

GALLUP NEWS SERVICE

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Democrats Continue to Lead on Generic Congressional Vote

Republicans less enthusiastic about voting than are Democrats

by Jeffrey M. Jones

PRINCETON, NJ -- The latest *USA Today*/Gallup poll shows that Democrats remain strongly positioned for this year's midterm elections, leading Republicans among both registered voters and a smaller group of regular voters. Democrats report heightened levels of enthusiasm about voting this year, a departure from each of the last three midterm elections. Compared with recent midterm elections, Republicans' enthusiasm is lower. The relative enthusiasm Republicans and Democrats express has borne some relation to the outcomes in recent midterm elections.

In the April 7-9 poll, Democrats lead Republicans by 52% to 42% among registered voters in Gallup's generic congressional ballot, a measure of whether voters support the Republican or Democratic U.S. House candidate in their district. The Democratic lead on this measure has been in the double digits in each of the last three Gallup Polls, starting in late February/early March.

Using a tighter screen on voting, Gallup finds Democrats leading by seven points, 51% to 44%, among "regular voters."

A review of historical generic ballot data shows that Democrats almost always lead on the generic ballot among registered voters, even in elections in which Republicans eventually win a majority of the overall vote for the House of Representatives. That is due mainly to differential turnout among the partisan groups. In midterm elections, fewer than half of eligible voters usually turn out to vote, and Republicans are more likely to turn out than Democrats (the registered voter number assumes equal and full turnout among all party groups). Nevertheless, a double-digit lead on the generic ballot suggests a strong positioning for the Democrats, even with different turnout levels.

Gallup uses a "likely voter" model to account for voter turnout in election years. Typically, in midterm elections, likely voter models are not applied until much closer to the election. That is in part because only a small percentage of Americans are engaged in the election at this point -- just 25% say they have given "quite a lot" of thought to it -- making it difficult to pinpoint who is likely to turn out. This low level of engagement is similar to what Gallup has found in other midterm election years at similar stages of the campaign.

To get a sense of how turnout might affect the current results, Gallup looked at a group of "regular voters" in these data. Regular voters are defined as those who 1) are registered to vote, 2) say they "always vote" and 3) say they voted in the last midterm election. That represents about half of the poll's sample (52%), whereas turnout in midterm elections is typically in the high 30% to low 40% range. The seven-point Democratic lead among these regular voters suggests that at this point in the campaign, Democrats hold a clear advantage.

Enthusiasm About Voting

Overall, 42% of registered voters say they are "more enthusiastic about voting than usual," while 44% report being "less enthusiastic." These figures obscure significant party differences in enthusiasm. Forty-eight percent of Democrats (including independents who lean toward the Democratic Party) say they are more enthusiastic about voting, compared with just 33% of Republicans (including independents who lean toward the Republican Party).

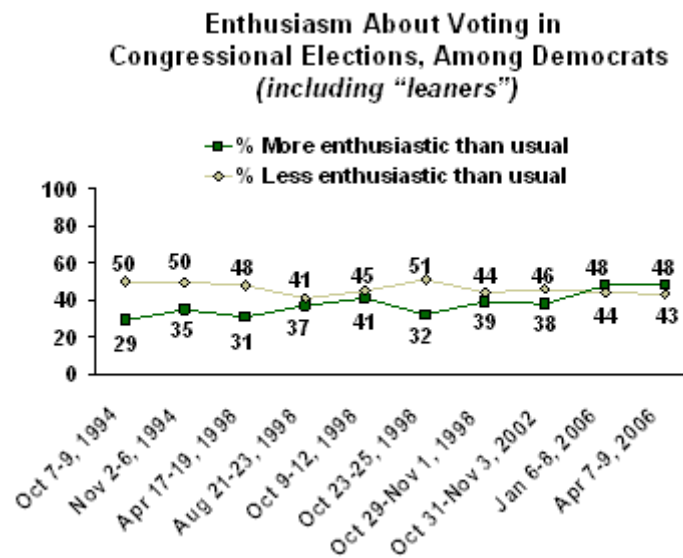
These data are a notable departure from recent history on two accounts. This is the first time in a midterm election year since Gallup began asking the question in 1994 that a significantly higher percentage of Democrats than Republicans claimed to be more enthusiastic about voting.

Partisan Enthusiasm in Recent Midterm Elections, Gallup Polls

Poll dates	% of Republicans "more enthusiastic than usual"	% of Democrats "more enthusiastic than usual"	Republican advantage
	%	%	%
2006 Apr 7-9	33	48	-15
2006 Jan 6-8	47	48	-1
2002 Oct 31-Nov 3 ^	42	38	+4
1998 Oct 29-Nov 1 ^	39	39	0
1998 Oct 23-25	44	32	+12
1998 Oct 9-12	45	41	+4
1998 Aug 21-23	42	37	+5
1998 Apr 17-19	31	31	0
1994 Nov 2-6 ^	44	35	+9
1994 Oct 7-9	40	29	+11

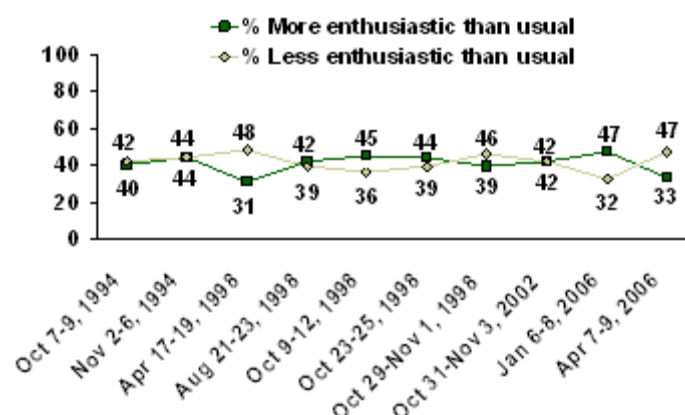
^ Final pre-election poll

Additionally, this is only the second time that Gallup has found a higher percentage of Democrats in the "more enthusiastic" than in the "less enthusiastic" column. The other time was at the beginning of this year.



The last time Republicans have shown a similar lack of enthusiasm was in April 1998. At only one other point in recent history -- in the final poll before the 1998 election -- have significantly more Republicans said they were less enthusiastic about voting than said they were more enthusiastic. Republican enthusiasm has declined quite a bit from January of this year, when Republican enthusiasm matched that of Democrats.

Enthusiasm About Voting in Congressional Elections, Among Republicans (including "leaners")



The diminished Republican enthusiasm since January may reflect growing discontent with the state of the country, and with George W. Bush specifically, among the general public and among Republicans in particular. High dissatisfaction levels on measures such as these are associated with poor performances by the incumbent party in midterm elections. Most political experts therefore expect Republicans to lose seats in both the House and the Senate this year, and much of the speculation around the midterm elections has turned to what the magnitude of those losses will be.

Relationship of Enthusiasm to Voting

The greater enthusiasm on the part of Democrats is a potentially good sign for them. In the past three midterm elections, the party that gained House seats had a better net enthusiasm score than the losing party. Typically, the party that gained had about an equal number of partisans saying they were more and saying they were less enthusiastic about voting. More importantly, the losing party usually had a significant deficit, with many more members of that party saying they were less enthusiastic than more enthusiastic.

Net Enthusiasm Among Partisan Groups in Final Midterm Pre-Election Polls, Recent Elections

Midterm election year	Party gaining seats in House of Representatives	Net Republican enthusiasm	Net Democratic enthusiasm
		(% more enthusiastic minus % less enthusiastic)	(% more enthusiastic minus % less enthusiastic)
1994	Rep	0	-15
1998	Dem	-7	-5
2002	Rep	0	-8
2006		-14	+5

That does not seem to be a function of higher turnout among the more enthused party group. There is not a strong relationship between enthusiasm and turnout when looking at recent midterm elections. In the last three such elections, Republicans have had at least a five percentage-point higher share of the electorate (as measured by likely voters in the final Gallup pre-election polls) than of the adult population. This occurred in 1994, when Republican enthusiasm was high, and in 1998 when it was lower. The Democratic share of the electorate compared with the general population has been fairly stable regardless of the party's enthusiasm about the election.

Democratic and Republican Shares of

General Population Versus Electorate, Final Gallup Midterm Pre-Election Polls

	% of national adults who are Democrats/ lean Democratic	% of likely voters who are Democrats/ lean Democratic	% of national adults who are Republican/ lean Republican	% of likely voters who are Republican/ lean Republican
1994	47%	45%	43%	48%
1998	49%	49%	40%	45%
2002	47%	45%	44%	51%

This suggests that the greater enthusiasm expands the party's strength at the more basic level of party identification, rather than increasing turnout rates among that base. In 1994 and 2002, the years when Republican enthusiasm was higher, a greater percentage of Americans identified with or leaned toward the Republican Party than did so in the lower enthusiasm year of 1998. Democratic identification has been more stable, but was slightly higher in 1998 than in 1994 and 2002.

The current environment finds an even stronger Democratic bedrock of support. In the last four Gallup Polls, an average of 51% of Americans have identified with or leaned toward the Democratic Party, compared with a 40% average for the Republican Party.

Survey Methods

These results are based on telephone interviews with a randomly selected national sample of 1,004 adults, aged 18 and older, conducted April 7-9, 2006. For results based on this sample, one can say with 95% confidence that the maximum error attributable to sampling and other random effects is ± 3 percentage points. In addition to sampling error, question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of public opinion polls.

For results based on the sample of 915 registered voters, the maximum margin of sampling error is ± 4 percentage points.

For results based on the sample of 577 "regular voters," the maximum margin of sampling error is ± 4 percentage points.

For results based on the sample of 510 Democrats or Democratic leaners, the maximum margin of sampling error is ± 5 percentage points.

For results based on the sample of 425 Republicans or Republican leaners, the maximum margin of sampling error is ± 5 percentage points.

Next, we have some questions about the election for Congress, which will be held in November.

3A. How much thought have you given to the upcoming elections for Congress -- quite a lot, or only a little?

	Quite a lot	SOME (vol.)	Only a little	None	No opinion
2006 Apr 7-9 (vol.) = Volunteered response	25%	3	66	5	1

Trends for Comparison:

	Quite a lot	SOME (vol.)	Only a little	None	No opinion
1998 Apr 17-19	24%	5	64	6	1
1982 Apr 23-26	19%	16	46	18	1

(vol.) = Volunteered response

Thinking for a moment about the elections for Congress next year,

4. *If the elections for Congress were being held today, which party's candidate would you vote for in your Congressional district -- [ROTATED: the Democratic Party's candidate or the Republican Party's candidate]?*

4A. *As of today, do you lean more toward -- [ROTATE: the Democratic Party's candidate or the Republican Party's candidate]?*

	Democratic candidate	Republican candidate	Undecided/ other
	%	%	%
Registered voters			
2006 Apr 7-9	52	42	6
2006 Mar 10-12	55	39	7
2006 Feb 28-Mar 1	53	39	7
2006 Feb 9-12	50	43	8
2006 Jan 6-8	49	43	8
2005 Oct 21-23	50	43	7
2005 Aug 28-30	53	41	6
National adults			
2006 Apr 7-9	53	40	7
2006 Mar 10-12	54	38	8
2006 Feb 28-Mar 1	52	39	10
2006 Feb 9-12	49	42	9
2006 Jan 6-8	49	42	9
2005 Oct 21-23	50	42	8
2005 Aug 28-30	52	41	7

5. *Compared to previous elections, are you more enthusiastic about voting than usual, or less enthusiastic?*

Trend for Midterm Elections

	More enthusiastic	Less enthusiastic	SAME (vol.)	No opinion
	%	%	%	%
National adults				
2006 Apr 7-9	40	46	12	2
2006 Jan 6-8	45	39	14	1
2002 Oct 31-Nov 3	38	45	14	3
1998 Oct 29-Nov 1	37	46	14	3
1998 Oct 23-25	35	47	16	2
1998 Oct 9-12	35	47	16	2
1998 Aug 21-23	38	41	17	4
1998 Apr 17-19	30	48	19	3
1994 Nov 2-6	38	48	13	2
1994 Oct 7-9	34	46	18	2
Republicans/Republican leaners				
2006 Apr 7-9	33	47	18	2
2006 Jan 6-8	47	32	20	1
2002 Oct 31-Nov 3	42	42	15	1
1998 Oct 29-Nov 1	39	46	14	1
1998 Oct 23-25	44	39	16	1
1998 Oct 9-12	45	36	17	2
1998 Aug 21-23	42	39	17	2

1998 Apr 17-19	31	48	19	2
1994 Nov 2-6	44	44	11	1
1994 Oct 7-9	40	42	18	*

Democrats/Democratic leaners

2006 Apr 7-9	48	43	8	1
2006 Jan 6-8	48	44	7	1
2002 Oct 31-Nov 3	38	46	13	3
1998 Oct 29-Nov 1	39	44	15	2
1998 Oct 23-25	32	51	16	1
1998 Oct 9-12	41	45	13	1
1998 Aug 21-23	37	41	18	4
1998 Apr 17-19	31	48	19	2
1994 Nov 2-6	35	50	14	1
1994 Oct 7-9	29	50	18	3

Registered voters

2006 Apr 7-9	42	44	13	1
2006 Jan 6-8	46	37	15	1
2002 Oct 31-Nov 3	41	42	15	2
1998 Oct 29-Nov 1	41	43	15	1
1998 Oct 23-25	37	44	18	1
1998 Oct 9-12	45	38	16	1
1998 Aug 21-23	39	39	19	3
1998 Apr 17-19	31	47	20	2
1994 Nov 2-6	40	45	14	1
1994 Oct 7-9	34	44	20	2

* Less than 0.5%

(vol.) = Volunteered response