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To: Interested Parties

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## **Trump & GOP Strategy Make Blue Wave More Likely: The Evidence** Key findings from new phone and web-panel surveys

Pundits built a new conventional wisdom that included higher job approval ratings for President Donald Trump due to the tax cuts and strong economy that could shrink the enthusiasm advantage and midterm vote for Democrats. But they are wrong about the political trends, the economy, and what motivates Democrats. They miss how the GOP strategy branded Trump and the GOP as only out for themselves and the rich.

This is according to the second of three waves of WWVAF's battleground research program conducted by Democracy Corps. This program consists of phone polling among registered voters and an on-going web-panel of 1,813 target voters – the Rising American Electorate of minorities, millennials, and unmarried women, plus white working class women – in 12 states with competitive races for governor, Senate, and Congress, including 42 Cook competitive seats.<sup>1</sup> The same web-panel respondents were interviewed in April and late June, so these reported trends we know to be true.

Here are the key findings:

- The off-year trends that favor Democrats have solidified and grown. In fact, Trump's base strategy is pushing up Democrats and anti-Trump voters' intention to vote in this off-year and is widening the enthusiasm gap.
- Over the past three months, a nationalized Democratic advantage has emerged across the Senate, congressional and governors' battlegrounds as Democrats have made gains in the Cook battleground districts and in the governors' races.

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<sup>1</sup> On behalf of *Women's Voices. Women Vote Action Fund*, Democracy Corps conducted the second in a series of three phone surveys with accompanying web-surveys among an on-going panel of minorities, millennials, unmarried women and white non-college educated women (the RAE+) in 12 states with Governor races (10 Senate race states): Arizona, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Michigan, Minnesota, Nevada, New Mexico, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Tennessee and Wisconsin. The phone survey of 1,000 registered voters with 66 percent cell-rate was conducted June 11-14, 2018. The voter-file matched web-panel of 1,813 "RAE+" registered voters was conducted June 13-28, 2018.

- Despite perceptions of a strong macro-economy, Donald Trump's poor job approval ratings barely budged from April; nor did the intense disapproval of his presidency diminish, thereby fueling and sustaining the enthusiasm gap between Democrats and Republicans.
- Trump and the GOP have a strategy, but it is not working: they did not make gains on handling taxes, the economy or immigration.
- Pundits are missing how frustrated ordinary citizens are with politicians who put government to work for their big donors and corporations, and don't get how much ordinary people are struggling with wages that don't keep up with higher costs, health care above all.
- The passage of the Republicans' tax scam for the rich has created a shared brand for Trump and the GOP as out for themselves and the rich.
- Yes, voters know there are more jobs and they are feeling more financially secure, but that has nothing to do with their wages and the cost of living. Two-thirds of the base say the growing economy is not helping them and a big majority says wages aren't keeping up with rising costs. Dominating their economic pain are health care costs.
- When asked what issues are impacting their vote, Democrats and the Rising American Electorate point first to the cost of health care, followed by guns.
- Democrats have powerful messages that drive higher turnout. Each begins with attacks on corrupt work for wealthy donors and corporations, highlights the corrupt tax deal for corporations and accuses Trump and the GOP of governing for the rich and themselves while voters struggle. The voters know which politicians are in charge and who they are working for, and they reward Democrats who embrace these messages.
- The strongest Democratic message platform: politicians in Washington divide the country so they can cut corrupt deals for big donors, corporations, and themselves which hurt working people and the middle class. The reckless increase in the deficit means less investment, less help with health care, and puts Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid at risk.
- A millennial-directed message on this platform has real power and drives up turnout among Democratic voters.

**DIVISION AND TAX SCAM FOR THE RICH:**

We need to change the political leadership in Washington. They are dividing the country and handing the government over to their wealthy donors and corporations at the expense of working people and the middle class. The Republican's tax scam for the rich recklessly drives up the deficit to justify their cuts to Social Security and Medicare and even less investment in education, infrastructure, and health care.

**MILLENNIAL REFERENDUM:**

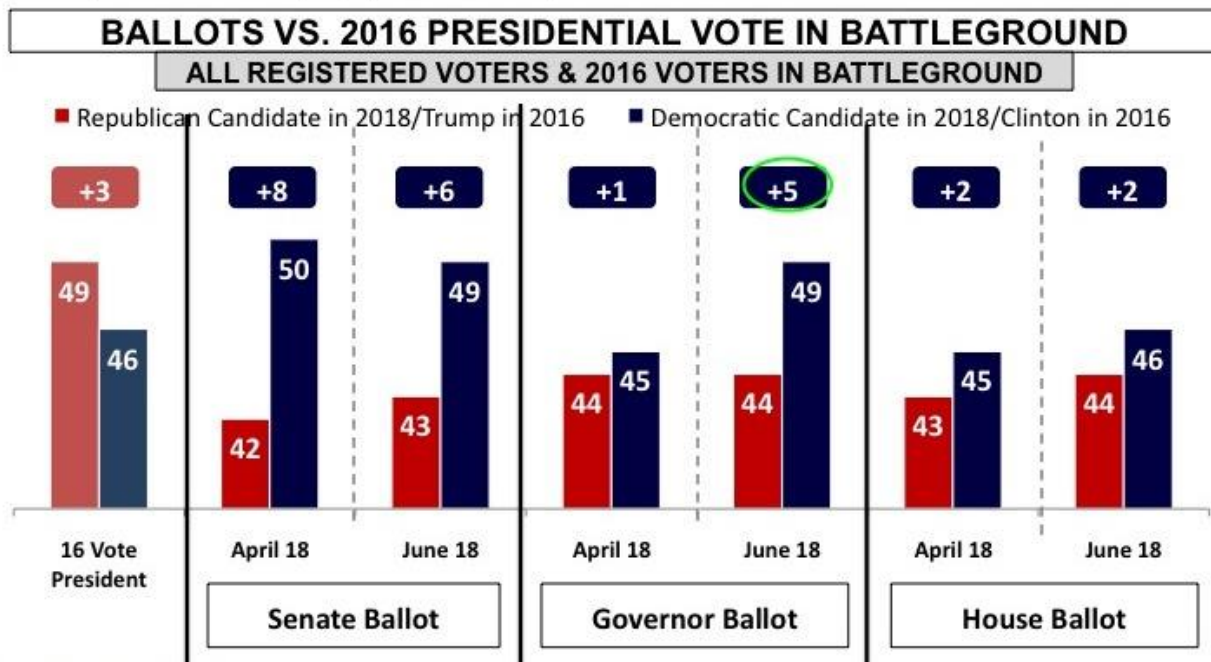
To the leaders who only get things done for corporate campaign donors and expect the next generation to live with the consequences, your time is up! We see you refusing to act on gun control, the price of college, and criminal justice reform. You sell out our futures by rolling back net neutrality and refusing to acknowledge climate change. Millennials don't have lobbyists or Super PACs, but we have the power to vote in November. It's our turn.

**The state of play**

Democrats' strong electoral position in this 12-state battleground is confirmed in this second wave of polling. There is considerable stability in the already impressive support for Democrats in the congressional and Senate ballots and on many key issues, and Democrats made gains in the governor ballot and in Cook House battleground districts. Donald Trump's disapproval, including strong disapproval, is undiminished, fueling the persistent Democratic enthusiasm advantage and improved Democratic margins among likely voters.

**Democrats maintain strong Senate & House leads, now extends to Governor**

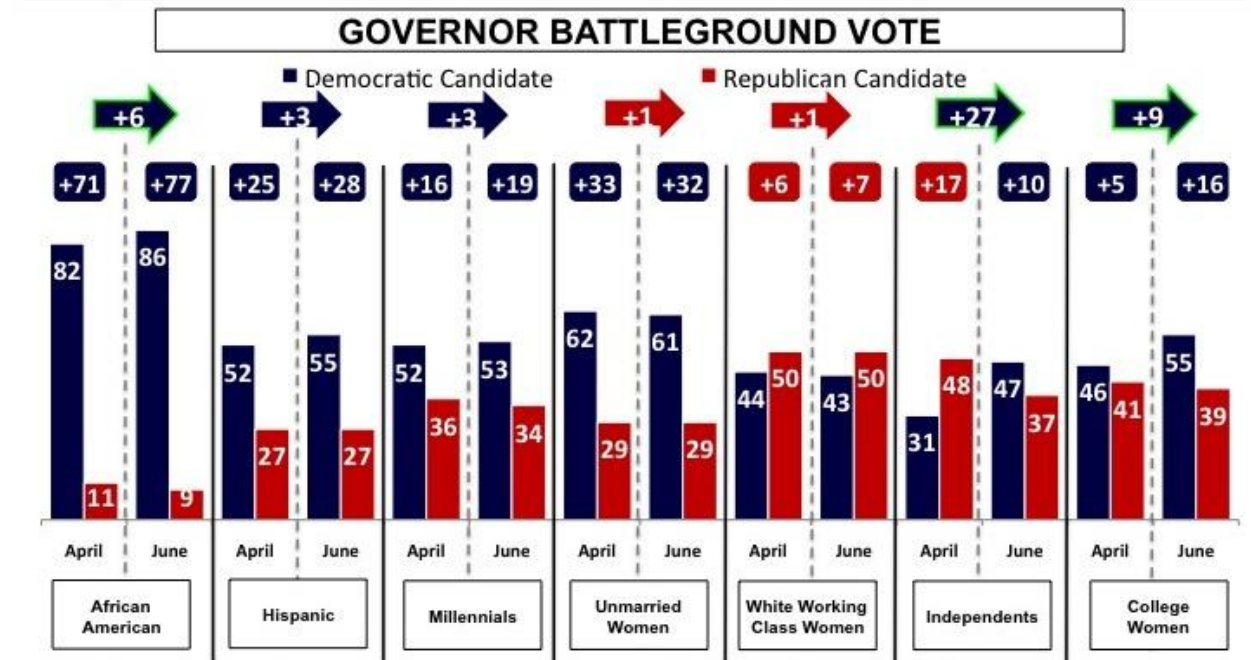
*Thinking about the election for U.S. Congress in your district/Governor in your state/Senate in your state in November 2018, will you vote for – (Democratic candidate) or (Republican candidate)?*



The stable national advantage for Democrats is now reflected in the governor ballot as independents, college women, and people of color have consolidated since April.

**Governor gains from independents & college women, also minorities, millennials**

*Thinking about the election for Governor in your state in November, will you vote for – (the Democratic candidate) or (the Republican candidate)?*



Democrats maintain their leads in the congressional ballot in these 12 states Trump won by 3-points and where a majority of the seats are held by Republicans. Importantly, in the competitive Cook districts in this battleground, Democrats more than doubled their lead to 8-points. In the 33 GOP-held Cook districts, which include many “likely” GOP seats, the Democrats hold a 5-point advantage (47 to 42).

The RAE base also showed more intense support for the Democrats and a 3-point increase in those reporting the maximum level of interest in the 2018 election. We are particularly confident that this is a real shift as these are the same RAE voters with whom we spoke in April.

Though they continue to lag all other groups, the greatest gains in enthusiasm came from white millennial women (19 to 29 percent ‘10’ in interest) who are second only to minority millennial women in their intense loathing of Donald Trump. College women, another key Democratic turnout target, also grew in interest (49 to 58 percent ‘10’ in interest). This has allowed Democrats to sustain their enthusiasm advantage over Republican voters and partisans despite their greater interest since April.

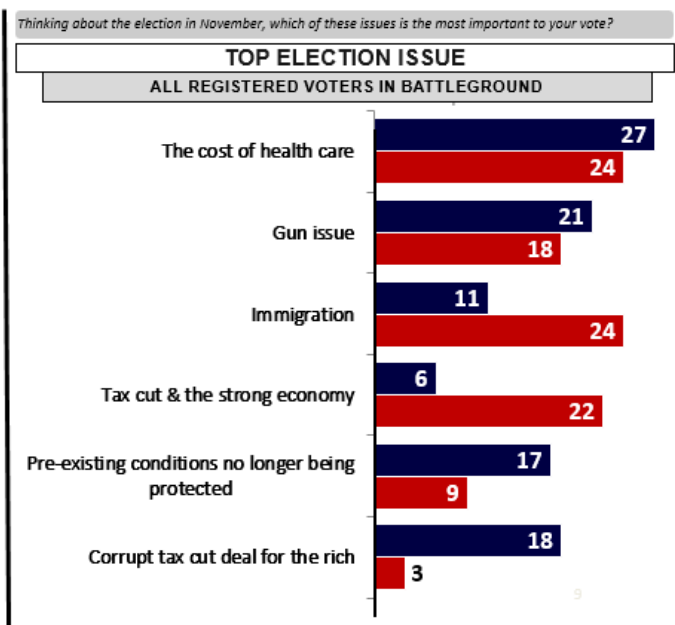
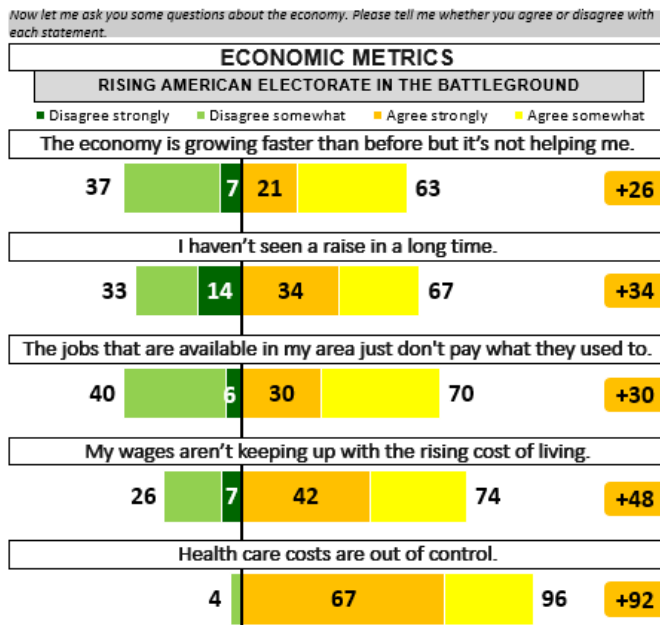
Democrats have also maintained or gained ground with the RAE on handling many important issues. That includes gaining ground on gun violence, which has become a top voting issue for Democrats in the battleground. Meanwhile, Trump and the Republicans have made no gain on who is better on the economy, taxes and immigration which are the 3 levers that are at the heart of their midterm strategy.

**Motivating issues in the midterm**

People know that the economy is growing and that there are more jobs available, and increasingly they report that “families like mine are beginning to feel more financially secure.” Between April and June there was an 8-point increase in this perception among the Rising American Electorate voters re-interviewed in our panel. That is all about jobs, not wages, where gains have been paltry.

Make no mistake, voters, and Rising American Electorate voters in particular, are in financial pain. Their shifting response reflects their greater employment security and is detached from their wages and rising costs, and the majority continue to insist that the economy “isn’t very strong for families like mine.” So while six-in-ten RAE voters say, “the economy is growing faster,” and a majority say, “there are more good jobs available in my area,” 63 percent also say that growth “isn’t helping me,” and almost three-quarters say those jobs “just don’t pay what they used to” and they “haven’t seen a raise in a long time.”

The real economy is one in which 60 percent of battleground voters, including three-quarters of the RAE, say their “wages aren’t keeping up with the cost of living,” leaving them struggling to cover basic expenses and unable to save. The tax cut is not providing the promised relief: six-in-ten RAE voters continue to say that the tax cut is not benefitting them personally and among all registered voters in the battleground, opposition to the tax cut grew 5-points (+9 to +4 support).



Health care costs are by far the most difficult expenses to afford, topping other expenses like housing, telecommunications bills, and their utility bills. There is near universal agreement (96 percent) among the base that “health care costs are out of control” and 56 percent report this crisis has deepened recently: “My healthcare costs have jumped [more] this year compared to any other year.” This crisis will only deepen as insurers announce further premium hikes planned for this fall and major pharmaceutical companies announce unprecedented price increases.

No wonder the cost of healthcare tops the list of the most important election issues for all battleground voters – including all Democrats and the RAE base. Health care costs are also tied with immigration as the top election issue among Republicans in the battleground (and health care is by far the top concern when you include the 9 percent who say pre-existing conditions no longer being protected is their primary concern).

In bad news for the GOP, health care is only associated with the Republican Party by 3 percent of the RAE. That is stunning when you consider health care was Republicans' primary campaign issue in the past three elections. In good news for Democrats, health care is the issue with which the Democratic Party is most associated among their base in open-ended responses; plus, intense preference for the Democrats handling health care costs among the RAE has only grown (43 percent say Democrats would do a much better job).

Trump is trying to distract Democrats from his vulnerabilities – such as this economy where wages don't keep up with costs like health care, even after their new tax cut, and his inaction on gun violence – by focusing on the GOP's other top issue and the focus of their best testing message: immigration, immigration, immigration! But Trump's focus on immigration in the past month did not produce greater support for the GOP's handling of the issue among the RAE voters and white working class women re-interviewed in this on-going panel. Two-thirds of the RAE and a majority of white working class women disapprove of Trump's zero-tolerance policy and his attack on immigrants actually led to greater affirmation of their value to America: two-thirds of the RAE now say that *“immigrants today strengthen our country through their hard work and talents.”*

### Messages & impact

What has crystallized for the base voters who form the RAE is that President Trump and the GOP are governing for the rich donors and themselves, with little regard to what is happening with the more vulnerable. Two-thirds now say Trump is governing for himself, with 50 percent saying it describes him very well. Over 60 percent agree that he is *“so rich he can't see how he is hurting the less fortunate.”* That perception was no doubt impacted by how the Trump Administration is separating immigrant parents from their children.

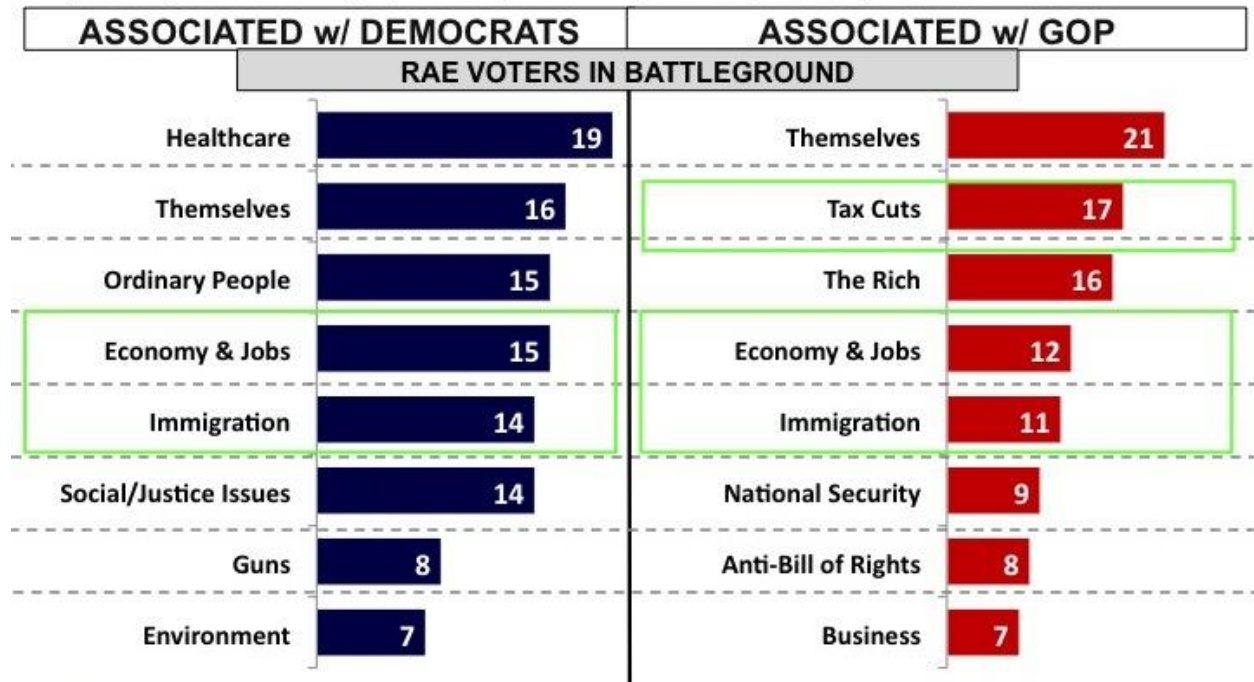
While the Democratic brand is diffuse, the GOP's is not: 54 percent in open-end responses say the Republican Party is for *“themselves,” “tax cuts,”* or *“the rich.”* That makes the rationale for changing the politicians in Washington very clear. Voters broadly, but especially the RAE, are more than frustrated with political leaders who blithely work for their big donors and corporations, and fail to see the economic and social realities they face.

That is why the strongest Democratic message with the Rising American Electorate puts the spotlight on political leaders in Washington who have divided the country to turn over government to their wealthy donors and corporations instead of addressing the struggles of working people and the middle class (57 percent more likely to support the Democrat; 41 percent strongly). The corrupt tax scam for the rich is the core action that drives up the debt, kills investment in education and health care and threatens Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid.



### Democratic brand diffuse, but not GOP: for themselves and rich

*When you think of the Democratic Party/Republican Party, what issues or priorities do you think they care about?*



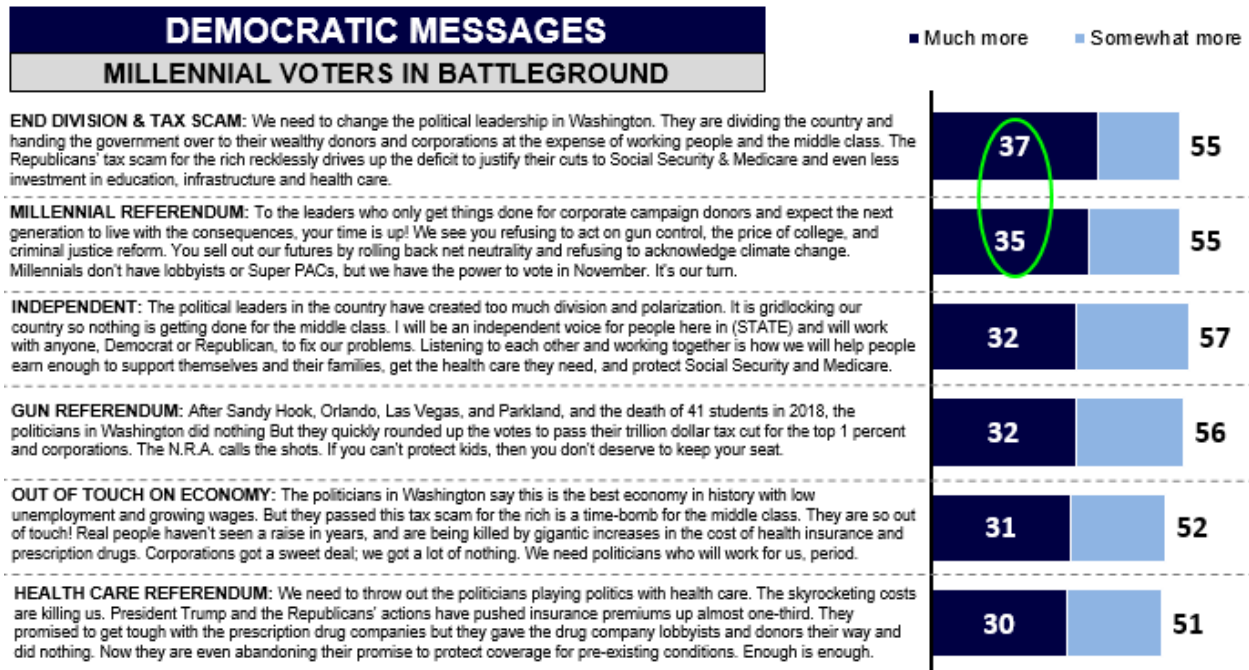
We have also now introduced a millennial message that should not be underestimated, especially among millennials, but also the entire Rising American Electorate. It attacks the political leaders for selling out their futures by governing for campaign donors at their expense, and failing to be responsible and deal with issues that are important to millennials – like gun violence, criminal justice reform, net neutrality, the cost of college, and climate change. It ends on an empowered note that promises they will bring reform, not through the corrupt system of Super PAC money and lobbying that has produced this mess, but by using their power at the ballot box.

This is the message that was most likely to produce a shift to maximum interest among those already voting for the Democratic candidate in the regressions. In other words, it powers base turnout!

It is important to notice that these top performing messages have a similar structure. They contrast the current political leadership that is prioritizing the wishes of the rich and corporations and their own political futures over the changes that the middle class really needs – whether it is real help with health care costs, retirement security, education investment, protection from gun violence, or other core issues.

### Tax scam for rich and millennial messages do well with millennials

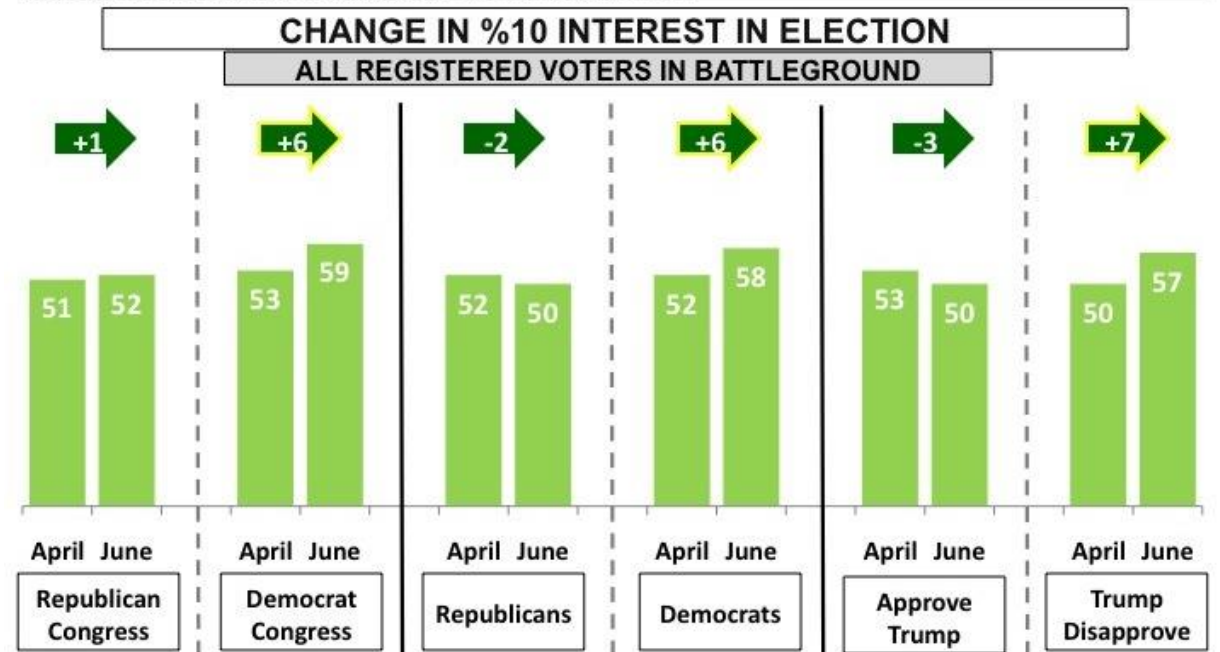
These are some things that Democrats are saying about the Republicans running for US Congress and offices in your state. For each, please indicate whether it raises very serious doubts, somewhat serious doubts, minor doubts, and no real doubts about the Republican candidate.



After hearing these powerful Democratic messages in a balanced debate, the RAE continues to grow their already well-consolidated vote in the congressional ballot (+22 to +24). More than that, the RAE became more interested in the election (39 to 42 in '10' interest) and specifically there is more interest among Democrats in the RAE and white working class women polled.

### Democratic voters more engaged, GOP & Trump supporters less

How interested are you in the elections in November? Please rate your interest from 1 to 10, with 1 meaning that you have no interest in this election and 10 meaning that you are extremely interested.





**Conclusion**

The Democrats' position strengthened in this wave of battleground research, but African Americans became less interested in the election since April and millennials are still far short of their potential, despite gains in enthusiasm since the first wave. Trump's base strategy is actually producing more energy in the anti-Trump base, and the Trump and GOP brands are becoming very well defined as working for themselves and their rich donors and indifferent to the less fortunate. Messages that highlight how their corrupt deals are putting so much at risk that we must send some very different leaders to Washington further strengthen Democratic advantages in the congressional ballot and increase enthusiasm among the base in the battleground.