

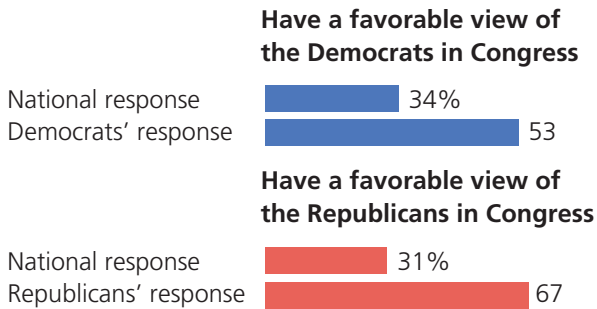
AEI Political Report

The Midterm Mood

Congress Under a Cloud

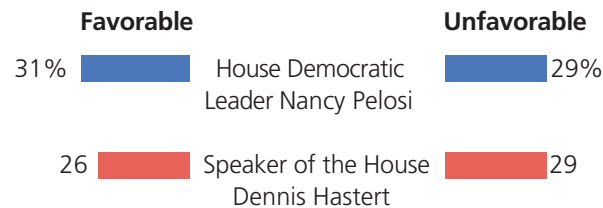
The Pew Research Center reports that “the level of explicit anti-incumbent sentiment against both individual members and Congress as a whole—is substantially higher than in most previous midterms.” As the data below show, Americans don’t have a positive view of either party. Partisans themselves aren’t enthusiastic about their own party’s performance in Congress. Many Americans don’t know House Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi or House Speaker Dennis Hastert, but among those with an opinion, views about them have become more negative. The negatives for both are about 10 percentage points higher than they were when measured more than a year ago. Gallup says that its ratings for both parties in Congress are “the worst Gallup has measured” since it began asking about each party in Congress in 1999.

Q: What is your impression of . . . ?



Source: Los Angeles Times/Bloomberg, June 2006.

Q: Now, we’d like to get your overall impression of some people in the news. As I read each name, please say if you have a . . . ?

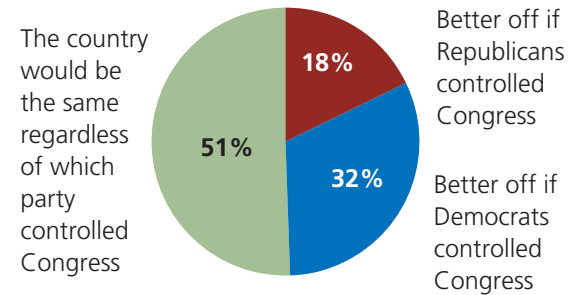


Source: Gallup/USA Today, June 2006.

A Dime’s Worth of Difference?

Gallup has asked the question shown below five times since 1998, and each time a plurality or majority has said that it doesn’t matter which party controls Congress. Today, the Democrats have their largest edge on this question since it was first asked.

Q: Do you think the country would be . . . ?



Source: Gallup/USA Today, June 2006.

Republicans: Curbing Their Enthusiasm?

Most surveys show Democrats winning the early “enthusiasm” contest, as the Gallup and Pew surveys below show.

Q: Thinking about the Congressional elections that will be held this November, compared to previous elections, are you . . . ?

	More enthusiastic about voting than usual			
	1994	1998	2002	2006
Republicans’ response	41%	41%	44%	30%
Democrats’ response	29	40	42	47

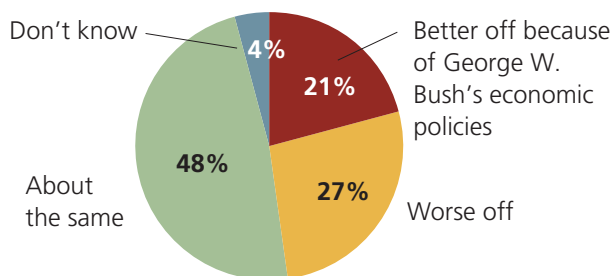
Note: Sample is registered voters.

Source: Gallup/CNN/USA Today, 1994; Pew Research Center, latest that of June 2006.

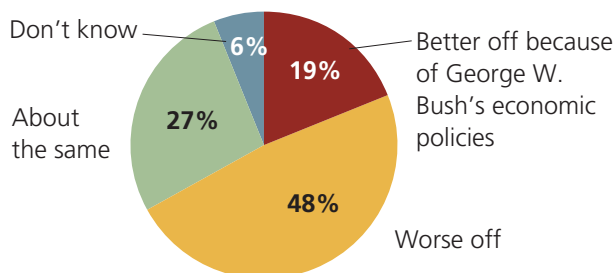
Are You Better Off?

In the 1980 campaign, Ronald Reagan asked Americans whether they were better off than they were four years ago. That question has become a political touchstone. The responses to a new version are shown below.

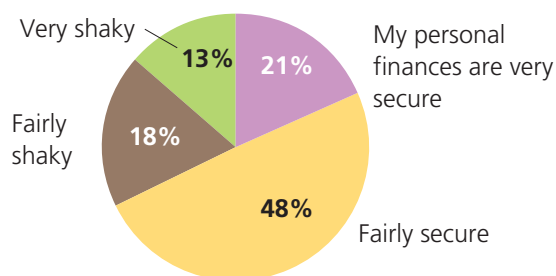
Q: *Would you say your own family's economic situation is . . . ?*



Q: *Would you say the country's economy is . . . ?*



Q: *Would you describe the state of your own personal finances these days as . . . ?*



Source: *Los Angeles Times/Bloomberg*, June 2006.



Warming to Al Gore?

Recent polls provide no indication that Al Gore's documentary on global warming, *An Inconvenient Truth*, has enhanced his public standing. Gallup has asked people's opinion about Gore since November of 1992 when 56 percent had a favorable opinion and 28 percent an unfavorable one. In recent years, views about him have been more divided. This June, 48 percent had a positive view and 45 percent an unfavorable one. That is not significantly different from his June 2003 rating. Bill Clinton's favorable to unfavorable ratio today (59 to 37 percent) is almost exactly where it was in 1992 (58 to 35 percent).

Another indication that Gore may not be as hot as some think comes from a Fox News/Opinion Dynamics poll. When asked in June with whom they would rather spend the Fourth of July, 35 percent said Gore and 44 percent George W. Bush.

As for the issue of global warming, Pew Research Center polling puts Americans' concerns about it in perspective. When asked how important 19 different issues were to them, 44 percent said global warming was very important to them. That level of concern was about the same as concern about government surveillance programs, ending the inheritance tax, and abortion, and far behind issues such as education (82 percent), the economy (80 percent), and the situation in Iraq (74 percent). Twenty-three percent of Republicans said global warming was very important, 56 percent of Democrats, and 49 percent of independents.

	Nov. 1992	June 2003	June 2006
Favorable opinion of Al Gore	56%	49%	48%
Unfavorable	28	45	45

Source: Gallup, latest that of June 2006.

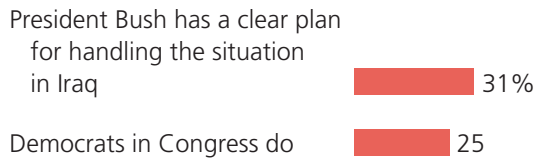
Vote to Win: Arizona's Experiment

Go to the polls and win a million dollars! Sound good? One Arizona voter may soon be so lucky. If an initiative on the ballot this fall passes, all voters in Arizona would be eligible for a one million dollar jackpot funded through unclaimed lottery winnings. The lottery would occur every two years, and voters who participate in both the primary and general elections would be entered twice.

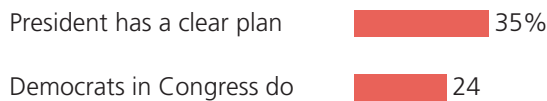
Iraq: Woes for Both Parties

Americans aren't confident that either the President or the Democrats in Congress see a clear way forward in Iraq.

Gallup, June 2006



ABC/Washington Post, June 2006



Exit Strategies?

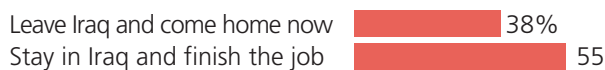
Three questions, all asked in late June, provide different pictures of Americans' exit strategy for Iraq.

Q: Here are four different plans the U.S. could follow in dealing with the Iraq war. Which one do you prefer . . . ?



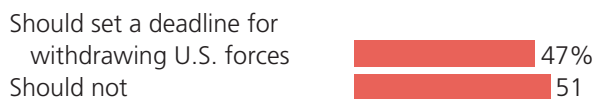
Source: Gallup/USA Today, June 2006.

Q: What do you want U.S. troops in Iraq to do . . . ?



Source: Fox New/Opinion Dynamics, June 2006.

Q: Do you, yourself, think the United States . . . ?



Note: Of the 47 percent who thought a deadline should be set, 22 percent said it should be set for 6 months, 16 percent for one year, 6 percent two years, and 1 percent longer.

Source: ABC News/Washington Post, June 2006.

The South and the Democrats' Future

When Republicans were shut out of a solidly Democratic South, they could win the presidency and majorities in the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives only by racking up often unsustainably large supermajorities outside the South. Today Democrats are better positioned. Still, they currently hold only four Senate seats, and they did not win a single one of the region's Electoral College votes in 2000 and 2004. Losing in the South makes it difficult to win nationally. Today no region provides more of a dilemma for Democrats than the South, and they are divided over what to do.

Three broad strategies are visible. Dave "Mudcat" Saunders, a Democratic political consultant, advises Democratic candidates to attract Southern, working-class whites by appealing to their distinctive culture, pregnant with patriotism, folksiness, and stock-car racing. Democratic Party Chairman Howard Dean emphasizes appealing to low-income Southern white voters based on their material interest in benefits like government health insurance. Tom Schaller, a liberal political scientist, advocates a third strategy: abandoning the South. In the forthcoming *Whistling Past Dixie* (Simon & Schuster), he argues that Southern white voters are so politically retrograde (motivated above all by racialism) that progressives can't win them over. Instead, he says, Democrats should concentrate on mountain and southwestern states, and on suburban and minority voters who are, moreover, of growing importance even in the South. Another new book, though, questions all three strategies. In *The End of Southern Exceptionalism*, political scientists Byron Shafer and Richard Johnston provide extensive evidence that decades of strong economic growth have already left Southern whites more suburban and middle class than ever before and that any successful political strategy must take this into account.

But agreement among Democrats is difficult because the three contending strategies reflect deeper divisions among liberals nationwide, between centrists, economic populists, and New Left progressives. As long as these conflicts persist, Democrats are unlikely to advance substantially in the South in 2008.

—Gerard Alexander

Pop Quiz

Q: *What is your best guess . . . ?*

Population of the United States is

Mean response 1.02 billion
Median response 280 million

Source: Gallup/USA Today, June 2006.

Summer Plans

Most Americans plan to take a summer vacation, but gas prices are causing hardship or at least second thoughts for some. Around 40 percent say that it is okay to call in sick once in a while to go to the beach.

Q: *Next, we'd like to know how the price of gasoline has affected your summer recreation plans, including any vacations or weekend trips you were planning to take. Which of the following applies to you . . . ?*

Going ahead with summer plans even though you will end up paying more 28%
Changing plans because of gas prices 33
Plans not affected by price of gas 38

Source: Gallup/USA Today, June 2006.

Q: *Do you think it is okay for people to occasionally call in sick in order to do something fun like go to the beach?*

Okay to call in sick occasionally and go to the beach 43%

Democrats' response 52%
Republicans' response 33
Independents' response 49

Source: Fox News/Opinion Dynamics, June 2006.

Stay Tuned for AEI's Election Watch

In 1982, AEI started a biennial Election Watch program. The AEI Election Watch team will be back this fall. More details about the fall 2006 programs will be forthcoming, but as always, an insightful and provocative program is in the works.

Current Commentary

"Ruling Should Worry All Who Care about Separation of Powers"

AEI resident scholar Norman Ornstein laments the recent ruling on the searching of Rep. William Jefferson's (D-LA) office. He argues that searches could be used as a tool of intimidation by the Executive Branch. <http://www.aei.org/publication24648/>

"Explaining Why People Are Pessimistic about the Economy"

AEI resident fellow Karlyn Bowman analyzes public opinion data on the economy, focusing on a variety of data including prices, personal finance outlook, and taxes. She also discusses surveys on Mitt Romney's religion, Congressional ratings, and Guantanamo Bay. <http://www.aei.org/publication24649/>

"The Hard Road to 15"

AEI research fellow John Fortier analyzes how the small number of vulnerable freshmen may make it difficult for Democrats to take control of the House. <http://www.aei.org/publication24646/>

The Broken Branch

In *The Broken Branch: How Congress Is Failing America and How to Get It Back on Track* (Oxford University Press, 2006), authors Norman Ornstein and Thomas Mann suggest that Congress has seen the collapse of the deliberative process, the erosion of the regular order, and a corresponding decline in the quality of legislation passed. The authors believe that the state of today's Congress is worse than it has been in the more than three decades each of them has spent immersed in the dynamics of Congress. *The Broken Branch* is available at your local bookseller.

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