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Poll Gives Bush His Worst Marks Yet



Jason Reed/Reuters

President Bush, speaking Tuesday in Sun City Center, Fla., faces poor approval ratings on the issues that have been at the top of the national agenda.

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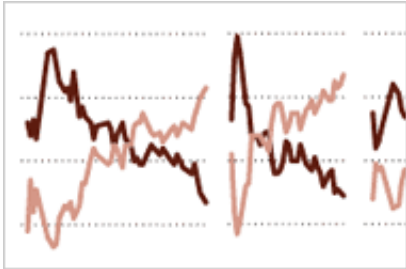
Published: May 10, 2006

Americans have a bleaker view of the country's direction than at any time in more than two decades, according to the latest New York Times/CBS News poll. Sharp disapproval of President Bush's handling of gasoline prices has combined with intensified unhappiness about [Iraq](#) to create a grim political environment for the White House and Congressional

Republicans.

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Multimedia



Graphic: Public Perceptions of the President and the Parties



Video: Bush's Approval at New Low

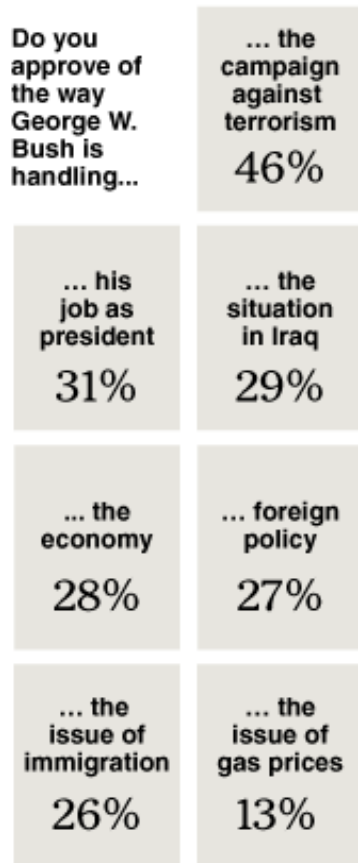
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The New York Times
CBS NEWS Poll



Source: The New York Times/CBS News Poll

Mr. Bush's approval ratings for his management of foreign policy, Iraq and the economy have fallen to the lowest levels of his presidency. He drew poor marks on the issues that have been at the top of the national agenda in recent months, in particular [immigration](#) and gasoline prices.

Just 13 percent approved of Mr. Bush's handling of rising gasoline prices. About a quarter said they approved of his handling of immigration, as Congressional Republicans try to come up with a compromise for handling the influx of illegal immigrants into the country.

The poll showed a further decline in support for the Iraq war, the issue that has most eaten into Mr. Bush's public support. The percentage of respondents who said going to war in Iraq was the correct decision slipped to a new low of 39 percent, down from 47 percent in January. Two-thirds said they had little or no confidence that Mr. Bush could successfully end the war.

The poll comes six months before Election Day and well before Labor Day, when Congressional campaigns will be fully engaged. Mr. Bush has shaken up his staff in an effort to improve his political fortunes, and White House aides said they were confident that events in Iraq were improving and that the political effects of high gasoline prices could fade by the election.

Nevertheless, the Times/CBS News poll contained few if any bright notes for Mr. Bush or Congress.

Mr. Bush's political strength continues to dissipate. About two-thirds of poll respondents said he did not share their priorities, up from just over half right before his re-election in 2004. About two-thirds said the country was in worse shape than it was when he became president six years ago. Forty-two percent of respondents said they considered Mr. Bush a strong leader, a drop of 11 points since January.

Mr. Bush's overall job approval rating hit another new low, 31 percent, tying the low point of his father in July 1992, four months before the elder Mr. Bush lost his bid for a second term to [Bill Clinton](#). That is the third lowest approval rating of any president in 50 years; only [Richard M. Nixon](#) and [Jimmy Carter](#) were viewed less favorably.

Mr. Bush is even losing support from what has been his base: 51 percent of conservatives and 69 percent of Republicans approve of the way Mr. Bush is handling his job. In both cases, those figures are a substantial drop in support from four months ago.

"We should have stayed out of Iraq until we knew more about it," Bernice Davis, a Republican from Lamar, Mo., who said she now disapproved of Mr. Bush's performance, said in a follow-up interview on Tuesday. "The economy is going to pot. Gas prices are escalating. I just voted for Bush because he's a Republican, even though I disapproved of the war. If I could go back, I would not vote for him."

Although the composition of Congressional districts will make it hard for the Democrats to recapture control of Congress in the fall, the poll suggested that the trend was moving in their direction. Just 23 percent said they approved of the job Congress was doing, down from 29 percent in January. That is about the same level of support for Congress as in the fall of 1994, when Republicans seized control of the House.

Americans said Democrats would do a better job dealing with Iraq, gasoline prices, immigration, taxes, prescription drug prices and civil liberties.

Fifty percent said Democrats came closer than Republicans to sharing their moral values, compared with 37 percent who said Republicans shared their values. A majority said Republican members of Congress were more likely to be financially corrupt than Democratic members of Congress, suggesting that Democrats may be making headway in their efforts to portray Republicans as having created a "culture of corruption" in Washington.

By better than two to one, Democrats were seen as having more new ideas than Republicans. And half of respondents, the highest number yet, said it was better when different parties controlled the two branches of Congress, reflecting one of the major arguments being laid out by Congressional Democrats in their bid to win back the House or the Senate.

Americans said that Republicans would be better at maintaining a stronger military than Democrats. But the Republicans had only a slight edge on combating terrorism, an issue that has helped account for the party's political dominance since the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001.

The nationwide telephone poll, of 1,241 adults, was conducted from May 4 to May 8. It has a margin of sampling error of plus or minus three percentage points.

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Marjorie Connelly and Marina Stefan contributed reporting for this article.

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