

Date: September 29, 2008  
To: Friends of Democracy Corps  
From: Stanley Greenberg, James Carville and Andrew Baumann

## **With country angrier, Republicans at edge of even bigger congressional losses**

*A new poll of the fifty battleground congressional races*

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This latest Democracy Corps and Greenberg Quinlan Rosner survey of the competitive battleground districts reveals an intensely angry electorate, even more sour on Republicans who have not distanced themselves enough from Bush and are now at risk even at the edge of the current map of competitive congressional seats. Democratic candidates are now ahead by 4 points in the 40 most vulnerable Republican seats, even in the bottom tier. A near majority of 48 percent in these Republican seats say they “can’t vote to re-elect” their Republican incumbent, while Democrats are ahead in the open seats.

When Democracy Corps last surveyed these Republican-held Congressional seats in July,<sup>1</sup> the Republicans had made gains, incumbents had protected themselves and we thought the battleground would contract to fewer seats. We were wrong: the opposite has happened. Increased anger about the country and a sharper focus on the economy has damaged Republican incumbents and put even more Republican seats in jeopardy. Democrats are in a position to take half of these seats or more and clearly the battleground extends beyond these 40 districts.

This memo is based on a survey of 1794 likely voters in the 50 most competitive Congressional districts, including 1394 likely voters in the 40 most competitive Republican seats and 400 likely voters in the 10 most competitive Democratic seats. The survey was conducted September 18-23, 2008.

The Democrats will lose some seats from the ten most competitive that they currently hold, as Bush carried these seats on average by 14 points in 2004. Though this is very Republican territory, the Democrats are running even in these districts and can carry half of them.

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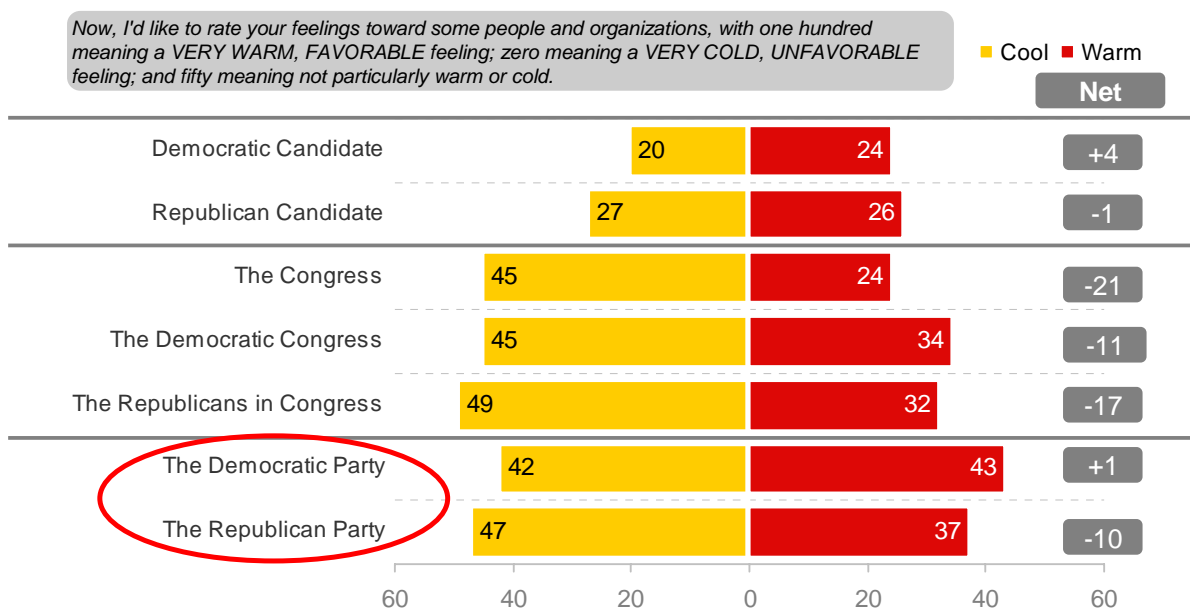
<sup>1</sup> Democracy Corps survey of 1600 likely voters in 50 Republican-held battleground districts conducted July 27 – 31, 2008.



### Environment Helps Democrats to Lead

The financial crisis, which had not yet reached its peak when this survey was in the field, is driving a deepening anger across the country and in these Republican districts. Just 14 percent of likely voters believe the country is heading in the right direction, the lowest number we have seen in our Democracy Corps congressional polling, even in this Republican battleground. The intensely negative mood is more directed at Republicans, who are seeing their brand continue to erode. President Bush remains toxic and the Republican Party is now significantly less popular than the Democrats, even in this more conservative battleground.

### Republican brand endangering Republican candidates



Democratic candidates are taking advantage of this favorable environment and now hold a 49 percent to 45 percent lead in the 40-seat Republican battleground.<sup>2</sup> This is a broad lead – with Democrats holding equal 4-point cushions in the top tier of races, the 20 most vulnerable seats, and in the second tier, the next 20 districts. If the election were held today, Democrats would be poised to win, perhaps, well upwards of 20 Republican seats.

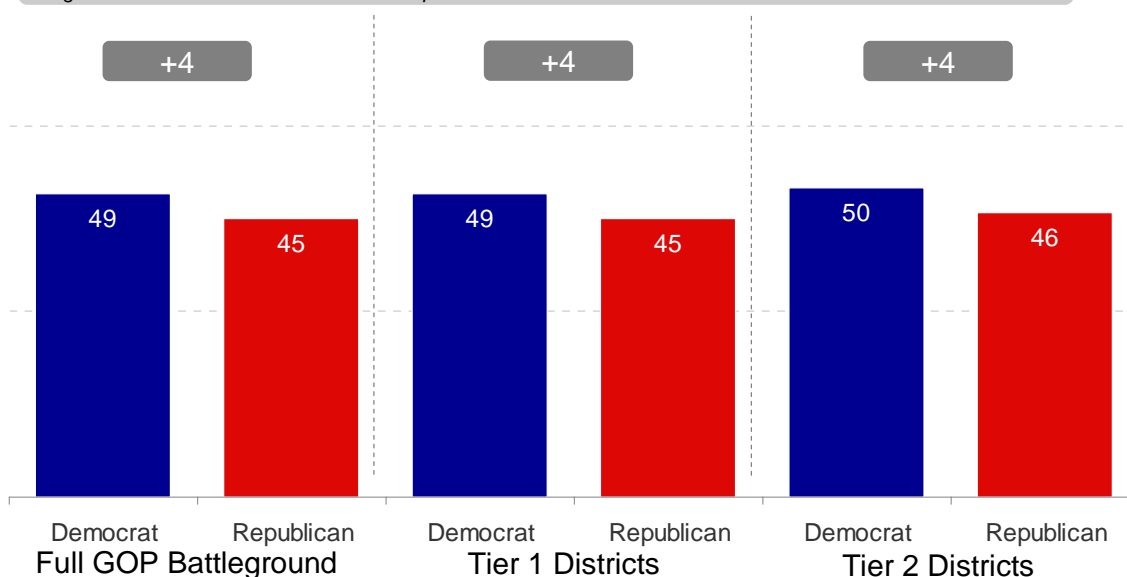
Democrats have a strong lead among independents, leading 50 to 38 percent, giving them a margin reminiscent of 2006. This represents a huge shift since July and accounts for much of the Democrats’ improved standing.

<sup>2</sup> The congressional vote was asked using actual candidate names in every district except LA-4, where the candidates are not yet official. In that case, generic candidates were used.



## Democrats take lead in toughest 20 Republican seats

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: For each district, the candidates' names were inserted, preceded by their party identification. In the LA-4, where the candidates are not yet official, generic candidates ("the Democratic candidate" and "the Republican candidate" were inserted.

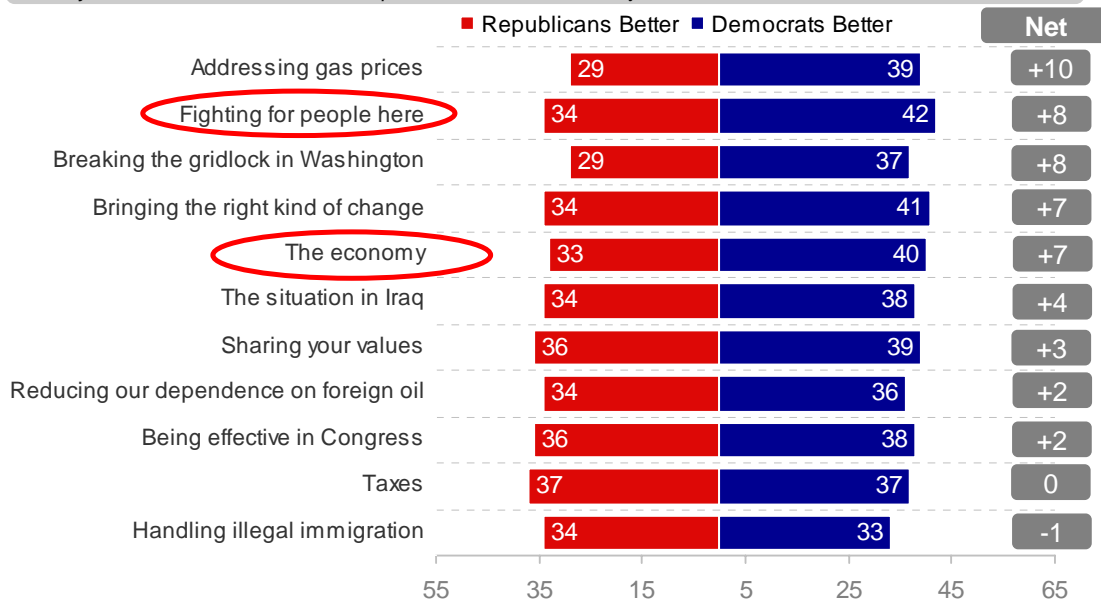
Democrats are now preferred in this Republican-held battleground on nearly every issue we tested in this survey. They hold a 7-point margin on the economy, which our regression modeling identifies as the most important issue in driving the vote. They also lead on gas prices (by a 10-point margin), bringing change (7 points) and breaking gridlock in Washington (8 points) and on Iraq (4 points). Democratic candidates even manage parity on taxes – the signature issue that is supposed to give Republicans credibility in a tough economy.

Perhaps even more important, by an 8-point margin, the Democratic candidates are viewed as the better candidates to “fight for people here,” which is also indentified by our regressions as an important driver of the vote and which fundamentally undermines the incumbents’ advantage in a troubled year.



### In GOP districts, Democrats as agents of change, better on economy

Now I am going to ask you something different. I am going to read a list of issues and I want you to tell me whether, overall, you think the Democrats or the Republicans would do a better job with this issue:



### Republican Incumbents Losing Ground and in Danger

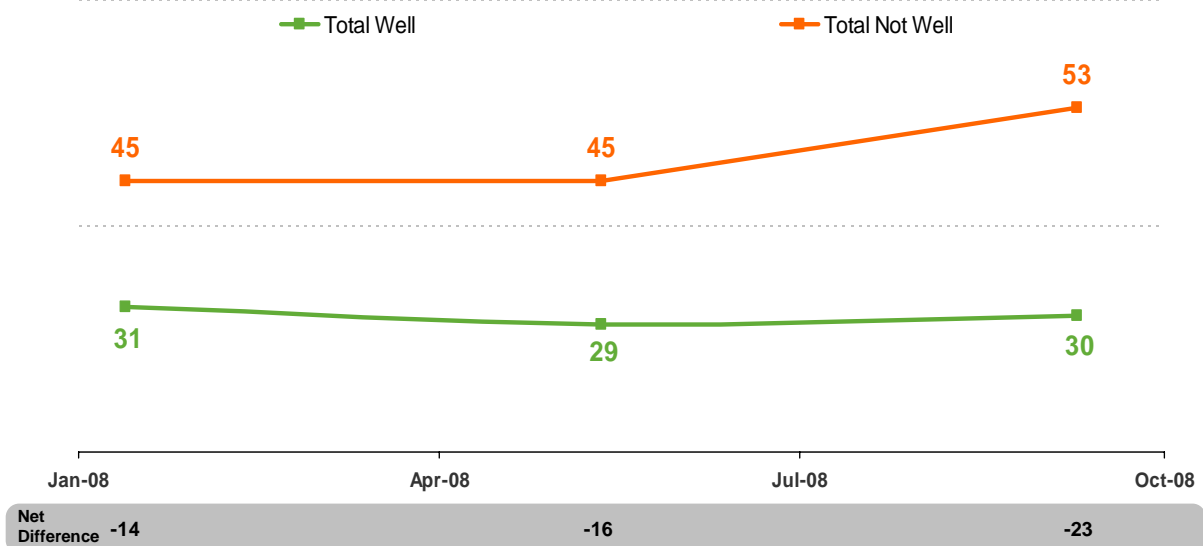
There is no doubt that the Democrats’ effort to expand their majority is aided by the 19 Republican open seats in this battleground. But Democratic opportunities are by no means limited to the open seats. In fact, Republican incumbents are losing further ground, being dragged down by the toxic environment and unpopular GOP brand. As disdain for Washington has increased, the Republican incumbents have failed to establish their independence from Bush or their party. Since May, the percent saying Republican incumbents are not independent has risen from 45 to 53 percent while the percent saying these incumbents follow Bush’s direction too much has jumped from 40 to 49 percent.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Democracy Corps survey of 1600 likely voters in 45 Republican-held battleground districts conducted May 19 – 26, 2008.



### More reject that member is “Independent, does not toe a party line”

Now, I am going to read you a list of words and phrases people use to describe political figures. For each word or phrase, please tell me whether it describes the (HOUSE INCUMBENT) very well, well, not too well, or not well at all.

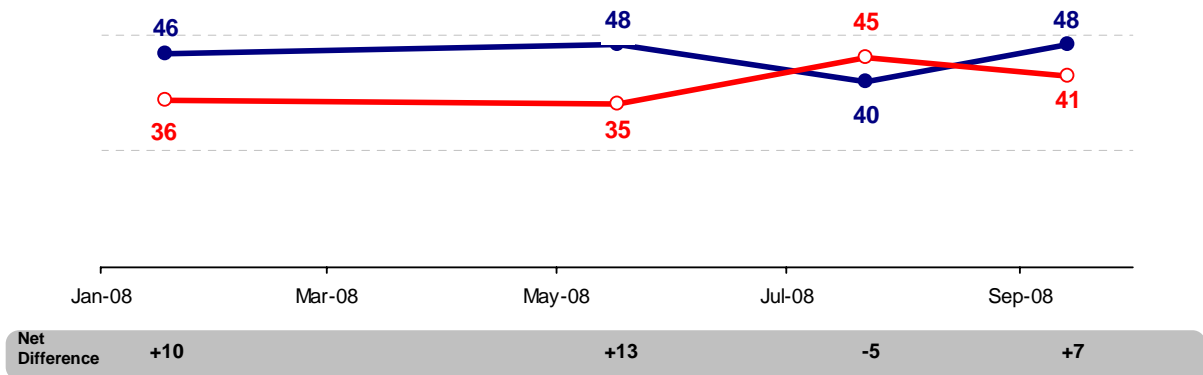


Meanwhile, 48 percent now disagree that Republican incumbents are “on your side,” up from 40 percent four months ago. This key attribute is another important driver of the vote in our regressions. As a result of this poor performance on so many attributes, a near majority of 48 percent of voters in these 40 Republican districts now say they simply can’t vote to reelect their incumbent congressman and in a named matchup, the Democratic challengers lead these incumbents 49-45.

### Voters turning away from incumbent in GOP battleground

Now I'm going to read you some pairs of statements. After 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.

- In November, I CAN'T vote to reelect (INCUMBENT) because we need new people that will work to bring the changes we need.
- In November, I WILL vote to reelect (INCUMBENT) because he/she is doing a good job and addressing issues that are important to us





## **Democrats Hold Lead After Simulated Campaign**

After a simulated campaign that tested the actual messages being used by incumbents and non-incumbents of both parties, the race shifts slightly toward the Republicans, but the Democrats still maintain a one-point lead in these Republican districts, a margin that would likely result in significant Democratic pick-ups in November. (The strongest messages for each party can be viewed in the attached graphs.)

## **Democratic Incumbents Overperforming, But Heavily Republican Battleground Means Some Losses**

We also surveyed the 10 most competitive Democratic-held seats. These are not typical swing districts – Republicans held 7 of them until the wave election of 2006 when Democrats picked up several of these seats primarily because of Republican scandals. In fact, these seats were significantly more conservative than even the second tier of Republican districts, voting for President Bush by a 57 to 43 margin in 2004. Nonetheless, the Democrats are running even in these districts — suggesting they could hold half of these seats — depending on how the vote is distributed. It is worth remembering how unusual 2006 was when Democrats lost no incumbents.

The dynamics of this deeply Republican battleground of ten seats does not reveal the overall dynamic – as Democratic incumbents generally are doing well and Democrats are up in the open seats in the Republican battleground.