

AEI Political Report

President Bush's Performance

The president lost the support of most Democrats long ago, and his marks among them today are very low. He is not faring much better among self-described political independents.

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

Approval	Republicans	Democrats	Independents
Economy	70%	12%	26%
Situation with Iraq	69	11	26
Campaign against terrorism	83	27	38
Response to the hurricanes	81	23	39

Source: CBS News, October 2005.

A Woman in the White House and on the Court?

With actress Geena Davis in the role of president in the new ABC drama *Commander in Chief*, the pollsters are looking once again at the public's views on a woman for president. In 1937, when Gallup first asked the question, 34 percent of Americans said they would vote for a woman "if she was qualified in every other respect"! Gallup changed the wording of its question, and the proportion saying they would support a woman in the Oval Office has risen to 86 percent today. People are still more confident of women's abilities on domestic affairs than they are about their abilities to handle foreign policy.

Polls conducted before and during the confirmation hearings for John Roberts asked how important it was for President Bush to nominate a woman to the Court. Americans said it would be nice but that it was not necessary. In a Gallup/CNN/*USA Today* poll after President Bush nominated Harriet Miers to serve on the high court, 82 percent said they would not have been bothered if Bush had not nominated a woman. Public opinion polls clearly show that the time for gender quotas has passed, if it ever existed.

Election Results You Haven't Read About

Rhodes Cook, one of Washington's premier political analysts, has been pouring over 2004 election returns. Below are some of fascinating results he's compiled.

The 2004 presidential vote in . . .

Republican Resorts

	Bush	Kerry
Taney County, Missouri (Branson)	70%	29%
Beaufort County, South Carolina (Hilton Head)	60	39

Liberal Resorts and Artists' Colonies

	Bush	Kerry
Provincetown, Massachusetts	12%	87%
Pitkin County, Colorado (Aspen)	30	68

Academic Centers

	Bush	Kerry
Cambridge, Massachusetts (Harvard, MIT)	13%	85%
Hanover, New Hampshire (Dartmouth)	22	77

Test Markets

	Bush	Kerry
Peoria County, Illinois	50%	50%
Montgomery County, Ohio (Dayton)	49	51

Old and New Economy Areas

	Bush	Kerry
Mahoning County, Ohio (Youngstown)	37%	63%
Santa Clara County, California (Silicon Valley)	35	64

Note: For more information on the Rhodes Cook Letter, visit <http://www.rhodescook.com/subscribe.html>.

Source: "Mapping the Political Landscape 2005," Pew Research Center, pgs. 147-159, 2005.



Why the Military is Hot, Why Congress is Not

In Gallup's latest survey of confidence in major institutions, the military ranks first of fifteen institutions the pollsters examined. Every time Gallup has asked the question since 1987, the military has either tied for or taken the top spot. In the May 2005 survey, nearly three-quarters (74 percent) had a great deal or quite a lot of confidence in it. In Harris's data from 2005, the military took top honors too.

Scandals involving procurement problems, sexual harassment, and the treatment of prisoners at Abu Ghraib have had little impact on the military's standing. There are several possible explanations. First, most of us know someone in the military, and familiarity tends to produce respect. Polls show that most military people themselves tend to report their military experience positively. Nearly two in ten Americans say they or someone in their immediate family now serves in the military, so contact with the institution is widespread. Another reason for the institution's high standing may come from the clarity of the military's mission. The military's responsibilities are clearly and narrowly defined, and the public believes the military is carrying out its mission to protect and defend the nation effectively. The military's generally stellar performance in dealing with disasters no doubt adds to the institution's luster. Some polling questions about Iraq that include explicit references to the military produce more support for the war than those questions that do not mention the military.

Congress's standing is low by comparison. In the same Gallup poll, only 22 percent said they had a great deal or quite a lot of confidence in the legislative branch. Americans have long associated politics with corruption, and that may explain the low regard for the institution. Few Americans would like to see a child of theirs choose politics as a career. Another explanation for Congress's low standing arises from the myriad responsibilities the institution has. There is simply a lot to criticize. Constant partisan squabbling in Washington probably contributes to the low regard in which the Congress is held.

Q: Do you think the ethical conduct of members of Congress has improved in recent years, declined, or stayed about the same?

Improved	7%
Declined	34
Stayed Same	56

Source: PSRA/Newsweek, October 2005.

Initial Impressions: Comparing Miers and Roberts

Positive initial impressions of John Roberts helped set the tone for his eventual confirmation. So far, many people have not formed an opinion about Supreme Court nominee Harriet Miers, but early reactions to her are less positive. Still, in Gallup's October 13–16 poll, more people said they favored her Senate confirmation (44 percent) than opposed it (36 percent).

Q: Is your opinion of Supreme Court nominee [Harriet Miers/John Roberts] . . . ?

Favorable opinion	
<i>All</i>	
Miers	11%
Roberts (7/29–8/1)	25
<i>Republicans' Views</i>	
Miers	22%
Roberts	51
<i>Conservatives' Views</i>	
Miers	15%
Roberts	42

Source: CBS News, October 2005.

Current Commentary

“On Fiscal Policy Congress Is in a Dream World”

AEI resident scholar Norman J. Ornstein warns that Congress and the president are both pursuing an irresponsible fiscal policy.

<http://www.aei.org/publication23261>

“Exception to the Rule”

AEI research fellow John C. Fortier says that Congress should define how the military can be used in response to catastrophic events.

<http://www.aei.org/publication23280>

“Spirit of St. Louis: Labor Rising in America”

AEI research assistant Bryan O'Keefe reports on the inaugural convention of the “Change to Win” labor federation.

<http://www.aei.org/publication23285>

The Governors' Races 2005

Virginia and New Jersey are the only two states holding gubernatorial elections this year. Both races have tightened up in recent weeks with Republican Jerry Kilgore and Democrat Tim Kaine in Virginia in a near tie and Republican Doug Forrester within striking range of Democrat Jon Corzine in New Jersey.

The Virginia race pits Lieutenant Governor Kaine against Attorney General Kilgore. Both men ran on the same ballot as Democratic Governor Mark Warner in 2001. Kaine and Warner ran similarly: Warner won his race by 52 to 47 percent; Kaine by 50 to 48 percent. In the same election, Kilgore ran ahead of his Republican ticket mates, winning by 60 to 38 percent. Polls over the summer gave Kilgore a 7 percentage point lead in the gubernatorial race. But recent polls show Kilgore's lead dropping. One recent poll shows Kaine up. Although Virginia can still be counted as a reliably Republican state in presidential politics, statewide races are usually competitive.

The New Jersey race is a battle of the multimillionaires. Former senator Jon Corzine was expected to win handily over former senate candidate Doug Forrester. Polls over the summer showed Democrat Corzine with a wide lead, about 10 points. But recent polls show Corzine's lead reduced. A mid-October Quinnipiac poll had Corzine leading by seven points. In presidential politics, New Jersey has been voting Democratic in recent years, but a series of scandals in the Democratic Party combined with backlash against even richer Jon Corzine may be giving the popular Forrester a boost.

Election Day is November 8th. Although the media tries to find deeper meaning in off-year gubernatorial results, these two races will be decided by local forces with little bearing on national politics.



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Election Reform Report

The Carter-Baker Commission on Federal Election Reform issued its report, *Building Confidence in U.S. Elections*, in late September and immediately found itself the target of substantial controversy over one of its recommendations: a call for a photo ID for voting at the polls. This was the one recommendation among dozens that generated spirited and emotional division within the commission itself.

The controversy over this provision is too bad; the report contains a large number of useful and thoughtful recommendations, virtually all of them embraced unanimously or near unanimously. In areas like voter registration, voting technology, voter access, and election administration, the report has a great deal to offer at a time when states are floundering in their efforts to provide statewide voter registration databases and where the flaws in voting machines, poll worker procedures, and provisional ballots were evident through the 2004 campaign. We barely dodged the bullet of another deeply controversial national election in 2004. To virtually all election officials and scholars in the area, the Help America Vote Act (HAVA) needs full implementation and full funding, neither of which has happened. Several of the issues the commission considered need to be revisited in light of the experience in 2004, and others, such as the expansion of Election Day and absentee voting, need to be addressed for the first time.

But the prognosis for movement in Congress in these areas in the next year or two is dim. The major players in election reform, those who fathered HAVA, have no interest whatsoever in raising the issue again. The commission report will be useful if and when politicians feel enough heat to act. But since the recalcitrance here is thoroughly bipartisan, it will not be soon.

Bird Flu Worries

Q: How ...?

Very/somewhat concerned about the spread of bird flu in the United States 63%

Federal government is very/somewhat prepared to deal with a potential outbreak 35

Source: Fox News/Opinion Dynamics, October 2005.