

US: New polls reveal mass opposition to Democrats and Republicans

Joe Kay
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New opinion polls released this week show mounting discontent within the American population over the war in Iraq and the policies of both political parties. They reflect deep and bitter opposition to the Bush administration, but also reveal that just six months after the Democrats took control of Congress, masses of Americans who voted Democratic to express their opposition to the Iraq war are disillusioned and angry over the Democrats' cowardice and complicity with Bush.

According to an NBC News/*Wall Street Journal* poll released on Wednesday, Bush's overall approval rating stands at an all-time low of 29 percent. Over 66 percent disapprove of his job performance. From April of this year Bush's approval rating dropped 6 percentage points, an extraordinary fall in such a short period of time, particularly given the president's already low numbers.

However, the continued collapse of support for the Bush administration has not translated into a corresponding rise in support for the Democrats. In fact, approval for the Democratic-controlled Congress stands at only 23 percent, below even that for Bush and down sharply from only a few months ago.

In early 2007, following the midterm elections, approval for Congress jumped to 31 percent from its pre-election low of 16 percent. Over the past two months, however, support for Congress has fallen a full 8 percentage points.

The fall in support for the Democrats reflects more than anything else anger over the passage of the \$100 billion war-funding bill in May.

Another recent poll, conducted by the *Los Angeles Times* and Bloomberg earlier this week, registered similar results. It found that 63 percent of the population believes that the new Democratic-controlled

Congress is governing in a "business as usual" manner—that is, doing nothing to change the course of US government policy.

The Democratic speaker of the House of Representatives, Nancy Pelosi, has an approval rating of only 36 percent, while 58 percent of self-described "liberal Democrats"—those most likely to oppose the war in Iraq—disapprove of Congress, up 15 percentage points from January.

On Iraq, the poll found that 68 percent of the population now favors the complete withdrawal of US troops within one year or less, with 25 percent favoring "immediate withdrawal," up from 19 percent in January. These views, held by the overwhelming majority of the population, are nowhere expressed in the political establishment.

At the same time, 54 percent of those surveyed in the NBC/*Wall Street Journal* poll said the situation in Iraq has gotten worse in recent months, during the period of the "surge," while only 10 percent said it has gotten better. A *New York Times*/CBS News poll last month found opposition to the Iraq war at record highs, with six in ten saying that the US should never have gone into Iraq.

The NBC/*Wall Street Journal* poll also found that only 19 percent of those surveyed—less than one in five—said that the country is "headed in the right direction," while 68 percent said it was "off on the wrong track."

Besides mass opposition to the Iraq war, these polls reflect mounting anger over the growing concentration of wealth at the top, and the increasingly difficult economic situation facing working people. Rising gas and food prices, the collapse of the housing market, job cuts, attacks on health benefits and pensions, wage stagnation have all contributed to widespread anxiety

and disillusionment within the American population.

The percentage of people who believe the country is headed in the right direction has declined steadily over the past several months, from 29 percent last October, to 28 percent in January, 25 percent in March, and 22 percent in April.

These figures provide a snapshot of a political system in deep crisis. Beneath the ossified and unrepresentative political and media establishment in the US is a population seething with anger and discontent.

Commenting on the NBC/*Wall Street Journal* poll findings Wednesday evening, NBC News anchor Brian Williams said they indicate a “volatile period in modern American history,” in which the mood of the population has turned “decidedly grim and downright angry.” NBC Washington Bureau Chief Tim Russert remarked that the polls showed “it’s churning out there.”

These comments reflect nervousness within the ruling elite that growing opposition could produce a social explosion, with the public finding new channels for expressing its views and interests beyond the confines of the two-party system.

There is a profound disconnect between the majority of the population, increasingly politicized by the war in Iraq and the social crisis, and the political establishment. Underlying the chasm between official politics and the sentiments of masses of people are longer-term trends, in particular, the extraordinary growth of social inequality. The political establishment is dominated by the interests of a tiny oligarchy.



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