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To: Friends of Democracy Corps & WVVAF

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Senate majority within reach for Democrats **Report on survey conducted in four Senate battleground states**

A major new survey in four U.S. Senate battleground states shows that Democrats are within striking distance of the majority in 2016. Democratic candidates are 6 points up in Colorado (Democratic hold), 5 points ahead of a Republican incumbent in Wisconsin (a Democratic pick up) and knotted in Ohio and Florida (both Democratic pick up states). The Republican brand continues to sour with the numbers for Senate leader Mitch McConnell, the Republican Congress, and the leading Republican presidential candidates all underwater. Demographically, the progressive Rising American Electorate (RAE) voters—unmarried women, people of color, and millennials—now claim a majority or near-majority of the vote share in each of these states. And most important, a Democratic middle class reform money and government message and agenda like the one tested in this poll shifts the vote in Colorado and significantly increases the turnout of unmarried women and white working class women.¹

Democrats' ability to convert this opportunity into a Democratic majority is predicated, however, on candidates in these states accomplishing a number of key political goals over the next year.

Fix the enthusiasm gap, particularly among unmarried women and millennials. This is a long-standing problem, reflected in Democracy Corps' research and other surveys. Voters within the RAE are significantly less enthusiastic about voting in 2016 than non-RAE voters. This survey shows how to raise engagement with unmarried women.

¹ This survey took place October 24-28. 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. Data shown in this deck is among all 2016 likely voters unless otherwise noted. Margin of error for the full sample= +/-3.2 percentage points at 95% confidence. Margin of error will be higher among subgroups. Respondents were divided equally among states (n=400) of Colorado, Florida, Ohio and Wisconsin. Margin of error for each state sample= +/-4.9 percentage points at 95% confidence. Margin of error will be higher among subgroups. Forty percent of respondents were reached by cell phone, in order to account for ever-changing demographics and accurately sample the full American electorate. Although the field is not settled in all of these states, we used republican Scott Tipton against Democratic incumbent Michael Bennett in Colorado, Democrat Patrick Murphy against Republican David Jolly in Florida, Democrat Ted Strickland against Republican incumbent Rob Portman in Ohio, and Democrat Russ Feingold against Republican incumbent Ron Johnson in Wisconsin.



Fix the margin among Democratic base voters, particularly unmarried women. There is still room to grow support among RAE voters, and the underperformance of unmarried women in these Republican-held Senate seats could not be more dramatic. To cite one example, Obama won 63 percent of unmarried women in 2012 in Florida, but the Democrats’ Senate candidate reaches just 48 percent in this survey.

Fix the margin with unmarried women voters and improve the margin with white working class women. Unmarried women are holding back the Democratic Senate candidates across these key states and more progress can be made with white working class women who are increasingly open to voting for Democrats. The Democratic message and agenda tested in this poll—particularly protecting Social Security from benefit cuts, policies to help working families like equal pay, and reforming government so it works for the middle class—get their attention.

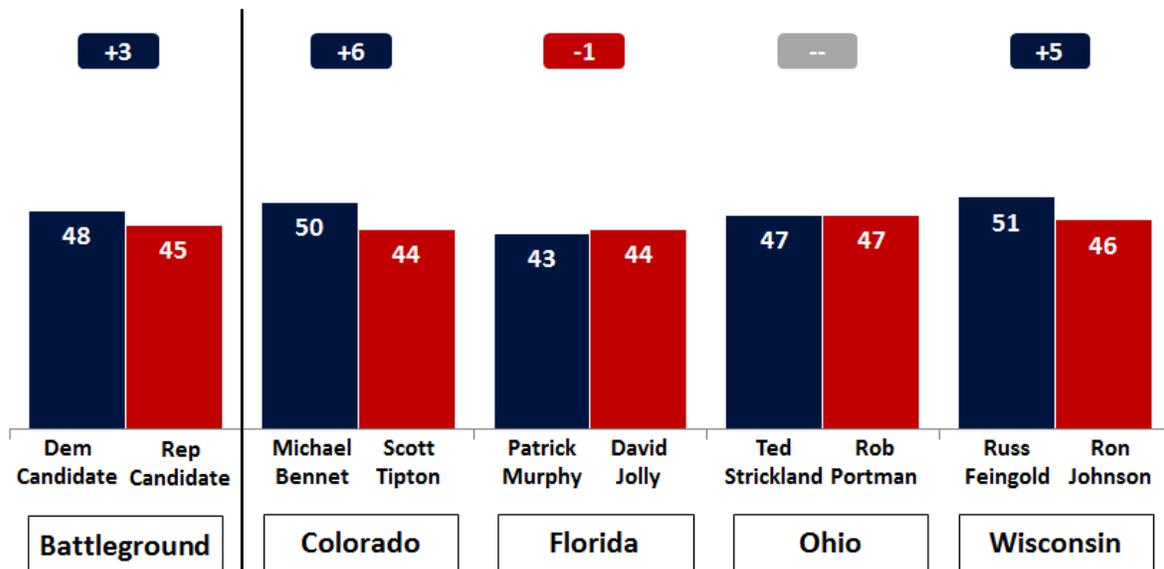
Brand a tarnished Republican Party that is too partisan for these times.

Run unambiguously on a middle class agenda that includes economic policies for working families and fundamentally reforms money and politics and reforms government for the middle class. It is important to recognize how addressing the first two of these issues is predicated on effectively addressing the last. In this survey, we field tested the money and government reform policies that WVWVAF and the Voter Participation Center developed this year. The result? Democratic candidates make major gains among unmarried women and help equalize the enthusiasm gap for unmarried women and white working class women.

The Starting Point

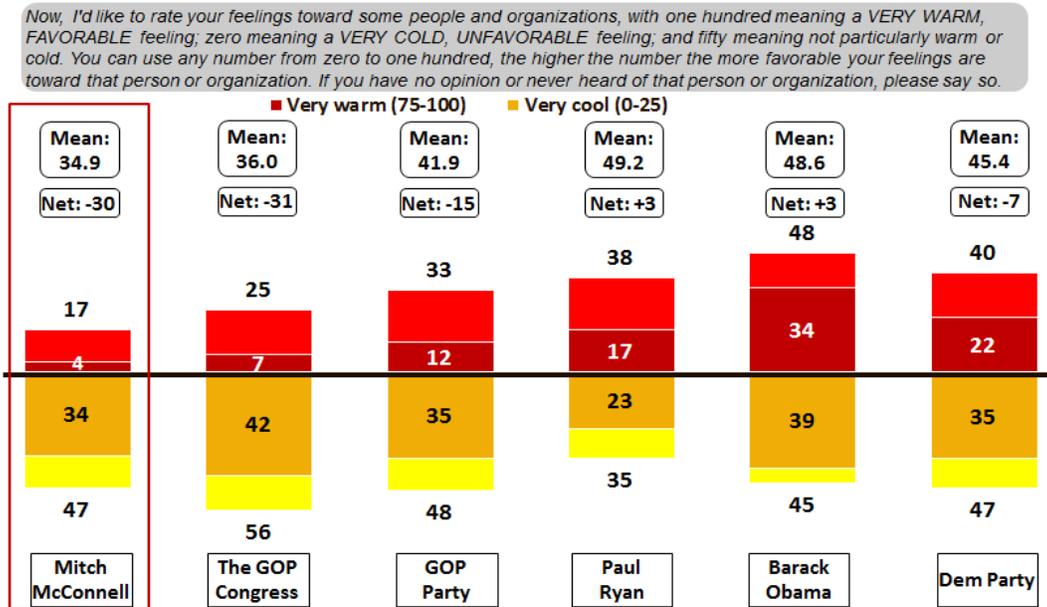
A Democratic sweep is well within the range of possibility as their candidates are winning or tied in each of the four battleground states. While all four of these states are promising and Bennet seems well-positioned to hold his Senate seat in Colorado, the most interesting results emerge in Wisconsin where Republican Senator Ron Johnson is 5 points behind former Senator Russ Feingold and 7 points underwater in favorability.

I know it's a long way off, but thinking about the election for Senate in 2016, if the election for U.S. Senate were held today, would you be voting for – [Democratic incumbent/candidate] or [Republican incumbent/candidate]?

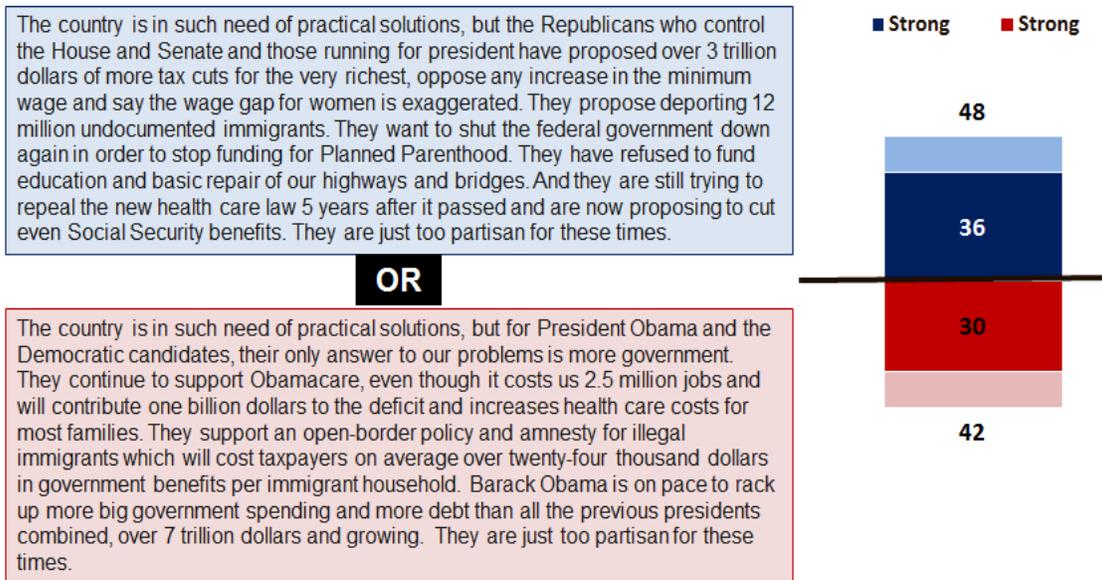




Democratic success here reflects two things. First, each of these states, like most of the nation, is growing apart from Republican Party, both demographically and culturally. Compared to the 2012 electorate, the percentage of progressive RAE voters jumped 5 points in Colorado, 2 points in Florida and Ohio, and 1 point in Wisconsin. Second, each of these nominees carries the oppressive burden of the Republican brand, which remains toxic.²



Republicans are seen as the more partisan and extreme party responsible for D.C. dysfunction.



² The one exception to this rule is Kasich (48 percent favorable, 31 percent unfavorable overall in Ohio), who enjoys notable Democratic and moderate support; this is probably why he is now at 2.5 percent nationally in the Republican primary.

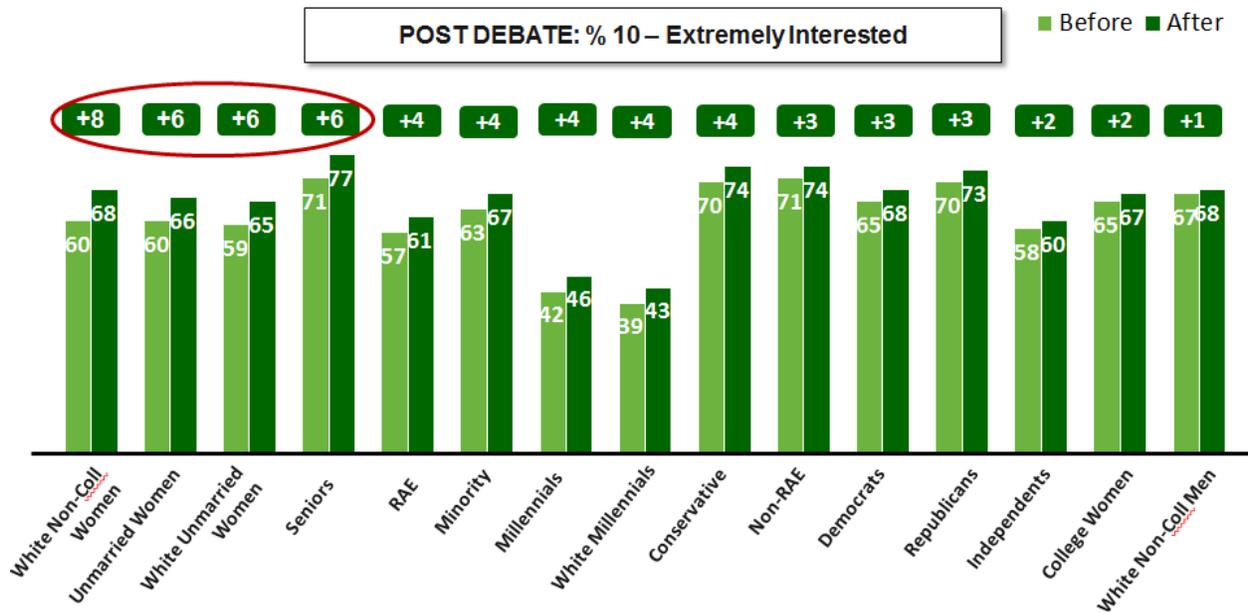


The Democratic Challenges

To be sure, much can happen in a year. The field is not settled in Florida and Colorado. Secretary Clinton still draws more unfavorable than favorable reviews and holds only a narrow lead over the Republican frontrunner in three of the four states, while trailing in Ohio. In this survey, however, there are two conditions for Democratic success: improving enthusiasm among their base voters and reaching their potential among unmarried women and white working class women.

Democrats face a significant enthusiasm gap among their core supporters. Across the four states, 57 percent of RAE voters described their interest in the elections as a ten on a ten-point scale, compare compared 71 percent among non-RAE voters. The problem is particularly acute among millennial voters (just 42 percent). But the middle class and reform agenda tested here increases the engagement of unmarried women and white working class women in particular.

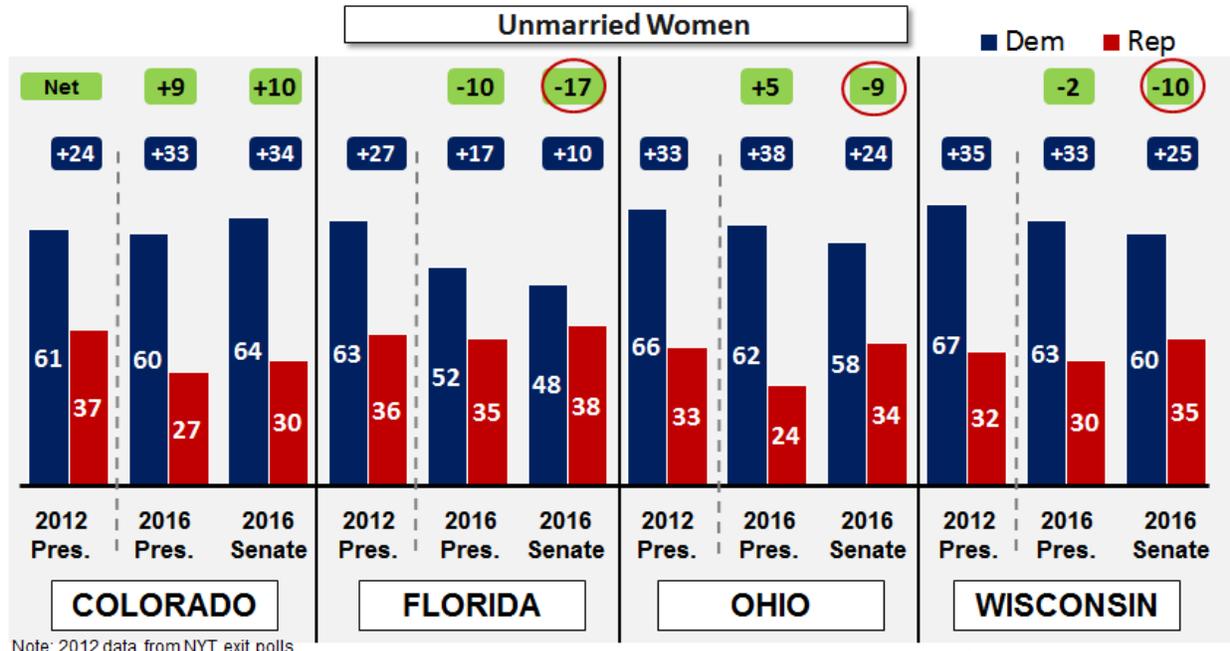
How interested are you in the November, 2016 elections for President, U.S. Congress and other state and local offices? Please rate your interest from one to ten, with one meaning that you have no interest in this election and ten meaning that you are extremely interested. Of course, you can choose any number between one and ten.



The second issue is voter margin among unmarried women. While Democrats roll up nearly a 17-point margin overall among RAE voters in the Senate battleground, there is still room to grow, particularly among unmarried women. In 2012, Obama exceeded 60 percent among unmarried women in all these states. Despite Clinton leading the ticket, Democratic Senate candidates underperform among unmarried women, falling short in all three Republican-held states.



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Being About Change

No candidate can survive, Democrat or Republican, who in voters’ eyes represents the status quo. Ask Jeb Bush. To reach their potential and seize the opportunity in these four states, Democrats need to be unambiguous in demanding an economy that works for the middle class. But it is also about the need for fundamental reform of money and politics and reform of government. The pairing is critical. Voters believe you cannot have a middle class-driven economy without first reforming our politics.

In this survey, we paired Republican messaging—taken from the candidates themselves—against the following:³

Democratic Middle Class Reform Money Agenda

We need an economy that works for the middle class, not more trickle-down economics. Today, jobs don't pay enough to live on and families and small businesses are struggling, yet the top 1 percent and CEOs are using money and lobbyists to write the rules so government works for them, not you. Well, we need to made sure taxpayers get their money's worth. ***We should start by barring corporate and secret contributions and empower small donations.*** Then, we must get behind an agenda for the hardworking and families. Make college affordable by getting rid of student debt; help working families with child care, paid sick days and equal pay for women; protect Social Security against any cuts in benefits; and ensure more credit and help for small businesses and independent contractors. By increasing taxes for the richest 1 percent, we can give breaks to companies that create American jobs and invest in infrastructure to modernize our country. Let's level the playing field for the middle class again.

³ In Colorado, we paired a Bennet bio paragraph with the economic messaging above against Republican messaging.



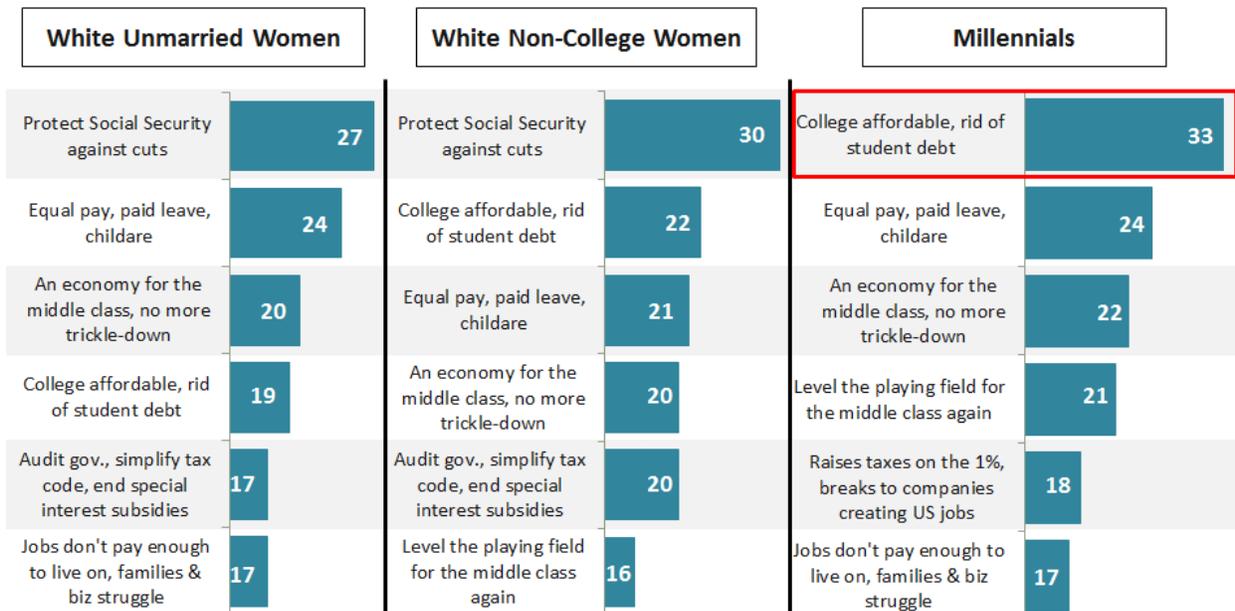
Democratic Middle Class Reform Government Agenda

We need an economy that works for the middle class, not more trickle-down economics. Today, jobs don't pay enough to live on and families and small businesses are struggling, yet the top 1 percent and CEOs are using money and lobbyists to write the rules so government works for them, not you. Well, we need to make sure taxpayers get their money's worth. ***We should start by auditing the entire federal government to root out waste, simplifying the tax code for low income and middle class families and eliminate 1 trillion dollars of special interest breaks and subsidies.*** Then, we must get behind an agenda for the hardworking and families. Make college affordable by getting rid of student debt; help working families with child care, paid sick days and equal pay for women; protect Social Security against any cuts in benefits; and ensure more credit and help for small businesses and independent contractors. By increasing taxes for the richest 1 percent, we can give breaks to companies that create American jobs and invest in infrastructure to modernize our country. Let's level the playing field for the middle class again.

The reform money and politics message that would bar corporate money and empower small donations was strongest with broad base voters, including millennials, and stronger in Colorado and Wisconsin. The reform government message that would audit the federal government to root out waste, simplify the tax code for the middle class and eliminate breaks and subsidies for special interests performed better with independents and white working class voters and better in Florida and Ohio.

What is really important to the RAE, particularly white unmarried women, white working class women and millennials, is protecting Social Security against cuts, working family policies like equal pay and paid leave and childcare, and making college affordable by getting rid of student debt.

When you think back on this statement, which TWO of the following are the most important to you?





Conclusion

The Republican Party has already lost the country at a national level, as they lost the culture war and represent a shrinking percentage of voters. But at the state level and district level, where voters are less diverse, they remain formidable enough to hold legislative majorities. This research suggests that fortress is beginning to deteriorate as well. But Democrats still need to accomplish much over the next twelve months to win back the Senate; they need to energize their base, both in terms of margin and turnout. And to do that, they need to speak to the lives of the RAE by campaigning on an economy that works for the middle class and a political reform movement that makes middle-class oriented economy possible.