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**To:** Friends of Democracy Corps

**From:** Stan Greenberg  
James Carville

**RE: STRATEGIC AND MESSAGE CLARITY**  
**ON THE EVE OF THE CONVENTION**

Report on the Stable Framework Favoring John Kerry's Election

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On the eve of the Democratic convention, John Kerry is making electoral gains after John Edwards' selection as vice president and is well-positioned to win within the current structure of the race, with a message that dominates Bush's faltering campaign. Kerry now has the lead in the race, by 5 points in the two-way ballot (51 to 46 percent) and by 3 points in a three-way (48 to 45, with Nader at 4 percent). With the convention, Kerry will extend his lead, no doubt to artificial heights, but we think it will be difficult for Kerry to lose his advantage before the Republican convention. The structure of the race is actually quite stable – from Bush's vote to the desire to change to the dynamics surrounding the economy and Iraq – and that will likely leave Bush at grave risk of defeat.

Because of the stability of the race, this memo based on the Democracy Corps survey provides a good guide to the strategic direction and message, but that is quite stable, reflecting our earlier recommendations.

It is important to note the size of the generic Democratic advantage in the race for Congress, now at 7 points (49 to 42 percent). If the Democrats were to carry that kind of advantage into the election, one would expect major gains in both chambers. Apparently, voters do not like a lot of what they see, and job performance numbers for the Congress are quite modest, according to other polls. The Democratic advantage in this poll reflects a shift of mood related to the presidential but also a judgment about the Congress, as this race consolidates within the current structure.

This memo underscores opportunities Democrats have to make health care and Bush's prescription drug bill a fatal combination. They must continue to control the definition of the real economy, which leaves the middle class ever more squeezed, especially on health care. They should confidently join the foreign policy debate and under-

score the fundamental problems with Bush's Iraq policy that leaves America less secure. They should not forget education, as Bush's advantage is fading and Democrats have the opportunity to reclaim the issue, along with the suburban women who it was intended to reach.

Bush has kept himself in the race by building his support among the most religiously devout and in rural areas, critical to many swing states. While Democrats may have made in-roads among rural voters in battleground states, this remains a key challenge. If the Kerry-Edwards ticket speaks comfortably to these rural voters – about values, faith, and keeping America safe, but also about job changes, health care, and corporate excesses – the electoral college outcome too could be greatly impacted.

These observations are based on the latest Democracy Corps national poll of 1,010 likely voters completed this week.<sup>1</sup>

### **Kerry-Edwards Well-Positioned**

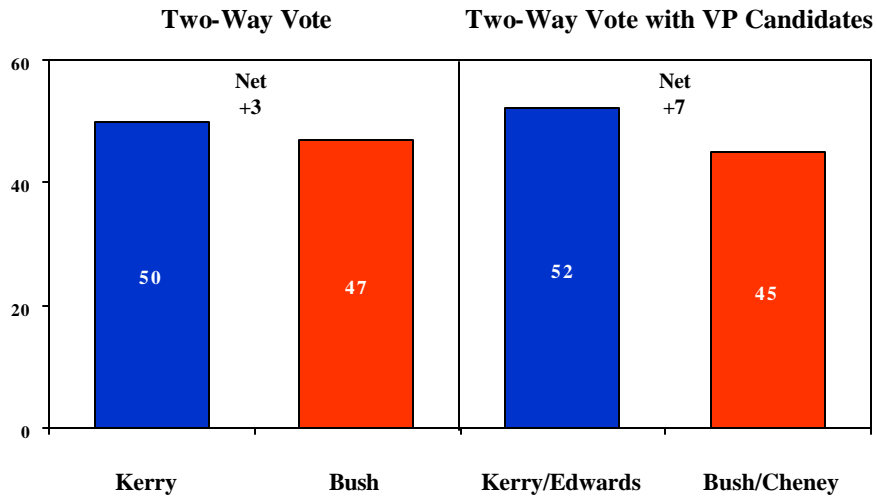
Kerry-Edwards have taken a clear lead in the race, after the vice presidential selection. Indeed, when we set out the choice as one between Kerry-Edwards and Bush-Cheney – the lead is bigger – 3 points with no mention and 7 points with the vice presidential choices in the mix. The biggest impact of the Edwards selection comes among women, independents, and seniors, where the combined ticket performs significantly better.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Democracy Corps conducted a national survey of 1,010 likely voters conducted July 10-13, 2004. The margin of error is +/- 3.1%. For the entire poll, go to [www.democracycorps.com](http://www.democracycorps.com)

<sup>2</sup> Indeed, Edwards right now has the highest thermometer rating in the race, with 38 percent giving warm and 32 percent cool reactions. That net 6 degrees for warm makes him the popular figure right now. Bush is net 5, but 43 percent give him a cool rating. Kerry is now a net 2 for the first time since the primaries and Cheney is a net minus 5.

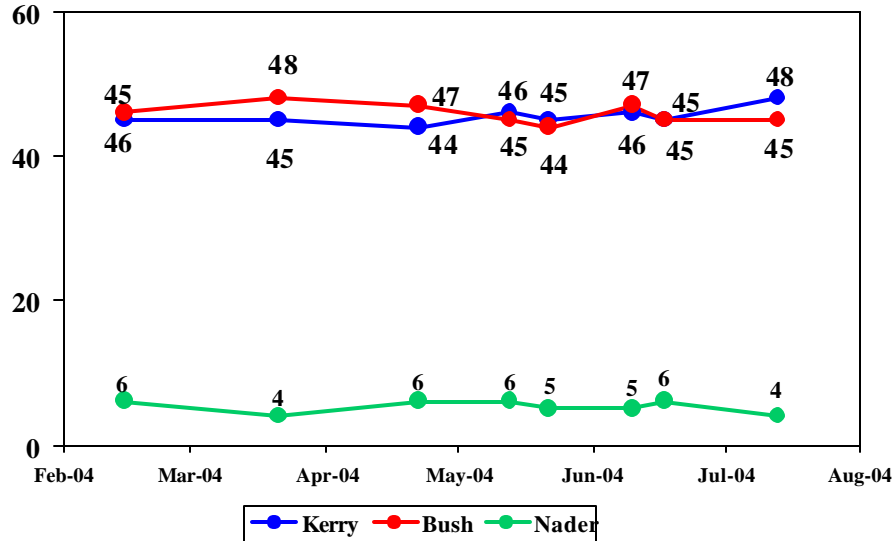
### Presidential Vote With and Without Edwards



Kerry has taken a clear lead in the three-way contest, including Nader and with no mention of vice presidents. Kerry has moved to 48 percent and Bush remains at 45 percent. That 3-point lead represents a 4-point swing in the margin toward the Democrat. Over the past two months, Kerry has been making gains with young voters, single voters, moderates, and with younger (under 50) non-college educated voters, though the last group still strongly supports Bush. This survey re-enforces those trends, with some further gains with white women and independents.

Bush has made gains with more socially conservative voters in the last two months, including older non-college educated women and with practicing white evangelicals and Catholics, though marginally offset by Kerry gains with the non-practicing. Bush has held his overall support in rural areas, though perhaps not in the battleground states.

### Three Way Presidential Vote



Kerry continues to hold a somewhat stronger lead in the battleground states – by 6 points in the two-way vote and 4 points in the three-way vote.

Kerry’s lead is rooted in the desire for change. This is after all, an election about the incumbent and voters want change: 54 percent say the country is headed seriously off on the wrong track: 55 percent say they want to go in a significantly different direction, rather than continue Bush’s direction.

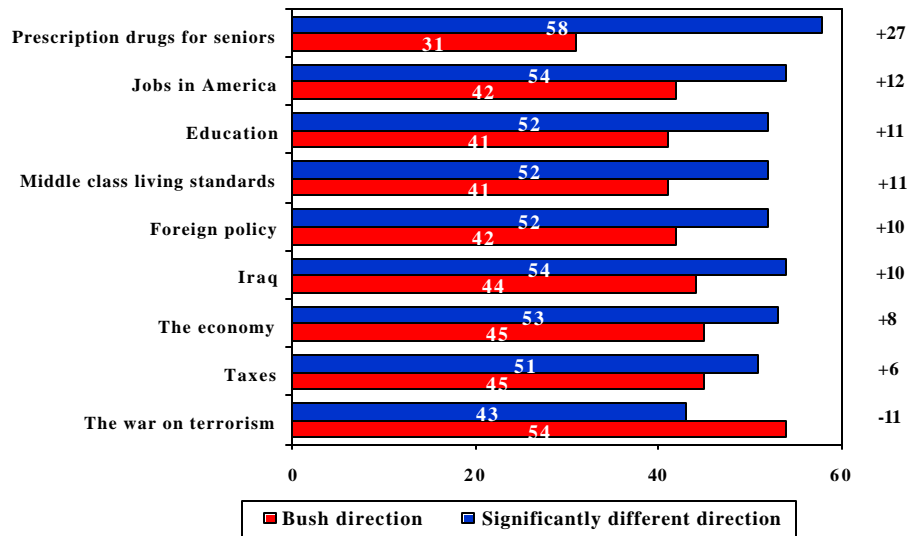
If one focuses on independents – the voters who are not driven by the partisan mood, but by the real social and economic currents and security issues – the change problem is even more dramatic for the administration: by 59 to 40 percent, they want significant change, not to continue Bush’s direction.

The desire for change is most evident in health care and prescription drugs, education, foreign policy and Iraq, and the economy, including jobs and middle class living standards. That puts the Democrats in a strong position to articulate the critique and new direction they would take the country. And the desire for change has risen on virtually all those issues in this poll. Bush has failed to make headway on Iraq and the economy, and Democrats can give voice to their failures.

It is striking that Bush is faltering here on the war on terrorism, where only 54 percent want to continue his policies –only 11 points more than those who want change.

But he is also losing the tax battle, the heart of his economic policies. There is no real area where the president stands on firm ground.

### Bush Direction vs. Significantly Different Direction



*“Now I’d like you to think about some specific issues. When it comes to each issue, please tell me whether you believe the country should continue in the direction Bush is headed or go in a significantly different direction.”*

This is the first survey in which Democracy Corps compares Kerry and Bush on the issues, and it is consistent with the current dynamics of the race. Kerry is ahead on middle class living standards, jobs and the economy, energy policy, and education. He is essentially even on taxes, foreign policy and Iraq – which is the heart of Bush’s primary rationale for re-election. Bush is ahead on handling the war on terrorism, but only by 51 to 40 percent – just 5 points above his vote in the two-way race.

Nonetheless, Kerry’s issue lead over Bush is weaker than the desire for change from Bush. Kerry is only ahead by 4 points on being on your side. In short, Kerry needs to gain further standing on the economy and foreign affairs, while also showing he is a strong advocate for people.

### Kerry Winning the Message Battle

Part of Kerry’s strong positioning coming into the race centers on his advantage in overall message. That was not only the case, but Kerry’s message about making America stronger at home and respected in the world decisively defeats Bush’s message about the war on terrorism, economic progress, tax cuts, and education. In fact, it is not

close. Kerry is crystallizing the essential critique people feel and offering hope for a new direction. The Bush message falls remarkably flat.

John Kerry says, I believe in an America that's strong at home and respected in the world. In Iraq, our go-it-alone foreign policy has left us bearing all the costs and without a plan for success. We must never compromise our commitment to a strong military, but we need to rebuild our alliances in order to more effectively fight the war on terrorism and ease our burden in Iraq. Here at home, a strong country starts with a strong middle class. Today more than ever, the middle class is squeezed, with prices for health care, college tuition, and gasoline skyrocketing while incomes remain stagnant. We need to cut middle class taxes, keep jobs in America with good wages and benefits, cut the deficit in half to protect Social Security, and pass health care reform that makes health care accessible and affordable to every American. My economic plan offers a new direction that stands up for the middle class because I recognize that a strong America starts at home.

George Bush says, I am optimistic about America because I believe in the people of America. In Iraq, we have accomplished our central goals - the removal of Saddam Hussein and his ability to develop weapons of mass destruction and the return of Iraqi government to the Iraqi people - and made our country safer. Here at home, our economy, after suffering recession, terrorist attacks, and corporate scandals, is growing faster than at any time in the last 20 years, showing that our tax cuts are working. With nearly a million and a half new jobs created and homeownership at an all-time high, we need to make these tax cuts permanent so this growth continues. We've also improved our schools, raising standards and increasing funding to ensure that no child is left behind, and my new Medicare plan will mean lower drug costs for seniors. Our country is moving in the right direction again.

At every level, the Kerry message scores stronger. On intensity, 35 percent are much more likely to support him after hearing it, compared to 26 percent for the Bush message (a 9-point gap); on being more likely to support, almost half, 49 percent, say yes after hearing Kerry, but only 39 percent say yes to Bush (a 10-point gap). The percent more likely to support Bush trails his vote by 7 points, meaning he is getting no lift. Indeed, if one looks at the number who respond positively in any way, 61 percent say yes to Kerry, but only 48 percent to Bush (a 13-point gap).

In the battleground states, Bush is losing the message war by 14 points (50 percent more likely to vote for Kerry after hearing his message, compared to a paltry 36 percent for Bush).

### **Remarkable Stability – Vote to Change on the Economy and Iraq**

While Kerry has made recent gains and Bush has sought to educate voters about the economy, Iraq, and Kerry's misplaced values, the race has settled into a structure – one favorable to Kerry and hard to deconstruct from Bush's point of view. They are having trouble getting heard on the key issues, largely because voters' attitudes have seemed to lock in around certain conclusions and because many of the key trends are moving against the president.

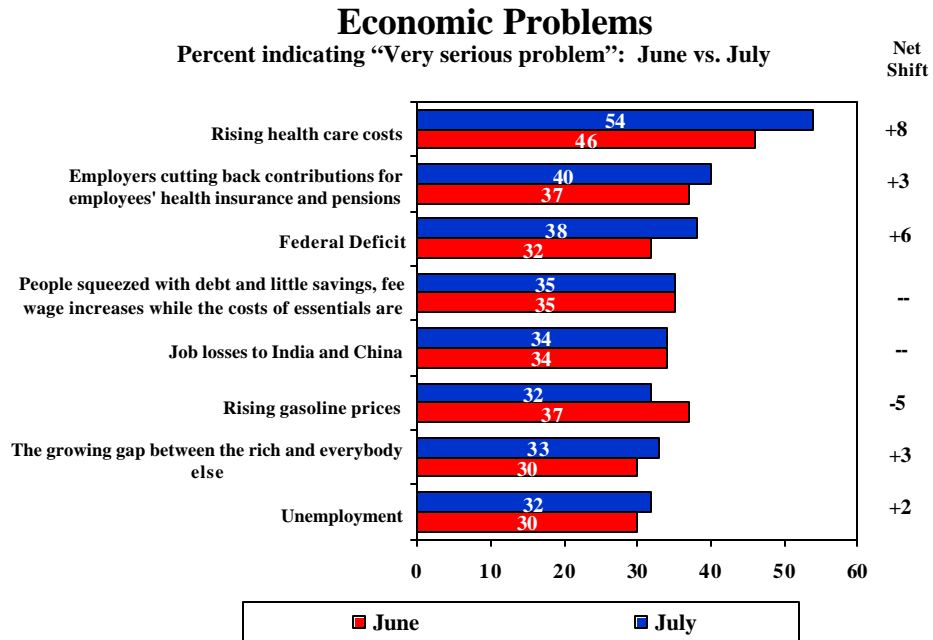
The starting point for the stability is the race itself. In the three-way race for president, Bush has been stuck at 45 percent for three months – and indeed, started the year at 46 percent.

Over the last four months, the percentage saying the country was on the wrong track has been stuck at 55 percent. The same is true for wanting a significant change in direction from Bush.

The same kind of stability is there on the economy and Iraq, despite the swirl of events all around them.

*Stability in the Economic Narrative.* Voters did notice when reports of a strong economy became more frequent, and last month there was a significant increase in the number of voters who wanted to continue Bush's direction on the economy and jobs. But in both areas this month, sentiment has rebounded somewhat: voters want a new economic direction by a net 8 points (up 4 points to 53 to 45 percent); on jobs in America, for change by a net 12 points, 54 to 42 percent – with intensity up 2 points.

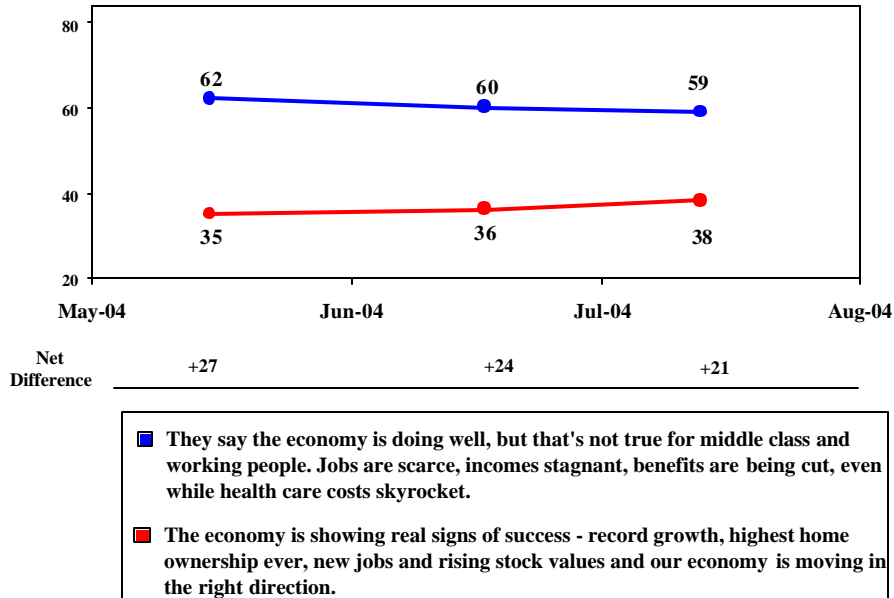
Much more important is people's assessment of all aspects of the economy impacting their lives. In the great majority of areas, people are worried more, not less – particularly about health care costs, which jumped 8 points this month alone (to 54 percent very worried). While worry about gas prices has fallen off a little, the dominant pattern is growing worries about health care costs and employers cutting back benefits, particularly for health care.



*"For each one, I'd like you to tell me whether you think the issue is a very serious problem?"*

Not surprisingly, Democrats continue to win the essential economic debate between a middle class squeezed and the evidence of economic progress. By 59 to 38 percent, voters believe that the middle class faces stagnant incomes, scarce jobs, cuts in benefits as health care costs are rising; not as the economists say, that the economy is showing signs of success, with increased employment, high home ownership, stock values and the like. That outcome of that debate remains largely unchanged, with the slightest of narrowing. Giving stability to this structure are the 51 percent who "strongly" reject the economic progress argument, down only 2 points from June and 5 points from May. Still, a majority of the electorate, on the eve of the Democratic convention, strongly reject Bush's core case for progress.

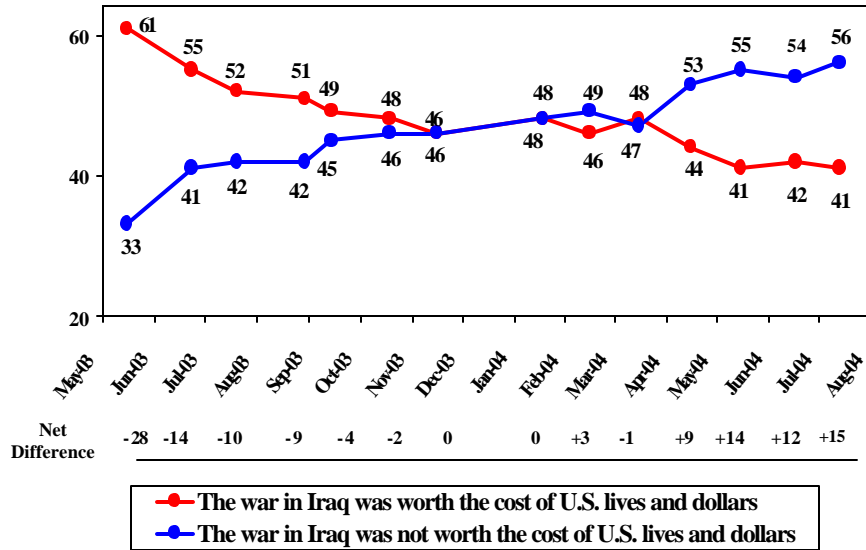
**Middle Class Squeezed vs. Economic Success**



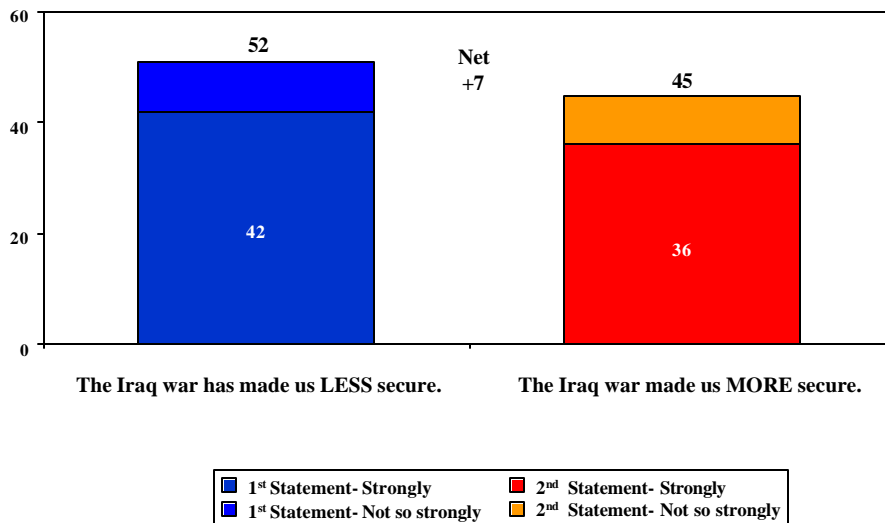
*Stability in the Iraq and Foreign Policy Narrative.* Sovereignty has passed, but there is precious little evidence in this survey of any progress for Bush on Iraq and foreign policy. By a net 10 points, the voters want to go in a different direction than Bush on Iraq and on foreign policy. But this is unchanged over the month.

On two critical criteria – whether Iraq was worth it and whether it has made us safer – Bush has lost the argument, unmoved by the transfer of “sovereignty” and the creation of more legitimate Iraqi leaders. A very large and growing majority of 56 percent say Iraq was not worth the cost in lives and dollars, with only 41 percent saying it was. More people say the intervention has made us less secure (52 to 45 percent) – the same as the previous month.

### Was the War in Iraq Worth it?



### War in Iraq: Less Secure vs. More Secure



*“Now I’m going to read you some pairs of statements. As I read each pair, please tell me whether the FIRST statement or the SECOND statement comes closer to your own views, even if neither is exactly right.”*

We mounted a national security debate – on the president’s terrain of resoluteness and hunting down the terrorists, contested by Kerry’s call for greater engagement. That

national security debate is a draw, where it stood two months ago, though Kerry had won it last month. Still, the president should be dominating this area, as Democrats are dominating health care. Instead, the structure of the foreign policy and security world remains stable, giving the president no advantage; indeed, he continues to trail on critical conclusions necessary for a comeback.

Overall, it is hard not to be struck by the stability of the structure that leaves Bush at 45 percent of the vote, with large majorities wanting change, with large majorities denying the economic progress for the middle class, and clear and stable majorities drawing dire conclusions about Iraq and wanting a change in U.S. foreign policy.

There is a reason why Democrats are handily winning the message debate and Kerry's vote is moving up. The structure is stable, but we should work to make it unshakeable. The Democrats need to re-enforce Kerry's message of America stronger at home and respected in the world. They need to join the economic debate about middle class America and the jobs with less pay and benefits, and above all, the rising health care costs. They need to critique the Iraq policy that has made us less secure and advance a vision of America in the world that can give us hope.