

**DEMOCRACY CORPS**  
**JAMES CARVILLE ♦ STANLEY GREENBERG ♦ ROBERT SHRUM**  
**10 G STREET, NE ♦ SUITE 400 ♦ WASHINGTON, DC 20002**  
**202-478-8330 (TEL) ♦ 202-289-8648 (FAX)**  
**WWW.DEMOCRACYCORPS.COM**

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**To:** Friends of Democracy Corps

**From:** Stan Greenberg  
James Carville

**RE: POST-KATRINA UPDATE**  
**Report on New Democracy Corps Poll**

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The country has lost confidence in George Bush's leadership, direction and plans for the country and indeed, seems to have closed down on him personally and his conservative project. In this survey – the 2<sup>nd</sup> after Katrina – 45 percent of American voters say, they are “finished with him.”<sup>1</sup> This is about his performance, about him personally, and his priorities. With growing passion, voters are upset about Iraq, the neglect of America, Bush's leadership and Katrina, the economy, deficits and gas prices. The result is a growing bloc of voters intent on change, and a diminishing bloc enthusiastic about Bush or his priorities. That is reflected in a major swing to the Democrats in the congressional contests – with a lot to be done to make that real.

That Bush's numbers continued to weaken after his Jackson Square speech and expressed determination to rebuild the Gulf Coast is particularly telling. After the speech, 63 percent said they are losing confidence in Bush, including 51 percent who say “a lot.”

While Bush's decline is the force behind the Republicans' congressional troubles, there is also a congressional dynamic too. Both parties have faltered, as well as the “Republican Congress” in this poll, suggesting the power of anti-Washington messages.

On Katrina, voters are very critical of all levels of government, but that is no solace for George Bush or the Republicans in Congress. The public is much more attuned to what the Democrats are saying – for an independent commission rather than a congressional inquiry; for a serious look at what went wrong, undeterred by attacks about a “blame game.” Indeed, they are all ears when presented with what is going wrong, producing high levels of doubt about what George Bush and the Republicans are doing. The starting point are the deficits and gas prices, but also the role of political appointees (Brown and Rove) and high-level corruption, top end tax cuts, and spending cuts for disaster preparedness in general and the levees, in particular.

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<sup>1</sup> Democracy Corps conducted a national survey of 1,000 likely voters September 19-21, 2005.

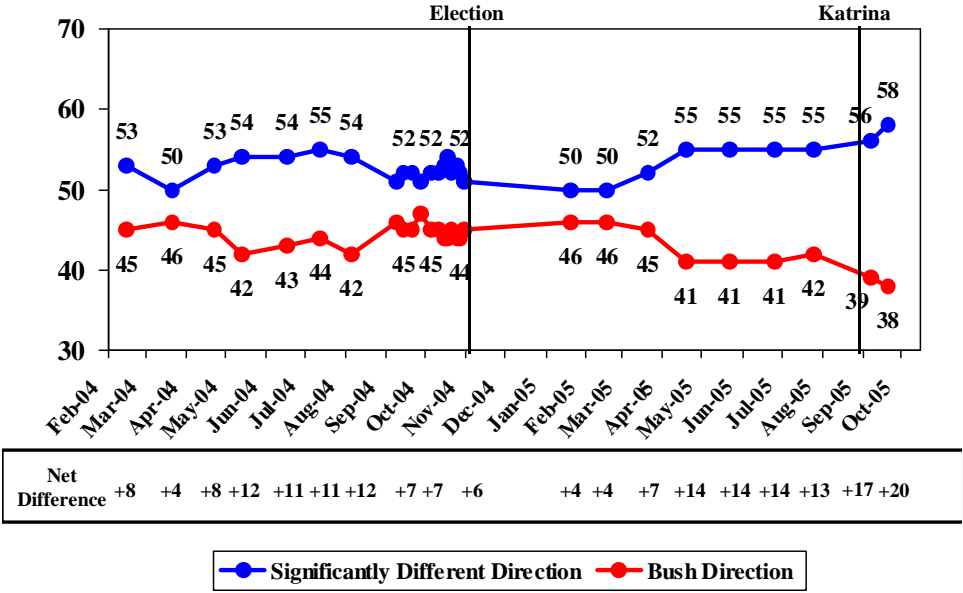
At the same time, voters are looking for an alternative vision and direction for the country. They are particularly responsive to plans for Katrina that prioritize energy independence and gas-price gouging and that creates a czar to oversee federal spending. They want energy done in a new way; they want government done in a new way. This is a moment when Democrats can get heard on their plans and their direction for the country. People are focused not just on Katrina, but even more on Iraq, the deficits, gas prices and the economy. They are looking for an alternative vision that calls on our country to set new priorities and invest in our own people.

This memorandum highlights some of the key findings and introduces the survey results presented in a quite dramatic set of graphs about the state of the country.

**Change, Change, Change**

About 60 percent of the country now wants the country to change course and wants to go in a “significantly different direction than Bush.” Only 38 percent want to continue with Bush’s direction. (Recall that eleven months ago, 51 percent voted for him.)

**Bush direction vs. Significantly different direction**

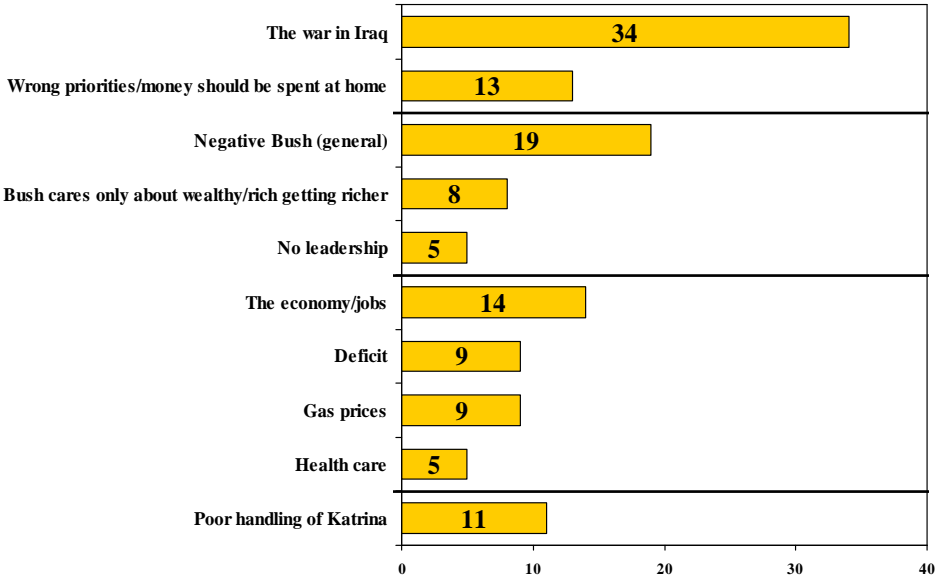


When people are asked what they are thinking about, they start with the war – mentioned by 34 percent, combined with a significant number (13 percent) who say our priorities are

wrong: we need to spend our money at home. A sizeable bloc focuses on Bush or the absence of leadership (24 percent). The economic critique is pretty powerful – focused on the economy and jobs (14 percent), combined with the open-ended mention of the deficits (9 percent) and gas prices (9 percent). There is a powerful sense that things are out of control and that bad choices are keeping us from doing what we need to do.

### Reasons country is on the wrong track

Open end



“Why do you say things are going in the wrong direction?”

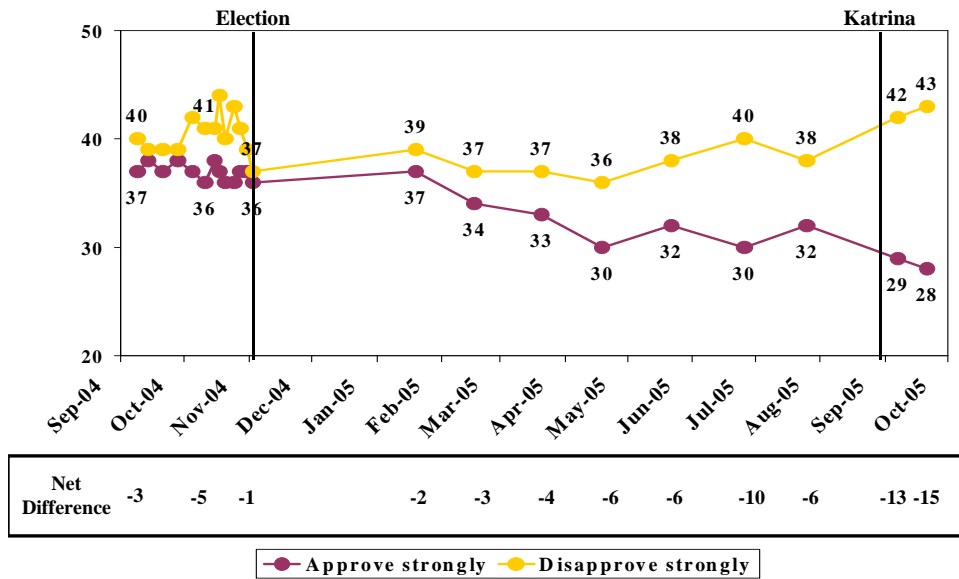
Bush gets his lowest job approval ratings in all these areas of doubt: Iraq (43 percent), the economy (42 percent), health care (35 percent), the federal budget (33 percent), and oil, gas and energy (30 percent).

### Disengaging from Bush

This is about George Bush – though voters are taking out their discontent on the Republicans in Congress. That is why this will be difficult to fix.

Bush’s approval continues downward, now at 43 percent. But more important is the total shift in mood around this. A growing group not only disapprove, they feel very strongly about it (43 percent strong disapproval); the thinning number who approve of Bush’s performance, includes ever fewer who are really enthusiastic supporters.

### Bush loses enthusiasts



The exact same pattern holds for Bush personally: overall decline, combined with rising intense dislike and declining intense regard. Only 43 percent still like George Bush, so do not imagine he woos his way out of these difficulties.

As we indicated earlier, 45 percent say they are “finished with him,” while 56 percent say he “seems in over his head.” A smaller and smaller number of voters view him as a strong leader, now down below 50 percent for the first time (49 percent).

Only 40 percent think he is addressing or making progress on the issues you care about, which will be the heart of any progress attack and definition of the election, centered on priorities.

Bush standing among independents continues to deteriorate. Just 35 percent of these voters approve of his performance in office and 63 percent now want to go in a significantly different direction from the course he has set. While these independents are no more favorable about the Democrats than Republicans – and indeed, feelings about the Democrats are at 2 ½ year lows – today, it is the feelings about the Bush presidency that are mainly driving their judgements.

While Bush has slipped since his speech in Jackson Square, there is some evidence of recovery amongst Republicans and voters in the Deep South -- the closest observers of the recovery effort. We still do not show a collapse of Bush's standing in rural areas.

### **The Congressional Fallout**

The fallout from these conclusions are quite dramatic. Democrats have a 9-point lead in the congressional balloting – produced by a continuing fall in the numbers of people wanting to vote Republican. As in our last poll, Democratic House incumbents are running 10 points stronger against their opponents than Republican incumbents against theirs. These were tested with actual names, and a 7-point Democratic lead represents a 10-point swing from the 2004 elections.

The same pattern holds for the U.S. Senate, where we tested with actual candidate names. While sample sizes are modest for one poll, the Democrats maintain a large leads in the competitive races now held by a Democratic Senator; in the competitive Republican seats, the races are quite close.

But Democrats are leaving a lot of votes on the table. They are getting 48 percent of the vote – the same as in 2004. As a result, 12 percent of the voters are “winnable” for the Democrats – not supporting us now, but open to it (a “fair” probability of voting Democratic and rates Democrats higher than Republicans).<sup>2</sup> With only 9 percent winnable for the Republicans, there is good reason to believe Democrats are underperforming and can widen their lead.

The “winnable” voters are nearly 60 percent female, and though they firmly believe that the war in Iraq has made us less secure, they are also uneasy with the idea of reducing the number of troops there. On the domestic front, they support repealing tax cuts for the wealthy, but express skepticism over new programs that would significantly increase government spending.

### **Katrina**

Voters are upset about big things, including but transcending Katrina, and are looking for new ways of thinking and doing things. They assume Bush and the Republicans have different priorities, so they are looking past them. But they are looking for a new focus on the American people, a new honesty in addressing their needs and a new approaches to issues, particularly energy.

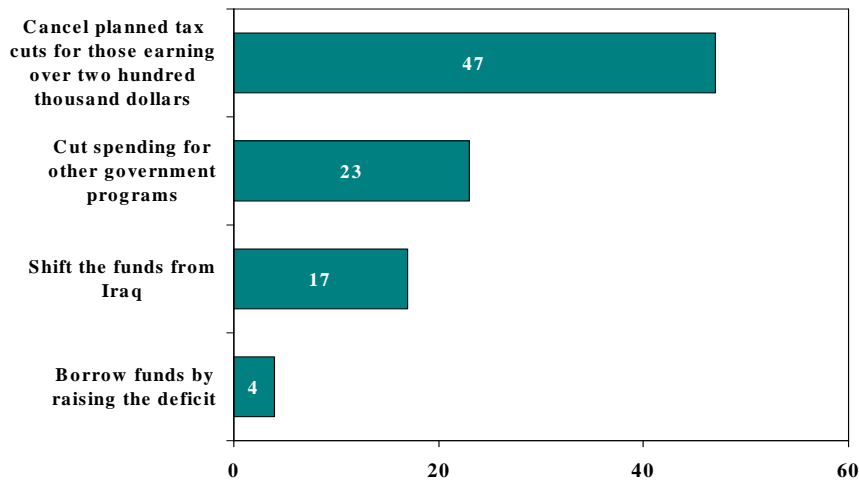
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<sup>2</sup> The Voter Choice Scale was developed by Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research.

Voters want a unified national response but combined with a determination to find out what happened (so that we are better prepared in the future), preferably with an independent commission (as with 9-11). There is little stomach for a joint congressional inquiry, particularly when presented against the option of a bi-partisan commission with independent experts. With both parties and the Congress faltering with the public, the Democrats are right to speak for the nation and press for an independent course and independent oversight. This is a first principle in the unfolding debate.

The second principle is wrong-headed priorities of Bush and the Republicans when it comes to addressing these challenges, particularly paying for it. Half the country (47 percent) would cancel any planned tax cuts for those earning over \$200,000 – twice as many as would cut domestic spending (23 percent). Almost as many (17 percent) would shift the money from Iraq. And few want choose to borrow and increase the deficit (4 percent). When faced with a forced choice, voters choose delayed tax cuts for the wealthy by over two-to-one over the Republicans’ preferred course of continued cutting of taxes and domestic programs. If you sneak in delaying the prescription drug benefit, only a quarter of the country opts for the Republicans’ general approach to these issues.<sup>3</sup>

### Funding the relief and rebuilding effort



*“As you know, they are estimating that it will cost almost 200 billion dollars for relief and rebuilding on the Gulf Coast after Katrina. Let me list four ways to pay for this. Please tell me which one you would choose first.”*

<sup>3</sup> It is important to note that questions that imply canceling broad-based tax cuts are not particularly popular. We should remember that people think the economy is weak and they are financially squeezed. Tax cuts are real money for working and middle class Americans.

Today, voters are most upset about the deficits and the failure to take on the oil companies and address high gas prices. Voters are upset with the rising deficits – produced by Katrina, the Iraq war and tax cuts for the very wealthiest. “Instead of making tough choices” – with the right priorities – the government is running a massive national debt and “passing on the bills to the next generation.” The deficit is about the deficit but it is even more, it is about their priorities (Iraq and wealthy over next generation); it is about a failure of leadership, which is supposed to think ahead. And it is about a troubled economy.<sup>4</sup>

The second strongest attack focuses the administration’s support for the oil companies, the high profits, and failure to do anything about rising gas prices. The strong responsiveness to attacks on gas prices is reflected later in the very high priority given to addressing gas gouging and our need to achieve independence from oil.

Do not underestimate the power of continuing to attack the political appointments, Brown, now Rove, who direct the relief efforts, while so many people suffer. The politicization and corruption at the top of the government are a key part of the story – and why people want independent oversight.

That the administration cut back spending for flood control, the Army Corps of Engineers and the levees, while increasing funds for rebuilding in Iraq, remains a powerful criticism.

Sometimes one has to choose between the negative and positive, but as we shall see here, the public’s critiques are directly and literally linked to what they want to see get done. This is a moment where Democrats have a chance to go back and forth between the positive and negative, each re-enforcing each other. Among the most fascinating results is the high priority given to energy, however poised. The strongest response is for moving to higher fuel efficiency standards, tax credits for hybrids and developing renewable energy. The public also wants to see a czar overseeing spending to make sure special interests do not control what happens post-Katrina.

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<sup>4</sup> The economy and deficits are closely linked in the open-ended comments.

<b>POLICY PROPOSALS IN RESPONSE TO KATRINA</b>		
<i>Top Tier</i>		
	<b>Strongly support</b>	<b>Total Support</b>
<p><b><u>TAKE STEPS TO REDUCE OUR DEPENDENCE ON OIL</u></b></p> <p>To reduce our dependence on oil, increase fuel efficiency standards for cars, create tax credits for hybrids and increase our commitment to develop renewable energy sources.</p>	<b>73</b>	<b>92</b>
<p><b><u>APPOINT CORRUPTION CZAR TO OVERSEE KATRINA</u></b></p> <p>Appoint a non-partisan 'corruption czar' overseeing all federal relief funds to make sure the money goes where it is needed, not to projects pushed by special interest lobbyists or companies that get no-bid projects with no accountability.</p>	<b>66</b>	<b>85</b>
<p><b><u>BAN PRICE GOUGING AND SET CAPS ON GAS PRICES</u></b></p> <p>Reduce gas prices by re-instating a law from the 1970's that banned price gouging by oil companies and set hard caps on the amount they could charge for gas.</p>	<b>64</b>	<b>79</b>
<p><b><u>APOLLO PROJECT FOR ENERGY</u></b></p> <p>Make a massive commitment, similar to the Apollo project that put a man on the moon, to support the research and development necessary to develop alternative energy sources to free us from dependence on foreign oil within ten years.</p>	<b>61</b>	<b>80</b>

We are still working on the broad themes and narrative for this moment when the country is looking for a new direction. In this week’s poll, two emerged at the top, and appear in the graph presentation. The first focuses on investment: Katrina reminds us that we failed to make the investments that would pay off later. It calls for America to come together and invest to expand opportunity for all, not the few. The second focuses on the need to prioritize America. It notes, while the government focused all its energies on Iraq, we failed to address our problems at home. It concludes, “it’s time that we got our priorities right and started putting America first again.”

The country, very much disengaged from Bush, very much focused on big problems, is ready to listen to the alternative.