

Priming Is Believing: Examining the Role of Partisan Identity in the Expression of Disputed Beliefs



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What's Hidden Inside "Crazy" Poll Questions?



Who do you think deserves more credit for the killing of Osama bin Laden:
Barack Obama or Mitt Romney?

Ohio

	Democrats	Republicans	Independents
Romney	1%	15%	1%
Obama	86%	38%	64%

North Carolina

	Democrats	Republicans	Independents
Romney	1%	15%	3%
Obama	87%	29%	61%

What's Hidden Inside "Crazy" Poll Questions?



Do you have a favorable or unfavorable opinion of Big Bird?

Virginia

	Democrats	Republicans	Independents
Favorable	67%	41%	58%
Unfavorable	6%	15%	11%

Wisconsin

	Democrats	Republicans	Independents
Favorable	58%	37%	56%
Unfavorable	11%	12%	9%

What's Hidden Inside "Crazy" Poll Questions?



Do you have a favorable or unfavorable opinion of Big Bird?

Virginia

	Very Liberal	Very Conservative	Moderate
Favorable	66%	49%	59%
Unfavorable	3%	14%	5%

Wisconsin

	Very Liberal	Very Conservative	Moderate
Favorable	66%	45%	52%
Unfavorable	6%	12%	6%

What's Hidden Inside "Crazy" Poll Questions?



What's Hidden Inside "Crazy" Poll Questions?



Do you think pollsters are intentionally skewing their polls this year to help Barack Obama, or not?

	Democrats	Republicans	Independents
Yes	14%	71%	45%
No	65%	13%	40%

What Do We Measure When We Measure Belief?



- Survey responses are respondent *expressions*
 - Ergo, they are social interactions
- Actual belief is probably only one component of what respondents tell us in their responses
 - Who's asking?
 - What does the question itself prime?
 - What social, political or historical context exists for the question?

What Motivates Belief Expression?



- **Identity Expression**
 - Beliefs as markers of group membership
 - Strength of affiliation and group norm adherence
- **Ego Defense**
 - Are party/candidate attacks seen as attacks on the self?
 - Bolstering and increased certainty
- **Issue Type and Salience**
 - Is it politicized? Is it relevant to respondents' self-concept?
 - Knowledge vs. opinion vs. belief

A Typology of Beliefs



	Politicized		
	Retrospective	Prospective	Ongoing
Consensus	Obama born in US	Temps will rise	Climate change
Disputed	Roe & crime rate	Economy improves	Gun safety
Unknowable	2000 election	Jesus will return	God guides events

	Non-politicized		
	Retrospective	Prospective	Ongoing
Consensus	Booth & Lincoln	World ends in Dec.	Vaccines & autism
Disputed	Oswald & Kennedy	Super Bowl winner	Attachment parent
Unknowable	Atlantis	Ragnarok	Alien life exists

Hypotheses & Research Question



- H1. Exposure to attacks on a particular political party will cause a) a greater gap between Republicans and Democrats on contested political beliefs, and in particular, b) greater gaps between stronger and weaker partisans
- RQ1. For what issues does this phenomenon manifest? Do they have shared characteristics?

Methods



- Online survey-experiment, September 2012 – N=306
 - Data collected via Mechanical Turk
- Traditional partisanship and ideology measures
- Stimulus material adapted from post-convention pundit round-up articles from *The Huffington Post*
- 2x2 experimental design
 - Moderate vs. negative reactions
 - Mitt Romney vs. Barack Obama
 - ✦ Same text other than candidates' names and names of Fox News or MSNBC on-air personalities

Methods



- **Belief statements (7-point agree/disagree):**
 - Barack Obama was born in the United States ($M = 5.96$)
 - Mitt Romney has paid income taxes in each of the last ten years ($M = 4.05$)
 - The Obama Administration has increased taxes for most Americans ($M = 3.35$)
 - There is solid evidence that the Earth is warming because of human activity ($M = 5.35$)
 - The 2009 economic stimulus package created a substantial number of new jobs in the U.S. ($M = 4.04$)

Methods



- **Belief statements (7-point agree/disagree):**
 - Abstinance-only education is an effective way to prevent unplanned pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases ($M = 2.36$)
 - The death of Osama Bin Laden has made the U.S. safer ($M = 3.77$)
 - Voter fraud will be a major problem in the 2012 elections ($M = 3.29$)
 - Mitt Romney's economic plan would raise taxes on the middle class ($M = 5.05$)
 - The Affordable Care Act (aka "Obamacare") was paid for by removing \$716 billion from Medicare ($M = 3.47$)

Results



- **Demographics controlled**
 - Age (31.89), gender (44% female), race (77.7% white), education (college grad), income (\$20-40K)
- **ANCOVA models for all ten belief outcomes**
 - Candidate (Romney vs. Obama)
 - Tone (moderate vs. negative)
 - Two-party partisanship (Republican vs. Democrat)
 - Strength of partisanship (weak/moderate vs. strong)

Results



	Obama born in the U.S.	Romney paid taxes	Obama raised taxes	Climate change	Stimulus worked
4-way interaction	<i>3.980***</i>	<i>.873</i>	<i>4.044***</i>	<i>2.605**</i>	<i>2.348**</i>

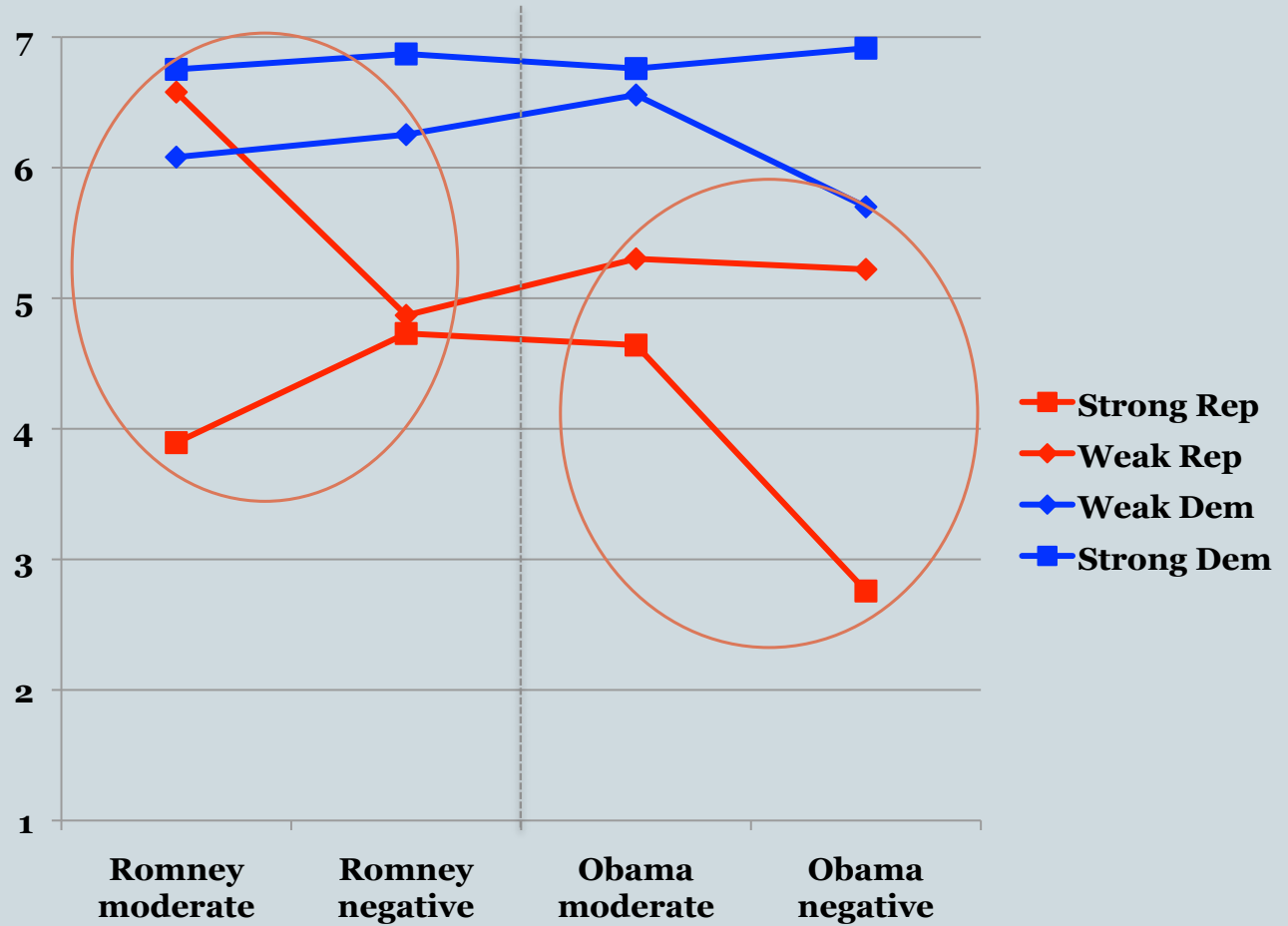
	Abstinence-only education	Death of OBL	2012 voter fraud	Romney to raise taxes	\$716M from Medicare
4-way interaction	<i>1.744</i>	<i>.639</i>	<i>3.106***</i>	<i>1.013</i>	<i>3.660***</i>

Cell entries are *F* scores; *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$
Entries in italics have significant main effect of party ID

Results

Barack Obama
was born in the
United States

Tone: $p = .067$
Strength: $p = .076$
Candidate: $p = .220$

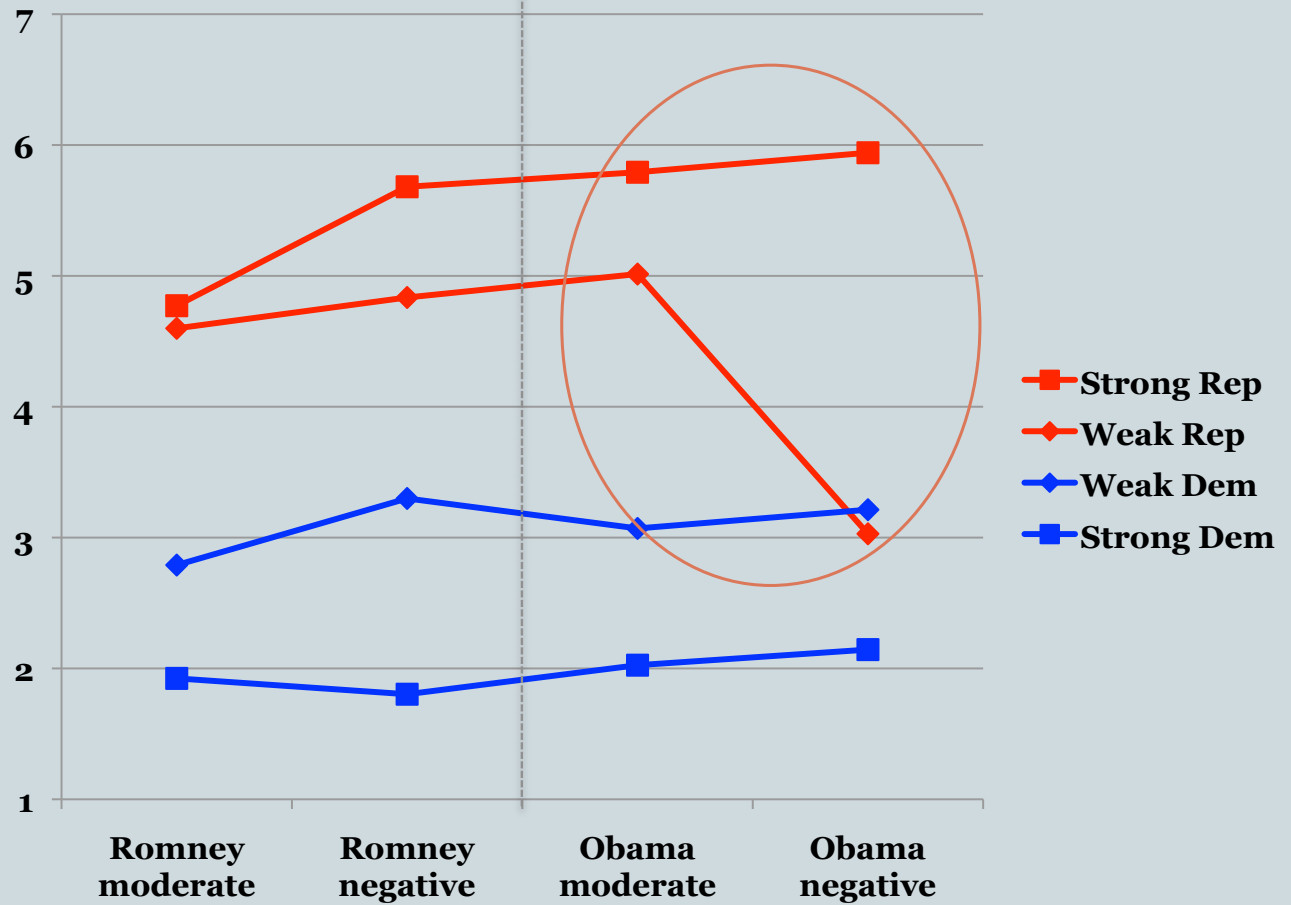


Results



The Obama Administration has increased taxes for most Americans

Tone: $p = .982$
Strength: $p = .904$
Candidate: $p = .780$

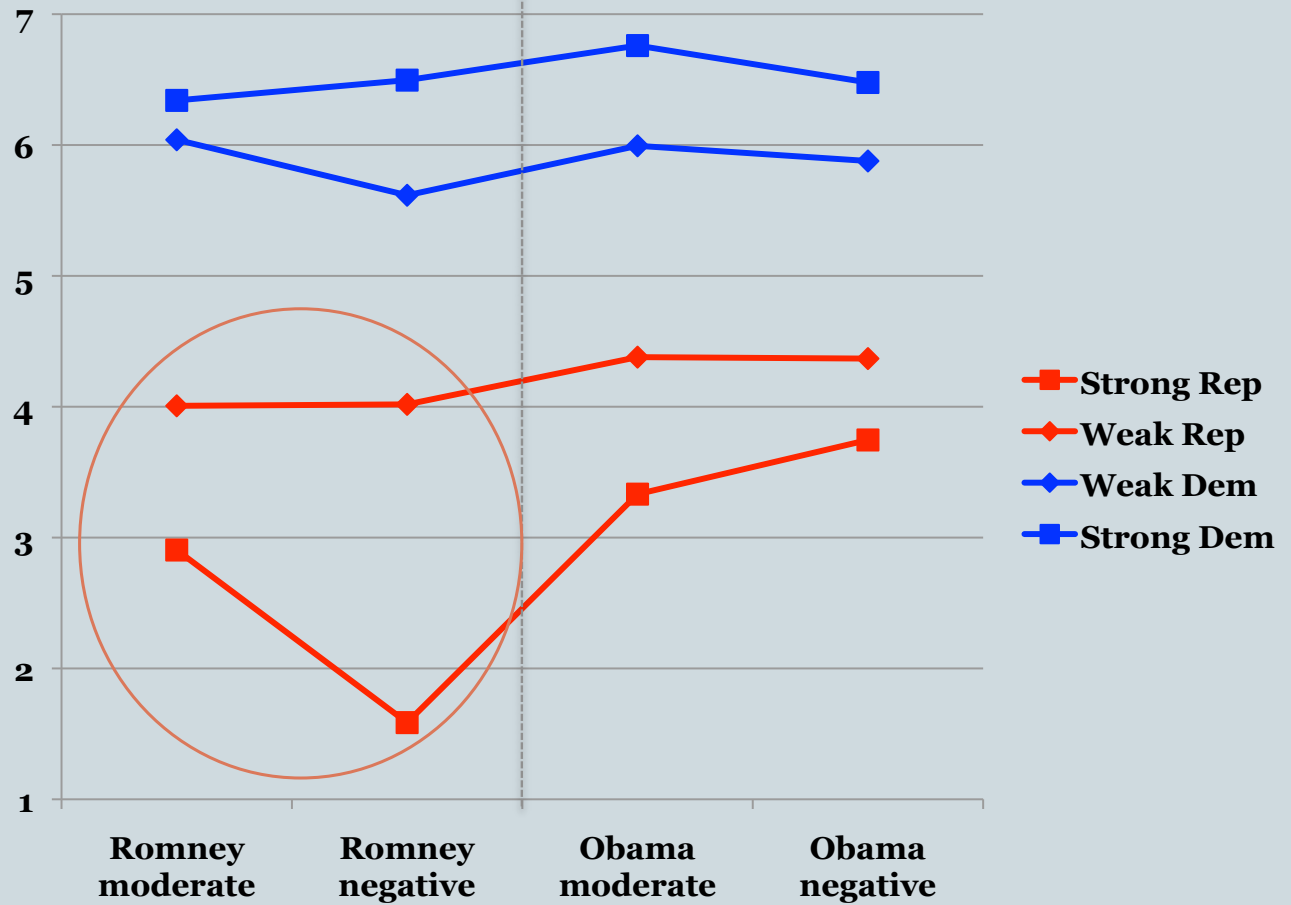


Results



There is solid evidence that the Earth is warming because of human activity

Tone: $p = .331$
Strength: $p = .113$
Candidate: $p = .016$

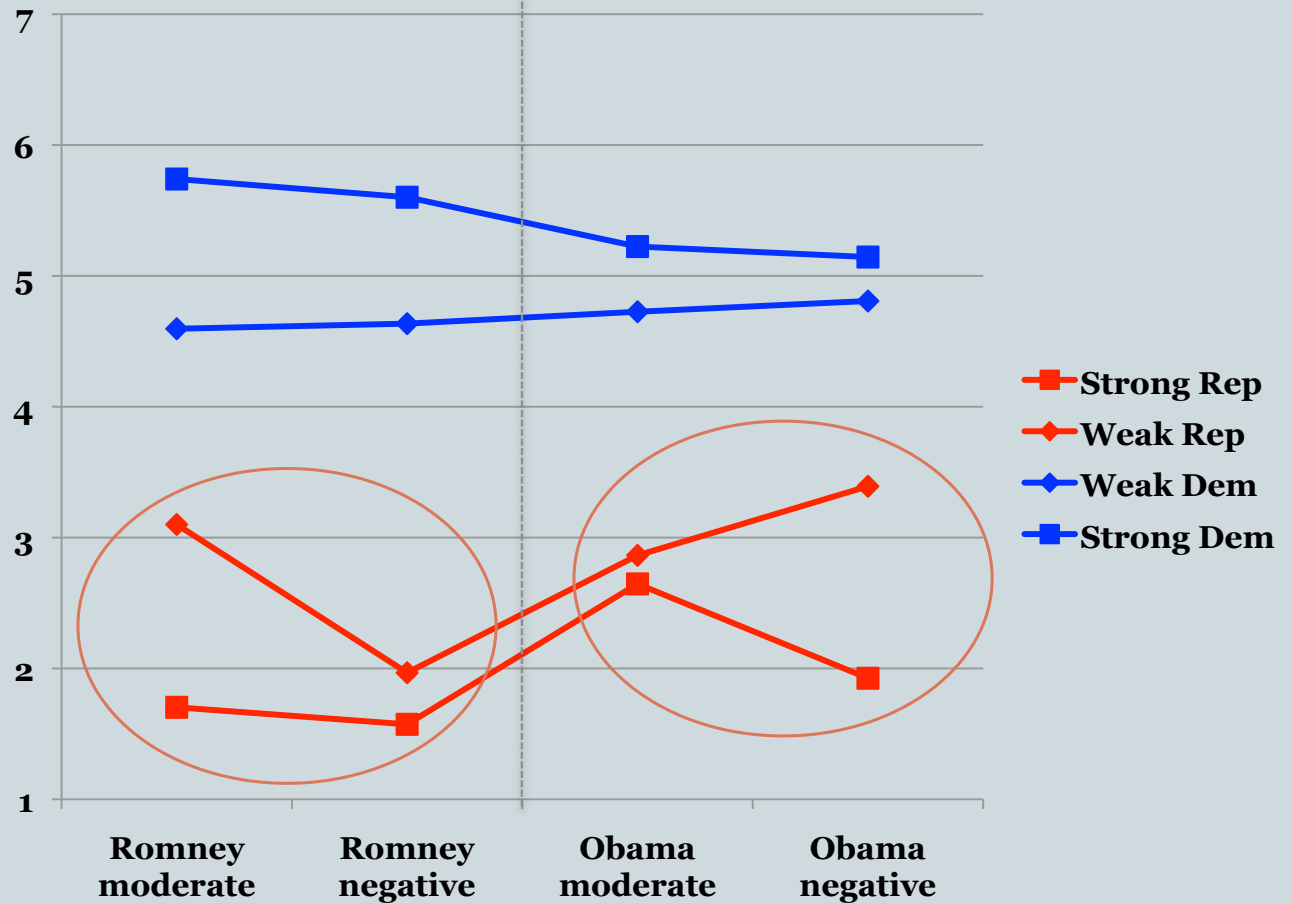


Results



The 2009 economic stimulus package created a substantial number of new jobs in the U.S.

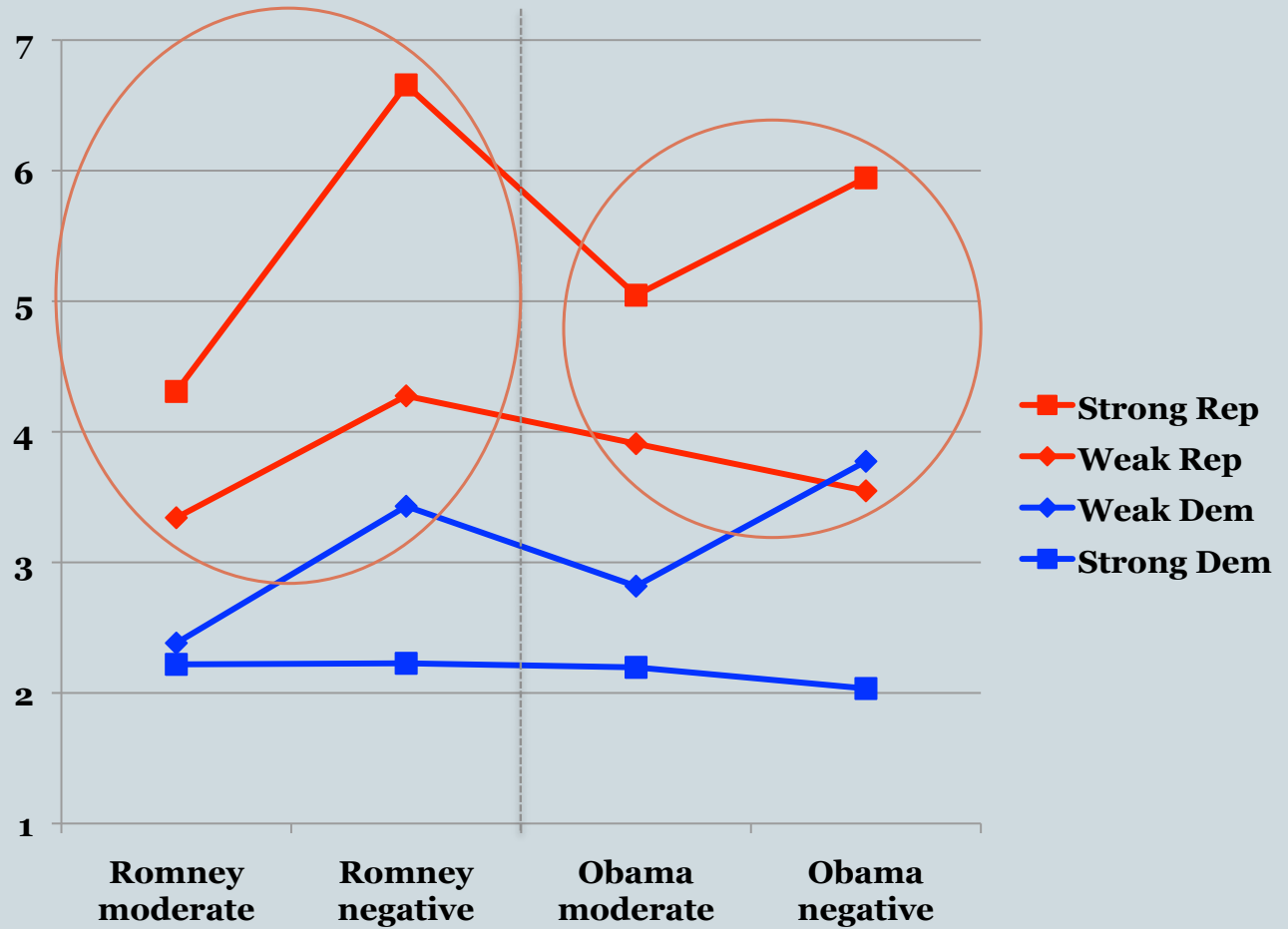
Tone: $p = .386$
Strength: $p = .773$
Candidate: $p = .313$



Results

Voter fraud will be a major problem in the 2012 elections

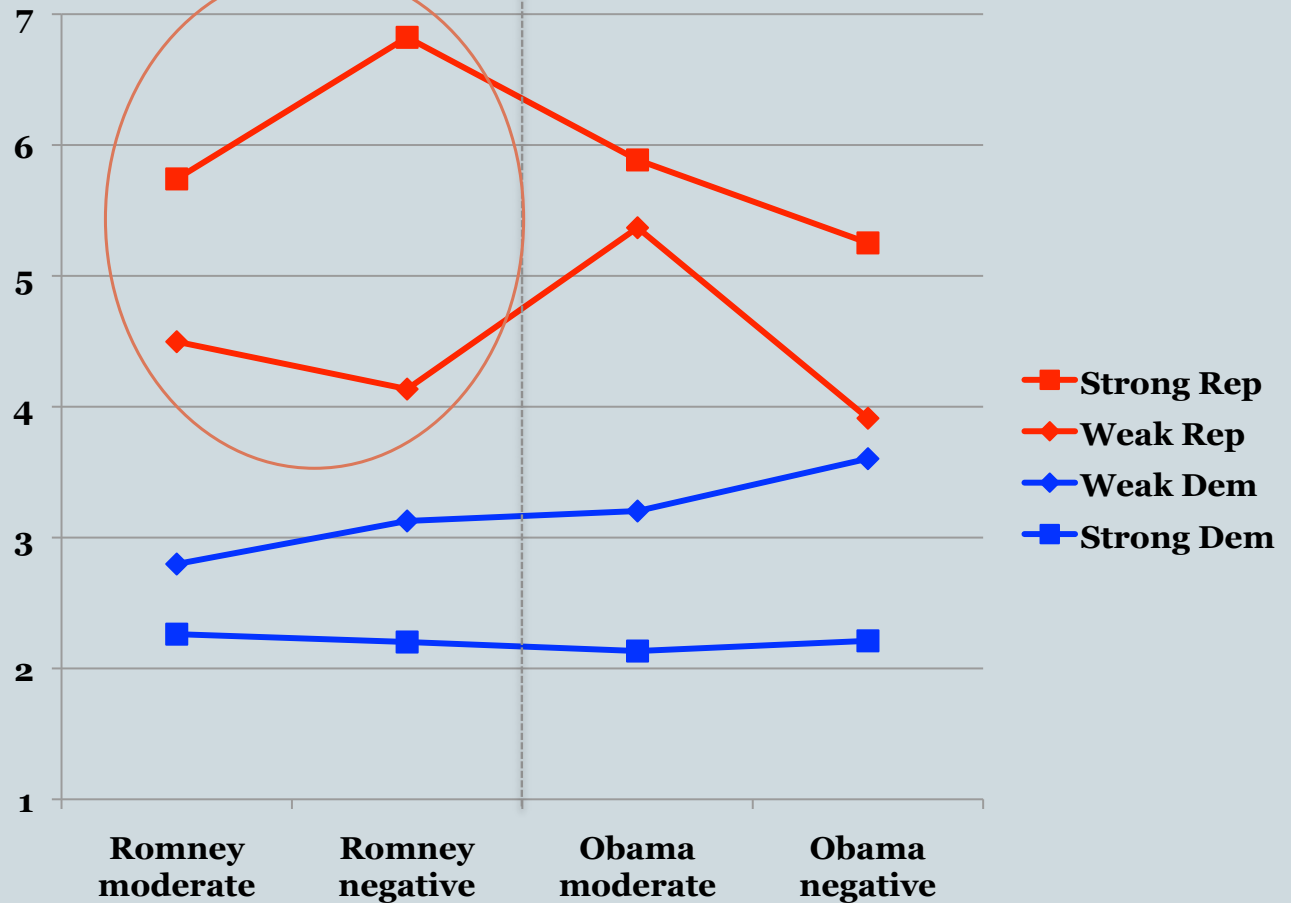
Tone: $p = .008$
Strength: $p = .148$
Candidate: $p = .839$



Results

The Affordable Care Act (aka "Obamacare") was paid for by removing \$716 billion from Medicare

Tone: $p = .739$
Strength: $p = .335$
Candidate: $p = .993$



Discussion



- **Priming partisan identity prompts bolstering**
 - Effects concentrated among Republicans, negative stimuli
 - Stronger agreement with partisan beliefs, and thus, wider gaps
 - Long-term effects? Does it aggregate? Do partisan talk and media use reinforce it? What role for ideology?
- **Issue characteristics**
 - Central beliefs about Obama and his administration demonstrate this effect; beliefs about Romney do not
 - ✦ Obama mostly primes Obama issues; Romney primes others
 - Are some policy issues (e.g., climate change) more connected to identity than others (e.g., abstinence-only)? How does this set of issues change over time?