



Date: May 1, 2014

To: Friends of Democracy Corps and Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research

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Making progress in the House battleground Recommendations based on April survey

Last week, we released a [new survey](#) of the 50 most competitive Republican House seats and the 36 most competitive Democratic House seats and stressed the important progress on the Affordable Care Act, as independents went from favoring repeal by a large margin in December to favoring implementation by 7 points (50 percent to 43 percent) and college and unmarried women emerged as intense defenders.¹

The anti-incumbent currents are very strong for both parties, but Republicans have the extra weight of their party. Their image has not improved in this poll – and Speaker Boehner is singularly unpopular. Incumbent approval and re-elect numbers are historically low.

Nonetheless, Democrats will need a strategic shift if they are to get the election to actually break in their favor. This will require them to engage base voters and to make major targeted efforts aimed at unmarried women in order to shift the vote and the balance..

Republican incumbents have slowly improved their vote in the most competitive districts over the year, though their vote is still below 50 percent and they are still vulnerable. By contrast, this poll shows the vote evenly split in the Democratic battleground seats, with an unimpressive vote to re-elect number.

While Republicans also have low re-elect numbers, abysmal approval numbers, and a much weaker Party brand, these underlying powerful liabilities for Republican incumbents are not yet apparent in the vote.

In this survey, we simulated two very different campaigns, one focused mostly on ACA, and the other focused mostly on economic issues, to see if the ACA focus would drive up base turnout. It did not. But the simulated campaigns did hurt both Democratic and Republican incumbents in

¹ This memo is based on a survey of 1,250 likely 2014 voters in the most competitive Congressional seats across the country, conducted by Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research for Democracy Corps. The survey included 750 interviews conducted in 50 Republican-held districts and 500 interviews in 36 most competitive Democratic-held districts. This survey was conducted from April 10-16, 2014 using a list of 2006 voters, 2010 voters, and new registrants. For questions asked of all respondents, the margin of error = +/- 2.77% at 95% confidence.

equal measure, suggesting unique anti-incumbent currents.

Half of the respondents heard a simulated campaign that was almost totally about the Affordable Care Act: Democratic incumbents and challengers delivered two messages supporting the ACA and one about the Democrats' economic agenda. They also delivered two attacks on the GOP position on ACA and one attack about Medicare vouchers.

The other half of respondents heard a simulated campaign that was mostly *not* about the ACA—they heard Democrats deliver one ACA message and two mostly economic messages and a series of attacks centered on the Ryan budget.

Both the Democratic and Republican members lost support at the end, which almost never happens.

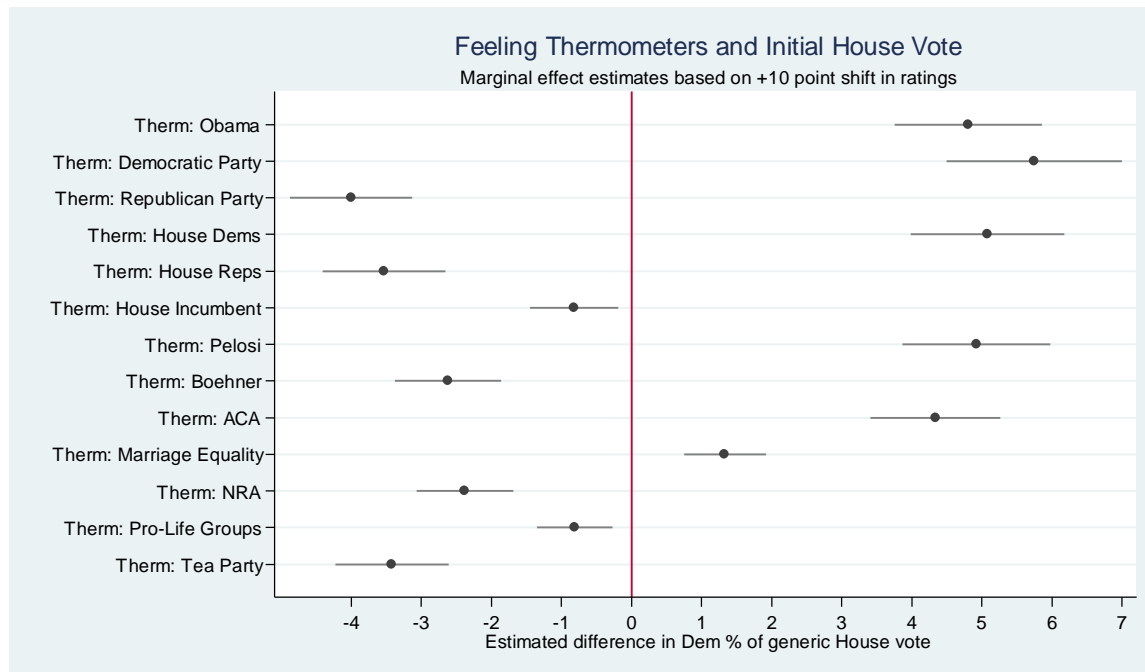
But more importantly, the simulated exercises — with or without ACA — did not produce a strong enough vote for Democrats that would allow them to protect their incumbents and endanger Republican incumbents. Simply put, Democrats do not have powerful enough weapons — if Democrats want to improve their vote, they need to get onto a better issue and partisan terrain and need to bring more of their supporters to the battle.

This survey suggests things that make Democrats more competitive and that are consistent with plans they already discuss.

The partisan terrain

Making a strategic shift starts with partisan dynamics, revealed in the regression modeling below. While the Republican Party and House Republicans are much less popular than the Democratic Party, House Democrats, and President Obama, it is feelings about the Democrats that currently have the biggest impact on the congressional ballot in the most competitive districts. This suggests that Democratic campaigns benefit from making the Speaker, the Republican Party, and House Republicans matter more. This survey shows how much that can matter — when over half of voters in the Republican seats say they want to vote against their named member when the incumbent is tied to Boehner and the Republican Congress's record on jobs.

President Obama is not helping Democrats, our modeling shows. His approval rating is stable in the battleground but stands at only 42 percent in the Republican districts. Each point change in President Obama's approval rating translates into a half-point gain for the Democrat in the congressional vote. Of course, the inverse is also true, which is why Democrats have a stake in efforts to raise the President's approval ratings.



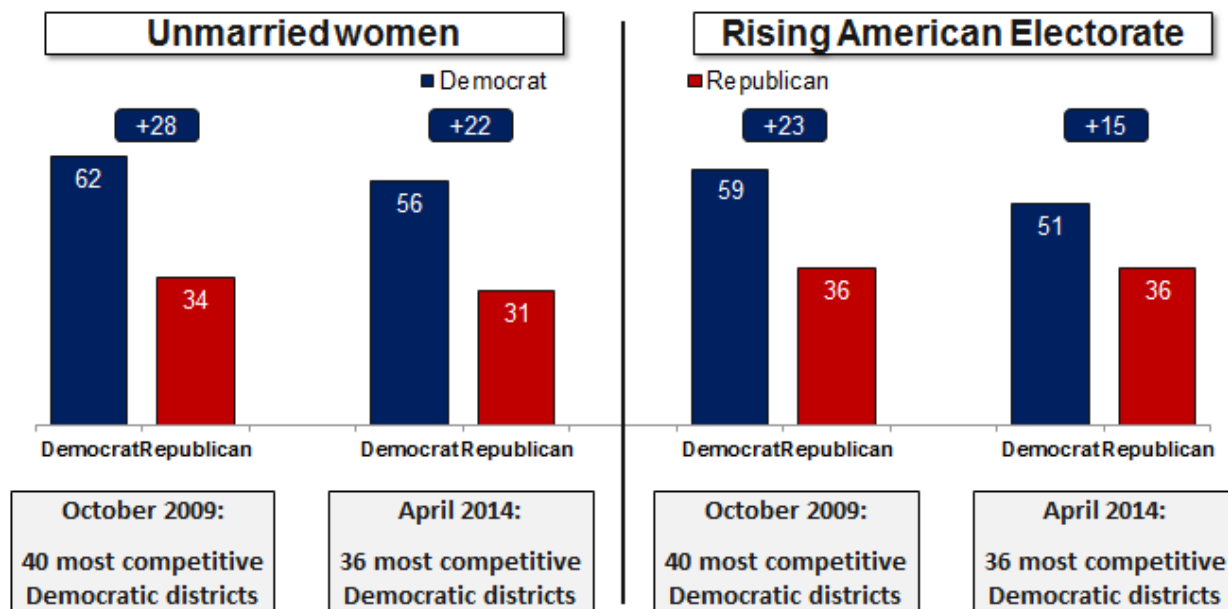
The results in this survey among unmarried women and the Rising American Electorate are very problematic for Democrats. Turnout issues are expected, but their modest vote for Democrats poses a big challenge. Unmarried women and the RAE are currently giving smaller percentages of their votes to Democrats than they did at a similar point in the 2010 cycle.

The ACA experiment in this survey did not produce higher base turnout, suggesting Democrats must use other strategies and tactics to get their base fully in the game.



Democratic incumbents lag among base voters— behind where they were at this point in 2010 cycle

I know it's a long way off, but thinking about the election for Congress in 2014, if the election for U.S. Congress were held today, would you be voting for – the Democratic candidate or Republican (HOUSE INCUMBENT)?



Turn the spotlight on Speaker Boehner, the economy and the Democrats' economic agenda

The strongest framework for Democrats to challenge the Republican incumbents and push off Republican challengers is a message that says “Speaker John Boehner and his policies that have hurt the economy and done nothing about jobs.” Amazingly, half (50 percent) say that their incumbent “may be okay” but they would not vote to reelect because he or she supports the Speaker and policies that produced gridlock and damaged the economy, and his priorities do not include getting to work on jobs. There is potential for reception to a call to action – one that makes candidates pay for their unpopular party, particularly in the House.

That framework takes advantage of the terrible brand position of John Boehner and the Republicans in the House. What is so striking is how much more powerful is this framework than a parallel test with Medicare and taxes that used to be equally strong. **If Democrats could achieve a large strategic shift by focusing on the Speaker and the economy.**



Main message framework is support for Boehner and failure to focus on economy and jobs— not Medicare and rich tax cuts

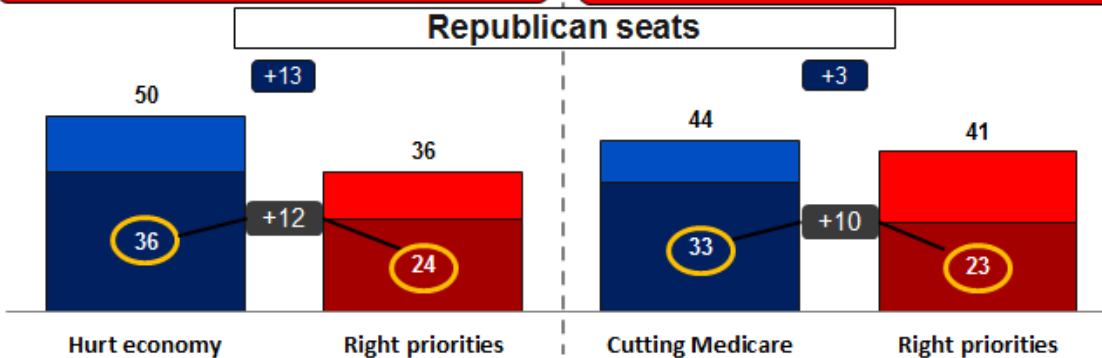
Now I'm going to read you some pairs of statements. After I read each pair, please tell me whether the FIRST statement or the SECOND statement comes closer to your own view, even if neither is exactly right.

It is time to vote out Members of Congress like (HOUSE INCUMBENT) who may be OK but they support Speaker John Boehner and his policies that have hurt the economy and done nothing about jobs.

It is time to vote out Members of Congress like (HOUSE INCUMBENT) who may be OK but they support Speaker John Boehner whose top budget priority is cutting spending for Medicare and making sure there's no tax increase for richest.

(HOUSE INCUMBENT) has the right priorities and (he/she) is fighting for us.

(HOUSE INCUMBENT) has the right priorities and (he/she) is fighting for us.



The majority ready to vote out their Republican incumbents seen in the graph above means that Democrats that focus intensely on the economy and jobs and shift the focus to Republicans by putting the spotlight on Speaker Boehner's leadership on the economy stand to exploit a powerful liability. That is Democrats' strongest framework.

The biggest shift in the vote in this survey happens when Democrats are focused on the economic agenda. Two-thirds of voters say these priorities make them more likely to vote Democratic.

1. The economic agenda, which includes raising the minimum wage, paycheck fairness, job training, and keeping good jobs in the US.
2. Investing in affordable college education, student loan reform, and partnerships between businesses and community colleges.
3. Fixing the ACA but making sure insurance companies must cover preventive care and cannot drop or deny people when they get sick or have pre-existing conditions, charge women more than men.

Running almost entirely on an economic agenda (folding education into the plan) is a strong strategy. The women's economic agenda is a very big part of it. Voters need to see Democrats consumed with jobs that don't pay enough to keep up with costs and advancing the economic

agenda that voters think could make a difference.

Strongest Democratic messages are education, economic agenda, and fix to keep insurance companies out

Now I'm going to read you a few statements (HOUSE INCUMBENT) might say. For each statement, please tell me whether that makes you feel much more positive about (HOUSE INCUMBENT), somewhat more positive, a little more positive, no more positive, or more negative about (HOUSE INCUMBENT)?

	Democratic Districts		Republican Districts	
(EDUCATION) I am working to invest in education so that our children can succeed in the 21st century economy. I fought to keep student loan rates low to make college more affordable, and will work to help local businesses partner ...	33	72	48	78
(ECONOMIC AGENDA) Everyone in Washington is fighting instead of focusing on jobs and jobs that pay enough to live on. We should raise the minimum wage to \$10.10 an hour, make sure women get equal pay for equal work...	35	64	38	67
(FIX LAW) I am fighting to fix the problems with Obamacare. This law isn't perfect, but we can't afford to return to when insurance companies dropped people when they got sick, denied coverage for preexisting conditions...	30	64	36	65
(INSURANCE WOMEN) The Affordable Care Act should have been implemented better but it is bringing really important changes. Insurance companies can't charge women more than men, can't consider pregnancy a pre-existing...	23	59	29	58
(INSURANCE YOU CAN COUNT ON) I'm proud I voted for the Affordable Care Act because people can finally have insurance they can count on and everyone will be insured. Insurance companies can't raise rates or drop you...	25	50	28	54

In the Democratic districts, the economic agenda has the biggest impact on the vote in the regressions — underscoring where voters want Democrats to focus.

The survey also shows that Democratic members should be perfectly comfortable supporting the ACA – and the “fix it” message is strong. ***But Democrats are best positioned when they prioritize the economy above all else — and the data suggests that is their best shot at shifting the dynamic.*** Folding in education, that economic agenda would look like the following based on this survey:

(ECONOMIC AGENDA) Everyone in Washington is fighting instead of focusing on jobs and jobs that pay enough to live on. We should raise the minimum wage to \$10.10 an hour, make sure women get equal pay for equal work, make job training and college more affordable, stop tax breaks for companies that export jobs, and stop any trade agreements that undermine U.S. manufacturing.

Unmarried women a target

Democrats need a massive effort targeted toward unmarried women. That starts with the women's economic agenda that our research shows to be very impactful and among the strongest messages in this survey. But among unmarried women, the "fix it" health care message is just as strong. In addition, the repeal attack was the top attack among unmarried women. So unmarried women, uniquely, need to hear in equal measure about the benefits of the ACA and Republicans' efforts to repeal it if Democrats want to improve turnout among that base constituency.

(FIX LAW) I will fight to fix the problems with Obamacare. This law isn't perfect, but we can't afford to return to when insurance companies dropped people when they got sick, denied coverage for preexisting conditions, charged women more than men, and failed to cover preventive care like cancer screenings.

(REPEAL) The Republicans in Congress are working to put the insurance companies back in charge of your health insurance, while taking millions in contributions from the insurance industry. That means they can once again impose lifetime limits, deny coverage to people with pre-existing conditions, and drop coverage if you become sick, while leaving millions without insurance.

Summing up the lessons

The dynamics this year are complicated in the battleground, but the ways to shift the dynamic are pretty straightforward.

- Shift the partisan dynamics to the Republicans and Republican House. Democrats could get there by focusing relentlessly on their support for the Speaker who has hurt the economy and done nothing about jobs.
- The Democratic focus should be totally on the economy: the critique of the Speaker and the Democrats' economic agenda.
- The economic agenda is focused on the fact that jobs don't pay enough to live on in this tough economy and Democrats have a serious economic agenda, including the women's economic agenda.
- Intense targeting of unmarried women – using in equal measure the economic agenda and ACA: repealing and putting insurance companies back in charge with how they treated women.