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**Date:** April 28, 2004

**To:** Friends of Democracy Corps

**From:** Stan Greenberg  
James Carville

**RE: BUSH STILL ENDANGERED**  
Notes on the Latest Democracy Corps Poll

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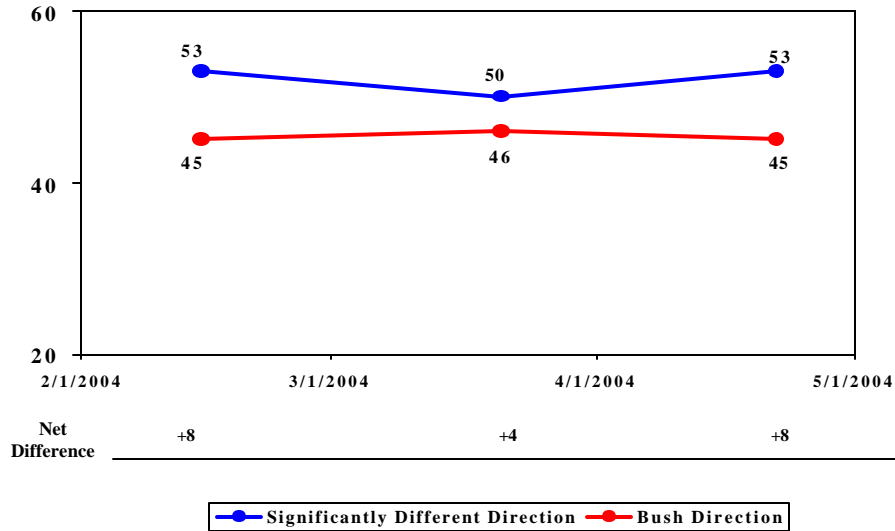
This has been a tumultuous month for the country and in the campaign that leaves Kerry within a couple of points of Bush, himself short of a majority, and more striking, that has the candidates evenly matched in the battleground states. For Bush, that is true, despite the awful turn for the worse in Iraq and a spate of bad news nights on the 9/11 Commission. For Kerry, that is true, despite the rise in negative sentiments since Super Tuesday, the \$50 million of anti-Kerry advertising in the key states and the slight improvement in perceptions of the economy.

Bush is particularly fortunate to hold on to his 49 percent of the vote, as the underlying race has moved against them, even in this period. Bush is an endangered incumbent. 2004 is still a “change” election and even more so in the last month.

By 14 points (54 to 40 percent), the electorate believes the country is headed in the wrong direction. And a striking majority of 53 percent says they want to go in “a significantly different direction” than Bush (47 percent agree strongly with that already strong assertion), while 45 percent want to continue with Bush. That majority for change is growing and creates the very opportunity for Kerry.

## Bush Direction vs. Significantly Different Direction

Overall

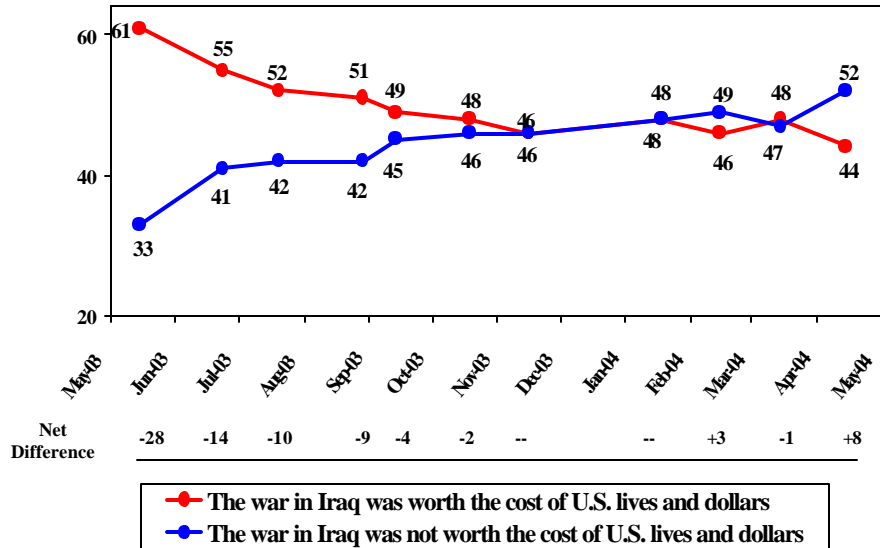


A declining number of voters are looking to Bush as a president with “a hopeful vision for the future,” down 3 points to 49 percent. In fact, for the first time in his presidency, a majority of the country (53 percent) says Bush is “in over his head” – a startling conclusion for a president who has toppled two regimes and is the Commander-in-Chief.

Bush’s approval rating has slipped to 50 percent, with 47 percent disapproving, matching the lowest point of his presidency. Bush’s fall is also personal. His “thermometer” score has dropped 2 degrees (from 54.9 to 52.9), making him very, very mortal. Despite all the fanfare about the jocular and well-liked Bush, just 49 percent in fact like him (give him a “warm” response) – for the first time below 50 percent.

Bush’s main problem is, not surprisingly, Iraq and the perception of a faltering foreign policy. A plurality have turned against the war. While the country was and is ambivalent, but a month ago, voters leaned toward embracing it (43 to 40 percent, on the warm-cool thermometer scale), but now, they lean against (41 to 46 percent) – an 8 point swing in margin. Last month, the country was exactly evenly divided on whether the war was worth the cost and lives, but now, a majority thinks not (52 to 44 percent).

### Was the War in Iraq Worth it?



On both Iraq and foreign policy, a near majority would now go in a significantly different direction, rather than continue Bush’s direction – 50 and 49 percent respectively.

There is some evidence of the public becoming a little less upset about the economy and job losses. The percent “very worried” about unemployment dropped from 35 to 30 percent, back to the mid-January level. And our key tracking question on the economy – whether jobs remain scarce and incomes stagnant or whether there has been progress, as Bush claims – dropped from its normal position of net +22 points to a net +18 points this month (57 to 39 percent). The coordinated national Republican campaign has also taken some of the edge off of the Medicare/prescription drug issue nationally, but not in the battleground states where their arguments are challenged. The bad news for the Republicans is that the country still doubts the economic progress in large numbers; similarly, by a 15-point margin, the country still wants to change Bush’s direction on Medicare reform.

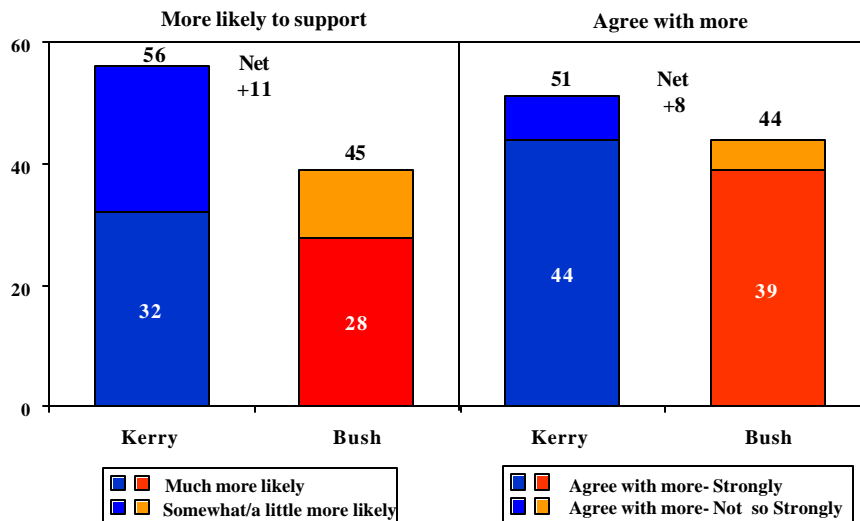
Bush has not faltered in the actual vote because John Kerry has not yet introduced himself nationally and he has been hurt by the Bush attacks, particularly in the battleground states, reinforced by heavy negative advertising. Overall, Kerry’s personal standing has continued to weaken, though much more slowly. His thermometer has dropped from 48.5 to 46.1 degrees, reflecting a small drop in “warm” responses (from 40 to 37 percent) and a nearly imperceptible rise in “cold,” negative ones (from 39 to 40 percent); the proportion of Kerry “hater” has gone up, from 29 to 32 percent, as part of our current

partisan polarization. But that caps a post-Super Tuesday period where Kerry's negatives have gone up 11 points. Taking into account statistical rounding, Kerry trails Bush by 2 overall and by 4 in the lower, core electorate; he trails by 4 points with Nader in the race.

This has also brought a slight dip in the image of the Democratic Party and slight drop in the Democratic generic vote, with the Democrats still ahead by 2 points.

But Kerry is sure to move up as he sets out his positions, message, biography and leadership qualities, which will surely happen. The issue terrain, in particular, dramatically favors Kerry and the Democrats. We presented voters with a Kerry message, centered on American priorities, and a Bush message centered on the main themes of his current speeches and advertising: presidential leadership and the war on terrorism, restoring honor and dignity to the White House and cutting taxes to restore economic growth. The Kerry message dominates Bush's, setting the stage for future gains. Overall, 56 percent say they are more likely to support Kerry after hearing his message – 11 points stronger than for Bush's current message. When the messages are put head-to-head, voters choose Kerry's by 51 to 44 percent – an 8-point margin (with rounding) – a 10-point swing to Kerry compared to the actual race.

**Kerry American Priorities Vision vs. Bush Vision**



*"After hearing that statement, please tell me whether this would make you much more likely, somewhat more likely, a little more likely, no more likely or less likely to support John Kerry/George Bush in this year's elections?"*

AND

*"Now setting aside how you intend to vote in the election for president in November, after hearing these two statements, I'd like you to tell me which statement you agree with more, the statement made by John Kerry or the statement made by George Bush?"*

The Kerry message has a number of components that build on important dynamics in our current period:

- American priorities: working together and start tackling our problems and building a strong America.
- Reassurance: a strong military and battling terrorists.
- The Iraq backdrop: a Bush policy that has left America alone, bearing the costs, brought increased instability and no plan for success.
- American priority number one, the economy, with a focus on outsourcing of jobs and high health care costs; secondarily, on retirement and drug prices.
- Corporate critique: running through all issues is a critique of corporate excess.
- For the middle class.

The Kerry American priorities message, with these elements, defeats the Bush message in key swing areas of the electorate: by 20 points among independents, 14 points among Catholics and by 13 points in the battleground states.

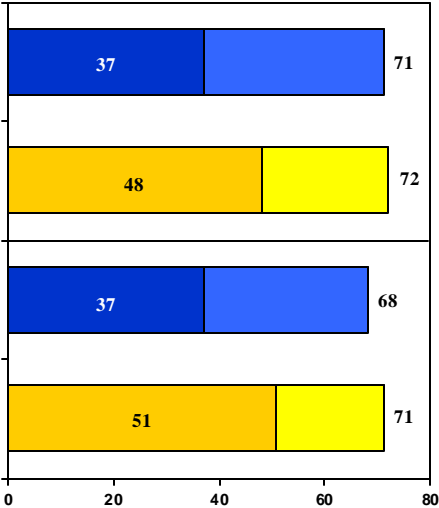
### **Bush: Losing Control**

What is driving the demand for change and the Kerry advantage on message is the sense that Bush is losing control and lacks plans for success in key areas impacting people's lives. As we noted earlier, 53 percent say Bush is "in over his head." There are two areas – first health care and second corporate excesses (high CEO compensation combined with lost pensions and exported jobs) – where voters are deeply worried about what is happening and believe Bush may be clueless (that is, doing little to help).

**Health Care Costs and Corporate Abuse**  
 Doubts they raise about Bush and whether he is helping or not

Health care costs have risen 40 percent since 2000, including a 14 percent increase in just the last year, while employers continue to cut back their contribution to health benefits. At the same time, 43 million people no longer have health coverage.

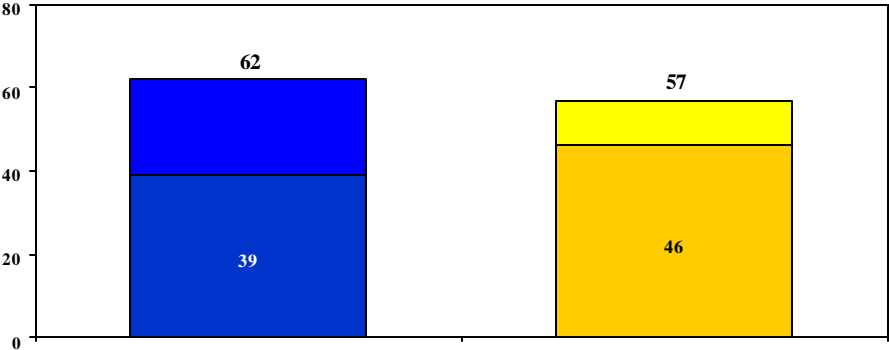
Corporate abuse and mismanagement have cost more than 3 million Americans their pension coverage since 2000, yet CEO's continue to make 500 times the amount of the average worker and companies continue to receive tax breaks for moving jobs overseas.



■ Raises very serious doubts about Bush  
 ■ Bush not helping at all  
■ Raises serious doubts about Bush  
 ■ Bush not helping much

Over 60 percent express serious doubts about Iraq being out of control, though there is less sense that Bush is idle before the problem.

**Iraq Out of Control**  
 Doubts it raises about Bush and whether he is helping or not



America has already lost more than 700 soldiers in Iraq, with over 3,200 wounded. In April alone, we've lost over 100, the worst month of the war. The resistance has spread to more areas of the country. The war has cost over 140 billion dollars, with 19 billion dollars for rebuilding Iraq. Next year will cost at least 50 billion dollars more.

■ Raises very serious doubts about Bush  
 ■ Bush not helping at all  
■ Raises serious doubts about Bush  
 ■ Bush not helping much

### The Economy, Taxes and Domestic Priorities

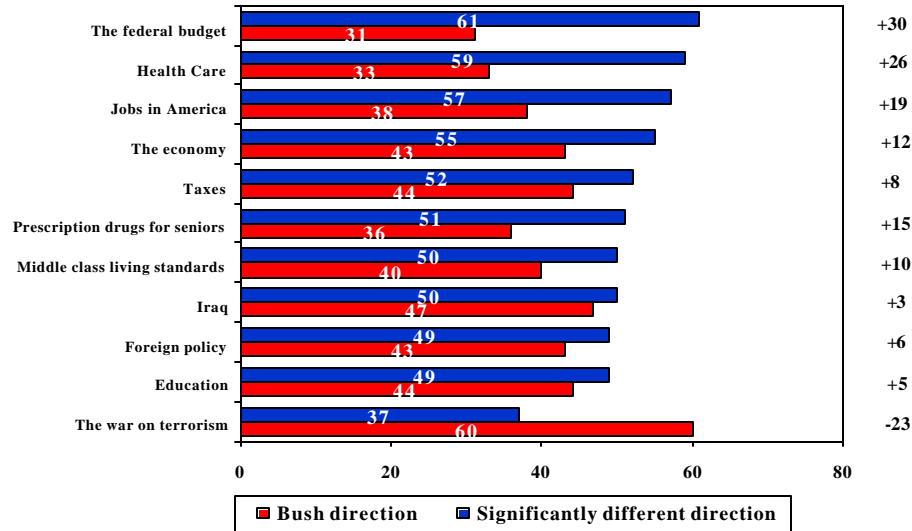
There is some evidence of an easing of some economic worries, but in the context of deep economic worries that will continue to impact the election. The 15-point margin for change on the economy has dropped marginally to 12 points this month, but that is still significant: 55 percent go in a significantly different direction and 43 percent continue with Bush's. While there has been a drop off of unemployment worries, concern is still high for job losses to China and India (34 percent very serious problem); gasoline prices have emerged to compete for the top (38 percent) and 46 percent still say rising health care costs are a very serious problem.

Taxes are becoming the intriguing issue of the election. Bush is successfully attacking Kerry on taxes and speaks without reserve about his desire for tax cuts. But as Bush advances this narrative, the voters continue to prefer a "significantly different direction" on taxes: 52 to 44 percent. The margin for change is stronger in the battleground states where the media is being aired.

What is going on? We believe that voters are uncomfortable with the Bush tax-cut agenda – that mainly produces benefits for the wealthiest and corporations, that explodes the deficits, that leaves war costs to the next generation and that leaves the government bereft of the resources to address domestic needs, like education, health care and retirement. When Bush says tax cuts, the citizenry may see simply misplaced priorities and policies that leave the country unable to address its problems.

The public wants to go in a significantly different direction on the federal budget (30-point margin for change), health care (26 points), and prescription drugs for seniors (15 points). Only on education is the demand for a change from the Bush direction muted (just a 4-point margin for change).

### Bush Direction vs. Significantly Different Direction



*“Now I’d like you to think about some specific issues. When it comes to each issue, please tell me whether you believe the country should continue in the direction Bush is headed or go in a significantly different direction.”*

### The Battleground States

While national events and the news are the main drivers of the election, advertising in the battleground states are a big contributing factor. Well, full-scale war has broken out there since Super Tuesday. The Bush campaign has spent about \$60 million – initially split between positive ads about Bush and attack ads on Kerry, but now, devoted exclusively to attacking Kerry on flip-flopping, taxes and national security – to real effect. In the battleground states, according to the Democracy Corps poll, Kerry negatives have been pushed up from 28 percent to 39 percent to 42 percent – up 14 points over two months.

But less appreciated is the fact that anti-Bush groups have run a focused media campaign as well – starting with MoveOn in the five pick-up states for the Democrats (Ohio, Missouri, West Virginia, Nevada and Florida), then with ACT, The Media Fund and the AFL-CIO in all the battleground states. The Kerry campaign has increased its buy, particularly in the last week. Together, they more than compete with the Bush advertising.

By virtually all accounts, Bush and Kerry are dead-even in the battleground states: ABC News showed Kerry marginally but not statistically ahead, 46 to 44 percent for Bush; Democracy Corps showed Kerry with 49 percent and Bush with 48 percent; ACT showed the race at 47 to 47 percent. That the race is even, given the Kerry slip-

page, suggests that the anti-Bush advertising has more than counter-balanced the Bush effort.

We grow more confident that the advertising is shifting the dynamics in the battleground states when we examine the resulting changes on issues. On issues not addressed in the anti-Bush advertising, such as the war on terrorism and foreign policy, the battleground patterns reflect the national changes. On the main issues addressed in the advertising – the economy and jobs, taxes, and prescription drugs – the shifts in the battleground have been much greater or even against the national trend. This is evident in the results below, which were first reported in the Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research poll for ACT/The Media Fund.

**Support for Bush on Issues: Battleground vs. National**  
Similar Trends

<b>Different Direction on the War on Terrorism</b>					
	Date	Total Different Direction	Total Bush Direction	Net	Shift
ACT Battleground	4/21/04	37	56	-18	+2
	3/24/04	37	57	-20	
Democracy Corps	4/22/04	37	60	-23	+3
	2/15/04	35	61	-26	
<b>Different Direction on Foreign Policy</b>					
	Date	Total Different Direction	Total Bush Direction	Net	Shift
ACT Battleground	4/21/04	48	41	+7	+2
	3/24/04	45	40	+5	
Democracy Corps	4/22/04	49	43	+6	+3
	2/15/04	47	43	+3	

**Support for Bush on Issues: Battleground vs. National  
Contrasting Trends**

<b>Different Direction on Economy</b>					
	Date	Total Different Direction	Total Bush Direction	Net	Shift
ACT Battleground	4/21/04	55	40	+15	0
	3/24/04	54	40	+15	
Democracy Corps	4/22/04	55	43	+12	-3
	2/15/04	56	41	+15	
<b>Different Direction on Taxes</b>					
	Date	Total Different Direction	Total Bush Direction	Net	Shift
ACT Battleground	4/21/04	50	42	+9	+6
	3/24/04	47	44	+3	
Democracy Corps	4/22/04	52	44	+8	-3
	2/15/04	53	42	+11	
<b>Different Direction on Medicare and Prescription Drugs</b>					
	Date	Total Different Direction	Total Bush Direction	Net	Shift
ACT Battleground	4/21/04	56	32	+24	0
	3/24/04	56	32	+24	
Democracy Corps	4/22/04	51	36	+15	-7
	2/15/04	55	32	+22	

The results for prescription drugs are instructive, as they show a national campaign to reshape perceptions on Medicare and prescription drugs having some impact nationally. But in the battleground states where anti-Bush groups have been active with about six weeks of advertising on the subject, there has been no gains. Even as the economy shows some signs of creating increase optimism, in the battleground states, six weeks of advertising on job outsourcing and overtime, show Bush losing ground, against the trend.

As anticipated, we are headed to a close election. But the opportunity for Kerry is clear and present. In a divided country that has become even more polarized under President Bush, Americans are hungry for a new direction that has us pull together to tackle our problems, and make America strong at home and abroad.