

Polls indicate growing dissatisfaction with two parties in US

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Public opinion polls are a fairly limited way of gauging popular sentiments. The way questions are posed and the options given for answers tend to skew or distort the actual views of those being surveyed. Still, newly released US polls certainly indicate intense public opposition to the war in Iraq, widespread hostility to the Bush administration and its policies, discontent with socio-economic conditions, and deep dissatisfaction with the Democrats and Republicans.

The approval ratings for Bush remain at very low levels, with a *Wall Street Journal*/NBC poll released Thursday reporting a figure of 39 percent, statistically unchanged from a month before. More than half the population—56 percent—registered disapproval for the Bush presidency.

At the same time, dissatisfaction with other political institutions and with the Democratic Party persists. Sixty percent of the population disapproves of the performance of the US Congress. While the plurality of those surveyed (48 percent) would prefer a Democratic-controlled Congress after the November elections, the party as a whole has a favorability rating of only 32 percent. According to the *Wall Street Journal*, this figure “is as unflattering as the *Journal*/NBC survey has ever recorded.”

The favorability rating for the Republicans is essentially the same—33 percent, which, according to the *Journal*, is “near the party’s record low”—while 39 percent give a negative rating to the Democrats and 46 percent give a negative rating to the Republicans.

A striking 60 percent of the population said that the country is “on the wrong track,” while only 27 percent said it was headed “in the right direction.” Of the 60 percent who said the country is on the wrong track, 80 percent—or nearly 50 percent of the total population—said it was part of a long-term decline.

Democratic pollster Peter Hart, who conducted the survey sponsored by the *Journal* and NBC, commented that the figures are “horrendous” and indicate a public mood that is “as dank and depressing as I have ever seen” in more than three decades of conducting polls.

What explains this state of affairs? On the economy, the *Journal*/NBC poll found that 38 percent of the population expects things to get worse, while only 14 percent think it will get better in the next year. Sixty-five percent think that life for their children will be the same as or worse than it is now.

These figures reflect growing uneasiness over rising prices, declining wages and the continued destruction of decent-paying jobs. These are not transient phenomena, and the public mood is a reflection of a long-term deterioration in the social position of broad sections of the population.

The most significant and persistent feature of American social reality is the immense and still-growing level of inequality. According to an article published in the *New York Times* on July 19 (“The Rise of the Super Rich,” by Teresa Tritch), between 2003 and 2004, “real average income for the top 1 percent of households—those making more than \$315,000 in 2004—grew by nearly 17 percent. For the remaining 99 percent, the average gain was less than 3 percent,” most of which went to the top 20 percent.

“In all,” the article noted, “the top 1 percent of households enjoyed 36 percent of all income gains in 2004, on top of an already stunning 30 percent in 2003.” Indeed, the bulk of the gains has gone to the top one tenth of 1 percent of the population.

Living standards for everyone who is not already wealthy have declined. The *Times* article referred to a Federal Reserve survey finding that “the wealthiest 1 percent of Americans accounted for 33.4 percent of

total net worth in 2004, compared to 30.1 percent in 1989. Over the same period, the other Americans in the top 10 percent saw their share of the nation's net worth basically stagnate, at about 36 percent, while the bottom 50 percent accounted for just 2.5 percent of the wealth in 2004, compared to 3.0 percent in 1989."

The war in Iraq, which has now dragged on for more than three years and which generates escalating levels of horrific violence, is now opposed by a substantial majority of the population. In a separate poll carried out by the *New York Times* and CBS, 63 percent of respondents said that the war in Iraq was not worth the lives and dollars it cost. Fifty-six percent supported a timetable for the reduction of US troops, while, according to the *Times*, "more than half those surveyed said they supported a withdrawal even if it meant Iraq would fall into the hands of insurgents."

The existing political institutions do not provide any means for the articulation of popular opposition to the war, let alone a real possibility of changing policy. Millions of Americans sense, entirely correctly, that their feelings and opinions about the war count for nothing. They can criticize the war, tell pollsters (if asked) that they oppose it, but the fighting and dying will go on and on regardless.

Just as these latest polls were being conducted, Bush announced that the US would be redeploying thousands of troops to Baghdad. There are no plans to begin withdrawing US soldiers, without which the Iraqi stooge regime would collapse.

A very weak proposal to begin withdrawing US troops by July 2007 was defeated in a bipartisan vote (86-13) by the US Senate in June. The US military is once again delaying the departure of some troops from Iraq to bolster forces there.

What generalizations and political conclusions can be drawn from these and similar polling data? The United States is a country within which there exists a vast and unbridgeable chasm separating the government and the existing institutions of the political establishment from the real interests, concerns and feelings of the broad mass of the American people. The vast propaganda machinery at the disposal of the state is employed to manipulate public consciousness in order to suppress the eruption of popular discontent.

But for all its power, the mass media is not omnipotent and there are limits to what can be

accomplished with propaganda. Reality has a way of smashing political fictions and dispelling illusions.

Widespread popular anger with government policy, deep-rooted dissatisfaction with prevailing social conditions, a loss of confidence in existing institutions, and a sense that things will continue to get worse—these are all indications that the United States is due to witness, sooner than most might even imagine, a massive eruption of popular anger.



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