



**The
Future of American Democracy
Foundation**

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

July 2009

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THE FUTURE OF AMERICAN DEMOCRACY FOUNDATION

Public Confidence in The State of the Nation

Public Confidence in the State of the Nation is the most important indicator of the health of our Democracy. This report is designed to provide a barometer of public confidence based on data gathered by America's major public opinion research organizations.

Public attitudes have changed significantly since our last report, issued before the inauguration of President Obama. Among the most striking changes are the following:

- Confidence levels that the country is moving in the right direction have improved sharply (though perceptions of how well the economy is doing divides along partisan lines).
- The public feels that there is now a mix of good and bad news about the economy, rather than just unrelieved bad news.
- The number of Americans who expect their personal finances to improve has risen to more than six out of ten but fewer than four out of ten rate their personal finances as excellent or good
- The public is hopeful that President Obama's policies will improve the economy in the long run, but they think it is too early to see any concrete positive impact.
- Rising levels of unemployment dampen peoples' hopes for the near term, as do the prospect of huge ever-growing deficits (yet, more than four out of ten Americans believe that the economy will improve over the next 12 months).
- The vast majority of Americans have cut back on their spending in the interest of saving money or not having it to spend. There are many indications that the new attitudes towards thriftiness will persist even after the economy recovers.
- The majority supports President Obama's overall economic program, but there is less support for government spending to bail out the automobile companies.
- Mistrust in the business community has increased, supporting stronger regulation.

In summary, though Americans are still dissatisfied with the state of the economy and their own financial situation, they are more confident about the future. If "the only thing we have to fear is fear itself," there are grounds for optimism because most Americans betray few signs of genuine fear. The current report shows that Americans continue to express a great deal of concern about the current State of the Nation but have hope for the future.

This 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 Public Agenda and America's foremost analyst of public opinion.

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IN

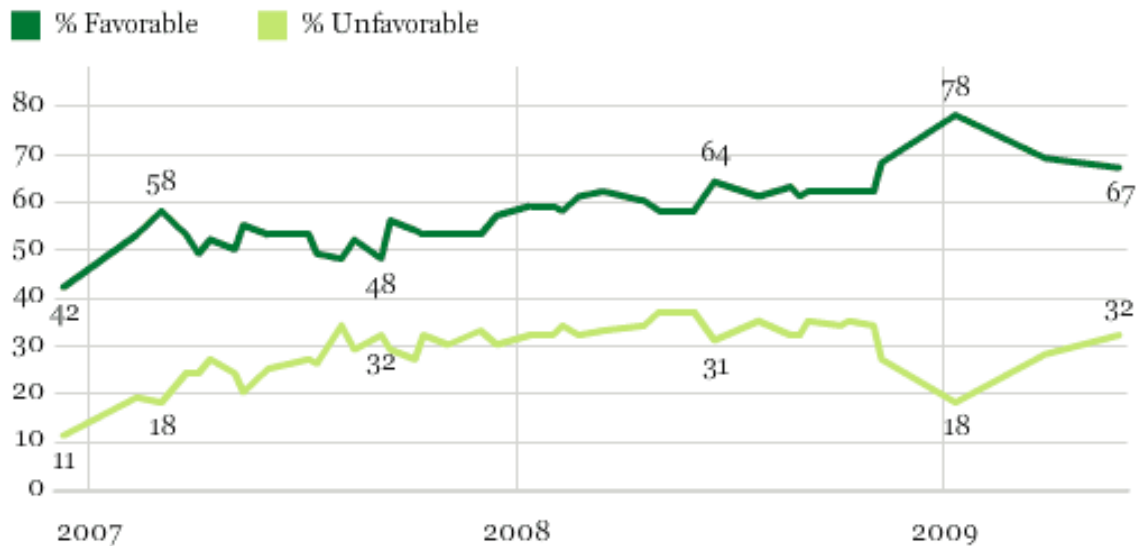
PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA

Public Confidence in President Barack Obama

Table 1

Overall Opinion of Barack Obama
2007—2009

Next, we'd like to get your overall opinion of some people in the news. As I read each name, please say if you have a favorable or unfavorable opinion of these people -- or if you have never heard of them. How about -- Barack Obama?



Source: Gallup Poll, April 2009

Public Confidence in President Barack Obama

Table 2

Public Approval of the Way President Obama is Handling His Job

Six out of ten Americans approve of the way President Obama is handling his job.

Approval

President Obama 60%

Question: Do you approve or disapprove of the way Barack Obama is handling his job as president?

Gallup Poll: Jun'09: 61%

New York Times/CBS News Poll Jun'09: 63%

NBC News/Wall Street Journal Survey: Jun'09: 56%

Average of 3 Polls: Jun'09: 60%

The majority of Americans have much more positive feelings for President Obama than for other Democrats and Republicans

	<u>Positive</u>	<u>Negative</u>
Barack Obama	64%	23%
The Democratic Party	45%	43%
The Republican Party	29%	44%
John McCain	42%	31%
George W. Bush	26%	57%
Dick Cheney	18%	54%

NBC News/Wall Street Journal Survey, April 2009

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

Public Confidence in President Barack Obama

Table 3

Public Approval of President Obama is
Highest on International Affairs
and Lower on Domestic Issues.

	<u>Approve</u>	<u>Disapprove</u>
The Situation in Iraq	71%	21%
International Affairs	67%	27%
The Situation in Afghanistan	63%	26%
U.S. Campaign Against Terrorism	62%	29%
Global Warming	61%	28%
US Relations with Cuba	61%	28%
The Economy	58%	38%
Health Care	57%	29%
Taxes	56%	38%
The Situation with Iran	54%	35%
The Federal Budget Deficit	51%	43%
Immigration Issues	48%	35%
The Situation with U.S. Automakers	41%	53%

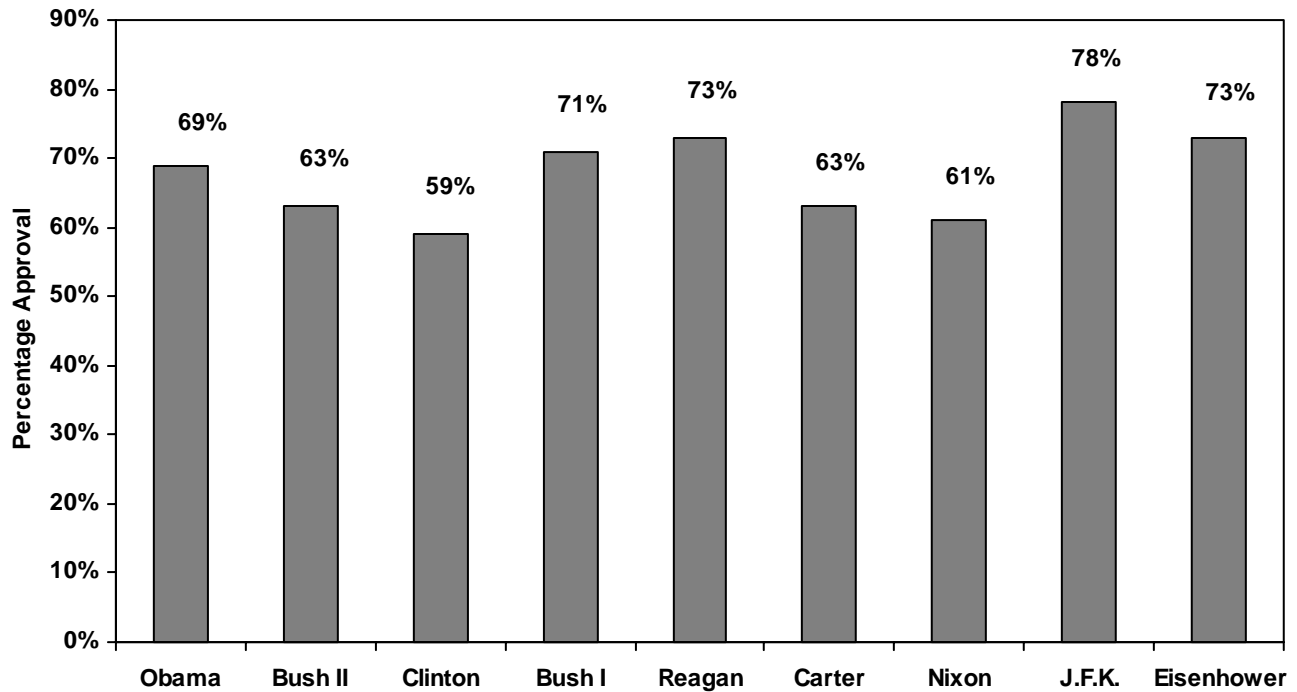
ABC News/Washington Post, April 2009

Question: Do you approve or disapprove of the way Obama is handling [ITEM]?

Public Confidence in President Barack Obama

Table 4

President Obama's Job Approval at 100 Days
is Similar to the Average for all Recent Presidents



Source: ABC News/Washington Post, April 2009



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PUBLIC CONFIDENCE

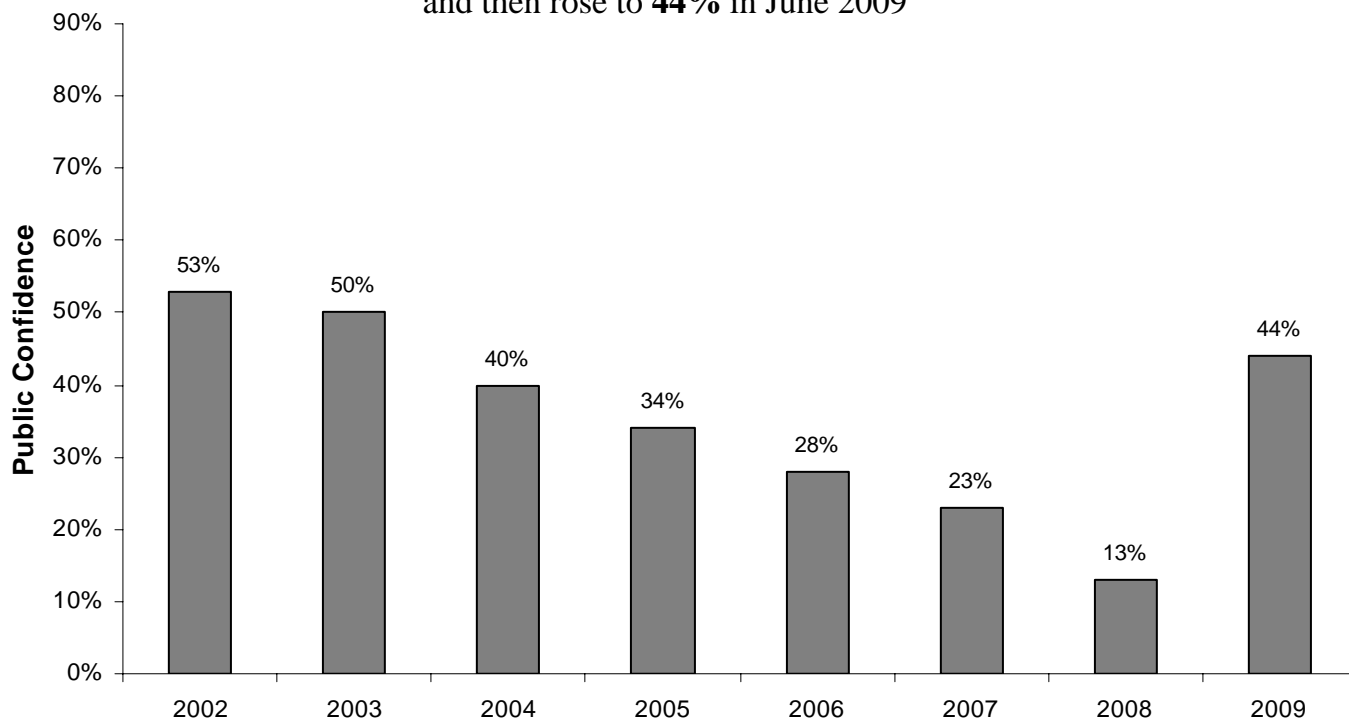
IN

THE RECENT PAST

Public Confidence in the Direction of the Country

Table 5

Public Confidence in
the Country Going in the Right Direction
declined from **53%** in 2002 to **13%** in 2008
and then rose to **44%** in June 2009



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%
Jun'09: 44%

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%
Jun'09: 47%

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%
Jun'09: 42%

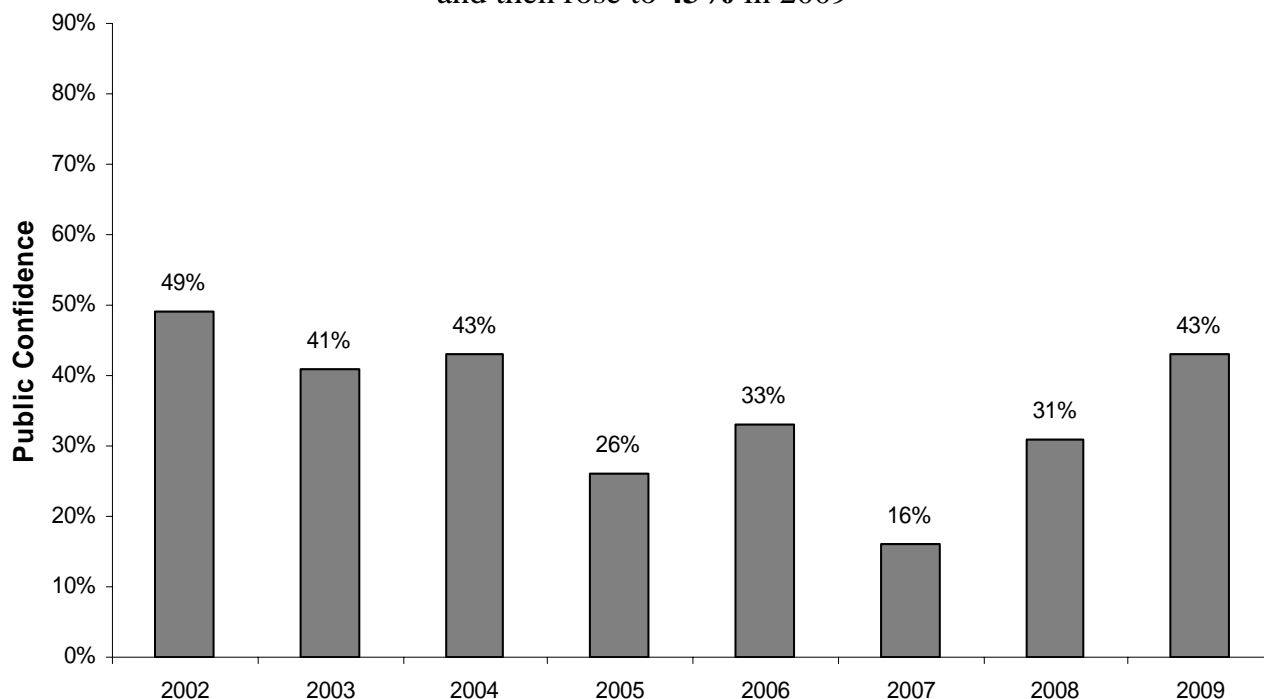
Average of 3 Polls

2002: 53% 2003: 50% 2004: 40% 2005: 34% 2006: 28% 2007: 23% 2008: 13% 2009: 44%

Public Confidence in the Direction of the Country

Table 6

Public Confidence in
the Nation's Economic Direction
declined from **49%** in 2002 to **31%** in 2008
and then rose to **43%** in 2009



Source: Gallup Poll, NBC/Wall Street Journal Survey, Pew Research Center Survey

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% Jun'09: 34%

NBC News/Wall Street Journal Survey

Question: During the next 12 months, do you think the economy will get better, get worse, or stay the same?

Get Better: Apr'02: 50% Jul'03: 45% Mar'04: 44% May'05: 28% Apr'06: 17% Mar'07: 16% Dec'08: 36% Jun'09: 46%

Pew Research Center Survey

Question: A year from now, do you think the economic conditions in the country as a whole will be better than they are at present, or worse, or just about the same as now?

Better: Jan'02: 44% May'03: 43% Feb'04: 39% May'05: 18% Jan'06: 20% Sep'07: 19% Dec'08: 43% Jun'09: 48%

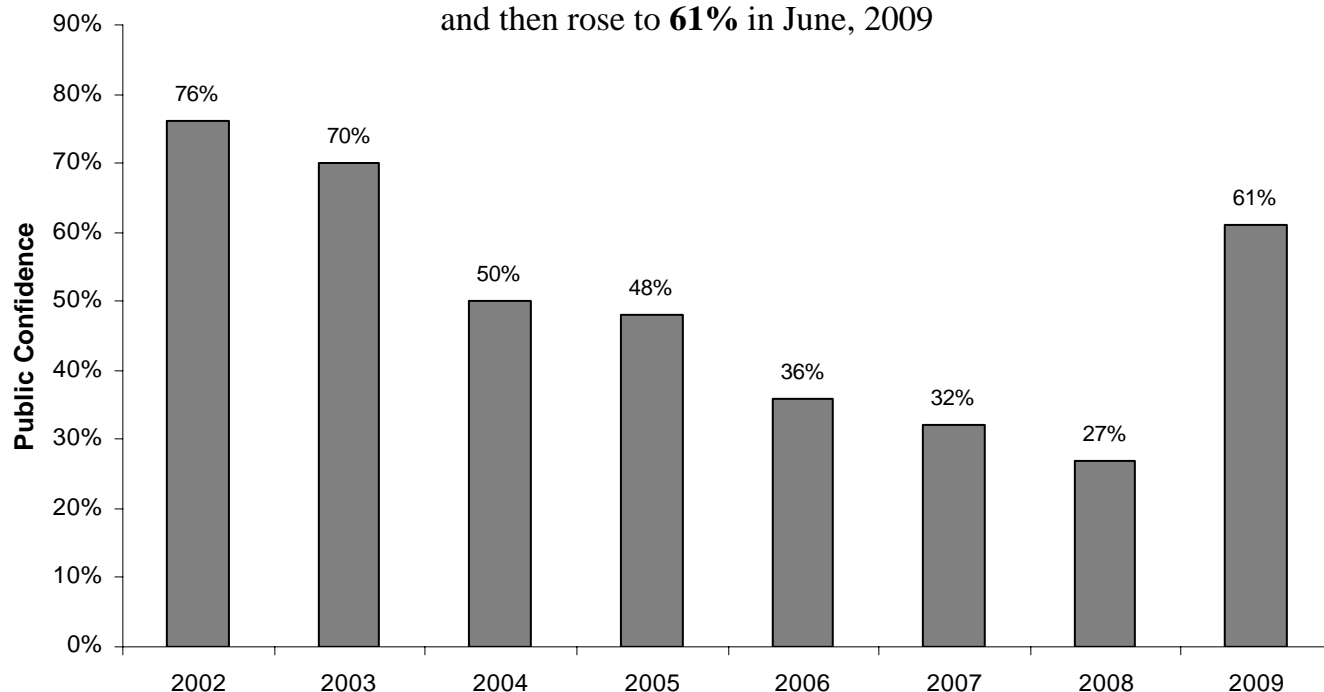
Average of 3 Polls

2002: 49% 2003: 41% 2004: 43% 2005: 26% 2006: 33% 2007: 16% 2008: 31% 2009: 43%

Public Confidence in the President

Table 7

Public Confidence in the President
declined from **76%** in 2002 to **27%** in 2008
and then rose to **61%** in June, 2009



Sources: Gallup Poll, New York Times/CBS News Poll, ABC News/Washington Post 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 [2002-2008]/Barack Obama [2009] 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% Jun'09: 61%

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% Jun'09: 63%

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% Jun'09: 65%

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% Jun'09: 56%

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% Jun'09: 61%

Average of 5 Polls

2002: 76% 2003: 70% 2004: 50% 2005: 48% 2006: 36% 2007: 32% 2008: 27% 2009: 61%



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PUBLIC PRIORITIES

Public Priorities

Table 8

The Public Desires to Have a Greater Say
in the Direction of the Country

	<u>Public Agreement</u>
I feel it's my duty as a citizen to always vote	90%
Elected officials in Washington lose touch with the people very quickly	76%
I feel guilty when I don't have a chance to vote	65%
Most elected officials don't care what people like me think	59%
People like me don't have any say about what the Government does	51%
I often don't have enough money to make ends meet	42%

Pew Research Center, April 2009

Question: "For each statement, please tell me if you completely agree with it, mostly agree with it, mostly disagree with it or completely disagree with it."

Public Priorities

Table 9

Public Opinion on Whether the Country is Going in the Right Direction is Sharply Different Among Democrats, Independents and Republicans

	<u>Going in the Right Direction</u>			
	<u>Total Population</u>	<u>Democrats</u>	<u>Independents</u>	<u>Republicans</u>
April 2009	50%	71%	44%	28%
January 2009	19%	22%	21%	20%
September 2008	14%	8%	8%	20%

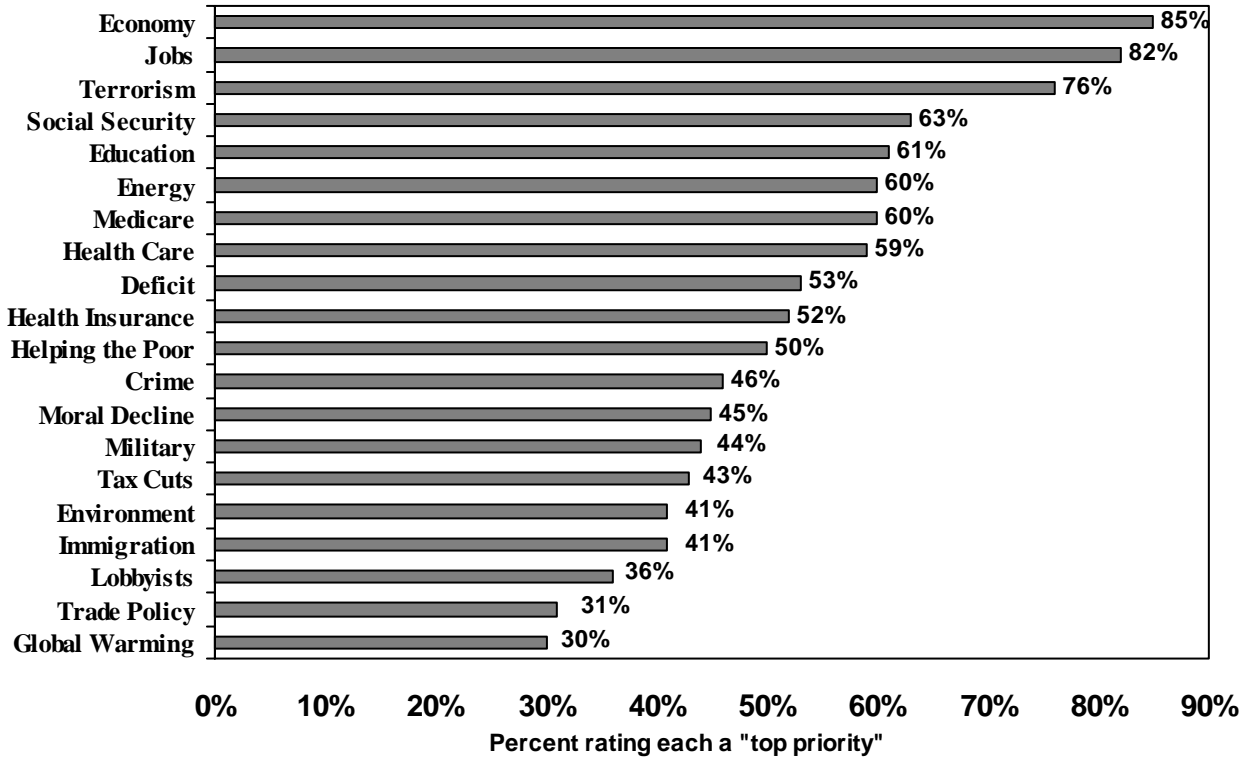
ABC News/Washington Post, April 2009

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

Public Priorities

Table 10

Public's Top Priorities for 2009



Source: Pew Research Center

Pew Research Center, January 2009

Question: "I'd like to ask you some questions about priorities for President-elect Obama and Congress this year... What about...[Insert Item]?"

Public Priorities

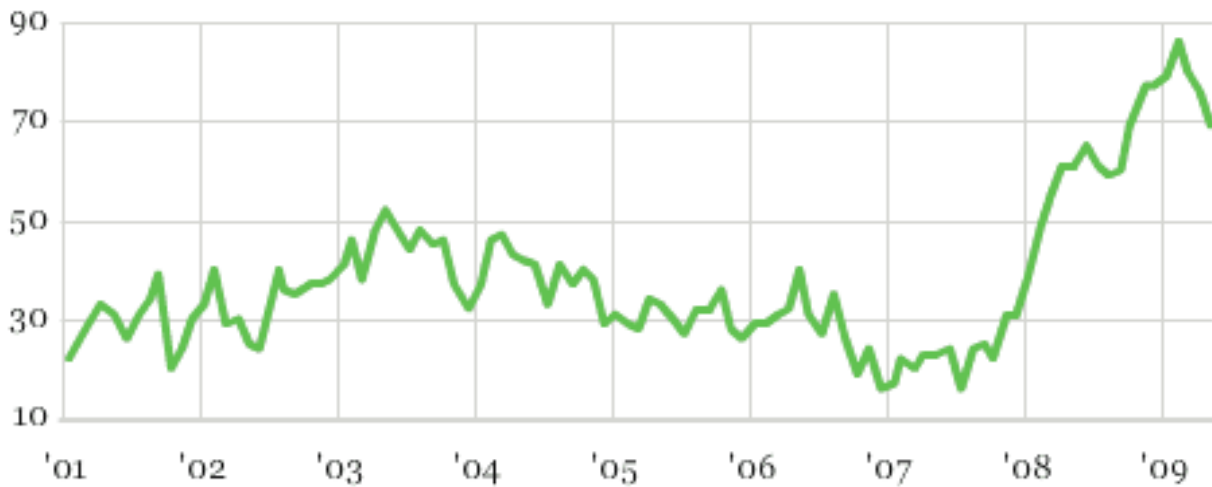
Table 11

Public Opinion on the Importance of Problems in the Economy
Increased Sharply in 2008 and 2009

Percentage of Americans Mentioning the Economy as the Nation's Most Important Problem

Selected Trend -- January 2001-Present

■ % NET mentions of the economy



Source: Gallup Poll, April 2009

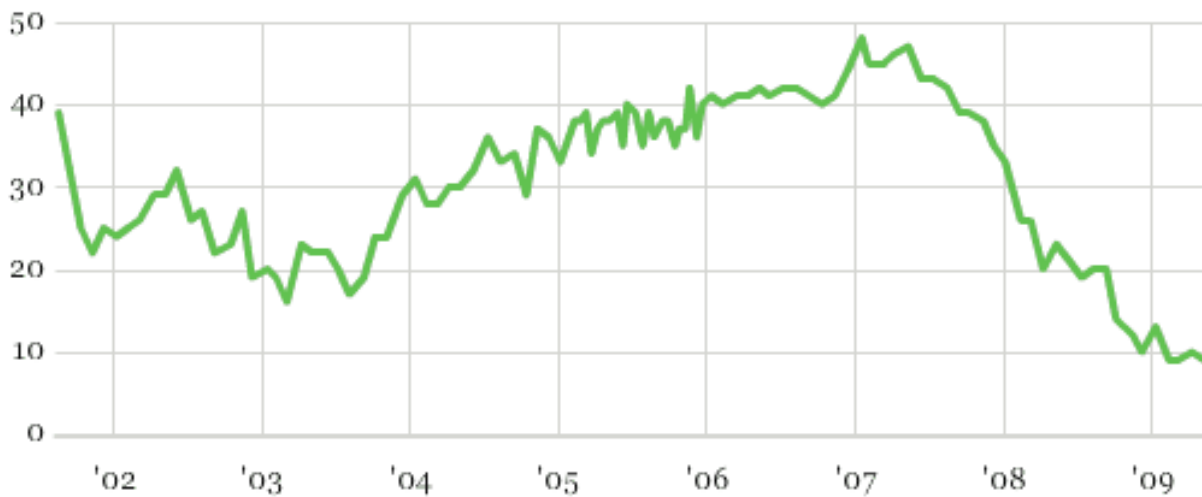
Public Priorities

Table 12

Public Opinion About the Job Situation
is at a Low Point

Thinking about the job situation in America today, would you say that it is now a good time or a bad time to find a quality job?

■ % Good time to find a quality job



Source: Gallup Poll, April 2009

Public Priorities

Table 13

Americans are Reluctant to Spend

The decline in economic conditions has led more than 3 out of 4 Americans to cut back on their spending patterns.

	<u>Dec</u> <u>2008</u>	<u>Feb</u> <u>2009</u>	<u>Jun</u> <u>2009</u>
<i>Have you done any of the following lately?</i>			
Cut back on planned vacation spending	57%	59%	59%
Been eating at restaurants less often	55%	55%	56%
Delayed/canceled buying major home items	44%	44%	40%
Delayed/canceled plans to buy a new car	33%	37%	36%
Any spending cutback	77%	79%	76%

Source: Pew Research Center, June 2009



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PRESIDENTIAL LEADERSHIP
PERSONALITY, IDEOLOGY, COMMITMENT***

Personality

Table 14

Public Opinion on Personal Qualities for Political Leadership

Public Agreement

I like Political Leaders who are willing to make
compromises in order to get the job done

79%

Pew Research Center, April 2009

Question: “For each statement, please tell me if you completely agree with it, mostly agree with it, mostly disagree with it or completely disagree with it.”

Ideology

Table 15

Public Opinion on Ideological Issues is Mixed

	<u>Agree</u>
I admire people who get rich by working hard	90%
The strength of this country today is mostly based on the success of American business	76%
It is the responsibility of the government to take care of people who can't take care of themselves	63%
Business Corporations make too much profit	62%
A free market economy needs government regulation in order to best serve the public interest	62%
I don't pay attention to whether a candidate calls him or herself a liberal or a conservative	62%
Labor Unions are necessary to protect the working person	61%
Labor Unions have too much power	61%

Pew Research Center, April 2009

Question: "For each statement, please tell me if you completely agree with it, mostly agree with it, mostly disagree with it or completely disagree with it."

Ideology

Table 16

Public Opinion on the Ideological Orientation
of President Obama is Mixed

<u>Treatment of Haves vs. Have Nots</u>	Barack Obama 2009	George W. Bush 2004	Ronald Reagan 1988
Treating about the same	51%	42%	39%
Helping the Haves	8%	47%	49%
Helping the Have Nots	30%	4%	4%

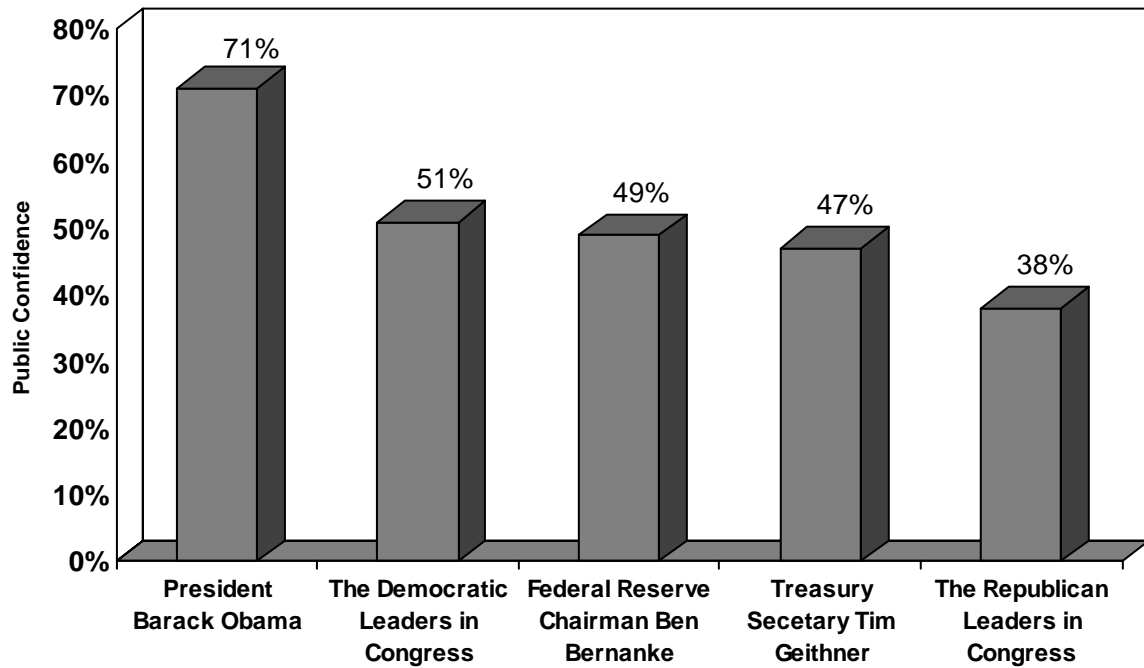
Pew Research Center, April 2009

Question: “On the whole, do you think the Obama administration is doing more to help the haves, doing more to help the have-nots, or it is treating both groups about the same?”

Commitment

Table 17

The Public has a High Level of Confidence in President Obama's Commitment to do or Recommend the Right Thing for the Economy



Source: Gallup Poll, April 2009

Gallup Poll, April 2009

Question: "Please tell me how much confidence you have in each to do or to recommend the right thing for the economy—a great deal, a fair amount, only a little, or almost none. How about—[ROTATED]?"



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*PUBLIC CONFIDENCE IN
THE FUTURE*

Achieving Positive Results The Economy

Table 18

Public Opinion Identifies the Economy as the Single
Most Important Issue in Selecting a President Today

	<u>Most Important</u>	<u>Second Most Important</u>	<u>Total</u>
The Economy	50%	20%	70%
Health Care	12%	23%	35%
Education	10%	15%	25%
Moral Values	10%	6%	16%
Iraq and Afghanistan	4%	10%	14%
Taxes	4%	10%	14%
Terrorism	4%	10%	14%

Pew Research Center, April 2009

Question: “Suppose there was a presidential election today. Which ONE issue would matter most to you in deciding your vote?”

Achieving Positive Results The Economy

Table 19

There is no Consistent Public View
on the Progress of the Economy

<u>The Economy is:</u>	<u>Average</u>
Staying the Same	38%
Getting Better	29%
Getting Worse	32%

Question: Is the Economy getting better, getting worse, or staying the same?

New York Times/CBS News Poll, June 2009

Staying the Same: 46% Getting Better: 27% Getting Worse: 25%

ABC News/Washington Post Poll, June 2009

Staying the Same: 29% Getting Better: 31% Getting Worse: 38%

Average of 2Polls

Staying the Same: 38% Getting Better: 29% Getting Worse: 32%

Achieving Positive Results The Economy

Table 20

Americans are Uncertain About the Impact of
the Obama Administration's Program
to Improve the Economy

	<u>Approval</u>
President Obama:	
Overall Approval	63%
Handling the Economy	57%
The U.S. Economy is:	
Very Bad	36%
Fairly Bad	48%
Fairly Good	14%
Very Good	1%
Obama's Policies Impact on the Economy:	
No Impact yet	48%
Positive	32%
Negative	15%
Does the Obama Administration have a Clear Plan for Dealing with the Deficit:	
Yes	30%
No	60%
Should the Government:	
Focus on Deficit Reduction	52%
Spend to Stimulate the Economy	41%

Source: New York Times/CBS News Poll, June 2009

Achieving Positive Results Health Care

Table 21

Americans Support a New Approach to Health Care
but are Uncertain About the Effectiveness
of President Obama's Approach

	<u>Opinion</u>
Would you Favor or Oppose the Government's Offering Everyone a Government Administered Health Insurance Plan like Medicare that would Compete with Private Health Insurance Plans?	
Favor	72%
Oppose	20%
Which is a More Serious Problem Right Now: Keeping Health Care Costs Down or Providing Health Insurance for Americans Who do not Have any?	
Providing for Uninsured	65%
Keeping Health Costs Down	26%
Would you be Willing or not Willing to Pay Higher Taxes so that all Americans Have Health Insurance that they Can't Lose no Matter what?	
Willing	57%
Not Willing	37%
President Obama's Handling of Health Care:	
Approve	44%
Disapprove	34%
Don't Know	22%

New York Times/CBS News Poll, June 2009

Question: "Do you approve or disapprove of the following?"

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PUBLIC CONFIDENCE IN THE STATE OF THE NATION

Summary of Findings

The findings of this report suggest that President Obama is still in the “honeymoon phase” enjoyed by all our most recent Presidents (see table 4). In this phase, what counts most is Presidential rhetoric: how forcefully and clearly the president articulates his goals and policies providing that these match the public’s own values and objectives. We are however, now entering a new phase. Public confidence will be sustained in the future only if the public perceives that the President and his Administration are actually producing positive results.



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.

A distinguished group of scholars and experts serves as the Foundation's officers and as members of the Foundation's Board of Advisors, including Jonathan Brent (Editorial Director of Yale University Press), John Donatich (Director, Yale University Press), Fredrica S. Friedman (President of Fredrica S. Friedman & Co., Inc.), Norton Garfinkle (Chair of the Foundation), William R. Griffith (Reed Smith LLP), Richard D. Heffner (Host, "The Open Mind"), Thomas E. Mann (The Brookings Institution), Norman Ornstein (American Enterprise Institute), Hugh Price (Former President of the National Urban League), Jeffrey Rosen (George Washington University), Ian Shapiro (Sterling Professor and Director of the Yale Center for International and Area Studies), Alan Wolfe (Boston College), Ruth A. Wooden (President, Public Agenda) and Daniel Yankelovich (Chairman, Public Agenda).

A major objective of the Foundation is to bring America's vast informational resources to bear more fully on contemporary policy debate. The Foundation acts as a unique clearing-house for public policy and public opinion research with the objective of disseminating this work to a broad audience of policymakers, legislators, the media, and concerned citizens.

Together with Yale University Press, the Foundation sponsored the Future of American Democracy series of books by some of America's foremost thinkers. The books in the series present a new, balanced, centrist approach to examining the challenges American democracy has faced in the past and must overcome in the years ahead. The first five books in the series were published in 2006 and 2007. Norton Garfinkle & Daniel Yankelovich, Editors, *Uniting America: Restoring the Vital Center to American Democracy*. Daniel Yankelovich, *Profit with Honor: The New Stage of Market Capitalism*. Alan Wolfe, *Does American Democracy Still Work*. Norton Garfinkle, *The American Dream vs. The Gospel of Wealth: The Fight for a Productive Middle-Class Economy*. Reed Hundt, *In China's Shadow: The Crisis of American Entrepreneurship*

Other important books by members of the Foundation's Board of Advisers include:

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)

In both its research and education efforts, the Foundation is committed to applying the highest standards of scholarship in a balanced, nonpartisan fashion in the expectation that careful and fair-minded analysis of public policy issues will enable the American public to move beyond the partisan approaches seen in recent years and secure sensible, centrist solutions to our policy challenges.

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