

**Polarized Opinion in the States:  
Partisan Differences in Approval Ratings of Governors, Senators, and George W. Bush**

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## **Abstract**

George W. Bush has provoked the widest partisan differences in job approval ratings of any president since surveys first began asking the question more than seventy years ago. A new set of state-level surveys conducted by SurveyUSA allows comparison of partisan differences at the state level in approval of the president, each of the senators, and the governor. The data show that Bush is a uniquely polarizing figure, that partisan differences in approval ratings of senators and governors are far more varied than those of the president, and that different sets of variables account for approval ratings by partisans for the different offices. For senators, polarization is greater for more extreme ideologues, national leaders, senators from more populous states, and women. Governors from smaller states, from states where the partisan balance favors the other party, and who are not national figures are the least polarizing. Polarized partisan evaluation of elected leaders is not a systematic feature of contemporary American politics, but rather depends on the positions they take, the agendas they pursue, and the context in which they operate.

George W. Bush has provoked the widest partisan differences in popular evaluations of a president's performance ever observed in the nearly seven decades that the surveys have been asking the job approval question.<sup>1</sup> In a new book explaining why Bush has become such a divisive figure, I argue that, while the polarized political atmosphere he inherited was a contributing factor, Bush's leadership style, agenda, tactics, strategies, and policy decisions (most notably, to invade Iraq) were the main reasons he has leapt far ahead of his closest competitors, Ronald Reagan and Bill Clinton, to become the most polarizing president on record.<sup>2</sup>

It is clear from Bush's example that presidents do much to shape how they are perceived by their own and the other party's identifiers and therefore how far they polarize the public. This should be true of other politicians as well. Hard line ideologues, for example, ought to provoke more divergent reactions than moderate centrists. Politicians who lead or stand loyally with their parties on the fundamental issues that divide Democrats and Republicans ought to be more polarizing than party mavericks or those who keep low national profiles and busy themselves delivering local benefits. Context and agendas should also matter. Politicians holding office at the national level, where the parties have become sharply divided across a range of issues, should find it harder to attract bipartisan approval than those serving at the state level, where the agenda (not to mention the local political ethos) may not encourage sharp partisan divisions. And, because they can cultivate personal connections with a larger share of their electorates, politicians serving relatively small, homogenous populations should find it easier to reach across party lines than should those serving large, heterogeneous populations.

Data to test these hypotheses, and, more generally, to compare partisan differences in evaluations of President Bush to those for other prominent elected officials, have recently become available. Beginning in May 2005, SurveyUSA, a polling firm whose main clients for its political surveys are local news media, has been conducting monthly statewide polls in

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<sup>1</sup> Prior to G.W. Bush, party differences in presidential approval ratings never exceeded 70 percentage points in any single poll and never averaged more than 63 points in any one quarter. The gap for Bush exceeded 70 points in 64 of the 83 Gallup surveys taken between January 2004 and February 2006, surpassing 80 points in six of them, with quarterly averages ranging from 71 to 79 points and an overall average of 74 points.

<sup>2</sup> Gary C. Jacobson, *A Divider, Not a Uniter: George W. Bush and the American People* (New York: Longman, 2007).

all 50 states. Their automated telephone surveys ask samples of approximately 600 respondents in each state if they approve of the performance of G.W. Bush, the state's governor, and both of its senators, as well as questions about each respondent's party identification, ideology, religious-service attendance, and demographic characteristics (age, education, sex, race, and in some states, region). In some months they also ask respondents' positions on policy issues. The aggregate results, including breakdowns of the approval questions by all of the respondents' other characteristics, are posted on the internet shortly after the surveys are taken.<sup>3</sup> Obviously, such data are potentially of great value for addressing a variety of interesting questions about state-level public opinion and elections—if they are of sufficient quality to be reliable. I thus examined the data carefully for internal and external consistency as well as intuitive plausibility and, as I describe in the Appendix, they passed all of the tests very satisfactorily. For the analyses that follow, I use the data produced by the nine monthly surveys taken from May, 2005 through January, 2006.

## **I. Comparing Performance Approval Ratings**

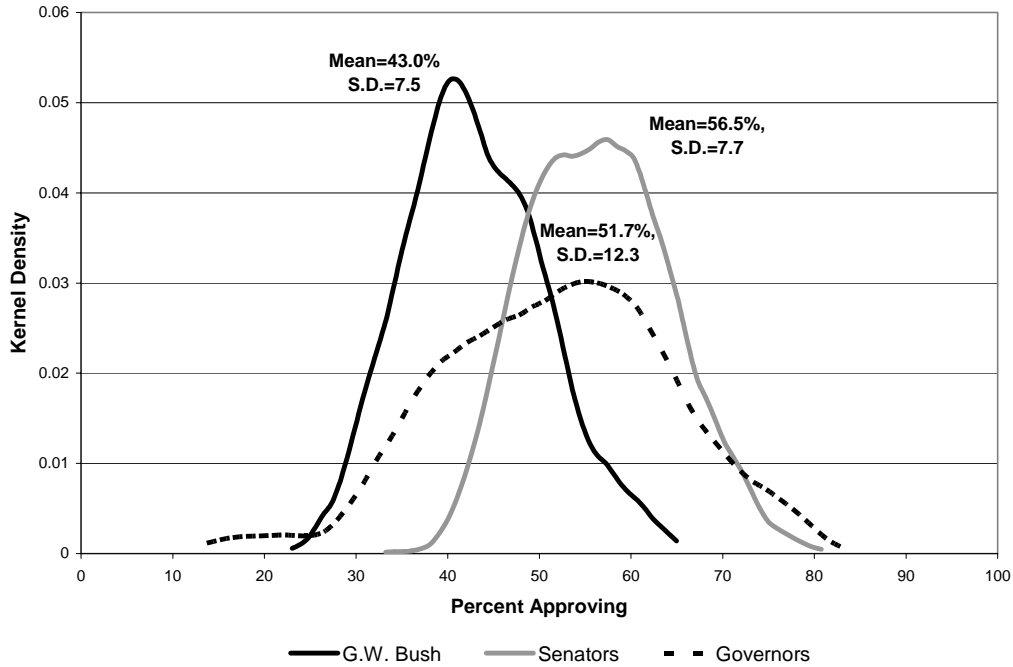
I began by comparing the means and distributions of job approval ratings across states for the three offices. I expected greater dispersal for senators and governors than for the president, if only because I was comparing evaluations of a single individual to those of 50 (governors) or 100 (senators) separate officeholders. Figure 1, which displays the kernel density plots of approval levels across states for all nine monthly surveys, confirms this expectation, but barely in the case of Senators. Evaluations of Bush have narrowest distribution and the lowest mean value. This was, of course, a period when the president's approval ratings had fallen to their lowest levels of his administration to that date; had the surveys been taken two years earlier, his average would have been about 13 points higher, and three years earlier, 26 points higher.<sup>4</sup> Senators enjoyed the highest average approval ratings during the period under examination, and their ratings are only slightly more dispersed than those of the president. On average, a majority of the governors' constituents also approve of their performance, but with considerably more variance across states than observed for the national politicians.

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<sup>3</sup> The data can be accessed at <http://www.surveymusa.com/50StateTracking.html>.

<sup>4</sup> Using the averages of 10 national media polls; see Jacobson, *Divider*, p. 3.

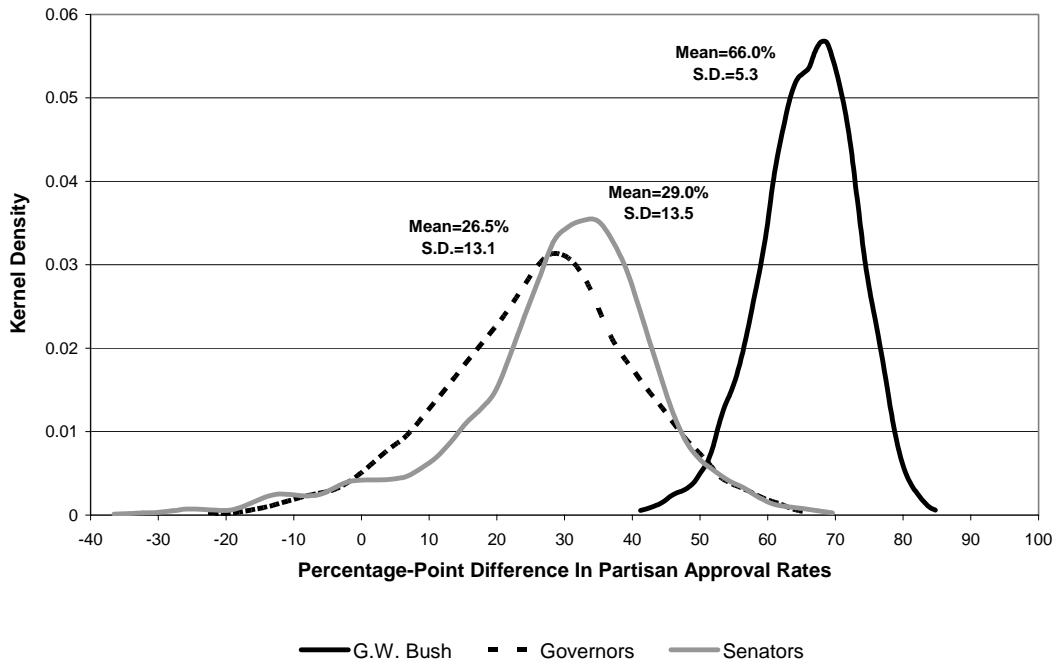
**Figure 1 Distribution of Approval of Senators, Governors and G.W. Bush, By State**



Next, I examined the extent to which partisans are divided in their assessments of these officials. Figure 2 shows that partisan differences in evaluations are on average more than twice as wide for Bush as for senators or governors, and their variation across states is much smaller. Republicans and Democrats differ in their approval of Bush’s performance by from 43 to 83 percentage points, with an average of 66 points. Views of senators and governors are far less polarized, and the degree of polarization far more variable; indeed, a few receive higher approval ratings from the opposing party’s identifiers than from their own. In only eight of the 900 possible comparisons were respondents more polarized in their evaluations of a senator than of the president;<sup>5</sup> in no state was the *average* partisan gap across the nine monthly surveys wider for any senator than for Bush. In *none* of the 450 comparisons were any state’s respondents more widely divided by party over the governor’s performance than over Bush’s.

<sup>5</sup> The eight cases involved three senators: John Kerry (4), Ted Kennedy (2), and Hilary Clinton (2), a list pointing to one obvious source of variation in partisan differences in evaluating senators; I have more to say about this below.

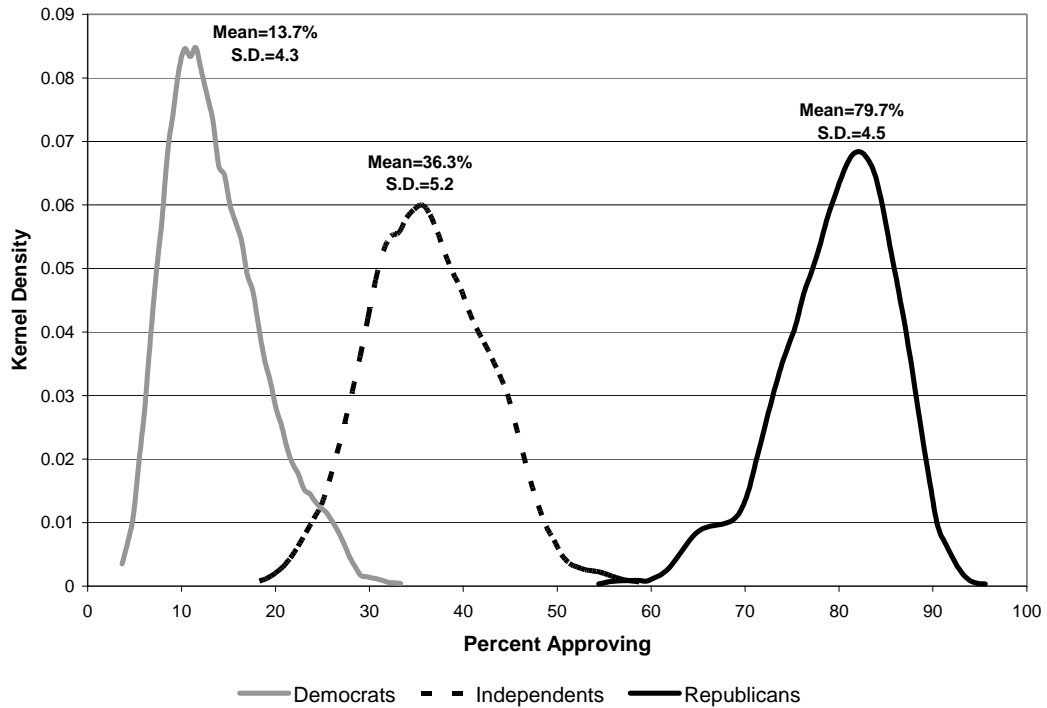
Figure 2 Distribution of Partisan Differences In Approval



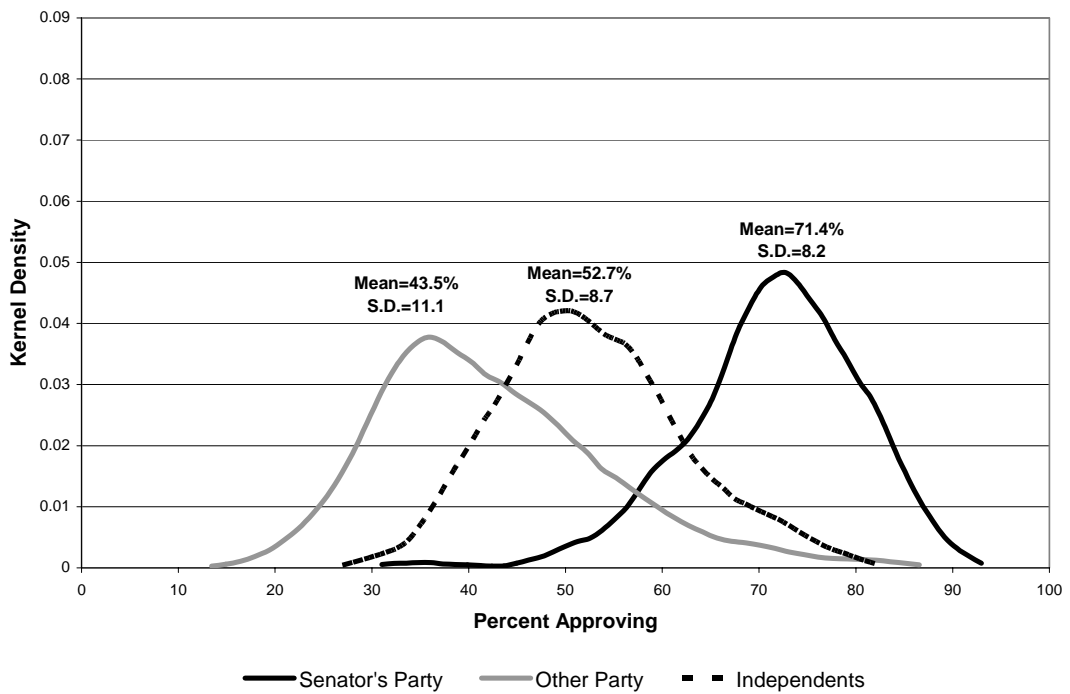
Figures 3-5 present more detailed comparisons of the distribution of partisan approval ratings across the three offices using a common scale. Figure 3 displays the widely separated modal statewide evaluations of Bush offered by Republicans, Democrats, and independents. There is almost no overlap between partisan categories; Bush's worst showing among Republicans in any of these 450 surveys (56 percent approving) is 24 points higher than his best showing among Democrats (32 percent approving). There is also little overlap between evaluations of independents and partisans. As in national polls, approval among independents is on average much closer to that of Democrats than to that of Republicans.

By comparison, the partisan distributions of senatorial approval are considerably less distinctive and much flatter (Figure 4). State-level approval is as low as 33 percent among a senator's own partisans and as high as 84 percent among the other party's partisans. Partisan differences are even more attenuated and variable among governors (Figure 5).

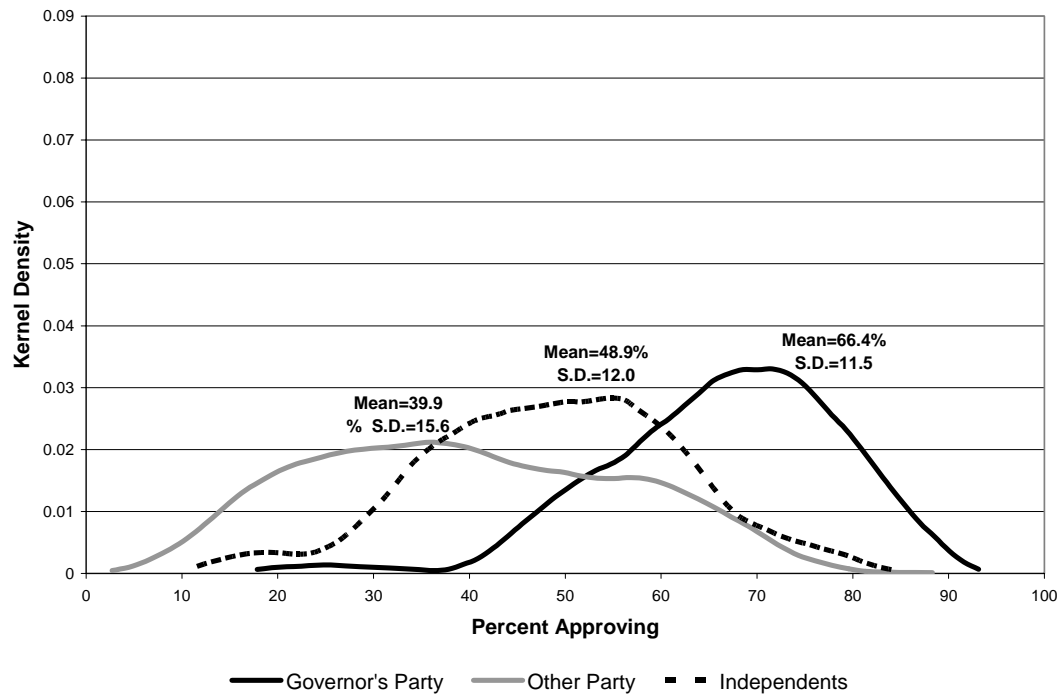
**Figure 3 Distribution of Presidential Approval in States, By Party**



**Figure 4 Distribution of Approval of Senators, By Party**



**Figure 5** Distributon of Approval of Governors, by Party



By this evidence, polarized partisan evaluation of elected leaders is not a systematic feature of contemporary American politics; Bush may be the most divisive president on record, but neither senators nor governors necessarily provoke anywhere near as much partisan discord as he does. Moreover, evaluations of Bush and these other politicians are not very strongly or systematically linked. Notice in Table 1 that state-level correlations between approval of Bush’s performance and that of senators and governors tend to be quite low. The largest correlation, between Bush and Democratic governors, is unexpectedly positive across all partisan categories (an explanation is proposed below). Relationships between approval of senators and governors are typically somewhat stronger but still modest, with again the strongest relationship appearing across party lines (Democratic Senator, Republican Governor). The strongest relationship occurs between pairs of senators, and in their case, the large negative correlation in partisan evaluations of senators of opposite parties suggest a considerable degree of polarization (the more partisans like their own party’s senator, the less they like the other party’s). The overall picture, though, indicates that state-level evaluations of top elected leaders are not strongly linked and must therefore be shaped by a somewhat divergent set of political forces. This conclusion is reinforced by the

observation that the degree of state-level partisan polarization in ratings of political leaders is also rather weakly correlated across offices (see the lower section of Table 1). It makes sense, then, to examine the sources of partisan evaluations the three offices separately.

**Table 1. Correlations Between Approval Ratings and Partisan Approval Differences Across Offices**

<b>Approval Ratings:</b>	<b>Party Identification of Respondent:</b>			
	<b>All</b>	<b>Republican</b>	<b>Democrat</b>	<b>Independent</b>
Approval of G. W. Bush and:				
Republican Senators	.13	.31	-.05	-.03
Democratic Senators	.08	-.02	.12	-.05
Republican Governors	.17	.05	.19	.05
Democratic Governors	.50	.11	.23	.23
Approval of Senators and Governors:				
Both are Republicans	.24	.24	.06	.13
Both are Democrats	.24	.25	.30	.08
Different Parties	.16	-.57	-.48	.18
Approval of Pair of State's Senators				
Both are Republicans	.40	.38	.40	.43
Both are Democrats	.52	.52	.27	.59
Different Parties	.17	-.65	-.54	.11
<hr/>				
<b>Partisan Difference in Approval:</b>	<b>President/ Senator</b>	<b>President/ Governor</b>	<b>Senator/ Governor</b>	<b>Senator/ Senator</b>
All States	.16	.24		
Republican Senator or Governor	.21	.27		
Democratic Senator or Governor	.13	.29		
All States			.15	.34
Both are Republicans			.31	.47
Both are Democrats			-.11	.29
Different Parties			.23	.26

## II. The President

Table 2 lists G.W. Bush's average approval ratings by state across the nine monthly surveys in descending order along with his share of the major party vote in 2004. A glance at these data suggests an obvious source of variations in G.W. Bush's state-level approval ratings: they mirror almost perfectly his state-level support in the 2004 election, albeit at a discount because he had become noticeably less popular by May of 2005 than he had been at the time of his reelection. The regression results reported in the first equation in Table 3 confirm what the eye detects. Bush's average approval rating for the period May 2005 through January 2006 stood at approximately 79 percent of his 2004 major party vote share in the state in question.<sup>6</sup> The estimate is quite precise, with this single variable accounting for 93 percent of the variance in his approval ratings across states.

In light of this strong relationship, it is no surprise to find that the same set of state-level variables accounts for both Bush's vote in 2004 and his ratings in the surveys (the second and third equations). Both rise with the proportion of Republican identifiers in a state, fall with the proportion of Democratic identifiers, and rise as the state's ideological balance becomes more conservative.<sup>7</sup> These three variables predict both the vote and approval ratings with great accuracy (note the root mean square errors), and the equations confirm the decisive impact of partisanship and ideology in shaping popular reactions to Bush.<sup>8</sup> Of these factors, partisanship is clearly the most important, accounting by itself for 84 percent of the variance in the 2004 vote and 82 percent of the variance in subsequent state-level approval. If the 2004 vote is included in the approval equation (the fourth equation in Table 4), it dominates statistically, presumably because it contains information about the state's electorate beyond the distribution of partisans, conservatives and liberals.

No other variables I examined, including region and state population, had any discernable effect on Bush's approval level, but there were some significant regional differences in the extent of partisan polarization on the approval question. Table 4 lists the states ranked in order of partisan differences in approval of the President.

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<sup>6</sup> For this analysis, I use the averages from the nine monthly surveys, producing 50 rather than 450 observations; this avoids artificially inflating the precision of the estimated coefficients and the problem of correlated errors across repeated observations for the same state.

<sup>7</sup> I did not enter percent conservative and percent liberal separately because they are so fully collinear ( $r=-.94$ ).

<sup>8</sup> Jacobson, *Divider*, passim.

**Table 2 Approval of GW Bush's Performance, by State**

<i>State</i>	<i>Bush Approval</i>	<i>Bush Vote 2004</i>	<i>State</i>	<i>Bush Approval</i>	<i>Bush Vote 2004</i>
Utah	<b>60.9</b>	72.8	Florida	<b>42.3</b>	52.6
Idaho	<b>57.7</b>	69.3	Minnesota	<b>41.7</b>	48.2
Wyoming	<b>56.3</b>	70.3	Hawaii	<b>41.3</b>	45.6
Nebraska	<b>54.6</b>	67.5	Missouri	<b>41.0</b>	53.7
Alabama	<b>50.8</b>	62.9	New Hampshire	<b>40.7</b>	49.3
Oklahoma	<b>50.3</b>	65.6	Arkansas	<b>40.3</b>	49.8
Mississippi	<b>50.1</b>	60.6	Wisconsin	<b>40.3</b>	55.0
Montana	<b>50.1</b>	60.2	Iowa	<b>40.1</b>	50.4
Alaska	<b>50.0</b>	63.8	Oregon	<b>39.9</b>	48.0
North Dakota	<b>49.8</b>	63.9	Nevada	<b>39.0</b>	51.3
Texas	<b>49.4</b>	61.5	Washington	<b>38.9</b>	46.3
Louisiana	<b>48.8</b>	57.4	Pennsylvania	<b>38.3</b>	48.9
Georgia	<b>47.7</b>	58.9	Ohio	<b>37.4</b>	51.3
Kansas	<b>47.7</b>	63.0	Michigan	<b>36.9</b>	48.3
South Dakota	<b>46.2</b>	60.9	Maine	<b>36.8</b>	45.9
Indiana	<b>46.1</b>	60.5	Illinois	<b>36.3</b>	45.0
Kentucky	<b>45.6</b>	60.0	Maryland	<b>36.3</b>	43.6
South Carolina	<b>45.6</b>	58.7	Connecticut	<b>35.7</b>	44.8
North Carolina	<b>45.0</b>	56.3	New Jersey	<b>35.7</b>	46.9
Tennessee	<b>44.8</b>	57.2	California	<b>34.6</b>	44.8
Arizona	<b>44.6</b>	55.5	Delaware	<b>34.1</b>	46.2
West Virginia	<b>43.9</b>	56.5	Massachusetts	<b>32.4</b>	37.3
Virginia	<b>43.4</b>	54.4	New York	<b>31.7</b>	41.2
Colorado	<b>43.0</b>	53.4	Vermont	<b>30.9</b>	39.7
New Mexico	<b>42.9</b>	50.9	Rhode Island	<b>29.9</b>	39.5

*Note:* Approval is the average of nine monthly polls taken between May 2005 and January 2006 by SurveyUSA, available at <http://www.surveyusa.com/50StateTracking.html>.

**Table 3. Sources of Presidential Approval Across States**

	(1) Average Approval		(2) 2004 Vote		(3) Average Approval		(4) Average Approval	
	Coefficient	Standard Error	Coefficient	Standard Error	Coefficient	Standard Error	Coefficient	Standard Error
2004 Presidential Vote	.79***	.03					.55***	.12
Percent Republican			.48***	.08	.38***	.08	.12	.09
Percent Democrat			-.35***	.06	-.35***	.06	-.16*	.07
Ideological Balance <sup>a</sup>			.46***	.05	.35***	.05	.10	.07
Constant	.27	1.73	40.63***	3.24	35.16***	3.26	12.73*	5.76
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.93		.94		.90		.93	
Root MSE	1.90		2.17		2.17		1.83	
Number of Cases	50		50		50		50	

*Note:* Except for the 2004 presidential vote, the variables are the average statewide percentages from in nine monthly surveys taken from May 2005 through January 2006.

<sup>a</sup>Percent conservative minus percent liberal. \* p<.05 \*\*\* p<.001

**Table 4 Partisan Differences in Approval of G.W. Bush, by State**

<i>State</i>	<i>Partisan Difference</i>	<i>Republicans</i>	<i>Democrats</i>	<i>State</i>	<i>Partisan Difference</i>	<i>Republicans</i>	<i>Democrats</i>
Minnesota	<b>74.7</b>	84.3	9.7	Maine	<b>66.2</b>	75.8	9.6
Washington	<b>74.3</b>	82.3	8.0	Wyoming	<b>66.1</b>	84.8	18.7
Montana	<b>73.1</b>	86.7	13.6	Indiana	<b>65.9</b>	80.8	14.9
Michigan	<b>72.7</b>	80.3	7.7	Maryland	<b>65.6</b>	77.6	12.0
Colorado	<b>72.6</b>	82.0	9.4	Florida	<b>65.4</b>	78.7	13.2
Wisconsin	<b>72.6</b>	82.7	10.1	Utah	<b>65.2</b>	85.8	20.6
Missouri	<b>72.1</b>	81.4	9.3	Nevada	<b>64.4</b>	75.2	10.8
Iowa	<b>71.7</b>	80.9	9.2	Massachusetts	<b>63.6</b>	74.9	11.3
Virginia	<b>71.1</b>	81.6	10.4	Mississippi	<b>63.6</b>	82.2	18.7
New Hampshire	<b>70.4</b>	80.7	10.2	Kansas	<b>62.9</b>	78.3	15.4
Georgia	<b>70.3</b>	83.8	13.4	Delaware	<b>62.7</b>	72.8	10.1
South Carolina	<b>70.3</b>	81.9	11.6	New Mexico	<b>62.7</b>	80.8	18.1
Ohio	<b>70.1</b>	78.2	8.1	Nebraska	<b>62.4</b>	82.7	20.2
Tennessee	<b>70.1</b>	81.7	11.6	Connecticut	<b>61.9</b>	74.6	12.7
Oregon	<b>70.0</b>	80.3	10.3	South Dakota	<b>61.9</b>	77.7	15.8
Idaho	<b>69.8</b>	86.8	17.0	New Jersey	<b>61.3</b>	72.6	11.2
Illinois	<b>69.8</b>	79.9	10.1	Rhode Island	<b>61.0</b>	70.3	9.3
Alabama	<b>69.3</b>	85.9	16.6	Oklahoma	<b>60.1</b>	82.6	22.4
Alaska	<b>68.2</b>	83.8	15.6	West Virginia	<b>60.1</b>	80.7	20.6
North Carolina	<b>68.2</b>	83.2	15.0	California	<b>60.0</b>	71.8	11.8
Arkansas	<b>68.0</b>	81.2	13.2	Louisiana	<b>59.1</b>	82.7	23.6
Vermont	<b>67.3</b>	75.6	8.2	Pennsylvania	<b>58.8</b>	71.2	12.4
North Dakota	<b>66.7</b>	82.2	15.6	Kentucky	<b>56.6</b>	77.0	20.4
Arizona	<b>66.3</b>	80.0	13.7	Hawaii	<b>53.4</b>	76.7	23.2
Texas	<b>66.3</b>	82.8	16.4	New York	<b>52.3</b>	65.7	13.3

*Note:* Data are average of nine monthly polls taken between May 2005 and January 2006 by SurveyUSA, available at <http://www.surveyyusa.com/50StateTracking.html>.

The regression equations in Table 5 suggest some of the general factors shaping average approval ratings of states' Republicans and Democrats. Among Republicans, approval is higher in more conservative states and lower in more Democratic states, particularly those in the Northeast.<sup>9</sup> Bush's comparatively low standing among northeastern Republicans presumably reflects the remnants of moderate Republicanism more common in that region than elsewhere. Approval among Democrats is higher the better Bush ran in the state in 2004 but, with that variable controlled, lower in states that

<sup>9</sup> On average Bush's rating among northeastern Republicans is about 7 points lower than in other regions ( $p < .001$ ); there is no significant difference among other regions.

are more Republican and conservative and, regionally, in the Midwest. Combining these effects, polarization tends to be lower where Bush ran well in 2004 and in states that are relatively more Democratic and relatively less conservative; the Northeast is a bit less polarized (because of the lower enthusiasm for Bush of Northeastern Republicans) and the Midwest a bit more so (because of the lower enthusiasm for Bush among Midwestern Democrats). Overall, though, these equations indicate that most of the action is in the constant term—that is, that a wide partisan divide is characteristic of all the states.

**Table 5 Sources of Partisan Polarization on G.W. Bush’s Performance Ratings**

	Republicans’ Approval		Democrats’ Approval		Partisan Difference	
	Coefficient	Standard Error	Coefficient	Standard Error	Coefficient	Standard Error
2004 Presidential Vote	-.03	.18	.80***	.19	-.80**	.27
Percent Republican	-.15	.13	-.27 <sup>†</sup>	.14	.14	.20
Percent Democrat	-.30**	.09	.38***	.10	-.66***	.14
Ideological Balance <sup>a</sup>	.31**	.11	-.18	.11	.47**	.16
Northeast	-3.61**	1.12			-3.18 <sup>†</sup>	1.81
Midwest			-3.36**	1.13	4.55**	1.71
Constant	91.24***	8.37	-28.59**	9.05	117.55***	12.83
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.66		.57		.45	
Root MSE	2.65		2.81		3.93	
Number of Cases	50		50		50	

<sup>a</sup>Percent conservative minus percent liberal. <sup>†</sup> p<.10 \* p<.05 \*\* p<.01 \*\*\* p<.001

### III. Senators

As Figure 1 showed, senators generally enjoy higher approval ratings than the president but with greater variation across states. Table 6 lists the senators in rank order of the average approval rating they received over the nine monthly polls. Maine’s Olympia Snowe and Susan Collins top the list, while John Cornyn barely edges Rick Santorum for last place. However, even the lowest rated senator is on average rated slightly higher than Bush during this period (his average was 43.0 percent). A visual

scan of the list suggests that moderates and senators from less populous states receive higher marks than ideologues and senators from more populous states; the rankings of Snowe and Collins also suggest that women might be better appreciated as well.

**Table 6. State-Level Approval of U.S. Senators**

<i>Senator</i>	<i>Party / state</i>	<i>Approval</i>	<i>Senator</i>	<i>Party / state</i>	<i>Approval</i>	<i>Senator</i>	<i>Party / state</i>	<i>Approval</i>
Snowe	R-ME	74.4	Hutchison	R-TX	60.0	Chafee	R-RI	52.9
Collins	R-ME	73.7	Thomas	R-WY	60.0	Alexander	R-TN	52.8
Obama	D-IL	71.9	Akaka	D-HI	59.6	Coleman	R-MN	52.4
Leahy	D-VT	69.4	Bingaman	R-NM	59.4	Landrieu	D-LA	52.2
Dorgan	D-ND	69.1	Hagel	R-NE	59.4	Frist	R-TN	51.9
McCain	R-AZ	69.0	Craig	R-ID	59.3	Ensign	R-NV	51.6
Conrad	D-ND	68.8	Wyden	D-OR	59.2	Cantwell	D-WA	51.4
Inouye	D-HI	68.8	Dodd	D-CT	59.1	Sarbanes	D-MD	51.2
Johnson	D-SD	68.2	Enzi	R-WY	59.0	Isakson	R-GA	51.0
Reed	D-RI	66.9	Warner	R-VA	58.1	Smith	R-OR	51.0
Rockefeller	D-WV	66.6	Bennett	R-UT	57.6	Boxer	D-CA	50.6
Grassley	R-IO	65.1	Pryor	D-AR	57.4	Murkowski	R-AK	50.6
Jeffords	I-VT	65.1	Session	R-AL	56.9	Talent	R-MO	49.7
Lieberman	D-CT	65.0	Kohl	D-WI	56.8	Burns	R-MT	49.3
Stevens	R-AK	65.0	Reid	D-NV	56.8	Voinovich	R-OH	49.3
Bayh	D-IN	63.7	Dole	R-NC	56.4	Bill Nelson	D-FL	49.2
Domencici	R-NM	63.6	Salazar	D-CO	56.3	Sununu	R-NH	49.2
Carper	D-DE	63.4	Thune	R-SD	56.3	Chambliss	D-GA	49.0
Ben Nelson	D-NE	63.2	Graham	R-SC	56.2	Durbin	D-IL	48.7
Byrd	D-WV	63.1	Feingold	D-WI	55.6	DeMint	R-SC	48.6
Clinton	D-NY	63.0	Lincoln	D-AR	55.6	Stabenow	D-MI	48.3
Lott	R-MS	63.0	Gregg	R-NH	55.3	Allard	R-CO	47.3
Biden	D-DE	62.4	Bond	R-MO	54.9	Kyl	R-AZ	47.0
Lugar	R-IN	61.6	Harkin	D-IO	54.7	Corzine	D-NJ	46.9
Crapo	R-ID	61.1	Murray	D-WA	54.0	Inhofe	R-OK	46.9
Hatch	R-UT	61.0	Kerry	D-MA	53.9	Coburn	R-OK	46.1
Mikulski	D-MD	60.8	Levin	D-MI	53.8	Bunning	R-KY	45.9
Baucus	D-MT	60.4	McConnell	R-KY	53.7	Burr	R-NC	45.9
Schumer	D-NY	60.3	Spector	R-PA	53.3	Dayton	D-MN	45.4
Cochran	R-MS	60.2	Feinstein	D-CA	53.2	DeWine	R-OH	45.4
Kennedy	D-MA	60.2	Roberts	R-KN	53.1	Lautenberg	D-NJ	45.0
Vitter	R-LA	60.2	Allen	R-VA	53.0	Martinez	R-FL	44.4
Shelby	R-AL	60.1	Brownback	R-KA	52.9	Santorum	R-PA	44.3
						Cornyn	R-TX	44.0

Note: Data are averages of nine monthly polls taken between May 2005 and January 2006 by SurveyUSA, available at <http://www.surveyusa.com/50StateTracking.html>.

The first equation in Table 7 tests these and other possibilities. In sharp contrast to the Bush, senators' approval ratings are completely unrelated to the state's partisan balance. Rather, they are shaped mainly by the members' ideological extremity and the state's population. More extreme senators and those from more populous states receive lower overall approval ratings. With the other variables set at their mean values, the coefficients suggest that the least extreme senator's approval rating will be about 12

points higher than that of the most extreme senator, and senators from the least populous states will be rated about 15 points higher than senators from California. Republicans are rated 3 points lower than Democrats; women receive slightly higher rating than men, but the coefficients are not significant. The same is true of partisan leaders, here defined as the Senate majority and minority leaders and whips, plus Lott, Kerry, Kennedy, and Clinton.<sup>10</sup> I also checked to see if Senate mavericks—defined here as the 11 senators who had party unity scores below 80 in 2005—were more or less popular than the rest once these other variables were controlled, and they were not, so this variable was omitted from the final equation reported here.

**Table 7 Senators' Approval and Partisan Polarization**

	<i>Approval of Senators' Performance</i>		<i>Partisan Difference in Senators' Approval</i>	
	Coefficient	Standard Error	Coefficient	Standard Error
Percent Senator's Party	.15	.12		
Percent Other Party	-.02	.11		
Ideological Extremity <sup>a</sup>	-3.75**	1.37	15.73***	2.16
State Population <sup>b</sup>	-3.75***	.70	-2.05 <sup>†</sup>	1.14
Senator is Republican	-3.08*	1.28	-.37	2.28
Senator is a woman	2.88	1.92	8.66**	3.36
Partisan Leader	2.34	2.20	13.44***	3.96
Bush polarization <sup>c</sup>			.50**	.21
Constant	55.21*	6.01	13.25	14.49
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.35		.46	
Number of Cases	91		91	

<sup>a</sup> Log of absolute DW Nominate Score.

<sup>b</sup> Log of the number of House seats in the state.

<sup>c</sup> Partisan difference in approval of G.W. Bush in the state.

<sup>†</sup> p<.10 \* p<.05 \*\* p<.01 \*\*\* p<.001

Figure 4 showed that partisan divisions in evaluations of senators are quite varied. Table 8 provides more specifics, listing all 100 senators in rank order of the difference in average approval ratings between their own and the other party's identifiers. It is readily apparent that senators identifiable as partisan national leaders tend to provoke the most polarized responses. John Kerry and Ted Kennedy top the list, with Hilary Clinton not far behind. John Thune, who had defeated minority leader Tom Daschle in the most hotly contested Senate contest of 2004—together, Thune and Daschle spent more than

<sup>10</sup> Only 91 senators are available for analysis because DW-Nominate scores are not yet published for senators elected in 2004.

\$34 million courting the state's 502,000 registered voters—also generates widely divergent partisan responses. So does James Jeffords, whose defection in 2001 cost Republicans control of the Senate for 18 months. Majority leader Bill Frist, his predecessor, Trent Lott, and Democratic minority leader Harry Reid are also among the top 20 polarizers. At the other end of the list are four Republican senators who win higher evaluations from the opposition party than their own. Three (Collins, Snowe, and Lincoln Chaffee—does his given name keep him from switching parties?) are northeastern moderates often at odds with their party; the other, Chuck Hagel is a conservative with an independent streak who has spoken out against the Bush administration's foreign policies.

The second equation in Table 7 presents a more systematic analysis of the sources of partisan differences on senators' performance. The most consequential variable is clearly the senator's ideological extremity; the more ideologically extreme the voting record, the wider the partisan division on job approval. Setting the other variables at their means, the coefficient predicts the partisan gap to vary from -6.2 points (higher approval from the other party's adherents) for the most moderate senator to 42.7 points for the most extreme senator. Other things equal, prominent partisan leaders provoke substantially more polarized responses, as do—surprisingly, given Collins' and Snowe's positions on the list in Table 7—women senators. The gap is also positively related to partisan polarization in evaluations of Bush, suggesting some systematic underlying variation across states electorates in degree of polarization. And in line with the hypothesis proposed in the introduction, smaller state constituencies are less polarized than larger ones.

If ideological extremity costs senators support, why are they not more moderate? The equations in Table 9 provide part of the answer and show more precisely how extremity provokes polarization. Ideological extremism has a large negative effect on approval ratings offered by people who identify with the party opposite the senator's; the coefficients indicate that approval is about 35 percentage points lower for the most compared to the least extreme Democratic senator and about 26 points lower for the most compared to the least extreme Republican senator. In contrast, ideological extremism has a significant *positive* effect on Republicans' approval of Republican senators (approval of the most conservative Republican is estimated to be 14 points higher than of

**Table 8 Partisan Differences in Approval of Senators**

<i>Senator</i>	<i>Party / state</i>	<i>Partisan Difference</i>	<i>Senator's Party</i>	<i>Other Party</i>	<i>Senator</i>	<i>Party / state</i>	<i>Partisan Difference</i>	<i>Senator's Party</i>	<i>Other Party</i>	<i>Senator</i>	<i>Party / state</i>	<i>Partisan Difference</i>	<i>Senator's Party</i>	<i>Other Party</i>
Kerry	D-MA	<b>57.6</b>	77.8	20.2	Biden	D-DE	<b>34.7</b>	78.1	43.4	Burr	R-NC	<b>27.6</b>	62.3	34.8
Kennedy	D-MA	<b>56.9</b>	83.1	26.2	Obama	D-IL	<b>34.3</b>	85.9	51.6	Rockefeller	D-WV	<b>27.3</b>	77.7	50.3
Thune	R-SD	<b>53.0</b>	81.9	28.9	Dayton	D-MN	<b>33.7</b>	61.1	27.4	Johnson	D-SD	<b>26.9</b>	83.9	57.0
Coleman	R-MN	<b>49.6</b>	80.8	31.2	Cochran	R-MS	<b>33.6</b>	77.6	44.0	Lautenberg	D-NJ	<b>26.6</b>	57.9	31.3
Clinton	D-NY	<b>49.3</b>	83.9	34.6	DeMint	R-SC	<b>33.6</b>	66.4	32.9	Dodd	D-CT	<b>25.2</b>	70.7	45.4
Murray	D-WA	<b>45.7</b>	76.4	30.8	Isakson	R-GA	<b>33.2</b>	68.2	35.0	Smith	R-OR	<b>24.6</b>	68.4	43.9
Boxer	D-CA	<b>45.4</b>	71.8	26.3	Conrad	D-ND	<b>33.2</b>	85.9	52.7	Baucus	D-MT	<b>24.1</b>	74.8	50.7
Jeffords	I-VT	<b>43.4</b>	81.0	37.6	Santorum	R-PA	<b>33.0</b>	63.9	30.9	Akaka	D-HI	<b>24.0</b>	72.8	48.8
Talent	R-MO	<b>43.4</b>	74.0	30.6	McConnell	R-KY	<b>32.8</b>	71.6	38.8	Durbin	D-IL	<b>24.0</b>	59.2	35.2
Reid	D-NV	<b>41.9</b>	78.0	36.1	Bennett	R-UT	<b>32.7</b>	70.4	37.8	Stabenow	D-MI	<b>23.9</b>	59.1	35.2
Burns	R-MT	<b>41.0</b>	70.6	29.6	Gregg	R-NH	<b>32.7</b>	73.9	41.2	Wyden	D-OR	<b>23.8</b>	73.0	49.2
Mikulski	D-MD	<b>41.0</b>	77.7	36.7	Shelby	R-AL	<b>31.8</b>	77.2	45.4	Alexander	R-TN	<b>23.6</b>	65.8	42.2
Hatch	R-UT	<b>40.9</b>	77.1	36.2	Allard	R-CO	<b>31.7</b>	65.9	34.2	Graham	R-SC	<b>22.6</b>	68.7	46.1
Leahy	D-VT	<b>40.6</b>	85.1	44.6	Inhofe	R-OK	<b>31.7</b>	65.0	33.3	Pryor	D-AR	<b>20.3</b>	66.3	46.0
Frist	R-TN	<b>40.2</b>	74.3	34.1	Thomas	R-WY	<b>31.3</b>	74.7	43.3	Bayh	D-IN	<b>20.0</b>	75.3	55.3
Allen	R-VA	<b>40.3</b>	74.7	34.8	Hutchison	R-TX	<b>31.2</b>	77.3	46.1	Domenici	R-NM	<b>20.0</b>	78.8	58.8
Byrd	D-WV	<b>39.8</b>	81.1	41.3	Coburn	R-OK	<b>31.1</b>	63.0	31.9	Schumer	D-NY	<b>20.0</b>	71.0	51.0
Lott	R-MS	<b>39.7</b>	83.2	43.6	Enzi	R-WY	<b>31.1</b>	73.0	41.9	DeWine	R-OH	<b>19.7</b>	57.7	38.0
Feingold	D-WI	<b>39.2</b>	73.6	34.3	Stevens	R-AK	<b>31.0</b>	81.3	50.3	Sarbanes	D-MD	<b>19.7</b>	60.6	40.9
Bond	R-MO	<b>39.1</b>	77.9	38.8	Crapo	R-ID	<b>30.9</b>	75.1	44.2	Inouye	D-HI	<b>19.3</b>	80.3	61.0
Harkin	D-IO	<b>39.0</b>	73.9	34.9	Roberts	R-KN	<b>30.9</b>	69.1	38.2	Bingaman	R-NM	<b>16.6</b>	69.2	52.7
Salazar	D-CO	<b>38.9</b>	77.7	38.8	Session	R-AL	<b>30.7</b>	73.6	42.9	Warner	R-VA	<b>18.1</b>	68.3	50.2
Lincoln	D-AR	<b>37.8</b>	73.3	35.6	Bunning	R-KY	<b>30.2</b>	63.1	32.9	Lugar	R-IN	<b>14.4</b>	70.2	55.8
Sununu	R-NH	<b>37.7</b>	70.3	32.7	Vitter	R-LA	<b>29.4</b>	78.0	48.6	Voinovich	R-OH	<b>11.4</b>	57.3	45.9
Landrieu	D-LA	<b>37.4</b>	70.6	33.1	Kyl	R-AZ	<b>29.1</b>	64.3	35.2	Ben Nelson	D-NE	<b>8.7</b>	70.0	61.3
Chambliss	D-GA	<b>37.0</b>	68.1	31.1	Corzine	D-NJ	<b>29.0</b>	61.8	32.8	Carper	D-DE	<b>8.2</b>	68.1	59.9
Cantwell	D-WA	<b>36.7</b>	69.9	33.2	Ensign	R-NV	<b>28.7</b>	69.3	40.7	Lieberman	D-CT	<b>2.6</b>	67.3	64.8
Dole	R-NC	<b>36.3</b>	77.3	41.0	Martinez	R-FL	<b>28.7</b>	61.6	32.9	Spector	R-PA	<b>1.4</b>	55.8	54.3
Murkowski	R-AK	<b>36.3</b>	68.9	32.6	Kohl	D-WI	<b>28.6</b>	71.4	42.9	McCain	R-AZ	<b>0.9</b>	71.7	70.8
Feinstein	D-CA	<b>36.1</b>	70.9	34.8	Grassley	R-IO	<b>28.1</b>	80.7	52.6	Bill Nelson	D-FL	<b>0.3</b>	51.1	50.8
Craig	R-ID	<b>35.4</b>	75.3	39.9	Levin	D-MI	<b>28.1</b>	66.3	38.2	Collins	R-ME	<b>-3.8</b>	71.7	75.4
Dorgan	D-ND	<b>35.4</b>	88.4	53.0	Reed	D-RI	<b>28.1</b>	77.9	49.8	Hagel	R-NE	<b>-7.4</b>	58.1	65.6
Brownback	R-KA	<b>35.3</b>	70.6	35.2	Cornyn	R-TX	<b>27.9</b>	59.6	31.7	Snowe	R-ME	<b>-9.1</b>	69.6	78.7
										Chafee	R-RI	<b>-19.6</b>	42.0	61.6

Note: Data are averages of nine monthly polls taken between May 2005 and January 2006 by SurveyUSA, available at <http://www.surveyusa.com/50StateTracking.html>.

the most moderate) and no significant effect all on how Democratic respondents rate Democratic senators. More extreme Republican senators get lower marks from independents, but the loss is almost completely offset by the gain among their own partisans; approval of Senate Democrats by independents is completely unrelated to roll call ideology. Ideologues in office may alienate rival partisans, but they do not appear to displease their own partisans in the least and do not put off independents to the extent that it might raise political problems.

**Table 9 Ideological Extremism and Approval of Senators' Performance**

	Republicans		Democrats		Independents	
	Coefficient	Standard Error	Coefficient	Standard Error	Coefficient	Standard Error
<i>Republican Senators</i>						
Ideological Extremity <sup>a</sup>	5.12**	1.73	-12.65***	2.18	-6.36***	1.72
State Population <sup>b</sup>	-1.90 <sup>†</sup>	1.12	-1.84	1.41	-2.20*	1.11
Constant	79.16***	2.92	32.19***	3.68	46.80***	2.91
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.16		.42		.26	
Number of Cases	48		48		48	
<i>Democratic Senators</i>						
Ideological Extremity <sup>a</sup>	-9.29**	2.87	2.56	2.71	.23	2.08
State Population <sup>b</sup>	-3.56**	1.26	-4.15***	1.05	-4.99***	.81
Constant	39.45***	4.59	82.25***	3.86	64.56***	2.95
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.36		.25		.50	
Number of Cases	43		43		43	

*Note:* The dependent variable, percent approving of the senator's performance, is from the average of nine monthly polls taken between May 2005 and January 2006 by SurveyUSA, available at <http://www.surveyusa.com/50StateTracking.html>.

<sup>a</sup> Log of absolute DW Nominate Score.

<sup>b</sup> Log of the number of House seats in the state.

\*\* p<.01

\*\*\* p<.001

Moreover, senators certainly recognize that ideological extremity might be a problem and so adapt their roll call voting to fit their state's partisan profile. This is evident when ideological extremism is regressed on the states' partisan and ideological balances (See Table 10). The coefficients suggest that the Democrat representing the state with the maximum combination Republicans and conservatives would compile a score .40 units closer to the center (on an absolute DW Nominate scale ranging from 0 to 1.0) than the

Democrat from the most Democratic and liberal state; and the Republican from the most Democratic and liberal state is predicted to have a score .36 units closer to the center than the one representing the most Republican and conservative state. A senators' propensity to vote in ways that antagonize the other party's identifiers or offend ideologues on the opposite side of the spectrum is thus inversely proportional to their shares of the state's electorate. No shock here, to be sure, but this result helps to explain why the partisan composition of the state appears to be unrelated to senators' statewide approval ratings (recall Table 7).

**Table 10 The Effects of State Partisanship and Ideology on Roll-Call Ideology**

	<i>Republican Senators</i>		<i>Democratic Senators</i>	
	Coefficient	Standard Error	Coefficient	Standard Error
Party Balance <sup>a</sup>	.008	.008	-.021*	.008
Ideological Balance <sup>b</sup>	.036***	.010	-.016*	.007
Constant	-2.106***	.233	.893***	.146
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.29		.35	
Number of Cases	48		43	

Note: the dependent variable is the log of the senator's absolute DW Nominate score for the 108<sup>th</sup> Congress.

<sup>a</sup>Percent Republicans minus percent Democrats

<sup>b</sup>Percent conservative minus percent liberal.

\* p<.05 \*\*p<.01 \*\*\* p<.001

A final point: there was little change in average approval ratings of senators over the nine months surveyed other than a slight upward trend that left the aggregate average 2.4 points higher at the end than at the beginning of the period. The average absolute change was only 3.6 points, with a standard deviation of 2.8 points. Only a few individual senators were subject to shifts that were unlikely to be random: approval of Conrad Burns (R-MT) fell with revelations about his relationship with the crooked lobbyist Jack Abramoff; Bill Frist's (R-TN) numbers also declined, presumably because of some rocky periods as majority leader. But for the vast majority, popular evaluations were quite stable during the period under examination.

#### IV. Governors

Governors provoke even more widely varied responses from their states' citizens than do senators. For obvious reasons—they do not hold federal offices—their standing among partisans is less subject to the influence of national politics. Partly for this reason, they are far more likely than senators to serve states where their party is in the minority.<sup>11</sup> For example, at present, 12 of the 31 states won by Bush in 2004 have Democratic governors, and 10 of the 19 states won by Kerry have Republican governors. The proportion of governors from the “wrong” party by this measure (42 percent) is notably larger than that of U.S senators (25 percent).

Public assessments of governors may also differ from assessments of senators simply because executives are so much more easily assigned credit or blame for policies and outcomes. Their actions get more routine attention from news media, and their successes

**Table 11 Approval of Governors' Performance**

Governor	Party and State	Percent Approving	Governor	Party and State	Percent Approving
Hoeven	R-ND	74.8	Codey	D-NJ	52.4
Rell	R-CT	74.1	Bredesen	D-TN	51.1
Rounds	R-SD	72.7	Sanford	R-SC	50.8
Huntsman	R-UT	69.3	Pawlenty	R-MN	50.7
Manchin	D-WV	66.0	Barbour	R-MS	48.2
Freudenthal	D-WY	65.2	Riley	R-AL	48.0
Schweitzer	D-MT	63.8	Ehrlich	R-MD	47.8
Warner	D-VA	63.8	Romney	R-MA	46.7
Douglas	R-VT	63.4	Rendell	D-PA	46.1
Lynch	D-NH	62.8	Doyle	D-WI	45.3
Henry	D-OK	60.8	Daniels	R-IN	44.0
Napolitano	D-AZ	60.4	Blanco	D-LA	43.9
Heineman	R-NE	60.3	Perry	R-TX	43.7
Lingle	R-HI	59.2	Pataki	R-NY	43.2
Richardson	D-NM	58.2	Gregoire	D-WA	41.4
Kempthorne	R-ID	57.9	Minner	D-DE	41.4
Guinn	R-NV	57.8	Kulongoski	D-OR	41.1
Sebelius	D-KA	57.0	Granholt	D-MI	39.6
Huckabee	R-AR	56.3	Blagojevich	D-IL	39.1
Bush	R-FL	55.4	Baldacci	D-ME	38.8
Carcieri	R-RI	54.4	Schwarzenegger	R-CA	35.3
Perdue	R-GA	54.4	Blunt	R-MO	34.8
Easley	D-NC	54.3	Fletcher	R-KY	33.9
Vilsack	D-IO	53.6	Murkowski	R-AK	28.9
Owens	R-CO	52.8	Taft	R-OH	18.6

Note: Data are averages of nine monthly polls taken between May 2005 and January 2006 by SurveyUSA, available at <http://www.surveyusa.com/50StateTracking.html>.

<sup>11</sup> For additional explanations of this phenomenon, see Morris P. Fiorina, *Divided Government*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1996), pp. 66-81.

and failures are individual rather than collective. Thus it is not surprising to find a wider range of evaluations of governors than of senators. Table 11 lists the 50 governor in rank order of their average approval ratings over the nine monthly surveys. A glance at the data indicates that the most popular governors match the top senators, with approval ratings approaching 75 percent, but the least popular of them are rated lower than the least popular senator (14 governors—28 percent of the total—have ratings below the lowest rated senator; compare Table 6). Mired in scandal, Robert Taft of Ohio brings up the rear.<sup>12</sup> Governors also suffer in pair-wise comparisons; 61 percent of senators are rated higher than their state's governor. On the other hand, all but nine governors get higher marks from their state's citizens than does the president.

Table 11 also offers hints about some factors that affect assessments of governors. Like senators, they apparently receive higher ratings in the less populous states, presumably for the same reasons—more homogeneous electorates, closer ties to constituents. Moreover, governors in states won by the other party's presidential candidate in 2004 seem more common higher on the list. The multivariate analyses in Table 12 bear out these observations and make several additional points. Unlike senators, governors are not given ideological scores, so their degree of extremism cannot be measured. However, past research suggests that their level of approval is sensitive to the state's unemployment rate, and hence this variable is included in the equations.<sup>13</sup> The governor's fit with the state's partisan leanings is measured by the 2004 presidential vote. A categorical variable indicates whether the governor might be considered a national politician (explained in greater detail below). I also add a categorical variable for Ohio because the Taft administration's scandals have made it an extreme outlier.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> In August, 2005, Taft pled no contest to violating the law by failing to disclose gifts from lobbyists, including those from a rare coin dealer now on trial for an investment scheme allegedly defrauding the state treasury. This was only one of several scandals besetting Taft's administration.

<sup>13</sup> Susan B. Hansen, "'Life is not Fair': Governors' Job Performance Ratings and State Economies," *Political Research Quarterly* 52 (March 1999), pp. 167-188.

<sup>14</sup> Ernie Fletcher of Kentucky was also beset by some personnel scandals, but the separate coefficient for that state did not achieve statistical significance so I do not include it here. Nothing of substance changes with or without it.

**Table 12 Sources of Approval of Governors**

	<i>All Respondents</i>		<i>Governor's Partisans</i>		<i>Other Party's Partisans</i>	
	Coefficient	Standard Error	Coefficient	Standard Error	Coefficient	Standard Error
Percent Governor's Party	.51**	.20				
Percent Other Party	.11	.24				
State Population <sup>a</sup>	-3.66**	1.29	-1.44	1.31	-4.83**	1.71
State Partisan Fit <sup>b</sup>	-4.18**	1.65	-1.40	1.41	-5.07**	1.67
Unemployment Rate, 2005	-5.11***	1.19	-4.51***	1.27	-5.43**	1.86
National Politician	-1.51	2.93	2.11	3.12	-5.77	4.09
Ohio	-23.72**	8.28	-34.26***	8.88	-15.82	11.66
Constant	63.51***	11.34	91.24***	5.89	76.43***	7.74
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.55		.44		.48	
Number of Cases	50		50		50	

*Note:* The dependent variable, percent approving of the governor's performance, is from the average of nine monthly polls taken between May 2005 and January 2006 by SurveyUSA, available at <http://www.surveyusa.com/50StateTracking.html>.

<sup>a</sup> Log of the number of House seats in the state.

<sup>b</sup> Takes the value of 1 if the governor's party's presidential candidate received more than 52 percent of the vote in 2004, -1 if less than 48 percent, and 0 if between 48 and 52 percent.

The results show that, unlike senators but like the president, the partisan composition of the state affects governors' levels of approval; all else equal, a 10 percentage-point difference in their party's share of identifiers is associated with a 5 point difference in their approval rating. As with senators, governors from less populous states receive higher marks; with other variables set at their means, approval is estimated to be about 15 points higher in single-seat states than in California (identical to the estimate for senators). The governor's fit with the state's partisan makeup also makes a significant difference; Democratic governors in red states and Republican governors in blue states receive significantly higher ratings. National politicians are neither helped nor hurt by that status. The most consequential variable affecting governors' ratings appears to be the state's level of unemployment; with the other variables set at their means, approval in the state with the lowest unemployment (2.8 percent) is estimated to be 26 points higher than in the state with the highest unemployment (7.9). (The governor's gender and party were unrelated to approval and so were omitted from the model discussed here.)

The higher approval level of governors serving states where their party is in the minority is not, on reflection, at all anomalous: they could not win the office such states without considerable cross-party appeal. This is the likely explanation for the positive

correlation between approval of Bush and approval of Democratic governors noted in Table 1; Democrats leading states where Bush ran strongly would have to be popular with both parties' identifiers to win and hold the office. A comparison of the effects of state size, partisan fit, national status and unemployment on the ratings of governor's partisans and the rival party's partisans (the second and third equations in Table 12) indicate that the first three of these variables matter primarily for the latter group; governors from the minority party serving small states win notably higher marks from opposition partisans, and without losing any ground among their own. National status is a negative with this group but its coefficient is estimated far too imprecisely to reach statistical significance. The unemployment rate, however, affects ratings of both sets of partisans about equally.<sup>15</sup> It is not clear whether the large effect of unemployment means that citizens hold governors responsible for local economic conditions, or if unemployment merely proxies the state's level of prosperity, which affects the relative difficulty of governing in a way that pleases voters. That is, we might be observing the consequences of variation in the depth of conflict and public unhappiness generated by taxing and spending decisions, which are bound to be more vexing when a weak economy forces governors to make tougher tradeoffs. However, when I examined changes in taxation or spending at the state level during 2005, I found no evidence that these variables had any effect on governors' ratings with or without unemployment included in the equation.

On average, governors are slightly less polarizing than senators and, of course, far less so than President Bush. Table 13 lists them by the rank order of the partisan gap in their approval ratings averaged over the nine sets of surveys. Governors with high national visibility or a background of participation in national politics—Jeb Bush, Arnold Schwarzenegger (major campaigner for Bush in 2004), Haley Barbour (former head of the Republican National Committee), Mitt Romney (running for president), Mitch Daniels (former director the Office of Management and Budget in the G.W. Bush administration) tend to appear higher on the list. The position of Christine Gregoire, number two on the list, is partly a legacy of a bitterly disputed 2004 vote count that took

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<sup>15</sup> I also examined the effects of a *change* in the unemployment rate in the state during 2005 but it had no effect on the governor's approval rating.

**Table 13 Partisan Differences in Approval of Governors**

<i>Governor</i>	<i>Party and State</i>	<i>Partisan Difference</i>	<i>Governor's Party</i>	<i>Other Party</i>
Pawlenty	R-MN	<b>53.1</b>	80.0	26.9
Gregoire	D-WA	<b>49.9</b>	67.3	17.4
Bush	R-FL	<b>46.9</b>	79.9	33.0
Schwarzenegger	R-CA	<b>46.7</b>	61.9	15.2
Romney	R-MA	<b>45.6</b>	76.2	30.7
Blunt	R-MO	<b>44.9</b>	60.6	15.7
Barbour	R-MS	<b>41.8</b>	69.3	27.6
Ehrlich	R-MD	<b>37.9</b>	71.7	33.8
Daniels	R-IN	<b>37.4</b>	62.8	25.3
Vilsack	D-IO	<b>36.8</b>	72.3	35.6
Doyle	D-WI	<b>36.6</b>	63.7	27.1
Perdue	R-GA	<b>35.9</b>	73.3	37.4
Owens	R-CO	<b>34.1</b>	71.3	37.2
Perry	R-TX	<b>32.2</b>	60.9	28.7
Blagojevich	D-IL	<b>31.1</b>	53.4	22.3
Murkowski	R-AK	<b>31.0</b>	45.9	14.9
Richardson	D-NM	<b>31.0</b>	73.1	42.1
Douglas	R-VT	<b>30.9</b>	83.7	52.8
Schweitzer	D-MT	<b>30.7</b>	81.3	50.7
Granholt	D-MI	<b>30.4</b>	54.0	23.6
Huckabee	R-AR	<b>29.6</b>	74.2	44.7
Sanford	R-SC	<b>29.1</b>	66.9	37.8
Napolitano	D-AZ	<b>29.0</b>	77.1	48.1
Baldacci	D ME	<b>28.8</b>	53.2	24.4
Fletcher	R-KY	<b>28.4</b>	49.0	20.6
Kempthorne	R-ID	<b>28.3</b>	70.9	42.6
Blanco	D-LA	<b>28.3</b>	58.4	30.1
Kulongoski	D-OR	<b>28.2</b>	56.0	27.8
Carcieri	R-RI	<b>28.2</b>	70.1	41.9
Rendell	D-PA	<b>27.0</b>	59.4	32.4
Riley	R-AL	<b>26.2</b>	61.6	35.3
Sebelius	D-KA	<b>22.7</b>	71.4	48.8
Hoeven	R-ND	<b>22.4</b>	85.3	62.9
Pataki	R-NY	<b>22.3</b>	58.0	35.7
Lingle	R-HI	<b>22.1</b>	74.2	52.1
Rounds	R-SD	<b>19.0</b>	84.2	65.2
Huntsman	R-UT	<b>17.7</b>	78.2	60.6
Lynch	D-NH	<b>17.6</b>	72.3	54.8
Minner	D-DE	<b>17.2</b>	51.2	34.0
Easley	D-NC	<b>16.2</b>	64.2	48.0
Warner	D-VA	<b>15.2</b>	71.9	56.7
Heineman	R-NE	<b>13.4</b>	69.9	56.4
Henry	D-OK	<b>13.0</b>	68.4	55.4
Taft	R-OH	<b>11.8</b>	26.1	14.3
Codey	D-NJ	<b>11.8</b>	57.9	46.1
Rell	R-CT	<b>7.0</b>	78.2	71.2
Manchin	D-WV	<b>4.9</b>	70.2	65.3
Guinn	R-NV	<b>2.8</b>	61.1	58.3
Freudenthal	D-WY	<b>1.8</b>	68.7	66.9
Bredesen	D-TN	<b>-7.7</b>	48.9	56.6

seven weeks to resolve and put her in office by a mere 129 votes (shades of Florida in 2000). But Washington is also characterized by polarized public responses to Bush and one of the state’s two senators (Patty Murray), as is Minnesota, where Tim Pawlenty stands as the most divisive of all governor during this period. Averaged across offices, Minnesota displays the highest level of partisan polarization of any state. Not all actual or would-be national figures are polarizing; George Pataki of New York is not because he is not very popular among his own party; Mark Warner of Virginia is not because he is popular with both parties.

Further analysis reveals patterns already implicit in the partisan comparisons in Table 12. Table 14 confirms that the partisan gap for governors is smaller the larger the proportion of their partisans in the state, larger the more populous the state, and smaller when the governor’s party is in the local minority. Unemployment has no significant effect on polarization, as it affects both sets of partisans almost equally. National politicians—coded as those who have served in the Senate or in high appointive offices in Washington or who served as national campaigners, along with those mentioned as likely presidential candidates in 2008—are significantly more polarizing.<sup>16</sup> Ohio is again in a class by itself, mainly because the extraordinarily low approval level offered by the governor’s own partisans leaves a large bipartisan majority panning his performance.

**Table 14 Sources of the Partisan Gap in Approval of Governors**

	Coefficient	Standard Error
Percent Governor’s Party	-.76**	.27
Percent Other Party	-.05	.33
State Population <sup>a</sup>	3.99*	1.74
State Partisan Fit <sup>b</sup>	5.72*	2.25
Unemployment Rate, 2005	1.47	1.59
National Politician	8.50*	4.00
Ohio	-23.22*	11.11
Bush Polarization	.56 <sup>†</sup>	.32
Constant	1.00	30.20
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.34	
Number of Cases	50	

<sup>a</sup>Log of the number of House seats in the state.

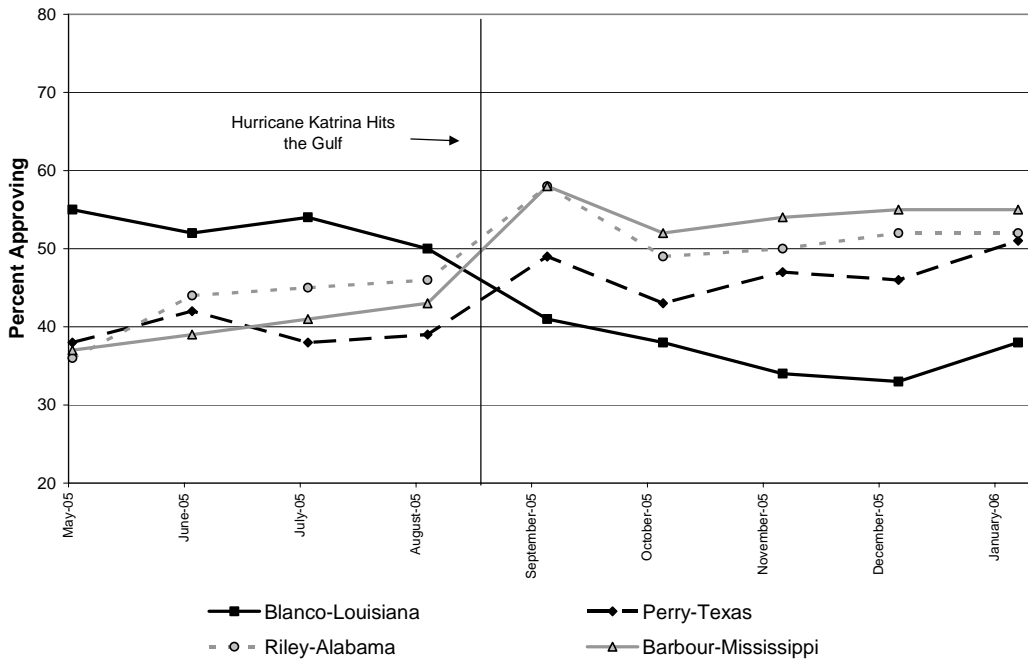
<sup>b</sup>Partisan difference in approval of G.W. Bush and state’s governor. <sup>†</sup>p<.10 \* p<.05 \*\* p<.01 \*\*\* p<.001

<sup>16</sup> The list includes Bush, Schwarzenegger, Romney, Barbour, Daniels, Murkowski, Richardson, Kempthorne, Pataki, and Warner.

As in the case of senators, the degree of polarization generated by Bush is positively related to the degree of polarization on governors' ratings, but only at the generous  $p < .10$  level of significance.

Finally, constituents' evaluations of governors were more changeable during the period under review than were their evaluations of senators. The average ratings of governors across all states rose by about 6 percentage points between May 2005 and January 2006 (from 48.4 to 54.3 approving). The mean absolute change over these months was 7.4 points, with a standard deviation of 5.5, both twice the values for senators. One systematic source of change was Hurricane Katrina (Figure 6). Louisiana's Kathleen Blanco shared blame for the slow and inept government response to the disaster that befell New Orleans and saw her approval ratings drop by 17 points. The governors of Alabama, Mississippi, and Texas receive higher marks for their responses, with approval ratings rising by 14, 18 and 13 points, respectively. Two governors serving the last few months of their terms during this period—Mark Warner of Virginia

**Figure 6 Approval of Governors in States Affected by Hurricane Katrina**



and Richard Codey of New Jersey—also enjoyed substantial increases in approval (17 and 23 points, respectively). Going to detail across all of the states would take us beyond the scope of this paper, but these cases are sufficient to underline the point that governors, as executives, are far more subject than senators to the assignment of credit or blame for decisions and their consequences.

## Discussion

When it comes to provoking widely divergent partisan reactions, George W. Bush is plainly in a class by himself. As Table 15 shows, he is typically rated higher by Republicans than are senators and governors of his own party; only six of the 28 Republican governors and two of the 55 Republican senators received higher average approval ratings from Republicans (over the nine surveys) than the president. And only one Republican governor—and not a single Republican senator—received lower ratings from Democrats.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, partisanship and ideology almost completely determine

**Table 15 Approval Comparisons Across Offices**

	Republican Senators	Republican Governors
Republican Respondents		
Rate Bush higher	53	22
Rate senator/governor higher <sup>a</sup>	2	6
Mean difference in rating <sup>b</sup>	11.1	11.3
Democratic respondents		
Rate Bush higher <sup>c</sup>	0	1
Rate senator/governor higher	55	27
Mean difference in rating	-27.9	-24.5

<sup>a</sup>Senators Lott (MS) and Thune (SD); governors Bush (FL), Douglas (VT), Rell (CT), Romney (MA), Hoeven (ND), and Rounds (SD).

<sup>b</sup>Rating of Bush minus rating of governor/senator

<sup>c</sup>Governor Murkowski (AK).

<sup>17</sup> Frank Murkowski (AK) received an average approval rating of 14.6 percent from his state’s Democrats, compared to 15.6 percent for Bush. No Democratic senator or governor receives lower ratings from Democrats or higher ratings from Republicans than does Bush.

the state-level distribution of popular responses to the president, just as they determined his vote in the 2004 election. Partisan responses to Bush are highly nationalized and, during the period under review, largely frozen.

Popular evaluations of senators and governors tend to be much less polarized along party lines, and the degree of polarization shows considerably more variance across states. In addition, polarization is only weakly related across offices, indicating that diverse rather than uniform forces shape popular performance ratings.

Among senators, constituency population, ideological extremism, status as a national partisan leader, and gender determine the degree of polarization. Senators from less populous states, with more moderate voting records, and without high national profiles as partisan leaders enjoy more cross-party support; those with the opposite characteristics are the leading polarizers. Women senators are also more divisive, on average, than men, an interesting empirical finding for which I have no good explanation. This pattern holds at the level of individual states as well as across the entire set of senators; in the seven states with senate delegations split by gender, the woman is the more polarizing figure in six (Debbie Stabenow of Michigan is the exception), generally receiving both higher marks from her own partisans and lower marks from rival partisans than her male counterpart. The average partisan approval gap is 12.6 points wider for the female than for the male senator in these states. Further research into this phenomenon is clearly needed.

To a considerable degree, senators determine the extent to which they polarized their state's partisans. Although there is nothing they can do about their gender or state's population, they can choose how to vote and what kind of a national profile to pursue. Prudently, senators tend toward moderation when their state's political profile favors the other party, and nearly half receive approval ratings above 50 percent from rival party identifiers, with eight above 60 percent, and three—Snowe, Collins, and McCain—above 70 percent. Only the most prominent national partisan leaders provoke state-level divisions approaching those inspired by Bush.

Governors display even greater political adaptability than senators, with a substantial number holding office in the “wrong” colored states and enjoying high levels of overall

approval by maintaining the cross-party support they had to achieve to get elected in the first place. They are more successful in doing so in the more sparsely populated states, however, and governors' ratings are evidently hostage to local economic conditions over which they have little if any real control. They also cannot avoid responsibility for decisions and outcomes in dealing with the challenges that nature, global change, or local politics hand them. Thus their ratings tend to be more variable over time, or at least they were during the period under scrutiny. Again, more nationally-oriented figures tend to generate wider partisan differences in evaluations. At present, polarization flows from the top down and from the center to the periphery of American politics.

Assuming SurveyUSA continues to conduct and distribute these surveys, the analyses presented here are only a beginning. About half the governors will be running for reelection in 2006, as will 29 senators, and it will be interesting to study how their approval ratings shape and respond to electoral politics over the coming months. The data will expand our ability to understand midterm election processes, particularly the regarding the effects of the president's ratings and other state-level variables on candidate recruitment, campaign finance, candidate popularity, and election results.

## Appendix: SurveyUSA Methodology

SurveyUSA uses automated telephone interviews featuring the voices of local broadcast anchors to introduce the questions. They interview samples of approximately 600 adult respondents per state survey per month. Their response rate (RR4)<sup>18</sup> of approximately .11 is lower than the mean for national telephone surveys (.22) but falls within the range of such surveys (.05 to .40). Similarly, their cooperation “rate 2”<sup>19</sup> of .22 is below the mean for national telephone surveys (.37) but within their range (.11 to .57).<sup>20</sup> The aggregate results and marginals reported at their website are weighted for basic demographics (age, sex, race, education), as are results reported by national media surveys.

I ran several diagnostic tests to assess the consistency and external plausibility of the data. The results across the nine monthly surveys were remarkably consistent. As Table A1 indicates, the results are very stable from one survey to the next in the states, with attitudes toward abortion and party identification showing the greatest aggregate stability, as we would expect on theoretical ground if they were being measured consistently.

**Table A1. Consistency of Responses Across Surveys**

Variable:	<i>Mean correlation across nine surveys (36 pairings)</i>	<i>Standard deviation of correlations</i>	<i>Mean absolute change between surveys</i>	<i>Standard deviation of mean absolute change</i>
Percent “pro-life”	.95	.01	2.21	1.80
Percent “pro-choice”	.95	.01	2.20	1.73
Percent Democratic identifiers	.91	.03	2.17	1.73
Percent Republican identifiers	.93	.01	2.21	1.71
Percent Independents	.94	.02	2.43	1.77
Approval of GW Bush	.93	.01	2.49	1.88
Approval of Senators	.89	.03	2.65	2.14
Approval of Governors	.93	.04	2.81	2.31

<sup>18</sup> AAPOR standard, calculated as completed interviews+ partial interviews /known eligible + e(unknown eligible).

<sup>19</sup> Calculated as completed interviews+partial interviews/successful contacts.

<sup>20</sup> Allyson L. Holbrook, Alison Pfent, and Jon A. Krosnick, “Response Rates in Recent Surveys Conducted by Non-Profits and Commercial Survey Agencies and the News Media.” Paper presented at the American Association for Public Opinion Research Annual Meeting, Nashville, Tennessee, 2003.

There was somewhat more change in approval of political leaders from one survey to the next, with the least change for president and the most for governors, for reasons discussed in the text. Again, this is in line with expectations.

I also compared the SurveyUSA estimates of state-level partisanship (percent of major party registrants who were Democrats) with estimates published by Gallup based on all of the surveys they took during 2004 and 2005. SurveyUSA estimates were more highly correlated with both sets than the two yearly Gallup estimates were with each other and were as tightly linked to the presidential vote as the Gallup estimates (Table A2).

**Table A2 Correlations with State-Level Gallup Data on Partisanship**

Survey Paring:	Correlation
SUSA/Gallup 2005:	.88
SUSA/Gallup 2004:	.88
Gallup 2004/Gallup 2005:	.75
SUSA/Gallup 2004, 2005 average:	.94
SUSA/2004 Presidential vote:	.87
Gallup 2004/ 2004 Presidential vote:	.84
Gallup 2005/ 2004 presidential vote:	.86

I examined the discrepancies between Gallup and SurveyUSA estimates of state-level partisanship and found that they were most common in the smallest states, where Gallup's samples were quite small (for example, fewer than 200 in Delaware, Rhode Island, Vermont, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Wyoming in 2005). In these cases, SurveyUSA produced more plausible estimates than Gallup. For instance, for 2005, Gallup has the two-party balance in Delaware at 67:33 Democratic; making it the most Democratic state in the nation according to their data; SurveyUSA has it at 58:42, a more plausible estimate, much more consistent with its 2004 presidential vote (53 percent for Kerry, 46 percent for Bush). Presumably because of Gallup's small sample problem, the

highest correlation in Table A2 is between the SurveyUSA estimates and the average of the two Gallup years; the Gallup errors evidently even out across the two estimates.

Finally, I compared the SurveyUSA's national estimate of approval of George W. Bush to that reported by *Newsweek*, Pew, AP-Ipsos, NBC News/*Wall Street Journal*, CBS News/*New York Times*, *Time*, *Los Angeles Times*, and ABC News/*Washington Post* polls over the same month period. The average of these media polls ranged from 39.0 to 44.0 percent approving, with a mean of 41.7 percent. The average for SurveyUSA was 40.8 percent. The correlation between the monthly averages of these national polls with SurveyUSA's nationally-weighted results over the 9 monthly data points is .97.

In sum, I found no reason to believe that the quality and accuracy of the aggregate data produced by SurveyUSA's automated telephone methodology is in any way inferior to that produced by other telephone surveys, and I thus have no qualms about using the data for scientific research on aggregate state-level political behavior.