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Republicans, Democrats Differ in View of Nation's Top Problems

Democrats nearly twice as likely as Republicans to say the Iraq war is the top problem

by Joseph Carroll

PRINCETON, NJ -- The current situation in Iraq is the nation's most salient issue, according to responses from Gallup's long-standing trend question that asks Americans, without prompting, to name "the most important problem facing this country today." Republicans and Democrats agree that the war in Iraq is the top issue facing the country, but Democrats are nearly twice as likely as Republicans to mention the war. Republicans are much more likely to say terrorism, morality, national security, and immigration are among the top problems. Democrats are more inclined to say unemployment or jobs and government dissatisfaction.

The results to this question have remained stable over the past several months. So, Gallup combined the results of three surveys between January and March on this topic to more closely examine partisan differences in perceptions of the nation's top problem.

Americans' Most Important Problem

The war in Iraq continues to be one of the dominant stories in the news and could potentially play a significant role in this year's mid-term Congressional elections. It's not surprising then that the war in Iraq is mentioned more than twice as often as any other specific issue as the most important problem facing the country today.

Overall, one in five Americans (22%) mentions the war in Iraq as the top problem. Other issues that follow the war in Iraq include the general state of the economy (10%), dissatisfaction with the government (9%), terrorism (8%), healthcare issues (8%), unemployment or jobs (7%), ethics and morality (6%), fuel prices (5%), and education (5%).

Most Important Problem Facing the United States

Results based on January-March 2006 aggregate

	%
War in Iraq/Fear of war	22
Economy in general	10
Government/Congress/president/poor leadership/corruption	9
Terrorism	8
Healthcare/health costs	8
Unemployment/jobs	7
Ethics/morals/religious decline/dishonesty/lack of integrity/family decline	6
Fuel/oil prices	5
Education	5
Immigration/illegal immigration	4
Federal budget deficit	4
National security	4
Poverty/hunger/homelessness	4
Foreign aid/focus overseas	3
Judicial system/courts/laws	2
Social Security	2
Lack of money	2
International problems/foreign affairs	2
Lack of energy sources/energy crisis	2

Crime/violence	2
High cost of living/inflation	1
Medicare	1
Lack of respect for each other	1
Taxes	1
Natural disaster response	1
Unifying the country	1
Gap between the rich and poor	1
Children's behavior/way they are raised	1
Drugs	1
Environment/pollution	1
Abortion issues	1
Wage issues	1
Welfare	1
Foreign trade/trade deficit	1
Abuse of power	1
Race relations	1
The media	1
Corporate corruption	1

Partisan Views on Nation's Most Important Problem

While both Republicans and Democrats cite the situation in Iraq as the most important problem facing the country, the two groups differ in their views of the significance of several other issues facing the country at this time.

Most Important Problem by Party Affiliation

Results based on January-March 2006 aggregate

	Reps. Inds. Dems.		
	%	%	%
War in Iraq/Fear of war	17	20	31
Terrorism	14	7	4
Ethics/morals/religious decline/dishonesty/lack of integrity/family decline	9	5	3
Government/Congress/president/poor leadership/corruption	8	7	12
Economy in general	8	11	11
Healthcare/health costs	6	8	9
Immigration/illegal immigration	6	5	2
National security	6	3	2
Unemployment/jobs	5	8	9
Fuel/oil prices	5	5	5
Education	4	6	4
Federal budget deficit	3	3	5
Poverty/hunger/homelessness	2	5	4
Foreign aid/focus overseas	2	3	4
Judicial system/courts/laws	2	2	2
Social Security	2	1	2
Lack of money	2	1	2
Lack of energy sources/energy crisis	2	2	1
Lack of respect for each other	2	1	1
Unifying the country	2	1	1
International problems/foreign affairs	1	2	2
High cost of living/inflation	1	1	2
Medicare	1	1	2
Crime/violence	1	2	1
Children's behavior/way they are raised	1	2	1
Taxes	1	1	1
Natural disaster response	1	2	1
Abortion issues	1	1	--
Welfare	1	1	*
Foreign trade/trade deficit	1	1	*
The media	1	*	*

Gap between the rich and poor	*	1	2
Environment/pollution	*	2	1
Drugs	*	1	1
Wage issues	*	1	1
Race relations	*	1	1
Abuse of power	*	*	1
Corporate corruption	*	1	*
* Less than 0.5%			

Democrats more frequently mention these three issues as the top problems:

- ***The situation in Iraq.*** Democrats mention the war in Iraq or fear of war nearly twice as frequently as Republicans, 31% to 17% respectively.
- ***Dissatisfaction with government.*** Twelve percent of Democrats say dissatisfaction with government, poor leadership, or corruption is the nation's most important problem. This is slightly lower among Republicans, at 8%.
- ***Unemployment and jobs.*** Nine percent of Democrats mention unemployment or jobs as the top problem, compared with 5% of Republicans.

Republicans, meanwhile, are more likely than Democrats to say the following issues are the most important:

- ***Terrorism.*** Fourteen percent of Republicans mention terrorism as the most important problem facing the country, compared with just 4% of Democrats. Terrorism ranks second, after the situation in Iraq, as the top problem among Republicans.
- ***Ethics and morality.*** There is a six-point difference between the percentage of Republicans (9%) and Democrats (3%) who say ethics, morals, family decline, and lack of integrity are the most important problems facing the country.
- ***Immigration/illegal immigration.*** Although the immigration issue ranks fairly low on the minds of either party group, Republicans (6%) are more likely than Democrats (2%) to mention it. In the March Gallup Poll, 8% of Republicans mentioned immigration, compared with 3% of Democrats.
- ***National security.*** Again, this issue is not highly prominent among either group; still, it is mentioned more frequently by Republicans (6%) than by Democrats (2%).

Survey Methods

Results are based on telephone interviews with 3,007 national adults, aged 18 and older, conducted Jan. 9-12, 2006, Feb. 6-9, 2006, and March 13-16, 2006. For results based on the total sample of national adults, one can say with 95% confidence that the maximum error attributable to sampling and other random effects is ± 2 percentage points.

For results based on the sample of 963 Republicans, the maximum error attributable to sampling and other random effects is ± 4 percentage points.

For results based on the sample of 942 Democrats, the maximum error attributable to sampling and other random effects is ± 4 percentage points.

For results based on the sample of 1,058 independents, 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.