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To: Friends of WVVAF and Democracy Corps

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New message platform for 2018's key battlegrounds

Report from phone survey & web-panel in the 12-state battleground

Democrats sit at the edge of a landslide repudiation of President Trump and Republicans – in the Congress and states where they govern in November. Though their momentum has stalled in the last few months, Democrats have important opportunities with minorities, millennials, and unmarried women, and, to some extent, white working class women, that will allow them to increase the number of competitive races and dominate in many battlegrounds in 2018. This is the first of three waves of a phone survey (conducted mostly on cell-phones) of registered voters and a coordinated on-going web-panel of more than 3,100 target voters in 12 states that include 12 Governor races, 10 Senate races, and 18 races in DCCC battleground districts. This suite of research provides clear guidance for progressives to get on the winning track.¹

Democratic victories in 2017 and 2018 were the result of differential turnout and strong performance across base and swing groups. Compared to 2016, there is a greater belief that the results of elections matter. But in the past few months, Democrats have appeared less focused on the economic and health care battles that most engage anti-Trump voters; at the same time, Republican base voters, especially white working class men, could finally point to a signature conservative policy achievement in the new tax cut law, where before they were grasping for news to justify their vote. This new research shows an evolved message as well as attacks on Trump and Republicans that allow Democrats to reclaim their footing.

The advice is straightforward: take away the GOP's presumed strengths – the state of the macro-economy and the new Republican tax cut – and make the most of their weaknesses on key issues that go to the heart of the case against Republican Trump-ism.

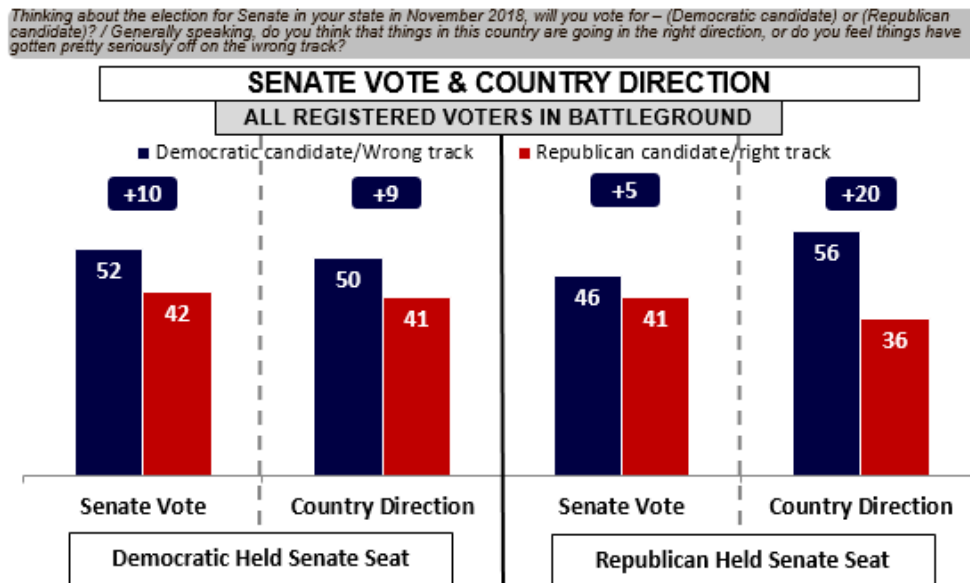
¹ On behalf of *Women's Voices Women Vote Action Fund*, *Democracy Corps* conducted the first in a series of three 1,000 registered voter phone surveys with accompanying registered voter web-surveys among an on-going panel of minorities, millennials, unmarried women and white non-college educated women (the RAE+) in 12 states with Governor races (10 Senate race states). They include 6 states "Diverse States" – Arizona, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Nevada, and New Mexico – with less than 70 percent white only populations and 6 "Rust Belt + States" – Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin + Tennessee – with more than 70 percent white only populations. The phone survey of 1,000 voter-file matched registered voters with 66 percent cell-rate was conducted April 5-12, 2018. The voter-file matched web-panel of 3,140 "RAE+" registered voters was conducted April 4-16, 2018. Ideological measures in the web-survey were weighted to phone-survey results to account for the bias in web-panels.

- First, Democrats must appeal to the large majority of voters struggling with wages that don’t keep up with rising costs, particularly the cost of health care. Trump and the Republicans promised to reduce these costs but supported policies with the opposite effect.
- Second, they should embrace an evolved economic message that insists on better from politicians than the short-term spending spree for the top one percent that endangers Social Security and Medicare and the short-sighted cuts to education and health care. (It is notable that this new message out-performed the “rigged” economic message that performed best up until now).
- Third, they should join the students of Parkland and attack Republicans for failing to act on gun control, which has become a top voting issue, particularly for millennials.

African Americans are already performing higher on turnout measures in this poll, but this message framework and the attacks on health care costs and gun-control significantly increase the number of high turnout voters among Hispanics, millennials and unmarried women as well.

The intensity and determination to vote

This is the first time we have surveyed the sprawling 2018 battleground that will determine control of state governments and Congress. Democratic candidates are already outperforming Clinton’s vote in these states (+3 Trump in in 2016), in large part because of their performance with Democratic base groups, particularly minorities and unmarried women.²



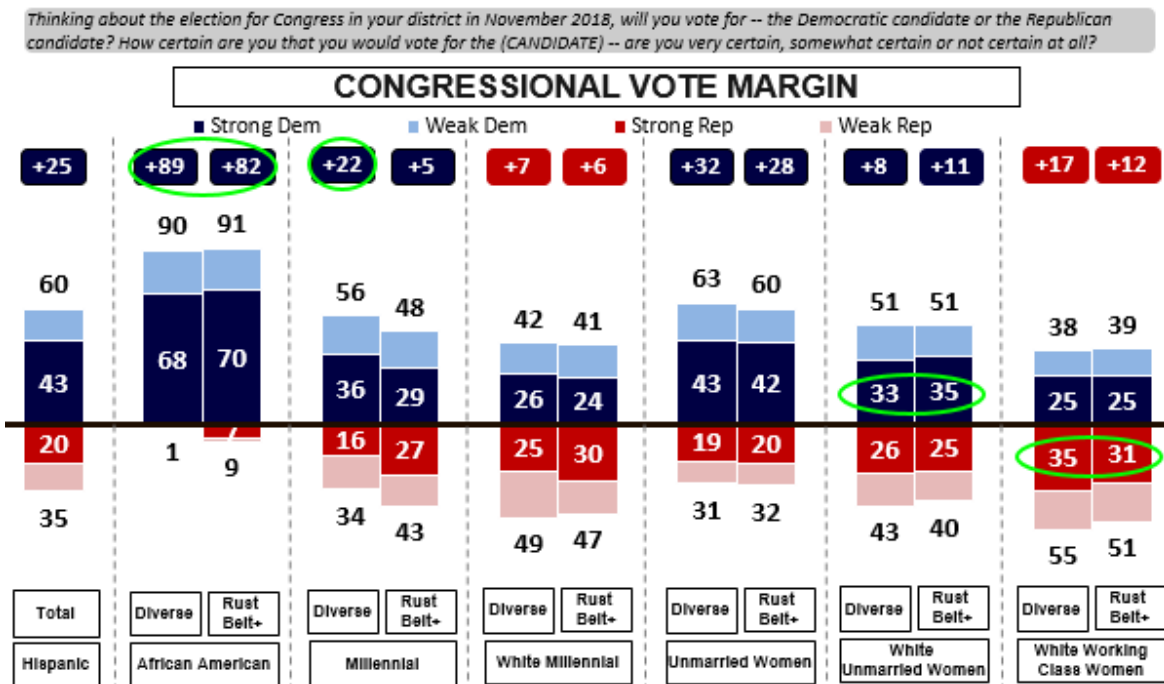
All registered voters in battleground phone survey.

² Donald Trump carried the 12 Governor race states and the 10 Senate race states by 3 points in 2016 (49 to 46).

Democrats are ahead in the Senate battleground (+8), where the majority of the Democratic candidates are incumbents running in states Trump carried. Democrats are also ahead in the Governor's races and in the House congressional ballot, dominated by the Republican-incumbents. Democrats have a 10-point lead in the DCCC battleground districts in these 12 states. They are the change candidates, as their vote tracks those who want to see a different direction.

The Democratic candidates are winning big majorities with African Americans and unmarried women of all races in both diverse states (Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Nevada, New Mexico) and "Rust Belt +" states (Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin + Tennessee). Unmarried women, including white unmarried women, are polling much stronger than they were at this point in the cycle in previous off-year battleground polls conducted for WWVAF.³ African Americans and unmarried women will be key turnout targets across the battleground.

Millennial women are registering base-level performance for Democrats in the races across "Diverse" and "Rust Belt +" states. It is critical for them to turnout in November, especially the white millennial women who show the lowest enthusiasm for voting in the midterms among the millennials in the panel. White millennials will also require more persuasion; white millennials, driven by the white millennial men, are voting for Republicans across the battlegrounds.



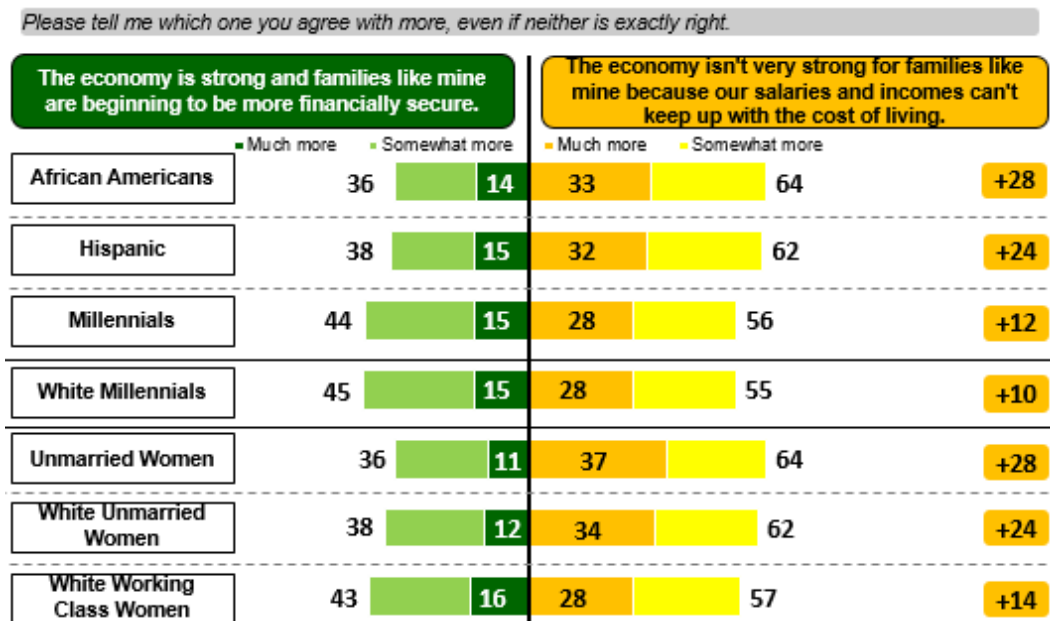
Web-panel of minorities, millennials and white working class women in the battleground.

³ Democrats carried unmarried women +11 in the Senate ballot [in a July 2014 battleground survey conducted by Democracy Corps for WWVAF](#) in Alaska, Arkansas, Colorado, Georgia, Iowa, Kentucky, Louisiana, Michigan, Montana, New Hampshire, North Carolina, and West Virginia. Democrats carried unmarried women by 10 points in the Senate ballot in this Senate battleground in a 2014 Election Night survey with Senate battleground oversample.

Getting back to people’s economic struggle and the tax cut

Democrats must not be distracted by the macro-economic and jobs-report numbers. It is a mistake to accept the rosy GOP narrative, attribute credit to President Obama, or insist it’s despite Trump and Republicans. Voters, especially Democratic voters, are genuinely struggling in this economy. They remain in pain because rising costs outpace any pay increases. Nearly two-thirds of African Americans and unmarried women and over 60 percent of millennials say “The economy isn’t very strong for families like mine because our salaries and incomes can’t keep up with the cost of living.”

Although the new tax cut law has more support than opposition among registered voters in these 12 battleground states, Democrats must also not doubt themselves about their opposition to the Republican tax cut. If Republicans wanted a tax cut that would help them win in November by really benefiting ordinary people, then they should have passed a different tax cut. The majority of Democratic base and swing voters in battleground states say they have not personally benefited from the tax cut, including 7-in-10 African Americans and white unmarried women, and 6-in-10 Hispanics and white working class women.

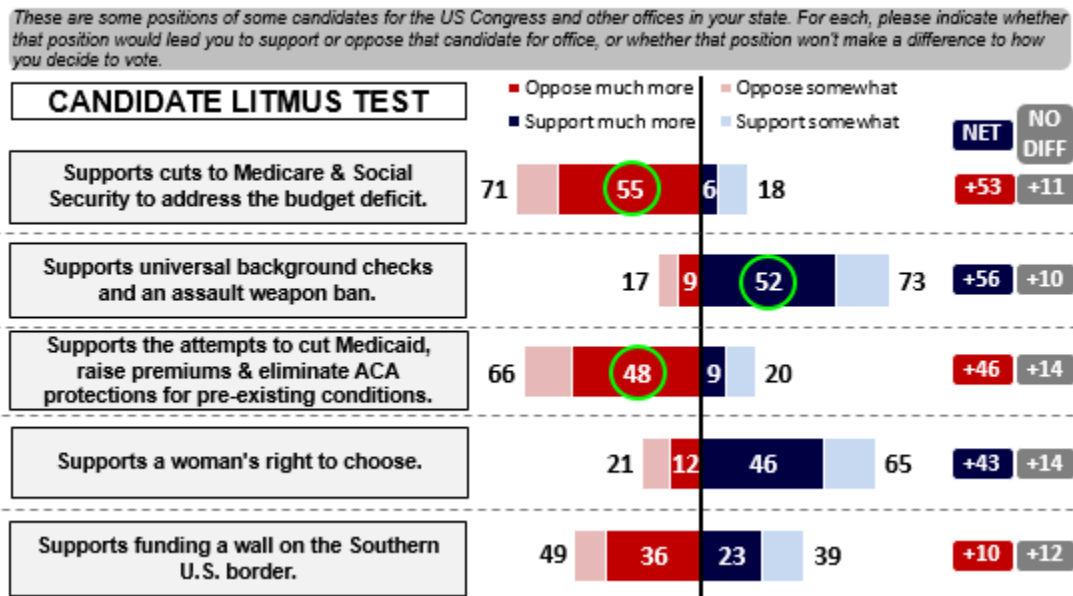


Web-panel of minorities, millennials and white working class women in the battleground.

GOP vulnerability to attacks

The Democratic brand is not very strong in the battleground and their advantages on issues rarely exceed their current vote. As a result, Democrats must focus on what Trump and the GOP are doing on the issues where they are vulnerable.

At least half of the Democratic base and swing groups say they will strongly oppose a candidate who supports cuts to Social Security and Medicare to address the budget deficit; who supported the attempts to cut Medicaid, raise premiums & eliminate ACA protections for pre-existing conditions; and who opposes universal background checks and an assault weapons ban.



Web-panel of minorities, millennials and white working class women in the battleground.

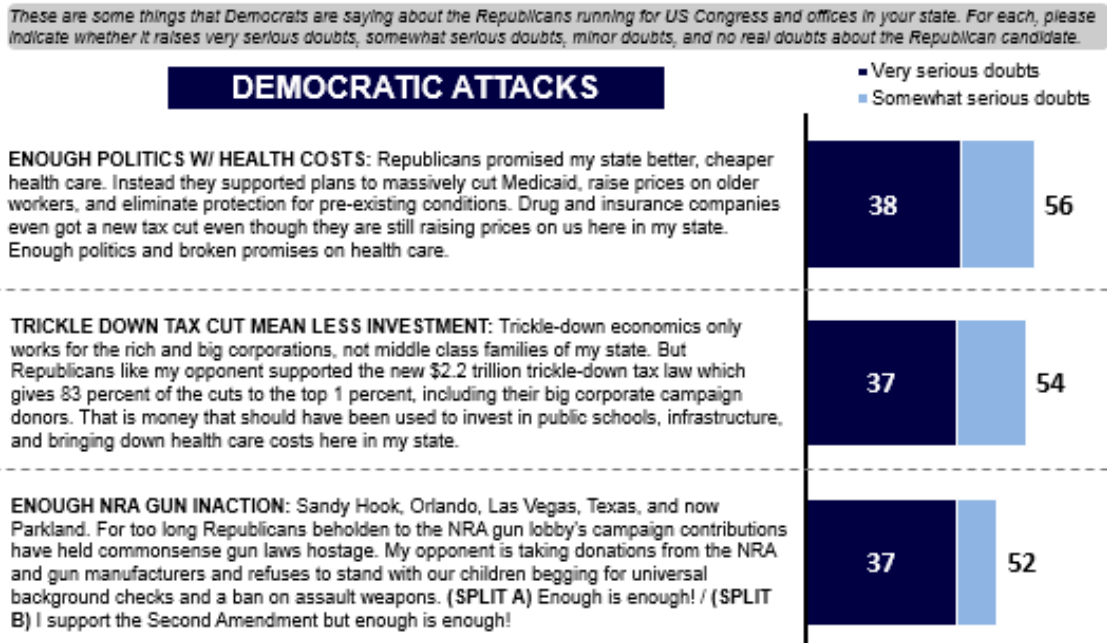
Medicaid is extremely popular (just 19 percent of base and swing voters have unfavorable views), particularly as the majority of these states have expanded Medicaid under the ACA. With the sole exception of white working class men, battleground voters have embraced the students of Parkland, with 40 percent expressing very favorable views.

These three issues are much more relevant to their decision in November than other items tested in our “litmus test,” like a candidate’s position on the DREAMERS or the special counsel’s Russia investigation; they are much more potent than whether the candidate believes Trump’s policies discriminate against minorities.

The GOP is most vulnerable on health care costs, which are a universally consuming concern for people. In a [recent national survey](#), 92 percent of registered voters agreed “health care costs are out of control.”⁴ Voters know that Donald Trump promised better, cheaper health care and after three elections promising a change to health care, he and Republicans only took actions that would make health care more expensive and out of reach for more people, especially the sick, elderly and poor people who most need it. They did nothing to reduce the burden for the middle

⁴ National phone survey of 1,000 registered voters conducted by Democracy Corps for the American Federation of Teachers March 25-April 2, 2018.

class seeing their health care increases exceed any wage gains and who live in fear of an unexpected health crisis setting them back even further. Every GOP lawmaker who cast a ballot for or supported the ACA repeal bills should face a reckoning.



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An attack on Republicans for their trickle-down tax cut is a close runner up to the health care attack across the battleground base and swing voters, and the impact of the tax cut will be a central part of the economic message for Democrats (see the new message section below).

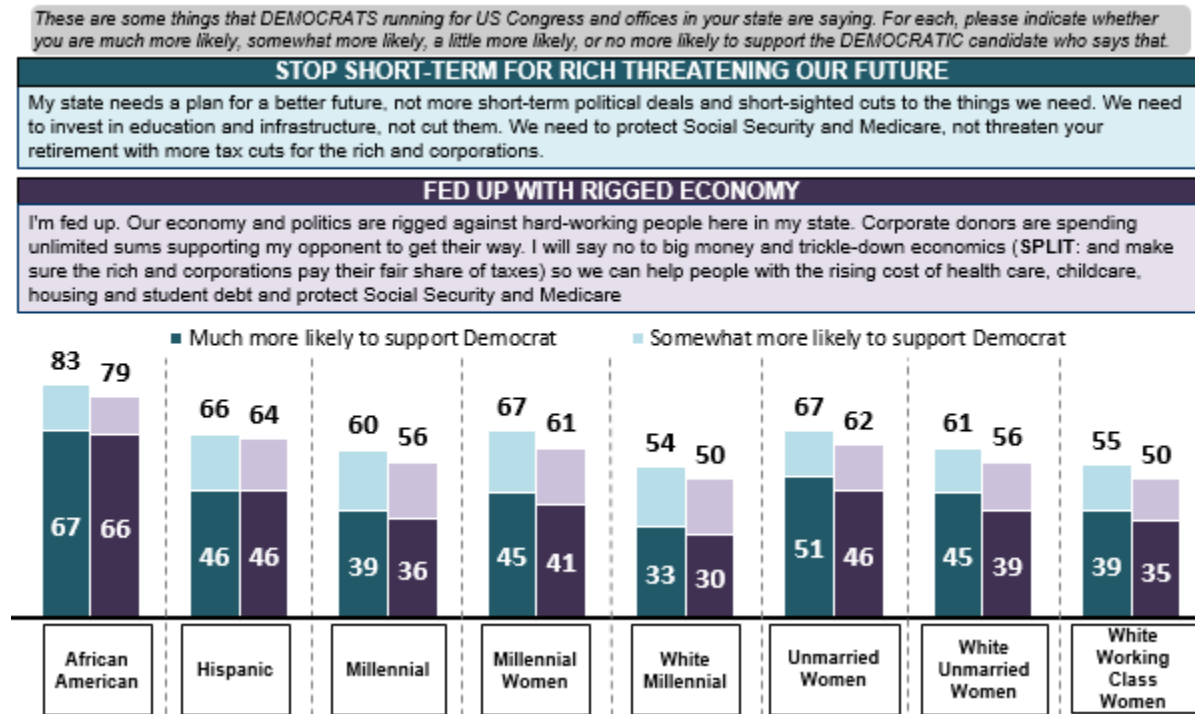
Republican inaction on gun control is an important and strategic attack because it is the top attack among millennials, who lag in enthusiasm compared to every other Democratic base group. Specifically, the gun attack tops all others when the Democratic candidate does not “hedge” by offering their support for the 2nd Amendment. (There was not a significant difference in reception to this attack with other key groups when that language was included.)

New message platform for 2018

After failing for most of the year to produce any major legislative victories, the passage of the tax cut has now increased many voters’ worries that Trump can and will do enduring damage. It is evident that the stakes have been raised in this poll and in focus groups with key voting blocs.

Voters cannot square what they see in their paychecks with the promise of the tax cut. They see the surging deficit and worry that this will all blow up and lead to cuts in Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid that will devastate their lives. They worry that the high price tag will mean

even more dis-investment in education, health care and infrastructure which have been under-funded for the past decade or more. The battles in each of the states only re-enforce the stakes. A message from a Democrat “fed up” with the rigged political and economic system is still popular with Democratic base and swing groups, but the consequences of the deficits produced by the trillions of tax cuts for the rich have shifted their focus and animate an even stronger message for Democrats. This new message dominates with all the base and turnout groups that will decide the outcome in November.



Web-panel of minorities, millennials and white working class women in the battleground.

Conclusion & Recommendations

Real voters are struggling in an economy where wages don’t keep up with rising costs, especially the rising cost of health care, and where voters are not seeing the benefits of the new tax law which adds trillions to the deficit and gives 83 percent of the cuts to the rich. Voters are now consumed with the long-term impact on Social Security and Medicare, on investments for the future and on the immediate reality that their urgent needs like education funding and help with health care will be sacrificed yet again.

In addition to these economic concerns, they are terrified by the threat of gun violence. Across the battleground, Democratic base and swing voters are ready to punish lawmakers who put the gun lobby and politics before passing universal background checks and an assault weapon ban.

POSITIVE MESSAGE:

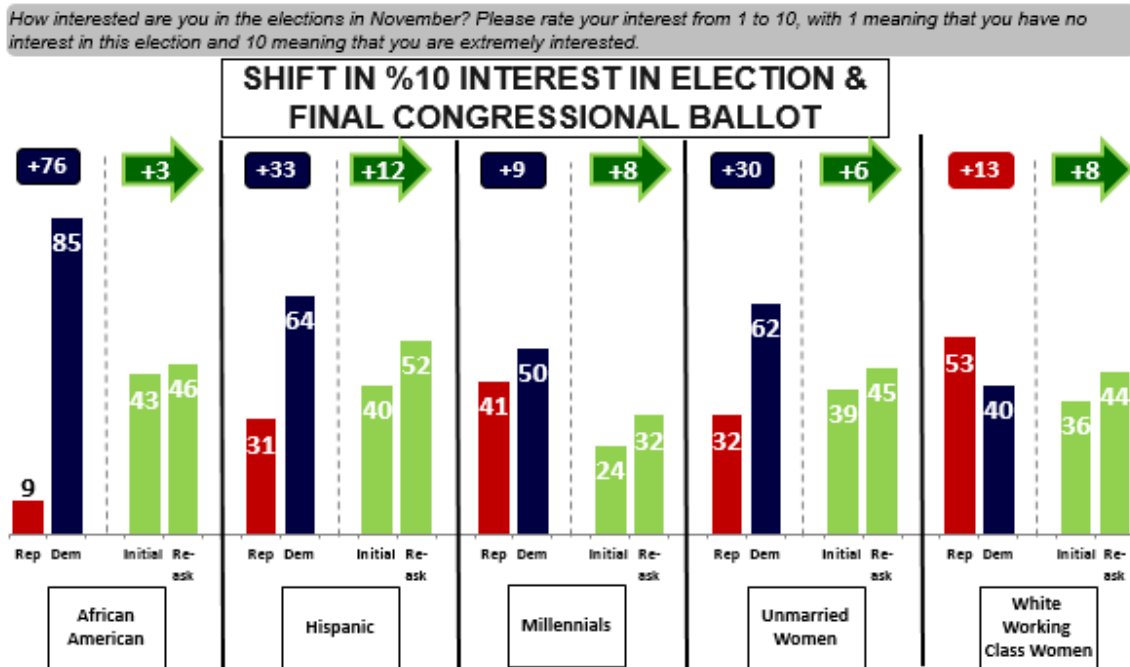
Stop short-term for rich threatening our future: Stop politicians and their huge tax-giveaway to the big corporations and the richest 1% which will blow-up and endanger our future. We need to invest in education and infrastructure, not cut them. We need to protect Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid, not threaten your hard-earned retirement.

ATTACKS ON REPUBLICANS:

1) Enough politics with health care costs: Republicans promised my state better, cheaper health care. Instead they supported plans to massively cut Medicaid, raise prices on older workers, and eliminate protection for pre-existing conditions. Drug and insurance companies even got a new tax cut even though they are still raising prices on us here in my state. Enough politics and broken promises on health care.

2) Enough N.R.A. gun inaction: Sandy Hook, Orlando, Las Vegas, Texas, and now Parkland. For too long Republicans beholden to the NRA gun lobby's campaign contributions have held commonsense gun laws hostage. My opponent is taking donations from the NRA and gun manufacturers and refuses to stand with our children begging for universal background checks and a ban on assault weapons. Enough is enough!

When Democratic base and swing voters hear messaging and attacks that speak to these deep worries, they become even more interested in voting. That is the most important measures on which to shift voters when Democrats are performing so well in the generic ballot. Hispanic voters and millennials make some of the greatest gains in interest.



Web-panel of minorities, millennials and white working class women in the battleground.

Democrats also improve their margins for Democratic congressional candidates among Hispanics by 7-points (+25 to +33) and in the DCCC Battleground Districts by 3-points (+17 to +20). In the Governor's races, these messages and attacks win over independents (+7 to +13 Democrat), persuade white millennial men (+14 to +8 Republican) and consolidate minority millennial women (+60 to +65 Democrat)

We believe that even greater shifts in vote choice are possible when Democrats focus on the recommended message and attacks above all others.