

First Choice 2004: Know *What You Want Before You Choose Who You Want*

1 Move aggressively to head off potential threats

2 Raise our defenses by tightening security

3 Use persuasion and collaboration to defeat terrorism



FDNY photo

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Most voters' guides compare the candidates. That's useful, but how can you decide who you want in office until you're sure about what you want that politician to do? And these days that's harder to figure out than it should be.

When politicians present their plans, they naturally play up the quick, easy, cheap part of their program and downplay the messy, expensive, risky parts. In reality, however, many problems don't get solved without facing harsh choices; the government can't avoid pleasing some people and offending others.

First Choice 2004 is designed to help you make the most of your vote by having strong, informed opinions about what those choices might be. With these guides, you can find out more about the problems facing the nation and weigh your values against the policies politicians put forward.

With First Choice 2004, we're not claiming to have the "correct" solution to a problem. What

you'll find here are some key facts along with three different points of view about how to address the issue. Each point of view comes with the arguments for and against, along with some potential costs and tradeoffs. We focus on what each problem means to the average person – and because Public Agenda isn't pushing a particular solution, we're not interested in sugar-coating any options or trashing other points of view. We call this section Chicework.

That doesn't mean, by the way, that the broad choices we present are the only ways of dealing with a problem. Many people would mix and match from different perspectives, and you may have your own ideas we haven't considered. We're also not suggesting that you should go looking for a candidate who agrees with you on every single issue. What we are suggesting is that it'll be easier to judge the candidates if you've considered where you want the country to go in the next four years – and what you're willing to do to get there.



Originally launched in 1992, "Choose or Lose" is MTV's comprehensive pro-social campaign to inform young adults about the political process, voice their most urgent political concerns, compel leading Presidential candidates to address those concerns, and organize young adults aged 18-30 to register and vote. In 2004 the campaign is dubbed "20 Million Loud," a movement to mobilize more than 20 million people aged 18-30 to vote in the 2004 election.

You can find out more about Choose or Lose at our Web site, www.mtv.com.



Founded in 1975, Public Agenda is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization devoted to public opinion and citizen education. Public Agenda's two-fold mission is to help American leaders better understand the public's point of view, while also helping citizens know more about critical policy issues so they can make thoughtful, informed decisions.

You can find out more about us at our Web site, www.publicagenda.org.

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Choicework In Brief: What Are the Options?

Approach One

Move Aggressively to Head Off Potential Threats

What should be done

- ▶ If we find a group or country is planning an attack, the U.S. should strike first to stop them.
- ▶ Use economic sanctions, diplomatic pressure and military force on countries that support terrorism or are trying to acquire weapons of mass destruction.
- ▶ Commit as many resources as needed to rebuild Iraq into a stable, democratic nation.
- ▶ The U.S. needs to draw in every ally it can. But the U.S. should also be willing to go it alone if other countries won't help.

Arguments for this choice

- ✓ The prospect of severe retaliation will deter rogue nations from providing havens for terrorists.
- ✓ The only way the world will be safer for Americans is if we take strong action to make it so.
- ✓ We can't let the United Nations or other countries have a veto over our actions. If we don't protect ourselves, no one else will.

Arguments against this choice

- ✗ The U.S. may be a superpower, but we're not strong enough to remake the whole world.
- ✗ When the U.S. acts this way, it feeds right into the hands of terrorists and their recruiting efforts.

Approach Two

Raise Our Defenses by Tightening Security

What should be done

- ▶ Dramatically tighten security on planes, ships, trains and public buildings, including thorough searches of baggage and cargo containers.
- ▶ Give law enforcement powers to conduct electronic surveillance, monitor potentially dangerous groups in the U.S., and to use "profiling" to check passengers.
- ▶ Tighten immigration rules to keep potential troublemakers out of the country.

Arguments for this approach

- ✓ Sept. 11 was primarily a failure of domestic security – some of the terrorists were on "watch lists" and should have been stopped.
- ✓ Other countries, such as Britain, give their police much more sweeping anti-terrorism powers without damaging civil liberties – or democracy.

Arguments against this approach

- ✗ This starts us down a slippery slope of giving up our civil liberties in a futile quest for security.
- ✗ Playing defense gives our enemies the initiative. We have to strike first and head off threats before they happen.
- ✗ Unless we attack the political problems that breed terrorism, we'll never win.

Approach Three

Use Persuasion and Collaboration to Defeat Terrorism

What should be done

- ▶ Support the United Nations and other multi-national forums that address world problems.
- ▶ Increase foreign aid substantially for Islamic countries that get serious about curbing extremism and promoting democracy
- ▶ Reduce our dependence on foreign oil and work to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.
- ▶ Increase cultural exchange to show that U.S. values are compatible with Islam and help Islamic moderates find outlets for their frustrated youth.

Arguments for this approach

- ✓ We're not just fighting a guy in a cave. We're fighting an idea: Islamic fundamentalism. And you can't successfully fight an idea by force; you can only work to persuade people that it's wrong.
- ✓ We need more friends, not more enemies, and a cooperative, "multilateral" foreign policy will win more countries to our side.

Arguments against this approach

- ✗ Sept. 11 didn't happen because Americans weren't nice enough. It happened because our security practices were full of holes.
- ✗ This is blaming the victim. The U.S. doesn't need to apologize for being attacked.

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Chicework: Approach One

Move Aggressively to Head Off Potential Threats

The war on terrorism is no metaphor – and the U.S. should take the war to the enemy. The U.S. needs to take the initiative to hunt down both terrorist groups and rogue states that pose a threat to our security. This means using economic, diplomatic and military means to strike at terrorists before they strike us again. It also means working with countries and intelligence agencies that may not share our values, if they can help us find the terrorists. In this view, the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq are completely justified; the first to root out al Qaeda's safe haven and the second to topple a regime that was a threat to its neighbors and ourselves.

What Should Be Done?

- ▶ If we find a group or country is planning an attack, the U.S. should not hesitate to strike first to stop them.
- ▶ Use economic sanctions, diplomatic pressure and, if need be, military force to isolate countries that support terrorism or who are trying to acquire weapons of mass destruction.
- ▶ Commit as many troops and as much money as needed to rebuild Iraq into a stable, democratic nation that can be a true ally in fighting terrorism.
- ▶ The U.S. needs to draw in every willing ally it can. But the U.S. should also be willing to go it alone if other countries can't or won't help.

Arguments For This Approach

- ✓ It's madness to just sit around and wait for terrorists to strike. Let's take the initiative by aggressively pursuing terrorists and their sponsors.
- ✓ The prospect of severe retaliation – military, economic and diplomatic – will deter rogue nations from providing havens for terrorists. Anything else shows weakness – and that will invite aggression.
- ✓ The only way the world will be safer for Americans is if we take strong action to make it so. We can't hide from the world, nor can we depend on wishful thinking.
- ✓ We can't let the United Nations or other countries have a veto over our actions. If we don't protect ourselves, no one else will.
- ✓ In some cases, we're going to have to deal with regimes we don't like, because they're the only ones who have the information we need.

Arguments Against This Approach

- ✗ This sets a bad precedent. What's to stop other countries from invading their neighbors in the name of "pre-emption?"
- ✗ The United States may be a superpower, but we're not strong enough to remake the whole world single handed – that's arrogant at best and a recipe for disaster at worst.
- ✗ When America acts this way, it feeds right into the hands of terrorists and their recruiting efforts.
- ✗ This is a double standard – we preach democracy for countries we don't like, but get in bed with regimes that torture and imprison their own citizens if they're willing to help us. If we're working with regimes like that, what are we fighting for?
- ✗ Terrorists are using our open trade and immigration policies against us. We need to look after ourselves first and tighten restrictions.

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Choicework: Approach Two

Raise Our Defenses by Tightening Security

Terrorism is like a chronic disease that can't be cured – but can be managed so you can lead a normal life. Just ask the British, the Israelis, the Spanish or people in a dozen other countries that have been living with terrorist movements for decades. We should pursue terrorists, but the best answer is keeping our guard up by improving security at home. We can't remake the world, which will always be a dangerous place. But we can change how we respond to it by tightening up our immigration and travel procedures and giving law enforcement more tools to track terrorist groups. The money we're spending in Iraq would be better spent training "first responders," but now that we're committed in Iraq, we have to stay at least until we can leave a stable regime behind.

What should be done?

- ▶ Dramatically tighten security on planes, ships, trains and public buildings. Thoroughly search baggage and cargo containers, even if it means delaying flights and cargo delivery.
- ▶ Create a domestic counter-terrorism agency modeled after Britain's MI-5. Increase intelligence capabilities to prevent infiltration by foreign terrorists.
- ▶ Give law enforcement new powers to monitor potentially dangerous groups in the U.S.
- ▶ Tighten immigration rules to keep potential troublemakers out of the country.
- ▶ Spend more money on training local police, fire and medical personnel to cope with terrorist attacks.

Arguments for this choice

- ✓ Sept. 11 was primarily a failure of domestic security – some of the terrorists were on "watch lists" and should have been stopped, and none of them should have got through airport checkpoints. Let's fix the problem we already know about.
- ✓ Terrorists are using globalization and our generous immigration policies against us – in fact, our pressure on others to join the global economy may be creating more terrorists. We simply can't be as lax about whom we let in the country anymore.
- ✓ Other countries, such as Britain, give their police much more sweeping anti-terrorism powers without damaging civil liberties – or democracy.
- ✓ The U.S. can't remake the world – it's too big a job, and trying to do so will just drain resources we should be using to prepare for threats at home, like training medical personnel to cope with biological and chemical attacks.

Arguments against this choice

- ✗ This starts us down a "slippery slope" of giving up our civil liberties in a futile quest for security. If we're not careful, we'll end up with neither liberty nor security.
- ✗ We can't pull up the drawbridge and isolate ourselves from the world. We need to engage others and try to make things better.
- ✗ Playing defense gives our enemies the initiative. We have to strike first and head off threats before they happen.
- ✗ Unless we attack the political problems that breed terrorism, we'll never win.
- ✗ This country was built by immigrants. We shouldn't take out our fears on the hundreds of thousands of immigrants who come here seeking a better life.

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Chicework: Approach Three

Use Persuasion and Collaboration to Defeat Terrorism

America is perceived by many, particularly in the Islamic world, as a bully that only cares about its own interests. That anti-Americanism fuels terrorism, and it makes decent people in the Middle East reluctant to stick their necks out to stop violence. The best way to improve our image is by working to improve the Middle East. We should live up to our beliefs in democracy and human rights, using diplomatic and economic pressure to push autocratic Middle Eastern regimes to reform. Our military presence in Iraq will only increase resentment of the U.S. We should hand over control to the Iraqis and bring the troops home as soon as possible. If we do all this, we'll strengthen moderate Muslims who reject terror while undermining the radicals who insist that we can't be trusted.

What should be done?

- ▶ Support the United Nations and other multi-national forums that address world problems.
- ▶ Increase foreign aid for Islamic countries that curb extremism and promote democracy.
- ▶ Increase cultural exchange to show that U.S. values are compatible with Islam and help Islamic moderates find outlets for their frustrated youth.
- ▶ Reduce our dependence on foreign oil and work to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.
- ▶ Increase our "public diplomacy" efforts overseas, enlisting Hollywood and Madison Avenue talents to tell our story

Arguments for this choice

- ✓ Terrorists groups don't pop up from nowhere. They arise because of poverty, political oppression, or religious fervor. We have to solve those problems to truly prevent terrorism.
- ✓ We're not just fighting a guy in a cave. We're fighting an idea: Islamic fundamentalism. And you can't successfully fight an idea by force; in the end, you can only work to persuade people that it's wrong.
- ✓ We need more friends, not more enemies, and a cooperative, "multilateral" foreign policy will win more countries to our side.
- ✓ If we find a way to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian dispute, we'll go a long way toward defusing the anger in the Arab world. And if we use less foreign oil, it'll be easier for us to urge reforms on the authoritarian regimes that sell us the oil.
- ✓ It makes a difference what the average person in the Arab world feels about us. If they identify with the terrorists' alleged grievances, then they'll be more likely to look the other way.

Arguments against this choice

- ✗ This is a great plan – if you don't mind waiting years for it to show results. Meanwhile terrorist attacks will become a regular part of American life.
- ✗ Sept. 11 didn't happen because Americans weren't nice enough to other people. It happened because our immigration and security practices were full of holes. Let's fix the real problem with tighter security.
- ✗ This is blaming the victim. The U.S. doesn't need to apologize for being attacked, nor does it need to apologize for responding with force.
- ✗ Some regimes, like Saddam Hussein's Iraq, can't be reasoned with. All they understand is force.

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Status Report: Where Are We Now?

Sept. 11 – one of those famous historical dates that needs no further explanation — has become the prism through which many Americans see problems at home and abroad. And with reason: the problem of terrorism touches not just on how the U.S. relates to the world but how Americans relate to each other.

A few countries have been fortunate enough to defeat terrorist groups in a few years, but for most, it turns out to be a war that lasts for decades, or maybe forever. But the 2004 election is a good moment to pose a few questions to think about as the candidates discuss terrorism. Because whatever strategy the U.S. adopts, we are likely to live

with this problem for a long time.

Do we kill the mosquitoes or try to drain the swamp?

Lots of people with dramatically different views on terrorism love this metaphor. Essentially the question it poses is whether it's better to pursue terrorist networks like al Qaeda or whether we should attack the broader causes that allow terrorism to thrive.

The very way the metaphor is phrased implies that draining the swamp is the better solution; but as anyone who's been attacked by a swarm of mosquitoes knows, sometimes it's not the most pressing concern. Al Qaeda is a real threat that has to be coun-



U.S. Customs photo
Tighter security has become a fact of life in the U.S. Find our more in our [special edition on terrorism](#).

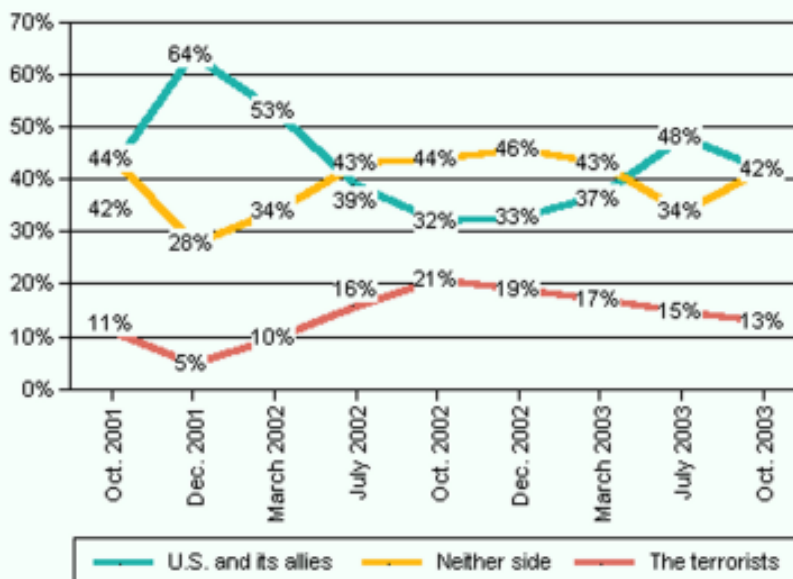
tered and that means direct efforts to break up its cells and cut off its money. For most Americans, stopping the next attack is the most important issue.

Advocates of draining the swamp say the real problem is the growth of a violent form of Islamic fundamentalism and a deep dissatisfaction with U.S. policy in the Arab world. If we don't address those problems, more terrorists will replace those who have been caught or killed.

But what people actually mean by this varies widely. Some supporters of the war in Iraq consider it part of a long-term strategy. If we help the Iraqis build a stable, democratic society, this argument goes, we will show Arabs an alternative to the autocratic regimes that dominate the region. Others say the real need is to find a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Still others say the problem is the poverty, lack of education and repression of women in much of the region.

The number of Americans who say the U.S. is winning the war against terrorism has fluctuated since Oct. 2001

Who do you think is currently winning the war against terrorism -- the U.S. and its allies, neither side or the terrorists?



Source: CNN / USA Today / Gallup 10/03

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So swatting the mosquitoes is hard and draining the swamp even harder. After all, the root causes of terrorism in places like the West Bank and Northern Ireland have defied attempts to solve them for decades, even centuries.

What does a secure country look like?

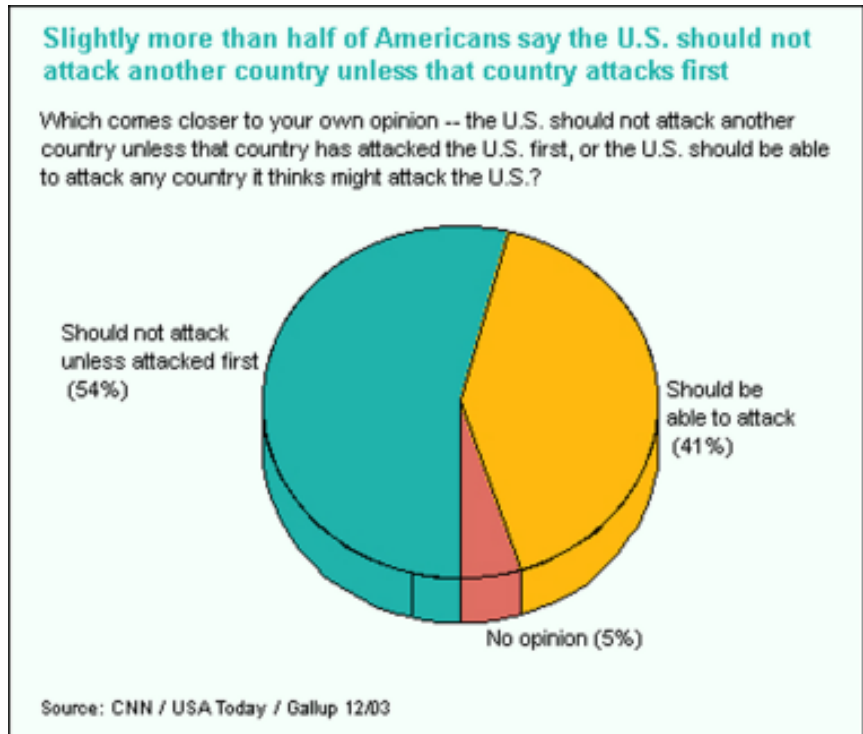
People still argue about what caused the Sept. 11 attacks and probably always will. But one thing is clear: teams of terrorists lived in the U.S. without being detected and walked onto airliners without being challenged. That can never be allowed to happen again. But that question leads to another: what does a secure country look like?

What does security mean, for example, for American views on immigration and race? Islamic militants are a threat, but how do we find them among the vast majority of law-abiding immigrants? Is it right to target people by their ethnicity? The government rounded up thousands of Muslims and Arabs on immigration charges after Sept. 11, and instituted special interviews and registration programs for immigrants from Middle Eastern coun-

tries. Yet only a handful of Middle Eastern immigrants have been accused of any terrorism-related crime.

What does security mean for the privacy of average Americans? With the USA Patriot Act and other initiatives, the government is gathering and coordinating

more information about people. It's also easier for government agencies to share information they already collected. Civil liberties groups bitterly oppose the Patriot Act, while the Bush administration wants to expand it. Benjamin Franklin said those who would trade liberty for safety deserve neither liberty nor safety.



The Public's Viewpoint

Since Sept. 11, the public has consistently told pollsters that terrorism and the economy should be the government's top priorities – sometimes they switch places, but terrorism is always either No. 1 or No. 2. But the public's actual concern about new attacks rises and falls depending on news events.

About six in 10 say the country is adequately prepared to defend against terrorism, but just as many say terrorists "will always find a

way" to attack.

Immediately following the Sept. 11 attacks, most Americans told pollsters the country would have to give up some civil liberties to fight terrorism, but as time has passed with no new attacks inside the U.S. that has changed. In August 2003, Gallup found 29 percent who said the government should take "all steps necessary" to prevent terrorism, with 67 percent saying the government

should prevent terrorism "but not if those steps would violate your basic civil liberties." **But only about two in 10 Americans say the government has gone too far in restricting civil liberties.**

Majorities of the public support the war in Iraq, but majorities also express doubts about casualties and the financial cost. Most people tell pollsters, however, that the U.S. should stay in Iraq as long as it takes to establish a stable government.

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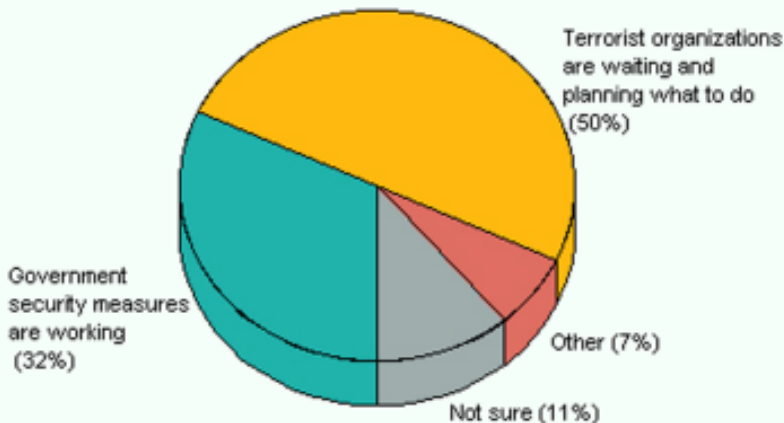
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Half of voters say there have not been further attacks in the U.S. because terrorist organizations are planning what to do

Do you think an absence of additional terrorist attacks in the U.S. is because the government security measures are working or because terrorist organizations are waiting and planning what to do?



Source: FOX News 9/03

But nearly every country facing a terrorist threat makes those tradeoffs – the security services in Britain and France have long have wider powers than their U.S. counterparts, and still remain democracies. Other countries have found the tradeoff leads to an even darker path.

Face the Facts

There were 199 international terrorist attacks in 2002, of which nearly half were in Asia, according to the State Department. The biggest was the Bali nightclub bombing, which killed 187. There were a total of 1,281 casualties (dead and wounded) as a result of all attacks in Asia in 2002.

Is it right for the U.S. to strike first? When should we “go it alone?”

The Bush administration has committed to a new doctrine of “pre-emption,” which at its core means that the U.S. will act first to head off potential threats to its security, especially when it involves terrorism or weapons of mass destruction. Iraq was the first test case. Saddam Hussein’s Iraq was an oppressive regime that in the past had attacked its neighbors (twice). The administration argued that the regime should be cut off before it could threaten others again. Others argued that it was immoral for the U.S. to “shoot first,” that it should only attack in cases of clear aggression.

Other critics argue that while “pre-emption” might be a good idea, it should only be used when the world at large agrees that a country is a threat to peace. While the Iraq war brought this argument to a point, the tension between

the U.S. acting alone (“unilateralism”) and in concert with others (“multilateralism”) has been building for some time.

Anyone who’s ever had to work with a committee knows by acting independently the U.S. can act more quickly and in some ways more effectively.

But it’s also true that terrorism, much like other complicated global problems, can’t be solved by one nation acting alone. If other countries feel left out or even threatened by U.S. policies, they’ll be less likely to help us when we do need them.

Which leads to another question:

Does it matter if people like us?

The day after 9-11, the French newspaper *Le Monde* declared “We are all Americans.” People around the world sent messages of support, held vigils, lay flowers outside the gates of American embassies. The world was with us.

By contrast, the Iraq war prompted huge protests around the world. Opinion surveys overseas show that views are particularly negative in the Muslim world where “the bottom has fallen out of support for America,” according to the Pew Global Attitudes Project.

Clearly, the job of fighting terrorism worldwide will be easier if people around the globe like and support the U.S. But how do we get that support? Is this a matter of building upon the vast influence of Hollywood and Madison Avenue to tell America’s side of the story? Or does it require policy changes? And if it means policy changes, is there a point where the U.S. has to decide that there are worse things than being unpopular?

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Additional Resources

- ▶ Visit our partner, [The New York Times Learning Network](#) for the latest campaign news, stories, and information on what the candidates are saying about these issues. Read the day's top stories and check out the "Issues in Depth" section for additional information.
- ▶ Even more information about the candidates and the campaign is available from our partner, [MTV's Choose or Lose](#).
- ▶ Terrorism is a particularly volatile and complex area of public opinion and can change rapidly. To find out more, Public Agenda has a detailed analysis of public opinion in our [special edition on terrorism](#).
- ▶ Think you know this topic? Try our [Test Your Knowledge](#) feature.
- ▶ Think these choices don't go far enough? Do you want to mix and match options? Visit Public Agenda Online and try our [Create Your Own Choicework](#) feature.
- ▶ Want to find organizations on all sides of this issue? Visit [Sources and Resources](#).

Set Your Own Priorities

Making public policy decisions isn't just about choosing the best way of attacking a problem – you also have to consider which problem should be tackled first. There are lots of things the government *could* do, and many it *should* do, but not even the federal government can do everything at once. So priorities have to be set. With our [First Things First](#) feature on Public Agenda Online, you can work through what you think the next administration should do – and what it should do first. Find out more at:

www.publicagenda.org/firstchoice2004/first-things-first.cfm

Find Out More About the Issues

If you like this edition of *First Choice 2004*, read some of our companion guides on:

- ▶ Terrorism and Foreign Policy
- ▶ Health Care
- ▶ Race and Affirmative Action
- ▶ Gay Rights
- ▶ Paying for College
- ▶ The Environment
- ▶ Jobs and the Economy
- ▶ Taxes and the Deficit
- ▶ Immigration

For even more detail, visit [Public Agenda Online](#), which offers nonpartisan issue guides on 21 issues ranging from abortion to welfare reform.