

June 10, 2004

To: Interested Parties

From: Simon Rosenberg, New Democrat Network
Mark Penn, Penn, Schoen & Berland Associates
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Re: 2004 Research Shows Good News for Democrats

To help Democrats chart a new course for 2004 and for years to come, the New Democrat Network launched the [New Majority Coalition Project](#), a multi-year research project to: help identify the characteristics of America's changing electorate; effectively communicate a Democratic message to them; develop a potent critique of Bush administration and Republican policies; and devise a strategy to build a lasting Democratic coalition.

As part of this effort, NDN commissioned Penn, Schoen & Berland Associates to conduct an exhaustive poll of 1515 likely voters, including 913 likely voters in 18 "battleground" states.¹ This survey builds on NDN's [path-breaking survey](#) of likely voters conducted last summer, and extensive polling and strategic development it has conducted since 2000. It will inform the work NDN is doing to advocate for a New Democratic agenda for the nation, and foster new strategies to build a new majority coalition for Democrats.

For more information on NDN activities, including [A Commitment to Hope and Progress: NDN's Agenda for the First Decade of the 21st Century](#) and NDN's [groundbreaking efforts](#) to educate the Hispanic community about this agenda, visit www.newdem.org.

Overview

Democrats Are Back. The Democratic Party has renewed strength; it has higher favorable ratings and scores better than Republicans on generic congressional and state legislative ballots. The presidential race is a dead heat nationally, and John Kerry is beating President Bush by eight percentage points (51 to 43) in battleground states. This is a dramatic change from last year and good news for Democrats.

Security Swings. About three-quarters of all voters have their minds made up about the presidential race. One-quarter are undecided, and 15 percent are truly open to either side. While they strongly prefer Kerry to Bush when it comes to economic issues, these voters are more concerned than the average voter about Kerry's ability to handle Iraq and

¹ The survey was conducted May 19-26 and consisted of interviews with 1,515 likely voters interviews nationwide, including 913 in the battleground states of Arkansas, Arizona, Colorado, Florida, Iowa, Maine, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Mexico, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Washington, West Virginia, and Wisconsin. The margin of error is $\pm 2.5\%$ for the overall sample and $\pm 3.3\%$ for the battleground sample.

protect America from terrorist attack. Even among female swing voters, it is security that is keeping them from becoming a solid Democratic vote. Security is also driving the gender gap wider apart.

Personality vs. Performance. Only 35 percent of likely voters say the country is on the right track, and the Republican Party has retreated to its core strengths and constituencies. Critically, the Republican Party has not improved its broader image. Yet Democrats are not viewed favorably among voters to whom values and strong leadership are important. Democrats need to frame issues that are Democratic strengths such as healthcare and stewardship of the environment in ways that convey our own values and leadership qualities.

Issue Agenda: Lead With the Positive. Of all the messages tested, the most effective one was the NDN Agenda that is centered on creating economic opportunity for all, keeping the military and alliances strong to win the war on terrorism, improving education, expanding access to health care, and protecting the environment. On the other side, Bush's record on the economy and health care has not been well-received by the American people. Democrats must convey how we will keep America competitive against new industrial powers, and lay out how we will deal with the threat of terrorism by maintaining a strong military and enlisting more allies. If Democrats do not meet this basic test on security, voters will not listen to our powerful arguments on domestic issues.

A Note on Nader. Without Nader on the ballot, Kerry has a tiny lead, 47 percent to 46 percent. With Nader on the ballot, Kerry is losing 43 percent to 45 percent (with Nader drawing 6 percent). Nader is drawing his votes from independents and Democrats, the majority of whom would otherwise be voting for Kerry. Without Nader on the ballot, Nader voters prefer Kerry over Bush 58 percent to 22 percent.

Key Findings

NOTHING TO BE BLUE ABOUT

The Democratic Party is popular and well-positioned. Of all the institutions and political figures tested, the Democratic Party has the highest favorability rating at 57 percent. Subtracting out its unfavorable rating of 38 percent, the party is 19 percent net favorable. This compares to a 7 percent net favorable rating for the Republican Party.

Party	% Favorable/Unfavorable	% Net Favorable
Democratic Party	57/38	19
Republican Party	51/44	7

The Democratic Party tops the Republican Party among key voter groups, including white females, battleground state voters, and swing voters. Among swing voters, the Democratic Party has nearly three times the net favorable rating of the Republican Party: 31 percent versus 12 percent. In the battleground, the Democratic Party has a net favorable rating of 20 percent compared to the Republican Party's two percent.

On generic ballots for congressional and state legislative races, Americans prefer Democrats -- a marked improvement from the party's standing in June of last year when the NDN survey found Democrats and Republicans tied in the congressional ballot.

Candidate	Congress	State Legislature
Democrat	46%	44%
Republican	38%	37%

THE ISSUE AGENDA: LEAD WITH THE POSITIVE

Americans want to hear an optimistic Democrat talking about how America can do better -- particularly on the issues of the economy and health care. Of all the messages tested, the most effective one was the NDN Agenda that is centered on creating economic opportunity for all, keeping the military and alliances strong to win the war on terrorism, improving education, expanding access to health care, and protecting the environment. (See Appendix A for the text of the NDN Agenda message and two other ones that tested well.)

Overall, in testing arguments for both sides, we found that themes that stressed the economy and health care, as well as the more general issue of social progress, trumped themes in which the focus was security. This indicates that security is a critical threshold issue, but if met by both sides, economic concerns will determine the outcome of the election.

Concerns Americans Have About the Bush Agenda. On the other side, Americans do not look at Bush's record on the economy and health care favorably. Three specific facts strongly concern voters: under Bush's watch, America has lost 2.3 million jobs; almost 44 million Americans do not have health insurance; and last year the number of Americans who do not have health insurance rose, the most it has in a decade.

Health Care Costs and Outsourcing are the Leading Economic Concerns

The cost of health care is the leading economic issue of concern to voters, followed by outsourcing. Two-thirds of Americans believe outsourcing is a “major problem,” and more than 8 in 10 Americans believe we should ensure that the tax code does not reward companies that choose to send jobs overseas.

Out of the following economic issues, which are you most concerned about?	All	Def Kerry	Def Bush	Swing	White Male	White Female	Battle-ground
The cost of health care	28%	27%	21%	37%	23%	29%	30%
Outsourcing American jobs abroad	18%	17%	16%	23%	18%	17%	19%
Unemployment	15%	20%	13%	12%	10%	17%	13%
The federal budget deficit	14%	22%	11%	7%	19%	12%	14%
Taxes	11%	3%	20%	10%	13%	10%	9%
Inflation	6%	6%	6%	5%	5%	6%	5%
Interest rates	3%	1%	6%	3%	4%	4%	3%
The U.S. trade deficit	3%	1%	4%	3%	3%	3%	3%
Don't know (VOL)	2%	3%	4%	0%	4%	1%	3%

Trade and the Global Economy. Also, America’s role in the global economy has emerged as an important issue. First, Americans see the benefit of free trade, so long as it’s fair trade. 53 percent of Americans say trade is good for America, but we need tougher enforcement of elements of those agreements that protect American workers from unfair competition, while just 33 percent say trade agreements hurt America and we need to make major changes to our trade agreements not just enforce them better.

Democrats Falling to the Back of the Class. Nationally, Kerry is enjoying the historic Democratic advantage on education (53 percent of those polled say Kerry would do better on improving public education to 34 percent who say Bush would). Yet in the battleground, Kerry’s lead on this issues shrinks from 19 percentage points to nine (47 percent to 38 percent), and is held below 50 percent. Democrats cannot take education for granted, and must remind voters in these states of their strong record and commitment to public education.

DEAD HEAT AT TOP; STRENGTH IN THE BATTLEGROUND

The presidential election is currently a dead heat, with Kerry getting 47 percent of the vote and Bush 46 percent. However, despite the nearly \$80 million Bush has spent on television advertising in the battleground states, Kerry has an eight percentage point lead over Bush in the battleground states, 51 percent to 43 percent.

Audience	Kerry	Bush
National	47%	46%
Battleground	51%	43%

SECURITY SWINGS

When it comes to economic and domestic issues, Democrats hold a sizable issue advantage, but must prove to voters that they will keep them and the country secure.

Iraq. Unlike the 2003 NDN survey in which the economy was the number-one issue, the number-one issue facing the country in the minds of voters is Iraq. Surprisingly, the Democratic standard-bearer is winning those who say that Iraq is the most important issue by 50 percent to 43 percent. Yet, the core of this support is among the one-third of those polled who are firmly anti-war. Bush is leading among those who consider themselves “pro-war” and those who have not yet made up their mind about the war.

Position	Percent	Ballot among those voters (Kerry/Bush)
Pro-War	34%	20%/76%
Anti-War	33	88/8
Neutral	30	35/52

Swing Voters Seeking Security. Approximately three-quarters of all voters have firmly made up their mind in the presidential race – 37 percent for Kerry and 37 percent for Bush. If you push it further, only about 15 percent of those polled are truly open to be persuaded by either side. While they strongly prefer Kerry to Bush when it comes to economic issues, these voters are more concerned than the average voter about Kerry’s ability to handle Iraq and protect America from terrorist attack. Even among female swing voters, it is security that is keeping them from becoming a solid Democratic vote. Security is the key to the swing.

Among Swing Voters

Issue	Kerry Would Do Better Job	Bush Would Do Better Job
Creating jobs	52%	23%
Creating opportunity	57	17
Improving the economy	57	27
Handling the situation in Iraq	36	49
Protecting America from terrorist attack	27	59

Democrats Must Be Trusted on Security. The electorate can be segmented into three types of voters: those who will be voting primarily on the economy (50 percent of all voters), security (29 percent), and values (20 percent). In the generic ballot for Congress, Democrats lead among economy voters but lose among both security and values voters. The implications of this are clear: since 100 percent of the half of the electorate who are most concerned about the economy cannot be expected to support a Democrat, the party must also have a strong agenda on security and values as well.

Congressional Ballot	All	Economy (50% of voters)	Security (29% of voters)	Values (20% of voters)
Democrat	46	60	34	30
Republican	38	24	50	53
Don't know	16	16	15	17

PERSONALITY VS. PERFORMANCE

At this stage of the election, the President is being judged for his leadership skills more than for his performance in office. Even though just 35 percent say the country is headed in the right direction, 51 percent say they give the President a positive rating for the job he is doing overall. Even though just 40 percent say the economy is headed in the right direction, 46 percent give the President a positive rating for the job he is doing on the economy. The Republican Party's appeal is based on the personal attributes of one person – not its issue positions or record; the Democratic Party's appeal is based on issues and record while its leader has yet to be defined in the eyes of the electorate.

Issues. Voters think Kerry would do a better job than Bush on almost all domestic issues from the economy to health care to education. Voters overall also give Bush a narrow lead on Iraq and a substantial lead on terrorism. As discussed earlier, Democrats cannot sustain this huge disadvantage on terrorism and have the American people listen to the full Democratic agenda.

Issue	Kerry Would Do Better Job	Bush Would Do Better Job
Reducing the deficit	54%	29%
Preserving Social Security	53	29
Improving public education*	53	34
Improving health care system	51	33
Creating jobs	51	35
Improving the economy	52	40
Handling the situation in Iraq	42	49
Keeping crime rate from rising	35	43
Protecting America from terrorist attack	35	53

* 48/33 among swing voters

Traits. Kerry is seen as standing for the middle class, sharing people’s values, and ties the President when it comes to compassion. However, President Bush retains the assets that have been the core of his presidency for the past three years – specifically, the impression that he is a patriotic leader of strong moral character and strong leadership skills.

Traits	Applies More to Kerry	Applies More to Bush
Is looking out for the middle class	53%	34%
Is intelligent	48	33
Shares your values	44	41
Takes responsibility for their own actions	44	41
Is compassionate	43	41
Has common sense	44	43
Is honest	36	43
Is someone you would like to spend time with	37	47
Is a leader	37	51
Is patriotic	31	48
Is optimistic	34	54
Has strong moral character	33	53
Is strong	31	56

Democrats will be more effective in communicating their agenda to the American people if they frame issues such as healthcare and stewardship of the environment, that are Democratic strengths, in ways that convey their own values and leadership qualities. Simply, Democrats need to leverage their strengths to offset their weaknesses.

GENDER GAP GROWS

Men and women approach this election as if they are from different planets. For example, among women, Kerry has an 11-percentage point lead over Bush (52 to 41); among men, the situation is reversed with Kerry down, 42 percent to 53 percent. The gender gap is even more pronounced among white men and white women. While the race is a dead heat among white women (46 percent for Kerry, 47 percent for Bush), Kerry trails by 23 percentage points among white men (36 to 59). Despite these differences in current support, a look at the swing electorate shows the need to appeal to both men and women – 28 percent of white women and 26 percent of white men are “swing” voters who are open to persuasion by either candidate for President.

Apparently driving the gender gap are the issues that disadvantage Democrats the most: issues such as fighting terrorism, handling Iraq, crime, and taxes; and candidate traits, specifically being a strong leader. A gender gap has also emerged on the issue of the economy. In the 2003 NDN survey, there was almost no difference between men and women on which party they trusted most with the economy. Now, asking that same question about the two parties’ nominees, Kerry leads Bush on “who do you think would

do a better job on improving the economy?” among women 55 percent to 38 percent and among men 48 percent to 43 percent.

Issue	Bush Lead with White Men
Terrorism	44%
Iraq	24
Crime	25
Taxes	17

Attribute	Bush Lead with White Men
Is strong	52%
Is a leader	36

The persistence of the gender gap drives home the importance of Iraq and terrorism in this election. Democrats must demonstrate credibility on these issues in order to close this gap and win over some of the “Office Park Dads” that are open to a Democratic economic appeal.

RADIO KILLED THE RADIO STAR

Voters whose main source of news is radio is the only group in which the Democratic presidential candidate is neither tied with the Republican nor leading him – a result undoubtedly linked to the dominance of conservative radio commentators.

Which of the following is your main source of news?	Media Usage % All	Ballot Among These Users	
		Kerry	Bush
Television	52	47	47
Newspapers	21	53	41
Radio	12	46	52
The Internet	10	50	42
Other	2		
Don't know	2		

The Stern Gang. Potentially offsetting the conservative dominance of the radio waves is Howard Stern. The nationally-syndicated radio host is listened to by 17 percent of likely voters, and nationally, they would support Kerry over Bush by a margin of 53 percent to 43 percent. In the battleground states, their preference for Kerry is even stronger, backing him by a margin of 59 percent to 37 percent.

More importantly, one-quarter of all likely voting Stern listeners are swing voters. This means that four percent of likely voters this fall are swing voters who listen to Howard Stern, showing Stern’s potential ability to impact the race. Generally, likely voters who are Stern listeners are: 2 to 1 male to female; 40 percent Democrats, 26 percent Republicans,

and 34 percent Independents; more liberal and less conservative than the average voter; significantly younger than the average voter (two-thirds are under 50 and 40 percent are under 35); more diverse; and more driven in their vote by economic issues.

Swing Voters Logging on for News. While television is still the dominant source of news, this poll shows that the Internet has emerged as major source of news, comparable in reach to radio. Indeed, among swing voters, 11 percent say that the Internet is their major source of news compared with 7 percent who say radio. Nationally, 12 percent say radio is their main source of news.

A NOTE ON NADER

Ralph Nader likes to say that he's just as likely to draw Republican votes as Democratic and hence is not a real threat to cost John Kerry the election. This simply is not true. Without Nader on the ballot, Kerry has a tiny lead, 47 percent to 46 percent. With Nader on the ballot, Kerry is losing 43 percent to 45 percent (with Nader drawing 6 percent). Nader is drawing his votes from independents and Democrats, the majority of whom would otherwise be voting for Kerry. Without Nader on the ballot, Nader voters prefer Kerry over Bush 58 percent to 22 percent.

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

The following three messages tested well, with the NDN Agenda testing the highest:

Name of Message	Text of Message
NDN Agenda	I believe America can and must do better. We can expand prosperity and opportunity for all Americans by balancing the budget, making taxes more progressive and championing 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.
Two Visions of America	The election is a choice between two visions of America—one for a few Americans or one for all Americans. George Bush thinks we need to cut taxes for the wealthy. I think we need to cut taxes for the middle class and ask the wealthy to pay their fair share so that the wealthy who are living off investment income are not paying less in taxes than other Americans who are who are trying to make ends meet
Changing Globe	The global economy is changing with China and India becoming huge industrial powers. And the world situation is changing with fanaticism and terrorism being the real enemy of America. The job of the next president is to keep America competitive against these new economic powers by focusing on education, healthcare and encouraging innovation in areas like alternative energy. And to keep America strong against terrorism, but both enlist a global coalition to defeat it and create greater understanding in the larger Muslim world. It will take a tough leader to lead us out of these tough new times.