

Date: May 6, 2010

To: Interested Parties

From: Page Gardner, Women's Voices. Women Vote Action Fund, Stanley B. Greenberg, Democracy Corps/GQRR, Anna Greenberg, GQRR

How To Survive 2010

A Year-Long Project Tracking the Participation and Preference Among the Rising American Electorate¹

Democrats need to make substantial political progress in the next six months. The basic problem is math. Currently independent voters prefer Republicans over Democrats by two to one in congressional trial heats. Other groups, such as blue collar whites and white seniors are similarly lopsided in their preferences. More competitive margins are possible with these groups, but that could come too late, and there are more immediate places to make up the numbers.

Good places to start are among unmarried women, young people and people of color. Voters we call the Rising American Electorate (RAE), who make up the majority of the voting age population in the country and voters who drove progressive victories in 2006 and 2008. They remain supportive but not nearly in the same numbers. They can help rescue Democrats from a very forgettable electoral cycle in 2010. Unmarried women alone make up 26 percent of the population and can have the biggest impact.

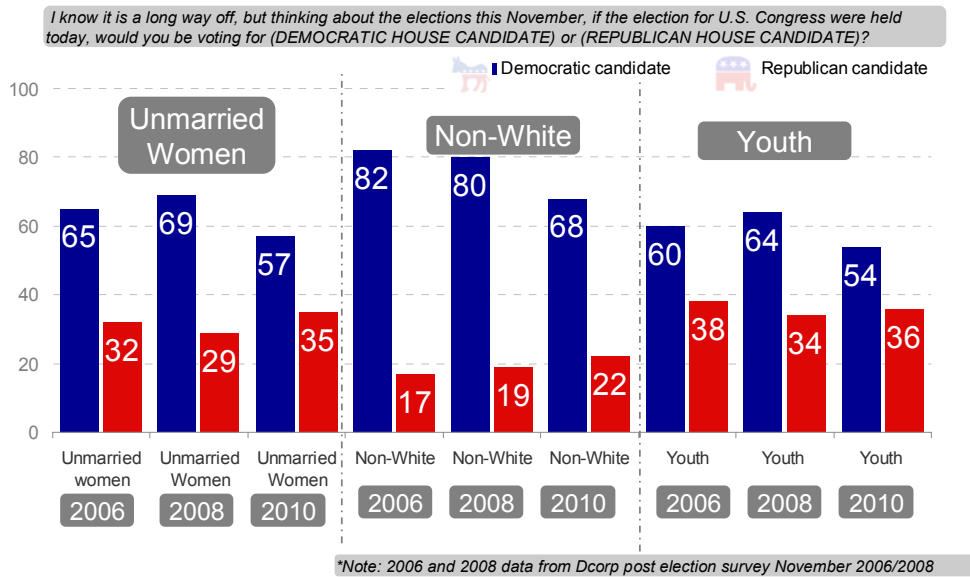
This joint project by Women's Voices. Women Vote Action Fund and Democracy Corps highlights distinct opportunities among these voters, but also core problems that need real attention and major political investments to make right.

- Voters in the Rising American Electorate are less engaged than other voters. Historically, these voters typically drop out of off-year elections in greater than average numbers. This survey continues to show a turn out problem, which we have tracked all year among these voters.
- Democratic margins are down among these voters relative to 2008 and even 2006, particularly among unmarried women and the young. Support among African Americans remains strong, but some evidence emerges that Hispanic support is down.

¹This memo highlights findings from a recent Democracy Corps survey of 1,000 2008 voters and a 480 case oversample of unmarried women, youth and people of color. The overall margins of error is +/-2.5.



Rising American Electorate underperforming



The pay-off for attending to this problem is made plain in the margins among those voters in the Rising American Electorate who are least likely to vote. Among RAE likely voters, Democrats enjoy a 58 to 32 percent margin (26 points) in congressional balloting, a decent number, but down from prior cycles and not enough to compensate for losses elsewhere. Among 2008 voters who say they might not vote in 2010, however, this margin jumps to 39 points (63 to 24 percent), close to what Democrats saw in the last election cycle.

Three distinct opportunities emerge.

1. **Health care.** Fully 65 percent of uninsured Americans are unmarried, according to Census figures. Yet, support for the new health care law is understated among RAE voters overall and unmarried women in particular. In fact, when it comes to health care reform white unmarried women divide evenly (46 percent favor, 46 percent oppose).
2. **The economy.** RAE voters distinguish themselves from other voters in several ways. They were more economically vulnerable before the recession and continue to struggle disproportionately. This enduring economic struggle likely plays a role in their engagement and the Democratic margin. However, they are also the most likely to register real economic progress. This survey is one of the first to show measures of voters’ real life economic experience (economic optimism, perceived state of the economy, etc.) “catching up” with macro-economic trends (GDP, stock market, etc.). Most important, while tax-cutting, supply-side economic narratives appeal to many voters now, RAE voters focus more on direct



government investments that have visible impact on their lives, things like education, mortgage relief and pay equity. This sets up a unique economic narrative and opportunity for these voters.

3. **Hope.** If the Tea Party voters are driven by anger, hope still reins among voters in the RAE. Notably, these voters now have more evidence in their lives that the hope they had in 2008 was well invested, but the key is giving them a message that gives them reason to hope for more change.

The Women's Voice's, Women Vote Action Fund and Democracy Corps will continue to track voters within the Rising American Electorate and explore messaging and issues to re-engage these critical voters, but another element to winning this support is programmatic. There needs to be a real commitment to investing in these voters.

The Challenges: Preference and Participation

Overall, the congressional vote stands at 43 percent for the Democratic candidate, 45 percent for the Republican candidate.² Despite some notable change in voters' economic optimism, this outcome reflects a fairly stable vote. Similarly, we see no real change in the vote among RAE voters (now 58 Democratic candidate, 32 percent Republican candidate). While this margin reflects a base group, it is also well off-pace compared to prior election results.

Democrats won 69 percent among unmarried women in 2008 and 65 percent in 2006, but now only manages 57 percent among likely voters. Even relative to January of this year, this is a decline (then 62 percent to 33 percent in favor of the Democratic candidate). Bob McDonnell won the youth vote in Virginia by 10 points in 2009 after even Obama carried young people in Virginia by 21 points in 2008. Nationally, they now break 54 – 36 percent in favor of the Democratic candidate, down from 64 – 34 percent in 2008. Non-whites also show a decline, an outcome that is likely reflective of diminished Hispanic support.³

Nonetheless, Democratic margins among those RAE members less likely to vote underscore the great opportunity these voters represent. Some of these margins even approach 2008 levels of support.

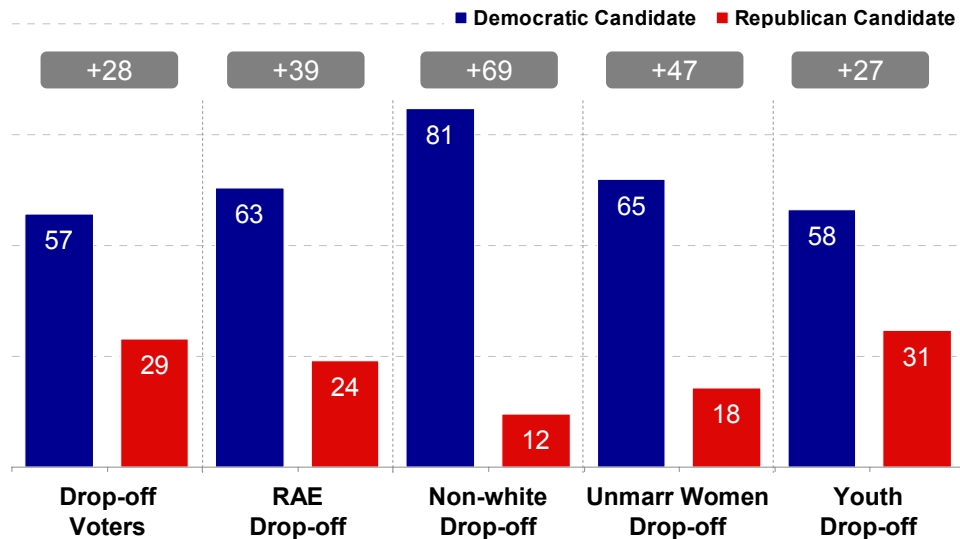
² In the landline sample, the incumbent names were inserted preceded by party identification. Generic "the Democratic candidate" or "the Republican candidate" were inserted for the opposition. For the cell phone sample and open seat districts, both candidates were given as generic.

³ We only have 90 Hispanic interviews in this survey, so we cannot ascribe much confidence to this observation.



Margins grow among drop-off voters

I know it is a long way off, but thinking about the elections in 2010, if the election for U.S. Congress were held today, would you be voting for (The Democratic Candidate) or (The Republican Candidate)?



**Note: In each district, the incumbent's name was inserted against a generic candidate. In seats where the incumbent has announced they will not seek reelection, both choices were represented by a generic candidate.*

Other results underscore the urgency of these findings. Independents support Republican candidates for Congress by a 52 to 26 percent margin. In 2008, Democrats carried independents 52 to 44 percent, according to national exit surveys. White seniors, a very reliable subgroup in terms of turnout, support Republicans 54 to 34 percent. Despite some improvement in economic outlook, non-college whites prefer Republicans 58 to 32 percent. Married women prefer Republican candidates by a 47 to 40 percent margin, leaving a 29-point marriage gap. These deficits will have to be made up somewhere.

The other challenge is participation.

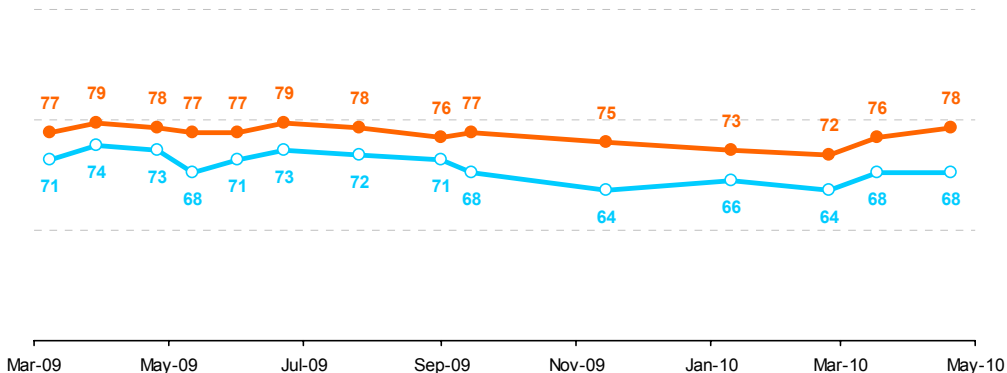
Democracy Corps and Women's Voices, Women Vote Action Fund has tracked alarmingly low levels of vote intention among RAE voters all year; this survey is no exception.



Still lower commitment to voting among RAE

Congress this November: are you almost certain to vote, will you probably vote, are the chances 50-50, or don't you think you will vote?

— Total Almost Certain
— RAE Almost Certain



The most problematic group to emerge is young people, just 50 percent of whom describe themselves as almost certain to vote, down seven points from last month. Part of the electoral movement we see among youth—and part of the reason why Republicans have had some success here in off-year and special elections—is that more Democratic oriented youth have simply dropped out of the electorate.

Democrats face a strategic choice in the 2010 election. Winning swing voters will be a hard grind and is not certain to succeed in the next six months, although it is essential to any long-term progressive project. Getting voters to participate who historically sit out off-year elections is no sure bet in this environment. But in the short-term, they offer more immediate opportunity – with opportunity for increased participation and support. Moreover, the results here indicate there are real opportunities to move up with both – if one uses the levers available to progressives.

1. Opportunity in Health Care

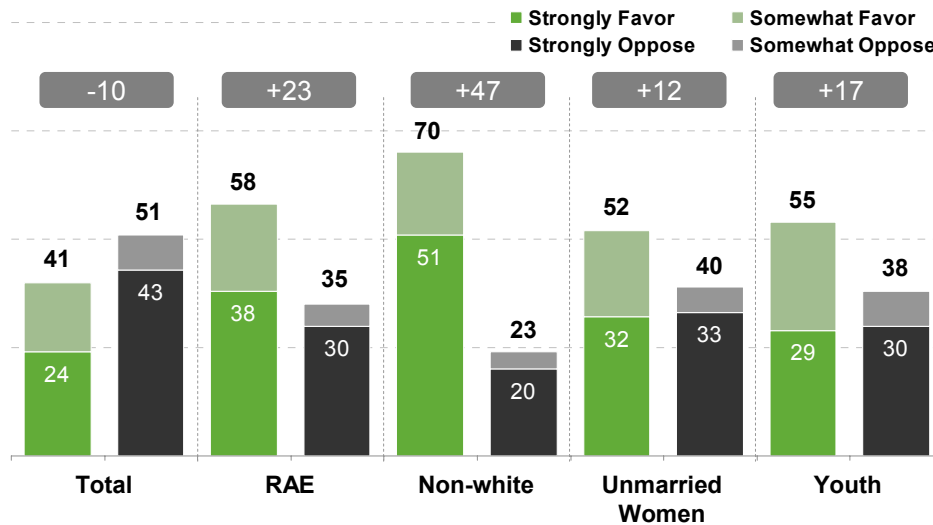
There are 8.1 million unmarried women in the country lacking health care insurance. Nearly 30 percent of all the uninsured in this country are unmarried women. Nonetheless, support for the new health care law is not where it could be and certainly not where it needs to be to energize these voters.

Passage of the Obama health care plan did not produce any spike in support for the plan overall (now 41 percent favor, 51 percent oppose). Support is higher among RAE voters, mostly because of African Americans, but only 52 percent of unmarried women support this law and white unmarried women divide evenly (46 percent favor, 46 percent oppose).



Underwhelming support for health care law

As you may have heard, President Obama's health care reform plan was passed by Congress and signed into law. From what you have heard about this plan, do you favor or oppose Obama's health care reform plan?



Unmarried women believe this legislation will improve the country (53 percent, compared to just 43 percent overall), but they are divided on the impact this law will have on themselves and their family. Just 42 percent believe they will see benefits from health care reform (48 percent perceive no benefit). A plurality of youth and unmarried women also believe they will pay higher health care costs as a result of this law.

This issue represents an challenge for Democrats to sell this reform among voters who are among the main beneficiaries. Focus groups conducted by Democracy Corps reveals massive confusion, even now, about the tangible benefits of this change. For many in the RAE, particularly among unmarried women, it means that that they did not have health insurance before, but will have health insurance now.

2. Opportunity on the Economy

Voters of all demographic groups suffered in this economy, but its pain has been ladled unevenly on voters in the Rising American Electorate. In this survey, they are twice as likely to report a job loss within the last year as voters outside the RAE. As a result, their approach to the economy is fundamentally different.



When asked what the federal government can do to improve their financial situation, nearly half of all likely voters talk about tax cuts for the middle class.⁴ Voters within the RAE, however, are more interested in things like college affordability, mortgage relief, direct government employment and pay equity. Their economic vision is significantly more progressive and activist.

RAE voters seek different solutions

Which one or two of the following do you believe the federal government could do right now to help your own financial situation?

	TOTAL	RAE	Other Voters
Cut taxes for the middle class	37	26	46
Make college more affordable	22	26	18
Mortgage relief	16	17	14
Government jobs for the unemployed	16	21	12
Ensure equal pay	12	14	11
Increase the minimum wage	9	14	6
Extend unemployment benefits	7	8	6
Provide more affordable child care	5	7	4
(All)	6	8	5
(None/Other/Refused)	15	11	18

Unmarried women show somewhat more interest in pay equality (16 percent) than voters overall, but the leading response here is making college more affordable (27 percent).

RAE voters are significantly less likely to have earned a four-year college degree as other voters (38 percent and 50 percent, respectively). Nonetheless, RAE voters are more likely to believe a college degree is necessary to be financially comfortable these days and more likely to believe that federal investments in education are important to improve the economy in the long-term. Fully 81 percent of younger unmarried women believe college is necessary to get ahead, compared to 70 percent among all young people.

⁴ The recent tax season may have amplified this response.



RAE voters see education as more important

Now I'm going to read you some pairs of statements. After I read each pair, please tell me whether the FIRST statement or the SECOND statement comes closer to your own view, even if neither is exactly right.

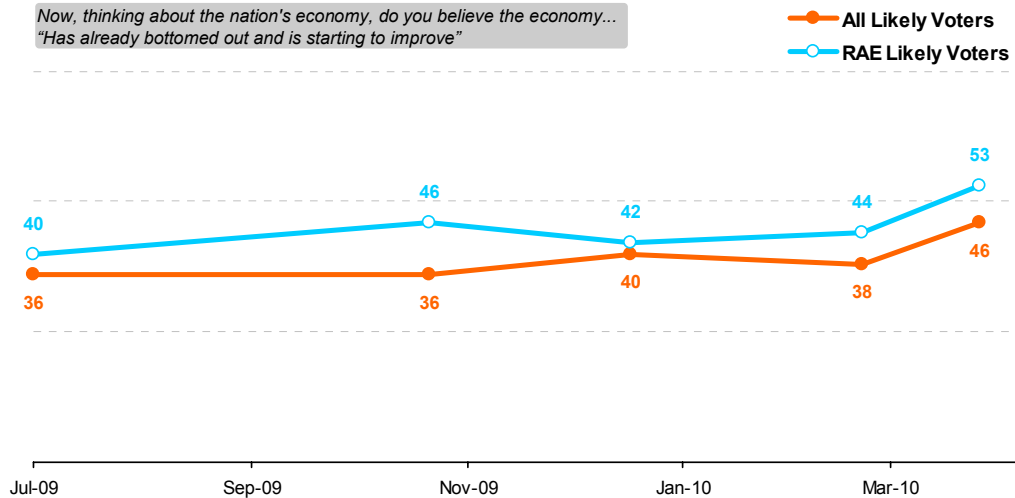
	TOTAL	RAE
In order to be financially comfortable in the United States today you need to have a college degree.	54	62
OR		
You can be financially comfortable in the United States today without a college degree.	40	34
A well educated workforce is important for business development and in order to improve the economy in the long run the federal government should invest in increasing the number of college graduates.	61	71
OR		
Having more college graduates is not necessary to improving the economy; the federal government has more important things to do and should not waste money trying to increase the number of college graduates.	31	23

These voters distinguish themselves in one other way as well. For six months, the news cycle has been filled with stories of banks recovering, GDP improving, and a rising stock market, but this progress has done little to impress average voters. This survey marks one of the few instances where we see voters' experience with the economy echo some of the broader economic trends. Voters in the Rising American Electorate are among the most likely to record more economic optimism. No doubt part of this reflects their political filter; these voters are strong Democrats and supporters of the Obama administration. But this was true in previous months as well.

Nearly half (46 percent) of likely voters believe the economy is bottoming out and starting to improve, up from 38 percent last month and higher than any point this year. Among RAE voters, this number jumps to 53 percent (up from 44 percent in March). They are growing more hopeful.



RAE more likely to see improvement in the economy



Within the RAE, the movement is particularly dramatic among African American voters (now 75 percent believe the economy is improving), up from 48 percent in January. Among unmarried women, the change is a bit more modest (now 46 percent economy improving), but still up from just 36 percent last July.

RAE Voters are also more optimistic about the direction of the country. Fully half (50 percent) of voters in the RAE describe the country as headed in the right direction, up from 36 percent last time. Overall, the number improved only marginally (to 33 percent, with 57 percent describing the country as off on the wrong track).

Improvement on more personal economic measures is discernable, but more modest. Voters' overall assessment of their personal finances stands at 5 percent positive, 23 percent cool, up from last month, but not too far off from numbers we saw earlier in the year. Similarly, we see modest improvements in the reported incidence of unemployment, reduced hours, lost health coverage or falling behind in the mortgages.

The chart below shows the change in how voters are experiencing the economy on a number of measures compared to last month.



Results of macro and personal economic measures among RAE

	Country Wrong Track	Economy Improving	Positive State of Economy	Positive State of Finances	Impacted by Job Loss
TOTAL	-5	+8	+10	+5	-4
RAE	-10	+9	+12	+5	-6
Unmarried Women	-7	+4	+14	+2	-6
Youth	-8	+9	+7	+4	-20
Non-white	-10	+9	+12	+5	-1

**Note: Results show change between March and April*

There is a unique economic narrative that needs to be heard among these voters. First, there is more, much more, room for contrast. Democrats fought for change and we are seeing some results; Republicans blocked change. The main focus is education and college affordability, though other issues (mortgage relief, pay equity, even government jobs) can play a role as well. Importantly, this message is aspirational, not ideological. It is not about promoting activist government for its own sake, but about giving the most economically vulnerable people in our country the tools they need to build a better life for themselves and their family. That, more than anything, defines the hope they had in 2008.

3. How to Move the RAE: Hope, Not Anger

In February, Women’s Voices. Women Vote and Democracy Corps released a report arguing hope, not anger, continued to animate the voters among youth, unmarried women and people of color. That analysis remains true to this day. If anything, as a significantly higher percentage of these voters believe the Administration’s economic policies are making a difference, the case for hope is even more compelling.

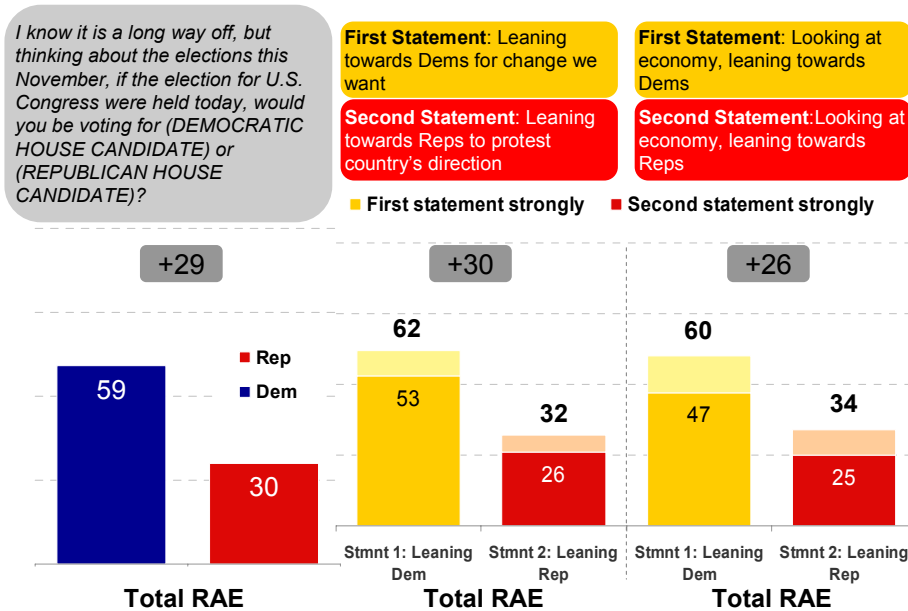
By a 71 percent to 27 percent margin, likely voters in the RAE are still “hopeful we will see real change in the direction of the country.” Looking more specifically at unmarried women who voted in 2008, 77 percent are hopeful we will see real change in the direction of the country. Although these numbers are down from the halcyon days of the 2008 election (then 84 percent agree), the response suggests little sense of let down or cynicism.

At present, voters in the RAE do not believe they have enough at stake in this election. Framing the election around putting “change” at risk or putting economic progress at risk holds



the current Democratic margin among RAE voters, but does not grow this margin. We see the same dynamic when the election is framed around economic progress.

Framing the election for the RAE



Winning 62 percent of the vote among RAE voters in an election framed around change or economic progress will likely not be enough for Democrats to compensate for losses among independents or blue collar whites. While the results of this survey make plain the need for progressives to appeal to the hopes of these voters, important pieces of the message remain missing. Part of the answer may lie in giving hope more definition, specifically in terms of economic progress and education.

Moreover, assuming continued improvements on the economy and rising recognition of those improvements, it is also possible that an economic contrast may amplify Democratic margins.

Democrats are a party that sought to improve the economy for all people and are finally seeing some fruit of that labor; Republicans focused more on blocking progress and helping Wall Street.

Conclusion

Democrats need to make headway in the next six months if they are to come out of this election with a congressional majority. To do that, they have an opportunity to put their money down on underperforming groups that have the potential to move and impact the election, specifically, on young people, people of color and unmarried women. Given their size, they make up at least one fifth the electorate even when underperforming, unmarried women can have the most impact.