

# AEI Political Report

## Bush and His Predecessors

March 2005 marks the 51st month that President Bush has occupied the Oval Office. This chart compares Bush's latest approval rating with those of his predecessors at this same point in their terms.

### The 51st-Month Mark

Mar. 2005	George W. Bush	52%
Mar. 1997	Bill Clinton	59
Mar. 1985	Ronald Reagan	56
Mar. 1973	Richard Nixon	57
Feb. 1968	Lyndon Johnson	41
Mar. 1957	Dwight Eisenhower	72

Note: Data are the first asking of the question each month.  
Source: The Gallup Organization.

## Bush's Ratings on the Issues

Terrorism remains Bush's strong suit, and Social Security, his weakest one.

Approve	Latest	2004 Avg.
Terrorism	59%	59%
Overall job	50	51
Health care	44	38
Economy	43	45
Iraq	39	46
Social Security	35	39

### Highest Priority for Bush and Congress This Year

Economy/jobs	27%
Iraq	23
Terrorism	17
Health care	16
Social Security	10

Source: ABC News/Washington Post, March 10-13, 2005.

## Democrats in Trouble?

Several recent polls show esteem for the Republicans higher than for the Democrats. Especially troubling for Democrats is the Democrats' view of their party.

*Q: In general, do you think the [Democratic/Republican] Party is headed in the right direction or that the [Democratic/Republican] Party is headed in the wrong direction?*

	On the Right Track	Headed in Wrong Direction
<b>Republican Party</b>		
National response	46%	48%
Republicans' response	87	10
<b>Democratic Party</b>		
National response	38	52
Democrats' response	59	34

Source: Marist Poll, February 2005.

## Prisoner #55170-054

Prison was good for Martha Stewart's stock, with shares of Martha Stewart Living moving from a low of about \$8 this summer to more than \$30 at the time of her release from prison. Prison also appears to have improved her standing in public opinion, as the numbers below show.

*Q: I'm going to read the names of some people. Please tell me whether you have a generally favorable or unfavorable opinion of each. If you've never heard of one, please just say so . . . Martha Stewart?*

	Favorable	Unfavorable
Jun. 2003	30%	45%
Mar. 2005	46	36

Source: Fox News/Opinion Dynamics.

## Social Security: The State of Play

The bad news for the president is that a plethora of polls on Social Security reform show Bush in a weak position on the issue right now. Three new polls show his rating on handling Social Security to be lower than his rating on any other issue. A third or less approve of his handling of Social Security.

The good news for the president is that Americans aren't confident of the Democrats. Democratic strategists Stan Greenberg and James Carville recently asked why the Republicans haven't "crashed and burned," given the president's low ratings on the issue. Their answer, from a February Democracy Corps memo: "[V]oters' deeper feelings about the Democrats who appear to lack direction, conviction, values, advocacy or a larger public purpose."

**Q: Do you approve or disapprove of the way George W. Bush is handling . . . Social Security?**

Approve	29%
Disapprove	55

Source: PSRA/Pew Research Center, February 2005.

**Q: Now I would like to read you a list of phrases related to Social Security, and after I read each phrase, please tell me whether you believe the phrase best describes President Bush or the Democrats.**

	President Bush	Democrats
Watching out for the interests of current retirees	40%	46%
Watching out for the interests of young people	45	42
Trust to make the right kinds of changes	48	40
Is offering the right kind of ideas	44	38
Is willing to work with both political parties to find a solution	51	33
Has proposals and positions that would protect Social Security into the future	44	40

Source: NPR, February 2005.

## The Second Anniversary of the Iraq War

Two years ago, as America prepared to go to war, about two-thirds of the American people supported the decision. From the beginning, Americans expected the peace to be more difficult than the war. In February 2005, they told pollsters that the elections went better than expected, and they are optimistic about the possibility that Iraq will keep its democracy in the future. People are divided about whether the war was the right thing to do. As for American troops, a majority seems prepared to see them stay put in Iraq for a while.

**Q: Which of the following do you think will be more difficult for the United States . . . ?**

Winning the war will be more difficult	13%
Rebuilding Iraq and establishing a new government will be	84

Source: Gallup/CNN/USA Today, April 2003.

**Q: Five years from now, do you think it is more likely that . . . ?**

	June 2004	February 2005
Iraq will have some form of democracy	34%	56%
Some form of dictatorship	47	28

Source: Fox News/Opinion Dynamics.

**Q: Should the U.S. troops stay in Iraq . . . ?**

As long as it takes to make sure Iraq is a stable democracy, even if that takes a long time	55%
U.S. troops should leave as soon as possible, even if Iraq is not completely stable	40

Source: CBS/New York Times, February 2005.

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## The 109th Congress: The Oldest One Yet

When the 109th Congress officially started business on January 4, it enjoyed the peculiar distinction of being the oldest Congress to date. As Neil Howe and William Strauss of Lifecourse Associates show, the average age of a senator and representative has greatly increased since the time of our founding.

	Average Age of Representatives	Average Age of Senators
<b>1801</b>	44	46
<b>1901</b>	49	58
<b>2001</b>	54	59
<b>2005</b>	56	61

Source: Lifecourse Associates.

## Senior Democrats

While both political parties have their share of “senior” members, the House Democrats count fifteen members who are at least seventy years old, including several ranking members of committees listed below. But as *Roll Call* points out, while the ranking members are often mentioned among potential retirees, they are also the first to insist they are staying put. Will they stay if the prospects for a Democratic recapture of Congress look dim?

Ranking Member	Committee	Age
John Dingell (MI)	Energy & Commerce	78
Tom Lantos (CA)	International Relations	76
John Conyers (MI)	Judiciary	75
Charles Rangel (NY)	Ways & Means	74
Ike Skelton (MO)	Armed Services	73
James Oberstar (MN)	Transportation	70

## Tax Time

It’s that time again. Here’s what Americans are saying about taxes:

- Forty-nine percent told Schulman, Ronca, Bucvalas/*Time* interviewers that the federal income taxes they pay were too high. Forty-five percent said they were about right, and 3 percent too low.
- Personal property taxes are a greater source of dissatisfaction than federal income taxes: 38 percent told Gallup that local property taxes were the worst tax they pay. Twenty-one percent felt that way about the income tax. Eleven percent described the Social Security tax that way.
- On Election Day, 5 percent of voters selected taxes as the top issue for them in casting their vote. As in past elections, they voted for the Republican over the Democrat, 57 percent for Bush to 43 percent for Kerry.
- In January 2005, 50 percent said the tax system worked well and required only minor changes. Twenty-nine percent said it needed major changes, and 17 percent wanted it to be completely rebuilt. People felt better about the operation of the tax system than the Social Security system, the legal system, the education system, or the health care system.
- Three percent love doing their taxes.

## Economic Indicators

In the public’s mind, the economy hasn’t shown much vigor lately. Today, 41 percent say things are getting better; 50 percent say things are getting worse.

### Economic conditions today are excellent/good

March 2005	35%
March 2004	32
March 2003	22
March 2002	34
March 2001	46

### Economic conditions in the country as a whole are

	Getting Better	Getting Worse
March 2005	41%	50%
March 2004	44	47
March 2003	23	67
March 2002	54	37
March 2001	28	61

Note: Data are the first asking of the question each month.  
Source: Gallup.



## 2005 and 2006 Governors' Races

In the next two years, thirty-eight governorships will be up for election. If history is a guide, there will be significant turnover, and Republicans may see a diminution of their twenty-eight to twenty-two lead in control of governors' mansions.

In 2005, New Jersey and Virginia will hold gubernatorial elections. Both states have Democratic governors who are not running for election, but in other respects they could not be more different. In New Jersey, despite the controversy surrounding the resignation of Jim McGreevey, Senator John Corzine should win easily. In Virginia, popular moderate Democrat Mark Warner is limited to serving one term,

and there should be a spirited race between Democratic Lieutenant Governor Tim Kaine and Republican Attorney General Jerry Kilgore.

Thirty-six states will hold gubernatorial elections in 2006. Republicans hold twenty-two of these governorships. Only once in the past forty years, 1986, has the president's party gained governorships in a midterm election. In 2002, the last midterm, twenty of the thirty-six governorships changed parties. That may have been the high water mark for change, as fourteen governors were term limited. Only six in 2006 will be term limited. Open seats are more likely to change hands.

Republicans hold the governor-

ships of the four biggest states. In California, Arnold continues to have very high approval ratings, although the state tends Democratic. In Texas, the real action may be in the Republican primary, as Senator Kay Bailey Hutchinson is mulling a race against sitting Governor Rick Perry, and Democrats have yet to field a candidate. In New York, George Pataki has not decided whether to run for a fourth term, and Democrats smell victory with Pataki's low approval ratings and the strength of likely nominee Attorney General Eliot Spitzer. The Florida race should be competitive, with Jeb Bush term limited. —John Fortier

2005	2006					
New Jersey	Alabama	Connecticut	Iowa	Minnesota	Ohio	South Dakota
Virginia	Alaska	Florida	Kansas	Nebraska	Oklahoma	Tennessee
	Arizona	Georgia	Maine	Nevada	Oregon	Texas
	Arkansas	Hawaii	Maryland	New Hampshire	Pennsylvania	Vermont
	California	Idaho	Massachusetts	New Mexico	Rhode Island	Wisconsin
	Colorado	Illinois	Michigan	New York	South Carolina	Wyoming

## 2004 Governors' Races: Cost per Vote

Eleven states held gubernatorial elections in 2004. Fundraising (a good proxy for spending) by candidates in these contests ranged from a high of \$12.67 per vote (by the losing Republican incumbent in New Hampshire) to a low of \$3.15 per vote (by the winning Democratic incumbent in Delaware).

Listed here is the amount each candidate in eight of the eleven gubernatorial races raised per vote he or she received. Figures for the other states are not available. In four of the states, the winning gubernatorial candidate raised less money per vote received than the losing candidate.

—Barry McMillion

State	Democratic Candidate: Amount Raised per Vote	Republican Candidate: Amount Raised per Vote
Delaware	<b>\$3.15 *</b>	\$4.94
Indiana	\$3.78 *	<b>\$3.95</b>
Missouri	\$8.57 *	<b>\$6.01</b>
Montana	<b>\$4.75</b>	\$3.45 *
New Hampshire	<b>\$8.74</b>	\$12.67 *
Vermont	\$4.70	<b>\$4.10 *</b>
Washington	<b>\$4.54 *</b>	\$4.28
West Virginia	<b>\$10.15 *</b>	\$3.38

Note: The winning candidate's amount is in **bold**, and the incumbent or incumbent party is indicated with an asterisk.

## Changes in Party Identification in the States

Since 1993 there have been dramatic changes within many states in the proportion of individuals who self-identify as a Democrat or Republican, or lean to either party.

Gallup data from 1993 and 2004 show that Republicans made the greatest inroads in party identification among voters in states carried strongly by George W. Bush, making their largest gains in Utah (+16.2 percentage points), Idaho (+16.0), West Virginia (+14.7), Montana (+13.3), and Texas (+12.7). Republicans also scored double-digit gains in party identification from 1993 to 2004 in four Southern/border states: Alabama (+11.7), Georgia (+11.6), Oklahoma (+11.0), and Louisiana (+10.2). In only six states did the number of residents who identify as Republican decrease or stay roughly the same in this period: Massachusetts, New Jersey, Oregon, Rhode Island, Vermont, and Washington.

Like Republicans, Democrats made the greatest gains in party identification between 1993 and 2004 in states carried solidly by their candidate. The greatest Democratic gains were in Vermont (+19.7), New Jersey (+8.4), Massachusetts (+7.0), Washington (+6.7), and Connecticut (+6.2). Democrats suffered losses or stayed roughly the same in party iden-

<b>States Won by Bush</b>	<b>Change in Republican Party identification 1993–2004</b>	<b>Change in Democratic Party identification 1993–2004</b>
with ≥ 55% of the vote (21 states)	+8.8	–4.5
with < 55% of the vote (9 states)	+4.9	+0.70

<b>States Won by Kerry</b>	<b>Change in Republican Party identification 1993–2004</b>	<b>Change in Democratic Party identification 1993–2004</b>
with ≥ 55% of the vote (8 states)	+0.10	+5.2
with < 55% of the vote (10 states)	+4.6	+1.0

Note: A Republican gain/loss in party identification in a state does not always correspond to an equivalent loss/gain in Democratic party identification, and vice versa, because of the movement of independents.

Source: American Enterprise Institute

tification in twenty-nine states, with the largest losses in Democratic party identification in Georgia, Louisiana, Kansas, Oklahoma, and Utah. Since 1993, red states have been getting more “red” in terms of the Republican advantage in identification, and blue states have become more “blue” in terms of a greater Democratic advantage, another sign that the electoral

and geographic bases of the two parties have become polarized.

The tables above show that Bush gained more in partisan identification in states he carried solidly (with 55 percent of the vote or more) compared to states he carried with less than 55 percent of the vote. The same is true for Kerry.

–Barry McMillion

## Current Commentary

### “Stop Messing Around—Call Barry Bonds”

AEI Research Fellow John Fortier argues that baseball has not been serious about investigating its steroid problem.  
<http://www.aei.org/publication22135>

### “Campaign Finance Reform Worked in 2004”

AEI Resident Scholar Norman Ornstein says Congress should now focus on reforming presidential fundraising.  
<http://www.aei.org/news21985>

### “Social Security Public Opinion Study”

AEI Resident Fellow Karlyn Bowman’s public opinion data on Social Security will be updated every week.  
<http://www.aei.org/publicOpinion4>