



The Unkindest Cut: Budget Debate Is Opportunity for Progressives

The budget debate could provide progressives with an opportunity to win back the support of a constituency key to regaining power in 2012 – the unmarried women, people of color and youth who make up the Rising American Electorate (RAE) – according to a just-released national survey.

Even though Democrats (traditionally more progressive) start in a hole on the budget --voters trust the Republicans more on handling the economy and jobs and employment (by 5 points) and on making the right choices on deciding how to reduce the federal budget deficit (by 15 points) -- the more Americans hear about Republican plans, the less they like them. That's especially true among the RAE voters who now comprise the majority (53 percent) of the voting age population. During the survey conducted last week of more than a 1000 voters by Greenburg Quinlan Rosner Research for Democracy Corps, after hearing about the specific cuts being proposed and arguments on both sides of the debate, unmarried women shifted away from the budget cuts by 30 percentage points and the RAE by 27 points.

Unmarried women and the rest of the RAE drove progressive victories in 2006 and 2008, but under-performed in 2010. Democrats will not be able to reclaim the country without recapturing the support of this core and growing constituency. The RAE is the fastest growing large demographic group in the nation and is responsible for 95 percent of the country's population growth over the last two years. Tracking their support levels on key issues like the budget over the next two years will help gauge the progress Democrats are making in their efforts to regain support and power.

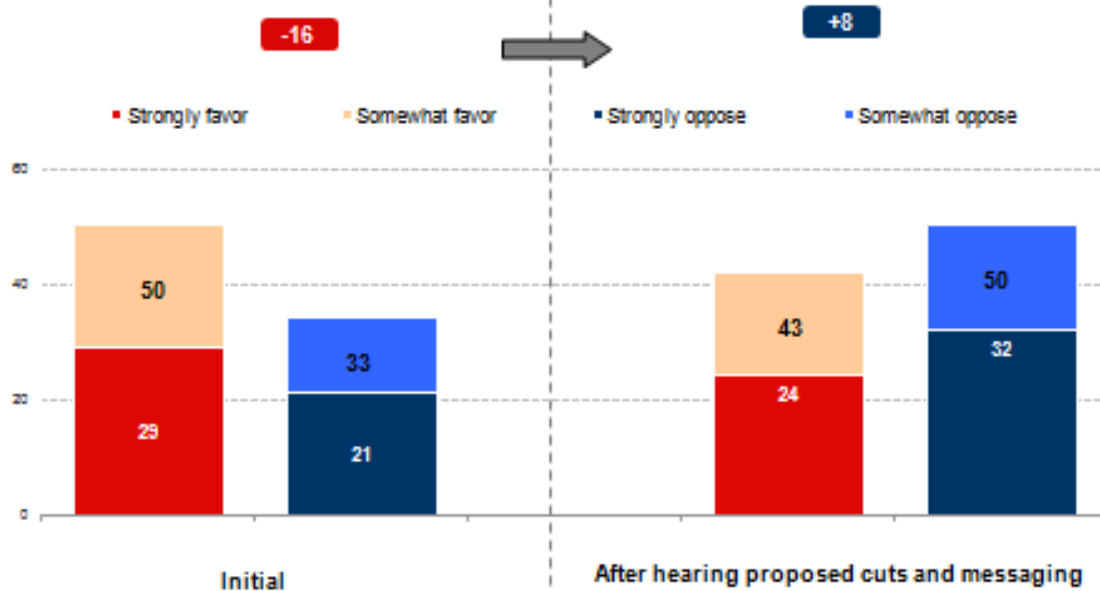
According to the Democracy Corps survey findings, the budget debate can potentially re-engage these voters and recommit them to their progressive political ideals if action on the budget is linked to fixing what's wrong with the economy and helping working families. To see the full memo: <http://www.democracycorps.com/wp-content/files/BUDGETMEMOFINAL1.pdf>

Key Findings:

The political climate has improved, the ugly polarized mood of 2010 has abated, and there is a chance for Democrats to be heard in the budget debate. Initially, the Democrats begin in a hole on the economy and budget. Half of the people surveyed (50%) supported \$32 billion in domestic spending cuts.

Dramatic change after hearing context (in tilted experiment)

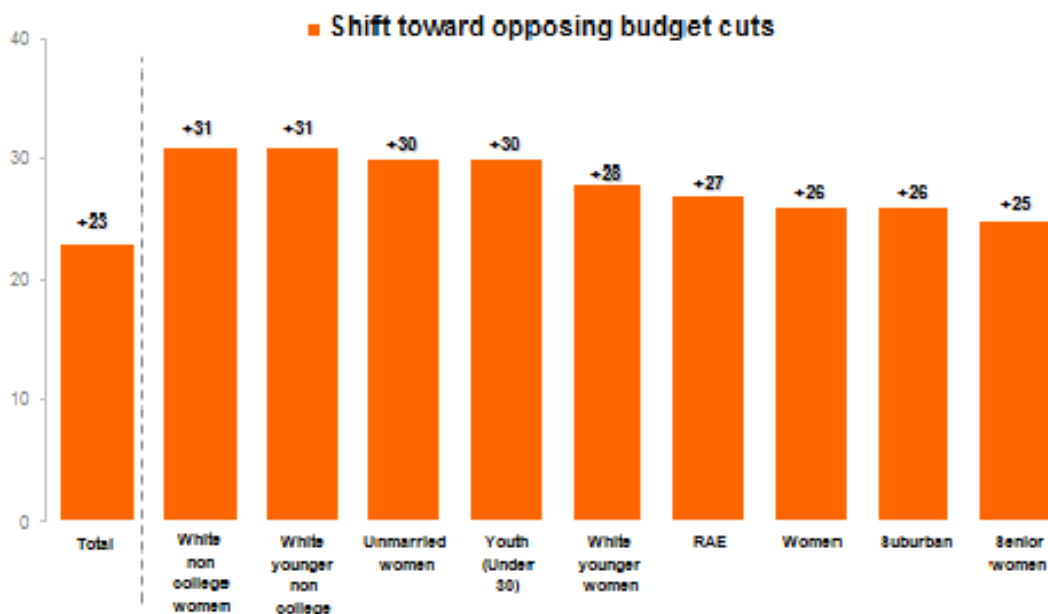
The Republicans in the House of Representatives will pass a budget that cuts 32 billion dollars from domestic programs this year. From what you know, do you favor or oppose this plan to cut spending by 32 billion dollars?



But that support shifts dramatically – especially among unmarried women and the RAE overall when voters learn that the Republicans are proposing deep cuts in education, meals for the elderly, food safety, Head Start and local governments and when those cuts are put into a persuasive message context.

Budget cuts: groups shift against the cuts – RAE, young, and women

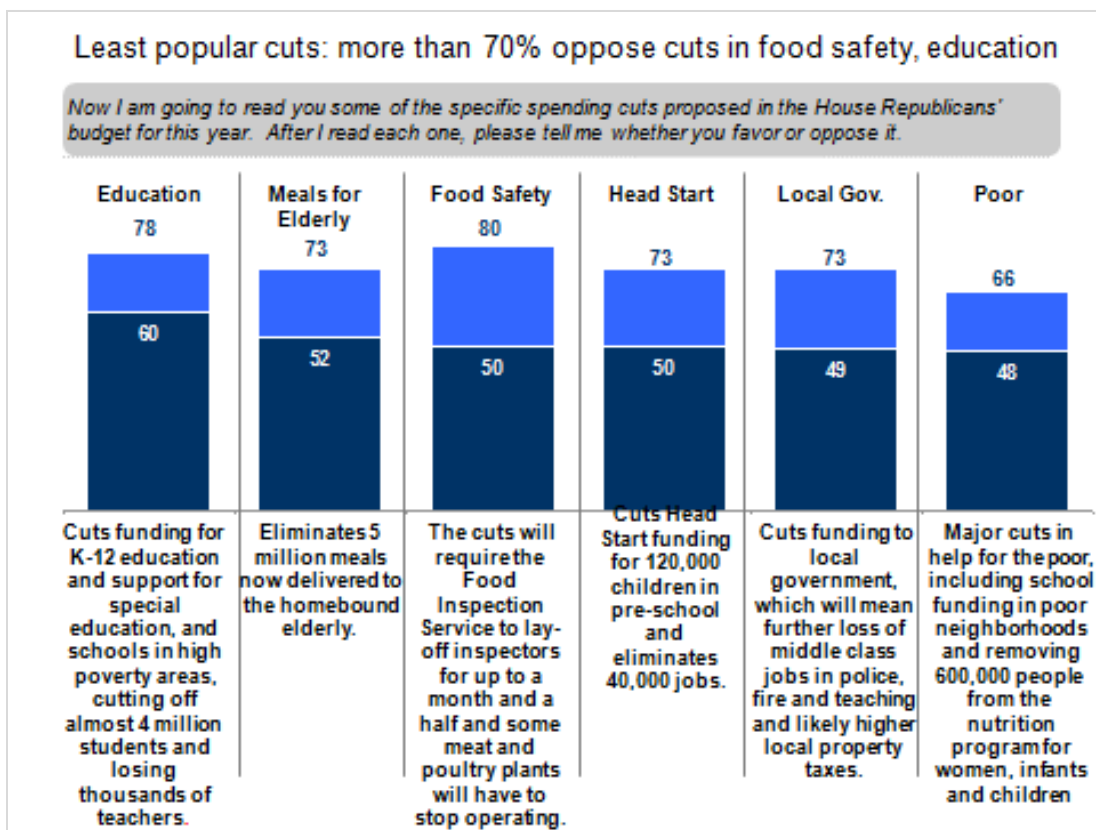
Let me ask something different. The Republicans in the House of Representatives will pass a budget that cuts 32 billion dollars from domestic programs this year. From what you know, do you favor or oppose this plan to cut spending by 32 billion dollars?



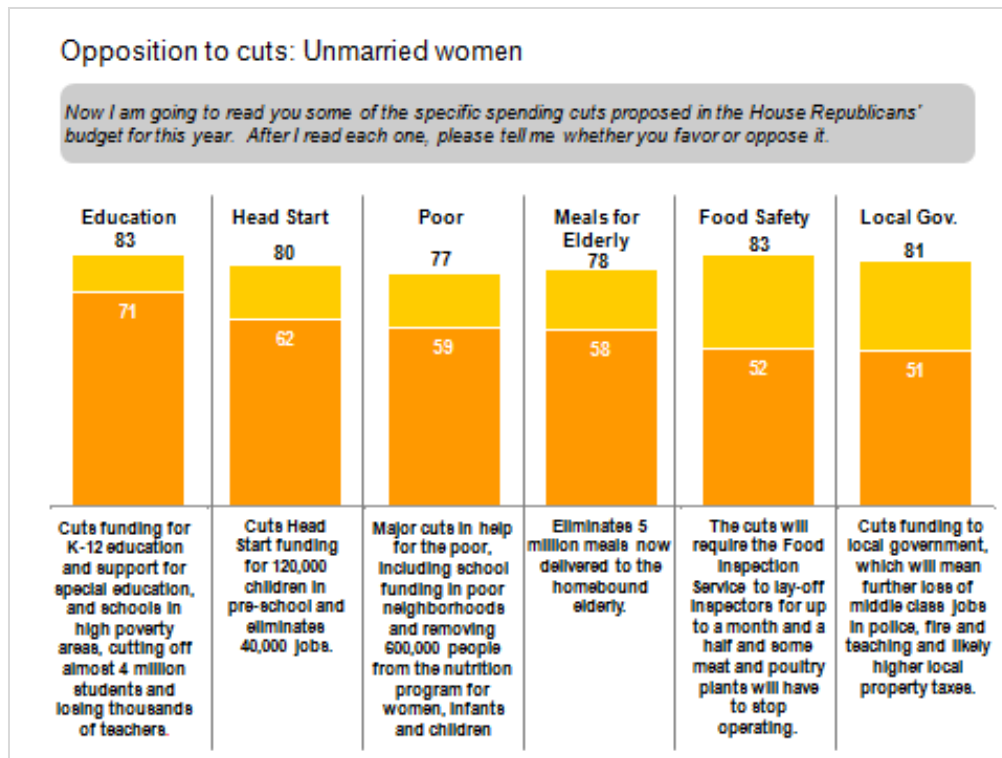
The messages that moved the most voters and that were especially powerful with the RAE were:

- Reducing the deficit is critical to our economic well-being and creating American jobs. We must be serious about deficit reduction.
- We must start by cutting wasteful and unnecessary spending, special interest subsidies and tax breaks, and demand accountability.
- And in tough economic times, don't start with cuts that hit those who can least afford it – middle class, working families with children, and the elderly.

Finally, the least popular budget cuts with voters overall, with more than 70 percent opposed, were in food safety and education.



Unmarried women opposed cutting food safety, education, local government and Head Start by more than 80 percent.



Conclusion:

As Women’s Voices. Women Vote Action Fund learned from its research partnership with Democracy Corps last year, the most effective way to engage unmarried women and the rest of the RAE is to connect directly to their daily lives and make clear their stake in the outcome of the policy or electoral debate. Clearly, the cuts being pushed by the Republican Party hit close to home and will be opposed by this key constituency – if policymakers take the time to engage them and encourage their participation in this budget debate. The budget debate could be an early opportunity for progressives to make significant mileage on the road back.

To see the entire Democracy Corps power point:

<http://www.democracycorps.com/wp-content/files/FebruaryBudgetslidesFINAL.pdf>

Women’s Voices. Women Vote Action Fund is a 501(c)(4) nonpartisan organization dedicated to informing and mobilizing unmarried women and other underrepresented groups to participate in the electoral and policy-making process. WVVAF engages and encourages underrepresented groups to make their voices heard and empowers them with the facts they need to make informed choices about candidates, ballot measures and issues.