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**To:** Friends of Democracy Corps

**From:** Stan Greenberg  
Matt Hogan

**RE: DEMOCRATIC TARGETS ON THE EVE OF THE DEBATES**  
**Report Based on Democracy Corps Post-Labor Day Polls**

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On the eve of the debates, John Kerry and the Democrats are rich with targets that could be consolidated or persuaded, despite the intense polarization of the presidential election. There are so many targets because, first, the election is so close. Democracy Corps has the race virtually even, with Kerry trailing by only 2 points and Bush at only 47 percent. Taking the average of the eleven public polls completed in the last week, the margin is 4 points, with Bush at 48 percent.

But there are other reasons, rooted in the dynamics of the race, on why this election is rich in targets: many voters who want to vote for change have not yet made the deal with Kerry. That includes some loyalist Democratic blocs, as well as real swing voters. In addition, the extreme cultural tactics of the Republicans has produced a counter-reaction among some surprising groups, while keeping some groups in the Republican camp that might have otherwise been contested. Those tactics have successfully consolidated white blue collar men, both young and old, veterans and white married voters, where there are signs of movement. But they have also created other kinds of uncertainty, as we shall see.

These targets are the key audience for the debates and the consolidation that is likely to follow. They are based on the Democracy Corps data base, which includes over 3000 interviews in September. That allows us to look at smaller groups with some confidence.

### The Unrealized Change Voters

A majority of the voters, around 52 to 53 percent, want to vote for change, but John Kerry has not yet won the full confidence of these voters. The result is a range of groups that can still be moved or consolidated when that happens. These voters are also the key to Democrats doing well at all levels, including the Congress.

- ***White non-college educated women (25 percent)***. This is the biggest potential gold mine for John Kerry. Right now, Kerry trails with them by 10, but many of these voters want change: 48 percent want a significantly different direction, but only 41 percent are currently for Kerry. These are not “security moms,” as they lean against the Iraq war, but above all, they are concerned with the decline of middle-class incomes; they strongly reject the idea that the economy is doing well.
- ***White rural voters (17 percent)***. The biggest key to the Bush election is holding on to white rural voters, obviously a large portion of the vote in Wisconsin, Iowa, and other states. His emphasis on security and values and his attacks on Kerry’s character have kept them largely in line, but these voters are still unsettled. They are not as Republican as their current vote and many would like to move in a different direction. They are particularly upset about lagging incomes and health care.
- ***White young voters under 30 years (8 percent)***. These have been very volatile voters, in this case, shifting toward Bush in the last month. But they are unrealized change voters: 46 percent different direction, though only 39 percent for Kerry. Their feelings about Kerry grew more negative in the last couple of months, but the main opportunity is on the economy, as they reject Bush’s case for progress.
- ***White senior women (10 percent)***. Kerry is actually doing well with these senior women, running 10 points ahead of Bush. But there is opportunity for considerable gains here. The margin on change is double the margin in the vote and these voters reject everything about Bush’s priorities. By 67 to 28 percent, they say the middle class is squeezed; by 61 to 33 percent, they say the Iraq war has made us less secure. Kerry can make significant gains here.

### Unconsolidated Democrats

One reason why Kerry is likely to make gains after the debate is the unconsolidated vote of a number of groups that are important to the Democratic base. All these groups are supporting Kerry with good margins, but they could do better given historic

performance and their own current party inclinations and feelings about Bush. The reasons vary by group: some, like African Americans, are simply looking for a more intense engagement with Bush and stronger focus on domestic issues; others, like the college educated women, are looking for a broader issue discussion, as well as a plan for Iraq and a greater sense of conviction from Kerry; and finally, the union households want engagement and economic issues but also greater evidence of personal strength and resolve against the terrorists.

- ***White single women (14 percent).*** Women on their own – single, divorced and widowed – still hold great potential for Democrats. Kerry is already winning them by 11 points (51 to 40 percent), but they are desperate for a election about the issues facing these economically vulnerable women: an astonishing 58 percent want to move in a significantly different direction. They are strongly against the Iraq war and want to see action on health care.
- ***Well-educated white women (16 percent).*** The biggest drop off in support after the Democratic conventions has come with white college educated women – from a 13-point lead down to a single point deficit. The drop was even more true for women with a post-graduate degree. The latter are still giving Kerry a big lead (26 points), but Kerry’s vote dropped from 66 to 58 percent. But these college educated voters are strong change voters (by 8 points) and align with the Democrats (by 6). Kerry can make important gains here. These voters strongly oppose the Iraq war, think the middle class is squeezed, and care about health care and education.
- ***White union households (17 percent).*** In September, Kerry was carrying these voters by 9 points (50 to 41 percent), but that trails their party alignment by 6 points and their desire for change by even more: 59 percent want to go in a significantly different direction. These voters are deeply upset about the economy, and also Iraq, but they are less certain of Kerry’s strength.
- ***African Americans (10 percent).*** Kerry is getting 82 percent of the vote and their interest in the election is very high. They will no doubt respond strongly to the engaged campaign that takes up domestic, as well as international issues.

### **The Surprising Consequences of Culture War**

The Bush campaign has resorted to strong attacks on Kerry on patriotism and security, taxes, and liberalism. That has produced a consolidated Republican base, though

well short of a national majority. But that has impacted who might be influenced in the weeks ahead.

- ***White college-educated men (18 percent of the electorate).*** The more secular, well-educated male voters had been held firmly in place by Bush's tax policies, but they are uncertain about the cultural attacks, the war, and even the economic direction. Thus, Bush is winning these white college men by 9 points, but this is half the margin Bush had earlier in the year. Indeed, Kerry has gained significantly here since the summer. The younger college educated men in particular (under 50 years) are particularly unsettled (53 percent are voting for Bush, but only 48 percent want to continue in Bush's direction).<sup>1</sup> These voters will stay with Bush, but not by the margins Republicans would have anticipated. Kerry has moved ahead by 6 points with post-graduate men.
- ***White mainline Protestants (14 percent).*** While these voters have trended Republican in recent years, the course of the election has moved them toward the Democrats this year, perhaps as a reaction to Bush's evangelical emphasis. Kerry trailed here by 6 points in the five months before the August convention, but he is now ahead by 5 points (49 to 44 percent). These voters are very opposed to the war and upset by the inequalities of the current economy. There are opportunities for a Kerry margin here that should get the attention of election planners.

This is an unusual landscape of opportunity because of the course the race has taken and Kerry's difficulties in fully consolidating Democratically inclined groups. The bad news is those patterns have kept Kerry a few points behind Bush in the race. The good news is that Democrats are clearly underperforming and can make gains in the race, and indeed win.

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<sup>1</sup> The same pattern is evident for the bloc I have called, "Privileged Men" in *The Two Americas*. They are defined as white married college educated males. Bush's margin has dropped 10 points over the course of the year, though they are still quite Republican.