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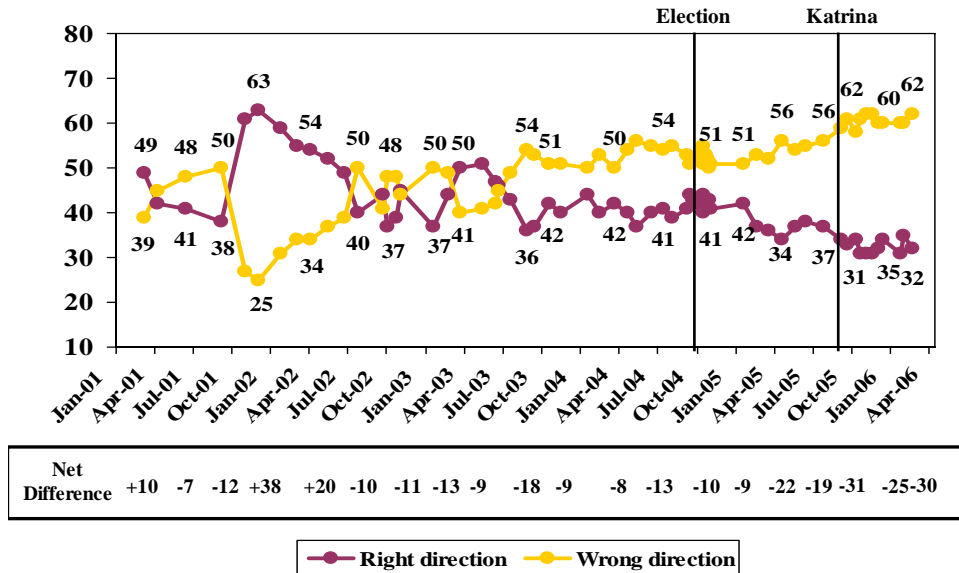
REPUBLICANS, TOO
Notes on the Latest Democracy Corps survey

We have entered a new stage in the 2006 election campaign, where Republicans now have become part of the problem too. These are voters that Republicans can potentially reclaim, but that effort to reconsolidate the base will be difficult, take time and be watched across the electorate. As we can see in this latest Democracy Corps poll, Democrats can run a campaign to change Washington so it works for ordinary Americans and can offer an agenda that dominates any Republican claims on progress.¹

But the starting point is George Bush, who every day is nationalizing this election on our terms. Other polls show breathtaking drops on job approval, but even more so for specific areas, like the war on terrorism and Iraq. He was already low on the economy. In this survey, he hits historic lows on the country's direction and specifically, on changing Bush's direction. With his personal approval hitting new lows here, we very much want 2006 to be about Bush's stewardship for the country. For sure, as we saw this past week, the Republicans will seek to make this about something else.

¹ Democracy Corps conducted a national poll of 1,135 likely voters February 23-27, 2006.

Direction of country

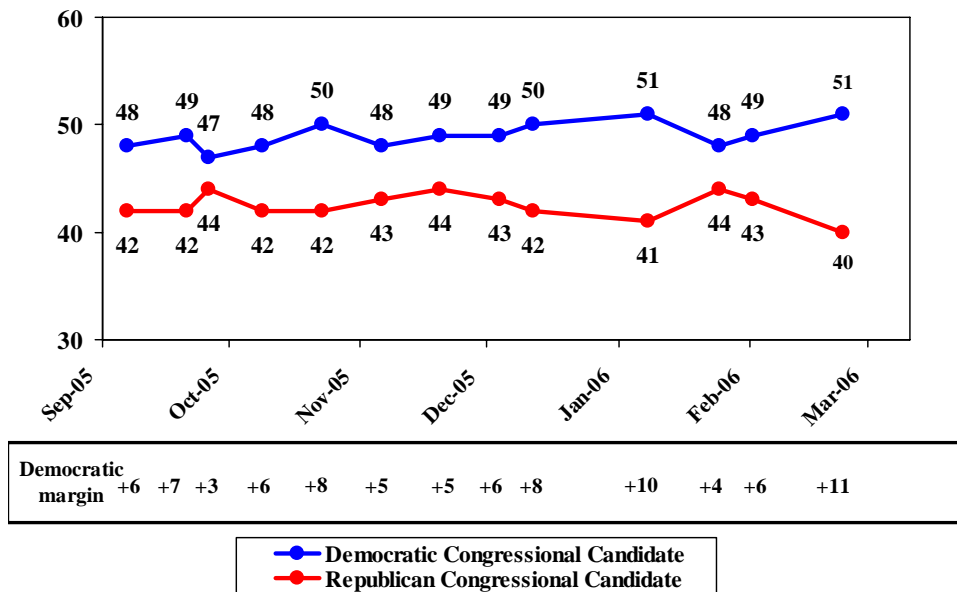


The disillusionment now has swept into the Republican loyalist world. Overall, we have seen a dramatic drop in the number of voters who “strongly approve” of Bush’s handling of the job. That fell 8 points this month to only 22 percent. The drop in enthusiasm was led by his base. Less than half of Republicans give him a strong approval rating – down 15 points; among conservatives, down 14 points; white married men, down 14 points.

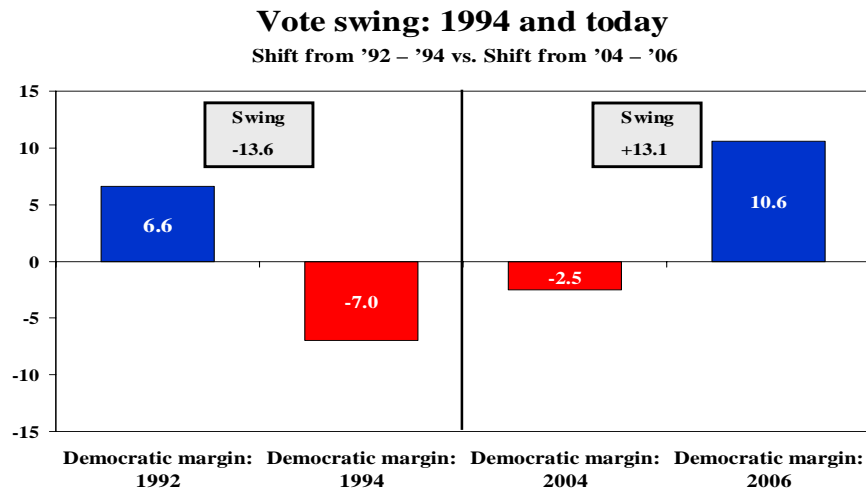
Our analysis of the Republican loyalist groups shows a sharp slippage among white rural voters and blue collar men, as well as the best-educated and upscale married men – even before the last controversies around port security and the Iraq “civil war.”

In this poll, 18 percent of 2004 Bush voters are voting Democratic for Congress, while only 9 percent of Kerry voters are voting Republican.² In the red counties that voted for Bush, Democrats are getting 42 percent of the vote, while in the blue counties, Republicans are only getting 30 percent. The map is changing. That is reflected in the rising vote for the Democrats for Congress.

Congressional vote: Candidates named



² It is important to note that this is an actual vote for Congress, using the incumbent name, not a generic ballot.



If Democrats win the 2006 election by 11 points, as in this survey, that would represent a 13 point swing from the actual vote in 2004, when the Republicans won by 2.5 points. This is identical to the level of vote swing the Republicans achieved between 1992 and 1994 – view conventionally as a landslide election.

Importantly, the latest fallout has produced the first major drop in the standing of the Republican Party. The percentage giving warm/favorable responses dropped 6 points to only 36 percent. The attempts to distance themselves from the president on these various issues has produced less confidence in the Republicans overall, who have depended on their show of unity and strength. There are a lot of pieces that have to be put back together.

They own a war that has reached its low point in popularity and an economy that is producing little joy among ordinary voters.

The Democrats could watch these unfolding events with some awe, but we recommend that they be heard. Voters are dislodged and dissatisfied, and as we shall see in this survey, extremely critical of what the Republicans have done and very open to a Democratic agenda. That agenda is particularly strong where it includes a strong component on living standards and

American jobs. The scale of the problems facing the Republicans and Bush only elevates the opportunity for Democrats to lay out their change agenda.

The most useful lesson from this survey is that Democrats can get heard on a clear and simple set of policies.

Competing Agendas: a practical and simple agenda for change

The mess in Washington and globally has created an electorate desperate for ideas and policies that will help ordinary Americans and the country. After hearing the Democratic very practical plans (comprised of five simple policies), 63 percent of voters say they are more likely to vote for the Democrats – well above the Democrats current vote. It is also 14 points above the number who say they would be more likely to vote for the Republicans after hearing about their agenda.

The strongest agenda includes the following:

- Raise the minimum wage to \$7 an hour
- Repeal the new tax loophole that encourages companies to move operations overseas
- Replace Bush's prescription drug plan with a simple one that controls costs
- Implement all the recommendations of the 9/11 Commission on Homeland Security
- Create tax incentives to expand the development of wind, solar, and biofuel technologies

In the open-ended follow-up, replacing the drug plan got the highest recall (35 percent), followed by a cluster of strong items (minimum wage, energy and minimum wage), each with about 30 percent. The 9/11 Commission was somewhat lower.

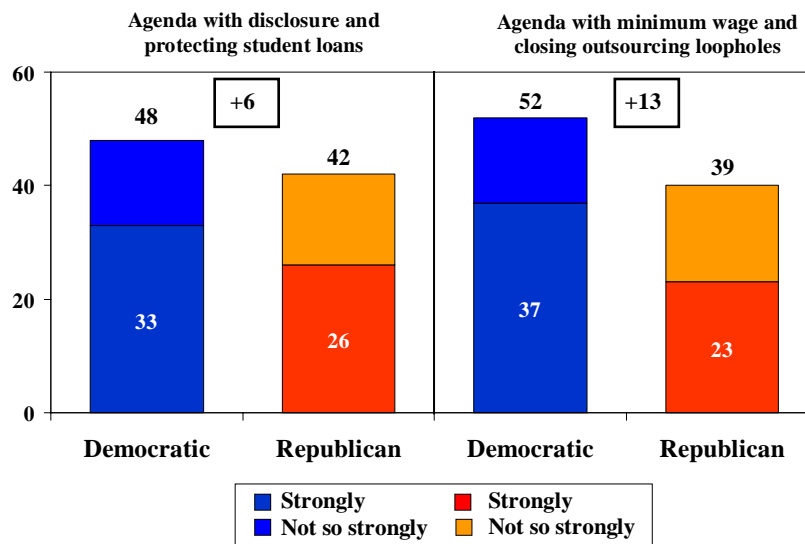
We also presented voters with another set of five policies. Instead of the minimum wage and tax loopholes on exporting jobs, we included the following:

- Require members of Congress to disclose every contact with lobbyists
- Repeal the cuts in all funding to student loan programs.

This second set of five proposals (energy, 9/11 Commission, prescription drugs, lobbyists and college loans) tested equally well overall. And the recall gave the greatest strength to replacing the drug plan and repealing the student loan changes.

But when we put this second set of policies in competition with the Republican policy priorities, the message that included two economic policies (minimum wage and exported jobs) defeated the Republican message by 13 points – double the win for the 2nd agenda.

Agreement with party priorities



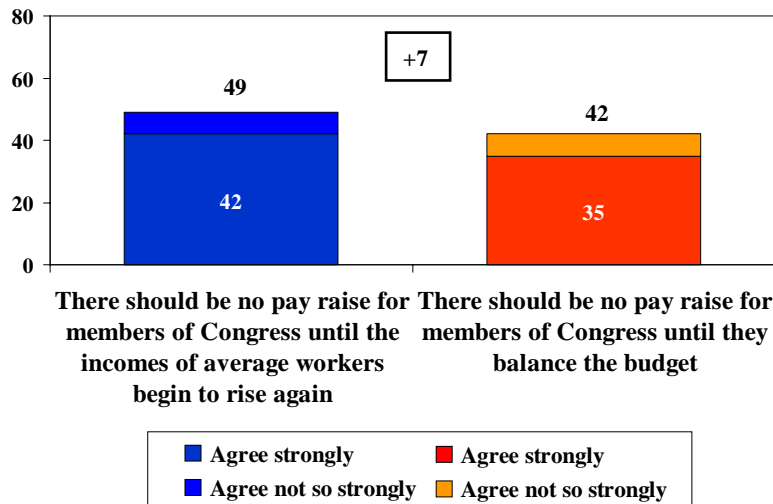
“After hearing these statements, regardless of how you plan to vote, do you find yourself agreeing more with the Republican issues priorities or more with the Democratic issue priorities?”

We tested the Republican policy priorities in two ways. First, we tested a record of progress. It makes the case for progress, focusing on Iraq, prescription drugs and the economy. However, just 49 percent say they are more likely to vote for the Republican candidate based on this – 14 points below the Democratic policy agenda. The second Republican statement talked about the record of progress but also set out new initiatives, including reduced troop levels, new energy plans and a crackdown on illegal immigrants using public services. The new agenda gets support up to 52 percent, a touch higher, but well below the Democrats.

The Democratic agenda might have proved even stronger had the agenda included the most popular Democratic reform – no pay raise for members of Congress until they balance the budget. In the January Democracy Corps survey, that was the strongest reform proposal.

However, we revised the proposal to link any pay raise instead to “the incomes of average workers beginning to rise again.”³ That was significantly more popular – reinforcing the notion that Democrats must show a central concern with living standards in our policy agenda.

Pay raise for Congress
 Rising incomes vs. Balancing the budget



“Now I’m going to read you some pairs of statements. Please tell me whether the FIRST statement or the SECOND statement comes closer to your own views, even if neither is exactly right.”

The prescription drug plan is an important part of this agenda, particularly for older voters. There is some evidence here that seniors have cooled a little in their anger about the plan,

³ It is important to note that using the minimum wage in this formulation was weaker. Then, voters were more focused on linking congressional pay raises to a balanced budget.

but feelings are still predominantly negative. Intense negative reactions are still almost twice that for the intense positives. More importantly, opposition to the plan is even greater with pre-retirees, who see the mess that has been created and get not immediate relief on their high health care bills.

Again, the lesson here is that Democrats have a pretty powerful agenda for a new Congress that voters are anxious to hear about as they pull back from the Republicans.

Changing the Congress

In the last Democracy Corps survey, we urged progressives and Democrats to frame this election as a change election, with reformist Democrats wanting to clean up Washington where the corporate lobbyists have run out of control – with a drug plan to help drug companies, not seniors; an energy bill to subsidize oil companies not lower prices; and no-bid contracting in Iraq, helping corporate friends, not the troops.

In this survey, we tested some of the top “outrages.” The results of this survey re-enforce the seriousness of these issues in defining the Republican direction for the country. Almost two thirds say these raise serious doubts and almost 40 percent say, “very serious.”

DOUBTS ABOUT REPUBLICANS		
	Very Serious Doubts	Total Serious Doubts
Republicans in Washington gave Halliburton, Vice President Cheney's old company, 10 billion dollars in no-bid contracts, yet our soldiers in Iraq still lack the body armor and armored vehicles they need to protect them from attacks.	40	68
Working closely with drug company lobbyists, Republicans in Washington drafted and passed a complicated prescription drug plan that confuses seniors and creates 139 billion dollars in profits for drug companies, but bars Medicare from negotiating lower drug prices for seniors.	35	65
The Bush administration has allowed a company in the United Arab Emirates, a country that has a poor record of helping the U.S. in the war on terror, to assume control of ports in six American cities.	35	63
While the income of the average American family has gone down over the past four years, including last year, CEO salaries have increased by 25 percent. Yet the republicans continue to give the biggest tax breaks to those earning over 200 thousand a year.	34	66
A strong education system is critical to America's future but Republicans in Washington propose 12 billion dollars in cuts to education funding, including the largest cut to student loan programs in history.	33	63

The corruption in Iraq, drug company lobbyists and the prescription drug plan, stagnant incomes while CEOs' incomes soar, the port deal, and waived fees for the energy companies add up to quite an indictment. The power is positioning them in a frame that requires voters to support the Democrats in order to clean up the mess in Washington.

Or maybe, it is just time for a change.