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The American Public

Opinions and Values in a 51%-48% Nation

President George W. Bush's reelection victory last year was narrow in percentage terms — 51% to 48% — but historic in raw numbers. He captured over 62 million votes, 3 million more than his Democratic opponent and 7.5 million more than any other winning presidential candidate in history. Bush's record vote total — and, for that matter, John Kerry's — came from an energized electorate that was paying close attention to the campaign.

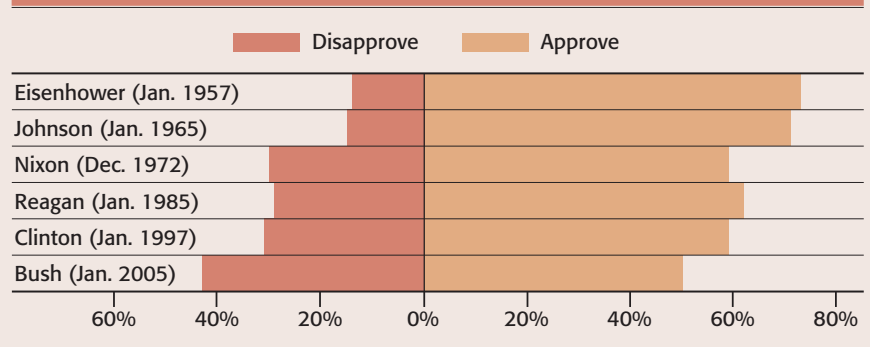
Yet as Bush begins his second term less than three months later, his policy agenda differs from the public's, the nation's partisan divisions are as deep as ever, and there is no sign of a reelection honeymoon on the horizon.

So what was November 2 all about?

Bush won for one reason above all others: The electorate judged him to be the stronger leader at a time when Americans feel threatened by terrorism. National security values loom much larger in shaping partisanship than they did in the 1990s, a new analysis by the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press has found. And exit polling found that Bush's clear stands on the issues and his strong leadership were far more important to his supporters than was his strong religious faith. More than anything else, November 2 will be remembered, figuratively as well as literally, as the first post-September 11 presidential election.

Even so, differences of opinion about security and foreign policy have widened as Americans have struggled among themselves with the decision to go to war in Iraq and, more recently, over how to achieve peace there. The debate over the war shattered the mood of national unity that followed 9/11 and magnified the stark divisions between Republicans and Democrats on a broad range of issues. The election showed that not only did backers of Bush and Kerry hold different positions, but they also saw different realities as they assessed the condition of the U.S. economy and the way things were going in Iraq.

Presidential Approval Ratings at Start of Second Term (1957-2005)



Note: 1957-1985 results from Gallup Poll.
Source: Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, January 2005

“**B**ush won for one reason above all others: The electorate judged him to be the stronger leader at a time when Americans feel threatened by terrorism.”

With such sharp contrasts between partisans, however, it is easy to lose sight of the fact that centrists still control the balance of political power and that fundamental American values reflect a mix of both consensus and contention. Broad public agreement about the importance of religion, the power of the individual and the need for environmental protection is often overshadowed by enduring differences over social issues and by the re-emergence of hawks and doves on foreign policy and national security.

The Second Term

Bush begins his second term with an approval rating of 50%, reflecting the tough election campaign just concluded and perhaps foreshadowing contentious times ahead. His approval mark is far below the ratings enjoyed by Presidents Eisenhower, Johnson, Nixon, Reagan and Clinton as they began their second terms.

Bush's support from his own party is on par with what those presidents enjoyed — 89% of Republicans approve of the way he is handling his job. What sets him apart from other recent two-term presidents, however, are the low marks he receives from the opposition. By more than four to one (77% to 17%), Democrats disapprove of Bush's job performance. Bush also gets lower marks from independents than other recent presidents received on the cusp of their second terms.

A Changing Agenda

As the president and the new Congress begin work, there are signs that domestic issues — largely shunted to the background during the campaign — are making a comeback. However, the public's policy agenda differs in several key respects from the one being proposed by the president.

A steadily growing number of Americans want action to reduce the federal budget deficit, and there is growing support as well for Congress and the president to deal with the problems of the poor and those lacking health insurance.

And while seven in ten say making the Social Security system financially stable should be a top priority for the coming year, the public believes that the health care system currently is in greater need of repair than Social Security, the tax system or the legal system, all of which have been targeted by the White House as major policy priorities for the coming year. Nearly half of all Americans (47%) believe the Social Security system now works pretty well and needs only minor changes. That compares with just 27% who believe the health care system works fairly well and 36% who say the same about the education system.

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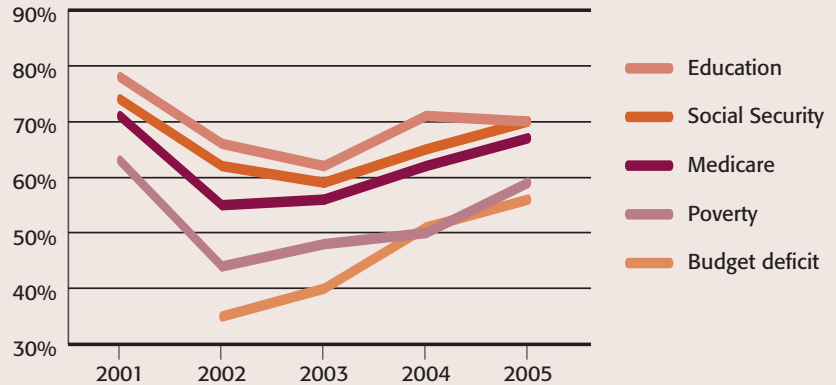
In terms of the overall policy agenda, Americans attach the greatest importance to defending the nation against terrorism and strengthening the economy — 75% rate these as top priorities. Yet while terrorism dominated public priorities in the years immediately following the September 11 terrorist attacks, it now is one among many top-tier issues, including the economy, education, Social Security, jobs and Medicare.

Public interest in helping the poor and needy, which fell dramatically in the aftermath of 9/11, has rebounded in the years since. Roughly six in ten (59%) want the president and Congress to make dealing with the problems of poor and needy people a top priority. This is up significantly from a low of 44% in January 2002, and nearly matches the 63% who rated helping the poor as a top priority a year earlier.

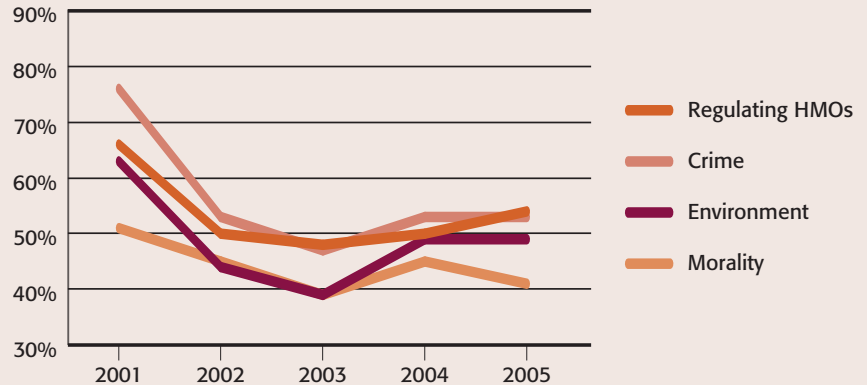
Opinion on providing health insurance to the uninsured has followed almost an identical pattern, plummeting in importance following the attacks, but slowly rising again to its pre-9/11 levels. The shift on health insurance is driven largely by Democrats and independents. Eight in ten Democrats (81%) now cite insuring the uninsured as a major priority, compared with 35% of Republicans. The partisan gap over expanding health insurance — now a staggering 46 points — has nearly doubled over the past three years.

Public Priorities Since 9/11

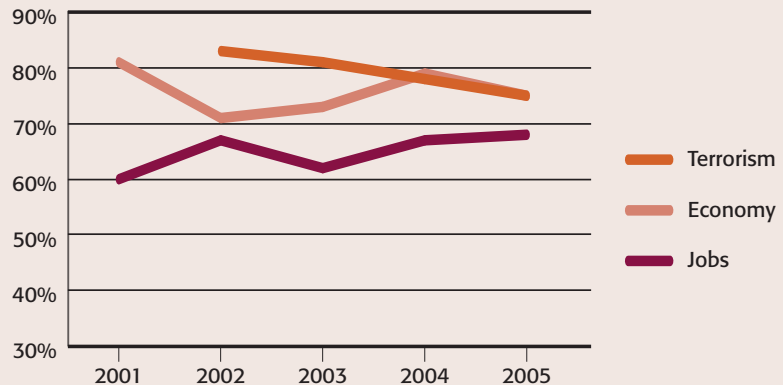
SOME ISSUES REGAIN PUBLIC ATTENTION ...



... OTHERS DROP AND NEVER REBOUND ...



... BUT CORE ISSUES BARELY CHANGE



Source: Pew Research Center for the People & the Press

Note: Lines show the percent considering each issue a top priority for the president and Congress in the coming year.

Top Domestic Priorities for Bush and Congress

PERCENT CONSIDERING EACH AS A "TOP PRIORITY"	JAN. 2001	JAN. 2002	JAN. 2003	JAN. 2004	JAN. 2005
Strengthening nation's economy	81	71	73	79	75
Defending U.S. against terrorism	—	83	81	78	75
Improving educational system	78	66	62	71	70
Securing Social Security	74	62	59	65	70
Improving job situation	60	67	62	67	68
Securing Medicare	71	55	56	62	67
Providing insurance to uninsured	61	43	45	54	60
Dealing with problems of poor	63	44	48	50	59
Reducing budget deficit	—	35	40	51	56
Regulating HMOs	66	50	48	50	54
Reducing crime	76	53	47	53	53
Strengthening the military	48	52	48	48	52
Protecting the environment	63	44	39	49	49
Reducing middle-class taxes	66	43	—	44	48
Dealing with energy problems	46*	42	40	46	47
Increasing minimum wage	40*	—	—	38	43
Dealing with moral breakdown	51	45	39	45	41
Tax simplification	—	—	—	—	39
Developing missile defense	41	39	42	35	35
Making tax cuts permanent	—	—	30	—	34
Dealing with global trade	37	25	—	32	32
Limiting awards in lawsuits	—	—	—	—	27
Gay marriage amendment	—	—	—	22	27

* Asked in early September, 2001

Source: Pew Research Center for the People & the Press

The nation's ballooning budget deficit also is a growing concern; 56% rank this as a top priority today, up from 51% a year ago and just 35% in 2002. However, public focus on the deficit has yet to reach the levels of the mid-1990s, when nearly two thirds (65% in 1994) said reducing the deficit was a top priority.

But not all domestic issues have seen an increase in public emphasis. For example, reducing crime, regulating HMOs and protecting the environment — all of which were rated as top priorities by 60% or more before September 11 — declined in importance afterward and have seen little or no rebound in public interest since that time.

A number of the president's announced policy objectives for the coming year also rate relatively low on the public's list of priorities. Most notably, barely a quarter of Americans (27%) view passing legislation that would limit the amount of money courts can award in personal injury lawsuits as a top priority; the same modest number attaches high priority to a constitutional amendment prohibiting gay marriages. President Bush's two major tax proposals — to make the 2001 and 2003 tax cuts permanent and to simplify the tax code — rank only slightly higher (34% and 39% as a top priority, respectively).

Close to Parity in Party Identification

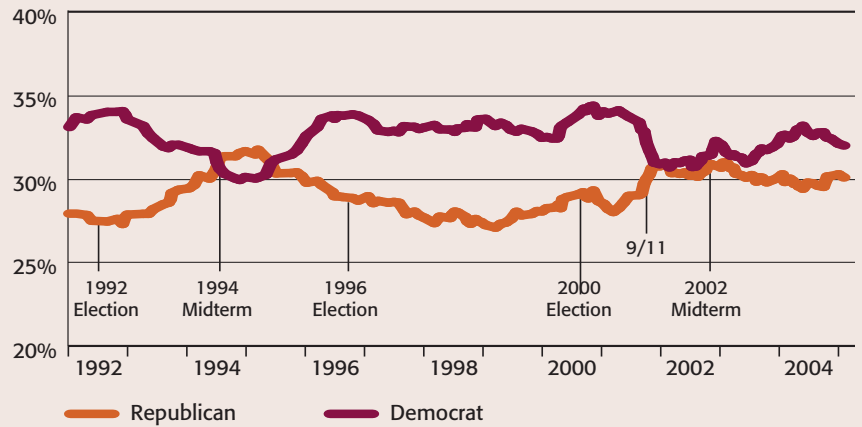
Based on Pew polls conducted throughout 2004, the Democratic Party held a slight edge in party affiliation among the general public (33% to 30%).

More significant, of course, was the fact that Republicans turned out at a higher rate on Election Day and therefore matched Democratic turnout (37% each), according to the exit poll conducted by the National Election Pool. That marked the first presidential election since modern exit polling began a generation ago that Republicans had equaled the Democrats in turnout.

From the time that Bush first took office in 2001, party affiliation among the public has undergone significant changes. Early in Bush's first term, the Democrats held roughly the same advantage in party identification as they enjoyed during Bill Clinton's second term in office. Democrats had held a much more substantial advantage in partisan identification for most of the 20th century.

Republicans made gains in party affiliation following the September 11 attacks, bringing the parties into virtual parity, but slipped back slightly in 2004. The Democrats have maintained a slight lead for most of the past year — though, as noted above, that partisan edge among the general public did not translate into a Democratic advantage among those who actually voted last November.

Party Identification Trends, 1992-2004



Source: Pew Research Center for the People & the Press

Party Identification Trend, By Demographic Groups

	2000		2002		2004		2004 N
	REP.	DEM.	REP.	DEM.	REP.	DEM.	
	%	%	%	%	%	%	
Total	28	33	30	31	30	33	29,092
Men	30	28	32	27	31	29	13,699
Women	26	38	29	35	28	37	15,393
White	32	29	35	27	34	29	23,828
Black	6	65	6	63	6	63	3,005
Hispanic	21	42	22	36	20	40	1,915
Conservative	49	23	50	22	51	22	10,908
Moderate	21	39	24	35	22	36	11,289
Liberal	9	52	9	47	8	51	5,365
18-29	25	30	27	27	25	29	4,855
30-49	29	32	32	30	31	32	10,869
50-64	28	35	30	33	29	35	7,313
65+	30	40	32	38	32	40	5,642
< H.S. grad	19	39	20	36	21	40	2,304
H.S. grad	26	34	29	32	28	33	8,355
Some college	31	32	34	30	32	31	8,106
Coll. grad+	34	30	36	29	33	32	10,178
White Catholic	29	34	32	30	31	32	4,934
White Protestant	39	27	42	24	41	26	12,490
Evangelical	43	26	47	23	49	22	6,313
Mainline	34	29	35	27	32	29	6,177
Jewish	16	52	18	51	17	55	561
No religion	16	28	16	27	15	31	2,751
< \$20,000	19	43	20	39	19	42	4,384
\$20,000-\$30,000	26	37	26	35	24	37	3,281
\$30,000-\$50,000	29	34	31	32	30	34	6,155
\$50,000-\$75,000	34	31	35	29	36	29	4,421
\$75,000 +	37	27	39	27	38	29	6,768

Where the Parties Stand

The Democratic Party continues to hold a solid advantage among African-Americans, Jews, Hispanics, liberals, women, people who did not finish high school, lower-income individuals and seculars.

Republicans have a big edge among conservatives and White Evangelical Protestants, and hold smaller but significant advantages among middle- and upper-income citizens and whites. The parties are about equally represented among people with college experience, White Catholics and men.

There has been relatively little change in party identification among most of these groups in the population. Republican identification among White Evangelical Protestants has grown over the past four years, but black support for the Democratic Party has not wavered. President Bush posted gains among Hispanic voters in the election of 2004, but Democrats still outnumber Republicans by two to one in this growing segment of the population.

Bush at the Midpoint

Bush's victory on November 2 provided him with the opportunity to broaden his base of support. But the early signs suggest that the partisan reactions toward Bush that characterized much of his first term will continue into his second.

This is evident when Bush's job performance ratings are compared with those of other recently reelected presidents. Bush enjoys roughly the same overwhelming support from his own party as did Presidents Clinton, Reagan, Nixon and Eisenhower at or near the start of their second terms.

What is striking, however, is the massive disapproval he generates among members of the opposition party. Pew's January 2005 survey showed that Democrats disapprove of Bush's job performance by more than four to one (77% to 17%). By contrast, Republicans disapproved of President Clinton at the start of his second term by a two-to-one margin (61% to 31%). And previous two-term GOP presidents — Reagan, Nixon and Eisenhower — attracted sizable crossover backing. Indeed, a narrow majority of Democrats gave Eisenhower a positive job rating early in his second term.

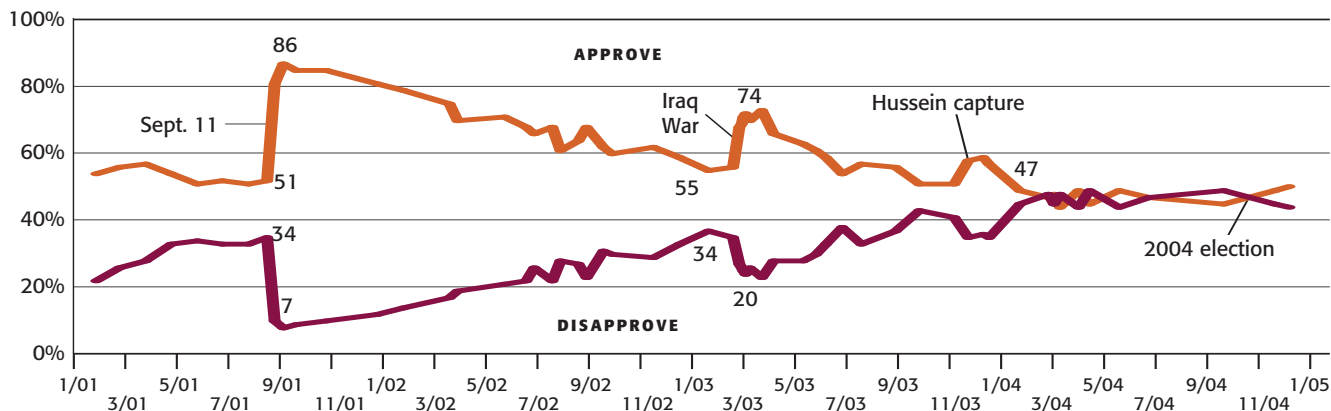
Bush won reelection despite the fact that his approval rating had not exceeded 50% since January 2004. In the past year, it has moved within a fairly narrow range — from a low of 43% in late April 2004, a period when violence was intensifying in Iraq, to a high of 50% in January of this year.

Job Approval Ratings at Start of Second Term, by Respondents' Party ID

	PRESIDENT'S PARTY	OTHER PARTY	INDEPENDENTS
BUSH	%	%	%
Approve	89	17	47
Disapprove	7	77	44
CLINTON			
Approve	86	31	54
Disapprove	8	61	33
REAGAN			
Approve	88	39	61
Disapprove	7	54	25
NIXON			
Approve	87	42	60
Disapprove	8	45	28
EISENHOWER			
Approve	85	52	69
Disapprove	7	35	17

Source: Data from Gallup surveys conducted in April 1957, Dec. 1972, and Jan. 1985, and Pew Research Center surveys in Jan. 1997 and Jan. 2005.

Bush's Job Approval



Source: Pew Research Center for the People & the Press

Strength of Support In Presidential Elections

	STRONG	SOFT	TOTAL
2004	%	%	%
Bush	39	9	48
Kerry	32	13	45
2000			
Bush	32	14	46
Gore	26	17	43
1996			
Dole	20	18	38
Clinton	29	23	52
1988*			
Bush	27	26	53
Dukakis	22	19	41
1984			
Reagan	39	18	57
Mondale	25	14	39
1980			
Reagan	25	22	47
Carter	20	24	44
1976			
Ford	26	23	49
Carter	26	22	48
1972			
Nixon	41	20	61
McGovern	19	16	35

Source: Pew Research Center for the People & the Press; final pre-election polls among likely voters
* Gallup Poll findings 1972-1988.

Yet Bush's enduring advantage, one that was crucial to his reelection, is the unwavering loyalty he receives from the GOP base. Pew's final pre-election survey in early November, which showed the president holding a small 48%-to-45% lead overall, found Bush holding a sizable edge over John Kerry in the intensity of his support. Indeed, Bush drew the highest percentage of strong support of any presidential candidate in the past two decades.

That pattern has continued since the election. In December, Pew found 72% of Republicans expressing very strong approval for Bush's job performance — on par with Democratic support for Bill Clinton when impeachment proceedings were moving forward in 1998. And Bush evokes nearly as much strong negative sentiment. In December, 63% of Democrats very strongly disapproved of how Bush handled his job. That is significantly greater than the level of strong disapproval among Republicans toward Clinton during the impeachment crisis.

Perception Meets Reality

The nation's contentious political atmosphere is not lost on the public. In fact, this is a rare point on which majorities of both parties agree. In December 2004, Pew found 77% of Democrats and 61% of Republicans saying the country is more politically divided than in the past.

Moreover, people perceive this increasing partisan tension not only in the context of national politics and policies, but also in how they relate to friends and acquaintances. More than half of all Americans (53%) said the people they know are disagreeing more about politics these days. Within their own circles, Democrats are much more apt than Republicans to perceive political divisiveness; 65% of Democrats said this, compared with only 44% of Republicans.

Why do Americans think the country is more divided today? Not surprisingly, the war in Iraq is seen as the most important reason. Roughly a third (32%) of those who believe the nation is more divided than in the past point to the war as the primary factor; far fewer cite economic issues, or moral values and such social concerns as gay marriage.

Most See a More Divided Nation

THE COUNTRY IS...	TOTAL %	PARTY IDENTIFICATION		
		REP. %	DEM. %	IND. %
More politically divided	66	61	77	64
Not more divided	26	32	16	29
Don't know	8	7	7	7
	100	100	100	100
PEOPLE YOU KNOW ARE...				
More divided over politics	53	44	65	52
Not more divided	40	51	29	40
Don't know	7	5	6	8
	100	100	100	100

Source: Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, December 2004

What's Dividing America?

	ALL %	PARTY IDENTIFICATION		
		REP. %	DEM. %	IND. %
Foreign policy (net)	36	35	39	33
War in Iraq	32	31	36	28
Terrorism	3	4	2	3
Domestic issues (net)	19	15	22	18
Economy/jobs	13	10	17	11
Taxes	2	1	2	*
Moral values and issues (net)	14	15	15	13
Morals, values	3	5	2	3
Religion	5	5	5	5
Gay marriage, gay rights	2	4	3	1
Abortion	2	2	2	1
Leaders (net)	11	7	13	13
Bush	6	3	8	8
Republicans/conservatives	1	—	2	*
Democrats/liberals	1	2	*	*
Rich-poor gap	3	1	5	2

Note: Based on respondents who said that America is more divided politically or that people they knew were more politically divided.
Source: Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, December 2004

New Look At Political Values

Late last year, Pew updated many of its long-term trends on the public's political, economic and social values. That survey of 2,000 Americans, conducted December 1-16, found much to confirm the widespread perceptions of increasing political contentiousness. Most notably, the survey showed that the war in Iraq not only has driven a wedge between Republicans and Democrats but has intensified the partisan gap over fundamental national security attitudes. It has made Republicans more hawkish and Democrats more dovish.

Yet this survey cannot be viewed as simply a study in rising partisanship. It also confirmed that a number of consensus values endure, which may be a surprising finding in today's political climate. For example, Americans overwhelmingly agree on the importance of religion, on the power of personal initiative, and on the need to protect the environment. They are likewise bound by skepticism toward big business and they generally agree that there has been movement toward racial progress.

Of course, consensus dissolves over more specific issues, such as the trade-off between the costs and benefits of environmental protection. Yet it remains the case that the points of public agreement on major subjects have been largely overshadowed by the partisan tenor of the times.

Moreover, many of the questions that divide the public are not partisan in nature. Immigration, which could emerge as a major issue in Bush's second term, splits both parties fairly evenly. And when it comes to opinions on government, the level of partisanship has actually decreased over time. GOP hostility toward government — a dominant attitude among Republicans in the early 1990s — has softened considerably.

Security Divide Deepens

Last year's election underscored the stark divisions over the war in Iraq. The exit poll by the National Election Pool found that 79% of Bush voters said the war had improved U.S. security, while 88% of Kerry voters said it had not.

Increasingly, that same divisiveness is seen in Pew's long-term foreign policy and national security measures. Indeed, our values survey showed that, taken together, attitudes on the efficacy of force versus diplomacy, and on the obligation of Americans to fight for their country, are now by far the strongest predictors of whether a person is a Republican or a Democrat. These attitudes surpass opinions on every other subject — including attitudes toward homosexuality, religion and the role of government in helping the poor — in predicting partisanship.

Of course, differences over America's place in the world are not new. Indeed, it would be hard to argue that the political tensions over national security are any greater now than they were during the Vietnam or Korean Wars. Even in the 1990s, when national security largely receded as a public concern, there were substantial disagreements over the efficacy of military force and over Americans' obligation to fight for their country.

What has changed since then is the extent to which attitudes toward national security influence partisan affiliation and voting decisions. During the 1990s, attitudes about government, welfare and business — as well as opinions concerning homosexuality — were most important in determining party affiliation, voting decisions, and presidential approval. But today, a single question, regarding the relative effectiveness of force versus diplomacy, is as powerful a predictor of party identification as the full set of values questions were in 1999.

Democratic Shift on Security

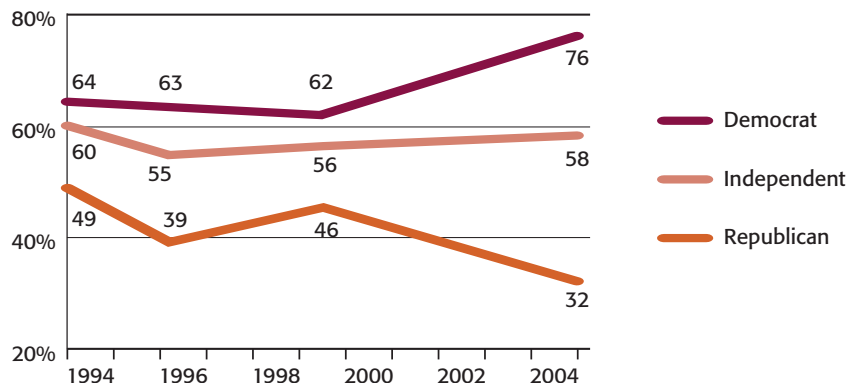
Significantly, the values study found little change in the public's overall views on basic foreign policy attitudes, even as Republicans and Democrats have grown further apart. A modest majority of all Americans (55%) said in December 2004 that good diplomacy, not military strength, is the best way to ensure peace. That was the same number who held that view in 1999 and virtually the same as in 1996 (53%).

Top Five Values Related to Party Identification

1999	INDEX OF INFLUENCE	2004	INDEX OF INFLUENCE
Government is almost always wasteful and inefficient	10	The best way to ensure peace is through military strength	24
Government regulation of business is necessary to protect the public interest	10	We should all be willing to fight for our country, whether it is right or wrong	12
Homosexuality is a way of life that should be accepted by society	10	As Americans we can always find ways to solve our problems	10
Poor people today have it easy because of government benefits	9	Poor people today have it easy because of government benefits	8
The government should do more to help needy Americans	8	This country should do whatever it takes to protect the environment	8

Note: Index numbers reflect the relative impact of each item in explaining party identification. Based on multiple regression analysis. Source: Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, December 2004

Good diplomacy is the best way to ensure peace

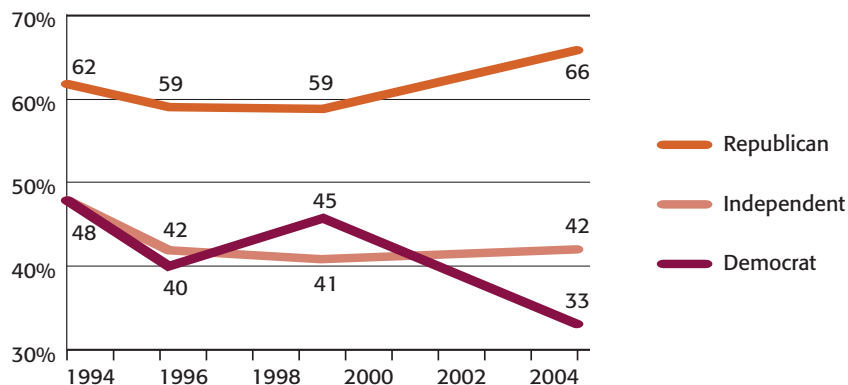


Source: Pew Research Center for the People & the Press

However, an increasing number of Republicans subscribe to the view that military strength – rather than effective diplomacy – is the best way to ensure peace. The percentage endorsing diplomacy as the better option dropped from 46% in 1999 to 32% in 2004.

The movement among Democrats – in the opposite direction – has been just as dramatic. In the 1990s, roughly 60% of Democrats expressed the view that good diplomacy was the best way to ensure peace; that number rose to 76% in 2004.

We should all be willing to fight for our country, whether it is right or wrong



Source: Pew Research Center for the People & the Press

A similar pattern is evident in views on the obligation to fight for the country, whether it is right or wrong. As in the 1990s, the public remained split on this measure – 46% thought a person should fight whether the country is right or wrong, while an identical number said it is acceptable for someone to decline to fight in a war they see as morally wrong.

Since 1999, an increasing number of Republicans express the view that a person has an obligation to fight, while Democrats have moved in the opposite direction. By 66% to 27%, Republicans said that people should fight for the country, right or wrong; Democrats, by a comparable margin, said it is acceptable to refuse to fight in a war that one sees as morally wrong.

Election Intensifies Differences

Pew first found evidence of a growing political gap in national security values more than a year ago, in our major survey on the American political landscape in November 2003. If anything, the 2004 election appears to have intensified these differences.

Roughly two thirds of Bush voters said that using overwhelming force is the best way to defeat global terrorism. An even larger percentage of Kerry voters said that relying too much on military force creates hatred that leads to more terrorism.

Bush and Kerry voters also expressed starkly different views about the U.S. role in world affairs. While a majority of Bush voters endorsed an activist foreign policy, just as many Kerry voters instead agreed with the statement: "We should pay less attention to problems overseas and concentrate on problems here at home."

Consensus Amid Conflict

However, what is frequently overlooked in discussions of public values is the extent to which there is a large measure of agreement, at least on general principles.

For example, roughly three quarters of Americans said that "religion is a very important part of my life." And slightly more — 78% — believe that everyone has it in his or her own power to succeed. These are values that transcend politics and set Americans apart from people in other wealthy nations.

Conflicting Views of America's Place in the World

	TOTAL	BUSH VOTERS	KERRY VOTERS	DIDN'T VOTE
	%	%	%	%
Military force is best way to defeat terrorism	39	66	17	33
Too much force creates hatred that leads to more terrorism	51	25	76	55
Neither/both/don't know (vol.)	10	9	7	12
	100	100	100	100
Take allies' interests into account	53	43	68	47
Follow own national interests	37	49	25	38
Neither/both/don't know (vol.)	10	8	7	15
	100	100	100	100
Best for country to be active in world affairs	44	57	37	34
We should concentrate on problems at home	49	37	57	59
Neither/both/don't know (vol.)	7	6	6	7
	100	100	100	100
Number of cases	2,000	808	706	358

Source: Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, December 2004

Consensus Values

	1994	1999	2004
RELIGIOUS FAITH			
	%	%	%
Religion is a very important part of my life	n/a	75	74
Religion is not that important to me		22	24
Neither/both/don't know (vol.)		2	2
		100	100
PERSONAL EMPOWERMENT & OPTIMISM			
Success in life is pretty much outside of our control	18	15	16
Everyone has it in their own power to succeed	79	80	78
Neither/both/don't know (vol.)	3	5	6
	100	100	100
ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION			
This country should do whatever it takes to protect the environment	78	80	77
This country has gone too far in its efforts to protect the environment	19	15	18
Neither/both/don't know (vol.)	3	5	5
	100	100	100
PERCEPTIONS OF BUSINESS POWER			
Too much power is concentrated in the hands of a few large companies	76	77	77
The largest companies do not have too much power	19	17	16
Neither/both/don't know (vol.)	5	6	7
	100	100	100
BELIEF IN BLACK PROGRESS			
The position of blacks in American society has improved in recent years	72	78	73
There hasn't been much real progress for blacks in recent years	25	18	20
Neither/both/don't know (vol.)	3	4	7
	100	100	100

Source: Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, December 2004

There also are more concrete issues on which much of the public holds similar values. By more than four to one, Americans said the country “should do whatever it takes” to protect the environment. And by a similar margin — 77%-16% — the public felt that the largest companies have too much power. Even on the contentious subject of race, significant majorities of Americans said that the position of blacks has improved in recent years.

Where Consensus Splinters

As is frequently the case, there was greater consensus on fundamental values relating to religion, business and other subjects than on more practical questions of policy implementation. Despite the overwhelming sense that big business is too powerful, for example, there was no agreement over the wisdom of using government to counteract that power.

The public also was divided over whether businesses make too much profit — 53% thought they do, while 39% said that corporate profits are reasonable. This opinion has remained stable over the past decade, despite the corporate scandals of recent years. Republicans and Democrats have very different views on this question, with a 64% majority of Democrats saying profits are too high compared with only 46% of Republicans who felt this way.

Opinion on Corporate Profits

	%
Corporations make too much profit	53
Corporations make a fair and reasonable amount of profit	39
Neither/both/don't know (vol.)	8
	100

Source: Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, December 2004

Religion and Morality

Although Americans are bound by their sense of the personal importance of religion, they divide almost evenly over whether belief in God is a prerequisite of personal morality. Roughly half assert that it is necessary to believe in God to be a moral person, while nearly as many disagree.

This is not a partisan question; Democrats and Republicans are each split on the issue. But the link between faith and morality divides the public in other ways. Only about a third of college graduates (35%) say a person needs to believe in God in order to be moral, while more than two thirds (68%) of those with no high school diploma feel this way. Whites are split evenly on the question, but blacks by a three-to-one margin (72% to 24%) see faith in God as necessary for a moral life.

Belief in God and Morality

	%
It IS necessary to believe in God in order to be moral and have good values	51
It is NOT necessary to believe in God in order to be moral and have good values	46
Neither/both/don't know (vol.)	3
	100

Source: Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, December 2004

Personal Empowerment

Americans not only overwhelmingly believe that all people have it in their power to succeed, they also see hard work as the key to success. About two thirds agreed with the statement that "most people who want to get ahead can make it if they're willing to work hard." That is down a bit from the boom years of 1999 and 2000, but majorities of Americans at all income levels still think hard work can lead to success.

The public is somewhat less bullish about the country's ability to deal with problems, a judgment that is made to some degree through a partisan lens. Overall, 59% thought that Americans "can always find ways to solve our problems and get what we want"; 36% said the country cannot solve many of its problems. Nearly three quarters of Republicans said Americans generally are capable of dealing with their problems, but only about half of Democrats agreed.

As in the past, opinion is split fairly evenly over whether there are any limits to growth in this country. A narrow 51% majority said there are no limits to growth, but as many as 41% thought that Americans "should learn to live with less."

The Cost of Environmental Protection

	%
Stricter environmental laws and regulations cost too many jobs and hurt the economy	31
Stricter environmental laws and regulations are worth the cost	60
Neither/both/don't know (vol.)	9
	100

Source: Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, December 2004

Black-White Gap on Race in America

	TOTAL	WHITE	BLACK
	%	%	%
Position of blacks has improved	73	77	56
Hasn't been much real progress for blacks in recent years	20	17	38
Neither/both/don't know (vol.)	7	6	6
	100	100	100
Discrimination is main reason many blacks can't getting ahead	27	24	44
Blacks who can't get ahead are responsible for their condition	60	63	43
Neither/both/don't know (vol.)	13	13	13
	100	100	100

Source: Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, December 2004

Protecting the Environment

Large and unchanging majorities of the public endorse environmentalism. However, for many the potential economic costs associated with stricter environmental laws are more problematic.

Ideology and partisanship strongly influence views on this measure. By more than six to one (83% to 12%), liberal Democrats said that tougher environmental laws are worth the cost. Just 49% of conservative Republicans agreed, while 41% thought such laws cost too many jobs and hurt the economy.

How Much Black Progress?

Americans continue to take a positive view of the amount of progress achieved by African-Americans. By more than three to one (73% to 20%), the public said that the position of blacks in American society has improved in recent years.

There was a sizable split between whites and African-Americans on this question, though even among blacks a majority (56%) said progress has been made. Attitudes on this value have been stable for a decade, among whites and blacks.

Most Americans endorsed the view that blacks who have been unable to make gains are mostly responsible for their own circumstances. But this is much more of a settled issue for whites than for African-Americans, who are evenly divided over whether blacks who cannot get ahead are responsible for their fate, or whether racial discrimination is to blame.

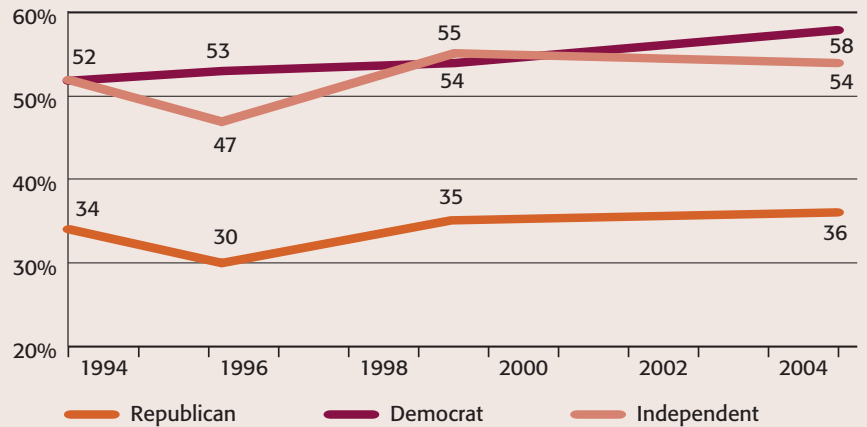
Little Change in Views on Homosexuality

An earlier Pew survey on the nation's political landscape, conducted in November 2003, showed that despite the signs of increasing polarization on many issues, there was no evidence of a growing gap on social and cultural values. In spite of the debate over the role that moral values and issues such as gay marriage played in Bush's victory, that remained pretty much the case in Pew's post-election values survey.

For example, on the question of whether homosexuality should be accepted or discouraged, which Pew has been measuring for a decade, 49% said it should be accepted, while 44% thought homosexuality should be discouraged. That was consistent with results from surveys in 2000 and 1999; in the mid-1990s, the balance was tilted slightly the other way, with pluralities saying homosexuality should be discouraged.

There are major differences between Republicans and Democrats on this value — 58% of Democrats and 36% of Republicans said that homosexuality should be accepted and not discouraged. But in contrast with attitudes toward national security, where there has been a growing partisan gap, the balance of opinion among Republicans and Democrats on this question has changed very little since the 1990s.

Homosexuality is a way of life that should be accepted by society



Source: Pew Research Center for the People & the Press

Government Protecting Morality

	TOTAL	REP.	DEM.	IND.
	%	%	%	%
Should do more to protect morality	41	53	34	37
Getting too involved in morality	51	41	60	54
Neither/both/don't know (vol.)	8	6	6	9
	100	100	100	100

Source: Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, December 2004

On the broad question of the government's role in upholding morals, about half of all Americans — 51% — agreed with the statement "I worry the government is getting too involved in the issue of morality," while 41% favored the government doing more in this area.

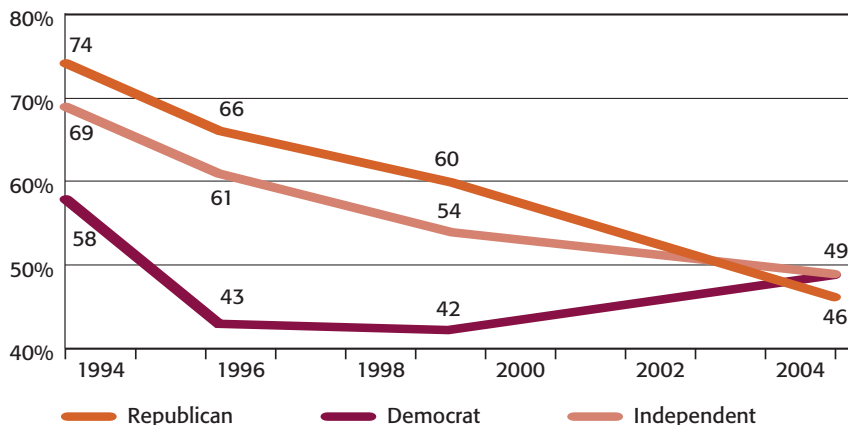
Republicans were more supportive than Democrats of greater government involvement in protecting morals. Still, Republicans were somewhat ambivalent — 53% believed the government should do more to protect morality while 41% said they worry that the government is getting too involved in morality.

Government OK with GOP

Americans have long been conflicted in their overall views of government and politicians. At times, the public has swung toward a harshly critical stance — as in the mid-1990s, when anti-government sentiment surged. But in the wake of September 11, support for government rebounded as Americans looked to Washington for protection.

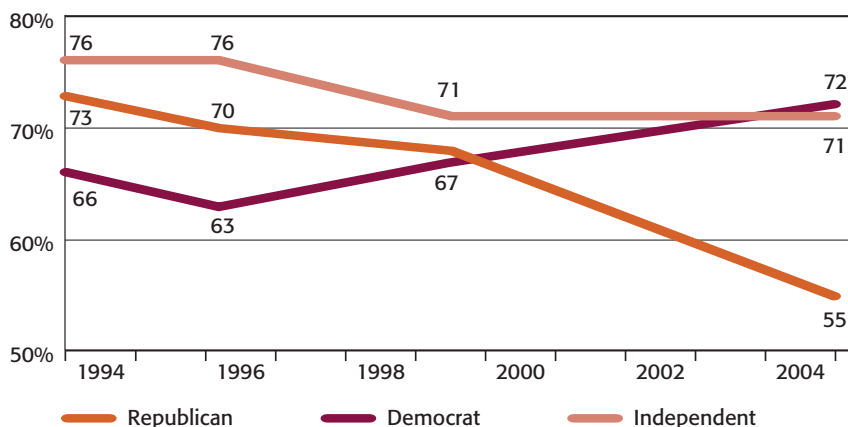
Pew's December 2004 survey on political values found moderation in the public's attitudes toward government. Nearly half of all Americans — 45% — thought government does a better job than it gets credit for; about the same number (47%) said that government is almost always "wasteful and inefficient." There was a similar split over the efficacy of government regulation — 49% believed it is necessary to protect the public interest, while 41% said it does more harm than good.

Government is almost always wasteful and inefficient



Source: Pew Research Center for the People & the Press

Elected officials in Washington lose touch with the people pretty quickly



Source: Pew Research Center for the People & the Press

But Democrats and Republicans no longer differ on these questions as they did through the 1990s. As recently as 1999, there were gaps of about 20 percentage points between the parties on both of these values; and throughout the 1990s, responses to these questions were important predictors of voting preference.

Those differences have now narrowed or vanished, and the change has been largely driven by growing pro-government sentiment among Republicans. This no doubt has much to do with the fact Republicans now control both the White House and Congress. Even so, the GOP's increasing comfort with government represents a major shift from the days of the Republican revolution.

Politicians have long had a negative image with the public. Two thirds of Americans (66%) said in the December 2004 survey that elected officials in Washington lose touch with people pretty quickly, and 63% felt that elected officials generally "don't care what people like me think." These numbers actually represent modest improvement since the mid-1990s.

Reflecting their parties' contrasting political fortunes over the past decade, Republicans have become much less critical of Washington politicians, while Democrats have become somewhat more negative. In July 1994, 73% of Republicans said that elected officials tend to lose touch quickly; ten years later, 55% felt this way. By comparison, the number of Democrats taking this position grew from 66% in July 1994 to 72% last year.

Debating Immigration's Impact

The values survey showed the public is evenly divided on the impact that immigrants are having on American culture and the economy. It also found no evidence that concerns about terrorism and homeland security have led to significantly more negative views of immigrants.

About as many people said immigrants strengthen the U.S. because of their hard work and talents as said they are a burden because of the impact on jobs, schools, health care and the like. Views of immigrants were a bit less positive than in 2000, during the economic boom, but much more favorable than in the mid-1990s. In 1994, the public by two to one saw immigrants as burdening the U.S. rather than strengthening it.

Americans also disagreed about whether immigrants, on balance, strengthen American culture (50% said this) or threaten it (40%). Hispanics were far more positive about immigrants than are whites or African-Americans.

Split Over Social Safety Net

Over the past decade, there has been a significant rise in empathy for the poor, as well as growing support for more government assistance for the poor and needy. About half of Americans subscribe to the view that poor people have hard lives because government benefits do not go far enough; only about a third think that the poor have it easy because they receive government benefits. That represents a major shift since the mid-1990s, when narrow majorities felt poor people had easy lives.

Opinions about Immigrants

	TOTAL
IMMIGRANTS...	%
... Strengthen our country through their hard work and talents	45
... Are a burden because they take our jobs, housing and health care	44
Neither/both/don't know (vol.)	11
	100
NEWCOMERS FROM OTHER COUNTRIES ...	
... Threaten traditional American customs and values	40
... Strengthen American society	50
Neither/both/don't know (vol.)	10
	100

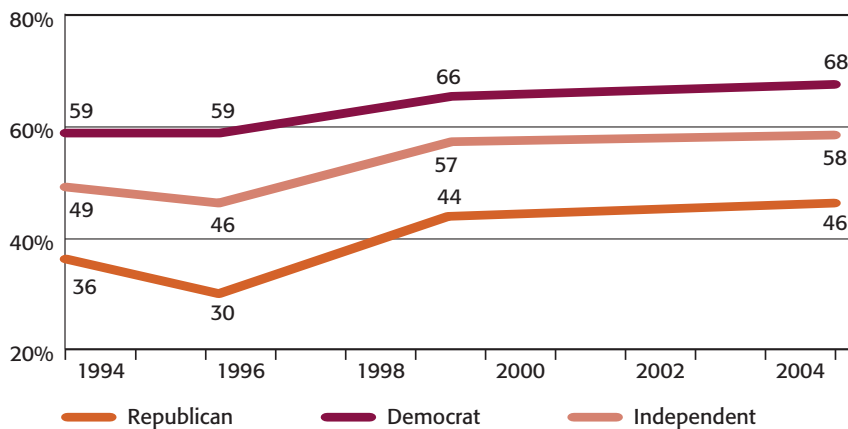
Source: Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, December 2004

Partisan Divide on Needs of Poor

	TOTAL	PARTY ID		
		REP	DEM	IND
	%	%	%	%
Poor people have it easy	34	50	24	29
Poor people have hard lives	52	36	64	57
Neither/both/don't know (vol.)	14	14	12	14
	100	100	100	100
Govt. should do more to help the needy	57	46	68	58
Govt. can't afford more help for the needy	33	45	25	31
Neither/both/don't know (vol.)	10	9	7	11
	100	100	100	100

Source: Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, December 2004

Government should do more for the poor, even if it means going deeper into debt



Source: Pew Research Center for the People & the Press

In the wake of welfare reform and tighter economic times, the public also has grown more supportive of increased assistance to poor and needy people. Over the past decade or so, the number favoring more aid for needy people has increased from about 50% to 57%.

Attitudes toward the social safety net remain highly partisan, but there have been major shifts on these measures among members of both parties over the past decade. In July 1994, nearly two thirds of Republicans said that poor people have easy lives; late last year, half of all Republicans expressed that view. Over the same period, the number of Democrats who believe that the poor have it easy has dropped from 44% to 24%.

A decade ago, 61% of Republicans felt that the government could not afford to do more to help the poor. In the 2004 values survey, as many Republicans said the government should do more to help the poor, even if it means going deeper into debt, as felt that the government cannot afford greater aid to the poor. The number of Democrats favoring increased aid to the poor also rose – from 59% to 68%.