

THE TARRANCE GROUP

MEMORANDUM

TO: BATTLEGROUND CLIENTS

FROM: ED GOEAS

DATE: SEPTEMBER 24, 2004

RE: PRESIDENTIAL TRACKING WEEK 2

Last week, my Democratic counterpart, Celinda Lake, characterized the data from the first week of our Battleground tracking as proof that George W. Bush's convention "bounce" was all but disappearing. While the overall numbers indicated a very intense, close race – I felt the underlying data indicated that George W. Bush had gained a strategic advantage. Week two of the Battleground Presidential tracking only serves to reinforce last week's data, and while the race remains very intense and close, the data shows that George W. Bush's lead has solidified at five percent.

As important, the dynamics of the "catch twenty-two" strategic box that John Kerry found himself in last week's post convention polling has not changed over the last week. John Kerry continues to trail George W. Bush on the characteristic of "*is a strong leader*" by twenty-one-points (Bush 56% - Kerry 35%), and his image rating continued to run behind the President's (Kerry net 4% favorable/Bush net 13% favorable). In fact, while John Kerry's favorable rating inched up a point and his negative dropped a point, Bush's advantage amongst those voters holding strong feelings about the two presidential candidates continued an upward trend for George W. Bush and a downward trend for John Kerry. (In last week's tracking Bush had a net 6% advantage in the difference between those voters with a strongly favorable view of him and those voters with a strongly unfavorable view of him – this week that difference has moved to a net eight-point among those with strongly favorable views. For John Kerry, last week had those holding strongly unfavorable feelings about him were six-points higher than those voters holding strongly favorable feelings – that deficit in Kerry's image rating grew to nine percent this week.) As John Kerry carried his campaign's attacks on George Bush this week he did little to change either his deficit on leadership or his deficit on likeability with the voters.

- President Bush continues to receive his most positive ratings from voters this year, with fifty-five percent (55%) favorable and forty-two percent (42%) unfavorable (+13-points favorable). At the same time, John Kerry's image rating inched up and now stands at fifty percent (50%) favorable and forty-six percent (46%) unfavorable (+4-points favorable). As mentioned in the introduction, with those voters holding "strong" feelings about George W. Bush and John Kerry, Bush's ratings continued to improve and Kerry's ratings

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continued to decline. Bush now has a eight-point favorable advantage (39% strongly favorable/31% strongly unfavorable) – and John Kerry is at a nine-point disadvantage (25% strongly favorable/34% strongly unfavorable).

- In the presidential target states, both candidates continue to hold more similar ratings – George W. Bush has a net eleven-point favorable rating, and John Kerry has a net eight-point favorable rating. (Last week both candidates had a net ten-point favorable rating.) This is reflected in the two-way ballot in these presidential target states, where both candidates continue to run neck to neck. (Again, it should be noted that Al Gore ran ahead of George W. Bush in these states by over two percent of the raw vote in the 2000 presidential election.)
- Voters remain extremely intense on both sides of the isle, with Republicans holding a slight advantage over the Democrats on most core constituencies. (80% of Republicans are extremely likely to vote, 78% of Democrats are extremely likely to vote, and 76% of Independents are extremely likely to vote.) White voters remain 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' 8% vote intensity advantage over White conservative Christians has now dropped to only a one-point advantage.
- Feelings about the direction of the country continues to be net negative – a majority (53%) of voters still feel the country is off on the wrong track and 39% feel the country is moving in the right direction. There is still no indication that this measurement is playing as important role in driving the presidential vote. Not only is George W. Bush's job approval now running 14-points ahead of those saying the country is going in the right direction, where voters were asked who would do a better job "*leading America in the right direction*," President Bush lead Senator Kerry by six percentage points (Bush 50%/Kerry 44%).
- President Bush's job approval has solidified at 53% approve/44% disapprove. George W. Bush's job approval has grown to a net twenty-points positive with White voters, is net positive with Hispanic voters (+5), and his negatives are driven heavily by African American voters (69% net negative), especially African American women (78% net negative). There continues to be a huge married gap with voters. Married voters approve of the President by net sixteen-points – while single voters disapprove of the President by net fifteen-points.
- On the two-way ballot Bush receives fifty percent (50%) of the vote and John Kerry receives forty-five percent (45%) – Bush's five-point lead holds with those voters who say that they will definitely vote for one of the two candidates (44% definitely voting for Bush and 39% definitely voting for John Kerry). This solidification of a five-point lead for George W. Bush is also reflected in

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the “unaided” ballot when voters are not given the names or Party of the presidential candidates. On the “unaided” ballot President Bush’s lead is also at five-points – George W. Bush forty-four percent (44%) and John Kerry thirty-nine percent (39%).

- Although there have been some lead changes over the last week of tracking with the youngest and oldest voters, George W. Bush ended the week leading on the presidential ballot with every age group but 18 to 34 year olds (Bush 47% - Kerry 49%). Bush leads on the two-way ballot with seniors by four-points (10-points with White seniors), leads with men by fourteen-points but trails with women by five-points. President Bush also leads with both White men (+27%) and White women (+9), and receives 92% 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 14% with married voters while he trails Kerry with single voters by 25% and with White conservative Christians Bush leads by 67% while he trails Kerry by 23% with Union voters.
- On both issue and character measurements Bush has maintained a strategic advantage versus John Kerry since mid-August. On “*safeguarding America from a terrorist threat*,” Bush now leads Kerry by twenty-three-points (+6 since August). On “*dealing with Iraq*,” Bush now leads Kerry by fifteen-points (+3 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 held his lead from last week and leads Senator Kerry by three-points (a net six-point improvement since August).
- It is on the character measurements, specifically strength of leadership, where President Bush came out of the Republican convention looking particularly strong, and those measurements held over the last week. On “*shares your values*” Bush now leads Kerry by seven-points (+6 since August). The biggest jump in all the character measurements that we saw coming out of the Republican convention came in the measurement of “*is a strong leader*.” President Bush held his lead over Senator Kerry of twenty-one percentage points seen in the first week of tracking – holding onto the nine-point increase since mid-August!

We now have a little over five weeks left in the 2004 Presidential Election and there was some bouncing around of voter groups. At the same time, both the overall data and the internal measurements seen in the first week’s tracking remained solid and extremely encouraging for the re-election of George W. Bush. Certainly the dynamic seen over the last two weeks continues to raise the ante for John Kerry in next week’s presidential debate.

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While this campaign continues to hold every potential to be an extremely close election, the dynamics giving George W. Bush a strategic advantage has continued, time is ticking away, and President Bush is showing fifty percent (50%) on the ballot for the first time in this year's Battleground polling program. It is possible that voters may be on the verge of electing a President with a majority of the vote for the first time in sixteen years.