

Date: January 13, 2025

Re: Climate Power - Research on the Trump Administration's Military Action in Venezuela

Following Trump's removal of President Nicolás Maduro, on January 8–11, on behalf of Climate Power, we conducted several research experiments to explore voters'<sup>1</sup> reactions to Trump's military actions in Venezuela.

While voters are split on the initial decision to capture Maduro, support erodes when the focus shifts to long-term involvement, control of oil, and the costs of sustained engagement abroad. Across polling and message testing, voters consistently respond most strongly to frames that connect Trump's actions to rising costs at home and broken "America First" promises. These findings point to a clear opportunity to engage persuadable voters by grounding foreign policy critiques in affordability, misplaced priorities, and everyday economic pressures.

### **Key Findings:**

**Awareness of Trump's military action in Venezuela is nearly universal.** Nine in ten voters report having heard at least a little about the event.

**Overall approval of the Trump administration's decision to capture Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro is divided, with almost equal shares of voters approving (43%) and disapproving (44%).** Approval is strongly polarized along partisan lines, with roughly three-quarters of those who voted for Harris disapproving, and nearly eight in ten people who voted for Trump approving.

**However, approval softens when voters consider the longer-term implications of U.S. involvement.** A majority of voters (54%) disapprove of Trump's plan to take control of Venezuela's oil and remain indefinitely, and a plurality (48%) believes the costs of involvement abroad outweigh the benefits.

- Notably, approval among Trump voters declines on these questions, suggesting greater vulnerability when the focus shifts from the initial action to sustained engagement and resource commitments.

**Affordability and cost of living concerns are the most effective tie-ins to drive down Trump's approval on the issue.**

- Voters are divided on how they expect Trump's military action to affect U.S. energy prices. A plurality (39%) believes it will reduce prices, while 32% expect no impact and 28% believe it will increase prices.

**Of 14 messages tested and evaluated on their ability to shift Trump approval, the most effective ones all centered on high costs for everyday Americans.**

- The most effective message at reducing Trump's approval combines affordability concerns with Trump breaking his "America First" promise.
  - 97th percentile: *"[Trump] promised 'no more wars,' to lower costs, and to put America first—but he's doing the opposite. **While families struggle to afford everyday expenses, Trump is diverting taxpayer dollars to foreign entanglements instead of our communities. Instead of lowering utility bills and creating good-paying clean energy jobs, he's threatening those projects while prioritizing giveaways to wealthy special interests. American families can't afford Trump's policies.**"*
- **While ties to the Trump administration's corruption are notable, it is essential to lead with costs.** Messages that contrast voters' economic hardships with Trump's actions benefiting wealthy or corporate interests, such as billionaires writing their own rules or taxpayer subsidies for big oil, also perform strongly.

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<sup>1</sup> This poll targeted voters in order to understand the opinions of civically-engaged citizens.

- 87th percentile: ***“American families’ groceries are getting too expensive, their rents are too high, and their utility bills keep skyrocketing. What is Donald Trump working on instead? Invading Venezuela to help oil and gas CEOs, while letting billionaires write their own rules for AI and datacenters and building a ballroom for parties with his rich donors. Donald Trump cares about them. Not you.”***
- 82nd percentile: ***“Families are struggling with skyrocketing grocery prices, healthcare costs, rent, and utility bills while Trump is focused on rewarding his corporate oil donors by taking control of Venezuela and even using American taxpayer dollars to subsidize Venezuela’s oil infrastructure. That means more record profits for rich oil CEOs, while everyday American families will continue to face higher prices at the pump, grocery stores, and in their homes.”***

**Messages that emphasize oil or clean energy impacts without tying them to household costs fall well below average in message testing.** This suggests that abstract or industry-centered energy arguments are less compelling than those that connect foreign intervention to everyday economic consequences.

- 17th percentile: ***“True energy independence doesn’t come from threatening other nations for their oil. It comes from investing in cheaper, cleaner, and more reliable energy right here at home. Escalating military action in Venezuela while cutting back on our own clean energy growth only leaves us more vulnerable to global oil shocks, raising costs for working families.”***
- 22nd percentile: ***“Real national security doesn’t come from threatening other countries for their oil. It’s about strengthening America right here at home. When we rely on foreign oil from unstable regions, it hikes up gas prices, makes everything more expensive, and can pull us into conflicts far away. Investing in American-made energy secures our jobs, lowers costs, and makes our country safer and independent, free from foreign influence and overseas crises.”***

**Despite believing that Trump’s motivations were driven by a desire to control oil, economic messaging outperforms oil-based narratives.**

- When asked directly about Trump’s motivations, a slim majority of voters (51%) believe his action was driven by a desire to control oil.
- However, despite voters’ beliefs about oil motivations, oil-focused arguments consistently underperform in testing. Arguments that center on oil or gas interests were the least chosen concerns when it comes to this intervention (chosen in less than 46% of matchups).

**When directly asked to choose the most persuasive arguments against Trump’s action, voters center on affordability and economic strain.**

- The single strongest argument emphasizes Trump breaking his “America First” promise while Americans struggle with high prices. This frame was chosen in 64% of matchups.
- Similarly, arguments that emphasize Trump’s use of American taxpayer dollars to benefit oil companies and special interests rather than investing that money at home were also chosen above average (57% of matchups respectively).

## **Methodology**

### *Issue Polling*

We collected 3,754 responses via online surveys nationally between 1/8 and 1/11. Responses are weighted to the 2024 electorate.

### *Maxdiff Polling*

We collected 5,102 responses via online surveys nationally between 1/8 and 1/10. Respondents are presented with several randomized matchups of 2 statements and are asked to select one based on the following question:

*"People have different views about President Trump's decision to remove President Nicolás Maduro from power in Venezuela and to continue US involvement in the country. Below are some concerns that some have raised about this action. Which, if any, comes closest to your view?"*

Each value represents how often each statement was selected by respondents paired with any other statement in the test. Higher values mean that people chose that statement more than the others, and lower means people chose it less than others. Responses are weighted to the 2024 electorate.

#### *Content Testing*

We collected 4,091 responses via online surveys nationally between 1/8 and 1/10. The test was conducted in an augmented experimental design – a randomized controlled trial, with the modeled results informed by survey respondent ratings of the messages tested. Results are estimated using models designed to evaluate the effectiveness of each message against a control group across the outcome metric.

The percentile metric shown in the table above is ranking these message frames against 1,000+ other messages tested in the same survey structure since January 2025.

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