

To: *MoveOn.Org Political Action*

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Re: New Findings Show Highly Competitive Presidential Race in Swing States, and Effective Strategies for Using Trump's Vulnerabilities to Engage Progressive and Swing Voters

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Donald Trump's candidacy represents much more than a threat to the hard-fought wins of progressives over the past 50 years; it is a direct assault on American Democracy—a veneration of the values of greed, ignorance, mediocrity, and fear that most Republicans find unacceptable; and a frightening opening for America to descend down the path of virulent nativism and paranoid authoritarianism, with unthinkable consequences for our nation and the world.

As part of a larger effort, not only to cement progressive victories in 2016, but to defeat and delegitimize Trump's brand of politics now and into the future, MoveOn.Org Political Action engaged *Lake Research Partners* and *Anat Shenker Osorio Communications* to conduct an innovative study of two critical 2016 voting blocs—independent swing voters and the Rising American Electorate (defined as voters of color, younger unmarried women, and Millennials)—across thirteen 'battleground' states: AZ, CO, FL, GA, IA, MI, NV, NH, NC, OH, PA, VA and WI. A central objective of this research was to assess Trump's vulnerabilities and determine how a campaign aimed at exploiting those vulnerabilities might begin to shift public opinion in a fundamentally more progressive direction beyond just this election cycle. This memo highlights the key findings from that research.

Overview of Findings

The data reveal important—and encouraging—similarities between swing and RAE voters when it comes to their common interest in the upcoming elections and strong sense of duty and responsibility regarding the importance of voting, even as both electoral blocs look askance at their options for President. The two groups of voters also share a strong desire for change, though their decidedly progressive, populist assessment of what is needed to correct the trajectory of the country, and the economy specifically, is offset by a deep sense of skepticism, apparent even among portions of the RAE, toward government experience and a willingness to treat an "outsider" perspective on Washington as a central criterion for Presidential leadership. **These conflicting attitudes combine to keep the race for President highly competitive among the voters who will decide the outcome of the 2016 election.**

The survey offers a portrait of two candidates who are well known to the public, are both highly defined and, among swing voters, decidedly unpopular.

- When it comes to patterns of support for the candidates, the RAE voters favor Clinton over Trump by a commanding margin (60% Clinton to 16% Trump), though with room still to grow. **The RAE voters are less certain than swing voters about their participation in the election, underscoring the importance of mobilizing the progressive base to a greater degree in the coming weeks and months.**

- The swing voters currently afford Trump important advantages over Clinton on key dimensions of leadership—including ushering in the right kind of change—which the presumptive Republican nominee converts into a lead on the ballot among independents: 39% Trump to 30% Clinton. By the end of the survey, however, after voters have heard a modicum of positive messaging on behalf of the two campaigns, and a battery of arguments against Trump, the Presidential ballot ends up in a statistical tie (35% Trump to 33% Clinton), **underscoring the power of the best messages to shift the outcome of the race.**

This study employed an innovative approach to message testing, examining not only voters' existing misgivings about Trump and their conscious, direct assessments of a number of arguments against his candidacy, but their unconscious, moment-to-moment reactions to those arguments, as well. This deeper analysis of the available data uncovers a particularly daunting set of concerns about Trump.

Our key findings about an effective strategy to confront Trump:

- **Solid majorities of RAE and swing voters see Trump as an essentially hateful, unstable bully, fundamentally untrustworthy and lacking the temperament necessary for the next President.**
- **The single most damning case against Trump, across the various measurements and using his own words and actions as evidence, is that as President he would escalate the likelihood of catastrophic violent conflict from without and within, posing a serious threat to the future of the United States.**
- **Simplifying the communications strategy, both groups of voters have grave concerns about trusting Trump with the country's nuclear arsenal and that his penchant for fomenting division could lead to a new civil war inside America.**
- **These arguments can be engaged to elevate the stakes of the race for voters, especially the RAE; reverse the trends in support for Trump among swing voters; and set the terms of the political debate in a decidedly more progressive direction.**

However, elevating concerns about Trump will only go so far to achieving these ends. With the high levels of animus toward both Trump and Clinton, third Party candidates are poised to attract sufficient support at the margins to impact the outcome of a tight election. One-in-ten RAE voters would support either Libertarian Gary Johnson (6%) or Green Party candidate, Jill Stein (4%), today. Among swing voters that number creeps even higher (9% for Johnson and 5% for Stein). An important caveat to emerge from the research is that executing this strategy to maximum effect requires giving voters something positive to vote in affirmation of, as well.

The Mood and Political Context

Both segments of the electorate are also in a decidedly anti-Washington mood, registering strong beliefs that the country needs to chart a different course, as well as serious concerns about a rigged economy and the continued threat of terrorism. Nearly three-quarters of the RAE and more

than eight-in-ten swing voters believe “we need new people in Washington to get things done, especially those who haven’t been involved in government” (RAE: 73% agree; Swing: 85% agree). For swing voters, in particular, the desire for change reflects a skepticism about the value of government experience that lends credence to a central tenet of Trump’s candidacy. In fact, by a substantial 15-point margin swing voters have more confidence in Trump than Clinton to “bring about desirable change” as President (39% to 24%). Even Clinton’s 33-point lead among RAE voters when it comes to effecting “desirable change” (52% to 22%) underperforms her margins among RAE voters on the ballot and suggests a profile that is wanting on this central dimension of desired leadership today.

Even so, interest in the election is high among both groups (RAE: 87% interested, including 63% very interested; Swing: 93% interested, including 74% very interested), though there is work to do still when it comes to mobilizing the progressive base. Fully 90% of swing voters are “certain” to vote compared to just 74% of RAE voters.

Both RAE and swing voters express a deep reverence for the importance of voting, considering it a core “responsibility” of citizenship (RAE: 89% agree; Swing: 95% agree)—and they believe it is their “duty to vote for leaders who will work to represent all Americans” (RAE: 89% agree; Swing: 92% agree). Both groups believe that “all people have equal rights, no matter what they look like or where they come from” (RAE: 77% agree; Swing: 77% agree) and that, “no matter where you are from, what makes a person American is his/her commitment to country” (RAE: 80% agree; Swing: 82% agree). These are important values to emphasize in communications, especially to RAE voters, whether focusing on Trump’s vulnerabilities or not.

Terrorism remains a constant source of concern for both groups, with nearly half of RAE voters (46%) and 43% of swing voters describing themselves as “worried” that they or someone in their immediate family will be the target of a terrorist attack. Only 16% of RAE voters and 19% of swing voters are “not at all worried” about terrorism in this highly personal context. Moreover, voters in both groups are far more hesitant to endorse the basic posture of both campaigns on matters of war and peace, as less than half of RAE and swing voters alike *strongly* agree that “the best way to ensure peace is through military strength and smart diplomacy” (RAE: 41% strongly agree; Swing: 45% strongly agree), registering a fraction of the intensity evident on matters of economy inequality, civic engagement, and the importance of change. As long as terrorist attacks dominate headlines and voters’ concerns for their safety remain so prominent, the two candidates will continue to jockey for position on matters of homeland security, though the picture is more complicated on matters of foreign policy, where voters’ tend place higher value on Presidential temperament.

Yet the data is perhaps most illuminating in the picture it paints of both groups’ protracted anxiety over an economy that long ago stopped working for the benefit of most Americans. More than three-quarters of RAE and swing voters alike agree that, “today it’s really true that the rich just get richer while the poor get poorer” (RAE: 84% agree; Swing: 79% agree), including majorities who *strongly* agree with that statement (68% and 61%, respectively). The similarities between base and swing voters does not stop at their shared diagnosis of the country’s economic problems. In fact, more than three-quarters of voters in each camp agree that “it is the responsibility of the government to ensure the well-being of its people” (RAE: 83% agree; Swing: 73% agree) and that “any economy requires oversight in order to best serve the public interest” (RAE: 73% agree; Swing: 70% agree). Much of voters’ desire for change stems from frustration that more has not been achieved on either count since the Great Recession. Indeed, fully 66% of RAE voters and 72% of

swing voters report their families' economic situations have stagnated over the past 8 years or are unsure how to characterize the trend short of not having improved. Only one-third of RAE voters (34%) and one-quarter of swing voters (27%) say their families' economic situations have gotten better in that time.

Perceptions of the Key Players

The lack of significant differences between the two groups of voters on key aspects of the progressive economic narrative is remarkable, though more telling is the fact that this framework is not translating into solid Democratic advantages for the likely nominee among the Rising American Electorate. As it turns out, swing voters' disdain for both candidates constitutes a critical barrier limiting the ability of either to make meaningful headway on the issues described above. More than two-thirds of swing voters in these states (30% favorable to 67% unfavorable) view Hillary Clinton in a negative light, and with considerable intensity (50% very unfavorable). Even among RAE voters, her image is more mixed than one might expect (58% favorable to 36% unfavorable). Donald Trump is unsurprisingly reviled among RAE voters (21% favorable to 73% unfavorable, including 61% very unfavorable). He is also solidly unpopular among swing voters (38% favorable to 59% unfavorable), though with slightly less negative intensity (43% very unfavorable) than his Democratic opponent.

In contrast to the two presumptive nominees, Bernie Sanders enjoys a positive profile among both electoral targets. Among RAE voters, 65% have a favorable impression of Sanders (30% very) versus 25% who have an unfavorable impression. More striking is Sanders' continued appeal among swing voters, a 53% majority of whom have a favorable opinion of him (23% very) compared to 39% who have an unfavorable opinion. In fact, Sanders boasts the highest personal favorability ratings of any of the figures tested in this survey, suggesting a potential to play an important role through the fall—consolidating Democrats and even bringing some independent voters into the fold, too.

Dimension of Leadership

An important corollary of the dynamic described above concerning swing voters' skepticism of both Trump and Clinton, is that the issue advantages voters afford each appear to stem as much from the perceived weaknesses of the opponents as from the candidates' own strengths.

RAE voters have more confidence in Clinton on every dimension tested, but provide her some of her greatest advantages over Trump on who “has the right temperament to be President” (+51), will “successfully execute the office of the Presidency” (+43), “cares about people like me” (+40), “shares my values” (+37), and will “be a President for all Americans” (+40).

<i>Which Candidate Do You Have More Confidence In To...</i>				
	RAE		SWING	
	Clinton	Trump	Clinton	Trump
<i>Have the right temperament to be president</i>	64	13	34	24
<i>Have the right character to be president</i>	58	16	33	26

<i>Successfully execute the office of the presidency</i>	59	16	34	31
<i>Be a president for all Americans</i>	56	16	29	33
<i>Be a successful president</i>	59	16	31	36
<i>Care about people like me</i>	56	15	26	30
<i>Share my values</i>	54	16	27	32
<i>Get things done</i>	54	20	27	42
<i>Bring about desirable change</i>	53	20	24	39
<i>Unite our country</i>	52	13	28	29
<i>Improve economic prosperity for all Americans</i>	54	19	26	41
<i>Provoke another war</i>	19	55	19	44

The perspectives of RAE voters on these questions stand in stark relief to those of swing voters. By solid margins, independents have greater confidence in Trump to “improve economic prosperity for all Americans” (+15 Trump), “get things done” (+16 Trump), “bring about desirable change” (+15 Trump), and by a narrower margin, “share my values” (+5 Trump). Swing voters are more divided on which candidate is more likely to “be a president for all Americans” (+5 Trump), “care about people like me” (+4 Trump), “unite our country” (+1 Trump), and “successfully execute the office of the presidency” (+3 Clinton). The only *positive* trait tested that swing voters solidly ascribe to Clinton over Trump is “hav[ing] the right temperament to be President” (+10 Clinton; +7 Clinton for a version that swaps “temperament” for “character”). Even so, fully 44% of swing voters believe Trump is more likely to “provoke another war”, a 25-point margin over the 19% who believe that describes Clinton better. While limited in scope, these advantages for Clinton are by no means insignificant. They build on a pronounced set of existing concerns about Trump, specifically that he is “dangerous for our future” (55% of swing voter say this describes Trump well; 76% of RAE voters), “a bully” (Swing: 65%; RAE: 78%), and fundamentally “not trustworthy” (Swing: 54%; RAE: 71%).

Trump’s penchant for using ugly and violent rhetoric to divide people along racial, ethnic, and gender lines has resulted in majorities of voters, RAE and swing alike, who consider him “hateful” (Swing: 52%; RAE: 71%), “sexist” (Swing: 57%; RAE: 73%), and “racist” (Swing: 49%; RAE: 70%). Moreover, voters’ concerns that Trump is “unstable” (Swing: 56%; RAE: 70%) and “thin skinned” (Swing: 46%; RAE: 59%) have left significant majorities worried about the consequences of electing him for the country’s future.

In fact, more than two-thirds of RAE voters and majorities of swing voters now believe Trump “creates divisions that could lead to a new civil war in America” (Swing: 52%; RAE: 71%) and that he “can’t be trusted with nuclear codes” (Swing: 51%; RAE: 68%). These misgivings about Trump have broad reach across both groups of voters, if only modest intensity; they also contain the seeds of powerful arguments against his candidacy, which have the potential to build greater intensity on all the dimensions outlined above and ultimately to shift support in the race for president.

Key Associations with Donald Trump				
	RAE		Swing	
	% Well	% Not Well	% Well	% Not Well
Is dangerous for our future	76	18	55	40
A bully	78	16	65	30
Creates divisions	77	14	65	28
Sexist	73	20	57	35
Racist	70	23	49	43
Creates divisions that could lead to a new civil war in America	71	22	52	33
Hateful	71	22	52	40
Not trustworthy	71	23	54	36
Can't be trusted with nuclear codes	68	21	51	36
Unstable	70	24	56	38
Dishonest	67	23	44	51
Thin skinned	59	29	46	43

Takeaways for Message Strategy

This study was designed to provide a finer assessment of message approaches than traditional, direct ratings of the arguments set forth. The quantitative phase of the research was conducted online expressly to allow for continuous dial testing of the various message approaches, supplying data not just on how convincing each argument is as a reason to oppose Trump, but the peaks and valleys over the course of the arguments as voters heard them. A comprehensive analysis of the findings will follow this summary memo, but the key takeaway is that Donald Trump is highly vulnerable to arguments that amplify existing concerns about his temperament and trustworthiness, particularly as they apply to his likelihood to create violent conflict at home and jeopardize America's strength and security in a volatile global arena. It is not just that these voters do *not* trust Trump with responsibility of nuclear weapons in today's world, though they do not; it is that they do not even like the way he *talks* about nuclear weapons and are extremely worried by his views on nuclear proliferation. Moreover, their concerns about Trump's temperament and fundamental instability raise serious questions about the consequences of his brand of leadership on an increasingly diverse America. In both arguments, voters respond clearly to appeals to patriotism—both groups of voters want a President who will work to represent all Americans. Notably, messages that seek to impugn Trump for his record of misogyny or for the consequences of his economic record and agenda on working Americans tend to be less effective.

Finally, a word of caution in advancing a message that is fundamentally based on stoking public fears about Trump: cynicism about the political process is a significant barrier to voting, and messages that operate on a solely one-sided, negative dimension could have the impact of diminishing enthusiasm in the elections. Acting to eliminate something bad—even a very potent bad—is not as effective, empowering, or sustainable as acting to create something good. Ultimately, for this message approach to have maximal impact, it would be complemented by a positive antithesis to the core set of arguments against Trump, providing the voters something, and someone, affirmative to vote for.

The table below includes the text of the best testing arguments, along with a portion of the critical data from the various measures.

Top Arguments Against Trump				
	RAE		Swing	
	% Convincing	Mean Rating; Min. Dial (-100 to +100 on Trump)	% very Convincing	Mean Rating; Min. Dial (-100 to +100 on Trump)
<p>“Donald Trump has made it clear that he doesn’t care about the opinions of our military and intelligence experts, because he says he has a QUOTE "very good brain." UNQUOTE Instead, he yells at and mocks anyone who disagrees with him. That’s a dangerous way to conduct meetings with leaders like Putin in Russia. It’s the opposite of what we need in a world leader. Trump’s reckless approach and thin skin could get us into a war. The commander in chief holds the codes to nuclear weapons for our entire nation, equaling 22,000 Hiroshimas—a world-ending destructive power. We can’t risk an individual of Trump’s temperament with his finger on the nuclear button.”</p>	68%, 53% very	-38; -65	53%, 36% very	-20; -50
<p>“We elect the President to be the President of all Americans. The White House is no place for hateful, bigoted language and attacks that divide Americans based on race, gender, or religion. Donald Trump has repeatedly insulted women, Latinos, African Americans, and has mocked disabled people. He’s courted support from white supremacists, emboldening racists and bigots like the KKK and making them feel like they have license to attack other groups. We are stronger as a nation when we treat everyone with respect and dignity. Insulting Americans and encouraging hate, not unity, is no way to govern. It would make us weaker as a nation, and could lead to heightened violence and conflict in our country.”</p>	64%, 49% very	-26; -65	51%, 35% very	-14; -51

In conclusion, the results of this study point to a strategy that could turn around two important and concerning political trends: RAE voters’ relative lack of engagement in the election (vis-à-vis swing voters) and underwhelming support for Clinton on the ballot; and Trump’s edge over Clinton among swing voters on the same ballot in the 2016 battleground states. However, while elevating voters’ concerns about Trump’s trustworthiness and temperament could set the race on a very different trajectory, such a strategy will likely not find maximal success—or provides a fundamentally more progressive framework for voters’ to evaluate politics and policy in the future—without a parallel effort that gives voters in these states something to turn out on Election Day and vote for.
