

Date: July 28, 2016

To: Friends of the Roosevelt Institute and Democracy Corps

From: Stanley Greenberg and Nancy Zdunkewicz, Democracy Corps

---

## **A Mandate to Rewrite the Rules of the Economy**

---

As the two party conventions were starting, Donald Trump enjoyed about a 4-point advantage on the economy and that is what keeps him in the race to November.<sup>1</sup> According to a new Democracy Corps survey on behalf of the Roosevelt Institute, the election and the battle for the economy will remain gridlocked if Hillary Clinton continues to describe her economic approach and policies as “building on the progress” of President Obama.<sup>2</sup> But this survey also shows that when Clinton embraces a “Rewrite the Rules” framework, she bests Trump on the economy and moves into a real lead in the race.

It is tempting to run on a “Build on the Progress” economic framework. The public perception of the state of the macro-economy is very different from early 2010 when the economic recovery was just beginning. Today, four in ten voters have a favorable impression of the state of the economy, up 17 points from this point in the last presidential election cycle. Understandably, President Obama has been eager to speak about the improved macro-economic outlook since he took office and establish a positive economic legacy. That is the accepted context in which the Democratic nominee and surrogates have framed their economic offer.

But this upbeat economic message ignores both the public’s *personal* experiences in the economy, and the Roosevelt Institute’s [Rewriting the Rules of the American Economy](#) report released last spring. The economy is failing more and more people and, as Roosevelt’s Chief Economist Joseph Stiglitz makes clear, only a comprehensive policy agenda that rewrites the rules of the economy can create the shared prosperity and sustained growth undermined by trickle-down economics. The need for such an ambitious policy agenda to combat inequality has been echoed by leading economists, the Center for American Progress and the progressive community at large.

To be sure, Hillary Clinton and Senator Sanders both offered robust economic platforms that would alleviate economic inequality in the Democratic primary. But in order to pass a legislative agenda capable of making a real difference, the Democratic ticket must win on the economy and advance an economic framework that creates a mandate for reform. That begins at the top of the

---

<sup>1</sup> [AP-GfK poll of 1,009 adults nationally, conducted July 7-11, 2016.](#)

<sup>2</sup> Democracy Corps conduct this national phone survey of 900 likely 2016 voters from July 13-18, 2016 on behalf of the Roosevelt Institute. Respondents were selected from the national voter file and 67 percent of respondents were reached by cell phone, in order to account for ever-changing demographics and accurately sample the full electorate. Margin of error for the full sample = +/-3.27 percentage points at 95% confidence.



ticket with a winning economic message – one that convinces voters their leaders understand what has gone wrong with our economy and politics.

The public is hungry for politicians to internalize what they have known for some time and what Roosevelt has described in Rewriting the Rules: *the rules of the economy have been written by the wealthy, corporate special interests and their allies in Washington so the economy works for them, not the middle class*. This is the judgment they offer, without prompting, in focus group after focus group and in the numerous surveys Democracy Corps has conducted on Roosevelt's behalf over the past year.

But leading into the party conventions, Democrats are on track to lose the debate over the economy with the public – even while leading in the race for the White House. Clinton and the Democrats enter this debate with a 6-point advantage in partisanship, yet they trail Donald Trump and the Republicans on who would do a better job on the economy and jobs.

This survey report shows that a “Rewrite the Rules” economic message – one that begins with a strong critique of the current economy, trickle down economics, the power of big money to make government work for them, and proposes a bold plan to rewrite the rules of the economy – is transformative.

### **The public's starting point: a rigged economy**

The country has settled into an anti-corporate mood and the public is sick of a rigged economy. By a two-to-one margin, voters say they have unfavorable views of CEOs of large businesses, and over one-quarter view them very negatively. The public scorns these executives because they have enriched themselves while outsourcing jobs, failing to invest in their own companies and employees, and using their donations and lobbyists to influence politicians to rig government so it works for them, not working families.

It has not gone unnoticed that CEOs are taking home record paychecks and profits by exploiting loopholes of their own making while their employees are working longer hours for lower wages. In fact, the biggest doubt about Trump on the economy is his use of the rigged rules to enrich himself at the expense of his workers: *“He made billions by bankrupting his businesses four times, laying off his workers and defrauding small contractors.”*

The top doubt about Clinton on the economy is also on this point: *“She is part of the political elite who have gotten rich selling access.”*

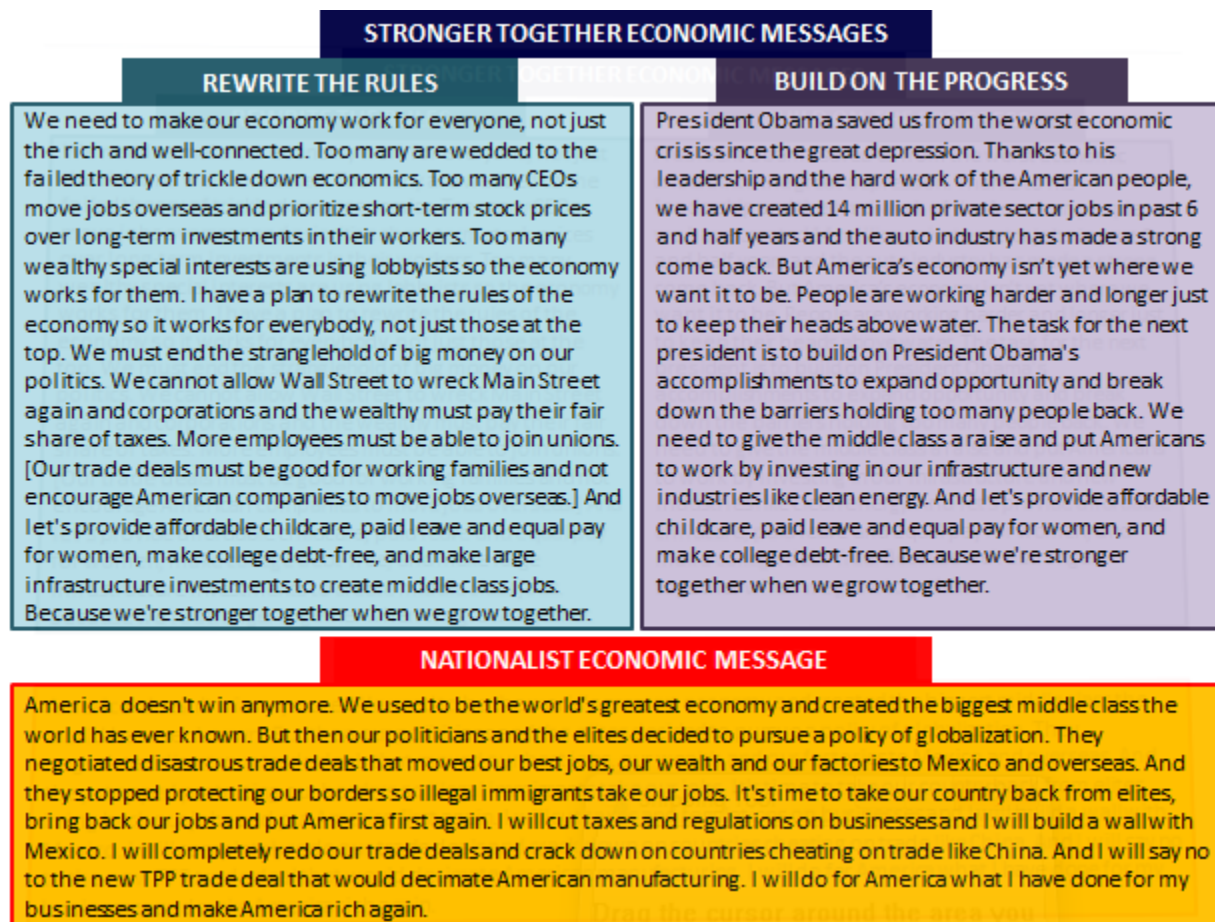
Despite a serious policy platform to reform corporations, change money in politics and combat income inequality, Clinton's off-stated vow to “build on President Obama's progress” telegraphs incremental change that would not overturn the rigged economy.

Senator Sanders and Donald Trump, by contrast, were surprisingly successful because of their strong and leading criticisms of the corrupt corporate influence over government and the economy. Senator Sanders focused on Wall Street and the campaign finance system; Donald Trump



ran not on the small government, austerity economics of conventional conservatives, but as the only candidate with the independence from special interests to buck the elite consensus on immigration and trade to put America first. That is the Republican candidate and “Nationalist” economic worldview that progressives face in November.

Progressives gain an advantage on handling the economy and creating inclusive growth, this poll reveals, when voters hear the Democratic nominee wrap her “Stronger Together” phraseology around a central “Rewriting the Rules” critique of the economy. This strategy for winning the economic debate has an electoral impact as well: key swing groups shift to support the Democratic nominee and progressive base groups consolidate.



**Discovering the power of a robust “Rewriting the Rules” agenda and message**

To understand the relative power of the “Rewriting the Rules” and “Build on the Progress” frameworks in a contest with a “Nationalist”, this survey used an experimental design to simulate the public debate over the economy. Voters heard a balanced debate including each candidate’s central economic policy proposals, doubts about their opponents’ ability to handle the economy, and their competing economic messages – all built from the candidates’ own language. Half of the respondents heard Clinton’s “Stronger Together” slogan with a “Rewriting the Rules”



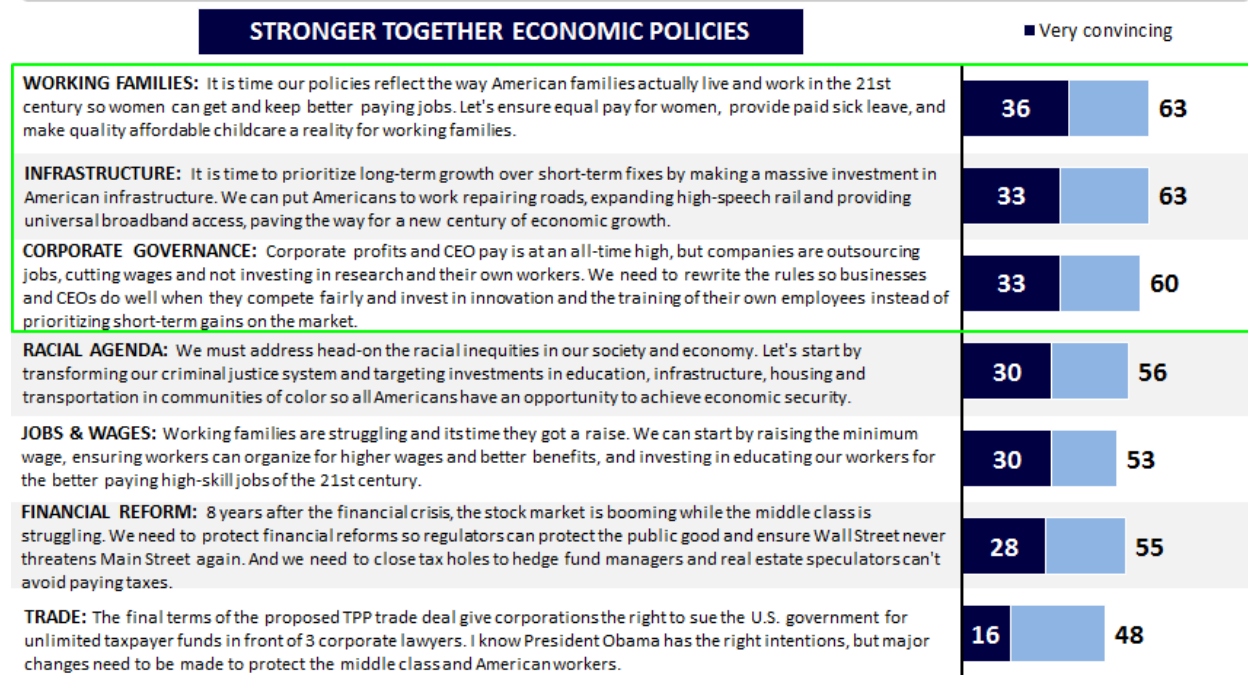
framework while the other half heard the “Stronger Together” slogan with a message that begins by vowing to “Build on the Progress” of President Obama.

The “Stronger Together + Rewrite the Rules” economic message opens by calling for an economy that works for everyone, not just the rich and well connected. It goes on to declare trickle-down economics a failure and condemns corporate short-termism and special interest lobbyists rigging the economy. It announces a plan to rewrite the rules so it works for everyone, starting with reforming the influence of money in politics.

The results show that the “Rewrite the Rules” iteration is dramatically more impactful. Both include the same bold economic proposals, but they are politically more powerful and compelling when framed in this narrative.

Here is the voter reaction to the proposals that are drawn from both the Clinton platform and the Roosevelt report. The leading policy proposals include policies for balancing work and family – equal pay, paid sick leave and affordable childcare – a large and long-term investment in infrastructure to power economic growth, and reforming corporate governance so companies invest in their workers and long-term growth, not short-term profits. (The most popular policy proposal from Donald Trump was also an infrastructure spending policy.)

*Now I am going to read you some things Hillary Clinton says about the economy. For each one, please tell me whether it is a very convincing, somewhat convincing, a little convincing, or not at all convincing statement about the economy.*

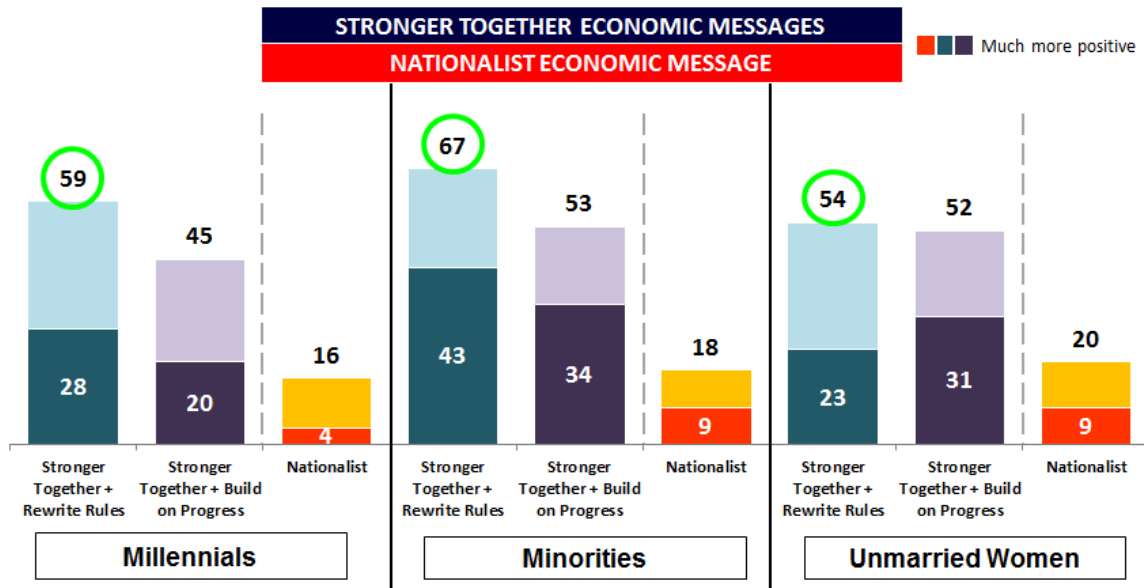


This progressive economic platform has the greatest impact on key voter groups, on the vote, and on views of which candidate is best on the economy when paired with a “Rewrite the Rules + Stronger Together” message.



The “Rewrite the Rules” economic message is much stronger with progressive base groups, like millennials and minorities, and is winning over voters holding back from Clinton.

*Now I am going to read you a statement from Hillary Clinton/Donald Trump about what needs to be done for the economy. Please tell me whether that statement makes you feel much more positive, somewhat more positive, a little more positive, or no more positive about Hillary Clinton's/Donald Trump's economic plans?*



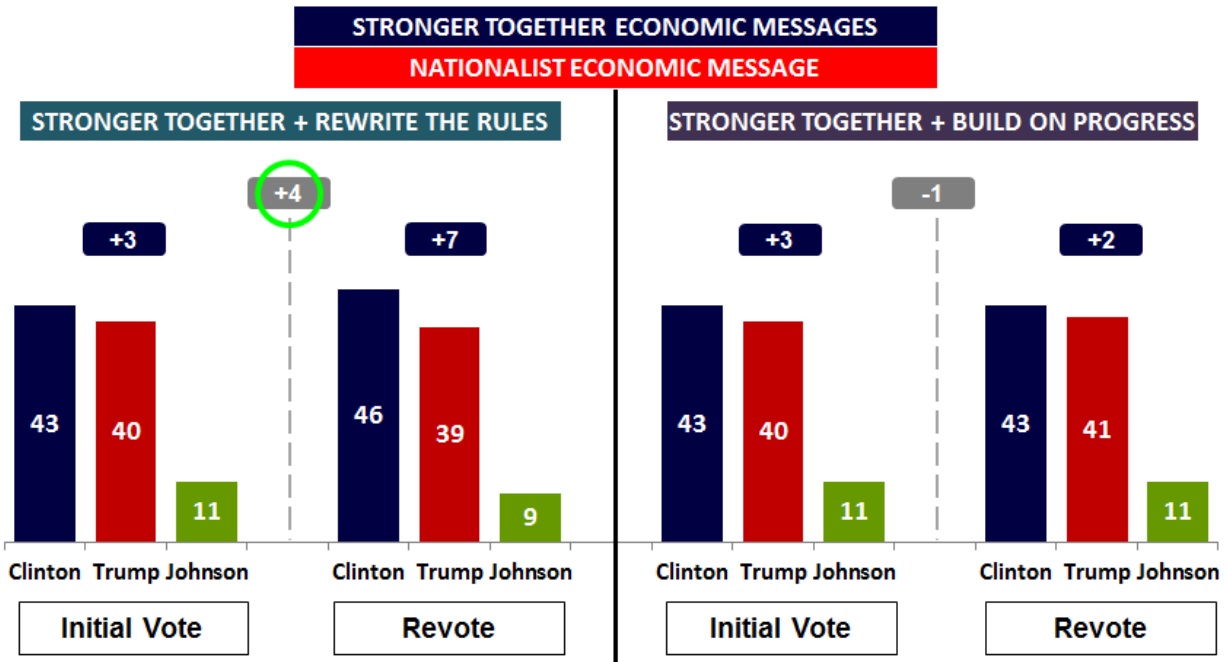
The “Build on the Progress + Stronger Together” message does not produce movement on the key tests included in this survey, despite including a popular policy agenda. At the end of the survey, Clinton’s vote margin against Trump fell by 1 point. This should underscore the importance of getting the economic framework right.<sup>3</sup>

By comparison, the “Rewrite the Rules + Stronger Together” message allows Clinton to build her vote margin by 4 points. This shift is produced by the progressive base and swing groups. Her vote margin with college women is 7 points stronger with the “Rewrite the Rules” message; it is 5 points stronger with white working class women. It is also 12 points stronger with those voters who do not like Trump or Clinton, providing a real opportunity to consolidate progressive-leaning voters.

<sup>3</sup> The “Nationalist” agenda and message scores best with the white working class men: half of white non-college educated men say that message makes them more positive about Donald Trump’s economic plans, 31 percent with intensity. That is Trump’s base and where he builds up his biggest vote margin. Nonetheless, the margin in the economic message choice is lower than that, suggesting a strong economic message can erode some of that lead.

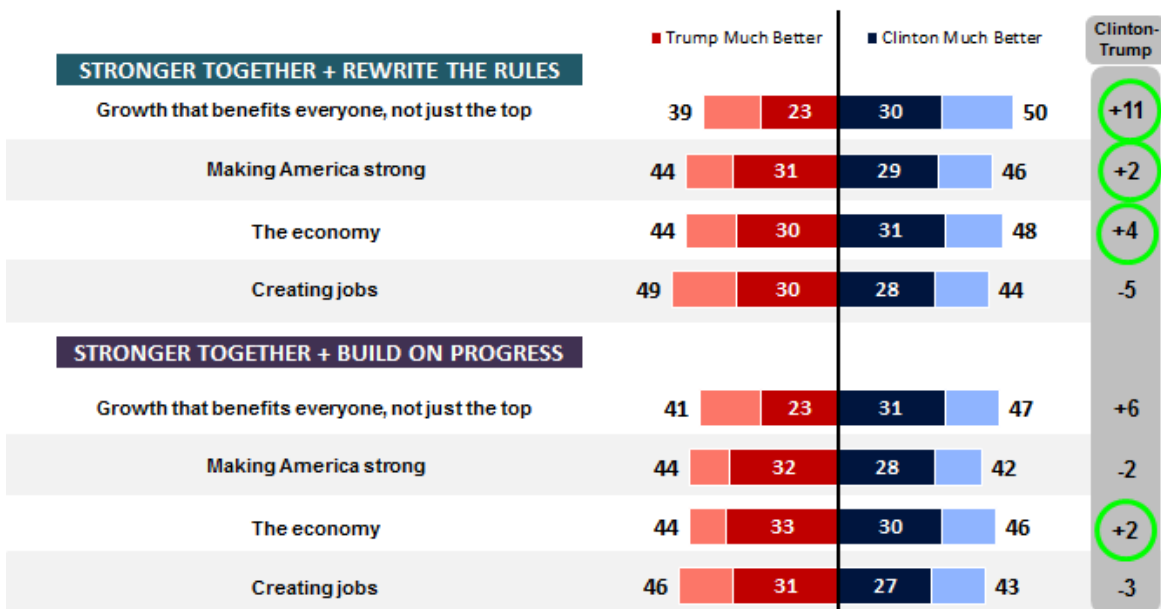


Now, thinking again about the election for President in 2016, if the election for President were held today, would you vote for -- Democrat Hillary Clinton, Republican Donald Trump or Libertarian Gary Johnson?



In the end, the most important test is whether an economic message is producing an effect on views of who is better on the economy and producing an economy that works for everyone, not just the few. The “Rewrite the Rules” message produces a 4 point advantage on the economy, 2 points stronger than the “Build on the Progress” message. It produces an 11 point advantage on “inclusive growth”, 5 points stronger than the “Build on the Progress” message. That advantage is critical to building an economic mandate and passing an agenda that will make a difference.

Now, I am going to again read you a list of issues and I want you to tell me whether, overall, you think (ROTATE) Hillary Clinton or Donald Trump would do a better job with each issue. If you do not know, just tell me and we'll move on.





Importantly, the “Rewrite the Rules” message also leads voters to trust Clinton over Trump on “Making America Strong” (+2). The “Build on the Progress” message leaves Clinton 2 points short of Trump on what is one of the more important metrics for the Trump campaign.

Democracy Corps and the Roosevelt Institute are happy to share these results in the hope of shaping this critical economic debate at the convention’s close and the eve of the general election campaign. The choice could not be more consequential.