

September 15, 2004

To: Interested Parties

From: Simon Rosenberg, New Democrat Network
Mark Penn, Penn, Schoen & Berland Associates

Re: Making the Democratic Case in the Home Stretch: The Latest Report from NDN's New Majority Coalition Project.

As part of its multi-year [New Majority Coalition Project](#), the New Democrat Network (NDN) has provided issues research to help Democrats chart a new course for 2004 and for years to come. This spring, NDN found that the Democratic Party had renewed strength in voters' minds, and by advocating a positive agenda that, among other things, showed that Democrats could provide the leadership to keep America safe and win the war on terrorism, Democrats could make great inroads in 2004 and beyond.

After the two parties' nominating conventions and three more months of campaigning, NDN commissioned another poll to assess how the Democratic agenda stood as we head into this critical election year. From September 9 to 12, 2004, Penn, Schoen & Berland Associates interviewed 800 likely voters nationwide.¹ The results show that despite the ups and downs of the presidential race, Democrats still are very well positioned to begin building a new progressive majority.

The path to a majority is clear:

Democrats Must Put Forward a Positive Agenda for the Future. The strongest message tested for either side was a positive New Democratic agenda that argues that Democrats will restore the promise of America after years of failed Republican leadership. It offers concrete policy plans on security, fiscal discipline, health care, education, and the environment. For example, with this [NDN Agenda](#) message, the presidential horse race shifts from 45 percent for John Kerry and 49 percent for George W. Bush, to 53 percent for Kerry and 43 percent for Bush.

Voters in the Dark About Democratic Agenda. Likely voters believe that the Democratic Party would do a better job in handling the major domestic issues of the day, but a majority do not believe that the Democratic Party or its standard-bearer has made clear its agenda for the future. 56 percent of voters believe that the GOP has a clear agenda for the future; only 45 percent say that the Democratic Party has one.

¹ The survey was conducted from September 9 to 12, 2004 and consisted of interviews with 800 likely voters nationwide. The margin of error is $\pm 3.5\%$ for the overall sample and higher for sub-groups.

Key Fundamentals Running Against Republicans. The mood of the country is running against the party in power. 50 percent say that the country is off on the wrong track, and 51 percent say the same about the economy. Democrats still win the generic congressional ballot (43 to 40) and the generic state legislative ballot (40 to 39). And after a nominating convention widely seen as successful, Bush leads Kerry by just 4 points (49 to 45).

Security and Personality Driving Presidential Support. The Republicans have successfully increased the salience of their strongest issue, security, with the number of voters who say that security is the most important issue they will be voting on increasing 12 percentage points since May 2004. Also, voters who support Bush overwhelmingly do so for his personal leadership abilities and values. Democrats still have a 20-plus percentage point disadvantage when it comes to whom voters trust on handling the war on terrorism. Democrats cannot concede the issue of terrorism to the Republicans. As part of any long-term agenda, Democrats must put forward a security agenda that is based on smart ideas for keeping America safe, not based on accomplishments of any individual candidate's past.

Swings Can Be Swung. This data shows that swing voters are ripe for becoming part of a durable Democratic coalition. Swing voters are pessimistic about the future of the economy, and care more about it. Yet, they also have much higher approval ratings of Bush (62 percent approving compared to 54 percent overall approving). To win swing voters into a long-term majority, Democrats must erode Republicans' advantage on leadership, match their toughness on security, and drive home issues on which swing voters favor Democrats: economy, health care, and education.

Voters Logging on to Politics. As many likely voters use the Internet as their main source of news as use radio. In addition, 25 percent of likely voters visit politics websites, with candidate and party websites being the most visited. Despite the continued dominance of television as a news medium, the Internet is a rapidly rising competitor that stands to be a major news source in the years ahead.

Key Findings

DEMOCRATS MUST PUT FORWARD A POSITIVE AGENDA FOR THE FUTURE

One of the key findings of the poll is that Democrats should be conveying a positive message explaining what they want to do for the nation. While the message should highlight Republican failures, it must go beyond this and assert a positive Democratic vision in order to be most effective.

We played out the recent history of the political landscape by reading respondents messages from the Democratic and Republican conventions, and then the more recent back and forth from both parties. This brought voters up to the present at which point we split the sample and read one group of voters a negative message criticizing Bush and the Republicans and read the other group a more positive message asserting that Kerry and the Democrats want to restore the promise of America and have an agenda to do so. The positive message, which laid out the NDN agenda, scored better, particularly with swing voters. The message said in part: “We want to restore the promise of America. Under the last four years of Republican leadership America’s economy has faltered. We have a plan to balance the budget, make taxes more progressive and champion trade that is fair. We must win the war on terrorism by ensuring our military is the world’s strongest and by working with our allies. We must keep our air and water clean and leave behind an even more beautiful America for our children. And we must stand on the side of families by making child care, health care, and college education more affordable.”

Given this, if the election for President were held today, for whom would you vote? (Kerry/Bush)	All	Dem	Rep	Indy	Economy	Security	Values	Swing²
Initial	45/49	84/11	6/92	48/42	72/23	24/71	25/72	32/43
Democratic Convention	48/47	86/10	9/89	51/38	74/20	27/69	25/65	39/34
Republican Convention	47/49	86/11	8/91	50/41	73/22	27/71	24/69	40/39
Democratic Response	49/46	88/9	9/89	54/37	75/20	30/67	28/66	53/28
Republican Response	46/49	86/10	8/90	48/43	72/22	26/70	24/70	44/38
Positive NDN Agenda	53/43	87/8	8/92	60/32	78/16	32/65	28/69	53/29
Criticize Bush and the Republicans	49/45	88/11	11/84	55/34	73/22	34/64	24/62	47/32

² Swing voters are those who report that there are not definitely voting for either Kerry or Bush. Independent voters are those who consider themselves an “independent.”

VOTERS IN THE DARK ABOUT DEMOCRATIC AGENDA

Likely voters believe Democrats will do a better job handling the major domestic issues of the day, but do not believe that Kerry or the Democratic Party has a clear agenda for the future of our nation. On issues such as handling stem-cell research, improving the health care system, preserving Social Security, improving public education, reducing the deficit, and creating jobs, voters believe that Democrats would do a better job than Republicans. Swing voters, especially, give Democrats higher marks than all voters do on handling stem-cell research and improving the health care system. And unlike all voters who see the two parties as even in their abilities to handle the economy, swing voters are highly skeptical of Republicans' ability to improve the economy.

Who would do a better job on this? (Dem/Rep)	All	Dem	Rep	Indy	Economy	Security	Values	Swing
Helping the poor get ahead	64/27	97/0	31/58	68/21	85/10	48/40	53/42	66/23
Getting prescription drug coverage for seniors	56/24	89/2	27/49	52/20	72/14	44/32	44/32	54/16
Handling stem-cell research	56/28	82/6	31/55	56/20	77/13	47/36	25/46	63/15
Improving the health care system	50/31	80/6	16/69	57/16	76/12	27/49	35/43	57/12
Preserving Social Security	50/35	83/8	14/73	53/26	75/13	26/57	42/45	50/23
Encouraging corporate responsibility	49/40	83/6	14/77	51/36	72/20	31/55	31/59	49/30
Improving public education	49/39	82/10	12/80	53/30	74/19	27/59	43/42	48/26
Creating jobs	48/39	85/9	12/75	52/28	74/15	21/63	34/55	47/33
Handling veterans' issues	47/38	82/8	15/73	44/31	65/19	29/58	32/49	40/37
Reducing the deficit	47/38	74/17	21/69	49/26	74/17	30/51	24/60	43/29

Despite this belief that Democrats would do a better job on the major issues of the day, voters do not believe that the Democratic Party or Kerry has a clear agenda for the future, and believe that Bush and the Republican Party do. Simply, voters are not being given clear reasons to support Democrats on domestic and security issues.

Do you think ... has a clear agenda for the future of our nation? (Yes/No)	All	Dem	Rep	Indy	Economy	Security	Values	Swing
George W. Bush	57/40	29/67	88/11	52/43	35/59	72/26	78/20	48/45
Republican Party	56/39	38/60	88/8	42/50	36/61	71/23	79/16	40/51
Democratic Party	45/50	71/26	27/70	40/53	59/38	28/67	45/50	39/44
John Kerry	41/52	75/17	14/84	37/53	58/34	30/67	27/64	38/48

KEY FUNDAMENTALS RUNNING AGAINST REPUBLICANS

Despite a successful nominating convention, reports of significant post-convention bounces, and boasts of resurgent and lasting Republican dominance, the key fundamental metrics that gauge how voters believe the country is doing are running against the GOP.

Forty-four percent think things in the country are going in the right direction, and 50 percent believe they are off on the wrong track.

Direction of the Country (Right Track/Wrong Track)

All	Dem	Rep	Indy	Economy	Security	Values	Swing
44/50	11/84	82/13	36/55	19/73	64/29	62/32	36/48

Forty-four percent think things in the economy of the country are going in the right direction, and 51 percent believe they are off on the wrong track.

Direction of the Economy (Right Track/Wrong Track)

All	Dem	Rep	Indy	Economy	Security	Values	Swing
44/51	12/82	82/14	35/60	21/76	63/32	64/31	40/54

If the election were held today, 45 percent of those polled would support Kerry for president, and 49 percent would vote for Bush – a margin that tracks the spread between the two in public polls going back more than half of a year.

Presidential Ballot (Bush/Kerry)

All	Dem	Rep	Indy	Economy	Security	Values	Swing
45/49	84/11	6/92	48/42	72/23	24/71	25/72	32/43

Forty three percent would vote for a Democrat, and 40 percent for Republican for Congress if the election were held tomorrow.

Congressional Ballot (Democrat/Republican)

All	Dem	Rep	Indy	Economy	Security	Values	Swing
43/40	87/7	4/84	41/26	64/20	26/56	23/58	40/29

Forty percent would vote for a Democrat, and 39 percent for a Republican for state legislature if the election were held tomorrow.

State Legislative Ballot (Democrat/Republican)

All	Dem	Rep	Indy	Economy	Security	Values	Swing
40/39	83/8	5/80	35/26	63/18	21/55	20/59	36/29

SECURITY AND PERSONALITY DRIVING PRESIDENTIAL SUPPORT

Bush has been able to open up a small lead over Kerry by driving up the salience of the Republicans' strongest issue, security, and then attracting security voters to his side. The dynamics of Bush's support rest on his personal leadership abilities and values, both of which underscore his strength on leading the war on terrorism.

When you vote in the 2004 election for President and Congress, which of the following issues will be most important to you?	All	May 2004	Dem	Rep	Indy	Swing
The economy	43	50	66	19	47	51
Security	37	29	24	53	34	30
Values	17	20	10	26	14	14
Don't know	2	1	1	1	5	5

Are you voting for President Bush primarily because of how you feel about:	All	Dem	Rep	Indy	Economy	Security	Values	Swing
His personal leadership abilities	37	39	36	39	45	41	20	27
His values	33	32	37	24	23	28	51	33
His views on issues	24	28	20	31	26	26	19	26
Don't know	7	0	7	6	6	5	9	14

These charts show that the foundation of Republican strength rests almost exclusively on the party's advantage on security issues and the personal attributes of one leader. While the latter fact may bode well for Democrats as the effect of Bush's personal attributes should be limited to his own close race, the former points to a potentially serious long-range problem for Democrats. Democrats' worst performing issues are those that revolve around security and values: voters trust Republicans over Democrats on protecting America from a terrorist attack by 51 percent to 33 percent, and swing voters by a margin of 57 percent to 18 percent. Democrats cannot succeed in this issue environment if they do not make a clear agenda for the future security of the nation a key part of their agenda.

To this end, the data was overwhelming when it comes to Vietnam and security: voters do not see Kerry's military record as particularly important in this area. 76 percent said that Kerry should spend less time talking about his experience as a soldier in Vietnam; only 4 percent said he should spend more time. Voters want to hear about the future, not just the past.

SWINGS CAN BE SWUNG

Swing voters represent 16 percent of likely voters, and are generally more moderate, slightly more downscale economically, less likely to live in a close-in suburb or city, and much more Catholic (38 percent of swings versus 21 percent of all voters) but slightly less religious than the general electorate.

Swing voters are slightly more pessimistic about the future of the economy, and care more about it when deciding their presidential ballot. They are far more skeptical about Republicans' ability to handle the economy, and more swing voters believe that Democrats are the better party to handle the issues of the uninsured, public education, poverty, and prescription drugs. Indeed, swing voters react very strongly to Democratic positive messages (and Republican negative messages) on bread-and-butter Democratic issues such as: health care, prescription drugs, and help for the middle class.

Yet, these voters are cross-pressured. Compared to the rest of the electorate, swing voters like the job Bush is doing a lot (62 percent approve of the job he's doing compared to 54 percent overall). They are more apt to doubt Democratic patriotism (21 percent of swing voters compared to 33 percent of all voters think that Democrats will make us proud to be Americans), and are more likely to believe Republicans' and doubt Democrats' ability to protect America from terrorist attack (51/33 for all voters; 57/18 for swing voters). On this front, they do not believe that Democrats or Kerry have a clear agenda for the future.

The data does show that there is enormous running room for Democrats to put forward a positive agenda on security and the economy and use both to match the Republicans on security, and then overwhelm them with Democrats' advantages on domestic issues. Indeed, the data shows that swing voters are thirsting for a positive Democratic message on security so that they can vote their pocket books and their safety – and not have to choose between the two.

Democratic Positives— Agreement	Strongly Agree	Agree/ Disagree	Dem	Rep	Indy	Economy	Security	Values	Swing
Reducing Dependence on Foreign Energy	53	73/23	91/9	53/44	76/17	86/12	64/32	63/32	82/13
Homeland Security	52	71/25	98/1	41/54	77/19	85/11	57/42	65/28	84/9
Access to Healthcare	51	70/26	92/6	37/58	79/14	90/8	54/39	52/41	72/20
Medicare	49	68/30	96/2	36/64	78/19	90/8	54/44	51/49	87/10
Tax Reform/Relief	47	62/36	91/9	32/65	70/28	83/17	44/56	48/50	77/18
Prescription Drugs	46	62/35	97/1	27/71	71/24	85/13	37/58	50/49	75/18
Stem Cells	45	66/30	86/12	40/60	72/18	81/16	55/39	51/45	68/20
Education Reform	44	61/35	87/11	31/68	66/26	77/20	51/46	39/54	70/23
Social Security	43	61/34	83/16	27/65	72/21	79/17	43/48	51/45	72/18
Job Creation	41	62/36	87/12	35/63	72/24	82/17	48/49	48/48	69/24

To win swing voters into a long-term majority, Democrats must erode Republicans' advantage on leadership, match their toughness on security, and drive home issues on which swing voters favor Democrats: economy, health care, and education.

VOTERS LOGGING ON TO POLITICS

The Internet is rapidly becoming a significant source of political news for voters. While television is still dominant, as many people say the Internet is their main source of news as say that radio is.

Which of the following is your main source of news?	All	May 2004	Dem	Rep	Indy	Economy	Security	Values	Swing
Television	58	52	56	63	53	57	60	53	62
Newspapers	21	21	24	16	22	22	21	17	18
Radio	10	12	8	11	10	7	9	16	8
The Internet	9	10	9	7	12	10	7	11	10
Other	1	2	1	2	1	2	0	2	1
Don't Know	1	2	1	1	2	2	1	1	1
None	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	1

Even more noteworthy is that 25 percent of all voters say they visit political websites (65 percent say that they do not).

Visit Political Websites (Do Visit/Do Not Visit)

All	Dem	Rep	Indy	Economy	Security	Values	Swing
25/65	27/65	22/68	26/63	28/60	21/70	22/68	16/74

And of those who visit political websites, candidate and party sites are the most frequented, pointing to the growing importance of these sites in American political communication.

IF VISIT POLITICAL WEBSITES: Which political websites do you visit most often?	All
Bush's website / georgebush.com/ bush.com	10
Democrat / DNC	10
Kerry's website/ johnkerry.com / kerry.com	9
Republican / RNC	8
None	6
Depends / Whatever I am interested in/whatever is the news that day / Whatever comes up in a search	4
whitehouse.gov	3
moveon.org	3
MSN	2
CNN	2
Specific newspaper sites	2
The candidates websites	1
Others	33
Don't Know / No Response	20

About NDN

The New Democrat Network was founded in 1996, and established itself as one of the nation's leading political organizations – raising tens of millions of dollars, helping to elect hundreds of candidates at all levels of government throughout the country, and successfully advocating the winning politics of the New Democrats to a new generation of political leaders.

Recently, NDN has launched new efforts to ensure the [long-term vitality of progressive politics](#); prepare the very best of a [new generation of elected officials](#) for leadership; and fight to make sure that the positive, optimistic and modern voice of the New Democrats is heard loud and clear in today's political debate.

This includes the development of the [NDN Agenda](#); our [New Majority Coalition Research Project](#) of which this poll and previous research is a part; and [Demócratas Unidos](#), our pioneering effort to inform and educate the Hispanic community about the Democratic agenda. For more information, visit: www.newdem.org.

Appendix A

KEY STATISTICS

Does this make you more likely to support Democratic or Republican candidates? (Dem/Rep)	Much More Dems	All	Dem	Rep	Indy	Economy	Security	Values	Swing
In the last four years, America has gone from a record surplus of \$236 billion in 2000 to a record deficit of \$422 billion in 2004 - the worse fiscal deterioration in America's history.	46	55/38	94/6	15/79	64/22	81/15	34/60	37/50	58/23
Almost 45 million Americans do not have health insurance.	45	57/35	97/2	8/84	60/26	83/13	35/58	37/44	70/21
The size of the national debt has grown to \$7.3 trillion.	43	58/37	95/4	13/82	60/31	82/13	38/58	40/55	62/23
After passing the No Child Left Behind Act, President Bush and the Republicans have provided \$22 billion less in funding to pay for it than they promised.	43	54/36	92/7	16/70	55/27	77/12	38/50	42/48	63/12
The number of unemployed Americans is the highest it's been in a decade.	41	53/39	91/6	11/85	58/25	77/19	34/54	33/55	58/28
4 million more Americans have fallen into poverty.	41	58/33	92/7	19/72	63/23	82/14	41/50	38/50	74/15
In the last three years over 5 million Americans have lost their health insurance.	40	54/38	94/4	13/80	59/28	80/14	33/57	36/56	60/22
America has lost 1.8 million private sector jobs.	39	52/41	90/8	10/83	67/23	77/17	26/70	32/55	57/32
Inflation is increasing faster than wages.	39	51/40	92/6	9/84	55/26	73/18	29/63	32/58	52/33
Real household yearly income has declined by \$1500.	37	50/41	94/3	11/84	50/34	72/20	37/56	30/59	49/40
In the last two years there have been more bankruptcies than ever before in American history.	37	51/35	89/7	9/80	59/19	80/9	24/61	31/54	54/21
The cost of a college education is increasing at the fastest rate it has in almost twenty years.	37	49/37	88/6	12/76	50/28	77/14	26/59	30/53	45/20
Under the new prescription drug law, 2.5 million seniors with retiree prescription drug benefits from their employers are at risk of losing coverage.	35	51/36	89/6	15/71	58/25	77/12	38/51	18/68	62/18

Appendix B

A COMMITMENT TO HOPE AND PROGRESS: NDN'S AGENDA FOR THE FIRST DECADE OF THE 21ST CENTURY

- 1. Expand Prosperity and Opportunity:** Create broad-based prosperity; move the federal budget to balance; champion free and fair trade; help all Americans succeed in the global economy; ensure the integrity and vitality of America's financial markets; encourage entrepreneurship and innovation and broad access to capital; prepare the country for the retirement of the Baby Boom generation; and re-establish greater progressivity in the tax code.
- 2. Assert Responsible Global Leadership:** Win the war on terrorism and end international conflicts that threaten our interests and values; foster security and democracy in Iraq; ensure that America's military is the strongest, most agile, and best equipped in the world; combat AIDS and other pandemics that threaten global stability; and work together with our allies and international organizations to advance democracy, human rights, liberty, free markets, opportunities for women, and rising standards of living across the world.
- 3. Protect the Homeland:** Implement a comprehensive homeland security strategy; improve our nation's counter terrorism intelligence capabilities and performance; ensure that those on the frontlines have the very best tools, training and support to protect our communities; secure our nation's borders and ports without impeding the free flow of goods and people; and fight to protect the civil liberties for all Americans that have long been the envy of the world.
- 4. Strengthen Families and Communities:** Put families, children and communities at the very center of our agenda by improving the nation's schools through higher standards, greater accountability, more choices for parents, quality teachers, and promised additional resources; fostering family friendly policies that help parents succeed at work and at home; expanding college opportunities; promoting safe neighborhoods, home ownership, personal responsibility, community service, and greater participation in our democracy; supporting a woman's right to choose; embracing immigrants seeking a better life in America; and striving for equal opportunity for all and a more diverse, integrated, and tolerant nation.
- 5. Modernize Our Health Care System:** Provide all with access to quality and affordable health insurance; address the rapid rise of health care costs; reform and improve Medicare; and invest in and encourage the extraordinary promise of the knowledge revolution in science and medical care that is perhaps the most important development of our time.
- 6. Leave Behind an Even More Beautiful America:** Keep our air and water clean; preserve land for future generations; and make America energy independent through greater production here at home, investments in new clean technologies and renewable sources of energy, and a national crusade to encourage smart energy use and conservation.

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