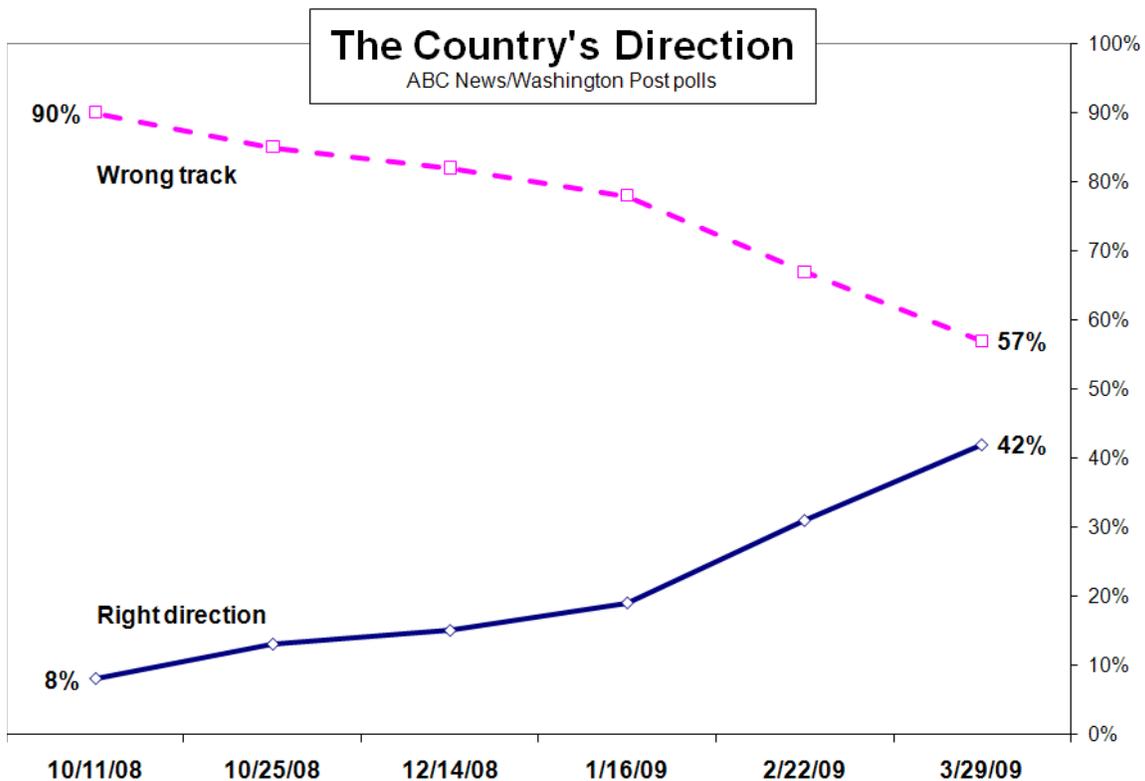


## “Right Direction” Rating Advances With Drop in Economic Pessimism

Americans’ views of the country’s direction have improved sharply since Barack Obama took office 70 days ago, fueled by better hopes for the economy and broad support – albeit sharply partisan – for his administration’s recovery efforts.

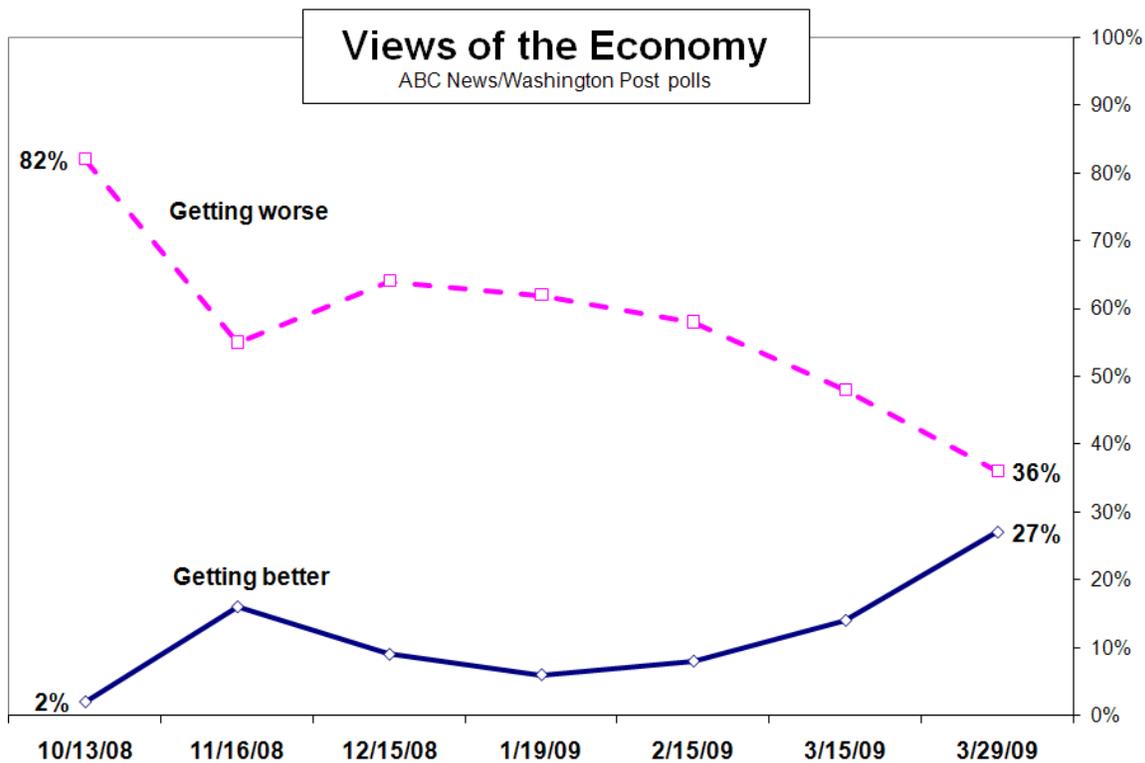
There’s far yet to go: Views of the economy’s course and the country’s overall direction are still more negative than positive. Ratings of the current economy remain dismal, with widespread blame and anger directed especially at corporate America. And President Obama’s approval rating is more divided by partisanship than any president’s at this stage in office in available data back to 1953.



But the gains in the latest ABC News/Washington Post poll are impressive nonetheless – and potentially a persuasive tool for Obama at this week’s G20 economic summit in London:

- Forty-two percent of Americans now say the country's headed in the right direction, more than double its level (19 percent) just before Obama took office in January and up from a mere 8 percent in October, a record low since the question first was asked in 1973. Most, 57 percent, still say the country's headed off on the wrong track – but that's down from 78 percent in January and a record 90 percent in October.

- A central reason: While 36 percent still say the economy's getting worse, that's fallen dramatically from 62 percent in January and a record 82 percent last October. And while just over a quarter, 27 percent, say the economy's improving, that's grown from only 6 percent in January and 2 percent last fall.



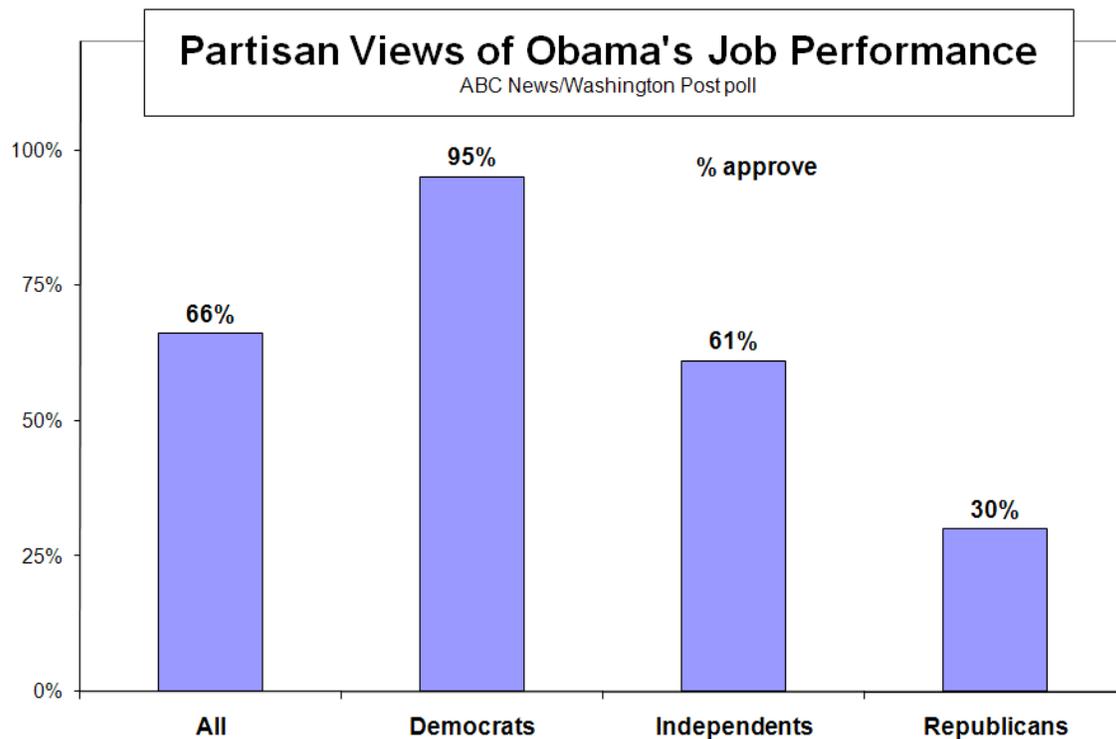
Positive reviews of Obama's work in office, particularly on the economy, inform these gains. Sixty-four percent express at least some confidence that his economic plan will help – down from 72 percent in January but still a substantial level of support. Sixty percent approve of his handling of the economy, an accomplishment given its dire condition. And his overall job approval rating, at 66 percent, is essentially steady from a month ago and the best in 20 years for a president at this stage in office.

OVER, NO; PARTISAN, YES – But the public's economic distress is nowhere near over. Positive ratings of the national economy, buying climate and personal finances remain near their lows in 23 years of weekly polls by ABC News. And the improvements in attitudes are very highly partisan; Republicans, by and large, have not joined the party.

From their low in October, for example, ratings of the nation's direction have gained 54 points among Democrats and 36 points among independents, but just 7 points among Republicans – among whom 78 percent still say they country's off on the wrong track.

Economic optimism, while less sharply partisan, is up by 35 points among Democrats and 25 points among independents, but just by 10 points among Republicans. Fifty-two percent of Republicans still say the economy's worsening. (However, that's down from 80 percent last fall.)

Obama overall has a 95 percent approval rating from Democrats vs. 30 percent from Republicans – a 65-point gap, compared with 58- and 57-point gaps for George W. Bush and Bill Clinton at about this point in their terms. That reflects the new age of partisanship that's prevailed since Clinton's days; the early partisan gaps for previous presidents were far smaller. As noted, Obama's overall approval is more partisan than any elected president's at this point in office in available data since 1953.

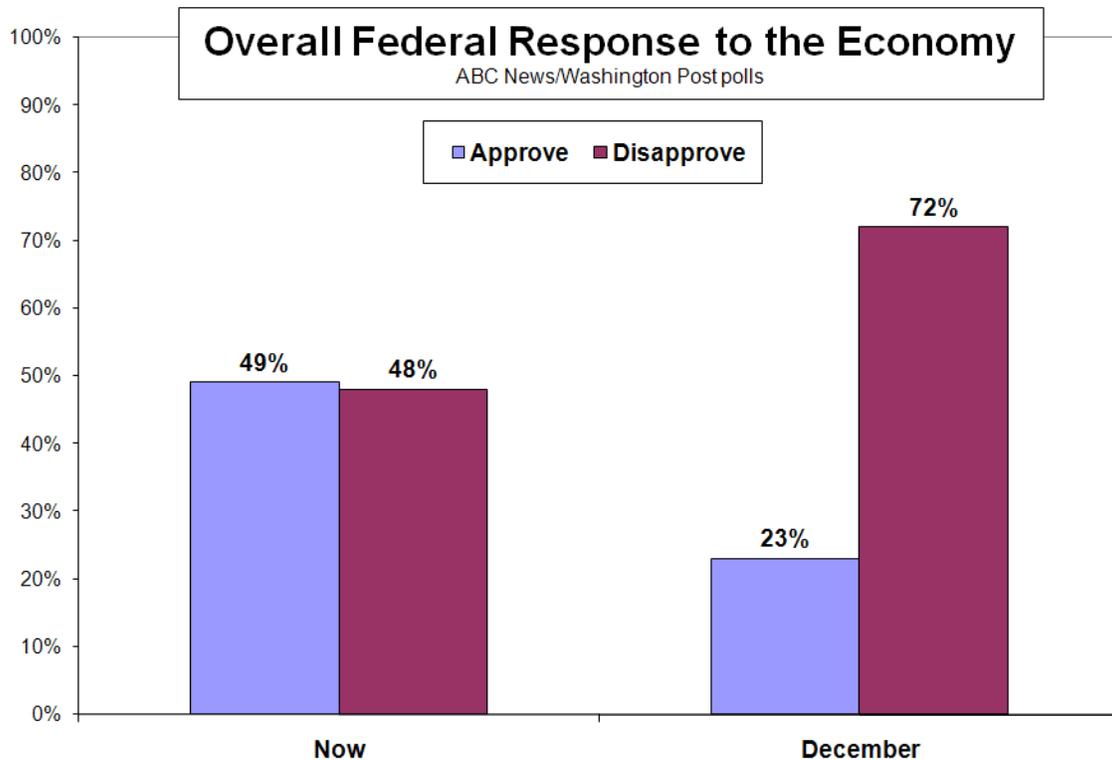


Two factors buttress Obama against this partisanship: His standing in the center, a 61 percent approval rating among independents; and the Democrats' continued advantage over the Republicans in partisan allegiance, a growing phenomenon since 2004.

UPPER HAND... BUT WATCH THE DEFICIT – Obama also retains the upper hand in Washington, a broad 58-25 percent advantage in trust over the Republicans in Congress to handle the economy. That's numerically the lowest preference for the out-party vs. the incumbent president in ABC/Post polls since 1991. (Notably, while 94 percent of

Democrats trust Obama over the GOP to handle the economy, far fewer Republicans, 60 percent, trust their own party over the Democratic president on this issue.)

Moving the assessment a step away from the president personally, Americans divide evenly, 49-48 percent, in their approval of the overall federal response to the economic situation. But this, too, represents a sharp gain from December, in the waning days of the Bush administration; then the public disapproved of the federal effort by a 3-1 margin, 72-23 percent.



Still, as underscored both by partisanship and by that split decision on the federal effort in general, not all is peaches for Obama and his recovery work. A big objection: The deficit. They're never popular, and that holds true now. Americans divide by 49-47 percent on whether it's more important to spend on economic stimulus or to hold down the deficit. And Obama's approval rating on handling the deficit is just 52 percent, 14 points lower than his job approval overall.

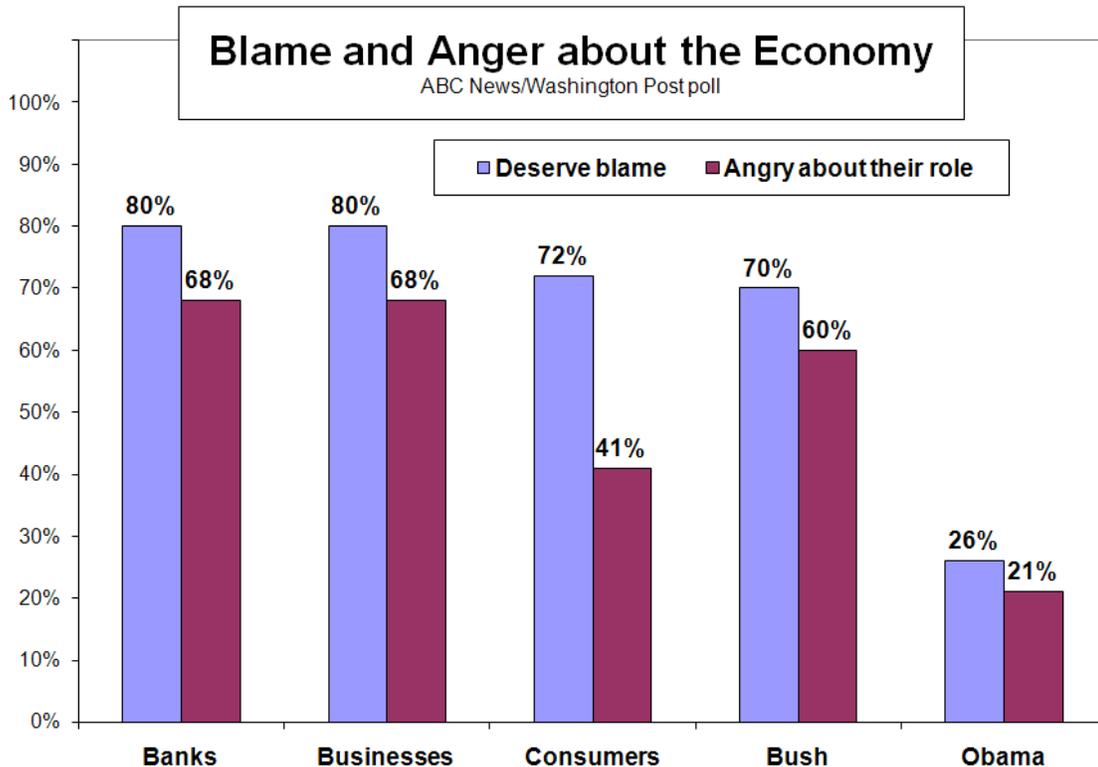
Views on the deficit, naturally, are a major factor in views on the recovery plan: People who are more concerned about the deficit are far less apt to back Obama's work on the economy, to be confident it'll succeed or to back the federal stimulus effort overall.

While the deficit is the Republicans' best pushback to Obama, the approach currently has limits: Americans by a substantial 30-point margin, 62-32 percent, reject the notion that he's an old-style tax-and-spend Democrat, instead classifying him as a new Democrat

who'll be careful with the public's money. But the future's never certain: Bill Clinton scored similarly well on this question at the start of his presidency – but then saw the tax-and-spend bear quickly bite. He went from a 26-point edge as a new-style Democrat in February 1993 to an even split by May.

**BLAME and ANGER** – Part of Obama's advantage in dealing with the economy is that while blame and anger are in great supply, he escapes both. Eight in 10 Americans blame the situation on banks and other financial institutions for taking on too much risk; as many blame large business corporations for poor management decisions. Seventy-two percent blame consumers for taking on too much debt; 70 percent blame the Bush administration for lack of needed regulation. Just 26 percent, though, blame the Obama administration. (High-level blame – “a great deal” – peaks for the first two, banks and other corporations.)

Anger runs along similar lines. Sixty-eight percent express anger at financial institutions and other corporations for their role in the economic meltdown; 60 percent at the Bush administration. That subsides to 41 percent who express anger at consumers for overextending themselves – and to just 21 percent who project anger at Obama's administration for the economic situation.



There's ill will in other areas as well: Eighty-one percent express anger about the large bonuses being paid to employees of companies that have accepted government loans, and

74 percent say they're angry about the levels of compensation paid to top corporate executives more broadly.

Notably, much of the public's ire crosses partisan lines. Large corporations are assigned blame for the economy by eight in 10 Democrats, Republicans and independents alike; and resulting anger ranges from nearly two-thirds of Republicans (64 percent) to nearly three-quarters of Democrats (73 percent) – sizable majorities across the board. And blame and anger directed toward banks and other financial institutions are similarly bipartisan.

**BACK TO THE PARTY** – Overall, while the advances on the country's and economy's direction are impressive, so is the level of partisanship – based at least some extent on Republicans' aversion to deficits and to government intervention in the marketplace.

There are a number of partisan splits as impressive as those noted above. Nearly all Democrats, 94 percent, express at least some confidence in Obama's recovery plan; that falls to 28 percent of Republicans. Seventy-one percent of Democrats approve of the federal government's response overall, up a remarkable 49 points since December; that falls to 23 percent of Republicans, essentially unchanged. And while 93 percent in his own party see Obama as a new-style Democrats, just 26 percent of Republicans agree.

Some such differences, as noted, are substantive ones. Sixty-seven percent of Democrats favor deficit spending to try to stimulate the economy; exactly as many Republicans oppose it. And on this basic question, independents, the fulcrum of national politics, divide right down the middle.

Better for Obama is that most independents are with him as he grapples with the economy. The challenge is that these less-partisan Americans are most apt to base their judgment not on politics, but on performance.

**METHODOLOGY** – This ABC News/Washington Post poll was conducted by telephone March 26-29, 2009, among a random national sample of 1,000 adults including both landline and cell-phone-only respondents. Results for the full sample have a 3-point error margin; click [here](#) for a detailed description of sampling error. 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

	NET	Strongly	Somewhat	NET	Somewhat	Strongly	opinion
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]? (IF ITEM A) Do you approve/disapprove strongly or somewhat?

3/29/09 - Summary Table

	Approve	Disapprove	No opinion
a. The economy	60	38	3
b. The federal budget deficit	52	43	5
c. Held for release.			

Trend where available:

a. The economy

	----- Approve -----			---- Disapprove ----			No
	NET	Strgly	Smwht	NET	Smwht	Strgly	opinion
3/29/09	60	34	25	38	12	26	3
2/22/09	60	NA	NA	34	NA	NA	6

b. No trend.

3. 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)?

	Right direction	Wrong track	No opinion
3/29/09	42	57	1
2/22/09	31	67	2
1/16/09	19	78	3
12/14/08	15	82	3
10/25/08 LV	13	85	2
10/11/08 RV	8	90	2
9/22/08 RV	14	83	3
8/22/08	19	78	2
6/15/08	14	84	2
5/11/08	16	82	2
1/12/08	21	77	2
11/1/07	24	74	2
6/1/07	25	73	2
1/19/07	26	71	3
11/4/06 RV	39	59	2
10/22/06	30	68	2
10/8/06	32	66	2
5/15/06	29	69	2
11/2/05	30	68	2
10/24/04 LV	41	55	4

Call for full trend.

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

	Obama	Reps	Both (vol.)	Neither (vol.)	No opinion
3/29/09	58	25	1	14	2

2/22/09 61 26 1 9 3

Compare to:

G.W. Bush or the Democrats in Congress:

	Bush	Dems	Both (vol.)	Neither (vol.)	No opinion
6/1/07	36	54	1	6	2
2/25/07	36	56	1	6	2
1/19/07	32	60	1	4	2
12/11/06	34	58	1	5	2
1/18/04	43	50	1	4	3
4/30/03	51	41	2	2	3
11/6/01	51	36	5	4	5
9/9/01	44	50	1	3	2
7/30/01	47	46	1	4	1
6/3/01	44	46	2	6	2

Clinton or the Republicans in Congress:\*

	Clinton	Reps	Both (vol.)	Neither (vol.)	No opinion
1/23/96	51	34	11	3	2
10/30/95	38	50	9	1	2
10/1/95	44	44	8	2	3
7/17/95	42	51	4	1	2
3/19/95	43	47	7	1	2
1/4/95	34	56	3	1	5
12/20/94	36	59	NA	NA	5
11/14/93	45	37	3	12	3
8/8/93	48	35	1	13	3
6/28/93	45	40	1	10	4
4/26/93	59	29	4	7	1

G.H.W. Bush or the Democrats in Congress:\*

	Bush	Dems	Both (vol.)	Neither (vol.)	No opinion
3/11/92	37	36	1	20	7
3/8/92	32	44	3	14	6
2/2/92	40	44	1	9	5
1/29/92	38	41	2	13	5
12/15/91	36	46	2	12	4

\*"on the economy"

5. Do you approve or disapprove of the federal government's overall response to the economic situation?

	Approve			Disapprove			No opinion
	NET	Strongly	Somewhat	NET	Somewhat	Strongly	
3/29/09	49	18	31	48	17	31	3
12/14/08	23	4	19	72	26	47	4

6. Do you think the nation's economy is getting better, getting worse or staying the same?

	Getting better	Getting worse	Staying the same	No opinion
3/29/09	27	36	36	1
3/15/09	14	48	36	2
2/15/09	8	58	31	3
1/19/09	6	62	31	1
12/15/08	9	64	25	1

11/16/08	16	55	28	1
10/13/08	2	82	13	2
9/15/08	13	52	34	2
8/17/08	6	58	36	*
7/13/08	2	78	18	2
6/15/08	4	74	21	1
5/11/08	4	77	18	1
4/13/08	3	73	22	1
3/16/08	3	68	28	2
2/17/08	8	62	29	1
1/13/08	5	65	29	1
12/16/07	8	61	28	3
11/18/07	7	68	25	1
10/14/07	11	55	30	4
9/16/07	8	49	41	1
8/12/07	15	57	26	2
7/15/07	12	51	36	0
6/17/07	11	52	35	2
5/13/07	14	55	29	2
4/15/07	13	46	40	2
3/18/07	15	49	35	2
2/19/07	16	41	41	1
1/14/07	18	34	45	2

Call for full trend.

7. How much blame do you think [ITEM] deserve(s) for the country's economic situation - a great deal, a good amount, only some or hardly any?

3/29/09 - Summary Table

- a. Banks and other financial institutions, for taking unnecessary risks
- b. The Bush administration, for inadequate regulation of the financial industry
- c. Large business corporations, for poor management decisions
- d. Consumers, for taking on too much debt
- e. The Obama administration, for not doing enough to turn the economy around

	--Grt deal/Gd amt-		----Some/Hardly any/None----					
	NET	Great deal	Good amt	NET	Only some	Hardly any	None (vol.)	No opinion
a. Banks	80	56	24	19	15	4	*	1
b. Bush	70	47	23	29	21	7	1	2
c. Business	80	57	23	19	14	5	1	1
d. Consumers	72	39	33	28	20	7	*	*
e. Obama	26	13	13	72	27	39	6	2

8. Would you describe yourself as angry or not angry about the role [ITEM] have/has played in the economic situation?

3/29/09 - Summary Table

	Angry	Not angry	No opinion
a. Banks and other financial institutions	68	31	1
b. The Bush administration	60	39	2
c. Large business corporations	68	31	1
d. Consumers	41	56	2
e. The Obama administration	21	77	2

9. Would you describe yourself as angry or not angry about [ITEM]?

3/29/09 - Summary Table

	Angry	Not angry	No opinion
a. Large bonuses being paid to employees at companies that have accepted government loans	81	18	1
b. The overall levels of compensation paid to top corporate executives	74	24	2

10. Which of these do you think is more important right now - (increasing federal spending to try to improve the economy, even if it sharply increases the federal budget deficit); or (avoiding a big increase in the federal budget deficit, even if it means not increasing federal spending to try to improve the economy)?

	Increasing spending	Avoiding deficit	No opinion
3/29/09	49	47	5
1/16/09	51	44	4

11. How confident are you that Obama's economic program will improve the economy - very confident, fairly confident, not very confident or not confident at all?

	---- Confident ----			----- Not confident -----			No opinion
	NET	Very	Fairly	NET	Not very	Not at all	
3/29/09	64	23	41	35	18	17	1
1/16/09	72	23	48	28	17	11	*

Compare to: Reagan

4/12/83	52	13	38	48	24	23	1
1/22/83	45	13	32	53	28	25	2
10/11/82 LV	49	12	37	48	23	25	3

12. Do you happen to have visited the website called RECOVERY DOT GOV, or not?

	Yes	No	No opinion
3/29/09	6	94	*

13. Which of these statements comes closer to your view: (Beneath it all, Obama is an old-style, tax-and-spend Democrat) or (Obama is a new-style Democrat who will be careful with the public's money).

	Old-style	New-style	Neither (vol.)	No opinion
3/29/09	32	62	3	3

Compare to: Clinton

5/22/96	44	50	NA	6
1/29/95	40	54	4	2
1/4/95	48	45	3	3
2/27/94	40	52	6	3
1/23/94	40	49	6	5
11/14/93	48	44	5	2
8/8/93	45	50	3	2
6/28/93	45	50	3	2
5/23/93	48	48	2	2
4/26/93	37	59	3	1
2/28/93	35	61	3	1

14-16 held for release.

17. Changing topics, do you have a favorable or unfavorable impression of Michelle Obama? Do you feel that way strongly or somewhat?

	----- Favorable -----			----- Unfavorable -----			No
	NET	Strongly	Somewhat	NET	Somewhat	Strongly	opinion
3/29/09	76	46	33	16	9	7	8
1/16/09	72	38	34	17	10	7	11
8/22/08 RV	51	26	25	30	14	16	19
6/15/08	48	21	27	29	11	18	23

18-28 held for release.

\*\*\*END\*\*\*