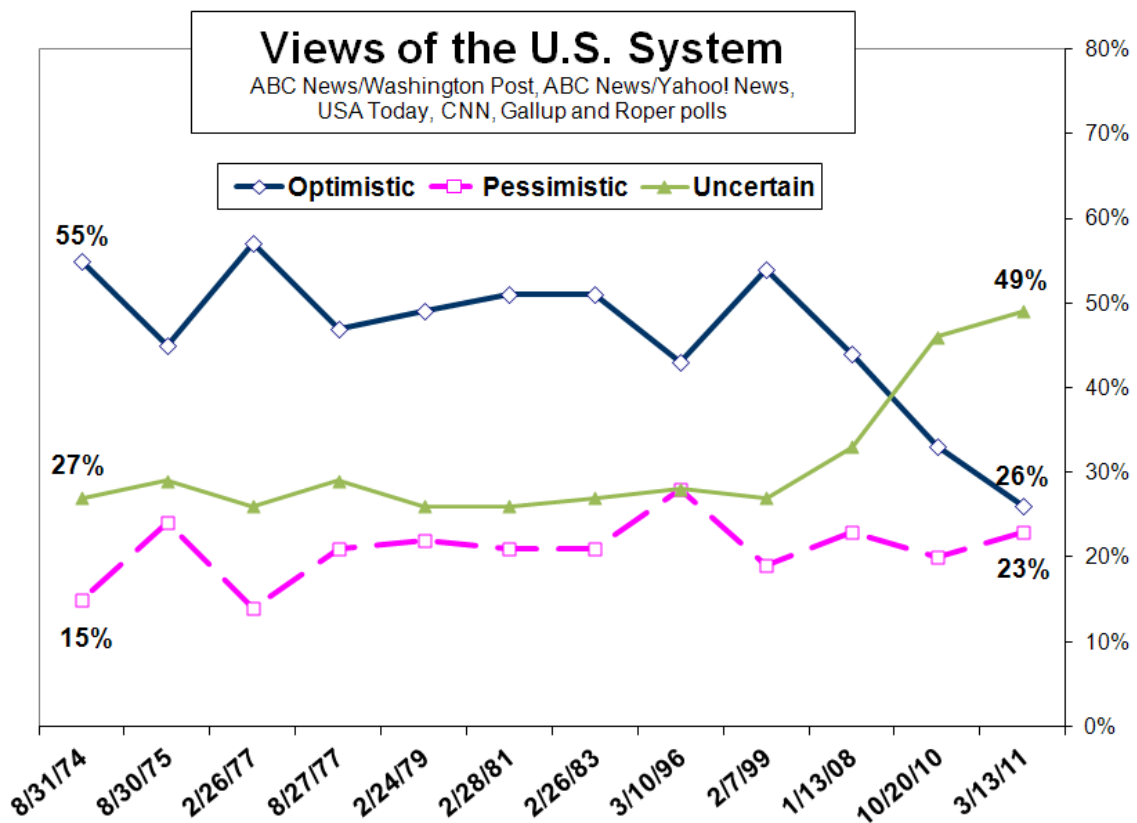


Economy, Gas, Partisanship and War Gang Up on Confidence in Government

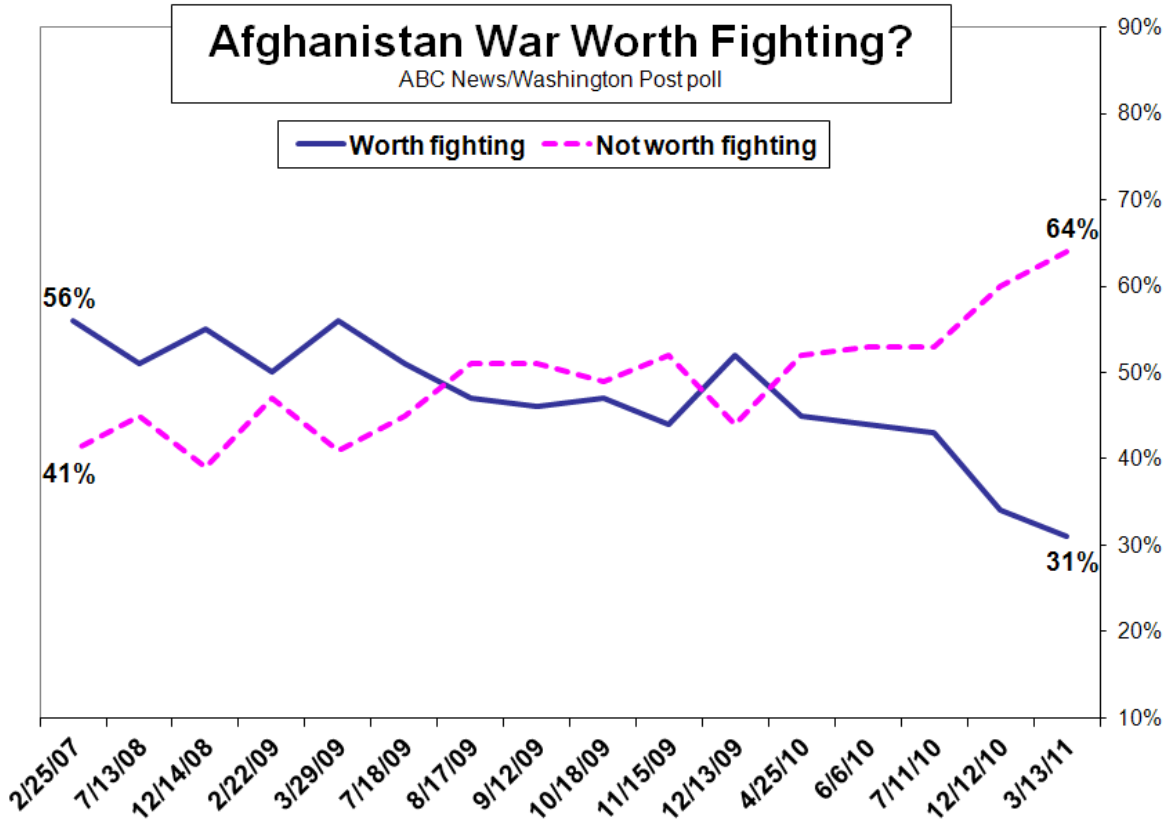
Confidence in the U.S. system of government has dropped to a new low in more than 35 years, with public attitudes burdened by continued economic discontent, soaring gasoline prices, record opposition to the war in Afghanistan – and a letdown in hopes for political progress after a bout of bipartisanship last fall.

Only 26 percent of Americans in a new ABC News/Washington Post poll say they're optimistic about "our system of government and how well it works," down 7 points since October to the fewest in surveys dating to 1974. Almost as many, 23 percent, are pessimistic, the closest these measures ever have come. The rest, a record high, are "uncertain" about the system.



The causes are many. Despite a significant advance, more than half still say the economy has not yet begun to recover. And there's trouble at the pump: Seventy-one percent in this poll, produced for ABC News by [Langer Research Associates](#), report financial hardship as a result of rising gas prices. Forty-four percent call it a "serious" hardship.

WAR – On an equally critical front in terms of potential political impact, just 31 percent now say the war in Afghanistan has been worth fighting, a new low. Sixty-four percent call it not worth fighting, and 49 percent feel that way “strongly,” both record highs in ABC/Post polls.



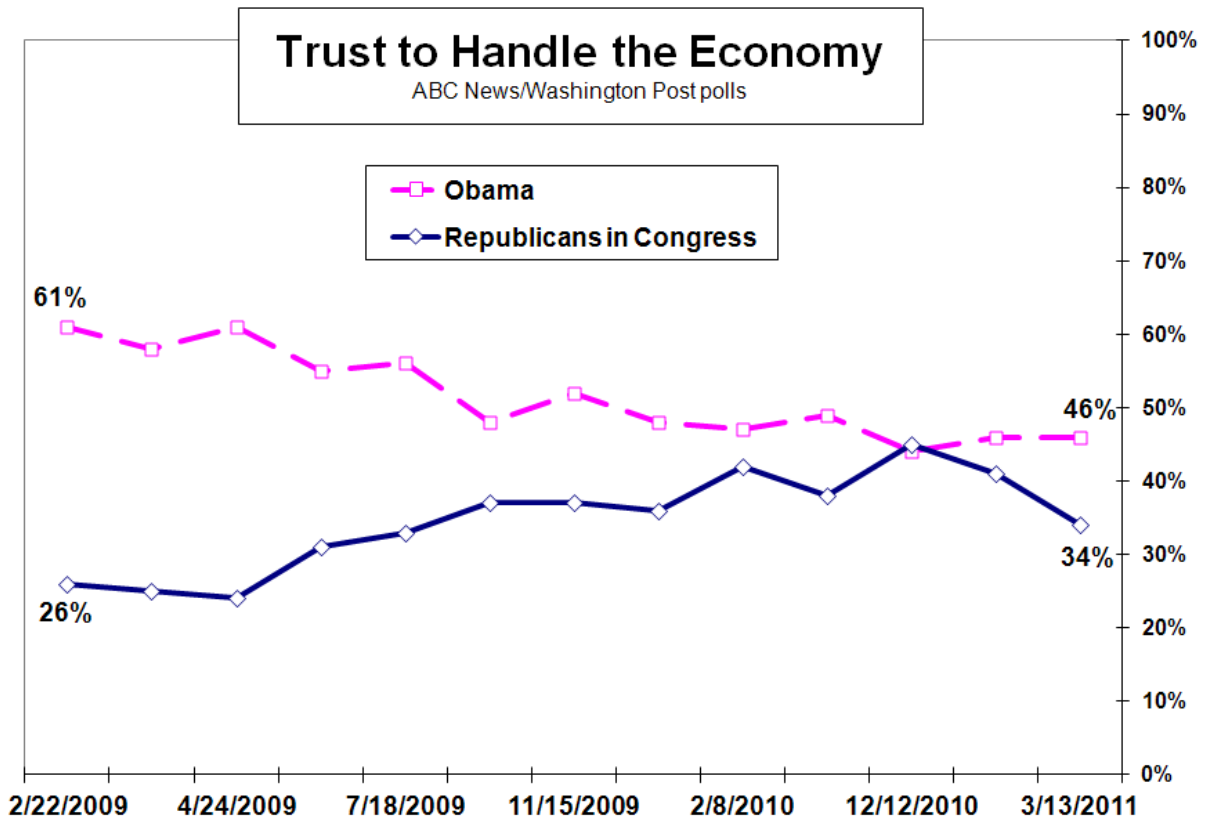
Two-to-one opposition for the first time puts public criticism of the war in Afghanistan at the level seen for the war in Iraq. Such views had a devastating impact on George W. Bush, the least popular second-term president in polls since the Truman presidency. And there’s danger ahead; fighting in Afghanistan, now in its winter lull, is expected to intensify come summer.

Indeed, with Gen. David Petraeus set to testify on Capitol Hill this week, a broad and bipartisan 73 percent of Americans say the United States should withdraw a substantial number of its combat forces from Afghanistan this summer. But just 39 percent think it will. (ABC News reported yesterday that field commanders in fact are asking for more troops, and a senior official called a sizable reduction unlikely despite the administration’s July 11 date for a drawdown to begin.)

POLITICS – In politics, many Americans appear to regard President Obama and the Republicans in Congress as a choice between a rock and a hard place. On one hand, 55 percent disapprove of Obama’s handling of the economy and budget deficit alike. On the other, Republicans have lost

ground in public trust to deal with both issues, now trailing Obama by 12- and 9-point margins, respectively.

Preference for the Republicans on both those issues has declined by 11 points since December, a comedown from the sentiment that lifted the party to its midterm success. More Americans now see the GOP as taking the stronger leadership role in Washington; the results on trust show how that position can carry a price



The drop in trust to handle the economy has occurred chiefly among independents, now drawing away from the GOP after rallying to its side. As recently as January, 42 percent of independents preferred the Republicans in Congress over Obama to handle the economy. Today just 29 percent say the same, and there’s been a rise in the number who volunteer that they don’t trust either side.

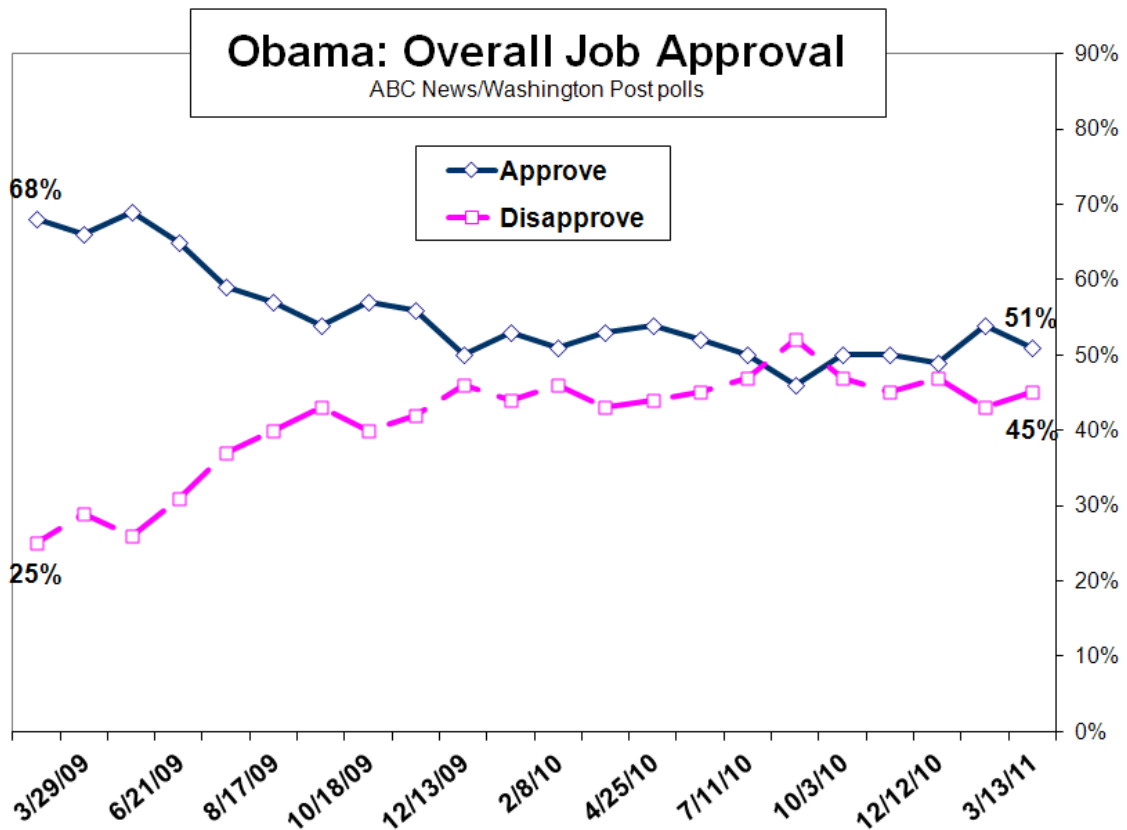
BUDGET – Perceived non-cooperation on the budget deficit is one problem for the Republicans in Congress. Seventy-one percent say the GOP is not willing enough to compromise with Obama on the deficit; that even includes 42 percent of Republicans. Fifty-two percent overall also say Obama isn’t willing enough to compromise – still a majority, but a substantially smaller one. (Indeed, 30 percent call Obama “too willing” to make peace; half as many say that about the GOP.)

It follows that on another measure, the public by a 14-point margin says it's more apt to hold the Republicans than Obama responsible if the budget impasse forces a partial government shutdown. (Then again, three in 10 also say a partial shutdown would be a good thing.)

There's a close division on another basic element of the debate: By 45-41 percent, Americans split on whether large reductions in the budget would do more to cut jobs or create them. The public also divides essentially evenly, 43-42 percent, on another measure – which side, Obama or the Republicans, they trust more to find the right balance between keeping government spending that is needed, and cutting spending that's not needed.

Most Americans take the middle ground in deficit-reduction: A substantial 64 percent say the best way to trim the deficit is with a combination of spending cuts and tax increases, rather than just cutting spending (31 percent, down 5 points from December) or only raising taxes (3 percent).

OBAMA – Obama, in all, is holding up fairly well. His job approval rating stands at 51 percent, with 45 percent disapproving – probably about as good as it can get in this kind of economy. The president's rating exactly matches his average in more than a dozen ABC/Post polls since December 2009, when the first bloom of his presidency faded.



In addition to his advantage over the Republicans in trust to handle the economy (12 points) and the deficit (9 points), Obama holds a 7-point edge in trust to handle “protecting the rights of

working people,” a potential area of differentiation given the controversy over the bargaining rights of unionized state employees.

He also leads the Republicans on two empathy measures: by 12 points in better understanding the economic problems people in the country are having, and by a scant 5 points in better representing “your own personal values.”

There are still substantial negatives for the president. In addition to his 55 percent disapproval on the economy and the deficit, just 28 percent of Americans say they think the economic stimulus package actually helped the economy, the fewest to say so since June 2009. It’s a central and sharp criticism of a president elected above all to turn the economy around.

CONGRESS/GOP – Congress overall, meanwhile, is laboring under just a 27 percent approval rating; it’s received less than 30 percent approval continuously since July 2008, its longest run that low in polling data since 1974.

For their part, the Republicans, as noted, are seen as having a stronger leadership role in Washington, at 46 percent to Obama’s 39 percent. That compares with an essentially even split in December. It’s much weaker than the leadership roles ascribed to congressional Democrats over Bush in early 2007, or to congressional Republicans over Bill Clinton in 1995; that may be because the out-party in those cases won both houses of Congress, not just one.

TWO KAHUNAS – Ultimately, the big kahuna in U.S. politics long has been the economy, and as noted, more than half of Americans, 53 percent, say it’s not yet begun to recover; 46 percent think recovery has begun. While that’s not great, it’s better than it’s been: The number who see economic improvement has risen by 12 points since October.

People who think the economy is improving are 20 points more apt than those who don’t to express optimism about the country’s system of government. That suggests that further perceived economic improvement would do much to ease the public’s long-running snit.

But there are two clear risks: One, the pain of gas prices. And two, simmering discontent with the war in Afghanistan. The irony for Obama would be to turn the corner on the economy, just as unhappiness with the war reaches full boil.

METHODOLOGY – This ABC News/Washington Post poll was conducted by telephone March 10-13, 2011, among a random national sample of 1,005 adults, including landline and cell-phone-only respondents. Results have a margin of [sampling error](#) of 3.5 points. The survey was produced for ABC News by [Langer Research Associates](#) of New York, N.Y., with sampling, data collection and tabulation by TNS of Horsham, Pa.

Analysis by Gary Langer.

ABC News polls can be found at ABCNEWS.com at <http://abcnews.com/pollingunit>

Media contact: Cathie Levine, (212) 456-4934.

Full results follow.

*= less than 0.5 percent

1. Do you approve or disapprove of the way Barack Obama is handling his job as president? Do you approve/disapprove strongly or somewhat?

	----- Approve -----			----- Disapprove -----			No opinion
	NET	Strongly	Somewhat	NET	Somewhat	Strongly	
3/13/11	51	27	24	45	12	33	4
1/16/11	54	30	23	43	15	28	3
12/12/10	49	24	25	47	15	32	4
10/28/10	50	27	23	45	11	34	5
10/28/10 LV	46	31	15	52	8	44	2
10/3/10	50	26	24	47	13	34	3
9/2/10	46	24	22	52	14	38	3
7/11/10	50	28	22	47	12	35	3
6/6/10	52	30	22	45	12	33	4
4/25/10	54	31	23	44	11	33	3
3/26/10	53	34	20	43	8	35	3
2/8/10	51	29	22	46	12	33	3
1/15/10	53	30	24	44	13	32	2
12/13/09	50	31	18	46	13	33	4
11/15/09	56	32	23	42	13	29	2
10/18/09	57	33	23	40	11	29	3
9/12/09	54	35	19	43	12	31	3
8/17/09	57	35	21	40	11	29	3
7/18/09	59	38	22	37	9	28	4
6/21/09	65	36	29	31	10	22	4
4/24/09	69	42	27	26	8	18	4
3/29/09	66	40	26	29	9	20	5
2/22/09	68	43	25	25	8	17	7

2. Do you approve or disapprove of the way Obama is handling [ITEM]? Do you approve/disapprove strongly or somewhat?

3/13/11 - Summary Table

	----- Approve -----			----- Disapprove -----			No opinion
	NET	Strongly	Somewhat	NET	Somewhat	Strongly	
a. The economy	43	22	21	55	13	41	2
b. The federal budget deficit	39	18	20	55	13	42	6
c-d previously released.							

Trend where available:

a. The economy

	----- Approve -----			----- Disapprove -----			No opinion
	NET	Strongly	Somewhat	NET	Somewhat	Strongly	
3/13/11	43	22	21	55	13	41	2
1/16/11	46	22	24	51	13	38	2
12/12/10	43	21	22	54	15	39	3
10/28/10 RV	44	21	23	54	15	39	3
10/28/10 LV	42	23	19	55	10	45	2
10/3/10	45	22	23	53	13	41	2
9/2/10	41	20	21	57	13	44	2
7/11/10	43	20	23	54	13	41	4
6/6/10	50	26	24	49	12	37	2

4/25/10	49	24	25	49	10	39	2
3/26/10	45	23	22	52	12	40	3
2/8/10	45	22	23	53	15	38	2
1/15/10	47	22	24	52	13	39	1
12/13/09	46	23	24	52	12	40	2
11/15/09	51	26	25	47	12	36	2
10/18/09	50	29	22	48	13	35	1
9/12/09	51	28	24	46	13	33	2
8/17/09	52	27	25	46	13	33	2
7/18/09	52	29	23	46	10	35	3
6/21/09	56	28	28	41	13	27	3
4/24/09	58	31	28	38	13	25	4
3/29/09	60	34	25	38	12	26	3
2/22/09	60	NA	NA	34	NA	NA	6

b. The federal budget deficit

	----- Approve -----			----- Disapprove -----			No opinion
	NET	Strongly	Somewhat	NET	Somewhat	Strongly	
3/13/11	39	18	20	55	13	42	6
1/16/11	43	21	22	52	11	41	6
12/12/10	38	16	22	55	19	36	7
9/2/10	39	18	20	58	13	45	3
7/11/10	40	20	20	56	11	45	4
6/6/10	39	22	17	56	13	42	6
4/25/10	40	20	20	55	14	42	5
3/26/10	43	22	21	52	14	38	5
2/8/10	40	17	23	56	16	40	4
1/15/10	38	18	20	56	15	41	6
12/13/09	37	16	21	56	12	44	6
11/15/09	42	19	23	53	10	43	5
10/18/09	45	20	25	51	14	37	4
9/12/09	39	17	22	55	13	42	6
8/17/09	41	19	22	53	12	41	5
7/18/09	43	19	24	49	11	38	8
6/21/09	48	22	26	48	13	35	5
4/24/09	51	NA	NA	43	NA	NA	7
3/29/09	52	NA	NA	43	NA	NA	5

3. Do you approve or disapprove of the way the U.S. Congress is doing its job? Do you approve/disapprove strongly or somewhat?

	----- Approve -----			----- Disapprove -----			No opinion
	NET	Strongly	Somewhat	NET	Somewhat	Strongly	
3/13/11	27	7	20	69	24	45	4
1/16/11	28	6	21	66	24	43	7
10/28/10 RV	23	6	17	74	21	53	3
10/28/10 LV	21	5	16	77	19	58	2
10/3/10	24	6	18	73	22	51	3
9/2/10	25	5	20	72	21	51	4
6/6/10	26	7	20	71	20	51	2
3/26/10	24	7	18	72	18	54	4
2/8/10	26	NA	NA	71	NA	NA	3
7/13/08	23			71			6
2/1/08	33			59			8
12/9/07	32			60			8
11/1/07	28			65			7
9/30/07	29			65			6
7/21/07	37			60			4
6/1/07	39	"	"	53	"	"	8
4/15/07	44	8	36	54	25	29	3
2/25/07	41	NA	NA	54	NA	NA	5

1/19/07 43
 Call for full trend.

50

8

4. Who do you trust to do a better job handling [ITEM] - (Obama) or (the Republicans in Congress)?

3/13/11 - Summary Table*

	Obama	Reps	Both (vol.)	Neither (vol.)	No opinion
a. The economy	46	34	2	15	4
b. The federal budget deficit	45	36	2	14	4
c. Held for release					
d. Protecting the rights of working people	46	39	*	12	3

*Half sample asked items a-b; other half sample asked items c-d.

Trend where available:

a. The economy

	Obama	Reps	Both (vol.)	Neither (vol.)	No opinion
3/13/11	46	34	2	15	4
1/16/11	46	41	3	7	3
12/12/10	44	45	2	7	2
4/25/10	49	38	1	9	2
2/8/10	47	42	1	7	2
12/13/09	48	36	1	12	3
11/15/09	52	37	1	8	1
9/12/09	48	37	1	12	2
7/18/09	56	33	1	9	2
6/21/09	55	31	2	9	2
4/24/09	61	24	2	11	2
3/29/09	58	25	1	14	2
2/22/09	61	26	1	9	3

b. The federal budget deficit

	Obama	Reps	Both (vol.)	Neither (vol.)	No opinion
3/13/11	45	36	2	14	4
1/16/11	44	41	4	8	2
12/12/10	39	47	2	9	4
4/25/10	45	41	1	10	3
2/8/10	45	43	1	9	1
9/12/09	50	36	1	12	1
7/18/09	54	35	*	9	2
6/21/09	56	30	2	9	2

c-d. No trend.

5. On another subject, regardless of whether or not the recession is over, in terms of your own personal experience, do you feel the economy has or has not begun to recover?

	Has	Has not	No opinion
3/13/11	46	53	1
12/12/10	41	57	2
10/5/10*	34	63	2
2/8/10	45	53	1
12/13/09**	50	49	1
11/15/09	44	54	1

*ABC News / Yahoo! News poll

**Add "Regardless of whether or not the recession is over..."

6. (IF ECONOMY HAS BEGUN TO RECOVER) Who do you think deserves most of the credit for that: (Obama), (the Republicans in Congress), both equally, or neither?

	Obama	Reps	Both	Neither	No opinion
3/13/11	39	6	27	27	1

5/6 NET.

	NET	Obama	Reps	Both	Neither	No op.	Has not begun	No opinion
3/13/11	46	18	3	13	13	*	53	1

7. Who do you think is taking a stronger leadership role in the government in Washington these days, (Obama) or (the Republicans in Congress)?

	Obama	Reps	Both (vol.)	Neither (vol.)	No opinion
3/13/11	39	46	2	9	3
12/12/10	43	42	3	8	5

Compare to:

	Bush	Dems	Both (vol.)	Neither (vol.)	No opinion
6/1/07	43	45	3	7	3
4/15/07	34	58	2	4	2
1/19/07	36	56	1	3	3
7/30/01	51	38	3	4	4

	Clinton	Reps	Both (vol.)	Neither (vol.)	No opinion
4/5/95	27	67	2	3	7
1/24/95	24	61	4	5	6
12/15/94	25	59	3	5	7

8. Who do you think [ITEM] - (Obama) or (the Republicans in Congress)?

3/13/11 - Summary Table

	Obama	Reps	Both (vol.)	Neither (vol.)	No opinion
a. better represents your own personal values	46	41	1	10	1
b. better understands the economic problems people in this country are having	47	35	3	12	2

9. When it comes to finding the right balance between [cutting government spending that is not needed] and [continuing government spending that is needed], who do you trust to do a better job - (Obama) or (the Republicans in Congress)?

	Obama	Reps	Both (vol.)	Neither (vol.)	No opinion
3/13/11	43	42	2	10	3

10. As far as the future is concerned, thinking about our system of government and how well it works - is this something you feel generally optimistic about, generally pessimistic about, or uncertain about?

	Optimistic	Pessimistic	Uncertain	No opinion
3/13/11	26	23	49	2

10/20/10*	33	20	46	1
1/13/08**	44	23	33	1
2/7/99***	54	19	27	1
3/10/96	43	28	28	1
2/26/83****	51	21	27	1
2/28/81	51	21	26	1
2/24/79	49	22	26	1
8/27/77	47	21	29	3
2/26/77	57	14	26	2
8/30/75	45	24	29	3
8/31/74	55	15	27	3

*ABC News/Yahoo! News, **USA Today/Gallup, ***CNN/Gallup, ****Roper

11. Thinking about the federal government's economic stimulus program, do you think the economic stimulus program has (helped) the national economy, (hurt) the national economy, or hasn't made much difference? (IF HELPED/HURT) Is that a great deal or somewhat?

	----- Helped -----			----- Hurt -----			No	No
	NET	Great deal	Somewhat	NET	Somewhat	Great deal	diff.	opinion
3/13/11	28	8	20	21	6	14	49	2
6/6/10	30	9	21	20	7	13	49	1
11/15/09	37	12	25	23	6	17	39	1
9/12/09	32	10	22	19	5	13	47	2
6/21/09	28	8	20	19	6	13	52	2
4/24/09	33	10	23	16	6	10	49	2

12. Do you think large cuts in federal spending would do more to (create jobs) or do more to (cut jobs) in this country?

	Create jobs	Cut jobs	Neither (vol.)	No opinion
3/13/11	41	45	7	7

13. Overall, what do you think is the best way to reduce the federal budget deficit - (by cutting federal spending), (by increasing taxes), or by a combination of both?

	Cutting federal spending	Increasing taxes	Combination of both	No opinion
3/13/11	31	3	64	3
12/12/10	36	2	60	1

14. Has the leadership of the Republican Party been too willing or not willing enough to compromise with Obama on the budget deficit?

	Too willing	Not willing enough	About right (vol.)	No opinion
3/13/11	16	71	5	8

Compare to: Has the leadership of the Democratic Party been too willing or not willing enough to compromise with Bush on the issue of the budget deficit?

	Too willing	Not willing enough	About right (vol.)	No opinion
10/29/03	30	56	4	10

15. Has Obama been too willing or not willing enough to compromise with the leadership of the Republican Party on the budget deficit?

	Too willing	Not willing enough	About right (vol.)	No opinion
3/13/11	30	52	10	8

Compare to: Has Bush been too willing or not willing enough to compromise with the leadership of the Democratic Party on the issue of budget deficit?

	Too willing	Not willing enough	About right (vol.)	No opinion
10/29/03	22	64	6	8

16. As you may know, the federal government might have to partially shut down later this month if (the Obama administration) and (the Republicans in Congress) cannot agree on a plan to keep it running while they work on a new budget. Who do you think is mainly responsible for this situation - (the Obama administration) or (the Republicans in Congress)?

	Obama	Republicans	Both (vol.)	Neither (vol.)	No opinion
3/13/11	31	45	17	2	4

Compare to: As you may know, the federal government has shut down some of its operations because the Clinton administration and the Republicans in Congress have not agreed on a plan to keep it running while they work on a new budget. Whose fault do you think this mainly is -- Clinton's or the Republicans' in Congress?

	Clinton	Republicans	Both (vol.)	Neither (vol.)	No opinion
1/3/96*	25	44	24	3	3
11/19/95	24	51	20	1	4
11/13/95**	27	46	20	2	5

* "many" changed to "some"

** phrased in future tense

17. Considering everything, do you think the partial shutdown of the federal government would be a good thing or a bad thing? (IF BAD THING) Would you say it would be a crisis or not?

	Good thing	----- Bad thing -----			No opinion
		NET	Crisis	Not crisis	
3/13/11	31	63	37	25	6
1/7/96*	23	75	36	38	3
1/3/96**	19	78	42	35	4
11/19/95**	26	68	33	34	7

* "was a good thing..."

** "is a good thing..."

18-23 held for release.

24. On another subject: All in all, considering the costs to the United States versus the benefits to the United States, do you think the war in Afghanistan has been worth fighting, or not? Do you feel that way strongly or somewhat?

	----- Worth fighting -----			--- Not worth fighting ---			No opinion
	NET	Strongly	Somewhat	NET	Somewhat	Strongly	
3/13/11	31	17	14	64	16	49	5
12/12/10	34	16	16	60	18	43	5
7/11/10	43	24	19	53	15	38	4
6/6/10	44	26	18	53	13	41	3
4/25/10	45	26	19	52	15	38	3

12/13/09	52	33	19	44	10	35	4
11/15/09	44	30	14	52	14	38	4
10/18/09*	47	28	19	49	13	36	4
9/12/09	46	28	18	51	14	37	3
8/17/09	47	31	15	51	10	41	3
7/18/09	51	34	18	45	11	34	4
3/29/09	56	37	19	41	12	28	4
2/22/09	50	34	17	47	9	37	3
12/14/08	55	NA	NA	39	NA	NA	5
7/13/08	51	NA	NA	45	NA	NA	4
2/25/07	56	NA	NA	41	NA	NA	3
*10/18/09	"was" and "has been" wording half sampled. Previous "was."						

25. (HALF SAMPLE) Do you think the United States should or should not withdraw a substantial number of U.S. combat forces from Afghanistan this summer?

	Should	Should not	No opinion
3/13/11	73	21	5

26. (HALF SAMPLE) Do you think the United States will or will not withdraw a substantial number of U.S. combat forces from Afghanistan this summer?

	Will	Will not	No opinion
3/13/11	39	53	8

27-31 previously released.

32 held for release.

33. Have recent price increases in gasoline caused any financial hardship for you or others in your household, or not? (IF YES) Has that been a serious hardship, or not serious?

	----- Yes -----				
	NET	Serious	Not serious	No	No opinion
3/13/11	71	44	26	29	1
7/28/08	72	45	27	28	*
6/15/08	77	51	25	23	0
5/11/08	63	34	29	37	*
4/13/08	67	38	29	32	1
5/21/07	58	27	30	42	*
4/15/07	67	36	31	33	*
7/19/06	60	29	30	39	1
5/15/06	57	31	26	43	*
4/9/06	70	44	26	30	*
9/11/05	64	34	30	36	*
8/28/05	66	36	30	34	*
8/21/05	53	26	27	47	*
4/24/05	64	34	30	36	*
3/20/05	57	29	28	43	*
5/23/04	64	37	27	36	0
4/18/04	54	31	23	46	0
4/28/02	53	20	33	47	*
4/29/01	48	17	30	52	*
6/25/00*	44	NA	NA	56	*
5/24/00	36			64	*
4/2/00	39			61	*
3/12/00	41			59	*

2/15/00 40 " " 60 *
*6/25/00 and previous by Gallup; slightly different wordings.

34-36 held for release.

END