

Date: June 3, 2008  
To: Friends of Democracy Corps and Greenberg Quinlan Rosner  
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## ANOTHER CONGRESSIONAL WAVE ELECTION?

*Democrats Improve Advantage in 45 Republican-held Districts*

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Even as we modified our sample design to include more hard-to-reach Republican-held districts, Democrats have significantly expanded their lead in this totally Republican battleground that Bush won by 12 points in 2004 and Republican members won by the same margin in 2006. You have to remind yourself that this is not a national poll but a poll in Republican-held seats where Democrats have moved to a 7-point lead (50 to 43 percent). Further, Republican incumbents have a very weak standing to be reelected while Democratic challengers enjoy a larger pool of winnable voters to approach in this election, win the issue debates and prove to be resilient to the most vicious Republican attacks. The underlying dynamics of the race show that the battleground could expand even further into Republican territory as more voters are open to vote Democratic in November.<sup>1</sup>

Will there be a second wave election in a row? Obviously, Democrats will not win all of these competitive seats but there is no reason to think they cannot win a majority of these seats in an environment that is increasingly Democratic.

### Another Wave Election

Even when we put the Democratic challengers to a more difficult test by expanding the battleground to include five new hard-to-reach Republican districts, the dynamics of this race remain unchanged and the Democrats expand their lead significantly. In this expanded battleground Democrats are leading the congressional named vote 50 to 43 percent – up from a 1-point deficit in January. Remember that in this battleground survey, we ask the vote using the actual name of the incumbents.

More importantly, the structure of the race as well as Democrats' advantage across the board show that 2008 can be another wave election for Democrats. To take advantage of this opportunity Democrats will have to expand the playing field further into Republican territory.

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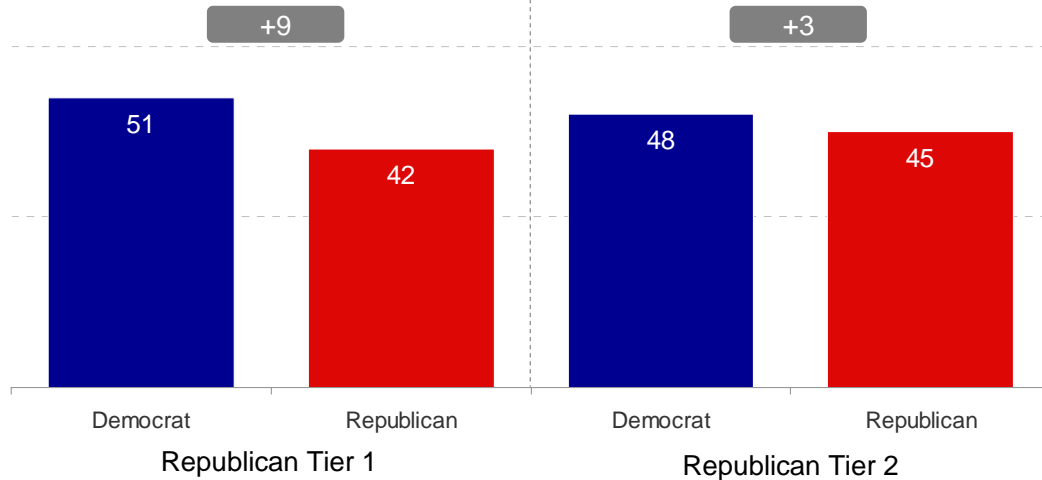
<sup>1</sup> Democracy Corps survey of 1,600 likely voters conducted May 19-26 in the 45 most competitive Republican-held districts.



- Democrats lead the congressional vote not only in the most competitive districts (51 to 42 percent), but also in the harder-to-reach districts (48 to 45 percent).

### Democrats hold significant lead in most competitive Republican districts

*Thinking about the election for Congress in November, if the election for U.S. Congress were held today, would you be voting for the Democratic candidate or the Republican candidate\*?*



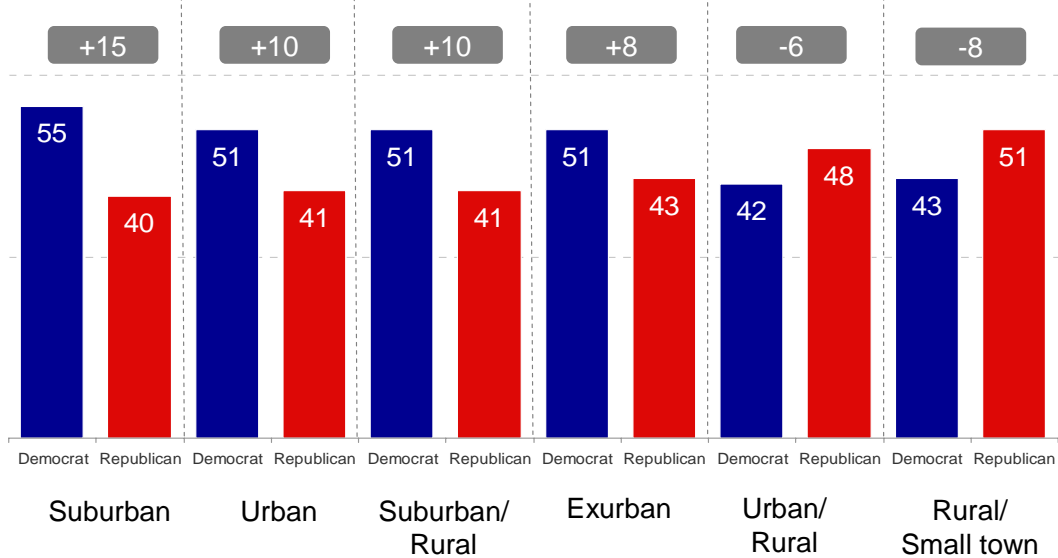
*\*Note: Actual names of incumbents inserted, and a generic candidate was inserted for the opposing party.*

- With the exception of rural small town and urban/rural districts, Democrats win by significant margins in all types of districts.



### Democrats best in suburban districts, challenged in rural-small town

Thinking about the election for Congress in November, if the election for U.S. Congress were held today, would you be voting for the Democratic candidate or the Republican candidate\*?

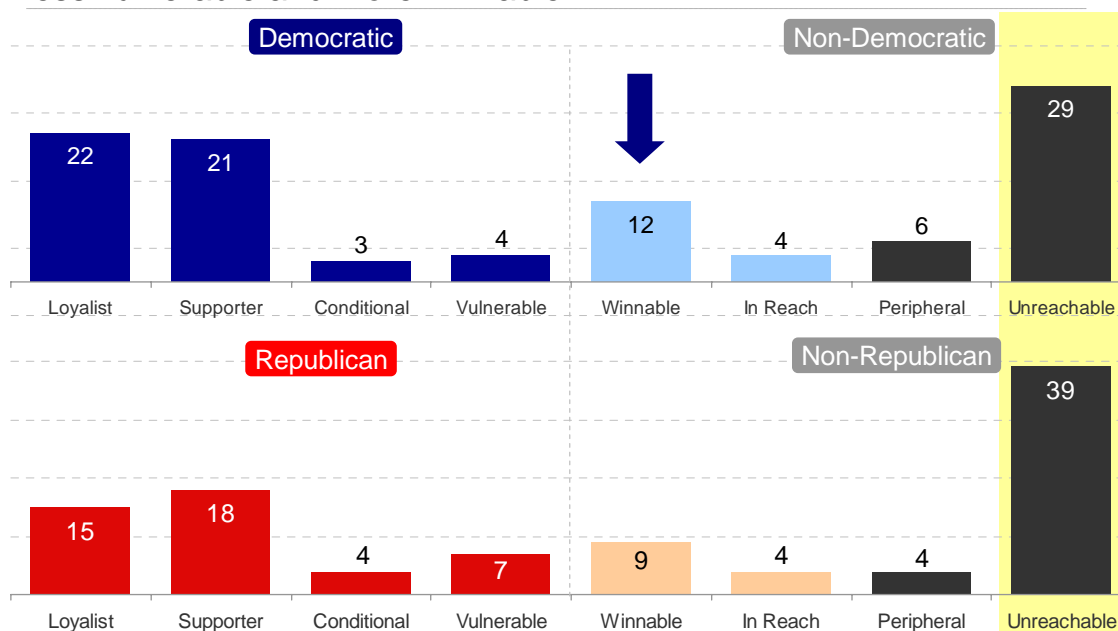


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- The structure of the congressional race is still dynamic but it seems to be moving further away from Republicans. Unlike the presidential race, where Obama and McCain have nearly identical patterns of support, the congressional race shows Democrats are in a stronger position to hold on to their vote and expand their lead. The Voter Choice Scale below uses eight questions to determine intensity of support, the probability of it being eroded, the scale of winnable voters and the number that are unreachable. In this survey Democrats have more strong supporters and winnable voters than Republicans while Republicans have more vulnerable voters than Democrats.



### Congressional Voter Choice Scale: Democrats have more loyalists and less vulnerable and more winnable



- Party identification is becoming more Democratic. While voters’ recall of 2004 and 2006 vote behavior is virtually the same as the actual vote, Democrats hold a 5-point advantage on party identification. So even though Democrats are splitting independents with Republicans (43 to 41 percent), they are winning 90 percent of the growing block of self-identified Democrats. Nonetheless, independents are the largest block of winnable voters for Democrats so their effort to expand their lead with new voters will most likely improve their standing among independents.

In this remarkably favorable environment, Democrats need not to be timid. They should remain on the offensive to expand their lead by reaching out to winnable voters while forcing Republican incumbents to shift resources to protect their own territory.

### A Changing Battleground

The Republican brand is deeply hurt and Republican incumbents face a serious challenge to hold on to their seats in an election driven by change. Pessimism about the direction of the country and Bush’s administration reached an all time high in this battleground with three-quarters of voters saying the country is off on the wrong track and just one-third approving of Bush’s job performance. Voters’ pessimism is largely driven by economic concerns, mainly rising prices for gas, health care and food.

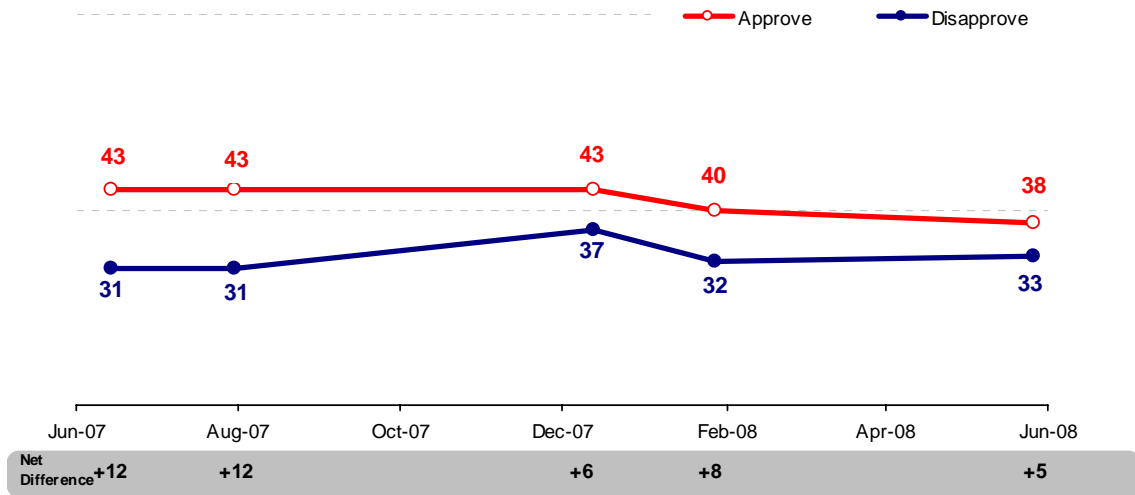
This landscape is especially corrosive for Republican incumbents who find themselves in a very weak position to defend their districts. For the first time, Republican incumbents’ job approval (using actual names) fell below 40 percent and their favorability dropped 4 points since



January. On the attributes that drive the vote and the members' personal standing, Republican members fail to reach a majority. Just 48 percent describe them as "honest and trustworthy" (down 5 points since January), four-in-ten describe them as being "on your side" and only one-third describe them as someone who will "bring the right kind of change."

### Republican incumbent job approval slips to 38 percent

Do you approve or disapprove of the way (member of Congress)\* is handling his/her job as a member of the U.S. Congress?



*\*Note: Actual names of incumbents inserted.*

Republicans' identification with the status quo is problematic as voters' desire for change increased significantly in the past four months. Voters see Republican incumbents as a continuation of Bush on Iraq and the economy (45 percent describes well) and tied to big business and special interests (40 percent describes well) and they want to vote for a candidate that will bring change. By an 18-point margin voters would rather vote for a Democratic challenger that will fight for change than "reelect their member of Congress because the new Democratic Congress is just business as usual and getting no more done than the last one."

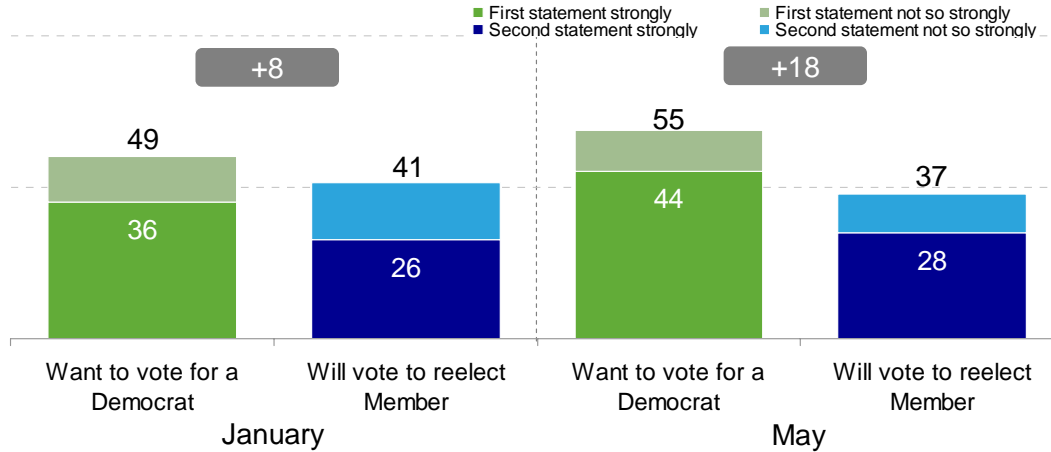


### Majority now in GOP CDs want to vote for Democrat, not own member

Now I'm going to read you some pairs of statements. As I read each pair, please tell me whether the FIRST statement or the SECOND statement comes closer to your own view, even if neither is exactly right:

Statement 1: In November, I really want to be able to vote for a Democrat for Congress because at least he or she will fight for change.

Statement 2: In November, I will vote for (Member of Congress)\* because the new Democratic Congress is just business as usual and getting no more done than the last one.



*\*Note: Actual names of incumbents inserted, unless asked in an open seat.*

### The strongest attacks and impact

One of the most important findings in this survey is the fact that Democrats hold on to their lead in this battleground even after we replicate a campaign environment and respondents are exposed to an equal number of Democratic and Republican attacks. Nevertheless, there are some attacks that Democrats must preempt. Republican attacks on Democrats for increasing taxes and supporting big government run health care programs work fairly well (54 and 52 percent total serious doubts, respectively) and are also strong predictors of the congressional vote. An attack focused on amnesty is somewhat stronger (64 percent total serious doubts), though it is not a strong predictor of vote behavior.

There are two lines of attacks that can be used against Republican incumbents that raise serious doubts, which are also strong predictors of the vote and the incumbents' favorability. That Republican incumbents are following Bush's direction in Iraq and the economy (51 percent total serious doubts) and that they will provide tax breaks for the rich, while offering nothing for the middle class which raises doubts for nearly two thirds of voters. These hits are important to show a sharp contrast between the status quo incumbents and their Democratic challengers that will deliver change.

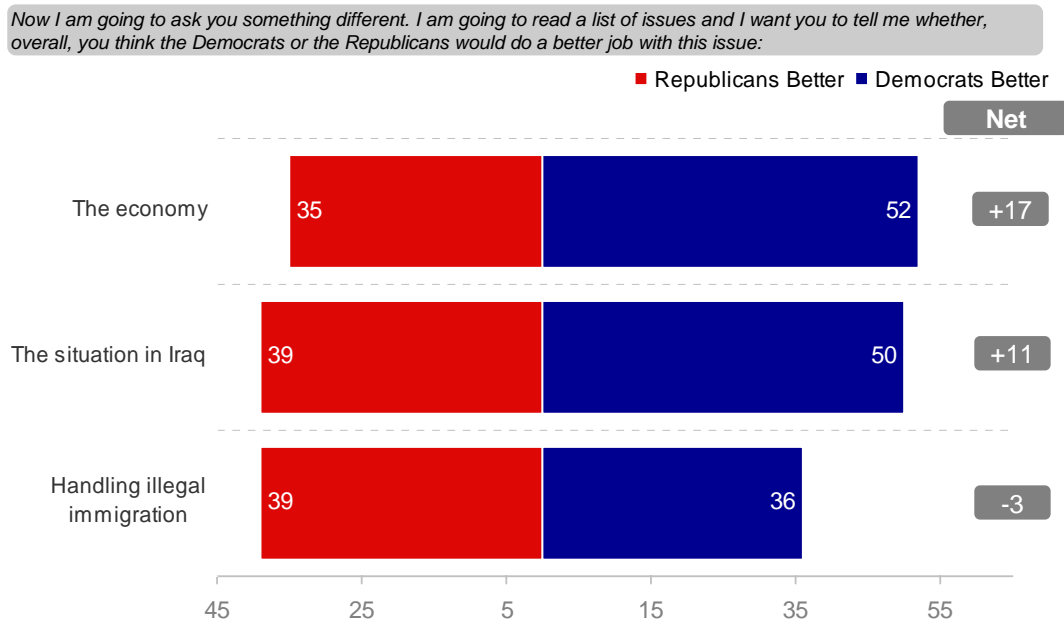


### Winning the Issues

Democrats' advantage remains strong even as voters' are exposed to the main issue debates and prevailing Republican attacks. Indeed, this survey shows voters in this battleground side with Democrats on issues ranging from Iraq to gay marriage.

On the issues that drive the vote more strongly – the economy and Iraq, Democrats have significantly increased their edge since January and now hold a double-digit advantage over Republicans on which party would do a better job with the most important issues facing the country. Even on immigration, an issue frequently used by Republicans as a wedge issue, Democrats are at parity with Republicans in this challenging battleground (36 to 39 percent).

#### Democrats better positioned to handle the economy, situation in Iraq



Voters in this battleground want to end the war in Iraq and decisively side with Democrats on this debate. By an 18-point margin voters want to reduce the troops in Iraq rather than stay the course – up from a 12-point margin in January.

More importantly, when forced to choose between Obama's proposal for a responsible troop withdrawal and a shift of resources to the U.S. and McCain's commitment to stay the course but have most troops out of Iraq by 2013, Democrats win the argument by double-digit margins. Engaging in the Iraq debate allows Democrats to reach out to independents and winnable voters well beyond their electoral support.



To sustain this position, Democrats need to be clear that they will act responsibly as they reduce troops in Iraq. Nearly half of voters are worried that Democrats will leave Iraq too soon, though more worry Republicans will stay too long. More importantly, when we identify the Democratic plan as Obama's, the Democratic advantage on this debate is 12 points in these Republican districts; when the Democratic candidate does not mention Obama, his or her advantage on the Iraq argument increases to 21 points.

### Iraq paired debate – with Obama reference

*Now I'm going to read you what the candidates for Congress are saying on Iraq. Regardless of who you would vote for, please tell me whether the Democratic statement or the Republican statement comes closer to your own view, even if neither is exactly right. .*

The Democratic candidate says the war in Iraq has cost us trillions of dollars while our economy has weakened, and has made America less secure. We must strengthen America's security by following **Barack Obama's plan** to start reducing our troops in Iraq in a responsible way, force the Iraqi government to use its oil money to pay for reconstruction and work with other nations to bring stability. We need to invest the money we are currently spending in Iraq to restore our military, deal with Afghanistan and strengthen America's own economy and security. But the Republican candidate for Congress wants to keep our troops in Iraq for at least another 5 years.

OR

The Republican candidate says there has been military and political progress in Iraq, and that to withdraw now would cost more in lives and create more instability in the Middle East. If we follow John McCain's lead to see our commitment through until the end of his first term, by 2013 America will have welcomed most of our troops home and the Iraq war will have been won. Though some violence will still occur, Iraq will be a functioning democracy with al Qaeda defeated and the U.S. maintaining just a small military presence that does not play a direct combat role. But the Democratic candidate for Congress wants to pull our troops out precipitously and give al Qaeda a big victory.

Surprisingly, Democrats even win the values debate in this Republican battleground. By a significant 9-point margin, voters favor a Democrat who supports civil unions and opposes a constitutional amendment to ban homosexual marriage over a Republican who favors such a constitutional amendment and characterizes Democrats as out of touch with mainstream values. More importantly, Democrats win this debate among independents and vulnerable/winnable voters though voters who are undecided in the congressional vote side with Republicans on this issue.



### Democratic position on gay marriage, civil unions is favored by electorate

The Democratic candidate says, I believe we need to be fair and support granting civil unions to gay and lesbian couples, which grant many of the legal rights and responsibilities of married couples. But I oppose a constitutional amendment to ban gay marriage because decisions about marriage should be left to the states as they always have been. This debate is important, but the Republican candidate for Congress is using it to divide our country and distract our attention from their lack of solutions to end the war in Iraq and fix our struggling economy.

The Republican candidate says, the recent decision by the California Supreme Court to legalize gay marriage is a big step that can lead to force other states to accept marriage between gay and lesbian couples. We need a constitutional amendment to ban same-sex marriage and preserve the sanctity of marriage between a man and a woman. Of course, this country faces a lot of other problems than need to be addressed, but our core values are under assault and it is a shame that Democrats are not standing up for American families.

