

Winning the Issues
Messaging on ISIS, Obamacare, Omnibus Spending
and Tax Bill Provisions, Speaker Paul Ryan,
Gun Control, and the Economy

January 2016

OVERVIEW

Presentation Testing conducted two mixed-gender focus groups with moderate Independents in Las Vegas, NV on January 7, 2016. One group was comprised of 12 Romney-voting moderate Independents, and the other was comprised of 11 Obama-voting moderate Independents. All respondents had at least some college education, and were age 22+.

KEY FINDINGS

- 1) **Most Independents knew that Congress has never passed a formal declaration of war against ISIS**

In the beginning of each session, we asked:

Has Congress ever passed a formal declaration of war against ISIS?

Answer choices	Romney INDs	Obama INDs	Total
1=Yes	0	1	1
2=No	10	6	16
3=Don't know	2	4	6

- 2) **Romney-voting Independents thought that it was important that Congress pass a formal declaration of war against ISIS. Obama-voting Independents generally disagreed.**

In the beginning of each session, we also asked:

How important is it, on a scale from zero to 10, that Congress pass a formal declaration of war against ISIS?

	Romney INDs	Obama INDs	AVG.
0=Not at all important to	7.0	4.3	5.7

10=Very important

During each session, we asked respondents who scored this question near the average why they did so.

Romney-voting Independents said the reason to pass such a declaration would be to “garner more support,” “acquire more resources” to execute the fight, “get other countries involved” on our side, and “show we are serious.”

Obama-voting Independents told us that the American people do not want another “full-blown war.” They argued that Congress needs to be behind military action overseas and formally state it for the record, but they pointed out that we do not really know what ISIS is because it does not have boundaries, borders, and manufacturing. In their view, we can only declare war against a nation-state. In addition, they mentioned that Congress did not officially declare war to invade Afghanistan or Iraq so they doubted that Congress would need such a declaration to fight ISIS. Also, respondents expressed concern that such a declaration would give our government carte blanche to invade multiple countries, which they do not support.

3) More than half of our respondents (12 of 23) did not know that prior to our focus groups, the President had never vetoed a bill passed by both houses of Congress to repeal Obamacare

In the beginning of each session, we asked:

How many times since the passage of the Affordable Care Act in 2010 has the President vetoed a bill, passed by both houses of Congress, to repeal Obamacare?

Answer choices	Romney INDs	Obama INDs	Total
1=Never	7	4	11
2=Once	0	0	0
3=Between two and five times	2	1	3
4=Six times or more	0	1	1
5=Don't know	3	5	8

4) Romney-voting Independents were split as to whether it is symbolically important that Congressional Republicans recently passed an Obamacare repeal bill for the President to veto. Most Obama-voting Independents (nine of 11) thought that it was a “waste of time.”

In the beginning of each session, we also asked:

On a scale from zero to 10, how important is it, as a symbol of what Congressional Republicans stand for, that both houses recently passed an Obamacare repeal bill for the President to veto?

	Romney INDs	Obama INDs	AVG.
0=Not at all symbolically important to 10=Very symbolically important	7.3	5.6	6.5

During each session, we asked respondents who scored this question near the average why they did so.

Among Romney-voting Independents, there was a 6-6 split as to whether there is symbolic value in sending an Obamacare repeal bill to the President to veto.

Respondents in that group who told us that it is symbolically important contended that Congressional Republicans were taking a stand and trying to expose the detrimental effects that the law would have on the American people if it were to remain in place. Also, respondents argued that Congressional Republicans were doing what their constituents expected of them. Some believe that Congressional Republicans have not taken a tough enough stand to oppose Obamacare in the past. One respondent explained:

“[Passing an Obamacare repeal bill] shows that [Congressional Republicans] are actually standing together now and standing against something. One of the reasons I would vote more Republican would be knowing that they do oppose that type of legislation. By standing together, they show me that they’re finally standing up for something that their constituents want them to [stand up for].” – Jeff, Romney-voting Independent

Opposing voices in that group told us that passing an Obamacare repeal bill was an attempt to unite the Republican Party, but it is not symbolically important because it was a “foregone conclusion” that President Obama would not sign a bill that Congress passed to repeal his healthcare law. One respondent explained:

“[Passing an Obamacare repeal bill] was a big waste of time in my opinion. Everybody knew that the Republicans were against Obamacare. Everybody knew that Obama was going to support his own bill and veto what [Congressional Republicans] put through so it was a big waste of time. I’m not big on symbolism. I’m big on action and actual results. I would have far rather seen them introduce something to alter Obamacare or something that stood a chance of actually doing something.” – Jessie, Romney-voting Independent

Nine of 11 Obama-voting Independents indicated that Congressional Republicans’ attempt to repeal Obamacare was a “waste of time.” One respondent described it as a “Republican power play for the next election.”

- 5) Overall, four GOP priorities in the year-end budget deal were the most well-liked among Independents, scored on a zero to 10 scale of “like/dislike.” Combining the results from both Tampa (in an unrelated project) and Las Vegas, the top four were “Providing of critical healthcare benefits for 9/11 first responders” (9.3), “Honoring our commitment to our veterans” (9.3), “Reining in the IRS” (8.5), and “Prevention of the transfer of Guantanamo detainees to American soil” (8.5).

During each session (as we did in Tampa), we asked respondents to evaluate 15 budget provisions (11 from Republicans and four from Democrats) out of the hundreds of provisions that Congress recently passed in the omnibus spending and tax package for how strongly they liked or disliked each one, on a scale from zero to 10. Zero means they totally disliked it, and 10 means they totally liked it.

The following chart shows the four highest-scoring provisions, on average—all GOP priorities—combining both cities, in descending order:

Omnibus provisions	Tampa, 12/15		Las Vegas, 1/16		AVG.
	Romney INDs	Obama INDs	Romney INDs	Obama INDs	
<p><u>Providing of critical healthcare benefits for 9/11 first responders:</u> More than 30,000 first responders continue to suffer from injuries or illnesses sustained during the 9/11 attacks. The bill contains a bipartisan measure to permanently reauthorize critical health care benefits for these brave men and women, and it does so in a fiscally responsible way.</p>	9.4	10	8.4	9.5	9.3
<p><u>Honoring our commitment to our veterans:</u> This bill ensures our veterans receive their much-deserved health benefits, speeds up VA claims processing, prioritizes modernizing the VA’s electronic health care record system, and tightens oversight of construction projects.</p>	9.7	9.3	9.1	9.2	9.3
<p><u>Reining in the IRS:</u> This bill freezes most IRS operations, and maintains budget cuts necessary to ensure this agency roots out wasteful spending, and redirects resources to serving the American people. In addition, the tax extenders package also includes a measure to prohibit the IRS from unfairly imposing the gift tax on contributions to</p>	9.5	9.1	8.8	6.7	8.5

non-profit groups, which have historically been exempt, to encourage donations to these important organizations.

<u>Prevention of the transfer of Guantanamo detainees to American soil:</u> The bill prohibits funds from being used to transfer terrorist detainees from Guantanamo Bay to the United States, and prohibits the construction or acquisition of a facility in the U.S. to house detainees.	8.4	9.8	9.2	6.6	8.5
---	------------	------------	------------	------------	------------

6) Overall, the highest-scoring year-end budget deal provision supported by Democrats, on average, was: “Reauthorization of Land and Water Conservation Fund” (8.4)

Combining the results from both cities, the highest-scoring year-end budget deal provision supported by Democrats was:

	Tampa, 12/15		Las Vegas, 1/16		
Omnibus provision	Romney INDs	Obama INDs	Romney INDs	Obama INDs	AVG.
<u>Reauthorization of Land and Water Conservation Fund:</u> Includes provisions that reauthorize the vital Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) for three years. The LWCF is one of our country’s most successful outdoor recreation and conservation programs. Over the last 50 years, it has conserved national parks and forests, farms and ranches, fish and wildlife refuges, trails, and state and local parks.	8.4	9.3	8.2	7.7	8.4

7) Overall, the lowest-scoring GOP priority, on average, was: “Repeal of harmful labeling requirements on American meat” (4.7)

Combining the results from both cities, the lowest-scoring GOP priority in the year-end budget deal was:

	Tampa, 12/15		Las Vegas, 1/16		
Omnibus provision	Romney INDs	Obama INDs	Romney INDs	Obama INDs	AVG.

Repeal of harmful labeling requirements on

American meat: The bill repeals mandatory country-of-origin labeling (COOL) requirements, ensuring that our economy does not suffer more than \$1 billion in trade penalties.

3.9 7.2 3.5 4.3 4.7

Romney-voting Independents interpreted this statement to mean that meat coming to the U.S. from other countries would be less safe for them and their families to eat. None of the respondents in that group thought that it was referring to meat produced in the U.S. that is shipped overseas.

Obama-voting Independents expressed concern about safety, arguing that “you cannot put a price on health.” They contended that if there are harmful effects of meat that we are going to consume, we have a right to know. All 11 respondents thought that this statement was about meat coming to the U.S. from overseas. Only one respondent thought that it was referring to a “two-way street,” where it also involved U.S.-produced meat being shipped overseas.

8) More than two months into his Speakership, almost half of Independents (11 of 23) with at least some college education still do not know that Paul Ryan is the Speaker of the House of Representatives

In the beginning of each session, we asked:

The current Speaker of the House of Representatives is...

Answer choices	Romney INDs	Obama INDs	Total
1=John Boehner	0	1	1
2=Kevin McCarthy	0	0	0
3=Paul Ryan	7	5	12
4=Mitch McConnell	0	0	0
5=Don't know	5	5	10

9) Nearly two-thirds of Independents (15 of 23) were not able to name one thing that Paul Ryan has said or done since becoming Speaker of the House on October 29th

In the beginning of each session, we inquired:

If asked, could you name one thing that Paul Ryan has said or done since becoming Speaker of the House on October 29th?

Answer choices	Romney INDs	Obama INDs	Total
1=Yes	4	4	8
2=No	8	7	15

Among the four Romney-voting Independents who could name at least one thing that Paul Ryan has said or done since becoming Speaker, all of them recalled his support for the budget bill that Congress recently passed.

Obama-voting Independents heard Speaker Ryan say that he wants to work across the aisle to get things done in Congress, Donald Trump will not win the GOP nomination for President, he would put an Obamacare repeal bill up for a vote, and it will take a Republican President to actually repeal Obamacare.

In the beginning of each session, we also asked:

On a scale from zero to 10, how satisfied are you with the job Paul Ryan has been doing so far as Speaker of the House?

	Romney INDs	Obama INDs	AVG.
0=Totally dissatisfied to 10=Totally satisfied	5.1	3.9	4.5

10) Independents were split along ideological lines with regard to how they reacted to President Obama's executive order related to guns. Obama-voting Independents were significantly more supportive of the President's actions than Romney-voting Independents.

In the beginning of each session, we asked:

On a scale from zero to 10, how much do you approve or disapprove of President Obama's executive order, issued this week, related to guns?

	Romney INDs	Obama INDs	AVG.
0=Totally disapprove to 10=Totally approve	2.1	6.2	4.2

11) Romney-voting Independents were split on their view of the direction of the unemployment rate in the U.S. Half of Romney-voting Independents (six of 12)

believe that the unemployment rate in the U.S. will increase from its current level of 5.0% to between 6% and 8% one year from today. The other half believes that the unemployment rate will remain between 5% and 6% or dip below 5%. Most Obama-voting Independents (nine of 11) indicated their belief that the unemployment rate in the U.S. would remain relatively stable in the 5% to 6% range or go under 5% one year from today.

In the beginning of each session, we asked:

The unemployment rate in the U.S. now stands at 5.0%. A year from today, do you expect it to be...

Answer choices	Romney INDs	Obama INDs	Total
1=Under 5%	3	4	7
2=Between 5% and 6%	3	5	8
3=Between 6% and 7%	5	1	6
4=Between 7% and 8%	1	1	2
5=Between 8% and 9%	0	0	0
6=Between 9% and 10%	0	0	0
7=Above 10%	0	0	0

ADDENDUM

As we did last month in Tampa, we again asked respondents to evaluate 15 budget provisions (11 from Republicans and four from Democrats) out of the hundreds of provisions that Congress recently passed in the omnibus spending and tax package for how strongly they liked or disliked each one, on a scale from zero to 10. Zero means they totally disliked it, and 10 means they totally liked it.

The following chart shows each of the 15 provisions, in descending order, from the most liked to the most disliked, on average, combining the results from both cities:

Omnibus provisions	Tampa, 12/15		Las Vegas, 1/16		AVG.
	Romney INDs	Obama INDs	Romney INDs	Obama INDs	
<u>Providing of critical healthcare benefits for 9/11 first responders:</u> More than 30,000 first responders continue to suffer from injuries or illnesses sustained during the 9/11 attacks. The bill contains a bipartisan measure to permanently	9.4	10	8.4	9.5	9.3

reauthorize critical health care benefits for these brave men and women, and it does so in a fiscally responsible way.

Honoring our commitment to our

veterans: This bill ensures our veterans receive their much-deserved health benefits, speeds up VA claims processing, prioritizes modernizing the VA’s electronic health care record system, and tightens oversight of construction projects.

9.7 9.3 9.1 9.2 9.3

Reining in the IRS: This bill freezes most IRS operations, and maintains budget cuts necessary to ensure this agency roots out wasteful spending, and redirects resources to serving the American people. In addition, the tax extenders package also includes a measure to prohibit the IRS from unfairly imposing the gift tax on contributions to non-profit groups, which have historically been exempt, to encourage donations to these important organizations.

9.5 9.1 8.8 6.7 8.5

Prevention of the transfer of Guantanamo

detainees to American soil: The bill prohibits funds from being used to transfer terrorist detainees from Guantanamo Bay to the United States, and prohibits the construction or acquisition of a facility in the U.S. to house detainees.

8.4 9.8 9.2 6.6 8.5

Reauthorization of Land and Water

Conservation Fund: Includes provisions that reauthorize the vital Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) for three years. The LWCF is one of our country’s most successful outdoor recreation and conservation programs. Over the last 50 years, it has conserved national parks and forests, farms and ranches, fish and wildlife refuges, trails, and state and local parks.

8.4 9.3 8.2 7.7 8.4

Suspension of Health Insurance Tax for One

Year: Suspends the Health Insurance Tax in the Affordable Care for one year, 2017, which will result in a reduction in health insurance premiums.

7.9 9.3 7.5 7.7 8.1

Extension of the Wind and Solar Tax

Credits: Extends the wind Production Tax Credit for five years (2015-2019), and extends the solar

7.6 9.0 7.0 8.2 8.0

Investment Tax Credit for five years (2017-2021). Extending the solar Investment Tax Credit is estimated to create 61,000 jobs in 2017 alone. It is also estimated that the wind industry will grow to over 100,000 jobs over four years with the renewed wind tax credit.

Strengthening of the Visa Waiver Program to protect the homeland: The Visa Waiver Program presents one of the most urgent threats to our homeland from radical Islamic terrorism. This agreement includes the House-passed bill to tighten the security requirements under the program. It would also deny visa waiver status to any individual who has traveled to certain terrorist hotspots, including Syria and Iraq, in the last five years.

8.1 8.2 7.7 7.6 7.9

Increased resources for our military: The arbitrary spending cuts in the “sequester” have depleted the resources our armed forces need to carry out their mission. This bill restores funding for our military to ensure our troops can confront today’s challenges and defeat ISIL.

9.1 7.8 7.9 6.4 7.8

Prohibition of new funding for Obamacare: The bill contains no new funding for Obamacare, and continues to prevent a taxpayer bailout of Obamacare’s risk corridor program.

8.8 5.7 8.8 6.1 7.4

Repeal of the antiquated oil export ban: This provision ends the 1975 ban on the export of American oil. Domestic energy production is booming in the United States, and lifting the ban will help create jobs, grow our economy, and promote greater exploration of our natural resources.

7.1 7.7 7.2 6.2 7.1

A Two-Year Delay of the So-Called “Cadillac” Tax: Delays, from 2018 to 2020, the so-called “Cadillac” tax in the Affordable Care Act, a tax on employer-provided health plans worth over a certain threshold.

6.1 6.3 5.8 3.7 5.5

Blocking of EPA overreach: The bill contains no funding for new or expanded EPA programs, holding the agency to its lowest funding levels

7.0 4.6 5.9 2.9 5.1

since 2008 and its lowest staffing levels since 1989.

Maintenance of strong protections for life: This bill maintains important pro-life provisions, including the Hyde Amendment, and prohibits taxpayer funding for abortion. It also includes a new prohibition on gene editing and cuts funding for a program involved in abortion-related activities, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), by 7 percent.

7.4 4.8 3.8 4.4 5.1

Repeal of harmful labeling requirements on American meat: The bill repeals mandatory country-of-origin labeling (COOL) requirements, ensuring that our economy does not suffer more than \$1 billion in trade penalties.

3.9 7.2 3.5 4.3 4.7
