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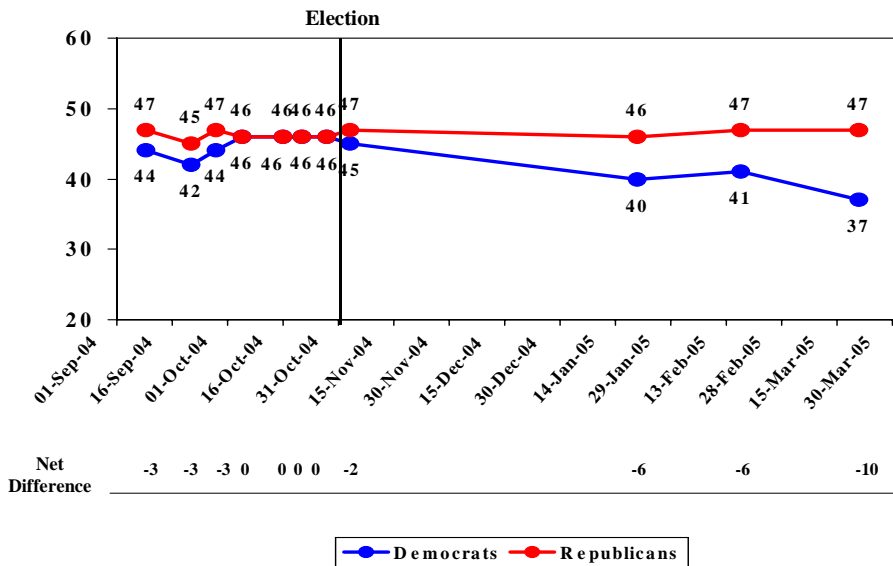
**Date:** March 30, 2005  
**To:** Friends of Democracy Corps  
**From:** Stan Greenberg  
 James Carville

**RE: THE STATE OF THE REPUBLICANS**  
**Survey on Public Thinking**

This year, we have focused a lot of our energies on the Democrats and their need to be much better defined. The Republicans' clarity of definition and strength in key areas – such as keeping America safe, respect for moral values, optimism, and looking to the future – has allowed them to build a growing gap in standing with the public – now a 10-point difference in favorability (at least before Terri Schiavo). While the gap is a function of what the Republicans are offering, it is mostly a function of what the Democrats are not. The Republicans, in this latest survey, falter on fundamental things and are vulnerable to a serious opposition and challenge.

**Party Thermometers**

% Holding a Favorable View of the Party



There is some evidence that the Terri Schiavo tragedy has driven down the approval ratings for Bush and the Republican Congress. Even before those events, the latest Democracy Corps survey showed a small drop in favorability for both.<sup>1</sup> It is quite possible that the stories about DeLay's ethics, Social Security privatization, and Terri Schiavo interact to build a more enduring sense of political excess.

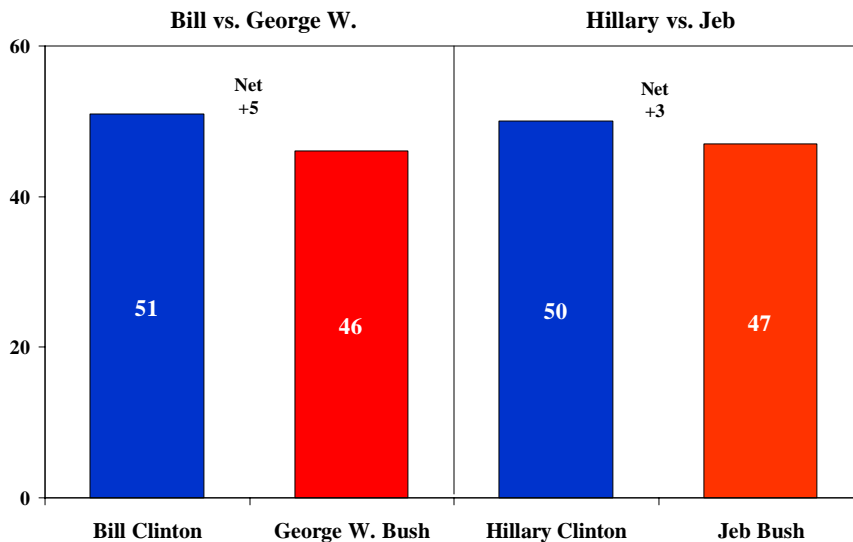
But even before that, in our March survey, we showed Bush and the Republicans quite vulnerable to a serious challenge. As a start, the Clinton family defeats the Bush family on who should lead the country in the years ahead. In a race between Senator Hillary Clinton and Florida Governor Jeb Bush for president, the Democrat wins by 3 points, 50 to 47 percent. She runs particularly well with young voters, women, including white women, college and unmarried women, and even holds a narrow advantage in the rural areas. She beats Bush by 7 points among independents and takes 11 percent of Republicans (greater than Bush's vote with Democrats).

We also invited people to imagine a constitutional amendment allowing both President Bush and former President Clinton to run, unfettered by term limits. In that race, Bill Clinton defeats George Bush by 5 points, 51 to 46 percent. Clinton wins 12 percent of Bush's 2004 voters and wins independents decisively, 52 to 40 percent. He is a landslide winner among union households and does well with mainline Protestants and white Catholics – taking the Democrats back to their 1996 level. He carries older women but not seniors or rural voters. But most important, the incumbent president is polling at only 46 percent of the vote.

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<sup>1</sup> Democracy Corps conducted a national survey of 1,002 likely voters March 15-21, 2005. The survey has a margin of error of +/- 3.1%

**Presidential Vote: Bushes' vs. Clintons'**



Two months into his second term, Bush registers an historically unimpressive job approval rating (51 percent, though likely lower now); only 39 percent support his Social Security proposal; only 41 percent think the country is headed in the right direction and only 40 percent think the economy is doing well; just 43 percent think that the Iraq war was worth it; and amazingly, only 45 percent want to continue in the direction that Bush wants to take the country.

**Sources of Republican Strength**

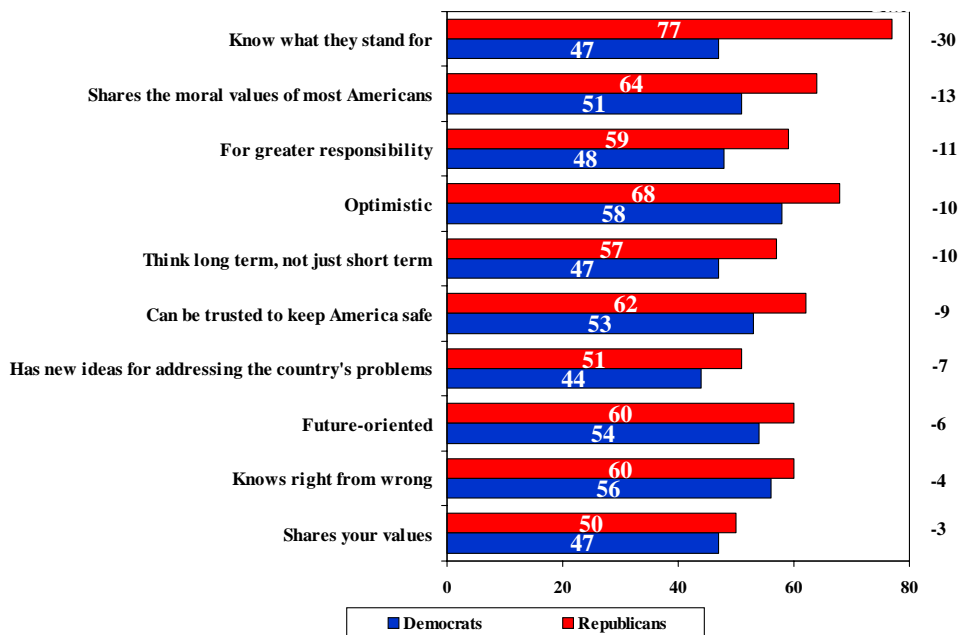
So, what holds the Republicans up, given their weakness?

To start, this is a party that knows what it stands for (77 percent, compared to a meager 47 percent who said the same about the Democrats last month) – a 30-point gap on clarity of convictions. They are associated with “strength” (69 percent) and “optimism” (68 percent, compared to 58 percent for Democrats). Perhaps as important, they are associated with the core beliefs central to their Reagan worldview. They are associated with an individualism, captured by “self-sufficiency” (65 percent describes well). They are associated with security and trust to keep America safe (62 percent). And they have made a values connection: 64 percent say they share the moral values of most Americans; 60 percent say they “know right from wrong”; a sizeable 59 percent think they are for “greater responsibility” – 11 points higher than for the Democrats.

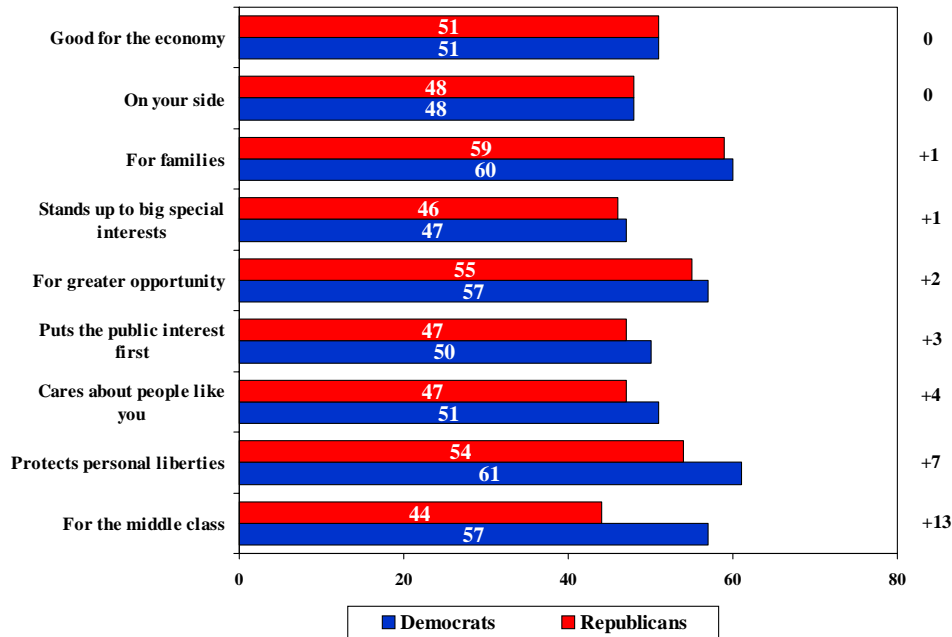
Democrats did comparably well last month on the core value of “equality” (68 percent), but only modestly on “for the middle class” and “greater opportunity” (both at 57 percent), and poorly on “cares about people” (51 percent) and “on your side” (48 percent). That leaves the Republicans as the conviction party but also one that has a strong identity on its core partisan values.

### Party Attributes: Republicans vs. Democrats

#### Republican Advantages



### Party Attributes: Republicans vs. Democrats Contested Attributes and Democratic Advantages



### Sources of Republican Vulnerability

So why, after all that, are the Republicans vulnerable?

The starting point for the Republicans is their weakness on being “for the middle class.” A meager 44 percent think that describes them – 13 points below that for the Democrats – and that is the source of almost everything else that drags them down. While we need much more time to analyze the rich data here, we wanted to highlight where the Republicans seemed in trouble or the public cautious.

- ***The Republicans are not for the average person:*** just 44 percent “for the middle class,” rising to only 47 percent on “cares about people” and 48 percent on being “on your side.” (Democrats falter, in part, because they are no higher on many of these key indicators, including scoring identically on being “on your side.”)
- ***The Republicans do not champion the public interest either:*** just 47 percent think they “put the public interest first” and 46 percent that they will stand up to special interests. Less than a third reject the attack that they put corporate interests ahead of the public interest.

- ***The Republicans put the needs of big corporate interests ahead of the ordinary citizen.*** Less than a third of voters reject any of these assertions: “for big business, not the middle class”; “for the rich,” and “government by and for the big corporate interests.” The Republicans have not crossed even a modest threshold on representing the interests of ordinary citizens or that of the public.
- ***Though the Republicans are strong on moral values, only half the voters think Republicans share their values and priorities.*** This lack of connection on values is rooted in a number of factors, starting with the indifference to ordinary people and the public interest. It also may reflect other kinds of values, as only 50 percent say the Republicans are “trustworthy.” Just 50 percent think they are in touch, presumably with their lives and needs. Less than half think they have the right priorities.
- ***Republicans may be going too far in pushing their religious conservative agenda.*** A majority of the country describe them as “too conservative” (52 percent), and perhaps most important, a like number say they “force their moral beliefs on others.”
- ***They are not heralded for their economic policies.*** Only half associate them with a good economy, including only 19 percent who do so strongly.
- ***They are not heralded on the environment.*** A majority of 53 percent thinks they are “indifferent to the environment.”
- ***They are not heralded for how they relate to the world.*** There is a reason why Bush established no real advantage over Kerry on foreign policy. A meager 49 percent believe that the Republicans make America respected in the world. Indeed, 58 percent say they are committing too many of our resources abroad and failing to address problems at home. In an earlier survey, this lack of domestic focus was one of the biggest doubts about the Republicans.
- ***They are the establishment,*** at a time when a majority of the country thinks things are headed in the wrong direction. A quite substantial 59 percent describe them as part of the Washington mess – 10 points below that for the Democrats. There is a potential price to pay for being in power.

## Toward a Democratic Framework

We continue to test potential frameworks for Democrats to challenge the Republicans and offer their own direction and ideas. In this survey, the strongest one – not surprisingly – is one centered on the middle class. It was stronger than ones that attacked the Republicans on ethics and stronger than another that highlighted how the Republicans are weakening the country. For now, there is great power in a middle class narrative, as set out below:

**This economy has left the middle class working longer, for less, while gas and health care prices rise. But Republicans at every turn have made things harder for the middle class. They've cut taxes on big corporations, CEOs and the highest earners, while shifting the tax burden to working people. They barred the government from negotiating lower drug prices for seniors. Their Social Security plan cuts benefits for seniors who expected a guaranteed benefit after a lifetime of work. Well, we need a new direction. The Democrats support middle class tax cuts for college, affordable health insurance and maintaining Social Security's guarantee. Our guiding principle is a strong middle class.**

A large majority of 56 percent said this statement made them much more or somewhat more likely to support the Democratic position; 64 percent including all more likely responses. The middle class critique was 6 points stronger than Bush's best statement on domestic matters and his best statement on the war on terrorism.

Obviously, the Democrats will need to address many issues as they raise their overall standing and re-establish themselves as a strong party with convictions, but the "middle class" is a good starting point. It is the linchpin to the doubts about the Republicans and their approach to all of America's big questions, and it is likely the key to the core values that will motivate Democrats.