



November 19, 2010

Rebuilding the Change Coalition

Key Demographic Analysis of the 2010 Election

To: The Political and Media Community
From: Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research
Women's Voices. Women Vote Action Fund

In 2006 and 2008, unmarried women helped drive the political change in this country. They not only turned out in record numbers, but voted overwhelmingly for new leadership, supporting Democrats with 65 percent of the vote in 2006 and 69 percent in 2008. In 2010, early evidence does not suggest a drop in turnout, but does show a significant drop in the Democratic margin among unmarried women, mostly driven by older women, who moved with other older whites against the Democrats in this election. The overall drop in turnout among younger voters left unmarried women a much older demographic group this year as well, amplifying the Democratic losses among unmarried seniors.

These voters tell a critical part of the story of 2010. As Democrats determine how to recover politically, they will likely look at white seniors, blue collar voters and voters in the Midwest, and try and figure out a way to become more viable among independents. It is equally important that they figure out how to rebuild support among voters critical to their success in 2006 and 2008. Looking at recent vote history, these unmarried voters represent the shortest step toward a more competitive electoral outcome.

This step is not uncharted ground. Due to the same funding issues affecting other engagement groups, the 2010 Women's Voices. Women Vote Action Fund program did not involve the same scale it did in 2008, but this program did prove tremendously effective. In terms of both developing the right message for "change coalition voters" and in reaching and turning out voters who maintained their progressive values on Election Day.

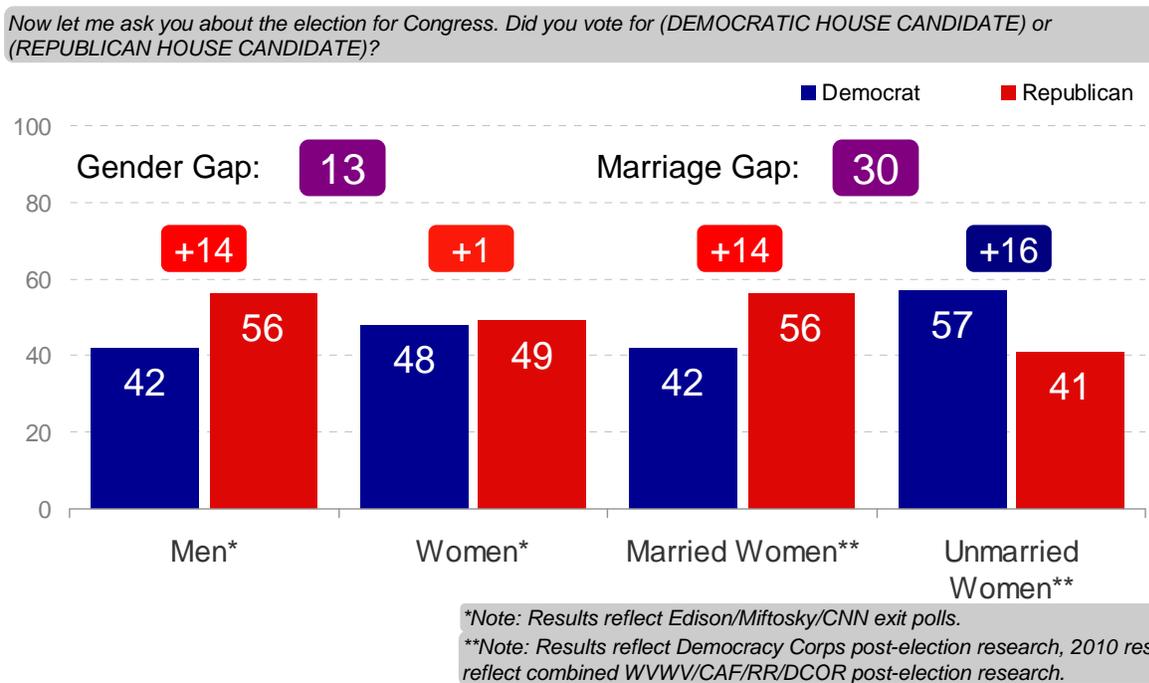
The data in this memo comes from a post-election survey of 2010 voters taken November 1st through 3rd, commissioned by the Women's Voices. Women Vote Action Fund. Where possible, it draws from two other post-election surveys sponsored by Democracy Corps and the Campaign for America's Future, as well as a bi-partisan survey conducted by Democracy Corps and Resurgent Republic. The total number of records in the combined data base is 2,587.

Marriage Gap Remains a Dominant Political Dynamic

Late in the 2010 election cycle, Democrats began to look at women as a lifeline, hoping the gender gap would help them overcome a difficult political environment. In the end, a sizable gender gap emerged, but Democrats still lost women by a one point (48 to 49 percent) margin and lost white women by a 58 to 39 percent margin.¹ Even if every male voter in the country stayed home on Election Day, Democrats would have still lost the popular House vote.

Yet, marital status is a far more powerful predictor of vote preference than gender. Indeed, overall, the marriage gap—the difference in margin between unmarried women and married women—on this Election Day was more than twice as large as the gender gap.

Figure 1: The 2010 Gender and Marriage Gaps



Importantly, this marriage gap persisted up and down the electorate demographically. While Democrats lost unmarried white women, they still did far better among unmarried white women than among married white women, who were not even competitive in 2010. Only among seniors did the marriage gap disappear.

¹ Results based on 2010 CNN Exit survey of 17,504 2010 voters.

Figure 2: The Marriage Gap within Subgroups

	Unmarried women (Dem-Rep)	Married women (Dem-Rep)	Marriage gap
Total	57-41	42-56	30
White	45-53	34-63	21
Under Age 50	68-30	42-54	50
Age 50 and over	51-48	42-57	18
White age 50 and over	43-56	35-63	15
White senior	34-64	35-64	1
College grad	56-43	40-57	30
Non-college	58-40	42-55	31
White college grad	46-52	36-62	20
White non-college	45-54	32-65	24

Note: Results reflect Democracy Corps post-election research, 2010 results reflect combined WVVV/CAF/RR/DCOR post-election research.

In fact, going all the way back to 1992, the marriage gap has always exceeded the gender gap, often by multiples of two or three.

The RAE Underperforms

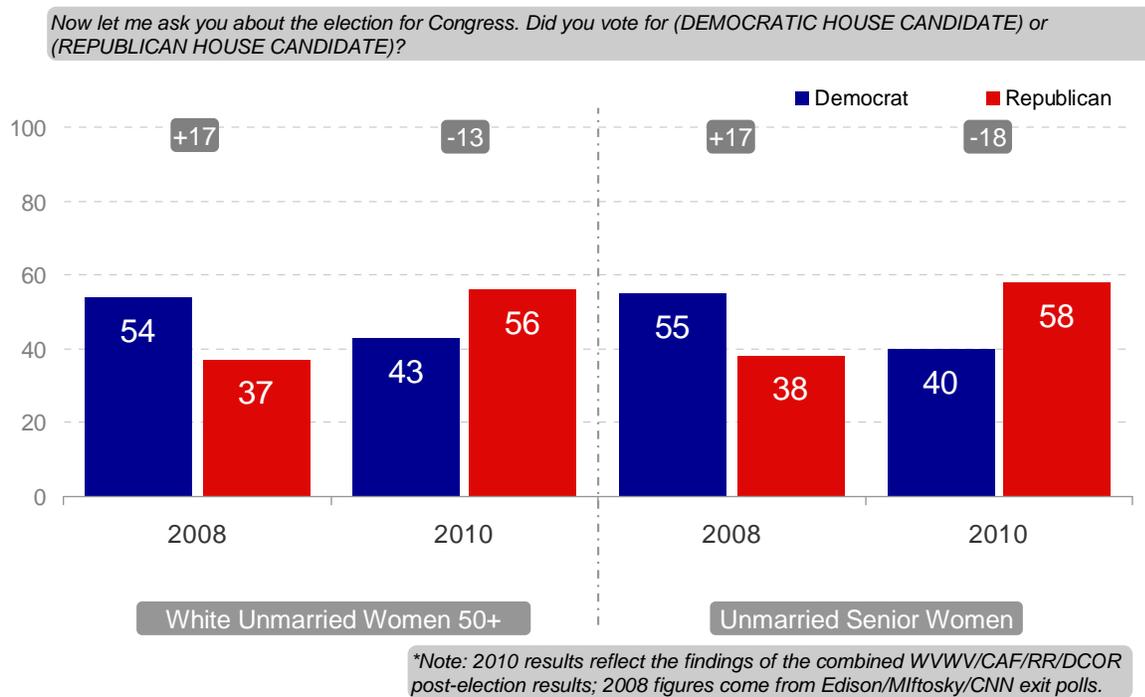
Throughout this election year, the Women's Voices. Women Vote Action Fund, in partnership with Democracy Corps, tracked the engagement of the Rising American Electorate (RAE), a coalition of progressive voters including unmarried women, youth and people of color. These voters represent a majority of the voting age population in this country and because of their demographic growth, have the power to set the political direction of this country. This research warned of dangerous signals for Democrats among these voters, both in their level of interest in participating in the 2010 elections and in the size of the margins for Democratic candidates.

In the end, the actual result was mixed for progressives. African American and Latino voters generally held for the Democrats. Turnout among Latinos and unmarried women was stable, but there was a significant drop in youth and African American turnout compared to 2008, but comparable to 2006.²

² Turnout estimates based on national exit survey and post-election surveys; these will need to be updated when the Census issues its report next year.

The bigger change was that Democrats lost appreciable support among both unmarried women and younger voters. Exploring unmarried women in more detail, we find that younger unmarried women (between the ages of 18 and 29) delivered a very strong margin for Democrats in 2010 (73 percent voted for the Democratic candidate, 24 percent for the Republican candidate). This exceeds young unmarried women’s support for Democrats in 2006 (63 to 32 percent among unmarried women under 40) and in 2008 (67 to 26 percent among unmarried women ages 18-29).³ Among younger white unmarried women, Democrats still managed a 55 to 39 percent margin; this is down somewhat from 2008, but no different from 2006 (53 to 39 percent Democratic). Problems emerged among older unmarried women, particularly older white unmarried women. Among unmarried women age 65 and older, for example, Democratic support dropped from 60 percent in 2006, to 55 percent in 2008 to 40 percent in 2010.

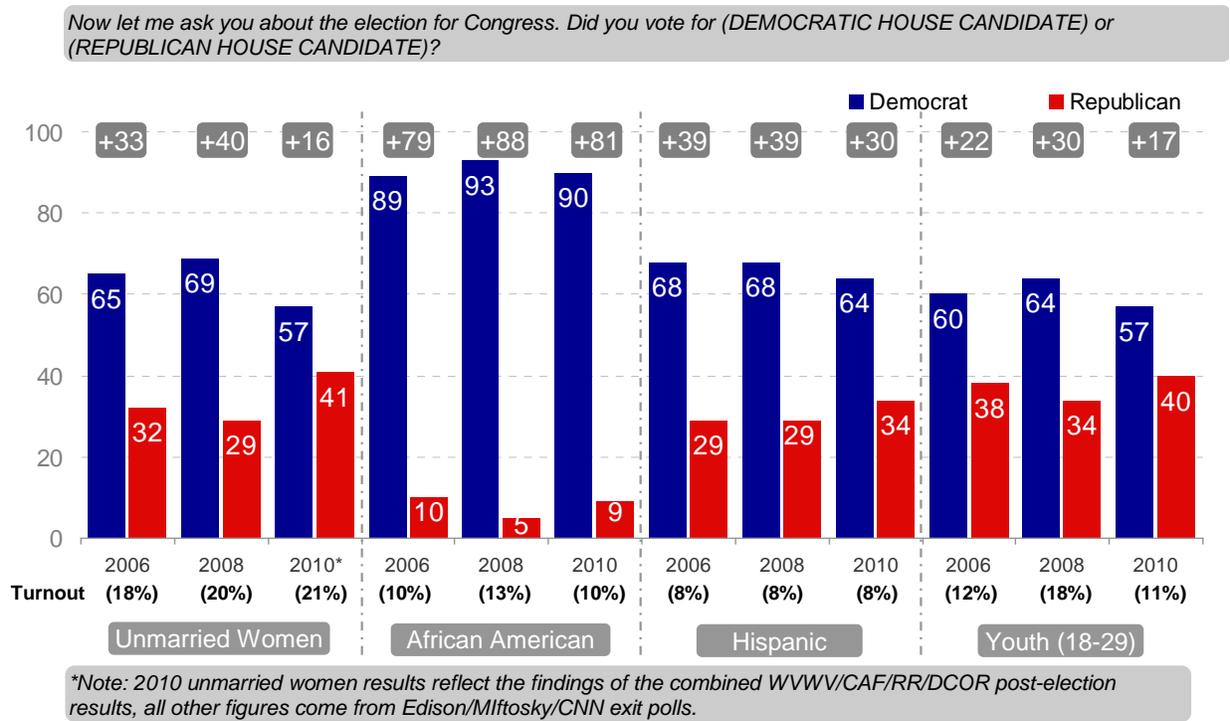
Figure 3: Significant Decline in Support among Older Unmarried Women



The drop in youth turnout further undermined the Democratic margin among white unmarried women. In 2008, a majority of white unmarried women were under age 50; in 2010, this number slipped to 38 percent.

³ 2006 and 2008 results based on Democracy Corps Post-Election surveys.

Figure 4: Decline in Democratic Base Margins



An Alternative Outcome?

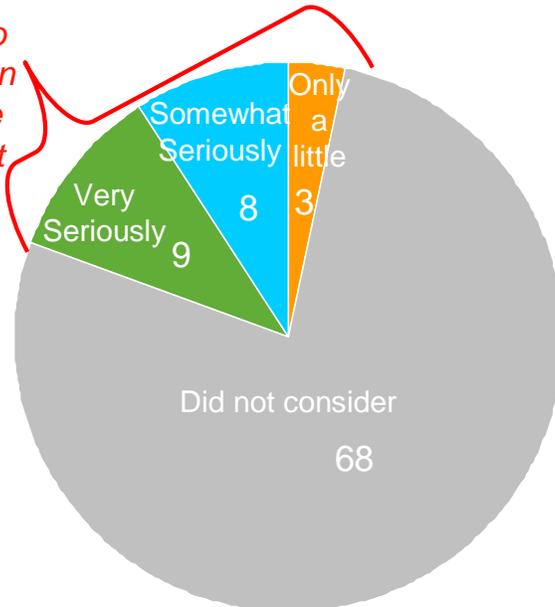
Democrats could have performed better among RAE voters. RAE voters, who supported Republicans, were amenable to Democratic outreach and the WVWVAF successfully targeted those voters. WVWVAF’s 2010 programs produced far more new voters and gave bigger margins to Democratic candidates.

Altogether, one in five voters in the RAE who ultimately voted Republican considered voting for the Democrat. This number is consistent with the number of “waverers” among non-RAE voters (19 percent). Among young people, the number climbs to 28 percent. Had some of these voters moved into the Democratic column, this years results would have been much closer to 2008 or 2006 levels of support.

Figure 5: Waverers a Missed Opportunity

(ONLY ASKED OF NON-DEM VOTERS) Think back in time for a minute. Did you, at any point in this campaign, think about voting for (The Democratic Candidate) for Congress?

RAE voters who voted Republican who could have voted Democrat



Note: Results reflect WVWV National Post Election research.

Moreover, RAE voters also broke fairly late in the election cycle, at least relative to non-RAE voters. Indeed, 34 percent say they did not make up their mind on whom to support until a week out or later, compared to just 27 percent among non-RAE voters. The youth vote was particularly volatile.

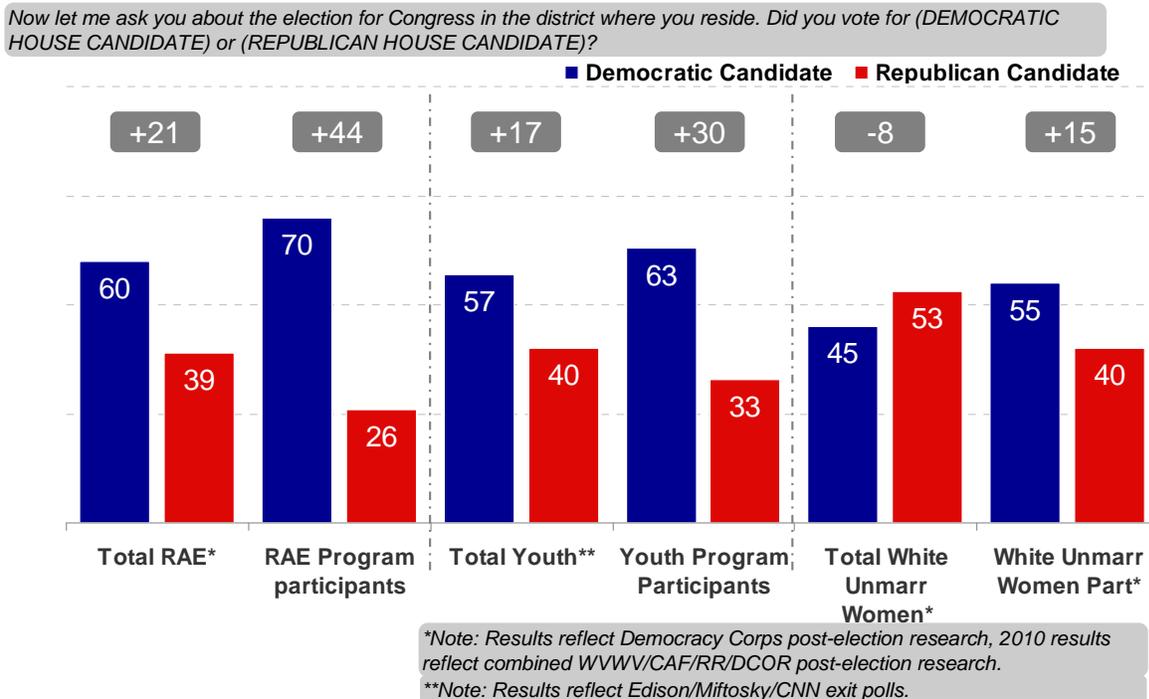
The most compelling data, however, emerges in the post-election survey of WVWVAF program participants.⁴ These are voters carefully modeled to assure a sense of shared progressive values. These voters' recall of the 2010 outreach is impressive. All told, 62 percent remember getting something from the Voter Participation Center urging them to register and vote this year.⁵

The overall Democratic vote among these RAE voters reaches 70 percent, or what it was in the progressive wave of 2008. Nationally white unmarried women supported Republicans in the 2010 election; among program participants, white unmarried women voted Democratic.

⁴ Program participants are voters who responded in some fashion to WVWV or WVWVAF registration and GOTV efforts.

⁵ The Voter Participation Center, a project of Women's Voices. Women Vote, works to study ways to encourage voting and to increase participation in the electorate. The Voter Participation Center is a non-partisan, non-profit organization that does not support any candidate.

Figure 6: Participants Show 2010 Margins Approaching those of 2008



Drilling down deeper into specific programs, in the WVVVAF vote by mail program, Democrats enjoyed a whopping 82 to 14 percent margin. Only among African American voters will Democrats find a deeper sense of shared progressive values. The success of the WVVVAF outreach suggests that a targeted effort to reach these voters could have meant the difference in close races.

In an election that saw only 3 percent of voters voting for the first time, the WVVVAF program also found success turning out new voters. Indeed, 27 percent of program participants voted for the first time in 2010.

Can You Hear Me Now?

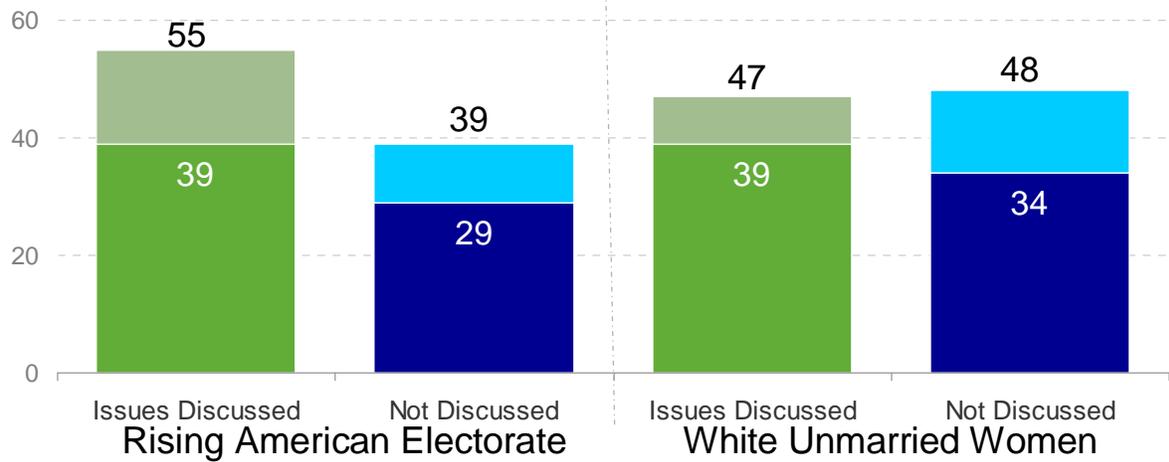
In 2008, voters in the RAE believed their vote mattered, their issues were addressed and their voices were heard. These convictions were strained in 2010, as a significant percentage of RAE voters, particularly those voters who drifted from Democrats, believed their concerns – primarily economic - were not discussed. While not a majority, a significant number of voters, including RAE voters did not believe their issues were addressed in this campaign. Most strikingly, this number is higher among white unmarried women and older unmarried women who defected from the Democrats this election cycle.

Figure 7: The 2010 Campaigns Did Not Reach Some

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

Statement 1: This year, I felt like the issues I really cared about were talked about in the campaign.

Statement 2: This year, I did not feel like the issues I really cared about were talked about in the campaign.



Note: Results reflect WVWV National Post Election research.

Even more so than voters overall, RAE voters were frustrated by the partisan bickering they saw in Washington and the belief that Democrats and Obama were more focused on Wall Street than on average people. Regardless of who, in fact, is responsible for this “bickering,” this sentiment typically redounds against the incumbent party.

Figure 8: Voters (especially RAE voters) Most Upset about Party Bickering

Which TWO of the following were you most upset about on what was happening with elected officials in Washington?

	All Voters	RAE	White Unmarried Women
Too much political party bickering	39	47	53
Too much spending, taxes and deficits	35	27	32
Too liberal	24	18	21
Forgot people and out of touch	19	14	19
Not focused on economy	18	23	14
For rich and Wall Street, not regular people	17	24	24
With lobbyists and corrupt	15	9	6
Too much extreme conservatism	13	14	13
(Other)	6	8	16
(Not upset)	3	4	0
(Don't know/refused)	5	5	3

**Note: Data reflect the results of the CAF/DCOR 2010 post-election survey of 897 voters.*

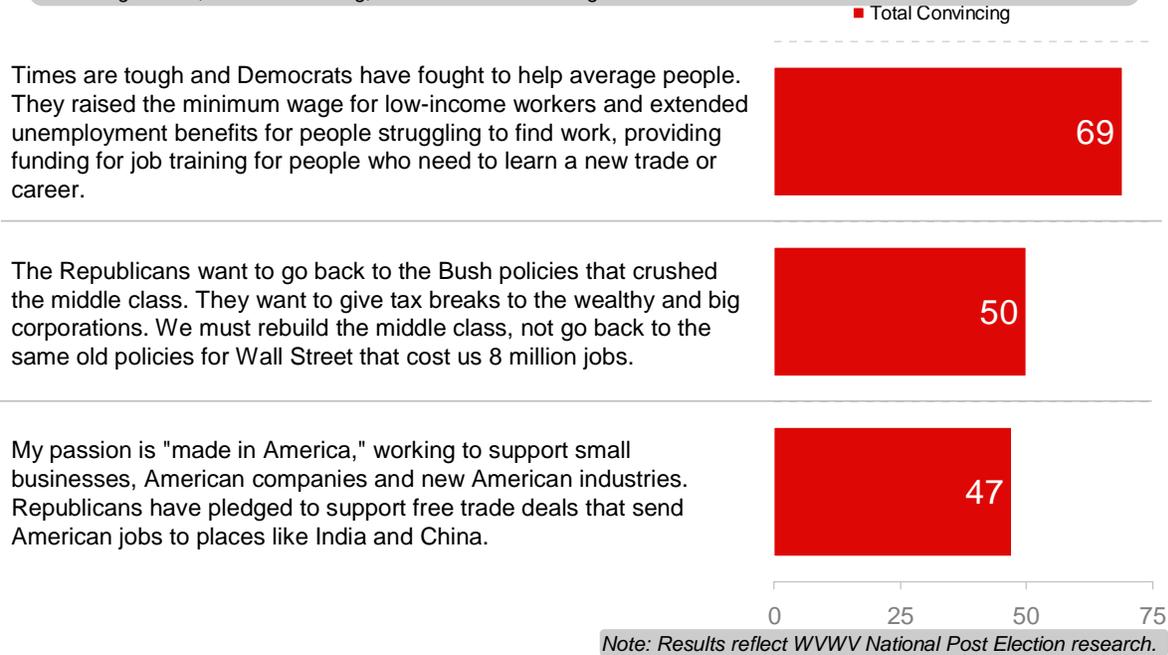
Could anything have been said to change these impressions?

In the 2010 election cycle, WWVAF and Greenberg Quinlan Rosner developed messaging to address these concerns. This messaging was tested in focus groups, surveys and in a real-world mail tests involving pre- and post-survey work. Coming out of the 2010 election cycle, this messaging remains the most powerful among RAE voters, including those RAE voters (older white unmarried women and youth) whose Democratic margins dropped in this election.

This messaging is very simple: **people are hurting and they need help**. Voters in the RAE, who are disproportionately economically stressed, react to policies that have a direct impact on their own lives. Big policy debates that do not have a tangible impact on their lives are far less relevant in their decision-making. Sadly, many of the big Democratic debates around stimulus and healthcare did not translate into tangible benefits for many financially stressed voters. This messaging, moreover, is much more powerful than the “do not go back to Bush” frame used by national Democrats near the end of the 2010 cycle.

Figure 9: Successful Message Frames among RAE

Let me describe some themes that were raised by Democratic candidates in this election. For each one, please tell me how convincing a reason it was to vote for a candidate who said this -- was it a very convincing reason, a somewhat convincing reason, a little convincing, or not at all a convincing reason to vote for them?



Next steps:

- The first step to rebuilding the progressive coalition is listening. A fair number of RAE voters did not believe their issues were addressed in this election or, at least, did not see those issues addressed in a fashion that seemed relevant to what was going on around them. They want their lives to improve and want to hear from policy makers advancing programs that have a reasonable chance of helping them, and people like them, directly.
- A bolder, more populist framework will also find traction here and the next Congress will likely afford many opportunities to contrast a progressive vision centered on the middle class with a conservative narrative defined by supply-side economics and spending cuts. By a 60 to 34 percent margin, RAE voters prefer the statement, “I want somebody in Washington who will fight big corporate special deals and work for the middle class and American jobs,” over a statement stressing deficit reduction.
- Progressives need to step up efforts to engage these voters directly. In 2008, Women’s Voices. Women’s Vote and the Women’s Voices. Women’s Vote Action Fund successfully contacted 20 million voters in the RAE; in 2010, due to funding, they were only able to contact about 5 million. Other programs in the engagement community suffered from a similar loss of funding. The result, from the collapse in turnout among youth to the issues of margin, is apparent for all to see.