

# CBS - Low Poll Numbers For Bush

NEW YORK, May 25, 2005

**(CBS)** President George W. Bush's overall job approval rating has hovered just below 50 percent since the beginning of the year, and now most Americans think he is out of touch with their priorities.

The public continues to have doubts about Bush's key foreign and domestic initiatives: as they have been for months, Americans are divided on whether Social Security investment accounts are a good idea and whether going to war in Iraq was the right thing to do.

While much recent news has been focused on President Bush's judicial nominees and the filibuster in the Senate, Americans see the country's most important priorities as the economy and jobs and the war in Iraq.

## THE PRESIDENT

Six in 10 Americans don't think the President shares their priorities for the country; just 34 percent say he does. These are the lowest marks Bush has received on this question since the eve of his first inauguration, when **CBS News** started asking it. An even larger majority -- 68 percent -- says Congress does not share their priorities.

## DOES BUSH SHARE YOUR PRIORITIES FOR THE COUNTRY?

### Yes

Now  
34%  
10/2004\*  
49%  
9/2003  
41%  
1/2001  
44%

### No

Now  
61%  
10/2004\*  
48%  
9/2003  
56%  
1/2001  
46%

\*asked of registered voters

## DOES CONGRESS SHARE YOUR PRIORITIES FOR THE COUNTRY?

(May 20-23, 2005)

Yes 20%  
No 68%

The President fares slightly better in the public's overall evaluation of him, though Americans continue to be divided. 46percent now approve of the job Bush is doing as president, while 48 percent disapprove. Last month, 44 percent approved, while 51% disapproved.

## BUSH'S OVERALL JOB RATING

### Approve

Now  
46%  
4/2005

44%

### Disapprove

Now

48%

4/2005

51%

The public's opinions of Bush's overall job performance are tied to views on whether or not he shares their priorities for the country. Nine in 10 of those who say Bush shares their priorities approve of the job he is doing as President. Among those who say Bush does not share their priorities, 73 percent disapprove of his job performance.

While the President has been campaigning hard for Social Security reform and has recently reiterated his opposition to federal funding for embryonic stem cell research, the public instead cites the war in Iraq and the economy and jobs as the country's most pressing problems.

### MOST IMPORTANT PROBLEM

(May 20-23, 2005)

War in Iraq 19%

Economy/jobs 19%

Terrorism 7%

Social Security 5%

The President has made small gains when it comes to the economy, but few when it comes to Iraq and foreign policy.

Bush's approval rating on the war in Iraq is virtually the same as it was last month -- 38 percent approve. Following the President's visit to Russia and former Soviet Republics, just 40 percent of Americans approve of his handling of foreign policy. The campaign against terrorism remains Bush's strongest area: 58 percent approve of his handling of it.

### BUSH'S JOB APPROVALS

Bush's approval rating on the economy remains low, though it is a bit higher now than it was last month. 38 percent approve, compared to 34 percent who approved last month. A slim majority of Americans -- 52 percent -- think the economy is in good shape, but 47 percent think it is not. These views are slightly less positive than they were in February when CBS News last asked about the state of the economy.

#### Overall

Now

46%

4/2005

44%

#### Campaign against terrorism

Now

58%

4/2005

53%

#### Foreign Policy

Now

40%

4/2005

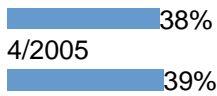
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2/2005

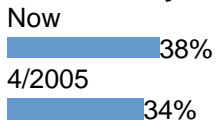
44%

#### War in Iraq

Now



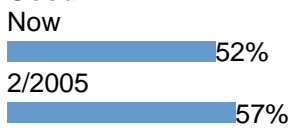
**The economy**



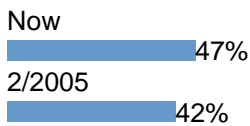
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**CONDITION OF NATION'S ECONOMY**

**Good**



**Bad**



The public's outlook for the economy is not optimistic. 33 percent of Americans say the economy is getting worse, while only 17 percent say the economy is getting better. Another 48 percent say the economy is staying the same.

**THE U.S. ECONOMY IS ...**

- Getting better 17%
- Getting worse 33%
- Staying the same 48%

Republicans are more positive about the future of the nation's economy than Democrats. 32 percent of Republicans say the economy is getting better, 49 percent of Democrats say it is getting worse.

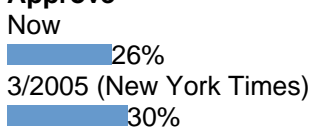
**SOCIAL SECURITY**

Despite his months-long campaign for Social Security reform, President Bush receives only a 26 percent approval rating for his handling of Social Security, and Americans continue to express doubts about his agenda to partially privatize the Social Security program.

62 percent of Americans *disapprove* of President Bush's handling of Social Security; just over a quarter approve. In March, a New York Times Poll found the public disapproved of Bush's handling of Social Security by 57 percent to 30 percent.

**BUSH'S HANDLING OF SOCIAL SECURITY**

**Approve**



**Disapprove**

Now

62%  
3/2005 (New York Times)  
57%

Disapproval of Bush's handling of Social Security is shared by majorities of Americans in all age groups. But there are party and philosophical differences. Half of Republicans approve of the President's handling of Social Security (three in ten disapprove), but Democrats and Independents overwhelmingly disapprove.

## BUSH'S HANDLING OF SOCIAL SECURITY

### All

Approve  
26%  
Disapprove  
62%

### Age 18-29

Approve  
32%  
Disapprove  
55%

### Age 30-44

Approve  
28%  
Disapprove  
58%

### Age 45-64

Approve  
25%  
Disapprove  
67%

### Age 65 and older

Approve  
18%  
Disapprove  
68%

### Republicans

Approve  
50%  
Disapprove  
32%

### Democrats

Approve  
8%  
Disapprove  
86%

### Independents

Approve  
24%  
Disapprove  
64%

### Liberals

Approve  
15%  
Disapprove



**Moderates**

Approve



Disapprove



**Conservatives**

Approve



Disapprove



Americans continue to be uneasy with the President’s plan to add individual investment accounts to Social Security. It has not gained in public support, despite months of active campaigning. The public is evenly divided over the President’s proposal: 47 percent say allowing individuals to invest a portion of their Social Security taxes themselves is a good idea, but another 47 percent say it is a bad idea.

**ALLOWING PEOPLE TO INVEST THEIR SOCIAL SECURITY TAXES IS:**

**Good idea**

Now



4/2005



1/2005



**Bad idea**

Now



4/2005



1/2005



Young people under age 30 -- presumably those with the longest time horizon to retirement -- are the most supportive of President Bush’s plan to allow individuals to invest a portion of their Social Security taxes on their own: two-thirds say it’s a good idea.

Support for individual Social Security accounts drops lower when people are asked to consider a possible reduction by as much as a third of the guaranteed benefit, one potential trade-off of President Bush’s proposal. Just one in five think individual Social Security accounts would be a good idea in that scenario, and seven in ten say it would be a bad idea.

**ALLOWING PEOPLE TO INVEST SOCIAL SECURITY TAXES – IF GUARANTEED BENEFITS ARE CUT:**

**Good idea**

Now



2/2005



1/2005



**Bad idea**

Now



2/2005



1/2005

70%

More than one in four have now heard a lot about President Bush's proposal. Most of those who have heard a *lot* about the President's plan say allowing individual investments of Social Security taxes is a bad idea. Those who have heard some are more evenly divided, as are those who have not heard much.

## HEARD ABOUT BUSH'S SOCIAL SECURITY PROPOSAL

### A lot

Now 26%  
2/2005 21%  
1/2005 13%

### Some

Now 45%  
2/2005 47%  
1/2005 34%

### Not much

Now 21%  
2/2005 20%  
1/2005 32%

### Nothing

Now 8%  
2/2005 11%  
1/2005 19%

## THE SOCIAL SECURITY SYSTEM AND HOW TO FIX IT

Nearly six in ten Americans do *not* think Social Security will have enough money available to provide them with the benefits they expect for their retirement, continuing a two-decade trend of skepticism. Those under age 45 are especially pessimistic about the Social Security system: eight in ten of them do not expect that the benefits will be there when they retire.

## WILL SOCIAL SECURITY PROVIDE YOU WITH RETIREMENT BENEFITS?

### Yes

Now 31%  
4/2005 36%  
1/2002 34%  
3/1995 35%  
6/1981 30%

### No

Now 55%  
4/2005 51%  
1/2002 46%  
3/1995 53%  
6/1981 54%

This poll tested some options for fixing Social Security. One option that has been discussed is raising the current \$90,000 limit on income subject to Social Security tax withholding. This idea is supported by 62 percent of the public.

A plan to limit the rate of growth of future Social Security benefits for middle- and upper-income workers, mentioned by President Bush a few weeks ago, receives mixed reviews. Half would support such a measure if the rate of growth of future benefits were limited for people with incomes of \$100,000 or higher. Only 35 percent would back the idea if the growth rate in benefits were reduced for those making between \$50,000 and \$100,000.

## OPTIONS FOR CHANGING SOCIAL SECURITY

### **Raising \$90,000 income limit**

Favor

 62%

Oppose

 31%

### **Limiting benefits if incomes are \$100K or more**

Favor

 50%

Oppose

 40%

### **Limiting benefits if incomes are \$50-100K**

Favor

 35%

Oppose

 55%

## **THE GOVERNMENT'S ROLE**

As a general matter, eight in ten Americans think the government has a responsibility to provide a decent standard of living for the elderly in this country. Only 15 percent say it is not the government's job to do this. These views are unchanged from February.

### **SHOULD THE GOVERNMENT PROVIDE A DECENT STANDARD OF LIVING FOR THE ELDERLY?**

#### **Yes**

Now 81%

2/2005 79%

#### **No**

Now 15%

2/2005 17%

But Americans divide on the philosophy on which the Social Security system should base its benefits. 43 percent think the program should take some of the contributions made by higher income people and use them to help pay benefits for poorer people this way-- similar to the current approach. But 46 percent think Social Security should pay out benefits based solely on the contributions made by retirees while they were working.

### **SOCIAL SECURITY BENEFITS SHOULD...**

#### **Be based only on contributions of retirees**

Now 44%

2/2005 47%

6/1981 47%

#### **Take some contributions of better-off people and give them to poorer people**

Now 43%

2/2005 43%

6/1981 37%

55 percent of Republicans and 52 percent of conservatives think Social Security payouts should be based only on the contributions of retirees, while 54 percent of Democrats think the system should take some contributions from better-off people to help out those who are poorer. Liberals and moderates are more evenly divided.

Responses are also based on economic self-interest. Americans in higher income categories are more likely than those earning less to say Social Security payments should be based solely on the contributions of retirees.

## THE WAR IN IRAQ

As violence in Iraq continues to take a toll on that country, a majority of Americans once again say things in Iraq are going badly for the U.S. there. 57 percent say things are going badly, while 41 percent say things are going well. In February, just weeks after the Iraqi elections, a majority of Americans said U.S. efforts to bring stability to Iraq were going well for the U.S.

### HOW ARE THINGS IN IRAQ GOING FOR U.S.?

#### Well

Now 41%  
4/2005 48%  
2/2005 53%



#### Badly

Now 57%  
4/2005 50%  
2/2005 47%



The public continues to divide on whether the U.S. did the right thing taking military action against Iraq in the first place. 47 percent say it did, while 49 percent say the U.S. should have stayed out. For much of the past year, opinion has been split, just as it is now.

### RIGHT THING TO TAKE MILITARY ACTION IN IRAQ?

#### Right thing

Now  
 47%  
4/2005  


#### Should have stayed out





Now  
 49%  
4/2005  


## THE NATION'S DIRECTION



With concerns about the economy and Social Security, and the ongoing instability in Iraq, Americans remain pessimistic about the overall direction of the country. 60 percent say things in the U.S. have seriously gotten off on the wrong track; only one third say things are headed in the right direction. Last month, 62 percent said the country was off on the wrong track.

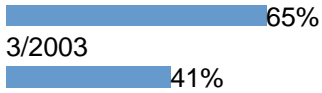
### DIRECTION OF COUNTRY

#### Right direction

Now  
 34%  
4/2005  
 32%  
5/2004  
 30%  
3/2003  


#### Wrong track

Now  
 60%  
4/2005  
 62%  
5/2004



These sentiments are similar to what they were a year ago when violence in Iraq escalated -- including the beheading of an American contractor. Photographs of abuse of Iraqi prisoners at Abu Ghraib also came to light last spring. The percentage who said the country was on the wrong track was also at a similarly high level back in November 1994, when Republicans swept into control of both houses of Congress for the first time in decades.

The last time a majority of Americans said the country was heading in the right direction was back in March 2003, at the start of the war in Iraq.

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*This poll was conducted among a nationwide random sample of 1150 adults, interviewed by telephone May 20-24, 2005. The error due to sampling could be plus or minus three percentage points for results based on all adults. Error for subgroups is higher.*