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To: Friends of Democracy Corps

From: Stan Greenberg
James Carville
Bob Shrum

RE: THE PRICE OF SILENCE
A Review of What Happened and What has to Happen

The election of 2002 produced a political earthquake. Republicans took control of all the institutions of government, and that will have profound policy and political implications. But 2002 was not an electoral earthquake. With the country divided down the middle, a relatively minor shift to the right – almost invisible to most analysts right up to election eve – gave the Republicans their crucial victory.

On Election Day, Republicans won by 4 points in voting for the House of Representatives (51 to 47 percent). That produced a gain of just 4 seats in the House. In the Senate, Democrats went from a one-seat majority to being in the minority. That represents a swing of 4 points away from Democratic performance in 2000 (even), actually the switch of around 2 percent of the voters, not a seismic change.

This small, but dramatic shift was produced by historic events, by a President who took the stage and played his part boldly, by tactics, and by money. And it was produced by the Democrats who barely took the stage, failed to tell voters what this election was about, and failed to offer bold critiques or alternatives, particularly on the economy.

This imbalance of energy and direction produced a unique electorate, which would have been noted election night, had the traditional exit polls been available. The 2002 electorate was more Republican and much more conservative than those that showed up in the Presidential election of 2000 and the off-year election of 1998. Republicans were greatly energized by their campaigns, while Democrats were not.

But, as we shall see in this memorandum, the voters could have responded differently. Indeed, they were very open to new, bold ideas, even as the Democrats chose silence.

As the press speculates about the President launching on his sweeping conservative, pro-business agenda, it is worth noting that the voters gave him no such mandate. The question then, is how Democrats respond to this moment. In the end, this survey shows that the 2002 voters were ready to respond to a bold Democratic critique and agenda. That is the mandate that Democrats will have to mold in the year ahead.

This memorandum uses post-election surveys conducted for the Campaign for America's Future and for Democracy Corps.¹ These 2000 interviews, 25 minute surveys, represent the most comprehensive look at why voters did what they did. They also give us an insight into the battleground Congressional districts and battleground US Senate states, where the election was fought out.

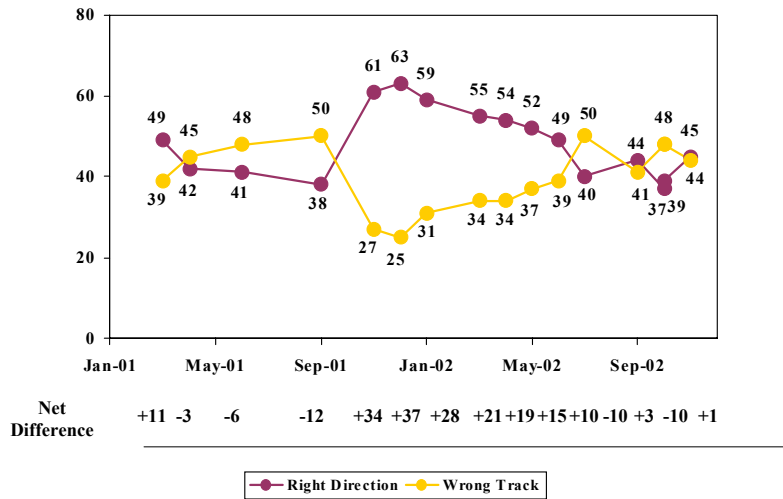
9-11: The Dominant Story of 2002

The last 14 months in America have been dominated by the 9-11 attack and the war on terrorism, on its many fronts. This has shaped the mood in ways that made it difficult to challenge the Republicans, particularly when the terrorist-like events, such as snipers, and the Administration drive on Iraq carried right through the campaign's final months. A Democratic resurgence in August was crushed by the Iraq debate and the President's late campaign, focused on Iraq and homeland security.

The entire campaign is symbolized by voter responses to the question, is the country headed in the right direction or is it seriously off track? The country had little confidence in the country's leadership before 9-11, but rallied to support the country and the President over the next 10 months. Voters lost confidence with the corporate scandals and economic weakening, but then the late Iraq focus brought the country back to its original division, split evenly between right and wrong direction.

¹ The Campaign for America's Future and Democracy Corps conducted surveys of 1000 respondents each on election night and the night afterwards. The surveys included those who voted in 2002 (1763 respondents in the two surveys) but also Presidential year voters who failed to vote (229 respondents). Nearly all the results presented here refer to 2002 voters. The memorandum refers, as well, to post-election studies done for National Public Radio (conducted jointly by Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research and Public Opinion Strategies), which of course, is not responsible for any of the editorial judgements contained in this memorandum.

Direction

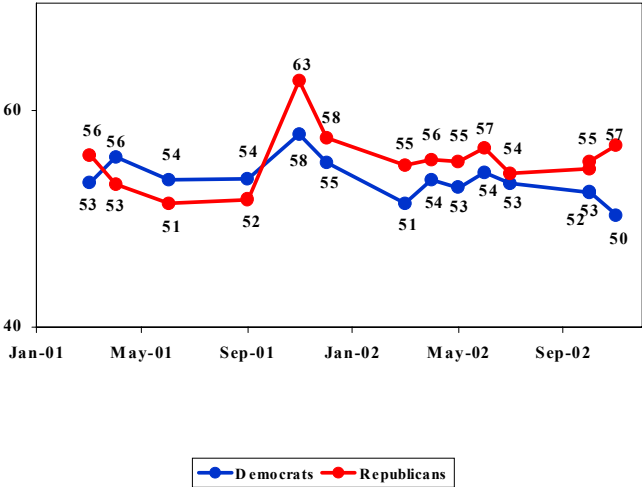


The sustained era of good feeling, partially restored at the end had a number of important political consequences:

- The President’s job approval, driven by security issues, remained in the mid-sixties right up the election – indeed, 64 percent for actual Election Day voters.
- After 9-11, voters started viewing Republicans more positively than Democrats. While concern about the economy grew at the end and confidence dropped, the Republicans finished this election with greater standing than the Democrats. A few weeks before Election Day, their advantage was a net 3 degrees, which grew to a 6-degree advantage on Election Day (56.8 degrees on our thermometer scale, compared to 50.3 degrees).²
- The Republicans emerged, not surprisingly, with a strong advantage on keeping America secure. A 16-point Republican advantage grew to about 25 points for most of the year, but jumped to 40 points on Election Day. As we shall see, support for the President and the war on terrorism helped create an electorate energized by security issues.

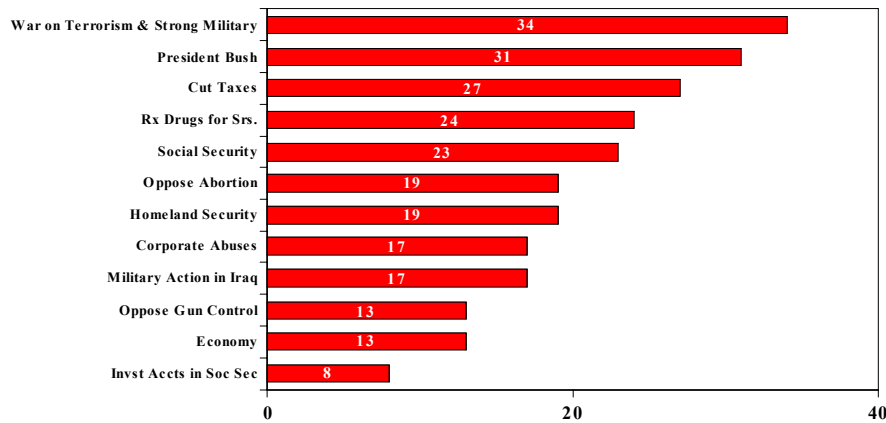
² In our thermometer scale, we ask voters to rate their feelings toward a person or entity on a scale of zero to 100 with zero being a very cold unfavorable feeling and 100 being a very warm favorable feeling.

Party Thermometers



Thus, when we asked those who voted or considered voting Republican, what was most important in that decision, the top two reasons were to support the war on terrorism and a strong military (34 percent) and to support President Bush (31 percent); another 19 percent said to speed up action on homeland security. These obviously came ahead of taxes and other aspects of the Republican agenda. (The NPR survey found the same pattern, asking in an open-end format, asking what you heard that made you feel more favorable about the Republicans in the last week.)

Reasons to Vote for the Republican



“Let me read you a list of reasons to vote for the Republican candidate for Congress. Which THREE describe the best reasons for you personally in this election to support or consider the Republican candidate?”

The late Republican campaign focused on George Bush, Iraq, homeland security, and other issues energized conservatives and help change the character of the Election Day electorate. Nothing comparable was happening on the Democratic side. We already noted the surge on security. But in the last month, the likely electorate began to include more pro-gun voters (up 4 points); on Election Day, there were suddenly more pro-life voters (up 4 points from the norm). This is part of a surge of strong Republican identifiers. On Election Day, 28 percent of voters were “strong” Republicans, up about 3 points in the last month and up around 5 points from the summer. The number of “strong” Democrats actually declined a few points to 19 percent. But that means there was a 9-point gap in intense party support on Election Day.

The Republicans achieved this late mobilization despite the fact that the traditional cultural issues – guns and abortion – were not very high up on reasons to vote Republican this year. This contrasts sharply with 2000 when the cultural issues were dominant. Republican intensity was driven by a conservative President, emphasizing family values and patriotism, who was able to campaign on Iraq and security.

In the end, 39 percent of the actual voters self-identified as Republicans, 3 percent more than in 2000 and 1998. The Democratic portion fell to 35 percent (down from 39 percent in 2000 and 37 percent in 1998). That alone could more than account for the shift witnessed at the polls.

There was an even bigger increase in self-identified conservatives in the electorate, 41 percent, compared to approximately 30 percent two and four years ago. That re-

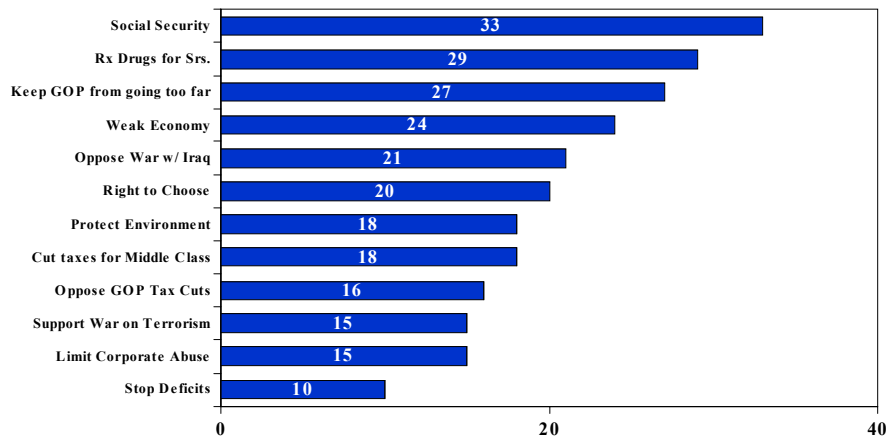
flects the increased conservatism of this post-9-11 period and the conservative energy reflected in turnout on Election Day.³

Muddying Issues: Prescription Drugs and Social Security

The Republicans set out to muddy a number of issues, particularly prescription drugs and to some extent Social Security. Bob Borosage, Director of Campaign for America’s Future, called it “cross-dressing.” Whatever it is called, the Republican strategy, buttressed by massive special interest money, was successful.

Democrats were not wrong-headed to think they could make progress on health care and retirement issues. The biggest reasons to vote Democratic were Social Security (33 percent) and prescription drugs (29 percent). And indeed, Democrats on Election Day stood well above the Republicans on health care (+19 points), prescription drugs (+18 points) and Social Security (+9 points).

Reasons to Vote for the Democrat



“Let me read you a list of reasons to vote for the Democratic candidate for Congress. Which THREE describe the best reasons for you personally in this election to support or consider the Democratic candidate?”

But the Democratic advantage on these issues was muted by Republican legislative and campaign tactics and money. While Democrats preserved their advantage on Election Day on many issues, including the budget, their margin dropped 3 points on pre-

³ We are also checking with VNS exit polling to make sure there is not any wording differences that might account for these results.

scription drugs, 7 points on Social Security, and 7 on education, compared to the Democracy Corps pre-election poll conducted October 22-24, 2002.

Social Security was still a defining issue in the election: 55 percent of voters said Republicans and Democrats differed on the issue, compared to 32 percent who thought both were trying to protect it. Privatization helped crystallize the issue, though Republican efforts to eschew privatization and to attack Democrats for taxing Social Security, reduced the Democratic advantage.

The prescription drugs issue, on the other hand, was neutralized. A plurality of the 2002 voters (43 percent) said both parties were supporting prescription drug benefits for seniors; only one-third said the parties disagreed on this issue. The Pharma campaign clearly achieved its cynical goal.

In one of the most striking findings in the survey, we found that getting prescription drug coverage for seniors and protecting Social Security were the 4th and 5th most important reasons to vote *Republican*.

The Lost Economy

The voters thought that the economy was the decisive issue in the election. Only the Democrats did not notice. This is one of the biggest fumbles in election history.

Voters thought the economy was sick: 70 percent said it was in only fair or poor shape. That was also true in the battleground Senate and congressional contests.

Voters insisted, by a 57 to 35 percent, that the economy was the most important issue in their vote, more than the war on terrorism and Iraq. This was no less true in this year's electoral battlegrounds.

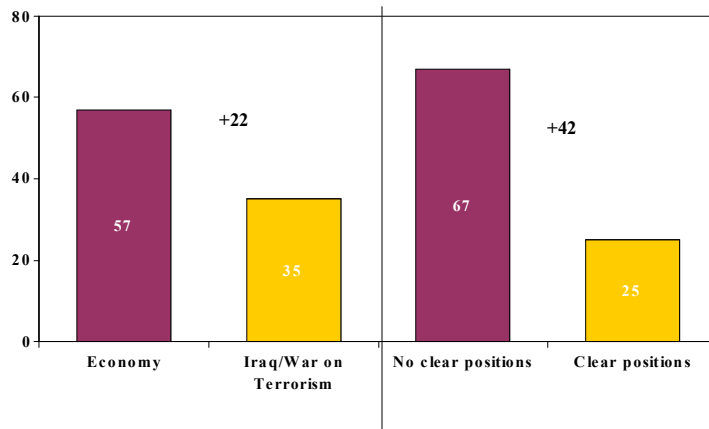
But on Election Day 2002, the voters were no more likely to turn to the Democrats than Republicans on handling the economy. In fact, Republicans were ahead by 2 points.

Maybe Republicans had better economic ideas in 2002. Plausible, but the data does not support that. In fact, the voters seemed hungry for an identifiable Democratic posture on the economy. In the post-election surveys, Democratic economic ideas trounced Republican ones. The Republicans had no mandate.

What the Republicans had going into this election was clarity of thinking. Remarkably, they enjoyed a 25-point advantage over the Democrats on "having clear ideas on what they want to do." But that seemed to apply mainly to the President's clear determination on security issues, not the economy.

On the economy, voters went to the polls, troubled by what was happening around them, determined to vote the issue, but faced with the muddle of politicians, particularly Democrats, who never spoke clearly on the economy. Two-thirds of the voters said the candidates this year did not set out clear positions on how to deal with the economy.

The Economy



“Now I’m going to read you a pair 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.”

In the survey for Campaign for America’s Future, we simulated two Democratic economic messages against a strong Republican one. The Republican message, focused on the weak economy and high taxes, committed to make the tax cuts permanent, lower taxes on corporations and small businesses, and simplify the tax code to cut red tape. About half the voters (52 percent) favored the approach, but that scored 17 points lower than either Democratic economic message.

One Democratic message focused on canceling the scheduled tax cuts and cutting taxes for low and middle income families, investing in school construction and homeland security, and extending unemployment benefits: 69 percent favored this proposal, 43 percent strongly.

Another Democratic message proposed postponing any new tax cuts, focusing on reining in spending, balancing the budget, and encouraging long-term growth: 69 percent favored this approach, 46 percent strongly.⁴

⁴ In the battleground states and districts, the same pattern was true on these economic proposals: 50 percent favored the Republican tax cut economic approach, compared to 70 percent favoring each of the Democratic approaches.

Without judging which economic course Democrats should have taken, it seems that any serious Democratic approach on the economy would have dominated those simple anti-tax proposals advanced by the Republicans.

In the Democracy Corps survey, we forced the choice on taxes.

The Democrat says, we should roll back the tax cut for the top one percent scheduled to take place a few years from now and use the funds now to fund middle class tax cuts, investments in education and to help with prescription drugs.

The Republican says, we should make President Bush's tax cuts permanent but in addition, cut taxes for individuals and abolish corporate taxes to spur the economy and put money back in people's pockets.

The voters – who supported the Republicans by 3 points in the congressional elections – favored the Democrats on this tax issue by 10 points.

Clearly, the Republicans broke even on the economy, the lead voting issue, only because the Democrats remained silent. If Republicans interpret that as a mandate, then hopefully the Democratic silence will come to an end.

The Lost Grip

This was not an election that is likely to re-align anything among voters, given the marginal shift to the Republicans. But Republicans got their critical gains because of their success in nationalizing the election and creating conservative energy around the President and security issues. Democrats lost ground mainly because of a loss of energy and some slippage in key groups.

As we pointed out earlier, the biggest change was in the Republican and conservative composition of the actual voting electorate on November 5th.

This year, the Democrats proved somewhat weaker with women, winning by only 2 percent, compared to 8 points in 2000 (and 5 in 1998).

Democrats lost seniors by 5 points. That is considerably lower than in 2000 when Democrats fought the prescription drug battle and won by 4 points. Still, Democrats had lost seniors by 10 points in 1998, reflecting the pull back of seniors on values issues.

While union households held up their percentage of the off-year electorate (21 percent), Democratic support was down by 5 points. Still, Democrats won 55 percent of voters in union households.

Democrats remain weak among married voters, losing the women by 12 points and the men by 19. They lost men aged 50 years and under by 13 points. They lost rural areas by 24 points. There is no evidence, however, that the shifts this year were produced by further erosion with the married, younger men or the rural areas.

What is striking is that how the great middle of the electorate remains contested, in 2002 and beyond. Democrats won in large and smaller cities but split evenly in the suburban areas and trailed only by a few points in smaller towns. Democrats ran well with voters earning under \$30,000 and Republicans ran comparably with voters earning over \$75,000. But in the great middle of the income spectrum, Democrats broke even with those earning between \$30,000 and \$50,000, and trailed by a few points among those earning \$50,000-\$75,000.

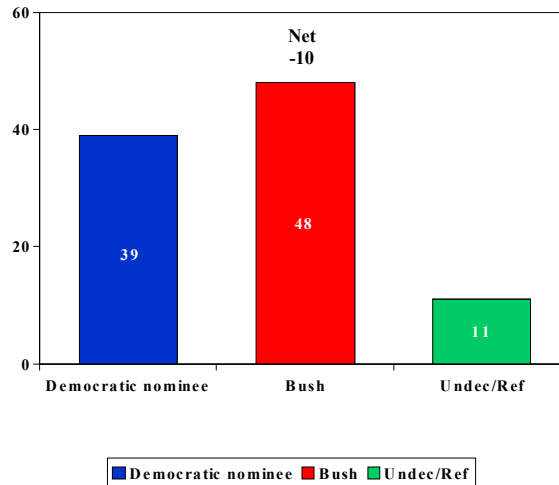
The great bulk of the electorate, it seems, remained fairly divided, prepared to respond differently to different times, different choices and different agendas.

Future for Democratic Boldness

The same voters who applauded George Bush and who stood frustrated on the economic issue are prepared to respond to a new Democratic boldness. In a special set of questions, we explored how these same voters would vote for President and how they would respond to a set of sweeping Republican and Democratic proposals on the key questions facing the country.

Voters affirmed their views about the security situation in this election and were frustrated in their desires on the economy, but that was about 2002, not 2004. When asked how they intend to vote for President, just 48 percent chose Bush over a generic Democratic nominee. From our point of view, that suggests voters indeed had a limited mandate in mind, at least with regard to the President.

2004 Presidential Vote



But voters, no doubt frustrated by this year's failure to address key problems, respond to bold Democratic proposals on health care, retirement, the economy, global engagement, corporate responsibility and tax reform. For the most part, this same electorate that tilted the country into the hands of the Republicans prefers the Democrats on the major unaddressed issues.

On health care, two-thirds of the voters (and over three-quarters of the non-voters) say they feel much more or somewhat more positive about the Democrat after hearing their proposal; 41 percent felt much more positive. The Democrat spoke out boldly on the health care crisis, moving to achieve universal health coverage, prescription drugs for seniors and patients rights.

On energy security, a remarkable 71 percent of this year's voters said they were more positive about a Democrat who was determined to achieve energy security and independence from Middle East oil by turning to car efficiency, cleaner and new energy sources, including solar, and financial incentives for new technology. This Democrat scored 18 points more positive than a Republican seeking energy independence through increased domestic production.

On the economy and taxes, 60 percent say they are more positive about a Democrat who wants to cancel the tax cut for the top 1 percent, cut taxes for the middle class now, and invest in school construction and homeland security. That Democrat scores 18 points higher than a Republican who wants to make the tax cuts permanent.

On Social Security, a Democrat who is determined to protect Social Security against borrowing and privatization is received positively by 62 percent, well above the Republican who wants to be bold and create private accounts to give people more control over their money (48 percent).

On global engagement, a Democrat speaking about the need for multilateralism and warning of a “go-it-alone” foreign policy is received positively by 62 percent, 6 points higher than the reception for a Republican insisting on waging the war on terrorism, alone if necessary, to defend America’s security.

On radical tax reform, a Democratic progressive proposal to simplify the tax structure and get rid of loopholes and deductions, including those favoring corporations, is received positively by 56 percent. Again, that does better than a Republican advocating a flat tax (47 percent).

These various Democratic proposals score well above a Democratic candidate who advocates bi-partisanship, a focus on deficit reduction, to achieve higher business investment, more employment and growth. While wanting to delay the tax cut, the candidate supports tax credits for education and new technology. Just 55 percent say they feel positively about this Democratic candidate.

Without trying to judge which bold proposals Democrats should advance, we simply want to underscore that this was an electorate hungry for Democrats who speak out and address the country’s greatest problems. In light of what happened after 9-11 and with the Democrats silent on the economy, they gave the edge to the Republicans, but not a mandate. Once again, this is still the Democrats’ moment.