



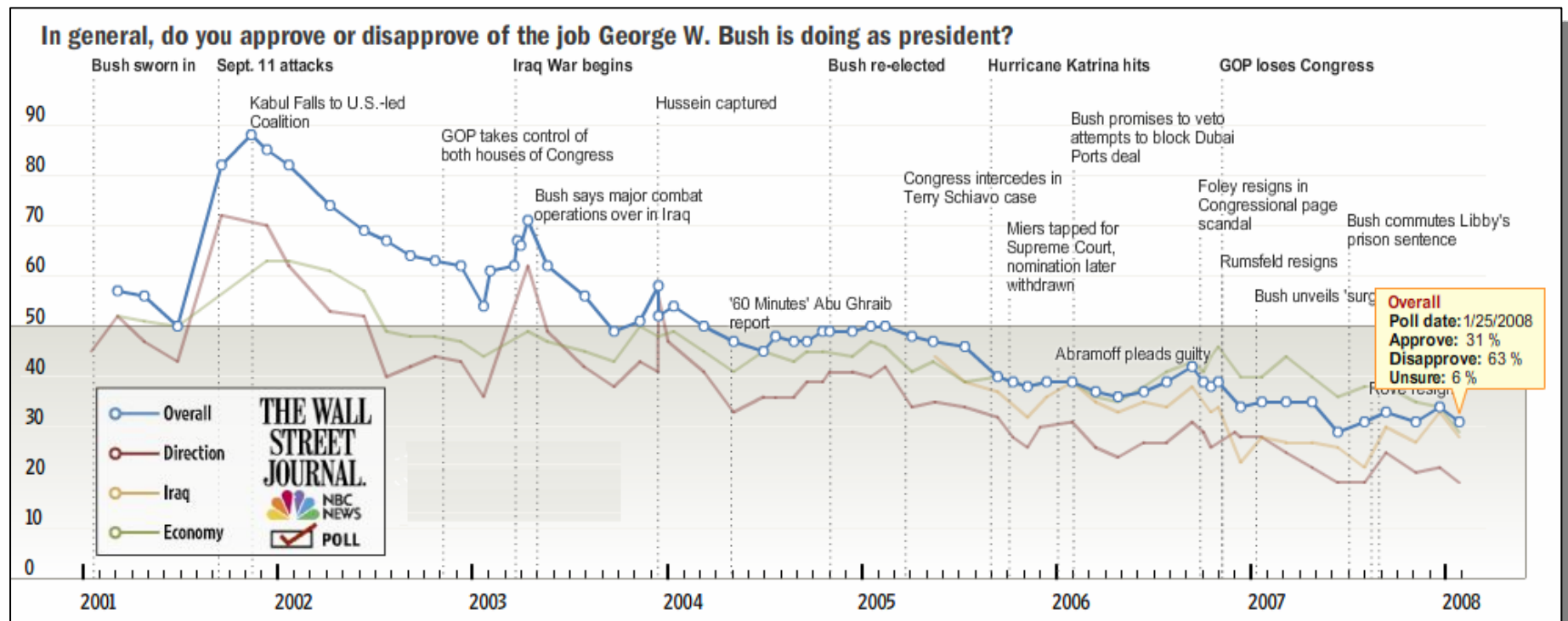
# **That's Entertainment: Politics as Theater in Campaign '08**

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# A Wildly Unpopular President





# A Clear Democratic Advantage?

Metric	Dem	Rep	Adv.
Approval Rating (1)	55	42	+13
Presidential Preference (2)	50	32	+18
Congressional Preference (3)	43	38	+5
Party Identification (4)	36	34	+2

Trust on Issues (5)	Dem	Rep	Adv.
Health Care	57	33	+24
Social Security	53	33	+20
Education	52	34	+18
Corruption	42	29	+13
Education	48	35	+13
Immigration	44	32	+12
Iraq	47	39	+8
Taxes	48	40	+8
Abortion	45	38	+7
National Security	43	43	0

Sources: 1. Gallup 1/13/08; 2. CBS 1/12/08; 3. Rasmussen 1/20/08; 4. Rasmussen 1/4/08; 5. Rasmussen 11/23/07



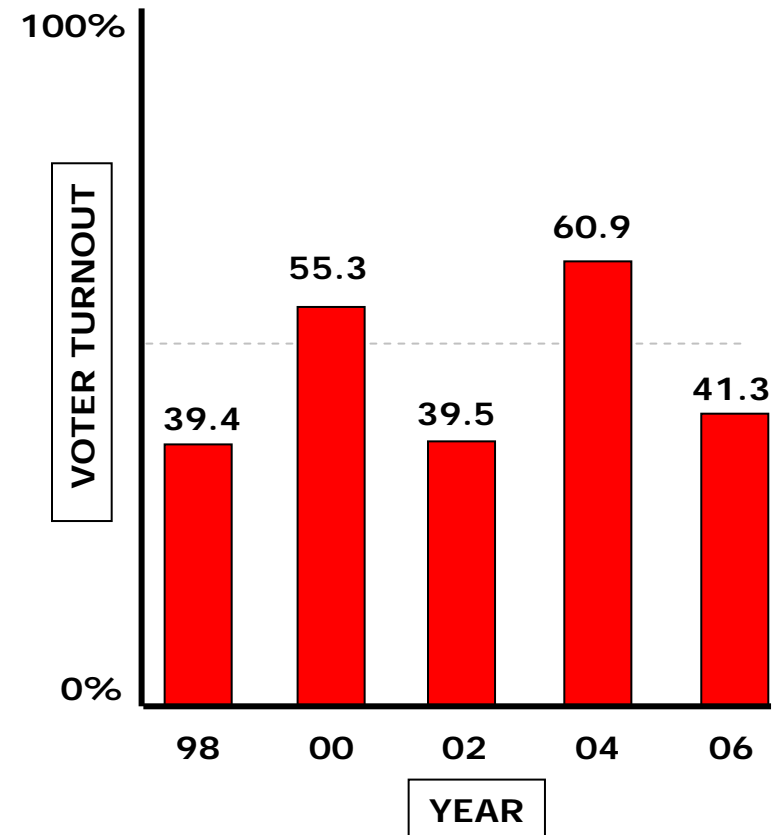
# Remember: This Man Was Elected...Twice





# It's Intensity, Not Propensity

- Voter intensity more important than majority preference
- Critical in low turnout elections
- Key is getting half of the half that vote
- Mobilizing single-issue groups essential

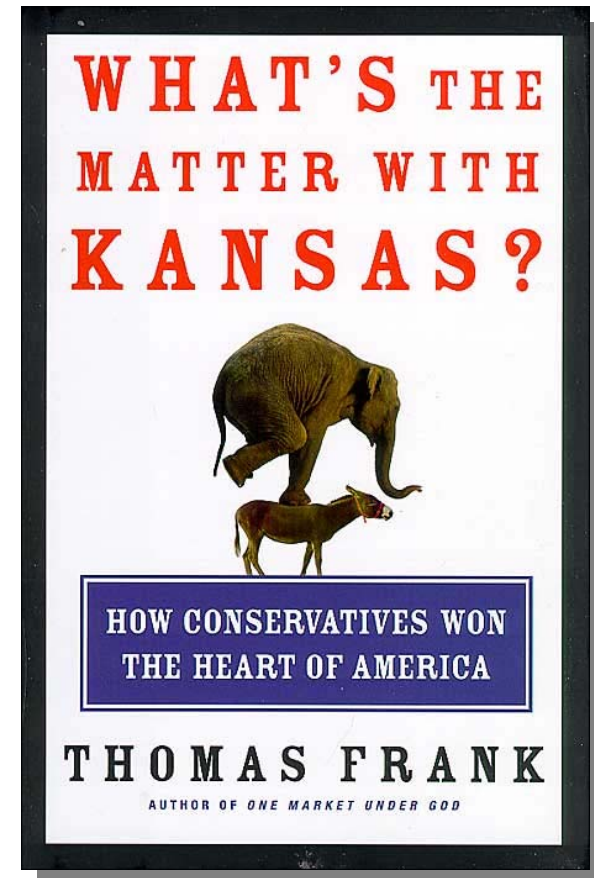


Source: United States Election Project, George Mason University



# It's the Culture War

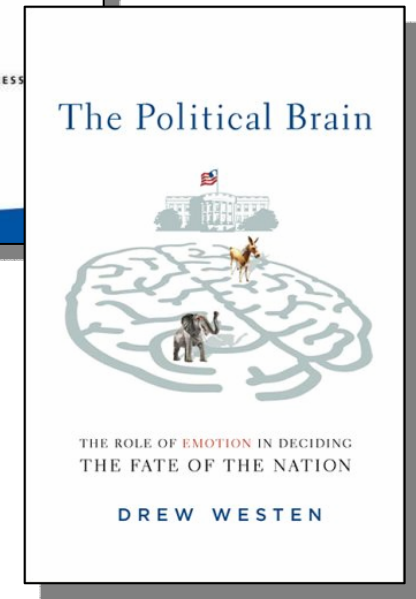
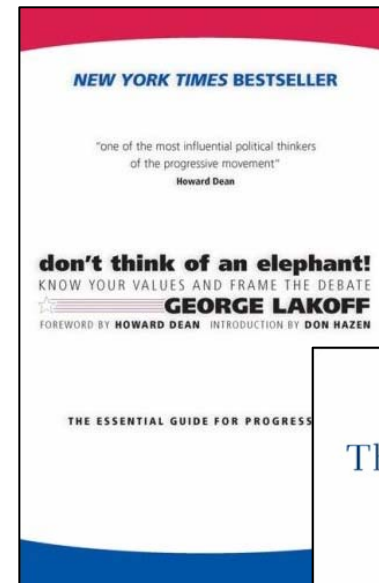
- Social issues trump economic self-interest
- GOP uses politics of division and the wedge issue
- Resulting policies hurt working Americans
- Example: 17 state same-sex marriage ban initiatives in '04 and '06





# It's the Mental Model

- People vote their values, not interests or issues
- Lakoff's "framing"
  - conservative "strict father"
  - liberal "nurturing parent"
- Westen's "political brain"
  - hearts over minds
  - emotion over reason





# It's Entertainment!

- Oversupply of media sources
- Concentrated media ownership
- Politics must compete for mindshare
- News, opinion and politics merge as just another form of entertainment
- Media presents issues in terms of conflict and confrontation
- Politicians must be performers





# Shifting Political News Sources

Where the Public Learns About the Presidential Campaign			
	Campaign year		
	2000	2004	2008
<i>Regularly learn something from...</i>	%	%	%
Local TV news	48	42	40
Cable news networks	34	38	38
Nightly network news	45	35	32
Daily newspaper	40	31	31
<b>Internet</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>24</b>
TV news magazines	29	25	22
Morning TV shows	18	20	22
National Public Radio	12	14	18
Talk radio	15	17	16
Cable political talk	14	14	15
Sunday political TV	15	13	14
Public TV shows	12	11	12
News magazines	15	10	11
Late-night talk shows	9	9	9
Religious radio	7	5	9
C-SPAN	9	8	8
Comedy TV shows	6	8	8
Lou Dobbs Tonight	--	--	7

Main Source of Campaign News				
<i>First source mentioned</i>	Feb	Jan	Jan	Late Dec
	1996	2000	2004	2007
	%	%	%	%
Television	73	68	68	60
Newspaper	15	15	15	12
Internet	1	4	6	15
Radio	8	8	7	8
Magazines	1	2	1	2
Other	1	2	1	1
Don't know	1	1	2	2
	100	100	100	100
<i>First or second mentions*</i>	Feb	Jan	Jan	Late Dec
	1996	2000	2004	2007
	%	%	%	%
Television	75	86	78	72
Newspaper	49	36	38	30
Internet	2	7	13	26
Radio	18	14	15	13
Magazines	4	3	2	4
Other	1	3	2	3
Don't know	1	1	2	2
	150	150	150	150

Source: Pew Research Center, 1/11/08



# Rise of the Infotainment Complex

- Decline of traditional media
  - local news, newspapers
  - national TV news
- Rise of new formats
  - cable news
  - talk radio
  - role of TV talk shows
- Explosion of Internet
  - online news sites, video, blogs, podcasts
  - impact by age group
- Audience self-selection





# Two - and Only Two - Sides





# Good vs. Evil Dramas

**"Wanted Dead or Alive"**



**"Bring 'Em On"**



**12 Year Old S-CHIP "Fraud?"**



**John Kerry "Swift Boated"**







# Conflict and Confrontation Sells

- Success of conservative radio
  - 91% of weekday content<sup>1</sup>
  - 76% in top 10 markets
- Leading cable news shows<sup>2</sup>
  - Fox News still #1
  - led by O'Reilly Factor
- Partisan publishing houses
- Even C-SPAN<sup>3</sup>
  - 51% of think tank coverage is right wing; 31% "centrist"



Sources: 1. Center for American Progress (2007); 2. TV Newser (January 2007); 3. CEPR (2007)



# The TMZing of Politics

Obama Girl



Hillary's Cleavage



Hillary's Laugh



John Edwards' Hair





# Politics as a Performance







# No War on Christmas Here







## What Voters Are Worried About...

Most Important Issue	Pct.
Job Creation/Economy	26%
Iraq	17%
Health Care	17%
Terrorism	10%
Illegal Immigration	10%
Energy/Cost of Gas	7%
Environment/Global Warming	6%
Foreign Policy/Iran	5%
Other	2%

Source: Wall Street Journal/NBC News Poll, 1/22/08



## ...Isn't What to Expect in 2008

- The tactics
  - “Barack Hussein Obama”
  - “President Hillary Clinton”
  - “socialized medicine”
  - “The party of Bush”
- The strategies
  - preemptive vote suppression over mythical “fraud”?
  - GOP obstructionism or “do-nothing” Dem Congress?
  - debate over economy or illegal immigration?
  - Iraq/national security redux?



# Implications of Politics as Theater

- Distorted debates
  - “uncertainty” over global warming
  - half of Americans still believe Saddam had WMD<sup>1</sup>
- Hyperpartisanship
  - conflict leads to gridlock
  - key issues, crises unresolved
- Increased cynicism
  - distrust of political leaders, parties & the press
  - potential for decreased turnout

Source: 1. Harris Poll (July 2006)



# Signs of Hope

- Record turnout
  - in Iowa, New Hampshire and South Carolina
  - “youthquake” among 18 to 29 year olds
- Internet organizing
  - rise of the “Netroots”
  - unprecedented mobilization, fundraising
- Citizen journalism
  - new engagement, accountability from blogs, etc.
  - George Allen’s “Macaca moment”