

DEMOCRACY CORPS
JAMES CARVILLE ♦ STANLEY GREENBERG ♦ ROBERT SHRUM
10 G STREET, NE ♦ SUITE 400 ♦ WASHINGTON, DC 20002
202-478-8330 (TEL) ♦ 202-289-8648 (FAX)
WWW.DEMOCRACYCORPS.COM

Date: May 26, 2005
To: Friends of Democracy Corps
From: Stan Greenberg
James Carville

RE: AMERICA TURNS AGAINST WASHINGTON
Report on a new national survey for Democracy Corps and Campaign for America's Future

George Bush was elected in a closely contested election last November, but the country is now bewildered about the consequences of that choice. Just six months after the election, a large majority of the country thinks the country is headed in the wrong direction – virtually the highest point of his presidency. While Bush got 51 percent of the national vote, just 41 percent now say they want to continue with his direction for the country.

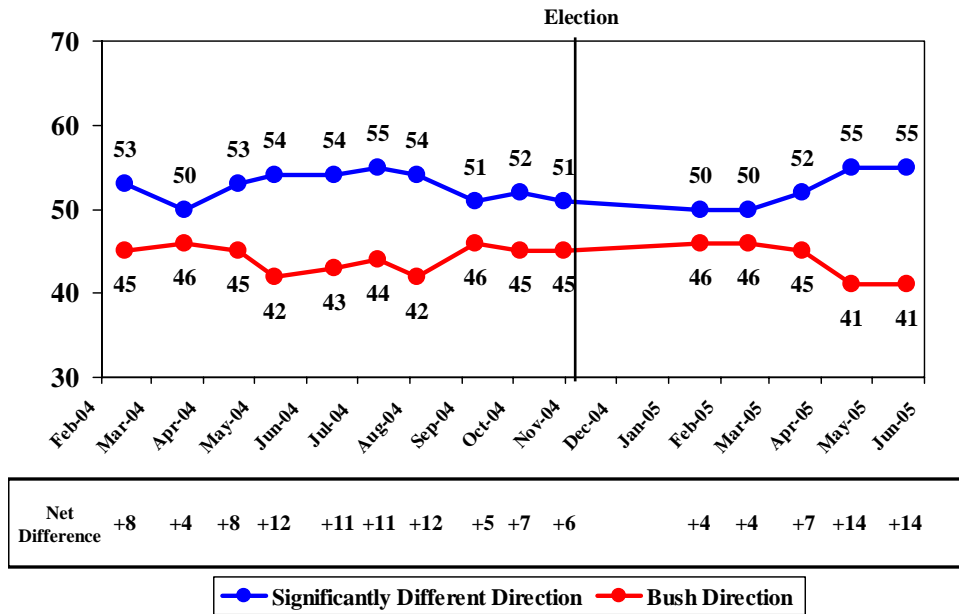
While there is no evidence yet that voters are turning to the Democrats, there is pervasive evidence of a country that is questioning the Republicans' priorities, values, signature policies on the economy, Iraq and Social Security, and questioning their whole use of power. People are looking for the Democrats to check the abuse of power and offer the country a very different set of priorities.

These conclusions are based on a new national survey conducted by Democracy Corps, with the Campaign for America's Future.¹ The results provide an important backdrop for the Campaign for America's Future Take Back America Conference next week, which will gather over 1000 progressive leaders and activists to share ideas and strategies for the next months.²

¹ This survey of 1,013 likely voters was conducted May 17-23, 2005. The survey has a margin of error of +/- 3.1%

² To register for the conference, go to www.ourfuture.org

Continue or Significant Change in Bush Direction

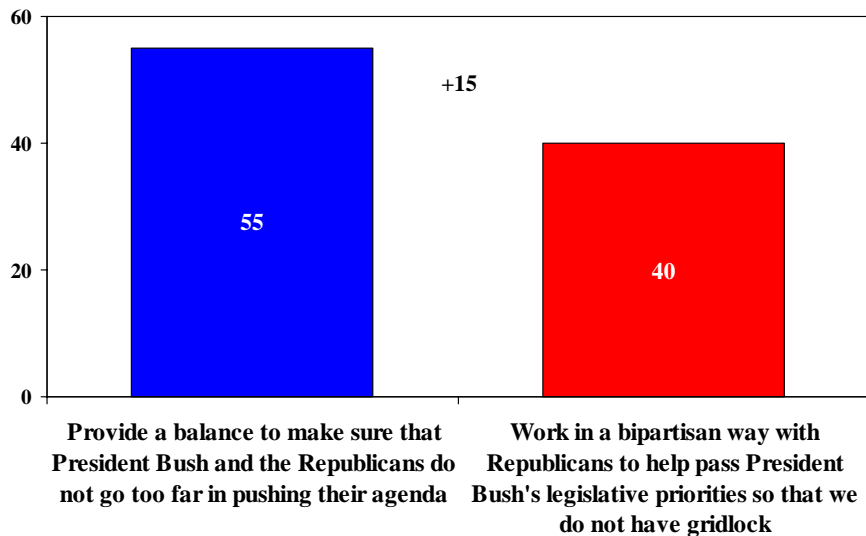


Change in Washington

In the six-month period since the election, Washington has become a very ugly place – as the voters see it from afar. A quite astonishing 70 percent say that the partisan bickering has gotten worse in recent years, including 60 percent who strongly believe that. By 41 to 30 percent, voters think the Republicans and the president are responsible for the political climate.

The revulsion about Washington is about the content, as well as the style, of Washington politics. By 57 to 33 percent, voters say Congress has the “wrong priorities” and is “not working on the issues that matter to me.” Rather than wanting to see Democrats ease the tensions and help the president with his agenda and avoid gridlock, the voters want the Democrats to stand up and “provide a balance” and make sure the “Republicans do not go too far in pushing their agenda.” That is a remarkable result for a re-elected president, barely home from the honeymoon.

Balance Republicans vs. Bi-Partisan Support



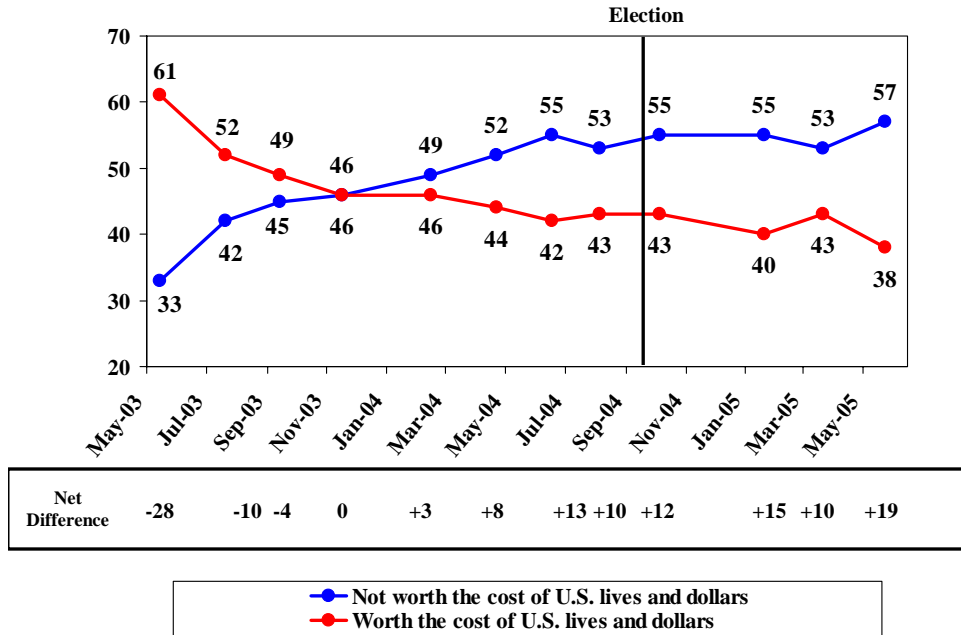
“Which of the of the following roles would you like to see the Democrats in Congress play –”

The Troubled Conservative Revolution: Iraq, Economy and Social Security

The starting points for President Bush and the Republicans in Congress are the three signature policies of the conservative revolution: Iraq, the economy and Social Security. The president has staked his future on taking the war on terrorism to the terrorists, with Iraq as the front-line. The president has passed tax cuts in virtually every year of his presidency and promises more, and he kicked off his second term with a bold plan to privatize and reform Social Security. On all three, he has lost the confidence of the country and reached the lowest point of his presidency.

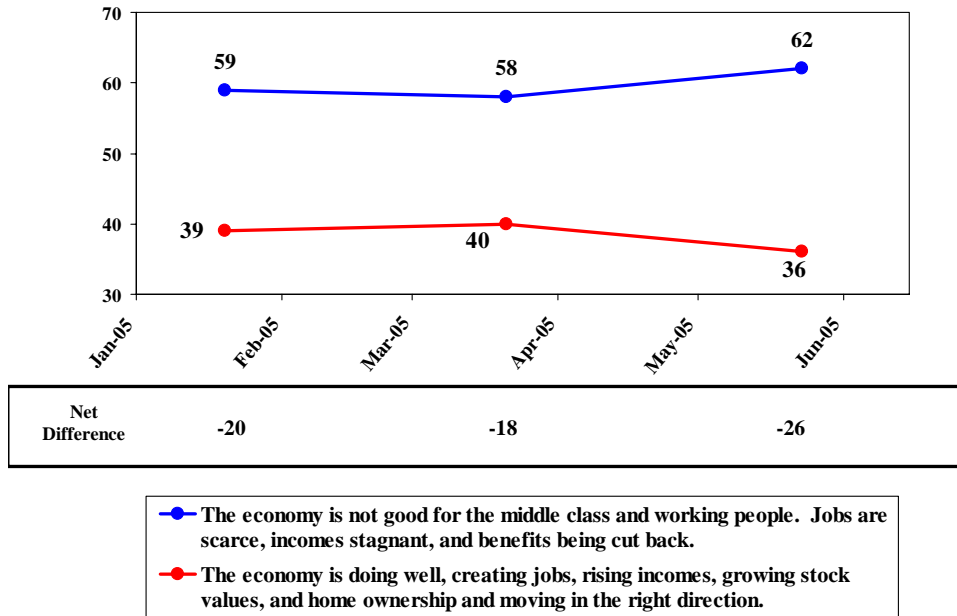
Driving the mood in this period are the rising doubts about the Iraq war. By 57 to 38 percent, voters think the war was not worth the cost in lives and dollars, now with a majority of 52 percent who believe it strongly. This is the moment of greatest opposition to the Iraq war and its continuing cost. When asked why the country is headed in the wrong direction, 34 percent say the war, up 4 points in a month – equal with President Bush’s leadership and direction as an explanation for America’s malaise.

Iraq War Worth it or Not



Opinion is settling in on the Bush economy, and it is not good. Over 60 percent say the economy is not good for the middle class, rejecting a statement that the economy is doing well, creating jobs and rising incomes and headed in the right direction. In fact, the percentage that feels this strongly has jumped 6 points this month, to 54 percent. As we shall see later, a Democrat who wants to repeal Bush’s tax cuts for the top earners gets significantly more political support. A Republican who wants to make them permanent loses support at the polls.

Characterizing the Economy



Social Security is a disaster for the president. Just 34 percent support his Social Security reforms, even when described in the most general terms. Support dropped further last month, and there is no sign that his press conference or specific plans have helped. Indeed, just 36 percent support his new plan, including private accounts and progressive indexing. It is opposed by almost 60 percent of the country, 47 percent strongly – and rising above 50 percent for all voters over 50 years of age.

The result is Republicans now lose the vote for Congress by 5 points (48 to 43 percent), which has been true now over two months. Bush’s personal favorability is falling to new lows and his job approval to a new plateau just below 50 percent. This is happening without any evidence of a Democratic resurgence, which might allow voters to let go of the incumbent Republicans. The potential for more political slippage is very real.

Independent and moderate opinion is moving sharply against Republican governance and priorities. In this report, we focus on independents, moderates, white mainline Protestants and voters in the battleground states – voters with “moderate” views or swing voters who are leading the revulsion with developments in Washington. Just a quarter of independents, for example, want to continue Bush’s direction – a sentiment now reflected in the battleground states where a large majority now wants change. Even white mainline Protestants – conventionally a Republican-leaning group – have turned away from the intensely partisan character of Republican governance: by 61 to 35 percent, they want the Democrats to be a check on Republican overreach.

	Independents	Moderates	White Mainline Protestants	Battleground States
Direction of Country				
Continue Bush Direction	26	30	35	40
Sig. Different Direction	66	66	62	56
<i>Bush dir – Sig. Diff. Dir</i>	-40	-36	-27	-16
Role of Dems in Congress				
Provide balance	59	65	61	54
Work in a bi-partisan way	34	30	35	42
<i>Balance – Bi-partisan</i>	+25	+35	+26	+12
Congressional Vote				
Democratic candidate	48	58	54	50
Republican candidate	25	29	35	41
<i>Dem – Rep</i>	+23	+29	+19	+9

The tremors that have been set off by the doubts about Bush and the Republicans are potentially changing the political map. The ability of Republicans to win in more rural states and the many red counties across the country gave them the Electoral College and important gains in the U.S. Senate. But in counties carried by Bush six months ago, only 50 percent say they want to continue with his direction, while 47 percent want significant change. In the white rural counties, a plurality of 49 to 46 percent wants to move in a significantly different direction.

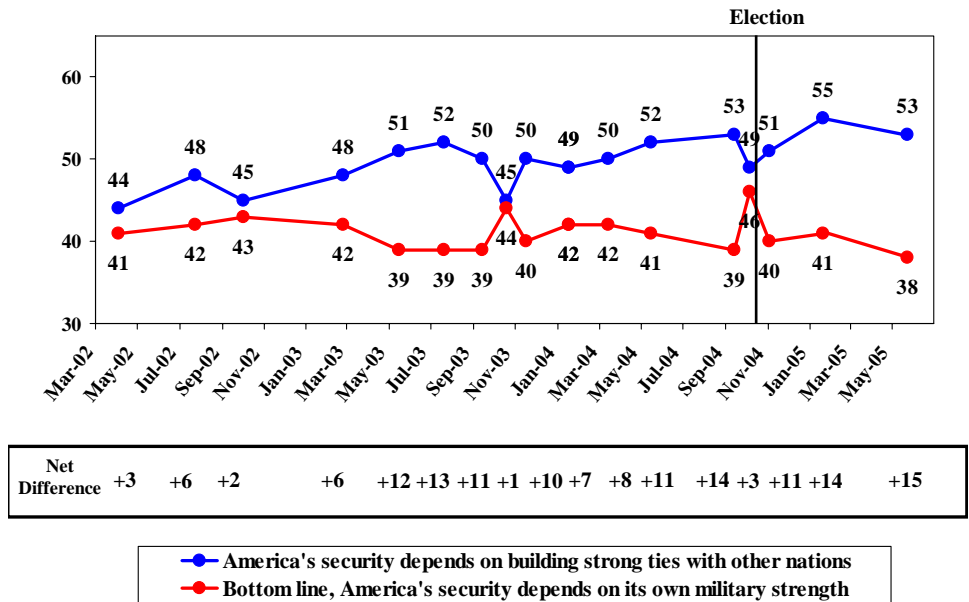
Ascendant Values

While we take very seriously the concerns with values and threats to the family, it is important for progressives to recognize that on many aspects of the values discussion, voters align with Democrats. That alignment on key values is likely being enhanced by the doubts about Iraq and uncertainty about the economy and retirement. The emerging doubts about the priorities of Bush and the Republicans may also center on the values that govern the conservative and progressive political projects.

When looking at the world and through the fog of war in Iraq, voters more than at any point in the last three years think America's security depends on strong ties with other countries; and the smallest number are thinking, "bottom line, America's security depends on its own mili-

tary strength.” The Iraq experience has left people thinking America might be more secure with a different approach to the world.

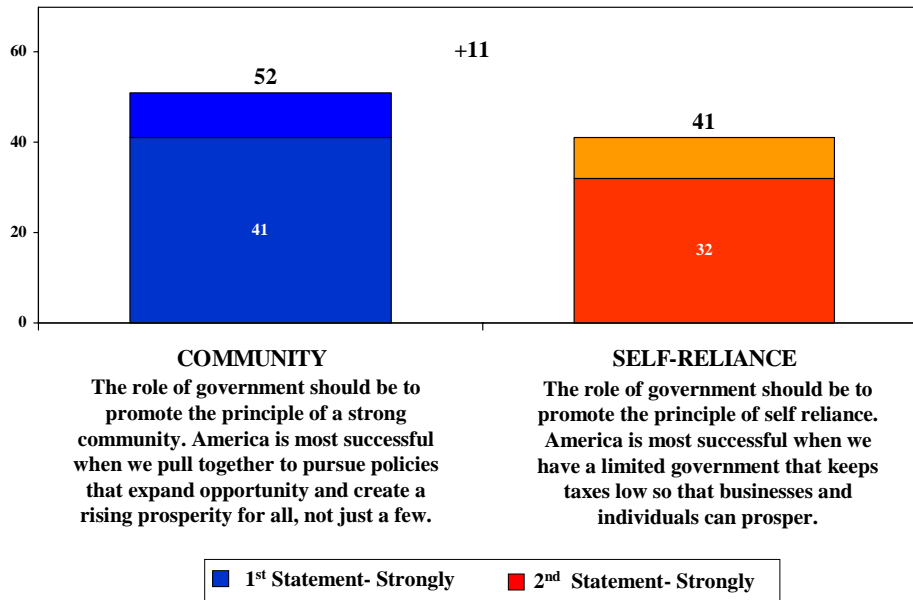
Strong Ties vs. Military Strength



Progressives are positioned to become champions of a family threatened by economic pressures – ranging from stagnant wages and health care costs, loss of retirement security and lack of time to raise children. Voters at present are more drawn to those family priorities (52 percent) than one that emphasizes “family values,” focused on gay marriage and abortion, the culture of sex and violence and kids not learning personal responsibility (38 percent). While voters are certainly concerned with many of those things, the other threats to the family – on their material well-being, security and ability to care for kids – are very real and can trump the culture war.

Finally, voters are looking at all the uncertainty around them and lean toward a worldview that emphasizes community and opportunity over self-reliance and individualism. We know from focus groups that voters actually value both community and self-reliance but when forced to choose, a small majority (52 percent) want an America where people pull together and pursue policies that expand opportunity and prosperity for all, not just the few. Just 41 percent are content with a focus on self-reliance, limited government and low taxes so business and individuals can prosper.

Community vs. Self-Reliance



In this period of rethinking, voters at the moment believe the Democrats may have the right approach to the world, to protecting the family, and to the role of government. That suggests that voters are reacting to Washington in a more fundamental way – suggesting the opening for a very different narrative and set of policies.

Competing Narratives: The Economy

The economy, along with security and values, is the primary meeting point where voters will decide which party to trust to lead the country. The earlier findings suggest that progressives need not be defensive about standing up for America’s security and for its families. They have relevant and important things to say. On the economy, we will now see, the Democrats have a more compelling narrative – one that dominates a Republican narrative stressing progress on the economy, jobs and homeownership, as well as Medicare and education reforms.

Competing Economic Narratives		
	Much more likely to support	Much/Smwt more likely to support
<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Democratic Economic Narrative</u></p> <p>America is headed in the wrong direction. We have a stagnant economy, with record budget and trade deficits. The tax cuts for the wealthy and big corporations have failed. Corporate profits are up, but workers' wages are not. Gas prices and health care costs are skyrocketing, and jobs are going overseas. We have to change course and make real investments in our economy. Keep good jobs on U.S. soil, increase wages, bring down the cost of health care, and strengthen our education system.</p>	42	58
<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Republican Economic Narrative</u></p> <p>America has faced great challenges in recent years, but we are making progress. The president's tax cuts are working and the economy is continuing to improve, with over 3 million new jobs created over the past two years and homeownership now at an all-time high. Medicare reforms have helped over 4 million seniors save money on prescription drugs and, thanks to No Child Left Behind, test scores in our schools are improving. America is moving in the right direction.</p>	17	35

The Democratic narrative on its own leads 58 percent of the voters to say they would be more likely to vote for the Democrats, including 42 percent much more likely. It is a powerful bill of particulars on the economy: tax cuts for the wealthy and big corporations that have failed; high corporate profits while wages fall; rising gas prices, health care costs and jobs going overseas. It calls for real investments in the U.S. economy to create jobs here, increase wages, bring health care costs down and strengthen education.

By comparison, the Republican narrative fails to pass a basic test of credibility: only 35 percent say they would be more likely to vote for such a candidate – almost 30 points below the Democratic statement. The country apparently does not believe things are moving in the right direction or making progress, and it is not clear that the Republican narrative will get heard.

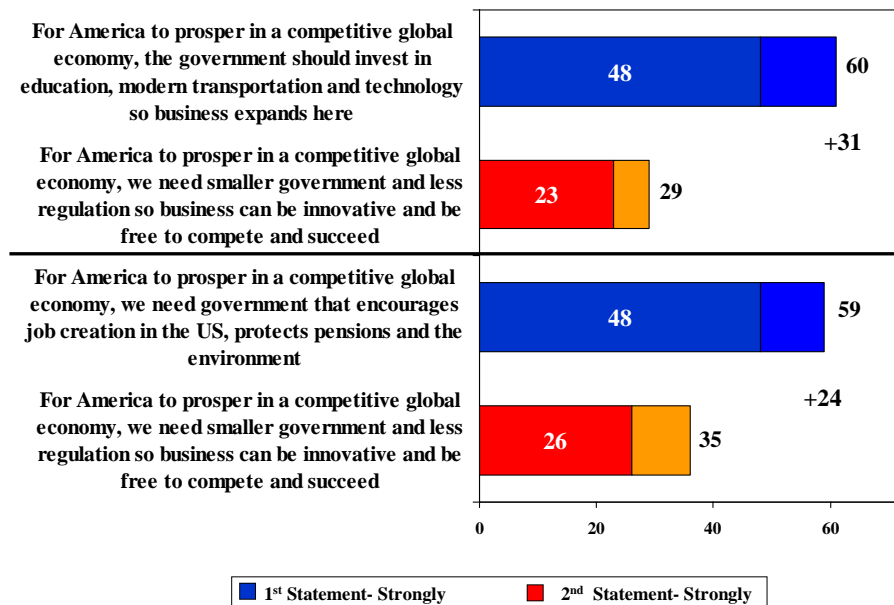
When respondents were asked to choose between these narratives, the Democrats' is preferred 57 to 39 percent, an 18-point advantage. That is 13 points greater than the Democrats current advantage in the generic congressional race, suggesting that a battle of narratives (wrong direction versus progress) could produce a significant electoral shift to the Democrats.

Globalization and Trade

Part of the uncertainty about this period is the status of American jobs in this global economy. That was a key part of the Democratic economic narrative, and the economy and jobs are important elements in people thinking the country is headed off track. Globalization is impacting both the mood of the country and public thinking about economic policy.

As a start, the country is looking for the government to take the problem seriously. Barely a third of the country wants a "smaller government" and "less regulation" so that businesses be innovative and free to compete and succeed. About 60 percent of the country supports an activist response, as we see below, whether it is to invest in education, technology and transportation so business expands in the U.S. or whether it promotes U.S. jobs and protects pensions and the environment in the face of global trade.

Globalization: More or Less Government



Three-quarters of voters say they would be more likely to vote for a candidate who wants to end tax breaks for companies exporting jobs, to allow unions to organize and have good benefit plans, and who concludes it is time to stand up the Chinese.

For the first time, Democracy Corps has pitted a Tom Friedman view of globalization against one posited for Lou Dobbs. We will evolve this draft over time, but for now, Dobbs has the edge. In the choice below, our Dobbs look-alike disparages the notion that free trade is good for us, focusing on the trade deficits, weak dollar and loss of 3 million jobs. That leads to lower paying jobs in the U.S. and the need for policies that reward job creation in America.

The Tom Friedman perspective notes the networking of individuals and businesses that allows all to compete globally, which creates both problems and opportunities. The answer is not to reverse globalization but to improve our education system, update our economic institutions and be a leader in the world economy.

Lou Dobbs vs. Tom Friedman	
Total Prefer	
<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Dobbs</u></p> <p>For too long, we have been told that free trade is good for us, but in reality it has resulted in record trade deficits, a weakening dollar and the loss of 3 million American jobs over the past three years. Good US jobs, from manufacturing to software design, are outsourced to foreign countries every day and, if they are replaced at all, it is by jobs with lower pay and less benefits. We must stop subsidizing companies that take jobs abroad and start rewarding those that create them here at home.</p>	54
<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Friedman</u></p> <p>In today's world, technology has enabled individuals and businesses anywhere to network and compete with each other. This presents America with new challenges, but also with new opportunities. Failing to step up to the challenges will only cause us to fall behind the rest of the world. Rather than attempting to reverse globalization, we must move quickly to improve our education system and update our economic institutions to compete and maintain our leadership position in the world economy.</p>	40

Today, the public goes with Dobbs over Friedman by 54 to 40 percent. But as we saw above, they are looking for government, not to step aside, but to both invest in education and the economic infrastructure and to stand up for our jobs and quality of life.

Competing Agendas

For the most part, voters are looking for leaders and the two parties to tackle big problems for the country. They get credit for trying in a broad range of areas. But across the board, there is a strong preference for the policy initiatives of the Democrats. That is true on education, energy, health care, and taxes. The voters seem particularly responsive to education initiatives, whether focused on pre-school and the public schools or whether focused on college. People are looking for windows of opportunity in a period that seems uncertain about opportunity. There is also a very strong response in favor of a far-reaching initiative on energy independence that mobilizes the scientific community, promotes fuel-efficient cars, invests in efficiency and expands use of alternative energy sources. Voters are looking for new ways to strengthen America's economy, while taking the initiative on energy issues and securing the country. And finally, they respond strongly to efforts to address health care, whether centered on the uninsured or high health care costs.

While many of the Republican initiatives get a non-plussed response, others do quite well, particularly if they emphasize problem solving on energy or health care and sound like they broadly serve the public interest. It underscores the challenge of getting heard in policy battles when the White House has learned some things about sounding pro-active. In areas where they have already rolled out their policies, like taxes and Social Security, they do not get much of a hearing. But voters are not unwilling to hear that the Republicans may want to address these problems.

People are evaluating these initiatives in the current political context where the Democrats have not stepped forward for some time with bold alternatives on education, energy or health care. The public is looking for leaders who will tackle serious problems with serious ideas, but with the right perspective, narrative, and values. They have lost confidence in the Republicans, who have played their biggest and signature initiatives, and presented their view of America and government – and voters have found them wanting. The Republicans have left Washington an ugly partisan place, where the public interest gets little attention. Voters are poised to look to the Democrats for a new direction: their priorities, underlying values and policy initiatives. This is a time for Democrats to tell their story and offer their big ideas for America.