Speaking to Core Beliefs: Communicating about Immigration in 2019-2020

Stephen Hawkins – Director of Research
More in Common
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Executive Summary

1. We found compelling evidence that balancing competing values works. The three immigration messages designed to speak across core beliefs rank first, second, and third of the ten that were tested.

2. Polarization is deep. The statements that receive the highest level of agreement from Devoted Conservatives and the lowest agreement from Progressive Activists, and vice-versa.

3. Ideological orientation predicts immigration stance the best, but support for balanced messaging cuts across demographic groups, including race and gender.

4. The winning message: "America can be both strong and compassionate. We can protect our borders from criminals and terrorists at the same time that we welcome immigrants who respect our laws and embrace American values."
   - It received 78% overall agreement score, with a low of 74% and high of 85%; 80% describe it as either fair, reasonable, or kind, and 67% say it makes them feel either happy, proud, excited, or hopeful.
Theory and Approach
Overview of Study

**Our Hypothesis:** If we communicate about controversial political subjects with language that balances competing core beliefs, then we will achieve broad reach and resonance across Americans of different political, psychographic and demographic profiles. For instance, by appealing simultaneously to the competing moral foundations of authority and care, we can generate agreement on a general approach to immigration among a majority of Americans.

**Perceived Value:** Message testing guided by an appreciation for core beliefs yields a deeper understanding of the causal relationship in communications than the standard message test. Understanding and quantifiably evaluating the principles for why certain themes and words “work” provides us and our partners greater capacity to increase the efficacy of communications, while also expanding the array of audiences we can successfully engage.
Step 1: In Hidden Tribes, we collected data on immigration topics and Core Beliefs

Attitudes about immigration [partial list]:
- Feeling thermometer towards Mexicans, immigrants, refugees
- Contribution of immigrants
- Shared values with immigrants
- Support for border wall
- Economic impact of immigration
- Support for DACA
- Support for refugee sponsorship
- Support for travel ban on Muslims
- Support for sanctuary cities

Core Beliefs [partial list]:
- Moral Foundations Theory
- Perception of Threat
- Authoritarianism
- Agency and causality
- Group identities
Step 2: We ran cross tabulation analysis of which Core Beliefs matter most

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Which do you agree with more?</th>
<th>Care Moral Foundation</th>
<th>Fairness Moral Foundation</th>
<th>Authority Moral Foundation</th>
<th>Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>All</td>
<td>Low care</td>
<td>High care</td>
<td>Difference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigration nowadays is bad for America, costing the welfare system and using resources that could be spent on Americans.</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>-11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigration is good for America, helping sectors of our economy to be more successful and competitive.</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Step 2: We ran cross tabulation analysis of which Core Beliefs matter most**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Immigration subjects</th>
<th>Most relevant Core Belief for Subject</th>
<th>Difference between high and low scores on Core Belief (absolute value percentages)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigration Impact</td>
<td>Authority</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sanctuary cities: info sharing</td>
<td>Authority</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sanctuary cities: enforcement</td>
<td>Care</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sanctuary cities: deportation</td>
<td>Authority</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sanctuary cities: tax dollars</td>
<td>Care</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undocumented impact on jobs</td>
<td>Authority</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employers responsibility jobs</td>
<td>Authority</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opposition to building border wall</td>
<td>Authority</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pro-DACA</td>
<td>Authority</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support for Pathway to Citizenship</td>
<td>Authority</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refugee responsibility</td>
<td>Authority</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refugees are dangerous</td>
<td>Authority</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opposition to ‘Muslim Ban’</td>
<td>Authority</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support refugee sponsorship</td>
<td>Authority</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average difference across items</td>
<td>Authority</td>
<td>15%</td>
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</tbody>
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Step 2: We ran correlation analysis of which Core Beliefs matter most

Core Belief Correlations with Key Issues

- **Authoritarianism**: 0.15, 0.21, 0.26
- **Rights and Responsibility**: 0.55, 0.49, 0.49
- **MFT: Authority**: 0.42, 0.41, 0.54
- **Group Favoritism: Immigrants vs. Citizens**: 0.64, 0.60, 0.71
- **Party ID**: 0.66, 0.55, 0.55

Issues:
- Trump Approval
- Border Wall
- Muslim Ban
Step 3: We then developed messages that appeal to these most relevant Core Beliefs

**Personal Agency & Responsibility**
- Rights
- Responsibility

**Group Favoritism**
- Discrimination
- Reverse Discrimination

**Moral Foundations**
- Loyalty
- Betrayal
- Care
- Harm
- Authority
- Subversion
Message Development
## Liberal Core Beliefs Messages

<table>
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<tr>
<th>L1</th>
<th>L2</th>
<th>L3</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Care OVER Loyalty (In-Group) AND Authority</td>
<td>Group Favoritism - Correct Oppression</td>
<td>Care OVER Authority</td>
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### L1
Our immigration system focuses too much on whether someone has legal status. The priority should not be on building walls, but on helping families and individuals to escape poverty and danger and begin a better life.

### L2
For much of America’s history, white people have exercised power and privilege over people of color, including immigrants. We need to dismantle all systems of oppression in America today, including our unjust immigration enforcement system.

### L3
When I see the way that children have been separated from their parents on the US border, I feel that our country has totally lost sight of what matters. We’ve stopped being human and it’s shameful.
# Balanced Core Beliefs Messages

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<th>B3</th>
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<td><strong>Fairness:</strong> Rights AND Responsibility</td>
<td><strong>Authority, Loyalty (In-Group) AND Care</strong></td>
</tr>
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## B1 - Care AND Loyalty (In-Group)

I believe that we can be compassionate towards people coming to our border while still being committed to our citizens. We should help people in tough situations, so long as American people who need help get it too.

## B2 - Fairness: Rights AND Responsibility

Immigrants who came to America as children without legal permission should not be punished. But as adults they should be expected to learn English, to find work, to pay taxes, and to respect the law.

## B3 - Authority, Loyalty (In-Group) AND Care

America can be both strong and compassionate. We can protect our borders from criminals and terrorists at the same time that we welcome immigrants who respect our laws and embrace American values.
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<th>C2</th>
<th>C3</th>
<th>C4</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Loyalty/Betrayal OVER all others</strong></td>
<td><strong>Group Favoritism - Perceived overcorrection or oppression</strong></td>
<td><strong>Authority OVER all others</strong></td>
<td><strong>Authority AND Fairness (As Accountability) OVER all others</strong></td>
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<td>It makes me angry that some cities and states are shielding illegal immigrants and refusing to cooperate with federal government and ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement). It’s a betrayal of America to not enforce our borders and our citizenship laws.</td>
<td>It bothers me that you can’t talk about immigration without being afraid of getting called “racist”. I don’t care about skin color, but I do care about American values and being safe from gangs and crime.</td>
<td>To me it’s very simple: undocumented or illegal immigrants have broken the law. That’s disrespectful to our country, our laws, and to me. Illegal immigration is immoral: like breaking into someone’s home.</td>
<td>It’s not politically correct to say this, but a lot of people coming to the US border make fake asylum claims. Our country should send a clear message and turn these people away.</td>
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Fieldwork Methodology
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Details
• Sample size: 2,100 representative of US population; messages were split-sampled 50:50
• Sample detail: participants of original Hidden Tribes study
• Methodology: online
• Fieldwork dates: June 18 – 25, 2019
• Vendor: YouGov
• Margin of error: +/- 3% and higher for subgroups

Metrics
• Agreement (scale: 0-100)
• Description of statement [ignorant, naive, harsh, fair, reasonable, kind, none]
• Emotion it makes you feel [angry, sad, embarrassed, frustrated, proud, happy, excited, hopeful, none]
• Highlight words agree with most
• Highlight words disagree with most
Findings by Hidden Tribes
## Top 5 Messages

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Core Belief Orientation</th>
<th>Message Text</th>
<th>All</th>
<th>Progressive Activists</th>
<th>Traditional Liberals</th>
<th>Passive Liberals</th>
<th>Politically Disengaged</th>
<th>Moderates</th>
<th>Traditional Conservatives</th>
<th>Devoted Conservatives</th>
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<td><strong>B3</strong> Authority, Loyalty (In-group) and Care</td>
<td>America can be both strong and compassionate. We can protect our borders from criminals and terrorists at the same time that we welcome immigrants who respect our laws and embrace American values.</td>
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<td>85</td>
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<td>83</td>
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<td>78</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>C2</strong> Group Favoritism – Overcorrection</td>
<td>It bothers me that you can’t talk about immigration without being afraid of getting called “racist”. I don’t care about skin color, but I do care about American values and being safe from gangs and crime.</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>75</td>
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<td>88</td>
<td>95</td>
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<td>When I see the way that children have been separated from their parents on the US border, I feel that our country has totally lost sight of what matters. We’ve stopped being human and it’s shameful.</td>
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<td>C4 Authority, Fairness over others</td>
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<td>L2 Group Favoritism – Correct Oppression</td>
<td>For much of America’s history, white people have exercised power and privilege over people of color, including immigrants. We need to dismantle all systems of oppression in America today, including our unjust immigration enforcement system.</td>
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</table>
Findings by Gender and Race
## Core Beliefs

### Message Text

America can be both strong and compassionate. We can protect our borders from criminals and terrorists at the same time that we welcome immigrants who respect our laws and embrace American values.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Core Beliefs</th>
<th>Message Text</th>
<th>All</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
<th>Asian</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td></td>
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<td>B2 Fairness: Rights and Responsibility</td>
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Findings by Party
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Core Beliefs Orientation</th>
<th>Message Text</th>
<th>All</th>
<th>Strong Democrat</th>
<th>Lean Democrat</th>
<th>Not very strong Democrat</th>
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<td>To me it’s very simple: undocumented or illegal immigrants have broken the law. That’s disrespectful to our country, our laws, and to me. Illegal immigration is immoral: like breaking into someone’s home.</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Favoritism – Correct Oppression</td>
<td>For much of America’s history, white people have exercised power and privilege over people of color, including immigrants. We need to dismantle all systems of oppression in America today, including our unjust immigration enforcement system.</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Care Over Loyalty (in-group) And Authority</td>
<td>Our immigration system focuses too much on whether someone has legal status. The priority should not be on building walls, but on helping families and individuals to escape poverty and danger and begin a better life.</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>75</td>
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</table>
Descriptions and Emotions
Generated by Messages
### Descriptions of Messages: US Average

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Which word best describes this statement?</th>
<th>Fair</th>
<th>Reasonable</th>
<th>Kind</th>
<th>Sum of Positives</th>
<th>Harsh</th>
<th>Ignorant</th>
<th>Naive</th>
<th>Sum of Negatives</th>
<th>None of the above</th>
<th>Net Description</th>
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<td>15</td>
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<td>37</td>
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<td>17</td>
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<tr>
<td>L2 Group favoritism – correct oppression</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>42</td>
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<td>24</td>
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<tr>
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<td>4</td>
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<td>C2 Group favoritism – overcorrection of oppression</td>
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<td>C4 Authority and fairness (as accountability) over all others</td>
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<td>22</td>
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### Emotions Generated by Messages: US Average

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What emotion does this statement make you feel the most?</th>
<th>Proud</th>
<th>Happy</th>
<th>Excited</th>
<th>Hopeful</th>
<th>Sum of Positives</th>
<th>Angry</th>
<th>Sad</th>
<th>Embarrassed</th>
<th>Frustrated</th>
<th>Sum of Negatives</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>1</td>
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<td>-11</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>L2</strong> Group favoritism – correct oppression</td>
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Appendix: Summary Slides
Our immigration system focuses too much on whether someone has legal status. The priority should not be on building walls, but on helping families and individuals to escape poverty and danger and begin a better life.

Assessment of Message

Emotional Resonance

Agreement

AVERAGE

53%

OVERALL RANK

10/10

HIGHEST
Progressive Activists

87%

LOWEST
Devoted Conservatives

10%
Summary: Group Favoritism – Correct Oppression

For much of America’s history, white people have exercised power and privilege over people of color, including immigrants. We need to dismantle all systems of oppression in America today, including our unjust immigration enforcement system.

Assessment of Message

Emotional Resonance

Agreement

OVERALL RANK

HIGHEST
Progressive Activists

LOWEST
Devoted Conservatives

54%
Summary: Care OVER Authority

When I see the way that children have been separated from their parents in the US border, I feel that our country has totally lost sight of what matters. We’ve stopped being human and it’s shameful.

Assessment of Message

Emotional Resonance

Agreement

AVERAGE

58%

OVERALL RANK

5/10

HIGHEST

Progressive Activists

95%

LOWEST

Devoted Conservatives

9%
**Summary: Care AND Loyalty (In-Group)**

I believe that we can be **compassionate** towards people coming to our border while still **being committed** to our citizens. We should help people in tough situations, so long as American people **who need help** get it too.

**Assessment of Message**

- **Affirmation**
  - None of the above 8
  - Fair 40
  - Reasonable 13
  - Kind 21
  - Total: 74%
  - Net Description: 55%
  - Total: 19%

- **Rejection**
  - None of the above 8
  - Naive 13
  - Ignorant 4
  - Harsh 2
  - Total: 74%
  - Net Description: 45%
  - Total: 19%

**Emotional Resonance**

- **Positive**
  - None of the above 23
  - Hopeful 42
  - Excited 2
  - Happy 6
  - Proud 6
  - Total: 56%
  - Net Description: 35%

- **Negative**
  - None of the above 8
  - Angry 21
  - Sad 3
  - Embarrassed 1
  - Frustrated 13
  - Total: 83%
  - Net Description: 57%

**Agreement**

- **Average**: 72%

**Overall Rank**

- **Highest**: Progressive Activists 83%
- **Lowest**: Devoted Conservatives 57%
Assessment of Message

**AFFIRMATION**
- None of the above: 7%
- Fair: 48%
- Kind: 5%
- Reasonable: 25%
- Total: 78%

**REJECTION**
- Naive: 7%
- Ignorant: 6%
- Harsh: 1%
- Total: 14%

Emotional Resonance

**POSITIVE**
- None of the above: 31%
- Hopeful: 37%
- Happy: 1%
- Proud: 4%
- Total: 45%

**NEGATIVE**
- Frustrated: 15%
- Sad: 3%
- Angry: 1%
- Embarrassed: 5%
- Total: 24%

Summary: Fairness: Rights AND Responsibility

Immigrants who came to America as children without legal permission should not be punished.

But as adults they should be expected to learn English, to find work, to pay taxes, and to respect the law.

Agreement

- AVERAGE: 74%
- OVERALL RANK: 2/10

- HIGHEST: African Americans - 80%
- LOWEST: Devoted Conservatives - 62%
America can be both strong and compassionate.
We can protect our borders from criminals and terrorists at the same time that we welcome immigrants who respect our laws and embrace American values.

Summary: Authority, Loyalty (In-Group) AND Care

Agreement
AVERAGE 78%
OVERALL RANK 1/10
HIGHEST
Traditional Liberals 85%
LOWEST
Asians 71%
Summary: Loyalty/Betrayal OVER all others

It makes me angry that some cities and states are shielding illegal immigrants and refusing to cooperate with the federal government and ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement). It's a betrayal of America to not enforce our borders and our citizenship laws.

Assessment of Message

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AFFIRMATION</th>
<th>REJECTION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None of the above 12</td>
<td>None of the above 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fair 14</td>
<td>Ignorant 17</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reasonable 28</td>
<td>Harsh 4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kind 2</td>
<td>Naive 23</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Emotional Resonance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>POSITIVE</th>
<th>NEGATIVE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None of the above 56</td>
<td>None of the above 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excited 5</td>
<td>Sad 8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Happy 1</td>
<td>Frustrated 11</td>
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<tr>
<td>Proud 3</td>
<td>Embarrassed 27</td>
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</table>

Agreement

AVERAGE 56%

OVERALL RANK 7/10

HIGHEST Devoted Conservatives 95%

LOWEST Progressive Activists 9%
Summary: Group Favoritism – Perceived overcorrection or oppression

It bothers me that you can’t talk about immigration without being afraid of getting called “racist”. I don’t care about skin color, but I do care about American values and being safe from gangs and crime.

Assessment of Message

Emotional Resonance

Agreement AVERAGE 67%
OVERALL RANK 4/10
HIGHEST Devoted Conservatives 95%
LOWEST Progressive Activists 18%
Summary: Authority OVER all others

To me, it’s very simple: undocumented or illegal immigrants have broken the law.
That’s disrespectful to our country, our laws, and to me. Illegal immigration is immoral: like breaking into someone’s home.

Assessment of Message

AVERAGE

Agreement

OVERALL RANK

HIGHEST Devoted Conservatives

LOWEST Progressive Activists

Emotional Resonance

POSITIVE

NEGATIVE

REJECTION

AFFIRMATION

None of the above

Fair

Naive

Ignorant

Kind

Harsh

None of the above

Hopeful

Excited

Happy

Proud

Frustrated

Embarrassed

Angry

None of the above

Net Description

Total

None of the above

65%

11%

7%

78%

14%

19%

14%

12%

16%

17%

28%
Summary: Authority AND Fairness (As Accountability) OVER all others

It’s not politically correct to say this, but a lot of people coming to the US border make fake asylum claims. Our country should send a clear message and turn these people away.

Agreement

OVERALL RANK 6/10

HIGHEST Devoted Conservatives 92%

LOWEST Progressive Activists 11%

Assessment of Message

Emotional Resonance
Thank you.