

## **Much-Diminished GOP Absorbs the Voters' Ire**

A much-diminished Republican president and his party stood before the voters Tuesday, their support corroded by an unpopular war. And the voters let them know it.

Fifty-seven percent in the national exit poll disapproved of the way George W. Bush is handling his job, 56 percent disapproved of the war in Iraq and 55 percent – the most since 1994 – said the country is headed seriously off on the wrong track.

It mattered: Each of these groups voted overwhelmingly for Democrats running for the U.S. House, giving the Democrats a 53-45 percent advantage in national House vote in the exit poll, their best since 1990.

Bush job approval	2006	2004	2002*
Approve	43%	53	67
Disapprove	57	46	31
Strongly approve	19%	33	45
Strongly disapprove	41	35	20

\*ABC News pre-election poll

Indeed the Republicans lost huge chunks of crucial voting groups they'd won in recent years. Most important were independents, the quintessential swing voters: They favored Democrats by a huge 57-39 percent, the Democrats' largest margin among independents in 20 years. Democrats won women by 55-43 percent, their best margin since 1986; they even eked out a 50-47 percent tally among men, their best since 1992.

The president and the war were the lightning rods of the election. Among Bush approvers, 84 percent voted for the Republican candidate in House races. Among disapprovers – the majority of voters – 82 percent voted for a Democrat.

War in Iraq	2006	2004
Approve	42%	51
Disapprove	56	45
Strongly approve	19%	29
Strongly disapprove	39	32

Another sign of the glum mood: Forty percent said they expect life for the next generation of Americans to be worse, up from 21 percent in 2000 and 33 percent in 1996.

Given such sentiments, voters by a 14-point margin were more apt to say they were voting to show opposition to Bush (36 percent) than to show him support (22 percent). The gap was decisive. House Republicans won voters who were supporting Bush, and also those who said Bush had no impact on their vote. But the anti-Bush voters were great enough in number to make the difference for the Democrats.

	All	House vote	
		Dem	Rep
Voting to oppose Bush	36%	93%	5%
Voting to support Bush	22	6	93
Bush not a factor	39	41	56

The 36 percent who said they were voting to oppose Bush was higher than the 21 percent who voted to show opposition to Bill Clinton in 1998, during the Clinton/Lewinsky scandal; and the 27 percent who did so in 1994, when the Republicans took control of Congress.

In another measure, among voters who said they supported Bush in 2004, 15 percent supported Democrats for House this year. Only about half as many John Kerry supporters – seven percent – voted Republican for House.

Another result shows the direction of the voters’ ire: In 1994, 65 percent of disaffected “wrong track” voters voted for Republicans for House. This year, among disaffected voters, even more – 78 percent – voted the opposite way, for Democrats.

Country is on	2006	2004	2000	1998	1996	1994
Right track	41%	50	65	59	53	39
Wrong direction	55	47	31	37	43	56

Similarly, among the 61 percent of voters who said they disapprove of how Congress is handling its job, seven in 10 voted for Democrats for House. In 1994, Republicans won House disapprovers, but fewer of them – 58 percent.

**GROUPS** – The vote patterns show other problems for the GOP: It was isolated in the South, with the Democrats winning a majority in the Midwest for the first time in a decade. GOP gains among Hispanic voters in 2004 were reversed: This year 69 percent of Hispanic voters favored Democrats for House, up 14 points.

Further:

-Young voters, age 18 to 29, voted for Democrats by a huge 60-38 percent margin. That compares to 55-45 percent in 2004, and was its best for the Democrats back to 1986.

-College graduates voted 53-46 percent for Democrats – the Democrats’ best margin in this group in exit polls since 1982.

-Ten percent of voters decided on their choice just on Election Day – and 61-36 percent voted for Democrats.

-White Catholics voted 50-49 percent for Democrats, their best in this traditional swing group since 1992.

-Whites overall voted narrowly Republican, by 51-47 percent, again the best for the Democrats since 1992.

-In 2004 married men favored Republicans for House by an 18-point margin; this year it was four points. Married women in 2004 voted Republican by nine points; this year they split about evenly, 48-50. Unmarried men voted for House Democrats by 62-36 percent, compared with 53-44 percent two years ago.

MESSAGE – The voters’ message was unmistakable. Just 43 percent approved of Bush’s job performance, down 11 points from 2004 and a vast 25 points below its level just before the 2002 midterm election. Forty-one percent "strongly" disapproved, more than double the number of strong approvers (19 percent). Intensity of sentiment by contrast was about equal in 2004 – 33 percent strongly approved of the president’s performance, 35 percent strongly disapproved. And in 2002 it was strong approvers who dominated.

Views on the war in Iraq have followed a similar path. In the 2004 exit poll, 51 percent approved of the war – just enough to keep Bush out of serious trouble. This year, just 42 percent approved. And 39 percent now "strongly" disapprove of the war, up from 32 percent two years ago.

The Republicans’ pushback to concerns about the war in Iraq has been the broader U.S. campaign against terrorism, the issue that won Bush re-election in 2004. This year, it didn’t work: Just 29 percent of voters said they trusted only the Republicans to make the country safer, far down from the 49 percent who only trusted Bush to handle terrorism in 2004.

Moreover, among terrorism voters – people who said terrorism is "extremely important" to their vote – the Republicans held only a 53-46 percent advantage. By contrast, the Democrats won by 60-39 percent among people who called the war in Iraq extremely important, and by a nearly identical 59-39 percent who said the same of the economy.

Voters by 59-35 percent also said the war in Iraq has not improved long-term U.S. security; that compares to 52-46 percent in 2004.

Indeed the election looks to have been nationalized around these concerns. Sixty percent of voters said they were casting their House vote mainly on the basis of national issues,

vs. 34 percent voting on local issues. But it didn't much matter: Democrats won both groups, albeit "national issue" voters by a wider margin.

Finally, the national exit poll deflated some pre-election speculation. Some analysts had anticipated a lower turnout by conservatives and evangelical white Protestants – both core Republican support groups – in the expectation they were dispirited.

It didn't happen: Evangelical white Protestants accounted for 22 percent of all voters, essentially the same as their 21 percent share in 2004. (There was no reliable exit poll in 2002). This year 26 percent of them voted for Democrats for House, about the same as their 24 percent vote for Democrats two years ago.

Conservatives, similarly, accounted for about the same number of voters this year as in 2004 (32 percent vs 34 percent) and voted about the same (20 percent for House Democrats, vs. 17 percent in 2004.) That three-point change compares to an eight-point shift among independents.

Nor do the results support the notion (also unsupported in 2004 exit poll data) that ballot initiatives would increase turnout among specific groups. This year, minimum wage initiatives were approved in Ohio, Montana, and Missouri, but turnout among its highest-supporting groups was not consistently higher than in past years.

Similarly, there were exit polls in three states that passed gay marriage bans, Virginia, Tennessee and Wisconsin. But turnout in these states did not increase among groups most apt to support the amendments – Republicans, conservatives and religious white Protestants. And in Arizona, where a gay marriage ban was defeated, turnout among liberals and Democrats was likewise unchanged.

STATES – A state-by-state analysis of some of the leading Senate races follows.

### **Connecticut:**

Remarkably intense negative feelings about Bush and the war in Iraq helped Ned Lamont give Joe Lieberman a run for his money; indeed Lieberman lost overwhelmingly among Democrats. But, extraordinarily, he won overwhelmingly among Republicans, as well as holding the center.

Lieberman, running as an independent after losing the Democratic primary to Lamont, won just 33 percent of Democrats, but 54 percent of independents and 70 percent of Republicans. He also won a majority of moderates (55 percent) and two-thirds of conservatives. Lamont won 69 percent liberals.

Nearly all of Lamont's voters disapproved of Bush and the war, but Lieberman's camp proved more complex. While 51 percent of his supporters disapproved of Bush's job performance, 71 percent of them said he agrees with the president the right amount. And half of Lieberman's supporters disapproved of the Iraq war but voted for the senator despite his support for it.

Not only did 66 percent of Connecticut voters disapprove of Bush's job performance, but half "strongly" disapproved. Lamont won support from 55 percent of Bush disapprovers, as well as nearly six in 10 of the 66 percent who disapproved of the Iraq war.

Forty percent said they voted to express opposition to the president, more so than in other states; just 15 percent to show support for Bush. Most of the pro-Bush voters (72 percent) voted for Lieberman. Anti-Bush voters - 79 percent of them - backed Lamont.

Though the newly independent Lieberman is expected to caucus with Democrats in the next Congress, the 55 percent of voters who wanted Democrats to control Congress voted broadly (66 percent) for Lamont.

A weakness for Lamont was that 57 percent said he lacks the experience to serve in the Senate; of those who felt that way, 13 percent still voted for him.

### **Missouri:**

Souring views of Bush helped Claire McCaskill oust Republican incumbent Jim Talent, in a race in which she accused her opponent of trying to be Bush's "best friend." In 2004, 54 percent of Missouri voters approved of Bush's job performance. Two years later, 45 percent approved.

Moreover, 32 percent of Missouri voters said they were casting their ballots to show opposition to Bush - 13 points more than the number saying they were showing support for him. They voted overwhelmingly for McCaskill. That alone helped tip the scale to McCaskill; Talent received majority support from those who voted to show support for Bush, or said he wasn't a factor.

In another change since 2004, 51 percent of Missouri voters said they disapprove of the war in Iraq; in 2004, by contrast, 54 percent approved. This too boosted McCaskill.

Critically, independents backed McCaskill 51-43 percent. Sixty-one percent of independents said they disapproved of Bush's job performance; independent voters were 24 points more likely to say they were voting to oppose Bush rather than support him; and 56 percent disapproved of the war in Iraq.

McCaskill won women (who are more apt to be Democrats) by 51-45 percent; Tester won men 51-46 percent.

On the issues, Talent won nearly six in 10 voters who called terrorism "extremely important" in their vote and two-thirds who said so about same-sex marriage or abortion. McCaskill, for her part, countered with six in 10 voters who called Iraq or the economy "extremely important" in their vote.

Endorsed by the Missouri AFL-CIO, McCaskill was strong among union voters, winning two-thirds of them.

**Montana:**

Conrad Burns can blame his own longevity, and a brush with scandal - not just George W. Bush and the war in Iraq – for his defeat in Montana.

Fifty-nine percent of voters said Burns, a three-term incumbent, had been in office too long – and he lost this group to John Tester by 77-20 percent. And, given his association with disgraced lobbyist Jack Abramoff, just 36 percent said Burns has high ethical standards - while 52 percent said Tester does. Indeed, among the 39 percent who called corruption in government extremely important in their vote, Tester won by a huge 46-point margin.

If that wasn't enough, 52 percent of Montana voters disapproved of Bush's performance (up from just 39 percent in 2004) and 51 percent disapproved of the Iraq war (up from 42 percent in '04). Both were very strong groups for Tester.

Tester won broad support from swing independent voters, winning them by a 24-point margin, 59-35 percent. In 2000, by contrast, Burns lost independents by just five points. Burns also narrowly lost white Catholics, a swing group he carried in 2000. And he suffered a sharp decline among men, winning just 50 percent of their votes, 18 points fewer than in 2000. (Women favored Tester by seven points, about the same as their margin for the Democrat six years ago).

The election may have been more a rejection of Burns and Bush than an endorsement of Tester. More than six in ten said their vote was in support of their candidate and not against his opponent; people in this group split between Burns and Tester. However, among the 34 percent who said their vote was against their candidate's opponent, Tester won the vote by 56-41 percent.

Likewise, 29 percent said their vote was in opposition to Bush, 21 percent said it was to support Bush and nearly half said Bush was not a factor. Tester won virtually all the votes among the Bush opposers and Burns won almost all the vote of Bush supporters. Burns also won by 54 to 43 among the voters who said Bush was not a factor. The eight-point margin of Bush opposers over supporters was enough to be decisive for Tester.

Late campaigning by Bush in Montana did not appear to help Burns much: An overwhelming 82 percent said they made their vote choice within the last month or earlier. Tester won in this group by 51 to 47 percent.

**New Jersey:**

Disapproval of Bush and the war in Iraq trumped concerns about ethics to rally Democrats around Bob Menendez in New Jersey.

Of the majority who panned both the president's job performance (64 percent) and the war in Iraq (63 percent), about three-quarters voted for Menendez. The incumbent

Democrat also won virtually all (90 percent) of the 52 percent of voters who wanted the Democrats to control Congress next year.

Thomas Kean Jr.'s criticisms took a toll, with 62 percent saying Menendez lacks high ethical standards. But more than a third of those people (33 percent) held their nose and voted for Menendez anyway.

Democrats, Republicans and independents showed up in virtually the same proportions as they did in the 2000 race for this seat. But Menendez enjoyed a more loyal base than his predecessor, winning 92 percent among Democrats (+7 points from 2000). And Democrats predominated, accounting for four in 10 voters.

The electorate was somewhat more polarized, with slightly more liberals and slightly more conservatives, but fewer moderates, than in 2000.

Menendez won seven in 10 Hispanic voters, but they're a small group in the state, accounting for fewer than one in 10 New Jersey voters.

Other issues:

-The bruising nature of this campaign left a sour taste with voters; 56 percent said both candidates unfairly attacked each other.

-Five years after the attacks that killed nearly 3,000 in neighboring New York, nearly eight in 10 voters worried about another major terrorist attack in the US.

### **New York:**

Independents and suburbanites broadly supported Hillary Clinton, a shift from 2000 that helped her win a second term by a much larger margin than she won her first.

Sixty-four percent of independents backed Clinton, compared with 46 percent in 2000. And she won 62 percent of suburban voters, compared with just 43 percent in 2000.

Clinton increased her support among Democrats and Republicans alike, but more slightly in both cases. Twenty percent of Republicans supported her, compared with 14 percent in 2000 – six points better, compared with her 18-point improvement among independents.

Similarly, compared with liberals and conservatives, Clinton gained the most ground – 15 points – among moderates, who backed her by 69-29 percent. She won 28 percent of conservatives, nine points more than in 2000, but seven in 10 conservatives still backed her opponent.

Indeed Gov.-elect Eliot Spitzer did considerably better with New York Republicans, winning 31 percent support compared with Clinton's 20 percent. Spitzer also won 33 percent of conservatives; similarly, back in 1994, in his last election to this Senate seat,

Daniel Patrick Moynihan won more Republicans (27 percent) and slightly more conservatives (32 percent) than Clinton.

	% Vote for Clinton	
	2006	2000
Democrats	94%	85
Republicans	20	14
Independents	64	46
Liberal	91	82
Moderate	69	54
Conservative	28	19
City>50K	80	72
Suburbs	62	43
Town/Rural	56	51

Clinton was helped by broad disapproval of Bush – 74 percent of New York voters disapproved of his job performance, including 56 percent who disapproved “strongly.” These groups voted overwhelmingly for Clinton. Similarly, 72 percent disapproved of the war in Iraq – and more than eight in 10 of them backed Clinton.

Some other highlights:

New York voters were more likely to say the country is less safe from terrorism today than it was before September 11, 2001 – 51 percent said so, compared with 42 percent who said the country was safer. Indeed, 76 percent said they were worried that there will be another major terrorist attack in the country.

Fifty-seven percent of New York voters said Clinton would make a good president. Fewer, 46 percent, said so of Giuliani, and just 15 percent said so of Pataki.

### **Ohio:**

Ohioans voted heavily against the Republican administration in Washington, resulting in incumbent Sen. Mike DeWine’s defeat in his bid for a third term.

Exit poll results found that nearly six in 10 voters disapproved of Bush’s performance in office, and 85 percent of them voted for Sherrod Brown. Fifty-six percent of voters disapproved of the war in Iraq, up sharply from 40 percent in 2006. And again, among war disapprovers, 82 percent voted for Brown.

Indeed Ohio voters by a nearly 2-1 margin said they were voting to show opposition to Bush (34 percent) as to show support for him (19 percent).

Independents – the classic swing voters – broke for Brown by more than 30 points, 65 percent to 35 percent. But Brown also did better in his base, winning 91 percent of Democrats. DeWine had siphoned off a quarter of Democrats in 2000.



Brown even edged DeWine among white voters, 52-48 percent – a group DeWine won by 2-1 in 2000 – while Brown won more than eight in 10 black voters, customary for a Democrat. And 68 percent of union households went for Brown; DeWine had won 50 percent of the union vote in 2000, compared to just 32 percent in his defeat this year.

The economy was also a factor for voters: Among Ohioans who said the state's economy is in good shape, 71 percent voted for DeWine; but of those who rated the economy negatively, three-quarters voted for Brown. And Ohio voters were negative rather than positive on the economy by a huge margin, 62 to 37 percent.

Ethics brought a pox on both houses: About four in 10 voters said neither the Republican nor the Democratic parties had high ethical standards. But only those who said the Democrats had high ethical standards were far more likely to vote for Brown, the Democrat.

### **Pennsylvania:**

Bob Casey Jr.'s victory was a product of a disgruntled Pennsylvania electorate, dissatisfied with Bush's job performance, and unhappy with the conduct of the Iraq war. More than six in ten voters disapproved of Bush and disapproved of the war alike, and Casey won these groups by 76 and 70 points respectively.

Rick Santorum lost key swing groups in this state. Independents, who voted convincingly for Santorum in 2000 (by a 14-point margin), went overwhelmingly for Casey this year – by a 44-point margin. Santorum also suffered among Pennsylvania's white Catholic voters, another swing group. Casey, also a Catholic, won them by 58-42 percent, compared to Santorum's nine-point margin in 2000. And while Santorum won married women by eight points in 2000, Casey captured them Tuesday by 58 to 42 percent.

Santorum also received significantly less support from white Protestant voters today than he did in 2000. Then he won this group by 21 points; today, by 10 points.

This election was more a rejection of Santorum and Bush than an endorsement of Casey. More than four in ten Pennsylvania voters said their vote today was in opposition to George W. Bush; just 15 percent were voting to show support for Bush. More than one-third also said their Senate vote today was against their opponent rather than for their candidate. Casey won by big margins in each of these groups.

### **Rhode Island:**

Being a Democrat in an overwhelmingly Democratic state – and one bent on change in control of Congress – enabled Sheldon Whitehouse to defeat incumbent Sen. Lincoln Chafee in Rhode Island. Nearly four in 10 voters (38 percent) identified themselves as Democrats, and 84 percent of them voted for Whitehouse. Fewer than two in 10, by contrast, identified themselves as Republicans.

Indeed Chafee won independents – swing voters in most states – by 55-45 percent. But it wasn't enough to overcome Whitehouse's huge partisan advantage.

An irony in the outcome is that, even as he lost his office, 63 percent of Rhode Island voters said they approved of the way Chaffee had handled his job as a Senator. What did him in was demand for change: Sixty-three percent of voters also said they wanted the Democrats to win control of the U.S. Senate.

Seventy-five percent of Rhode Island voters disapproved of George W. Bush's job performance – 56 percent strongly so – and they voted for Whitehouse by 67-33 percent. Similarly, 73 percent disapproved of the war in Iraq, 52 percent strongly so; and Whitehouse won 65 percent of them.

Women voters mattered as well: Whitehouse won them by 57-43 percent, while men split evenly.

### **Tennessee:**

Bob Corker won a substantial majority of whites and benefited from a boost (from 2000) in conservative voters to narrowly defeat Rep. Harold Ford. Together, those factors were enough to counter sharply divided views on Bush and the war in Iraq in this usually reliable Republican state.

Corker claimed 79 percent of all conservatives, who made up 45 percent of the electorate - a nine-point increase in conservative turnout from 2000. Ford won 63 percent of moderates and even more broadly among liberals, but the size and strength of the conservative vote told the tale.

Political independents, a traditional swing group, divided about evenly. More than nine in 10 Republicans voted for Corker; and an equally large proportion of Democrats for Ford. The contest was not particularly racially divisive. White voters supported Corker by a 58-41 percent margin - but that's less than the 74 percent of whites won by Bill Frist in 2000. More than nine in 10 black voters supported Ford; blacks are a core Democratic group.

Corker's victory was won on the margins. Fifty percent said they disapproved of the job Bush was doing as president and among these, 84 percent voted for Ford. Slightly fewer – 48 percent – supported Bush; Corker won 89 percent of their number. Attitudes toward Iraq mirrored the divided views on Bush, who got 57 percent of the vote here in 2004. Fifty percent approved of the war in Iraq, 47 percent disapproved. Among those who approved of the war, 84 percent voted for Corker; among those opposed to the war, 83 percent went for Ford.

Ford was able to peel off 13 percent of 2004 Bush voters. Corker was less effective in luring Kerry voters, claiming five percent of their vote.

More than four in 10 – 44 percent – said one reason for their vote was to send a message to Bush. But unlike elsewhere in the country, the message these voters were sending was mixed: 21 percent said they had voted to show support for Bush while 23 percent said

they were signaling disapproval. Nationally, anti-Bush voters outnumbered pro-Bush voters by 14 points.

Voters were more likely to blame Corker than Ford for negative attacks. Seventy-five percent said Corker had made unfair attacks on Ford, while 63 percent said Ford had done the same to Corker. But overall, a 56-percent majority said both candidates engaged in unfair attacks.

Finally, Frist, nursing presidential ambitions, leaves with a bit of a razz: Slightly more Tennessee voters said he'd make a bad president (44 percent) than a good one (36 percent).

### **Virginia:**

Like many Democrats this year, political novice Jim Webb was boosted to victory in Virginia by majority dissatisfaction with George W. Bush and the war in Iraq – in a state the president won with 54 percent of the vote just two years ago.

This time Virginia voters by a 10-point margin said they were casting their ballots to show opposition to Bush rather than to show him support. That made the difference. Incumbent Republican Sen. George Allen easily won voters who said Bush was not a factor in their vote, as well as those showing support for the president. But there were enough anti-Bush voters - barely - to give Webb the win.

	Total	Webb	Allen
Voting to show for support Bush	23%	1%	99
Voting to show opposition to Bush	33	98	2
Bush was not a factor	42	38	62

Overall, the exit poll found that 54 percent of Virginia voters disapproved of Bush's performance in office; 53 percent, similarly, disapproved of the war in Iraq. Those views translated into voting decisions: Allen won 93 percent of Bush supporters and 90 percent of war supporters; Webb countered with 87 percent of Bush disapprovers, and 83 percent of war opponents.

Critically, Webb won 56 percent of independents; Allen had won 58 percent of these swing voters six years ago. Webb made important inroads among white Catholics; they gave Allen 52 percent of their vote Tuesday, but that was a 12-point drop from six years ago. Webb narrowly won Virginia's most affluent voters, those with \$100,000-plus household incomes – a group that Allen captured handily six years ago. And Webb trounced Allen by 60-40 percent in vote-rich northern Virginia, home to more than a quarter of the electorate. Allen ran significantly better in that region six years ago.

Allen suffered a series of missteps that began with the "Macaca" gaffe last summer. On one hand, 37 percent of voters saw him as insensitive to minorities. But his 15 percent support from blacks was about the same as his share of black voters in 2000. (Webb won 85 percent of blacks, a core Democratic group.)

Fewer, 28 percent, saw Webb as insensitive to women. Allen had criticized Webb for what he described as scenes in some of his novels that were degrading to women. In the event, though, Webb won women, with 55 percent support, while Allen won 55 percent of men. (Women are more apt to be Democrats, and in Virginia the division was wider than usual. Forty-three percent of women voting in the state described themselves as Democrats, compared with just 28 percent of men.)

Forty-two percent of Virginia voters called the war in Iraq "extremely important" in their vote and nearly six in 10 of them supported Webb. At the same time, 44 percent of voters said terrorism was "extremely important," and six in 10 of these voters supported Allen. Webb, a decorated Vietnam veteran who had served as Ronald Reagan's secretary of the Navy, is a longtime critic of the war; Allen supported the president.

Webb lost veterans by 16 points, 42-58 percent. Still, that was better than John Kerry's showing in 2004; he lost veterans in Virginia to Bush by 27 points, 36-63 percent.

Allen apparently received little help from Amendment 1, defining marriage only as a union between a man and a woman. Republicans had counted on the amendment to boost turnout among religious, socially conservative voters. But the exit poll suggested that these voters accounted for about the same proportion of the electorate Tuesday as they did in Allen's election in 2000.

-By Gary Langer, Dalia Sussman, Peyton Craighill, Rich Morin, Brian Hartman and Bob Shapiro. (Note: Data updated after final weightings.)