

AEI Political Report

Bush and His Predecessors

April 2005 marks the 52nd 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 52nd-Month Mark

Apr. 2005	George W. Bush	48%
Apr. 1997	Bill Clinton	54
Apr. 1985	Ronald Reagan	52
Apr. 1973	Richard Nixon	54
Mar. 1968	Lyndon Johnson	36
Apr. 1957	Dwight Eisenhower	67

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

Congress's Rating Not Robust

When the Pew Research Center asked people recently whether they approved of the job the Republican leaders in Congress were doing, 39 percent said they did. The Democrats in Congress didn't fare any better. Thirty-seven percent approved of the job the Democrats were doing. Gallup's new sounding confirms the Pew findings. People are in a sour mood about Washington.

Q: Do you approve or disapprove of the way Congress is handling its job?

	Approve	Disapprove
Today's rating	38%	54%
All-time high (October 2001)	84	10
All-time low (March 1992)	18	78

Source: The Gallup Organization, April 4-7, 2005.



Bush's Ratings on the Issues

Terrorism remains Bush's strong suit, and Social Security and the Schiavo case, his weakest ones.

	2005	2004 Avg.
Approve		
Terrorism	57%	57%
Iraq	43	47
Economy	41	45
Social Security	35	—
Terri Schiavo case	34	—

Source: Gallup, CNN, *USA Today*, April 1-2, 2005.

Play Ball?

When NBC News and the *Wall Street Journal* asked people if the stories about baseball players using steroids had diminished their opinion of the game, 42 percent said they had, while 51 percent said they had not. Other polls showed that Americans want Major League Baseball and not the federal government to deal with the situation. Views of Mark McGwire have definitely taken a hit since he broke Roger Maris's record in 1998.

Q: Who do you think should be in charge of creating and enforcing rules against the use of performance-enhancing drugs by professional baseball players . . . ?

Federal government should be in charge	30%
Major League Baseball should	64

Source: ABC News/ESPN, March 11-15, 2005.

Q: Now I am going to read you the names of several public figures, and I'd like you to rate your feelings toward each one . . .

Opinion of Mark McGwire

	Positive	Neutral	Negative
September 1998	66%	17%	3%
March-April 2005	20	36	27

Source: NBC News/*Wall Street Journal*, March 31-April 3, 2005.

Most Important Problem

For more than sixty years, Gallup has been asking Americans about the most important problem facing the country. People give any response that comes to mind, and Gallup's interviewers then tabulate the responses. The top responses to the latest question are shown below. Iraq leads the list as the most important problem facing the country, but it has declined in prominence since the January election there, when 25 percent called it the top problem. Concern about Social Security moved from 3 percent after the U.S. election to 12 percent in early March. It's at 8 percent now. Fuel/oil prices has moved from 1 percent in Gallup's postelection poll to 9 percent today.

Top Problems

Q: What do you think is the most important problem facing this country today?

Situation in Iraq/war	18%
Economy in general	12
Fuel/oil prices	9
Unemployment/jobs	8
Social Security	8
Terrorism	8

Source: The Gallup Organization, April 4–7, 2005.

Gas Prices Beginning to Bite

For the first time in six years of asking the question, a majority (58 percent) told Gallup, CNN, and *USA Today* interviewers that recent price increases in gasoline had caused financial hardship for them or their households. Of this group, 15 percent said the hardship was serious, and 43 percent moderate. Below is a list of some things people have done to deal with rising gas prices.

Q: As a result of the recent rise in gas prices, would you say you have—or have not—done each of the following? How about . . .

	Have Done	Have Not
Made an effort to find the cheapest gas in your area	72%	27%
Cut back significantly on how much you drive	48	51
Cut back significantly on household spending	38	62

Source: Gallup, CNN, *USA Today*, April 1–2, 2005.

Taxing Times

Harris Interactive and the Tax Foundation recently released a poll covering a variety of tax issues. Among the highlights: Fifty-five percent described the amount of federal income taxes that they had to pay as too high, one third about right, and only 2 percent too low. When asked about the “maximum percentage of a person's income” that should go to all taxes, the median response was 16 percent. This response is comparable to other recent polls that probe total tax burden. The Harris Interactive/Tax Foundation poll included separate questions about the worst federal and state/local taxes. The results are shown below.

Worst Federal Tax

Q: Some taxes are paid to the federal government in Washington and some are paid to state and local governments. Of the following federal taxes, which do you think is the worst tax, that is, the least fair?

Federal estate tax	30%
Federal income tax	26
Social Security payroll tax	15
Federal corporate income tax	8

Worst State and Local Tax

Q: Of the following state and local taxes, which do you think is the worst tax, that is, the least fair?

Local property tax	38%
State income tax	19
Sales tax	18
State corporate income tax	7

Source: Harris Interactive/Tax Foundation, March 28–April 5, 2005.

Social Security Scorecard

President Bush's ratings on handling Social Security are lower than his ratings on most other issues. About one third approve. That said, polls provide no indication that the Democrats are gaining ground on the issue.

More people continue to see Social Security as a crisis down the road than as an immediate one. At the same time, however, Americans are critical that political leaders haven't acted more swiftly on the matter. In early April, 61 percent of Americans told Gallup, CNN, and *USA Today* interviewers that political leaders were moving “too slowly” on the issue, while 29 percent said they were moving at an appropriate pace. Roughly equal numbers of Democrats, Republicans, and independents agreed that leaders weren't moving fast enough.

Environmental Ennui?

In all recent polls, the environment ranks far behind Iraq, the economy, gas prices, and Social Security as an issue people want Congress and the president to address. Most people feel good about the environment where they live, but they are not as positive about it in the country as a whole.

Q: Next, we'd like to know whether you feel good about various things in this country and in your life. Do you . . . ?

Feel good about the quality of the air, water, and environment where you live and work 71%

Source: Harris Interactive, October 2004.

Q: How would you rate the overall quality of the environment in this country today, as . . . ?

Excellent	4%
Good	39
Only fair	46
Poor	11

Source: The Gallup Organization, March 2004.

Young people, who were the vanguard of the environmental movement, are less likely than thirty years ago to say that being involved in programs to clean up the environment will be essential or very important to them personally. They describe themselves as sympathetic to the movement.

College Freshmen

*Objectives considered to be essential or very important personally—
Becoming involved in programs to clean up the environment*

1971	43%
2004	17

Source: "The American Freshmen: National Norms," Cooperative Institutional Research Program, American Council on Education, UCLA.

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Micropolitics: Congressional District Results and the 2004 Presidential Election

President Bush not only won the popular vote and the electoral college, but he also carried seventy-five more congressional districts than Senator John Kerry, according to newly released figures from Polidata, a demographic and political research firm. Their report is the first in-depth look at the presidential vote by congressional district.

President Bush won 255 out of 435 congressional districts, while Senator John Kerry carried 180. Bush's 255 districts were 27 more than he carried in the 2000 election.

Bush also had fewer congressional districts switch between 2000 and 2004. Only two districts that had voted for Bush in 2000 went for Kerry in 2004—North Carolina 13 and Oregon 4. Seventeen districts that voted for Gore in 2000 went for Bush this time around. These districts were spread out over ten states: Arkansas, California, Florida, Iowa, Nevada, New Jersey, New York, Tennessee, Texas, and West Virginia.

More troubling for Democrats is that "Bush Democratic districts" were far more common than "Kerry Republican districts." Bush won forty-one districts that are represented by a Democrat in Congress, while Kerry only won eighteen districts represented by a Republican.

Bush districts held by a Democrat and Kerry districts held by a Republican were also spread along predictable geographic lines. The top "Bush Democrat" districts were found in red states such as Mississippi, Missouri, North Dakota, and Utah. The top "Kerry Republican" districts were in blue states such as Connecticut, Delaware, Illinois, and Pennsylvania.

While congressional redistricting has made most House seats safe for one party, these figures in the Polidata report show that there still might be room for each party to pick up additional districts. For example, Democrat Representatives Gene Taylor of Mississippi and Ike Skelton of Missouri are both "blue-dog" Democrats in districts Bush carried by healthy margins. If either legislator should retire, Republicans would be favored to win the seats. Likewise, Democrats would be favored to win seats currently held by Republican Representatives Rob Simmons of Connecticut or Mike Castle of Delaware.

—Bryan O'Keefe

The Politics of the Professoriate, the Public, and Students

Stanley Rothman, Robert Lichter, and Neil Nevitte* recently released the results of the first large-scale survey in two decades on the ideological composition of American faculty. Ipsos-Reid did the fieldwork for the 1999 survey, interviewing 1,643 faculty from 183 four-year colleges and universities.

Among the highlights: 72 percent of the faculty considered themselves left or liberal, while only 15 percent considered themselves right or conservative. Half of the faculty identified themselves as Democrats, compared with only 11 percent who called themselves Republicans.

As for specific departments, professors of English literature were the

most liberal (88 percent), followed by those in the performing arts and psychology (84 percent). Business professors were at the bottom of the list in terms of their liberalism (49 percent), but only 39 percent of them identified as conservatives. In not one of the twenty-one departments for which the authors compiled data did conservatives outnumber liberals, or Republicans outnumber Democrats. A late 2004 survey of students at fifty top universities, by the Center for Survey Research and Analysis at the University of Connecticut for the American Council of Trustees & Alumni, found that 68 percent said their professors had made negative comments about George W. Bush during the campaign;

only 17 percent reported negative comments about John Kerry.

How do the ratings of the professoriate compare to those of the general public and to college students? The three organizations shown below ask different questions, so only rough comparisons are possible. Harris's twenty-five year trend for the public shows stability, with conservatives always outnumbering liberals. The question that UCLA asks a large sample of college freshmen has shown more volatility. In 2004, college freshmen were less liberal and slightly more conservative than they were in the early 1970s. Faculty liberalism is out of whack with the public and students.

—Karlyn Bowman

	Rothman/Lichter/Nevitte (Faculty)		Harris (Public)		UCLA (College Freshmen)	
	1999		1999	2004	1999	2004
Liberal	72%		18%	18%	25%	30%
Conservative	15		37	36	19	24

* Robert Lichter is president of the Center for Media and Public Affairs. Stanley Rothman is the Mary H. Gamble Professor Emeritus of Government at Smith College. Neil Nevitte is a professor of political science at the University of Toronto.

Source: For the faculty, Stanley Rothman, S. Robert Lichter, and Neil Nevitte, "Politics and Professional Advancement among College Faculty," *The Forum*, article submission.

For the public, Harris Interactive.

For college freshmen, "The American Freshmen: National Norms," Cooperative Institutional Research Program, American Council on Education, UCLA, selected years.

Current Commentary

"Don't Throw Out the Good Travel with the Bad"

AEI Resident Scholar Norman Ornstein argues that, contrary to press accounts, congressional travel can actually be a valuable experience for lawmakers.

<http://www.aei.org/publication22270/>

"National Institutes of Health, Senate Overreact on Ethics, but House Keeps on Dissembling"

AEI Resident Scholar Norman Ornstein says that NIH went too far in their new ethics rules.

<http://www.aei.org/publication22296/>

"Public Opinion on Taxes"

AEI Resident Fellow Karlyn Bowman's public opinion data on taxes. Updated for Tax Day, April 15.

<http://www.aei.org/publicopinion6>

"Big Labor Targets Wall Street"

AEI Research Assistant Bryan O'Keefe says that labor unions are going after Wall Street investment firms that support personal retirement accounts.

<http://www.aei.org/publication22242/>

The British Elections

Most observers expect Tony Blair to win reelection on May 5, but with a significantly reduced majority in Parliament. The polls below show dissatisfaction outweighing satisfaction with Blair's performance and with that of Conservative Party Leader Michael Howard. Concerns about crime and race relations/immigration have been rising in Britain.

Job Ratings

	Satisfaction	Dissatisfaction
Tony Blair		
1994 (when he became leader of the Opposition)	34%	16%
1997 (when he became prime minister)	65	9
Today	34	59
Michael Howard		
2003 (when he became leader of the Opposition)	26%	17%
Today	31	41
Charles Kennedy		
1999 (when he became leader of the Liberal Democrats)	21%	10%
Today	39	29

Source: Market & Opinion Research International.

Top Five Issues Facing Britain Today

National health service	44%
Race relations/immigration	33
Education/schools	30
Crime/violence	29
Defense/foreign affairs/terrorism	24

Source: Market & Opinion Research International, March 2005.

The Royal Wedding

On April 9, Prince Charles wed Camilla Parker Bowles. While Brits warmed over time to the idea of the marriage, they aren't ready to make her their Queen.

Q: Do you think Camilla Parker Bowles should become Queen at Prince Charles' side?

Yes, should become Queen	23%
Should not	64

Source: Market & Opinion Research International for the *Observer*, April 7-9, 2005.

Voting Intention

		Labour	Conservative	Liberal Democrats
YouGov*	4/12-14	38%	33%	22%
ICM	4/13-15	40	30	22
ICM	4/16	41	33	20
NOP	4/15-17	37	32	21
Populus	4/15-18	39	33	21
MORI	4/15-18	41	31	21

Among those absolutely certain to vote:

MORI**	4/15-18	40%	32%	21%
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*YouGov excludes "don't know" and "will not vote" responses.

**Fifty-nine percent of the MORI sample indicated that they were absolutely certain to vote.

Source: Survey organizations shown above for various news organizations.