

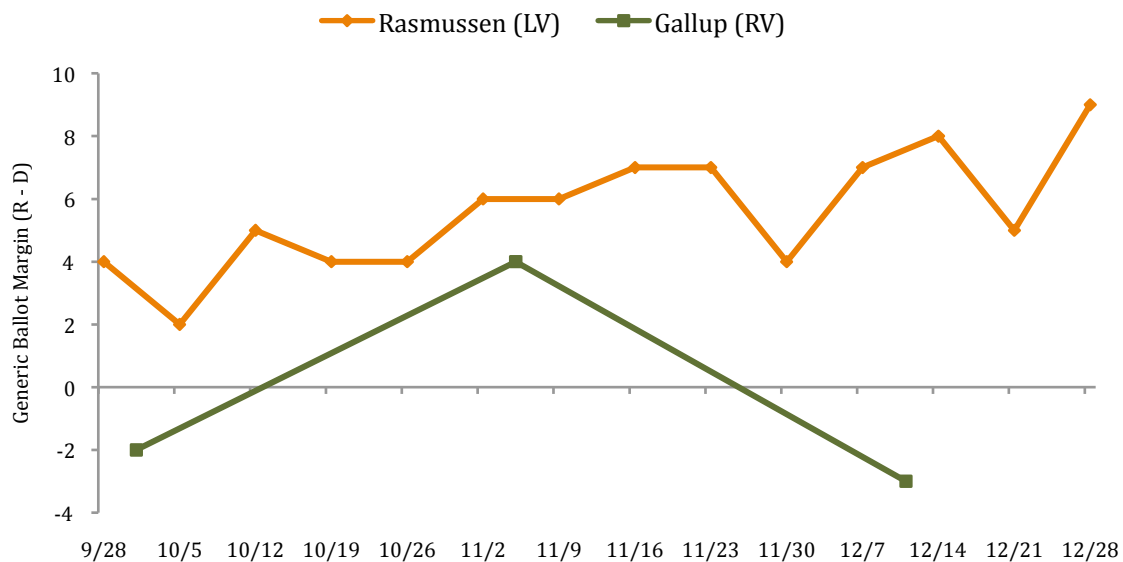
## Polling News & Notes

*Overlooked Recent Polling and Insights • January 7, 2010*

**Generic Ballot: Gallup vs. Rasmussen:** Over the past week, many Democratic operatives have begun [attacking](#) Rasmussen Reports, claiming the firm’s polling has a persistent pro-Republican bias. A comparison between Rasmussen and Gallup’s polls on the generic congressional ballot—a question asking voters which party’s congressional candidate they would vote for in the abstract, rather than in their particular district—shows that Rasmussen’s polling since last October has consistently showed Republicans leading Democrats by 2-7 points, while Gallup’s polls have found a much closer race, with Democrats now ahead by 3 points.

### Generic Ballot: Gallup vs. Rasmussen

(Oct. 2009 to Jan. 2010)

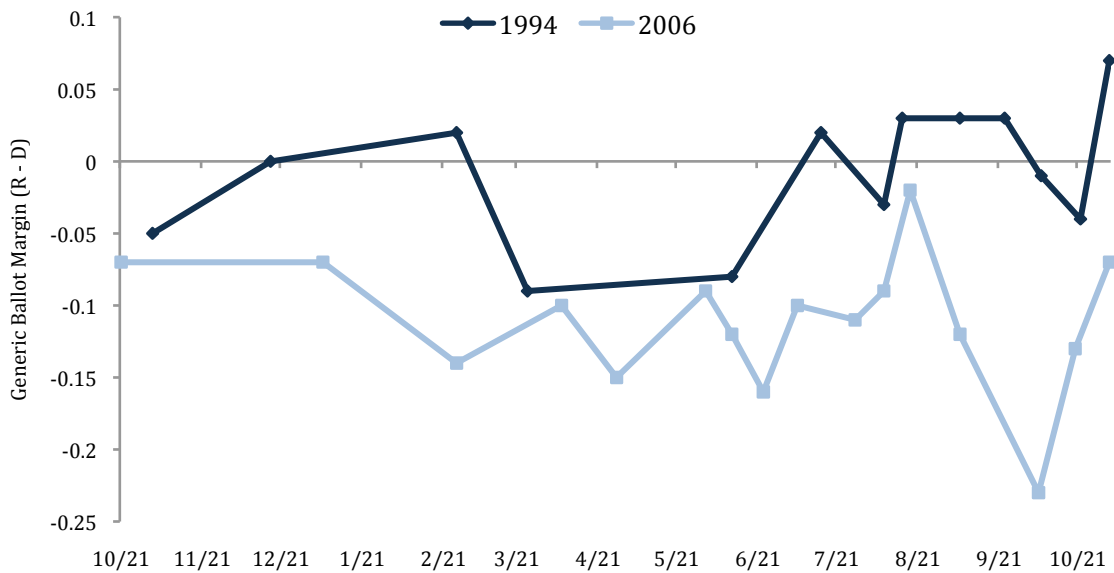


One explanation for this discrepancy may be that Rasmussen and Gallup are polling two different groups of voters. Gallup’s generic ballot polls have been conducted among registered voters, while Rasmussen’s polls narrow their sample universe to only those voters the firm has determined are most likely to vote. Yet since turnout is so low in midterm elections, Democrats almost always lead on the generic ballot among registered voters, even in elections in which Republicans eventually win a majority of the overall House vote. As Gallup’s Lydia Saad wrote in 2005, “the norm is for Republicans to be trailing by about five points among all registered voters on [the generic ballot], which converts to a slight lead among likely voters.”<sup>1</sup>

Looking back at previous elections, Gallup’s generic ballot polling has been quite [accurate](#) at predicting the national House vote—but only when using the firm’s likely voter model, which it traditionally does not apply until the immediate run-up to the election. In both 1994 and 2006, for instance, Republicans experienced a significant boost in the final polls before the election when Gallup applied its likely voter model (see chart at top of next page).

<sup>1</sup> Lydia Saad, “Midterm Elections Look Dickey for GOP,” October 26, 2005, in Alec Gallup & Frank Newport, *The Gallup Poll: Public Opinion 2005* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), p396.

**Gallup: Generic Ballot Margin, 1994/2006**



So what does this mean for this year's elections? Neither Gallup's nor Rasmussen's generic ballot results are inherently biased, but they are measuring different indicators. Gallup's polls better estimate the state of public opinion among the electorate as a whole, while Rasmussen's may reflect the portion of the electorate that will actually cast a ballot on Election Day. Many polling experts have disagreed on whether or not Rasmussen's automated Interactive Voice Response (IVR) methodology is capable of accurately predicting election results, but IVR pollsters [performed better](#) than traditional live interviewers in last year's gubernatorial elections. Only time will tell if Rasmussen's methodology will prove equally accurate this fall.

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