

AEI Political Report

Washington's Woes

There is not much good news for Washington in recent polls. For the first time in Bush's tenure, a majority in the new ABC News/*Washington Post* poll disapprove of the job the president is doing. In the poll, Americans are now divided about how he is handling terrorism (50 to 49 percent), the issue that has given the president strong positive marks since 9/11. On the issues Americans are most concerned about—the economy and Iraq—solid majorities disapprove of the job he is doing.

Q: Do you think . . . ?

Bush is doing a better job as president in his second term than in his first	30%
Worse	38
Same (volunteered response)	30

Source: ABC News/*Washington Post*, June 2005.

Iraq continues to weigh the administration down. A Harris poll in May showed a weak plurality (39 percent) saying things were moving in the right direction in Iraq, while 29 percent said they were moving in the wrong direction. Many were not sure. Only 21 percent thought conditions for U.S. troops were better; 39 percent said they were worse. In the ABC/*Post* poll, 41 percent approved of the job the president was doing there and 58 percent disapproved. Although two-thirds in the ABC/*Post* poll said the United States is getting bogged down there, other polls

that have asked about troop withdrawal show little pressure to remove our troops immediately.

The Republicans and Democrats in Congress are not faring much better than the president. The ABC/*Post* poll produced identical scores for the way they were doing their jobs: 42 percent approved, but 56 percent disapproved. Sixty-one percent said they still liked the way their own representative was doing his or her job. In 1994, before the Republicans seized the House, 51 percent gave that response. In a late May Gallup/*CNN/USA Today* poll, the public divided evenly on whether the current level of conflict between Republican and Democratic leaders in Congress was the worst in their lifetimes or whether it had been as bad or worse at other times.

On many of these questions, partisanship colors responses. Democrats exhibit loyalty to their party; Republicans to theirs. But since January, on many of these questions, independents have moved away from the president.

	Job Approval	Job Disapproval
President Bush	48%	52%
Congress	41	54
Republicans in Congress	42	56
Democrats in Congress	42	56
My own representative in Congress	61	32

Source: ABC News/*Washington Post*, June 2005.

The Red, White, and Blue

Before September 11, 2001, substantial majorities consistently told the pollsters that they were proud to be Americans. Immediately after the tragedy, patriotic sentiment spiked. People flew their flags more than in the past and displayed their love of country in more overt ways. Those activities have receded, but patriotic sentiment is still very strong. Eighty-three percent of Americans told Gallup in January that they were extremely or somewhat proud to be an American.

American patriotism is not a blind patriotism. Polls show that Americans find a lot to criticize in their society. But they still love their country, and they are not reluctant to say so. In his recent book *Making Patriots* (University of

Chicago Press, 2001), AEI scholar Walter Berns discusses the unique nature of American patriotism.

Q: How proud are you to be an American—extremely proud, very proud, moderately proud, only a little proud, or not at all proud?

Extremely proud	61%
Very	22
Moderately	12
Only a little	3
Not at all	1

Source: Gallup/*CNN/USA Today*, January 2005.

Looking at the Supreme Court

The Gallup Organization recently updated its battery of questions on confidence in major institutions. In terms of high confidence, the Supreme Court fell in the middle of the fifteen institutions Gallup inquired about, with 41 percent expressing a great deal or quite a lot of confidence in it. Gallup first asked about the Court in 1973, when 44 percent said they had high confidence in it. Republicans (47 percent) were more likely than Democrats (42 percent) to have high confidence in the Court. The military is the top rated institution in the country, followed closely in the ranking by the police and the church/organized religion.

People are not very knowledgeable about individual justices. In a May 2005 Quinnipiac poll, for example, 45 percent said they had not heard enough about Supreme Court Chief Justice Rehnquist to have an opinion about him. In a May Gallup/CNN/USA Today poll, 56 percent did not recognize Antonin Scalia, and around a third said the same about Clarence Thomas. The memories of the Clarence Thomas's confirmation battle have faded, but it is worth remembering that all major polls taken between July 1 and October 14, 1991, (he was confirmed by the Senate on October 15) showed plurality or majority support for his confirmation.

In a number of recent poll questions, pluralities say the Court tends to be "about right" or "balanced" in its decisions. Of the remainder, people appear to be evenly divided in the belief that it is "too conservative" or "too liberal." When people are asked what they want in a future nominee, a plurality tends to say it wants the next justice to be a moderate. Of the remainder, more would prefer a conservative than liberal.

Q: In general, do you think the Supreme Court is . . . ?

Too liberal	28%
Just about right	40
Too conservative	27

Source: The Gallup Organization, September 2004.

Q: When it comes time for Bush to nominate a new justice to the U.S. Supreme Court, do you think he should pick someone who is more of a liberal, moderate, or conservative?

Liberal	21%
Moderate	43
Conservative	33

Source: ABC News/Washington Post, December 2004.

Sum, Sum, Summertime

In her book *Working at Play: A History of Vacations in America* (Oxford University Press, 1999), historian Cindy Aron argues that the idea of leisure time did not come easily to Americans. When vacations became available to the middle class after the Civil War, time away from home was often used to do work of other kinds—on farms, attending lectures, or Bible study. Today, most Americans say they are satisfied with the amount of vacation time they have.

Data collected by Roper Starch Worldwide (now NOP World) suggests that Americans are giving new emphasis to leisure time. In 1975, 48 percent of Americans told interviewers that work was the important thing "and the purpose of leisure time is to recharge people's batteries so they can do a better job." Thirty-six percent said leisure was most important, with the purpose of work "to make it possible to have the leisure time to enjoy life and pursue one's interests." In 2000, those numbers were 34 and 43 percent, respectively.

Q: Now I'll read you a list of job characteristics. For each, please tell me how satisfied or dissatisfied you are with your current job in this regard.

The amount of vacation time you receive

Completely satisfied	52%
Somewhat satisfied	27
Somewhat dissatisfied	9
Completely dissatisfied	8

Source: The Gallup Organization, 2004.



Shorts Cuts

Fifty years ago this summer, 20 percent of men and 12 percent of women told Gallup that they approved of men wearing Bermuda shorts to the office. The shorts became popular after the British military permitted soldiers to wear them in tropical parts of the empire in the early twentieth century. A third of men, but only 22 percent of women, approved of women wearing them in the street. Virtually identical percentages of men and women (81 and 80 percent, respectively) said they would not wear the shorts themselves.

IN WASHINGTON . . .

Still Relevant?

There has been much talk recently about President Bush as a lame duck. While historically presidents have not performed as well in their second terms as in their first, President Bush's troubles in Congress are not primarily the result of the fact that he cannot run again. They arise because he has lost control of the legislative agenda.

Bush won a solid victory in 2004, and Republicans picked up seats in the House and the Senate. But Bush recently held a press conference where he had to make the case that he was still relevant and his job approval ratings have dipped. What has happened?

Bush's ambitious plan to reform Social Security has not received expedited consideration by Congress. The scope of the proposed changes is significant, and his own party is not wholly on board. But more significantly, we have not seen committee action, nor are we likely to see votes on the floor of the House or Senate before the fall. All of this means that Congress is talking about baseball, Terri

Schiavo, and the filibuster—not Bush's agenda.

In fairness to the president, second terms are often rocky. Presidents get less of their legislative agenda through Congress. They are dealing with members of Congress who have to run for reelection, while they cannot. Members think about winning reelection, presidents about their legacy. Both Congress and the bureaucracy may be tempted to delay action while waiting for a new president. And there are often major scandals in second terms (Watergate, Iran-Contra, Monica Lewinsky), especially when the president's party is not in control of Congress. But despite these limitations, Bush should have had Congress's undivided attention in the first year after his reelection.

If Bush does succeed in passing a Social Security plan, we will forget about this period of time when Bush's agenda was not the congressional agenda. But unless that happens, Bush will have missed the opportunity to make the first year of his second term a success.

—John C. Fortier

IN THE STATES . . .

Parties Draw From State Level Executive Offices

A little examined source of U.S. Senate and gubernatorial candidates are the approximately 215 popularly elected, partisan, state-level executive offices such as attorney general and secretary of state. These offices are a particularly important source of announced or potential candidates in six of the key 2006 Senate contests—including those in Missouri, Montana, Pennsylvania, Nebraska, Rhode Island, and Vermont—as well as at least ten upcoming gubernatorial contests anticipated to be competitive in Alabama, California, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Iowa, Massachusetts, Ohio, Rhode Island, and Virginia. Not only do these offices provide each party with a bench of potential candidates for higher office, but they also provide an opportunity for the minority or disadvantaged party in a state to groom future Senate or gubernatorial candidates. Recent successful examples include Gov. Kathleen Sebelius (D-Kans.), who served as insurance commissioner; Gov. Janet Napolitano (D-Ariz.) as attorney general; Gov. Jim Douglas (R-Vt.) as treasurer; and Sen. Ken Salazar (D-Colo.) as attorney general.

The table below examines the current partisan breakdown for the five most common statewide offices, controlling for whether Bush or Kerry won the state in 2004. Democrats hold the advantage in two of the offices (attorney general and treasurer), Republicans in two (secretary of state and auditor), and the parties are tied in one other (lieutenant governor)—but the overall partisan division across all five office types is relatively close, with Democrats holding seventy-six (49 percent) of the 155 positions and Republicans seventy-nine (51 percent). Across all five offices, Democrats are more successful in electing candidates in Bush or “red” states than Republicans are in “blue” states—forty-two versus fourteen. Much of the Democratic success in red states is due to the party's continued down-ballot strength in southern states such as Arkansas, Georgia, Louisiana, and North Carolina. But it is also partly attributable to its strong performance in highly competitive states such as Iowa and New Mexico, where it holds seven of these eight offices (two do not exist). Republican success in blue states is primarily due to the party's performance in the swath of battleground states in the Midwest—having won at least one of these offices in each of Minnesota, Wisconsin, Illinois, Michigan, and Pennsylvania.

(continued on the next page)

IN THE STATES (continued) . . .

Partisan Division for State-Level Executive Offices, 2005

	<i>Attorney General</i>		<i>Secretary of State</i>		<i>Treasurer</i>		<i>Auditor</i>		<i>Lieutenant Governor</i>	
	Dem	Rep	Dem	Rep	Dem	Rep	Dem	Rep	Dem	Rep
<i>Bush states</i>	13	15	8	16	9	15	7	11	5	8
<i>Kerry states</i>	11	4	7	4	9	2	3	3	4	1
<i>Total</i>	24	19	15	20	18	17	10	14	9	9

Note: Totals do not add up to fifty or the same number across the five offices because not all states have each elective office. The numbers for lieutenant governor include only those states that elect lieutenant governor as a separate constitutional officer and not on a ticket with the governor.

Source: Table compiled by author.

—Barry McMillion

Current Commentary

“Pollitics”

AEI resident fellow Karlyn H. Bowman discusses the latest poll numbers on President Bush, the war in Iraq, the religious right, moral values, journalism, and political ideology.

<http://www.aei.org/publication22629>

“How Many Warnings Does Congress Need before Protecting Itself?”

AEI resident scholar Norman J. Ornstein says that Congress must enact reforms to keep institutions of government running in the event of a serious terrorist attack.

<http://www.aei.org/publication22597>

“On Judges, Stem Cells, Moderates Are Winning. Can They Keep It Up?”

AEI resident scholar Norman J. Ornstein asks if centrist victories in recent congressional battles will continue in the future.

<http://www.aei.org/publication22573>

“Maybe the Deal Will Fly; for Now, the Senate Lives”

AEI resident fellow John C. Fortier praises the Senate filibuster deal.

<http://www.aei.org/publication22583>



Political Report Note: See You in September!

Political Report will not publish an August issue.

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