

Polling News & Notes

Overlooked Recent Polling and Insights • February 18, 2010

Comparing 2010 and 1994: On the blog fivethirtyeight.com, Democratic booster Nate Silver recently suggested the 2010 midterms won't produce an anti-Democratic swing of the same magnitude of 1994 because "unlike in 1994, the GOP remains quite unpopular." So how similar is the current political environment and that of 1994, when Democrats lost 54 seats in the House and 8 in the Senate?

A glance at key political indicators reveals that many conditions are comparable to what they were in 1994. Just as in 1994, less than one-quarter of Americans are satisfied with the direction things are headed in the country, and congressional job approval is lower today. The President has an approval rating of 52% in the latest Gallup poll—identical to Clinton's standing in late February 1994.

Feb. 1994 vs. Feb. 2010: Key Political Indicators

Indicator	February 1994	February 2010
Country Headed in Right Direction (Pew Research)	24%	23%
Presidential Job Approval (Gallup)	52%	52%
Congressional Job Approval (ABC News/ <i>Washington Post</i>)	32%	26%
Re-Elect Incumbent Congressman (ABC News/ <i>Washington Post</i>)	32%	36%
Generic Congressional Ballot (Gallup: registered voters)	GOP +2	Tied
Which Party More Trusted to Deal With Nation's Problems (ABC News/ <i>Washington Post</i>)	Dem +14	Dem +6
Democratic Party Net Favorability (Pew Research)	+28	+4
Republican Party Net Favorability (Pew Research)	+30	0

Similarly, both years are marked by a strong anti-incumbent sentiment—today, just 36% of voters believe their congressman deserves re-election, just a few points above the 32% recorded in 1994. *Contra* Silver's assertion, the GOP's popularity is also comparable to its 1994 levels: Democrats have no significant edge in favorability over Republicans. On the question of which party is better trusted to solve the nation's problems, Republicans fare better today, trailing by 6 points, 37% to 43%, than they did in 1994 when they were behind 32% to 46%. Of course, Republicans continued to improve their position between February and Election Day in 1994, cutting the Democrats' edge on the question to just 2 points. Democrats would do well to heed indications that this year's midterm results may resemble 1994's.