

AUGUST 2008

Prior to the November 2004 General Election, Californians were deeply divided along party lines on many key issues. As the 2008 General Election approaches, voters remain fundamentally at odds on a variety of critical policies; yet, the partisan gap has narrowed in opinions about the general direction of the country, the state of the economy, and approval ratings of the president. How will the “red” and “blue” divide play out this November? Analyses of PPIC Statewide surveys point to persistent and increasing differences between parties on policy, but growing consensus that change is needed.

- **PARTISAN GAP NARROWS IN OPINIONS ABOUT NATION'S DIRECTION, ECONOMY, PRESIDENT.**  
Today, just 12% of Democrats and 31% of Republicans believe the country is headed in the right direction, compared to 20% of Democrats and 74% of Republicans in 2004. Moreover, only 15% of Democrats and 29% of Republicans think that the United States is headed toward good economic times – an overwhelming drop of 16 points among Democrat and 44 points among Republicans since 2004. Approval ratings of President Bush have also declined: only 7% of Democrats and 54% of Republicans approve of how he is handling his job today, narrowing the divide by 20 points.
- **REPUBLICANS STILL MORE OPTIMISTIC THAN DEMOCRATS ABOUT WAR IN IRAQ.**  
Although optimism over the war has increased slightly across parties since 2004, Democrats (20%) are still far less likely than Republicans (71%) to think that the situation in Iraq is going well. And partisan division has increased significantly over the effect of the war on the long-term security of the United States: Just 27% of Democrats think the war has contributed to the nation's long-term security – an 11 point drop since 2004. Republican views on this issue are the same as in 2004 (69%).
- **DEMOCRATS AND REPUBLICANS CONTINUE TO DIFFER ON TAXATION, REGULATION OF BUSINESS.**  
The partisan divide over taxation is about the same as in 2004. Republicans (69%) remain far more likely than Democrats (29%) to prefer lower taxes and a government that provides fewer services. Democrats today (67%) are somewhat more likely than in 2004 (61%) to believe that government regulation of business is necessary to protect the public interest, leading to a 7 point increase in the partisan gap on the issue. Republican support on this issue (41%) is about the same as in 2004 (42%).
- **SOCIAL POLICY DIFFERENCES ARE ABOUT THE SAME AS FOUR YEARS AGO.**  
Democrats (60%) continue to be far more likely than Republicans (23%) to favor gay and lesbian marriage. Republicans (42%) remain far more likely than Democrats (18%) to believe the government should pass more laws restricting abortion.
- **IMMIGRATION AND HEALTH CARE POLICY PERCEPTIONS HAVE WIDENED SINCE 2004.**  
Democrats today are even more likely than in 2004 to differ from Republicans in saying that immigrants are a benefit to California (63% to 25%) and to favor universal health care coverage (76% to 31%). The divide has increased by 9 points on immigration, 10 points on health care policy.
- **PARTISAN DIFFERENCES ON ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY HAVE INCREASED SIGNIFICANTLY SINCE 2004.**  
Since 2004, the partisan divide has increased 11 points on the issue of global warming. Today, almost all Democrats (94%) think that it is necessary to counter the effects of global warming right away, while far fewer Republicans (54%) agree. A 12 point increase in the divide on allowing more oil drilling is largely due to a surge in support among Republicans (62% in 2004, 77% today).

## California's Partisan Divide

		Likely Voters	Party Registration		Party Divide (percentage points)	Change in Divide (percentage points)
			Dem	Rep		
<i>Think that the United States is headed in the right direction</i>	September 2004	41%	20%	74%	54	- 35
	August 2008	22	12	31	19	
<i>Think that the United States will have good times financially in the next year</i>	September 2004	47	31	73	42	- 28
	August 2008	19	15	29	14	
<i>Approve of the way that George W. Bush is handling his job as president of the United States</i>	August 2004	42	14	81	67	- 20
	August 2008	27	7	54	47	
<i>Think that things are going well for the United States in Iraq</i>	August 2004	35	13	66	53	- 2
	August 2008	45	20	71	51	
<i>Would rather pay lower taxes and have a state government that provides fewer services</i>	May 2004	47	27	68	41	- 1
	May 2008	47	29	69	40	
<i>Favor allowing gay and lesbian couples to be legally married</i>	February 2004	43	57	23	34	+ 3
	August 2008	47	60	23	37	
<i>Think the government should pass more laws that restrict the availability of abortion</i>	February 2004	22	16	35	19	+ 5
	August 2008	24	18	42	24	
<i>Believe government regulation of business is necessary to protect public interest</i>	September 2004	54	61	42	19	+ 7
	August 2008	56	67	41	26	
<i>Think immigrants today are a benefit to California because of their hard work and job skills</i>	February 2004	49	61	32	29	+ 9
	August 2008	48	63	25	38	
<i>Favor universal health care coverage</i>	September 2004	54	72	37	35	+ 10
	August 2008	54	76	31	45	
<i>Think the war in Iraq has contributed to the long-term security of the United States</i>	August 2004	48	38	69	31	+ 11
	August 2008	45	27	69	42	
<i>Believe it is necessary to take steps to counter the effects of global warming right away</i>	July 2004	74	86	57	29	+ 11
	July 2008	75	94	54	40	
<i>Favor allowing more oil drilling off the California coast</i>	July 2004	42	32	62	30	+ 12
	July 2008	51	35	77	42	

Sources: PPIC Statewide Surveys: February, May, July, August, September 2004; May, July, August 2008.  
 Contact: [surveys@ppic.org](mailto:surveys@ppic.org)