



GREENBERG QUINLAN ROSNER RESEARCH

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State of the Union 2015: Playing offense, President Obama makes gains on critical issues

Online dial testing with 61 white swing voters across the United States and two follow-up online focus groups – one with white non-college educated men and women and one with unmarried women – show that President Obama's agenda to bring America closer together as a "tight knit family" scored big.¹ The President's speech generated strong, positive reactions to policies ranging from investment in infrastructure and college education to a populist agenda that takes on special interest and the wealthy in order to make sure the middle class gets its fair share. His proposals resulted not only in major gains on crucial traits and issues, but bolstered the President's standing as well. President Obama's personal favorability improved from a neutral rating (44 percent warm, 44 percent cool) to a net +33 (66 percent warm, 33 percent cool), the largest post-State of the Union shift seen for the President in recent years. Tonight's speech clearly inspired our audience of swing voters.

The President comes away from this address with much to celebrate. In focus groups, voters note that the President was stronger, more confident, and more relaxed than they have seen him recently, and that they liked his positive vision, with one participant concluding that the president was "almost the guy that was elected 6 years ago, that [was] going to do a lot for the country."

The President was also successful in crafting an agenda that reached across partisan lines. Despite a deep partisan divide in the November elections and in various issue debates, there was little polarization between Democrats and Republicans throughout the speech, with the Republican dials near or above 50 for most of the President's address.

The President successfully communicated a strong sense of advocacy for middle class Americans, reflected in big gains on impressions of him as a leader, someone who is on voters' side, and someone who understands the challenges facing Americans. Voters also express greater confidence in the President than in Republicans on key issues Obama highlighted in the

¹ Based on online dial testing focus group research on January 20, 2015, by Greenberg Quinlan Rosner for Democracy Corps and Women's Voices Women Vote Action Fund. Research was among 61 swing voters using LiveRead software by Stratallys. Additional methodology information can be found at the conclusion of this memo.



speech—including growing American industries, jobs and trade, handling issues facing working women and families, finding new ways to get better jobs that pay more, and having good plans for the economy.

Total Describes Well	Pre-Speech	Post-Speech	Shift (Post – Pre-Speech)
Looks Out for the Middle Class	38	70	+32
On My Side	32	63	+31
Has Good Plans for the Economy	31	62	+31
Strong Leader	30	59	+29

More Confident in Democrats than Republicans on Issue	Pre-Speech	Post-Speech	Shift (Post – Pre-Speech)
New Ways to Get Better Jobs that Pay More	-8	+27	+35
Helping Small Businesses	-26	+6	+32
The Economy	-21	+9	+30
Growing American Industries, Jobs and Trade	-25	+5	+30
Education	+27	+56	+29
Getting Rid of Special Interest Wasteful Spending	-16	+13	+29
Issues Facing Working Women and Working Families	+25	+53	+28

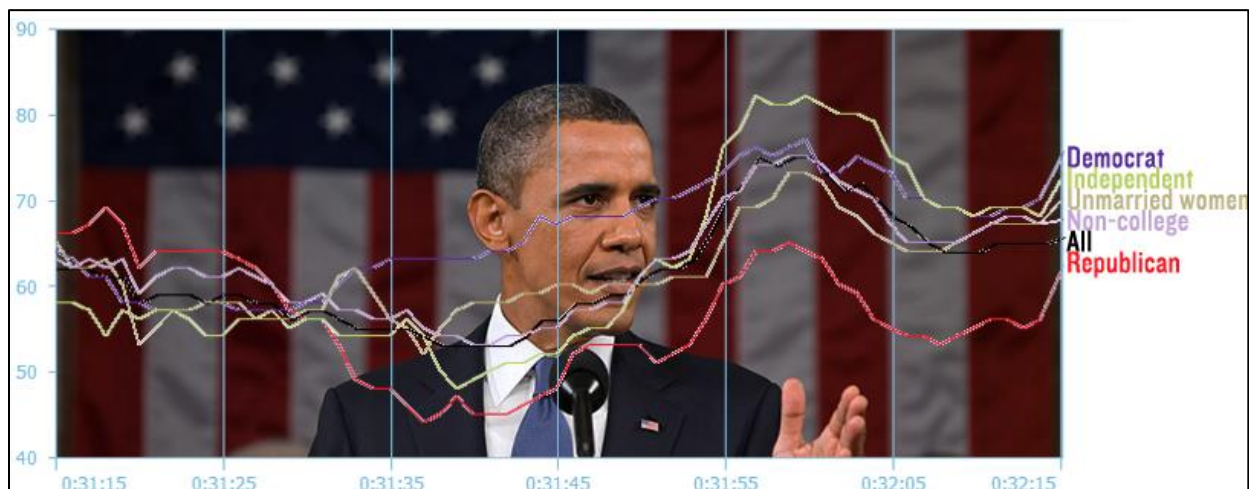


Importantly, the President also appealed to key voters he and Democrats need to win—particularly unmarried women and working class voters. However, there is more work to do to convince these swing voters that the President and Congress can come together on issues and actually make progress on this ambitious agenda.

The Middle Class and the Economy

While voters are not completely certain that the economy is fully back on track, the President received some of his highest responses of the night as he laid out the case for the economic recovery, including the creation of 11 million new jobs and savings produced by lower fuel prices and greater independence from foreign oil. These statistics pushed the overall dials to 71, with the Democratic line in the 80s and the Republican and independent lines both in the mid-60s.

Moreover, swing voters responded strongly to the President’s populist proposals to protect American jobs, make our economy fairer, and help middle class families with a plan to close tax loopholes for special interests and the wealthy while increasing investment in the middle class.



“Let’s close the loopholes that lead to inequality by allowing the top one percent to avoid paying taxes on their accumulated wealth. We can use that money to help more families pay for childcare and send their kids to college.”

Reactions to the President’s proposal struck a chord with participants immediately as the right approach, with a strong focus on fairness. Real-time reactions as the President spoke about the proposal included:

There are too many ways for the wealthy to cheat and get away without paying their fair share of the money they make when it is usually made from the middle class.

The rich don’t pay their fair share and it’s time.

I think the working class deserves fairer taxes and childcare and college.



The president's agenda to help the middle class clearly hit home, causing major shifts on economic measures from pre- to post-speech. At the outset, just 31 percent of voters said Obama has "good plans for the economy", a measure that increased to 62 percent after the speech. And those saying that the President "looks out for the middle class" increased 32 points over the course of the speech, from 38 to 70 percent.

Voters also responded positively to proposals that fold into this middle class agenda, including investments in innovation and infrastructure, access to education, a commitment to pay equity, and affordable, high-quality child care.

Infrastructure

A major piece of the President's address concerned modernizing our nation's infrastructure, allowing us to create jobs and compete in a changing global economy. Voters responded enthusiastically to this issue, with Democrats, Republicans, and independents' dials spiking dramatically to 80 as Obama advocated for infrastructure upgrades to help build our economy and create jobs "here in America."



“So no one knows for certain which industries will generate the jobs of the future. But we do know we want them here in America. That’s why the third part of middle-class economics is about building the most competitive economy anywhere, the place where businesses want to locate and hire. Twenty-first century businesses need 21st century infrastructure—modern ports, stronger bridges, faster trains and the fastest internet.”

The President's focus on infrastructure inspired a significant increase in confidence in his ability to "grow American industries, jobs, and trade," with voter confidence shifting 30-points in his direction relative to Republicans from pre- to post-speech.

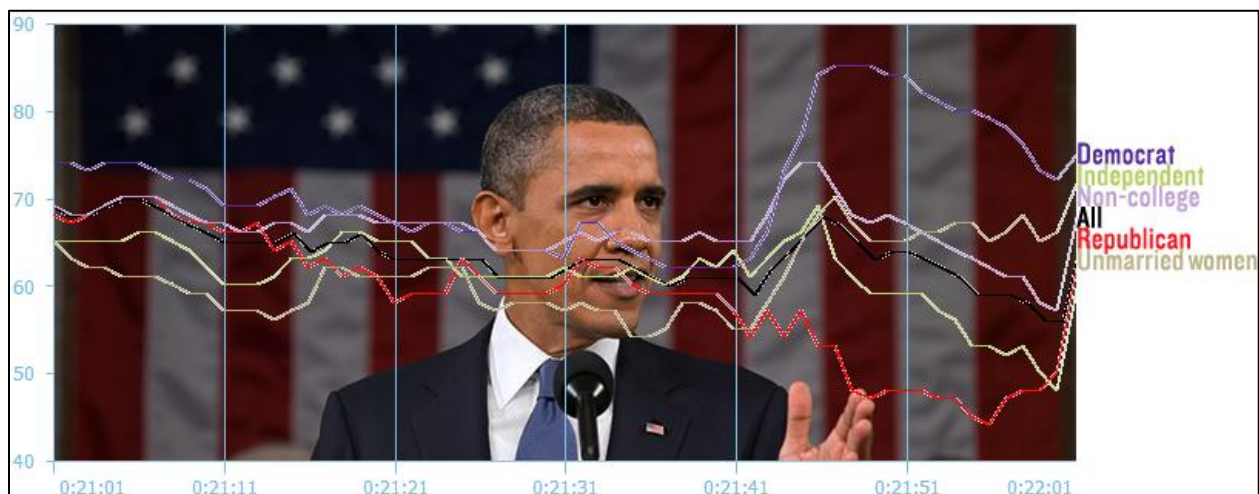
Democratic voters responded positively to Obama's specific call for a bipartisan infrastructure plan that extended beyond the Keystone XL pipeline, but the mention of the pipeline brought



about a predictably polarized response. Yet when the President tied improvements in infrastructure to prioritizing science, technology, and R&D, voters across party lines rose in unison to 80 once more, as did working class women, who spiked to the high 80s.

Community College and Student Loans

Another one of the strongest sections of Obama’s speech was his proposal to provide two years of free community college to qualifying students. Voters recognize the importance of education and frequently lament the increasing costs of college, so the President’s announcement inspired excitement— especially among Democrats, whose dials spiked to nearly 90. Said one unmarried woman, “I know so many young adults that would love to go to school and get an education, though they can’t afford to survive and pay tuition.” Conservative voters expressed concerns about the proposal’s cost and feasibility, but agreed that “it would definitely be a boost in the economy and work force.”



“By the end of this decade, two in three job openings will require some higher education. Two in three. And yet, we still live in a country where too many bright, striving Americans are priced out of the education they need. It’s not fair to them, and it’s not smart for our future. That’s why I am sending this Congress a bold new plan to lower the cost of community college—to zero.”

Furthermore, Obama’s desire to “make sure Americans already burdened with student loans can reduce their monthly payments” drew one of the strongest reactions of the evening, with even Republicans spiking up to the mid-70s and Democrats reaching 80. Working class men responded dramatically and hit the low 80s, very close to their highest point of the entire speech. Roughly two thirds (64 percent) of voters already trust Democrats more than Republicans to make college more affordable, but the strong reaction to Obama’s push to reduce student debt suggests that Democrats can increase their advantage on education even further.



Equal Pay

The President was unequivocal in his support for equal pay, asking Congress to “pass a law that makes sure a woman is paid the same as a man for doing the same work. Really. It’s 2015. It’s time!” Our past surveys have consistently shown this issue’s relevance and resonance, especially among key segments of the electorate, and equal pay was highly popular again tonight. Obama’s call for equal pay legislation caused dials to jump to 70 among Democrats, independents, and Republicans alike, with women’s dials surpassing 80.

Focus group research reinforced how central equal pay is to both working class and unmarried women. Not one of seventeen working class women opposed the President’s proposal in focus group responses, with several echoing Obama’s frustration that this is still an issue in 2015. Said one independent man, “this is a no-brainer.” A Republican unmarried woman voiced a similar thought: “I think this is an amazing idea and long overdue. There is absolutely no reason why a woman with the same qualifications as man shouldn’t receive equal pay.” For many of these women, passing equal pay legislation is not just a political priority but an absolute necessity.

Childcare

The President’s proposal to increase affordable, high-quality childcare drew rave reviews as well, with Democrats’ dials rising to 80 and independents’ dials spiking intensely from the mid-50s to the mid-70s in a matter of seconds as Obama argued that affordable childcare is a national economic priority. The positive reactions came from both men and women, and from working class as well as college educated voters. Women particularly appreciated that the President acknowledged that affordable childcare is an issue for us all; said one young unmarried woman, “I especially liked how he said that childcare is not a woman’s issue and how he would like to provide families with [...] lower cost childcare.”

Conclusion

While post-speech reactions illustrate the positive reception to the President’s policies and agendas, there is still more work to be done. Making this agenda a reality will not be easy in the current political environment, a concept that voters in the focus groups recognize. The strongest hesitation expressed—repeatedly—in the post-speech focus groups was a concern about how much of this agenda our government can feasibly accomplish, with one Republican woman noting, “My only qualm on such a speech is that the President has a hard time of bringing such ideas to fruition. Actions speak so much louder than words.”

Yet, despite these reservations, voters want to believe in the America as a “tight knit family who has made it through some very, very hard times.” They are eager to see Washington come together and follow through on an agenda to help middle class and working families and continue working to rebuild the economy. And they commend the President for a strong State of the Union address that lays out a vision for helping the nation get there.



Methodology

Research was conducted on January 20, 2015 by Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research for Democracy Corps and Women's Voices Women Vote Action Fund.² Participants were 61 white swing voters nationwide who split their votes fairly evenly between Democratic and Republican candidates over the past several Presidential and Congressional elections, though there were slightly more Obama voters than Romney voters. The group's self-identified partisanship was 33 percent Democratic, 34 percent Independent, and 33 percent Republican. The group included 27 women and 34 men, including 13 unmarried women.

Dial testing focus group research was conducted using Stratalys Research. Moment-to-moment data collection powered by LiveRead by Stratalys. Researchers using LiveRead have the ability to add critical, real-time quantitative feedback that compliments qualitative analysis and results in clearer, more focused intel for their clients. Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Researchers measured and examined several participant subsets including political identification, and many demographic variables to aid analysis.

This research also included two online focus groups immediately following the speech to explore reactions to the speech itself. These were conducted using Q2® and were among non-college swing voters and unmarried women.

² Women's Voices Women Vote Action Fund (WVWVAF) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan 501 (c)(4) organization founded in 2005 and dedicated to increasing the voting participation and issue advocacy of unmarried women. Learn more at www.wvwvaf.org