

Date: April 1, 2016

To: Page Gardner, Women's Voices. Women Vote Action Fund

From: Stan Greenberg and Nancy Zdunkewicz, Democracy Corps

## **Edging toward an earthquake**

### *Report on the WVWV March National Survey*

---

Democracy Corps' new poll on behalf of WVWVAF shows the country edging toward an earthquake in November.<sup>1</sup> Hillary Clinton already holds a 13-point margin against Donald Trump and a 6-point lead over Ted Cruz, just a point short of Obama's margin in 2008. But seven new findings in this survey suggest something even more disruptive electorally.

1. The GOP brand has reached a new historic low, putting the party at risk in swing segments of the electorate.
2. The GOP civil war is producing an eye-opening numbers of Republicans ready to punish down-ballot candidates for not making the right choice with respect to how to run in relation to the front-runner. Moderate Republicans are already peeling off.
3. The disengagement pall has been lifted. Our focus groups with white unmarried women, millennials and African Americans showed a new consciousness about the stakes in November. In this poll, the percentage of Democrats giving the highest level of engagement has increased 10 points. The biggest increase in engagement came with college-educated women, putting them on par with Republicans and seniors.
4. The Trump white working-class strategy is faltering because every white working-class man abandoning the Democratic candidate is being erased by Republican losses with the white working-class women. As you will see, it is statistically impossible for Trump to turn out enough angry white working class men to surpass Clinton.
5. The Rising American Electorate (RAE) is producing high Democratic margins, with unmarried women producing the highest Democratic vote – and widest marriage gap – we have measured.
6. After years of stagnating Democratic congressional performance, the Democrats have opened a 6-point lead in the named congressional vote. That is not enough to produce

---

<sup>1</sup> This national survey took place March 17-24, 2016. Respondents who voted in the 2012 election or registered since were selected from the national voter file. Likely voters were determined based on stated intention of voting in 2016. Margin of error for the full sample is +/-3.27 percentage points at 95% confidence. 65 percent of respondents were reached by cell phone, in order to accurately sample the American electorate.

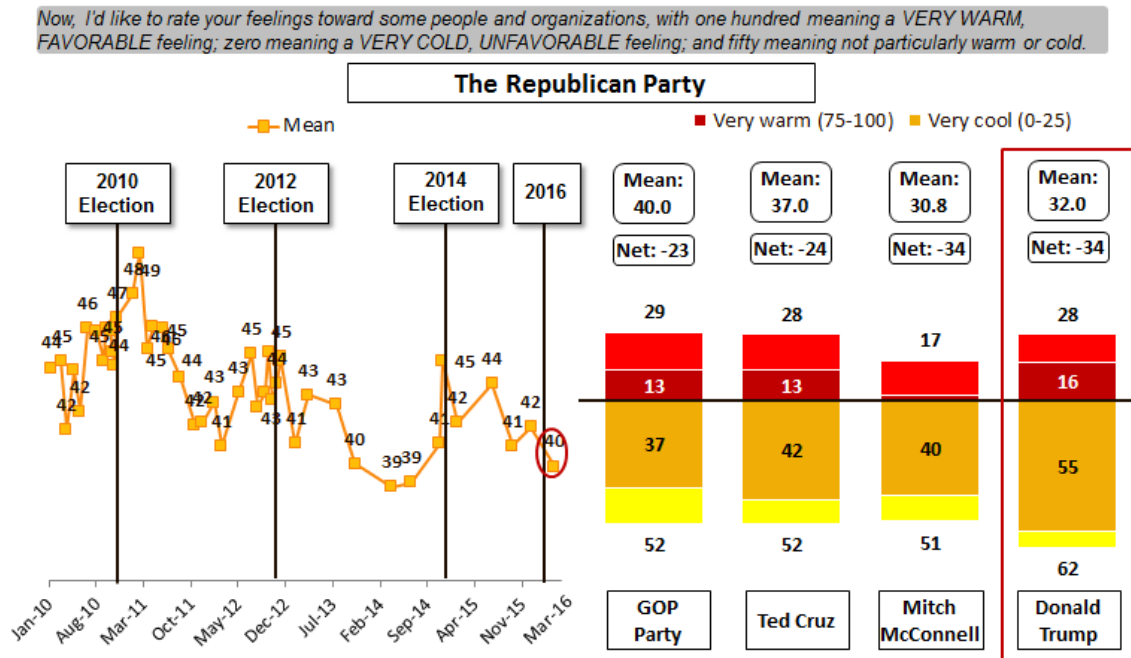


Democratic control, but this trend corresponds to when Democrats began to show life in 2006 and 2008 when they picked up seats. If the Democrats simply reproduced Clinton’s margin with the RAE, the Democratic congressional vote would be at a much higher point. That creates obvious targets to cause an earthquake.

- The Democratic “Level the Playing Field” message dominates the Trump nationalist economic message, particularly if it incorporates reforming campaigns – which appeals to progressive base voters – and reforming government – which appeals to swing voters. This bold and populist economic message increases the vote, turnout, and support for congressional Democrats. It is much stronger than Clinton’s current “Ladders of Opportunity” message, which limits her vote in the primary and general. The success of the “Level the Playing Field” message also suggests a united Democratic Party can make further gains.

### Potential for earthquake

The Republican Party brand, now defined by its widely-loathed presidential candidates and gridlock, has deteriorated to the record lows seen in the months after the government shutdown and debt-ceiling crises. More than half of likely voters now view the GOP unfavorably, driven down by diminished support among swing groups, including white unmarried women, the white working class, and independents, who now view the GOP more unfavorably than not.



The unpopular Republican Party and GOP candidates are already having an impact on their chances in November. And to keep perspective, Ted Cruz’s thermometer rating with likely voters is even worse than those of the Republican Party.

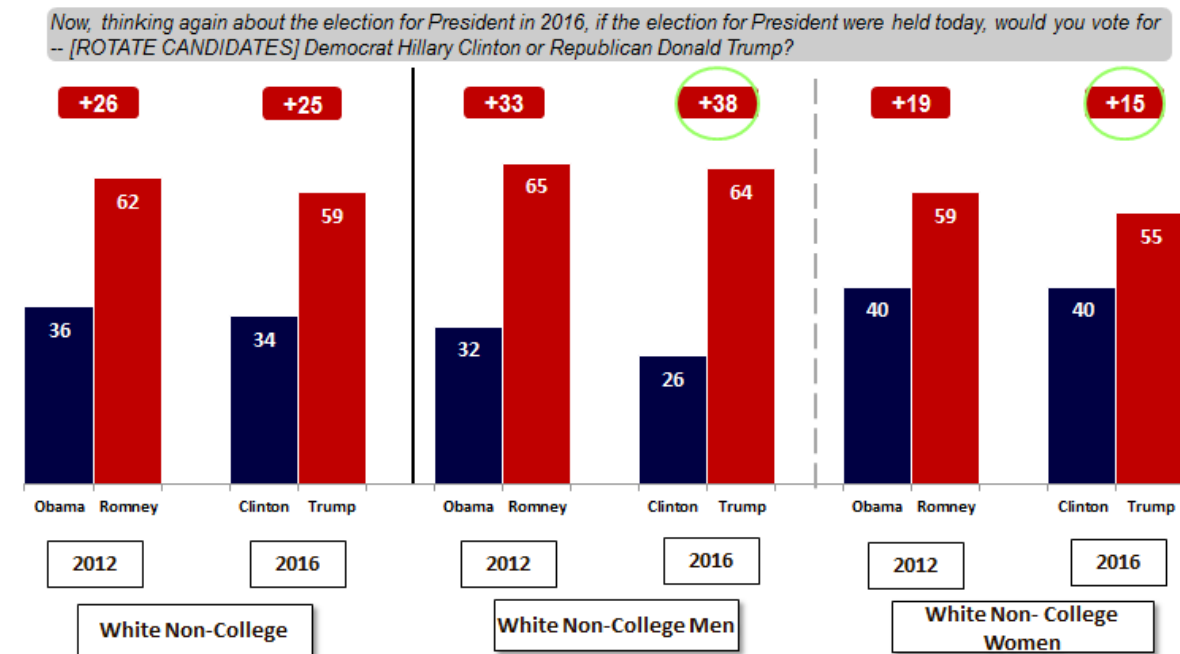


**Pull back from the GOP.** The souring GOP brand is putting key swing groups in play. White unmarried women no longer underperform and are voting for Clinton two-to-one. The Trump candidacy also moves the once competitive suburban vote firmly into the Clinton camp, produces a small lead among seniors, and brings the vote to even among white college-educated men who voted heavily for Romney. And arguing against Mr. Trump’s claim that he is winning over independents is the 31-point decline in their willingness to vote Republican since 2012.

Presidential Vote	White Unmarried Women	White College men	Suburban	Seniors	Independents
2012	52 Obama 48 Romney	36 Obama 61 Romney	55 Obama 44 Romney	44 Obama 56 Romney	44 Obama 52 Romney
2016	66 Clinton 28 Trump	45 Clinton 45 Trump	61 Clinton 29 Trump	47 Clinton 45 Trump	45 Clinton 21 Trump

If Ted Cruz wins the Republican nomination, he barely improves on Trump’s performance with seniors, white college men and in the suburbs where big changes remain possible.

**Failed white working-class offer?** How do the Republicans produce unprecedented gains with the white working class when women are repelled by Trump? As noted in the graph below, Clinton’s losses among the white working-class men are matched exactly by Trump’s own losses among the white working-class women, where the race is still a contest.

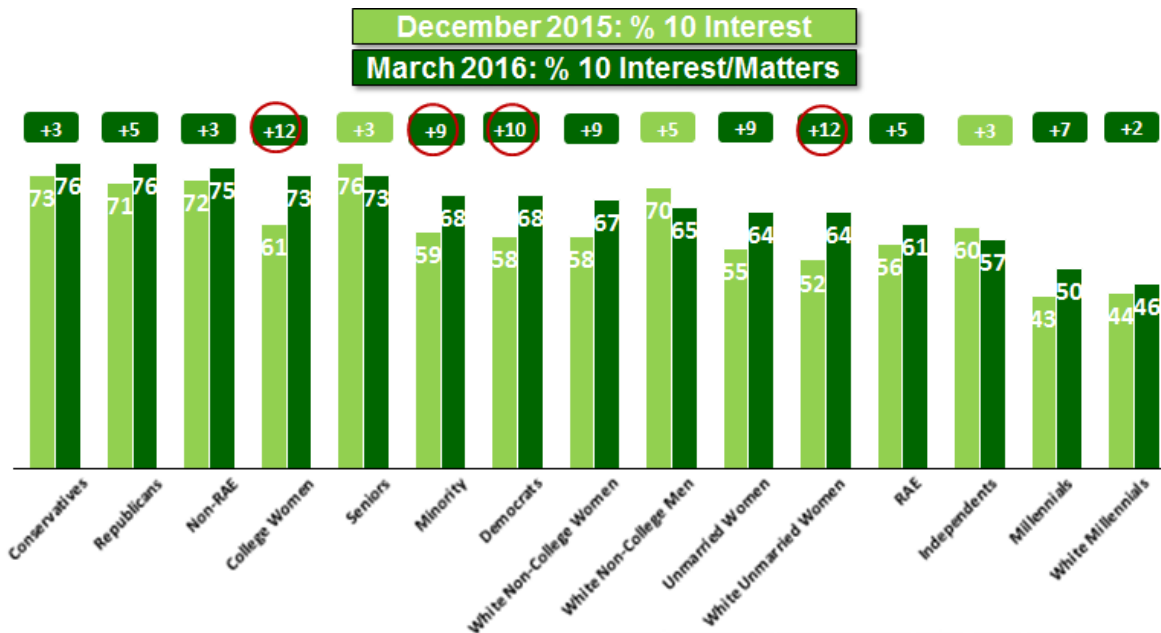




By our calculations, he would have to increase the white working class male vote share from 17 to 37 percent to reach parity in the popular vote with Clinton. That would require a 100 percent turnout of those voters.<sup>2</sup>

Zero-Sum Turnout Calculator				
		White Non-College Men	Everyone Else	Total
<b>Electorate Share</b>		37%	63%	
<b>Vote Share</b>	<i>Clinton</i>	26%	57%	46%
	<i>Trump</i>	64%	36%	46%
	<i>Undecided</i>	10%	7%	8%
	<b>Voters</b>	50,320,000	85,680,000	136,000,000
	<b>Turnout Rate</b>	100%	49%	61%
	<b>Citizen 18+</b>	50,188,043	173,311,958	223,500,000

**GOP primary and Trump producing much higher engagement among RAE.** Throughout 2015 we warned of an enthusiasm gap among the Rising American Electorate that threatened Democratic candidates in November. But focus groups for WVVAF in Ohio, held earlier this month, suggested the stakes had changed for these voters since the start of the presidential primaries. They are paying close attention to the Republican presidential contest and are repulsed and frightened for their future and the future of the country.



<sup>2</sup> The number of 18+ White Non-College voters is estimated using the average of the Census CPS Voting and Registration Supplement from 2008, 2012, and 2014 and the Citizen 18+ Population is extrapolated from Census CPS estimates. 2016 voter estimate adds the number of 2012 voters to the difference in voters from 2004 to 2012.



This poll confirms those findings. Nearly seven-in-ten minorities and Democrats now give the highest possible interest rating on our scale. Unmarried women now match white working-class men in engagement, and college-educated women are now among the most engaged.

**Clinton gaining ‘huge’ margins with RAE.** Much has been said about Donald Trump’s trouble with women voters, and Clinton wins with women 58 to 35 in this poll. But the gender gap is, in fact, a marriage gap. In one of the most stunning findings, Clinton leads unmarried women 73 to 21, while Trump wins married women 48 to 45. The 21-point gender gap is the result of the massive 55-point marriage gap. And if the contest is with Cruz, Clinton’s vote among unmarried women is 68 percent and her margin exceeds Obama’s over Romney by 6 points.

Presidential Vote	RAE	Unmarried Women	Minorities	Millennials <i>*18-29 in 2012</i>
2012	66 Obama 33 Romney	67 Obama 33 Romney	81 Obama 18 Romney	60 Obama 37 Romney
2016	67 Clinton 36 Trump	73 Clinton 21 Trump	78 Clinton 17 Trump	60 Clinton 28 Trump

Second, polling among minorities always under-reports the vote margin on Election Day, so Clinton’s 78 percent in this poll is a big accomplishment. Clinton has a less impressive margin among millennials, reflecting some reluctance on the part of Sanders supporters, but one may assume those voters will consolidate behind the Democratic candidate in the fall.

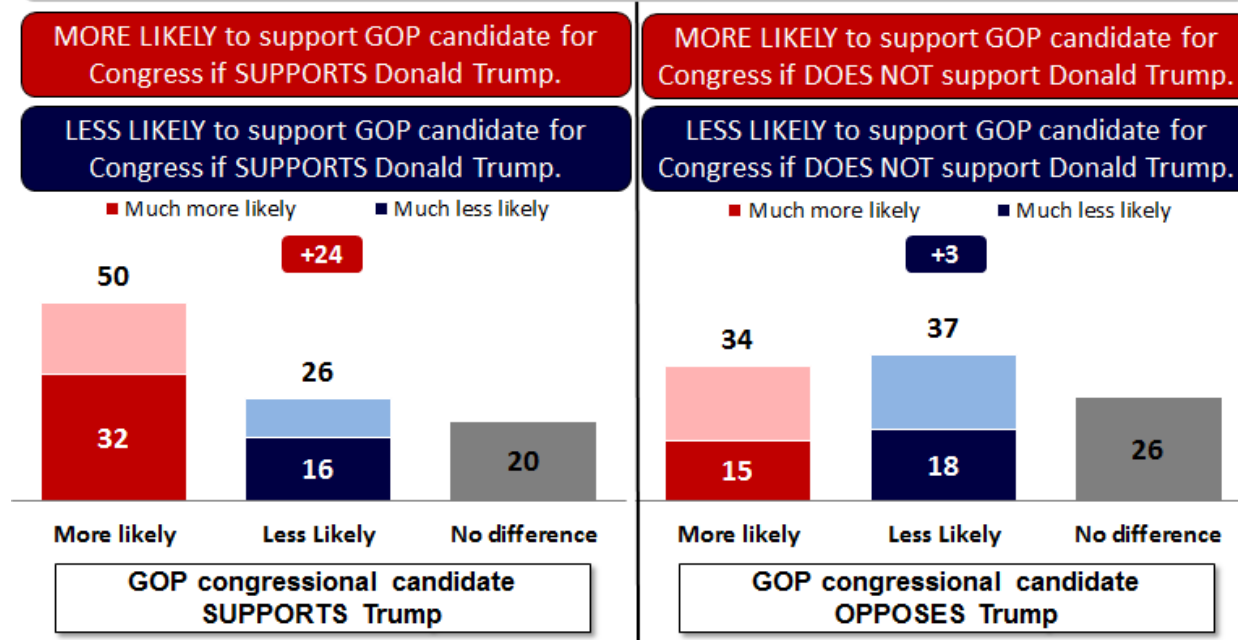
**The growing damage from the Republican civil war.** The moderate Republicans who count for almost three-in-ten base Republicans are being driven away from their party – only 78 percent say they will vote for Donald Trump in November. Almost five months from the election, Clinton maintains her 92 percent vote share among Democrats, but the disaffection of moderate Republicans brings Donald Trump’s support within his own party to 85 percent.

The civil war in the party is playing out down-ballot as Republican voters try to figure out who to punish. This has all the makings of a food fight. A quarter of those not voting for the Democratic candidate for Congress say they will pull back from the Republican nominee if they are supporting Donald Trump. But almost 40 percent say they are *less likely* to support the Republican candidate if they withhold their endorsement. We hope they stare at this table at the Republican caucus retreat.

Almost as a warning to the GOP establishment if it were to deliver the nomination for Cruz, Republican base voters are most likely to rebel when Republican candidates do not support Donald Trump.



*(IF NOT VOTING FOR DEMOCRATIC CANDIDATE FOR CONGRESS) If the Republican candidate for Congress in your area SUPPORTS/DOES NOT SUPPORT Donald Trump in the general election against Democrat Hillary Clinton, would that make you more or less likely to SUPPORT the Republican candidate for Congress?*



**Senate and House gains.** The congressional vote is showing its first signs of improvement, and Democrats now hold a 6-point advantage. This will need to improve to replicate their performance in 2006 and 2008 when Democrats won by an 8-point margin (52 to 44 in 2006, 51 to 43 in 2008). The widening presidential vote, high base performance and engagement, the despised GOP brand, and GOP fragmentation provides a tremendous opportunity for Democrats to increase their congressional vote margin.

With Clinton over 50 percent against both Trump and Cruz, one-in-ten voters are ready targets to raise the Democratic congressional vote.

**Moving toward a “Level the Playing Field” message.** Clinton’s message to voters is situated within a “Ladders of Opportunity” framework, buttressed by a contrast with Trump on national security and a denouncement of Trump’s attitudes toward women and minorities. It is the economic message that holds her back in the primary and against Trump’s economic message.

**LEVEL THE PLAYING FIELD:** We need a country that works for the middle class, not one governed by trickle-down economics. Jobs don't pay enough to live on and families and small businesses are struggling, while CEOs and billionaires use their lobbyists to make government work for them, not you. So, we should bar secret corporate campaign contributions and empower small donors. And make sure taxpayers get their money's worth by rooting out waste and special interest tax breaks. Then we can level the playing field for the middle class. Protect Social Security against cuts in benefits. Ensure any trade deal creates American jobs. Make college affordable, cut student debt, and improve education quality at all levels. Help working families with child care, paid sick days, and equal pay for women. And make the wealthiest pay their fair share in taxes so we can invest in American again.



When Clinton offers a “Level the Playing Field” economic message she increases her support among the RAE, wins swing and Sanders voters, increases turnout, and most importantly, wins over the target voters Democrats need to nationalize the Clinton vote margin. In fact, Democrats who hear the “Level the Playing Field” message pull even on enthusiasm with conservatives in this split, and even exceed the enthusiasm of Republicans. The same is not true of Democrats hearing the “Ladders of Opportunity” message.

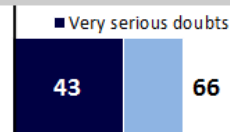
**“Level the Playing Field” v. Trump economic nationalism.** There is no contest when the “Level the Playing Field” message is matched against Trump’s economic nationalist message: 54 percent of voters say the “Level the Playing Field” message makes them much or somewhat more positive about Clinton; by contrast only 38 percent rally to Trump’s message.

**Trump Economic Message:** We want to see America great again. America doesn't win anymore and we don't compete globally because our leaders are incompetent. We are negotiating disastrous trade deals that let other countries take our manufacturing and our jobs. We don't have borders anymore and illegal immigrants take our jobs and bring drugs and crime. Our healthcare is too expensive and our military has been gutted. Our elected leaders owe the billionaires and they do their bidding. We need smart leaders who will take care of our people first. I will redo our trade deals and bring back our jobs. I will build a wall to keep immigrants out and make Mexico pay for it. And when these corporations move to another country to avoid taxes, they will pay. America needs leaders who will make America great again.

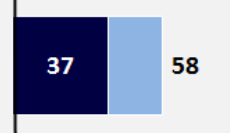
**Message strengthened by attacks on Trump.** The attacks on Trump are very strong, and attacks on Clinton much weaker by comparison. The top doubt about Trump concerns his sexism, which has the greatest impact on the revote in the regressions. And as we saw in our focus groups, Trump’s ability to handle national security is also a top concern among voters. Who can best keep the country safe is now an important part of the Clinton-Trump contrast.

*Now I'm going to read you some things that DEMOCRATIC critics are saying about Donald Trump. These could decide whether you vote in November. Please tell me whether it raises very serious doubts, serious doubts, minor doubts, or no real doubts in your own mind about Donald Trump.*

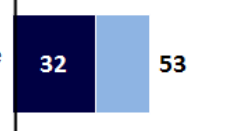
**SEXIST:** Donald Trump is very disrespectful of women. He said Megyn Kelly is a bimbo and must be on her period, told women they owe their jobs to their looks, called a female lawyer disgusting for breaking to pump breast milk, and worse. This is unacceptable from a presidential candidate.



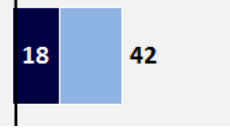
**DANGEROUS:** Donald Trump says he gets his national security advice from TV shows and says attending a military academy in high school counts as experience. National security is serious business, and nothing is more dangerous than an erratic strong-man who can send your children to war or fire a nuclear weapon.



**XENOPHOBIA:** Donald Trump calls immigrants criminals and rapists and wants to ban Muslims from entering the country which is unconstitutional. And he refused to immediately disavow the endorsement of a former Klu Klux Klan leader and defended violence against protestors at his rallies.



**EGO-MANIAC:** Donald Trump cares more about being famous and powerful than he does about the country. Instead of helping ordinary people recover from the worst recession since the great depression and keeping our country safe, he was turning himself into a reality TV star.



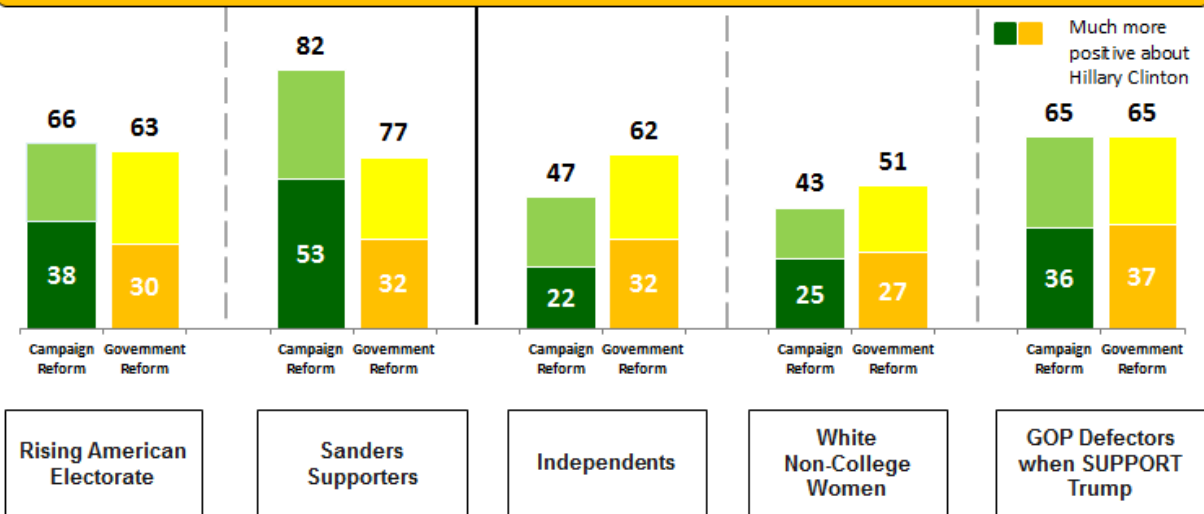


**Message empowered by reform.** While the results are pretty impressive, there are many things Democrats can do to move this to being an earthquake election. That includes embracing reform – both of campaigns, which has been elevated by Sanders and energizes the base, and of government, which holds power among the base and swing voters.

*Now I am going to read you something Hillary Clinton is saying about the country. Please tell me whether the statement makes you feel much more positive about Hillary Clinton, somewhat more positive, a little more positive, or not at all positive.*

**CAMPAIGN REFORM:** Our government needs to work for everyone, not just the special interests and the wealthy. So we need to overturn Citizen's United, outlaw corporate donations, and empower small donors so candidates can spend less time fundraising and more time listening to working families.

**GOVERNMENT REFORM:** We need to make sure taxpayers get their money's worth. That means auditing every federal agency to cut waste and fraud, simplifying the tax code to undercut the influence of lobbying and eliminating \$500 billion of special interest tax breaks and subsidies.



### Conclusion

Trump’s candidacy, the tarnished GOP brand and outsider GOP candidates, and a divided Republican Party are producing higher engagement among the RAE and an impressive margin for Clinton, driven by an astonishing marriage gap among women. And for the first time this cycle our polling shows down-ballot Republicans at risk with Democrats holding a considerable lead in the congressional vote. Whether Trump or Cruz wins the nomination, Trump’s candidacy further threatens the Republican congressional candidates as voters will punish those who support and those who withhold their support for the front-runner. Finally, the messages and attacks tested in this poll suggest Clinton wins the argument with target groups when the front-runners turn to the general election. There is an opportunity to nationalize this election and make gains down ballot with the right messaging.