

Grand Old Party
for

A Brand New
Generation



“I would say your image is all wrong.”

It was early January, and we were in San Diego observing a focus group of young Obama voters. On one side of the glass, the participants had just been asked what they would like to say to the leaders of the Republican Party. First to jump into the discussion was a 27-year old Indian-American woman, a self-described moderate independent.

“If this is the generation that we are, we are getting older and if you are expecting to stay around then you are going to have to change some of the things that you do,” she continued. “The image ... there are negative things that are coming out from it. And we aren't 15, we aren't 16, we are voting members, tax-paying members of the country and we are just going to keep getting older and we have the values that we have. So you are going to have to change.”

She was not alone in her assessment of the image of the Republican Party. Comments like hers followed us around the country from focus group to focus group. But what changes could possibly convince her to cast a ballot for a Republican in the future? Strategically and tactically, in messaging or in policy, what can Republicans do to win young voters?

We believe that Republicans can win young voters but that it will require a significantly different approach than has been used in recent elections. In this report, we propose what such an approach would entail and offer research-

based insights that can guide Republicans wishing to find success with a new generation.

President Barack Obama won 5 million more votes than Gov. Mitt Romney among voters under the age of 30 in the 2012 election. Despite Romney holding a 2 million-vote advantage over the President among voters aged 30 and older, Obama's significant lead with the youth vote was enough to ensure his re-election. While Obama's advantage among young people shrank from 34 points in the 2008 election to 23 points in 2012, the election reinforced the generational challenge faced by the GOP.

Perhaps most surprising on election day was not the wide margin of Republicans' losses with young voters, but rather the increased proportion of the electorate made up by the under-30 set. Volumes of data before the election seemed to indicate diminished enthusiasm among young voters. It was not hard to see why that might be the case: youth unemployment was particularly high and student loan debt had spiraled upward. Yet despite significantly less enthusiasm for President Obama than four years ago, the millennial generation made an even bigger mark at the ballot box than in 2008, jumping from 18% to 19% of the electorate.

Conventional wisdom incorrectly holds that young people naturally favor Democrats. This is used primarily as an excuse for the GOP's poor performance among young voters in recent elections, and is typically accompanied by the

suggestion that Republicans focus their turnout and persuasion efforts elsewhere. While it is true that the Democratic Party is on a recent winning streak with the youth vote, starting with Bill Clinton's edge over George H. W. Bush in the 1992 election, the recent margins won by President Obama far exceed historic norms. In the first election where 18-year-olds were eligible to vote, some 52% of voters under age 30 cast their ballots for Richard Nixon. Prior to Obama, it was Ronald Reagan who held the record for winning the highest proportion of young voters at 59% in 1984. Indeed, in the 2000 election, George W. Bush only lost young voters by 2 points, while at the same time losing senior citizens (aged 65 and older) by 4 points.

All of which is to say that the Republican Party has won the youth vote before and absolutely can win it again. But this will not occur without significant work to repair the damage done to the Republican brand among this age group over the last decade.

The following report assesses the findings from a variety of studies on young voters, including a new March 2013 survey conducted for the College Republican National Committee (CRNC), and makes recommendations about how Republicans can begin this work today.

The post-election discussion within the Republican Party has focused heavily on understanding what went wrong and how the party can rebuild itself. There are essentially three camps that have emerged in the aftermath of the

2012 election, each of which has a different take on why the Republican Party failed to appeal to an adequate number of voters. Broadly summarizing, these groups can be thought of as the **“technology” camp, the “policy” camp, and the “brand” camp.**

The technology camp posits that Republican losses had quite a bit to do with the GOP's failure to keep up with Democrats on key items such as data systems, polling, social media, and advertising. While each of these items is very different from the others, they are frequently lumped together under the umbrella of a GOP technological deficit. While the Obama campaign built sophisticated data systems that shared information across the campaign, allowing supporters to be effectively targeted and swing-voters to be persuaded with precision, the Romney campaign's data systems were epitomized by the public fiasco of “Project ORCA,” a turnout engine that crashed on election day. While Obama's pollsters had accurate situational awareness about his standing in key swing states, the Romney campaign was guided by overly optimistic data and was left stunned on election night. While Obama's campaign consistently tested and optimized their online efforts, such behavior was not ingrained into the culture of the campaign on the right.

When it comes to the issue of young voters, the question is clear: how could a campaign that was operating behind the times reach out to the most tech-savvy generation in the electorate?

Yet for others, technology was not the problem: it was the party's policies that kept young voters from supporting the GOP. Indeed – and as this report will examine in great detail – there are subjects where the Millennial generation and Republican Party are not in perfect agreement. Significant attention is paid in the media to the “social issues,” which are often thought of as one bucket rather than as separate items, and which are seen as departure points for many young people. And some have said that young people are trending away from the right on issues of defense, the role of government, etc. However, there are also areas of agreement where Republicans are in sync with the beliefs and aspirations of young voters.

If young voters primarily thought the Republican Party's policy plan in 2012 was to prevent gay marriage and to ensure very low taxes for very rich people, the policy camp has posited, it's understandable that a large majority voted the other way. The question for them is, what can Republicans stand for that will broaden their appeal among young voters?

The third take on the election is that the party's policies are largely fine and that technology is an inadequate reason for explaining Republican losses; instead, it is the party's branding and messengers who are to blame. House Majority Leader Eric Cantor prominently espoused this position in his statement likening the GOP to a pizza company, saying that the party needs to focus on changing the “pizza box” rather than the “pizza.”

It is not hard to find examples of Republican missteps in the 2012 election that enhanced this brand challenge. Whether the infamous “47%” remarks made by Romney or the “legitimate rape” comments made by Rep. Todd Akin in his Senate campaign, there were numerous examples of Republican leaders making statements that were terribly out of step with where voters – particularly young voters – stand. Is it any wonder, asks the brand camp, that young people reject the GOP when its message is being carried in such a negative and out-of-touch way?

This report seeks to explore all three of these areas. Neither technology, nor policy, nor branding alone will fully endear the Republican Party to a generation that has now twice broken for a Democratic candidate by historic margins. Indeed, these areas are all quite connected with one another. Based primarily on survey research and focus groups conducted for the CRNC, this report examines young voter attitudes and offers recommendations to interested campaigns, parties, and candidates who want to make progress with young voters. (For details on research methodology, see the appendix. Unless otherwise specified, data in this report is drawn from this Spring 2013 CRNC research initiative.)

Making inroads with Millennials – those born between 1980 and 2000, represented in this report primarily as voters under the age of 30 – is critical not just in the short term, but for the long-term prospects of the Republican Party.

Research has shown that voting is a habit-forming behavior, and that brand loyalty to a particular party can emerge when voters come of political age and choose one party in a series of elections. **Turning this tide is both possible and essential, and must begin today.**

A grayscale photograph of a person from behind, wearing large headphones and looking at a laptop. A red banner is overlaid on the top left.

chapter 1

“I also have to say that I - many people wouldn't admit to this, but I also watch The Daily Show and Stephen Colbert.”

The focus group participant who made the previous statement was wrong in one aspect; many people *would* admit to watching *The Daily Show* as a main source of news over the course of our research on young voters. Conducted in San Diego, CA, in January 2013, this focus group was the first of six sponsored by the College Republican National Committee of young voters who were considered “winnable” for Republicans either due to their partisanship, ideology, or beliefs about the role of government, yet still cast their ballot to re-elect the president. In this particular case, the group was focused on understanding the views of young Latino voters. The respondent above was the first to answer the question of where she gets most of her political news. She would not be the last to mention Comedy Central programming as a main source of information.

Survey research backs up the finding from the focus groups that a reasonably significant number of young people think of these shows as a source of news, with 29% of young voters saying that they get political news from *The Daily Show* at least once a week, and 26% saying the same of *The Colbert Report*.

So where *else* are young people getting their political information from today? What do Republicans need to know about the media consumption habits of a new generation in order to be sure their message is being heard? Some of the answers are surprising. While more traditional communications channels such as local news and the newspaper are not completely obsolete,

programs like *The Daily Show* and the emergence of a variety of popular online news sites offer new ways to reach Millennial voters and underscore the need for Republicans to catch up to the changing media landscape.

Our research asked registered voters aged 18 to 29 to tell us how often they get political news from a variety of sources. In focus groups, we were struck by the number of mentions of Yahoo! News and CNN, in addition to the number of young people who said they were tuning in to their local television news. The survey findings matched up quite well with what we heard in the focus groups. (Of particular note is the fact that Facebook trumps all other sources of news for young people.)

Source	% getting news at least once a week
Facebook	58%
Local TV news	56%
Yahoo! News	44%
CNN	40%
Hard copy of newspaper	38%
Fox News	36%
Newspaper websites like NYTimes.com	35%
Blogs	31%
MSN News	30%
The Daily Show	29%
Twitter	28%
MSNBC	27%
The Colbert Report	26%
NPR	21%
Political Talk Radio	21%

In addition to finding out the sources of information that young voters turned to most often, we also sought to learn how information is consumed. The following table presents the results.

Activity	% doing this at least once a week
Reading other people's tweets	37%
Re-tweeting other people's tweets	24%
Posting your own tweets	26%
Reading posts in your Facebook news feed	74%
"Like" or comment on other people's Facebook posts	69%
Posting your own items on Facebook	54%
Watching videos on YouTube	73%
Uploading own videos on YouTube	11%
Sending someone a link to an article you read	30%
Sending someone a link to a video you watched	39%
Sending someone a link to a website you visited	44%
Use a DVR or TiVo to record and watch TV shows	40%
Use apps on a smartphone like an iPhone or Android	69%
Use a landline telephone to make or receive phone calls	40%
Listen to satellite radio like Sirius/XM	24%
Send or receive e-mail	91%
Send or receive text messages	88%
Use online messaging and chat like GChat	36%
Watch TV Shows on Hulu	33%
Watch movies streaming from Netflix or a similar service	56%
Listen to streaming audio from Pandora or Spotify	52%
Play games like Angry Birds on a smartphone	45%
Use a laptop computer	83%
Use a desktop computer	61%
Use a tablet like an iPad	41%
Use a cell phone to make or receive phone calls	90%

Social media

The data strongly suggest Facebook as an absolutely critical source of information. Harvard's Institute of Politics found in the spring of 2012 that 84% of young voters had an account on Facebook¹. With 58% of young people saying they use it for *political* news at least once a week, and with nearly three out of four saying they read posts in their Facebook news feeds at least once a week (some 44% say they do this *multiple times a day*), the importance of getting one's message out on Facebook is critical. Furthermore, young voters are not just consuming information from Facebook, they are often participating in the conversation there: 69% said that they "like" or comment on people's Facebook posts at least once a week, and 54% said that they post items on Facebook at least once a week.

While Facebook came up frequently in our focus groups, Twitter was not as common. Some 44% read Facebook multiple times a day, but only 14% say they read other people's tweets more than once a day. This is in part due to the fact that Twitter's active user base is much smaller than Facebook's². However, Twitter has grown rapidly in the few short years since its launch and shows no signs of stopping; Twitter CEO Dick Costolo has said that the company's current goal is to continue focusing on growing their user base³.

Twitter is undoubtedly a driver of conversation at the elite or activist level; for instance, Twitter emerged as the "new spin room" during the 2012

presidential election⁴. It may well be that Twitter is a more effective driver of a message to opinion-makers than as a tool for reaching and persuading large numbers of voters. Yet Twitter allows political campaigns to insert a political message into conversations among target audiences with very little expense; in 2012, Crossroads Generation (XG), a Republican super PAC focused on winning young voters, made a small investment in “promoted tweets” aimed at users following the Twitter conversation around the MTV Movie Awards (including Tweets such as “It’s easier to win The Hunger Games than it is to get a job in the Obama economy.”). Later in the campaign, XG promoted the “#PaulRyanFacts” hashtag, intended to raise awareness of and favorability toward newly selected vice presidential nominee Rep. Paul Ryan, with more lighthearted Tweets such as “Paul Ryan’s body fat percentage is lower than the unemployment rate.”

Twitter and politics are no strangers; the most re-tweeted item on Twitter ever was the photo shared by President Obama of a hug between himself and Michelle Obama with a caption reading “Four more years.”⁵ Despite having less reach than Facebook, Twitter is still a significant social media platform on which campaigns must engage in order to reach some young voters.

But what does a successful social media strategy look like? The key is understanding what makes social media such a powerful tool to begin with.

In an August 2012 survey conducted for XG, only 18% of young voters said they got political news very or somewhat frequently from political ads online. In our focus groups, young voters time and again expressed skepticism about the content of political advertisements, including online ads and particularly banner ads, which they viewed as “spam.”

“I think our generation is so immune to [political] advertising, because we have seen so much and we know that they’re not serious,” said one of our participants in San Diego. Discussing online ads, she added, “Then too, there’s all these viruses going on, and you get redirected to some weird website sometimes, like a porn website, and you’re like, ‘What!?’ Ugh, no.”

What, then, makes Facebook so important? For a generation that is skeptical of political ads, the power of Facebook is not that it is online, it is that it is *personal*. Many of our focus group participants drew a distinction between items in their Facebook “news feed” and the advertisements displayed on the right-hand side of the window; they said they trusted items in the news feed while avoiding the obvious advertisements. By promoting content *in the Facebook news feed*, advertising can blend in with trusted content and commentary from friends. To most of our focus group respondents, Facebook was a way of viewing news that had been curated by friends and family. A video or link shared on Facebook became more than just an ad or a news story, it had earned the implicit endorsement of a trusted friend. “I find out about a lot

of other things that I might miss during the day from Facebook. Then I read it on there and I will go to Google news and look up more about it," said one respondent in Columbus, OH. Multiple respondents cited Facebook as a place where they are first exposed to a news story or something worth reading that they can then follow up on with research elsewhere.

In addition to being a place to find shareable content, Facebook is also important because of the political dialogue that takes place. Users are not just consuming information; they produce information and content on their own and engage in debate there in front of their friends. "During the debates, a lot of the people were talking about what each candidate was talking about," said one respondent in Columbus. Facebook offers places for people not just to share what others have written but to express themselves. Take, for instance, the 2.7 million users who changed their Facebook profile photos to a red-and-pink version of the logo for the Human Rights Campaign in support of same-sex marriage during the Supreme Court's hearings on the issue in March. Facebook is not just a place where news is passively consumed; 54% say they create their own Facebook posts on at least a weekly basis.

This is not to say those posts and likes are all political in nature. On the contrary, many of our focus group respondents noted that they were somewhat uncomfortable putting their views "out there," but had plenty of stories of watching online debates unfold. "Once Obama won the election, I posted,

“Yay!” The people who agreed with me joined in, but I have very respectful friends and they are professional. So there wasn’t a lot of – my sister, though, on her posts, it was a whole other story. There were, like, close to 200 comments on her posts. She likes to stir the pot,” recalled one respondent in San Diego.

Would investing more in Facebook/Twitter advertising and in building a stronger Facebook/Twitter fan-base be useful to Republican candidates? Certainly. But where these services hold the most power for Republicans wishing to reach young voters is in providing content that people want to share. Having a large number of Facebook fans is good; producing a post that is interesting and compelling enough that your Facebook fans will share it on their own timeline is *great*.

So what makes a shareable Facebook post or Tweet? There is still significant research to be done, but one study showed that in the 2012 election, the posts that got the most attention and engagement on Facebook coming out of the Obama campaign were posts about the Obamas’ family life. Meanwhile, the posts that derived the most engagement from the Romney campaign’s much smaller fan-base were related to campaign milestones and deadlines⁶. A study published by the American Marketing Association posits that items that evoke positive emotion are more likely to be shared than those with a more negative focus, though posts that inspire strong emotions are more likely to be shared than those that fail to generate much emotional reaction, positive or

negative. Furthermore, when people share content online, they are making a statement about themselves. They will therefore be more likely to share things that make them appear entertaining or intelligent to their friends⁷.

Understanding that success on Facebook and Twitter comes from getting people to *share*, not just consume, your message is a key first step for Republicans trying to improve their reach with young people.

Audio and video

Television often consumes the lion's share of ad spending in campaigns, and not without reason: even in the 2012 election, 64% of young voters told the Pew Research Center they considered television a "top source for campaign news." However, in the August 2012 XG survey, only one out of four young people said that political ads on TV were a frequent source of political news. Considering the amount of money poured into television advertising, particularly through broadcast media, it is astonishing to consider that young people in that survey saw a cable comedy program – *The Daily Show* – as a more frequent source of news.

TV is certainly still an important way for campaigns to get their message out, even to young people. In our focus groups, a number of young people noted watching the local TV news. In fact, local TV news trailed only Facebook as a news source in our survey. Furthermore, respondents in Ohio were able to recall a variety of television advertisements that had been promoted by

candidates and super PACs, including ads about Republicans cutting funding for Planned Parenthood and the infamous Priorities USA “Coffin” advertisement attacking Mitt Romney’s career at Bain. In 2012, TV still mattered greatly.

Nonetheless, there are shifts in how TV is consumed that are critical for Republican campaigns to bear in mind when aiming to reach young people through the medium. Some 40% of our respondents said that they use DVR or TiVo to watch TV shows, while one out of three (33%) watch TV online on Hulu or a similar service. Some 56% stream movies and TV shows from a service like Netflix. Some 73% watch YouTube videos at least one a week, and a sizable amount (39%) say they share YouTube videos with friends that frequently. For a growing number of young people, even paying a cable bill seems unnecessary when so much TV and video content is available streaming and online⁸.

Radio is another communication channel that is diminishing in importance for reaching young people as the medium changes shape. The two radio news sources – NPR and talk radio – were the least frequently used political news sources in our survey. Meanwhile, nearly a quarter of our respondents say they listen to satellite radio at least once a week (24%), and a majority (52%) say they use streaming audio from Pandora or Spotify at least weekly.

A number of our focus group respondents recalled hearing presidential campaign ads on Pandora. “A lot of young people are listening nowadays to Pandora instead of the radio, and that’s why [Pandora ads] are smart ... but

Romney had a lot there and I think Romney had more on there than Obama did," said one respondent. (Our respondents in the Florida and Ohio focus groups noted hearing ads from both the Obama and Romney campaigns on Pandora.) Participants would note encountering the short ads while at the gym or working.

For Republican campaigns interested in reaching young people, TV and radio still matter, but there are a number of other emerging, potentially more cost-effective ways of getting video and audio advertising on target. Investing in advertisements on services like Hulu and Pandora reach people – especially young people – in places where they are increasingly turning to view and hear content. But this also requires Republican campaigns not to use the ability to hyper-target as a reason to *only* reach out to “favorable” audiences. As one respondent in our Orlando focus group noted, he doubted that he ever would have heard a Romney ad because of his taste in music: “And that’s what I was just about to say, because a lot of my Pandora stations, I don’t want to generalize, but I can pretty much guarantee that everything that I listen to on my Pandora would have an Obama ad on it. I don’t feel like if I had, like, Jay-Z radio, that Mitt Romney [ads] would come on.”

Campaigns should use the ability to target by show or by artist as a way to expand their audience and reach, rather than see it as a way to more effectively “preach to the choir.”

Additionally, campaigns should be thoughtful about the platforms they are targeting. For instance, data on click-throughs from XG's advertising on Pandora showed that – despite the ads appearing an equal number of times on the mobile and desktop Pandora platforms – click-throughs were 40 times higher through the mobile app.

Phones, laptops, and tablets

Perhaps one of the most significant coming shifts in how campaigns will reach voters – particularly young voters – comes from the rapid growth in mobile use. The means of contact through a mobile device are plenty, from a more traditional get-out-the-vote phone call to a person's cell phone, to text messaging, to e-mail that can be read on a mobile device, to mobile browsing and smartphone apps. In an October 2012 survey conducted by The Winston Group, 24% of 18- to 34-year-old voters said they got most of their political news on a smartphone, and 8% said they got their news mostly from a tablet. These younger respondents were twice as likely as the overall sample to say a smartphone was a major news source.

Nine out of 10 young voters told us that they use a cell phone at least once a week. Only 40% said they used a landline at least once a week. And phones aren't just for talking; 69% said they use smartphone apps at least once a week (47% use them multiple times a day), with 45% saying they play games on their phones at least weekly. Text messaging is enormously common, with 88%

of respondents saying they text at least weekly, and with 62% saying they text *multiple times per day*. In our San Diego focus group, when asked what the best way would be for a campaign to reach them, our respondents centered on two methods of contact – texting and Facebook.

(Not only is news and engagement more accessible on-the-go due to phones; the dominance of laptops over desktop computers underscores how young voters increasingly prefer portable ways to connect. While 61% of respondents say they use a desktop computer at least once a week, 83% say they use a laptop with that frequency.)

Mobile also gives campaigns an incredible ability to target voters regardless of where they are. Indeed, campaigns can now target advertisements to mobile users in a specific geographic area down to the nearest cell tower. (XG targeted ads at college football stadiums on game day in key swing states, for instance.)

Email also allows campaigns to reach out to supporters and prospective supporters on all of the devices named above. Some respondents in our focus groups noted getting huge quantities of e-mail from the Obama campaign. In the words of one focus group respondent in Columbus, “Oh my gosh, I thought Michelle was my best friend ... She e-mailed me every day at 12 a.m., ‘Dear friend, sorry it is so late.’” Other respondents recalled getting e-mail from Beyonce.

It is important for campaigns to remember that mobile doesn't just have to be a broadcast mechanism or a portal to get communications out; it should be a way to get young supporters to engage *in* the campaign. Apps that encourage a user to call through their contacts on their phones, text fundraising campaigns, even campaign websites that are designed to be easily readable on mobile devices to encourage sign-ups – all are ways that a campaign can create two-way communication with younger supporters. As the team at GOP digital firm Engage noted in “Inside the Cave,” their report on the Obama campaign’s digital operation, the Obama campaign established “Quick Donate” that made mobile contributing so fast and easy, one supporter called it “hyper-addictive” and likened it to sending a “drunk text.”⁹

Young voters today are more than likely to be buried in their smartphones or laptops, consuming information as well as producing it, connecting with peers and connecting to the world. Campaigns that understand this reality and create easy ways to interact through mobile platforms, e-mail, and text messaging will have the edge when it comes to reaching young voters.

Newspapers and blogs

The trials and tribulations of the print media industry have been well-documented. While a “hard copy of the newspaper” is read at least weekly by 38% of respondents, trends in media consumption lead us to believe that number will only decline. However, given the attention paid to the decline of

print news, it may surprise some that the number of young people who still pick up the “dead tree” version of a paper is so high. One participant in our Columbus focus group described how living with his parents for a time had gotten him used to the hard copy of the paper: “I just moved to a new apartment for this job, and I realize I’m dying without – my parents got a newspaper, and before that I was traveling for my job so I would read USA Today at the hotels. Now that I don’t have a newspaper at this new apartment, it is killing me.”

Nonetheless, *daily* news readership is more focused online for young people. Only 17% of young people read a hard copy at least daily, matching the 17% who get news from MSN.com, while 21% read newspaper websites like NYTimes.com with that frequency. Additionally, 30% of young voters name Yahoo! News specifically as a source of political news they turn to at least daily. As another of our Columbus respondents put it: “When I log onto the internet, my homepage is Yahoo!, so most of the time during that time, any issues will pop up, or an article will pop up, and I will read it.” Blogs also play a role, with 19% of young voters saying they get political news from a blog at least once every day or so.

What should be of note to campaigns is not just the prominence of the Internet for daily news consumption, but the ease with which online articles can be shared. Three out of 10 young voters say they send around a link to a news

article at least once a week. Also recall the significant number of young people who say they get political news from Facebook; given that Facebook itself is not a content generator, its “news” must come from somewhere. Whether this involves having a blog outreach strategy, specifically engaging reporters from online news sources, or engaging in ad buying targeted to these online news sources, campaigns interested in reaching young voters should focus on media that has some sort of online, shareable presence.

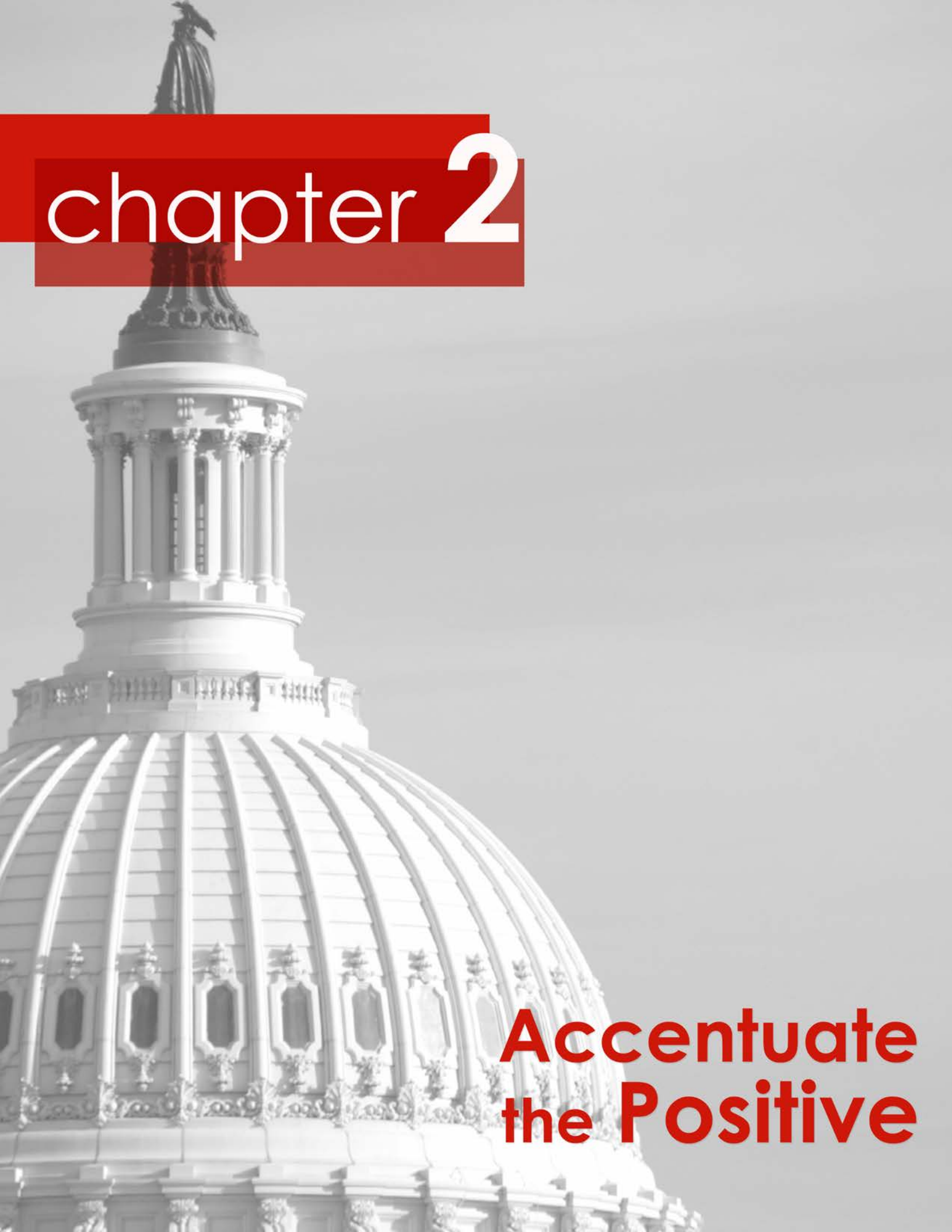
It’s Personal

The common theme that unites these findings is that even as our ability to broadcast a message far and wide is increasing, politics still remains deeply personal. Using any of the aforementioned platforms to talk *at* young people with messaging that fails to be personally relevant is not useful at all. A good Pandora ad is one that reaches the listener with a message that matters personally and offers them the ability to click through for more information. A Facebook ad in a person’s news feed, along with personal posts from friends, may not be viewed as a paid advertisement at all; a shared post or link from a personal friend gains a level of credibility an ad can hardly get otherwise. Politicians can correspond directly and publicly with constituents and supporters on Twitter. This is not so much a bold new frontier as it is timeless, effective one-to-one voter contact adapted to the digital age.

To that end, showing up and making contact matters, which requires understanding the new ways young voters are connecting with campaigns and with each other. According to an October 2012 survey by CIRCLE, only 15.1% of young people said they were asked to give money or volunteer on a campaign, and of those, respondents were almost twice as likely to have been reached by the Obama campaign (59.7%) as the Romney campaign (32.1%)¹⁰. Furthermore, that contact can't just follow old models of reaching out in the days right before an election, since it takes time to build up an interested audience.

Republicans hoping to engage young voters must begin the hard work of reaching out through these channels with a message that resonates, and must begin that work sooner rather than later. This will require a shift in priorities for campaign teams who view online or youth-oriented media as far less important than traditional broadcast buys or direct mail.

As the old saying goes, "half of life is showing up," and it's time Republicans started showing up where young people are.



chapter 2

**Accentuate
the Positive**

Even if a campaign perfects the channels of communication it uses to actually reach young voters, Republicans face the challenge of persuading young people to agree with their policy positions on enough items to win their votes.

The XG August 2012 survey confirmed that Obama's standing had fallen sharply from four years prior and that young people were not strongly in favor of all of his policies. Only 20% of respondents thought the economy had gotten better in the last year, and only 22% thought Obama's policies had made it easier for young people to get a job. Only 29% thought they were better off as a result of the stimulus package. When the survey asked young voters who disapproved of the president why they did so, the most commonly used word in their responses was "economy."

Nonetheless, despite those poor marks for Obama and the Democrats on the economy, Democrats held a 16-point advantage over the Republican Party among young voters on handling of the economy and jobs (chosen as the top issue by 37% of respondents). For those respondents who said they approved of the job Obama had been doing as president, the number one word they used? "Trying." He was trying. Young voters were disappointed in Obama's performance, but gave him credit for attempting to improve the situation. In our focus groups, many respondents strongly defended President Obama even while acknowledging the mediocrity of the last four years. And when it came to

“trying,” they doubted Republicans would do any better; that same survey showed only one in four young people thought Mitt Romney would put into place policies that would make it easier for young people to get jobs.

Young voters did not vote overwhelmingly for Obama and the Democrats because the party had a strongly positive brand, or because young people strongly favored their ideas. After all, only 46% of young voters surveyed had a favorable view of the Democratic Party. In an October 2012 CIRCLE study, only 46% of young voters thought that Barack Obama was the candidate who best “understands the problems of people [my] age”; however, only 15.2% preferred Mitt Romney on that item. (Other options included “none” or “both”.)¹¹ Young voters simply felt the GOP had nothing to offer, and therefore said they trusted the Democratic Party more than the Republican Party on every issue tested.

Much of the conversation around young voters and the GOP’s policy positions has focused on the “social issues” and, in particular, the issue of same-sex marriage. While the data do clearly point to a gap between the position held by many young voters and the position held by many Republican leaders, there are a number of other issues where the Republican Party’s current positioning and the beliefs of young voters converge. The good news is that, on many of the issues that matter most to young people, there is a clear path forward for Republican candidates, and with messaging that explains what we

are *for* and not just what we are *against*, we can begin to rebuild standing with young people on key policy issues.

Economy and Jobs

As we saw in the August 2012 XG survey, young voters were unimpressed with Obama's economic record but were even less thrilled with what Republicans had to offer. Asked who they trust more on the economy, young voters gave Democrats a 16-point edge.

Yet at the same time, our data show that young people are incredibly eager to be entrepreneurs and to start their own businesses. Some 45% in the August 2012 XG study, including 58% of black and 64% of Hispanic respondents, said they hoped to start their own business one day. As one participant in a focus group of young aspiring entrepreneurs in Orlando, FL put it: "We should really try to find out, what barriers do people have towards being successful and of being hardworking, educating themselves, and trying to improve the economy and so on, and work on maybe reducing the obstacles there."

Young voters are also aware that the current economy makes it hard for them to start families. "I've been dating my girlfriend for almost five years now, and we're still not even really thinking about getting married because we don't have the money for it. We live together and everything, but I think that financially we're in a bad spot, as a whole generation," said one of the young entrepreneurs in our Orlando focus group.

The Pew Research Center reports that 22% of young people have postponed having a baby and 20% have postponed getting married because of bad economic conditions.¹² A report from Pew also found that home ownership for those under 35 has declined from 40% in 2007 to 34% in 2011.¹³ From a political perspective, researchers have shown that there is a significant connection between factors like marriage and homeownership and partisanship, which would suggest that as Millennials trend away from marrying and buying homes earlier in life, it increases the challenge Republicans face in trying to win their vote¹⁴.

For a multitude of reasons, it is extraordinarily important for Republicans to have a plan that can grow the economy and that ultimately allows young people to make these choices about family and home on their own terms, without pressure to put them off due to a poor economy.

This creates an incredible opportunity for Republicans. By March of 2013, still only 23% of young people thought the nation's economy had improved in the last year. Some 45% named "growing the economy so more people can have jobs" as one of their top two or three policy priorities, roughly tied with "reducing government spending and cutting our national deficit" at 46%, but far outpacing any of the other many options available.

However, there is trust to be rebuilt. This is a generation that was significantly affected by the "Great Recession," and understanding their views

on the economy requires understanding their beliefs about what caused the recession in the first place. Our March 2013 survey asked respondents to tell us how much of a factor they thought various items may or may not have been in the recession. The list included items that either arose in the focus groups or have been pinpointed by experts as factors actually involved in the financial crisis. Although “Republican economic policies” is the factor least likely to be viewed as playing a major role in causing the crisis, this is mostly due to young Republicans in the sample hesitating to pin blame directly on their own party, and an outright majority of young people still think those Republican policies are to blame – hardly an encouraging finding.

Item	% saying item “played the biggest role” or “played a major role” in the recession
Republican economic policies	51%
The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan	55%
Poor oversight of government agencies like Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac	75%
Homeowners who took out loans they couldn't pay back	68%
Wall Street banks trading assets they did not understand properly	70%
Mortgage banks that engaged in bad lending practices	79%
Financial deregulation that let banks make riskier investments	72%
Too much government spending	72%

Young voters point to the failures of big entities – big banks and government – as causes for the recession. Neither is terribly beloved by this generation.

In the August 2012 XG survey, there was not a strong consensus around the virtues of lowering taxes and regulations on business. Only 34% of respondents in that survey thought they'd be better off if the corporate tax rate were lowered, and only 36% thought such a move would make it easier for young people to get jobs. Only 40% thought they'd be better off if regulations on business were reduced.

Yet change the phrasing to emphasize *small* business and a completely different picture emerges. Some 67% of young people in that survey said that “keeping taxes low on small businesses” would make it easier for young people to get jobs. Some 49% thought that “reducing regulations on small businesses” would make it easier for young people to get jobs.

In our focus group of young aspiring entrepreneurs who voted for Obama, respondents noted that Republicans were the more “pro-business” party. Yet when asked why they voted Democratic despite their desire to start a business themselves, the responses were clear: “I don't think [the Republicans] would make it easier for small businesses.” “A corporation, maybe, absolutely. A small business?” “The Republican Party would make it really easy to start a business and have a successful business if you already have that capital in your bank

account, because you're not losing that money. But we're all sitting on our own various debts and our student loans, and the Republican Party isn't helping us with any of that."

During October of the 2012 campaign, MTV offered to interview both presidential candidates on air. The Romney campaign declined, but President Obama agreed and was interviewed at the White House by MTV's Sway Calloway. In the interview, President Obama was asked to address the concerns of young people who aspire to be the "next Mark Zuckerberg" by explaining what he would do to make it easier for young people to start their own business. The president's response was masterful: he remarked on how he had worked to remove financial regulations that prohibited *small* investors from contributing money online, unleashing the ability of crowdfunding sites like Kickstarter to help young entrepreneurs raise capital.

The legislation Obama is referring to in this response is the JOBS, or Jump Start Our Business Startups, Act, a bill passed in Congress with wide bipartisan support including the vocal backing of Republican House Majority Leader Eric Cantor. It offered the perfect example of a policy targeted at enabling entrepreneurship, removing barriers to opportunity, and *actually repealing harmful, stifling government regulation*. Best yet, it was something positive – something to stand for rather than simply an Obama policy to stand against. It is examples like this of policies that align perfectly with conservative principles,

that actually pull back the obstacles created by government and unleash the power of small business, that must be at the heart of an economic agenda that can appeal to young voters.

Big Government and Spending

If young voters look skeptically at big business, does it follow that they are skeptical about “big government” as well? Are there different ways of talking about big government that yield different reactions?

The results from the focus groups were somewhat surprising. Across all six focus groups we conducted, respondents were asked if they thought government was spending too much. They generally agreed. But whether or not the government was “too big” was a perplexing question for them. Few had a clear picture of what “big government” meant.

Testing this out in the survey, we found that “reducing big government” was less of a priority than focusing on spending itself. Respondents were asked how much more or less likely they would be to vote for a candidate who held certain attributes and positions. When asked how they would feel about a candidate who said he or she would make “reducing big government” a top priority, 61% said it would make them more likely to vote for that candidate. However, when the focus was on spending and debt, the numbers grew even more favorable. Some 67% said they’d be more likely to vote for a candidate who said “cutting government spending” was a top priority, and the numbers

skyrocket to 77% saying they'd be more likely to vote for a candidate who says "fixing the national debt" was a top priority. "Fixing" trumps "reducing" and "cutting" and builds a broader base of support.

Data from an October 2012 survey by CIRCLE backs up this assertion; while 75.6% of young people agreed that "the federal deficit is too big," that number fell to 59.1% agreeing that "the government is too big and powerful." We presented respondents in the March 2013 CRNC survey with a number of potential frames for the need to scale back and reform government programs. Each was designed to be something that Republicans could embrace. While all frames were well-received, the frame about "big government" trailed the other alternatives.

Item	% "agree"
We need leaders who aren't afraid to fight existing interests like big companies or big unions in order to reform outdated and unsustainable programs.	93%
We need to reform Social Security and Medicare now so that the next generation isn't left cleaning up a huge mess down the road.	90%
We need "safety net" programs that get people back on their feet quickly when they fall on hard times but don't encourage people to stay dependent on the government.	88%
We need to reduce regulations that hurt the economy and stifle innovation while getting better at enforcing regulations that keep us safe.	86%
We need to make tough choices about cutting government spending, even on some programs some people really like, because the national debt is simply out of control.	82%
We need to reduce the size of government, because it is simply too big.	72%

To be clear, this isn't a call for Republicans to stop the fight against big government. This is, however, a finding that suggests alternative ways of discussing Republicans' beliefs on the subject with young voters who see "big government" as less of an enemy than entrenched interests or out-of-control debt. Rather than focusing on reducing big government as an end in and of itself, Republicans should instead focus on outcomes: reduced spending, greater economic growth, repaired entitlement and social welfare programs.

Cutting spending and reducing debt are more effective frames for talking to young people, who know they are the ones who will have to pay the bill. Republicans should note that they do not start out with an inherent advantage on the issue: in the August 2012 XG survey, Democrats held a 6-point advantage over Republicans on the issue of who young voters had more confidence in to handle the national debt. Only 41% of respondents connected cutting spending to job creation for young people, while a slim majority (52%) thought they'd be better off if government spending was cut by 5%.

However, recall that "fixing the national debt" was an extremely positive priority for someone running for office in the minds of young people. Reducing spending and cutting the deficit were also a top priority for 46% of respondents in the March 2013 CRNC survey. In the focus groups, a number of respondents felt that government spending had actually contributed to the economic downturn, and the survey confirmed that this is a widespread belief, with 72% of

young voters (including 68% of young *Democrats*) holding the view that too much government spending played a major role, if not the biggest role, in causing the 2008 recession. Some 50% of young voters believe “we should cut government spending significantly,” while another 38% believe “we should cut government spending somewhat.” Only 9% think we shouldn’t cut spending much, and only 4% thought spending should be increased.

In our January focus group in San Diego, one of the respondents noted: “I think I’m a Democrat, but I agree more with the Republicans on spending money, because we’re in a time that we don’t need to be asking for more money. We need to conserve what we have and work with what we have instead of Barack Obama asking for trillions and trillions and who knows when we’re going to get out of this debt.” Recall that few young voters in the August 2012 survey felt they were better off as a result of policies like the stimulus; it is unsurprising then that only 20% of young people in the Spring 2012 Harvard Institute of Politics survey would say that “government spending is an effective way to increase economic growth.”

However, it is important for Republicans to bear in mind that not all cuts are equal. Overwhelmingly, respondents in the focus groups thought the problem was not just that too much money was being spent, but rather that it was being spent on the wrong things. (The groups were clear that they felt education deserved more, not less, funding.) Indeed, a large number of

respondents pointed to the defense budget as the place where cuts should start. In the survey, 35% of respondents thought that “we should have a smaller defense budget and leaner military,” including 49% of young independents. Few – only 17% – thought the military should be larger.

Taxes

Young voters may have an appetite for spending cuts, but do they stand with the right on low taxes? The answer: somewhat.

In the August 2012 XG survey, Democrats held a significant 22-point issue handling advantage on taxes. Some 67% wanted low taxes on small businesses, saying it would make it easier for young people to get jobs. Yet those numbers dramatically changed for “lowering the corporate tax rate,” with only 36% thinking that would make it easier for young people to find work. Only 34% thought lowering the corporate tax rate would make them better off. This survey, conducted before the debate over the “fiscal cliff,” also showed that only 27% of young people thought “extending current tax rates for all taxpayers” would help young people get jobs, though over a third (34%) said they did not know one way or the other.

Perhaps most troubling for Republicans is the finding from the March 2013 CRNC survey that showed 54% of young voters saying “taxes should go up on the wealthy,” versus 31% who say “taxes should be cut for everyone.” (Far less

popular were the options “taxes should be cut for the wealthy” at 3% and “taxes should go up on most Americans” at 12%.)

Our focus group participants were able to note that “raising taxes on the wealthy” was a clearly stated goal of President Obama in the campaign. For many, the better way to raise taxes on these individuals was by “simplifying the tax code,” as they perceived that the wealthy were able to take advantage of loopholes to ensure they paid less in taxes than young (and not particularly wealthy) people do. As one respondent in our Orlando group of young Latino voters noted, people in the higher tax brackets “have a lot of tax breaks and loopholes” that allow them to avoid “paying their share.”

However, they also sensed that complexity often led to *small* businesses getting stuck paying a lot. As one participant in our young aspiring entrepreneur focus group put it: “A lot of small businesses are suffering because of the economy, and not being able to basically run their companies due to the different taxes that they face.” The trouble for Republicans is that none of these participants made the connection between small businesses and the way that much small business income flows through to individual tax returns, effectively meaning that a tax increase on individuals earning over \$250,000 also means a tax increase on small business. The vastly different polling numbers for taxes on small businesses versus taxes on “the wealthy” underscores the fact that the connection between the two is rarely made.

The challenge for Republicans is to connect lower (or simpler) taxes to economic growth, a link that is not currently strong in the minds of many young voters. Asked in the Spring 2012 Harvard Institute of Politics survey if they thought “cutting taxes is an effective way to increase economic growth,” 39% agreed, with 21% disagreeing. A significant number were unsure. Having a credible conversation about what pro-growth tax policy looks like is critical not just for winning young voter support for the Republican position on taxes but also because it links tax policy to the absolute top issue: jobs and the economy.

Health Care

Health care remains a second-tier issue behind the economy and the national debt. In the August 2012 XG survey, only 8% of young voters said it was their top issue, and just 27% named “lowering health care costs and improving care” as one of their top two or three priorities in the March 2013 CRNC survey. Nonetheless, the issue is at the top of the second tier in both surveys and came up frequently in our focus group research.

In the August XG survey, young voters handed Democrats a heavy advantage on the issue, preferring their handling of health care to Republicans’ by a 63-37 margin. Some 41% thought things overall would be better as a result of Obama’s health care reform plan (versus to 32% who said things would be worse), and compared to the other conservative economic policies tested (such as allowing more exploration for oil and gas or enacting free trade

agreements), repealing Obamacare had the second lowest number of young people saying they thought it would make them better off (37%), behind only the number saying they would be better off as a result of lowering the corporate tax rate (34%).

Many of the young people in our focus groups noted that they thought everyone in America should have access to health coverage. In the Spring 2012 Harvard Institute of Politics survey of young voters, 44% said that “basic health insurance is a right for all people, and if someone has no means of paying for it, the government should provide it”; 23% disagreed. Those with loved ones who had had trouble getting care before were hopeful that the Affordable Care Act would make sure their family and friends would have access when they needed it. “I know that before, my mom had to struggle with having to pay [for] health insurance and everything. But maybe if they make more changes to it, it can be more affordable for her to do it,” said one participant in our Orlando group of Latino voters.

However, some participants were concerned that quality of care might decrease under the new law. One of the women in our Columbus focus group noted: “I haven’t heard of good quality where everybody has a health care plan. There have always been a lot of negative things that I don’t think would work ... because if everybody is going to get health care, who’s going to end up paying for all of that health care? Somebody is. And I guess just looking at

some of the countries where everybody has health care, a lot of the negative aspects of that is where the quality of health care that you get is lower, because nobody has to compete to get your business anymore."

For other participants, bringing down costs was an important priority. One of the respondents in our San Diego group of Latino voters noted, "Most of the money from the Treasury goes to social services and health care costs, so if we can make it cheaper, then that's a lot of money freed up for other projects. " In our Orlando focus group of young entrepreneurs who voted for Obama, one respondent noted: "Small businesses, they get shut down quick. I'll tell you personally, I could not afford to pay for health insurance for 16 guys. My guys make good money, but I'd lay every one of them off and cut the pay back \$4 or \$5 an hour to pay for it. Otherwise I couldn't operate."

Despite these concerns about the law, the general sentiment seemed to be that at least Obama had attempted to change things. Few felt like the current health care system was working well, and thus even with their concerns about how Obamacare might turn out, they once again gave the president credit for trying. As one participant in our focus group of young men in Columbus put it, "at least Obama was making strides to start the process of reforming health care."

Republicans have an opportunity to point out how Obamacare will drive up cost and reduce quality. They also have an opportunity to point out how the

existing employer-based model of health care is woefully inadequate to meet the needs of today's young people, who jump from job to job relatively frequently. In the words of a recent Princeton study, "the nature of the private-sector employment relationship in the United States has changed substantially in ways that make jobs less secure and workers more mobile ... What is clear is that young workers today should not look forward to the same type of career with one firm experienced by their parents."¹⁵

As Obamacare is implemented and headlines continue to tell the tale of increasing costs and new problems with the health care system, it will be important for Republicans to outline a vision for how they would build a better system that does contain costs and improve quality. For the moment, the advantage that Obama has on the issue is largely due to the fact that he attempted a reform plan at all.

Entitlement Reform

Rising health care costs aren't just a factor in how people view Obamacare; as our participant in Columbus noted, rising costs also stick the taxpayer with a larger bill for programs like Medicare and Medicaid. Indeed, the conventional wisdom is that since these programs are so unsustainable, Republicans have an advantage when speaking to young voters, as Republicans are generally more favorable to structural reforms that would pare back programs in order to make them solvent. As one of our respondents in the

Orlando focus group of young Latino voters put it, “The baby boomers are starting to retire, so even though we are working, it’s not guaranteed that we are going to have Social Security.” In the first ten minutes of the Columbus focus group of young men, participants were asked what makes their generation unique. The first response? “Probably not going to get Social Security.”

Where does entitlement reform fall in the issue mix for young voters? Certainly below jobs and the economy, and when tested as a separate item from debt and spending, it comes in significantly lower. Some 21% of respondents in the March 2013 CRNC survey said that “fixing programs like Social Security and Medicare” was one of the two or three things they most wish political leaders would do. In the August 2012 XG survey, only 1% of respondents said “Social Security” was the top issue affecting their vote, and only 2% said “Medicare/Medicaid.”

While the longer-term fiscal issues may take a backseat to the economy, the more short-term issue of spending, and health care, there is still room for Republicans to make positive arguments here to young voters. Some 58% in that August 2012 XG study say they would be better off if Medicare and Medicaid were reformed so they cost less in the future. Furthermore, recall that 90% of respondents agree with the statement, “We need to reform Social Security and Medicare now so that the next generation isn’t left cleaning up a huge mess down the road.”

The challenge for Republicans is that these issues are not top-of-mind for young voters. There is also not a sense that there's a solution on the table that will truly fix things. Messaging that drives home the problem isn't likely to change minds, as many young people have already assumed these programs will go bankrupt before their retirement. In short, they have bigger problems in the short run that they want addressed. Consider this exchange between two young men in our Columbus focus group who were asked what challenges we will face twenty or thirty years from now. "A lot of people our age don't look that far forward anymore. Time seems like you don't want to look that far forward because—" "There's enough to focus on right now." The data suggest this is the case, given the significantly higher importance placed on debt/spending issues versus Social Security/Medicare reform.

While entitlement reform may offer significant opportunities to Republicans, the short-term economic and fiscal anxieties of young voters are much more top-of-mind. Young people also need to hear how a plan will fix things in addition to hearing how bad the problem is.

Student Loan Debt

When asked what the "biggest challenges facing the Millennial generation" were, student loans inevitably came up. Student loans are seen as a weight around the necks of young voters, an obstacle that prevents them from achieving their goals. "Thinking about retirement when you can't even

pay your student loans? Starting a Roth IRA when you don't even have money to pay off the money you already owe? How can you justify putting money away for this when you owe this much money here?" This was the comment of one young voter in Columbus.

At a national level, 39% of respondents to the XG survey said that they had student loan debt. While not a majority, we do know that student loans are becoming an increasingly greater burden for many households. A Pew Research Center study found that 19% of households have student loan debt, and among respondents where the head of house is younger than 35, that number jumps to 40%.¹⁶ Pew also estimates that the average student loan debt load is \$26,682.

Many focus group members did think that Democrats were responding to the student loan crisis. "I think they're more in tune to what we need right now with student loans, getting a job, fixing the housing market and the environment," observed one participant from Orlando, with another adding that he had "heard Obama once say, oh, he has student loans, he went to school, he knows what we're going through." A focus group participant in San Diego remarked that she had heard that "[Obama] has done a lot of good things for student loans, in terms of pushing back on having to pay them off, so that reduces the financial burden on students." A focus group participant in

Columbus even went so far to claim that for him, “Obama is helping us with our student loans. That was why he got my vote.”

Student loans are enormously important to many young voters, and it may seem that Democrats have the easier path forward by promising ever-greater amounts of federal subsidies for tuition. This is likely a major reason why Republicans hesitate to engage on the issue. Yet Republicans should offer a way forward that doesn't just propose to subsidize the problem of sky-high tuition; they should offer solutions that would help make an education more affordable in the first place.

In Texas, Gov. Rick Perry has issued a challenge to institutions to create the “\$10,000 bachelor's degree,”¹⁷ and in Indiana, then-Gov. Mitch Daniels helped establish Western Governor's University Indiana, a non-profit, competency-based university developed by a bipartisan group of governors and education innovators¹⁸. Additionally, Republicans have an opportunity to point out how the government's complete removal of private competition from the educational lending market – snuck into the Affordable Care Act – is bad for young borrowers.

The opportunities are great for Republicans to talk about the factors that have made college tuition spiral upward ever faster, and to point out Republican solutions, especially at the state level, that have started to tackle the challenge of providing affordable, quality college education.

Climate Change and the Environment

While young people are more likely to value environmental protection than older voters, the issue of climate change and the environment is not a high priority for many young voters. A March 2013 Gallup survey of American adults showed more 18- to 29-year-olds saying environmental protection should take priority (49%) than those saying economic growth should take priority (45%), a striking finding and one that sets young people apart from the older cohorts, all of whom privileged economic growth over the environment¹⁹. However, despite more pro-environmental leanings, not all young people are strongly motivated by the issue, and not all are convinced that government action on issues like climate change and green energy would be positive overall.

The August 2012 XG survey found that only 3% of voters between the ages of 18 and 29 listed the environment as their most important issue in deciding how to vote for president, while 37% gave the economy/jobs as their top answer. The March 2013 CRNC survey found that just 8% of young voters hoped that America's political leaders would address the issue of climate change, compared to 45% who wanted them to focus on growing the economy and 46% who wanted them to reduce government spending and the national debt.

Other polling offers insight into how concerned young voters are about climate change. A Quinnipiac poll found that 63% of all voters are either very concerned or somewhat concerned about climate change, and found

identical numbers for voters 18 to 29.²⁰ This suggests that young voter opinions on this issue are not very different from the rest of the population – climate change is a concern, but it is not a priority. Additionally, a study by the Yale Project on Climate Change found that while slightly more young people think climate change is driven by man-made causes, they are no more likely than older people to think climate change is happening, and are actually less likely than older voters to report that they have thought a lot about the issue²¹.

(Interestingly, the Yale study also shows that while liberals aged 35 to 59 are the most likely to say global warming is happening at 83%, it is young conservatives – under age 35 – who are the least likely to believe global warming is happening, at just 30%.)

On the question of whether or not government should do anything about climate change at all, polling shows young voters are either divided or unsure. A Harvard Institute of Politics poll²² asked young voters if they thought “government should do more to curb climate change, even at the expense of economic growth.” Only 28% agreed, while 26% disagreed and 45% neither agreed nor disagreed. The same poll asked participants to choose which policy priorities were more or less important; 61% said that combatting the impact of climate change was a less important policy. In several of our focus groups, discussion about the environment didn’t come up at all.

When it comes to environmental questions that are related to the economy, young voters can be receptive to the Republican position. The XG survey found that 51% of young voters think they would either be much better off or somewhat better off if more oil and natural gas exploration was permitted. That view was held by 55% of young Independents. Only 35% of young Democrats agreed, bringing the average down. Unsurprisingly, 76% of young Republicans believed more exploration would make them better off, with 46% saying it would make them “much” better off.

Some young voters are even receptive to the idea that government investing in green energy is not an effective way to improve the economy. “I do want green energy to be available. I want renewable resources to be more available, but I don't think that the way to fix our economy is to offer tax credits. Right now, you're getting \$7,500 for buying an electrical or hybrid vehicle. I don't think you need that,” remarked one of the participants in an Orlando focus group.

Ultimately, while voters may say they are concerned about climate change, they rarely list it among the issues on the top of their minds. Moreover, they are not necessarily convinced that government programs are an ideal way to help the environment.

Defense and Foreign Affairs

Older Millennials were in high school or college on September 11, 2001; the very youngest Millennials may have little or no recollection of the horrors of that day. For most if not all of this generation's political life, the U.S. has been engaged in armed conflict overseas in Iraq and Afghanistan. How, then, do young voters look at foreign affairs?

The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have caused young voters to be somewhat skeptical of pre-emptive military action. In the Spring 2012 Harvard Institute of Politics survey, only 22% of respondents said they agreed that "In today's world, it is sometimes necessary to attack potentially hostile countries, rather than waiting until we are attacked to respond." Some 35% disagreed with the statement, though another 42% said they neither agreed nor disagreed. In our focus group of young Latino voters in Orlando, one participant summed up this uncertainty succinctly: "I am undecided. People want to feel protected, I guess." Only 24% said the U.S. should take the lead in solving international crises, while 73% said the U.S. should let the U.N. and others take the lead.

The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan themselves, however, were largely viewed as having been a net negative for the U.S. In fact, during focus group discussions about the recession, one respondent said she felt that the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan had contributed in part to the economic crisis. When

tested in the survey, 55% of respondents agreed, saying that the wars had played either the biggest role or a major role in contributing to the recession.

National defense issues are not at the top of people's minds; just 17% of respondents in the March 2013 CRNC survey named "keeping America safe from terrorism" as one of the top two or three priorities that political leaders ought to have. The primary way that foreign affairs emerged in the January young voter focus groups came through conversations about spending. These voters were concerned that the U.S. was spending too much, and when asked what the country should cut first, defense – and to a lesser extent, foreign aid – emerged as the best places to start. While certainly wanting America to be able to defend itself and to have a strong military, many questioned why the U.S. military budget was so much greater than that of other countries.

As one participant in our Orlando focus group of Latino voters put it, "I think, yes, we have to protect our country, but if somebody is going to want to attack the country, they are going to find a way to attack. I think we are spending way too much time out there fighting other countries' wars that they need to figure out themselves. I think we could have spent that time in America, dealing with our own issues."

While the push for a smaller defense budget is not the majority opinion among young voters, there is little appetite to see more money put toward national defense. Some 47% of respondents in the March 2013 CRNC survey said

that “we should keep our military about the same size it is now” while only 17% said “we should have a larger defense budget and stronger military.” Just over a third (35%) said “we should have a smaller defense budget and leaner military” – and the group most likely to take this position was not Democrats but rather Independents, among whom 49% felt we should have a smaller military.

This may represent a false choice; perhaps there are ways to strengthen the military that do not require increasing its budget. Indeed, for some participants in the focus groups, the frustration with defense spending or overseas military engagements was more a question of outcomes and the effective use of funds. In the words of one woman in our Columbus focus group, on the issue of where the government should look first to cut spending: “But the biggest thing is the war in Iraq. Any type of war like that, they don’t have a purpose. We’re going to do A, B, C, and D and then we’re done. We’re still on B and we’re still lagging. We’re still spending all this money and it’s not getting us anywhere. It’s killing our men and women and they have all these issues and we’re spending more money on that ... You know they sent like \$100 million over there and they don’t know where it went.”

For one participant in our San Diego focus group of young Asian-American voters, this issue of defense spending pulled him in opposite directions: “I like the controlled spending of Republicans; I don’t like the war side

traditionally with Republicans." He is not alone; this debate is ongoing within the Republican Party.

The key for Republicans hoping to communicate with young voters is to outline clear objectives for America's foreign engagements. This is a generation that looks skeptically at overseas military efforts and thinks we may be able to achieve our national security goals by spending resources more wisely. Focus group participants consistently characterized Republicans as the party that was strong on defense, but did not always mean that as a positive; the key for the party is to merge that attribute with fiscal responsibility, rather than allowing the two to stand in conflict.

Immigration

The issue of the Republican Party's challenges with the youth vote and the party's challenges with non-white voters are inseparable. As this report will explore in the next chapter, the Millennial generation is significantly less likely to be white than are older cohorts. Republicans have also performed less well with non-white voters in the last two elections. To what extent, if any, is this related to the Republican Party's position on immigration?

In the aggregate, immigration polls below the issue of the economy and jobs. In the August 2012 XG survey, only 3% of young voters named immigration as their top issue. Only 11% in the March 2013 CRNC survey named "reforming our nation's immigration system" as one of their top two or three priorities.

Whether or not a voter names immigration as a top issue of course has much to do with their own background and personal connection to the issue; according to a 2012 post-election poll conducted by CIRCLE, some 16.8% of young adults “from recent immigrant backgrounds” chose immigration as their top issue, while that number fell to 5.7% for young people who are not immigrants and do not have a parent who is an immigrant either²³.

Nonetheless, the immigration debate may set up a “gateway issue.” For voters who are undecided but have a connection to communities affected by immigration policy, the issue can certainly turn voters away. As one of our focus group participants in San Diego framed it, “For a lot of people that I know that are in the middle and could go either way, I think immigration is the issue for them. They are like, ‘I would vote for them, but I have family that wants to come here.’ So I think if [the Republicans] were more open and not to any extreme – nobody should be to one extreme or the other – but if it was moderate and came to a compromise, then things would change.”

For one respondent in the Orlando group of young Latino voters, Republicans did not do an adequate job differentiating between legal immigrants, illegal immigrants who have committed no other crime, and those who are here illegally and break other laws. “Better opportunities to make it easier for people that are working hard, hardworking individuals that come to the States to better themselves, better the future for their kids, for their family.

And concentrate on, instead of just trying to deport or make it hard and complicated for someone that is just trying to be better, I think they should help everyone, all the immigrants, to actually, if they aren't doing anything wrong, anything bad, give them more opportunities to stay here, and put their efforts on criminals. Fine, if you are here illegally and you are a criminal, let's find them. Get out, get deported. But right now they are just treating all immigrants like the same."

This is not to say that these voters expected the Republican Party to shift overnight to offer an easy path to citizenship for all undocumented immigrants. In fact, one respondent in the Orlando group of young Latino voters noted the challenges her family had faced in coming to the U.S. legally and said she wished that policies would be more accommodating to those who try to "do it the right way." "Make it a little bit more friendly to live here and come here. Like my parents, we left Venezuela when I was 15. My parents sold everything they had to bring us here for a better life, and it took my parents 10 years to become citizens, and their savings and retirement. So now my parents have nothing to retire on and now rely on me and my sister to take care of them. Which is fine, I don't mind at all. They could have done it the wrong way and still be here, but now they are here and legal and everything. But it just takes a long time, it's really expensive to do it the right way. And it was just really difficult. So I just wish it would have been a little bit easier."

In the CRNC survey, respondents were asked to choose which of four options most closely aligned with their views on illegal immigration. The options were not necessarily contradictory, but aimed to discover what young voters see as the biggest priority. The position taken most frequently by young voters was that “illegal immigrants should have a path to earn citizenship,” chosen by 35% of respondents. Closely behind this were the 30% who preferred the “enforcement first” strategy of securing the border and enforcing existing immigration laws. Some 19% chose “illegal immigrants should be deported or put in jail for breaking the law,” while another 17% took the position that “illegal immigrants should have a path to legal status but not citizenship.”

On the issue of laws that “would allow illegal immigrants brought to the U.S. as children to gain legal resident status if they join the military or go to college,” three out of four (75.3%) young adults agreed in an October 2012 poll conducted by CIRCLE. And young voters for the most part knew how the candidates in the election stood on that issue; in that same survey, 63% of respondents said that Barack Obama was the candidate who supported “allowing many illegal or undocumented immigrants who were brought to the United States as children to remain in the country,” while only 3% said that was Mitt Romney’s position.²⁴

This paints a complicated picture of where young voters stand on immigration, and underscores the significant challenge the party faces in

carving out a path that is good policy and that gains the support of a majority coalition. Indeed, just barely over half of young voters chose a response that focused on creating a path to legal status for illegal immigrants, while just under half chose a response that was focused on enforcement, border security, and deportation.

In our Hispanic focus groups, some raised the Arizona law as an example of something they felt allowed unfair targeting of legal immigrants, and as something that made them feel less positive about the Republican Party. When asked if they thought any Republican policies were making them personally worse off, one replied, “Arizona comes to mind, all the laws that they’ve passed there regarding immigration and being allowed to pull somebody over just based on how they look.”

Additionally, in that same Hispanic young voter focus group, when one participant took the position that illegal immigrants should be sent home, another respondent quickly jumped in, noting: “But sometimes, again, it’s not really their fault, because sometimes they come when they’re really young with their families. I think that they shouldn’t be getting deported, because they didn’t make the choice of coming over here. The choice was made for them when they were babies.”

In the Spring 2012 Harvard Institute of Politics survey, only a quarter of respondents agreed that “recent immigration into this country has done more

good than harm." It is important for the Republican Party to be clear about the difference between legal and illegal immigrants, and to also differentiate illegal immigrants from the *children* of illegal immigrants and how they would be affected by policies.

Abortion

Despite a great deal of rhetoric broadly declaring young voters to be "liberal on social issues," the data do not show that young people are significantly more likely to be pro-choice. In the March 2013 CRNC survey, respondents were given four options: abortion should be legal in all cases, legal "up until a certain point in the pregnancy," illegal with exceptions for health of the mother or in cases of rape or incest, or illegal in all cases.

The results debunk the conventional wisdom on the issue and establish that not all "social issues" are viewed the same. Indeed, only 16% of young voters preferred that abortion be legal in all cases, while 32% said abortion should be legal "up to a certain point." Combined, that comprises 48% who take a position leaning toward legality. On the other side, 37% felt abortion should be illegal with exceptions, and 14% thought abortion should always be illegal, making a combined 51% who lean toward prohibiting abortion. On this issue, there is small gender divide, with men in the survey actually tending to lean more pro-choice than women.

Harvard Institute of Politics' Fall 2012 survey presents a different set of options to its survey respondents on the issue, but similarly uncovers a slight pro-life leaning²⁵. While they find 32% who say "abortion should be permitted in all cases" and 14% who say "it should be permitted but subject to greater restrictions than it is now," they find 27% who say abortion should only be permitted in cases of rape, incest, or to save the mother's life, 8% who say abortion should only be allowed to save the woman's life, and 15% who say abortion should not be permitted at all. Combining the last three answers yields 50% who lean toward prohibiting abortion in the vast majority of cases.

The 2013 CRNC survey also asked two separate questions on whether being pro-life or pro-choice made young voters more or less likely to vote for a particular candidate. While 40% of young voters said they were more likely to vote for a candidate if he or she was pro-life, 27% were less likely to vote for the candidate. Asked separately, 41% said they were more likely to vote for a candidate if he or she was pro-choice, while 25% said they were less likely. This seeming contradiction may suggest lack of clarity on the intended definitions of "pro-life" and "pro-choice," or may reflect that the issue was not a strong motivator either way; roughly a third of all respondents on both of those questions said that the particular position on abortion would have no impact on their likelihood to vote for a candidate.

Where the Republican Party runs into trouble with young voters on the abortion issue is not necessarily in being pro-life. On the contrary, the Democratic Party's position of pushing for abortion to be legal in all cases and at all times, including some recent laws around how to handle medical care for babies born alive during abortion procedures, is what is outside the norm of where young voters stand. Unfortunately for the GOP, the Republican Party has been painted – both by Democrats and by unhelpful voices in our own ranks – as holding the most extreme anti-abortion position (that it should be prohibited in all cases). Furthermore, the issue of protecting life has been conflated with issues around the definition of rape, funding for Planned Parenthood, and even contraception.

In the words of one female participant in our Hispanic voter focus group in Orlando, “I think Romney wanted to cut Planned Parenthood. And he supports policies where it would make it harder for a woman to get an abortion should she choose, even if it were medically necessary. That goes head in hand with redefining rape.” In the Columbus female voter focus group, even respondents who said they were strongly pro-life were uncomfortable hearing Republicans talk about wanting to defund Planned Parenthood. In the words of one pro-life respondent, “The Planned Parenthood thing for me is not so much about abortion; it's about counseling before you can get to that point, and I feel that

that's a big part of what they do, is contraception counseling and about being safe."

It is true that there are some young men and women who are strongly pro-choice and say they would have a very hard time voting for a Republican candidate who took the pro-life position. Yet it may not be the case that remaining silent on the issue is the best course of action for Republicans, nor is shifting away from being pro-life. The challenge is to be mindful of ways that the issue of abortion branches (or can be distorted by opponents) into other policy areas where the GOP does not enjoy the same level of support.

Gay Marriage

Perhaps no topic has gotten more attention with regards to the youth vote than the issue of gay marriage. And on this issue, the conventional wisdom is right: young people are unlikely to view homosexuality as morally wrong, and they lean toward legal recognition of same-sex relationships. Only 21% of young voters in the Spring 2012 Harvard Institute of Politics survey felt that religious values should play a more important role in government, and only 25% felt homosexual relationships were wrong. Young people nowadays are more likely than ever to know someone who is openly gay or lesbian, and that factor is correlated with attitudes supporting same-sex marriage²⁶. In the March 2013 CRNC survey, some 44% of young voters said that same-sex marriage should be legal across the country, while 26% said that it should be up to states to decide

how they wish to recognize or allow same-sex marriages. Some 30% said marriage should be legally defined as only between a man and a woman.

Because in the focus groups this issue repeatedly came up as one that made young voters wary of supporting the GOP, we added two other items to the survey to gauge how young voters would respond to a candidate who opposes same-sex marriage.

As with the questions about pro-life and pro-choice candidates, the survey asked respondents if they would be more or less likely to vote for a candidate who opposed same-sex marriage. Some 39% said it would make them less likely to vote for the candidate, including 51% of young Independents. Roughly a third (33%) said that the issue would make no difference to them. Only 11% of respondents said that making same-sex marriage legal was a high priority.

Surveys have consistently shown that gay marriage is not as important an issue as jobs and the economy to young voters. Yet it was unmistakable in the focus groups that gay marriage was a reason many of these young voters disliked the GOP. As one young man in our Columbus focus group put it, “In this last election, everyone said that the biggest issue was the economy. I think to a lot of people that definitely was the case, but that comes to things we talked about earlier, where you can agree with so much of their things, but if there is just that one thing – a lot of those social issues that you can’t get behind – and

see, everything is in two buckets, and if one of those things in those buckets is something you just can't agree with then [it doesn't] matter what else is there, economic or otherwise."

In the survey, we sought to test the extent to which opposition to same-sex marriage constituted a "deal breaker." We did this by asking respondents how likely they would be to vote for a candidate who opposed same-sex marriage while also holding the same positions as the respondent on taxes, spending, immigration, and defense. Because respondents had been asked earlier in the survey to provide their position on these issues, the online survey was able to customize this "ideal candidate" for each respondent based on his or her personal positions.

The answer should concern Republicans, but not completely discourage them from reaching out to young voters. Among those respondents who said that same-sex marriage should be legal (a full 44% of young voters), half said that they would probably or definitely not vote for a candidate with whom they disagreed on same-sex marriage, *even if they were in agreement on taxes, defense, immigration, and spending*. But among those young voters who took the "let states decide" approach to marriage (some 26% of those surveyed), only 12% viewed opposition to same-sex marriage as a reason they probably or definitely would not vote for a candidate.

Taking the sample as a whole, about a quarter (26%) of young people say they'd probably or definitely not vote for a candidate who opposes gay marriage even if they were in agreement on many other issues. That opposition to gay marriage is a "deal breaker" to one out of four young voters represents neither a hopeless situation for the GOP nor a great one. It instead raises the challenge: how can the GOP expand its appeal on the issue, or win on issues of greater issue salience so that gay marriage is not a "deal breaker" for a large number of young voters?

It is important for Republicans to bear in mind that young voters warmed to President Obama long before his position on gay marriage "evolved," and that there is no consensus in either party on the issue. Additionally, there is a "middle ground" approach of letting states decide the issue, a position that has been espoused by some prominent Republicans like Marco Rubio. Nonetheless, there is hardly an appetite from this generation to see the GOP crusade against same-sex marriage. In the short run, as we wait for the Supreme Court rulings on the Defense of Marriage Act and California's Proposition 8, the best course of action for the party may be to promote the diversity of opinion on the issue within its ranks (after all, for quite some time, former vice president Dick Cheney was to the left of President Obama on same-sex marriage) and to focus on acceptance and support for gay people as separate from the definition of marriage. Where the Republican Party will run into the most trouble over this

issue is when it is not winning on any of the more prominent issues, either – the economy and spending. If a candidate is compelling enough on economic opportunity and spending, they may well be able to overcome a difference of opinion with young voters on same-sex marriage.

A hand holding a paintbrush, painting a dark grey shape on a white background. The brush is positioned diagonally, with the bristles pointing towards the bottom right. The paint is applied in a thick, textured stroke, creating a large, irregular shape. The background is white, and the overall composition is clean and minimalist.

chapter 3

Reinventing the Brand

While there is much work to be done on reaching young voters and presenting them with policies that are compelling, the Republican Party's brand challenges with young people are deeper than can be cured by a strong tax plan or a well-executed social media strategy. This became terribly clear in the August 2012 XG study on the issue, where a meager 28% of young people surveyed said they had a positive view of the Republican Party. By the March 2013 CRNC survey, those numbers had ticked up just barely, to 33% favorable, 53% unfavorable. In contrast, the Democratic Party's numbers, while not spectacular, were more positive at 41% favorable, 44% unfavorable, with 13% having no opinion.

It is not that young voters are enamored of the Democratic Party. They simply dislike the Republican Party more. In the focus group research conducted in January 2013, the young "winnable" Obama voters were asked to say what words came to mind when they heard "Republican Party." The responses were brutal: closed-minded, racist, rigid, old-fashioned.

When someone purchases a product, in some ways they are buying into the value system espoused by the brand. With a list of attributes like that, who *would* want to buy the product the GOP is selling?

The descriptions of the Democratic Party were more charitable. While some respondents viewed Democrats as "soft" or as supporting big spending, most noted that they were "tolerant," "diverse," and "open-minded."

Our research finds both a dismal present situation and an incredible opportunity for turning the GOP brand around. By positioning a vote for the Republican Party as the choice of intelligent, hardworking young people, the GOP just may be able to win a greater share of the Millennial vote.

Brand Attributes

At the very start of the March 2013 CRNC survey, respondents are asked two completely non-political questions, and are told to choose the two or three words that best finish each sentence: “I hope people see me as...” and “I hope people *never* think of me as...”

Respondents were given a long list of positive options, including some words that conventional wisdom would suggest are highly important to this generation: tolerant, cool, creative, unique. Yet the results did not suggest this is a generation that wants to be seen as cool, or adventurous, or creative.

Instead, they want to be thought of as smart.

**I hope people see me as...
(only response options garnering at least 10%)**

	% choosing
Intelligent	39%
Caring	30%
Hardworking	29%
Responsible	26%
Open-minded	18%
Positive	15%
Competent	14%
Strong	13%
Helpful	13%
Unique	13%
Creative	12%

Response options like “adventurous” and “optimistic” all came in at single digits. Listening to the media today, you might never have guessed that “competent” would win over “cool,” and yet the mindset of wanting to be viewed as intelligent, hardworking, and responsible was dominant alongside caring and open-minded.

We then sought to understand what young people hoped would *never* be said about them, to identify the negative attributes that the GOP should avoid most seriously.

Again, the results focused heavily on work ethic and competence items.

**I hope people NEVER think of me as...
(only responses garnering at least 10%)** **% choosing**

Stupid	34%
Lazy	28%
Incompetent	24%
Irresponsible	21%
Weak	21%
Mean	20%
Uncaring	19%
Closed-minded	14%
Boring	13%
Negative	13%
Unhelpful	10%

For the GOP, being thought of as closed-minded is hardly a good thing. But if the GOP is thought of as the “stupid party,” it may as well be the kiss of death. Recall that at this point in the survey, respondents are not necessarily thinking in a political mindset, as no other questions have been posed. Yet the attributes they reject revolve around lack of intellect, incompetence, and poor work ethic.

We then asked respondents to look at the same lists of positive and negative attributes and to tell us which attributes would make them more or less excited about voting for someone. Intelligent again emerged as the most sought-after quality in a candidate, chosen by 34%, followed by “hardworking” and “responsible” at 28% each. They were then followed by “open-minded” and “principled” at 26%, and “competent” at 24%. On the list of negative

attributes for a candidate for office, the most disliked qualities were “irresponsible” and “incompetent,” tied at 32%, followed closely by “closed-minded” at 29%.

Does the Republican Party have an advantage on these work-ethic brand attributes? They certainly could, but right now do not. When respondents were presented with that same list of ostensibly positive characteristics and asked which they felt best described the GOP, respondents tended to gravitate toward responses that for some audiences may not even represent a net positive: 41% said the GOP was rich while 34% said it was religious. Some 27% viewed the Republican Party as “principled” while 18% chose “hardworking” and 17% chose “entrepreneurial.”

Asked which words *least* described the GOP, respondents gravitated toward “open-minded” (35%), “tolerant” (25%), “caring” (22%), and “cooperative” (21%). Theoretically, the good news in all of this is that while the Republican Party’s negative brand is being driven heavily by a perceived lack of open-mindedness and caring, the other brand attributes that matter to young people – intelligence, a strong work-ethic, and competence – are not out of reach and are certainly up for grabs.

Respondents were also asked what they thought of the Democratic Party. Just as the Republican Party loses on the “open-minded” attribute, the Democrats win it with 33% of respondents saying the word best describes the

Democratic Party. This is followed by “tolerant” at 26%. Of note, 14% of young voters say they think of the Democratic Party as “intelligent” – the same proportion that see the Republican Party that way.

When asked what words *least* describe the Democratic Party, the ambiguous “religious” is the number one choice at 27%, trailed by “responsible” at 20% and “thrifty” at 18%.

Therein lies the opportunity for the GOP. Yes, the Democratic Party is currently winning on the attributes of being caring and open-minded. This was heard in the focus groups, and it was echoed in the survey. But the great news for Republicans is that while those items matter, they are not the *only* things that matter: intelligence, competence, hard work, and responsibility matter a lot too, and neither party has cornered that market. These are brand attributes that, if the party makes real efforts to emphasize them over and over, can begin to turn the tide on the GOP's negative brand image.

However, while winning on the values of intelligence and hard work will go a long way to rebuilding the GOP's brand, they do not necessarily address the diversity concerns that emerged time and again in the focus groups.

The Republican Party cannot survive in elections winning white voters by twenty points overall yet losing non-white voters by such margins as to swing the whole election to the Democrats. In fact, Mitt Romney won young white voters by a 7-point margin but still lost the race. It could be said that the GOP's young

voter problem is as much about failing to gain support from the African American and Latino communities as anything else. With non-white voters making up 42% of voters under the age of 30, the issue of party diversity and the party's success with the youth vote are absolutely inseparable.

So what can be done to address the Republican Party's poor standing with non-white voters, particularly Latino voters? Certainly there's immigration, discussed in Chapter 2 as a complicated issue for the GOP to navigate. But the Republican Party's challenges with non-white voters are not just about one issue. These voters are perhaps even more focused on the broad idea of enabling economic opportunity than they are about immigration. Indeed, one comment by a Hispanic voter in the San Diego focus group harshly laid out how she thought Republicans viewed social mobility for immigrants: “[They have] that mentality that you're born like royalty and the peasants stay peasants. I don't think that is the view that America was founded on. This is supposed to be a land of opportunity.”

Another woman in the same focus group took a similar view: “Focusing on the Mexican culture and how they view Republicans, the Mexican culture tends to be more a family-oriented, warm, home – attention to others, help your neighbors, you cook them a meal if you know that they're struggling. Republicans are more like, yeah, I'll scratch your back only if you are my neighbor here in the high society, or whatever.”

For young Latino voters, the question is, “Do Republicans even *want* to help me out?” Take for instance education. While the economy and spending were the top issues for young Latino voters, they were followed closely by the issue of “lowering the cost of going to college” at 30%. In fact, young black or Latino voters were *twice as likely as young white voters* to name this as a top priority.

The road to building a diverse Republican coalition among young voters goes through more than just immigration. It goes through every issue tied to economic opportunity and social mobility.

The Winning Narrative

Recall the six overarching frames tested in the March 2013 CRNC survey: the top answer, “we need leaders who aren’t afraid to fight existing interests like big companies and big unions in order to reform outdated and unsustainable programs,” found agreement among 93% of respondents. The least successful, while still garnering agreement among 72% of respondents, was “we need to reduce the size of government because it is simply too big.”

Item	% “agree”
We need leaders who aren’t afraid to fight existing interests like big companies or big unions in order to reform outdated and unsustainable programs.	93%
We need to reform Social Security and Medicare now so that the next generation isn’t left cleaning up a huge mess down the road.	90%
We need “safety net” programs that get people back on their feet quickly when they fall on hard times but don’t encourage people to stay dependent on the government.	88%
We need to reduce regulations that hurt the economy and stifle innovation while getting better at enforcing regulations that keep us safe.	86%
We need to make tough choices about cutting government spending, even on some programs some people really like, because the national debt is simply out of control.	82%
We need to reduce the size of government, because it is simply too big.	72%

Digging into the survey data show significantly lower support for the “big government” message among Hispanic respondents. While the other five messages tested show minimal or insignificant differences in levels of agreement by race or ethnicity, only 57% of Hispanic respondents agree that “we need to reduce the size of government,” compared to 75% of white respondents. No other message showed such a divergence, suggesting that any of the other five

present an opportunity for building a broad coalition, and also suggesting that a focus on reducing the size of government is the least effective messaging path.

The survey also examined a variety of broad narratives that could be promoted by a Republican candidate, and evaluated how much more or less likely respondents would be to vote for a candidate who said each of the following:

If you heard a candidate talking about __ would it make you more or less likely to vote for that candidate?	% more likely to vote for them (much + somewhat)	% <u>much</u> more likely to vote for them
“We should be focused on creating jobs and economic growth.”	82%	48%
“We should be focused on tackling the tough, long-term problems that will face the next generation.”	81%	40%
“We should be focused on giving hardworking people the opportunity to move up in society.”	78%	40%
“We should be focused on protecting Americans’ liberty and the principles of the Constitution.”	72%	36%
“We should be focused on innovation and on reforming many of our policies to meet modern challenges.”	71%	30%
“We should be focused on promoting liberty and reducing the role of government in people’s lives and decisions.”	61%	33%
“We should be focused first on protecting and promoting families and core American values.”	61%	30%

Economic growth, tackling long-term challenges, and focusing on opportunity trumped narratives around the constitution, liberty, and American values. While those things are not unimportant, this generation is looking for outcomes – particularly economic outcomes – that are going to make them better off.

This should come as absolutely no surprise; with only 23% of young people saying the nation's economic situation has gotten better in the last year, and with a whopping 51% of young Latino voters saying the economy has gotten worse, this remains the number one issue and top priority.

Yet a message and narrative that focuses on economic growth and opportunity cannot exist without substance behind it. As Chapter 2 demonstrated, there are still many items in the Republican economic agenda that young voters have not been sold on. Also recall that while young voters were also not sold on Obama's economic policies, the sense that he was at least trying and Republicans were not was enough to hand the Democrats a win on that issue with young people.

Economic growth and opportunity policies cannot just be about tax cuts and spending cuts. To win young voters, this agenda must include a range of policies, and they must also be about removing barriers to getting a good education, removing barriers to entrepreneurship, and addressing the challenges of our nation's health care and immigration systems. A message

focused on economic growth is a clear winner, but it must have the substance behind it in order to resonate and succeed.

The Messenger

In the discussion about the 2012 election and the failure to reach young voters, many point to poor candidates and flawed messengers as a key reason why the GOP suffered. Indeed, the August 2012 XG survey found that Mitt Romney's brand was never able to become more favorable than that of the Republican Party; it too sat at only 28% favorable.

During the January 2013 focus group research, respondents in the Columbus group of young men who voted for Obama were asked to name who they viewed as leaders of the Democratic Party. They named prominent former or currently elected officials: Pelosi, the Clintons, Obama, Kennedy, Gore. When those same respondents were asked to name Republican leaders, they focused heavily on media personalities and commentators: Bill O'Reilly, Rush Limbaugh, Glenn Beck.

Yet across all six groups, when the topic turned to *future* leaders of the parties, the GOP was clearly in a stronger position. Asked to name up-and-coming Republican stars, these young Obama voters could point to a number of examples. Marco Rubio, Chris Christie, Paul Ryan, Bobby Jindal, and Rand Paul were all mentioned.

On the Democratic side? Few groups could list even one up-and-coming Democratic leader. The young men's focus group in Columbus named Cory Booker, while another participant said, "I can't think of any young people." The young women said the same: "We don't have any." "I can't think of any." The young entrepreneurs in Orlando could not name any rising Democratic leaders at all. Despite the focus groups describing Democrats as the "young" party, no one could actually describe who their young leaders might be.

What can emerging Republican leaders do to be viewed favorably? The attributes discussed previously certainly matter; positioning themselves as intelligent, hardworking, and competent will go a long way to winning over a greater proportion of young voters. But does actually *being* young matter?

The March 2013 CRNC survey suggests: not really, though it helps to be somewhat in touch with pop culture. Some 30% of respondents said that they would be more likely to vote for a candidate who can talk comfortably about music, movies, and sports, while only 21% said that they would be more likely to vote for a candidate who is under the age of 40. Young voters are far more concerned about finding candidates who understand what they are going through and have solutions to address the problems they are facing; whether that comes from a 60-year-old or a 30-year-old is not quite as important. (After the 2010 elections, House Republicans' average age fell to under 55, while the average age of a Democratic member of the House rose to over 60²⁷. This did

not stop “old” from being mentioned in almost every focus group as an attribute associated with the GOP.) However, youth and knowledge of pop culture may not even necessarily be a boost. In an October 2012 survey by CIRCLE, when young people were asked how they’d react to a candidate who is young and is aware of youth trends, 16.8% said it would make them more interested in supporting the candidate while 14.6% said they’d be concerned that he or she lacks experience.²⁸

To shed the brand of being old-fashioned, the GOP need not just find young candidates who can make pop culture references with ease. Instead, candidates need to be able to show that they understand the problems young people face when it comes to economic opportunity and have a plan to break down the barriers that are standing in their way.

chapter 4

What Now?

The Republican Party's struggles with young voters are well-documented and stem from a number of sources. The question now is what to do about it. We do not pretend to have a magic answer that will turn the tide completely; indeed, it is more of an “all-of-the-above” approach that will be necessary to build a Republican Party brand that can win Millennial voters. Every candidate will have his or her own particular constituent issues, personal characteristics, and campaign dynamics that may render some or all of this advice unhelpful.

Nonetheless, our goal in analyzing the existing survey research on young voters and in creating this new body of survey and focus group research is to offer concrete strategic recommendations. We offer these five overarching points as a guide to candidates, party leaders, consultants, and activists who feel a call to repair the party brand with this emerging generation of voters.

1) Focus on the economic issues that affect young people today: education, the cost of health care, unemployment.

The Republican Party likes to talk to young voters as if they are all future entrepreneurs, and not without good reason: significant numbers, including a majority of black and Hispanic young people, hope to start a business one day. Policies that lower taxes and regulations on small business are quite popular. Yet our focus on taxation and business issues has left many young voters thinking they will only reap the benefits of Republican policies if they

become wealthy or rise to the top of a big business. We've become the party that will pat you on your back when you make it, but won't offer a hand to help you get there. This has to change in order to have a shot with young voters. The opportunities are there to talk to young people about what's really driving the rapidly increasing costs of college tuition, what's really standing in the way of their ability to get a great job, what's really going to happen to their health care costs under Obamacare. And even more importantly, there's an opportunity to talk about what a Republican might do to fix these things. These pressing, relevant, pocketbook items have to be at the core of a policy platform and overall narrative about economic growth and opportunity.

2) Capture the brand attributes of intelligence, hard work, and responsibility.

Chasing what is fashionable is a fool's errand for the GOP. Trying to morph overnight from the party of the old-fashioned will not be achieved by giving interviews on MTV or reaching out to celebrities (though we would certainly not advise *against* those things). Luckily for Republicans, what young people want to be thought of even more than cool is intelligent. When Louisiana Gov. Bobby Jindal stood up and said that the Republican Party cannot be viewed as the "stupid party," he was absolutely right. The "intelligent" brand

(among other positive attributes) is seriously undercut by outrageous statements made by errant Republican voices that are inevitably repeated over and over in the media. We as a party must value intelligence and elevate smart leaders. And we must underscore the way our policies support those young people who are themselves intelligent, hardworking, and responsible.

3) Don't concede "caring" and "open-minded" to the left.

This may sound like a daunting challenge. After all, isn't it easier to gain a reputation for being "open-minded" if you are socially liberal? Isn't the way to be the "caring" party to support lavish government spending on social welfare programs? We disagree. "Caring" does not have to equal "giving out free stuff," and "open-minded" does not have to equal "being liberal." It's time we try to take these attributes back. Even if we don't win them, we must put up a fight. When it comes to the issue of caring, the Republican Party can push back by promoting a narrative of economic growth and opportunity, with policies behind it that clearly show how those who are down on their luck or disadvantaged aren't left out. If we don't believe that Republicans are the "fend for yourself" party, then it's time for us to explain why – and to show our work. This will go a long way overall, but particularly with Latino voters, who tend to think the GOP couldn't care less about them.

On the “open-minded” issue, yes, we will face serious difficulty so long as the issue of gay marriage remains on the table. In the short term, the party ought to promote the diversity of thought within its ranks and make clear that we welcome healthy debate on the policy topic at hand. We should also strongly oppose the use of anti-gay rhetoric.

4) Fix the debt and cut spending, but recognize that messages about “big government” are the least effective way to win this battle of ideas with young voters.

Republicans know that government is often a lousy tool for solving problems in our society. Bloated bureaucracy, waste, fraud, abuse, and overreach plague governmental solutions to problems that would have been best solved by individuals, communities, or private entities. And in general, young people are with us: in the August 2012 XG study, 51% of respondents said that “government is trying to do too many things that are best left to individuals and the private sector.” Some 49% thought that “when something is run by the government, it tends to be inefficient and wasteful.” Our recommendation is not that the GOP should lay down its arms in the fight against big government. It is not the case that young voters are hungry for big-government solutions. However, in both the focus groups and in the survey, we find that reducing the size of government isn't the outcome that really matters most to young people. It is a means to achieving better things

like economic growth, yes, but the focus must be on the outcomes rather than on treating “big government” itself as the enemy. When Republicans proudly say they are going to take on President Obama’s “big-government policies,” many young people shrug their shoulders, unsure what we mean by “big government” and exactly how that crusade will make their lives better. Focus on fixing the debt, on tackling long-term problems, on reforming institutions that are broken, absolutely. But realize that railing against “big government” isn’t the most effective way to win the hearts and minds of this generation.

5) Go where young voters are and give them something to share.

There’s an old saying that “half of life is showing up,” and yet Republicans have consistently failed to even show up for young voters in the last few election cycles. Democrats give an interview to MTV, Republicans are nowhere to be seen. Pictures appear on Facebook of Obama at a college dive bar with a young student and go viral. Obama campaign ads appear during the MTV movie awards, and supporters rush to win a dinner party invitation from Sarah Jessica Parker. We don’t expect candidates to throw back shots with college kids, but it wouldn’t hurt to have them target ads at the people who watch re-runs of Family Guy. Young people do not get their

information the way voters used to. They carry smartphones in their pockets and purses that allow them to connect with anyone, anytime, anywhere, and that give them instant access to any piece of information they may want to know. There are countless ways they can watch the latest episode of their favorite TV show, and the screens where they're focusing their eyes all day are more and more likely to be portable. To win young voters, the Republican Party and its candidates must embrace this reality.

This doesn't just mean putting up a Facebook page and calling it a day. This means having a campaign website that is seamlessly accessed from a mobile device, that encourages supporters to text in their support, that is optimized to get a message across to the girl at the gym listening to Pandora on her headphones and the guy watching clips of last night's Daily Show on his iPad. It means really studying the shows that young people are watching and occasionally buying some TV time there, or at least buying advertising time on Hulu and other streaming video sources. Most importantly, it means creating online content that is interesting, funny, or positive, and that makes someone want to share it with their friends because it makes *them* seem interesting and funny. As young voters increasingly distrust campaign advertising, finding ways to get supporters to put their "seal of approval" on a video or post by sharing and retweeting is essential to giving your message the credibility that will let you change minds.

These five items are just a start, and they won't be easy. What we're calling for involves not just a modernizing of media strategy or a change in tone, but a fundamental re-thinking of how we can connect our policy ideas to the broad narrative of economic growth and opportunity, and how we can credibly demonstrate that a Republican vote is an intelligent move.

We believe the work will be hard, but that it can be done. And that it must start today.

Methodology

Data used in this report, unless otherwise cited, is drawn from two surveys conducted for the College Republican National Committee or its partner organizations.

The March 2013 CRNC Survey results are based on 800 registered voters aged 18-29 nationwide. The survey was developed by The Winston Group and was conducted online with fieldwork partner YouGov. For the survey, YouGov interviewed 858 18-29 year old registered voters between February 27 and March 4, 2013, who were then matched down to a sample of 800 to produce the final dataset. The respondents were matched on gender, race, education, party identification, ideology and political interest. YouGov then weighted the matched set of survey respondents to known marginals for the 18-29 year old U.S. registered voter using the 2010 American Community Survey, the 2008 Current Population survey and the 2007 Pew Religious Landscape Survey.

The August 2012 XG Survey results are based on 800 registered voters aged 18-29 nationwide. The survey was developed by The Winston Group and was conducted online with fieldwork partner YouGov. For the survey, YouGov interviewed 883 18-29 year old registered voters between August 13 and August 19, 2012, who were then matched down to a sample of 800 to produce the final dataset. The respondents were matched on gender, age, race, education, party identification, ideology and political interest. YouGov then weighted the matched set of survey respondents to known marginals for the 18-29 year old U.S. registered voter using the 2007 American Community Survey, the 2008 Current Population survey and the 2007 Pew Religious Landscape Survey.

The focus groups of young Obama voters were conducted by The Winston Group (moderated by Kristen Soltis Anderson) for the CRNC in January 2013 in three cities as follows:

- San Diego, CA, January 10, 2013 (Hispanic voters age 18-29, Asian-American voters age 18-29)
- Orlando, FL, January 14, 2013 (Hispanic voters age 18-29, aspiring entrepreneurs age 18-29)
- Columbus, OH, January 16, 2013 (Single women age 25-29, men aged 18-24 having economic difficulties)

For additional details on methodology, please contact Kristen Soltis Anderson of The Winston Group (ksoltis@winstongroup.net).

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