

# AEI Political Report

## Midterm Election Preview

Three of Washington's best election watchers, Charlie Cook, Stuart Rothenberg, and AEI's Norman Ornstein have upped the number of House seats they expect to be truly competitive this fall. Some of the key factors they and other analysts are watching for the 2006 midterm contests are discussed below.

**Enthusiasm:** Recent polls show that Democrats are more energized than Republicans about this fall's contests. According to Gallup, in the past three elections, the party that gained seats had a better net enthusiasm score than the party that lost them. In the 2002 and 2004 elections, Republicans had impressive turn-out-the-vote operations which, if effective again, could help to counteract the Democrats' greater enthusiasm about voting.

### Interest in this November's election (point 10 on a 10-point scale)



Source: RT Strategies/Cook Political Report, June 2006.

### More enthusiastic about voting than usual



Source: The Gallup Organization, April 2006.



**Partisan Identification:** Before the 2004 presidential election, Gallup looked at how people identified themselves politically and found the country split almost evenly: 45.5 percent of those surveyed called themselves Republicans and 45.2 percent Democrats. Party identification fluctuates in individual surveys, but there has been a clear drop over the past year in the proportion of Americans identifying themselves as Republicans. Among people who say they will vote in November, the partisan gap is smaller, but the magnitude of the overall gap spells difficulty for the Republicans this fall.

### Consider self a



Source: The Gallup Organization, May 2006.

**Presidential Approval:** In most polls, strong pluralities or majorities say that President Bush will not be a factor in their vote this fall. Still, the president's low ratings are a drag on his party. Gallup reports that if the president's ratings stay in the 30 percent range this fall, they would be "the lowest presidential job rating in any midterm election since Harry Truman in 1950." (Democrats lost twenty-nine seats that year.) Of those who disapprove of the job the president is doing, a near majority disapproves strongly, another possible indicator that the intensity factor favors the Democrats.

### President Bush's most recent ratings

		Approve	Disapprove
ABC News/ <i>Washington Post</i>	May 11-15	33%	65%
Gallup	June 1-4	36	57
RT Strategies/Cook Political Report	June 1-4	37	57



**Congressional Approval:** Like presidential approval, Congressional approval is low, below 30 percent in several recent polls. As the Harris data here show, less than a majority of partisans approve of the job their own party is doing. According to Gallup, "In the five midterm elections since 1974 in which Congress's approval rating was below 40 percent [1974, 1978, 1982, 1990, and 1994], the average net change in U.S. House seats from one party to the other was 29 seats."

### My party is doing an excellent or good job in Congress



Source: Harris Interactive, May 2006.

(continued on the next page)

**The Country's Mood:** In the latest polls, only around three in ten Americans say that the country is headed in the right direction. Large majorities report it is on the wrong track. The level of negative feeling is similar to what the pollsters found before the 1982 election (Republicans lost twenty-six seats in the House) and before the 1994 ones (Democrats lost fifty-two seats).

**Country on the wrong track**



Source: ABC News/Washington Post.



**Cold, Hard Cash:** According to Federal Election Commission data released in mid-May, the National Republican Congressional Committee (NRCC) and the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee (DCCC) have nearly identical amounts of cash on hand, about \$23 million. The NRCC has raised \$83 million to the Democrats \$58 million thus far this cycle.

On the Senate side, the National Republican Senatorial Committee (NRSC) has \$16.5 million in the bank, and the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee (DSCC) has \$32.1 million. As for fundraising, the DSCC has raised more this cycle than the NRSC, \$56 million to \$50 million.

Both parties will see to it that candidates in the most competitive races have the money they need. The average cost to win a House race in the last off-year election was nearly \$1 million. Many expect the hottest Congressional races this year to be more expensive than Senate contests in 2002, in which the victor spent on average \$4 million.



**How People Say They Will Vote:** The “generic ballot” question that asks people for whom they would

vote if the election were held today is asked of a national sample, making it of questionable value when looking at the roughly fifty House contests that will probably be truly competitive this fall. In the past, a double-digit advantage of the kind Democrats have now in many polls would have translated into big gains, but redistricting has given the country fewer competitive seats than ever before.

**Would vote for**

	Democratic candidate	Republican candidate
April 2006 (Gallup)	52%	42%

Note: The figures for Gallup's sample of those most likely to vote, called regular voters, were 51 percent Democratic candidate and 44 percent Republican candidate.



**State Legislature Changes:** Immediately following the 2004 elections, Republicans and Democrats were essentially tied in the number of state legislative seats held. Since that time, according to an analysis done by 2005 AEI Ford fellow Barry McMillion, Democrats have picked up eighteen formerly Republican seats, fifteen of which were in districts won by President Bush. By contrast, Republicans have picked up on seven seats, only two of which were in districts Senator Kerry won. Many of the Democratic gains have been in suburban districts.

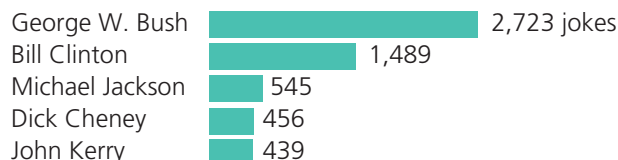
**Legislative seats that have changed parties in special elections (December 2004–May 2006)**

	Total	Bush Districts	Kerry Districts
Democratic Pickups	18	15	3
Republican Pickups	7	5	2

**The Butt of Every Joke?**

In the first five years of his presidency, George W. Bush was the target of eighteen percent of the 15,400 jokes from late night talk show hosts Jay Leno, David Letterman, and Conan O'Brien. This compares to sixteen percent for Bill Clinton during the first five years of his presidency.

**Top five subjects of jokes on late night TV, 2001–2006**



Source: Center for Media and Public Affairs report, January–February 2006.

## Looking Ahead to the Senate 2008

While most observers believe that Democrats will gain Senate seats in 2006, few of them think the Democrats will take the majority. The likelihood is that the Senate will be closely divided going into the 2008 elections when the real battle for control will take place. What are the parties' prospects in the Senate in 2008?

Democrats have one clear advantage. They will defend only twelve seats to the Republicans' twenty-one. However, in the states that look to be the most competitive at this early stage, the parties have roughly equal numbers of vulnerable seats. There are six GOP senators up for reelection in 2008 in states that Bush lost or that he won by less than 5 percentage points. There are seven Democratic senators up for reelection in states that Kerry lost or that he won by less than 5 percentage points. (See table on the right)

Open seats are more apt to change hands than seats with an incumbent. It is too early to know which seats will be open, but Republicans Allard and Collins have pledged to serve only two terms. If they retire, their seats are likely candidates for turnovers. Additionally, seven Republicans and three Democrats up for reelection in 2008 will be over seventy years old, and of these, two

Republicans, Ted Stevens and John Warner, and one Democrat, Frank Lautenberg, will be over eighty.

### Republicans in competitive states

	<b>Bush 2004 Margin (percentage points)</b>
Susan Collins (ME)	Lost by 9
Gordon Smith (OR)	Lost by 4
Norm Coleman (MN)	Lost by 3
John Sununu (NH)	Lost by 1
Wayne Allard (CO)	Won by 5
Pete Domenici (NM)	Won by 1

### Democrats in competitive states

	<b>Kerry 2004 Margin (percentage points)</b>
Tim Johnson (SD)	Lost by 22
Max Baucus (MT)	Lost by 20
Mary Landrieu (LA)	Lost by 15
Jay Rockefeller (WV)	Lost by 13
Mark Pryor (AR)	Lost by 9
Tom Harkin (IA)	Lost by 1
Carl Levin (MI)	Won by 3

## Current Commentary

### **“Future Intimidation is the Real Risk of the Jefferson Raid”**

AEI resident scholar Norman Ornstein warns that the recent raid on Congressman Jefferson's office presents a unique problem for the separation of powers.

<http://www.aei.org/publication24459>

### **“Even Partisans are Giving Their Parties Bad Reviews on the Hill”**

AEI resident fellow Karlyn Bowman analyzes how Americans view their representatives in Congress, feminism, *The Da Vinci Code*, and other issues.

<http://www.aei.org/publication24444>

### **“Making the Switch”**

AEI research fellow John Fortier discusses how it is not likely that members of Congress will switch parties.

<http://www.aei.org/publication24461>

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## Some Recent Social Indicators

### Feminists' Forces

The ranks of feminists have held steady for more than fifteen years.

#### Women who consider themselves to be a feminist



Source: Yankelovich/CNN/Time, 1989; CBS News, May 2006.



### Movies at Home

Seven in ten Americans watch at least one movie a week. Far more of them prefer to watch movies at home than go to the movie theater, and that number has increased over time.

#### Prefer to watch movies at home

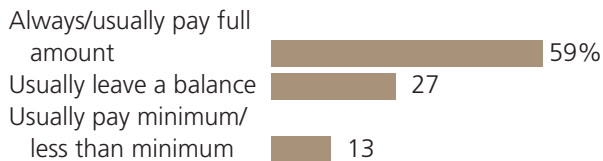


Source: Pew Research Center, February–March 2006.



### Credit Card Debt

Americans who have credit cards have an average of 3.6 of them. The mean balance on those cards is \$3,426. Here's how they deal with this debt.



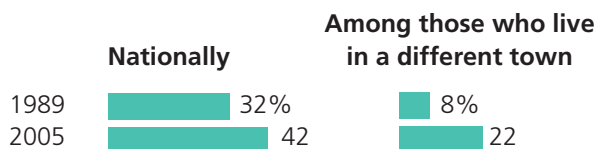
Source: The Gallup Organization, April 2006.



### Calling Home

The number of adults who maintain contact with their parents on a daily basis while living in a different town from them has more than doubled in the past seventeen years. Pew attributes the increase to the affordability of cellphones and the decline in the cost of long-distance calls.

#### Make daily call to a parent



Source: The Gallup Organization, 1989; Pew Research Center, Oct.–Nov., 2005.

### Death Penalty

Americans continue to favor the death penalty. Sixty-three percent believe that innocent individuals have been executed in the past five years, but 60 percent say it is applied fairly in this country today.

#### Favor Death Penalty for person convicted of murder



Source: The Gallup Organization, May 2006.



### Gay Marriage

Americans do not support gay marriage. Gallup recently polled two different samples of Americans, and both groups did not support legally recognizing gay marriage as valid with majorities of 58 and 56 percent respectively. Americans, however, are more skeptical about a Constitutional amendment to define marriage as a union between a man and a woman (see chart below). The proportion supporting gay adoption has increased from 14 percent in 1977 to 49 percent today in ABC News/Time polling.

*Q: Would you favor or oppose a constitutional amendment that would define marriage as being between a man and a woman, thus barring marriages between gay or lesbian couples?*



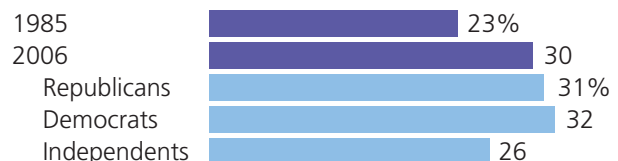
Source: The Gallup Organization, May 2006.



### Divorce Data

If current marriage and divorce patterns continue, half of all young adults will experience a divorce over the course of their lifetimes. That familiar statistic is a projection based on current data, not a snapshot of the situation today. Currently, as the Gallup data here show, 30 percent of adult Americans have had a divorce.

*Q: During your lifetime, have you ever had a divorce?*



Source: The Gallup Organization, latest that of March 2006.