

# AEI Political Report

## After the Storm

In 1985, the Pew Research Center began asking people what news stories they were following most closely. The organization has asked about attention paid to hundreds of policy, political, social, and economic stories since that time. In reviewing the responses, Pew notes that people follow disaster and war stories much more closely than they follow any other kind of news. Hurricane Katrina fit the pattern with more than seven in ten Americans riveted to the story. Below are some snapshots from the polls.

*Q: Now thinking about what happened . . . , how would you rate the way . . . has responded to the hurricane?*

	Very good or good	
	Initial response	What has happened in the past few days
George W. Bush	44%	58%
The residents of New Orleans	39	59
State and local officials	38	57
FEMA	36	56

Note: Poll taken September 8–11.  
Source: Gallup/CNN/USA Today, September 2005.

*Q: How would you assess the . . . ?*

	Government response	Private charities' response
Excellent/good	32%	86%
Fair/poor	67	9

Source: Zogby International, September 2005.

*Q: Do you think the severity of Hurricane Katrina is . . . ?*

The result of global climate change	25%
Just the kind of severe weather event that happens from time to time	66

Source: Pew Research Center, September 2005.

*Q: In your view, did this disaster show that . . . ?*

Racial inequality remains a major problem	38%
This was not a particularly important lesson of the disaster	50

Note: Seventy-one percent of blacks said this showed that racial equality was still a major problem compared to 32 percent of whites.  
Source: Pew Research Center, September 2005.

*Q: Do you think that the fact that those left in New Orleans were mostly black and poor was a . . . ?*

Major factor in the government's response	29%
Minor factor	19
Not a factor	50

Source: CBS News, September 2005.

*Q: Now thinking about the looters in New Orleans who entered stores and took things in the first few days after the hurricane, which comes closer to your view . . . ?*

They were mostly criminals taking advantage of the situation	46%
They were mostly desperate people trying to find a way to survive	48

Source: Gallup/CNN/USA Today, September 2005.

*Q: Have you or anyone in your household . . . ?*

Made a donation to those affected	56%
Plan to do so	28
Won't do so right now	15

Source: Pew Research Center, September 2005.

*Q: Have you ever . . . ?*

Visited New Orleans	35%
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Source: CBS News, September 2005.

## Looking Ahead to the 2006 Elections

At this stage in the election cycle, both parties are trying to keep congressional retirements to a minimum. That is because open seats are more competitive than races with an incumbent. Thus far this cycle, politics watchers point to seventeen seats where a member has announced a retirement, looks poised to do so, or has announced that he or she is seeking a different office.

At this point in 1993, there were twelve open seats, but by election day in 1994, there were fifty-two. The number this year is unlikely to balloon, because leaders of both parties are doing their utmost to keep current members in place. AEI's Norman Ornstein estimates that of the 435 seats in the House, there will probably be thirty to thirty-five serious contests next year.

## Roberts Rules

Every public opinion poll since President Bush nominated John Roberts to serve on the Supreme Court shows that more people favor than oppose his nomination. In the latest ABC News/*Washington Post* poll, taken September 8–11, 55 percent said the Senate should confirm Roberts's nomination. Twenty-six percent disagreed. In their August poll, those who wanted the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* abortion decision to be upheld favored his confirmation as did those who thought the decision should be overturned.

### Senate should confirm Roberts

*Opinion of Roberts among those who believe*

*Roe v. Wade should be . . .*

Overtured	69%
Upheld	53

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

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## Immigration and the Bellwether State

A new Field Poll of Californians provides some new indications of the potency of this issue. Eighty-one percent of registered voters there said they were concerned about the issue of illegal immigration, including a near majority, 49 percent, who reported being extremely concerned. The August poll revealed some sharp political fissures: Republicans (65 percent) were much more likely than Democrats (42 percent) to say they were extremely concerned about the issue.

Californians rejected the idea of private citizens forming patrols along the California-Mexico border, by 56 to 41 percent. A solid majority of Republicans (58 percent) were in favor, while 65 percent of Democrats were opposed.

Californians were divided about whether the governor should declare a "border emergency" (see below). Once again, Republicans and Democrats were on opposite sides of the issue.

Nationally, the immigration issue divides both political parties, but in 2008 it is more likely to cause more trouble for Republicans with generally Republican-leaning business interests favoring President Bush's immigration reform proposal, and many mainstream conservatives opposing it.

*Question: The governors of Arizona and New Mexico recently declared "border emergencies" in their states after a series of violent incidents involving illegal immigrants occurred along the U.S.-Mexican border. Some officials in California are urging Governor Schwarzenegger to do the same thing here in California. Do you think conditions along the California-Mexico border are such that . . . ?*

	Governor Schwarzenegger should declare a "border emergency"	Should Not
All Californians	44%	40%
Democrats	35	48
Republicans	62	23
Non-partisans	32	51
Non-Hispanic whites	49	35
Latinos	20	65
Black/Asian/Other	41	40

Source: Field Poll, August 2005.

## Tax Reform . . . Again

In January, President Bush appointed an advisory panel to look at the tax code once again. Chaired by former senators John Breaux and Connie Mack, the panel is expected to make its recommendations in a few months.

As the data below show, people are not exactly clamoring for major changes in the tax system. Today concern about local property taxes tops concern about the federal income tax system.

Still, pollsters are reporting widespread, if low-level, dissatisfaction with taxes. In a Harris Interactive poll earlier

this year for the Tax Foundation, 25 percent rated the value they personally get from the federal taxes they paid as excellent or good, while 66 percent described it as only fair or poor. Eighty-one percent described the current system as complex.

People like the idea of a flat-rate income tax with no deductions, and they say they would be willing to give up some deductions to make the system simpler. But these questions are hypothetical, and they may be unreliable.

Q: Do you think the . . . ?

	Works pretty well/only minor changes needed	Major changes	Completely rebuilt
Health care system	27%	50%	21%
<b>Tax system</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>17</b>
Education system	36	45	17
Social Security system	47	34	15
Legal system	44	37	15

Source: Pew Research Center, January 2005.

## Names in the News

In July, the Pew Research Center asked about views of some people and organizations. Some of the responses are shown below.

Q: Now I'd like your views on some [people/groups and organizations in the news]. Would you say your overall opinion is. . . ?

	Favorable	Unfavorable
Pope Benedict XVI	44%	11%
Christian conservative movement	42	34
American Civil Liberties Union	38	35

Source: Pew Research Center, July 2005.



## Current Commentary

### “The Similarities to '94 Are Real, But They're Far From Exact”

AEI resident scholar Norman J. Ornstein says while the 2006 midterm election might look like the historic 1994 election, the parallels are not exact.

<http://www.aei.org/publication23194>

### “How Strong Is Sentiment Against the Iraq War?”

AEI resident fellow Karlyn H. Bowman reviews a series of recent polls on the Iraq war.

<http://www.aei.org/publication23137>

### “Roberts Rolls”

In his new weekly “The First Branch” column for the *Hill*, AEI resident fellow John C. Fortier says that John Roberts will become the next chief justice of the Supreme Court, despite significant Democratic opposition on the Judiciary Committee and full Senate.

<http://www.aei.org/publication23140>