



January 6, 2009

TO: Chairman Howard Dean  
The Democratic National Committee (DNC)

FR: Cornell Belcher

RE: A Stronger National Party: the Arc of the Democratic Party from 2004 - 2008

Over the next several weeks, we will see a changing of the guard in the leadership of the National Committee. This change coincides with the beginning of a period of extraordinary opportunity for the Party—a solid lead on the primary issues of concern to voters, an erosion of the central pillars of the Republican brand, a plurality of voters now saying Democrats are more likely to share their values than Republicans, a more expansive infrastructure that better engaged voters in areas we had been previously losing, and a once-in-a-generation transformative leader about to take office in the White House. As Democrats prepare to grasp these opportunities, we should pause to examine the extraordinary arc of how we got here with an eye toward the formative challenges that remain for our Party.

There are a number of extraordinary stories to be told about the 2008 Democratic Presidential and Congressional elections. The one that has yet to be explored involves a deeper look at the turnaround by the Democratic Party not only this year, but over the course of the last four years, starting with the challenges the Democratic Party faced in the wake of George W. Bush's reelection and long coattails. How does this arc impact the future of the Democratic Party? Where are the key areas of growth for the Party going forward?

To understand the arc of this story, we looked at the results of our post 2008 election poll through the prism of our national data for the DNC going back to 2004 when Republicans and many independent pundits were considering whether or not the GOP could seriously consolidate their victories and strong Party brand into a “permanent majority.” To better understand the tremendous change of fortunes between the two Parties, we paneled back

voters from our 2004 post election poll to see how their perspectives of the parties and issue playing field had changed between then and now. Together, this analysis provides a unique understanding of the trends and developments that led to the decisive Democratic turnaround.

## **Highlights of the Last Four Years**

**First, a quick flash back** – At the end of the 2004 election, our post election research along with Exit polls showed voters to be most focused on national security, Iraq, the economy, and moral values (which actually had a slight plurality in the exit polling). In that environment, Bush and Republicans were well positioned because in the minds of most voters, values were analogous to security, strength and leadership – in the heightened security anxious environment of 2004 they trusted Republicans more. And indeed, in many of these so-called red states, the Republican Party was the sole voice engaging them where they lived and worshiped. In our 2004 post election polling, Bush really encapsulated the Republican brand's superior positioning. A majority of voters supported Bush because they viewed him as a moral, strong and decisive leader in the face of an increasingly dangerous and hostile world. In 2004, a plurality (32 percent) of Bush voters open-ly said they voted for Bush because of his *strong and decisive leadership*. And 32 percent pointed to Bush's *strong morals* as the reason why they voted for him, while 19 percent said it was his *job with the war on terrorism*. And while Democrats held an advantage on the economy back in 2004, given Republicans' large advantage on the other central issues of the moment in 2004 (leadership and judgment), Republicans were better positioned to win the trust of voters. In 2004, the boogiemans at the door of Middle America was the threat of terrorists who hated our freedoms.

**Moving into 2006 and eroding the Republican brand** – Democrats made real inroads and began to erode key pillars of the Republican brand while improving our image on key issue lines of battle that had been our undoing in 2004. The very underpinnings of the Bush/ Republican brand had been severely eroded by the near perfect political storm of Katrina, rampant corruption, and a quagmire in Iraq that a majority of Americans began believing actually made us less safe. While Americans were losing faith in the Administration's handling of the Iraq war, the trail of corruption leading from key White House officials and Republican Hill leaders to K Street was coming into full focus. This was a critical moment for Democrats. As this was happening, Democrats began to really hone in and make the case about a culture of corruption that casts a wide and damning shadow over the Republican Party. Sure, opinion showed that voters thought that Washington in general was corrupt and Democrats were not immune, but they blamed Republicans overall much more than Democrats.

In a strategic way, Democrats were able to dissipate the Republicans' two core issue advantages, allowing them to be more competitive with groups of voters that Republicans had previously won overwhelmingly. **Unlike in 2002 and 2004, Democrats entered the fall of 2006 better organized on the ground and better able to compete strongly with Republicans, even in areas where the GOP once dominated.** In 2006, Democratic successes had less to do with any dramatic changes in turnout, but more to do with

Democrats simply competing more strongly across many groups of voters. Looking at county data in Missouri and Ohio, the Federal statewide candidates appear to have run marginally further ahead of Democratic performance in 50 to 40 percent Democratic performing counties (swinging counties) than they did in majority Democrat performance counties – in a nutshell, we did better in swing areas. In our DNC 2006 post-election poll, Democrats battled Republicans to a near standstill (48 percent to 43 percent) in precincts that in the past had broken Republican by an average of 55 percent (Republican-leaning swing). Democrats took the fight to Republican areas and competed well. This was a remarkable turnaround. **Democrats were succeeding in competing more broadly for voters across the entire demographic spectrum.**

As the chart to the right indicates, our polling over the two years leading into 2006 showed that the Democratic strategy to undermine Republicans' strength had slowly but surely come to fruition. Eroding key components of the Republican brand allowed Democrats an **opportunity to compete for voters in areas where we had struggled mightily in the past couple of election cycles.**

<b>Dwindling Republican Advantages on Terrorism and Moral Values</b>			
	<b>Dem</b>	<b>Rep</b>	<b>Dem-Rep</b>
<b>Terrorism</b>			
Nov 2006	42%	49%	-7
Aug 2006	44%	42%	+2
Feb 2006	42%	47%	-5
June 2005	38%	51%	-13
Feb 2005	34%	56%	-22
<b>Moral values</b>			
Nov 2006	40%	50%	-10
Aug 2006	39%	47%	-8
Feb 2006	42%	47%	-5
June 2005	34%	56%	-22
Feb 2005	30%	60%	-30

Without question, Iraq was a central and pivotal issue that helped Democrats in 2006. But **in our view, the data simply does not support the idea that we could have so convincingly broken the Republican coalition without the influence of the “culture of corruption” as a significant voting issue.** Clearly Democrats' strategy to undermine Republicans' strength was succeeding. Corruption voters broke strongly Democratic in 2006 (+22 in the exit polling<sup>1</sup> and +25 in our post election polling<sup>2</sup>), making us more competitive among target segments of voters who had not been inclined to support us previously and who we were not winning over on the issues of Iraq or the economy.

In our internal national polls dating back to early 2006, corruption was emerging as a top tier issue, particularly for Red State and born-again women. In February 2006, corruption was actually running ahead of national security as a top tier voting issue among Red State women, white women, and Independent voters. It was tied with national security among faith voters, married women, and Catholics. A culture of corruption and greed resonated strongly with many faith voters and it spoke to the values of the Republicans.

<sup>1</sup> Media exit poll conducted on November 7, 2006

<sup>2</sup> 2,600 respondent poll in battle ground states conducted Nov 8-12, 2006

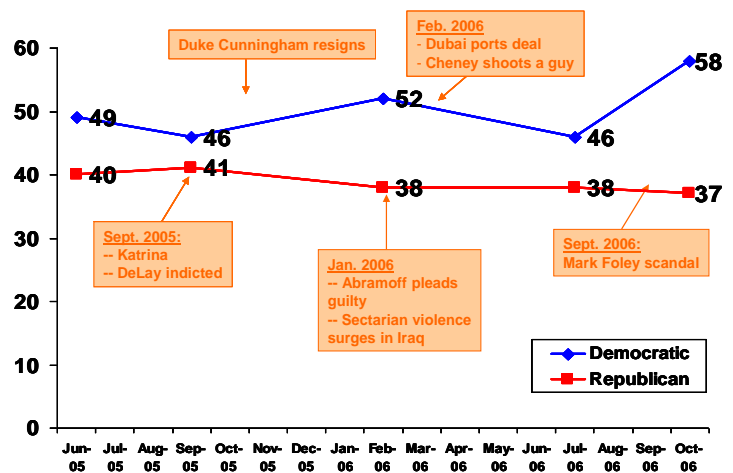
While Iraq maintained its status as a top tier issue in our polling from the end of 2004 through 2005 and 2006, the number of voters breaking our way on the issue did not dramatically fluctuate, despite major swings in the generic horserace advantage over that same period of time. Again, the culture of corruption messaging strategy was potent because it crystallized for voters the picture of a Republican Party that was out of touch and more focused on power than issues that impacted the real daily lives of voters.

In June 2005, Democrats were winning voters who ranked Iraq as very important (8 or above on a scale of 0 to 10) by 16 points, in February of 2006 we were winning those voters by 24 points, at the beginning of August 2006 we were winning them by 20 points, and in our post election 2006 mid-term battleground poll we beat Republicans by 17 points among these voters (+22 in the exit polling among those who said Iraq was extremely important). Voters in the East, a key cohort on the Iraq question, had a higher Iraq issue concern average over that same period of time than voters in other areas of the country, and voters in Blue States had a higher average than voters in Red States.

In the states covered in our 2006 post election poll, 43 percent of the electorate was still fluid/ moveable at the end of September, including 56 percent of voters under the age of 35, 52 percent of independents, and 47 percent of faith voting women. These late-breaking voters were not voters who had been inclined to support us in the past: just 37 percent said they supported Gore in 2000, and 38 percent said they supported Kerry in 2004. In the final month of the campaign, however, **the crown jewel of Republican corruption unfolded in the Foley scandal, and these still fluid voters who were part of the Bush coalition in both 2000 and 2004, ended up breaking Democratic by +10 points.**

The strategy of expanding the battlefield and competing more broadly in traditionally Republican leaning areas put Democrats in place to take advantage of a changing issue environment and the erosion of the Republican brand in 2006. The 2006 elections proved that if we show up and fight, we can compete nationally.

Congressional vote w/ leaners - trend



**Moving back to the present – to a certain degree one can argue that the winged tipped banker with a foreclosure notice largely replaced the Middle East extremist in the anxious minds of Middle America.** However, to say that this election was all about the economy is to miss important parts of the larger picture and what it means for

the Party. **While the economy did play an almost singularly dominating role this year (effectively crowding out many of the top issue concerns that played more prominently in 2004), national elections are seldom simply or accurately reduced to one theme or issue and 2008 clearly is no exception.** Indeed, the road to 2008 is a vast epic that encompasses far flung territories once thought to be impregnable to Democrats back in 2004, a dramatic shift in the issue environment from 2004, the Shakespearian rise and fall of the Republican brand at the hands of incompetent hubristic leaders (a permanent Republican majority indeed), and a Democratic Party with the courage to buck conventional wisdom and build the infrastructure needed to communicate with and touch voters in so called “red” states. Dominating the story is **Barack Obama, a once in a generation type transformational leader** who was able to excite and mobilize legions of new and disproportionately younger voters who changed the face of the American electorate and tipped the balance of power by moving the battle lines away from the bloodied fields where the 1960s era culture wars had raged for so long.

Key to continuing and expanding Democratic gains from 2008 is understanding both the dynamics within the electorate that have changed since 2004, as well as the changing landscape of issues. Our analysis looks at both of these important topics, highlighting successes over the last few years and identifying new opportunities for Democrats to explore going forward.

## **Expanding the Map for Democrats**

**The Democratic Party is better positioned today than it was in 2004 because of its alignment with Barack Obama and the Party’s bold commitment to broaden its efforts to engage voters across a more expansive playing field in between elections.** Today more voters are identifying with the Democratic Party. Democrats have closed the gap and overtaken Republicans on party self-ID, and now lead by 9 points after trailing or staying even for the last few years. This trend is especially pronounced among voters under 30 years old, where the party ID lead is 20 points for Democrats, up from just a 4 point spread in our post 2004 poll. We are seeing the fruits of this groundswell as we make gains not only with younger voters, but also with voters in historically so-called red areas. In our post-election 2004 polling for the DNC, we sampled voters in what we predicted then would be critical emerging areas that Democrats would have to work to do better in if we were really going to compete nationally, along with some tried and true conventional presidential battleground states (Virginia, North Carolina, Ohio, Wisconsin, Iowa, Nevada, New Mexico, and Georgia). Bush carried our emerging and typical battleground mixed sampling by 8 points in 2004. That same year, these voters were also slightly more likely to identify with the Republican Party than with the Democrats. In our post 2004 poll, 33 percent of these battleground state voters self identified as Republican, 36 percent as Independent, and 31 percent as Democrat. When we called back a subset of these same voters in November 2008, a slight plurality (38 percent) of these “panel back” voters now identify as Democrats, 34 percent identify as Independents, and 29 percent identify as Republicans. Clearly the efforts of Democrats to reach these once Republican leaning voters who had very little contact from Democrats prior is beginning to pay off, as a 37 percent plurality of our panel back voters say they

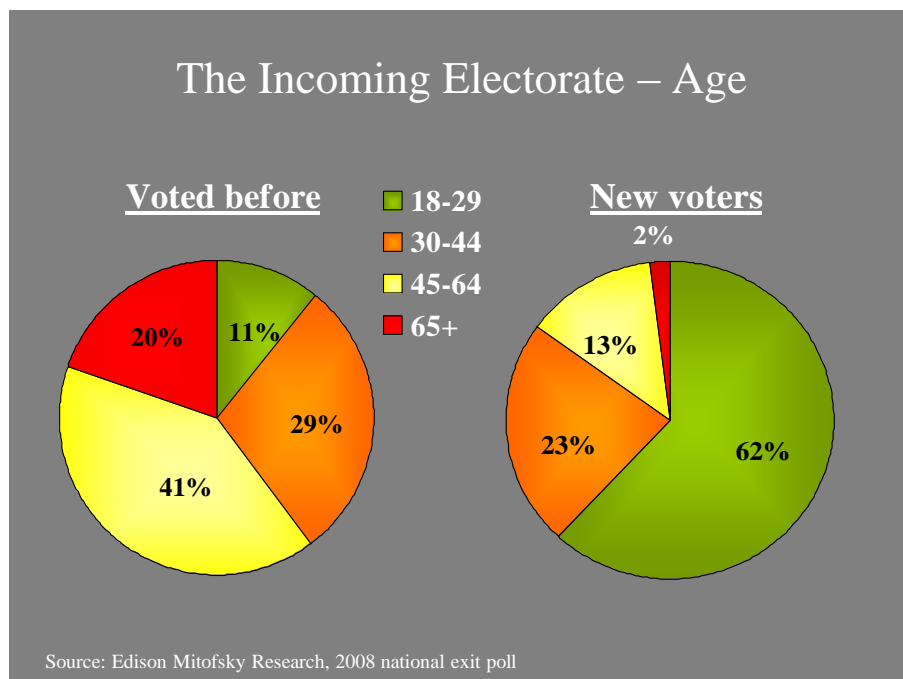
have had more contact from the Democratic Party over the last couple of years than the Republican Party, 26 percent say they have had more contact from Republicans, 25 percent say they have had about equal contact while the remainder say they cannot recall having had any contacts from either Party.

Among these voters who say they have had more contact from Democrats, Obama beat McCain by 46 points, and McCain beat Obama by 50 points among those who had more contact from Republicans. When both Parties touched these Republican leaning voters equally, McCain garnered an advantage (+32 points), and showing their natural leaning if uninfluenced by contacts from either Party, McCain won voters in our panel back with little to no contact by 12 points. Overall, the Republican presidential margin was cut in half among our panel back voters as we drew to a very competitive 4 point race. This proves again that when we put forward the effort to engage voters more broadly, we can compete with our ideas and values anywhere in the country.

The news was even better on the Congressional ballot with these voters. House Democrats carried voters on our panel back who had been contacted more by Democrats by 40 points, Republicans carried panel back voters who had been contacted more by them by 30 points, but House Democrats also managed to narrowly carry voters who say they had been contacted equally over the last couple of years by 4 points. In 2004, House Republicans carried these voters by 6 points. Clearly the Party's efforts to expand its ability to reach and touch more voters in red areas paid some dividends, but we have to stay aggressive and redouble our efforts to touch more of these voters because when we touch them more than Republicans they can be persuaded. When we show up, we can compete in any region. The Party should look to reinforce and expand on the 50 state strategy moving forward, particularly in light of Republicans now talking about the need for their very own 50 state strategy – remarkable.

### A Younger Diverse Surge for Democrats

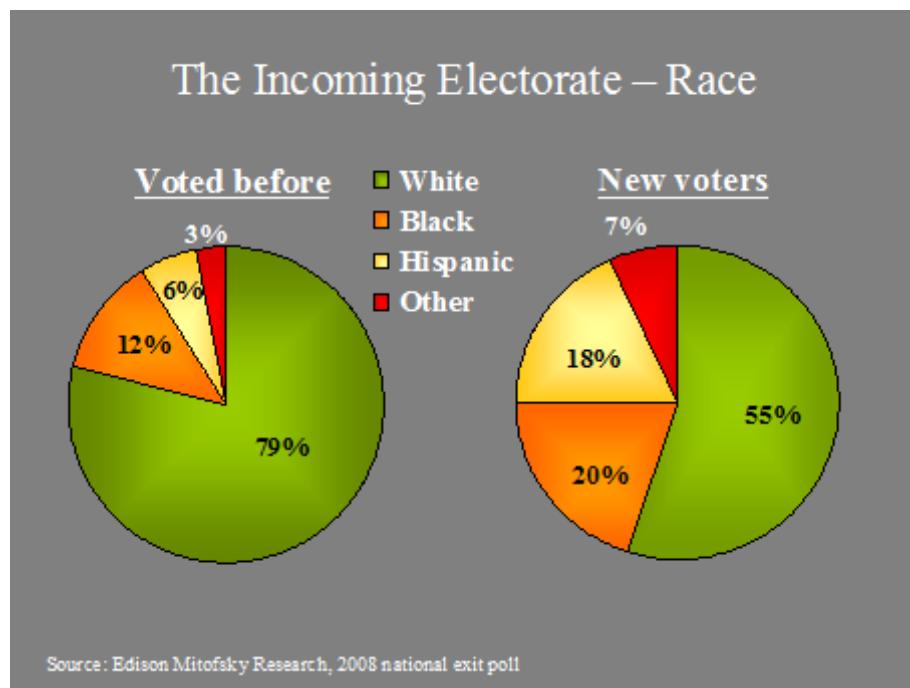
Younger new voters are critical to the Party's new growth and positioning. Approximately 11 percent of our electorate was new and they broke hard for Obama by 57 points. Obama won new voters 68 to 11 while the race was basically a tossup among the conventional



electorate (49 percent Obama to 48 percent McCain). And indeed, in our sample among perfect presidential year voters, McCain beats Obama 51 percent to 47 percent. The new voters coming into the electorate in 2008 are different in many ways from those that came before and keeping them engaged and in the electorate is imperative for maintaining and growing the Democrat's new coalition. An incredible 62 percent of new voters are under the age of 30. The cornerstone of our new electorate is much younger than our conventional likely voters, and browner. In addition, they are much more likely to come into the process identifying with our Party: a near majority of 49 percent identify as Democrats, 28 percent identify as Independents and 19 percent as Republicans. And the Democratic brand overall appears to be benefiting from its alignment with Obama among younger voters. Obama's favorability thermometer rating in our post election poll among younger whites is over 10 points higher than that of Democrats overall: Obama enjoys a thermometer rating of 66 among whites under 35, while The Democratic Party enjoys only a rating of 54.

The surge among new voters of color was incredible. Thirty-eight (38) percent of our new electorate was either Hispanic or African American. It is becoming increasingly clear that the

key to sustaining and growing our Democratic majority coalition lies with younger and more diverse voters who are clearly trying to turn the page. Younger white voters are far more open to supporting Democrats than their parents (whites under age 35 broke for



the Democratic House candidate by +14 points in our polling), but Democrats must work hard to fully bring home these voters who primarily surged in support of Obama. Our post election poll data shows that Democrats down the ballot left a good number of younger votes on the table as 20 percent of voters under age 35 dropped off after casting a presidential ballot rather than voting for a House candidate. These younger and browner surge voters are, by and large, Obama's right now, not necessarily the Democratic Party's. If Democrats are to strengthen our majority coalition going into the off year, we will clearly need to reach and engage these voters with some party persuasion. Again, the Party must continue to aggressively build in the off year—the

time to let up on the 50 state strategy is not now. We must expand upon it with a particular youth and minority focus.

## The Issues Landscape

**We made a very strong case for the issues this year based on our values. Democratic campaigns did their jobs very effectively this year, and made this election more about our issues than re-fighting the same old culture wars. This election was decided first on the issues dimension, and secondly on religious vs. secular values dimension.**

We dominated on the issues front and gained real ground competing on the values front. And Republicans arguably had less opportunity/ opening this cycle to draw the central battle front to the faith/values dimension because of

the changing issues landscape and context. To identify key issue groupings, we used factor analysis, a statistical technique that reduces a large number of questions or topics to smaller number of basic factors. This technique identified two factors, which we named as follows.

- 1) 2008 Election Issues
- 2) Faith vs. Secular Values

Top issues in the “2008 Election Issues” factor included the economic crisis, judgment, values, the war in Iraq, and national security. These, in addition to a comparatively positive view of the Democratic candidate and Party, were key components of Democratic success in this election cycle. Although traditional Republican wedge issues still moved some votes to McCain, these issues were overwhelmed by other areas where Democrats competed effectively. The horizontal axis in Figure 1 represents the “2008

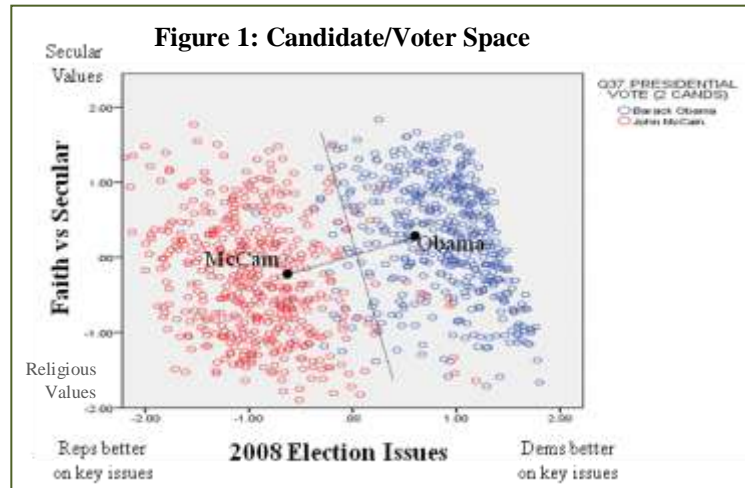
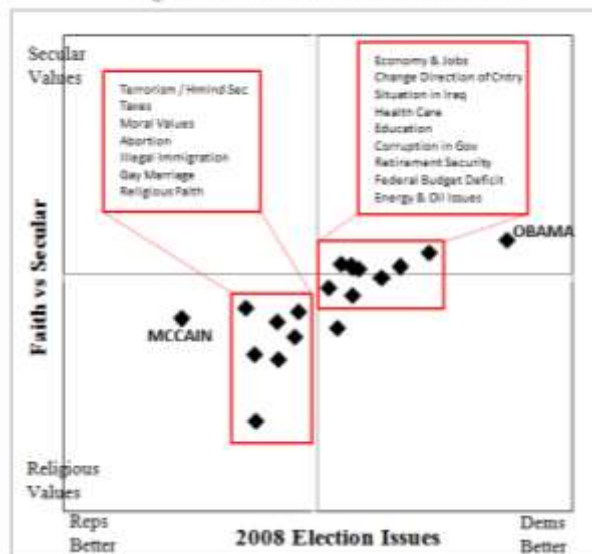


Figure 2: Placement of Issues Voters

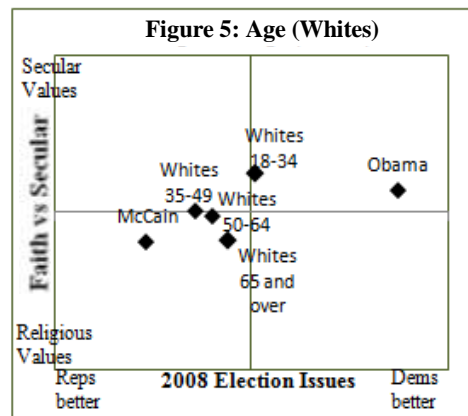
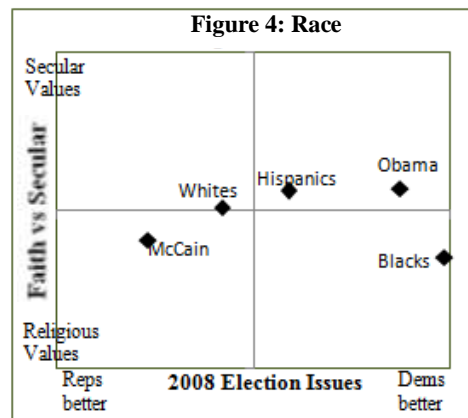
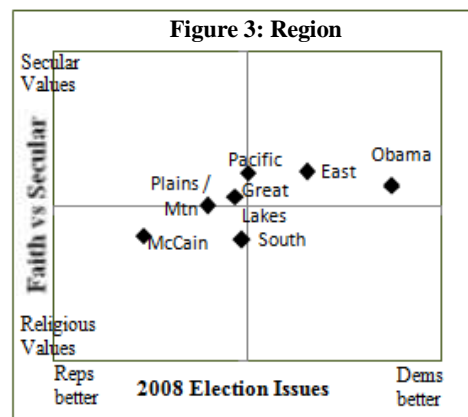


Election Issues” factor, which shows perceptions of each party on the dominant issue set. The vertical axis represents the “Faith vs. Secular Values” dimension, and is defined by items such as faith, position on abortion, and church attendance. The points show where the voters were on these groups of issues and where voters perceived the candidates to be on the same issues. The key split on vote choice is horizontal, which means that perceptions of each party on the dominant issues were more important than faith issues in driving the vote year. **Voters this cycle were closer to Obama and the Democrats on the issues dimension** and the gravitational pull of that dimension this year far outweighed that of the faith vs. secular values dimension (Figure 1 and 2).

**Regionally, voters varied significantly along the two main factors, with Eastern voters closest to Obama, and Southern and Plains/Mtns voters closest to McCain** (Figure 3). Southern voters identified most strongly with religious values, while the Pacific and Eastern region voters were more secular. Plains/Mtns voters were closest to Republicans on the issues, but were not strongly driven by religious values. Great Lakes voters were also in the middle of the Faith vs Secular values spectrum. This demonstrates that Plains/Mtns and Great Lakes voters are open for further gains in future election cycles, as each group are less susceptible to being pulled away by Republican wedge issues.

**Whites overall were only slightly closer to the Republican candidate, while Hispanics and Blacks were closer to Obama** (Figure 4). Whites were pulled toward McCain by the issues more than by religious values (it is important to remember that Democrats again did not win white voters). Blacks, on the other hand, anchored the Democrat end of the issue spectrum, but were also more likely than Whites or Hispanics to see religious values as important in voting. Hispanics were closer to the Democratic end on the issues, and closer to the middle on the values spectrum.

**Younger white voters were more secular in their values and closer to the middle on election issues than older white voters** (Figure 5). This presents a key opportunity for Democrats, as this younger group will be more likely to side with Democrats on faith vs. secular issues. However, the younger group is to the

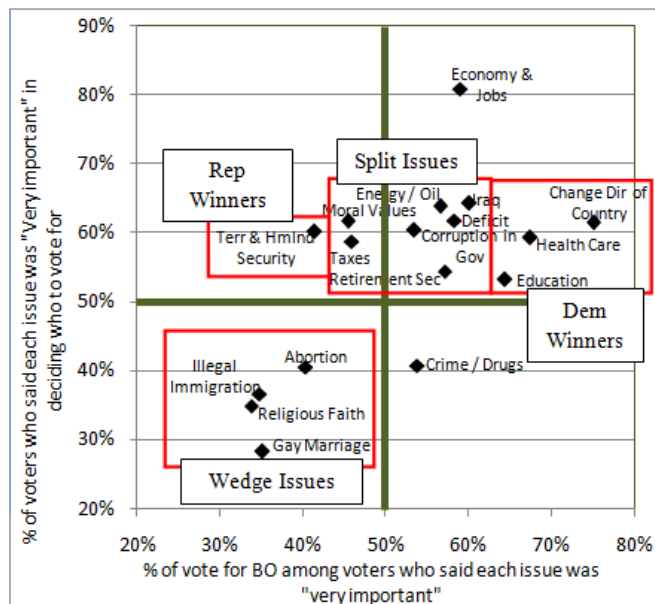


center on issues, and could swing in either direction on the issues in future elections. The Party must look to specifically build here among these younger whites. Working to move this younger group of voters toward the Democrat end of the issues spectrum should be a strategic focus in our off year work to solidify them for Democrats for the long term. Middle age white voters were more compelled by the Republican positions on the issues than their younger counterparts. Although senior whites tilted slightly toward the Republicans on the issues, they were much more compelled by religious values than the other age groups. This makes older whites a real tough get unless we continue to undermine Republicans arguments that have largely defined the values playing field. Democrats must continue to be aggressive in setting the values debate in a unifying as opposed to dividing and wedging way.

**This year, the economy crowded out most other issues from the landscape, and Democrats strongly won this issue. Overall, Democrat issues were more important to voters this cycle than were traditional Republican issues.** Eight of ten (81 percent) voters said “the economy and jobs” was a very important issue in deciding their vote

(Figure 6), much higher than any other issue this year and slightly higher than it was in 2004. Again, in our 2004 post election polling, Iraq loaded slightly higher as an issue concern for voters than the economy, while national security basically tied with the economy as a voting issue concern. Those three issues effectively dominated and defined the issues playing field along with moral values. Moral values was a much higher issue concern for voters in 2004 than in 2008, and voters most concerned about values broke harder for

**Figure 6: Issue Importance and Vote**



Republicans in 2004 than in 2008. In 2004, the top three issues were all within a single digit of each other in the top-box very important rankings, but this year the economy really distanced itself at the top from all other issues at 81 percent very important. This year, 64 percent said Iraq was very important and only 60 percent said terrorism and national security was very important. And, while some key issues for Republicans were still present this year, the GOP failed to dominate among those issues as they did in 2004. Among voters very concerned about national security and terrorism, McCain only garnered a 16 point win (Bush carried them by 23 points in 2004), and among voters most concerned about values, McCain only managed to garner an 8 point win (in 2004, Bush carried values most important voters by an astounding 33 points). So not only did the issues playing field shift dramatically from under the Republicans feet, their hold on

some of those critical issues lessened.

Of those voters who pointed to the economy as very important this year, Obama won 59 percent. Overall, the issues break down as follows.

- Dem Winners (high importance, Obama wins): Health care, change direction, education.
- Rep Winners (high importance, McCain wins): Terrorism / homeland security.
- Wedge Issues (low importance, McCain wins): Religious faith, illegal immigration, gay marriage, abortion.
- Split Issues (high importance, split vote): Energy, corruption in government, Iraq, budget deficit, moral values, taxes, retirement security.

Notably, the Democrats had more winning issues in this election than Republicans. Obama also won most of the split issues, albeit narrowly in some cases. Obama closed the gap on McCain on normally Republican issues of taxes and moral values. While McCain dominated the vote on Republican wedge issues including illegal immigration, faith, gay marriage, and abortion, these issues were not important to a large enough number of voters to compensate for Republican losses in other areas this year.

**The overall Democratic Party is now better positioned from a brand and issue standpoint than the GOP.** As mentioned earlier, the party self-ID gains for Democrats have been significant these last few years. Fueling the decisive win by both Obama and Democratic Congressional candidates is a consistent belief that Democrats will be better at addressing the key issues currently facing the country (Figure 7). Voters overwhelmingly give Democratic Party the advantage on changing the direction of the country (+52), improving America's image (+43), uniting the country (+37) and standing up for people in this economic crisis (+35).

Most notably, Republicans have lost almost all credibility on economic issues with Democrats maintaining a double-digit advantage over Republicans on the federal budget deficit (+22), dealing with the economic crisis (+18), Social Security (+18) and energy issues (+14). This advantage on dealing with the economic crisis was critical this year, given the dominance of this issue over all others. In short, voters trust Democrats to deal with what is important right now, getting the economy back on track, and doing so in a way that ensures ordinary people realize the benefits of the economic recovery.

Although voters give Democrats only a slight edge on dealing with Iraq (+5) and sharing their values (+4), they are more likely to say overall they trust Democrats' judgment (+10). That Democrats are now seen as the Party most likely to share the values of American voters is a remarkable and notable moment – BRAVO!

Republicans continue to hold a slight edge over Democrats on keeping America safe (+8) and national security issues (+15), and voters still view Democrats as more likely to raise their taxes, (+10).

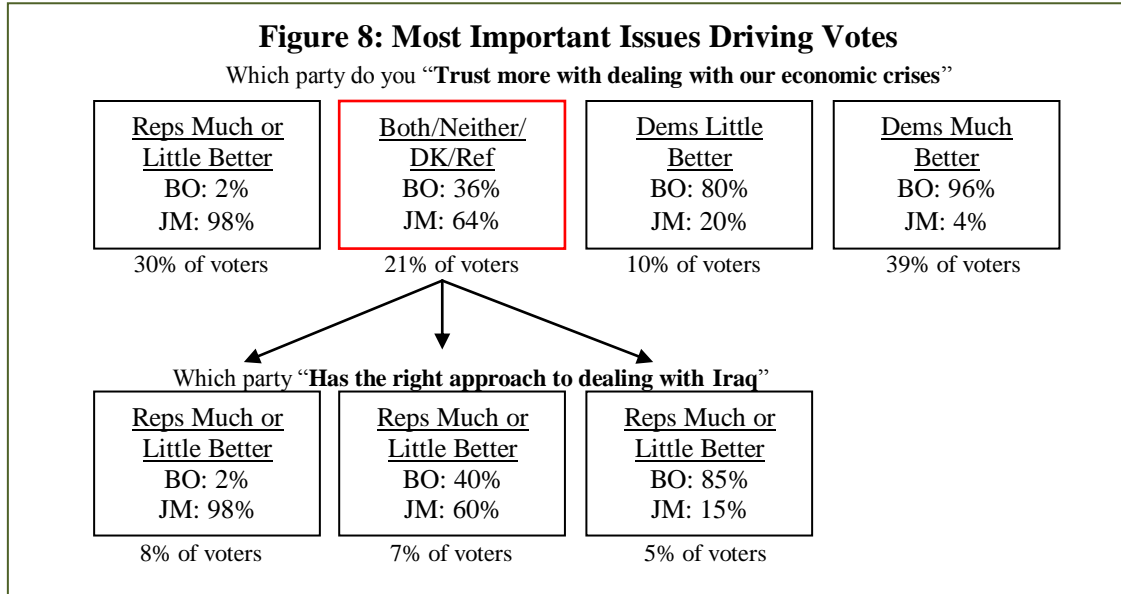
<b>Figure 7: Issues</b>	<b>Dems better</b>	<b>Reps better</b>	<b>Dems - Reps</b>
Change direction of the country	64	12	+52
Improving American's image	60	17	+43
Unite the country	51	14	+37
Stand up for people in the economic crisis	55	20	+35
The federal budget deficit	46	24	+22
Dealing with an economic crisis	47	29	+18
Social Security	40	22	+18
Energy and oil issues	44	30	+14
Trust their judgment	43	33	+10
The situation in Iraq	41	36	+5
Shares your values	42	38	+4

What we saw clearly in this election is that **when we show up for the values debate, and clearly articulate our Democratic values; we do have a solid alternative to the narrower Republican definition of values as being only about the wedge issues.**

Among voters who said “moral values” were very important to their decision, 34 percent self-ID as Democrats, tied with the 35 percent who ID Republican. This is an enormous change from four years ago, when Republicans led in Party ID among values voters by 18 points (42 to 24 percent).

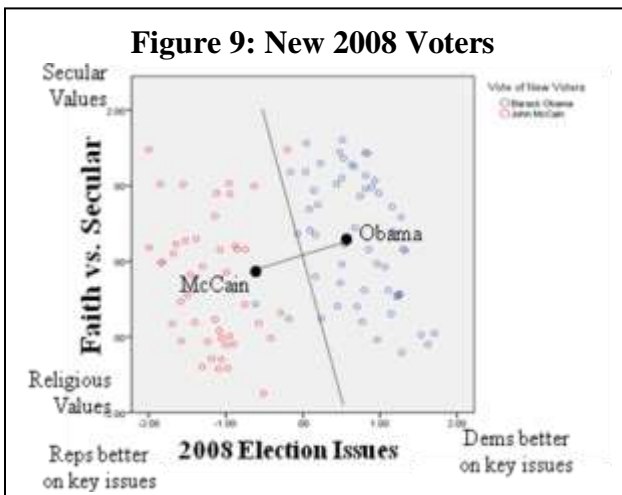
It is important to note here the distinction between faith voters and values voters. Those who place a high importance on faith in their voting choices still swing heavily Republican. But although nearly all faith voters (93 percent) are also values voters, the reverse is not necessarily true. Only half (53 percent) of values voters agree that religious faith was a very important influence in their voting choices. In short, many voters see their values as being about more than solely their religious faith. We should not shy away from promoting Democratic values moving forward. If we can continue to make inroads here, we can begin to solidify our new broader coalition.

**Oh yeah, Iraq still plays** – Perceptions of each party on handling the economy were the best predictors of the vote. Those who were undecided on the economy turned next to each party’s approach to Iraq. Confirming voters’ self reported importance statements, we used CHAID analysis (Figure 8) to analyze issues driving the vote, by



looking at voter’s perceptions of each party, and which specific beliefs best predicted vote choice. CHAID analysis establishes relationships between a ‘dependent variable’ (i.e. vote choice) and other explanatory variables such as how a voter perceives each party on a set of issues. Once again, the economy rose to the top as the predominant issue in this election.

Importantly, 49 percent of voters saw Democrats as better on this issue, compared to only 30 percent for Republicans. The 21 percent of voters undecided on the economic question turned next to Iraq policy. Figure 8 shows how clearly these two issues predict the vote.



**The Obama youth surge helped to reestablish the Democratic national majority coalition, but work will be needed to hold on to our gains from this year.** New voters aligned themselves with Obama, but will need more convincing to solidify this group for 2012. Voters in 2008 were punishing Republicans for poor performance, but Figure 9 shows how close to the dividing line many new voters were. While Obama and even the Democratic Party as a whole enjoy significant favorability advantages,

these advantages will be risked by adopting positions too far toward the extremes.

Our most significant threat in the next few years is underperforming. If we underperform on the primary issues on which we currently hold advantages, we open the door to the wedge issues. We need to avoid wedge issues that tilt the dividing line.

## **Summary: Looking to the Future**

**The Democratic Party is in solid shape in terms of the makeup of the Party, perceptions of the Party, and the values we represent.** We won this election by fighting and winning it on our issues and taking advantage of the changing face of the electorate with younger and more diverse voters. This portends well for the future, if we can solidify our gains among both our traditional party base, and these new voters by continuing to reach out to them and speak to the values they are seeking to express with their vote choices. Without our President-elect on the ticket in the upcoming midterms, the Party will need to sharpen its position and brand with these voters who surged primarily because of Obama. We will need to continue to expand on our infrastructure nationally and in unique ways to reach a non-traditional group of voters who surged because of Obama.

Departing from our past reluctance to engage on values, **we saw clearly that when we engage values voters, and discuss Democratic values and let voters compare, we win.** We won among voters focused on the economy, by far the most important issue in this election, by presenting real solutions, and by talking about standing up for everyday people in these difficult times. We also framed this election as being about change, as well as traditional Democratic strengths such as Health Care and Education. Given our recent success in framing the values debate on our own terms, we have a very real opportunity to control the values debate and shape future elections more around our issues. We cannot afford to ignore the values debate going forward, lest we slip back into damaging culture wars, which we are bound to lose.

The arc of the story over the last four years has been positive, and built to the victories this November. But our work is just beginning, if we want to solidify and build on our successes going forward. The 50 state strategy worked, and now is the time for the Party to stay aggressive and put some real lasting structure around the 50 state framework.