

**New Models
Messaging on Competing Visions
for America, Speaker Ryan, Omnibus Spending
Bill Provisions, and the Economy**

December 2015

OVERVIEW

Presentation Testing conducted two mixed-gender focus group dial tests with moderate Independents in Tampa, FL, on December 21, 2015. One group was comprised of 11 Romney-voting moderate Independents, and the other was comprised of 10 Obama-voting moderate Independents. All respondents had at least some college education, and were age 22+. An actress named Victoria advocated for a conservative vision for America’s future. Susan spoke as the liberal advocate. They engaged in a point-counterpoint debate, which is referenced throughout the report.

KEY FINDINGS

- 1) The messages that Speaker Ryan used in his Library of Congress speech dial tested extremely well, especially in contrast to the messaging from the Democrats. It generated strong cross-over appeal, with four of 10 Obama-voting Independents siding with that messaging. All 11 Romney-voting Independents sided with the conservative advocate, as well.**

During each session, we conducted a 25-minute point-counterpoint dial test, where we contrasted the messaging of conservatives (mostly from Speaker Ryan’s speech at the Library of Congress) with that of liberals, where they presented two competing visions for America’s future (read by actresses from a teleprompter).

After the video, we asked respondents in each group which argument they found more persuasive.

	Romney INDs	Obama INDs	Total
Victoria (conservative advocate)	11	4	15
Susan (liberal advocate)	0	6	6

Then, we asked respondents why they found one advocate’s arguments more persuasive than the other advocate’s arguments.

Multiple portions of Speaker Ryan’s speech scored above 90 (on a zero to 100 scale of agreement) with both groups. That is exceptionally strong and rare in a dial test.

Romney-voting Independents who sided with Victoria said that she believes America is about the people, and Susan believes America is about the government. They think that people are responsible for working to improve their lives, rather than depending on government, and they thought that Victoria expressed values that they share, including having less government in our lives. They described Victoria as “forward-looking” and “positive,” and they liked that she talked about growing the economy. They mentioned that Susan frequently blamed Republicans, but Victoria was not blaming any party.¹ Also, they questioned Susan’s assertion that Obamacare is working.

Obama-voting Independents who sided with Victoria supported her approach of having less government in our lives. They agreed that we need to create good jobs so people can improve their standard of living and not depend on government assistance, such as food stamps. Respondents described her as “upbeat” and “positive,” and they liked that she had a vision for how our nation should move forward. Also, they mentioned that they liked what Victoria said about the military, which included reforming the Pentagon to adapt to new threats and developing a strategy to defeat ISIS.

Obama-voting Independents who sided with Susan agreed with her support of social programs, which in their view, helps to provide opportunities to everyone, regardless of the situations into which they are born. They liked that she advocated for a “living wage.” They agreed with her argument that the wealthiest have too much power in this country and that they are working to make the laws work for them. They believe that the poor are worse off as a result. Also, they supported Susan’s approach to defeating ISIS.

Note: None of the Romney-voting Independents sided with Susan.

2) Two dial test snippets in particular serve as effective examples of how Republicans can persuade Independents with a positive message

During the dial test video, your advocate stated:

We want America to be confident again. People who don’t have a job want to be confident that they can find one—and take it. People with jobs want to be confident that they will be paid well. Students should know that their time in college—and all that debt—will be worth it. Seniors need to know that all those years of hard work—and all those years of paying taxes—will be rewarded, and that Medicare and Social Security will be there when they need them. When Americans look at Washington, they should see spending going down, taxes going down, and debt going down. People want to believe in the future again. We want a country where no one is stuck, where no one settles, where everyone can rise. And on the world stage, we want to show that we stand for freedom—not with bluster or bravado, but with calm, steady action. We want our military to

¹ In the text we tested, we removed attacks on Democrats and focused solely on a positive GOP message.

command respect from our adversaries and to inspire confidence in our allies. And when they come home, we want to give our veterans the care they deserve. We want America to lead again.

This messaging garnered extremely high agreement in both groups, with sustained periods in the mid-to-high 90s. Toward the end, Romney-voting Independents had reached 99 and Obama-voting Independents had reached 100.

At the end of the dial test video, your advocate argued:

It's important that Congressional Republicans offer the American people a positive, future-focused agenda. After all, it's easy to say "no" to policies that we oppose. But if we want to lead in the 21st century, we can't just be the party of "no." Instead, we must do the hard work of creating a positive, can-do agenda, rooted in freedom and limited government, that moves our country forward. Let's do that, and offer it to the American people. If they accept, then let's get to work.²

This messaging garnered very high levels of agreement, as well. Romney-voting Independents scored this messaging in the mid-80s to mid-90s, and Obama-voting Independents scored this in the low-80s to low-90s.

Romney-voting Independents told us that your advocate was "selling optimism." Also, they liked that she was getting out in front of being labeled as the party of "no" and they liked her commitment to no longer being labeled that way.

3) Be careful with some specific verbiage that was misconstrued

There were a couple of statements (that we modified slightly from Speaker Ryan's Library of Congress speech) that dropped significantly in the dial test.

During the dial test video, your advocate argued:

Government should break up problems so people can solve them themselves. It should set clear, firm rules that all of us can live by—rules that tell us what's expected and what's off limits.

Romney-voting Independents turned their dials down from 99 to 87, and Obama-voting Independents turned their dials down from 100 to 76. Some respondents thought that this sounded like a plea for an all-powerful government.

Later in the dial test video, your advocate also stated:

² This is text I composed, and inserted it at the very end of the script to see whether it worked as a conclusion; it did. It is intended to prod those in the GOP who think saying "no" to liberal policies is sufficient for the GOP to succeed.

Think about a single mom with one child. She’s making minimum wage, and she’s on food stamps, Medicaid, housing assistance, and other assistance. Suppose she hears about a job that pays more. Should she take that job? The answer, in this country, should always be yes. But can you really blame someone for thinking “no”? The intentions may be good. But the results are clear: We are trapping people in poverty. We have to make sure it always pays to work.

When your advocate argued, “The intentions may be good. But the results are clear: We are trapping people in poverty,” Obama-voting Independents turned their dials down from 86 to 68. Romney-voting Independents also turned their dials down. Some respondents interpreted this example literally, meaning they thought that the new job would automatically pay more than what the government benefits are worth. As a result, some wondered how this mom could be trapped in poverty by the government.

4) Obama-voting Independents rejected your advocate’s argument that we need to repeal and replace Obamacare

During the dial test video, your advocate stated:

There are many things to do, but the most urgent is to repeal and replace Obamacare and its mandates, restrictions, and red tape. Premiums are going up every year because people have too few choices.

Obama-voting Independents turned their dials down from 92 to 47. During our discussion, one respondent mentioned that he is covered under Obamacare, and he is saving a lot of money under his healthcare plan. Another respondent worried that taking away Obamacare would leave people in a worse situation where they would not be able to afford healthcare.

5) Nearly two months into his Speakership, eight of 21 Independents 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	1	3	4
2=Kevin McCarthy	0	0	0
3=Paul Ryan	8	5	13
4=Mitch McConnell	0	0	0
5=Don’t know	2	2	4

6) Most Independents (17 of 21) 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	0	4
2=No	7	10	17

Among the four Romney-voting Independents who could name at least one thing that Paul Ryan has said or done since becoming Speaker, three cited his endorsement of the budget deal that Congress recently passed. The other recalled that Speaker Ryan was not putting amnesty up for a vote and he was “not working on weekends.”

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	5.5	5.0	5.3

It appears that it is too soon for respondents to hold a strong opinion about how Paul Ryan is doing so far in his new position as Speaker. As mentioned previously, most respondents (17 of 21) could not tell us one thing that he has said or done since becoming Speaker nearly two months ago.

7) Only six of 21 respondents overall—including five Romney-voting Independents—knew that Congress had passed a \$1 trillion omnibus spending and tax bill

In the beginning of each session, we asked:

True or false: Last week, Congress passed a \$1 trillion omnibus spending and tax bill.

Answer choices	Romney	Obama	Total
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	INDs	INDs	
1=True	5	1	6
2=False	1	1	2
3=Don't know	5	8	13

8) **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.” The top four were “Providing of critical healthcare benefits for 9/11 first responders” (9.7), “Honoring our commitment to our veterans” (9.5), “Reining in the IRS” (9.3), and “Prevention of the transfer of Guantanamo detainees to American soil” (9.1).**

During each session, 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—in descending order:

Omnibus provisions	Romney INDs	Obama INDs	AVG.
<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	10.0	9.7
<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	9.5
<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 non-profit groups, which have historically been exempt, to encourage donations to these important organizations.</p>	9.5	9.1	9.3

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

9.1

**9) The highest-scoring year-end budget deal provision supported by Democrats was:
“Reauthorization of Land and Water Conservation Fund” (8.9)**

During each session, the highest-scoring year-end budget deal provision supported by Democrats was:

Omnibus provisions

**Romney
INDs**

**Obama
INDs**

AVG.

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

8.9

10) The lowest-scoring GOP priority was: “Repeal of harmful labeling requirements on American meat” (5.6)

During each session, the lowest-scoring year-end budget deal GOP priority was:

Omnibus provisions

**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

5.6

Several Romney-voting Independents feared that Congress was lifting protections on the meat that they or the people they know would consume in the United States. Of the 11 respondents in that group, nine interpreted the statement to mean that labeling requirements were being repealed on the meat that we import into the United States, and two thought that the statement referred to meat that we were exporting to other countries.

11) Views about the direction of the U.S. economy were tied to ideology, with Obama-voting Independents holding a far more positive view compared to Romney-voting Independents. Among Obama-voting Independents, six stated that the U.S. economy is getting somewhat better, four indicated that it is staying as is, and none said that it is getting any worse compared to one year ago. Romney-voting Independents were more split, with two stating that the U.S. economy is getting somewhat better, five indicating that it is staying as is, and four saying that it is getting somewhat worse or much worse compared to one year ago.

In the beginning of each session, we asked:

Compared to one year ago, is the U.S. economy...

Answer choices	Romney INDs	Obama INDs	Total
1=getting much worse	1	0	1
2=getting somewhat worse	3	0	3
3=staying as is	5	4	9
4=getting somewhat better	2	6	8
5=getting much better	0	0	0

We asked respondents in each session who believe that compared to one year ago, the U.S. economy is getting at least somewhat better or at least somewhat worse what evidence they have for their belief.

Romney-voting Independents who believe that compared to one year ago, the U.S. economy is getting somewhat better cited:

- Real estate is selling fast
- Home buyers are able to secure loans
- The improving real estate market helps other industries
- The unemployment rate has gone down
- The Federal Reserve just raised interest rates, which is a sign of economic improvement

Obama-voting Independents who believe that compared to one year ago, the U.S. economy is getting somewhat better cited:

- The real estate market is improving
- Gas prices are dropping due to fracking in the United States
- Interest rates are up, leading to increased savings and investments
- Economic situations are improving—people are getting jobs and buying homes

Romney-voting Independents who believe that compared to one year ago, the U.S. economy is getting somewhat worse or much worse cited:

- One respondent told us that the unemployed people that she has known are still unemployed, and others who are employed have job situations that have worsened, such as being demoted
- The unemployment rate is underreported—it excludes unemployed people who are no longer eligible for benefits
- We are giving billions of dollars to Iran that we do not have
- Our deficit has skyrocketed, and we just passed a \$1 trillion spending bill
- The Federal Reserve continues to print money, which is destabilizing our economy
- Another respondent is experiencing restricted choices in healthcare providers under Obamacare, and she believes that will become a big issue for others in the coming year

Note: None of the Obama-voting Independents believe that the U.S. economy is getting somewhat worse or much worse, compared to one year ago.

12) Two-thirds of Independents (14 of 21) believe that the unemployment rate in the U.S. will remain in the 5% to 6% range one year from today. Only three Independents overall believe that the unemployment rate will fall from its current level of 5.0% to under 5% one year from today, which suggests that most think the unemployment rate has leveled off and will not improve moving forward.

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%	2	1	3
2=Between 5% and 6%	8	6	14
3=Between 6% and 7%	1	1	2
4=Between 7% and 8%	0	0	0
5=Between 8% and 9%	0	2	2
6=Between 9% and 10%	0	0	0
7=Above 10%	0	0	0

ADDENDUM

During each session, 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 each of the 15 provisions, in descending order, from the most liked to the most disliked, on average:

Omnibus provisions	Romney INDs	Obama INDs	AVG.
<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	10.0	9.7
<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	9.5
<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 non-profit groups, which have historically been exempt, to encourage donations to these important organizations.</p>	9.5	9.1	9.3
<p><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.</p>	8.4	9.8	9.1
<p><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.</p>	8.4	9.3	8.9
<p><u>Suspension of Health Insurance Tax for One Year:</u> Suspends the Health Insurance Tax in the Affordable Care for one year, 2017, which will result in a reduction in health insurance premiums.</p>	7.9	9.3	8.6

<p><u>Increased resources for our military:</u> 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.</p>	9.1	7.8	8.5
<p><u>Extension of the Wind and Solar Tax Credits:</u> Extends the wind Production Tax Credit for five years (2015-2019), and extends the solar 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.</p>	7.6	9.0	8.3
<p><u>Strengthening of the Visa Waiver Program to protect the homeland:</u> 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.</p>	8.1	8.2	8.2
<p><u>Repeal of the antiquated oil export ban:</u> 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.</p>	7.1	7.7	7.4
<p><u>Prohibition of new funding for Obamacare:</u> The bill contains no new funding for Obamacare, and continues to prevent a taxpayer bailout of Obamacare’s risk corridor program.</p>	8.8	5.7	7.3
<p><u>A Two-Year Delay of the So-Called “Cadillac” Tax:</u> 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.</p>	6.1	6.3	6.2
<p><u>Maintenance of strong protections for life:</u> 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.</p>	7.4	4.8	6.1
<p><u>Blocking of EPA overreach:</u> The bill contains no funding for new or expanded EPA programs, holding the agency to its lowest funding levels since 2008 and its lowest staffing levels since 1989.</p>	7.0	4.6	5.8

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

5.6