

A Chink in Kerry's Armor Lets Edwards Make it Close

John Edwards gave John Kerry a scare in Wisconsin by exploiting a 10-year-old Senate vote – and broad concern about jobs.

Edwards found his voice – and a willing audience – on the issue of NAFTA. Kerry voted for the trade agreement; Edwards ran ads in Wisconsin calling it a jobs-killer – and the issue resonated for him. It wasn't enough to win – but it did bring Edwards close.

Three-quarters of Democratic voters said foreign trade takes more jobs from their state than it creates, and Edwards ran about evenly with Kerry in this huge group. The economy and jobs, moreover, was the most-cited issue – and Edwards won those voters outright. (He won economy voters just twice before – in South Carolina and Oklahoma, states where he also ran anti-NAFTA television ads, and finished ahead of Kerry.)

Trade with other countries:	Kerry	Edwards
Takes more jobs (74%)	39%	36
Creates more jobs (13%)	45	27
Has no effect (7%)	30	32

Top issues:	Kerry	Edwards
Economy/Jobs (41%)	35%	46
Health care (19%)	43	30
War in Iraq (17%)	44	23

But where this takes Edwards is not clear. This state may have been especially open to NAFTA-bashing; it has nearly twice as many manufacturing jobs as the national average. It also had an open primary, with more independents voting than in any state to date save New Hampshire; Edwards won independents (and Republicans who turned up), but wasn't close among mainline Democrats. And, as elsewhere, Edwards was weak among minority voters.

	Kerry	Edwards
Democrats (62%)	48%	31
Independents (29%)	28	40
Republicans (9%)	18	44

	Kerry	Edwards	Dean
Whites (89%)	37	37	18
Blacks (6%)	55	15	15

All these suggest tougher sledding ahead for Edwards. Minority voters were relatively scarce in Wisconsin; they're much more abundant in many Super Tuesday states (March 2 – including California, New York, Georgia, Ohio and Maryland) and Southern Tuesday (March 9) states beyond. In the 2000 primaries more liberals voted in seven of the nine Super Tuesday states than showed up in Wisconsin this Tuesday. And most of the upcoming states historically have had more Democrats voting, and fewer independents.

Kerry, for his part, survived his Wisconsin scare with the aid of base Democrats - liberals (he won them by 11 points, while splitting moderates and losing conservatives); black and Hispanic voters (small groups in Wisconsin, but he won them by wide margins while splitting whites with Edwards); women (he won them, tied Edwards among men); and lower-income (under \$30,000) and less-educated voters.

	Kerry	Edwards
Liberals (43%)	41%	30
Moderates (42%)	41	39
Conservatives (15%)	30	37
Under \$30,000 (25%)	47%	29
Over \$30,000 (76%)	36	36

But Kerry's mainstay, electability, was a less dominant issue than it's been elsewhere. Voters by nearly 2-1 said a candidate who agrees with them on issues was more important than one who can beat Bush – a wider margin than in most other states. And Edwards topped Kerry among issue voters by 10 points, while Kerry won beat-Bush voters by more than 30 points.

More important in a candidate:	Kerry	Edwards
Agree on the issues (60%)	29%	39
Can beat Bush (33%)	59	28

In another question, the attributes list, there were as many voters looking mainly for "someone who stands up for what he believes" as looking for someone who can beat Bush; with "someone who cares about people like me" and "has a positive message" close behind. These four were bunched more closely than elsewhere.

Kerry won very strongly on electability, but ran third – behind Howard Dean and Edwards – on "stands up." Edwards won solidly on "cares" and "positive message," by now his campaign trademarks.

Most important candidate attribute:	Kerry	Edwards	Dean
Stands up for what he believes (25%)	24%	28	32
Can defeat George W. Bush (23%)	69	21	8
Cares about people like me (19%)	30	47	17
Has a positive message (17%)	27	57	12

One other result may give Kerry pause as the race moves on to Super Tuesday: Edwards, by a wide margin, won voters who made their final decision in the campaign's final week. And there were more of them in Wisconsin than in any previous state.

	Kerry	Edwards
Decided in the last week (58%)	30%	45
Decided before that (42%)	52	21

Final mention goes to Dean, who declared Wisconsin a must-win state, then reconsidered. His third place was a distant one; he didn't challenge among any sizable group, save those looking for a candidate who "stands up for what he believes."

And a summary of Kerry's and Edwards' best groups:

Kerry's top groups:

- 74% of those who'd be very satisfied if Kerry wins
- 69% top quality - can beat Bush
- 68% top quality - has the right experience
- 59% beating Bush more important than agreeing on issues
- 55% blacks
- 54% non-white women
- 52% early deciders
- 49% other Christians
- 48% Democrats
- 47% top issue - education

Edwards' top groups:

- 57% top quality - has positive message
- 52% dissatisfied if Kerry nominated
- 50% satisfied with Bush administration
- 48% somewhat satisfied if Kerry nominated
- 47% top quality - cares about people like me
- 46% top issue - economy/jobs
- 45% late deciders
- 44% Republicans
- 42% approve of the Iraq war
- 41% somewhat conservative

METHODOLOGY – This analysis is based on exit polls of 2,277 Democratic primary voters in Wisconsin. The results have a margin of sampling error of plus or minus four percentage points. Field work by Edison/Mitofsky for the National Election Pool.

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