

Sharp Challenges for Bush On Policy and Politics Alike

George W. Bush faces sharp challenges on political and policy fronts alike, marked by a steep jump in public disapproval of his energy policies and a broad call for him to reverse course in his approach to Congress.

Fifty-eight percent of Americans now disapprove of the way Bush is handling the energy situation, up 15 points since the release of his energy plan. Disapproval of his work on the environment is also up, and his overall job approval rating is down by eight points to 55 percent, lower than seven of the previous nine presidents at the four-month mark.

Politically this ABC News/Washington Post poll finds a broad call for moderation. The public says by a 30-point margin that Bush has tried harder in the last four months to “push his own agenda” in Congress than to compromise with the Democrats – and by 40 points, 68-29 percent, that in the future he should focus on compromise instead.

Much is at stake, because control of the center is so crucial in politics. As things stand now, Americans by 25 points, 57-32 percent, say the Democratic Party is more open than the Republicans to the ideas of political moderates. And by 41-20 percent they say it’s a “good thing” control of the Senate has changed hands via the Jeffords defection.

	Push his agenda	Compromise with Dems.
Bush HAS done	63%	32
Bush SHOULD do	29	68

More open to the ideas of political moderates:

	Republican Party	Democratic Party
	32%	57

Change in Senate control:

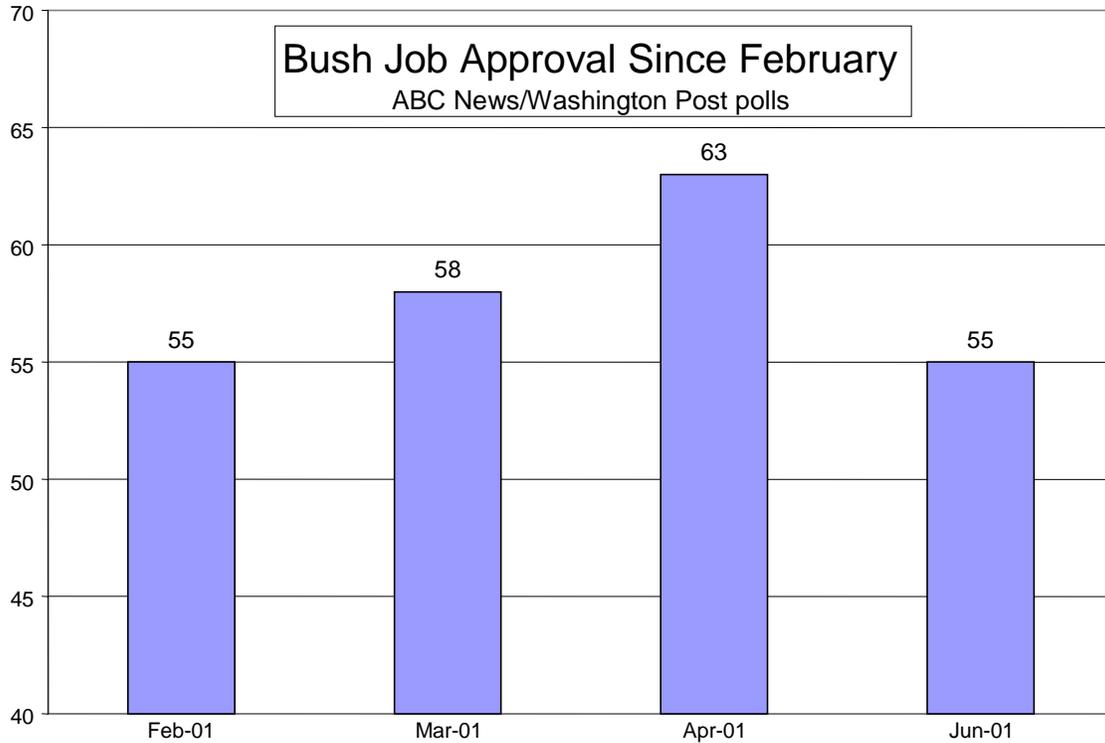
	Good for the country	Bad	No difference
	41%	20	38

LEADERSHIP – In another telling result, Americans today divide about evenly on whose leadership they prefer, Bush’s (40 percent) or the Democrats’ (42 percent). In April, it was Bush by a 10-point margin.

Preferred direction:

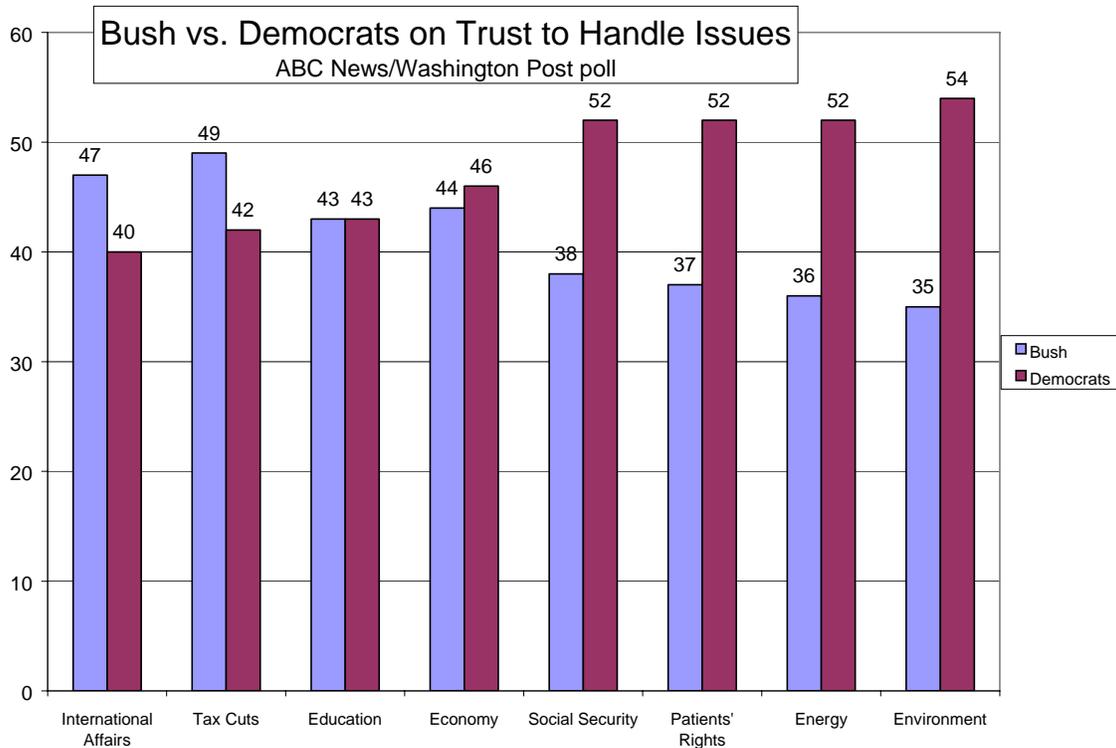
	Bush’s	Democrats’	
6/3/01	40%	42	Dems +2
4/22/01	46	36	Bush +10

Moderates – who account for nearly half of all Americans – prefer the Democrats’ direction by a 12-point margin. And moderates by 2-1 think the Democrats are more open to their ideas.



Moreover, Americans by sizable margins express preference for the Democrats’ approach over Bush’s on four issues tested in this poll – the environment, energy, patients’ rights and Social Security. Bush’s approach is preferred, by narrower margins, on two issues, taxes and international affairs. They’re even on education and the economy.

Trust more to handle:	Bush	Democrats	Margin
Environment	35%	54	Dems +19
Energy	36	52	Dems +16
Patients’ rights	37	52	Dems +15
Social Security	38	52	Dems +14
Economy	44	46	Dems +2
Education	43	43	=
International affairs	47	40	Bush +7
Tax cuts	49	42	Bush +7



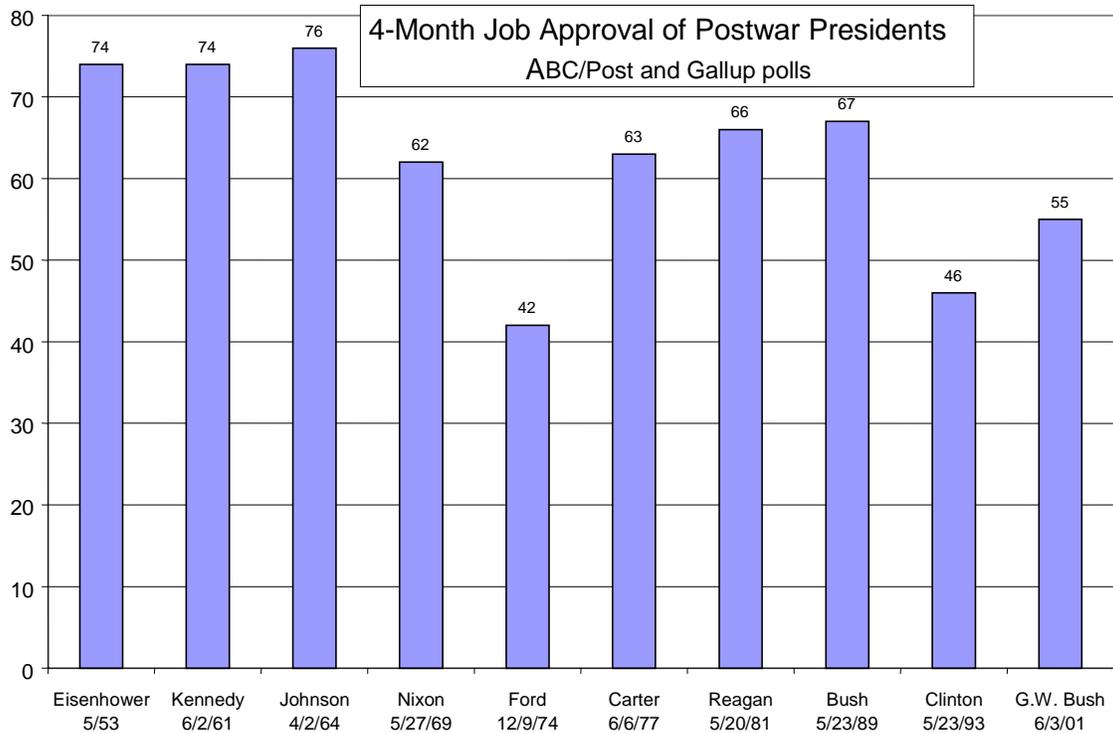
These preferences are best seen in terms of thematic affinity rather than views on specific legislation, which the public tends to follow less avidly than the professionals do.

NO TAX BOUNCE – In addition to his troubles on energy and the environment, Bush gets no bounce from the \$1.35 trillion, 10-year tax cut that’s been hailed as the signal achievement of his first four months.

That marks public ambivalence on the issue. On one hand tax cuts in and of themselves are not unpopular, and Bush holds a 58 percent approval rating for handling the issue. But there’s still a broad suspicion (54 percent in this poll, the most to date) that the tax cut disproportionately benefits the wealthy. And Americans by 2-1 say they’d have preferred to see the tax cut money spent on social programs instead.

JOB APPROVAL – Bush’s difficulties holding the center seem a lesser version of Bill Clinton’s eight years ago. When Clinton was seen as tacking left after winning election as a centrist, his job approval rating fell sharply, to 46 percent at the four-month point.

Bush is doing better than Clinton at four months in overall job approval, 55 percent. But Bush is down from his level in late April (63 percent), and lower than usual for a postwar first-term president at what still should be the honeymoon stage. Other than Clinton, only Gerald Ford was lower.



Views of Bush’s performance are not strictly ideological; a third of Americans call him “too conservative,” which is about where it’s been. At the same time, his job approval rating is 73 percent among self-described conservatives, compared to 50 percent among moderates (and 42 percent among liberals).

Views of Bush “as a person,” at 61 percent favorable, are now a bit more positive than his job rating. The two were about equal in April.

ISSUE APPROVALS – Bush wins majority approval for his work specifically on international affairs (58 percent), taxes (also 58 percent), education (57 percent) and the economy (53 percent). His ratings fall below majority approval on energy, the environment, patients’ rights and Social Security.

	Approve	Disapprove
International affairs	58%	33
Tax cuts	58	37
Education	57	35
Economy	53	41
Social Security	46	40
Environment	41	50
Patients’ rights	40	39
Energy	37	58

ENERGY – As noted, on one of these, energy, a majority – 58 percent – disapproves of Bush’s performance. And it’s a potent issue, since six in 10 think the country is heading into an energy crisis. (That number has not grown since April, however, and fewer – four in 10 – think the country’s in an energy crisis now.)

Belief that an energy crisis is coming is fairly stable across regions, although Westerners are somewhat more apt (at 46 percent) to think a crisis is here now. Bush’s disapproval rating on energy is highest in the West, at 68 percent, but it reaches majority disapproval in all regions.

Bush’s overall job approval rating also dips in the West, to 44 percent, though it’s not much lower (49 percent) in the East. It’s a good bit higher in the Midwest and South.

Bush’s handling of energy policy:	West	Midwest	East	South
Approve	28%	35	41	41
Disapprove	68	59	55	52
Overall job approval:				
Approve	44	56	49	63
Disapprove	49	39	46	31

CAPS – On one specific energy policy, 56 percent (and again, majorities across regions) support federal caps on the price of electricity, something Bush opposes.

On other policy choices the public continues to show a broad preference for conservation over new power production; Bush’s plan has been widely portrayed as focusing more on production. Eight in 10, for example, say they “strongly” support more energy conservation and higher fuel-efficiency in cars and trucks.

In terms of production, eight in 10 also strongly support the development of more solar and wind power. But strong support falls off sharply for some of the proposals Bush has made – more oil and gas drilling (49 percent), more coal mining (33 percent) and more nuclear power (29 percent).

	Support “strongly”
More fuel-efficient vehicles	81%
More solar/wind power	80
More conservation by businesses	79
More conservation by consumers	78
More oil/gas drilling	49
More coal mining	33
More nuclear plants	29

GROUPS – Call the Polling Unit for additional crosstab analysis.

METHODOLOGY - This ABC News/Washington Post poll was conducted by telephone May 31-June 3, 2001, among a random national sample of 1,004 adults.

The results have a three-point error margin. Fieldwork by TNS Intersearch of Horsham, Pa.

Analysis by Gary Langer.

ABC News polls can be found at ABCNEWS.com on the Internet at:
<http://abcnews.go.com/sections/politics/PollVault/PollVault.html>

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Here are the full results (*=less than 0.5 percent):

This ABC News/Washington Post poll was conducted by telephone May 31-June 3, 2001, among a random national sample of 1004 adults. The results have a 3.1-point error margin. Fieldwork by TNS Intersearch of Horsham, PA.

*= less than 0.5 percent

1. Do you approve or disapprove of the way George W. Bush is handling his job as president?

	-----Approve-----			-----Disapprove-----			No opinion
	NET	Strongly	Somewhat	NET	Strongly	Somewhat	
6/3/01	55	27	28	40	22	18	6
4/22/01	63	33	30	32	16	16	5
3/25/01	58	NA	NA	33	NA	NA	8
2/25/01	55	NA	NA	23	NA	NA	22

2. Do you approve or disapprove of the way Bush is handling...?

6/3/01

Summary Table:

		Approve	Disapprove	No opinion
a.	The economy	53	41	6
b.	International affairs	58	33	9
c.	Environmental issues	41	50	9
d.	The issue of tax cuts	58	37	6
e.	Education	57	35	8
f.	The energy situation	37	58	5
g.	Patients' rights in the health care system	40	39	21
h.	Social Security	46	40	14

Trend:

a. The economy

	Approve	Disapprove	No opinion
6/3/01	53	41	6
4/22/01	55	38	7
3/25/01	50	42	8

b. International affairs

	Approve	Disapprove	No opinion
6/3/01	58	33	9
4/22/01	62	31	7
3/25/01	56	31	13

c. Environmental issues

Approve	Disapprove	No opinion
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6/3/01	41	50	9
4/22/01	47	41	12
3/25/01	46	41	13

d. The issue of tax cuts

	Approve	Disapprove	No opinion
6/3/01	58	37	6
4/22/01	54	39	7

e. Education

	Approve	Disapprove	No opinion
6/3/01	57	35	8
4/22/01	60	28	12

f. The energy situation

	Approve	Disapprove	No opinion
6/3/01	37	58	5
5/13/01	39	43	18

g. Patients' rights in the health care system

	Approve	Disapprove	No opinion
6/3/01	40	39	21

h. Social Security

	Approve	Disapprove	No opinion
6/3/01	46	40	14

3. Do you think the country should go in the direction Bush wants to lead it, go in the direction the Democrats in Congress want to lead it, or what?

	Where Bush wants	Where Democrats want	Other direction (vol.)	Neither (vol.)	No difference (vol.)	No opin.
6/3/01	40	42	5	7	3	3
4/22/01	46	36	4	6	3	4

4. Who do you trust to do a better job handling ... - Bush or the Democrats in Congress?

6/3/01 Summary Table:

		Bush	Dems	Both (vol.)	Neither (vol.)	No opin.
a.	The economy	44	46	2	6	2
b.	International affairs	47	40	3	7	4
c.	Environmental issues	35	54	2	5	4
d.	The issue of tax cuts	49	42	1	6	2
e.	Education	43	43	1	7	6
f.	The energy situation	36	52	1	5	6
g.	Patients' rights in the health care system	37	52	*	3	7
h.	Social Security	38	52	1	5	3

5. On another subject, which political party do you think is more open to the ideas of people who are political moderates - the (Democrats) or the (Republicans)?

	Democrats	Republicans	Both (vol.)	Neither (vol.)	No opin.
6/3/01	57	32	2	6	4

6. As you may know, control of the U.S. Senate is about to switch from the Republicans to the Democrats. On balance, do you think the Democrats' taking

control of the Senate is a good thing or a bad thing for the country, or doesn't it make much difference?

	Good	Bad	No diff. (vol.)	No opin.
6/3/01	41	20	38	1

7. In the last four months do you think Bush has tried mainly (to push his own agenda in Congress), or tried mainly (to compromise with the Democrats in Congress)?

	Push own agenda	Compromise with Democrats	No opin.
6/3/01	63	32	5

8. In the future, do you think Bush SHOULD try mainly (to push his own agenda in Congress), or try mainly (to compromise with the Democrats in Congress)?

	Push own agenda	Compromise with Democrats	No opin.
6/3/01	29	68	4

9. Do you think Bush's views on most issues are too liberal for you, too conservative for you, or just about right?

	Too liberal	Too conservative	About right	No opin.
6/3/01	15	32	50	4
4/22/01	10	31	55	3
9/6/00 RV	12	31	51	6
7/23/00 RV	12	29	52	7
7/23/00	12	28	52	8
3/11/00	12	28	52	8
2/27/00	10	33	51	5
2/24/00	12	33	43	12
2/6/00	12	30	49	8
9/2/99	10	20	58	13
3/14/99	7	20	53	20

10. Some people say the federal government should set limits on the price of electricity to prevent price gouging by suppliers. Others say price caps would not solve energy shortages and may discourage the development of new supplies. What's your opinion - do you support or oppose federal limits on the price of electricity?

	Support	Oppose	No opinion
6/3/01	56	40	4

11. To address the country's energy needs, would you support or oppose action by the federal government to ...? Do you support/oppose that strongly, or not strongly?

6/3/01 Summary Table:

	-----Support-----			-----Oppose-----			No opin.
	NET	Strongly	Not Strongly	NET	Strongly	Not Strongly	
a. Build more nuclear power plants	46	29	17	51	36	15	3

b. Develop more solar and wind power	90	80	10	8	3	4	2	
c. Increase oil and gas drilling	67	49	19	29	19	11	3	
d. Increase coal mining	54	33	21	39	23	15	7	
e. Encourage more energy conservation by businesses and industries	90	79	12	8	4	4	2	
f. Encourage more energy conservation by consumers like yourself	90	78	12	8	6	3	2	
g. Require car manufacturers to improve the fuel-efficiency of vehicles sold in this country	89	81	7	10	6	4	2	
	-----Support-----			-----Oppose-----			Gas	No
	NET	Strongly	Not Strongly	NET	Strongly	Not Strongly	only (vol.)	opin.
h. Build more power plants that burn oil, coal or natural gas	62	43	19	31	18	13	3	5

12. Of the ones you support, which one should be the federal government's highest priority?

6/3/01

	Highest priority
Build more nuclear power plants	8
Develop more solar and wind power	23
Increase oil and gas drilling	11
Increase coal mining	1
Encourage more energy conservation by businesses and industries	17
Encourage more energy conservation by consumers like yourself	8
Require car manufacturers to improve the fuel-efficiency of vehicles sold in this country	19
Build more power plants that burn oil, coal or natural gas	10
No Opinion	1
None	1

13. Do you think the United States is heading into an energy crisis, or not?

	Yes	No	No opin.
6/3/01	61	36	3
4/22/01	64	34	3

14. Do you think the United States is in an energy crisis now, or not?

	Yes	No	No opin.
6/3/01	39	60	1

15. As you may know, Congress has approved a tax cut of nearly one-point-four trillion dollars over the next 10 years. Do you think this tax cut will mainly benefit lower income people, middle income people, upper income people, or all people about equally?

	Lower	Middle	Upper	All equally	No opin.	
6/3/01	5	10	54	27	4	
4/22/01*	2	13		53	28	4
2/25/01*	4	8		47	33	8
8/1/99**	6	14		49	23	7
4/22/81***	5	14		48	27	6
3/29/81	6	17		47	26	5
2/20/81	7	15		43	31	4

*Do you think the tax cut Bush has proposed would mainly benefit ...?

**8/99: As you may know, the Republicans in Congress have called for a billion dollar tax cut over the next 10 years. Who do you think would benefit most from such a tax cut: poor and lower income people, middle income people, upper income people, or do you think all people would benefit pretty much equally?

***4/81 and previous: Reagan called for a 30 percent federal income tax reduction for all taxpayers over the next three years. Who do you think would benefit most from such a tax cut: poor and lower income people, middle income people, upper income people, or do you think all people would benefit pretty much equally?

16. In general, do you think this tax cut will be good for the economy, bad for the economy, or won't it make much difference?

	Good	Bad	No difference	No opin.
6/3/01	35	13	50	3

17. What would have been your own preference - (to have this tax cut), or (to have the federal government spend more on domestic programs such as education, health care and Social Security)?

	Tax cut	Spend more	Neither (vol.)	No opin.
6/3/01	33	63	3	1

18-22. Held for release.

23. Do you have a favorable or unfavorable impression of Bush as a person?

	Favorable	Unfavorable	No opinion
6/3/01	61	34	5
4/22/01	64	32	4

END