



DEMOCRACY CORPS

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To: Friends of Democracy Corps

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Disillusioned GOP moderates *First action memo from Trump-GOP project*

Democracy Corps just completed focus groups with key segments of the Republican Party. They confirm very clearly that Donald Trump riling up his Tea Party and Evangelical base both fuels the Democratic resistance and pushes away many in the GOP. Trump's base strategy is especially disillusioning for the GOP moderates who are one-quarter of the Republican base.¹ (The same is true for nearly half of the secular conservative Republicans who are roughly one-fifth of the Republican base and the subject of our next focus group report to be released.)

How progressives communicate with these voters will affect whether they turnout in 2018 and whether they vote Democrats to "reel [Trump] in" or to stop the possible repeal of *Roe v. Wade*.

The anti-Trump reaction is evident by the GOP moderates' response to videos of Donald Trump speaking at rallies, his preferred method of communication with his base. Nearly all of the moderates had negative reactions when he was touting his progress on North Korea, highlighting the economy and jobs numbers, or talking about appointments to the Supreme Court. Trump's style is so off-putting for them that they could not embrace progress on the issues on which they agree – like the economy and immigration.

Trump speaking about social issues did not work with these socially liberal Republicans. Moderates embrace gay marriage, new laws to combat gun violence, Planned Parenthood, and regulations to protect the environment. They are disgusted by Trump's treatment of women and worry about the apparent greenlight he gives for sexism. The threats to women's rights pushed them over the edge, and some indicated they would take to the streets and organize over *Roe v. Wade*.

This all leads half of the moderates to express their interest in a different sort of Republican candidate in 2020. As one woman explained, "I just want an honest Republican who is sane and a decent human being." In *Democracy Corps*' latest national phone survey that has just come out of the field, one-quarter of moderates voted for a Third-Party candidate in 2020. In the near term, some may stay home, some may vote for candidates who will be a check on Donald Trump, and some may even be open to Democrats.

¹ *Democracy Corps* conducted a focus group on July 16, 2018 with Republicans and Republican-leaning independent white women from Oakland County, MI who are ideologically moderate and don't identify as evangelical Christian or observant Catholic. They are mostly working class. All but one Third Party voter voted for Trump in 2016.



On the other side of the ideological divide

Sex & women. Moderate Republicans more closely resembled Democrats in their social views. Though gay marriage was not the hot button issue it once was among the conservative and religious Republicans with whom we spoke in other focus groups, it is not even a question for moderates. Asked what they thought about gay marriage, they said “cool,” “sweet,” and “whatever.”

They all “feel good” about Planned Parenthood, saying, “They’ve done a lot of good.” There was not a single qualification. Moderates are also supportive of abortion rights and are “scared to death” that it is now a possibility that *Roe v. Wade* could be overturned. “It’s not going to stop abortion,” one woman said, “it’s just going to stop legal abortion.” A successful challenge to *Roe* would be so “huge” that these moderates may become activists: “I can’t say that I have ever gotten involved in organizing [...] I would for 100% march, picket and whatever I had to do to stop that from happening. I would beat down the doors at Congress.”

Moderates are more worried about “going backwards with all the women’s rights” because they believe that the President is “so chauvinistic against women.” They were disgusted by a video of candidate Trump’s disrespectful treatment of women. They said they loath “the name calling, the degrading, the grabbing them with the pussies,” and they also cited his recent disrespect towards female world leaders as a problem. This behavior towards women was “almost” a reason not to vote for him in 2016, though Hillary Clinton was tarnished for them on that issue and others.

Multiculturalism. While moderates want much more control on immigration, they embrace America’s multiculturalism, which distinguished them from other GOP groups. In reaction to a *Coca-Cola* ad featuring a multilingual version of ‘America the Beautiful,’ they said:

I like it.

It was amazingly beautiful. I lack the words.

It showed America as a melting pot, which is what we are.

I thought it was nicely show, all wanting and doing the same sort of thing in their own ways.

And I think it shows ... the people not speaking English that they are immigrants to the country and they are showing their pride for America by singing our National Anthem in their own language.

Role of government and business. Unlike other factions of the GOP base, the moderates supported a greater role for government in solving a range of issues that impact their health and safety. For example, they supported the Second Amendment, but they also said there should be limits: “The right to bear arms means that you have the right to defend yourself, does not mean that you have the right to carry a gun out in the open. Does not mean that you [have] the right to



carry an assault rifle.” These moderates were deeply concerned about the threat of gun violence, especially against children. One woman even said that she and her husband were unsure whether to have children because they worried they could not keep them safe today.

Moderates also “don’t think we do enough for our environment at all” and are concerned about the trend under Trump. “He’s doing things that worry me about the environment, rolling back things that are important to me,” said one moderate woman pessimistic about the future of the country. That led them to embrace environmentalists without qualification in open-ended associations.

Other Republicans vocally opposed a government guarantee that everyone should have good healthcare, but moderates “definitely believe government should be more involved in guaranteeing us that we have healthcare coverage.” They even suggested moving to a Canadian or UK model.

Everybody else in the world has it. I don't understand why we don't have it for us. I think Canadians have their own health care system, is that right? [...] Maybe they started out bumpy, I don't know, but how they got there let's try to copy or do the same process for us.

My friend in England has it [...] and she's got to wait sometimes a little bit, but at least she's not saddled with a huge bill that can bankrupt her.

When it comes to the private sector, moderates are skeptical of “shady” and “greedy” CEOs. Interestingly, when asked what they associated with CEOs of large companies, they began to talk about special treatment for lawmakers:

I think that goes with anything that's higher up like the president, well maybe not the president so much but maybe all of our senators that have all these benefits that are just absurd and that's our tax money.

I was just going to touch base on like the government shutdown and all the senators being paid their pay checks and here our military people, military families were going without pay even though they were all there for us.

When the moderator asked the room why they directed the conversation this way, they explained, “I look at politicians as big CEOs of this country” and “they pick the candidate too.” This suggests a possible opening for Democrats.

The reaction to Trump

Trump is dividing the country. When asked about the future of the country, moderates used words like “very sad,” “worried,” “less hopeful,” and “unsafe.” They are uncertain about the country’s future because of the divisiveness of the Trump-era.



I think not being together, being so divided. I know when Trump was elected, there was hope that he was going to bring this country together and I think this country is more divided than anything.

Everybody's just fighting about politics [...] and you can't even have a conversation say with a friend without having an argument.

It's not just that we're divided, people are willing to literally, physically fight because of difference of opinion. That's not what this country is about. This country is about being free to argue and to be free to have that difference of opinion. People want to fight for it.

That is why it is important that all of the moderates responded negatively to Donald Trump's rallies, his preferred venues for talking to voters. These events fuel further division in the country and the moderates know that's intentional: "That's what I think Trump's about. He's about stirring the pot and making people [upset] and that's not how a president should be."

Even though the economy is the area where moderates give Trump the most credit, his egoism and his demeanor lead them to qualify the economic figures he cites in his speech.

He started talking about bringing back jobs and we've hit the lowest unemployment. Yeah, we've got a lot of jobs, but they're all low paying jobs. He wants to cut the minimum wage, so the employers can pay whatever the heck they want to pay you, and people are getting two and three jobs just to get by. So, you know, we've got low unemployment, but it's not always good.

I'm definitely not an Obama fan, but the economy was headed into the positive when he was not in office, and it seems like Trump just wants to take credit for that. Like the economy was actually disastrous when the last few years Obama was in office, it wasn't great, but it was headed in the right direction. And he just – I don't know, I just have a problem with it. He just seems like he wants to take all of the credit.

Check on Trump. Moderates were already pulling back from the Republican Party for being out of touch with their views on social issues and the role of government and for refusing to reel in Trump.

I just don't see any Republicans standing up to him and trying to stop some of these things that are going through.

I kind of feel the same way. I'm hoping that the Republican party will open up their eyes and see Trump for what he is. I was a supporter of Trump, but I'm not so much now. I'm not going to say I'm totally against him, but I'm hoping that the Republican party can reel him in a little bit.

They were consciously looking for candidates who will be a check on Trump, including possibly voting for a Democrat.



The Russians. The moderates expressed more concern up front with the Russians, and they were impacted by possible escalating indictments that could happen before Election Day.

We distributed a handout describing the existing indictments of the Special Counsel and asked them to consider a hypothetical scenario in which Mueller also indicts Paul Manafort and Donald Trump Jr. for criminally aiding Russians and issues a report to Congress finding President Trump obstructed justice. All of the moderates took this very seriously and called it “another Watergate”.

Especially that many people, it's not just one we are talking 32 and then three that were – that pled guilty then to something that is supposed to be for the people and it's just very corrupt.

Completely unsettling.

Indictments, this enormous amount of people that it says? Insane that there's that many people corrupt in this political campaign, in any political campaign.

They were the most willing of the Republican groups to respond by suggesting Trump is “not as innocent as he says he is” and even brought up impeachment.

I agreed with [the] initial thought of impeachment. I mean if something comes out like that I mean –

Yeah, I think they should impeach him. I mean obstructing justice, that's impeachable. Donald Trump, Jr. was – if he is involved then I'm sure dad knew about it and was behind all this and the Russian involvement is again, I keep bringing it up it's scary.

At the very least they felt that it was critical for there to be punishment for anyone involved as a deterrence from a corrupt political system becoming even worse: “Even if he had a little bit of involvement in it, even minute, it is still involvement and you are president of this country. [...] If there's [not] going to be a harsh punishment to deter others from doing this then, yes, it is a complete waste of our money.”

Scandals and crimes become major reasons not to vote for the Republicans in 2018 after this discussion, and they doubted that Republicans would take this matter seriously: “The reason I put into this was because Trump and the Republicans stand by their man no matter. And I really believe that most of them don't believe that and believe what he is saying.”

The message to Trump. The moderate GOP's postcards to President Trump at the end of the group beseeched him to listen to the people outside his base, to recognize we are all equal, and to work together for all people and the common good. They warned him not to let money and greed destroy the country and asked him to “please help people with health care” and to protect the environment.



Post-session post-cards to Donald Trump

Dear President Trump, you are the leader of the greatest country and a wonderful melting pot of people. Please use your power for good – the common good for the poor-middle class and wealthy. All types of people are counting on you. It is important to take pride in the position and information being provided to the people. Although 2018 has such a large following on all social media platforms you don't need to be a part of that banter. Send a message, don't start a rant and focus on changing the country for the better.

Dear President Trump, I believe in your vision for the future of the United States. I am very happy that you are so supportive of our military. Please be a little more proactive on strengthening their strength and pay them what they deserve. Stay off social media, it is hurting your image. Stay strong on illegal immigration.

Great job on immigration control. However some stipulation in regard to a few of your choices and laws. Let's do this together where all are equal and no one is left out. Let's agree to do the right thing. One more thought is about the environment. Let's ensure our environment is in the top 25 of our list of things to consider as we go forward as one.

Please reunite the families continue with immigration reform but you are going about it with disregard for good upstanding people. Please STOP using twitter/social media and clean up your rhetoric. Listen to the people not just to the ones that agree with you.

Stop tweeting. When going into meetings and speaking to your country, please remember that THE PEOPLE put you there and expect our country to be represented in a certain way. The policies and improvements will be better received if you are able to communicate properly with people in and outside of the country. Please continue to "Make America Great Again" by listening to ALL of us and representing both parties.

Donald, please think about the children—how your name calling and behavior is affecting them. How you destruction of the environment by bringing coal back and all the Obama rollbacks will hurt not only our kids but yours too. Money and greed is going to destroy our country. Please surround yourself with scientists and professionals and take their advice.

Please help people with health care. Can't afford premiums to health insurance. People should not go bankrupt in the country and lose homes to pay medical expenses. Working people cannot afford this. Yes, jobs are important. Bring jobs back to America. America was great at one time.