

**New Models**  
**Messaging on ISIS, Obamacare and the Supreme Court, 529 Plans,  
 Keystone XL pipeline, Immigration, and the Economy**

**March 2015**

**OVERVIEW**

Presentation Testing conducted two mixed-gender focus groups with moderate Independents in Phoenix, AZ on March 2, 2015. One group was comprised of 12 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 or older.

**KEY FINDINGS**

- 1) Independents were concerned about ISIS, and almost all respondents (20 of 22) thought that the likelihood of a terrorist attack on U.S. soil carried out by ISIS is about the same or higher than it was six months ago, which suggests that the President’s actions against that group are not reducing their level of concern**

In the beginning of each session, we asked:

*On a scale from zero to 10, how concerned are you about ISIS, also known as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria?*

	<b>Romney INDs</b>	<b>Obama INDs</b>	<b>Total (avg.)</b>
<b>0=Not at all concerned to 10=Very concerned</b>	<b>8.0</b>	<b>7.8</b>	<b>7.9</b>

We also asked:

*Compared to six months ago, would you say that when it comes to the likelihood of a terrorist attack on U.S. soil carried out by ISIS, the threat now...*

<b>Answer choices</b>	<b>Romney INDs</b>	<b>Obama INDs</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>1=is currently lower</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>2=is about the same</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>3=is currently higher</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>12</b>

**2) Independents were not very familiar with the upcoming U.S. Supreme Court case related to the constitutionality of Obamacare**

In the beginning of each session, we asked:

*On a scale from zero to 10, how familiar are you with an upcoming U.S. Supreme Court case related to the constitutionality of Obamacare?*

	<b>Romney INDs</b>	<b>Obama INDs</b>	<b>Total (avg.)</b>
<b>0=Not at all familiar to 10=Very familiar</b>	<b>3.9</b>	<b>3.9</b>	<b>3.9</b>

Our discussions with Independents revealed that only two of 22 respondents, one in each session, could tell us what the case is about and what is specifically being challenged.

**3) Obama-voting Independents were more inclined than Romney-voting Independents to believe that we would be able to help the millions of people who gained health insurance through the President’s health care law who could lose it if the Supreme Court says a major portion of the law is unconstitutional**

During each session, we asked:

*If the Supreme Court overturns a major portion of Obamacare, and says it is unconstitutional, millions of people who gained their coverage through Obamacare could lose it. What should be done for those people, if anything?*

Some Romney-voting Independents expressed skepticism that we would be able to do anything for those people who could lose coverage. One respondent asserted that his health insurance costs will have doubled from 2013 to 2016. He said that he would like to help those people, but he wondered how much extra money the average person could pay to subsidize others’ health insurance costs.

Another Romney-voting Independent argued that there are a lot of clinics that are run by nonprofit organizations that work very well, but in his view, government often attempts to control what they are doing if they provide financial support to them. He argued that we should be getting behind those clinics, which, in his view, are getting the job done. Most Romney-voting Independents expressed support for that proposal.

Other proposals from Romney-voting Independents included providing block grants to states to help pay to cover those people and allowing those who would lose their health insurance coverage to stay on their plan during a transitional period while they figure out what to do next (so they are not losing their coverage so abruptly).

Among Obama-voting Independents, some thought that we should figure out a way to continue to subsidize their health insurance.

One respondent suggested that private health insurance companies should offer lower cost plans that those people who could lose their health insurance may be able to afford. In that respondent’s view, there would be some restrictions, such as choice of doctors, but it would provide those people with an affordable option. Seven of 10 respondents in that group supported that idea.

Obama-voting Independents were generally skeptical that Congress would intervene to help these people due to the continuous gridlock that they have witnessed over the years. As a result, the private health insurance industry would need to be involved, in their view.

Other proposals from Obama-voting Independents included moving to a national health care plan, which would cover those people, continuing to subsidize their health insurance for six months to a year while they transition to another option, and providing increased federal funding to clinics, who would be able to treat people with basic emergencies.

**4) It was fairly important to Obama-voting Independents that the President’s health care law remains the law of the land; Romney-voting Independents disagreed.**

In the beginning of each session, we asked:

*On a scale from zero to 10, how important is it to you that the President’s health care law, also known as Obamacare, remains the law of the land?*

	<b>Romney INDs</b>	<b>Obama INDs</b>	<b>Total (avg.)</b>
<b>0=Not at all important to 10=Very important</b>	<b>1.8</b>	<b>6.5</b>	<b>4.2</b>

We asked respondents who scored this question near the average why they did so.

Among Romney-voting Independents, we heard that people should be able to purchase health insurance if they want it, but it should not be required.

Obama-voting Independents told us that it is important to them that people are able to get health insurance coverage through the President’s health care law, but they could not score this question higher because they did not know enough about the details of the law to do so.

**5) Independents were not very knowledgeable about 529 plans, but when they were presented with a choice between the President’s recent proposal and the bill that the**

**U.S. House passed in late February, they overwhelmingly sided with the U.S. House bill**

In the beginning of each session, we asked:

*On a scale from zero to 10, how familiar are you with “529” plans that are used to help parents save in advance for their kids’ college education expenses, including tuition, fees, and supplies?*

	<b>Romney INDs</b>	<b>Obama INDs</b>	<b>Total (avg.)</b>
<b>0=Not at all familiar to 10=Very familiar</b>	<b>3.0</b>	<b>3.6</b>	<b>3.3</b>

Prior to the sessions, only one of 22 respondents, a Romney-voting Independent, had heard about President Obama’s proposal in January 2015 that the investment income generated from new contributions to 529 plans should be taxed when withdrawn, instead of being tax-free. And that revenue would then help cover free tuition for two years at community colleges.

We asked respondents in each session what they thought about that proposal.

All of the Romney-voting Independents opposed that idea, contending that the proposal would serve as a disincentive for parents to save for their children’s college expenses.

Almost all (eight of 10) Obama-voting Independents opposed the proposal, as well. They did not like the idea of paying additional taxes to pay for someone else’s college education and seven of 10 respondents in that group thought that it would be harmful to the middle class.

Obama-voting Independents also expressed their concerns about fairness. First, some thought that we should not provide a preference to two year colleges over four year colleges. And second, one respondent argued that because we have education budget problems in grade schools—and not everyone will attend college—we should allocate additional financial resources for education to grade schools, where everyone can benefit.

During our discussion, we also told respondents that the U.S. House recently voted to let people use tax-advantaged education savings accounts to pay for computers, and place refunds from colleges back into their accounts without penalty.

Independents in both sessions expressed support for both of those ideas voted on by the U.S. House, and all 22 respondents preferred that proposal rather than the President’s.

**6) Independents indicated to us that they held only some familiarity with the proposed Keystone XL pipeline**

In the beginning of each session, we asked:

*On a scale from zero to 10, how familiar are you with the proposed Keystone XL pipeline?*

	<b>Romney INDs</b>	<b>Obama INDs</b>	<b>Total (avg.)</b>
<b>0=Not at all familiar to 10=Very familiar</b>	<b>5.8</b>	<b>5.3</b>	<b>5.6</b>

**7) Independents would not say that it is a “high priority” for the U.S. that the Keystone XL pipeline be built**

During our discussions with respondents, we learned that only three Romney-voting Independents and two Obama-voting Independents would say that it is a “high priority” for the U.S. that the Keystone XL pipeline be built.

Then, we asked those respondents in each session what the benefits would be of building the Keystone XL pipeline.

Romney-voting Independents offered the following list:

- Most of the oil would remain in the U.S.
- It would be more environmentally sound to transport the oil via the pipeline rather than by rail
- The building and maintenance of the pipeline would create jobs, directly and indirectly
- It would help to keep gas prices low
- Access to this oil would make our nation more secure

Obama-voting Independents compiled the following list:

- It would help us to become self-sufficient with our energy resources
- Without the Keystone XL pipeline, the oil will go to China and be sold back to us for a higher price
- Most of the oil would remain in the U.S.
- It would help the economy with job creation
- It would help to keep gas prices low

During our discussions with respondents, we learned that the decline in gas prices over the past several months has not had any impact on their view of the Keystone XL pipeline issue.

**8) Independents were split along ideological lines about whether or not Republicans in Congress should keep talking about the Keystone XL pipeline and pushing it legislatively by trying to over-ride the President’s veto. Romney-voting**

**Independents thought that Republicans in Congress should continue to push this issue; Obama-voting Independents disagreed.**

During our discussion with respondents in each session, we asked:

*Is [the Keystone XL pipeline] an issue that Republicans in Congress should keep talking about and pushing legislatively (by trying to over-ride the President's veto), or should they just accept that the President has vetoed the bill, and just move on?*

Even though most Romney-voting Independents did not believe that the Keystone XL pipeline is a high priority for the U.S. right now, they wanted Republicans in Congress to continue pushing the issue. Only two of 10 Obama-voting Independents agreed that Republicans in Congress should continue to push the issue.

Among Romney-voting Independents, we heard that as people learn more about it, they might believe that we would be better off with the Keystone XL pipeline than without it. Obama-voting Independents told us that we need to spend more time understanding the environmental impact of the proposed pipeline.

- 9) Obama-voting Independents were optimistic about the direction of the U.S. economy compared to one year ago, with nine of 10 saying that the economy is getting at least somewhat better. Romney-voting Independents were more split, with four saying that the economy is getting at least somewhat worse, two saying that it is staying as is, and six saying that it is getting somewhat better.**

In the beginning of each session, we asked respondents the following question:

*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	2	1	3
4=getting somewhat better	6	7	13
5=getting much better	0	2	2

We asked respondents in each session who thought that compared to one year ago, the U.S. economy is getting at least somewhat worse or at least somewhat better 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:

- More opportunities in the job market
- The stock market has increased

- Building construction has increased
- The energy sector in the U.S. is growing
- Money for projects is increasingly becoming available in various industries (i.e., alternative energy)
- Increased activity in the housing market
- More people are buying luxury cars
- Lower gas prices

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

- The unemployment rate has declined
- People are spending more money on travel (i.e., increased tourism in Las Vegas)
- Wall Street is doing better (companies' reports)
- Increased construction activity (homes and office buildings)
- The stock market is improving
- The number of conventions and concerts in the area has increased
- People are spending more money on entertainment
- Increased liquor sales
- Increasing property values
- Return of some manufacturing jobs
- Fewer foreclosures and short sales in the housing market
- Increased jewelry sales

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

- The value of the U.S. Dollar is declining
- Wages are remaining stagnant or declining
- More people are getting food stamps or state assistance
- There are not many jobs available

Note: None of the Obama-voting Independents thought that the U.S. economy is getting at least somewhat worse compared to one year ago.

**10) Obama-voting Independents were far more optimistic than Romney-voting Independents about where they believe the unemployment rate will be one year from today, with eight of 10 expressing their belief that the unemployment rate will be at 6% or below at that point. Slightly more than half (seven of 12) of Romney-voting Independents believe that the unemployment rate will increase from its current level of 5.7% to between 6% and 7% one year from today.**

In the beginning of each session, we asked respondents the following question:

*The unemployment rate in the U.S. now stands at 5.7%. A year from today, do you expect it to be...*

Answer choices	Romney INDs	Obama INDs	Total
1=Under 5%	1	1	2
2=Between 5% and 6%	4	7	11
3=Between 6% and 7%	7	2	9
4=Between 7% and 8%	0	0	0
5=Between 8% and 9%	0	0	0
6=Between 9% and 10%	0	0	0
7=Above 10%	0	0	0

**11) Independents, including most Romney-voting Independents, generally opposed the Republican strategy of tying the funding to the Department of Homeland Security to the defunding of the President’s executive order on immigration**

During our discussion with Romney-voting Independents, we learned that only three of 12 supported the Republican strategy of tying the funding to the Department of Homeland Security to the defunding of the President’s executive order on immigration. Some described that strategy as “passive aggressive” and “political extortion.” Others expressed discomfort with combining separate ideas into one bill because some Members of Congress could be focused only on one of the issues, and they could end up passing bills with unintended consequences. They thought that we should be dealing with one issue at a time.

Eight of 10 Obama-voting Independents did not believe that the two issues are even related and as a result, they did not support the Republican strategy. They expressed frustration with House Republicans and the Tea Party for not allowing a “clean” bill on funding the Department of Homeland Security.

**12) Romney-voting Independents strongly disagreed with the President’s decision to issue an executive order allowing approximately five million illegal immigrants to remain in the U.S. Obama-voting Independents were moderately supportive of that decision.**

In the beginning of each session, we asked:

*Near the end of 2014, President Obama issued an executive order allowing approximately five million illegal immigrants to remain in the U.S. How much do you agree or disagree with that decision?*

	Romney INDs	Obama INDs	Total (avg.)
0=Totally disagree to 10=Totally agree	0.8	6.2	3.5

Prior to the sessions, almost all Independents had heard something about President Obama's executive order late last year with respect to immigration.

We asked respondents in each group why they agreed or disagreed with the President's executive order.

Romney-voting Independents were most bothered by the fact that the President went around Congress to achieve the result that he wanted. Also, respondents indicated that others must respect our laws and they were troubled that the illegal immigrants would be allowed to stay when others go through the proper channels to get legal status in the U.S.

During our discussion with Romney-voting Independents, who were very troubled by the President's executive order on immigration, we asked how they would go about defunding it. Some mentioned taking the matter to court and impeachment. They thought that Republicans were elected to Congress in 2014 to challenge the President and they wanted the fight to continue, but they were fairly resigned to the idea that Republicans in Congress could not pass a veto-proof bill to defund the executive order on immigration.

One respondent suggested that Republicans in Congress pass a bill that strips the funding for the executive order on immigration so that the President could veto it and go on the record as acting unilaterally and against the will of the American people.

Obama-voting Independents stated that our nation was built on immigration, and we should want the illegal immigrants to get jobs and be productive members of society. In addition, some contended that we should not punish the immigrants who were brought to the U.S. as children, and we should not send their parents back to their home country because that would break up families and hurt the economy.

**13) Independents were generally split over who they primarily blame for the impasse between the President and Congress related to the threatened partial government shutdown at the Department of Homeland Security. Romney-voting Independents blamed the President, and Obama-voting Independents blamed Congress.**

During each session, we asked respondents if they had heard anything about a threatened partial government shutdown at the Department of Homeland Security related to the President's executive order on immigration. Almost all Romney-voting Independents and slightly more than half of Obama-voting Independents had heard something about that.

Romney-voting Independents indicated that they blamed the President for the impasse, stating that Republicans in Congress were just responding to something that he did, which they believed was illegal. One Romney-voting Independent explained:

*"I think the President has taken much more control than he should have ever had. I think he's bypassed quite a bit and I think that's what sets the fear into a lot of people that*

*we're experiencing, whether it's directly related to immigration or anything else. He's created fear because any time you put one person in charge—why does a company have a board? Why do schools have a board? So that one person is not making all of the decisions because they're one person.” – Christy, Romney-voting Independent*

Obama-voting Independents blamed Republicans in Congress for this situation because they are not funding the Department of Homeland Security because they are not getting their way on immigration.