

**DEMOCRACY CORPS**  
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**Date:** September 29, 2006  
**To:** Friends of Democracy Corps  
**From:** Stan Greenberg and Ana Iparraguirre  
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**RE: DEMOCRATS BATTLING ON A LARGE PLAYING FIELD**  
**Special Survey of Republican-held Competitive Districts**

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Six weeks before the election, Democrats hold a 6-point lead in the generic congressional ballot in the 45 most competitive Republican-held seats, and trail by only 3 points in the named ballot. However you look at it, they dominate the top tier of the 15 most competitive races, the front line in the battle for control of the Congress. While Republicans lead in the remaining 30 seats, the incumbents and Republican candidates are getting less than 50 percent of the vote. The Democrats confront a big playing field in the next election – they must win where they are ahead and take advantage of the Republicans’ genuine vulnerability in a large number of seats.

The large sample size of this poll allows us to group the 45 districts into three tiers, depending on how competitive they are. Democracy Corps will conduct two further tracking polls in these districts between now and November 7<sup>th</sup>.<sup>1</sup>

The survey underscores key trends in these Republican districts:

- Nearly 60 percent of the voters, even in the least competitive seats, want to see change.
- The President’s attempt to nationalize the election around the war on terrorism is backfiring, with Iraq rising in importance and more people believing the war makes us less secure.

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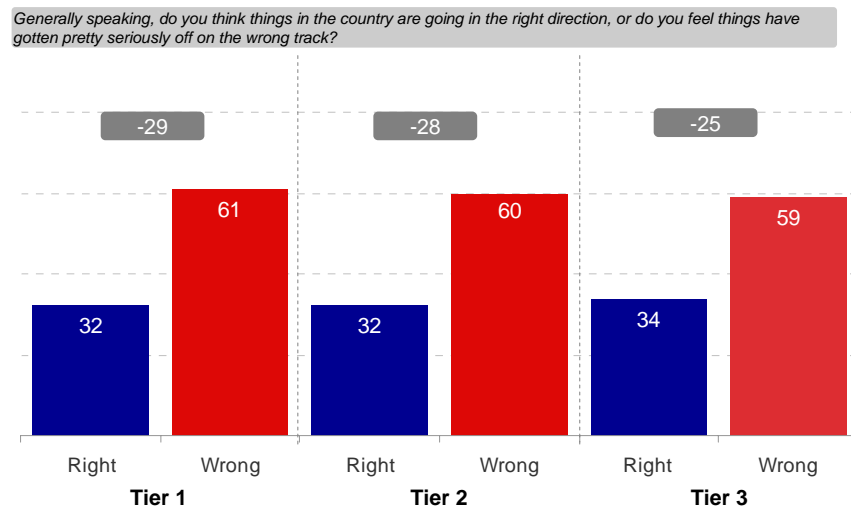
<sup>1</sup> Democracy Corps survey of 1,200 likely voters conducted in the 45 most competitive Republican-held districts, September 24-26, 2006.

- Congress is falling sharply in repute at the end of session with the Democrats able to run against a polarized and partisan Congress that is not doing the people's business.
- Democrats are significantly more interested and more engaged in the election in these Republican districts.
- The cluster of messages and attacks do not favor the Republicans here, as worries about special interests, middle class squeeze, and gas and drug prices trump worries about taxes, immigration and terror.

### Desire for Change

The 45 most competitive Republican-held seats look a lot like the nation as a whole, where there is a strong desire for change. Six-in-ten voters say the country is heading in the wrong direction – virtually the same proportion that has been dissatisfied with the direction of the country since July. The desire for change spreads beyond the most competitive districts as nearly six-in-ten voters in the second and third tier districts also say that the country is heading in the wrong direction.

#### Desire for change as strong among all tiers



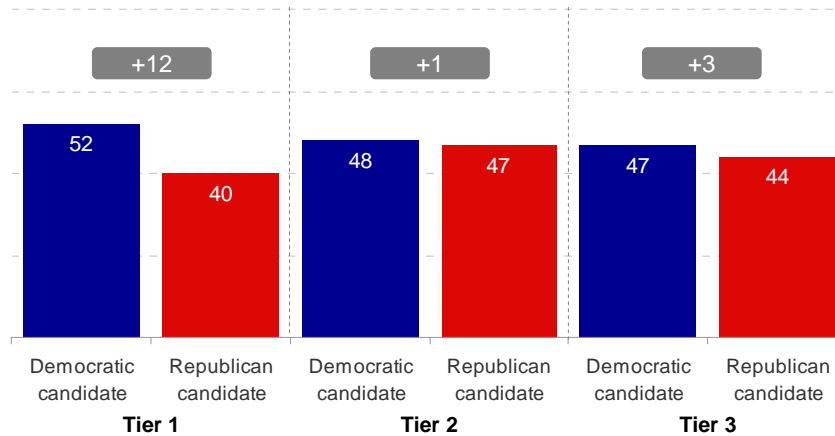
### Large Playing Field

Democratic candidates are in a good position to compete in Republican swing districts. Democrats are ahead by 6 points in the generic ballot in all 45 Republican-held seats, including an impressive 12-point advantage in Tier One, the 15 most competitive seats. They run with a strong wind in these districts where they can nearly take back the House.

Republicans are ahead in the named congressional vote in the 45 seats, but only by 3 points (48 to 45 percent). Indeed, Republicans lead in Tier 2 and Tier 3, but their support is below 50 percent in many of these districts. In this context, Democrats must work hard to protect their lead in the most competitive districts and expand their persuasion efforts to fight in those districts where Republicans have yet to reach the 50 percent threshold.

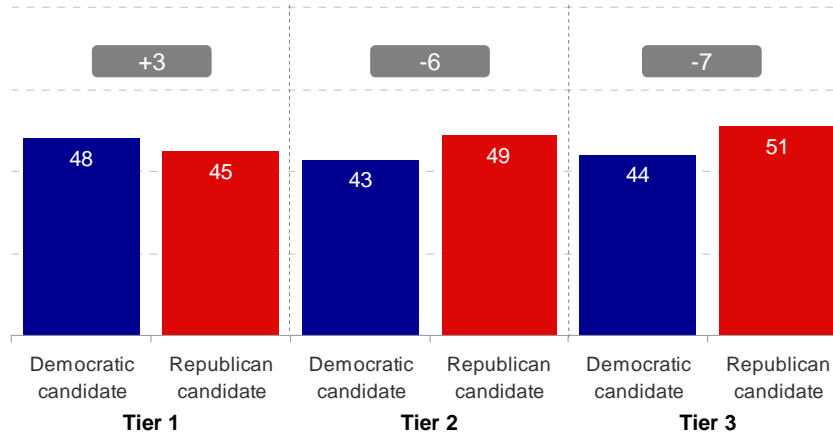
#### In generic congressional vote, Democrats lead all tiers

*Thinking about this year's elections, if the election for U.S. Congress were held today, would you be voting for the Democratic candidate or the Republican candidate in the district where you live?*



### Democrats ahead in top tier in named congressional vote

And let me ask you again about the election in November, though with the actual candidates. If the election for U.S. Congress were held today, would you be voting for...



### Bush’s “National Security” Strategy Backfiring in Republican Territory

The President’s recent attempt to define this election as a contest over the war on terror and shift attention from Iraq and the economy has not worked and indeed has backfired. The President’s latest 9/11 address to the country and the wiretapping debate has not raised Bush’s approval ratings in GOP-held districts. Bush’s job approval has been virtually fixed at 43 percent since July and his personal favorability is down in these Republican-held districts.

The President’s effort to nationalize the election around the war on terror is in fact nationalizing on Iraq, where public sentiment is turning more negative. In these districts, more voters cite Iraq than the war on terror as a factor in their congressional vote. More voters are reacting negatively to the war; substantially more now think the war makes us less secure and more want to start reducing troop levels – all in the last two weeks. These districts are divided evenly on the question of troop reductions versus don’t ‘cut and run’.

### Image of Congress Crashing

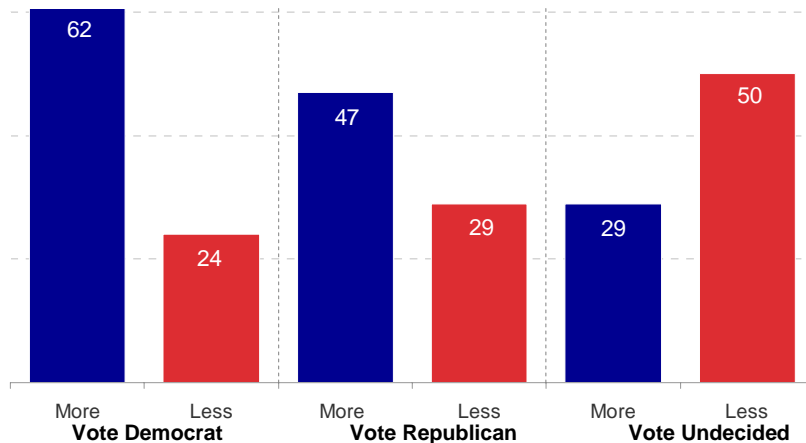
The image of Congress is crashing in these Republican-held districts as voters watch the end of session. Division among Republicans does not look good in these Republican-held seats. In fact, less than three-in-ten voters have warm feelings toward the Congress and just 47 percent approve their incumbent member’s job.

Given this deep disenchantment with Congress as an institution coupled with Members’ performance, it is not surprising that engagement and morale are strongly favoring the

Democrats. Even in Republican-held competitive districts, Democrats report a higher level of interest and enthusiasm in this year's election than Republicans. Democrats are 8 points more likely than Republicans to say they are very interested in this year's election – '10' on a 1-to-10 scale, and those voting for the Democratic candidate for Congress are 15 points more enthusiastic about this year's election than those voting for the Republican candidate.

### Democratic voters more enthusiastic

*In thinking about the Congressional elections that will be held this November, compared to previous elections, are you more enthusiastic about voting than usual or less enthusiastic?*



Dissatisfaction with the current state of affairs is likely to have an impact on turnout as change voters and those concerned about the war in Iraq are the most motivated. Those who disapprove of the job of their Member of Congress are 11 points more likely to be very interested in this year's election and those citing the war in Iraq as their most important vote issue are 9 points more likely to be very interested than the electorate overall.

The strongest frame for Democrats is one that emphasizes what voters do not like about Congress and that links individual Members to the mess in Washington.

***“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.”***

The Democratic critique of Congress as a polarized partisan institution, where Members vote to give themselves a pay rise and serve special interests rather than working together to do the people’s business, is very strong. In fact, this Democratic characterization of the election is 9

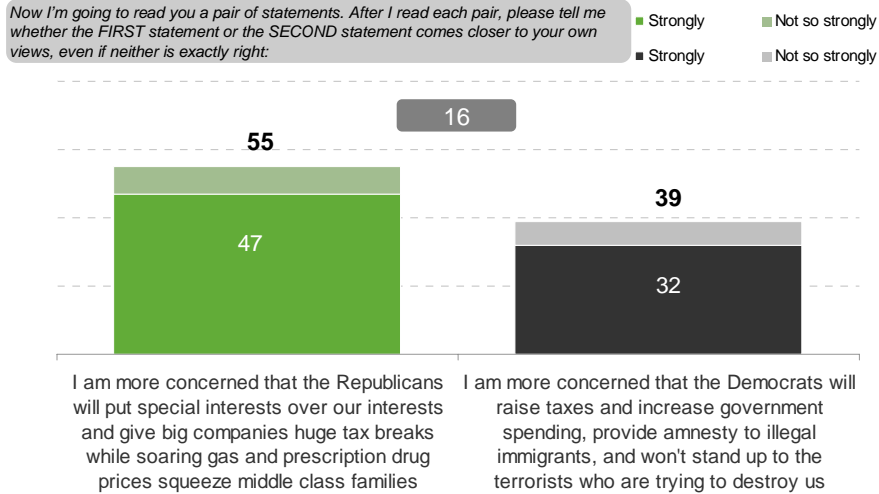
points above Republicans' 'tax and spend' attack and 13 points ahead of their 'cut and run' attack.

### Central Democratic critique for the election

	Much more likely	Total more likely
This Congress is not doing the people's business. It worked to give breaks to the oil companies, 6 pay raises to themselves and constitutional amendments for special interest groups. We need a Congress that has no pay raise until it raises the minimum wage, forces Medicare to negotiate lower drug prices, and works for energy independence	38	67
This Congress is so stuck in partisan political battles that it gets nothing done. We need a new Congress where people work together to get things done	38	67
This Congress forgot it was supposed to do the people's business. We need a Congress that addresses issues that really impact people's lives	31	66
This is a do-nothing Congress and America needs a new direction	26	53

Overall, the Democratic position dominates the Republican one in these Republican-held districts. By a 15-point margin, voters are more concerned about a Republican that will favor special interests and do nothing about prescription drug prices over a Democrat that will raise taxes and be soft on national security and terrorism.

Greater worry about Republican priorities in Republican districts



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Democrats are winning the 15 most competitive Republican-held districts by a 3-point margin and have the opportunity to expand their lead further if they develop a sharp critique of Congress. Clearly, this election could break further and most likely for the Democrats.