

Date: March 25, 2013

To: Friends of Democracy Corps and Women's Voices. Women Vote Action Fund, and the Voter Participation Center

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The Urgent Policy Agenda for Unmarried Women **Unmarried women focused on critical economic issues**

Less than a week after Paul Ryan released his latest budget—which would slash funding for Medicare, Medicaid, food stamps, and child care—Republicans released a new report announcing that they will try harder to connect with young voters, minorities, and women.

We know something about young people, minorities and unmarried women (which we call the Rising American Electorate). And we know that Paul Ryan's budget has little to do with their priorities. To find out how these voters are thinking about the policy agenda and the future, Greenberg Quinlan Rosner, along with Democracy Corps, Women's Voices. Women Vote Action Fund, and the Voter Participation Center¹ conducted a national survey of 950 voters in the 2012 election, half of whom were reached via cell phones.²

The survey results are clear. If the GOP—or anyone—wants to connect with the Rising American Electorate, they need to understand their real priorities, which include social insurance benefits, child care, and investment in jobs and education – in other words, the same programs that would be slashed under the Ryan budget plan. This is an inauspicious beginning for the re-invented Republican Party.

What Paul Ryan and Republicans have fundamentally missed is that these voters depend on these programs in the present and require them for the future. Paul Ryan seems to have no sense of the real pocketbook economy in which these voters live every day. Members of the Rising American Electorate are 7 points more likely than average to report that they or someone in their family lost health insurance and 8 points more likely than average to report that they have moved in with a relative or had someone move in with them to save money.

These voters, especially the unmarried women who formed almost a quarter of the electorate and were critical to President Obama's success in the 2012 election, are on the edge financially and face

¹ The Voter Participation Center's role in this project relates only to policy research for RAE outreach and education

² This memo is based on a phone survey of 950 2012 voters nationwide conducted by Greenberg Quinlan Rosner for Democracy Corps and Women's Voices. Women Vote Action Fund and the Voter Participation Center from March 9-12, 2013. Unless otherwise noted, margin of error is +/-3.18 percentage points at 95 percent confidence.

pocketbook-level pressures every day. These women are totally focused on the economic policies that would help to ease working families' fiscal pressures.

Key findings:

- **The economy is still very tough.** Nearly 6 in 10 give the economy a negative rating and pocketbook-level indicators have not improved. More than half of the Rising American Electorate reports major spending cuts at the grocery store and almost 40 percent have had to move in with family or had someone move in to save money.
- **Voters are deeply concerned about the sequester cuts – both personally and for the country.** More than three-quarters of the RAE and 71 percent of all voters fear the cuts will affect the country in a negative way.
- **Republicans have just released their 2012 “autopsy” but have a lot of ground to make up with voters.** In this survey, two-thirds of all voters disapprove of the Republican Congress and almost half give negative ratings to John Boehner and the Republican Party.
- **Democrats have a strong early lead on Republicans in the generic Congressional vote – up 4 points among likely 2014 voters.** While voters have soured on Washington in general, Republicans have borne the brunt of voters' anger.
- **But despite a lead in the vote, support for Democrats among the RAE and unmarried women has declined since November.** RAE support has dropped from a 33-point margin in November to a 26-point margin now. And among unmarried women, the margin has dropped net 13 points—from a 36-point margin in November to a 23-point margin now. Additionally, these voters are less engaged overall—in terms of interest and intention to vote.
- **Unmarried women feel that their priorities are not being addressed.** Almost 6 in 10 unmarried women do not feel the national political debate is raising issues important to them, which include social insurance benefits, childcare, and economic support.
- **Democrats can re-engage unmarried women, whose participation will be critical in 2014.** They are moved by a working women's agenda – including education, support for women-owned small businesses, raising the minimum wage, child care, pay equity, and paid sick leave.
- **The working women's policy framework increases unmarried women's support for Democrats, 11 points higher than their current vote, and much stronger than when the policy framework is focused on women's preventive health issues.**
- **There is work to do emphasizing the benefits of the new health care reform law.** Unmarried women are largely unaware of the health care law's benefits and not seeing its gains. Fifty-five percent of unmarried women think it's too early to tell how the health care law will affect them.

The Economy

Voters' perceptions of the economy, as well as their own economic experiences, remain very tough 45 months into the "recovery." Just 26 percent give the economy a warm rating (down from a high of 33 percent in November. Well over half (56 percent) still give the economy a negative rating.

An overwhelming majority of voters say that the economy is not working for them. Nearly two-thirds (65 percent) say that the economy is not beginning to benefit working people and the middle class. This is not speculative; it is grounded in lived experiences. These voters do not report any improvements in their own personal economies. A fifth say that they or their families have fallen behind on mortgage payments—unchanged since the peak of the housing crisis. A quarter report losing health insurance coverage—unchanged in over 2 years and higher than when we began tracking this metric in 2010. More than a third (35 percent) report that they or someone in their immediate family has lost a job in the last year—the same as when we began tracking in 2010. Strikingly, almost half of respondents report that they have had to cut back at the grocery store and 31 percent report sharing intergenerational housing in order to make ends meet.

Many of these challenges have hit the Rising American Electorate especially hard. More than 50 percent of the RAE has made major changes to their buying habits at the grocery store, and almost 40 percent of these voters have had to move in with family or had someone move in with them to save money.

The Sequester and Politics in Washington

Voters are deeply concerned about the impact of the sequester cuts – both for themselves personally and for the country. Seventy-one percent of all voters are worried the cuts will affect the country in a negative way and three-quarters (76 percent) of the Rising American Electorate are concerned about the impact the cuts might have on the country.

They've already felt the impact of dysfunction in Washington in their own lives. More than half (55 percent) of voters report they have suffered the payroll tax increase and a fifth (20 percent) report receiving reduced benefits for unemployment and child care, including 23 percent of the Rising American Electorate and 22 percent of unmarried women.

In that context, voters give negative ratings to almost all parties and politicians in Washington, especially Republicans in Congress. Barack Obama's approval rating has dropped from its post-election high of 54 percent down to 48 percent. But Republicans in Congress are the true target of voters' frustrations with Washington. Just 27 percent give John Boehner a positive rating and almost half (47 percent) give him a negative rating. A similar 45 percent give the Republican Party a negative rating and 46 percent give the Republican Congress a negative rating.

As a result, Democrats have a strong early lead on Republicans in the generic Congressional vote – up 4 points among likely 2014 voters.

But despite a lead in the vote, Democrats have lost ground with the voters who put them there—and whose turnout and performance will likely decide the makeup of the Congress in 2014. At this point, Democrats should be well aware of what happens when the Rising American Electorate of unmarried women, minorities, and young people disengages. These voters turned out for Democrats in 2008 and 2012 but dropped off in 2010. Securing their turnout and support must be the central mission for the Democratic Party over the next year.

While the Rising American Electorate on the whole currently produces the same margin for Democrats in 2014 as they did in 2012 (+26), this is driven by increased support among young people and Latinos. Overall, engagement among the Rising American Electorate trails the average and unmarried women's support for Democrats has dropped significantly (9 points), from a 32-point margin in November to 23 points now.

Among RAE voters who voted in 2012, just 70 percent report that they are almost certain to vote in 2014, compared to 81 percent of voters not in the Rising American Electorate. The number is startlingly low among young voters—just 63 percent of whom report that they are almost certain to vote in 2014.

And just half of RAE voters now report that they are interested in following news about politics and the election, compared to 61 percent of those not in the Rising American Electorate. Engagement is particularly low among unmarried women (only 41 percent of whom report they are extremely or very interested in following news about politics and the election) and young people (42 percent of whom report they are extremely or very interested). This early engagement gap should provide a warning for Democrats, whose fortunes will very likely depend on these voters' turnout and engagement.

Working Women's policy agenda moves unmarried women

The drop in engagement and performance for Democrats among unmarried women is driven by a pretty pointed critique that the political debate in Washington has not focused on the issues that are most important to them. Almost 6 in 10 unmarried women do not feel the national political debate is raising issues important to working and single women.

A lot more room for leaders to pursue these issues – especially those important to working and single women

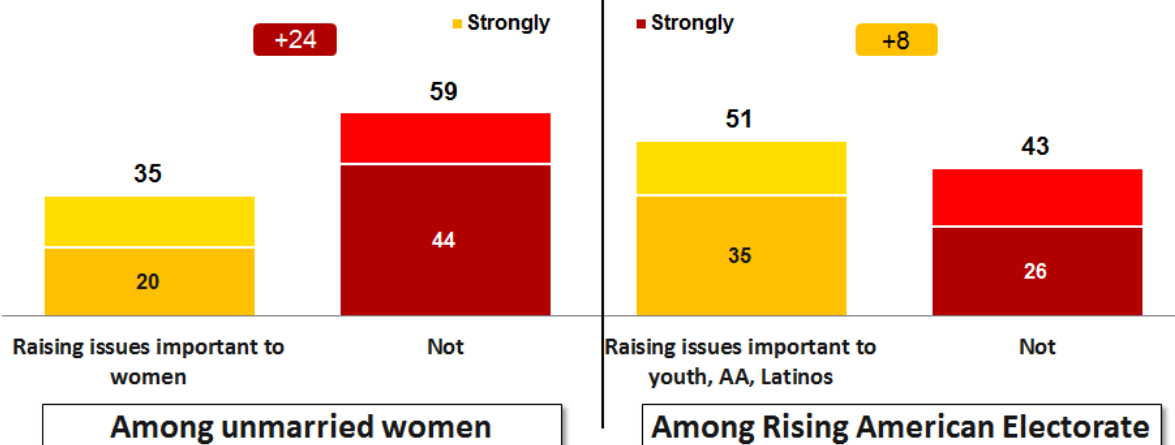
Now you're going to see some pairs of statements about the economy. For each pair, please choose whether the FIRST statement or the SECOND statement comes closer to your own view, even if neither is exactly right.

President and the political debate in the country are raising issues important to working and single women.

The national political debate in the country just isn't dealing with issues that matter to them.

The President and the political debate in the country are raising issues important to younger people, African Americans, and Latinos.

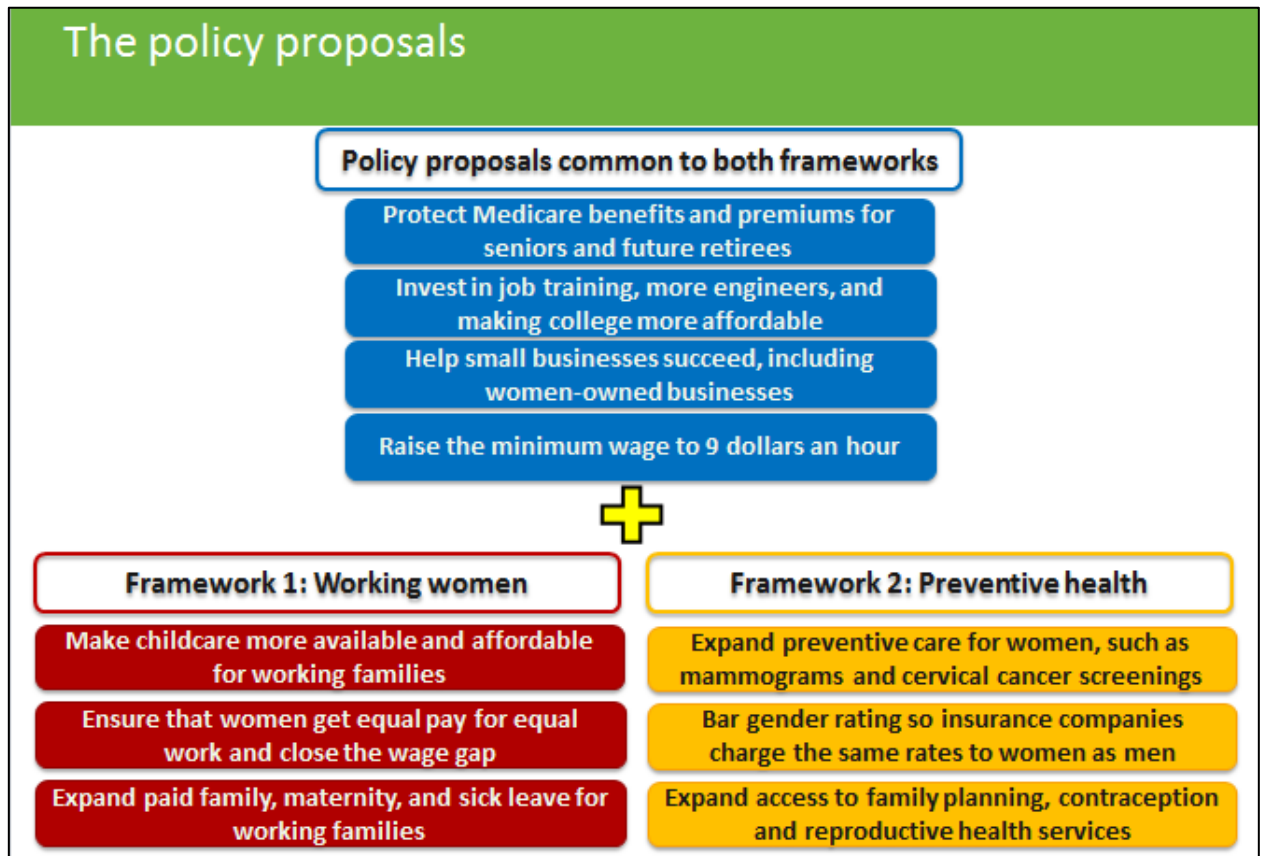
The national political debate in the country just isn't dealing with issues that matter to them.



There is room for leaders to re-engage these voters, but first Washington must understand what issues are actually important to them. Among the RAE, voters say the most important policies for the middle class are protecting social insurance and making preschool and college education more affordable. Both of these outweigh deficit reduction for these voters.

These voters are grounded in an economy in which access to the middle class is increasingly difficult—particularly for unmarried women who support their households on a single income. As a result, this survey finds clear evidence that unmarried women are moved by a working women’s agenda – that includes, in addition to protecting Medicare and investing in education, support for women-owned small businesses, expanding maternity and sick leave, and enforcing pay equity.

We tested two policy agendas: one emphasizing women’s preventive health care and another focused on policies to support working women. There was a very clear result among unmarried women, who overwhelmingly favor the policies grounded in changing the basic economic bargain for working women.



After hearing the working women policies, unmarried women more strongly support Democrats than currently—by a margin of 11 points—and support Democrats much more strongly than when the policy framework is focused on women’s preventive health issues.

The top two most important policies that Democrats could support for unmarried women are protecting Medicare benefits and investing in job training and affordable education. Half (48 percent) of unmarried women support a proposal to protect Medicare and 44 percent of unmarried women support a proposal to invest in job training and affordable college education. These top tier policies are followed by a series of proposals that would particularly help women and unmarried women: Help small businesses and women-owned small businesses succeed (25 percent); raise the minimum wage to 9 dollars per hour (24 percent); Make childcare more available and affordable (20 percent); enforce pay equity (19 percent); Expand paid family and sick leave (6 percent).

This confirms the results of focus groups we conducted in February, in which unmarried women said they applauded Barack Obama’s emphasis on pay equity but wished he would do more on childcare and family leave.

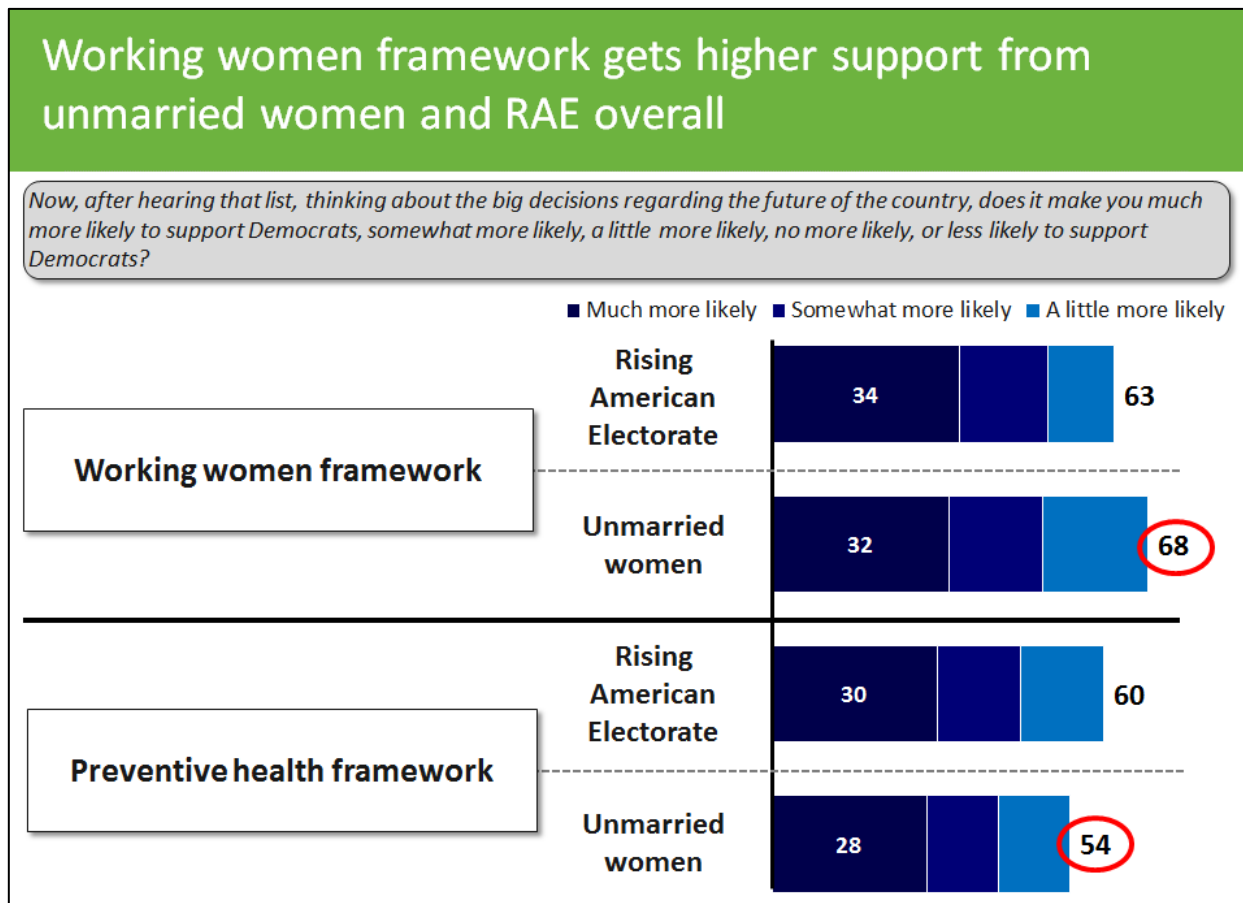
Ofentimes I worked 5 jobs, never saw the kids. They raised themselves. A majority of politicians don’t understand the hardship.

There are women who...have three children...and they can make minimum wage, where are they going to get a job where they can put 3 toddlers in day care?

One of my coworkers just had a baby and you know was out on maternity leave, came back, and then kind of looked at day care versus working and she said that if she's going to pay for day care it'd be more than half her salary so it was more economical for her to stay home with her baby than to keep working.

These issues make a big difference in the lives of women, unmarried women in particular. While these women supported many of the preventive health policies, the working women's policies had more of a real impact.

After hearing the preventive health framework, 54 percent of unmarried women reported that they were more likely to support Democrats and 60 percent of the Rising American Electorate reported that they were more likely to support Democrats. By contrast, after hearing the policies for working women, 63 percent of the RAE and 68 percent of unmarried women reported that they were more likely to support Democrats—14 points higher than the preventive health framework among unmarried women and 11 points higher than the vote among this group.



The working women framework also makes voters more receptive to the Democrats' middle class message. We tested two messages—a Democratic message focused on restoring the middle class bargain and a Republican message focused on deficit reduction.

Democratic message: Reducing the deficit is important but we cannot reduce the deficit through cuts alone. We also need to restore the middle class bargain: if you work hard you can get ahead. So let's invest in education, protect retirement security, and reduce health care costs in a balanced way that asks the wealthiest to pay their share to invest in growth that creates good middle class

Republican message: Our biggest problem is that we spend too much, not that we tax too little. Our national debt is over 16 trillion dollars. We must cut spending, including Medicare and Social Security so they are there for future generations. Further tax increases will crush our economy and leave our children and grandchildren saddled with debt.

Those who heard the preventive health policies chose the Democrats' message by a 15-point margin. By contrast, those who heard the working women policies preferred the Democrats' message to the Republican message by a 24-point margin.

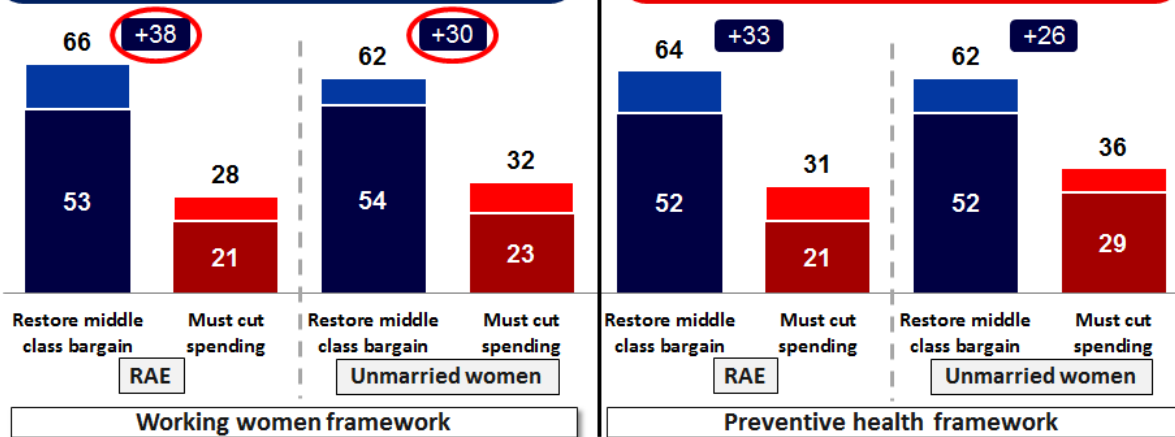
This result is also clear among the RAE and unmarried women. RAE voters who heard the working women policies were net 5 points more likely than those who heard the health policies to select the Democratic message. Unmarried women who heard the working women policies were net 4 points more likely to select the Democratic message than those who heard the preventive health policies.

And that framework better among RAE and unmarried women

Now I'm going to read you a pair of statements, one that Democrats might say and one that Republicans might say. After I read the statements, please tell me whether the FIRST statement or the SECOND statement comes closer to your own view, even if neither is exactly right.

Reducing the deficit is important but we cannot reduce the deficit through cuts alone. We also need to restore the middle class bargain: if you work hard you can get ahead. So let's invest in education, protect retirement security, and reduce health care costs in a balanced way that asks the wealthiest to pay their share to invest in growth that creates good middle class jobs.

Our biggest problem is that we spend too much, not that we tax too little. Our national debt is over 16 trillion dollars. We must cut spending, including Medicare and Social Security so they are there for future generations. Further tax increases will crush our economy and leave our children and grandchildren saddled with debt.



And when asked which party would do a better job on the big issues: addressing our long-term problems and reducing deficits over the long-term, unmarried women who heard the working women framework were more likely to say Democrats are better on these two issues—by big margins. On getting the deficit down over the long-term, those who heard the working women framework were net 9 points more likely to say Democrats would do a better job than Republicans. And unmarried women who heard the working women policies were net 18 points more likely to say Democrats would do a better job than Republicans at addressing our long-term problems.

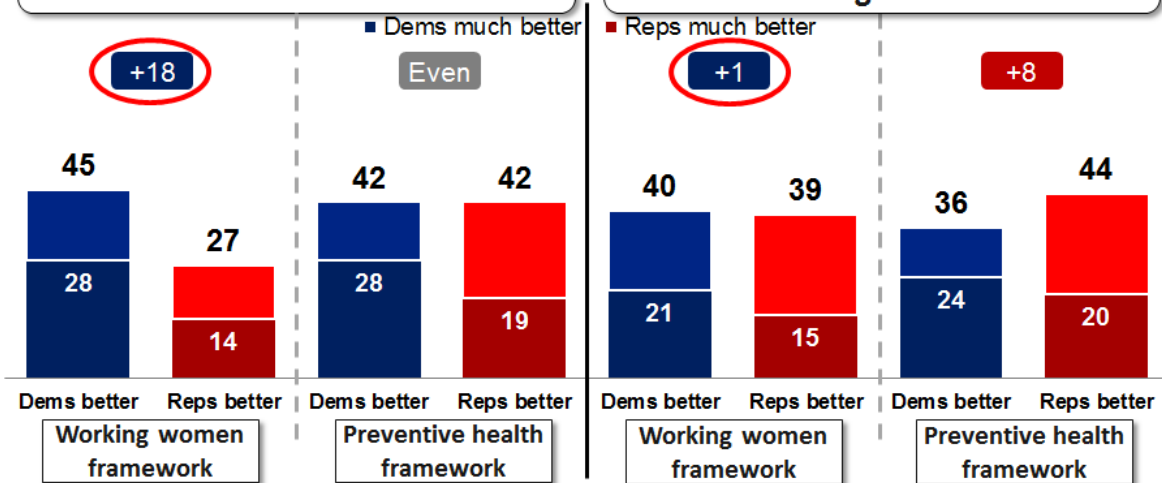
Working women framework pushes unmarried women towards Democrats' long-term plans

I am going to read you a list of issues and I want you to tell me whether, overall, you think the Democrats or the Republicans would do a better job with each issue. If you do not know, just tell me and we'll move on.

Among unmarried women

Addressing our long-term problems

Getting the deficit down over the long-term



Health Care

This survey also makes clear that supporters of Obamacare have a lot of work to do. Among all voters, almost half (47 percent) say that it is still too early to make a judgment about the health care law. Just 12 percent believe they are already seeing its benefits, 19 percent say they are not seeing benefits, and 19 percent say the health care law is making things harder for them. Half (51 percent) of RAE voters say it's too early to tell and just 15 percent say they are seeing benefits. Strikingly, unmarried women – one of the primary beneficiaries of the new law – are largely unaware of its benefits and not seeing its gains. Over 55 percent of unmarried women think it's too early to tell how the health care law will affect them and just 11 percent say they are seeing its benefits.

Over 50 percent of RAE and unmarried women think it's too early to tell how health care law affecting them

I want to ask you about the new health care reform law. I'm going to read you a few short statements about the health care reform law. After I read all the statements, please tell me which one of these statements comes closest to your experience.

