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**To:** Friends of Democracy Corps

**From:** Stan Greenberg  
James Carville

**RE: FROM SMALL BOUNCE TO BIG OPPORTUNITY**

Report on the Post-convention Environment for Change and How to Make the Most of it

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The Democratic convention in Boston has given the Kerry-Edwards ticket a clear lead in the race, 5 points in our Democracy Corps poll just completed (49 to 44 percent, with 4 percent for Nader). That is fully consistent with the other public polls, excepting the publicly released CNN poll conducted mostly on a Friday and Saturday of an August weekend.<sup>1</sup> (In a head-to-head contest, Kerry enjoys a 7-point lead, taking 52 percent of the vote). That represents a small “bounce,” compared to our previous poll completed a week before the convention – with the margin up 2 points and the Kerry vote up only a point. In the two-way, the bounce was 4 points, and Kerry’s vote up 2 points.<sup>2</sup>

The Kerry campaign did accomplish important things at the convention, which we do not minimize and which together may well form a staging area for later advances. It made gains on strength and a “stronger America” and foreign policy, the convention’s theme, an identification with veterans, and on having a hopeful vision. The expressions of faith may have made Kerry well with Catholic voters, who had pulled back from him earlier.

Indeed, while the convention may not have produced a “bounce,” Kerry has emerged from the five-month general election campaign since Super Tuesday well ahead of Bush on having a hopeful vision, caring about people, honesty, the economy, and even sharing your values.

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<sup>1</sup> Democracy Corps conducted a survey of 1,013 likely voters August 2-5, 2004; other public polls showing consistent data include: ABC News/Washington Post poll of 1,200 adults conducted July 30 through August 1, 2004, American Research Group poll of 776 registered voters, conducted July 30 through August 1, CBS News poll of 1,052 adults conducted July 30 through August 1, Marist College poll of 1,075 adults conducted July 30 through August 2, and a Newsweek poll of 1,190 adults conducted July 29 through July 30.

<sup>2</sup> If one looks at the 8 polls conducted right before the convention, Kerry had an average lead of 1.5 points, which would suggest a convention bounce of about 3.5 points in the margin.

And finally, the convention, predictably, fully consolidated Democrats, 93 percent of whom are now voting for Kerry, with Bush squeezed down to 4 and Nader to 2 points. That was counter-balanced by the Republicans who, also predictably, consolidated in like numbers after hearing Kerry. The partisans were both apparently just waiting for their cues.

Despite these accomplishments, the small shift in the vote is disappointing, particularly as there were few noticeable shifts in other areas: on personal favorability and leadership attributes, on issues and on perceptions of Bush. We hoped the convention would have pushed up the Kerry vote at least to the proportion wanting change – and then some more, reflecting the usual unreality of many voters momentarily taken with all the excitement and hope.

It is possible that the country has been so polarized so early that such changes are not possible. That is certainly part of the story. Voters have been paying inordinate attention – since Super Tuesday, at a level higher than October of the two previous presidential elections – and at least that level in the battleground states, where they have already seen six months of advertising. The president's decision to be a president for his base rather than the country and to be a full-fledged candidate starting in March has created a very mature and political and hardly fickle electorate.

We think the Kerry campaign and Democrats should chase the larger majority wanting change by delivering their message more fully and by reaching out more broadly electorally to shake up what are now entrenched voting patterns.

The convention introduced the slogan and framework, “stronger at home, respected in the world.” It defined the framework wholly in terms of security, the war on terrorism and foreign policy. John Kerry was presented as a military person prepared to defend the country. Thus, the convention sent the important message: John Kerry will keep America strong militarily and restore her strength in dealing with the world. The DNC advertising is re-enforcing those very points.

But voters will respond more fully when they hear the full message. Voters are frustrated with Bush's policies and priorities that leave so many of our problems unattended and want a leader who will address our problems at home, particularly the economy and health care. Without that frustration and passion and definition, Democrats do not get the full power of the message.

To really move people, everything Democrats do and say has to connect to the framework. To be strong at home, means keeping jobs in America, not exporting them; to be strong at home, means all having affordable health care; to be strong at home means an America with new energy sources independent of the Middle East turmoil. Because Bush has thumbed his nose at the world and failed to build respect, we carry the whole burden alone, unable to devote our energies to making a stronger America at home.

The incomplete message framework is related to the inability to upend some of the emerging voting patterns. The convention re-enforced the emerging trends in the electorate, with Kerry making gains with college graduates, those earning over \$75,000, in large cities and suburbs. That is counter-balanced by slippage or just flat support among the non-college educated, small towns and rural areas. These voters are more religious but also more populist and nationalist and many want to see the country move in a different direction. Not speaking to them – and not fully advancing our message – puts a real ceiling on the gains that are possible.

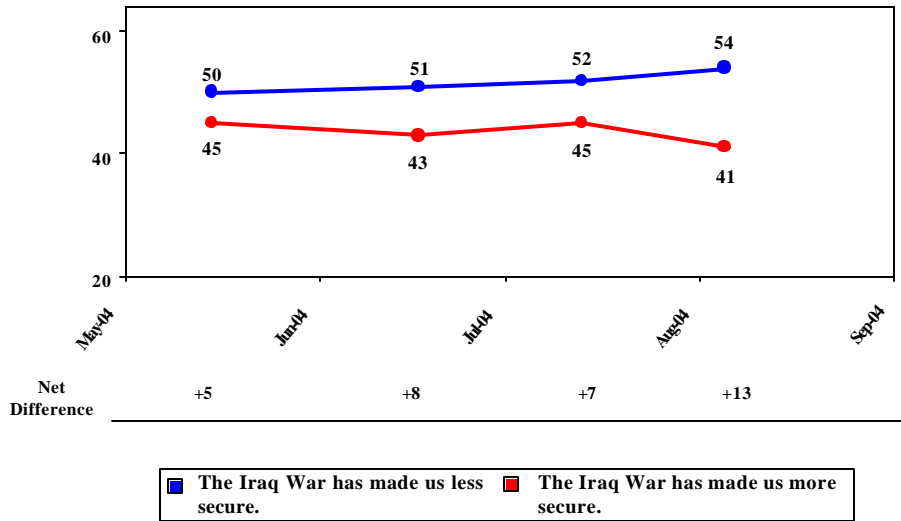
But all that is also opportunity. With the gains the campaign has achieved on American strength and security and on hopefulness, it is in a strong position to consolidate and even enlarge its lead, when it delivers the campaign message with all its potential power.

### **The Stable Majority for Change**

These gains are possible because the basic structure of the race remains amazingly unmoved by events, with Bush actually weakening on some key indicators. Frankly, 55 percent of the country are ready to vote for change of some kind: 55 percent say the country has gotten seriously off on the wrong track, 54 percent say that we should move in a significantly different direction rather than continue Bush's direction, and 55 percent say they are no better off since Bush came to office.

The two big drivers the race, Iraq and the economy, show no sign of changing course. A large majority still says the war not worth it (53 to 43 percent) and a growing number say Iraq has made us less secure (54 to 41 percent). A growing majority accept John Kerry's basic approach to security, compared to Bush's, which is a stunning starting point for the Republican convention. And 60 percent of the country now says Bush is "too ready to go to war," including 43 percent who believe that strongly.

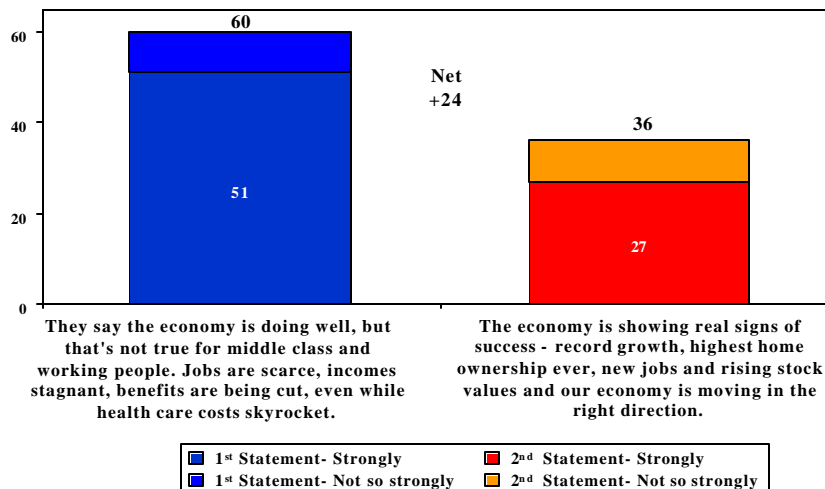
### War in Iraq: More or Less Secure



*“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.”*

On the economy, we again show no lessening of worries on five of six economic indicators, including unemployment, financial squeeze and health benefits. Indeed, Kerry’s lead over Bush on the economy, now 7 points, has grown in the last month, prior to the recent job numbers. There is a growing majority, now reaching 60 percent, that rejects Bush’s argument for economic success and instead sees a middle class facing scarce jobs, stagnant incomes, benefit cuts, and rising health care costs.

### Middle Class Squeezed vs. Economic Success



At this point in the race, Kerry has respectable leads over Bush on handling foreign policy, the economy and education; substantial ones on jobs, middle class living standards, prescription drugs and the federal deficit. They are at parity on issues that Bush should lead: taxes, Iraq and making a stronger America. Bush leads by about 10 points on the war on terrorism and homeland security, but his lead should be greater: just 51 percent pick Bush on his signature issue.

While Kerry has not taken significant ground after the convention, Bush has lost some. Just 50 percent describe him as honest and trustworthy, down 6 points over the past two months; 51 percent say he has misled the country, up 5 points. Growing numbers doubt he shares their values (51 percent) and an amazing 64 percent say he favors big corporate interests over the public interest, up 5 points. The president is increasingly seen as too negative in his campaign, up a stunning 10 points to 43 percent. Clearly, the critiques are being heard and voters are increasingly prepared to vote for change.

Our task should be to realize that majority for change, which is clearly practical. In the race for Congress, this poll gave Congressional Democrats a 10-point lead, even though the Democrats enjoy only a small advantage in party identification. Giving the full meaning to the message is the pre-condition for winning more support, particularly as George Bush tries to use his convention to build a sense of progress and relevance for the issues facing the country.

As Bush goes into convention, about 47 percent grant him many positive qualities, including caring about people, making progress on the country's problems, and someone you can trust to make the right decisions. We should presume that, with a successful convention, he could readily move his vote up at least to that level, obviously making this a closer contest.

### **The Well-Defined Bounce and Implications for the Kerry Message**

While Kerry got a small bounce in the vote, he achieved well-defined gains in important areas and the focus of the convention. A large majority of 58 percent say John Kerry will keep America strong, up 4 points after the convention. On which candidate would do a better job "making a stronger America," the two are effectively tied 47 percent prefer Kerry and 44 percent Bush – but that is an amazing accomplishment in light of the backdrop of the war on terrorism. Kerry also increased the margin on foreign policy by 5 points, driven by Kerry gains and bigger Bush losses.

The strength of the Kerry biography is likely reflected in the voters' 14-point preference for Kerry on dealing with veterans.

Kerry made modest gains on being on your side, up 3 points, while Bush slipped further, giving Kerry an 8-point lead on this critical dimension. He made modest gains on honesty, up 3 points to 59 percent, just as Bush has fallen to the 50 percent mark.

Perhaps most important and reflecting the tone of the convention, 62 percent say Kerry has a hopeful vision for the future. That is up 5 points after the convention and stands a striking 14 points higher than for Bush: only 48 percent see him as similarly hopeful. Combined with the growing number seeing Bush as too negative, that is clearly becoming an important contrast.<sup>3</sup>

That has brought the thermometer rating of the Democratic Party up and above that of the Republicans for the first time in three years (53.4 to 51.6 degrees).

But John Kerry did not make broad gains from the convention. His thermometer was fairly constant, with “warm” responses up only 3 points to 46 percent (and now even with Bush). That contrasts with John Edwards’ thermometer, up significantly to 55.0 degrees (and warm responses up 10 points).

On personal and leadership attributes, few moved up more than a few points and some, like cares about you, remained constant. The convention did not diminish any of the negative attributes, like being too liberal, flip flopping and lack of clear ideas, and too ready to raise taxes.

On the issues, the number choosing Kerry barely rose on the economy (up 1 point), education (up 2), taxes (down 2), creating jobs in America (up 2), raising middle class living standards (up 2), and energy independence (no change).

We think that the bounce was contained largely because the message – stronger at home and respected in the world – is defined purely by the convention’s focus on strength, military, security and foreign policy. That has shaped the electoral choice, as the regression model shows Iraq, foreign policy and hopefulness as the strongest predictors of the vote. But Kerry is even with Bush on Iraq and up only 4 points on foreign policy. While that is important accomplishment, leaving the message there also leaves Kerry short of the majority that is currently possible.

That the message is only partially defined is evident in the fact that Kerry has only a 3-point lead over Bush on making “America stronger at home and in the world (48 to 45 percent). Strong at home is simply subsumed by the general focus on security, without any real domestic content. If it did, Kerry’s advantage would be driven up by his larger margins on the economy and jobs, middle-class living standards, education, health care and energy.

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<sup>3</sup> In the regression models, it ranks in the top three, along with Iraq and foreign policy.

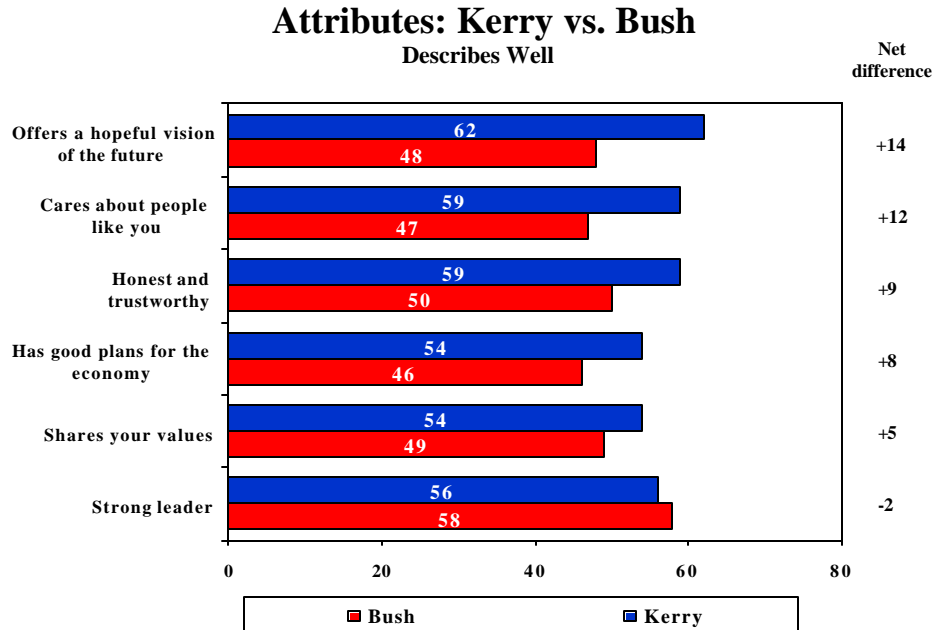
The Kerry message framework will have greater force when it is more fully and consistently articulated. It must contain a core frustration, shared by so many voters: that Bush's policies leave us mired in Iraq alone, meaning we fail to pay attention to America's problems.

The message will also gain power when Kerry and Edwards explicitly define what it means to make America stronger at home, as we discussed above. The campaign has chosen three issues – jobs in America, affordable health care and energy independence – which are quite powerful. (Our earlier research also indicates the power of the federal deficits, linked to protecting Social Security, though we are partial to limiting the case to three items, as of now).

### **Kerry and Bush**

The focus on the bounce should not lose track of the big advantage that Kerry has built up over the last six months over Bush on leadership qualities and on issues. This election took shape early and was joined in the battleground states and nationally. The question now will be whether Bush has the ability, after six months of campaigning outside the Rose Garden, of moving these indicators.

Whether or not the convention was a success, about 60 percent of the country believes that Kerry offers a hopeful vision of the future, that he is likeable, cares about people and is honest and trustworthy. Nearly as many (58 percent) say he will keep America strong and has what it takes to be president. Kerry is 14 points stronger than Bush on hope, 12 points on cares about people like you, 9 points on honesty and 8 points on the economy. Given the principal rationale for Bush candidacy, it is important to note that Kerry is 5 points stronger on shares your values and only 1 point weaker on keeping America safe and 2 points lower on being a “strong leader.”



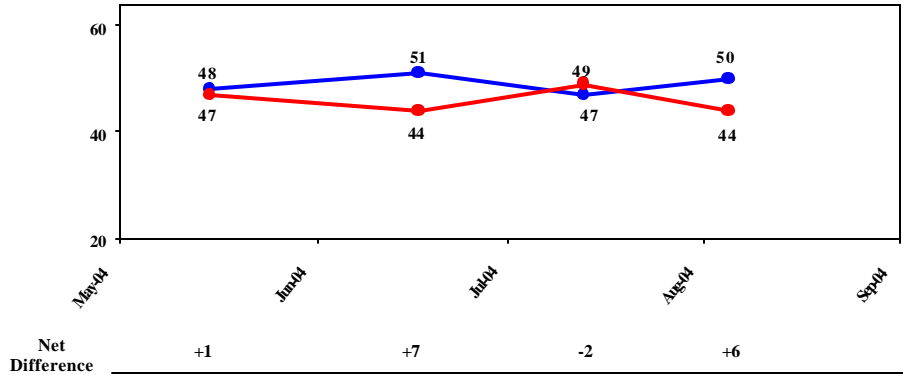
*"Now I am going to ask you something different. I am going to read a list of issues and I want you to tell me whether, overall, you think John Kerry or George Bush would do a better job with this issue. If you do not know, just tell me and we will move on to the next item."*

When one looks at Bush going into his convention, he barely scores above 50 percent on any attribute, except negative ones. About 47 percent grant him most things, including caring, having good plans on the economy and Iraq, making progress on the country's problems and trusting him to make the right decisions. That does suggest that he has the potential to drive his vote up toward that number, which would make the race closer, as we suggested earlier. He reaches 50 percent on honesty, which is dangerously low, and the middle-fifties on security and being a strong leader. But all these perceptions are impacted by the big conclusions people have drawn: too ready to go to war (60 percent) and supports big corporate interests rather than the public interest (64 percent).

### Dominating the Emerging Debate

There is emerging debate in the country on how best to make America secure and relate to the world, and on the character of the current economy. Kerry-Edwards and the Democrats should join that debate fully confident the public fully understands the case for change.

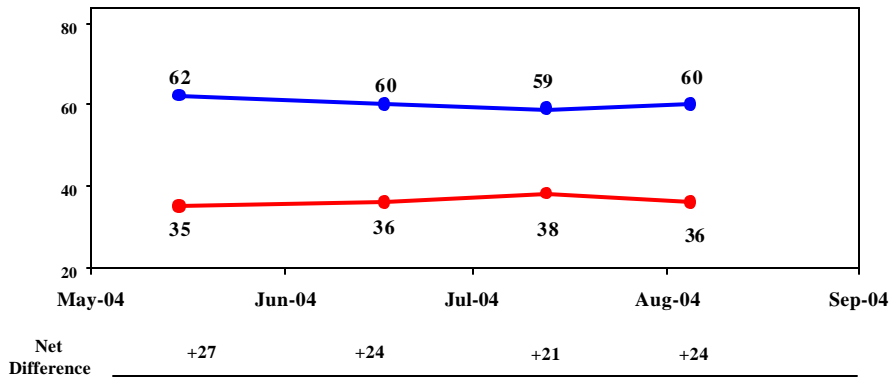
### The National Security Debate



**■** Our current go-it-alone foreign policy is producing less respect for America, weaker and divided international alliances, a hatred of America that fosters new generations of terrorists. Bottom line: it leaves us less secure.

**■** Our current foreign policy shows an America resolute in fighting terrorism and promoting democracy, that puts America's interests before anything else, and that sends a signal to rogue nations and terrorist networks that there is no place to hide. Bottom line: it makes us more secure.

### Middle Class Squeezed vs. Economic Success



**■** They say the economy is doing well, but that's not true for middle class and working people. Jobs are scarce, incomes stagnant, benefits are being cut, even while health care costs skyrocket.

**■** The economy is showing real signs of success - record growth, highest home ownership ever, new jobs and rising stock values and our economy is moving in the right direction.

### Attacking John Kerry and the Stability of the Race

In this survey, we hit Kerry with a barrage of attacks – eight in all, four heard by each respondent. These included attacks on taxes, abortions without limits, defense cuts,

extreme anti-gun record, Dukakis-crime record, Heinz exporting jobs, flip flopping on the war, no Senate record, and gay marriage. These raise serious doubts for over 50 percent of the electorate and on one issue, for almost 60 percent – and thus should be taken seriously. But after all these attacks and a much shorter set of Kerry positive messages, the head-to-head contest closes by only 2 points, leaving Kerry ahead 51 to 46 percent.

The strongest attack is on taxes and obviously cannot be allowed to stand.

The weakest attack is on gay marriage. Interestingly, this raises serious doubts for only 44 percent of the voters.

The off-setting positive themes shows the ability to engage these attacks, while re-enforcing the campaign's main message framework. One theme emphasizes not wearing religion on one's sleeve but giving expression to shared values that unite us – “family, faith, hard work, opportunity and responsibility for all, so that every child, every adult, every parent, every worker in America has an equal shot at living up to their God-given potential.” Almost 60 percent said they are more likely to support Kerry after hearing that. It would only have been stronger had John Kerry said, “that's what I mean by a stronger America.”

The other positive theme, which tested the strongest, joins the tax attack by re-asserting emphasis on a “strong middle class being critical to a strong America.” Kerry commits to repealing Bush's tax cuts for those earning over \$200,000 and to cutting middle class taxes and health care costs. The statement concludes with the campaign message framework and over 60 percent say they are more likely to support Kerry: “Strengthening the middle class is our starting point in making a stronger America at home.”

There is power in the Kerry-Edwards message framework advanced at the convention, which has the ability to give the campaign a further bounce – and deny Bush his.