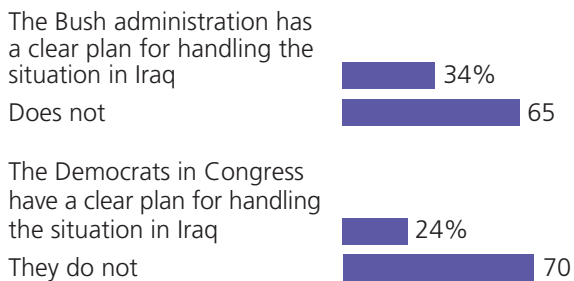


AEI Political Report

Iraq: The President and the Democrats in Congress

President George W. Bush's ratings on handling the situation in Iraq are negative, and Americans are not confident that his administration has a clear plan for handling things there. The Democrats are not in better shape. Only a quarter think they have a plan, but 70 percent say they do not. In a new ABC News/*Washington Post* survey, both parties have lost ground over the past year on the question of which party could better handle the situation in Iraq. The poll showed the parties were tied at 42 percent.

Q: Do you think . . . ?



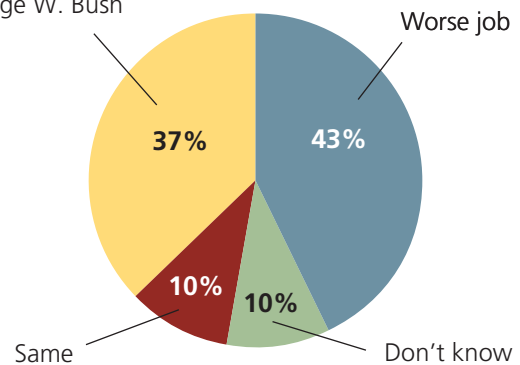
Source: ABC News/*Washington Post*, March 2006.

So You Think You Could Do Better?

Nearly four in ten people say they think they could do a better job as president than Bush is doing. Unsurprisingly, Democrats (54 percent) are more likely to give this response than Republicans (14 percent). Forty-three percent of Independents thought they could do better.

Q: Do you think that . . . ?

I, personally, would be doing a better job as president than George W. Bush

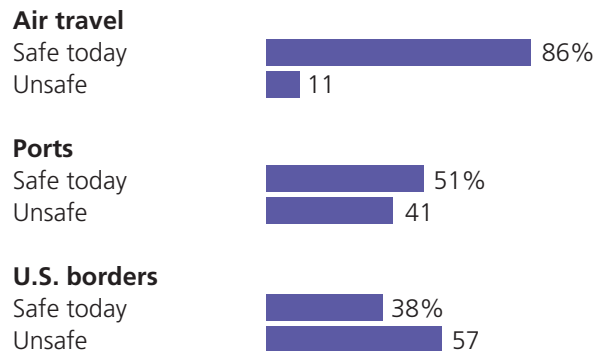


Ports in a Storm

The administration's plan to turn the management of six U.S. ports over to a UAE company met with strong public opposition. Of the 70 percent that disapproved of the deal in an early March ABC News/*Washington Post* poll, 53 percent felt strongly about it. At the same time, however, deep cynicism about our political class caused a near majority, 49 percent, to say that elected officials were mainly concerned about using the issue for political advantage while 37 percent said they were mostly concerned about national security.

Americans believe that progress has been made since 9/11 on making air travel safer. In a Fox News/*Opinion Dynamics* poll, 51 percent said our ports are safe today; 41 percent said they are not.

Q: How safe do you believe . . . ?



Source: Fox News/*Opinion Dynamics*, February–March 2006.

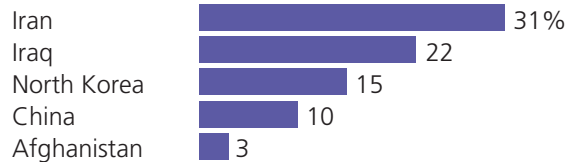
The Threat Posed by Iran

In early February, the Gallup Organization asked Americans to rate twenty-two countries on a favorable/unfavorable scale. Iran ranked dead last, with only 7 percent giving the country a favorable rating and 86 percent an unfavorable one. Other pariah states were Iraq (21 percent favorable/75 percent unfavorable), Cuba (21/71), and North Korea (10/81).

Several recent polls show that Americans are more likely to view Iran as our greatest enemy than feel that way about any other country. In Gallup's polling from 2001, 8 percent considered Iran our greatest enemy.

Q: What one country in the world do you consider . . . ?

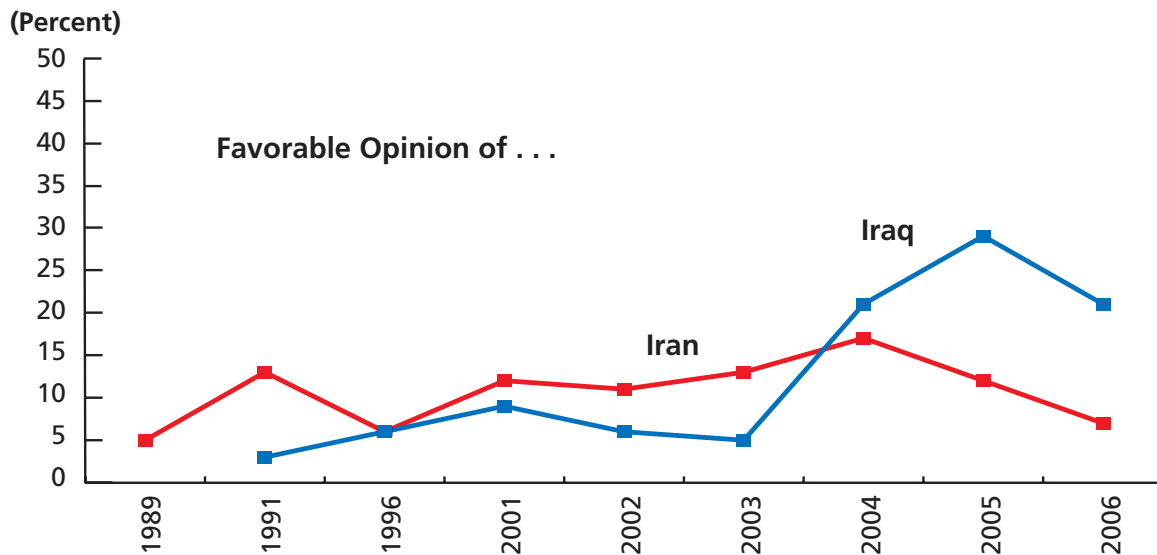
America's greatest enemy today



Note: Top five responses shown.

Source: The Gallup Organization, February 2006.

Q: I'd like your overall opinion of some foreign countries. First is your overall opinion of . . . ?



Note: In 1989 for Iran and 1991 for both Iran and Iraq, the question was asked more than once. We have shown the first asking of each year. Source: The Gallup Organization, latest that of February 2006.

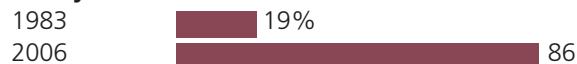
Risky Behaviors

For nearly a quarter century, Harris has been measuring risky behaviors. There is good news on smoking. The proportion saying they smoke cigarettes is down to a little more than two in ten. And, more people are always using seatbelts than were doing so twenty years ago. Obesity remains a big problem, with more than eight in ten in Harris's calculations being overweight. In an early February Gallup poll, 56 percent said they would like to lose weight, 39 percent would like to stay at their present weight, and 4 percent would like to put on some pounds.

Smoke cigarettes



Always wear seatbelts



Are overweight*



Note: "Overweight" is based on the Metropolitan Life Tables using self-reported weight, height and body frame (small, medium or large). Like all self-reporting this is subject to error, but the identical questions and methods were used in all these surveys. In 2005, Harris switched to just using weight and height data in their analysis. Source: Harris Interactive, February 2006.

Rating Members of Congress

In March, *National Journal* released its annual vote ratings on members of Congress. The story these figures tell is of extreme polarization of the parties. Fifty years ago, the Democratic and Republican Parties had significant overlap, with conservative southern Democrats often allied with Republicans and progressive Republicans allied with Democrats on certain issues.

What is extraordinary about the new ratings is that the parties in Congress are almost completely polarized. Almost every Democrat is to the left of every Republican, and vice versa.

In the Senate, there are only two senators who do not fit the pattern. Senator Ben Nelson (D-NE) votes like a moderate Republican and Lincoln Chafee (R-RI) votes like a moderate Democrat. In the House, the story is similar with only eight members not fitting the pattern. If Democrats Gene Taylor (MS), Bud Cramer (AL), and Jim Marshall (GA) were traded for Republicans Jim Leach (IA), Ron Paul (TX), Chris Shays (CT), Michael Castle (DE), and Sherwood Boehlert (NY), then every Democrat would be to the left of every Republican. For a more academic set of vote rankings go to www.voteview.com, where you can watch as the graphical depictions of past Congresses show members moving away from the middle and to the left and right.

Members in the Middle

Below we take a look at some statistics about the most conservative Democratic and most liberal Republican members.

- Nineteen of the 20 most conservative House Democrats represent districts won by President Bush in 2004. But only seven of the 20 most liberal House Republicans came from districts won by Kerry.
- Seventeen of the 25 most conservative Democrats represent southern states with another 3 representing border states.
- Liberal Republicans are more geographically diverse than commonly believed. Only 11 of the 25 most liberal Republicans come from the Northeast. Only one of nine New York State Republicans made it into the top 25.
- Seven of the 16 House Democratic Hispanics were among the most 50 conservative Democrats. Henry Cuellar (TX) is the most conservative Democrat among Hispanic members. There are also 5 Republican Hispanic members, 2 of whom are in the moderate category.
- The most liberal Republican member is Jim Leach of Iowa. The most conservative Democrat is Gene Taylor of Mississippi.
- The most conservative Democratic women are Stephanie Herseth of South Dakota and Melissa Bean of Illinois. Only seven of the 50 most liberal Republicans were women, out of 23 women total.
- The most conservative African-American Democrat is Sanford Bishop of Georgia. Among the 50 most conservative Democrats, four are African-American.

Current Commentary

“Part-Time Congress”

AEI resident scholar Norman J. Ornstein warns that Congress must accelerate its pace to finish its legislative tasks within the most condensed schedule since 1947.

<http://www.aei.org/publication24006>

“Hillary Clinton, John McCain and the Polarized Electorate”

AEI resident fellow Karlyn H. Bowman discusses a series of issues including Hillary Clinton and John McCain’s favorability ratings, bird flu, and the United Nations.

<http://www.aei.org/publication24058>

“The Other Kennedy”

AEI research fellow John C. Fortier analyzes Congressman Mark Kennedy’s (R-MN) prospects for the Senate.

<http://www.aei.org/publication24023>

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