



Contact: Thomas Riehle 202-463-7300 [thomas.riehle@ipsospa.com](mailto:thomas.riehle@ipsospa.com)  
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## Congressional Preference Does Not Favor Democrats; Midterm Election Party Preference Is “thisclose” – Here’s Why

### In September, Bush’s Handling of Economy Became Less of a Factor

*Between September 16 and September 19 and October 1 and October 3, 2002, Ipsos-Reid US Public Affairs interviewed a representative sample of 2,000 adults nationwide, including 1,520 registered voters. The margin of error for the combined surveys is ± 2.2% for all adults and ± 2.6% for registered voters.*

**WASHINGTON, D.C.**, (October 8, 2002) — Among registered voters, 44% want to see Democrats win control of Congress in next month’s elections, and 43% want to see Republicans in control. Among the most likely voters in our poll, the order is reversed: 45% want Republicans in charge, 44% Democrats. Registered voters who do not consider themselves close to either the Democratic or Republican parties are evenly divided, with 27% preferring Democratic control and 26% Republican control.

### And if the election for Congress were held today, would you want to see the Republicans or Democrats win control of Congress?

	Registered Voters: Party Identification				
	Registered voters	Likely voters	Republicans	Democrats	Independents
Republicans	43%	45%	89%	5%	26%
Democrats	44%	44%	5%	86%	27%
(DO NOT READ) Neither	9%	8%	4%	6%	35%
(DK/NS)	4%	3%	2%	3%	12%

Congressional partisan preference is closely divided because some key factors that often drive midterm elections—concerns about the direction the President is taking the country, particularly on domestic and economic policy—are not currently in play.

## Statistical Analysis of Factors Affecting Congressional Voting, January - September

Democrats have failed to make the 2002 midterm election a referendum on Bush economic and domestic policies. This conclusion is based on a special Ipsos-Reid analysis of the factors driving Congressional partisan preference based on 18,000 interviews conducted in January through September. The inability of Democrats—especially in a time of war talk—to get voters to choose between the Bush economic policies and those of the Democratic Party leave voters drifting toward a midterm election vote that endorses and supports the party of the Commander-in-Chief.

REGISTERED VOTERS									
	9/16- 10/3/02	10/1- 3/02	9/3- 19/02	8/16- 9/5/02	8/2- 18/02	7/18- 8/4/02	3 <sup>rd</sup> Q JAS 02	2 <sup>nd</sup> Q AMJ 02	1 <sup>st</sup> Q JFM 02
Republicans....	43	43	42	41	42	43	43	44	43
Democrats .....	44	44	45	46	45	43	44	40	41
Neither .....	9	8	9	8	9	10	9	12	12
Not sure .....	4	5	4	5	4	4	4	4	4

Ipsos-Reid learned:

- In the first quarter, January through March, Democrats held their own on Congressional preference despite Bush's stratospheric job approval ratings. That was because the Congressional vote was focused on policy issues—Bush's handling of the economy in particular.
- In June, consumer attitudes collapsed, according to the Ipsos-Reid CASH Index questions on Consumer Attitudes and Spending by Household. Democrats caught up, and took the lead from Republicans in Ipsos-Reid/Cook *Political Report* polls over the summer. In August, as in the first quarter, the chief driver of Congressional preference were attitudes on Bush's handling of the economy.
- In September, war talk began in earnest, and the basis for Congressional preference answers shifted away from feelings about how Bush handles economic issues. Democratic voters are driven by concerns about the economy itself, but Independent and Republican voters are not. Fewer voters are being driven by concerns about Bush's economic *policies* than at any time all year.
- Democratic candidates have not made Bush economic policies the issue, even though few voters strongly defend Bush's economic policies. In fact, there is a complete absence of evidence that Republican voters will vote for Republicans for Congress because of confidence in Bush's handling of the economy.

Four weeks in politics represents a lifetime. The Congressional vote seems to be as evenly divided today as the Presidential vote proved to be in November 2000—and trends could move in either direction. But with evidence that voters are not voting based on their opinions of how Bush handles economic and domestic policy, Democratic candidates will not catch a tail wind from voter concerns about those domestic and economic policy issues—unless and until Democratic candidates change the way voters frame their vote decisions.

**For more information on this release, please contact:**

**Thomas Riehle**  
**President**  
**Ipsos-Reid US Public Affairs**  
**202.463.7300**  
[thomas.riehle@ipsospa.com](mailto:thomas.riehle@ipsospa.com)

#### **About Ipsos-Reid US Public Affairs**

*The survey was conducted by Ipsos-Reid US Public Affairs, the Washington, D.C.-based division of Ipsos, which is the world's fourth largest polling and market research organization, based in Paris. Ipsos-Reid US Public Affairs is a non-partisan, objective public affairs research organization made up of Democratic and Republican campaign and political polling veterans. It was established in Washington in August 2001, and it is led by Thomas Riehle, who has more than 15 years of experience as a political pollster in Washington. The Ipsos-Reid/Cook Political Report poll and the Ipsos-Reid Consumer Attitudes and Spending by Household (CASH) Index poll are conducted the first and third week of every month, as part of Ipsos-Reid US Public Affairs weekly omnibus polling service.*

*The political survey is designed in conjunction with Charlie Cook of the Cook Political Report. Founded in 1984, The Cook Political Report is an independent, non-partisan newsletter that analyzes elections for the U.S. House, Senate, governor and President as well as domestic American political trends. The New York Times has called the publication, "a newsletter that both parties consider authoritative" while the dean of the Washington political press corps, the Washington Post's David Broder has called Charlie Cook, its editor and publisher, "perhaps the best political handicapper in the nation." Cook also writes two weekly columns that appear in National Journal magazine and CongressDaily/AM and on nationaljournal.com, and serves as a political analyst for Cable News Network's show "Inside Politics." Researched and written by a staff of five based in Washington, D.C., the Cook Political Report's subscribers are primarily the lobbyists and managers for the political action committees of the nation's major corporations, trade associations and labor unions as well as by news organizations, foreign governments and others with an interest in detailed, impartial information and analysis of Congressional, gubernatorial and presidential elections.*