



Child Poverty: Messaging on a National Crisis

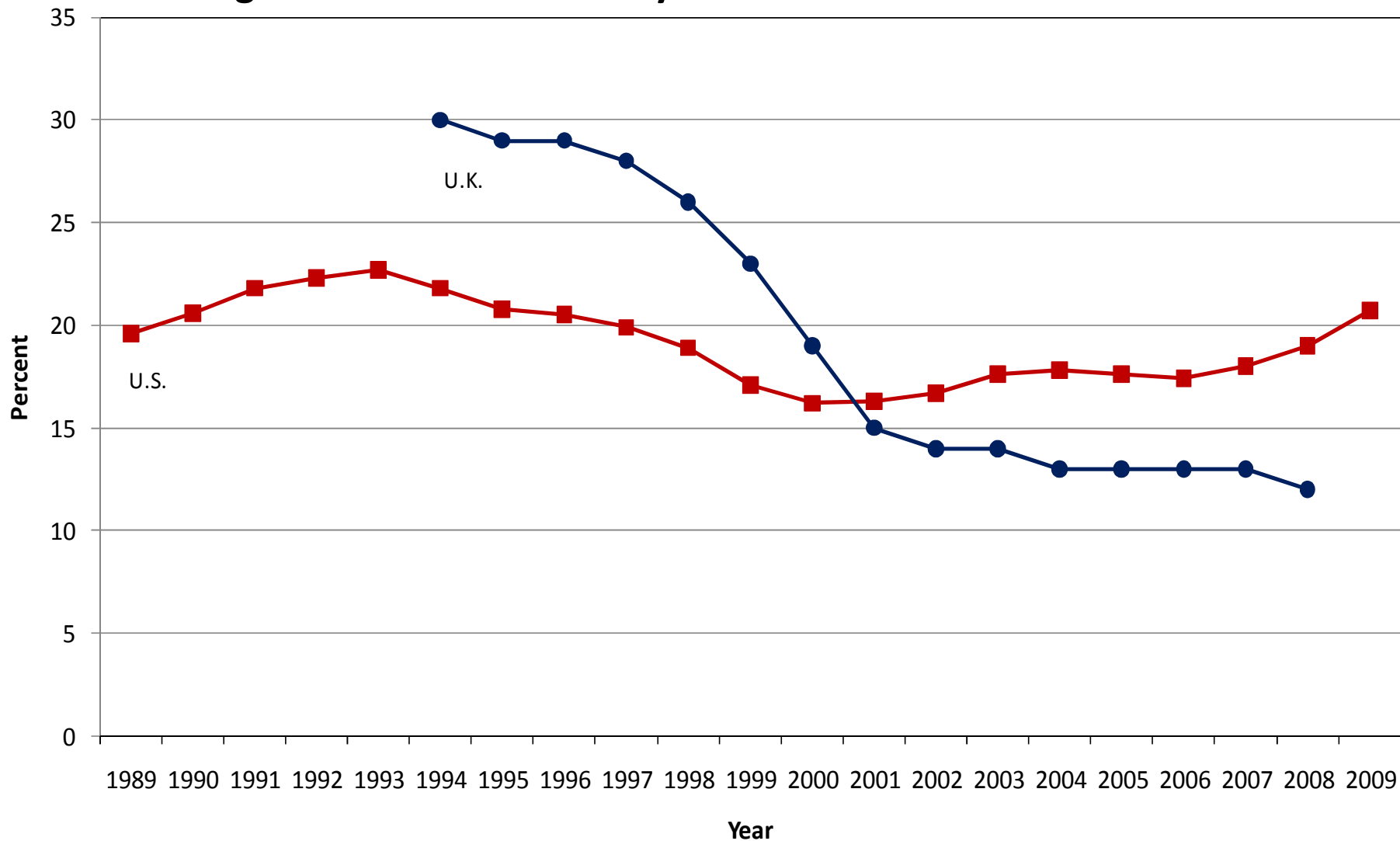
June 16, 2011



FIRST FOCUS

MAKING CHILDREN & FAMILIES THE PRIORITY

Figure 1: Absolute Poverty in the U.S. & U.K. 1989–2009



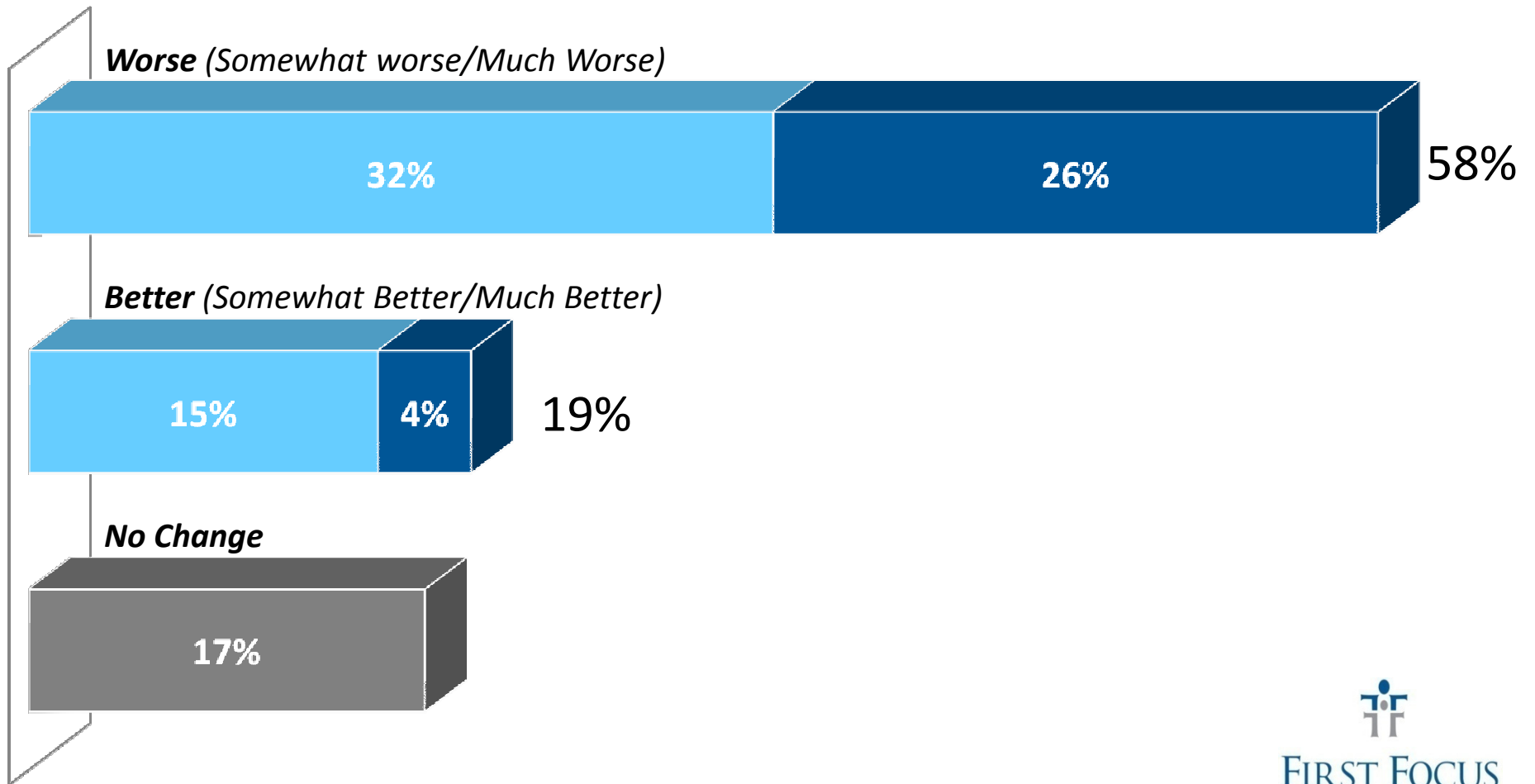
■ U.S.: Percent all persons under 18 years below official US Poverty Line, 1989-2009 (about 35 percent of median income in 2000)
● U.K.: Percent of U.K. children below the absolute poverty threshold, 1989-2008 (about 60 percent of median income in 1998-99)

Source: U.S. Census Bureau (2010); U.K. Department of Work and Pensions (2010); HBAI, 81.

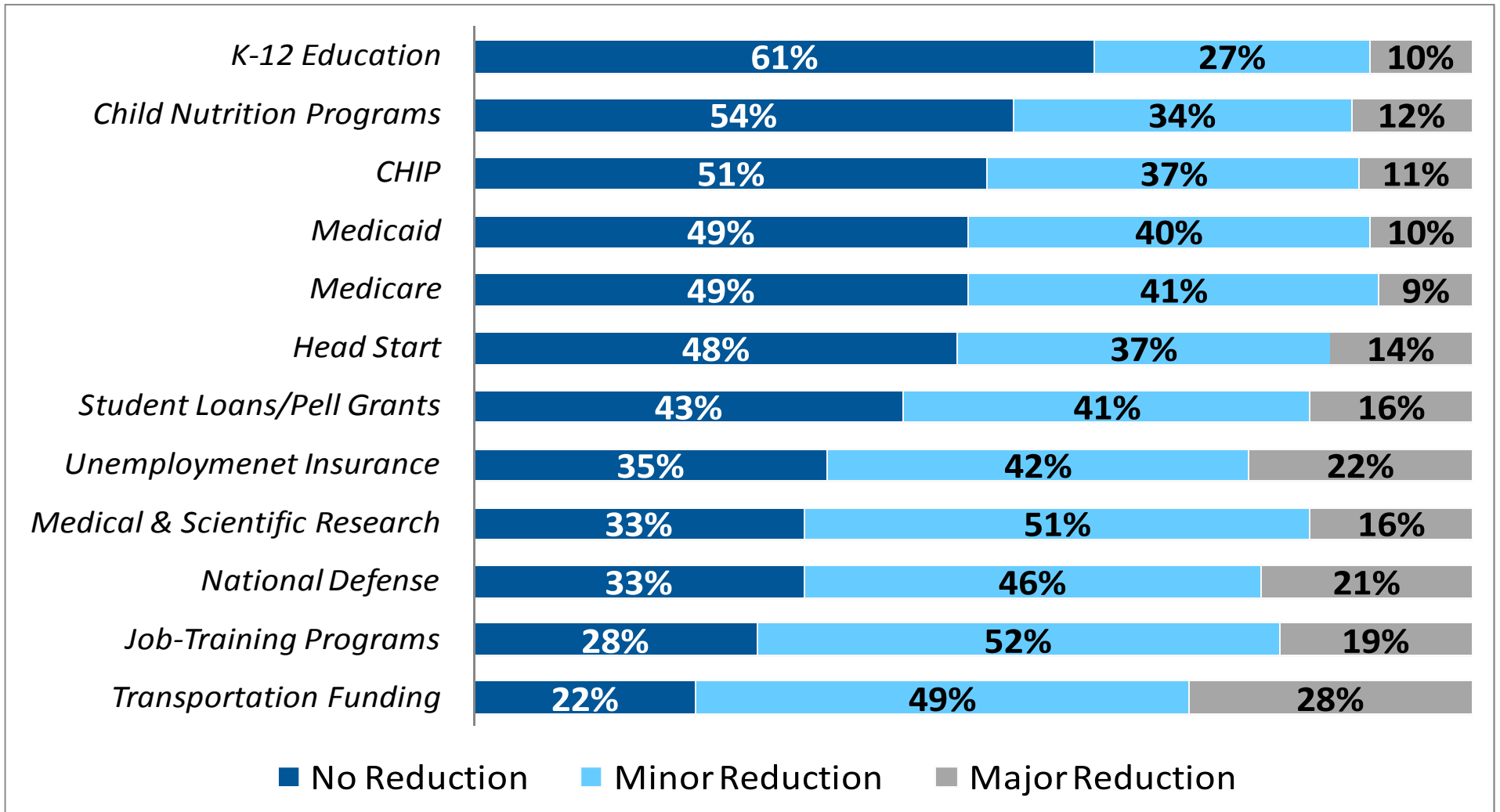
Smeeding & Waldfogel, 2010

Voters Believe America's Kids Fare Poorly

Thinking about the last 10 years, would you say that the lives of children in America have gotten better, gotten worse, or no change?

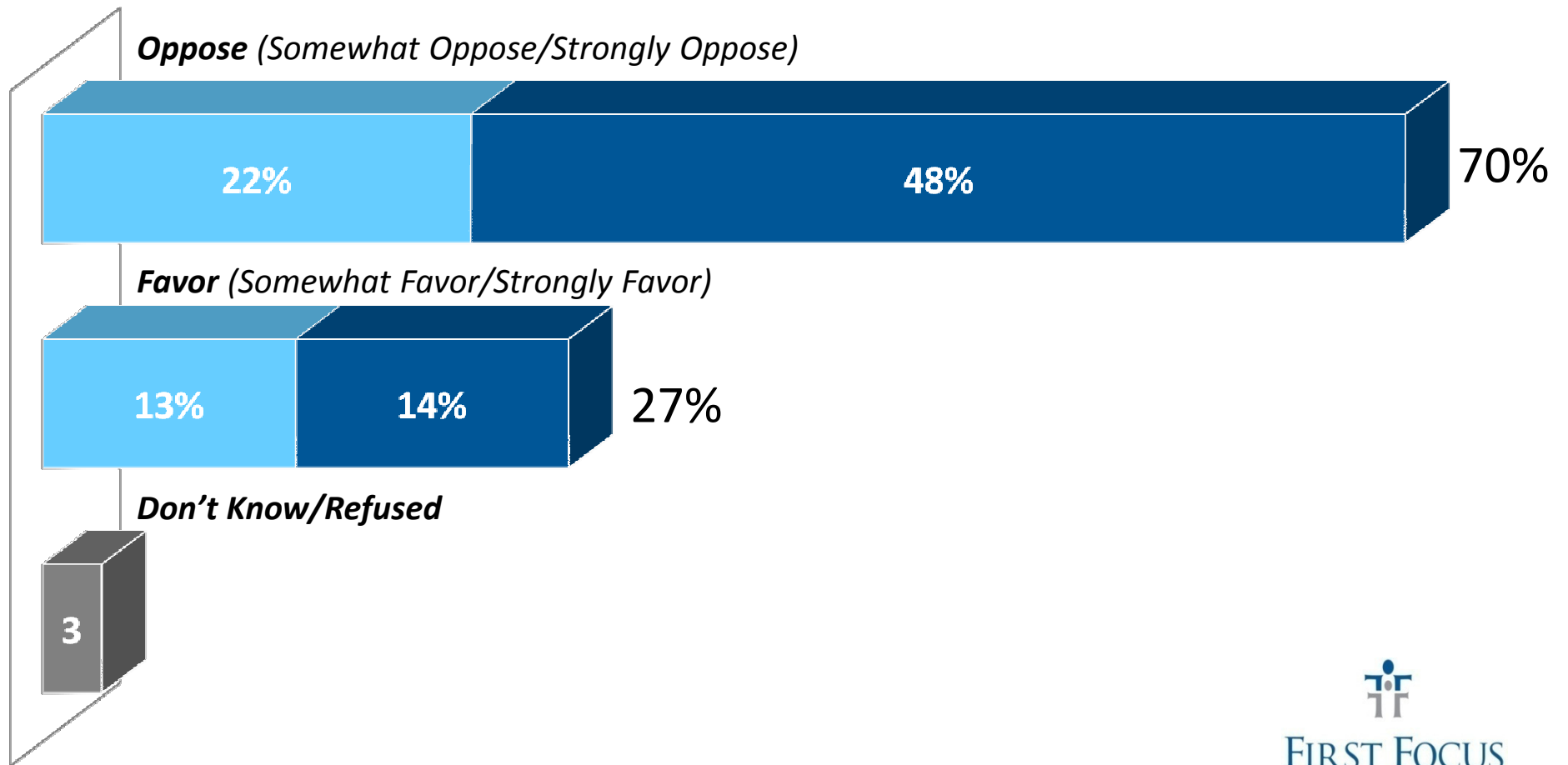


Kids' Programs are Voters' Priority



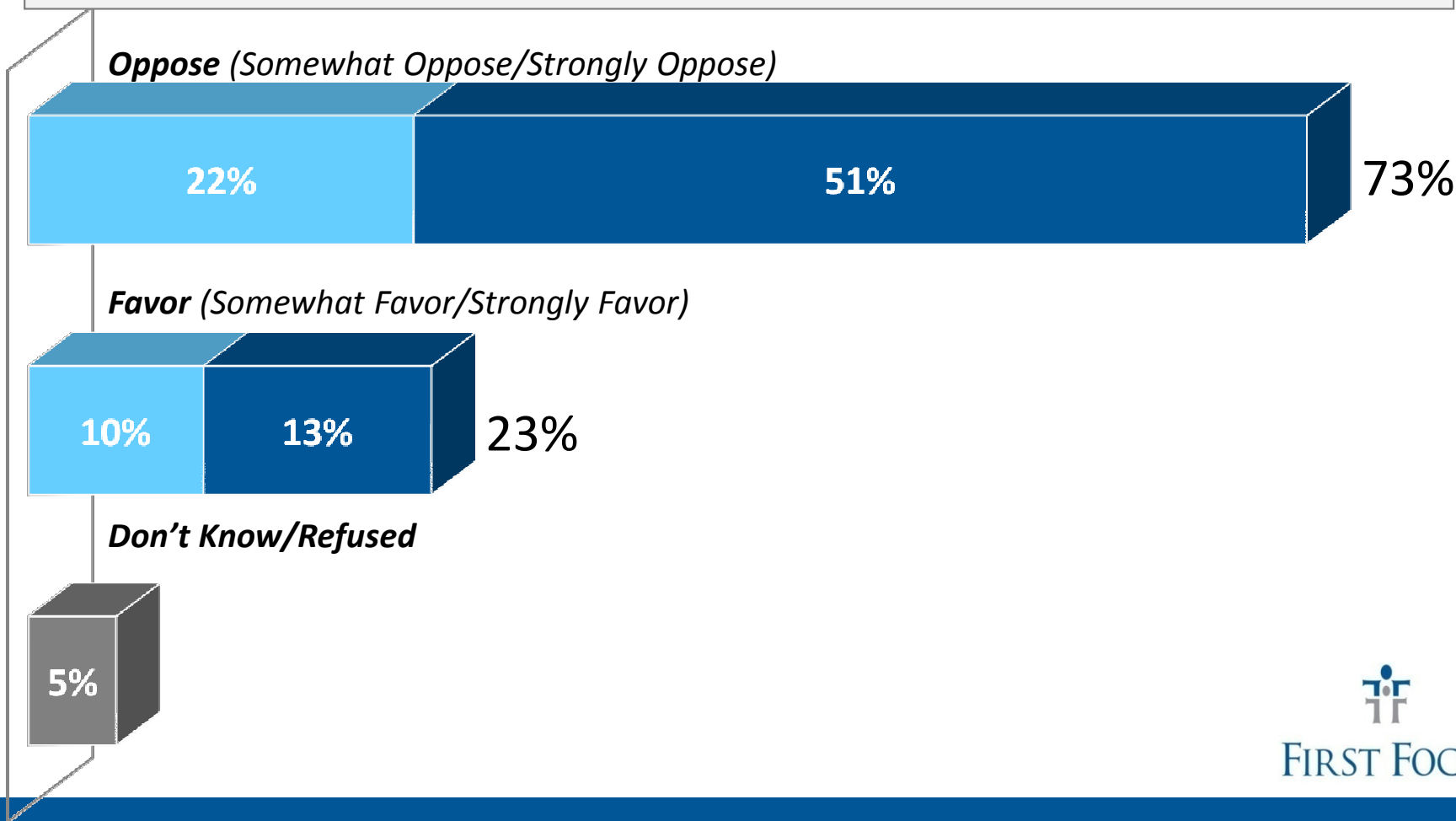
Voters Protect Medicaid

The House budget proposal **cuts over \$750 billion from funding for Medicaid**, a federal health program that provides care to low-income children, the elderly, and the disabled. Generally speaking, **do you favor or oppose this cut.**

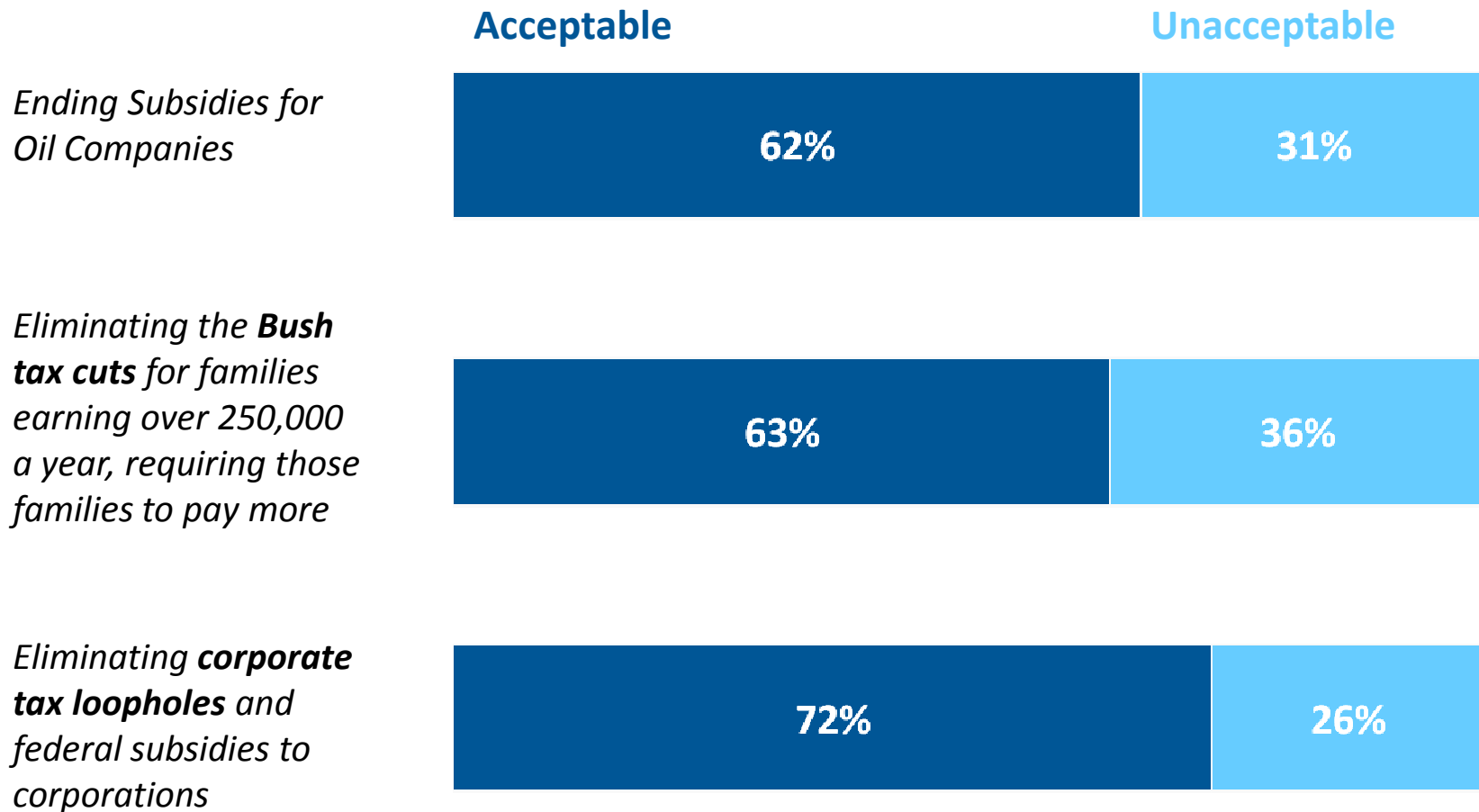


Voters Protect CHIP

The House budget proposal **cuts spending for the Children's Health Insurance Program**, a federal health program for low-income children whose families do not qualify for Medicaid. The budget proposal creates a \$150 billion shortfall and could threaten the health care coverage for more than 7 million children. **Generally speaking, do you favor or oppose this cut to CHIP.**



Cutting Programs is Not the Only Option



Cutting Programs is Not the Only Option

When it comes to dealing with the federal government deficit, which approach would you prefer?

Raising taxes on those earning over one million dollars

72%

Cutting important programs

21%

Both

4

Neither

2

*Don't know/
Refused*

2

Children: Top Priority Among U.S. Voters

The American people also choose to make children a priority over other issues on a head-to-head basis.



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Children: Best Messages Vary by Race/Ethnicity

Best Messages

(Back On Kids) The deficit is a national crisis and it is critical to the future of our country to get the deficit under control, but it is wrong to balance the budget on the backs of children. Children cannot vote and do not make campaign donations to politicians. Politicians choose to protect corporate donors from cuts that might affect their bottom line. It is up to us to stand up for our kids.

(Invest in the Future) These cuts may save us some money in the near-term, but in the long-term, they make no sense and will end up costing us more money. By investing in our kids now, we produce much more productive adults later. In fact, studies show that for every dollar invested in our kids, the government will get back a 7-10% return on this investment...due to kids going to college, leading healthier lives and avoiding prison.

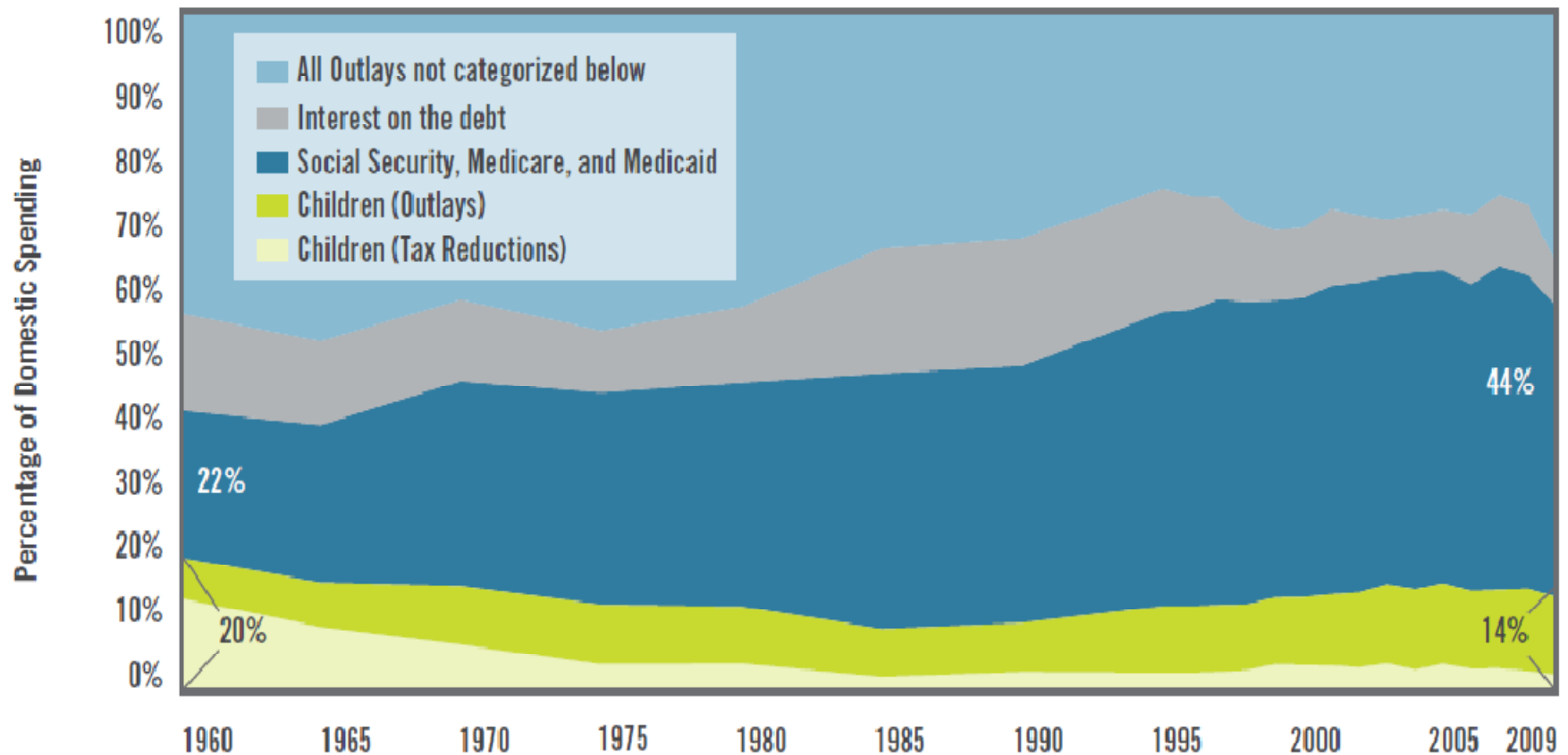


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Children in the Budget

Kids' Share: Spending Trends

FIGURE 9 Trends in Expenditures on Children as a Share of Domestic Federal Spending

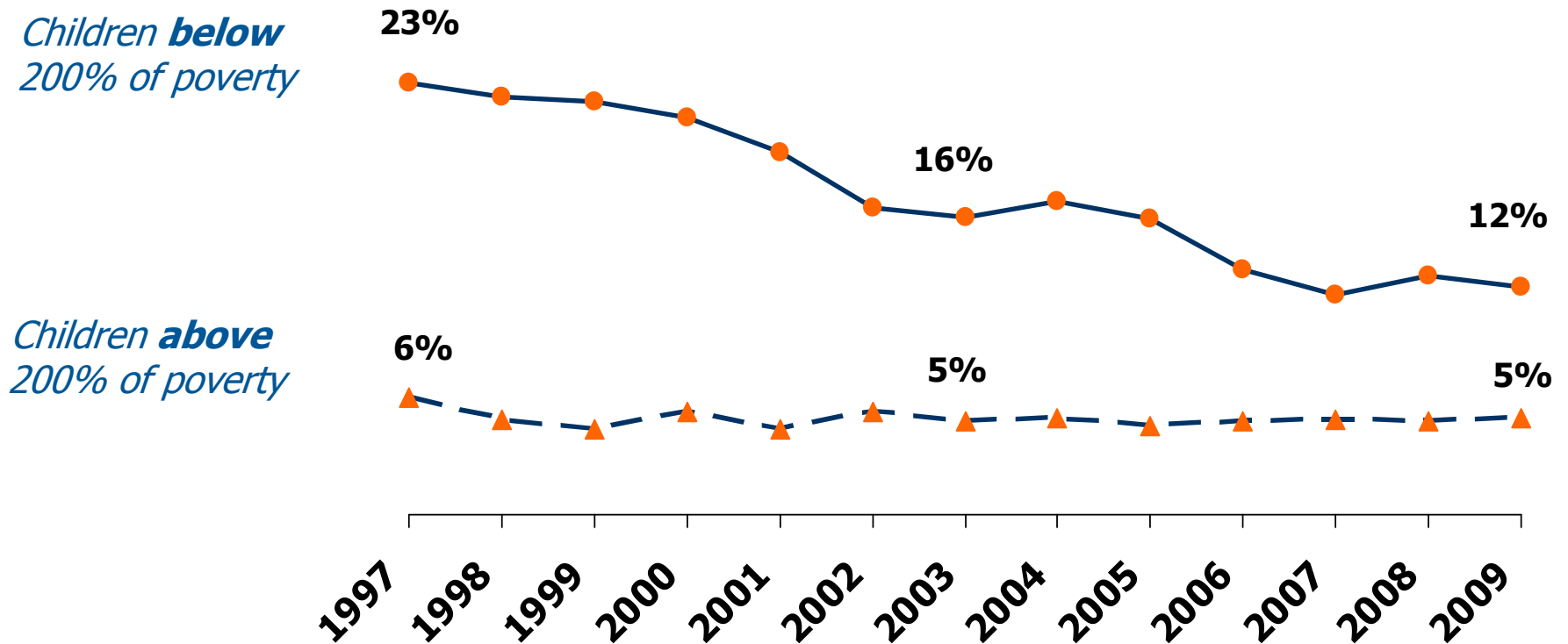


Source: The Urban Institute and The Brookings Institution, 2010. Authors' estimates based on data from the *Budget of the U.S. Government Fiscal Year 2011* and previous years.

Notes: Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid excludes spending already captured as children's spending. For this exercise, domestic spending includes tax expenditures on children as well as outlays on all budget items other than defense and international affairs.

Create Agenda: CHIP – It Works

Percentage of Children Without Health Insurance, By Poverty Level, 1998-2009



How did our messages fare?

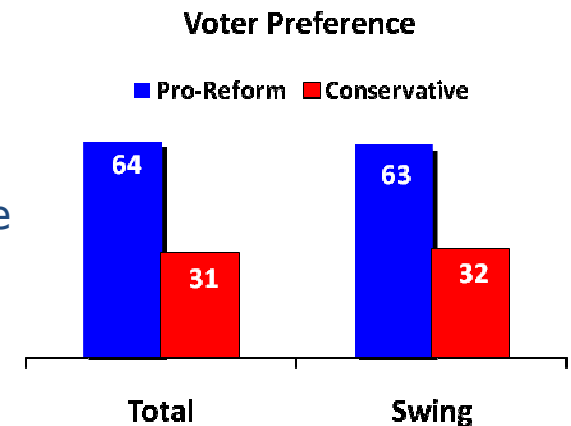
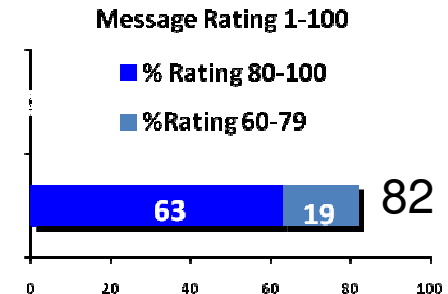
Children as a Priority

	Mean Rating	Percent preferring progressive	Percent preferring opposition	Margin
Opposition message	60.1	-	-	-
American Leadership	77.5	64	30	+34
Investment	78.8	63	31	+32
Back to Basics	79.6	62	32	+30
American Dream	77.2	60	33	+27
Greatest Generation	75.4	56	38	+18
American Challenge	72.7	55	40	+15

Making Children a Priority

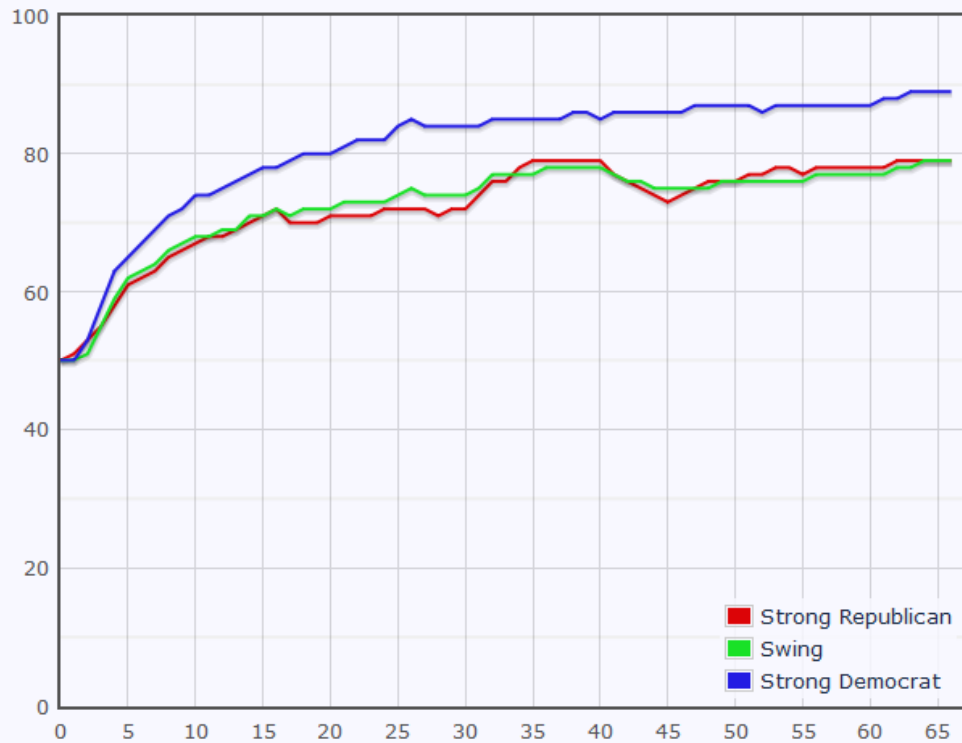
Investment

Investing in our children is investing in America. When we help children grow and succeed, we are paving the way for our country's next generation of workers and leaders. *Investing in our children means investing in a world-class education, making sure every child starts kindergarten ready to learn, every teenager who aspires to a college education and is willing to work for it can afford one, and making sure there are jobs waiting for them on the other end. Investing in our children means recognizing that children learn the values of respect and responsibility in strong families and safe communities. And investing in our children means investing in those who are most vulnerable, helping parents in poor communities protect their children from poverty, violence, and drugs; providing mentors and role models so all our nation's teenagers finish high school; and caring for the millions of children who are abused and neglected, so every child stands a chance for a satisfying, productive life. Supporting our children isn't just the right thing to do. It's one of the best investments we can make as a nation.*



Dial-test results

Investment

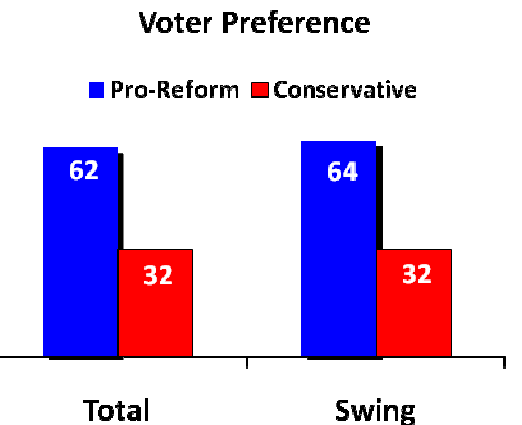
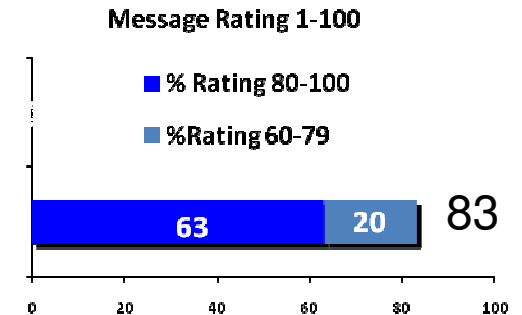


Note: The investment theme appealed to voters across the political spectrum, from right to left. The introduction and conclusion to this message provide a good example of the structure of a successful message, “bookending” the key points with a central, aspirational theme that resonates with a wide range of voters.

Making Children a Priority

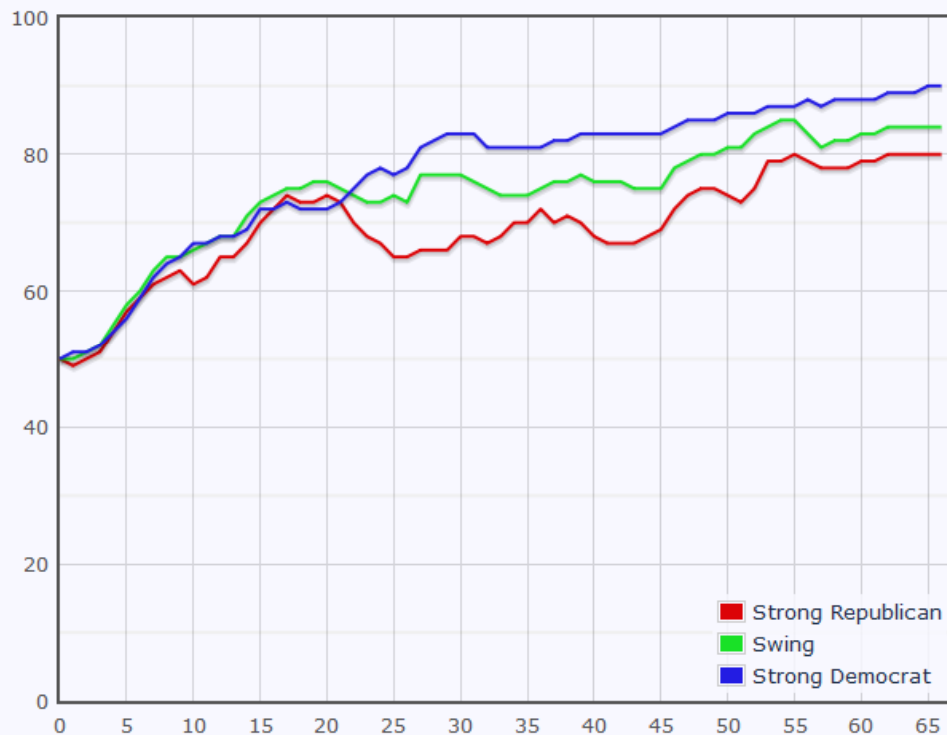
Back to Basics

When it comes to America's children, it's time to get back to basics. That means protecting their health and safety, protecting them from harsh economic times, and helping them develop their God-given potential. America should be at the top of the list of industrialized nations in the health and safety of its children, not at the bottom, starting with making sure every woman has prenatal care and every child has a doctor. And no child in this country should ever go hungry. It's time we reduced child poverty, increased child tax credits for working and middle class families, and offering working people who've lost their jobs through no fault of their own a way to avoid having their homes foreclosed and their children left without a place to sleep. And getting back to basics means our kids should have the top math and reading scores in the world, not be competing for number 30. That means encouraging parents to get more actively involved in their kids' education, raising the quality and the pay of teachers, and leading the world again in college graduates, not high school dropout rates. Our children are our future. It doesn't get any more basic than that.



Dial-test results

Back to Basics

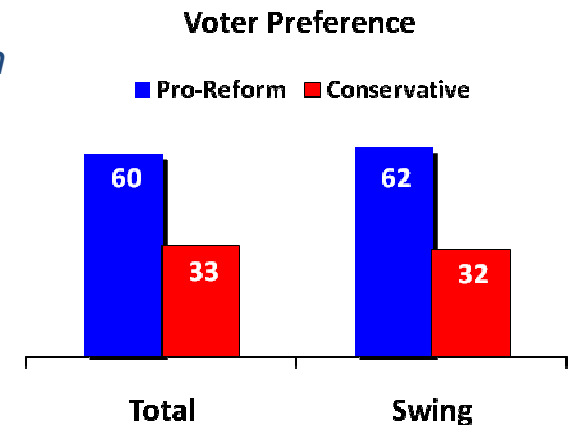
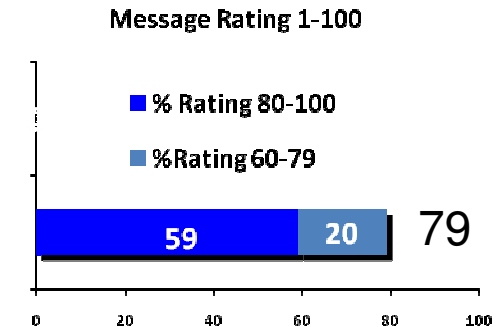


Note: This is another strong message that appeals across the political spectrum, with a theme that led the dials to shoot up, of getting “back to basics.” Interestingly, the dials dropped slightly in two places, in which swing voters tracked with strong GOPs: a reference to prenatal care (likely because Americans have trouble seeing the causal link across so many years to children’s health or achievement) and to raising the quality and pay of teachers (likely reflecting concerns about budgets and “bad apple” teachers).

Making Children a Priority

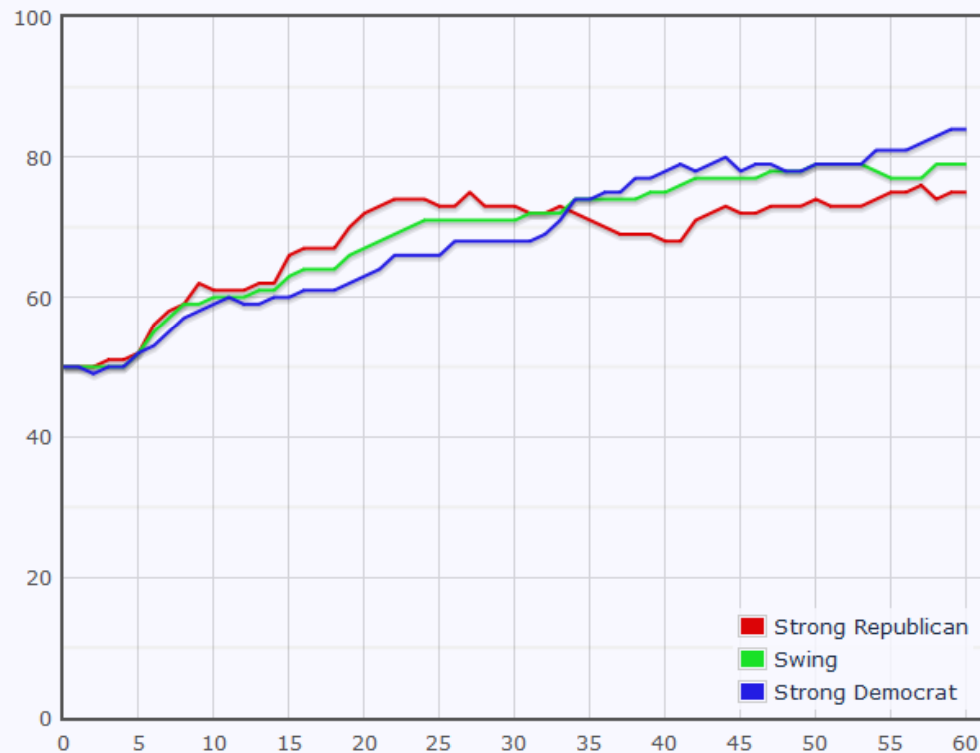
American Dream

For the first time in our history, most Americans don't believe their kids will have the same opportunities they had to lead a happy, healthy, and prosperous a life. When Americans no longer believe in the American Dream, it's time to reclaim our heritage. *Our parents and grandparents knew that if they worked hard and played by the rules, their kids could expect a shot at a home, a college education, and the opportunity to develop their gifts to the best of their abilities. But in the last 10 years, the middle class has been shrinking as CEO salaries and bonuses have skyrocketed. One out of five kids in this country is born into poverty, and working and middle class Americans are losing their jobs and homes at record rates. With unemployment above 25% among young people, whole generations of high school and college graduates are getting shut of the job market. America has always risen to the challenge of ensuring a brighter future for our children. It's time we rise to that challenge again.*



Dial-test results

American Dream



Note: This message drove the dials up from start to finish. As can be seen from the dial results, partisan differences were virtually nonexistent. This message speaks to the pervasive sense Americans have that the American Dream has been lost and needs to be reclaimed. Perhaps the only reason it did not receive the top ratings despite leaving the dials near 80 for all groups was the lack of at least some reference to a solution.

How did our messages fare?

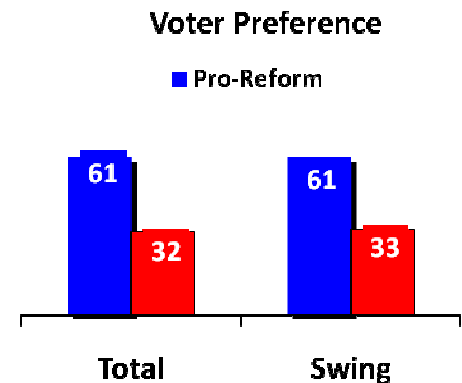
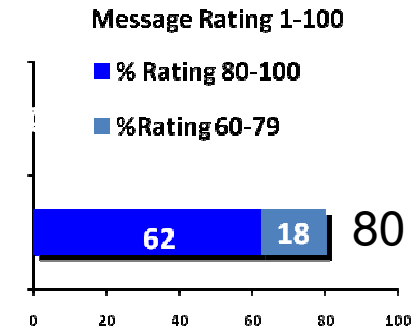
Family economics

	Mean Rating	Percent preferring progressive	Percent preferring opposition	Margin
Opposition message	60.6	-	-	-
I Don't Want to Hear	77.9	61	32	+29
Tax Code	77.5	60	33	+27
Pangs of Hunger	76.6	59	33	+26
Nation Building	77.6	58	35	+23

Family Economics

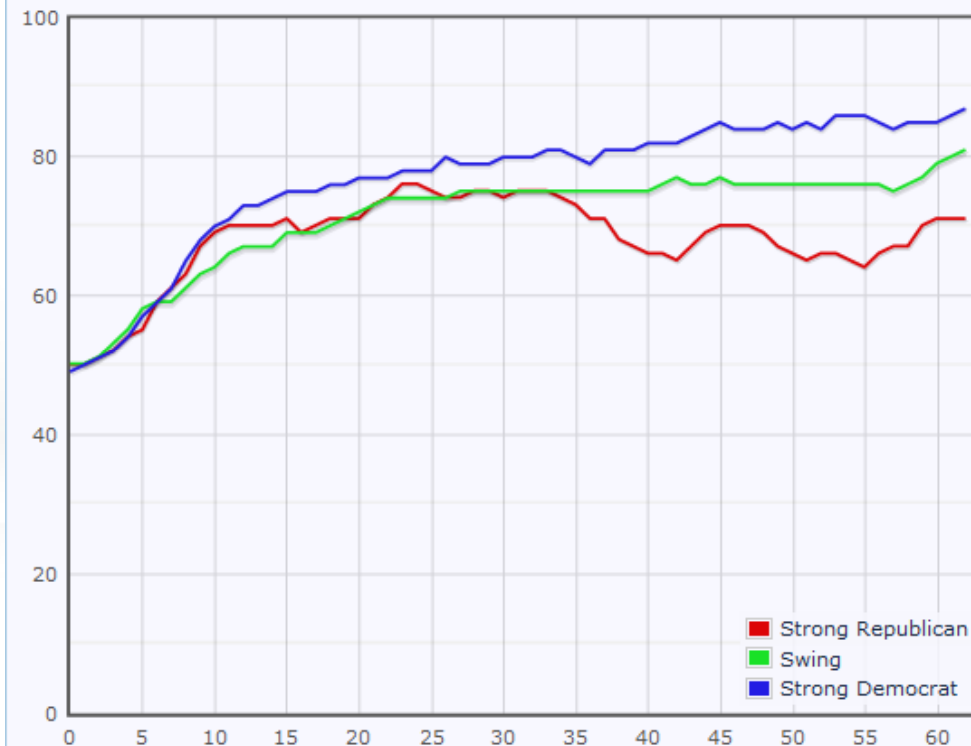
I Don't Want to Hear

American families should be working their way into the middle class, not falling out of it. *Yet today, so many families are living month to month, hoping their car doesn't break down because they have no idea where they'd find the money to fix it. And those are the lucky ones who have a job. Ten million Americans out of work isn't some abstraction. These are real people, and one out of three Americans who gets laid off has to go home that night and explain to their kids that daddy or mommy isn't going to work tomorrow and things are likely to get pretty rough, and they might stay that way for a while. So I don't want to hear how we can't afford to pay unemployment insurance to people who've lost their job through no fault of their own. I don't want to hear about how we need to lay off police, firefighters, and teachers, leaving us without protection and our kids without the first-class education they'll need to compete someday in the global economy. I don't want to hear how we need to cut Medicaid for poor children, many of whose parents are working three jobs to get by. I want to hear a plan for putting Americans back to work.*



Dial-test results

I Don't Want to Hear



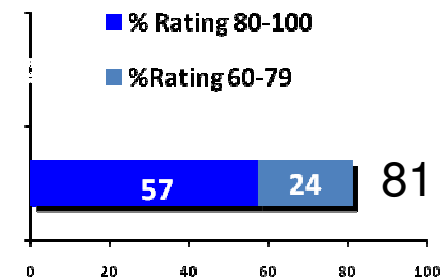
Note: This message was a homerun from start to finish, speaking to the populist anger across the political spectrum, even leaving the average strong GOP with a final dial rating of 70.

Family Economics

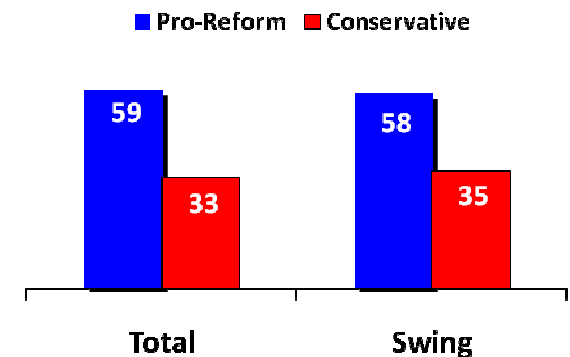
Pangs of Hunger

No child in the United States of America should ever feel the pangs of hunger. Yet today, a million American kids will go hungry. *No child in America should be forced to live on the street. Yet with the economic downturn, millions of parents have had to tell their kids "this isn't your room anymore," because some bank that was bailed out with our tax dollars foreclosed on the home they've lived in for 15 years. No hard-working American should be unable to feed their family because some Wall Street banker played Russian roulette with our economic security. We don't have a shortage of work ethic in this country, we have a shortage of work, and if the private sector can't put Americans back to work, we have plenty of roads to build, bridges to fix, and classrooms that could use a teacher. The number of children living in poverty is now one in five, and this is America. We can't balance our national budget when over 10 million Americans are out of work and can't balance theirs. That's the bottom line.*

Message Rating 1-100

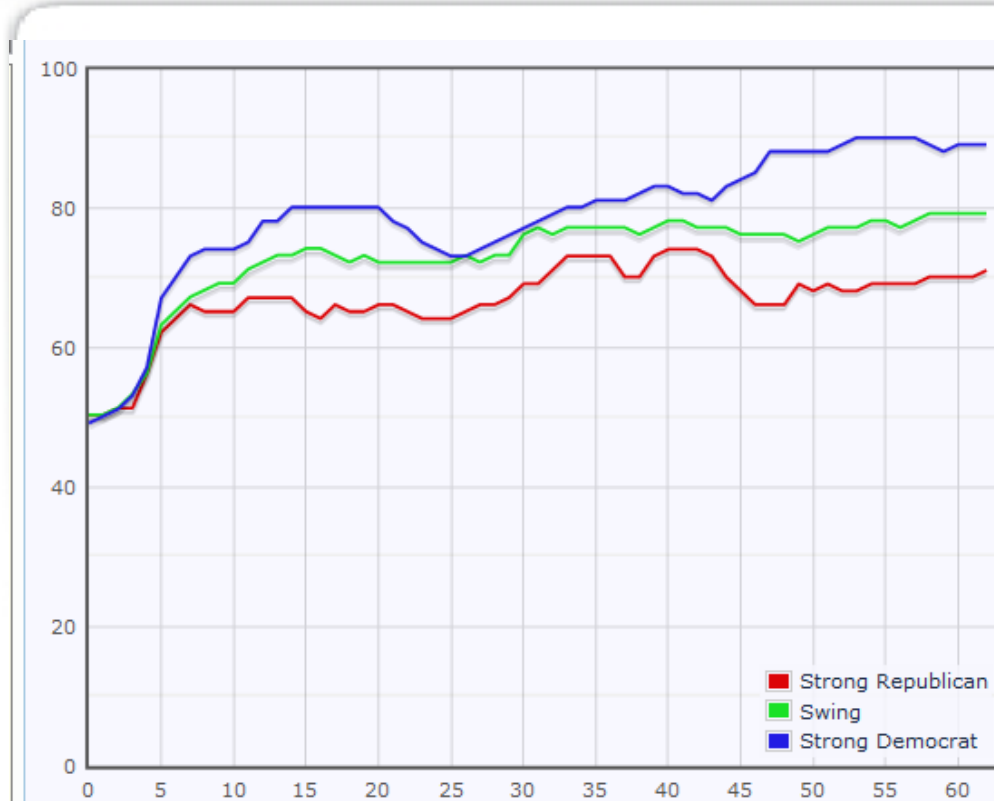


Voter Preference



Dial-test results

Pangs of Hunger



Note: No line in this survey drew the dials up as fast as “No child in the United States of America should ever feel the pangs of hunger.” What is striking about this message is that it focuses on an issue traditionally associated with stigma and prejudice and nevertheless draws a strong positive response, deactivating the prejudice and making this an American problem.



Westen: High Ground on Values

Core Values

- ✓ American Leadership
- ✓ American Dream
- ✓ Personal Responsibility
- ✓ Back to Basics
- ✓ Investment
- ✓ Security
- ✓ Character
- ✓ Opportunity
- ✓ Hard work
- ✓ Community
- ✓ Accountability
- ✓ Partnership
- ✓ Common Sense

Connect w/ Aspiration

Describe problem –
Concrete, Visual

End w/ a Solution that
That Evokes Hope that
Something Can Change

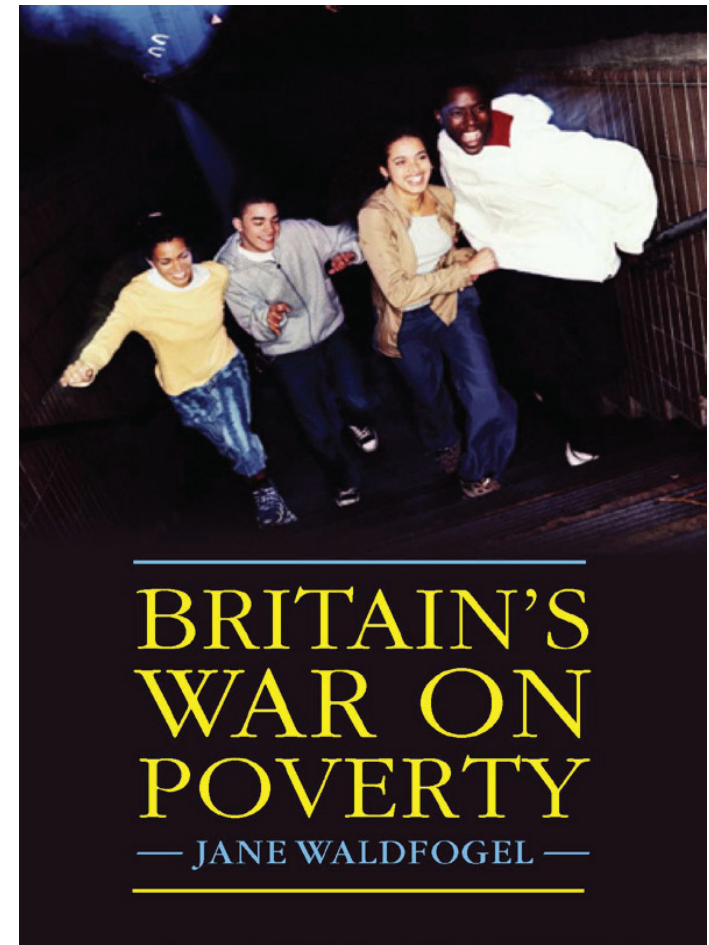
Return to Central
Theme/Value



What Did Britain Do?: Lessons for the United States

The British anti-poverty strategy had four parts:

- 1) Setting a national target/priority
- 2) Promoting work and making work pay
 - National minimum wage
 - Working Families Tax Credit
 - Reduced payroll taxes for low-income workers
- 3) Raising incomes for families with children
 - Child Benefit
 - New Child Tax Credit for low-income families
 - New Child Trust Funds
- 4) Investing in children





FIRST FOCUS

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