From the outside, Donald Trump's presidency would appear to be an endless series of missteps. And at each step, media personalities, voters, and his fellow elected officials have wondered aloud whether his favorability ratings would come crashing down. But through his comments about John McCain and Gold Star families, his setting off the longest government shutdown in history, and even his mishandling of a global pandemic, the president's popularity has stayed remarkably steady, never veering more than a few points from where he started. Fact after fact, failure after failure have barely changed minds.

Now, new research conducted on behalf of Giffords reveals that <u>if Democrats are to win in November, they must communicate about Trump in an emotionally resonant way – helping potentially gettable voters move from a place of hope for Trump to a place of disappointment.</u>

- They need to *feel* he is not the strong leader they hoped he was and is just another disappointing politician who does more for donors than the people.
- This new research finds that the president's flip-flop on and opposition to a universally popular background check policy after talking to his NRA donors can help drive the emotional journey necessary to move voters.
- And they need to hear from credible messengers who help take them on this journey, especially authority figures.

There are still voters who can be persuaded to feel differently about Trump. Poll after poll suggests Biden has a lead, but with under two months to go, much can change. That's why <u>Giffords focused in on "swayable" voters: the quarter of the likely voter electorate who are neither very favorable nor very unfavorable toward Trump and whom Trump must win</u>. While these swayable voters are generally still somewhat favorable toward Trump, they also acknowledge he is not perfect, and after learning about his flip on background checks, they are six points less likely to support him.

But to move them, communications must make voters feel disappointment. Voters in both focus groups and the three surveys conducted expressed a number of emotions about Trump's time in office – both positive and negative. But of the ten emotions tested in the initial survey, statistical regression analysis (mathematically determining the relationship between two variables) reveals that only two actually drive how voters feel and whether they are willing to change their vote: hope and disappointment. <u>Dispelling any sense of hope or pride in Trump and replacing that with disappointment moves voters away from him and toward Biden.</u> Gun violence prevention is a key issue that can be used to take swayable voters on this emotional journey.

Based on our research, Trump's most obvious negatives don't move these voters. While swayable voters clearly believe Trump is self-absorbed (77% say this describes him well), delivers for the wealthy (62%), and ignores the experts when it matters most (53%), this research shows believing these and other traits that apply (full list in appendix) don't dictate how Americans will vote come Election Day.

Showing these voters that Trump is not the strong leader they elected drives them to reconsider their vote for him. Statistical regression analysis suggests communications should show voters that Trump is "not the strong leader they thought" and "no longer represents change for the better," emphasizing that he "does more for his donors than the people he represents." Voters who are made to feel that these statements apply move away from Trump on the vote.

Swayable voters do not yet know that Trump isn't with them on background checks. These swayable voters, like voters at large, overwhelmingly support background checks on all gun sales (93% support/7% oppose), and **only a paltry 15 percent know Trump does not.** In a world where voters are rarely surprised, Trump's opposition to and flip on a position as popular as background checks shocks, surprises, and importantly, disappoints. Given that Trump is one of the most well-defined, over-exposed politicians ever, there is rarely 'new' information you can provide swing voters which they find convincing. Messaging around his record on background checks is one of those things.
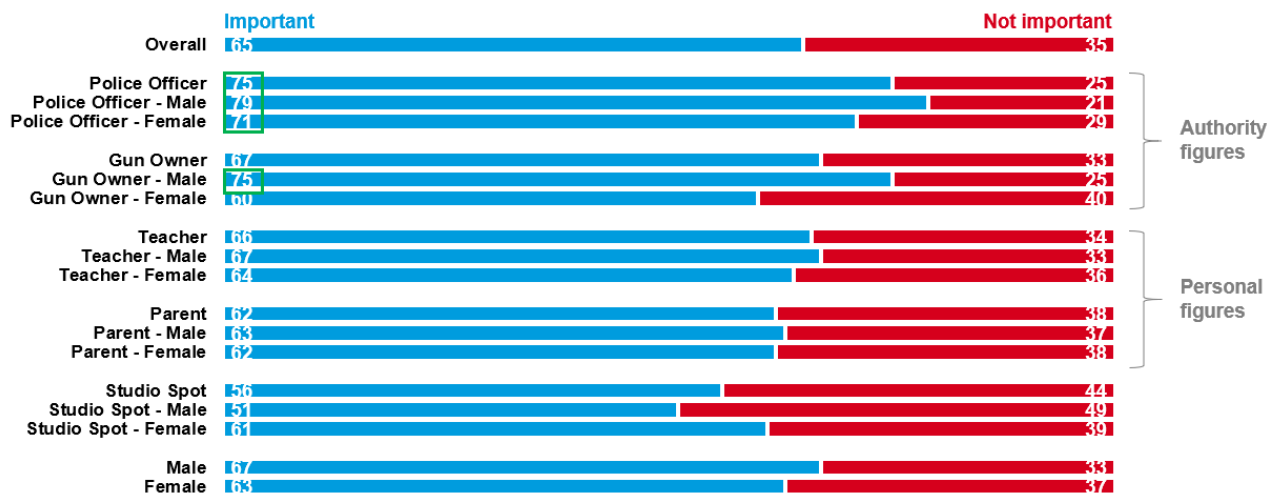
His flip on background checks helps drive disappointment and shows he's not the strong leader they expected. After voters read a fact-based statement about how Trump went from saying "I support strong, meaningful background checks" in the wake of the El Paso and Dayton shootings, to threatening to veto bipartisan background check legislation after a single conversation with his donors at the NRA, swayable voters are four points less likely to feel hopeful about Trump. Further, they are seven points more likely to feel disappointed and 11 points more likely to say he does more for his donors than for the people he represents. In an election where emotion is key, gun violence prevention can be a difference maker with the groups Trump needs desperately to win.

Pairing this story around Trump's flip with values-oriented language moves the needle even further. Voters who were persuaded to no longer support Trump in the initial survey were more likely to strongly value authority (the importance of following rules), purity (protecting the sacred against anything that contaminates or dirties), merit (fairness and the idea of being rewarded based on work put in), and in group (caring for the well-being of those around you) according to models developed by Grow Progress. Subsequent testing shows that messaging that adheres to those values, can move the needle ever further, causing voters to be 10 points less likely to feel hopeful about Trump and nine points more likely to feel disappointed.

Use "authority figures" to message around Trump's flip on background checks. Gun violence prevention messengers that are perceived as authority figures (e.g., a police officer or a gun owner[1]) are better at driving home this feeling of disappointment than messengers with more personal stories (e.g., a teacher or a parent). Swayable voters – especially female swayable voters – are particularly responsive to male authority figures: Women are seven points more likely to shift their vote to Biden on net when they hear from a male messenger versus a female one. Should an authority figure not be an option, a studio spot can be similarly powerful, especially with Republican swayable voters. A teacher can also be a powerful messenger with younger voters and voters of color.

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[1] The only two authority figures tested in this research were law enforcement and a gun owner. It is possible that others, such as a veteran or an active duty member of the military, could fall into the "authority" bucket and be similarly powerful.

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

	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

Police Officer / Gun Owner rows bracketed as **Authority figures**; Teacher / Parent rows bracketed as **Personal figures**.

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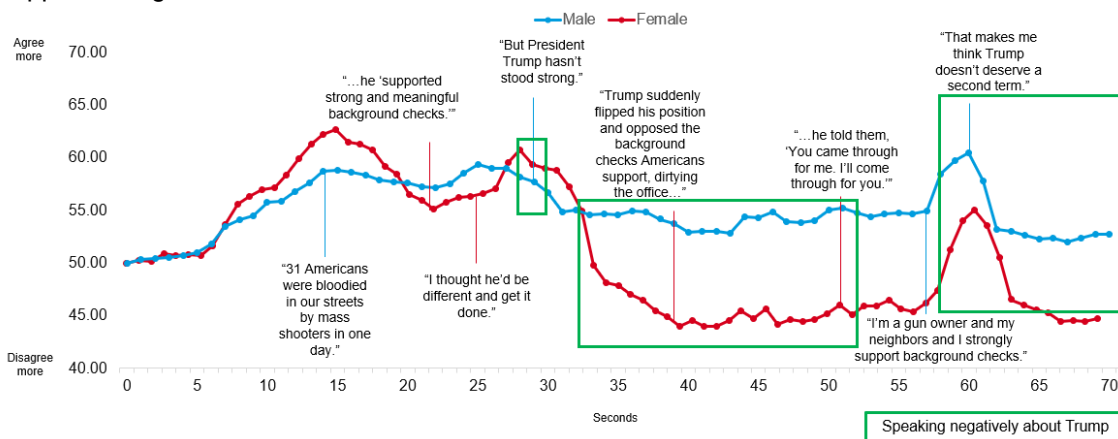
*But President Trump **hasn't stood strong**. After one call with **lobbyists from the NRA,** Trump suddenly flipped his position and opposed the background checks Americans support, **dirtying the office** just like every other politician. The **NRA spent $30 million** to elect him, so he told them,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

DIAL TESTING

In our messenger test, swayable voters watched a video and moved a dial in real-time based on whether they agreed or disagreed with the speaker. The chart below depicts levels of agreement throughout the gun owner messenger video (the higher the line, the more agreement), and shows voters are far more likely to agree with a male gun owner (in blue) than a female gun owner (in red) when each starts attacking Trump, and especially when the speaker reasserts that gun owners support background checks

Appendix

All voters were asked how well 24 different traits described President Trump and how well 10 different emotions described their own feelings about President Trump's time in office both before and after reading a statement about President Trump's flip on background checks. The statement they read, as well as the results of those tests are below, along with results of regression analysis that 1) determined which emotions/traits drive current vote choice; and 2) determined whether movement on each trait actually drove movement away from Trump.

THE KEY STATEMENT:

President Trump pledged to support background checks on all gun sales on more than a dozen occasions, including after 31 Americans died in the El Paso and Dayton shootings in just 24 hours last August, when he said, "I support strong meaningful background checks." He even added that "we are going to get [background checks] done" and "it's not going to be talk like it has been in the past."

But after speaking with and listening to lobbyists from the NRA - an organization that spent $30 million helping to elect Trump in 2016, which is more than any other outside group - Trump immediately reversed his stance. Now he opposes background checks on all gun sales and has threatened to veto background check legislation, even if it passed the House and Senate.

Emotions:

	Pre-Statement	Post-Statement	Difference	Regression: drives vote choice <u>before</u> statement	Regression: drives vote movement away from Trump <u>after statement</u>
Emotion	Well	Well	Well		
Concerned	63%	66%	3%		
Confused	51%	56%	5%		
Uncertain	57%	61%	4%		
Disappointed	44%	51%	7%	****	***
Distrustful	43%	50%	7%		*
Exhausted	48%	53%	5%		
Excited	46%	46%	0%		
Proud	52%	53%	1%		**
Secure	59%	58%	-1%		*
Hopeful	68%	64%	-4%	****	***

Pre-statement: respondents were asked how well each word describes how they feel about President's Trump's time in office before reading any information.
Post-statement: respondents were asked how well each word describes how they feel about President's Trump's time in office after reading the background checks statement.
*Regressions: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; *** p<0.01, **** p<0.001. **** is most meaningful.*

Traits:

Trait	Pre-Statement	Post-Statement	Difference	Regression: drives vote choice <u>before</u> statement	Regression: drives vote movement away from Trump <u>after</u> statement
	Well	**Well**	**Well**		
Looks out for special interests first	44%	51%	7%		
Does more for his donors than the people	42%	53%	11%	**	**
Delivers for the wealthy	62%	62%	0%		
More focused on riling up his base than getting things done	45%	51%	6%		
Puts himself first	57%	63%	6%	***	
Self-absorbed	77%	75%	-2%		
Listens to the wrong people	45%	53%	8%		
Ignores the experts when it matters most	53%	55%	2%	***	
More focused on getting re-elected than getting things done	43%	49%	6%		*
Listens to whomever is in his ear at that moment	48%	58%	10%		
Went in a businessman and came out a politician	50%	51%	1%		
Just another politician	36%	44%	8%		
Doesn't take a stand on the things that matter most	33%	43%	10%		
Wishy washy	46%	55%	9%		
Isn't the strong leader we elected	36%	42%	6%	*	***
Puts people at risk	43%	48%	5%		**
Isn't doing enough even as people suffer	39%	43%	4%		
Plays politics while people suffer	40%	47%	7%		**
Dealmaker	79%	81%	2%		
Independent thinker	76%	69%	-7%		
Puts America first	78%	72%	-6%		
Honest with the American people	58%	54%	-4%		
Takes our safety seriously	73%	65%	-8%		
Not perfect, but does represent change for the better	74%	68%	-6%	****	***
Effective	70%	65%	-5%	***	**

Pre-statement: respondents were asked how well each trait describes President Trump before reading any information.
Post-statement: respondents were asked how well each trait describes President Trump after reading the background checks statement.
Regressions: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; *** p<0.01, **** p<0.001. **** is most meaningful.