

DEMOCRACY CORPS
CAMPAIGN AMERICA'S FUTURE

Founders
James Carville
Stanley Greenberg
Robert Shrum

Executive Director
Jim Gerstein

Senior Advisor
Karl Agne

Research Conducted by:
Greenberg Quinlan Rosner

Date: November 15, 2006
To: Friends of Democracy Corps
From: Bob Borosage, Campaign for America's Future
James Carville and Stan Greenberg, Democracy Corps

RE: THE MELTDOWN ELECTION
Report on the 2006 Post-Election Surveys

2006 was a meltdown election – the meltdown of the Gingrich-Bush-conservative model for politics and governance – that gave Democrats control of both the House and Senate and a large majority of the governorships and state legislatures. Voters did not rush to identify with Democrats or liberals, but they were making a very important judgment about the Republicans' priorities that gave us the Iraq war as well as a Congress and the Bush White House, which are dominated by corporate special interests, making them unable to advance the public interest or the needs of a struggling middle class.¹

Under Karl Rove's guidance, and earlier under Newt Gingrich, Republicans gained the Congress and the White House by polarizing the country and catering to their base groups with a material and cultural largesse. Thus, they became dependent on building ever-larger majorities and turnout within their base voters – from white evangelical and rural voters, to younger non-college educated and upscale business-oriented men. Taxes and terror were trotted out by Rove as the way to nationalize and define a "choice election". Abortion, gay marriage and particularly immigration were this year's cultural weapons. In 2002 and 2004, the Bush White House polarized the country on the Iraq war to gain a partisan advantage in the war on terrorism; this year, that polarization and the failed war effort cost the Republicans the public's trust on national security and much more.

On November 7th, the American people voted not just against Republicans; they voted against their model for governance that got them bogged down in war, aligned with corrupt, special interests rather than people,

¹ Democracy Corps/Campaign for America's Future Post-Election poll conducted nationally and in 50 Republican-held competitive seats from November 7-8, 2006 of 2,020 voters

and unable to govern competently on important issues. The result was a landslide among independents, voting 58 to 38 percent for Democrats, and the opening up of rural states and even more territory in the suburbs to the Democrats. Republicans lost at least 29 seats, mostly in Republican territory and where there were 10-20 more seats at risk.

Voters were contemptuous of this Congress, both parties and the President, though with no Democratic incumbent losing a seat in the House or Senate, it is clear the voters held the Republicans uniquely responsible for the mess in Washington, the country and the world. In this post-election survey of 2006 voters, voters preferred the Democrats by large majorities on 'reform and change' and on 'being for the middle class' – a considerable advance from early 2005 – and were clearly open to seeing the Democrats take their turn in control. With the Gingrich-Bush conservative model shattered by the election, Democrats have the opportunity to advance their approaches to issues that matter to people and win elections in this much bigger world.

The New Party World

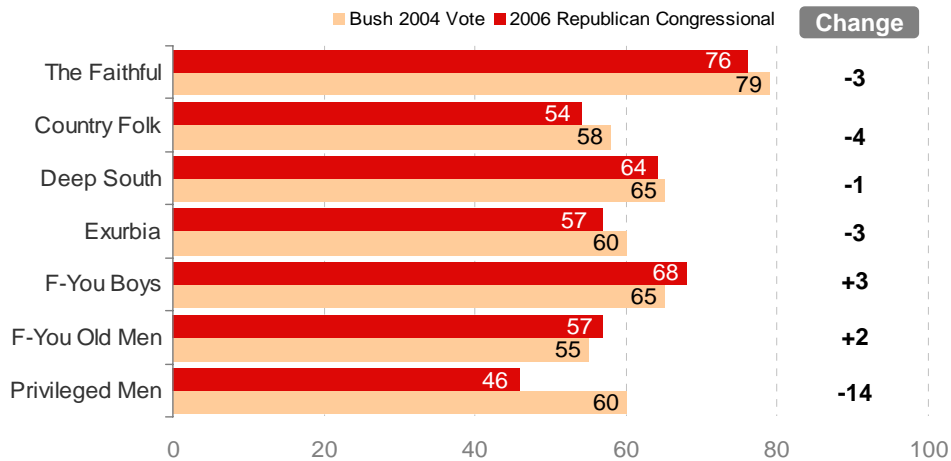
The Republicans in 2006 were caught in a trap they set themselves: the necessity of increasing support and turnout within their base, but that cost them dearly elsewhere. The problem became acute this year because the Republicans were neither consolidated nor enthusiastic, requiring even more extreme effort to get their coalition back in line and to the polls on Election Day. The Republican campaigns did bring back much of their base support in the end, but they fell short in important ways: one-in-five Bush voters supported Democrats in the congressional elections; and, Republicans were slightly less consolidated behind their candidates than Democrats, the reverse of 2002 and 2004.

When one looks at the Republican base, one sees trouble, with the Republicans now clearly split on how to address the problem.

- Republicans fell 3 points short of their 2004 performance with white evangelicals, white rural and exurban voters. The exit polls have them down almost 8 points with white evangelicals.
- They fell dramatically short with the best-educated, married men (most earning over \$75,000 and pro-business), indeed, losing them to the Democrats.

To get back the more culturally conservative voters in the conventional way clearly has a price in this new battleground. And their problem with the best educated voters is broader, impacted by the war and America's position in the world; fiscal problems and spending, and partisan gridlock.

Republican base: mostly consolidated, but fell short in rural and defection of upscale men



The Democrats increased their vote margin in this election by an impressive 9 points among Democratic identifiers and raised their support with the broader set of groups forming the Democratic base. This was most dramatic for Hispanic voters, with the Democratic vote up 9 points to 69 percent. The “immigration issue” has taken Hispanics back up to Clinton era levels of support. Democrats made large gains with the most secular voters and large cosmopolitan regions, expanding their suburban support. They increased support about 3 points with African Americans and union families as well.

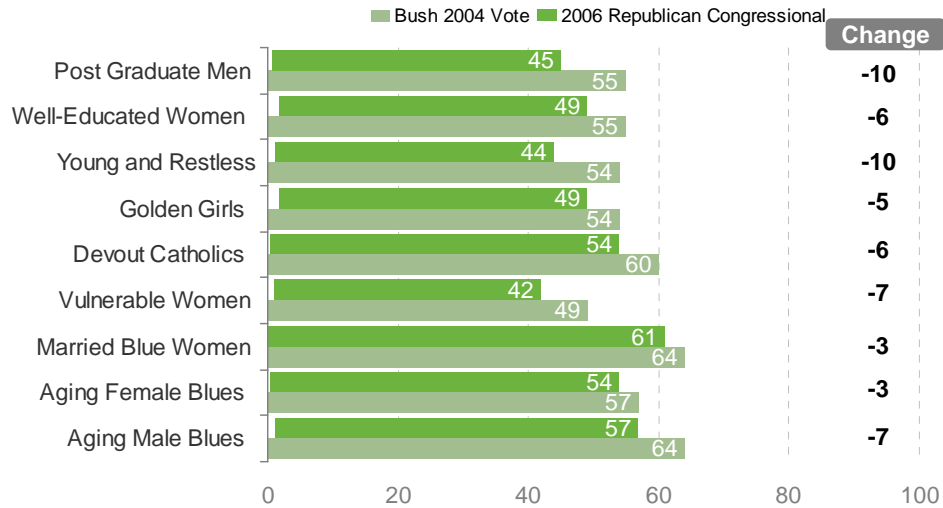
The reaction against conservative governance was greatest among independents and the world of swing contested voters. Democrats won independents by 18 points nationally and by even more, 24 points, in the 50 contested Republican held seats. That is a sea of change from 2004 when they were divided 49 to 48 percent for the Democrats, and 2002 when they split 48 to 45 percent for the Republicans.

The problem for the Republicans is not simply the scale of shift among independents, but the possible new patterns in the middle of the electorate. The shifts have come among the following sectors:

- **Young voters.** The Republican vote was down 6 points among all voters under 30, with Democrats winning 60 to 38 percent; they lost even more, 10 points, among young white voters. Their turnout increased their share of the vote from 2002, though down from 2004.

- ***The best-educated.*** The Republicans lost 10 points with post-graduate men and 6 with college-educated women. And while college women have leaned Democratic, this election brought a dramatic shift of the men: from minus 16 points in 2002 to plus 6 this year.
- ***The older non-college men.*** The Republican vote dropped 7 points with these white, older, blue collar voters (and 3 points with the women) that together form 25 percent of the electorate. This is one of the biggest changes in this election: in 2002, older white non-college voters supported Republicans by 15 points, but in 2006, they voted Democratic by 6. These voters favored Republicans on security and values in the last election, but in 2006, their populist concerns took precedence, and they were looking for Washington to do something about American jobs.
- ***Unmarried women.*** The white, unmarried women leaned Democratic in 2002 but supported Democrats by almost 20 points in this election. They are the most economically vulnerable and on their own, and are now a more Democratic base group.
- ***Devout Catholics.*** Republicans lost ground with religious voters, including a 6-point drop in support among Devout Catholics.
- ***Seniors.*** They divided evenly, after leaning Republican congressionally and strongly for Bush in 2004. They remain very contested.

New world in the middle

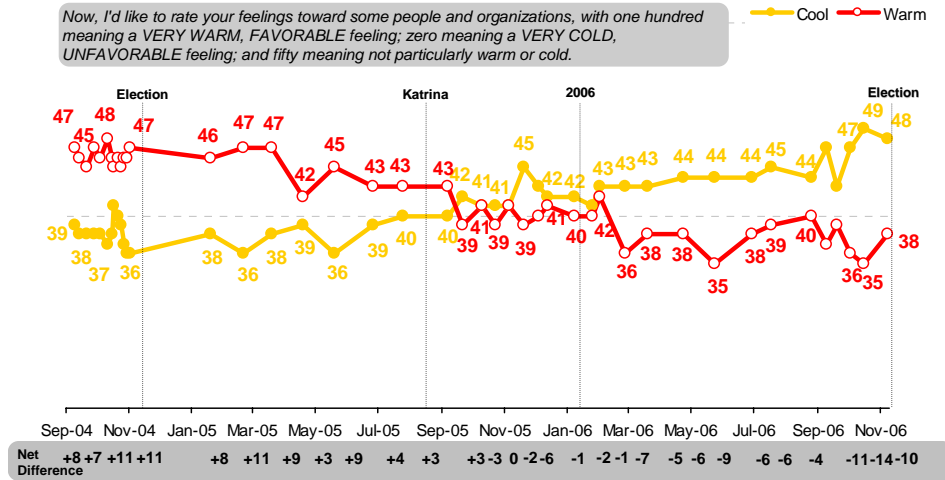


These are not just groups of independent or swing voters: they represent distinct forms of reaction to the way Bush and Gingrich have governed since 1994.

After the 1994 upheaval and Republican win, ‘conservatives’ were viewed very positively: 47 percent warm/favorable reactions and only 25 percent cool/negative. But with the 2006 upheaval and Democratic takeover, ‘conservatives’ lost the public’s affection, now with more negative than positive responses (38 percent warm and 41 percent cool).

The Republican Party has ended up with the most negative image in memory, lower than Watergate. Its vote in congressional races is the lowest since 1982.

Republican Party takes a hit – lowest point in memory



The Democratic Party also ended up being viewed more negatively during this election than in 2004, and slightly more negative at the end in this campaign. With the gap between the parties comparable to 1994, Democrats made big gains, but they are surely not revered. Voters are open to the Democrats, reflected in the vote and the gain on important attributes over the last two years, including ‘reform and change’, being ‘for the middle class’ and ‘new ideas’. But Democrats have only modest advantages – and are chosen by fewer than 50 percent – on key attributes such as being ‘on your side’, ‘future-oriented’ and ‘for families’. The parties are evenly divided on ‘shares your values’, unchanged from January 2005. But with this new stage, Democrats have the opportunity to be heard on their convictions, values and ideas.

The Message of the Meltdown Election

There is no doubt that voters were making a big judgment on Iraq in this change election, which they say is the most important issue in their vote by a wide margin, and its handling is their highest doubt about Republicans. With Bush declaring that Iraq is the frontline in the war on terrorism, voters turned not just against the war but against the idea that “bottom line, America’s security depends on its own military strength” (34 percent); many more now see greater security in “building strong alliances” (58 percent). The Republicans lost most of their advantage on national security in this election.

Voters want a new direction on Iraq and expect a Democratic victory to bring troop reductions: 40 percent expect a decreased number of troops and 31 percent want the removal of all troops, according to the MoveOn poll². Nonetheless, voters remain conflicted about the pace of reductions and concerned about what will follow in Iraq.

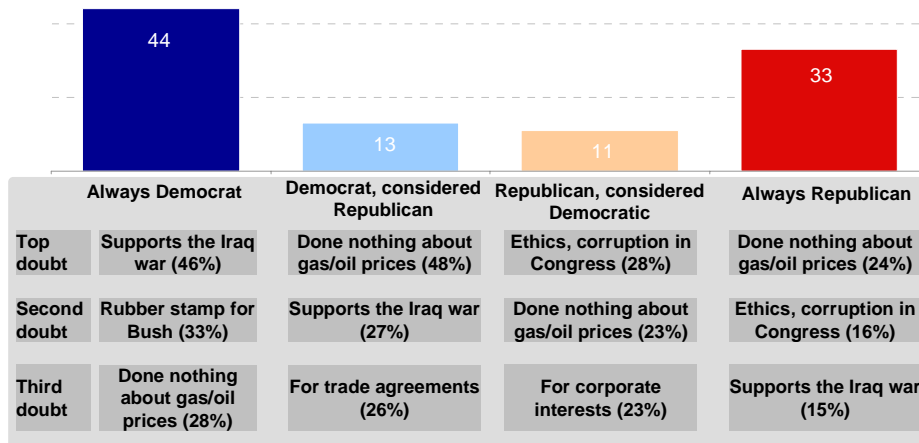
President Bush was a significant factor in this election (18 point net negative), with as many voting against him in the Republican-held competitive seats as nationally. Bush's approval grew more negative nationally in the final weeks of the campaign, and the anti-Bush gap on intensity reached its widest point among those who voted November 7th: 46 percent strongly disapprove and only 23 percent strongly approve. The more the president campaigned, the lower his approval rating nationally.

Yet this election is about much more than Iraq. When we focus on the doubts that led people to vote out the Republicans, voters are extremely concerned with the economic and financial issues that squeeze the middle class (gas and health care costs), as well as the ethics, corruption and corporate special interests that crowd out the public interest. A populist anger is an important ingredient of this change election. That is why the message of this election for conservatives is more than about a war gone wrong.

Top doubts about Republicans for swing voters - national

■ Numbers are based on percent of total voters

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



² MoveOn Post Election poll, conducted November 5-7, 2006 of 1,021 likely voters

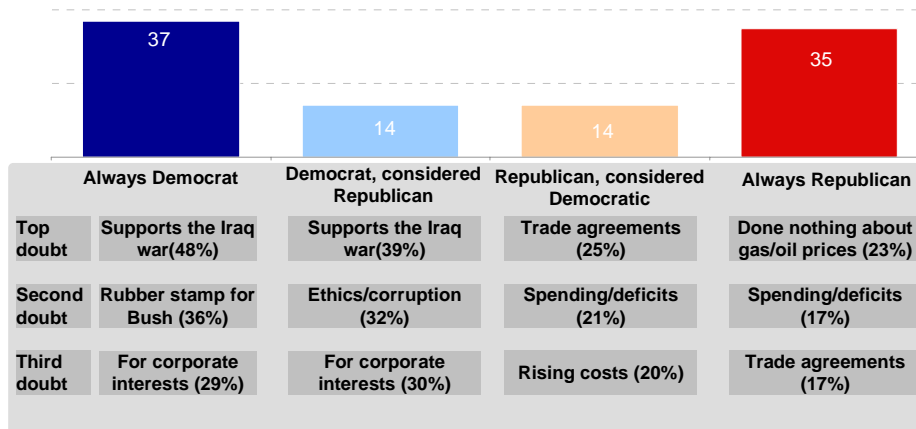
While the Iraq war was somewhat more important in the Republican competitive districts, the other doubts are also strong, combined with a greater worry about Republicans letting spending get out of control.

In the competitive districts where control of the House was decided, the strong Democratic voters (those who never wavered or considered voting Republican) were motivated strongly by Iraq and Bush, along with a concern about corporate special interests. But the swing voters – those that considered or supported Republicans during the election but voted Democratic in the end and gave them the victory – were strongly populist, with concerns about ethics, corruption, and corporate interests which nearly equaled anger about Iraq. It is interesting that the swing voters who stuck with the Republicans were most put off by the Republicans’ support of trade agreements that cost jobs and government spending.

Top doubts about Republicans for swing voters – GOP districts

Numbers are based on percent of total voters

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



The Narrative of the Meltdown Election

The dominant narrative for voters in interpreting their vote on November 7th begins with Iraq and Bush and a Congress that will play a role restraining him. Iraq has intensity and is particularly important for the unwavering Democratic voters. Among all Democratic voters, however, the theme most important to their vote is the desire for “politicians to work for the public good, instead of the special interests”. That current is strong for the strong Democrats as well as for swing voters who gave Democrats their majority. Almost as strong – and also a powerful complement – is a desire for an economic course that allows middle class families to prosper again. This was the 2nd strongest theme for swing voters who voted Democratic.

And we should not leave out the concern with “competence” on “dealing with our big problems”. This race crystallized with Katrina and the theme is important for all swing voters.

Top themes in Democratic vote

I want to read you some reasons why you may have voted for the Democratic candidate for Congress, or considered voting for that candidate. Please tell me whether, for each one, if it is the SINGLE MOST IMPORTANT reason, one of the TOP FEW, NEAR THE TOP, in the MIDDLE, or NOT an important reason why you voted or considered voting for the Democrat for Congress.

	Single most	Total important	
		Top two	Top three
Getting us out of the mess in Iraq	26	51	75
Getting politicians to work for the public good, instead of the special interests	21	50	79
Getting a Congress that will challenge President Bush and his policies	22	48	68
Getting a government that's competent on dealing with our big problems	20	45	76
Changing our economic policies so middle class families can prosper again	19	45	75

The State of Conservatism

Important conservative principles, particularly those articulated by the Gingrich-Bush Republican conservatives, never won majority support in the country and indeed, some fell along with the Republicans last Tuesday. Their incompetence and reckless spending ironically has left people more skeptical about the government’s ability to do things in some areas. Nonetheless, the meltdown has revealed large majorities ready for the government to act – particularly to deal with the loss of American jobs and energy independence.

There are important areas where conservatives have lost ground to progressives.

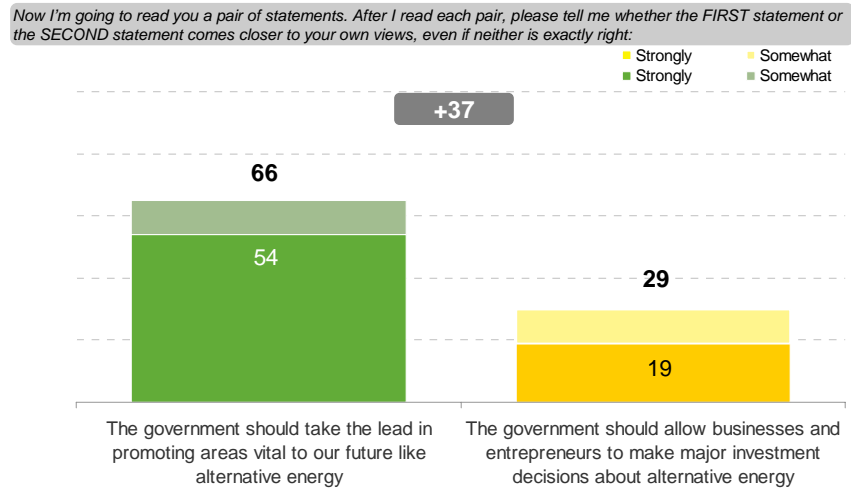
- To achieve security, voters now are dramatically more likely to prefer “building strong alliances” to depending on America’s “own military strength” (58 to 34 percent).
- The more gay marriage is debated, the more tolerant the country grows, with a majority now saying that “homosexuality is a way of life that should be accepted by society” (51 percent), rather than something that should be “discouraged by society” (42 percent).

- Large majorities think religious groups are getting too mixed up in politics, including large majorities of mainline Protestants and Catholics.
- “Promoting community and responsibility, because we’re all in this together” seems more appropriate to voters now than “promoting individualism, personal responsibility and self-reliance” (50 to 40 percent).
- Consistent with where things stood back in 2002, large majorities say government regulation of business is necessary to protect the public good rather than regulation causing “more harm than good” (54 to 38 percent).

But given the decade of experience with a government that has not performed well in many areas, the electorate is cautious about the idea of government helping “create the conditions so that many can prosper, not just the few” contrasted with keeping taxes low “so that business and individuals can prosper” (44 to 52 percent). America still depends on the private sector and entrepreneurship and is cautious about taxes, particularly in a period of rising financial pressures.

Still, the philosophic caution gives way quickly once one identifies specific areas where government might take the initiative. There is overwhelming support for protecting jobs and ensuring that trade is fair, rather than government promoting free trade to expand exports and import cheaper goods. And voters, with great intensity believe the government should take the lead in promoting alternative energy, rather than depending on business and entrepreneurs to make the major investment decisions.

By wide margin, Americans want to invest in alt. energy sources



Ads in this election – often from both Republicans and Democrats – featured attacks on corporate lobbies and donors, with oil companies and drug companies among the leading targets. This reflected and contributed to voter attitudes that are remarkably dour about big corporations, thus favoring government acts to keep them in check, and seeking politicians who will act in the public good, not the interests of corporate lobbies.

Democrats now have the stage with the opportunity to show the direction they will take the country. The starting points are the lessons of the Meltdown Election of 2006, with voters looking for Democrats to act for people and the public interest.