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To: Friends of Democracy Corps

From: Stan Greenberg
James Carville

RE: SOLVING THE PARADOX OF 2004
Why America Wanted Change but Voted for Continuity

George Bush was re-elected on November 2nd by taking 51 percent of the vote and by edging out John Kerry in the state of Ohio. That win, along with gains in the U.S. Senate, will give Republicans even more control over the federal government and lead conservatives to claim a mandate for the president's conservative agenda. Very important things happened in this election to make Bush's victory possible, but support for the president's approach to domestic and world affairs is not one of them. The American electorate – including the 2000 voters we sampled immediately after the election – wanted change, but settled for the president.

Understanding that paradox is the key to understanding 2004 and for Democrats developing a strategy for the future. The president and his campaign acted boldly to create an election dynamic that enabled Bush to escape the consequences of his incumbency and the public's desire for change. That included a contrast on character and leadership, though that would not have saved the president. More important was the attack on Kerry on abortion and gay marriage and the extreme cultural polarization of the country. That proved effective at the end because the president was able to keep the election centered on safety (the terrorist threat) and values, rather than on Iraq and the stagnant economy. Bush asked people to vote their beliefs and feelings, rather than to judge his performance or ideas for the future.

That is why George Bush's vote on Election Day exceeded his pre-election job approval and exceeded his final poll numbers.

That is why George Bush has no mandate for his policy agenda.¹

¹ Greenberg and Bob Borosage will be presenting a separate memo on the lack of mandate and the issue challenges for progressives in the period ahead.

John Kerry and his campaign were in a position to win the presidency, falling short at the end. While Kerry crossed the threshold on security, he was weighed down by doubts about his convictions and authenticity and cultural baggage that left him short with rural, many blue collar, non-college educated and union voters, and Hispanics. In the end, Kerry was unable to make the economy a central point of choice and change or break through with his vision for creating better jobs with more affordable health care. When that became apparent in the last week, large sections of downscale America shifted, opting to vote their values, rather than their economic worries. That produced a cultural surge at the end, an intensified polarization that took down many Democrats in rural states and the South, that diminished their blue collar support generally and that allowed George Bush to get a national majority from red America.

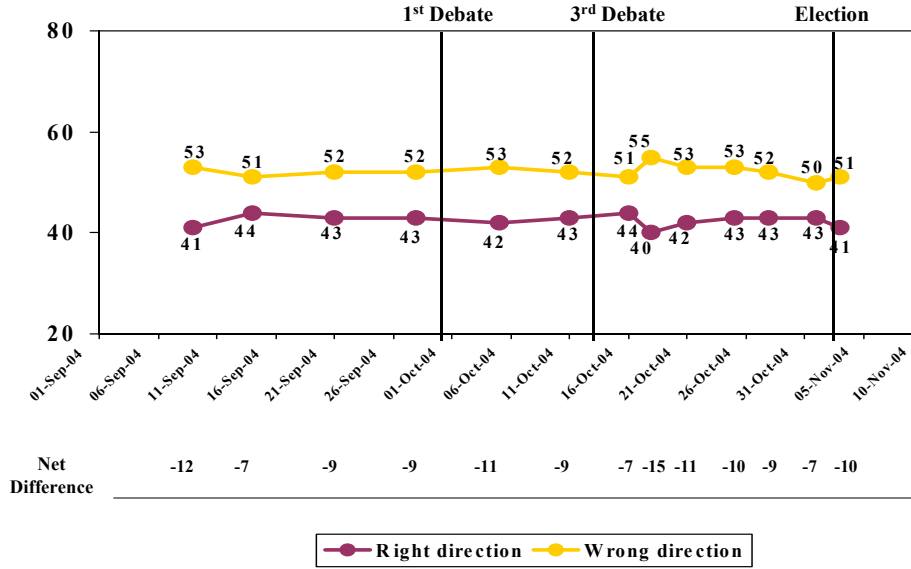
We will leave the lessons from all this for another day, but offer this analysis as a vital starting point for assessing our current moment.

Still a Change Election

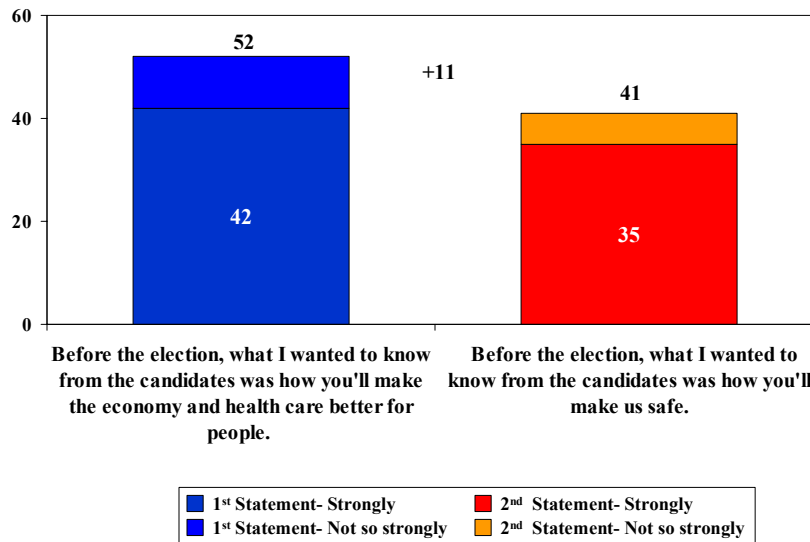
The voters that we interviewed in this joint survey conducted immediately after the election cast 51 percent of their votes for George Bush and 48 percent for John Kerry, but they were the same change voters we interviewed before the election.² A sizeable majority felt the country was headed in the wrong direction; their top issues remained the economy and jobs and Iraq, along with the war on terrorism. Indeed, many more voters said they wanted an election about the economy and health care, rather than about how to keep America safe (52 to 41 percent). They were more tolerant than not on broad questions about homosexuality, indeed, increasingly so. More voters on Election Day thought Iraq had made us less secure than more (49 to 45 percent). And many more preferred engagement with the world as a route to security than building up our military defenses (51 to 40 percent).

² Democracy Corps conducted a national survey of 1,000 voters November 2-3, 2004. We combined the data with 1,000 voters in a survey conducted for the Institute for America's Future on the same dates. The two surveys shared several common questions such as issue concerns and reasons to vote for the candidates, enabling us to look at large sub-samples of the population.

Country Direction 2004



Election on Economy more than Safety Closing Information for Choice



"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."

The voters who elected George Bush did not shift in their thinking or their priorities or their judgment about the current course of the country. So, why did this change electorate re-elect this incumbent?

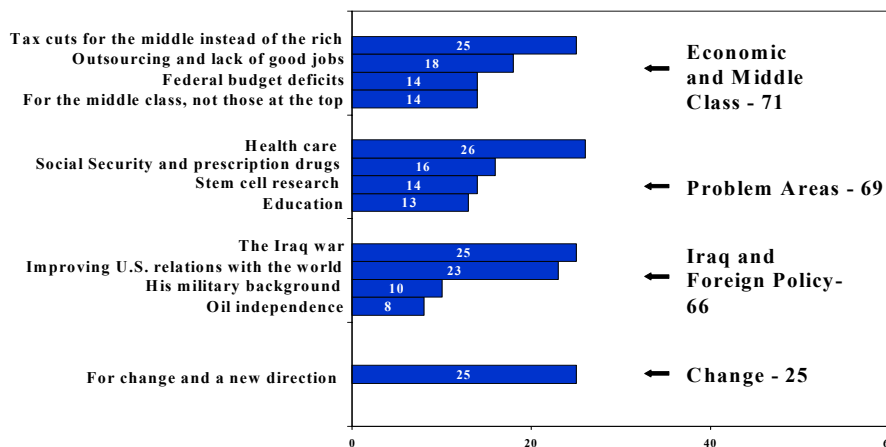
The answer lies in the success of the Bush campaign in defining John Kerry and in keeping the campaign centered on safety and values to the end. It also lies in the inability of the Democrats to make the economy and their vision for the country compelling for the electorate, particularly those most hurt by current changes. Together, that gave us the cultural polarization of the 2004 election.

**John Kerry Defined:
Flip-flopper and cultural issues more than security and taxes**

In this post-election survey, like the ones we have conducted in previous years, we ask the voters to choose reasons for supporting John Kerry and for not supporting him. (We conduct a similar exercise with George Bush.) Each question offers a broad range of options, and respondents can pick up to three reasons, giving a quite rich and complex view of the vote choice. The rationale for a Kerry vote is divided fairly evenly between three areas – the economy and middle class, issue areas like health care, and Iraq and foreign policy.

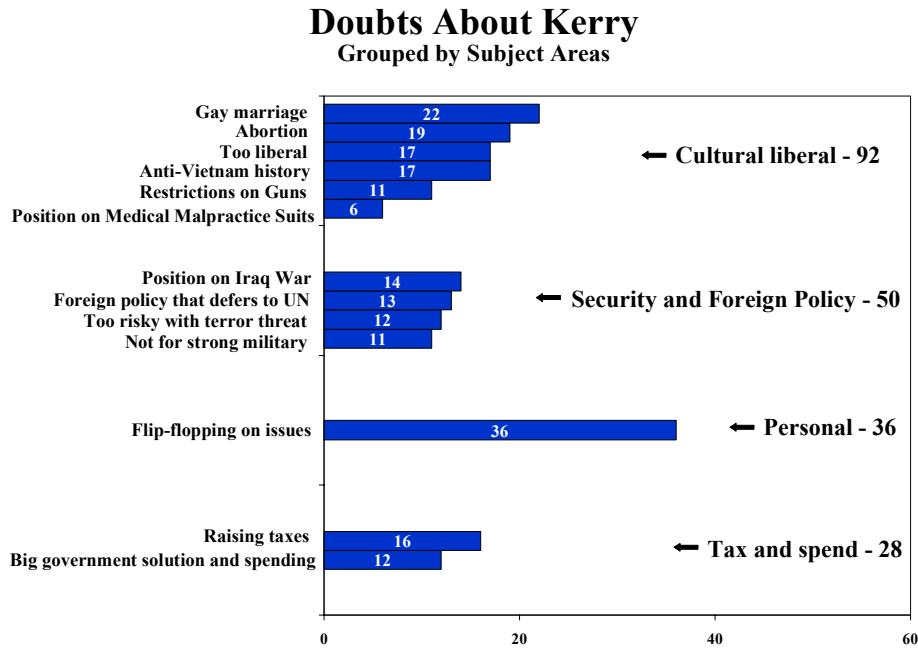
For *the Bush* “waverers” – those who voted for Bush in the end, but seriously considered supporting Kerry – their top reasons were health care, Social Security and prescription drugs, and tax cuts for the middle class, rather than the rich. These are the voters who gave Bush his majority and might have produced a Kerry majority.

Reasons to Vote for Kerry
Grouped by Subject Areas



“(IF VOTED FOR OR CONSIDERED VOTING FOR KERRY) Now, something different about your choice for president. Let me read you a list of reasons to (vote/consider voting) for John Kerry. Which THREE best describe the issues and qualities that led you to (vote/consider voting) for him?”

But the doubts about Kerry are not fragmented. The single biggest response is Kerry as “flip-flopper” (36 percent), but when grouped, the responses are dominated by worries about cultural distance. With the ability to choose three doubts, 92 percent of the responses center on cultural issues, starting with gay marriage and abortion. That is almost twice the number who indicated problems with Kerry on security, terrorism or being too big a risk; it is almost four times as much as responses on taxes, spending and big government.



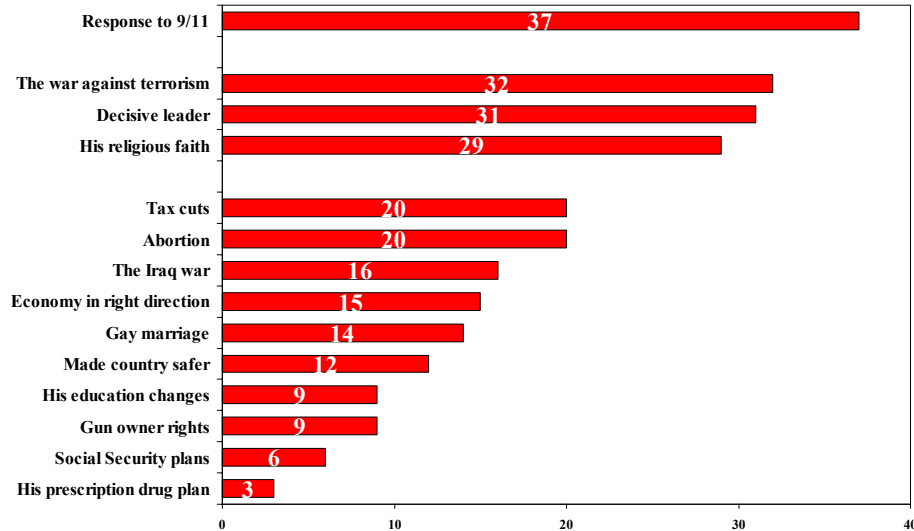
“Let me read you a list of doubts about John Kerry. Regardless of how you voted, which *THREE* describe the most important issues and best reasons *NOT* to vote for him?”

The same is true for *the Bush waverers*, though a remarkable 60 percent also mention “flip-flopping.” These voters who gave Bush his majority at the end are skeptical that Kerry has firm principles and worry that he is out of touch with them on the cultural issues. They are not worried very much about his tax and spend positions or his being a risk in the face of the terrorist threat.

**George Bush Defined:
Decisive and faithful; doubts about jobs and corporate bias**

The reasons to support President Bush are not very complicated, centered on his response to 9-11 and the terrorist threat. That is buttressed by a sense that he is decisive and a person of faith.

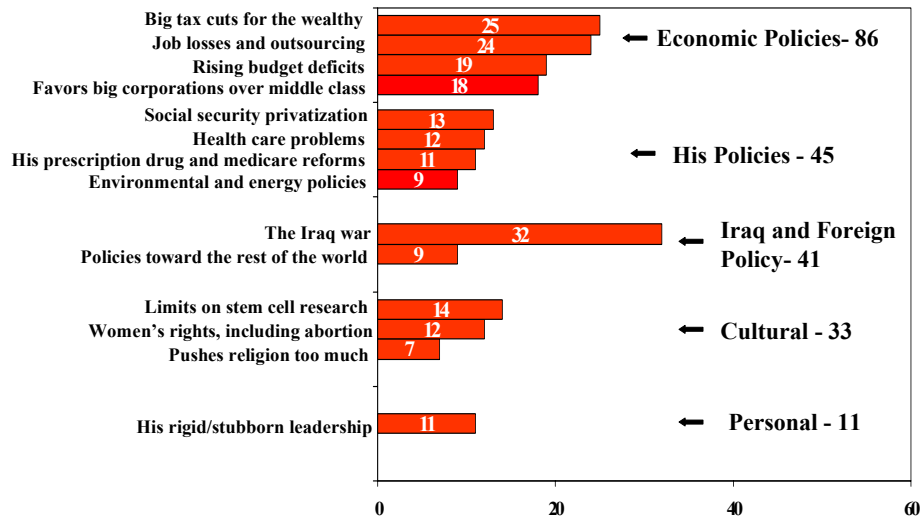
Reasons to Vote for Bush Top Three Reasons to vote for him



“(IF VOTED FOR OR CONSIDERED VOTING FOR BUSH) Now, something different about your choice for president. Let me read you a list of reasons to (vote/consider voting) for George Bush. Which THREE best describe the issues and qualities that led you to (vote/consider voting) for him?”

The doubts about Bush reflect the campaign that was and perhaps was not. The Iraq war brings the single biggest response, mentioned by 32 percent. But the biggest collection of doubts center on his economic policies, big tax cuts for the wealthy, job losses and outsourcing, with 86 percent of the responses. That is even more true for *the Bush waverers*. More importantly, for the Bush waverers, Iraq is a much less important issue, dominated by the frustrations with the country’s economic course.

Doubts About Bush Grouped by Subject Areas



"Let me read you a list of doubts about George Bush. Regardless of how you voted, which THREE describe the most important issues and best reasons NOT to vote for him?"

The Progressives' Campaign

The explanation for why this change electorate produced a Bush majority does not lie in the lack of resources or an imbalance of organizational effort. As we know, the Kerry campaign and outside progressive groups were well-funded. The organizational effort of the two sides were at parity, but as we see in this post-election survey, the pro-Kerry forces made more contact (32 percent) than the Bush forces (26 percent) in the battleground states and among swing voters (the Kerry and Bush waverers), while 12 percent overall say they were contacted by both equally.

Labor unions made the most contacts, followed by pro-life and pro-gun groups, and then environmental, religious conservative and seniors' groups in equal measure.

The new voters constituted fully 11 percent of the electorate in the end, reflecting the vast efforts at voter registration and new interest in the election. These voters supported Kerry, according to this survey, by 59 to 41 percent.

And finally, the very late deciders, either broke evenly or more for Kerry, as one would expect in an incumbent election. But, as we shall see below, that was swamped by the shift of downscale voters in the final week and a half, as values trumped the undeveloped economic concerns. In that period, the vote broke for Bush by 55 to 44 percent.

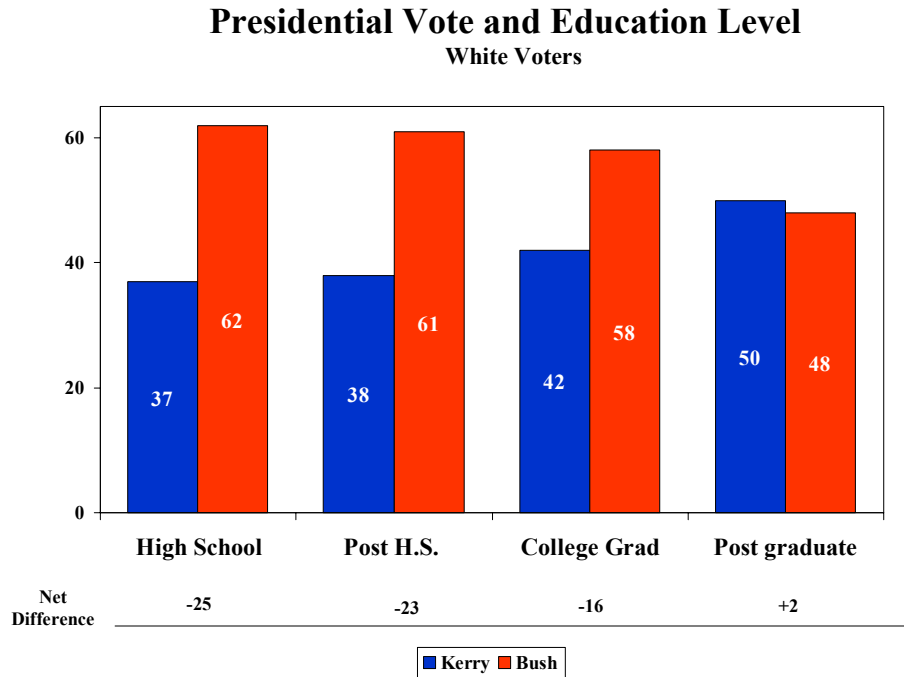
The Cultural Polarization of the American Electorate

The debate about whether “moral values” was really the top issue concern of voters, in some senses, misses how powerful a factor were the cultural issues in this election. When asked what was the most important issue in your vote, 19 percent say “moral values,” equal to the number who say the war in Iraq, terrorism and national security, and the economy and jobs.

For the certain Bush voters, terrorism and national security are the dominant voting issue, followed closely by moral values. But for *the Bush waverers*, who were the key swing group in the election, moral values is as important as terrorism and national security, and critically, are followed by concerns with the economy and jobs which are also quite important.

No issue, however, matches “moral values” as a determinant of vote. For Kerry, health care, economy and jobs, and Iraq are the strongest issues. Those who choose those issues vote for Kerry by almost two-to-one. On the other hand, those who mention terrorism and national security give 79 percent of their votes to Bush. Those that mention moral values, give him 89 percent. Concern with moral values combines with the principal doubts about John Kerry that center on the cultural issues.

That has produced the most striking feature of this election – the inverted class election among white voters – with the very best educated voting for Kerry and the least educated voting for Bush. The former are the least and the latter the most concerned with moral values and cultural issues.



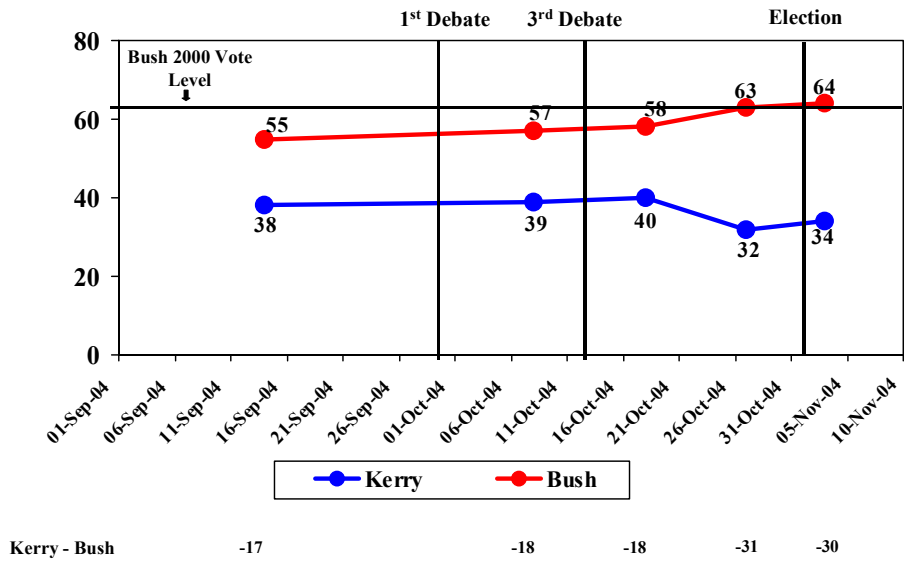
We will argue below that this was not inevitable. Many of these downscale voters were concerned about economic problems as well as moral decline. They mostly hung back from Bush, many providing him with less support than in 2000, until the final 10 days of the election. This pattern was most evident for the following groups:

- Among white rural voters – key to what happened in so many battleground states and in so many U.S. Senate races – Bush’s vote was at only 57 percent, 6 points below where Bush stood in 2000. But about 10 days out, they broke, ultimately giving Bush what he achieved four years earlier.
- Among white older non-college educated women, Bush’s vote had fallen to 45 percent, 5 points below his 2000 level, though the vote started to break 10 days out and moved to Bush in the final weekend, ultimately reaching 58 percent.
- The white older non-college educated men also lagged for Bush. In the last week, Bush’s vote stood at 52 percent, 6 points below the 2000 level, but they broke Bush on Election Day.
- White seniors were lagging for Bush right to the end, with Bush 4 points below the 2000 level. But with few material issues being debated in 2004 – no “lock box” – seniors voted their moral concerns, giving Bush a stunning 59 percent. (In *The Two Americas*, Greenberg highlighted how sen-

iors have always given Republicans about 60 percent of their votes before seniors issues were contested, starting in 1992.)

White Rural: Presidential Vote

2000: 63% for Bush

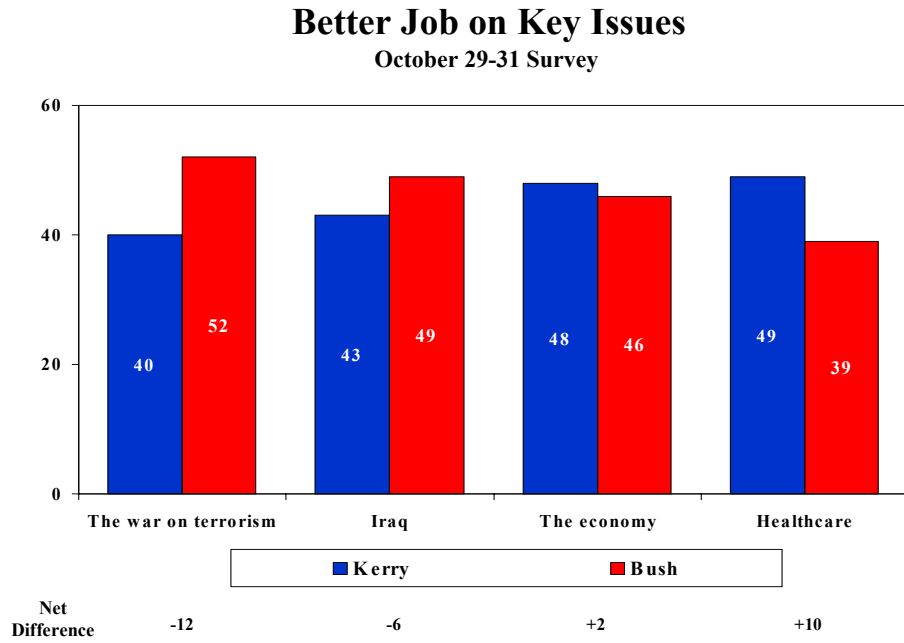


The concern with cultural issues is reflected in the vote among married and unmarried voters, though Greenberg will discuss those patterns in a separate report for Women’s Voices Women Vote.

These shifts allowed Bush to get his national 51 percent majority – by elevating his margin in the red states and diminishing Kerry’s in the blue.

The Unrealized Economic Debate

Most of the campaign was dominated by the issues of terrorism and Iraq. That was the result of real world events, the debate timing and format, the single-minded efforts of the Bush campaign, and at key junctures, the Kerry campaign as well. While Iraq more often than not put Bush on the defensive, the Kerry campaign understood it was not the issue that could close the deal for John Kerry. The voters marginally preferred the president to handle the issue. Indeed, in this whole area right up to Election Day, voters worried more about Kerry not being resolute enough before the terrorist threat than about Bush being too ready to go to war (52 to 44 percent). The *Bush waverers* almost universally worried about Kerry’s resoluteness, with only 15 percent thinking Bush pushes the country to war.



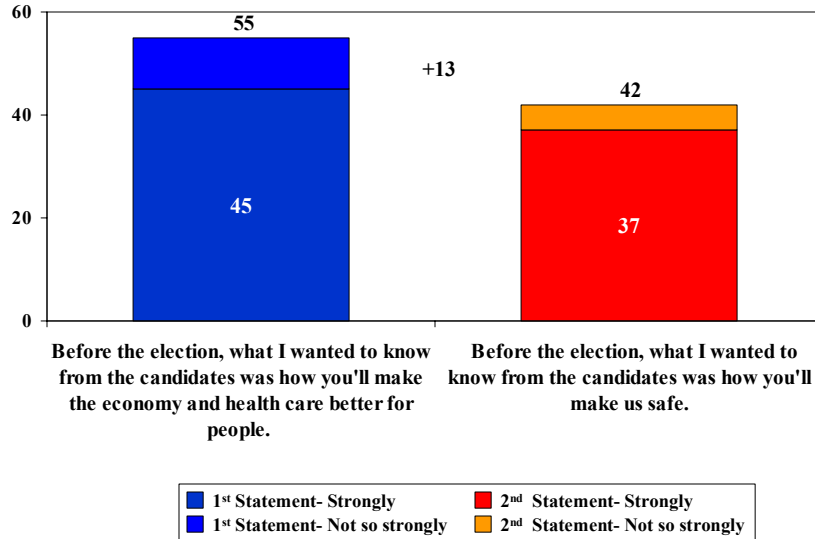
To close the deal, the Democrats had to move the whole the debate to the state of the economy and health care, and who has the better approach to making life better for most Americans. Here, Kerry was more trusted on the issues and here, voters were very critical of Bush’s handling of the job. Here, the public was ready to judge the president on his performance and treat him as an endangered incumbent.

The voters on Election Day told our callers what they wanted to hear at the end was less about “how you’ll make us safe” and more about “how you’ll make the economy and health care better for people.” This was particularly true for large sections of older, blue collar, and more vulnerable America.

But what stands out for this critical decision period of the campaign are *the Bush waverers*. It is not surprising that the Kerry voters overwhelming wanted to hear about economy and health care, but so did these Bush voters who were caught between Bush and Kerry at the end. By 55 to 42 percent, they wanted a campaign centered on the economy rather than safety.

Economy vs. Safety

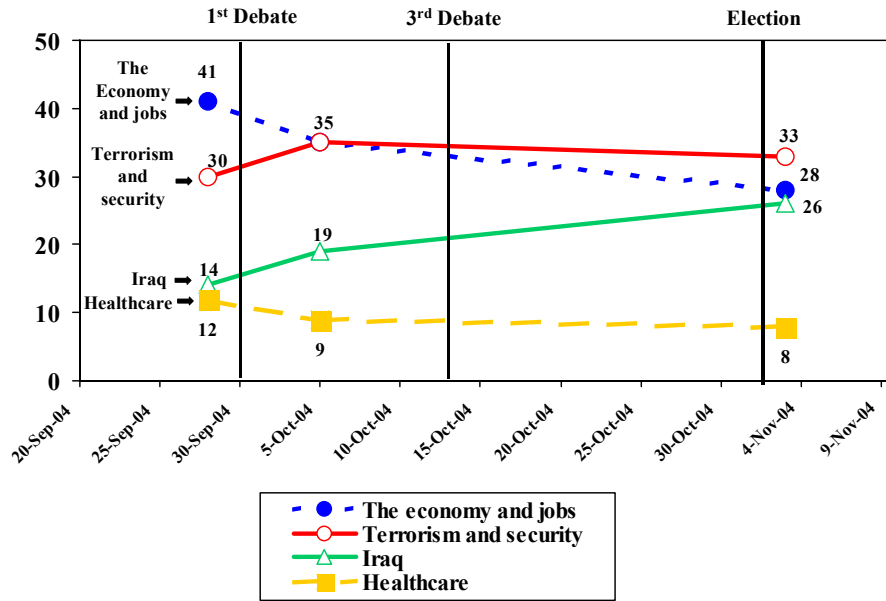
Bush Waverers



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In this final phase, unfortunately, the economic issues slipped away for the Democrats. After the debates, voters preferred Kerry over Bush on the economy by up to 7 points, but in the final week that slipped to just 2 points. More importantly, the issue focus moved away from the economy and to Iraq. Both during the debates and on Election Day, a third of the voters said terrorism was their top voting issue. Iraq grew in importance through the final weeks – up from 19 to 26 percent – but at the expense of the economy and jobs, which dropped from 35 to 28 percent. This election moved away from the Democrats' key issues and choice in the final phase of voter decision-making.

Most Important Issues to Vote



When the economy slipped away as an issue in this final phase, Bush was in a strong position to consolidate these voters on their worries about terrorist and safety and their worries about John Kerry on the cultural issues and his values. That led to the late shift of white rural, blue collar, and senior voters to Bush. That gave Bush his narrow national majority.

The change-voters, tragically we believe, voted for continuity. That was not their desire even on Election Day, which should temper judgments about George Bush’s conservative mandate.