Guaranteed Income:
A window of opportunity to frame the narrative

Communications Research Summary:
Audiences and Messaging

April 2024

Economic
Security
Project

Outcome: Win a federal guaranteed income in 10 years

via the GI Blueprint

Purpose:

The purpose of this combined (quantitative + qualitative) communications research is to understand how <u>current</u> and <u>persuadable</u> audiences can be identified and reached, to build a supportive public opinion environment for Guaranteed Income policies to be implemented.

Process:

1. Understand our potential audience, including what makes them likely or unlikely to support guaranteed income policies.

2. Understand the message frames, values, mindsets, policy parameters, messengers, and story strategies likely to expand and move our audience.

3. Define, segment and size supportive, persuadable, and skeptical audiences in support of GI in alignment with the values and frames researched

4. **Use the research!** Input for policy design, a lever to build field capacity & a toolkit for strategic communications

Qualitative

- → Research performed by Wonder + GSSR

- → 75 registered voters in Colorado, Georgia, Michigan, and Central/Southern Illinois.
- → Mix of online bulletin boards, focus groups, and in-depth interviews with oversampling for people of color.

Quantitative

- → Research performed by GBAO
- → n=6,000, US Gen Pop 18+ registered voters, national sample
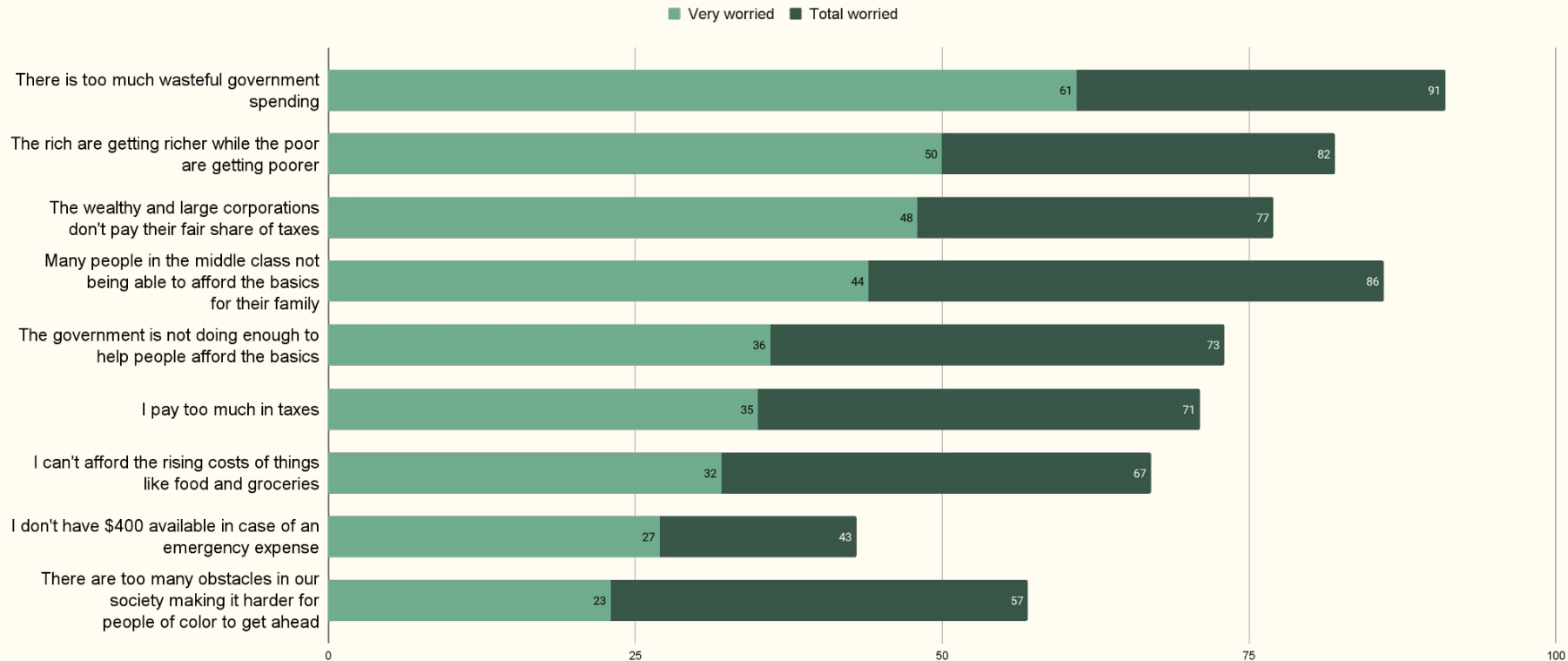- → Margin of error = ± 1.3 percentage points.

Headlines

➔ There is majority support for guaranteed income but it is not consistently defined as a concept

➔ There is a large swath of persuadable audiences on guaranteed income showing tremendous possibility for movement scale

➔ Persuadable audiences are not confined to traditional partisan ideologies and can be reached with values-based messaging

➔ To reach these audiences, we combine values-based messaging from trusted messengers and emphasizes pilot programs

➔ **A focus on persuadable and select swing audiences, coupled with effective narrative techniques, will achieve the goal of building national majority support for GI.**
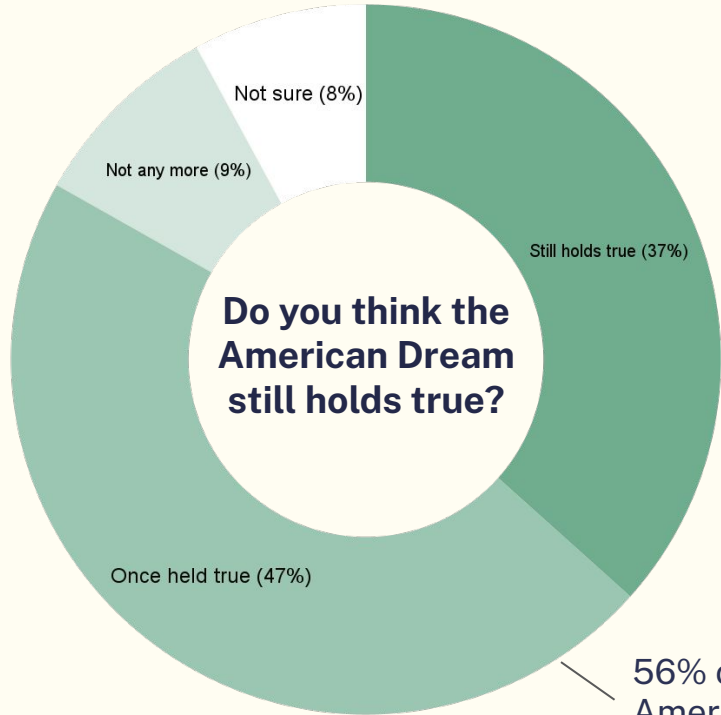
Audience Insights

Landscape

Voters are pessimistic about the overall U.S. Economy

Legend: ■ Very worried ■ Total worried

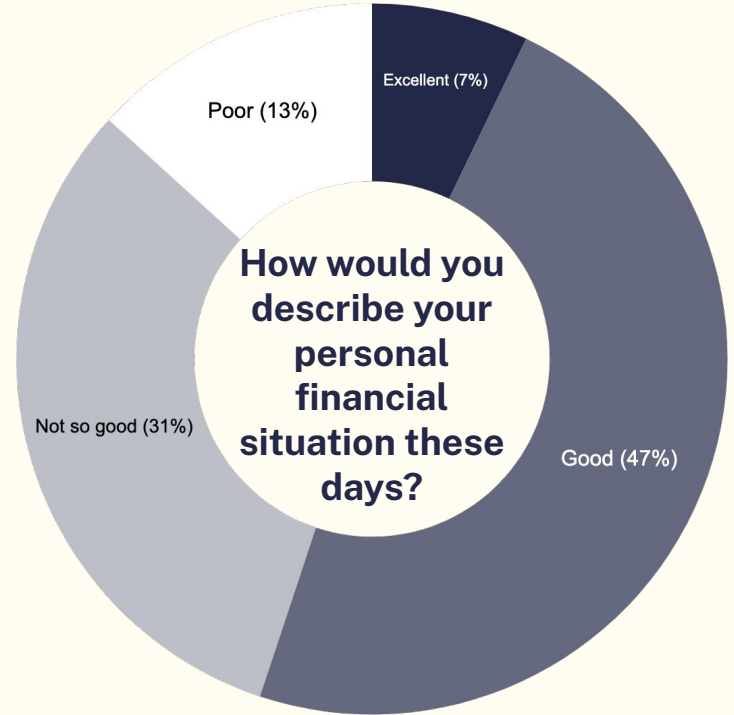| Statement	Very worried	Total worried
There is too much wasteful government spending	61	91
The rich are getting richer while the poor are getting poorer	50	82
The wealthy and large corporations don't pay their fair share of taxes	48	77
Many people in the middle class not being able to afford the basics for their family	44	86
The government is not doing enough to help people afford the basics	36	73
I pay too much in taxes	35	71
I can't afford the rising costs of things like food and groceries	32	67
I don't have $400 available in case of an emergency expense	27	43
There are too many obstacles in our society making it harder for people of color to get ahead	23	57

Landscape

Voters are less pessimistic about their individual economic circumstances than the economy overall, but even among those doing well financially, the problem of economic precarity is widely recognized
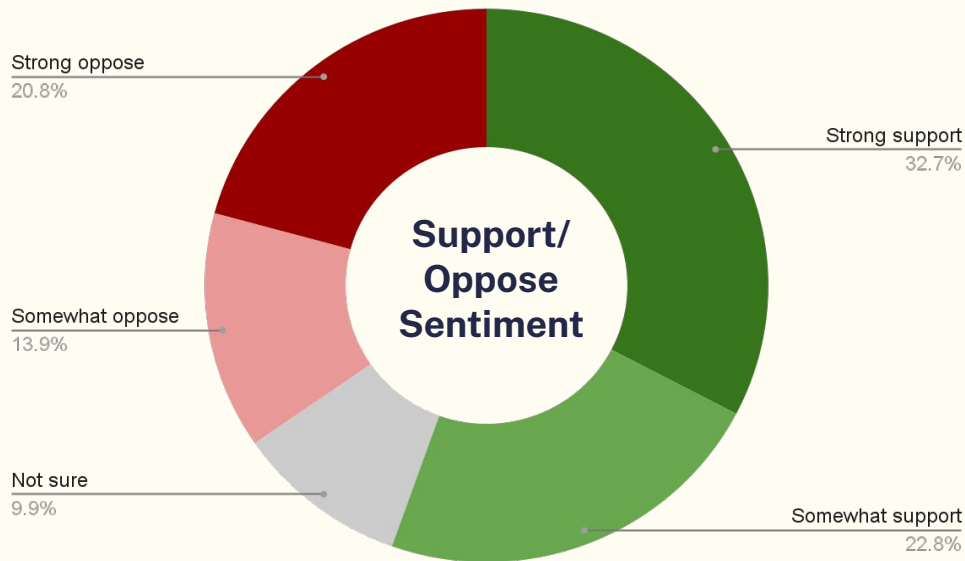

Do you think the American Dream still holds true?

- Still holds true (37%)
- Once held true (47%)
- Not any more (9%)
- Not sure (8%)

56% of voters believe the American Dream no longer exists.

How would you describe your personal financial situation these days?

- Excellent (7%)
- Good (47%)
- Not so good (31%)
- Poor (13%)

Insight #1

There is majority support for Guaranteed Income (GI)

56% of voters are supportive of GI

Strong oppose
20.8%

Strong support
32.7%

Somewhat oppose
13.9%

**Support/
Oppose
Sentiment**

Not sure
9.9%

Somewhat support
22.8%

When asked: "*Do you support or oppose establishing a Guaranteed Income in your area—regular monthly payments of about $500 that families can use on what they think is best for them, like food, gas, or to pay bills?*

Insight #2

GI is not consistently defined across the public and is largely misunderstood

"A minimum amount of regular income which a person can count on receiving to pay basic expenses."

"A standard amount given to all people by the government."

"People get paid for not working."

➔ GI is not yet defined in an entirely partisan way

➔ Uncertainty around what GI is opens up knowledge gaps and reasoning chains where people default to pre-existing biases and negative tropes

➔ Respondents are easily swayed by messages on both sides

➔ Given viewpoint fragility, there is a first-mover advantage to defining GI

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Insight #3

When issues like GI are unfamiliar, audiences can fall into a number of psychological traps which drive opposition to GI

Psychological Trap	Broken reasoning chains	Upstairs vs. Downstairs brain	"In-group" vs. "Out-group"
What it is	The trap of filling in gaps of understanding with misinformation based on their own lived experiences, biases, and other heuristics.	When the more primitive "downstairs brain" feels threatened or a sense of unfairness it can override the "upstairs brain" which governs empathy, compassion and morality.	The trap of preferring "people like me" and negatively stereotyping or "othering" those in the "out-group."
Example applied to GI	For those unaware of Guaranteed Income, that Guaranteed Income will disincentivize work or lead to illicit spending.	Initial skepticism or opposition often invokes a cheating framework that denotes people gaming the system or using tax dollars for non essential/luxury illicit activities.	When audiences perceive Guaranteed Income as available to low-income individuals this forces a social comparison creating an outgroup.
Potential strategies to counteract	Success metrics from pilot studies, particularly measures of effectiveness and lack of waste – and consider coupling with payment technologies that help govern category spending (e.g., prepaid debit cards.)	Participants overwhelmingly expressed an interest in time limits on payments, upskilling, and/or limits on the types of permissible expenditures, acting as proxies for responsibility. (Note: Work requirements were not mentioned.)	Emphasizing the reach of "GI is available to all but the highest earners" and a variety of potential benefits like personal advancement and initiative and that GI is not a replacement for work.

Audience Clusters

GI Supporters From Base + Persuadables Audience

College Democrat Strong supporters

MAGA Supporters

Base Democrat Soft Supporters

Econ Anxious Republican Fence-Sitters

Moderate Sr Dem Fence-Sitters

Concerned Opponents

Reagan Republican Opponents

Insight #4

Mindsets and values help us understand supportive and potentially supportive audiences–more so than political identities squarely

Intensity of Responses

#	AUDIENCE VALUE	Young & Anxious Strong Supporters	College Democrats strong supporters	MAGA supporters	Base Dem soft supporters	Econ Anxious Rep Fence-Sitters	Moderate, Senior Dem Fence-Sitters	Concerned opponents	Reagan Republican opponents
		40%	5%	6%	9%	9%	4%	8%	21%
1	"The government should do more to help people and businesses"	●	●	◔	●	◔	●	◔	○
2	"Government is doing enough/not enough to help with the basics"	●	●	●	●	●	○	●	○
3	"I/we don't have enough to cover a $400 emergency expense"	◔	○	●	○	◑	○	○	○
	Support for GI	85%	76%	60%	60%	44%	44%	25%	12%

➔ These three values around 1) the role of government, 2) government doing enough to help, and 3) personal economic precarity underpin this audience model

➔ They help identity both our "base + persuadable" audience as well as "swing" segments am how we grow the movement at scale.

Insight #5

"Base + Persuadables" feel a shared sense of economic precarity, forming the foundation of their support for GI

	BASE + PERSUADABLE AUDIENCE
	Young & Anxious Strong Supporters
% of US Registered Voters 18+	**40%**
Support GI	**85%**
Views on the U.S. Economy % Excellent/Good	**24%**
Condition of their personal finances % Excellent/Good	**33%**
Demographic profile	• Young voters Women, voters of color, Dems, non-college • HS or less • Non-college Dems • Non-college women • Black & Latino

Insight #6

"Swing Audiences" represent pockets of opportunity for growing support

	"SWING" AUDIENCES			
	College Democrats Strong Supporters	Base Democrat Soft Supporters	Economically Anxious Republican Fence-Sitters	Moderate Older Democrat Fence-Sitters
% of US Registered Voters 18+	5%	5%	9%	4%
Support GI	76%	60%	44%	44%
Views on the U.S. Economy % Excellent/Good	34%	55%	15%	68%
Condition of their personal finances % Excellent/Good	82%	88%	43%	91%
Demographic profile	• College educated • VOC college • Strong Dems • College Dems • Liberal • Dem women • College women	• Seniors (65+) • Older Dems • College-educated (white, older, Dem)	• Older non-college • Older Republicans • White non-college • Non-college Republicans	• Mod/Cons Dems • Seniors (65+) • Older voters (men, white, college, Dems) • College men • College Dems • White men • Amer Dream holds true

➔ MAGA should be deprioritized as a viable "swing" audience because this group lacks durability in their support and believes in less government
➔ Swing Dems: Less economically vulnerable at an individual level as "Base + Persuadables"
➔ Swing Republicans: Economically anxious Republicans share economic views of our "Base + Persuadables"; moderates show openness to a more expansive government role to address economic precarity

Narrative Insights

Insight #7

Persuasive comms blends the right message, messenger, and use of pilot program examples

## Messenger

Non-political, third-party validators including:

➜ local business owners
➜ school counselors
➜ Pediatricians
➜ small-town mayors
➜ and other types of local community leaders (pastors, chamber of commerce officials, etc.)

Message

➜ Enabling personal advancement and initiative
➜ Nurturing strong families
➜ Providing care for loved ones
➜ Strengthening communities

Pilots

➜ Pilots are the supporting evidence and add credibility
➜ Ease audiences discomfort around abuse and illicit spending, normalize GI as a mainstream popular idea for all but the highest earners

Messenger

Message

LOCAL FRAME

Pilots
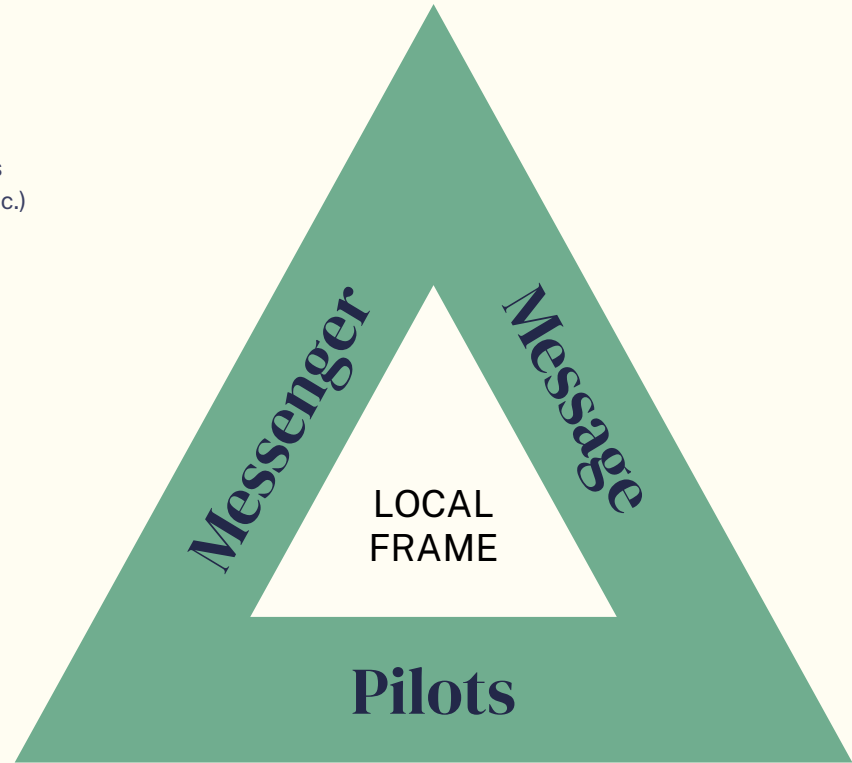
Insight #8

Messages that focus on elevating shared values around interconnectedness, shared community benefits, and hope are highly persuasive

- **Enabling Personal Advancement & Initiative**

  - Effective interventions showed how Guaranteed Income is a tool to attain advanced education, support entrepreneurship, and allow for greater success at work – themes adjacent to the value of work; this frame generated hope and optimism and was straightforward and relatable

- **Nurturing Strong Families**

  - Effective messaging interventions showed how Guaranteed Income helps to nurture strong families, reduce caregiver stress to make ends meet and give children what they need to thrive, resulting in benefits across the community; this is especially effective at connecting with women

- **Providing Care for Loved Ones**

  - Effective interventions showed how Guaranteed Income helped people to manage moments of crisis due to unaffordable care or unplanned emergencies for loved ones; these were met with empathy and compassion by nearly all participants

- **Inspire Hope**

  - Audiences that move toward becoming more supportive cite a feeling of hopefulness that their community will become better off as a result of Guaranteed Income

Insight #9

Messengers are just as important as message in building understanding and support

- **Non-political, community validators that are trusted messengers** should both speak to the societal value of rising tides and credibly validate the benefits of Guaranteed Income–on both a personal and community level; multiple respondents lifted up a connection to faith without prompting

- **GI participants are effective messengers** when they mirror shared identities, lived experiences, and/or motivations and demonstrate how they would (or have) used the money in ways that align with our audience's values and frames

- **Change-of-heart stories** mirror and acknowledge people's concerns about Guaranteed Income

- **Naming and acknowledging concerns about GI is important** in calming potential resentment that people will abuse the benefit by not working or using the money for leisure or illicit activities

"

It [Guaranteed Income] could make a big enough difference in some people's lives and I think back to how I had to start out with no help whatsoever, totally on my own. I don't wish that on anybody, so if that [Guaranteed Income] was able to give people a better start in life, then yeah I could go for it."

White man,
Low-Income,
Independent,
Colorado

Insight #10

Specifics from pilot programs help calm concerns and reduce skepticism of GI

Curated details and stories from pilots were extremely persuasive for respondents such as: the amount of money provided, how the money was spent (groceries, bills) and by what means (pre-loaded debit cards vs. cash), evidence that these pilots did not decrease workforce participation

Diversity of pilots – that reflect smaller more rural towns, not just larger metropolitan areas – are effective at demonstrating how GI can work in different geographic contexts, and are already being implemented successfully

Aim for credibility and relevance, not stats. Results from pilots show that these programs can work in communities like mine, with people like me. They expand the "in group" vs. try to prove themselves with economic stats alone.

"

"[After seeing the spending breakdown in the FAQ] It is not being abused. People aren't using it for something that they don't need like alcohol, drugs, the vices."

Hispanic man, Low-income, Democrat, Illinois

Insight #11

Existing messages around poverty alleviation, racial equity, and freedom will not drive increased support for GI

Anti-poverty themes do not appear to drive support for Guaranteed Income. Audiences expressed empathy for those in poverty, including those facing economic precarity, however – empathy was insufficient to move audiences to support

Audiences do not organically make connections between Guaranteed Income and **racial justice**. This is equally true for participants of color and those with lower incomes

The **value of freedom and "no strings attached"** elicits associations with "free money" as seen in opposition messaging today.

"People are going to be people. You've got some people that are going to use it for their betterment or their family's betterment. Then you've got some people that are just going to waste it, not value it, because it was freely given."

Black woman, High-Income, Democrat, Michigan

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Insight #12

Referencing the pandemic can be a double edged sword when attempting to grow support for GI

(+) The pandemic as a whole can serve as an effective proxy for unexpected emergencies and economic precarity can happen to anyone, without warning.

(-) Pandemic relief era programs denote fraud, waste and abuse and heighted latent concerns around cash being taken advantage of by bad actors.

Use references to the pandemic sparingly and strategically to create a shared sense of individual economic precarity as it underpins support for GI.

> "I think that people will be abusive towards the program. Money is going to run out. I don't think the government has got that much money. Eventually, it could just be overwhelmed with a lot of applicants and people that are trying to apply. It is not going to be enough money to go around. I keep hearing in the news about the COVID, all the people that took advantage of COVID funds, about the billions of dollars that the federal government lost because of citizens that were abusive towards it."

Hispanic man, Low-Income, Democrat, Illinois

> "I feel like there was a lot of misappropriation of funds. There were a lot of people who wouldn't have qualified if they did actual verification. And there were a lot of funds that can't be accounted for. I've seen the story of a guy who qualified four times and got $4 million and hasn't been heard from since. That is $4 million that could have been used to help other people."

Black man, Low-Income, Democrat, Colorado

Insight #13

A strong investment in the "base + persuadables" and strategic targeting of select "swing" audiences through a tested narrative framework can win majority support for GI in the general public
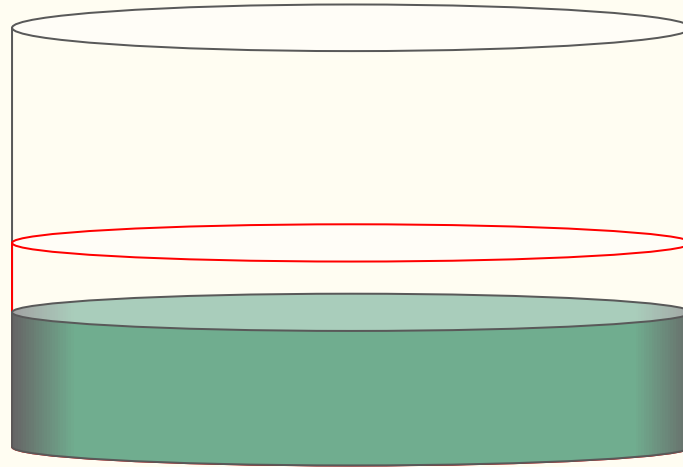
Fill this big glass just over <u>halfway</u> using a combination of supporters from the narrow glasses below.
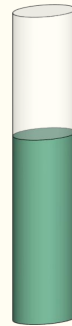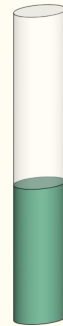
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Concerned Opponents

Reagan Republican Opponents

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Conclusion

This research forms the building blocks essential to growing support for GI in a significant way

1
THE ROLE OF GOVERNMENT

Which of the following statements comes closest to your own view, even if neither is exactly right?

1) Government should do more to solve... need...

2) Gove... bett... indiv...

3) Not s...

2
GOV'T DOING ENOUGH TO HELP

The government is not doing enough to help people afford the basics.

1) Very worried
2) S...
3) N...
4) N...

3
$400 FOR AN EMERGENCY EXPENSE

I don't have $400 available in case of an emergency expense.

1) Very worried
2) Somewhat worried
3) Not too worried
4) Not at all worried

+

Messenger

Message

LOCAL FRAME

Pilots

HOW TO DEFINE OUR AUDIENCE
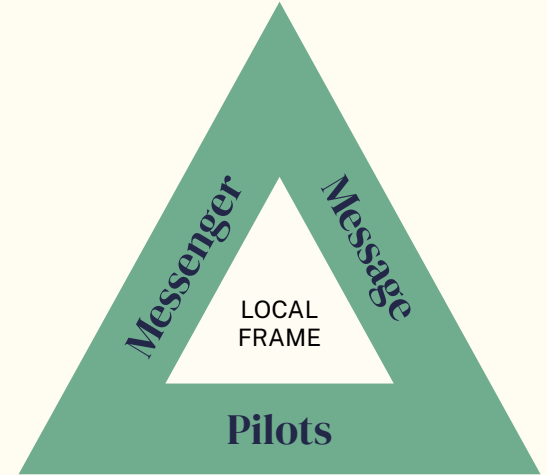
HOW TO SPEAK TO THEM

Summary
of Insights

Audience Insights

1	There is majority support for Guaranteed Income (GI)
2	GI is not consistently defined across the public and is largely misunderstood
3	When issues like GI are unfamiliar, audiences can fall into a number of psychological traps which drive opposition to GI
4	Mindsets and values help us understand supportive and potentially supportive audiences-more so than political identities squarely
5	"Base + Persuadables" feel a shared sense of economic precarity, forming the foundation of their support for GI
6	"Swing Audiences" represent pockets of opportunity for growing support

Summary of Insights
Narrative Insights

7	Persuasive comms blends the right message, messenger, and use of pilot program examples
8	Messages that focus on elevating shared values around interconnectedness, shared community benefits, and hope are highly persuasive
9	Messengers are just as important as message in building understanding and support
10	Specifics from pilot programs help calm concerns and reduce skepticism of GI
11	Existing messages around poverty alleviation, racial equity, and freedom will not drive increased support for GI
12	Referencing the pandemic can be a double edged sword when attempting to grow support for GI
13	A strong investment in the "base + persuadables" and strategic targeting of select "swing" audiences through a tested narrative framework will win majority support for GI in the general public