



DEMOCRACY CORPS

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To: The Progressive Community

From: Stanley Greenberg, Democracy Corps

The GOP Crash and the Historic Moment for Progressives *A call to make history*

We are witnessing the crash of the Republican Party as we know it, and progressives should dramatically change their strategy to maximize conservative losses and move the stalled progressive reform agenda in the election's aftermath.

Rightfully shaken by off-year losses, low base turnout and Trump's appeal to some union members, progressive strategy has been cramped by worst-case assumptions and by the goal of stopping the GOP from expanding their Electoral College map.

That caution risks missing the opportunity to magnify GOP losses, expand the Democratic map and targets, shift control of states and legislatures, break the gridlock and create momentum for reform. A change in strategy increases the likelihood that parts of the progressive agenda can move, or even pass, in the first months of a new Democratic administration and new Congress. It increases the chance progressive reforms can move further in the cities and states.¹

The Republican Party is being shattered by *a three-front civil war* against the GOP establishment and that in-fighting will profoundly impact how people vote for president and all the way down the ballot:

First, Donald Trump and his Tea-Party and working class supporters joined an all-out war with a GOP establishment that failed to stop President Obama from changing America. His brazen nationalist economic appeal includes attacks on immigrants, bad trade deals and disloyal American corporations; he promises to fight for American jobs, to take care of American workers first, and to make America great again. He is the skunk at the garden party with his overt racism and hostility to immigrants and Muslims. But GOP base voters are race-conscious and anti-immigrant, as they have made clear at the state level since Pete Wilson in 1994. They say they want a nominee who will fight against the growing immigrant diversity in the country. Donald

¹ For background, read the chapter entitled, "The End of the GOP as We Know It," in my recent book [America Ascendant](#); Democracy Corps' recent [Republican Party Project survey](#) of Republican base voters released in March; Democracy Corps' January web-survey for the Roosevelt Institute entitled ["Taking on the tough fights in 2016: unions, trade & bank policy"](#); and Democracy Corps' new survey on behalf of Women's Voices. Women Vote Action Fund entitled ["Edging toward an Earthquake."](#)



Trump has captured the base's anger with GOP leaders who've failed to slow illegal immigration and America's growing multiculturalism.

Second, Ted Cruz and the Republican Party's religious conservatives fought a war with a GOP establishment that failed to slow President Obama's liberal social agenda. The Evangelical and religiously observant base of the party was stunned by the Supreme Court's legalization of gay marriage. They want their leaders to defend traditional marriage, make abortion illegal in the states, and deny protections to the LGBTQ community. It is on abortion where the GOP-controlled states have pressed the furthest against the national consensus. That is why Ted Cruz emerged as the 2nd strongest candidate and the only other candidate who could have plausibly been nominated by this Republican Party.

Third and just as important, moderate Republicans are deeply alienated from a GOP establishment that views them as illegitimate. This third front in the civil war has not been covered by the media, in part because no GOP candidate has been willing to seek their votes on the issues that matter to them. None of the pundits have speculated that the silence on their agenda has anything to do with the primary or what will happen in the election ahead. The moderates are a stunning 31 percent of the party base, and they are heavily college-educated and socially liberal. They are conservatives on immigration, regulation, taxes and national security, but as a college-educated majority, they accept the science and urgency of addressing climate change. And most importantly, they are the one bloc that accepts the sexual revolution. That changes everything. Two-thirds say abortion should be legal in all or most cases and three-quarters say the party should accept gay marriage and move on.

They deeply resent being ignored and pretty dramatically refused to give their votes to the GOP establishment's candidates – Jeb Bush and Marco Rubio – because they were extremists on abortion. That is why both candidates crashed and why some moderates supported Trump who allowed that Planned Parenthood does some worthwhile things. (See my piece, [Republicans, beware: Moderates could help elect Clinton](#), in the *Washington Post*.)

This three front civil war has totally changed the strategic opportunities for progressives in the short-term campaign and in the election's aftermath. Seizing them will increase the probability that the Democrats' rapidly growing demographic hegemony will finally be realized electorally. It will increase the probability of an electoral earthquake and Democratic control of the White House, the Supreme Court and perhaps the Congress.

The fracturing of the Republican Party has created three new short-term opportunities to magnify the probability of an electoral earthquake in November:

1. ***New opportunity one: battle for the GOP moderates.*** In past elections, moderates have consolidated around the Republican candidate who shares their views on government spending, regulation, taxes and national security. But it is an open question what they will do if religious conservative Ted Cruz is the nominee or if Donald Trump carries his civil war against the establishment into the fall. Right now, Cruz and Trump are only running even with white college-educated men in a race against Clinton – an affluent group that gave Mitt Romney over 60 percent of their vote and a 25 point lead against Obama.

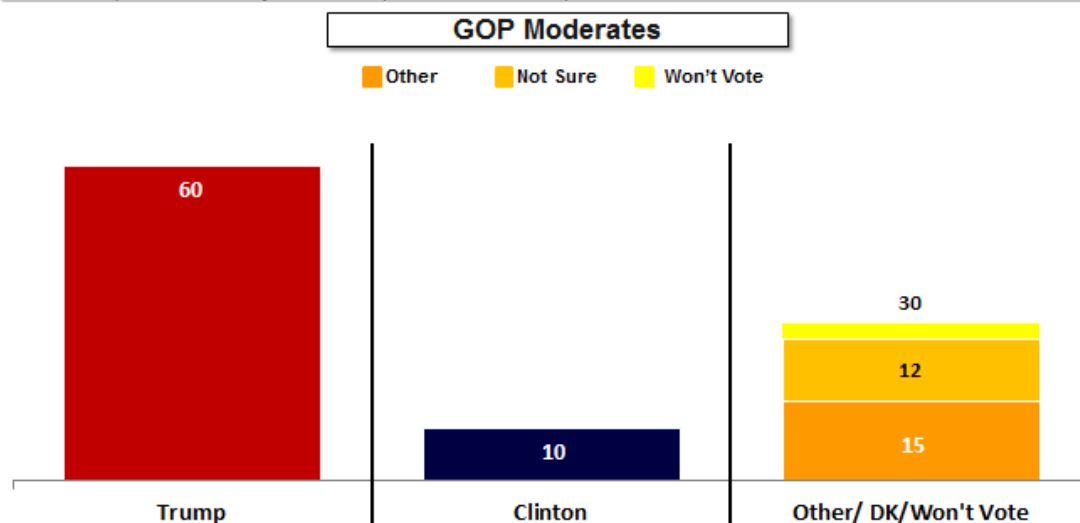


In our poll of GOP base voters, 10 percent of moderates say they will vote for Clinton against Trump and 30 percent say their vote is uncertain. For perspective, only 6 percent of Republicans voted for Obama in 2012.

While the GOP establishment ignores these voters, progressives need to recognize and identify with their quandaries and convince them to support Democrats this time. These college-educated base voters are pro-choice and accept marriage equality; they believe climate change is real and requires urgent action. In our survey of GOP base voters, they responded to a Democratic candidate's messages on national investment, bank regulation and corporate governance, and getting beyond the social issues to address the nation's problems.

Democrats need an opportunistic strategy to make sure these moderates get heard and split off in this election and more important yet, allow some elected Republicans after the election to support changes newly on the table.

Thinking about the election for President in November, if the election for President were held today, would you vote for -- (ROTATE CANDIDATES) Democrat Hillary Clinton or Republican Donald Trump?



- 2. *New opportunity two: building registration and turnout with voters who now know the stakes.*** Our new poll on behalf of WVWVAF shows a 10-point surge in the highest measure of voter interest among Democrats, key parts of the Rising American Electorate (specifically, the unmarried women and minorities), and college-educated women, a key part of the Democratic coalition. Our focus groups for the Roosevelt Institute and WVWVAF showed us that millennials and unmarried women are closely following the GOP primary battles, the GOP's hatred of Obama and Donald Trump's xenophobia and sexism. They now understand the stakes like no time before.

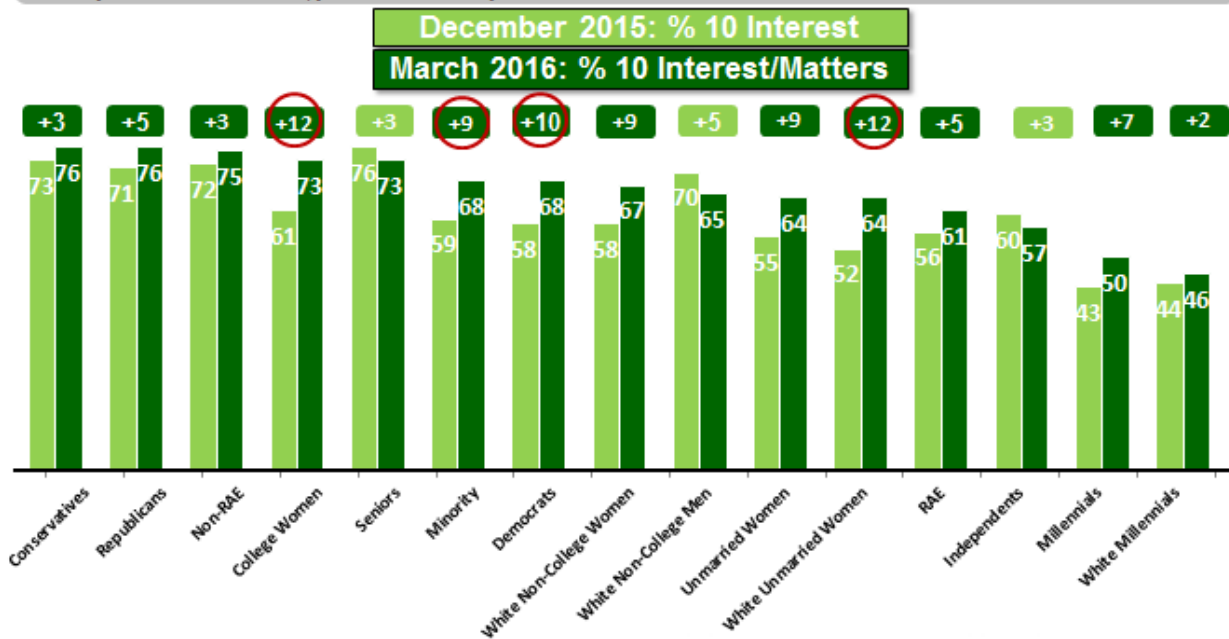
I have listened to African American voters in focus groups, and they have come to believe everything their community has achieved is now at stake. And Hispanics are rushing to get citizenship in order to vote in November. Millennials are suspicious of



Clinton and in an anti-political mood, yet their interest is up too. They are offended by the racism and sexism and they too are ready to believe their values are at risk.

It is even more important to expand the scope of registration efforts and mobilize infrequent voters, but it is taking place at a moment of rising interest and growing clarity on the stakes. It dramatically changes what messages will prove motivating in 2016. And it raises the urgency of delivering some palpable changes after the election or risk a slide back into disengagement and cynicism.

How much do the elections this November for President, U.S. Congress and other state and local offices matter this year? Please rate how much they matter from one to ten, with one meaning they don't matter at all and ten meaning they matter tremendously. / 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.

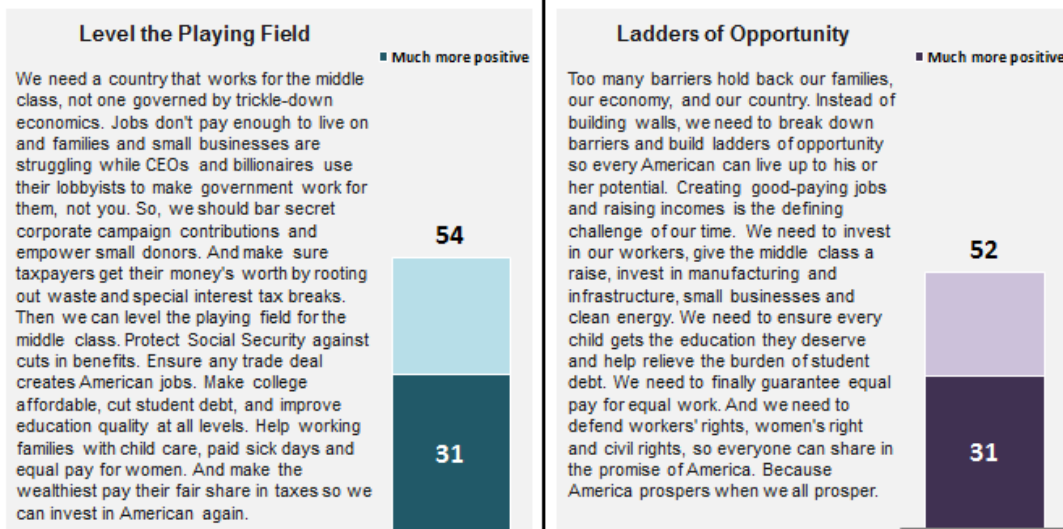


3. **New opportunity three: Joining the battle for the working class.** Bernie Sanders has shown in the Democratic primary and Donald Trump in the Republican that working class voters will rally to a demand to “level the playing field.” They want to rein in the power of big money so it can no longer write the rules of the economy to favor CEOs and corporations and so government can work for the middle class and working families again. Our polling for WVWVAF and the Roosevelt Institute shows it is just that kind of message that engages the financially-pressed white unmarried women, millennials, and the white working class, particularly the women.

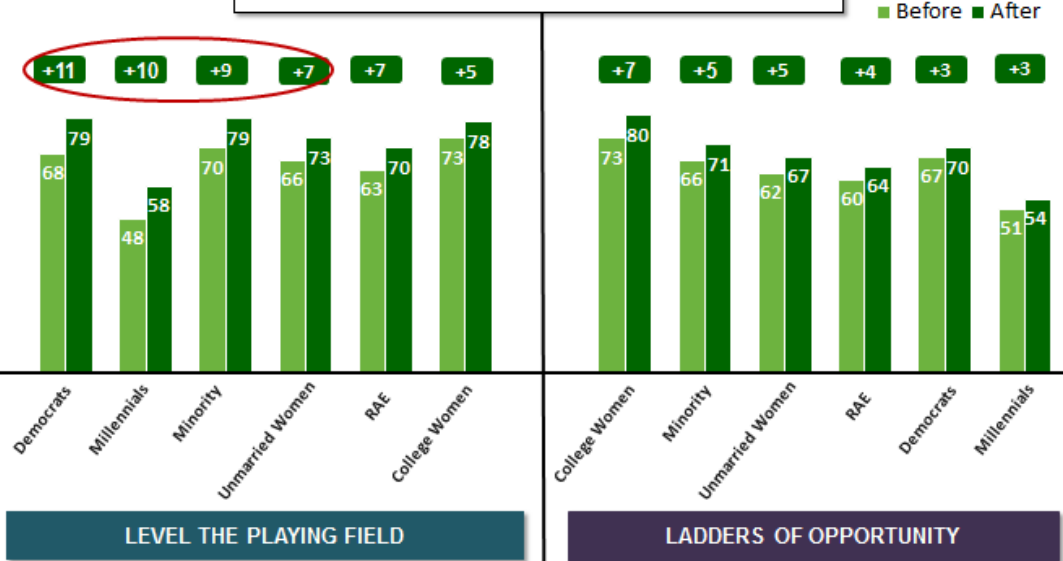
Trump’s chauvinism and hostility to America’s diversity has cost him electorally and led to the early consolidation of the Rising American Electorate. But the primaries also show we have a new opportunity to achieve an earthquake election and win strongly among **both** the RAE, and the working class (where Democrats have lagged) if they strategize to win the big economic argument. As progressives rally around Hillary Clinton in the general, it is critical they unify around a narrative that allows them to dominate on the economy, reform and trade in order to grow her working class vote.



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.



POST DEBATE: % 10 – Matters/Interest



If progressives make this strategic turn – exploit this three-front GOP civil war and rise to these new opportunities – the election will indeed prove shattering for the Republicans. This is not like the aftermath of 2008 and 2012, where the GOP quickly united and dug in to stop President Obama. The civil war will only grow more intense in the aftermath, and some GOP leaders and elected officials will support policies unthinkable only a short time ago. It only takes a handful, as we saw with the handful of Democrats who supported the Reagan tax cuts after his win. The GOP's business allies may demand acceptance of immigration reform and gay marriage and serious investment in infrastructure investment and R&D.

With Democrats likely to control the U.S. Senate and with Republicans perhaps just holding a small majority in the House, Republican members from blue states and swing districts will want to show their willingness to support change in some areas.



These are some of the initiatives that could be on the agenda for action soon after the election, and that ought to be part of progressive planning:

- ***Comprehensive immigration reform.*** With a deepening reaction against the GOP's immigration policies among the Hispanic community and business elites, passage of a comprehensive immigration reform bill will be the most obvious and effective antidote. Republican leaders, the business community and savvy Republicans know this must happen fast in the aftermath on the election.
- ***Paycheck fairness and equal pay for women.*** Clinton has made this her highest priority and this law came within two votes of passing the Senate in the past. With Trump and Cruz almost certainly pushing away women voters, many Republican members will want to cast this distinguishing vote.
- ***Raise the minimum wage to \$12.00 an hour.*** No action would translate so quickly into income gains, and many Republican members will be conscious of how readily red-state voters supported raising the minimum wage when given the chance in referenda.
- ***Full and immediate disclosure of secret campaign contributions legalized by Citizens United.*** Republicans used to support disclosure, and they may be under pressure to do something about the corrupt system of financing campaigns. Transparency is only a small step, but it may be empowering for voters and activists to see that reformers can win.
- ***Student loan debt relief.*** If Republicans are wiped out among millennials, there could be Republican support for major steps to relieve or cap student debt, following the example of some employers who are matching student debt payments. As with money and politics, these immediate steps should foreshadow policies that tie student debt to future income.
- ***Child tax credit.*** Paul Ryan and Marco Rubio and the conservative 'reformicons' have talked about expanding the child tax credit. An expanded tax credit for younger children could attract Republican support.
- ***Infrastructure Bank.*** Trump and Clinton have stressed the need for major infrastructure investment and Clinton backs an infrastructure bank that has been strongly supported by the Chamber of Commerce and labor. Since a bank leverages private funds and operates independently from Congress, it gives Republicans an opening for supporting much greater public investment.
- ***Congressional endorsement of the EPA's proposed regulations on the future of coal-fired power plants.*** Big policy changes on renewables or a carbon tax will have to wait until the new administration, but starting with a national consensus on moving away from coal is not unimportant.



- ***Pass ENDA, the Employment Nondiscrimination Act.*** It prohibits job discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and the GOP candidates ought to be pressed on where they stand.

I am not talking here about the broader set of actions a new Clinton Administration will offer to the country. The focus here is on the shattered Republican Party and what are the prospects for moving the reform agenda in the election's aftermath and what should be done now to elevate these possibilities.

Hopefully, this urgent note will begin the discussions.