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## **Registering women in the RAE: what are you waiting for?** Findings from March and April 2019 Focus Groups

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With voters turning out at historic levels in 2018 and people now following politics more closely than at any point in the past, WWVAF asked us whether progressives should start working to register unregistered and low propensity voters? It usually conducts its registration programs with the Rising American Electorate in the Fall of the odd year before the election.<sup>1</sup>

The answer for the women is resoundingly, yes. They are already politicized, engaged by President Trump, and looking for how to bring change.

Listening to these unregistered or low propensity African American women, Hispanic women, white unmarried women, and white millennial women tells us quickly they are so engaged early in reaction to President Trump:

- Trump has raised the stakes and you know elections and your vote matter.
- Trump's in-your-face style and over-claiming tweets force them to pay attention.
- 100 new women being elected in reaction to Trump says change is possible.
- Claims of "greatest economy" is hurting Republicans, particularly as people are struggling financially, while corrupt politicians take care of the richest.
- Trump's divisiveness is elevating their desire for greater unity.
- There is a new millennial consciousness – shaping the reaction to Trump.

We are in a unique time when every time Trump tweets to argue his case, he produces a backlash in the RAE that motivates them to register and vote.

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<sup>1</sup> Democracy Corps conducted a series of seven focus groups among unregistered eligible members of the Rising American Electorate or registered voters who had not voted in 2018 and 2016: white millennial men and African American women in Charlotte, NC on March 4<sup>th</sup> 2019, white unmarried women in Phoenix, AZ on March 5<sup>th</sup>, and white millennial women and African American men in Atlanta, GA on March 6<sup>th</sup>. Two additional groups were conducted among white millennial women and Hispanic women in Phoenix, AZ on April 15<sup>th</sup> 2019. Research of this nature traditionally is done partly for VPC and partly for WWVAF using appropriate allocation methods.

**1. President Trump’s election has raised the stakes and given people a reason to get involved.** The damage that Donald Trump has done has raised the stakes and these women now have a very clear reason to register and vote: “Change is needed, and a new president is needed.” (African American woman, Charlotte)

Think about whose hands our lives are in and what can happen if the current president gets back in office. We need to elect candidates that are great for not only our country but our local cities and counties. (African American woman, Charlotte)

We need to make a difference and let our voices be heard to change some of the decisions that were put in place these past few years by voting for a better candidate. (African American woman, Charlotte)

Everything that's going on, I kinda want to stop complaining about it, and I want to vote and really, I just want change. I think it's time. (Hispanic woman, Phoenix)

Importantly, many of these RAE reported they failed to participate in the past because they felt their “vote would not have a difference,” but many now believed it was possible for people to come together and change the direction of the country by voting:

If you currently do not like what is happening, then vote to make that change. We the people collectively can make the change. (White unmarried woman, Phoenix)

If you want change to happen you have to have a voice. Don’t just vote, start writing letters. Don’t just vote. (Hispanic women)

**2. President Trump and his tweets remind the RAE every day what they hate about him – the divisiveness, overreach, exaggeration, arrogance, pettiness, inability to be presidential, and partisanship.** Just showing four of Trump’s tweets hurt Trump and the Republicans and got them more involved.



The tweet that upset the RAE women most was one that claimed, “*Republicans have created the best economy in the HISTORY of our Country – and the hottest jobs market on planet earth. The Democrat Agenda is a Socialist Nightmare. The Republicans Agenda is the AMERICAN DREAM! Vote.GOP.*”

Some found this characterization of the economy incredibly out of touch: “he’s too boastful some of the stuff he does he just over exaggerates some of his stuff. It’s just not needed,” explained one African

American woman. The Hispanic women hated it. But most focused on how inappropriate, over the top, and divisive this tweet is.

Numb. The garbage talking is so heavy on both sides. (White unmarried woman, Phoenix)

I feel like it was inappropriate. He didn't think it through, he wasn't advised properly or whatever. (White unmarried woman, Phoenix)

Why would somebody be so angry to say that? (White unmarried woman, Phoenix)

One, it seems very immature. It's like boys against girls or it just seemed varied of mix or it makes our nation divided, which is why I think that it's - seems upsetting to me when it's you know, like, basically you're against each other. [...] That seems really weird for a president to tweet. (White millennial woman, Atlanta)

The labeling of Democrats as socialists was thought to be “hyperbole” and not taken seriously at all.

These tweets reinforce the greatest doubts about Donald Trump: he “encourages hate” and “leads and supports” separation instead of bringing us together and lifting us up. They do not trust him to be unbiased and to treat people equally and they said he was racist, homophobic, and sexist.

Second, they considered Trump an “immature” “bully” who “acts like a spoiled child” or a “bully.” Third, they worried Trump is “not mentally equipped to be our leader.” Finally, they said he was “power hungry” and “selfish” and is not “putting Americans’ best interests at heart.” Each time Trump tweets, he reinforces all of these concerns.

Progressives should appreciate this incredibly unique situation. What the opponent considers to be his best arguments reinforce voters’ greatest doubts about him and remind them why they want change. The opponent making his own case actually motivates his opposition and dismays his supporters.

**3. The House of Representatives with over 100 newly elected women.** Progressives have totally underestimated the RAE’s level of excitement for this new Congress and its over 100 newly elected women. Simply asking for the first word of phrase that comes to mind when they think about “*The House of Representatives with over 100 newly elected women which is now controlled by the Democratic Party*” produced animated reactions among not just the RAE women, but also the white millennial men who are “optimistic” and have “high hopes” as well. They believe that this is the right kind of change and that more women will make Congress more effective.

It’s progress, it's moving in a good direction. (White millennial woman, Atlanta)

I’m clapping. (White millennial woman, Atlanta)

It sounds good. Democrats are women, I like it. (White unmarried woman, Phoenix)

Yeah I am glad to see there is more women and I hope that they actually dismantle the boys club brick by brick and get in there and really do what needs to be done. It’s time. (White unmarried woman, Phoenix)

I think it’s great. Change is good. (White unmarried woman, Phoenix)

Amazing. (African American woman, Charlotte)

It's about time. (African American woman, Charlotte)

Progress. (Hispanic woman, Phoenix)

It's a good thing. To me it is. (Hispanic woman, Phoenix)

They hope that "Girls are gonna get it together and get stuff done." (White unmarried woman, Phoenix)

**4. Trump is dividing, and they want the country to transcend it.** There is a palpable feeling that the country is divided. "That was the biggest thing that I feel like is happening right now," explained one white millennial woman, "We're very divided and that's causing more problems than there should be. It's almost like drama."

Trump and his tweets are believed to be stoking this division, as the reactions to his tweets above illustrated.

I hate the way we're kinda - we're in chaos and there's a lot of division right now. I mean, there's always gonna be division but I think now it's even more so than has been in the past with any other president. (White millennial woman, Atlanta)

I feel like there's always been violence but since he's been president, I feel like it's more- I feel like there's a lot more violence going on. (Hispanic woman, Phoenix)

We tested a number of frames from a Democratic candidate for president, and the best testing frame was one that talked about overcoming hate and division. It acknowledged that "*powerful forces are trying to sow hate and division among us*" and called for a return to the American values of "*we, the people*" over "*us versus them*."

It has reached a point that many white RAE expressed reluctance to discuss politics with their friends and families. One white unmarried woman from Phoenix said that she was more likely to talk about political issues with "a stranger on a bus, somebody you're never going to meet again," than with a family member. Many white RAE reported they were reluctant to state their positions on social media as well, for fear of alienating a client or coworker:

I'm a real estate agent, if I have position online, that's the difference between me making a check or not. (White unmarried woman, Phoenix)

I would say I do not ever speak of any hot topics on social media. I feel everything you put on the internet is there forever and I think professionally anything that you put out there, can come back to bite you. (White millennial woman, Atlanta)

**5. The anti-corporate mood and wages and costs leaving people on the edge.** Because Trump so often talks about how great the economy is, progressives must never forget how much that conflicts with the lived experience of ordinary people.

Simply asking for a word or phrase to describe their reaction when the moderator said “wages not keeping up with the cost of living” produced a reaction strong enough to remind you just how much they are living on the edge.

Times are hard. (African American woman, Charlotte)

I need a second job. (African American woman, Charlotte)

Stressful. (African American woman, Charlotte)

Terrifying. (White unmarried woman, Phoenix)

It seems like they give you [in one place] and then take it from another. There is no increase. (White unmarried woman, Phoenix)

It's far off. (White millennial woman, Atlanta)

It's very scary. It's very scary. (Hispanic woman, Phoenix)

Most of the RAE targets we interviewed described a near crisis in their finances. The crisis is a long-term crisis as well, as there was tremendous concern that the cost of living was preventing them from being able to save enough to retire one day, and some participants described how their rent had been increasing while their paychecks had not.

The millennial women in particular expressed deep concern about college affordability and their student loan debt. One white millennial woman called her loan debt “an endless cycle” and another said she felt she was starting “five steps behind” as a result of her loans.

These voters are also in a deeply anti-corporate mood as evidenced by their forceful, negative reactions to CEOs, pharmaceutical companies, and money and politics. “Nothing that doesn't include four letter words,” comes to mind, said one white unmarried woman from Phoenix. CEO's are “shady,” “greedy,” and “not paying their people.” Pharmaceutical companies are “despicable,” “money hungry,” and “prey on people.” “They're getting doctors to push pills” and “now we have an opioid addiction,” said one Hispanic woman. Politicians are “corrupt” and “not about the people they claim to represent” and money and politics are like “peanut butter and jelly.”

**6. Millennial consciousness.** The RAE was aware that the millennials – those born in 1980 or later – are driving a lot of the resistance to Trump. Millennials of all races were aware of their distinctive role. One millennial woman just out of college said that she and others in her generation were more interested in politics now as a result of it becoming cool to support Bernie Sanders on campus in 2016.

Some of the non-millennial RAE we spoke to mentioned that their children were pushing them to get involved to make a change. “My son, he's very, we gotta change the world, mom. It all starts with you, it all starts with us, we've gotta - how is it going to change if you don't,” explained one white unmarried woman. One millennial woman in Atlanta was talking more about issues to her mother: “The bigger part of my family is probably more conservative, but my mom, my small part [of the family], a lot of the big issues, lately, I've really brought up more conversations than I used to.”

Finally, many young mothers were starting to see how important it was for them to take action to leave a better world for their children: “I have kids and I’d rather my kids grow up in a, you know, a friendly world.” (Hispanic woman, Phoenix).

Climate change was mentioned much more than in the past.

Older white Trump voters were also aware of the role that millennials play. In focus groups with Trump voters last summer, Democracy Corps heard these defensive Trump voters complain about the generational divide in their families, communities, and workplaces as younger people confronted them about their politically incorrect views and support of Trump.

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These are extraordinary times that are producing a level of engagement unseen before. It is a reaction to President Trump that forces people to be engaged with an emerging political consciousness. It is ironic, but President Trump is motivating the Rising American Electorate and doing the critical message work for us. Timing is everything. As President Trump becomes more divisive and over-the-top in his claims, the base reacts with a call for unity, a bigger role for women and millennials.

That is why it is critical to pay close attention and be opportunistic in the critical battle to change the direction of the country. The RAE base understand the stakes.