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AN ANALYSIS OF RECENT PUBLIC POLLING – DECEMBER 20, 2005

by
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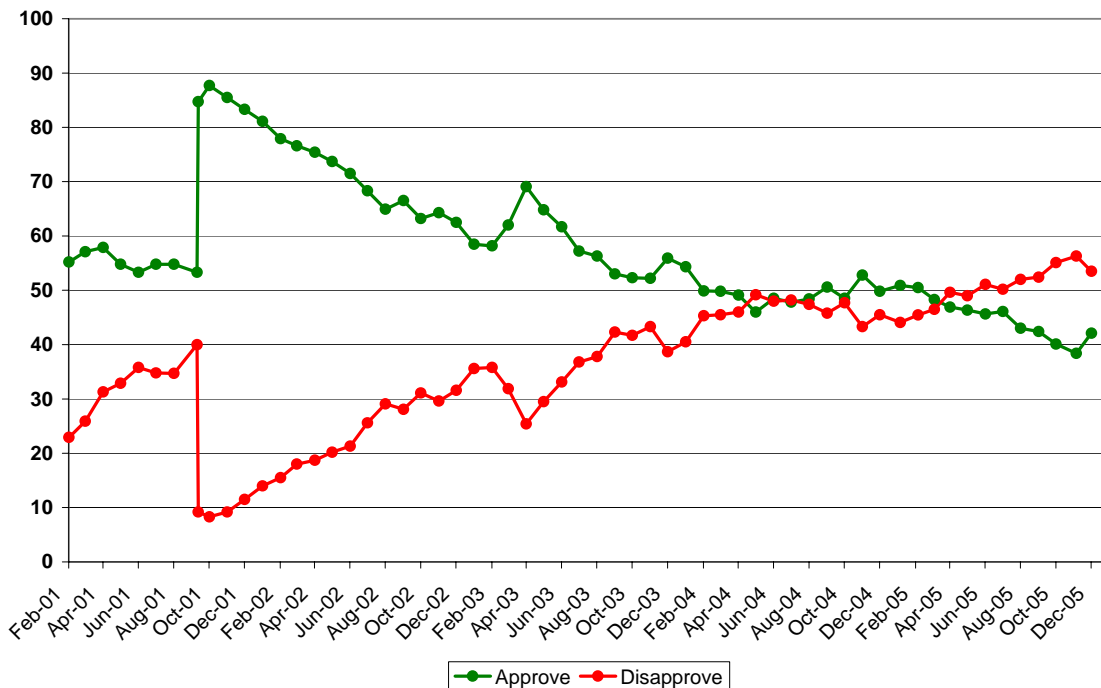
Much has been made over the last couple weeks in Washington and in the political media about a supposed boost in President Bush's political standing. Many commentators are breathlessly declaring an end to the President's precipitous decline over the last few months, and presumably the fumbling and tone-deaf leadership that has contributed to this decline. This response clearly begs the question – what has really changed in the country's political environment that could help President Bush and Republicans in Congress reverse current political trends and overcome deep-seated public doubts on Iraq, the economy, health care, ethics, and whose interests they are really representing in Washington? Based on a deeper analysis of polling released over the last few weeks, the answer is "not much."

First, let's look at the data cited by Republicans and conservative commentators as evidence of a surge in the President's standing and a reversal of his steady erosion over the last ten months:

1. Bush's rising approval marks

It is true that Bush's approval has gone up in December, from a record low of 38 percent in November to 42 percent in December. But this still represents the second lowest marks of any second-term presidency at this stage, and is comparable to Nixon's marks just before he resigned the office.

Presidential Job Approval



The most recent polls show greater discrepancies than we have seen in some time – the CNN/Gallup/USA Today poll completed on December 18th puts Bush's approval at 41 percent while the ABC News/*Washington Post* survey completed the same day puts it at 47 percent – but there is no question that a clear majority of Americans still disapprove of Bush's job performance.

And his approval on the major issues facing the country – particularly Iraq and the economy – remains well below his overall approval mark. It is also important to note that Bush's personal favorability remains well below 50 percent, and that ratings of his honesty and other measures of personal integrity have not rebounded this month.

2. Ratings of the economy

It is no surprise that as gas prices have fallen nearly a dollar per gallon since their post-Katrina highs, that ratings of the economy have also gained some ground. But once again, some perspective is needed. The ABC News/*Washington Post* Consumer Comfort Index has climbed 5 points in the last month to reach -13, matching its 2005 average. But that average is down 2 points from 2004 and 4 points from its 20-year average.

In the same survey, only 37 percent hold a positive view of the economy, compared to 63 percent who rate it 'not good' or 'poor.' And as the holiday buying season approaches its peak, ratings of the country's buying climate are falling, with only 36 percent viewing it positively. Conservatives bemoan the fact that these public ratings do not reflect the relatively strong numbers being posted in national economic measures, but this is clearly because any gains seen by most individuals are more than offset by rising prices and increasing economic insecurity. As a result, 8-in-10 Americans in the CBS News/*New York Times* poll see the economy getting weaker (35 percent) or simply staying the same (45 percent), with only 19 percent anticipating a stronger economy.

3. Bush taking his case on Iraq to the American people

The Bush administration, after months of denial, finally acknowledged that their sunny analysis of undefined 'progress on the ground' and an Iraqi insurgency in its last throes were not only being rejected by the American people, but fueling public discontent on the issue. But the lead paragraph of today's release of the CNN/Gallup/*USA Today* survey sums up the results:

President Bush's approval ratings do not appear to have changed significantly, despite a number of recent speeches he's given to shore up public support for the war in Iraq and its historic elections on Thursday.

A number of different surveys completed this month present similar results:

- In the CBS News/*New York Times* poll, only 1-in-4 Americans say Bush has a clear plan for getting American troops out of Iraq, while 70 percent maintain that Bush has no plan to get troops out. Similarly, 61 percent say Bush has still failed to explain what our goals are in Iraq.

- The same survey finds Democrats holding a 5-point advantage (40 percent to 35 percent) as the party ‘more likely to make the right decisions about the war in Iraq.’
- Quinnipiac finds deep distrust for the Bush administration on the war, with a plurality saying the administration ‘intentionally misled the American public’ in making the case for war.
- In testing the effectiveness of Bush’s speeches to the American people, FOX finds just 25 percent of Americans – including just 7 percent of Democrats and 18 percent of Independents – feel the speeches have given them a better understanding of the situation in Iraq.
- Despite Bush’s reassurances, the CNN/Gallup/*USA Today* poll finds 55 percent still believe the U.S. will not be able to establish a stable democratic government in Iraq and 58 percent say he has no plan for victory in Iraq.

A more sober analysis of the tremendous amount of public opinion data released in the last week reveals that, after three months of political free fall, President Bush has stopped falling. But any claims of a political comeback or that Bush has overcome the public doubts that caused his fall are unsupported by the current data. In fact, we would point to three trends which strongly suggest the underlying political dynamics in the country remain firmly in favor of dramatic change on the eve of this election year.

1. Direction of the country

Barely 1-in-3 Americans (34 percent) now feel the country is headed in the right direction, while more than 60 percent remain convinced the country is off on the wrong track. And both the CBS News/*New York Times* and *Hotline* surveys find Republicans driving this number higher; just 27 percent of Independents in both surveys feel optimistic about the country’s current direction.

2. Rising tide of corruption

In the wake of Duke Cunningham’s bribery conviction, Tom DeLay’s indictment, and the growing investigations into several Republican members of Congress linked to Jack Abramoff, Senate Minority Leader Harry Reid recently labeled this the ‘most corrupt Congress in history.’ And the American public seems to agree. We have documented in earlier months the impact that the Plame investigation and other ethics controversies surrounding the White House have had on once-impervious ratings of Bush’s personal honesty and integrity. That damage has not been reversed, with majorities in two different polls saying they do not view Bush as ‘honest and trustworthy.’

Perhaps even more damaging for the man who once ran on the promise to restore honor and dignity to the White House, a majority of Americans in the CBS News/*New York Times* poll now say he has less integrity (22 percent) or the same level of integrity (29 percent) as most elected officials (the total rises to 56 percent among Independents). Given that 88 percent view political corruption as a serious problem facing the country today, including 51 percent who rate it as a very serious problem, it is clear that Bush is now just part of the mess in Washington. And while voters clearly hold both parties responsible for this mess, they know that Republicans are in control in Washington. As a result, Democrats hold an edge on being more ethical (36 to

33 percent), handling ethics in government (47 to 38 percent), and standing up to lobbyists and special interest groups (42 to 34 percent).

Republicans have lost all credibility on this issue and will undoubtedly spend a great deal of time and money over the next 10 months trying to drag Democrats down to their level. If Democrats can not only highlight the ethical lapses of the current Republican leadership but offer a consistent reform agenda that demonstrates how things will be different in Washington with a Democratic Congress, their current advantages on this issue of growing importance are certain to expand.

3. The generic congressional contest

While the 2006 elections are still more than 10 months away, the tremendous advantage enjoyed by Democrats in the generic congressional contest should not be ignored. As President Bush's standing fell and congressional Republicans continued to lose ground over the last few months, we saw the Democratic advantage in the generic vote grow to as much as 10 points. If such an advantage were to persist until Election Day, it would likely produce an historic victory for Democrats. But as Republican strategists were quick to point out, this measure is volatile so far out from the election and will certainly close as the election becomes more defined and Republicans use their powers of incumbency to shift the debate back to friendlier terrain.

Yet even amidst claims of a Bush rebound, the Democratic advantage in the generic vote remains virtually unchanged – +10 in the CBS News/New York Times survey (including +14 among Independents), +10 in the Hotline poll of registered voters (including +18 among Independents), and +9 in the most recent ABC News/Washington Post release. If Bush and the Republicans are making any real gains among American voters, it's not showing up in the 2006 vote numbers.

Polls included in this analysis:

Time/SRBI. 11/29-12/1/05; 1,004 Adults.

Quinnipiac University. 11/28-12/4/05; 1,230 Registered Voters

CBS News/New York Times. 12/2-6/2005; 1,155 Adults.

Associated Press/Ipsos Public Affairs. 1002 Adults. 12/5-7/05.

Gallup. 12/5-8/05; 1,013 Adults.

ABC News/Washington Post. Month Ending 12/11/2005. 1,000 Adults.

Pew Research Center. 12/7-11/05; 1,502 Adults.

CNN/Gallup/USA Today. 12/9-11/05; 1,003 Adults.

Pew Research Center. 12/7-11/05; 1,502 Adults.

NBC News/Wall Street Journal. 12/9-12/05; 1,006 Adults;

Diageo/Hotline. 12/12-13/05; 813 Registered Voters.

Fox News/Opinion Dynamics. 12/13-14/05; 900 Registered Voters.

ABC News/Washington Post. 12/15-18/05; 1003 Adults.

CNN/USA Today/Gallup. 12/16-18/05. 1003 Adults.

BUSH JOB APPROVAL – POST 9/11/01

		Approve	Disapprove	App – Disapp
Monthly Average – December	Dec-05	42.1	53.5	-11.4
CNN/Gallup/USA Today#	12/18/2005	41	56	-15.0
ABC News/Washington Post#	12/18/2005	47	52	-5.0
Fox News/Opinion Dynamics^	12/14/2005	42	51	-9.0
Diageo/Hotline^	12/13/2005	50	47	3.0
Democracy Corps#	12/12/2005	44	53	-9.0
NBC News/Wall Street Journal#	12/12/2005	39	55	-16.0
CNN/Gallup/USA Today#	12/11/2005	42	55	-13.0
Cook/RT Strategies#	12/11/2005	42	55	-13.0
Pew Research #	12/11/2005	38	54	-16.0
AP/Ipsos#	12/7/2005	42	57	-15.0
CBS News/New York Times#	12/6/2005	40	53	-13.0
Democracy Corps#	12/4/2005	41	54	-13.0
Quinnipiac University^	12/4/2005	40	54	-14.0
Time#	12/1/2005	41	53	-12.0
Monthly Average – November	Nov-05	38.4	56.3	-17.9
Fox News/Opinion Dynamics^	11/30/2005	42	48	-6.0
Cook/RT Strategies#	11/20/2005	41	52	-11.0
Gallup#	11/20/2005	38	57	-19.0
Democracy Corps#	11/20/2005	42	56	-14.0
Diageo/Hotline^	11/15/2005	39	59	-20.0
CNN/Gallup/USA Today#	11/13/2005	37	60	-23.0
Newsweek#	11/11/2005	36	58	-22.0
Gallup#	11/10/2005	40	55	-15.0
Fox News/Opinion Dynamics^	11/9/2005	36	53	-17.0
AP/Ipsos#	11/9/2005	37	61	-24.0
NBC News/Wall Street Journal#	11/7/2005	38	57	-19.0
Pew Research #	11/6/2005	36	55	-19.0
Democracy Corps#	11/6/2005	42	54	-12.0
AP/Ipsos#	11/2/2005	37	59	-22.0
ABC News/Washington Post#	11/2/2005	39	60	-21.0
CBS News#	11/1/2005	35	57	-22.0
Monthly Average – October	Oct-05	40.1	55.1	-15.1
CNN/Gallup/USA Today#	10/30/2005	41	56	-15.0
ABC News/Washington Post#	10/29/2005	39	58	-19.0
Fox News/Opinion Dynamics^	10/26/2005	41	51	-10.0
Gallup#	10/26/2005	41	56	-15.0
Pew Research #	10/24/2005	40	52	-12.0
Democracy Corps#	10/23/2005	42	55	-13.0
CNN/Gallup/USA Today#	10/23/2005	42	55	-13.0
WNBC/Marist^	10/17/2005	41	53	-12.0
CNN/Gallup/USA Today#	10/16/2005	39	58	-19.0
Diageo/Hotline^	10/16/2005	40	57	-17.0

Fox News/Opinion Dynamics^	10/12/2005	40	51	-11.0
Democracy Corps#	10/10/2005	42	54	-12.0
NBC News/Wall Street Journal#	10/10/2005	39	54	-15.0
Pew Research #	10/10/2005	38	56	-18.0
CBS News#	10/5/2005	37	58	-21.0
AP/Ipsos#	10/5/2005	39	58	-19.0
Monthly Average – September	Sep-05	42.4	52.4	-10.0
Newsweek#	9/30/2005	40	53	-13.0
Fox News/Opinion Dynamics^	9/28/2005	45	47	-2.0
CNN/Gallup/USA Today#	9/28/2005	45	50	-5.0
Democracy Corps#	9/26/2005	46	51	-5.0
Democracy Corps#	9/21/2005	43	53	-10.0
ABC News/Washington Post#	9/11/2005	42	57	-15.0
Pew Research#	9/11/2005	40	52	-12.0
Pew Research#	9/7/2005	40	52	-12.0
Newsweek#	9/9/2005	38	55	-17.0
Time#	9/8/2005	46	47	-1.0
AP/Ipsos#	9/8/2005	39	59	-20.0
Democracy Corps#	9/7/2005	45	53	-8.0
CBS News#	9/7/2005	42	52	-10.0
Monthly Average – August	Aug-05	43.0	52.0	-9.0
CBS News#	8/31/2005	41	51	-10.0
ABC News/Washington Post#	8/28/2005	45	53	-8.0
Harris#	8/16/2005	40	58	-18.0
Gallup#	8/11/2005	45	51	-6.0
CNN/Gallup/USA Today#	8/5/2005	44	51	-7.0
Newsweek#	8/4/2005	42	51	-9.0
AP/Ipsos#	8/3/2005	42	55	-13.0
CBS News#	8/2/2005	45	46	-1.0
Monthly Average – July	Jul-05	46.1	50.2	-4.1
Monthly Average – June	Jun-05	45.6	51.1	-5.4
Monthly Average – May	May-05	46.4	49.0	-2.6
Monthly Average – April	Apr-05	46.9	49.6	-2.7
Monthly Average – March	Mar-05	48.3	46.5	1.8
Monthly Average – February	Feb-05	50.5	45.5	5.0
Monthly Average – January	Jan-05	50.9	44.1	6.8
Monthly Average – December	Dec-04	49.8	45.5	4.3
Monthly Average – November	Nov-04	52.8	43.3	9.5
Monthly Average – October	Oct-04	48.5	47.7	0.8
Monthly Average – September	Sep-04	50.6	45.8	4.8
Monthly Average – August	Aug-04	48.4	47.4	1
Monthly Average – July	Jul-04	47.8	48.2	-0.4
Monthly Average – June	Jun-04	48.5	48	0.5
Monthly Average – May	May-04	46	49.2	-3.2
Monthly Average – April	Apr-04	49.1	46	3.1

Monthly Average – March	Mar-04	49.8	45.5	4.3
Monthly Average – February	Feb-04	49.9	45.3	4.6
Monthly Average – January	Jan-04	54.3	40.5	13.8
Monthly Average – December	Dec-03	55.9	38.7	17.2
Monthly Average – November	Nov-03	52.2	43.3	8.9
Monthly Average – October	Oct-03	52.3	41.7	10.6
Monthly Average – September	Sep-03	53	42.3	10.7
Monthly Average – August	Aug-03	56.3	37.8	18.5
Monthly Average – July	Jul-03	57.2	36.8	20.4
Monthly Average – June	Jun-03	61.7	33.1	28.6
Monthly Average – May	May-03	64.8	29.5	35.3
Monthly Average – April	Apr-03	69.1	25.4	43.7
Monthly Average – March	Mar-03	62	31.9	30.1
Monthly Average – February	Feb-03	58.2	35.8	22.4
Monthly Average – January	Jan-03	58.5	35.6	22.9
Monthly Average – December	Dec-02	62.5	31.6	30.9
Monthly Average – November	Nov-02	64.3	29.6	34.7
Monthly Average – October	Oct-02	63.2	31.1	32.1
Monthly Average – September	Sep-02	66.5	28.1	38.4
Monthly Average – August	Aug-02	64.9	29.1	35.8
Monthly Average – July	Jul-02	68.3	25.6	42.7
Monthly Average – June	Jun-02	71.5	21.3	50.2
Monthly Average – May	May-02	73.7	20.2	53.5
Monthly Average – April	Apr-02	75.4	18.7	56.7
Monthly Average – March	Mar-02	76.6	18	58.6
Monthly Average – February	Feb-02	77.9	15.5	62.4
Monthly Average – January	Jan-02	81.1	14	67.1
Monthly Average – Dec.	Dec-01	83.3	11.5	71.8
Monthly Average – Nov.	Nov-01	85.5	9.2	76.3
Monthly Average – Oct.	Oct-01	87.7	8.3	79.4
Monthly Average – Sept.	Sep-01	84.7	9.2	75.5
Monthly Average – Sept.	Sep-01	53.3	40	13.3
Monthly Average – August	Aug-01	54.8	34.7	20.1
Monthly Average – July	Jul-01	54.8	34.8	20
Monthly Average – June	Jun-01	53.3	35.8	17.5
Monthly Average – May	May-01	54.8	32.9	21.9
Monthly Average – April	Apr-01	57.9	31.3	26.6
Monthly Average – March	Mar-01	57.1	25.9	31.2
Monthly Average – Feb.	Feb-01	55.2	22.9	32.3

COUNTRY DIRECTION						
	Direction/Satisfied	Date	Right	Wrong	Right-Wrong	
Monthly Average - December 2005			Dec-05	33.8	61.3	-27.5
Democracy Corps#	D	12/12/2005	34	60	-26	
Cook Political Report/RT Strategies#	D	12/11/2005	36	61	-25	
AP/Ipsos#	D	12/7/2005	33	64	-31	
Democracy Corps#	D	12/4/2005	32	60	-28	
Monthly Average - November 2005			Nov-05	30.4	64.6	-34.1
Gallup#	S	11/20/2005	36	62	-26	
Democracy Corps#	D	11/20/2005	31	67	-36	
Newsweek#	S	11/11/2005	26	68	-42	
Gallup#	S	11/10/2005	31	66	-35	
AP/Ipsos#	D	11/9/2005	32	64	-32	
NBC News/Wall Street Journal#	D	11/7/2005	26	63	-37	
Democracy Corps#	D	11/6/2005	31	62	-31	
Monthly Average - October 2005			Oct-05	32.8	61.3	-28.5
Gallup#	S	10/26/2005	35	63	-28	
Democracy Corps#	D	10/23/2005	31	61	-30	
Gallup#	S	10/16/2005	31	68	-37	
Democracy Corps#	D	10/10/2005	34	58	-24	
NBC News/Wall Street Journal#	D	10/10/2005	28	59	-31	
AP/Ipsos#	D	10/5/2005	28	66	-38	
Newsweek#	S	9/9/2005	28	66	-38	
Monthly Average - September 2005			Sep-05	33.5	61.5	-28.0
Newsweek#	S	9/30/2005	31	61	-30	
Gallup#	S	9/28/2005	39	59	-20	
Democracy Corps#	D	9/26/2005	36	57	-21	
Democracy Corps#	D	9/21/2005	33	61	-28	
Gallup#	S	9/15/2005	34	62	-28	
NBC News/Wall Street Journal#	D	9/12/2005	32	57	-25	
Newsweek#	S	9/9/2005	28	66	-38	
AP/Ipsos#	D	9/8/2005	32	65	-33	
Democracy Corps#	D	9/7/2005	34	59	-25	
Monthly Average - August 2005			Aug-05	36.7	57.7	-21.0
Gallup#	S	8/11/2005	37	60	-23	
Newsweek#	S	8/4/2005	36	54	-18	
AP/Ipsos#	D	8/3/2005	37	59	-22	
Monthly Average - July 2005		Jul-05	37.8	56.4	-18.6	
Monthly Average - June 2005		Jun-05	37.1	55.9	-18.8	
Monthly Average - May 2005		May-05	36.1	55.4	-19.3	
Monthly Average - April 2005		Apr-05	36.9	54.6	-17.7	

Monthly Average - March 2005	Mar-05	40.3	55.5	-15.3
Monthly Average - February 2005	Feb-05	41.2	51.8	-10.7
Monthly Average - January 2005	Jan-05	42.0	51.0	-9
Monthly Average - December 2004	Dec-04	42.5	49.5	-7
Monthly Average - November 2004	Nov-04	44.5	50.5	-6
Monthly Average - October 2004	Oct-04	40.9	53.6	-12.7
Monthly Average - September 2004	Sep-04	42.4	51.7	-9.3
Monthly Average - August 2004	Aug-04	40.0	53.4	-13.4
Monthly Average - July 2004	Jul-04	39.1	54.3	-15.2
Monthly Average - June 2004	Jun-04	38.6	54.4	-15.8
Monthly Average - May 2004	May-04	34.6	58.6	-24
Monthly Average - April 2004	Apr-04	38.8	56.8	-18
Monthly Average - March 2004	Mar-04	39.0	54.8	-15.8
Monthly Average - February 2004	Feb-04	42.0	53.5	-11.5
Monthly Average - January 2004	Jan-04	46.9	47.2	-0.3
Monthly Average - December 2003	Dec-03	46.0	45.9	0.1
Monthly Average - November 2003	Nov-03	40.7	52.0	-11.3
Monthly Average - October 2003	Oct-03	40.3	53.4	-13.1
Monthly Average - September 2003	Sep-03	38.2	54.8	-16.6
Monthly Average - August 2003	Aug-03	40.8	52.8	-12
Monthly Average - July 2003	Jul-03	43.5	49.3	-5.8
Monthly Average - June 2003	Jun-03	47.2	46.0	1.2
Monthly Average - May 2003	May-03	51.0	42.2	8.8
Monthly Average - April 2003	Apr-03	56.5	35.0	21.5
Monthly Average - March 2003	Mar-03	46.6	46.6	0
Monthly Average - February 2003	Feb-03	40.0	52.8	-12.8
Monthly Average - January 2003	Jan-03	38.6	52.0	-13.4
Monthly Average - December 2002	Dec-02	43.4	48.2	-4.8
Monthly Average - November 2002	Nov-02	46.8	46.5	0.3
Monthly Average - October 2002	Oct-02	42.8	48.3	-5.5
Monthly Average - September 2002	Sep-02	46.2	45.3	0.8
Monthly Average - August 2002	Aug-02	46.0	47.0	-1
Monthly Average - July 2002	Jul-02	46.2	48.3	-2.2
Monthly Average - June 2002	Jun-02	49.6	39.0	10.6
Monthly Average - May 2002	May-02	52.0	40.2	11.8
Monthly Average - April 2002	Apr-02	55.5	34.3	21.3
Monthly Average - March 2002	Mar-02	56.0	36.3	19.8
Monthly Average - February 2002	Feb-02	63.0	31.5	31.5
Monthly Average - January 2002	Jan-02	63.5	28.0	35.5
Monthly Average - December 2001	Dec-01	67.7	22.7	45
Monthly Average - November 2001	Nov-01	63.7	27.3	36.3
Monthly Average - October 2001	Oct-01	67.0	29.0	38
Average - September 11-30, 2001	9/11-30/2001	59.3	32.7	26.7
Average - January 1-September 10, 2001	1/1-9/11/2001	48.1	43.2	5
Yearly Average - 2000	2000	53	37	16.5
Yearly Average - 1999	1999	52	39	12.5

Yearly Average - 1998	1998	54	38	15.4
Yearly Average – 1997	1997	46	46	0.2