

Bush sinks in opinion polls, but Democrats offer no alternative

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A series of opinion polls published this week demonstrate that the American people decisively oppose the Bush administration and its policies. A *Washington Post*-ABC News poll found only 39 percent approval for the Bush presidency, with 60 percent opposed. A separate Associated Press-Ipsos poll found Bush's support even lower, at 37 percent, with 59 percent disapproving.

The disapproval rate was the highest for an incumbent president since Bush's father was defeated for reelection in 1992. Nine out of 10 self-identified Democratic voters disapproved of Bush, as well as 7 out of 10 independents and even 2 out of 10 Republicans.

The *Post*-ABC poll found a majority or plurality disapproval of Bush's policy or performance on every major issue, including, for the first time, the "war on terror." Some 68 percent said the US was headed in the wrong direction, 65 percent said the economy was in poor or bad shape, 67 percent gave the administration a negative rating on ethics and 59 percent said that top Bush political aide Karl Rove should resign because of his involvement in the CIA leak scandal.

The most important issue in undermining Bush's political standing is the war in Iraq. Among those polled, 55 percent said that the administration had misled the American people in its case for launching the war in Iraq, while 60 percent said the war was not worth fighting and 73 percent said US casualties in Iraq had reached an "unacceptable" level. Of those who said the United States was headed in the wrong direction, nearly one third cited the Iraq war as their principal concern.

The negative factors cited in the two polls, in addition to the war in Iraq, include Bush's attack on Social Security, the failures in rescue and recovery in Hurricane Katrina, the debacle of the nomination of Harriet Miers to the Supreme Court, and the indictment of top White House aide I. Lewis Libby for perjury and obstruction of justice.

One striking finding of both polls was the growing intensity of the opposition to Bush: according to the *Post*-ABC poll, 47 percent strongly disapproved of the Bush presidency, up from 35 percent in January; 20 percent strongly approved, down from 33 percent in January. The AP-Ipsos poll found a similar result: 42 percent said they strongly disapproved of Bush and his policies, while only 20 percent strongly approved.

The Republican-controlled Congress posted an even lower poll rating, with only 35 percent approval, down from 44 percent last February. Asked whom they would prefer in the 2006 congressional elections, when one third of the Senate and all 435

seats in the House of Representatives are at stake, those polled gave preference to the Democrats by 52 percent to 37 percent, the biggest poll margin for the Democrats in more than 20 years.

Among registered voters, Democrats led by 49 percent to 38 percent, a net shift of more than 20 points from the last mid-term congressional vote, in 2002, when the Republican Party was favored by a margin of 51 percent to 39 percent in pre-election polls. Democrats were preferred over the Republicans by double-digit margins on a series of issues: the economy, Social Security, education, health care, taxes, the federal budget, gasoline prices and the war in Iraq.

The biggest shift in opinion against Bush in the year since his narrow reelection victory came among those identifying themselves as independents and moderate Republicans. Two thirds of independents expressed disapproval of the administration's performance, and more than one third of moderate Republicans. Bush's political support remains at extremely high levels only among those who identify themselves as conservative Republicans.

The poll suggested that the alignment of Bush and the congressional Republicans with the Christian fundamentalist right, in such issues as the Terry Schiavo case and the attack on the teaching of evolution in public schools, was deeply unpopular. The Democratic Party enjoyed its biggest lead over the Republicans in the *Post*-ABC poll, 60 percent to 24 percent, on the question of which party was "more open to ideas of political moderates."

There is an enormous disjuncture between the mass anti-Bush and antiwar sentiment—which if anything the opinion polls understate—and the operation of the US political system, where the Bush administration is virtually unchallenged and the Republican Party maintains its grip on Congress and on the federal judiciary, especially the Supreme Court. The visceral hostility to the right-wing policies and corrupt and vicious political methods of the Bush administration finds almost no expression in the existing political structure.

The Democratic Party and the corporate-controlled media play a vital role in propping up a discredited government and sustaining the illusion of Bush's political strength. Through Bush's nearly five years in the White House, both the nominal political opposition and the so-called Fourth Estate, supposedly an independent and critical force, have sought to cover up the criminal character of the Republican administration.

This goes back to the very beginning, when the Democratic

Party capitulated to the theft of the 2000 presidential election and the media legitimized a president who received fewer votes than his main opponent. After the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, congressional Democratic leaders rallied round the Republican president, ignoring the evidence suggesting that the Bush administration had ample warning of the attacks and allowed them to go forward in order to obtain a pretext for military action in Central Asia and the Middle East.

The Democrats endorsed the invasion of Afghanistan, the creation of a US concentration camp at Guantanamo Bay, and a series of domestic repressive measures such as the USA Patriot Act. Most importantly, they sanctioned the Bush administration's "bait-and-switch" policy, declaring war on terror and then targeting Iraq, which had nothing to do with the 9/11 attacks.

In October 2002, on the eve of the last congressional mid-term elections, the Democratic-controlled Senate joined the Republican-controlled House in authorizing military action against Iraq. Democratic leaders as Tom Daschle, Harry Reid, John Kerry, Hillary Clinton and John Edwards all voted to give Bush the authority to invade and conquer Iraq. They are just as responsible as Bush, Cheney, Rumsfeld & Co. for this act of aggression, the most blatant violation of international law by a major world power since Hitler invaded Poland and started World War II.

The Republican control of Congress and Bush's own reelection—regularly cited by the Democrats as proof of Bush's popular support—are directly attributable to the collaboration of the Democratic Party with the war in Iraq. The Republican victories in the 2002 congressional elections, in which they regained control of the Senate, followed the congressional vote to authorize the invasion of Iraq.

The 2004 presidential election was reduced to a meaningless contest when the Democratic Party establishment engineered the nomination of a pro-war candidate, John Kerry, despite the fact that an overwhelming majority of Democratic voters opposed the war. The Democratic National Convention became a celebration of Kerry's military service, not his role as a prominent opponent of the Vietnam War. In August 2004, Kerry declared that even knowing there were no weapons of mass destruction in Iraq and no connections to Al Qaeda or 9/11, he did not regret his vote for war.

While Kerry reversed himself last month, in a little-noticed speech in which he belatedly asserted that his October 2002 pro-war vote was based on Bush administration lies, the Democratic Party leadership as a whole remains firmly in the war camp. Despite the predominance of antiwar sentiment among rank-and-file Democratic voters, all of those prominently mentioned as candidates for the party's presidential nomination in 2008—Hillary Clinton, Joseph Biden, John Edwards, and Kerry himself—oppose a US withdrawal from Iraq and call for intensified efforts to win a military victory.

The war is the most polarizing political issue in the United States, except in the upper circles of the political, media and business elite. Nearly two thirds of the American people, according to recent polls, oppose the war and support withdrawal of US troops. A sizable minority, about one third, still endorse sacrificing the lives of American soldiers in Iraq. But in official Washington, there is a near-unanimous conviction that a US

withdrawal from Iraq or a military defeat there are unthinkable. The antiwar majority has virtually no representation in these circles.

One more figure from the latest opinion polls is perhaps the most instructive: while public support for the Bush administration has collapsed, there has not been a proportional rise in support for the Democratic Party. Only 41 percent of those responding to the *Post-ABC* poll gave a positive rating to the congressional Democrats (compared to 35 percent for the Republicans). On the question of political ethics and honesty, while barely 12 percent gave an advantage to the Republicans, only 16 percent favored the Democrats; 71 percent said there was no difference.

The Democrats and Republicans are in full agreement on the necessity to maintain US control of Iraq, which gives American imperialism a dominant position in the oil-rich Middle East. Both parties are representatives of the American ruling elite, those who control the giant corporations and the lion's share of the national wealth.

What underlies the political crisis and the growing divorce between public opinion and the two officially recognized political parties is the growth of social inequality. Not since the days of the robber barons in the nineteenth century has American society been so polarized between the relative handful of wealthy families at the top and the working people who make up the vast majority.

Over the past quarter century, the top 1 percent of American society have more than doubled their share of the national wealth. In 1979, they controlled less than 20 percent of the wealth. Today, that figure stands at more than 40 percent. It is this staggering social fact that finds expression in the drastic shift to the right by both of the major bourgeois political parties.

The social structure of the United States is simply incompatible with the maintenance of democratic forms of rule. Hence the intensifying attacks on democratic rights, particularly in the last four years, when the "war on terror" has become the all-purpose pretext for what is in fact a war on the American people.

American society has reached an impasse. All social needs have been subordinated to an increasingly insane drive to accelerate the private accumulation of wealth through tax cuts for the rich, deregulation of business and the destruction of working class living standards. As the Katrina disaster showed, it has become impossible for the most advanced industrialized society on the planet to carry out such elementary social responsibilities as preventing floods and rescuing disaster victims.

While the representatives of the ruling elite declare in chorus that society can no longer afford decent-paying jobs, pension and health benefits, the reality is that working people can no longer afford the depredations and plundering of the wealthy parasites at the top.



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