

Whither the *Democrats?*

John B. Judis, who co-authored the important new book The Emerging Democratic Majority, confronts the recent U.S. election outcome.

GOP political strategist Jeffrey Bell offers an important alternative explanation.



John B. Judis is a senior editor of *The New Republic* and the co-author with Ruy Teixeira of *The Emerging Democratic Majority* (Scribner, 2002).



It's National Security, Stupid!

BY JOHN B. JUDIS

In the 1996, 1998, and 2000 elections, Democrats increased their margin in Congress, and in the 1992, 1996, and 2000 presidential elections, Democrats increased their presidential vote. Al Gore lost the presidency in 2000, but won the popular vote. It looked like a new Democratic majority would replace the conservative Republican majority that had taken hold in the 1980s and had reached its peak in November 1994. But this trend was clearly set back by the November 2002 election, which handed control over both houses of Congress back to the Republicans. The question is whether, and under what circumstances, the trend toward a Democratic majority could resume.

There is one major factor that contributed toward a Democratic shift in the 1990s. Over the past fifty years, the United States has been moving from an industrial society to a post-industrial society characterized by a new workforce devoted primarily to the production of ideas rather than things, a transformed geography centered in new post-industrial metropolises, and a new understanding of the role of government, family, religion, sex, work, leisure, nature, and the market. The conservative Republicans of the 1980s were a backlash to the first stirrings of this social revolution. They stood for old-time fundamentalist religion and laissez-faire economics in opposition to women's rights, civil rights, immigration, and environmental and consumer protection.

But the old Democratic party was also tone-deaf to this historical transformation. Before the 1960s, the Democrats were based in the unionized blue-collar work-

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ing class, the urban ethnic North, and in the white rural South. They were the party of redistributing income rather than creating wealth. But in the past three decades, the Democrats have become the party of post-industrial America, led by professionals (from teachers and nurses to fashion designers and actors), women (who have become disproportionately Democratic), and minorities. They are concentrated in new metropolitan areas such as California's Silicon Valley; and they stand for a progressive centrist politics that grew out of the Clinton-Gore Administration of the 1990s. This progressive centrism—which is characterized by support for government regulation, but also sensitivity to the conditions of economic growth—continues to

define the terrain of domestic politics in the United States. Outside of a few states in the deep South, Republicans have been forced to mimic Democrats' commitment to a positive role for government in regulating market capitalism.

But the conservative Republicans of the 1980s also came to power in the wake of Democratic divisions over the Vietnam War, Soviet advances into Africa, and the Iranian hostage crisis. Republicans became the party of national security to whom Americans looked when they believed the country was in danger. As long as the Cold War continued in the 1980s, the Republicans were able to win elections as the party of national security, but when the Berlin Wall fell in 1989, the Republicans lost their most important source of political popularity. By 1992, the party had split over foreign policy, and Democrats under Clinton argued successfully that the country should turn its attention to the economy and away from what seemed like the ghosts of Cold War conflict.

That's how matters stood in American politics until the attack on the World Trade Centers and the Pentagon on September 11. That event—and Bush's energetic response to Al Qaeda and the Taliban in Afghanistan—revived the Republicans' reputation as the party of national security and contributed to Bush's soaring popularity. The shadow of September 11, lengthened by the profile of Saddam Hussein, continues to fall over American politics. Bush's approach to foreign affairs and the war against terror enjoys wide support among Americans voters.

Democrats had hoped to contest these elections over domestic rather than foreign policy. And to the extent they were able to do so—in the state governor's races, where foreign policy is not a factor—they enjoyed some success. But Democrats were not able to turn the Senate or House races into referenda on the Republicans' economic policies. Instead, Bush and the Republicans succeeded in making them referenda on their con-

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duct of the war against terror. On the eve of the election, a revealing Gallup Poll found that voters gave a greater weight to the complex of “terrorism, war, and international issues” than to the set of economic issues around social security and prescription drug prices.

As long as national security concerns remain paramount, and as long as Bush and the Republicans are seen as more effective in meeting them than the Democrats, Republicans will enjoy an advantage in Congressional and Presidential elections, just as they did during the 1980s. If American fears of terror from abroad should finally abate, and cease to preoccupy Americans, then it is likely the factors favoring Democrats will reassert themselves. Or if the Bush administration should be unsuccessful in prosecuting the war on terror—with the United

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States becoming bogged down, for instance, in a protracted and expensive occupation of Iraq and faced by rising instances of terrorism—then voters might reconsider the Republicans as the part of national security. Which outcome is the more likely—it won’t be clear for two or as long as four years. ♦

No, It’s a Deeper, More Fundamental Problem of Cultural Detachment

BY JEFFREY BELL

The biggest near-term problem with John Judis’s hope for Democratic dominance is the same one that the party’s 2002 campaign strategy ran into: its tacit desire to take foreign policy and the war on terror “off the table.”

Foreign policy does occasionally drop from view in American politics, as the three presidential elections from 1992 to 2000 prove. But in the period since the emergence of the United States as a global power in the Spanish American War, which

Jeffrey Bell, a principal of Capital City Partners, is author of *Populism and Elitism: Politics in the Age of Equality* (Regnery, 1992).



encompasses the twenty-six presidential elections between 1900 and 2000, I would list only three other elections—1924, 1928, and 1932—in this category. We may applaud or lament this pattern, but unless things change in a way rather difficult at the moment to foresee, the inward-looking 1992–2000 election cycle is quite likely to be remembered as an aberration.

So Democrats will need a foreign policy—but what? Anyone you meet can tell you the downside of a me-too approach to the hawkishness of President Bush, as attempted by former House Minority Leader Richard Gephardt (MO) in the recent campaign. If it was meant to take the war “off the table,” it certainly failed. But is Judis certain that the Democrats would have fared better if their new House leader, Nancy Pelosi (CA), had been calling the foreign-policy shots? Under the much-maligned Gephardt strategy, not a single

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Democratic House incumbent was defeated for reelection, other than in five districts completely rearranged by redistricting.

However defensible, the Gephardt strategy is probably unsustainable. As has been true for at least three and one-half decades, the base of the Democratic Party is considerably more dovish than the Republicans on issues of war and peace. Even former Vice President Gore, in 1991 one of just ten Democratic senators to vote to authorize war with Iraq, has defected to the doves. And if Bush's conduct of the war goes badly, this may look better in general-election terms than it does right now.

But the likely Democratic trend toward skepticism on the war underlines a deeper problem with *The Emerging Democratic Majority*, the challenging new book Judis has co-authored with Ruy Teixeira. For the heart of the Democratic base's dislike of the war and of George W. Bush is rooted not in foreign-policy realism or pacifism, but in a stinging critique of the United States itself rooted in the values wars of the 1960s. For the dominant Democratic world-view, the last thing the America of George W. Bush should be doing is reshaping the rest of the world in its own image. It should instead be reshaping itself.

Judis and Teixeira acknowledge that this stance was a disaster for the Democratic Party of the late 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. They argue that due to the upsurge of Democratic-leaning immigrant groups and the emergence of a post-industrial economy, America is today a different country. The far greater numbers of left-leaning professionals (government workers, teachers, and lawyers) and the emergence of a multicultural "ideopolis"—knowledge-centered settlement clusters built around university towns and

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the New Economy—presage far greater openness to the left's cultural critique.

Bill Clinton is fondly remembered as a Democratic president who benefited from the demographic changes boosting the left side of the culture wars, without needlessly antagonizing millions of traditionalist voters. But this did not always come easy. Following the huge Democratic losses in the 1994 elections, Clinton pulled the plug on the campaign for sexual openness being waged by Surgeon General Joycelyn Elders. And for all his personal scandals, a Clinton presidency engaged in abolishing the federal welfare entitlement and successfully reducing the crime rate proved a difficult moving target for antagonistic social conservatives.

The greatest danger of an increasingly militant Democratic attack on Bush and the war is that it will bring out the rawest, most arrogant aspects of 1960s liberalism. Because the anti-Bush, anti-war critique is cultural in nature, there is every chance it will wash over into seemingly unrelated issues—needlessly antagonizing traditional voters who backed Clinton and Gore for 1990s economic success, and bringing to the surface an alienation from America that could prove an unpleasant surprise to immigrants and New Economy professionals alike.

Coming during a Republican presidency marked by a strong, disciplined political strategy, the Democrats' return to basics could wind up making this a much more Republican country. ◆