

Beating Back the Paycheck Fairness Act

The impact of pro and anti-PFA messages on weak partisan & pure independent voters

Overview

The Independent Women's Voice (IWV) commissioned Evolving Strategies to test the effectiveness of messages related to the Paycheck Fairness Act (PFA) and the "War on Women" narrative.

ES executed a randomized-controlled, PocketTrial® message experiment to identify the impact of IWV's anti-Paycheck Fairness Act messages in the context of the Progressive message on the PFA.

A PocketTrial quantifies the true impact of a message using a customized, double-blind, and fully controlled experimental design. It's like a small-scale clinical drug trial, but it's a message we're testing.

Online survey respondents from a consumer research panel were randomly assigned to one of five conditions in a true experiment – four treatment groups and a control. All treatment conditions included the Democratic message; three treatment conditions also included IWV messages on the PFA.

We surveyed only pure independents and weak partisans – no strong Republicans or Democrats were included (a non-probability, opt-in respondent sample of 1,006 registered independent and weak partisans fielded May 24-29th 2012). Statistical analyses were then performed to identify significant treatment impacts.

Treatments:

- *Control Group*: No political message.
- *Progressive Only*: Respondents read only a comprehensive Progressive message in support of the PFA.
- *Progressive & Choice*: Respondents read a) a message explaining that women are already protected from wage discrimination, and differences in pay are caused by women's choices, and b) read the Progressive PFA message
- *Progressive & Economy*: Respondents read a) a message explaining why the PFA would be bad for business, job creation and the economy, and b) read the Progressive PFA message.
- *Progressive & Economy/Choice*: Respondents read a) IWV's "Choice" message, b) IWV's "Economy" message, and c) the Progressive PFA message.

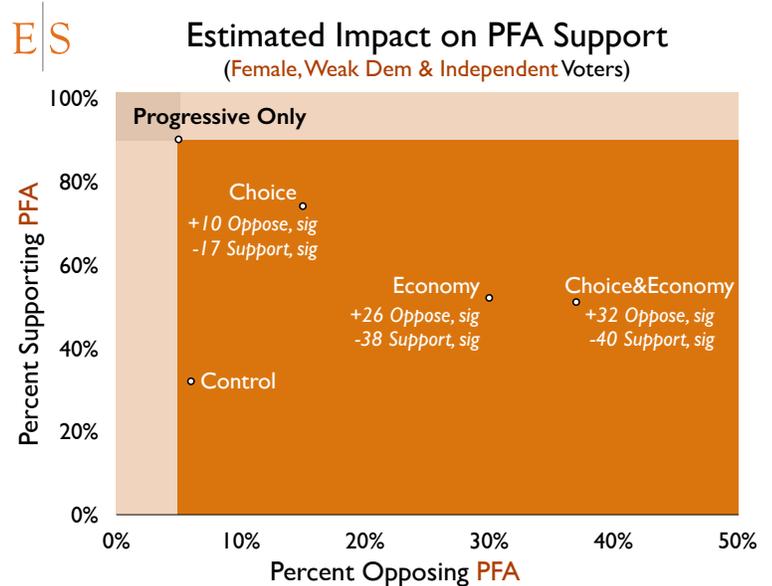
Key Findings

While the PFA debate increases support for the legislation, it actually appears to harm Democrats politically. Fighting the PFA is good policy and good politics.

- About two-thirds of women (66 percent) have never heard of the legislation.
- The vast majority of women (74 percent) agree at least somewhat that workplace discrimination is a serious problem; but this doesn't necessarily mean they want more government regulation to "solve" the problem or that they will reward politicians even if they do support such action.
- When women hear both sides of the PFA argument instead of the Progressive argument alone, support for the PFA drops and opposition rises dramatically. PFA support declines most when it is reframed in economic terms.
- The PFA debate actually *hurts* President Obama substantially with the Independents and weak partisan women who helped put him in the White House.
- Support for the PFA is weak and does not appear to translate into electoral benefits for Democrats.

Pushing Back on the Issue

- **Bottom Line:** Progressives can sell the PFA easily, but support is tenuous and a low priority for female voters. The economic argument is the best attack on the PFA.
- When the Progressive argument for the PFA is delivered on its own, without an opposing argument, support for the PFA rises dramatically to about 90 percent.
- Support for the PFA dramatically *decreases* by 38 points (90 to 52 percent) when respondents read both the Progressive message and IWW's Economy message highlighting the negative economic effects of the PFA regulations. Opposition rises 26 points, from 5 to 30 percent.
- The results indicate that messages focused solely on explaining why the "wage gap" is a myth are less effective, possibly because it fights the PFA within the terms put forth by feminist groups on the left.



Winning on the Politics

- **Bottom Line:** Progressives win the balance of *support* on the PFA, even with the winning Economy message, but it actually *drags down* electoral support for Obama. Even the Progressive message delivered on its own, which garners near unanimous support for the PFA, does *not* translate into greater support for Obama.
- The debate over the PFA *reduces* support for President Obama among weak Democratic and Independent women by 13-points, from 59-46 percent, with Romney's share *rising* 10 points, from 19 percent to 29 percent.
- The debate over the PFA also reduces support for ObamaCare and positive perceptions of Obama's economic plans.

