

# The Battleground 2002

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## Democratic Strategic Analysis

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*President Bush is still popular, but signs of weakness are beginning to emerge. His ratings have gone down slightly. A majority of voters think he is too tied to the wealthy. And while granting him credit for success in Afghanistan, voters are tiring of the war and worry about the expanding nature of the conflict. Given his high approval ratings, it is noteworthy that only 43 percent of the electorate say they will definitely vote to reelect Bush.*

*There are also several indications that even if Bush remains popular, this will have limited if any impact on the Congressional elections in November. Democrats now have a 4-point advantage on the generic congressional ballot. Voters continue to solidly prefer divided government—Congress controlled by a different party than the President. Moreover, only 34 percent of voters want a member of Congress who supports Bush—31 percent wants someone who acts independently and 35 percent don't care. And while Bush has maintained an advantage on several key issues, Democratic advantages on key election issues have grown over Republicans more generally. Democrats have significant advantages on health care, Social Security, and being for the middle class, even against Bush, which should stand them in good stead for the November elections.*

*Additionally, voters have a clear agenda for Congress: they want Congress to pass a prescription drug benefit, Social Security Reform, pension reform, and additional education funding. And while they are somewhat cynical this will happen, they intend to blame Republicans if this legislation doesn't pass.*

## THE CONTEXT FOR THE 2002 CONGRESSIONAL ELECTIONS

### THE PRESIDENT IS POPULAR, BUT SIGNS OF WEAKNESS ARE EMERGING

*George W. Bush continues to get favorable ratings for the job he is doing. But, for the first time since September 11<sup>th</sup>, voters are starting to worry about the expanding conflict abroad. Both core Democratic constituencies and key battleground groups are beginning to reassess the president through lenses other than the war on terrorism, and ratings are beginning to slide.*

Voters continue to give President Bush strongly favorable ratings. Three-quarters of the electorate view Bush favorably (including 48 percent very favorable). While this is still a very high favorability rating for a politician, it marks a slight drop from our

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January survey, when Bush enjoyed 81 percent favorable ratings (54 percent very favorable).

***Voters also continue to give President Bush strong job approval ratings, with 74 percent approving of the job he is doing. However, this marks a 10-point drop from January, when Bush enjoyed an 84 percent approval.*** As was to be expected, this drop comes from core Democratic groups, who were rallying around the president in a time of war, but are beginning to reevaluate his overall performance. Bush's job approval is falling among Democrats (50 percent approve of the job he is doing as president, down 21-points), liberals (57 percent, down 16-points), women (74 percent, down 11-points), unmarried women (66 percent, down 16-points), labor union households (69 percent, down 14-points), Hispanics (68 percent, down 3-points), and African American voters (43 percent, down 17-points). But Bush's ratings are also dropping with key battleground constituencies including seniors (70 percent approval, down 12-points), suburban voters (72 percent, down 17-points), Independents (76 percent, down 6-points), and moderates (68 percent, down 12-points).

This drop in ratings is due to a number of factors. As has been discussed in many places, the rallying around the president because of the war is slowly waning and will most likely continue to do so through the Congressional elections. Even more importantly, voters are also coming to see the president as more partisan. Voters are now 8-points less likely to think Bush has reached out to the Democratic Party than they were in January, though two-thirds of voters still think he has made significant efforts (66 percent). Voters are also more likely now to think Bush is siding with the rich and powerful over working families—a majority of voters now think Bush is too tied to the wealthy and to big businesses (52 percent).

***But perhaps most importantly as we look forward to the November elections, voters are beginning to have concerns about the expanding conflict abroad. A majority of voters agree that while Bush has done a good job in Afghanistan, he is getting too involved in other countries without a clearly defined goal (53 percent, including 29 percent who strongly agree).*** Key electoral constituencies, including seniors, women, Hispanics, blue collar voters, and rural voters are particularly likely to share this view. Those voters more likely to think Bush is getting too involved abroad include Democrats (75 percent agree, including conservative Democrats—74 percent), African Americans (65 percent), Hispanic voters (72 percent), liberals (67 percent), moderates (57 percent), seniors (60 percent), women (56 percent, particularly older women and unmarried women—58 percent each), high school graduates (60 percent), voters who live in rural areas (59 percent), lower income voters (61 percent), and those voters who do not own stock or mutual funds (58 percent).

This is a feeling we are also seeing in focus groups. As voters see domestic concerns going un-addressed and budget surpluses turn to deficits, they are looking for sources of money. Expanding involvement abroad is seen as too much focus abroad when things like education reform and a Medicare prescription drug benefit go unfunded and

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Congress dips into the Social Security Trust Fund. As elections loom and domestic concerns go unmet, this could well become a key issue for voters.

The drop in Bush's ratings coupled with concern for his ties to the wealthy and concerns about our expanding mission abroad have translated into real reservations about Bush for the future. There are eerie hints for Republicans that this President Bush, with soaring numbers in times of war, could be denied reelection like his father. ***A majority of voters hold back from saying they will definitely vote to reelect the president in 2004 (43 percent definitely vote for Bush, 29 percent consider someone else, and 23 percent definitely vote for someone else).*** This is remarkable for a president who is still viewed favorably by close to three-quarters of the electorate.

Both core Democratic groups and key swing groups hold back from unconditional support for Bush in 2004. Not surprisingly, Democrats overwhelmingly reject voting for Bush in 2004 (only 13 percent definitely vote to re-elect Bush), including conservative Democrats (18 percent). African-Americans (18 percent vote to definitely re-elect Bush), unmarried women (32 percent), working women (38 percent), and voters in labor households (32 percent) also hold back from supporting Bush in 2004. But Independents are also holding back from committing to Bush (only 36 percent vote to reelect), particularly younger Independents (34 percent).

#### **VOTERS CONTINUE TO WORRY ABOUT THE ECONOMY**

***Regardless of leading economic indicators, voters continue to have major concerns about the economy, with attitudes very similar to what we saw in January. Currently, only 29 percent of voters think the economy is in good condition.*** The majority of voters think the economy is either fair (51 percent) or poor (20 percent). Voters who list the economy as their top concern are even more negative (59 percent fair, 25 percent poor). And as we saw 6 months ago, voters continue to be more likely to feel as though they are worse off financially than they were a year ago (26 percent) than to feel they are better off (16 percent).

Stockholders are more likely to think the economy is in good shape (30 percent) than those who do not own stock or mutual funds (23 percent), while non-stockholders are more likely to think the economy is in poor condition (27 percent, compared to 17 percent of stockholders). Men who own stock are even more likely to think the economy is in good shape (33 percent), as are younger investors (those under 45 (34 percent). Still, the majority of every group thinks the economy is in fair or poor condition.

***This lingering concern about the economy has had a negative impact on Bush's re-election numbers. The more negatively people view the economy, the less likely they are to support Bush's re-election.*** Nearly three-quarters of voters who think the economy is in good shape say they would definitely vote for reelection (65 percent). In contrast, only 38 percent of people who think the economy is in fair condition and 23 percent who think it is poor say they will vote to reelect the President. And while Bush gets good ratings for

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his handling of the economy (65 percent approval), his ratings on the economy continue to trail his overall job performance rating by about 10-points.

***This focus on the economy crystallizes when voters are asked the number one problem facing the country today. The economy (20 percent) and jobs (7 percent), combined, are the top issue concern for voters, followed by terrorism and national defense (23 percent).***

Economy oriented voters who are evenly split in terms of party identification, give Democrats an 11-point advantage on the generic congressional ballot, and are less likely than voters overall to say they would definitely vote for Bush's reelection (39 percent). Men tend to be more focused on the economy (26 percent pick the economy as the top problem)—particularly men over age 45 (29 percent), married men (28 percent), Democratic men (30 percent), dads (25 percent), and men who invest in the stock market (27 percent). Voters in labor union households (27 percent) are also economy oriented.

Jobs oriented voters are overwhelmingly Democratic (28 points Democratic in terms of party identification), give Democrats a 25-point advantage on the generic congressional ballot, and are less likely than voters overall to say they would definitely vote for Bush's reelection (37 percent). Jobs oriented voters include African Americans (11 percent), Hispanics (11 percent), and younger non-college educated voters (13 percent).

Terrorism is the second rated concern for voters (23 percent). These voters tend to be Republican (10-point Republican margin) and are more likely to say they would definitely vote to reelect Bush (52 percent). However, in a sign of Bush's limited coattails (and the coattails of the war on terrorism), these Republican leaning voters only give the Republicans a 4-point advantage on the generic Congressional ballot. Terrorism is of particular concern to voters in the northeast (33 percent), homemakers (33 percent), voters in their sixties (31 percent), Independents (27 percent; particularly older Independents, 31 percent), upscale suburban voters (32 percent), and upper income voters (31 percent of voters with incomes over \$100,000).

***As we noted in January, this recession is a pocketbook recession, not a jobs recession. To an even greater degree than six months ago, voters' specific economic concerns revolve around the cost of health care (34 percent), a secure retirement (22 percent), and taxes (17 percent).*** Of somewhat less concern to voters are child care and college costs (11 percent), and least is losing their job (9 percent).

For seniors, rising health care costs dominate their economic concerns. A majority (54 percent) worry most about the cost of health care. Younger voters tend to focus more on child care and college tuition (24 percent among voters under 35) and jobs (15 percent) while middle aged voters focus more on a secure retirement (27 percent). Rural voters are also more concerned about the cost of health care (40 percent), while voters in the suburbs are more focused on a secure retirement (24 percent). Voters who list the economy as their top concern share a focus on health care and a secure retirement with

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voters' overall, but are also more focused on jobs (14 percent) and less concerned than voters overall with taxes (13 percent). Not surprisingly, people who own stock or mutual funds are more focused on a secure retirement (24 percent) than voters overall—still, health care remains the top economic concern for these voters. More active traders (bought or sold stock in the last year) are also more tax oriented (21 percent).

***While Bush is vulnerable on the economy, so are Democrats. Only 40 percent of voters overall approve of the job the Democrats in Congress are doing on the economy—that includes only 38 percent of Independents, only 45 percent of blue collar voters, only 41 percent of voters worried about the economy, and only 33 percent of voters worried about jobs.*** While Democrats have a solid advantage over Republicans on creating jobs (+13) and fighting for the middle class (+18), they trail Republicans on improving the economy (-2) and keeping America prosperous (-9) which is now associated more with low taxes than good jobs. Democrats have an advantage over Bush on fighting for the middle class (+8), but tie on jobs, and are behind on the economy (-11) and prosperity (-17). Democrats must parlay their strengths on health care, jobs, retirement, and being for the middle class into a broader economic mission.

#### **TRUST IN GOVERNMENT IS RETURNING TO PRE-SEPTEMBER 11<sup>TH</sup> LEVELS**

There has been quite a lot written in the aftermath of September 11<sup>th</sup> about rising trust in government. Students of government noted increasing trust as the country rallied together and speculated about the implications for government activism. Recent studies have shown that trust has already begun to fall, though it is still above the levels observed before the terrorist attacks. We have framed the question slightly differently than most: we asked voters how much they trust the government to make good decisions for them *and their family*. Not surprisingly, we see even lower levels of trust. Only 25 percent of the electorate trusts government to make good decisions most of the time.

No more than about a third of any group trusts government to make good decisions most of the time. Women (29 percent), and particularly homemakers (40 percent), trust government more than men (21 percent). Younger voters (33 percent of those under age 35) are also more trusting of government than are seniors (25 percent) or particularly pre-retirement voters (19 percent). Interestingly, Republicans (29 percent) and conservatives (28 percent) are more likely to trust government to make good decisions for them and their families than are other voters.

Moreover, voters continue to see government as wasteful. A majority of voters believe at least a quarter of the budget is wasted.

## THE CONGRESSIONAL ELECTIONS

### DEMOCRATS LEAD ON THE GENERIC CONGRESSIONAL BALLOT

*While party identification is even (36 percent Democrats and 36 percent Republican), Democrats currently enjoy a 4-point advantage on the generic Congressional ballot (44 percent to 40 percent).* Both parties are solidifying their bases of support, with Democrats winning 88 percent of Democratic voters (compared to 79 percent in January) and Republicans winning 84 percent of Republican voters (compared to 83 percent in January). The overall Democratic advantage comes from growing support among Independents—Democrats now enjoy an 8-point lead with Independent voters, compared to a 3-point advantage in January. Democrats currently enjoy large leads among voters who are focused on the economy (+11) and jobs (+25), as well as those who list education as their top concern (+26). At the same time, Republicans have only a 4-point lead among terrorism oriented voters, an 11-point drop from January.

Democratic Base in Generic Congressional ballot		
Demographic	Difference in Support	% of the electorate
<b>Total</b>	<b>4-points Democratic</b>	
Northeast	10-points Democratic	23 percent of the electorate
West	18-points Democratic	15 percent of the electorate
California	22-points Democratic	10 percent of the electorate
50-59 year olds	12-points Democratic	22 percent of the electorate
60-69 year olds	14-points Democratic	16 percent of the electorate
Women over 45	9-points Democratic	35 percent of the electorate
Working women	11-points Democratic	29 percent of the electorate
Single voters	20-points Democratic	14 percent of the electorate
Unmarried women	14-points Democratic	19 percent of the electorate
Moms	9-points Democratic	18 percent of the electorate
African-Americans	80-points Democratic	10 percent of the electorate
Latinos	37-points Democratic	7 percent of the electorate
High school graduates	15-points Democratic	27 percent of the electorate
Men –no college	18-points Democratic	16 percent of the electorate
Older non-college	16-points Democratic	23 percent of the electorate
Labor union members	28-points Democratic	14 percent of the electorate
Income under \$20,000	19-points Democratic	12 percent of the electorate
Income \$20,000-\$39,999	15-points Democratic	22 percent of the electorate
Liberals	56-points Democratic	35 percent of the electorate
Urban area residents	19-points Democratic	24 percent of the electorate
Rural area residents	11-points Democratic	20 percent of the electorate
Economy #1 problem	11-points Democratic	20 percent of the electorate
Unemployment/jobs #1 problem	25-points Democratic	7 percent of the electorate
Education #1 problem	26-points Democratic	8 percent of the electorate
Less likely voters	10-points Democratic	12 percent of the electorate

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Democrats have picked up support with both men (now even on the generic ballot) and women (now giving Democrats an 8-point advantage). In particular, Democratic support has grown among moms (9-point lead, compared to trailing by 10-points in January), married women (5-point lead, compared to trailing by 10-points in January), and college educated women (8-point lead, compared to trailing by 2-points in January). Democrats have also seen marked gains among non-college men (18-point lead, compared to trailing by 3-points in January),

Democrats have solidified support among other key base groups. They now have a whopping 80-point lead among African-Americans (compared to 57-points in January). Support has also grown among high school educated voters (15-point lead, compared to trailing by 2-points in January). Democrats are also doing significantly better among Hispanics (37-point lead, compared to a 27-point lead in January).

Republicans continue to have large advantages among the wealthy and elite. Republicans lead by 10-points among those with incomes over \$100,000, while Democrats lead by 18-points among those with incomes under \$30,000 and by 15-points among those with incomes between \$30,000 and \$50,000. Also, Republicans lead among stockholders (by 2-points), while Democrats have an overwhelming advantage among those who do not own stocks or mutual funds (20-point Democratic lead).

Undecided voters on the generic Congressional ballot make up 16 percent of the electorate. Those most likely to be undecided include working women (22%) especially white working women ages 18-64 (25%), voters in their forties (21%), Independents (36%), Nader voters (36%), moderates (32%), suburban voters (21%), and less likely voters (23%).

In our past polls, Republicans have enjoyed an advantage among Internet users. However, currently, Democrats have a 1-point lead among hardcore Internet users and an 8-point margin among regular users. This may well be an indication that as the Internet proliferates, the Republican leanings will dissipate. Republicans do continue to have a 5-point advantage among those who use the Internet to get political information, a select set of Internet users—38 percent of Internet users get some sort of political information online.

Republican Base in Generic Congressional ballot		
Demographic	Difference in Support	% of the electorate
<b>Total</b>	<b>4-points Democratic</b>	
40-49 year olds	7-points Republican	22 percent of the electorate
70 years old and over	6-points Republican	16 percent of the electorate
Non-working women	7-points Republican	9 percent of the electorate
White voters 18-45 years old	16-points Republican	26 percent of the electorate
White men	14-points Republican	36 percent of the electorate
College graduates	4-points Republican	38 percent of the electorate
College men	9-points Republican	32 percent of the electorate
Married Men	7-points Republican	32 percent of the electorate
Dads	7-points Republican	15 percent of the electorate
White married working moms	7-points Republican	7 percent of the electorate
Conservatives	27-points Republican	59 percent of the electorate
Suburban voters	3-points Republican	51 percent of the electorate
White male suburban	12-points Republican	8 percent of the electorate
White downscale suburban	13-points Republican	9 percent of the electorate
Incomes \$60,000- \$99,999	6-points Republican	22 percent of the electorate
Incomes \$100,000 +	10-points Republican	12 percent of the electorate
Bought or sold stock in last year	13-points Republican	31 percent of the electorate
Use internet for political info	5-points Republican	27 percent of the electorate
Terrorism/natl. defense #1 issue	4-points Republican	23 percent of the electorate

High turnout continues to be a key for Democratic success in November. While Democrats now lead among extremely likely voters (+3) and very likely voters (+4), turnout continues to be of great importance. Democrats have a 10-point advantage among those who are only somewhat likely to vote.

*Voters' preference for a Democratic candidate on the generic Congressional ballot is in line with their preference for divided government. A majority of voters (56 percent) prefer the President and Congress to be of different parties so they will balance each other out. Only 36 percent of voters want Congress and the President to be of the same party. While a majority of Republicans want single party control (50 percent), Independents (64 percent for divided control) and Democrats (60 percent for divided control) overwhelmingly support divided government.*

*And in a sign of the limited nature of the presidential coattails, only a third of voters (34 percent) want to elect a member of Congress who supports Bush. Voters are just as likely to say they want a member of Congress who acts independently (31 percent) or that it is not an important factor in their vote (31 percent). Over the course of the year, there has been a slight shift toward action and more independence. Again, not surprisingly, Republicans overwhelmingly want a member of Congress who will support Bush (61 percent). Democrats want a member who will act independently (49 percent). And while Independents are more evenly divided, a plurality prefers a member who acts independently or don't know (44 percent).*

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Voters give fairly even ratings to the two parties in Congress—51 percent approve of Democrats and 54 percent approve of Republicans. A whopping 69 percent continue to approve of their own member of Congress.

## **DEMOCRATS AND REPUBLICANS ON THE ISSUES**

***Democrats are given large advantages on protecting the environment, improving health care, protecting the middle class, strengthening Social Security, and creating jobs. Republicans continue to have the advantage on fighting terrorism, as well as on taxes, cutting government waste, and keeping America prosperous. The two parties are essentially even on improving education, balancing the budget, improving the economy, and values.***

The Congressional elections remain a battleground. Attitudes on the two parties relative strength on strengthening Social Security, improving the economy, improving education, and values predict the Congressional ballot.

Noticeably, attitudes on taxes and terrorism do not predict Congressional vote. Democrats need to shift the terrain to focus on strengthening Social Security and emphasize the values on which we have an advantage, particularly community. Also, by focusing on health care costs (and particularly the cost of prescription drugs), retirement security, and jobs, Democrats can shape the economic agenda in their favor. The two-parties currently split on the economy. If Democrats shift the focus to where they are stronger, voters will shift to view Democrats more favorably on this dimension. Finally, it is important to note that while Bush continues to have the advantage on education (by 10-points over Democrats), the Democrats currently have a slight advantage over Republicans in general (by 3-points). Moreover, as we will see later, Democrats have a strong advantage in the argument about increasing funding for education.

***President Bush has maintained his advantage on a host of issues. However, in contrast to our January Battleground survey, the President's success on issues is not translating into party-wide advantage. This is yet another indication that the popularity of the president will not have long coattails that will cover the 2002 Congressional elections.***

Bush continues to hold large advantages over Democrats on fighting terrorism (53-point margin), taxes (27-point margin), cutting government waste (23-point margin), values (19-point margin), and keeping America prosperous. Bush also leads Democrats on improving the economy (12-point margin) and improving education (10-point margin)—though education is the one area where we see Bush's edge slipping slightly, a 6-point drop since January.

However, even against the popular president, Congressional Democrats continue to lead Bush on the environment (29-point Democratic margin), health care (11-point Democratic margin), strengthening Social Security (9-point Democratic margin), and protecting the middle class (8-point Democratic margin). As we saw in January, it is

noticeable that for the most part, Democrats advantages are in the areas of voters' greatest economic concern. As was discussed above, voters are increasingly concerned about the expanding focus in the Middle East and worry about the lack of attention on key domestic fronts. As the elections approach, Democratic advantages on economic issues will be key.

<b>BUSH VS. CONGRESSIONAL DEMOCRATS</b>			
	<b>APRIL, 2001</b>	<b>JANUARY, 2002</b>	<b>JUNE, 2002</b>
	<b>Democratic Advantage</b>	<b>Democratic Advantage</b>	<b>Democratic Advantage</b>
<b>Protecting the Environment</b>	+32	+31	+29
<b>Improving the health care system</b>	+11	+15	+11
<b>Strengthening Social Security</b>	+10	+10	+9
<b>Protecting the middle class</b>	+7	+9	+8
<b>Creating Jobs</b>	*	+3	0
<b>Balancing the Federal Budget</b>	-1	-7	-4
<b>Improving education</b>	-12	-16	-10
<b>Improving the economy</b>	-11	-11	-12
<b>Keeping America prosperous</b>	-14	-19	-17
<b>Sharing your values</b>	-10	-18	-19
<b>Cutting government waste</b>	-22	-22	-23
<b>Holding the line on taxes</b>	-20	-34	-27
<b>Safeguarding US from Terrorism</b>	*	-59	-53

\*Question not asked in 2001 survey

**While Bush has largely maintained his advantage on these issues, Republicans more generally are seeing support erode nearly across the board.** Democrats have seen significant increases in their advantage over Republicans on important issues such as health care (now a 23-point margin, an 8-point increase), Social Security (16-point margin, a 4-point increase), improving education (3-point margin, a 10-point increase), improving the economy (trail by 2-points, an 8-point improvement), and values (trail by 3-points, an 8-point improvement).

Democrats also have growing advantages on the environment (40-point margin), protecting the middle class (17-point margin) and creating jobs (13-point margin). The two parties are basically even on balancing the budget (a 10 point improvement). And while still trailing by large margins, Democrats have closed the gap on cutting government waste, taxes, and fighting terrorism.

<b>DEMOCRATS VS. REPUBLICANS</b>			
	<b>APRIL, 2001</b>	<b>JANUARY, 2002</b>	<b>JUNE, 2002</b>
	<b>Democratic Advantage</b>	<b>Democratic Advantage</b>	<b>Democratic Advantage</b>
<i>Protecting the Environment</i>	+39	+32	+40
<i>Improving the health care system</i>	+16	+15	+23
<i>Protecting the middle class</i>	+11	+7	+17
<i>Strengthening Social Security</i>	+14	+12	+16
<i>Creating Jobs</i>	*	+7	+13
<i>Improving education</i>	-3	-7	+3
<i>Improving the economy</i>	-2	-10	-2
<i>Balancing the Federal Budget</i>	+2	-11	-1
<i>Sharing Your Values</i>	-3	-11	-3
<i>Keeping America prosperous</i>	-1	-17	-9
<i>Cutting government waste</i>	-11	-20	-16
<i>Holding the line on taxes</i>	-9	-29	-24
<i>Safeguarding US from Terrorism</i>	*	-45	-36

\*Question not asked in 2001 survey

*Similarly, while Bush has maintained large advantages on a range of values, Democrats have closed the gap with Republicans more generally. And voters think Democrats better represents community (by 13-points over Republicans). Republican advantages have declined on values such as family (now 16-points, was 20-points), personal responsibility (now 26-points, was 31-points), and moral values (now 29-points, was 34-points).*

#### **THE CONGRESSIONAL AGENDA**

*There are several important pieces of business voters want Congress to address before the elections. However, they are cynical that Congress will actually take action, and for the most part, they blame Republicans for this lack of action.*

About two-thirds of voters think it is very important Congress pass a prescription drug benefit (69 percent), Social Security reform (69 percent), pension and retirement reform (68 percent), and education funding (64 percent). A majority of voters think it is important Congress preserve the recent tax cuts (57 percent).

A majority of voters think Congress will pass additional education funding and will preserve the tax cuts. However, they think it is less likely Congress will pass the most important parts of their agenda. Only 42 percent think Congress will pass a prescription drug benefit, only 37 percent think they will pass pension and retirement reform, and only 32 percent think Congress will reform Social Security. Moreover, there is a real debate to be had with voters about what is good reform or bad reform of prescription drug benefits.

<b>THE CONGRESSIONAL AGENDA</b>			
<b>The Issues</b>	<b>Importance</b>	<b>Likelihood</b>	<b>Blame</b>
Rx Benefit	69 percent very important	42 percent likely	Republicans by 25-points
Social Security Reform	69 percent very important	32 percent likely	Republicans by 11-points
Pension Reform	68 percent very important	37 percent likely	Republicans by 8-points
Education funding	64 percent very important	58 percent likely	Republicans by 21-points
Preserving tax cuts	57 percent very important	50 percent likely	Democrats by 13-points

While voters think these issues are important and are cynical action will take place, they know who they are going to blame. Voters clearly will blame Republicans if there is no prescription drug benefit enacted—a majority of voters (51 percent, to 26 percent who blame Democrats) say they would hold Republicans responsible for legislation not passing. Similarly, Republicans will get the blame for a failure to pass additional education funding (48 percent blame Republicans, to 27 percent who blame Democrats), a failure to pass Social Security Reform (44 percent blame Republicans, to 33 percent who blame Democrats), and a failure to pass pension and retirement reform (41 percent blame Republicans, to 33 percent who blame Democrats). Democrats only get the blame if the tax cuts are not preserved; 48 percent of voters will blame Democrats if legislation preserving tax cuts isn't passed (something voters think is fairly likely to happen). As we have seen elsewhere, talking about rolling back the tax cuts is a loser for Democrats. However, Democrats can talk about delaying additional tax cuts for the wealthy and the Enrons that jeopardizes other programs.

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## **KEY BATTLEFIELDS FOR THE COMING ELECTION**

### **THE GENDER GAP**

Democratic gains over the past 6 months have come in both pulling even among men and regaining a strong advantage among women. Our last poll showed many groups of women trending Republican, in large part due to the rallying around the President following September 11<sup>th</sup>, and during the beginning stages of the war in Afghanistan.

Women are currently 4-points Democratic in their party identification, while men are 5-points Republican. In January, Women were evenly split while men favored the Republican Party (by 9-points). Women now give Democrats an 8-point advantage on the generic Congressional ballot, while men are split evenly. In January, women were evenly split, while men favored the Republicans by 6-points.

This increase in Democratic support among women has been across the board, but has been particularly strong among women under age 45 (were -4, now +7), older working women (were even, now +14), women with a college degree (were -2, now +8), married women (were -10, now +5), and moms (were -10, now +9). These are key constituent battlegrounds for the 2002 elections. Turnout among women will be key as well. African American women vote 91 percent Democratic today and unmarried women (high drop off group) are 14-points for the generic Democratic candidate.

And while men and women both give President Bush overwhelming job approval (men 75 percent, women 74 percent), women are less likely to say they will definitely vote to reelect the president (40 percent) than are men (46 percent). Women are also more likely to think that while Bush has done a good job in Afghanistan, he is getting too involved in other countries (56 percent to 50 percent among men).

The economy is the top issue for men (26 percent), while terrorism is the top issue for women (25 percent). For both, health care is the top economic concern, and both give the economy similar ratings. Men and women rate the two parties similarly on the issues, though women do give Democrats more of an advantage on creating jobs (+19, compared to +6 among men) and improving education (+5, compared to +1 among men).

### **SENIORS**

Seniors remain a battleground and a group Democrats need to focus on. They are currently 2-points Republican, and are two points Republican on the generic Congressional ballot—a 9-point drop from January when they were 7-points Democratic on the ballot. Seniors resemble other voters in terms of Bush's reelection, with 42 percent saying they would definitely vote to reelect him. Seniors are more likely than younger voters to think that we are getting too involved in other countries (60 percent).

There is a real age divide among the older sectors of the electorate. Younger seniors and older pre-retirement voters (those in their sixties) are 9-points Democratic in party

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identification and 14-points Democratic on the Congressional ballot. Seniors over 70 vote 6-points Republican. There is also a real gender gap among seniors. White senior women split between the two parties on the generic vote while white senior men vote 12-points Republican. Both groups lean 6-points Republican in terms of partisan identification.

Seniors resemble other voters in terms of issue concerns, though they do tend to focus more on health care (9 percent) and other concerns like retirement (26 percent) and prescription drugs. Voters in their sixties are particularly focused on terrorism (31 percent). In terms of the economy, seniors are overwhelmingly concerned with the rising health care costs (54 percent). They are the most focused on health care of any of the demographic and regional groups.

Bush has done a good job of gaining ground on key senior issues among this target audience. However, that has not translated into more general Republican advantages. Bush is now even with the Democrats among seniors on health care (though Democrats have a 15-point advantage among voters in their sixties). This is a major shift from January, when Bush trailed Democrats by 11-points on health care. Bush also has made significant gains on Social Security. He now has a 3-point advantage on Social Security (though Democrats have a 4-point advantage among voters in their sixties). This marks a major change from January when Democrats had a 17-point advantage over the President on Social Security among seniors.

However, Bush's gains on these key senior issues have not fully translated to his party. Democrats continue to have a 10-point advantage on health care over Republicans more generally and a 6-point lead on Social Security. However, Democrats should be doing better. And among voters in their sixties, Democrats have a 30-point advantage on health care and a 29-point advantage on Social Security.

## **SUBURBAN VOTERS**

Suburban voters continue to lean Republican in their party identification (5-points Republican). While they lean Republican on the generic Congressional ballot (now giving Republicans a 2-point lead), this marks a significant gain for Democrats who trailed by 9-points in the suburbs in January. Voters in the suburbs are similar to voters overall in terms of voting for Bush's reelection (42 percent) and in terms of concern about expanding involvement in other countries (54 percent).

Democrats have made major gains with suburban white men. In January, Democrats trailed by 28-points, but now only trail by 12-points. Democrats have also made major gains with upscale suburban voters. Democrats trailed by 17-points in January, but now trail by only 4-points. Democrats do continue to struggle with white suburban women who are 17-points Republican, and 10 points Republican on the generic ballot.

As with voters in other types of communities, suburban voters' top concerns are primarily the economy and jobs (25 percent) and terrorism (24 percent). Upscale

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suburban voters (32 percent) are particularly terrorism focused. Retirement security is of particular concern to suburban voters (24 percent), though health care costs (30 percent) heads the economic agenda. Suburban white men (29 percent) and upscale suburban voters (32 percent) are particularly retirement security focused

Suburban voters split between the two parties on education but give Democrats solid advantages on being for the middle class (+19), being good on health care (+23) and being good on Social Security (+17). Watch for Republicans to try to turn the agenda back to taxes (-28) and keeping America prosperous (-14) where they have a strong advantage in the suburbs.

### **NASCAR MEN, NOT OFFICE PARK DADS**

There has been a lot of talk of late about so-called office park dads: men who tend to be suburban, independent, leaning Republican, and moderate<sup>1</sup>. While we agree that Democrats certainly need to find groups of men to target for increased support and are currently benefiting from doing better among suburban and blue collar men, we think office park dads are a dead end because of their Republican leanings. Currently, office park dads are 7-points Republican on the generic ballot, and among the most supportive of Bush's reelection (50 percent).

Instead, we suggest Democrats target **NASCAR men** (48 percent of all men). These are men who have watched a NASCAR race in the past year. They resemble men overall in many respects, including party identification (both are 5-points Republican) and 2000 presidential vote (a majority for Bush). NASCAR men are slightly less educated (38 percent high school degree or less education), are slightly more likely to be dads (36 percent), are slightly more likely to be in a union household (30 percent), are slightly more likely to be middle-income (30 percent \$40,000 to \$60,000 a year), and are slightly less likely to use the Internet regularly (33 percent).

In the long run, to win NASCAR men, Democrats need a stronger economic profile. NASCAR men give Democrats strong advantages on fighting for the middle class (+18), health care (+30), and Social Security (+12). However, these men who worry most about the economy split between the two parties on jobs, give Republicans a 15-point advantage on the economy, and give Republicans a 20-point advantage on prosperity.

***Still, NASCAR men are 5-points Democratic on the generic congressional ballot, compared to men overall who are 1-point Republican.*** Thus while these men largely resemble men overall, they are voting Democratic. They are more middle-class, less educated, and more likely to be in a union. These factors, taken together, give Democrats an advantage with this key group of swing voters. So, our advice to Democratic candidates is to buy ad time on NASCAR television and radio and be seen at the local racetrack. The man with the deciding vote in your election may well be watching.

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<sup>1</sup> Note: Office park Dads haven't been formally defined in any of the literature or presentations. We simulated the group based on the general descriptions that have been released.