



**The
Future of American Democracy
Foundation**

**PUBLIC CONFIDENCE
IN
THE STATE OF THE NATION**

January 16, 2009

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THE FUTURE OF AMERICAN DEMOCRACY FOUNDATION

REPORT ON

PUBLIC CONFIDENCE IN THE STATE OF THE NATION

The Future of American Democracy Foundation presents a disturbing report on Public Confidence in the State of the Nation. Public confidence has declined steeply in every important dimension, including confidence in the American economy, in America's position in the world and in the overall direction of the country.

- √ Confidence in the "Position of the United States in the World Today" declined from 71% in 2002 to 10% in 2008.
- √ Confidence in the "Nation's Economic Direction" fell from 53% in 2002 to 13% in 2008.
- √ Confidence in "The Overall Direction of the Country" fell from 53% in 2002 to 13% in 2008.
- √ The Composite Index of Public Confidence in the nation and its leadership, based on 14 separate indicators, declined from 53% in 2002 to 22% in 2008.

Public Confidence is the most important indicator of the health of our Democracy. The media have a special responsibility to report not only on the President's view of the State of the Union but also on the public's confidence in the State of the Nation.

The enclosed charts show dramatic erosion of public confidence in our major institutions. Confidence in the Presidency declined from 58% in 2002 to 26% in 2008. Confidence in the Congress declined from 54% in 2002 to 18% in 2008. Confidence in the Supreme Court declined from 50% in 2002 to 32% in 2008. Confidence in the News Media declined from 35% in 2002 to 24% in 2008.

At the same time the American public holds out hope for a better future. A great majority of Americans believes that changes can be made in public policy to secure a positive future for our democratic society.

This report is based on data gathered by America's major public opinion research organizations. The report was compiled under the supervision of the Chairman of the Foundation, Norton Garfinkle, and the Chairman of the Foundation's Board of Advisors, Daniel Yankelovich, the Founder of the Public Agenda and America's foremost analyst of public opinion.

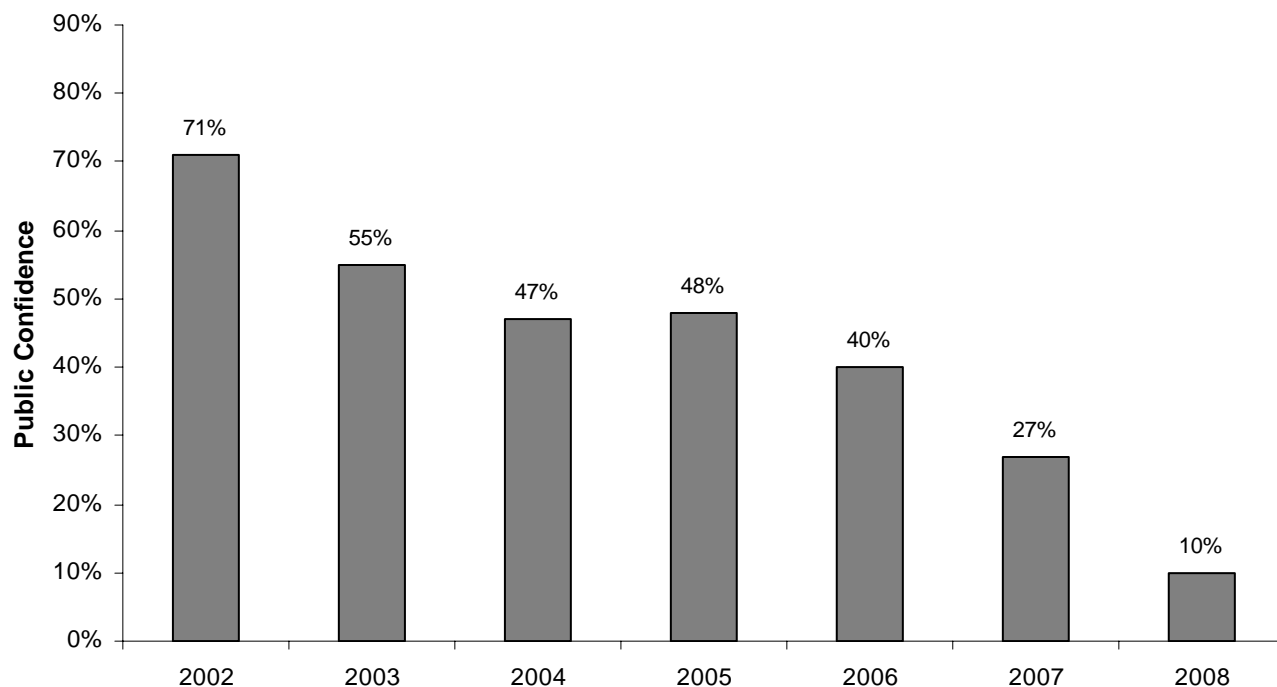
Table of Contents

Report on Public Confidence	2
Public Confidence in the Direction of the Country	
Public Confidence in the United States Position in the World Today	4
Public Confidence in the Country Going in the Right Direction	5
Public Confidence in the Nation's Economic Direction	6
Public Confidence in the Nation's Environmental Future	7
Public Confidence in the Moral Values of the Country	8
Public Confidence in Major Institutions	
Public Confidence in the Presidency	9
Public Confidence in Congress	10
Public Confidence in The Supreme Court	11
Public Confidence in The News Media	12
Public Confidence in President George W. Bush	
Public Confidence in President George W. Bush	13
Public Confidence in George W. Bush's Handling of Foreign Policy	14
Public Confidence in George W. Bush's Handling of the Iraq War	15
Public Confidence in George W. Bush's Handling of the Economy	16
Public Confidence in George W. Bush's Handling of Healthcare Policy	17
Public Confidence Index	18
President's Bush's Legacy	19
Public Confidence in President Barack Obama	
Public Approval of Barack Obama	20
Public Confidence in Barack Obama's Actions After the Election	21
Public Confidence that Barack Obama will Achieve his Goals for the Country	22
Public Confidence in Barack Obama's Economic Program	23
The Future of American Democracy Foundation	24

Public Confidence in The Direction of the Country

Table 1

Public Confidence in
The United States Position in the World Today
declined from 71% in 2002 to 10% in 2008



Sources: Gallup Poll, Public Agenda Confidence in U.S. Foreign Policy Index.

The wording of the questions asked is shown below:

Gallup Poll

Question: On the whole would you say that you are satisfied or dissatisfied with the position of the United States in the World today?

Satisfied: Feb'02: 71% Feb'03: 55% Feb'04: 47% Feb'05: 48% Feb'06: 43% Oct'07: 26% Dec'08: 10%

Public Agenda Confidence in U.S. Foreign Policy Index

Question: Thinking about U.S. relations with the rest of the world, would you say things are heading in the right direction or are they off on the wrong track?

Right Direction: Jan'06: 37% Sep'07: 28%

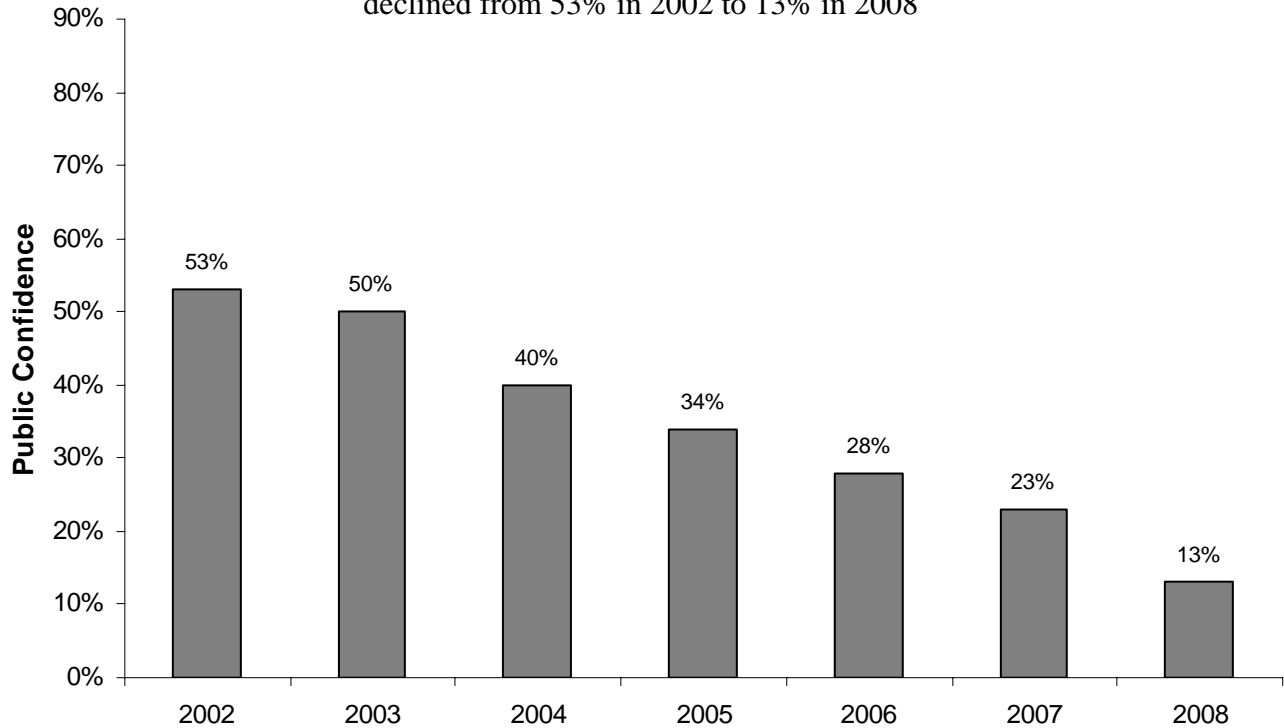
Combined data from 2 Polls

2002: 71% 2003: 55% 2004: 47% 2005: 48% 2006: 40% 2007: 27% 2008: 10%

Public Confidence in The Direction of the Country

Table 2

Public Confidence in
The Country Going in the Right Direction
declined from 53% in 2002 to 13% in 2008



Sources: New York Times/CBS News Poll, ABC News/Washington Post Poll, NBC News/Wall Street Journal Survey.

The wording of the questions asked is shown below:

Question: Do you feel things in this country are generally going in the right direction or do you feel things have pretty seriously gotten off on the wrong track?

New York Times/CBS News Poll

Right Direction: Jan'02: 52% Mar'03: 50% Mar'04: 38% Mar'05: 37% Mar'06: 28% Sep'07: 24% Dec'08: 12%

ABC News/Washington Post Poll

Right Direction:: Feb'02: 54% Apr'03: 52% Apr'04: 42% Nov'05: 30% May'06: 29% Nov'07: 24% Dec'08: 15%

NBC News/Wall Street Journal Survey

Right Direction: Apr'02: 53% Jan-Jul'03: 47% Mar'04: 41% Apr'05: 34% Mar'06: 26% Nov'07: 21% Oct'08: 11%

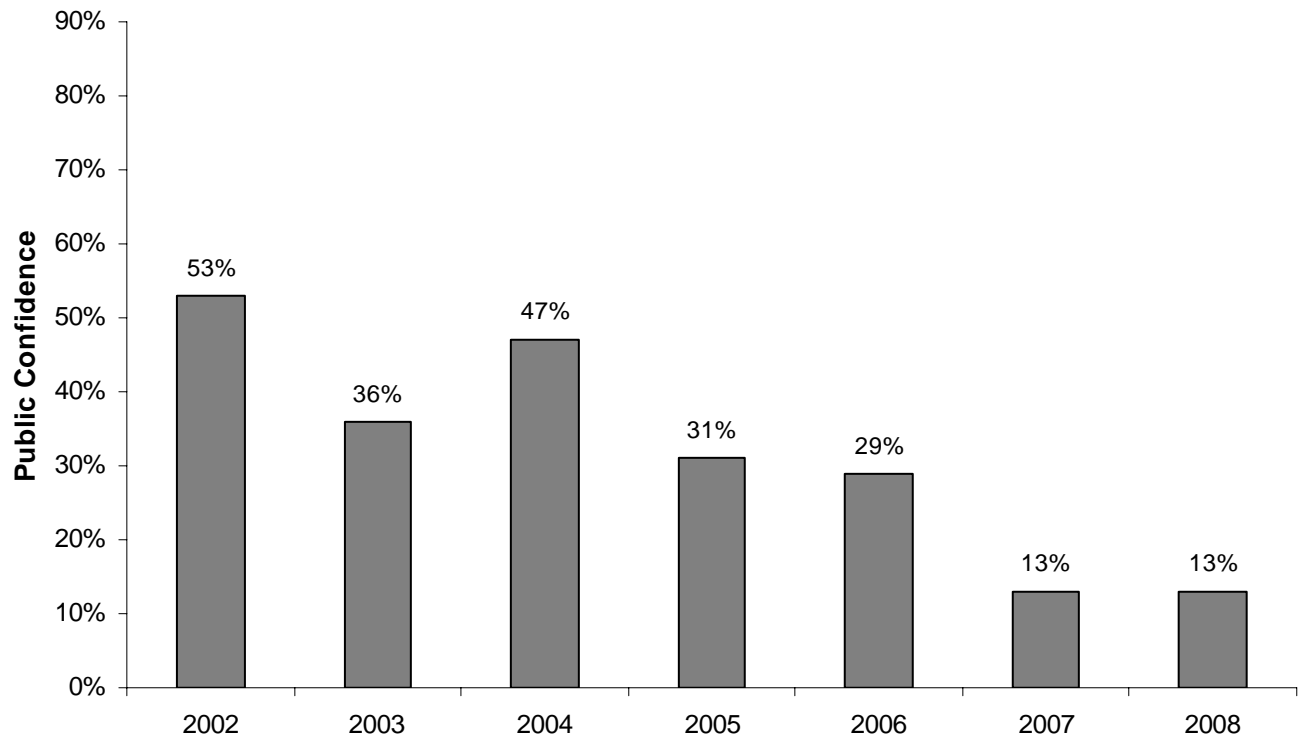
Average of 3 Polls

2002: 53% 2003: 50% 2004: 40% 2005: 34% 2006: 28% 2007: 23% 2008: 13%

Public Confidence in The Direction of the Country

Table 3

Public Confidence in
The Nation's Economic Direction
declined from **53%** in 2002 to **13%** in 2008



Source: Gallup Poll

The wording of the question asked is shown below:

Gallup Poll

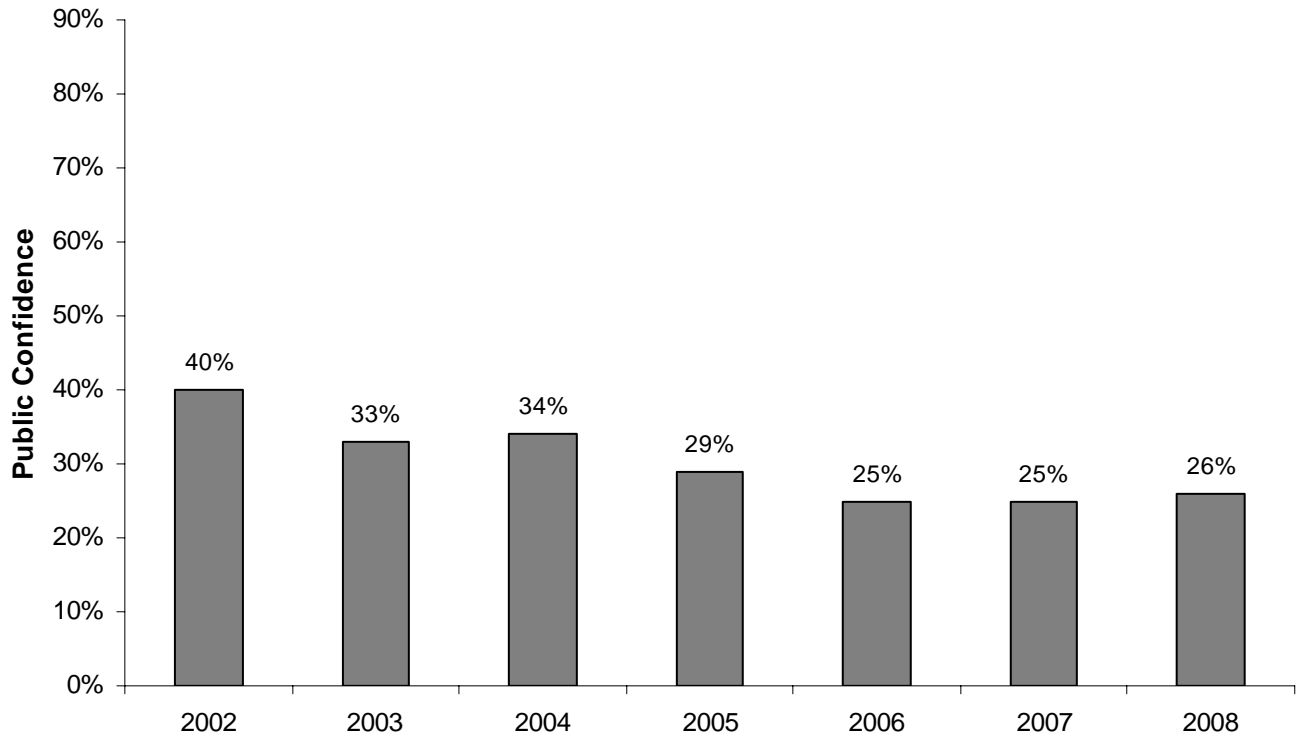
Question: Right now, do you think economic conditions in the country as a whole are getting better or getting worse?

Getting Better: Apr'02: 53% Apr'03: 36% Apr'04: 47% Apr'05: 31% Apr'06: 29% Nov'07: 13% Dec'08: 13%

Public Confidence in The Direction of the Country

Table 4

Public Confidence in
The Nation's Environmental Future
declined from **40%** in 2002 to **26%** in 2008



Source: Gallup Poll.

The wording of the question asked is shown below:

Gallup Poll

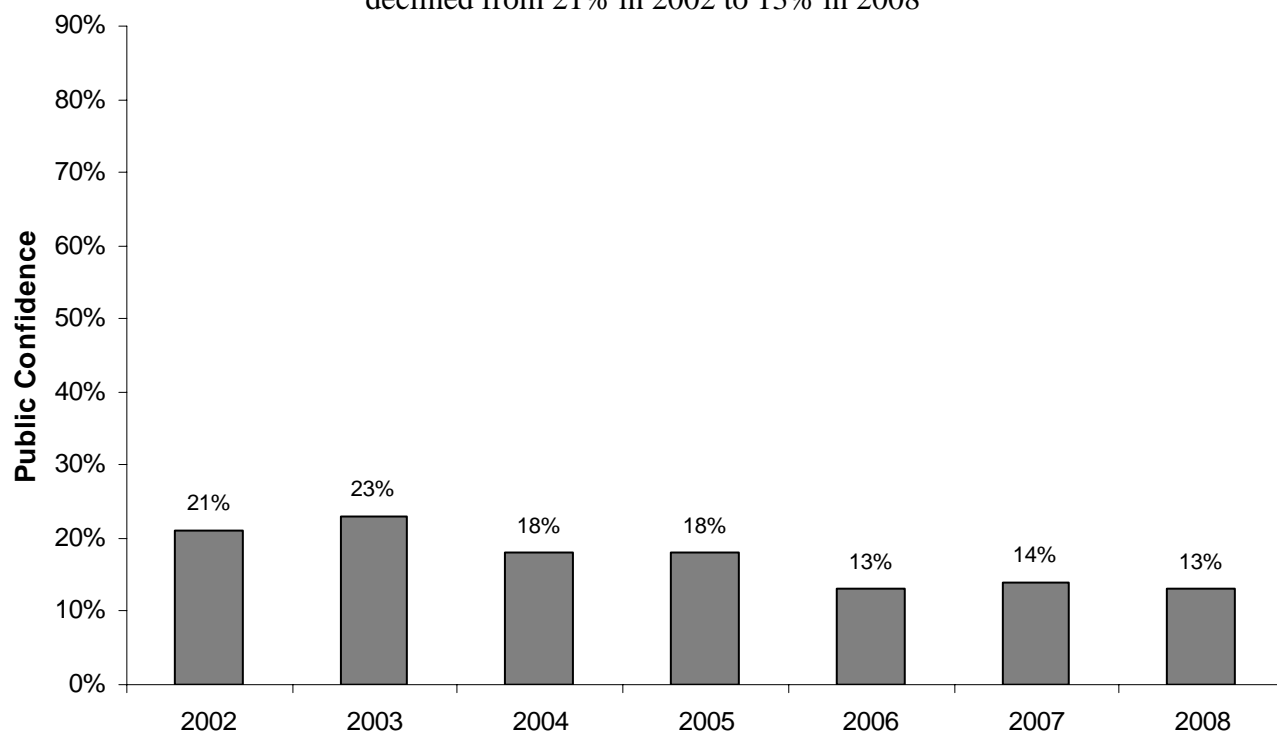
Question: Right now, do you think the quality of the environment in the country as a whole is getting better or getting worse?

Getting Better: Mar'02: 40% Mar'03: 33% Mar'04: 34% Mar'05: 29% Mar'06: 25% Mar'07: 25% Mar'08: 26%

Public Confidence in The Direction of the Country

Table 5

Public Confidence in
The Moral Values of the Country
declined from 21% in 2002 to 13% in 2008



Source: Gallup Poll.

The wording of the questions asked is shown below:

Gallup Poll

Question 1: How would you rate the overall state of moral values in this country today – as excellent, good, only fair, or poor?

Excellent or Good: May'02: 18% May'03: 22% May'04: 19% May'05: 19% May'06: 14% May'07: 17%
May'08: 15%

Question 2: Right now, do you think the state of moral values in the country as a whole is getting better or getting worse?

Getting Better: May'02: 24% May'03: 24% May'04: 16% May'05: 16% May'06: 11% May'07: 11%
May'08: 11%

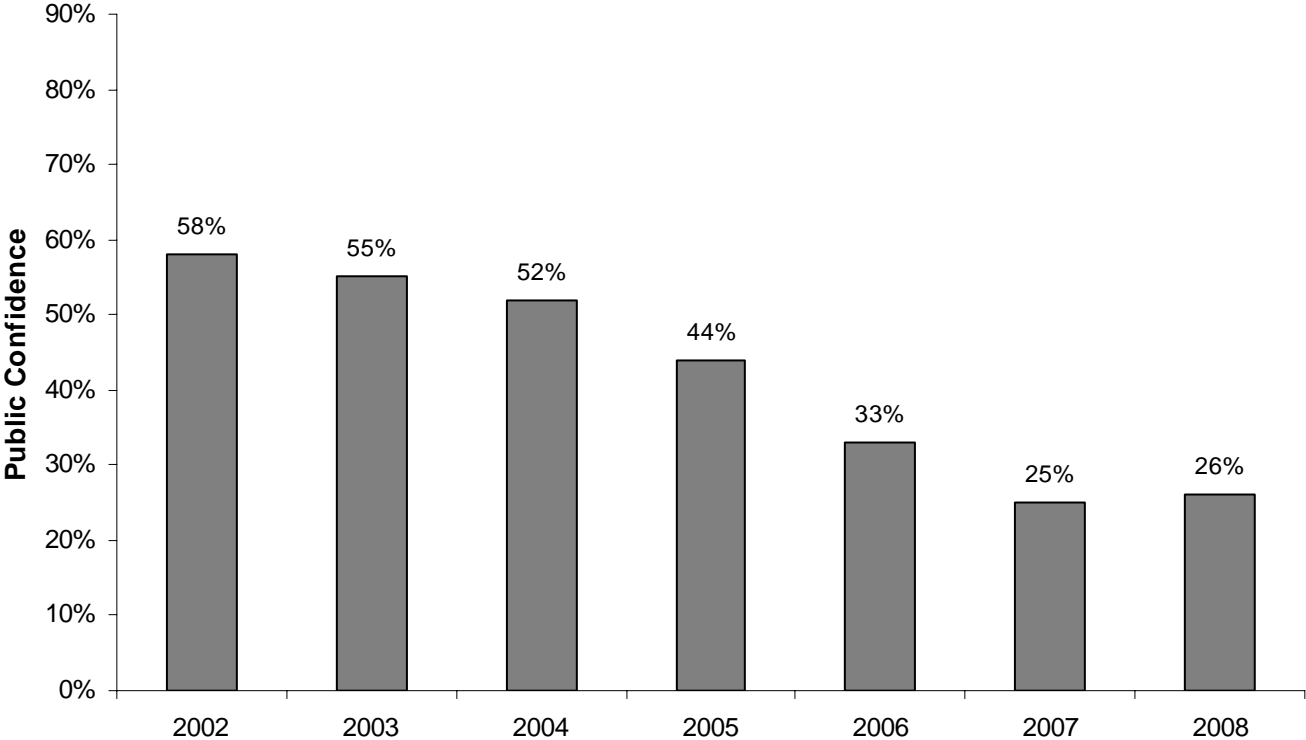
Average of 2 Questions

2002: 21% 2003: 23% 2004: 18% 2005: 18% 2006: 13% 2007: 14% 2008: 13%

Public Confidence in Major Institutions

Table 6

Public Confidence in
The Presidency
declined from **58%** in 2002 to **26%** in 2008



Source: Gallup Poll.

The wording of the question asked is shown below:

Gallup Poll

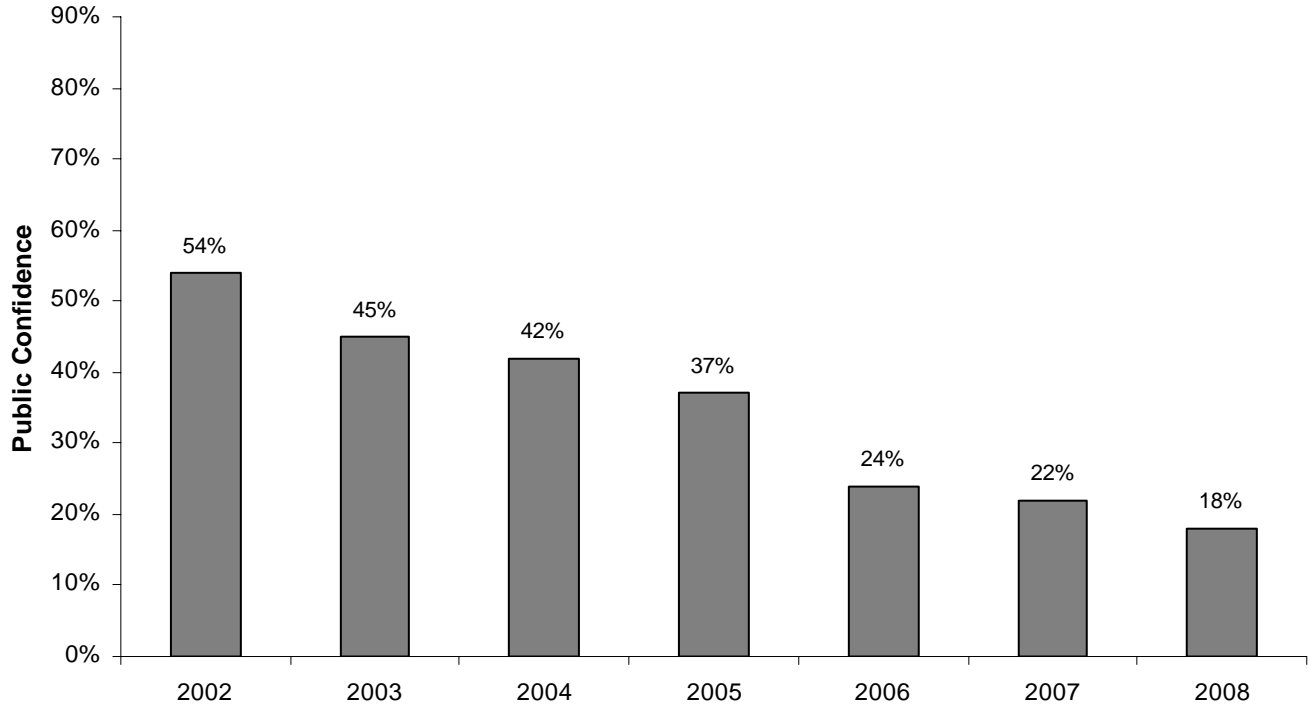
Question: Please tell me how much confidence you, yourself have in the Presidency, a great deal, quite a lot, some or very little?

A great deal or quite a lot: 2002: 58% 2003: 55% 2004: 52% 2005: 44% 2006: 33% 2007: 25% 2008: 26%

Public Confidence in Major Institutions

Table 7

Public Confidence in
Congress
declined from **54%** in 2002 to **18%** in 2008



Sources: Gallup Poll, New York Times/CBS News Poll, NBC News/Wall Street Journal Survey.

The wording of the questions asked is shown below:

Gallup Poll

Question: Do you approve or disapprove of the way Congress is handling its job?

Approve: Apr'02: 57% Apr'03: 58% Apr'04: 43% Apr'05: 38% Apr'06: 23% Nov'07: 20% Dec'08: 19%

New York Times/CBS News Poll

Question: Do you approve or disapprove of the way Congress is handling its job?

Approve: Feb'02: 50% May'03: 35% Jan'04: 45% Apr'05: 35% Apr'06: 27% Oct'07: 27% Dec'08: 15%

NBC News/Wall Street Journal Survey

Question: In general do you approve or disapprove of the job that Congress is doing?

Approve: Jan'02: 54% May'03: 43% May'04: 39% Apr'05: 39% Apr'06: 22% Nov'07: 19% Dec'08: 21%

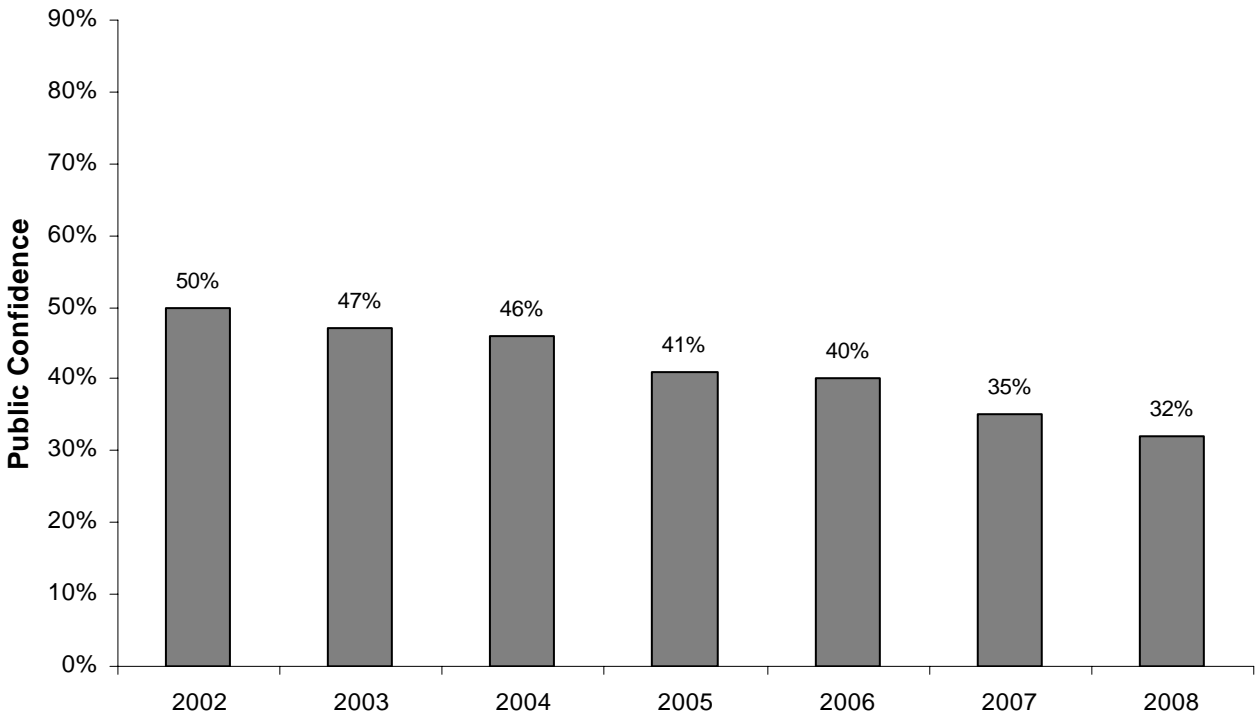
Average of 3 Polls

2002: 54% 2003: 45% 2004: 42% 2005: 37% 2006: 24% 2007: 22% 2008: 18%

Public Confidence in Major Institutions

Table 8

Public Confidence in
The U.S. Supreme Court
declined from **50%** in 2002 to **32%** in 2008



Source: Gallup Poll

The wording of the questions asked is shown below:

Gallup Poll

Question: Now I am going to read you a list of institutions in American society. Please tell me how much confidence you have in each one – a great deal, quite a lot, some, or very little?

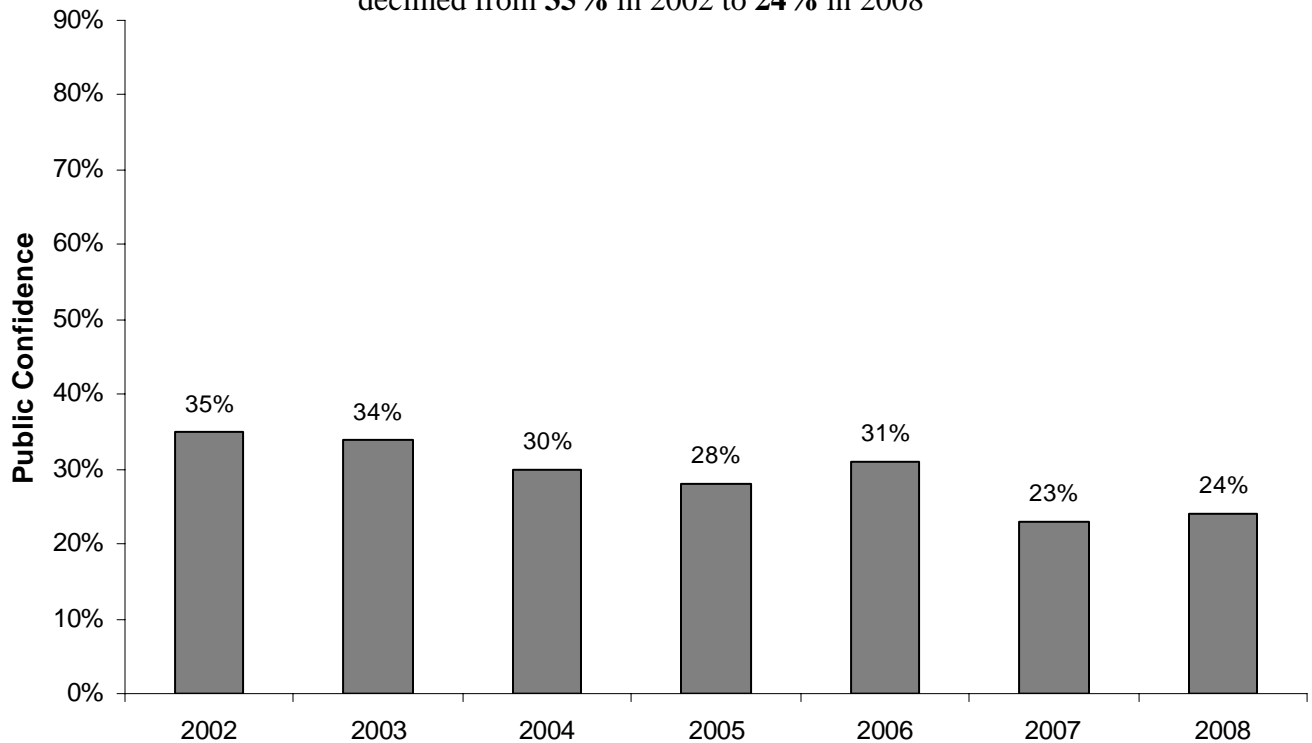
The U.S. Supreme Court

A great deal or quite a lot: 2002: 50% 2003: 47% 2004: 46% 2005: 41% 2006: 40% 2007: 35% 2008: 32%

Public Confidence in Major Institutions

Table 9

Public Confidence in
The News Media
declined from **35%** in 2002 to **24%** in 2008



Source: Gallup Poll.

The wording of the questions asked is shown below:

Gallup Poll

Question: Now I am going to read you a list of institutions in American society. Please tell me how much confidence you have in each one – a great deal, quite a lot, some, or very little?

Television News

A great deal or quite a lot: 2002: 35% 2003: 35% 2004: 30% 2005: 28% 2006: 31% 2007: 23% 2008: 24%

Newspapers

A great deal or quite a lot: 2002: 35% 2003: 33% 2004: 30% 2005: 28% 2006: 30% 2007: 22% 2008: 24%

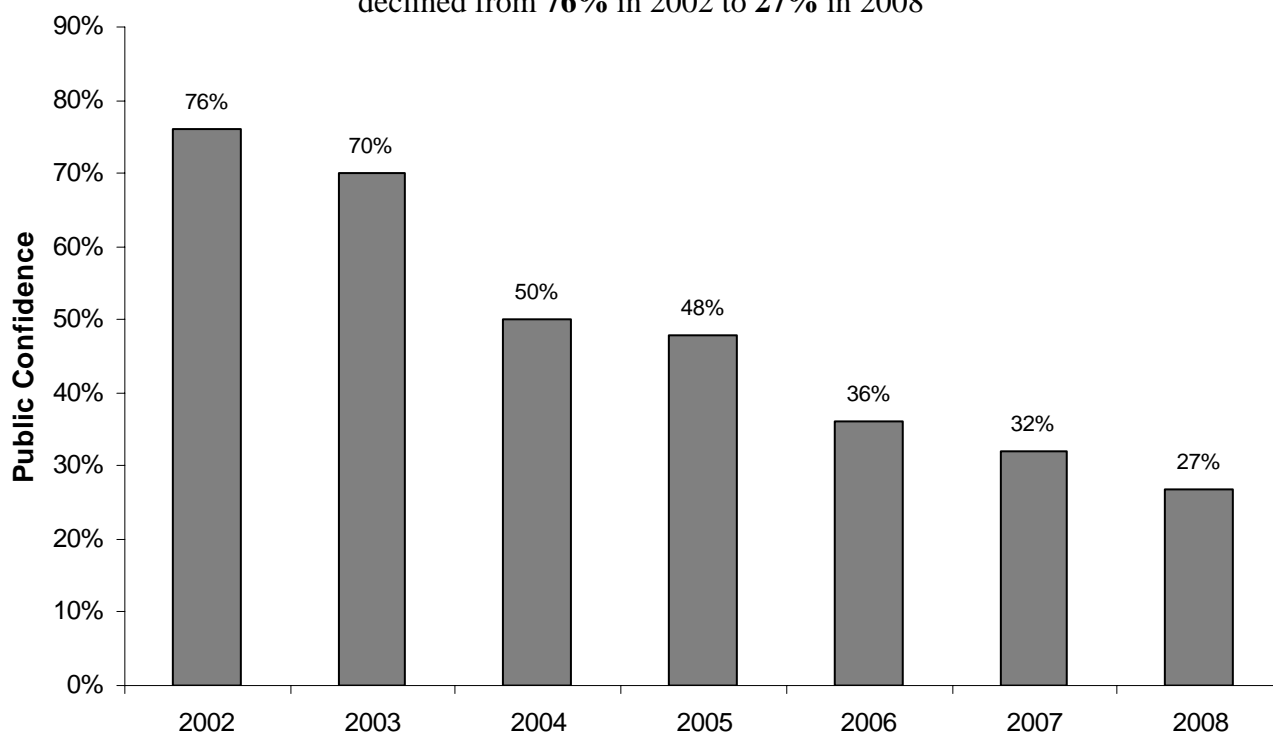
Average of Television News and Newspapers

2002: 35% 2003: 34% 2004: 30% 2005: 28% 2006: 31% 2007: 23% 2008: 24%

Public Confidence in President George W. Bush

Table 10

Public Confidence in
President George W. Bush
declined from **76%** in 2002 to **27%** in 2008



Sources: Gallup Poll, ABC News/Washington Post Poll, New York Times/CBS News Poll, NBC News/Wall Street Journal Survey, Pew Research Center Survey.

The wording of the questions asked is shown below:

Question: Do you approve or disapprove of the way George W. Bush is handling his job as President?

Gallup Poll

Approve: Apr'02: 77% Apr'03: 70% Apr'04: 52% Apr'05: 48% Mar'06: 34% Sep'07: 36% Dec'08: 29%

ABC News/Washington Post Poll

Approve: Apr'02: 78% Apr'03: 71% Apr'04: 51% Apr'05: 47% Mar'06: 41% Sep'07: 33% Dec'08: 30%

New York Times/CBS News Poll

Approve: Apr'02: 77% Mar'03: 69% Mar'04: 51% Mar'05: 46% Mar'06: 34% Sep'07: 29% Dec'08: 24%

NBC News/Wall Street Journal Survey

Approve: Apr'02: 74% Apr'03: 71% Mar'04: 50% Apr'05: 48% Mar'06: 37% Nov'07: 31% Dec'08: 27%

Pew Research Center Survey

Approve: Apr'02: 74% Apr'03: 69% Mar'04: 47% Mar'05: 49% Mar'06: 35% Oct'07: 30% Dec'08: 24%

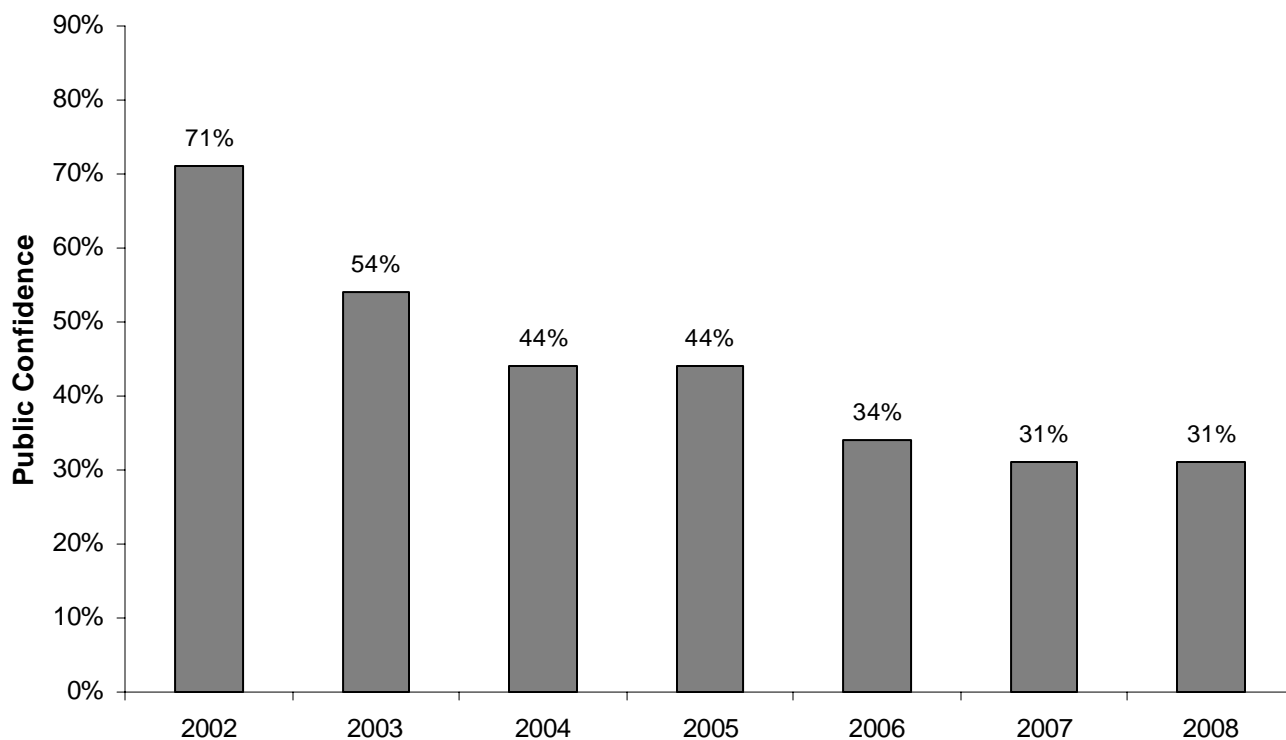
Average of 5 Polls

2002: 76% 2003: 70% 2004: 50% 2005: 48% 2006: 36% 2007: 32% 2008: 27%

Public Confidence in President George W. Bush

Table 11

Public Confidence in
George W. Bush's Handling of Foreign Policy
declined from **71%** in 2002 to **31%** in 2008



Source: Gallup Poll, New York Times/CBS News Poll., NBC News/Wall Street Journal Survey

The wording of the questions asked is shown below:

Gallup Poll

Question: Do you approve or disapprove of the way George W. Bush is handling foreign affairs?

Approve: Jul'02: 63% Aug'03: 55% Aug'04: 44% Aug'05: 43% Aug'06: 39% Mar'07: 33% Nov'07: 29%
Feb'08: 32%

New York Times/CBS News Poll

Question: Do you approve or disapprove of the way George W. Bush is handling foreign policy?

Approve: Jan, Feb & Mar'02: 70% Mar'03: 51% Mar'04: 45% Feb'05: 44% Mar'06: 30% Sep'07: 26%

NBC News/Wall Street Journal Survey

Approve: Jan'02: 81% Jul'03: 55% Aug'04: 44% Jul'05: 45% Jul'06: 34% Jul'07: 34% Dec'08: 30%

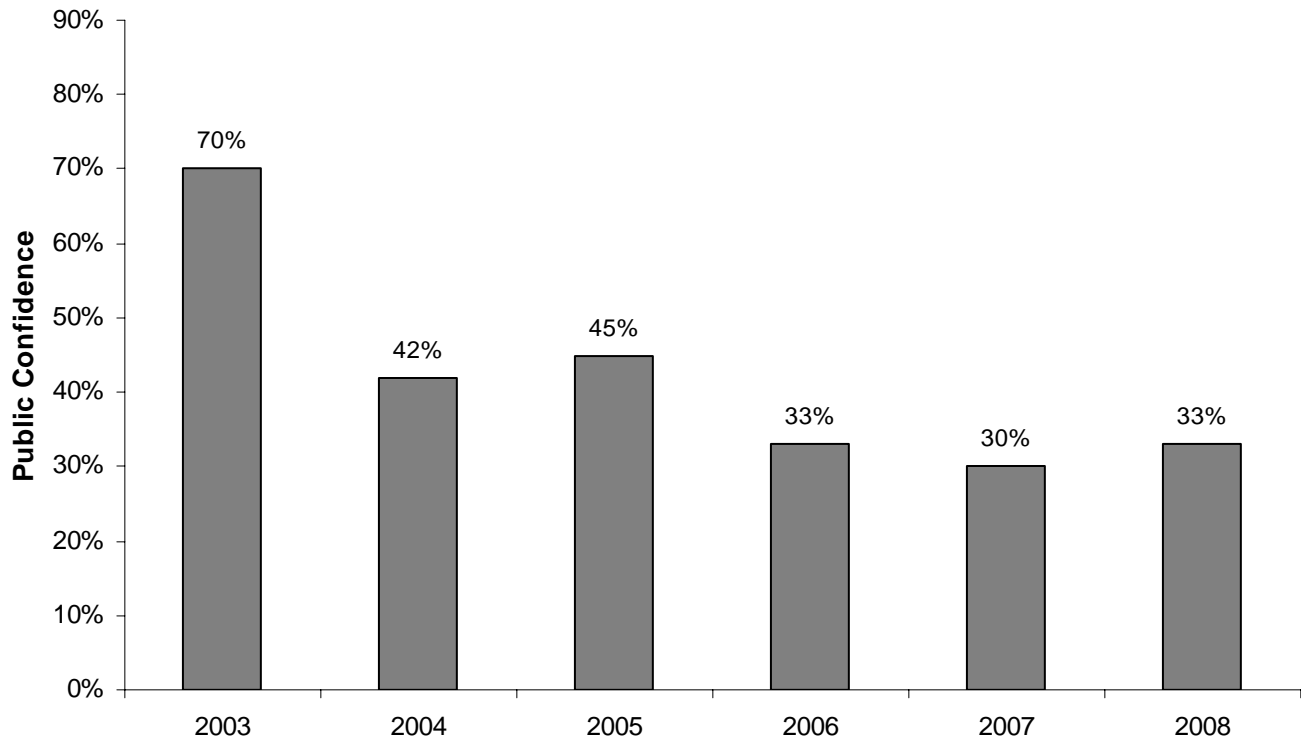
Average of 3 Polls

2002: 67% 2003: 54% 2004: 44% 2005: 44% 2006: 34% 2007: 31% 2008: 31%

Public Confidence in President George W. Bush

Table 12

Public Confidence in
George W. Bush's Handling of the Iraq War
declined from **70%** in 2003 to **33%** in 2008



Sources: New York Times/CBS News Poll, NBC News/Wall Street Journal Survey, ABC News/Washington Post Poll..

The wording of the questions asked is shown below:

New York Times/CBS News Poll

Question: "Do you approve or disapprove of the way George W. Bush is handling the situation with Iraq?"

Approve: Mar'03: 69% Mar'04: 44% Feb & Mar'05: 42% Mar'06: 31% Oct'07: 26% Feb'08: 31%

NBC News/Wall Street Journal Survey

Question: And do you feel more confident or less confident that the war in Iraq will come to a successful conclusion?

More Confident: Dec'04: 41% Feb & Apr'05: 46% Mar'06: 32% Nov'07: 27% Dec'08: 33%

ABC News/Washington Post Poll

Question: All in all, considering the costs to the United States versus the benefits to the United States, do you think the war with Iraq was worth fighting, or not?

Worth Fighting: Apr'03: 70% Dec'04: 42% Dec'05: 46% Dec'06: 36% Dec'07: 37% Dec'08: 34%

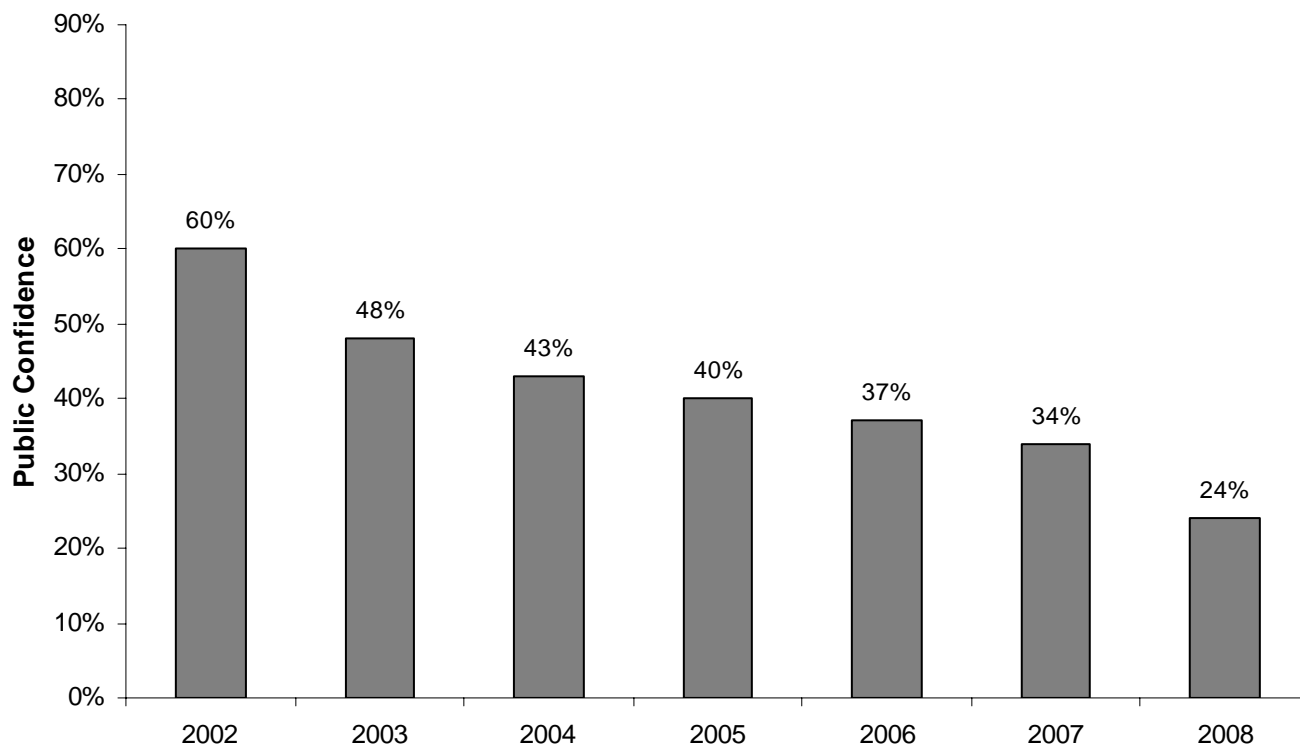
Combined data from 3 Polls

2003: 70% 2004: 42% 2005: 45% 2006: 33% 2007: 30% 2008: 33%

Public Confidence in President George W. Bush

Table 13

Public Confidence in
George W. Bush's Handling of the Economy
declined from **60%** in 2002 to **24%** in 2008



Sources: Gallup Poll, New York Times/CBS News Poll, NBC News/Wall Street Journal Survey, ABC News/Washington Post Poll.

The wording of the questions asked is shown below:

Question: Do you approve or disapprove of the way George W. Bush is handling the economy?

Gallup Poll

Approve: Apr'02: 60% Apr'03: 49% Apr'04: 46% Apr'05: 43% Apr'06: 39% Aug'07: 35% Feb'08: 27%

New York Times/CBS News Poll

Approve: Feb & May'02: 53% Mar & Apr'03: 48% Mar & Apr'04: 38% Apr'05: 34% Mar & Apr'06: 36% Sep'07: 32%

NBC News/Wall Street Journal Survey

Approve: Apr'02: 61% Apr'03: 49% Mar'04: 45% Apr'05: 41% Apr'06: 35% Nov'07: 35% Dec'08: 20%

ABC News/Washington Post Poll

Approve: Apr'02: 64% Feb'03: 47% Apr'04: 44% Apr'05: 40% Apr'06: 40% Dec'07: 34% Dec'08: 24%

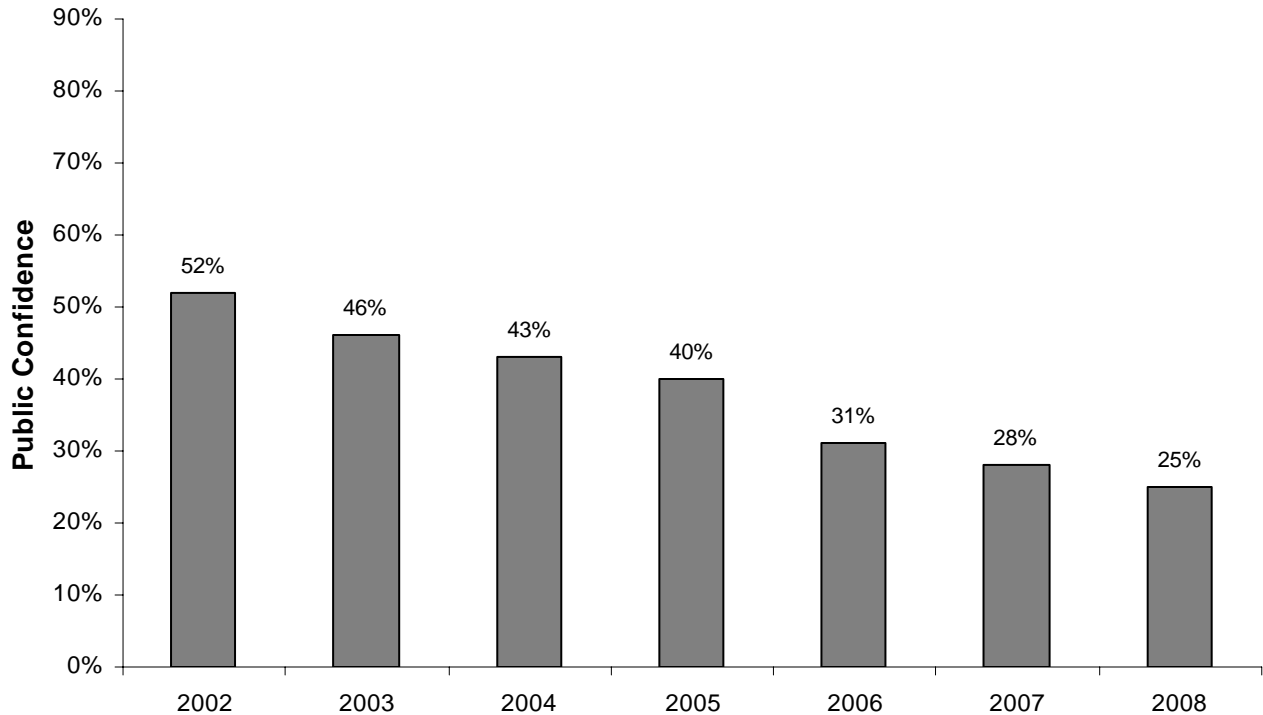
Average of 4 Polls

2002: 60% 2003: 48% 2004: 43% 2005: 40% 2006: 37% 2007: 35% 2008: 24%

Public Confidence in President George W. Bush

Table 14

Public Confidence in
George W. Bush's Handling of Healthcare Policy
declined from **52%** in 2002 to **25%** in 2008



Source: Gallup Poll.

The wording of the question asked is shown below:

Gallup Poll

Question: Do you approve or disapprove of the way George W. Bush is handling Healthcare Policy?

Approve: Mar'02: 52% Feb'03: 46% Jan'04: 43% Jan'05: 40% Jan'06: 31% Feb'07: 28% Feb'08: 25%

State of the Nation

Public Confidence Index*

	Change (2002 - 2008)	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Public Confidence in the State of the Nation								
Confidence in the United States Position in the World Today	-61%	71%	55%	47%	48%	40%	27%	10%
Confidence in the Country Going in the Right Direction	-40%	53%	50%	40%	34%	28%	23%	13%
Confidence in the Nation's Economic Direction	-40%	53%	36%	47%	31%	29%	13%	13%
Confidence in the Nation's Environmental Future	-14%	40%	33%	34%	29%	25%	25%	26%
Confidence in the Moral Values of the Country	-8%	21%	23%	18%	18%	13%	14%	13%
Public Confidence in Major Institutions								
Confidence in The Presidency	-32%	58%	55%	52%	44%	33%	25%	26%
Confidence in Congress	-36%	54%	45%	42%	37%	24%	22%	18%
Confidence in the U.S. Supreme Court	-18%	50%	47%	46%	41%	40%	35%	32%
Confidence in the News Media	-11%	35%	34%	30%	28%	31%	23%	24%
Public Confidence in President George W. Bush								
Confidence in President George W. Bush	-49%	76%	70%	50%	48%	36%	32%	27%
Confidence in George W. Bush's Handling of Foreign Policy	-40%	71%	54%	44%	44%	34%	31%	31%
Confidence in George W. Bush's Handling of the Iraq War (2003-2008)	-37%	N/A	70%	42%	45%	33%	30%	33%
Confidence in George W. Bush's Handling of the Economy	-36%	60%	48%	43%	40%	37%	34%	24%
Confidence in George W. Bush's Handling of Healthcare Policy	-27%	52%	46%	43%	40%	31%	28%	25%
Public Confidence Index* (Composite Average)	-31%	53%	48%	41%	38%	31%	26%	22%

* The Public Confidence Index is a composite average of all 14 items listed above.

The Percentage shown for each item is the percentage of the U.S. adult population that expresses positive confidence.

Sources: Gallup Poll; New York Times/CBS News Poll; NBC News/Wall Street Journal Survey; ABC News/Washington Post Poll; Pew Research Center Survey; Public Agenda Confidence in U.S. Foreign Policy Index.

President Bush's Legacy

A majority of Americans believe that George W. Bush's Administration will be best known for Failures and he will go down in history as a Below Average or Poor President

Pew Research Center, December 2008

Question: The President's Administration will be best known for:

	<u>Failures</u>	<u>Accomplishments</u>
George W. Bush (Dec'08)	64%	24%
Bill Clinton (Jan'01)	27%	60%

Question: This President will go down in history as outstanding, above average, average, below average or poor?

	<u>Below Average or Poor</u>	<u>Outstanding or Above Average</u>	<u>Average</u>
George W. Bush	58%	11%	28%
Bill Clinton	21%	42%	32%
George H. W. Bush	12%	36%	51%
Ronald Reagan	14%	59%	25%

Gallup Poll, December 2008

Question: In the long run, do you think history will judge the U.S. invasion and subsequent involvement in Iraq as a total success for the United States, mostly successful, mostly a failure or as a total failure for the United States?

Total Success	4%
Mostly Successful	38%
Mostly a Failure	36%
Total Failure	18%

Public Confidence in President Barack Obama

Public approval of President-Elect Barack Obama was at a very high level in December 2008.

NBC News/Wall Street Journal Survey, December 2008

Question: Now I'm going to read you the names of several public figures and I'd like you to rate your feelings to each one as very positive, somewhat positive, neutral, somewhat negative or very negative:

	Very or Somewhat <u>Positive</u>	Very or Somewhat <u>Negative</u>
Barack Obama	67%	16%
Hillary Clinton	53%	26%
Bill Clinton	49%	29%
George W. Bush	31%	59%
Dick Cheney	21%	58%
The Republican Party	27%	52%
The Democratic Party	49%	28%

Public Confidence in President Barack Obama

A large Majority of Americans are satisfied with President Elect Barack Obama's performance and believes that he will accomplish his positive goals for the country.

NBC News/Wall Street Journal Survey, December 2008

Question: "Since Barack Obama's election as president, please tell me for each of the following whether you are satisfied and feel that Barack Obama has done enough in this area, or are not satisfied and feel that he should do more in this area?"

	Satisfied/Feel He Has Done <u>Enough</u>
Appointing minorities and women to important positions	79%
Working well with the Bush administration	79%
Being open and accessible	77%
Setting the right tone for the country	76%
Assembling a good team of economic advisors	69%
Assembling a good team of foreign and national security advisors	69%
Being bipartisan in his approach on issues	68%
Having a plan to improve the economy	59%

Public Confidence in President Barack Obama

Public confidence in President-Elect Barack Obama’s ability to achieve his positive goals was at a high level in December 2008.

NBC News/Wall Street Journal Survey, December 2008

Question: “I would like to read you several goals that Barack Obama has said he plans to accomplish. For each one, please tell me how likely you think it is that he will achieve it during his term as president. Is it very likely, somewhat likely, somewhat unlikely, or very unlikely?”

	Very or Somewhat <u>Likely</u>	Very or Somewhat <u>Unlikely</u>
Improve America’s image around the world.....	80%	17%
Get the economy back on track.....	73%	24%
Repair the country’s roads, bridges and other transportation infrastructure	73%	23%
Pull most American troops out of Iraq within the next 16 months	70%	28%
Close the prison holding terrorist suspects at Guantanamo, Cuba.....	68%	22%
Rework trade deals with other countries to make them better fit America’s interests	68%	28%
Create and save two-and-a half million jobs	63%	34%
Increase the number of troops in Afghanistan	62%	34%
Create more cooperation and less bickering between the political parties	62%	36%
Reduce taxes for the middle-class.....	61%	37%
Extend health care coverage to all Americans	61%	36%
Reduce the United States' dependence on foreign oil	59%	39%
Eliminate waste and fraud in the federal budget	55%	44%
Reduce the influence of lobbyists and special interests in Washington	47%	47%

Public Confidence in President Barack Obama

Public opinion on the present condition of the economy is very negative, but public confidence in President-Elect Barack Obama's ability to make the right decisions about the economy is very positive.

NBC/Wall Street Journal Survey, December 2008

Question: How would you rate the condition of the national economy these days? Is it good, fairly good, fairly bad?

Very Bad or Fairly Bad: 91%

CBS News Poll, December 2008

Question: How confident are you in Barack Obama's ability to make the right decisions about the economy?

Very Confident or Somewhat Confident: 76%

CBS News Poll, December 2008

Question: Are you generally optimistic or pessimistic about the next 4 years with Barack Obama as President:

Optimistic: 75%



The Future of American Democracy Foundation

The Future of American Democracy Foundation is a nonprofit, nonpartisan foundation dedicated to research and education. The mission of the Foundation is to renew and sustain the historic vision of democracy that has unified Americans throughout the nation's history and to stimulate historically informed analysis and debate on contemporary public policy issues. The Foundation seeks to enable the American public and public policy thinkers throughout the country to have a direct impact on public policy debate and action.

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The Broken Branch: How Congress Is Failing America and How to Get It Back on Track (Institutions of American Democracy) by Thomas E. Mann and Norman J. Ornstein (Oxford University Press, USA; Reprint edition (August 29, 2008)). *The Supreme Court: The Personalities and Rivalries That Defined America* by Jeffrey Rosen (Holt Paperbacks, December 26, 2007). *The Future of Liberalism* by Alan Wolfe (Knopf, February 3, 2009). *A Conversational History of Modern America* by Richard D. Heffner (Basic Books, August 28, 2003). *Coming to Public Judgment: Making Democracy Work in a Complex World (The Frank W. Abrams Lectures)* by Dan Yankelovich (Syracuse University Press; 1st edition May 1991)

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