

Conclusions/Strategic Recommendations

- Successful implementation of inoculation and response strategy serves only to limit erosion – not going to get any sort of clear “win.”
- Democrat attempt to label GOP position on Social Security as favoring “privatization” presents serious threat. GOP, Members, and candidates must fight back against this label.
- GOP candidate is most effective messenger. Voters react to seeing and hearing candidates directly. They respond better to information and commitments from candidate directly. Voters have some suspicion of studio spots because they do not sufficiently communicate sincerity.

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Conclusions/Strategic Recommendations

- Electorate's “attention span” on debate about SS is very deep. They will react to all information provided, and won't grow tired or tune out of the debate.
- GOP candidates should not ignore attacks – no matter how many have previously been undertaken and/or responded to. Every Democrat attack spot registers a significant drop in Republican vote intention.
- Total weight of message(s) on the Social Security issue matters.
- AARP is a dangerous adversary in this debate. They have greater credibility than any entity on this issue and are not viewed as partisan.

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Conclusions/Strategic Recommendations

- Candidate must focus on messages that reassure voters/seniors that they will not cut benefits and that nothing will change with their Social Security.
- However, voters are skeptical of "emphatic" claim language. GOP candidates need to firmly state commitment without relying on overly-emphatic adjectives.
- No effective direct rebuttal to attack on spending Social Security trust funds on other things. Response must refocus on commitment to making sure all Social Security trust funds are spent on Social Security benefits.
- Mentions of support for prescription drug benefit in GOP spots regarding Social Security has a positive impact on party and candidate confidence on this issue and Health Care in general.

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Framing the Debate

GOP

Dem

Effective

- Outlining what we oppose (no cuts, no tax increases)
- Fighting for seniors across the board: No changes to SS, plus a prescription drug benefit
- Outlining plan
- President is credible, trustworthy, bipartisan

Not as effective

- Democrats don't have a plan
- Courage to tackle this issue
- Tactic: changing the subject

Effective

...AARP opposes...
 ...Social Security...
 ...prescription drug benefit...
 ...lock box...
 ...rich vs. poor...
 ...market is risky...
 ...particularly with seniors...

Not as effective

...Republicans only want to cut SS...
 ...but could gain credibility if let unchecked...

- AARP is opposed to plan (seen as credible, apolitical)
- Raiding SS surplus/breakin lock box
- Rich vs. poor
- Market is risky (particularly with seniors)
- Republicans only want to cut SS (but could gain credibility if let unchecked).

Message Construction Conclusions

INVOKING SOCIAL SECURITY:

"Social Security is a sacred trust, it must be saved." (from "Facts about Social Security")

"When they retire, many workers rely on social security. It must be there." (from "Our Plan")

PROMISE MADE:

"You've kept your promise to America" and "And I will keep America's promise to you." (from "GOP Senior Inoculation")

"Retirement security also depends upon keeping the commitments of social security, and we will." (from "Lockbox promise")

"The plan ensures seniors get every penny of their benefits, with no increase in taxes on workers." (from "Our Plan")

"Social Security is a defining American promise." (from "Bush Credibility")

"Ensuring every penny owed our seniors is paid." (from "Quick Pivot")

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Message Construction Conclusions

QUICK, COMPACT RECITATION OF GOP PLAN:

"I have a plan to save Social Security. It insures seniors get every penny of the benefits they've been promised.

"Our plan will protect benefits and make the system financially strong for generations to come, without raising taxes." (from "Plan/No Plan")

PROTECTING SOCIAL SECURITY:

"To protect and strengthen Social Security. Always." (from "GOP Senior Inoculation")

"I want to save and modernize Social Security." (from "Quick Pivot")

NO CUTS:

"No cuts in social security. For any senior." (from "GOP Senior Inoculation")

"I'll only support a plan that ensures there will be no cuts in benefits." (from "Priorities")

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Message Construction Conclusions

NO NEW TAXES:

"No increase in Social Security taxes on workers" (from "Priorities")

"The plan ensures seniors get every penny of their benefits, with no increase in taxes on workers."
(from "Our Plan")

INVOKING BIPARTISANSHIP:

"[Bush has] appointed a bipartisan commission to find the best way to modernize social security for seniors and generations to come." (from "Bush Credibility")

IF A REPUBLICAN CHALLENGER COULD EVER SAY THIS:

"As a member of Congress, I will never vote to spend social security trust fund money on anything other than social security.

"Spending that money for anything else is just wrong." (from "Dem Senior Inoculation")

"We need to secure Social Security by making sure every penny of taxes paid for Social Security are only spent ON Social Security." (from "Lockbox promise") 57

Message Construction Conclusions

ATTACKS THAT REALLY HURT:

"As a member of Congress, I will never vote to spend social security trust fund money on anything other than social security. Spending that money for anything else is just wrong." (from "Dem Senior Inoculation")

"Everyone agreed. We need to secure Social Security by making sure every penny of taxes paid for Social Security are only spent ON Social Security." (from "Lockbox promise")

"But now Republicans like Congressman XXX are breaking their promise." (from "Lockbox promise")

"He's spending over one trillion dollars of the Social Security trust fund on tax cuts for the rich." (from "Lockbox promise")

"But he voted to spend social security trust funds on other things and now there's a \$1 trillion hole in the trust fund." (from "Privatization")

"The AARP says the Republicans and Congressman GOP candidate have dipped into the social security trust fund again." (from "AARP")

"The AARP says GOP candidate's plan for social security will drain \$1 trillion out of the trust fund." (from "AARP") 58