

Key Findings from Research on Ending Violence against Girls and Women

November 9, 2012

Executive Summary

- Voters consider violence against girls and women important, though the issue is often pushed out by the intensity of the focus on the economy.
- Referring to “rape” and “abuse” heightens concern.
- When it comes to the issue of ending violence against girls and women, voters initially focus more at the community level than that national level, though after voters hear messages around violence against girls and women, we move people to see this issue as more of a national priority.



- Voters are most engaged today around taking action by personally intervening when they witness violence and working to introduce anti-violence curriculum in schools.
- People respond to education to prevent violence because they believe a major root cause of violence is cycles of violence learned in childhood, which affects both girls and boys.
- Educating about prevention is also an area where people feel they can publicly take action and are likely to be effective.
- Successful messaging strategies focus most on values rather than statistics, studies, or even social math. The strongest messages focus on human rights, right versus wrong, and tools to prevent violence.
- The least successful messages and facts revolve around health implications, small-scale socialization, women’s rights, and the cost to society.
- African American voters respond well to the impact on the community, and talking about the personal impact resonates well with Latino voters.

The Context

- **Voters tend to place the economy and jobs far ahead of violence against girls and women** and a host of other domestic and international priorities.
- **The top associations voters have with violence against girls and women are rape and abuse.** We should think about ways to speak to our audiences using language that resonates with them.

Root Causes of Violence

- Voters believe that two things are the primary root causes for violence against girls and women in the US:
 - Drug or alcohol abuse and addiction, particularly for men.
 - Cycles of violence that are learned in childhood and then passed on to the next generation, especially for women.
- A lack of parenting also resonates as a root cause.

Messages

- Our messages are stronger than our social math. **Messaging resonates at a core value level.**
- The most convincing messages focus on human rights, right versus wrong, and using education to prevent violence. **These messages tap into values and the sense that we can get something done.**
- These messages also resonate with voters who are already willing to take action.
- Our weakest messages are focused on health, women's rights, and the way gender norms can also contribute to violence.
- The best messages differ by race:
 - Among African Americans, the best testing messages are Human Rights and Community Impact.
 - Latinos focus on education and our personal connection to violence.



Text of Best Testing Messages:

[Human Rights]

Living a life free of violence is a basic right for everyone and it goes against our values when girls and women are beaten and raped. **All girls and women deserve the basic rights and fundamental freedoms of life, liberty, safety, and respect.** And when these rights are violated, we have a duty to help. No one should be subjected to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, and violence against girls and women is an extreme human rights violation that must be stopped.

[Right versus Wrong]

When we talk about violence against girls and women, it really comes down to right versus wrong. **When girls and women are beaten and raped, when they're killed or forced into prostitution just to survive, it violates what we believe in.** We are taught that you stand up for the vulnerable and fight injustice, even when it's hard. Violence against girls and women is not consistent with our values and not what our country stands for.

[Education to Prevent Violence]

Our education system plays an important role in preventing violence against girls and women. Schools are uniquely positioned to promote better attitudes and behavior among young people, and to help girls who are suffering or vulnerable. We need to educate boys to not turn to violence and to respect girls and we need to educate girls to have self-esteem. **Boys and girls who are empowered through this kind of education are less likely to engage in violence or to think violence is acceptable.** We all know

schools have a lot to deal with, so as a community we should support them in their role in ending violence.

Social Math

- We gave voters a series of facts about violence against girls and women and asked them if these facts made them more or less likely to want to get personally involved.
- **The most motivating statements were focused around teens and girls:**
 - Forty percent of teenage girls ages 14 to 17 say they know someone their own age who has been hit or beaten by a boyfriend.
 - At least one in three girls is sexually abused by the time she reaches the age of 18.
- The statement about underreporting sexual assault and rape was compelling, too.
- **Facts did not work as well as the messages.** This issue is about moral values rather than facts or transactional issues like assessments of cost.
- Indeed, the fact that resonated the least with voters centered on the cost of violence to society.

Ending versus Preventing Violence

- Although we heard pushback in focus groups about how realistic the goal of ending violence is, we see in the data that both “ending” and “preventing” violence test well.
- A majority are more likely to vote for a candidate who would make ending OR preventing violence a priority for the community. While voters support these priorities, intensity is low for both and lowest for ending violence.
- However, we do see tax sensitivities to this priority as voters are not sure we can afford expenditures in the area.
- **A solid majority say they are likely to get involved in either ending or preventing violence in their community.**



Priorities for the Government and Communities

Initially, voters tend to put the issue of reducing and ending violence against girls and women as a lower priority for the U.S. government.

- **However, voters are initially more likely to see this as a priority for our communities.** When we frame the question as a priority for our communities, a majority say it should be a top priority or one of the top priorities.



- After voters hear more information about violence against girls and women, they shift their views about it being a priority for the U.S. government. They respond similarly to violence against girls and women as a priority for the nation and our communities.
- The economy, however, is clearly pushing this and many other issues out of the public eye.

Taking Action

- Noticeably, the actions that voters see themselves taking involve intervening directly if they see someone inflicting violence on a girl or woman.
 - Reach out to authorities if they see someone inflicting violence on a girl or woman
 - Speak up if they see someone inflicting violence on a girl or woman
- All other actions were much lower in intensity.
- Of all the actions, only reaching out to television stations about the way girls and women are portrayed was something voters did not see themselves being likely to do, even though the media is seen as having a major impact.

Barriers to Getting Involved

None of the barriers we tested resonates particularly well.

- The most compelling barrier to voters is that individuals do not want to intervene because it can be personally dangerous. This was especially salient to seniors, Independent women, unmarried women, African Americans, Latinos, voters in the West South Central region*, and New England women*.
- There are also tax sensitivities in this area, as in most areas right now. Many movements are struggling to overcome these sensitivities.

SWOT Analysis

Strengths

- We have broad appeal.
- Voters have strong associations with rape and abuse when they think about violence against girls and women.
- Our top messages resonate at a core value level.
- We can talk about either preventing or ending violence, as voters show little difference in their responses.



Weaknesses

- We do not have strong intensity. Getting people to agree is not the issue, getting intensity in agreement and action is.
- Voters do not prioritize violence against girls and women. Instead they focus on the economy and jobs.
- The only actions voters see themselves taking involve intervening if they see someone inflicting violence. Right now, they are substantially less willing to take other actions.

Opportunities

- Voters orient themselves at the community level and would like to see community action.
- We can tap into voters' values by using our top tier messages.
- Voters see the cycle of violence that is learned in childhood as a root cause, and believe education among young people in the schools is advantageous.
- The prevention frame resonates strongly with voters.

Threats

- No barriers overwhelmingly resonate with voters, which makes addressing barriers difficult.
- Additionally, reasons they do not get involved are diffuse. This makes it hard to address since we cannot go in and surgically answer.
- Voters are concerned about getting involved because of worries around personal safety, which could be difficult to alleviate.
- Voters are tax-sensitive and do not think we can afford expenditures in this area.

Recommendations

- Leave the statistics at home and focus on the values and messages that matter to voters.
- Focusing on girls in messaging and facts (when you use them) tend to work better than focusing on women alone.
- Work “rape” and “abuse” into the language you use around violence against girls and women since these words resonate with our audiences.
- Talk about men being raised to not respect women, rather than girls and women not being valued.
- Talk about low self-esteem among girls in relation to violence, rather than a lack of opportunities as a root cause of violence.
- We can talk about ending violence or preventing violence as voters respond similarly, however, we should keep in mind that focus group participants raised issues about the reality of being able to end violence. Moreover, prevention is the most action-oriented frame.
- It is better to focus on values than on the cost to society.
- Practice message discipline and focus messaging on the three top messages: human rights, right versus wrong, and education to prevent violence.

