



CONFIDENTIAL MEMORANDUM

TO: Interested Parties

FROM: Tony Fabrizio

RE: Closing Bush's Job "Approval Gap" – the Key to
Unlocking an 8 Point Bush Lead

DATE: July 14, 2004

One of the more troubling findings from our recently completed survey of 1000 likely voters in the 19 battleground states is the sizeable "gap" that exists between President Bush's job approval score and his vote. We found that in these key states, 8.6% of the voters APPROVED of the job George Bush is doing as President, yet they were NOT voting for him. We call this the "approval gap."

A cursory glance at the aggregate results from our survey, would tell the knowledgeable observer that a "gap" existed, as overall President Bush received a 51.6% positive job approval rating, yet he only received 44.3% of the vote. To the casual observer this "gap" would appear to be 7.3%. However, since in reality the President does actually receive a minor amount of votes from those who disapprove of the job he is doing, the actual number of those who approve, but do not vote for him – the "approval gap" is 8.6%.

In a close election, this "approval gap" is crucial to the President. However at present this 8.6% of the vote isn't just sitting on the sidelines, they appear to be choosing up sides AGAINST the President DESPITE approving of his job. Here's how this 8.6% of the vote stacks up:

John Kerry holds a superior image.

- While President Bush holds roughly a 5 to 3 favorable to unfavorable ratio (47.7% favorable to 30.2% unfavorable) with these voters, John Kerry holds a far superior 3.5 to 1 ratio (53.5% favorable to 15.1% unfavorable).

These voters are pessimistic about the country and economy.

- 52.3% see the country headed down the “wrong track” while only 30.2% see it headed in the “right direction.”
- By better than a 2 to 1 margin (47.7% to 20.9%) they say that things in the country are worse off than they were 4 years ago.
- They are pessimistic about the economy as nearly 3 in 4 (72.1%) see the state of the national economy as fair or poor.
- A clear majority (57%) rate their own personal financial situation as only fair or poor.
- And by better than a 3 to 1 margin (37.2% to 10.5%) they see jobs in their area DECREASING as opposed to increasing.

Kerry is winning the communications “war.”

- They are more likely to have seen, read or heard something about John Kerry’s campaign recently (75.6% Kerry vs. 66.3% Bush).
- And what they heard about Kerry’s campaign made them MORE likely to vote for him by a 2 to 1 margin (40% more likely vs. 20% less likely) as opposed to a split based on what they heard about the President’s campaign (28.1% more likely vs. 29.8% less likely).
- A plurality claimed to have seen ads critical of both Kerry and Bush (32.6%) with 24.4% saying they saw more ads critical of the President versus 20.9% saying John Kerry.

Kerry is getting their votes.

- 54.7% of these voters are already voting for John Kerry, 14% are voting for Ralph Nader and 31.4% are undecided.

Recapturing a majority of these voters and closing the “approval gap” is the key to unlocking an 8 point Bush lead.

- If President Bush were to garner what Kerry currently receives from “approval gap” voters, it would result in sizeable vote shift with Bush receiving 49% to Kerry’s 40.7% -- an 8.3% lead!

Focusing on “approval gap” voters versus Undecided voters will yield a better return on investment.

- “Approval gap” voters aren’t predisposed against the President personally. They approve of the job he is doing and he holds a 5 to 3 favorable to unfavorable ratio which is far better than the 1 to 1 he receives overall.
- Undecided voters are predisposed against the President personally. They DISAPPROVE of his job by more than 6 points and give him a net UNFAVORABLE image rating of more than 7 points.
- “Approval gap” voters are less pessimistic about the direction of the country and the economy than Undecided voters.

Direction of Country	“Approval Gap” Voters (8.6% of Sample)	Undecided Voters (6.8% of Sample)
Right Track	30.2%	23.5%
Wrong Direction	52.3	52.9
NET +/-	-22.1	-29.4

Country as Compared to 4 Years Ago	“Approval Gap” Voters	Undecided Voters
Better Off	20.9%	8.8%
Worse Off	47.7	52.9
Same	29.1	27.9
NET +/-	-26.7	-44.1

National Economy	“Approval Gap” Voters	Undecided Voters
Excellent/Good	25.6%	20.6%
Fair/Poor	72.1	72.1
NET +/-	-46.5	-51.5

Personal Financial Situation	“Approval Gap” Voters	Undecided Voters
Excellent/Good	41.9%	30.9%
Fair/Poor	57.0	60.3
NET +/-	-15.1	-29.4

Not closing the "Approval Gap," would require a significant increase in President Bush's overall net job approval to reach the same 49% of the vote achievable by just closing the "gap".

- Currently among all voters, President Bush's net positive is 5.3% (51.6% approve versus 46.3% disapprove). If the "approval gap" stays as is, his job approval would need to increase to nearly 58% with his disapproval dropping to almost 40% (a net job approval increase of 13%) to yield enough support to reach 49% of the vote.

The key to closing this "approval gap" lays in redefining John Kerry with these voters.

- Kerry has virtually NO negatives with "approval gap" voters as only 15.1% view him unfavorably as compared to 30.9% who view him unfavorably among undecideds and 38% overall.
- "Approval gap" voters do NOT view Kerry as liberal as do the rest of the voters. While 55% of all voters see Kerry as a liberal, only 43% of "approval gap" voters did. "Approval gap" voters were also more likely to see Kerry as a moderate (29.1%) compared to voters overall (21.3%). Moreover, nearly 1 in 5 of "approval gap" voters (19.8%) could NOT say where Kerry was ideologically.

Conclusion:

In a campaign that is fought at the margins over ever shrinking slivers of the electorate, no sliver is more important or more pre-disposed to being recaptured by the Bush campaign than "approval gap" voters.

There is no question that the Bush team needs to continue to try and drive increases in the President's overall job approval. Because if the President's job disapproval rating should increase beyond where it is in this survey currently, President Bush's re-election would be in serious doubt.

But to maximize every hard fought point of approval increase, this "gap" needs to be closed. Therefore a two pronged effort is needed. One prong would focus on bolstering perceptions of the economy and future (hopefully bolstering the President's job approval) while the other focuses on redefining John Kerry.

Based on this data, that is the key to closing the “approval gap” and putting President Bush back where he belongs – comfortably in the lead.

About the Poll

The telephone survey was conducted in the 19 battleground states in which the Bush and Kerry campaigns have focused their paid media efforts to this point. The sample of 1,000 likely Presidential voters was conducted on July 6-7, 2004 and has a margin of error of +/-3.1% at the 95% confidence interval. Respondent selection was at random within predetermined geographic units to reflect actual electoral vote allotment to each state. The battleground states used for the survey were AR, AZ, CO, FL, IA, LA, ME, MI, MN, MO, NH, NM, NV, OH, OR, PA, WA, WI, WV.