

Acknowledgements

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Introduction

In 1989, the authors of this paper wrote “The Politics of Evasion” — a critique of the Democratic Party of that era. We wrote the paper after a series of electoral defeats including one race, in 1988, that Democrats fully expected to win. We named the paper as we did because Democrats were clinging to a series of myths that thwarted critical thinking and needed change. Democrats were evading cold truths and hard choices.

Fifteen years later, Democrats lost another presidential election that they expected to win, this one on the heels of the closest and most controversial electoral defeat in modern U.S. history. In addition, they suffered a series of crushing defeats at the congressional level.

While our analysis will illustrate some important parallels between these two periods, there is a key difference that we wish to stress at the outset. At the presidential level, the Democratic Party is in a much stronger position than it was when we wrote “The Politics of Evasion.” California, a state that had gone Republican in every presidential election from 1952 through 1988 except the Johnson landslide of 1964, has been firmly in the Democratic column for the past four elections and seems likely to remain there for some time. In addition, Democrats have solidified their hold on parts of the country such as the Northeast, creating a partial counterweight to Republican strength in the South.

At the congressional level, however, Democrats arguably are in the worst shape since the 1920s. The 1994 loss of the House of Representatives and the subsequent incumbent protection redistricting of 2000 makes recapturing the House especially difficult. The Republican takeover of the House of Representatives is the culmination of long-term historical trends. It is the price Democrats have had to pay for their leadership in the civil rights movement — a price that President Lyndon Johnson predicted even as he enacted piece after piece of groundbreaking legislation. Nearly all vestiges of the once-powerful Southern Democratic party have been swept away, leaving only safe (mainly minority) Democratic House seats and a handful of Democratic southern senators.

While there are some obvious differences between 1988 and 2004, their implications are much the same: to have a competitive two-party system that can address the country’s problems, Democrats must reflect on their situation and clarify their stance.

In writing this paper, we once again uncovered a series of myths — most of them new — that cloud Democrats’ minds. We found, as well, a phenomenon we call the *politics of polarization*.

It is not news that our political elites are more polarized than they were a generation ago. Less well known is a dramatic new development—a *great sorting-out* of the

electorate—that has occurred along many dimensions. Self-described liberals are much more likely to vote Democratic, and self-described conservatives for Republicans, than in the past. Party affiliation is a far greater predictor of voting behavior, as is religious observance. Blue states are bluer, red states redder, and swing states fewer, than in previous cycles. Even individual counties have become increasingly polar, with far more conferring a vote of 60 percent or greater for a presidential candidate than in the past.

The initial reaction to the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina vividly illustrates this new politics of polarization. Under normal circumstances, a natural disaster brings people together. Not this time. According to a *Washington Post* poll released September 7, 2005, 74 percent of Republicans but only 17 percent of Democrats approved of President Bush's handling of the crisis; about two in three Republicans rated the federal government's response as good or excellent, compared to only one in three Democrats. (Independents were more evenly divided.)

What is equally striking about the politics of polarization is that a strong plurality of Americans continue to associate themselves with the moderate center of the political spectrum. In fact, the politics of polarization is occurring against a backdrop of sustained ideological stability. In 2004, the electorate was 21 percent liberal, 34 percent conservative and 45 percent moderate. That is practically a carbon copy of the average over the past thirty years — 20 percent liberal, 33 percent conservative, and 47 percent moderate—with remarkably little variation from election to election.

With three conservatives for every two liberals, the sheer arithmetic truth is that in a polarized electorate effectively mobilized by both major parties, Democratic candidates must capture upwards of 60 percent of the moderate vote — a target only Bill Clinton has reached in recent times — to win a national election.

This phenomenon has several significant ramifications that we discuss in this paper. First, our politics is more polarized than the people themselves. Thus, a system of polarized parties does not provide a natural home for the plurality of Americans who define themselves as moderates. Indeed, it leaves them feeling frustrated, unrepresented, and alienated from political life.

Second, this polarization creates substantial distance between the political parties (and governmental institutions) and the people. Many Americans do not want to choose between a vigorous economy and a strong safety net, between individual liberty and national security, between social tolerance and moral tradition, or between military strength and international cooperation, and they resent a politics that forces them to do so.

Third, polarization has tilted the national playing-field against Democrats. In 1976, Jimmy Carter eked out a victory with only 51 percent of the moderate vote because he won nearly three in ten conservative voters. In 2004, John Kerry won 54 percent of the moderates and still lost by 3.5 points because he won a much smaller share of conservatives. With three conservatives for every two liberals, the sheer arithmetic truth is that in a polarized electorate effectively mobilized by both major parties, Democratic candidates must capture upwards of 60 percent of the moderate vote — a target only Bill Clinton has reached in recent times — to win a national election.

The growing polarization has led many pundits and political operatives to believe that swing voters have all but disappeared and that base mobilization is therefore the be-all-and-end-all of contemporary politics. We disagree. During the past five elections, as partisan and ideological polarization has intensified, the Democratic presidential nominee's popular vote margin has varied from +8 to -8. (Both the 2000 and 2004 results were closer to the mid-point than to the extremes of this range.) The principal reason lies in shifting political preferences among self-identified independents and moderates. The Democratic margin among independents has ranged from +8 to -12. The variation among moderates has been even more striking—from a low of +1 in 1988 to a high of +24 in 1996. Even in polarized times, national campaigns will be won or lost in the independent and moderate center of the electorate.

It is of course too early to assess the long-term impact of Hurricane Katrina's aftermath on the outlook and preferences of the American people. While it is clear that President Bush's image as a strong leader has been tarnished and that Republicans' appeal to moderate and independent voters has diminished, there is little evidence that these shifts have reduced polarization or improved the people's assessment of Democrats as the alternative to continued Republican governance.

But one thing is clear: the polarization of the parties has created an opportunity for a political leader — from either the center-right or the center-left — to capture the hearts and the votes of the vast legion of moderate voters who are not comfortable calling either party “home.”

Today's crisis of *confidence* in political leaders and institutions is in large part a crisis of *competence*, at home and abroad. The American people are learning the hard way that visions are not plans and that hope is not a strategy. Whatever its specific agenda, the leaders of a new majority coalition will have to persuade the people that they can close this gap.

During the past decade, each party has squandered its chance to seize the center and build a stable governing majority. Both are in the grip of powerful forces that resist this course. The first to overcome them will forge a new majority that can shape our policies and dominate our politics for years to come.

Executive Summary

This paper covers three sections that roughly correlate to the past, present, and future of modern-day electoral politics.

The Clinton Legacy

Section I looks back at the Clinton legacy and how his incumbency changed voter opinions of Democrats in the broad areas of economics, national security and values. Our findings show that one of Clinton's main political accomplishments was to improve the image of Democrats as able managers of the economy and to reduce Americans' hostility toward government, issues that had dragged down Democratic candidates for several electoral cycles. In 1980, Jimmy Carter received only 39 percent of the two-party vote among those who said economic issues were most important to their vote. But in the last four presidential elections, no Democrat received less than 60 percent of the vote among these economy voters.

On national security and foreign policy, by contrast, Clinton had few opportunities to solve Democrats' post-Vietnam problems. So enduring is the public's image of Democrats as weak on defense that virtually no one noticed when Al Gore proposed a defense budget one hundred billion dollars greater than George Bush's. Gore won only 43 percent of the two-party vote among voters who ranked defense or foreign affairs as their number one issue — and that was a high water mark for Democrats dating back to at least 1976.

The Clinton legacy on values issues is one of lost opportunities for Democrats. Clinton initiatives on welfare reform, crime and affirmative action solved a set of race-based values issues that bedeviled Democrats throughout the 1980s. In its place, however, the Monica Lewinsky scandal left a lasting moral stain on Democrats, and religion-based values issues have become increasingly important. Today, Democrats run far behind Republicans among so-called "morals" voters. So deep is this deficit that it now seems hard to believe that through the 1970s and 1980s, Democrats comfortably outpolled Republicans on the question of "traditional family values."

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The Jaws of Defeat

Section II analyzes the last two presidential races and exposes four modern myths to which Democrats have fallen prey.

The *myth of mobilization* is an old standby, first analyzed in “The Politics of Evasion.” It argues that the key to Democratic victory is to energize the base and bring them to the polls in record numbers. But in an electorate where conservatives outnumber liberals three to two and where ideology so closely predicts voting behavior, Democrats cannot win the game of “base” ball, except in those rare circumstances in which conservatives are discouraged and demobilized.

The *myth of demography* is the view that long-term, ongoing changes in the U.S. population will secure a Democratic majority for decades to come. Central to this myth is the rising tide of Hispanic voters, who now number 8.4 percent of the voting population, up from 4.1 percent in 1996. The tide has risen, but the terrain has changed. Clinton’s fifty point margin among Hispanics in 1996 dwindled to less than twenty for Kerry in 2004. Along with rising Hispanic voter rolls has been a dramatic increase in Hispanic incomes, and these newly affluent voters behave more like the rest of the middle class electorate.

The *myth of language* relies on the convenient thesis that the problem with the Democratic Party is not what it believes, but rather how it speaks. The way candidates talk undoubtedly makes a difference, but the best rhetoric will fail if the public rejects the substance of a candidate’s agenda or entertains doubts about his integrity. Democrats are in trouble today, not only because their candidates have lacked compelling “narratives” that resonate with voters, but because they lack a coherent approach to foreign policy, espouse positions on key social issues that strong majorities of the electorate reject, and lack compelling economic proposals that speak to the new economic challenges of the 21st century.

The *myth of prescription drugs* is our shorthand for the proposition, which seems to bewitch Democratic political consultants, that Democrats can win present-day national elections by avoiding cultural issues, downplaying national security, and changing the subject to domestic issues such as health care, education, and job security. This proposition fails the test of political reality in the post-9/11 world. First, national security is the dominant issue of the day and will trump domestic concerns for the foreseeable future. It is no accident that since the end of the Carter Administration, signaled by the Iranian hostage crisis and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, Democrats won the plurality of popular votes only in the elections—1992, 1996, and 2000—when national security was all but absent from the national debate. Second, Democrats’ focus on the details of domestic policy proposals comes at the expense of cultural issues, which for

many voters are seen through the prism of candidates' individual character and family life. Republican campaigns rarely make this mistake.

As these myths strengthened their grip on Democrats, recent election cycles witnessed a precipitous drop in support from two vital groups. The movement of married women and of Catholics toward Republicans is one of the most significant new stories in modern American politics. Democrats saw their margins among married women decrease from four points for Clinton in 1996, to even for Gore in 2000, to minus twelve for Kerry.

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Among Catholics, the margin decreased from sixteen points for Clinton in 1996, to two points for Gore in 2000, to minus five for Kerry.

Both women and Catholics were moved by national security and moral issues. Married women ranked moral issues number one and national security number three among the most important matters determining their

vote (health care ranked a distant sixth). Both women and Catholics had a much broader view of moral issues than the hot-button issues of gay marriage and abortion. Candidate character, honesty, and personal integrity followed closely behind these divisive cultural issues among this segment of the electorate.

The Great Sorting-Out

Section III looks to the future and identifies a phenomenon we call *the great sorting-out*, which defines and explains the politics of polarization. Many people believe that modern Republican political successes are the result of increasing conservatism in the electorate. But that is not true. Since the 1970s, the electorate's ideological self-identification has varied within a narrow range, averaging 20 percent liberal, 47 percent moderate, and 33 percent conservative.

Jimmy Carter captured only 72 percent of the liberal vote in 1976 and won the presidency. John Kerry captured 85 percent of the liberal vote and lost.

However, during that time partisan affiliation and ideology have become far greater predictors of electoral behavior. Jimmy Carter captured only 72 percent of the liberal vote in 1976 and won the presidency. John Kerry captured 85 percent of the liberal vote and lost. Carter captured 77 percent of registered Democrats and won; Kerry captured 89 percent and lost. In fact, no Democrat in modern history captured a greater

percentage of both self-identified liberals and registered Democrats than Kerry, yet he lost. Between 1976 and 2004, the likelihood that a liberal would vote for a Republican or a conservative for a Democratic candidate for president decreased by half.

We found religious faith to be the overriding factor behind *the great sorting-out*. The impact of church attendance on voting behavior has increased significantly. Moreover, traditionalism and modernism are now more important markers of political orientation than is broad religious affiliation. Where once Catholics and Jews tended to vote Democratic and Protestants tended to vote Republican, today evangelical Protestants, traditionalist Catholics, and

Orthodox Jews tend to be conservative and Republican voters; mainline Protestants, Vatican II Catholics, and Reform Jews tend to be liberal and Democratic voters. In addition, Democrats win only among less observant voters or those who do not have religion in their lives at all.

Finally, as we noted in the *myth of mobilization*, the politics of polarization associated with this sorting-out works to the advantage of

Republicans. In sheer numbers, Democrats have to capture far more moderates to win fifty percent plus one of the electorate than Republicans. And even though the last two presidential elections have been close by historic standards, the number of swing states in play has dropped. In 1988, fully twenty-six states fell within five percentage points of the national outcome. By 2004, only nineteen states fell within the five-point margin. In 2004, three-fifths of the nation's counties gave supermajorities of 60 percent or more to either presidential candidate. In 1996, only two-fifths did.

We conclude the paper by noting that, like 1989, dominant myths are preventing Democrats from asking tough questions and making hard choices. Democrats will not be given the opportunity to govern if they hide behind domestic policy as a means to avoid issues of national security and questions about the appropriate use of force. To succeed, Democrats must unite the left and moderate wings of the party behind a coherent foreign policy that is based on a belief in America's special role in the world, including a military role. (This does not mean rubber-stamping the policy choices of the current administration.) Only then will they have the credibility to refocus public attention on

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homeland security, a continuing problem the severity of which Hurricane Katrina has exposed.

On cultural issues, Democrats must show tolerance and common sense. Republicans allowed high-profile pro-choice figures like Arnold Schwarzenegger, Rudolph Giuliani, and George Pataki to address their 2004 convention; many Catholics still remember the Democrats' refusal to allow the pro-life governor of Pennsylvania to address theirs in 1992.

Finally, Democratic candidates have to establish a bond of trust with the electorate that is based as much on character and integrity as policy agendas and issue papers. We believe that in presidential elections, which pose the most personal political choices voters ever make, this personality test is the most important of all. We summarize it in three questions, which are not ours but rather the electorate's: Is the candidate a person of *strength*, with core convictions and the ability to act on them through challenges and criticism? Is the candidate a person of *integrity*, who displays consistency over time, who tells the truth, and whose words and deeds coincide? And: is the candidate a person of *empathy*, who understands and cares about people like us? In American national politics, candidates who appear cold, calculating, vacillating, or elitist rarely succeed.

I. The Clinton Legacy (1989-2000)

A. Looking Back At The Politics Of Evasion

In 1989, the Democratic Party had just suffered its third presidential defeat in a decade. This defeat, the fifth out of the past six presidential elections, was surprising to many and, for that reason, especially revealing. It came not at the hands of a charismatic communicator, Ronald Reagan, presiding over peace and prosperity, but at the hands of a politician of more modest skills, Vice President George H. W. Bush, who had spent the second term of the Reagan Administration skirting scandal. The Democratic candidate, Governor Michael Dukakis, went from a 17 point lead in the summer of 1988 to a loss in November that included white southerners, Catholics, moderates, independents and voters in the heart of the middle class.

Not surprisingly, a vigorous argument broke out within the ranks of the Democratic Party, with some arguing that Democrats lost because they pulled back from full-throated advocacy of traditional liberalism and others arguing that contemporary liberalism had lost credibility and was no longer politically viable.

Backed by a newly aggressive Democratic Leadership Council (DLC), the authors of this paper decided to take a frank look at some of the assertions being made about the Democratic Party's failures in the year after the 1988 election. Using the standard analytical tools of political science, we tested a series of propositions and concluded that:

“Instead of facing reality [Democrats] have embraced the politics of evasion. They have focused on fundraising and technology, media and momentum, personality and tactics. Worse, they have manufactured excuses for their presidential disasters — excuses built on faulty data and false assumptions, excuses designed to avoid tough questions. In place of reality they have offered wishful thinking; in place of analysis, myth.

This systematic denial of reality — the politics of evasion — continues unabated today, years after the collapse of the liberal majority and the New Deal alignment. Its central purpose is the avoidance of meaningful change. It reflects the convictions of groups who believed that it is somehow immoral for a political party to pay attention to public opinion. It reflects the interests of those who would rather be the majority in a minority party than risk being the minority in a majority party.”ⁱ

If the analysis sounds harsh, that is what was intended. It set off a vigorous debate within the party. “The Politics of Evasion” played a modest role in helping Bill Clinton

interrupt the Democratic losing streak. Clinton, like the DLC that he headed, came down on the side of the argument that said liberal fundamentalism was not the path to victory. Running on a message that stressed “Opportunity, Responsibility, Community,” he managed to look sufficiently new to convince a large enough segment of the public to trust the Democratic Party once again. Of particular importance was the fact that, in 1992, the big topic was, in the immortal words of James Carville, “The Economy, Stupid.” Clinton was prepared with an historical explanation of the economy that emphasized the transition from the industrial age to the information age and a set of policy prescriptions that emphasized fiscal conservatism and a new, reformed government. All that – and some significant help from the candidacy of Ross Perot – managed to turn the political tide.

The first two years of the Clinton Administration were a mixed bag for the New Democrats and ended in disaster for the Democratic Party. On economic questions and reform of government Clinton stuck with the New Democrats’ philosophy. The economic policies were slow to show gains, however. And the government reform agenda lacked short-term political salience. On other domestic questions, especially health care and gays in the military, many saw the Clinton Administration as having regressed toward a form of liberal fundamentalism. These perceptions helped create a political cataclysm. In 1994, one of the myths we identified in “The Politics of Evasion” — the Myth of the Congressional Bastion — exploded, and Democrats lost the House of Representatives for the first time in forty years.

Following that catastrophe, Clinton adopted the strategy of “triangulation” and moved sufficiently back to the center — by cutting the deficit and signing the welfare reform bill — to gain the only second term won by an elected Democratic president since Franklin Roosevelt.

The second term of the Clinton Administration will be remembered as one giant missed opportunity, dominated as it was by the Monica Lewinsky scandal and the resulting impeachment fight. Despite rolling to victory by 8 percentage points over Bob Dole, Clinton missed the opportunity to modernize the New Deal legacy by reforming Medicare and Social Security and to forge a new majority coalition by bringing Perot voters into the Democratic fold. This failure is all the more dramatic given that Clinton actually managed to eliminate the budget deficit, the economic issue Perot had emphasized. Perot voters were drifting back to the Republican Party as early as the 1994 mid-term elections. In 1996, Dole won twice as many Perot voters as Clinton, and in 2000 Bush won 64 percent of Perot voters, compared to only 27 percent for Gore.ⁱⁱ

The 2000 presidential election was unprecedented in many ways. The Vice President of the incumbent party won the most votes and lost the election in the Electoral College following an intervention by the Supreme Court. Because the election was close and the results disputed, analysis was difficult at best. Partisans of Vice President Al Gore

believed that the election was lost primarily because of the hangover effect of the Clinton scandals and the subsequent impeachment. Partisans of Bill Clinton argued that Gore's own clumsiness as a candidate and the failure of his campaign to trumpet the peace and prosperity brought to voters by the Democratic Administration were to blame. But the 2000 election post-mortem never really got started, or settled, because the tragedy of 9/11 interrupted the normal rhythm of American politics.

Nonetheless, the election of 2000 ended the Clinton era. Presidents have a powerful and unique ability to stamp an identity on the political party they head, which is why it makes sense to begin an analysis of the Democratic Party today with a look at the impressions of the Democratic Party that were formed during the Clinton years.

B. Economics, Foreign Policy, and Values

If we look at the electorate through the three big “baskets” of issues they tend to care about, we come to the following conclusions: On economic matters the Clinton years seem to have corrected one of the major problems of the Democratic Party in the 1980s and given Democrats a source of strength on which to build. On foreign policy, the legacy of the Clinton years — mostly unavoidable — was a failure to turn around a persistent image of the Democratic Party as weak on defense, an image that in the post-9/11 environment works to the detriment of the Party. And finally, on values questions, the Clinton years put some previously divisive issues (mostly race-based) to bed but also helped usher in a new set of religion and character-based values issues that are working to the Party's disadvantage.

Economics

In 1989 we wrote that Democrats had “... lost the economic base that they once enjoyed among people who work for a living. ... Voters have lost confidence in the Democrats' ability to manage the economy, a traditional strength dating back to the days of the New Deal.”^{viii}

One of the great accomplishments of the Clinton years was to improve the image of Democrats as able managers of the economy and reduce hostility toward government. These two goals were accomplished with considerable internal Democratic Party angst. Deficit reduction and government downsizing were anathema to traditional Democrats in the early to mid-1990s. And yet they were significant and durable accomplishments for the Democrats.

Chart 1 shows the Democratic Party's share of the two-party presidential vote among voters who thought economic issues were most important. In all three presidential elections of the 1980s, the Democrats failed to speak to voters who said they were voting primarily on economic issues. Jimmy Carter's record of high inflation, Walter Mondale's attempted revival of the New Deal, and Michael Dukakis' assertion that it was

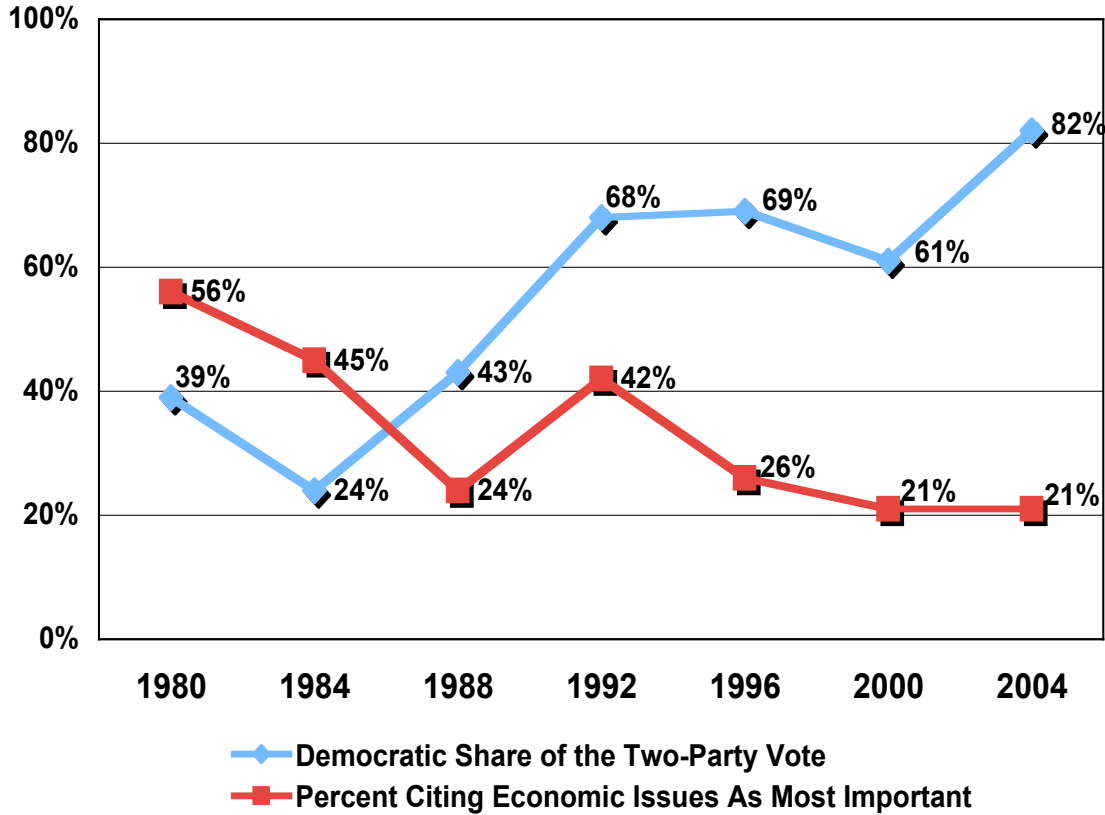
competence not ideology that mattered all failed to convince voters to trust the Democratic Party as managers of the economy. That changed in 1992. Clinton managed to connect to people's economic anxiety in the midst of a changing economy, and his careful stewardship of the economy, especially deficit reduction, helped to grow the economy and win him re-election in 1996. These gains were essentially maintained in the 2000 election and increased dramatically in the 2004 election — testament to the fact that a lasting legacy of the Clinton years has been to improve the image of the Democrats among those who care about economics.

However, as is evident from the red line on the chart, once the Clinton prosperity kicked-in, the electorate turned its attention elsewhere. As early as 1996, the proportion of the electorate who voted primarily on economic issues had dropped dramatically, a harbinger of things to come. These voters remained a smaller portion of the electorate in both the 2000 and 2004 presidential elections. Thus, while Clinton had made significant progress on the economy, it was of little help to Democrats in an electorate whose priorities had changed.

A lasting legacy of the Clinton years has been to improve the image of the Democrats among those who care about economics.

CHART 1

Democratic Share of Two-Party Presidential Vote Among Those for Whom Economic Issues Were Important to Their Vote and Percent of Voters Citing These Issues as Most Important



(Data drawn from national election exit polls)

A similar story unfolds on negative attitudes towards government, a sub-problem in the economic arena. Not surprisingly, since Franklin Roosevelt Democrats have been associated with big government. When attitudes towards big government — especially big federal government — became increasingly negative in the late 1960s, this shift disproportionately affected the Democrats. However, the Pew Research Center’s poll, *Trends 2005*, found significant moderation in the public’s attitudes toward government. In 1994, 74 percent of Republicans thought that the government was always “wasteful and inefficient,” as did 69 percent of Independents. But by 2004, only 46 percent of Republicans and 49 percent of Independents held this view. The trend here is steady throughout the six years of the Clinton Administration. Among Republicans, the belief that government is always wasteful and inefficient dropped 14 points *before* Bush was elected; among Independents the drop was 15 points.^{iv} Not surprisingly, the trend

continued during the first term of the Bush Administration. Ironically the Clinton Administration's progress in reducing the deficit and "reinventing government" had some fundamental long term impact on public attitudes, even though they failed to help Al Gore — the designated leader for government reinvention — in the 2000 election.

The failure of the federal government to manage disaster relief in the wake of Hurricane Katrina has brought a renewal of interest in mundane questions of government management. It is not difficult to see parallels between the myriad management failures in planning for the occupation of Iraq and similar failures in planning for relief in New Orleans. To the extent that these two events re-focus the public's attention on government capacity, Democrats should profit.

Foreign Policy

On foreign policy the Democratic Party has had to cope with the legacy of Vietnam and the impression of voters that Democrats are weak on defense. The straightforward question — is foreign affairs important to your vote? — has not been asked consistently over time. But a glance at the most relevant foreign policy questions for any given election year shows an unmistakable preference for the Republican Party among those voters who care about foreign policy. In 1976, for instance, among voters who said foreign policy was important to their vote, fully 81 percent voted for the Republican candidate, in spite of the fact that President Gerald Ford made an embarrassing gaffe in the debate that year by asserting that Poland was not a communist-dominated country. While the questions asked vary from year to year, the overall story of Table 1 is clear: foreign policy and defense-minded voters have traditionally voted for Republicans over Democrats.

TABLE 1
**Democratic and Republican Share of the Two-Party Presidential
 Vote Among Defense and Foreign Policy Voters**

Polling Question	Republican Vote	Democratic Vote
1976 - Foreign Affairs important to vote	81%	19%
1980 - Should deal forcefully with Soviet Union	71%	29%
1984 - Soviet threat justifies US troops in Central America	75%	25%
1984 - Strengthen defenses before nuclear freeze	82%	18%
1988 - Defense spending important to vote	69%	31%
1988 - US/Soviet relations important to vote	67%	33%
1988 - National Security most important issue	85%	15%
1992 - Gulf War very important to vote	73%	27%
1992 - Foreign Policy important to vote	92%	8%
1996 - Foreign Policy important to vote	62%	38%
2000 - World Affairs important to vote	57%	43%
2004 - Terrorism or Iraq important to vote	60%	40%

(Data drawn from national election exit polls)

So powerful and enduring is the public's image of the Democrats as weak on defense that even when, in the 2000 election campaign, Al Gore proposed spending 100 billion dollars more on defense than did George Bush, virtually no one noticed. The Democratic problem on defense and foreign policy reappeared in the 2004 election campaign, which will be remembered as a contest dominated by defense issues in which a president who never fought in Vietnam beat a candidate who had distinguished himself there as a decorated war hero.

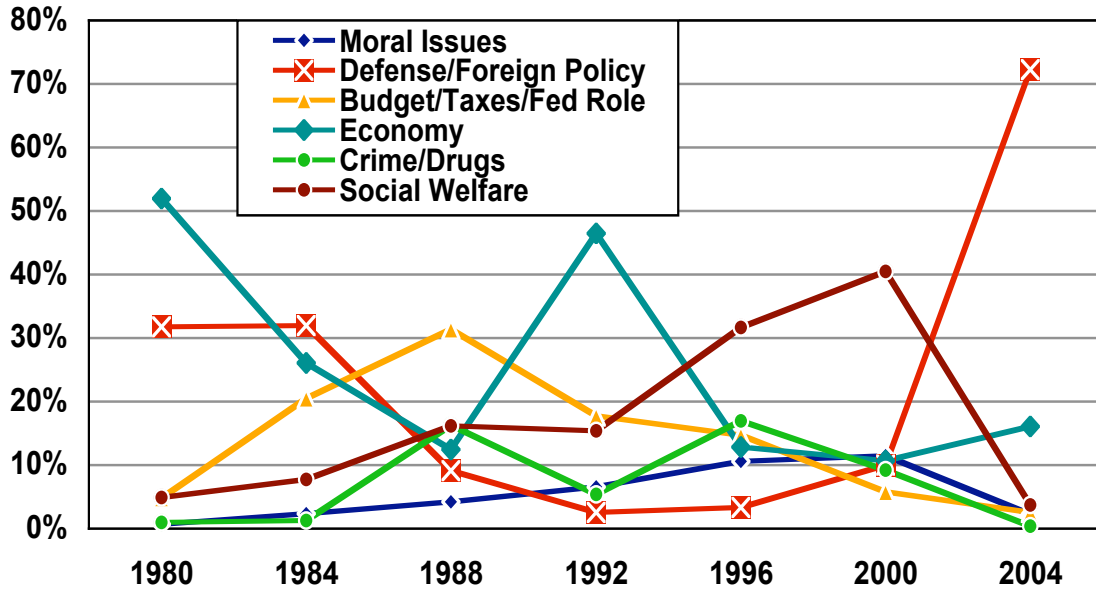
While these attitudes pose a serious and continuing problem for Democrats, the Clinton presidency did nothing to change them. For one thing, the Clinton Administration inherited the necessary downsizing and retargeting of the military begun by the Bush Administration in the wake of the end of the Cold War. Secondly, the first military action in the Clinton Administration — Somalia — resulted in a disaster that had a chilling effect on foreign interventions. And third, the only significant military operation in the Clinton Administration — the defeat of Slobodan Milosevic — took place after much (some say too much) internal hand-wringing and did not involve “boots on the ground.”

It can be argued that the Clinton foreign policy was at times tepid and at other times unfocused. But the fact of the matter is that the 1990s presented no large-scale opportunities for Clinton to change the public's impression of the Democratic Party in foreign affairs. The decade was relatively peaceful, one of the few periods in the twentieth century in which presidents had the political latitude to focus almost exclusively on a domestic agenda. Given the low level of attention Americans typically give to foreign affairs, it takes a rather dramatic episode to change the perception of an entire political party. It was President Bush's strong response to the events of 9/11 that boosted his standing on national defense into the stratosphere. Nothing remotely resembling that catastrophe occurred during Clinton's two terms in office.^v

The long-standing Democratic weakness on foreign policy and defense simply didn't matter much in the last three presidential elections. 1992, 1996, and 2000 stand out as years in which a very small percentage of voters cared principally about those issues. It is not surprising that in those years Democratic presidential candidates won a plurality of the popular vote.

But, as Chart 2 shows, 2004 was a new ball game. Defense and foreign policy issues zoomed upward and were more important in that election than in any election in the past quarter of a century. The reason, of course, is obvious: the attacks of 9/11 and the war in Iraq. This set of issues went from nowhere to among the most important in the campaign, to the substantial detriment of the Democrats.

CHART 2
Percent Indicating Different Issue Areas Are “Most Important”*



(NES 2004 Election Study)

*The National Election Study asked Americans an open ended question which read “what do you think has been the most important issue facing the United States over the last four years?” The answers were coded into 55 categories. For the purposes of this chart, the authors combined the defense and foreign policy responses.

“Indeed,” says a recent Pew poll, “our values survey showed that, taken together, attitudes on the efficacy of force versus diplomacy, and on the obligation of Americans to fight for their country, are now by far the strongest predictors of whether a person is a Republican or a Democrat. These attitudes surpass opinions on every other subject — including attitudes toward homosexuality, religion and the role of government in helping the poor — in predicting partisanship.”^{vi} Illustrative of this gap is the number of people who agree with the statement that “The best way to ensure peace is through military strength.” Pew has been asking this question since 1997, and while Republicans have always tended to agree with the statement more than Democrats, the gap has grown in recent years (Table 2).

Attitudes on the efficacy of force versus diplomacy, and on the obligation of Americans to fight for their country, are now by far the strongest predictors of whether a person is a Republican or a Democrat.

TABLE 2
Gap over time between the percentage of Republicans and Democrats who agree with the statement “The best way to ensure peace is through military strength”

Year	Republicans	Democrats	Gap
1997	65%	56%	9%
1999	70%	53%	17%
2002	72%	55%	17%
2003	69%	44%	25%

(Data from “Evenly Divided and Increasingly Polarized,” The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, November 5, 2003)

Democrats have not adapted quickly or smoothly to a world in which foreign policy and military concerns dominate. Relying on a simplistic reading of polls, Democratic consultants put foreign policy behind them so they could fight the 2002 mid-term elections on domestic issues like prescription drug coverage. They were then caught off guard and ill-prepared when Bush managed to nationalize the mid-term elections over the issue of the Department of Homeland Security.

Democrats were no better prepared for the importance of foreign policy issues in 2004. John Kerry never could explain why he voted for the war in Iraq and then voted against the \$87 billion needed to fund it. Nor could the narrative he offered to the public explain who he really was — war hero or war protestor. The American people learned that Kerry was for the Vietnam war before he was against it—not a biography designed to dispel the foreign policy ambivalence that hovered like a fog over his campaign.

Moral Values

In economic terms, the Clinton legacy to today’s Democratic Party is largely positive. In foreign policy terms, the Clinton legacy is neutral; the story is less “missed opportunity” than “no opportunity.” On the values front, however, the Clinton legacy is much more mixed. Clinton’s extraordinary rapport with and trust among African-Americans allowed him to defuse a set of race-based, value-laden issues that had plagued the Democratic Party for much of the 1980s and that had caused us to write in 1989 that “...the next nominee ... must squarely reflect the moral sentiments of average Americans...”^{vii}

Paramount among these values-based issues was welfare for the poor. Passage of welfare reform legislation that focused the welfare system on work and personal responsibility did a great deal to take this issue off the table. Between 1994 and 2002, the number of whites who agreed with the statement that “Poor people have become too dependent on government assistance programs” fell by ten percentage points.^{viii}

By the 2004 election, the set of values-based issues that had caused Democrats such problems since the late 1960s were largely gone. The perception that Democrats were soft on crime faded as crime dropped. While conservative activists continued to complain about court decisions on affirmative action, the issue waned as a flash-point among the

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public. And welfare — the issue that moved swing voters most in the 1992 election — virtually disappeared by 2004. It was not even a factor in the Democratic primaries.

But just as the set of race-based values issues that had worked to the detriment of Democrats in the 1980s were disappearing, they were being replaced by another set of

values issues. In the immediate aftermath of the 2004 election, the National Election Pool exit poll triggered a vigorous public debate when it reported that when voters were asked to pick from a list of seven possibilities, the one issue that mattered the most in deciding how to vote, 22 percent chose moral values, compared to 20 percent for the economy, 19 percent for terrorism and 15 percent for Iraq.^{*}

The result was startling, in part because so much of the campaign’s rhetoric had centered around the war in Iraq and in part because conventional wisdom among political scientists, pollsters, and pundits held that cultural/moral issues only come to the fore when economic or foreign policy issues are absent. Soon thereafter, headlines such as “It’s All About Moral Values,” “Democratic Moral Values?” and “Democrats Getting Lessons in Speaking Their Values” appeared in newspapers, fueling an orgy of speculation about the Democrats’ “values” problem. Of course, pollsters noted that different ways of posing the moral values question yielded very different results, in part because voters disagreed on the meaning of the phrase. But a second poll, taken days after the 2004 election, showed essentially the same thing as the National Election Poll survey. When asked their reasons for voting as they did, Moral Values came in at 19 percent, tied with terrorism and national security as well as the economy and jobs and just one point behind the war in Iraq.^{ix} Moral values, whatever that meant, had become part of

* The exit polls asked the following question: “Which one issue mattered most in deciding how you voted for President?” The options and results were: Health Care (8%), Moral Values (22%), Economy/Jobs (20%), Terrorism (19%), Iraq (15%), Education (4%), and Taxes (5%).

the “big three” sets of issues. And in a wide variety of polls, moral values voters preferred Republicans over Democrats by substantial margins.

The 2004 election left many Democrats wondering how the Party ended up on the wrong side of these issues with such a large number of voters. To become the “immoral” party was particularly troubling to those Democrats who had spent much of their life advocating for the poor and downtrodden and championing social justice.

The Democratic “morals” problem — such as it is — is a relatively new phenomenon. Prior to 1988 it was the Republicans’ problem. Table 3 is drawn from a book written by the political scientist John Kenneth White. He goes back to polling questions asked in 1974, 1984 and 1986 on the theme of family values. In each of these years, Democrats held comfortable leads on this topic over the Republicans.

TABLE 3
Parties and Values, 1974-1986 (in percentages)

Question	Democrats	Republicans
When it comes right down to it, do you feel that the Democratic Party or the Republican Party more closely represents your views and values, or don't you feel either one really does? * (1974)	47%	15%
Is the Republican or the Democratic Party the party of traditional family values? ** (1984)	40%	29%
Regardless of how you usually vote, do you think the Republican Party or the Democratic Party is the party of traditional family values? *** (1986)	45%	33%

(Table taken from *The Values Divide* by John Kenneth White, p. 122.)

* Yankelovich, Skelly and White, poll, March 1974

** CBS News/New York Times, poll August 5-9, 1984

*** CBS News/New York Times, poll, September 28-October 1, 1986.

As White goes on to point out in his book, Clinton was a masterful politician when it came to talking the language of values, from his use of the term “New Covenant” to his mantra of opportunity, responsibility and community. But his rhetorical skills were eventually undercut by his behavioral flaws. The damage from the Monica Lewinsky scandal spilled onto the Democratic Party as a whole. In polls taken in 1998 and 1999, Republicans were preferred over Democrats by substantial margins on a variety of polling questions having to do with moral standards and traditional family values. For instance, on the question which party is better at upholding traditional family values,

asked by CBS/New York Times in November 1999, the public preferred the Republicans to the Democrats by 19 percentage points, a pattern repeated in a host of other questions, ranging from which party voters believed would encourage high moral standards and values to the party they associated with the term “discipline.”^x

There is some evidence that the Clinton scandals undermined support for his Vice President among liberal and moderate voters. In 2000, liberal and moderate voters who thought that the moral climate of the country was on the wrong track were 25 percent more likely to vote for Bush over Gore, and liberal and moderate voters who thought that the scandals were very important were 40 percent more likely to vote for Bush over Gore.^{xi} As the pollster Stan Greenberg put it, “... Republicans have made Bill Clinton their ‘poster child’ for America’s moral decline.”^{xii}

II. The Jaws Of Defeat (2000-2004)

A. Four New Myths That Cloud The Mind And Thwart Change

In “The Politics of Evasion,” we wrote of a “systematic denial of reality” that was contributing to the defeat of Democratic candidates for national office. Underpinning this denial were three pervasive “myths” that conveniently excused party leaders, elected incumbents, and activists from critical thinking.

“The first [myth] is the belief that Democrats have failed because they have strayed from the true and pure faith of their ancestors — we call this the myth of Liberal Fundamentalism. The second is the belief that Democrats need not alter public perceptions of their party but can regain the presidency by getting current non-participants to vote — we call this the Myth of Mobilization. The third is the belief that there is nothing fundamentally wrong with the Democratic Party: there is no realignment going on, and the proof is that Democrats still control the majority of offices below the presidency. We call this the Myth of the Congressional Bastion.”^{xiii}

Despite the differences between 1989 and 2005, it is our contention that the Democratic Party is in much the same position as it was in the wake of Michael Dukakis' defeat. As in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the party today is challenged to modernize its stance on key issues facing the nation and to revise its political strategy and tactics. And as was the case fifteen years ago, there are pervasive myths about the party's condition that stand in the way. Each contains a kernel of truth. But all have the effect of denying the need, and weakening the impetus, for fundamental change.

The Myth of Mobilization

The first of these is the latest version of an old standby, the *myth of mobilization* — the thesis that the key to Democratic victory is to energize the base and bring it out to vote in record numbers. In its 2005 incarnation, this myth claims that a weak-kneed, excessively compromising establishment has undermined the party's appeal and that MoveOn.org and related networks of fervent, intransigent activists should step in to assume leadership and galvanize the faithful.

There is something to this, of course; an enthusiastic base is a necessary condition for any party's success. And the activists of MoveOn and other organizations have succeeded in providing the Democratic Party with a vibrant small donor fundraising base that made them financially competitive with the Republicans in 2004, even though Republicans controlled all the traditional centers of political and financial power. But an active base is rarely if ever a sufficient condition for victory — especially for Democrats. In the first

place, the Republican Party's conservative activist base is 50 percent larger than the Democrats' liberal base. That has been true for every election dating back to at least 1976. When American politics turns into a shootout between liberals and conservatives, conservatives almost always win.

Second, the old assumption that Democrats are better able to turn out their troops than are Republicans has been overtaken by events; Republicans now wage the "ground war" at least as effectively as Democrats. The 2004 election was notable for the enormous mobilization that took place. Overall participation increased fifteen percent, with the Democratic vote increasing from 51 million to more than 57 million. But the Republicans showed that they had mastered what was once a Democratic strategy — turnout — and their vote surged from 50.5 million to nearly 61 million.

Third, it is a misreading of political history to claim that mobilization of the base is the principal cause of Republicans' recent victories. As we will show, George Bush secured his reelection in 2004 largely through an improved performance among swing voters such as married women, Catholics, and infrequent church-attenders — not just from aroused Protestant fundamentalists. Despite the increased polarization of our political elites (and to an extent of the electorate as well), seizing the center remains the key to victory.

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Finally, those who persist in believing that greater mobilization is the elixir for Democrats should pay attention to black and white, as well as male and female, voter turnout numbers over the past 40 years. The continued strong support African-Americans give to the Democratic Party is a major asset to the Party. It is often argued that greater mobilization of the African-American community is a key to Democratic victory. Likewise, the propensity of women voters to support Democrats is another argument behind a strategy of mobilizing the base.

The problem with these arguments, as illustrated by the following tables, is that in the past forty years turnout levels among blacks has approached that of whites, and women now vote in higher percentages than men. While there is still room for improvement in black turnout, the extra votes that could come from a 3 percent to 4 percent improvement are not likely to result in any stunning electoral turn-arounds. Female turnout is now 3.6 percent higher than male turnout — a complete reversal from 1968. The greatest leap in

female voter turnout compared to men occurred between 1980 and 1984, an election that ended in a 49-state sweep for Ronald Reagan. It should be noted that the relatively higher turnout of women over men is offset by declining margins that women have bestowed upon Democrats.

TABLE 4
Voter Turnout Among Whites and Blacks
in Presidential Elections

Presidential Election Year	White Voter Turnout in Percentages	Black Voter Turnout in Percentages	Percentage Difference Between White and Black Voter Turnout
1964	70.7	58.5	12.2
1968	69.1	57.6	11.5
1972	64.5	52.1	12.4
1976	60.9	48.7	12.2
1980	60.9	50.5	10.4
1984	61.4	55.8	5.6
1988	59.1	51.5	7.6
1992	63.6	54.0	9.6
1996	56.0	50.6	5.4
2000	56.4	53.5	2.9
2004	60.3	56.3	4.0

(Source: US Census Bureau, *Current Population Surveys 1964-2004*,
Table A-9, May 26, 2005)

TABLE 5
Voter Turnout Among Men and Women in Presidential Elections

Presidential Election Year	Percentage Male Voter Turnout	Percentage Female Voter Turnout	Difference Between Male and Female Voter Turnout
1968	76.0	72.8	3.2
1972	73.1	71.6	1.5
1976	67.1	66.4	0.7
1980	66.6	67.1	- 0.5
1984	67.3	69.3	- 2.0
1988	65.2	67.8	- 2.6
1992	66.9	69.3	- 2.4
1996	64.4	67.3	- 2.9
2000	62.2	65.6	- 3.4
2004	64.0	67.6	- 3.6

(Source: US Census Bureau, *Current Population Surveys 1968 - 2004*, Table A-10, May 26, 2005)

The Myth of Demography

This thesis claims that long-term, ongoing changes in the U.S. population will secure a Democratic majority for decades to come. Among the major components of this shift are: a growing class of post-industrial professionals; women (especially those who are single or highly educated) affected by the feminist revolution; and Hispanics and Asian immigrants, who have come to the United States in record numbers during the past generation.^{xiv}

There is something to this thesis as well: Democrats are doing increasingly well among upscale professionals, and women as a whole remain more supportive of Democrats than Republicans, as do Hispanics. But there are some important trends that counterbalance these developments. As we show in an upcoming section of this paper on values, married women concerned about moral issues and security against terrorism have been moving away from national Democratic candidates, reducing John Kerry's margin among women to a scant 3 percentage points, compared to Bush's 11 point edge among men.

While the actual numbers remain somewhat disputed, there is no doubt that George Bush improved his performance among Hispanics in 2004, with Hispanics' continuing

moral traditionalism and rapidly increasing prosperity both contributing to this result. For years now, Democratic leaders have been predicting that the great Hispanic contribution to the Democratic Party is just around the corner. But unlike African-American voters, Hispanics have not given overwhelming majorities to the Democrats. While the 44 percent figure of Hispanics that were supposed to have supported George Bush in 2004 may be too high (the result of poor exit polling), experts agree that Hispanic support for Republicans was almost certainly higher than it was in 2000.^{xv} In addition, the family income of Hispanics grew more rapidly than that of any other ethnic group during Clinton's second term and Bush's first term. Not surprisingly, attitudes of Hispanic voters are increasingly parallel to the attitudes of voters in the rest of the population. A recent Democracy Corps survey underscores this trend. Only 19 percent of likely Hispanic voters call themselves liberal, compared to 42 and 35 percent of Hispanics who say they are moderate and conservative, respectively — nearly the same breakdown as the voting population as a whole.^{xvi}

Finally, Democrats have increased their margins among those with the most education — especially the so-called "knowledge workers" of the information age. But while these gains have been impressive, their electoral impact has been limited by the fact that Democrats have simultaneously decreased their margins among those who have lower levels of education. For example, John Kerry did 9 points better among college graduates than Michael Dukakis had done, and 7 points better among voters with post-graduate education. By contrast, he did 6 points worse among voters without high school diplomas, and 2 points worse among high school graduates. Since the early 1970s, in fact, Democrats have found it difficult to maintain a stable coalition of these groups, and the recent rise of national security concerns and moral values issues has made the task all the more difficult.^{xvii} In sum, although demography may set the table, it (like mobilization) is a necessary but not sufficient ingredient for Democratic victories.

The Myth of Language

The *myth of language* is the thesis that the problem with the Democratic Party is not what it believes, but rather how it speaks. This thesis comes in two variants — the simple-minded and the sophisticated. The simple-minded version says that if Democrats have a problem with observant religious believers, the solution is for candidates to quote the Bible as often as possible. The sophisticated version, most closely associated with the eminent Berkeley linguist George Lakoff, focuses on the need to situate issues within attractive "frames" — phrases, metaphors, and narratives that trigger favorable associations and persuade voters to go along.

The simple-minded view need not detain us long: to state the obvious, candidates who begin waving the Bible after a lifetime of public secularism will have a hard time conveying conviction and retaining credibility. Jimmy Carter appealed to religious voters

(including some who were quite conservative) not because he quoted verses from Matthew and Luke when he ran for president, but because he had grown up as a regular church-attending Christian and viscerally understood the community from which he came.

The sophisticated view, by contrast, offers some important – if not exactly original – insights: how candidates talk does make a difference, and the significance of issues is embedded in narratives and stories.^{xviii} But the best rhetoric that speechwriters can devise will fail if the public rejects the substance of a candidate's agenda or entertains doubts about his integrity.

John Kerry could not "frame" his way out of what the public saw as a contradiction between his initial vote authorizing the president to go to war against Iraq and his vote against the \$87 billion supplemental appropriation needed to fund it. Democrats are in trouble today in part because they lack

Democrats are in trouble today in part because they lack a coherent approach to foreign policy, espouse positions on key social issues that strong majorities of the electorate reject, and have failed to offer compelling economic proposals that speak to the new economic challenges of the 21st century. Rhetoric cannot solve substantive problems such as these.

a coherent approach to foreign policy, espouse positions on key social issues that strong majorities of the electorate reject, and have failed to offer compelling economic proposals that speak to the new economic challenges of the 21st century. Rhetoric cannot solve substantive problems such as these; the Democratic Party must acknowledge its real situation, think hard, and change. Absent serious reflection and reform, Democrats may win the occasional election, but they will not know what to do with the power they temporarily acquire.

The Myth of Prescription Drugs

The Myth of Prescription Drugs is our shorthand for the proposition, which seems to bewitch political consultants, that Democrats can win present-day national elections by avoiding cultural issues, downplaying national security, and changing the subject to domestic issues such as health care, education, and job security. This proposition fails the test of political reality in the post 9/11 world.

Even among unmarried women (one of the most reliably Democratic constituencies), national security issues that included the situation in Iraq and terrorism ranked higher as

deciding voting factors (38 percent), than the economy and jobs, Social Security and Medicare, affordable health care, and education combined (37 percent). Moral values (13 percent) ranked higher than affordable health care and education *combined* (12 percent) among unmarried women.^{xix}

With national security a key issue for the foreseeable future, it will be impossible for Democrats to even be heard on most domestic issues unless they pass a national security threshold with voters. It is no accident that since the end of the Carter Administration, signaled by the Iranian hostage crisis and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, Democrats won the plurality of votes only in those elections — 1992, 1996, 2000 — when national security was all but absent from the national debate.

Moreover, Democrats' focus on the details of domestic policy proposals comes at the expense of cultural issues, which for many voters are seen through the prism of candidates' individual character and family life. As Democrats wring their hands over the partly mythical *What's the Matter with Kansas* syndrome, Republican campaigns rarely make this mistake.

B. Bleeding Blue: Married Women and Catholics Defect To GOP

The Marriage Effect

The most immediate fallout from the Clinton scandals came, not surprisingly, from married people. Some commentators, including Kamarck (who wrote an article to this effect), predicted that the defection of married women from the Democratic Party would be a temporary phenomenon

and that they would return to the Democratic fold in 2004 when the effects of the Clinton sex scandals had faded. But, as the following tables show, this was not to be. While the Clinton

scandals may have been the impetus for married people to move away from the Democrats, the 2004 election indicated that something more profound was happening to change the allegiances of these voters.

Holding all other variables constant, the pro-Republican shift of married women is among the most significant of any group in the electorate.

Table 6 shows the movement of both married women and married men away from the Democrats. Married women and married men with children in the home were the biggest defectors from the Democrats between 1996 and 2000, in spite of Al Gore's own, well-known good marriage, symbolized by Al and Tipper's passionate kiss on the stage at the Democratic convention. But while the Democratic vote among married men with children stabilized in 2004, the Democratic vote among married women with children continued

to drop, as did the Democratic vote among married women with no children. Democratic weakness among married people was particularly important in key states like Ohio, where George Bush beat John Kerry among married people 59 percent to 41 percent, improving his standing in this group by six percentage points over his showing in the 2000 Ohio election.^{xx}

TABLE 6
Democratic Share of the Two Party Vote
Among Married People Under Age 65

Marital Status and Presence of Children	1992	1996	2000	2004
Married Women with Children	49%	53%	47%	43%
Married Men with Children	46%	45%	37%	38%
Married Women, no children	52%	51%	52%	44%
Married Men, no children	46%	46%	42%	41%

(Data drawn from national election exit polls)

In contrast, the Democratic share of the vote among single women — with and without children — remains strong throughout these years, although single women, like their married counterparts, show a small drift away from the Democrats.

TABLE 7
Democratic Share of the Presidential Vote
Among Single People Under Age 65

	1992	1996	2000	2004
Single women with children	69%	74%	71%	67%
Single men with children	67%	65%	48%	55%
Single women without children	61%	68%	66%	63%
Single Men without children	61%	57%	51%	53%

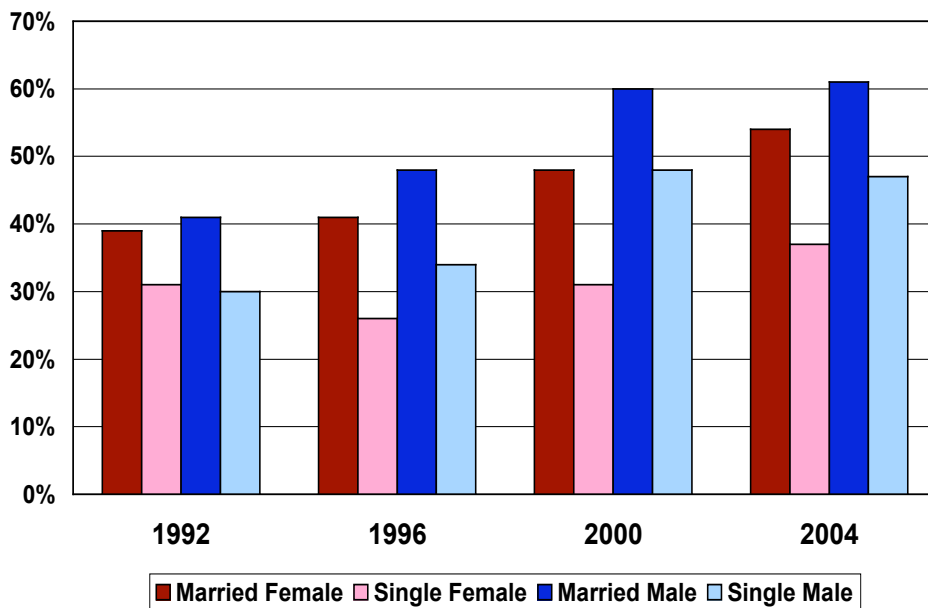
(Data drawn from national election exit polls)

The movement of married women towards the Republicans is one of the most important new stories in modern American politics. To test the significance of these trends, we conducted a multivariate analysis of each of the past five presidential elections. (Unfortunately the 1988 exit polls did not ask about marital status.) In each

model, we held constant *all* other variables asked in the poll, including demographics like age and income as well as positions on issues. The results are shown in Chart 3.

Holding all other variables constant, the pro-Republican shift of married women is among the most significant of any group in the electorate. In the 1992 election, a married woman’s probability of supporting the Republican Party was just under 40 percent. In 1996, it rose to just over 40 percent, but by 2000 it was almost 50 percent,, and by 2004 it was almost 55 percent. (While support for Republican presidential candidates among married men rose sharply between 1992 and 2000, it barely budged between 2000 and 2004.) Single women remain the strongest Democratic grouping. But even though they increased their share of the electorate between 2000 and 2004, it was not enough to compensate for the movement of married women away from the Democrats.^{xxi}

CHART 3
Gender/Marital Status and Support for Republican Candidates



(Data drawn from national election exit polls)

Why the dramatic loss of support among married women? In a November 22, 2004 poll, Anna Greenberg looked at the differences between unmarried and married women when it came to the most important issue determining their presidential vote. As shown in Table 8, the contrast is striking. For unmarried women the situation in Iraq was the most important issue, followed closely by the economy and jobs, terrorism and national security and moral values. All other issues, including Democratic consultants’ perennial favorite affordable health care — are in the single digits. For married women, moral

values tops the list, with Iraq, terrorism and the economy coming in second, third and fourth.

TABLE 8
Most Important Issue in Determining Presidential Vote
(percent responding)

Issue	Unmarried Women	Married Women
The situation in Iraq	25	21
The economy and jobs	18	15
Terrorism and National Security	13	18
Moral Values	13	27
Social Security and Medicare	7	4
Affordable health care	6	4
Education	6	3
The federal deficit	2	2
Taxes	1	1
None	3	1
Don't know/Refused	6	3

(Drawn from “Election 2004 Updated, Unmarried women. Unmarried women vote for change and strongly supported John Kerry,” Anna Greenberg and Jennifer Berkold, (Washington, D.C. Greenberg, Quinlan, Rosner Research Inc., November 22, 2004)

The conventional wisdom on the 2004 election — that we had gone from the “soccer moms” of the 1990s who gave most of their votes to Clinton to the “security moms” of the post-9/11 era — is partially borne out by these data. But the more important story is that, among married women, moral concerns clearly trump security concerns.

Catholics

Catholics are a second group shifting away from Democrats in recent elections, partly in response to values issues. Catholics constitute a critical bloc of voters. In modern times, no Democrat has ever won the presidency without at least a plurality of the Catholic vote. While Protestants are solidly Republican (especially Protestants who identify themselves as born again), and Jews solidly Democratic, Catholics are the quintessential swing vote, giving an edge to every winner of the popular vote since 1976.

The Republican Party and the Bush campaign worked hard to win over Catholics in 2000 and 2004, and

their efforts succeeded. As Table 9 illustrates, while Bill Clinton carried the Catholic vote by 9 points in 1992 and 16 points in 1996, Bush held Al Gore to a near draw in this constituency and beat John Kerry, the first Catholic presidential candidate since 1960, by 5 points.

When Catholic voters are asked to define moral values in an open-ended question, they are much more likely to emphasize personal integrity, family solidarity, and the social compact than to mention specific positions on abortion, gay marriage, belief in God, or the Ten Commandments.

TABLE 9
Major Party Shares of the Catholic Vote, 1992-2004

	Democratic	Republican
1992	44%	35%
1996	53%	37%
2000	49%	47%
2004	47%	52%

(Data drawn from national election exit polls)

The 2004 campaign was particularly effective in this regard, moving the Catholic vote from a dead-heat nationwide and in the battleground states to a solid victory in November.^{xiii} Bush’s gains among Catholics in 2004 exceeded his margin of victory in key states such as Ohio and Florida. Among white Catholics, Democratic losses have been even more severe; although Clinton carried this group by 7 points in 1996, Gore lost

them by 7, and Kerry by 13. And even among Hispanic Catholics, a rapidly growing portion of the total and a voting bloc central to those who espouse the *Myth of Demography*, Bush lifted his share of the vote from 31 percent in 2000 to 42 percent in 2004.^{xxiii} To put these data in historical perspective: while George Bush did just as well among Catholics in 2004 as his father had in 1988, his share of the Catholic vote exceeded his national percentage by about a point and one half, while his father's Catholic share fell below his national share by about the same amount.

In the immediate aftermath of the 2004 election, a great deal of attention was given to the role of evangelical voters in the Republican victory. But this is not a new story. While not all exit polls ask the voter if they are evangelical Christians, we do know that, holding all other attitudinal and demographic variables constant, the propensity of evangelicals to vote Republican in 1988 was even greater than in 2004. Although the mobilization of evangelicals in 2004 was impressive, their presence in the Republican coalition is not new. On the other hand, the propensity of Catholic voters to vote Republican not only increased significantly in 2000 and again in 2004, but was actually higher in 2004 than in 1988. (As a whole, Protestants showed no change during that period.)

What happened? The evidence suggests that while Catholics are moved by Republican appeals concerning national security and the war on terrorism, they are also influenced by a range of moral issues. An in-depth Democracy Corps survey reveals two overlapping target groups that are up for grabs: the 10 percent of white Catholics who identify themselves as Democrats but did not vote for Kerry, and the 14 percent who voted for Bill Clinton in 1996 but not for Kerry.

Before Democrats jettison long-held principles on issues such as abortion and tolerance for gays, they should be aware that when Catholic voters are asked to define moral values in an open-ended question, they are much more likely to emphasize personal integrity, family solidarity, and the social compact than to mention specific positions on abortion, gay marriage, belief in God, or the Ten Commandments. Catholics are also more likely to endorse tolerance than are the evangelical Protestants who form the base of the Republican Party.^{xxiv} Table 10, drawn from a Democracy Corps Poll, is quite revealing. When asked to define moral values, Catholic voters are nearly twice as likely to mention qualities of personal integrity as they are to cite the hot-button issues of abortion, gay marriage and marital fidelity.

TABLE 10
Defining Moral Values

Personal Integrity	24
Honesty/Integrity/Honor	14
Knowing right from wrong	3
Standing up for what you believe in	3
Tolerance/Not judging others/Not forcing views on others	3
Family and Culture	22
Family/Home	13
Respecting/Valuing life (general, not specifically abortion)	6
Children/Taking care of/Raising well	3
Golden Rule/Social Compact	21
Doing the right thing/Being a good person/living a good life	8
Golden rule/Treating other people well/Compassion	7
Taking care of people/Health care/Safety net	4
Helping poor/Homeless/Less fortunate	3
Gender Roles (incl. Abortion & Gay Marriage)	14
Abortion	9
Homosexuality/Gay marriage	5
Religion	11

(Open-ended responses; Catholic voters only)

Having said this, it is important to recognize that Catholics are more pro-life than is the electorate as a whole (particularly in the Midwest) and that they respond very negatively to proposals for legalizing gay marriage. Indeed, while Democrats as a whole were evenly divided on gay marriage, Catholic swing voters were opposed by a margin of nearly 40 points.^{xxv} A June 2004 survey of all Catholics showed 34 percent support and 64 percent opposition. Only 4 percent of Catholics said they would definitely oppose a candidate who opposed gay marriage, while 23 percent indicated that they would definitely oppose a candidate who supported it.^{xxvi} These sentiments may undergo long-

term evolution, but they are unlikely to change anytime soon. At the same time, Catholics show a surprising level of support for civil unions, and they oppose a U.S. constitutional amendment outlawing gay marriage.

We should place the abortion views of Catholic swing voters in context. On this highly charged issue most of the population continues to fall in the moderate middle. In data from 1975 to 2004 collected by Gallup, over 50 percent of the population agrees with the statement that abortion should be legal in certain circumstances. However, over this period of time there have been small but significant changes in opinions about abortion at the extremes of the political spectrum. Support for the proposition that abortion should be legal under any circumstances (the position most identified with the Democratic Party) peaked in 1992 at 34 percent. By 2004 it had dropped 10 points, to 24 percent. By contrast, support for the proposition that abortion should be illegal in all circumstances reached a low of 10 percent in 1990 and has since risen to 19 percent in 2004.^{xxvii} Table 11 shows that similar trends can be found among voters polled in presidential election exit polls. In the 1992 election, 36 percent of the electorate said that abortion should be legal in all cases. By 1996 that number had dropped to 26 percent and by 2004, to 21 percent.

TABLE 11
Percentage of the electorate on the extreme ends
of the abortion debate: 1992-2004

	<i>Abortion should be legal in all cases</i>	<i>Abortion should be illegal in all cases</i>
1992	36%	9%
1996	26%	12%
2000	24%	13%
2004	21%	16%

(Data drawn from national election exit polls)

A recent study by Third Way shows that Democrats are continuing to win the battle of those who believe in an absolute right to abortion by healthy margins. Nonetheless most people still fall into the big mushy middle on the abortion debate. It is here that, contrary to conventional wisdom, Republicans are gaining ground. While they have been successful in mobilizing their base, they have also been successful in using issues such as partial-birth abortion and parental notification to convince moderates that they are being less intransigent and more reasonable on the issue than are the Democrats.

The new Third Way study illustrates this point. They looked at the large segment of the population that believes abortion should be legal or illegal “most of the time,” and they called these voters the “abortion grays” because they did not choose either extreme of the issue. They find that “... unlike the Polars, who gave solid majorities to the Democrats, the Grays gave modest but consistent majorities to Republicans across the board.”^{xxviii} These voters went for Dole/Perot by 8 points in 1996, for Bush by 11 points in 2000 and for Bush by 7 points in 2004. These findings are all the more striking because the majority of voters in the gray area believe that abortion should be mostly legal, not illegal. The authors of this study conclude: “Strategic initiatives on abortion by Republicans have allowed them to capture the center and win the abortion debate among the electorate.”^{xxix}

Finally, it is important not to conflate Catholics and born-again Protestants. While these Protestants emphasize a gospel of personal salvation, Catholics are less individualistic and more communitarian. They respond affirmatively to the theme of social justice; they favor policies that support the middle class; and they deplore extremes of economic inequality and corporate abuse. Parties and candidates seen as strong on defense, economic opportunity and fairness, and mainstream values should resonate with this critical portion of the electorate.

Moral Values and Candidate Character

While the timing of the rising salience of “moral values” in American elections makes it tempting to emphasize the causal role of the Clinton scandals, the persistence of this phenomenon in 2004 among groups like married women and Catholic voters, and the continued enthusiastic mobilization of Protestant Evangelical voters, suggests that this issue is in fact broader and more complex than previously understood.

The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press conducted a poll in the days immediately following the 2004 election. When presented with a list of options, 27 percent of respondents chose moral values as the principal determinant of their vote. When offered an unprompted question, however, only 14 percent of respondents volunteered some version of moral values. But even when asked in an open ended way, the moral values question still came in second, behind only Iraq.

Within this broad category, gay marriage and abortion top the list of definitions of “moral values,” but “candidate qualities” are not far behind. As Table 12 illustrates, while abortion and gay marriage are important to these voters, there are other areas — especially candidate qualities — that we need to consider.

TABLE 12
“Moral Values” — What Comes to Mind?

	Chose Moral Values*	Did not choose**
Social policies (net)	44%	18%
Gay Marriage	29%	11%
Abortion	28%	8%
Stem cells	4%	3%
Other Policies	9%	8%
Candidate qualities	23%	17%
Religious Preferences	18%	11%
Traditional Values	17%	35%
Negative responses	1%	12%
Other	4%	6%
Means Nothing/DK	2%	15%
Number of cases	205	362

(Table drawn from Pew Research Center for People and the Press, “Moral Values: How Important?,” November 11, 2004, p. 7)

(Numbers add up to more than 100 percent because voters could list up to two items.)

* Voters who selected “moral values” as either the first or second most important issue from the list of seven items.

** Voters who did not select “moral values” as either the first or second most important issue

This more nuanced and personality driven view of the “moral values” debate should remind us that selecting a president is a deeply personal transaction between candidates and the electorate. The following excerpt from a disenchanted voter’s post-election letter speaks eloquently to this point:

“I tried so hard to give you guys a chance. I’m young, I’m not extremely religious, and I’m supportive of liberal ideals like fighting for higher wages, stopping outsourcing of jobs, and standing up for the little guy. I wanted to vote Democratic this time, more than I can possibly put into words. You just didn’t give me the option. President Bush won on values, yes, but not hatred of gays or any other stereotype you have in your head about Bush voters like me. He won because he

has values, and even thought I agree with little of what he believes, at least I know what he believes. At least I know that he really does believe in something, At least I know that he will do what he says he will do.”

An Open Letter to the Democratic Party — November 5, 2004

Unlike Republicans, Democrats seem to have a problem understanding the importance of personal qualities to American voters. In 2000, the Bush campaign very successfully painted Al Gore as someone prone to exaggeration and self-aggrandizement, based on a series of trivial and inaccurate stories: from the assertion that Gore claimed to invent the Internet, to disputes about what medicine his mother-in-law’s dog did or didn’t take. Nonetheless, the Gore campaign was never really able to reverse the impression created. By Election Day, nearly a quarter of the electorate thought honesty and trustworthiness mattered most in a candidate, and they gave their votes to Bush by overwhelming margins. As Table 13 shows, this characteristic trumps experience, Gore’s strength, and even strong leadership, a key Bush advantage (probably also related to the question of honesty.)

TABLE 13
Which Candidate Quality Mattered Most 2000

	Bush	Gore
Honest/Trustworthy (24% of total voters)	80%	15%
Has Experience (15% of total voters)	17%	82%
Strong Leader (14% of total voters)	64%	34%

(Data drawn from national election exit polls)

A similar dynamic was at work in 2004. The Bush campaign was able to use a series of Senate votes to paint John Kerry as a “flip-flopper” who didn’t know his own mind. Kerry and his campaign were unable to counter the attack on his character, which reached new heights when a group known as Swift Boat Veterans for Truth managed to impugn his war record. While Kerry had a clear advantage among those voters who wanted to bring change (as the non-incumbent candidate almost always will), on the issues of leadership and clear stands on issues he was at a serious disadvantage.

TABLE 14
Most Important Candidate Quality 2004

	Bush	Kerry
Will Bring Change (24% of total voters)	5%	95%
Strong Leader (17% of total voters)	87%	12%
Clear Stand on Issues (17% of total voters)	78%	20%

(Data drawn from national election exit polls)

Having logged many presidential campaigns between us, the authors can attest to the fact that Democrats are likely to spend days on health care plans and minutes on character issues. (Republican campaigns do not often make such mistakes.) The delay in responding to the attacks of the Swift Boat Veterans will go down as one of the great strategic blunders of modern presidential politics. But the interplay between morality and personal characteristics raises a larger issue: in the public mind morality has as much to do with the personal integrity of the presidential candidates as it does with their stance on hot-button social issues. This presents Democratic candidates with an enormous strategic challenge. On the one hand, the public will notice—and mistrust — candidates who are perceived as changing their positions on issues that should be matters of firm conviction. On the other hand, the public will not accept candidates who forthrightly espouse moral views far outside the mainstream.

In the public mind morality has as much to do with the personal integrity of the presidential candidates as it does with their stance on hot-button social issues.

III. The Great Sorting-Out: (2006 and Beyond)

The recent trends in the American electorate that we discussed in Section I are occurring against a backdrop of long-term structural political change, much of it associated with the Clinton legacy. In Section II, we exposed four new myths which have thwarted change within the Democratic Party. We also analyzed two shifting voting blocs — married women and Catholics — that were once reliable parts of the Democratic base. In this section, we analyze the increasing political polarization and what it signals for Democrats in the future, as well as the shifting identity of voters often dubbed “New Democrats.”

A. Faith and Polarization

In the four decades since race, Vietnam, and the counterculture roiled the Democratic Party, Republicans have won 7 out of 10 presidential contests and have moved from minority to majority status in both houses of the U.S. Congress. Although many attribute these developments to the increased “conservatism” of the American people, evidence for this hypothesis is thin. Since the 1970s, the electorate’s ideological self-identification has varied within a narrow range, averaging 20 percent liberal, 47 percent moderate, and 33 percent conservative. In this respect, the 2004 election was typical, with voters dividing into 21 percent liberal, 45 percent moderate, and 34 percent conservative.

TABLE 15

Ideological self-identification of the U.S. electorate, 1976-2004

	1976	1980	1984	1988	1992	1996	2000	2004	Avg
Liberal	20	18	17	18	21	19	22	21	20
Moderate	48	51	44	45	48	48	49	45	47
Conservative	32	31	35	33	31	34	30	34	33

(Data drawn from national election exit polls)

This stability does point, however, to a basic arithmetic truth that helps explain the politics of the past generation: if the electorate becomes increasingly polarized along ideological lines, the more conservative party will benefit — unless large numbers of voters who regard themselves as moderates find that party’s increased conservatism unacceptable. We argue that such a polarization has occurred; we call it the Great Sorting-Out.^{xxx} In the course of this great sorting-out, socioeconomic class, the basis for

party identification for much of the twentieth century in American politics, has been overlaid (though not entirely replaced) by religiosity.

A recently released survey indicates that only 29 percent of Americans consider the Democratic Party to be friendly toward religion, down from 40 percent just a year ago. (By contrast, 55 percent believe that the Republican Party is supportive of religion.)^{xxxii} A recently completed series of focus groups among non-college rural and red state voters underscores the growing salience of morally laden cultural themes. Participants reported

Michael Dukakis fared only two points worse among regular churchgoers than among those who attended church infrequently or not at all.

broad dissatisfaction with the Bush Administration on three issues—the lack of progress in Iraq, economic stagnation and job insecurity, and soaring health care costs—and indicated support for some progressive initiatives in

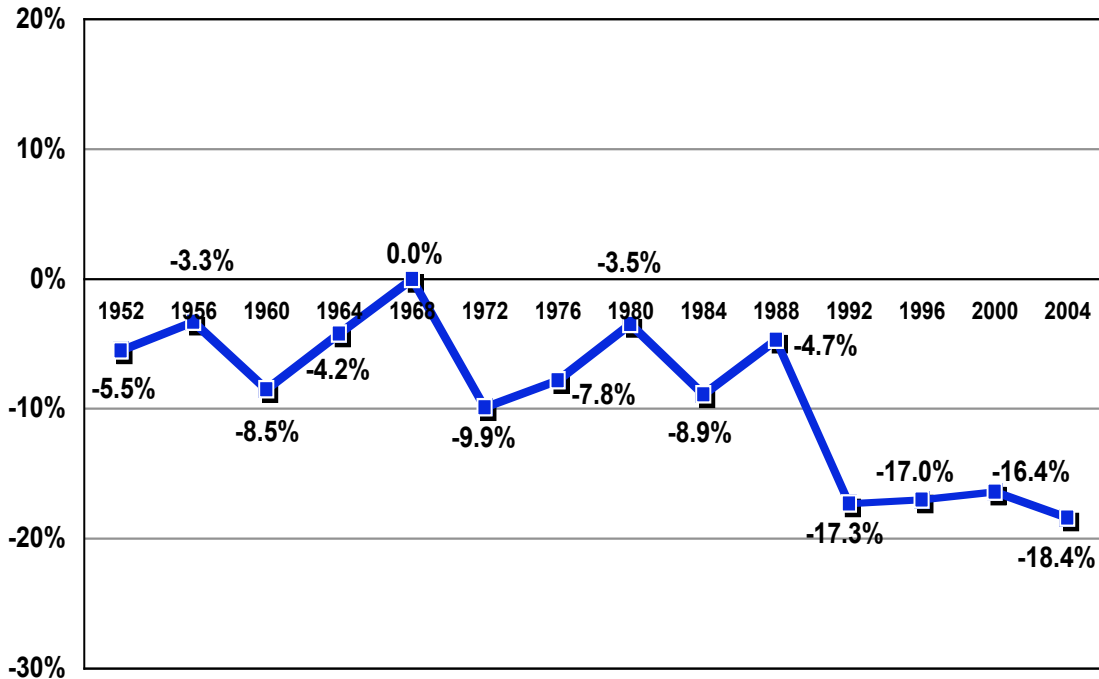
these areas, which they believed Democrats would be more likely to offer. But as the summary of these focus groups goes on to note, “the introduction of cultural themes—specifically gay marriage, abortion, the importance of the traditional family unit, and the role of religion in public life—quickly renders [these progressive issues] almost irrelevant in terms of electoral politics at the national level.”^{xxxii}

While participants see the Republican Party as offering a clear and consistent traditionalist stance on moral issues, they view Democrats as dangerously inconsistent on—or worse, as hostile to—traditional values: “Most referred to Democrats as ‘liberal’ on issues of morality, but some even go so far as to label them ‘immoral,’ ‘morally bankrupt,’ or even ‘anti-religious.’” They regard Democrats as too politically correct, as caring about the rights of the few rather than of the many. While this resistance might well have focused on racially tinged issues two decades ago, today it centers on religion and its role in public life. Issues such as removing the Ten Commandments from public building and outlawing public manger displays at Christmastime symbolize what these voters see as Democrats’ support for an elitist “subversive minority” that is out to “erode the moral foundations of our country.”^{xxxiii}

Indeed, the gap in the voting behavior between religious and secular voters in the last four presidential elections has widened dramatically compared to modern historical levels. Michael Dukakis fared only two points worse among regular churchgoers than among those who attended church infrequently or not at all. That was typical of Democrats’ performances between 1952 and 1988. Starting in 1992, the religion gap jumped to nearly twelve points on average.^{xxxiv}

This has occurred despite the increase in black turnout noted earlier — a voting bloc comprised of many regular church attendees. Among white voters, the gap between religious and secular voters increased from an average of 5.6-points between 1952 and 1988 to 17.3-points thereafter.^{xxxv}

CHART 4
Difference in Support for the Democratic Presidential Candidate 1952-2004, Between White Regular Church-Attendees and White Yearly/Never Church-Attendees



(Source: American National Election Study, 1952-2004)

We do not wish to suggest that the political impact of religion works only in one direction. On the one hand, 74 percent of Americans favor displaying the Ten Commandments in public buildings; 57 percent favor teaching creationism along with evolution in public schools; 67 percent say liberals are going too far in trying to keep religion out of public life and public schools; 44 percent believe that secularist liberals have too much control over the Democratic party. On the other hand, 45 percent of Americans believe that religious conservatives have too much control over the Republican Party. By a margin of 52 to 30, they see Democrats as more concerned than Republicans to protect freedom of individual choice—a very important value in our increasingly choice-centered culture. 56 percent have reached the conclusion that it is more important to conduct research that may result in new cures than to preserve the potential life of human embryos. And while two-thirds of Americans believe that

religious organizations are helping to solve social problems and should be eligible to receive federal funds for this purpose, only 31 percent think that it is ever appropriate for clergy to speak out on political issues from the pulpit.^{xxxvi}

These sentiments help explain why religion is a double-edged sword that can injure both political parties. Democrats lose ground when their separationist impulses lead them to stances that most Americans interpret as secularist, even hostile, toward religion. For their part, Republicans

lose ground when their embrace of religion shades over into what is perceived as a theocratic drive to politicize religion, invade the zone of personal choice, and impose their particular (and controversial) concept of morality on everyone.

The gradual overlaying of socio-economic status with religiosity has

contributed to the great “sorting-out” in American politics. This is evident over time on several dimensions. Consider the following:

During the 1970s, Democrats received more than one-quarter of the conservative vote, while Republicans enjoyed a nearly comparable share of the liberal vote. Over the next three decades, however, each of those shares fell by half.

Democrats lose ground when their separationist impulses lead them to stances that most Americans interpret as secularist, even hostile, toward religion. For their part, Republicans lose ground when their embrace of religion shades over into what is perceived as a theocratic drive to politicize religion, invade the zone of personal choice, and impose their particular (and controversial) concept of morality on everyone.

TABLE 16
Share of two-party vote by voter ideology

	Liberal	Conservative
Democratic (1976)	72	29
Democratic (2004)	85	15
Republican (1976)	26	70
Republican (2004)	13	84

(Data drawn from national election exit polls)

As a result, to a far greater extent than 30 years ago, the Democratic Party’s coalition tilts in a liberal direction, and the Republicans’ toward conservatism. In 1976, liberals outnumbered conservatives in the Democratic Party by less than 2 to 1; now it’s nearly 4 to 1. In 1976, the Republican Party had a moderate plurality, while today a conservative majority dominates.

TABLE 17
Party coalitions by ideology

	Liberal	Moderate	Conservative
Democratic (1976)	28	54	18
Democratic (2004)	38	51	10
Republican (1976)	10	47	43
Republican (2004)	6	38	56

(Data drawn from national election exit polls)

As ideological commitment and party identification have become more closely aligned, party identification has increasingly predicted voting patterns. Self-identified Democrats are more likely to support the Democratic presidential nominee than they were thirty years ago, and Republicans to support Republicans.^{xxxvii}

TABLE 18
Party coalitions by partisan identification

	Democratic	Independent	Republican
Democratic (1976)	77	43	9
Democratic (2004)	89	49	6
Republican (1976)	22	54	90
Republican (2004)	11	48	93

(Data drawn from national election exit polls)

At the same time, partisanship has become more intense, especially toward the ends of the ideological spectrum. More than three-quarters of liberals are critical of the Democratic leadership as failing to stand up for the party’s traditional positions on key issues.^{xxxviii} At the same time, many religiously observant Americans, who tend to be conservative and Republican, have become less willing to search for common ground on key social issues. When asked whether “Even elected officials who are deeply religious sometimes have to make compromises and set their convictions aside to get results,” only 63 percent of respondents who attend worship services at least once a week agreed, down from 82 percent in 2000. Evangelical Protestants and traditional Catholics both expressed an increased unwillingness to accept compromise, especially on issues such as abortion and gay marriage.^{xxxix}

The correlation between religious observance and political ideology is consistent and powerful: the more observant, the more conservative. For example, more than half of those who attend church once a week regard themselves as conservative, four times the percentage who are self-declared liberals.

TABLE 19
Religious observance and political ideology

Church attendance	Conservative	Moderate	Liberal
Once a week	54	33	13
Almost every week	47	39	14
Once a month	38	42	19
Seldom	31	45	24
Never	26	40	34

(USA Today/CNN Gallup, February 2003-May 2004)

Given the increasingly strong link between ideology, political partisanship, and voting, it would not be surprising to find a similar link between religious observance and political preferences. That link proved particularly powerful in 2004, and the pattern structurally resembles the pattern shown in Table 19.

TABLE 20
The religious divide in the 2004 election

Level of church attendance	Bush %	Kerry %
More than weekly	64	35
Weekly	58	41
Monthly	50	49
Occasionally	45	54
Never	36	62

(NEP and Pew Research Center, *Trends 2005*, p. 27)

While it is hard to prove that the political impact of religion has increased in recent decades relative to other factors, a wealth of anecdotal evidence (and some multivariate analysis) suggests that it has. For example, the Pew Research Center constructed an “index of impact” measuring the relative weight of particular variables in determining an individual’s vote for president. Between 2000 and 2004, the impact index for church attendance rose from 22 to 28, the largest gain of any variable studied. By contrast, the impact of income rose only marginally (from 8 to 9), as did that of education (from 4 to

5).^{xi} In a recently completed analysis, the Princeton political scientist Larry Bartels finds that among frequent church-attenders, the impact of social issues on both party affiliation and presidential choices has more than doubled since 1984.^{xii} These findings help explain a phenomenon that has perplexed Democratic strategists and liberal commentators and that is evident in Table 21—the increasing tendency of less educated voters to prefer conservative candidates.

The impact of social issues on both party affiliation and presidential choices has more than doubled since 1984.

TABLE 21

Democratic share of the two-party vote by educational status

	1992	1996	2000	2004
High school grad	54	59	49	47
Some college	52	55	47	46
College grad	49	49	47	46
Post-grad	58	57	54	55

(Data drawn from national election exit polls)

The argument is this: Americans always look for morality in their leaders, but they disagree about the link between morality and religion, and the disagreement is correlated with education. While 51 percent of all Americans say that it is necessary to believe in God in order to be moral and have good values (46 percent say that it is not necessary), only about one-third of college graduates believe that this link is necessary, versus about two-thirds of those with no more than a high school education.^{xiii} Less educated voters, therefore, are more likely to respond positively to candidates who present themselves as sincere believers for whom religion matters in their lives and to mistrust candidates who appear secular in their orientation.

Traditionalism and modernism are now more important markers of political orientation than are Protestant/Catholic/Jew.

For more than a century following the great waves of immigration that started in the 1830s, the political division of America mirrored longstanding religious differences.

Protestants tended to be Republicans, Catholics (and later Jews) Democrats. During the past thirty years, however, these classic cleavages have weakened, while new ones have arisen. Once-pervasive anti-Catholicism and anti-Semitism have become marginal phenomena in American life. Today, politically significant religious allegiances cut across denominational lines, while splits occur within what were once unified religious blocs. Traditionalism and modernism are now more important markers of political orientation than are Protestant/Catholic/Jew. So evangelical Protestants, traditionalist Catholics, and Orthodox Jews tend to be conservative and Republican; mainline Protestants, Vatican II Catholics, and Reform Jews tend to be liberal and Democratic. The development of a new traditionalist entente among previously antagonistic faith communities has worked to the advantage of the Republican party, whose political prospects were long limited by the consequences of the anti-Catholicism its elected leaders and supportive Protestant ministers had spearheaded, well into the 20th century.^{xliii}

B. The Ramifications of Polarization

As this Great Sorting-Out has proceeded at the national level, two consequences have proved especially significant. First, because there are more conservatives than liberals, the shift toward ideological homogeneity within parties has tended to boost Republican self-identification at the expense of Democrats. And because the link between partisanship and voting has also strengthened, this shift in partisanship has worked to the advantage of Republicans.

In 1976, Democrats enjoyed a 45/28 percent edge in party identification; by 2004, Republicans in the electorate had achieved parity with Democrats (37/37). This shift involves more than generational replacement—i.e., fervent New Deal Democrats dying off while less Democratic-leaning cohorts enter the electorate. It is also a matter of voters

As the Great Sorting-Out intensifies, it will increase pressure on Democrats to appeal successfully to the center of the American electorate.

actually switching party allegiance.

Today, fully 38 percent of self-identified Republicans report that they once thought of themselves as Democrats. By contrast, only 22 percent of current Democrats (primarily liberals) once thought of themselves as Republicans.^{xliv}

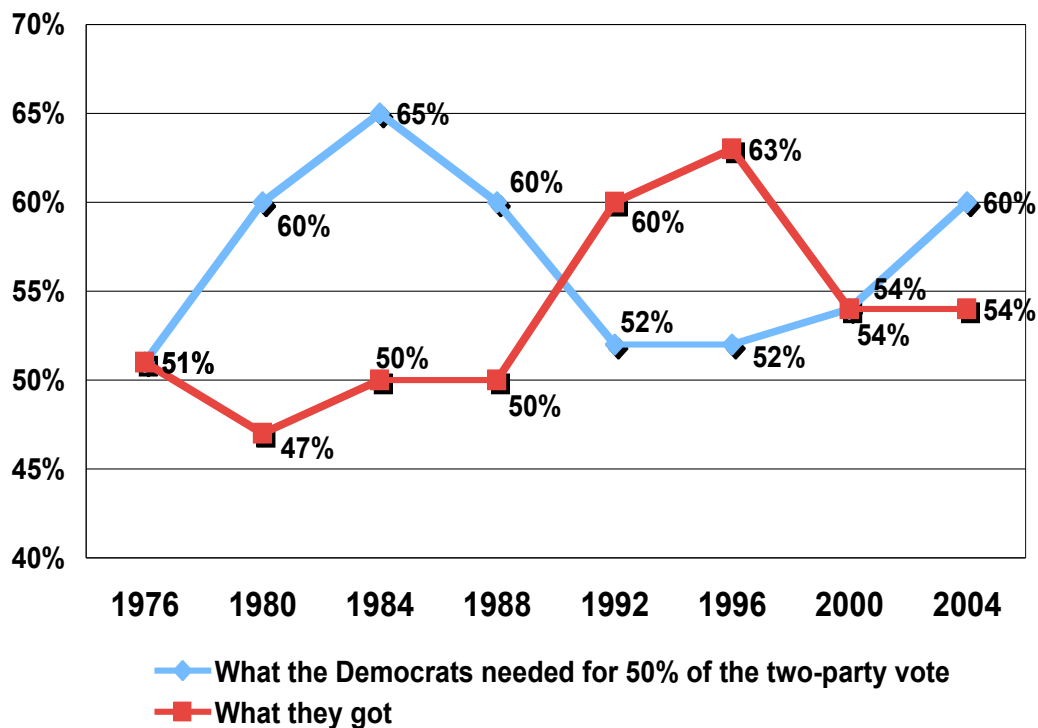
The second key consequence of the Great Sorting-Out is the Democrats' increased dependence on voters who

think of themselves as neither liberal nor conservative. In 1976, Jimmy Carter achieved a 2-point edge over Gerald Ford in the popular vote while receiving only a bare majority support (51 percent) among moderates. In 1988, Michael Dukakis did better than Carter among liberals and about as well (50 percent) among moderates, while losing the popular

vote by 8 points. In 2000, Al Gore’s 54 percent share of the moderate vote gave him only a paper-thin edge in the popular vote; four years later, an identical share gained John Kerry no better than a 3.5 point loss. By contrast, Bill Clinton achieved his two victories with the aid of 60 percent-plus shares of the two-party moderate vote. As Chart 6 shows, he could have gotten by with less; the reason is that he succeeded in boosting the Democratic share of the conservative vote from Mondale’s 17 percent in 1984 and Dukakis’ 19 percent in 1988 to 22 percent, a level he reached in both 1992 and 1996. But because the Democrats’ share of the conservative vote fell back to 17 percent in 2000 and a record-low 15 percent in 2004, Gore needed a somewhat larger share of the moderate vote than Clinton did and Kerry needed an even larger share.

The lesson is clear. As the Great Sorting-Out intensifies, it will increase pressure on Democrats to appeal successfully to the center of the American electorate. By 2004, John Kerry was receiving so few conservative votes that he needed to get 60 percent of the moderate vote in order to win. To the extent that this polarization of American politics remains a stable feature of presidential elections, it means that Democrats will not win unless they are able to garner a substantial portion of the moderate vote — a direct challenge to the *myth of mobilization* that plays to “base” politics.

CHART 5
Democratic Share of the Two-Party Moderate Vote: 1972-2004



(Data drawn from national election exit polls)

Conversely, the challenge facing Republicans at the national level is to keep their base energized without driving away the minority of moderate voters who continue to support them. This was perhaps the most significant accomplishment of the 2004 Bush campaign. Two examples will illustrate this point. First, religion: while Bush continued to do very well among highly observant Catholics and born-again Protestants, his gains over 2000 came almost exclusively among members of these groups who reported attending religious services much less regularly.^{xlv} Second, abortion: while the Bush campaign’s conservative mobilization helped raise the share of voters who believe that abortion should always be illegal from 13 percent to 16 percent, it achieved this result without reducing Bush’s share of the vote among those who believe that abortion should be legal in most or all cases. By contrast, Kerry’s share of voters who believe that abortion should be illegal in most or all circumstances fell by more than 2 percentage points from Gore’s already anemic level of support in these groups.^{xlvi}

The growing polarization has led many pundits and political operatives to believe that swing voters have all but disappeared and that base mobilization is therefore the be-all-and-end-all of contemporary politics. We disagree, because the facts do not support this conclusion.

During the past five elections, the Democratic margin has varied from +8 to -8, principally because of shifting political preferences among self-identified independent and moderate voters.

TABLE 22
Democratic minus Republican support, 1988-2004 (%)

	1988	1992	1996	2000	2004
Total	-8	+5	+8	0	-3
Independents	-12	+6	+8	-2	+1
Moderates	+1	+16	+24	+8	+9

(Data drawn from national election exit polls)

It is easy to show that shifts in political preferences among moderates and independents account for the lion’s share of the election-to-election changes in overall levels of support for the parties’ national tickets. It would be a Pyrrhic victory for either party if the mobilization of its ideological and partisan base came at the expense of its appeal to centrist and independent voters. The key to victory is a majority coalition that energizes its base while taking into account the concerns of citizens whose votes are up for grabs.

The Great Sorting-Out is even clearer in congressional races. In eleven of twelve contentious Senate races in 2004, the Democratic candidate won a plurality or outright majority of moderate voters — often by large margins — but because conservatives in those states vastly outnumbered liberals, and ideology is now a far greater predictor of voting behavior than in the past, the Republican candidate won nine of those twelve races. In Alaska, Democrat Tony Knowles took 85 percent of the liberal vote and won moderates by six points, yet still lost to Republican Lisa Murkowski. Florida Democrat Betty Castor took 80 percent of liberals and 57 percent of moderates, but lost to Republican Mel Martinez. Democrats Tom Daschle of South Dakota and Dan Mongiardo of Kentucky took 63 percent and 62 percent of moderates respectively. Each found themselves giving concession speeches on election night.

In most of these races, the Democrat fared as well or better among liberal voters as the Republican fared among conservative voters. But the new electoral math associated with the Great Sorting-Out indicates that Democrats now need in the vicinity of 65 percent of the moderate vote to win in many states where they have had historical success.

TABLE 23

The New Electoral Math

<p>Georgia</p> <p>TOTAL Majette Isakson ✓</p> <p>Liberal (14%) 77% 21%</p> <p>Moderate (44%) 50% 48%</p> <p>Conservative (41%) 15% 83%</p>	<p>Arkansas</p> <p>TOTAL Lincoln Holt ✓</p> <p>Liberal (13%) 87% 13%</p> <p>Moderate (45%) 72% 28%</p> <p>Conservative (41%) 26% 74%</p>	<p>North Carolina</p> <p>TOTAL Bowles Burr ✓</p> <p>Liberal (17%) 84% 15%</p> <p>Moderate (43%) 55% 43%</p> <p>Conservative (40%) 21% 78%</p>
<p>Kentucky</p> <p>TOTAL Mongiardo Bunning ✓</p> <p>Liberal (15%) 79% 21%</p> <p>Moderate (46%) 62% 37%</p> <p>Conservative (39%) 24% 76%</p>	<p>Colorado</p> <p>TOTAL Salazar Coors ✓</p> <p>Liberal (22%) 88% 10%</p> <p>Moderate (43%) 60% 39%</p> <p>Conservative (35%) 13% 85%</p>	<p>Ohio</p> <p>TOTAL Fingrht Voinovich ✓</p> <p>Liberal (20%) 70% 30%</p> <p>Moderate (47%) 41% 58%</p> <p>Conservative (34%) 10% 90%</p>
<p>Louisiana</p> <p>TOTAL John/Dems Vitter ✓</p> <p>Liberal (17%) 51% / 77% 21%</p> <p>Moderate (44%) 31% 54% 44%</p> <p>Conservative (40%) 15% / 24% 75%</p>	<p>Nevada</p> <p>TOTAL Reid Ziser ✓</p> <p>Liberal (18%) 89% 9%</p> <p>Moderate (48%) 73% 26%</p> <p>Conservative (34%) 31% 65%</p>	<p>South Carolina</p> <p>TOTAL Tenenbaum DeMint ✓</p> <p>Liberal (15%) 75% 22%</p> <p>Moderate (47%) 56% 41%</p> <p>Conservative (38%) 19% 80%</p>
<p>Florida</p> <p>TOTAL Castor Martinez ✓</p> <p>Liberal (20%) 80% 19%</p> <p>Moderate (47%) 57% 41%</p> <p>Conservative (34%) 18% 80%</p>	<p>Alaska</p> <p>TOTAL Knowles Murkowski ✓</p> <p>Liberal (17%) 85% 12%</p> <p>Moderate (45%) 49% 43%</p> <p>Conservative (38%) 15% 79%</p>	<p>South Dakota</p> <p>TOTAL Daschle Thune ✓</p> <p>Liberal (16%) 78% 22%</p> <p>Moderate (45%) 63% 37%</p> <p>Conservative (39%) 20% 80%</p>

(Data drawn from national election exit polls)

On the House level, the sharp rise in safe congressional seats and corresponding decline in contested districts is well known. Less familiar is the decline of districts splitting their votes between presidential and congressional candidates. In 2004, only 59

congressional districts went in different directions in presidential and House elections. In 2000, there were 86 such districts; in 1996 and 1992, there were more than 100.^{xlvii} Of the 59 split districts in 2004, Bush prevailed in 41 also won by congressional Democrats, while Kerry won only 18 held by congressional Republicans.

This polarization extends to the county level as well. In 2004, fully 60 percent of the nation's counties gave super-majorities of 60 percent or more to either Bush or Kerry. The corresponding figure for 2000 was 53 percent; for 1996, only 38 percent. In the words of pollster Mark Mellman, "Americans may be bowling alone, but they are voting together."^{xlviii}

Remarkably, there is evidence of increased polarization even among the states. In 1988, George H. W. Bush's best state gave him 66.2 percent of the vote, 12.8 points higher than his national share, while in his worst state he received 44.8 percent (8.6 points lower than his national share). The gap between the best and the worst was thus 21.4 percentage points. In 2004 (another race between a Bush and a Massachusetts liberal), George W. Bush's best state came in at 71.1 percent (20.4 points better than his national share) and his worst at 37.0 (13.7 points below), for a best/worst gap of 34.1 points.^{xlix} This finding is not the artifact of a single election: in 2000, Bush's best state was 67.2 percent (19.3 points better than his national share) and his worst 32.3 (15.6 points below), for a best/ worst gap of 34.9 points.

This finding represents more than aberrant states at the bottom and top. In recent years, the Red states have gotten redder and the Blue states bluer; the differences among states have deepened, and the

number of states near the national mean has diminished. In 1988, George H. W. Bush won only 15 states with vote shares more than 5 points above his national total, and there were only 9 states in which his share was more than 5 points below his national percentage.

Fully 26 states were within a 5-point range of the national percentage as a whole. In 2004, by

contrast, George W. Bush, won 21 states with vote shares more than 5 points in excess of his national total, and there were 10 states where he ended up with more than 5 points less. Only 19 states fell within the 5-point range, down significantly from 1988.¹

In recent years, the Red states have gotten redder and the Blue states bluer; the differences among states have deepened, and the number of states near the national mean has diminished.

A more detailed analysis supports the thesis that states are sorting out. In 1988, the average state deviated from the national results by 4.7 points; the median state, by 4.6. By 2004, the average state deviated from the national results by 7.2 points; the median, by

6.1. So the sorting-out phenomenon involves more than a few extreme states; the increasing dispersion from the national results is pervasive.

The changing patterns of competitiveness during this period tell a tale of geographical shifts in the balance between the major parties. Of the 26 states in 1988 within five points of the national results, 16 had ceased to be so by 2004. Of the 16 departures, 10 have shifted solidly into the Republican camp—all of them in the South or Great Plains. The other 6 departures are now solidly Democratic: California, Illinois, Maryland, and three New England states (Maine, Vermont, and Connecticut). During this same period, 9 states joined the ranks of the highly competitive. Three once solidly Democratic states in the upper Midwest (Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Iowa) as well as Oregon are now up for grabs. At the same time, Democrats now are more competitive in 5 states where their chances were once remote—Arizona, Florida, Nevada, New Hampshire, and Virginia.

This story of competitiveness reveals continuity as well as change. Of the 26 highly competitive states in 1988, 10 remain so today: Delaware and New Jersey in the Mid-Atlantic; Michigan, Missouri, Ohio, and Pennsylvania in the heart of the Midwest; and four states west of the Mississippi—Arkansas, Colorado, New Mexico, and Washington.

The net result of these developments is that the Midwest is far more central to presidential campaigns than it was two decades ago. Of the 26 competitive states in 1988, only 5 were in the Midwest. By 2004, 7 out of 19 were from that region, representing fully 96 of the 211 electoral votes in the competitive category. In the Electoral College aggregate, enhanced Republican hopes in Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Iowa precisely counterbalance the pro-Democratic shift in Florida.

Another line of analysis supports the thesis that the Midwest is by far the most pivotal region of the country. Of the 6 states deviating least from the national results over the past five presidential elections, 5 are Midwestern.

TABLE 24
States tracking the national results most closely, 1988-2004

State	Average deviation between state & national results (%)
New Mexico	1.1
Ohio	1.6
Missouri	1.7
Michigan	1.8
Pennsylvania	1.9
Iowa	1.9

(Data drawn from national election exit polls)

It is notable (though not entirely surprising) that Catholics, the largest and most important swing group in the electorate, are the single largest religious group in each of these states. Key facts of geography and demography turn out to be mutually reinforcing.

C. The Rise and Fall of The New Democrats

For most of the 1980s and 1990s, New Democrats struggled with traditional New Deal and post-1960s liberals to define the direction of their party. One of the key consequences of this struggle, coupled with the political strategy the Bush Administration chose to pursue, has been to blur many of the bright lines that once divided these factions. On the one hand, many liberals have accepted the logic of signature New Democratic themes such as fiscal restraint, balanced budgets, a generous immigration policy, and a more open world economy. On the other hand, the radical, unyielding conservatism of the Bush era has forced Democrats to subordinate their differences to the imperatives of mounting an effective opposition. In the 1990s, a majority of New Democrats would have supported the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA), and some would have stepped forward with their own Social Security reform plans. In 2005, by contrast, New Democrats in the House have opposed CAFTA almost unanimously, and New Democratic senators who were expected to break ranks on Social Security have refused to do so.

The evidence supporting a new political alignment is more than anecdotal. Over the past two decades, the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press has mapped the terrain of American politics, using sophisticated statistical methods to discover the typology of the electorate—that is, the basic groups into which they are divided. This technique makes it possible to examine the composition of party coalitions and to identify the characteristics of less partisan voters. During the 1990s, New Democrats emerged as a distinct ideological grouping. By 2005, they had all but disappeared as a separate group, while Liberals had grown to form the single largest group (19 percent of registered voters) within the core Democratic coalition. The authors of the Pew study suggest that “some of the growth among Liberals comes from former New Democrats, whose views on national security and government regulation have become more polarized after more than four years of GOP control.”^{li}

This is not to say that differences within the Democratic coalition have disappeared. A group of Conservative Democrats (15 percent of registered voters) has a demographic profile very different from Liberals—older, less well educated (only 16 percent are college graduates, versus 49 percent for Liberals) and less well-off (15 percent with family incomes over \$75,000, versus 41 percent). This group is more hawkish than Liberals on the role of military power in foreign policy and far more affirmative about religion. For example, 74 percent of Conservative Democrats believe that to be moral and have good values, it is necessary to believe in God; 84 percent of Liberals disagree; 54 percent of Conservative Democrats believe that government should do more to protect

morality in society, while 88 percent of liberals worry that government is getting too involved in moral issues.^{lii} And despite Conservatives' modest means, they are more inclined than are Liberals to believe in the politics of personal empowerment and that most people can get ahead with hard work.^{liii} It is striking, however, the extent to which Liberals and Conservative Democrats agree on core economic issues: overwhelming majorities of both groups oppose private accounts in Social Security, advocate repealing President Bush's tax cuts for wealthy Americans, favor government guaranteed health insurance and a higher minimum wage, and believe that reducing the federal budget deficit should receive a higher priority than it now does.^{liv}

Along a number of dimensions, Liberals differ not only from other Democrats, but also from the country as a whole. Not only are they younger, better educated, and more prosperous; they are less likely ever to have been married or to have children in their home. They are more likely to be secular in their orientation, only half as likely as other Americans to attend religious services weekly, and only one third as likely to participate in Bible study or prayer groups. 61 percent of Liberals oppose displaying the Ten Commandments, versus only 22 percent of all Americans. A remarkable 80 percent of Liberals favor gay marriage; less than one third of their fellow Americans agree.

Liberals differ not only from other Democrats, but also from the country as a whole. Not only are they younger, better educated, and more prosperous; they are less likely ever to have been married or to have children in their home.

In the area of defense and foreign policy, 67 percent of Liberals believe that the preemptive use of military force is rarely if ever justified, versus only 35 percent of all Americans. 65 percent favor cutting the defense budget to reduce the deficit; again, only 35 percent of the electorate would go along with them. Liberals are only half as likely to be military veterans as are Americans as a whole. Only two-fifths report that they regularly display the U.S. flag, versus two-thirds of their fellow citizens.

While social issues and defense dominate today's political terrain, it is in these areas that Liberals espouse views diverging not only from those of other Democrats, but from Americans as a whole. To the extent that Liberals now constitute both the largest bloc within the Democratic coalition and the public face of the party, Democratic candidates for national office will be running uphill. Whatever their personal views, these candidates will be vulnerable to the kinds of negative campaigns that Republicans have proved adept at running since 1988. In current circumstances, it is hard to see how Democrats can overcome this disadvantage — unless candidates are willing and able to carry out their

own suitably updated version of the strategy Bill Clinton so successfully employed in his 1992 primary and general election campaigns.

Times change, of course. It is not hard to imagine two sets of circumstances that would reduce the salience of Democrats' difficulties on defense and social issues. In the first place, the Republicans could over-interpret the significance of their 2004 election victories and overreach in their use of the unchecked power they now enjoy. If they go too far — as they already have on a range of issues — they could end up abandoning the political center, offering new opportunities to their opposition.

Second, as Americans continue to worry about their future in an increasingly competitive and rapidly changing global marketplace, the arena of political combat could shift back toward large economic issues. If so, the advantage shifts toward the Democrats, who are both more united on these issues than are Republicans and also more closely aligned with the electorate as a whole. But as Bill Clinton recognized, even in a year in which the economy is the dominant concern, candidates must pass the threshold of credibility on non-economic issues. This cannot happen unless they understand the problem they face and act boldly to address it.

IV. Conclusion — Beyond Polarization

As we write, the Republican administration is showing signs of strain not uncommon to second term presidencies. Their religious base led them into an intervention into the tragic case of a brain-dead woman — Terri Schiavo — that was opposed by a wide swath of Americans angry at what they perceived as an unwarranted government intervention into a family matter. (This episode offers a preview, and perhaps warning, of the reaction that could come if other parts of the agenda of the religious right were to be enacted into law.) In addition, patience with the war in Iraq has been waning as more American troops die and we seem no closer to achieving the security stabilization that is the precondition for the withdrawal of our forces. The aftermath of Hurricane Katrina has called into serious question the adequacy of the Bush Administration's efforts to strengthen homeland security. And the signature domestic issue of Bush's second term — Social Security privatization — is dead in the water. Taken together, these factors have managed to keep Bush's approval ratings below fifty percent for much of his first post-election year and have recently taken them to new lows.

As a number of analysts have noted, recent Republican difficulties have not yet redounded to the advantage of the opposition party. One reason is that up to now, Democrats have found it difficult to articulate a compelling message or an alternative agenda.^{lv} Whatever voters may think of the Republican mantra—strong defense, lower taxes, traditional values—at least they know where Republicans stand. They have no such conviction about the Democrats.

What would Democrats do if they were to get serious about changing this situation?

Confront the current myths of the Democratic Party.

While the new activists are an enormous financial boon to Democrats, the Party cannot mobilize its way out of this problem. The *myth of mobilization* is just that in an electorate where the liberal base is substantially smaller than the conservative base. Although the elixir of mobilization is a myth for both major American political parties, it is a more viable strategy for the Republicans than for the Democrats.

Democrats must also admit that they cannot simply grow themselves out of their electoral dilemmas. The groups that were supposed to constitute the new Democratic majority in 2004 simply failed to materialize in sufficient numbers to overcome the right-center coalition of the Republican Party.

Finally, Democrats need to stop fooling themselves into thinking that language is their only problem. In 1992, Bill Clinton combined evocative language with new

proposals on everything from welfare reform to reinventing government. Relying on language and “framing” can be a surefire recipe for disaster in an electorate that values personal honesty and integrity even more than experience or positions on issues.

Stop hiding behind domestic policy and honestly confront the biggest issue of our time: national defense, and especially the use of military force.

The Democratic Party must be able to articulate a coherent foreign policy that is based on a belief in America’s role in the world. While this will cause internal conflict in the Democratic coalition, it will not be any more severe than the fight Bill Clinton sparked when he confronted his coalition with proposals for reforming welfare. This task will fall to Democratic internationalists, who will need to convince their counterparts in the party that America can do good in the world and that, for example, stopping genocide in Darfur — a foreign policy goal the left of the party would probably support — will require the same levels of military strength and preparedness as fighting the war in Iraq, a foreign policy goal they do not support.

Democrats must emphasize the importance of the American military as a potential force for good in the world, and in so doing they need to engage “Michael Moore Democrats,” who instinctively view American power as suspect. A focus on military strength goes against the grain of many Democrats, who were weaned on Vietnam and have come to see Iraq as a similar lesson in the futility and immorality of projecting U.S. military power, but these views must be confronted if Democrats are to be coherent on this issue in a time of war.

Along with national defense policies that reflect patriotism, strength, and resolve, Democrats must seize the opportunity to offer compelling alternatives to current Republican policies concerning homeland defense and the ultimate nightmare of nuclear weapons in the hands of terrorists, areas in which the Bush Administration’s efforts have fallen woefully short.

Show tolerance and common sense on hot-button social issues.

Democrats are right in thinking that most of America is with them when it comes to the broad outlines of the social agenda. We would bet that when Americans’ religiosity comes face-to-face with their desire to solve personal problems in their own homes and families, the desire for freedom from the State will win out. But Democrats must avoid getting trapped in the extremes. They could continue to support the core of *Roe v. Wade* while dropping their intransigence on questions such as parental notification and partial-birth abortion. They could oppose court-imposed gay marriage while favoring decent legal treatment for gay couples and insisting that this is matter for the people of the several states—not the U.S. Constitution or the judiciary—to resolve. And they could take steps to ensure that while the Democratic Party today may be the home of

Americans who regard themselves as secular, it will neither be, nor be seen as, the secularist party.

At the same time, Democrats must paint a clear picture of Republican extremists, who advocate a level of government intrusion into people's lives that conflicts with their desire to be left alone.

Support an economic policy that embraces global competition and a modernized social safety net that protects American workers in a vibrant and churning economy.

For all their problems, Democrats still have a strong hand when it comes to economic and social safety net issues. But an electoral strategy that involves waiting for economic disaster is not a plan worth having. Democrats need to keep in touch with the economic challenges of this century, not the last.

A serious, forward-looking opposition party would respond to this new situation, and to public concerns, with ideas as large as the problems they address — with nothing less than a 21st century economic and social policy. The reason is this: while no nation can hope to succeed by walling itself off from the world, in circumstances of rising global competition, a vibrant national economy will inevitably involve lots of churning. Businesses will succeed and fail; jobs will be created and destroyed. Average citizens will tolerate this level of uncertainty and risk only if it is combined with a strong social safety net so that they will not lose everything when markets change. The core of this approach would require returning to the notion of social insurance as protection against catastrophe — whether an impoverished old age, or the personal and family stress produced by long-term unemployment, or bankruptcy caused by unaffordable and uninsured health care expenses — while ensuring that every American enjoys this protection.

Finally, Democrats have to pay more attention to the very personal quality of elections, especially presidential elections, in the media age.

Recent Democratic candidates have failed to establish the bond of trust with the electorate that is so essential to modern elections. Consistency, personal morality, and above all authenticity are critical in a media age — which is why the *myth of language* discussed above threatens to lead Democratic candidates down the wrong path.

Time and again we have seen the same story in elections — especially presidential elections. The public says that it agrees with the Democrats on the issues, but it votes for Republicans. In 2004, most Democratic advisors assumed that the steady drumbeat of bad news out of Iraq would hurt President Bush. And by Election Day, a slight majority of Americans agreed that the war was going badly. But they voted for Bush, not only because he persuaded a majority that our Iraq mission (however difficult and

discouraging) was part of the larger war against terrorism, but also because he managed to convey strength, certainty and conviction.

The presidential vote is the most personal political decision that Americans make. There is a personality threshold which, all too often, Democratic candidates have failed to understand and therefore to cross. In 1988, Michael Dukakis failed to understand how his legalistic stance on a host of hot-button issues, from the Pledge of Allegiance to Willie Horton to anchor Bernard Shaw's famous question of what he would do if his wife were raped, created an impression of his character that was unacceptable. In 2000, Al Gore, a politician known for his honesty and integrity, could not reverse the impression — created by a series of trivial anecdotes — that he was somehow not trustworthy. In 2004, John Kerry could never transcend the interpretation of indecision and lack of conviction placed on his record in Vietnam and in the Senate.

We would argue that of all the tests national candidates must pass, the personality test is the most important. This test may be summarized in three questions that voters are asking and that candidates must answer to their satisfaction. First: Is the candidate a person of *strength*, with core convictions and the ability to act on them through challenges and criticism? Second: Is the candidate a person of *integrity*, who displays consistency over time, who tells the truth, and whose words and deeds coincide? And third: Is the candidate a person of *empathy*, who understands and cares about people like us?

It is not possible for us to draw out fully the practical implications of these questions. But some things are clear on their face. Candidates who say only what they think others want to hear cannot display strength. Candidates who shift position on what should be matters of conviction can not pass the integrity tests. And candidates who are far removed from the lives and feelings of average families will have a hard time understanding the daily challenges these families face, or credibly conveying care and concern about them.

This last point poses a special challenge for Democrats. Since the mid-1950s, and more notably after 1968, the party has been home to both highly educated upscale professionals and less well educated working class voters. Not only do upscale professionals lead lives that are quite different from those of average families, they also tend to think and speak differently. Complex professional discourse tends to create a barrier between our candidates and the voters with whom they must communicate. If Democratic candidates do not “speak American” as a native language, average Americans will find it hard to believe that these candidates really understand or care about them. It is no accident, we believe, that Michael Dukakis, Al Gore, and John Kerry, the three recent Democratic candidates most closely connected with the outlook of the professional class, found it so difficult to convey their agendas and concerns to the

electorate, or that Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton, with their small-town roots, were more able to do so.

In the days after the 2004 election, a reporter interviewed Ohio families to understand why they had voted as they did. One woman spoke for many others when she told him that George Bush's reelection was "a victory for people like us." What she meant, we believe, is that she identified with Bush but not Kerry, that Bush was "like us" and Kerry was not. We cannot preclude the possibility that highly cultivated candidates or those from privileged backgrounds may win the presidency; FDR, JFK and the two Bush presidents are evidence enough of that. But today, average Americans are at least as much social populists as they are economic populists. They are sensitive to signs of condescension, and it is all too easy for them to experience social distance as indifference. In these circumstances, to nominate national candidates who are seen as representing the outlook and interests of the upscale professional class to the exclusion of middle and working class families is to stack the deck against victory.

Contemporary U.S. party competition is far less class-based than it was during the New Deal era. Today, a majority party must hold together a coalition representing citizens of vastly differing economic circumstances. Republicans have become adept at deploying a social populist agenda of national strength and traditional values to weld the denizens of corporate boardrooms and NASCAR race tracks. The Democratic Party has not yet found a comparably effective formula for bringing its post-McGovern surge of educated professionals together with the average families who continue to hope for some relief from the burdens and uncertainties of the modern economy. Until it does, national Democratic candidates will remain vulnerable to Republican efforts to portray them as elitists, which has always been the kiss of political death in this viscerally egalitarian nation.

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election; the Blaine amendment, which nearly succeeded in changing the U.S. Constitution and catalyzed a rash of anti-Catholic amendments and legislation in the states; and the alliance between Republican Progressives and the KKK in the 1920s.

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- xlvi Jim Kessler, “Who is Winning the Abortion Grays?,” Third Way, Washington, DC, August 2005
- xlvii Dan Balz, “Partisan Polarization Intensified in 2004 Election,” *The Washington Post*, March 29, 2005, p. A4
- xlviii Mark Mellman, “Americans are voting as a bloc,” *The Hill*, January 19, 2005, p. 16
- xlix This finding is not the result of an arbitrary selection of comparison years. 2004 and 1988 were divisive elections featuring effective Republican attacks on the leadership and personal qualities of the Democratic nominees, both Massachusetts liberals. George W. Bush was running as an incumbent, his father as at least a quasi-incumbent. While neither of these elections was close, neither was a landslide either. In 2000, a less divisive year than 2004, Bush’s best showing was 67.2 percent of the vote in Idaho and his worst, Massachusetts at 32.5, for a high/low gap of 34.7. Something has happened in the past two decades to increase inter-state political polarization.
- I While it is hard to know for sure why inter-state polarization is increasing, three hypotheses seem promising. First, it is well-established that most people prefer to live near others who are like themselves. When individuals enjoy mobility and choice, they will tend to select areas well populated with those of similar racial or ethnic background, cultural outlook, and political orientation. Second, once the gap between the two majority parties becomes large, it may reach a tipping point in which the minority gives up hope of ever prevailing and even feels too intimidated to express and act on its views in public. Third, as Mellman observes, homogeneous political networks are “self-reinforcing”: as the majority’s view moves away from the center, it becomes harder and harder for the minority to peel votes away from the majority.
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