

Date: June 19, 2007
To: Friends of Democracy Corps
From: Stan Greenberg
James Carville
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RE: On the Offensive
First Survey in the 2008 Battleground Districts

These are both the best of times and challenging times for the Democrats. The electoral situation could not be better, particularly in the battleground districts where 2008 looks like a repeat of 2006, but further into their playing field. Here is the challenge, though: Iraq is the most important issue for voters who want change, yet it brings gridlock and attracts all the camera attention, obscuring progress on other issues where it is happening. Some conclude, wrongly, step back from Iraq and focus on other issues. What Democrats need are bursts of engagement on Iraq taken as far as our majorities will take us, recognizing Democrats are gaining against the President. Democrats also need bursts of engagement on domestic issues, achieving laws where possible but engagement with the President where not. That combination is likely to keep Democrats on this new playing field where it is on the offensive.

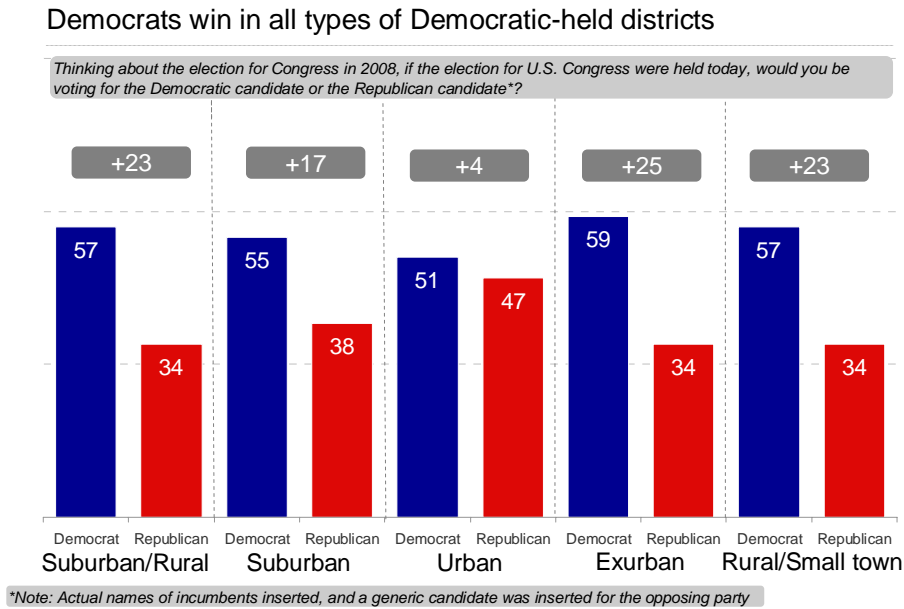
With an unpopular President and an even more unpopular war, Republicans are ceding territory and opening new areas for Democrats. This is our first battleground poll – 70 districts, half Democratic and half Republican – that constitute the districts that could be in play. It has a large 1,600 interview sample to make it possible to give some texture to this analysis. Indeed, Democratic congressional candidates in this named ballot hold on average a 9-point lead in these districts that actually supported the Republican candidate by 1 point in 2006 and President Bush by 8 points in 2004. That means the center of the battlefield has shifted as much since 2006 as it did in the lead up to it.

Given how much the Iraq debate and engagement has helped Democrats, particularly in the suburban Republican districts, we should not lose the momentum on working for change.

Tactically, we also need to think about the map. The so-called marginal Democratic incumbents have 20 point leads on average in their races and poll in the mid-50s. Even Mark Gersh, the premier targeting analyst, may have to think again about this new world.¹

On the Offensive

Democrats enter the 2008 race in a strong position to readily defend their own seats while expanding their 2006 electoral gains. Democratic incumbents hold a significant lead in the battleground districts, winning the congressional vote by 20 points -- 56 to 36 percent. Obviously, there are some special cases, but the consistency across all types of Democratic seats makes it difficult for the Republicans to find many Democratic targets. Indeed, Democratic incumbents' electoral advantage is as strong in their most vulnerable districts – those held by freshmen who picked up new seats in 2006, as it is in the least competitive districts. Furthermore, their advantage extends to rural-small town and exurban areas where Democrats lead by 23 and 25 points, respectively.

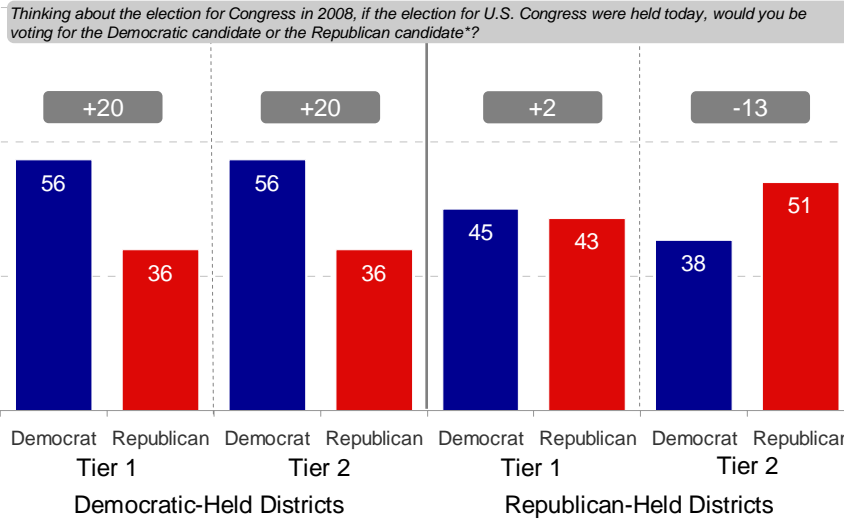


The underlying dynamic in the Republican-held battleground emulates their 2006 vulnerability and suggests Republicans can lose more ground in 2008. Democrats tie the vote in the most competitive Republican-held districts – 45 to 43 percent, and are well positioned to win

¹ Democracy Corps survey of 1,600 likely voters in competitive districts conducted June 10-14, 2007.

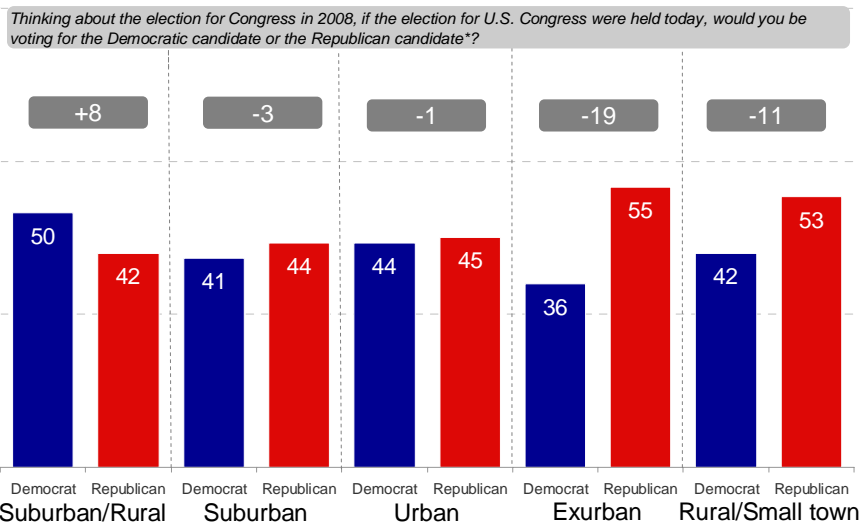
half of these districts. Moreover, Democrats tie the vote in Republican-held urban and suburban districts and hold an 8-point advantage in suburban-rural districts.

Democrats dominant in battleground seats;
Republicans losing more ground in 2008



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

Republican's suburban and urban seats at risk



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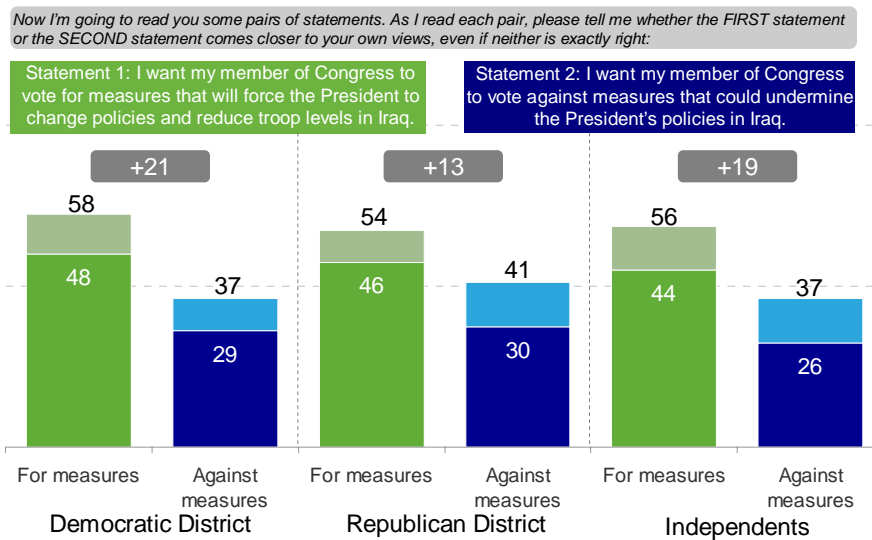
The Challenges – Iraq and Gridlock

There is no doubt that the plates have shifted towards the Democrats. Yet, there are big strategic and organizational challenges that Democrats must meet to maintain their lead and make 2008 as big of an election as 2006.

1) Iraq First: bursts of engagement

The battle over Iraq is central to current structure of the race, only strengthened as Democrats engaged and went up against the President; while voters did not like gridlock, they shifted against the President right up to the last moment of engagement. The issue was not breaking against the Democrats. A large, growing majority view the war unfavorably and most important, nearly six-in-ten want their members of Congress to vote for measures that will force the President to change policies and reduce the number of troops in Iraq. The desire to mandate troop reductions is strong in both Democratic and Republican-held districts and among independents; the 19-point margin on Iraq for independents is double the advantage in the congressional race. Make no mistake, Iraq is central to the changing battlefield.

Iraq: member should vote to force troop reduction



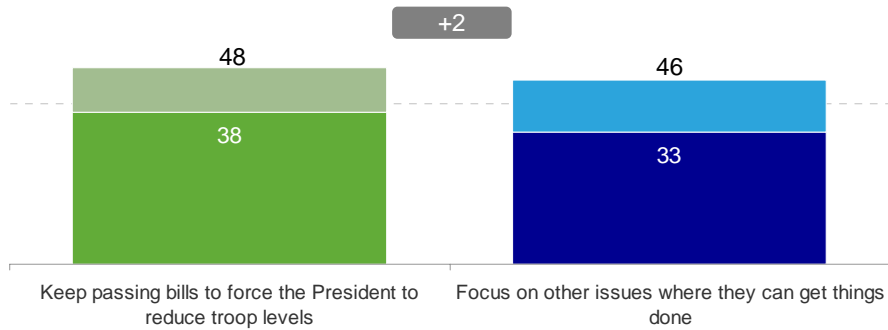
But Iraq also brings gridlock, and the country is split on whether Democrats should keep taking the issue back for a Presidential veto or move on to other issues. We are actually surprised that half say don't pull back, but understand among self-identified Democrats, 70 percent say stay the course, with over 60 percent feeling strongly about it. As Democrats have gained during these confrontations with the President, it is important to take each one to the point that small majorities will allow – and then being honest about the reason and the determination to come back in a few months.

Half of voters want to keep focus on Iraq, half want Congress to focus on other issues

Now I'm going to read you some pairs of statements. As I read each pair, please tell me whether the FIRST statement or the SECOND statement comes closer to your own views, even if neither is exactly right:

Statement 1: Congress should keep passing bills that require the President to reduce troop levels in Iraq and set a date for removing most U.S. forces, even if the President keeps vetoing these bills.

Statement 2: The Congress isn't able to change policies in Iraq and should instead focus no other issues where it could get things done.



Nonetheless, independents marginally want to address issues, and the image of the Democratic Congress has declined. That requires a real strategy, as long as they do not walk away from the first issue, Iraq. The growing unpopularity of the war, sure to rise in September, will put suburban Republicans under much greater pressure.

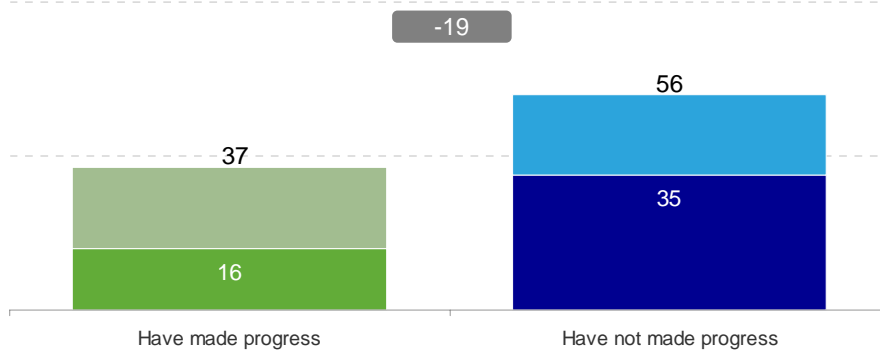
2) Bursts of Progress on Issues

In order to address other elements of the structure, Democrats need bursts of activity and progress on issues that show they are part of the change, not the problem. Despite the initial strong reaction to the '100 hours,' the public now sees little progress since the new Democratic majority was sworn in and a majority say Democrats have not followed through with their campaign promises. On the specifics of '6 for 06,' voters see virtually nothing happening. Surprisingly, half know a rise in the minimum wage has become law; there is awareness that Democrats have engaged with the President on Iraq and stem cell. Everything else is invisible.

Voters feel Democrats have not made progress on legislative goals

Now I'm going to read you some pairs of statements. As I read each pair, please tell me whether the FIRST statement or the SECOND statement comes closer to your own views, even if neither is exactly right:

Statement 1: Democrats have made progress on the actions they pledged to take if they took control of Congress.
 Statement 2: Democrats have not made progress on the actions they pledged to take if they took control of Congress.

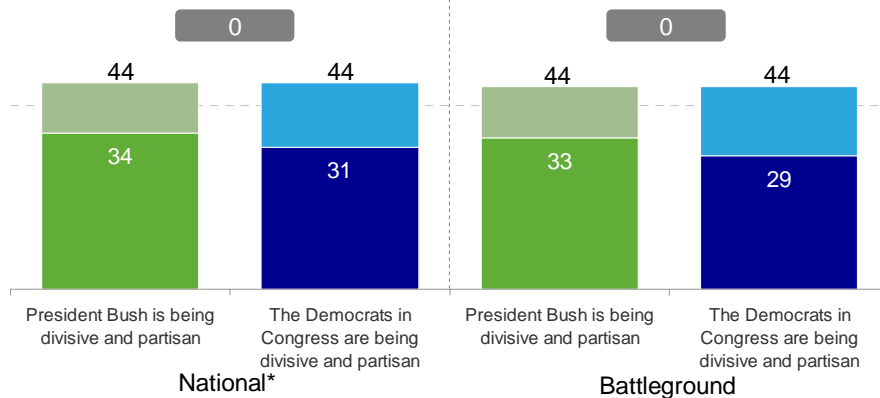


Voters' frustration with the lack of progress achieved by the new Congressional leadership is evident in the low favorability ratings of the Democratic Party and Democrats in Congress -- which stand at 38 and 37 percent respectively and are barely higher than the President's. Indeed, the partisan gridlock and lack of progress left voters evenly split on who to blame for the divisiveness and partisanship in Washington.

Voters split on who is more divisive and partisan

Now I'm going to read you some pairs of statements. As I read each pair, please tell me whether the FIRST statement or the SECOND statement comes closer to your own views, even if neither is exactly right:

Statement 1: President Bush is being divisive and partisan.
 Statement 2: The Democrats in Congress are being divisive and partisan

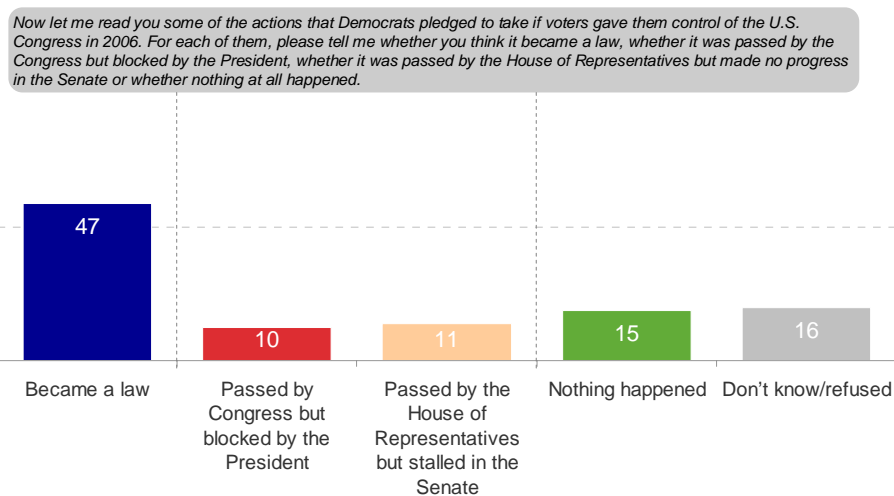


*Note: National data from latest national Democracy Corps survey conducted May 29-31, 2007 of 1000 likely voters.

In voters' minds, the first six months of the Democratic leadership is marked by one achievement, a few proposals blocked by Republicans and the President and many unfulfilled promises.

- Achievement: From the various areas where Democrats have attempted to make progress since the election, only 'increasing the minimum wage' is perceived as a success in voters' minds. Indeed, a surprising 47 percent of voters recall the proposal became a law despite the fact that it was passed in the midst of the Iraq spending bill debate.

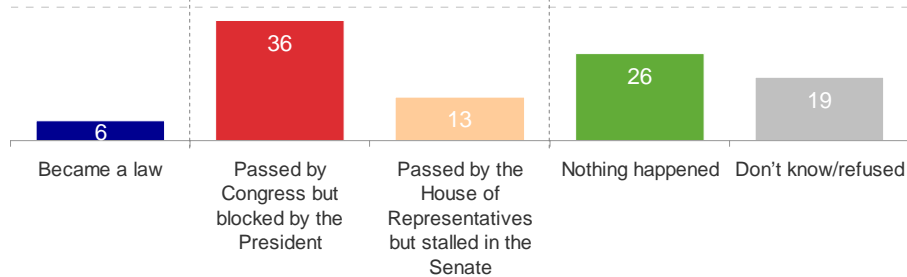
Raising the minimum wage



- Engagement: Voters clearly identify the two issues that the President has vetoed or threatened to veto -- 'setting a timeline for American troops to leave Iraq' and 'broadening the types of stem cell research allowed with federal funds'. On these areas, voters give Democrats the credit for pressing for their position and recognize the President and the Republicans blocked the passage of these bills. These issues, with help of the Senate, create defining engagements with the President.

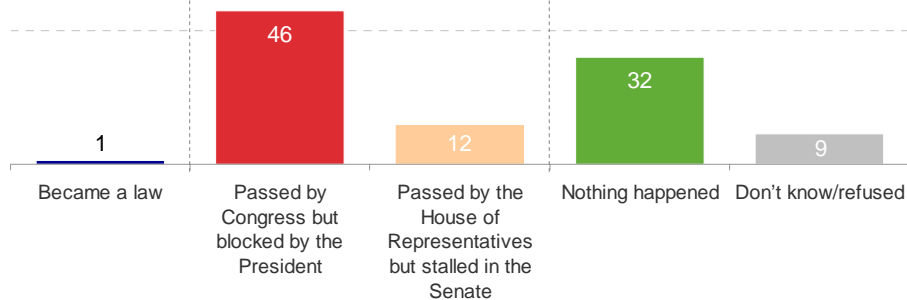
Broadening the types of stem cell research available with federal funds

Now let me read you some of the actions that Democrats pledged to take if voters gave them control of the U.S. Congress in 2006. For each of them, please tell me whether you think it became a law, whether it was passed by the Congress but blocked by the President, whether it was passed by the House of Representatives but made no progress in the Senate or whether nothing at all happened.



Setting a date for American troops to leave Iraq

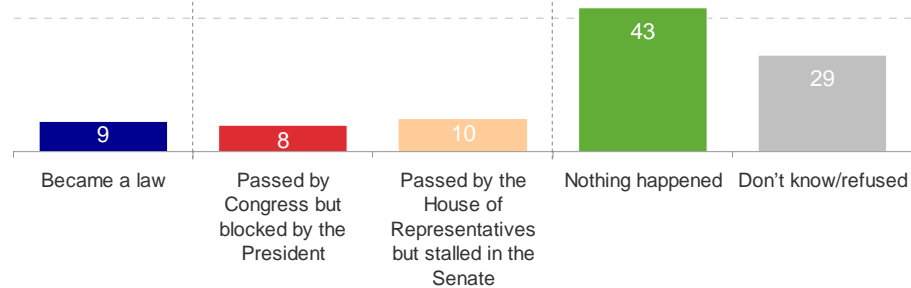
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- Stalemate: On many other areas – including those that Democrats passed in the House but not in the Senate, voters assume there has been no progress made or are unable to recall what happened. This includes proposals such as the implementation of the 9/11 Recommendations, cutting student loans interests, repealing tax breaks for oil companies to invest in alternative energy, lowering prescription drug costs, and lobbying reform.

Cutting student loan interest rates in half

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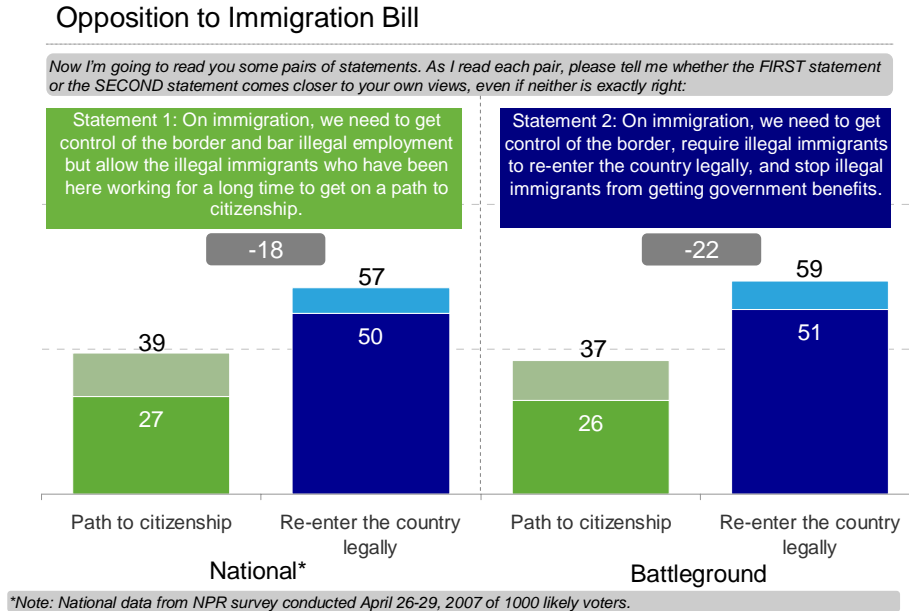
Future Agenda

Despite the low levels of recollection of Democrats’ achievement during their first six months in control of the legislative branch, Democrats have the opportunity to move forward an agenda that embraces progressive values on health care, immigration and energy.

- **Expanded health coverage for kids:** Nearly half of respondents chose this as one of the top two proposals that Congress should focus on. Progress on the healthcare front will allow Democrats to make significant improvements among their base voters and independents whose support for this proposal is particularly strong.
- **Energy independence:** Alternative energy proposals have broad appeal among voters – especially Democrats. Yet, support is strong across all parties and much higher when it focuses on the development of alternative energy sources.
- **Immigration:** Immigration reform is an area of great concern for voters in the battleground. Indeed, more than a quarter of voters mention immigration as one of their two most important concerns. Yet, proposals to address this issue garner more support when focused on border control more than legalization. In fact, voters are 22 points more likely to support Congressional proposals focused on increasing border security and stopping illegal immigrants from getting government benefits than one focused on legalization.

We do not find very much voter support for the comprehensive Senate bill. We asked without description (opposed 28 to 47 percent) and with description (45 to 49 percent). After hearing a

description of the immigration reform passed by the Senate, a majority of independents and Republicans oppose the bill while Democrats are torn 47 to 47 percent.



We tested the kinds of attacks Republicans will use on the immigration issues – from ‘English as the official language’ to ‘amnesty’ and immigrants getting Social Security. Those demagogic attacks are not ineffective, suggesting Democrats will have to take up immigration in ways that offset the attacks. In terms of the battleground districts, immigration attacks are more likely to play a key role in Democratic rural and exurban districts where opposition towards immigration is stronger and Democrats hold a smaller advantage.

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Democrats are holding a 9-point electoral advantage in the battleground and have an immense opportunity to win more seats in 2008. The new Democratic leadership must remain on the offensive by 1) engaging Bush and the Republicans on Iraq to maximize opportunities in the most vulnerable Republican-held districts and 2) engaging on domestic issues and showing progress or exposing Bush’s resistance to change. There is every reason to believe this can be done in ways that preserves and deepens the Democrats’ advantage and that shifts the battleground.