

**DEMOCRACY CORPS**  
**CARVILLE ♦ GREENBERG**

**Date:** August 3, 2007  
**To:** Friends of Democracy Corps  
**From:** Stan Greenberg, James Carville and Ana Iparraguirre

**RE: 2008 HOUSE BATTLE MOVES TO REPUBLICAN TERRITORY**  
**Report on Latest Democracy Corps Battleground Poll**

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This second battleground survey in the 70 most competitive Congressional districts, half Democratic and half Republican, shows the Democrats in a strong position to hold their gains from 2006 and move far into Republican territory in 2008. As the Congress heads into the August recess, the Democratic members hold a comfortable 18-point electoral advantage (55 to 37 percent), in position to hold all but a handful of seats. The Republican members, by contrast, are in trouble, behind on average by 5 points, 44 to 49 percent, with more than half of the 35 members facing possible defeat. The Republican members have lost ground in the most recent period, pushed by even greater dissatisfaction with the Iraq war. The perception of gridlock is actually worsening the situation for the Republican incumbents.<sup>1</sup>

**Democratic Seats Secure; Republicans at Risk**

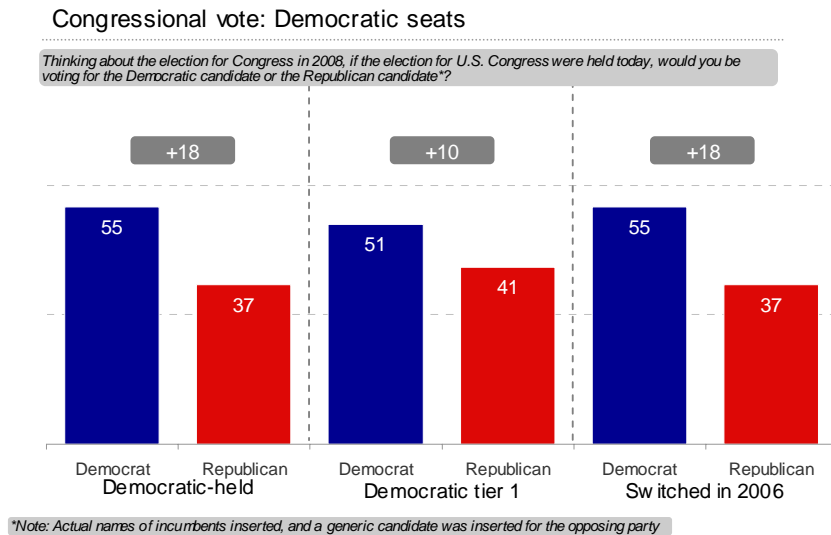
In the current environment, the Democrats have quickly consolidated their advantage in these, their supposedly most vulnerable seats, including virtually all the freshmen members. In the 35 Democratic seats, the members lead by 18 points – 55 to 37 percent – and the freshmen fully reflect this pattern. While Congress' approval rating is low, the approval rating of the individual Democratic members asked by name is much higher and 5 points higher than for the Republicans, who are long-time incumbents. There is no evidence that the Congressional battles are having a negative impact on the personal standing and electoral prospects of the so-called marginal Democrats.

Likewise, the most competitive Democratic seats (Tier 1) also seem mostly out of reach of the Republicans. Democrats are ahead in their most vulnerable seats by 10 points, 51 to 41 percent, leaving the Republicans with few pickup opportunities.

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<sup>1</sup> Democracy Corps survey of 1,600 likely voters in 70 competitive districts conducted July 25-31, 2007.

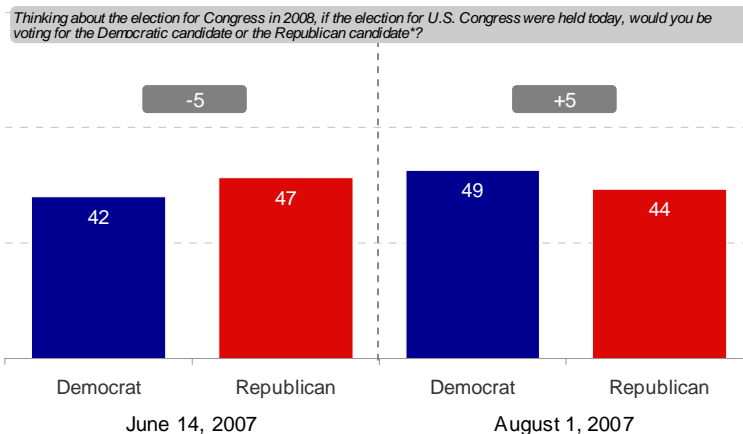
## 2008 House Battle Moves to Republican Territory



On the other hand, the Republicans are in trouble – almost as much trouble as they were in 2006. Democrats are not only ahead in the most competitive Republican districts (Tier 1), but they also lead by 3 points in the second tier, less competitive Republican seats, which means there might well be additional Congressional seats at risk beyond the 35. The extent of Republicans’ vulnerabilities suggests that Democrats can take their advantage far into Republican territory in 2008. This pattern that allowed the Democrats to take 30 seats in the last mid-term election could well take Democrats up to 20 in the Presidential, unless confounded by intervening events. There really could be another wave election.

Unlike the Democratic incumbents, Republican members in competitive districts face a range of trends that are working against them, reflected in their deteriorating margin – a 10-point net swing against them since mid-June.

### Democrats improve 10 points in Republican-held districts



*\*Note: Actual names of incumbents inserted, and a generic candidate was inserted for the opposing party*

Republican incumbents are paying a big price for the deep discontent in the country and for aligning with the President who is no more popular in the Republican districts than in the Democratic ones. Indeed, nearly two-thirds of voters in the Republican battleground say the country is going in the wrong direction and Bush's approval rating is only at 37 percent, just one point higher than nationally.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, favorable feelings towards the Democratic Party in the Republican battleground are 7 points higher than the Republican Party (40 percent warm for the Democratic Party compared to 33 percent for the GOP). This remarkably difficult environment indicates how much work Republicans will have to do to defend their own districts and improve their situation heading into 2008.

Of course, it is possible that the Presidential race will undercut this dynamic and the Democratic advantage. But for now, Democrats are holding a stable lead in the generic Presidential ballot in Republican districts. Democrats lead the Presidential vote by 12 points, 51 to 39 percent and the generic Democratic Presidential candidate is winning the counties carried by Bush in 2004 by 6 points, 48 to 42 percent.

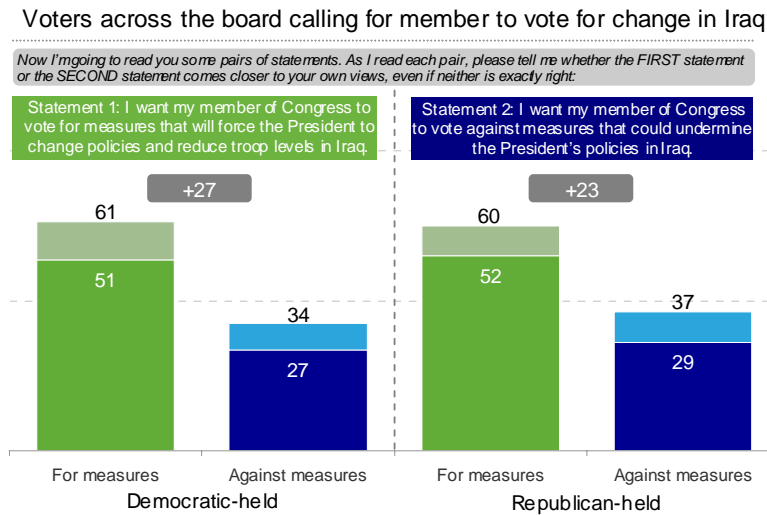
### Iraq Reinforces Political Trends

Attitudes towards the Iraq war are undistinguishable in Democratic and Republican battleground districts. Six-in-ten voters hold unfavorable feelings towards the war in Iraq, a

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<sup>2</sup> Data from Democracy Corps poll conducted July 25-30, 2007 of 1000 likely voters nationwide.

solid majority of 55 percent support reducing the troops over staying the course; and amazingly, in Republican-held districts 60 percent “want their member of Congress to vote for measures that will force the President to change policies and reduce troop levels in Iraq.” The numbers in Democratic districts are nearly identical.



More importantly, while attitudes on most issues are rather stable, that is not true on Iraq. Indeed, feelings toward the war have grown more negative in the past month with net favorability towards the war declining 5 points and support for Congress forcing a change in the President’s Iraq policy rising from 57 to 61 percent. The Republicans’ backing of the President’s policies in Iraq is deepening their problems in the battleground. As long as Republican incumbents continue to support an unpopular President and an even less popular war, it will be virtually impossible for them to reverse their electoral vulnerability.

Democrats should not fear confronting the President again in September after the surge report is completed. Messages supporting Democrats’ arguments for setting a timeline for withdrawal resonate with great intensity in both Democratic and Republican-held districts. Indeed, a majority of voters in Democratic-held districts are more likely to support their member when hearing a message emphasizing the rising cost of this endless war that is shifting resources abroad and preventing us from addressing problems at home. This message also helps raise doubts about Republican incumbents as four-in ten-voters in Republican-held districts report serious doubts about their member after hearing this critique.

Cost of the war resonates in Democratic districts; raises doubts in Republican

*For each of these reasons, please tell me if it would make you much more likely, somewhat more likely, a little more likely, no more likely or less likely to support (member of Congress).*

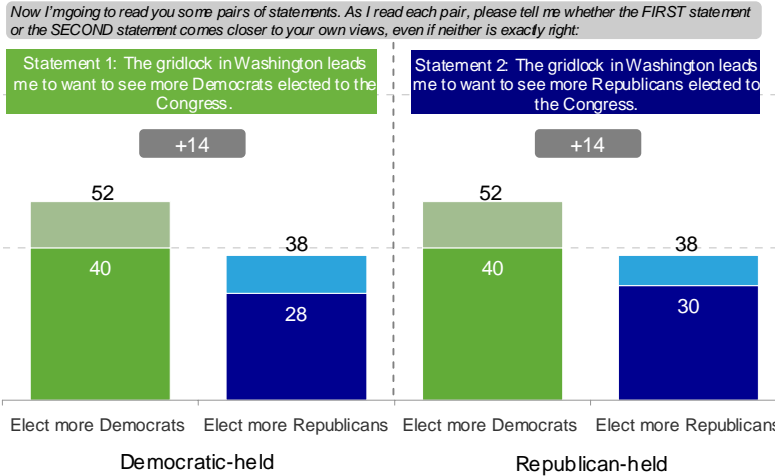
Democratic-held districts	Much more likely	Much/Smwrt likely	Total more likely
It is clear now that President Bush is determined to continue the war indefinitely, which now is costing us 10 billion dollars a month and rising. We can't afford to waste American taxpayers' money in this way when we have a chance to address our country's problems, like health care, the deficit and our dependence on foreign oil.	38	55	64
Republican-held districts	Very serious doubts	Serious doubts	Total Serious doubts
It is clear now that President Bush is determined to continue the war indefinitely, which now is costing us 10 billion dollars a month and rising. We can't afford to waste American taxpayers' money in this way when we have a chance to address our country's problems, like health care, the deficit and our dependence on foreign oil.	17	25	43

As Democrats highlight this issue and have a broad mandate from the public for change, they should be aware that the public still wants to proceed responsibly to avoid instability in the aftermath. While more voters worry that Republicans will take too long to withdraw troops (50 percent), a significant number (46 percent) worry the Democrats will move too fast.

**The Consequences of Gridlock**

The gridlock and partisan battles in Washington are hurting the Republicans, with no evidence here of lost prospective support for Democrats. Republicans own the mess in Washington as voters in both Democratic and Republican-held districts blame the President and Republicans more than the Democrats for the gridlock in Washington – by 19 and 13 points respectively. And this has electoral consequences. By 52 to 38 percent, voters in these battleground districts say the gridlock in Washington makes them want to see more Democrats elected to the Congress. That same dynamic is at work even in the Republican-held seats.

Gridlock makes voters want to see more Democrats elected



The Democrats are in a better position to be heard in the current debate about Congress. The Democratic messages receive higher scores overall: indeed, support for Democratic messages is higher than support for any of the Republican messages tested. While voters are doubtful about real progress, they respond very positively when Democrats talk about the increase in the minimum wage and biggest increase in health care for veterans. More importantly, this message gets as positive a reception in the Republican-held districts.

Minimum wage increase and veterans health care strongest message

Democrats in Congress are making progress to move America in a new direction. They increased the minimum wage for the first time in 10 years, passed the largest veterans health care increase in history and are protecting health coverage for millions of children. We need the support of the American people to continue moving forward.

Does that statement make you much more likely, somewhat more likely, a little more likely, no more likely or less likely to support (member of Congress).

	Much more likely	Much/Smwrt likely	Total more likely
Democratic-held districts	40	60	73
Republican-held districts	40	60	72

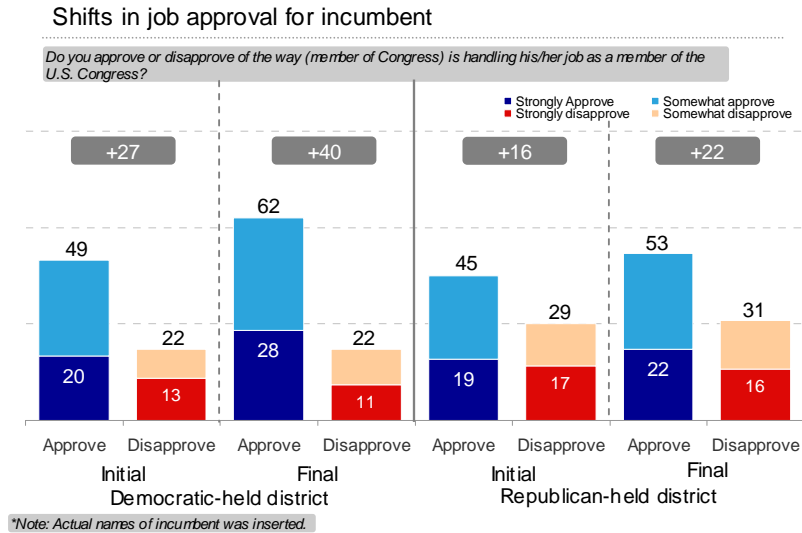
Voters are very responsive to Democratic members' messages stressing their support for investment in alternative energy to reduce our dependence on foreign oil and stop global warming, vote against a pay increase for members of Congress while nothing is being done in Washington, and battling for an increase in minimum wage and health care benefits for returning veterans. Support for these three messages in the battleground is significantly stronger than the current Democratic electoral advantage and intense support is 7 points higher than support for the best ranking Republican message.

Messages resonating strongest in Democratic districts

<i>After hearing each one, please tell me whether it makes you much more likely, somewhat more likely, a little more likely, no more likely or less likely to support (incumbent member).</i>	<b>Much more likely</b>	<b>Much/Smwht more likely</b>	<b>Total more likely</b>
<b>I will support investments in the development of clean, alternative energy like solar, wind and biofuels which will create new businesses and jobs, reduce our dependence on foreign oil and stop global warming.</b>	51	73	84
<b>I will support investments in the development of clean, alternative energy like solar, wind and biofuels which will create new businesses and jobs and reduce our dependence on foreign oil.</b>	50	75	87
<b>I will vote against any increase in pay for members of Congress when so little is getting done in Washington.</b>	48	68	79
<b>I am proud of the fact that I helped get enacted the first increase in the minimum wage in ten years and a fifty percent increase in the money for health care for our returning veterans from Iraq.</b>	45	71	83

Republican members are more likely to increase their support when they position themselves as spending watchdogs. Indeed, nearly two-thirds of voters are more likely to support a Republican incumbent when he or she opposes any spending bills that are much larger than what the President proposed in his budget.

After we present these messages by the Democratic members, at the end of the survey, they see a major gain in their (named) job approval, while the Republican members get only a modest boost. In fact, the Democratic member approval increases 13 points – from 49 to 62 percent. The net shift towards the Democrats is twice as large as the gains for the Republicans. Likewise, this differential is replicated among independents whose net shift towards the Democrats is two times larger than towards the Republicans, suggesting that the Congressional debate actually enables Democrats to make further gains with key swing groups.



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The Democrats are in a strong position to hold on to their majority in the House and make significant inroads into Republican territory. Indeed, Democrats hold an 18-point electoral advantage in their own districts while Republicans are losing their districts by 5 points overall – 7 points in their most vulnerable districts, 51 to 44 percent. The Democratic electoral advantages are reinforced by two dynamics – the war in Iraq and the sense of continued Republican resistance to change. Democrats are ahead on both battles as voters align with Democrats on setting a timeline in Iraq, blame the Republicans for the stalemate and want more Democrats elected to Congress. As Democrats head into the August recess, they are likely to get a receptive audience when they describe their own actions and goals and the battles they fought for people.