Supreme Court Cases and Presidential Actions Helped Define the Major Issues for 2016 Presidential Election

Timeline of Events Affecting the 2016 Election

June (King v. Burwell) Decision

2015

2015

June 🤇

July 🔘

2015

Aug (2015

2015

The Supreme Court ruled to uphold federal subsidies for all eligible Americans under the Affordable Care Act. This effectively upheld the ACA's constitutionality making its repeal a major rallying cry for Republican presidential candidates. For Democratic candidates, especially Hillary Clinton, preserving and championing the ACA took on added significance.

June (Obergefell v. Hodges) Decision

The Supreme Court ruled the 14th amendment required all states to grant and honor same-sex marriage licenses. The decision brought the issue to the fore within the Republican primary causing social issues to become a major criteria when vetting candidates.

Congress Approved and Obama Signed Trade Promotion Authority for Trans-Pacific Partnership

Congress granted Obama authority to negotiate the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) without Congressional amendment. Democratic candidates denounced TPP as undermining U.S. labor with Republicans split over the issue. Establishment candidates largely favored the deal while outsider candidates like Trump and Cruz considered it bad for the economy.

The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) was Announced

The JCPOA or the "Iran Deal", was announced and Republicans quickly lambasted it. For Republicans, it provided a contrast on how they would be a stronger commander-in-chief than Democrats. For Democrats, the deal was seen as evidence of their prudence and measured leadership contrasted with the Republican's hot-headedness.

Obama Announced Finalized Clean Power Plan

President Obama announced the Clean Power Plan, which empowered the EPA to regulate carbon emissions. Democrat candidates largely supported the measure seeing it as a critical step to combating climate change. Republican candidates viewed the plan as imposing burdensome regulations upon states, which would aversely impact the

economy.

Source: InfoPlease, February 2016; BBC, "Russia Joins War in Syria: Five Points," October 1, 2015; Allie Maloy, "Obama Unveils Major Climate Change Proposal," CNN, August 3, 2015.

National Security Became One of the Top Issues Towards the End of 2015 Due to Syria and Terrorism

Timeline of Events Affecting the 2016 Election

Sep 🔾

Russia Entered Syria and Began Air Campaign to Support Syrian Dictator Bashar al-Assad

2015

Russian airplanes and ground troops entered Syria to support Syrian leader Bashar al-Assad. Further questions about U.S. Middle Eastern strategy were discussed in the presidential debate, especially on the Republican side. Republicans used Russian presence as an example of continued U.S. weakness under Obama.

Oct 🔘

Obama Announced U.S. Ground Troops in Syria

2015

A rift began to appear between Democratic candidates on national security with Hillary Clinton largely supportive of Obama's Syria strategy while Bernie Sanders wanted all U.S. troop withdrawn from Syria. A similar rift emerged in the Republican campaign with most Republicans calling for a more "muscular" strategy with an increased troop presence, while others called for the U.S. to embrace a less "interventionist" foreign policy in the Middle East.

Nov 📮

Paris Terrorist Attack

2015

ISIL operatives killed 130 people and caused widespread panic across France. National security became a top concern amongst voters, especially Republicans. Republican candidates called into question the vetting process for Syrians and Iraqis entering the U.S. causing a major discussion about whether the U.S. should be letting in Syrians or Iraqis at all. Democrats tried to differentiate themselves as the more welcoming party and painted Republicans as fear-mongering.

Dec 💍

San Bernardino Terrorist Attack

2015

Two gunmen, who were a couple, attacked a social services clinic killing 14 and injuring 22 people. One of the perpetrators, Tashfeen Malik, was a Pakistani immigrant and a permanent legal resident. Her immigrant status made fears over Middle Eastern immigrants more acutely felt and made terrorism the dominant topic in the national conversation.

Source: InfoPlease, February 2016; BBC "Russia Joins War in Syria: Five Points," October 1, 2015; Allie Maloy, "Obama Unveils Major Climate Change Proposal," CNN, August 3, 2015.

Justice Antonin Scalia's Unexpected Death Has Put Added Significance onto the 2016 Presidential Election

Timeline of Events Affecting the 2016 Election

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U.S. and Iran Prisoner Exchange

2016

U.S. and Iran exchanged prisoners resulting in five U.S. prisoners being released. Four returned to the U.S. and one remained in Tehran. Democratic candidates pointed to the exchanges as proving that diplomacy could produce results without the need for military intimidation. Republican candidates pushed back against this sentiment pointing to an incident where Iran held U.S. sailors hostage, albeit temporarily.

Feb C

Some of Hillary Clinton's Emails Were Marked As Classified

2016

Some of Hillary Clinton's emails from her time as Secretary of State were retroactively labeled as containing classified information. Republican candidates pointed to this as showing how reckless Clinton was and how she cannot be trusted to handle sensitive information. The Democratic candidates continued to consider the email a smear campaign with Clinton arguing major Republican officials like Colin Powell and Condoleezza Rice used a similar private email server while handling retroactively classified material.

Feb (

Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia Died

On February 13th, Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia died. A discussion began on whether Obama should appoint a new Supreme Court justice or whether it should wait until the next president. Consequently, the presidential election took on added significance as the winner was seen as the one who would appoint Scalia's successor and determine if the court would have a liberal or conservative majority.

Source: InfoPlease, February 2016; BBC, "Russia Joins War in Syria: Five Points," October 1, 2015; Allie Maloy, "Obama Unveils Major Climate Change Proposal," CNN, August 3, 2015.