

# A NEW CASE FOR THE MINIMUM WAGE

CONDUCTED FOR OUR STORY– THE HUB FOR AMERICAN NARRATIVES

March 2016

# AMERICAN WAGES



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## HOLDING AND GROWING SUPPORT

A majority of Americans favor increasing the minimum wage to \$12 per hour (67% favor, 45% strongly), and even to \$15 per hour (59% favor, 38% strongly). At the same time, we know in the course of a contested campaign that support can and will erode. Advocates cannot assume victory; we have to work hard for it. The analysis that follows reports on the results of a new national survey designed to understand which message strategies make the most difference and why.

The survey builds on findings from “Making the Case for Minimum Wage Hikes” (by the Topos Partnership, October 2015), which finds, in part, that the top-of-mind, strongly felt reason to support an increase in the minimum wage is at the Moral Level – people with jobs should be able to make ends meet. People know this argument; there is little controversy about it.

However, it can be difficult to maintain support for the minimum wage on the basis of the Moral argument alone:

- It can easily come across as little more than altruistic charity.
- There is little true engagement or urgency among those who make more than the minimum wage; it’s about “them” not “me.”
- It does not address the opposition’s main attacks, which are: an increase will cost jobs, the market sets appropriate wage levels so these jobs must not be worth much, only teenagers are paid the minimum wage, it will lead to increased prices, and so on.

People can easily face an inner conflict. On one hand, they want increased wages. On the other hand, they fear that mandating wage increases will cost jobs (hurting the very people a wage hike is supposed to help), and fear it will raise prices (hurting those who won’t see the benefit of increased wages). We have to take away the opposition’s economic argument, or at least turn it to a stalemate.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This mind, what strategy will be relevant for all Americans? Our research suggests it is important to combine the Moral argument with a Progressive Economic argument. The right kind of economic argument:

- Allows people to rationalize their moral stance,
- Provides a reason to have a stake, even for those who don't earn minimum wage,
- Undermines the only argument the opposition has, and
- Sets up a progressive economic worldview that will lead to support for other policies.

**Moreover, this research points to a new, potentially game-changing redefinition of the debate that touches on both Moral and Economic considerations, by expanding the movement. This discussion follows.**

### A DIVERSE “FACE” FOR THE MOVEMENT

Communicators tend to emphasize workers who earn the lowest wages, meaning the federal minimum wage or slightly above. With campaigns focused on \$12 or even \$15 per hour, we have an opportunity to create a far more diverse “face” for the movement. Any job that pays less than \$12 or \$15 per hour is an appropriate example for communicators. This is the silver lining to setting the high bar of \$15; campaigns are able to include a lot of new folks in the dialogue!

The Fight for \$15 movement has without question increased public consciousness and support for raising the minimum wage. At the same time, if fast food workers are the only face of minimum wage workers, we open ourselves to some vulnerabilities and, more importantly, miss what this research finds is a powerful argument for raising the minimum wage: that many types of jobs pay low wages.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A prominent focus on fast food workers to the exclusion of other occupations has some disadvantages:

- It feeds the idea that consumer prices will go up (people readily jump to the price of a Big Mac);
- It reinforces the assumption that these are part-time jobs for teens;
- It conveys these are unskilled jobs that don't deserve a living wage – one shouldn't expect to support a family on a “burger flipping” job; and
- It tips toward the “moral” argument by focusing on the poorest workers.

A more occupationally diverse movement shifts the conversation from a narrow debate about fast food to a broader debate about low wages across America. In our survey, people report being unaware that the average income for nursing assistants is \$11 (53% unaware), for preschool teachers is \$9 (58% unaware), and for paramedics is \$13 (63% unaware). These kinds of jobs avoid the traps noted above:

- They are not immediately associated with consumer prices,
- They are full-time jobs held by adults, and
- They are positions that are presumed to require special skills.

By far, the top-rated argument in the survey is, “It’s ridiculous that even skilled, important jobs like nursing assistants, preschool teachers, and paramedics pay less than \$15. We should value working people more than that.” (82% convincing, 51% very convincing)

**Most important, highlighting these kinds of examples is both moral (it shows how many people will be helped by this change) and economic (it makes a minimum wage increase a central, working class and “middle” class economic boost while not automatically triggering the fear that it will simply increase prices).** This in mind, the framing choice shouldn't be Moral OR Economic, rather, how to combine them and which elements to emphasize.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## THE DYNAMICS OF THE DEBATE – POLICY

Using a split sample survey design, we explored campaign dynamics for both \$12 and \$15 proposals. The experiments demonstrate that the dynamics of the \$12 and \$15 debate are different. While support for increasing the minimum wage to \$12 per hour is broad, it erodes slightly over the course of the survey. The percent favoring an increase ranges from 67% at the start of the survey to 61% after sustained attack. While support rebounds, there is a statistically significant decline in mean support by the end of the survey.

Overall, support for a \$15 proposal starts out lower than the \$12 proposal. However, while a \$12 proposal loses ground, a \$15 proposal shows opportunity for growth. Initially, 59% favor increasing the minimum wage to \$15 (-8 percentage points compared with support for \$12). Support increases to a high of 64% after initial priming questions and a low of 56% after sustained attack. By the end of the survey, support is essentially where it started, suggesting those who favor a \$15 proposal are solid supporters less resistant to erosion.

**The differing patterns in support between \$12 and \$15 proposals suggest there is a group of soft supporters who want an increased minimum wage, but are nervous. These are people we need to win at \$15 and hold at \$12.**

**Who are they? Importantly, the drop in support from \$12 to \$15 is not even across subgroups.** Rather, some of the strongest supporters of a \$12 proposal have the largest drops in support when the proposal is higher. For example, 81% of union households support an increase to \$12, but 19 percentage points fewer support a \$15 proposal. Some of the largest differences in support are among the people who would likely personally benefit from an increase to \$15: households with an hourly worker earning less than \$12 per hour (-13 points) or \$12-\$16 per hour (-11 points), respondents with a high school or Associates degree (-11 and -12 points respectively), and self-described working and lower class respondents (-9 and -11 points respectively). Notably, support among people of color drops from 82% to 71% (-11 points).

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## THE DYNAMICS OF THE DEBATE – MESSAGE STRATEGY

In addition to investigating two different wage proposals, the survey also employed a split sample design to explore potential campaign message dynamics at both a \$12 and \$15 level:

**Opposition:** a scenario in which opponents get their message out first and supporters are in a position of responding

**Moral or Fairness:** a strategy emphasizing the injustice of poverty-level wages, and the struggles of the working poor

**Progressive Economic:** an approach to get people thinking about the positive effects that ripple throughout communities when average people have more money

**Merged:** an approach that combines Economic and Moral ideas

### **MERGED:**

*People who are for the proposal say what ails families and our economy is the same thing – low wages. The cost of groceries, housing and other basics have gone up for years but wages haven't come close to keeping up, and that hurts both workers and the economy. Full time jobs should at least pay enough for people to afford the basics, because when people have more money to spend it will boost Main Street, create jobs, and help our communities thrive.*

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In summary, the experiments found:

- If the opposition gets the advantage early and their message out uncontested, support will erode and campaigns will struggle to win support back. In comparing the mean difference between the baseline measurement and support after a two-sides debate, support drops significantly for both a \$12 and \$15 proposal.
- An approach that combines the Moral and the Economic wins supporters for a \$15 proposal and holds the broader base of supporters for a \$12 proposal.
- While the Moral approach is emotionally compelling, the gains do not hold under pressure once the opposition engages.
- A Progressive Economic approach, by defining the economic terms of the debate, inoculates against opposition attack. It is essentially a draw at maintaining support for the minimum wage. However, it lays a foundation for progressive economic policies by helping people see the economic benefits of progressive policies. Those exposed to the Progressive Economic frame think an increased minimum wage will help, not hurt, business in their state (+5 point margin) and those exposed to the Merged frame are divided (-2 point margin). In contrast, those exposed to the Moral and Opposition frames think an increased minimum wage will hurt business in their state (-16 and -15 point margins respectively).

These patterns suggest that advocates would be well advised to marry the moral and economic, and to do so early and loudly. Don't wait for the opposition to promote their economic interpretation and then respond with ours, because it will be harder to define the economic case once the opposition has engaged.

Shifts From Baseline to Two Sides Debate		
	\$12 Mean Difference	\$15 Mean Difference
Opposition	-.194*	-.123*
Moral	-.098	.010
Economic	-.105	-.025
Merged	-.095	.194*

Mean Difference from Baseline  
\* Sig

## What is a "mean difference"?

The questions measuring support for the minimum wage have five responses, numbered from 1-5 (with "don't know" as the mid-point). We calculate the overall mean response for each question, and determine the difference in mean responses between questions. An \* indicates when the difference is significant.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## THE WINNING NARRATIVE

The winning narrative needs to establish that this is an issue that concerns us all, and it needs to undermine the opposition's case, which plays on people's main doubts. A winning narrative brings together moral and economic elements, into one, cohesive case:

- Full time jobs should pay enough.
- Many jobs, including skilled jobs, pay far too little.
- Profitable industries can afford to pay more; taxpayers shouldn't subsidize a company's low wages.
- Higher wages are good for families, community and the economy.
- Growing the economy relies on better wages.

When tested as part of a convincing battery, merged messages are among the top-testing:

It's only right that full time jobs should at least pay enough for people to afford the basics, and when people have more money to spend it will boost Main Street, create jobs, and help our communities thrive. (75% convincing, 41% very)

Increasing wages is both fair and smart. It is fair because no one who works full-time should live in poverty and it's smart because when people have more money to spend, it boosts local economies and creates jobs and thriving communities. (73%, 39%)

Note that both of these examples make a moral case (people should be paid enough to



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

afford the basics/not live in poverty) AND provide an explanation for **how** increased wages will boost the economy (when people have more to spend, it boosts Main Street, creates jobs, and leads to thriving communities). It does not simply “assert” benefits for the economy; it explains how. It takes on the “job killer” attack by communicating the common sense logic that more spending **creates jobs**. Finally, it makes a collective, emotional case by bringing “thriving communities” into the conversation.

As noted earlier, occupational diversity is game changing:

It’s ridiculous that even skilled, important jobs like nursing assistants, preschool teachers, and paramedics pay less than \$15. We should value working people more than that. (82%, 51%)

Finally, it helps to make the point that higher wages mean fewer people will have to rely on public assistance. This is both a moral idea (working people shouldn’t be in poverty) and economic (it will save tax dollars; why are taxpayers subsidizing Walmart?). In addition, people fear that businesses are so fragile that increasing the cost of doing business will affect jobs. Stressing that businesses can afford it addresses that fear.

The minimum wage is so low, that many full time workers qualify for food stamps and other public assistance. Taxpayers shouldn’t subsidize low wage employers; they should pay workers enough to live on. (77%, 44%)

Profitable industries can afford to pay more, but they choose not to, and are instead working to keep wages down. We need an economy that works for all of us, not just the wealthy. (75%, 44%)

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

These elements of the Winning Narrative can be combined in a number of ways, for example:

*The cost of groceries, housing and other basics have gone up but wages haven't, and that hurts working people and slows down the economy. The minimum wage is so low, that many full time workers qualify for public assistance. It's ridiculous that even jobs like nursing assistants, and paramedics pay less than \$15. Profitable industries can afford to pay more, but they choose not to, and are instead holding wages down. Jobs should pay at least enough for people to afford the basics, and when people have more money to spend it will boost the economy, create jobs, and help our communities thrive.*

The analysis that follows explores these ideas in more depth.

## METHOD

The analysis that follows is based on an survey of 1,201 American adults, conducted online, February 22-28, 2016.

The survey incorporated a number of experiments designed to understand the impacts of various communications strategies at different levels of proposed increases in the minimum wage. Half of survey respondents considered a \$12 proposal while the other half considered a \$15 proposal. Furthermore, respondents were divided into four groups each with a different set of questions to prime a particular way of thinking, and then follow with a two-sides debate. Respondents were grouped into the following experimental cells:

	Economic	Moral	Merged	Opposition
\$12 proposal	N=150	N=150	N=150	N=150
\$15 proposal	N=150	N=150	N=150	N=150

More details on the experiments follows.

After the initial baseline question, survey respondents were assigned to one of four experimental splits, and exposed to questions designed to prime a particular way of thinking. Those questions were:

	Economic	Moral	Merged	Opposition
<b>Priming the mindset</b> How concerned are you that:	...consumer spending is down, and that hurts business and the economy	...many families can't afford the basics	...many families can't afford the basics which means consumer spending is down, hurting both families and the economy	...about a lack of jobs
How much have you heard about:	...how local communities and economies are struggling because wages are too low. When jobs pay more, it boosts the economy and helps communities thrive, because families have more to spend at local businesses. Higher wages help families while putting money back into the economy, which creates more jobs.	...how families are struggling because wages are too low. People are working full-time and still living in poverty, making it hard for many working families to feed their kids, keep the lights on, and pay the rent. Costs keep going up, but wages, especially for the poorest Americans, haven't kept up.	...how jobs pay so little that many families work full time but earn less than the poverty level. When jobs pay more, it boosts the economy and helps communities thrive, because families have more to spend at local businesses. Higher wages help families while putting money back into the economy, which creates more jobs.	...how small businesses are struggling because the economy is so weak. Businesses are laying off workers, and small businesses in particular are weighed down by government regulations and the high cost of benefits.
Is this new information for you or not?	Each \$1 per hour increase in wages creates a ripple effect in spending in a community, generating \$1.20 in the economy.	A single parent working full-time at the minimum wage earns less than the poverty level.	Each \$1/hour increase in wages creates a ripple effect in spending in a community, generating \$1.20 in the economy.	8 out of every 10 new businesses fail in the first 18 months.
	Nursing assistants on average make only \$11 per hour.	60% of minimum wage workers are women, and many are single moms.	Nursing assistants on average make only \$11 per hour.	8 million Americans are unemployed, and an additional 6 million are only working part-time, even though they want full-time work.
	Preschool teachers on average make only \$9 per hour.	80% of minimum wage workers are over 20 years old.	80% of minimum wage workers are over 20 years old.	The first 10 days of 2016 marked the worst start of the year ever for the stock market.
	Paramedics on average make only \$13 per hour.	The federal minimum wage is just \$7.25 per hour, which is less than \$300 per week for full-time workers	The minimum wage is so low that a person who works full time qualifies for food stamps.	When the cost of doing business goes up, businesses end up cutting back on jobs.
	Corporate profits are at record highs, while employee income and benefits are the lowest they've been in 65 years.	CEOs make roughly 300 times what the typical worker does.	Corporate profits are at record highs, while employee income and benefits are the lowest they've been in 65 years.	Adding more regulations on business can slow hiring and economic growth.

After the priming, respondents rated their support for increasing the minimum wage a second time, and then read a two-sided debate, after which they rated their support once again.

	Economic	Moral	Merged	Opposition
Two sides Debate Proponent	People who are for the proposal say the best way to grow our economy is to increase wages. When people can make ends meet, it helps families while growing the economy. Full time jobs should at least pay enough for people to afford the basics, because when people have more money to spend it will boost Main Street, create jobs, and help our communities thrive.	People who are for the proposal say people can't make ends meet on the minimum wage. The cost of groceries, housing and other basics have gone up for years, but wages haven't come close to keeping up. Full time jobs should at least pay enough for people to afford the basics; that will boost families and move us closer to an economy that works for all of us.	People who are for the proposal say what ails families and our economy is the same thing – low wages. The cost of groceries, housing and other basics have gone up for years but wages haven't come close to keeping up, and that hurts both workers and the economy. Full time jobs should at least pay enough for people to afford the basics, because when people have more money to spend it will boost Main Street, create jobs, and help our communities thrive.	People who are for the proposal say what ails families and our economy is the same thing – low wages. The cost of groceries, housing and other basics have gone up for years but wages haven't come close to keeping up, and that hurts both workers and the economy. Full time jobs should at least pay enough for people to afford the basics, because when people have more money to spend it will boost Main Street, create jobs, and help our communities thrive.
Opponent (Constant Across Splits)	People who are against the proposal say that this increase just isn't affordable. Business owners will have to cut hours, lay off workers, or raise prices, passing on costs to the rest of us. This is the wrong way to increase wages and will just hurt the economy. If we want to grow the economy, we have to help businesses, not weigh them down with more mandates.			

At this point, the experimental splits were complete and respondents received uniform questions through the end of the survey.

## NOTE ON PRESENTING DATA:

The graphs that follow show shifts in response in two ways. First, color coded boxes include percentage point shifts in response – red for oppose, blue for favor, gray for undecided and so on. The boxes at right, for example, say there is a 5 point increase in opposition and a 4 point drop in favor compared with the baseline question. In addition, the mean difference between questions, with an indication of significance, appear at the bottom of each graph in gold.

+5

-4

### What is a “mean difference”?

The questions measuring support for the minimum wage have five responses, numbered from 1-5 (with “don’t know” as the mid-point). We calculate the overall mean response for each question, and determine the difference in mean response between questions. An \* indicates when the difference is significant.

Shifts From Baseline to Two Sides Debate		
	\$12 Mean Difference	\$15 Mean Difference
<b>Opposition</b>	-.194*	-.123*
<b>Moral</b>	-.098	.010
<b>Economic</b>	-.105	-.025
<b>Merged</b>	-.095	.194*

Mean Difference from Baseline

\* Sig

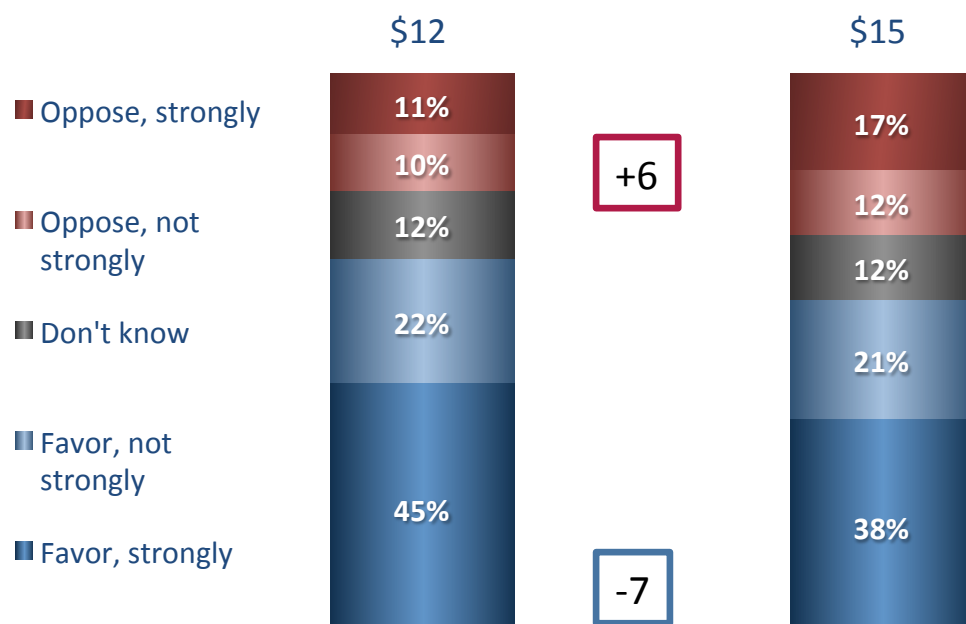
**WHERE WE START**



## LEVELS OF SUPPORT

### Baseline Support

*As of now, would you favor or oppose raising the minimum wage to (Split Sample: \$12/\$15) per hour, phasing in over the next few years, and from then on increasing at the same rate as the cost of living?*



**There is broad support for an increased minimum wage, even for a \$15 proposal.**

Survey respondents were split into two groups, with half responding to a \$12 proposal, and half responding to a \$15 proposal.

Overall, two-thirds favor increasing the minimum wage to \$12 (67%) and 59% favor increasing it to \$15. Interestingly, the differences in response between the proposals are in strongly held opinions, with the \$15 proposal getting 7 percentage points less strong support, and 6 percentage points more strong opposition.



## WHO'S WITH US & WHO NEEDS CONVINCING?

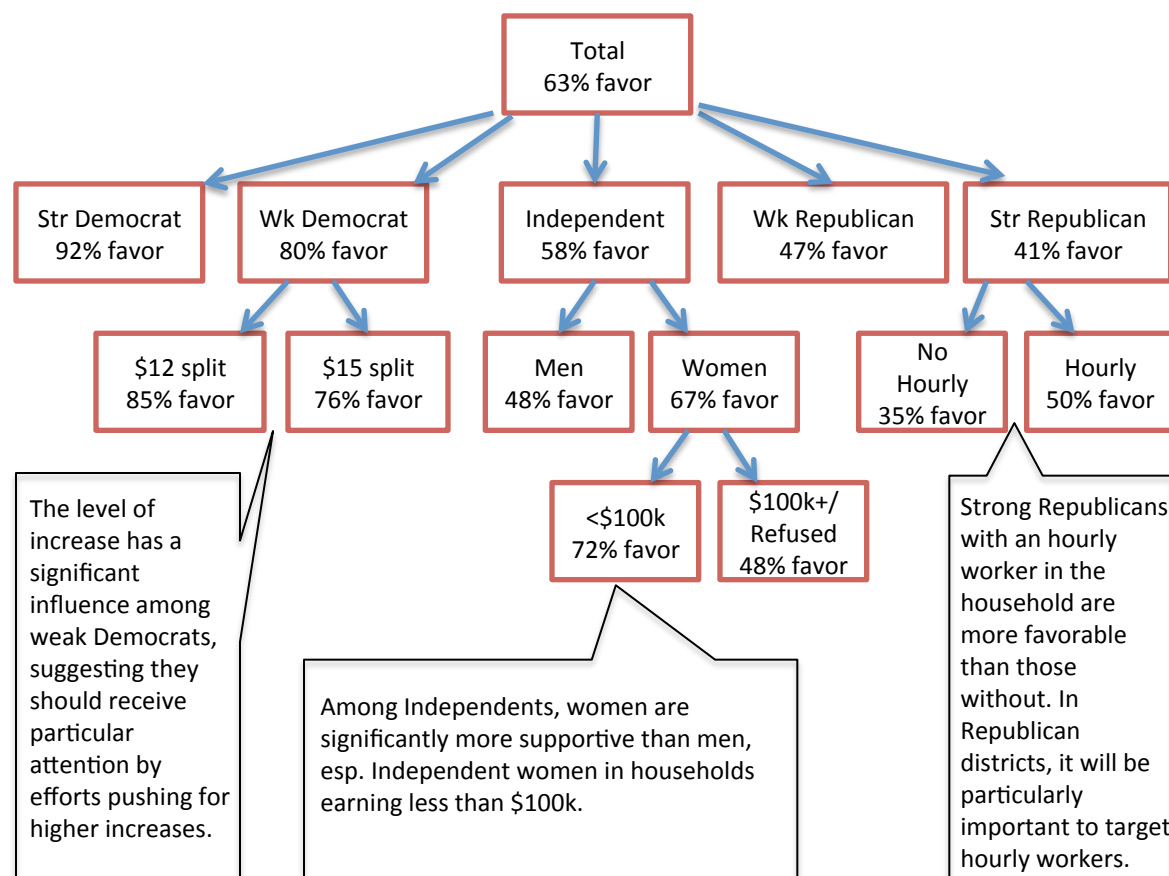
	<b>\$12 Favor</b>	<b>\$15 Favor</b>	<b>Difference</b>
Total	67	59	-8
Union household	81	62	-19
<\$12/hr wage household	73	60	-13
\$12-\$16/hr	72	61	-11
>\$16/hr	66	64	-2
High School	65	54	-11
Tech/Assoc.	70	58	-12
Some college	68	63	-5
Bachelors	68	65	-3
Post Grad	62	58	-4
Upper middle class	64	62	-2
Middle class	64	60	-4
Working class	69	60	-9
Lower class	73	62	-11
White, non Hispanic	62	56	-6
People of color	82	71	-11
Men	60	52	-8
Women	72	66	-6
Strong Democrat	94	91	-3
Democrat	84	75	-9
Independent	61	56	-5
Republican	53	41	-12
Strong Republican	46	36	-10

**Overall, a \$12 proposal receives 8 percentage points higher support than a \$15 proposal. Importantly, the drop in support is not even across subgroups.** Rather, some of the strongest supporters of a \$12 proposal have the largest drops in support when the proposal is higher. For example, 81% of union households support an increase to \$12, but 19 percentage points fewer support a \$15 proposal.

Some of the largest differences in support are among the groups that would likely personally benefit from an increase to \$15: households with an hourly worker earning less than \$16/hour, less educated respondents, and self-described working and lower class respondents.

**These patterns suggest that a significant group of voters want to support an increase but are nervous – they can be lost at \$12 or won over to \$15.**

# PREDICTING SUPPORT



A CHAID or tree analysis determines how groups best combine to predict the outcome for a particular variable. In this instance, all responses to the baseline support question were combined (whether for a \$12 or \$15 proposal).

Initially, support for increasing the minimum wage is influenced by party identification more than any other dynamic: Strong Democrat (92% favor), weak Democrat (80%), Independent (58%), weak Republican (47%), strong Republican (41%).

After party id, different variables drive support. Among weak Democrats, the level of increase matters. And income influences response for Independent women and Strong Republicans.

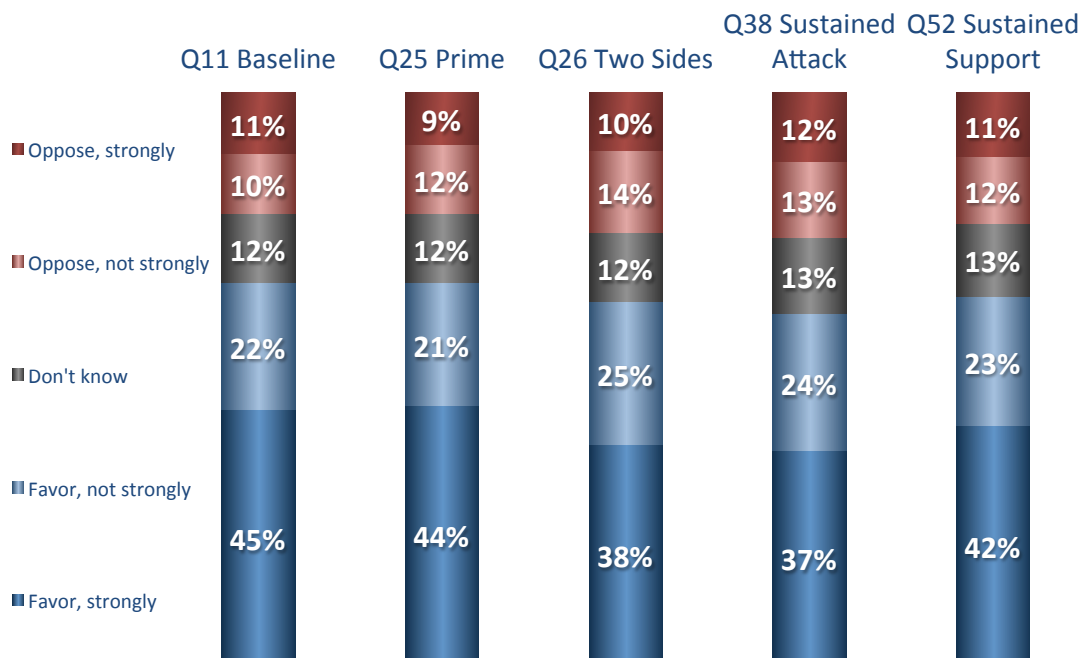
# THE DYNAMICS OF THE DEBATE



# DYNAMICS OF THE \$12 DEBATE: Broad Support with Potential Erosion

## \$12 Support Throughout Survey

*Would you favor or oppose raising the minimum wage to \$12 per hour, phasing in over the next few years, and from then on increasing at the same rate as the cost of living?*



Mean Difference from Baseline

\* Sig

.030

-.123\*

-.184\*

-.075\*

**Overall, there is some erosion in support for a \$12 proposal over the course of the survey (as demonstrated by mean differences from the baseline).** Though not dramatic, the drop is significant and suggests there are soft supporters who can be lost in a sustained campaign.

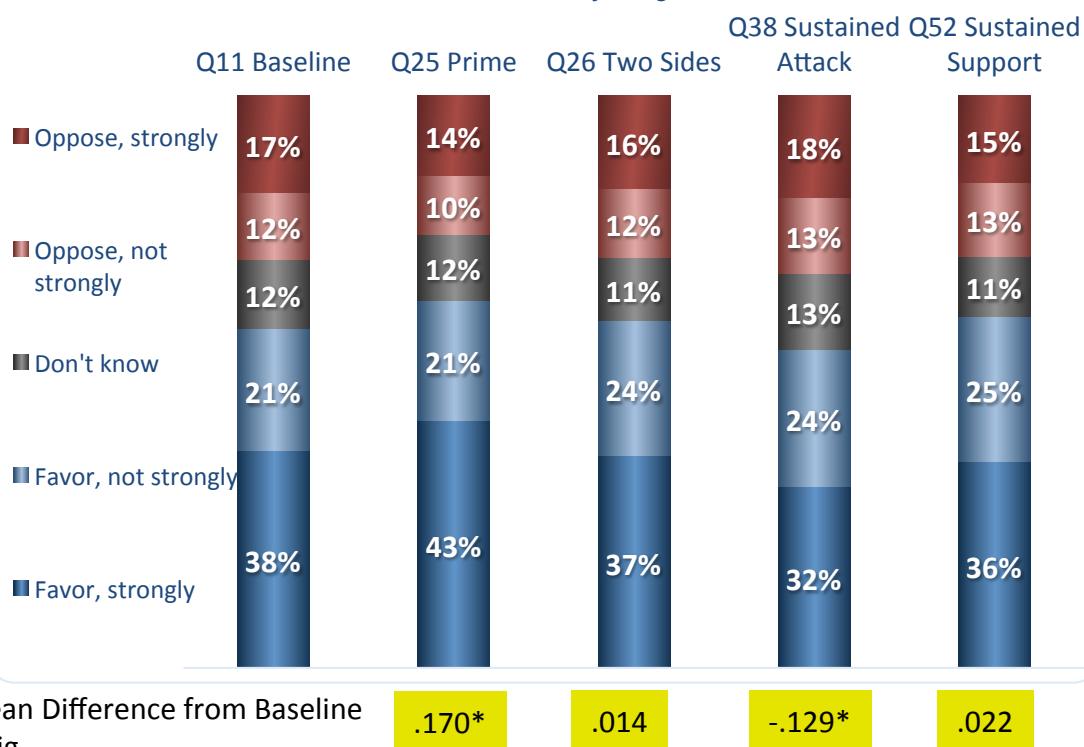
Once the debate is engaged in a two sides argument, “strong” support shifts (-7 percentage points in strong support between the initial baseline and the re-test after the debate). The lowest support at any point is after respondents hear a number of opposition arguments (61% favor).

**The broad support for a \$12 proposal needs to be shored up to prevent erosion during a prolonged debate.**

# DYNAMICS OF THE \$15 DEBATE: Fewer, More Solid Supporters

## \$15 Support Throughout Survey

*Would you favor or oppose raising the minimum wage to \$15 per hour, phasing in over the next few years, and from then on increasing at the same rate as the cost of living?*

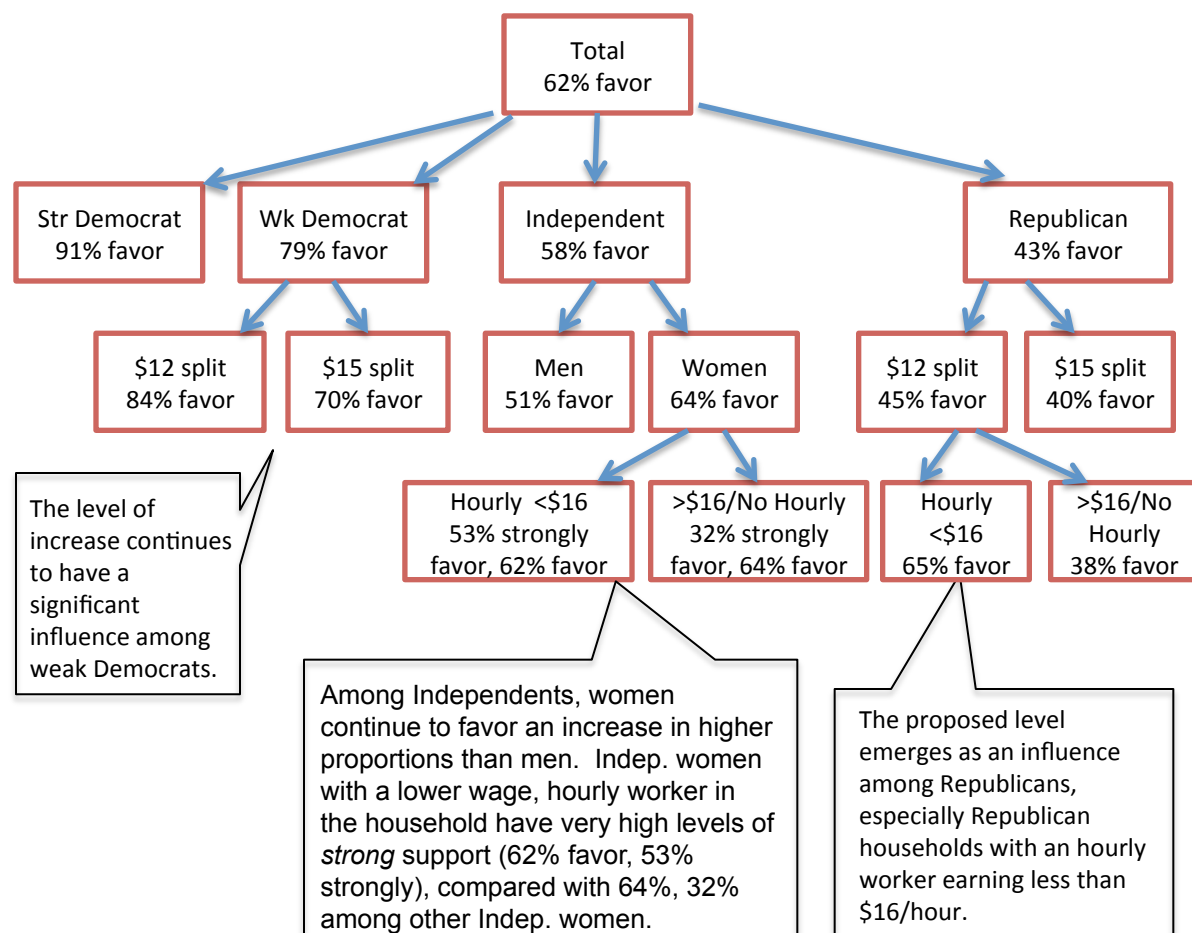


Overall, support for a \$15 proposal starts out lower than for a \$12 proposal. However, while a \$12 proposal loses ground, a \$15 proposal shows opportunity for growth.

Initially, 59% favor increasing the minimum wage to \$15. It increases to a high of 64% after the initial primes and a low of 56% after sustained attack. By the end of the survey, support is essentially where it started, suggesting supporters of a \$15 proposal are the solid supporters less resistant to erosion.

**The differing patterns between \$12 and \$15 suggest there is a group of soft supporters who want to support an increased minimum wage, but are nervous. These are people we need to win and hold.**

## IMPACT ONCE DEBATE IS ENGAGED



Once the debate has been engaged and people begin to hear more information about increasing the minimum wage, households with hourly workers earning less than \$16/hour emerge as a key constituency (as opposed to all hourly workers or households with incomes under \$100k annually).

Party identification continues to have more influence on support than any other dynamic: Strong Democrat (91% favor), weak Democrat (79%), Independent (58%), Republican (both weak and strong) (43%).

# STRATEGIC FRAMING CHOICES



# STRATEGIC FRAMING CHOICES

Topos created a survey designed to replicate strategic choices campaigns make about messaging. After a baseline question assessing support for increasing the minimum wage (to either \$12 or \$15), survey respondents were exposed to one of four sets of questions designed to prime a particular mindset.

**The Opposition Prime** was designed to simulate a scenario in which opponents get their message out first and have many more resources than supporters.

**The Moral or Fairness Prime** was designed to emphasize the injustice of poverty-level wages, and the struggles that the working poor face.

**The Economic Prime** was designed to get people thinking about a progressive economic model based on the idea that when average people have more money, the positive effects ripple throughout communities.

**The Merged Prime** was designed to provide equal weight to Economic and Moral approaches.

After priming, survey respondents once again provided their view of increasing the minimum wage, to assess the impact of the priming alone.

Finally, the last question in the experiment exposed people to a traditional “two sides” debate in which the opposition statement was held constant while the proponent statement was altered to reflect the experimental prime.

The result of each experiment follows.



# FRAMING SUMMARY

## EFFECTS OF TWO SIDES DEBATE

The pages that follow discuss the detailed dynamics of each frame. The key lessons for campaigns are:

- If the opposition gets the advantage early and their message out uncontested, support will erode and campaigns will struggle to win support back.
- An approach that combines the Moral and the Economic wins supporters for a \$15 proposal and holds the broader base of supporters for a \$12 proposal.

Shifts From Baseline to Two Sides Debate		
	\$12 Mean Difference	\$15 Mean Difference
<b>Opposition</b>	-.194*	-.123*
<b>Moral</b>	-.098	.010
<b>Economic</b>	-.105	-.025
<b>Merged</b>	-.095	.194*

Mean Difference from Baseline

\* Sig

### What is a “mean difference”?

The questions measuring support for the minimum wage have five responses, numbered from 1-5 (with “don’t know” as the mid-point). We calculate the overall mean response for each question, and determine the difference in mean responses between questions. An \* indicates when the difference is significant (as seen in the gray boxes above).

A Note on Presenting Data:

The graphs that follow show shifts in response in two ways. First, color coded boxes include percentage point shifts in response – red for oppose, blue for favor, gray for undecided. In addition, the mean difference between questions, with an indication of significance, appear at the bottom of each graph.

+5

-4

# STRATEGIC FRAMING CHOICES

## OPPOSITION PRIME

Clearly people are concerned about jobs and are very familiar with a storyline about increasing costs of business leading to job cuts. This is the opposition's main argument, and it is very effective. (Note that the point of these questions was to prime the opposition mindset, but the responses also provide insight.)

- Nearly three quarters are concerned about a lack of jobs (73% extremely or very concerned, 40% extremely concerned).
- High percentages have seen “news coverage about how small businesses are struggling because the economy is so weak. Businesses are laying off workers, and small businesses in particular are weighed down by government regulations and the high cost of benefits” (78% have seen “a lot” or “some” news about that issue).
- Majorities are already familiar with most elements of the opposition’s “fragile economy” storyline:
  - When the cost of doing business goes up, businesses end up cutting back on jobs. (83% “already knew” this, 17% said it was “new information”)
  - Adding more regulations on business can slow hiring and economic growth. (74%, 26%)
  - 8 million Americans are unemployed, and an additional 6 million are only working part-time, even though they want full-time work. (66%, 34%)
  - 8 out of every 10 new businesses fail in the first 18 months. (61%, 39%)
  - The first 10 days of 2016 marked the worst start of the year ever for the stock market. (54%, 46%)

# STRATEGIC FRAMING CHOICES

## OPPOSITION PRIME (continued)

At this point after the prime, survey respondents expressed their view of increasing the minimum wage once again.

Finally, survey respondents read a “two sides” debate, and voted again. In this split sample experiment, survey respondents read the following:

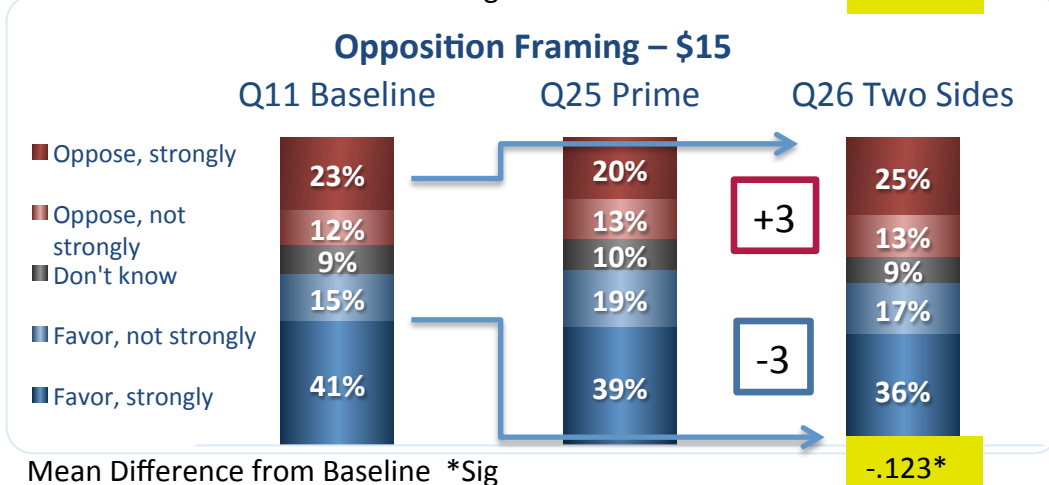
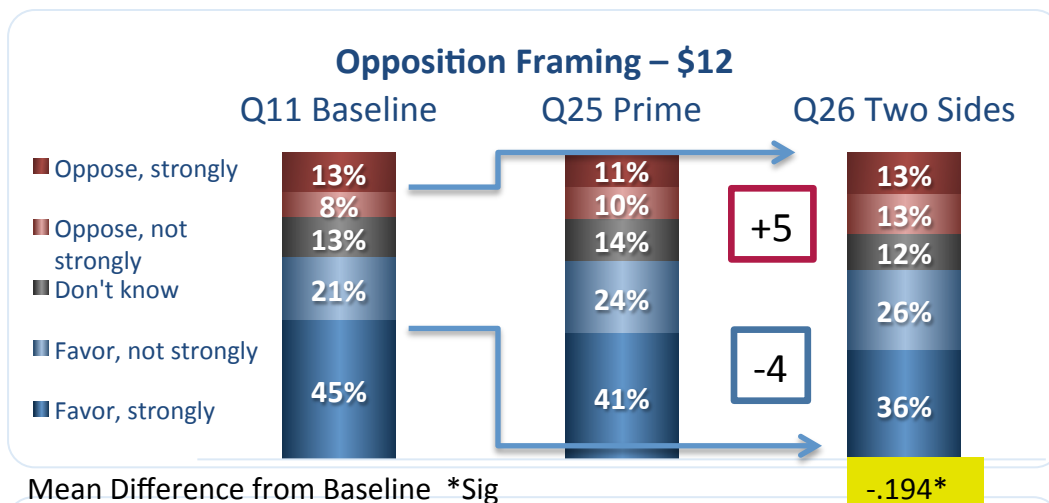
(Opponent)

People who are against the proposal say that this increase just isn’t affordable. Business owners will have to cut hours, lay off workers, or raise prices, passing on costs to the rest of us. This is the wrong way to increase wages and will just hurt the economy. If we want to grow the economy, we have to help businesses, not weigh them down with more mandates.

(Proponent)

People who are for the proposal say what ails families and our economy is the same thing – low wages. The cost of groceries, housing and other basics have gone up for years but wages haven't come close to keeping up, and that hurts both workers and the economy. Full time jobs should at least pay enough for people to afford the basics, because when people have more money to spend it will boost Main Street, create jobs, and help our communities thrive.

# STRATEGIC FRAMING CHOICES



## OPPOSITION PRIME (Consequences)

The initial priming has no statistically significant impact at either the \$12 or \$15 level – this is a story people already know.

However, after the Opposition priming and presenting two sides, there is a 9-point swing (from favor to oppose) at the \$12 level, and a 6-point swing at the \$15 level compared to the baseline question. Clearly, once the opposition attack sets in, it is tough for our message to hold onto support. **It is insufficient to simply respond with a strong message that includes a progressive economic message; we need to establish our position early.**

# STRATEGIC FRAMING CHOICES

## MORAL OR FAIRNESS PRIME

The Fairness or Moral argument has a lot of passion behind it. People are extremely concerned about struggling families, and are quite familiar with this storyline. However, this experiment makes clear that while it has a lot of energy, it is insufficient. Under pressure it isn't enough to hold onto softer supporters or to win those who are undecided.

- Three quarters are concerned that many families can't afford the basics (76% extremely or very concerned, 42% extremely concerned).
- More than 8 in 10 have seen "news coverage about how families are struggling because wages are too low. People are working full-time and still living in poverty, making it hard for many working families to feed their kids, keep the lights on, and pay the rent. Costs keep going up, but wages, especially for the poorest Americans, haven't kept up" (85% have seen "a lot" or "some" news about that issue).
- Majorities are already familiar with most elements of the Moral/Fairness storyline:
  - The federal minimum wage is just \$7.25 per hour, which is less than \$300 per week for full-time workers. (84% "already knew" this, 16% said it was "new information")
  - CEOs make roughly 300 times what the typical worker does. (79%, 21%)
  - A single parent working full-time at the minimum wage earns less than the poverty level. (76%, 24%)
  - 60% of minimum wage workers are women, and many are single moms. (59%, 41%)
  - 80% of minimum wage workers are over 20 years old. (52%, 41%)

# STRATEGIC FRAMING CHOICES

## MORAL OR FAIRNESS PRIME (continued)

At this point after the prime, survey respondents expressed their view of increasing the minimum wage once again.

Finally, survey respondents read a “two sides” debate, and voted again. In this split sample experiment, survey respondents read the following:

(Opponent)

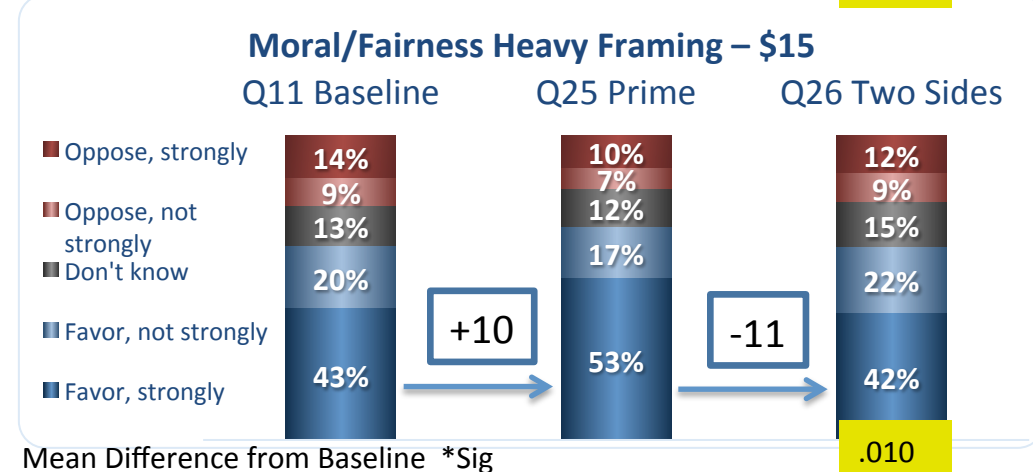
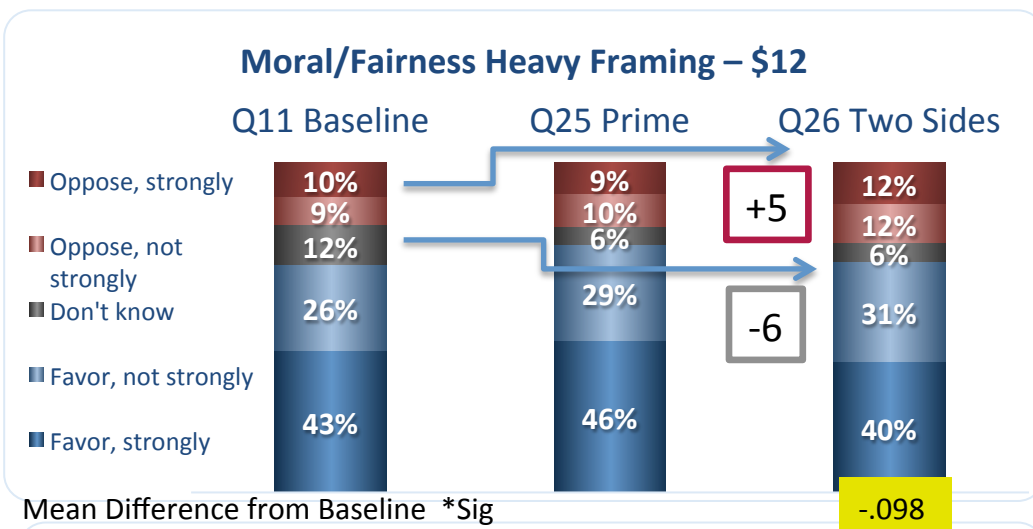
People who are against the proposal say that this increase just isn’t affordable. Business owners will have to cut hours, lay off workers, or raise prices, passing on costs to the rest of us. This is the wrong way to increase wages and will just hurt the economy. If we want to grow the economy, we have to help businesses, not weigh them down with more mandates.

(Proponent)

People who are for the proposal say people can’t make ends meet on the minimum wage. The cost of groceries, housing and other basics have gone up for years, but wages haven't come close to keeping up. Full time jobs should at least pay enough for people to afford the basics; that will boost families and move us closer to an economy that works for all of us.

(Note that this Moral/Fairness Heavy framing includes a very brief reference to the economy.)

# STRATEGIC FRAMING CHOICES



## MORAL/FAIRNESS PRIME (Consequences)

The priming tends to shift people toward favoring a \$12 proposal, and increases the intensity of support for a \$15 proposal. **Critically, gains do not hold under pressure.** After both sides, those who were undecided break toward opposition at the \$12 level (undecided -6, opposition +5 compared to the baseline), and response is essentially flat at the \$15 level.

We noticed the same pattern in our qualitative work. People find this frame emotionally compelling, but they struggle to maintain enthusiasm when faced with the opposition's argument.

# STRATEGIC FRAMING CHOICES

## PROGRESSIVE ECONOMIC PRIME

The Economic argument has less passion than the Moral/Fairness frame, (fewer are concerned that a lack of consumer spending hurts the economy), but there are several elements in this story that are new to voters. Nearly all of the informational ideas we shared in the priming represented new ideas for a majority of research participants.

- Half are concerned that consumer spending is down, which hurts business and the economy (50% extremely or very concerned, 19% extremely concerned).
- 7 in 10 have seen “news coverage about how local communities and economies are struggling because wages are too low. When jobs pay more, it boosts the economy and helps communities thrive, because families have more to spend at local businesses. Higher wages help families while putting money back into the economy, which creates more jobs.” (70% have seen “a lot” or “some” news about that issue).
- Most are unfamiliar with most elements of the Economic storyline:
  - Each \$1 per hour increase in wages creates a ripple effect in spending in a community, generating \$1.20 in the economy. (36% “already knew” this, 64% said it was “new information”)
  - Paramedics on average make only \$13 per hour. (37%, 63%)
  - Preschool teachers on average make only \$9 per hour. (42%, 58%)
  - Nursing assistants on average make only \$11 per hour. (47%, 53%)
  - Corporate profits are at record highs, while employee income and benefits are the lowest they’ve been in 65 years. (69%, 31%)



# STRATEGIC FRAMING CHOICES

## PROGRESSIVE ECONOMIC PRIME (continued)

At this point after the prime, survey respondents expressed their view of increasing the minimum wage once again.

Finally, survey respondents read a “two sides” debate, and voted again. In this split sample experiment, survey respondents read the following:

(Opponent)

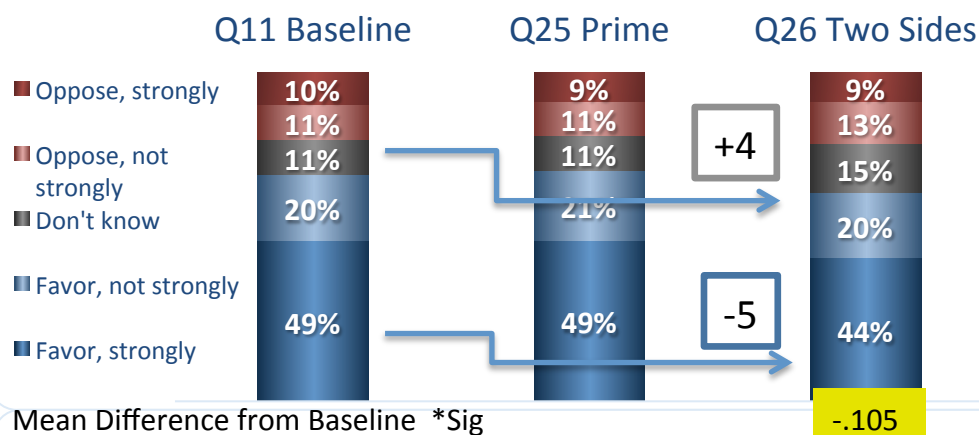
People who are against the proposal say that this increase just isn’t affordable. Business owners will have to cut hours, lay off workers, or raise prices, passing on costs to the rest of us. This is the wrong way to increase wages and will just hurt the economy. If we want to grow the economy, we have to help businesses, not weigh them down with more mandates.

(Proponent)

People who are for the proposal say the best way to grow our economy is to increase wages. When people can make ends meet, it helps families while growing the economy. Full time jobs should at least pay enough for people to afford the basics, because when people have more money to spend it will boost Main Street, create jobs, and help our communities thrive.

# STRATEGIC FRAMING CHOICES

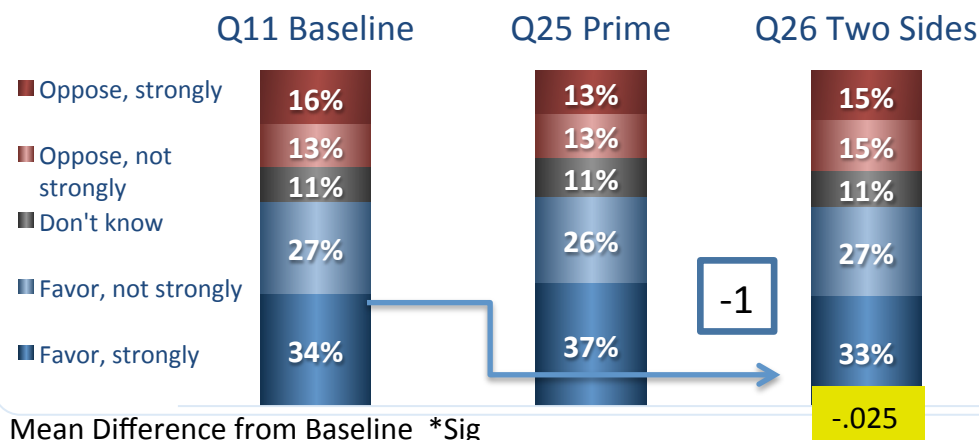
## Economic Heavy Framing – \$12



## ECONOMIC PRIME (Consequences)

Both after the priming and after the two sides vote, the Economic argument is essentially a draw. By making the Economic argument upfront, we've neutralized the opposition argument. (There is insignificant erosion from strongly favor to undecided at the \$12 level, and no change at \$15.) A draw is not a bad outcome considering the proposals start with strong support and some of the other frames lose ground to the opposition. Importantly, the Economic frame lays a foundation for a new perspective on the economy, a perspective that will benefit progressive policies in the long run. (There is more on this point later in the analysis.)

## Economic Heavy Framing – \$15



# STRATEGIC FRAMING CHOICES

## MERGED PRIME

The Merged framing has higher levels of concern and more familiarity than the Economic Priming alone, but not quite as much as the Moral/Fairness priming. The two “economic” ideas are new information for most folks, the rest are not.

- Nearly three quarters are concerned that “many families can’t afford the basics which means consumer spending is down, hurting both families and the economy” (73% extremely or very concerned, 36% extremely concerned).
- Three quarters have seen “news coverage about how jobs pay so little that many families work full time but earn less than the poverty level. When jobs pay more, it boosts the economy and helps communities thrive, because families have more to spend at local businesses. Higher wages help families while putting money back into the economy, which creates more jobs. ” (75% have seen “a lot” or “some” news about that issue).
- Majorities are familiar with three of the tested elements, but two are new for most:
  - The minimum wage is so low that a person who works full time qualifies for food stamps. (71% “already knew” this, 29% said it was “new information”)
  - Corporate profits are at record highs, while employee income and benefits are the lowest they’ve been in 65 years. (69%, 31%)
  - 80% of minimum wage workers are over 20 years old. (57%, 43%)
  - Nursing assistants on average make only \$11 per hour. (39%, 61%)
  - Each \$1 per hour increase in wages creates a ripple effect in spending in a community, generating \$1.20 in the economy. (33%, 67%)

# STRATEGIC FRAMING CHOICES

## MERGED PRIME (continued)

At this point after the prime, survey respondents expressed their view of increasing the minimum wage once again.

Finally, survey respondents read a “two sides” debate, and voted again. In this split sample experiment, survey respondents read the following:

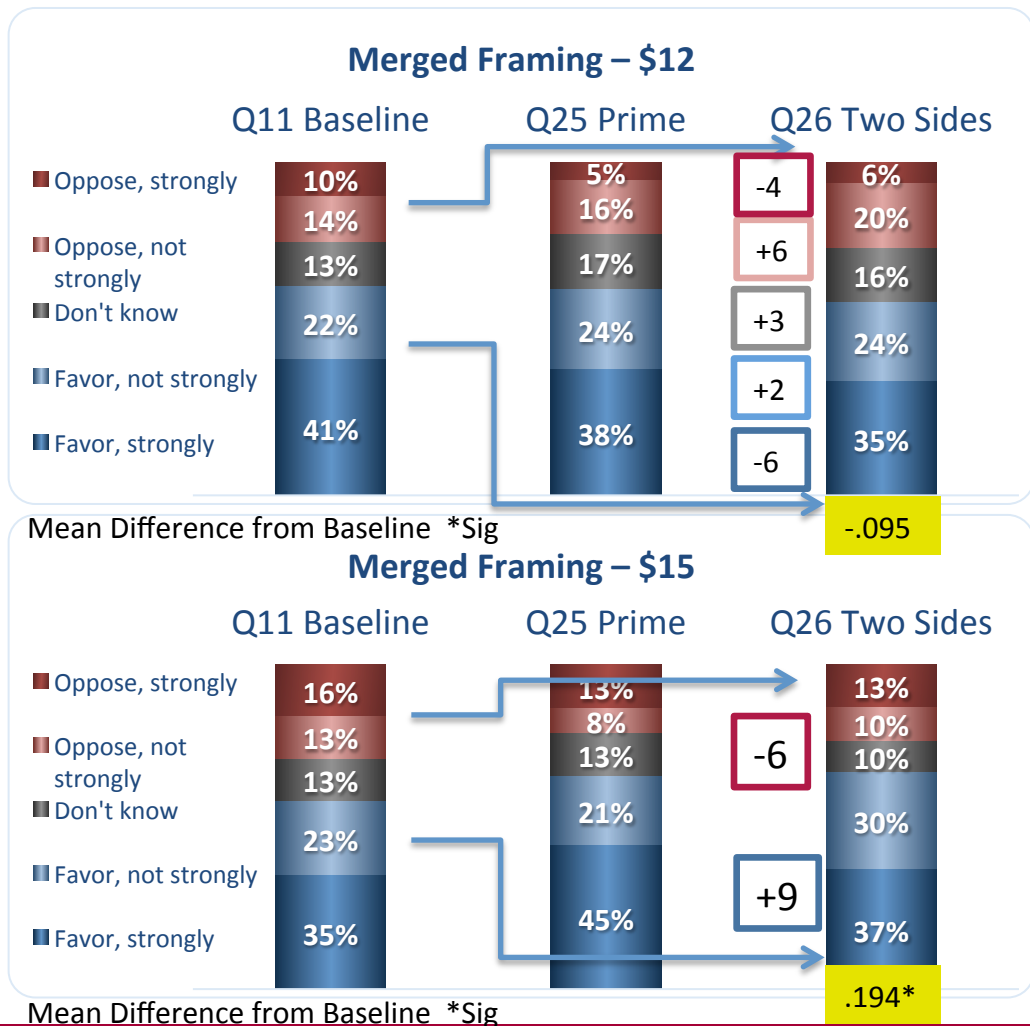
(Opponent)

People who are against the proposal say that this increase just isn’t affordable. Business owners will have to cut hours, lay off workers, or raise prices, passing on costs to the rest of us. This is the wrong way to increase wages and will just hurt the economy. If we want to grow the economy, we have to help businesses, not weigh them down with more mandates.

(Proponent)

People who are for the proposal say what ails families and our economy is the same thing – low wages. The cost of groceries, housing and other basics have gone up for years but wages haven't come close to keeping up, and that hurts both workers and the economy. Full time jobs should at least pay enough for people to afford the basics, because when people have more money to spend it will boost Main Street, create jobs, and help our communities thrive.

# STRATEGIC FRAMING CHOICES



## MERGED PRIME (Consequences)

The merged message is clearly a winner at \$15 (a 15 point swing from opposition to support), but a draw at \$12 (people move to the middle with no significant shift overall).

As discussed earlier, the dynamics for \$12 and \$15 are different. A \$12 proposal captures a broader base of support, so holding onto support becomes the primary goal. Those who favor \$15 are more likely to be solid supporters. Therefore, at the \$15 level, it is more appropriate to focus on winning the swing—those who would support \$12 but when faced with \$15 worry it is too high.

In both instances, we are focused on the same swing voters—those who we may lose or win under debate.

# A FOUNDATION FOR ECONOMIC POLICIES



# DEFINING ECONOMIC UNDERSTANDING

## GROWTH OVER EQUITY

Asked to prioritize economic growth or equity, a solid majority lands on the side of growth (59% growth, 41% equity, net 18 points). Therefore, to advance a progressive economic agenda, progressives need a rationale based on growth.

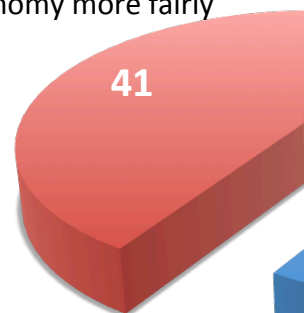
Right now, progressives do not own “growth” and support for increasing the minimum wage is not defined by growth. Those who oppose increasing the minimum wage prioritize growth at higher levels than supporters. Among those who initially oppose increasing the minimum wage, 73% prioritize growth compared with 55% of those who favor increasing the minimum wage.

**For the long term, progressives need to redefine how economic growth happens, and the minimum wage debate is a good place to start.**

The Merged frame may help with this redefinition, as those exposed to that frame chose growth over equity by 24 points, the same as the Opposition and higher than the Economic or Moral frames (14 and 12 points respectively).

*Sometimes when people talk about the economy, they talk about “growing the pie” meaning focusing on growing the economy as a whole, as opposed to “slices of the pie” meaning focusing on how the benefits of the economy are divided between groups of people – the rich, the middle class, the working class and so on. Which do you think is the more important priority:*

Economic policies that “slice the pie” of the economy more fairly

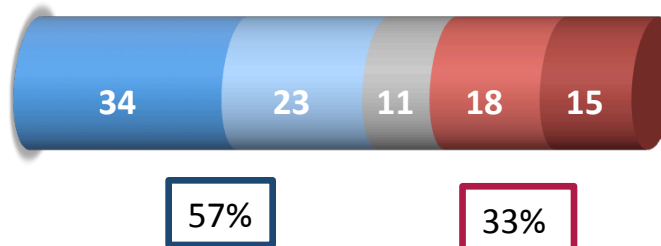


Economic policies that “grow the pie” of the economy faster

## DEFINING ECONOMIC UNDERSTANDING

As progressives embark on minimum wage battles, they should consider laying a foundation for a new perspective on the economy, a perspective that will benefit progressive policies in the long run. The minimum wage affords an opportunity to advance that dialogue. While the question illustrated below was not a “before and after” test, a majority of respondents (57%) side with the idea that raising wages is good for the economy, rather than bad for the economy (33%). This argument allows us to make a credible progressive case for growth. (Note that the priming experiments had no significant effect on response to this question.)

*Raising wages is good for the economy, because it puts money in people’s pockets, which boosts consumer spending, helps business and creates jobs.*



*Raising wages is bad for the economy, because the cost of doing business goes up, which increases consumer prices and costs jobs.*

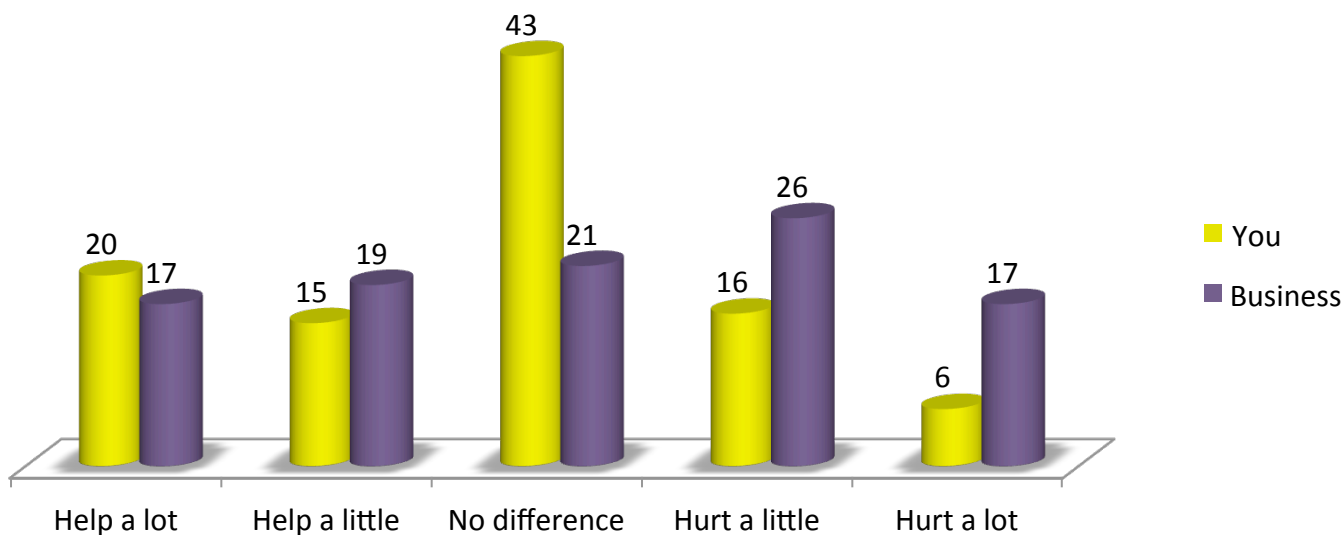


## DEFINING ECONOMIC UNDERSTANDING

But this view is not solid. It is easy for many to continue to believe that minimum wage proposals will make no difference in their lives and hurt the economy. Overall, a plurality (43%) say an increased minimum wage will have no effect on their family, though slightly more think it will help (35%) than hurt (22%) them. When it comes to business, 43% believe an increased minimum wage will hurt business while fewer believe it will help (36%) or make no difference (21%).

### Affect on You and Business

*If this proposal passed, how do you think it would affect you and your family/ businesses in your state?*

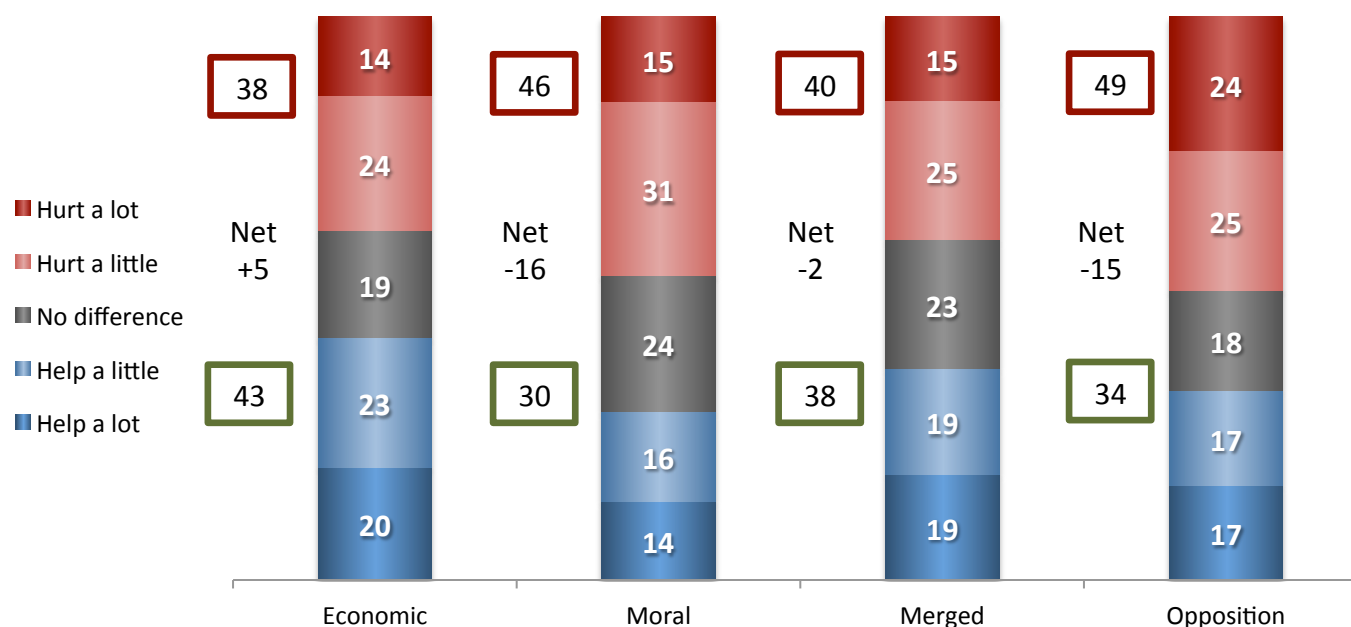


# DEFINING ECONOMIC UNDERSTANDING

Importantly, the Economic frame and the Merged frame result in a draw on one of the Opposition's main arguments – that an increased minimum wage would hurt business. Those exposed to the Economic frame say the proposal would help business in their state (43%) rather than hurt it (38%) for a net of +5. The Merged Frame is essentially a draw, while the Moral and Opposition frames result in respondents concluding the measure will hurt, not help business.

## Affect on Business

*If this proposal passed, how do you think it would affect businesses in your state?  
(by Experiment; Net = "help" minus "hurt")*



# WINNING STORY ELEMENTS



# WINNING STORY ELEMENTS

## OVERVIEW

These patterns suggest that advocates would be well advised to marry the moral and economic, and to do so early and loudly. A merged approach combines the emotional power of the Moral frame with the inoculating power of the Economic frame. Don't wait for the opposition to bring up their economic interpretation and then respond with ours, because it will be harder to define the economic case once the opposition has engaged.

The winning narrative needs to establish that this is an issue that concerns us all, and it needs to undermine the opposition's case, which plays on people's main doubts. A winning narrative brings together the moral and the economic, into one, cohesive case:

- Full time jobs should pay enough.
- Many jobs, including skilled jobs, pay far too little.
- Profitable industries can afford to pay more; taxpayers shouldn't subsidize a company's low wages.
- Higher wages are good for families, community and the economy.
- Growing the economy relies on better wages.

# WINNING STORY ELEMENTS

## THE BASIC CASE

As illustrated in the previous discussion of the experiment results, the basic “merged” story creates some positive effects on support. When tested as part of the convincing battery, the merged story also performs well. Note that both of these examples make a moral case (people should be paid enough to afford the basics/not live in poverty) AND provide an explanation for **how** increased wages will boost the economy (when people have more to spend, it boosts Main Street, creates jobs, and leads to thriving communities). It does not simply “assert” benefits for the economy; it explains how. It takes on the “job killer” attack by communicating the common sense logic that more spending **creates jobs**. Finally, it makes a collective, emotional case by bringing “thriving communities” into the conversation.

	Very + Somewhat Convincing	Very Convincing
It’s only right that full time jobs should at least pay enough for people to afford the basics, and when people have more money to spend it will boost Main Street, create jobs, and help our communities thrive.	75	41
Increasing wages is both fair and smart. It is fair because no one who works full-time should live in poverty and it’s smart because when people have more money to spend, it boosts local economies and creates jobs and thriving communities.	73	39

# WINNING STORY ELEMENTS

## A MORE DIVERSE FACE FOR THE MOVEMENT

Without question, this research makes a case for diversifying the face of the movement, and shifting the focus to all jobs that pay less than \$12/\$15 rather than focus on the lowest paid workers. It is by far the top-rated message, this is new information for many, and it is likely the reason that hourly workers who are paid <\$16 begin to emerge as an important constituency over the course of the survey.

	Very + Somewhat Convincing	Very Convincing
It's ridiculous that even skilled, important jobs like nursing assistants, preschool teachers, and paramedics pay less than \$15. We should value working people more than that.	82	51

# WINNING STORY ELEMENTS

## BUSINESS CAN AFFORD IT

As Topos research (and others) has shown, it helps to make the point that higher wages mean fewer people will have to rely on public assistance. This is both a moral idea (working people shouldn't be in poverty) and economic (it will save tax dollars; why are taxpayers subsidizing Walmart?). In addition, people fear that businesses are so fragile that increasing the cost of doing business will affect jobs. Stressing that businesses can afford it addresses that fear.

	Very + Somewhat Convincing	Very Convincing
The minimum wage is so low, that many full time workers qualify for food stamps and other public assistance. Taxpayers shouldn't subsidize low wage employers; they should pay workers enough to live on.	77	44
Profitable industries can afford to pay more, but they choose not to, and are instead working to keep wages down. We need an economy that works for all of us, not just the wealthy.	75	44

# WINNING STORY ELEMENTS

## SECONDARY POINTS

Several points test fairly well, but are not essential to the winning story. Communicators may make these points depending on the particular situation they face. The cost of living going up while wages haven't may help with the idea that increased wages will increase costs (costs have been going up in spite of low wages). Single mothers as the majority of low wage workers may help cut against the idea that these are jobs for teens (though the strategy to diversify the face of the movement is far more effective). Corporate lobbying on wages may dispute the "free market" assumption, and what the wage would be if it had kept up with productivity demonstrates that \$15 is realistic.

	Very + Somewhat Convincing	Very Convincing
The cost of groceries, housing and other basics have gone up for years. But wages haven't come close to keeping up. Raising the wage floor to \$15 helps families catch up with the cost of living.	71	39
The majority of minimum wage workers are women with children, struggling to make ends meet. Increasing the minimum wage will help working women and their families.	71	38
Big, multinational corporations are dumping millions into lobbying and campaigns to keep wages down. We need to stand up against them and support efforts to improve incomes.	70	40
The minimum wage was created 50 years ago to help keep working families out of poverty, but it hasn't kept up with the cost of living. If the minimum wage had kept up with gains in what workers contribute in increased productivity over the last 50 years, it would be over \$19 now, so gradually raising it to \$15 is very realistic.	69	38



# WINNING STORY ELEMENTS

## LESS SUCCESSFUL ECONOMIC POINTS

The economic case needs to be part of the conversation, but there are some economic points that are less effective. Asserting that raising wages is “one of the best things we can do to boost the economy” rates slightly lower than other economic points. Our qualitative work suggests that it seems like an overpromise to say minimum wages have that much of an impact. The “strong families” message below fails to make the message about growing the economy. We need more study to understand why San Francisco and Seattle are not effective exemplars; it may be that their high cost of living makes them an exception in people’s thinking. Finally, the wage ripple effect needs further study to determine how to effectively make that point.

	Very + Somewhat Convincing	Very Convincing
One of the best things we can do to boost our economy is to raise wages because families who earn more, spend more, and that creates jobs and leads to thriving communities.	67	35
A strong economy is built on strong families. Raising the wage floor to \$15 will boost families and move us closer to an economy that works for all of us, not just the wealthy.	66	33
Cities that have raised the minimum wage to \$15 like San Francisco and Seattle, have booming economies, proving that when people have more money to spend, we’re all better off.	63	33
When we raise the minimum wage, that results in raises for workers who earn more than the minimum wage, as employers adjust their pay scales.	60	25

# OPPOSITION MESSAGES



# OPPOSITION MESSAGES

## HIGHER PRICES, DESTABILIZE ECONOMY, JOB LOSS

The Opposition argument is always grounded in economic fear. Historically, opponents have emphasized job loss and that continues to be an effective attack. However, this survey suggests increased prices is an even more pervasive concern. Further reinforcing the recommendation to diversify the face of the movement, people find convincing the critique that \$15 is “too much for burger flipping jobs.”

	Very + Somewhat Convincing	Very Convincing
Raising the minimum wage means higher costs for businesses, which means they will raise prices. This proposal will result in consumers facing higher prices for gas, food and other products.	71	34
We need to increase the minimum wage, but raising it to \$15 is more than double the federal minimum wage. That’s going too far, too fast and will destabilize our weak economy.	67	32
This increase goes way too far. A \$15 minimum wage just isn’t affordable. Business owners will have to cut hours, lay off workers, or move their operations to other states or even abroad. It will just hurt the economy.	65	35
Some jobs certainly should earn \$15 per hour, but that is way too much to pay for burger-flipping jobs that anyone can do.	65	35
A \$15 minimum wage might be appropriate in cities with a high cost of living, but it doesn’t make sense for most small towns and rural areas.	63	27
Instead of raising the minimum wage, we should focus on improving the business climate because that will result in better paying jobs for everyone.	58	28

# KEY AUDIENCES



## KEY AUDIENCES

### SHORING UP SWING SUPPORTERS

One goal for communicators should be to shore up weak or swing supporters. As noted earlier, a \$12 minimum wage proposal receives slightly higher support than a \$15 proposal. Those groups that support \$12 at far higher levels than \$15 are more likely to slip away in a \$12 campaign, and are good targets for growth in a \$15 campaign. They want to support an increase, but are nervous about the impact.

Interestingly, many of these swing supporters are those who would likely personally benefit from an increase to \$15: households with an hourly worker earning less than \$16/hour, less educated respondents, and self-described working and lower class respondents. Other key audiences include union households and people of color.

All of these audiences respond strongly to the recommended Winning Story Elements:

- The idea that even skilled jobs pay less than \$15 is universally the top message.
- That profitable industries can afford to pay more and taxpayers shouldn't subsidize a company's low wages are also top messages among swing supporters.
- The merged message that it's right for jobs to pay enough, and that will boost Main Street, create jobs and thriving communities, is a top messages for swing supporters.

Brief descriptions of these swing supporters follow.

## KEY AUDIENCES

### SHORING UP SWING SUPPORTERS

#### Households with an hourly worker earning less than \$16/hour (34% of respondents)

Seven in ten favor a \$12 proposal, and 6 in ten favor a \$15 proposal. By the end of the survey, 18% of those earning <\$12 per hour shift their support for the minimum wage (combined proposals), mostly toward favoring an increase (11%), while 18% of those earning \$12-16 per hour shift their support, but slightly more move toward opposing an increase (10%). These households respond to the overall winning story elements. In addition, those earning <\$12 per hour also respond to the idea that the majority of minimum wage workers are women with children.

#### People of Color (26% of respondents)

Eight in ten (82%) favor a \$12 proposal and 71% favor a \$15 proposal (-11 percentage point difference). By the end of the survey, 16% of people of color shift their support for the minimum wage (combined proposals), mostly toward opposing an increase (10 points). In addition to the winning story elements, people of color also respond to the idea that cost of living has increased while wages have not, and to the idea that the majority of minimum wage workers are women with children.

## KEY AUDIENCES

### SHORING UP SWING SUPPORTERS

#### Respondents with Less Education (43% of respondents)

Among those with a high school education, 65% favor a \$12 proposal and 54% favor a \$15 proposal (-11 percentage point difference). By the end of the survey, 20% of high school educated voters shift their support, mostly toward favoring an increase (11%). Among those with a technical or Associates degree, 70% favor a \$12 proposal and 58% favor a \$15 proposal (-12 percentage point difference). By the end of the survey, 20% of those with a technical or Associates degree shift, mostly toward opposing an increase (14%).

#### Self-Described Working and Lower Class Respondents (43% of respondents)

Among those in the lower class, 73% favor a \$12 proposal, 62% favor a \$15 proposal (-11 percentage point difference), and the pattern is similar among those in the working class (69%, 60%, -9 points). Over the course of the survey, 16% of working and lower class respondents shift their support, with 9% shifting toward favoring an increase.

#### Union Households (14% of respondents)

Eight in ten (81%) union households favor a \$12 proposal and 62% favor a \$15 proposal (-19 percentage point difference). However, during the course of the survey there is less movement among this audience (13% overall, 7% toward favor). In addition to the winning story elements, this audience responds to the idea that cost of living has increased while wages have not.

## KEY AUDIENCES

### OPPONENTS

Some of those who initially oppose the measure can be won over. Among those who start out strongly opposing, just 4% shift toward favoring it by the end of the survey. However, among those who were not strong in their opposition, fully 21% shift to support it by the end (18% of those who favor, but not strongly, shift to oppose by the end).

As would be expected, those who oppose increasing the minimum wage find all the arguments less convincing than other survey respondents. The top four messages they find the most compelling are consistent with the recommended winning story:

“Very” + “Somewhat Convincing”	Oppose Initiative	
	Not Strong	Strong
It’s ridiculous that even skilled, important jobs like nursing assistants, preschool teachers, and paramedics pay less than \$15. We should value working people more than that.	69	58
The minimum wage is so low, that many full time workers qualify for food stamps and other public assistance. Taxpayers shouldn’t subsidize low wage employers; they should pay workers enough to live on.	57	34
It’s only right that full time jobs should at least pay enough for people to afford the basics, and when people have more money to spend it will boost Main Street, create jobs, and help our communities thrive.	53	29
Profitable industries can afford to pay more, but they choose not to, and are instead working to keep wages down. We need an economy that works for all of us, not just the wealthy.	52	37



# CONCLUSION

## CONCLUSION

Americans want to see increased wages, and strong majorities support a proposal to increase the minimum wage to \$12 and even \$15. Still, advocates cannot assume a win. People have economic fears the Opposition can play upon: that increasing the minimum wage will put pressure on fragile businesses, which might have to lay off workers or increase prices.

While the moral desire to make sure workers are paid fairly is the reason people want to act, they are held back by economic fear. They need a rationale for the minimum wage based on economic growth. Not only will increasing the minimum wage not *hurt* the economy, it will *help* it! This research suggests combining the Moral and Economic into one cohesive case, including broadening the face of the movement, is the strongest path forward.

The Winning Story can be expressed in a number of ways, for example:

*The cost of groceries, housing and other basics have gone up but wages haven't, and that hurts working people and slows down the economy. The minimum wage is so low, that many full time workers qualify for public assistance. It's ridiculous that even jobs like nursing assistants, and paramedics pay less than \$15. Profitable industries can afford to pay more, but they choose not to, and are instead holding wages down. Jobs should pay at least enough for people to afford the basics, and when people have more money to spend it will boost the economy, create jobs, and help our communities thrive.*



**Topos** has as its mission to explore and ultimately *transform the landscape of public understanding* where public interest issues play out. Our approach is based on the premise that while it is possible to achieve short-term victories on issues through a variety of strategies, *real change* depends on a fundamental shift in public understanding. Topos was created to bring together the range of expertise needed to understand existing issue dynamics, explore possibilities for creating new issue understanding, develop a proven course of action, and arm advocates with new communications tools to win support. For more information contact: [team@topospartnership.com](mailto:team@topospartnership.com)

**Our Story - The Hub for American Narratives**, works to support and develop the capacity among the progressive infrastructure and leaders for powerful, values based communication on core American beliefs. For more information contact: Richard Kirsch, [rkirsch@ourstoryhub.org](mailto:rkirsch@ourstoryhub.org).