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To: Interested Parties
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Creating a New Economic Narrative

Engaging the Rising American Electorate for 2012

As the end of Congress's summer recess nears and Washington prepares to reengage on the debate over the economy, new research¹ makes clear how essential it is for the two parties to the voters those voters who created such much change in recent elections using an economic narrative that connects with their current lives and motivates them.

The Rising American Electorate—unmarried women, people of color, and younger voters—comprises a rapidly growing majority of the eligible voting population in this country. These voters drove change in 2006 and 2008; however, among some, their support for Democrats dropped in 2010. How they respond in 2012 will drive much of the outcome of that election.

This is a real challenge for both sides. Dissatisfaction with Washington's inability to make any progress on economic issues, coupled with the fact that these voters are disproportionately feeling the brunt of the economic downturn, creates uncertainty about those currently in office and leaves RAE voters with little motivation to engage in political issues.

Uncertainty About Economic Problems

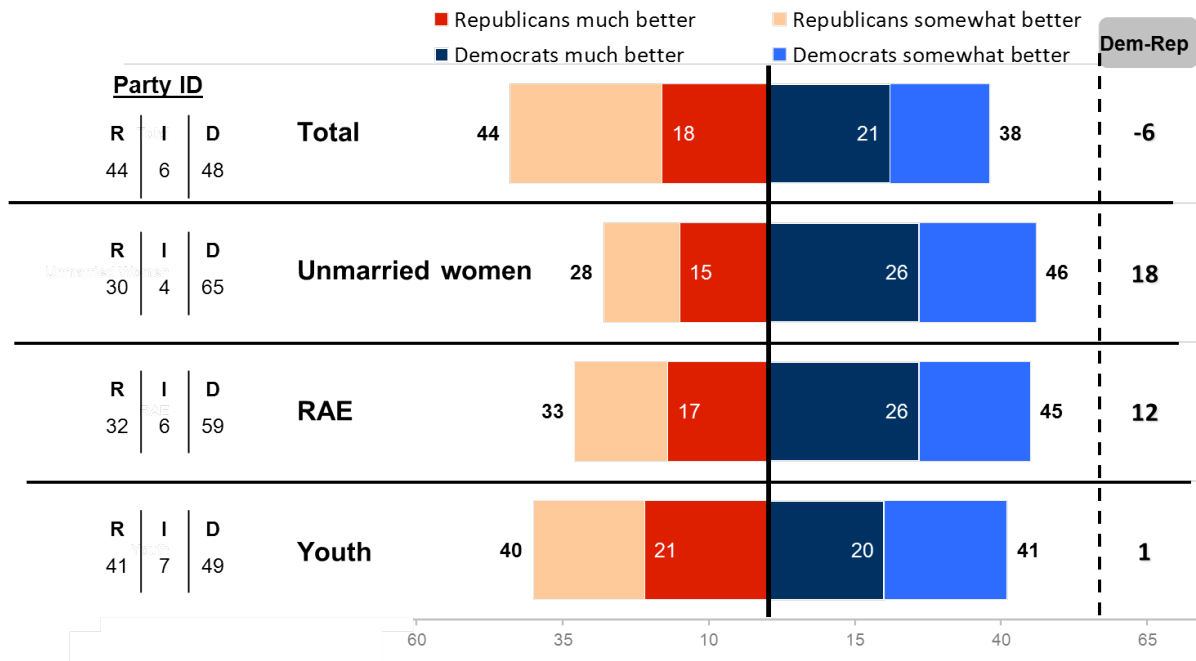
Those in Congress who are concerned about the middle class and those most damaged by the current economic crisis have yet to make the case strongly enough that they can solve the economic problems facing Americans, particularly to unmarried and young voters. Despite the significant partisan advantage that Democrats enjoy among these groups, that advantage does not translate to confidence on handling the economy. Among RAE voters, a 27-point tilt in partisanship is cut to 12 points on whether Democrats or Republicans would do a better job on the economy. This gap exists among a number of key groups, including unmarried women and youth.

¹ This memo is based on a national survey of 1480 likely 2012 voters (1000 weighted) August 6-10, 2011 conducted by Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research for Democracy Corps and Women's Voices, Women Vote. Unless otherwise noted, margin of error= +/- 2.5 percentage points at 95 percent confidence.



RAE Uncertain on Progressive's Handling of the Economy

Now I am going to ask you something different. I am going to read a list of issues and I want you to tell me whether, overall, you think the Democrats or the Republicans would do a better job with this issue. If you do not know, just tell me and we will move on to the next item. (Ranked by the economy)



While RAE voters believe that Democrats are more likely than Republicans to look out for the interests of women, they are uncertain that their interests are currently being served on economic issues. The debt ceiling debate led to a less favorable view of Democrats (39 percent more favorable, 45 percent less favorable) among RAE voters and a majority (52 percent) of RAE voters thinks the debt agreement will have a significant and negative impact on them.

Women's Economic Concerns Center on Wages and Cuts to Benefits and State Workers

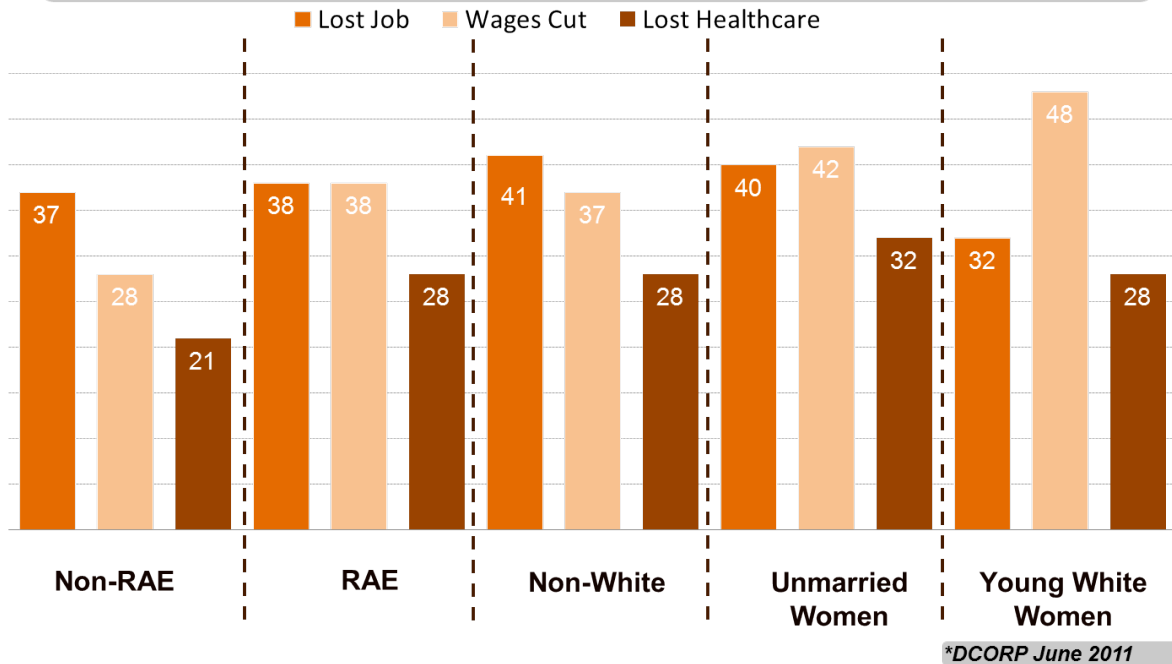
At this point, economic concerns consume RAE voters. Voters in the RAE—particularly unmarried women, voters of color, and white women under the age of 50—have been hard hit by the economy. These voters are more likely than the overall electorate to have themselves or a family member experience a significant reduction in economic well-being over the past year; nearly half of younger white women have seen their own wages or those of an immediate family member cut, while one third of unmarried women or their immediate families have lost health insurance.²

² Data from Democracy Corps June 2011 Poll



RAE Voters are Suffering

I'm going to read you a list of economic experiences some people have recently had. For each one, please tell me if you have directly experienced this in the last year, if your family has directly experienced this in the last year, or if someone you know well, like a friend, neighbor or co-worker, has experienced this or if no one you know well has experienced it. (Ranked by personally /family member affected)



While many candidates are appropriately focusing on jobs and lowering unemployment, RAE voters face just as much struggle with the cost of living—made more difficult because of reduced wages. It is not surprising, therefore, that RAE voters have the strongest reaction to making changes that specifically affect women’s standing in the economy as it relates to wages. Nearly half of RAE voters want to see changes made to pay inequities between men and women, including 52 percent of unmarried women who are most likely to be the sole breadwinner in their households.

Focusing on an economic agenda that lowers the cost of living also resonates with RAE voters—particularly older unmarried women—in the context of protecting seniors. These voters say that preventing cuts to Medicare and Social Security benefits that help the elderly poor—two-thirds of whom are women—is also among the most important actions on economic changes that impact women.



RAE Voters React to Changes that Impact Women's Economic Standing

	All	Women	Unmarried Women	Unmarried women ages 18-49	Unmarried Women Ages 50+
Due to the recession, women are increasingly the sole breadwinner in many families. Yet women are still getting paid less than men doing the same job.	43	47	52	51	52
More than two-thirds of poor people over 65 are women, who face potential cuts in Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security.	37	40	40	34	46
Women are the majority in state worker positions such as nurses and teachers and these jobs are being cut at much greater rates across the country.	34	34	35	39	29
Millions of dollars have been cut from college loans and job training programs that allow women to get ahead.	21	19	19	21	16
Only 10 percent of the new jobs created in the last 12 months went to women compared to 90 percent to men.	21	20	22	30	13
<i>Now for something a little different. I am going to read you some facts about women and the economy. After I read this list, please tell me which TWO you believe are the most important to change.</i>					

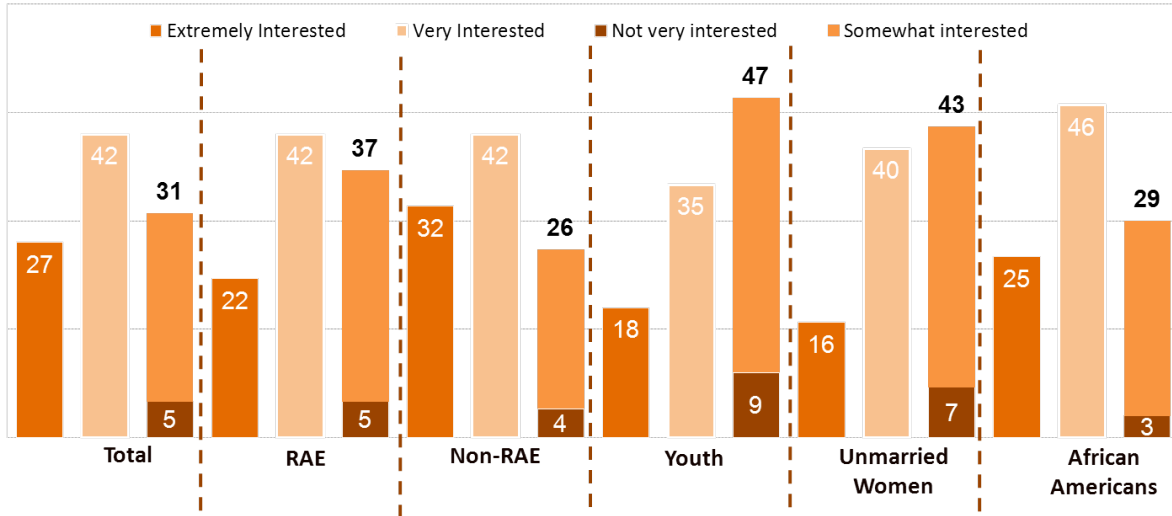
RAE Voters Less Motivated to Vote than RAE Voters

RAE voters need to be re-engaged and motivated if they are going to turnout in 2012. Just one in five voters in the RAE say they are extremely interested in elections and debates in Washington, compared to nearly one-third of non-RAE voters. The lack of engagement is even more pronounced among young voters and points to the need to provide a compelling narrative to engage these crucial voters.



RAE Less Engaged

How interested would you say you are in national issues, like elections and legislative debates in Washington or in your state capitol -- extremely interested, very interested, somewhat interested, or not very interested?



Conclusion

RAE voters are not hearing an economic narrative that speaks to their problems and concerns or convinces them that their leaders have the ability to solve those problems. There is a risk that these voters – an ever increasing share of the voting eligible population and one that heralded the stunning changes of 2006 and 2008 – will lack engagement and motivation. If this is true, both parties will miss opportunities to reach these crucial voters. Developing a strong economic framework that addresses the concerns of RAE voters is an important moment in building a winning coalition in 2012.