



**THE PEW RESEARCH CENTER**  
**For The People & The Press**

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**Most Have Heard Little or Nothing about Redistricting Debate**  
**LACK OF COMPETITION IN ELECTIONS FAILS TO STIR PUBLIC**

*A Survey Conducted in Association with  
The Brookings Institution and the Cato Institute*

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**Most Have Heard Little or Nothing about Redistricting Debate**  
**LACK OF COMPETITION IN ELECTIONS FAILS TO STIR PUBLIC**

The concern among some politicians and political experts over the lack of competitiveness in U.S. elections is generally not shared by the public. Moreover, voters appear to lack a clear sense of whether the elections in their own House districts are competitive or not.

The public is only dimly aware of the debate over how boundaries are drawn for legislative districts. Just 10% of Americans say they have heard a lot about this issue – compared with 89% who have heard little (38%) or nothing (51%) about it.

And while 71% of voters in districts where there are competitive House elections this year say the race is close in their district, a majority of voters (55%) in non-competitive districts also think their local House races are close.<sup>1</sup> There is much greater awareness of the competitive situation in Senate and gubernatorial races.

The latest survey by the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, in association with the Brookings Institution and the Cato Institute, also shows that most Americans see a downside in electoral competition. Just 22% say that when politicians face tough competition for reelection it makes “them work harder to represent their district better.” By contrast, 62% say that tough reelection campaigns make politicians “focus too much on fundraising and campaigning instead of being a good representative.”

***Little Awareness of Redistricting Process***

The survey, conducted Oct. 17-22 among 1,552 registered voters (2,006 adults) finds that not only is the debate over the redistricting process “below the radar” for most people, a majority of the public is unaware of who controls the process in their states. Although the vast majority of Americans live in a state where elected officials have the final responsibility for redistricting, just

<b>Few Have Heard about Redistricting Debate...</b>	
<i>Heard about debate over how to draw boundaries...</i>	%
A lot	10
A little	38
Nothing at all	51
Don't know	<u>1</u>
	100
<b>...And Many See Downside of Competitive Elections</b>	
<i>When politicians face tough competition they...</i>	%
Work harder for their district	22
Focus too much on campaign	62
Do both equally (vol.)	2
Do Neither (vol.)	1
Don't know/Refused	<u>13</u>
	100

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<sup>1</sup> The competitive House districts were identified using rankings from early to mid-October in *Congressional Quarterly*, *The Cook Political Report*, *The Rothenberg Political Report*, *The New York Times*, and Larry Sabato's *Crystal Ball*.

44% are aware of this. Nine percent believe redistricting is done by a nonpartisan panel, and 47% say they don't know.

Given the lack of public familiarity with the process and the debates about it, it is not surprising that most people have no opinion when asked whether they are satisfied or dissatisfied with how redistricting is conducted in their state. Overall, 13% say they are satisfied, 14% are dissatisfied, and 70% say they have no opinion. Democrats (18% dissatisfied) are less happy with the process than are Republicans (11% dissatisfied).

The small number who expressed dissatisfaction with the redistricting process were asked why they feel this way. The plurality of responses (32%) cited some aspect of gerrymandering – partisan outcomes, incumbent protection, the creation of safe districts for minorities, and the like. Other reasons cited by respondents included the belief that the process leads to an unfair distribution of resources, that the process is too complicated, or that the public has no say in how it's done.

***Do Voters Know if Their Elections are Competitive?***

While most of the public knows little about the debate over redistricting, they are somewhat better informed about the level of competition in the elections for which they are eligible to vote, especially those at the statewide level. Most voters who live in states with competitive senate and governor's races are aware that those races are closely contested – 69% in states with close senate races and 65% in states with close gubernatorial races.

		<b>Drawing the Lines</b>			
		<u>Total</u>	<u>Rep</u>	<u>Dem</u>	<u>Ind</u>
		%	%	%	%
As far as you know, who is normally in charge of how districts lines are drawn?	Elected officials	44	42	51	41
	Nonpartisan panel	9	8	9	11
	Don't know	<u>47</u>	<u>50</u>	<u>40</u>	<u>48</u>
		100	100	100	100
Are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the way district lines are drawn in your state?	Satisfied	13	17	13	10
	Dissatisfied	14	11	18	14
	No opinion	70	69	67	74
	Don't know	<u>3</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>2</u>
		100	100	100	100

Based on respondents in states with more than one congressional district (N=1,961)

<b>Dissatisfied With Redistricting</b>	
<i>Reasons for dissatisfaction...</i>	%
Gerrymandering (NET)	<b>32</b>
Too partisan	10
Protects incumbent	10
Racial, ethnic or econ. issues	6
Gerrymandering (General)	6
Unfair distribution of federal \$	6
Too complicated/unclear process	4
Other	32
Everything	12
Don't Know/Refused	<u>14</u>
	100

\*Based on 294 respondents who were dissatisfied with how redistricting is done.

Somewhat fewer – though still a majority – of those living in states where the senate or governor’s race is one-sided realize that the race is not competitive. In states without a close senate race, 55% know that one candidate is heavily favored; in states without a close governor’s race, 52% know this.

Voters are less aware of the level of competition in races for the U.S. House. Those who live in competitive districts are more likely than others to say that their race is likely to be close (71% say this), but even in non-competitive districts, majorities of voters think the race is tight (55%). This perception could be accurate in many of the Republican-held districts not on the list of competitive races, given that Pew’s polling shows Democratic candidates doing well in many districts other than the most competitive ones. But voters in safe Democratic districts, where the Democratic advantage in the generic ballot is overwhelming, have essentially the same perceptions about the competitiveness of the races: 54% say the race is close, 26% say one candidate is heavily favored.

<b>How Close Will the Election be Where You Live?*</b>			
	<u>All</u>	Com- petitive	Not com- petitive
	%	%	%
<i>Your House race</i>			
One candidate favored	23	16	24
Will be close contest	57	71	55
Don't know/Refused	<u>20</u>	<u>13</u>	<u>21</u>
	100	100	100
Number of cases	(1552)	(528)	(1023)
<i>Your Senate race</i>			
One candidate favored	45	22	55
Will be close contest	44	69	34
Don't know/Refused	<u>11</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>11</u>
	100	100	100
Number of cases	(1150)	(382)	(768)
<i>Your governor's race</i>			
One candidate favored	46	29	52
Will be close contest	46	65	39
Don't know/Refused	<u>8</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>9</u>
	100	100	100
Number of cases	(1183)	(298)	(885)
* The survey includes an oversample of voters in 40 congressional districts that are identified as competitive by political analysts this year.			
Based on registered voters where there is an election for each office in 2006.			

### ***Satisfaction With Electoral Choices***

Voters are divided over the question of whether the electoral choices available to them this year are satisfactory or not. A bare majority of 51% is satisfied, while 43% say they wish there were other choices. This reflects slightly more satisfaction with the alternatives than in 1994, when 45% were satisfied and 47% dissatisfied, and a somewhat greater change from 1990 (41% satisfied, 54% not). Voters who live in places with competitive races – whether House, senate, or governor’s – are no more satisfied with the choices than those who do not have competitive races.

But satisfaction with the alternatives does differ across certain groups in the population. Independents, in particular, are more likely to want other choices than are Democrats or Republicans. Nearly six-in-ten independents (58%) say they would like alternatives, compared with just 33% of Republicans and 39% of Democrats. Blacks are less satisfied with the electoral choices they have than are whites.

	<b>Satisfied With Choices in Your Elections This Year?</b>	
	<i>U.S. House Race*</i>	
	Com- <u>petitive</u> %	Not com- <u>petitive</u> %
Satisfied	46	52
Want other choices	48	43
Other/don't know	<u>6</u>	<u>5</u>
	100	100
Number of cases	(528)	(1023)

\* Based on registered voters.

### ***Is Competition a Good Thing?***

While the principle of open competition underlies America’s free enterprise system and its system of elections, not all aspects of electoral competition are viewed positively by the general public. Not surprisingly, most people who identify with a political party want their party to win. Respondents in the poll were asked which party wins most elections where they live. Overall, 28% said Republicans win most elections, 21% said the Democrats win most elections, and 39% said a mix of each do so. Over two-thirds of Democrats (67%) and Republicans (68%) who claimed that their own party wins most elections said they thought this was a good thing. And most who said the other party wins most elections said it was a bad thing (77% among Democrats, 64% among Republicans).

Still, many people prefer that a mix of each party wins. Among those who say that this is the pattern in their own area, 60% or more – regardless of party – say this is a good thing. People who feel this way constitute over one-quarter (27%) of all respondents to the poll.

Respondents were also asked about the impact of electoral competition on the behavior of politicians. When asked to choose between two alternatives, a solid majority (62%) said that tough competition leads politicians to focus too much on campaigning and fund raising; just 22% said it made politicians work harder to represent their districts better. College-educated respondents were more likely than those with just a high school education to believe that tough competition makes politicians focus too much on campaigning.

<b>In Tough Races, Voters Believe Incumbents Focus on the Fight</b>				
		Coll	Some	HS
<i>When reps face tough competition they...</i>	<u>All</u>	<u>Grads</u>	<u>Coll</u>	<u>Grad</u>
	%	%	%	%
Work harder for their district	22	22	19	23
Focus too much on campaign	62	66	69	58
Do both equally	2	4	2	2
Do Neither	1	1	1	1
Don't know/Refused	<u>13</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>16</u>
	100	100	100	100

## ABOUT THIS SURVEY

Results for this survey are based on telephone interviews conducted under the direction of Princeton Survey Research Associates International among a nationwide sample of 2,006 adults, 18 years of age or older, from October 17-22, 2006. For results based on the total sample, one can say with 95% confidence that the error attributable to sampling is plus or minus 2.5 percentage points. For results based on registered voters (N=1,552), the sampling error is plus or minus 3 percentage points. For results based on Form 1 (N=1,003) and Form 2 (N=1,003) the sampling error is plus or minus 3.5 percentage points. For results based on likely voters (N=1,118) the sampling error is plus or minus 4 percentage points.

In addition to sampling error, one should bear in mind that question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of opinion polls.

This survey includes an oversample of 515 respondents in congressional districts with competitive U.S. House races in the 2006 election for a total of 682 respondents who reside in such districts. Competitive districts were identified using rankings by Congressional Quarterly, The Cook Political Report, The Rothenberg Political Report, The New York Times, and Larry Sabato's Crystal Ball in early to mid-October. This yielded a list of forty competitive districts: Arizona-05, Arizona-08, California-11, Colorado-04, Colorado-07, Connecticut-02, Connecticut-04, Connecticut-05, Florida-13, Florida-22, Georgia-08, Georgia-12, Iowa-01, Iowa-03, Illinois-06, Illinois-08, Indiana-02, Indiana-08, Indiana-09, Kentucky-04, Minnesota-06, North Carolina-11, New Jersey-07, New Mexico-01, Nevada-02, New York-20, New York-24, New York-29, Ohio-01, Ohio-15, Ohio-18, Pennsylvania-06, Pennsylvania-07, Pennsylvania-08, Pennsylvania-10, Texas-17, Virginia-02, Vermont at-large, Washington-08, and Wisconsin-08.

In addition, nine states with competitive Senate races (N=490) and twelve states with competitive governor's races (N=371) were identified using The Cook Political Report and The Rothenberg Political Report rankings. Senate races in Connecticut, Missouri, Montana, New Jersey, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Tennessee, and Virginia and governor's races in Arkansas, Colorado, Iowa, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Nevada, Oregon, Rhode Island, and Wisconsin are considered competitive.

This survey was conducted in association with the Brookings Institution and the Cato Institute. Michael McDonald of the Brookings Institution and George Mason University, and John Samples of the Cato Institute provided consultation on the study design. Professor Gary Jacobson of the University of California, San Diego generously provided data on voting patterns in congressional districts.

## ABOUT THE CENTER

The Pew Research Center for the People & the Press is an independent opinion research group that studies attitudes toward the press, politics and public policy issues. We are sponsored by The Pew Charitable Trusts and are one of seven projects that make up the Pew Research Center, a nonpartisan "fact tank" that provides information on the issues, attitudes and trends shaping America and the world.

The Center's purpose is to serve as a forum for ideas on the media and public policy through public opinion research. In this role it serves as an important information resource for political leaders, journalists, scholars, and public interest organizations. All of our current survey results are made available free of charge.

All of the Center's research and reports are collaborative products based on the input and analysis of the entire Center staff consisting of:

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**PEW RESEARCH CENTER FOR THE PEOPLE & THE PRESS**  
**OCTOBER 2006 SURVEY ON ELECTORAL COMPETITION**  
**FINAL TOPLINE**  
**October 17 - 22, 2006**  
**N=2006 General Public**  
**N=1552 Registered Voters**

**QUESTIONS 1-17 PREVIOUSLY RELEASED**

Q.18 Generally, are you satisfied with the choices you have in the elections this year in your state, or do you wish there were other choices?

**BASED ON ALL REGISTERED VOTERS [N=1552]:**

		<i>CBS/NYT</i>	
		Oct	Oct 28-31
		<u>1994</u>	<u>1990</u>
51	Satisfied	45	41
43	Wish other choices	47	54
1	Depends on race (VOL.)	1	1
<u>5</u>	Don't know/refused	<u>7</u>	<u>4</u>
100		100	100

**QUESTION 19 PREVIOUSLY RELEASED**

**ASK REGISTERED VOTERS ONLY (REGICERT=1):**

Q.20 What's your impression -- in the race for the U.S. House in your district, is one candidate heavily favored to win or do you think this will be a close contest?

**BASED ON ALL REGISTERED VOTERS [N=1552]:**

23	One candidate heavily favored
57	Will be a close contest
<u>20</u>	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)
100	

Q.20a Which candidate – the Republican candidate or the Democratic candidate – do you think will win?

**BASED ON ALL REGISTERED VOTERS [N=1552]:**

35	Republican candidate
43	Democratic candidate
*	Other candidate
<u>22</u>	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)
100	

**NO QUESTION 21**

**IF R'S STATE HAS U.S. SENATE RACE [SENSTATE=1], ASK:**

Q.22 What's your impression -- in [INSERT STATE]'s U.S. Senate race between [ROTATE ORDER OF CANDIDATES] Republican [INSERT SENREP NAME] and Democrat [INSERT SENDEM NAME] is one candidate heavily favored to win or do you think this will be a close contest?

**BASED ON REGISTERED VOTERS WITH SENATE RACE [N=1150]:**

45 One candidate heavily favored  
44 Will be a close contest  
11 Don't know/Refused (VOL.)  
100

Q.22a. Which candidate -- [ROTATE ORDER OF CANDIDATES] the Republican [INSERT SENREP NAME] or the Democrat [INSERT SENDEM NAME] -- do you think will win?

**BASED ON REGISTERED VOTERS WITH SENATE RACE [N=1150]:**

34 Republican candidate [INSERT SENREP NAME]  
52 Democratic candidate [INSERT SENDEM NAME]  
1 Other candidate  
13 Don't know/Refused (VOL.)  
100

**NO QUESTION 23**

**IF R'S STATE HAS GOVERNOR'S RACE [GOVSTATE=1], ASK:**

Q.24 What's your impression -- in [INSERT STATE]'s Governor's race between [ROTATE ORDER OF CANDIDATES] Republican [INSERT GOVREP NAME] and Democrat [INSERT GOVDEM NAME] is one candidate heavily favored to win or do you think this will be a close contest?

**BASED ON REGISTERED VOTERS WITH GOVERNOR'S RACE [N=1183]:**

46 One candidate heavily favored  
46 Will be a close contest  
8 Don't know/Refused (VOL.)  
100

Q.24a. Which candidate -- [ROTATE ORDER OF CANDIDATES] the Republican [INSERT GOVREP NAME] or the Democrat [INSERT GOVDEM NAME] -- do you think will win?

**BASED ON REGISTERED VOTERS WITH GOVERNOR'S RACE [N=1183]:**

41 Republican candidate [INSERT GOVREP NAME]  
45 Democratic candidate [INSERT GOVDEM NAME]  
2 Other candidate  
12 Don't know/Refused (VOL.)  
100

**QUESTIONS 25-49 PREVIOUSLY RELEASED**

**ASK ALL GENERAL PUBLIC:**

Q.50 As you may know, states with more than one seat in the U.S. House of Representatives redraw their congressional district boundaries from time to time. How much, if anything, have you heard or read about the debate over how these boundaries should be drawn – a lot, a little, or nothing at all?

10 A lot  
38 A little  
51 Nothing at all  
1 Don't know/Refused (VOL.)  
100

Q.51 Thinking specifically about [INSERT STATE], as far as you know, who is normally in charge of how congressional district lines are drawn... is it [ROTATE OPTIONS]...<sup>2</sup>

**BASED ON STATES WITH MORE THAN ONE CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT [N=1961]:**

44 Elected officials such as the state legislature  
9 A nonpartisan committee or panel  
47 Don't know/Refused (VOL., DO NOT READ)  
100

Q.52 Just your opinion, are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the way congressional district lines are drawn in your state, or don't you have an opinion about it?

**BASED ON STATES WITH MORE THAN ONE CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT [N=1961]:**

13 Satisfied  
14 Dissatisfied  
70 No opinion about it  
3 Don't know/Refused (VOL.)  
100

**IF DISSATISFIED (2 IN Q.52) ASK [N=294]:**

Q.53 What in particular are you dissatisfied about regarding the way [STATE]'s districts are drawn? [OPEN END; PROBE FOR CLARITY ONLY, NOT FOR ADDITIONAL RESPONSES]

32 **GERRYMANDERING (NET)**  
10 Too partisan  
10 Designed to protect incumbents  
6 Racial, ethnic, or socio-economic criteria  
6 Gerrymandering (General)  
6 Unfair distribution of resources  
4 Too complicated/unclear process  
2 The public has no say  
2 Need an independent panel to draw districts  
15 Other (Misc.)  
13 Other (Misunderstood question)  
12 Everything  
14 Don't know/Refused  
100

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2 Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, Vermont, and Wyoming each have only one Congressional district. Respondents from these states were not asked questions 51 through 53.

**ASK ALL GENERAL PUBLIC:**

Q.54 In the area where you live, which party wins most of the elections... the Republicans, the Democrats, or a mix of each party?

**ASK IF RESPONDENT GIVES AN ANSWER IN Q.54 (Q.54=1,2,3):**

Q.55 Do you think it's a good thing that [**IF Q54=1:** Republicans win most elections/**IF Q54=2:** Democrats win most elections/**IF Q54=3:** A mix of each party wins elections], a bad thing, or doesn't it matter to you?

28 Republicans win most elections

9 Good thing

9 Bad thing

9 Doesn't matter/DK

21 Democrats win most elections

9 Good thing

5 Bad thing

7 Doesn't matter/DK

39 Mix of each party wins elections

24 Good thing

3 Bad thing

12 Doesn't matter/DK

12 DK/Refused

100

**ASK ALL GENERAL PUBLIC:**

Q.56 When politicians face tough competition for reelection, does it... [**READ AND ROTATE**]

22 Make them work harder to represent their district better

OR does it

62 Make them focus too much on fundraising and campaigning instead of being a good representative

2 Both equally (**VOL. DO NOT READ**)

1 Neither (**VOL. DO NOT READ**)

13 Don't know/Refused (**VOL. DO NOT READ**)

100