

DEMOCRACY CORPS

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Date: October 6, 2006
To: Friends of Democracy Corps
From: Stan Greenberg and Amy Gershkoff
James Carville

RE: IRAQ AND PARTISAN CONGRESS SHIFT THE PLATES **Report on Democracy Corps' latest tracking poll**

With the close of Congress, the news and real world events have shifted the plates, with a surge in hostility towards the Republican Congress, increased doubts about the Iraq war's progress, and greater disengagement of Republican voters. According the latest poll for Democracy Corps¹, the Democrats maintain large leads in the races for House and Senate, with rising gains among independents and the most likely voters, but they have not yet realized the full potential in the current mood for change. The campaign can still produce further gains for the Democrats.

Briefly, we find:

- Views of the Republican Party and the Republicans in Congress drop to the lowest point on Democracy Corps' record.
- Growing perception that Congress does nothing but engage in partisan bickering and accomplishes nothing on issues important to people. That is the strongest rationale for changing who is serving in Washington.
- Dramatically worsening perceptions of Bush and the Republicans' handling of Iraq and the war on terrorism, likely precipitated by the high recall of Bob Woodward's book, much more pessimistic perceptions of the war's progress, and greater worry about casualties.

¹ Democracy Corps national survey of 1000 likely voters, conducted October 1-3, 2006.

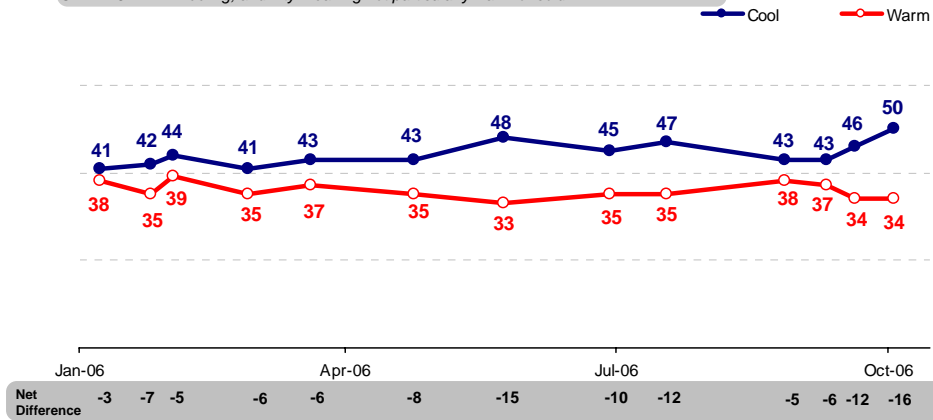
- Democrats make gains in perceptions of their handling of Iraq, national security, and values, though the overall image of the party has not changed since 2005.
- Republicans are becoming demoralized, with a widening gap on engagement and enthusiasm between Republican and Democratic voters. For the first time this cycle, the *most* likely voters produce an even greater margin for the Democrats than the likely electorate overall.

Crash of the Republicans

View of Republicans in Congress slid to a new low, with only 34 percent of voters overall and only 5 percent of those undecided in their congressional vote reporting warm feelings towards Republicans in Congress. Overall views of Congress also slipped, with only 31 percent of voters overall and only 21 percent of undecided voters reporting warm feelings towards Congress.

Congressional Republicans' image shattered

Now, I'd like to rate your feelings toward some people and organizations, with one hundred meaning a VERY WARM, FAVORABLE feeling; zero meaning a VERY COLD, UNFAVORABLE feeling; and fifty meaning not particularly warm or cold.



The decline in the last week was precipitous: 53 percent of likely voters say that based on what they have heard in the last week, they have a worse opinion of Congress and 66 percent say they have a worse view of Republicans in Congress.

Republicans' crash appears to be driven by the growing impression that Congress only engages in partisan bickering and fails to address the real problems that affect people's lives. We have shown this theme emerging again and again in various polls over the last several weeks, and we underscore it again here: when asked – in an open-ended question – why they disapprove of Congress, 31 percent of voters said that Congressional infighting was the main reason they disapprove of Congress, making it the most-mentioned item in the open-ended format.

Moreover, by a very wide margin, undecided and swing voters say that election is more about electing a Congress that will stop partisan infighting and start dealing with the problems that affect people’s lives than it is about specific issues like Iraq and health care; the margin was 13 points with voters overall, jumping to 29 points with independents voters and 43 points with voters undecided in the congressional election. That is the strongest set-up for the issues that campaigns will prioritize in their districts and states.

Highlighting voters’ exasperation with the current partisan bickering in Congress is their preference – by 17 points – of a Democratic message pledging to stop partisan fighting and start engaging in bipartisan cooperation to a Republican message pledging to stand up to Bush and the Republican Party when they take actions the candidate does not support. But independents support the Democratic message even more strongly than the average voter, with roughly two-thirds supporting the Democratic narrative.

Democratic message of ending partisan bickering dominates

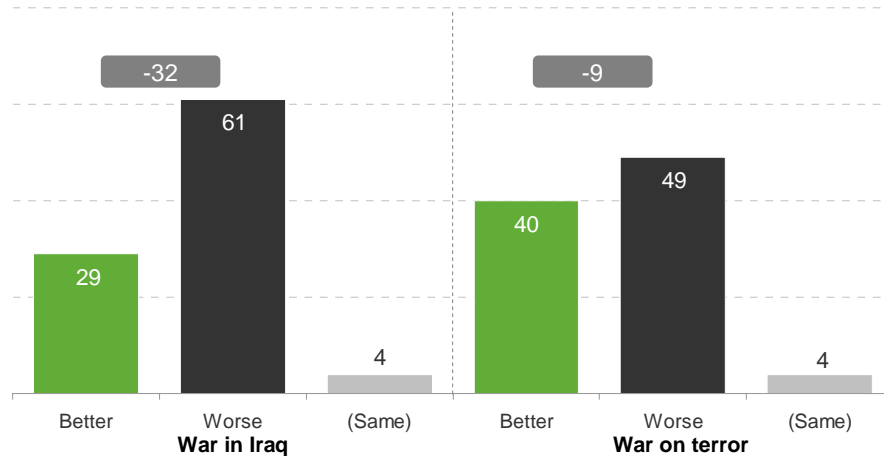
<i>Now let me read you statements from two candidates for Congress. After I read them, please tell me which statement comes closest to your own views, even if neither is exactly right. (ACTUAL NAMES INSERTED)</i>	Strongly	Total
(The Democratic candidate for Congress*) says, this Congress is stuck in partisan political battles and not doing the people's business. We need a Congress where people work together on issues that really impact people's lives.	43	57
OR		
(The Republican candidate for Congress*) says, I support conservative policies that help our country and our area. When I disagree with President Bush and my party, I stand up to them because I'm an independent voice who can bring change	28	40

Republicans Lose Ground on Iraq and Terrorism

Republicans who wish to blame their crash on Mark Foley failed to note that in the last few weeks, Republicans lost ground on their core issues of Iraq and national security. Based on news in the last week, by a 32-point margin, voters think Iraq is getting worse and by a 9-point margin, voters think the war on terror is going worse. The numbers are dramatically higher for independents, who by a 48-point margin think the situation in Iraq is getting worse, and by a 12-point margin think the war on terror is going worse.

Public overwhelmingly believes Iraq, war on terror going worse

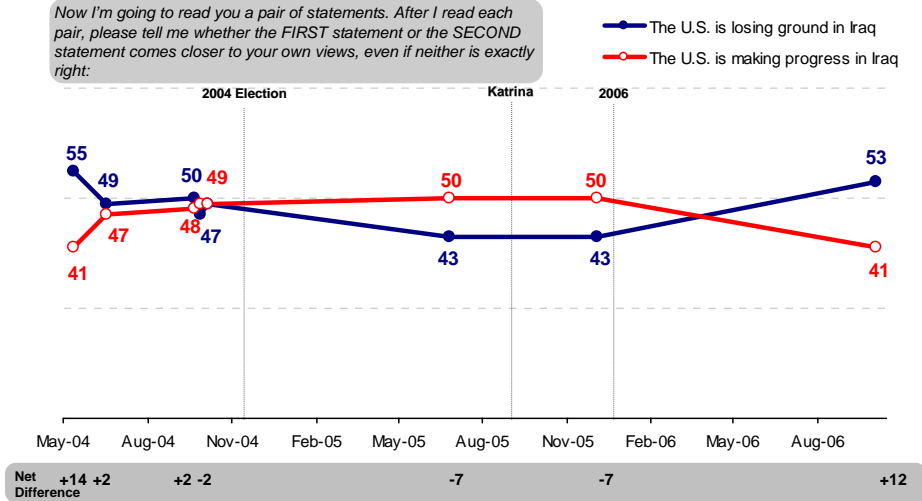
Based on what you have heard recently, do you think the war in Iraq/ war on terror is going better or going worse?



Bob Woodward’s new book, and more importantly, his conclusion that the war is going worse than most people believed, has penetration and is partially responsible for some of the shift. Woodward’s book was the most recalled Iraq or terrorism news story in the last week, besting the leak of the National Intelligence Estimate, wiretapping, military tribunals, and several other news stories. The high recall of Woodward’s book was coupled with a new perception – by more than half the electorate – that Bush was dishonest with the American people about Iraq, a key tenet in Woodward’s new book.

The book and the reality of the war has produced for the first time a plurality of likely voters that say we are “losing ground”, not making progress in Iraq. In that context, when asked – in an open-ended question – what they remember hearing about Iraq and terrorism in the last week, the most frequently mentioned item – by a very large margin – is the growing number of casualties in Iraq, and approximately half mention something negative about how the war is going, including the rising number of casualties, the continuation of the bloody insurgency, or the degeneration of Iraq into a cesspool of terrorism. By an 18-point margin, the public now believes that the war has made us less secure rather than more, and the number continues to rise a few points every survey.

Public has lost confidence that we're making progress in Iraq



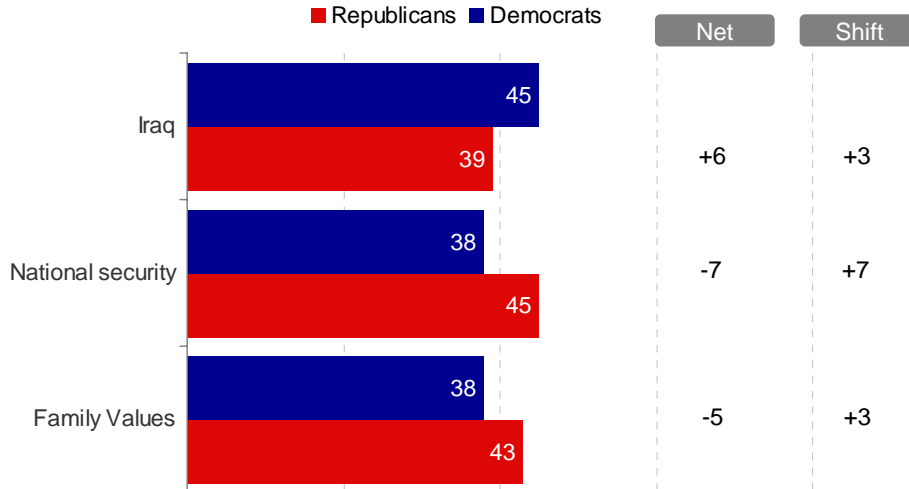
Democrats Make Some Further Gains

While Republicans have crashed, Democrats have made gains in key areas, particularly with independents and voters in swing districts (on the latter point, Democracy Corps be will repeating its survey of Republican competitive seats next week).

Democrats are closing the gap on core national security issues: since last month, Democrats have made a 7-point gain on the question of which party does a better job on national security, and have made a 3-point gain on the question of which party does a better job dealing with the situation in Iraq.

Democrats making progress on Iraq and national security

I am going to read you a list of statements and I want you to tell me whether, overall, you think the Democrats or the Republicans would do a better job with this issue.



*Note: Shift from Democracy Corps National Survey, conducted September 6-10, 2006 of 1004 likely voters

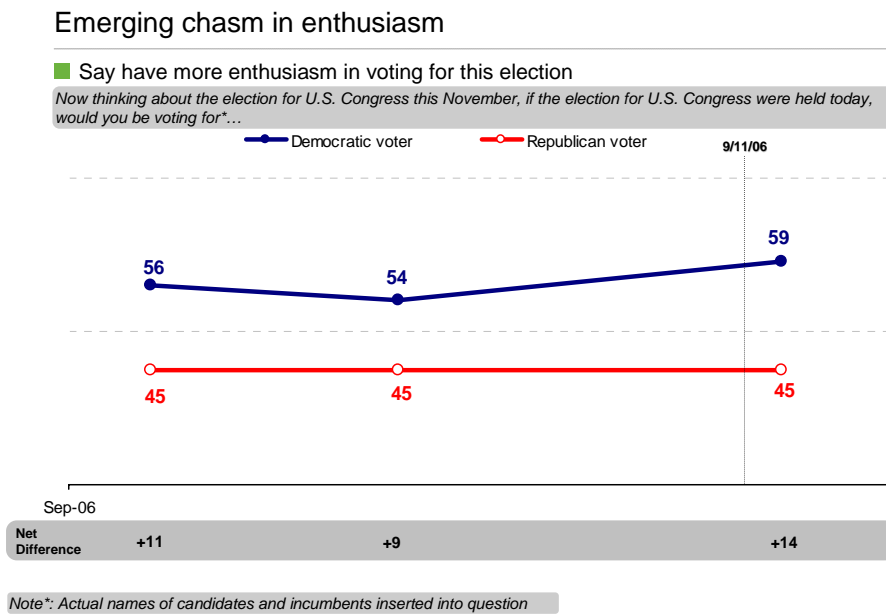
Most of those gains came from swing voters: independents, for instance, gave Republicans a 14-point advantage on national security last month, but that has deteriorated to just a 6-point lead now. White seniors – another key swing group – went from giving Republicans a 30-point advantage on “keeping America secure” to giving Republicans only a 12-point advantage now, and shifted from giving Republicans a 10-point advantage on Iraq to the parties being at parity on the issue now. Democrats also made substantial gains with white rural voters on Iraq – cutting Republicans’ lead in half – and national security, where Republicans’ 27-point advantage has evaporated to only a 12-point lead.

Moreover, the number of voters who name Iraq as their most important issue in their vote continues to climb every poll, while the number who mention terrorism as the most important issue in their vote has been stagnant since before Bush’s 9/11 offensive.

Democrats also made a modest gain on values, moving from an 8-point deficit last month to a 5-point deficit now, and most of these gains again came from swing voters. While this is not statistically significant, the change on values is particularly marked – and statistically significant – with white seniors (who shifted from giving Republicans a 22-point advantage on family values to giving Republicans only a 9-point advantage in the latest survey).

Republicans Demoralized, Democrats Energized

Republicans continue to lag behind Democrats in enthusiasm and engagement in the current election: 59 percent of those planning to vote for a Democratic candidate report being more enthusiastic about this election than usual, while only 45 percent of those planning to vote for a Republican candidate report being more enthusiastic than usual. Democrats also report higher levels of interest in the election: 63 percent of voters planning to vote for the Democratic candidate rank their interest in the election at '10' – the highest possible level of election interest – compared to only 53 percent of voters planning to vote for the Republican candidate.



The news in the last week has produced an up-swing in anti-Bush sentiment among Democrats, and a downturn in pro-Bush sentiment among Republicans. Since our last national Democracy Corps survey two weeks ago, the percentage of Democratic voters who think of their vote as a vote *against* Bush has increased from 49 to 53 percent, while the percentage of Republican voters who think of their vote as a vote *for* Bush has decreased from 34 to 30 percent. A month ago, nearly 40 percent of Republican voters considered their vote a vote for Bush, so 30 percent represents a new low in pro-Bush sentiment among Republican voters.

In fact, in the last month, every segment of the Republican base has seen a drop in the percentage of voters who think of their congressional vote as a vote for Bush, including white rural voters and white evangelicals, while every bloc of swing voters has seen an increase in the percentage who think of their vote as a vote against Bush.

The Change Election

The latest survey underscores an electorate that hungers for an end to partisan infighting and the beginning of a Congress that deals with the real issues affecting people's lives, including changing course in Iraq and dealing with the rising costs of energy and health care. The Foley scandal only reinforces the need and desire for a change in Congress, and the Woodward book only underscores Republican failures in Iraq.
