

Message Testing

January 2025

Messaging Highlights

Summary of Findings

- **High statewide baseline support** for fair share proposals of
 - Raising income taxes on those making \$500,000 or more
 - Raising corporate income taxes and closing corporate tax loopholes
 - Providing low income taxpayers with a \$600 annual tax credit
- **Combining messaging about fair share with information about the budget crisis, and using an emotional message frame strengthens support statewide, and bolsters localized support in all congressional districts.**
 - Elected officials and advocates working in **MD-2 should utilize impassive, educational** messaging when talking about raising income taxes
 - Statewide, voters connect with the “hardworking Marylanders” framework that acknowledges they already pay their share, and can’t afford more
- Messages that name the budget crisis do not lower support for fair taxes

Message Framing

Do This	How to Frame It	Key Points
Educate voters about the budget crisis	“Maryland is facing a serious budget crisis this year. If legislators don’t take action now, we could lose funding for our public schools, transportation projects, and important state programs people rely on.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Action is needed now- We could lose things voters care about
Connect with how voters feel	Hardworking Marylanders can’t afford to foot the bill, especially when everyday costs are so high.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- “Hard working people” resonates more than middle class- Acknowledge the cost burden
Explain how we got here	“For too long, the share of taxes paid by the wealthiest people, and large corporations has been decreasing”	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- It doesn’t have to be this way- The system is broken
Provide a solution	“It is time for our elected officials to reform the tax system and make sure everyone pays their fair share, so our state has the funding we need”	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Change/reform the broken system- Now is the time- When we do this, we thrive
Lean on shared values	“Without raising taxes on hardworking Marylanders, or our small businesses”	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Name who we’re protecting- Reminder that this is what’s fair

Best Message

“Maryland is facing a serious budget crisis this year. If legislators don’t take action now, we could lose funding for our public schools, transportation projects, and important state programs people rely on. For too long, the share of taxes paid by the wealthiest people, and large corporations has been decreasing– the middle class and small businesses pay more, while our state receives less revenue to fund state services. We can’t afford to foot the bill, especially when everyday costs are so high. It is time for our elected officials to reform the tax system and make sure everyone pays their fair share, so our state has the funding we need without raising taxes on hardworking Marylanders, or our small businesses.”

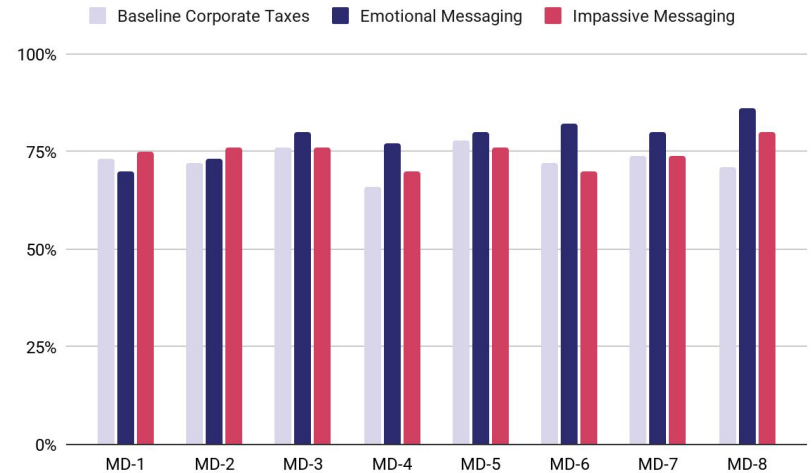
How well does messaging work?

- First, **baselines** are very high across the state for raising income taxes and corporate taxes. With messaging, support rises even more
- Messaging is especially important in MD-3, MD-4, and MD-8. In MD-2, voter responded best to educational messaging and were less moved by the unfairness framework.

Raising Income Taxes with Messaging



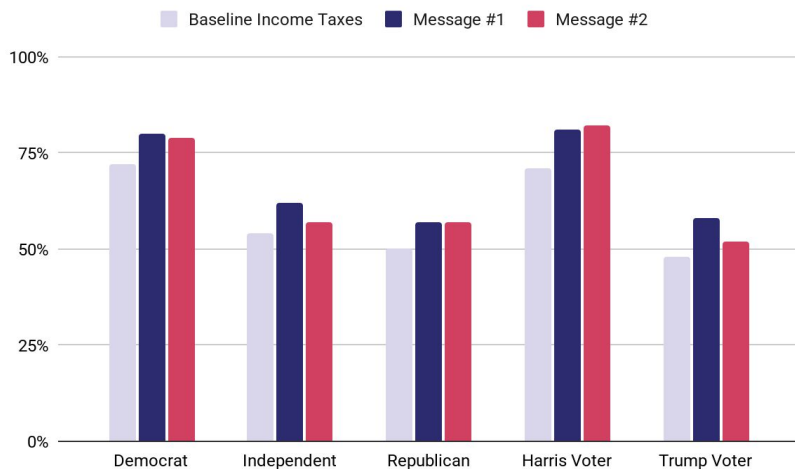
Raising Corporate Taxes with Messaging



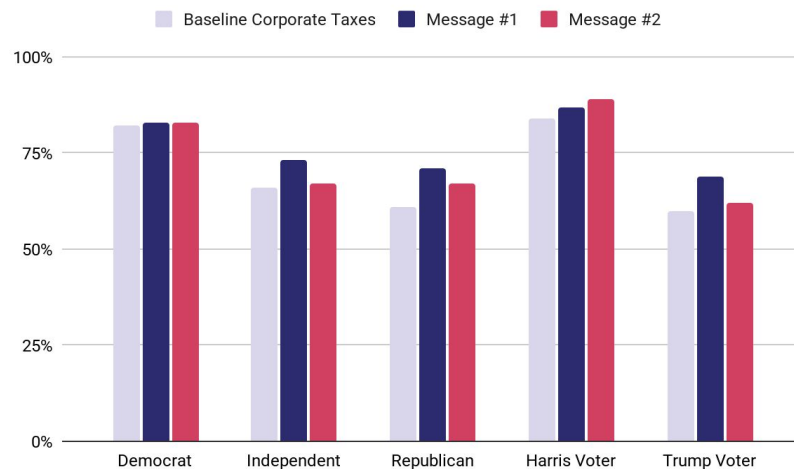
Support Across Political Parties

- Messaging was effective at persuading voters of all political persuasions
- In the November 2024 election, voter turnout by party was: Democrat 67%, Republican 29%, Independent or Other 4%

Raising Income Taxes by Political Persuasion with Messaging



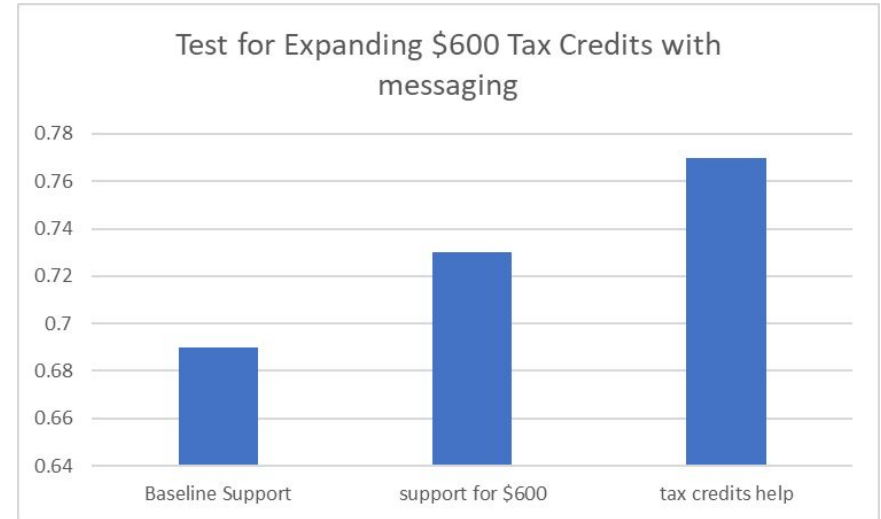
Raising Corporate Taxes by Political Persuasion with Messaging



Role of Tax Credits in Messaging

Marylanders support providing low income taxpayers with a \$600 tax credit.

- **Talking about tax credits is a net positive**, particularly for demonstrating ways of helping people make ends meet
- Support exists for a general tax credit without specifying eligibility factors
- **Being more specific about how tax credits benefit people gets a stronger response**, especially citing data and research that shows its effectiveness for covering basic expenses and lifting people out of poverty
- Naming people who benefit from tax credits boosts support from those demographic groups, e.g. “young men” and “expectant mothers”



Conclusion

Combining messaging about fair share with information about the budget crisis, and using an emotional message frame strengthens support statewide, and bolsters localized support in all congressional districts. These results track with national testing trends that show emotional messaging that taps into feelings of unfairness and protecting working people from tax increases is a persuasive and effective frame.

If given the opportunity to focus messaging geographically, special attention should be given to MD-2, where impassive messaging has stronger resonance.