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To: Progressive community

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## **Hillary Clinton's strong debate defines closing election choice**

*Clinton gains on honesty, middle class and economy and impacts U.S. Senate races*

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The final debate was a very good night for Hillary Clinton. Live dial meter focus groups conducted on behalf of Women's Voices Women Vote Action Fund reveal Clinton won the night 57 to 26 percent. She achieved this by her clarity of plans and self-confidence, by focus on the middle class, the economy and taxes, and appointing Supreme Court justices that would look out for everyone not just the rich, and by standing up for the rights of women.<sup>1</sup>

With just 19 days until the election on the night of the final debate, voters were moving toward final judgements about their presidential choice. At the end of the night, Trump's supporters were 6 points less certain in their vote and he made almost no gain across a vast range of personal attributes. His refusal to accept the results of the election stopped the dials. Nonetheless, he did get some response from the white working class persuadables in this dial test and did get some additional vote support here.

His lowest points in the night came when Trump was given the opportunity to address the biggest doubts about him, from concerns about his fitness to serve and allegations of sexual assault to his bromance with Putin and his capacity to handle nuclear weapons. Clinton's approach – pivoting on Trump's liabilities to offer positive, unifying, hopeful messages about American values and a fairer future for everyone – had the opposite effect and created some of the strongest moments in the dials.

At the end of the dials, many described her as honest, for the middle class and having clear plans for the future – and said these were the best reason to support her.

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<sup>1</sup> Democracy Corps conducted online dial meter research among 140 likely voters nationally during the third presidential debate: 19 white millennials, 27 minority millennials, 48 white non-college persuadable voters, 28 white unmarried women, and 17 Clinton voters who were splitting their ticket in Senate races in battleground states. Surveys were administered before and after the live dial meter session. An online breakout focus group among those who shifted their vote to the Democratic candidate down-ballot was conducted after the debate. This research is qualitative in nature and involves 140 total participants. Results are not statistically projectable onto a larger population.



Associate more with Clinton than Trump	Pre-Speech	Post-Speech	Shift (Post – Pre-Speech)
<b>A better economy</b>	+10	+32	<b>+22 Clinton</b>
<b>For the middle class</b>	+22	+44	<b>+22 Clinton</b>
<b>The right approach to taxes</b>	+22	+34	<b>+12 Clinton</b>
<b>Not beholden to special interests</b>	--	+10	<b>+10 Clinton</b>
<b>Right approach to the deficit</b>	+22	+32	<b>+10 Clinton</b>
<b>Will keep America safe</b>	+14	+22	<b>+8 Clinton</b>
<b>On my side</b>	+28	+36	<b>+8 Clinton</b>

Clinton provided the clearest contrast yet in the campaign and made “*stand[ing] up for families against powerful interests, against corporations*” so the economy works for everyone the mission and mandate for her presidency if elected. It is hard to underemphasize how much Hillary Clinton spoke about the middle class and the size of her gains on “looks out for the middle class” – up 14 points at the end of the survey. She also made dramatic 22 point gains in her margin over Trump on who would do a better job looking out for the middle class and handling the economy. She also built a 10 point advantage over Trump on not being beholden to special interests.

Total Describes Clinton Well	Pre-Speech	Post-Speech	Shift (Post – Pre-Speech)
<b>Looks out for the middle class</b>	58	72	<b>+14</b>
<b>Will fight to bring change</b>	56	66	<b>+10</b>
<b>Has a clear vision for the future of the country</b>	61	71	<b>+10</b>
<b>Honest and trustworthy</b>	39	48	<b>+9</b>
<b>Has good plans for the economy</b>	61	67	<b>+6</b>
<b>Strong leader</b>	62	67	<b>+5</b>
<b>Excited if she becomes president</b>	55	60	<b>+5</b>
<b>Will keep our country safe</b>	59	62	<b>+3</b>

Her 30 year history lesson on her commitment to fighting for people, while Trump fought for himself, was successful and Trump’s rebuttal focused on assuring voters of the size of his father’s seed funding once again did him a disservice: the dials went from high highs to low lows in a matter of seconds. The result was impressive and perhaps defining shifts on honest and being trustworthy. She gained 11 points to 48 percent saying she was “honest and trustworthy.” That is why Clinton’s personal favorability rose 19 points. It is hard to imagine Clinton’s performance does not produce a more favorable public image in the period ahead. Maybe the pundits will not be able to focus so much on the two unpopular candidates.



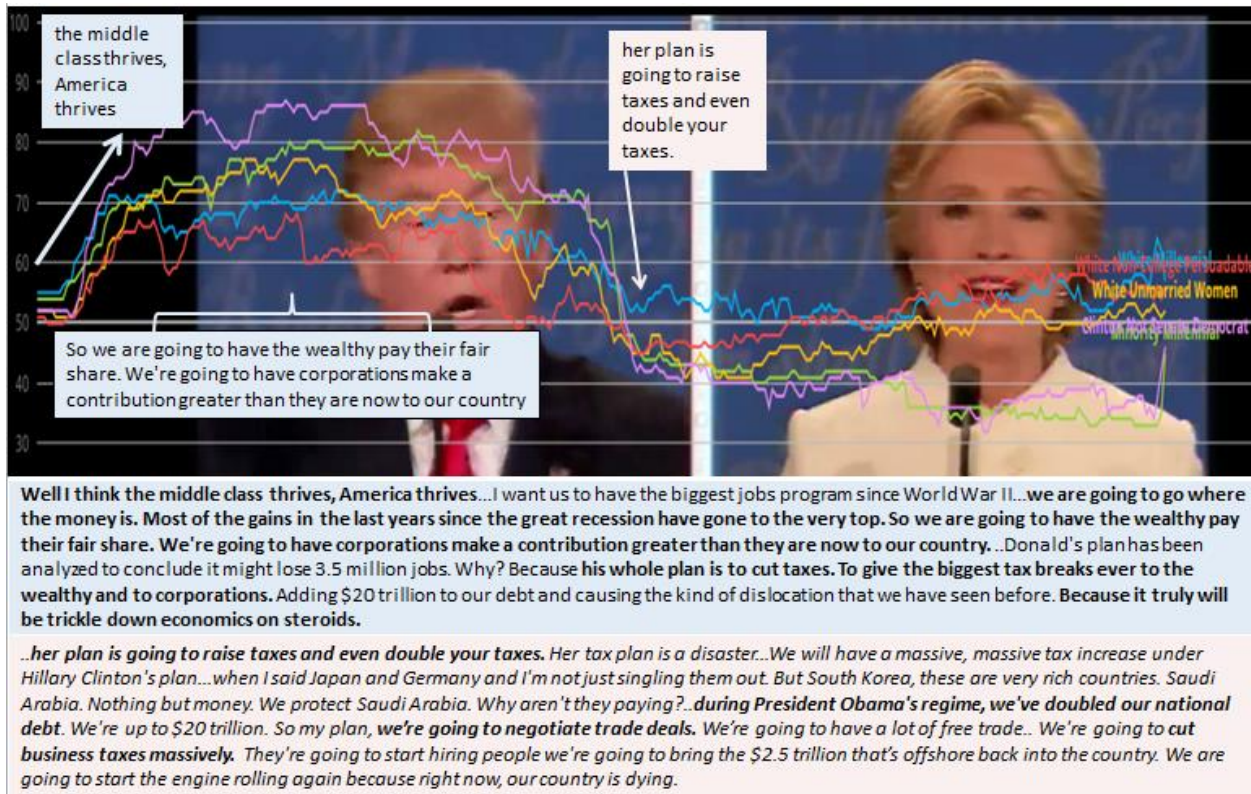
The most important result may be the potential impact on down ballot contests. The Democratic Senate vote in the battleground states shifted from 46 percent to 55 percent over the course of the debate. Voters came out of the debate with a reason to vote for Clinton but perhaps for other Democrats too.

**The contrast on an economy that works for the middle class**

Clinton put the economy center stage and defined the choice in this election: an economy that works for everyone and higher taxes on the rich *or* more “trickle down on steroids.” Hammering home on taxes and an economy for everyone produced the highest points of the night across the target groups and gave her an advantage on the economy and being for the middle class (+28 percent and +38 percent advantages over Trump, respectively).

Clinton’s statement that “*I think the middle class thrives, America thrives,*” produced one of the sharpest upturns of the dials. She continued, “I want us to have the biggest jobs program since World War II” and said the rich would pay for it.

Her economic messages were especially powerful among the white working class persuadable voters who appreciated her answer in the context of fiscal responsibility. Minority millennials were excited to hear her take on trickle-down economics and vow to tax the rich their fair share.



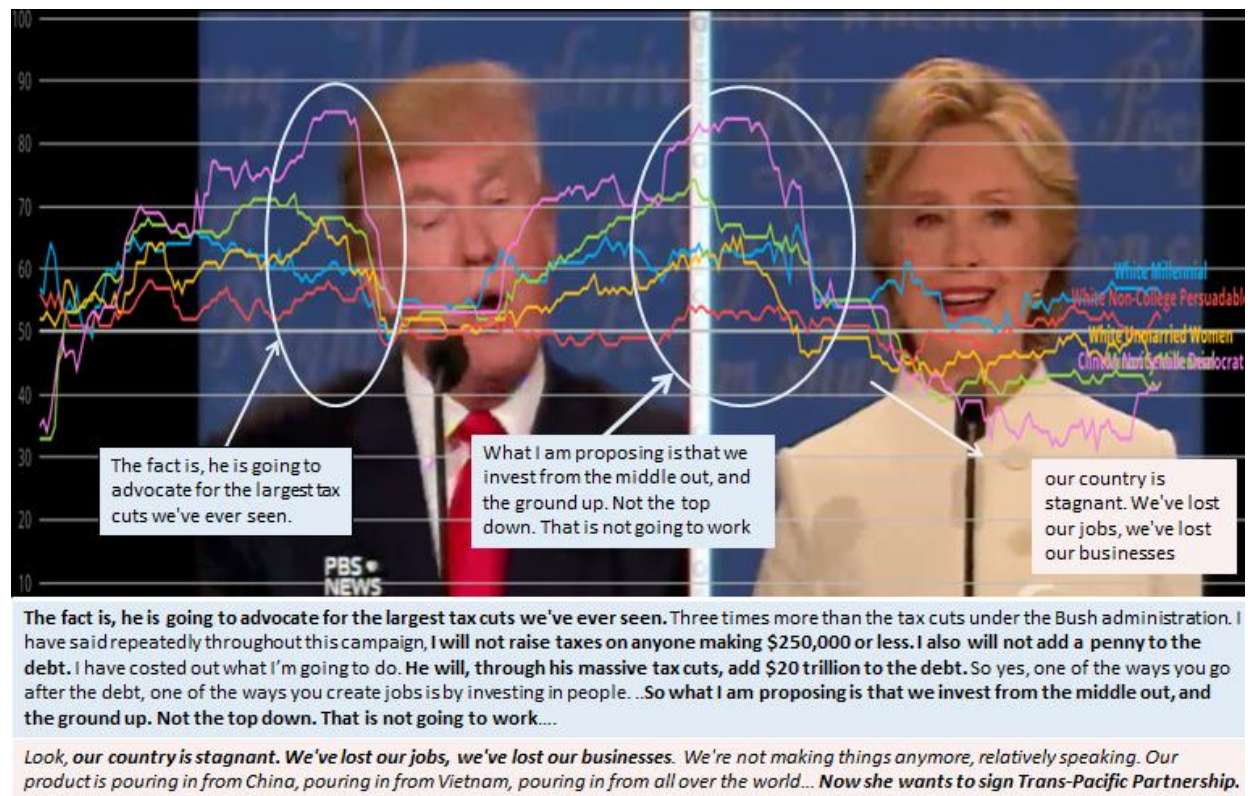


Trump, on the other hand, failed to offer a convincing economic vision or defense of his taxes. “*Your donors do what I do*” was an unacceptable excuse and led to one of the sharpest declines in the dials of the night.

Clinton’s focused economic message ended up building her advantage over Trump and taxes and on handling the deficit, an area where one might expect a Republican to gain (+12 and +10 toward Clinton, respectively). She even succeeded in making herself the change agent in this change election – there was a 10 point shift in those saying Clinton “will fight to bring change” and at the end of the night Clinton’s association with change surpassed Trump’s (66 percent to 57 percent).

### Taxing those that can afford it, because that’s where the money is – and not trickle down

As in the first debate, Hillary Clinton took every opportunity to affirm that Trump will take us to a trickle-down economics on steroids to help the very wealthiest, like himself, who avoid taxes; she intends to raise taxes on the rich, because it is fair and where the money is, to make much needed investments that don’t contribute to the debt and to fund Social Security. In every instance that contrast pushed up the dials, including the most reluctant of the participants. This election has become a choice about taxes.



She also talks about this in terms of taking on inequality: “*most of the gains in the last years since the great recession have gone to the very top. We are going to have the wealthy pay their fair share of taxes. We’re going to have corporations make a contribution greater than they are now to our country.*” So,

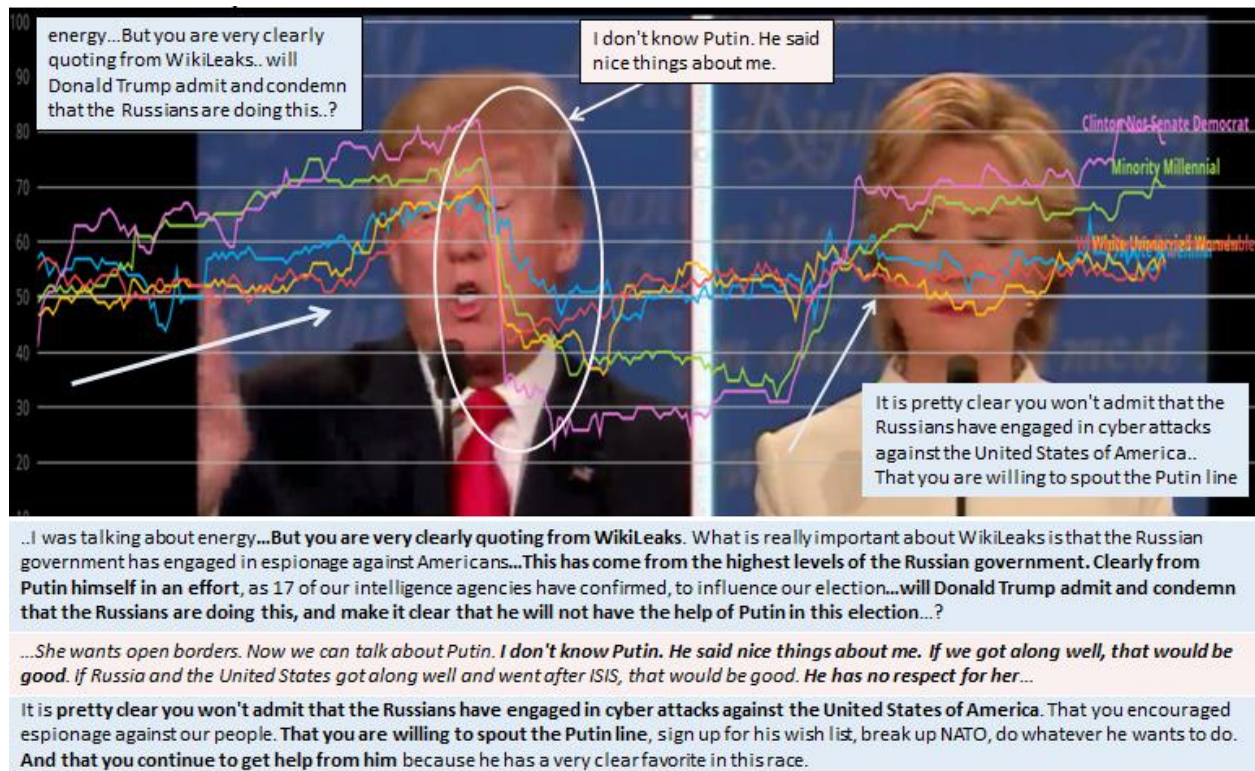


instead of an economy that works top down, “*I am proposing we invest from the middle out.*” To invest in your family, “*we are going where the money is*” so they “*pay their fair share.*”

### Security and Foreign Affairs

This is a presidential election and the final debate left more voters feeling safe in Clinton’s hands. At the end of the survey, she increased her margin over Trump by 8 points on who “will keep America safe.”

Trump’s anti-interventionist rhetoric did appeal to white millennials, but he failed to capitalize on that opening. Where he failed, however, Clinton succeeded. White millennials’ reaction to her response on the no fly zone was surprising, given their anti-interventionist mood. She navigated this issue deftly and demonstrated her depth of knowledge and careful consideration of the trade-offs. Trump also doubled down on his Putin-denial, which did not help him.



Among white non-college persuadable voters, Clinton walked a line on respect for gun rights and the need for gun safety regulation and drew a contrast with Trump that earned one of their top responses.

### Abortion rights and respect for women

Clinton also had impressive moments during discussions of abortion rights, and that may have been decisive for many of the women who shifted to Democrats after the debate. While the news coverage was



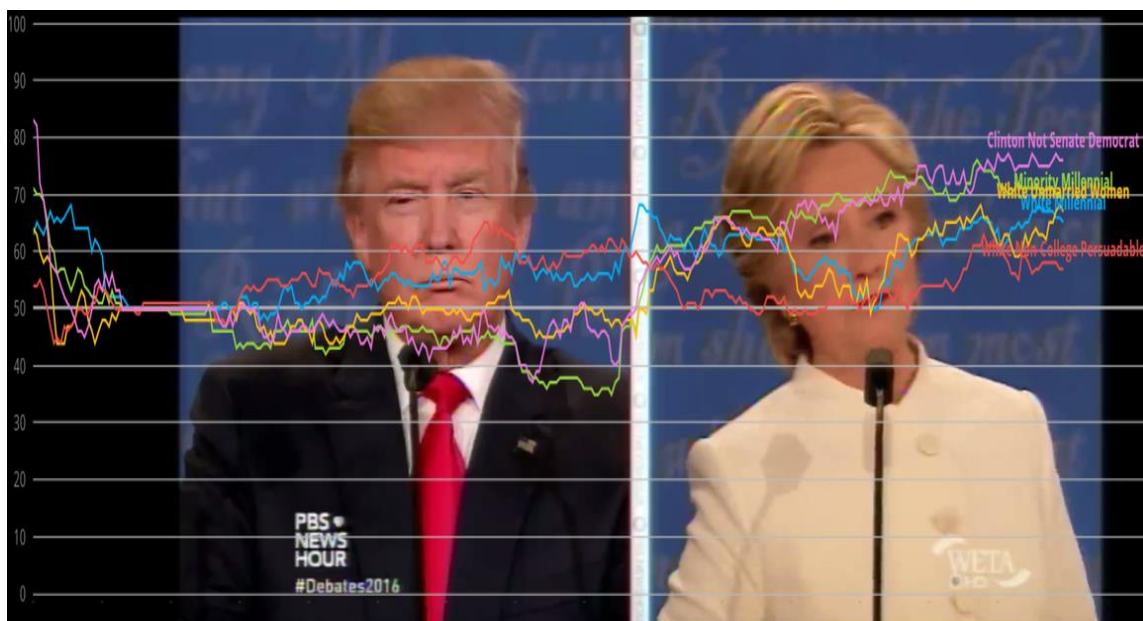
on ‘late term abortions,’ the much more important moment was the initial defense of Roe v. Wade and Planned Parenthood in contrast to Trump’s commitment to overturn it and defund. That period saw the highest sustained positive response from the white millennials of the night.



### Immigration and millennials

Clinton gave a strong defense of her position on immigration and how it reflects American values, and it helped with millennials. Minority millennials were especially responsive when it came to how the deportation proposal from Trump betrays our character as a country, while white millennials responded to the need to bring immigrants out of the shadows so they are not exploited.

Clinton got less of a response on how we should handle refugees, and white working class persuadables did shift their vote to Trump at the end. Trump, however, is not likely to look at this as a great victory as he lost 4 points on which candidate would better handle immigration.

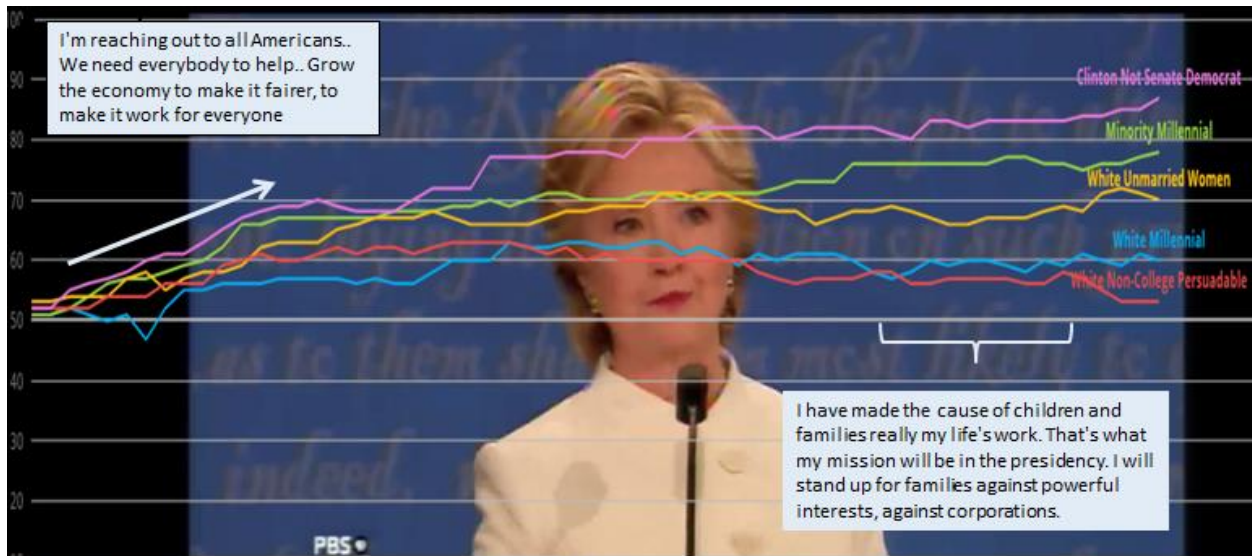


### Building a wave

After this debate, there may be some good news down-ballot. The vote for the Democratic candidate for Senate in battleground states shifted from 46 percent to 55 percent over the course of the debate. Our post-debate breakout group among down-ballot shifters revealed that most of these voters have not yet tuned into the senate races in their states. Their reactions to tonight’s debate may point to the path forward with these unconsolidated voters in the final stretch of the campaign.

They overwhelmingly pointed to Clinton’s economic priorities – like raising taxes, raising the minimum wage, and her focus on families and children, equal pay and affordable college – as the things that were most memorable about the night and made them feel better about Clinton. And when asked what her performance says about her values, they said “*She truly cares about us*” (White unmarried woman) and “*It says that she’s focused on the everyday people and the priorities of helping us succeed*” (Minority millennial) and “*She fights for what she believes in and will stand up for the middle class, women and equal pay*” (Clinton, Ticket-splitter)

Their strongest reaction of the night came during Clinton’s closing statements. Hearing more about a progressive economic agenda, with an emphasis on raising taxes on the rich to make their lives better, and using a positive tone, will appeal to these voters.



Well I would like to say to everyone watching tonight that I'm reaching out to all Americans, Democrats, Republicans and independents, because we need everybody to help make our country what it should be, to grow the economy, to make it fairer, to make it work for everyone. We need your talents, your skills, your commitment, your energy, your ambition. You know, I've been privileged to see the presidency up close, and I know the awesome responsibility of protecting our country and the incredible opportunity of working to try to make life better for all of you. I have made the cause of children and families really my life's work. That's what my mission will be in the presidency. I will stand up for families against powerful interests, against corporations. I will do everything that I can to make sure that you have good jobs with rising incomes, that your kids have good educations from preschool through college. I hope you will give me a chance to serve as your president.