

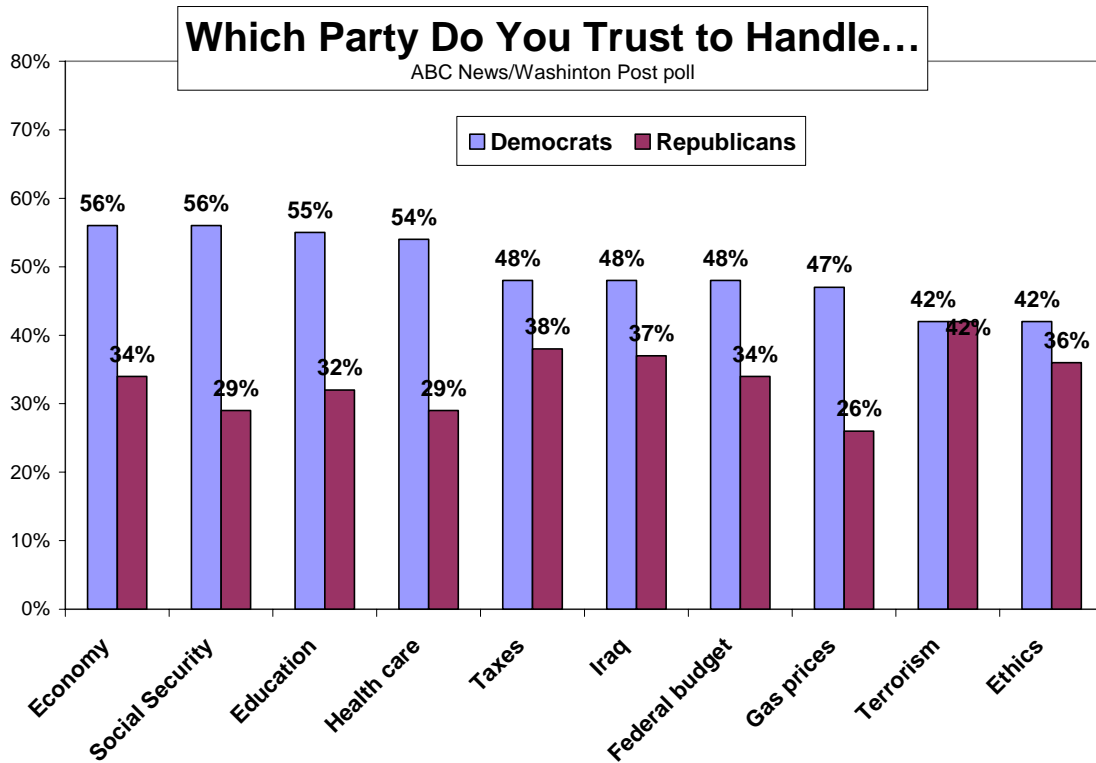
A Year from the '06 Midterms

The Democrats Lead on Issues

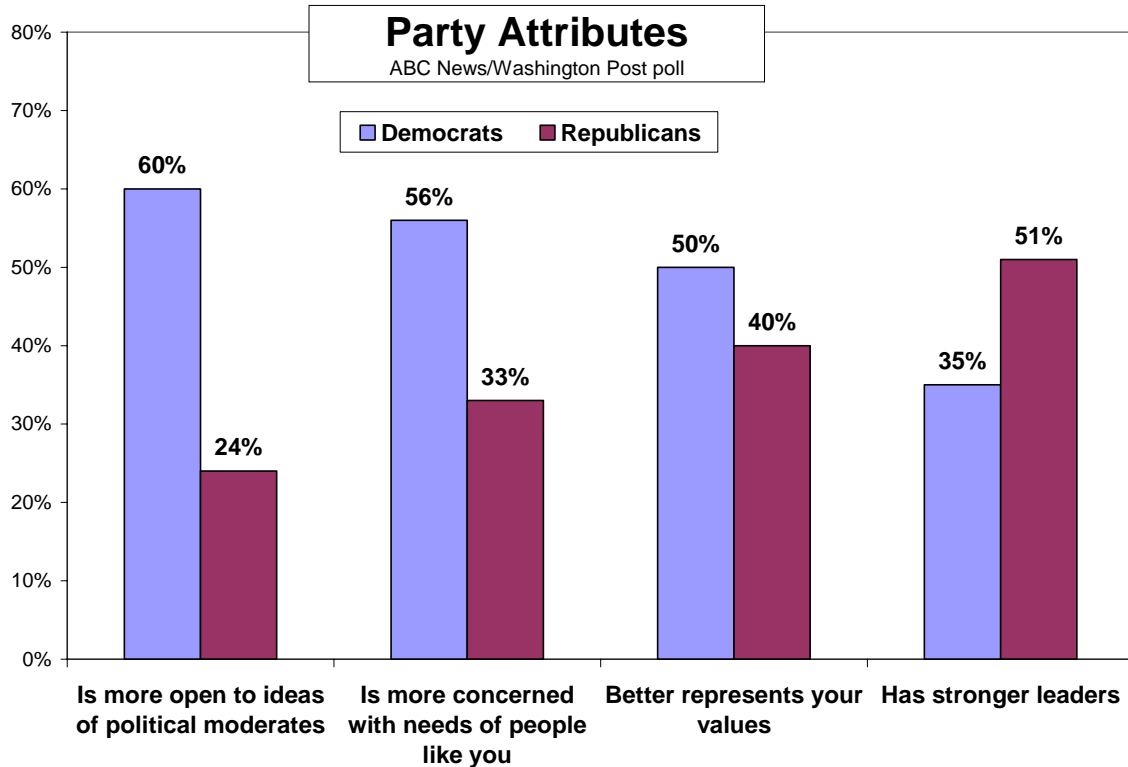
A year out from the 2006 midterms, the Democrats hold an extraordinary lead in voter preferences – but far less of an advantage in the practical elements it can take to turn an out-party's hopes into votes: leadership, anti-incumbency and a unified theme.

Opportunity is there for the Democrats: Capitalizing on George W. Bush's troubles, the party has a 12-point advantage over the Republicans in trust to handle the nation's main problems, and it leads in nine of 10 individual issues, with some huge gains from three years ago. In the tenth – Bush's trademark, handling terrorism – the Democrats run even.

Indeed 55 percent of Americans in this ABC News/Washington Post poll say they'd like to see the Democrats take control of Congress in 2006. And if the election were today, registered voters would favor the Democrat in their congressional district by 52-37 percent. That 15-point margin is numerically the biggest for the Democrats since an ABC/Post poll in September 1984 (they ultimately lost 14 seats), although about the same as a 14-point Democratic lead in one poll in 1996 (when they gained nine).



The Democrats' advantage on issues extends to some surprising areas – Iraq and the economy, for example – and show striking gains from late 2002. So does their edge in attributes: They hold a 10-point lead, 50-40 percent, as the party that “better represents your personal values.”



But a year can be a millennium in political terms, and midterm elections are far more complicated than a single popularity contest. With incumbent re-election rates usually over 90 percent, it takes a nationalized congressional election – with a differentiated, unifying theme and anti-incumbent sentiment – to create real change. The template is the Republicans' realigning election of 1994, when they gained 52 House seats and the control they still enjoy today.

Those elements, thus far, are lacking for 2006. Sixty percent of Americans approve of the work their own representative is doing (compared with 49 percent in October 1994). Despite trailing virtually everywhere else, the Republicans hold a 16-point advantage, 51-35 percent, as the party that has stronger leaders. And Republicans are more unified behind their party's leadership than are Democrats behind theirs.

But perhaps the biggest challenge for the Democrats is differentiation: Even with their edge on issues, just 44 percent of Americans say the Democrats are offering the country a clear direction that's different from the Republicans. (And notably, just 38 percent of independents say so.) That suggests that the current state of play says more about Republican weaknesses than Democratic strengths.

BUSH – While the Democrats struggle to find a compelling message, Republican candidates may seek distance from their president, complicating Bush’s efforts to govern in the year ahead. By nearly a 2-1 margin, 34-18 percent, Americans say they’re more likely to oppose than to support a candidate who’s closely associated with Bush.

And independents – the key swing voters – say by a slightly wider margin, 37-12 percent, that they’re more apt to oppose a candidate who’s closely aligned with Bush.

That reflects Bush’s current difficulties – a career-low 39 percent job approval rating and weakness across issues and personal attributes – brought on by difficulties in Iraq, the troubled Hurricane Katrina response, economic concerns and the ethics cloud over the White House.

Ethics, though, do not look like a Democratic advantage: Americans roughly divide on which party has a higher level of ethics and honesty – 16 percent say the Democrats, 12 percent say the Republicans – and the big majority, 71 percent, rate them the same.

There is also somewhat of a pox on both houses in public attitudes. Just 46 percent of Americans express confidence in the government’s ability to get things done. Fifty-nine percent disapprove of the way Congress is doing its job, and 61 percent disapprove of the way the Republicans in Congress specifically are performing. But the Democrats, while better-rated, hardly have bragging rights: Fifty-four percent see their performance negatively as well.

CHANGE – That said, the change in preferences between the parties on issues since they were last asked in an ABC/Post poll in late 2002 is vast. Then the two parties were rated about evenly in trust to handle the economy; now the Democrats lead by 22 points, 56-34 percent. On Iraq, the Republicans led by 26 points; now the Democrats lead by 11. On terrorism, the Republicans led by 36 points; now the parties are even.

	Now	12/02
Trust to handle:	Dem-Rep	Dem-Rep
The economy	56-34% D+22	44-45% R+1
Terrorism	42-42 even	25-61 R+36
Iraq	48-37 D+11	30-56 R+26
Education	55-32 D+23	49-40 D+9
Taxes	48-38 D+10	46-44 D+2
Social Security	56-29 D+27	54-34 D+20
Health care	54-29 D+25	55-33 D+22

As strong as they currently are on issues, the Democrats two biggest leads are on attributes: By 33-points, 56-33 percent, they’re seen as the party “more concerned with the needs of people like you.” And they hold a 36-point advantage, 60-24 percent, as the party that’s “more open to the ideas of people who are political moderates.” The challenge for the Democrats in the next year is to consolidate that image advantage into actual votes across congressional districts.

METHODOLOGY – This ABC News/Washington Post poll was conducted by telephone Oct. 30-Nov. 2, 2005, among a random national sample of 1,202 adults. The results have a three-point error margin. Sampling, data collection and tabulation by TNS Intersearch of Horsham, Pa.

Analysis by Gary Langer.

ABC News polls can be found at ABCNEWS.com at <http://abcnews.com/pollvault.html>.

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Full results follow (*= less than 0.5 percent).

1-2. Previously released.

3. If the election for the U.S. House of Representatives in November 2006 were being held today, would you vote for (the Democratic candidate) or (the Republican candidate) in your congressional district? (IF OTHER, NEITHER, DK, REF) Would you lean toward the (Democratic candidate) or toward the (Republican candidate)?

Net Leaned Vote:

		Dem cand.	Rep cand.	Other (vol.)	Neither (vol.)	Will not vote (vol.)	No opin.
11/2/05	All	53	36	1	3	2	5
11/2/05	RV	52	37	1	4	2	6
11/4/02	LV	48	48	1	1	0	2
11/3/02	LV	48	48	*	1	0	2
11/2/02	LV	50	49	*	1	0	2
10/27/02	LV	47	49	1	1	0	3
9/26/02	All	46	42	2	2	5	3
9/26/02	RV	47	44	2	3	2	3
9/26/02	LV	49	47	1	2	0	2
7/15/02	All	47	45	1	1	1	4
7/15/02	RV	47	46	1	1	1	4
1/27/02*	RV	43	50	NA	2	1	5
9/6/00	RV	49	42		2	1	6
7/23/00	RV	46	45		3	1	5
2/27/00	RV	45	46		2	1	5
10/31/99	RV	50	43		3	1	3
9/2/99	RV	48	44		3	*	5
3/14/99	RV	50	41		2	1	6
2/14/99	RV	48	41		3	1	7
1/30/99	RV	49	39		8	1	3
11/1/98	RV	51	43		4	*	2
10/25/98	RV	48	43		3	1	4
10/18/98	RV	49	44		3	1	4
9/28/98	RV	49	44		2	*	4
8/21/98	RV	48	45		3	1	3
7/12/98	RV	47	45		2	*	6
1/31/98	RV	49	40		2	1	8
1/19/98	RV	47	44		3	1	5
10/8/96	RV	51	41		2	1	5
9/29/96	RV	48	41		3	1	7
9/22/96	RV	50	43		2	1	4
9/15/96	RV	49	45		1	1	4
9/4/96	RV	48	44		3	*	5
8/29/96	RV	53	39		3	1	5

8/28/96	RV	51	40	3	1	5
8/27/96	RV	51	41	3	0	5
8/26/96	RV	51	41	3	0	5
8/25/96	RV	48	43	3	1	6
8/24/96	RV	47	43	2	1	6
8/19/96	RV	49	42	3	0	6
8/18/96	RV	45	46	3	0	6
8/15/96	RV	46	43	4	1	5
8/14/96	RV	48	42	3	1	6
8/13/96	RV	49	43	3	0	5
8/12/96	RV	49	42	3	1	5
8/11/96	RV	49	40	4	1	6
8/10/96	RV	49	41	4	1	5
8/4/96	RV	48	45	2	1	4
6/30/96	RV	49	44	3	*	3
5/22/96	RV	52	41	3	1	3
3/10/96	RV	51	43	2	*	4
1/21/96	RV	52	43	3	1	1
10/1/95	RV	49	44	3	*	3
11/6/94	RV	47	42	5	2	5
10/31/94	RV	48	44	4	1	3
10/23/94	RV	50	45	2	1	2
10/9/94	RV	46	47	3	2	2
9/11/94	RV	50	45	1	1	4
8/7/94	RV	49	42	4	1	4
2/27/94	RV	50	40	8	1	2
10/21/91	RV	51	41	4	*	4
7/28/91	RV	49	41	6	*	3
6/2/91	RV	48	42	4	1	5
11/4/90	RV	51	41	5	*	3
10/14/90	RV	50	41	5	*	3
9/9/90	RV	47	46	3	*	3
7/24/90	RV	51	41	4	1	4
5/21/90	RV	47	45	5	1	2
9/21-10/10/88	RV	52	41	2	1	4
9/19/88	RV	51	39	3	1	6
6/22/85	RV	48	44	5	*	3
10/16/84	RV	52	44	2	NA	5
9/11/84	RV	53	45	2	NA	1
7/8/84	RV	58	40	2	NA	1
10/27/82	RV	58	39	NA	NA	3
10/11/82	RV	55	36	NA	NA	9
9/13/82	RV	58	36	NA	NA	6
11/22/81	RV	53	41	"	NA	7

*1/27/02 and previous: No "other candidate" option recorded

4-10. Previously released.

11. Do you approve or disapprove of the way the U.S. Congress is doing its job?

	Approve	Disapprove	No opinion
11/2/05	37	59	4
8/28/05	37	59	4
6/5/05	41	54	4
10/29/03	40	52	9
4/30/03	57	37	6
9/26/02	51	43	6
7/15/02	57	36	7
2/21/02	57	39	4
1/27/02	58	35	7

12/19/01	59	34	7
9/9/01	45	48	7
7/30/01	48	48	4
4/22/01	58	33	8
10/31/99	42	53	6
9/2/99	46	47	7
6/6/99	48	46	6
3/14/99	44	49	7
2/14/99	46	50	4
12/20/98	44	51	5
12/19/98	45	50	5
12/13/98	49	46	5
11/7/98	41	55	4
11/1/98	49	47	5
10/25/98	45	44	11
10/18/98	46	45	8
9/28/98	52	44	4
8/21/98	55	39	6
7/12/98	46	44	11
5/12/98	45	45	9
4/4/98	47	45	8
1/31/98	55	35	10
1/30/98	55	35	10
1/25/98	56	37	8
1/24/98	55	38	7
1/19/98	47	49	5
10/13/97	36	57	7
8/27/97	39	54	7
7/8/97	40	53	6
4/24/97	40	53	7
3/9/97	35	60	5
8/5/96	42	52	7
6/30/96	35	58	7
5/22/96	35	60	5
3/10/96	30	64	6
1/7/96	31	65	5
11/19/95	27	68	5
10/1/95	32	65	3
7/17/95	34	63	3
3/19/95	39	56	5
1/29/95	42	52	6
10/31/94	21	72	8
10/23/94	18	78	4
9/11/94	24	70	5
6/26/94	34	61	5
3/27/94	35	62	3
2/27/94	32	64	4
1/23/94	29	60	11
11/14/93	28	66	6
8/8/93	33	64	3
4/26/93	30	69	2
1/17/93	29	66	6
4/9/92	17	78	5
3/18/92	19	76	5
3/8/92	22	73	6
2/2/92	32	64	4
12/15/91	35	59	6
10/21/91	45	50	5
6/2/91	49	46	5
10/14/90	34	63	3
2/4/90	41	55	4
1/16/90	39	55	6
8/21/89	42	53	5

5/23/89	54	44	2
2/14/89	53	44	3
1/23/88*	43	53	4
6/1/87	56	40	4
6/22/85	54	37	9
5/83	33	43	24
6/81	38	40	22
6/79	19	61	20
9/78	29	49	22
6/77	34	42	24
6/75	29	54	17
8/74	48	35	17

*1/23/88 and previous: Gallup

12. Do you approve or disapprove of the way (ITEM) are doing their job?

11/2/05 - Summary Table

	Approve	Disapprove	No opinion
a. the Republicans in Congress	35	61	4
b. the Democrats in Congress	41	54	5

Trend:

a. the Republicans in Congress

	Approve	Disapprove	No opinion
11/2/05	35	61	4
6/5/05	42	56	2
6/6/99	41	52	7
3/14/99	40	56	4
7/8/97	40	54	6
9/15/96 RV	46	48	6
6/30/96	38	56	6
4/5/95	45	50	5
10/31/94	33	59	7
10/23/94	31	64	5
9/11/94	35	59	6

b. the Democrats in Congress

	Approve	Disapprove	No opinion
11/2/05	41	54	5
6/5/05	42	56	3
6/6/99	51	42	7
3/14/99	51	42	7
7/8/97	45	49	6
4/5/95	36	60	4
10/31/94	39	53	8
10/23/94	36	59	5
9/11/94	41	53	6

13. Do you approve or disapprove of the way your own representative to the U.S. House of Representatives in Congress is handling his or her job?

	Approve	Disapprove	No opinion
11/2/05	60	33	7
6/5/05	61	32	8
9/26/02	64	27	9
7/15/02	68	23	9
11/1/98	72	20	8
11/1/98 LV	73	23	5

10/18/98	68	20	11
10/18/98 LV	67	25	9
9/28/98	70	21	10
9/28/98 LV	71	23	6
7/12/98	70	18	12
1/19/98	74	19	7
4/5/95	65	25	9
10/31/94	51	38	11
10/23/94	49	43	8
9/11/94	53	35	12
6/26/94	59	31	10
3/27/94	62	26	12
1/17/93	60	29	11
4/9/92	47	39	13
3/18/92	49	40	11
2/2/92	56	32	12
12/15/91	60	28	12
10/21/91	64	27	9
6/2/91	61	26	14
10/14/90	64	29	7
5/23/89	71	18	11

14. Overall, which party, the (Democrats) or the (Republicans), do you trust to do a better job in coping with the main problems the nation faces over the next few years?

	Democrats	Republicans	Both (vol.)	Neither (vol.)	No opinion
11/2/05	49	37	3	9	3
6/5/05	46	41	1	9	2
8/11/03	39	40	3	10	7
12/15/02	41	44	2	11	2
10/27/02 LV	39	51	2	5	2
9/26/02	39	46	3	8	4
9/26/02 LV	42	49	1	7	2
7/15/02	42	45	2	7	4
1/27/02	40	44	3	10	4
4/22/01	47	40	4	7	3
7/23/00	42	42	2	9	6
9/2/99	45	39	4	9	4
6/6/99	45	35	3	13	5
3/14/99	47	37	5	9	3
2/14/99	48	37	4	7	4
10/18/98	44	36	3	12	6
10/18/98 LV	43	42	3	10	2
9/28/98	49	38	2	8	3
9/28/98 LV	45	44	1	8	2
8/21/98	48	36	4	9	3
7/12/98	45	38	3	8	6
1/31/98	47	37	4	6	7
1/19/98	45	42	2	7	4
7/8/97	44	37	2	14	3
9/15/96 RV	45	38	3	11	3
8/5/96	43	38	3	11	3
6/30/96	46	37	3	12	3
5/22/96	47	38	3	10	3
11/6/94 RV	41	39	2	12	6
10/31/94	43	43	2	8	4
10/23/94	39	40	3	15	3
9/11/94	43	40	4	11	3
6/26/94	41	36	3	14	5
2/27/94	46	32	4	16	3

11/14/93	42	39	3	11	4
1/17/93	49	28	5	13	5
7/8/92	48	38	1	8	4
6/7/92	43	37	3	11	6
3/11/92	45	37	1	11	5
3/8/92	51	36	1	7	5
2/2/92	49	39	2	7	3
12/15/91	39	37	3	15	6
10/21/91	39	40	3	13	5

15. Which political party, the (Democrats) or the (Republicans), do you trust to do a better job handling (ITEM)?

11/2/05 - Summary Table*

	Democrats	Republicans	Both (vol.)	Neither (vol.)	No op.
a. The economy	56	34	1	8	1
b. The U.S. campaign against terrorism	42	42	4	10	3
c. The situation in Iraq	48	37	2	11	2
d. Education	55	32	4	7	2
e. Social Security	56	29	1	11	3
f. Gasoline prices	47	26	2	21	5
g. Health care	54	29	2	12	3
h. Taxes	48	38	1	11	1
i. The federal budget	48	34	2	13	2
j. Ethics in government	42	36	3	16	3

*Half sample asked items a-e, other half asked items f-j.

Trend where available:

a. The economy

	Democrats	Republicans	Both (vol.)	Neither (vol.)	No op.
11/2/05	56	34	1	8	1
12/15/02	44	45	4	6	1
10/27/02* LV	43	48	3	3	2
9/26/02 LV	50	41	3	5	1
9/26/02	47	39	3	6	5

*10/27/02 and previous: "The economy and jobs"

b. The U.S. campaign against terrorism

	Democrats	Republicans	Both (vol.)	Neither (vol.)	No op.
11/2/05	42	42	4	10	3
12/15/02	25	61	5	6	2
10/27/02* LV	26	61	4	5	4
9/26/02 LV	34	52	4	7	3
9/26/02	30	51	6	6	8

*10/27/02 and previous: "The war on terrorism"

c. The situation in Iraq

	Democrats	Republicans	Both (vol.)	Neither (vol.)	No op.
11/2/05	48	37	2	11	2
12/15/02*	30	56	4	7	3
10/27/02 LV	31	58	3	4	4
9/26/02 LV	30	61	3	3	2

9/26/02 33 52 6 4 6
 *12/15/02 and previous: "The situation with Iraq and Saddam Hussein"

d. Education

	Democrats	Republicans	Both (vol.)	Neither (vol.)	No op.
11/2/05	55	32	4	7	2
12/15/02	49	40	4	5	2
10/27/02 LV	44	45	4	3	3
9/26/02 LV	47	43	3	5	1
9/26/02	46	39	4	5	6

e. Social Security

	Democrats	Republicans	Both (vol.)	Neither (vol.)	No op.
11/2/05	56	29	1	11	3
12/15/02	54	34	3	6	3
10/27/02 LV	51	39	3	4	3
9/26/02 LV	50	34	4	10	3
9/26/02	50	33	3	8	6

f. No trend.

g. Health care

	Democrats	Republicans	Both (vol.)	Neither (vol.)	No op.
11/2/05	54	29	2	12	3
12/15/02*	53	33	3	7	4
10/27/02 LV	50	39	3	5	3
9/26/02 LV	49	39	3	5	4
9/26/02	50	35	4	5	6

*12/15/02 and previous: "The cost, availability, and coverage of health insurance"

h. Taxes

	Democrats	Republicans	Both (vol.)	Neither (vol.)	No op.
11/2/05	48	38	1	11	1
12/15/02	46	44	2	6	2
9/26/02	44	44	3	6	4

i,j. No trend.

16. Whether or not you agree with them, do you think the Democrats are or are not offering the country a clear direction that's different from the Republicans?

	Yes, they are	No, they are not	No opin.
11/2/05	44	51	5

17. Which political party, the (Democrats) or the (Republicans), do you think:

11/2/05 - Summary Table*

Both Neither No

	Dems	Reps	(vol.)	(vol.)	opin.
a. better represents your own personal values	50	40	1	7	1
b. is more concerned with the needs of people like you	56	33	1	9	1
c. has stronger leaders	35	51	5	8	2
d. is more open to the ideas of people who are political moderates	60	24	2	9	5

*Half sample asked items a-b, other half asked items c-d.

Trend where available:

a. Better represents your own personal values

	Dems	Reps	Both (vol.)	Neither (vol.)	No opin.
11/2/05	50	40	1	7	1
4/24/05	47	38	2	10	2
3/14/99	47	39	3	8	3

b,c. No trend.

d. Is more open to the ideas of people who are political moderates

	Dems	Reps	Both (vol.)	Neither (vol.)	No opin.
11/2/05	60	24	2	9	5
7/15/02	53	32	4	4	6
1/27/02	49	38	3	3	7
6/3/01	57	32	2	6	4

18. When it comes to the level of ethics and honesty among politicians, do you think (the Democrats are generally better than the Republicans), (the Republicans are generally better than the Democrats), or isn't there much difference between them when it comes to ethics and honesty?

	Democrats better than Republicans	Republicans better than Democrats	Not much difference	No opin.
11/2/05	16	12	71	1
3/27/94	10	8	81	1
5/23/89	13	8	79	1

19. If a candidate for Congress supports Bush in many areas, would that make you more likely to (support) that candidate for Congress, more likely to (oppose) that candidate, or wouldn't it make much difference in your vote?

	More likely to support	More likely to oppose	Wouldn't make much difference	No opin.
11/2/05	18	34	48	1

20. Regardless of your local contest, which party would you like to see in control of Congress after the congressional elections a year from now, the (Democrats) or the (Republicans)?

	Democrats	Republicans	Neither (vol.)	No opin.
11/2/05	55	37	6	2

21. When the government in Washington decides to solve a problem, how much confidence do you have that the problem actually will be solved: A lot, some, just a little, or none at all?

	---- Confidence ----			----- Little/No Confidence -----			No
	NET	A lot	Some	NET	Just a little	None at all	opin.
11/2/05	46	7	38	54	36	18	*
9/6/02	53	8	45	47	38	9	1
1/27/02	66	14	52	34	27	7	1
6/25/00*	51	8	43	48	35	13	1
12/4/95**	39	4	35	61	38	23	*
5/15/94	36	4	31	64	42	22	*
1/23/94	43	4	39	56	40	16	1
2/28/93	51	5	46	49	37	12	*
4/9/92	50	4	46	50	38	12	1
10/29/91	37	7	31	62	38	23	1

*NPR/Kaiser/Harvard

**Kaiser/Harvard/Washington Post

22-44. Previously released.

45. (ASKED OF LEANED DEMOCRATS) In your view, is the leadership of the Democratic Party currently taking the party in the (right direction) or in the (wrong direction)?

	Right direction	Wrong direction	No opin.
11/2/05	62	30	8

46. (ASKED OF LEANED REPUBLICANS) In your view, is the leadership of the Republican Party currently taking the party in the (right direction) or in the (wrong direction)?

	Right direction	Wrong direction	No opin.
11/2/05	76	23	1

47. (ASKED OF LEANED REPUBLICANS) In your view, is President Bush currently leading the Republican party in the (right direction) or in the (wrong direction)?

	Right direction	Wrong direction	No opin.
11/2/05	72	25	3

END