

# GSG Compass

MID-TERM MESSAGING:

## Focus on Growth to Frame Priorities

APRIL 2014

Republicans define Democrats as a party for the 47% who are takers. Democrats define Republicans as a party for the 1% who are wealthiest. And meanwhile, a majority of voters questions who is looking out for their interests, and an increasing number concludes the answer is no one.

Narrowly focusing on “income inequality” just continues this narrative and leaves many waiting for a message that actually speaks to them. Survey data confirms that “opportunity” is much more effective, but is it the *most* effective way to encapsulate Democrats’ message on wages and income? Or is there a higher priority economic objective that would serve as an even better frame when advocating an increase in the minimum wage?

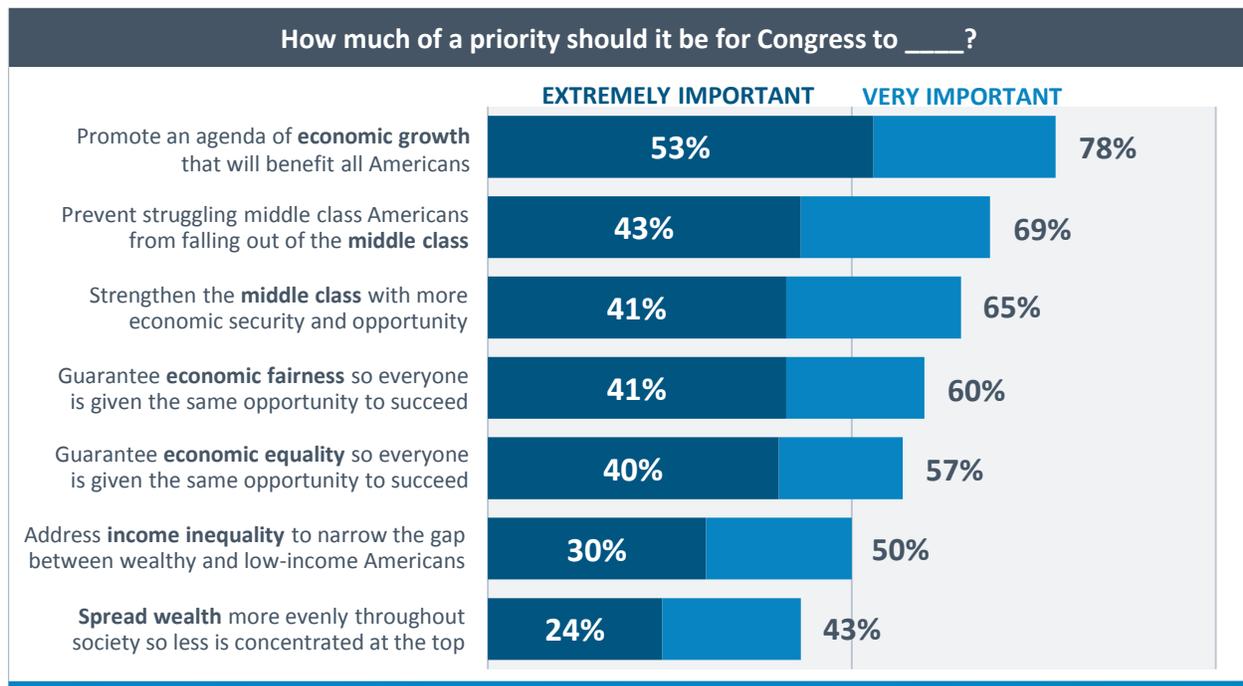
Highlighting data from multiple national voter surveys, this **GSG Compass** makes the case for Democrats to focus on **growth** as a frame for all of the party’s policy priorities, economic and otherwise, and leads the way to a message for the mid-term elections that appeals to a broader cross-section of voters, in particular the 52% too often left out of the economic debate.

## A focus on economic fairness is better than a focus on income inequality, but a focus on growth appeals to even more voters

More than three-quarters of voters (78%) believe promoting an agenda of economic growth that benefits all Americans should be a very important priority for Congress, and a majority (53%) believes such an agenda is extremely important. No other statement of economic priorities for the country registers as high, as the chart below shows.

Only a bare majority (50%) believes it is very important to address income inequality to narrow the gap between the wealthy and low-income Americans, with 30% labeling it extremely important. In fact, this economic language that is used most readily by many Democrats today rates just seven points higher than the idea of spreading wealth more evenly throughout society.

Though not as broadly appealing as the focus on growth, a focus on either the middle class or economic fairness is an improvement over focusing on income inequality. Almost two-thirds (65%) say strengthening the middle class should be very important, and 60% say guaranteeing economic fairness so everyone has an opportunity to succeed is very important.



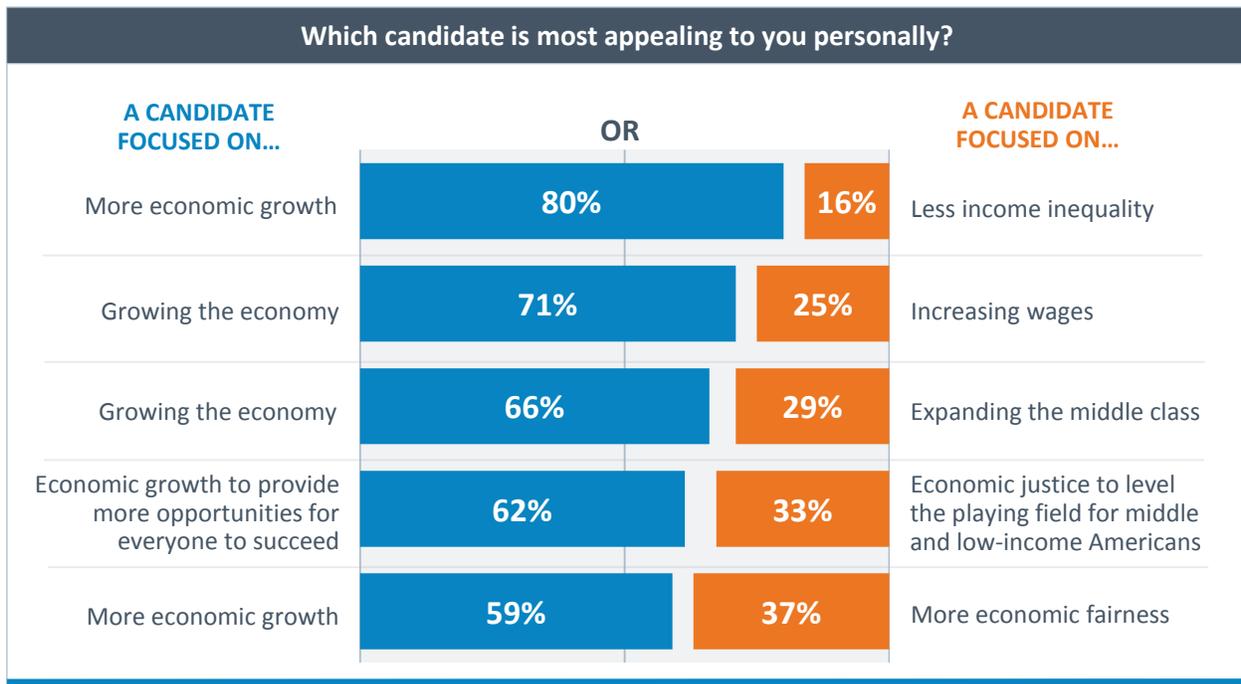
## Growth-focused candidates appeal to many more voters than those focused on wages, inequality, or middle class expansion

Candidates focused on “growing the economy” or “more economic growth” win by a wide margin when paired against candidates focused on a host of other economic priorities.

Most dramatic is the 64-point margin between a candidate focused on “more economic growth” (80%) and one focused on “less income inequality” (16%), but nearly as significant are growth’s 46-point margin over “increasing wages” (71% to 25%) and 37-point margin over “expanding the middle class” (66% to 29%).

In addition, a candidate focused on “economic growth to provide more opportunities for everyone to succeed” has a 29-point advantage over one focused on “economic justice to level the playing field for middle and low-income Americans” (62% to 33%).

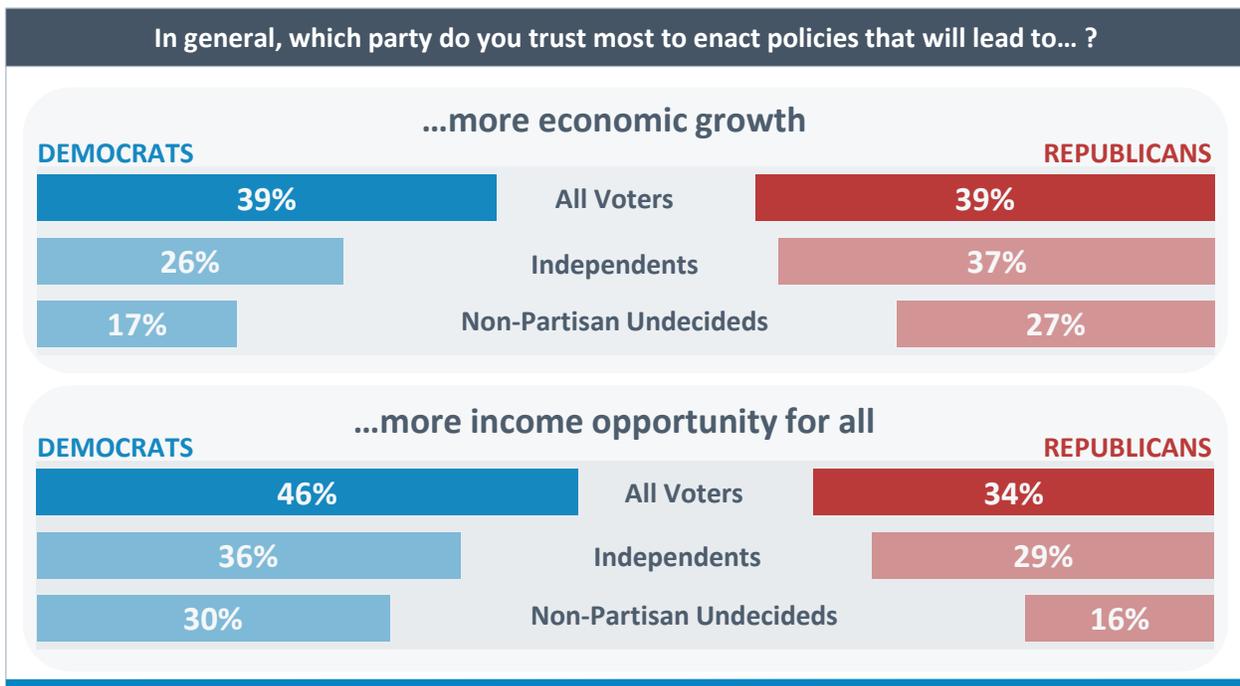
A candidate focused on “more economic fairness” holds a growth-focused candidate to the narrowest margin but is still at a 22-point disadvantage (59% to 37%), demonstrating the need to do more than simply re-brand “income inequality” with synonyms like “economic fairness” or “economic equality.”



## Democrats are trusted more to improve income opportunity, but voters' trust is evenly split on "economic growth"

When it comes to enacting policies that lead to more income opportunity for all, Democrats have a clear advantage. By a 12-point margin, more voters trust Democrats (46%) over Republicans (34%) to enact such policies. And Democrats' advantage on income opportunity extends further with a seven-point margin among Independents (36% to 29%) and a 14-point margin among non-partisan undecided voters (30% to 16%). Non-partisan undecideds are voters who are undecided on the generic ballot and unwilling to self-identify with either party – making them a key group of swing voters.

But when it comes to enacting policies that lead to more economic growth – the more important of the two objectives for many voters – trust is split between Democrats (39%) and Republicans (39%). Among Independent voters, Democrats actually find themselves at a nine-point disadvantage (26% to 37%), and among non-partisan undecided voters Republicans have a 10-point advantage over Democrats (17% to 27%). Even more significantly, 37% of Independents and 56% of non-partisan undecideds are unsure of which party to trust on growth – a major opportunity Democrats should seize.

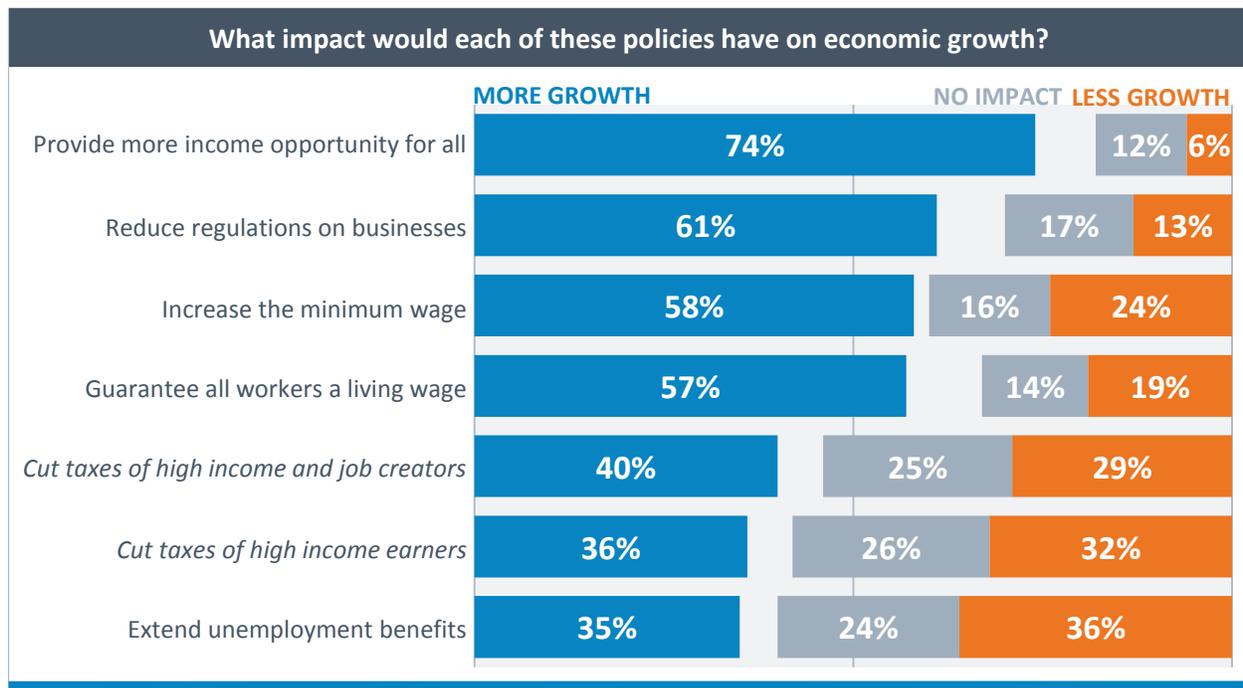


## Democrats' income and wage priorities are more credible as contributors of economic growth than Republican tax policies

So do Democrats need to alter their policy priorities in order to become the party of economic growth? Absolutely not. As the chart below shows, more voters believe Democrats' priorities on income and wages will lead to growth than believe Republicans' priorities on taxes will, despite the fact that Republicans have made the growth argument for their tax policies for decades.

In fact, just 36% of voters believe cutting the taxes of high-income earners will lead to more growth, while nearly as many (32%) believe the policy leads to less growth. Even adding "job creators" to high-income earners only increases to 40% the number saying their tax policy leads to more growth.

By contrast, 58% believe increasing the minimum wage will lead to more growth, and nearly as many (57%) believe guaranteeing all workers a living wage would have the same impact. Additionally, three-quarters (74%) say "providing more income opportunity for all" – a better frame for Democrats' wage policies than "income inequality" – will lead to growth.



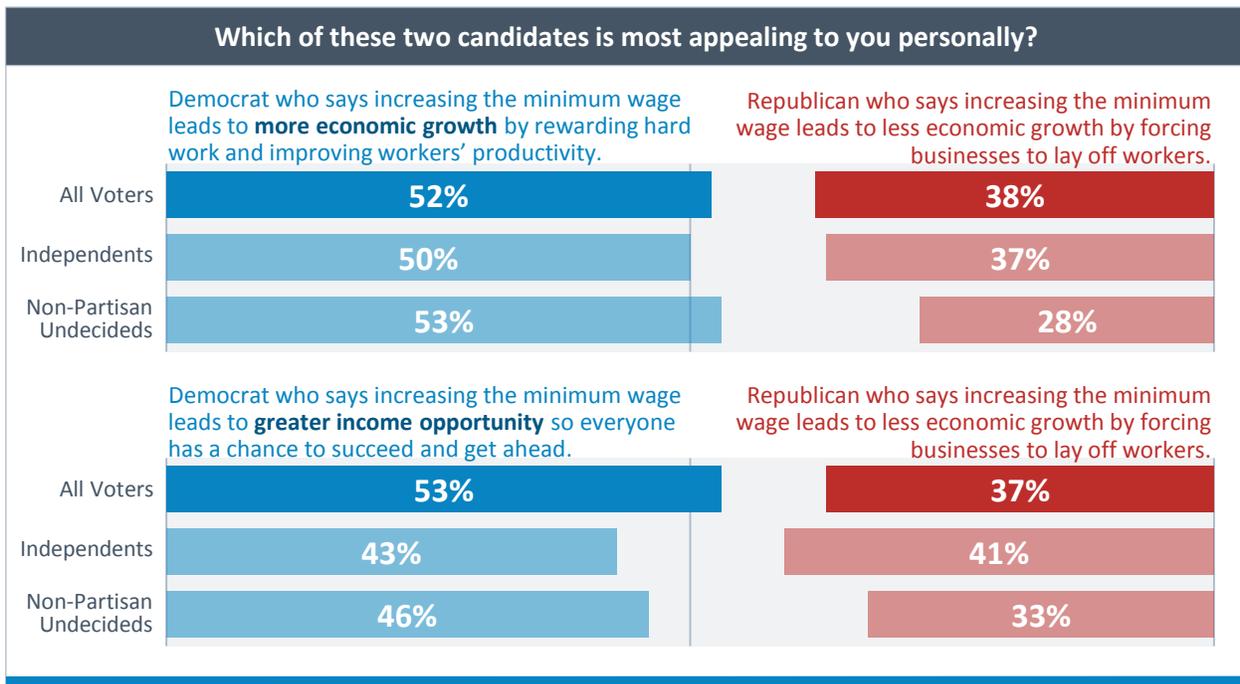
## Framing a minimum wage increase around growth **wins more Independents and swing voters** than an opportunity frame

A Democrat who argues that increasing the minimum wage “leads to more economic growth by rewarding hard work and improving workers’ productivity” has a 14-point advantage over a Republican who argues that increasing the minimum wage “leads to less economic growth by forcing businesses to lay off workers.”

A similar 13-point advantage exists among Independents (50% to 37%), and among non-partisan undecided voters the Democrats’ advantage expands to 25 points (53% to 28%).

A Democrat who argues that increasing the minimum wage “leads to greater income opportunity so everyone has a chance to succeed and get ahead” (53%) has a 16-point advantage over a Republican who argues that an increase leads to less growth (37%).

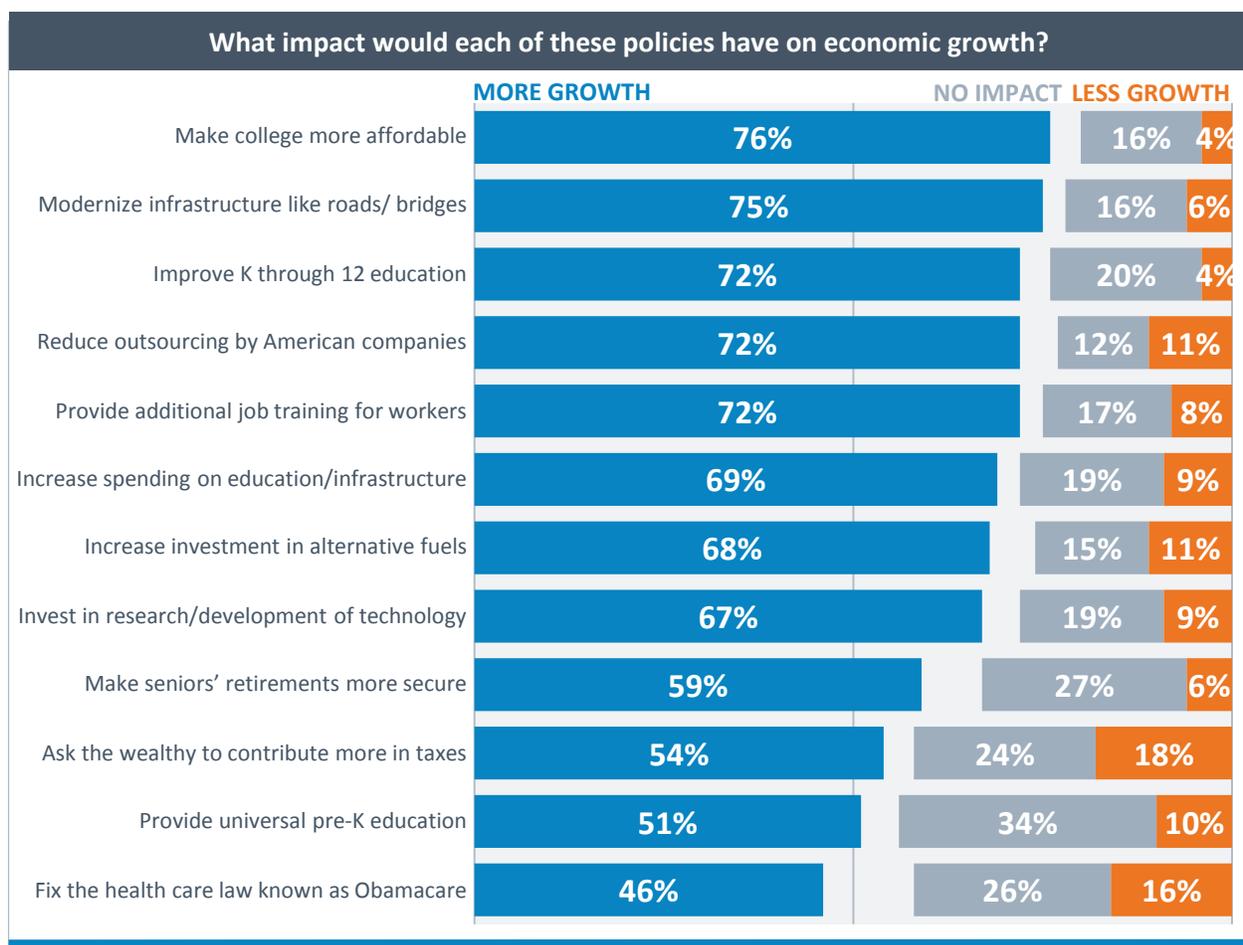
That Democrat maintains a 13-point advantage among non-partisan undecided voters (46% to 33%), but the margin narrows to just 2 points among Independents (43% to 41%). So while both “opportunity” and “growth” are effective frames, Independents and swing voters are more attracted to a candidate focused on growth.



## Voters believe many Democratic policy priorities lead to growth, making it a credible and effective focus of a reframed agenda

Is growth an effective frame for other priorities that are not typically included under the rubric of economic policy? The answer from voters is a resounding yes. In fact, most believe much of the Democratic agenda, if enacted, would lead to more growth.

About three-quarters believe making college affordable (76%) and modernizing infrastructure (75%) would lead to more growth, and the number who say the same about improving K-12 (72%), reducing outsourcing (72%), and providing additional job training (72%) is nearly as high. A majority even believes making senior' retirement more secure (59%) and asking the wealthy to contribute more in taxes (54%) would lead to more growth.



## THE KEY POINTS

- Focusing on growth appeals more broadly than focusing on either income inequality or low wages. In fact, candidates who emphasize "economic equality" or "economic fairness" lose badly to candidates who emphasize "economic growth."
- "More income opportunity for all" pairs well against "more economic growth," but Democrats already win on opportunity, while the jury is still out on growth. Additionally, there are no regular, monthly measurements of opportunity, as reporting on the economy inherently focuses on aspects of economic growth.
- Most voters already believe many of Democrats' priorities will lead to more economic growth, so Democrats should be framing them that way.
- Republicans have argued for decades that top bracket tax cuts lead to growth; Democrats should argue that increased income opportunity and increased wages leads to growth. The Democratic argument is both more credible and more convincing – and has the added benefit of actually being true!
- To be clear, Democrats do not need to alter their policy agenda one bit; rather, Democrats' priorities should just be framed differently. For example, a new argument for increasing the minimum wage: "increasing the minimum wage leads to more economic growth by rewarding hard work and improving workers' productivity."

**METHODOLOGY:** This **GSGCompass** references results from three national surveys of 1,000 registered voters each conducted by Global Strategy Group via telephone. The first was conducted January 19-22, the second was conducted February 16-19, and the third was conducted March 16-19. Special care has been taken to ensure geographic and demographic divisions are properly represented. The margin of error for 1,000 voters at the 95% confidence level is +/- 3.1%; the margin of error for any split samples of 500 voters each is +/- 4.4%.