



Date: December 15, 2000

To: The Institute for America's Future

From: Stan Greenberg

RE: THE PROGRESSIVE MAJORITY AND THE 2000 ELECTIONS
A Report on Post-Election National Surveys¹

Conservative dominated institutions – the US Supreme Court and Florida legislature – successfully brought the 2000 election to a close. All the more reason to underscore that Al Gore won the election held on November 7th. Al Gore won the popular vote across the nation, 48.3 to 48.0 percent, leading Bush by 338,000 votes and, by almost every independent reading, was the top choice of voters in Florida, probably winning by more than 20,000 votes.² Indeed, this was an election where a majority of the American people (51 to 48 percent) thought they had voted for a center-left or progressive candidate for President.

More important than underlining who won the election is highlighting the even larger progressive impulse that was revealed through the 2000 election. Al Gore was the preferred candidate, by far, on the major issues facing the country. Voters liked that he was pro-choice. They trusted him to handle the economy and the big budget choices ahead. They liked his commitment to both investment and balanced budgets. Gore's broad populist theme was dominant over Bush's anti-government theme. And voters after the election said they hoped the new administration and Congress would take up Gore's issues, rather than Bush's. The country was indeed ready to affirm a larger progressive majority.

Al Gore built up impressive support in the African-American and Hispanic communities and in union households. He affirmed the emerging presumption in favor of Democrats among all post graduates and among college-educated and independent women who see the Democrats as supportive in the choices they face. And Gore's priori-

¹ This report is based on post-election studies conducted on the night of the election and the night afterwards for the Institute for America's Future and for Democracy Corps. Each survey included 1000 interviews, allowing a close look at what people were thinking as they went to the polls. Each survey lasted around 25 minutes.

² The *Miami Herald* (12/2/00) estimates that Gore would have won a statewide hand count by about 23,000 votes.



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ties—commitment to family, willingness to tackle powerful interests and a balanced approach to government—won support in segments of the electorate lost to Democrats in recent years. So, what needs to be explained in the 2000 election is why Al Gore and the Democrats, who were dominant on issues and themes, approaches to policy and government and the country's future agenda, ended up in a dead heat with George W. Bush. Put more simply, why is George W. Bush now preparing to move into the White House?

As we shall see in this report, Al Gore's larger majority was reduced by a number of dynamics. They, too, are important to understand if Democrats and progressives are to develop effective strategies for the future.

- ***The conservative cultural rebellion against Clintonism.*** While voters preferred Gore's progressive and populist issues and themes, the 2000 election was a cultural election, born of the right's 8-year battle to topple Clinton and all he represented. The war began in 1992 and seemed triumphant in 1994—only to be set back in 1996, culminating in the impeachment that left voters worried about the Democrats on values. As we shall see below, the cultural war produced an evenly divided and polarized country, raised the biggest doubts about Gore, and reduced the progressive majority in the country. In the end, Al Gore ran behind expectations, not among upscale voters, but among the downscale—the non-college white electorate where values concerns were most pronounced.
- ***The stylistic contrast: trust.*** The 8-year focus on scandals and impeachment pushed trust to the center of this year's political discourse. While Gore was seen as personally honest and a family man, his "exaggerations" were exaggerated and entangled Gore in the trust issue. At two moments—at the end of September and again, after the first debate—the press mania on the subject temporarily eroded Gore's lead. But the concerns about trust were real and contributed to many voters' decision to vote for change.
- ***Issue blurring.*** While Gore was dominant on the issues in 2000, George W. Bush ran as a leader receptive to an expanded government role in many areas, from education to Social Security and prescription drug coverage. While voters generally ended up agreeing with Gore in these issue debates, the Bush strategy changed the character of the issue terrain. Bush seemed fairly reasonable and indeed, on education and Social Security, a noticeable minority of voters were interested in hearing more. In the end, almost half the electorate threw up its hands, unable to differentiate the proposals of the two candidates. The overall impact of Bush's neutralization campaign was to allow those voters who supported Democrats on the issues to prioritize and vote their cultural concerns.



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- ***The anti-establishment, reformist bloc.*** Reformist, anti-establishment and anti-political voters have proved an important force in this year's party primaries and in the last two national elections. One in ten voters still say they are Perot voters. They are disproportionately white, younger, non-college educated men, and are skeptical of elites and of both government and private power. In the past two national elections, these voters were dislodged from the right bloc and thus helped Bill Clinton win. In this election, they were attracted to both Gore's populist and Bush's anti-Washington themes, but in the end, they went for Bush as more the anti-political, anti-establishment and anti-Clinton candidate. They voted for a restoration of trust and a restoration of the military. But the reformist, anti-establishment bloc remains a real and volatile force, undigested by either of the national partisan camps.

As George W. Bush looks back on the election, he and his advisors will no doubt be contemplating the absence of any conservative tide or mandate. As Democrats and progressives contemplate their choices and strategies in this period of partisan parity, they will put the spotlight on specific issues like education, HMO reform, and retirement security, where voters were looking to the Democrats for investment and change. They will continue to advance a progressive narrative for these times: we live in a moment of prosperity, which belongs to everyone, not just the few. They will fight conservative efforts to outlaw abortion and to limit new roles for women and new opportunities for the previously excluded.

But Democrats and progressives will also need to address the cultural distance that kept many voters away from Al Gore and the Democrats in this election. They will have to prove worthy of the reformist and anti-establishment voters who are still looking for change and more responsive, popular government. And they will have to join the new issue debates, with new clarity and ideas that break through the bi-partisan haze.



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The Progressive Thematic Ascendancy

While people divided their votes almost evenly in this election, they opted strongly for Gore's view of the political world – the big challenges facing the country, what government should focus on, what should happen with the surplus, the appropriate policy priorities, and who has the right approach to representing people in these times. The big choice is set out below.

Al Gore says, America has put its house in order and has the opportunity to make sure all are enriched by our prosperity. But George Bush squanders the surplus on a massive tax cut for the wealthiest few. His plans would drain a trillion dollars out of Social Security. Gore says we should make choices that reflect our values. We should balance the budget and pay down the national debt. To continue our prosperity, we must cut middle class taxes, invest in education, and secure Medicare and Social Security for a safe retirement. We should make our prosperity work for all.

George W. Bush says: The people created our surplus and prosperity, not the government. Al Gore thinks it's the government's money. He favors big government solutions to every problem. I trust the people; he trusts the government. Some of the surplus should be returned to the people through a tax cut. We should do more to renew education and help seniors with prescription drugs. I want more local control and accountability in schools. Bush says, I trust the people to invest their Social Security and make choices in health care.

The Gore statement of purpose and direction was favored by 54 percent of the electorate, and the Bush statement by 37 percent – a 17-point thematic advantage for Gore.



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There are many reasons, as we shall see below, for Gore not achieving a larger majority, but his overall themes, populism, and views of government and spending were not among them. A sizeable majority of the voting electorate agreed with Gore that this was a moment to make sure our prosperity enriched all Americans. Voters supported the choices Gore would make on the surplus and budget: balancing the budget and paying down the debt and cutting taxes for working families and the middle class. They wanted to see more investment in education and in securing retirement. They agreed with Gore that Bush's massive tax cut for the top 1 percent and his proposals to drain Social Security through privatization were the wrong choices in this moment of prosperity.

When forced to choose between these approaches, only 37 percent of the electorate opted for Bush's overall theme – that the surplus belonged to the people and that he would rather trust the people, not Washington, with the money. Despite the reassurances that Bush would introduce prescription drug coverage, create more choice in education and retirement savings and cut taxes, only a minority of voters preferred to go down the road Bush set out in his campaign.

Gore's overall populist, progressive message helped him create a potential majority in this election. Among the Gore voters who considered switching to another candidate (the weak Gore voters), 84 percent chose the Gore rather than the Bush theme. A like number of Nader voters made the same thematic choice.

At least as important, one third of Bush's own weak voters agreed with Gore's overall populist theme, rather than Bush's; they held back from supporting Gore for other reasons. Independents, who divided their votes fairly evenly in the election, broke for Gore on his message: 48 to 40 percent.

Gore's overall populist theme – centered on using our prosperity to enrich all families, not just the few – enabled him to consolidate his own vote, attract Nader voters at the end and reach out to independent and Bush voters. If the election were run on message alone, Al Gore would be president with a comfortable majority of the popular vote.

That was most apparent in the period beginning with Gore's Democratic convention speech in mid-August and closing in the third week in September when other campaign dynamics came into play. But in this 6-week period of contending themes, Gore moved from a double digit deficit to a 4- or 5-point lead over Bush, rising to 8 points (52 to 44 percent) in a head-to-head contest, according to the Gore campaign's own surveys.³

³ The Gore campaign has authorized the use of some of their surveys to assist in the preparation of this report.



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Clinton-economy

Because Clinton had a relatively high job approval rating (58 percent at the end of the campaign) and because the economy is strong, some have proposed that Gore would have been better served by running on the Clinton-Gore economic successes. It is worth highlighting a few aspects of the electoral environment in 2000 that bear on this question:

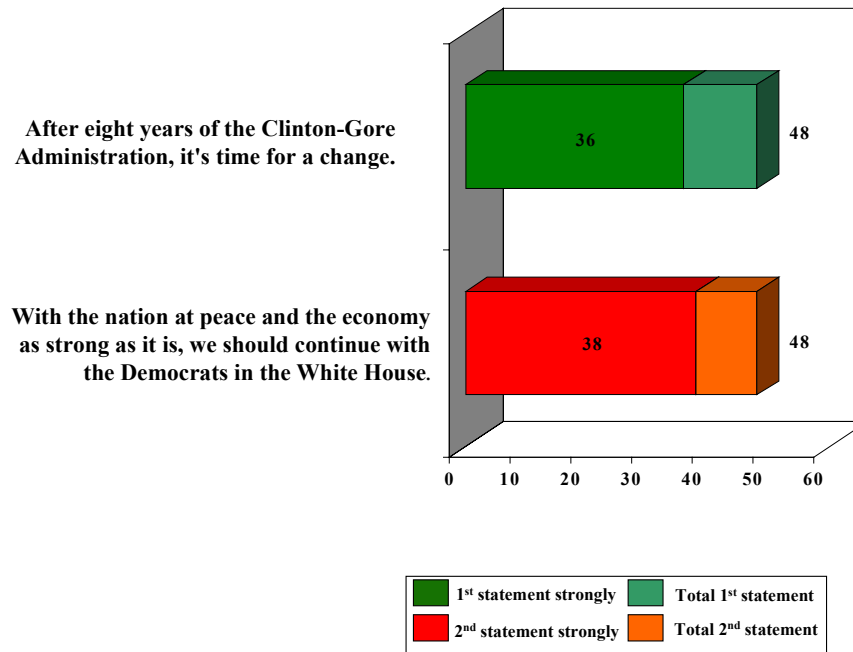
- The Gore campaign did, in fact, run on the economy. Its message of “prosperity for all, not just the few” was premised on continuing the prosperity. In the last phase of the campaign, after doubts about Bush had set in, Gore spoke (and advertised) about America putting its house in order – moving from high deficits and unemployment to low unemployment and rising surpluses – which George W. Bush would put at risk. On Election Day, Al Gore achieved a 9-point advantage over Bush on handling the economy.
- While Bill Clinton had a high job approval rating for his performance as president, people are much more conflicted about him as a person and leader. Nearly as many voters viewed him unfavorably as favorably (43 to 46 percent). The right’s cultural war to bring down Clinton and the impeachment took its toll, leaving voters doubtful on trust and values. These complex feelings about Clinton made it difficult to advance themes that put Clinton at the center of the narrative.
- Because of the mix of material and values concerns, the country was divided down the middle on whether this was a time for continuity or change: 48 percent believed that “with the nation at peace and the economy as it is, we should continue with the Democrats in the White House”; but an equal number said that “after eight years of the Clinton-Gore administration, it’s time for a change.”⁴ Economic success and continuity were insufficient thematic concepts to build a real Democratic majority. As we saw earlier, extending the prosperity to all families and into the future was a much more powerful theme.

⁴ This question was used in the Gore research and developed by Hickman-Brown.



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Continue or Change

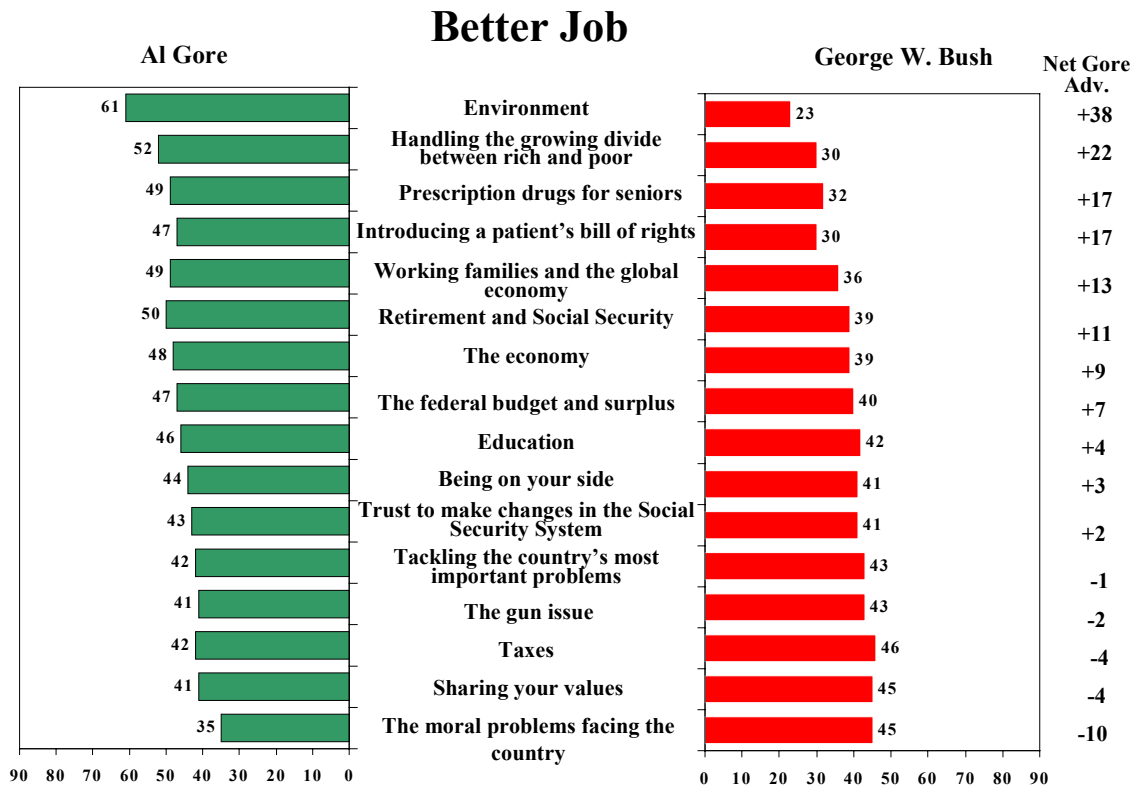


The issues and public agenda

When all is said and done, voters strongly favored Gore's, rather than Bush's, approach to the issues facing the country. The dramatic advantage of Democrats on the issues is displayed in the graph below.



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Gore completely dominated issues related to social insurance – retirement and Social Security (+ 10 points over Bush), HMO reform (+ 17 points) and prescription drugs (+17 points). While Bush tried to capture those issues, in the end, voters trusted Gore to do a better job in these areas of social support.

Not surprisingly, Gore's biggest advantage was on the environment (+ 38 points), where the two candidates debated energy policy and oil drilling in fragile areas of Alaska.

As we pointed out earlier, Gore finished with a 9-point lead on who would do a better job on the economy. Consistent with Gore's broader message, he was seen as better on handling the divide between rich and poor and with the challenges facing working families in the global economy.

On fiscal and tax issues, Gore more than held his own. On who would do a better job with the budget and surplus, voters chose Gore, remarkably, by 7 points (47 to 40 percent). The days of Democrats being seen as instinctively profligate on federal spending and budgets seem to be in the past. In fact, Bush finished with only a 4-point advantage on handling taxes (46 to 42 percent). These are areas that Bush should have dominated, yet Gore proved more than credible on taxes, spending and managing the budget.



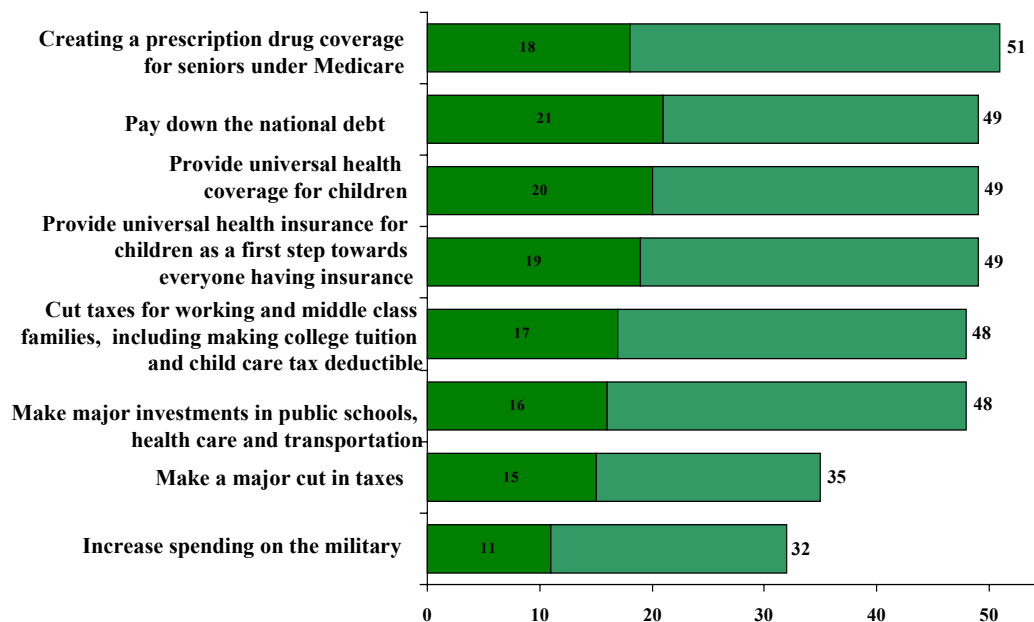
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For Bush, finishing with only a 4-point advantage on taxes – the core of his philosophy – is a measure of his relative thematic weakness. The attacks on the scale of Bush's tax cuts and their bias for the wealthiest were effective and undermined Bush's rationale for being President.

Gore held the advantage on tax and spending because the electorate agreed with him on what should happen at this moment of budget surpluses. By 57 to 36 percent, voters agreed with Gore that "we need to invest in education and a secure retirement" rather than Bush who said, "we need across the board tax cuts."

With the federal budget projected to be in surplus over the next 10 years, voters were asked what priority they would give to the various options. The results are telling and send a signal about what voters thought they were saying in the election. At the top of their priority list was prescription drug coverage for seniors (51 percent the single highest or among the top few priorities), paying down the national debt (49 percent) and providing universal health coverage for children (49 percent). At the bottom of their list was making major tax cuts (35 percent) and increasing spending on the military (32 percent).

Future Priorities





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The larger Gore progressive majority

In this survey, we asked Gore voters and the Bush voters who said they at least considered supporting Gore, what the best reasons to support him were. Together, the Gore and “consider-Gore” voters constituted 60 percent of the electorate and obviously the outer limit of what Gore or any Democrat might have achieved in this election.

This potential Gore larger majority was attracted to Gore because of his commitment to a secure retirement and investing in education, because of his populist positioning, his stands on the right to choose and the environment, and his approach to fiscal issues—particularly middle class tax cuts, balancing the budget and paying down the national debt.

The best reasons for supporting for Gore appear in the graph below. The two dominant reasons, cited by about a third of these voters, center on a secure retirement (protecting Social Security and adding a prescription drug benefit) and investing in education (more teachers and smaller class size). About a third mention some element of Gore’s populist positioning in the race – making sure prosperity enriches all not just the few, his willingness to stand up to the HMOs, drug and oil companies and his opposition to a tax cut for the top 1 percent.

A quarter of the electorate said his position on a woman’s right to choose was one of the best reasons to support Gore.

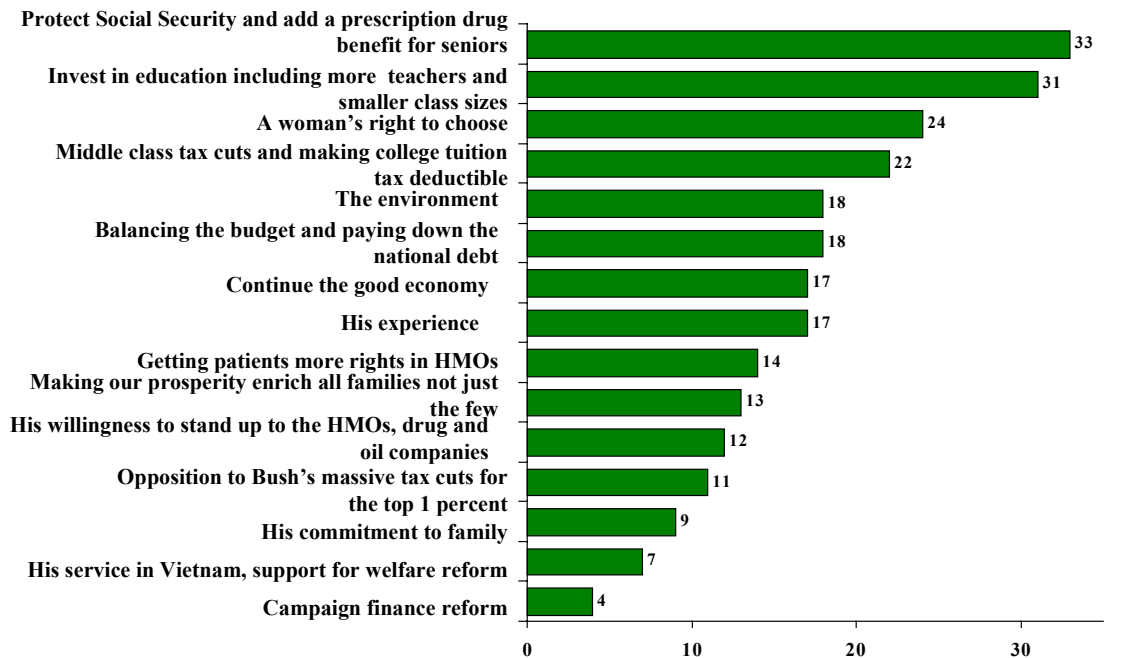
Nearly a quarter cited Gore’s support for middle class tax cuts, particularly to go to college. Another 18 percent focused in on Gore’s desire to balance the budget and pay down the debt. That means, overall, almost 40 percent of these voters cited Gore’s fiscally cautious approach to the budget and tax relief.

For the weak Gore voters – ones who might have been attracted to Bush – they chose the same top issues, but gave somewhat more weight to Gore’s experience, which was a factor in their choice to stay with Gore. For the weak Bush voters – the ones who might have switched to Gore – they too chose these top issues, but gave greater importance to Gore’s commitment to paying down the debt. They were tempted by his focus on retirement, education and fiscal prudence but held back from making the switch.



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Reasons to Vote for Al Gore



"Let me read you a list of reasons to vote for Al Gore. Which THREE best describe the issues and qualities that led you to vote for/consider voting for him?"

Al Gore's attacks on Bush and the thematic and issue contrasts successfully defined Bush as a candidate of the wealthy and most privileged, who would potentially endanger Social Security, oppose a woman's right to choose and whose Texas record left him with uncertain experience for the job.

The starting point in the doubts about Bush is his commitment to the most privileged. "Favoring the wealthiest and most privileged" (22 percent) and "his squandering the surplus on a massive tax cut for the wealthy" (19 percent)—together comprised 41 percent of the responses on the best reason to be against George W. Bush.

A quarter of the voters said the best reason to vote against Bush was "his risky plan to privatize and take a trillion dollars out of Social Security."

Another quarter focused on Bush's "opposition to a woman's right to choose."

Bush's inexperience and not being up to the job were also a significant factor: 21 percent mentioned his inexperience in foreign affairs and 11 percent his simply not being up to the job – together constituting a third of the responses on why they did not vote for Bush.

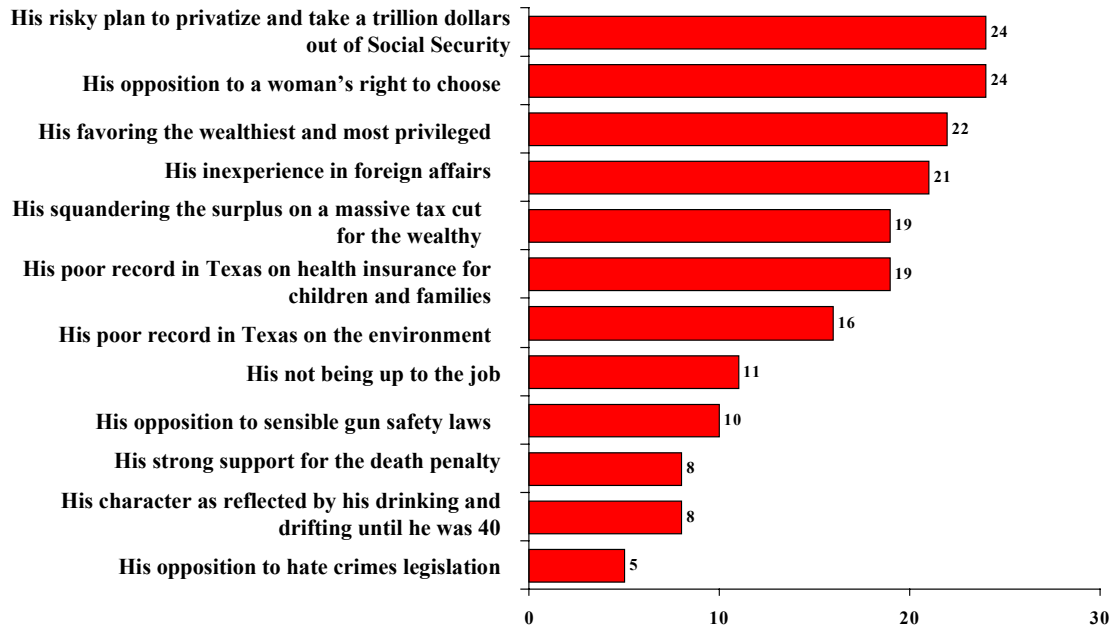
Doubts about Bush being up for the job were reinforced by doubts about his Texas record on health insurance (19 percent) and the environment (16 percent). The fo-



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cus on Bush's Texas record was most pronounced in the battleground states (40 percent for health insurance and the environment combined) – the main subject of Gore television advertising over almost three months.

Doubts about Voting for George W. Bush



*"Let me read you a list of doubts about George W. Bush. Regardless of how you voted, which **THREE** describe the best reasons for not voting for him?"*

In Election 2000, Gore drew a sharp contrast between himself and George W. Bush—centered on the Democrats' strongest issue and thematic terrain. In the process, he appealed to a broad set of voters. Gore's (and Bush's) chosen thematic contrast – making our prosperity work for all *versus* trust the people not Washington – strongly favored Gore across the electorate. Gore was seen as better on the issues of the day, reinforcing that thematic choice – from the economy and Social Security to prescription drugs and a Patient's Bill of Rights. Voters liked that Gore wanted to invest but also intended to balance the budget and pay down the debt. Indeed, the best reasons to vote for Gore centered on his overall populist positioning and his commitment to education and a secure retirement. The best reason not to vote for Bush was his favoritism for the most privileged, his reckless proposals on Social Security and poor preparation to make the big choices before the country. Many did not like the fact that Bush was anti-choice on abortion.



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As a battle of themes, Gore was winning around 54 percent of the vote in this election.

So, why was Al Gore unable to hold on to the larger majority?

Eroding the Gore-Progressive Majority

The Gore majority proved to be only a plurality because of four main factors – the stylistic contrast with Bush centered on trust, the cultural rebellion against Clintonism, Bush's success at blurring issues and the defection of anti-establishment Perot voters to the Republicans.

The Stylistic contrast: trust

Al Gore was handicapped in this race by being the Vice President in the shadows of a high profile President. As with other vice presidents, it leaves the public believing that Gore is a “weak” leader without his own agenda. In this case, the 8-year focus on scandals and impeachment also successfully raised questions about trust and truthfulness. The “exaggerations” – successfully highlighted by the Bush campaign and exaggerated by the media – enmeshed Gore in that world of doubts, even if he was seen as personally honest and a family man. Gore came to the race perceived not as a glad-hander, but as very tough and aggressive – an image reinforced by the primary campaign.

As a result, Al Gore trailed George W. Bush for the entire year, broken only by the 6-week period when Gore launched his overall populist thematic positioning. Indeed, for the most of the year leading up to the convention, Gore trailed Bush by an average of more than 6 percentage points.

The trust factor made itself felt at key points in the race, as can be seen in the graph below that tracks the Gore and Bush votes from the convention period onward.⁵ Gore built up a lead through three weeks in September, but his lead dropped at two points. The first was the occasion of the news flap over “exaggerations,” centered on a minor Gore misstatement about prescription drugs for his mother and his dog, followed by the proposed release from the petroleum reserve, which was seen as political. Gore's vote lead, however, quickly returned to its earlier level. But Gore's lead was erased again

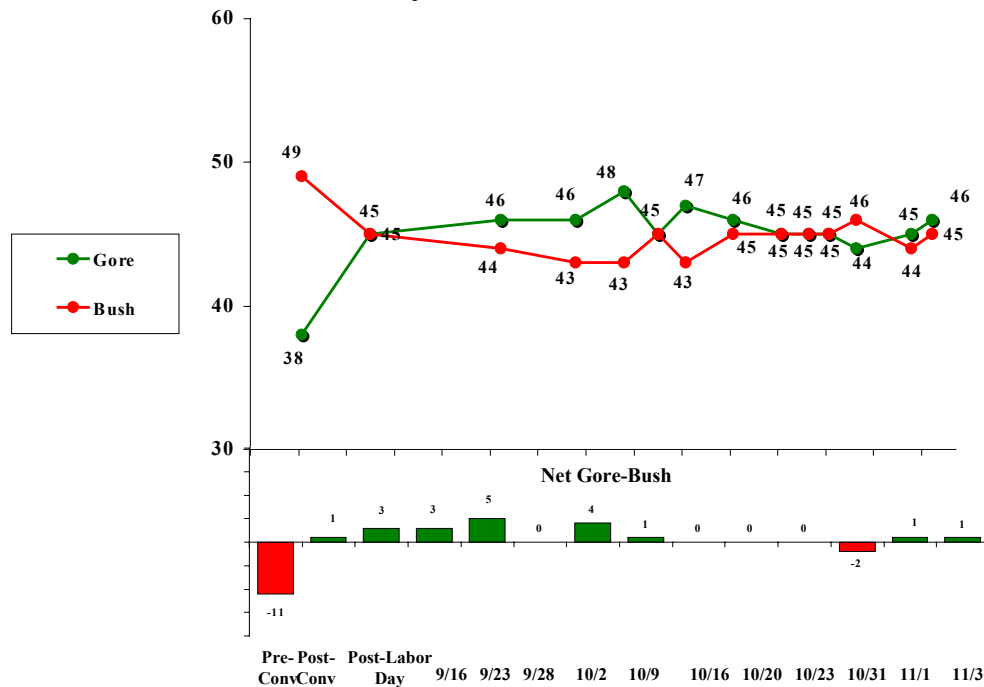
⁵ These figures are based on data provided by the Gore campaign. All points except those for 10/31 and 11/3 represent an average of two or more surveys conducted during that period.



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with the first debate where he was seen as too aggressive and where exaggerations again became an issue and trust concerns became elevated.

Four-Way Presidential Vote



Unfortunately, trust was a recurring factor in the election and a continuing doubt about Al Gore that held down his larger majority.

The Cultural Rebellion Against Clintonism

This election took place against a vivid backdrop shaped by a decade-long struggle to defeat Bill Clinton and what he represented. The failure to stop Clinton in 1992, the aborted Gingrich revolution, Clinton's victory in the 1996 election and in the impeachment war left the right in rebellion determined to end this era of "moral decline." For the ideological right, defeating Gore in 2000 was to be the final act in redeeming the country from Clintonism.

The extended battle to bring Clinton down badly tarnished his image and personal standing with the country. In this post-election survey, Clinton had a thermometer score rating of 49.1, on a 100-point scale: 46 percent of the public viewed him favorably (with



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ratings above 50 degrees) and 43 percent unfavorably (with the rating below 50 degrees).⁶

Bill Clinton's personal ratings were particularly low and the trust issue particularly pronounced in the battleground states central to an Electoral College majority. The table below makes clear that Clinton had a net negative personal standing in nearly every battleground state, except Minnesota, Michigan and Washington.⁷ Intense anti-Clinton voters outnumbered the intense pro-Clinton voters in every state—usually by a large number. Anti-Clinton sentiment was striking in Missouri, Wisconsin, Iowa, Kentucky and Ohio – where the intense anti-Clinton feeling was nearly twice as great as intense pro-Clinton sentiment. This pattern of anti-Clinton feeling in Midwest states with significant rural and small town populations was the last revenge of the right-wing cultural warriors.

The Clinton Factor

Bill Clinton's Favorability	Strongly Favorable	Strongly Unfavorable	Difference	Total Favorable	Total Unfavorable	Total Difference
Minnesota	18	26	-8	44	42	2
Michigan	24	34	-10	44	45	1
Washington	19	29	-10	44	43	1
Arkansas	23	33	-10	46	46	0
Pennsylvania	20	29	-9	42	42	0
Florida	22	32	-10	44	45	-1
Illinois	18	27	-9	42	43	-1
Arizona	19	35	-16	43	47	-4
Louisiana	21	33	-12	43	47	-4
New Mexico	22	32	-10	42	46	-4
Tennessee	23	32	-9	43	48	-5
Maine	16	28	-12	40	46	-6
Nevada	18	31	-13	41	47	-6
West Virginia	21	29	-8	40	46	-6
Oregon	19	31	-12	40	47	-7
Iowa	17	32	-15	39	46	-7
Missouri	17	33	-16	40	48	-8
Wisconsin	16	32	-16	39	47	-8
New Hampshire	15	38	-23	38	47	-9
Kentucky	17	32	-15	39	50	-11
Ohio	18	34	-16	38	50	-12

⁶ That contrasts with Al Gore (51 and 38 percent respectively) and George W. Bush (51 and 35 percent) where, in both cases, personal favorable impressions significantly outweigh unfavorable ones.

⁷ These state results for the Gore campaign come from surveys conducted by Hickman-Brown in late October.



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But Democrats need to be aware of the toll they were beginning to take on values issues, going back to the 1998 congressional elections during the impeachment battle. The values problem was somewhat obscured by the fact that Clinton had a very good election in 1996 against Bob Dole and that Democrats, against the historical trend, picked up seats in 1998. That left Democrats a little sanguine about their issues and their potential majority.

In fact, Democrats had fallen 4 points behind the Republicans on which party “shares your values” – which grew to 15 points among white voters and an alarming 25 points among married white voters.⁸ Democrats did well in 1998, compared to 1996, because of a high turnout in union households and the African-American community and because of gains with the most-educated white voters upset with the extremism of the congressional Republicans. But Democrats lost ground with non-college white voters, particularly with non-college white women (down 6 points from 1996).⁹ Even before Election 2000 began, Democrats were in trouble with white non-college and rural and small town voters -- Ruy Teixeira’s “forgotten majority.”¹⁰

The result was the cultural Election of 2000. While it is interesting to look at the demographic patterns, the most striking are the cultural divides – centered on guns, abortion and Bill Clinton.

According to the exit polls, 48 percent of the voters owned guns, up from 37 percent in 1996. That 11-point rise in the gun-owning electorate was not produced by massive gun sales; it was produced by the increased engagement and mobilization of pro-gun voters. In our post-election surveys, voters owning no guns supported Al Gore by 13 points (53 to 40 percent). Those voters with three or more guns, comprising one-fifth of the electorate, supported George W. Bush by 23 points (57 to 34 percent).

The fourth of the electorate that thinks abortion should always be legal supported Gore by 70 to 25 percent – a 45 point margin.¹¹ That was unchanged for the Democratic presidential candidate from 1996, despite the presence of pro-choice Nader voters. Gore also led strongly with those who think abortion should be legal under most circumstances (58 to 33 percent).

⁸ Anna Greenberg and Stanley Greenberg, “Adding Values” *American Prospect* August 28, 2000.

⁹ The findings on voting changes among various demographic groups are based on the exit polls, conducted by VNS.

¹⁰ Ruy Teixeira and Joel Rogers, *The Forgotten Majority: Why the White Working Class Still Matters*. New York: Basic Books, 2000.

¹¹ The findings on abortion and the vote are based on the exit poll results.



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But the anti-choice electorate moved powerfully against the Democrats. Those who said abortion should be illegal under most circumstances supported Bush by 40 points (69 to 29 percent). The Republican margin increased 15 points. The most anti-choice section of the electorate – the 13 percent who say abortion should always be illegal – voted almost unanimously for Bush (74 to 22 percent), a 15 point margin, up 7-points from 1996.

Attitudes toward Clinton produced an even greater polarization of the electorate. Among certain Gore voters, just 6 percent had a *very* unfavorable view of Clinton, which rose to 14 percent for those who supported Gore but wavered during the campaign. Among the weak Bush voters who considered Gore, 57 percent had a very unfavorable view of Clinton. But among the certain Bush voters, intense anti-Clinton sentiment was pervasive – 85 percent viewing Clinton very unfavorably.

The elevation of these cultural issues helped contribute to a reduction of the Democratic presidential vote among white Catholics: Gore lost 45 to 52 percent – a 7 point deficit, after a 7-point win in 1996. White devout evangelicals voted almost to a person for Bush, 80 to 18 percent.

The cultural rebellion, reflected in these groups, was offset by strong Gore support, as indicated earlier, among pro-choice voters, but also among African Americans (90 to 9 percent, an 81 point margin and up from 72 points 4 years earlier), gays and lesbians (70 to 25 percent), Latinos (62 to 35 percent) and union households (59 to 26 percent).¹²

We now know that if we have a cultural election, we can divide the country right down the middle – with the Democrats marching up the two coasts, the Republicans overrunning the South and Mountain states, and the two parties evenly matched in the Midwest, with the Democrats maybe slightly ahead. But dividing the country down the middle along cultural lines undermines the majority there for Gore's candidacy and his progressive positioning.

That cultural divide played out directly in the campaign and voters' decision-making, which reduced the size of the Democratic majority in 2000.

¹² The Gore margin among union households, +22 points, was slightly down from 1996 (+29 points), but that is very misleading. In 1996, 9 percent of union households voted for Ross Perot, thus suppressing the Republican vote. And this year, 3 percent voted for Ralph Nader, thus suppressing the Democratic vote. Given those dynamics, the union vote for Gore was impressive and a critical counterweight to the cultural wave that swept more traditional sections of the electorate.



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Pulling back from Gore

The people who voted for Bush or considered supporting him based that judgment, above all, on factors related to the Clinton era rebellion – restoring honor and dignity to the White House (31 percent), restoring America's military strength (31 percent), and restoring family values (23 percent).

That Bush would cut taxes was important (26 percent), but by no means a dominant draw for Bush.

Together, reducing the number of abortions (20 percent) and protecting the rights of gun owners (18 percent) are at least as important.

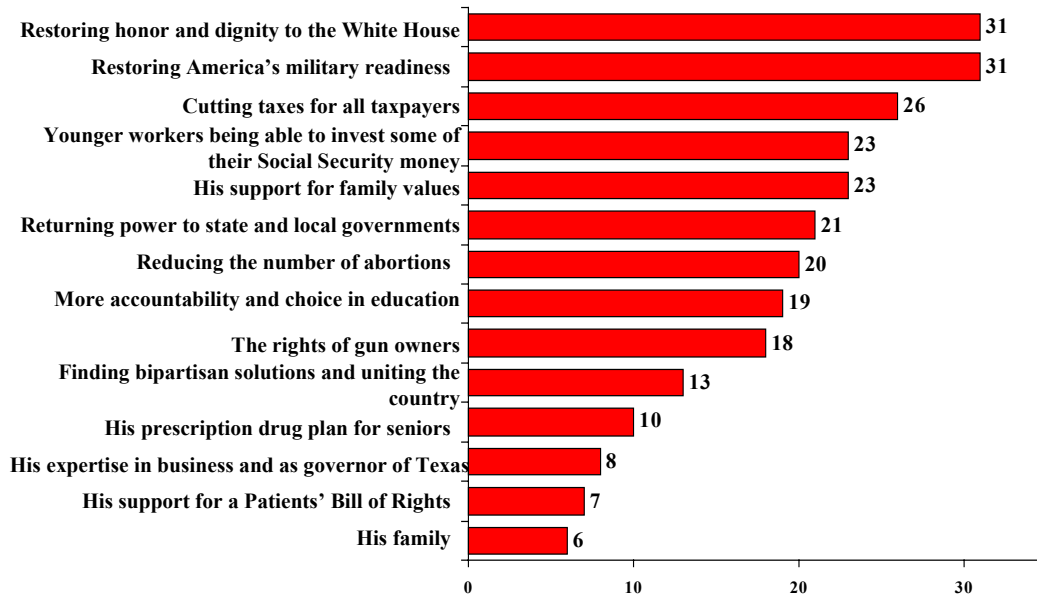
That he would return power to state and local governments, away from the federal government, was mentioned by 21 percent. Attitudes toward government were clearly less important than the range of values issues.

On the other hand, there is some evidence of voters being interested in his proposals on Social Security and education. A sizeable 23 percent of the electorate mention the opportunity to privately invest some Social Security funds and 19 percent mention more accountability and choice in education. Indeed, those were the two best reasons wavering Gore voters gave for possibly supporting Bush.



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Reasons to Vote for George W. Bush



"Let me read you a list of reasons to vote for George W. Bush. Which THREE best describe the issues and qualities that led you to vote for/consider voting for him?"

Voters turned away from Al Gore, in the first instance, on cultural concerns, followed by concerns with trust and the role of government. But the cultural minefield caused the most damage, moving non-college white women and younger non-college white men to Bush and unraveling the larger progressive majority in the country.

The biggest collection of doubts center on cultural concerns: legalizing unions of gay couples (20 percent) and his position on abortion (19 percent) and guns (16 percent). Affirmative action was a small figure (4 percent), but together, all the cultural factors constituted 59 percent of the responses on not voting for Gore. Among the wavering Bush voters – who might have been won over to Gore under other circumstances – the cultural doubts constituted 74 percent of the responses.

The second set of reasons to vote against Gore cluster around the concept of trust. In the largest single response, 29 percent cited "exaggerations and untruthfulness," buttressed by the 17 percent who specifically agreed with Gore "being too close to Clinton." Together, 46 percent of the responses are about trust. While the trust issue was expressed in the campaign through exaggeration, it too is caught up in the cultural rebellion against Clintonism.

The 3rd ranked set of reasons to vote against Gore cluster around the role of government, adding to 43 percent of the responses. The voters who were most skeptical about government divide between three concepts: his support for big government solu-

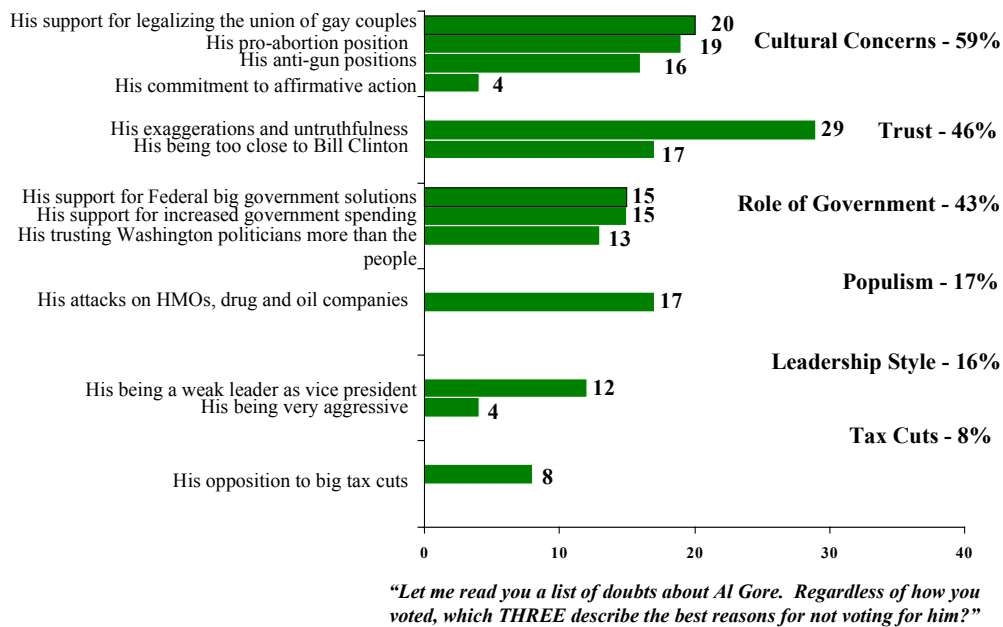


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tions (15 percent), his support for increased government spending (15 percent) and his trusting Washington politicians more than the people (13 percent). Obviously, the campaign could have done more to reassure on these issues, but it is not these doubts that played the primary role in suppressing the Gore vote. Overall, Gore's approach to government won him votes.

Populism itself, or at least the attacks on the HMOs, drug and oil companies, was mentioned by a mere 17 percent.

Doubts about Voting for Al Gore



As a consequence of these doubts – particularly about cultural issues and trust – voters turned to Bush more than Gore on values. In the earlier graph illustrating which candidate would do a better job on a broad range of issues, we saw that Bush was preferred by 4 points on values and by 10 points on addressing the moral problems facing the country. (Had we asked about the military, Bush's lead would have been close to 20 percent, based on other available polls.) By contrast, Gore had the advantage on issues related to spending, such as the federal budget and surplus.

In the regression model that we developed for explaining people's vote choice, there were two dominant sets of factors. Among the four top predictors of the vote, two relate to values (which candidate shares your values and will address the moral problems facing the country) and two relate to a populist orientation (which candidate is on your



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side and will handle the divide between rich and poor). Together, the values factors are slightly more powerful than the populist factors.¹³

The cultural and trust issues, together played out across the demographic map, with consequences for Gore and the Democrats this year:

- Younger non college white men gave as their strongest reason to vote for Bush – the rights of gun owners (37 percent) and the need to restore the military (35 percent). They voted against Gore because of concerns about trust, his closeness to Clinton (together, 54 percent) and his anti-gun position (34 percent). According to our post election poll, these voters supported Bush by 64 to 32 percent, a 32-point margin. That is double the thematic margin achieved by Bush on his anti-government message.¹⁴
- Non-college white women took note of Bush wanting to restore honor and dignity to the White House (33 percent) and his wanting to restore family values (31 percent) – as the two best reasons to vote for Bush. They turned away from Gore because of trust (28 percent) and Clinton (18 percent) and because of gay unions (24 percent) and abortion (22 percent). These voters went for Bush by 7 points (52 to 45 percent), though they favored Gore on the big thematic choice (by 21 points).
- Non-college white men brought together the concerns of the white younger non college men and non-college women, which together produced a landslide vote for Bush in the non-college white male world (64 to 33 percent), a 31 point margin. Bush enjoyed only a 12-point lead in the thematic battle.

That in every case the Bush vote margin far exceeded the Bush thematic margin suggests that these voters were driven to Bush by the cultural forces at work in this election.

Compounding the Cultural Problems

Some cultural forces worked for Gore and progressives, particularly tolerance, openness to change, the new roles for women and the right to choose. Thus, in this election, Gore support for the right to choose was one of the top reasons to support him; Bush's being anti-choice was one of the top reasons to shun him. Successful progres-

¹³ After these two dominant sets of factors, the strongest predictors were, in rank order, the economy (who would do a better job), prescription drugs and then taxes.

¹⁴ Younger voters are defined as respondents who under 50.



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sives, therefore, will figure out how to combine their commitment to broaden the country's bounty and their commitment to the modern family and gender roles.

Nonetheless, the cultural distance of Gore and Democrats was elevated by a number of factors special to this election – Bradley and Nader.

In the primary, Bradley and Gore competed to be the most correct on abortion, gay civil unions and guns. Musings 14 years ago about parental notification were the cause of controversy; gun registration competed with gun-owner licensing; the legal foundations of gay unions made it in the national public discourse for the first time. Clear in his convictions, Gore continued to give voice to these issues and positions, especially in the national presidential debates.

Ralph Nader's candidacy elevated the role of cultural issues in this election. For most of the fall campaign, Nader garnered 4 to 5 percent, almost half of which shifted to Gore in the final weekend. The Nader voters and particularly those that shifted to Gore were younger and extremely secular. They were, above all, pro-choice, which is the single biggest reason (followed by the environment) these voters shifted to Gore.

To bring over the Nader voters, who were critical to a Gore win, the campaign made direct appeals to these voters focused on choice and the environment in Oregon and Wisconsin. Based on public polling and the final tallies, it seems that the Nader vote in Oregon was cut in half. Nonetheless to address the Nader question, the Gore campaign was forced to give even more attention to cultural issues in order to consolidate the progressive majority.

Issue Blurring

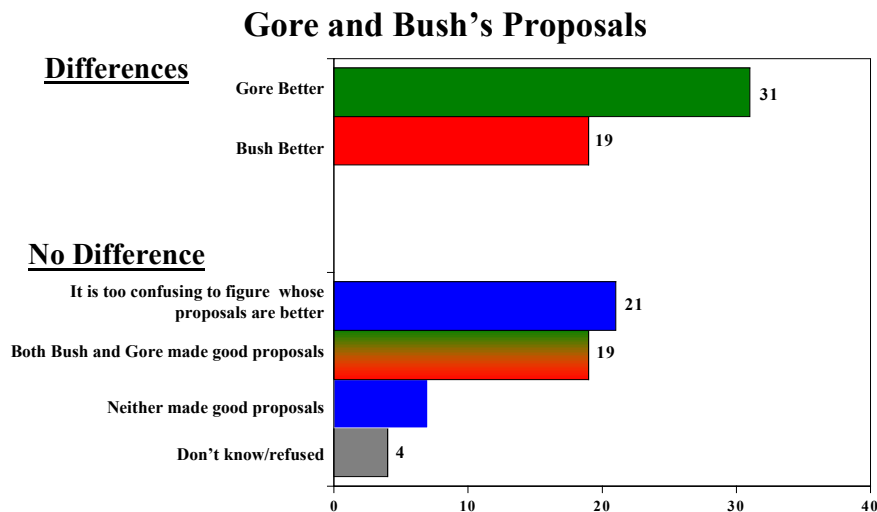
The Bush campaign helped push the election off of issues and on to values and trust by demonstrating a reasonableness and by creating confusion on the big issues of the day.

Bush demonstrated a reasonableness and caught the interest of some voters on education and, to some extent, Social Security. On education, Gore enjoyed only a 3-point advantage, which is historically very low for a Democrat. On Social Security, Bush promised secure benefit levels for seniors and the ability of young workers to invest. He did not succeed in winning the Social Security issue, as voters preferred Gore on the question by 11 points; on prescription drugs, Gore was favored by 17 points. However, voters chose Gore by only 3 points on changing the Social Security system. While voters may have preferred Gore to preserve the system's basic insurance quality, Bush got heard as someone willing to promote change, without undermining the system. This was no Bob Dole who was ready to dismantle the Department of Education.



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The overall impact of these exchanges on issues was to create confusion and uncertainty on issues – undermining some of the potential power of the progressive issue contrasts in the 2000 election. A large majority of the country's voters thought the election involved very big differences (67 percent), but on the issues of education, a Patient's Bill of Rights and prescription drugs, half the voters found no difference due to confusion, lack of difference or lack of known specifics. Those who could cut through the back and forth debate mostly concluded that Gore had better ideas, but that advantage was seriously neutralized by the nature of the debate.



"Both Al Gore and George W. Bush proposed plans on education, a Patient's Bill of Rights, and prescription drugs for seniors. On these, which of the following is true?"

By running as a benign candidate, committed to preserving social insurance and improving public services, Bush was able to improve his standing on issues. It did not erase the Gore issue advantage or undermine the thematic contrast but it did make the debate more confusing and made the Republicans look less threatening. That may have allowed some voters, who support the Democrats on the issues, to vote their concerns in the cultural world.

The Anti-Establishment Vote

In the last two presidential elections, there was an anti-establishment, anti-political reform bloc that voted for Ross Perot – 1 in 5 voters in 1992 and 1 in 10 in 1996. Many of those voters would have supported John McCain, given the chance in 2000. These anti-establishment voters are historically more Republican, but based on earlier research, they are dislodged from both parties. Still, absent Perot, they would have split evenly in 1992 and would have split 2 to 1 for Dole in 1996.



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The Perot voters of 1996 – 9 percent of the electorate and this post-election survey – without a clear reformist option – went overwhelmingly for Bush (59 to 32 percent). That helps account for the shift to Bush among white men, under 30 voters and high school graduates.¹⁵

The Perot voters today are more male, younger and non-college. They are more libertarian, anti-elitist and anti-political. They are anti big corporations and big government. They are, at the core, anti-Clinton. After all, most had voted against Bill Clinton in both 1992 and 1996 and viewed him very negatively in this election: 34 thermometer score (26 percent favorable and 55 percent unfavorable). Thus, according to our post-election surveys, they voted against Gore because of trustworthiness and exaggerations. They voted for Bush because he would restore honor and dignity to the White House and because he would restore the military. They preferred Gore's more populist theme about making sure America's prosperity enrich all, not just the few (by a 3-point margin), but that was not strong enough to win them over. They were ready to cast an anti-establishment and anti-political vote and in this election, Al Gore was not the candidate of choice.

* * * * *

By all accounts, the 2000 elections were historic. Most will focus on the closeness of the race and the unprecedented 5-week struggle to count votes and establish a legitimate winner. But the election was special in other ways that should not get lost amidst the constitutional controversy and the attempts to find bi-partisan avenues across the partisan divides. Al Gore won the election and perhaps more important for our purposes, a majority of Americans cast their ballots for Democratic and progressive candidates, which has not happened before in the post-Reagan era. But the 51-percent majority for the candidates of the center-left grows to at least 54 percent for the progressive themes and issues they championed.

The election should not produce a smug satisfaction that our ideas are ascendant, certainly not with conservatives holding precariously to power in all our national institutions. Instead, it should produce a focus on the genuine concerns that kept our ideas and investment agenda from being fully realized. Cultural distance, values and trust are powerful concepts that shaped the decisions voters made this year and diminished the power and relevance of our ideas.

To be successful, the Democratic Party will continue to be an open and modern party—receptive to change that supports: individual opportunity and rights, new gender

¹⁵ Results based on the exit polls.



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roles and new family issues. It will resist racial and religious barriers. In the conflict between community and private interests, we tilt toward the community. Thus, Democrats will fight discrimination and defend the right to choose. It will be instinctively pro-environment. It will be cautious about guns, but also cautious about an issue that produces a losing cultural battle—particularly in the current political environment.

But to break the impasse, Democrats need to build a natural affinity with their broad popular base on family and values concerns. The white non-college majority takes its religious faith seriously, but it is also tolerant and uncomfortable with politicians who would impose religious practices on others. These voters are ready to respond to progressives and a populism that respects faith and that wants to help families in their complex responsibilities. This is fully consistent with being an open and tolerant party that advances rights, as well as responsibilities.

Democrats have an opportunity to consolidate their larger majority if they seek to win over the reformist and anti-establishment voters. The pundits are waiting around for John McCain to claim them, but in this new period, Democrats should be the reformers, fighting for ordinary people and impatient with special-interest privilege. We should fight big money in politics and demand responsive, accountable government. Today, George W. Bush is the establishment.

The progressive majority was very real in the 2000 elections, but so were the forces that undermined it. We now have the opportunity to build bonds that can create something more enduring.