

AEI POLITICS WATCH

WWW.AEIPOLITICALCORNER.ORG

Volume 1, Issue 2

February 2005

Bush and His Predecessors

February 2005 marks the 50th 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 50th Month Mark

Feb. 2005	George W. Bush	57%
Feb. 1997	Bill Clinton	60
Feb. 1985	Ronald Reagan	60
Feb. 1973	Richard Nixon	65
Jan. 1968	Lyndon Johnson	48
Feb. 1957	Dwight Eisenhower	72

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

A Closely Divided Country

Gallup's cumulative party identification data for 2003 and 2004 reveal a closely divided country.

	Republican	Democrat
2003	45.5	45.2
2004	45	48

Harris's comparison of party identification data by decade shows that a partisan realignment may already have occurred.

	Democratic Lead over the Republicans
1970s	+21
1980s	+ 11
1990s	+ 7
2000–2003	+ 5

Bush on the Issues . . .

Terrorism remains Bush's strong suit. Most of his early 2005 approval ratings are similar to his 2004 averages.

Approve of Bush's handling of . . .

	Latest	2004 Avg.
Terrorism	55%	57%
Education	52	52
Iraq	50	47
Environment	49	--
Taxes	49	57
Foreign Affairs	45	47
Economy	45	45
Social Security	43	--
Health Care	40	38
Immigration	34	--
Budget Deficit	32	--

Source: Gallup/CNN/USA Today, January 7–9, 2005, February 4–6, 2005, and February 7–10, 2005.

Howard Dean and Other Political Figures

New Democratic National Committee Chair Howard Dean begins his tenure with a low favorability rating in comparison to other national political figures.

	Favorable	Unfavorable
Laura Bush	80%	12%
George W. Bush	59	39
Condoleezza Rice	59	27
Bill Clinton	56	41
Dick Cheney	51	41
Donald Rumsfeld	48	40
Howard Dean	31	38
Tom DeLay	29	24

Source: Gallup/CNN/USA Today, February 4–6, 2005.

Social Security Reform

Opinion is unformed about President Bush's proposals to modernize Social Security, as the three polls below show, though other aspects of the debate are clear. Most people over the age of thirty think they will get a Social Security check, but not in the amount they think they are due. People do not see an immediate crisis. Democrats lead Republicans on the issue, but people think the president has more new ideas than the Democrats in Congress for fixing the system.

Q. Do you feel that you generally understand how the proposal to let people invest a portion of their Social Security contributions in personal or private accounts would work, or do you feel that you need more information to understand this proposal?

Generally Understand	37%
Need More Information	59
Not Sure	4

Source: Fox News/Opinion Dynamics, February 8-9, 2005.

Q. Which of these statements do you think best describes the Social Security system -- it is in a state of crisis, it has major problems, it has minor problems, or it does not have any problems?

Crisis	17%
Major Problems	55
Minor Problems	23
No Problems	4

Source: Gallup/CNN/USA Today, February 4-6, 2005.

Q. Based on what you know, do you generally favor or oppose the changes to Social Security proposed by the president?

Favor	26%
Oppose	36
Not Aware of	30

Source: PSRA/Newsweek, February 3-4, 2005.

Q. Now on the subject of Social Security . . . When you retire, do you expect that Social Security will be able to pay all the benefits you are entitled to under current law, or not?

	Total	18-34	35-44	45-54	55+
Yes	39%	32	37	42	44
No	43	62	56	49	16

Source: PSRA/Newsweek, February 3-4, 2005.

The War in Iraq

The elections in Iraq made Americans more optimistic about Iraq's prospects, but they did little to change Americans' divided views about the wisdom of the war. Americans do not expect to be leaving Iraq soon.

Q. Five years from now, do you think it is more likely that Iraq will have some form of democracy or some form of dictatorship?

	Democracy	Dictatorship
June 2004	34%	47%
Feb. 2005	56	28

Note: Question wording varied slightly in June 2004.

Source: Fox News/Opinion Dynamics, February 8-9, 2005.

Q. Do you think this election will allow the United States to significantly reduce the number of U.S. troops it has in Iraq in the . . . ?

Next Few Months	17%
Next Few Years	51
Not for the Foreseeable Future	29

Source: Gallup/CNN/USA Today, February 4-6, 2005.

Q. Do you think going to war with Iraq was the right thing for the United States to do or the wrong thing?

	Right Thing	Wrong Thing
Feb. 2005	46%	49%

2004 Avg. 50 43

Source: Fox News/Opinion Dynamics, February 8-9, 2005.

Q. In view of the developments since we first sent our troops to Iraq, do you think the United States made a mistake in sending troops to Iraq or not?

	Yes	No
Feb. 2005	45%	55%

2004 Avg. 46 52

Source: Gallup/CNN/USA Today, February 4-6, 2005.

Examining the 2004 State Legislative Races

The aggregate outcome of state legislative elections held in November 2004 reflects a closely divided and competitive electoral environment. In 2005, Democrats control 3,647 (49.4%) state legislative seats, while Republicans hold 3,658 (49.6%). Overall, Democrats gained majority status following the 2004 elections in four red state chambers (the Colorado House, Colorado Senate, Montana Senate, and North Carolina House) while achieving ties in two others (the Montana House and Iowa Senate). Republicans did not gain majority status in any blue states but did maintain their legislative majorities in states such as Michigan, Pennsylvania, and

Wisconsin—all of which were carried by Senator Kerry.

There are several other noteworthy features of the recent legislative elections. As table 1 indicates, George W. Bush is the only incumbent re-elected in the most recent nine presidential election cycles whose party had a net loss of seats in both the lower and upper chambers of the nation’s legislative chambers.

But the net partisan change in 2004 was relatively small compared to the average change that has occurred across all presidential elections since 1964; on average, the party winning the presidency has gained 107 lower house seats and gained 11 upper house seats.

While Bush’s lack of coattails in 2004 may reflect a closely divided electorate, it also reflects Republican success in the 2002 midterm elections. Typically, when an incumbent is re-elected, his party rebounds from losses incurred during the midterm election.

In the case of George W Bush’s re-election campaign, the Republicans entered the 2004 cycle in a unique position since the party gained, rather than lost, seats in 2002. In other words, 2004 was not a “rebound election” for a presidential party following an unsuccessful midterm election.

–Barry McMillion

Table 1: Incumbents Re-Elected / Presidential Party Gains (+) or Losses (-) in State Houses

Election	Incumbent	Lower House	Upper House	Total Change
1972	Nixon (R)	+45	-52	-7
1984	Reagan (R)	+293	+23	+316
1996	Clinton (D)	+74	-21	+53
2004	Bush (R)	-23	-5	-28

Source: National Conference of State Legislatures; American Enterprise Institute.

Table 2: Midterms of First-Term Presidents / Presidential Party Gains (+) or Losses (-) in State Houses

Election	Incumbent	Lower House	Upper House	Total Change
1970	Nixon (R)	-204	-60	-264
1978	Carter (D)	-313	-44	-357
1982	Reagan (R)	-140	-18	-158
1990	Bush (R)	-18	-11	-29
1994	Clinton (D)	-394	-120	-514
2002	Bush (R)	+116	+46	+162

Ideological Positioning: Clinton, Frist, and McCain

It has been said that every senator wakes up, looks in the mirror, and says, "I could be president." By our count, 10 percent of sitting senators may throw their hats into the ring in 2008. Interestingly, each has undergone an ideological journey while in the Senate which could impact the 2008 race.

National Journal's annual vote ratings just came out, and the big news was that Hillary Clinton has moved right. She is still a liberal; she scored only 29 out of 100 on the *NJ*/conservative vote scale, but that 29 is up significantly from 11.2 and 13.3 in

2003 and 2002. Clinton’s recent speech about abortion and her support for Condoleezza Rice revealed a candidate confident of support from her liberal base and ready to stake out the middle ground for the general election.

Bill Frist’s ideological trajectory is different. According to the ratings, he began his Senate career as a conservative, but one in the middle of the Republican caucus. The past four years have seen a tack to the right with numbers consistently in the high eighties on the *NJ*/conservative scale. He received a 77 this year, but the overall pattern has been of a moderately conservative first term and a much

more conservative second term. In a Republican primary, Frist could make the case that he is the candidate of the right.

John McCain’s journey has been leftward. In this year’s Senate ratings, he ended up as the third most liberal Republican senator with a 51.7 conservative vote rating. His score is down from the sixties in the past few years and from his early years when his scores were in the seventies and eighties. If McCain runs again, he may make an issue of his strong support for President Bush, but on most issues he will run as the moderate.

–John Fortier

The Exit Polls: What Went Wrong

On Election Day 2004, the exit poll consortium of the major networks and the Associated Press, called the National Election Poll, conducted 11,719 interviews at 250 polling stations around the country for its national poll. An additional 500 telephone interviews were conducted of absentee/early voters. At the state level, 69,719 interviews were conducted at 1,469 polling locations. An additional 5,818 phone interviews were done with absentee/early voters. On election night, the NEP produced estimates and exit poll data for 120 races. There were no incorrect projections of winners.

But there were clearly problems with the exit polls, and they were greater than in the past.

The estimates produced by the exit poll data overstated the vote for John Kerry in twenty-six states by more than one standard error and for George W. Bush in four. An in-depth analysis by Edison Media Research and Mitofsky International, the team that conducted the poll, found no systematic problems with sampling or data collection or processing. Instead they attributed the problems on Election Night to what is called "Within Precinct Error." Kerry voters were more likely to take the exit poll ballot than were Bush voters. Also contributing to the discrepancies were precinct characteristics, such as the distance interviewers are kept from polling places and

interviewer characteristics (older and better-trained interviewers had lower error rates than younger, less-trained ones). The estimates that many heard early in the day that women were voting in very large numbers turned out to be caused by a programming error.

Next time, the exit pollsters plan to recruit and train interviewers better, work more closely with state officials to ensure reasonable access to voters leaving the polls, and upgrade computers. They will not release the data to subscribers until late in the afternoon or early evening. Good luck on that last one.

—Karlyn Bowman

Consumer Confidence

Consumer confidence in January looked very similar to the average for 2004 and it was higher than the 2001-2003 averages.

Jan. 2005 95.5

2004 Avg. 95.2

2003 Avg. 87.6

2002 Avg. 89.6

2001 Avg. 89.2

Source: University of Michigan Surveys of Consumers.

California Bellwether?

Half of California voters in the 2004 presidential election were under age forty-five, up from 36 percent in 2000 and 41 percent in 1996.

The Ten Commandments

On March 2, the Supreme Court will hear arguments that deal with the display of the Ten Commandments on government property. Americans believe this is okay.

Q. Do you believe it is proper or improper for the Ten Commandments to be displayed in a government building?

Proper	70%
Improper	23

Source: Pew Research Center, August 5-10, 2004.

AEI POLITICS WATCH CONTRIBUTORS

Karlyn Bowman, Resident Fellow; John Fortier, Research Fellow; Norman Ornstein, Resident Scholar; Ben Wattenberg, Resident Fellow; Barry McMillion, Ford Fellow.

Research Assistants:

Bryan O'Keefe, Editor; Christopher Trendler; and Jeremy Kadden.