

WINNING WORDS

HEALTH CARE DEBATE
Message Analysis, Insights & Ideas



Methodology

This Winning Words content analysis compares the messages breaking through in news and social media from Democrats and Republicans in the wake of the US Supreme Court's decision on the Affordable Care Act. As this issue promises to remain high on the agenda in the weeks and months ahead, this edition of Winning Words offers insights and ideas for supporters of health reform to define the debate moving forward.

The sample includes prominent quotes and sound bites from state and national party leaders and organizations appearing in print, online and broadcast news outlets, as well as content in tweets.

Because Republicans were much more visible in news coverage and social media conversations, the earned media analysis draws on a representative sample of 50 quotes from Democrats and 100 quotes from Republicans. The social media analysis is based on a representative sample of 100 tweets from Democrats and 150 tweets from Republicans.

Voters Strongly Favor the Benefits of Reform...

Surveys show that voters overwhelmingly approve of specific benefits provided by the Affordable Care Act, such as guaranteed coverage despite pre-existing conditions, prescription drug discounts to seniors and coverage for children to age 26.

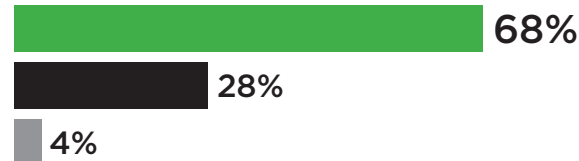
Do you approve or disapprove of a provision in the 2010 health care law that requires health insurance companies to cover those who may have an existing medical condition or prior illness?



Previously, seniors had to pay the full cost of their prescription drugs once they reach the Medicare prescription drug coverage limit. Do you approve or disapprove of a provision in the 2010 health care law that offers discounts to reduce this Medicare prescription drug coverage gap, commonly called the donut hole?



Do you approve or disapprove of a provision in the 2010 health care law that allows children to stay on their parents' health insurance policies until the age of 26?

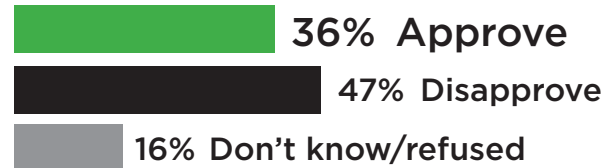


New York Times/CBS News Poll, March 26, 2012

...But Not the “Health Care Law” in the Abstract

Voters are much less likely to voice approval of the “health care law” when no benefits are mentioned. It is critical for supporters to consistently cite popular benefits when talking about health reform. If the debate strays into generalities, health reform loses.

Based on what you’ve heard or read, do you approve or disapprove of the health care law enacted in 2010?



New York Times/CBS News Poll, March 26, 2012

The Debate Thus Far

Democrats missed an opportunity to define the debate around popular benefits of health care reform—and to put Republicans on the defense for threatening to take away health care guarantees that people value.

Republicans successfully framed the individual coverage requirement as a “tax”—and Democrats did not reframe it effectively.

Republicans drove a clear call-to-action to motivate opponents of health reform—the Democrats’ message lacked a counter call-to-action to rally supporters.

Democrats ceded their “middle-class” terrain to Republicans in this debate.

“They’re going to say it’s time to move on and not want to talk about it because it’s so unpopular. But guess what, we’re going to talk about it.”

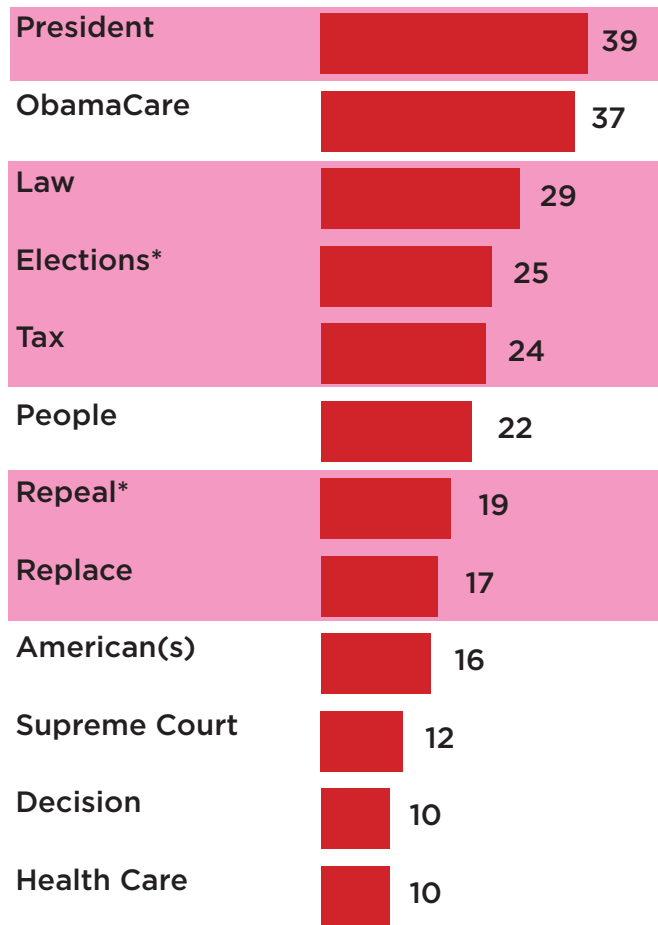
REPUBLICAN LEADER

“The Supreme Court has spoken. The matter is settled. We shouldn’t waste time refighting old, old battles.”

DEMOCRATIC LEADER

Word Frequency in Media Coverage

Republican Keywords Created a Call-to-Action: Replace Obama & Repeal His Tax



- » The Republican response was an election rallying cry to the base, as evidenced by the dominance of “President,” “ObamaCare” and “elections.”
- » Frequent repetition of “tax” promises to create a powerful, negative association in voters’ minds.
- » “Repeal and replace” is easy to retain and repeat, so the call-to-action has strong word-of-mouth potential.

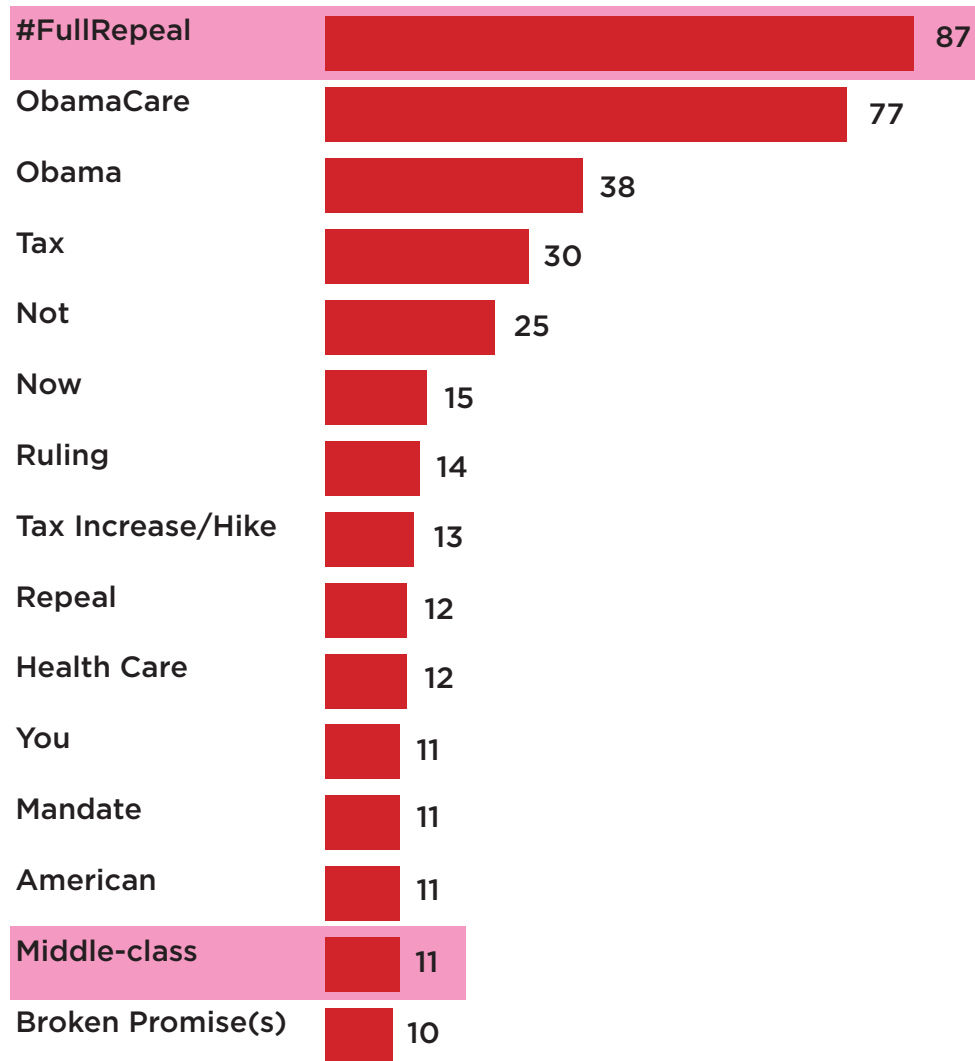
“It’s a tax. Obama will be a one-term president as a result of this bill.”

REPUBLICAN LEADER

*Figures reflect the number of times a word or phrase appeared within the sample.
Includes variations on this word.

Word Frequency on Twitter

Republicans Drove the Call-to-Action Online- And Began to Talk to Middle-Class Families



- » The #FullRepeal hashtag raised the visibility of the call-to-action message.
- » Atypically, the Republican message included a direct appeal to “middle-class” voters—which was missing from Democratic messages.

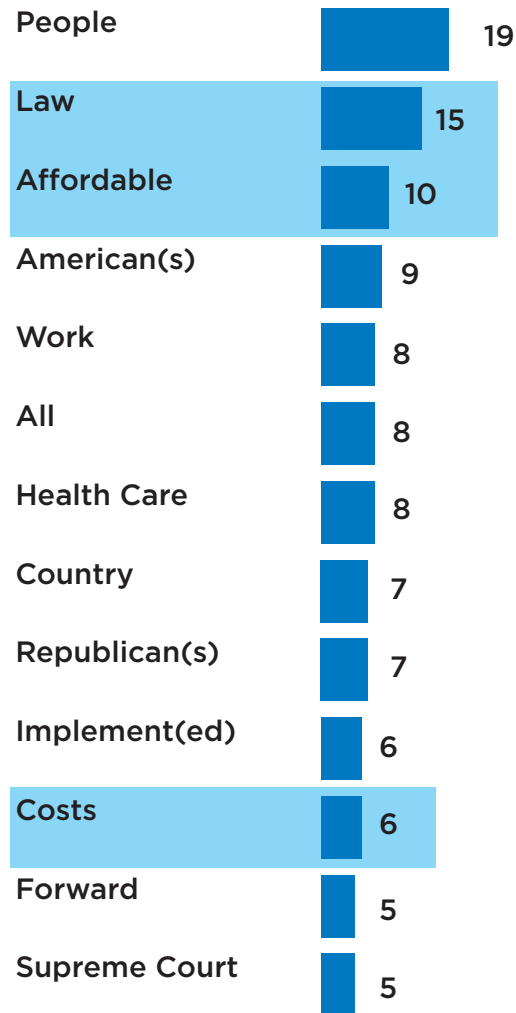
“We need a #FullRepeal of the massive middle-class tax increase. #ObamaCare”

REPUBLICAN PARTY
COMMITTEE

Figures reflect the number of times a word or phrase appeared within the sample.

Word Frequency in Media Coverage

Democrats Drove “Affordable” Message, But Not Specific Benefits



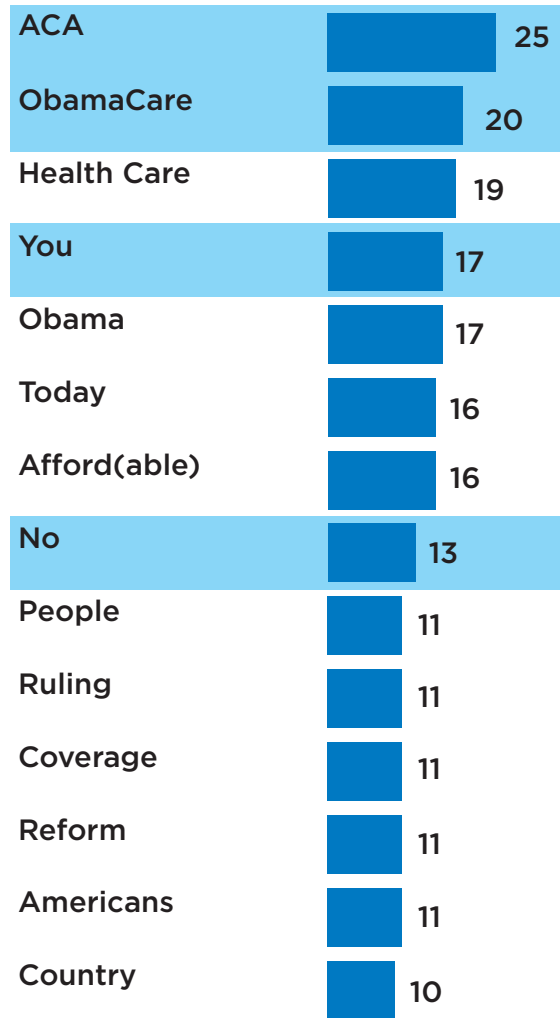
- » Prominent use of the term “law” suggests Democratic messengers fell into the trap of speaking in generalities.
- » The message highlighted affordability, but not specific benefits favored by the vast majority of Americans.
- » No effective response to the “tax” attack broke through in the coverage.

“We will continue to implement this law and we’ll work together to improve on it where we can...”
DEMOCRATIC LEADER

The above figures are based on the number of times a word appeared within the sample of coverage.

Word Frequency on Twitter

Democrats Talked about Benefits in the Negative



- » Democrats were divided over what to call health reform—the “Affordable Care Act” or “ObamaCare,” which could confuse voters.
- » Use of the second person indicated Democrats were talking about health reform’s impact on the audience, which helps make the topic more personally relevant than talking about “people” in the abstract.
- » The relative prominence of the word “no” was associated with benefits of the law, which were often described in negative terms, as explained on the next page.

“[Insurance companies] can no longer drop your coverage if you get sick. #ACA”
DEMOCRATIC PARTY
COMMITTEE

The above figures are based on the number of times a word appeared within the sample of coverage.

Democrats Talked About Health Reform's Benefits in Negative Terms

When Democrats mentioned specific benefits of health care reform, they often used a negative construction, which complicates the message and limits its appeal. Describing benefits in a positive way makes the benefits more clear, compelling and quotable.

NEGATIVE CONSTRUCTION

- » Insurance companies can *no longer drop your coverage* if you get sick.
- » 105 million Americans *no longer have lifetime limits* on their insurance coverage.
- » Children can *no longer be denied insurance* because of a preexisting condition.

POSITIVE CONSTRUCTION

- » You'll be *guaranteed coverage* that can't be taken away—even if you get sick.
- » You'll have *unlimited insurance coverage* for your lifetime.
- » You'll know that your children will be *guaranteed the care they need*, even if they already have a medical condition.

Insights & Ideas for Supporters of Health Reform

INSIGHTS

Health reform opponents win the battle of public opinion when the debate is about generalities.

Republicans have dominated the debate thus far with a “tax” attack.

Republicans issued an urgent call-to-action—which lacked a counter call-to-action.

Democrats neglected to speak to middle-class voters.

IDEAS

Get specific: Mention the most popular benefits of reform, like guaranteed coverage for pre-existing conditions, using simple, positive language.

Push back: Define the coverage requirement as a penalty for “free riders” or “freeloaders” who don’t want to pay for their health care. For example, “Republicans want to take away popular benefits just for the sake of a few freeloaders.”

Rally supporters: Most voters support the benefits of health reform. Raise the stakes of repeal with a message that mobilizes supporters.

Stay on a winning message: Always refer to “middle-class families” when talking about the benefits of health reform.

Winning Words Narrative

Health care reform means that you're **guaranteed health coverage**¹—even if **you** have a preexisting medical condition. It means that **seniors** will get discounts on prescription drugs. It means your **children** will be guaranteed the care they need, if they're ever sick or injured².

All of us will need health care at some point in our lives. If we want to continue to have the best health care system in the world, everyone who can **afford it** needs to **support it** by buying health insurance³.

The Republicans want to **take away** guaranteed health coverage from the majority of Americans⁴—just for the sake of a few **freeloaders** who can afford it, but don't want to pitch in. It's not right for some people to get a **free ride** and make the rest of us pay for their health care.

Repeal means **higher costs** and **less coverage** for middle-class **families**⁵. We need to **stop the repealers** and **save the guarantees** we now have for ourselves, our parents and our children⁶.

¹This is the core benefit of health care reform—and defines what's at stake in this debate.

²These are popular benefits. Put people in the picture to frame the debate in human terms.

³This explains how the individual coverage requirement benefits everyone.

⁴People do not like the idea that benefits will be taken away.

⁵Define the consequences of repeal clearly and consistently.

⁶Include a memorable call-to-action.

Winning Words Define the Debate

REPEALERS SAY:

Health care law

Repeal ObamaCare.

It's a tax on the middle class.

Repeal and replace

SUPPORTERS SAY:

Guaranteed health coverage

Save guaranteed health coverage for you and your family.

It's a penalty on free loaders who want to make the rest of us pay for their health care.

Stop the repealers and save guaranteed health coverage for middle-class families.



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