



AP Poll: Public view of Bush's handling of issues slumps; Kerry hasn't taken advantage

Washington, DC (AP) -- Public opinion of President Bush's handling of hot-button issues such as the economy and the war on terrorism is near the low point of his presidency, but Democratic rival John Kerry has been unable to capitalize on the Republican's slide, an Associated Press poll found.

The Associated Press Poll is conducted by Ipsos-Public Affairs. Between May 3-5, 2004, the AP/Ipsos poll interviewed a representative sample of 1,000 adults nationwide, including 778 registered voters. The margin of error is +/- 3.1 for all adults, +/- 3.5 for registered voters. Margin of error for subgroups may be higher.

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Washington, DC (AP) -- Public opinion of President Bush's handling of hot-button issues such as the economy and the war on terrorism is near the low point of his presidency, but Democratic rival John Kerry has been unable to capitalize on the Republican's slide, an Associated Press poll found.

The AP-Ipsos poll found the race between Bush and Kerry remains close, with Bush's support at 46 percent, Kerry at 43 percent and independent candidate Ralph Nader at 7 percent.

Despite recent encouraging economic news on the growth of the economy and jobs -- unemployment dipped from 5.7 percent to 5.6 percent in April -- support for Bush's handling of the economy was at 43 percent, the lowest number since Ipsos began tracking that question at the start of 2002.

Support for Bush's handling of foreign policy and terrorism, usually his strongest area, was at 50 percent, down from 55 percent a month ago. The current level almost matched the 51 percent who approved last November, before the capture of Saddam Hussein.

Southerners and Republican women, two key Bush constituencies, have lost enthusiasm about his handling of foreign policy and terrorism, according to the poll conducted for the AP by Ipsos-Public Affairs.

The poll comes at a time of increasing violence in Iraq, the deadliest month yet for U.S. troops and politically damaging allegations of prisoner abuse in Iraq that have Bush and his administration on the defensive. More in the poll disapprove of Bush's handling of Iraq, 51 percent, than approve, 46 percent.

Carl Adams, a 66-year-old retiree from Louin, Miss., said recent news about prisoner abuse in Iraq has made him feel "very much stronger against Bush and against the war."

"I don't like American soldiers being killed," Adams said. "There should have been a way to work around this Iraq situation without soldiers getting killed."

Despite the growing problems for Bush, Kerry has not been able to gain ground.

The likely Democratic nominee launched a \$25 million ad campaign this week to tell voters more about himself — notably his service in Vietnam and his career in public service. Other recent polls have found Kerry's personal image undercut by more than \$60 million worth of ads by the Bush re-election campaign and a steady stream of Kerry-bashing by Republicans.

"If I had to vote today, I would probably go with the devil I know," said 33-year-old political independent George Hillyer of Buffalo, N.Y., referring to the incumbent. Hillyer says he's closely watching Kerry, but has many questions.

"I don't hear a 'this is what I would do' attitude," Hillyer said. "With Bush, when he says 'this is what I'm going to do,' you know what he's going to do."

One encouraging sign for Kerry is that the number of weak Kerry supporters who say they would consider supporting Bush decreased in the last month. Instead, they would stay home or vote for Nader.

When 58-year-old retiree Donna Bittle of Lugoff, S.C., talks about the presidential race, her focus is more on opposing Bush than supporting the Democratic candidate.

"I can't think of his name, but it's not Bush," she said in explaining who she favors for president. "I'm definitely for John Kerry, I don't want nothing to do with Bush. I think Bush has made a mess on the economy, in Iraq, on the high cost of medicine."

Almost six in 10 Americans say the country is headed down the wrong track, about where that measure of pessimism has been since March. Southerners and Republican women were more likely than a month ago to say the country was headed down the wrong track.

Gladys Blanchard, a 74-year-old Republican from Weymouth, Mass., said she's solidly behind Bush, and wants nothing to do with Kerry, a senator in her state for 19 years.

"I think Kerry is like the Kennedys," she said. "He's one of Ted Kennedy's boys. I'm not particularly fond of the Kennedys except for John."

The AP-Ipsos poll of 1,000 adults, including 778 registered voters, was taken May 3-5 and has a margin of sampling error of plus or minus 3 percentage points.

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