



To: WIB PAC Investors
From: David McIntosh
Date: September 28, 2023
Re: Initial findings on how to challenge President Trump

This memo shares findings from our attempts to identify an effective approach to lower President Trump's support among Republican primary voters so we can maximize an alternative candidate's ballot share when the field begins to consolidate.

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INITIAL FINDINGS

After conducting extensive message testing through several live-phone and online surveys, both nationally and in early states, we produced more than 40 television ads that we tested in 12 in-person focus groups and four online randomized controlled experiments. We also tested publicly available digital and television ads produced by other groups via the same methods.

Key learnings on messaging against President Trump

- All attempts to undermine his conservative credentials on specific issues were ineffective, regardless of the setting (live surveys, online surveys, focus groups, controlled experiments). Even when you show video to Republican primary voters – with complete context – of President Trump saying something otherwise objectionable to primary voters, they find a way to rationalize and dismiss it. This does not mean issue attacks against him will never work during the campaign, but rather, it means they failed to work during the initial phase of the campaign when we tested these options. This research should be ongoing throughout the primary.
- Broadly acceptable messages against President Trump with Republican primary voters that do not produce a meaningful backlash include sharing concerns about his ability to beat President Biden, expressions of Trump fatigue due to the distractions he creates and the polarization of the country, as well as his pattern of attacking conservative leaders for self-interested reasons.

Key learnings on how to produce ads against President Trump

- Every traditional post-production ad attacking President Trump either backfired or produced no impact on his ballot support and favorability (see Appendix A for examples). This includes ads that primarily feature video of him saying liberal or stupid comments from his own mouth.
- The best performing ads include non-scripted Republicans sharing reservations in their own words that touch on the themes and broadly acceptable messaging mentioned above. Notably, when the same testimonial-type of ad provides commentary on a specific issue in President Trump's record, they are largely ineffective.
- It is essential to disarm the viewer at the opening of the ad by establishing that the person being interviewed on camera is a Republican who previously supported President Trump; otherwise, the viewer will automatically put their guard up, assuming the messenger is just another Trump-hater whose opinion should be summarily dismissed.

IMPACT OF IOWA ADS

After testing each ad qualitatively and quantitatively, we chose to run a combination of our six best performing ads in three Iowa media markets: Des Moines, Cedar Rapids, and Sioux City. We dedicated 1000 GRPs on broadcast, Fox News, and CTV for each ad. This media campaign cost over \$4 million. Iowa media markets where we did not advertise served as our control group. We conducted n = 500 surveys in the treatment and control areas before, during, and after the conclusion of our ad campaign. This design is not perfect, but it allowed us to reasonably measure the impact of our ads compared to other factors that may have affected the race.

Six ads we ran opposing President Trump in Iowa (in order):

1. John – <https://youtu.be/TXmRng3ZtcM>
2. I'm Back – <https://youtu.be/ghVeXHoCfso>
3. Fresh Blood – <https://youtu.be/cDhPeep3KPQ>
4. Lottery – https://youtu.be/kgTmwNC8_GA
5. Risky – <https://youtu.be/04mtaXeGsic>
6. Tough Guy – <https://youtu.be/LGliZKngr5s>

Summary of Results

Based on the results of our polling (see table 1 on page 3), we successfully damaged President Trump's standing in our treatment markets on every key metric we tracked compared to the shifts that occurred in the control markets.

We observed a net drop of 12 points in the percentage of voters who had a “very favorable” view of President Trump, 12 points in those who are “definitely” considering voting for him, and 13 points in those who believe “Donald Trump was a good President and the best possible candidate Republicans can nominate in 2024.” These three metrics show a significant drop in the intensity of his support. The topline movement in his total favorability and consideration was more muted at six points and five points, respectively.

Additionally, we observed a net drop of nine points in ballot support for President Trump on the full ballot and 15 points on the head-to-head ballot against Ron DeSantis. However, these shifts are less threatening to President Trump than they appear because none of the alternative candidates capture a meaningful amount of ballot share and the control group offset these gains by continuing to shift in his favor in the same way the national environment has. As a result, the statewide toplines continue to show a significant lead for President Trump.

The results of our polling also indicate that there are diminishing returns with the messaging track we deployed through this ad campaign. We observed more movement in these metrics after the first three ads ran than we did in our final three ads. There is no guarantee that we maxed out the effect from this line of attack with six ads, but there are clearly limits as we approach President Trump's assumed floor of support.

Note: We also conducted a test in South Carolina that showed similar results (see Appendix B).

Next Steps

While we successfully identified messaging and a series of ads that lowered President Trump's support across our testing and polls, none of the alternative candidates have consolidated the non-Trump vote yet. We plan to continue developing and testing ads to deploy when there are signs of consolidation.

Table 1. Impact of Anti-Trump Ads in Iowa

Key Measurements	Target DMAs			Control DMAs			Effect of Treatment Difference in changes between polls in control and treatment groups		
	Poll 1 7/6-7/10	Poll 2 7/30-8/2	Poll 3 8/27-8/31	Poll 1 7/6-7/10	Poll 2 7/30-8/2	Poll 3 8/27-8/31	Poll 1 to 2	Poll 2 to 3	Poll 1 to 3
Trump Image									
Total Favorable	70	68	62	72	74	70	-4	-2	-6
Very Favorable	47	42	45	45	51	55	-11	-1	-12
Full Ballot									
Total Trump	41	39	37	42	47	47	-7	-2	-9
Head-to-Head Ballot									
Total Trump	52	48	48	47	52	58	-9	-6	-15
Trump Margin	13	9	8	3	17	22	-18	-6	-24
Consider Voting for Trump									
Total Consider	73	70	65	75	75	72	-3	-2	-5
Definitely Consider	53	48	50	50	51	59	-6	-6	-12
Net Consider	48	42	33	51	51	45	-6	-3	-9
Trump Viewpoint									
Good POTUS/Best Candidate	42	40	38	41	45	50	-6	-7	-13

Methodology: WPA Intelligence conducted separate polls of n = 500 likely Iowa Republican caucus voters in the Target DMAs and Control DMAs. Data was collected July 6-10, July 30-August 2, and August 27-31 by live telephone interviews with 48% of interviews conducted to cell phones and 52% to landline phones. The samples were selected from the state voter file and were stratified by geography, age, gender, and vote history to ensure a representative sample. The surveys have margins of error of ±4.4%.

Trump Image: If they have a favorable or unfavorable impression of Donald Trump. Images were collected on all candidates.

Full Ballot: Donald Trump’s ballot support versus Doug Burgum, Chris Christie, Ron DeSantis, Nikki Haley, Mike Pence, Vivek Ramaswamy, and Tim Scott.

Head-to-Head Ballot: Donald Trump’s ballot support versus Ron DeSantis in a head-to-head matchup.

Consider Trump: If they are considering or not considering voting for Donald Trump. Considerations were collected on all candidates.

Trump Viewpoint: A three-point response on their opinion of Donald Trump as a Republican candidate for president in 2024, which include:

- 1) “Donald Trump was a good president and the best possible candidate Republicans can nominate in 2024.”
- 2) “Donald Trump was a good president, but it would be better if Republicans nominated a different candidate in 2024.”
- 3) “Donald Trump was not a good president, and the Republican Party would be better without his influence.”

APPENDIX A – INEFFECTIVE ADS

Most of the ads we tested in focus groups and online randomized controlled experiments failed to damage President Trump’s favorability and ballot support. This included attacks on his handling of the pandemic, promotion of vaccines, praise of Dr. Fauci, insane government spending, failure to build the wall, recent attacks on pro-life legislation, refusal to fight woke issues, openness to gun control, and many others.

Below are three examples of ads that failed in our testing process.

Example 1: That Road – <https://youtu.be/3Mgjs7Gp874>

“That Road” features a testimonial by an Iowa Republican critiquing President Trump’s handling of the pandemic and how it affected his small business.

This ad was our best creative on the pandemic and vaccines that we tested in focus group settings, but it still produced a backlash in our online randomized controlled experiment – improving President Trump’s ballot support by four points and net favorability by 11 points.

Example 2: No Better – <https://youtu.be/Ehcoyk9OL6k>

“No Better” is a post-production ad that features video footage of President Biden and President Trump advocating for similar gun control measures and attacking the National Rifle Association.

This was the best received post-production ad we tested in focus groups because participants responded well to the side-by-side video treatment of Biden and Trump saying similar things, but an online randomized controlled experiment showed it had zero impact on any measure of Trump’s support.

Example 3: King of Debt – <https://youtu.be/i9CFZwFRxFA>

“King of Debt” is a post-production ad that features video footage of Donald Trump commenting in 2016 on how we need to reduce the national debt, and then, highlights how he added more to the national debt in his presidency than even President Biden has up to this point.

While focus group participants claimed that they were concerned with the mounting national debt, they admitted that they do not expect anyone to be able to do anything about it, which led them to completely dismiss the attack on President Trump. This ad also had limited impact on Trump’s ballot support or those willing to consider supporting him according to an online randomized controlled experiment.

APPENDIX B – SOUTH CAROLINA TEST

Similar to our Iowa media campaign, we chose to run a combination of three ads (see ads 1-3 on page 2) in the Greenville media market in South Carolina. We dedicated 1000 GRPs on broadcast, Fox News, and CTV for each ad. This media campaign cost roughly \$1.8 million. South Carolina media markets where we did not advertise served as our control group. We conducted n = 500 surveys in the treatment and control areas before and after the ad campaign. This test helped to validate the results of our Iowa media campaign in a less cluttered environment.

Table 2. Impact of Anti-Trump Ads in South Carolina

Key Measurements	Target DMAs		Control DMAs		Effect of Treatment
	Poll 1 7/6-7/10	Poll 2 7/30-8/2	Poll 1 7/6-7/10	Poll 2 7/30-8/2	Poll 1 to 2
Trump Image					
Total Favorable	77	73	74	78	-8
Very Favorable	55	50	52	56	-9
Full Ballot					
Total Trump	49	46	43	47	-7
Head-to-Head Ballot					
Total Trump	58	54	53	57	-8
Trump Margin	26	19	20	25	-12
Consider Voting for Trump					
Total Consider	79	76	76	80	-7
Definitely Consider	61	56	53	59	-11
Net Consider	59	53	54	61	-13
Trump Viewpoint					
Good POTUS/Best Candidate	49	46	44	47	-6

Methodology: WPA Intelligence conducted separate polls of n = 500 likely South Carolina Republican primary voters in the Target DMAs and Control DMAs. Data was collected July 6-10 and July 30-August 2 by live telephone interviews with 56% of interviews conducted to cell phones and 44% to landline phones. The samples were selected from the state voter file and were stratified by geography, age, gender, and vote history to ensure a representative sample. The surveys have margins of error of ±4.4%.

Please refer to descriptions provided below table 1 on page 3 to interpret the table above.