



**The
Future of American Democracy
Foundation**

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

January 2010

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THE FUTURE OF AMERICAN DEMOCRACY FOUNDATION

Public Confidence in The State of the Nation

Public attitudes have changed significantly since our last report in July, 2009. Among the most striking changes are:

- Public Confidence that the country is moving in the right direction has declined sharply.
- There has been a significant decline in the percentage of Americans who approve of the way Barack Obama is handling his job as President.
- Jobs and other economic issues are the most important public concerns of a majority of Americans. By contrast, only 16% consider health care reform to be most important and fewer than 2 out of 10 mention either War, Iraq, Afghanistan, Defense, Terrorism or Foreign Policy.
- More than 3 out of 4 Americans believe the condition of the economy is bad.
- Rising levels of unemployment dampen peoples' hopes for the near term, as does the prospect of huge ever-growing government deficits.
- Mistrust of the business community has increased, supporting stronger regulation.

In summary, most Americans are dissatisfied with the state of the economy. They seem to be telling us that time spent on other issues is distracting our leaders from responding effectively to their concerns about the impact of the weak economy on their personal lives.

The findings of our last report in July, 2009 indicated that President Obama was still in the "honeymoon phase" enjoyed by all our recent Presidents. In that phase, what counts most is Presidential rhetoric: how forcefully and clearly the President articulates goals and policies that match the public's own values and objectives.

The honeymoon phase has now given way to a new phase of public expectations. In this new phase, public confidence in the President and the State of the Nation will be sustained only if the public believes that the President and his Administration are producing positive results on the economic issues that concern them most. Despite much disappointment in the Administration's performance in 2009, most Americans hope President Obama's policies will succeed in the future.

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. 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, America's foremost analyst of public opinion.

Table of Contents

Public Confidence in the State of the Nation	2
Public Confidence in The Direction of the Country	
Change in Public Confidence in the Direction of the Country	5
Public Confidence in President Barack Obama	
Public Approval of the Way President Obama is Handling His Job	7
Public Approval at the End of First Year for Obama Compared to Other Recent Presidents	8
Public Approval of President Obama on Specific Issues	9
Public Priorities	
Public Desire to For More Active Participation in Public Life	11
Public Opinion on Ideological Issues	12
The New Public Emphasis on Results: The Economy, Health Care	
Public Focus on the Economy as the Most Important Issue Facing the Nation	14
Public Concern About the Economy	15
Public Approval on How President Obama is Handling the Economy	16
Public Opinion on Health Care	17
Public Evaluation of the Administration's Health Care Bill	18
Public Opinion on How Health Care Reform will Affect Them	19
Looking To The Future: The Search for Presidential Leadership	
Public Opinion on Whether President Obama Has Met Their Expectations	21
Public Hopeful President Obama's Future Policies Will Be Successful	22
The Future of American Democracy Foundation	23



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PUBLIC CONFIDENCE

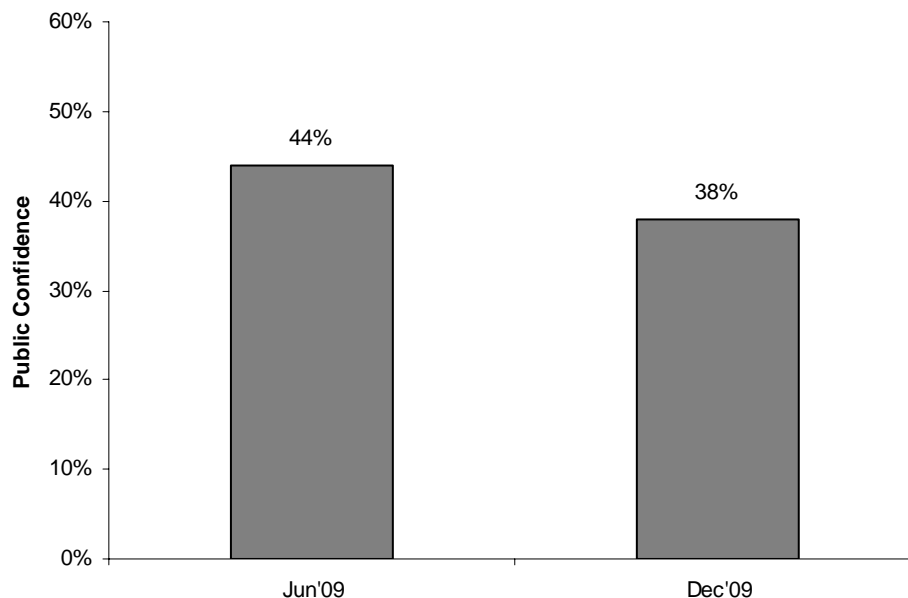
IN

THE DIRECTION OF THE COUNTRY

Public Confidence in the Direction of the Country

Table 1

Public Confidence in the Direction of the Country
declined from **44%** in June 2009 to **38%** in December 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: Jun'09: 44% Dec'09: 37%

ABC News/Washington Post Poll

Right Direction: Jun'09: 47% Dec'09: 44%

NBC News/Wall Street Journal Survey

Right Direction: Jun'09: 42% Dec'09: 33%

Average of 3 Polls

Right Direction: Jun'09: 44% Dec'09: 38%



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PUBLIC CONFIDENCE

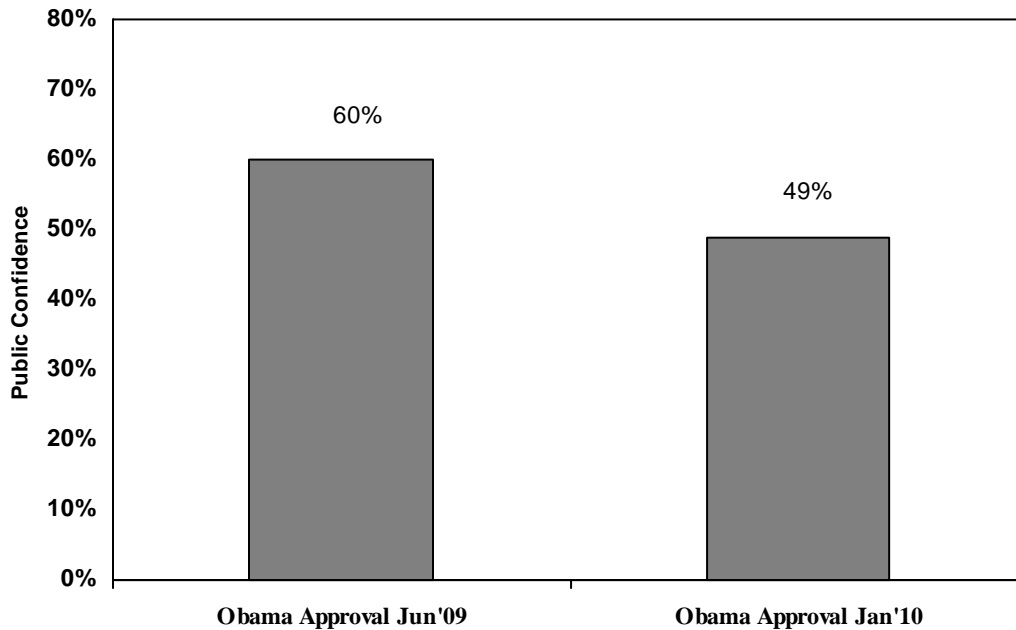
IN

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA

Public Confidence in President Barack Obama

Table 2

Public Approval of the Way Barack Obama is
Handling His Job as President
Declined from **60%** to **49%** in the Last 6 Months



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

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

Gallup Poll:

Approve: Jun'09: 61% Jan'10: 51%

New York Times/CBS News Poll

Approve: Jun'09: 63% Dec'09: 50%

NBC News/Wall Street Journal Survey:

Approve: Jun'09: 56% Dec'09: 47%

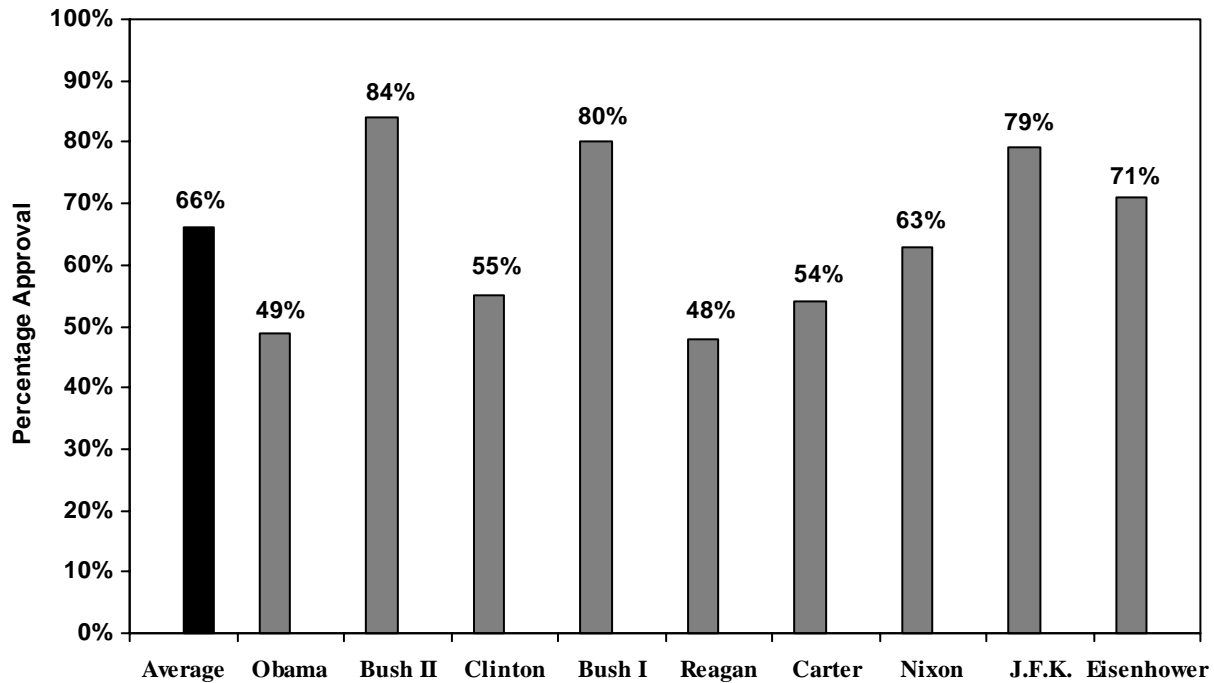
Average of 3 Polls:

Approve: Jun'09: 60% Dec'09/Jan'10: 49%

Public Confidence in President Barack Obama

Table 3

President Obama's Job Approval is Lower
Than the Average for Most Recent Presidents
At the End of the First Year of Their Presidency



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

The wording of the questions asked is shown below:

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

Gallup Poll

Approve: Jan'10: 51%

New York Times/CBS News Poll

Approve: Dec'09: 50%

NBC News/Wall Street Journal Survey

Approve: Dec'09: 47%

Average of 3 Polls

Approve: 49%

Gallup Poll

Question: Do you approve or disapprove of the way [G.W. Bush, William Jefferson Clinton, George H.W. Bush, Ronald Reagan, Jimmy Carter, Richard Nixon, John F Kennedy, Dwight D. Eisenhower] is handling his job as President? (Approval Rating 1 year after taking Office)

Public Confidence in President Barack Obama

Table 4

There is an Increasing Number of Americans
Who Disapprove of President Obama's Handling of the
Issues they Consider Most Important

	<u>Apr'09</u>	<u>Dec'09</u>
Disapprove of the way Obama is handling:		
The Economy	46%	52%
Unemployment	47%	48%
Health Care	44%	53%
The Federal Budget Deficit	37%	56%
The Situation in Afghanistan	26%	44%

ABC News/Washington Post

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



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PUBLIC PRIORITIES

Public Priorities

Table 5

The Public Desires More Active
Participation in Public Life

	<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%

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 6

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."



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THE NEW PUBLIC EMPHASIS ON RESULTS

THE ECONOMY

HEALTH CARE

The Economy

Table 7

Public Opinion Identifies the Economy as the Single
Most Important Issue Facing the Nation Today

	<u>Most Important</u>
The Economy/Jobs	45%
Health Care	16%
War, Iraq, Afghanistan	11%
The Economy/Budget Deficits	9%
Terrorism	7%
Climate Change/Environment	3%

Question: What is the most Important issue facing the Country today?

New York Times/CBS News Poll, December 2009

CNN/Opinion Research Poll, December 2009

Bloomberg Poll, December 2009

Average of 3 Polls, December 2009

The Economy

Table 8

Most Americans Recognize That
Economic Conditions in the U.S. Continue to be Bad

The U.S. Economy is:	Jun'09	Dec'09
Very Bad	36%	33%
Fairly Bad	48%	44%
Fairly Good	14%	20%
Very Good	1%	2%

The U.S. Economy is:		
Getting Better	27%	29%
Getting Worse	25%	23%
Staying the Same	46%	47%

New York Times/CBS News Poll, June 2009 & December 2009

The Economy

Table 9

There is a Substantial Decline in Overall
Approval of President Obama and
His Handling of The Economy

	<u>Approval</u>	
	Jun'09	Dec'09
President Obama:		
Overall Approval	63%	49%
Handling the Economy	57%	47%

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

Health Care

Table 10

Before the Health Care Debate Started Most Americans
Supported a New Approach to Health Care
but Were Uncertain About the Effectiveness
of President Obama's Approach

	<u>Jun'09</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?"

Health Care

Table 11

By the End of the 2009 Less Than
4 out of 10 Americans Were in Favor of
The Administration's Health Care Bill

	<u>Good Idea</u>	<u>Bad Idea</u>	<u>No Opinion</u>
	<u>Favor/Support</u>	<u>Oppose</u>	<u>Unsure</u>
Barack Obama's Health Care Plan ¹	32%	47%	21%
Barack Obama's Handling Health Care ²	42%	50%	7%
Barack Obama's Handling Health Care ³	44%	53%	3%
The Senate Health Care Bill ⁴	42%	56%	2%
Congress Health Care Plans ⁵	36%	44%	20%
Congress Health Care Legislation ⁶	36%	43%	21%
Average of 6 Polls	39%	49%	12%

The wording of the questions asked is shown below:

¹NBC News/Wall Street Journal Survey

Question: From what you have heard about Barack Obama's Health Care Plan, do you think it is a good idea or a bad idea? Dec'09

²New York Times/CBS News Poll

Question: Do you approve or disapprove of the way Barack Obama is handling Health Care? Dec'09

³ABC News/Washington Post Poll

Question: Do you approve or disapprove of the way Obama is handling Health Care? Dec'09

⁴CNN/Opinion Research Corporation Poll

Question: As you may know, the Senate is considering a bill that would make major changes in the Country's Health Care System. Based on what you have read or heard about that bill, do you generally favor it or oppose it? Dec'09

⁵Associated Press/GFK Roper Poll

Question: In General do you support, oppose or neither support or oppose the Health Care Plans being discussed in Congress? Dec'09

⁶USA Today/Gallup Poll

Question: Thinking about Health Care legislation now being considered in Congress: Would you advise your member of Congress to vote for or against a health care bill this year? Dec'09

Health Care

Table 12

Less than 2 out of 10 Americans
Believe That the Administration's Health Care
Reform Will Help Them Personally

The Health Care Reform Will:

Help Me Personally	16%
Hurt Me Personally	34%
Have No Effect	42%
Don't Know/No Answer	9%

New York Times/CBS News Poll, December 2009

Question: From what you've heard or read, do you think the Health Care reforms under consideration in Congress will mostly help you personally, will mostly hurt you personally, or don't you think they will have much effect on you personally?



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***LOOKING TO THE FUTURE
THE SEARCH FOR
PRESIDENTIAL LEADERSHIP***

Looking To The Future

Table 13

An Increasing Number of Americans
Feel That President Obama Has Fallen Short of
What They Expected From His Presidency

	<u>Fallen Short</u>	<u>Exceeded</u>	<u>Met</u>	<u>Unsure</u>
December 2009	48%	11%	39%	2%
May 2009	28%	17%	52%	2%
February 2009	23%	16%	58%	2%

CNN/Opinion Research Corporation Poll

Question: Regardless of whether you approve or disapprove of Barack Obama, do you think he has met your expectations for how he would handle his job as President, or has he exceeded your expectations, or has he fallen short?

Looking To The Future

Table 14

Despite Their Increasing Disappointment
Most Americans Hope That President Obama's
Future Policies will Succeed

	<u>Succeed</u>	<u>Fail</u>	<u>Mixed</u>
December 2009	71%	22%	6%
March 2009	86%	11%	2%

CNN/Opinion Research Corporation Poll

Question: In general, do you hope that Barack Obama's policies will succeed or do you hope that his policies will fail?



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 (Executive Director of the YIVO Institute), 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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