

DEMOCRACY CORPS

CARVILLE ♦ GREENBERG

10 G STREET, NE ♦ SUITE 400 ♦ WASHINGTON, DC 20002

202-478-8330 (TEL) ♦ 202-289-8648 (FAX)

WWW.DEMOCRACYCORPS.COM

Founders

James Carville
Stanley Greenberg
Robert Shrum

Executive Director
Jim Gerstein

Senior Advisor
Karl Agne

Research Conducted by:
Greenberg Quinlan Rosner

Date: March 27, 2006
To: Friends of Democracy Corps
From: Stan Greenberg
James Carville

RE: DEFINING THE 2006 ELECTION **Notes on the Latest Democracy Corps Survey**

We believe now is the moment for Democrats and progressives to take charge of the 2006 election – by taking the initiative, expanding the electoral battlefield, crystallizing the choice before voters and presenting their agenda. The goal is an upheaval in 2006, now a genuine possibility. The moment is right because Bush’s problems are now so clear, deep and long-standing, and because Republicans too are now part of the problem. A large majority of the country is determined to vote against candidates who support Bush’s direction for the country. Even now, the Democrats have near landslide leads in the races for the House and Senate, but to consolidate that position and translate it into congressional majorities, Democrats can now take this election to a new stage.

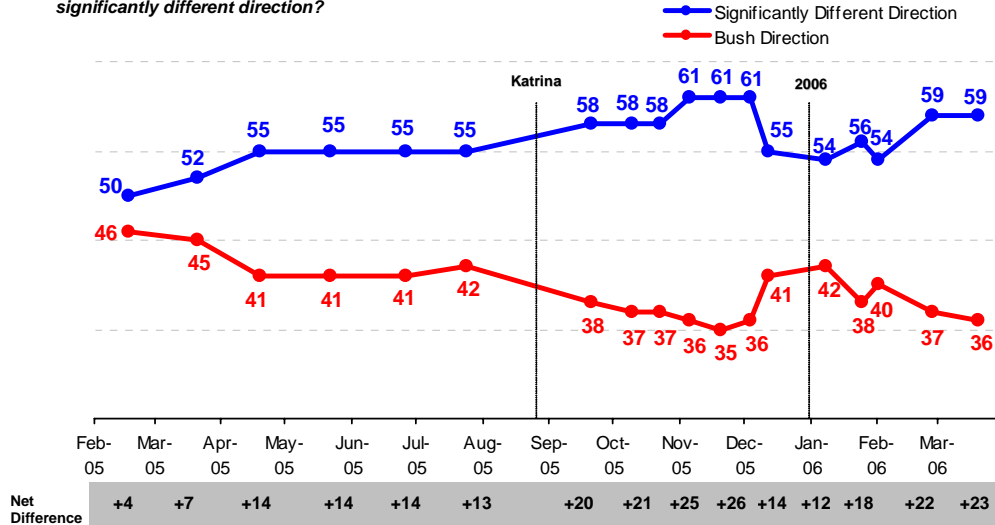
We too are in awe of the depth and scope of the president’s problems. He is at his lowest point yet on the country’s direction, Bush direction, job approval and personal popularity, which has worsened almost inexorably over the last eight months.

- In the race for the House (using actual candidate names), Democrats have an 11-point lead (51 to 40 percent); Republican incumbents are getting only 51 percent of the vote.¹
- In the race for the Senate, Democrats have a 12-point lead (52 to 40 percent); Republican candidates in competitive Republican-held seats are getting only 40 percent of the vote.

¹ Vote results are based on interviews with 3,085 likely voters from three surveys conducted between February 23 and March 20, 2006; Democracy Corps Senate and Congressional vote questions use the actual names of the incumbent within that state or district to obtain a more accurate reading of the level of support for the incumbent.

Bush's direction: One third want to continue

Now let me ask overall, do you think the country should continue in the direction Bush is headed or go in a significantly different direction?



It is tempting for Democrats to watch the Republicans dig the hole deeper, but they should feel confident now, based on months of research, that they can make this a bigger election than any we have experienced in recent memory. This will include:

1. Thinking out of the box and enlarging the playing field in every possible way – realizing unprecedented support among Democratic base voters, making sweeping gains among swing independents, and striking deep into Republican territory.
2. Nationalizing the election around George Bush.
3. Posing a very simple choice: continuing in Bush's direction or moving in a new direction.
4. For a very simple reason: Bush governs for the few, while Democrats want an America that works for everyone.
5. And offering an agenda for a new direction for America:

No pay raise for Congress until average workers' incomes rise; replace new prescription drug plan with a simple one that controls costs; raise minimum wage; repeal loopholes that encourage companies to move overseas; implement recommendations of the 9/11 Commission and inspect 100 percent of containers; restore student loan funding and tax breaks for college, and create tax incentives to develop wind, solar and bio-fuel technologies.

The New Strategic World

The first step is thinking expansively enough to accommodate the battlefield opportunities that accompany a race where Democrats are ahead by more than 10 points. Republicans will battle back with immigration, gay marriage and some new national security event, but that will not succeed if Democrats are advancing on their new multiple fronts.

1. ***Democrats can achieve even greater consolidation, mobilization and turnout of Democrats.*** With Republicans demoralized and fragmenting, losing enthusiasm for Bush, Democrats have a chance to tilt the off-year playing field to the Democrats. That is what the Republicans succeeded in doing in 2002 and 2004, when their voters were more motivated. Our targeting analysis highlights the need to reach union households, unmarried women and Hispanics where there is opportunity for further gains and increased turnout.
2. ***The swing independent segments of the electorate are put off by the character of the Bush presidency and Republican governance in Washington.*** Democrats are running 18-points ahead among independents and 66 percent want to go in a significantly different direction than Bush. They are reacting against the Iraq war, deficits, corruption, and the partisan and ideological politics of Washington. Only 36 percent even like George Bush. The rebellion of the independents is reflected in the surprising and continuing gains for Democrats among baby-boom college voters (ahead by 18 points) and white mainline Protestants (ahead by 8 points). Democrats are also ahead among white Catholics.
3. ***The scale of Bush's problems opens up vast new political territory.*** Democrats should look hard at their target districts, as right now Republican candidates for Congress are only winning 49 percent of the vote in the "Red" counties carried by Bush in 2004. In the last two months, Democrats have finally broken through and are marginally ahead in the white rural areas. Democrats have moved to even with white older non-college voters, both men and women, who earlier had broken heavily for Bush.
4. ***Don't forget the seniors.*** Democrats are running much better today with white seniors, but still only running even. Seniors were the biggest swing group against Democrats in 2004 – an election in which "seniors' issues" were not very prominent. But because of prescription drugs, Medicare and Social Security privatization, not to mention Iraq, the possibility of a senior revolt is very real. While February polling diminished opposition among seniors to the prescription drug plan, the March poll shows opposition moving back up to earlier levels: 54 percent negative and only 29 percent positive.

Defining the Election

This survey provides a strategic framework that shows how Democrats can maximize their support in this new enlarged battleground. This represents the culmination of a number of

surveys, but critical exercises in the latest survey where we test the impact of various election definition and choices. Four elements emerge from this exercise.

Element One: Nationalizing the election around Bush. In the Congress, Republicans are rushing to find their independence, but they have supported Bush’s direction at every step. Bush is less popular than Republicans and less trusted on the issues. Democratic message choices are stronger when referencing Bush. Indeed, Bush is weaker than the Republicans on nearly all issues, including security, as we saw in the recent NPR survey. Bush and the congressional Republicans have nationalized the issues that now put them in so much difficulty. We should keep the focus there, as they try to change it.

Element Two: Bush’s direction versus new direction. The choice in this election is not very complicated, as demonstrated in the most recent Democracy Corps poll.

**The Republicans want to continue Bush’s direction.
The Democrats say, we need a new direction.**

Overall, 57 percent say that choice makes them more likely to vote Democratic, including 39 percent much more likely – making this virtually the strongest definition tested. It is the strongest definition for independents and key Republican groups; it is nearly the top definition for Democrats.

The message has the virtue of nationalizing the election around Bush and putting Republican candidates on the spot on continuing Bush’s direction. Among independents, being a rubber stamp for Bush is actually a very strong definition of the race.

Defining the election: the Democrats

■ Top Tier

	Much more likely Democratic	Total more likely Democratic
The Republicans put the <u>big corporations and CEOs</u> first. Democrats will put the <u>American people</u> first	41	57
The Republicans want to <u>continue Bush's direction</u> . The Democrats say, we need a <u>new direction</u>	39	57
The Republicans are <u>working for the few</u> . The Democrats say, <u>America should work for everyone</u>	38	55
The Republicans do not prioritize <u>creating American jobs</u> . The Democrats' <u>priority is American jobs</u>	35	55
The Republicans have turned Washington over to the <u>corporate lobbyists</u> . The Democrats say, Washington should <u>work for the people</u>	37	54

“Now, I am going to read you what some people say are some differences between Democrats and Republicans. For each, please tell me if it is a difference that makes you MUCH MORE LIKELY to vote for a Democratic candidate, a difference that makes you SOMEWHAT MORE LIKELY, a difference that DOESN'T MAKE YOU ANY MORE LIKELY, or is it NOT A REAL DIFFERENCE between Democrats and Republicans?”

Element Three: What is wrong with Bush's direction? He governs for the few (wealthy, corporations and CEOs), when we need an America that works for everyone.

When we ask voters what is wrong with what is happening with the Republicans in Washington, it is not a complicated story: far above all other things, voters say the Republicans “work mainly for the wealthy and corporations,” with an added number saying, they “don’t watch out for the average person.”

When we tested phrases that capture what Democrats want to achieve, the strongest theme and slogan reflects the aspiration for a country that works for everyone.

An America that works for everyone, not just the few (66 percent positive, including 45 percent very positive).

This theme is particularly strong with independents; among Democrats, it combines with “America needs a new direction” to create a powerful combination.

The theme gains power when incorporated into the choice between Republicans and Democrats.

**The Republicans put the big corporations and CEOs first.
The Democrats will put the American people first.**

**The Republicans are working for the few.
The Democrats say, America should work for everyone.**

Nearly 60 percent say this makes people more likely to vote Democratic, with about 40 percent much more likely. Referencing corporations and CEOs is strongest for Democrats and independents, while working for the few is strongest for Republican groups.

Element Four. America. It is very important to make this election about America. Underlying many of the critiques of Bush is a sense that he has neglected the country and not focused on the American people. When we presented positive themes and slogans, the 2nd and 3rd most popular elevate those concepts:

**Building a stronger America at home
Putting the American people first**

Two thirds react positively to these themes, though Democrats do not rank them as high. These America first phrases are strong for independents, though below an America that works for all. However among the Republican-oriented groups, older non-college and white rural voters, they are the two top themes.

Across these exercises, voters are giving some of their strongest responses to items that include the following phrases – “put the American people first,” “neglecting America,” “priority is American jobs,” and “building a stronger America at home.

Democrats in 2006 will be the champions of America: they want an America that works for everyone.

The Democratic Agenda: Pledges for 2006

In almost every exercise, a “new direction” scores significantly higher than “time for a change” because voters want to know that Democrats will take the country to a better place. They want to know that Democrats have plans for a new direction. Clearly, the goal of Democratic policies is an America that works for everyone.

Over the last two surveys, we have tested a set of pledges that Democrats can advance as their priority agenda for the new Congress. These were the strongest:

Block any pay raise for Congress until the incomes of average workers begin to rise.

Replace Bush’s prescription drug plan with a simple one that controls costs.

Raise the minimum wage to \$7 an hour.

Repeal the new tax loophole that encourages companies to move operations overseas.

Implement all the recommendations of the 9/11 Commission on homeland security and inspect 100 percent of containers coming into America.

Repeal the cuts in all student loan programs and increase tax breaks for college costs.

Create tax incentives to expand the development of wind, solar, and biofuel technologies.

Voters were presented with this agenda as well as a Republican one that identified areas of progress and new initiatives and that criticized the Democrats on gay marriage and abortion, higher taxes and big government. After hearing these, the public supported the Democrats by 11 points, further consolidating Democratic gains.

The reaction to the Democratic agenda reveals important things about the Democrats' approach to 2006.

- The pledge to block further Congressional pay raises until the incomes rise for average Americans is by far the strongest policy in the list. (It is almost as strong when linked to the deficit.) It says a lot about the values and priorities of Democrats challenging Republican control of Washington.
- In the February poll, the determination to change Bush’s prescription drug plan and address drug costs was among the strongest policies recalled from the list. That is obviously central to not forgetting seniors and seniors’ issues.

- The 9/11 Commission gains considerable importance when it adds specifics, like 100-percent inspection.
- Restoring college funding emerges much stronger when it includes tax deductibility.
- Energy issues and alternative fuels are a major pledge and important to making America work for all.

South Dakota Abortion Ban

The South Dakota ban on all abortions, except for the life of the mother, is not a popular act. By 64 percent to 33 percent, voters say they would be less likely to support a candidate who endorsed it; almost half the country says they are “much less likely” to support that candidate.

That act, as it moves up the judicial ladder, may well create a new issue that pushes voters further away from Bush and the Republicans. With Bush working to build support among his base voters, this may be a hard moment for him to oppose the South Dakota law.

Democratic Self-Confidence and Initiatives on Security

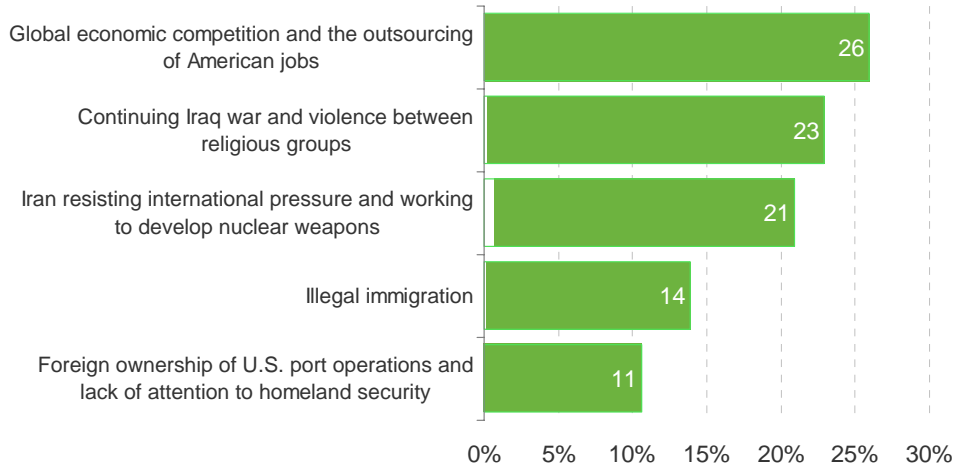
The world outside matters to voters in this election, which is why it is so important that the Republican advantage on security has almost entirely evaporated in light of Iraq and the new spotlight on homeland security. In this survey, voters say by 51 to 47 percent that Bush’s policies toward other countries and terrorism have made us less, not more secure. In the NPR survey, Democrats are more trusted than Bush to handle the ports issue and homeland security, and to deal with the continuing sectarian violence in Iraq. Only on Iran and nuclear weapons does Bush have a small, 4-point, advantage.

The NPR survey and this Democracy Corps survey says that Democrats can now engage these security issues, without losing ground. This is no longer presumptive Republican territory.

The global threats and challenges are impacting security, society and the economy – and people get it. The ones raising the highest concerns are presented in this NPR graph, underscoring the importance of global competition and outsourcing, the Iraq war and Iran.

Global issues impacting America – Top concern*

I want you to think about some things that happening in the world that could impact things here in America. Please tell me which concerns you the most.



**From National Public Radio survey of 800 likely voters, conducted 3/12/06 - 3/14/06.*

The Democratic pledges on stopping tax benefits to export jobs, minimum wage and linking Congressional pay raises to rising wages are all sensitive to income pressures people feel in this global economy. On dealing with global competition and outsourcing, Democrats are more trusted than Bush by 17 points; they are more trusted than the Republicans by a striking 23 points.

But on Iraq, Democrats have only a 1-point advantage over the Republicans, suggesting the need for a clearer Democratic direction. That their advantage rises to 9 points when contrasted with the president, reminds us that he is the main subject of this election.

In this survey, we tested a range of attacks on Bush’s foreign policy, with the assertion that they make America less secure. After them and a robust Bush statement defending his post-9/11 approach to security, the Democrats did not emerge any stronger. As with Iraq, it strongly suggests that Democrats need to show that they have ideas on how America can move in a new direction and be more secure.

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On whatever the issue, we are in a period when the plates have moved, changing the rules and possibilities. “Security” is no longer defense, as Democrats are as trusted as Republicans and voters will listen to their ideas for a new direction. That now forms part of a larger strategy as Democrats galvanize their base, embrace independents and reach out to key Republican groups. The choice we pose for this election reaches all of them. The agenda Democrats can offer for an America that works for everyone gives reality to the choice, and takes Democrats beyond the cynicism that previously limited their gains.