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To: Friends of Democracy Corps

From: Stan Greenberg
James Carville

RE: PREVAILING ON DEMOCRATIC IDEAS AND VALUES
Report on the Democracy Corps' Post-convention polls

The election campaign in August, dominated by lots of detours and distractions and a Bush campaign relentlessly focused on security, put George Bush marginally in the lead for president. His lead is real, and there is no doubt that Kerry has lost ground on a range of issues. But we should not exaggerate what has happened or lose sight of the contours of this race. The election is still close and competitive. Voters still want change. They are upset with Bush's direction on Iraq and the economy, and have serious doubts about him. They respond strongly to Kerry's vision.

The president has a lead of about 5 points, if we look at the average of all the public polls done after the convention; the Democracy Corps poll completed last Thursday shows the president with a 3-point lead. In any case, Bush is at 49 percent with the former estimate and 48 in our survey. At the height of Bush's convention bounce, he is just at the edge of electability. His position is simply not that strong. If his bounce recedes, as it did for Kerry, and if Kerry takes the race to Bush, the president could easily be endangered again.

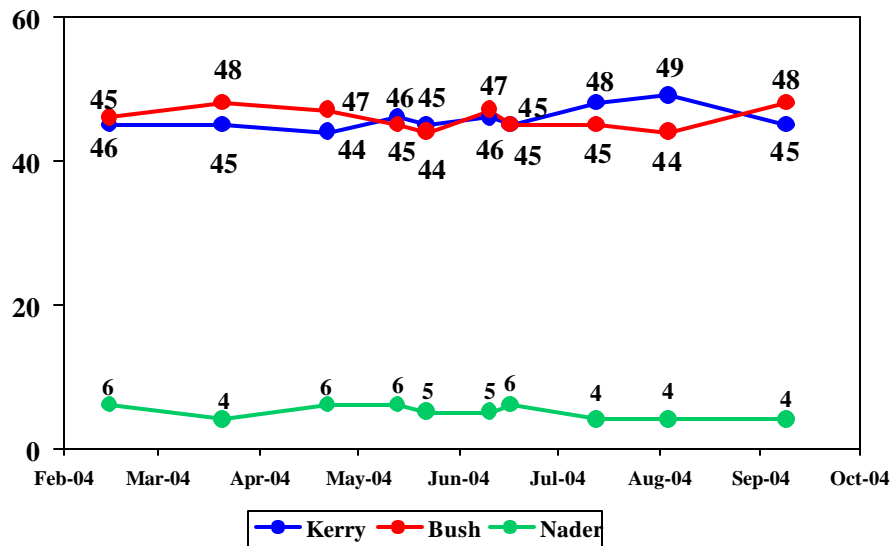
Since the Democratic convention, the Democracy Corps poll shows a swing of 8 points away from Kerry; the public polls show a 9-point swing. But we should note that Kerry lost his 4-point convention bounce, and Bush is likely to lose some or all of his 5-point bounce, assuming we get back to the campaign dynamics that put Kerry in the lead. All the evidence of this survey shows that this is possible when Democrats give voice to their ideas and values.

The Race

We will not dwell on the race, except to emphasize that Bush is at 48 or 49 percent in the race, which is only a winning number if his convention gains are consolidated or if Kerry does not move to define the race. We think Bush's number will be eroded in the weeks ahead.

Three Way Presidential Vote

Democracy Corps

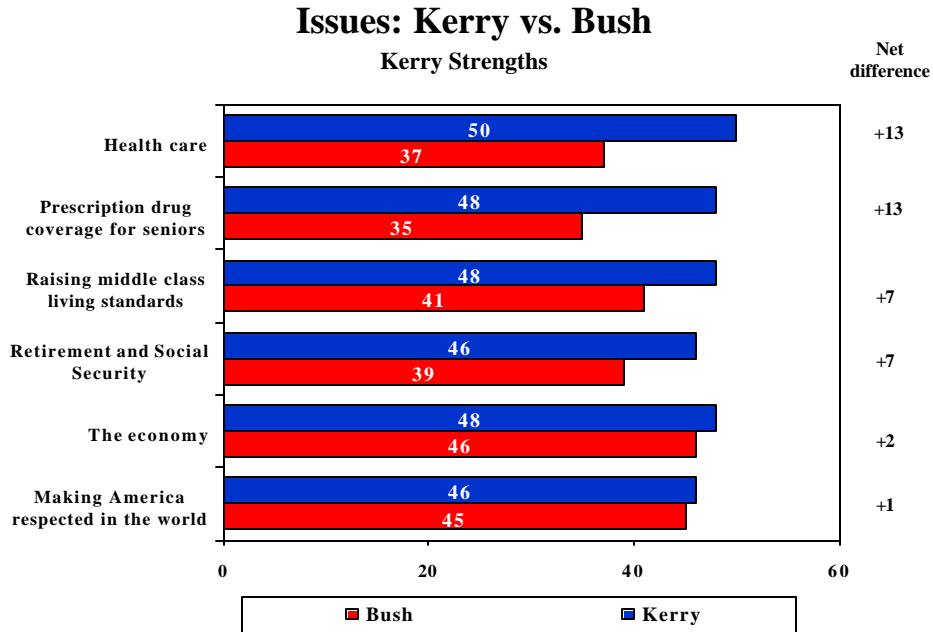


That said, we recognize the degree which Bush has gained on Kerry on honesty, clarity of ideas, and leadership strength. On the issues, Bush has gained across the field but particularly on foreign policy and having a hopeful vision. Bush is now ahead by about 19 points on the war on terrorism, 9 points on Iraq, and 8 points on foreign policy. The first is not surprising, though it had narrowed after the Democratic convention, but the slippage on Iraq and foreign policy can clearly be reversed, given the findings below. Bush's advantage on clarity of ideas (17 points) points to the varying successes of the campaigns in defining the election and poisoning the choices before voters.

But we should not underestimate the weaponry available to Kerry. About 54 percent of the country believes that he will keep America strong and safe. Kerry obviously needs to continue to reassure and raise these numbers, but he has crossed a key threshold for a majority of voters.

Kerry still has strong advantages over Bush on a broad range of issues, even if these are somewhat diminished since the Democratic convention. The strongest are

health care and prescription drugs, but also raising middle class living standards. He has the edge on the economy (2 points) and is even on America being respected in the world.



“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.”

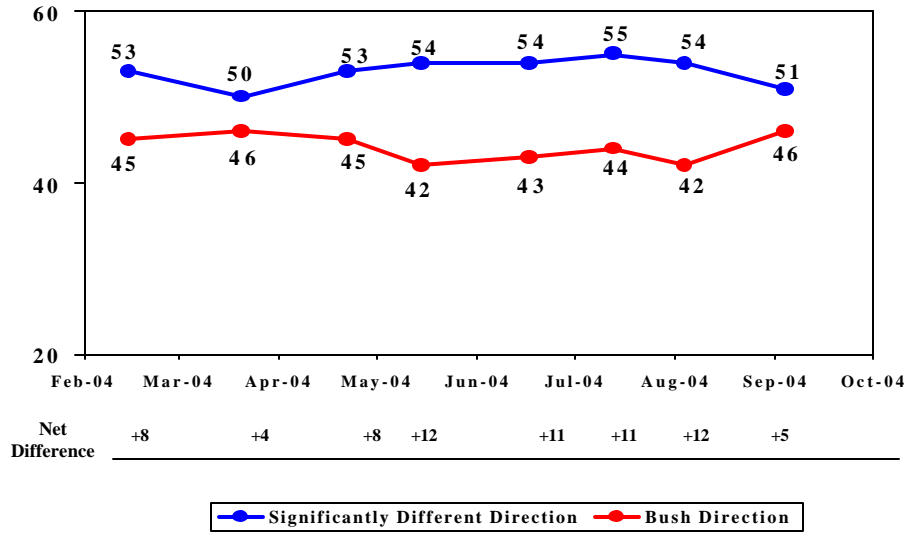
At this point, Kerry and Bush are contesting education, being on your side, and having a hopeful vision for the future. Whether Kerry moves ahead on advocacy for people and having a distinctive vision is a good indicator on whether he moves back into the lead in the race.

The Stability of the Race

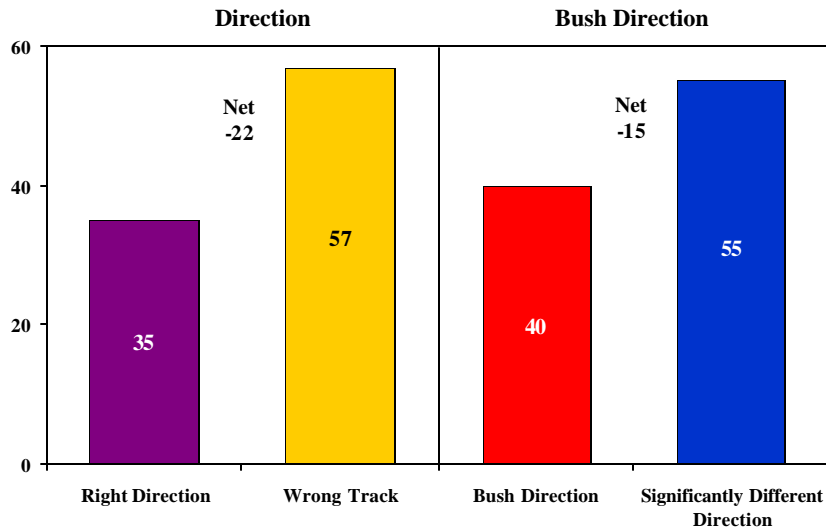
What is so striking in this poll after the two conventions is how a big electoral swing of 8 points could change so little in the structure of the race. The country wants a change in course, which is evident on both Iraq and the economy.

A majority of the country still wants change. By 53 to 41 percent, voters think the country is headed in the wrong direction; by 51 to 46 percent, they want to go in a significantly different direction than Bush. The mood for change is even greater among independents (57 to 35 percent) and battleground state voters (55 to 40 percent). Indeed, the Bush vote is unstable in an election where Kerry and Edwards are talking about a new direction: 14 percent of the electorate is comprised of Bush voters thinking things are going wrong.

Change: Bush Change Direction



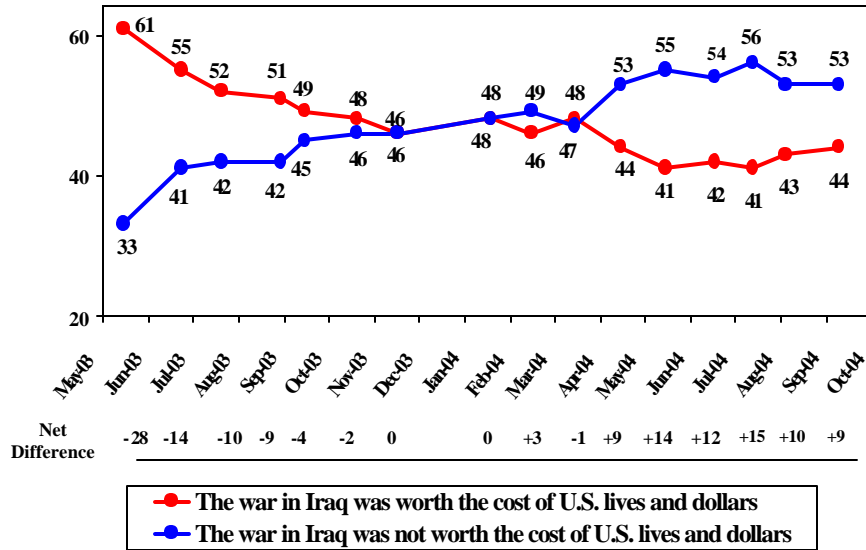
Independents and Change



The essentials on the war in Iraq and foreign policy have not changed. While Bush has gained on having plans for Iraq and it bringing more security, a stable majority

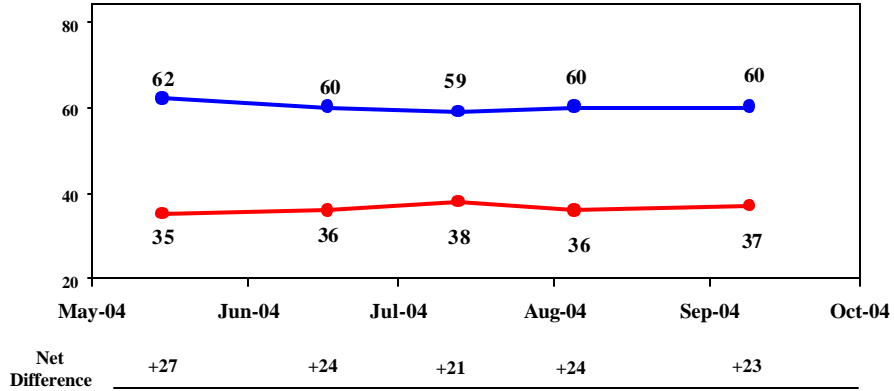
says the war was not worth it. Just 43 percent believe we are making progress there, and this is before recent developments in Iraq, with increased fighting. Kerry's view of the world and how to achieve security is as compelling as the one offered by Bush.

Was the War in Iraq Worth it?



And on the economy, voters by nearly two-to-one reject Bush's assertion that the middle class is making gains. The voters are ready for discourse in which Bush claims success on the economy and Kerry underscores what is happening to real people. Bush could not be more out of sync, even as he is compelled to make the case for progress.

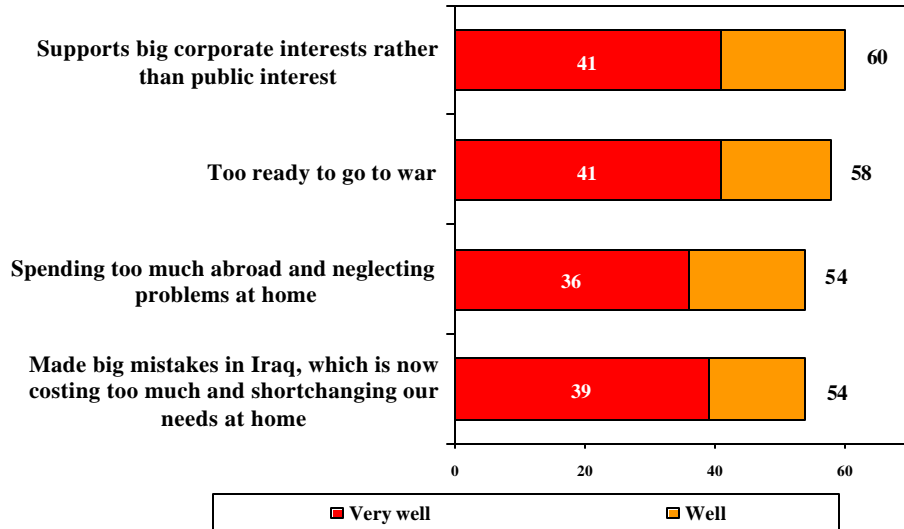
Middle Class Squeezed vs. Economic Success



- 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.

Part of the stability of this race are the grave doubts voters feel about George Bush. Despite Bush's orchestrated gains, particularly on the war on terrorism, these remain powerful opportunities as Bush comes under increasing attack. These doubts about Bush are largely undiminished in the last month: Bush favors corporate interests over the public interest (60 percent serious doubts), is too ready to go to war (58 percent), spending too much abroad and neglecting home (54 percent), and made mistakes in Iraq that shortchange America at home (54 percent).

Bush Doubts



“Now, I am going to read you a list of words and phrases which people use to describe political figures. For each word or phrase, please tell me whether it describes George Bush very well, well, not too well, or not well at all.”

The Message Debate

Despite the changes of August, Kerry’s message for America is still significantly stronger than the Bush message, which should be taken up by progressives with considerable confidence in its efficacy. Voters are still living the same lives and responding to the same vision for change.

In this survey, we tested the Bush message and vision, reflecting above all the speech he gave at the convention. This is his most recent formulation of his approach to security, the economy and an ownership society. We counterpoised that positioning to a Kerry positioning – reflecting Kerry’s convention speech, the campaign’s theme (stronger at home, respected abroad), Kerry’s various speeches over the past few weeks and some of the themes long part of the Democratic approach this year, including building a stronger middle class. It also includes the three policy areas that Kerry has emphasized since Super Tuesday, keeping jobs in America, getting health care costs down and achieving independence from Middle East oil.

In the Democracy Corps poll, a Kerry message defeats the Bush message by 7-points, which is 10 points better than the race between Kerry and Bush. Among independents, it wins by 18 points and in the battleground states, by 15.

Those results are the most important finding of this survey. Amidst the fog of conflicting poll numbers, convention bounces and many distractions, voters remain ready to respond to strong Democratic campaigns in 2004. Democrats should put their energies into this critique, choice and vision, recognizing that big change is possible. Kerry can clearly move back into the lead in this race.

John Kerry says, we need to move in a new direction. That means working to build an America stronger at home and respected in the world.

For sure, that means a strong military and I will battle the terrorists that threaten our country. But Bush's mistakes in Iraq and go-it-alone foreign policy have left us stuck there, costing 200 billion dollars and rising, which shortchanges us at home. Kerry says I'll prioritize building a strong middle class. While CEOs are doing fine, the middle class struggles with scarce jobs, stagnant incomes and skyrocketing health care costs. To be strong at home, America must stop rewarding companies for shipping jobs overseas, get health care costs under control, and end America's dependence on Middle East oil. We need a new direction.

George Bush says, I have a clear and positive plan to build a safer world and more hopeful America. My most solemn duty as president is to protect the American people, and I will do whatever it takes to defend our country, never showing uncertainty or weakness. Bush says, I believe in the energy and innovative spirit of the American people, so we unleashed that energy with the largest tax relief in a generation. Because we acted, our economy is growing again and creating jobs. We passed the most important education reform in history and America's schools are getting better. We brought Republicans and Democrats together to help seniors buy medicine. And we are working to build an ownership society because ownership brings security, dignity, and independence.

We now go forward confident in the future of America.