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THE 2004 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS:  
HOW MUCH DO ISSUES INFLUENCE THE VOTE?

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. MANN: Good morning, everyone. I'm delighted to welcome you or welcome you back to Brookings for this series, which is cosponsored by Princeton's Woodrow Wilson School and The Brookings Institution, on the elections.

If you've been here before, you know our objective is to see if we can't rise above daily punditry and see if, in fact, there aren't some more general findings and observations about elections and presidential elections, in particular, that would help us understand what's going on this year and what might transpire in the less-than-three weeks remaining before the election.

I've been delighted to co-direct this enterprise with my friend, Larry Bartels, who is the Donald Stokes Professor of Politics and Public Affairs at Princeton. Larry and I are the constants in this series, and we've had the good fortune of attracting a stellar cast of electoral scholars and distinguished journalists to take part in this enterprise.

As I told Susan Page, who is Washington Bureau Chief for *USA Today*—and I think known to all of you through public radio, television, and her writings in *USA Today*—we've invited first-rate journalists to keep the electoral scholars honest, to make sure that we bring back what we think we might know in a more general sense to the situation

this year, in 2004. I'm delighted that Susan has joined us today.

On Susan's left, from your perspective, is another good friend of mine, of many years standing, Byron Shafer, who's the Hawkins Chair of Political Science at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Byron spent 16 years as the Mellon Chair at Oxford University and has, over the years, helped us understand much about American politics, including political conventions, but more recently helped us understand issues and ideologies, and that will be the focus of his remarks today.

We also have with us Benjamin Page, who's the Gordon Fulcher Professor in the Department of Political Science at Northwestern University and who's written an important book, *The Rational Public: 50 Years of Trends in American Policy Preferences*, and has most recently been a part of the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations study of public opinion on foreign policy. He was in town, just recently, making a series of important presentations on that.

Our first two sessions dealt with partisanship and then campaign effects. As part of the first discussion, we talked about the polls and how to read them, how reliable they were, and how important the partisan composition of sample was in understanding what was being presented to us.

The second event came the day after the first presidential debate, and we had findings from past elections suggesting the magnitude of debates effects. Larry presented some very interesting information on how the element most subject to change during debates has to do with the image of the candidate. If one actually tracks the pre-debate polls before the first debate and the post-debate polls after the last one, you'll see, I think, quite conclusively, that most of the movement occurred on the challenger and on those very personal image dimensions.

Now we have our third session on the role of issues in campaigns, following the final presidential debates. First, though, a preview: The next session, two weeks hence, will be on mobilization and turnout, probably the most important issues at that time as both parties and their allied supporters work to get out their vote, and then two weeks hence, the final session will be on mandates and governance.

Today, we're going to be exploring a whole range of questions. Are elections about the past or the future? Candidates always say they're about the future. Some of us may suggest democratic accountability works primarily through the mechanism of retrospective voting.

Are specific issues important, or is it more a matter of broad ideologies? Do parties own issues? How do

they come to own them, and can that be altered during the course of a presidential campaign?

To what extent are issues important as a choice of alternatives for voters? That's certainly the model many journalists have. I would call it the "good government/ League of Women Voters" perspective on the role of issues. For instance, the candidate clearly lays out what he's going to do on Iraq, the other candidate does the same, and then the public decides between those competing choices.

It turns out that may be a good way; it may be a lousy way. There may be too little information that voters actually absorb to be able to make that choice. It may be that what candidates say is their position on the future is an unreliable guide to how they will perform in office and much better is to look at their past performance in office.

Do objective conditions determine which issues are important in a particular election, or are subjective perceptions, which can be directly influenced by the campaign itself, critical?

Those are some of the issues, matters we're going to be grappling with as we try to understand how much issues influence the vote.

It occurs to me there are three things that we want to cover, in particular, with respect to 2004. First, you can see that in the third debate, and in the subsequent campaign, President Bush has pivoted from accusing Senator

Kerry of being a flip-flopper to being a Massachusetts liberal. What do we know about the term "liberal," and the extent to which that will resonate with undecided voters or work as a way of mobilizing one's base or depressing someone else's vote?

Secondly, Iraq. We know that the President still has a substantial lead as the person most trusted to deal with terrorism and, to a smaller degree, even to deal with Iraq. But how does something as important as the war in Iraq shape the election season, directly and indirectly?

The final issue really goes to the question of those elusive, uncommitted, or undecided voters. At past sessions, I've recalled *The Daily Show's* skit on the focus group of undecided voters. Who in the world are these people? How much information do they have, and to what extent will issues—operating in some fashion or another, as referendum, as choice, as a window to the character of candidates—be relevant in their ultimate electoral choice?

Well, enough from me. We're now going to turn to Larry who will make an initial presentation with the overheads, and then we will have our discussion.

A final two points. First, a reminder that the transcripts of these sessions appear very quickly on our Web site. The first two are there. This one will be up soon after the session.

Secondly, there are copies of the overheads that Larry will be using, and Alan will be moving up the aisle and providing those copies to those who would like them.

Thank you, and we turn now to Larry.

MR. BARTELS: Thanks, Tom. Thanks, once again, to everyone at Brookings for your hospitality and to the people at the Carnegie Corporation who are supporting this project as part of their effort to promote public understanding of the American electoral process.

I want to start today by saying a little bit about ideology and a little bit about issues and a little bit about the economy and retrospective judgments about the state of the country as factors in the election.

The first picture that I have for you was inspired by a column of George Will's early this week that talked, very movingly, about the triumph of conservatism in American politics over the last 40 years.

Well, this is a measure of the ideology of prospective voters from the National Election Studies, going back not quite 40 years but more than 30 years. Part of what should be evidence from this is that there really isn't a lot of movement from year to year. The ideological complexion of the electorate has really been quite consistent over a long period of time, and so although I think it's probably right that there are more and better conservative intellectuals and public officials and pundits

than there were 40 years ago, the ideological complexion of the electorate really hasn't changed very much.

What is that ideological complexion? Well, if you follow the center line with the dots, that's the average ideological position of the electorate as a whole, on a scale that runs from zero at the most liberal end to one hundred at the most conservative end.

And importantly, this is a general question about liberal and conservative views rather than about specific issues.

You see that, on average, the line is a little bit over the 50/50 mark, which means that people are a little more attracted to the label of conservatism than they are to the label of liberalism, although their views about a lot of specific issues are actually more liberal than conservative.

The other lines that I've shown you here are the separate calculations of those average ideologies among Republican and Democratic Party identifiers.

You see that, consistently, the Republicans are more conservative and the Democrats are more liberal than the electorate as a whole. That isn't a surprise. You see a little bit of widening of that gap toward the end of this period, in the last 10 or 20 years. There's been a little bit of polarization of the parties along ideological lines, although perhaps not as much as you would expect, given all

the popular attention to that concept in the last couple of years.

You can also see a little bit of a shift in the overall electorate to the right, that is to the conservative side of the spectrum, in recent years, but again, the shift is pretty small by comparison with the overall range of possible views.

Here's the same picture. What I'm showing you now are not the views of Republican and Democratic Party identifiers along with the general electorate, but, rather, the positions that are attributed by prospective voters to Republican and Democratic presidential candidates.

So in addition to asking people themselves whether they think of themselves as liberal or conservative, they get asked to rate the candidates on this same scale.

And so what I've shown you here is the average ratings that they attribute—if they can place the candidates on these scales at all, which many people can't—the average ratings that they assign to the Republican candidate and the Democratic candidate in each election year.

Again you see that the Republicans are consistently to the right, the Democrats are consistently to the left.

One of the things that I think is interesting about this picture is that there's relatively little variation in this as well from year to year.

People seem to have noticed that McGovern was more liberal than the typical Democratic candidate and that Carter, in 1980, was more conservative than the typical Democratic candidate.

There's a little bit of an upward blip for Reagan in 1980 as well but certainly not very spectacular by comparison with the potential range of responses that people might have to these candidates, and if you look over the last 15 years or so, you see virtually no variation, at least in the perceptions that voters have of where these candidates stand ideologically.

So all of the thinking and talking about candidates positioning themselves--you know, was Bush a compassionate conservative by comparison with previous Republican candidates--to the extent that that mattered at all in terms of Bush's sense of himself or what he intended to do in office, it certainly didn't seem to register very much with prospective voters.

They mostly figure out that the Democrats are to the left and that the Republicans are to the right, and that's really about it.

The other picture that I want to show you is based not on responses to a general question about ideology but, rather, to more specific issue questions.

There are a bunch of questions in these surveys that get repeated pretty consistently, and what I'm going to

look at is a set of eight or nine of them that have been repeated consistently since the 1984 election on a variety of economic and social issues.

The economic issues include a variety of different things, but mostly things that have to do with social welfare spending, taxation, and government policy with respect to jobs. The social issues include abortion, attitudes about women, and racial attitudes, so what I'm doing is combining all of those separate responses to a bunch of individual questions into two overall indices, one of economic issue positions and one of social issue positions. Again, what I'm showing you here is the average position of the electorate as a whole and then the positions of Republican and Democratic identifiers with respect to economic and social issues.

The general patterns are roughly similar in the sense that the electorate as a whole is pretty moderate with respect to this whole range of issues, maybe a little bit conservative with respect to economic issues, especially in the last couple of elections, maybe a little bit liberal with respect to social issues, especially in the last couple of elections.

Again, the Republicans are a little more conservative on both sides, especially on economic issues. The Democrats are a little more liberal on both sides but especially with respect to social issues, and the gap may

have widened between the parties—the partisans of the two parties—a little bit in recent elections.

Well, what are the implications of these kinds of policy views for what the candidates should be doing? There are very elegant formal models in political science that explain that when you have an electorate that looks like this, and indeed, more generally, given almost any distribution of views in the electorate, what we ought to expect the candidates to do is to push their positions to the middle, that is, to try to appeal to as many people as they can by piling up right next to each other at the middle of the distribution of popular views.

You can see from this kind of picture that if the candidates are doing that, the voters haven't caught on to it. In fact, it seems to me that the candidates haven't done that. This picture is an accurate reflection of how things look, at least to the extent that we find Democratic candidates consistently to the left of the middle, Republican candidates consistently to the right of the middle.

So this elegant theoretical account of how it is that electoral pressures have to force them to be indistinguishable simply doesn't seem to work very well in practice.

Well, how are these people actually voting on the basis of these economic and social issues?

What I've done here is to divide the electorate into four cells, people who are more liberal than average and those who are more conservative than average on economic issues. So that's the distinction between the left panels and the right panels here.

And then the distinction between the top panels and the bottom panels: I've split people into those who are more conservative than the average on social issues and those who are more liberal than the average on social issues.

So we have a division in each respect between people who are to the left and to the right of the middle. Some are pretty extreme in those positions, but most are pretty close to the middle but a little bit to the left or a little bit to the right.

And the question is: What kind of voting pattern do we see in each of those four cells of the electorate? What I've done here is to show you the proportion of the total presidential vote averaged over the series of elections in each of those four cells for the Republicans and for the Democrats.

The total vote, as it happens in the surveys for these five elections, is just about even between Republicans and Democrats. The total vote for the two parties is, I think, 51 for Democrats and 49 for Republicans.

But how do those votes divide into the four cells? Well, you see there are two big bars here, each of which account for about a quarter of the electorate. One is the dark bar in the upper right. Those are people who are conservative on both economic and social issues and vote for a Republican presidential candidate. That's the bulk of Republican votes, but notice that it's only about half of the total Republican vote. The other half of the Republican vote comes from people who are either liberal on both dimensions or else cross-pressured in some way because they take conservative views on economic issues and liberal views on social issues, or vice-versa.

With respect to the Democrats, you see a very similar kind of pattern. About half of the Democratic vote and about a quarter of the total electorate consists of people who are liberal, at least a little liberal on both economic and social issues, and vote for Democratic candidates.

But again, about half of the overall Democratic coalition comes from people who aren't in that category, who are either conservative on both dimensions or liberal on one dimension and conservative on the other dimension.

And so the point here is that both parties have these complex kinds of balancing acts in which they can't simply appeal to people on the basis of a consistent ideology because there is no consistent ideology that

attracts majority support, given the distribution of views in the country as a whole. And so, not surprisingly, in a two-party majoritarian system, the parties have to put together packages of issue positions that appeal to people in ways that are more complicated than you might guess just on the basis of their rhetoric.

More specifically, where are those votes coming from? Well, sometimes the pattern changes.

Here's an interesting example of a pretty significant change in voting patterns on the basis of a single issue. This is the issue of abortion. There are actually two different questions that the National Election Study has asked about abortion. They overlap in 1980, and as you can see from the traffic jam there in 1980, the results that you get from this calculation, using the two different questions, are quite similar, and so I don't feel too bad about splicing them together.

But the pattern you see here is that in the early part of this period, through the '70s and through the Carter administration, there's really no difference in voting patterns between people who are pro-life and pro-choice with respect to the abortion issue. They're virtually indistinguishable in their voting patterns.

Beginning with the Reagan administration you see a gap begin to appear in which people who are pro-life are more Republican in their votes than people who are pro-

choice. Then there's another pretty significant increase in that gap in 1992, which you remember is the year in which the Republican Convention featured Pat Buchanan talking about "culture wars." That significantly polarized, especially people on the pro-choice side of the issue, and so now we're in a period where people who are pro-choice are consistently a good deal more Democratic in their voting behavior than people who are pro-life.

The difference between the two positions amounts to about 30 percentage points in terms of the expected division of the presidential vote between those two groups.

Well, that's a pretty impressive shift and one that's attracted a good deal of attention.

But to put it in perspective, I think it's helpful to look at a similar kind of picture with respect to some specific economic issues.

I have two that I'm showing you here; the longer time trend going back to 1972 is for a question about the government's role in providing jobs or guaranteeing jobs to people, so it's a classic social welfare issue.

The second line, which starts in 1984, characterizes people on the basis of their views about government spending and services: basically, should the government provide more services and spend more money and raise more in taxes, or should it do less of those things?

Again you see a pretty sharp and consistent difference in voting patterns between people who take conservative and liberal positions on those issues, maybe some widening of the gap, very recently, especially with respect to the question about government spending and services.

But if you compare the magnitude of the difference in voting patterns between conservatives and liberals on these economic questions with the corresponding pattern that I just showed you with respect to abortion, you see that the economic issues actually do a better job of differentiating people in their voting behavior than abortion does.

In this case we have about 80 percent of the people who take conservative views voting for Republican candidates and about 20 percent of the people who take liberal views voting for Republican candidates, and so the gap there is something on the order of 60 percentage points.

Even at the end of this period where abortion has become a good deal more politicized, this gap is only about half that large. You still have about a third of the people who are pro-choice voting for Republican candidates and more than a third of the people who are pro-life voting for Democratic candidates.

Although abortion has become a good deal more politicized than it was, it's still less strongly connected to voting behavior than the classic economic issues are.

The other way that political scientists often think about issues and their electoral impact is not in terms of the candidates' positions on specific issue and promises about what they will do if they're elected, but, rather, their retrospective evaluations, looking backward as to how the country has done.

These were presumably with respect to all kinds of national conditions, whether crime is up or down, whether the environment is cleaner or less clean, whether we're mired in some unwinnable war or not, at a given point in time.

But the one that scholars have studied most systematically (because the data are available over a long period of time in a consistent kind a way) has to do with economic conditions and the impact of economic conditions on election outcomes.

I want to show you two ways of looking at that. This first picture, which I think is actually the second one in your handout, relates the change in real disposable income per capita in each administration, running from Quarters Three through Fifteen of the administration. Why three through fifteen? Well, Quarter Three is about halfway through the president's first year; it's a plausible guess about when we might want to start holding this president accountable for economic conditions. It turns out that you

get more or less the same results if you fiddle with that a little bit. It doesn't make too much difference.

Quarter Fifteen is the last quarter before the election, so it's the quarter that just ended at the end of last month in the case of the current election.

What I've shown you here is each president's record with respect to income growth over that period of the administration, graphed against how well the president did with respect to the popular vote margin.

But I have to tell you that I've adjusted the popular vote margin in an important way here to take account of how long a given party has been in power. It turns out that there's a pretty strong systematic relationship between how long the party's been in office and their vote performance in the election, with parties that have been in power longer doing less well.

The longer you've been in office, the more likely you are to do things that are going to irritate people and make it harder to get reelected.

Indeed, you see the numbers that I've shown you here show what would have happened in each election, if the party had been in power for only four years. There's only one instance in which a party that's been in power for only four years has been booted out; that was in 1980 when Carter was not reelected. All the other cases of incumbent parties that have lost were cases where they'd been in office for at

least eight years, and often longer than that. So that's an important thing to keep in mind.

But you see that there's a positive relationship between the state of the economy over the course of the administration and how well the incumbent party does. That's consistent with the idea that people are evaluating the incumbent's economic performance and judging him on the basis of how well things have gone.

The little open circle there is the average disposable income growth number for the current administration, up, not through Quarter 15, since the data for Quarter 15 aren't available yet, but through Quarter 14, through the first half of this year.

You see that Bush's performance is just about average. The vertical line there with the bars on it shows the expected popular vote margin for Bush given that level of economic performance.

The range of the bar is, in principle, supposed to encompass about two-thirds of the probability, and so there's about a one-third chance that the result will be somewhere between the open dot on the upper bar, about a one-third chance that it'll be somewhere between the open dot and the lower bar, and then about a one-third chance that it'll be outside that range entirely.

That's, in principle, based on the historical record, but remember, it doesn't take into account any of

the specifics of this election cycle. There's nothing in here about Iraq, for example, which is obviously going to be important.

So I intend this not as a forecast of how the election's going to turn out but, rather, to give you some sense of the impact of economic conditions on expected votes over a long period of time.

But the other picture that I want to show you, and this, in closing, is a similar kind of picture of the relationship between short-term income growth and election outcomes. The idea is the same. We're measuring each administration's performance along a horizontal dimension and seeing how that relates to the incumbent party's vote margin.

Here you see a much stronger relationship than you did in the first instance. If you just look at how tightly the points are aligned with the line that I've shown you here, there's much more scatter, a less strong relationship in the case of long-term income growth, and a much tighter relationship with respect to short-term income growth, which I'm measuring here as Quarters 14 and 15—the spring and summer of the election year.

What does that imply? Well, it seems to me to imply that to the extent that people are judging the performance of the incumbent, they're not doing it very competently. That is, they're not taking into account the

entire record of how administrations have performed but in a myopic kind of way focusing only on how well things have gone in the very recent past, and that seems to me to be an important problem from the point of view of democratic accountability.

For example, it provides an incentive for incumbents to "goose" the economy as the election's coming by providing lots of transfer payments and other kinds of benefits, tax cuts just before the election in order to make people think things are going well in the short term, even though there may be important long-term consequences to those kinds of policies.

And so it seems to me that while many political scientists have interpreted this strong relationship between economic conditions and the vote as being a mark of the rationality of voters in figuring out how things are going and rewarding or punishing the incumbent accordingly, it seems to me to be an indication that voters are doing this in a myopic way that maybe isn't very heartening from the standpoint of democratic accountability.

But let me stop there and turn to a general discussion.

MR. MANN: Larry has once again set the plate very well for discussion. Thanks very much. A number of things emerged from that that I'm sure we'll want to turn back to.

Just to make sure that we get to it, on the last matter, Larry: I want to make sure we know that, when we're dealing with real disposable income per capita, I gather that's post-taxes as well so that it includes tax increases or tax refunds and the like. But it also, I think, is a mean, and one of the interesting questions is if there is increasing income inequality, and if benefits are clustered at the upper end, that moves the median, and do we know anything about sensitivity of alternative measures of means and medians? But that's something we'll come back to.

And we'll return to the more general questions of what dimensions of economic policy are important and whether those vary over time. But before we get into that, I'd like to pick up on your initial presentation, the broader perspective on ideology and issues—really party ownership of issues—and ask Byron if he wouldn't offer some observations on that.

MR. SHAFER: You heard Tom set out the themes for today, on issues and ideologies and images and Massachusetts liberals, and then he says to me, "Well, Ben and Susan will handle everything in the last six months; you handle the last 50 years." He's a brutal guy! And he said to take as much time as you need as long as you do it in five minutes!

And so how the hell do you do that in five minutes? It seems to me you stop at three places—1956, 1980, and 2004—and you take a quick look around and you see

where we are. The "bones" of the policy profile of the modern party system were actually already in place in 1956, 50 years ago, when political scientists first had, through what became the National Election Studies, the ability through surveys, actually, to see public preferences on policy issues.

The post-war party system, this is not news, was built around social welfare issues, around the New Deal and the coming of the welfare state. Central to that is the American retirement system—Social Security, which allegedly becomes the third rail of American politics—plus unemployment insurance, the minimum wage, farm price supports, and last but not least, health care—Democrats were in favor, Republicans were opposed, and that was a conscious choice.

Even ,in fact, the detailed steps in the partisan ballet around this great cluster of economic welfare issues were already in place in the early 1950's. You can see them.

Democrats will expand the programmatic reach of the welfare state, and they'll raise benefits within existing programs.

Republicans have to counter that with something. What they counter it with is reminding you of the tax implications of what you're doing, or indeed offering you tax cuts rather than program expansions, and then reminding

you about the prospects for economic growth and the alleged risk to economic growth of following Democrats, a world that looks remarkably unchanged, in some ways, over 50 years.

And then foreign affairs functioned as the great secondary issue of that party system, often cross-cutting the first one.

The Second World War, followed by the Cold War, again, this is not news, brings an end to the long isolationist period of American foreign policy and generates new partisan policy alignments.

But these, I think I want to argue to you, are much more historical accidents than conscious choices, and that's important to what comes later.

Democrats were in power when World War II arrived and when the institutions and alliances of the Cold War had to be built. Dwight Eisenhower then actually has to undermine the long isolationist tradition of the Republican Party so that Republicans become able, courtesy of Eisenhower, to have the issue cluster of foreign affairs benefit them, in some sense, in both ways.

They become the aggressive defenders of the nation but they're also not responsible for the Second World War or the Korean War, and you really have a period in which foreign affairs is extremely benign to Republicans, and you have a party system—to wrap up the early days in the wisecrack of the time—about which people said, well, we have

a two-party system: Republicans bring you depression and Democrats bring you war.

Flash-forward to 1980. The 1950 story is a story of great events and the response of the partisan rank and file. The 1980's story, instead is a story of partisan activists and the response of their ostensible rank and file; by 1980, divisions on economics and social welfare within the voting public, had, if anything, widened.

The liberal wing of the Republican Party that once took a more accepting position on social welfare and even on labor-management relations was disappearing fast, while Democrats in the face of a decade of economic difficulties and stagflation had not pulled back on any of these items, really, at all. That gap was widening. But foreign affairs was showing an even greater change.

The active Democratic Party, first through the Vietnam War, had become a party opposed to the projection of American values abroad by force and was very unenthusiastic about defense spending in general, while the Republicans had stayed in the Cold War positions to which Eisenhower had led them and where Ronald Reagan in 1980 could still call Vietnam a "noble cause."

And then there's a whole set of newer, individually small but collectively important issues coming along for these active parties, though --I think Larry's pictures showed you this very nicely--not yet for their rank

and file, and these were essentially cultural rather than economic. They included public order, public role of religion, criminal justice, gender roles, and you can roll them on and on.

Note three things about this new world, which I still think is our world, though I'm not as sure about that as I used to be. But three things about the world that we can already see in 1980:

One, this world was generated by the active parties and party activists, not by the rank and file. There are still huge numbers--again, Larry's picture's is very neat this way--still huge numbers of Democrats who were East Coast welfare liberals but cultural national conservatives, just as there were huge numbers of Republicans who were economic welfare conservatives but cultural national liberals.

It was just that they now faced active parties that were either liberal on both, the Democrats, or conservative on both, the Republicans.

Two. That started to produce divided government, so-called, split partisan control of the institutions of American national government, first, Republican presidencies stapled on to Democratic congresses, and eventually the opposite as well. There is a huge irony within that pattern.

The American public, across the post-war years, was--and other things that Ben has written show this very nicely--becoming, in some ways, moderately more conservative on economic welfare issues, clearly more liberal on cultural and national issues, and yet the liberal party, the Democrats, continues to benefit from economic welfare issues where the public's going the other way, and the conservative party, the Republicans, benefits hugely from cultural and national issues where, again, the public is going the other way, and that is of course because the active parties have staked out positions, staked out policy territory that leaves the vast bulk of the public sitting in between and searching for some way to pick and choose and put together their own wishes.

And then three, and then we'll leave 1980, we of course get the era of divided government, which certainly extended from 1968 up until 2002, and then flash-forward to 2004, and I'll get off the stage, to the question of whether we are still in that era.

Social welfare remains a Democratic issue. It features Democratic--Tom gave you the phrase "issue ownership" in the jargon of our business, though George W. Bush has been willing to address education, which he saw as "up for grabs;" he's willing to address Social Security, which he saw as a bridge to younger voters; and he's actually willing to legislate on prescription drugs.

At the same time he's done tax cuts, the traditional Republican counterpunch on social welfare, and we all watched the economic cycle with puzzlement and anticipation to see what it will do to him.

Foreign affairs remains a Republican issue; it features Republican issue ownership, though John Kerry did offer you the only "war convention" among Democrats in my conscious memory, I have to say. The generals, the veterans, the bio film that featured Vietnam, all adding up to a life, if you believe it.

Here we watched the place of Iraq—and I think Ben will help out a lot on that—in this constellation with real fascination. Can it be tied to terrorism by the Republicans, or can it be severed from terrorism by Democrats?

So, final thought: Does 2004 look like the rest of the era of divided government? I think so, and the predictions that follow from that are therefore obvious. Either you get a Kerry presidency stapled onto a continuing Republican Congress, or you get a congressional uprising to go with the Bush reelection.

It has to be said that the two nominees are both trying very hard to escape the policy strictures of this extended era. They don't appear to me to be able to do so. But if they could, we would be in a new world, and the Election of 2002 would actually mark its beginning.

MR. MANN: Lovely. Fifty years of capsule history. Well done.

Byron, let me--

MR. SHAFER: There'll be a quiz on 1973 in a minute.

MR. MANN: Let me raise a question I raised at the beginning and have you tie it to this discussion. Namely, the question regards the "liberal Massachusetts senator" charge that now seems to be a centerpiece of the Bush closing campaign.

It was used effectively against Michael Dukakis in 1988. Given the evolution of parties and ideology and perceptions, is that a potentially winning strategy?

MR. SHAFER: Geez. If I answer yes, I mean, where will we be? Two thoughts. One is a little one, abstracted. "Liberal" or "conservative" is always a funny term because people can classify themselves easily, but in my observation, what they have in mind changes from election to election. In one year, you say "I'm a liberal" and that means you are willing to use the government to provide job guarantees, and in another year you say "I'm a liberal" and that means you're pro-choice.

But "Massachusetts liberal," I think, is a term that's gone. I mean, this is inside baseball. If you even know what he's talking about, you're too old. It's useful when you teach, to recall that your undergraduates have no

conscious intellectual memory of a president before Bill Clinton. That is what the presidency is. That's what presidents do, whatever you think that is.

And as for your graduate students, a few of them who have worked for a few years before coming back, recall the last couple of years of the Reagan administration. But otherwise, no. Otherwise, they count the two Bushes and Clinton as theirs. There's no one left who knows what a "Massachusetts liberal" is. I mean, there is one: there's a famous senator, Edward Kennedy, but he is important because of his role in the Senate, and because of the things he does and the connections he has and the issues he mobilizes.

There's no one in the electorate who knows about that, and there's no one in the electorate who connects it to anything. I mean, "You're a Massachusetts liberal" is much like my saying, "You idiot, you're a Bryan Democrat."

MR. MANN: Would any of our colleagues like to either react to that point or supplement it in any way? Or do you agree basically? Larry?

MR. BARTELS: The import of that picture that I showed, that had the perceptions of the candidates, I think, is that candidates really have to do a lot themselves in order to establish an ideological identity that's outside of the ordinary.

You mentioned Dukakis. There's very little evidence in that picture that anybody outside of the Bush

campaign recognized Dukakis as being a Massachusetts liberal. They did recognize McGovern as being a liberal, but they had a lot of cooperation from McGovern in establishing that point, and I don't think Kerry is going to be that cooperative.

MR. MANN: Let's put another cluster of issues on the table, namely Iraq. Some of us have mused, going through a historical counterfactual, that if President Bush had not decided to invade Iraq, he may well be coasting to reelection right now.

That suggests Iraq as an issue is important, but it's not clear how it's important and how issues on foreign policy really relate to a campaign and to electoral choice. That's why Ben is going to help us understand all that.

Ben.

MR. PAGE: Well, this is clearly an election where foreign policy matters more than it has in quite a while, and I think one way you can think about that is to recall Larry's graphs about changes in income, disposable income, which are kind of the core of economic issues, and if you look where that little round empty circle was, that predicted how many votes George Bush would get if that were the only issue on the table, and as I read those graphs he was supposed to win by seven to ten percentage points based on the growth of the economy.

As Tom pointed out, there are a few iffy things about do medians matter more than means now, and so forth. But clearly, the economy's working on Bush's side.

So foreign policy is the other elephant or donkey in the room, and what can we say about that?

Let me make three points. The first one is that over a bunch of foreign policy issues, if you pay attention to policy preferences—the kind of thing Tom was referring to as the future-oriented politics, the future-oriented attitudes of the public—on a good many of them, John Kerry is much closer to the average American than George Bush. This became especially clear to me when I worked on this Chicago Council on Foreign Relations study, for which the results were released a couple of weeks ago, which includes a national sample of Americans and asked a lot of foreign policy questions.

Let me give you just a few examples in order to pin this down. The main thrust of it was that the American public is much more multilateral than most of us think of the Bush administration as being, much more in favor of international organizations, more in favor of international treaties and agreement, much less enthusiastic about democratizing the world, and much less interested in unilateral uses of force, particularly preemptive uses or nuclear weapons.

So let me just give you a couple percentages to get in your minds.

If you think about democratizing the world, the Chicago council asked this real mild sort of question that I assume would be a softball everybody would hit out of the ballpark: Should the United States put greater pressure on countries in the Middle East, like Saudi Arabia and Egypt, to become more democratic?

I figured that's about an 80 percent "yes." It turns out it's a 35 percent "yes" and 57 percent "no." There's a lot of allergy to the Middle East right now. There's also a lot of allergy in the public toward this idea of democratizing, even this mild sort of "put greater pressure" kind of question.

When you ask about the goals of U.S. foreign policy, the very last one among something like fourteen is helping governments abroad to become more democratic.

Another concrete piece of data is we asked about lessons of September 11th. Is the lesson of September 11th that the U.S. needs to work more closely with other countries to fight terrorism, or does the U.S. need to act on its own more?

That's overwhelming; "work more closely with other countries," 73 percent, 23 percent "act on its own." That actually was true even in 2002, a very similar finding.

We asked about circumstances under which a country ought to be able to go to war with another country that they believe poses a threat, and one option was if they have strong evidence that the other country is acquiring weapons of mass destruction that could be used against them at some point in the future. This is a rough approximation, maybe, of the national security strategy doctrine; perhaps not.

Another option is only if they have strong evidence that they're in imminent danger of being attacked by the other country.

And then a third option was only go to war with another country if the other country attacks first.

And it turns out this version of preventive war got only 17 percent in favor, the option if you have strong evidence the other country's acquiring weapons of mass destruction that could be used against you in the future, and by far the center of opinion was for only if there's an imminent threat.

And then about a quarter of the public said to wait for an actual attack. So the notion that 9/11 has transformed attitudes about preemptive or preventive war seems to be wrong.

Then a question about using military force to restore a democratic government that's been overthrown. This is related to the spread democracy thing, but it's a relatively easy case. That is, for the democratic

government that's been overthrown, whether the U.N. Security Council should have the authority to do that, whether an individual country could, and a substantial majority said yes to the U.N., but a majority said no to a single country, by 53-40.

First use of nuclear weapons. Three options again. Never use nuclear weapons under any circumstances; use nuclear weapons only in response to a nuclear attack; or in certain circumstances the U.S. should use nuclear weapons even if it has not suffered a nuclear attack. And that again picks up on the administration's national security strategy, the idea of possible "bunker buster" nuclear weapons and so forth.

That idea is endorsed only by 19 percent of the public. Well over half say use nuclear weapons only in response to a nuclear attack, and about a quarter say never use nuclear weapons.

Support for the U.N.: we asked a whole lot of questions about that, and--this has been true for decades--the American public is very supportive of the U.N. in general. What was striking this time was that large majorities said we should do more working within the U.N. than not, and especially surprising to me is a substantial majority said the U.S. should even give up its veto in the U.N. Security Council under certain circumstances.

The question was: If all the other countries on the Security Council agree on something, should the United States be able to veto it or not? We explained what the veto meant.

And there was a substantial majority saying no, go along with the other countries.

And then finally, a lot of questions about treaties and agreements. You all probably noticed President Bush's position in the debate of actually bringing up the International Criminal Court as something that was a terrible idea, which struck many observers as being odd because that's not a tremendously salient issue.

But we happened to ask a question about it and about three other treaties, the first one on the International Criminal Court. It turns out a very large majority of the U.S. public actually favors it, 76 percent to 19, and we could hardly believe that, so we asked the question two different ways in 2002.

One was elaborate and mentioned the administration argument that U.S. soldiers might be seized on political grounds and be tried unfairly, and so forth. Didn't seem to make a lot of difference. We still got about a 70 percent support for the International Criminal Court.

Comprehensive nuclear test ban treaty, support by 87 percent to nine. The land mines treaty, support by 80 to sixteen. And the Kyoto agreement, support by 71 to

nineteen. That's another one where we asked in elaborate ways and we came out about the same.

All four of these treaties, of course, had been rejected by the administration, and the Clinton administration wasn't wildly supportive of them either.

So here's a puzzle for you. Given this evidence, and I could give you a lot more examples, it really looks as if the American public is much more in tune with John Kerry's future-oriented proposals about foreign policy than what Bush is offering. It's very hard to find counterexamples.

So is this giving Kerry a huge advantage? Well, it does not appear to be at the moment, and I think there are two kinds of reasons.

One has to do with the relatively low salience of some of these things that I mentioned; in other words, the ICC is not something that you get protest demonstrations about.

But I wouldn't overstate that because there's a lot of evidence that these opinions are quite real and that they're connected to other opinions, that they lead to certain kinds of behavior, and so forth.

I think much more important is that, to a large extent, the administration has been able to manage perceptions very, very successfully so that most Americans don't believe that the administration is unilateral and that

the Coalition of the Willing idea has been very successful and that in fact we work through the United Nations on Iraq and that it was just a couple of obstructionist countries that prevented us from getting a new resolution, and so forth. So I would focus on perceptions.

Then there's a point related to the first, about salience and intensity, and this picks up on what Tom said about future versus past. It appears that when it comes to foreign policy, many voters are much more oriented toward the performance of government than they are toward promises or statements about what will be done in the future.

And on performance it's clear that the Bush administration does better in people's minds, on average, than on a lot of these concrete policy preference questions.

On terrorism, obviously, the war in Afghanistan was very popular, considered a great success. Most Americans like the idea of going after al Qaeda and the Taliban.

Even for the Iraq war, about half the public is saying this is really a necessary, important thing to do; this is part of the war on terror; Iraq was a threat linked to terrorists.

A lot of Americans still say that there was evidence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq.

The net result of this is that the Bush administration's not in absolutely great shape, but it's in

pretty good shape on the past performance measures in foreign policy. This is not 1952. In 1952, one of the reasons the Democrats were thrown out of office was perceived failures in the Korean War, which was then looked at as sort of a costly stalemate.

In 1968, of course, Vietnam was a disaster for the Democratic Party. In 1980, there were a number of things going on, including economic things, but the Iranian hostages and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan--

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MR. PAGE: [continuing] harmful to Carter.

So again I see something of a puzzle here because according to a number of experts, the war on terror hasn't been going all that well, the Iraq war isn't going all that well and doesn't have very close connections with terrorism and perhaps as a distraction may even be counterproductive. Experts can argue about that, but at least there's a strong possibility that performance in Iraq has actually been quite poor.

And so that takes me to my third point having to do with why the Bush administration is doing as well as it's doing in foreign policy, and I think some of that has to go back to points Byron made about the history of the party's connections with foreign policy and the traditional Republican Party advantage.

But I think a lot also has to do with perceptions as opposed to reality. That is, past performance and voters' evaluations of it have a whole lot to do with what they think is going on, which has a connection with reality—but it's not always a perfect connection.

Larry mentioned the example of this possibly myopic focus on what happened in the last year because most people don't have macroeconomic models or statistics in their heads, and they have a sense of what happened recently—that seemed to be an improvement or not an improvement.

But that leaves room—since people don't know exactly what's been going on in performance—that does leave room for perceptions and beliefs, and it seems to me this administration has been extremely successful in conveying as positive a picture as possible of its accomplishments in the war on terror and especially Iraq, and I won't go into great detail about that but we can discuss it some, if you want, later.

So I guess I'd just end with the idea that perceptions and beliefs make a lot of difference; it's worth thinking about what techniques work in persuading people. A relentlessly upbeat tone seems to be very helpful, but there's more than that I think. What role do media play in all this, and how does political discourse work? Thanks.

MR. MANN: Ben, thank you very much. It seems to me that raises all kinds of questions that are relevant to 2004, in particular these struggles over the definition of the existence of a link between Iraq and terrorism, the meaning of a global test for U.S. use of military forces, and the importance of what the candidates do and say in shaping how the issue is framed. Maybe we can come back to that. But Kerry seemed to regain traction in mid-September when he used Iraq as a way of returning to a referendum on the president's performance and raised questions in the minds of the public about just how successful that enterprise had been.

I'd like to bring Susan in now to give us her sense of how to put these issues in perspective relative to other factors as voters make up their minds.

Susan.

MS. PAGE: First of all, I'm glad to be here; Brookings has been a terrific resource for journalists, and Tom has too, and I'm always glad to reciprocate in any way I can. This is the seventh presidential election I've covered, and it's different I think than the previous six, for two reasons. One is the wounds over the disputed outcome in 2000 are still pretty raw, especially among Democrats, but more importantly, it's the first election we've had of course since the September 11th attacks.

When Tom called me about being on this panel, he said the topic was: Do issues matter? I would argue issues matter less this time than they have in any of the previous elections I've covered that were competitive. Two of the elections I've covered, in '84 and in '96, were never really competitive, and nothing really mattered in those years.

But in the other five, issues, I thought, were clearly important in a way that they are not this year.

We asked a question in the USA Today/CNN/Gallup poll: Which is more important to you in deciding who you're going to vote for: the candidate's stance on issues or his leadership skills and vision?

And when we asked this about ten days ago, in a poll, by seven points people said leadership skills are more important to them than their stance on the issues, 46 to 39 percent, and in fact this year, every time we've asked this question people have said leadership skills are more important than issues.

That's in contrast to what they said four years ago in 2000, when of course we had one of the same candidates running. In 2000, people said the stance on issues was more important than leadership skills and vision. At this point in October, by eight points. That's a significant switch in what voters say matters to them most, and I think you can really see this play out with both campaigns.

Byron talked about the war convention that the Democrats had, which was of course really not about war at all but was about leadership. The Democrats were trying to use Senator Kerry's experience in Vietnam to make the case that he's a strong leader.

And the flip-flop charge, which has been the fundamental charge that the Republican have used against Kerry, is also not at all about the issues. It's about Senator Kerry's steadiness and his leadership skills. It's really an issue-free charge.

So who does this advantage, if people care more about leadership skills than issues? I think you can argue that up to now it's advantaged Bush, and that may be why, or one reason why, Ben's analysis of how voters seem to be shows they care a lot about national security foreign policy issues, they're more aligned with Senator Kerry than with President Bush, and yet the election is dead even at this point. I think one reason would be because people have seen President Bush as being a stronger leader.

He's been seen as a stronger leader. Does he have the personality and leadership qualities a president should have? In January, by 33 points people said yes, he does.

That's a much bigger advantage than Senator Kerry has had, but it's an advantage that has been eroding, and I think Senator Kerry's attack, his rather effective attack on how the war in Iraq has been handled, not the decision

whether to go to war but whether it has been managed in a good way, has eroded the sense of President Bush as a good leader.

He now has an advantage of about 15 points on being a strong leader, having the leadership qualities a president should have.

Senator Kerry has an advantage of ten points. That's not a big difference.

I think one reason this race went from having a Bush advantage in early September to an evened up race now is because you've seen erosion in the sense of President Bush being a strong leader.

One other thing I would say about the 9/11 effect on this campaign is that it has changed the issues that people care about most.

In the past six elections, you'd certainly say pocket book issues were the most powerful issues—the economy and health care. Those were the things that were more important to voters. That's not what you find this year.

When we asked, again in this poll in early October, what are the issues most important to your vote? terrorism was Number One, 30 percent. People said terrorism was the Number One issue that would determine their vote.

The economy only tied for second with Iraq, 27 percent for each. So you really see a different kind of--to

the degree issues matter, it's different issues that are determining how people are going to vote.

And I'd just mention one other thing we've looked at in using our Gallup poll data. Our polling director, Jim Norman, did a chart that showed presidential approval rating, which is the best single determinant of how a president will do in a reelection campaign, and he laid over it consumer confidence, and usually when you do that they really track with one another. People feel more confident about the economy, they assess the president more highly.

Those two numbers were disconnected for President Bush this year. There was no relationship between consumer confidence and presidential approval.

But when we laid over a line on, Do you think the war in Iraq was worth it? his approval rating tracked almost perfectly with the number of people who said yes, the war was worth it.

And as the number of people who thought the war was worth it has gone down, that's what has driven down his approval rating, and you certainly see that in the most recent poll we've done, which shows the war was not worth it, that number up to 54 percent, tied with the most pessimistic views people have had about the war, his approval rating driven down to 47 percent, definitely dangerous territory for presidents.

So I really think this is a different kind of election. Some of the election models that have worked so well in the past, I think you don't have much confidence in this year because this does seem to be a different kind of election.

MR. MANN: Thanks.

You know, there was also a study released suggesting some sensitivity of presidential approval ratings to terrorism alert warnings. When terrorism becomes more salient as measured by changes in alert levels, there seems to be a spurt in presidential approval, which would underscore your point about the importance of terrorism and might also give us some indication of what to look for in the remaining--

MS. PAGE: For the next 18 days; yeah.

MR. MANN: --days of the campaign.

I'd invite Byron, Larry, Ben to comment on what the connection is between issues conceived broadly and "leadership" and "character."

MR. SHAFER: Let me take that and push it back to Ben. I'll take it slightly differently, but I'm thinking about issues; I'm thinking about public response; I'm thinking about the activist. I wonder if I can interpret those foreign policy numbers a little differently, Ben, if I stick them into institutions too.

I'm struck by the "we know" we have good evidence that Group X or Nation X is going to launch some sort of nuclear bomb against us, and despite that, the public--25 percent--say never use nuclear, half say use nuclear only after you've been hit, and less than a quarter are willing to say, well, if you know that, blow them away.

MR. PAGE: No; no. Actually, I mean that's not the way the question went. About 53 percent said if there's imminent danger, go for it.

MR. SHAFER: As I listen to so many of those, I'm trying to think about the advice you would give to a candidate or even to a president, going on from the distribution of responses to the question, which is to say: Are you really going to say to the president, well, the public says don't use these, or public says we'll be very happy--I had the misfortune, the other night, of watching Tom Clancy's *The Sum of All Fears*, in which a nuclear weapon blows up Baltimore, and we won't put that to an opinion test as well--do you think it's a good idea?

But these questions sort of invite you to say, well, three-quarters of the people say respond if hit. You can't actually imagine any candidate--

MR. PAGE: No, no, no. That's one-quarter, and if I could just make a little comment on that. I don't really believe that, and I don't think the people who were saying it really believe it.

I think when you're asked a survey question like that, some people say, "I really want to discourage the use of nuclear weapons, so I'm saying don't use them at all." But then, if you sit them down with a scenario of the kind you're mentioning, they'll say, "Well, yes, in those circumstances."

The same thing with torture. We got very, very strong opinions against using torture, at all. But you can build a scenario in which somebody has their finger on a nuclear trigger or knows where someone has a finger, et cetera. People will make exceptions.

MR. SHAFER: The analogy that was in my head as you were doing those—and they're really interesting, and I have confidence in those answers—but you and I both lived through the era of extended deficits and polling on deficits, and when you ask the public what--there were many years in which the Number One issue was "solve the deficit."

You ask people what's the number one problem facing the country. They say the deficit.

But you can find no politician out there who actually believes that either raising taxes or cutting benefits will do anything other than destroy you. And so you--

MR. PAGE: Well, aren't the '90s a refutation of that? In other words, the Clinton strategy, or the Robert

Rubin strategy, essentially was to put a lot of effort into cutting deficits.

MR. SHAFER: I'll get off this and hand it over to Susan; she's got the answer here, I'm sure.

MS. PAGE: Yeah; right.

MR. SHAFER: And I actually read the '90s differently. I mean, I read the '90s as a triumph of divided government, which is to say you've got an extended period in which Republicans cannot cut taxes and Democrats cannot increase expenditures, and eventually the economy has to grow and when it does the deficit will disappear, and as long as you've got enough divided government you can have fiscal responsibility.

MR. BARTELS: That was a piece of it, but Byron leaves out the 1993 tax bill which was passed entirely with Democratic support and was the first piece of a set of actions that actually created a virtuous cycle. I'm sort of with you on the divided government argument, but there was that first step, that Clinton--

But to the extent that that was based on a reading of public opinion that suggested that people were concerned about the deficits and the Perot movement, I think it was probably misplaced. Where it worked was, first of all, in reassuring the bond market, and secondly, in producing the kind of growth that would be politically consequential after

the fact, but not because people thought at the time that reducing the deficit was important.

MR. MANN: Exactly. This was an effort to change economic realities rather than to respond to public preferences on particular deficit policies.

MR. BARTELS: And I think that's very much the political calculation with respect to foreign policy as well. To the extent that presidents are thinking about the political costs and benefits, it's much more, How is this going to make the world look in the future? than it is, Are people for it or against it right now?

One of the things I think people have kind of lost track of with Bush's policy in Iraq is that for all of the talk about him being willing to do anything he has to do to get reelected, if he were simply concerned about being reelected, we wouldn't have been in Iraq in the first place because there was a downside potential there that was pretty significant and not a lot of upside, and I think that's an instance in which a president did something because he thought it was good policy, not because of any direct political calculation.

MS. PAGE: Although they did think it would be over by now. I mean, they thought the situation would be stable enough now that this election would be fought on economic issues, not on the war in Iraq which--

MR. BARTELS: Well, they certainly underestimated the downside, but they knew that there was a downside.

MS. PAGE: Yes, but they didn't figure it would turn out to be either--they didn't figure this election would turn on whether or not people thought it was a worthwhile thing to do, which it may.

MR. BARTELS: Well, and the analogy with the first Gulf War I think was quite important on both sides, but especially maybe on the Democratic side, where the people who opposed the first Gulf War realized that there was nothing in it for them because things turned out well, and so they were much more hesitant to oppose this one, and so it's a puzzle: Why is it that people are only now beginning to evaluate Iraq and notice that things aren't going very well and holding the president accountable?

Well, I think it's in large part because the Democrats have been quite hesitant about criticizing the policy, and Senator Kerry is a kind of symbolic instance of that. He's kind of tried to stake out this delicate middle position in the same way that many other Democrats have.

Howard Dean made it a clear issue in the primaries, but, at that point, most of the public wasn't paying very careful attention. So it's only recently that they've heard a kind of strong partisan indictment of the president's policies.

MR. MANN: I think that's so important to keep in mind, this reshaping of public opinion. My view is that by pure force of will, President Bush built the domestic political support he felt he needed to start the war in Iraq.

It just simply didn't exist there before he made the case, and he made it strongly enough to generate support in Congress as well as in the broader public, and it was only, as Larry said, when the opposition began building on realities, what people were seeing on their television sets, that you got a real change in public sentiment on this. So now it's much more divided, and, on balance, depending on how you word the question, the public now believes the costs outweigh the benefits, in that we are more at risk for terrorism than less, as a consequence of that action, but without the elite critique that probably would have taken much longer to develop on its own.

MS. PAGE: You know, I would just say it was not only Bush's ability to build domestic support but also the Democrats' failure to pose real objections. The Democratic leadership went along with the war.

And I think Larry makes a good point, that it reflects in part their skittishness after their experience with the previous Gulf War, which they had a lot more skepticism about. It turned out to be rebuked, in effect. I mean, if Kerry had voted for the first Gulf War, I wonder

if he would have felt free to vote against the second one. Maybe.

MR. MANN: Let's go back to the global test. Kerry used that language in a long statement, and the Bush campaign picked up on it. What Bush argued is that a President Kerry would condition our use of force on others' approval, especially in times of great risk, a position that Americans would react negatively to. On the other hand, what Kerry said he was saying was that no action by the U.S. in this world can ultimately be successful if it doesn't meet a test of credibility and legitimacy.

And Ben would argue there's a broad reservoir of public support and belief that we ought to play by the rules of the game, of the international game, and that we will be most successful if we do so. It was one of the reasons the public liked the idea of Congress weighing in and the president not acting on his own.

Another reason was they were anxious to have the U.N. weigh in. We want to operate with others. But the question is: Which way is it framed? Is it the first frame or the second frame? This tells you that issues matter, in part, based on which candidate or party is most successful in framing the particular issue and choice.

MR. PAGE: If I could, I think the global test business is very interesting to think about in connection with those results I was giving, because at least if you

take it at face value, it appears a lot of Americans are saying that "global test," even in the sense President Bush is using the term, not just in the credibility/legitimacy sense that Kerry actually used it, but even in that sense—most Americans seem to like the idea of global constraints on U.S. policy in return for getting a lot of multilateral support.

But I think there's an important qualification there, and that is surveys also show that Americans want to reserve some measure of unilateral capability, particularly in connection with terrorism, and if you ask people about, for example, air strikes or ground troops against terrorist bases, that kind of military action, there's tremendous support for doing it with or without the U.N.

And so Senator Kerry's response, I think, highlights that distinction, because his response to the criticism on the global test has been mainly to say, I have never said there should be a veto by anyone on U.S. use of force. That's where he might be vulnerable.

But, on the other hand, on the general question of getting other countries, sharing the burden, doing multilateral decision making, it seems to me there the president's on shaky ground.

MR. MANN: Byron, did you want to say something?

MR. SHAFER: To take you back to something that Larry said up at the beginning, it's also, when you're

looking at this sort of issue prospectively, you also, right away, get into this tension between the substance of a particular policy or plank within an issue area and back to this question of issue ownership, and where it goes, which is to say if Susan's world is accurate, and, in effect, two-thirds of--60 percent of the public is saying, terrorism and Iraq are number one, and you're in this curious question in which a number of specific things that you might do on terrorism or on Iraq appear to lead you toward the Democrats and not toward Republicans, but as the issue goes up the dial you're driven toward the Republicans.

So I mean, who owns it? and the answer is if that's what it's--I have a--Tom knows this--confirmed habit of going to national party conventions, which I can no longer explain even. It's like you can't explain to your mother why you did that.

But one of the things that always interests me is how there are constant ongoing party programs and they don't change all that much. The Democrats always talk to you about health care. The Republicans always talk to you about national defense.

But they frame it quite differently from time to time, depending on the context we're in and what else is up. And you had this amazing sort of litmus of where are we in 2004, at the Democratic convention. This year, any number

of Democrats from the podium tell you we must do national health insurance.

Why should we do national health insurance?  
Because we owe it to the troops when they come home.

Now there's going to be no other year in American history when we make that argument. But you go to the Republican--

MR. PAGE: A little footnote. In 1960, remember how Kennedy used the Cold War for social programs.

MR. SHAFER: The same. Since then, we ain't seen this, and suddenly, here it is. You go to the Republican convention, and even on the night of minority outreach and domestic programs, Rod Paige gets a major speech and in his 20-25 minutes there are three lines about Iraq, and two of those three lines get his only sustained applause.

I mean, there's a kind of--this is a world that wasn't here four years ago and won't be here four years from now.

MR. MANN: Listen, we have a little time for questions from you. We have mikes that we'd like to bring. Let's begin right here with this lady. Please.

QUESTION: Hi. Irina Oshlek [ph] from the Danish Embassy. Now we've heard how issues seem to be less important than personal qualities, so I was wondering, if we do try to rescue this model of issue voting or voting based on how you see the issues, I was wondering if we know

whether voters actually have the knowledge to do this, because now we have heard how foreign policy is mostly shaped by perception and not reality.

And when you watch the coverage of the debate, it seems to me that there's more focus on how they acted rather than what policy differences came out.

So I was wondering if there is any kind of study—I know it's hard to measure—but if there is some kind of study where you actually compare the voters' views of the candidates' issues to what those, to how they actually stand on those issues? Have there been any measurements of that, and do voters have the required knowledge to do issue voting?

MR. MANN: Larry, do you want to start with that?

MR. BARTELS: Yeah. I think the answer is that some do. It's hard to pin down the exact proportion. There are clearly a large number of voters who aren't paying sufficiently close attention either to have well-thought-out positions of their own on these issues, or even if they have their own positions, to figure out what the candidates' positions are. And so those figures that I showed you about perception of where the presidential candidates stand on ideology are based on excluding lots of people who either don't have a view themselves or who don't recognize the candidates' positions.

And so you have to set lots of people aside who aren't voting on the basis of issues.

And then for the other people, the question is: how do the issues matter in combination with, or by comparison with, all these other kinds of things that they're paying attention to, like personality, characteristics of the candidates, and the state of the economy, or the state of the country more generally.

All of those things, though, you also have to remember, I think, are viewed through partisan lenses, and so, for example, if you look at perceptions of where the candidates stand, they're largely explained by the voters' own liking or disliking of the candidate.

If I think the candidate's a good guy, I imagine that he has positions on issues that are very similar to my own. If I think he's a bad guy for some reason, I think his issue positions are wacko, regardless of what he's actually saying about where he stands.

So there's a lot of a kind of perceptual bias built into how people think about these, and so they end up supporting the candidate who they say has issue positions more like theirs, but that may be an effect of their vote as much or more than it is a cause of their vote.

MS. PAGE: You know, Annenberg Center actually did a study about this before the first debate, about whether voters could identify the issues of the candidates, and they

discovered that most voters couldn't. I mean, voters did not have an accurate view of what the candidates had called for, even though this was after a campaign that has gone on for months and months and months.

It found, for instance, that there were a lot of Americans who believed President Bush has called for renewing the draft, including 50 percent of young people, which is one reason you saw this perplexing scene in the House where they called up a measure on the draft and defeated it, just to demonstrate that they weren't for that. It has been a surprising problem for Bush and the Republicans, this perception. But, generally, many people were not able to say what these candidates had called for.

And the point of the Annenberg study was that the debates were an important way for the candidates to tell, you know, a large group of Americans, including some voters who hadn't tuned in before, what they actually stood for.

MR. MANN: All right. Next question right here, please.

QUESTION: Tom Kolina [ph], 20/20 Vision. Thank you all for your presentations.

My question goes to an issue that was raised about how the perceptions of the American public on Iraq are very different than the reality and the success the Bush administration has had in creating these misperceptions about the lead-up to the war and then the success, so be it,

you know, after the war, and that this is the reason they're doing as well as they are right now.

How different is this than previous administrations? If you look historically, I mean it strikes me that this is a different animal than I've seen before in my short lifetime. But I'm wondering if you all, who have a longer perspective on this--no offense--

MR. : I'm too young.

MR. : No one's going to answer that one!

QUESTION: To me, I see an administration that is willfully misleading the public to create perceptions that are not correct. Now am I just being naive? Is this happening all the time, or is this truly a different animal than we've seen before?

MR. PAGE: I have a wonderful bipartisan point to make here. One of the best examples of this kind of thing to me is Lyndon Johnson and Vietnam. The few of us who remember that era, that was quite remarkable, what we were told in the run-up to the Vietnam War. But of course that led to credibility gaps and big political consequences, and I think that it's an interesting question about this election, whether some of that is starting to happen to President Bush.

I also share the feeling that the Bush administration is more skillful at this sort of thing than anybody I've seen in a long time.

MR. MANN: Byron.

MR. SHAFER: There is some good work, which I think we can bang this into, on Korea versus Vietnam, which actually suggests that the dynamics of public opinion were quite similar. The difference is that Korea goes on for two and a half years and Vietnam goes on for six plus. But if you look at public opinion at the same point in time, they're actually quite similar, and my guess is that Iraq will fit very neatly into that, that we're at the point now--you put yourself six months into Korea, or six months into Vietnam, we're probably not as positive as the public was at that point in both of those. But we're in a territory we've been in a number of times before.

MR. MANN: In fact I would be a contrarian, arguing that the shifts are occurring somewhat more rapidly. In fact, the shifts began last year in the late fall, when it was clear that things weren't working well.

The public was beginning to sour. It was at that point the administration began to make some critical decisions about when to transfer sovereignty, about the training of Iraqi forces, and the withdrawal of U.S. forces from some of the hottest insurgent spots.

We then had the capture of Saddam, which led to a rally effect, but that didn't last long before it came down. So I would actually argue that, in fact, the television coverage of Abu Ghraib, the rapid increase in casualties,

and the perceptions of chaos have produced a blow-back on Iraq that was there.

It then took a leap in framing from the opposition party to begin to make it more of an issue. But it'll be interesting to see. Byron argues that because of issue ownership of national security by the Republicans, the more salient Iraq is, the more Republicans gain; the alternative is that the public has soured more rapidly on this experience and Kerry's route to return to parity and possibly to win the election has been to use that public discontent to get there. We don't really know, at this stage, how that's going to play out.

MR. BARTELS: I just want to add, when we talk about issue positions, it's important to bear in mind two things I think. One is that with respect to these foreign policy issues, but many others as well, the public is fundamentally pragmatic, and so their ideological views are very likely to be overwhelmed by their perception of whether things are going well or badly.

And the other thing is that they make no promise of consistency. So if you take the position in advance that's consistent with their views and it turns out to work badly, they reserve the right to punish you for having done that in spite of the fact that it was what they wanted and have now forgotten they wanted as things turn out badly.

MR. MANN: Yes?

QUESTION: Thanks. Gary Mitchell from The Mitchell Report. I want to ask a question about accountability and voter behavior because it seems to me what this conservative is really talking about is how do voters hold incumbents and potential office holders accountable and I think I'm more in the Susan Page camp, if I understand here--

MS. PAGE: The people in my camp are supposed to be on this side of the room.

QUESTION: And it's a pretty simple question in a way because it seems to me that the most interesting factor in the polls this year is the fact that Bush scores high on the war on terrorism but increasingly low on the specific of Iraq.

So, you know, gasoline prices are going up, health care costs are going up, all the things that used to matter back in the days that Byron was talking about don't seem to have the same sort of cutting edge to them.

The question I'm trying to get to here is: is this new electorate that doesn't know what a Massachusetts liberal is—and could care less—is this new electorate measuring presidents and holding them accountable in different ways, and if so, are we really moving into an era where perception is more important than performance?

MR. MANN: Who would like to wrestle with that?

MR. BARTELS: I think part of the issue here has to do with the specific nature of terrorism. In the absence of actual terrorist attacks, it's very hard to get a handle on what the reality is that we should be evaluating. So Senator Kerry says, you know, we should be counting how many containers are being inspected as they come into the ports, but that's a kind a hard thing for people to get a handle on.

So in the absence of clear indicators of performance, they fall back on atmospherics, and the fact that Bush was standing at Ground Zero with the bull horn I think is important in a way that it wouldn't be if we had some sort of government statistics released every month that talked about what the state of the country actually is with respect to preparedness against terrorist attacks.

That's one of the reasons why the economy has probably a greater element of reality mixed in with the perception than it otherwise would, because there's a social apparatus that impresses upon people the state of the economy, at least in some ways aside from their own kind of idiosyncratic, personal experiences of it.

MS. PAGE: You know, I think people are pretty clued into the performance on economic issues, in particular. It's hard for Americans to know whether things are getting better or worse in Iraq, for instance. That's a

difficult judgment to make; you make it based on news coverage.

But in your own life, you know whether your personal income has gone up or down, you know whether your brother in law has been laid off from his job and had to take another job that didn't have health insurance.

So I actually think when you talk to voters, they have a pretty good sense of what is actually happening in their own lives, and it's hard for the most skilled practitioner of imagery to change their mind. In fact, I think it's a risk for President Bush at this point, when he talks about the economy being good to seem out of touch with voters who think the economy's not been that good in their lives. That's certainly what happened to his father in his reelection fight.

MS. SHAFER: I'd go farther, which is to say the first set of three or four questions, it seems to me, has filtered half the story of the argument here. It's time for somebody to say, even more than Susan's saying, in defense of the general public, for many years I had to suffer with the question that came up all the time--Do you know that two-thirds of Americans can't find Belgium on a map? to which I simply learned to answer, And do you know that 85 percent of Belgians can't find Iowa on a map?

So this is--living a political life, along with the rest of your life--taking care of the kids, making sure

they get to soccer, making sure that food is on the table, that the health care is there—is, on the one hand, not a matter of taking a test, it's not a matter of knowing what major city is on the Ouagadougou River.

I mean, you use a very different complex, you talk to the neighbors, you do watch the debates, and people do pretty well positioning themselves--after all, at the end of the day, in the presidency they're going to vote for one of two guys. All they're going to do, and they're going to either, is to pick Bush or pick Kerry, and they do a pretty good job of getting themselves there through all kinds of shorthands, or through the neighborhood you live in, and the people you talk to, and the experiences of your uncle.

And the fact that you can't pass this 100 question exam actually doesn't mean that you're doing badly or by and large, over time, getting things wrong. Over time, fairly coherent. And the only reason we can talk about these things over time is actually the patterns are fairly straightforward and change only slowly.

So that I don't think the fact that two-thirds of Americans can't find Belgium should be taken to mean that they won't make a quite intelligent choice for president.

MR. MANN: In fact you could argue—and it goes back to Democratic accountability—that to the extent this election is a referendum on the performance of the country, at home and abroad, under George Bush's leadership, it will

produce a modest victory for John Kerry. That is, the referendum is now modestly negative, and that sort of comports with a certain reality.

The economy isn't horrible. There has been some growth and some gains. On the other hand, on grounds of jobs and real wages, and health care and energy costs, and strains, it's been disappointing. Similarly, there's difference of opinion about Iraq and whether it advances or retards a broader effort against terrorism, but on balance, people think it has probably retarded, if not exacerbated, that.

And that's why the Bush campaign has turned away from, for the most part, campaigning on that record and has framed their campaign as saying John Kerry is an unacceptable alternative in an era in which terrorism is the overriding issue of the times.

Now that suggests to me that the public is weighing in. I would say that's a form of issues—that is, the economic policies and economic conditions and war in Iraq, the choices made, the consequences, direct or indirect—that have conditioned this election to be a negative referendum and put the president at risk. In that sort of squishy sense, issues matter.

MS. PAGE: Although I would just add that what the 9/11 attacks did was remind people that you can't predict what a president's going to face, and it made it more

important that they have a president who's strong and has good judgment they trust, more important than if they agreed with him on health care policy or what to do about the United Nations.

MR. SHAFER: Also worth saying, a matter of accountability, that we do accountability differently than most nations, in that you can be misled by watching the presidency only. I mean, we're going to elect three branches of government, and a lot of what accountability is about is actually in the interplay, and this is back to Larry's point. I mean, you'll also have a set of congressmen there who are doing one thing today, but if the public shifts--you give them what they want and it doesn't work--you've got a set of congressmen out there who'll begin to pummel the new president in exactly that direction, say, You idiot, why did you ever do that? It's perfectly obvious that you never should have done that.

We do this three institutions interacting to produce accountability, rather than a kind of plebiscite, and if we're talking largely about a presidential election it's worth not missing the fact that that's not actually the route of accountability in our system of government.

MR. MANN: Excellent point, and we've run over our time, so I want to bring this to a close.

I want to thank our panelists very much for a stimulating discussion and thank you all for coming.