

# THE TARRANCE GROUP

## MEMORANDUM

TO: INTERESTED PARTIES

FROM: BRIAN NIENABER AND ED GOEAS

RE: KEY FINDINGS FROM A NATIONAL SURVEY OF LIKELY VOTERS AGE 17-29

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### METHODOLOGY

The Tarrance Group is pleased to present these findings from a national survey of “likely” voters age 17-29. All respondents interviewed in this study were part of a fully representative sample of N=500 “likely” voters age 17-29 nationwide. Responses to this survey were gathered September 8-17, 2008. Lake Research Partners administered the survey, which was designed in collaboration with The Tarrance Group. The confidence interval associated with a sample of this type is  $\pm 4.4\%$  in 19 of 20 cases.

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Looking at this data from the perspective of a Republican pollster, there are four (4) key findings from this data:

1. Despite claims to the contrary, this age cohort has views, concerns and interests that mirror the electorate as a whole.
2. However, in examining their concerns more thoroughly, these voters have a remarkably diverse number of issues about which they feel passionately and have a strong desire for more information on many issues.
3. The young voters are engaged in the electoral process and energized about voting.
4. While the Presidential ballot and Congressional generic ballot look very challenging for Republicans, there are opportunities for McCain and for Republican Congressional candidates to make progress with these voters.

Each of these key findings will be examined in this memorandum.

### Young Voters Mirror Overall Electorate

In looking at how young voters view the broad political environment, they hold views remarkably similar to the views of the overall electorate. A strong majority (69%) believes the country is on the wrong track. Their top concern from a list is jobs and the economy and their open-ended concern is jobs and the economy. This pessimism about the direction of the country and anxiety about the economy is also seen in current national polling.

In looking at their sources for news, this most wired and internet savvy generation still has strong majorities that follow election news by watching television – cable (81%), local (79%), and national (79%) and by reading the newspaper (68%). While 63% do

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follow election news online and 48% admit to using the “Daily Show”, it is clear that these voters still use some pretty traditional means for gathering electoral news.

## Diverse Issue Passions/Desire for More Information

While economic anxiety drives their top of mind concerns, in examining their concerns about other issues it is clear that this group has a diverse number of issues about which it feels passionately and a strong desire to hear more information about many issues.

Asked to rank the personal importance of a variety of issues on a 0 to 10 scale, six of the nine issues tested have a mean score of 7.7 or above, including gas prices/energy (8.7), creating jobs (8.7), Iraq (8.3), health care (8.3), terrorism (8.0), and college affordability (7.7).

As one might expect, the issues about which a majority of young voters do not think they have gotten enough information mirrors the issue of highest personal importance. The issues about which a majority of young voters believe they have not received enough information includes college affordability (65%), creating jobs (64%), health care (56%), and gas prices/energy (55%).

Candidates would do well to continue to address these kitchen table pocketbook issues with a special emphasis on college affordability in their outreach to younger voters.

## Young Voters – Highly Engaged and Highly Energized

Overall, fully 69% of this age cohort indicates they are “extremely” likely to vote in the elections in November. This represents a 7% increase in the “extremely” likely category since just February. In addition, those voters who have taken the most basic step of selecting either McCain or Obama as their current Presidential ballot preference are at 73% “extremely” likely.

In addition, these voters are already highly engaged in following the election. A majority (57%) indicate that they are following news about the election either extremely (27%) or very (30%). This represents a 15-point increase in interest level since February. As with the likelihood to vote measure, those who hold a preference on the Presidential ballot are even higher with both McCain and Obama voters at more than 60% on this measure.

These voters also have a very enthusiastic view about the impact their vote will have on this election. More than 70% believe either their age group (89%) or they alone (71%) have the power to change things in this election. Similarly, more than 70% of young voters believe this will be a historic election because we will be electing either an African American President (83%) or a female Vice President (70%).

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## Challenging for Republicans Now, but Opportunities for Gains are Available

Both the Presidential ballot and the Congressional generic ballot present problems for Republicans. However, there are certainly opportunities for McCain and his fellow Republican candidates to make progress with voters under age 29.

The Presidential ballot remains largely unchanged from the February study with the McCain-Palin ticket trailing the Obama-Biden ticket by 27-points (29%-56%). This performance is driven in part by the “image gap” that McCain (44% favorable) and Palin (37% favorable) have with Obama (69% favorable) and Biden (49% favorable).

However, fully 23% of Obama voters indicate there is a chance that they might change their vote. In addition, McCain has not yet solidified his base with these voters as Obama has with his base. McCain is receiving just 76% of the Republican vote while Obama is receiving 91% of the Democratic vote. Should McCain succeed in the debates at illustrating Obama’s foibles and energizing the young GOP base, McCain could certainly make some impressive gains with these voters.

The Congressional generic ballot yields a remarkably similar trend. The GOP trails the Democratic Party by 22-points (27%-49%). However, while 87% of Democrats are supporting the Democrat on this ballot, just 78% of Republicans are supporting the Republican. An intensification of the GOP base would yield notable gains on this measure.

For both McCain and Republican Congressional candidates, these outreach efforts can be some of the most cost effective methods available. In asking about actions they have taken to gather information or take action about the election, 92% of young voters have talked with friends/family, 56% have watched an online video, and 40% have visited a campaign website. So, two simple actions -- asking supporters to send messages to friends and family and archiving video on a campaign website – would provide near universal coverage of this age cohort.

## Conclusion

As we enter into the final sprint of this election season, Senator McCain and Congressional Republicans need to make gains with voters under 30. However, given the issue interest similarities this age cohort has with overall electorate, their strong desire to learn more about the election, and their preference for gathering information in methods that are cost effective for campaigns, there are some real opportunities for McCain and GOP candidates to make significant gains with these voters by both solidifying their base vote and by reaching on key pocketbook issues to these voters.

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