60, 65

	Male	Female	Average
MAX (higher better)	63.09	61.59	62.34
MIN (higher better)	50.00	42.28	46.14
GAP (lower better)	13.09	19.13	16.2

Note: Swayable voters watched a video and were asked to evaluate it in real-time, moving a dial to the right when they agreed with the speaker and to the left when they disagreed with the speaker.

Speaking negatively about Trump

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Same pattern holds true with a gun owner: Women are penalized for hitting Trump

Gun Owner Dial Test

	Male	Female	Average
MAX (higher better)	60.42	62.73	61.58
MIN (higher better)	50.00	43.99	47.00
GAP (lower better)	10.43	18.74	14.58

Speaking negatively about Trump
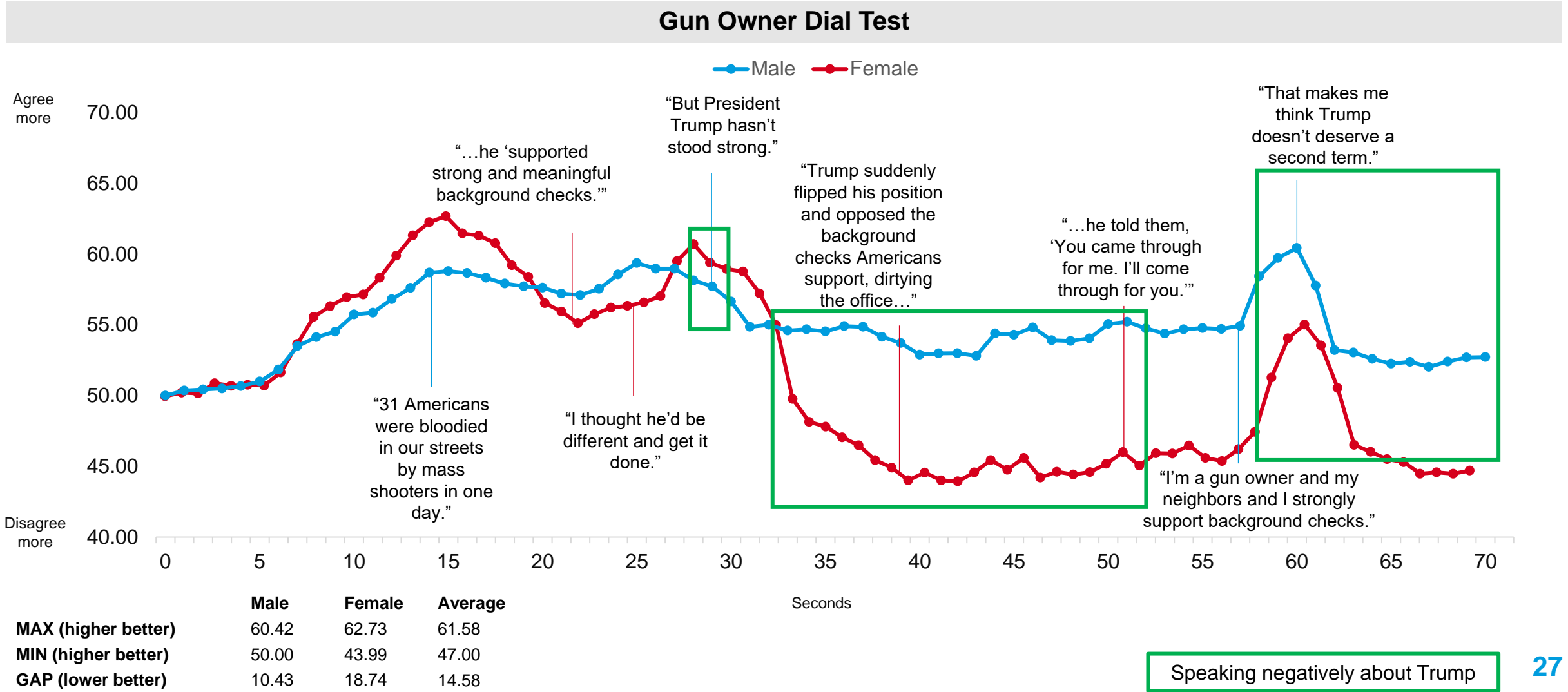
Messenger Recommendations

- We'll need a strategic messaging approach that uses different messengers to target different groups of voters.

  - **Rely on authority figures more broadly:** A police officer is most effective at moving the vote within this group of swayable voters broadly, especially with the hardest to reach audiences (again within this small sliver of population). But gun owners, especially male gun owners, can be nearly as effective and are a good alternative, especially when we call out that "gun owners like them support background checks" in the context of Trump's flip. Gun owners are especially effective with voters of color, who are less persuaded by police officers.
    - Male voices have the greatest resonance for both a police officer and gun owner.
    - Given this groups focus on authority, it's also possible veterans may work

  - **Use more personal messengers if targeting:** Young people and voters of color respond to teachers who share their perspective on how Trump has let them down with his flip on background checks. A parent also has resonance, but given how they can trigger sadness, and therefore potential backlash, they are not our strongest messenger with this group and at this time.

  - **Studio spots can also work for Republican leaning voters:** If a police officer or gun owner is not available, a studio spot is just as effective for Republicans. The narrator's gender is less relevant for studio spots, with even a slight preference for women.

Thank You