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To: Interested Parties

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### **A Progressive Comeback?**

*The Rising American Electorate's Role—and Potential Role—in Averting an Electoral Disaster*

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Democracy Corps's tracking this week and last week report a closing congressional vote. Any movement at all in the Democratic direction is notable given the unprecedented disparity in independent campaign expenditure this cycle and continued disheartening economic news. These results also show that, unlike the summer, voters are willing to listen to Democratic arguments. All that said, while the movement in the Democratic direction is likely real, it is also very small. Democrats still face a very tough task and the Right's ability to drop \$50 million in the last two weeks will make the mountain even steeper.

Candidates in competitive races would do well to leverage this progress during the next few critical weeks, specifically by targeting voters in the Rising American Electorate (RAE). These voters—unmarried women, young people, and people of color—make up a majority of the American voting-age-population and have the demographic strength to change the outcome in this election. They also drove the change in this country in 2006 and 2008. Democracy Corps and Women's Voices, Women's Vote Action Fund have been tracking these voters throughout this election cycle.<sup>1</sup> While the results show some improvement in progressive margins with these voters, they are also under performing for Democrats electorally. The progressive vote has not been exhausted among these voters.

This memorandum is based on a national tracking survey of 928 likely voters in November's general election, conducted by Democracy Corps between October 9 and 11. It includes 351 interviews among members of the Rising American Electorate, including 189 unmarried women, 56 young people, and 172 people of color. The overall margin of error is +/- 3.22 at a 95 percent confidence level.

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<sup>1</sup> WVWVAF's non-partisan role in funding this survey is to urge engagement of the Rising American Electorate, those segments of the population who have been traditionally under-represented.



Key findings include:

- Democrats have closed the Republican margin slightly in recent weeks and voters in the RAE have played a substantial role in that progress. Specifically, Democrats post their best showing among unmarried women since May.
- However, progressives still have room to increase their margins among RAE voters. There are as many persuadable voters in the RAE universe as outside the universe; moreover, unmarried are among the most likely to move to the progressive candidate after hearing both Democratic and Republican messages.
- Enthusiasm for voting this election cycle improved sharply among RAE voters to the degree that is comparable to non-RAE voters. This is one of the most encouraging signs in the survey. Enthusiasm still lags among young people. Moreover, RAE voters are two-and-half times more likely to drop-off the ballot—that is, fail to complete their ballot—as non-RAE voters. That means that up to 14 percent of the most progressive voters will not be making decisions about their state legislature or various referenda.
- Early voting and vote by mail may provide one solution to this problem, particularly looking ahead. All told, nearly a third of voters now plan on voting early, and this number reaches a majority in some states. Early voting is even more popular among elements of the RAE, and the progressive margins grow among early RAE voters.
- In the last report, we outlined a powerful framing for these voters: “Times are tough and we have fought to help average people while they have opposed helping average people,” also noting that this messaging needs real-life examples (e.g., minimum wage, job training, or health care reform) that relate to the personal lives of these voters. This message can be amplified by focusing specifically on the middle class, outsourcing, and trade issues. These are voters that compete most directly with low-wage foreign competition, so the success of this message among RAE voters is not surprising.
- Neither party is sufficiently targeting RAE voters. Democrats do seem to steering their mail outreach toward the RAE, but among the RAE voters least enthusiastic about voting—the voters that need this outreach more than anyone—this advantage disappears.

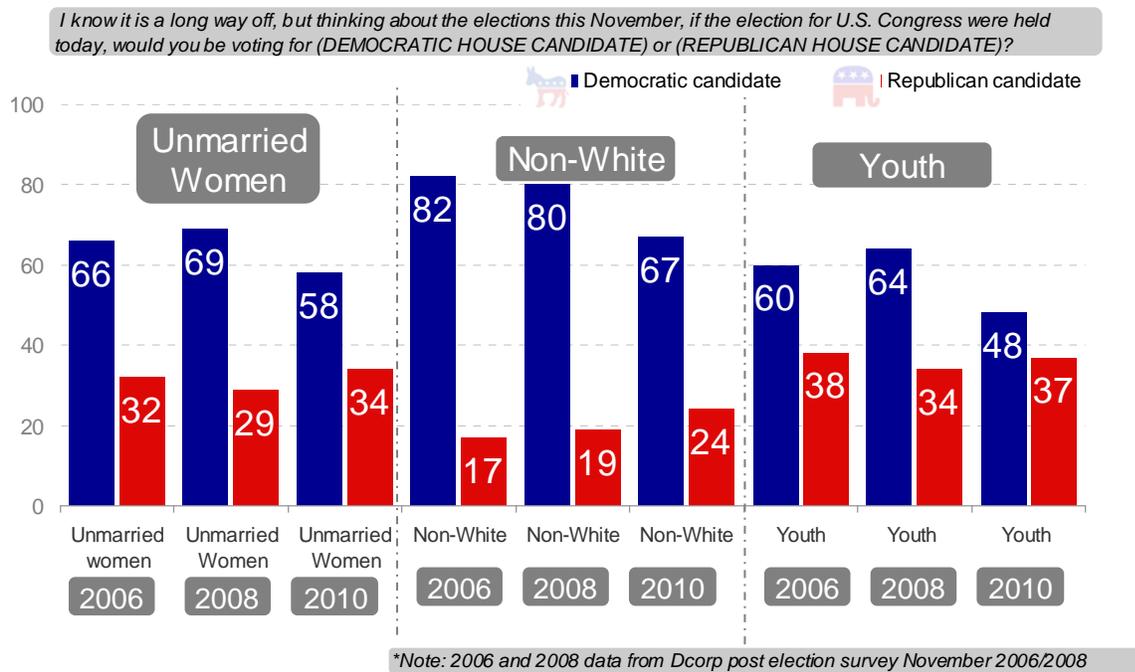
Even at this last date, the outcome of this election is not carved in stone. Voters show in this survey and other research a new willingness to listen to the progressive messages; there are still opportunities to close margins in competitive races and change heart-breaking losses into close wins.



### RAE Anchors Closing Margin

Among likely voters, the Republican hold on the congressional vote closes to two points (now 47 percent Republican candidate, 45 percent Democratic candidate), compared to an 8 – 9 point margin we saw in August and September. Democrats have closed the gap significantly among Independent voters, but also improved their standing among unmarried women. Currently Democrats lead among unmarried women 58 – 34 percent. This is the largest margin we have seen among these voters since May. Importantly, however, Democrats are still not close to matching their historic totals of previous cycles in the Rising American Electorate.

### Rising American Electorate underperforming



Democrats still have ample room to grow support. Breaking voters down into categories on a Voter Choice Scale,<sup>2</sup> we find just as many persuadable voters among RAE voters as among non-RAE voters. Unmarried women further reveal themselves as a prime persuasion target when asked to reconsider their vote choice at the conclusion of the survey. Democrats initially lead 58 to 34 percent among unmarried women; after hearing balanced arguments from both sides, Democrats increase their margin among unmarried women to 61 to 30 percent. This is not too distant from the 2006 total among unmarried women.

<sup>2</sup> The Voter Choice Scale is a system developed by Greenberg Quinlan Rosner that uses several questions to subdivide voters into groups ranging from loyalist to unreachable. Voters that fall in the middle of the scale are moveable in an election.



## The RAE is still persuadable

|                          | RAE       | Non-RAE   |
|--------------------------|-----------|-----------|
| Conditional/Vulnerable   | 4         | 4         |
| Vulnerable/Winnable      | 12        | 11        |
| Winnable/In Reach        | 12        | 12        |
| <b>Total Persuadable</b> | <b>16</b> | <b>17</b> |

The RAE represents a base progressive group. That has been true for most of this year and remains true currently. But it is also a base group that has been under performing electorally, particularly compared to previous cycles. The improvements we see here are important, particularly if they accelerate over the next few weeks; Democrats have not exhausted their potential support among these voters.

### Improvement in Enthusiasm among RAE, but Lingering Problems Down the Ballot

Voter enthusiasm among likely RAE voters increases sharply in this survey and is now comparable to enthusiasm among non-RAE voters. Historically, RAE voters typically drop off in disproportionate numbers from a presidential cycle to a non-presidential cycle. There is still a lot of work to be done to drive turnout among these voters, but these results are encouraging.

RAE voters also are more likely to “roll off” the ballot, which is to say they complete the ballot at the top-of-the-ticket, but fail to vote for offices down the ballot or referenda. RAE voters are more than twice as likely to admit to rolling off the ballot as non-RAE voters.

Overall, 51 percent of RAE voters describe their enthusiasm for voting this year as “10” on a 10-point scale. This is up sharply from September (then just 32 percent) and not too far from the results among non-RAE voters (57 percent). Turnout among young people, however, still looms as a very serious problem (just 27 percent describe their enthusiasm for voting as a 10).

Voters will be making decisions this year that affect the future of their country and their community. Not all of these decisions will be immediately obvious when reading the front page of national newspapers on November 3, but will nonetheless be critical to the progressive movement. Voters will be deciding on control of a significant number of legislatures going into

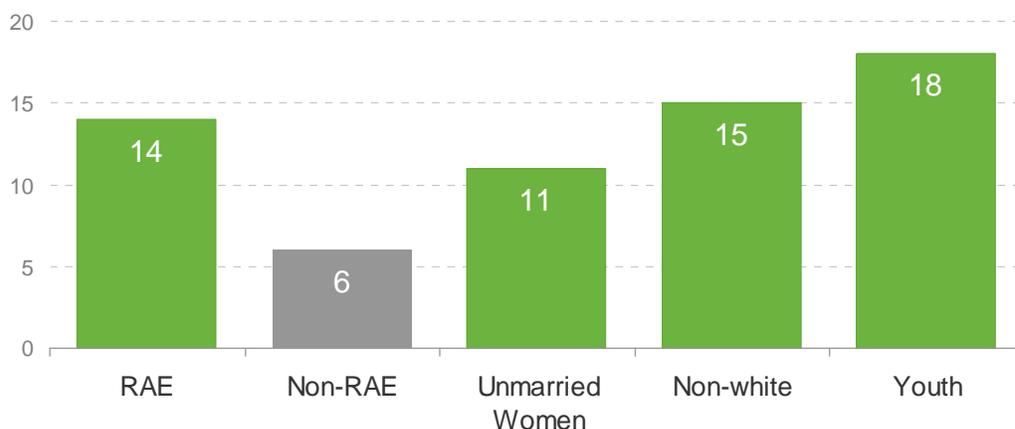


redistricting, as well as ballot initiatives affecting school funding, choice and the environment. The most progressive voters in this electorate are two-and-a-half-times more likely to surrender their choice on these issues as the more conservative voters.

All told, just 9 percent admit to failing to complete the ballot, but this number jumps to 14 percent among RAE voters (compared to just 6 percent non-RAE voters).

### Increased ballot drop-off among the RAE

*Sometimes there are many elections on one ballot, such as elections for governor, Senate, Congress, and state and local offices, as well as referenda or initiatives on the ballot about specific issues. Some people do not vote in all of the elections on the ballot. How about you? (PERCENT DROP-OFF)*



In our focus group work with RAE voters both this cycle and last cycle, we find that the primary reason they drop off is that they do not feel competent enough to cast an informed ballot. On Election Day, they are confronted with names of candidates they have never heard of, or convoluted ballot language they do not understand. So, reasonably, they drop off the ballot.

One solution, particularly looking ahead to 2012 and beyond, is early voting. Early voting gives these voters the opportunity to research issues and candidates on-line before filling out the ballot. In our focus group testing, we have found that this ability, in addition to the obvious convenience, represents one of the most appealing aspects of early voting.

Overall, 30 percent of likely voters say they are planning on voting early. This increases to 35 percent among unmarried women and among young people. As notable, the progressive margin increases among early voters in the RAE universe. Among all RAE voters, Democrats enjoy a 57 to 35 percent advantage. Among early RAE voters, Democrats enjoy a 62 to 33 percent advantage, 65 to 32 percent among unmarried women who vote early.



## Outsourcing and Middle-Class Message Amplifies RAE Framework

In prior memos, we outlined a framework for talking to the RAE.<sup>3</sup> This survey takes that framework a step further. Focusing on the middle class, economic nationalism, and outsourcing American jobs finds traction among RAE voters, as well as among many independent and blue-collar voters who have left the Democratic column this cycle. RAE voters are among the most economically insecure voters in the country, competing more directly with low-wage earners overseas. The success of this framework is not surprising.

My passion is "made in America," working to support small businesses, American companies and new American industries. (CANDIDATE) has pledged to support the free trade agreements with Colombia, Panama, and South Korea and protect the loophole for companies outsourcing American jobs. I have a different approach to give tax breaks for small businesses that hire workers and give tax subsidies for companies that create jobs right here in America. Let's make our country work again for the middle class again.

A 53 percent majority of the RAE describe themselves as more likely to support a Democratic candidate supporting this position, 34 percent describe themselves as much more likely. This message outperforms all other Democratic messages, as well as competing Republican messages, within the RAE universe.

## Outreach

Despite the disparity in third-party spending this year, Democrats overall have managed to stay competitive with the Republicans on television—not only overall, but in the congressional battleground as well. In one of the most targeted forms of outreach—mail—Democrats have also done a better job than the Republicans skewing outreach to RAE voters. Nonetheless, two problems emerge. First, a significant number of voters, including voters in the congressional battleground, have not heard much from either candidate. In this kind of environment, that kind of radio silence is deadly. Second, in terms of RAE voters, the Democratic edge breaks down among those least enthusiastic about voting.

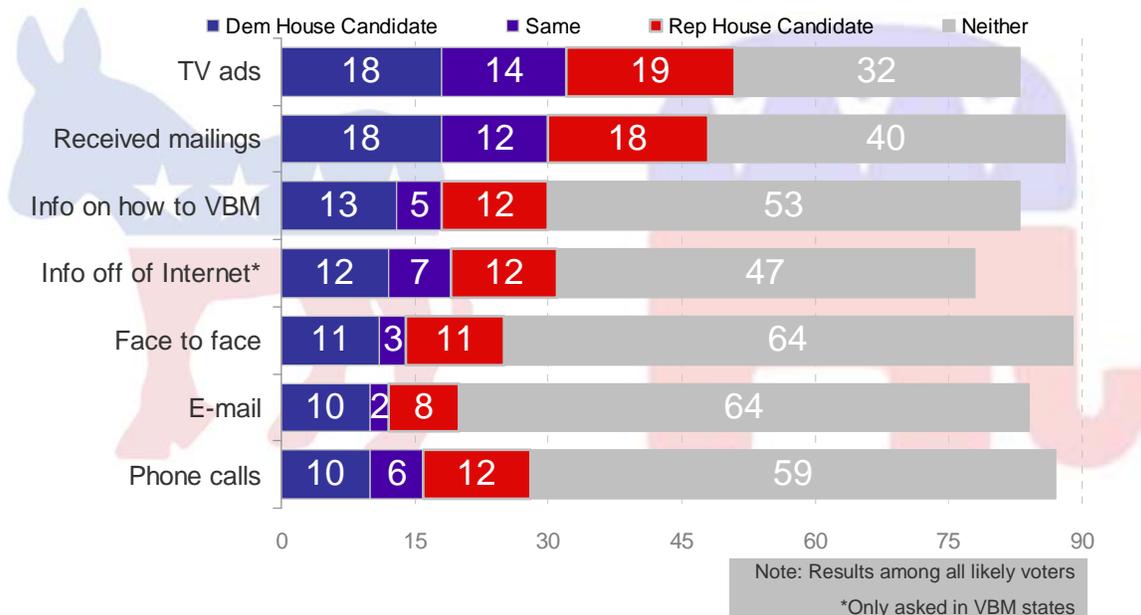
All together, Democratic candidates have stayed fairly competitive with the Republicans in getting their message out. That fact may account for some of the closing margin in Democracy Corps research this month. Still, there are voters who have not heard much from their campaigns in their area, including voters in the battleground.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.vaf.org/assets/2010/9/16/0910surveymemo.pdf>



### Low voter contact

Now, I'd like to ask you something different. Over the course of the campaign so far, have you (READ ITEM) more from those who want you to vote for (DEMOCRATIC HOUSE CANDIDATE) or (REPUBLICAN HOUSE CANDIDATE)?



Looking at mail, 23 percent of RAE voters report hearing more from people who want them to vote for the Democratic candidate, 16 percent report hearing more from those on behalf of the Republican candidate. However, among those in the RAE least enthusiastic about voting, this advantage disappears (25 percent hear more from the Republicans, 21 percent hear more from the Democrats).

Democrats will be outspent—badly this year—and for many races, the disparity in spending will minimize any strategic advantage Democrats may enjoy in messaging and targeting. In close races, this election cycle is about stretching campaign dollars. To that point, Democrats might do well to pay attention to progressive voters less likely to vote, rather than spending all their resources chasing swing voters on television.

### Conclusion

Improvements in enthusiasm among RAE voters and changes, however modest, in margin make plain the importance of increasing the engagement of the RAE universe. Candidates in close races, particularly those candidates facing disparities in television, would do well to target some of their resources to those voters who, historically, are under-represented. For some, it could be the difference between winning and losing.