



To: Congressional Institute
From: The Winston Group
Re: Summary of 2017 Research for Congressional Institute
Date: January 25, 2017

This is a brief summary of qualitative research among conservative Republicans and independent voters in Orlando on December 5; middle income voters and women in Pittsburgh on December 20; and a national survey of 1000 registered voters conducted January 14-16.

Post Election Outlook

From the qualitative discussions, there are two central themes in voters' interpretation of what the election was about. The first was that this election was about the economy and finding a more positive economic direction, especially with a President who has a business background rather than a political one. At a broader level, voters felt their choice in this election was between change and the status quo.

Orlando Independent Voter: It seemed like it was - this election was either a change or the same old thing. The same status quo that has been going on the last eight years.

Another major theme of the election was the belief that voters' voices had not been heard.

Pittsburgh Female Voter: I think it [the election] was more about people standing up for exactly what they believe in. And wanting their own voices to be heard.

Role of the Media

There was consensus about the unhelpful role of the media and how the media is contributing to national division, with one person feeling that during the campaign *"it was hard to sort through the wheat and the chaff to know what is fact."* Another stated that *"all I heard was negative about either [candidate]."*

Based on voter descriptions, it was not that the media was deliberately misleading; the problem was that they presented partial facts and an incomplete view. Some said that they watched CNN and Fox to hear both sides' interpretation of news, and then merged the two interpretations together as an attempt to discern fact from opinion.

Direction of the Country

The overall mood of the country remains cautiously pessimistic (39-44 right direction-wrong track) following the election, and not unexpectedly, Republicans are more optimistic than other groups about the direction of the country (52-35 right direction-wrong track), with a very large percentage

of Republicans expecting significant positive change (56%). However, based on qualitative discussions with many swing groups, there was some level of positive anticipation about the changes that the incoming administration might make, although with an acknowledgement that there were many unknowns.

Is Your Voice Heard?

In terms of the question of voices not being heard, by 2:1 the electorate still does not see their voices being heard (29-58 yes-no), but this is an improvement from where this number stood a year ago (19-79). This positive improvement is because a larger percentage of Republicans now feel they are heard to a greater extent (42-49 yes-no) as compared to where it stood a year ago (15-84 yes-no). This improvement among Republicans in voices heard was observed in the qualitative discussions with conservative Republicans. In those discussions, the outcome of the election gave some conservative Republicans hope that their voices were heard more than before, and that going against elites and the media in this election was evidence that people could be heard if they acted and engaged.

More generally among the electorate, voters still feel they are not heard, but also that lawmakers do not pay attention even when voices are heard. Even though there are concerns about Congress not getting things done, voters cited examples of legislation being passed that went against voter priorities, and even when some legislation is passed, voters do not feel they are heard. Throughout the focus group discussions, the passage of Obamacare was frequently cited as an example of voters' voices not being heard.

Pittsburgh Female Voter: [My voice] hasn't been heard, for the last eight years, maybe more than that. It hasn't been heard. We've had meetings, and things have been changed, things have been done that I think would be harmful. But it hasn't been heard.

How Voters Want to Be Heard

When asked how they would know that their voices were heard, they were not fully clear on how that would happen, but they were looking to actions taken by Congress and the incoming administration to enact changes they voted for - particularly on the economy - as evidence that they were heard.

Reflecting the Constitutional role of Congress being closest to the people, voters hold their elected representatives in Congress responsible for having the largest role (43%) in whether their voices are heard - more than themselves (27%), the President (11%), or the media, which was last (7%). In the discussions, many said that because of their work and family schedules, they did not have time to “call people daily” to make their voices heard, so they would vote a certain way and hope that lawmakers would act on voters' priorities.

Pittsburgh Middle Income Voter: `When we elected Obama it was for change, but we got more of the same government running over us. Then how are you heard? I'm a father of two. I work 55 hours a week. I can't call people daily to complain, so I will never be heard. This is our one chance to be heard. Hopefully we were and it works this time.

Voter Definition of Change

In the survey, we asked voters to rank a series of potential changes that were discussed by policymakers and candidates during the election. Among voters overall, *jobs coming back to the US* was the number one change they wanted to see, followed by *dealing with ISIS and terrorism* and *upholding the Constitution*. Among many of the swing groups such as women and middle income voters, economic outcomes were ranked even higher than foreign policy outcomes. Among Republicans, repeal of the ACA ranked as a significantly higher priority than it did among other groups.

This prioritization of jobs as well as security is consistent with what we heard in the qualitative discussions. The following excerpts from voter discussions reflect the prioritization of jobs as the key change they are seeking.

Orlando Independent Voter: Just start to actually measurably see that progress happen - see the country actually turn around, see some jobs come back, or see new jobs created. Those are things that to me are showing that we are being heard.

Orlando Republican Voter: I believe that what this whole election was about - what I think would be a problem solver is jobs. I think that's the bottom line with everything. That's going to grow the economy. And I think that's going to...more people will be off the entitlements. It will just cure a lot of problems.

In addition to the broad changes they want to see in the country, voters prioritized economic items and security for personal outcomes they want to see in their own lives. More specifically, voters' most important personal outcomes are having a secure retirement, being able to have quality affordable health care, being safe from terrorism and not having to worry about paying next month's bills.

Expectations and Priorities: “Bottom of the Ninth...Two Outs”

In both groups, participants described their expectations for the incoming administration as “*hope for change*” - cautious optimism but with many unknowns that remain. Their expectations resulted from their views about the serious state of problems in the country, with one Pittsburgh middle income voter stating that “*this is the bottom of the 9th and there are two outs.*”

*Pittsburgh Middle Income Voter: I think if it is ever going to happen it is going to happen with this election cycle. This is the first time in the history of our country that we have somebody serving who was never in the military, and who was never in politics or government. He has the right formula and we have the branches of the government all lined up now—the House, Congress—it's all controlled by the Republicans and things are not going to be the same...This is going to be different, I really believe that. Something has to change. **The middle class is shrinking and this is our last chance. This is the bottom of the ninth and there are two outs.***