

The Bush strategy: Rigging the 2004 vote

WHAT does it take for a voter to support George W. Bush for president? According to polls such as one recently conducted by the University of Maryland's Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA), the answer is ignorance. They exhibit a profound lack of knowledge about world events and about Bush's political positions.

A clear majority (72%) of Bush voters believe, for example, that Iraq possessed Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) immediately prior to the American invasion. A majority believes that the federal government's own Duelfer Report, which ascertained that Iraq had no significant weapons or weapons programs, came to the opposite conclusion. Seventy-five percent incorrectly believe that Iraq provided substantial aid to al Qaeda, even though the CIA and the 9/11 Commission concluded otherwise. Fifty-five percent went stated that the 9/11 commission found such a link. Less than one third of the Bush voters understood that most of world opinion opposed the U.S. invasion of Iraq.

The same polls show that the candidate these voters support only exists in their imaginations. Most incorrectly believe that Bush supports the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (69%), the international treaty banning landmines (72%), the International Criminal Court – which he denounced during the debates (53%) and the Kyoto accords on global warming (51%). Seventy-four percent of them incorrectly believe Bush supports including labor and environmental standards in international trade treaties.

If keeping their flock ignorant is the Republican Party's strategy for the 21st Century, Fox News is certainly their strongest tool. An earlier PIPA poll asked Americans if they believed any of the following three misperceptions: that links between Iraq and al Qaeda have been found, that WMDs were found in Iraq, or that world public opinion favored the

THE BUSH STRATEGY: RIGGING THE 2004 VOTE / 2

U.S. invasion of Iraq. The poll then queried participants as to their main sources for news and information. Of those who said they get most of their news from Fox, 80% harbored at least one of these misperceptions. The other corporate TV outlets didn't fare much better, with a majority of ABC (61%), CBS (71%), CNN (55%) and NBC (55%) news viewers also holding at least one of these misperceptions. At the other end of the corporate media spectrum, only 23% of NPR and PBS listeners and viewers labored under one of these misperceptions – a number that is still shockingly high. I'd suspect that the number of Pacifica Radio (Democracy Now!, Free Speech Radio News, etc.) listeners, by contrast, holding these misguided beliefs would be statistically insignificant.

The Color of Democrats

While the GOP has been successful in keeping many of its voters ignorant about both world events and their presidential candidate, it still faces the problem that its minions constitute a minority of the American electorate. Hence, the Republicans also must work to keep the anti-Bush majority from voting. Luckily for them, however, it's pretty easy to sort the potential Kerry voters from the Bush voters. If they're uneducated suburban or rural white males, the group the press glosses as "the NASCAR dads, they're likely to vote for Bush. Likewise, if they're in the top income brackets, greedy for tax cuts and short-sighted about how the ensuing social chaos will impact their lives, they're also likely Bush voters. And then there're the fundamentalists whose preachers blasphemously claim to speak for God – telling their flock that the big guy commands them to vote Republican – the Prince of Peace be damned.

The group of voters that are most likely to favor Kerry are even easier to spot – they're black. This of course comes after a century of prominent Republican politicians (though not all) either kowtowing to racists or supporting racists and their policies outright. Depending on the region, 90-98% of African-American voters now vote Democratic. Likewise, well-read draft-age college students also fall strongly into the anti-Bush camp. Though they lack any real enthusiasm for the Democratic party, they seem passionate about getting rid of Bush. Other core groups of Kerry supporters include unionized workers and elderly South Florida sunbirds and retirees.

Bagging white guys – erasing black folks

Hence, the Republican strategy is two-pronged. Get the NASCAR dads to the polls. And keep black folks and college students from voting. The NASCAR dads are easy – just scare the shit out of them by flashing alert levels like they were the starting lights, or "Christmas Tree," at the drag strip (yes, I know drag racing is not NASCAR). Remind them that al

THE BUSH STRATEGY: RIGGING THE 2004 VOTE / 3

Qaeda will kill their mommas if Kerry wins, and pump up the testosterone with a Schwarzenegger line about "girly-men." Maybe bait them with images of scary tall black men like George H.W. Bush did with his racist Willie Horton ads in 1988. Then they're in the bag.

Keeping black people from voting is a bit more difficult – and sloppy. But in the past, it's proven a winner for the GOP. In 2000, for example, over 20,000 black voters lost their right to vote after being falsely identified as felons by Jeb Bush's Florida state government. Tens of thousands of votes were voided due to punch card reading errors in predominantly black neighborhoods (segregation makes such mischief possible). Countless other black voters were turned away from the polls due to equipment failures, long lines or intimidation by crooked cops and poll workers. When the Supreme Court prematurely stopped the ballot recount, Bush was ahead by less than 600 votes, leaving no doubt that Bush seized the White House by successfully suppressing the black vote.

To again seize the White House in next month's election, the Bush team must not only repeat the disenfranchisement of black and inner-city voters that occurred in 2000 – they must expand upon it.

Election observers from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), initially invited by the Bush administration to certify the cleanliness of the American electoral system, released a report last month warning of problems with the upcoming U.S. presidential election. In addition to concerns over electronic voting machines that can easily be rigged, which provide no ability for recounts and which run on hidden software written and locked up by companies that are Republican campaign contributors (see Grip 10/30/03), the OSCE also expressed concern over possible intimidation and disenfranchisement of ethnic minorities.

Disenfranchisement 2004

The OSCE's concerns, all but ignored by the U.S. corporate press, seem well founded, as this year's Republican tricksters have already put their voter disenfranchisement campaign into full swing, with Florida again rising from the muck as ground zero for vote suppression. This is no accident. Campaign strategists feel that the election victor will be the one who wins two out of these three states: Florida, Pennsylvania and Ohio. Former Florida Secretary of State and 2000 Bush campaign statewide chair Katherine Harris is gone. In her place, overseeing the vote count for the 2004 election, is Glenda Hood, appointed by George W. Bush's brother Jeb, the governor of Florida.

Hood immediately set out shamelessly repeating the same disenfranchisement tactics that allowed the Bushes to steal the election in 2000 – creating a new "felon" purge list

THE BUSH STRATEGY: RIGGING THE 2004 VOTE / 4

that would have thrown 22,000 African-Americans off of the voting rolls. Interestingly enough, the same list only removed 61 Hispanics. Hispanics outnumber African-Americans in Florida – hence the small number is suspect, especially in the light of the fact that the group is dominated by Cuban-Americans who tend to vote Republican – and tend to commit crimes at about the same rate as African-Americans and White folk. When the mainstream media got wind of this, Hood cut and ran, abandoning this scheme.

Hood also is fighting to prohibit voters whose registration is challenged, from filling out provisional ballots – which are later certified or destroyed after elections officials determine the registration status of the voter. Hood wants to deny this right to voters who turn up at the wrong polling place – even though most such errors have proven to be the fault of the local elections offices and not the misdirected voters. And most of these errors occur in inner-city areas. The Ohio Secretary of State issued a similar edict there. Hood is also fighting to void over 10,000 new voter registration forms where potential voters filled out an affidavit stating they are U.S. citizens, but failed to check a box redundantly making the same statement.

Stealing the senior vote

Meanwhile, at the unofficial level, The Guardian of London reports that Republican tricksters have been telephoning Florida's senior citizens who polled as likely Kerry voters, offering to let them "vote" early using the touch-tone pad on their phone. Other senior citizens were called by operatives claiming to be from the board of elections, who offered to allow them to request an absentee ballot over the phone – a ballot that will never arrive. And senior citizens in Tallahassee report being contacted by a supposed elections worker who offered to come to their homes and pick up their absentee ballots to "hand deliver" to elections officers. Leon County (Tallahassee) Elections Supervisor Ion Sancho told The Guardian, "I've been an elections supervisor for 16 years now, and nobody has ever called me with this kind of activity occurring." The Guardian, it should be noted, is the same paper that broke the story about voter wide-scale disenfranchisement in Florida in 2000.

Florida is far from being alone this year when it comes to organized Republican efforts to suppress the vote. The Milwaukee Journal Sentinel reports that Milwaukee County Executive Scott Walker wants to print 260,000 fewer ballots than requested by elections officials in the city of Milwaukee. Most Milwaukee voters are minorities, who gave Bush less than 2% of the vote in the 2000 election. In addition to serving as County Executive, Walker pulls double duty as co-chair of the statewide Wisconsin Bush campaign.

Trashing Democratic registration forms

In Nevada, the Republican Party was busted for running a voter registration operation falsely purporting to be affiliated with the nonpartisan organization, "America Votes." In actuality, according to investigations conducted by the Las Vegas Review-Journal and KLAS-TV, the Republican operation, which called itself Voters Outreach of America (VOA), was run by the Arizona based political consulting firm, Sproul & Associates (S&A). S&A is under contract with the GOP. According to VOA employees, supervisors destroyed completed registration forms where registrants selected "Democrat" as their party preference. The perspective Kerry voters, who believe they're registered, will find out otherwise on Election Day. Likewise, the San Jose Mercury News quotes one VOA worker whose pay was docked because he turned in too many forms marked "Democrat."

Since the initial report broke two weeks ago, investigators found Sproul running similar operations under contract with the GOP in the "swing states" of Minnesota, Missouri, Oregon, West Virginia and Pennsylvania. Pennsylvania is also home to a last minute effort by the GOP to relocate 63 inner-city polling places in African-American Philadelphia neighborhoods. Democrats have so far thwarted the move which would have caused chaos and confusion on Election Day.

Republicans in New Hampshire leafleted college student voters in 2002, falsely stating that they would jeopardize their financial aid by voting where they attend school. Similar threats, falsely challenging the legality of student voter registration, were leveled by a Fox News crew in Arizona. In Ohio, where ex-felons have the right to vote, 21 counties insisted they didn't. Meanwhile, a Republican Nevada official unsuccessfully attempted to purge 17,000 Democrats from the state's voting rolls, claiming that they weren't active voters.

Pimpily college Republicans run amok

On a national level, according The New York Times, the GOP is recruiting tens of thousands of poll watchers to challenge the qualifications of voters in swing states who they suspect are not eligible to vote. Ground Zero for this operation is the Democratic and minority stronghold of Cleveland, where the Republicans have already registered 1,400 recruits to annoy, frustrate, insult and otherwise harass voters while ultimately causing lines and confusion in the polling places. The GOP is training these mischief makers, for example, to challenge the credentials of those who accompany and assist handicapped [inner-city] voters. They'll also be challenging people who they think don't look American.

The OSCE appears justified to worry about the upcoming U.S. elections. Regimes that come to power in coups seldom leave office gracefully. There's a dark cloud hanging over our future. Only an uncontestable landslide can save us from an electoral crisis.