

THE TARRANCE GROUP

MEMORANDUM

TO: BATTLEGROUND CLIENTS

FROM: ED GOEAS

DATE: SEPTEMBER 17, 2004

RE: PRESIDENTIAL TRACKING WEEK 1

With both political conventions over and the Fall campaign in full swing, it would appear that the dynamics of the presidential campaign are beginning to settle in. Clearly August was a bad month for the Democratic nominee, capped off with a very successful Republican convention. While the overall numbers still indicate a very intense, close race – the underlying data would indicate that George W. Bush has gained a strategic advantage.

Most importantly, John Kerry has been put in a box that is truly a campaign version of “catch twenty-two.” First, over the last month John Kerry’s image rating has taken a real hit. In mid August, fifty-four percent (54%) of voters held a favorable view of Kerry and forty-two percent (42%) held an unfavorable view. Today forty-nine percent (49%) of voters are favorable and forty-seven percent (47%) are unfavorable. At the same time George W. Bush has taken a twenty-one-point (+21) lead over John Kerry on the characteristic of “*is a strong leader.*” Therein lays the catch twenty-two! John Kerry can not look weak by letting surrogates carry the attacks on Bush’s leadership. At the same time, by leading the attack with a one-to-one image ratio, Kerry runs the risk of only running up his unfavorable ratings with a majority of the voters and his presidential candidacy increasingly losing credibility.

- President Bush currently receives his most positive ratings from voters this year, with fifty-four percent (54%) favorable and forty-four percent (44%) unfavorable. At the same time John Kerry’s favorable rating has dropped five-points since mid-August and his unfavorable rating is up by an equal amount and now stands at forty-nine percent (49%) favorable and forty-nine percent (49%) unfavorable. With those voters holding “strong” feelings about George W. Bush and John Kerry, Bush has six percent advantage (39% strongly favorable/33% strongly unfavorable) and John Kerry is at a six point disadvantage (27% strongly favorable/33% strongly unfavorable).
- In the presidential target states, however, both candidates hold a net ten-point favorable rating. This is reflected in the two-way ballot, where both George W. Bush and John Kerry receive forty-eight percent of the vote! (It should be

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noted that Al Gore ran ahead of George W. Bush in these states by over two percent of the raw vote.)

- Voters remain extremely intense on both sides of the aisle, with Republicans holding a slight advantage over the Democrats on most core constituencies. (79% of Republicans extremely likely to vote, 77% of Democrats extremely likely to vote, and 76% of Independents extremely likely to vote.) White voters are 10% more likely to vote than African Americans and married voters are 10% more likely to vote than single voters. At the same time, union voters are 8% more likely to vote than White conservative Christians, maintaining the vote intensity advantage gained following the Democratic convention.
- Feelings about the direction of the country continue to inch up. In our first Battleground poll of the campaign season in March 57% of voters felt the country was moving in the wrong direction and 38% felt the country was on the right track. Today a majority (53%) of voters still feel the country is off on the wrong track and 41% feel the country is moving in the right direction. While there is still no indication that this measurement is playing as important a role in the dynamics of this year's presidential race (many of the voters who feel the country is off on the wrong track feel President Bush is the answer), it certainly highlights the "married gap" and how married and single voters have a much different view of America. Married voters are positive about the direction of the country by a net three percentage points – while single voters are negative about the direction of the country by a net fifty-three percentage points.
- Voters remain focused on the two dominant issues of terrorism/war in Iraq (40%) and the economy/health care (30%). Both of these issues continue to receive the same level of focus by both Democratic and Republican voters.
- President Bush's job approval has solidified at 52% approve/45% disapprove and looks very similar to Bill Clinton's 54% approve/41% disapprove at the same time period of the 1996 presidential election. (This also is in direct contrast to the job approval of George H.W. Bush in the second week of September in the 1992 presidential race – where Gallup had the President's job approval rating at 39% approve and 55% disapprove!) George W. Bush's job approval stands at a net sixteen-points positive with White voters and twenty-three-points positive with Hispanic voters, and his negatives are driven heavily by African American voters (67% net negative), especially African American women (82% net negative). There is also a huge married gap with voters. Married voters approve of the President by net twenty-two-points – while single voters disapprove of the President by net twenty-six-points. It is important to note, however, that with those voters holding a higher approval rating of the President also being higher propensity voters, George W. Bush's

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approval rating with “likely presidential voters” currently stand at fifty-five percent approve (55%) and forty-four percent disapprove (44%).

- On the Two-way ballot Bush receives forty-nine percent (49%) of the vote and John Kerry receives forty-five percent (45%) – Bush’s lead increases with those voters who say that they will definitely vote for one of the two candidates (43% definitely voting for Bush and 38% definitely voting for John Kerry). This voter intensity for George W. Bush is also reflected in the “unaided” ballot when voters are not given the names or Party of the presidential candidates. On the “unaided” ballot President Bush’s lead grows to six-points – George W. Bush forty-five percent (45%) and John Kerry thirty-nine percent (39%).
- George W. Bush now leads on the presidential ballot with every age group (including a five-point lead with seniors), leads with men by thirteen points and is down with women by four-points (but leads with both White men and White women by double digits), and receives 93% support from Republicans where Kerry receives 88% support from Democratic voters. With two key groups we will track throughout the Fall campaign – Bush leads Kerry by 19% with married voters while he trails Kerry with single voters by 35% and with White conservative Christians Bush leads by 71% while he trails Kerry by 25% with Union voters.
- Trends on the “unaided” ballot follow those of the two-way ballot. It is interesting to note, however, that throughout the week President Bush has consistently had over forty percent of the Hispanic vote volunteer on the “unaided” ballot that they would vote for Bush in November. If this trend continues, George W. Bush’s goal of breaking forty percent (40%) of the Hispanic vote in the November election is a very real possibility!
- On both issue and character measurements Bush has improved his position versus John Kerry since mid-August. On “*safeguarding America from a terrorist threat*,” Bush now leads Kerry by twenty-five-points (+8 since August). On “*dealing with Iraq*,” Bush now leads Kerry by eighteen-points (+6 since August). On “*creating jobs*,” George W. Bush still trails John Kerry by six-points (but has closed his deficit on this measurement by four-points since August and eleven points since March). On another economic measurement – “*keeping America prosperous*” – President Bush now leads Senator Kerry by four-points (a net seven-point improvement since August).
- It is on the character measurements, specifically strength of leadership, that President Bush came out of the Republican convention looking particularly strong. On “*shares your values*” Bush now leads Kerry by six-points (+5 since August). This is somewhat off-set, however, by “*representing middle class values*” where John Kerry has a five-point lead over George W. Bush. The biggest jump in all the measurements came in “*is a strong leader*,” where

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President Bush now leads Senator Kerry by twenty-one percentage points – a nine-point increase since mid-August!

With a little over six weeks left in the 2004 Presidential Election and there are certain to be ebbs and flows yet to be played out, both the overall data and the internal measurements are extremely encouraging for the re-election of George W. Bush. While this campaign has every potential to be an extremely close election, the dynamics are increasingly looking more like the 1996 Presidential Election than many may have thought just a few short months ago.