

The original documents are located in Box 63, folder “11/12/75 - To Dick Cheney - Analysis of Early Research and Strategy Recommendations” of the Robert Teeter Papers at the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library.

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MEMORANDUM

To: Richard Cheney
From: Robert Teeter
Re: Analysis of Early Research
Date: November 12, 1975

Background

We have for the past year and undoubtedly will be for the next year, dealing with an electorate that is more alienated and more cynical than at any point in modern time. These feelings of alienation and cynicism are directed at all major institutions - the government, businesses, unions, school systems, media, churches, and even stores where people shop. While these attitudes are more visible when directed at government, there is ample evidence that many working people distrust their own union as much as they do the corporation they work for. This has resulted in more and more people becoming inner-directed and having as their only goal getting as much as they can get out of the system and putting as little into it as possible.

The common evil most people see in our institutions is their size. Bigness is again and again mentioned as what is wrong. As the society has gotten larger and more complex, individuals have lost their ability to influence any of the institutions that affect their lives. This is against a background of having been taught our system works best when made up of individuals who all act as responsible individuals. This is one of the reasons that there has been a large increase in the number of ad hoc pressure groups formed over the last several years on behalf of all kinds of different causes. People could not find any way to influence these large institutions through established channels.

Many citizens see all the leadership of these large institutions together in a conspiracy against them rather than in any adversary relationship with each other.

Another cause for the increase in alienation and cynicism is a feeling that too many policy decisions that affect individuals have been taken out of any system that has accountability or that they can influence. Major policy decisions that affect them are now made by the courts, the bureaucracy and "The Headquarters" of various organizations. Again, these attitudes are directed at most major institutions, not just the government. People feel that decisions about their jobs, the way their children are educated, how their church functions and products they buy are made by someone and some place so distant that they can't find anybody to talk to that has any influence over them.



Perception of the President

While the President leads his potential opponent in almost every state, his support is soft. He is seen as honest, sincere, just and friendly, but gets mediocre or relatively poor ratings being competent, strong, intelligent, and a forceful leader. He is seen as someone who is concerned for the average citizen, is trying to do the right thing but not getting results. While people like him and want him to succeed, the single biggest negative is a lack of forceful leadership.

His personal appearance and the family are both significant pluses. He is seen as being handsome, athletic, vigorous and friendly. Large majorities approve of Mrs. Ford's performance as the First Lady and of her speaking out on controversial subjects. Significant numbers of people also mention the Ford children in a positive light.

The President has not created any Ford constituency unique from that of any Republican President. The one exception to this is that he does show unique strength with young voters for a Republican. In fact, the age groups that support him at the highest level are those under 35 and over 55. The basis for this support with young voters is his honesty, friendliness, candor, and the family. He has, however, some problems with those in the middle age group (35-55) which are the largest voting groups. This weakness is caused by the recession. These are the age groups that are made up largely of working people who are feeling squeezed and threatened by inflation and unemployment. Almost the entire dip the President experienced in the national polls in the last 60-90 days has been confined to the eastern regions.

While only about half of the voters feel they know very much about Reagan or what he stands for, the Republicans do have a very positive perception of him. He is perceived as bold, decisive, strong, intelligent, and competent and this perception is held with almost no negatives. Moreover, when Reagan and the President were compared on the handling of a series of issues, the President has leads only in the issues of foreign affairs and dealing with Congress. Reagan is close to or ahead of the President in being seen as able to handle inflation, unemployment, government spending, and crime. Obviously, it is important that we don't get into the position of having to fight Reagan or any Democrat issue by issue.



Style

The key to reinforcing and improving the President's perception over the next few months is the style in which he handles the job of being President. We should remember the campaign advertising will be only a small portion of the President's total exposure. Research has shown that the perceived style of leadership is by far the most important thing to most voters in evaluating officeholders and candidates. This does not necessarily mean the way they dress or their manner of speech but the style with which they evaluate issues and make decisions. Several elements of style ought to be emphasized during the next few months.

1. He needs to appear more presidential. While his warm, friendly manner has served him well, he does not have any of the aura of being President. Also, appearing as being knowledgeable and competent. The various arrangements for his foreign travels should be thought through with this domestic consumption in mind. We need a little more "Hail to the Chief."
2. His warm, friendly, honest, and candid manner has served him well and he ought not to do the things that undermine this. He shouldn't sound strident and certainly should not say things that most people don't think are true. For example, in the press conference Monday night, the President said he was pleased with the political situation in the country now because we had peace and prosperity. The fact is a majority of people think things are worse now than they were two or three years ago, that we don't have prosperity.
3. We badly need to find some positions and issues where the President can violate his stereo-type as a classic Republican. The problem is every position or statement he has made recently has been something that would have been expected from a Republican President, even though a majority of the voters may agree with him, e.g. budget cuts, food stamps, vetoes of spending programs. There is research that indicates that when an individual violation his stereo-type, many of the aspects of that stereo-type which might have been previously perceived to be negative are then seen as positive, i.e. - Nixon going to China, and Jerry Brown talking about cutting out government programs and spending in California, etc. We need to find issues and positions the President can take on in the next few months that he or any Republican President would not be expected to advocate.



4. He ought to stay away from all of the traditional Republican clichés particularly those about the budget, government spending, and a strong national defense. Many of his ideas in these areas are shared by the majority of voters but the old-time Republican political rhetoric makes them sound political and doesn't communicate the positives of the idea.
5. Talking about his proposals and programs, he is failing to communicate with a large share of the voters. They simply can't relate 28 billion dollars or even a few million dollars to their personal situation. We need to use as many simple examples as possible and every time the President talks about or proposes something new, his statement or speech has got to interpret very simply how it will affect the citizen it is meant to help. Every speech and statement needs to have a bottom line. It is impossible to oversimplify or repeat too often the positive aspects of the President's program. When the President talks about his programs or proposals, he should always interpret them in terms of benefiting people and not talk about them in terms of how they affect institutions. Everyone in the administration seems prone to talking about business, labor, government, education, capital, etc., and not people.
6. Even though he is a candidate and will be engaged in a political campaign all next year, he ought to remain as non-political and as far above the battle as possible. Every time he gives a hard, strident, political speech, he hurts his strongest point and that is his perception as being honest, candid and fair.



Theme

The President, the administration and the campaign need a theme. I am concerned that the President is seen as a tactician without an overall strategy of his plan for the country. This lets voters and his opponents interpret many of his perceptions and programs as things done for political expediency or to appease special interest groups rather than as part of an overall plan to move the country toward a perceived set of goals or objectives. We need an umbrella under which we can put all of the President's programs and end up with the whole being greater than the sum of its parts.

The President needs to set forth in a major speech some time soon, his idea for what the destiny of our country is and how his program relates to it. I think the backbone of this theme ought to be anti-bigness. He ought to be against big government, big unions, big businesses, big school systems and the concentration of power in general.

At the same time, he needs to be for individuals. Everything he advocates ought to be seen as helping the individual live his life as independently as possible and help him relate to the institutions in a large complex society.

There are several advantages to this type of theme. First of all, it fits his style and ideas. Secondly, it can be very presidential and puts him on the high road for the campaign. Also, it keeps him away from having to fight the election on a series of individual issues which, as an incumbent with a pessimistic public, would be difficult to win. Lastly, it would appeal to the press, to Republicans and to Independents.

In addition to the anti-bigness or concentration of power idea, the theme ought to have a strong moral tone and one of hope. One of the problems with the issues now, and over the last several years, is that there is no element of hope which has been the underlying theme of successful politics for many years.

Given the relatively short period of time we have to set perceptions, it would be useful if the theme of the President's program is given a name soon. The hope element was implicit in the main "New Deal", "Fair Deal", "New Frontier", and "Great Society". While it is important not to overpromise and to be responsible, we have to communicate that things can and will get better over the next few years with Gerald Ford as President.

While we want as wide a coverage as possible to such a speech, it would be most effective if given somewhere other than a joint session of Congress which epitomizes the establishment and the concentration of power in Washington. A youthful audience somewhere outside of Washington would probably be best.



Additional Thoughts

Détente is a particularly unpopular idea with most Republican primary voters and the word is worse. We ought to stop using the word whenever possible.

There are not enough people out talking about the President positively. We particularly need more people from the administration and Congress out not only defending the President, but boosting him. Probably the most successful part of the '72 campaign was the surrogate program and something like it needs to be established.

The key perception between Reagan and Ford with the primary voters is not ideology as much as degrees of Republicanism. There are three groups of Republican primary voters, the hard core Republicans, the more moderate-liberal independent ticket-splitting group and a third group made up of the hard core right (only about 5%) and of independent and new Republicans who tend to be lower socio-economically than others. The President is doing well with the first two groups while most of Reagan's support comes from the third. It is very important that in the primary the President be perceived as the regular Republican candidate while Reagan is seen as the dissident. This is why the endorsement of respected Conservative Republican officeholders and politicians is particularly important at this time as it destroys Reagan's credibility as a loyal Republican.

