IMMIGRATION ◄◄◄ NEW MESSAGING

HOW TO TALK ABOUT IMMIGRANTS IN AMERICA

Winning messages *Engage the Base, Persuade the Middle, & Provoke the Opposition* to reveal their true colors. This new immigration messaging was developed with the input of over 100+ advocates from over 50+ allied Labor, Progressive, and Immigration organizations. We then refined the best messages through 6 focus groups of voters in 3 cities and then dial-tested these with a national representative sample of 1145 voters. These are the words that work for us to talk about immigrants in America. Use the words that work to win.

Replace These …	With These …
Undocumented Workers	Aspiring Citizens
Illegal Aliens	New Americans
Illegal Immigrants	New American Immigrants
Reform Immigration System	Create an Immigration Process
Pathway to Citizenship	Roadmap to Citizenship
Paying Taxes	Commitment to Country
Do Jobs No One Wants	Contribute to Our Culture
No Human is Illegal	All People have Rights
Secure the Borders	People Move
Rule of Law	Freedom

Elevate the Debate & Connect with Values

"Message frames that are effective tap into shared experiences and values while also affirming the American identity of immigrants."[1] Advertisers know the best **"branding"** creates a sense of shared identity between the product and the customer, where the consumer uses the product to express their personal identity and "sees themselves" in the product. Imagine that our customer is the persuadable audience, and our product is 'immigrants in America' – the best way to create a sense of shared identity between them is using the language of shared values. Always bridge with values that are commonly held and easily understood, only after that pivot to facts and figures (messages that begin with facts & figures fall flat). Better yet, start with values and then pivot to shared experiences, as mentioning statistics activates the analytical centers of the brain and silences valuable emotional impulses.[2] The words that win on immigration will rely upon these emotional impulses and shared values to create a shared sense of identity between immigrants, advocates, and the persuadable audience.

Thank you for using the words that win.

---

[1] Lake Research Partners, "Research findings from the dial survey and focus groups", America's Voice July 2012

[2] For examples, see "How Rational Thought Blocks Empathy" (pg. 238) in Dan Arielly's "The Upside of Irrationality".

WORDS THAT WIN
IMMIGRATION

Re-Branding Immigrants: Aspiring Citizens v. Illegal Aliens

The only reason to put the words '*illegal*' & '*alien*' next to each other is to criminalize and dehumanize a person as the basis of an anti-immigrant argument. '*Illegal*' is an ethnic slur that will soon sound like '*colored*' or '*wop*' (which stands for "without official papers"). This language is designed to win the argument for our opposition. One focus group participant said, "the first thing that pops in my head when I think of immigrants is illegal," and a person said in a post-survey interview, "Illegal is bad. Legal is good." Frank Luntz says, "The labels used to describe [immigrants] determines the attitudes people have toward them."[3] You will lose the argument using their terms.

DO SAY: Aspiring Citizens, New Americans, New American Immigrants
DON'T SAY: Illegal Aliens, Illegal Immigrants, Undocumented Workers

Aspiring Citizens ranks #1 among base (38%) and persuadable (38%) audiences, with fully half of all persuadable shifters choosing this option. As a contrast, the previously suggested language 'undocumented worker' only gets minor support from base (12%) and persuadable (16%). New Americans ranks a close 2nd with base (36%) and persuadable (27%) audiences, and it also garnered the most intense support among advocates.

Change the Frame: Freedom to Move v. Rule of Law

The current 'rule of law' framework for the immigration debate is challenging, but not insurmountable. Most debates devolve to the point where someone will say, "but they broke the law" and then the argument is over. As one DREAM Activist said, "This is a losing narrative. Accept criminality in the narrative, and the immigration reform 'solution' will treat immigrants like criminals. It's that simple."[4]

DO SAY: Freedom to Move, Land of Freedom & Opportunity, People Move
DON'T SAY: Rule of Law, Broke the Law, Secure our Borders

With near unanimity, when asked to explain "who are immigrants", the response is "people who move." According to our survey, 70% of Americans have moved from the county they were born in, which illustrates the fact that Americans are a highly mobile population. Moving is a shared experience for most Americans, and they can relate to the hardships associated with moving. Connect this to the freedom to move, which is our unassailable moral high-ground. 'Freedom' was the #1 word association with 'America' in our focus groups, freedom is a dominant American value, and our laws must abide by our values (we change those that don't).

Policy Application: Create a Process v. Solve a Problem

As cognitive linguist Anat Shenker-Osorio points out, when we say 'reform immigration', we are communicating that immigration is a problem to be solved.[5] Many polls show Americans see Arizona-style deportation-only policies as a form of immigration reform, which is not good. 'Immigrants as a problem' is harmful for us.

DO SAY: Create a Process, Create a Common-sense Immigration Process, Roadmap to Citizenship
DON'T SAY: Solve the Immigration Problem, Reform Immigration System, Pathway to Citizenship

When you state that we need to "create a common-sense immigration process", you pre-suppose that the policy solution is to create a process where none currently exists (as Jose Antonio Vargas says, "there is no line to get into"). Watch the metaphors evoked here too: following a 'roadmap' is something people do in a car to get to a destination, while following a 'path' is something animals do in a forest. Creating a policy that provides a "roadmap to citizenship for new Americans who aspire to be citizens" will be a winner for most Americans.
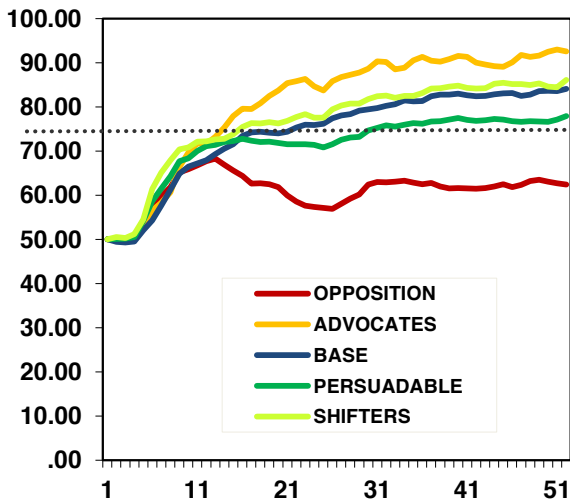
---

[3] Frank Luntz, "Words that Work: It's Not What You Say, It's What People Hear", pg. 284

[4] Flavia de la Fuente, "Dear Democrats, Change the Frame", DREAMactivist.org Dec 2010

[5] Anat Shenker-Osorio, "Migrating Our Message – the Language of Immigration Advocacy," Opportunity Agenda Sep. 2011

WORDS THAT WIN - IMMIGRATION
BEST WINNING MESSAGES

Define America

"America is a nation of values, founded on an idea - that all men and women are created equal. We hold these truths to be self-evident that all people have rights, no matter what they look like or where they came from. So how we treat new immigrants reflects our commitment to the values that define us as Americans. We believe that families should stick together, that we should look out for each other, and that hard work should be rewarded. You see, it's not about what you look like or where you were born that makes you American - it's how you live your life and what you do that defines you here in this country. That's why all Americans who love this country very much deserve a common sense immigration process, one that includes a roadmap for people who aspire to be citizens."

Dignity of Work
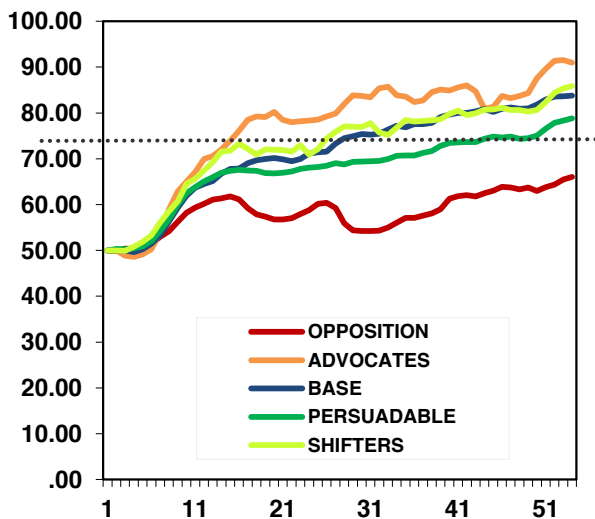
"Out of many cultures, our country's strength is grounded in our ability to work together as fellow Americans. From those who cook the food that we eat to those who create innovative businesses, new immigrants realize the value of working hard and doing your part in exchange for the blessings of liberty. As Americans, we all do our part to contribute, and we're all the better for having hardworking new immigrants as contributing members of our communities by being customers in our stores, paying payroll taxes, and giving to local churches and charities. All Americans living here come from diverse backgrounds and many different places; we are united by a deep respect for those who work hard for a living and a shared commitment to the country we all call home. America works best when we all do our part and work together as one nation, indivisible and strong."

IMMIGRATION ◀◀◀ NEW MESSAGING

Roadmap to Citizenship
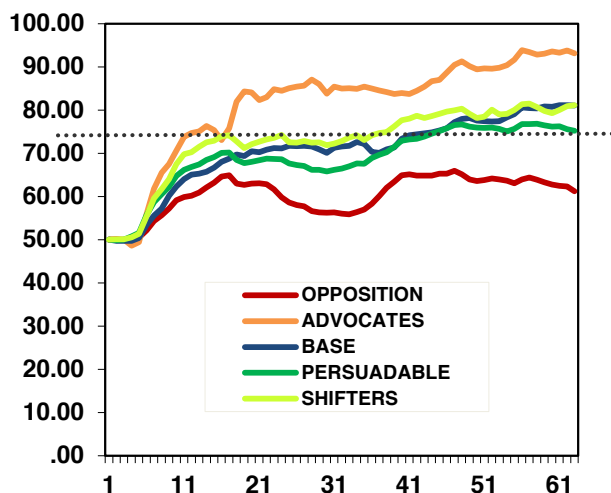
"America deserves a common sense immigration process, one that includes a roadmap for New Americans who aspire to be citizens. Everyone agrees that the current patchwork of policies and programs is mismanaged and broken, and it breaks up families. For those currently striving for citizenship, the current maze of regulations provides no light at the end of the tunnel, because there's often no line to get into for becoming a fully participating American. For aspiring citizens, the essential rights of citizenship should be attainable by taking a test of our history and government, paying an appropriate fee, and pledging allegiance to our country. People move their families here to the land of freedom and opportunity, in order to provide a better life for their children and contribute to our culture in this country. In order to do our part to welcome newcomers, we need to create a common sense immigration process that recognizes the hardships and contributions of people moving here, keeps families together here in this country, and creates a roadmap to citizenship for New Americans who aspire to be citizens."

People Move
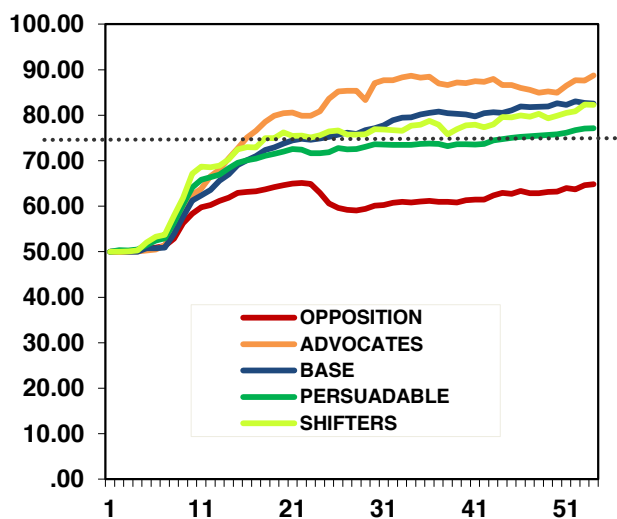
"The same is true today as it has been throughout history: people move to make life better for themselves and their families. It's hard to move - to pack up everything and go to a new place takes courage - but you do it in order to put food on the table, to provide for your family, or send your kids to a decent school. Immigrant Americans move here for the promise of freedom and opportunity in this country. People move in order to improve life, and we believe that moving to make a better life for your family is one of the best things and one of the hardest things a person can do. One of the values we hold dear to our hearts is a deeply rooted belief in the freedom to be who you want to be, say what you want to say, and go where you want to go. America is supposed to be the land of the free and the home of the brave - that's a good thing so let's keep it that way."

WORDS THAT WIN - IMMIGRATION
ATTACKS & RESPONSES

ATTACK: *"Immigrants are not real Americans."*

RESPONSE: It's not what you like or where you were born that makes you American – it's how you live your life and what you do that defines you here in this country. How we treat New Americans reflects our commitment to the values that define us as Americans. We believe that families should stick together, that we should look out for each other, and that hard work should be rewarded. No matter where you are from, what makes you American is your commitment to the country we all call home.

ATTACK: *"We should deport them all."*

RESPONSE: It's time to stop playing politics and focus on creating a common sense immigration process in our country that puts our values first and moves us forward together. No reasonable person believes we should deport all immigrants living here, especially since it would take 30 years and cost millions of dollars. Immigrants come here to provide a better life for their children and contribute to our culture in this country, and we're all the better for having them here. So let's find a common sense fix that puts our values first, creates a reasonable immigration process, and moves us forward together – that's what all Americans want.

ATTACK: *"Immigrants steal our jobs, drain public services, and don't pay taxes."*

RESPONSE: All types of immigrants, regardless of how they came here, contribute to our culture & economy. As Americans, we all do our part to contribute, and we're all the better for having hardworking new immigrants as contributing members of our communities by being customers in our stores, paying payroll taxes, and giving to local churches and charities. People around the world have moved here throughout history to work hard in order to make life better for the next generation, and the constant revitalization of the American spirit - bringing new energy, new cultures, and new ideas here – that makes us strong as a country.

ATTACK: *"Immigrants don't have rights."*

RESPONSE: All men and women are created equal, and fighting for your rights is the American way. We hold these truths to be self-evident that all people have rights, no matter what they look like or where they came from. In every generation, we've had brave individuals who choose to defend liberty and justice for all. No exceptions. Whether motivated by a sense of justice or a moral belief, the land of the free is always moved forward by brave people of good conscience standing on the correct side of history.

ATTACK: *"Immigrants should come here the right way or not at all."*

RESPONSE: Everyone agrees that the current patchwork of policies and programs is mismanaged and broken, and it breaks up families. For those currently striving for citizenship, there's often no line to get into for becoming a fully participating American. In order to do our part to welcome newcomers, we need to make America the most attractive place for the best, brightest, and hardest working people from around the world. For aspiring citizens, the essential rights of citizenship should be attainable by taking a test of our history and government, paying an appropriate fee, and pledging allegiance to our country.

ATTACK: *"Immigrants broke the law and should be sent back home."*

RESPONSE: People move to make life better for themselves and their families. Most families moved here in the past for the same reason that American immigrants move here today - to raise a family in a land of opportunity. It's hard to move - to pack up everything and go to a new place takes courage. People move in order to improve life, and we believe that moving to make a better life for your family is one of the best things and one of the hardest things a person can do. One of the values we hold dear to our hearts is a deeply rooted belief in the freedom to be who you want to be, say what you want to say, and go where you want to go. America is supposed to be the land of freedom and opportunity – that's a good thing so let's keep it that way.

* Language in responses drawn from all messages tested in the focus groups and the nationwide dial-test survey.

IMMIGRATION ◀◀◀ NEW MESSAGING

WORDS THAT WIN
10 THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT IMMIGRATION

1. **Immigrants are Americans.**
   Americans agree that immigrants are already American and contributing to our country in a variety of ways. The immigration debate is as much about how we define America as how we talk about immigrants. Always couch language regarding immigrants in the shared identity of being American. Always think 'us' not 'other'; if it is 'il' (i.e. "illegal") or 'un' (i.e. "undocumented"), then it is 'other'. Be confident in asserting this American identity – most Americans agree.

   "Even if you're not born in America, you can be an American."

	BASE	PERSUADABLE	OPPOSITION
Strongly/Somewhat Agree	98%	92%	74%
Strongly/Somewhat Disagree	1%	6%	23%

2. **Immigrants Contribute to America.**
   By emphasizing that immigrants contribute to America, most Americans assume they are already citizens who are beneficial to our communities, our economy, and our culture. Even for those immigrants who are not yet citizens, the vast majority of Americans agree that they contribute to our country. This point engages the base, persuades the middle, and provokes the opposition perfectly – repeat this point over and over again.

   "All kinds of immigrants, regardless of how they came here, contribute to our culture & economy."

	BASE	PERSUADABLE	OPPOSITION
Strongly/Somewhat Agree	94%	78%	37%
Strongly/Somewhat Disagree	6%	21%	59%

3. **Immigrants are Committed to America.**
   In focus groups, people expressed uncertainty about immigrants' desire to become full-fledged American citizens. They assume that the immigration process is accessible and therefore those who do not apply for citizenship must be avoiding it because they don't want citizenship. The good news is: yes, most immigrants want to become American citizens, are very committed to America, and love this country very much.

   "No matter where you are from, what makes you American is your commitment to the country."

	BASE	PERSUADABLE	OPPOSITION
Strongly/Somewhat Agree	95%	90%	67%
Strongly/Somewhat Disagree	3%	10%	29%

4. **Americans Don't Believe All Immigrants Pay Taxes.**
   It's true that all immigrants pay taxes, but many Americans refuse to believe it. One man in a focus group asked, "Why are they able to send their paychecks back down or wherever they are from tax free?" In this debate, 'paying taxes' is really a proxy for whether immigrants are committed to and contribute to America, but this is the worst possible way to argue that point. If you must talk taxes, say payroll taxes, which is the most believable version we discovered.

   "People who are here 'illegally' still pay taxes."

	BASE	PERSUADABLE	OPPOSITION
Strongly/Somewhat Agree	78%	39%	19%
Strongly/Somewhat Disagree	18%	50%	72%

5. **Speaking English is a Sore Spot.**
   Press 1 if you're tired of hearing this argument. The opposition keeps pushing it because it works, and this conversation inevitably arises in research on immigration. The 'speak English' conversation is one of the worst arguments to have regarding immigration, even among base constituencies. Pivot hard, & do it quickly.

   "Speaking English is a necessary part of being American."

	BASE	PERSUADABLE	OPPOSITION
Strongly/Somewhat Agree	70%	92%	96%
Strongly/Somewhat Disagree	29%	8%	3%

IMMIGRATION ◀◀◀ NEW MESSAGING

WORDS THAT WIN
10 THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT IMMIGRATION

6. **Deportation-Only Policies Only Work for the Opposition.**
   No reasonable person thinks it's worthwhile to deport 12 million immigrants, which is part of what makes our opposition so unreasonable. The good news is that we do have a strong majority in the base and a small majority in the middle that oppose deportation-only solutions.

   "All 'illegal' immigrants should be deported."

	BASE	PERSUADABLE	OPPOSITION
Strongly/Somewhat Agree	12%	43%	77%
Strongly/Somewhat Disagree	87%	53%	18%

   But that doesn't mean Americans are ready for "your tired, poor, wearied masses yearning to breathe free…"[6]

   "We should welcome immigrants, regardless of how they came here."

	BASE	PERSUADABLE	OPPOSITION
Strongly/Somewhat Agree	65%	36%	16%
Strongly/Somewhat Disagree	33%	62%	80%

7. **Economic Conversations are an Immigration Ambush.**
   This is another high-ground for conservatives in the immigration debate, especially when scapegoating immigrants for current economic anxiety. A typical way that immigrants are commodified is by saying "immigrants do jobs most Americans will not do", which confers 2nd class citizenship on them while creating a separation of identity between immigrants and Americans. Additionally, advocates rejected outright any reference to immigrants in terms of their economic value, whether beneficial or not. Even though the inclusion of immigrants in our country represents a net advantage for our economy, it is advisable to pivot out of this conversation rather than engage too deeply with it.

8. **Americans Don't Believe Families Get Separated.**
   Yes, it's happening every day. No, voters will not believe it. In one focus group, a participant rebuffed the moderator 3x when asked how she would react if American children were separated from their immigrant mothers, saying, "Personally, I don't think that occurs." Many focus group participants expressed the belief that American-born children leave the country with immigrant parents who are deported. While it is true and a tragedy that families are separated by deportation every day, there would need to be a significant amount of public education prior to using this fact for persuasive messaging on a national basis.

9. **Mind Your Metaphors.**
   Metaphors are cognitive simplifications that help us understand concepts where we lack direct experience. One dominant metaphor in the immigration conversation is 'nation as a house', which is a problematic simplification. Some of the evocations of this metaphor are "open our doors", "breaking in", and "guest worker". Using this metaphor directly taps into concepts promoted by the opposition because houses have owners who allow selected people to enter and rightfully keep others out, and people who enter without permission are committing a crime. Post-survey linguistic analysis indicates that using the metaphor of 'nation as body' (i.e. "backbone of this country", "more vital nation", "have new blood") is a much more useful metaphor to evoke for our purposes.[7]

10. **Diversity is a Source of American Strength.**
    The value of diversity is implied heavily in numerous messages, although the word 'diversity' is never mentioned overtly. In spite of that fact, many of the focus group participants and post-survey interviews made overt references to the value of diversity and how it makes America strong. This is a value worth pre-supposing and possibly stating outright, though that remains to be seen in future research concerning immigrants in America.

---

[6] Emma Lazarus, "The New Colossus," New York City 1883

[7] Anat Shenker-Osorio, "We Can Get There From Here: Language Analysis of New Immigration Messages", America's Voice July 2012

IMMIGRATION ◀◀◀ NEW MESSAGING

Always Remember: the Base is the Best Messenger of the Message.

In advertising, **"brand advocates"** are loyal customers that spread the word to their friends and family about your product, and substantial advertising dollars are spent on cultivating and equipping these advocates. Politically applied, your "brand advocates" are the base, who will spread your message if they like what they hear. Messages are like a baton that must be passed through millions of people in order to gain political traction. If you tell them something that is antithetical to their values, they will not spread your message. If your message does not spread, your words do not work. Winning is persuading uncommitted people to accept the assumptions held by our committed base of support, and that begins with training our base camp with words that work, that they will spread, and that are persuasive. The language presented above is new immigration messaging that *engages the base, persuades the middle, & provokes the opposition.*

Thank you for using words that win.

IMMIGRATION ◀◀◀ NEW MESSAGING
A COLLABORATION OF:

AMERICA'S VOICE
THE POWER TO WIN COMMON SENSE IMMIGRATION REFORM

Frank Sharry
202.463.8602 ext. 308
fsharry@americasvoiceonline.org

Lake Research Partners

Celinda Lake
202.776.9066
clake@lakeresearch.com

asocommunications
ANAT SHENKER OSORIO COMMUNICATIONS

Anat Shenker-Osorio
510.417.5955
anat@asocommunications.com

The Opportunity Agenda
Building the National Will to Expand Opportunity in America

Julie Rowe
212.334.5977
jrowe@opportunityagenda.org

Coordinated by:
Ryan Clayton
202.656.2116
ryanc@buying-time.com

IMMIGRATION ◀◀◀ NEW MESSAGING