

## **MEMO**

**TO:** NCEC Board Members  
**FROM:** Mark Gersh, NCEC Washington Director  
**DATE:** September 15, 2005  
**RE:** 2006 Congressional Elections

### **CHANGING DEMOGRAPHICS AND HOPE FOR 2006**

#### **Background**

In 2004, Republicans reelected a president and controlled both chambers of Congress for the first time since 1924. Yet the country actually remains almost evenly divided, and there is no evidence that voters intended this as a mandate for President Bush or the Republicans. President Bush won by just 3 million votes out of 123 million total votes cast, while Democrats need to win only 15 seats to regain control of the U.S. House and just 6 seats to have a majority in the Senate. To put this in historical perspective, Republicans needed to gain 40 seats in order to take control of the House in 1994 – they had a net gain of 52 that year. The Democratic challenger held President Bush to the smallest popular-vote victory margin of any victorious president in a reelection bid since 1948 and on a percentage basis to the smallest victory margin ever by an incumbent. In fact, close examination of the 2004 election results and the composition of the legislative bodies suggest that both Bush's and the overall Republican success is largely a regional phenomenon. Outside of the South, John Kerry won by more than 2 million votes, and Democrats, including Kerry, have won by more than a million votes in both New York and California in each of the last four presidential elections. However, President Bush managed to more than overcome that effort with his strong performance in the South, where he defeated Kerry by more than 5 million votes. In addition, Republicans now control 91 of the South's House seats and 22 of the region's Senate seats. By comparison, Democrats now control just 51 House seats and only four of the Senate seats within the region.

#### **Where We Stand Today**

Despite recent Republican electoral successes, there are a number of factors that appear to be working in Democrats' favor. If these conditions continue to develop, they could transcend the polarization of the American electorate, allowing Democrats to retake the House and/or Senate in 2006. The public is increasingly dissatisfied with the Bush administration's handling of the war in Iraq and is also extremely critical of the federal government's response and apparent lack of preparedness along the Gulf Coast in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. As a result, President Bush's approval rating has now fallen below 40 percent. Typically, the party of the president loses seats in the next election cycle when a president's approval rating falls to this level.

Scandals involving Tom DeLay, the second-ranking Republican House leader, and lobbyist Jack Abramoff have also hurt the Republicans – especially in the House. Abramoff has also been linked to Ohio Republican Representative Bob Ney. In addition, Ohio's Republican governor, Bob Taft, was recently found guilty on four misdemeanor charges in an ethics



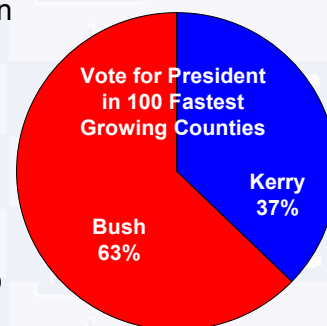
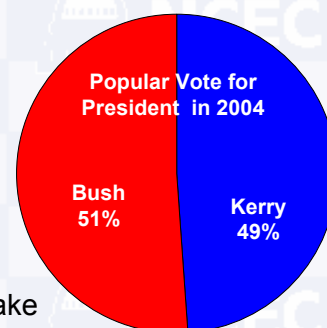
scandal that engulfed his administration. The resulting backlash toward the Republican administration could give Democrats an excellent chance at winning the open-seat gubernatorial contest, may have put as many as five of the state's Republican-held congressional districts into play, and has helped dramatically increase the potential vulnerability of Republican Senator Mike DeWine in his reelection bid next year.

Thus far, it also appears that Democrats have been more successful than Republicans in recruiting top-tier candidates in both House and Senate races. Democrats recruited attractive candidates to take on incumbent Republican senators in Pennsylvania and Missouri and are on the verge of doing so in Ohio as well, while Republicans have thus far failed to recruit their top choices in Nebraska and Florida. In the House, a few examples of Democratic success in recruiting top-tier challengers can be found in Connecticut's 4th District, Florida's 22nd District, and Pennsylvania's 6th District. As a result, Democrats have succeeded in expanding the number of overall marginal House seats that are in play from around the 30 or so that were in play last cycle to about 50 in 2006. Democrats probably need to have at least 40 House seats in play to have a realistic chance of winning the 15 seats needed in order to take back control. It now appears possible Democrats could take back control of the House and gain seats in the Senate if events continue to unfold in a manner beneficial to Democrats. Clearly, developing circumstances and Democratic recruiting successes have combined to make this much more likely than was thought possible in the immediate aftermath of the 2004 elections.

### Political/Demographic Analysis

Recently there has been much talk about "exurbs" and the impact voters living in them are having on elections. President Bush managed to carry all 25 of the fastest-growing counties [see table on page 4] and 97 of the nation's 100 fastest-growing counties. A large majority of these fastest-growing counties are classified as "exurban." Counties within this classification include places like Delaware County, Ohio; Scott County, Minnesota; and Loudoun County, Virginia. There is also rapid growth on a percentage basis among the Hispanic populations in many exurban areas, but it will take time, assuming they continue to support Democrats more often than Republicans, before growth among this group offsets the Republican gains these areas are experiencing.

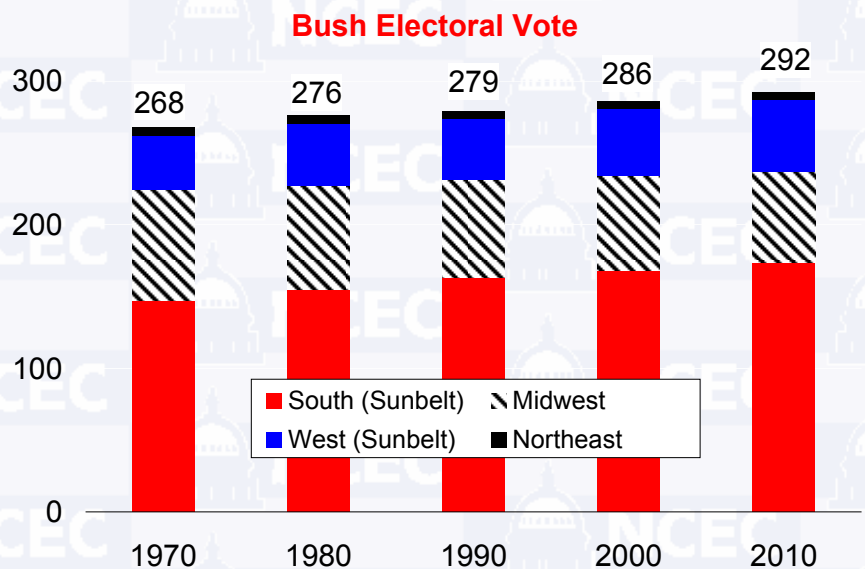
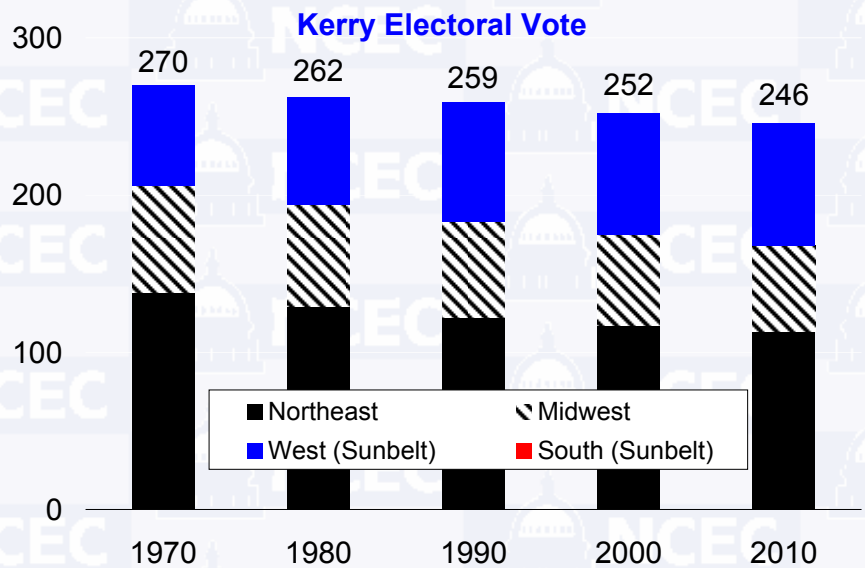
As we have seen, Republicans have come to dominate the House and Senate delegations within the South and won the presidency in 2004 largely because of Bush's overwhelming success in this region. But Republicans have successfully used "wedge" issues in rural, micropolitan, and exurban areas throughout the country. "Micropolitan" is a classification developed by the Census Bureau to describe areas that fall in between the rural and exurban classifications. Looking at Ohio, we find that, despite President Bush's narrow statewide victory margin, the use of such issues in these types of places allowed Bush to carry 72 of that state's 88 counties.



At the same time, Democrats have traditionally relied on urban and suburban areas for the bulk of their support. In 2004, according to a Pew Research Center report, John Kerry won 16 of the nation's 25 most populous counties – places like Cook County, Illinois; Brooklyn, New York; and Los Angeles, California. He also ran up huge margins in places like Cleveland, Detroit, and Philadelphia. For example, Kerry carried the city of Detroit by an enormous margin of about 286,000 votes. But these areas are not growing nearly as fast (and in some cases, actually losing population) as the exurban and micropolitan counties where Republicans are performing well.

These growth patterns have implications well into the future for Democrats. A recent study by William H. Frey for the Metropolitan Policy Program at the Brookings Institution projects that states in the Sun Belt are growing at a pace far greater than the rest of the country. Largely as a result of this Sun Belt growth, by the year 2030, an estimated 17 electoral votes could shift away from states won by John Kerry in 2004 while another 17 electoral votes would likely be added to states that supported Bush in 2004. Thus states like Georgia, Texas, and Florida will gain electoral votes at the expense of states like New York, Pennsylvania, and Illinois.

The two charts on this page further illustrate this trend by applying the 2004 presidential results to states using their electoral composition following the Census in 1970, 1980, 1990, and 2000 and a projection for 2010. During this period, 24 electoral votes would have shifted from Democrats to Republicans.



If Democrats are to counter these changing demographics, it will be necessary to expand their “base” voters. It should be possible to build on Democratic gains in older suburbs like Oakland County, Michigan; Delaware County, Pennsylvania; St. Louis County, Missouri; and Bucks County, Pennsylvania. These are all areas where Democrats have made inroads in recent elections. Voters living there and in areas similar to them across the country should be open to messages stressing the outrageous social policies promoted by right wing Republicans. Performing better in exurban areas should also be a goal in a reformulated Democratic strategy for 2006 and beyond. In order to change the outcomes of elections, Democrats do not need to carry these areas, but they must find a way to run two to three percentage points better than they have in them in the past. Election successes in Colorado, where Democrats won both a Senate race and a Republican-leaning House district, and the Montana gubernatorial contest demonstrate that Democratic candidates can be successful in these formerly hostile areas when they successfully connect with exurban voters.

### BUSH CARRIED ALL 25 OF THE FASTEST GROWING COUNTIES IN 2004

TOP 25 GROWTH COUNTIES	2000 POP TOTAL	2004 POP TOTAL	POP INCREASE	POP PERCENT INCREASE	2000 GORE VOTE	2000 BUSH VOTE	2000 BUSH PERCENT	2004 KERRY VOTE	2004 BUSH VOTE	2004 BUSH PERCENT
Loudoun, VA	169,599	239,156	69,557	41.0%	30,938	42,453	57.8%	47,271	60,382	56.1%
Flagler, FL	49,832	69,005	19,173	38.5%	13,897	12,613	47.6%	18,578	19,633	51.4%
Douglas, CO	175,766	237,963	62,197	35.4%	27,076	56,007	67.4%	39,661	80,651	67.0%
Rockwall, TX	43,080	58,260	15,180	35.2%	3,642	13,666	79.0%	5,320	20,120	79.1%
Forsyth, GA	98,407	131,865	33,458	34.0%	6,694	27,769	80.6%	9,201	47,267	83.7%
Henry, GA	119,341	159,506	40,165	33.7%	11,971	25,815	68.3%	21,096	42,759	67.0%
Kendall, IL	54,544	72,548	18,004	33.0%	8,444	13,688	61.8%	12,374	19,774	61.5%
Newton, GA	62,001	81,524	19,523	31.5%	6,703	11,127	62.4%	10,939	18,095	62.3%
Lincoln, SD	24,131	31,437	7,306	30.3%	3,844	6,546	63.0%	5,703	11,161	66.2%
Paulding, GA	81,678	105,936	24,258	29.7%	6,743	16,881	71.5%	9,420	30,843	76.6%
Delaware, OH	109,989	142,503	32,514	29.6%	17,134	36,639	68.1%	27,048	53,142	66.3%
Scott, MN	89,498	114,794	25,296	28.3%	17,503	23,954	57.8%	23,958	36,055	60.1%
Collin, TX	491,675	627,938	136,263	27.7%	42,884	128,179	74.9%	68,935	174,435	71.7%
Osceola, FL	172,493	219,544	47,051	27.3%	28,181	26,212	48.2%	38,633	43,117	52.7%
Williamson, TX	249,967	317,938	67,971	27.2%	26,591	65,041	71.0%	43,117	83,284	65.9%
Hamilton, IN	182,740	231,760	49,020	26.8%	18,002	56,372	75.8%	26,388	77,887	74.7%
Spencer, KY	11,766	14,822	3,056	26.0%	1,554	3,150	67.0%	1,970	4,816	71.0%
Lyon, NV	34,501	43,230	8,729	25.3%	3,955	7,270	64.8%	5,637	11,136	66.4%
Fort Bend, TX	354,452	442,620	88,168	24.9%	47,569	73,567	60.7%	68,722	93,625	57.7%
Union, NC	123,677	153,652	29,975	24.2%	14,890	31,876	68.2%	17,974	42,820	70.4%
Stafford, VA	92,446	114,781	22,335	24.2%	12,596	20,731	62.2%	17,208	28,500	62.4%
Lake, FL	210,528	260,788	50,260	23.9%	36,571	50,010	57.8%	48,221	74,389	60.7%
St. Johns, FL	123,135	152,473	29,338	23.8%	19,502	39,546	67.0%	14,659	52,059	78.0%
Spotsylvania, VA	90,395	111,850	21,455	23.7%	13,455	20,739	60.7%	16,623	28,527	63.2%
Placer, CA	248,399	307,004	58,605	23.6%	42,449	69,835	62.2%	55,573	95,969	63.3%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3,464,040</b>	<b>4,442,897</b>	<b>978,857</b>	<b>28.3%</b>	<b>462,788</b>	<b>879,686</b>	<b>65.5%</b>	<b>654,229</b>	<b>1,250,446</b>	<b>65.7%</b>

Between 2000 and 2004 the 25 fastest growing counties saw a 28% increase in population. Bush won almost two-thirds of the vote and all of these counties in 2004. Bush increased his 2004 vote by 370,000 over 2000 while the Democratic vote increased by only 191,000.