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To: Friends of Democracy Corps

From: Stan Greenberg
James Carville

RE: KERRY IS BACK AND WITH A MULTITUDE OF OPPORTUNITIES
Report on the Latest Democracy Corps National Survey

With his tackling of the Iraq issue and his debate performance, John Kerry has once again put himself in position to win the presidential contest in November. Indeed, he has more than eliminated Bush's post-convention lead, leading by 49 to 48 percent nationally and by 50 to 47 percent in the battleground states, according to Democracy Corps' most recent survey of likely voters.¹

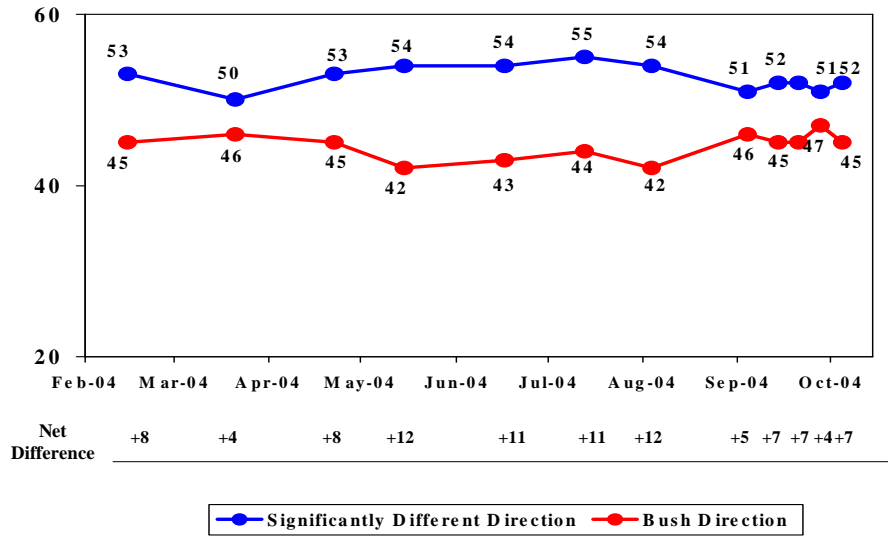
The public polls keep producing a similar result. The twelve polls conducted this week, show Bush, on average, with 47 percent of the vote and Kerry with 46 percent. We underscore the point we have made in previous reports. George Bush, as with almost any well-known polarizing incumbent, will get very little of the undecided or Nader vote, both of which strongly want change. At 47 percent, Bush would likely fall short of re-election.

Much more important than the state of the race are the changing dynamics that have moved Kerry into a competitive position and that have created so much opportunity for gain. With the Town Hall debate focused equally on security and domestic issues, this is an opportunity for John Kerry to make the case for change.

The desire for change remains unchanged, with 52 percent wanting to move in a significantly different direction, while only 45 percent want to continue in Bush's direction. What has changed is John Kerry's favorability and acceptability as a president. Positive sentiment rose 4 points, while negatives dropped 4. He is now somewhat more popular than Bush.

¹ Democracy Corps conducted a survey of 1,022 likely voters October 3-5, 2004. This memo also cites data collected in our nationally representative survey of debate watchers conducted on the nights of the Presidential and Vice Presidential debates.

Change: Bush Change Direction
2004



More important than popularity are the gains Kerry achieved as a leader and the gains he achieved on the issues. After the debate, over 55 percent of the voters said he offers a hopeful vision and has clear ideas, cares about people, will keep America strong, and has what it takes to be president. While Bush’s approval ratings and image were only marginally diminished, Kerry clearly now stands on the same stage.

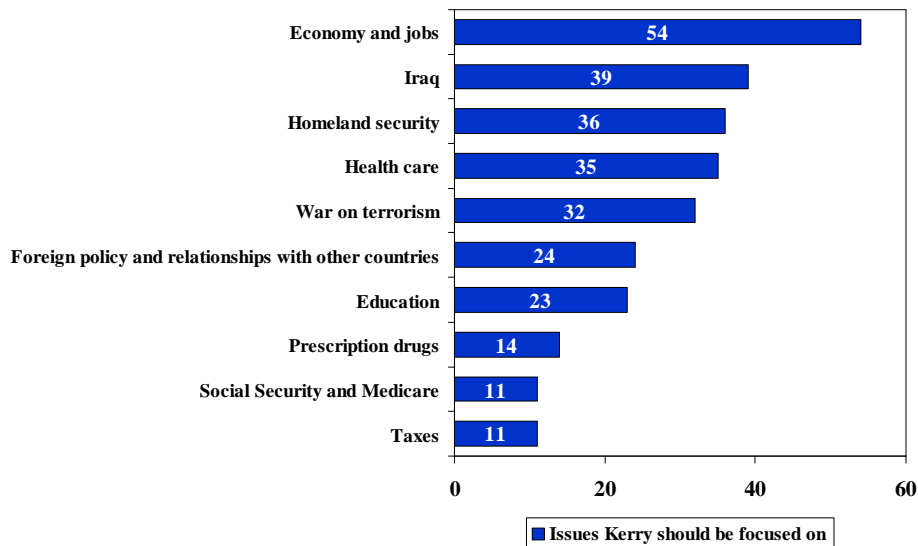
Kerry also made major gains on a broad range of issues – indeed, around 5 points on who would do a better job. But he made his biggest gains on security related questions. He gained 7 points on handling the war on terrorism, cutting Bush’s lead to just 12 points; he did the same on foreign policy and is now more trusted than Bush by 47 to 45 percent. Based on Democracy Corps’ debate night polls, we know that Kerry made even bigger gains on homeland security. The biggest single gain was on which candidate has clear ideas on addressing the country’s problems. Here, Kerry made a 12-point gain, with Bush still leading by 48 to 41 percent.

Kerry has emerged more than competitive in this race, but it is important to underscore that Kerry has room to make gains, assuming he uses his current position to take the race to the next stage. This memo underscores the opportunity that requires intense effort, given the vagaries of the news and real world events, and the determination of the Bush campaign to take this campaign back to the post-convention phase, centered on the war on terrorism, broadly defined.

The Battle for the Agenda

The public, particularly those to be persuaded and those to be mobilized, want to see John Kerry focus on the economy and jobs above all else, but also Iraq, homeland security and health care. In all these cases, they want to know what are his plans. Below, we outline what independents want to see from John Kerry in this election.

Preferred Kerry Focus: Independents
Top three issues he should be focused on vs. Top three issues he is focused on



“What THREE issues do you feel John Kerry SHOULD be most focused on in this election?”

The priority is even clearer for Democrats whose energy and unity matters to this election: 53 percent say economy and jobs, followed by health care (42 percent) and Iraq (38 percent).

This economic debate has not yet happened, but George Bush must make the case for the economy’s strength, which he does on every occasion. They are deeply invested in that perception. Except the great majority of the country, and with great intensity, believes the middle class has not shared in that prosperity.

Kerry has already moved into a 6-point lead on handling the economy and has the chance to make this decisive in the election.

The World of Gender

The first presidential debate was focused on security issues and, as a result, Kerry's gains were primarily among men. These were important gains that made it possible for him to get up to this current platform.

- Among white men, Bush's margin was cut from 26 to 16 points, a 10-point shift to Kerry.
- Among white non-college educated men, Bush's margin was cut from 36 to 24 points – a 12 point shift.

Minority voters – both African American and Hispanic – liked what they saw and gave Kerry a significant boost. But white women voters have not yet moved. That is true, whether you are speaking of non-college or college educated women. College educated women, for example, give Kerry a 6-point lead, but that is well below the 20 point margin achieved after the Democratic convention.

These women are critical targets in the next phase of the campaign, where the debates will automatically be taking the election to a broader set of issues.

It is important for Democracy Corps readers to see Anna Greenberg's piece on the myth of the Security mom.² These women voters liked the John Kerry they saw in the first debate, but they have held back. They are looking for this election campaign to finally address their lives, meaning their ability to support their families, get kids educated, and have affordable health care.

Broader Opportunities

While John Kerry has fought back to reach 49 percent of the vote, he had reached a comparable point after the Democratic convention in August. To get to a different place, he needs to break through key groups, particularly seniors, where he clearly deserves to be in a better position. These are important opportunities for progressive groups.

Seniors. Right now, John Kerry is underperforming with seniors. Among the white elderly, Kerry is trailing by 11 points, which lags behind Gore's performance in 2000. This margin also lags significantly behind the party leanings of white seniors who

² Link to Anna Greenberg's piece, "The Security Mom Myth":

http://www.greenbergresearch.com/publications/reports/r_security_mom_myth092804.pdf

Link to Ellen Goodman's article, "The Myth of Security Moms":

http://www.boston.com/news/globe/editorial_opinion/oped/articles/2004/10/07/the_myth_of_security_moms/

even now split evenly between the parties. The Bush margin is hard to understand, given the feelings about the prescription drug issue and the president's policies, where Kerry has his greatest advantage over Bush. These are also voters, by 56 to 42 percent, who think the Iraq war was not worth the cost in dollars and lives.

Rural areas. Kerry has not yet made gains in rural areas, though these voters are very concerned about the economy and health care, and remain very skeptical about Bush's claims on the economy. The economic debate is central to getting heard in this political world.

Mainline Protestants. One of the surprises in this election is the fact that John Kerry is winning amongst whites who belong to mainline Protestant churches. That is a new phenomenon and likely reflects Bush's complete association with evangelical religious politics and pushing religion ever more explicitly into the political realm. There is clearly an opportunity that many organizations will want to address.

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Obviously, we are delighted to chronicle Kerry's reclaiming the higher ground, but we mainly wanted to use this moment to remind all those involved in the 2004 effort that there are more votes to get. A majority of 52 percent want big change, but Kerry is at 49 percent. In fact, 6 percent of the electorate is comprised of Bush voters who do not want to continue in his direction. As a result there are important opportunities, with women in particular, but also with seniors and other groups. Kerry and the Democrats have a multitude of opportunities.