

How to Talk About Fraud & Build Support for the Public Good.

Grounding → A Very Abridged Account of Fraud

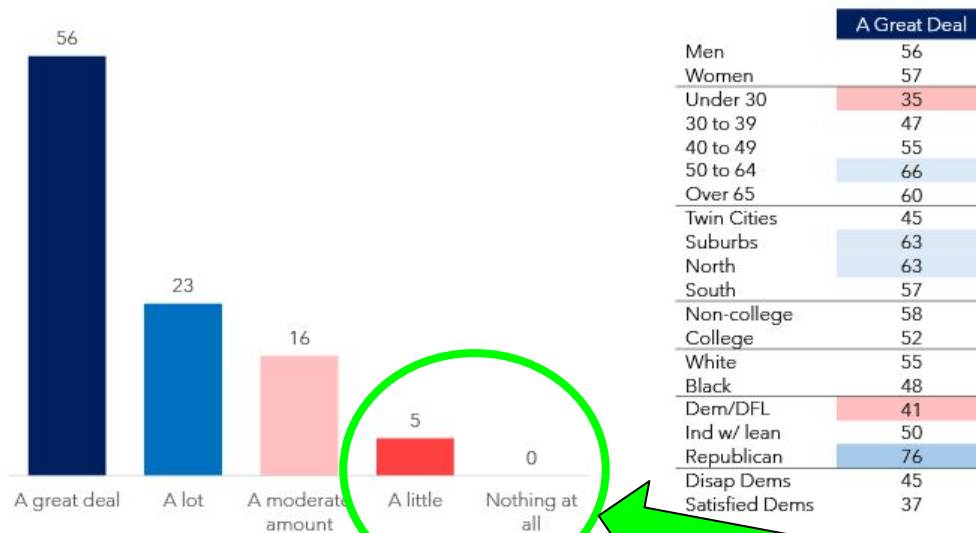
1. In our country's history, some have long contested who are “deserving” and “undeserving” of public goods and services to undermine role of government and program funding.
2. The Right runs narrative tests on fraud in Minnesota
3. Real fraud occurs in Minnesota. People are pissed and concerned.
4. Trump and MAGA go full tilt weaponizing real fraud to justify cuts and power grabs.

Awareness of Fraud Scandal

Over half of Minnesotans say they have heard a great deal about reports of fraud involving welfare and social service programs in Minnesota.

Awareness differs most by partisan identity as Republicans are more likely to have heard a great deal than Democrats, which is likely a reflection of increased coverage in right-wing media.

How much have you read, heard, or seen news about reports of fraud involving welfare and social service programs in Minnesota?



Grounding → The Narrative Landscape So Far

1. Don't talk about it
2. Try to Out-Crackdown Republicans

Recommendations

General Tips

- Acknowledge fraud
- Validate and redirect people's anger about fraud
- Avoid trying to “out-crackdown on fraud”
- Name political motivations behind concerted anti-fraud narratives
- Lead with support for the public good, e.g., what we are protecting.

Research Deeper Dive

Research Deeper Dive → Design

- Our research sought to identify the most effective message for countering the dominant right-wing narrative against social service programs while building support for public programs and services. In the main message test, respondents were divided into two groups.
- The first group heard the right-wing message followed by a “status quo” (a.k.a. Tough on Fraud Message) counter-message around holding people who commit fraud accountable.
- The second group heard the same right-wing message followed by a counter-message (“Exploit,” a.k.a. Our Message) that calls for accountability, asserts that politicians want to exploit this scandal in order to gut programs they have long sought to defund, and affirms the benefits of public programs and services that help people.
- After the messages, respondents were then asked about their willingness to take action in support of public programs, the importance they place in public programs, and re-asked a question on whether it is more important to ensure people access the public programs and services they need or prevent waste, fraud, and abuse of programs and services.

Research Deeper Dive → Results

- Attempts to simply redirect attention to a different issue, such as billionaires who avoid paying what they owe in taxes, does not address voters' underlying concerns.
- Any successful message must begin by acknowledging wrongdoing, committing to accountability, and assuring voters that similar abuses will not happen again.
- From the standpoint of trying to counter racialized narratives that seek to erode support in public services, “Exploit” is the stronger message.
- This message combines a clear commitment to accountability with an affirmative defense of public services. It is more successful at moving skeptical and persuadable voters toward prioritizing the protection of public programs while simultaneously rebutting attacks on them.

Research Deeper Dive → Results

- The “neighbors” message resonates strongly with core audiences.
- This message asserts the shared Minnesotan value of caring for our neighbors and roots it in the experience of coming together during Operation Metro Surge.
- It has an effective call to action in appealing to the same spirit again to protect essential services, and the people who need them, from politicians trying to exploit the fraud scandal.

Message Test

Everyone Hears Intro

As you may know, a recent investigation found a series of local non-profit organizations committed fraud that involved the theft of hundreds of millions of dollars from state-administered, federally funded social services.

Over 100 people have been indicted or arrested in the investigation, the federal government has withheld 2 billion dollars in Medicaid funding from Minnesota, and the state Department of Human Services had to revalidate over 5000 Medicaid providers.

Half Hear
"Right wing"
vs.
"Status Quo"
Response

Half Hear
"Right wing"
vs.
"Exploit"
Response

Everyone asked:

- ✓ If wanted to be contacted to join actions to protect social service programs
- ✓ Importance of public programs and services
- ✓ Re-ask of view toward programs and fraud

Message Test by View Toward Fraud

The larger agreement of the status quo message comes from pulling people who prioritize preventing fraud and abuse, even if that means reducing the number of people who get the help they need.

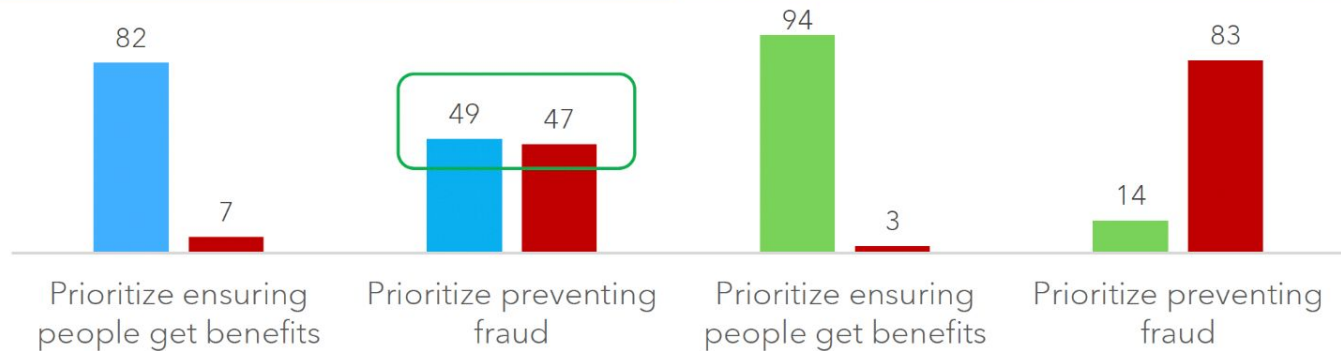
The status quo message is essentially a less rhetorically-loaded anti-fraud message that gets greater agreement by appealing to people who prioritize preventing fraud to begin with.

Which of the following statements is closer to your opinion?

Some people say that status quo politicians spent our surplus and let criminals steal billions of dollars of Minnesota taxpayers' hard-earned money rather than ask basic questions that might have seemed politically incorrect. The scale of this fraud is massive. Fraudsters bought luxury cars, took beach vacations, and enriched their families overseas with stolen funds. We need to clean up our state, end wasteful spending, and lead the way toward a nationwide anti-fraud agenda.

[SQ] Other people say we are right to be angry when public dollars are stolen. Fraud is real, and it costs our families and communities. That's why we need real accountability. That means going after the criminals who abuse our programs, prosecuting fraudsters to the fullest extent of the law, and making sure public resources reach the people they're meant to serve. No more looking the other way. If you cheat the public, you will answer for it.

[Exploit] In Minnesota, we look out for each other. When people defraud public programs, it violates our trust and makes us angry. We must hold criminals accountable and ensure this never happens again. But certain politicians exploit this crime and blame immigrants so they can cut things like healthcare funding to give their billionaire backers more tax cuts. We have to protect programs and services and ensure they reach the people who need them.



Race Class Narrative Segments

We added three worldview questions on race, class, and the role of government. We have used these questions for the last 9 years to create three audience segments first derived in the original Race Class Narrative research in 2017.

Base (36% of likely voters)

- Believe that wealthy Americans got their success because they were given more opportunities than others.
- Believe that people of color face greater barriers to economic success than white people, and
- Believe that government should do more to solve problems and help meet the needs of people.
- **Somewhat more likely** to be women, under 40, college-educated, live in the Twin Cities, and identify as Democratic.

Opposition (25% of likely voters)

- Believe that wealthy Americans got their success because they worked harder than others.
- Believe that people of color who cannot get ahead are mostly responsible for their own condition, or
- Believe that government does too many things better left to businesses and individuals.
- **Somewhat more likely** to be men, between 40-65, Republican, non-college educated, and live in Greater MN.

Persuadables (39% of likely voters)

- Divide on each dimension though tend to resemble base adults on race, and opposition adults on class and government.
- **Tend to look like the overall population, but are somewhat more likely** to be women, independent, over 65, and live in the Twin City Suburbs.

	All LV	Base	Pers	Oppo
Men	48	41	43	67
Women	51	57	56	33
Under 30	11	17	8	8
30-39	16	24	10	14
40-49	18	17	16	24
50-65	24	20	24	30
Over 65	30	22	41	24
Twin Cities	29	44	27	13
Suburbs	26	23	31	26
North	22	18	20	35
South	19	14	22	26
Non-College	55	45	59	63
College	43	55	39	31
White	85	89	84	80
Black	5	7	5	2
Democrat/DFL	43	82	34	0
Independent + Lean	31	19	38	36
Republican	33	1	37	70
Disappointed Dems	11	22	9	0
Satisfied Dems	42	74	38	1

NOTE: Respondents were able to select multiple racial and ethnic groups.

Countering Fraud

Both of our messages effectively counter the right-wing narrative among Persuadables.

Part of the success of the status quo message is that it pulls from Opposition voters.

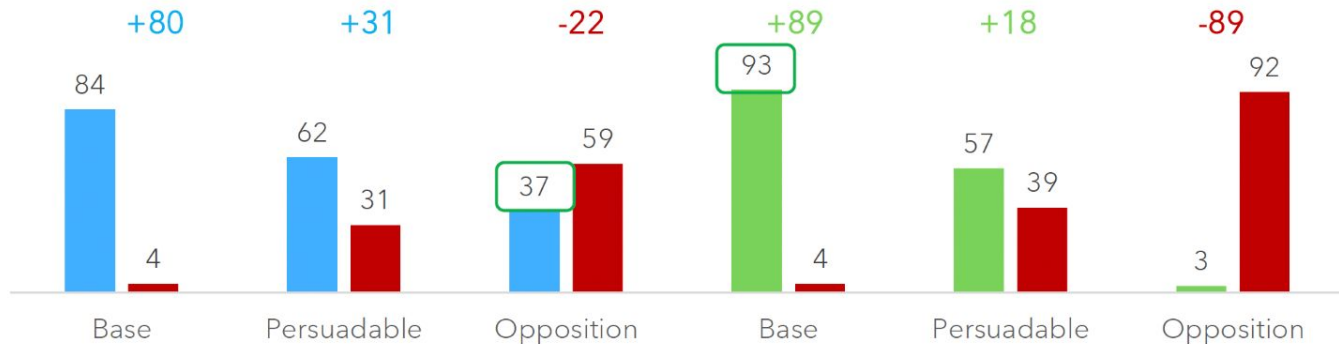
Persuadables agree with both the SQ and Exploit counters to the right-wing narrative, while the Exploit counter finds stronger agreement with Base voters.

Which of the following statements is closer to your opinion?

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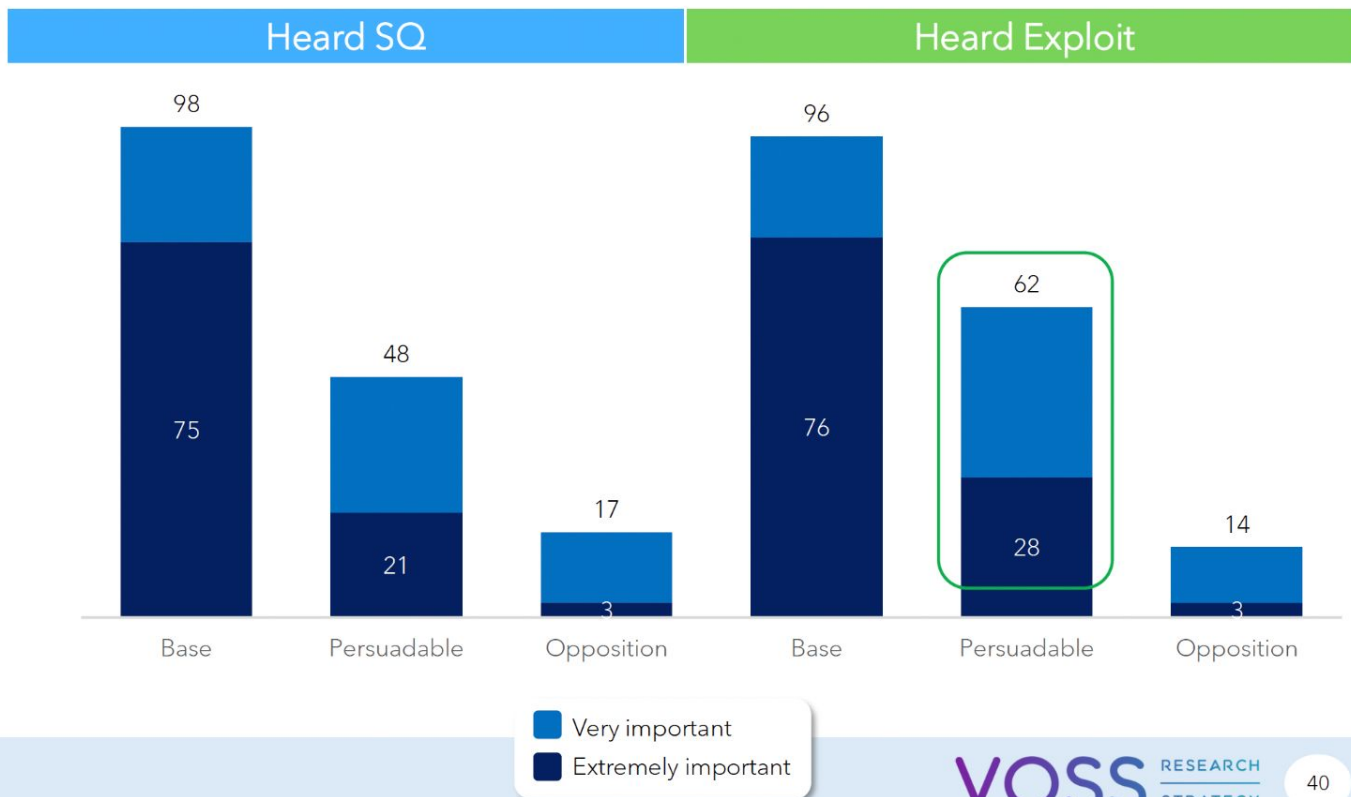
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Importance of Public Programs and Services

Persuadables are notably more likely to say that it is extremely or very important to them personally that our government provides enough funding for public programs and services that help people after hearing the Exploit message.

How important is it to you personally that our government provides enough funding for public programs and services that help people?



Shift on Social Service Programs

After hearing both messages, Persuadable voters are still more likely to prioritize preventing fraud.

However, they shift significantly toward prioritizing ensuring people who need help get the benefits these programs provide, even if some fraud and abuse occur after they hear the Exploit message.

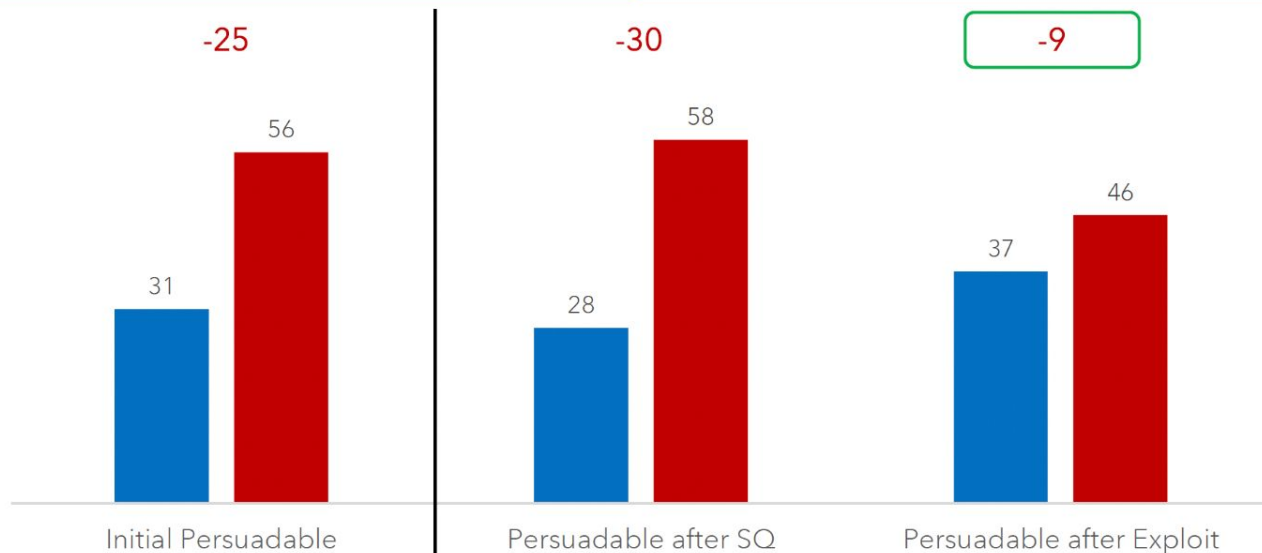
In contrast, the status quo message pushes Persuadables toward prioritizing preventing fraud even if that means reducing the number of people who get the help they need.

The status quo message in essence shifts the Overton window away from a pro-social services stance.

Which of the following is more important to you when you think about social service programs?
[By awareness of the scandal]

Ensuring people who need help get the benefits these programs provide, even if some fraud and abuse occur.

Preventing fraud and abuse, even if that means reducing the number of people who get the help they need.



Recommendations → Example Message

In Minnesota, we look out for each other. When federal agents targeted our neighbors, we stood together, shared food, and protected our communities.

When people defraud public programs, it violates our trust and makes us angry. We must hold criminals accountable and ensure this never happens again.

But today, politicians use real cases of fraud to justify cuts to healthcare, schools, and public services so they can give their billionaire backers more tax cuts.

We have to protect programs and services and ensure they reach the people who need them.

We want accountability for public dollars, but we won't let politicians divide us to cut programs people need. Minnesotans know that when neighbors stand together, everyone is stronger.

- ✓ Appeal to Minnesotan values around neighborliness.
- ✓ Celebrate the collective response to ICE.
- ✓ Acknowledge wrongdoing and make clear call for accountability.
- ✓ Spell out how politicians exploit this scandal to help their billionaire backers.
- ✓ Name popular programs – healthcare and schools.
- ✓ Make affirmative case for public programs and services that help people.
- ✓ Draw the line between accountability, exploitation and division.
- ✓ Appeal to defiance in a call to action.